

Strange Specimens  
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FADE IN ON:

**INT. SOMEWHERE DARK - UNKNOWN TIME**

Blackness. The kind of quasi darkness where one can *almost* make out a shape.

Shadows mutate on the edge of one's vision. Your brain struggles to understand. But somehow... can't.

Engines HUM smoothly. Soothing - in a deceptive way.

JESSICA HANDLESMAN (30s) lies on a platform, on her side. Fetal position. Knees to chest.

She's clad in a white lab coat which hides her slim form. Red-brown hair obscures her face.

One intelligent eye opens. Blinks. Takes in the view.

Glowing SPECKS swirl above her - fireflies in a breeze.

Jessica sits up and swats one "pest".

THUNK.

A curved pane of GLASS WHACKS her cheek.

Another speck of light dive-bombs her face. Causing the "world" to:

FADE TO WHITE:

**INT. LABORATORY - THIRTY MINUTES AGO**

Revealing: Jessica posed near a *different* pane of glass. The white coat stays the same, a clipboard in her hand.

But this particular glass has no curves. The sign above it reads simply: CERN. The window opens onto a -

WHITE BOOTH.

Inside, ROBOT ARMS manipulate a GLOBE OF LIGHT. The ball pulses in mid-air.

Monitors surrounding Jessica spit out numbers.

The globe revolves like mini-Earth. The measurements fitfully change.

Jessica jots down notes at a brisk pace.

FOOTSTEPS interrupt her thoughts.

Jessica looks up to see:

A grinning DOUG LANNEN (30s). Geeky yet handsome in yuppie clothes.

He waves. Confusion flickers on Jessica's face.

DOUG  
Earth to Dr. Handelsman. Your favorite  
engineer has arrived.

JESSICA  
Doug? Your shift ended hours ago.

DOUG  
I figured you could use some help.

JESSICA  
The test's running fine. You can go.

Jessica turns back to her work.

DOUG  
But Kevin wants to see the particle.

JESSICA  
Kevin who?

KEVIN (O.S.)  
Dad, don't lie!

Jessica looks down at... KEVIN LANNEN (6). A rumpled mini  
Doug, saddled with a *Star Wars* backpack half his size.

DOUG  
Jessica meet Kevin; my son.  
Kevin, meet Dr. Jessica Handlesman. She's  
the theoretical physicist who works a lot  
with your Dad.

KEVIN  
Work? Big deal: who cares?

Kevin pouts at Jessica. She stares back. Neither one  
seems impressed. Doug pushes Kevin forward, anyway.

DOUG  
Kevin's psyched about being a scientist.

KEVIN  
Nuh-uh. I like sports.

DOUG

Kid, fess up. This isn't school. Your friends won't hear. Your backpack shows what you *really* like.

KEVIN

You gave me that for Christmas. I asked Santa for a football!

Kevin rips free of his father and heads for a panel of blinking lights.

JESSICA

Don't touch anything!

KEVIN

(holds up both hands)

Like I did anything. See? All clear.

The globe in the booth glows, highlights his face. Kevin doesn't bother to glance toward the light.

DOUG

Never mind Kevin. He's been cranky recently.

JESSICA

No kidding.

DOUG

It's... the divorce.

JESSICA

So why bring him here?

DOUG

To introduce him to... new sights. Listen: I don't hand Kevin back to his Mom until ten. When you get off work, how does sit down dinner sound?

JESSICA

Unnecessary and expensive.

DOUG

Not if it's on me. I know you don't get out much, but there's some excellent chow in town. Pizza. Mexican. Sushi. Thai...

JESSICA

Not my style.

DOUG

How 'bout Chinese?

JESSICA

Thanks, but I've got all I need.

Jessica pats her pocket. Revealing: a PROTEIN BAR. Kevin roams further, pokes a panel with a bored finger.

JESSICA

I told you, don't touch anything!

KEVIN

This is a *science* lab. Isn't experimenting the point?

DOUG

Kevin, behave!

(to Jessica)

Give him a break. He's real upset.

Jessica raises a sarcastic brow.

JESSICA

Maybe you shouldn't flirt with co-workers in front of him?

DOUG

I'd like to think we're... friends.  
Besides, Kevin has to adjust. The separation's been almost a year.

Doug rolls up his coat sleeve, revealing: a faded TATTOO.

It apparently once read "Shirley". The scabbed "ey" has been laser removed.

JESSICA

"Shirl"?

DOUG

A man's gotta fact facts, and move on.

Kevin glares at Jessica, and reaches for a panel. Slow as molasses. Deliberately.

JESSICA

Don't!

KEVIN

Don't boss me. You're not my Mom!

The boy defiantly flips a switch.

Instantly, robot arms recoil.

The particle in the booth FLARES nova-bright. The three observers shield their eyes.

Then the globe EXPLODES, bathing them in searing light.

**INT. SOMEWHERE DARK - PRESENT**

Jessica sits up, alert.

She presses her hands against dark, curved walls. Running them across the glass, she explores.

Her haggard reflection frowns back at her.

Jessica staggers to her feet and looks around. There's nothing more to see. Except more dark.

SUDDENLY:

Footlights spear up from the floor, revealing...

Where she really is: a ceiling-to-floor GLASS TUBE.

And it's not the only one. Three tubes stand side by side in an efficient, military row.

Kevin's curled up in the middle Tube. Weighed down by his backpack and depression, he huddles on the floor.

Doug's in the third, standing. Who knows how long he's been awake?

He actively explores every nook and cranny of his prison, almost mirroring Jessica's previous movements.

Doug and Jessica spot each other, lock anxious eyes.

DOUG

Woof. You're ok? I was getting worried.  
It took you time to wake up.

JESSICA

Where are we?

DOUG

Not sure. But I've got a theory.

Jessica's gaze slips past the glass, and falls upon: four black, featureless WALLS.

JESSICA

Based on what evidence?

DOUG  
Not much. But a hunch.

AN EARSPLITTING RUMBLE. The three tubes shake.

The wall in front of them retracts. Revealing:

A massive, empty ROOM. Tiles with abstract SYMBOLS  
comprise the floor.

A glowing, circular PANEL sits dead-center. X (or rather  
"O") marks the spot.

The ceiling towers thirty feet above their heads - a mass  
of open, metal GRIDS.

Jessica pounds on her tube. She yells to Doug, voice  
muffled by doubled layers of glass:

JESSICA  
You want to fill me in on that hunch?

DOUG  
In a minute, after I'm out.

Doug yanks on a lever. It SPARKS.

KEVIN  
Dad, watch out!

DOUG  
Sit tight, pal. Lights can't harm your  
old man. I'd hug you, but -

Doug spreads his arms. Tube walls block his way. So Doug  
turns back to his work, probes *different* things.

JESSICA  
We're *scientists*, Doug. You wanted to  
show your son what we do? Then let's  
gather solid facts first. Observe our  
surroundings for awhile.

DOUG  
I already have. I'm done.

JESSICA  
How long have *you* been awake?

DOUG  
About an hour. Maybe more.

He pulls a wire. Jessica winces. SPARKS fly.

JESSICA

Dr. Lannen, what are you doing?

DOUG

Elementary, my Dear Dr. Handlesman. I'm Reverse Engineering how to escape.

JESSICA

Tinkering with unfamiliar equipment: you think that's wise?

DOUG

Freedom for you, me and my son? Big time.

JESSICA

Be rational.

DOUG

You know me. *That* I am.

Doug's movements grow more intense as he explores.

JESSICA

Doug, please. Let's think this through. Starting with not *where* but *why*.

DOUG

Okay, *Doctor*. You first.

JESSICA

Kevin must've triggered a containment breach. We're quarantined for safety. I think.

DOUG

We don't have labs that look like this.

JESSICA

You don't think they're classified?

DOUG

If that theory was true, wouldn't someone be explaining it to us now?

JESSICA

Why don't we wait, and find out?

Doug arches a defiant brow, looking just like Kevin in the lab. Like Father, Like Son - in reverse.

KEVIN

I wanna go home, not wait!



DOUG  
Chill your jets, kid. I'll get us out of here. Soon, the toughest choice you'll be facing is Pizza or Chinese. And either one beats Protein bars...

Doug peers up at his Tube's ceiling, grins.

DOUG  
This should do the trick!

He rips out a wire. Doug's tube SLIDES OPEN.

DOUG  
Score One for the Engineer! Wait'll Human Resources hears about this.

He fist-pumps to Kevin; face bathed in platform lights.

DOUG  
Don't move an inch, pal. You're next.

JESSICA  
Wait...

Doug takes a triumphant first step onto the floor.

ZAP - and VAPORIZES in a blinding flash of light! A black stain marks where he once stood.

KEVIN  
Dad!

Jessica and Kevin freeze in their tubes. Terrified.

**INT. ANOTHER TUBE - UNKNOWN TIME**

Another eye opens. This one; rich chocolate brown. Sweat glistens on dark skin.

RON CLAXTON (30s, African American) awakes on a familiar platform floor.

His camo shirt screams US Army.

Ron leaps instantly to his feet: rams his head against the almost invisible glass barrier.

THUNK. The impact knocks him out.

**EXT. IRAQI DESERT - THIRTY MINUTES AGO - DAY**

Ron and LUKE MASON (30s) trudge under an unyielding sun.

Luke's buzz-cut blond, with farm-tested iron arms.

Both soldier's uniforms display a coat of sand. M-16s cradled in rough hands.

Their bodies may be fatigued, but not their mouths.

Along with the CRUNCH of weathered boots, the macho banter marches on.

LUKE  
(southern accent)  
I warned you, Bro. Watch your step.

RON  
"Bro"? You're kidding, right?

LUKE  
Dunno where you hail from -

RON  
Detroit.

LUKE  
Who worthwhile lives out there?

RON  
Michael Moore.

LUKE  
That liberal wuss?

RON  
We're talkin' Detroit. Trust me, that's tough.

LUKE  
And this ain't Kansas, son. It's Karbala. Being politically correct here'll get you killed dead.

RON  
Can a man get killed in *non-lethal* ways?

LUKE  
I ain't jokin'. Before you arrived, there was this entitled dickhead in our squad.

RON

(points at Luke's nametag)  
Lemme guess: his name was Luke?

LUKE

Nah. Cutter. A rich-boy private who thought he ruled the world by Divine Right. You know the type?

RON

I've encountered guys like that before. In my experience, it ain't the *rich* part that's the problem. It's the know-it-all attitude that makes 'em weak. Some poor folks got that Achilles Heel, as well.

LUKE

Achill-wha?

RON

Never mind.

LUKE

Fuck that. Point is: one night Cutter got piss-drunk, and crossed the perimeter to take a leak. One misstep, and an IED exploded. All that was left of Cutter was one foot. A size ten boot, if I remember right.

RON

Who screwed up the initial sweep?

LUKE

One of the Sand Nig - I mean, Arabs. We *thought* he was on our side. But he'd just planted the charge that night.

RON

Don't be racist.

LUKE

I'll talk smack 'bout ISIL all I please.

RON

You said "Nigger."

LUKE

I didn't.

RON

Yes, you did.

LUKE

But I stopped.

RON

You said a bit.

LUKE

I'm just tellin' it like it is. That ain't racism, Son.

RON

You're calling me Son? I'm your age.

LUKE

Those ragheads can't be trusted. Get that through your skull.

Righteous anger grows in Luke's eyes.

LUKE

I hear those Koran Kreepers are breaking Geneva code. Experimenting with hallucinogenics to fuck with your mind.

RON

LSD? Haven't done shit like that since high school prom.

LUKE

Try Bath Salts mixed with PCP. Stuff that makes you *think* you're in reality. Like those *Matrix* films with Keanu Reeves.

RON

The sequels were stupid.

LUKE

Who gives a shit? Keanu looked slick. So did Leonardo DiCaprio in *Inception*...

RON

Level with me, Man. Are you gay?

GUNFIRE echoes over a dune.

Luke and Ron dart headlong towards the noise. As they breach the crest, they see:

One US SOLDIER dead.

Bickering over the corpse are two Middle Eastern men: MAITHEM and AMIR (30s).

Amir wields a GUN. Maithem's wrapped in a bulky coat, screams fury and Arabic at Amir.

LUKE

Fuck!

Luke FIRES.

Amir goes down. Still alive, but spewing red.

Ron aims at Maithem.

MAITHEM

Don't!

Maithem waves his hands. Ron hesitates - rifle trained at Maithem's head. He and Luke scream back and forth:

LUKE

What you waiting for? Shoot the cocksucker!

RON

That ain't protocol. We haven't confirmed he's hostile!

LUKE

You see the dead soldier? At his *feet*?

RON

It could've been the other guy!

LUKE

So he just stood back and watched? Letting it happen's just as bad!

RON

That guy had a gun. This one could be a civilian. In the wrong place, at the wrong time.

LUKE

Of all the naive shit -

RON

It happens in Detroit all the time!

LUKE

That's no Goddamned civilian.

(to Maithem)

What you hiding in those clothes?

Maithem doesn't respond. Which pisses Luke off even more.

LUKE  
You speak English, fucktard? Open your  
god-damned coat!

Maithem's fingers tremble. He unzips his vest.

Revealing: EXPLOSIVE CHARGES. A tangle of wires criss-  
crossing a strange black BOX on his chest.

LUKE  
Fuck and a half. I was right!

MAITHEM  
I am a prisoner. He *made* me wear this.

RON  
Why should we believe you?

MAITHEM  
I beg you, take that leap of faith!

RON  
Whatever. Consider your hostile status  
confirmed!

Amir GURGLES - and reaches for Maithem's leg.

Luke charges at both Middle-Eastern men.

Ron grabs his partner's shoulder. CURSES fly.

RON  
You wanna end up like Cutter?

LUKE  
Do you? Let me go!

MAITHEM  
You don't know what you're doing.

LUKE  
I sure do.  
(to Ron)  
Take 'em down!

Maithem turns to run.

Luke SNARLS and tackles Maithem mid-waist, like the high-  
school football star he once was.

ZAP. A LIGHT BLAST hits the skirmish dead-center; like  
spotlights at a stadium.

Or the explosion in the CERN lab.

**INT. RON'S TUBE - UNKNOWN TIME**

Ron GROWLS and staggers to his feet. Shakes cobwebs from his head.

His M-16 jabs him in the side. Advising Ron: it's still there.

Ron realizes his luck and grins - brilliant white on his dark, wide face.

LIGHTS flicker on, revealing three GLASS TUBES: arranged in neat, military rows.

Ron's in the first.

Maithem and a dying Amir share the center.

Luke imprisoned on the end.

Luke swings *his* rifle around, aimed at Maithem's face.

LUKE

I don't give a shit what hole your  
buddies threw us in. You're still gonna  
die. This ammo pierces steel!

SCRAPE. The wall in front of them rolls up.

Revealing: Jessica and Kevin imprisoned in Tubes across the room.

Luke swings towards them reflexively. FIRES.

The first bullet RICOCHETS back, nails Luke in his calf.

LUKE

Ow!

RON

Soldier, hold your fire!

LUKE

You joined *my* platoon. Don't tell me what  
to do!

Luke shoots again.

*This* volley BLASTS the tube's glass to smithereens. Luke steps forward, a smirk on his farm-boy face.

LUKE

Second time's the charm. Who wants a  
piece next?

Jessica waves frantically.

LUKE  
Hey, pretty lady -

JESSICA  
Don't!

Luke's boot "touches down". ZAP. Luke VAPORIZES, just like Doug. His M-16 CLATTERS to the floor.

Jessica and Kevin duck and cover.

RON  
(whispers)  
I warned him.

He swivels angrily towards Maithem and Amir.

RON  
What the Fuck did you do? Tell me now, or  
I'll finish Luke's job!

He aims his M-16 at Maithem, echoing Luke's initial move.

Maithem backs towards the far end of his Tube. And trips over Amir - who grabs his ankle again.

MAITHEM  
I'm innocent. Please.

His jacket gaps open - revealing explosives still wired to his chest.

MAITHEM  
This could explode!

Ron glances towards Jessica and Kevin.

RON  
(mutters)  
Just look at those clothes. You're  
American civilians. That's a risk I  
shouldn't take....

Conflicted, Ron collapses against his Tube's wall. Pins Maithem with a glare.

RON  
Don't make a single move. From now on,  
I'm watching you.



**INT. ANOTHER TUBE - UNKNOWN TIME**

TODD ATKINS (17) groans, eyes closed. His dried-out tongue stuck to the floor.

Todd takes a SNIFF and recoils. Sits up instantly, like he's been shocked.

He scrubs his tongue against his sleeve to kill the taste. Gold braids decorate a red velvet cuff.

A closer look at Todd's ears reveals crushed Vulcan prosthetics.

He's wearing a *Star Trek* uniform. Torn like Captain Kirk, after a fight.

Firefly lights dance before Todd's pale face, and reflect off a curved Tube wall.

Todd glances down at his uniform.

TODD

Ripped? I paid fifty bucks for this. What asshole pulled this prank? Is this reality TV?

**EXT. CITY STREET - DAY - THIRTY MINUTES AGO**

Todd strolls boldly along - where many have gone before.

His costume and makeup clean and new, he stands out. Though not in the best of ways.

A neon sign blinks in the distance: *NYC Comi-Con*.

But there's a human WALL Todd must breach first: a crowd of *Occupy Something* PROTESTORS.

Millennials, mostly. A handful of Boomers and Gen-Xers on the side.

On the outskirts:

Todd spots SARAH (16): blonde, modest-pretty and glowing with protestor pride.

A GOLD CHAIN dangles from her neck.

Instantly smitten, Todd smooths down his uniform and glides Sarah's way.

He extends his hand in a Vulcan salute.

Perched on a nearby wall, OFFICER ALLEN JOHNSON (30s) communes with OFFICER VIETTA ROBINSON (50s).

Allen munches falafel. The cops scan the crowd, bored.

ALLEN

What are you thinking, V?

VIETTA

That I shoulda chose a different job. And bought that pizza before clocking on.

ALLEN

No, I mean that kid over there.

He points out Todd's approach toward Sarah.

ALLEN

Wanna bet ten bucks she slaps him down?

VIETTA

Rookie, that kid blew his shot with "hello".

ALLEN

Don't call me Rookie. I've been working here six whole months.

VIETTA

And you haven't drawn your firearm. Not *once*.

ALLEN

That's cause Black Lives matter...

VIETTA

Blue lives, too.

ALLEN

I have gun control, Officer. Do you?

A few feet away: Sarah gives Todd the once-over. Flashes him a tepid smile.

SARAH

Nice clothes.

TODD

Uh, I don't wear this everyday. It's for Comi-Con. Custom-made.

SARAH

That Sci-Fi thingy?

TODD

Yeah. Do you know where the entrance is?

Sarah giggles and points at the neon sign.

SARAH

Duh. Over there. Is your makeup in the way?

TODD

My contacts aren't as good as my glasses. What are you here for?

SARAH

Protesting. Double Duh. Who are you dressed as - Captain Obvious?

TODD

Nah, that'd be a yellow shirt. What are you protesting?

SARAH

Economic inequality. Something more important than spaceships.

TODD

Don't forget aliens. My name's Todd. What's yours?

A male voice interrupts: PAUL (17). Preppy. Handsome. Oh-so-snide.

PAUL

Don't bother, Sarah. Space nerds like him *worship* the military industrial complex.

SARAH

Hey, Paul. This is -

TODD

- Todd.

Paul drapes a possessive arm over Sarah's shoulder.

PAUL

Is Todd bothering you? Should I kick his ass?

Officer Allen snickers through falafel.

ALLEN

And... he's officially cock blocked. Boo-yah!

VIETTA  
(chuckles)  
A new record - two seconds flat!

Nearby: A bundle of rags weaves through the crowd,  
bounced back and forth like an unwashed pinball.

GREG (50s) - homeless and confused. Wearing a filthy  
baseball cap, Greg eyes a sea of back pockets. Searching  
for something good to steal.

He spots a vulnerable iPhone. His face lights up.

GREG  
Millennial punks don't realize what they  
got...

Todd's makeup catches Gary's eye. His grin morphs to an  
angry scowl.

GREG  
Alien!

He whips out a knife. Head down, Greg lunges at Todd.

Chaos ensues.

Paul shoves Sarah out of the way. She screams to Todd.

SARAH  
He's got a knife!

Officer Allen dives off the wall, into the crowd.

VIETTA  
Wait for me, Rookie!

Paul sees Allen coming, and trips him with a subtle foot.  
As Allen falls, Paul whispers in his ear.

PAUL  
Police brutality? See how *you* like it,  
Officer.

Out of control, Allen crashes into the teens.

Press cameras STROBE in their direction.

Consumed by a brighter FLASH OF LIGHT. It's the energy  
PULSE from before.

Todd, Paul, Sarah, Greg and Allen all disappear - leaving  
Officer Vietta Robinson behind.

Todd watches Sarah flail in slow motion.

Her necklace swings free from her shirt, revealing a polished GOLD CROSS.

Todd reaches for her. Misses...

**INT. TODD'S TUBE - UNKNOWN TIME**

Lights flicker.

Three Tubes stand in a neat little row, like before.

Ever the Bridesmaid, Todd's alone.

Sarah and Paul share a Tube, crushed in an awkward pile.

Officer Allan and Greg share a Tube as well. Their eyes shoot open. They jump apart.

The glass walls don't let either travel far.

Greg SQUAWKS incoherently, waves his knife.

Allan fumbles for his gun - doesn't dare look away.

ALLEN

Drop your weapon!

GREG

You drop yours!

ALLEN

This isn't negotiation, Sir. I'm the cop.  
Do things *my* way.

GREG

You can't order me around. I got rights!

PAUL

He hasn't shot you yet. Guess that's  
because you're white.

ALLEN

(to Greg)

Release your weapon. Get down!

GREG

Are you nuts? There ain't enough floor!

The WALLS in front of them roll up...

...revealing a familiar room.

Jessica and Kevin imprisoned in Tubes along Wall #1.

Ron, Maithem and Amir stand like wax work statues in Tubes along Wall #2.

All five pound on glass. Though they scream, their words are muffled - not much sound escapes.

Allen and Greg continue to struggle.

The cop's fingers tighten on his gun.

Allen's eyes drift to the Tube's wall - focus on a fragile VENT in "front".

ALLEN

I should fire my gun? Now's the time.

Allen raises his revolver. Pulls the trigger -

BLAM!

Glass BLASTS outward. Splinters rip through floor tiles in the room.

A LARGE SHARD spears Todd's Tube, right at waist height.

It punctures the glass, but doesn't penetrate all the way through. Todd stares at the thwarted agent of death. Expels a huge sigh of relief.

Allen prepares to step through the hole.

The others HOWL, and point at SMUDGES on the floor.

The remains of Luke and Doug...

.....a detail Allen doesn't know.

RON

It ain't safe!

JESSICA

The floor could explode.

Paul watches Allen's reaction closely. Smirks.

PAUL

You gonna listen, Cop? Or protect and serve?

Allen thinks it over, retreats back in his Tube.

PAUL

Coward.

ALLEN

Fuck you, too.

PAUL

That's abusive language. When we get out,  
I'm filing a complaint.

Greg slides down his side of the Tube, to the floor.

GREG

Look. I'm down. Happy now?

Painful moments TICK by.

The Prisoners stare at the fourth and final wall. And  
wait for it to reveal... whatever's in store.

It doesn't. Eventually, impatience takes its toll.

Greg fumbles with wires in the Tube's platform. Allen  
kicks his hand away.

ALLEN

You have no idea what that'll do.

Ron fidgets with his M16, stares at Maithem's reflection  
through Tube glass.

RON

You're still armed. That's suspicious.

MAITHEM

So are you!

RON

I could shoot you from here, and never  
set a tippy toe on that floor. Don't try  
anything funny.

MAITHEM

I'm not funny!

RON

No, you're not. At all.

TODD

If you go Rambo we could die!

He points at his shard-impaled Tube. Then Ron's gun.

TODD

What if something ricochets?

Maithem gestures at the booby-trapped wires on his chest.

MAITHEM

If we stay, we could run out of time.

RON

Fingers crossed, we won't.

MAITHEM

"Fingers crossed" - what does that mean?

RON

*Inshallah* - God Willing.

TODD

(to Maithem)

What the *fuck* are you wearing? Are you insane?!?

PAUL

*I can say the same thing to you. Why don't you beam us outta here? That's the logical solution, don't you think?*

Sarah spots Kevin.

SARAH

How old is *he*?

Kevin cries. Officer Allen raises a gentle hand.

ALLEN

Shhh. Let me assess the situation. In the meantime, everyone stay calm. And safe! I'll figure out where we are.

Prisoners shout ideas. A Tower of Babble fills in the room. Jessica's voice penetrates the noise:

JESSICA

Gathering information: that's a start. Along with an even more fundamental question. What's the initiating cause?

GREG

Huh?

JESSICA

*Why* are we here?



PAUL

What are you: a scientist?

JESSICA

Yes. Quantum physics, in fact.

Sarah GASPS and grabs her cross.

Paul glances over at Doug's open, empty Tube. Colorful WIRES dangle from the top.

Paul gazes up at *his* ceiling. Two small wires match. He reaches for one.

JESSICA

What are you? An engineer?

PAUL

Poly Sci. But I took Shop Class last semester.

JESSICA

Shop Class? Big deal.

PAUL

I got a "A".

Paul yanks Wire 1. His Tube HISSES, but doesn't open. Sarah grabs his arm.

SARAH

Don't. I'm scared.

Ron eyes the smudges of Doug and Luke on the tiles.

RON

Hmmm, interesting.

MAITHEM

Death is interesting to you?

RON

Not usually. But the floor tiles are different colors.

MAITHEM

And different geometric shapes.

Ron glances sideways at Maithem.

RON

What does that mean, *civilian*?

MAITHEM

I told you. I don't know!

Maithem examines the SYMBOLS on each tile. They appear to be sequences, lined up in rows. He points one out to Ron.

RON

Is it Arabic?

MAITHEM

No. I'm sure it signifies something. But the meaning isn't clear.

RON

Maybe only *some* of these explode?

MAITHEM

We can't take a chance and risk death.

RON

Unless someone - maybe you - volunteers?  
Be the canary in the coal mine. Give us a gesture of good will.

MAITHEM

"Canary in a coal mine"? What is that?

RON

English slang.

Sarah raises a timid hand.

SARAH

Maybe we should wait and see what happens?

TODD

Until we run out of air?

PAUL

Open your eyes. We've got vents.

Sarah closes *her* eyes, starts to pray. Paul hugs her, initiating a *Close Encounter of the Unwanted Kind*.

PAUL

Whatever happens, I'll protect you.

He glares territorially over her shoulder at Todd.

TODD

How's about everyone takes a deep breath?

Everyone does. As they exhale...

All the Tubes SLIDE OPEN. Leaving each Prisoner on their platform - exposed to the main room.

TODD

Did *I* do that?

No-one responds.

Todd sucks in air, sampling the oxygen in the room. He doesn't choke, and cracks a smile.

TODD

Dive in; the water's fine.

PAUL

Who's gonna roll the dice and step first?

Paul eyes the potentially lethal floor.

Jessica fishes a pen from her coat, removes the cap.

JESSICA

Let's conduct a few tests first.

TODD

You're gonna throw that?

He points towards the glass spearing his tube.

TODD

Remember - shrapnel hurts!

Ron COMBAT GROWLS, and jumps from his Tube to the floor.

He leap-frogs over every tile colored or shaped like "Luke's" or "Doug's".

Until he reaches the center of the room.

Ron teeters on the edge of the glowing circular panel. Wobbles crazily - but his boot doesn't touch.

Still on one leg, a triumphant Ron hops around.

RON

Boo-yah. I was right!

An excited Greg pushes past Allen, darts from his Tube.

And runs *right over* a "dangerous" tiles.

Everyone ducks and covers.

Nothing explodes.

The remaining prisoners inch slowly from their Tubes.

Except for wounded Amir. He clutches Maithem's leg, holds on tight.

AMIR

Thar Nafish (Avenge Oneself!)

Amir extracts a grenade from his vest, PULLS the pin.

Maithem grabs for his hand - too slow.

Amir chucks the lethal baseball at Ron.

Ron lets loose with his M-16.

Maithem ducks. His tube SHATTERS. Holes SPIDERWEB out, inches over his head.

The grenade rebounds off Ron's chest, and rolls towards Kevin. Jessica protectively covers the boy.

Sarah SCREAMS. The grenade EXPLODES.

Time skips a beat. The air turns frosty, crystallized.

ALL THE WEAPONS - including the explosion - disappear.

Luke and Ron's rifles. Allen's Gun. Greg's knife. The fragments of Amir's shattered grenade.

The only item remaining is Maithem's explosive "vest". That's still live-wired to his chest.

Ron BEAR-ROARS and rushes Amir. Cold breath puffs like smoke from his nostrils.

Though afraid, Maithem steps between Amir and Ron.

RON

Get outta the way, you sand N... Bro!

MAITHEM

The violence has to end.

RON

I'm gonna tear that rag-head to shreds!

Maithem RIPS his shirt open; exposing the doomsday weapon blinking there.

MAITHEM

I don't like him, either. But he's almost gone. Death doesn't require your help to collect souls.

Amir looks harmless; his last ounce of strength drained. Ron lets loose on Maithem instead.

RON

So why are you still armed?

PAUL

(points at Maithem)  
Maybe that one's a guard.

MAITHEM

No. I am just like you - a prisoner.

RON

Prove it.

MAITHEM

I would very much like to. But I can't.

RON

Luke was right. You can't be trusted.

MAITHEM

(whispers)  
Once cannot disprove a negative. The burden of evidence lies not on me, but you. Have you not heard of *Russell's Teapot*?

RON

What nonsense are you blabbing about?

Jessica perks up, surprised.

JESSICA

Bertrand Russell? Who are you?

MAITHEM

(beat)  
A Biology teacher. Nothing more.

JESSICA

A man who understands empirical reasoning? That's a *lot more*! Especially since we're stuck in here...

She hugs Kevin. The boy pulls away.

Allen steps to Maithem's side.

ALLEN  
I'm a cop. Let me handle this.

RON  
We're not in your jurisdiction now.

Both men reach for guns that are no longer there.

An intense stare-down ensues. Ron puffs out his bigger chest, and backs away - towards the center of the room.

RON  
(to Maithem)  
I'm watching you. So watch your step.

ALLEN  
Tone it down, *soldier*. You don't even have a weapon now.

TODD  
Good question. Where'd they go?

RON  
Who cares? I'll snap that bastard's skinny neck with my hands!  
(mutters)  
"Can't disprove a negative"... Suck my hairy ass.

Ron nods towards a dying Amir in Maithem's Tube.

RON  
Why don't you stay in there, with your friend?

MAITHEM  
We're not friends. I told you before.

RON  
Either way - if that bomb goes off, I'm gonna make *sure* it's your skin that gets deep fried. Not anyone else's.  
(points at the others)  
His. That kid's. Mine. Or hers.

Maithem eyes Ron. The soldier's built like a tank. Disobeying him seems unwise.

So Maithem drops to the floor, outside his Tube.

Regards Amir solemnly through the glass. And waits.

Dead silence. The other prisoners approach Ron.

They huddle together, lock nervous eyes. No-one dares touch the glowing circle at their feet.

TODD

Well, *that* was FUBAR. On the bright side, how could things get worse?

RON

Trust me, they can. And will.

JESSICA

Let me say this *one more time*. We should collect data first.

ALLEN

Right! Everyone, state your names and where you're from. We need to establish a connection between us. Somehow.

PAUL

The only person I know here is Sarah.

He reaches for Sarah's hand. In shock, she pulls away.

SARAH

Big deal. We share a class.

ALLEN

What's everyone's careers?

Todd eyes his *Star Trek* shirt. Ron's uniform. Jessica's now-charred white lab coat.

TODD

Isn't it obvious?

PAUL

It is for you - Vulcan Geek!

Todd tears off a prosthetic and throws it to the floor.

TODD

You know this is Vulcan? What does that make you?

JESSICA

The question is - what's this room?

Metal grids loom above their heads.

KEVIN

Jail, I guess.

JESSICA

Or - quarantine.

TODD

For what, a Zombie virus?

JESSICA

No, something else - more dangerous. And more grounded in reality.

Everyone turns to Jessica.

RON

Mrs. *Scientist*, please explain.

JESSICA

I... we...

PAUL

Who's "we"?

JESSICA

Doug.

She points at Doug's black smudge on the floor. Kevin CHOKES back a sob. Jessica's voice stutters as she looks his way.

JESSICA

We were... working at the CERN lab. A quantum manipulation spin test, one which *should* have been completely safe. But there was... an accident.

RON

An *accident*? Pardon me?

JESSICA

Radiation could have been released.

ALLEN

I was stationed in Times Square. How the hell would we get exposed? Not to mention, end up here?

JESSICA

If my theory is correct, space folded in on itself.

PAUL

Folded? What does that mean?

JESSICA

To be concise, a wormhole... opened up.



TODD

An actual wormhole - for reals!?!

RON

Then this is all your fault?

Jessica glances at Kevin again. Looks away.

JESSICA

I take full responsibility.

**LATER**

Ron patrols the room's perimeter. Runs rough hands along smooth walls.

RON

Solid steel. No doors. I've seen what maximum security prisons look like.

ALLEN

So have I. They look... different.

RON

Maybe in Times Square, but War? In some countries, prison's just a hole you bury your enemies in, deep. A dark place, where you can watch 'em close.

PAUL

(sneers)

Like Guantanamo?

Ron nods. Kevin squirms. Sarah wanders to his side.

SARAH

God will protect us. Have Faith.

KEVIN

I hafta go to the bathroom!

Ron waves towards one Tube.

RON

Pull up a shadow anywhere, take a shit. You'll find privacy over there.

Sarah gasps in horror, clamps hands over Kevin's ears.

Paul eyes the room, ceiling to floor.

PAUL

If this is Prison, where's the guards?

Allen points at grids overhead.

ALLEN  
Up there, I guess.

RON  
Or down here. Disguised.

He eyes Maithem - who fidgets with his explosive vest.

RON  
Don't touch that!

MAITHEM  
I want it off!

RON  
Ain't gonna happen. Keep it on.

MAITHEM  
If I explode, other people will get hurt,  
too. How is that logical?

Paul turns to Todd.

PAUL  
What do you think, Vulcan?

TODD  
Well, he could throw it at us.

MAITHEM  
Or blow you all up from here.

JESSICA  
(shudders)  
He's got a point.

Ron marches over. With a single swipe, he RIPS the charges off Maithem's chest.

The soldier tucks the bomb under one arm, storms away.

Maithem sighs in relief. Ron pins him with a glare.

RON  
Stay there. You still could be a spy.

Allen clears his throat - distracts the group from Maithem and Amir.

ALLEN  
Let's continue the introductions. And...  
move on.

He points at Paul and Todd.

ALLEN

I saw you two together. You must be connected in some manner.

TODD

Us?

PAUL

Me and him? No way. We only met a few seconds. A massive waste of my time.

TODD

Yeah! We should be looking for someone... different. Someone - or something - that stands out in the crowd.

Paul grins at Todd's Star Trek gear.

PAUL

"One of these things is not like the other?" Lemme guess. It's you.

TODD

Everyone here looks worse than me.  
(nods towards Maithem)  
Including Mr. Scapegoat over there. And that guy...

Todd points at Greg. The bum huddles in a corner like a caged animal.

SARAH

That's not fair. Homeless people are harmless.

ALLEN

If I were going to "infiltrate" a prison, I'd try to look harmless, too.

Paul singles out Kevin.

Done with his "bathroom break", the boy pokes through his *Star Wars* backpack with a smile.

Sensing he's being watched, Kevin raises his head. And closes the backpack quickly - ZIPPPP.

PAUL

Like that harmless kid over there? I don't think so. Where'd he come from? The army? A Wall Street protest?

JESSICA

Not exactly -

PAUL

What's the explanation, then?

JESSICA

(quiet)

The CERN lab. I was there. So was he.

ALLEN

At a quantum particle collider? Why?

JESSICA

I worked with Doug. Kevin just... tagged along.

PAUL

Who the Hell is "Doug"?

Jessica pulls Kevin close, shields his ears.

JESSICA

He was my co-worker. The one who -  
vanished over there. Kevin's his son.

She points to a black smudge. The group falls silent.

TODD

I guess twenty questions is a mistake.  
Why don't we frisk the group instead?

PAUL

Fuck you. I have a right to privacy!

Ron and Allen exchange looks. They're on Todd's side.

RON

I take the men. You handle the women.

JESSICA

Leave me out. I'm not a criminal.

RON

If you're innocent, you'll have nothing  
to hide.

SARAH

No way I'll let you grope me! Who do you  
think you are - Donald Trump?

RON

Safety's important. Especially now we're unarmed. Unless someone pulls a grenade...

The group turns around. Maithem's returned to his Tube, and PRAYS in Arabic over Amir.

RON

I thought you said you weren't friends?

MAITHEM

We're not. I'm Shia. He's Sunni. And he did *that* to me.

He points at the explosive vest in Ron's hand.

MAITHEM

But he's dying. And deserves respect.

PAUL

Smells like bullshit. Wanna guess who the "infiltrator" is?

CRACKLING STATIC fills the air.

The missing weapons (the rifles, Allen's gun and Greg's knife) materialize inside the center circle of the room.

A shocked Ron drops Maithem's vest.

Greg dives for his knife.

JESSICA

Wait!

Allen shields Sarah from the expected blast.

Greg lands on the panel - hard. But nothing explodes. Yet.

Ron and Allen dart for the munitions stockpile.

Allen lunges for Greg's knife.

Paul reaches it first; scoops the knife off the floor.

Greg grabs Maithem's vest, rolls into a defensive ball.

No-one's looking. Paul slips the knife into his pocket.

Ron and Allen each scoop up an M-16. A Mexican standoff ensues. Ron levels his rifle at Greg.

RON

Put the bomb down, or I'll blow your fool head off.

ALLEN

For Christ-sake, there are children here!  
I'd like to see my son's 3rd birthday.  
And no kid should see this.

He nods towards Kevin. Ron grunts Jessica's way.

RON

Blame her. That boy shouldn't be here.

Jessica snatches Allen's patrol gun off the floor, and aims it awkwardly with two hands.

JESSICA

Let's count to ten and put the weapons down. One. Two...

Greg scuttles to a corner with the bombs.

Ron swings his rifle back and forth. Targets Allen. Maithem. Then Greg.

Todd and Sarah duck down.

Kevin darts away, and cowers in a Tube.

Allen lowers his M-16 and stares at the boy, raw compassion on his face.

Jessica advances on Ron.

JESSICA

I'm not kidding. Put that down.

RON

Big deal. Can you even shoot?

JESSICA

My father taught me to use a rifle.

RON

How long ago? And what kind?

JESSICA

A Bushmaster. In fifth grade.

RON

(laughs)

Get out of the way, "Ms. Scientist". Let the professionals do the dirty work.

Allen reaches for Jessica's gun.

ALLEN

Shh... Give that to me.

Jessica complies. Todd bends over in sheer relief.

TODD

Whew. That was close -

A COMMUNICATOR PROP drops from his pocket to the floor.  
THUNK.

Ron swings towards the sound, shoots blindly.

Bullets graze Todd in the arm and cheek.

Maithem dives out of the way...

...more BULLETS riddle Amir. Amir GASPS one final time -  
expires in a spray of red.

Todd clutches his shoulder wound, pale.

TODD

I'm a red shirt. This can't end well.

Suddenly: all the weapons vanish. AGAIN.

LIGHTS flare from ceiling grids. Spotlights so dazzlingly  
bright, it hurts the eyes. A SHRILL HUM trails behind.

Everyone drops to their knees.

The light slides down the walls. Pulsing, it takes form.  
The edges are almost soothing. Everyone looks up, blinks  
their eyes.

Ron steps clear of the beam.

RON

Radiation. That ain't *never* safe.

The light envelops Amir.

ENERGY streams out of Amir's corpse and merges with the  
cloud. In seconds, every atom of his body's gone.

JESSICA

He evaporated?

MAITHEM

...Tissue, bones. Organs, too?

SARAH  
It's so beautiful!

Everyone swivels towards Sarah.

RON  
What the Hell did you just say?

Maithem glances at Sarah's cross. It glitters in the brilliant light.

MAITHEM  
What do you think this is?

SARAH  
The rapture! What else could it be?

One last HUM, and the light disappears.

All attention remains riveted to the ceiling. Everyone's afraid to look away.

TODD  
Amir was a Muslim. They don't get  
raptured. I think.  
(to Maithem)  
Am I right? No offense.

MAITHEM  
None taken, my young friend.

Jessica waves a hand through the air.

JESSICA  
The air's warm. It was an energy  
conversion of some kind. No need to drag  
religion into this.

Maithem mulls her words carefully.

MAITHEM  
No reason not to, either.

JESSICA  
I thought you believed in Russell's  
teacup?

MAITHEM  
I believe in evidence. What we saw must  
be explained.

TODD  
If it was the rapture, wouldn't more  
people have.....



SARAH  
Disappeared?

She points to Luke's, Doug's and Amir's black spots.

**LATER**

The group sits close together on the floor.

Sarah's flanked by Todd and Paul.

A skittish Kevin keeps his distance. The boy lingers between Tubes.

Maithem walks towards the ring of adults - careful not to cause alarm.

But there's no room; the circle's closed.

MAITHEM  
We all want the same thing: freedom. May  
I join?

Everyone looks up at him. But no-one clears a space.

Kevin leans against Luke's shattered Tube - toys with wires on its side.

JESSICA  
Kevin, please don't touch that.

KEVIN  
(pouts)  
You said that once before.

JESSICA  
And look where it got us. Come over here  
and sit with me.

KEVIN  
I told YOU before... you're not my Mom!

Jessica sighs, and stands up.

Maithem quickly takes her place.

Jessica approaches Kevin, who scrambles into Luke's Tube to hide.

She circles the container, waves cheerily at Kevin through the glass. The boy keeps his head down - refuses to look Jessica in the eye.

Jessica runs her hands across Tube's walls.

And peers down at the platform, near Kevin's leg.

The metal's ripped wide open. Strange, semi-organic circuits blink inside.

JESSICA

That doesn't look right.

Allen yells across the room.

ALLEN

Do either of you need a hand?

Jessica's head snaps up. Intelligent eyes ablaze.

JESSICA

News flash. I've finally got a theory.  
This *isn't* a quarantine lab at CERN. No-  
one could possibly build things like  
this. Or vaporize people into thin air.

Kevin whimpers, and rolls into a ball.

Jessica crawls into Luke's Tube and cuddles the boy.  
There isn't much room available - Jessica's feet jut out  
the broken side.

Sarah raises her hand, like in school.

SARAH

God can do anything. He's all powerful.

JESSICA

(snaps)

Then why would he bother to build things?  
If he wanted something, he'd just wave  
his hand.

SARAH

Because he's testing us!

JESSICA

On what topic? You tell me. Why did the  
others "leave" - but we stayed?

TODD

Uh, just riffing here. It's not like I  
believe. But Luke and your friend tried  
to escape. Maybe they were being  
punished. And that terrorist guy just...  
died. And God cleaned up the mess?

Kevin blinks at Jessica, eyes filled with tears.

KEVIN

My Dad's dead!

Jessica hugs him, shakes her head.

JESSICA

Never assume anything, Kevin. Maybe, somewhere, your Dad's alive. Not like that other horrible man.

MAITHEM

That horrible man's name was Amir.

RON

Ah-ha. You do know him!

MAITHEM

We went to school as children. Amir radicalized in college, long after we were friends. And yes, he was a terrorist. On that, you are sadly right.

TODD

So, this isn't the rapture.

He smiles at Sarah - a feeble attempt to charm.

TODD

Doesn't God take people who are pure? But somehow... you're still here.

SARAH

We've all sinned in our lives. Every person in this room!

PAUL

If that's heaven, what's this? Limbo?

TODD

Don't ask me. I'm an atheist.

(points at Jessica)

Like her, over there.

MAITHEM

Not all scientists are atheists. As the lady said, don't assume.

TODD

Of course they are.

MAITHEM

I'm not.

TODD

Gimme a break; you're a teacher of biology! Doesn't evolution cancel out faith?

MAITHEM

A person's soul is big enough to embrace both worship and logic. The two philosophies aren't exclusive.

TODD

Yes, they are.

MAITHEM

Your Albert Einstein believed in God. And his name means "Genius", does it not?

JESSICA

Einstein was misquoted. "Playing Dice with the Universe" was just a metaphor.

TODD

Stephen Hawking is an Atheist. And he's more up to date than Al.

Maithem looks to Jessica for support.

MAITHEM

Tell us *your* new theory. Please?

JESSICA

You already know about the accident at CERN. I *still* think space could have bent. But maybe something more radical occurred...

TODD

More radical than a worm-hole?

JESSICA

This could still be quarantine - yet in an alternative time line. One where science is more advanced.

ALLEN

Sounds like cherry-picking to me. Your reason for that theory is?

JESSICA

It's too coincidental that the particle imploded at the *exact same time* we came to this place. It must have been the initiating event.

MAITHEM

Correlation doesn't imply causation.  
Unless you have more evidence?

Jessica smiles broadly - Maithem speaks her language!

JESSICA

Let's stick with Occam's Razor. The  
simplest explanation's always the best.

RON

The craziest explanation, you mean?

Greg peels skin on his fingers, chews his thumb.

GREG

It don't matter what you fools believe. I  
know the God's *honest* truth.

ALLEN

Which is?

GREG

The Men in Black got us under  
surveillance. We ain't gettin' out of  
here any way but dead!

PAUL

You find a way out of here, or shut the  
fuck up, nut bag!

Sarah pulls away from Paul, shocked.

SARAH

Don't talk to him like that. He's sick.

PAUL

Poor guy. But he's the one who grabbed  
the bombs. He could've blown us all to  
Hell.

SARAH

(mutters)

"Hell" is right.

Kevin shrinks against Jessica's chest. Sarah clutches her  
cross necklace tight.

SARAH

Don't be scared, Kevin. Have Faith.

JESSICA

Faith won't accomplish anything here!

SARAH  
Why else would we be still alive?

ALLEN  
(sighs)  
Forget the bible study, folks. Let's just  
set up some ground rules.

RON  
Who put you in charge?

Allen glances down at his badge. Back at Ron's face.

RON  
I've been on three combat tours. If  
anyone should lead, it's me.

PAUL  
You gonna declare military law?

SARAH  
Let's put it to a vote!

Ron stands up; glares down at her.

RON  
Girl, you may be God-fearing. But you'd  
better learn your place.

SARAH  
(defiant)  
Which is?

RON  
You're a spoiled little college kid who  
has no idea what real life's like. People  
die all the time. They walk across a  
street and... blam! Hit by a bus.  
Pancaked like a rat. Or they're taking a  
night stroll like Cutter for a piss...

TODD  
Who? What?

RON  
Boom, one step on a EID, and they're  
blown to tiny bloody bits. Little girl,  
do yourself a big favor. Sit down, hum  
your mantra. Do whatever... even pray.

SARAH  
(pouts)  
I protested for BLM last month. Doesn't  
that count as action to you?

RON

It doesn't make us "blood brothers".

TODD

Or sisters.

RON

And it don't make you folks prepared.  
This situation's Life and Death. Outta  
all the people in this room, I'm the only  
one who's played that game.

Maithem side-eyes Ron skeptically.

MAITHEM

You think you have it hard? Yesterday, I  
was a man teaching boys about DNA. Then  
Amir put that vest on me. He vowed to  
kill my wife and daughter if I did not do  
as he said. "Mr. Soldier" - what would  
you have done in that case?

RON

Killed the mother-fucker. Dead.

Maithem looks towards the smudge that was once Amir.

MAITHEM

I considered that. But - too late.

PAUL

(sighs)

Great group we've got here: a biology  
teacher, a cop, a soldier and a geek.

TODD

What is this - a game of Clue?

PAUL

And a scientist that's no use.

JESSICA

Quantum physics is no use?

RON

You gonna formulate our way outta here?

Allen points at the circular panel on the floor. It looks  
like it can be removed.

RON

Yeah. You're right.  
(to Maithem)

You want us to have "Faith" in you? I guess there's one thing you can do.

**MOMENTS LATER**

Ron, Allen and Maithem work as a team. Staggering under its weight, they lift the panel from the floor.

The others sit it out in Tubes: makeshift shields in case something explodes.

It doesn't.

The three men set the hatch aside.

Chips and wires jut from the hole - more hybrid tech.

Ron pokes around inside, grunts at Maithem.

RON

Hold that wire out of my way.

MAITHEM

I'm a biologist, not an engineer. Do you know what you're doing at all?

RON

I specialized in electronic repair. What do you do, teacher? Grade tests for little kids?

Maithem places a hand on Ron's shoulder. Ron snarls and hisses in his ear.

RON

I'm also an expert in hand to hand. Touch me one more time, I'll break your neck.

Ron plunges his arm further into the hatch. Now Allen looks concerned.

ALLEN

What if you trigger a reaction? We don't want anyone else killed. Especially the boy.

Allen nods at Kevin.

Ron yanks a wire loose.

Engines RUMBLE under the floor.

The entire FOURTH WALL retracts into the ceiling.



Revealing: a huge MONITOR.

One that prominently displays - EARTH. People gasp.

SARAH

Oh my God!

JESSICA

No, not "God". Space.

TODD

How did we get here, by transporter?

JESSICA

I don't know. Maybe.

TODD

Now we know this isn't the Rapture.

SARAH

Why not?

TODD

What does God need a Starship for?

Todd chuckles. Sarah doesn't get the Trekkie joke.

Maithem mumbles a prayer, lowers his eyes.

And stares at those strange symbols on the floor.

SUDDENLY: LIGHT shoots down from the ceiling.

Two COLORFUL BLOBS phase through the grids, like the metal isn't even there.

Flowing like half-cooled plasma, the Blobs hover above the captives' heads. Cilia shaped FIBERS float inside amorphous shapes.

TENDRILS of light extrude like jellyfish tentacles.

A hypnotized Kevin reaches out.

KEVIN

Oooooooooo.

His fingers graze one.

The boy SCREAMS. Allen snatches his hand away.

Greg dives for shelter behind a Tube.

The Blobs descend further. They envelope Maithem and Todd, who collapse and writhe.

**MAITHEM AND TODD'S POV:**

Jumbled images and sounds pour through their heads.

- Alien visions of some strange world.

- POVs of their own naked bodies, strapped to quasi-liquid tables. Lights flicker. Scans HUM.

**INT. CONTAINMENT ROOM - UNKNOWN TIME**

The Blobs rise and phase back through the ceiling.

Leaving the humans - alone.

The group gathers around Todd and Maithem - a circle of terrified, wide eyes.

Sarah kneels by Todd. Paul scowls; he's not pleased.

SARAH

Are you OK?

TODD

Um, the answer's no...

(to Maithem)

Did you see - the same as me?

Maithem nods. Then vomits.

Even that minor movement makes him sicker. Jessica hovers over the stricken man and the teen.

JESSICA

Tell us every thing you saw. Quick - before you forget details.

TODD

Images of some bizarro universe. I was tied to a table made of - ice?

MAITHEM

Those creatures were intelligent. Communicating through our minds.

JESSICA

What did they say?

MAITHEM

Not much. Just what they were. And where they came from.

ALLEN

And that was?

TODD

The stars.

Paul rolls his eyes; he's not convinced.

JESSICA

Did they mention why we're here?

MAITHEM

That would require language. They gave us visions, but no words.

PAUL

You almost got electrocuted. Maybe your life just flashed before your eyes?

Maithem staggers to his feet.

MAITHEM

I cannot speak for him, but mine did.  
(directed at Ron)  
Several times today, in fact.

JESSICA

Wait a minute - those were aliens? From "the stars"?

Todd stands up on wobbly legs. Slips in Maithem's puke.

TODD

That's what they looked like to me.

PAUL

You would say that. Nerd.

Kevin clutches his back-pack to his chest.

KEVIN

I saw something, too!

ALLEN

What was it, kid? You tell me.

KEVIN

I dunno. Lights n' stuff?

Allen turns to the group.

ALLEN

Well, that makes *three* witnesses.

RON

You're gonna believe a scared little boy?

Jessica studies Maithem, Todd and Kevin. All their faces look sincere.

JESSICA

All *three* of you experienced similar things? That's it - I'm invoking Occam's Razor again. This is First Contact. Amazing!

Greg grumbles from his Tube.

GREG

Fuck me sideways with a goat dildo. I won't stand for no anal probe!

PAUL

Isn't that what a dildo's for? And who says you need to stand?

GREG

(glares)

Wanna say that to my face, boy?

Paul ignores his challenge.

Instead, he looks towards the monitor of Earth.

A PANEL near it SPARKS for a brief second. Paul frowns. Thinks. Turns away.

# **LATER**

Another group pow-wow. Under the monitor, this time.

Earth glows brilliant blue above their heads; the light cascading down to each worried face.

Maithem touches a symbol on the floor.

MAITHEM

Maybe this is a Rosetta Stone.

TODD

A way to learn their language?

JESSICA

But we have nothing to compare it to. No idea how to pronounce the words.

MAITHEM

That is, if the aliens communicate by sound. Perhaps their medium is tele -

Maithem struggles for the English word.

TODD

Telepathy?

Jessica nods; that makes sense. But others aren't convinced. Not Ron. And not Allen.

RON

Bullshit. You ask me, this is psychological torture - the human, Earth based kind. Dose us with bath salts, and throw us in a hole. Hell, you *all* could be a mirage. Maybe the only people really here is just me and that guy...

Ron points at Maithem.

JESSICA

The argument for Solipsism? Try again.

RON

OR - we're all prisoners. Someone's trying to break us down.

ALLEN

Just wait until we get hungry. We'll lose our minds.

RON

You think that's bad? Try no sleep.

Wedged between Jessica and Sarah, Kevin squirms.

KEVIN

I'm hungry now.

His stomach GRUMBLES. Jessica slips the protein bar from her lab coat into his hand.

TODD

You bring enough for the rest of us?

JESSICA

No-one planned this camp out. And I'm prioritizing Kevin. He's a kid.

Jessica and Kevin exchange smiles.

KEVIN

I was wrong. You're... kinda nice.

Jessica raises an eyebrow.

JESSICA

You mean I finally passed your "test"?

KEVIN

In a way, I guess.

SARAH

If someone's testing us, I bet it's God.

Ron leaps to his feet, grabs Allen's arm.

RON

Let's talk in private. Now.

He drags Allen to a Tube. Pitches his voice low.

ALLEN

What's with the secrecy?

RON

There's just two authority figures here - you and me. Grow a set, and take charge.

ALLEN

Jessica's a rocket scientist...

RON

And a civilian - she don't count. We have to provide a united front. Stick together with how we interpret this fucking mess.

ALLEN

You have something Classified to divulge?

RON

I just ain't buying this Alien BS. This isn't *Space 1999*.

ALLEN

No, it's 2017. And you're paranoid. We've have to consider the possibility they're right.

RON

How long have you been on the force, *Officer*?

ALLEN

Uh - six months. Almost seven. But I graduated top of my class.

RON

(laughs)

A rookie, huh? I was once like that. Unaware of how crazy things can get. They aren't always what they seem. Kids - and women - they're all suspect. I should've listened to Luke. Maybe then, he wouldn't have died.

Ron's face crumbles. Allen reaches out. Ron violently shrugs him away.

ALLEN

I know you've been through a lot -

RON

Screw therapy. That don't work!

ALLEN

Fine. What's your point?

RON

That we can't assume we've been abducted by aliens. This could be some crazy psy-ops mind fuck.

Over with the others, the debate rages on:

Jessica, Maithem and Todd stand on one side, Kevin tucked in between.

The conversation grows heated. Sarah and Paul sit at the opposite end.

SARAH

If this wasn't a test of Faith, why don't the aliens tell us what they need?

JESSICA

Oh, I bet this *is* a test. An observation of our species, in fact.

PAUL

Then what's with all the games? Why not sit us down and ask us things?

JESSICA

You saw them; beings made of light. I doubt they could "sit us down".

They probably communicate through wave lengths, colors. EM charges of some kind.

PAUL  
(to Maithem)  
You're the biologist. What do you think?

MAITHEM  
That this is a behavioral study. We're -  
how do you say it - animals?

TODD  
Guinea Pigs.

JESSICA  
They're subjecting us to stimuli.

KEVIN  
Animals. Did they put Dad "to sleep"?  
His eyes grow wide. Jessica's face betrays her concern.

JESSICA  
Maybe they just put him in another room.

TODD  
Maybe any... disappearances... were  
accidental?

MAITHEM  
Or on purpose. To see how we react.  
Todd shifts his weight and winces. Ron's gunshot hurts.

TODD  
In other words, an IQ test. They put us  
in a hamster maze, and see if we escape.

SARAH  
Or *God's* watching us right now - to see  
if we help each other out!

Suddenly: the center of the room FLICKERS - the fabric of  
space warped and wet.

A BIBLE and KORAN materialize on the floor.

Sarah and Maithem reflexively step forward. Ron yells -

RON  
Stop. It's a trap!

TODD  
Religion? You bet.



RON  
Don't Blaspheme, Boy.

Ron runs for the books.

But Sarah is closer. And shockingly quick.

She snatches the Bible off the floor.

Everyone else shuffles back, in case the book explodes.

Nothing happens. A split-second of time THU-THUMPS by.

Maithem gently picks up the Koran. He examines it: back and front. Locks eyes with Sarah.

SARAH  
We can open these, right?

MAITHEM  
Each of us... must decide.

PAUL  
Where's the Torah? Are there any Jews here?

TODD  
I am. If "non-practicing" counts.

Todd laughs. Maithem glares.

MAITHEM  
Religion isn't a joke.

Sarah cracks her Bible open.

SARAH  
This is a sign. I was right!

Maithem scans his Koran. Based on the contents, it appears both books are real.

Until: paper STICKS to Maithem's fingers. The words get blurrier, every page he turns.

He glances at Sarah - she's reading Old Testament. Eyes shut, she mouths a prayer.

Maithem flips to the back of the Koran.

The book MELTS in his hands. Bio-goo oozes up his arm.

Maithem drops the book like it's on fire.

Sarah's Bible starts to dissolve as well. She shudders, but holds on tight.

JESSICA

Let it go!

SARAH

No. Oh Father, Who Art in Heaven.  
Hallowed Be Thy Name...

GREG

(chuckles)

I knew it. They're poisoning us with  
Faith.

SARAH

Just believe, and you'll be Saved!

The Bible liquefies completely.

Slime crawls up Sarah's arms, across her chest.

She SCREAMS and bolts towards the Tubes; wipes goo off her skin onto glass walls.

Which works... but a grossed-out Sarah can't stop. She rubs against the glass so hard, her hands bleed.

Paul and Todd run over to her side.

TODD

You're safe now. Calm down.

SARAH

Satan touched that book!

TODD

Or... the Aliens knew we were scared.  
Somehow, they knew what you like. So they  
tried to comfort you. The only way they  
knew how.

PAUL

*That* was comforting?

TODD

Maybe the books weren't "baked" long  
enough?

Paul wipes sludge off Sarah's face, shoves Todd away.

PAUL

Go play with your *Star Wars* Toys.

TODD  
That's *Star Trek*.

PAUL  
Whatever. She doesn't need you here.

Todd backs away. Paul gathers Sarah in his arms.

PAUL  
(whispers)  
Shhhh. I know a way out.

Sarah stares. Paul secretly flashes her: Greg's knife.  
Then he points to a panel next to the Earth Monitor.

PAUL  
See that? I think it's a door. Which I  
can probably open with this. It's  
primitive, but I bet it'll work...

The monitor flickers for a *split second*. Light shines  
through the panel *simultaneously*.

Too quick to be seen by others; they're still too stunned  
about the books to look.

PAUL  
I *think* it's a pattern. Whenever the  
monitor surges, that light flashes. If I  
slip this knife in at the *right* time,  
it'll probably cause a short circuit. And  
we can slip... outta here.

SARAH  
You sure?

PAUL  
I took a shop class, didn't I?

SARAH  
Doesn't that door lead into space?

PAUL  
(shrugs)  
It's worth a try.

SARAH  
Shouldn't we consult the others?

PAUL  
And have them stop us? No way.

SARAH

How about we just ask Todd? He understands "space stuff".

PAUL

Are you gonna believe the Atheist? Or me?

Sarah snuffles, and reaches for Paul's hand.

**LATER**

The circle's back again - everyone participates this time. Even Greg, though the others give him space.

JESSICA

We need to discuss what happens next.

Kevin's stomach GROWLS again.

KEVIN

I wanna eat!

PAUL

You already did.

RON

If this goes on much longer, we'll all starve.

Todd stares at his black leather *Star Trek* boots.

TODD

I'd kill for a burger now.

PAUL

Literally?

RON

Eventually, we will.

SARAH

Don't say that!

(beat)

But Spaghetti sounds real good. Even though carbs make me fat.

PAUL

Nah - you look great. Me? I want a steak.

KEVIN

Mom makes the best Mac N' Cheese in the world. But Dad says it's junk food...

His voice trails off at the thought of Doug. Jessica interjects as quickly as she can:

JESSICA

I like Microwave food. Hot Pockets and protein bars. Nothing has to taste good. Just quick.

RON

(laughs)

Then you'd love MREs.

ALLEN

What's that?

RON

Meals Ready to Eat. Just a plastic bag with food. They issue them in the field.

TODD

(sarcastic)

Mmmmmmm. Yummy.

RON

And easy: just heat, rip and squeeze.

Kevin nudges Jessica.

KEVIN

Do you have more protein bars?

JESSICA

I'm sorry. You got the last one.

GREG

You're hungry, Kid? Chew your nails. They're protein. So is hair.

ALLEN

Don't listen to him, Kevin.

GREG

I ain't shittin' you. Stuff like that takes the edge off.

Ron turns to where Amir lay.

RON

It's a shame he's gone. We could've -

JESSICA

We're not the Donner party.

ALLEN

Yet.

KEVIN

What's the Donner party?

TODD

You don't wanna know.

Kevin clutches his stomach. The hunger grows.

Jessica gently extricates Kevin from his back-pack, and drops it in the boy's lap.

JESSICA

The best thing to do is stay distracted.  
You have anything fun in there?

Kevin hesitates, then opens his backpack: ZIPPP. He sticks a hand in slowly - smiles.

GREG

What the Hell you doin'? Masturbating  
through that hole?

ALLEN

Leave the kid alone!

Todd looks at Kevin.

TODD

Lemme see.

KEVIN

Don't!

(beat)

You'll regret it. I promise.

Todd sticks *his* hand into the backpack. Freezes when he feels....

TODD

Dude, what's *in* here?

A guilty look floods Kevin's face.

Todd SCREAMS in horror (or pain?).

A GERBIL (ARNIE) darts up his arm. Todd shrieks like a girl and flings the rodent far away.

KEVIN

Arnie! Are you okay?

RON

We need food? Consider it served!

Arnie skitters towards the Monitor of Earth.

Ron and Kevin race after him: Kevin nowhere near a match to Ron.

Arnie stops at the panel Paul observed before.

The curious rodent SQUEAKS and sniffs.

Ron grabs for Arnie's tail.

A panicked Kevin jumps in his way.

Ron feints to his right. Kevin mirrors the move. Provoking a frantic back and forth; contrasted by each opponent's age and size.

The "dance" does block Arnie from Ron. The others watch, mesmerized.

KEVIN

You can't eat Arnie. He's mine.

TODD

You brought a gerbil into space?

KEVIN

I was taking Arnie to school. But Dad made me go to work.

(glares at Jessica)

He wanted to see... other stuff. I don't even like Science. It's not fair!

Ron bowls Kevin over, and snatches Arnie.

Kevin HOWLS, and dives on Ron's back.

The soldier grabs Arnie's neck - ready to snap the rodent's spine.

Allen and Maithem dart over.

Maithem tears Kevin off Ron.

Allen elbows Ron in the nose. The soldier ROARS in pain.

Ron drops Arnie, and rabbit-punches Allen's throat. Allen doubles over. Gasps for air.

Kevin scoops up his beloved pet; kicks Ron in the crotch.

The soldier drops to his knees.

Right behind him, PLATES OF FOOD materialize on the floor. A JELLO mold. Heaping slabs of MEAT.

Seven prisoners. Five plates. You do the math.

All the prisoners dive for their share. Each of them ravenous; some prepared to fight.

Jessica steps over the food, holds up a hand.

JESSICA

Wait. Let's split this up.

Everyone freezes. Jessica's got a point.

The food's divvied up in seconds; "separating" enough for two more meals. Ron hesitates over his.

RON

Is this another test?

JESSICA

Maybe they want to see us cooperate.

RON

Or find out if we'll eat poison.

Paul holds his plate to his chest.

PAUL

Catch-22. Take the risk... or starve.

GREG

Someone's gotta be the guinea pig.

TODD

Gerbil, don't you mean?

Kevin's eyes grow wide.

TODD

Just kidding. Never mind.

RON

Fine. I'll go first.

(chows down)

Hmmmm - not bad.

PAUL

Better than an "MRE"?



RON

Don't knock MREs, *Officer*. Pick the right one, they're gourmet.

The others dig in as well. Todd grins through food.

TODD

Who knew Aliens could cook?

Jessica picks at her plate and takes a bite. Not bad at all! A smile lights up her face.

She grabs the next slice, revealing...

...DOUG'S SHOULDER TATTOO - still intact enough to see.

Jessica spits out her food and GAGS.

Kevin raises meat towards his mouth.

KEVIN

What's wrong? This stuff tastes great!

Jessica SCREAMS and slaps the food away.

Everyone stares. Has she gone insane?

Jessica runs around the circle. Grabbing all the plates - and smashing them to the floor.

PAUL

What the Hell's wrong with you?

Jessica pulls the adults to one side.

#### **MOMENTS LATER**

Several prisoners puke. Todd upchucks in a Tube.

TODD

Holy Soylent Green. And I thought  
"Serving Man" was bad...

Greg grabs discarded meat off the floor, and swallows it in a single gulp.

Light ZAPS him from the ceiling. Not fatal, but it hurts.

The glow then zips past Greg, encompassing both food and plates. Which DEMATERIALIZE before everyone's eyes.

Greg glares up at the ceiling.

GREG

Don't tease me, you amoeba space fuckers.  
Just tell us what you want!

Ron yanks Jessica aside.

RON

You're *certain* that was - human?

JESSICA

I have no doubt about Doug. Probably your  
friend, as well.

Ron throws up. He wipes his mouth, doesn't miss a beat.

RON

Tell me, Ms. Scientist -

JESSICA

My name is Jessica, okay?

RON

How do you kill something made of light?

JESSICA

Energy can't be created or destroyed. I  
have no idea how break that rule. Though  
it could be disassembled. What exactly do  
you have in mind?

RON

I'm gonna make those glow-sticks pay for  
torturing us.

He yells up at the ceiling, like Greg.

RON

For no God-damned reason at all!

JESSICA

(whispers)

Maybe this was another test. To see how  
desperate we get.

Maithem rocks on the floor and prays.

Ron glances toward Sarah, Todd and Paul.

RON

Maybe that snotty kid is right.

JESSICA

Which one?

RON

The one that said this is "Hell."

By the teens: Sarah squints at Todd, who looks pale.

SARAH

Don't think about it. You'll get sick.

PAUL

Did you swallow?

TODD

My vomit? Just a bit.

PAUL

I mean the meat.

TODD

No. Do you?

PAUL

Buzz off. This is no time for jokes.

Todd's eyes roll back in his head. But not from sarcasm this time. He collapses to the floor.

Sarah darts over.

SARAH

What's wrong?

Todd MOANS, clutching the wound in his arm. Sarah rips off his sleeve, takes a closer look.

SARAH

Not too bad. And not so big.

Until she peers down at Todd's shirt. It's soaked through with blood. Almost invisible due to his red costume.

SARAH

It's *still* bleeding?

TODD

(weak)

I didn't want anyone to freak out.

SARAH

We've got to do something!

TODD

There's no hospital nearby.

Paul whips out Greg's knife. Steel flashes.

Sarah misinterprets, and jumps in front of Todd.

SARAH  
Mercy killing's wrong!

TODD  
(gasps)  
Yeah. Especially when there's no consent.

PAUL  
Not everything's about you, Loser. But  
I'm not gonna wait for rescue anymore.

Paul storms to the panel "door" near the monitor.

He counts off seconds until the screen flickers again -  
then plunges the knife into a crack. He fishes around  
like a locksmith: CLICK.

PAUL  
No system's gonna hold *me* down! Come on,  
Sarah. We gotta go!

He pulls on the panel.

An ENERGY BOLT lances down from the ceiling. ZAPPPPP!

Paul vaporizes, like Luke and Doug before.

The panel drops. Air RUSHES out.

Into an airless VOID.

The adults rush over to put the panel back. The plate's  
almost too unwieldy to lift.

Jessica's hair WHIPS. Maithem GASPS.

RON  
Lift it up. It's gotta fit.

ALLEN  
Whatever happens, don't let go.

The metal pinches Allen's hand against the wall, RIPS a  
bloody GASH across his palm. Allen grits his teeth,  
doesn't make a sound.

Ron locks eyes with him. Impressed.

The panel shifts, nearly slips.

Jessica turns to Maithem, doom in her eyes.

JESSICA

In case it matters, we won't explode.

MAITHEM

No, we'll freeze. In thirty seconds - maybe less.

Suddenly: the panel slides into place. CLICK. The adults exchange relieved glances - they're safe!

Sarah bolts over, grabs Greg's knife.

And presses it against her wrist.

MAITHEM

Don't do that. It's a sin.

SARAH

I can't take this anymore!

Todd runs over and grabs the knife.

GREG

That's mine!

Ron and Allen lunge for the weapon as well.

A SEARING LIGHT blinds them all.

The Blobs drift down through the ceiling again.

This time, they descend towards Sarah and Todd. Todd shoves Sarah out of danger's way.

Greg's knife CLATTERS to the floor. Greg dives.

The Aliens drift lower, just above their heads.

Tendrils of LIGHT reach for Todd and Greg; penetrating like undulating ghosts through the humans' skulls.

The one attached to Greg retracts quickly.

Leaving only Todd "engaged."

#### **TODD'S POV**

More jumbled images:

- A STARSHIP seeding primitive Earth.

- Evolution in fast-forward: Single cells. Mammals. Humans. Controlled mutations each step of the way.

- In every phase of the process, Aliens are involved.  
Testing. Observing. Tweaking results.

**INT. CONTAINMENT ROOM - UNKNOWN TIME**

Todd babbles, overwhelmed.

TODD

All we are is farm animals. They've been  
with us since the dawn of time!

Todd's knees wobble; he's about to faint. His throat  
poised above Greg's abandoned knife.

Jessica grabs Todd before he falls.

Her arm PHASES through an alien "light tentacle." And...

**JESSICA'S POV**

Images rape *her* mind as well.

**INT. CONTAINMENT ROOM - UNKNOWN TIME**

Jessica crumples to the floor.

The Blob disengages from Todd. Both Aliens float up to  
the ceiling grates. Phasing through, they disappear.

An incoherent Jessica lies on the floor.

Stray ELECTRICITY sputters in her palm.

**MOMENTS LATER**

Everyone sits in a circle. Eyes closed. Holding hands.

The only two non-participants: Kevin and Greg.

Kevin cowers in a tube. Gerbil Arnie's his only friend.  
Greg MUMBLES in a corner.

TODD

This feels so stupid.

JESSICA

Just breathe. Take it all in.

TODD

Why do I have to do this? I already saw  
everything.

JESSICA

We have to make sure everyone else does,  
too.

RON

Why do you think this'll work?

JESSICA

Don't ask. I just - know.

ELECTRICITY arcs from palm to palm.

**POV - EVERYONE**

Transmitting the same visions to everyone.

**INT. CONTAINMENT ROOM - UNKNOWN TIME**

Todd MOANS.

TODD

This is better than Magic Mushrooms.

Eventually, the electricity fades. Members of the circle exchange looks. Given their shared visions, there are no words. Ron breaks the silence first.

RON

That was -

ALLEN

Enlightening. To say the least.

RON

How do we know any of this is true?

TODD

I saw it. So did you.

RON

We saw what they *wanted* us to see. Only  
fools believe everything they're told.

ALLEN

Mr. Military -

RON

Fuck you, Officer.

JESSICA

(points towards Kevin)  
Shhhh!

ALLEN

- might be correct. The aliens could be feeding us disinformation.

RON

That's what I'd do.

TODD

Why would they want us to believe we're farm animals?

RON

Because they're lying.

TODD

If they're gonna lie, what happened to "We Come in Peace"?

JESSICA

Maybe it's all part of the test.

TODD

A test of *what*?

JESSICA

To see how we react.

SARAH

If they created us - maybe they *are* God!

MAITHEM

Or an invading force. One that wants to break our will to resist.

He side-eyes Ron. The soldier avoids Maithem's gaze.

Maithem follows Ron's focus down to the floor -

- and the symbol laden tiles.

"Eureka" hits. He points down.

MAITHEM

I know what these are. Stylized drawings of Nucleotides. Of course!

TODD

Nucleo whats?

MAITHEM

The building blocks of DNA!

RON

And that means?



MAITHEM

Their secret's written right in front of us, one they didn't try to even hide. It's all right here - on the floor.

ALLEN

What's there?

JESSICA

The blueprint of the human genome. How could we have missed this before?

TODD

Well, I was stressed.

MAITHEM

And you were right! The aliens are the farmers. We're just sheep, culled from the herd.

ALLEN

Not for long. This sheep's gonna run!

Allen and Ron jump up. Sarah clings to Allen's arm.

SARAH

You saw what happened to Paul!

Ron nods.

RON

For once, Captain Obvious -

ALLEN

Thanks, GI. Joe.

RON

- is right. We can't let them win. Or manipulate us any further.

Jessica shoves the two men apart.

JESSICA

What we *should* do is take our time.

TODD

We've got shit-loads of that to waste.

JESSICA

Until we figure out what they want.

RON

Other than messing with our minds?

JESSICA

If there wasn't a purpose to their experiment, we'd all be...

SARAH

Dead?

A defiant Ron shakes his head.

RON

I haven't died in combat, I won't die now. And they won't pick us off one by one.

Greg jumps to his feet, makes a beeline for the open panel in the floor.

He grabs exposed WIRES.

Suicide by electrocution is *his* plan.

GREG

Those bastards won't eat me next!

An alien CIRCUIT falls into Greg's coat pocket.

Nothing sizzles. Greg rummages deeper into the floor.

Jessica runs over and pulls him away.

An exposed wire BURNS her hand.

JESSICA

Ow!

Greg scoops a handful of psychiatric DRUGS from his jacket - tries to swallow them in one gulp.

Maithem slaps the drugs from Greg's hand, grinds them to powder underneath his boot.

He and Greg stare each other down.

GREG

Fucking terrorist.

MAITHEM

Western loon.

GREG

(beat)

Thanks for saving my life?

MAITHEM

You're welcome. Please sit down.

The tension in the chamber eases a notch.

Jessica turns away to examine her burn.

JESSICA

Well, if we must be rebels, let's collaborate on a plan.

She pivots towards Todd.

JESSICA

Mr. Sy-Fy -

TODD

Me?

JESSICA

Yes, you in the flashy uniform. Quick: give us your best idea.

Todd glances down at his red shirt.

TODD

Not dying would be nice.

JESSICA

We need something better than that. Something that emphasizes creativity. Sneaky smarts.

RON

Screw that noise. I choose strength.

JESSICA

We already know *that* doesn't work.

Todd fidgets, awkward.

TODD

Let's debate the pros and cons.

ALLEN

So the aliens can hear us?

SARAH

Who cares? They can read our minds!

TODD

Well, the aliens are curious, right? Let's lure them down, and trap them.

ALLEN

With what? They're made of light.

TODD

Let the quantum scientist figure that out. We'll turn the tables on their translucent ass!

RON

Not a bad idea. Maybe.

MAITHEM

You want to anger "the Gods"? We don't stand a chance!

Todd glances over at Greg, alone in a corner.

**FLASHBACK:**

- The alien tendril touches Greg, then recoils.

**PRESENT TIME:**

Todd scratches the exact same spot on his skull.

TODD

I've got an idea in "mind."

**MOMENTS LATER**

Jessica kneels gently beside Kevin, on the floor.

Playing with Gerbil Arnie, the boy hides the shell-shocked look on his face.

JESSICA

Honey -

KEVIN

Don't call me that. You're not my Mom.

JESSICA

Kevin. I just want you to know: in a few minutes, us adults are going to do something.

KEVIN

Like talk some more? That doesn't work.

JESSICA

We're going to communicate with the Aliens. And convince them to let us go home.

Kevin stares at her.

KEVIN

For reals?

JESSICA

Totes. And if that doesn't work, I've got a super secret plan as well. But if *anything at all* goes wrong, I want you to go and hide someplace very dark.

Jessica points at a Tube; only to realize it's splattered with Amir's blood. She points to a different one instead.

KEVIN

What do you mean, goes wrong?

JESSICA

In that case, do whatever the lights tell you. Promise me you won't be brave.

KEVIN

Dad said people *should* be brave.

Jessica looks to Ron and Allen, who strategize (MOS.)

JESSICA

Sometimes, being brave means not fighting. You have to stay here and keep Arnie safe.

Kevin pulls the rodent to his chest.

JESSICA

Your Dad would be so proud of you. If anything happens to me -

KEVIN

I won't hate you anymore.

# **MONTAGE:**

- Adults and teens set multiple traps.
- Ron and Allen rip wires from the floor panel. Look surprised when they don't get zapped.
- They lie down loops of WIRES on the floor.

Allen winks at Ron.

ALLEN

Law and order, Baby.

RON  
Lock n' load.

TODD  
(grins)  
Rock n' roll?

The cop and soldier turn away.

Ron works feverishly, splicing cords. He yanks several from the floor, holds a length of wire up to Todd.

TODD  
Think that'll reach?

RON  
Tell me it won't.

He slaps a wire into Todd's hand.

RON  
Make yourself useful. Lay those out.

TODD  
Where should I put them?

RON  
(chuckles)  
Wherever you prefer, College Boy.

A few feet away, the others watch. On their faces, fear battles fatigue for control.

Sarah and Maithem sit on the floor and pray, eyes closed. Maithem solemnly intones:

MAITHEM  
Bismillaahil-latheh laa yadhurru ma'as-  
mihi shay'un fil-'ardhi wa laa fis-  
samaa'i wa Huwas-Samee 'ul- 'Aleem.  
Bismillaahil-latheh laa yadhurru...

Sarah peeks.

SARAH  
Didn't you say that part already?

MAITHEM  
(grins)  
A good ear you have, young lady. Are you a language major, then?

SARAH

Uh, undecided liberal arts. And isn't it my turn now?

MAITHEM

That was the first recitation. I have to say this prayer two more times.

(quotes)

Ma'as-mihi shay'un fil-'ardhi wa...

SARAH

What prayer is that?

MAITHEM

Abu Dawud 4/323.

SARAH

What does it mean?

MAITHEM

It's a Duaas for Protection from Accidents and Calamities. A Prayer for Protection, as it were. Requesting that nothing cause us harm on this Earth.

Maithem raises his eyes to the monitor, and the big blue planet in frame. He whispers.

MAITHEM

Nor in the Heavens.

SARAH

Where we are now?

(Maithem nods)

Amen.

The two hold hands. United by emotion; different faiths.

A few feet away: Jessica traces the burn on her hand, absorbed in thought.

A HUGE YAWN breaks the silence - it's Kevin. Jessica waves the boy over.

JESSICA

You. Get over here.

KEVIN

I thought you wanted me to stay where it's safe.

JESSICA

I do. But there's one more thing you need to hear.

Kevin scuttles over, head bobbing from lack of sleep. He yawns again, even louder than before.

JESSICA

When's the last time you took a nap?

KEVIN

Dunno. How long have we been here?

JESSICA

Hours.

KEVIN

Days?

JESSICA

Maybe. It depends how we're perceiving time.

Jessica stares up at the monitor of Earth.

JESSICA

Hard to tell with no sunlight. I should've noted the rotation before -

Kevin slumps against Jessica's shoulder. She reaches out, strokes his hair.

KEVIN

I can't sleep.

JESSICA

Why?

KEVIN

'Cause I'm scared.

He looks up, eyes innocent.

KEVIN

What were you gonna tell me?

JESSICA

(beat)

That everything'll be just fine. Whatever happens, you and Arnie'll be safe.

## **LATER**

Todd sits cross legged on the floor, looking like a cyberpunk yoga guru - inside a spiral of wire coils.

Cords snake up his shirt, out his sleeves.



Todd's arms extend forward, palms face up.

Greg's psychiatric PILLS piled in his uninjured hand.

Allen observes Todd with an eagle eye.

ALLEN

Whatever happens, don't drop the drugs.

TODD

(sarcastic)

Do you say that to all your prisoners,  
Officer?

ALLEN

Yeah, I do. Right along with "Stop being  
a smart ass." This isn't the time.

Ron looms over Todd.

RON

You clear on what comes next?

TODD

I'm the genius who brainstormed this  
idea. Of course.

RON

But do you have the balls to execute it?

Todd drops his eyes to the floor.

TODD

This isn't rocket science.

(nods towards Jessica)

If it was, she'd be here pretending to  
meditate, not me. I'm just the idiot  
who's gonna lure them in.

ALLEN

Let's go over details. How?

TODD

(recites)

I make some noise, jump around. Get our  
friends to mind meld with me again.

ALLEN

And when they do?

TODD

I pull a Timothy Leary on their ass.

Maithem frowns at the phrase.

MAITHEM

"Timothy Leary"? What does that mean?

TODD

That I tune in, turn on. And THEY tune out. That's how it's *supposed* to work, at least.

Sarah rolls her eyes.

SARAH

You're risking our lives on a theory?

JESSICA

Everything in Science is Theory, sweetheart.

SARAH

(sarcastic)

Like Evolution, you mean?

JESSICA

Yes... But Theory doesn't mean random guess. It's a model of how we think reality works. Gravity's just a theory too. But I doubt you'd jump off a roof.

Sarah turns to Maithem for moral support.

SARAH

You're a scientist. You tell her.

MAITHEM

(softly)

Ms. Jessica is right. All Science develops from Theory, similar to nature's plants. Theories we must test to before acceptance grows.

SARAH

So - what's the theory here?

Todd points at Greg.

TODD

He didn't taste right to those things last time. They tried to touch him, then backed away. The question is - what makes him different from us?

SARAH

Um, he's crazy? I mean sick?

Greg looks up, his feelings hurt. Allen holds up a hand: "wait".

ALLEN  
No-one here is *crazy*.  
(points at Todd)  
Are you?

TODD  
Some people think that. Sometimes. But they're wrong.

ALLEN  
In reality, we're all... unique. In different - special - ways.

Greg beams at Allen, satisfied.

TODD  
With Greg, that difference is probably due to drugs.

ALLEN  
Which isn't his fault.

GREG  
(nods)  
The clinic gives me shit that messes with my mind.

TODD  
And might mess up *those things* as well. If we trap 'em in my skull.

SARAH  
What if your theory's wrong?

TODD  
I might get punished. But if it works -

GREG  
(chuckles)  
Those things might fight back, and scramble your brains.

ALLEN  
Or - we leverage our advantage, and blackmail them to send us home!

SARAH  
How?

TODD

However they brought us here. What other options do we have?

Sarah reaches for Todd's hand. Frightened by the intimacy, Todd turns away.

He picks up exposed wires, and waves them theatrically in the air. Then pretends to make them touch.

He glances up at the ceiling. No response.

No floaty aliens in sight.

TODD

(yells at the ceiling)

Wanna see what happens when this ape shoves these in my mouth? I'll piss on your mondo expensive TV. Burn a hole through that high def screen!

Sarah makes a face.

SARAH

Ewwwwwwww.

Just then: a bright light HITS.

Todd braces himself. Closes his eyes, takes a breath.

TODD

Bring it on. Touch me like the glowstick pedos you sickos are.

RON

Damn, kid. Language. I'm impressed!

The two Alien life-forms drift down. Jessica dives in front of Todd, blocks the creatures' path.

RON

Get the Hell outta the way, lady!

JESSICA

That's Jessica to you, Private!

RON

I don't give a fuck what your name is.

JESSICA

I'm the only rocket scientist here. It's time for me to take charge.

She swivels towards the aliens. Multi-colored lights strobe in her face.

JESSICA  
Let's talk, you and I.

MAITHEM  
Jessica, don't! One dare not confront the Gods...

Jessica flashes a grin at Maithem through alien "flesh."

JESSICA  
Don't you get it? We're both scientists.  
Trained to use brains over brawn.

The lights on the alien's side changes patterns. They're thinking things over. Very hard.

JESSICA  
(to the creatures)  
You may think we're a young species. But thanks to you, we've grown up now. So it's time we built a mutually beneficial relationship. One that brings us together - like the equals we are.

The pulsing STROBES angrily. The colors freeze. Then...

ZAP!

Tendrils lance out - VAPORIZING Jessica in one strike.

Kevin screams and dives into a Tube.

Todd stiffens in his yoga pose - too terrified to move.

Ron throws panicked hand signals towards Allen.

RON  
Plan B. Go. Go. Go!

Allen grabs a wire and JAMS it into one alien.

Electricity FRIES and SIZZLES. Light around the creature WARPS. An electric HUM crescendos to a BUZZ.

Then... ZAP.

Another bolt lashes out. Turns Allen into ash.

The second alien descends rapidly on Todd, and latches onto his skull with Dayglow coils.

Todd pops Greg's pills into his mouth.

TODD  
(mutters)  
This better act real damned fast.

TODD'S POV: Chaotic mental images flow. Todd's POV switches. Is - reversed.

ALIEN'S POV: Todd stares through the creature's eyes.

The view floats down towards Jessica's scorched remains. A RED SCREEN OF LIGHT is overlaid.

Then over to what's left of Allen. Red lights saturate his cremains, as well.

Ron's face looms large - distorted like a fun-house mirror. Colors flicker back and forth: RED and GREEN.

Kevin cowers in a corner, colored GREEN. No danger detected there.

Maithem and Sarah hug each other for comfort. Maithem whispers in the young girl's ear.

MAITHEM  
Don't look. Just pray.

SARAH  
Yes. I have Faith.

For them, the alien light turns PURE GREEN.

Next, the focus turns to Greg.

His light pulses RED - fades to GREY. Blocked by a mental fog, there's no way to determine if he's safe.

The alien's companion floats over Todd. Ethereal tendrils caress the teen's face.

STATIC CRACKLES flood his skull. Too well-formed to be random. But not clear enough for words.

Todd forms his words through spontaneously bleeding lips.

TODD  
You're culling the herd, aren't you?  
Eliminating anyone who's a threat?

The tendrils pause. Todd raises his voice.

TODD

I get it, OK? You didn't like Doug, Luke and Paul. Just because they tried to escape. Allen tried to hurt you, so you hurt him back. But why'd you kill Jessica? Don't be cowards - tell the truth! Lemme guess: because she didn't view herself as inferior? And that pissed you off big time?

The lights flicker - don't respond.

TODD

You don't wanna answer? Fine. I'll start. You ever wanna see your Bright-Lite pal again, us ANIMALS are gonna negotiate some terms. You're gonna send us home, safe and sound.

Todd whips Greg's knife out of his pocket, and holds it against his own throat.

TODD

If you don't play nice, this won't end well. For your Christmas tree buddy. Or red shirted me.

The lights stop flashing. Consider the offer carefully.

# **MOMENTS LATER**

The Survivors step into individual Tubes.

Todd stumbles into one, knife still against his throat.

The remaining alien hovers over him. If a bundle of lights could look nervous, this one would.

Engines GLOW. The Tube platforms power up.

Sarah waves at Todd.

SARAH

You alright?

TODD

(croaks)

Define okay.

SARAH

Are you still you?

TODD

Well, I've got an alien life-form in my head. Scratching at my skull. And it wants out.

SARAH

When?

TODD

I hope... when we beam away?

Kevin's Tube slides shut, trapping the boy inside. He presses terrified hands against the glass. Arnie the Gerbil scampers up his arm.

KEVIN

Help?

Sarah presses a hand against *her* Tube.

SARAH

I promise. Everything'll be just fine.

KEVIN

Not for my Dad. Or her.

Tube doors slide shut on Greg, Ron and Maithem.

Claustrophobic, Greg digs in his pocket. Sadly, all his drugs are gone.

GREG

Dammit!

Ron and Maithem exchange looks from their containers.

RON

So, "Teacher" -

MAITHEM

The name's Maithem.

RON

You ready to take that leap of Faith?

MAITHEM

For sure. Bring it on. Fingers crossed.

Somewhere, a ship engine HUMS. The power-up's almost complete. Lights warp the air around Todd's face.

The alien trapped inside eager to emerge.

Sarah waves again to Todd.



SARAH  
See you on the other side?

TODD  
If we luck out bigly. I think.

SARAH  
Some tough negotiator you are.

TODD  
(beat)  
Wherever we end up - you wanna go out  
with me later, on a date?

SARAH  
Am I even gonna remember who you are?

TODD  
I'd like to. If they let me.

Sarah opens her mouth. An engine ROAR swallows her words.

Tubes FLARE, blinding everyone.

Space-time skips and flutters, like a fading heartbeat.

**EXT. IRAQI DESERT - DAY**

Unblinking sun stares down at scorched terrain.

Ron and Maithem shield blinded eyes.

The two men stand close enough to touch. Both of them  
seem... confused.

There's no sign of Amir, nor Luke. Wind has erased their  
tracks.

Maithem's explosives haven't returned. But Ron's in full  
uniform, and armed.

Ron scrutinizes Maithem head to toe.

RON  
Who are you?

MAITHEM  
I - don't know.

Seconds later, Maithem's mind reboots.

He reaches for a pocket.

Ron grabs his rifle by reflex.

Maithem extends a photo ID: a smiling picture of his face, posed next to several TEENS.

Next to that, his name scrawled in Arabic.

MAITHEM  
I'm Maithem Abustany.

RON  
What do you do?

MAITHEM  
Teach Biology in Karbala.

Ron squints from Maithem's face to the photo - faint suspicion in his eyes.

RON  
What are you doing here?

MAITHEM  
Leaving work. I have an infant daughter,  
a five year old son. And a beautiful  
wife, who wants me home. And you?

Ron thinks it over. Rolls his eyes.

RON  
I'm Ron. From Detroit.

MAITHEM  
What part of the United States is that?

RON  
A place you don't wanna see.

MAITHEM  
Oh. Can I go now?

RON  
It's a free country. Of course.

Maithem stares at him, confused.

MAITHEM  
Excuse me?

RON  
That's English slang. Never mind.

A faint memory flickers on Ron's face.

RON

Wait. Have you seen another soldier here recently? A big white guy with muscles. Blond.

Ron points his own nametag out to Maithem.

RON

Right here, it should say Luke. Can you read English?

MAITHEM

(beat)

I'm learning it now. For my career.

The two men fidget in silence. What direction will this conversation take?

Finally: Ron waves his rifle to the left.

RON

Go home to your family. Kiss your daughter, son...

MAITHEM

And wife?

RON

For me. And if you see my friend - tell him I headed back to base.

The men start to shake, but don't touch. On second thought, it's not wise.

Turning their backs, they part ways.

Smiles grow on their relieved faces.

There's been no violence. That's all one can ask for. In some worlds.

**EXT. CITY STREET - ALLEYWAY - EVENING**

A lamp post flickers; a feeble electronic attempt to survive. Space warps in an odd manner.

Todd and Sarah materialize.

Sarah slumps against a wall.

Todd falls to his knees.

Greg's knife CLATTERS from his hand to the pavement. Todd stares at it, surprised.

Above his head: A warped LIGHT FORM pulses. Colors spiral into the center - dissolve into void.

Neither of the teens notice.

Todd retches his guts out, head held low.

TODD  
Killer hangover. Here it goes...

He vomits on top of Greg's fallen knife.

TODD  
Where did that come from? And what the  
Fuck did I drink last night?

Sarah fights to focus, holds out her hand.

SARAH  
Whatever it was, you're wasted good.

She blinks at Todd's ripped Star Trek shirt.

SARAH  
I guess not all red-shirts die.

Todd's head whips up.

TODD  
Did you just make a Star Trek joke?

SARAH  
Uh, yeah. Don't tell anyone, OK?

TODD  
You don't LOOK like a Trekkie.

SARAH  
I watch the movies, from time to time.

TODD  
Old or new?

SARAH  
The ones with bad FX.

TODD  
(beams)  
Classic? Yeah!

SARAH  
You need a lift home, Captain Kirk?

TODD  
Sure. Beam me up, Yeoman Rand.

SARAH  
(confused)  
What? My name is Sarah.

TODD  
I'm Todd.

Todd holds out a vomit covered hand. Sarah wrinkles her nose.

SARAH  
You look familiar. Have we met before?

TODD  
I bet you say that to all the boys.

Todd rises to his feet, inspects his costume. The bullet wound on his arm is gone.

The Star Trek RIP across his shirt's still there.

Sarah takes a step. Wobbles.

Todd grabs her before she falls. Sarah stares up at him, vertigo in her eyes.

TODD  
I guess you had drinks as well?

SARAH  
Thanks for catching me. Your... puke kind of made me ill.

TODD  
And I doubt it would've broken your fall.

The two stagger toward the alley exit. Instant attraction in the air.

Todd side-eyes the cross necklace on Sarah's neck.

TODD  
You're Christian?

SARAH  
Of course. Are you?

TODD

I worship Patrick Stewart and Leonard Nemoy. But I'm okay with other faiths. If you dig him, Mark Hamill's okay.

SARAH

I know I just met you. And don't think I'm flirting, but - you have a really kind face.

TODD

I know I need a shower.

SARAH

No kidding. Where do you live?

TODD

I'm a home-grown Jersey boy.

SARAH

Let's stop at my place to freshen up. My parents bought me a studio in Saint Mark's. Paul was supposed to crash there tonight, but I guess he split...

TODD

Wait - you have a boyfriend?

SARAH

Him? Paul's not important. He's just some guy I kind of know.

The teens walk out of the alley and disappear. *Almost* as if swallowed by city lights.

In the alleyway: a TRASH CAN wobbles by itself.

Behind it: Greg the Bum.

Kevin lies next to him. The boy notices Greg, leaps away.

KEVIN

Don't touch me! Dad says -

Greg holds a dirty finger to his lips.

GREG

Shhhh. I ain't gonna hurt you. Never touched no kid in my life.

KEVIN

Who are you? Where's Dad?

Greg mulls the question over, and scratches the BASEBALL CAP still on his head.

GREG  
You don't remember?

KEVIN  
What?

GREG  
I'll take that as a no.

Greg's cap CRINKLES. He pulls it off, grins at the shiny lining inside.

GREG  
Guess tinfoil did the trick.

KEVIN  
I'm hungry. I wanna go home.

Kevin backs away.

Greg rifles in his own pockets: there's no food.

He *does* find Gerbil Arnie. Intact. Skittish. But alive.

Underneath Arnie, in Greg's hand: the ALIEN CHIP from the panel floor.

Greg holds rodent and hardware up to a sputtering lamppost light.

GREG  
Stupid bastards ain't never gonna believe me. Even with evidence in my hand.

Greg tucks Arnie and the chip into Kevin's palm. Folds Kevin's small fist closed.

GREG  
Boy, you're gonna be fine.

KEVIN  
Did you say that to me before? I remember something....

GREG  
Just keep botha these real safe.

Greg leads the boy towards the alley's entrance.

Poking his head out, he spots Officer Vietta Robinson (Allen's partner) nearby. He points her out to Kevin.

GREG

You see that pretty lady over there?  
That's a *good* cop. Go over and tell her  
you're lost. She'll help you find your  
Mom. But whatever you do - don't let her  
know what I gave you, Son.

KEVIN

Why?

GREG

'Cause it's a secret. The grown-up kind.

KEVIN

Dad says I shouldn't share secrets with  
strangers.

GREG

I'm a friend now, so don't you mind. But  
when you get home, tell your Momma to  
take you where your Dad worked... I mean  
"works". Find someone in a long white  
coat, and give them what I gave you.

KEVIN

No. Arnie's mine!

GREG

Just the metal chip, Boy. You can keep  
your furry friend warm and safe.

Greg pushes Kevin forward. Stubborn tears glisten in the  
boy's eyes.

KEVIN

Where's Dad?

GREG

He had ta... go away. You probably won't  
see him no more. But trust me, he's in a  
good place. We all are now. For awhile.

Kevin whimpers. Then staggers toward Officer Vietta.

Greg observes every step Kevin takes, watches the boy's  
progress like a hawk.

Something WHISTLES overhead. A frown creases Greg's face.

He looks up - past tall buildings, at the sky.

It's the kind of dark, ominous night where you can *almost*  
make out a form.



Something BRILLIANT WHITE cuts a swath across the heavens, fades away.

Greg waves a defiant fist in the air.

GREG

Good riddance, Motherfuckers. The sheep won this time. And you missed one rebel. See ya next Millennium, if you dare!

FINAL FADE OUT: