

PROJECT: HAIL MARY

Screenplay by

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Based on the novel by

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INT. MEDICAL BAY

CLOSE ON A MAN'S EYES as they flutter towards consciousness.
A COMFORTING VOICE echoes around us:

VOICE
Eye movement detected.

The man groans. He's been out for quite some time.

VOICE (CONT'D)
*Cognition assessment. What's two
plus two?*

We will come to know the man as GRACE.

GRACE
Wh... where am I?

He's lying in some sort of medical bay. Various life-support tubes connect his body to complicated equipment.

His breath quickens. He grabs at the IV tubes in his arms.

VOICE
*Hand movement detected. Remain
still.*

He doesn't obey. He struggles to rip the tubes out of his body. ROBOTIC ARMS descend from the ceiling to prevent him from doing so.

VOICE (CONT'D)
Remain still.

He bats the arms away. He cries out in pain as he tears the tubes free. He rolls out of his bunk and hits the ground with a dull thud.

He's awake now.

Panic begins to overtake him. His heart starts POUNDING.

VOICE (CONT'D)
*Full-body motion detected.
Cognition assessment. What's two
plus two?*

GRACE
Where am I?

He struggles to his feet. The room is dark. There's A PALE LIGHT at the other end of the corridor. Grace is drawn towards the light. He steps carefully towards...

A VIEWING WINDOW.

And as Grace approaches, his breath catches in his throat as he sees --

STARS.

Endless. Cold.

He's in outer space.

In the reflection of the window, we see his eyes widen with recognition -- *Oh god I'm in space* -- and off HIS SHARP INTAKE OF BREATH --

CUT TO:

INT. MURPHY'S BAR - FLASHBACK

ULTRA-CLOSE on a flicking image. Are those... stars? No... they're pixels... we're looking at a NEWSCAST.

VOICE (ONSCREEN)

*We received confirmation about
ninety minutes ago that the
Arclight craft successfully
inserted into orbit around Venus...*

We're in MURPHY'S BAR. Classic Irish-American Pub. For some reason, this place is jam-packed on a Tuesday and --

Every single person in the bar is glued to the NASA newsfeed.

Including Grace.

He's at the corner of the bar, sitting alone. He leans forward, straining to hear the feed.

ONSCREEN: DR. BROWNE, head of Planetary Sciences for NASA, addresses A REPORTER from the gallery of the flight-control room at JPL.

DR. BROWNE

*Once it has passed through the
Petrova line, the Arclight will
have collected enough material for
its onboard analysis lab...*

A NASA GRAPHIC details the Arclight spacecraft's orbit. It intersects with a BRIGHT RED ARC cutting through the solar system. The label draws our attention:

*

"The Petrova Line."

REPORTER

And what do we hope to learn from
this first batch of data?

DR. BROWNE

(hesitates)

If I knew what was in the Petrova
line, it would sure save us all a
lot of trouble.

His joke falls flat. Behind him, the scientists and
technicians in the gallery stare up at that MAIN SCREEN.

The mood at JPL seems TENSE.

DR. BROWNE (CONT'D)

(recovering)

Arclight will collect samples from
the line and we'll be able to view
them through the internal
microscope --

Behind Dr. Browne, the graphic on the MAIN SCREEN in the
flight-control room switches to the Arclight data feed. It's
a grainy image. Nothing but black dots on a white
background. But as soon as the gallery sees it --

The whole flight-control room GASPS.

Dr. Browne whips around to look at the view screen.

INSIDE THE BAR, the patrons push forward to get a better look
at what's happening.

Grace tries to quiet the increasingly alarmed bar so he can
hear what the newsfeed is saying. *Shh.*

But on the screen, things have grown more CHAOTIC at JPL.
Even the reporter seems to have forgotten his job as everyone
stares and points at THAT MAIN VIEWSCREEN.

The black dots are MOVING.

INSIDE MURPHY'S -- the BARTENDER looks to Grace as if to say
What the hell is happening?

And we're CLOSE ON GRACE as he realizes why everyone at NASA
is reeling. *Oh my god...*

GRACE

I think we might be looking at the
first evidence of extraterrestrial
life.

ON THE SCREEN: as those black dots move with the chaotic consistency of a living organism...

CUT TO:

INT. CORRIDOR

Those static STARS. Cold and distant. Grace stands where we left him. Still fighting panic. Struggling to get his bearings. *

VOICE

Cognition assessment. What's two plus --

GRACE

Four.

Grace looks around. What is this place? He notices what looks like A HATCH on the wall.

VOICE

What's the cube root of eight?

GRACE

(has to think)

Two.

He tugs at the hatch. It doesn't budge.

VOICE

To open hatch, state your name.

He opens his mouth to answer... but nothing comes.

GRACE

It's...

(then)

It's...

He doesn't remember his name.

His heart starts to POUND.

VOICE

State your name.

GRACE

(struggling)

I... I don't know.

His eyes dart back down the corridor. Searching for any clue. He makes his way back to the room where he awoke...

It's still dark. He can barely make out his own med-bay. But as he crosses, he notices on the other side of the room --

Two more medical bays. With the dark silhouettes of bodies in them.

There are other people here.

Grace hurries over the first bed. He grabs the body -- wake up -- and GASPS when he sees --

She's DEAD. And looks like she's been dead for quite some time. Her mummified features almost seem peaceful in repose.

Grace backs away. Looks at the other bunk in apprehension. Finds ANOTHER BODY. Appears to be male. Also mummified.

Grace's hands start to shake.

His knees go weak as the situation overwhelms him. As he falls, ROBOTIC ARMS extend from the wall to catch him. He cries out, surprised. He fights them off -- get away -- as he slumps back against the bulkhead.

HOLD ON GRACE as the panic overtakes him. *He's alone.* In space. With two dead crewmates. He doesn't know why.

VOICE

Cognition assessment...

His eyes flash with terror. *He doesn't know his own name.*

CUT TO:

INT. CLASSROOM

CLOSE ON GRACE. He's standing at a large white board.

GRACE

It all comes down to light.

(then)

There's a downward trend in the sun's output. Right now the sun is point-oh-one percent less bright than it should be...

He seems to be sketching something complicated with a stylus. We're not yet wide enough to see *where* we are.

GRACE (CONT'D)

If it continues to follow the current exponential progression, the sun's output would drop a full percent over the next nine years.

(MORE)

GRACE (CONT'D)

Which would be... catastrophic.
(steps back from board)
Obviously.

Grace turns to face his audience... and we reveal:

A CLASSROOM filled with SIXTH GRADERS.

*Wait... Grace is a sixth grade teacher? How does he end up
in outer space? Sit tight -- the answer will come in time,
but for now, here's what's important:*

Both the classroom and Grace feel well-worn and rumped.
Nothing fancy -- the teachers make do with what they can.

A girl (TRAN) near the front of the class raises her hand.

TRAN

Are you sure you're supposed to be
teaching us this?

The look on Grace's face says, "Nope, I am not."

GRACE

We're encouraged to tie current
events into our curriculum here at
West Grover Cleveland Elementary.

TRAN

Principal Marder is gonna come sit
in on class. Again.

GRACE

Well he won't if you don't narc me
out, Tran. And besides, this is
science. Technically.

And as we roll along, we get the sense Grace treats his
students more like adults than sixth graders.

Which is exactly why they love him.

MAX

Why is the sun getting dimmer?

Grace nods, *good question, Max*. He heads back to the board --

GRACE

So two years ago, scientists notice
an infrared line appear in our
solar system... it's called the --

SILAS

Petrova line!

GRACE

I'm not giving you points for that,
Silas. It's written right here on
the board.

*
*
*

And so it is. Along with a very helpful diagram.

GRACE (CONT'D)

The Petrova line appears, the sun
starts getting dimmer. One theory
is an organism is affecting the sun
somehow. Think of it like...
algae, right?

*

IVY

Isn't algae an integral part of our
planetary biome?

*
*

GRACE

It's not a perfect metaphor.
(points to Petrova Line)
This could be bad algae. Bad...
space algae.

*

MAX

Bad space algae is eating the sun?

GRACE

We don't know, yet. It's a theory.
But Earth is getting slightly less
sunlight. And over time, that's...
catastrophic.

*
*

SOLEDAD

What does that mean?

GRACE

(searches)
"Involving great damage or
suffering..."

SOLEDAD
Not the word --

MAX
Suffering?

GRACE

It's like climate change. All of
the problems we've been having from
climate change --

IVY

My dad says that's not real.

GRACE

We all get your dad's emails, yes.
But it's real. And it happened
because CO2 emissions changed
Earth's temperature one and half
degrees. But with this --

(goes back to board)

Earth could cool ten to fifteen
degrees in the next thirty years.

(then)

Which would mean our crops would
die... which means our food chain
would collapse... which means a
significant portion of our
population would be...

(beat)

Not... here anymore.

There's an awkward silence as the grim reality Grace is
describing settles over the students. Grace stares at their
frightened faces, realizes he's overstepped.

PILAR

(quietly)

How are they gonna stop it?

Everyone turns to look at Pilar at the back of the room.

PILAR (CONT'D)

How are they gonna stop the sun
from dying?

Grace does his best to be reassuring.

GRACE

That's... what they're working on
right now.

PILAR

Who?

HOLD ON GRACE. Momentarily at a loss. Because the truth
is... he's scared, too.

PILAR (CONT'D)

Who's "they?"

CUT TO:

INT. SHIP

CLOSE ON GRACE as a glimmer of recognition flickers across
his face.

He struggles to his feet, crosses back to the hatch. *

VOICE

To open hatch, state your name.

GRACE

Ryland Grace.

The hatch swings open. Grace steps into THE REST OF THE SHIP. He finds another room up ahead:

It looks to be some sort of LABORATORY. There's a LAB TABLE mounted to the floor, EQUIPMENT lines the walls.

Grace stares at the room for a moment... as though it's triggering a memory. *This place seems familiar...*

He's still shaky, unsure. He steps carefully towards the front of the ship. There's A LADDER at the end of the passage... *

INT. COCKPIT

Grace climbs up into THE COCKPIT. Every surface covered with touchscreens and computer monitors. The technology feels advanced yet familiar. Grace sits down in the pilot seat.

VOICE

Pilot detected.

GRACE

Hello? Can anyone hear me? *

(then) *

I-I don't know what's happening... *

There's silence. Then. *

VOICE

Angular anomaly.

GRACE

I don't understand.

Grace leans forward, tries to make sense of the digital information streaming across the various screens.

GRACE (CONT'D)

What's -- *

VOICE

Angular anomaly. *

A blinking RED SHAPE draws Grace's attention to a MAP. *

VOICE (CONT'D)
Relative motion error. Auto-
correcting trajectory.

The MAP readjusts the course of a dot labeled HAIL MARY.
Grace taps on the screen. *

GRACE
That's us? *

He stares at the map. *Hail Mary*. The words seem to trigger
memory. He nods. *That's us*. He traces the guidance lines. *

GRACE (CONT'D)
This is our trajectory... *

The ship seems to be approaching a large circle. Numbers
flash across the screen, but one reading stands out to Grace.

GRACE (CONT'D)
This is... *

Wait. Grace's heart starts to POUND. *

GRACE (CONT'D)
What's our current velocity?

VOICE
Eleven-thousand, eight-seventy-two
kilometers per second.

GRACE
Eleven *thousand*? That can't be
right...

He looks at the map. Sees there's a tab marked "Live-feed."
He pushes it. Suddenly...

The screens at the front of the cockpit transform. As though
they're becoming the classic front glass window. Grace's
breath catches in his throat as he sees the starfield... and
that GIANT ORANGE SUN in the distance.

GRACE (CONT'D)
(in awe)
How far are we from Earth?

On the readout screen: distance designations cycle. It might
as well be a different language.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Show me.

He presses the "Main Screen" tab on the Map. *He's getting the hang of these controls.* Half the window is now THE MAP.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Show me our position relative to Earth.

And the map starts to WIDEN OUT. WHOOSH. And the HAIL MARY becomes tiny... and MORE CIRCLES fill the screen... as though we just zoomed out on our galaxy...

It takes Grace a moment to realize what he's looking at... there's ANOTHER CIRCLE marked "Sol" on the map... and a flashing cross designating "Earth."

And it's nowhere near his current position.

Grace's blood goes COLD. His eyes dart to the live-feed.

GRACE (CONT'D)

(realizing)

That's not our sun.

He tries to make sense of the map as PANIC overtakes him once again. *

GRACE (CONT'D)

Where are we? *

CUT TO:

EXT. HAIL MARY

And we (finally) cut outside the ship to see the HAIL MARY in ALL HER GLORY:

Her design feels man-made, in line with modern space design, yet unique. As though *she was built for a singular purpose.*

Her MASSIVE FUEL TANKS flare the darkness as she races through space. Heading towards that bright new star in the distance...

...that is not our sun.

CUT TO:

INT. CLASSROOM

A beautiful, paper-mache SUN slowly rotates in its central position of honor in Grace's classroom. He has a scale replica of our entire solar system hanging from the ceiling.

ANGLE DOWN from the sun to FIND GRACE. He's alone in the classroom, erasing the diagram of the Petrova line on the whiteboard. He glances up as his door opens... and a person he doesn't recognize enters without invite.

Her name is EVA STRATT. She has the type of effortless authority about her that makes you want to sit up straight and apologize for something you didn't do.

STRATT

Dr. Grace?

He nods.

STRATT (CONT'D)

Eva Stratt. I'm with the Petrova Taskforce. Did you write this?

She tosses a binder on his desk. We catch the title: "An Analysis of Water-Based Assumptions and Recalibrations of Expectations for Evolutionary Models."

GRACE

Sorry. Who... How did you get past security?

STRATT

I've been granted a considerable amount of authority by the United Nations to solve our current problem and, yes, superseding elementary school security does fall under than purview.

She taps the paper. *This is you?* He nods.

STRATT (CONT'D)

(flips it open)

I'm interested in this section. "The Goldilocks Zone Is For Idiots."

GRACE

I probably could have worded that better.

STRATT

You called Dr. Scyther a "staggering waste of carbon."

GRACE

I stand by that part.

STRATT

You called out dozens of the world's pre-eminent scientists for the common-held belief that water is necessary for life to evolve.

GRACE

(after a pause)

My paper writing days are over. Academia didn't work out for me.

STRATT

And you like working here? *

GRACE *

(hesitates) *

It's a job. *

STRATT

(regarding his paper)

You still believe this?

Grace shifts in place. Can't help but take the bait.

GRACE

There's nothing magical about hydrogen and oxygen. Water's required for *Earth* life, sure. But another planet could have completely different conditions. All life needs is a chemical reaction that results in copies of the original catalyst. You don't need water for that.

STRATT

(nods)

Good. I need you to come with us.

Us? Grace glances out the window of his classroom and sees SEVERAL BLACK SUVS and SUITED AGENTS in the parking lot. The whole group has a MILITARY feel. *Jesus, what is this?*

STRATT (CONT'D)

Roscosmos recovered the Arclight from low-Earth orbit. The Petrova samples are en route. I want you to examine them.

GRACE

You want me to examine the... space algae?

STRATT

(beat)

We're probably gonna need a better name for it than that.

GRACE

Why me?

STRATT

You have a doctorate in molecular biology.

GRACE

So do thousands of other people. Who weren't...

STRATT

Fired in disgrace for insubordination?

GRACE

...unappreciated in their time?

She grabs his binder.

STRATT

You're the only one who wrote this.
(then)
It survives on the surface of the sun. Does that sound like a water-based life-form to you?

Grace is flustered, but the question does give him pause. He considers what she's asking of him.

GRACE

I'd... I'll need to stop by my apartment first.

STRATT

We've already been to your apartment. Your bags are in the car.

Grace stops in his tracks. *What? Jesus...* But she holds his gaze, unapologetic. And we see real *fear* in Grace's eyes as he feels the full weight of what's happening: *

GRACE

The sun's really dying, isn't it?

Stratt nods. *Let's go.* She exits the room.

HOLD ON GRACE. Standing alone beneath that paper-mache solar system. As he stares at his students' EMPTY DESKS...

GRACE (PRELAP) (CONT'D)
I'm not entirely comfortable with
this...

INT. TASKFORCE LAB

Grace locks in the hood of his HAZMAT GEAR, his nervous breath fogging up his clear vinyl mask.

He's standing alone in an elaborate lab. In addition to his complicated protective gear, a multitude of cameras document his every move.

GRACE
Is all of this necessary?

Stratt overlooks the room through a large OBSERVATION WINDOW. She's flanked by twenty or so intimidating people in various military uniforms from around the world. She keys the speaker:

STRATT
It's possible you're about to make
contact with an alien life-form.
So... yes.

Grace approaches THE CONTAINER.

GRACE
There's no glove box here. I can't
expose the samples to normal air.

STRATT
The entire room is filled with
argon. Don't rip your suit.

Grace tries to keep his nerves in check. He opens the container. Inside is a clear plastic ball. It appears empty to the naked eye.

Huh. This is somewhat... underwhelming.

But Grace is in his element. He takes the ball over to the workstation. He splits it in half, mops one half with a cotton swab. He rubs the swab on a slide. Places the slide under a microscope.

THROUGH THE LENS: we see a much clearer image of the sample.

GRACE

Sample consists of many round objects. Almost no variance in size.

(adjusts backlighting)

Samples are opaque. I can't see inside, even at the highest available light setting.

STRATT

(impatient)

Are they alive?

GRACE

I can't determine that at a glance. What do you expect is gonna happen here?

STRATT

I expect you to confirm they're alive. Once you do that, I expect you to explain how they work.

GRACE

It took scientists two centuries to understand how bacteria work.

Stratt discusses something with the military personnel in her room. Grace can't hear what they're saying. Stratt turns her attention back to him, keys the speaker.

STRATT

Please do it faster.

Grace nods. *You got it, boss.* He turns his attention back to the microscope. As we ANGLE IN ON THOSE BLACK DOTS...

INT. OBSERVATION ROOM

Much later. Grace and Stratt sit alone in the room. Grace looks exhausted. He's covered in sweat, his hazmat suit half-around his waist as he details his findings.

GRACE

They give off infra-red light at the 25.984 micron wavelength...

STRATT

...the Petrova frequency...

GRACE

(nods)

Which is why we see a line arcing through our solar system...

He goes to the screens to help illustrate. He points to the simulation of PETROVA LINE.

STRATT

That's them?

GRACE

It's the *evidence* of them. It's their light. But the remarkable part is they only emit light when they move. And they emit a lot of light for a single-celled organism.

(then)

I'm pretty sure that light is how they move around.

STRATT

How is that possible?

GRACE

Light exerts force. If you were out in space and you turned on a flashlight, you'd get a teeny, tiny amount of force.

(so)

I measured their average mass at about twenty picograms. The movement I see is consistent with the momentum of emitted light.

STRATT

Is that something that happens in nature?

GRACE

No way. Nothing in nature has that kind of energy storage.

STRATT

They're coming from the sun and the sun is losing energy.

GRACE

(nods)

Which is why I think it's a life-form. It consumes energy, stores it in some way we don't understand, then uses it for propulsion.

STRATT

So the Petrova line is... tiny rocket flares?

GRACE

That's good. Yes. And the light goes away from their direction of travel.

They look back at THE PETROVA LINE.

STRATT

They're eating the sun and then moving on.

Grace nods.

STRATT (CONT'D)

I need to know how they store energy, how they travel... how they survive.

It's not a request.

GRACE

(deflates)

Don't you have somebody else?

STRATT

Of course. I have three-hundred and forty-seven other biologists in twenty-one different countries mobilizing as we speak. But you disagreed with all of them. And you were right.

(then)

So this is now your life.

Grace doesn't argue. Understands the severity of the situation.

STRATT (CONT'D)

(shakes her head)

We always assumed first contact would be some form of little green men in a saucer... instead it's just...

GRACE

Bad space algae.

STRATT

We're definitely gonna need a better name for it than that.

CUT TO:

INT. COCKPIT

CLOSE ON THE VIEWSCREEN. And ONE WORD fills up our entire screen:

"ASTROPHAGE"

Widen to reveal Grace. Still in the cockpit. Studying the viewscreen intently. His eyes drift to the THREE LARGE CYLINDERS holding the astrophage in question. There's another key word that stands out:

"FUEL"

And maybe we make the connection. *The astrophage is fuel.* Maybe we don't right now. That's fine. But what's important here is this image... and the LEVEL NUMBERS next to the fuel... suddenly triggers something in Grace.

And he starts to PANIC.

*

He unbuckles his seatbelt. Races out of the cockpit.

INT. LAB

Grace enters the lab. Moving with URGENCY. He surveys the panels on the walls. *There...*

"Supplies." He opens a panel. Inside: a cache of well-organized, soft-sided packing cubes. Grace rifles through the contents... *A-ha.*

He takes the cube to the lab table. Tears it open. A small WHITEBOARD. A selection of MARKERS. *Science just comes down to scribbling.*

Grace notices the VIEWSCREENS in the lab. He touches one, scrolls to find the same readout he saw in the cockpit:

FUEL: 20,862 kg... 20,811 kg...

Grace starts doing the math. He scribbles furiously. We see him pulling the figures from the screens:

CONSUMPTION RATE: 6.043 g/s...

ON THE WHITEBOARD -- Grace writes the word:

"DAYS LEFT"

His hand starts to shake as he does the division. He can barely bring himself to write the answer.

"40"

He drops the marker. He collapses in his seat. As he stares at the number... we see GENUINE DESPAIR wash over him.

Oh God. What do I do?

CUT TO:

EXT. HAIL MARY

The Hail Mary cuts through the cold distance of space. Heading towards THAT STAR...

INT. LAB

FROM DARKNESS -- an image blinks to life. We're looking at GRACE though a CAMERA POV. He's addressing us directly, as though this is an official type of OBSERVATION LOG.

However.

Nothing else about this seems official. Let's start with Grace. He looks ROUGH. His eyes are bloodshot, his hair unkempt. And the lab space behind him?

It's trashed.

Cabinets are open, containers are dumped all over the floor. All sorts of various equipment litters the area.

GRACE

Okay, so. We've got a lot to go over here...

His words seem a bit slurry. But he seems... upbeat?

GRACE (CONT'D)

This is Dr. Ryland Grace. It has been... almost three hours since I awoke from coma sleep. I'm still experiencing memory loss and disorientation but that... seems to be improving with time.

He takes a drink from what looks like AN IV BAG.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Shortly after awaking, I determined I am in a completely different solar system to complete an experiment that will most likely fail and I currently have enough fuel to last forty days... If I turned around right now, it'd take...

(MORE)

GRACE (CONT'D)

(does calculations)

...four years to get back to Earth.
Which means in forty days, the life
support systems shut down and I'll
die a horrific death. Oh! And
also I'm alone up here because the
rest of the crew is already dead.

(takes a drink)

So I had to process all that.

CUT TO:

INT. LAB - EARLIER

Grace TRASHES the room. Sheer meltdown. He's crying,
screaming, throwing equipment against the wall.

INT. LAB - CAMERA POV

GRACE

Somewhere in there I calmed down...

INT. VARIOUS - EARLIER

He did not calm down. QUICK SHOTS:

-- Grace pounds on the observation window and screams at
those STARS outside.

-- Grace stares at a WALL-SIZED SCREEN of JELLYFISH floating
underwater.

GRACE

(furious)

What the hell is this?!!!

-- Grace tosses CREW PERSONAL CONTAINERS on the floor in a
fury. Various items spill out -- photographs, mementos, etc.
Grace makes an absolute mess of things.

INT. LAB - CAMERA POV

Grace takes another drink from the bag.

GRACE

Eventually, I discovered
crewperson...

Reads the label on the bag.

GRACE (CONT'D)

"Ilyukhina" had several liters of
vodka in her personal effects. So
that's been... so clutch.

(MORE)

GRACE (CONT'D)

(thinks)

Although, one of the... interesting things about drinking vodka from a plastic bag is it's hard to tell how much you're consuming...

INT. DORMITORY - EARLIER

Grace, completely hammered, cries and cries as he places both palms on that JELLYFISH SCREEN.

INT. LAB - CAMERA POV

GRACE

So... I'm trapped in a spaceship... alone... somewhat hammered... with no chance of getting home. And the best I can hope for is a quick death when I run out of fuel and this ship shuts down.

(nods)

All things considered, I think I'm handling it well.

He might not be handling it well.

CUT TO:

INT. TASKFORCE LAB

A BANK OF MONITORS show A VARIETY OF DIFFERENT LABS. Labels detail the INTERNATIONAL OPERATION this has become. *Berlin... Stockholm... Beijing...*

All across the globe we see scientists hard at work in well-ordered laboratories.

And then we widen to reveal GRACE'S LAB.

Which now looks like a hot mad-scientist mess. Considerable time has passed since last we were here, and in that time Grace has transformed the entire space.

Every nook and cranny is now covered in DUCT TAPE and ALUMINUM FOIL. Grace rips a long piece of tape and starts duct-taping an infrared camera to his own head.

GRACE

This is not gonna work.

He gestures to the observation window, which is also covered with foil.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Steve, can you hear me?

STEVE (OVER INTERCOM)
Go ahead, sir.

GRACE
I'm shutting down all light. Keep
it dark out there.

STEVE
Understood, sir.

Grace fires up his makeshift infrared goggles and kills all the lights in the room.

INFRARED POV: as Grace studies his experiment through the IR, he dictates his findings:

GRACE
Astrophage Sample One found the
filter...

We see the HOT SPOT where the astrophage is located. POV shifts over to the second HOT SPOT...

GRACE (CONT'D)
As did Sample Two...
(searches)
Now where is Sample Three...

His camera searches the experiment table. And locates the THIRD HOT SPOT.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Third sample found the filter.
This reinforces how they --

And his EYES FIND a FOURTH HOT SPOT. And he actually JUMPS in surprise.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Oh shit.

He clumsily knocks his goggles off his face. He slams the table shut. Turns on the lab lights. Sits there in STUNNED SILENCE.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON A CELL PHONE. Grace dials "Stratt."

STRATT (OVER PHONE)
What.

GRACE

I think I... I figured out how
Astrophage reproduce.

STRATT

You "think?"

GRACE

I did it. I had three cells. Now
I have four.

STRATT

Can you repeat it?

GRACE

Yes.

STRATT

Don't move.

She hangs up. Grace sits in silence for a moment. Then we hear what sounds like A REAL COMMOTION march down the stairs to the door of Grace's lab.

The door opens and A MILITARY OFFICER (STEVE) steps into the room.

STEVE

Sir, you need to come with me.

Grace sees the look on Steve's face and realizes what it means. His shoulders slump.

GRACE

You're not gonna let me pack, are
you?

EXT. TRAVIS AIR FORCE BASE

Steve races the jeep across the tarmac. He stops beside a FIGHTER JET. AN AIR FORCE OFFICER is awaiting their arrival.

The officer hustles Grace out of the jeep. He herds Grace up the ladder and straps him into the seat behind the pilot.

It all happens so fast, Grace barely has time to protest. The officer hands Grace a pill and a cup of water.

OFFICER

Take this, sir. It'll keep you
from vomiting all over the cockpit.

GRACE

Where are we going?

OFFICER
I can't tell you that, sir.

The officer gives him an almost-condescending pat on the shoulder.

OFFICER (CONT'D)
It'll also help you sleep.

EXT. PACIFIC OCEAN

The fighter jet cuts through the air, angling downwards towards A LONE AIRCRAFT CARRIER. There's no land as far as the eye can see.

Grace is fast asleep.

EXT. FLIGHT DECK

The flight crew hustles a bewildered and groggy Grace out of the cockpit. Everything feels VERY LOUD.

Grace notices the naval crew helping him are all CHINESE. He looks up at the LARGE CHINESE FLAG flying overhead.

Behind him, the fighter jet takes off as soon as Grace is clear. Grace watches it go.

Where the hell am I?

INT. AIRCRAFT CARRIER - CORRIDORS - CONFERENCE ROOM

A CHINESE OFFICER marches Grace through the claustrophobic corridors. He eventually opens up a door and points inside. Grace enters...

...and stops in his tracks as an ENTIRE CONFERENCE ROOM turns and looks at him.

It's a diverse and eclectic bunch. Military personnel and top scientists from all around the world.

All staring at Grace.

Stratt sits at the head of the table.

STRATT
Dr. Grace. How was your flight?

GRACE
(um...)
Bad? I haven't gone to the bathroom in fourteen --

STRATT

I'm so sorry I asked. Ladies and Gentlemen, this is Dr. Ryland Grace from the United States. He figured out how to breed Astrophage.

And the room collectively GASPS. *What?* Everyone speaks over one another, equal parts astonished and infuriated.

The GERMAN MINISTER (VOIGHT) seems quite upset.

VOIGHT

Stratt, warum haben sie -- ?

STRATT

Nur Englisch, Voight.

VOIGHT

Why are we only hearing of this now?

STRATT

I wanted to confirm his results before I invited...
(gestures)
...opinion.

VOIGHT

This is hardly *opinion* --

An ELDERLY JAPANESE WOMAN in a lab coat speaks calmly. Her TRANSLATOR helps the group understand.

TRANSLATOR

Dr. Matsuka would like to respectfully request a detailed description of the process.

STRATT

You'll have it. While Dr. Grace was en route our technicians were packing up his lab.

A DISHEVELED RUSSIAN SCIENTIST looks to Grace. His name is DIMITRI KOMOROV. He points to the chair beside him. *

DIMITRI

You. Sit.

But Grace is desperate to get out of the room. *

GRACE

Oh, I won't be staying long. *

STRATT
You're definitely staying long.

*
*

DIMITRI
(to Grace)
Is it possible to breed Astrophage
on a large scale?

*
*

GRACE
S-sure.

*

DIMITRI
Explain how.

GRACE
(thinks)
In practical terms? You take an
elbow-shaped ceramic pipe and fill
it with carbon dioxide. Then...
make one end as hot as you can get
it and have a bright light there.
Put an IR emitter at the other end
of the elbow and have it emit light
at 4.26 and 18.31 microns. Make
the inside of the pipe as black as
you can.

*
*

The group starts to settle, trade glances with one another.
Grace is earning the respect of the room.

*

GRACE (CONT'D)
The Astrophage gather energy at the
sun side, then when they're ready
to breed, they follow that magnetic
field to the elbow. They'll see IR
light at the other end, carbon
dioxide makes them breed, parent
and daughter cells go back to the
sun side.

DIMITRI
How fast is the process?

GRACE
It would have a doubling time. I'm
not sure how long, but considering
the sun is getting dim it must be
pretty quick.

(then)
I'm happy to... put this all in an
email for you, as soon as I get
back to dry land...

*
*
*
*

A CHINESE SCIENTIST (XI) looks up from her phone --

XI

Our scientists have reproduced his results.

VOIGT

How? He just told us his process.

STRATT

Spies, presumably.

VOIGT

(furious)

You circumvent this counsel?

STRATT

She sure did. Who cares. What did you find, Ms. Xi?

XI

We estimate the doubling time to be just over eight days, under optimal conditions.

As the tensions escalate in the room, Grace moves to leave. *I'll just get out of your hair.* An AFRICAN DIPLOMAT (CHIMAMANDA) stops him --

*
*
*

CHIMAMANDA

So how much can we make? In, say, a year?

Grace glances at Stratt, she gives him a "Just sit the fuck down, Grace" look. He deflates, sits, pulls out the calculator on his phone --

*
*
*

GRACE

With the one-hundred fifty Astrophage we have... in one year you'd have 173,000 kilograms.

CHIMAMANDA

(looks to Stratt)

We need two million.

GRACE

Eight day doubling time. Add a month.

(then)

Why do you need that much Astrophage?

VOIGT

He doesn't have clearance.

STRATT

Grace, stand up.

(he does)

Dr. Ryland Grace, I hereby grant you top-secret clearance to all information pertaining to Project Hail Mary.

She looks to Voigt -- satisfied? He grimaces. Dimitri laughs.

DIMITRI

You voted to give her authority.

GRACE

What's Project Hail Mary?

CUT TO:

AN INTRICATE DIGITAL MAP of the STARS fills the screens in the room. Ms. Xi stands at the front and explains.

XI

The sun is not the only star dying. And there's a clear pattern of infection.

The map shows our star infected by WISE 0855-0714... which was infected by SIRIUS... which was infected by EPSILON ERIDANI... The map branches outward through the galaxy.

XI (CONT'D)

Every star was infected by its neighbor.

(then)

Except one.

The map isolates on a star cluster, centers on ONE STAR.

GRACE

Tau Ceti?

STRATT

Eleven point nine light years away. It's uninfected, despite being well within the cluster of infected stars.

GRACE

Why?

STRATT

We don't know. That's what we want to find out. So we're gonna make a ship and send it there.

Grace looks at her like she's insane.

GRACE

It's twelve light years away. You can't just... make an interstellar ship.

STRATT

The ship is not the problem. The energy required to power the ship is the problem.

DIMITRI

It was the problem.
(nods to Grace)
Assuming he's right.

STRATT

Dr. Komorov heads up the Russian Federation's research into Astrophage.

DIMITRI

Please call me Dimitri. Astrophage turns energy into mass. Then, when it wants the energy back, it turns that mass into light.

GRACE

(realizing)
You're gonna use the Astrophage as fuel.

DIMITRI

Provided we can make enough of it. Which is why you are now my new best friend.

STRATT

(to Grace)
The flight hangar is empty. Just tell me what you need for your lab and I'll make it happen.

It's not a question. Grace struggles to understand the ramifications of everything that's happening.

GRACE

If what Dimitri is saying is accurate, the potential energy expenditure of that much Astrophage could be...

(does the math)

Cataclysmic.

STRATT

Why do you think we're working in the middle of the Pacific Ocean? If you screw up out here, we won't accidentally vaporize California.

Dimitri laughs and claps a (now very pale) Grace on the shoulder.

DIMITRI

Welcome to the team.

CUT TO:

INT. HAIL MARY - STORAGE

CLOSE ON A MISSION PATCH: "**Hail Mary**" above the Earth.

It's been some time since we left Grace. He seems less frazzled (or more sober.) He organizes the personal bins as he finishes cleaning the mess he made earlier. *

His eyes linger on the FLIGHT SUITS in storage. He studies the corresponding names on the suits: *

"Yao" and "Ilyukhina"

As he considers what to do next -- *

GRACE (V.O.) *

It's not like there's a great option here... *

CUT TO:

INT. HAIL MARY - DORMITORY

Grace makes his way to the dormitory. He's carrying the flight suits under his arm. *

GRACE (V.O.) *

They don't really build spaceships with morgues in them. *

Grace approaches the bodies of Yao and Ilyukhina. They're still in their med-bays, covered by sheets. *

GRACE (V.O.)

And even if I could put them
somewhere where they're not giving
me the heebie-jeebies... we're
never going back home anyway. This
all ends the same way -- with us
floating in space.

(then)

But at least I can give them some
dignity.

Grace takes a deep breath. *C'mon Yao, let's get you
dressed...*

INT. HAIL MARY - CORRIDOR

Grace carries the (now clothed) body of Yao in his arms.
It's as awkward as you'd expect it to be.

GRACE (V.O.)

Okay, maybe "dignity" isn't the
best word for this.

Grace winces as he nearly knocks the body into the wall --
awww, c'mon.

GRACE (V.O.)

But I'm doing what I can.

As Grace carries Yao into the airlock --

STRATT (PRELAP)

The problem is time...

INT. AIRCRAFT CARRIER - HANGAR LAB

Stratt conducts a meeting of the Hail Mary Team in the newly
bustling LABORATORY that has been built inside Hangar One.

STRATT

Our maximum size for the Hail Mary
is one hundred twenty-five cubic
meters. Which means the crew
compartment has room for three
people...

CHIMAMANDA

...and we're estimating a four-year
travel time to Tau Ceti.

STRATT

You put three people in a small
space for that long, and they'll
kill each other.

VOIGT

We simply have to find the right three people.

Stratt tosses a set of files at them.

STRATT

It's not hyperbole. They'll actually kill each other.

Grace picks up his copy of the file. Cyrillic writing translated to English. A few words stand out "...Effects of Close-Quartered Isolation..."

STRATT (CONT'D)

Russians tested it at the height of the Space Race, trying to put together a plan for Mars. Multiple sets of potential cosmonauts. The average any group made it before violence broke out was ninety-one days. In one case, a subject stabbed another one after with broken glass after one hundred-and-ten. No group lasted longer than one hundred thirty-one.

GRACE

Is it possible the subjects were just more violent because they're Russian?

Dimitri nods, good-natured. *Yes, good point.*

STRATT

It's not just the external aggression. Each crew member would spend the four-year journey knowing it's a one-way trip, and that the rooms on the ship are all they're going to know for the rest of their short life. Our psychiatrists think depression is highly likely, and suicide is a real risk...

INT. HAIL MARY - CORRIDOR

*

Grace carries the (dressed) body of Ilyukhina towards the airlock.

*

*

STRATT (V.O.)

Who would sign up for that?

INT. AIRCRAFT CARRIER - HANGAR LAB

Stratt tosses another brief to the group.

STRATT

Option B. A couple years ago a medical group in Thailand looked at putting cancer patients into comas for aggressive chemotherapy treatments.

XI

They tested this on humans?

STRATT

Primates. And the long-term coma subjects did not fare well. Primates either died during coma or came out of it with significant cerebral impairment.

GRACE

This option sounds worse. Maybe we go with a non-Russian version of Option A?

STRATT

Page 47. They did a follow up study. They were trying to find what humans who survived long-term comas unscathed had in common. Short-answer: it's genetic. A select group of the population has a gene combination that gives them a degree of "coma resistance." Their term. They ran tests on primates with those genes and every single one survived long-term with no ill-effects.

VOIGT

So we do DNA tests on all applicants and put the crew in comas...

STRATT

We'd have to develop a completely automated monitoring and action system to take care of the crew while they're under. And even then, there's no guarantee. Machines break, things go wrong...

GRACE (CONT'D)

but I remember you were funny. You brought letters from your parents when you were a little girl at summer camp... Anatoly and Sasha. I'm sure they're proud of you.

(then)

You both deserve better than this. I wish... I wish you were still here. I-I don't want to die...

(then)

But... I'll do my best to make sure this wasn't all...

He can't quite say "in vain."

GRACE (CONT'D)

I'll do what I can.

(shifts)

I put some of the photos of your loved ones in your flightsuits. So you're not... alone.

Grace is out of words. He nods.

Goodbye.

He shuts the airlock door. He stares at the two bodies of his crew mates through the window.

A moment of silence. Then Grace keys the panel and presses "**JETTISON.**" The airlock decompresses. The outer door releases.

Whoosh. The bodies Yao and Ilyukhina are jettisoned to space. They fall away from view. The outer door closes.

Grace stands in the ensuing quiet. He stares at the stars.

INT. DORMITORY - LATER

Grace sits in front of that WALL-SIZED SCREEN we saw earlier. It's now showing waves crashing on a beach. Open space seems to envelop Grace. The waves rise and fall... rise and fall... It's hypnotic...

Grace breathes... and breathes...

A LIGHT begins to flash. Grace turns his attention to the ship's readout screen.

An ALARM begins to sound.

VOICE
*Approaching Tau Ceti. Prepare for
 deceleration.*

Grace's face falls. *Oh shit...*

INT. COCKPIT

Grace races into the cockpit. And the sight on the
 viewscreen stops him in his tracks.

TAU CETI. Up close in all her glory. The screens are
 heavily filtered so Grace can view it at all, but the star is
 no less impressive. Grace stares in wonder.

I'm in another solar system.

VOICE
 10... 9... 8...

Oh, crap. Grace remembers the matter at hand.

VOICE (CONT'D)
 7... 6... 5...

He dives towards the chair.

VOICE (CONT'D)
 4... 3... 2...

He scrambles to get the belt buckled.

VOICE (CONT'D)
 1.

He doesn't make it in time.

Gravity hits zero. Grace floats up in the air.

He flails about, awkwardly holding tight to one end of the
 seatbelt, which flips him upside down.

None of this is graceful.

Grace pulls himself downward, into the chair. After some
 struggling, he manages to get the seatbelt in place. *Click.*

GRACE
 Don't throw up. Don't throw up.
 Don't throw up.

He manages to get himself under control. Phew.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 Okay. Okay.

He turns his attention back to THAT BEAUTIFUL STAR.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 I need a Petrovascope.
 (hmmm)
 "Toggle Petrovascope."

VOICE
*Command unknown. Please state
 clearly your desired command.*

GRACE
 I want to view Tau Ceti through the
 Petrovascope.

VOICE
Command unknown. Please state --

GRACE
 I want you to be quiet.

Silence.

GRACE (CONT'D)
That worked?

Okay, fine. He starts scrolling through the viewscreens.
 Finds what he's looking for: PETROVASCOPE. He presses the
 button.

The MAIN VIEWSCREEN shifts to the Petrovascope view. Grace
 GASPS when he sees:

A beautiful, dark red ARCH coming from the bottom of Tau
 Ceti. *Oh my god...*

GRACE (CONT'D)
 (excited)
You do have a Petrova line.

*

BEHIND GRACE: several screens start flashing. It looks an
 awful lot like some sort of ALARM.

But Grace doesn't notice. He's too focused on Tau Ceti.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 Now why aren't you dying...

BEHIND GRACE:

AN OBJECT

Enters frame on the map. It starts moving closer and CLOSER to the Hail Mary.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 (thinking to himself)
 I need to isolate the line...

He searches for camera controls... and turns to see the FLASHING ALERTS. He nearly jumps out of his seat.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 What the hell is that?

Silence.

Goddamnit. Grace searches for and un-clicks the MUTE key.

Suddenly a CACOPHONY of ALARMS blares in the cockpit.

GRACE (CONT'D)
What the hell is that?

VOICE
*Foreign Object... Proximity
 Alert...*

GRACE
 What kind of object?

He sees movement on one of the small side cam screens. He swipes it up to the main viewscreen. And all at once WE REVEAL:

A spaceship. More specifically...

A very alien spaceship.

And it's heading straight towards us.

Grace PANICS. His fight-or-flight kicks in -- *get out of there, Ryland* -- and he UNBUCKLES HIS SEAT BELT...

...and immediately floats straight up in the air.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 No. NO. Damnit --

He twists and flips like some sort of injured bird. Behind him on the screens the spaceship keeps approaching...

EXT. HAIL MARY

...and we cut outside to get the FULL VIEW OF THAT SHIP.

It's three times the size of the Hail Mary. Its angular lines and strange materials suggest construction by a wholly otherworldly intelligence.

It's beautiful. It's terrifying. It maneuvers in close to the Hail Mary and stops.

Grace is no longer alone out here.

INT. COCKPIT

Click. Grace somehow manages to pull himself back into his seat and fasten the seatbelt. He'd be embarrassed if he wasn't so panicked. He wipes the sweat from his brow.

Pull it together, Ryland.

He stares at the ship. He breathes... and breathes...

Okay...

Now what?

He reaches for the pilot controls. *Let's get out of here.* But as he's about to engage the engines, something stops him. He stares at the ship, hand hovering over that button.

An idea hits Grace.

He taps the spin drive.

EXT. HAIL MARY

The Hail Mary's thrusters flare ONCE.

INT. COCKPIT

Grace watches the alien ship. Keeping particular focus on THE THRUSTERS.

They flare. *Once. Just like the Hail Mary's did.*

Grace taps the controls again. Tap... tap... tap...

EXT. HAIL MARY

The Hail Mary's thrusters flare THREE TIMES.

The alien ship's thrusters do the same. *One... Two...*

INT. COCKPIT

Three. Grace pumps his fist when he sees the response. Yes.

They're communicating.

As Grace tries to determine his next move, he notices SOMETHING MOVING on the hull of the ship. He adjusts the camera, ZOOMS IN...

It looks like A ROBOTIC ARM is sliding along a series of tracks along the hull. It stops when it reaches a position closest to the Hail Mary.

It seems to be holding something.

Grace zooms in further. *What IS that?* It looks like some sort of CYLINDER.

The robot reaches out towards the Hail Mary... and releases the cylinder into space.

Grace tenses as he sees the cylinder slowly spinning end over end. Heading towards the Hail Mary.

Think, Ryland.

INT. HAIL MARY - CORRIDOR

Grace floats through the ship, moving with purpose. He's clearly getting more comfortable in zero-g.

He floats to the airlock. Opens the inner door and pulls out the ORLAN-MKS2 EVA SUIT. He opens the chrysalis lock on the back of the suit and CLIMBS INSIDE.

INSIDE THE SUIT: Grace watches the systems boot up as the suit autoseals him inside.

He closes the inner airlock door. He clips himself onto the tether. He begins the cycling sequence... the airlock starts to pressurize...

HOLD ON GRACE while the airlock cycles. We hear his HEAVY BREATHING inside the suit.

What the hell am I doing?

The pump stops. Grace takes a deep breath.

He opens the outer door.

LIGHT FROM TAU CETI fills the airlock. Grace stands at the threshold, takes in the awe-inspiring view. *There's the alien ship... Tau Ceti in the distance... the endless starfield...*

And that canister.

It's continuing its slow, graceful journey towards the Hail Mary. Grace studies its trajectory, tries to ascertain where it will land. Roughly the middle of the ship.

Grace climbs out on the hull. The ship is crisscrossed with rails and latch points for EVA tethering. Tether by tether, rail by rail, Grace makes his way to the center of the ship.

He locks himself in place. Waits. The cylinder flips towards him. He reaches out...

And catches it.

He studies the canister. It's about the size of a coffee can. Seems to be hollow.

Something is inside.

INT. LAB

Grace floats into HIS LAB. He releases the canister. It floats in mid-air. Grace thinks.

He pulls himself over to the touchscreen. Cycles through the controls. Finds it...

"ENGAGE CENTRIFUGE SEQUENCE"

Grace starts the procedure.

ALERTS ring out through the corridors...

EXT. HAIL MARY

The Hail Mary begins to SPIN.

INT. LAB

ONSCREEN: **Pitch Rate** climbs to **20.71 degrees per second...**
Lab Gravity climbs towards **1.00 g...**

Both Grace and the canister float down.

The canister settles on the table.

Gravity achieved.

Grace sits down at the table. Takes the canister in hand. It's largely featureless. Save for one thin GROOVE running around the circumference. *Is that a lid?* Grace tries to pull it open. It's no use. *Hmmm.* He tries to unscrew it...

And the cylinder clicks open.

Grace pulls the halves apart. IN THE BOTTOM HALF he reveals what looks like... some sort of sculpture. *Or model.* Whiskers hold up TWO METAL SPHERES. One large, one small. And a parabolic shape connecting the two.

Hmm. Grace seems to recognize it. *This seems familiar.*

He turns his attention to the TOP HALF of the canister. Inside is ANOTHER MODEL. This one's much more complicated. Dozens of whiskers connect dozens of spheres.

Grace unfurls the model across the table. It forms a sort of disc with ONE LARGE SPHERE in the middle and thirty-one smaller spheres radiating around it.

ONE FILAMENT connects the large sphere to one of the smaller spheres. Grace studies it. Realizes...

GRACE (V.O.)
It's a map...

CUT TO:

Grace scrolls through the star charts on the view screen. He positions Tau Ceti at the center of the diagram... Looks to THE LARGE SPHERE.

He spins the star chart so it matches the model on the table. Thirty-one stars click into position *just like the model.*

Grace traces the filament to the smaller star. Finds it on the screen. A star labeled "**40 Eridani.**"

GRACE (V.O.)
They're telling me where their home is. The 40 Eridani system. And they've come to Tau Ceti.

Grace goes back to the first model. One large sphere and one small one. And THAT LINE connecting the two.

GRACE (V.O.)
And I think they're telling me *why.*
It's a Petrova line...

INT. LAB

Grace is talking to his documentation camera while he works on the model. He has a SOLDERING IRON out and he's soldering A WIRE to Tau Ceti.

GRACE
I think they might be here for the same reason we are.

He solders the other end of the wire to A STAR. He checks the viewscreen to makes sure it's the right one. "**Sol.**"

Then he takes some paraffin and attaches his own small Petrova line to Sol.

INT. AIRLOCK

The outdoor airlock door opens. Grace (in his EVA suit) holds up THE CANISTER. Aims it at the center of the alien ship. He lets it go. *It floats away...*

INT. COCKPIT

Grace watches the screens. The robot arm slides along the alien ship and lets ANOTHER CANISTER go.

INT. AIRLOCK

Grace watches the next canister float towards him. *They aimed it at the airlock this time.*

Grace catches the canister. Looks out at the alien ship.

He gives a little wave. *Thank you.*

Grace feels self-conscious. *Did I just wave at a spaceship?*

INT. LAB

Grace opens the new canister. It's another model. It takes Grace a moment to realize what he's looking at... *it's a small ship... and another one... wait...*

It's a perfectly scaled model of the Hail Mary and the alien ship. And there's an umbilical tunnel connecting the two.

Grace stares at the model. Realizes what this means.

They want to meet.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. HAIL MARY

It's now happening in real life. The two ships have maneuvered right next to one another. And there's an umbilical tunnel extending out from the alien ship.

Just like on the model.

INT. HAIL MARY

Grace stands in his EVA suit, nervously watching the tunnel extend TOWARDS HIS AIRLOCK.

The Hail Mary SHAKES as the tunnel makes contact.

Grace watches the screens as the robot arms slide along the umbilical. They seem to be fastening the tunnel to the airlock.

HOLD ON GRACE as the nervous anticipation starts to overtake him. *What's about to happen here?*

And just like that, the work settles. The robot arms retract. The tunnel holds in place.

Grace steels himself. *Here we go.*

He opens the inner door. Steps inside. Cycles the airlock. Opens the outer door...

INT. TUNNEL

The airlock door swings open to reveal A DARK TUNNEL. Grace turns on his helmet lamps. Steps into the darkness.

Grace floats cautiously through the tunnel. His sweeping lights illuminating just enough to see a few steps in front of him. He tries to keep his breathing under control.

He looks at his arm computer. Studies the atmosphere readings. Wait. *That's strange. The tunnel is pressurized.* Grace glances back at the airlock. He doesn't have time to fully process what that means because UP AHEAD...

...is a wall.

*

It's a dead end, of sorts. Grace approaches and sees the whole wall is composed of different colored and textured HEXAGONS. Almost all of them are opaque, but one, near the bottom, is TRANSLUCENT.

Grace pulls himself low. Tries to look through the small window. Sees only darkness. He taps on the window. *Tap, tap, tap...*

He glances back through the window. Darkness. And then...

A CLAW enters frame.

Grace JUMPS. What the hell is that?

The claw taps on the window. *Tap, tap, tap.*

Grace tries to keep his panicked breathing under control. He sees movement on the other side of the window. He (somewhat reluctantly) lowers himself down to the window once again.

THROUGH THE WINDOW: a claw is holding a small replica of the HAIL MARY. Just like the one in the canister.

ANOTHER CLAW enters frame. Holding something else...

It's a small figurine of AN ASTRONAUT.

Is that...

GRACE

Is that me?

The claw moves the astronaut into the Hail Mary.

Grace glances over his shoulder. Gets the message:

GRACE (CONT'D)

You want me to go back inside?

INT. HAIL MARY

Grace watches the camera feeds. He now has a camera placed so the angle is looking DOWN THE TUNNEL. He can barely make out THAT WALL on the far end.

The wall slides backwards. *As though something was pulling it back into darkness.*

Grace struggles to see what the hell is happening. But there is only darkness.

INT. LAB

Grace keeps a tense eye on the VIEWSCREENS as he tries to address HIS OWN CAMERA.

GRACE

Um. So. The situation has escalated. There's now a... claw... involved.

Get ahold of yourself, Grace.

GRACE (CONT'D)

I believe I have made first contact with an alien species. It does not seem hostile. But it does seem...

(searches)

...up to something.

ON THE VIEWSCREENS: ANOTHER WALL slides into place. And this one is COMPLETELY CLEAR.

But it's STILL DARK in that tunnel. Grace can barely make out movement beyond as what looks like a claw appears behind the window...

Knock... knock... knock...

Grace stares at the screens. At a complete loss for words.

Knock... knock... knock...

INT. AIRLOCK

Grace (in his EVA suit) waits for the airlock to cycle.

He does his best to keep his BREATHING under control.

The DOOR OPENS. Grace checks his arm computer. Yes, the tunnel is still pressurized. And he notices something else...

...the external oxygen levels are high. That's strange...

Can I take my EVA suit off in this tunnel?

But he doesn't chance it. Not right now. He makes his way down that dark tunnel.

And this time he's prepared. As he pulls himself down the tunnel, he stops every few meters and tapes FLASHLIGHTS and CAMERAS to the walls. Giving him (and us) a MUCH BETTER view of things.

And there, at the end, is that wall of TRANSLUCENT HEXAGONS. As Grace pulls himself forward, his LIGHTS illuminate the darkness beyond...

And AN ALIEN walks forward into the light.

Grace nearly jumps out of his skin.

GRACE

Oh! Oh my god.

At first glance, it looks like a LARGE SPIDER. It's about the size of a Labrador, with FIVE LEGS radiating out from a central carapace. No sign of an eyes or face anywhere.

Each leg has an elbow and ends in a sort of hand with three fingers. Its entire body seems to be made of segmented ROCK.

And it's wearing A SHIRT. A cloth garment covers its carapace. Complete with holes for its many legs.

Grace stands there frozen. Not sure what to do. And then...

The alien WAVES.

Just like Grace did earlier in the airlock.

It takes Grace a moment to register what's happening. *The alien is waving at me?* Grace slowly lifts his arm...

And waves back.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Hello.

ALIEN

MrrrrrooEEEEEOowww --

GRACE

(jumps)

OH SHIT you can talk --

"Talk" is not exactly accurate. It sounds more like a collection of whale songs. Chords overlap to create an almost musical cacophony.

GRACE (CONT'D)

(studying the alien)

How can you talk... you don't even have a mouth...

The sounds seem to emanate from inside the carapace. Grace listens in awe. It's lovely.

The alien waves again.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Yes.

(swallows)

Good. Hello again.

The alien moves towards the wall. Grace, as a reflex, takes a few steps backwards. *

The alien seems to mimic Grace, moving backwards. *

Grace studies the alien. *Is it just doing what I'm doing?* *

Grace tests his theory. He steps towards the alien, waves his arms around. The alien approaches, does the same. *

They begin to mirror one another. Like some sort of bizarre pantomime. It's strangely hypnotic. Grace sways his body. The alien does the same. Grace spins in zero-G. The alien does the same. It almost feels like a dance.

Grace laughs.

ALIEN
EeeeeeuUUU...

Is the alien... laughing?

They continue to mirror one another. They go back and forth. Then...

The alien moves forward. Grace does the same. The alien taps on the glass. Grace does the same.

The alien taps harder on the glass. Grace does the same.

And now the alien seems to appear ANNOYED.

ALIEN (CONT'D)
RrrrreeeeooOOORRRR --

GRACE
What? Sorry -- I thought we were doing a thing there.

The alien waves its arms, gesturing at the glass with conviction.

Is it trying tell Grace something?

GRACE (CONT'D)
What -- I don't understand...

The alien taps at the wall. Then moves like it's turning around. *You want me to turn around?*

Grace turns around. And as he does so, he sees --

There. Up in the seam of the tunnel... there's a PACKAGE of some kind.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Is that for me?

He floats over to the wall. And finds two large spheres. One has an embossed image of THE HAIL MARY. The other has an image of the ALIEN SHIP.

Grace opens his sphere. And removes what looks like a long string of beads. Grace unfurls it, gets a better look.

Two circles of threaded beads connected by a bridge of thread. Each circle has eight beads attached.

GRACE (CONT'D)

What is this?

The alien makes whale sounds. Grace stares at the beads.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Is this a necklace?

(gestures)

You want me to wear this?

Maybe it's Grace's imagination, but the alien seems to look at him like he's stupid.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Okay. No.

It's not a necklace. Grace turns his attention to the beads. Hmm. Something about this seems familiar...

The alien takes its two front arms and waves them in two circles. Seems to be gesturing at the tunnel itself.

Grace looks up and around. *What is it about the tunnel?*

He takes a deep breath.

Wait...

His breath.

GRACE (CONT'D)

(realizing)

It's oxygen.

He holds the chains up again. Getting excited.

GRACE (CONT'D)

These are atoms, the beads are protons. Two atoms, each with eight protons. Oxygen! Twice. O₂.

(yes)

This is my atmosphere.

(thinks)

You're telling me you understand my atmosphere.

He looks down at his arm readouts.

GRACE (CONT'D)

That's why the oxygen levels are so high. You made the tunnel safe for me.

Grace stares at the alien. Amazed.

He double checks his arm readouts. Yes, everything looks good. *Do I chance it?*

Grace opens his helmet. He takes a deep breath. *Oxygen.* Grace laughs. The alien shakes its carapace, as though mimicking his laughter.

Okay, now we're getting somewhere.

Grace turns his attention to THE OTHER SPHERE. It has an indentation of THE ALIEN SHIP.

GRACE (CONT'D)

And this is you?

He points to the alien. Then he waves his two hands at the surrounding air, *just like the alien did earlier.*

The alien makes an excited sound. Waves its two arms around. As if to say: *Yes yes -- you understand!*

ALIEN

OwweeeAAAooooWWWWW...

Grace looks down at the sphere.

CUT TO:

INT. LAB

The sphere now sits open on the lab table as Grace removes THE CONTENTS. There are A WHOLE LOT MORE beaded chains.

Grace spreads them out on the table. As he studies them...

GRACE (V.O.)

He gave me seven protons connected to three individual atoms with one proton.

(then)

One nitrogen attached to three hydrogens...

INT. LAB

Grace is detailing his findings for his CAMERA.

GRACE

Ammonia. He breathes ammonia. Which is why everything he sends me smells like cleaning fluid. And he gave me one O2 molecule for me and twenty-nine ammonia molecules for him, which means he has twenty-nine times as much atmosphere as I do. We don't have... remotely compatible environments. Under that pressure, I'd die in seconds if I was on his side of the tunnel. And I'm guessing he wouldn't do so well over here...

Grace trails off. *This is going to be challenging.*

GRACE (CONT'D)

But. We have sound and pantomime. That's a good start for communication.

(beat)

We'll do our best -- he seems to have an advanced level of intelligence. He's already demonstrated an understanding of molecular science, and he seems remarkably adept at mechanical engineering.

(thinks)

And his name is Rocky.

(yes)

I've named him Rocky. On account of the fact that he looks like a giant rock.

On the viewscreens BEHIND GRACE, Rocky approaches the translucent wall. **Knock knock knock...**

Grace jumps, surprised. Sees Rocky. *Damn it.*

GRACE (CONT'D)

He's also really impatient.

Knock knock knock...

GRACE (CONT'D)

(yells)

Okay!

(to camera)

No idea if he can hear me or not.

ON THE SCREEN. Rocky keeps KNOCKING.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 (thinks)
 I need to figure out how to teach
 him about time.

Grace realizes the difficulty of what he's saying. *Hmmm...*

GRACE (CONT'D)
 How the hell am I gonna teach him
 about time...

CUT TO:

INT. TUNNEL

Grace is holding AN ANALOG CLOCK in his hands as approaches the wall. He's no longer wearing his EVA suit -- he's already comfortable in this tunnel.

GRACE
 All right, Rocky. This is a clock.
 These are the hands. This is how
 they spin. See...

Grace turns the dial on the back so the clock hands spin.

Rocky makes a circular motion with his hands.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 Yes. Good. Now...

Grace sets the clock to 12:00. He takes a dry erase marker and draws hands for 2:00.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 (gestures)
 I'll be back here when the clock
 matches... this.

Rocky reaches forward with his hands, then pulls them back. He repeats the gesture.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 I don't understand.
 (then)
 You want me to bring it closer?

Grace does. He pushes the clock up against the wall. Rocky *
 seems confused. *

Grace tries to show him the clock hands again. But he has to *
 pull it off the glass. *

GRACE (CONT'D) *
 This is twelve. I'll be back at *
 two. See? *

But Rocky doesn't seem to understand. And as Grace studies *
 him... and studies the simple, black and white numbers on the *
 clock face... he realizes something. *Wait...* *

GRACE (CONT'D) *
 Can you see? *

Grace looks behind Rocky. To the airlock. Where everything *
 is DARK. Come to think of it, there's no lights on Rocky's *
 ship... *

GRACE (CONT'D) *
 You're blind, aren't you? *

INT. LAB *

Grace addresses camera. He's holding the clock as he thinks. *

GRACE *
 I assumed he saw in frequencies of *
 light I can't see. *
 (demonstrates with clock) *
 But any vision in any spectrum *
 should be able to discern black and *
 white... *

INT. TUNNEL *

Grace is waving his hands in front of Rocky. *

GRACE (V.O.) *
 But he knows what I'm doing... he *
 can mimic my gestures. *

Rocky waves his arms just like Grace does. *

INT. LAB *

Grace now has the clock open and is in the process of fitting *
 raised pieces to all the flat numbers. *

GRACE *
 My working theory is he "sees" with *
 sound. Sort of how we use *
 electromagnetic waves to understand *
 our three-dimensional environment. *
 Or how dolphins use echolocation to *
 do kick-ass dolphin stuff. *
 Passive sonar. *
 (MORE)

GRACE (CONT'D)

Ambient sound waves to resolve
their environment. On steroids.

He holds the new clock up, pleased with his work.

GRACE (CONT'D)

So the sonar can see clock hands...
but it can't see ink. It needs
surface area... something for sound
waves to bounce off of...

INT. TUNNEL

CLOSE ON GRACE'S CLOCK -- he's replaced all the flat ink with
raised numerals.

GRACE

Okay, try this.

Grace holds the clock up against the wall. Rocky immediately
seems more engaged than before.

GRACE (CONT'D)

This is twelve.

Grace moves the hands again. Places the piece at "2:00."

Rocky starts to bounce, as though he's excited. He raises
his hands and sort of waves them.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Good? Jazz hands means "good?"

Rocky waves his hands again. Grace nods. *Okay then. Jazz
hands means good.*

Rocky holds up one finger. *Wait.*

Grace is impressed. *They're learning each other's gestures.*

GRACE (CONT'D)

Yes. I'll wait.

Rocky disappears back into his ship. He returns carrying A
CYLINDER.

GRACE (CONT'D)

You guys really like cylinders,
don't you?

Rocky holds it up so Grace can get a better look at it. The
cylinder has five horizontally aligned windows. Each window
has a shape. *Are they letters?*

The symbol on the right rotates away and is replaced by another. After a few seconds, it happens again. And again.

GRACE (CONT'D)

It's a clock! I showed you a clock, so you showed me a clock.

Grace points from his clock to the cylinder.

Rocky does jazz hands. *Yes, good!*

As Grace studies Rocky's hands...

GRACE (V.O.)

Best I can tell, they use base six for their numbers...

INT. LAB

Grace records his findings.

GRACE

Which makes sense. We're base ten, because...

He holds up his hands, wiggles his fingers.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Ten fingers.

INT. TUNNEL

Grace and Rocky are deep in the process of communication. Rocky gestures with both hands. Grace studies the SIX FINGERS.

GRACE (V.O.)

They're base six.

Grace has his stopwatch and is timing Rocky's clock. He's making notes on the dry erase board as he does.

GRACE (V.O.)

We've established one Earth second equals two-point-three-three of his seconds. Which is a big deal. This is science, after all...

They both wave jazz hands at each other.

GRACE (V.O.)

And we've established a base unit of time.

INT. LAB

Grace paces as he thinks. The camera records it all.

GRACE

I bet we can follow the same lesson plan and establish length and mass. Which will give us our fundamentals.

(thinks.)

Scientific communication... through jazz hands.

He shakes his head at the ridiculousness of it all. Then.

GRACE (CONT'D)

But that won't be enough. We need to have complex conversations. And we need to have them fast. Bob Fosse won't be much help with interplanetary molecular biology. We need...

(thinks)

We need...

Grace trails off, lost in thought.

He turns and exits the room.

INT. STORAGE

Grace rummages through storage. *A-ha...*

Multiple LAPTOPS.

INT. LAB

Grace scrolls through files on the laptop. Finds the one that will work:

"Tympanum Labs Waveform Analyzer"

Grace opens the file. We see a Fourier Transform feature and a piano keyboard.

Grace sets the laptop next to a second open laptop. He picks up a roll of duct tape.

ON THE VIEWSCREENS: Rocky starts knocking on the wall.

GRACE

Hang on!

Shhhrrrappp. Grace tapes the two laptops together.

INT. TUNNEL

Grace points to the number "1" on HIS CLOCK.

GRACE

One.

He holds up one finger.

GRACE (CONT'D)

One.

Grace points at the number "1." Then points to Rocky.

Rocky makes a sound.

ROCKY

WeeeoooUUUuuu...

ON THE LAPTOP: the waveform analyzer dissects Rocky's sound into a series of notes.

Grace flips the laptops. The waveforms record into his master file. He labels the first set "**One**" and plays back the notes.

One... Rocky starts to jump up and down when he hears his own language.

Grace points at the number "2."

GRACE

Two.

ROCKY

OooAAAAA...

The WAVEFORM captures it. Grace flips the laptops (which looks surprisingly impressive in zero-g) and labels "**Two**." He plays it back. *Two...*

Rocky bounces with excitement. *It's working.*

Okay. *What next?*

Grace pats his own chest.

GRACE

Grace.

(then)

I'm "Grace."

Rocky points at him.

ROCKY
EeeeAAaaOOOOO...

Grace flips the laptops. Types "**Grace.**" Plays it back.

Grace points at Rocky.

GRACE
"Rocky."

Rocky pats his own chest. Just like Grace did.

ROCKY
IiiiwwwwweeeOOOeee...

Grace types "**Rocky.**" Plays it back.

As the notes begin to play, Rocky excitedly harmonizes with the sound of his own name. Grace looks at Rocky as the notes hit CRESCENDO...

Hello.

HOLD ON GRACE as he stares at Rocky in wonder. *

GRACE (PRELAP) *
I think I've done what I can *
here... *

INT. AIRCRAFT CARRIER - HANGAR LAB

FROM BLACK we find Grace and Stratt. Significant time has passed since last we were in the lab. Massive amounts of equipment from the Astrophage experiments now line the room.

GRACE *
The onsite lab is operational, *
Astrophage production is ahead of *
schedule... you've got... teams of *
scientists smarter than me... *

STRATT *
I don't like it when you're humble. *
It's off-putting. *

GRACE *
You don't need me anymore. *

STRATT *
Are you trying to quit? *

GRACE *
I want to go home. *
(off her look) *
(MORE) *

GRACE (CONT'D)

Stratt, please. I can't live like
this. I sleep in a can. My room
is the size of a shower.

STRATT

I've seen your apartment back home.
It's not much better.

GRACE

That's not the --
(wait)
When did you see my apartment?

STRATT

I have detailed intelligence on
literally everyone.
(before he can follow up)
You probably shouldn't dig too deep
on what I know about you. It'll
make things weird.

GRACE

I'm not talking about my space.
(struggling)
I miss... my freedom. The stupid
little things. Walking the pier,
going to baseball games, eating ice
cream...

STRATT

There's ice cream in the
commissary.

GRACE

It's not the same, it's frozen.
I'm talking about fresh soft serve.
(off her look)
It's not the specifics, it's the --

STRATT

Summation of experience.

GRACE

Yes.

STRATT

You're describing life, Grace.

Grace looks excited -- *so you do get it!* But she gives him a
glance that withers him right back down.

STRATT (CONT'D)

What exactly do you think we're
trying to save here?

Grace deflates. *Stratt, seriously...* *

GRACE *
 You don't need me to do this job *
 anymore. *

STRATT *
 I'm adjusting your job. *

She tosses a set of file briefs in front of him. *We may recognize the first two photos as the two dead bodies on the Hail Mary.* *

GRACE *
 (reads) *
 "Commander Yao Li-Jie..." *

STRATT *
 Our astronauts. Three prime and *
 three backups. All coma resistant. *
 You're responsible for training the *
 science team... *

Grace looks at the photos of the scientists. "Martin Dubois" *
 and "Annie Shapiro." Neither looks familiar. *

STRATT (CONT'D) *
 ...though for redundancy I'll need *
 you to work with all six over the *
 next few months. *

The reality settles over Grace as he studies the files. *He's not going home anytime soon.* *

GRACE *
 I don't know what you want me to *
 do. *

STRATT *
 You're the one complaining about *
 your old life. You're a teacher. *
 Teach. *

GRACE *
 (bristling) *
 That's not what I meant... *
 (then) *
 I'm a scientist. *

STRATT *
 Whatever. *
 (then) *
 I'll get you an ice cream machine. *

GRACE
 (wait)
 Really?

STRATT
 (yes so get to fucking
 work)
 They arrive at 0600.

INT. AIRCRAFT - LOWER HANGAR DECK

Grace leads THREE ASTRONAUTS through the lower hangar deck of the aircraft carrier. The space is fully transformed into a multiple-laboratory-science hub.

GRACE
 Pay attention, there will be a quiz
 at the end of this...

COMMANDER YAO radiates a stoic authority at the front of the group.

YAO
 (good-natured)
 We aren't your sixth-graders, Dr.
 Grace.

Grace is eating an ice-cream cone.

GRACE
 Students pay more attention when
 they know there might be a quiz.
 You don't even have to have a quiz.
 You just say "quiz" a lot and
 everyone straightens up...

Grace leads them into a vacuum chamber. A SPIN DRIVE is mounted in the center facing a LARGE, SHINY METAL PLATE.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 This is a spin drive. The Hail
 Mary will be fitted with a thousand
 of these...

OLESA ILYUKHINA'S playful demeanor can't hide her intense focus.

ILYUKHINA
 Now that we know there isn't going
 to be a quiz I'm less inclined to
 pay attention.

GRACE

I didn't say there isn't going to
be a quiz. There will be a quiz.
The quiz will be --
(points up)
-- up there and if you fail, you
die.

YAO

(to the astronauts)
That reminds me -- I promised Ms.
Stratt I'd submit our preferred
ways to die tonight.

MARTIN DUBOIS has a casual confidence that comes from being
the smartest person in the room for most of his life.

DUBOIS

I'm going with nitrogen
asphyxiation.

GRACE

Guys, focus. Seriously, you're
worse than sixth-graders.
(wait...)
What do you mean, "preferred way to
die?"

YAO

Once our mission is complete, we
want the option to end our lives on
our terms.

GRACE

That's morbid.

YAO

The alternative is slow, miserable
death by starvation.

ILYUKHINA

It's better to have control.

DUBOIS

Equip a nitrogen tank to the EVA
suit. The suffocation reflex does
not come from a lack of oxygen but
rather an excess of carbon dioxide.
So, we have the suit slowly remove
carbon dioxide, leaving only
nitrogen, and I drift to a
beautiful sleep.

GRACE
 You're so much worse than sixth-
 graders.
 (re-focus)
Spin-drive.

He holds up a small sample container of Astrophage.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Fuel. Less than a gram here, and
 we only need of fraction of that.

YAO
 To do what?

Grace points to the large plate.

GRACE
 To melt this metric ton of metal.

CUT TO:

Grace leads them out of the vacuum chamber and over to the
 safety zone on the other side of the hangar.

Scientists and technicians cross as they prepare the test.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 We estimate twenty micrograms of
 Astrophage will generate sixty
 thousand Newtons of force...

All three astronauts are suitably awestruck.

YAO
 Sixty-thousand?

DUBOIS
 Won't that... vaporize this entire
 aircraft carrier?

GRACE
 I said the same thing to Dimitri!
 (to explain)
 That's why we're using the vacuum
 chamber. No air to ionize.

They take their places next to the viewing station. ON THE
 SCREENS: we see the inside of the vacuum chamber.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 The metal itself will absorb the
 energy.

(MORE)

GRACE (CONT'D)

Which, in addition to being
educational, will look awesome.
Ready?

The technicians give Grace a nod. *We're ready.*

Grace hits the button at the station. There's a muffled
whump from the far side of the bay, followed by a hum.

ON THE SCREENS: the metal is now a GLOWING BLOB. It happened
almost instantaneously.

ILYUKHINA

(Oh my God)
Twenty micrograms of Astrophage did
that?

Grace nods.

YAO

And we'll have how much up there
with us?

GRACE

Over twenty-thousand kilograms.

Good lord. They stare at the molten mass for a moment in
silence. The grim reality of their endeavor settles over
them for a moment. Then.

YAO

I'm thinking a gun. Bang. Done.
Simple.

ILYUKHINA

I'll take the airlock. Just open
it up and let me drift into space
like a cosmic statue.

Grace shakes his head.

GRACE

You're all insane.

DUBOIS

Why, what would you choose?

Grace thinks about it for a moment.

GRACE

I'd choose to stay down here.

They all start laughing. *

CUT TO: *

INT. HAIL MARY - LAB *

CLOSE ON GRACE as works in his lab. He opens up storage to reveal a container marked ASTROPHAGE. He removes a vial. *

He stares at the black, oily substance. *

INT. TUNNEL

Grace holds up the vial to the wall.

GRACE

We call this "Astrophage."

Rocky's entire posture changes. He hunkers his carapace a little lower. He tightens his claws.

GRACE (CONT'D)

You recognize it? What do you call it?

He points from the Astrophage to Rocky. *They've developed a bit of a shorthand.*

Rocky's voice seems quieter than usual.

ROCKY

Uuuueeeiiiiiaa...

Grace checks the laptop as it analyzes Rocky's voice. ONSCREEN: "**Translation: NONE.**" Grace quickly types "**Astrophage**" into the database.

GRACE

Astrophage on my star. Bad.

The computer translates Grace's sentence into Eridian. Rocky RESPONDS. The translated words flash past on Grace's screen:

Astrophage on me star. Bad bad bad.

Grace nods. Relief in his voice. It's confirmed.

GRACE (CONT'D)

We're here for the same reason.

Rocky speaks quickly:

You come from where, question?

GRACE (CONT'D)
No understand.

Your star is what name, question?

GRACE (CONT'D)
Oh! Sol. My star is called "Sol."

Understand. Me name for your star is --

Rocky sings a series of notes. As he does so, Grace types "Sol." *Another word added to the database.*

GRACE (CONT'D)
My name for your star is "Eridani."

Rocky translates. Grace quickly types "**Eridani**" into the database.

Grace Rocky [UNKNOWN] Astrophage.

GRACE (CONT'D)
No understand.

Rocky re-thinks what he's trying to say.

Grace Rocky help stars.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Yes. We work together. Help stars.

Rocky bounces around the tunnel.

Rocky happy.

GRACE (CONT'D)
I'm happy, too.

Rocky happy not alone.

Grace stares at the translation. *Wait...*

GRACE (CONT'D)
Why are you alone?

Rocky doesn't seem to understand.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Where is the rest of your crew?

No understand.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 "Crew" is... other Eridians on
 ship.

Rocky lowers his carapace again.

Was twenty-three Eridians on ship. Now only one.

Grace hears the sadness in Rocky's notes.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 What... what happened to crew?

When arrive here other Eridians...

Rocky stops moving and floats in the air.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 They died?

Rocky repeats the word in Eridian. The translator inputs it.

"Died."

GRACE (CONT'D)
 How did they die?

Rocky not know. Only Rocky not died.

Grace stares at Rocky. Sees his pain and loneliness.

How many human crew on Grace ship, question?

GRACE (CONT'D)
 There were three of us. Two died
 on way here.

Grace shifts uncomfortably. Genuine sadness in his own voice
 as the reality of his circumstance washes over him.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 Now there is only me.

And now Rocky goes quiet. The way he lowers his carapace
 seems to convey an empathetic response.

They stand there in silence.

CUT TO:

INT. LAB

Grace updates his video journal.

GRACE

As best I can tell, he was their
engineer...

CUT TO:

INT. TUNNEL

Rocky has set up a sort of workbench on his side of the tunnel. As he combines two forms of liquid material...

GRACE (V.O.)

He's remarkably adept at repair and construction. His primary building material is a form of solid-state xenon...

The liquids form that same tan-gray METAL that we see everywhere on Rocky's side of things.

INT. LAB

Grace studies the tan-gray metal under his spectrometer.

GRACE (V.O.)

I'm calling it "xenonite." But how he makes it is beyond me. All I know is he can make near anything with it.

Grace glances over at the TUNNEL VIEWSCREEN. Rocky is constructing something on Grace's side of things.

GRACE (V.O.)

When our vocabulary fails us, he scampers off into his ship and comes back with a model of what he's trying to say...

INT. TUNNEL

The tunnel is once again sealed. Grace and Rocky each have large scale replicas of the Tau Ceti system on their sides.

Rocky is gesturing from one planet on the far side of the system.

GRACE (V.O.)

Like an extraterrestrial puppet show.

Rocky slides himself along the large filament stretching towards Tau Ceti. As he gestures --

GRACE
 (understanding)
 Yes! The Astrophage reaches Tau
 Ceti -- otherwise we wouldn't see
 the Petrova Line --

Grace mirrors the journey on his side of the model. He leaves the laptop behind as he floats to the planet on the far end of the tunnel.

Near the wall -- Rocky grabs the Tau Ceti planet and asks a question with urgent tone.

Grace has his hands full with the planets at the other end.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 I don't understand.

Rocky repeats the question, getting annoyed.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 I can't see the laptop.

Grace has an idea.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 Wait --

CUT TO:

Grace is back at the wall. He's rapidly adjusting his software.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 Okay, say it again.

Rocky speaks. And this time, the computer translates the text to speech:

BOOMING MALE VOICE
Why this star not dying, question?

Grace smiles, excited. *He's effectively made an audio translator.*

He toggles the voices.

GRACE
 Say it again --

Rocky's voice now is a SULTRY FEMALE.

SULTRY FEMALE
Why this star not dying, question?

GRACE

Nope.
 (toggles)
 Again.

It's now an INCREDIBLY SCOTTISH VOICE:

INCREDIBLY SCOTTISH VOICE
Why this star not dying, question?

Grace starts laughing. Rocky throws up his hands like he's annoyed by all this.

INCREDIBLY SCOTTISH VOICE (CONT'D)
No understand laugh!

CUT TO:

Later. Grace and Rocky are close to the wall. *They're having an actual conversation.*

GRACE

The Astrophage is present on Tau Ceti. But somewhere along the way it is rendered passive.

ROCKY

What is passive, question?

ROCKY'S VOICE now has a calming, neutral tone.

GRACE

It means... powerless.
 (searching)
 It doesn't work. And you don't have to say question, you just...
 (realizes this is too complicated)
 Never mind.

ROCKY

(thinks)
 Is possible Astrophage not same as our world, question?

Grace nods.

GRACE

That's a good point.

Grace stifles a yawn. *How long has he been awake?*

GRACE (CONT'D)
 We'd have to examine the Astrophage
 in this system.

ROCKY
 How we do that, question?

GRACE
 (can't think straight)
 I don't know. I gotta think about
 it...
 (shakes head)
 I need to sleep.

Grace turns to go. He grabs the clock, starts drawing on it.

ROCKY
 No understand word.

GRACE
 "Sleep?" Sleep is...

Hmmm. How do I explain this?

GRACE (CONT'D)
 Sleep is this.

Grace curls up into a ball and closes his eyes.

Rocky seems upset.

ROCKY
 Sleep is dead, question?

GRACE
 No. We do this for...
 (points to clock)
 Twenty-nine thousand seconds.

Grace curls up again. He even snores to make it more dramatic.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 And then we stop.

He mimes waking up. Rocky bounces around, excited.

ROCKY
 Understand! Eridians same!

Rocky goes limp. Floats in zero-g. Then pops back up. He repeats the word in Eridian.

Grace types "**Sleep.**" He nods, pleased. He takes the clock and moves it closer to the wall.

GRACE
I'll be back in twenty-nine
thousand seconds.

ROCKY
I observe.

Grace stops. *Sorry, what?*

GRACE
You observe?

ROCKY
I observe Grace sleep.

GRACE
That's... not... That's creepy.

ROCKY
I alone.

GRACE
You're making it creepier.
(then)
There's nothing for you to see. I
stay still for a long time. That's
it.

ROCKY
Eridians watch sleep.

GRACE
You watch each other sleep?

ROCKY
Yes! Eridians watch sleep.

GRACE
Humans don't.

Grace moves to leave. Rocky seems agitated.

ROCKY
Rocky observe Grace. Grace observe
Rocky.

GRACE
We don't need that.

Rocky lowers his carapace. His actual voice goes quiet.
It's almost as if *Rocky's scared.*

ROCKY

I alone.

Grace sees Rocky's fear. His eyes soften.

GRACE

All right.
 (what the hell)
 You can watch me sleep.

CUT TO:

INT. TUNNEL

Grace straps the mattress and blanket from his bunk to the walls of the tunnels with copious amounts of duct tape.

GRACE (V.O.)

So. We watch each other sleep.

CUT TO:

Grace tucks himself in to the zero-g bed. Rocky sits at his workbench on the other side of the wall.

Grace turns off his main light. Closes his eyes. Through the wall, we can barely make out the outline of Rocky standing watch. He tinkers away at his workbench.

GRACE (V.O.)

I think it's an evolutionary
 function.

CUT TO:

INT. TUNNEL

Another day. Rocky now floats in zero-g. Motionless. Grace works at his computer. Keeping watch.

GRACE (V.O.)

Eridians don't sleep like a human
 does. They seem legitimately
 paralyzed.

Rocky floats into the wall. Thump. He doesn't stir.

GRACE (V.O.)

He can't wake up. It's a survival
 norm...

Grace watches.

GRACE (V.O.)
Someone has to keep you safe.

INT. TUNNEL

Another day. Grace's duct tape bed has been replaced with a more secure xenonite frame. Grace is fast asleep. Rocky is working away on something more complex on his side of things.

Grace's eyes flutter open. He unhooks himself from his bed. He floats about the tunnel, turning on the various lights.

Rocky makes a friendly sound.

GRACE
Good morning.

There's something routine about their actions, as though they've done this for a few days now.

With the lights on, Grace gets a better look at Rocky's side.

GRACE (CONT'D)
What are you building?

ROCKY
Room and device to keep me alive on your ship.

GRACE
You're coming aboard my ship?

ROCKY
Yes is allowed, question?

GRACE
Sure. What, uh... why?

ROCKY
Want to see human technology. Is allowed, question?

GRACE
Of course.

Grace marvels at the construction going on in front of him. Rocky assembles a series of transparent pentagons into a geodesic sphere.

GRACE (CONT'D)
What do you want to see?

ROCKY
Everything. Human science better
than Eridian science.

Rocky points at the laptop.

ROCKY (CONT'D)
Machine that think. Eridians no
have that. Many machines Eridians
no have.

Rocky starts pulling the device over his carapace. Grace
realizes what Rocky is making...

GRACE
It's your life-support system.

ROCKY
No understand.

GRACE
Your device. Like my EVA suit. To
survive.

ROCKY
Yes.

Grace gestures to the AIRLOCK DRAWER in their wall.

GRACE
How are you gonna get all that
through the wall?

ROCKY
You leave tunnel. I make new wall.
Bigger airlock.

Rocky locks the suit in over his carapace. He powers it on,
dances with excitement. *It works!*

GRACE
Okay. I'll go... tidy up the
place.

ROCKY
No understand.

GRACE
I'll see you in the ship.

Grace collects his bedding and heads inside.

INT. HAIL MARY

The airlock door cycles shut. Grace sees his ship with fresh eyes. *He wasn't expecting company.*

Grace gets to work. He tosses his bedding back into his bunk. Velcros them in place. Smooths the sheets. Fluffs the pillow. Looks around -- *what else?*

INT. LAB

Grace cleans up the lab. Puts free equipment back into storage. An empty food packet floats past -- *seriously, Ryland? Who lives like this?*

CUT TO:

Grace waits at his (now clean) work station. He types on his laptop, looks to the viewscreens on the ship. One of the screens now mirrors his laptop -- *he's loaded the translator onto the ship's interface.*

ON THE OTHER VIEWSCREENS: we may notice Rocky disassembling the tunnel outside.

INT. CORRIDOR

Grace floats nervously back and forth down the corridor. The ridiculousness of what's happening is not lost on him.

OUTSIDE: the new tunnel locks into place. Grace cycles the airlock.

The door swings open... and Rocky enters the Hail Mary.

Click-click-click... he's inside his sphere. As he moves, the sphere rolls forward... an extraterrestrial hamster ball.

Rocky makes a whole lot of sing-songy noises as he takes in the ship. He sounds excited. He rolls right past Grace, eager to see EVERYTHING.

Rocky stops at the doorway to the lab. Seems to ask a question. Grace flips the viewscreen to the translator. (The audio translator now runs on the ship computer, so there's no need for Grace to carry the laptop.)

ROCKY

What's this room, question?

GRACE

This is my lab. All the science happens here.

ROCKY
 Good good good! Want to understand
 all!

Click-click-click... Grace hurries to keep pace.

GRACE
 How do you stay on the deck?

ROCKY
 Magnetized xenonite.

Rocky shows Grace the two metal blocks he's holding. They help control the magnetic effect on the xenonite.

ROCKY (CONT'D)
 What's this room, question?

GRACE
 It's my storage. It's... not
 usually this messy.

ROCKY
 Yes good.

Click-click-click...

GRACE
 This is the dormitory. This is
 where I sleep. At least before the
 tunnel.

ROCKY
 You sleep here alone, question?

GRACE
 Yes.

ROCKY
 Sad sad sad. I also sleep alone.
 Sad.

Rocky studies the other empty bunks.

ROCKY (CONT'D)
 How did Grace crew die, question?

GRACE
 It was a long journey here. A
 dangerous sleep. They didn't wake
 up.

ROCKY

Yes sleep dangerous yes. Eridians
get sick on journey too.

Something about that gives Grace pause.

GRACE

But you didn't.

ROCKY

I not know why.

GRACE

What kind of sick was it?

ROCKY

I need word. Small life. Single
thing. Like Astrophage. Eridian
body made up of many many of these.

GRACE

"Cells." My body is many many
cells also.

ROCKY

My crew have problem with cells.
Many many cells die. Not
infection. Not injury. Just die.
But not me. Why, question?

GRACE

Sounds like radiation sickness.

ROCKY

No understand.

Grace thinks about it. An idea occurs to him. He heads to
the lab...

INT. LAB

Grace grabs the xenonite replica of Rocky's ship.

GRACE

Where did you spend most of your
time on your ship?

ROCKY

I have room in back of ship.
Workshop.

Rocky points to the back of the ship near the engines.

GRACE
And where do you store your
Astrophage fuel?

ROCKY
Near engines. Many many many
containers of Astrophage.

Rocky points to the same area on the ship.

GRACE
(thinking it through)
You don't know about radiation...
How do you not know what radiation
is...

ROCKY
No understand.

GRACE
The Astrophage shielded you.

ROCKY
Shielded from what, question?

GRACE
Radiation is... fast moving
hydrogen atoms. Very very fast.

ROCKY
Hot gas.

GRACE
No. Much faster. Almost the speed
of light. They were created by
stars long ago.
(thinks)
Rocky, you're still in danger on
your ship.

ROCKY
Grace danger too, question?

GRACE
No. We're safe here. We have
radiation shielding built into the
ship.

Grace stares at Rocky. Realizing what this means.

GRACE (V.O.)
So...

INT. HAIL MARY

GRACE (V.O.)
I have a new roommate now.

Grace helps Rocky carry HIS EQUIPMENT in from the airlock. He hoists what looks like a CANVAS-BAG over his shoulder and lugs it into the main area...

Which is FILLED with similar bags, soft-boxes, and xenonite equipment. As the STORM OF CLUTTER floats around them...

GRACE (V.O.)
He's a lot messier than I am...

INT. COCKPIT

Grace sits in the chair. Rocky sits beside him in his sphere. Grace demonstrates the controls of the ship.

GRACE
 We gotta make the ship spin...

He gestures "spinning" with his hands. Rocky does the same.

EXT. HAIL MARY

The Hail Mary (now detached from the tunnel) begins to ROTATE.

INT. HAIL MARY

The bags of equipment gently float down to the ground.

Gravity achieved.

INT. HAIL MARY

Rocky is a whirlwind -- fastidiously building what look like HABITRAIL TUBES through the ship.

GRACE (V.O.)
*The ship wasn't exactly designed
 for an Eridian with mild obsessive-
 compulsive disorder.*

Grace tries to help, but Rocky is very animated -- *no, I'll do it myself.*

INT. LAB

Rocky is calibrating a device that looks a bit like a space raygun. Grace watches, impressed.

*

*

*

GRACE (V.O.) *
Luckily, he's proving to be quite *
the handyman. *

Rocky points the device at one of Grace's external CAMERA *
 READOUT SCREENS. Rocky's device translates the screen into a *
 texture map. As Rocky "reads" it, he grows visibly excited. *

ROCKY *
 Success! *

GRACE *
 You can "see" the screens? *

ROCKY *
 This device analyze light and show *
 as textures. *

Grace shakes his head in amazement. He pats Rocky's bubble. *

INT. DORMITORY

GRACE (V.O.) *
We're making it work. *

Rocky sleeps in his newly built habitat.

Grace watches over him.

CUT TO:

INT. LAB

It's a new day. The lab is now transformed. Rocky's
 partitions allow him equal movement in the space.

They've moved their impressive model of the Tau Ceti system
 into the lab.

ROCKY *
 I have idea. *

Rocky holds up a model of THE HAIL MARY.

ROCKY (CONT'D) *
 I make sampler for Astrophage. *

He holds up a model of a SAMPLER.

ROCKY (CONT'D) *
 We attach to ship. *
 (demonstrates) *
 Then fly ship through Petrova *
 line... *

Rocky moves the ship through the Petrova line extending from the star. Grace stares at the model, deep in thought.

GRACE

We'd only be able to intersect the line for a few seconds.

Grace shakes his head.

GRACE (CONT'D)

A solar system isn't static. The line is constantly moving.

ROCKY

We move with line.

GRACE

There's no stability. We have to be able to park inside it...

Grace turns his attention to the OTHER END OF THE PETROVA LINE. Where A PLANET intersects with the Astrophage arc.

Grace grabs the planet. Sees his HANDWRITTEN LABEL: "**TAU CETI E.**"

GRACE (CONT'D)

(idea forming)

We need to be in orbit.

CUT TO:

INT. LAB

POV: Grace addresses his CAMERA directly. He tosses the Tau Ceti E model back and forth in his hands like a tennis ball.

GRACE

We can make it. I've spent the last two days checking and double checking the math. It'll take us one-hundred and thirty kilograms of fuel to get there... but we'll be able to reach Tau Ceti E in eleven days... At which point --

As Grace talks... Rocky interrupts. He climbs up into frame, partially obscuring the camera.

ROCKY

Why you need talk to camera box, question?

GRACE
Hey -- c'mon. Get out of the way --

CUT TO:

We exit the camera POV as Grace tries to get Rocky to move out of the way.

GRACE (CONT'D)
I have to get this on record.

ROCKY
No understand. You talk to Earth, question?

GRACE
No. We're too far. So I have to record it all. And I'll send everything we've learned back in probes when we're done.

ROCKY
Why not you tell them yourself, question?

Grace realizes there's an aspect of this mission he hasn't discussed with Rocky. He considers his words carefully.

GRACE
This is a one-way trip for me.

ROCKY
No understand.

GRACE
Earth is very far. We had enough Astrophage to get out here... but not enough to get back. Not for a full ship with life-support systems.

Rocky shifts in place as he thinks about it. He seems distressed. *

ROCKY
No understand. *

GRACE
There's no way to get home. We undertook this mission knowing we would not be returning. *

ROCKY
What happens Grace, question? *

GRACE

I should have enough food to survive two or three years out here.

ROCKY

Then Grace die, question?

GRACE

Yes. Once we've done our work... I'm gonna die, Rocky.

Rocky's movements suggest he's growing increasingly agitated. But Grace is calm about it. Serene, even.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Rocky, it's okay. I've made my peace with it.

ROCKY

What mean make peace, question?

GRACE

It means... I know I won't be going home. And I know why. And... I am not sad about it.

There's a calm resolve to Grace's voice. And Rocky senses it. He seems to relax. Rocky thinks in silence. Then.

ROCKY

You are --

Grace glances at the viewscreen. **"You are [UNKNOWN]."**

ROCKY (CONT'D)

I need word. When you risk self to help other.

Grace thinks about it. Types it in to the translator.

GRACE

"Brave?"

ROCKY

Yes.
(then)
You are brave human.

Grace shrugs. *If you say so.*

Rocky lowers his carapace. He walks out of the room slowly, like a depressed labrador. As he goes --

ROCKY (CONT'D)
Sad sad sad...

Click-click-click...

HOLD ON GRACE. Alone in the silence. And it seems like he was telling Rocky the truth -- he's resigned to his fate. There's a stoic calm about him, even while he's alone.

*
*
*

But then.

Click-click-click-click-click...

Rocky sounds like he's coming back towards us. Grace turns to the door...

*
*

ROCKY (CONT'D)
 I can give.

Rocky races back into the room --

*

ROCKY (CONT'D)
 How much Astrophage you need return Earth, question?

GRACE
 (what? ummm...)
 ...just over two-million kilograms.

*
*

ROCKY
 I can give.

Grace straightens up. *Wait... what?*

*

ROCKY (CONT'D)
 I have extra. Can give that much from my ship and still have plenty for return to Erid.

Grace's heart starts to pound. *That can't be right...*

*

GRACE
 Rocky, it's two-million kilograms...

ROCKY
 Yes. Two times ten to the sixth power. I know math. My ship more efficient than planned on trip here. You can have.

GRACE
 Oh my God...

Grace fully absorbs what Rocky's saying. *What it means.*

Tears spring to his eyes.

ROCKY
No understand.

Grace is at a loss. Overwhelmed. All the emotion he's been holding in to survive *pours out at once* --

ROCKY (CONT'D)
You are okay, question?

GRACE
Yes.
(then)
I-I can go home.

Grace's voice breaks in his throat. His knees go weak, tears start flowing down his face in earnest. The exact opposite of the stoic demeanor he was affecting moments ago --

Rocky seems confused by the emotion pouring out of Grace --

ROCKY
No understand. This is happy, question?

GRACE
Yes, this is happy.

ROCKY
I thought you make peace.

GRACE
I didn't make peace at all, Rocky. I was totally lying to you. I've been so terrified this entire time and I never thought... I never... thought I'd see home again --

ROCKY
But Grace can, yes.

Grace laughs in relief, joy. He grabs Rocky's sphere and hugs him TIGHT --

GRACE
Yes. Thank you. Thank you, Rocky.
(then)
I can go home.

CUT TO:

INT. DORMITORY

LIGHT catches ocean waves. The reflections sparkle across the screen like stars.

ROCKY
This Earth, question?

GRACE
Yes, this is Earth.

They're both in front of the LARGE VIEWSCREEN in the dormitory. Grace is controlling the images; Rocky tries to follow along with his texture mapping device.

GRACE (CONT'D)
They built this so we could remain tethered to home on our mission. Our psych team insisted on it. I call it the Don't Go Crazy Wall.

ROCKY
Does it keep no crazy, question?

GRACE
Sort of?
(regarding the screen)
This is the beach. 71% percent of our surface is covered in water. Where it meets the land... we call that the beach.

Rocky makes a new WHALE SOUND. Grace nods, types "Beach" into his translator.

Rocky reads his texture map.

ROCKY
It... moving. Always.

GRACE
Yes. That's why it's calming. The waves are constantly in motion. But each day, the beach remains the same.
(then)
I used to walk along Rodeo Beach for hours.

Grace and Rocky sit and take in the motion. The screen is so large they seem to be on Earth.

ROCKY
 (excited)
 What else, question?

CUT TO:

GIANT REDWOODS seem to tower all around them. Grace is now hyper-animated, excited to be showing Rocky his world.

GRACE
 ...and some of them are so big you can drive a car through them!

ROCKY
 Why do that, question?

GRACE
 No one knows!

CUT TO:

Grace and Rocky are now standing in the center of a baseball stadium.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 ...and then a tech company ruined it but as far as I'm concerned it will always be Candlestick --

CUT TO:

We're in the Presidio Branch Library. Stacks and stacks of books all around --

GRACE (CONT'D)
 (whispering)
 ...it's my favorite place to go when it's raining outside --

ROCKY
 Why you talk quiet, question?

CUT TO:

Now we're underwater looking at jellyfish.

GRACE
 One of the other astronauts must've found jellyfish relaxing and honestly I'm starting to get it...

CUT TO:

And now we're outside of West Grover Cleveland Elementary.
It's a bright beautiful day.

GRACE (CONT'D)
...they must have loaded in actual
places from our lives...

ROCKY
What this, question?

GRACE
It's where I used to work.

ROCKY
You miss work, question?

The sight of his old life makes Grace surprisingly emotional.

GRACE
I didn't think I did...
(points, excited)
That's my classroom!

CUT TO:

Grace and Rocky sit on the edge of a SKYSCRAPER. Down below,
New York City stretches out in all its glory.

ROCKY
(in awe)
Yes.

GRACE
Right?

CUT TO:

INT. DORMITORY

Later. The screen now shows the ocean at night. Grace is in
bed -- it's Rocky's turn to watch.

GRACE
What do you miss most about your
planet?

ROCKY
Is much.
(thinks)
Others. Eridians.
(then)
My mate.

GRACE *
 (sits up) *
 Sorry... your mate? You have a *
mate back home? *

ROCKY *
 Yes. *

GRACE *
 And you're just mentioning this *
 now? *

ROCKY *
 You ask now. *

GRACE *
 I'm so sorry -- I've been talking *
 about trees this entire time... *

ROCKY *
 No sorry. I like learn Earth. *

GRACE *
 What's... what's your mate's name? *

Rocky emits a series of whale sounds. It's lovely. There's *
 no translation. *

GRACE (CONT'D) *
 Tell me more. *

ROCKY *
 Yes. But sleep now. I watch. *
 (then) *
 Need rest. We have much do. Save *
 Earth. Save Erid. Go home. *

Grace nods. He lies back down. They both watch the waves *
 crash on the night shore. *

CUT TO: *

EXT. PLANET

A BRIGHT GREEN PLANET cuts a vibrant sphere in the stellar
 patchwork. Dark and light bands of color suggest a turbulent
 atmosphere, evoking the gas-giants Saturn and Jupiter.

It's stunning.

GRACE (O.S.)
 Ladies and gentlemen...

The Hail Mary zooms through orbit, high overhead the wispy clouds. Grace stands on the hull in his EVA suit, like a pirate captain on the bow of his ship.

GRACE (CONT'D)
I give you Tau Ceti E.

ROCKY (OVER COMMS)
Need new name for planet...

INT. HAIL MARY

Rocky navigates the control room he's built for himself inside the Hail Mary.

ROCKY
That name boring.

GRACE
First of all, how do you know it's boring? It's a translation.

ON THE VIEWSCREENS: various angles of Grace working outside on the hull.

GRACE (CONT'D)
You can assign it anything you want in your language...

ROCKY
Is same name as star plus "E."
Boring.

GRACE
Okay. That's a fair point...

EXT. HAIL MARY

Grace makes his way to the square cube mounted to the hull.

GRACE
I'm at the sampler.

ROCKY (OVER COMMS)
Has sampler collected enough
Astrophage, question?

GRACE
I'll have to get it inside to know
for sure.

Grace clips the tether to the sampler unit. As he works...

GRACE (CONT'D)

You want to give the planet a new name? Be my guest.

ROCKY (OVER COMMS)

Yes I give new name.

GRACE

But be careful! You can overthink it. Like "astro" means stars and "phage" means eater so you call it star-eater. But then you say them together out loud and it sounds like... interstellar lubricant.

ROCKY (OVER COMMS)

No understand.

Grace pulls the release lever. The sampler detaches from the hull and floats up beside Grace, attached to his tether like a weird metal balloon.

GRACE

Just... name it something personal to you. That's the best way to do these things.

ROCKY (OVER COMMS)

Understand.

Grace stares at the GREEN PLANET. *

GRACE *

Tell me the name of your mate again. *

Rocky makes the same notes we heard earlier. *

GRACE (CONT'D) *

Let's go with that. *

Grace starts making his way back to the airlock again, tugging the sampler with him as he goes. *

ROCKY *

Grace no have translate. *

GRACE *

Right, so we need a human word for Rocky's mate... *

Grace looks back at that beautiful planet and smiles. As the pale-green light washes over him...

GRACE (CONT'D)
Hello, Adrian.

INT. HAIL MARY - LAB

Grace places the sampler in the middle of the lab table. Rocky scampers up his tube to a viewing position on the ceiling, above Grace.

Grace opens up the sampler, revealing two large PANELS.

They're both covered with a black, sticky substance.

Grace glances up at Rocky and nods.

CUT TO:

Science prep. Grace scrapes the Astrophage from the sampler and divides it into containers. He methodically begins to run his tests.

CUT TO:

Grace studies the population count...

GRACE
Interesting.

Rocky scurries through his hamster tube to get a better look.

ROCKY
What is interesting, question?

GRACE
The population count on the Adrian side is not nearly as high as we were expecting...

Hmmm. Grace smears some of the "returning" Astrophage on a slide and places it under his microscope.

ROCKY
Good good inspect with science gear.

THROUGH THE MICROSCOPE: Grace finds focus...

GRACE
Whoa.

The familiar black dots of Astrophage are all over the sample. But so are translucent cells, smaller bacteria-looking things, and larger amoeba-like things.

ROCKY
What is you see, question?

GRACE
Life.
(then)
It's not just Astrophage.
Bacteria, amoeba... thin things,
fat things, spiral things...

ROCKY
Amaze amaze amaze!

GRACE
Adrian isn't just some planet.
It's a planet with life.

ROCKY
Yes I give good name.

GRACE
(laughs)
You sure did.

Rocky freezes. Then he shoots bolt upright, raising his carapace in a way we've never seen before.

ROCKY
Life is also reason for population
discrepancy! Life is reason!

He scampers up the tube to the ceiling, gesturing wildly downward at the two containers of Astrophage.

GRACE
How? What? I don't understand.

ROCKY
Some life on Adrian eats
Astrophage! Population in balance.
Natural order. This explains all
things!

Grace stops in his tracks.

GRACE
(realizing)
Astrophage has a predator.

ROCKY
Yes understand yes.

GRACE

There's a whole active biosphere on
Adrian. There's an active
biosphere within the Petrova line.

ROCKY

This where started.

Grace nods -- *yes, you're right!*

GRACE

It has to be -- how else can you
explain countless different
lifeforms that evolve to migrate in
space? They have to come from the
same genetic root.

(then)

Adrian isn't some planet Astrophage
infected. It's the homeworld.

ROCKY

Predator on homeworld too.

GRACE

Yes! It's down there somewhere.
We find it --

ROCKY

-- and take home! It eat
Astrophage, breed, eat more
Astrophage, breed, eat more more
more. Stars saved!

GRACE

(Oh my God)
Stars saved.

Overwhelmed with relief and joy, Grace reflexively tries to
hug Rocky. Bumps into the tube instead.

ROCKY

What you doing, question?

Grace awkwardly tries to save it, like when you try to shake
hands mid-hug.

GRACE

Here. Celebration. Fist-bump.

ROCKY

No understand.

Grace taps the tunnel with his fist.

GRACE
This. Do this.

Rocky mirrors him. They bump fists through the tunnel. It sort of works?

GRACE (CONT'D)
Close enough. Celebration!

EXT. ADRIAN

As we ANGLE IN on the pale-green planet in question...

GRACE (V.O.)
The problem with Adrian is the atmosphere. The breeding altitude for Astrophage is 91.2 kilometers from the surface. *If* a predator organism is exists, it'd be at the same altitude...

INT. LAB

Grace addresses camera.

GRACE
But if I bring this ship any closer than one hundred meters to that planet, it'll burn up in atmosphere.
(beat)
Luckily, I happen to know an insane alien crab engineer...

INT. LAB

Rocky has built an elaborate model of what's about to happen. As he gesticulates wildly...

GRACE (V.O.)
...who has an endless supply of ideas and xenonite.

Grace struggles to understand what Rocky is saying.

GRACE
So it's like fishing? Is it fishing?

ROCKY
No understand word.

CUT TO:

Grace is now doing an elaborate demonstration of fishing. He's fashioned a rod out of xenonite tubing.

GRACE

So this is the rod and the bag of liquid rations over there is the rainbow trout --

ROCKY

What this have to do with spaceship, question?

GRACE

Just go with it --

CUT TO:

INT. LAB

Grace addresses camera. He's holding the prop Hail Mary. It now has a lengthy chain attached to it.

GRACE

We have to maintain a velocity of 12.6 kilometers per second to stay in orbit. But if we drag a chain through the atmosphere at that velocity, it'll get vaporized --

Rocky interrupts again. As he climbs into frame.

ROCKY

I want talk to camera box.

GRACE

You... want to do this?

ROCKY

Yes!

Grace shrugs. Be my guest.

GRACE

All right, Rocky. Please explain how this mission will work.

ROCKY

Yes. First Grace sleep. I watch. Then Grace wake up. Eat burrito.

GRACE

Okay --

ROCKY

Then Grace use toilet. I not allowed to watch.

GRACE

Skip ahead to the mission --

CUT TO:

Rocky holds the Hail Mary model backwards at an angle above his Adrian model. The chain drops down to the planet.

It looks a lot like the spaceship is going fishing.

ROCKY

We must thrust at angle to keep proper velocity. Go too slow, drop into atmosphere and die. Go too fast, hit orbital velocity. And die.

(then)

Many ways to die.

GRACE

You left out the part where I have to go out and retrieve the sampler while we're in reverse thrust.

ROCKY

Yes.

(then)

That also way to die.

Rocky and Grace feel the weight of what they're about to do.

ROCKY (CONT'D)

Many things can go wrong.

GRACE

(indeed)

Many things can go wrong.

Grace shrugs. *No sense worrying about it now.*

GRACE (CONT'D)

Welcome to science.

EXT. LAUNCH PAD - FLASHBACK

WIDE ON THE LAUNCH SITE. Significant time has passed since we've last seen Grace. We're now in Russia, site of the launch for Project: Hail Mary.

Grace and Stratt stand on the launch pad beneath the HAIL MARY herself. She's nearly finished -- crews are working round the clock to get her ready for launch.

GRACE

Four times the mass of the International Space Station, put together in one-twentieth of the time.

(then)

It's impressive, Stratt.

It's the closest he's come to complimenting her.

She's not great with compliments.

STRATT

Desperation is a wonderful motivational tool.

(then)

Nine days until launch, Grace.

GRACE

(I know, I know)

We ran the containment scenario this morning for all six astronauts. Tested them under duress.

STRATT

And?

GRACE

Science team aced it. The others... there's work to do.

STRATT

Nine days.

GRACE

I'll get them ready.

STRATT

I know you will.

It's the closest she's come to complimenting him. She starts to walk away. Hesitates.

STRATT (CONT'D)

After launch, we should have a window where your responsibilities are not... mission critical. If you'd like to go home.

Which is all he wants in the world.

*

GRACE
I'd like that. Thank you.

*

*

STRATT
(good...)
Get back to work.

*

She walks away.

*

Grace smiles. He turns his attention back to the Hail Mary.
She really is a beautiful spaceship, isn't she?

And right then...

There's a BRIGHT FLASH in the distant buildings behind him.

And two seconds later...

A DEAFENING EXPLOSION shakes the world.

Ka-BOOOOOM! Grace is blown from his feet by the shockwave.
The windows in all the buildings around him SHATTER.

Sirens BLARE as chaos ERUPTS.

Grace struggles to get his bearings from the ground.

A PILLAR OF SMOKE plumes from the distant buildings.

Grace rolls to his hands and knees. Sees Stratt. She's
already upright. Running towards the smoke.

STRATT (CONT'D)
(RUSSIAN, into walkie)
Eto Stratt. Chto sluchylos?!?

Grace struggles to his feet. Ears ringing.

STRATT (CONT'D)
*Somebody give me a situation
report...*
(then)
What the fuck is happening?

HOLD ON GRACE. Framed against the HAIL MARY as SIRENS and
SMOKE overtake the world.

He looks so small.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. ADRIAN

The HAIL MARY cuts across the starfield and accelerates towards Adrian.

Here we go.

INT. HAIL MARY - COCKPIT

Grace and Rocky sit side-by-side, Grace in his pilot chair and Rocky in his module. Pilot and co-pilot.

GRACE

Ready?

Rocky give him a thumbs-up.

Grace initiates roll...

EXT. ADRIAN

The Hail Mary rotates so that it's pointed backwards to the direction of travel.

INT. COCKPIT

The ship shudders as Grace tries to adjust to flying the ship backwards.

GRACE

Orientation is good. Initiating thrust.

EXT. ADRIAN

Grace fires the engines, countering the direction of travel.

INT. COCKPIT

The Hail Mary goes from zero-g to 1.5-g in under a second. Grace is pressed backwards in his chair, Rocky holds tight.

Grace fights with the controls. He's now flying backwards, at an angle, under intense g-force.

Rocky's free hands hover over his controls.

ROCKY

You tell when to release probe.

GRACE

Not yet --

He struggles to stabilize the ship. His eyes fall on the outside cams beneath the ship.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Oh my God...

ROCKY

What, question?!

ON THE SCREEN: it looks like the entire planet is GLOWING.

GRACE

The engines are heating up Adrian's atmosphere.

EXT. HAIL MARY

And so they are. The IR blast from the engines heats the air in Adrian's atmosphere so much it becomes literally RED HOT.

As Grace angles the engines toward the planet, the problem gets worse. The air gets brighter and BRIGHTER... the ship cuts a red streak across the sky.

INT. COCKPIT

Grace keeps his eye on the attitude screen. Watches that angle climb as he fights with the controls.

ROCKY

Danger, question?

GRACE

I don't know.

ROCKY

I no like that answer.

The angle climbs to sixty degrees. Holds.

GRACE

Angle achieved!

ROCKY

Happy! Release, question?

The LIFE SUPPORT panel pops up on the main screen. "EXTERNAL TEMPERATURE EXTREME."

ROCKY (CONT'D)

Ship no touch air. Why is ship hot, question?

GRACE

It's bouncing our IR back at us.
We're getting cooked.

ROCKY

Ship is Astrophage cooled.

GRACE

(nods)

It should absorb the heat.

We hope? Grace double checks the readings.

GRACE (CONT'D)

It's not gonna get any better.
Drop probe!

Rocky slams his claw on the drop button.

ROCKY

Drop probe!

EXT. HAIL MARY

Rocky releases THE SAMPLER: it's a large SPHERE attached to a multi-segment xenonite chain. Multiple SPOOLS are required to house ten kilometers of chain -- they release in order.

The sampler plummets down into the atmosphere beneath the ship...

INT. COCKPIT

Rocky reports his readings.

ROCKY

Spool Six away...

The LIFE SUPPORT sounds an aggressive alarm. Grace mutes it.

ROCKY (CONT'D)

Spool Twelve away! Sampler signal good. Sampler detecting air now.
Good good.

GRACE

Good good.

EXT. HAIL MARY

The chain continues to unspool in furious fashion. The final spool releases --

INT. COCKPIT

ROCKY

Spool Twenty away. All spools released. Air density of sampler is almost Astrophage breeding ground level....

Grace watches Rocky with bated breath.

ROCKY (CONT'D)

Sampler has closed! Seal is airtight, heater is on! Success success success!

Grace steels himself. Tries not to look terrified.

GRACE

Now comes the fun part.

Grace unclips from his seat. He has to fight the gravity angle to climb out of the cockpit. As he goes --

ROCKY

(confused)

This part not fun at all.

GRACE (O.S.)

Cultural sarcasm!

INT. AIRLOCK

Grace pulls on his EVA suit. The VIEWSCREENS show various angles of black spacecape and red hot planet atmosphere.

Grace tries not to look at the screens as he attaches a Rocky-designed winch to his tool belt and CYCLES THE AIRLOCK.

EXT. HAIL MARY

The airlock door opens. Grace climbs out onto the hull. The ship's current alignment means the door is on top (facing the spacecape).

BENEATH THE SHIP -- the fiery red glow roils out from around the edges of the Hail Mary, partially obscuring the green hues of Adrian below.

The ship itself is protecting Grace from the heat.

Grace attaches his tether and starts climbing along the hull. He winces with each step -- this is painstaking labor.

ROCKY (OVER COMMS)
What is problem, question?

GRACE
The gravity is brutal.

UP AHEAD: Grace spots the chain's anchor plate near the edge of the ship. He struggles his way over to it.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Attaching the winch to the anchor point.

ROCKY (OVER COMMS)
Good good.

Grace wedges the winch between the anchor plate and the chain. He hooks the winch to the plate, confirms it's properly seated.

Deep breath.

He hits the activation button.

The winch springs to action. A gear pops out of the center, the cog catches a chain link. The gear then *turns* and drags the chain into the internal workings of the winch. Once inside, it rotates the link 180 degrees... *and ejects it.*

Then it ejects the next link... and the next... and the next...

GRACE
It works!

ROCKY
Happy. Increase speed.

Grace cranks the lever. Loose links fly out in a veritable blizzard as the winch hauls the chain up towards the ship...

INT. COCKPIT

Rocky tracks progress on his equipment.

ROCKY
Sampler device radio signal strong.
Getting closer. Be ready.

ON THE SCREENS behind Rocky -- NEW ALERTS start flashing...

EXT. HAIL MARY

Grace tries not to focus on the firestorm of air flaring around the edges of the ship as he watches the chain...

GRACE

I have visual on the sampler!

There it is -- the sampler rushes up towards Grace from the planet below. Grace slows the winch as it gets close --

GRACE (CONT'D)

Got it!

ROCKY (OVER COMMS)

Amaze! Happy happy happy!

Grace detaches the chain from the winch. He now drags the sampler like a ball and chain. He clips the free end of the chain to his belt.

He starts making his way to the airlock. He takes a few laborious steps...

...and the ship SHUDDERS.

Grace crashes to the hull. He scrambles to grab hold of the handrails.

GRACE

What was that?!

ROCKY

I not know. Ship move. Sudden.

The ship shudders again... then starts TILTING FORWARD. From Grace's POV, the horizon RISES.

GRACE

We're thrusting in the wrong direction!

ROCKY

Get inside fast fast fast!

Grace struggles to his hands and knees. He pulls himself along the handrails while the ship keeps tilting forward.

He drags the sampler over to the airlock. It's still facing (mostly) up, but that's changing quickly. As the ship rotates, Grace grabs the sampler close to his chest...

And dives into the airlock.

WHAM! He slams into the deck. Scrambles to right himself. He grabs the outer hatch, SLAMS it closed.

As the airlock cycles, he struggles out of his EVA suit.

INT. HAIL MARY

The airlock finishes cycling, the door swings open -- Grace charges to the cockpit --

ROCKY
Screens flash many colors!

Grace pulls himself into his chair.

A metallic GROAN screams from somewhere down below.

GRACE
Where's that noise coming from?

ROCKY
All around. But loudest at
starboard dormitory wall segment.
It bending inward.

GRACE
(thinks)
The gravity's tearing the ship
apart.

ROCKY
We have sampler. We leave now.

Grace throws the spin-drive controls to full. The ship lurches forward. As Grace struggles --

GRACE
Something's wrong. She's fighting
me --

ROCKY
*Hull bending in big room below
dormitory!*

Grace frowns -- what's he talking about? He checks the screens and goes pale --

GRACE
That's the fuel tanks.

ROCKY
Turn off engines, question?

GRACE

Not until we get to stable orbit.
Otherwise we'll crash down into
Adrian...

The ship GROANS and SHUDDERS. Grace fights the controls as he watches the screens.

C'mon... c'mon...

GRACE (CONT'D)

Velocity good! Stopping engines.

Grace zeros the sliders. The engines stop. Grace collapses in his seat. *Oh thank God...*

And for one quiet moment, everything feels like it might be okay.

Wait...

Grace leans forward again. Holds his hand up. Relaxes it. His arm drifts down and to the left.

GRACE (CONT'D)

We still have gravity...

He tries again with both arms. He looks to Rocky.

GRACE (CONT'D)

That doesn't make sense. We're in
orbit.

ROCKY

Spin drive, question?

GRACE

No, it's offline. Zero thrust.

Rocky removes tools from his tool belt. He drops them one at a time. They plummet down with increasing velocity.

ROCKY

Gravity increasing.

GRACE

Force increasing.

Grace grits his teeth as he realizes --

GRACE (CONT'D)

I'm having trouble... breathing...

He swipes through the screens, searching for the source of the problem --

His eyes go wide when he reaches "Structure."

GRACE (CONT'D)
There's a hole in the ship...

EXT. HAIL MARY

And so there is. A chaotic, sputtering explosion vents out from the breach, *propelling the ship forward...*

INT. COCKPIT

The force in the cockpit is increasing by the second -- ALARMS ring out all around -- every move for Grace is a struggle --

GRACE
Hull breach. Port fuel tanks.

ROCKY
Why thrust, question?

GRACE
(thinks)
It's the Astrophage! The fuel is migrating to Adrian!

ROCKY
Bad bad bad!

GRACE
We have to jettison the breached tanks...

Grace struggles to reach the screen. Rocky presses up against the xenonite barrier, unable to help.

ROCKY
Yes yes yes! Hurry!

Grace fights his hand forward... towards the "Jettison" button... *c'mon... c'mon...*

He hits the button.

EXT. HAIL MARY

The first tank is jettisoned. The resulting explosion LAUNCHES THE HAIL MARY forward --

INT. COCKPIT

Grace and Rocky are JERKED FORWARD under the acceleration --

GRACE

Is slammed against his restraints. He can't breathe. *He's suffocating.*

ROCKY

Smashes into his walls like a pinball -- he's not restrained, but the force is too much for even him. SILVER BLOOD splatters the xenonite everywhere he makes impact.

ONSCREEN: **"EXCESSIVE CENTRIFUGAL FORCE WARNING"**

Grace tries to speak, but has no air.

GRACE

Hnnnnnh...

Rocky tries to recover his bearings. Braces himself with ALL FIVE OF HIS ARMS --

ROCKY

Jettison other tank!

Grace can barely move. He glances down AT HIS SEAT and sees the metal beginning to BEND UNDER THE CENTRIFUGAL FORCE --

Don't think about that, Grace.

His eyes dart to the jettison button. It's inches away. But might as well be miles. He fights his arm forward inch by painstaking inch...

The metal on his seat begins to SCREAM as it twists free.

Grace slams his hand into the button.

And a whole bunch of things happen at once:

-- The SECOND TANK jettisons -- rocketing the Hail Mary forward --

-- Grace's seat *rips free* under the force. He's slammed around the cockpit --

-- Rocky smashes again into the walls. SILVER BLOOD flies.

And then things get quiet.

HOLD ON GRACE.

He can't breathe. He's struggles against the prison that is his seat as it suffocates him. He fights the restraints. But it's no use.

He's going to die.

His eyes drift over to Rocky's compartment...

But it's empty.

Grace's eyes dart around. *Where did Rocky go?*

The cockpit seems to be filling up SMOKE.

As Grace starts to BLACKOUT, he thinks to himself *why is there smoke in the cockpit?*

Rocky climbs up the ladder.

He's on Grace's side of the cockpit, no longer protected from the Earth atmosphere. THICK SMOKE billows from under his carapace.

The atmosphere is killing Rocky.

Rocky grabs Grace's chair... RIPS THE RESTRAINTS FREE...

He takes Grace in his arms.

INT. HAIL MARY

As ALARMS RING OUT all around, Rocky drags Grace down the corridor as fast as he can --

Rocky pulls Grace to the dormitory -- picks him up and puts him in the med-bay --

Grace's eyes see the AWFUL DAMAGE the atmosphere is doing to Rocky. He tries to speak --

GRACE

...Rocky...

But Rocky's in bad shape.

ROCKY

Save... Earth... Save... Erid...

Rocky engages the autodoc.

Mechanical arms shoot down from the ceiling.

Rocky collapses. As Grace tries to sit up --

Rocky!

-- the mechanical arms GRAB GRACE -- needles are injected into his arms -- A BREATHING TUBE is shoved down his throat --

And GRACE BLACKS OUT.

CUT TO:

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - FLASHBACK

SMOKE roils across the frame. Disaster cleanup crews work to manage the wreckage of a massive explosion.

We're looking down on the proceedings from an large observation window.

STRATT

According to his digital diary, Dubois wanted more experience with Astrophage-powered electrical generators. Shapiro was there to assist.

Stratt directs the meeting from the head of the room.

ILYUKHINA

Should have been me testing this. I am responsible for ship maintenance.

GRACE

(reading his brief)
One nanogram of Astrophage isn't enough to blow up a building.

DR. LOKKEN

When DuBois requisitioned one nanogram of Astrophage from the quartermaster, they gave him one milligram by mistake.

GRACE

That's literally a million times the heat-energy release they were expecting.

DR. LOKKEN

The containers are the same and the quantities are so small...

YAO

A measuring mistake killed my entire science team?

STRATT

It doesn't matter. We have to deal with the problem in front of us. We have five days to launch and no science expert.

The group trades glances. Grace gets the sense they all know something he doesn't.

GRACE

We have to delay the launch.

STRATT

The Hail Mary will leave on schedule.

DIMITRI

(nods)

We don't have a choice. If it does not set out within next week, we lose the orbital window.

STRATT

Which will effectively set us back months.

GRACE

Fine. We need that time to find and train a new science expert.

The group trades glances again.

STRATT

We're already at the edge of our acceptable casualty projection. Any delay and that projection increases exponentially. As do the odds of mission failure. This is our chance. We have to launch. Now.

She slides another brief to him.

He glances at the label. Sees HIS OWN NAME. And immediately realizes what she's suggesting. He shakes his head.

GRACE

No.

YAO

We'll train you as we go. We'll do the hard tasks. You're only responsible for the science.

Grace looks at him... looks at everyone... and realizes they've all made this decision without him.

GRACE
 (this is insane...)
 I'm not an astronaut.

STRATT
 I don't need an astronaut. I need an expert on Astrophage who's mission ready.
 (before he can argue)
 You've been present for every major scientific or strategic meeting we've had about the ship and its mission. I made sure of it.

Grace stares at her -- *why would you make sure of it?*

Then he realizes.

GRACE
 You tested me for coma resistance...

STRATT
 Of course I did. I tested everyone.
 (then)
 Do you think I kept you on this project because I needed a sixth-grade teacher around?

She might as well have slapped him. He holds her gaze -- any previous warmth between them gone.

Grace feels the full weight of the room bearing down on him.

GRACE
 You want me to go on a suicide mission.

STRATT
 If you don't go, you die anyway.

GRACE
 Yeah, in thirty years. With the...

He trails off. Catching himself.

STRATT
 "With the rest of us?"

GRACE

I'm sorry. That's not what I meant.

(then)

It's just... you're asking me to give my life.

They are. He looks around the table to see empathetic faces. But it's clear -- they're all in agreement.

STRATT

There is greater purpose to life beyond the self, Dr. Grace.

Grace fights back tears.

GRACE

(quietly)

Can I think about it?

The group looks to Stratt. She checks her watch.

STRATT

You have three hours.

HOLD ON GRACE.

CUT TO:

INT. MEDICAL BAY

Grace's eyes flutter open. Some time has passed -- the med-bay has done its job. Grace is bruised and bandaged, but alive.

He groans as he pulls the tubes out of his mouth. Coughs.

GRACE

Rocky?

There's no response.

Grace climbs out of the bed.

He notices A TRAIL on the floor. Ash-like flakes... and mucous... as though something was injured and dragged itself through the ship.

Grace follows the trail.

INT. LAB

The room is a mess. Rocky has clearly been busy -- new tubes of xenonite snake around the room.

And Rocky's in the center of it all, back on his side of things. Hard at work, despite the fact that --

He looks terrible.

GRACE

Rocky.

Rocky turns to acknowledge Grace and we get a better look at him. It's clear he's sustained serious injury. His carapace is scorched and ashy. Even his movements are labored.

ROCKY

Need you look at sampler.

Rocky gestures at the workstation. He's brought the sampler inside and built a translucent containment box.

GRACE

You're hurt.

But Rocky is focused on the matter at hand.

ROCKY

Need you look for predator. Did we succeed, question?

He points at the box. Look.

Grace nods. Okay.

ROCKY (CONT'D)

Built containment box for you work.

Grace studies the box. Valves and pumps regulate the inside environment. There's a set of handholds for Grace to manipulate the claws inside.

Grace grabs the handholds. Flexes the claws open and shut.

He takes the claws and grabs the cotton swab. He takes the sample and smears it on the waiting glass.

While he works, his eyes drift over to Rocky. They linger on those scorch marks. He can't hide his concern.

Rocky gestures. Work.

Grace takes the slide and inserts it into the microscope.

THROUGH THE LENS: Grace sees THOSE BLACK CLUSTERS that we've come to know as Astrophage. He adjusts the focus and notices ANOTHER ORGANISM nearby...

It's the PREDATOR.

The amoeba-like organism lurches towards the Astrophage and ENVELOPS IT.

It happens fast. Grace gasps. Can't believe his eyes.

The Astrophage wiggles a sort of death rattle, and then becomes cell-like in appearance. The black disappears, leaving only organelles and membranes.

The Astrophage is dead.

Grace's eyes dart up at Rocky. He nods, excited.

It worked.

Rocky does his best approximation of a nod.

Then he collapses.

It's hard to tell if it's relief or exhaustion. Probably both.

Grace hurries over to him.

ROCKY (CONT'D)

Need rest...

GRACE

Can I do anything to help you?

ROCKY

Try... not... die... while I rest...

Grace would laugh if he wasn't so concerned.

GRACE

You got it.

Grace leans against the barrier. Getting as close to Rocky as he can.

Grace watches his friend.

They sit in silence.

CUT TO:

INT. LAB

Later. Rocky sleeps. Grace paces nervously.

INT. LAB

Later. Rocky floats in his strange coma. Grace keeps watch nearby.

INT. LAB

Later. Grace sleeps in a chair beside Rocky. Like a loved one in intensive care.

There. Rocky moves. He lets out a small whale sound.

Grace instantly sits up.

ROCKY

Why you not working, question?

Grace smiles.

INT. LAB

Grace clears off space on the lab table. He begins placing XENONITE BOXES beside each other.

GRACE (V.O.)

Once we isolated the predator, we had to figure why it only existed on Adrian...

Grace preps the atmospheric controls on the boxes.

INT. LAB

Grace speaks directly to camera.

GRACE

We also had to name it. It's from the Tau Ceti, it looks like an amoeba, so I went with "Taumoeba."

He hesitates, then throws up his hands.

GRACE (CONT'D)

What do you want from me?

INT. LAB

The lab is once again transformed with complicated experimentation around the atmospheric tanks.

GRACE (V.O.)

We ran repeated tests with different air variables.

(MORE)

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

*Every time we introduced nitrogen,
the Taumoeba died.*

Grace is in the middle of the experiment. Rocky hovers from his position above. Rocky's health seems to be improving.

GRACE (V.O.)

*Which is only a problem if you
happen to come from systems with
nitrogen-rich atmospheres.*

INT. LAB

Grace is addressing camera again. Rocky climbs into frame.

ROCKY

I do come from nitrogen-rich
system.

GRACE

I know.

ROCKY

Nitrogen also present in Earth.

GRACE

I was being facetious. Just let me
do my journal --

INT. LAB

Rocky builds a series of BREEDER TANKS in the lab.

GRACE (V.O.)

*We had to figure out how to breed a
strain of nitrogen-resistant
Taumoeba...*

INT. DORMITORY

Grace does calculations while he watches Rocky sleep.

GRACE (V.O.)

Which took some trial and error...

INT. LAB

Grace and Rocky argue over the breeder tanks.

GRACE (V.O.)

*Eighty-one-point-four trials and
errors, to be precise.*

CUT TO:

THROUGH THE MICROSCOPE: a healthy TAUMOEBA vibrates with life.

GRACE (V.O.)
But Taumoeba trial eighty-two-point-five proved nitrogen resistant.

CUT TO:

Grace and Rocky are celebrating the results. Rocky puts his fist against the barrier like Grace showed him earlier.

ROCKY
Fist me!

GRACE
Nope. That's not how we say that.

INT. LAB

Grace addresses the camera. He's alone. He gestures to the xenonite breeder tanks behind him.

GRACE
Which means... we make enough resistant Taumoeba to survive the journey...
(beat)
And we get to go home.

EXT. HAIL MARY

The HAIL MARY decelerates as it approaches ROCKY'S SHIP. It rotates into position, aligning itself with the tunnel...

INT. HAIL MARY

Grace walks through the ship. Rocky's usual mess is now absent, replaced with PACKED DUFFELS and ORDERED CRATES. *

Grace opens the storage compartment. Rummages until he finds the container marked --

"Personal Kits."

He selects Ilyukhina's kit, opens it. Smiles when he finds one last liter bag labeled "Vodka." *

INT. DORMITORY

Grace enters the dormitory and discovers Rocky wearing a NEW OUTFIT. It's a smooth cloth with symmetrical rigid shapes. It almost looks like armor.

Rocky swells with pride when he sees Grace.

ROCKY
This is special clothing for
celebration!

Grace holds up the vodka.

GRACE
This is special liquid for
celebration.

ROCKY
Humans eat to celebrate?

GRACE
It's one of the ways.
(holds up liquid)
To Taumoeba 82.5!

ROCKY
Good good! Yes.

Grace takes a long drink from the vodka.

GRACE
I have a gift for you.

He pulls out one of his LAPTOPS.

Rocky starts jumping up and down.

ROCKY
Want want want! Portable Earth
thinking machine!

GRACE
It has everything we know.
Terabytes of our knowledge. Be
careful with it -- it won't survive
Eridian air.

ROCKY
I make special thinking-machine
life-support system!

GRACE
I figured you'd come up with
something.

ROCKY
Our scholars will be excited
excited.

(MORE)

ROCKY (CONT'D)

(then)

I no have gift for you. *

GRACE *

That's all right. It's a human
custom. Don't worry about it. *

ROCKY *

I want participate custom. What
Grace want, question? *

Grace shakes his head -- I'm fine, really. But as he takes
another drink of his vodka, something occurs to him -- *

GRACE *

How hard would it be to make me one
of your protection suits? *

ROCKY *

Why, question? *

GRACE *

There's something I'd love to see. *

CUT TO: *

INT. CORRIDOR/ROCKY'S SHIP *

Grace walks through the darkness. He's wearing a massive
PROTECTION SUIT -- some cross between Rocky's tech and a
bathysphere. He lumbers out of the darkness -- it's slow
going. Step... step... step... *

Rocky leads him forward -- c'mon! -- and they enter ROCKY'S
SHIP. *

We're WITH GRACE as he takes in his friend's world. His
FLASHLIGHT BEAM finds the alien technology. *

There's no sound between them -- the atmosphere makes it
impossible. But we can tell Rocky is excited to show Grace
his world. *And Grace is delighted to see it.* *

HOLD ON GRACE -- as he takes in the wonders all around him... *

GRACE (PRELAP) *

I understand why you think I'm the
right candidate for the mission... *

CUT TO: *

INT. OFFICE - FLASHBACK

CLOSE ON GRACE. He seems to have the weight of the world on his shoulders. He chooses his words carefully.

GRACE

And... that means a lot to me. It really does.

(then)

But I'm afraid I can't accept.

WIDEN TO REVEAL we're in Stratt's office. ARMED SECURITY GUARDS flank the doorway.

Stratt sits at her desk across from Grace. She levels her stoic gaze at him. Grace shifts uncomfortably.

GRACE (CONT'D)

I took what you said to heart. And you're right. We have a greater responsibility than ourselves. I'm a teacher. I belong down here.

She says nothing.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Even if the Hail Mary finds an answer, it's gonna take decades to institute change. They're gonna inherit a mess. I can do a lot more by preparing them for what's to come. I should stay here on Earth. Where I'm needed.

STRATT

As opposed to on the Hail Mary. Where you could solve the entire problem.

GRACE

We can train someone else.

STRATT

There's no time.

GRACE

I've seen you in action. You'll find a solution.

STRATT

I appreciate your faith in me.

She keeps her gaze locked on him.

GRACE

My... my place is in the classroom.

STRATT

Stop pretending this is about the children. It's insulting.

She points to one of the many files on her desk.

STRATT (CONT'D)

Our current climatology analysis estimates we will lose over a quarter of the world's population in next thirty years. And that assumes all the nations of the world work together and ration food. As countries become more desperate, they will become more tribal. War will beget famine. I'd conservatively double the estimate. If you truly cared about the children, you wouldn't hesitate to get on the ship. Call it what it is.

(then)

You're a coward.

Grace wilts under her glare. It takes him a moment to recover.

GRACE

I understand the stakes. I do.
But my mind is made up.

(shifts)

You can't convince me.

STRATT

I'm not trying to convince you, Dr. Grace. I'm trying to help you understand what I'm about to do next.

Grace frowns. *I'm sorry?*

STRATT (CONT'D)

I figure I owe you that much.

Stratt gestures to the armed guards.

STRATT (CONT'D)

Take Dr. Grace into custody. Escort him to medical. We need to get the workup as quickly as possible.

The guards brace Grace before he fully can process what's happening.

Stratt keys her phone.

STRATT (CONT'D)
 (into phone)
 Yeah, he's gonna fight us. Prepare to sedate him. We're on our way to you.

GRACE
 Stratt -- wait -- no --

The guards grab him -- he struggles --

GRACE (CONT'D)
 No -- PLEASE -- you can't do this --

STRATT
 I can.
 (to guards)
 Take him through the service corridors. Medical is waiting.

Grace stares at her in shock. *Jesus Christ, she's serious.*

The guards begin to forcibly drag Grace out of the room.

GRACE
 Stratt -- wait -- WAIT -- you're right.

Stratt gives him a look. Yes? The guards pause.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 You can't send me up there. You're right about me.
 (then)
 I'm a coward. I am.

STRATT
 I know.
 (shrugs)
 But you don't have to be.

She nods to the guards. Go.

Grace fights for his life. As they drag him away --

GRACE
 No -- PLEASE --

CUT TO:

INT. AIRLOCK/TUNNEL

As Grace's pleas echo, we FIND HIM standing in the airlock. Waiting for the cycle to finish. The outer door opens...

And Grace walks down the tunnel one last time.

He approaches the barrier. Rocky's already there waiting for him on the other side. Right where they started.

GRACE

Well. This is it.

ROCKY

Yes.

Rocky's low-tone indicates sadness.

GRACE

Stay in your engineering room as much as you can. The Astrophage should keep you protected from the radiation until you make it back to Erid.

ROCKY

Yes will stay in room.

GRACE

Did you double check the laptop? You tested it in the support system?

ROCKY

Yes work yes. Happy.

(then)

Did you test the breeder tanks, question? Still have time to make more xenonite if there is problem.

GRACE

They're working great.

They both shift uncomfortably.

GRACE (CONT'D)

I guess... I guess we should get going.

ROCKY

Yes have long journey. Still don't understand why longer for you than me.

GRACE

I know... it's relativity...

ROCKY

Erid same distance from Tau Ceti,
and you will take four years.

GRACE

I'll experience four years, because
time won't be as compressed for
me...

ROCKY

Only take me three years.

GRACE

Your ship accelerates faster than
mine... you'll be moving closer to
the speed of light.

ROCKY

So complicated.

GRACE

All the information about
relativity is on the laptop. Have
your scientists take a look.

ROCKY

You spend four years alone. You
will sleep in coma, question?

GRACE

I don't know. I haven't decided
yet.

ROCKY

Long time to be alone. You are
very brave.

Grace flinches at the word "brave."

*

GRACE

I'm not as brave as you think I am,
Rocky.

Rocky does his closest gesture to a shrug.

ROCKY

You are bravest human I have ever
met.

The joke brings a smile to Grace's face.

Thank you, Rocky.

Grace fights back tears.

GRACE
Goodbye, friend Rocky.

ROCKY
Goodbye, friend Grace.

Rocky gives a little wave, just like Grace did at the very beginning. Then he turns and heads to his ship.

Grace watches until Rocky disappears inside.

EXT. HAIL MARY

The two ships part ways. The vibrant light of Tau Ceti bids farewell as Rocky's ship heads in one direction...

...and the Hail Mary heads in the other.

INT. MEDICAL WARD - FLASHBACK

Grace is violently slammed down onto a operating table as he FIGHTS with the guards.

A DOCTOR preps an injection. We hear AN ALARM blaring. *

Rrrrrroooo --- rrrrrroooo --- rrrrrroooo ---

GRACE
No PLEASE -- you can't do this --

DOCTOR
Dr. Grace, you have to hold still.

The guards hold him down. Grace sees Stratt watching through the window --

GRACE
STRATT --

The doctor plunges the needle into his arm.

INT. DORMITORY

Grace's eyes flutter open. He tries to shake away the darkness. *Was that a dream?*

The ALARM keeps blaring.

Rrrrrroooo --- rrrrrroooo --- rrrrrroooo ---

Grace realizes it's the ship. He races out of the dormitory.

INT. LAB

As Grace hops into his chair, we may notice some time has passed since he said goodbye to Rocky. His hair is a bit longer, he now has a beard.

He takes stock of the FLASHING SCREENS. Notes INTERNAL ATMOSPHERE.

"FOREIGN PRESENCE DETECTED"

Grace scrolls to the location.

"LABORATORY"

Grace looks at the composition readout. Sees something that makes him go pale. He flips on the cameras in the lab.

And sees THOSE XENONITE BOXES.

And it may not be clear to us what's wrong, but it's definitely clear to Grace.

He springs to action. He shuts down the engines. *

EXT. HAIL MARY

The ship decelerates as the engines go dark.

INT. COCKPIT

The ship loses gravity. Grace, well at home now with the gravity changes, doesn't miss a beat. He holds himself steady with one hand, keeps working with the other...

He turns off the heating breakers. NEW ALARMS start to sound. Grace silences them.

INT. AIRLOCK

Grace pulls himself into the EVA suit. Moving FAST. He enters the airlock, leaving the inner door open...

...and opens the manual emergency valve on the outer door.

The air inside the ship HISSES out into space.

INT. LAB

ONSCREEN: the INTERNAL ATMOSPHERE readings show the numbers plummeting as the air is sucked out of the ship. *

Grace, still in his EVA suit, floats into the lab.
While he waits, he stares at THOSE XENONITE BOXES.

GRACE (V.O.)
*There was a leak... The Taumoeba
escaped their containers...*

INT. LAB

Later. Grace addresses camera from the lab.

GRACE
Fortunately I was able to contain
it before it reached the fuel
cells... or it would have eaten all
my Astrophage. And I'd be dead in
the water.

Behind him -- the lab is once again in disarray. Grace has
been busy experimenting on those containers.

GRACE (CONT'D)
But there's a deeper problem.
There isn't a breach in the
container. The leak is on a
molecular level. Best I can tell,
when we evolved environment-
resistant Taumoeba, that
environment...

He reaches over and knocks on one of the xenonite containers.

GRACE (CONT'D)
...included xenonite.

Grace shakes his head, frustrated with himself.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Molecular Biology 101. "Don't take
a life form you know nothing about
and then start modifying it with
technology you don't understand."
(then)
Good news is, I tested it with
Earth materials, and they still
hold Taumoeba fine. So I
transferred the remaining supply to
plastic containers and no further
leaks.
(nods)
The problem is xenonite.

Grace's face darkens. As he realizes...

GRACE (CONT'D)

Most of Rocky's ship is made of xenonite.

(thinks)

It'll already be in his fuel lines. By this point it's probably eaten his entire supply of Astrophage...

EXT. ROCKY'S SHIP

Rocky's ship sits motionless in space. The engines DEAD.

GRACE (V.O.)

He won't know what's happening. He won't be able to find the leak because it's the ship itself... Once the Astrophage is gone, his navigation systems will stop working... his communications will stop working... And then his life-support systems will start to fail...

INT. LAB

Grace almost forgets he's talking to the camera.

GRACE

If that doesn't kill him... the radiation sickness will.

(beat)

Either way, he's looking at a slow, painful death.

(then)

Alone.

Grace sits in the silence. At a loss.

Then.

He stands up, walks back to the supply panel. Rummages until he finds the small WHITEBOARD and MARKER.

He clears space on the table. Starts doing math with the marker. Just like he did at the beginning.

He looks at the initial numbers. Shakes his head. Grim.

He keeps calculating. While he works...

GRACE (V.O.)

I can't do it.

(then)

(MORE)

GRACE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I barely have enough food to make
 it home now. Even if I did...

He stares at the results.

INT. COCKPIT

Grace sits in the chair. Looks at the starfield. Deep in thought.

GRACE (V.O.)
 His fuel is gone. So by the time
 we make more, I'll have cut in to
 my reserves. There's no way to do
 both.
 (then)
 I can either go home... or I can
 save Rocky.

HOLD ON GRACE.

INT. HAIL MARY

Grace works on THE BEETLES: four unmanned probes, each housing a Taumoeba minifarm.

GRACE (V.O.)
 Lucky for me... or should I say,
 lucky for you... I was never
 supposed to make it home anyway.

Each probe looks like a small spaceship.

INT. LAB

Later. Grace looks freshly shaven. His lab is clean and organized. He seems calm. Resolved.

*

GRACE
 I've left you detailed logs on all
 my findings, along with the
 Taumoeba minifarms. Hopefully it
 makes sense. If not...

He shrugs. Smiles.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 You're smart. You'll figure it
 out.

INT. HAIL MARY

Grace takes the memory card from the camera. Affixes the label. Writes in block letters:

"STRATT"

He places the card in the last beetle. Closes it up.

EXT. HAIL MARY

The FOUR BEETLES are all launched from the Hail Mary.

INT. DORMITORY

Grace watches the LARGE VIEWSCREEN on the Don't Go Crazy Wall. The waves crash on Rodeo Beach. He stares at the shoreline for a few moments. As though he's saying goodbye.

Grace turns off the screen. He stands in the darkness. Then he heads towards the cockpit.

INT. COCKPIT

Grace climbs into his chair.

He places THE XENONITE FIGURE of Rocky on his dash.

He opens up the Navigation Menu.

He inputs a new destination.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROCKY'S SHIP

We're angling around Rocky's ship to reveal...

The Hail Mary.

And *there's* Grace. He's standing in the open airlock in his EVA suit. Just as we angle in on him...

Grace jumps out of the airlock.

He floats across the black expanse, tethered to the Hail Mary. He looks *so small* against the universe beyond as he makes his way towards Rocky's ship. Closer... closer...

WHAM! Grace SLAMS into Rocky's ship with considerable force. He scrabbles at the hull, desperate to find purchase. He tumbles across the ship... his arm reaches out...

...and grabs the ANTENNA. *Got it.*

He catches his breath. Then he begins to crawl towards the AIRLOCK PORTAL Rocky built when they first met. He pulls himself inside the alcove. Tethers himself in place.

The translucent xenonite portal is still in place, allowing Grace to see just inside. But it's DARK. No signs of life.

Grace removes the wrench from his belt. Begins banging on the hull. *Wham... wham... wham...*

GRACE
Rocky? Rocky!

There's no response.

Grace angles his headlamps towards the portal. Desperate for any signs of life.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Rocky?!

There.

A flash of movement.

Rocky races towards the portal.

He looks *rough*... his clothes are a mess, covered in the familiar Taumoeba residue... there are burn marks all over his arms... but he's alive.

And his body language is SHEER JOY.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Hi.

Tears spring to Grace's eyes as he sees his friend.

Rocky gestures wildly with happiness --

*

You came back for me.

Grace nods.

GRACE (CONT'D)
I'm here.

CUT TO BLACK.

And we stay in darkness for a moment. Exhale.

Then...

INT. OFFICE

FROM BLACK... pinpricks of lights begin to resolve themselves. The pixels dance like stars in the sky.

GRACE (V.O.)
I've left you detailed logs of all
my findings, along with the
Taumoeba minifarms. Hopefully it
all makes sense...

The image resolves itself... we're looking at the video of
Grace...

GRACE
If not... you're smart. You'll
figure it out.

Reveal STRATT. Watching Grace's last message.

Time has passed. Her eyes bear the lines and weight of these
last few years.

The video keeps playing past what we saw earlier.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Honestly, Stratt... the best part
about this plan is I never have to
hear you say, "I told you so."

That brings a smile to Stratt's face. She stands up, steps
to the OBSERVATION WINDOW that makes up one entire wall of
her office.

The video keeps playing.

GRACE (CONT'D)
But. You were right.

DOWN BELOW: there's a HANGAR bustling with activity.
Scientists and engineers in clean-suits work tirelessly as
they assemble what looks like some sort of DELIVERY ROCKET.

GRACE (CONT'D)
There is greater purpose to life
beyond the self.

HOLD ON STRATT. Silhouetted against this kinetic image of
scientific progress in action.

ON THE VIDEO: Grace looks at the camera with warm eyes.
Waves goodbye.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Take care.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. ERID

FROM BLACK... we find A NEW PLANET. One we've never seen before. The roiling atmosphere hides the wonders beneath. *

TITLE: SIXTEEN YEARS LATER**INT. HABITATION - BEDROOM**

CLOSE ON A MAN'S EYES as they flutter towards consciousness. A COMFORTING VOICE echoes around us:

VOICE
Good morning.

RYLAND GRACE sits up in his bed. He's sixteen years older than last we saw him.

He stretches as the automated windows let SUNLIGHT in the room. Grace smiles. *It's a new day.*

INT. HABITATION - LIVING ROOM

Grace sits at his breakfast table eating a synthetic meal that doesn't look particularly appetizing. But Grace is used to it by now.

We get a better look at the place. The architecture and furnishings somehow feel both alien and familiar. As though some foreign creatures did their best to approximate humanity despite their limited resources.

VOICE
You have a visitor.

Grace looks up from his breakfast.

EXT. HABITATION

Grace opens the front door to his habitation. He steps outside slowly, walking with the assist of a cane.

He looks up at the sky, and sees THE DOME covering his entire habitat. Artificial lights high above simulate sunlight.

Grace crosses THE GROUNDS of his living area. A beautiful array of multicolored and strangely-shaped rocks give the appearance of landscaping.

Grace makes his way to A LARGE AIRLOCK DOOR at the edge of the dome.

Someone's BANGING on the other side of it.

GRACE
Hang on, I'm coming...

Grace opens the airlock...

And Rocky steps into the HABITATION.

He's wearing a sleeker version of his CONTAINMENT SUIT. It allows him to move freely in Grace's environment.

ROCKY
 Why you take so long?

[NOTE: We SUBTITLE Rocky's dialogue. Grace himself no longer needs translation.]

GRACE
 I'm old. Give me a break.

They walk the grounds. Two old friends.

ROCKY
 We experience time same and I am not slow.

GRACE
 Well... first of all, we don't. I've done a lot more time-dilated travel than you...

ROCKY	GRACE (CONT'D)
Still no understand	Yeah, I'm working on that --
relativity --	

GRACE (CONT'D)
 -- but secondly you have a life-span of like six-hundred years so why are we even arguing?

ROCKY
 I have news, friend Grace.

He says it with a tone that makes Grace stop in his tracks.

ROCKY (CONT'D)
 The astronomy hive reports Sol has returned to full luminance.

Grace can't quite believe what he's hearing.

GRACE
 You're sure?

ROCKY
 Yes yes. Data was analyzed by a
 thrum of astronomers.
 (then)
 Your sun is safe.

Grace's knees go weak as he's flooded with relief. He sits
 down on a nearby stone bench.

He fights tears. Looks up to the light in the sky.

GRACE
 (quietly)
 Good work, Stratt.

A beat. Rocky shifts his carapace so that he appears to be
 following Grace's gaze.

ROCKY
 That not real sky.

GRACE
 I know.

ROCKY
 That not Sol, either. Just
 approximation of --

GRACE
I know. I'm just grateful. It's a
 cultural thing.

Rocky shrugs. Okay.

ROCKY
 Our scientists ready to prepare
 Hail Mary for journey home.
 (then)
 If you want.

Grace feels the sunlight on his face.

GRACE
 It's a long trip, Rocky. And I'm
 old.
 (then)
 I'll think about it.

Rocky seems relieved.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 But in the meantime...

Grace stands.

GRACE (CONT'D)
I better get to work.

Rocky "nods," happy. He holds up one claw in a fist.

Grace nods right back. *We did it.*

They fist-bump.

CUT TO:

INT. CLASSROOM

We're WITH GRACE as he walks down the aisle of a strange chamber. He seems happy. In his element. *

AROUND HIM: we hear a restless cacophony of overlapping whale-like sounds...

GRACE
All right, all right... settle
down. C'mon. Get in your seats.

And we reveal THE CLASSROOM:

THIRTY ADORABLE ERIDIAN CHILDREN all scramble about in little learning cubicles partitioned off from Grace's atmosphere.

They scamper to their desks and quiet down. Ready for the lesson to begin.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Now then...

Grace takes his place at the front of the class.

Where he belongs.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Who here can tell me the speed of
light?

Twelve kids raise their claws.

CUT TO BLACK.

The End