

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE

The International Space Station (ISS) majestically hangs above the Earth, backdropped by the planet's northern horizon.

KAREN THOMAS (40s), in a tethered SPACE SUIT, strong jawline, faded smile lines, performs routine maintenance on an external antenna with a capable and experienced hand.

Purpose and intent in her eyes as she works. She pauses, distracted, her gaze rises to the Big Dipper constellation.

Its familiar curved handle and rectangular dipper bowl, but:

Something's OFF.

The edges of Karen's eyes wrinkle, as she studies the constellation. There's a star MISSING in the dipper's handle.

Another one DISAPPEARS into the DARKNESS, then another, followed by a couple of other nearby stars.

It's subtle, but Karen follows a seemingly RANDOM PATTERN OF EVAPORATING STARS as it expands across the heavens.

She BLINKS HARD a few times, doubtful that what she sees is real, but it has no effect. Those stars remain GONE, until:

POP

Like far-flung Christmas lights being plugged back in, all the missing stars spring back into life.

Karen shakes her head, suspecting some physical or environmental side effect that has now passed.

She looks out into space again, relieved to find everything back to normal.

KLUNK!

The antenna she was working on hits her backpack. She swings around and is met by the...

ENTIRE SPACE STATION DRIFTING towards her.

It seems to be SPINNING now also.

KAREN

Heads up. I got main truss motion,
relative speed... half meter per
second, spin rate... approximately
ten degrees per second.

Karen quickly grips one of the station's bulkheads, restoring their relative motion. Her helmet RADIO cuts in:

RADIO (V.O.)

We just got kicked out of orbit, I
don't know what the hell happened.
Commander, you need to get back in
here now...

Karen looks back to where the stars had disappeared --

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. OLD LAS VEGAS - NIGHT

The starry desert sky above --

A seedy casino, decrepit façade, dim flickering neons, an old cinema-esque light box marquee sign: "PENNY SLOTS".

The rest of the street is lined with equally dilapidated liquor stores and strip joints.

If Lonely Planet Vegas had a "Do Not Go Here" section, this area would be top of the list.

A side door BURSTS open into a dimly lit ALLEYWAY.

ERIE THOMAS (Late 40s), sunken eyes, heavy stubble, board shorts, flip-flops and a "I Heart Vegas" T-shirt, flies out.

He stumbles to the ground, breaks his fall with one arm, miraculously holds onto a Pina Colada with the other.

He's followed by a muscle-bound bouncer FRANKY, and RALPH (60s), short sleeved shirt, shiny gray suit pants, comb over.

RALPH

No mother fucking card counters in
my casino.

Erie, face down, smiles at his still half-full glass.

ERIE

Mathematical probability analyst.

RALPH

What?

Erie staggers to his feet, careful of any more spillage.

ERIE

I prefer the title mathematical
probability analyst.

Erie sips his cocktail, digs out a SHINY METAL BADGE buried
in his pants pocket. Holds it up for Ralph.

ERIE (CONT'D)

Nevada Gaming Commission.
(pocketing his badge;
swaying a little)
You two are going to jail.

Ralph and Franky share a look.

ERIE (CONT'D)

Two jacks, one queen and three
kings. Removed from your eight-deck
shuffle. Tipping the odds
approximately... 1.765 percent in
your favor. Cheating.

Erie, unsteady on his feet, pauses to take a drink from his
cocktail as Ralph carefully sizes up the situation.

ERIE (CONT'D)

As for my winnings, I'd like them
distributed amongst the players at
my table. They're the ones you're
stealing from. Are we clear?

A beat. Ralph glances to Franky, gestures him towards Erie.

Franky approaches Erie. Erie steps back, protecting his
drink. Franky SMACKS Erie's cocktail out of his hand.

ERIE (CONT'D)

Hey! What are you doing --

Franky roughly pats him down, looks back to Ralph shaking his
head. Ralph smiles, encourages Franky to continue.

SMASH! Franky drops Erie with a left hook. Ralph walks over.

RALPH

What's clear, my friend, is that you're blind drunk, obviously delusional and a disgrace to the *wonderful* organization you represent.

Erie squirms in pain on the ground.

RALPH (CONT'D)

If I were you, I'd crawl back into whatever shithole I came out of and never show my face around here again.

Ralph and Franky turn to go back inside. Erie rubs his jaw.

ERIE

That hurts...

(smiling; up on his hands and knees)

You know, you really need to put more alcohol in your drinks...

(smile gone; defiantly)

And put those fucking face cards back in your decks.

Franky rolls his eyes, comes back, BURIES his boot in Erie's ribs. Erie is thrown onto his back, gasping in agony.

FRANKY

Fucking deadbeat.

INT. THEO'S UBER/EXT. LAS VEGAS OUTSKIRTS - NIGHT

Erie sits in the back nursing a swollen jaw. Vegas lights in the far distance. The RADIO plays.

RADIO HOST (V.O.)

-- to the Washington post.

"President Roberts taking some time out to deal with a 'minor' health issue."

Driver, THEO (40s), a rail-thin, willow of a man with a long ponytail, steals a look at Erie in the rear-view mirror.

RADIO HOST (V.O.)

'Minor health issue'? Shouldn't we know more details? I mean, the man works for us after all --

-- Theo abruptly turns down the radio.

THEO
You're Erie Thomas, right?

Erie slowly lifts his head off the headrest to respond.

ERIE
...ah, yeah.

THEO
(excited)
Oh, shit. It's really you. My old
math professor made me look you up.

ERIE
(perking up)
Oh, yeah. What were you working on?

THEO
(shrugs dismissively)
...I dunno ...I don't remember, I
dropped out -- but I did read that
Herald article on you.

Erie's sinks back into his seat, mood immediately deflated.

THEO (CONT'D)
The kid with highest IQ in the
country. Went on to work for NASA,
huh?

Erie smiles meekly, winces from the pain in his ribs.

THEO (CONT'D)
My son wants to be an astronaut.
Wants to go to Mars, you believe
that?

Erie gazes up at the night sky. Reverence, longing.

ERIE
(low; to himself)
Him and me both.

THEO
You made astronaut?

ERIE
Almost...
(a wry smile)
I failed the medical, and that was
the end of that. Orbital mechanics
beckoned.

THEO
 (eyes Erie's swollen jaw,
 bloody shirt)
 Yeah. How's that working out for
 ya?

A beat. Erie looks at his UBER App: "Driver Name: THEO"

ERIE
 Listen Theo, you got your five
 stars buddy. So, let's dial back
 the enthusiasm a little bit, ok?
 I'm pretty beat.

Theo nods, smiles in the mirror, then as his eyes return to the road, his enthusiasm slowly shifts to frustration.

INT. THEO'S UBER/EXT. DESERT EDGE - ERIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Theo's Uber drives down a dirt road, pulls up to an overstuffed mailbox, letters fluttering in the desert wind.

In the b.g. an isolated rundown 70's bungalow.

Erie, arm around his ribs, stumbles out of the car.

Theo rolls down his driver window.

THEO
 I want to apologize. Didn't mean to
 pry.

Theo offers his hand to Erie. Off Erie's look --

THEO (CONT'D)
 C'mon, please? I want to be able to
 tell my son that I shook the hand
 of an honest-to-god genius.

Erie hesitates, shrugs, puts his hand in Theo's, then --

ERIE JERKS HIS HAND BACK IN PAIN --

A dot of blood covers a tiny PIN PRICK hole in Erie's palm.

Theo guns his Uber, takes off -- Erie chases after him --

ERIE
 What the fuck is wrong with you?!

Theo's Uber disappears into a cloud of dust. Erie stops, hands on knees -- breathless.

A BEEPING SOUND from Erie's smart watch.

ERIE (CONT'D)
Jesus fucking Christ!

Erie pulls up his shirt, revealing a HEART MONITORING PATCH stuck to his chest -- he RIPS it off, FIRES it into a ditch.

Erie forces himself to take deep slow breaths, then:

Wearily takes a PILL BOTTLE from his pocket, pops one --

-- his phone BUZZES -- he pulls it out -- Theo's smiling face on an Uber RATE MY RIDE request message --

Erie glances at the pin hole in his hand -- hammers the ONE STAR RATING -- heads for the house.

INT. ERIE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Erie lies face down on a bed in the same clothes as earlier, snoring loudly.

A distant WHOOSHING sound.

Light STREAMS down from the sky through Erie's open window.

The whooshing sound gets LOUDER, the window's white lace curtains begin to billow.

Erie wakes up, startled by the noise.

The whole house is SHAKING now.

Erie looks out his window, blinded by white light, blasted by rushing air, something LARGE landing in his driveway.

He grabs a RIFLE from under the bed, pokes it out the window.

EXT. LAS VEGAS DESERT - ERIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A MILITARY CHOPPER sits in Erie's driveway, rotor blades spinning loudly.

A silhouetted figure comes from the helicopter, sees Erie's rifle, shouts towards the window.

ALEX
Erie! It's me, Alex.

ERIE
(squinting to see)
...Alex?!

ALEX STOCKTON (30s), coifed hair, barber shop stubble,
wearing a NASA sweatshirt, comes into view.

Erie lowers his rifle.

ERIE (CONT'D)
Jesus Christ, you scared the shit
out of me.

ALEX
Can you come out here?

Erie moves away from the window, back into the house.

Erie arrives out the front door, rifle lowered by his side.

ERIE
What's with the friggin'
helicopter?

ALEX
Susan needs you to come to Houston.

ERIE
(hopeful)
She wants me back?

ALEX
She needs to discuss a problem with
your guidance system equations.

ERIE
...and?

ALEX
That's all I can tell you.

ERIE
You land a goddamn gunship in my
front yard at three in the morning -
- I'm going to need a tad more than
that.

ALEX
I'm only authorized to give you the
details once you're in the
helicopter.

ERIE

Here we go! Already with the smoke
and mirrors. This is the reason I
left in the first place.

ALEX

(pointedly)
You didn't leave, Erie.

Erie's fists tighten around the rifle, Alex tries to recover.

ALEX (CONT'D)

-- It's an issue on the ISS. Karen.
(struggles with the next
part)
We need your help.

ERIE

Is she in danger?

ALEX

(re: helicopter)
We can discuss it on the way.

Erie shakes his head in frustration, puts his rifle down,
pulls his front door shut, steps into his flip-flops.

ALEX (CONT'D)

(re: "I Heart Vegas" Tee,
flip-flops)
You wanna change maybe?

ERIE

No. I don't want to change, Alex.
I'm guessing I don't need a packed
lunch either.

Alex shrugs, heads towards chopper. Erie discreetly checks
his pocket for his PILL BOTTLE, follows Alex.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - NIGHT

VICE PRESIDENT PETER JENKINS (50s), heavy unibrow, bulging
waistline, double chin, looks very unpresidential as his
obese frame sinks into a couch.

He side-eyes the President's chair, empty in the b.g.

REAR ADMIRAL GINA SCHUSTER (40s), dress uniform, tall,
athletic, powerful presence, sits across from him.

THREE STOIC DIA AGENTS stand obediently behind her.

Sitting on a low table between them is a --

SLEEK BLACK METAL LOCK BOX

Cubed in shape, each side about 12-inches. Handcuffs attached to its handle. A thumb print reader with a flashing green LED, the lid of the box cracked open but lying closed.

JENKINS

(re: box)

This is what y'all are so hot and bothered about?

SCHUSTER

Ah... yes, Mr. Vice President.

JENKINS

Well, let's take a look then.

Jenkins nonchalantly lifts the lid on the box, then stops, mesmerized by its contents, which WE DON'T GET TO SEE. YET.

Jenkins, transfixed, reaches out to touch what's in the case.

SCHUSTER (O.S.)

I wouldn't handle it, Sir. We're still analyzing its structural makeup.

Jenkins jerks his hand back, takes one more long look, then:

JENKINS

Alright, get this thing to our folks in Houston. We'll see how we go.

Schuster nods.

An Agent closes the box, thumbs the print reader -- CLICK! -- it locks, LED goes red.

The Agent attaches the handcuffs between his wrist and the box, takes it, exits with the others, leaving Jenkins alone.

Jenkins stands, saunters over to the President's chair, tries it out for size, a tight squeeze. He picks up the desk phone.

INT. HOUSTON - JOHNSON CENTER - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

SUSAN BAKER (40s), smart business suit, sits with her laptop at a conference table, on the phone, shoes off. Crow's feet crack around her eyes, little desire to conceal them.

The American and NASA flags stand by a wall. A photo hangs between them, it's of her: "NASA Administrator Susan Baker".

SUSAN
 (staring at her laptop)
 Yes, Sir. I arrived an hour ago...
 he should be here any minute.

Her browser window is open on a BREAKING news item: "VP TAKES TEMPORARY COMMAND: PRESIDENT'S HEALTH QUESTIONED."

SUSAN (CONT'D)
 How's President Roberts?... What
 does he think --... Yes, sir. I
 understand... Soren Mur is looking
 for an update, I'll need to give
 him something --

Through the conference room's glass windows, Susan sees Erie approaching. Slips her feet into comfortable flats.

A MAN (20s) can also be seen sitting anxiously just outside the room, stiffening as Erie passes.

SUSAN (CONT'D)
 -- He's here... ok, will do, sir.

She hangs up. Erie comes in, agitated.

ERIE
 -- Something changed. Something had
 to have changed. Any math, my math
 included, doesn't just stop
 working.

SUSAN
 Good to see you too, Erie.
 (re: Vegas T-shirt,
 swollen jaw)
 You look...

ERIE
 -- like shit, I know.
 (beat)
 How's Karen doing?

SUSAN
 She's doing ok, considering.

ERIE
 Does she know I'm here?

SUSAN
 Not yet.

ERIE

Good. Let's keep it that way. She has enough to worry about.

(back to business)

They're on manual thrusters, burning fuel like there is no tomorrow?

SUSAN

Yes.

ERIE

Because you say my guidance code doesn't work.

SUSAN

Well not me exactly, Erie --

ERIE

How long?

SUSAN

At the current burn rate, approximately 48 hours before they run out.

ERIE

Sending more fuel is not an option because docking would be difficult--

SUSAN

-- on manual thrust, I know. Erie --

ERIE

I wouldn't say impossible though. It should be an option we look at --

SUSAN

-- are you clean?

A beat. Erie, winded, looks like he just took a gut punch.

ERIE

Susan...

SUSAN

Yes or no.

ERIE

Yes, I am clean.

She stares at him for a moment, then nods. Erie gathers himself quickly, picks up where he left off.

ERIE (CONT'D)

...Soyuz departure preparations should also begin in parallel, just in case --

SUSAN

(calmly)

-- you're here to fix a problem in your orbital guidance system code, you're not mission director.

ERIE

Yeah, about that, where exactly is the problem in my code? Alex, your *mission director*, couldn't explain it to me on the ride over. That code has kept the ISS in its most fuel-efficient orbit for four years, I very much doubt if it's the cause --

SUSAN

-- stop talking, Erie.

(off his look)

We have someone who can show you exactly where the problem lies. Now, he may seem a little 'over eager' but he's very good. One of our best.

Susan waves to the Man outside. SANDEEP SINGH (20s), button down shirt and tie, nervous, almost manic energy, comes in.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Erie, this is Sandeep Singh. He's a recent graduate of our astronaut training program, where he excelled, particularly in orbital mechanics. Sandeep, this is Erie Thomas.

Sandeep shoots out his hand.

SANDEEP

Super pleased to finally meet you, Mr. Thomas.

Erie takes Sandeep's hand. Sandeep shakes it vigorously.

ERIE

Finally meet me?

SANDEEP

Oh, yes. I've been an avid follower of your work for many years. It's been the foundation of my own work and --

SUSAN

(refocusing Sandeep)
-- Sandeep, tell Erie what you found in his code.

SANDEEP

Ah, well, you see... I think that your Hohmann Transfer calculations are a little...
(reaching)
off.

ERIE

That's not possible.

Sandeep opens his folder. Erie turns to Susan.

ERIE (CONT'D)

This is not productive. There's nothing wrong with my math.

SUSAN

Then Sandeep will help you prove that. Find a room and report back to me in an hour.

Susan waves them out. Erie reluctantly exits with Sandeep.

INT. ISS - MOMENTS LATER

Karen floats in zero G speaking to Susan on a video screen.

SUSAN

He didn't want me to tell you that he was here.

KAREN

That figures.

A beat.

SUSAN

(re: Erie)
Is it going to be a problem?

An ALARM interrupts them, Karen turns towards the sound.

KAREN

I gotta go.

She ends the video call, heads in the direction of the Alarm.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Susan sits in front of her laptop, where Karen just hung up.
A NASA TECH enters.

TECH

Administrator Baker, we have a
situation.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - MISSION CONTROL - DAY

Ten rows of room-wide desks covered with monitors, headset
wearing TECHNICIANS, SCIENTISTS and ENGINEERS behind each.

They all face a huge computer screen on the front wall
showing the ISS and its ORBITAL PATH, plus an approaching
SATELLITE and its ORBITAL PATH.

Both projected paths come close but don't intersect. For now.

Erie, Susan, and Sandeep stand at the back. Alex puts on a
wireless headset that was handed to him by another ENGINEER.

Everyone is mostly communicating through wireless headsets.

ALEX

Trajectory. Status.

TRAJECTORY

Seventeen minutes ago, we detected
numerous upper atmosphere junk
satellites that had exited their
assigned orbits, one of which was
on a possible collision course with
the ISS. Propulsion.

PROPULSION

Manual ISS thruster burns were
initiated to ensure minimum safe
clearance distance.

Susan motions to an ASSISTANT for a headset, gets one, puts
it on.

Erie gestures to the Assistant that he wants one too, the
Assistant looks to Susan, who hesitates.

ERIE
(to Susan; low)
That's my sister up there...

Susan nods to the Assistant, who gives Erie a headset. Erie grabs one for Sandeep as well. They both put them on.

TRAJECTORY
Following the burns, we confirmed minimum clearance distance will be maintained when the satellite flies-- by the ISS in T-minus four minutes ten seconds.

ALEX
CAPCOM, how's the crew doing?

CAPCOM
They are all updated, but Commander Thomas has some concerns.

ALEX
Explain.

CAPCOM
She says her visual of the satellite does not match our positioning data.

ALEX
Trajectory. Response?

TRAJECTORY
Positional data is coming from our New Mexico satellite array. Everything is performing nominally.

ALEX
CAPCOM, tell her everything looks good on our end, her visual may be off.

ERIE
(into headset mic)
Let's just bring up the external cameras, confirm what she sees.

Nobody responds, Erie realizes his headset is muted.

Erie discreetly walks over to a TECHNICIAN sitting at a monitor in the very back row.

ERIE (CONT'D)
Hey Tom, can you --

TOM

(low)

-- Erie... What are you doing here?

ERIE

Long story, can you bring up the
ISS's external cameras?

A beat. Tom throws a quick look to Alex, who's facing away from him, then back to Erie.

ERIE (CONT'D)

Humor me, please.

TOM

Sure.

A dashboard of twelve cameras appears on Tom's screen. The approaching satellite appears in one. Erie points to it.

ERIE

Can you take two snapshots from
camera five, ten seconds apart and
load them into our trajectory
modeling software?

Sandeep moves over behind Erie.

TRAJECTORY

T-minus three minutes until fly-by.

The big screen shows the satellite moving along its path approaching the ISS. Its projected path passing by safely.

Tom's screen now has the two snapshots, identical except for the satellite is a little closer in the second one.

ERIE

Use camera five's position on the
ISS and those background stars
(Erie points to stars in
photo b.g.)
as reference points, and
extrapolate the satellite's path.

Tom enters some data on the keyboard.

A 3D model of the ISS pops up with camera five on one of its solar wings highlighted. The celestial sky in the b.g.

The ISS spins until camera five is aligned with the stars in the photo. A 3D model of the satellite appears.

Tom clicks "play" on the trajectory modeling.

TRAJECTORY

T-minus two minutes until fly-by.

On Tom's screen the model shows the satellite move towards the ISS, then SMASH into its middle section.

FATAL EVENT.

Tom shoots a concerned look at Erie who's on his way to Alex.

ERIE

(to Alex)

Positioning is wrong, the satellite's going to hit the main truss. We have to fire thrusters now.

ALEX

What?

TOM

Sir, we did some trajectory modeling from ISS external camera five. It shows direct impact with main truss.

TRAJECTORY

T-minus one minute until fly-by.

CAPCOM

Sir, the Commander says the satellite is heading right for them. She's extremely adamant.

ERIE

Alex, you need to fire the thrusters now!

ALEX

Telemetry, bring up camera five on the big screen.

TELEMETRY

Yes, sir.

TRAJECTORY

T-minus thirty seconds until fly-by.

The big screen splits in two, one side shows the satellite's projected path safely going by the ISS, the other shows camera five and --

THE SATELLITE COMING RIGHT AT THE ISS.

CAPCOM is animatedly relaying details to the ISS crew. Erie shouts over to the Propulsion Engineer.

ERIE
Propulsion, fire thrusters six and seven, five second sustained burn!

Propulsion looks to Alex.

Alex is staring at the screen, the satellite closing in.

CAPCOM
Sir, it's going to hit --

ALEX
-- Propulsion, fire thrusters six and seven, five second burn.

The propulsion engineer enters commands on his keyboard.

TRAJECTORY
T-minus ten seconds until fly-by.

EXT. ISS - SPACE

The satellite is about to hit the ISS's middle truss, suddenly two thrusters fire and begin to SPIN THE ISS AWAY from the satellite.

It almost clears but the satellite's solar panel just CLIPS THE ISS'S DOCKED SOYUZ CAPSULE.

The satellite's solar panel snaps off but the satellite itself passes by safely, heading out into space.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - MISSION CONTROL - DAY

The big screen shows camera five's spinning view of space, debris from the satellite's solar panel floating by.

ALEX
Biometrics.

BIOMETRICS
We had a pressure drop in docking bay four, it automatically sealed.

ALEX
CAPCOM, how are the crew?

CAPCOM

Crew confirms a brief cabin pressure drop. Pressure normalizing now.

TRAJECTORY

Sir, I've no idea why positioning is off. I've triple checked the data --

ALEX

-- We'll investigate later. Propulsion, thruster fuel status.

PROPULSION

At current burn rate, thruster fuel exhaustion in T-minus thirty-two hours fifteen minutes.

Erie shakes his head in frustration. Sandeep goes to him.

SANDEEP

You just saved their lives.

ERIE

Not yet. Docking bay four was their departure capsule. They've no way home now.

(beat)

I need to talk with my sister.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Alex and Erie stand watching a video screen which shows: "WAITING TO CONNECT".

Erie still sports his Vegas T-shirt and shorts, holds a printed REPORT.

ALEX

(re: big screen)

You get ten minutes with her. She hasn't slept in 24-hours.

Erie nods, fiddles with his T-shirt anxiously.

ALEX (CONT'D)

When was the last time you two talked?

ERIE

Not sure how that's relevant.

ALEX

As Mission Commander, I'm mindful of the situations, or people, that will emotionally stress my astronauts.

ERIE

Not my intention... Congratulations on the job. By the way.

ALEX

Thanks. And I didn't have to sleep with the boss to get it.

Erie smiles tightly, holds Alex's gaze. Sandeep rushes in.

SANDEEP

Administrator Baker wants me here.

ERIE

Of course she does.

Alex's phone dings. He checks it.

ALEX

(turns to leave)
Keep it professional, Erie.

ERIE

Yep, got it, Mission Commander.

Alex exits. Erie waits anxiously, stares at the video screen.

SANDEEP

(tentatively)
I got your email. I see why it can't be the Hohman Transfer code, but shouldn't we be looking at the ISS sensor data next?

ERIE

No. We look at the data that is degrading the quickest, first.
(off his look)
The astronaut's memory.

Karen appears on the big screen, her audio on the speakers. She's frustrated, her voice edged with irritation.

KAREN

I filled in my report. I have no idea why this call is necessary --

ERIE
 (gesturing to Sandeep)
 -- Commander, we just want to
 clarify a few things.

Karen sees Sandeep, dials back the agitation.

KAREN
 Sure. It's just been a long 24-
 hours. Go ahead.

ERIE
 (reading from report)
 You were doing repair work on the
 WA3 HF antenna when the ISS
 initially exited its orbit.
 Correct?

KAREN
 (eye-roll)
 Yes, that's correct.

ERIE
 The S-Zero truss is about ten feet
 from there and --

KAREN
 -- it has the GPS antenna array, I
 know. And no. I did not go anywhere
 near it.

ERIE
 Yes, but maybe on the way back --

KAREN
 (anger growing)
 -- I didn't touch it, Erie. Ok?

Sandeep glances to Erie. Erie nods to Karen, moving on, he
 flicks to the end of the report.

ERIE
 At the end of your report, you
 mention a visual anomaly. Can you
 explain what you saw?

KAREN
 It's not relevant. Probably a side
 effect of the cosmic radiation
 hitting my retina --

ERIE
 (reading)
 -- "Light from some celestial
 objects disappeared briefly". Which
 ones?

KAREN
 ...I don't know...
 (sighing)
 It was in Ursa Major, the Big
 Dipper, the first, second and
 fourth star in its handle.

SANDEEP
 Alkaid, Mizar and Megrez.

Erie turns to Sandeep. Impressed.

KAREN
 Anyway, that's where it started.

ERIE
 Started? It was a pattern.

KAREN
 Kind of -- Erie, what are we doing
 here?!

ERIE
 (caught off guard)
 ...I'm, I'm trying to fix this.

KAREN
 How about you start by fixing your
 code? *Before* anyone dies this time.

Sandeep briefly side eyes Erie. *Dies? This time?*

ERIE
 (rattled)
 ...That's all we need for now,
 Commander. Thanks for your time.

KAREN
 (shakes her head)
 Still in denial. Jesus Christ.

Karen reaches forward, the video session ends. Erie rubs his
 forehead. Sandeep shifts on his feet uncomfortably.

ERIE
 I'd like you to look at why the New
 Mexico team is having problems with
 positioning --

SANDEEP
 (re: Karen)
 What did she mean 'this time'?

Susan comes in holding a NASA button-up shirt, khaki pants.

SUSAN
 (hands Erie clothes)
 Erie, put these on. You have
 another video conference to attend.
 (to Sandeep)
 He'll be back soon. Continue to --

ERIE
 (re: clothes)
 -- I don't have time for this.

SUSAN
 The Vice President wants an update.

ERIE
 The Vice President of what?

Susan deadpans him.

ERIE (CONT'D)
 ...Oh. Ok.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - ATRIUM UPPER LEVEL - DAY

Erie exits a restroom wearing his new NASA button-up shirt and oversized khaki pants, holding his old clothes.

Erie sees Susan speaking with SOREN MUR (50s), clouded corneas, white-cane, at the top of the atrium stairs.

Susan shows Mur into a large office where Alex awaits, then she walks to Erie.

SUSAN
 (re: old clothes)
 You want those back?

ERIE
 Not particularly.

Susan takes Erie's clothes, dumps them in a trash can.

SUSAN
 (walks away)
 Let's go.

Erie looks to the trash can, to Susan, grins, follows her.

ERIE

What's Mur doing here?

SUSAN

We're going to launch his SpaceVoy capsule, unmanned, up to the ISS. Like you, he thinks a capsule dock with the ISS on manual thrust is actually possible. Great minds... and all that.

ERIE

He's willing to take the risk?

Susan badges them through a hallway security door.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - HALLWAY - DAY

Susan and Erie continue down a hallway.

SUSAN

The headline "SPACEVOY SAVES ISS AND NASA" seems very attractive to him... NASA's also eating half the cost of the launch.

(beat)

It'll bring extra thruster fuel.

ERIE

Fuel? It's a rescue mission, right? It docks, takes them home. Simple.

Susan thumbprints open heavy double doors.

An "AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY" sign above them.

They walk through into --

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - SECURE AREA - DAY

-- a short hallway leading to an elevator with a single RED button. DOWN ONLY. NO UP.

SUSAN

(presses button)

Erie, the ISS is the most expensive object ever built. We're not just going to let a quarter of a trillion dollars float off into space without trying to fix it first.

Erie looks at the elevator, the red button. The doors open.

ERIE

Holy shit, we're going to the bat cave. Who else is going to be there?

They step in, Susan swipes her badge one last time.

SUSAN

I wish you wouldn't call it that.

The elevator doors close.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - UNDERGROUND ROOM - DAY

Susan and Erie are escorted into a hazily lit, windowless bunker-like room by a DIA AGENT.

The DIA Agent exits pulls it closed behind him.

Rear Admiral Schuster, from the Oval Office scene, stands at the end of a long mahogany table.

Newly minted President Jenkins on a video screen.

The same DIA Agent from the Oval Office scene, the LOCK BOX handcuffed to his wrist, stands in the shadows.

JENKINS

(gesturing to seats)
Erie, grab a seat please.

Erie looks around. Everyone else is standing. Tentatively:

ERIE

...I think I'll stand, Mr. Vice President. I need to get back to --

SCHUSTER

-- it's Mr. President.

JENKINS

(chuckling)
It's ok, Miss Schuster. I'm not too big on formalities.

(to Erie)
Sir will do fine, Erie. We know you're working to solve this ISS problem, we'll make this as brief as possible.

Erie looks questioningly at Susan, then nods.

Jenkins waves over the DIA Agent.

The DIA Agent un-cuffs the LOCK BOX from his wrist, unlocks it, keeps the lid closed, places it on the table.

JENKINS (CONT'D)

Erie, what we're about to tell you, show you, is classified as Top Secret and a matter of National Security. I need you to agree to keep it that way.

Erie stares blankly, thrown by the melodrama. A pause.

SUSAN

We need you to say "I agree", Erie.

ERIE

Yes, I agree, Sir -- Mr. President, Sir.

Schuster walks over, opens the lock box for Erie, REVEALING:

A POLISHED BLACK SPHERE, 10-inch diameter, made of what could be glass, a dim incandescent glow throbbing from its surface.

ERIE (CONT'D)

What is that?

JENKINS

Well, to be honest, we're not too sure, but for one: I'm told it's a perfect sphere.

Erie stares at the Sphere.

ERIE

Perfect?

SCHUSTER

Laser measurements show zero diameter deviations.

ERIE

That's not possible.

SCHUSTER

If it's not, we don't have the tools to prove otherwise.

ERIE

(studying Sphere)
What's it made of?

SCHUSTER

We think it's a hard silicon compound --

ERIE

-- You think...?

JENKINS

Alright, settle down now. I understand you have lots of questions, Erie, but that's not why you're here.

(beat; re: Sphere)

The dim glow you see coming from it? It emanates from thousands of luminous alphabetic symbols just under its top surface. Letters. Letters that appeared just hours after the ISS incident last night. Those letters form a DNA sequence. One which we ran through various federal databases, including NASA's.

Erie looks at the Sphere in awe.

JENKINS (CONT'D)

It's your DNA sequence, Erie.

Erie looks up at the President.

ERIE

What?

Erie glances briefly at the -- PIN PRICK HOLE HIS PALM -- made by Theo, his Uber driver from the night before.

JENKINS

The timing of this ISS issue, your involvement, this Sphere. We think it's all related.

ERIE

...you think I have something to do with this?

SUSAN

(jumping in)

Not intentionally. We're just trying to understand --

JENKINS

(direct; re: Sphere)
-- what do you make of this thing,
Erie?

Erie looks at the Sphere, lets out a short incredulous laugh, his own distorted reflection on its surface.

ERIE

Ah... I don't...

He calms himself, leans in close to the Sphere, inspects it, reaches his hand towards it, his fingers touch it, then:

CLACK!

The Sphere's surface CRACKS into thousands of tiny HEXAGONALS which initially expand outwards, then fold in on each other, as the Sphere REBUILDS itself into another SHAPE --

A NARROW-LENSED VISOR

Think Lt. La Forge in Star Trek but WAY COOLER, made of the same slick black material as the Sphere.

Erie startled, steps back, the DIA agent rushes over:

JENKINS

(waving agent off, eyes
locked on the Visor)
Stand down.

The DIA agent backs away.

Erie studies the Visor, flickering light comes from the back of the Visor's narrow lenses.

Drawn to it, Erie moves closer, reaches out to pick it up.

SUSAN

Erie, maybe we should wait --

-- Erie puts on the visor...

INT. VISOR VIEW - ERIE'S POV - UNKNOWN

A 2D static image close up of what looks like a human head with the face removed, a shiny chrome robotic bone structure underneath, complete with eye, nose and mouth sockets.

Text blinks across the image.

"BR UPLOAD BEGINNING"

A counter joins the text starts at 0%, begins rising slowly, 2%, 5%...

A high-pitched TONE rises with the counter.

INTERCUT WITH --

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - UNDERGROUND ROOM - DAY

Erie stands with the visor on. The others watch.

ERIE
...I see ...a robotic face.

Susan, Schuster and Jenkins share looks. Even the DIA Agent is completely enthralled.

ERIE'S POV: The chrome face, the counter now at %20, the TONE INCREASING IN VOLUME.

ERIE (CONT'D)
(breathing faster)
Do you hear that?

SUSAN
Hear what? We don't hear anything.

ERIE
There's a tone. It's increasing
with the counter.
(wincing)
It's getting very loud.

Hand to his ear, Erie doubles over, leans on the table.

SUSAN
You ok? What counter?

The "BR UPLOAD" counter is now at 55%, %60...

ERIE
(holding in head)
Ugh. It says...

JENKINS
...Says what? What does it say?

ERIE'S POV: %70, %75 the tone is excruciatingly loud. Susan notices a tiny needle inserted into Erie's temple.

SUSAN
(steps towards Erie)
Take it off, Erie.

JENKINS

Wait, what else do you see?!

Erie drops to his knees now, grabbing his chest, close to convulsions.

ERIE'S POV: The counter reads %90, %95...

Susan rips the Visor off Erie's face, tosses it on table, where it immediately REBUILDS itself back into the Sphere.

Erie lies on the floor now, gasping for breath, a small dot of blood on his temple, desperately searches for something in his pants pockets.

SUSAN

(to DIA Agent)

Get a doctor!

The DIA Agent speaks into his lapel mic, quickly exits.

Erie pulls out his PILL bottle, hands shaking, he can't get the lid open.

Susan gets down beside Erie, takes his pill bottle, opens it, gives him one, his head now on her lap.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

(to Schuster; re: jug)

Give him some water.

Schuster quickly pours a glass of water. Hands it to Susan.

JENKINS

(trying to see)

Is he ok?

Erie sips the water, swallows his pill, still shaking.

JENKINS (CONT'D)

What did he see?

Susan shoots a sharp look at the big screen.

SUSAN

We need to get him to the infirmary.

JENKINS

Of course. Whatever that boy needs.

ERIE'S POV

His vision begins to blur in and out just as a DOCTOR comes into the room, a tiny willow of man with a ponytail, it's -- THEO, THE UBER DRIVER, in a medical coat -- looking agitated. Erie's vision blurs completely now, as his lids close --

-- TO BLACK:

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - INFIRMARY - DAY

Small medical room. Erie, awake but dazed, on a medical recliner, shirt open, sensors stuck to his chest and temples, rhythmical BEEPING from various monitors beside him.

A muted wall mounted TV live streams the SPACEVOY launch.

A NURSE draws blood from Erie's arm --

NURSE
(chuckling)
-- ponytail? No. Doctor Adams
doesn't have a ponytail.

Erie stares into space, still processing what just happened.

NURSE (CONT'D)
How are you feeling?
(off his reverie)
Erie?

ERIE
(recovers; re: monitors)
...Palpitations gone. Heartbeat
good. Blood pressure good. EKG
rhythms normal. Good to go.

The Nurses finishes the blood draw. Erie looks to the TV.

NURSE
(smiles wryly)
I think you know none of these
monitors show EKG rhythms, Erie.
The doctor is still reviewing your
EKG report.

The SpaceVoy rocket launches on the TV screen.

ERIE
(distracted by TV)
It'll be fine... I need to get back
to work.

NURSE

We'll see what the doctor says,
shall we. For now, you stay here.

The Nurse exits just as Sandeep enters.

ERIE

(to Sandeep; re: TV)
They're sending up Mur's rocket?

SANDEEP

Yeah. It's bringing extra fuel.
(re: sensors; concerned)
How are you doing Mister Thomas?

Erie stares at the TV, the SpaceVoy rocket speeding skyward.

ERIE

I'm fine.
(beat; looks to Sandeep)
How much do you know about current
nanotech? The reconstitution of
matter into different shapes?

SANDEEP

...not much. Sounds hella cool
though. Something else you're
working on?

ERIE

...not really ...how we doing on
why the New Mexico team's
positioning data is off?

SANDEEP

(shakes his head)
...I looked at everything. No
calculation errors, software,
hardware, all seem good. It almost
seems like the GPS data is off.
Maybe interference --
(beat)
A solar flare storm?

They look at each other, Erie's eyes light up.

ERIE

...a huge solar magnetic radiation
burst could affect the atomic
clocks on those GPS satellites.
(impressed)
That's good, the ISS has one too,
that might explain --

SANDEEP

-- but wouldn't that cause global
chaos in terrestrial GPS systems.

In the b.g. the TV shows the rocket dropping its stage 1
boosters, cutting to worried faces at launch control.

ERIE

Not if it's minuscule.

Sandeep takes out his phone, starts searching --

ERIE (CONT'D)

The ISS travels at 18,000 miles an
hour, 220 miles up, its positioning
calculations are sensitive to even
the tiniest variation...

Erie is distracted by the TV where a ground camera shows the
SpaceVoy rocket in the far distance --

DESCENDING NOT ASCENDING.

SANDEEP

(re: phone; deflated)

Bummer. No solar flare activity --

ERIE

(re: TV)

-- Something's wrong, it didn't
break the upper atmosphere.

Erie grabs the remote turns the TV volume on. They watch as
the camera follows the nose-diving rocket, burners full on.

TV COMMENTATOR

A major issue has occurred, this is
not meant to be happening folks--

A HUGE FIREBALL erupts on the far horizon. A beat. --

TV COMMENTATOR (CONT'D)

-- we're just being told... that
the explosion you just saw was the
SpaceVoy rocket hitting the
ground...

They both stare at the TV. Shocked. Then:

Erie starts ripping off all his sensors, buttoning up his
shirt. Sandeep pulls his eyes from the TV.

SANDEEP

What are you doing?

ERIE
 (re: TV)
 It's all related. It has to be.

He exits. Sandeep rushes after him. Aerial footage on the TV shows scorched earth, billowing smoke, burning wreckage.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - HALLWAY - DAY

Erie marches towards Susan's conference room, Sandeep in tow. Through the room's window, we see Soren Mur is with Susan.

SANDEEP
 She looks busy. Maybe you should wait until she's done? ...Erie?

Erie ignores him.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - SUSAN'S CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Susan stands. Soren Mur vents at her, his milky eyes wide with frustration, a white-knuckled fist gripping his cane.

MUR
 -- what I am supposed to tell those families? I need all of your engineers working on this --

Erie bursts in. Sandeep stays outside, looking anxious.

ERIE
 -- I think what just happened is related to the problem on the ISS.

SUSAN
 You should be in the infirmary.

Mur faces Erie.

MUR
 Who are you?

ERIE
 (to Mur)
 When did the problem start? After stage 2? Was it a trajectory issue?

SUSAN
Erie, this is not the time or place to --

MUR
-- Erie Thomas is back working for
NASA?

(to Susan)
I knew there was something you
weren't telling me.

Mur walks over to Erie, his cane stopping at Erie's foot.

MUR (CONT'D)
(to Erie)
I want all your data and everything
you've worked on in the last 24-
hours.

A beat. Susan looks hard at Erie. Sandeep watches from
outside the room.

ERIE
(to Mur)
Was it a trajectory problem?

Mur's white eyes seem to penetrate Erie, then:

MUR
...guidance system sent us too low
into the upper atmosphere, we
deflected back, nose took on a huge
temperature surge, fried the
onboard computer ...heat panels are
only on the base.

ERIE
(to everyone)
Ok, we've no choice now... we have
to reexamine the core theories. I
don't know how they could have...

MUR
What do you mean?

ERIE
The ISS and your rocket have vastly
different guidance code but they
both use the same fundamental
mathematical equations. Couple that
with the New Mexico teams
positioning issues --

SUSAN
-- I thought you said that those
equations couldn't be wrong?

ERIE
 (pointedly to Susan)
 Yeah, well, it wouldn't be the
 first time today I've had to re-
 evaluate the impossible.

A beat, as Susan and Erie share a tense moment.

MUR
 I want my team to review your work.

ERIE
 They will. But first, I need ninety
 minutes with all the data. No
 distractions.
 (to Susan)
 No video calls.
 (to Mur)
 Nobody looking over my shoulder.
 After that, I'll give an update,
 full disclosure. Everything.

Susan shifts uncomfortably, bites her tongue. Mur goes to
 respond but Erie's already turned and left the office.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - HALLWAY - DAY

Sandeep stands waiting as Erie exits.

SANDEEP
 Should I leave you alone to --

ERIE
 (walks past him)
 -- Let's go. We've got work to do.

Sandeep, straightens up, shoulders back, follows Erie.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - COMPUTER LAB - NIGHT

High end PC's, a large whiteboard. Desks covered with notes.

Erie stands, weary, staring at reams of mathematical
 equations on the whiteboard. Sandeep sits working on a PC.

ERIE
 This is ludicrous, these theorems
 are rock solid. Why would they fail
 now?

SANDEEP
 (re: his monitor)
 Check this out.

Erie walks over, astronomy message boards cover the screen.

SANDEEP (CONT'D)
 Those three stars Karen said
 disappeared? I checked some
 astronomy message boards.
 (re: screen)
 They weren't the only ones.
 Thousands of others vanished in
 those same ten seconds, recorded by
 astronomers all across the world.

On the screen, "SIMULTANEOUS TRANSITIONS?", "ONCE IN A
 LIFETIME EVENT", "WTF?" message threads.

SANDEEP (CONT'D)
 I compiled a list of as many as I
 could find, built a celestial map.

Sandeep brings up a 3D celestial model of our Milky Way.

In a top down view, our Sun is highlighted by a BLUE arrow in
 one of the galaxy's spiraling arms.

Tiny GREEN arrows begin appearing pointing at other stars.

SANDEEP (CONT'D)
 (re: green arrows)
 These are the stars effected.
 Random size, type, age, no
 pattern... Except --

Sandeep picks up a computer pen, draws a large WHITE CIRCLE
 on the screen with our Sun in the middle.

All the green arrows are OUTSIDE this circle.

Erie leans closer to the screen.

SANDEEP (CONT'D)
 They are all, every single one,
 very far away. Right on the edge of
 our visual range.

A beat.

This information seems to ignite something in Erie, he looks
 to the whiteboard then back to the screen.

SANDEEP (CONT'D)
Not sure how it all relates...

ERIE
Bring up the weather channel.

SANDEEP
What?

ERIE
Weather dot com.

Sandeep opens "weather.com" on his browser.

ERIE (CONT'D)
Graph New York, temperature versus
time.

Sandeep does this, it shows the last 24-hours, a horizontal
line tracks the fluctuating daily temperature on the graph.

ERIE (CONT'D)
Add some more cities from around
the world, London, Moscow, Tokyo,
Sydney, Rio...

SANDEEP
(adding cities)
Why --

ERIE
-- now stack the graphs vertically.

Sandeep arranges them from top to bottom on the screen. Each
show different temperature lines but the time is aligned.

ERIE (CONT'D)
Graph one minute before and after
the ISS initial event.

Sandeep changes the time, clicks "apply". They all update.

Each graph. Every single city. Planet-wide. Shows a small
TEMPERATURE DROP AT EXACTLY THE SAME MOMENT, one minute in --
RIGHT WHEN the stars disappeared, when the ISS DE-ORBITED.

ERIE (CONT'D)
Holy shit...

Sandeep looks at the graphs, trying to make sense of them.

Erie, reinvigorated, heads for the door, turns back.

ERIE (CONT'D)

I want you to gather data that tracks the velocity of five different satellites from five separate physical dishes in the New Mexico team's terrestrial array.

(re: temperature graphs)

Around that same time.

SANDEEP

...sure. Where are you going?

ERIE

I'm going to go request something that has a... fair chance of getting me committed to an insane asylum.

Sandeep watches Erie exit, returns to screen, typing quickly.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - SUSAN'S CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

Susan sits at the conference table. Erie stands opposite her, his fingers hammering away on Susan's laptop.

Mur stands behind Erie. Alex paces to the side shaking his head in frustration.

ALEX

The speed of light changed?

(beat)

Susan, this is insane.

Erie continues typing without looking up.

ERIE

Data point one; Both NASA's and SpaceVoy's guidance systems depend on the speed of light being constant.

Mur listens attentively, taking it all in.

SUSAN

(concerned)

Erie, I really think you need to return to the infirmary, your collapse earlier may have affected more than --

ERIE

(still typing)

-- data point two;

(MORE)

ERIE (CONT'D)
 GPS positioning also depends on the
 speed of light, and data point
 three; --

-- Erie turns the laptop towards everyone. It has all the
 Weather Channel city temperature graphs from earlier.

ERIE (CONT'D)
 (re: screen)
 A planet-wide temperature drop
exactly when all this began.

ALEX
 The Weather Channel? Are you
 kidding me? What has this got to do
 with anything?

MUR
 E equals mc squared.

They all turn toward Mur.

ALEX
 ...how does that apply here?

MUR
 Our Sun is a big fusion reactor,
 Mr. Stockton. E, its energy output
 and Earth's heat source, is equal
 to its mass multiplied by the speed
 of light squared. A change in the
 speed of light would trigger an
 instantaneous change --

ERIE
 -- in global temperature.
 (re: screen)
 A tiny change, but a change,
 nonetheless.
 (to Susan)
 I need you to commission a speed of
 light test in the Texas lab.

Alex's disbelief explodes into laughter.

ALEX
 After four and a half billion
 years, the constant we've used to
 define the entire universe has
 what? Just changed, Erie? That's
 your theory?
 (incredulous)
 And you're using the 'Weather
 Channel' to prove it? Jesus Christ!
 (MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)

(to Susan)

This is beyond stupid.

(calmly)

My team is close to a guidance system workaround that will buy us at least an extra week.

ERIE

(to Alex)

It won't work. If the speed of light has changed, the foundational theorems are all off, anything you build on top of them will fail.

A beat. Erie turns to Susan, raises his hands in concession.

ERIE (CONT'D)

I know this is crazy. You think I don't know this is crazy? But I wouldn't suggest it, if I hadn't eliminated every other possibility.

(re: desk phone)

If you call the Texas lab now, commission the test, we'll have the results within a few hours. If I'm wrong, I'm wrong. If by some miracle, I'm right, we upload the new guidance code right after.

A pause.

Susan looks to Erie, Alex. Mur is unusually quiet. Unnoticed, Sandeep arrives at the door with PAGES, waits in the b.g.

SUSAN

The speed of light changing, Erie? You need to get some rest. Alex, prepare your code. We'll try an upload as soon as it's ready.

Erie drops his head, rubs his temples. Alex, turns to go, meets Sandeep at the door, pushes past him, exits.

SANDEEP

(waving pages)

I have the GPS array data, Mr. Thomas.

Erie lifts his gaze toward Sandeep then defiantly to Susan.

ERIE

Forget the test. I'll figure out the new speed of light myself, I'll build new guidance code and I'll meet you in mission control in thirty minutes.

Erie turns, takes the pages from Sandeep and exits.

SUSAN

(to Sandeep)

Go with him. Make sure he doesn't leave the building.

Sandeep nods, rushes after Erie, leaving Susan and Mur alone.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

(re: temp graphs)

Tell me you're not taking this seriously.

Mur barely acknowledges, his mind somewhere else.

MUR

I need to talk with my team.

Susan watches Mur exit, frowns.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Sandeep hurries to catch up, Erie glances back briefly.

ERIE

(as he walks)

We'll use the change of speed of the satellites and their distance from the array to re-calculate the speed of light. The satellites changing orbital distance will complicate things but --

Erie stops. Sandeep stops. Erie turns back to face Sandeep.

Erie's eyes suddenly brimming with self-doubt.

ERIE (CONT'D)

Do you think I'm crazy?

Sandeep, taken aback, pauses --

ERIE (CONT'D)

-- Strike that. Stupid question. Do you think I'm right?

A beat.

SANDEEP

They blamed you for the Mars rocket disaster, didn't they? That's what Karen was talking about earlier.

Not the response that Erie was expecting.

SANDEEP (CONT'D)

Sorry, I didn't mean to --

ERIE

-- It's ok. Yes. They blamed me. How does that matter now?

SANDEEP

Are we moving too quickly? We could be missing something.

ERIE

The nature of the problem is dictating the pace. Not me.

Erie turns, continues walking.

ERIE (CONT'D)

I need to save those astronauts.

Sandeep takes a deep inhale, follows him.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - SUSAN'S CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

Susan sits at her laptop on the phone.

SUSAN

...yes, Sir. As soon as his doctor gives the ok, we can try again... about the ISS -- ...what? ...when did he send it?

She searches for something on her laptop screen --

SUSAN (CONT'D)

-- found it...

She glowers at the screen.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

We'll get right on it.

She hangs up and quickly exits.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - MISSION CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

Alex and Mur stand talking. Engineers fill wide desks, the ISS is tracked on the big screen. Everyone wears headsets.

Erie and Sandeep arrive, they meet Susan waiting by the door.

ERIE
(to Susan)
You believe me now?

SUSAN
(glares at Mur)
The SpaceVoy team's light speed tests are far from ideal, but they do show some abnormalities. Plus, the ISS is directly above us for the next fifteen minutes. So, yes, we'll try your code now, while we wait for Alex's team to finish their workaround.

A TECH hands Erie, Sandeep and Susan some wireless headsets.

ERIE
(putting on headset)
If my code works, we won't need Alex's workaround.

Alex, professional, contains his deep frustration.

ALEX
(into headset mic)
Propulsion. Status.

PROPULSION
Code uploaded. Ready to activate.

ALEX
(side-eyes Erie)
Have the deactivate signal queued. We may abandon this test very quickly.

PROPULSION
Deactivation queued.

CAPCOM
Sir, Commander Thomas wants to speak with Administrator Baker.

Alex looks to Susan.

SUSAN
Put her on the big screen.

Karen appears on the screen, her voice on the room speakers.

SUSAN (CONT'D)
Commander?

KAREN
Is he high?

SUSAN
What?

KAREN
Is my brother high? I want him drug
tested. He was high for the launch
last year, so --

Susan gestures to Alex, who quickly types on a keyboard --

-- Karen's image drops from the screen, her voice silenced
from the speakers. Susan, steps away, Erie follows her.

SUSAN
(low; into her headset)
We tested him, Karen. He's clean.

Erie hears this, briefly catches Susan's eyes. A realization.

ERIE
Oh... The blood draw. Sure. Why
wouldn't you test it.

In the b.g. Sandeep listens. Confused. Wary.

SUSAN
(to Karen in mic)
...I know how it sounds... The risk
is very low here, we can abort at
the first sign of an issue. Plus,
we have to wait for the workaround
anyway... I understand... Thank
you.

Susan gives a "go ahead" gesture to Alex.

ALEX
Propulsion. Activate guidance
system.

PROPULSION
Activated.

Everyone watches the big screen with bated breath...

NOTHING HAPPENS. No orbital correction by the ISS. Then:

The screen shows a thruster fire on the ISS's left side.

PROPULSION (CONT'D)
Thruster five fired. Continuous
burn.

TRAJECTORY
ISS rising ten meters per second
away from ideal orbit. Sir?

Erie's body crumbles with disappointment.

ERIE
Goddamnit, deactivate.

ALEX
Deactivate guidance system.

TRAJECTORY
Orbit rising twenty meters per
second.

ALEX
Propulsion?!

PROPULSION
Sir, it won't deactivate. I'm
getting a control module sync
error.

ALEX
Put it on the big screen. Enable
Erie's microphone.
(re: error on screen)
Erie?

Erie stares up at the error, calculating, panicking.

TRAJECTORY
Orbit rising --

ERIE
-- the control module uses the same
speed of light constant -- shit --I
forgot --
(rushes to a monitor)
We need to patch the control module
here with the same value to sync.

On the big screen, the ISS approaches a MAX SAFE ORBIT line.

TRAJECTORY
T-minus one minute until maximum
safe orbit is breached.

Erie types, red-faced, frenzied, trying to fix this.

ALEX
Erie, how much --

ERIE
(breathless)
-- It's done. Deactivate.

PROPULSION
Guidance system deactivated.

The big screen shows the error gone, deactivation confirmed.

ALEX
Fire thrusters two and eight.
Sustain until stabilization.

PROPULSION
Fired.

The ISS on the big screen stops just short of the MAX ORBIT.

TRAJECTORY
ISS stable in new orbit.

PROPULSION
All thruster burn stopped.

Alex tosses his headset, walks over, up into Erie's face.

ALEX
(whispers; intense)
What the fuck, Erie?

ERIE
...I ...forgot --

ALEX
-- You forgot?
(re: big screen)
At that orbit we can't use the
workaround, and those burns your
code used? Now they've only four
hours of fuel left.

CAPCOM
Commander Thomas is looking for an
update, sir.

ALEX
 (to Erie)
 You want to tell her, or will I?

Erie looks at the floor. Alex pulls off Erie's headset.

ALEX (CONT'D)
 You've done enough damage.
 (low; into Erie's ear)
 You never belonged here.

Alex turns away to huddle with Mur and some Engineers.

Susan walks over to Erie with a SECURITY GUARD. She shares a pained look with Erie, then, low, to the Guard:

SUSAN
 Escort Mr. Thomas to the infirmary.
 Stay with him while he rests.

Sandeep watches Erie leave, his urge to follow him crushed.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - INFIRMARY - NIGHT

Erie sits on a medical chair. The Security Guard stands by the door.

In the hallway window, Sandeep rushes to the door, the Security Guard lets him in.

ERIE
 Didn't expect to see you again.

SANDEEP
 (out of breath)
 You're not crazy.

ERIE
 What?

SANDEEP
 Your calculations were correct. The speed of light has changed. Our Texas lab just confirmed exactly the same deviation as the SpaceVoy tests... It's incredible, it changes everything --

ERIE
 (frustrated)
 -- why didn't the code work?
 ...what are we missing?

SANDEEP

'How are we still alive?' Is a better question. A change, even this small, should cause untold damage to the very fabric of the universe.

A beat. Even the Security Guard looks on, captivated.

ERIE

Something must have counteracted it...

(suddenly enthused; turns to Sandeep)

What would offset a speed of light drop? What one other universal constant would need to change?

(off Sandeep's silence)

Big G.

SANDEEP

The Gravitational Constant?

ERIE

If big G changed by exactly the same amount squared, the physical world might remain stable. I need to talk to Susan.

Erie heads for the door but the Security Guards blocks him, shaking his head.

ERIE (CONT'D)

(to Sandeep)

Can you get Susan down here?

SANDEEP

It's very unlikely she'll let you upload new code. And we'll need to perform much more diligent testing this time, Mr. Thomas.

A beat, as Erie thinks. Then:

ERIE

Tell her I want to talk about the Sphere.

SANDEEP

What?

ERIE

Just tell her those words. Exactly. She'll come down.

(MORE)

ERIE (CONT'D)
 (off his look)
 Please.

SANDEEP
 ...ok. And I'll start looking into
 a Gravitational Constant change.
 Nothing seems impossible at this
 point.

Sandeep goes to exit.

ERIE
 Sandeep?

SANDEEP
 Yes.

ERIE
 Thanks for keeping me honest.

Sandeep nods, exits. Erie looks at the Security Guard
 briefly, then to his phone on the desk, pauses, stands up.

ERIE (CONT'D)
 I need to go to the restroom.

The Security Guard gives him a puzzled look, slowly gestures
 towards a very obvious restroom door right in front of Erie.

Erie discreetly picks up his phone, enters the restroom.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - INFIRMARY - NIGHT - LATER

Erie is back on the medical recliner. Susan enters, indicates
 to the Security Guard that he should leave. He nods, exits.

SUSAN
 What part of 'Top Secret' don't you
 get?

ERIE
 I'm sorry, we needed to talk.

SUSAN
 This isn't about the Sphere, is it?

ERIE
 No --

SUSAN
 (shakes her head)
 -- you're not uploading any more
 code.

(MORE)

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Alex's team is building new code
accommodating for the light speed
deviations you found --

ERIE

-- it won't work.

SUSAN

Sandeep told me about your new
theory and he's going to work with
Alex's team to prove --

ERIE

-- that's not why I asked you down
here.

A panic rising in Erie.

SUSAN

What is it?

ERIE

...I'm a fuck up.
(breaking down)
I killed seven astronauts last year
including my sister's husband --

SUSAN

-- that wasn't your fault.

Erie looks at her. A pause.

ERIE

They found meth in my blood,
Susan... and today I fucked up
again... and now she might die.

SUSAN

(sighing)
Erie, I can't do this right now...

Erie takes out his phone, brings up a video.

ERIE

(re: phone)
Can you send my sister this video?

A beat, as Susan debates the request.

ERIE (CONT'D)

Who knows what's going to happen
next.

SUSAN

...ok. Text it to me. I'll see what I can do.

(goes to exit, turns back)

If your doctor gives the ok, I need you to go back downstairs and try that 'thing' again.

Erie, texting the video, looks up, nods in agreement.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - INFIRMARY HALLWAY - NIGHT

Susan exits Erie's room, sees Admiral Schuster speaking with the infirmary DOCTOR in an office at the end of the hallway.

Susan watches them for a moment, curious.

DING.

Susan takes out her phone, plays Erie's video, a selfie he recorded earlier in the restroom.

ERIE

(in tears)

I don't know how to even begin this. You deserve so much better than me --

She stops it, content confirmed, uncomfortable watching more, pockets her phone, walks away.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - MISSION CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

Susan arrives through a side door, speaks to a TECH.

SUSAN

(to Tech)

I just queued a message for Commander Thomas. Make sure it's uploaded.

The Tech nods, hands Susan a wireless headset. She puts it on, walks over to join Sandeep standing by the back wall.

Alex is orchestrating events from the middle of the room.

The big screen shows the ISS's orbit rising very slowly towards the RED "MAX SAFE ORBIT" LINE.

A BLUE LINE has now appeared beyond that labelled "POINT OF NO RETURN".

SUSAN (CONT'D)
 (to Sandeep)
 What's happening?

SANDEEP
 The ISS's orbit is rising. It's slow enough that it's not a major concern but CAPCOM just reported a comm issue. They're looking at that now.

SUSAN
 (re: screen)
 What's the blue line?

SANDEEP
 Beyond that point, even if we got the guidance system working, the ISS won't have enough fuel to make it back to a safe orbit.

Alex speaks to his team through his wireless headset.

ALEX
 CAPCOM, confirm status of ISS comms.

CAPCOM
 Audio still garbled, Sir. It's weird, video is fine, just audio.

CAPCOM's ISS video feed shows an ASTRONAUT making "I can't hear" gestures. Karen is in the b.g. WATCHING ANOTHER SCREEN.

ALEX
 (calculating)
 ...audio is more sensitive to delay. Maybe we're higher than we think...
 (beat)
 TRAJECTORY, have we got the adjusted GPS positioning data from the New Mexico team? I need the big screen map updated with that new info asap.

TRAJECTORY
 Speed of light adjusted GPS data received. Updating screen map now.

The big screen updates. SUDDENLY, THE ISS APPEARS RIGHT NEXT TO THE "NO RETURN" LINE. The ISS icon starts FLASHING RED.

TRAJECTORY (CONT'D)
 (shocked)
 Ah -- Sir, T-minus 57 seconds until
 NO RETURN breach.

Everyone in the room jolts to attention.

ALEX
 PROPULSION. Options?

PROPULSION
 Any manual thruster fire will waste
 more fuel, same outcome. Only the
 guidance system can bring us back.

ALEX
 It's not ready. So, not an option.

TRAJECTORY
 T-minus 30 seconds until NO RETURN
 breach.

A beat. The entire room stares at the big screen.

The ISS, and its crew, CREEPING EVER CLOSER TO OBLIVION.

ALEX
 PROPULSION, we're going to fire
 thrusters anyway. We have to do
 something. Calculate minimum burn
 to halt orbital rise.

PROPULSION
 Calculating... Ready to activate.
 But it will cause a NO RETURN
 breach --

TRAJECTORY
 -- orbit stabilized.

ALEX
 What?

PROPULSION
 Sir, I'm showing the ISS guidance
 system online --

TRAJECTORY
 -- ISS descending ten meters per
 second -- twenty meters per second.

Everyone looks stunned as they watch the ISS move back down
 and away from the "NO RETURN" line on the big screen.

CAPCOM

Crew audio is back -- and ah...
Commander Thomas wants to relay a
message.

(turning to Alex)
"Tell Erie it worked."

Alex looks at Susan. A beat.

Susan quickly takes her phone out. Presses play on Erie's video, fast forwards, there's a point where Erie's demeanor completely changes, she rewinds, presses play at that point.

ERIE

(wiping away false tears)
...I'm guessing Susan would've
stopped watching at this point --
(calm; with intent)
So, Kaz. By now you know that, 'a',
I'm not high -- apology accepted --
and 'b', the speed of light has
actually changed. What you may not
know is that the Gravitational
Constant has also changed. Alex's
team might not get you new code in
time. So, here's a workaround.
Because we can't weigh the ISS, the
onboard computer tracks its
estimated mass. The guidance code
uses this, along with the
Gravitational Constant in its
orbital equations. If you manually
reduce this mass value on the ADCO
console, by .0027 percent, it will
create the same effect as changing
big G. Then just activate the last
version of the guidance code we
uploaded. Ok? That'll work
...whatever has happened between
us. I was right about the speed of
light. I'm right about this.
(forces a smile)
See you soon.

The video stops. Susan can't help but smile. Sounds of excitement and relief permeate throughout the room.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - SUSAN'S CONFERENCE ROOM - DAWN

Erie and Susan sit at the conference table talking.

ERIE

The ISS is back in its nominal orbit. The guidance code can now use the solar powered electrical boosters to maintain that position almost indefinitely. Unless...

SUSAN

-- something else changes...
(beat)
Do we have any idea what could have caused all this?

ERIE

The speed of light changing is one thing, but the Gravitational Constant changing by precisely the correct amount to counteract that change. I would say that it's more of a 'who' than a 'what'.

(beat; re: Sphere)

I need to go back down there.

SUSAN

I don't think your body can take it.

ERIE

That's what they told me in the astronaut program.

SUSAN

They were right.

ERIE

Your doctor says my heart's fine.

SUSAN

We both know he's lying. He's telling you what they want you to hear.

ERIE

There's no other option. If we're dealing with some kind of... I dunno... alien tech --

SUSAN

-- please. That's...

ERIE

Insane? Two days ago, half the known universe disappeared for ten seconds, so...

(MORE)

ERIE (CONT'D)

(beat)

I'll be fine. Besides, you can just rip the friggin' thing off my face like you did last time, so...

A pause -- Susan reluctantly agrees.

ERIE (CONT'D)

I'll be in Comm Room One, come get me when they're ready.

Erie exits. Susan takes out her phone, puts it to her ear.

SUSAN

This is NASA Administrator Baker, I need to speak with the President. ...Sir, we're ready to try again.

INT. UNKNOWN - BEDROOM - MORNING

Large, luxurious, a chandelier, a four poster bed. Conspicuously no windows. A dim bedside lamp, the only light.

A figure stirs in the bed. A MAN (60s) restlessly turns in his sleep. Suddenly, he pops up, eyes open, SCREAMING:

MAN

WE NEED TO LEAVE!! WE NEED TO --

He breathes hard, attempts to get his bearings as two SECRET SERVICE AGENTS rush into the room.

MAN (CONT'D)

(to Agents)

Get the Vice President. Tell him I need to see Theo --

AGENT #1

(gently)

-- you should lie down, Mr. President. Get some more rest. We'll have President Jenkins come see you soon.

MAN

(delirious)

President Jenkins? He wants me committed? Is that it?

(jumping out of bed)

I need to see him now!

President Roberts goes for the exit but Agent#2 blocks him.

AGENT #2
 Sir, we'll have him come down right
 away.

Roberts calms slightly, blinks hard to clear his head, then:

ROBERTS
 Is Theo coming with him?

Agent #2 glances to Agent #1 for help. Agent #1, tentatively:

AGENT #1
 Sure. We'll tell him to bring Theo.

Roberts seems satisfied with this answer, slowly climbs back into the bed, his hands massaging his temples.

AGENT #2
 (whispers to Agent#1)
 Who's Theo?

AGENT #1
 (shrugs)
 No idea.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - COMM ROOM ONE - DAY

Tiny soundproof room with a couple of comfy chairs facing a monitor. Erie sits, eagerly looks at the screen. A 'CONNECTING' message appears, then Karen, on the ISS.

Erie beams expectantly. Karen smiles, somewhat anxious.

KAREN
 Hey.

ERIE
 ...hey.

Erie tries to break the awkwardness with humor --

ERIE (CONT'D)
 You're alive!

KAREN
 (uncomfortable chuckle)
 Yep.
 (sincerely)
 Thanks to you. You saved us,
 Erie... That video you made was
 pretty clever, the way you fooled
 Susan --

ERIE

(excited)

-- I knew I was right, Kaz. None of them believed me -- you should've seen Alex's face when my code worked.

KAREN

...I bet that was something -- look I'm sorry I went off on you earlier.

ERIE

It's ok. Don't worry about it.

A beat. Karen gestures over her shoulder.

KAREN

Ah... we still have some issues that I need to take care of...

ERIE

Oh. Yeah, sure, but... Kaz?

(beat)

Are we ok?

KAREN

Erie.

ERIE

You and me. Are we ok?

Karen sighs, look away.

KAREN

Let's not talk about this now.

ERIE

I just saved your life.

KAREN

And I said thank you. And you were just fixing a problem you caused in the first place.

ERIE

Are you kidding me? The speed Of fucking light changed -- how's that on me?

KAREN

Well, at least you weren't high on meth this time, I guess.

ERIE

That had nothing to do with that accident. I made the right decision with the information on hand. The committee's report backed that up.

KAREN

My husband and seven other astronauts died --

ERIE

-- I made the right decision.

KAREN

And that's all that matters, huh?! You being right. Just like now.

ERIE

I saved your *life*, Karen.

KAREN

Oh, was that what it was about? Saving my life? Or, was it about the look on Alex's face when you proved him wrong? hmm?

ERIE

Karen --

KAREN

-- I gotta go. We'll talk later --

-- the video link hangs up. Erie stews.

KNOCKING. Susan opens the door.

SUSAN

They're ready for you.

Erie, sighs, gets up and follows her out.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - UNDERGROUND ROOM - DAY

Erie sits in a medical recliner, hooked up to medical monitors. The infirmary Doctor sits beside him.

President Jenkins is on the video screen, Schuster and Susan stand to one side of Erie. A DIA AGENT holding an open LOCK BOX, the SPHERE resting inside it, stands to the other.

JENKINS

Let's begin, shall we.

The Agent brings the lock box over to Erie. Erie reaches into it, touches the Sphere lightly with his fingers --

CLACK!

-- the Sphere's surface cracks into tiny hexagons, rebuilds itself as the NARROW-LENSED VISOR.

Erie and Susan share a brief look before Erie takes the Visor from the box and puts it on, lies back on the recliner.

ERIE'S POV: Same static 2D image of a chrome exoskeleton face as earlier, "BR UPLOAD" counter, high pitched tone.

ERIE

I see the same robotic face, the counter's at ten percent and rising. The tone's volume matching it like before.

Susan glances over at the Doctor who nods to indicate that everything looks ok.

ERIE (CONT'D)

Fifty percent.

Erie winces, fights hard to stay calm.

ERIE'S POV: Counter at **60%**, the tone ear piercing now.

ERIE (CONT'D)

(whole body tensing)

Seventy percent.

DING! DING! A medical machine begins to alarm.

DOCTOR

Heart rate just broke one eighty.

(to Jenkins)

Sir?

Jenkins ignores him. DING! DING! The alarm continues.

ERIE

(through gritted teeth;
rapid breaths)

Eighty... almost there!

BEEP! BEEP! A second alarm joins the first.

DOCTOR

Blood pressure spiking.

Susan rushes towards Erie, the DIA AGENT blocks her.

ERIE'S POV

Counter at **90%**, excruciatingly loud tone, as the counter hits... **100%**... THEN --

SILENCE

The chrome face comes ALIVE --

It's a...

INT. COCOON - UNKNOWN

REFLECTION -- in the polished black metal inner-wall of a dimly lit coffin-sized container.

It's head and silicon eyes match Erie's movements.

ERIE IS THE ROBOT

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)
Upload complete. Welcome to the BR.

LEDs above Erie's head light the tiny space.

Erie looks down, he has a human shaped body covered in a black neoprene exoskin.

His wrists and ankles locked in place by steel bands.

SWOOSH!

The black metal plate in front of Erie opens...

INT. WAREHOUSE SUPER STRUCTURE - UNKNOWN

Erie, the wet-suit like black neoprene exoskin covers his entire body and head except for his chrome exoskeleton face.

He stands upright in his cocoon staring out into a cavernous room of mind-boggling dimensions.

Opposite him are tall glossy black marble aisles, about ten feet wide, ten feet apart, extending away towards infinity.

A glass drawer, shoe box in size, slides out from the cocoon wall by Erie's left leg. Inside is a flesh-colored object being 3D printed by hundreds of lasers.

Intricate details form on the object's surface, Erie suddenly recognizes them:

IT'S ERIE'S HUMAN FACE

Two vice-like pincer blocks extend from the cocoon walls on either side of Erie's robotic head, lock his skull in place.

The lasers stop, face mask complete. An incredibly accurate replica of Erie's human face. Eyes closed and expressionless.

A mechanical arm unfolds from the wall, removes the face mask from the glass drawer, raises it up in front of Erie's head.

A dark shimmering nanotech surface can be seen on the back side of the face mask as it moves towards Erie's head.

Erie's silicon eyes dart left and right, as they disappear under his new face. The mechanical arm retracts.

The new face begins to mold against the metal exoskeleton underneath, tiny facial movements grow rapidly to more exaggerated expressions, until finally the eyes --

POP OPEN

ERIE

FUCK ME!!

Erie's wrist and ankle bands release, the cocoon's back wall pitches forward throwing Erie onto the black marble floor.

Erie groans loudly as he slowly picks himself up off the ground, very unsteady in his new body, disoriented.

Finally upright, Erie slowly looks around. The marble aisles in front of him continue away into the far distance.

A large glass case to his left catches his attention. Erie walks tentatively over to it.

Inside the case is an old battered bell shaped metallic object about 3ft high, 4ft wide.

It looks like some kind of landing probe device with three stub-like legs on its base.

A small NAMEPLATE on one side, Cyrillic script on it that ends in a series of ARABIC NUMERALS.

Erie studies the nameplate.

THEO (O.S.)

You finally made it. Unlike your President, who's feeble little mind really wasn't up to it when I visited him.

Erie turns to see Theo, his face weirdly transposed onto a black neoprene exoskin body and head similar to Erie's.

THEO (CONT'D)
 One star, Erie? Really? That pretty
 much ruined my driver rating.
 ...sorry about your hand though, I
 needed your DNA.

A beat. Erie, stunned and confused. Tentative --

ERIE
 Who the fuck are you? What is this
 place?

THEO
 This is the future, Erie.

Erie, head spinning --

ERIE
 ...the future of what?

THEO
 Humanity's birthplace.

Erie, struggling to understand, looks arounds --

ERIE
 This is Earth?

THEO
 Sol One. Earth's solar system.

Theo gestures to a marble side wall that suddenly becomes TRANSLUCENT, revealing a...

Dark desolate mountain panorama, a starry sky above it.

A BLUE NEON CIRCLE appears on the wall magnifying a distant OBJECT in the lower sky.

A dark grey asteroid-like ROCK.

THEO (CONT'D)
 (re: astral rock)
 That's Earth.

Erie studies the dead planet. His wide-eyes rise to a dim fiery planet higher in the sky. Theo follows Erie's gaze.

THEO (CONT'D)
 Your Sun -- or what's left of it.

ERIE
What the fuck happened...

Spotlights o.s. turn on, flood the f.g. outside the wall.

THEO
And I'm sure I don't need to tell
you which planet we're on.

Erie's eyes drop to the distinctive RED ROCK LANDSCAPE of...

MARS

THEO (CONT'D)
You finally made it here after all.

Erie, in disbelief, sputters out an involuntary SNICKER --

Then another -- before breaking into, loud, manic --

-- INCREDULOUS LAUGHTER --

ERIE
(gestures around him)
Alright, whatever the fuck this,
some crazy shit-hot VR or... I
don't know...

Erie swallows hard, tries to calm himself, back to Theo.

ERIE (CONT'D)
What has it got to do with the
changes we're seeing? And Why me?
Why the hell am I here?

THEO
I need you to solve a problem.

ERIE
What --

Erie stops, looks away, touches his temple, processing
something, looks back to Theo.

THEO
That problem.

ERIE
How did you --

THEO
-- Doesn't matter. Solve it.

ERIE
Impossible. The matrices exponent
can never reach two.

THEO
Then you and everyone you know will
die.

The side wall turns opaque again. Theo smiles.

THEO (CONT'D)
Time to go back Erie -- Time is of
the essence after all --

ERIE
(approaches Theo)
No! Wait! what? -- who are you? --

THEO
-- I'm your savior Erie. Isn't that
obvious?

ERIE POV: Theo's smirking face, the marble pillars,
everything FADES TO WHITE --

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - INFIRMARY MEDICAL ROOM - NIGHT

-- close on Erie's EYES as they SNAP open -- his forehead
tenses -- he looks down - medical TUBES jammed in his mouth.

WHOOSH. WHOOSH.

A VENTILATOR beside him rises and falls.

Erie scans the room.

Windowless. Erie lies in a hospital bed, wires and tubes
snake from various body parts to a multitude of machines.

A NURSE sits outside an open door filling out a clipboard.

Erie's hand slowly rises to his mouth, tries to yank the
tubes out -- GAGS loudly.

NURSE (O.S.)
He's awake. Let them know.

The Nurse rushes to Erie's bedside.

MOMENTS LATER

Erie sits up in the bed, groggy, tubes gone from his mouth.

The Nurse stands by the bed, trying to stop him removing wires from his chest and arms --

NURSE (CONT'D)
-- we need to do some tests --

ERIE
-- I told you, I feel fine --

He stops, eyes landing on a wall clock.

ERIE (CONT'D)
Holy shit, I've been here for ten hours --

The Nurse reconnects some of the wires Erie unplugged.

NURSE
-- the doctor will go over everything with you when he arrives.

Sandeep comes into the room, Erie immediately turns to him.

ERIE
Sandeep, what happened, how'd I get here?

SANDEEP
Erie, you're ok?!

NURSE
We don't actually know if he's ok yet, he needs to --

ERIE
-- of course I'm ok.
(to Sandeep)
How'd I get here?

SANDEEP
You stopped breathing. Susan gave you CPR. We brought you here.

NURSE
(to Sandeep)
I'm going to get the doctor. Don't let him out of that bed.

The Nurse quickly exits.

SANDEEP
How you feeling?

Erie disconnects wires, rips off a couple of chest sensors. Sandeep frowns, steps closer.

SANDEEP (CONT'D)
Ah... maybe you should --

ERIE
-- Mars Viking One. You know it?

Erie pulls back his bed covers. Weak, he swings his feet with some effort over the bed side. Sandeep goes to him.

SANDEEP
Maybe you should stay in bed like
the Nurse said.

Erie waves him away.

ERIE
Russia's Mars Viking One, 1974. Do
you know it?!

Erie sits on the edge of bed, catching his breath.

SANDEEP
Ah... yes ...I know it --

ERIE
Contact ROSCOMOS. Find out if it
has a nameplate, about 6x6 inches,
right above it's forward camera.
Get me the text on it, specifically
the last eleven digits.

Sandeep stares at Erie, confused, reluctant. Erie, with as much gravitas as he can muster --

ERIE (CONT'D)
It's linked to what's happening. I
need you to do this for me, okay?

The two men hold each other's gaze. A beat.

SANDEEP
...ok.

Erie nods, goes to stand, his legs give way. Sandeep catches him before he falls. Lowers him back on the bed.

ERIE
God damnit! What the fuck is wrong
with me?

Erie catches his breath on the bed, exhausted.

A beat. Erie rubs the stubble on his face, rougher, longer. He glances at the wall clock again, something dawns in him.

ERIE (CONT'D)
I've been here longer than ten
hours, haven't I?

SANDEEP
...you've been here for two weeks,
Erie.

Off Erie's face --

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - INFIRMARY OPEN AREA - NIGHT

Erie stands, in his hospital gown, hand on a wall to steady himself, an empty wheelchair in the f.g., he looks out a window, RAIN and HIGH WINDS batter the glass.

SUSAN (O.S.)
Your doctor is looking for you.

Erie turns to see Susan, a FOLDER in her hand.

ERIE
Some good he did me two weeks ago.
I hear you saved my life.

A beat. She walks to him, eyes brimming with emotion --

The WINDOW VIBRATES VIOLENTLY from the power of wind. Susan, back to business, gestures to the window --

SUSAN
(re: raging storm)
Things have escalated quite a bit.

ERIE
Not exactly Texas weather.

She hands him the FOLDER.

Erie flicks through the IMAGES of EXTREME WEATHER, hurricanes, flooding, tornados, from across the globe.

SUSAN
Thousands of casualties so far.
(beat)
They're predicting...

ERIE
Do they know why it's happening?

Susan points to one sheet of tabulated DATA in the folder.

SUSAN

They say the Earth is slowing down.
Spin rate dropped two percent in
ten days. They think its related to
the speed of light, big G changes.

ERIE

That's doesn't make any sense --
those changes wouldn't cause this --

Erie stops reading. A beat. He turns to look out the window again, a corner of the MOON cracks between distant clouds.

Sandeep arrives into room reading from a PRINTOUT.

SANDEEP

Found some Mars Viking 1 photos in
NASA's Coldwar archives. It had a
nameplate. Mainly Russian text
ending in Arabic numerals 8-3-

ERIE

--6-9-0-8-1-2-8-7-9.

SANDEEP

(reading sheet)
Yeah. How'd you know?

ERIE

(beat; to himself)
Holy shit, he was telling the
truth.

SUSAN

Who was telling the truth?

Erie hands Susan back the folder.

ERIE

(to Susan)
I need to use the Sphere again.

SUSAN

What?! No! You nearly died --
technically you did die, you were
brain dead for two weeks.

ERIE

I need to go back.

SUSAN

Go back where?

ERIE

Get everyone together with the Sphere in the next hour, I'll explain it all then -- oh, maybe have the ventilator in the room this time --

SUSAN

This is crazy.

Erie walks over to Sandeep.

ERIE

(to Sandeep)

Contact Goddard Space Center, get the latest Lunar Ranging measurements.

Susan jumps between them.

SUSAN

What are you doing, Erie?!

Erie stops, points out the window at the Moon.

ERIE

I think 'that', is getting closer to 'us'. Its resulting increased gravitational pull is the only thing that could cause the
(re: Susan's folder)
Earth to slow that quickly.

Erie waves Sandeep out the exit, heads towards a hallway.

SUSAN

Where are you going?

ERIE

I'm going to get changed. I don't think you want me meeting the President looking like this.

SUSAN

Karen wants to speak with you.

Erie stops, a small smile, walks quickly back to Susan.

ERIE

Ok. Let's do that first.

SUSAN

(re: his revealing hospital gown)

(MORE)

SUSAN (CONT'D)
 You should probably still change
 though.

Erie, looks at gown, nods. Hurries to his room. Susan watches him exit, shakes her head.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - COMM ROOM 1 - DAY

Erie, back in his NASA sweatshirt and slacks, sits in front of the a blank monitor, furiously scribbling on a NOTEPAD.

A series of EQUATIONS on the notepad pages.

A 'CONNECTING' message appears on the screen. He puts the NOTEPAD to one side. Karen, on the ISS, appears.

KAREN
 What happened to you? They won't
 tell me anything.

ERIE
 They won't let me talk about it.
 'Top Secret' and all that bullshit.

A beat.

KAREN
 ...you look terrible.

ERIE
 (smiles)
 I've had better days. But I'm doing
 ok. How about you?

KAREN
 Sitting pretty up here, watching
 the mayhem down there.
 (beat)
 Listen, about earlier --

ERIE
 -- you were right. I'm all about
 proving people wrong --

KAREN
 -- I didn't mean --

ERIE
 -- including you.

Erie struggles to find words, then --

ERIE (CONT'D)
I'm not the monster you think I am.

KAREN
Jesus Christ. Don't be so melodramatic. I just needed you to say you were sorry, Erie. For once.

ERIE
For taking meth? Because that had --

KAREN
-- *for* what happened. For our loss. For something... you were Flight on that mission. You should've taken responsibility regardless of whether you were right or wrong.

A long beat as Erie thinks this over.

ERIE
What about now?

KAREN
What *about* now?

ERIE
What if I said I'm sorry now?

KAREN
I'd tell you to go fuck yourself.

Erie shakes his head, looks away.

KAREN (CONT'D)
Hey. Dufus.
(Erie looks at her)
But in a couple of days I'd come round. Throw you a bone, make you say sorry a few more times. Three or four maybe. Then I'd remember that you're my brother. And that I love you. Even if you are a fucking moron sometimes --

BLEEP! BLEEP! from the ISS b.g.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. ISS

Karen looks at another monitor.

ERIE
What is it?

KAREN
Incoming seismic waves.

ERIE
Where from? I know they reported
activity along the pacific coast?

KAREN
...they're not from Earth.

ERIE
...what?

Karen peers out a port hole window.

The MOON -- activity on its surface...

DUST CLOUDS rise from massive sections of landscape that seem
to be SHEARING against each other --

GIGANTIC CRACKS APPEAR in its OUTER CRUST --

A JET OF MOLTEN ROCK SHOOTS out from one crack -- hundreds of
kilometers into space --

THE MOON IS SPLITTING INTO PIECES!

FOUR LARGE QUADRANTS SLOWLY BREAK AWAY FROM EACH OTHER.

THOUSANDS OF PIECES OF DEBRIS FALLING AWAY FROM THE EDGES OF
EACH PIECE.

THE MOON'S MOLTEN CORE (IT HAS ONE) LEFT SWIRLING IN SPACE.

ERIE (CONT'D)
What is it?

Karen, dumbfounded by the cataclysmic events unfolding before
her eyes --

KAREN
The Moon... it's...

Suddenly the ISS SHUDDERS violently as the seismic waves hit,
Karen hits a side wall --

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - COMM ROOM 1 - DAY

-- the video connection disconnects.

ERIE

Karen!

Erie rushes out the door --

EXT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - BALCONY - NIGHT

Erie runs out onto a windswept small outdoor seating area.

He stops, fights to keep his balance in the powerful gusts, stares up to the sky at a...

SHATTERED MOON

Four continent sized Moon chunks frame a dimming orange core.

SANDEEP (O.S.)

We've no idea...

Sandeep at a door in the b.g. They both look skywards, agape. Erie shouts over the wind --

ERIE

What's the ISS's status?

SANDEEP

Seismic infrasound waves briefly broke communications, left the crew at little shaken but stable now.

They both continue to stand, eyes locked on the sky, astonished by the spectacle unfolding above them --

SANDEEP (CONT'D)

...Goddard confirmed that the Moon's range was decreasing, but... why is this happening?

ERIE

(awestruck)

...the Roche Limit ...the power of Earth's gravitational forces ripping it apart...

A beat. Erie grounds himself, turns to Sandeep --

ERIE (CONT'D)

I need you to estimate the time of debris impact on the ISS.

Sandeep looks lost, terrified --

ERIE (CONT'D)

Sandeep!

Sandeep looks at Erie.

SANDEEP

Yes. Got it.

Erie nods, quickly heads back inside, leaving Sandeep to look back up at the FRACTURED MOON --

The core dead, its massive fragments seem more separated also now -- perceptibly DRIFTING in the same direction across the sky --

-- gaining SPEED as they go --

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - SECURE AREA - NIGHT

Erie and Susan stride through the same double-doors as earlier, an "AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY" sign above it, toward the elevator with the single RED button.

Erie studies the pages of his NOTEPAD as he goes.

SUSAN

Six hours until the debris hits the ISS.

She turns to Erie, head stuck in his NOTEPAD --

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Erie, did you hear me? It won't survive. *They* won't survive.

ERIE

(frantically turns pages)
I know, Sandeep told me.

They reach the elevator, Susan presses the red button.

SUSAN

(re: notepad)
What is that?

The elevator doors open, Erie closes the notepad.

ERIE

Will everything be setup when we get there?

Erie steps into the elevator, Susan follows.

SUSAN

Yes. Doctor, President, Sphere and ventilator, will all be joining us.

(beat)

Erie, we'll need some kind of explanation before we let you use it.

Erie, a nervous nod. The elevator doors close.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - UNDERGROUND ROOM - NIGHT

Erie's Doctor beside a recliner and medical equipment, a DIA AGENT holds the LOCK BOX with the Sphere in it.

Erie's NOTEPAD lays on a table.

Erie and Susan stand speaking with President Jenkins on a video screen. Aides bustle around behind the President giving him updates on various emergencies. Chaos reigns.

JENKINS

(to Erie)

The future? You met this... Theo person... in the future?

Jenkins indicates to aides o.s. to give him a minute.

ERIE

Yes, Sir.

JENKINS

(re: Sphere)

So that makes that a... what? A time machine?

Susan winces slightly, anxiety building.

ERIE

I know that sounds crazy --

JENKINS

Son, the Moon just exploded. We're way past crazy at this point --

-- an aide appears beside Jenkins on the video call.

AIDE (O.S.)

Mister President, Admiral Smith needs to speak with you urgently.

Jenkins nods to the aide, turns back to Erie --

JENKINS

(re: Sphere)

That thing, whatever it turns out to be, is the only lead we have in figuring all this stuff out.

(to Susan; re: Erie)

Call me back when he's ready to go.

SUSAN

Yes, Sir.

The video call ends.

Susan shares an exasperated look with Erie, turns to the Doctor and the DIA Agent.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

You heard the President. Let's get him ready.

MOMENTS LATER

Erie sits in the recliner hooked up to the machines. The Doctor holds the ventilator mask at the ready.

The DIA Agent has the lock box open in front of Erie, Susan stands in the b.g.

President Jenkins watches from the video screen.

Erie gives Susan one last re-assuring look -- reaches out and touches the Sphere --

NOTHING HAPPENS

It doesn't change shape. Nothing. Erie places all his fingertips, his entire palm on it, picks it up, nothing.

A beat.

JENKINS

Why isn't it working?

ERIE

...I don't know.

Erie slowly puts the Sphere in the lock box, thinking --

SUSAN

(checks her phone)

I need to get back upstairs. The ISS crew need to be prepared for what's about to happen.

Susan heads for the exit. Erie glances at his NOTEPAD on the table, then --

ERIE
 (re: Sphere)
 -- I know what's wrong. I can get
 it to work.
 (to Susan)
 I need Sandeep down here.

Susan turns back, gives Erie a resigned look.

In the b.g. the President is handed an urgent phone call by an aide on the video screen.

SUSAN
 Erie, you might want to think about
 talking with your sister before
 that debris reaches the ISS --

JENKINS
 (hand over phone; to
 Susan)
 -- get this guy Sandeep down here.

SUSAN
 (to Jenkins)
 Sir, but --

JENKINS
 (re: Erie)
 -- get him whatever he needs to get
 this thing working and report back
 to me.

The video calls ends. Erie looks to Susan, she turns to exit.

ERIE
 Susan...

SUSAN
 I'll send Sandeep down.

LATER

Erie quickly writes a long series of MATH EQUATIONS on a LARGE WHITEBOARD.

The Doctor is gone, the DIA Agent stands at the back of the room with the closed lock box.

Sandeep is escorted into the room by DIA AGENT #2, the agent then exits, closes the door.

Sandeep, throws a cautious glance at the DIA Agent with the lock box, then to Erie.

SANDEEP
You wanted to see me?

Erie gestures towards the whiteboard.

ERIE
You recognize any of this from the
ASCAN course?

Sandeep steps up the whiteboard, studies it.

SANDEEP
...it's an n by n matrix
multiplication algorithm...

Sandeep's eyes follow the equations to a final result of $w = 2.3345$. His jaw drops, stunned --

SANDEEP (CONT'D)
...holy crap --
(to Erie; re: whiteboard)
Is this real?

ERIE
Yes.

SANDEEP
(mesmerized)
Two point three... Le Gall could
only get to two point nine.

ERIE
We need to reduce it to two.

SANDEEP
...point what?

ERIE
No. Just two.

SANDEEP
Impossible.

ERIE
Maybe, maybe not. I need you to
help me try.

SANDEEP
Erie... the ISS, your sister... I
don't think this is the best use of
our time.

(MORE)

SANDEEP (CONT'D)
 (re: whiteboard, Agent)
 And you've told me so little about
 any of this.

A beat. Erie thinks this over -- then points at the lock box.

ERIE
 (to Sandeep)
 In that box --

DIA AGENT
 Sir, that's classified information--

ERIE
 (to DIA Agent)
 -- Jesus Christ! Pieces of the
 fucking Moon the size Nebraska are
 going to crash into the planet in
 the next 72 hours, I think we can
 drop the bureaucracy, don't you!

The DIA Agent lets this sink in, Erie turns to Sandeep --

ERIE (CONT'D)
 Inside that box is a device that
 sent me ...or my consciousness, to
 the future.

The DIA Agent draws his gun with his free hand, holds the
 lock box in the other. Aims his gun at Erie.

DIA AGENT
 Sir, I won't ask you again.

ERIE
 (to DIA Agent)
 Go ahead, shoot me. We'll all be
 dead soon anyway.
 (re: whiteboard; to
 Sandeep)
 Which is where I got this. Our
 future selves want me to reduce the
 upper boundary in that equation to
 two, and then they will help us
 with all this shit that's happening
 in our present.

The DIA Agent stands gun still raised, unsure what to do.

SANDEEP
 (re: whiteboard)
 Why --

ERIE

(to Sandeep)

-- It's a test or something, I don't fucking know -- but on that board is an equation that couldn't have possibly come from anywhere but the future. And I knew the last eleven digits on a Russian probe's nameplate that launched fifty years ago.

Sandeep looks at Erie, shocked but still reluctant --

ERIE (CONT'D)

Oh -- and there's a DIA Agent pointing a gun at me just for telling you this, so...

Sandeep, glances from the equation, to Erie, to the DIA agent and back. A beat.

SANDEEP

Two weeks ago I would've said this was all bat shit crazy.

ERIE

And now...

Sandeep sighs, points to the Desktop PC in the corner.

SANDEEP

I can use that to link to Big Blue on floor two to run the numbers.

(re: DIA Agent)

...but first I'm gonna need him to lower that gun.

Erie grins. They both look to the DIA Agent --

ERIE

'Give him whatever he needs' - that's what your President said.

(re: Sandeep)

And I need him.

The DIA Agent slowly lowers his gun.

LATER

Sandeep sits crossed legged on the floor, a keyboard on his lap, a monitor on the ground in front of him.

He looks up at the whiteboard on the wall above him as Erie furiously makes changes to their ALGORITHM on it.

The DIA Agent, weary, sits in b.g. with the lock box.

ERIE (CONT'D)
 (stops writing)
 Wait... what if?
 (crosses out last line)
 ...we add the Strassen C-Tensors
 here to further limit H.
 (writes new equations)
 That'll allow us to use a Salem-
 Spencer set instead.

A man possessed, Erie frantically scrawls numbers and letters on the board, then turns to Sandeep --

ERIE (CONT'D)
 Plug that in.

Sandeep enters the new data on the Big Blue mathematical modeling app on his monitor, presses return -- RESULT --

SANDEEP
 Two point four.

ERIE
 Damn it. Everything we add makes it worse.

Sandeep looks at the ALOGRITHM on his screen, half-frustrated, half-in awe --

SANDEEP
 What they gave you is perfect. It can't be made any better.

ERIE
 Everything can be made better. We just need to figure out what to add.

Erie turns back to board, studies it. Susan enters.

SUSAN
 Erie, can we speak a moment?

Erie walks over to her.

SUSAN (CONT'D)
 We're just about to enter the ISS's final two hour prep window before the debris impacts. There's twenty minutes left of family and friends video time.

(MORE)

SUSAN (CONT'D)

(beat)

I really think you should use it.

Erie looks at the board, a tangled mess of scribbled mathematical functions, nods, turns to Sandeep.

ERIE

Give me twenty minutes.

(re: board)

Take a bathroom, food break...
whatever you need.

SANDEEP

I'm good.

Sandeep lies flat out on the floor, exhausted.

SANDEEP (CONT'D)

(re: DIA Agent)

I'll just hang out with our friend
here.

SUSAN

(to Erie)

All the comm rooms are full, I got
you a private link from CAPCOM's
desk.

Susan and Erie exit. Sandeep lies on the floor eyes closed, the DIA Agent in the b.g. with the lock box.

SANDEEP

So... you got any good jokes?

The DIA Agent side-eyes him briefly, then eyes front again.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - MISSION CONTROL - NIGHT

Ten rows of room-wide desks covered with monitors. Headset wearing TECHNICIANS, SCIENTISTS and ENGINEERS behind each.

The huge screen on the front wall shows the ISS, its orbital path, an approaching CLOUD OF DEBRIS in a higher orbit and above that, four MASSIVE MOON CHUNKS in their orbits.

Alex stands in the middle of the room, overseeing everything.

Erie, at CAPCOM's desk, headset on, Karen on a monitor. Her eyes well with emotion, coming to terms with her fate.

KAREN
 (half-jokingly)
 You're still trying to save me,
 huh?

ERIE
 You're all I got Kaz.
 (beat)
 After this call, I'm going to go
 back and...

KAREN
 -- it's ok, I don't need to know.
 (beat)
 I hear it's snowing there.

A beat. Erie nods, smiles.

ERIE
 Without the Moon's pull, the
 Earth's tilt is normalizing. The
 new north pole will be somewhere
 over Lake Michigan I think.

KAREN
 As if the Chicago winters weren't
 cold enough.
 (they share a smile)
 You remember when dad used to take
 us sledding?

ERIE
 You were fearless.

KAREN
 You'd sit trying to figure out the
 best path to take, analyzing the
 angles, obstacles... you always
 over think everything, add
 complexity where it's not needed.

Erie looks at her, listening intently.

KAREN (CONT'D)
 Sometimes you just need to simplify
 things, Erie. You'll enjoy life
 more.

Erie looks away, suddenly struck by a new thought --

ERIE
 (low; to himself)
 -- that's it ...that's it! Remove
 the complexity, not add to it.
 (MORE)

ERIE (CONT'D)
 (to Karen)
 You're a genius, Sis.

Erie pulls over a keyboard, brings up a window on another monitor, starts connecting to the Big Blue server --

KAREN
 Erie?

ERIE
 (typing; to himself)
 Simplify.

Erie has the ALGORITHM on the other monitor, starts removing functions from it.

Karen looks at him, perplexed. Erie presses return, the app spits out a result -- **2.15.**

ERIE (CONT'D)
 That's more like it.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. ISS

TAT! A BB-Gun like sound from behind Karen, she turns around.

BACK TO ERIE

Erie makes more changes, presses return -- **2.03.**

BACK TO THE ISS

Karen puts her ear to the ISS wall -- TAT! ...TAT! TAT!

BACK TO ERIE

Erie, focused on the other screen, finishes one last change --

ERIE
 C'mon --

-- **RESULT 2.00.**

Erie smiles, looks up to see Karen's concerned face on her video monitor, a growing cacophony of TAT! TAT! sounds interspersed with louder BLAMS! come from behind her.

KAREN
 We got outer shell impacts.

CAPCOM reaches over Erie's shoulder, his hand out --

CAPCOM
 (re: his headset)
 I'm going to need that back.

Erie gives CAPCOM his headset, quickly stands up, lets CAPCOM sit. Erie scans the room, anxious activity builds around him.

CAPCOM (CONT'D)
 (into headset to Karen)
 Commander, hold for Telemetry.

Erie hurries over to Alex.

ALEX
 (into headset)
 -- why didn't we detect those particles?

ERIE
 (to Alex)
 Alex, what's going on?

Alex waves Erie away. An ALARM sounds -- the ISS icon on the big screen blinks red -- "PRESSURE DROP IN S1 TRUSS".

ALEX
 (into headset)
 -- Biometrics, deploy atmospheric masks.

Erie slowly backs away, watches the growing chaos. A beat.

Erie turns, rushes out a nearby door.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Erie hurries towards the Secure Area. He stops, is met by --

Sandeep and the DIA Agent, the lock box still handcuffed to the DIA Agent's wrist, walking towards him.

SANDEEP
 The President wants an update. Asap
 apparently --

Erie walks to the DIA Agent, points at the lock box --

ERIE
 -- I need you to open that now!

The DIA Agent instinctively moves back --

DIA AGENT

We can discuss that with the
President downstairs, Sir.

ERIE

I don't have time to discuss
anything -- open that box and give
me the Sphere!

DIA AGENT

When we get back downstairs --

The DIA Agent puts his hand on his weapon --

ERIE

(re: gun)

Oh, we're going to do this again,
really?! -- Let me explain
something to you, if you shoot me,
if I die, the President is going to
be pretty fucking pissed, because
I'm the only one that --

Erie stops talking, looks at an outdoor balcony area,
blanketed with snow, then --

Turns, strides towards it, the DIA Agents follows him --

DIA AGENT

Sir, where are you going, you need
to...

EXT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - BALCONY - NIGHT

Blustery snow swirls around this outdoor dining area.

An American Flag whips violently on top of a pole anchored to
the balcony's outer wall.

Erie barrels out from the hallway, makes for the flagpole.

The DIA Agent and Sandeep follow shortly behind him.

Erie uses the flagpole to haul himself up on the wall,
teetering on the edge of a FIVE-STORY DROP.

He grips the pole tightly, shouts through the snow and high
winds at the DIA Agent --

ERIE

Open that box or I'll jump!

The DIA Agent and Sandeep freeze. The Agent, breathing fast now, slowly raises his free hand, waves Erie down --

DIA AGENT
...if you come down then I'll --

ERIE
-- open the fucking box!

Erie turns toward the edge, snow blasting around him --

SANDEEP
Erie, no!

DIA AGENT
OK! ...OK.

The DIA Agent slowly lowers the lock box, thumb prints it open, revealing the Sphere. Erie extends his free arm --

ERIE
Hand it to me.

The DIA Agent takes the Sphere, walks towards Erie, his eyes focused on Erie's outstretched arm.

ERIE (CONT'D)
Wait.
(the DIA Agent stops)
Give it to him.

Erie points at Sandeep. The DIA Agent's face tightens, then he carefully hands the Sphere to an extremely wary Sandeep.

Erie gestures Sandeep towards him.

Sandeep walks slowly to Erie, blinking through the swirling snowflakes, raises the Sphere towards Erie --

Erie, one hand on the pole, bends low, reaches his other to the Sphere, his finger touches it and...

CLACK! --

it changes shape -- Sandeep yanks his hand away --

the changing Sphere drops --

Erie GRABS IT before it falls.

He now holds THE VISOR.

Erie, eyes locked on the Visor, carefully straightens up.

Sandeep notices something in the NIGHT SKY above them --
SMALL FIREBALLS STREAKING DOWN FROM THE HEAVENS...

The Moon debris arriving early.

They all look up, snow whirling, bright orange-tailed
meteorites exiting the dark clouds.

It's beautiful.

Erie looks down, eyes full of pain. A deep breath and he --
PUTS ON THE VISOR.

Sandeep's eyes move to Erie, who now wears the Visor --
Erie's grip loosens on the pole, his body goes limp --

SANDEEP

Erie!

Erie falls backward over the balcony wall, disappearing in
the darkness --

INT. WAREHOUSE SUPER STRUCTURE - THE FUTURE

-- Erie FALLS onto the marble floor, pitched out from his
cocoon. Back in his sleek neoprene exoskin.

THEO (O.S.)

Clear your mind. Think through your
solution, I'll lift it from your
consciousness.

Erie looks up at Theo standing nearby.

Suddenly Erie LEAPS up grabs Theo by the THROAT -- PINS him
up against a black marble pillar.

ERIE

No more games! What the fuck is
this place? What is happening?!

Theo doesn't resist, tries to remain calm.

THEO

I told you. This is your future.

ERIE

And you can fix my past?

THEO

I can fix your world, yes. I just need the solution that's in your head. If you would just calm down and --

ERIE

-- you'll fix it and send me back into the past before all that shit happened?

THEO

...that's not how it works --

Erie leans in close to Theo.

ERIE

-- fix it! And send me back in time before it started!

THEO

...it's not time travel, Erie.

Erie squeezes Theo's neck harder, his fingers digging deep into the neoprene covering Theo's throat.

ERIE

What the fuck is it then? You said this is the future? Maybe that's bullshit, huh? Maybe this is some fucked up VR?

The neoprene breaks under Erie's thumb. Panic rises in Theo.

THEO

You should let me go now.

ERIE

Tell me the truth!

Drops of a viscous grey liquid slowly seep out of the neoprene breaks in Theo's neck. Theo winces and --

His hands grab Erie's wrists as he tries to WRENCH Erie's hands from his throat.

Erie, eyes full of RAGE, resists Theo's efforts, driving him harder against the pillar.

ERIE (CONT'D)

TELL ME!

Theo grimaces, SCREAMS back his answer --

THEO
YOU'RE THE VR!

Erie freezes...

-- stares into Theo's eyes.

A long beat.

Erie's grip loosens, Theo pulls himself away from the pillar.

ERIE
...what?

Theo, bent over, rubs the neoprene on his neck as it HEALS itself, annoyed at Erie, at himself --

THEO
You're not meant to know! It effects the simulation outcome.
(off Erie's look)
Come on! The speed of light changing, Erie? Really?

Erie looks up at the huge black marble aisles. Theo sees this, straightens himself up, recovering.

THEO (CONT'D)
(re: aisles)
Quantum servers. Your home.
(beat)
Servers that were having resource issues, by the way, about to crash. Until I stepped in. Reducing the speed of light, a quick and dirty temporary fix.

Erie drops to his hands and knees, his head reeling --

THEO (CONT'D)
But I needed a more permanent solution.

Erie, eyes on the floor, piecing things together...

ERIE
The algorithm...

THEO
Yes. The algorithm. Very good. Which I still need by the way. So, if you could just, you know...

A beat. Erie raises his head towards Theo.

ERIE
 Why couldn't you solve it?

Theo sighs, then --

THEO
 ...because I came from a simulation
 too, Erie. Just like you. Just not
 as smart.
 (beat)
 Before humanity left they
 designated us, the inhabitants
 (motions to quantum
 servers)
 of their funky lab experiments, as
 having developed into sentient
 beings. And tasked me with
 maintaining them. A little deal we
 made -- now if you would just run
 through that algorithm in that
 little genius head of yours, I'll
 have you back on your Earth before
 it's completely destroyed...
 although you may need a new body --

ERIE
 -- rewind it.
 (off Theo's look)
 Back the simulation up. Send me
 back before you made the speed of
 light change.

THEO
 I can't.

ERIE
 Why not?

THEO
 I don't have the compute resources.

A beat. Erie stares to the side, imaging in his mind's eye.

ERIE
 How about now?

Theo's eyes dart from side to side, reading, processing --

THEO
 ...clever! ...very clever.

Theo turns his attention back to Erie.

ERIE'S POV: Theo smiles. Everything around Erie begins to fade to WHITE --

ERIE

Wait. What deal did you make --

INT. ERIE'S HOUSE - MORNING

-- bright sunlight streams through an open window.

White lace curtains gently billow in the warm desert breeze.

Feet hanging off the end of a bed.

Board shorts and a "I Heart Vegas" T-shirt.

Erie, eyes closed, lays on the bed, motionless:

His eyelids SNAP OPEN --

He pops up in bed, looks around the room -- shields his eyes from the sunlight, winces, lifts his shirt to reveal heavy bruising around his rib cage.

Breathless, he pauses, brow furrowed, thinking -- he checks his palm, NO MARKS on the unbroken skin.

He pulls his phone out, opens the Uber app, check the last ride -- "Arnie 2.45 am", a smiling, bespectacled Asian man.

A beat.

Erie makes a call, paces the room.

ERIE

...hey ...yeah, I know, longtime --
I'm fine... -- where are you?

(stops pacing; tense)

Wait, why are you there? -- Is
there a problem with the ISS?...

(relief)

Oh, ok... no, I'm good...

(beat)

Listen, if I fly there this
morning, I was wondering if you
could do me a favor...

INT. UBER - DAY

A hand puts a folded NEWSPAPER in a seatback pocket beside some fancy bottled water. A sidebar article on the newspaper--

"VP OPENS LIBRARY"

A small inset PHOTO of a tight smiling JENKINS awkwardly cutting a red ribbon with COMICALLY LARGE scissors.

EXT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - DAY

Erie climbs out of the Uber. Clean shaven, collared T-shirt, long dress pants and shoes.

He enters a FIVE-STAR rating on his Uber app, pockets his phone, looks up at the main building.

The American Flag on the fifth floor balcony hangs close to the pole, unmoving in the still dry heat.

His eyes shift to the lower sky, near the horizon --

THE MOON

A faint white hemisphere backdropped by serenely clear blue.

It's beautiful.

Erie turns, heads towards the main entrance.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - HALLWAY - DAY

Susan and Erie walk together.

SUSAN

Singh?

ERIE

Yeah, Sandeep Singh ...he's the son of a friend of mine. Bright kid.

SUSAN

Ah... no, can't say I heard that name. I can check with the graduate program admin if you like?

ERIE

No. It's ok. Don't worry about it.

SUSAN

...you ok?

ERIE

Yeah. Just, ...crazy dreams last night.

(MORE)

ERIE (CONT'D)

(beat)

Thanks for organizing this.

Susan nods. They arrive at a conference room door.

SUSAN

You got ten mins, she has a busy day ahead of her. I'll be right out here ...just in case you need backup.

Erie smiles, walks into the conference room.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Karen, on a wall-mounted video link from the ISS, works with another astronaut o.s. when she notices Erie come in:

KAREN

(to astronaut o.s.)

-- just give me a moment. This shouldn't take that long.

Erie walks to the middle of the room, stands facing the screen, nervously repositioning his hands.

Karen waits for the astronaut o.s. to move out of earshot. Then, turns to face Erie:

KAREN (CONT'D)

What the hell is this about Erie? hmm? Always with the drama -- I swear to God, this better not be another one your it-wasn't-my-fault speeches because I don't have time--

ERIE

-- I'm sorry.

Karen stops, thrown --

KAREN

What?

ERIE

I'm sorry.

KAREN

...for what?

Erie, a response backed by an ocean of guilt, pain, empathy. A brother speaks to his sister. Simple. Authentic. Truthful.

ERIE
For everything.

A beat.

Karen stares at Erie, fighting back her own tide of emotion.

KAREN
...I guess there's only one way I
can respond to that...

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - HALLWAY - DAY

Erie comes out of the conference room, a broad grin on his face. Susan walks to him.

SUSAN
That was quick. How'd it go?

ERIE
She told me to go fuck myself.

SUSAN
Oh. I'm sorry Erie.

ERIE
(a hopeful smile)
It's ok. I think she'll come round
in couple days. Throw me a bone,
make me say sorry three or four
more times, and then maybe we can
start over.

SUSAN
...maybe.

Susan's phone buzzes. She indicates for Erie to give her a minute, he nods.

SUSAN (CONT'D)
(into phone)
...Yes, Sir. ...ok. ...I'll be
right there.

Susan quickly puts her phone away.

ERIE
Everything alright?

SUSAN
Yeah, all good.
(re: phone)
Duty calls.

(MORE)

SUSAN (CONT'D)

You know your way out at this point
I'm guessing?

(off his grin; beat)

It was good seeing you, Erie.

Erie nods in agreement. Susan goes to walk away.

ERIE

-- I'm going to apply for a
teaching position on the ASCAN
Orbital Mechanics Program.

(Susan turns back)

It's in DC. If I get it... you
might see more of me.

SUSAN

I guess you better get it then.

She smiles, walks away. Erie watches her thumbprint open
double doors.

As they close, Erie notices the sign above the door --

"AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY"

The same door from earlier.

A beat. Erie looks at the closed door, debating, then glances
at a hallway to his left -- walks towards it.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - OFFICE CUBICLE AREA - DAY

Tom, the control room technician that helped Erie model the
satellite/ISS fly-by, works on his computer in a cubicle.

Erie arrives at the cubicle entrance.

TOM

Erie, holy shit! What are you doing
here?

ERIE

Just visiting. Catching up with
some folks.

Tom, hesitant, caught off guard.

TOM

...yeah? ...how've you been?

ERIE

Great. Couldn't be better.

(beat)

(MORE)

ERIE (CONT'D)

Hey, ah... I need your help with a bit of research. My nephew's doing a paper on the Mars Viking One landing probe. He read somewhere that the Russians put a nameplate on it.

TOM

Nameplate?

ERIE

Yeah. Thinks it would look cool on his cover page. The thing is, he can't find any images of it online.
(indicates Tom's PC)
I was wondering if you could search the archives for anything?

Tom looks at Erie, reluctant --

ERIE (CONT'D)

You'd be doing me a big favor, Tom. Said I'd help him out, trying to get back in his good books...

(beat; sincere)

Trying to get back in everyone's good books really.

Tom, softens, shrugs.

TOM

Sure.

He types on the keyboard, his screen facing away from Erie.

Tom presses enter repeatedly, types more, shakes his head --

TOM (CONT'D)

Ah... nope, ...sorry. No nameplates.

Erie, a wash of relief floods over him --

ERIE

Ok. Thanks for checking.

As he walks away, a relaxed smile cracks across his face.

TOM (O.S.)

Serial plate, though.

Erie stops, turns back.

ERIE
Excuse me?

Tom stands over his monitor, gestures towards it.

TOM
The Russians threw a serial plate
on there. Last minute job. Doesn't
appear in any of the official
photos.

Erie looks down, stares at the ground, then --

ERIE
8-3-6-9-0--

As Erie speaks, Tom is initially confused then looks down at
his screen --

ERIE (CONT'D)
--8-1-2-8-7-9.

TOM
(re: screen; chuckles
incredulously)
Jesus. How the hell did you know
that?

Off Erie's face --

SMASH TO BLACK:

THE END