

PASSENGERS

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FADE IN:

EXT. INTERSTELLAR SPACE

A million suns shine in the dark.

A STARSHIP cuts through the night: a gleaming white cruiser. Galleries of windows. Flying decks and observation domes.

On the hull: *EXCELSIOR* - A HomeStead Company Starship.

The ship flashes through a nebula. Space-dust sparkles as it whips over the hull, betraying the ship's dizzying speed.

The nebula boils in the ship's wake. The *Excelsior* rockets on, spotless and beautiful as a daydream.

INT. STARSHIP *EXCELSIOR* - GRAND CONCOURSE

A wide plaza. Its lofty atrium cuts through seven decks, creating tiers of promenades framing a vast skylight.

The promenades are empty. Chairs unoccupied. Beetle-like robots vacuum the carpets and wax the floors.

CAFETERIA

Super-modern and gleaming. Hundreds of tables, all empty.

FORWARD OBSERVATION DECK

Lounge furniture and star-filled windows. Completely deserted. A robot on spindly legs washes the glass.

HIBERNATION BAY

Endless corridors lined with vertical glass tubes. Inside each tube stands a PASSENGER. Eyes closed in sleep. If they're breathing you can't tell by looking.

They sleep on their feet, leaning against padded supports. Straps secure them in place; sensors adhere to their skin. They wear shorts and tank tops with HomeStead Company logos.

We survey their faces. No children, no senior citizens. Men and women of every ethnicity in the prime of their lives.

We settle on one man. JIM PRESTON, 38. Sound asleep. A small display on his pod reads:

JAMES PRESTON
Rate 2 Mechanical Engineer
Denver, Colorado

Age: 38
 Blood type: A+
 Passenger class: silver
 Fare: one-way

A deep BOOM. Echoes roll down the corridors.

Lights wink on in Jim's hibernation pod. Machinery hums to life. Instruments beep and chitter.

Medical data fills the pod's screen. Jim's temperature rises. His heart begins to beat. He takes a breath.

Jim opens his eyes.

Groggy, blinking, seeing nothing.

The backrest behind him converts into a recliner, lowering him into a seated position.

The sensors on his skin drop off and snake back into the pod's machinery.

A video screen descends before Jim's eyes.

ONSCREEN - A beautiful stewardess appears, beaming at the camera. She is inhumanly perfect, a computer-generated image.

VIDEO STEWARDESS
 Good Morning, *James!*

JIM
 (disoriented)
 Jim. What the...

VIDEO STEWARDESS
 Don't worry, *Jim*. It's normal to feel confused. You've just spent a hundred and twenty years in suspended animation.

She makes it sound sexy. Jim scowls and rubs his eyes.

ONSCREEN - An animation. Happy people go to sleep in glass tubes in a hospital. The tubes are loaded onto a spaceship.

VIDEO STEWARDESS (CONT'D)
 You're a passenger on the Starship *Excelsior* - a Homestead Company Starship. We've nearly completed the 120-year flight from Earth to your new home - the colony world of Homestead II. Congratulations!

ONSCREEN - The *Excelsior* leaves a skyscraper-covered Earth and soars through space to a lush green Homestead II.

JIM
 (remembering)
 Oh, yeah.

VIDEO STEWARDESS
 The *Excelsior* is on final approach.
 (sensually)
 For the next two months, you'll enjoy
 luxury space travel. Food. Fun. New
 friends.

ONSCREEN - The ship's lavish amenities: fine dining, sports facilities, shops, all swarming with happy passengers.

VIDEO STEWARDESS (CONT'D)
 Then you'll start your new life on
 Homestead II. Back to basics. A fresh
 start. Room to grow.

ONSCREEN - Publicity shots of Homestead II. Mountains, forests, beaches. Settlements ringed by farmland.

VIDEO STEWARDESS (CONT'D)
 Your wake-up capsules and nutrient
 juice will help you recover from
 hibernation!

Pills rattle into a dish; a glass of pink juice appears. He takes his pills and gulps his juice with a grimace.

Jim's backrest eases him onto his feet. A drawer pops open, revealing a Homestead Company bathrobe and slippers.

VIDEO STEWARDESS (CONT'D)
 Make yourself comfortable in your
 complimentary robe and slippers.

He puts them on.

VIDEO STEWARDESS (CONT'D)
 Your shipcard is your key to the
 starship.
 (flirtatiously)
 Don't lose it!

The pod produces Jim's shipcard: a plastic ID card on a lanyard. He hangs it around his neck.

VIDEO STEWARDESS (CONT'D)
 Now you're ready to go to your cabin.
 Make yourself at home! Enjoy the rest
 of your voyage, *Jim!*

JIM
 Right.

Jim steps out of his pod into the corridor.

All the other pods are closed, the people inside asleep. A look of concern crosses Jim's face.

VIDEO STEWARDESS

Jim, your cabin is this way.

The screen flips around to face him. The video stewardess points down the corridor.

VIDEO STEWARDESS (CONT'D)

Take Elevator D to deck seven. Your cabin number is on your shipcard.

JIM

Thanks.

He shuffles down the corridor in his slippers, rubbing his face. Having trouble keeping his eyes open.

Behind him, his pod closes up. Its screen reads PASSENGER DISCHARGED.

ELEVATOR FOYER

Jim finds a bank of elevators. As he approaches, the indicators blink on. An elevator opens, spilling light.

He steps inside, and muzak begins to play.

DECK SEVEN

A corridor lined with doors. A CLEANING ROBOT vacuums.

Jim appears. Instantly the corridor lights brighten. The cleaning robot rolls past Jim.

CLEANING ROBOT

Hello, Passenger.

JIM

(startled)

Hello, robot.

Jim follows wall markings to his cabin. Lets himself in.

JIM'S CABIN

Cozy but small. A bed, a desk, an armchair. No window.

A SCREEN lights up. The HomeStead Company theme music plays. An ANNOUNCER speaks.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 Welcome to your cabin, *Jim*! Your home
 until we make landfall.

Jim doesn't pay attention. Pokes around, opening drawers.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Over the next two months, you'll
 prepare for your new life on
 Homestead II.

Jim peers into the tiny bathroom. There's a little video
 screen, and the presentation's running there too.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Passengers are organized into
 Learning Groups for orientation.
 You've been assigned to Learning
 group...*thirty-eight*! Don't forget!

ONSCREEN: "Learning Group 38."

The DOORBELL rings.

Jim opens the door eagerly - and deflates. No one there.

He looks down. A waist-high CARGO ROBOT peers up at him with
 goggle eyes. It carries two suitcases and a duffel bag.

CARGO ROBOT
 Passenger James Preston?

JIM
 Jim. Yeah.

CARGO ROBOT
 Your luggage, Passenger Jim. Swipe
 your shipcard to confirm.

Jim swipes his shipcard through a slot on top of the robot.
 The robot scoots inside and deposits Jim's bags on the floor.

CARGO ROBOT (CONT'D)
 Enjoy your luggage!

JIM
 Thanks.

CARGO ROBOT
 Thank you, Passenger Jim!

The robot zips out the door.

Jim looks up and down the corridor. The receding robot is the
 only sign of life. He steps back inside.

ANNOUNCER

Your group's orientation starts in forty-five minutes. Join them in Conference Room Twenty on Deck One. Don't forget!

DECK FOUR - SHOPPING DISTRICT

A mall with tiled floors and ornate storefronts.

Jim walks along in his robe and slippers. Storefront signs flicker to life as he passes.

A dry fountain gushes water at his approach.

DECK ONE - CONFERENCE ROOM TWENTY

Forty chairs around a big table. A large screen on the wall.

ONSCREEN: A digital INSTRUCTOR, a handsome woman of middle age, waits with a computer's infinite patience.

Jim walks in. The door slides closed behind him.

VIDEO INSTRUCTOR

Hello, Passengers. Will you all please take a seat.

Jim looks around. He's the only one there. He sits.

VIDEO INSTRUCTOR (CONT'D)

Earth is a prosperous planet. The cradle of civilization. A world with a long, proud history. But for many, it's also overpopulated. Over-priced. Overrated. Overrun.

Behind the Instructor, video clips of Earth's urban sprawl: an endless gleaming metropolis glittering with traffic.

JIM

(raising his hand)
Can I just...

VIDEO INSTRUCTOR

No questions until the end, please.

JIM

Wait. Where are all the other...

VIDEO INSTRUCTOR

The Colonies offer an alternative. A better way of life.

The screen fills with shots of Homestead II: aerial footage of mountains, beaches, beautiful garden cities.

VIDEO INSTRUCTOR (CONT'D)

And none is more beautiful than Homestead II, the Jewel of the Occupied Worlds.

ONE HOUR LATER

Jim sits wearily, chin propped on his hand. The Video Instructor chatters on. Inspiring footage of Homestead II.

VIDEO INSTRUCTOR

...thriving job markets in mining, farming and manufacturing. An explosion in the cultural arts. And if you long for the life less civilized, you can apply for a pioneer permit and seek your fortune in the wild.

(a pregnant pause)

Any questions?

JIM

(exploding)

Where IS everybody?!

The Instructor pauses. The question seems to confuse her.

VIDEO INSTRUCTOR

We're all on the Starship Excelsior. Five thousand passengers and fifty-eight crew members.

JIM

But I'm the only one awake.

VIDEO INSTRUCTOR

No, all the passengers wake up at the same time.

JIM

Then something's wrong with the other hibernation pods.

VIDEO INSTRUCTOR

Hibernation pods are fail-safe.

JIM

So why am I the only one here?

VIDEO INSTRUCTOR

I'm sorry. I don't understand your question.

GRAND CONCOURSE

Jim finds an INFOMAT - an information kiosk. A banner scrolls across the screen: ASK ME A QUESTION! Jim taps the screen.

INFOMAT
(insanely cheerful)
Hello! What's your question?

JIM
I need to talk to a person. A real
live person.

INFOMAT
What sort of person? Personal
trainer? Travel planner? Therapist?

JIM
Someone in charge.

INFOMAT
The Ship Steward handles passenger
affairs. You can find him in his
office on the Service Deck.

ONSCREEN: A dotted line on the map shows how to get there.

JIM
Thank you.

INFOMAT
Happy to help!

SERVICE DECK - CORRIDOR

Jim appears around the corner. The lights brighten, the ventilation kicks up a notch.

He finds a door marked SHIP STEWARD.

SHIP STEWARD'S OFFICE

The lights flash on as Jim enters, revealing...an office in mothballs. Empty chairs, barren desks.

JIM
Not good.

ELEVATOR LOBBY

Another Infomat. Jim arrives at a jog.

INFOMAT

Hello! What's your quest...

JIM

Who's flying the ship?

INFOMAT

The bridge crew includes the Captain, the Pilot, the Chief Navigator...

JIM

The Captain. I want to talk to the Captain.

INFOMAT

The Captain rarely handles passenger queries directly.

JIM

Emergency, okay? Where is he?

INFOMAT

The Captain is usually found on the Bridge, on the Command Deck.

ONSCREEN: A helpful map shows the way. Jim marches off.

COMMAND DECK

Jim finds the door to the Bridge. He opens it eagerly - only to find a second door behind it - an armored hatch labeled FIREWALL and SECURE ACCESS AREA.

A porthole of thick glass gives a narrow view of the Bridge. It's deserted. Instrument lights gleam in the dark.

JIM

(pounding on the hatch)

Come on! What the hell is happening?

DECK THREE - CAFE COURTYARD

Jim RUNS past restaurants, lounges, shops. All deserted.

JIM

(panic in his voice)

Hello? Hello!

SERVICE DECK - CELESTIAL PROMENADE

The highest promenade on the ship: windows on all sides. The huge skylight just overhead. It's almost like being outside.

The atrium plunges seven stories to the Concourse below.

JIM
 (an echoing shout)
 Hello!

A SOUND behind him makes him spin.

But it's just a window-washer: a robot with long spindly limbs. It moves past Jim, polishing windows. Oblivious.

A sign catches Jim's attention: "*OBSERVATORY - Your Place In the Universe.*"

OBSERVATORY

Jim enters the planetarium of the future: theater seats facing a holographic "stage."

IN HOLOGRAM: An image of the starship hangs in space. Glowing text reads "Look through the eyes of the Starship *Excelsior!*"

Jim goes to the control podium. Touches the screen.

OBSERVATORY
 (a voice as deep as God's)
 What can I show you?

JIM
 We're supposed to land pretty soon,
 but it looks like I'm the only one
 awake. Is that normal?

OBSERVATORY
 I don't understand. What can I show
 you?

JIM
 (impatiently)
 Show me Homestead II.

IN HOLOGRAM: The planet Homestead II, Earth's twin sister.

OBSERVATORY
 Homestead II is the fourth planet in
 the Bhakti system.

JIM
 Right. And how soon are we landing?

OBSERVATORY
 Approximately ninety years.

JIM
 What?

OBSERVATORY

We land on Homestead II in ninety years, three weeks, and one day.

JIM

No. How long ago did we leave Earth?

OBSERVATORY

Approximately thirty years ago.

Jim stares at the hologram in horrified realization.

JIM

I woke up too soon.

OBSERVATORY

I don't understand.

JIM

Neither do I.

HIBERNATION BAY

Jim sprints down a row of hibernation pods. Heart pounding. Slides to a stop in front of his empty pod.

Jim fusses with the controls, pressing buttons. But the screen just reads "PASSENGER DISCHARGED."

Crouching, he pulls at the pod's canopy, trying to open it with his hands. It doesn't budge.

JIM

I'm supposed to be in there!

HIBERNATION BAY - CORRIDOR

Jim trudges between rows of sleeping passengers to the aft end of the huge Hibernation Bay.

There he finds a hatch labeled CREW HIBERNATION FACILITY.

Jim opens it eagerly - and finds another armored hatch with a small porthole. Labels reads FIREWALL and SECURE ACCESS AREA.

Jim presses the switch. No result.

He peers through the porthole. Inside, the entire crew of the starship stands sleeping.

GRAND CONCOURSE - INFOMAT

Jim stands at another Infomat.

JIM
How do I make a phone call?

INFOMAT
Your cabin telephone...

JIM
No. Long distance. How do I send a message to Earth?

INFOMAT
Interstellar messages are sent by laser array. Speak to the Duty Officer in the Comm Center.

ONSCREEN: The Infomat displays a helpful map.

INFOMAT (CONT'D)
Please note that interstellar messaging is an expensive service.

JIM
(walking away)
Bite me.

INFOMAT
Happy to help!

COMMAND DECK - COMMUNICATIONS CENTER

Two communications booths for passenger use. Jim sits at one of these. Swipes his shipcard.

COMMUNICATIONS BOOTH
Planet and connection?

JIM
Earth. The HomeStead Company.

COMMUNICATIONS BOOTH
There are thirty thousand phone numbers listed under "HomeStead Company." What number?

JIM
I don't know. I'm emigrating to Homestead II. I have an emergency.

COMMUNICATIONS BOOTH
Division of Colonial Affairs, Homestead II Program. I have a Customer Help Line.

JIM
Sounds about right.

The booth's camera zooms in on Jim's face. A microphone extends toward his mouth. The red RECORDING light comes on.

COMMUNICATIONS BOOTH

Begin message.

Jim's a deer in the headlights. He collects himself.

JIM

Hi. I'm Jim Preston. I'm a passenger on the *Excelsior*. Something went wrong with my hibernation pod and I woke up too soon. Ninety years too soon. I can't get back to sleep. Nobody else is awake.

(with growing panic)

If I don't figure something out, I'm going to die of old age before we get to Homestead II. So help me out here.

(takes a deep breath)

I'll keep trying to fix this. Maybe I missed something simple. But I could use a hand. Thanks.

Jim pushes the "SEND" button. Sits back in his chair.

COMMUNICATIONS BOOTH

Message sent.

JIM

Outstanding.

COMMUNICATIONS BOOTH

Message will arrive in nineteen years.

JIM

Say what?

COMMUNICATIONS BOOTH

Earliest possible reply in fifty-five years.

JIM

No.

COMMUNICATIONS BOOTH

We are nineteen light years from Earth. By the time your message arrives, we will be thirty-six light-years from Earth. We apologize for the delay.

JIM

(devastated)

Fifty-five years.

COMMUNICATIONS BOOTH
That will be six thousand dollars.

GRAND CONCOURSE

Jim crosses the Concourse like a sleepwalker in his robe and slippers. He looks shell-shocked.

He comes to the Concourse Bar: the fanciest watering hole on the ship. Black leather stools along a marble bartop.

Jim touches the bartop...and a MAN swings up behind the bar - as if mounted on a hinge. A handsome fellow in a bartender's uniform - his hair and skin eerily perfect. This is ARTHUR.

Jim jumps out of his skin.

ARTHUR
What can I get you?

JIM
I thought I was the only one awake!

ARTHUR
I doubt it. It's the middle of the afternoon. Are you drinking or not?

He produces a cloth and polishes the bartop. In a startling movement, he glides the length of the bar, polishing all the way, and glides back as if on roller skates.

Jim steps up on the footrail and peers behind the bar.

Arthur's body stops at the waist. He's mounted on rails, built into the bar.

JIM
(deflated)
You're a robot.

ARTHUR
Android, technically. Arthur's the name.

JIM
(taking a seat)
I'm Jim.

Arthur shakes his hand.

ARTHUR
Pleased to meet you. What'll it be?

JIM
Whiskey, neat.

Arthur pours. Jim knocks the drink back. Points into the empty glass while his eyes water. Arthur pours another. Jim takes a big swallow and sets the glass down half-full.

JIM (CONT'D)

Arthur, how much do you know about the ship?

ARTHUR

I don't know. I know some things.

JIM

What do I do if my hibernation pod malfunctions?

ARTHUR

Impossible. Hibernation pods are fail-safe.

JIM

Yeah, well, I woke up early.

ARTHUR

Can't happen.

JIM

(a challenge)

How long until we get to Homestead II?

ARTHUR

Ninety years or so.

JIM

And when are all of us passengers supposed to wake up?

ARTHUR

Not until the last two months.

JIM

So how can I be sitting here with ninety years to go?

Arthur's eyes take on a faraway look. His head twitches.

ARTHUR

It's not possible for you to be here.

He smiles as if he's solved the problem.

JIM

But I am.

ARTHUR

Sorry, Jim. My specialty is cocktails and conversation. Take your fancy trick questions to one of those Infomats. They think they know everything.

JIM

Arthur, I'm in trouble. I'm screwed. I am completely, ridiculously screwed.

ARTHUR

Lot of self-pity.

JIM

Self pity? I'm going to die of old age on this ship!

ARTHUR

Jim, we all die. Even androids end up on the scrap heap. It's not dying that matters, it's living. This is your life. Are you going to live it or lie down and die?

Jim shakes his head in surrender.

JIM

What do I owe you?

ARTHUR

Jim, the booze is on the house.

DECK NINE - AFT OBSERVATION DECK - NIGHT

A moody lounge with panoramic windows. Jim walks in. Strolls up to the glass.

Stares out at the red stars behind the ship, the cold white stars all around.

INT. JIM'S CABIN - MORNING

Jim wakes up and rolls out of bed. Shuffles into the shower.

CAFETERIA

Machines offer food and drink in dizzying variety. Each machine has a card slot and a screen displaying its menu.

Jim enters, dressed in his own clothes - jeans, a T-shirt.

He swipes his shipcard at a coffee machine. It offers sixteen kinds of coffee, from a simple cup of joe to the "Mocha Cappuccino Extreme." Jim picks the best of the lot.

COFFEE MACHINE

Sorry. The Mocha Cappuccino Extreme is reserved for gold-class passengers. Please select another item.

Jim presses one button after another, denied each time.

COFFEE MACHINE (CONT'D)

Sorry...sorry...sorry...Large coffee.

JIM

Are you serious?

COFFEE MACHINE

Please enjoy.

ELEVATOR

Jim ascends, sipping coffee and eating an egg sandwich.

The doors open at the Command Deck. A sign reads "Crew Area - No Passengers beyond this point." Jim breezes past the sign.

COMMAND DECK

Jim prowls the floor, opening doors.

He finds a room marked EMERGENCY GEAR and opens it eagerly. It's full of space suits and oxygen tanks.

He peers into a red HAZARD cabinet: fire extinguishers, an axe, an epoxy foamer for atmosphere leaks - all behind glass.

He opens another door marked EMERGENCY MANUALS - and smiles: shelf after shelf of waterproof, fireproof technical manuals.

Jim pulls a manual labeled HIBERNATION SYSTEMS.

INT. SUBDECK B - PASSENGER CARGO STOWAGE - DAY

A cavernous cargo hold. Jim drives a forklift down the aisle, scanning container numbers.

He finds a container labeled "PASSENGER #1498, JAMES PRESTON." The forklift pulls it from the rack.

THE CARGO CONTAINER

Opens to reveal Jim's belongings. Cartons marked "sports" or "clothes" or "kitchen stuff."

Amidst the cartons, a heavy-duty TOOLBOX. Jim hauls it out.

HIBERNATION BAY

Jim sits in front of his empty hibernation pod. His toolbox beside him. The Hibernation Systems manual lies open.

Jim tinkers with the electronics inside his pod.

The pod hums to life. Its data screen flickers with information. Mysterious WHIRS and THUNKS.

The canopy opens.

Elated, Jim bounces to his feet. Strips off his shirt and scrambles in. The canopy closes over him.

He assumes the position, his back against the backrest, waiting for the pod to put him to sleep.

Nothing happens. He pokes at the ports where the sensors and intravenous lines used to protrude. Shakes the machine.

He gives up. It's not working.

But now he's trapped inside the pod.

He pushes at the canopy, but it's locked shut. He pounds on the glass with no effect. Finally he loses it, shouting and stamping, hammering and raging - all muffled behind glass.

Exhausted, he sinks to the floor of the pod, staring out at his tools and his manual, his discarded shirt.

Then he notices the emergency release handle down by the floor. He pulls it, and the canopy pops open.

OUTSIDE THE POD

The pod's display screen blinks back to its original message. PASSENGER DISCHARGED.

CREW HIBERNATION FACILITY DOOR

Jim looks through the porthole at the sleeping crew.

Jim swipes his shipcard through the door switch. ACCESS DENIED. He pokes at the keypad. ACCESS DENIED.

Jim opens his toolbox, selects a tool and starts to remove the keypad's cover plate.

FADE TO BLACK.

SUPER: THREE WEEKS LATER

INT. CREW HIBERNATION FACILITY DOOR - MORNING

Jim works on the door with an industrial LASER CUTTER. Sparks fly. He's drenched in sweat. Mussed and unshaven.

He lifts the goggles and inspects the door. The laser cutter has barely marked the surface.

The door's a mess. Its switch hangs on wires. There are pry marks around the latch. Gouges around the window. Failed drill holes. Dents left by an axe.

But the door stands firm.

Jim lets the laser cutter fall. It joins a scrapyard of tools on the floor: sledgehammer, jackhammer, drill, crowbar, axe.

HIBERNATION BAY - JIM'S POD

Another debris field surrounds Jim's hibernation pod. Tools and cables, electronic instruments, a diagnostic laptop.

Jim stalks by without so much as a sideways glance.

CONCOURSE BAR - DAY

Arthur stands behind the bar polishing glasses. Jim sits, sweaty and grimy, a whiskey in front of him.

His speech is soft around the edges. He's had a few.

JIM

I thought I'd figure something out. I thought it would just come to me.

ARTHUR

Stands to reason.

JIM

But I've tried everything.

ARTHUR

Sometimes you can't catch a break.

Jim gives Arthur a thoughtful look.

JIM

I'm your only customer, but you're always polishing a glass.

ARTHUR

Trick of the trade. Makes people nervous when a bartender just stands there.

JIM

Okay. Lay some bartender wisdom on me. I'm lost in space here.

Arthur polishes the bar while he thinks that one over.

ARTHUR

You're not where you want to be. You feel like you're supposed to be somewhere else. Right?

JIM

You said it.

ARTHUR

Well, here's the thing. Say you could snap your fingers and be wherever you wanted to be. Back on Earth, or on Homestead II.

JIM

Okay.

ARTHUR

I'll bet even if you got your wish, you'd still feel this way. Not in the right place. Supposed to be somewhere else. That's not a crisis, it's the human condition.

Jim takes a moment to consider that.

JIM

That's not me.

ARTHUR

Well, maybe not. The point is, you can't get so wrapped up in where you'd rather be that you forget to make the most of where you are.

JIM

What are you telling me?

ARTHUR

It's a big ship. You're always running around banging on things and yelling at the computers. Take a break. Live a little.

Jim spins on his barstool, surveying the Grand Concourse.

JIM

Live a little.

When he comes back around he gives a shove. He spins faster.

ARTHUR

That's the spirit.

Jim goes for one more shove. Misses. Falls off his stool.

GRAND CONCOURSE - INFORMATION KIOSK

Jim scans a map of the ship. Second-class cabins. First-class cabins. And the good stuff: palatial suites named for European cities.

His finger stops on one of the biggest. The Berlin Suite.

BERLIN SUITE

High ceilings, posh furniture, panoramic windows.

The door jumps in its frame with a THUNK. Slides open. Jim enters, a crowbar in hand.

A cargo robot follows him in, carrying his toolbox and suitcases. It deposits them on the floor.

CARGO ROBOT

The Berlin Suite! Enjoy your luggage!

BERLIN SUITE - BATH

Jim cleans up in the opulent bathtub. A robot arm with a water jet washes his back.

BERLIN SUITE - BEDROOM

Jim unpacks. Stowing clothes in closets, laying out mementos. He pulls a pair of sneakers out of his luggage.

DECK TWO - GYMNASIUM - BASKETBALL COURT

Jim shoots baskets in sneakers and gym clothes. He's not bad. He shoots, rebounds, shoots.

SPA

Jim lies on a massage table wearing a towel. A pair of robot arms emerge from the table and begin to massage him.

DECK THREE - MARCELLO'S - DAY

The Italian restaurant. Cafe tables, white tablecloths.

Jim sits perusing a menu. A robotic waiter - a machine, not a counterfeit human - rolls up to the table.

JIM
(with relish)
Let me have the rigatoni alla diavola,
with the sauteed spinach and a glass
of the Montepulciano.

DECK TWO - ARCADE - EVENING

A state-of-the-art game room. Jim inspects the flagship game: "Z Factor!" A huge holographic display, a futuristic cockpit.

Jim swipes his shipcard. The game speaks like an angry giant.

Z FACTOR
Jim Preston! Welcome to the cutting
edge of gaming! The greatest
challenge you will ever know!

JIM
All right then.

He clambers into the cockpit.

Z FACTOR
(snarling)
Are you ready to play Z Factor?

JIM
Yes!

Z FACTOR
(an echoing roar)
Begin!

IN HOLOGRAM: A fortress shines on a hilltop. War machines crawl over a blasted land. Letters flash: LEVEL ONE.

A WARRIOR appears. Jim's character. Jim works the controls.

IN HOLOGRAM: The Warrior rises off the ground on a beam of light - and is immediately torn to pieces by enemy fire.

Z FACTOR (CONT'D)
You lose! Z Factor reigns supreme!

The game howls with demonic laughter.

DECK FOUR - MOVIE THEATER - EVENING

A classic theater. Seats for a thousand. A velvet curtain.

Jim enters. Cued by his arrival, the curtain parts. The film begins. Jim settles into a seat.

FADE TO BLACK.

SUPER: THREE MONTHS LATER

DECK TWO - ARCADE - DAY

Jim is playing "Z Factor!" and he's on fire.

IN HOLOGRAM: The Warrior battles dragons above a crystalline city. A title announces "Level 40."

Jim moves like a martial artist, dripping sweat.

IN HOLOGRAM: The Warrior challenges the game's Final Enemy - a colossus with a hundred eyes. The Final Enemy falls dead.

Z-FACTOR
You are victorious!

JIM
Yes!

Z-FACTOR
You are the Grand Master of Z Factor!

JIM
(elated)
I am the Grand Master of Z Factor!

GYMNASIUM - BASKETBALL COURT

Jim shoots baskets. He's brought dozens of balls onto the court. He no longer rebounds, just grabs the nearest ball.

He shoots from half court. From even farther away. Long shots, bounce shots off the wall.

He launches a full-court shot, bangs it off the rim, and lets himself topple over backward. Lies staring at the ceiling.

BELLA CANTINA - AFTERNOON

The ship's Mexican restaurant. It has the same robot waiters as the Italian place, but here they wear sombreros.

Jim sits over the wreckage of his lunch. He downs a margarita and puts the empty glass down beside several others.

JIM
Another margarita!

MEXICAN ROBOT WAITER
You have had many, señor.

JIM
(drunkenly)
Margarita otra vez!

MEXICAN ROBOT WAITER
Si, señor.

LIBRARY - AFTERNOON

A room full of workstations, each with a reading machine. Jim sits at one in a headset, taking a Russian Language course.

RUSSIAN TEACHER (FILTERED)
This is the Gudonov Russian Language Course. Level One. Let's begin. Repeat after me.
(in Russian)
[I am beginning to learn.]

JIM
(in Russian)
[I am beginning to learn.]

RUSSIAN TEACHER (FILTERED)
I am beginning to learn.

JIM
I am beginning to learn.

CONCOURSE BAR - EVENING

Jim sits drinking. Three glasses in front of him. Drunk.

JIM
(in bad Russian, subtitled)
[I be study the Russian.]

ARTHUR
 (in perfect Russian, subtitled)
 [*Good for you! It's a beautiful
 language.*]

JIM
 You speak Russian!

ARTHUR
 Of course. We have Russian
 passengers.

JIM
 Well, I'm trying new things. From now
 on, every time I sit down, I want a
 drink I haven't had before.

ARTHUR
 Fair enough.

Arthur mixes a bright green drink, sets it in front of Jim.
 Jim takes a sip and makes a horrible face.

JIM
 What's that?

ARTHUR
 Something new.

FADE TO BLACK.

SUPER: THREE MONTHS LATER

INT. BERLIN SUITE - BEDROOM - MORNING

Jim sleeps in his luxurious bed. The covers knotted around
 him. He hasn't shaven in weeks.

His eyes open. He lies staring at the ceiling.

After a long moment he gets up. Shuffles toward the bathroom
 in his underwear. He's put on a beer gut.

CAFETERIA - MORNING

Jim walks past empty tables. Dials up a coffee and a roll.
 Sits sipping coffee and staring at nothing.

ARCADE ENTRANCE - DAY

Flashes and blasts of noise. The sounds of *Z Factor!*

Z FACTOR (O.S.)
 You are victorious!

AT THE Z-FACTOR MACHINE

Jim sits blank-faced in the cockpit.

Z-FACTOR
New high score!

Bored, Jim punches his name into the High Scores board. JIM.
All the other high scores say JIM.

CONCOURSE BAR - MORNING

Jim walks up to the bar and slides onto a stool.

JIM
(in fluent Russian, subtitled)
[I'm ready for today's new drink]

ARTHUR
(in Russian, subtitled)
[I'm afraid I can't help you, my friend.]

Jim thumps his fist on the bar.

JIM
(in Russian, subtitled)
[Don't argue with me, robot. Give me a new drink.]

ARTHUR
(reluctantly)
There are no new drinks.

JIM
What do you mean?

ARTHUR
I can make two thousand, seven
hundred and thirty-eight cocktails.
You've had them all.

The news hits Jim like a death in the family.

JIM
There are no new drinks.

NIGHTCLUB - EVENING

On the holographic stage, a sexy LOUNGE SINGER in a slinky dress croons a torch song. Jim stands just inches away.

He touches her face. The hologram dissolves into static.

Jim drops his hand, restoring the illusion. Closes his eyes in an agony of loneliness.

GRAND CONCOURSE - SHOPPING DISTRICT - NIGHT

Jim walks past the upscale shops, blind to their displays.

He comes to a PHOTO BOOTH. The promotional pictures on the side catch his attention: people clowning, smiling, kissing.

He pulls back the curtain, sits in the booth. The curtain falls. The strobe flashes.

A photostrip drops into the tray outside the machine: four identical shots of Jim staring into the lens without emotion.

ELITE DECK - ELITE PROMENADE - DAY

Jim walks numbly along, ignoring the stellar view. He munches potato chips out of a bag.

A SWEEPER ROBOT follows him like a dog, collecting crumbs. Jim feeds it chips. One for Jim, one for the robot.

FORWARD OBSERVATION DECK

Jim enters, still munching chips. The sweeper robot follows.

Jim stands at the windows. Stares out into the dark. Sighs a terrible sigh.

Suddenly he's wracked by sobs. Tears welling up. He leans his forehead against the glass. Moaning.

After a moment he sits down blindly.

The whole room begins to slide past him.

Confused, Jim looks around. He's accidentally sat down on the sweeper robot: it carries him across the room.

TRAVELING SHOT

The robot carries Jim up and down the Celestial Promenade. Down an elevator.

Past the Concourse Bar. Jim waves. Arthur waves back, speechless.

DECK ONE

The robot heads into a low hatch. Jim ducks to fit through.

ROBOTICS CENTER

A mechanical hive. Here the ship's robots are cleaned, repaired, recharged. Robots bustle everywhere - never colliding, never getting lost. A ballet.

Jim's sweeper robot vomits its load of collected dirt into a waste chute. Heads into a recharging niche.

Jim jumps off.

He explores: it's an engineer's fantasia. Jim's eyes show signs of life. But it's a hazardous place, with cranes and platforms, hoses and blowtorches on the move.

He exits through another low hatch to find himself in the...

HIBERNATION BAY

Thousands of sleepers in their glass tubes. Jim walks among them, looking at their faces.

Suddenly he stops, staring. Inside a pod, a woman stands sleeping. This is AURORA DUNN. A breathtaking beauty.

JIM

Who are you?

(peers at her data screen)

Aurora.

He moves on, browsing people. Stops. Backtracks. He stands in front of Aurora, looking in through the glass.

He glances at her data screen again.

JIM (CONT'D)

New York City. Journalist.

INT. DECK TWO - LIBRARY

A workstation. Jim types "Aurora Dunn" into a search engine. It returns a list of *New Yorker* articles. Some titles:

The New Corporate Overlords

Patient or Patent? Genetic Medicine and You

Modern Love: Dating the Database

Jim moves the articles onto a digital slate.

CONCOURSE BAR - EVENING

Jim sits reading one of Aurora's articles. Arthur keeps busy.

JIM

Did you know ninety percent of the businesses in the world are owned by just eight companies?

ARTHUR

Is that right?

JIM

She's good. She knows her stuff, and she's not afraid of anybody.

ARTHUR

Who's that?

JIM

Aurora.

ARTHUR

Who's Aurora?

JIM

A woman. A passenger.

FADE TO BLACK.

SUPER: THREE MONTHS LATER

INT. BERLIN SUITE - MORNING

Jim lies asleep, wearing boxer shorts and a full beard. The suite's a wreck. Laundry and dishes litter the floor.

His eyes open. He looks at the stars outside. Gropes under the pillow and pulls out a remote control. Punches a button.

The window shades come down, hiding the view.

CORRIDOR

Jim emerges from his room in boxer shorts and slippers. He's dragging a blanket.

A housekeeping robot, its dustpan quivering in anticipation, hovers outside his door.

Jim taps the "Do Not Disturb" button on his door panel and walks away.

The housekeeping robot squeals in frustration as the door closes over the mess inside.

CAFETERIA

Jim pours milk over a bowl of cereal.

ELEVATOR

Jim descends, the blanket draped over his shoulders like a serape. He holds his bowl of cereal in both hands.

HIBERNATION BAY - AURORA'S POD

Jim stands eating cereal and staring at Aurora. His eyes never stray from her face.

GRAND CONCOURSE - CONCOURSE BAR

Jim glowers at the bar in his boxers and blanket. The cereal bowl on the bar beside him.

JIM

I'm not saying the universe is evil.
It's just got an ugly sense of humor.
It doesn't just crush you. It crushes
you ironically.

ARTHUR

Things may look dark sometimes...

JIM

You get to fly to another planet, but
you die on the way. You're completely
alone, with the perfect woman right
in front of you, just out of reach.

ARTHUR

Aurora.

JIM

Yes, Aurora! Arthur, I'm falling for
her. I've read all her stuff.
Sometimes I talk to her and I know
exactly what she'd say.

ARTHUR

Jim, Aurora's asleep.

JIM

I know.
(lays his head on the bar)
I know.

DECK NINE - OBSERVATORY - DAY

IN HOLOGRAM: *Excelsior's* progress diagram.

The *Excelsior* hangs between Earth and Homestead II. A legend reads: "TIME TRAVELED: 30 YEARS. TIME REMAINING: 90 YEARS."

Jim stands watching.

The numbers change with a digital *click*. TIME TRAVELED: 31 YEARS. TIME REMAINING: 89 YEARS.

CONCOURSE BAR - MORNING

Jim walks up to the bar with the HIBERNATION SYSTEMS MANUAL. Drops the book on the bar with a thud and takes a seat.

JIM

Arthur. Say you were trapped on a desert island, and you had the power to wish somebody there with you. You wouldn't be alone anymore, but you'd be stranding another person on the island. Would you make the wish?

ARTHUR

I don't know. I've never been on an island.

JIM

Okay. Say you figured out how to do something that would make your life a hundred times better. But it's wrong, and there's no taking it back. How wrong would it have to be to stop you? I mean, what if it made your life a thousand times better? How do you do the math?

ARTHUR

Jim. These are not robot questions.

Jim stares at Arthur in frustration.

JIM

(spelling it out)
I know how to wake up Aurora.

ARTHUR

Sounds like a fine idea. You could use some company.

JIM
I'd be stranding her on this ship for
the rest of her life!

ARTHUR
Oh. Well, you can't do that.

Jim buries his face in his hands.

JIM
What am I going to do?

ARTHUR
Jim. I'm here for you.

JIM
(looking up)
Arthur, you're a machine.

Jim hauls the manual off the bartop and stalks away.

EXT. STARSHIP EXCELSIOR

The ship forges through space, its lit windows shining.

Jim paces back and forth on a promenade, a tiny figure
dwarfed by the mighty ship and the tapestry of stars.

DECK TWO - HALL OF FAITH - DAY

Jim passes under a sign reading "Hall of Faith," into a
circular walk.

There's a small fountain in the middle of the circle. Around
the edges, doors labeled: BUDDHISM, JUDAISM, HINDUISM,
CHRISTIANITY, ISLAM, OTHER FAITHS.

Jim walks the circle, looking through the doorways: a cross,
a Buddha, an abstract sculpture in the "Other Faiths" chapel.

He continues around the circle and out into the ship.

DECK FOUR - STARBOARD E.V.A. ROOM

Jim opens a door marked "Starboard E.V.A. Room - No
Passengers Beyond This Point!"

The E.V.A. Room is dominated by an airlock. Spacesuits in
racks. Tools, tethers, shuttle docking rings.

Jim goes to the airlock. Opens the inner door.

A BUZZER sounds a warning.

He steps into the airlock. The door closes behind him.

Jim looks at the red lever that opens the outer door. He grips the lever. Looks thoughtfully out at the stars.

EXT. STARSHIP *EXCELSIOR* - STARBOARD AIRLOCK

The airlock outer door opens with a blast of air. Jim emerges from the airlock - wearing a SPACE SUIT.

He plants his feet on the hull and walks up the side of the ship on magnetic boots.

ATOP THE SHIP

Jim walks forward across the giant skylight.

AT THE BOW

Jim stands, face uplifted. The cosmos reflected in his visor. Raises his arms. Imploring the heavens for an answer.

But no answer comes. His lifted arms fall.

INT. HIBERNATION BAY - AURORA'S POD

Jim stands looking at Aurora: a bearded pilgrim in a holy place.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. BERLIN SUITE - BATH - DAY

Jim stands at the sink with a futuristic shaver in his hand. He talks to himself as he takes off his castaway's beard.

JIM
I'm shaving off my beard.
(to his reflection)
It's wrong, man.

The whiskers pile up in the sink, wash down the drain. His face emerges from its mask.

JIM (CONT'D)
Seriously wrong. You can't do it.

He's finished. Clean-shaven.

JIM (CONT'D)
Don't even think about it.
(astonished at himself)
I'm shaving off my beard.

CORRIDOR

Jim exits his cabin in his coveralls, carrying his toolbox.

He finds a squadron of housekeeping robots waiting outside.
He taps the "PLEASE SERVICE" button beside his door.

The robots zoom inside with squeals of joy.

HIBERNATION BAY - AURORA'S POD

Jim stands in front of Aurora: toolbox in one hand, the technical manual in the other. He's breathing hard.

He sets the toolbox down. Opens the manual. It's densely annotated in Jim's handwriting.

He opens the pod's cover panel and goes to work, following the steps in his manual. His hands shake.

He starts to close a final contact.

Stops.

Gets to his feet. Stands looking at Aurora.

Quickly he kneels and completes the circuit. Pulls his hands away as if the metal had burned him.

JIM
Okay.

Aurora's pod hums. Medical data flows across its screen. Her vital signs re-start. Her pale skin flushes with color.

Jim beats a retreat.

AURORA'S POD

Aurora's perfect lips part. She takes a shallow breath - and then a deep one. Her chest rises and falls.

Her thighs shift as she bends her knees. The sensors on her body drop off and withdraw into the pod.

She opens her eyes. They're beautiful.

Her pod's backrest flexes, scooping up her knees as it becomes a seat. A video screen drops in front of her.

VIDEO STEWARDESS
Good morning, *Aurora!*

BERLIN SUITE

The luxury cabin now tidy and immaculate.

Jim bursts in, wild-eyed. Drops his toolbox. Hides the marked-up manual in the closet.

He splashes water on his face. Stares into the mirror.

HIBERNATION BAY - AURORA'S POD

Aurora puts on her Homestead Company bathrobe and slippers. Places her shipcard around her neck on its lanyard.

VIDEO STEWARDESS
You're ready to go to your cabin.
Make yourself at home! Enjoy the rest
of your flight, *Aurora!*

Woozy, Aurora sees the other passengers still asleep.

AURORA
Wait! Why are all these people still
hibernating?

The screen pivots to face her. The Video Stewardess points.

VIDEO STEWARDESS
Aurora, your cabin is this way!

DECK SEVEN - CORRIDOR

Jim sticks his head out of his cabin, looks up and down the hall. Steps out warily.

HIBERNATION BAY - AURORA'S POD

Jim approaches Aurora's pod, electrified. The pod is empty. The screen reads PASSENGER DISCHARGED.

DECK NINE - NUMBER NINE PROMENADE

Aurora finds her cabin. It's a first-class cabin, its door overlooking the Grand Concourse atrium.

AURORA'S CABIN

Posher than Jim's original cabin. A king-sized bed, a panoramic window.

A widescreen video screen lights up. The Homestead Company theme music plays.

ANNOUNCER

Welcome to your cabin, *Aurora*! Your home until we...

Aurora slaps the display off. Goes to the phone.

A touch of her finger brings up the ship's telephone directory. *Aurora* selects "Information."

PHONE

No one is available at that number.

She touches other phone links, faster and faster.

PHONE (CONT'D)

No one is available...No one is...No one...No one...No one is available at that number.

AURORA

What the hell's going on?

DECK FOUR - SHOPPING DISTRICT

Aurora strides down the lane of quiet shops. Actively searching for other people.

ELITE DECK - ELITE PROMENADE

Jim paces nervously, glancing around. She could be anywhere.

AURORA (O.S.)

Hello?

Jim rushes to the railing. Below on the Grand Concourse, *Aurora* is turning in circles, looking up at the balconies.

AURORA (CONT'D)

(shouting)
Hello!

JIM

(a husky whisper)
Hi.
(mustering a shout)
Hello!

Aurora spins. Spots him.

AURORA
(shouting)
Hey! I want to talk to you!

JIM
(shouting)
I'll come down.

Jim runs down six flights of stairs, his heart in his throat.

He reaches the Grand Concourse out of breath. He stops a few paces away, just looking at Aurora, getting his wind back.

AURORA
Passenger or crew?

JIM
Passenger. Jim Preston.

He sticks out a hand. She shakes it firmly. Electric for Jim. First contact.

AURORA
I'm Aurora.

Jim's lips move as she speaks her name, almost saying it with her. *Aurora*. She doesn't pick up on it.

AURORA (CONT'D)
Do you know what's happening? Nobody else in my row woke up.

JIM
Yeah, I...same for me.

AURORA
The crew's supposed to wake up a month before we do. But I haven't seen anybody.

Jim swallows hard.

JIM
The crew's still sleeping. They've got a special facility. I can see them in there but I can't get in.

Aurora stares at him.

AURORA
You're saying nobody's awake?

JIM
Just me.

AURORA
Just you?

JIM
Just us.

AURORA
But somebody's got to land the ship
in a few weeks.

Jim's finding it unexpectedly hard to deliver the bad news.

JIM
I have to show you something.

ELEVATOR A

Jim and Aurora ride upward. She looks out into the atrium, watching the floors go by.

AURORA
Typical. There's so much incompetence
in these big companies. No
accountability! They lost my luggage
on the flight to the spaceport. I'm
leaving the planet and my bags almost
didn't make it! And nobody
apologizes. Nobody even feels bad.

Jim is only half listening - his eyes drawn to the spill of her hair over her neck, the line of her jaw.

AURORA (CONT'D)
It's the corporate mentality.
(looking at Jim)
Where are we going?

Jim yanks his eyes away from her neck.

JIM
The Observatory.

OBSERVATORY

Aurora's eyes, wide and staring. Her face a mask of horror.

In front of them hangs the starship's progress indicator - the *Excelsior* hanging between Earth and Homestead II. Thirty-one years elapsed; Eighty-nine years to go.

AURORA
(a shocked whisper)
Eighty-nine years to go.

JIM

The other passengers aren't late waking up. We're early.

Aurora stares at Jim.

AURORA

We've got to get back to sleep.

HIBERNATION BAY

Jim and Aurora walk down a row of hibernation pods.

AURORA

Nobody strands me on a spaceship for a hundred years. I work for the New Yorker. I'll write an expose so hot you'll need oven mitts to read it. Trust me.

JIM

It's not that simple. Putting somebody into hibernation takes special equipment. Remember the facility where they put us to sleep?

Jim points at a pod beside them. A middle-aged woman inside.

JIM (CONT'D)

This pod will keep her in hibernation as long as you want. And it can wake her up. But it can't put her back to sleep.

AURORA

(getting it)

You don't think there's a way back into hibernation.

JIM

Not that I can see.

AURORA

There has to be. There's always a way. Where's the crew?

CREW HIBERNATION FACILITY DOOR

Jim and Aurora stand staring at the door: scarred by Jim's many assaults.

Aurora looks through the porthole at the crew inside. She runs her hands thoughtfully over the door's dents and gouges.

AURORA
 (dreading the answer)
 How long have you been awake, Jim?

JIM
 A year and three months.

Aurora covers her mouth. Her eyes full of horror.

AURORA
 Oh, my God. No.

She turns her back. Suddenly she walks briskly away. And breaks into a run. Jim watches her go, astonished.

After a moment he runs after her.

HIBERNATION BAY

Aurora runs down a row of hibernation pods, her eyes searching wildly among the glass tubes. She turns a corner. Hesitates. Runs down another row. She's fighting tears.

She puts on speed. Her sash unknits itself and her robe billows behind her.

IN ANOTHER ROW

Jim jogs along, worried. He's lost her. He pauses, listening. In the distance, slippered feet. He runs that way.

He stops: the sash of Aurora's robe lies on the deck. He picks it up. Runs on.

JIM
 Aurora!

He turns another corner and sees her. She's sitting down, her back against a hibernation pod. Laughing at her own tears.

AURORA
 I can't even find the one I'm
 supposed to be in.

Jim extends a hand. She lets him pull her to her feet. He gives her the sash, and she ties her robe around her.

AURORA (CONT'D)
 Thanks.

Jim looks back at her, miserable with guilt.

JIM
 I shouldn't have told you like that.

AURORA

No, I'm sorry. It just hit me how serious this is. How did you wake up?

JIM

I just did. I woke up, my pod dumped me out, and there I was.

AURORA

Me too. We have to get help.

COMMAND DECK - COMMUNICATIONS CENTER

Jim and Aurora stand in at a Passenger Communication Station.

Jim swipes his card through the Comm Station's slot. It brings up his account information.

JIM

I've sent...sixteen messages to Earth. A bunch to the Homestead company, one to the Space Administration, one to the United Nations. A couple to Homestead II, just for the hell of it. My phone bill's about eighty grand.

AURORA

How soon could we hear something?

JIM

With speed-of-light lag, fifty-six years. That'll be from Earth. Nothing from Homestead II until we're almost there anyway. Eighty years or so.

Aurora's mouth goes dry. She swallows hard.

AURORA

What about the other planets?

JIM

The other occupied worlds are even farther away. We'd die of old age before they could answer.

AURORA

What about other ships?
(off Jim's stare)
Jim?

JIM

(feeling very stupid)
I never thought of other ships.

AURORA

Jim, you've had more than a year!
There has to be a flight plan or
something...

They search the Comm Center and find a map table showing the
Excelsior's position relative to the Occupied Worlds.

Aurora fiddles with the controls. Interstellar flight plans
appear: a spiderweb of starship tracks between the worlds.

AURORA (CONT'D)

There!

They inspect the threads of light - an icon on each thread
representing a starship. Even Jim is excited now.

AURORA (CONT'D)

How do we tell how far away they are?

JIM

The computer knows. Give me a ship.

AURORA

(peering at the star map)
The starship *Zephyr*.

JIM

Round-trip message lag...ninety-nine
years.

AURORA

The starship *Andromeda*.

JIM

One hundred thirty-two years.

AURORA

The *Maximilian*.

JIM

Eighty-one years.

Jim and Aurora deflate visibly.

AURORA

That's the closest one.

GRAND CONCOURSE - EVENING

The ship's lights turn the cool blue of evening. Jim and
Aurora walk across the plaza.

AURORA

I know I should be working the problem right now, but I can barely keep my eyes open.

JIM

You just came out of hibernation. It'll be a couple days before you're a hundred percent. You should rest.

AURORA

(yawning)

I think I have to.

JIM

I'll walk you to your cabin.

AURORA

No, I'm all right.

JIM

Okay.

AURORA

Jim. Don't look so down. It's going to be okay. You've got me on the team now. Chin up, all right?

Jim nods, speechless.

AURORA (CONT'D)

I'm in cabin ninety forty-eight, if you need me.

Jim watches her walk away.

JIM

I'm in the Berlin Suite if you need me.

She stops. Turns to look back at him.

AURORA

A year and a half? Must have been hard.

JIM

It was.

AURORA

Good night, Jim.

GRAND CONCOURSE - CONCOURSE BAR

Jim sits down at the bar.

JIM
Whiskey. Rocks.

ARTHUR
Sure thing. How's your day been?

Jim takes a stiff drink.

JIM
Aurora's awake.

ARTHUR
Congratulations.
(off Jim's face)
You don't look happy.

JIM
Arthur. Can you keep a secret?

ARTHUR
I'm a bartender.

JIM
Don't tell Aurora I woke her up. She
thinks it was an accident. Let me
tell her. Okay?

AURORA'S CABIN - NIGHT

Aurora sleeps, her hair a fan of gold on the pillow.

BERLIN SUITE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jim lies awake, fidgeting and staring at the ceiling.

GRAND CONCOURSE - INFOMAT - MORNING

Aurora talks with a relentlessly cheerful Infomat.

She's wearing her own clothes, and it's a transformation: she
looks hip and urban, beautiful.

AURORA
How can there be no way to put
someone into hibernation aboard ship?
What if a pod breaks down?

INFOMAT
No pod has malfunctioned in thousands
of interstellar flights.

AURORA
Well, I'm awake.

INFOMAT
Hibernation pods are fail-safe.

Jim appears behind Aurora.

JIM
Good morning. Have you eaten?

AURORA
I'm starving. This is the dumbest machine.

CAFETERIA

Jim watches in astonishment as Aurora blithely orders the snacks that the machines deny him. The Mocha Cappuccino Extreme. The French Breakfast Puff. The Gourmet Fruit Salad.

They sit. Aurora eyes Jim's tray.

AURORA
You're a man of simple tastes.

JIM
I'm a silver class passenger. The French Breakfast Puff is above my pay grade.

AURORA
Oh, no! All this time? What can I get you?

JIM
No, I'm fine, really...

AURORA
Shut up. I'll be right back.

She gets up. In a minute she's back, setting a tray down in front of Jim: A western omelette with a side of bacon...a cafe latte...half a honeydew melon.

Jim shoves his old breakfast aside.

JIM
Thank you.

They dig in.

AURORA
You think the crew members would know what to do?

JIM
I was hoping so.

AURORA

Could we wake them up if we got in there?

JIM

(awkwardly)

I'm no expert. But I think so.

AURORA

Maybe there's another way to go to sleep. Did you check out the infirmary?

JIM

I looked around. It's the usual hospital stuff. Scanners, autodocs.

AURORA

Did you look for ways of going to sleep?

JIM

Not really.

AURORA

Well, Jim!

JIM

You think they've got suspended animation pills sitting around?

AURORA

You don't know until you look. What about cargo? Maybe there's a hibernation machine in the hold.

JIM

I looked at the manifests. It's mostly farming stuff, industrial machines. We're not going to find a hibernation facility in a box.

AURORA

You don't know that! We have to think big here. Maybe we can build our own hibernation machine.

JIM

No, we can't.

AURORA

You're not even trying!

JIM

I've been awake a year and a half. I've tried everything I can think of.

AURORA
 (she gets up angrily)
 Well, it looks to me like you missed
 some possibilities. And I'm not ready
 to give up.

She strides out. Jim watches her go. Reaches over and takes
 the Gourmet Fruit Salad off her tray.

DECK TWO - LIBRARY - DAY

Aurora sits at a library workstation.

WORKSTATION
 No plans are available.

AURORA
 What about research articles, any
 kind of technical documents?

WORKSTATION
 Hibernation technology is
 proprietary. The following articles
 deal with the subject on a
 theoretical level.

COMMAND DECK - COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - DAY

Aurora sits at the Passenger Communications Booth.

COMMUNICATIONS BOOTH
 Planet and connection, please.

AURORA
 Earth. *The New Yorker* magazine,
 office of the Editor in Chief.

COMMUNICATIONS BOOTH
 Begin message.

AURORA
 (into camera)
 My name is Aurora Dunn. I'm doing a
 long-term piece on the colony worlds.
 I know you won't get this message for
 a long time...but you should know I'm
 in trouble.

SERVICE DECK - INFIRMARY - DAY

Aurora inspects the gleaming medical equipment. Rummages
 through cabinets full of medicines and instruments.

She opens a steel vault. A deep freeze: icy vapor rolls out. Inside: racks of steel capsules at subzero temperatures.

She leans close: each frosted capsule is labeled with a passenger's name and the word SPERM or OVA.

CREW HIBERNATION FACILITY DOOR - EVENING

Aurora frowns through the window at the sleeping crew.

A litter of tools still surrounds the battered door. Aurora snatches up a crowbar and bashes the porthole. The bar spins from her stinging hands, but the window's not even marked.

ELITE DECK - ELITE PROMENADE - EVENING

Jim sits at a table with his tools, struggling with a high-tech mechanism.

Aurora drops into a chair across from him. He looks up. Takes in her condition: weary and frustrated.

AURORA

There's no way we're going to build a hibernation machine.

JIM

No.

AURORA

And there's no magic sleeping drugs in the infirmary.

JIM

No.

AURORA

I did find the gene bank. Five thousand sperm and egg samples on ice. I should be glad they do that. By the time we get to Homestead II, that little capsule in the freezer is going to be all that's left of me. We really are screwed, aren't we?

JIM

Pretty much.

BELLA CANTINA - EVENING

Jim and Aurora sit across a Mexican dinner they've already put a dent in. An electric candle burns between them.

A robot in a sombrero drops off two mojitos and scoots away.

AURORA

So who are you, Jim? I'm going to be seeing you around. I should know who I'm talking to.

JIM

I'm from Denver. Lived there all my life.

AURORA

What kind of work do you do?

JIM

A little of everything. Transport, robotics, industrial systems. I fix what's broken. On the emigration forms I'm a "rate two" mechanical engineer. Means I don't have a Ph.D.

AURORA

Neither do I. But a journalist doesn't need one; she just needs a way with words and an attitude. I'm from Manhattan, so I had the attitude.

JIM

I noticed.

AURORA

And the words have always been there when I needed them.

(she laughs)

I would never have lasted a year with no one but robots to talk to. They're all such idiots!

JIM

Not all of them.

GRAND CONCOURSE - CONCOURSE BAR - NIGHT

Jim leads Aurora up to the Concourse Bar. It appears deserted. Aurora is all curiosity.

Suddenly Arthur appears, doing his swinging-up-on-hinges trick. Aurora gives a squeal of surprise.

ARTHUR

Evening, Jim. Who's the lovely lady?

JIM
Arthur, this is Aurora. Aurora,
Arthur.

ARTHUR
Aurora. A pleasure.

He takes her hand formally.

AURORA
Arthur! Lovely to meet you.

She peeks over the bar at Arthur's mechanical mounting, the rails he rolls on.

ARTHUR
What'll it be?

AURORA
Dirty martini!
(to Jim)
Now this is a robot I can talk to.

JIM
Android, technically.
(to Arthur)
Whiskey and soda.

LATER

Empty glasses show that Jim and Aurora have been doing yeoman's work at the bar. Both are tipsy and laughing.

AURORA
(collecting herself)
My God, I almost forgot my life is in
ruins.

That wipes the smile off Jim's face.

JIM
Sorry.

AURORA
What for? It's time to sleep. In the
morning we'll think of something
brilliant.

JIM
All right.

AURORA
Good night, Jim. Good night, Arthur.

She exits.

ARTHUR

Good night.

(to Jim, *sotto voce*)

She's wonderful. Excellent choice.

Jim drops his head into his hands.

AURORA'S CABIN - NIGHT

Aurora stows clothing in drawers and closets.

She hangs snapshots on the wall: family and friends. Most of the pictures were apparently taken at the same grand party.

She looks at them wistfully - and a look of astonishment crosses her face.

AURORA

Of course!

ELITE DECK - BERLIN SUITE DOOR

Aurora pounds on the door.

AURORA

Jim! Wake up!

The door opens. Jim stands blinking in his bathrobe.

AURORA (CONT'D)

We'll go home!

JIM

What?

She pulls him down the hall, chattering.

AURORA

It takes too long to get to Homestead II. But we're still closer to Earth. We'll turn the ship around.

ELEVATOR

Aurora drags Jim in and punches the button.

AURORA

We'll go home.

JIM

It would take decades.

AURORA
It's our only chance of getting off
this ship in our lifetimes.

COMMAND DECK

Aurora drags Jim out of the elevator. Looks around.

AURORA
Where's the...navigating place?

JIM
That way. But...

She drags him toward the Bridge.

AURORA
We can learn how to pilot the ship.
We have all the time in the world.

JIM
There's just one problem.

COMMAND DECK - BRIDGE DOOR

Aurora opens the Bridge door - revealing the armored firewall hatch just beyond it.

JIM
Everything important - the reactor,
the gravity drive - it's all behind
firewalls. There's no way through.

AURORA
Oh.

JIM
Sorry.

AURORA
(crushed)
That was my last good idea.

FORWARD OBSERVATION DECK - DAY

Aurora sits curled up in an armchair. Around her, a dizzying view of the cosmos.

There's a cup of coffee on a table beside her. In her lap, an electronic slate with an attached microphone.

AURORA
New file. My Voyage.

A clean page opens on the slate. The title in the corner: "*My Voyage.*" As Aurora speaks, the page fills with words.

AURORA (CONT'D)

I boarded the *Excelsior* on assignment. Maybe the most ambitious writing assignment ever given. But things have taken an unexpected turn. I'm not writing for *The New Yorker* anymore. I'm writing for me.

ELITE DECK - CORRIDOR - DAY

Aurora jogs in sneakers and sweats. Cabin doors flash past.

AURORA (V.O.)

I've been awake on this ship for seven days, awake far too soon...

Dead end. She's reached the aft end of the ship. She crosses a lobby and runs back the other way.

AURORA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

...and I might spend the rest of my life here...

Running along a promenade, Aurora reaches the forward end of the ship. Dead end again.

AURORA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

...in a little steel world five hundred meters long.

GRAND CONCOURSE

Jim sits at a table, a technical manual open in front of him. He looks up. Watches Aurora jog around the atrium and vanish.

AURORA (V.O.)

I'm not alone. Another passenger shares my fate. A mechanic named Jim Preston.

SWIMMING POOL - DAY

The swimming pool is a marvel: one entire wall is a window extending from the ceiling to the bottom of the pool.

Aurora enters in her HomeStead Company bathrobe. Drops the robe to reveal a bathing suit.

AURORA (V.O.)
The other passengers will sleep for
another ninety years.

She dives into the pool.

EXT. STARSHIP EXCELSIOR - SWIMMING POOL WINDOW

Aurora swims, a slender shape moving on the water's surface.
We pull out, the ship dwindling, the blue window receding.

AURORA (V.O.)
By the time they wake, Jim and I will
have lived, grown old and died.

INT. FORWARD OBSERVATION DECK

Back on Aurora in her armchair, writing.

AURORA
Vanished, like a dream, in the blink
of an eye.

She falters, frightened by her own words.

CAFETERIA - DAY

Jim sits eating and tinkering with a small robot. The table
is strewn with dishes and tools.

Aurora sits down across from him.

AURORA
Why did you do it?

Jim is thunderstruck. The game is up. He swallows hard.

JIM
Do what?

AURORA
Emigrate. Leave Earth. I'm
interviewing you.

JIM
You're what?

AURORA
Interviewing you. You're the first
victim of hibernation failure in the
history of space travel. That makes
you news.

JIM
Who are you going to tell?

AURORA
Posterity. So why'd you give up your
life on Earth?

Jim seems stunned by the question. He hadn't thought about it
in quite those words.

AURORA (CONT'D)
A hundred and twenty years'
hibernation means you never see your
family and friends again. You sleep
your way to another planet and
another century. The ultimate
geographical suicide.

JIM
I, uh...I never really...

AURORA
Were you running away from something?

JIM
No. Things were okay.

AURORA
So?

JIM
I just wanted more, I guess. You
know. More room. A fresh start. Back
to basics.

AURORA
(chiding)
That's HomeStead Company propaganda.

JIM
I guess.

AURORA
Jim!

JIM
I'm a mechanic. A rate-two mechanic.
We're a dying breed on Earth. But in
the colonies, they still have
problems to solve. My kind of
problems. In the colonies, a handyman
is somebody.

Nothing there for Aurora to scoff at. She looks impressed.

JIM (CONT'D)

And there's room! Open country. Woods and fields. I like the outdoors. You know, room to grow.

AURORA

Now you're back to advertising.

JIM

Can't it still be true?

HIBERNATION BAY

Jim and Aurora walk down an aisle of hibernation pods.

AURORA

You know how much the Homestead Company's made off its first planet, Homestead I? Over eight quadrillion dollars. That's eight million billions. Colony planets are the biggest business there is. Did you pay full price for your ticket?

JIM

No, I'm in a desirable trade.

AURORA

(triumphantly)

So they fill your head with dreams, discount your ticket, and you fly off to populate their planet and pay HomeStead ten percent of everything you do for the rest of your life. You think you're free? You're just part of the business plan.

Jim waves at the rows of sleepers.

JIM

All you see here is five thousand suckers?

AURORA

I see zeroes on the HomeStead Company's bottom line.

JIM

I see five thousand men and women changing their lives. For five thousand different reasons. You don't know these people.

Jim walks up to a hibernation pod. Glances at the data screen. He covers the screen with his hand.

JIM (CONT'D)
 This guy. Banker, teacher, or
 gardener?

Aurora studies the sleeper: a barrel-chested man of 50 with
 gray temples and a jutting jaw.

AURORA
 Banker.

JIM
 Gardener.

Jim moves down the row, peeks at another screen, covers it.

JIM (CONT'D)
 Is this Madison, Donna, or Lola?

Aurora peers: a birdlike young woman with long red hair.

AURORA
 She's too silly to be a Donna. I
 think she's a Lola.

JIM
 Madison. Chef, accountant, or
 midwife?

AURORA
 She has to be a midwife. There's no
 way you made that one up.

JIM
 (chuckling, caught)
 She's a midwife. I didn't know they
 still had midwives.

They move among the sleepers, quizzing each other.

AURORA
 (pointing at a man and
 woman side by side)
 Married, or strangers?

JIM
 Married.

AURORA
 (impressed)
 Yes.

JIM
 (indicating a young woman)
 Sixteen, twenty-six, or thirty-six?

AURORA
I'd almost say sixteen...twenty-six.

JIM
Right.

AURORA
(about an older woman)
Politician, historian, or artist?

JIM
I don't know. Artist?

AURORA
It doesn't say. But I'll tell you
this: I like her. We'd be friends.

Jim looks at Aurora seriously.

JIM
You think you can see that?

AURORA
Don't you?

Jim looks at the woman in the pod. Smiles.

JIM
Yeah.

FORWARD OBSERVATION DECK - DAY

Jim and Aurora sit at opposite ends of a sofa - their feet almost but not quite touching. They sip cocktails.

AURORA
That was my plan. Travel to Homestead
II. Live there for a year and see
what emigrating's really like. Then
back to Earth. I'm the only passenger
on board with a round-trip ticket.

JIM
(perplexed)
I left Earth for a new life. But you
end up back where you started.

AURORA
No! I end up in the future. Two
hundred and fifty years in the
future. On Earth, which is still the
center of civilization, overcrowded
or not. And I arrive in the future
with an amazing story.
(MORE)

AURORA (CONT'D)

A perspective no other writer has.
Literary immortality.

JIM

And what's this amazing story?

AURORA

The selling of the colonial dream.

JIM

Big plans.

AURORA

My friends threw me this huge
farewell party. Everyone came. It was
the happiest, saddest night. And look
what it's all come to.

(she sighs)

Jim, I can't think of anything else
to try. To save us, I mean. I don't
even want to think about it anymore.
So. What is there to do around here?

MOVIE THEATER - DAY

Jim leads Aurora into the movie theater. The lights come up.
The curtain opens. Aurora looks around in wonder.

A bundle of cables snakes down the aisle.

JIM

Watch your step. I've made a few
changes.

Next to Jim's favorite seat there's a cluster of machines
with power cables and hoses running to them.

Jim and Aurora sit. A screen beside Jim lists movies.

JIM (CONT'D)

I got tired of running up to the
projector room, so I moved the
controls down here. Thirty thousand
movies to choose from. I've only
watched about five hundred of them.

He taps a button on another machine, which produces a bucket
of hot popcorn. He offers Aurora some.

JIM (CONT'D)

Popcorn?

Aurora grins and takes some.

GYMNASIUM - BASKETBALL COURT - DAY

Jim and Aurora play one-on-one. She's not especially good, but fiercely competitive. They jostle and scramble, laughing.

Aurora snags the ball. For a minute she just stands there, beaming.

JIM

What are you so happy about?

AURORA

I'm up two points!

She cuts around him toward the basket.

DECK TWO - VIRTUAL MUSEUM - EVENING

Jim and Aurora walk through the museum's white rooms. The walls display a Jackson Pollock collection.

Aurora goes to the control podium. Scrolls through the menu, covers her eyes and chooses blind.

The wall panels fill with Heironymous Bosch paintings - medieval visions of Hell. She winces and chooses again. A somber collection of portraits by Dutch masters. She frowns.

Jim steps to her side and makes a selection.

The walls fill with abstract landscapes - stark plains and oceans, with lonely figures isolated in the vastness.

The images pull Jim and Aurora in: they stand before a dark seascape.

Without thinking she reaches out and tucks her hand in the crook of his elbow.

FADE TO BLACK.

SUPER: ONE MONTH LATER

SWIMMING POOL - MORNING

Aurora swims laps, cutting through the water.

In the balcony above the pool, Jim stands watching her. Aurora, making a turn at the end of a lap, catches a glimpse of him but doesn't let on.

Underwater she smiles.

DECK THREE - SHOPPING DISTRICT - MORNING

A cleaning robot scurries along the shopping street, looking for spots to polish.

Jim's hands reach into frame, pluck the robot off its wheels.

DECK NINE - NUMBER NINE PROMENADE

Aurora stands at the railing, watching curiously as Jim crosses the Concourse below with the robot under his arm.

SUBDECK C - MACHINE SHOP - DAY

Jim stands at a workbench, the robot in front of him. He tinkers with its complex works.

GRAND CONCOURSE - DAY

Jim sits in an armchair with his industrial laptop. He types a string of commands, hits *EXECUTE*.

Beside him on the floor, his kidnapped cleaning robot does a figure-eight. Jim smiles in satisfaction.

FORWARD OBSERVATION DECK - DAY

Aurora sits in her habitual writing position: cross-legged on her favorite sofa, her writing slate in her lap.

AURORA

The starship's designers gave the ship a daily rhythm. The light is warm in the morning, bright during the day, cool at night. We need those changes. But I miss other rhythms. There are no holidays here. Every day is a day of leisure. There are no seasons. The sky never changes.

A mechanical whir distracts her. She looks down.

Jim's pet robot looks up at her with binocular eyes. It carries a note in a clip on its back. Aurora pulls it free.

A handwritten invitation from Jim. It reads:

Come to dinner with me tonight?

- Jim

Aurora reads the note with a grin.

AURORA (CONT'D)
 (to the robot)
 Is he asking me on a date?

SUBDECK C - MACHINE SHOP

Jim sits at his laptop, watching the screen: a robot's-eye-view of Aurora.

He wiggles a joystick on his laptop, and...

FORWARD OBSERVATION DECK

...the robot nods its goggle head.

Aurora laughs.

Beside the note-clip, the robot carries a pen in a makeshift holder. Aurora takes the pen, scribbles on the paper. Tucks it back into the robot's note clip.

GRAND CONCOURSE - CONCOURSE BAR

Arthur polishes glasses behind the bar.

The robot crosses the Concourse, note clipped to its back.

Arthur watches it pass.

SUBDECK C - MACHINE SHOP

Jim plucks the note from the robot's back. Aurora's reply is written in bold letters:

Love to.

-A

AURORA'S CABIN - EVENING

Aurora gets ready for dinner. A slim gown, a few pieces of jewelry, her hair up. She looks like a goddess.

The doorbell rings. She answers it.

Jim stands on her doorstep in a black jacket, looking dapper. His eyes widen as he takes Aurora in.

JIM

Wow.

AURORA
You clean up all right yourself. You
went shopping.

JIM
I went shoplifting.

In the corridor stands a cargo robot to which Jim has
attached an upholstered loveseat. He helps Aurora aboard and
takes a seat beside her. She's charmed.

JIM (CONT'D)
Rutherford! To the bar!

CARGO ROBOT
Yes, Passenger Jim!

The robot zooms off to the sound of Aurora's laughter.

GRAND CONCOURSE - CONCOURSE BAR

Jim and Aurora take seats. Arthur puts on his best manners.

ARTHUR
Evening. What can I get for you?

AURORA
A manhattan, please.

JIM
Single malt, rocks.

Arthur pours.

ARTHUR
You two look fine this evening.

AURORA
(confidentially)
We're on a date!

ARTHUR
Very nice.

AURORA
(to Jim, teasing)
Took you long enough to ask.

JIM
I was giving you space!

AURORA
Space is one thing I don't need more
of. I've been doing research.
(MORE)

AURORA (CONT'D)

I found a drug that would put us in a coma indefinitely, and machines that would keep us alive.

JIM

Really?!

AURORA

But it's not suspended animation. We'd still be aging.

JIM

Oh.

AURORA

Yeah. If I have to grow old on this ship, I'd at least like to be awake for it. So that was a failure.

JIM

A highly ambitious failure.

AURORA

There's the title of my memoir. "A Highly Ambitious Failure," by Aurora Dunn.

Jim laughs. He thinks for a minute.

JIM

"Voyage to Nowhere," by Jim Preston.

AURORA

(laughing)

"My Life in a Tin Can."

JIM

"A Spaceship Built For Two."

THE STARDOME - XANADU

A great glass dome, the highest point on the ship. Outside the dome, a riot of stars. Inside, a luxury restaurant.

Jim and Aurora emerge into the dome.

She turns, looking at the glittering river of the Milky Way, the blue stars ahead of the ship, the pink stars behind them.

AURORA

Incredible.

They sit at the best table. Robots attend to their every need. The blue stars frame Jim's head; the pink, Aurora's.

Beautiful dishes arrive: new wines with every course.

NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

A holographic 12-piece band plays on stage: a jazz standard. Jim walks onto the dance floor. Holds out his hand to Aurora.

She comes to him, and they dance. They're pretty good. Smiles grow on their faces.

Jim spins her out, spins her back - close enough to kiss. They almost do - but they don't.

DECK THREE - SHOPPING DISTRICT - NIGHT

Jim and Aurora ride along on the cargo robot. Her head rests on his shoulder. Suddenly she sits up.

AURORA
Rutherford, stop!

The robot stops. She pulls Jim off.

AURORA (CONT'D)
Come on, we have to do this!

She pulls him to the photo booth. They tumble inside. As the strobe flashes, she kisses him hard.

Outside, the photo strip drops into the tray: four color pictures. In the first they laugh; in the second they clown; in the third, they kiss. In the last image, Aurora smiles at the camera; Jim looks at Aurora.

Aurora taps the pictures: they start to move: each is a one-second movie clip. The pictures laugh, and clown, and kiss.

DECK NINE - CORRIDOR - OUTSIDE AURORA'S CABIN

The robot pulls up to Aurora's door. Jim helps her down.

Aurora opens the door. Turns back to him.

AURORA
Thank you. I had an amazing time. A great night.

JIM
Yeah, me too. Well, good night.

He turns to go.

AURORA
Jim.

He turns back. Aurora grabs him and drags him into her cabin.

AURORA'S CABIN

They stagger across the room together. He backs her up against a wall, kisses his way down her throat.

She drags his jacket off his shoulders. Pulls at his shirt.

He slips the straps from her shoulders. Her dress slides to the floor. They roll onto the bed.

CAFETERIA - MORNING

Breakfast. Jim watches Aurora eat.

AURORA

This is so good. I'm starving.
(she smiles at him)
Last night was just what I needed.

JIM

You are the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. You're so beautiful it hurts me.

She stares, shocked. Leans across the table and kisses him. Soon they're making out right on top of breakfast.

A passing robot pauses to observe the scene - then moves on.

SERIES OF SHOTS

1. Jim and Aurora make out fiercely in the movie theater while a movie plays onscreen.
2. Aurora straddles Jim in a jacuzzi in the ship's Spa. She moves against him: she's close. She climaxes gorgeously.
3. Jim stands on a promenade. Aurora passes, jogging. He gives her a smile as she goes by. A moment later she runs back into frame and tackles him. They tumble to the deck.

BERLIN SUITE

Jim and Aurora lie in Jim's imperial bed, glistening with sweat and breathing hard. She lays her head on his shoulder, her eyes far away and wistful.

JIM

You okay?

AURORA

Yes, I'm fine. It's just...

She waves her hand in the air as if to signify, all of this.

JIM

I know.

She snuggles in tighter, and he holds her close.

EXT. STARSHIP EXCELSIOR - BERLIN SUITE WINDOW

Through the window, Jim and Aurora lie together in the luxurious bed.

We pull out, the window dwindling, as the *Excelsior* soars away from us into the stars.

FADE TO BLACK.

SUPER: THREE MONTHS LATER

ELITE DECK - CORRIDOR - MORNING

A luxury cabin door: the doorplate reads "Vienna Suite."

VIENNA SUITE - BEDROOM

The best suite on the ship. One side of the bedroom, Aurora's mementos and possessions. On the other side, Jim's.

They wake together. She kisses him on the cheek with the ease of long habit and heads for the shower. He watches her go.

SWIMMING POOL - MORNING

Swimming, Aurora reaches the end of a lap. A hand reaches down and catches her before she can turn.

Jim kneels at the edge of the pool, in coveralls and work boots, a tool belt slung over his shoulder.

Aurora pulls herself up and kisses him.

JIM

I'm going to finish my survey of the cargo hold. See what there is to play with.

AURORA

Be careful.

JIM

Back by happy hour.

FORWARD OBSERVATION DECK - DAY

Aurora writes on her sofa, surrounded by electronic slates, each displaying a reference book or research paper. On one, a map of the Polynesian archipelago.

AURORA

The Polynesians set out into the Pacific Ocean with no destination. Searching for islands. They sailed into the endless sea on faith.

SUBDECK A - NUMBER EIGHT CARGO HOLD - DAY

Jim walks among the towering cargo racks. His flashlight illuminates machines stacked from floor to ceiling: tractors and combines, helicopters and seaplanes.

AURORA (V.O.)

Some never returned, but others found land, and prospered. What drove them out onto the sea? Curiosity? Tradition? The wish for something better?

Jim opens cargo containers. He finds ingots of metal, computer components, spools of superconducting wire. Raw materials for a young world.

AURORA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The urge to move is as primal as hunger or thirst. We run, we drive, we sail, we fly.

Jim finds a stash of utility golf carts and his eyes light up. He unpacks one, starts it up. Drives off into the dark.

GRAND CONCOURSE - CONCOURSE BAR - DAY

Aurora sits at the bar with her slate, sipping a drink.

AURORA

Is it movement that we need? Or the possibility of something new?

ARTHUR

What's that?

AURORA

I'm writing, Arthur. Hush.

Aurora's slate has recorded this exchange: she erases the extra words with her fingertip.

SUBDECK A - NUMBER SEVEN CARGO BAY

Jim drives his cart into a new bay - and stares in wonder.

In oversized hibernation pods: cattle, horses, sheep, oxen.
All asleep. Chickens, ducks and geese in individual cells.

AURORA (V.O.)

Like seeds, we carry what we need.
The wind drives us - whether the
trade winds, the solar winds, or the
winds of chance.

The next aisle holds plants in stasis: saplings in tubes,
seedlings in individual vials.

Jim stops in front of a glass case. Rosy light bathes his
face. He smiles. We don't see why.

AURORA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

We take root where we fall. And
helplessly we grow.

VIENNA SUITE - BEDROOM - EVENING

Aurora sits with her slate. Eyeing Jim's side of the room.

Giving in, she begins to explore Jim's possessions: poking
into the drawers of his nightstand and dresser.

She opens his closet. Shifting things, she finds a dog-eared
manual on hibernation pods. She pulls it out.

There's a bookmark in the pages. She goes to open the book -
and the bookmark slides into her hand.

It's the photo strip Jim took during his isolation: Four
identical shots of his face, bearded and hollow-eyed. The
melancholy images hit her hard.

She touches the pictures to make them move: but Jim sits
immobile. In the fourth image, he sighs heavily.

Voices in the hall.

CLEANING ROBOT (O.S.)

Hello, Passenger.

JIM (O.S.)

Hello, robot.

Hastily Aurora replaces the manual. Closes the closet.

Jim appears in the doorway: tool belt over his shoulder,
duffel bag in hand.

AURORA

Hi.

JIM

Hi. How was your day?

AURORA

I don't know. I wrote a few pages. I'm not sure what I'm doing anymore. I was writing a book, and I was keeping a diary. But the book and the diary are running together. I think I'm writing about us.

JIM

Makes sense to me.

AURORA

I'm not sure I want to write about this life. I don't even know how to think about it. I live in a palace. But it's also a prison. I'm moving at half the speed of light and I can't go anywhere!

Jim takes that in.

JIM

The cargo hold is full of pioneer gear. There's a submarine down there, can you believe it? Ships and airplanes and bulldozers. That's what I wanted, a world still being built. But I'll never see it.

They sit for a moment in glum contemplation.

AURORA

Did you find anything that could help us?

JIM

Yes. I found these.

Jim unzips his duffel bag and takes out a bouquet of long-stemmed roses. Aurora gasps. Reaches out to touch them.

AURORA

Are they real?

JIM

I cut them myself.

Aurora leaps into action. She finds scissors, a pitcher. At the sink she trims the stems, arranges the flowers.

AURORA
Thank you.

JIM
You're welcome.

She looks into his eyes.

AURORA
For very unlucky people, we got
pretty lucky.

FADE TO BLACK.

SUPER: THREE MONTHS LATER

INT. ELITE DECK - CORRIDOR - DAY

Jim and Aurora sprint down the hall, cabin doors flashing by.
Jim's practically dragging her along.

A deep background RUMBLE.

JIM
It's coming! Run!

CELESTIAL PROMENADE

Jim and Aurora run up the stairs onto the highest promenade
on the ship: glass all around, skylight above.

The deep RUMBLE is louder. A bloody light fills the sky.

A STAR looms ahead of the ship: a RED GIANT. The *Excelsior*
rockets toward the star.

The passage takes less than a minute. The Red Giant swells in
the windows. The ship shudders. The engines howl. Aurora
falls into Jim's arms. The ship bathed in red light.

The star fills the skylight, fills the sky itself. A fiery
surface turbulent with sunspots and mysterious currents. The
engines howl.

And then they're past. The star recedes, dwindling as quickly
as it grew. The engines quiet. The ship's calm restored.

AURORA
(breathlessly)
That was incredible.

JIM
Closest we'll get to a star on the
whole trip. Happy birthday.

She throws her arms around him.

VIENNA SUITE - BEDROOM - EVENING

Aurora stands in her bathroom, getting pretty for dinner.

SUBDECK C - MACHINE SHOP

Jim puts the finishing touches on a beautiful RING woven from gold and silver wire. It's crowned with a flower of gold.

He removes the ring from its clamp: inspects it thoroughly. Satisfied, he wraps it in a cloth and tucks it in his pocket.

STARDOME - XANADU - EVENING

Jim and Aurora dine. They laugh and flirt with easy intimacy.

Their plates emptied, they sit back, sipping wine. Jim lifts the table's candle and waves it in the air. A robot rolls up with a birthday cake, candles alight.

JIM

(singing)

Happy birthday to you...

Happy birthday to you...

Happy birthday, dear Aurora...

Happy Birthday to you.

Aurora sits bathed in candlelight, and for this moment she is truly and fundamentally happy. She blows the candles out.

GRAND CONCOURSE - CONCOURSE BAR - NIGHT

Jim and Aurora sit at the bar, tipsy. Arthur pours.

ARTHUR

Birthday cocktail for the birthday girl.

AURORA

Aren't you going to check my I.D.? I might not be old enough to drink.

ARTHUR

I'd never ask your age in front of a gentleman.

AURORA

Jim's not a gentleman. Anyway there's no secrets between me and Jim.

ARTHUR
(looking at Jim)
Is that so?

JIM
You heard the lady. Be right back.

He walks away.

AURORA
You know what I like about you,
Arthur? You have a sense of occasion.
I bet ladies fall for you on every
trip.

ARTHUR
I'd say you were pulling my leg, but
I haven't got any.

AURORA
(laughing)
Exactly! There you go.

ARTHUR
I remember your last birthday, a year
ago. Jim was really looking forward
to meeting you.

Aurora frowns, processing this sentence - her smile fading.

AURORA
What?

MEN'S WASHROOM

Jim stands at the mirror, straightening his lapels, touching
up his hair.

He unwraps the ring. Looks it over. Smiles at his reflection.

CONCOURSE BAR

Aurora scowls at Arthur, trying to get her bearings.

AURORA
What do you mean, he was looking
forward to it? How could he...

ARTHUR
He couldn't stop talking about you,
let me tell you. He spent months
deciding whether to wake you up.

Aurora eyes widen in shock.

AURORA
Jim woke me up.

ARTHUR
Oh, yes. Said it was the hardest
decision of his life, but I see it
worked out just fine.

Aurora stops breathing. She stares at the bartop.

Jim strolls up to the bar. His hand slides into the jacket
pocket where the ring lies hidden.

But Aurora's body language is all wrong. He stops, perplexed.

JIM
What?

She looks up, her face rigid. Her voice a whisper.

AURORA
Did you wake me up, Jim?

Jim's hand slides out of his jacket pocket. He shoots a look
at Arthur, who smiles back, oblivious.

Aurora's eyes bore into him. Finally Jim finds his voice.

JIM
Yes. I woke you up.

AURORA
(in agony)
How could you do it?

JIM
I tried not to.

AURORA
You pulled me out of hibernation. You
destroyed the rest of my life. You
murdered me!

JIM
That's a little strong...

AURORA
You murdered me. I'm going to be
sick. Oh, my God. I...I can't see.

She gets up to leave.

JIM
Aurora.

He goes after her.

AURORA
Get away from me!

She slaps at him blindly, almost hysterical. Stumbles away.

SERVICE DECK - CELESTIAL PROMENADE

Aurora stares out at the stars. Jim appears behind her.

She speaks without turning.

AURORA
(bitterly)
How did you decide?
(turning on him)
Did you just go shopping? A couple
thousand women in their underwear,
and you get to pick your favorite.

JIM
It wasn't like that.

AURORA
What was it like? And you had it all
planned out! Dinner and movies and
our big date...Oh, my God! And I just
ate it up. Fake! All fake!

JIM
This was real. I didn't plan this.
It...happened.

AURORA
(mocking)
"Find true love on the Starship
Excelsior! Romance between the Stars!
The woman of your dreams!" Was it
everything you thought it would be?

JIM
Aurora. I love you.

AURORA
This is sick.
(she glares at him)
Show me how you did it.

HIBERNATION BAY - AURORA'S POD

Aurora walks up to her old hibernation pod. Jim trails her.

AURORA
So?

Jim stares at her, unbelieving. But she means it. He opens the cover panel, points out the key components.

JIM

I looked at my pod. A couple different processors burned out at the same time. I triggered the same failure in your pod. Short circuit across these two contacts, and then these two. And cut these wires.

AURORA

Just like that.

JIM

Just like that.

AURORA

I'm so stupid. I fell for all of it. I fell for you. I thought you saved me. But you didn't save me, Jim. You did this to me. And now I'm stuck with you. Stuck with the second-rate mechanic who ruined my life.

JIM

(lamely)

Rate two mechanic.

But Aurora's already walking away.

VIENNA SUITE - DAY

Aurora walks in, barely under control, and breaks down. Sinks to her knees, racked by sobs.

HIBERNATION BAY - AURORA'S POD - DAY

Jim sits at the foot of Aurora's hibernation pod, staring into the empty tube.

VIENNA SUITE - EVENING

Jim walks in. All of Aurora's things are gone. Her half of the bed has been made. She's moved out.

DECK THREE - CAFETERIA - MORNING

Aurora sits finishing her breakfast. Jim enters and approaches her table.

JIM

Can I talk to you?

AURORA

I don't want to talk anymore. I don't want to look at you anymore. If you see me coming, get out of my way. If you see me sitting, find somewhere else to be. There's plenty of choices. It's a big boat.

DECK FOUR - SHOPPING DISTRICT - DAY

Jim walks alone, hands in his pockets, in a deep funk.

A little robot crosses his path: he KICKS it down the street.

SWIMMING POOL

Aurora swims. Reaches the end of a lap and rests.

She looks up abruptly as if she senses someone watching her - but the balcony above the pool is deserted.

ELITE DECK - FORWARD OBSERVATION DECK - DAY

Aurora sits reading. Digital slates surround her. A whir distracts her. She looks down.

Jim's pet robot sits beside her. A note on its back.

She picks up the note. It's the photo strip from her first date with Jim: their first kiss captured on film. Clipped to the photo strip is a handwritten note: "This was real."

Aurora leans down toward the robot's binocular eyes.

ROBOT'S POV

Aurora looms close. She holds the note up to the robot's eyes and crumples it up.

AURORA

Watching me through a robot is creepy, Jim. Cut it out.

SUBDECK C - MACHINE SHOP

Jim sits in front of his laptop: Aurora's accusing eyes stare out of the screen. He closes the laptop.

COMMAND DECK - COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - DAY

Jim sits at the security console, disheveled and bearded. Twenty screens give different views of the ship.

One screen shows the Elite Promenade. As he watches, Aurora jogs by in sneakers and shorts.

Jim has her route mapped: as she vanishes from one screen she appears on the next. He follows her from screen to screen.

He picks up a microphone.

ELITE DECK

Aurora circles the atrium.

OVER THE P.A. SYSTEM: Jim clears his throat.

JIM (VIA INTERCOM)

Aurora.

Aurora stops in surprise, looking up.

JIM (VIA INTERCOM) (CONT'D)

Please, just hear me.

Aurora rolls her eyes and resumes running.

COMMAND DECK - COMMUNICATIONS CENTER

Jim watches Aurora move from screen to screen. He holds the mic in both hands. His voice reverberates through the ship.

JIM

The day I first saw you, my life changed. I couldn't forget your face. I kept coming back to see you. Trying to know you through the glass. I read every word you ever wrote, trying to hear you. The day you woke up...

DECK NINE - NUMBER NINE PROMENADE

Aurora doesn't break stride. But she's listening.

JIM (VIA INTERCOM)

When you woke up I had no idea what would happen next. I had no reason to believe you would see anything in me. When you did, when we found each other, this ship I'm trapped inside suddenly felt like a limitless place.

(MORE)

JIM (VIA INTERCOM) (CONT'D)
My pointless life suddenly had
meaning.

Aurora skids to a stop beside a Deck Steward's station.

She leans over the counter, finds an intercom terminal and grabs the microphone. A whine of feedback. She looks into the lens of the nearest security camera.

AURORA
That's great, Jim. Just great. I'm
glad that ruining my life somehow
improved yours. But I have a run to
finish, so...

GRAND CONCOURSE - CONCOURSE BAR

Arthur looks up, listening, as voices echo through the ship.

JIM (VIA INTERCOM)
Wait. Aurora. Don't go.

AURORA (VIA INTERCOM)
You may be the only game in town,
Jim, but that doesn't mean I have to
play. Just pretend I'm not here.
Because as far as you're concerned,
I'm not.

DECK NINE - NUMBER NINE PROMENADE

At the Deck Steward's station, Aurora stares into the camera.

JIM (VIA INTERCOM)
I don't want to lose you.

COMMAND DECK - COMMUNICATIONS CENTER

Jim stares at Aurora on the video screen.

AURORA (VIA INTERCOM)
Jim, you lost me.

She drops the microphone and walks out of frame. Jim slumps over the console in defeat.

FADE TO BLACK.

SUPER: THREE MONTHS LATER

ELITE DECK - VIENNA SUITE - BEDROOM (DAY)

Jim lies asleep on his bed in dirty clothes and shoes. He has a shaggy beard.

Half-finished dishes in bed with him. The suite is squalid.

ELITE DECK - CAFE MAXINE

The ship's posh French cafe.

Aurora eats a fancy lunch, reading a novel on a digital slate. She's groomed and put together.

DECK THREE - CAFETERIA

Jim sits in front of a bowl of breakfast cereal, a dry slice of toast. He stares into space. He has milk in his beard.

FORWARD OBSERVATION DECK

Aurora sits in her writing chair, dictating to her slate.

AURORA

It's the modern way of life. We surround ourselves with people. A constant din of conversation. As if we need the mirror of other faces to see ourselves. The clamor of voices in our ears to reassure us that we exist. Do we need it? Can we live without it?

VIENNA SUITE - DAY

The TV blares. Jim lies asleep in an armchair, covered with snack chips.

AURORA (V.O.)

I think the secret to survival is productive activity.

SHOPPING DISTRICT - CRAFT SHOP - DAY

Aurora investigates the craft shop's shelves. Collects an electronic book on painting. Paints and canvasses. An easel.

AURORA (V.O.)

We need to be good for something.

VIENNA SUITE - BATHROOM - DAY

Jim lounges in the bathtub in his bathrobe: sopping wet and drunk. Gold glitters in his hand: the RING he made for Aurora. He scowls at the ring.

AURORA (V.O.)
A challenge equal to our character.

With a snarl, Jim tosses the ring into his mouth. Chases it with a slug of vodka straight from the bottle. Swallows hard.

SERVICE DECK - CELESTIAL PROMENADE

Aurora stands in front of her easel on the promenade. She looks out the window and begins to paint.

AURORA (V.O.)
Something worth doing.

SHOPPING DISTRICT - AVENUE

Jim plays kick-the-can with the empty vodka bottle. Drunk. The bottle clatters against the PHOTO BOOTH.

Muttering in Russian, Jim attacks the booth, punching and kicking - and hurts his foot with a shout. He limps away.

A moment later he's back - wearing his tool belt. He pulls a LASER CUTTER and starts carving the booth away from the wall.

SHOPPING DISTRICT - LATER

Jim drives his golf cart unsteadily across the deck.

A HORRIBLE NOISE: he's dragging the photo booth across the floor by its power cord.

STARBOARD E.V.A. ROOM

Jim looks into the airlock through the small porthole in the inner door. Red lights flash.

The photo booth is crammed into the airlock.

EXT. STARSHIP EXCELSIOR - AIRLOCK

The airlock shoots open. The photo booth tumbles into space.

GRAND CONCOURSE - CONCOURSE BAR - EVENING

Arthur does make-work behind the bar.

Jim and Aurora approach simultaneously. They meet awkwardly: they haven't spoken in a long time.

AURORA
What are you doing here?

JIM
(drunk)
You! Tuesday's my day with Arthur.
You're trespassing.

ARTHUR
Actually, today's Wednesday.

JIM
I slept through Tuesday?

AURORA
Forget it. The bar's all yours. But
I'd say a drink is the last thing you
need. You're pathetic.

Aurora leaves. Jim takes a seat.

ARTHUR
What'll it be?

JIM
I'm going to kill myself.

ARTHUR
Why's that?

JIM
I'm a murderer.

ARTHUR
Who'd you murder?

JIM
Aurora.

ARTHUR
But she's alive. She was just here.

JIM
She won't talk to me. She won't let
me tell her what happened. How I fell
in love with her. How I want to be
with her. And I'm not sorry I woke
her up. I'm not. I love her. And you
know what? She loves me.

Around the corner, out of sight, Aurora stands listening.

JIM (CONT'D)
What was I supposed to do? I couldn't
live without her. It was now or
never, and I chose now. I chose now.
(MORE)

JIM (CONT'D)

And I was right. But I woke her up, Arthur. I woke her up, and she says I killed her. And now she's gone. She's gone.

(sobbing)

Gimme another bottle.

ARTHUR

I think you've had enough.

Jim looks at Arthur as if he's said something profound.

JIM

You know what? You're right. I've had enough.

SUBDECK A - CARGO HOLD - DAY

Jim drives his cart up to a rack of large batteries: they're identical to the battery that powers the golf cart itself.

Jim starts loading his cart with extra batteries.

SERVICE DECK - CELESTIAL PROMENADE

Paintings leans against the windows: Aurora's starscapes. The first few are rudimentary, the later ones quite good.

She works on a new one: a red nebula. She looks out the window - and her focus changes. She sees her own reflection.

Her brush moves across the canvas. She adds the suggestion of a cheekbone...a slender neck...an eye. A face made of stars.

SUBDECK C - MACHINE SHOP

Jim finishes connecting a bank of batteries to his cart's motor: quadrupling the power.

He rolls a huge tractor tire up to the cart and bolts it on.

DECK FOUR - SHOPPING DISTRICT

Aurora jogs.

A rumble and wail of rubber behind her. Jim's monster golf cart comes ROARING toward her.

Aurora leaps for safety as the cart passes. Jim blasts past her with a war whoop and a wave. He wears welding goggles.

Aurora looks after Jim in astonishment.

DECK FOUR - SERVICE CORRIDOR

Jim races down a long straightaway. Squeals around a corner. Puts the cart on two wheels as he dodges a cleaning robot.

He steers down a stairway: The cart bounces crazily down to the deck below. At the bottom Jim takes the corner too hard.

The cart tumbles and SLAMS into the bulkhead. Debris rains down. Jim lies crumpled in the wreckage, his goggles askew.

FORWARD OBSERVATION DECK

Aurora sits in her writing chair, a slate in front of her. But the slate is blank, and her face is tense.

AURORA

I haven't written in days. I don't know why. It's the old problem, I guess. Who's my reader? Who am I talking to? What's it for?

(she sighs)

I used to love it.

SERVICE DECK - INFIRMARY

Jim lies in the autodoc in his underwear - his head protruding, his body visible behind glass.

Lasers and sensors pass over his body.

AUTODOC

Two separated ribs. Fracture of the right arm, radius and ulna. One fractured finger. Dislocated thumb.

JIM

Am I gonna be okay?

Blindingly fast, robot arms straighten Jim's elbow. Wrap his ribs and arm with smooth white bandages. Jim shouts in shock.

AUTODOC

Leave the bandages on for one week.

The autodoc opens and Jim climbs out, testing his arm. A bottle of pills rattles into a tray in front of him.

AUTODOC (CONT'D)

Take one of these pills each day until they are gone.

JIM
Thanks, doc.

AUTODOC
And take better care of yourself.

FADE TO BLACK.

SUPER: THREE MONTHS LATER

FORWARD OBSERVATION DECK - DAY

Aurora paints, wild-eyed and fragile.

Her brushstrokes are fierce. She slashes at the canvas. As she paints she begins to cry, silently. She doesn't stop painting. The easel shakes as she works.

GRAND CONCOURSE

Jim kneels on the Grand Concourse. He's torn a huge hole in the carpet to expose the deck plates beneath.

With his laser cutter he cuts a large rectangular hole. Pries the plate up with a crowbar, opening a cavity in the deck.

AURORA'S CABIN

Aurora paces in her bathrobe, hair wrapped in a towel.

She looks at her gallery of snapshots. Touches the pictures one by one. The faces begin to move and speak. A cacophony of good wishes. Laughter and cheers.

Finally only one clip still plays. Aurora's mother.

AURORA'S MOTHER
I promise you we'll think of you
every day. When you wake up, I know
we'll be gone...but you just know
that we lived our lives remembering
you, and holding you in our hearts.
(She starts to cry.)
I don't understand, baby. I'm trying,
but I can't believe I'm losing you.
(She tries to soldier.)
I hope you find what you're looking
for. I hope it makes you happy.

Aurora watches, devastated.

GRAND CONCOURSE - CONCOURSE BAR - DAY

Jim, in work clothes and tool belt, drops by the bar. He's as dirty as a coal miner but he looks happy.

ARTHUR

Hello, Jim. Whiskey?

JIM

Iced tea.

ARTHUR

Coming up. Are you getting my barstool dirty?

JIM

Got to get dirty to get things done, Arthur. If your hands are too clean, it means you're not making anything.

ARTHUR

And what are you making?

JIM

Improvements.

ELITE DECK - ELITE PROMENADE - EVENING

Aurora strolls listlessly. Glances over the railing at the Grand Concourse below - and gasps. She runs for the elevator.

GRAND CONCOURSE

Aurora walks wonderingly up to a GARDEN on the Concourse: a ten-foot OAK TREE surrounded by flowerbeds and green grass.

ELITE DECK - FORWARD OBSERVATION DECK

Jim walks through Aurora's informal art gallery.

She has abandoned starscapes in favor of self-portraiture. The painted faces ever more tragic.

The last one is a field of white. Aurora fading away.

INFIRMARY - GENETIC BANK - DAY

Wisps of cold mist roll off the metal capsules. Aurora browses the rotating racks, reading names.

With a start she comes across her own name. AURORA DUNN, FEMALE, BORN 4/27/2819.

She punches buttons. The racks rotate, shedding flakes of frost. She finds what she's looking for. JAMES PRESTON, MALE, BORN 9/9/2810.

She looks at the metal cartridge for a long moment. Then she slaps a switch, and the genetic bank closes up on itself.

GRAND CONCOURSE - LOUNGE

Jim sits reading an electronic slate. He looks up to find Aurora standing over him.

AURORA

I need you.

The last thing Jim expected to hear.

AURORA (CONT'D)

I mean, I need a repairman.

Jim's face falls.

EXT. AURORA'S CABIN

Jim opens the door. Inside is chaos: the lights throb. Static sizzles on video screens. Speakers blare noise. The blinds jerk and flap. The adjustable bed convulses like a monster.

JIM

Wow. You do need a repairman.

INT. AURORA'S CABIN - LATER

A dark room. In the light of a utility lamp, Jim re-attaches a control panel to the cabin wall. Aurora watches.

JIM

The control unit burned out. I took the one from the cabin next door.

He throws a switch. The lights come on. Back to normal.

JIM (CONT'D)

All better.

Aurora gives him a brittle smile and sits on the bed.

JIM (CONT'D)

So how are you doing? You all right?

AURORA

I'm fine, Jim. Thanks for your work.

She sits immobile, frosty. After a moment Jim walks out.

FADE TO BLACK.

GRAND CONCOURSE

Jim passes a cleaning robot stuck in a corner. He frees the robot: it plows right back into the corner.

Another robot zooms in - and gets stuck beside the first one. Jim studies the robots thoughtfully.

SUBDECK C - MACHINE SHOP - DAY

Jim tinkers with a malfunctioning robot.

A squawk of static comes over the P.A. system.

Jim looks up, listening.

FORWARD OBSERVATION DECK

Aurora sits with her digital slate in her lap. She too is looking up, listening.

VOICE (VIA INTERCOM)
Hello! Anybody there?

Aurora bolts to her feet, wide-eyed.

SUBDECK C - MACHINE SHOP

Jim has vanished - the robot still rocking on the workbench.

DECK ONE - HIBERNATION BAY

Jim sprints down the hallway, eyes searching left and right.

VOICE (VIA INTERCOM)
This is Deck Chief Gus Mancuso.

Jim skids to a stop, astonished: the door to the Crew Hibernation Facility stands open.

VOICE (VIA INTERCOM) (CONT'D)
Who the hell planted a tree on my
ship?

The Grand Concourse! Jim spins and runs back the other way.

GRAND CONCOURSE

GUS MANCUSO stands at a deck steward's station, intercom mic in hand. A stocky man of 55, with a bristling mustache, wearing a crewman's coverall. Haggard and weary. He stares in consternation at the garden in the middle of the Concourse.

Running footsteps.

Jim and Aurora race into the Concourse from opposite directions. They see Gus and stop, astonished.

GUS
(pointing at the tree)
Who did that?

Jim raises a hand sheepishly. Gus shakes his head.

GUS (CONT'D)
I can't even talk about that now. Who are you?

JIM
Jim Preston. Rate-two mechanic.

GUS
Mechanic, huh?
(to Aurora)
And who are you?

AURORA
Aurora. Aurora Dunn.

GUS
Gus Mancuso, Senior Deck Chief. Nice to meet you.
(looks at the tree again)
How long have you been awake?

AURORA
A year.

JIM
Two years.

GUS
This is not good.

CAFETERIA

Jim, Aurora, and Gus sit around a table. Gus leans heavily on his elbows, sipping from a mug.

GUS

I always get a hibernation hangover
but this is the worst ever.

(he drinks)

So it's just the two of you?

JIM

Yeah.

GUS

Two years. Ouch.

(looks them in the eye)

You know what it means, right?

There's no way back into hibernation.

AURORA

I was hoping you'd know something we
didn't.

GUS

No. We're awake for the duration. How
far along are we? You know?

JIM

Thirty-two years. Eighty-eight years
to go.

Gus blows air.

GUS

That's tough.

(he shakes his head)

Hibernation failure! They said it
couldn't happen. And now three on one
trip.

Aurora shoots Jim a look. Gus doesn't notice.

GUS (CONT'D)

Well, let's see what we can do.

COMMAND DECK

Gus leads Jim and Aurora to the Bridge's armored hatch. He
swipes his crew card and the door opens.

JIM

You have no idea how long I've been
trying to get in here.

GUS

Now you're in. Don't touch anything.

BRIDGE

The computer consoles of the Bridge brighten as they enter. Gus walks from station to station, studying the screens.

GUS

We're on course....Whatever's wrong with the ship, NavComp's still minding the store.

JIM

What do you think is wrong?

GUS

Three pod failures? Something's wrong. Question is what.

He turns to leave.

AURORA

Wait. What about diverting the ship? Can we go back to Earth?

Gus almost laughs.

GUS

We're going forty percent of lightspeed away from Earth. To go home we'd have to come to a stop, accelerate back towards Earth, and then come to a stop again. It'd take as long as going on to Homestead II. Anyway, navigation's not for amateurs. Space is a big place, and a planet's just a little thing.

Gus has a coughing fit. Wipes his mouth with his fist.

GUS (CONT'D)

Let's go next door. See how the old girl's doing.

DIAGNOSTIC CENTER

Gus opens a secure compartment beside the bridge. Inside, the Diagnostic Computer stands dark and dead.

GUS

I thought we'd see a lot of red lights here. That would mean trouble.

AURORA

So everything's okay?

GUS

No, if everything was okay we'd see a lot of green lights here.

AURORA

What does no lights mean?

GUS

No lights means big trouble. Diagnostic Computer's down. We've got some work to do.

JIM

What do you need?

GUS

Right now? Cheeseburger.

ELITE DECK - STARDUST DINER

Gus eats a cheeseburger. Jim and Aurora sit across from him.

GUS

(with his mouth full)

Never been so hungry. Worst hibernation hangover ever.

Jim can't take his eyes off Gus. A new person.

JIM

So where you from, Gus?

GUS

Grew up in Chicago. But I've lived on this ship a long time. The Excelsior's made five inter-planetary runs, and I've been on every one. I live aboard. When she makes port, I live where she lands until she lifts again.

JIM

(doing the math)

How old does that make you?

GUS

Fifty-six.

JIM

But how long ago were you born?

GUS

Oh. Hang on...

(he does mental math)

About six hundred years ago.

(MORE)

GUS (CONT'D)

Most of that I lost to hibernation or
relativity. Doesn't really count.

(he coughs again)

I tell you, I feel about six hundred
years old right now. I woke up hard.

AURORA

You should rest.

GUS

I think I will.

(he climbs to his feet)

Tomorrow morning, eight bells, you
meet me beside that tree of yours.
Until I figure out what's wrong with
the *Excelsior*, you work for me.

Jim and Aurora smile.

JIM

Yes, sir.

AURORA

Good night, Gus.

Gus waves and walks off. That leaves Jim and Aurora sitting
awkwardly on the same side of a diner booth.

After a moment Aurora moves over to the other side. Looks at
Jim across the table.

AURORA (CONT'D)

Six hundred years old!

JIM

I've missed you.

Aurora stares, caught off guard. She gets up.

AURORA

See you in the morning.

COMMAND DECK - DIAGNOSTIC CENTER - MORNING

Gus and Jim examine the Diagnostic Computer. Jim holds a
flashlight while Gus pokes around with a voltmeter inside.

Behind them, Aurora stands watching with a digital slate.

GUS

The CPU's burned out, can you believe
it? Why should that happen? It's
rated for five hundred years.

AURORA

Can you fix it?

GUS
You don't fix it, you replace it.
There are spares for everything in
storage. Make a note. Diagnostic
Computer CPU. And a new cooling fan,
this one looks shot.

AURORA
Got it.

GRAND CONCOURSE

Gus and Aurora stand waiting as if for a bus.

AURORA
Don't take this the wrong way - I
wish for your sake you were still
asleep - but I'm glad you're here.

GUS
Thank you, sweetheart.

A GROWL of gears. Jim drives up in his souped-up golf cart.

GUS (CONT'D)
What's this?

JIM
The golf cart.

Gus takes in the bank of batteries, the giant tractor wheels.

GUS
This I like.

SUBDECK A - NUMBER TEN CARGO BAY

Jim pilots the cart through the stacks. Aurora rides shotgun.
Gus, in the back seat, plays a flashlight over the stacks.

GUS
Next bay is the ship's stores. So how
fast can she go?

Jim puts the pedal down. The cart lays rubber on the deck
plates and shoots down the aisle while Aurora and Gus yell.

SHIP'S STORES

Up on a hydraulic lift, Gus digs components out of storage.
Hands them to Aurora, who hands them to Jim, who loads them
into the cart.

DIAGNOSTIC CENTER

Gus works on the Diagnostic Computer while Jim looks on. Nearby, Aurora thumbs through Gus's technical manuals.

Gus clamps a final component in place and nods at Jim.

GUS
Start 'er up.

Jim closes a circuit breaker and powers up the computer. A deep electrical HUM as the machine boots up.

The screen flashes a message: RUNNING VESSEL DIAGNOSTIC. A progress bar shows that the diagnostic is 0.0% complete.

The lights on the indicator panel remain dark. The first light begins to flicker as the diagnostic runs.

JIM
How long will it take?

GUS
Full diagnostic from a cold start?
Days. But it'll tell us everything.

GRAND CONCOURSE

Gus strolls through the ship, looking around nostalgically. He passes Jim's garden and shakes his head.

CONCOURSE BAR

Gus walks up to the bar.

ARTHUR
Chief Mancuso! Good to see you.

GUS
Good to see you too, Arthur.

ARTHUR
What can I get you?

GUS
Just an ice water with a little
lemon. I feel hot as hell.

Gus mops sweat from his brow and sips his water. His hand trembles hard enough to rattle the ice cubes.

GUS'S CABIN

A homey space, filled with Gus's possessions: pictures of fellow spacers and vacation spots on half a dozen planets. Books, keepsakes and mementos.

Gus sits on his bed, on a handmade quilt. Coughs violently into a handkerchief, leaving the cloth spotted with blood.

GRAND CONCOURSE - GARDEN - MORNING

Aurora stands waiting by the oak tree. Jim arrives with two cups of coffee, and hands her one. Aurora smiles, touched.

AURORA

Thank you.

Gus arrives in a fresh coverall, a steaming mug in hand. No signs of frailty. He hands each of them a digital slate.

GUS

All right. Last night I checked ten atmosphere stations and two of them were burned out. Twenty percent failure rate. Unheard of. So we're going to see how far the rot runs.

(to Aurora)

You. You're going to walk Decks Two, Three, and Four, and check every atmosphere station. Green light good, red light bad, no light really bad. Write down what you find, I want a complete census.

AURORA

Yes, sir.

GUS

(to Jim)

You. Go down to the Ship's Stores. Find atmosphere station CPUs and take an inventory of the spares. I know what the manifest says, but lists ain't facts.

JIM

Got it.

GUS

I'm going down to the Hibernation Bay to look at our pods. Maybe I can spot what went wrong.

Jim and Aurora exchange glances.

AURORA
That should be interesting.

HIBERNATION BAY - AURORA'S POD - DAY

Gus kneels in front of the pod, examining the mechanism. Alone, he doesn't hide his difficulty: sweating and panting.

Something he finds inside the machine makes him forget his symptoms. He stares, astonished.

GUS
Son of a gun.

A sound behind him. Gus turns to find Jim watching. He looks from Jim to the pod mechanism and back again.

GUS (CONT'D)
You're supposed to be doing inventory.

JIM
I finished.

GUS
(holding Jim's eyes)
I looked at your pod. Very simple. The clock chips burned out. Not supposed to happen, but it's simple.

Jim fidgets. Starts to speak. Gus cuts him off.

GUS (CONT'D)
My pod was complicated. A bunch of different failures at once, the whole thing went haywire. I think that's why I feel so bad.
(points at Aurora's pod)
But this pod...

JIM
Gus...

GUS
You did this.

JIM
Yeah.

GUS
I was thinking what a lucky son of a bitch you were, stuck with a beauty like Aurora. But it wasn't luck.

JIM

No.

Gus sits down heavily, looking at Jim.

GUS

She knows?

JIM

She knows.

Gus thinks that over, shaking his head at the idea.

GUS

I could see there was some trouble
between you.

Gus starts putting his tools away. Jim lays the electronic
slate down beside him.

JIM

Here's your inventory. I'll be in the
machine shop if you need me.

COMMAND DECK - DIAGNOSTIC CENTER

Gus sits working. Behind him the Diagnostic Computer displays
its progress bar: the diagnostic is 9% complete.

Aurora enters with a digital slate.

AURORA

I finished the census.
(she hesitates)
You saw the hibernation pods?

GUS

Yeah.

AURORA

So you know. What Jim did.

Aurora's chin begins to tremble.

GUS

Yeah, he told me.

AURORA

He told you? Just like that? And?

She waits, trembling with righteous indignation. Gus doesn't
want to get into this: he looks away uncomfortably.

AURORA (CONT'D)

It's not forgivable, Gus. It's not.
Don't tell me it is.

GUS

No, it's a bad thing. But...

(he shrugs helplessly)

Look. When a drowning man drags
somebody down with him, you don't
call it right. But he's drowning. A
starving man steals a loaf of bread,
what can you say? You should have
starved?

AURORA

I would have starved.

GUS

Really?

Aurora looks hard at Gus, thinking, and says nothing.

ELITE DECK - ARGENTINA STEAKHOUSE - EVENING

A rustic restaurant. Gus, Jim, and Aurora sit around a table.
Gus reads an electronic slate.

GUS

By Aurora's count, about thirty
percent of the atmosphere station
CPUs are burned out.

JIM

We can replace them.

GUS

We will. But they'll just burn out
again if we don't figure out why it's
happening.

JIM

Where do we start?

GUS

We wait for the diagnostic report.
You've been knocking around this ship
for two years. A few days more won't
kill you.

Gus hacks and coughs. For a moment his weakness is plain to
see...but robots sweep in and lay dishes on the table. Gus
sets his slate aside.

GUS (CONT'D)

Here you go. This is the best food on the ship.

GRAND CONCOURSE - CONCOURSE BAR

Jim, Aurora, and Gus sit at the bar. Arthur stands by.

AURORA

So how did you end up in space?

GUS

Only place I ever wanted to be. When I was sixteen I lied about my age and got onto a lunar shuttle crew. A few years later I moved on to planetary ships. Made the Venus run a hundred times, then Jupiter and Saturn. Then the gravity drive came along. Real spaceflight. I did everything I could to get onto an interstellar ship. I was thirty-six years old the first time I saw an alien sun. No going back after that. I've walked on seventeen planets in five solar systems.

JIM

That's incredible.

AURORA

Don't you feel homeless?

GUS

I'm a spacer. My home is where I am. You can't take much with you, so you don't get hung up on things. You have yourself. The things you do. The company you keep.

Gus pushes himself off his stool. Momentarily shaky, he pulls himself together.

He takes a seat at the grand piano and plays - a fine beerhall pianist. Gus touches a switch and lifts his hands: the piano keeps playing.

Gus stands and extends a hand to Aurora. She takes it, and Gus sweeps her across the floor.

Jim watches from the bar.

ARTHUR

(aside, to Jim)

Gus always dances with the ladies.

Aurora follows Gus's lead - but steals looks at Jim. Her eyes unreadable. They watch each other as the dance goes on.

GRAND CONCOURSE - THE GARDEN - MORNING

Jim and Aurora wait beside the garden. They've been waiting for a while. Both look around for Gus.

JIM

You haven't seen him at all?

GUS'S CABIN DOOR

A doorbell chimes. Jim and Aurora wait in the hall, listening. Jim rings again.

AURORA

I don't think he's up.

GUS'S CABIN

Gus lies feverish and semi-conscious in his bed.

A THUNK! The door slides open. Jim and Aurora rush in.

JIM

Gus! Are you all right?

GUS

No. No, I'm not.

INFIRMARY

Gus lies in a medical scanner. Jim and Aurora watch as the machine bathes Gus in light, sensors floating over his body.

GUS

Couldn't get up. Weak as a baby. What does it say is wrong with me?

The scanner's display screen lists not one diagnosis, but hundreds: disorders, diseases, dysfunctions.

JIM

(hiding his horror)

It's a few things.

MEDICAL SCANNER

Diagnosis complete.

Gus hauls himself out of the scanner. Pulls a bathrobe on and comes around to look at the screen. He sees it and blanches.

MEDICAL SCANNER (CONT'D)
Six hundred twelve disorders found.

GUS
What's the summary?

MEDICAL SCANNER
Pan-systemic necrosis. Progressive
organ failure. Cause unknown.

GUS
(losing his temper)
I'll tell you the cause. My goofy
hibernation pod is the cause.

AURORA
What's the treatment?

MEDICAL SCANNER
No treatment known.

Gus pivots the monitor so that only he can see it.

GUS
Prognosis.

A series of images flickers over the screen, casting shadows
on his face. Gus swallows hard and looks away.

GUS (CONT'D)
How long have I got?

MEDICAL SCANNER
Between two and three days.

A long moment of silence. Gus turns and exits.

MEDICAL SCANNER (CONT'D)
These sedatives will alleviate
suffering in the final hours...

Pill bottles clatter into a metal bin. Aurora scoops them up.
Jim goes after Gus.

CORRIDOR

Gus settles himself behind the wheel of Jim's cart.

JIM
Gus!

GUS
Sorry, Jim.

Gus puts his foot down and the cart squeals away.

Aurora stumbles into the hall, her hands full of pill bottles. She and Jim watch the cart recede.

COMMAND DECK - COMMUNICATIONS CENTER

Aurora sits at the security console, watching the monitors. Jim enters.

JIM
He's not in his room.

Aurora flips on the intercom, speaks into the mic. Her voice resonates through the ship.

AURORA
Where are you? Gus, please answer.
We'll be at the Concourse Bar every
hour. I'm really worried.

JIM
Where is he? What's he doing?

GUS (O.S.)
What are you doing?

They spin. Gus stands in the doorway behind them.

GUS (CONT'D)
Guy's got a couple of days to live
and he can't get any peace.

AURORA
Where have you been?

GUS
Making arrangements. You kids have
dinner plans?

JIM
No.

GUS
Xanadu at eight.
(exiting)
Now stop shouting at me.

GUS'S CABIN - EVENING

Gus makes a tour of the room, touching his photographs and mementos in farewell.

He puts on his dress uniform: chest crowded with medals and decorations for the planets he's seen, the voyages he's made.

He takes a photograph from a dresser: a handsome woman in her forties. Kisses the snapshot. Tucks it in his breast pocket.

In the mirror he studies his haggard face.

Suddenly he SHOUTS, a wordless cry of anger. Pounds on the dresser with his fists. Teeth clenched in pain and fury.

Then he straightens. Stands at attention. Takes a deep breath. Pivots on his heel and leaves the room.

STARDOME - XANADU - NIGHT

Jim and Aurora enter the Stardome to find Gus sitting shaky but proud at the head of a table.

They sit. Gus pours wine with a trembling hand.

AURORA

You look magnificent.

GUS

(to Jim)

Ladies love the dress blues.

(to both of them)

Thanks for coming. Sorry to run out today, but I didn't have a lot of time, and there was a lot to do.

He sips his wine. Jim and Aurora watch with concern.

JIM

How you feeling?

GUS

Fine, fine.

AURORA

Gus, just because some stupid machine says there's no cure...

GUS

State-of-the-art machine, Aurora. Anyway, I can feel it happening.

AURORA

But you just got here. It's barely been a week.

He takes her hand.

GUS

No point counting the days.

XANADU - LATER

Their dinners are nearly done. Gus pours more wine. He's in the middle of a tale of adventure.

GUS

A pure oxygen environment is about as dangerous a place as you can be. A steel pipe will burn in pure O2. And there I am with a hammer, trying to close this valve and stop the oxygen flow, when one spark will kill us all. But the thing is, O2 makes you punchy. So I can't stop laughing. And then the guys behind me start in, and soon everybody's going. Captain's giggling like a girl. The Navigator pissed his pants laughing.

Jim and Aurora laugh. But pain contorts Gus's face. He grips the table with white knuckles. And nobody's laughing anymore.

GUS (CONT'D)

This is happening fast. I got some things for you. Come with me.

DECK FOUR - STARBOARD E.V.A. ROOM

On a table at the edge of the plaza, a small pile of objects waits. Gus stops beside them. Turns to Jim and Aurora.

GUS

I went through the ship's manuals and made notes wherever there was something special you should know. These should keep you straight. In a few days the Diagnostic Computer will show you what needs fixing.

He takes his shipcard from around his neck. Hands it to Jim.

GUS (CONT'D)

This'll get you anywhere you need to go. Questions?

JIM

Why are we standing by the airlock?

AURORA

Oh, God! Gus, no!

GUS
 Got no choice about going. But I can
 decide how to go, and I'm going out
 on my own two feet.

JIM
 (shocked)
 Are you sure about this?

GUS
 If you knew how this feels, Jimbo,
 you wouldn't ask me to stay.

Gus extends a hand to Aurora. She throws her arms around him.

AURORA
 Gus. I can't stand it. There's got to
 be some other way. Don't do this.

Gus gently frees himself from her arms.

GUS
 (tenderly)
 It's all right, Aurora. It's all
 right.

Gus turns to Jim. They clasp hands. Slap each other's
 shoulders in a rough embrace.

GUS (CONT'D)
 Jim. Fix the ship.

JIM
 Yes, sir.

GUS
 And take care of each other.

Gus turns and opens the airlock. He straightens, squares his
 shoulders, and steps inside. Turns to face them.

GUS (CONT'D)
 All right.

Aurora covers her mouth. Jim raises a hand in stunned
 farewell. The airlock door closes. Red lights flash.

Through the porthole they see Gus look out into space.

Then the outer door slams open and a blast of air shoots Gus
 out among the stars. His body lost in the infinite night.

Aurora steps into Jim's arms. Lays her head on his chest. For
 a moment he holds her. Then she pushes him gently back. Meets
 his eyes sadly.

Jim watches her walk away.

INT. GRAND CONCOURSE - DAY

Arthur polishes glasses, chipper as ever. A SWEEPER ROBOT passes on its daily errands.

FORWARD OBSERVATION DECK

Aurora slouches in her writing chair, staring into space - a picture of sorrow.

SUBDECK C - MACHINE SHOP

Jim sits motionless at his workbench, brooding.

A CLATTER rouses him.

Jim's little pet robot is banging its head against the wall, emitting beeps of distress. Jim frowns.

ROBOTICS CENTER

Jim walks in. Everywhere robots bunch and stumble.

A pair of sweeper robots fight to enter the same recharging niche. They trip up a procession of gangly window washers - who stumble into a parade of robot waiters.

Chaos spreads. The robots' clockwork perfection upset.

CAFETERIA

Aurora draws a glass of orange juice and gets green sludge. Dials for toast and gets two slices of charcoal.

COMMAND DECK - DIAGNOSTIC CENTER

Aurora enters. The Diagnostic Computer's console is no longer dark: it's a sea of green and red lights. A lot of red.

The computer's screen reads "Diagnostic Complete." It displays a long list of error messages.

271 Aurora stares in horror at the red lights.

271

Jim enters behind her. Takes in the bad news.

AURORA

There's trouble everywhere.
Atmosphere systems, water systems,
waste systems, robot control.

JIM

(under his breath)
What's happening?

Aurora goes to the worktable: its surface displays the diagnostic report. Thousands of faults and failures.

AURORA

It started two years ago. Thirty
years with no trouble, then forty-
seven failures in a single day.
(reading the list)
Structural concussion.
System overvoltage.
Transient pressure anomaly.
Circuit reset, conduit 12.
Sync failure, hibernation pod 1498.

JIM

Pod 1498? That's me!

AURORA

Whatever happened that day woke you
up.

She pulls up a graph of failures over time: A trickle of
breakdowns that swells into a torrent.

JIM

Ever since then, more and more
failures. Faster and faster.

AURORA

How do we find out what's going on?

JIM

We start at the beginning. The
breakdowns from the day I woke up.

Aurora brings up a map of the ship on the display. Red
markers blink on the map.

AURORA

They're all on Deck One.

DECK FOUR - AFT FIREWALL

An armored hatch leads to the Engine Room.

Jim wears his tool belt. Aurora carries a flashlight. Each of them carries one of Gus's manuals.

Jim swipes Gus's crew card and the hatch opens. They go in.

ENGINE COMPARTMENT - UPPER LEVEL

A huge space spanning multiple decks at the rear of the ship. Here the real heart of the *Excelsior* throbs in the dark.

Jim and Aurora emerge into a humming electrical station. Jim peers at gauges.

JIM

Power Converter seems okay.

AURORA

The failures are all below us.

ENGINE COMPARTMENT - MIDDLE LEVEL

A huge sphere 120 feet across dominates the compartment. Signs read: CAUTION - FUSION REACTOR. A deep RUMBLE.

Jim and Aurora descend beside the reactor on a spiral stair.

They emerge onto a catwalk at the reactor's equator and walk around the sphere.

REACTOR CONTROL ROOM

Jim cards open a door labeled "REACTOR CONTROL ROOM." Red light pours out. They enter.

JIM & AURORA

(together)

Don't touch anything.

Banks of control panels - but Jim and Aurora have eyes only for the windows into the reactor's heart.

Inside the reactor is a caged sun: an orb of fire hanging in space. Loops and tongues of flame leap from its surface.

It roars like a forest fire.

AURORA

It's beautiful.

JIM

Scares the hell out of me.

AURORA

What keeps it in?

JIM

Gravity. The gravity plant gives us weight. Propels the ship. And it contains the fusion reaction. All one system.

Aurora watches Jim as he walks among the consoles, studying the instruments.

JIM (CONT'D)

Not much trouble here. A couple of computers running hot.

AURORA

The cluster of failures is still one level down.

ENGINE COMPARTMENT - LOWER LEVEL

Jim and Aurora emerge from an elevator. They come to a door marked CENTRAL COMPUTING.

AURORA

This should be it.

Jim cards the door with Gus's shipcard. The lock flashes a red light and stays closed.

JIM

Gus's card should open any door.

AURORA

(flipping through her manual)
Let me try an override code.

She squeezes past Jim. Taps at the door's keypad. Jim peers through the narrow window in the door.

JIM

Wait a sec, maybe there's a reason the door...

The light flashes green.

The door begins to slide open.

A HOWLING WIND sucks Aurora against the crack in the door. She screams. Jim grabs at her. A hurricane drags her inside.

CENTRAL COMPUTER FACILITY

Aurora tumbles into the room and smashes into a column. She clings in the gale-force wind, grimacing in pain.

There's a RAGGED HOLE punched in the hull. Outside, stars burn in the vacuum of space. A tornado of escaping air screams out through the hole.

Red lights flash. Claxons sound. The door begins to close.

Jim pulls a HAMMER from his belt and jams it crossways in the doorway, propping open the door. The door's motors whine.

Jim dives inside. Skids to a stop beside Aurora. Pulls her loose from the column and shoves her toward the door, fighting the wind.

Aurora scrambles through the doorway. Jim tries to follow - but the hammer suddenly bends and springs out of the doorway.

The door slams: Aurora outside, Jim in the airless room.

The last of the atmosphere flashes away into space.

Aurora screams and pounds on the other side of the door. But Jim hears only his own thudding heartbeat.

The last air leaves Jim's lungs in a silent shout, vapor whipping away between his teeth.

He spins. Scans the room desperately.

OUTSIDE THE DOOR

Aurora re-enters the override code. But the code is denied.

She drops to her knees. Scans frantically through her manual.

IN THE AIRLESS ROOM

Jim rips open a wide metal drawer built into the wall. It's full of computer components: Jim sweeps them onto the floor.

OUTSIDE THE DOOR

Aurora tears open an instrument panel beside the door, revealing a yellow emergency button marked "PURGE." She flips back the safety catch and slams the button.

IN THE AIRLESS ROOM

White jets of compressed air blast from the ceiling, turning the room into a whirling tornado of debris.

Jim clings for his life, gulping air as flying fragments batter him.

The wind tears him from his handholds and hurls him toward the jagged hole in the hull.

He falls ACROSS THE HOLE. Metal fangs inches from his body. He strains to avoid being speared or sucked out into space.

The air jets stop. The wind dies as the air escapes.

Jim lunges back to the open drawer. Pulls the LASER CUTTER from his tool belt and cuts the entire drawer free.

He turns back, holding the metal DRAWER like a shield - and staggers, half fainting.

OUTSIDE THE DOOR

Aurora sees Jim falter. Slams the PURGE button again.

IN THE AIRLESS ROOM

Compressed air blasts into the room, renewing the windstorm.

Jim rides the wind, sliding across the steel deck and SLAMMING the steel drawer across the hole in the hull.

Air screams away through the gaps.

Jim lunges to an emergency locker and pulls out an epoxy foamer - a steel canister like a fire extinguisher. He aims it at the hole in the hull and pulls the trigger.

ORANGE FOAM blasts out, stiffening into a hard plastic. Jim buries the steel drawer and the hull breach in foam.

His eyes flutter closed. Starved of oxygen, he falls limp.

OUTSIDE THE DOOR

Aurora hits the PURGE button. White jets of air blast into the sealed room. The pressure comes up. The door slides open.

CENTRAL COMPUTER FACILITY

Aurora dashes in. Falls to her knees beside Jim. Takes his pulse. Listens for breath: he's not breathing. She presses her mouth over his and blows air into his lungs.

After a moment Jim coughs. He opens bloodshot eyes. She props his head on her knee.

AURORA
Jim. Are you okay?

Jim breathes deeply. Blinks his eyes.

JIM
I think I'm all right.
(his eyes go wide)
Look.

In the center of the room a round column houses the CORE COMPUTER. There's a CRATER blasted in the machine.

JIM (CONT'D)
That's the core computer.

Jim hauls himself to his feet, leaning on Aurora. He approaches the blasted computer. Reaches into the hole. Strains. A CREAK...and Jim pulls a melon-sized METEOR from the crater. An orb of pitted metal.

COMMAND DECK - DIAGNOSTIC CENTER

Jim and Aurora sit at the worktable. The meteor sits between them on the table.

JIM
A meteor.

AURORA
A rock.

They stare at the meteor: the cause of it all.

A BEEP: on the Diagnostic Computer's console, more green lights turn red. New errors pop up on the diagnostic report.

AURORA (CONT'D)
I don't get it. This thing hit down on Deck One. But there are failures everywhere.

JIM
(a brainstorm)
The computers are networked. Ever since the core computer got blown away, all the other computers must have been carrying the load. Running at full capacity around the clock for two years. They're burning out.

AURORA
And every computer that burns out increases the load on the others.

JIM

Yeah. The breakdown accelerates. If we don't stop it, the whole ship will go down.

AURORA

I'm trapped on a sinking ship?

JIM

Gus said there's spares for everything. If we replace the core computer, it'll pick up the load. The burnouts will stop.

Another BEEP. Another green light turns red.

AURORA

Let's go.

SUBDECK A - SHIP'S STORES

Jim pilots his golf cart at breakneck speed through the cargo racks. Aurora rides shotgun, reading an electronic map.

AURORA

Two more rows, then left!

The cart squeals around a corner.

CENTRAL COMPUTER FACILITY

Aurora buries the hull breach in another layer of epoxy foam.

Jim wrestles a massive crate off the golf cart's cargo deck. Wearily uncrates the replacement computer.

CENTRAL COMPUTER FACILITY - LATER

Aurora inspects the replacement core computer, a manual in her hands. The pages she's consulting are covered with Gus's handwritten notes.

Jim sits on the floor with another manual. Cables and connectors lie around him on the floor.

AURORA

First you connect the data bus, then the sync cable, then bridge the power and backup power...you're supposed to run a startup checklist, but Gus made a note. He says you can skip straight to power-up as long as you...

(MORE)

AURORA (CONT'D)

(frowning)

Jim!

Jim is nodding off over his manual. He looks up, blinking.

AURORA (CONT'D)

You need to sleep. We can't make mistakes here.

JIM

(groggy)

I'm fine.

AURORA

You just got sucked into outer space.
Take a break.

ELITE DECK - BERLIN SUITE - NIGHT

Jim lies asleep in trousers and T-shirt, dead to the world.

DECK NINE - AURORA'S CABIN - DAWN

Aurora wakes. Rolls out of bed.

COMMAND DECK - DIAGNOSTIC CENTER - DAY

Aurora sips coffee. Surveys the Diagnostic Computer's warning lights. Turns to stare thoughtfully at the meteor itself.

She exits.

The console flickers. A green light turns red. And another. The pattern of red lights spreads like a bloodstain.

ELITE DECK - BERLIN SUITE

Jim still lies sleeping. He hasn't moved a muscle. Aurora looks in on him, and slips quietly away.

DECK TWO - SWIMMING POOL

In a bathing suit, Aurora dives into the pool, cleaving the water cleanly and striking out in a crawl stroke.

She reaches the end of the lane. Kick-turns and swims back...

...and the gravity cuts out.

The water heaves itself into weird humps and tentacles. Aurora flounders in the weightless water.

BERLIN SUITE (ZERO GRAVITY)

Sound asleep, Jim floats weightless from his bed, his blanket billowing. He touches the ceiling.

His eyes open. He shouts in astonishment.

Gus' crew card floats in front of him. He grabs it. His blanket snarls around him: he struggles to free himself.

SWIMMING POOL (ZERO GRAVITY)

Rippling masses of water float everywhere, dividing and merging. There is no surface. There is no up.

In the middle of this chaos, Aurora is trying not to drown.

A truck-sized blob of water swallows her up.

Inside the jiggling mass she struggles, running out of air. She gathers herself. Lunges through the water. Shoots out of the blob, gasping for breath.

She drifts within reach of a railing and grabs hold.

BERLIN SUITE (ZERO GRAVITY)

Jim braces himself in a corner of the ceiling. Spots his tool belt floating in mid-air.

He dives through the air, snags his tool belt on the way, and opens the door.

JIM

Aurora!

ELITE DECK - ELITE PROMENADE (ZERO GRAVITY)

Jim emerges from a corridor onto the promenade: airborne, propelling himself from one handhold to the next.

He's barefoot in trousers and undershirt, his toolbelt around his waist. Gus's shipcard around his neck.

AURORA (O.S.)

Jim!

In the middle of the atrium, Aurora drifts mid-air, far from any handhold. She wears a damp shirt over her bathing suit.

JIM

What are you doing?

AURORA
(exasperated)
I'm drifting helplessly.

JIM
We've got to get you down. The
gravity might come back on.

Aurora hadn't thought of that. She looks down fearfully.

Jim swings over the railing. Braces his feet. Takes aim.

AURORA
Whoa. Hey. Let's talk about this.

JIM
Hang on.

AURORA
To what?!

Jim dives at her like Superman. Wraps his arms around her.
They tumble through space until Jim grabs a railing.

JIM
You okay?

AURORA
There's no gravity.

JIM
Yeah. That's bad.

AURORA
Why is there no gravity?

JIM
The gravity plant's failing. Internal
field goes first. After that the
engines die...then the fusion reactor
goes nova.

AURORA
That is bad.

JIM
We've got to get the core computer
online. Now.

ENGINE COMPARTMENT - FUSION REACTOR (ZERO GRAVITY)

A roar of THUNDER. The caged sun shudders. Tongues of fire
lick from its surface.

DECK FIVE - CORRIDOR (ZERO GRAVITY)

Jim and Aurora, getting the hang of it, shoot down a hallway - dodging a robot that spins its wheels in the air.

ENGINE COMPARTMENT - CORE COMPUTER ROOM (ZERO GRAVITY)

Jim and Aurora float into the room and stare: Jim's golf cart and the replacement Core Computer hang tumbling in the air.

Aurora extends her hand to Jim. He takes her hand, and with his other hand grabs a handhold. Aurora floats up and grabs the replacement core computer by a cable. A human chain, they haul it down to the deck.

Aurora holds the new computer down. Jim floats up to the ruined old computer. Opens latches. Disconnects cables. Eases the machine out of the column into the air.

The room shakes. A deep note in the background falls silent.

JIM

The engines just shut down.

FUSION REACTOR CONTROL ROOM (ZERO GRAVITY)

Consoles alive with warning lights. The room is bathed with a hellish glow: the orb of fire swells and roars.

A computer burns out with a sputter of flame. The air fills with a haze of smoke.

FUSION REACTOR

The caged sun boils and swells. Tentacles of flame graze the reactor walls, leaving charred trails.

CORE COMPUTER ROOM (ZERO GRAVITY)

Jim and Aurora strain at the replacement computer: it's nearly in place. Each shoves with one hand, gripping a handhold with the other. Their feet kick in the empty air.

Red lights flash. A warning klaxon sounds.

ANNOUNCER

Reactor failure. Reactor failure.
Passengers please remain calm.

Aurora holds the computer in place, gripping two handholds, her shoulder planted against the machine.

Jim floats up, reaches around the computer to connect cables.

JIM

Does the data cable go in the "bus"
port or the "through" port?

AURORA

Bus port! The blue one!

The ship shudders violently, throwing them from side to side.
Jim forces one cable after another into their sockets.

Aurora tires: the computer slides out of place.

JIM

Hold it! Hold it!

AURORA

Trying!

She strains. The computer slides back into place.

Jim closes the last connection. Slips out of the niche and
lowers the clamps that hold the computer in place.

He throws the heavy power lever. The lights go out.

EXT. STARSHIP EXCELSIOR

A wave of darkness engulfs the ship.

INT. SUBDECK A - CORE COMPUTER ROOM

Floating, Jim and Aurora stare at each other in the dark.

AURORA

What's happening?

JIM

Don't know.

The core computer flashes to life. The lights come back on.

So does the gravity. Jim and Aurora slam to the floor. Inches
away, the old computer plunges down and embeds itself in the
deck. Across the room the golf cart bounces on its tires.

INT. FUSION REACTOR

The orb of fire withdraws its blazing tentacles and dwindles
to its proper size.

CORE COMPUTER ROOM

Jim and Aurora lie on the deck, breathing hard. Aurora starts to laugh.

JIM
What's so funny?

AURORA
We're alive!

The engines rumble back to life.

A distant, rhythmic sound begins: *BOOM-CHAK...BOOM-CHAK...*

DECK TWO - PROMENADE

Jim and Aurora walk wearily.

JIM
We have to replace the other burned-out computers. But we have time.

Aurora slides her arm around his waist.

BOOM-CHAK...BOOM-CHAK...

JIM (CONT'D)
What is that sound?

Aurora stiffens, looking over his shoulder. Outside the window, a hibernation pod spins into view. A woman inside.

AURORA
(finding her voice)
Jim!

He turns. Stares in shock as more pods drift past the window.

HIBERNATION BAY

Jim and Aurora sprint into the facility. The sound is loud here: *BOOM-CHAK...BOOM-CHAK...*

It's the sound of hibernation pods being ejected. The wave of ejections marches down an aisle: one pod after another disappearing into the ceiling.

Jim rushes to a CONSOLE. Scans the display.

JIM
The hibernation system rebooted. It thinks the ship's in port. It's ejecting the empty pods.

AURORA
(horrified)
They're not empty.

EXT. STARSHIP EXCELSIOR

The ship leaves a trail of glowing hibernation pods.

INT. HIBERNATION BAY

Jim slides to a halt in front of a hibernation pod. Pulls a power driver from his belt and removes the cover panel.

Aurora arrives on his heels. Watches as he works.

An ominous sound approaches. *BOOM-CHAK...BOOM-CHAK...* The wave of ejections advances down their row.

AURORA
Hurry.

JIM
I see it.

He's not fast enough. The pod slides up and out of sight.

EXT. STARSHIP EXCELSIOR

The pods Jim was working on tumbles out into space.

INT. CREW HIBERNATION FACILITY

Jim slams into the facility at a dead run. Scans the crew hibernation pods. Picks one and goes to work.

Aurora enters. Looks at the man inside the hibernation pod: a stern fellow with a bristling gray beard.

AURORA
Who's that?

JIM
The Captain.

The sounds of the ejection wave come closer. *Boom-chak.*

AURORA
You don't have much time.

JIM
I know.

BOOM-CHAK! A crewman's pod vanishes into the ceiling on the opposite side. The ejections march down the row.

AURORA

Go go go!

The wave of ejections reaches the end of the facility and marches back on Jim's side.

JIM

Got it!

The hibernation pod hums to life.

Inside, the Captain opens his eyes. He stares in astonishment at the first thing he sees: Aurora, in her bathing suit and shirt, a disheveled angel.

BOOM-CHAK!

The pod beside the Captain's shoots out of sight. He sees it. Looks at Aurora in alarm. Reaches out, his hand spread flat on the glass.

She reaches back, her hand matching his.

The Captain's pod rises through the ceiling and vanishes. Jim roars in frustration. Aurora leaps back with a cry of horror.

DECK NINE - AFT OBSERVATION DECK

Jim and Aurora stare out the windows. In the ship's wake, five thousand pods glitter like diamonds. The cloud of pods dispersing as they watch.

Stricken, Aurora walks away.

Jim watches her go, then turns back to the window, looking out at the tumbling sparks.

EXT. STARSHIP EXCELSIOR

The starship recedes, leaving five thousand pods in its wake.

FADE TO BLACK.

SUPER: TWO WEEKS LATER

INT. COMMAND DECK - DIAGNOSTIC CENTER - DAY

Jim stands at the Diagnostic Computer. The indicator light panel is a sea of green. Only a few red lights remain.

Aurora enters.

JIM

That's the last of the burned out processors. When it reboots we should be all green.

AURORA

Can we talk?

FORWARD OBSERVATION DECK

Aurora's writing couch. Jim and Aurora sit facing each other. Aurora gathers her thoughts. Takes a deep breath.

AURORA

You know, if it wasn't for you waking me up, I'd be drifting out in space right now with the others. And if you'd never awakened, the whole ship would have been lost while we slept.

Jim shakes his head at the tangle of it.

AURORA (CONT'D)

But no matter how we got here, the fact is that we're here. All I know is, when I have a good idea, you're the person I want to tell. When I wake up in the morning, I wish you were there. When I look at you, I just see Jim. And I miss him.

Jim looks at her, moved and caught off-guard.

JIM

I've missed you too.

AURORA

I don't want to be angry anymore. I can't be. We've come through too much. No matter what you've done... the fact is, I love you.

Jim reaches out and takes her hand. She watches him intertwine his fingers with hers.

Aurora gazes out at the stars - the endless shining sky that enfolds them. She looks at Jim and smiles.

AURORA (CONT'D)

Hell of a life.

Jim meets her eyes.

JIM

Hell of a life.

She climbs into his lap, and they kiss. A kiss with a year's frustration behind it. A kiss that matters.

EXT. STARSHIP EXCELSIOR - STARBOARD AIRLOCK - DAY

The airlock opens with a gust of air. Jim emerges in a space suit - followed by Aurora.

ATOP THE SHIP

They walk toward the bow, stars reflected in their visors.

AT THE BOW

They sit side by side. Aurora takes Jim's hand.

They lean together, helmets touching, and look together into the blue stars of their future.

FADE TO BLACK.

SUPER: EIGHTY-EIGHT YEARS LATER

EXT. HOMESTEAD II - CAPITAL LANDING FIELD - DAWN

An orange sun rises over green hills. In the foreground the roofs of Homestead II's capital city glow in the dawn.

At the city's edge, timeworn spacecraft sit on their landing gear around a grassy landing field.

Colonists gather. They watch the sky expectantly...

A new star shines on the horizon.

The star grows into a white starship gleaming in the sun. The *Excelsior* sweeps over the field with a rumble of engines.

The ship's hull is scorched and abraded from its cosmic crossing. But the lights shine, the engines throb, the landing gear receive the weight of the ship.

The starship's gangway lowers. The doors open.

CHILDREN run down the gangway. Children of all ages, of all races. Twenty of them, thirty. They point at the sun, at the clouds, laughing, wide-eyed in wonder.

We move up the gangway, through the disembarking passengers.

Behind the children: Teenagers. Adults in smaller numbers as they grow older. Finally a handful of gray-haired elders.

INT. STARSHIP EXCELSIOR - GRAND CONCOURSE

Transformed by the wear and tear of a century's habitation. Paths worn into floors, furniture repaired or re-purposed.

We move past vegetable gardens. Battered sweeper robots water the plantings. Window-washers till the soil.

The OAK TREE towers a hundred feet tall over the Concourse. Its branches brush the skylight far above.

We move past walls decorated with murals and carvings.

At the Concourse Bar, Arthur is slicing vegetables. His timeworn uniform mended by hand.

At the aft end of the Concourse, a high wall. Here a long list of dates is inscribed. The last date is the ship's landfall on Homestead II; the first, Jim's awakening. In between: an accelerating tally of births, deaths, marriages, catastrophes and achievements...a century of shipboard life.

At the base of the wall we find a table like an altar, where a collection of artifacts is displayed:

The meteor pried from the *Excelsior's* heart.

Gus's worn shipcard, his picture still visible.

A beautiful hand-bound book. *In the Blink of an Eye: Our Lives Between the Stars*, by Aurora Dunn. Beneath these printed words, a handwritten dedication: *For Jim*.

In the center of it all, in the place of honor: the photo strip of Jim and Aurora from their first date.

They laugh. They clown. She kisses him.

Aurora looks into the camera's eye.

Jim looks at Aurora.

FADE OUT.

THE END.