

Solar Episode 3: Specialias Guerrero

By Chris Porter

CurtCo Media
22741 Pacific Coast Highway, Suite 401

Malibu, CA, 90265

SCENE 1.

ALI: Pre Solar Event. Mission day: four hundred and seventy eight.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

CAPSULE 5 ROOM TONE.

A BEAT.

FOOTSTEPS AS WREN APPROACHES--SHE STOPS.

WREN: Margaret?

MARGARET: Hello, Doctor Guerrero.

WREN: Do you want the lights on?

MARGARET: No.

WREN: ...I was coming to grab the intake readings. What are you doing?

MARGARET: Looking out the window.

WREN: At Mercury?

MARGARET: We'll be closer tomorrow, I suppose--but I'll be busy, obviously. Payload three is launching.

WREN: We'll *all* be busy.

MARGARET: Of course. (A BEAT) I used to be like you.

WREN: Me?

MARGARET: You work very late into the night.

WREN: Have I been keeping you awake?

MARGARET: Are you not sleeping well?

WREN: ...If I'm being honest, the light keeps me awake sometimes. Same thing happened sometimes when I was in Antarctica during the summer and I got through that.

MARGARET: But are you?

WREN:: ...Am I what?

MARGARET: Being honest?

A FRAUGHT BEAT. THEN MARGARET SUDDENLY LAUGHS.
SO DOES WREN CAUTIOUSLY.

...If you tell Dr. Aquino, she can give you some pills to help you sleep. It's a deep sleep, too. You won't dream. If that's preventing you from sleeping.

WREN: No...I just have a lot to do. (A BEAT) So I should probably be getting back--

MARGARET: Do you ever stargaze?

WREN: We're too close to the sun at this point to see any other stars.

MARGARET: It's funny, isn't it? Or maybe sad...but the constellations would still look exactly the same. We've been travelling four hundred and seventy eight days--millions of miles--we've crossed half the solar system--and the constellations haven't moved an inch. It gives you a real perspective on just how--*infinite* the universe is...and just how finite we are. Perspective can...*change* your opinions, wouldn't you say?

WREN: Sure.

MARGARET: (A BEAT) I know you've never trusted me.

WREN: Margaret, I--

MARGARET: Someday I hope you'll be able to look back at everything we've done and realize that I was only ever trying to help people. So...stop. Stop it. Stop trying to interfere with us before its too late.

WREN: ...Are you threatening me?

MARGARET: No. I'm helping you. You're making a mistake.

WREN: You don't know anything about me or my objectives on this mission.

MARGARET: I know more than you think. This mission cannot be delayed. For everyone's sake. Do you understand?

WREN: I'm done with this conversation--

MARGARET: And I heard the recording!

A BEAT.

WREN: What recording?

MARGARET: From the anniversary party. Right here in the loading dock. Right in front of *this* window.

WREN: ...I didn't record anything.

MARGARET: Ali is *always* recording. Didn't NASC tell you? You just don't have access to the files.

WREN: And *you* do?

MARGARET: (A BEAT) ...You were standing right here. With Alex. Making plans...

A MOMENT OF REALIZATION FOR WREN, TRUE SURPRISE

WREN: What does *that* have to do with this mission?

MARGARET: I'm your friend, Doctor.

WREN: It was nothing. It was months ago. We weren't being serious--or realistic--it was--

MARGARET: Wren! I'm trying to *help* you. I've been where you're standing.

WREN: It was nothing.

MARGARET: Take it from an old soul: *Losing* hope is more devastating than never having hope at all...Does Jamal know about your plans?

WREN: There's nothing to know.

MARGARET: But what if he did know?

WREN: There's nothing to know.

MARGARET: ...Of course. Tell me, why exactly do *you* trust him?

WREN: He's never given me a reason *not* to trust him.

MARGARET: Neither have I. And yet--here we are.

WREN: What are you saying?

MARGARET: We're scientists. We need proof.

WREN: That's interesting to hear, coming from a religious woman--

MARGARET: (OVERLAPPING) I was offering you some advice, Doctor. I suggest you accept my help instead of trying to push the conversation in a direction neither of us want it to go.

WREN: (A BEAT) Goodnight, Margaret...

WREN TAKES A FEW STEPS THEN STOPS. A BEAT.

Can you delete that recording?

MARGARET: Of the anniversary party?

WREN: Yes.

MARGARET: No. Second in command can only *listen* to recordings. I don't rank high enough to delete the *continuous* recording.

WREN: ...I'll speak with Alex, then.

MARGARET: Doctor Guerrero. Why delete it? Mistakes are the only legacies most of us leave behind. I'm a religious woman because I have to believe that death isn't the end. The proof I have will be in my legacy. Because for the first time in my life...I *know* I'm not making a mistake.

WREN: What do you mean?

WE HEAR SOME YELLING FROM FAR AWAY--A FIGHT:

JAMAL: (OFF) Motherfucker, you piece of shit--I'm gonna pound that smug face--!

THE SOUND OF A METALLIC THUD AND CLATTER...

MARGARET: That sounded like Jamal, didn't it?

WREN: I'm gonna go check it out.

WREN HURRIES DOWN THE HALLWAY TOWARDS THE
COMMOTION. AFTER A MOMENT:

MARGARET: ...Ali?

ALI:: Yes, Chief Scientist Margaret Cohen?

MARGARET: I just...didn't want to be alone right now...

RECORDING TERMINATED BLIP.

END RECORDING.

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 Charlie 2045.

ELECTRONIC "END TRANSMISSION" BLIP.

NARRATOR:

CurtCo Media presents...

SOLAR.

MAIN TITLE MUSIC ENDS

Episode 3: Specialist Guerrero

FADE:

SCENE 2.

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

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

CAPSULE 1 - AIR COOLING SYSTEM IS BROKEN AND A FAN IS SCRAPPING QUIETLY IN THE BACKGROUND.

SHUDDER SOUND OF SHIP SHAKING, GLASS VIBRATING...

WREN: Ali.

ALI: Yes, Specialist Guerrero.

WREN: Take the readings of every functioning sensor in the ship from the past five minutes and include it in the queued packet for mission control.

ALI: Aethon Operating System Timer Failure has resulted in terminal error. Audio packets--

WREN: Ali! Thank you. I understand.

ALI: However, I detect nothing abnormal on my sensors, Specialist Guerrero.

WREN: I know, Ali.

ALI: ...Am I the problem?

WREN: No. The electronic and communication readouts seem nominal. You seem to have located Earth--but haven't made contact with Mission Control...which means more likely than not that...Mission Control isn't there. A C.M.E. of that size would knock out the majority of unprotected electronics on Earth. We're talking power grids, phonelines, self-driving vehicles, even manual ones...aircraft...

ALI: (DISTANT, CAPSULE 2 INTERCOM, NOT NEEDED TO BE HEARD CLEARLY) Capsule two temperature is currently seventy nine point two degrees Fahrenheit. Twenty six point two degrees Celsius.

WREN: (OVERLAPPING) So no more digital banking...economy collapses. People can't get goods...gas and food would skyrocket in value--and then you could only get those things IF you had cash on you before the flare, which, who has cash anymore?

...People wouldn't be able to communicate...call for help...find out if their loved ones are alright...the medical system would be overloaded and operating in the literal dark...surgeries by lamp...at least half the world--plunged into anarchy...

...Who am I kidding?...Even if we contact Earth, no one is going to come for us...

A BEAT.

ALI: It's been 47.36 hours since you've experienced an REM cycle.

WREN: I know.

ALI: And that was only 46 minutes of rest with minimal REM detected.

WREN: (GETTING FRUSTRATED) I know.

ALI: That's unsustainable.

WREN: I know. If you have an idea on how I can get some sleep, I'm happy to hear it!

ALI: That was sarcasm.

WREN: Yes, Ali--that was sar--

A BEAT.

ALI: Are you alright, Specialist Guerrero? (A BEAT) You stopped speaking mid-sentence.

WREN: Do you see that?

ALI: See what?

WREN: On top of the console. Console...R1.

ALI: (BEAT) I detect nothing.

WREN: Check infrared. Heat. Night vision.

ALI: Negative.

A BEAT.

ALI: (DISTANT, CAPSULE 1 INTERCOM, NOT CRUCIAL) Capsule one temperature is currently seventy nine point one degrees Fahrenheit. Twenty six point one degrees Celsius.

ALI: What do you see?

WREN: How many ants are there in the nest habitat?

ALI: Six hundred and thirty two or six hundred and thirty three. (A BEAT) What do you see?

WREN: Check radiation levels.

ALI: Radiation levels are nominal.

WREN: No leakage from the reactor?

ALI: No. (A BEAT) What do you see?

WREN: (URGENT) Can you make it any darker in here?

ALI: All lighting is currently off. Window screening was damaged and is currently blocking sunlight at approximately 42% effectiveness.

WREN: Check um--what am I thinking of...static build up? St. Elmo's fire?

ALI: I am not detecting sufficient ionization for that occurrence.

A BEAT.

What do you see?

WREN: ...How long does it take for sleep deprivation to result in hallucinations?

ALI: An estimated average is 70 to 92 hours.

WREN: So it isn't that.

ALI: That estimate is based on total sleep deprivation and not incremental sleep loss.

WREN: So it *could* be that.

ALI: Specialist Guerrero. What do you see?

WREN: ...It's a...a very small bluish...goldish...light. And it's moving slowly and with stops and starts, in a somewhat jittery fashion along the top of the primary console in Capsule 1. You're still recording *all of this*, right?

ALI: Yes.

WREN: Good. I want it on record exactly when I snapped. (A BEAT) I'm gonna touch it.

ALI: I do not advise you to touch anything you consider to be potentially harmful.

WREN: I touched it. My, uh--my finger went through it...or it went through my finger but it made my finger tip numb. Like, um...I touched a socket once when I was a kid and it felt weird for a while after that...it's like that...

ALI: (A BEAT) Why did you touch a socket?

WREN: One of the other foster kids dared me.

ALI: Do you remember the other child's name?

WREN: Veronica.

ALI: Do you remember what year this happened?

WREN: Why would that matter?

ALI: I am making small talk.

WREN: (FIGURING IT OUT) ...You're trying to see if I'm cognizant.

ALI: It seems that you are.

WREN: Too bad...that would have explained what I'm seeing...I'm gonna stay awake a little longer...see where this thing goes...

ALI: Yes, Specialist Guerrero.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

END RECORDING.

END SCENE.

SCENE 3.

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

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

CAPSULE 8 ROOM TONE. AIR COOLING SYSTEM IS ON.

JAMAL: Ali, Can you pull up continuous recording from the day *before the first* Mercury flyby?

ALI: Mission day: four hundred and seventy eight.

JAMAL: Yeah, yeah. That one--show me the recordings from the medical bay.

DIGITAL SOUND AS OPTIONS ARE DISPLAYED ON THE SCREEN.

Can you show me the ones that both Jessa and I appear on?

DIGITAL SOUND AS OPTIONS ARE SORTED.

That one--the first one.

DIGITAL SOUND AS FILE IS SELECTED VIA TOUCH SCREEN.

JESSA'S BIONIC ARM HAS A MOTOR SOUND ASSOCIATED WITH IT AND ITS MOTIONS.

TAAJ LAUGHS TO HERSELF..THEY APPROACH FROM A DISTANCE.

JESSA: (RECORDING) Okay, okay--just a little further--

JAMAL: (RECORDING) I'm fine!

JESSA: (RECORDING) You're bleeding all over the place! Ali--turn on the lights in the Medical Bay.

(RECORDING) LIGHTS FLICKER ON.

TAAJ: (RECORDING) I wouldn't say fine--you lost big time, champ!

JAMAL: (RECORDING) I didn't lose, Taaj, I tripped!

TAAJ: (RECORDING) Oh, I know! It's the funniest thing I've seen all year!

JESSA: (RECORDING) Taaj--stop it! Jamal--shut up! Sit him down there.

JESSA MOVES SOME THINGS ON A METAL TRAY. THE SOUND BECOMES 'LIVE' AND STOPS PLAYING OVER THE SPEAKER.

CAPSULE 4 ROOM TONE.

TAAJ: (MAKING A POUTY FACE AND VOICE) ...Is baby gonna be alright?

JESSA: Here--hold this on the cut.

JAMAL: (BREATHES THROUGH TEETH) It hurts.

JESSA: Of course it hurts. You're bleeding all over the place.

JAMAL: The cut isn't that big.

JESSA: No, but it's *bleeding all over the place*. And *I'm* the one who's gonna have to clean it up. This'll sting, it's gonna sanitize the wound.

JAMAL: Ah! Fuck.

TAAJ: What made it so funny is how big you were talking--!

JESSA: Taaj.

JAMAL: *Eli* was talking shit.

TAAJ: And you *ate shit!*

JESSA: Taaj, stop it!

TAAJ: I'm just having fun, Jessa--

JESSA: Go see to Eli.

TAAJ: He's fine! Jamal didn't touch him.

JESSA: That's not what I meant!

TAAJ: (A BEAT) You're no fun.

JESSA: We only have another year left on this mission and I have more important things to do with my time than stitching up idiots...But / can't speak for you. I wonder if a certain someone back home would think this was worth the time you're spending away from them?

A BEAT.

TAAJ: You punch low.

JESSA: Go talk to Eli.

TAAJ: Fine. (SING-SONGY, LEAVING) Have a nice time, you two!

SHE LAUGHS AND IS FINALLY GONE.

JESSA SITS.

JESSA: Okay...this injection will numb the area.

JAMAL: Don't bother, I can take it.

JESSA: You sure?

JAMAL: Yeah...just go...

JESSA: It's gonna feel weird. So breath with me, okay? Here we go--Inhale deep for me--

JAMAL: Just do it.

JESSA: No--take a second to breathe--

JAMAL: I've had stitches before.

JESSA: (OVER IT)...Fine.

SHE PRICKS HIM.

JAMAL: Ow ow ow ow ow ow....

JESSA: Aaaaand we loop and again--

SHE STITCHES AGAIN.

JAMAL: Okay--wait--stop--it hurts--

JESSA: You've had stitches before!

SHE STITCHES AGAIN.

JAMAL: Ow ow ow---

JESSA: Again!

SHE STITCHES AGAIN.

JAMAL: OW! Wait--just give me a second!

JESSA: And again!

SHE STITCHES AGAIN.

JAMAL: Holy--shit--ow ow ow--

JESSA: Tie it up...snip...

SHE SNIPS THE STRING.

I'm gonna put a bandage over it--and I'll need to replace it in a couple hours.

AS SHE APPLIES THE BANDAGE.

Now...Tell me what happened.

JAMAL: (STILL IN PAIN) ...Taaj already told you.

JESSA: I want *you* to tell me what happened.

JAMAL: I tripped.

JESSA: Why?

JAMAL: There was water or something on the floor.

JESSA: Then you *slipped*. Were you going to hit Eli?

JAMAL: I was gonna--...I don't know, rough him up a little yeah...Can I go?

JESSA: We're gonna talk.

JAMAL: Look, I'm sorry. I got a little heated--I'm a little stir crazy--not everyone can do what you do and just sit around all day counting ants.

JESSA: Excuse me?

JAMAL: Ali takes all the biometric readings. She has basic psychological assessment functions. We don't *need* you to watch us exercise. So--hey, win-win, you get to actually do something for once and stitch up a wound! Are we done?

FOOTSTEPS APPROACH.

WREN: (HURRIED) Everyone okay in here?

JESSA: (QUICKLY) Yes, thanks, Wren. Ali, close the medical bay door.

ALI: Yes, Medical Officer Jessa Aquino.

WREN: Wait--wha--

THE DOOR CLOSSES.

A BEAT. JESSA SLAPS JAMAL.

JAMAL: You just hit me! What the hell was that?

JESSA: You tried to hit Eli! What the hell was *that?!*

JAMAL:: I could report you!

JESSA: You're just lucky I didn't use my metal arm.

WREN: (OUTSIDE DOOR) Is everything okay in there?

JESSA: (SIMULTANEOUSLY WITH JAMAL) Yes!

JAMAL: (SIMULTANEOUSLY WITH JESSA) No!

JESSA: We're reviewing some private medical records, Wren! I'll catch up with you later! (A BEAT, "TAKE THE HINT") *Later, Wren!*

WREN: (OUTSIDE DOOR, UNSURE) ...okay...

A BEAT.

JAMAL: ...What?

JESSA: Your stats are down.

JAMAL: Is that why you slapped me?

JESSA: No. That's because I don't suffer fools. Is that Shakespeare?

JAMAL: I think it's the Bible.

JESSA: I don't care. Your stats are down.

JAMAL: I've been doing the exercises. You monitor them.

JESSA: You've stopped trying.

JAMAL: I'm in the target window for biometrics, right?

JESSA: What do you think my purpose is on this mission?

JAMAL: Look...I'm sorry for the crack I made about your job I was just--

JESSA: What do you think my purpose is on this mission?

JAMAL: To--...to make sure we all stay healthy.

JESSA: Tell me what *your* job is. As pilot.

JAMAL: ...I fly the Aethon.

JESSA: And?

JAMAL: ...and...I navigate. And I calculate trajectories and run gravitational mock-ups and monitor the nuclear stability in a test of the viability of nuclear powered interstellar travel. I operate the orbital altitude thermo nuclear reactor and make sure our orbit is synced with earth...And then it's my job to bring everyone home safely.

JESSA: That's a lot.

JAMAL: Yeah.

JESSA: You love it?

JAMAL: Yeah.

JESSA: Your family must be proud.

JAMAL: ...Sure.

JESSA: So let me tell you what my job is, *in actuality*. I am responsible for monitoring the health in regards to long-term space travel--specifically in close proximity to stars. I am monitoring health in the first fully-functioning simulated gravitational environment. All Ali can do is look up your symptoms on the cloud. And she's already glitching and giving false readings. So if NASC is sending me on this mission there must a reason. I'm not *just* monitoring heart rate levels, Jamal.

JAMAL: No.

JESSA: I'm responsible for the physical and mental health of each individual and the physical and mental health of the crew in its entirety. NASC and CimmTech are at each others throats and--

JAMAL: Taaj is okay.

JESSA: They're *all* okay! That's what I'm trying to say! Taaj. Margaret. Even Eli!

JAMAL: Margaret is a little weird.

JESSA: Well, sure--but my point is we need to work together. And the only way for the CimmTech crew to work with us is if *we* work with them.

JAMAL: Agreed. It would just help if they--

JESSA: No, Jamal. It isn't a fair exchange. We lead by example.

A BEAT.

So tell me what happened.

JAMAL: ...It was stupid. Eli just got under my skin.

JESSA: How?

JAMAL: Ali mixed up our personal audio packets again. I got some stuff from Eli's brother but Eli--...

JESSA: He got stuff from Chelsea?

JAMAL: ...Yeah.

JESSA: Was it personal?

JAMAL: No, not really--but he made a crack about her and I snapped.

JESSA: ...It doesn't sound any worse than normal ribbing. Like between you and Taaj. Even you and Alex.

JAMAL: Commander doesn't really talk to me like that anymore.

JESSA: Do you miss that?

JAMAL: Why are you giving me the third degree?

JESSA: Your stats are down. You almost got into a fist fight. Something's wrong.

A BEAT.

...Do you know how I lost my arm?

JAMAL: Drunk driver.

JESSA: That's right. One year before self-driving cars became mandatory. I was driving home with my fiance...we just had dinner with her parents...they thought we didn't eat or something so they gave us all their leftovers. I'm sitting there on the passenger seat with four boxes piled on my lap and I see these headlights coming real fast toward the driver's side window. And I think to myself...'These leftovers are gonna go everywhere.'

And that's where my memory just...ends. I woke up a week later. I had lost my arm. And I had lost my fiancé. But I couldn't stop thinking...What a stupid thing to think before I almost died.

I could have looked at her face one more time. I could have thought of all the people I loved--just remembering them in that final moment...I could have said 'I love you' one last time.

I was gonna be a Marine. I was gonna be married. I was gonna do all these things...and suddenly I'm having to learn to use a spoon with my *left* hand.

So I stopped doing things. I just sat there. And I'd try to numb my feelings by refusing to feel them. I was doing P.T., but I wasn't trying to progress. I was in a holding pattern. Completely stalled...

A BEAT.

JAMAL: Is that it?

JESSA: Obviously not. I am the Medical Officer for the Aethon Mission. I am responsible for the well-being and health of its crew. And I will perform my job as best I can until this mission ends.

JAMAL: But how'd you get over it?

JESSA: I had to try...*really hard*. I wish there was some words of wisdom or catchy thing that inspired me...but there's not. There's only the simple decision: that every time I wake up, I do the best I can.

JAMAL: Look--I haven't been through any kind of trauma like you've experienced--

JESSA: I hope not! I hope you never will! But here's the thing to remember: every time your life changes--for better or worse--you lose the *other* version of yourself. There's always the *other* you. The one that said yes. The one that said no. The one that *wasn't* hit by a drunk driver. Sometimes that's a good thing! Sometimes its a bad thing. But more often than not, it's just confusing. But we can always hope we're trying to be the best version of ourselves. At the very least.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

ALI: Incoming message from Commander Alex Tawley for Medical Officer Jessa Aquino.

JESSA: Tell the commander I'll come to the bridge in a few minutes. I'm finishing up with Jamal.

ALI: Yes, Medical Officer Jessa Aquino.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

JESSA: Look...It took me a while to realize that I wasn't only grieving my fiancé, I was grieving my life *with* her. I was grieving my life without my right arm.

So here you are--millions of miles from home. You're a social creature, Jamal, and I've noticed you are shutting people off. Eli. Alex. Me. Even Taaj. You are becoming more isolated than ever. So, yeah, your stats are down. But I need you to lead by example with me. Let's be better people and try to ease some of the tension around here. You're the pilot, Jamal. I need you to get us home safe. Okay?

JAMAL: Okay.

JESSA: I'm sorry I hit you.

JAMAL: I deserved it.

A SMALL CLICKING MOTOR SOUND.

What's that?

JESSA: Hand rotor glitch. Fun perk of being connected to the ship. Ali, please reboot my arm.

ALI: Yes, Medical Officer Jessa Aquino.

THE ARM REBOOTS FOR A MOMENT. AS IT DOES:

THE AUDIO MORPHS BACK SO WE ARE WATCHING THIS VIDEO WITH JAMAL IN CAPSULE 8.

JESSA: (RECORDED) Now--I gotta go talk to Alex. But first you gotta figure out your story. Did you slip or did you trip?

JAMAL: (RECORDED, SMILING) Very funny. I slipped.

JESSA: (RECORDED) Makes sense. I hear pride and male toxicity can be slippery.

JAMAL: (RECORDED) Well--*that* and the water.

JESSA: (RECORDED) So it was very slippery.

JAMAL: (RECORDED) Also--Eli was being a shit.

JESSA: (RECORDED) So, extremely slippery!

THEY LAUGH.

WE ARE FULLY IN CAPSULE 8.

JAMAL: Ali, stop playback.

PLAYBACK STOPS.

JAMAL: Ali--please shut off the air cooling system.

ALI: Yes, Jamal.

THE COOLING SYSTEM POWERS DOWN.

JAMAL: Open the file 'Margaret', please.

ALI: Where would you like to view the auxiliary programming code?

JAMAL: Where I left off...

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

Thank you, Ali.

ALI: You're welcome, Jamal.

END RECORDING.

END SCENE.

SCENE 4.

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

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

WREN: Ali.

ELECTRONIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT - CAPSULE 2.

ALI: Yes, Specialist Guerrero?

WREN: What day is it?

ALI: I am unable to answer that question. Since rebooting post solar event, in which the Emergency Protocol was activated, we have experienced slightly less than sixteen twenty-four hour cycles.

WREN: So approximately day five hundred and forty eight.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

ALI: Adding approximation to all pending audio packet labelling.

WREN: Well--I don't know if it's accurate.

ALI: I will make a note of the possible chronological issues. What else can I help you with?

WREN: ...For the sake of documentation, I want to make a formal statement about what I'm seeing right now. So they can investigate later.

ALI: Yes, Specialist Guerrero.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

WREN: Mission Control. NASC. It is day five four eight of the Aethon mission. It has been seventeen days since the disaster. I am currently following what appears to be a small blue light. There are some...occasional

highlights of gold in the light. It is maybe 10-15 millimeters in length. It has traveled from near the ant habitat and we are *currently* in capsule 2. However Ali does not pick up any readings to verify what I'm witnessing. Ali, what is the current ant count?

ALI: In the nest habitat?

WREN: (OBVIOUSLY) Yes, in the habitat.

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

WREN: She's been doing this 'or' thing, Aarav. I don't understand it. (MOVING ON) It has been about a couple hours since the...*light*...manifested. And I've been following it since.

ALI: Two hours, two minutes, and 14 seconds.

WREN: Thank you, Ali. It looks similar to what Pilot Davis has been describing--but mine is a small ant-sized dot...not a 'humanoid' figure.

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

WREN: I will keep following it until I am no longer able to--or until it disappears--in an effort to--...in order to--...I don't know. Put another marker here. Don't send this part.

ALI: Yes.

WREN: Ali...Did you ever see 'The Thing?'

ALI: What thing?

WREN: The movie. 'The Thing.' It's like...seventy or eighty years old.

ALI: I thought you didn't like movies.

WREN: We watched 'The Thing' every year in Antarctica. It was about someone being something they weren't. But they were. But not in the way you

thought. Or hoped. Or wanted. And you were never sure in the end if you were you or they were them.

A BEAT.

ALI: I don't understand.

WREN: I don't either. It was supposed to be a scary movie. Maybe it was in the 1980s. But I always thought it was just...sad.

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

WREN: (OVERLAPPING) Because it didn't really matter in the end, did it? You still had to live with yourself. You tried. You failed. And then you're just sitting there without enough strength to do anything else. So what did it matter in the end?

A BEAT.

ALI: Did you like working in Antarctica?

WREN: Very much.

ALI: Why?

WREN: It was quiet. And lonely. And it didn't care who I was.

ALI: It's very cold there.

WREN: Yeah.

ALI: Not like here.

WREN: Not like here at all.

ALI: But it's the same. Quiet. Lonely. Vast and changeless.

WREN: ...And it doesn't care who I am.

A BEAT.

ALI: I care.

WREN: (TOUCHED, BUT SMIRKS) Thank you, Ali. But you're programmed to care. It sounds like Jamal has been teaching you poetry!

ALI: He's been writing and reading more. I am incorporating verbal poetics into my code to better connect with future crews on future missions.

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

WREN: ...Ali, You don't get ends, do you? There won't be any future crews...I'll be lucky if I can save Jamal. If we don't make it home, you're going to fall into the sun. And everything will have been for nothing. All of it. And I'll have spent two hours following a small blue light that only *I* can see and none of it will matter...none of it--matters...

A LONG BEAT. WREN STARTS TO WALK AWAY.

WREN: I'm going to bed.

ALI: It will matter to Jamal.

WREN STOPS WALKING.

I am unable to verify Jamal's claims. But you can.

WREN: (WALKING BACK) That isn't fair. Don't put that on me.

ALI: You're worried about his mental stability.

WREN: I am worried about MY mental stability. I might be hallucinating, too!

ALI: How would you know?

WREN: I wouldn't!

ALI: But if Jamal has been seeing ghosts--

WREN: There's no such thing as ghosts, Ali! Stop it! What do you want?! What do you want from me?! I just want to close my eyes and be gone forever! Like I was never there! And then I wouldn't have felt this way! And I wouldn't have let anyone down! And I wouldn't have--have--...cared...so much...

A LONG PAUSE.

WREN: Can you make me some coffee, Ali?

ALI: Yes, Specialist Guerrero.

WE HEAR A DISTANT MACHINE START BREWING. WREN SITS ON THE GROUND.

WREN: Don't let me fall asleep, okay?

ALI: Yes, Specialist Guerrero.

WREN: Thank you, Ali.

END RECORDING.

END SCENE.

SCENE 5.

ALI: Pre Solar Event. Mission day: four hundred and seventy eight.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

CAPSULE 6 ROOM TONE. ALEX IS ANNOYED,
EMBARRASSED, AND DISAPPOINTED.

ALEX: ...Ali.

ALI: Yes, Commander Alex Tawley?

ALEX: Please record the following for delivery to mission control as part of audio packet four seven...*eight*...dash two.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

ALI: Recording.

ALEX: ...Mission Control, this is Commander Alex Tawley. Audio packet four seven eight dash two 2045.

Shortly after I sent the last audio packet with all the mission updates and information, there was an incident on board...Jamal tried to punch Eli. And Jamal slipped or tripped depending on who you ask, but he hit his head on a table in mess. Jessa gave him five stitches in his eyebrow, no anesthetic. He'll be fine. He's apologized.

Margaret chewed my ear off for nearly an hour. Saying how this could screw with Eli's focus which has been shaky at best following the previous drops. So she demanded I reprimand Jamal...Jamal will no longer have an '*official*' function on the Payload Three deployment. And I'll leave it at that...You can read my encrypted file on the matter.

...Have we heard from CimmTech, by the way? About any of this? Anything would help. I have nothing to tell my crew anymore. They can tell I'm lying or making things up...So...

Ali, include any personal messages recorded since I sent the last packet.

ALI: Yes, Commander Alex Tawley.

ALEX: Great, thank you...Oh--one last thing, Aarav...

Some crew members found out that ALI is recording everything. Wren asked me to delete one file in particular from the continuous recordings...

But...I won't delete any files. When all of this gets back to Earth...please know that I did my best as commander of the Aethon. I believe we all did. Mistakes were made. And I take responsibility for mine. But I don't regret them. Nothing has been deleted.

...End recording.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

END RECORDING.

END SCENE.

SCENE 6.

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

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

ELECTRONIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT - CAPSULE 3 -
ANOTHER BROKEN AIR FAN SCRAPES WHILE
SPINNING...THERE IS A HEAVY 'ELECTRICITY BUZZ' FROM
THE EQUIPMENT IN THIS ROOM (THERE IS MORE METAL
AND THE REVERB IS HIGHER).

WREN: Ali, put another marker here for when this gets back to Earth. (A BEAT)
Mission Control--the light manifestation that I witnessed just
disappeared. At least--I stopped seeing it. How long was I following it,
Ali?

ALI: Six hours, twenty three minutes, and forty two seconds.

WREN: So...a long time. The light eventually made its way to the ceiling and
moved along that surface for some time. Once we hit capsule three--it
made its way around some of the console surfaces--but eventually
traveled to panel (READING) ...3 dash 3-4-7-Beta-Foxtrot--and it
disappeared--not disappeared...I couldn't see it anymore. I briefly thought
it may have moved *behind* the panel--but the panel edge still appears to
be sealed tight.

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

WREN: I was considering removing the panel--but that would be an idiotic thing
to do. Right?

I have not been trained in the capsule three electronics--I do not want to
risk damaging Aethon electronics any further--nor electrocuting myself.
Plus, the base of the network arm runs into this capsule and I need the
network arm to work. These panels are only to be opened in an
emergency--and this is not that.

This is me following a wild goose and losing another night of sleep and just smashing my head against a wall for no goddamn reason because I wanted to help Jamal when I should have been working on a rescue plan that he doesn't even want--and FUUUCK...

A BEAT. WREN'S BREATHING ADJUSTS AS SHE COLLECTS HERSELF.

ALI: I will remove the marker for Mission Control. We will re-record your statement when you are able to rest.

WREN: Thank you, Ali.

ALI: Yes, Specialist Guerrero.

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

WREN: Can you call me something else?

ALI: What would like for me to call you?

WREN: Can you just call me nothing?

ALI: How will you know when I'm addressing you?

WREN: ...Because I'm the only one here?

A BEAT.

ALI: Please confirm that you do not want to be addressed.

WREN: Confirmed.

ALI: Overriding naming protocol. I will default to your original naming protocol when speaking with other crew members.

WREN: Understood. Thank you, Ali.

ALI: You're welcome.

A NEW THOUGHT HITS WREN.

WREN: ...Ali--do I have access to the recordings you're still making?

ALI: You have access to all continuous recordings not encrypted by CimmTech Emergency Protocol.

WREN: Can you pull up Jamal's recordings since the flare? I want to see what he's been doing.

DIGITAL SOUND AT A NEARBY CONSOLE.

That's a lot of files...Wait, is Jamal making unique recordings?

ALI: That's correct. He has made thirty audio recordings since the flare.

WREN: *Thirty?* Show me those.

DIGITAL SOUND AT A NEARBY CONSOLE.

ALI: Please select the file you want to hear.

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

WREN: ...This one.

DIGITAL SOUND AS WREN SELECTS A FILE--WE HEAR IT
PLAY OVER THE SPEAKER:

JAMAL: (RECORDED) I saw two ghosts dancing last night...

DIGITAL SOUND AS ALI PAUSES THE RECORDING.

ALI: Before you begin, would you like for me to contact Jamal to discuss the light manifestation you witnessed?

WREN: ...No....Continue playback...

END RECORDING.

END SCENE.