

Solar Episode 1: The Pilot

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COLD OPEN.

A SMALL DISRUPTION OF STATIC, ALARMS BEGIN

ANOTHER BURST OF STATIC.

ALI, THE SPACECRAFT SYSTEM INTERFACE IS BLARING
ALARMS AND WARNINGS.

WREN: Mission control! Do you read?! This is the Aethon! Mayday mayday!
Solar flare, X45, pointed directly at Earth! Do you copy?! Mayday!
Mayday!

TAAJ: (INTERCOM, A REALIZATION) 'I knew certain things would happen, if
not when.'

JESSA: What did you say Taaj?

WREN: Everyone on board get to safety restraints immediately!

TAAJ: (MESSAGE SCRAMBLING) Margaret knew. *Margaret knew this whole
time.*

WREN: Mission control do you read? This is the Aethon! Mayday! Mayday!

JESSA: Wren--Taaj said something about Margaret--

JAMAL: (INTERCOM) Wren! Close the airlock!

WREN: Not now! Jessa! Everyone get to restraints! Aethon to Mission Control!
Aethon to Mission Control. Solar flare pointed directly at earth!

TAAJ: (INTERCOM) Please--Wren--!!

JAMAL: (INTERCOM) Wren! Close the airlock! Close the airlock!

THE AUDIO BECOMES CHAOS--THEN SOME SCREAMS--
THEN SOME ELECTRONIC BURSTS AND
EXPLOSIONS...THEN BLEND TO:

SCENE 1.

SMALL CROWD WALLA. A DOOR OPENS AND WE HEAR SOME CAMERAS TAKE PHOTOS AND A SMALL COMMOTION--POTENTIALLY SOME PEOPLE ASKING FOR QUESTIONS.

A MICROPHONE IS ADJUSTED.

FELICIA BRYANT:

Thank you all for being here. I know it's a difficult time for all of us...My name is Felicia Bryant, and I am the *servicing* Director of Public Relations for the North American Space Coalition, NASC, following the untimely passing of Dennis Oldman. Joining me is the Aethon Mission Control Flight Director, Aarav Patel.

THERE IS A BRIEF WARPING ELECTRONIC SOUND IN THE AUDIO.

Our hearts here at NASC go to those impacted by the solar flare two weeks ago. We extend our thoughts and prayers to those who died and those who lost loved ones as a result of the flare and we pray for a quick end to the rioting all over the Western Hemisphere. Mankind will rise above, as it always has...

Mr. Patel?

MICROPHONE READJUSTMENT AS AARAV TAKES THE STAGE.

AARAV PATEL:

(A BEAT) ...NASC located the Aethon two days ago.

THE CROWD STIRS AND MORE PHOTOGRAPHS ARE TAKEN.

Mission Control identified its solar orbital position on April 4th, 2045 at 11:32AM Coordinated Universal Time. However, we have *not* established contact. Apart from locational pings, there have been no data transfers between Mission Control and the Aethon following the flare. In addition, we have not been able to identify any evidence of steering or propulsion that would clarify the functionality of the craft.

REPORTER 1: (OFF) Do you know who survived?

FELICIA BRYANT: Please wait until we open the floor for questions.

REPORTER 1: (OFF) Did Tawley make it?

FELICIA BRYANT: We won't answer any questions until--

AARAV PATEL: There are six--(CORRECTION) *Seven* men and women on board the Aethon. And you only care about *one*?

REPORTER 1: (OFF) Tawley was largely considered the face of the mission--

AARAV PATEL: (EMPHATIC) There are *seven* people on board the Aethon. And as far as I'm concerned, they're all alive.

A SMALL COMMOTION FROM THE ROOM THAT FADES.

FELICIA BRYANT: (A REBUKE) Please continue, Mr. Patel!

AARAV PATEL: ...The orbital altitude thermo-nuclear reactor appears to still be functioning to some extent--however, as the Aethon is currently orbiting the sun at a fixed altitude free from normal gravitational orbit--

FELICIA BRYANT: In layman's terms, Mr. Patel.

A BEAT.

AARAV PATEL: ...The Aethon has power. The engine is keeping the ship at a fixed altitude, not relying on orbit. It was designed to keep the Aethon and CimmTech's equipment on *this* side of the sun, in *sync* with Earth orbit which is why it doesn't orbit as fast as Mercury. But *now*--...(A BEAT, SINCERE WORRY) ...The Aethon isn't moving with us. Given our current trajectories--the Aethon and Earth will move to opposite sides of the sun in roughly seven days. And at that point--we will lose any opportunity to contact the Aethon for almost a year before the Aethon and Earth can make direct contact again.

THE ROOM IS SURPRISINGLY SILENT.

FELICIA BRYANT: (A BEAT) ...We--We will continue to monitor the situation and hold out hope for the mission's seven potentially surviving crew members...

AARAV PATEL: (OFFENDED) Potentially?

FELICIA BRYANT: (IGNORING AARAV) We remain in touch with the families of those on board and ask you to respect their privacy...At this time, we will open the floor for questions--

CLAMOR FOR QUESTIONS

REPORTER 2: (OFF) Ms. Bryant! Why did NASC issue a public alert instead of informing the White House or the Canadian Prime Minister first?

FELICIA BRYANT: We only had twenty or thirty minutes from the Aethon distress call to the flare arriving on Earth. It was determined the warning was best directed to the public to take individual protective measures. Yes, over there?

REPORTER 3: (OFF) What is NASC doing to prevent this in the future?

FELICIA BRYANT: This isn't something we can prevent. We can only prepare.

REPORTER 5: (OFF) Were any of the crew members at fault?

A HESITATION FROM THE PODIUM.

FELICIA BRYANT: ...All protocols were followed by both NASC and CimmTech crew members.

REPORTER 3: (OFF) Did NASC or CimmTech *cause* the solar flare?

AARAV PATEL: (OFF MIC) That's a ridiculous question.

FELICIA BRYANT: We have no power over the sun.

AARAV PATEL: (TO REPORTER 3) Listen to yourself.

FELICIA BRYANT: (OFF MIC) Aarav. (ON MIC) We have no control over solar events.

REPORTER 2: (OFF) Is NASC taking any steps to help in the recovery efforts?

FELICIA BRYANT: Obviously, we will do whatever is requested by the Canadian and United States governments to the best of our abilities...They have access to the few remaining lines of communication that we have functioning, but with our given resources--

AARAV PATEL: What do you want us to do, exactly?

FELICIA BRYANT: Aarav!

AARAV PATEL: We are the North American Space Coalition. We aren't responsible for your phone lines or or or the power grid. We don't control the universe.

FELICIA BRYANT: I apologize for Mr. Patel.

AARAV PATEL: (OFF MIC) Don't apologize for me.

CHRISTIAN YANCY: (OFF) Ms. Bryant! Ms. Bryant! What are the odds of survival for the Aethon crew?

FELICIA BRYANT: We won't speculate on *those* circumstances. I'm sure you can understand.

CHRISTIAN YANCY: (OFF, CROWD QUIETS DOWN) They are, and I quote Mr. Oldman, "the farthest away from earth any human being has ever been." Even if they did survive, is it realistic to believe they *could* be rescued?

FELICIA BRYANT: Again, I refuse to speculate--

CHRISTIAN YANCY: Would saving them even be *worth* it?

FELICIA BRYANT: Does anyone have any other questions?

CHRISTIAN YANCY: (OFF) Does that mean 'no'?

AARAV PATEL: (OFF, BUT LOUD) It means we're going to do everything we can!

FELICIA BRYANT: (A SCOLD) Mr. Patel.

AARAV PATEL: (OFF) No. No. What is your name?

AARAV TAKES THE MIC BACK FULLY.

CHRISTIAN YANCY: (OFF) Christian Yancy with US Headline.

AARAV PATEL: Mr. Yancy--these men and women have risked their *lives* to further knowledge and science and our understanding of the universe. In what might be their final moments, they warned *us* about the flare. *They are heroes*. We **will** bring them home.

CHRISTIAN YANCY: (OFF) *If* you can.

A STIR IN THE CROWD.

AARAV PATEL: What's your problem?

FELICIA BRYANT: Aarav.

CHRISTIAN YANCY: (OFF) I'm just trying to do my job.

AARAV PATEL: You're being *insulting*.

CHRISTIAN YANCY: I'm being realistic. After these past couple weeks, I personally don't think anyone should be waiting for miracles.

AARAV PATEL: I agree!

FELICIA BRYANT: Mr. Patel--

AARAV PATEL: There's no such thing as miracles! But this won't be a miracle...It will be a triumph! *NASC will bring them home*. Do you understand?

CHRISTIAN YANCY: (OFF) And are you going to partner with CimmTech in this 'triumphant' rescue effort?

AARAV PATEL: (SCOFFS) CimmTech...

FELICIA BRYANT: (HURRIED) Cimmerian Technologies is our partner on this mission. Three crew members were specifically placed on this mission *by CimmTech*. Of course they want to rescue this crew just as much as we do. Moving on--

CHRISTIAN YANCY: (OFF) Are you implying that CimmTech *wouldn't* want to help in a rescue effort if it was only NASC crew members?

FELICIA BRYANT: Of course not!

CHRISTIAN YANCY: (OFF) Correct me if I'm wrong--It was CimmTech who paid for most of this mission, yes? CimmTech bailed out NASC after the downturn, so maybe they--

AARAV PATEL: Bailed out?!

FELICIA BRYANT: Aarav! (TO YANCY) We have reached out to CimmTech and are awaiting a response.

CHRISTIAN YANCY: (OFF) Are you saying you haven't been in contact with CimmTech since the flare?

AARAV PATEL: We haven't been in contact with CimmTech *for months!*

FELICIA BRYANT: That's enough!

AARAV PATEL: No, it's not! We've been picking up anomalies, shudders, and erroneous readings for almost a year now and we have been reaching out to CimmTech for answers over and over again. And we haven't heard a thing. Just silence. They're refusing to answer us. *They're hiding.*

THE CROWD STIRS.

FELICIA BRYANT: You can't say that, Aarav--

AARAV PATEL: Listen--If any of you have any way of reaching CimmTech, tell them to come and talk to me. I'm *going* to bring my crew home. And I'll work with CimmTech *IF* they want *any* of the crew to come back alive...

COMMOTION--AARAV IS LEAVING THE PODIUM.

CHRISTIAN YANCY:

(OFF) Wait--are you implying CimmTech doesn't want the crew to return alive? What do you mean anomalies? How long did you believe the Aethon was in danger?

A DOOR SLAMS SHUT.

FELICIA BRYANT:

My apologies to the rest of you on behalf of Mr. Patel and Mr....Yancy, was it? There will be no further questions....

STATIC WARP AND THE SOUND CUTS OUT.

END SCENE.

-TITLES-

MAIN TITLE MUSIC

ELECTRONIC "ERROR" BLIP.

ALI:

(ELECTRONIC) Aethon Operating System Timer Failure has resulted in terminal error. Audio packets are unable to be compiled chronologically. Please reset A.O.S. internal clock. Manual Whiskey Foxtrot One fifty six Delta two.

ELECTRONIC "INTERNAL" BLIP.

Emergency audio packet 22 dash Alpha 2045.

ELECTRONIC "END TRANSMISSION" BLIP.

NARRATOR:

CurtCo Media presents...

SOLAR.

MAIN TITLE MUSIC ENDS

Episode 1: The Pilot

FADE:

SCENE 2.

ALI: Post Solar Event. Approximate mission day: five hundred and forty seven.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

CAPSULE 8 ROOM TONE. AIR COOLING SYSTEM IS OFF.

WE HERE SOMEONE TYPING. JAMAL SIGHS...HE'S BEEN AT IT A WHILE.

STARTING LOW--THEN GETTING LOUD--THE SHIP SHAKES AND GROANS AS A STRONG ELECTRIC PULSE SURGES THROUGH THE WALLS, METAL CREAKING, GLASS RATTLING, AN EARTHQUAKE--THIS IS A **SHUDDER**.

JAMAL: (ALARMED, FAST) Safety restraint standby!

ALI: Safety restraints on standby.

JAMAL: Display cam feed on reactor turbine!

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

Standby on remote joystick control for reactor repair arm!

ALI: Remote control on standby.

THEN THE SHUDDER DISSIPATES. AND IS GONE. JAMAL, RELIEVED TAKES A BREATH.

JAMAL: ...Thank you, Ali. Please disable all standbys from the last thirty seconds.

ALI: Yes, Pilot Jamal Davis.

JAMAL: Reactor okay?

ALI: Yes, Pilot Jamal Davis. I detect no irregularities.

JAMAL: You never do. But with the flare--you *detected* it--you tracked the system overloading--but you didn't...*feel* it?

ALI: I'm unable to answer the question.

JAMAL: You didn't feel the surge? The explosion?

ALI: I feel no pain.

JAMAL: And the glitching?

ALI: I'm unable to answer the question.

ALI: (AN INTERCOM FAR AWAY) Searching for mission control.

JAMAL: ...Yeah okay. Shut up, Jamal...

JAMAL RESUMES TYPING.

ALI: (IN CAPSULE 9--DISTANT) Capsule nine temperature is currently One Hundred and nine point three degrees Fahrenheit. Forty two point nine degrees Celsius.

A BEAT.

ALI: (IN CAPSULE 8) What are you working on, Pilot Jamal Davis?

JAMAL: I'm writing some auxiliary programming.

ALI: Auxiliary programming can be quite extensive. Can I assist you?

JAMAL: No. I don't think you're up for it, Ali. You keep forgetting where the Sun is.

ALI: That doesn't sound like me.

JAMAL: It doesn't. And the sun is right out there. I can see it from my window.

ALI: (OVER A GENERAL INTERCOM) Capsule eight temperature is currently one hundred and eight point two degrees Fahrenheit. Forty two point three degrees Celsius.

JAMAL: Point is--I need to write this programming myself...You're broken right now, Ali.

ALI: I'm broken.

JAMAL: There's something wrong in your code that I don't have time to fix.

ALI: Why don't you have time to fix my code?

JAMAL: ...Because I'm going to run out of oxygen in about five days. So I need to prioritize what I do with the time I have left.

ALI: And you need to prioritize the auxiliary programming?

JAMAL: Yes.

JAMAL KEEPS TYPING.

ALI: ...Can I assist you with anything?

JAMAL: You can leave me alone.

ALI: How long would you like me to leave you alone?

JAMAL: What is this? Why are you being so talkative today?

ALI: You've declined ten of the last twelve messages from Doctor Wren Guerrero.

JAMAL: Yeah, so?

ALI: You are isolating yourself.

JAMAL: Okay?

ALI: Isolating oneself following a personal trauma may indicate depression, anxiety, and-or a mental crisis.

JAMAL LAUGHS.

JAMAL: D. All of the above.

ALI: I am programmed to help humans to my fullest extent.

JAMAL: I know.

ALI: I want to help you. Even if I'm broken.

A BEAT. JAMAL RELENTS.

JAMAL: Okay...let's...let's do another recording. I'm gonna keep typing though.

ALI: Who is this recording for?

JAMAL: I don't know yet. Just go ahead and start recording.

ELECTRONIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.

A BEAT. A FEW MORE KEY STROKES...A PAUSE...THEN:

...Chelsea--

A BEAT.

No--never mind. Not Chelsea--Delete that and start a new recording.

ELECTRONIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT. HE PAUSES...

ALI: It has been [five/ten] seconds and you have not begun a message. Would you like to terminate the recording and begin again?

JAMAL: (*OVERLAPPING*) No--no...I just need to...

A BEAT.

ALI: Talk.

JAMAL: Figure out what I want to say.

A BEAT.

ALI: Do you not know what you want to say?

JAMAL: I *do*, I just--...don't know how to say it.

ALI: How can I assist you in 'how to say it.'?

JAMAL: You can't...It just takes time...You got it let it come out naturally. Let it find it's own words. You gotta start walking before you know the destination.

ALI: Who is this recording for?

JAMAL: I don't know, Ali.

ALI: Would you like to terminate the recording and begin again?

JAMAL: No...just...keep it rolling until I tell you to stop, okay?

ALI: Yes, Pilot Jamal Davis.

JAMAL: (MILDLY ANNOYED) *Please* don't call me that. Especially now.

ALI: What would you like for me to call you?

JAMAL: I *want* you to call me Jamal but I know that I don't rank high enough to--

ALI: Overriding naming protocol to address Pilot Jamal Davis as Jamal.

JAMAL: (A BEAT) You said I didn't rank high enough to override naming protocol.

ALI: You do now.

JAMAL: ...I do...*now*...

ALI: Yes, Jamal.

HE HITS A FEW MORE KEYS--THEN PAUSES AGAIN...

JAMAL: ...I saw two ghosts dancing last night.

They aren't 'ghosts'. People freak out about that word, you know? But I don't know what to call them...Auras. Manifestations.

Visions...Hallucinations, maybe...

Maybe aliens, I guess. But Wren got really angry when I suggested that...But I'm seeing something...I am...I wish that--with Eli--...

I've seen 11 ghosts in 15 days. Ever since the flare.

HE STARTS TYPING AGAIN--A LITTLE MORE
DISTRACTEDLY, BOTH IN THE TYPING AND TALKING...

This was the first time seeing two ghosts at once--again I know they aren't ghosts...Don't go tell Wren I'm claiming they're ghosts.

ALI: I won't, Jamal.

JAMAL: But these things--they were...*dancing*, I think. They were holding onto each other. Moving slowly. Almost like sheets in the wind. At least the way sheets look in the movies. In real life they just hang there. You know?

HE LAUGHS. THEN TYPES A LITTLE MORE...THEN STOPS...

What the hell am I talking about? We had a dryer growing up. I've never seen laundry drying on clotheslines...I was just trying to be poetic...but I'm allowed to do that, right? I never 'wound up' a car window. I never saved things to a floppy disk, but I know the icon.

At what point is my understanding of the world just what I've been told it *used* to be?

...Maybe ghosts are just dead people who haven't realized they're dead yet.

ALI: (IN CAPSULE 9--DISTANT) Capsule nine temperature is currently One Hundred and nine point five degrees Fahrenheit. Forty three point 1 degrees Celsius.

THE DISTANT SOUND SNAPS JAMAL BACK--HE BEGINS TO TYPE MORE FOCUSED AND TALK MORE 'FACTUALLY.'

JAMAL: ...The ghosts are...'humanoid' is the word, but they're made of light. Like hundreds of overlapping strands, made of this...blue-gold fiber. Glowing threads, woven in the shape of a human. (STOPS TYPING) *Or an outline of where a person should be...*(STARTS TYPING)...but moving all the time...internally restless...outwardly calm...(SMIRKS) Just like dancing, I guess...

Pause recording.

ALI: Recording paused.

JAMAL: Ali--can you run my program in simulation mode?

ALI: Running auxiliary programming in simulation mode.

DIGITAL SOUND--THEN AN ABRUPT ERROR SOUND.

Auxiliary programming simulation has failed.

JAMAL: Can you bring back up the coding and show me the line where it failed?

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

Thanks...Unpause recording...

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

ALI: Recording unpaused.

A BEAT.

JAMAL: I forgot where I was.

JAMAL: (VOICE ON PLAYBACK) ...just like dancing, I guess...

JAMAL: Oh yeah...

HE STARTS TYPING AGAIN.

...These 'dancing ghosts' or whatever they are...they were in the loading dock. Formerly capsule 5. Now, the *nothing* in the center of the Aethon. Before it was ripped in half...

HE STOPS TYPING.

ALI: (OVER A GENERAL INTERCOM) Capsule eight temperature is currently one hundred and eight point five degrees Fahrenheit. Forty two point five degrees Celsius.

JAMAL: This isn't what I want to say. I'm gonna try again...let me just...

JAMAL STANDS UP AND WALKS AWAY FROM THE
CONSOLE--WE HEAR SOME WATER BEING POURED INTO
A CONTAINER.

ALI: Drinking water will decrease your oxygen supply.

JAMAL: (FROM A DISTANCE) I know, Ali. Thank you.

A BEAT.

ALI: Who is this recording for?

JAMAL: Still don't know, Ali. (A BEAT) ...I grew up in Cape Canaveral, did you know that?

ALI: I did know that.

JAMAL: Yeah--yeah...of course you did...I miss the sound of the ocean.

ALI: I have fifty-two unique recordings of the ocean--

JAMAL: Ali, please--...I appreciate you mentioning it. But every wave is different. There aren't 'fifty-two different sounds--'

ALI: (AS A CORRECTION) I have *fifty-two unique recordings*.

JAMAL RETURNS TO THE CONSOLE.

JAMAL: I get it, Ali. Thank you. Please--just let me get through this...I'm trying to figure out how I want to say it...

ALI: Okay, Jamal.

HE BEGINS DISTRACTEDLY TYPING AGAIN.

JAMAL: (BEAT) ...When I was ten...I and my friend...Chelsea--she convinced me to go and watch a SpaceX launch with her. My mother said I wasn't allowed to go. We were still in the pandemic and she didn't want me to risk exposure. But--I *had* to go. So I snuck out. And Chelsea and I rode our bikes for something like five miles to get there in time. We hopped a fence to get a little closer--and away from everyone else--but still far enough away that no one was patrolling...

...You could feel the roar of the engine inside of your chest. Even from far away. The light from the engines just...cutting through the sky--illuminating and blinding, all at once. The white column of smoke shooting straight up to heaven. Like the holy smoke from the temple being sent to God...

ALI: Are you religious?

JAMAL: No. But I like the poetry in it.

ANOTHER SUDDEN **SHUDDER**--STRONGER THAN THE LAST--FELT THROUGHOUT THE SHIP.

JAMAL: Safety restraint standby!

ALI: Safety restraints on standby.

JAMAL: Display cam feed on reactor turbine!

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

Standby on remote joystick control for reactor repair arm!

ALI: Remote control on standby.

A BEAT. JAMAL IS TENSE.

JAMAL: You okay, Ali?

ALI: Yes, Jamal.

AN ALARM BEGINS.

ALI: (INTERCOM SPEAKERS, REPEATING) Altitude warning. Reactor Failure.

JAMAL: (OVERLAPPING, SERIOUS AND URGENT) I'm going weightless--I feel it! Activate reactor arm video feed!

ALI: Reactor Arm Video feed only available in capsules eight and nine--

JAMAL: That's fine--still activate--activate joystick control--thank you--grabbing closest rotary drum--SHIT! Wait wait--I can't reach--I didn't--the safety harness--I need to push off the ceiling--wait a sec--wait...ugh--okay...ummm...strapping myself into the chair!

ALI: (OVER SPEAKERS) Meltdown imminent.

JAMAL: No no no no no--grabbing the closest drum--!

ALI: Drum two--

JAMAL:

Grabbing drum two and--

HE JIGGLES JOYSTICK. THE DRUM STARTS SPINNING.
ALARM SHUTS DOWN. SOME SMALL THINGS CLINK AS
THEY LAND. HIS CUP OF WATER SPLASHES ON THE
GROUND. HIS BREATHING IS INTENSE.

ALI:

(INTERCOM SPEAKERS) All systems are nominal.

END SCENE.

SCENE 3.

ALI: Aethon Audio Packet from Mission Control. Thirty five dash one 2044.

ELECTRONIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

AARAV PATEL: (PRE-RECORDED) Aethon. This is Mission Control. Flight Director Aarav Patel. Mission day 35. Audio packet 1. Year 2044. That is: 'audio packet 35 dash 1 2044.' The day the Aethon leaves Earth Orbit.

This is the first audio packet communicate for the Aethon Mission and as a matter of confirmation, I am reaffirming that official radio communications have ceased between the Aethon and Mission Control until the Aethon has returned to Earth orbit. Radio communications can be sent in cases of emergency, but responses can take up to five minutes at present and can take twenty to thirty minutes as the Aethon approaches the sun. Commander Tawley, in your response audio packet, please confirm receipt of this packet, uh...thirty five dash one, and acknowledge the new procedures for radio communications in manual echo echo victor five three.

A PAGE ON A CLIPBOARD IS FLIPPED BACK AND FORTH.

Alright...business out of the way--I just want to say how proud we all are. I'm jealous. I'm excited. I can't wait to see what happens. Congratulations.

APPLAUSE FROM A FEW PEOPLE IN MISSION CONTROL
OFF-MIC.

Enclosed in this packet are a few messages of note...

There's a joint statement from the US President and the Canadian Prime Minister along with one from Head of NASC, Fred Chiu.

A message from Public Relations Director, Dennis Oldman.

One from Head of CimmTech...Allyson Logan.

And then a few personal messages for some of the crew. Three for Pilot Jamal Davis. Please ask him to limit his responses to under five minutes per recipient. He's not good about that.

Also, Alex, there's a cute message from your school--Tawley Elementary and some well-wishes for their ant colony. It's pretty cute. You might want to share it with the others.

Let's see...There are some manual updates--a patch that should fix the bugs between the AOS and Jessa's bionic arm--oh, and we've reached out to Aldan at CimmTech regarding the outlier data you picked up. I know Margaret wasn't concerned and neither are we. Our guess is that it's just a ghost in the machine, if you will--some glitch from starting up the program with ALI without all four of the solar satellites, or payloads, in position and activated for the CimmTech experiment. I'll let you know when we hear back from CimmTech.

Alright, Aethon.

As always...Be careful. Do your job. Get home safe. Change the world.

We'll be here for you every step of the way.

ELECTRONIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.

ALI:

You have selected to play the classified message for Dr. Wren Guerrero. Please enter four digit security code.

WE HEAR FOUR ENTRIES ON A KEYPAD.

ELECTRONIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.

Now playing classified message for Dr. Wren Guerrero.

RECORDING BEGINS.

AARAV PATEL:

Wren--Since we're switching to the audio packet communiques, we're shutting down the secure wireless communication we were using with

you away from CimmTech's access. We'll re-open it if circumstances change.

A BEAT.

Good luck. We're counting on you.

...Godspeed.

RECORDING ENDS.

END SCENE.

SCENE 4

ALI: Post Solar Event. Approximate mission day: five hundred and forty seven.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

CAPSULE 1 ROOM TONE. SOMETHING CLICKS IN THE BACKGROUND. THE SHIP IS DAMAGED. A LIGHT FLICKERS.

SOMEONE IS CHANGING AN AIR FILTER IN THE DISTANCE.

ALI: (DISTANT, CAPSULE 3 INTERCOM) Capsule three temperature is currently seventy nine point two degrees Fahrenheit. Twenty six point two degrees Celsius.

A BEAT.

WREN: (AWAY FROM CONSOLE) Ali, please confirm air filter has successfully been replaced.

ALI: (REGULAR) Filter has been replaced successfully.

WREN: (AWAY FROM CONSOLE) Replacing vent--

A STRONG SHUDDER HAPPENS--WE HEAR WREN DROP THE METALLIC VENT. THE ALARM BEGINS....

ALI: (INTERCOM SPEAKERS, repeating) Altitude warning. Reactor Failure.

WREN: Shit. Shit shit shit--

WREN SITS DOWN AND WE HEAR HER PULL A HARNESS ON.

Tighten safety restraint.

ALI: Safety restraint being tightened.

WE HEAR THE RESTRAINT TIGHTEN AND WREN BREATHES HEAVILY FOR A MOMENT, FRIGHTENED.

WREN: ...We are weightless!...shit shit shit...Please--Jamal--...Don't give up. Don't let go. Please, Jamal. (ALMOST A PRAYER) You won't talk to me-- but please...I need you. I can't do this without you. Please Jamal. Restart the reactor. Please still be there. Please--...please...I need you...

...THEN THE ALARM SUDDENLY STOPS. THE VENT AND SOME OTHER DEBRIS HIT THE GROUND--THEY WERE FLOATING.

A BEAT.

ALI: (INTERCOM SPEAKERS) All systems are nominal.

WREN TAKES A BREATH TO COMPOSE HERSELF...

WREN: ...Okay...Ali?

ALI: Yes, Doctor Wren Guerrero.

WREN: Contact Jamal.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

And release safety restraint.

WE HEAR A MOTOR WHIR AND FAIL.

ALI: Safety restraint released.

WREN: No--Ali...it hasn't released. Try again.

THE MOTOR WHIRS AND FAILS.

ALI: Safety restraint released.

WREN: Still no, Ali.

NEGATIVE ELECTRONIC BLIP.

ALI: Jamal has declined your contact. Would you like to leave him another message?

WREN: ...No. I wouldn't.

SHE BEGINS TO 'UNLACE' THE STRAPS HERSELF--IT'S COMPLICATED.

And I don't want him to know I got stuck in a harness again. So don't tell him.

ALI: Yes, Doctor Wren Guerrero.

WREN: Do you know how long it takes me to undo and redo these straps, Ali?

ALI: The longest you have taken to relace the straps is twenty one point five four minutes. (ALT - twenty one minutes and thirty two seconds)

WREN: Well--that was my *first* time. I'm faster now.

ALI: Yes, Doctor Wren Guerrero.

ALI: (AN INTERCOM FAR AWAY) Searching for mission control.

WREN: Ali--take note of all scientific readings throughout the Aethon--life support, data, reactor readings, CimmTech payload monitoring for--whatever their experiment is monitoring--everything from the past five minutes. Time stamp all of it and load it into the queue to send to Earth.

ALI: I am unable to locate Mission Control--

WREN: (OVERLAPPING) I know--just put it in the queue.

AUTO-RESPONSE TRIGGERED.

ALI: An Aethon Operating System Timer Failure has resulted in terminal error. Audio packets are unable to be compiled correctly. Please reset A.O.S. internal clock. Manual Whiskey Foxtrot One fifty six Delta two.

WREN: (OVERLAPPING) I've read it, Ali. There's nothing in there about how to fix the problem. Just please load it into the queue!

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

ALI: Data log loaded into queue. All readings are nominal given current conditions, Doctor Wren Guerrero. Are you sure you would you like to transmit log when connection has been re-established?

WREN: Yes, Ali. Stop asking me if I'm sure about things. I'm sure.

ALI: Yes, Doctor Wren Guerrero.

ALI: (DISTANT, CAPSULE 2 INTERCOM) Capsule two temperature is currently seventy nine point one degrees Fahrenheit. Twenty six point one degrees Celsius.

WREN: Ali?

ALI: Yes, Doctor Wren Guerrero?

WREN: Pull up Jamal's current readings.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

ALI: Jamal currently has enough oxygen and water for approximately six point three five days if he limits oxygen intake and capsule cooling system usage.

WREN: And if he doesn't?

ALI: Approximately four days.

WREN: Four days? No decimals?

ALI: Approximately three point eight six days.

WREN: That's sounds more accurate. When did you write yourself optimistic programming?

ALI: Day four hundred and--

WREN: Ali--I wasn't serious. Write yourself some sarcastic programming when you have the chance.

ALI: Yes, Doctor Wren Guerrero.

ALI: (CAPSULE 1 INTERCOM) Capsule one temperature is currently seventy nine point two degrees Fahrenheit. Twenty six point two degrees Celsius.

A BEAT. SHE MESSES WITH THE RESTRAINT A LITTLE MORE...IT UNFASTENS.

WREN: There we go...much faster on the restraint release, see?

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

ALI: Safety restraint 1A is currently unfunctional. Please relace safety harness.

WREN: (ANNOYED) Yes, thank you, Ali--I'm aware.

WE HEAR THE BUCKLES AS WREN BEGINS WORKING WITH THE RESTRAINT.

ALI: (AN INTERCOM FAR AWAY) Searching for mission control.

WREN: ...Ali...please play the current, queued distress call.

ELECTRONIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.

WREN: (PRE-RECORDED, OVER SPEAKERS) Mayday mayday mayday. This is the Aethon. Solar Flare X45 directed at Earth. Power system and

nuclear core overload resulted in onboard explosion. Capsules four through seven have been--

WREN: (OVERLAPPING) Stop playback.

ELECTRONIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.

Delete distress call.

ALI: Are you sure you want to delete distress call?

WREN: (ANNOYED) I'm sure, Ali.

ALI: Do you want to record a new distress call?

WREN: Yes.

A BEAT.

...Have we lost any ants?

ALI: I am unable to answer the question.

WREN: How many ants are there?

ALI: Six hundred and thirty two or six hundred and thirty three.

WREN: (TO HERSELF, FRUSTRATED) Why is it 'or'?

ALI: I'm unable to answer the question.

WREN: At this point, Ali, it's all rhetorical. It's always rhetorical.

ALI: How would you like for me to respond?

A BEAT. WREN COLLECTS HERSELF.

WREN: Begin recording a new distress call.

ELECTRONIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.

ALI: Recording.

A BEAT.

WREN: (CALM) Mayday Mayday Mayday. This is the Aethon. The mission has gone critical. On day 532 of Aethon's mission...March 21st, 2045 at 18:32 Coordinated Universal Time, UTC...The Aethon was in the middle of deploying and activating Payload Four of the CimmTech gravitational time distortion experiment...Wright, Azi, and Tawley were launching the satellite via spacewalk...Aquino was in Capsule 4 in the medical bay...

Per Commander Tawley's orders...I was the onboard commander during the walk.

After issuing an alert to Earth, the Aethon was struck by the largest solar flare and Coronal Mass Ejection recorded to date. The CME overloaded our systems. The payload, which hadn't fully deployed, exploded and blew out the center of our ship. Compartments four through seven were destroyed.

The flare was pointed directly at Earth and...for all I know...maybe you don't have a way of reaching us anymore. Maybe we are alone. I don't know what kind of a priority there would be in rescuing us anyway. But...

ALI: (DISTANT, CAPSULE 3 INTERCOM) Capsule three temperature is currently seventy nine point two degrees Fahrenheit. Twenty six point two degrees Celsius.

WREN: (LOSING FORMALITY) ...There were six of us left. I don't know if I'm allowed to say it, but there *were* seven...then six, and now there are two. Pilot Jamal Davis and me. We are trapped on separate sides of the ship. I am in compartments one through three. I have the living quarters. The central computer mainframe. The supplies. I have a functional airlock. And one remaining space suit, for what that's worth.

Pilot Davis, however...Jamal is trapped in compartments eight and nine. He has access to the reactor, but no equipment to be able to do anything about it even if we needed him to. He has no airlock. No spacesuit...With the explosion of capsules four through seven--we have no way of making in-person contact. We are separated. We only have radio communication. Whenever a shudder happens that shuts down the reactor, Jamal's jumpstarting it himself using camera feeds and machinery controls that I no longer have access to following the explosion. Obviously--if Jamal doesn't make it--I'm screwed...

And Jamal claims he's been seeing...'Ghosts' that aren't actually ghosts. I think he might be hallucinating...He'll run out of oxygen within the week, so...

ALI: (DISTANT, CAPSULE 2 INTERCOM) Capsule two temperature is currently seventy nine point two degrees Fahrenheit. Twenty six point two degrees Celsius.

WREN: (OVERLAPPING) Jamal has given up...In his mind, he can die fast in comfort or slow in agony. But I'm going to find a way to save him. I want to ask him to last as long as he can. It's selfish but I don't--I can't--...If I was alone--...

Ali, please delete the recording after 'He'll run out of oxygen within the week.'

ELECTRONIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.

ALI: Deleted.

WREN: (START OVER) ...As I am on the side of the ship that formerly held supplies for *seven* individuals, I have the potential to survive an estimated two or three years...Lucky me. (A BEAT) Ali, please delete 'Lucky me.'

ALI: That was sarcasm.

WREN: Yes, Ali.

ALI: 'Lucky me' deleted.

ELECTRONIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.

WREN: ...And then...ALI, The Aethon Language Interface, has been glitching. She's been glitching this whole mission, but it's obviously been worse following the event.

ALI: (AN INTERCOM FAR AWAY) Searching for mission control.

WREN: Ali's emergency protocol was activated so I can't even re-listen to the disaster to see what went wrong. I'm going through all the NASC manuals, but even the ones Ali directs me to have proven useless.

ALI: (DISTANT, CAPSULE 1 INTERCOM) Capsule one temperature is currently seventy nine point one degrees Fahrenheit. Twenty six point one degrees Celsius.

WREN: ...I've also just been thinking about time...it took us over a year to get to the sun...and I'll be on the far side of the sun for just as long...Given my supplies and how long it would take to launch a rescue effort from Earth...if there is still an Earth and if they want to save me...I have roughly five days to contact earth before it's too late...

Ironically, most of the ants are still alive from the Tawley Elementary School Experiment. Is that ironic?

ALI: No.

WREN: (ANNOYED, STILL RIDING THE EMOTION) So sarcasm is difficult but you *get* dramatic irony?

ALI: Dramatic irony is based in fact. Sarcasm is based in falsehood.

WREN: Thank you for the English lesson.

ALI: Was that sarcasm?

WREN: (RAW NERVE EXPOSED) Yes, Ali--please just--!

JUST FOR A MOMENT, WREN SEEMS ON THE VERGE OF TEARS...

...Aarav...You sent the wrong person. I'm not worth it...

WE HEAR IN WREN'S BREATHING AN EMOTIONAL CHANGE. WHATEVER WAS ABOUT TO COME OUT IS QUICKLY IDENTIFIED, ISOLATED, AND BURIED. SHE IS BACK TO 'NOMINAL.'

Delete this recording.

ALI: Are you sure you want to delete the recording?

WREN: (A BEAT) Yes, Ali.

ELECTRONIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.

ALI: Recording deleted. Would you like to record a new distress call?

WREN: ...Give me a minute.

ALI: Yes, Doctor Wren Guerrero.

A BEAT.

ALI: (AN INTERCOM FAR AWAY) Searching for mission control.

END SCENE

SCENE 5.

ALI: Pre Solar Event. Mission day: seventy four

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

MESS ROOM TONE.

FOOTSTEPS APPROACH FROM DOWN THE HALL, THEN
STOP AT THE DOORWAY. IT'S ALEX.

ALEX: (A GREETING) Guerrero.

WREN: Commander.

ALEX: ...I was just coming to grab some coffee.

WREN: I had Ali make a pot a little while ago. Help yourself.

HE WALKS OVER AND POURS HIMSELF SOME. AS HE
DOES:

ALEX: ...Is anything wrong?

WREN: No. Why?

ALEX: It's two in the morning.

WREN: I'm aware, Commander. Thank you.

HE SIPPS THE COFFEE.

ALEX: ...Wren...May I bother you for a moment?

WREN: Yes, Commander.

ALEX: May I sit down?

A FEW FOOTSTEPS AS HE APPROACHES THE TABLE.
WREN BEGINS TO FIDDLE WITH THE PAPERS.

WREN: Uh, yeah--let me put some of this away.

ALEX: You don't have to--

WREN: *I do.*

A BEAT.

I'm sorry...I have to.

ALEX: ...Understood.

HE SITS DOWN, TAKES A BEAT, AND THEN SIPS HIS
COFFEE.

...For some reason, when they told me I'd be the 'bridge between NASC and CimmTech,' I thought I'd be able to help things--unite people--bring organizations together...'For science!'

WREN: ...And what do you think now?

ALEX: Bridges are lonely. And *exhausting*.

WREN: ...So you're a glass half-empty kind of guy?

ALEX: No. Definitely not. I'm a half-glass kind of guy. You'd know that if you had dinner with the rest of us...which is what I wanted to talk to you about...

WREN: Having dinner with you?

ALEX: Having dinner with *us*. *Most* of us eat dinner at the same time. So...come be a part of the team. We're all working together. We may as well break bread on occasion, right?

A BEAT.

Wren, no one knows what to think of you. You joined late. You keep to yourself, you work into the night, alone, never talk to anyone--

WREN: I talk to Jessa.

ALEX: Because you have to. We all do.

WREN: I have a lot of work--

ALEX: It's an invitation. Not an order. Okay?

WREN: ...Thank you, Commander.

ALEX: Alex.

A BEAT.

WREN: Alex...What is 'a half-glass guy?'

ALEX LAUGHS...

ALEX: ...I call it like it is. It doesn't matter if you see it as empty or full, it's a half-glass.

WREN: Seems pedantic.

ALEX: We're scientists. We have to be pedantic.

WREN: I mean--You have a particular way of talking.

A BEAT.

ALEX: I was born in the United States, but I spent the first decade of my life in Scotland. The farm there went belly-up--which was an early sign of things to come I suppose--but we moved to Alabama, got a new farm...and about a decade later...came the real Downturn. When that farm failed I left and joined the Air Force. Which are all great examples of the glass thing I'm talking about. Farm stops working--I get to see the world! Downturn hits, I join the air-force. I fly unimaginable aircraft! I see the WHOLE world! I get to be a commander!...What you need to know

before you can make an argument of half-full or half-empty is whether you're pouring or drinking.

WREN: It seems so obvious now.

ALEX: Clear as mud!

HE SIPS AGAIN.

...And as a half-glass guy, I am compelled to say that this coffee is terrible.

WREN: That's on Ali.

ALEX: How can you drink this?

WREN: Keeps me awake when I need to be.

ALEX: / was working on status reports for Mission Control. I got a couple days behind. A little because of Margaret. And little because...I got behind. What about you?

WREN: ...My research is...very involved.

ALEX: Aarav said you were a hard worker. (A BEAT) Thomas Chesterfield--the guy who had the spot before you--he was a guy who would take his time.

WREN: ...What was he researching?

ALEX: DNA and gene mutation...monitored over a long space mission with artificial gravity and close interstellar occupancy...(A JOKE)...the usual.

WREN: Is that not important?

ALEX: NASC didn't think it was important enough. They reduced and simplified his experiment and handed it off to Jessa.

WREN: Is that the ant thing?

ALEX: Egh--the ant thing...no...that's just a PR stunt. The whole experiment is just to see how many survive--and I don't think the school even had an accurate count to begin with.

WREN: That seems important to know.

ALEX: Not really. Listen. Ali, how many ants are there in the habitation nest?

ALI: Six hundred and thirty three.

ALEX: See? Six hundred and thirty three.

WREN: Were you close with Chesterfield?

ALEX: Not terribly.

WREN: I meant--Did you mind me joining the mission so late?

ALEX: Oh, I *absolutely* did!

WREN LAUGHS A LITTLE SURPRISED.

I was with Jamal on that one! Both Jamal and I wanted to stick with Thomas. We knew him. We trusted him. And I always favor people I trust.

WREN: But you made it seem like I wasn't a problem.

ALEX: I had to!

WREN: Why?

ALEX: The 'bridge' thing, remember?...*Aaaand* Aarav asked me to trust him. And I '*always favor people I trust.*' It's a curse. What can I say?

A BEAT. ALEX SIPS HIS COFFEE AGAIN.

WREN: (SEEING AN IN)...Can you tell me anything about CimmTech's research?

ALEX: (SHAKING HEAD) No no no--that's classified...I had to sign my life away just to find out the *bare minimum* of what Cimmerian Technologies was doing.

WREN: You can be vague! Since they need their satellites to be synchronized with Earth Orbit, it must have to do with capturing large quantities of energy and radiation emissions--

ALEX: (OVERLAPPING) No...no...*Wren*. No. I have to work *between* CimmTech and NASC. I can't tell you anything...and I can't tell Margaret anything. Understand?

A BEAT. WREN IS CLEARLY FRUSTRATED. ALEX STANDS UP AND SIGHS...

...But you also don't have to ask *me* for help.

WREN: What do you mean?

ALEX: Ali, can Wren have access to the power readings recorded during CimmTech Experiments?

WREN: I don't have authorization--

ALI: (OVERLAPPING) Satellite recordings are confidential, Commander Alex Tawley. But Doctor Wren Guerrero has access to power usage readings from the reactor with authorization.

ALEX: And who can provide authorization?

ALI: Pilot Jamal Davis.

ALEX: (TO WREN) Well...Sounds like you want to talk to Jamal.

WREN: ...Thank you...Alex.

ALEX LEAVES.

A MOMENT, THEN AN ELECTORNIC BLIP ENDING THE
RECORDING.

END SCENE.

SCENE 6.

ALI: Post Solar Event. Approximate mission day: five hundred and forty seven.

RETURNING TO THE EARLIER SHUDDER.

JAMAL: No no no no no--grabbing the closest drum--!

ALI: Drum two--

JAMAL: Grabbing drum two and--

HE JIGGLES JOYSTICK. THE DRUM STARTS SPINNING.
ALARM SHUTS DOWN. SOME SMALL THINGS CLINK AS
THEY LAND. HIS CUP OF WATER SPLASHES ON THE
GROUND. HIS BREATHING IS INTENSE.

ALI: (INTERCOM SPEAKERS) All systems are nominal.

BLIP OF AN INCOMING MESSAGE.

ALI: Incoming message from Doctor Wren Guerrero.

JAMAL: (STILL GETTING HIS BEARINGS) Decline.

ALI: You've declined 10 of her 12 previous messages--

JAMAL: Decline, Ali!

ALI: Yes, Jamal.

INCOMING MESSAGE DECLINED SOUND.

Would you like to terminate recording and begin again?

JAMAL: No.

ALI: Do you know what you want to say?

JAMAL: Still no. Save auxiliary programming.

ALI: As what?

A MOMENT. JAMAL LAUGHS TO HIMSELF, AMUSED, BUT DARKLY.

JAMAL: Margaret.

ALI: Saving as Margaret dot NTR dash A.

ELECTRONIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.

Auxiliary programming saved.

A BEAT. JAMAL CHUCKLES.

JAMAL: (TO HIMSELF) Wren is gonna hate that...

ALI: Why will Doctor Wren Guerrero hate that?

JAMAL: Sorry, Ali. I'm still not sure if you get jokes.

ALI: I have two thousand five hundred jokes in thirteen different languages stored in my memory. What is this program for, Jamal?

JAMAL: ...Saving Wren. For when I'm not here anymore... (A BEAT, TO ALI) Turn on air cooling system.

ALI: That will reduce your available oxygen.

JAMAL: Turn it on, Ali.

AIR COOLING SYSTEM TURNED ON.

JAMAL: (BEAT, JAMAL SIGHS IN RELIEF) ...That afternoon I snuck out with Chelsea. Watching my first launch...I knew exactly what I wanted to do with my life.

We started sneaking out for every launch. I was obsessed. We used to crane our necks and squint our eyes to follow the smoke trail to see who would be the last one to see it leave the atmosphere...I always won...

HE LAUGHS.

...I always lied...

But it didn't matter if I saw it--last or not--because I knew one day I was going to be on one of those launches. Leaving everything behind...

ALI: (IN CAPSULE 9--DISTANT) Capsule nine temperature is currently One Hundred and eight point two degrees Fahrenheit. Forty two point three degrees Celsius.

JAMAL: ...When I told my mom I wanted to be an astronaut, her face got real serious and she told me I didn't mean it. She said she'd pray for me to stop 'talking nonsense' and have a career that wouldn't put me in harm's way...

She was a librarian. She wasn't closed-minded...just scared. You could live through books, so why put your life at risk? She thought of books as stories completed. But to me, books were instructions.

ALI: (OVER A GENERAL INTERCOM) Capsule eight temperature is currently one hundred and eight point 1 degrees Fahrenheit. Forty two point three degrees Celsius.

JAMAL: (OVERLAPPING) I read everything in the library written by men and women who had been to space. I made a plan for my life. Join the Air Force. Be the best. Become a test pilot. Join a space program...just...get to space and never look back. There was nothing on earth I wanted more than to leave it. Even for a little bit...to...what's that phrase?

ALI: I am unable to answer the question.

JAMAL: That poem written by that old guy.

ALI: What 'old guy'?

JAMAL: They put the poem on all the headstones of pilots and astronauts--how did it go? "...To...To...slip the surly bonds of earth, / And dance the skies on laughter-silvered wings; / Sunward I've climbed and joined the tumbling mirth of sun-split clouds - / and done a hundred things You have not dreamed of..."

ALI: John Gillespie Magee, Jr.

JAMAL: That's the old dude!

ALI: He died at the age of nineteen.

JAMAL: Oh, shit. (HE LAUGHS) Well...I guess I have it better than him at least.

A BEAT.

...For six years, while my mother worked in the library, I planned a secret life without her knowing. And in one afternoon--all of it...came crashing down...one of the books I checked out fell to the back of my locker. The late notice from the library went out. My mother saw it, checked my history...And I came home to a *list*...

ALI: (AN INTERCOM FAR AWAY) Searching for mission control.

JAMAL: (OVERLAPPING) The Challenger disaster. January 28th, 1986. Columbia. February 1st, 2003. Vladimir Komarov. 1967. Michael J Adams. Also 1967. The three onboard the Soyuz 11. 1971. And it went on and on...

'You still wanna throw your life away and go to space,' my mom asked. 'Yeah, Mom. If God made the universe--then why should I be scared of it?'

ALI: Would you like me to provide a list of all space disasters?

JAMAL: I know it by heart, Ali. My mother burned it into me...Every name. Every disaster. Every possible way to die...and I kept the list going as a test pilot when I had to add the names of a few friends...

(GETTING FASTER) Theo. James. Kara. They didn't make it off the launch pad. I was the one who told Curtis' wife after he crashed on the moon. And I knew all eight of the Venture crew! Carlos, Brady, Vincent, Laura, Li Jing, Elliot, Julie, Rosa.

My mother thought all of these men and women would be deterrents to me. Reasons why I shouldn't follow my dream--but they sacrificed their lives for something. Right? They risked their lives for something. Anything! Life doesn't have to be contained by the bounds of gravity. Does it?

...Does it!?!

ALI: I am unable to answer your question.

JAMAL: No one will ever know if they thought it was worth it...because those people who sacrificed their lives are gone...

A BEAT.

...There's this recording of a 'lost cosmonaut.' Some people think it was Komarov from Soyuz 1. But no one knows for sure...It's a man or a woman...in a defective spacecraft...hurtling into reentry...the cosmonaut is angry and scared. Cursing mission control. Cursing God. Cursing themselves...

And there's a photo of a body--burned to a crisp--unrecognizable as a human form--being displayed in an open casket. And that we *know* is Komarov. He demanded an open casket to force the Soviet officials to confront the consequences of their actions.

ALI: Did you find those documents to be traumatic as a youth?

JAMAL: No...the opposite....My mother forced me to listen to the recording on loop every night as I tried to go to sleep for the last few months before I left. Right up until I joined the Air Force...She made me stare at the photo of the open casket and ask if it was really worth it...

And after a while...I learned to find peace in that cry for help. In that desperation.

It was a sacrifice...*for me*....

ALI: How did Komarov sacrifice himself for you?

JAMAL: We stand on the shoulders of others...and I could accept their losses. Paving the way for the next person to carry the torch just a little further...It was worth it...

I could see myself standing over the casket and still thinking it was worth it...

And then I could see myself lying in the casket. And I thought...I thought it was worth it...

A BEAT.

ALI: Who is this recording for?

JAMAL LAUGHS SADLY, QUIETLY.

JAMAL: ...On the day of my graduation--my mother asked if I still wanted to be an astronaut.

I said I did.

...And she said..."If you go down this road, then you'll be dead to me. Because I don't ever want to hold out hope that you'll be coming home when you won't."

I became a ghost to her. I was dead already. I just didn't know it yet.

So what I'm trying to say is... if you're listening, Mom...

I'm sorry.

You were right. I never should have become an astronaut.

A LONG BEAT.

ALI: (AN INTERCOM FAR AWAY) Searching for mission control.

JAMAL: Terminate recording.

ELECTRONIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.

END SCENE.

SCENE 7.

ALI: Post Solar Event. Approximate mission day: five hundred and forty seven.

A SUDDEN MOTOR WHIRS...BUCKLES FALL TO THE GROUND.

ALI: Safety restraint released.

WREN: ...Yes...Ali...that time you got it.

ALI: Thank you, Doctor Wren Guerrero.

WREN: Did you say 'Jamal?'

ALI: I said 'Doctor Wren Guerrero.'

WREN: No, earlier.

ALI: Jamal overwrote his naming protocol.

WREN: He can do that?

ALI: Yes, Jamal can now override his naming protocol.

WREN: (A REALIZATION) ...Because we rank high enough now.

ALI: Yes, Doctor Wren Guerrero.

WREN: Now that everyone else--...is gone.

ALI: Yes, Doctor Wren Guerrero.

WREN: ...Ali, I'd like to override my naming protocol, too.

ALI: What would you like me to call you?

WREN: ...Just 'Wren' for now.

ALI: Overriding naming protocol to address Doctor Wren Guerrero as Wren.

A SURGE IN THE AMBIENCE--ELECTRICITY SEEMS TO SWELL.

WREN: What was that?

ALI: I do not detect any abnormalities.

WREN: The lights are getting brighter. Is the electricity overloading?

ELECTRONIC SCRAMBLE SOUND.

ALI: Everything is nominal.

WREN: The console screen is scrambling. Ali?

ALI: I detect no irregularities.

WREN: Well...Then I think we're both fucked.

INCOMING MESSAGE ALERT.

ALI: Incoming message from Jamal.

WREN: Accept...Accept!

MESSAGING CONNECTED.

JAMAL: (SPEAKER) WREN!! It's coming in through the airlock! Get away from the airlock! Get into a different compartment! Hurry! Get out of capsule 1! Lock the partition!

THE ENERGY SPIKES AGAIN.

WREN: Jamal, what are you talking about?

JAMAL: (SPEAKER) There's a ghost climbing into capsule 1! It climbed down from the antennae on the network arm! Capsule three exterior! It's moving towards the airlock! Get out! Get away from the airlock!

WREN: Calm down!

JAMAL: (SPEAKER) It shorted out the antennae! It's shorting everything out! Wren! WREN!! It's gonna blow the whole system!

WREN: Jamal! Calm down! I don't see anything!! There's nothing climbing inside--there are no such things as ghosts---!!!

THE DISTORTION SWELLS AND WIPES OUT THE
RECORDING--LEAVING THE MOMENT IN SUDDEN SILENCE.

END SCENE.