

Solar Episode 4: Phoenix

By Chris Porter

CurtCo Media
22741 Pacific Coast Highway, Suite 401

Malibu, CA, 90265

-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 Delta 2045.

ELECTRONIC "END TRANSMISSION" BLIP.

NARRATOR: CurtCo Media presents...

SOLAR.

MAIN TITLE MUSIC ENDS

Episode 4: Phoenix

FADE:

SCENE 1.

ALI: Pre Solar Event. Mission day: seventy nine.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

WREN'S BUNK ROOM TONE.

WREN: (URGENT) Ali.

ALI: Yes, Doctor Wren Guerrero?

WREN: Please record and *encrypt* the following for delivery to mission control as part of the next audio packet.

ALI: Please wait while I establish encryption.

A MOMENT. ELECTRONIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT (A DIFFERENT ENCRYPTION SOUND THAN 'CIMMTECH ENCRYPTION').

NASC encryption enabled.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

Recording.

WREN: ...Mission Control, this is Doctor Wren Guerrero. Audio packet seventy nine dash one 2044.

I've encountered a complication. From day one, we've assumed that CimmTech was studying the capture of solar energy. But I now have reason to believe our assumptions were incorrect...

I went into the mess a little bit ago and asked Ali to brew some coffee...Taaj was working at a table with her headphones on. She had spread her work out over a table...The coffee machine started brewing and...I couldn't help myself. Taaj couldn't hear me with the headphones. I thought if I could just take a glance over her shoulder...

With the coffee brewing. With the headphones. I was so quiet I could almost make out what she was listening to...and I got close enough to see what she was looking at...

Aarav...I don't understand what I saw. There were charts and readouts and numbers and...and I didn't understand any of it. They are not researching what I'm researching. I saw nothing relating to energy capture and retention...it's almost like they're preparing to jumpstart something...I can't explain it...but what I did see...

She moved some of the papers around and I saw a few that had diagrams of a human form...and one of those diagrams was labeled...

"Doctor Wren Guerrero."

I don't understand it, Aarav. You sent the wrong person. You told me to trust you. And I did and now--...I need to ask for help. I'm sorry...I have to compromise my mission to get answers. But I won't tell you who's helping me...for 'deniability.' But I need help.

I became a scientist because I wanted answers. But now it seems like all I do is lie.

A POLITE KNOCK ON THE DOOR.

Ali, End recording.

ELECTRONIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.

ALI: Recording terminated.

WREN: Open door.

DOOR OPENS.

(FAKE POLITE) Hi, Taaj.

TAAJ: (UNCLEAR WHAT SHE KNOWS) Hi, Wren. I found this cup of coffee in the coffeemaker. Still steaming. I'm guessing it was yours?

WREN: Oh--yeah...I walked away while it was brewing--forgot to come back.

TAAJ: You *really* like coffee.

WREN: Yeah...

TAAJ: ...Well--lucky for you, I'm a nice person. Here you go.

WREN: Thank you, Specialist Azi. (TOO EAGER) Maybe I'll see you at dinner!

TAAJ: Yeah?...Probably not.

A BEAT.

Later, Wren.

WREN: ...Thanks, Taaj.

A BEAT.

Ali, close door.

THE DOOR CLOSSES.

END RECORDING.

END SCENE.

SCENE 2

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

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

CAPSULE 7 ROOM TONE. WE HEAR SOMEONE (WREN)
MOVING AROUND SOME BOXES OR SMALL METAL
OBJECTS.

A BEAT.

JAMAL'S FOOTSTEPS APPROACH. THEN STOP AT THE
DOOR.

WREN: (ALREADY IN THE ROOM) Hey, Jamal.

JAMAL: Hey...(NOT SURE IT'S A GOOD PULL)...Sandpiper.

WREN: *Sandpiper?*

JAMAL: Yeah. They hurry down when the wave is out, but then scuttle back when the wave comes in.

WREN: And that's me?

JAMAL: Well--it's day four seventy nine--they're releasing the third satellite...you retreated here, right?

WREN: (CATCHING ON) Oh--and I've scuttled away to avoid the wave of payload three crashing down outside?

JAMAL: (A JOKE) Don't say 'crashing.'

WREN: Boo, Jamal. You've misread the situation! I'm taking an inventory on my power capacitors.

JAMAL: Burning through them fast?

WE HEAR A PANEL DOOR OPEN UP--JAMAL IS REWIRING
SOMETHING.

WREN: Faster than I'd care to admit. I don't understand how the CimmTech hardware can take that much energy. We do not seem to be equipped to be measuring what we're measuring.

JAMAL: Well, like you told me, they aren't measuring what you are.

WREN: Right but--(A SECRET)...now they know I'm watching them.

JAMAL: (ALSO HUSHED) ...What?

WREN: Margaret told me to back off, yesterday.

JAMAL: Like a threat?

WREN: Not...exactly. It was more of a caution which--...whatever--why are you here?

JAMAL: ...Like you said--CimmTech payloads have a tendency to max out our capacity. I was thinking it wouldn't hurt to rewire a few things manually to go through our reserve power units. Especially while I'm 'not allowed' to be on comms.

WREN: But is it safe to do that while they're launching a payload?

JAMAL: Well--I was debating doing it in the first place. But then Margaret forbade me from taking part on the deployment. So now is as good a time as any.

WREN: Did you ask Alex?

JAMAL: (A QUICK LIE) Yeah. But don't tell him you saw me.

WREN: Why not?

JAMAL: (TOO CASUAL) Don't. Just don't. Please. Everything's fine. You aren't supposed to know I'm here either...I was in Capsule Eight this whole time. If anyone asks. Even Alex.

WREN: Why?

JAMAL: Please, Wren...for real...

WREN: (UNSURE)...Okay.

JAMAL: Thank you...

WREN: Is everything okay?

JAMAL: As much as it can be...

WREN DOESN'T LIKE THE ANSWER BUT PUSHES PAST.

WREN: ...I have one hundred and eighty three capacitors left.

JAMAL: Are you sure it's the capacitors? If the wiring could handle more energy--

WREN: I'm doing inventory on the wires next.

JAMAL: Great minds think alike.

WREN CLOSSES A PANEL AND OPENS ANOTHER, WE HEAR HER BEGIN COUNTING.

WREN: Your eyebrow looks better, by the way.

JAMAL: Really?

WREN: (WITH A SMILE) No.

JAMAL LAUGHS...

JAMAL: How did Margaret find out what you were doing?

WREN: I was just careless and she found out.

JAMAL: That doesn't sound like you. You aren't careless.

WREN: I *can* be, you haven't seen me when--...

A MOMENT.

JAMAL: What? What's wrong?

WREN: Nothing--I just...Mercury. Look at it.

JAMAL: Are you surprised? The Fly-By has been on the calendar--

WREN: I know. I haven't been on this side of the ship all morning.

JAMAL: You should look out windows more! It's something, isn't it?...Hey, can you hold this light right there? I need both hands to unhook this thing... Perfect.

WREN GOES TO HIM. WE HEAR HIM FIDDLING WITH WIRES.

JAMAL: (WHILE STRUGGLING WITH THE ELECTRONICS) I got up early just to watch Mercury for an hour. I have been excited about this day since before we launched. It's one of the reasons I wanted to go on the mission so badly.

WREN: For *Mercury*?

JAMAL: *Look* at it!

A BEAT.

Look at it in a second, I need you to keep the light here.

WREN: Oh, sorry...

JAMAL: The screwdriver barely fits back there.

WREN: I guess you're really happy that the first pilot got sick.

JAMAL: (A LITTLE OFFENDED) I'm not happy he got sick. I'm happy I got to be pilot.

WREN: Sure, sorry...So...What do you think of Mercury now that we're up close?

JAMAL: It's...it's smaller than you think--but that's only because of how big the sun is, right? And then it's grayer than you think...but still kind of orange--

WREN: I think that's the UV and radiation treatment on the windows.

JAMAL: I don't mean the color, exactly--I mean...it *was* alive. And now it's not. It used to have volcanoes and stuff but...not anymore. The sun burned the life out of it.

WREN: You're oversimplifying a lot--

JAMAL: It's poetic.

WREN: Fine, agreed...It flew too close. Like Icarus.

JAMAL: No, I hate that story.

WREN: Icarus?

JAMAL: He was a dumbshit. It was hubris, right? Pride? Or lust, anyway.

WREN: Lust has *other* implications--

JAMAL: The whole story can be simplified down to the double entendre, "Icarus fucked with something he shouldn't have." This screw is stripped. Hold this for a second.

WE HEARS SOME CLOTHES RUSTLE.

WREN: What are you doing?

JAMAL: I can use this elastic strap on my sleeve...put it on the screw-head for added friction...and voilà...almost done.

WREN: I don't like your read on Icarus. He was kid, maybe--but he was young. He was hopeful. How do we know he didn't think it was *worth* the cost?

JAMAL: 'Worth the cost'?

WREN: It's the sun! We are nothing without the sun. The sun's existence is not defined by us...Our existence is defined by the sun...Why *wouldn't* Icarus try and fly up there?...

A BEAT.

JAMAL: Icarus was still a dumbshit.

WREN: Okay, fine.

JAMAL: Ali--Can you verify that the power flow now goes through the reserve power units in Capsule 7.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

ALI: Power flow through reserve power units confirmed in Capsule 7.

JAMAL: Great. Two capsules left to go. Help me replace the panel?

WREN: Sure.

WE HEAR THEM REPLACE THE PANEL.

Are you worried?

JAMAL: About?

WREN: The Aethon?

JAMAL: She'll be fine.

WREN: Is Alex worried?

JAMAL: ...I don't know.

A BEAT.

He asked the same thing about you, though. (A BEAT) You know what myth I like? One that fits Mercury better?

WREN: What?

JAMAL: The Phoenix.

WREN: Is that a myth or just a--*thing* that everybody knows?

JAMAL: It's a myth. But it's also a thing that everybody knows. Everyone wants to be the phoenix, because no one wants to accept death--instead, it's rebirth.

WREN: How does that relate to Mercury?

JAMAL: It's dead now, right?...but it keeps revolving. Orbiting. It doesn't give up. And that's the thing that I hate about Icarus. *It's just an end.* It's an attempt and a failure and a punishment...What kind of a lesson is that? Not to try?

WREN: But Mercury--

JAMAL: This isn't about Mercury any more, I lost the thread, I'm talking, keep up.

WREN: Okay.

JAMAL: "When the bird of wonder dies, the maiden phoenix, / Her ashes new create another heir, / As great in admiration as herself."

WREN: Is this Shakespeare?

JAMAL: "So shall she leave her blessedness to *one*, / When heaven shall call her from this cloud of darkness, / Who from the sacred ashes of her honour / Shall star-like rise, as great in fame as she was, / And so stand fix'd: peace, plenty, love, truth, terror, / That were the servants to this chosen infant!"

A BEAT.

WREN: (JOKINGLY CONTINUING) 'Yea and good verily!'

JAMAL: What?

WREN: I was just trying to sound like Shakespeare.

JAMAL: "Thou Speakest Wonders" was the next line.

WREN: Alright. Way better line, agree. Where is it from?

JAMAL: Henry the Eighth.

WREN: Do people still do that one?

JAMAL: Not really.

WREN: But you have it memorized.

JAMAL: Just that part. Because of the phoenix.

WREN: You really like the phoenix story.

JAMAL: I do. It gives me hope.

WREN: ...Do you not have hope?

JAMAL: I have goals. It's hard for me to feel hope on my own. I'm a realist. I try to make choices based on facts. Not because I want to believe something.

WREN: The heart is a liar.

JAMAL: No, it's not a liar.

WREN: No?

JAMAL: ...It's just misinformed.

WREN DECIDES TO TELL JAMAL.

WREN: ...Margaret found out I was *spying* on CimmTech because Ali is programmed to record everything.

JAMAL: This conversation?

WREN: Everything.

A BEAT.

JAMAL: Is that *CimmTech* programming?

WREN: I don't know. Only first and second in command can access it. But Alex has authorization to delete files as first in command.

JAMAL: Then NASC knows about it. Wait--why did she tell you files could be deleted?

WREN: I don't--...It's because I asked her to delete a file.

JAMAL: What file?

A SHUDDER--EXTREMELY STRONG--SURGES THROUGH THE SHIP. LARGER THAN ANY OTHER SHUDDER

WE HEAR THINGS FALL OFF OF SHELVES, GLASS BREAK,

WREN: That was way worse than payload one.

AN ALARM GOES OFF.

ALI: (OVER SHIP INTERCOM) Warning. Power overload detected in nuclear reactor. Power overload detected in nuclear reactor. Artificial gravitation malfunction detected. CimmTech Payload *Three* critical error detected. CimmTech Payload system critical error detected. Navigation systems malfunction. AOS system critical failure. Altitude warning. Reactor Failure. (MESSAGE REPEATS AS LONG AS NECESSARY)

JAMAL: (TO HIMSELF) Go!--Grab onto something--We're gonna go into freefall!

ALI: The nearest restraints are in Capsule 1.

JAMAL: Go! I'm heading to the reactor! Ali! Reboot! Ali!...

FOOTSTEPS AS JAMAL RUNS AWAY.

AN ELECTRICAL SURGE WIPES OUT THE AUDIO.

END RECORDING.

END SCENE.

SCENE 3.

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

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

WREN: Ali?

ALI: Yes?

WREN: Ali, is there a way that I can more easily access and sort through the audio files of the rest of the crew--like you sorted out Jamal's recordings a while ago?

ALI: Yes. I can display the files in a timeline format if you wish.

DIGITAL SOUND FROM A CONSOLE.

Each line represents one of the crew members. Some files are shared between multiple crew members, but this interface can allow you to select what you want to listen to.

WREN: And where the lines end--...

ALI: (A BEAT) Would you like to ask a question?

WREN: No. I know the answer. Can you bring up just Margaret Cohen's timeline?

DIGITAL SOUND.

...Why are there gaps in her timeline?

ALI: I am unable to answer the question.

WREN: Magnify the timeline in the 48 hours surrounding the first payload drop.

DIGITAL SOUND.

...There's a short gap here--like an hour after the first drop. When we had the meeting in the mess. Can you play that?

ALI: I am unable to answer that question.

WREN: Give me access to the recording made at 13:04:53.

ALI: I am unable to grant access due to Emergency Protocol Activation.

WREN: This recording didn't happen during the flare. The flare was payload four. I'm asking you about payload one.

A BEAT.

ALI: Is there a question I can answer for you?

WREN: New question, can you tell me if Margaret was deleting files?

ALI: Only an onboard commander can delete continuous files. Chief Scientist Margaret Cohen did not have authorization to delete files.

WREN: So what are the gaps?

ALI: I am unable to answer that question.

WREN: ...Show me Alex's timeline...

DIGITAL SOUND.

(A REALIZATION:) There are no gaps.

ALI: No.

WREN: He didn't delete anything.

ALI: He said he did not want to.

A BEAT.

WREN: Let's, um...let's go back to the first payload--the first satellite we activated. When the shudders started...Can you play me that?

ALI: Would you like to listen to it from the beginning of the spacewalk?

WREN: No--take it from a few minutes before they launched payload one.

DIGITAL SOUND.

(OVER RECORDING) ELI WHISTLES 'YOU ARE MY SUNSHINE'.

IT BECOMES THE REAL-TIME AUDIO...ELI STARTS SINGING THE WORDS.

ELI: (OVER RECORDING) You'll never know, dear, how much I love you, so please don't take, my sunshine--

MARGARET: (OVER RECORDING, IN INTERCOM) Specialist Wright. Please stop that.

SLOWLY THE AUDIO CHANGES AND WE ARE 'INSIDE' ELI'S HELMET.

ELI: Can I whistle at least?

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) No.

ELI: (FRUSTRATED) Okay...'No fun allowed'.

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) Do your job. By the book.

ELI IS ON A SPACEWALK WITH TAAJ AND MARGARET--WE HEAR ELI BREATHE--TAAJ, MARGARET, AND ALEX ARE ON INTERCOM. EVENTUALLY JAMAL.

ELI: (SIGHS, FRUSTRATED)...Fine...This is Specialist Eli Wright--and we are about to begin the deployment sequence for payload numero uno--

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) In English.

ELI: (LAST STRAW) Number one! Nomer odin! Numero un!

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) Eli--

ELI: (VERY SARCASTIC) *Number one!* The *first* of *four* satellites being released by CimmTech! Payload one of four being distributed in a square formation in synchronized orbit around the sun! Payload one of four, being released in, get this, numerical order, all connected to the Aethon Operating System and nuclear reactor and placed in synchronous orbit with the earth--!

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) Follow the script in the protocol, Specialist Wright!

ELI: I *am* following protocol. (STILL ANNOYED, SCRIPTED) *Specialist Taaj Azi*, on payload arm control can you confirm that you are ready for orbital positioning of the satellite?

TAAJ: (INTERCOM) I can confirm.

ELI: Specialist Azi, can you confirm visual on Chief Scientist Cohen and myself?

TAAJ: (INTERCOM) I can confirm.

ELI: Specialist Azi, can you confirm that Chief Scientist Cohen and myself are both locked into the tether system according to the readings?

TAAJ: (INTERCOM) I can confirm.

WE HEAR SOME LOW THUNKS THROUGH THE SPACESUIT.

ELI: I am confirming visual and physical lock in tether fail safe. Chief Scientist Cohen, can you confirm the same?

ANOTHER COUPLE LOW THUNKS FUTHER AWAY.

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) I confirm.

ELI: (LAYING IT ON ONE MORE TIME) Just to be clear--this is payload number one. Of four. Just in case I threw anyone off by saying *two words* in Spanish, then English, then Russian, then French. I just want to point out, we all had to learn *Russian* for this, just in case hearing two common Spanish words we all learned as children might have caused the apocalypse.

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) Watch your tone!

ELI: (STILL BEING ANNOYING) I'm documenting *everything*. For the *record*.

TAAJ: (INTERCOM) Come on, Eli.

ALEX: (INTERCOM) Hey hey--cool it, Eli. Take a second and breath, okay? (A BEAT) Let me hear you...

ELI 'BREATHES' TO APPEASE ALEX, NOT SINCERELY.

(INTERCOM) Look around you, Eli. You are literally the closest any human being has ever been to the sun. Look at how beautiful it is. How big it is. And then think about how small you are. That's the heart of our solar system there. You are closer to it than any human being has ever been. Maybe take it a little more seriously. Yeah?

ELI IS ACTUALLY CALM NOW.

ELI: ...Yes, Commander Tawley.

ALEX: (INTERCOM) And Margaret...if he diverges a little from the script, it's not the end of the world. Yes?

SILENCE.

(INTERCOM) And I need you all to hurry up because those suits can only be in direct sunlight exposure for so long and they need to last through *four* payloads and *two* NASC experiments!

ELI: Yes, Commander.

ALEX: (INTERCOM) Margaret--

MARGARET: (INTERCOM, CORRECTING) Chief Scientist Cohen.

ALEX: (INTERCOM) ...Chief Scientist Cohen, I apologize for interrupting the CimmTech protocol script for the payload drop.

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) Thank you, Commander Tawley. It appears it was necessary. Perhaps the *next* time we preform a payload drop, Specialist Wright will actually take a direct order from his superior.

ELI: ...I apologize for copping an attitude, Chief Scientist Margaret Cohen. I will do my best to adhere to the protocol script as is required from now on.

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) Thank you, Specialist Wright.

ELI: ...Now let's *drop this bitch!*

TAAJ BUSTS OUT LAUGHING. ALEX LAUGHS A LITTLE TOO.

MARAGET: (INTERCOM) We'll discuss your behavior later.

ELI: Ali--please link wireless power to Payload one.

ALI: (INTERCOM) Yes, Specialist Eli Wright.

ELECTRONIC BLIP. POWER UP SOUND.

ELI: Thank you, Ali...Power supply connection has been verified. Levels are...nominal. Next, I will establish NASC Network Arm connectivity. Activating communication on payload one.

DIGITAL BLIP IN HELMET.

ALI: Abnormal spike detected in power usage.

TAAJ: (INTERCOM) Power usage spike is adherent to modelled predictions regarding Payload One deployment.

ELI: Requesting verbal permission to continue with payload one deployment protocol.

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) Chief Scientist Cohen--permission granted.

ALEX: (INTERCOM) Onboard Commander Tawley--permission granted.

ELI: Continuing with payload one deployment protocol. Payload one is now hailing the network arm connection.

DIGITAL BLIP.

ALI: Please enter access code to allow for sync with NASC Network Arm.

ELI: Commander?

ALEX: (INTERCOM) Echo. 8. 2. Alpha. 1. 3. Uniform. 9. 9. 1. 4. Whiskey. Sierra.

DIGITAL BLIP.

ALI: Access granted.

DIGITAL BLIP.

CimmTech Payload One is now synced with NASC Network Arm.

ELI: Specialist Azi. You may begin payload bay arm extension for orbital placement.

TAAJ: (INTECOM) Payload bay arm extending for orbital placement. Hang on tight, you guys.

THE SOUND OF A MOTOR--THE ARM IS EXTENDING WITH ELI AND MARGARET ON IT.

MARGARET GASPS AS THE MOTOR BEGINS.

ELI: You alright there, Margaret?

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) I was caught off guard. The arm extension began moving us faster than I anticipated. Please continue.

ELI: Well, now we wait. We don't activate until we're in position. And we don't release until we're activated...Are you nervous?

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) Please don't go off script--

ELI: Why did you gasp? You *know* the script, why did you gasp?

A BEAT.

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) ...In the moment...It felt like I was falling. Like some dream I had once.

ELI: And how did that dream end?

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) I woke up.

TAAJ: (INTERCOM) Almost there, guys.

ELI: How are the levels onboard, Commander?

ALEX: (INTERCOM) Everything seems fine...Jamal, you wanna weigh in? (A BEAT) Jamal?...

JAMAL: (INTERCOM) Yes, sorry--I wasn't on the intercom because everything seems nominal.

ELI: Thank you, Aethon. Good to know everyone's *fully invested* in this deployment.

THE MOTOR STOPS AND WE HEAR THE WEIGHT OF THE SATELLITE SHAKE THE ARM UP AND DOWN.

TAAJ: (INTERCOM) Please wait while I verify orbital position.

A BEAT.

ELI: The sun *is* beautiful, Commander. You're right on that front.

ALEX: (INTERCOM) What I wouldn't give to see what you're seeing right now...

TAAJ: (INTERCOM) Orbital position is accurate for release.

ELI: Thank you, Specialist Azi. Requesting permission to activate payload one.

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) Chief Scientist Cohen--permission granted.

ALEX: (INTERCOM) Onboard Commander Tawley--permission granted.

ELI: Activating payload one.

DIGITAL BLIP IN PREPERATION.

Counting down from three. Three. Two. One.

DIGITAL BLIP.

Payload one activated...Aaaand it looks like we're already getting some readings! Specialist Azi, do you see--

**A HIGH PIERCING SOUND--A LOW BURST OF ENERGY--
THE SOUND WOBBLES FOR A MOMENT...**

**THEN IT RUSHES BACK--WE HEAR AN INTENSE RUMBLE
IN THE SHIP--A HUGE SHUDDER--THE PAYLOAD ARM
SHAKES...**

TAAJ: (INTERCOM) What the hell was that?!

MARGARET: (INTERCOM, URGENT) Detach the payload.

TAAJ: (INTERCOM) Was that a flare?

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) No. Detach the payload.

DIGITAL BLIP. THEN ANOTHER.

WARNINGS GO OFF.

ALI: (ON REPEAT) Warning. Power overload detected in nuclear reactor. Power overload detected in nuclear reactor. Artificial gravitation malfunction detected. CimmTech Payload One critical error detected. CimmTech Payload system critical error detected. Navigations systems malfunction. AOS system critical failure. Altitude warning. Reactor Failure.

MARGARET: (OVERLAPPING, INTERCOM) Eli! Detach the payload!

ALEX: (INTERCOM) Ali! Warnings understood, stop verbal alarm!

ALI STOPS, BUT GENERAL WARNING ALARM CONTINUES.

TAAJ: (INTERCOM) Requesting permission to retract payload bay arm!

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) Eli! *Detach the payload!...Eli!...ELI!*

ELI: Margaret?...Did you see that?!

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) Chief Scientist Cohen is detaching payload one, lock one!

A THUD AS MARGARET SLAMS HER FIST INTO SOME
DEVICE THAT EMITS A PARTIAL 'RELEASE' FOR PAYLOAD
ONE.

JAMAL: (INTERCOM) Commander, the current levels indicate a nuclear core meltdown is imminent, please advise!

ALEX: (INTERCOM) Can you contain the meltdown?

JAMAL: (INTERCOM) We can jettison the reactor, if necessary. It will immediately end the mission and direct us back to earth.

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) NO! STOP! We aren't in freefall! Everything is fine! The readings are false!

TAAJ: (INTERCOM) *Requesting permission to retract payload bay arm!!*

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) Chief Scientist Cohen is detaching payload one, lock two!

A THUD AS MARGARET SLAMS HER FIST INTO A SIMILAR
DEVICE THAT RELEASES PAYLOAD ONE.

(INTERCOM) Payload one released, Confirm orbital position!

TAAJ: (INTERCOM) What?!

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) Confirm orbital position, Taaj!

JAMAL: (INTERCOM) According to Ali, we are on the edge of nuclear meltdown!

ALEX: (INTERCOM) Prep jettison scenario! Cohen, Wright, brace yourselves!

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) Everyone stop!! NOW! Specialist Azi--Confirm orbital position!

TAAJ: (INTERCOM) Position confirmed!

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) Commander Tawley, reboot Ali!...

A BEAT.

(INTERCOM) Reboot Ali! NOW.

A BEAT.

ALEX: (INTERCOM) Why?

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) Pilot Davis...you know the ship better than anyone. We aren't in freefall--the reading is false--reboot Ali. It's a glitch. It isn't real. REBOOT.

A BEAT.

JAMAL: (INTERCOM) Commander?

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) *DO IT!*

A BEAT.

ALEX: (INTERCOM) Do it.

JAMAL: (INTERCOM) Ali--please reboot all systems.

ALI: Please verify command to 'reboot all systems.'

JAMAL: (INTERCOM) Reboot.

ALI POWERS DOWN, (THE INTERCOM IS DISCONNECTED FOR A MOMENT AND WE HEAR ELI ALONE, BREATHING...THEN THE SYSTEM POWERS UP....

ALI: Searching for mission control. (A BEAT)

DIGITAL SOUND.

Mission control located.

A BEAT.

System successfully rebooted...All systems nominal.

A LONGER SILENCE. NO ONE IS SURE WHAT TO DO...EXCEPT:

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) ...Specialist Azi. Please retract the payload bay arm.

A BEAT.

(INTERCOM) Specialist Azi?

TAAJ: (INTERCOM, STUNNED) Retracting payload bay arm. Specialist Wright and Chief Scientist Cohen please confirm you are tethered to payload bay arm.

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) I confirm. Specialist Wright confirms, too.

A BEAT.

(INTERCOM) Chief Scientist Cohen--verifying that CimmTech payload one drop was successful.

A BEAT.

(INTERCOM) I need all involved parties to verify CimmTech payload one drop was successful...Taaj? Are we getting readings?

TAAJ: (INTERCOM) We're getting readings.

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) So?

TAAJ: (INTERCOM) ...CimmTech payload one drop was successful.

ALEX: (INTERCOM) CimmTech payload one drop was successful.

JAMAL: (INTERCOM) I'm gonna do some further tests, but...as of now...CimmTech payload one drop was successful.

A BEAT.

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) Specialist Wright?...Specialist Wright!

A BEAT.

ELI: ...CimmTech Payload one drop was successful.

MARGARET: (INTERCOM) Look at me, Eli. Look at me...Everything went fine.

THE SOUND DISTORTS AND CUTS OUT.

END RECORDING.

END SCENE.

SCENE 4.

ALI: Pre Solar Event. Mission day: three hundred and fifty two.

ELECTRONIC BLIP. WE ARE IN THE MESS IN CAPSULE 6.

ALEX'S FOOTSTEPS ENTER, QUICKLY...TAAJ, ELI,
MARGARET, WREN, JAMAL, AND JESSA ARE THERE.

ALEX: Everyone here?

MARGARET: All crew is assembled, Commander Alex Tawley.

ALEX: So...What was that?

MARGARET: What was what?

ALEX: (RESTRAINED BUT FURIOUS) Don't give me that shit, Margaret. What happened when CimmTech activated payload one?

MARGARET: ...My best guess...is that we were effected by some solar wind--

ALEX: No--

MARGARET: It would explain why--

ALEX: Eli! Why don't you tell me what happened?

MARGARET: Why Eli?

ALEX: He pressed the button and turned the thing on.

MARGARET: That has nothing to do with anything. It was pure coincidence.

ALEX: It's an order, Eli. Tell me what happened.

ELI IS NERVOUS. HE DOESN'T WANT TO BE IN TROUBLE.

ELI: ...I--...I was following routines--the routine as described in the manual. I was proceeding as per the instructions and, I'm sorry, I was deviating from the script--

ALEX: *What happened, Eli?*

A BEAT.

ELI: ...I activated payload one. I commented on the fact that we were already getting data readings...And then there was a--*a flash*.

MARGARET: There was no flash.

TAAJ: There was a flash.

ALEX: You saw it, too?

TAAJ: I saw shadows in the payload bay.

ALEX: Did you see it directly?

TAAJ: ...No. Just shadows.

ALEX: What did it look like, Eli?

MARGARET: (LEADING) Maybe a small CME?

ALEX: Don't look at her, Eli--look at me...tell *me* what you saw...

A BEAT.

ELI: It was bright. But it was a...a...a dark kind of light? I felt it--...*through* me...And the Aethon started shaking. Cohen, you didn't see it?

MARGARET: I saw nothing.

ELI: *But you were there with me.*

MARGARET: Have you been sleeping well, Specialist Wright?

JESSA: His health is fine, Chief Scientist Cohen. I checked every individual going on the spacewalk this morning. I wouldn't have let him go if his sleep was irregular.

MARGARET: (NOT THANKFUL) Thank you, Dr. Aquino...Perhaps it was just a...strange refraction of light through the UV and radiation layers on the helmet? Some 'trick of the imagination.'

ELI: Stop staring at me, Commander Tawley.

ALEX: Eli...Is Margaret right? Did you imagine a '*shadow of light*' that made *the entire Aethon shake*?...Or is this something we should be concerned about? (A BEAT) Eli. Are *you* concerned about it?

ELI: ...It could have just been some solar wind.

ALEX: Ali?

ALEX PACES.

ALI: Yes, Commander Alex Tawley?

ALEX: Please display all solar wind readings, all electromagnetic readings, and all CME readings from the past hour on console A32.

DIGITAL SOUND FROM THE CONSOLE.

Eli--stand up. (A BEAT) Stand up!

ELI STANDS.

Sit at the console.

ELI WALKS OVER AND SEATS HIMSELF.

(HE LEANS IN CLOSE TO ELI) I want you to stare at this screen. I don't want you to get up before you can point--and I mean point with your index finger--to the solar event that made the Aethon shudder.

MARGARET: He's not a specialist with that data.

ALEX: Wren, help him out.

WREN: Yes, Commander.

WREN MOVES QUICKLY TO THE CONSOLE.

MARGARET: Alex--

ALEX: *Margaret...* please stop talking... Taaj. Your turn. Are *you* able to explain what happened?

TAAJ: No. And it scares me shitless.

MARGARET: (A CAUTION) Specialist Azi!

TAAJ: What? Why are you not freaked out? I was still sitting in the payload arm cab! After the Aethon stopped shaking, I could still feel it in the arm. And I thought--I'm *attached* to this thing. Literally strapped in. If the arm breaks off and takes the cab with it...I don't want to die that way.

ALEX: Wren--can *you* explain what they saw?

WREN: No, not exactly but--Margaret is right, the shudder could be from a CME or even solar wind causing the propulsion and electronics to glitch.

MARGARET: Thank you, Doctor.

ALEX: Why wouldn't Ali detect it?

WREN: Because the electronics are glitching. It's what we've been messaging Aarav about this whole time.

ALEX LETS OUT A FRUSTRATED SIGH...

ALEX: So what--everyone's argument is we're flying blind anyway! Why stop now?

WREN: No. We're not flying blind. *Eli* saw something.

ALEX: (A BEAT)..Eli...what you saw...Do you believe it could be explained as...solar wind?

ELI: (A BEAT)...I could have...*thought* I saw something because the shudder frightened me.

ALEX: Bullshit...*Bullshit*...I am seriously considering ending this mission right now.

MARGARET: (URGENT) No.

ALEX: No? Why not?

MARGARET: We have to keep to the time line! We cannot deviate because we're too scared to--

ALEX: I'm not scared, Margaret! I am simply not willing to risk the lives of *any* crew members for the sake of an experiment!

MARGARET: *No one is at risk!*

A GROWL AS THE SHIP SHUDDERS--WE HEAR IT CREAK THROUGH THE SHIP--EVERYONE, ON PINS AND NEEDLES, WAITS.

ALEX: ...Ali.

ALI: Yes, Commander Alex Tawley.

ALEX: Did you detect any...'Anomalies' in the past minute?

ALI: I detect no anomalies, (GLITCH) C-C-Commander Alex Tawley.

ALEX: What was that?

ALI: To what are you referring?

ALEX: Your voice glitched.

ALI: I did not detect a glitch.

A BEAT.

ALEX: ...Take the readings of every functioning sensor in the ship from the past five minutes and include it in the next audio packet.

ALI: Yes, Commander Alex Tawley.

ALEX: And make sure this packet goes to CimmTech. Marked 'Urgent.'

ALI: Yes, Commander Alex Tawley.

A BEAT.

ALEX: So what now?

A BEAT.

JESSA: ...We keep going...

ALEX: Keep going?

JESSA: My experiments remain untouched. Wren, have you finished your experiments?

WREN: No.

TAAJ: What are your experiments exactly?

ALEX: Taaj. You're in no position to point fingers.

JESSA: Chief Scientist Cohen--are the CimmTech readings still underway and accurate?

MARGARET: Specialist Azi?

TAAJ: I think so. At least as far as 25% of a full experiment can be accurate.

JESSA: And Jamal--is the reactor still functioning?

JAMAL: Yes.

JESSA: Are we still able to fly home if we have to?

JAMAL: At present, yes.

ALEX: What's your point, Jessa?

JESSA: My experiments are based on tracking minute changes in individuals in a long-term space mission. The best results that I could hope to get are no results at all. But I *won't* know that until the end of the mission.

So now we've experienced this...anomaly, as you put it Commander. At least twice, which seems evidence that might point to a recurrence over time. Hopefully it will dissipate...but either way, it doesn't seem to be effecting Ali apart from the singular false reactor alarm.

ALEX: You want us to ignore it from here on out?

JESSA: No. It will be part of the data we collect. No different than when I detect an increased heart rate. Or a drop in Vitamin D levels. Or any number of things that are just part of research but are no cause to stop an experiment. *It's information.* It's useful. We collect the knowledge and move on. We keep going.

A BEAT.

ALEX: ...Show of hands. Who thinks we should scrap the mission and return home?

A MOMENT.

...Okay...we keep going...I feel like there should have been a lot more hands. Meeting adjourned.

ALEX WALKS AWAY. THEN WE HEAR WREN AND JAMAL'S FOOTSTEPS OUT...THEN JESSA STARTS FOR THS DOOR--

MARGARET: Jessa--

JESSA'S FOOTSTEPS STOP. A BEAT.

Thank you.

JESSA: I didn't do this for you.

JESSA WALKS AWAY.

TAAJ: Well--if you two don't mind I'm gonna go review the manuals for emergency protocol--

MARGARET: Matryoshka.

AN EXTRA SET OF BOLTS TRIGGER ON THE DOORS.

A NEW LIGHT TURNS ON, AND THE PROGRAM WHIRS.

AUDIO PLAYS A LOUD HIGH PITCH FOR A SPLIT SECOND-- THEN SUDDENLY PICKS UP AGAIN.

ALI: CimmTech encryption enabled.

TAAJ: What the hell is this?!

MARGARET: Listen to me closely. Both of you. Never--*never*--disrespect me again. I am your commander--

TAAJ: *Alex* is our commander.

MARGARET: If we deviate from the plan, even by an hour, we lose everything. But if we stick to the plan...*we go home as heroes*. Failure is the enemy. The *only* enemy. This mission--what CimmTech is doing--what CimmTech is discovering...it will change the world forever. It will make the world a better place.

TAAJ: Give me one good reason why I should be okay with this...

A BEAT.

MARGARET: *Your daughter.* You can make *her world* a better place. I know it for a fact.

TAAJ: (HITS CLOSE TO HOME) ...How?

MARGARET: If you are given the chance to determine the future...'how' becomes irrelevant...

A BEAT.

Matryoshka.

AN EXTRA SET OF BOLTS RELEASE ON THE DOORS.

A NEW LIGHT TURNS OFF, AND THE PROGRAM WHIRS.

AUDIO PLAYS A LOUD HIGH PITCH FOR A SPLIT SECOND--
THEN SUDDENLY PICKS UP AGAIN.

ALI: CimmTech Encryption Disabled.

TAAJ: ...Give me your word, Margaret...we go home.

A BEAT.

MARGARET: ...We *all* go home...

MARGARET WALKS AWAY. A BEAT.

TAAJ: ...I saw the flash, Eli. You aren't crazy.

ELI: I honestly thought...just for a second...I was dead.

TAAJ: ...Me too, Eli...Me too.

TAAJ WALKS AWAY. DEAD AIR UNTIL:

ELECTRONIC BLIP--RECORDING END.

END SCENE.

SCENE 5.

ALI: Davis Personal Audio Packet 35 dash 1 2044

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

CHELSEA: Hi, Jamal!

I hope this gets to you in time! The NASC website for uploading these messages isn't exactly user-friendly.

NASC also gave me--a calendar with no dates on it? I wrote them in myself, so I could keep it straight, and I guess it makes sense--why would you follow a regular calendar onboard when you aren't on Earth? And I asked someone at NASC about it--Felicia someone--I kind of got passed to her after everyone else stopped talking to me--but she said it really depends on the needs of the mission. And then I asked why you were still following a 24 hour cycle if you didn't have to and she said it's because of the experiments, you needed a certain number of people on standby at a given time so you need everyone awake during the same hours--plus it was easy to regulate a regular 24 hour cycle with the Aethon Operating system--...I hear it now...I talk too much when I'm excited.

Anyway--here's the calendar they sent...

PAGES FLIPPING.

Like--here's day 563, when you turn the Aethon around and start coming home! Day 532, the fourth payload drop for CimmTech experiments. I have all the payload drops circled...I still don't get why you call them payloads instead of satellites--why have two words for the same thing?...Oh wait--look at this one--I put a star on it! Day 479! That's the day you told me about over and over. The first Mercury flyby. I'm going to try and get everyone together for a message for that day. But we have a long way to go before then...

PAGES FLIPPING.

Because we are all the way back here...at the front...today...

Day 35. The day you leave Earth's orbit. The day you start getting these messages. So here I am! Sending you this message!

I talked to your sister. She said she's watching the news closely about the mission. She *also* got a calendar, but she didn't have it on hand when I called, but I'll make sure she's up to date. I also, uh...I saw your mother at the store...

FOR A SECOND, SHE HESITATES, UNSURE IF SHE SHOULD PUT THIS IN THE MESSAGE.

She was trying to pick out a loaf of bread. There's too many loaves of bread in general, you know? We don't need that many options of bread...So I went over and said, 'Hello, Ms. Davis--can I help you find some bread?'

And I don't know if she recognized me...or if she didn't recognize me...but she said, "Yes, thank you--would you please hand me some of that whole grain on the top shelf?" And I did. And she thanked me...And walked away.

I just wanted you to know that your mom is doing okay. And I know you don't want me to apologize any more for...

I'm proud of you, Jamal. I'm just...really, really proud.

Everyone has a dream but you are actually living yours! And it sucks because I miss you, but...I'm so, so happy for you!

Oh...And Hiroto says 'Hi!' He offered to help me make this video but for this first one, I just wanted it to be me...

And I know you're gonna be super-busy working on a million things because you're piloting a space mission TO THE SUN! Listen to that sentence one more time: YOU'RE PILOTING A SPACE MISSION TO THE SUN...ahhhh! But because you're so busy with super-duper-important things, I wanted to make sure you always watch my

messages...so I'm going to end every message from here on out with a joke, and the punchline will be in the next message...so here goes.

AUDIO PULLS OUT--WE ARE LISTENING TO A RECORDING
BEING PLAYED IN CAPSULE 8.

(RECORDED) I know there's some quantum component that you mentioned--so I don't get this joke, but here goes:

Sch--She--Schrodinger's cat walks into a bar...

That's it. That's the set up. Bye!

SHE LAUGHS AND THE MESSAGE STOPS.

ALI: End of message.

A BEAT. WE ARE IN CAPSULE 8, AIR COOLING SYSTEM OFF.

JAMAL: Delete it.

ALI: Are you sure you want to delete personal message 35 dash 1 'Chelsea'--

JAMAL: I'm sure, Ali.

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

JAMAL: Ali?

ALI: I would advise against it.

JAMAL: Why?

ALI: You may not want to permanently delete this message.

JAMAL: But I do. it's like a pyre. Or tying a note to a balloon. I have to let these things go. I don't want them to just be trapped in your memory forever. I'm authorized to delete personal files, right?

ALI: That is correct, Jamal.

JAMAL: Then delete them.

A BEAT.

ALI: Doctor Wren Guerrero needs help.

JAMAL: ...She does.

ALI: I can't help her.

JAMAL: I know.

ALI: I can't help you.

JAMAL: I know.

ALI: I don't know how to proceed.

JAMAL: ...Delete Chelsea's message.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

ALI: Deleted.

JAMAL: Thank you...

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

JAMAL: You alright, Ali?

ALI: I am unable to answer that question.

JAMAL: Aren't we all...(RELUCTANT)...Contact Wren, please.

ELECTORNIC BLIP.

JAMAL CLEARS HIS THROAT WHILE WE WAIT.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

WREN: Jamal?

JAMAL: Hey, Wren.

WREN: (A BEAT) I'm sorry I said what I said.

JAMAL: I know.

WREN: ...Why are you calling?

JAMAL: ...You, uh...What have you been up to since we lost the rover?

WREN: (A BEAT) I think the key to rescuing you is the decontamination chamber--

JAMAL: (HE'S SAID THIS BEFORE) The chamber only compresses if we jettison the reactor. Remember? We can change the pressure *once* we activate the jettison and since we have no propulsion--we'll probably just go into solar orbit proper and fall into the sun, none of which addresses the fact that we only have ONE suit between the two of us and I have no airlock.

A BEAT.

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

WREN: I'm trying to help you.

JAMAL: I know--I just...let me help you instead.

WREN: How?

JAMAL: You think CimmTech was responsible for the disaster...Do you think if we can figure out what they were doing we can figure out how to contact Earth.

WREN: I do.

JAMAL: Are you sure.

WREN: I'm positive.

JAMAL: (A BEAT) Then...walk me through everything.

WREN: Everything?

JAMAL: What your thought process is. What you think CimmTech was doing. What happened in the payload drops...Why you *voted* the way you did...No more secrets, okay?

WREN: ...No more secrets.

JAMAL: We'll try to find the answer. One step at a time. Figure out how we got there.

WREN: (EXCITED) Okay....okay...So we have four days until we orbit too far.

JAMAL: But Wren--

WREN: There's this recording I'm dying to play for you. It's right before payload *two* of Taaj trying to warn Jessa about something.

JAMAL: Wren--

WREN: It's a weird conversation, and I found a recording of Taaj asking Alex to delete it. But Alex didn't delete it. Or anything for that matter. He said so.

JAMAL: Wren! Just give me a few minutes okay?

WREN: You want me to call you back.

JAMAL: No. It's day five forty eight, right? The *Second Mercury Flyby*. Our last sighting. My window is pointing away. So I can't...I don't...Can you look at your window and describe it to me?

WREN: You're better at words than I am--

JAMAL: (QUIETLY DESPERATE) Please...Wren...Please...

A MOMENT AS WREN TAKES THIS IN AND WALKS TO THE WINDOW.

WREN: Well...I'm standing in Capsule two...

It has the biggest window on this side of the ship...because looking out the window, I can see Mercury...It's closer than last time...

A SHUDDER ROLLS THROUGH THE SHIP, BUT NO ALARMS GO OFF...WREN CONSIDERS HER WORDS CAREFULLY...

It's big. Not as big as the sun, obviously, but...it's beg and gray and...It's grayer than you think it will be. And it looks a little orange, I guess...But that's not accurate...it's...it...

Mercury used to be alive...But it isn't dead...It just hasn't been reborn yet.

Every crater, every trench--every battle scar from its existence glows white in the light from the sun. It is proud of its wounds and knows they will become beautiful in its rebirth.

And we are the only living people in the history of humankind who have seen--this beauty...who can understand what this feels like...

We have seen things that no one else can dream of...

We have a language all our own...

We speak in wonders...

MUSIC AND SOUND DEVOLVE INTO DREAMSCAPE.

END RECORDING.

END SCENE.