

"THE DRAKE EQUATION"

By

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FADE IN:

EXT. CITY SKYLINE - DAY

The morning Sun rises above the horizon, lighting the way for...

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

...commuters. Pedestrians race down the sidewalks, as others impatiently wait in line for a bus that's stuck in traffic.

MAN'S VOICE

(V.O.)

The human race.

INT. BUS - DAY

Passengers hopelessly stare out the window.

MAN'S VOICE

(V.O.)

Mankind.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Telemarketers on headsets packed like sardines in a sea of endless cubicles.

MAN'S VOICE

(V.O.)

Homo-sapiens.

INT. SUBWAY PASSENGER TRAIN - NIGHT

People texting, reading, avoiding eye contact.

MAN'S VOICE

(V.O.)

Are we alone in the universe?

A man entertains himself by playing a game on his phone that he's too old for.

MAN'S VOICE

(V.O.)

Yes or no, the answer to that question tells us something profound about who we are.

Without taking his eyes off his phone, he gets up and exits the train car and walks up the escalator.

MAN'S VOICE
(V.O.)
About our place in the cosmos.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - NIGHT

A skateboarder ollies over a bench, wipes out, and lands on his back. His friends point and laugh.

MAN'S VOICE
(V.O.)
But with no evidence to date, how
do we quantify the probability of
extraterrestrial intelligence?

Hurt, but not injured, the skater takes a moment to look up at the starry night.

Stars fill the screen.

TITLE SEQUENCE OVER STARRY BACKGROUND:

TITLE - THE DRAKE EQUATION

Stars crystallize into symbols. They form...

TITLE - $N = R^* \text{ fp ne fl fi fc L}$

The equation disappears with the exception of...

N

MAN'S VOICE
(V.O.)
The answer is N. The number of
alien civilizations in our galaxy
right now with whom we could
communicate. To resolve this
equation each variable must be
assigned a value.

$N = R^*$

MAN'S VOICE
(V.O.)

R star. The average rate of star formation in our galaxy. The estimated value is seven stars per year.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. INTERSTELLAR SPACE - DAY

STARS.

A rotating, windowless STARSHIP coasts at 15% light speed.

An enormous ROCKET, eclipsed in size by a surrounding RING.

Between them, pneumatic transport TUBES.

FIGURES in exo-suits are scattered about the ship. Like ANTS in constant motion, these technicians work tirelessly to repair their damaged ship. HOME TO THE SPACE-FARERS.

A home in ZERO-G.

Blowtorches ablaze against the desolate blackness of space.

EXT. ROCKET

A TECHNICIAN fires his mini-thrusters. He floats to a damaged shielding panel and hooks a local tether.

He yanks the panel to pry it loose. Underneath...an abraded hull. His EYES widen and start to GLOW, broadcasting what he sees...

INTERCUT:

INT. ENGINEERING, RING

...to a STEREOSCOPIC HOLOGRAPHIC PROJECTION. Crew members surround the projection to observe.

The technician activates his comm, syncing up with the crew.

They communicate WITHOUT SPEAKING ALOUD.

WE HEAR THEIR INNER VOICES.

TECHNICIAN
Zooming in.

HIS IRISES REARRANGE THEIR STRUCTURE. The projection MAGNIFIES to reveal tiny fissures in the hull's surface.

TECHNICIAN
Recommending a panel weld,
Commander.

COMMANDER SHAN sits behind the projection, inspecting an architectural blueprint of the ship.

SHAN
All clear. Proceed.

The projection dissipates. The technician's eyes revert. He starts welding. Seconds later...

THWICK!

An imperceptible MICROMETEOROID spins him out of alignment.

Worried, he looks around.

DINK!

Another one cracks his glass visor. He taps his comm.

TECHNICIAN
Aborting weld! Incoming debris! I
repeat, incoming debris!

The others abort their hull repairs and head for cover. He reaches for his tether...*THWACK!*

Severed.

*CHING!...*Another micrometeoroid penetrates his thruster assembly, SPINNING HIM WILDLY OUT OF CONTROL.

TECHNICIAN
Help! Somebody! I've lost
thrusters!

SHAN
Qraus, do you copy!?

LIEUTENANT QRAUS, a fearless yet disciplined bulwark, flies down the rocket toward the technician.

QRAUS
On my way.

Qraus' eyes glow, projecting for the Shan and crew.

CAPTAIN VI, visibly pregnant, enters the room.

SHAN
Captain Vi, we have a situation.

VI
Qraus?

QRAUS
I have visual.

TECHNICIAN
Aagh! Help me!

Vi and Shan watch the projection as Qraus nears the technician.

QRAUS
Almost there.

SNATCH!

QRAUS INTERCEPTS THE TECHNICIAN.

They continue spinning.

DINK! The technician's visor cracks again.

TECHNICIAN
My visor!

Qraus gently places his hand on the technician's chest.

QRAUS
Calm down.

TECHNICIAN
It's breaking!

VI
Quickly Qraus!

QRAUS
Please bare with me Captain, the
situation will improve in a moment.

DINK! Qraus' visor cracks from impacting debris.

QRAUS
Maybe.

They continue a VIOLENT spin away from the ship. Qraus takes a quick look at the technician's exo-suit.

TECHNICIAN
What are we going to do!?

QRAUS
The impact has damaged the thruster
assembly. It's overheating.

TECHNICIAN
WHAT!?

QRAUS
Please remain calm.

TECHNICIAN
Calm!? You kidding!? How can I...

BEEP.

Qraus mutes the technician's comm.

He takes a SMALL CANISTER and sprays foam onto the thruster. The expelling fuel prevents the foam from adhering.

VI
Qraus...

QRAUS
It's okay Captain. I have an idea.

He takes out a MICRO-EXPLOSIVE, affixing it to the damaged thruster assembly. The technician flails his arms and legs.

VI
What are you doing!?

The technician is FREAKING OUT, making it difficult for Qraus to calibrate the explosive. Qraus pulls out another small canister and STABS the technician's exo-suit. The canister cuts through the suit and stays in place.

Gas discharges into the technician's suit. KNOCKS HIM OUT.

QRAUS
There we go.

SHAN
This isn't protocol.

VI
I know.

QRAUS
Protocol cannot salvage this situation.

Qraus finishes calibrating the explosive. He pushes a button located on the technician's exo-suit. A SPECTACULAR LIGHT SHOW dances inside the technician's helmet.

Qraus does the same for himself.

He moves around the technician, takes out the foam and sprays the technician's cracked visor. It solidifies immediately.

He secures a tether between the exo-suits and clutches tight.

POP!

The explosive PUNCTURES the thruster's tanks, suddenly liberating the rest of the fuel. It catches FIRE, but immediately extinguishes.

QRAUS
Our circumstances have improved.
See you soon.

Qraus' projection dissipates. Vi breathes a sigh of relief.

SHAN
(TO VI)
He's got a taste for the dramatic.

VI
Believe me, I know.

Qraus fires his thrusters while...

EXT. AIRLOCK, ROCKET

...airlock crew members broadcast Qraus' arrival to the Captain.

QRAUS
(TO CREW)
Thanks guys.

Qraus hands off the technician.

QRAUS
(TO CAPTAIN)
If it's all the same Captain, I
think I'll take the rest of the
da...

SHING! A micrometeoroid rips through Qraus' helmet.

Blood spatter.

Captain Vi SCREAMS ALOUD.

MAN'S VOICE 1
(O.S.)
The chair recognizes the gentlemen
from Nevada, Mr. Jack Sawyer.

CUT TO:

EXT. WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY

OVERCAST day in Washington.

MAN'S VOICE 2

(O.S.)

Thank you chairman.

INT. RUSSELL SENATE OFFICE BUILDING, WASHINGTON, D.C.

A TITLE CARD FADES IN:

SEPTEMBER 22, 1993

The Senate Committee sits in a mostly empty room. SENATOR JACK SAWYER, a pompous, half-wit snake, questions the witnesses.

SAWYER

Let's talk about NASA's High Resolution Microwave Survey, also known as "Hermes." Administrator Scott, can you please state for the record what the purpose of this program is?

Just another day in Washington for NASA's Administrator.

NASA ADMIN.

Hermes searches for radio transmissions sent from extraterrestrial origins.

SAWYER

For the record, you're looking for...aliens.

NASA ADMIN.

Yes sir.

SAWYER

Uh huh. With big ol' telescopes.

NASA ADMIN.

Just the Arecibo in Puerto Rico.

SAWYER

I see. Now, Dr. Bloom, my staff tells me you're in favor of shutting this program down.

Aerospace Engineer DR. RYAN BLOOM (early 40s), a cynical, misanthropic futurist.

BLOOM

Uh, no.

SAWYER

I heard that you think waiting around to pick up a radio signal is a waste of time.

Bloom holds up his paper.

BLOOM

No. My paper demonstrates alternative methods for detecting intelligent life.

SAWYER

Now hold on, I have it right here. An interview you gave last year. You describe the use of telescopes as quote, "rather arbitrary choice of technology." In other words, what makes us think ET uses radio like we do?

BLOOM

My paper outlines signals we could possibly detect coming from...

SAWYER

What makes you think ET is out there waiting to take calls on his 1-800 number?

Bloom rolls his eyes.

BLOOM

The point is, we don't know for sure. Science doesn't allow you to rule anything out until you can eliminate possibility.

SAWYER

If you had to take a guess, how old would you say the Universe is?

BLOOM

I'm sorry, guess?

SAWYER

Yeah.

Bloom clears his throat.

BLOOM
Thirteen point seven two billion
years.

SAWYER
Billion?

BLOOM
That's right, with a 'B'.

SAWYER
Uh huh. And how many stars are in
outer space?

BLOOM
Our galaxy has a few hundred
billion.

SAWYER
Billion with a 'B'?

BLOOM
'B' for Bloom, PhD, yes.

SAWYER
I'm sorry, are we wasting your
time?

BLOOM
I came here to talk about my paper,
not a fifth grade science lesson.

SAWYER
Thank you Mr. Know-It-All, you're
free to go back to your laboratory,
or whatever.

BLOOM
Fine. Fuck this bureaucratic
bullshit.

Bloom storms out.

SAWYER
Dr. Hyde, can you please tell us
how many times we've been contacted
from outer space?

HRMS Director DR. JEFFREY HYDE (mid 30s), a boy scout idealist.

HYDE
It's complicated.

SAWYER
Un-complicate it.

HYDE

Well as a matter of fact I'm trying to replicate observations I made just last month.

SAWYER

Observations?

HYDE

Data, actually.

SAWYER

Boy, sounds compelling Dr. Hyde.

HYDE

I found what looks to be some type of carrier frequency in what most people would call white noise, or static.

SAWYER

People say space is filled with radio noise.

HYDE

Yes, that's why I need more time to try and replicate the results.

SAWYER

Dr. Hyde...

HYDE

We've only been operational for eleven months.

SAWYER

It seems like with that fancy piece of equipment ya'll got down there in Pu-waerto Ree-co we'd be getting messages all the time.

HYDE

It's not as easy as tuning into your favorite radio station. Assuming that intelligent life is transmitting a signal we can decode, we have to distinguish it from natural interference.

SAWYER

Time equals money. You've spent millions and haven't bagged a little green fellow. Not a single Martian has said, "Take me to your leader," and not a single flying saucer has applied for FAA approval. This 'Great Martian Chase' may have to come to an end.

Hyde exchanges a worried look with his colleague, a rough-and-tumble former hippie, DR. JOHN FESQ, who sits a few rows back.

HYDE

With respect Senator, the Universe is unfathomably large. To end this program now would be like filling a drinking glass with ocean water and declaring the oceans lifeless.

SAWYER

Maybe there are aliens running around out there on Planet Vulcan. I'm just not sure that my constituents appreciate their hard earned tax dollars going to waste trying to get in touch with these out-of-towners.

HYDE

Twelve million dollars from a federal budget of hundreds of billions is a relatively small...

SAWYER

Let's get this straight for the record. If the Universe is as old as that fella said it was...

Sawyer points to Bloom's empty seat.

SAWYER

...why should we assume there are millions of ETs out there just waiting for us to dial in when there's no proof they exist?

HYDE

We're so close Senator. But we've only been capable of observing radio transmissions for a little over a century. A blink of an eye, cosmologically speaking.

SAWYER

And how many alien civilizations does this...equation say are out there?

HYDE

There won't be a good answer until we succeed in finding life just once. But in the meantime, if we assume the number of suitable planets on which intelligent life ACTUALLY appears, capable enough of developing technology that releases detectable signals into space during a time period synchronized with our own modern existence, and assuming they haven't already destroyed themselves via nuclear holocaust, some estimates place this number in the thousands.

SAWYER

Well then...where the hell are they? Sounds like you got yourself a paradigm...

Sawyer's aide whispers in his ear.

SAWYER

...er, a paradox, Dr. Hyde.

A beat.

HYDE

I can assure you Senator, I won't rest until I can provide undeniable evidence to you and your constituents.

SAWYER

My constituents? I'm not sure if they have the patience to...

Sawyer turns to his staff.

FESQ

(TO HIMSELF)

Poor, miserable bastards.

SAWYER

(TO STAFFER)

...aren't we due on the floor?

A staffer nods.

SAWYER
I'm afraid our veterans need my
support. I yield my time.

SENATE CHAIRMAN
Gentleman yields his time. Hearing
adjourned.

CRACK!

The Chairman slams the gavel. Fesq walks to Hyde.

FESQ
What the hell's his problem?

HYDE
Dunno. Never done this before.

The NASA Administrator turns to them and smiles a little.

NASA ADMIN.
I've done this plenty of times.
It's just the way things go. Don't
worry too much. I'm sure
everything will be fine.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Hyde reads a postcard delivered from Puerto Rico.

"Jeff, thanks for the coffee last week. Constellations when you
get back? - Lorraine"

HYDE
Hmm.

KNOCK. KNOCK.

Hyde opens the door.

FESQ
Mornin'. Watcha got there?

HYDE
It's from Lorraine. Something
about constellations.

FESQ
Lemme see.

Fesq grabs the postcard.

FESQ
Nice, my man!

HYDE
What?

FESQ
Whaddya mean?

HYDE
I don't get it.

FESQ
I swear man, you're too busy
looking at things light years away
from you to notice what's right in
front of your face. She likes you
man, come on.

HYDE
We observe stars all night long.

FESQ
Yeah, with telescopes...

A bellhop delivers the morning paper.

FESQ
(TO BELLHOP)
Thanks.

Fesq thumbs through.

FESQ
How about with your own two eyes
like normal people?

HYDE
Too much light pollution.

FESQ
You're hopeless.

HYDE
Well, I suppose if she had the time
to...

FESQ
Oh shit.

HYDE
What is it?

Fesq hands him a newspaper.

FESQ
Have you seen this?

Hyde looks down at an article titled,
"SATELLITE CRASH LANDS IN AFGHANISTAN."

HYDE
A satellite crashed in Afghanistan?

FESQ
What? No. Further down. That
weasel stripped our funding last
night.

HYDE
What? How?

FESQ
With an amendment to a Veterans
Affairs bill or some shit.

HYDE
What does this mean?

FESQ
We're done, man! That's it.

Hyde drops Lorraine's postcard to the floor.

HYDE
But we just started the program!

FESQ
We spend more on defense than the
next fourteen countries combined,
but god forbid twelve million go to
radio astronomy!

HYDE
Sawyer said, quote, "The chances of
Hermes detecting aliens are so
remote, and the likely benefits of
the program are so limited that
there is little justification to
use taxpayer dollars for the
program."

FESQ
Benefits? From a NASA program?
Christ! GPS, LASIK, MRIs!

HYDE

He says government "shouldn't be in a position to stimulate ideas" and says the twelve million should be redirected to his home state of Nevada in order to "put toddlers in daycare."

FESQ

Who elected this guy!?

HYDE

I've spent years developing this program.

FESQ

I'm sorry Jeff.

HYDE

The signal. What the hell did we find?

FADE TO BLACK

CUT TO:

TITLE SEQUENCE CONTINUED OVER STARRY BACKGROUND:

$N = R * fp$

MAN'S VOICE

(V.O.)

F sub P. The fraction of stars in our galaxy that have planets. It's safe to say most stars, if not all, have planets orbiting around them. The estimated value approaches one.

FADE IN:

INT. UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND LECTURE HALL - DAY

TITLE CARD FADES IN:

20 YEARS LATER

Astro 380 - Introduction to Astrobiology

HYDE speaks to a half-filled lecture hall. He wears a WIRELESS LAVALIER MICROPHONE.

HYDE

Test, one, two...good?

His assistant checks levels on the mixing board. Nods.

HYDE

In 1961, Frank Drake devised a formula to estimate the probability of alien civilizations existing elsewhere in our galaxy. A.K.A...

Hyde points to the students.

STUDENTS

The Milky Way.

HYDE

An object so vast, it takes light itself one hundred and fifty thousand years to cross, even traveling at three hundred thousand kilometers per second. Big place. Certainly, someone else is out there. Maybe Alf?

Silence.

HYDE

Never mind... A half-century later, mankind is no closer to making first contact with an intelligent species. But why? I'd argue it has nothing to do with lack of resources. We have the money and the technology. So what is it?

He's got them in the palm of his hand.

HYDE

It's us! We simply stopped caring...

PROJECTION SLIDE - Cover of TIME MAGAZINE 12/25/2006.

HYDE

...and literally started staring...into the mirror. You guys remember this one, right? Time magazine nominated "You" as their "Person Of The Year" in 2006.

Hyde holds his arms outstretched.

HYDE

A cosmic backyard with millions of terrestrial landscapes just like Earth...

He sits on the floor and looks directly at a student.

HYDE

...but let's get back to that vlog.
Nevermind all those other places.

Hyde smiles. Students laugh.

HYDE

Are we really so special? You ever
consider that life itself isn't
native to Earth? Think about it.
Earth wasn't even habitable for the
first billion years.

SLIDE - Molten Earth.

HYDE

How 'bout Mars? Evidence suggests
it had liquid water and an oxygen-
rich atmosphere.

SLIDE - Mars.

HYDE

One day a comet or meteor hits, and
BAM! Martian debris ejected from
its surface. Debris carrying
microbial life capable of
withstanding the harsh environment
of interplanetary space.
Extremophiles.

SLIDE - Tardigrade.

HYDE

That debris comes to Earth,
completing the sequence of cosmic
pollination.

SLIDE - Allan Hills 84001 Meteorite.

HYDE

This Martian meteorite was found in
Antarctica in 1984. Electron
microscope imaging showed some
interesting structures. Some
scientists thought it was
fossilized bacteria.

SLIDE - Microscopic view of Allan Hills 84001 Meteorite.

HYDE

While scientific consensus wasn't fully achieved in that particular case, the point is that we don't know for sure where life started. Maybe Earth. Maybe Mars. Maybe elsewhere.

SLIDE - Earth.

HYDE

It's only a matter of time before we discover, with certainty, microscopic life in our solar system. Mars. Europa. Enceladus.

SLIDE - Mars, Europa, Enceladus.

HYDE

Yes, we'll be studying polysaccharides and gluconeogenesis this semester.

Hyde spots a NAVAL ROTC student on his phone. He points.

HYDE

But maybe, mister...

STUDENT

Whip.

HYDE

But maybe, Mr. Whip, we can shift our attention away from ourselves...

WHIP, embarrassed, puts his phone away.

SLIDE - Stars.

HYDE

...and refocus on life elsewhere in the cosmos.

Hyde points to the slide, which expands to fill the screen.

MATCH DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. INTERSTELLAR SPACE - DAY

The starship streaks across the screen.

VI
(O.S.)
Qraus, can you hear me?

INT. ENGINEERING, RING

Qraus' P.O.V. The crew surrounds him as he wakes up.

QRAUS
What's going on?

Captain Vi steps closer, visibly distressed.

QRAUS
Captain, what's wrong?

VI
What's the last thing you remember?

QRAUS
Setting the charge
and...initializing consciousness
download.

VI
(TO SHAN)
Can we have a moment?

SHAN
(TO CREW)
Let's move along everyone.

THE ROOM CLEARS TO REVEAL A HUMANOID ROBOT. The robot looks at its hands.

The robot is Qraus.

Qraus turns around to see rows of inactive, lifeless bots just like him, awaiting the voyage's next fatality.

QRAUS
Vi...I'm sorry.

VI
It's not your fault.

QRAUS
This wasn't supposed to happen.

They embrace. Qraus holds reaches down and touches Vi's MID-SECTION. Shan watches through a window.

SHAN
(TO CREW MEMBER)
Any response yet?

CREW MEMBER
Signal is broadcasting. No
response sir.

A TONE swells louder into...

CUT TO:

INT. HYDE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

...a ringing phone.

Hyde's not home. His computer screen saver shows an animated DRAKE EQUATION.

Answering machine picks up.

HYDE
(MACHINE GREETING)
You've reached Dr. Jeffrey Hyde. Sorry I
missed you. If you've made first contact with
any extraterrestrials please leave your name
and number and I'll get back to you soon.
Until then, keep looking up.

FESQ
(PHONE)
Hey what's up, man? Movie night?

INTERCUT:

INT. MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

Some asshole TEXTS on his cell phone.

FESQ
(PHONE)
Hey listen, I was sent some data today from,
well, the uh, folks up at Hat Creek.

A LASER POINTER LIGHT appears on his screen.

FESQ
(PHONE)

I don't want to say too much right now, but
just call me.

Man turns around. No laser.

FESQ
(PHONE)

I'll be at the office. Tonight, tomorrow...
doesn't matter what time, okay?

Man texts again, laser comes back. He turns around. Nothing.

Man puts his cell phone away, clearly irritated.

Hyde cracks a smile as he puts his laser pointer in his pocket.

CUT TO:

INT. FESQ'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Fesq hangs up the phone. Looks at his old notes, with sloppy
handwriting, then to his computer screen.

FESQ'S NOTES - "1.42 gigahertz / 8 Hours."

HAT CREEK'S NOTES - "1.42 gigahertz carrier signal for
approximately 9 hours."

CUT TO:

EXT. FREEWAY - NIGHT

Hyde drives home.

INT. CAR

News radio is on.

REPORTER
(RADIO)

Senate Republicans filibustered to
block passage of NASA's proposed
budget for its state-of-the-art
Tyson space telescope. Senate
Minority leader JACK SAWYER said
the country can't afford the high
price tag.

SAWYER
(RADIO)

Look, NASA is a troubled agency. Columbia, Challenger. Heck, they even sent up Hubble with a faulty lens. The continued funding of such programs is not in our nation's best interest, especially in my home state. We need those funds to build new schools. My constituents are looking for ways to improve our state's education.

REPORTER
(RADIO)

Education in Sawyer's home state of Nevada currently ranks 45th in the nation.

Hyde changes the station.

ALANIS MORISSETTE
(RADIO)

"Isn't it ironic?"

Hyde smirks.

INT. HYDE'S HOUSE

Hyde walks in. Doesn't notice the BLINKING LIGHT on his answering machine. Pours a drink and plops down on the couch. Turns on the TV. Pastes his movie ticket in a scrapbook, next to 2001, E.T., Star Wars, Close Encounters, etc.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HYDE'S HOUSE - MORNING

Hyde's asleep on the couch. His cat jumps up, waking him.

HYDE
Oh hello Jean-Luc. What's that?
You learned how to scoop your
litter box?

He sees the blinking light. Gets up. Hits play.

FESQ
(RECORDING)
Hey what's up, man?

INTERCUT:**INT. FESQ'S OFFICE UC BERKELEY - EARLY MORNING**

A nameplate on Fesq's door says...

"DR. JOHN FESQ. PROFESSOR OF ASTRONOMY"

Fesq is asleep on the sofa.

RRRIIIIIINNNG.

He wakes up. Checks his watch. 4 A.M. He picks up the phone.

FESQ

What's wrong with you?

HYDE

You said anytime.

FESQ

No I didn't. What'cha see last night?

HYDE

You know, the alien one.

FESQ

Geek.

HYDE

Jesus man, why am I calling you?

FESQ

Hat Creek sent me some data.

HYDE

Uh huh.

FESQ

It actually looks...familiar.

A beat. Hyde sighs.

HYDE

How familiar?

FESQ

Puerto Rico familiar. Right in the goddamn water hole, man.

HYDE

I don't know if I can do this again John.

FESQ
Is that right? What's on your
screensaver right now?

HYDE
Oh come on.

FESQ
We gotta go up to Hat Creek.

HYDE
I can't do that, the semester just
started.

FESQ
Just tell 'em you've got important
shit to do.

HYDE
It's the first week back! The
department will kick my ass.

FESQ
Look, if what they sent me is what
I think it is, the department will
KISS your ass. Prolly name a whole
building after you. Besides, don't
you want to see her?

HYDE
Oh give me a break!...What if it's
nothing?

FESQ
Book one way. I'll fly you back
first class.

HYDE
No layovers.

CUT TO:

INT. OAKLAND INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

Hyde exits the terminal with a briefcase.

FESQ
You check any bags?

HYDE
Nah. This is it.

FESQ
Ooookay.

HYDE
You're flyin' me back tomorrow.

FESQ
Sure about that?

HYDE
Fully reclining seat.

FESQ
Whatever you say, princess.

EXT. I-5 HIGHWAY

With one hand on the wheel, Fesq reaches for the back seat.

FESQ
Here's my old notebook. And here's
what Hat Creek sent me. Look at
page three.

Hyde flips through, and then opens his briefcase. He moves his
socks and underwear to one side to get his notebook.

FESQ
What'cha got there?

HYDE
My old notes.

FESQ
What's wrong with mine?

HYDE
Your handwriting's dreadful.

FESQ
Whatever, man. Just look at it!

HYDE'S NOTES - "1.42 gigahertz / 8 Hours."

HAT CREEK'S NOTES - "1.42 gigahertz carrier signal for
approximately 9 hours."

HYDE
Huh.

FESQ
For the record, mine say the same
thing.

HYDE
Does she know I'm coming too?

FESQ
 Uh...yeah. I called her yesterday.

HYDE
 Okay...what'd she say?

FESQ
 Relax man. Everything's fine.

CUT TO:

TITLE SEQUENCE CONTINUED OVER STARRY BACKGROUND:

$N = R \cdot f_p \cdot n_e$

MAN'S VOICE
 (V.O.)
 N sub E. The average number of
 habitable planets per star. The
 estimated value is one.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SPACE - DAY

SILENCE. The Starship zooms across screen.

INT. ENGINEERING, RING

A cable connects Qraus' head to a computer terminal.

BEEP.

CREW MEMBER
 All set.

VI
 You sure you want to go back out
 there?

A beat. Qraus nods.

INT. STARSHIP TUBE, RINGSIDE

Qraus enters a POD, which transports him to the Rocket like an elevator. Nearing the Rocket, the artificial gravity gradually disappears. The pod door opens to reveal...

INT. ROCKET CORRIDOR

...the gigantic CENTRAL CORRIDOR of the Rocket. With a firm grip, Qraus pulls his weightless body down the length of the corridor. FLYING.

INT. E.V.A. PREP ROOM, ROCKET

Qraus' team is already there, putting on their exo-suits.

Doors open. Qraus floats in. Faces - expressing pity.

QRAUS

Alright everyone, we got a lot of work to do.

The technician floats up to Qraus.

TECHNICIAN

I'm sorry Lieutenant.

QRAUS

It's alright. Let's get to it. Jek, there's a camera out on Ring north. Yun, Ring south. Everyone else on torches.

Nobody moves.

QRAUS

Questions?

Silence.

QRAUS

Proceed.

INT. AIRLOCK, ROCKET

Qraus snaps down his tether.

CREW MEMBER

(O.S.)

Ready Lieutenant?

QRAUS

Affirmative.

CREW MEMBER

(O.S.)

Depressurization in five, four...

Qraus is jolted by a quick MEMORY FLASH - his cracked visor.

CREW MEMBER
(O.S.)
...three, two, one...

SSSSSSSHHHHHHHHHH.

The external doors open. Qraus is blown out into space. With his tether pulled taught, he disconnects and thrusts himself back towards his...

EXT. ROCKET

...team - already at work. The SHIP HULL is scarred with MICROMETEOROID IMPACTS.

BEEP.

QRAUS
Broadcasting now.

INTERCUT:

INT. ENGINEERING, RING

Vi observes Qraus' holographic projection. Her face distressed.

Qraus has another FLASH - spinning wildly out of control. His holographic projection shakes.

VI
You alright Qraus?

A beat.

QRAUS
Yes Captain, everything is...

Qraus looks to his team.

QRAUS
...no...

VI
What's the matter Qraus?

THEY ALL SPIN OUT OF CONTROL, REACHING OUT TOWARDS HIM.

TEAM
(TO QRAUS)
Help us!

QRAUS
...No!

The projection shows Qraus' arms in a defensive posture, as if he's protecting himself. His team, safe and sound.

VI
Something's wrong.

SHAN
(TO TEAM)
Get him back here, now!

A technician is seen approaching Qraus through the projection.

QRAUS
Aaaaaagggggghh! No!

CUT TO:

INT. ENGINEERING, RING

Qraus is hunched over on an examination table. Head in hand.
Rows of inactive, lifeless bots rest offline on the back wall.

VI
What happened out there?

QRAUS
Difficulty...adjusting. I don't know.

SHAN
All functions nominal Captain.

VI
Maybe you should take it easy for a while.

Qraus yanks the plug from his head and heads for the door.

VI
Qraus!

Qraus storms out. Vi follows.

INT. ENGINEERING VAULT, RING

Qraus marches up to a large VAULT. He stops and stares.
Qraus glances back at the Vi...

QRAUS

I gave him my word. He's counting on me.

...then walks off.

CUT TO:

EXT. HAT CREEK RADIO OBSERVATORY, CALIFORNIA - DAY

The HCRO TELESCOPE ARRAY sits in striking contrast to the surrounding rural landscape and Sierra Nevada Mountains.

Fesq and Hyde drive down a barely-paved road and arrive at a one-story lab.

HYDE

Weren't they building three hundred fifty?

FESQ

Yeah, but then funders dropped out.

They get out of the car and look around.

HYDE

Looks like there's only thirty-five or forty.

FESQ

Forty-two. They went into operational hibernation a little while ago due to lack of funding. It's a miracle they got back online.

HYDE

What happened?

FESQ

Same thing that always happens.

HYDE

Which is?

FESQ

People lost interest.

WOMAN'S VOICE

(O.S.)

Not this time.

They turn around to find the woman from Hyde's photograph, DR. LORRAINE MAY (late 40s), a recovering misandrist.

FESQ
Lorraine!

MAY
John.

HYDE
Did you completely rule out
interference from interstellar
hydrogen precession?

May doesn't even look at Hyde.

MAY
I didn't know you were coming, Dr.
Hyde.

HYDE
(TO FESQ)
I thought you said...

FESQ
Lorraine, why don't we meet you
inside.

Fesq tugs at Hyde.

FESQ
Lemme just get something out of the
car.

HYDE
What are you talking about...

FESQ
(WHISPER)
Come here!

May walks back to the lab. Fesq drags Hyde to the car.

HYDE
What's wrong?

THWACK! Fesq slaps Hyde on the back of his head.

FESQ
Are you kidding me?

FESQ
(MOCKING TONE)
"Did you rule out the
interference!?"

FESQ
How about, "Nice to see you
Lorraine! You haven't aged a day!"

HYDE

Oh for crying out loud, not this again.

FESQ

What's wrong with you?

HYDE

Nothing.

FESQ

Get your head in the game!

HYDE

What game?

FESQ

Don't be coy.

HYDE

Oh goodness gracious.

FESQ

Now we're going to go in there and see what she's got. Afterwards you're going to stop playing doctor doofus and talk to her.

HYDE

I WAS talking to her.

FESQ

You know what I mean. Why do you do this?

HYDE

Do what? Last time I saw her was Puerto Rico.

FESQ

Exactly. You were too focused on the damn telescope to see a good thing right in front of you. Here on THIS planet, man!

HYDE

What is this, bait and switch? I thought I came out here to...

FESQ

...to make things right.

Fesq points to the lab.

INT. HCRO LAB

May's team analyzes data on computer terminals in the background. A hi-tech, but lean operation held together with duct tape. Hyde and Fesq enter. The team stops working.

STARES. SILENCE.

May rolls her eyes.

MAY

(TO TEAM)

Oh for God's sake. Get back to work.

May signals Hyde and Fesq into...

FESQ

What was that about?

INT. MAY'S OFFICE

May looks to Hyde, then to Fesq.

MAY

They think he's...you know.

FESQ

What...a celebrity?

HYDE

Who?

MAY

They're young. They don't know any better.

HYDE

Huh?

FESQ

Lorraine, what you sent...

MAY

Yeah, I know. Other sites see it too.

FESQ

Italy?

MAY

Yep.

FESQ
Australia?

MAY
Mmm hmm.

HYDE
How about Puerto Rico?

A cold look across May's face.

MAY
Excuse me?

Fesq winces.

FESQ
You still reading a carrier at
1.42?

MAY
Yep.

FESQ
Origin?

May flippantly waves her hand.

MAY
Same.

FESQ
As Hermes?

HYDE
You can't be serious.

MAY
I'm sorry, WHO can't be serious?

FESQ
Why hasn't this been reported
everywhere?

MAY
Needs to be vetted John. You know
that.

HYDE
Are we sure we're not being played
by some other country? Who knows,
maybe China?

MAY
What are you talking about?

FESQ

Right. Like, who can trust those bastards? One minute they happily sell us little American flags they made and the next minute they're hacking their way up our asses.

HYDE

Exactly.

FESQ

All the way up!

MAY

Oh for Chrissakes, what does that have to do with anything?

HYDE

All I'm saying is that UFO mythology runs deep with Americans. Some lens flare gets posted online and all those alien-abduction whack jobs point and say, "See! See!" Next thing you know, crazy is the new rational.

FESQ

Crazy IS the new rational.

MAY

Huh?

FESQ

Don't you watch Fox News?

MAY

Oh Jesus!

MAN'S VOICE
(O.S.)

Dr. May!

May looks over at DIVVY, an analyst.

MAY

What'cha got Divvy?

DIVVY

I think you should take a look at this!

MAY

Hang on.

FESQ
(TO HYDE)
...but they probably don't have the
technology to do something like
this.

MAY
One more thing.

FESQ
What's that?

MAY
It's not just a carrier at 1.42.
We're picking up carriers at every
frequency between 1.42 and 1.66.
No lower. No higher.

HYDE
What!?

FESQ
That's the WHOLE goddamn water
hole!

DIVVY
Dr. May!

MAY
Come on.

INT. HCRO LAB

They walk over to Divvy's desk. His screen reveals a colored,
three-dimensional representation of the recorded signal.

DIVVY
I'll have to run this through some
software, but I'm seeing potential
here in this.

MAY
Good work.

HYDE
Potential for what?

A beat.

DIVVY
Please excuse me Dr. Hyde. I'm a
big fan.

May sighs. Shakes her head.

HYDE

Thank you. So what's this showing us? I'm not familiar with this new software.

MAY

(UNDER HER BREATH)

Shocking.

FESQ

(QUIETLY TO MAY)

Easy now.

DIVVY

It could be a pattern of some sort.

MAY

Compare it with the other sites. Let me know what you come up with.

DIVVY

There's one more thing.

MAY

What's that?

DIVVY

The signal appears to be...blueshifting.

Hyde's jaw drops.

MAY

What's the probability of error?

DIVVY

Give or take ten percent.

HYDE

You're saying that whatever is transmitting this signal is moving closer to Earth.

DIVVY

I believe so, yes.

FESQ AND HYDE

(TOGETHER)

Holy shit.

CUT TO:

INT. GRILL - NIGHT

Hyde, Fesq and May sit around a table, in an awkward silence.

FESQ
Does NASA know about this yet?

MAY
I spoke with the Administrator
yesterday. He's briefing the
President tomorrow morning.

HYDE
But you gotta be sure.

MAY
Of course we do. You think I don't
know that?

A beat.

FESQ
Tell you what. I got
some...papers...to grade so I'm
gonna head back to the motel.

HYDE
What papers?

Fesq gets up and shuffles towards the door.

FESQ
You know. Papers.

May clears her throat.

MAY
Aren't you gonna eat something,
John?

FESQ
I'll grab something back at the
motel.

MAY
This is the only place for twenty
miles.

FESQ
I'm sure they got a...vending
machine.

Fesq exits. SILENCE. No eye contact.

HYDE
Nice place.

MORE SILENCE.

HYDE
Sooo I...

MAY
Why are you really here, Dr. Hyde?

HYDE
What's with this "Dr. Hyde" stuff?

MAY
Last I heard you were outta the game.

HYDE
(TO HIMSELF)
What's with this game?

MAY
What?

HYDE
Never mind.

MAY
You waltz up here and expect me to pretend like we haven't seen each other in twenty years?

HYDE
I'm sorry. Sawyer shut the Hermes project down.

MAY
Oh, well I wasn't aware that you required government funding to have a relationship.

HYDE
It was a long time ago. I'm sorry, okay?

May signals.

MAY
Waiter!

Hyde signals the waiter to stay put.

HYDE

Okay, look. I was embarrassed.
Alright? Humiliated. Devastated.
I worked my whole life developing
that program, and that bastard just
took it away overnight.

MAY

There's more to life than work.

HYDE

It wasn't just work to me, you know
that. Goodness, we found
something. I couldn't bare the
thought of not knowing. I took it
so...

MAY

...personally?

HYDE

If it makes you feel better it took
me a long time to look at myself in
the mirror again.

MAY

You look this morning? You look
like a schlub.

A beat.

Hyde sees a DIAMOND RING on her RIGHT ring finger.

HYDE

That's a nice, uh...

MAY

Divorced. It was his fault.

HYDE

Oh. I'm sorry. John didn't
mention...

MAY

How's that new Bio-stuff going?

HYDE

It's not exactly new.

MAY

I listened to a few of your
lectures.

HYDE

Really!?

MAY
Your students actually buy into
that crap?

HYDE
Oh come on, Lorraine. I came up
here because of you, okay?

MAY
Is that right?

HYDE
Yeah.

MAY
You didn't come for the signal?

HYDE
If you weren't up here I would have
told John to go without me.

MAY
What's on your screen saver?

HYDE
Look, let's get some food and maybe
you can tell me how I can help.

MAY
Dinner's on you.

HYDE
Fine. Now can you at least give me
a ride back to the motel?

MAY
I'll think about it.

CUT TO:

INT. WHITE HOUSE OVAL OFFICE - DAY

PRESIDENT MCGRATH meets with his Cabinet.

PRESIDENT
Alien intelligence? Is this real?

NASA ADMINISTRATOR.
Quite possibly sir.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
What about satellite interference?

NASA ADMINISTRATOR
No. They're actually detecting
multiple carrier frequencies in a
very specific range. We call it
the water hole.

VICE PRESIDENT
The water hole?

NASA ADMINISTRATOR
Terrestrial radio waves don't
penetrate this range. And natural
sources like the Sun don't emit
narrow-band frequencies like this.

VICE PRESIDENT
English Doc.

NASA ADMINISTRATOR
It's a universal understanding.

PRESIDENT
Of what?

NASA ADMINISTRATOR
The best way of attempting first
contact sir.

PRESIDENT
What about the U.N.?

SECRETARY OF STATE
The Security Council has already
scheduled meetings later this week.
China has, shall we say, a
particular interest.

PRESIDENT
How so?

SECRETARY OF STATE
May I be blunt?

PRESIDENT
Of course.

SECRETARY OF STATE

The Middle East has been a thorn in our side for the past few decades. All the while China's economy has grown considerably. They're the largest holder of foreign currency reserves, they lead the world in trade and they've been winning back public trust recently with a hard-line commitment to stamping out political corruption. It's no longer a question of if, but when their economy eclipses ours, making them the next superpower state.

VICE PRESIDENT

What's that got to do with anything?

NASA ADMINISTRATOR

Let's just say that they've developed a great sense of pride in their space program. And because of NASA's exclusion policy towards the Chinese, they're eager to leave us in the dust.

VICE PRESIDENT

Sawyer will never let you hear the end of it. All that "leading from behind" bullshit will come right on back and bite us in the ass.

SECRETARY OF STATE

Agreed. It'll make us look weak.

PRESIDENT

Has he been briefed?

NASA ADMINISTRATOR

I'm briefing the Senate committee later today.

VICE PRESIDENT

He'll use this as a wedge issue in the upcoming campaign season.

SENIOR ADVISOR

Undoubtedly. Playing on people's fears, citing his pro-war voting record to suggest he'll protect everyone from an invasion.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Alien invasion?

PRESIDENT

We have to be careful here.

SENIOR ADVISOR

Right, but you need to get ahead of Sawyer on this. Sell it to the American people like a challenge, not a threat. Polls could swing our way if we could improve the country's below-average global rankings in STEM.

VICE PRESIDENT

Science, technology...

SENIOR ADVISOR

...engineering, mathematics.

VICE PRESIDENT

If we take the lead, this could be your "Go to the moon" moment.

PRESIDENT

Or a way for Sawyer to swift boat my next term.

CUT TO:

INT. HCRO LAB - DAY

Hyde, Fesq, and May huddle around Divvy's computer.

MAY

Alright, please tell me you've got something.

DIVVY

I took a ten-minute sample, stripped out microwave background noise, as well as anything perceived as interference.

Divvy's screen shows a DIGITAL AUDIO WAVEFORM EDITOR.

MAY

(TO HERSELF)

Come on, come on, come on.

The cursor clicks play. A SUSTAINED TONE. 440 Hz. WIDE EYES.

MAY

What's that, feedback or something?

DIVVY
Don't think so. Lemme restart.

Divvy stops playback.

HYDE
No, just let it play.

MAY
Do you mind?

HYDE
Sorry.

MAY
Divvy, start it from the beginning again.

440 Hz. Seconds later we hear another tone fade in. 220 Hz.

HYDE
Hear that? An octave lower.

MAY
Shhh! Yes, we hear it.

Another tone. 880 Hz.

MAY
(QUIETLY)
An octave higher.

110 Hz.

MAY AND HYDE
(QUIETLY)
Lower.

1760 Hz.

MAY AND HYDE
(QUIETLY)
Higher.

Tones keep fading in. Lower. Higher. Eventually inaudible.

MAY
Divvy, can you bring up a spectrum analyzer?

DIVVY
Yeah.

Divvy switches to view the audio spectrum. With each note, they see a corresponding visualization on screen.

MAY

See that!?

Low frequencies show 0.859375, 1.71875, 3.4375 Hz.

FESQ

Yeah, I don't hear those ones.

High frequencies show 28,160, 56,320, 112,640, 225,280, 450,560.

FESQ

Or those.

HYDE

Exactly!

Hyde looks at May. She looks back in reluctant solidarity.

FESQ

Alright Mulder and Scully, what is it?

Divvy stops playback.

MAY

Octaves. A wide aural spectrum.

FESQ

Yeah. I got that. So what.

MAY

How do you communicate with someone when you don't know if they can hear you? By saying "Hello" to every species on Earth.

FESQ

Why EVERY species?

HYDE

More like ANY species. On average we hear everything between twenty to twenty thousand Hertz. But Bats can use frequencies up to a HUNDRED thousand. Blue Whales, as low as TEN.

MAY

Brilliant.

HYDE

Thanks.

May points to the computer screen.

MAY

I was talking about them.

FESQ

We have to find what's sending this signal.

MAY

Can you make some calls? See if we can get some time on an optical somewhere?

FESQ

You got it.

HYDE

I think we need to call someone else too.

FESQ

Who?

CUT TO:

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO, BOULDER - DAY

SIGN reads - 16th Annual International Mars Society Convention.

DR. BLOOM stands behind a lectern and gives an opening plenary to fellow scientists and enthusiasts. Slide accompaniment.

BLOOM

For four-and-a-half billion years we were tethered to Earth. Of course, that all changed in '69. We got so good at space travel we actually thought we'd colonize Mars by the 80s. Remember those days? But Tricky Dick had to go and start meddling.

SLIDE - President Nixon.

BLOOM

...and we ended up with the shuttle program. Sure, we put Hubble up there, but since 1972 we've been dicking around in low Earth orbit.

SLIDE - Astronauts playing with food in ISS.

BLOOM

The problem with NASA's lack of current achievement is not money. The problem is lack of focus. Lack of a goal. It shouldn't be "Humans To Mars In Fifty Years," it should be "Humans To Mars In Ten."

SLIDE - Mars.

BLOOM

The question I get most is, "Why aren't we doing this?" There's a big sense of disappointment, almost verging on a sense of betrayal. I like those cute rovers on Mars, but it should be us up there. They promised it to us. Instead, we got fucking Facebook.

SLIDE - Astronaut on Mars.

BLOOM

After the shuttle program ended in 2011 the U.S. didn't replace it with anything. Ronald Reagan would roll over in his grave if he heard we had to hitch a ride with the Russians to get to the International Space Station!

SLIDE - U.S. Astronaut hitchhiker.

BLOOM

Why can't the U.S. get anything done anymore? If we keep dragging our feet, next thing you know China's establishing the first colony on Mars. So again, the time to start colonizing Mars and BEYOND is NOW and we shouldn't be marginalized for thinking so. Thanks so much for your support.

APPLAUSE. Bloom walks off. His aide hands him his cell phone.

AIDE

Sir, your phone has been ringing non-stop for the past twenty minutes.

BLOOM

What?

RRRRRIIING.

He looks at the number.

BLOOM
(TO HIMSELF)
Who the hell is this?

Bloom answers.

BLOOM
This is Dr. Bloom. Who the hell is this?

HYDE
(PHONE)
We're getting the band back together. How would you like another shot at Sawyer?

CUT TO:

EXT. SCIENCE BUILDING, UC BERKELEY - DAY

CROWDS gather outside.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM

The room is FILLED. Reporters, photographers, general public.

INT. HALLWAY

Hyde and Fesq wait for May. Fesq checks his watch.

FESQ
Come on, where is she?

HYDE
You didn't tell me she married.

FESQ
You were invited to the wedding.

HYDE
No I wasn't.

FESQ
You're right, you weren't. But I told you about it.

HYDE
No you didn't.

FESQ

Look, the point is you still have a chance to set things right between you two.

May walks in.

Hyde offers a surprised look, wondering what she heard.

MAY

(TO FESQ)

Does he have to be here?

FESQ

Lorraine, come on, it's related.

MAY

You better be god damn sure, or else I'm out.

FESQ

Alright, let's go. They're waiting for us.

MAY

(TO HYDE)

What are you looking at?

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM

Camera's flash as they sit down at the head table.

FESQ

If everyone can take a seat we can get started.

The room settles.

FESQ

Thank you all for coming. I'm Dr. John Fesq, professor of astronomy here at UC Berkeley. In 1958, the University established a small radio observatory in the remote Hat Creek Valley in northern California. Over the years, and with gracious funding from the Paul Allen Family Foundation, UC Berkeley and Dr. May's team have been able to expand the capabilities of the observatory from a mere two telescopes into the large array as we see it now. I've worked closely with Dr. May over the years and I'm proud to be a part of this announcement today. And now, let me turn things over to her.

MAY

Hello everyone, I'm Dr. Lorraine May. I'm sure you're excited to hear what we have to say so I'll just get right to it. My team at the observatory has discovered what appears to be an artificially derived signal from space. Other sites around the world have confirmed this as well.

REPORTER 1

Dr. May, does it contain some type of message?

MAY

It's a series of tones. Octaves, repeated over and over. Possibly to have us take notice.

REPORTER 2

Do you know where it's coming from?

May glances at Hyde.

MAY

Not exactly.

REPORTER 3

Care to speculate?

MAY

No, not really.

Fesq clears his throat.

FESQ

You may have noticed my good friend Dr. Hyde joining us today. The signal is not unlike what he observed twenty years ago. Jeff, why don't you say a few words?

HYDE

Sure...

Hyde looks to May for approval.

May sits back. Crosses her arms.

HYDE

The strength and duration of the carrier frequencies are simila...

May grabs the microphone.

MAY

The point is, we're not certain. Whatever is transmitting this signal is moving towards us.

The room EXPLODES. Camera FLASHES. GASPS.

REPORTER 4

Is it some kind of spaceship?

FESQ

Unfortunately that's all we know right now. Thank you all for your time.

CUT TO:

INT. U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, NEW YORK CITY - DAY

Diplomats listen to a presentation by the Secretary of State.

SECRETARY OF STATE

Right now all we have is conjecture and speculation. If we somehow manage to uncover definitive proof that an alien spacecraft is heading towards Earth, it is the intent of the United States to be the first point of contact.

CHINESE AMBASSADOR

I'm afraid we can't support that measure.

SECRETARY OF STATE

We believe it is absolutely imperative for the safety and well-being of our world.

CHINESE AMBASSADOR

Allow me to clarify our concerns. It is our belief that U.S. intervention would not be in the best interest of the international community. Your country does not have a good track record when it comes to extraterrestrials.

SECRETARY OF STATE

I don't understand.

CHINESE AMBASSADOR

If I may be blunt, we don't have time for any more Area 51 hocus pocus.

SECRETARY OF STATE

You can't be serious. I can assure you no aliens ever crash landed in the United States.

CHINESE AMBASSADOR

Maybe, maybe not. Your country has had seventy years to come clean and as of today, big questions still remain.

A few diplomats nod in support.

SECRETARY OF STATE

I assure you, the United States will keep open lines of communication if we should ever encounter a situation.

CHINESE AMBASSADOR

We are defined by our actions, Mr. Secretary.

CUT TO:

TITLE SEQUENCE CONTINUED OVER STARRY BACKGROUND:

$N = R * f_p n_e f_l$

MAN'S VOICE

(V.O.)

F sub L. The fraction of habitable planets that actually develop life. The estimated value approaches one.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BEDROOM LIVING QUARTERS, RING - DAY

Vi wakes up, grimacing in pain.

VI

Qraus...arrrrgh...I think...it's time.

She looks over. He's gone.

VI

(ALoud)

Qraus!?

INT. STARSHIP BRIDGE, ROCKET

Shan and crew observe video feeds from exterior cameras.

CREW MEMBER

All systems go Commander.

SHAN

Deploy the magsail.

BEEP BOOP BEEP.

With keyed commands, the crew initiates MAGSAIL DEPLOYMENT.

INTERCUT:

EXT. ROCKET

Each side along the front end of the Rocket slowly retracts to reveal three ENORMOUS SPOOLS OF SUPERCONDUCTING WIRE.

The wire is only two millimeters thick. It connects the three spools to each other, forming a closed loop.

Each spool has 200 KILOMETERS OF WIRE, tethered to a central hub, itself wound on hub spools.

CREW MEMBER
Exterior hull retracted. Starting
the spools.

The central hub spins, and the spools unwind.

CREW MEMBER
Electrical current engaged.

The wire pushes outward into arcs between the spools.

CREW MEMBER
Loop is intact.

SHAN
Good work everyone.

CREW MEMBER 2
Commander, we have a situation in
medical.

INT. MORGUE, RING

Graus gently grasps on the handle of a stainless steel door.

DOOR P.O.V.

WOOSH.

The door opens, illuminating a pair of lifeless feet. Graus reaches in and grabs the tray the body lies on. He pulls it out, revealing the body as his own. He turns away with one quick look at his face. He hangs his head.

Shan frantically bursts in.

SHAN
(ALoud)
Why is your comm off? What are you
doing!?

Graus doesn't acknowledge.

SHAN
Commander Shan to medical. I've
found him.

GRAUS
(ALoud)
I don't know if I can do this.

SHAN
(ALoud)
Whatever this is, it has to wait.
Vi needs you.

INT. MEDICAL, RING

Shan and Graus rush in to find Vi in labor.

VI
(ALoud)
Where were you!?

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MAGSAIL SPOOL - NIGHT

An empty spool. ONE HUNDRED KILOMETERS from the ship.
The magsail now has a SIX HUNDRED KILOMETER circumference.

INT. MEDICAL LOBBY, RING

A crew member approaches Commander Shan.

CREW MEMBER
Commander, the magsail is fully
deployed.

SHAN
Thank you.

CREW MEMBER
You should know that our scouting
probe has entered their solar
system.

SHAN
Lemme guess, still no response to
the signal.

CREW MEMBER
We're sending the full spectrum of
tones. No response yet.

SHAN
Doesn't make any sense.

Medics walk past Shan and into Medical. As the doors open, CRIES
from a NEWBORN are heard.

Shan peers in and spots Qraus holding his son. Qraus looks up, struggling to appreciate the miracle in front of him.

CUT TO:

EXT. WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY

Partly sunny in Washington. MASSIVE crowds gather around The Capitol. Supporters. Protestors. At each other's throats. The police wear riot gear. Signs like "BEAM ME UP SCOTTY", "ET GO HOME" and "NO MORE ILLEGAL ALIENS" are seen.

NEWS REPORTER
(V.O.)

Astronomers from the Hat Creek Radio Observatory in California are appearing before a Senate Committee. The topic? People are calling it, "The signal from space."

DEMONSTRATOR 1

This is a remarkable time we're living in. I can't wait to see what comes next.

NEWS REPORTER
(V.O.)

But others have a different view.

A BEARDED, TATTOOED MAN, dressed in fatigues, looks menacingly into the news camera.

BEARDED TATTOOED MAN

This country has enough problems. Don't need aliens messin' with us.

MAN'S FRIEND

Ain't no way ET is stickin' a probe up my ass!

NEWS REPORTER
(V.O.)

Security has been beefed up to account for these massive demonstrations.

INT. RUSSELL SENATE OFFICE BUILDING, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Hyde and Fesq sit among a filled room. May testifies.

FESQ
(TO HYDE)
Where's Bloom?

HYDE
I don't know. He said he'd be here.

SENATE CHAIRMAN
The chair recognizes the gentleman from Nevada, Mr. Sawyer.

SAWYER
Alright, let's get to it. Dr. May, what's so important about these dial tones?

MAY
We believe the tones are most likely a universal greeting. We tried "dialing" them back but they didn't pick up.

SAWYER
I didn't know you were authorized to speak on behalf of the American people Dr. May.

MAY
We're looking for answers Senator.

SAWYER
Furthermore, this is an issue of national security. This information should have remained confidential until we had sufficient time to review the facts.

MAY
Is this your campaign speech or something?

SAWYER
Excuse me Dr. May, but you've put this whole country on edge. There's damn near fifty thousand people outside ready to start the next civil war, god forbid.

MAY

Sounds like you're beating the war drum.

SAWYER

You all just hold a press conference willy nilly that basically says the sky is falling without any regard to the consequences.

MAY

You're blowing this out of proportion.

SAWYER

I'm getting phone calls. Emails. Letters from my constituents. Every day, every hour, every minute. You know what they say? They're scared. They're scared some aliens are gonna take away their children.

MAY

You're a fear-monger.

SAWYER

Fear is like a virus in this country. It spreads like wildfire.

MAY

Which is it, virus or wildfire?

SAWYER

How do we know you aren't just making this up?

MAY

It's called evidence, scientific consensus, pattern recognition!

SAWYER

But no proof?

MAY

...and just plain common sense!

SAWYER

Oh please! If you can't show me any proof of anything then the American people will have no choice but to hold you all accountable once these demonstrations turn violent!

CRREEEEK!

Bloom enters the back of the room carrying a stack of papers. The room is silent, but for his DETERMINED FOOTSTEPS. All eyes are on him.

SAWYER

Who are you?

Bloom gets to the front and...

WOOSH!

...THROWS THE STACK OF PAPERS DIRECTLY AT SAWYER. Sawyer dodges as the stack flies by his head. Bloom walks right back out.

SAWYER

What the hell is this!? Arrest that man!

The room erupts. Camera flashes go off.

SENATE CHAIRMAN

Order!

CUT TO:

INT/EXT. MONTAGE

News anchors on TV catch us up to speed.

MSNBC'S CHRIS MATTHEWS

Spaceships? Aliens? A bizarre day here in the nation's capital.

MSNBC'S RACHEL MADDOW

Twenty years later, Dr. Ryan Bloom finally got his shot to show his paper. Literally!

CNN'S ANDERSON COOPER

It outlines a way of detecting interstellar space crafts from extraterrestrial origins.

CNN'S WOLF BLITZER

Like finding a ship from its wake.

Televised BLOOM interview.

NBC'S BRIAN WILLIAMS

You call it Project Big Eye, a large antenna array positioned in space.

BLOOM

It's all about finding starship radiation. Gamma, cyclotron, bremsstrahlung. We find those in space and SETI never has to worry about fundraising ever again.

WILLIAMS

Why haven't we done this already?

BLOOM

Indifference. Corruption. The military industrial complex. Choose your poison.

THE "BIG EYE" ANTENNA IS POSITIONED IN SPACE. It has ten radio telescopes in a circular array.

NEWS ANCHOR

(V.O.)

After stalling for weeks, Congress finally managed to budget five billion dollars for the construction of the Big Eye antenna.

SAWYER on the campaign trail at the NRA Convention.

SAWYER

We shouldn't be wasting taxpayer dollars on a wild goose chase when our military clearly needs those funds. Every American citizen should use their God-given second amendment right to bear arms and protect those they love. We can't let Dr. May and her science extremists welcome a potential threat on our homeland!

PRESIDENT on the campaign trail at a University.

PRESIDENT

Senator Sawyer wants you to FEAR the unknown. I have a different path for America. Let's seize this opportunity and allow our students to EMBRACE the unknown. Together, we can stimulate the economy by shifting our focus back on creating jobs for our STEM graduates.

SAWYER on the campaign trail at the Iowa Straw Poll.

SAWYER

The President is outta his mind to think this isn't a matter of national security. Dr. May says there's no threat to our country. How'd she reach that conclusion? With a beaker? Who put her in charge anyway? As President, I will increase our military's strength to defend this great nation against any aliens. Martian or Mexican. I don't discriminate!

PRESIDENT

Yes, national security is part of the equation. But don't let Sawyer turn it into national IN-SECURITY. We face this together, not alone.

HYDE lectures his class. His assistant interrupts him to share the breaking news...

Meanwhile, Divvy walks into May's office to turn on her TV.

DIVVY

They found something!

The news coverage shows protestors standing outside NASA.

NEWS ANCHOR

(V.O.)

Today, amidst aggressive demonstrations, scientists at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory announced their discovery of an interstellar spacecraft heading for Earth.

More news coverage showing...

- Global reaction. Worshippers, zealots, rioters.
- People staring into the sky, wondering...
- Chinese billionaire pledging \$100 million towards search for extraterrestrial radio waves.

BLOOM televised interview.

BLOOM

It's confirmed. We got ourselves a Magnetic Sail coming our way next year.

NEWS ANCHOR

Can you explain what that is?

BLOOM

It works like a parachute. But in this case the parachute is a magnetic field slowed by hydrogen atoms it deflects out of its way.

NEWS ANCHOR

Why not use rockets?

BLOOM

Magsails don't need fuel. The only catch is that it takes much longer to slow down.

Protestors look menacingly at May through a TV Studio window.

May interview.

60 MINUTES' SCOTT PELLE

Humans are not alone in the Universe.

MAY

These beings are undoubtedly far more advanced than we are.

PELLEY

What about the signal Dr. Hyde discovered twenty years ago?

MAY

I dunno. Look, what's important here is that finding microbial life on other worlds would tell us that life on Earth is not a miracle.

PELLEY

That we're not special.

Hyde pensively watches May's interview from his couch.

MAY

Right. But the potential to leapfrog that and make contact with another intelligent species...I somehow don't think we're ready for such a strong blow to our ego. Which is strange for me to say, since I...

MAY AND HYDE
 (UNISON)
 I've waited my whole life for this
 moment.

END MONTAGE

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PACIFIC OCEAN - NIGHT

A LARGE U.S. NAVAL FLEET PATROLS THE AREA - supercarriers,
 warships, submarines.

A TITLE CARD FADES IN:

16 MONTHS LATER

TV REPORTER
 (V.O.)
 The U.S. Navy is on alert, as Earth
 awaits what many have started to
 call, "First Contact."

EXT. AIRCRAFT CARRIER FLIGHT DECK

Bloom, Hyde, Fesq, and May await the arrival of the spacecraft.
 Press. Cameras.

FESQ
 (TO BLOOM)
 Can you believe Sawyer was
 nominated this year?

BLOOM
 I don't get this stupid country
 sometimes.

FLEET ADMIRAL HAISLIP approaches the group.

ADMIRAL
 Dr. Bloom, what exactly are we
 looking for?

BLOOM
 Flying saucer. Not sure, exactly.

ADMIRAL
 Aren't you the guy who found this
 thing?

BLOOM
 Yeah, but it's too small to
 photograph.

ADMIRAL

What makes you think it's coming
down here?

BLOOM

I'm a rocket scientist.

The Admiral stares Bloom down and then walks off.

FESQ

What's his problem?

BLOOM

Too many years with his thumb up
his ass.

Hyde and May look to the night sky.

HYDE

Clear sky.

MAY

Mmm hmm.

HYDE

Reminds you of Puerto Rico, doesn't
it?

MAY

Not really.

INT. AIRCRAFT CARRIER BRIDGE

The Admiral enters, picking up a pair of binoculars.

ADMIRAL

Any activity?

OFFICER

None yet, sir.

He looks out, and focuses in on a lone Chinese aircraft carrier,
a few miles out.

ADMIRAL

(TO HIMSELF)

Didn't think so. Communist
bastards.

BEEP.

The officer detects a signal on the infrared scanner.

OFFICER
Admiral Haislip, got a signal on
the IR!

ADMIRAL
The Chinese?

OFFICER
Doubtful, sir. It's...over one
hundred kilometers out.

ADMIRAL
(TO HIMSELF)
Showtime.

EXT. FLIGHT DECK

Back on Hyde and May.

HYDE
Lorraine, I know how much this
means to you. I just wanted to say
how happy I am for you.

MAY
Thanks.

HYDE
Alright, well...

Hyde offers a polite smile, turns around and walks away.

OFFICER
(O.S.)
Bogey bearing one five zero!

All eyes on the sky. A BRIGHT RING ILLUMINATES HIGH ABOVE. IT
DISAPPEARS, AND THEN A STREAK OF LIGHT FALLS FROM THE SKY.

BLOOM
Holy shit!

FESQ
Far out, man!

IT descends slowly, leaving a barely visible trail of smoke.

SHOOOOOM!

Two X-47B STEALTH DRONES are launched toward the object.

OFFICER
(TO MAY)
Come inside for a better look!

They follow the officer inside to find...

INT. DRONE CONTROL ROOM

...two drone 'pilots'.

OFFICER

(TO ADMIRAL)

Sir, it's heading straight for the Chinese ship.

ADMIRAL

I'll be damned if they get to it first. Dr. Bloom, what the hell is this!?

The cameras on the drones reveal a SMALL SPACECRAFT firing its thrusters, decelerating its approach towards Earth's surface. No external lights. Just the glow from the thrusters. It deploys LANDING GEAR.

BLOOM

In my professional opinion it looks like ET is trying to land his ship in the goddamn Ocean.

ADMIRAL

Why!?

BLOOM

I don't know!

ADMIRAL

What do you mean you don't know!? You found this godforsaken thing!

BLOOM

Yeah, in space. Once those bastards land it's your problem pal.

ADMIRAL

Is that thing here to blow us up or not!?

BLOOM

How the hell do I know?

HYDE

They wouldn't send a ship down to kill us.

BLOOM

Right. They would've nuked us from space. Unless the ship's a nuke.

FESQ

That doesn't sound good.

ADMIRAL

Can't you geeks give me a straight answer!?

FESQ

That's not nice, man.

PILOT

Sir, T-minus five seconds to touchdown.

The spacecraft slowly dips into the ocean. Once partially submerged, the thrusters stop firing and the spacecraft FLOATS on the surface of the water.

The Chinese deploy smaller ships to its location.

ADMIRAL

Surely they can't be that stupid.

PILOT

Permission to engage, sir?

ADMIRAL

Granted. Whatever you do, do not hit that spaceship.

BLOOM

You can't just fire on the Chinese.

ADMIRAL

The U.N. Security Council has authorized the U.S. to lead this recovery operation, not them. Any interference is to be interpreted as hostile.

HYDE

This isn't a war, Admiral, it's a scientific discovery.

ADMIRAL

You scientists seem to think math is the only type of universal language.

RATTA TATTA TATTA!

The drone pilots fire multiple warning shots at the Chinese, stopping them in their tracks.

ADMIRAL
(TO OFFICER)
Get a salvage crew prepped now.

CUT TO:

EXT. PEARL HARBOR NAVAL BASE - NIGHT

May, Hyde, Fesq and Bloom are led by a naval officer to the entrance of a large facility.

MAY
What do you mean they've already started!?

OFFICER
They opened it up a few hours ago.

HYDE
Was anyone inside?

INT. NAVAL FACILITY

The SPACECRAFT is in a large warehouse. ARMED GUARDS, TECHNICIANS, LAB COATS, DIAGNOSTIC EQUIPMENT everywhere. Panels have been pried off, exposing the craft's interior.

A STRANGE EMBLEM ON SPACECRAFT CATCHES HYDE'S EYE.

MAY
They were supposed to wait for us!

Technicians wheel large crates to a back room.

MAY
Where are they going with that!?

The Admiral intercepts the group.

ADMIRAL
Can't let you back there.

MAY
What do you mean? We're entitled access!

ADMIRAL

The spacecraft's contents are to remain classified until further notice.

MAY

What!?

HYDE

Under whose authority?

The Admiral looks behind them, then leaves. They turn around and see the President and Senator Sawyer in a private booth.

BLOOM

What the hell is going on?

INT. BOOTH

Sawyer lights a cigar.

PRESIDENT

This is blackmail.

SAWYER

More like a mutually beneficial agreement.

PRESIDENT

People have a right to know what we found in those capsules.

SAWYER

Sure they do. The same way they have a right to see these photos of you and you know who.

Sawyer pats his coat pocket.

PRESIDENT

You're a piece of shit, you know that?

Sawyer exits the booth.

SAWYER

Have a nice day, Mr. President.

An armed guard stands at the doorway. It's Hyde's former student, WHIP.

CUT TO:

INT. CAPITOL BUILDING - DAY

A TV reporter interviews Sawyer.

SAWYER

I completely disagree with the President's wishes to classify the information regarding the alien spaceship. The American people have a right to know if their lives are in danger.

REPORTER

You're saying it was sent with hostile intent?

SAWYER

We have to assume this alien probe was sent here to size up our defense capabilities and report back to the mothership. What the American people need to understand is that as their next President, I will personally guarantee their safety from foreign threats, no matter what world it comes from.

CUT TO:

TITLE SEQUENCE CONTINUED OVER STARRY BACKGROUND:

N = R* fp ne fl fi

MAN'S VOICE

(V.O.)

F sub I. The fraction of habitable planets that develop intelligent life. The estimated value approaches one.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SPACE - DAY

From a fixed position, the Starship races towards and quickly whips past the screen. It's quickly too small to be seen. The glowing, barely visible magsail ring enters frame from all sides. It grows smaller as the ship races further away.

INT. PLAYROOM, RING

Vi sits among other parents, watching the younglings play.

MOTHER
So Captain, how is
Zubrin...adjusting?

VI
What do you mean?

MOTHER
Well, you know, to his father.

Vi offers a polite smile.

VI
Fine. Just fine.

MOTHER
I haven't seen Qraus lately. Is he
okay?

VI
Just...busy.

Vi gets up.

VI
(ALoud)
Come on Zubrin. Time to go.

Vi picks up Zubrin and heads back...

INT. LIVING QUARTERS, RING

...to find Qraus sitting still in a chair.

VI
(ALoud)
Time for rest.

Vi puts Zubrin down in the nursery.

VI
I can't keep making excuses for
you.

Qraus doesn't move. Vi sighs.

VI
(TO HERSELF)
Not again.

She examines him closely. HIS POWER SUPPLY IS OFF. She opens up his back access panel, swaps out the dead batteries, and boots him back up. Qraus comes to.

BANG!

Vi slams down the expired batteries on the table.

VI

(ALoud)

You can't keep doing this to us.
Zubrin needs you. I need you.

QRAUS

(ALoud)

I'm no good Vi. Just shut me down
and forget about me.

VI

(ALoud)

Sorry. It's not that easy! You
got a raw deal, but we all knew the
risks. That's why they chose us
for this ship. And when he grows
up he's going to know his father
was a great man. I just hope he
can see that for himself.

BEEP.

A visitor at the door.

VI

(ALoud)

What!?

Qraus hunches over and covers his face with his hands.

SHAN

Excuse me Captain. Probe analysis
came back.

VI

Come in Commander.

The door opens. Shan enters. Zubrin cries.

VI

(TO QRAUS)

Qraus, please.

Qraus slowly gets up and walks into the nursery.

VI

Proceed.

SHAN

Oxygen atmosphere, water, magnetic shielding, tidal heating. It's habitable.

VI

Just as we suspected. But why no response to the signal?

SHAN

Captain, the technicians are inquiring about Lieutenant Qraus.

Qraus eavesdrops around the nursery threshold.

VI

He's doing just fine.

SHAN

With respect Captain, some have ambitions to fill the void left by the Lieutenant.

VI

There is no void, do you understand?

SHAN

Sorry Captain, he's just...

Vi raises her hand.

VI

I know. He'll come back, don't worry.

CUT TO:

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY

PROTESTORS. SIGNS. A TICKING TIME BOMB. POLICE BARRICADES.

REPORTER

(V.O.)

Amid the massive demonstrations here in Washington today, the Senate Committee on Space meets today to discuss where to go from here.

INT. WHITE HOUSE OVAL OFFICE

May, flustered and fidgeting, meets with the President.

MAY

We're entitled to see it.

PRESIDENT

I'm sorry Dr. May. But it's a matter of national security.

MAY

With respect Mr. President, I expect that type of spin from Senator Sawyer, but not from you.

PRESIDENT

I'm very sorry. I wish I could do more.

INT. WHITE HOUSE HALL

Fesq and Hyde wait for May as she exits the Oval Office.

FESQ

How'd it go?

MAY

I think I might start killing people.

FESQ

Ssh! Jesus Lorraine, keep it down.

MAY

I worked my whole life for this!

HYDE

Lorraine...

MAY

And now they're just taking it away from me!

HYDE

Lorraine!

MAY

WHAT!?

HYDE

It's alright. We'll figure this out.

MAY
How exactly, Dr. Hyde?

FESQ
Look, let's just calm down, okay?

Lorraine walks away.

HYDE
Where are you going?

MAY
I can't do this anymore!

HYDE
Lorraine!

Hyde follows, but Fesq holds him back.

FESQ
It's okay man, let her go.

HYDE
I'm trying here John.

FESQ
I know. Give her some time. Don't forget, you were in her shoes once.

HYDE
Yeah, I know. She has every right to be upset. We have at our finger tips the single most important discovery in human history, and it's hostage to this charade we call politics.

FESQ
The President's probably just playing it safe with the election coming up. Who knows? Maybe he'll change his mind in his 2nd term.

MAN'S VOICE
(O.S.)
I do solemnly swear...

SAWYER
(O.S.)
I do solemnly swear...

CUT TO:

EXT. CAPITOL BUILDING - DAY

Oath of office ceremony for President-elect Sawyer.

CHIEF JUSTICE
...that I will faithfully
execute...

SAWYER
...that I will faithfully
execute...

INTERCUT:

INT. HYDE'S HOUSE / FESQ'S HOUSE

Hyde and Fesq, on the phone, watch Sawyer's inauguration on TV.

HYDE
Is this really happening?

FESQ
I'm watching live on TV and I still
don't believe it, man.

SAWYER
(TV)
..the Office of President of the
United States.

BEEP.

Hyde glances down at his laptop. E-mail from UNKNOWN SENDER.

Subject line - "HANG UP. GET YOUR MAIL."

HYDE
Yeah...me neither.

FESQ
You talk to Lorraine?

HYDE
Hey listen, I gotta run.

FESQ
Alright man, well give me a call...

BEEP.

Hyde hangs up on Fesq. Goes to look out his front window.

Nothing. No one.

He walks out to his mailbox, looking for anything out of the ordinary. Gets his mail and walks back inside.

He shuffles through his mail and finds an UNMARKED ENVELOPE.

Inside the envelope - a TYPED LETTER. It reads...

"Spaceship has plaque. Engraved with planets. Will never see the light of day. Top Secret. Stay tuned."

Hyde smirks and shakes his head in disbelief. Looks out the window, then back to the letter.

He thinks for a moment. Reaching deep. Then...a realization.

He picks up his phone.

INTERCUT:

INT. BLOOM'S OFFICE

Bloom watches the inauguration on TV.

BLOOM
(TO HIMSELF)
Stupid fucking country.

RING.

BLOOM
Dr. Hyde?

HYDE
I need a favor.

CUT TO:

INT. BLOOM'S OFFICE - DAY

Hyde rushes in, carrying his briefcase.

BLOOM
What's so important that you had to fly out here?

HYDE
What's the chance we completely missed another spacecraft landing on Earth?

BLOOM
Unlikely we missed anything.

HYDE

The signal I recorded in Puerto Rico. This whole time we've been assuming it was the same signal coming from the ship that just landed. What if another ship came down twenty years ago...

BLOOM

...and no one took notice? Holy shit. Didn't anyone compare your data to Lorraine's team?

HYDE

Not officially. Sawyer shut our program down before we had the chance to get anything published. All I have are my personal notes.

BLOOM

Well it depends on the amplitude, you know, signal strength.

Bloom looks in bewilderment as Hyde shuffles through his briefcase.

BLOOM

What the hell? Is that underwear?

HYDE

I pack light.

Hyde unpacks his notes, starts flipping through the pages.

BLOOM

Just because we're geeks doesn't mean we have to be weirdos.

HYDE

Here it is.

BLOOM

Get comfortable. This is going to take some time.

CUT TO:

INT. HCRO LAB - NIGHT

Divvy gets his things and heads for the front door. May sits alone in her dark office, staring at her computer screen.

DIVVY
 Sorry Dr. May, we'll try again
 tomorrow.

MAY
 See ya.

She sits back in her chair and takes a deep breath.

INTERCUT:

INT. BLOOM'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Hyde is asleep on a couch.

BUZZ.

He wakes up and answers his phone. It's May.

HYDE
 Lorraine?

MAY
 Yeah.

A beat.

HYDE
 I...

SNAP. SNAP. SNAP.

Bloom snaps his fingers, motioning Hyde to hang up.

HYDE
 (TO MAY)
 I'm sorry, but I have to go.

MAY
 (SARCASTICALLY)
 Oh okay. I get it.

HYDE
 (TO MAY)
 No, that's not what I meant.

May hangs up.

HYDE
 (TO MAY)
 Lorraine?

BLOOM

You can make it up to her later.
Listen, I got good news, bad news
and ugly news. Bad news is that I
can't guarantee you jack shit.

HYDE

Okay.

BLOOM

Good news is that if another
spacecraft came down twenty years
ago, my analysis indicates a high
probability it didn't land in the
ocean.

HYDE

Where would it have landed?

BLOOM

That's the ugly news. Somewhere in
the goddamn Middle East.

HYDE

(TO HIMSELF)

Middle East?

Hyde gets up and starts pacing.

BLOOM

That's the best I can do.

HYDE

(TO HIMSELF)

Middle...East.

Hyde stops.

MEMORY FLASH - News article about Afghanistan satellite crash.

BLOOM

So what now?

HYDE

I have to go.

BLOOM

Where?

Hyde packs his things and rushes for the door.

HYDE

I wasn't here, okay?

BLOOM
Hey, whatever man. I don't give a
shit.

CUT TO:

EXT. WASHINGTON POST BUILDING, WASHINGTON, D.C. - NIGHT

KAUFFMAN, a seasoned journalist, exits the building.

HYDE
(O.S.)
Mr. Kauffman!

He turns around. Hyde approaches.

HYDE
Mr. Kauffman. Please, a moment of
your time.

KAUFFMAN
Who are you?

HYDE
Over twenty years ago you wrote a
short piece about a satellite crash
in Afghanistan.

Hyde holds up the newspaper article. Kauffman continues walking.

KAUFFMAN
Sorry, all editorial inquiries can
be directed to my assistant.

HYDE
I don't think it was a satellite.

KAUFFMAN
You and everyone else. You're a
bit late to be joining the
bandwagon.

HYDE
Don't you think that's a bit
strange?

They take the stairs down to the subway, Kauffman pacing ahead.

KAUFFMAN
Doesn't matter what I think
anymore. It was twenty years ago
in the middle of nowhere.

HYDE

Listen, how would you like a lead on the biggest story the world has ever known?

KAUFFMAN

You know how many times I'm asked that Mr...

HYDE

Hyde. Dr. Jeffrey Hyde. I'm a professor of astrobiology at the University Of Maryland. But more importantly, what I'm offering is a chance to declassify the information Sawyer's got locked up.

Kauffman turns around.

KAUFFMAN

I'm listening.

HYDE

No one claimed the satellite because it was another alien ship.

KAUFFMAN

Come with me.

CUT TO:

INT. KAUFFMAN'S HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

Kauffman sifts through old files piled up around the room.

KAUFFMAN

I was stationed in Kabul, covering the United Islamic Front's fight for democracy against the Taliban. One day their leader, Ahmad Shah Massoud, comes to me and says he and his men found some wreckage in the Hindu Kush mountains, right outside the Ghaziabad District. So I go and check it out.

Kauffman throws a folder to Hyde. Hyde opens it to find Kauffman's original notes and photographs.

HYDE

Did you find anything?

BUZZ.

Hyde looks at his phone. It's May. It pains him to hang up.

HYDE
Sorry, go ahead.

KAUFFMAN
Everything was destroyed beyond
recognition when I got there,
except...

HYDE
Except what?

KAUFFMAN
It was probably nothing, but I
overheard Massoud discussing
something quietly with his wife.
Like they didn't want anyone to
know. From the little Pashto
language I understood back then, it
sounded like they were talking
about some kind of...

HYDE
...engraved plaque.

A beat.

KAUFFMAN
Yes. How'd you know that?

Hyde hands Kauffman the LETTER from his mailbox.

KAUFFMAN
Where did you get this?

HYDE
You have your sources. I have
mine. Can we contact Massoud?

KAUFFMAN
He's dead. Assassinated in 2001.

HYDE
His wife?

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET, BAZARAK, AFGHANISTAN - DAY

A town ravaged by war and drought. Dusty roads weave in and out
of the Hindu Kush mountain terrain. Mud houses. Stone walls.

Streets filled with people, looking suspiciously at Hyde and Kauffman.

KAUFFMAN
Keep your head down and don't make
eye contact with anyone.

HYDE
How much farther?

KAUFFMAN
Almost there.

EXT. MUD HOUSE

Kauffman knocks on the door. A young woman answers the door.

KAUFFMAN
Hi, my name is Mike Kauffman. I'm
an American journalist who wrote
about Ahmad Shah Massoud.

YOUNG WOMAN
My father is not here anymore.
Good bye.

KAUFFMAN
Please, wait!

She shuts the door. Some TOUGH-LOOKING LOCALS stare at Kauffman and Hyde. Kauffman knocks again.

KAUFFMAN
Please, I knew your father and he
was a great man. I'm writing a
story about your mother and I was
hoping to speak with her.

The locals walk towards them.

HYDE
We have company.

KAUFFMAN
Shit.

Kauffman knocks again.

KAUFFMAN
Please, we need to speak with
Sediqa!

LOCAL
(IN PASHTO)
Hey, who are you!? What are you
doing!?

HYDE
Kauffman!?

KAUFFMAN
It's about Ahmad!

THE LOCALS SURROUND THEM.

HYDE
What now?

KAUFFMAN
Sediqa, please!

ONE OF THE LOCALS GRABS KAUFFMAN AND THROWS HIM DOWN.

KAUFFMAN
Sediqa!

ANOTHER LOCAL TAKES OUT A KNIFE AND PUSHES HYDE DOWN.

WOMAN'S VOICE
(IN PASHTO)
Stop!

Massoud's wife, SEDIQA, 50s, stands in the doorstep with her two
sons, armed with AK-47 rifles.

SEDIQA
(IN PASHTO, TO SONS)
Bring them inside.

HYDE
(TO KAUFFMAN)
What is she saying?

KAUFFMAN
(TO HYDE)
Just get up.

LOCAL
(IN PASHTO, TO SEDIQA)
They're American scum!

SEDIQA
(IN PASHTO, TO LOCAL)
Leave them to me. I'll handle
them.

Sediqa's sons pull Hyde and Kauffman inside.

INT. MUD HOUSE

Sediqa's sons push Hyde and Kauffman inside. Dirt floors, old tapestries, barely a roof over their heads.

SEDIQA

You're a long way from home, Mr. Kauffman. Two Americans, strolling along without escort in Afghanistan. You must be pretty stupid.

KAUFFMAN

Look, I wouldn't be here unless it was important. Ahmad gave you something from the satellite crash.

SEDIQA

Look around. I lost everything when two men posing as journalists assassinated my husband.

KAUFFMAN

I know, and I'm very sorry about Ahmad. We're not here to harm you.

SEDIQA

Who's your friend?

KAUFFMAN

This is Dr. Hyde, a professor. We're here to ask you about the artifact Ahmad found.

SEDIQA

What artifact?

HYDE

A plaque. With engravings. Planets.

SEDIQA

Corruption, crime, and kidnappings are this country's chief export. If I had anything of value it would have been taken from me long ago.

KAUFFMAN

Please Sediqa. Does it exist?

SEDIQA

I'm sorry I can't help you.

Sediqa's sons push Hyde and Kauffman towards the door.

KAUFFMAN
Does it exist!?

SEDIQA
I must protect my family. I'm sure
you understand. Goodbye Mr.
Kauffman.

HYDE
Wait! What if we could offer you a
way to relocate your family?
Somewhere safe. A chance for a
better future.

SEDIQA
I don't think you can help us.

HYDE
Give us the plaque, and people will
speak Ahmad Massoud's name for a
thousand years.

SEDIQA
He warned me someone would
eventually come looking for it. We
suspected U.S.S.R, but you look too
weak to be Soviet.

HYDE
(RELIEVED)
Thank you.

KAUFFMAN
It exists!?

SEDIQA
How can I trust you?

KAUFFMAN
We're not the ones carrying guns.

Sediqa nods to her daughter, who leaves for the back room. Hyde
and Kauffman exchange a look.

Her daughter returns holding a dilapidated wooden table.

One of Sediqa's sons grabs a crowbar and kicks the table over.

THWACK!

He jams the crowbar into the underside of the table.

CREAK!

He pries the table apart, destroying it.

CLANG!

The sound of metal falling to the floor - THE PLAQUE.

Sediqa's daughter picks it up.

A dusty metal plaque, partially destroyed by the crash landing.

HYDE SPOTS THE STRANGE EMBLEM UPON THE PLAQUE.

HE GAZES AS IF IT WAS GOD HIMSELF WERE STANDING BEFORE HIM.

HYDE

Oh my God.

KAUFFMAN

All this time.

Hyde approaches the plaque cautiously. It contains a planetary system and alien text.

HYDE

Planets. This... This is a solar system.

KAUFFMAN

What's it say?

HYDE

The markings seem to distinguish the terrestrial planets from the gas giants.

KAUFFMAN

They sent us a map of our own solar system?

HYDE

No.

Hyde points to the damaged portion.

HYDE

Where's the missing piece?

SEDIQA

This is all that remains.

HYDE

This solar system contains just five planets.

KAUFFMAN

Well what system is it?

HYDE

Without the missing piece I can't be certain.

KAUFFMAN

What's on the missing piece?

HYDE

The star.

SEDIQA

What does this have to do with the Soviets?

KAUFFMAN

This did not come from the Soviets. It didn't even come from Earth.

HYDE

Sediqa, Ahmad's legacy will live on through this discovery.

Kauffman hears voices outside. He peeks out the window and sees two Chinese officers engaged in a heated verbal exchange with the locals.

KAUFFMAN

That's strange.

HYDE

What?

KAUFFMAN

Look.

Hyde takes a look out the window.

HYDE

The Chinese! Shit.

KAUFFMAN

What's wrong?

SEDIQA

What about my family!?

HYDE

Ssh! Calm down.

SEDIQA

If I give this to you, you might as well put a target on our backs!

Hyde reaches into his pocket. Sediqa's sons raise their guns.

HYDE
No, no, no. Relax.

Hyde takes out an ENVELOPE.

KAUFFMAN
What's that?

HYDE
(TO SEDIQA)
A bank account with your name on
it. Five hundred thousand, half my
retirement.

KAUFFMAN
Are you crazy?

HYDE
(TO SEDIQA)
You give me this plaque and get
yourself somewhere safe and the
money is all yours.

KAUFFMAN
What if it's not real?

HYDE
Trust me.

Hyde hands the envelope to Sediqa.

HYDE
Take this. Leave now.

Sediqa takes the envelope. Her sons put their guns down.

Hyde carefully takes the plaque from Sediqa's daughter.

HYDE
Thank you.

CUT TO:

INT. HCRO LAB - DAY

May slouches at Divvy's computer, massaging her forehead.

MAY
Give me something Divvy.

DIVVY
I'm sorry Dr. May. Nothing yet.

MAY
Keep looking.

DIVVY
I'm sorry Dr. May. Nothing yet.

May darts up and heads for the door.

EXT. HCRO LAB

May steps outside. Lights up a cigarette. Fidgeting.

HYDE
(O.S.)
You're smoking again?

MAY
(STARTLED)
Jesus Christ! What the hell are
you doing here?

HYDE
I came to see you.

MAY
You can't just keep showing up like
this.

HYDE
I...brought you something.

MAY
Whatever it is, I don't...I
can't...

HYDE
Did you see the emblem on the side
of the spacecraft?

May turns away.

HYDE
I know there's nothing I can say
that will fix things. But please,
just look inside.

Hyde opens his briefcase, with the plaque inside. May stays put.

HYDE
Lorraine, please.

May sighs. Turns around.

MAY
What the hell is that?

HYDE
This is going to change everything.

NEWS VANS ARRIVE.

MONTAGE:

- TIMES SQUARE. A stack of newspapers thrown down at a news stand. Headline reads, "ALIEN PLAQUE DISCOVERED."
- TOKYO. MUMBAI. LONDON. TIJUANA. People in their homes and on the streets stop and watch live news coverage of Hyde and the plaque.

HYDE
(TV)
We strongly urge the President to
declassify the spacecraft and its
contents.

- BEIJING STATE COUNCIL. Chinese government officials, in a large conference room, watch Hyde on the television.

PREMIER
That scientist could help us.

PRESIDENT
Could he turn his back on his
country?

CUT TO:

INT. WHITE HOUSE PRESS ROOM - DAY

Rabid hyenas, waiting for a shot at President Sawyer.

REPORTER 1
Mr. President, in light of recent
events, doesn't the world have the
right to know more about the alien
spacecraft?

SAWYER

My predecessor made the right call to classify the report. We have yet to confirm the intent of the alien ship. Who sent it? Are they hostile? Until we get answers, we should do everything we can to bolster our defenses.

REPORTER 1

But you criticized that decision...

SAWYER

As President it's my responsibility to protect this country from a possible alien invasion. Don't just take my word for it. Everyone likes Stephen Hawking. Go ask him. He'll tell you the same thing. Visitors from another planet will invade and strip our resources.

REPORTER 2

Does the spacecraft contain a plaque like the one Dr. Hyde discovered?

SAWYER

I'm not going to put our national security at risk on the basis of circumstantial evidence.

REPORTER 3

This was vetted by the Washington Post. And what about the similar marking? The emblem? News coverage of the ocean landing even confirms that.

SAWYER

Any kid in junior high could have made that in shop class.

REPORTER 2

You can't be serious.

SAWYER

We can't let Dr. Hyde, Dr. May, or any other scientist lead us to believe we're safe until we have all the facts. Thank you.

Sawyer exits. He pulls the SECDEF aside.

SAWYER
I want it all destroyed.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
But sir...

SAWYER
Just do it!

CUT TO:

INT. ARMY BASE - NIGHT

THE SPACE CRAFT IS CRUSHED AND INCINERATED.

CUT TO:

TITLE SEQUENCE CONTINUED OVER STARRY BACKGROUND:

N = R* fp ne fl fi fc

MAN'S VOICE
(V.O.)
F sub C. The fraction of
intelligent civilizations that
develop detectable radio
technology. The estimated value is
one half.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LIVING QUARTERS, RING - DAY

Qraus lies on the sofa. Tosses a rubber ball. Zubrin, a tyke,
fetches. Vi radios Qraus from the Bridge.

VI
(O.S.)
Qraus, why don't you come up now.
The other families are gathering
for open Bridge.

Qraus secures Zubrin in a carrier on his back.

His power supply flashes YELLOW.

INT. STARSHIP TUBE, RINGSIDE

Groups of families wait in line to enter the Tube. Qraus and Zubrin among them. The younglings stare at Qraus. He avoids eye contact. Qraus and Zubrin enter the pod.

INT. BRIDGE, ROCKET

They float into the Bridge, where the crew gives demonstrations to the families. All eyes turn to Qraus. Vi approaches.

VI

Hi.

QRAUS

Can you take him?

VI

Of course. Come here Zub.

Qraus hands Zubrin over. Vi notices his yellow battery light.

VI

You're running low again?

QRAUS

I should go.

VI

No. Please, stay here. I think the other families would enjoy speaking with you. I'll go back and get fresh batteries.

Qraus pensively nods. A family approaches.

WOMAN

Thanks for the demonstrations Captain.

VI

My pleasure.

Vi and Zubrin exit the Bridge and join...

INT. STARSHIP TUBE, ROCKETSIDE

...a technician in the Pod. The doors close behind them.

INTERCUT:

INT. BRIDGE

BEEP. BEEP. BEEP.

A RED FLASHING LIGHT.

CREW MEMBER

Commander, sensors are picking up a considerable amount of incoming debris.

SHAN

Get our techs back inside, and get these families in the Corridor.

SHAN

(TO QRAUS)

Lieutenant, I could use your help.

INTERCUT:

INT. ENGINEERING

A technician's projection displays INCOMING METEOROIDS.

CREW MEMBER

We have incoming debris!

INTERCUT:

EXT. SHIP

BASH! BASH! BASH!

METEOROIDS PUMMEL THE HULL.

AND THE TUBE.

INTERCUT:

INT. POD

The Pod STALLS midway through the Tube.

SHAN

Your family is in that Tube!

Qraus COWERS.

SHAN
Lieutenant!?

Flashbacks replay in Qraus' mind, PARALYZING him.

Shan walks away in frustration.

Families exit the Bridge and gather in the Corridor.

SHAN
Status?

CREW MEMBER
The Pod has stalled. Tube doors on lockdown.

SHAN
We'll need to manually secure a tether. Can someone assist the Lieutenant to the Corridor?

SHAN
(TO VI)
Captain, do you read us? Is everything okay?

VI
How quick can you get us out of here Commander?

SHAN
We're working as fast as we can.

A crew member escorts Qraus out of the Bridge. Technicians arrive at the Tube door.

TECHNICIAN
Attempting manual over...

BAAAAASSSSSH!

A LARGE METEOROID COLLIDES WITH THE TUBE, BREAKING IT OPEN, NEARLY EJECTING THE POD.

The Pod passengers are thrown about. The Pod loses power.

PASSENGERS
(ALoud)
AAAGH!

Display monitors hanging in the Bridge and Corridor show the damaged Tube.

Qraus P.O.V. - The frightened families reach for Qraus.

He sees the Tube damage and covers his face with his hands.

QRAUS
No. Please, I can't.

SHAN
Captain, can you read me?

The technician in the Pod turns on a FLASHLIGHT.
SSSSSSSS.

The father looks around. His irises rearrange.

POD TECHNICIAN
Small fissure. Air's leaking.

VI
Commander, do you copy?

SHAN
Yes Captain.

VI
How bad is it?

CRREEEEEEEEEEEEK.

The Pod slips further out of the Tube.

VI
(TO POD TECHNICIAN)
Look at me and start broadcasting
to Qraus!

The technician's EYES glow.

QRAUS
No!

QRAUS' P.O.V. - A BLINDING WHITE LIGHT.

Vi appears and looks into his eyes.

She speaks, but we cannot hear her voice.

Qraus looks through her projected image and up to the monitors.

He sees the Pod dangling and thrusts himself up.

He looks at the Tube door, and then back at the families.

He propels himself towards the Bridge door.

BEEP.

The doors open.

QRAUS

Everybody, back in the Bridge!

He motions the families back through the door.

CRREEEEEEEEK.

POD TECHNICIAN

The Pod is depressurizing!

VI

How much longer do we have?

The father's face says it all - NOT LONG.

CREW MEMBER

The Pod is slipping away Commander!

SHAN

Qraus!

QRAUS

MOVE BACK!

The families rush in the Bridge.

SHAN

What are you doing!?

QRAUS

Opening the Tube! Shut it behind me!

Qraus grabs a TECHNICIAN'S BAG and seals the Bridge door. He flies back towards the Tube door. Types on the keypad.

BEEP. BOOP. BEEP.

Qraus braces himself against the door's threshold.

His POWER SUPPLY FLASHES RED.

COMPUTER VOICE

Manual override in three, two, one...

WOOOOOSH!

The doors open, rapidly blowing Qraus down the damaged Tube.

CLINK!

Qraus snaps down a tether inside the Tube.

CRREEEEEEEEK.

The Pod SLIPS COMPLETELY OUT OF THE TUBE. Vi and others struggle to remain conscious.

Graus flies towards the Pod.

The ship's crew watches on monitors.

CLANK!

Graus grabs hold of the Pod, snapping down the other end of the tether. He floats around the Pod and takes out a foam canister.

He sprays the foam onto the micro fissure, sealing it up.

He opens a small HATCH on the Pod and grabs another canister from the bag. He screws down the canister to a THREADED PIPE.

BEEP.

He presses a button to release OXYGEN into the Pod.

Vi and the Pod technician regain consciousness.

TWANG!

SCRAP METAL SHEARS THE TETHER.

Graus pulls back the loose end. Ties it to his leg.

He propels himself towards the other loose end. REACHING.

His POWER SUPPLY READS, "POWER FAILURE IMMIMENT."

He grabs hold, instantly wrapping the other end around his arm.

THWICK!

A SMALL METEOROID SEVERS HIS TETHERED LEG.

BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!

His POWER SUPPLY READS, "POWERING DOWN."

With his last watt of energy, he quickly snatches his leg.

GRAUS, SUSPENDED 'LIFELESS' IN SPACE. THE CREW WATCH AS MORE SMALL METEORIDS FLY PAST.

CUT TO:

INT. CONVENTION CENTER - DAY

Signage reads "Annual First Contact Convention." Thousands in attendance. Some in costumes. Darth Vader, Mr. Spock, Klingons, etc.

INT. HALL, BACKSTAGE

May fixes Hyde's tie. Their eyes meet.

MAY

There we go.

HYDE

Thanks. Dinner later?

May smiles.

MAY

Yeah.

FESQ

(O.S.)

Let's give a big welcome to Dr. Jeffrey Hyde!

Fesq waves Hyde on stage. Hyde awkwardly kisses May on the cheek and walks on stage.

A PACKED HALL, GIVING A STANDING OVATION.

HYDE

Thank you very much. An old college professor of mine, named Philip Morrison, once said that the search for extraterrestrial intelligence is the archaeology of the future. Meaning, signals we receive from alien civilizations tell us about their past, yet inform us about what our future may hold. Namely, that we have a future.

THE BEARDED, TATTOOED MAN in fatigues walks down the aisle.

HYDE

Who sent the plaque? What are they trying to tell us? There's something much bigger at work here than any one of us can imagine.

The man catches May's attention.

HYDE

It reaches beyond race...

The man pulls out a PISTOL.

HYDE

...beyond nations...

May walks out on stage.

HYDE

...even beyond this pale blue dot...

The man points the gun at Hyde. May RUNS.

HYDE
...floating in the middle of nowhere.

May tackles Hyde. The man pulls the trigger.

BANG!

PANDEMONIUM. SECURITY TACKLES THE GUNMAN.

May is BLEEDING heavily. Gunshot wound to the gut.

HYDE
Lorraine!

MAY
We're not alone. Promise me you'll
find them.

HYDE
Not without you! Please, don't
leave me!

MAY
Promise me.

HYDE
I promise.

Hyde holds her close and kisses her. She closes her eyes.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FUNERAL - DAY

An URN contains May's cremated ashes. A eulogy is read aloud.
Fesq and Bloom stand next to a stoic Hyde.

HYDE
Should've been me.

FESQ
She loved you Jeff.

Hyde shakes his head.

FESQ
It's true.

Fesq puts his arm around Hyde.

FESQ
Even when she hated your guts, she
still loved you.

FADE TO BLACK

FADE IN:

INT. U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL CHAMBER

Diplomats listen to a presentation by the Secretary of State.

SECRETARY OF STATE

We have concluded our analysis of the space craft and can definitively state that it was in fact a weapon of mass destruction. Our military has taken appropriate measures to neutralize this threat.

CHINESE AMBASSADOR

Mr. Secretary, surely you can not expect us to believe you.

SECRETARY OF STATE

Your country was moments away from initiating an act of war against the United States and got away with a slap on the wrist. I'm not so sure how many more times we can afford to extend you that courtesy. But to your concern, we will be happy to release our full report upon...

CHINESE AMBASSADOR

Therefore it is clear to us what we must do next.

SECRETARY OF STATE

I'm sorry?

CHINESE AMBASSADOR

May I direct everyone's attention to the screen.

Slides project images taken of the space craft and its contents while in U.S. custody.

SECRETARY OF STATE

These images are classified. Where did you get these?

CHINESE AMBASSADOR

As the council can clearly see, there is nothing to be concerned about.

CUT TO:**INT./EXT. HYDE'S HOUSE - DAY**

Empty liquor bottles. Trash everywhere.

Stacks of old newspapers. Headlines read...

"ADMINISTRATION DEEMS SPACE CRAFT WMD"

"\$2 TRILLION DEFENSE BUDGET APPROVED"

"GUN VIOLENCE INCREASES FOR 10TH STRAIGHT YEAR."

"U.S. STUDENTS RATED POOREST IN SCIENCE AND MATH"

Hyde, disheveled, slumps down on his sofa.

He STARES at his TV.

His computer screen saver - still an animated DRAKE EQUATION.

Framed photos of May above his TV.

HER VOICE ECHOES IN HIS MIND.

MAY
(V.O.)

Promise me.

INTERCUT:**EXT. STARSHIP - DAY**

The magsail releases from the front of the Rocket.

KNOCK. KNOCK. KNOCK.

CHINESE MAN
(O.S.)

Dr. Hyde, we need to speak with
you!

A Chinese man and woman, in suits, stand outside Hyde's door.

CHINESE MAN
He's just sitting there.

KNOCK. KNOCK. KNOCK.

CHINESE WOMAN
Dr. Hyde!

Small detonations break apart the magsail wire.

CHINESE MAN

This is ridiculous. I'm going in.

The Chinese man opens the front door. They walk inside, stepping over the clutter. They stand right in front of him. He just stares right past them.

HYDE P.O.V. - The Chinese speak but Hyde doesn't hear them.

The magsail spools fire thrusters to pull away from the ship.

THE CHINESE MAN HOLDS A PHOTO IN HYDE'S FACE.

Hyde's EYES slowly wander to the photo.

He takes the photo.

HYDE

Where did you get this?

INTERCUT:

INT. RING/ROCKET

Passengers line up at the Tubes.

VI

(O.S.)

Please prepare for orbital positioning.

They float to their Rocket living quarters.

The Chinese woman plays a video on her tablet. WHIP appears on screen.

WHIP

Hello Dr. Hyde. What your about to see is indeed real. I provided everything to China, as it was clear to me that our government would never let this information see the light of day. In return, they have provided me refuge. I can't divulge my whereabouts, but perhaps someday we'll meet again.

HYDE

He was a student of mine.

CHINESE WOMAN

Take a close look at the photo.
What do you see?

HYDE P.O.V. - The photo is a PRISTINE ENGRAVED PLAQUE.

HYDE
Three stars.

Ring thrusters fire to slow the ship's rotation.

HYDE
It's Alpha Centauri.

CHINESE WOMAN
Would you like to know about the capsules?

HYDE
Capsules?

THE CHINESE WOMAN SHOWS HYDE THREE MORE PHOTOGRAPHS.

CHINESE WOMAN
The first...soil.

CHINESE MAN
The second...water.

CHINESE WOMAN
The third...oxygen.

The ship stops rotating.

CHINESE MAN
You've been given a raw deal Dr. Hyde.

CHINESE WOMAN
Your country is preoccupied with debating issues every other civilized society has already dealt with.

CHINESE MAN
Abortion, the 2nd Amendment, climate change. Which gives China a unique opportunity to become the next superpower state.

CHINESE WOMAN
We're picking up where Kennedy left off. You give people the proper motivation...

SHE HANDS HIM A CONCEPTUAL DRAWING OF THE ROCKET/RING SHIP.

CHINESE WOMAN
...and the history books write themselves.

Forward and aft thrusters flip the ship 180 degrees.

HYDE

You're building a space ship?

CHINESE WOMAN

Our country needs you Dr. Hyde.
The people of Earth need you to be
their Ambassador, despite the
differences our countries have with
each other.

HYDE

Why me? I'm sure you could get
thousands of people who would line
up for the job.

CHINESE MAN

But there's only one person who the
world would universally support.
Your participation in our program
would be immeasurable.

Ship's MAIN THRUSTERS fire.

HYDE

Even if I agreed, I wouldn't live
long enough to get there.

The Chinese man hands Hyde a BUSINESS CARD.

It reads - HUMAN EVOLVED VIRTUAL NETWORK

CHINESE MAN

HEVN Industries is a Chinese
company that specializes in digital
bio-tech and neuroscience research,
obviously operating outside of the
red tape and religious constraints
of your country.

CHINESE WOMAN

They will soon be developing a
prototype, and aim to be fully
operational within ten years.

HYDE

Prototype for what?

CUT TO:

EXT. WENCHANG LAUNCH CENTER, CHINA - YEAR 2110 - DAY

Qraus, (late 20s) in human form, approaches a HUMANOID ROBOT.
The robot stares up towards the sky.

QRAUS

Dr. Hyde!

The robot turns around. THE ROBOT IS HYDE.

HYDE

A little young for lieutenant,
aren't you?

QRAUS

Actually, a little old.

HYDE

Do I make you uncomfortable?

QRAUS

I've just never met anyone...like
yourself.

HYDE

I admit. It takes some getting
used to.

QRAUS

You sure you want to travel in
hibernation?

HYDE

I made a promise long ago,
Lieutenant. A promise I intend to
keep, but one that weighs more
heavily upon my heart with each
passing day. If it's all the same
to you, I'd much rather skip past
the next half-century.

QRAUS

I'll do my best to get us there in
one piece.

HYDE

Promise me.

QRAUS

Sure, doctor.

CUT TO:**INT. ENGINEERING VAULT, RING**

Vi and Shan approach the VAULT. A computer terminal is marked
 "HEVN INDUSTRIES."

BEEP. BOOP. BEEP.

VAULT P.O.V. - THE DOOR RETRACTS.

MAY
 (V.O.)

Promise me.

HYDE EXITS THE VAULT.

SHAN

Dr. Hyde, can you hear me? We've
 brought you out of hibernation.

HYDE

Where are we?

VI

Forty trillion kilometers from
 Earth.

HYDE

What year?

VI

2155.

CUT TO:**TITLE SEQUENCE CONTINUED OVER STARRY BACKGROUND:**

N = R* fp ne fl fi fc L

MAN'S VOICE
 (V.O.)

L. The length of time alien
 civilizations release detectable
 signals into space. The estimated
 value is three hundred years.

DISSOLVE TO:**EXT. MOON ORBIT - NIGHT**

The ship rotates, ORBITING AN EARTH-LIKE MOON.

Behind it, a GIGANTIC gas planet.

Artificial light on the shaded half of the moon signifies...

HYDE

(V.O.)

Cities. Who lives there? Time to
find out.

INT. LAUNCH BAY, ROCKET

Hyde sits in a DESCENT MODULE. Qraus secures the hatch.

Hyde salutes Qraus. Qraus acknowledges with a nod.

INTERCUT:

INT. OBSERVATION LOUNGE, RING

Vi watches on the screens.

VI

There's no guarantee we can get you
back up here once you land on the
surface. You sure you don't want
me to send a rover instead?

HYDE

I'm here for answers. There's no
going back.

VI

Good luck Dr. Hyde.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROCKET

SWOOSH!

An exterior hatch opens. A descent module is blown out.

EXT. MOON ATMOSPHERE - DAY

The heat shield glows RED-HOT.

FFF! FFF! FFF!

Thrusters balance the module's descent.

The module falls downward at Mach 20.

A SONIC BOOM.

FOOM!

A large PARACHUTE opens.

FPAW!

Heat shield blows off, revealing a ROVER inside.

SHING! The rover is JETTISONED from the module.

A second later LANDING ENGINES surrounding the rover ignite to slow its descent to a...

EXT. MOON SURFACE

...FLAT PLAIN LANDSCAPE.

The rover is lowered with tethers from the landing engines.

It touches down.

CRACK. CRACK. CRACK.

Small detonations break the tethers loose. The landing engine flies away and crashes.

EXT. ROVER

Hyde exits the rover and looks at the SETTING SUN.

HYDE

(TO HIMSELF)

Is that you Lorraine? Looking down
on me?

The host planet is MASSIVE.

STRETCHING ACROSS THE ENTIRE HORIZON.

CRACKLE.

The sound of a hand-held radio behind him.

He turns around.

A HUMANOID FIGURE STANDS FIFTY YARDS AWAY.

The figure pulls out a LARGE GUN, pushes a few buttons on it, and aims it directly at Hyde.

HYDE
Wait, please!

SSSHHHHOOOOOOMMMM!

The figure fires a mini-rocket right at Hyde.

He ducks for cover.

The rocket EXPLODES IN MID-AIR. It sets off a chain reaction of small but loud explosions that form a giant circle around Hyde.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

FIREWORKS.

The dust settles. The figure approaches. He's EIGHT FEET TALL, has a REPTILIAN FACE, and wears light armor.

He lowers his weapon and points to the sky. Hyde turns around.

LARGE CREATURES fly away, scared off by the explosions.

The REPTILE MAN grabs his radio. Hyde cocks his head at the strange, slithering language he hears.

Reptile man puts his weapon on the ground, walks up to Hyde while holding his hand to his CHEST.

REPTILE MAN
Rakshif.

RAKSHIF motions to their surroundings.

RAKSHIF
Hovienta.

Hyde extends his hand.

HYDE
(V.O.)
Generations after we discovered the probes...

Rakshif looks at Hyde's hand, smiles, and then extends his.

They shake.

HYDE
(V.O.)
...humans finally made first
contact with an alien species...

The rest of Rakshif's crew arrives in their own rover.

HYDE
 (V.O.)
 ...on an alien world orbiting Alpha
 Centauri.

EXT. CITY - DUSK

The two rovers approach the city. It's an ALIEN METROPOLIS.
 'Reptilians' gather in the streets. They stop and stare.

INT./EXT. CITY HALL

They arrive at a large hall. They exit the rovers and walk inside.

Inside the hall awaits the REPTILIAN MONARCH.

THE MONARCH IS ROBOTIC LIKE HYDE.

Hyde holds up the original, damaged plaque from Afghanistan.

HYDE
 (TO MONARCH)
 The signal.

Hyde plays back the tones that were sent to Earth.

HYDE
 (TO MONARCH)
 Why didn't you answer? We used
 your same signal.

THE MONARCH REVEALS A SIMILAR PLAQUE.

Hyde looks confused.

The reptiles play a video, which expands to fill the screen.

INTERCUT:

EXT. SWAMP, REPTILIAN ISSHKA PLANET (500 YEARS AGO) - DAY

An Earth-like planet.

THE REPTILIAN ISSHKA DISCOVER A PROBE OF THEIR OWN.

HYDE
(V.O.)

The reptiles, or Isshka as they call themselves, aren't native to the moon. Five hundred years ago, a probe was sent to their home planet orbiting Epsilon Eridani, a star over ten light years from Earth.

EXT. ISSHKA STARSHIP

THE ISSHKA STARSHIP TRAVELS TO ALPHA CENTAURI.

HYDE
(V.O.)

So who sent the plaques to each of our planets?

EXT. MOON SURFACE - DAY

THE ISSHKA ARRIVE ON THE MOON. A ROBOTIC SPECIES GREETES THEM.

HYDE
(V.O.)

The Isshka told us of the GDOD, an alien species of solely artificial intelligence. Their goal? To spread intelligent life throughout the galaxy.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MOON SCHOOL - DAY

Zubrin, NOW A MAN, accompanies his wife and son to school.
Vi takes Graus' hand in hers as they watch from a distance.

HYDE
(V.O.)

But only the kind that challenged themselves to do so, like humans and the Isshka before us. If you didn't want to be there, then you didn't deserve to be there.

INT. MOON UNIVERSITY - DAY

Hyde lectures in front of a large class. He shows them slides of EXTINCT DINOSAURS, which shock the Isshka students.

HYDE

(V.O.)

The only rule implemented by the GDOD was to preserve any existing life found on the moon. After all, they were here first.

INTERCUT:

EXT. EARTH - DAY (2160)

A world with a familiar blue, but with more brown and less green.

HYDE

(V.O.)

When you look at Earth from space, you don't see the imaginary lines we've created...

INT. U.N. HEADQUARTERS

Diplomats sit in silence as they watch a video from Hyde, revealing the mystery of the probes to Earth.

HYDE

(V.O.)

...separating one nation from another.

INT. JUNIOR HIGH CLASSROOM - DAY

A history teacher shows the class the front page of an old newspaper. The headline reads...

"Sawyer Impeached"

HYDE

(V.O.)

Might the success of our interstellar voyage erase them?

EXT. MOON OCEAN SHORELINE - NIGHT

Hyde walks up to the water with MAY'S URN.

HYDE

(V.O.)

Which brings us back to N. How many other alien civilizations are out there? It's a value I've spent more than one lifetime trying to quantify.

He removes the lid.

HYDE

(V.O.)

Maybe it's a thousand.

MEMORIES OF MAY FLASH IN AND OUT AS HE POURS OUT HER ASHES.

HYDE

(V.O.)

Perhaps ten thousand.

The ashes scatter into the wind and out to sea.

HYDE

(V.O.)

It doesn't matter anymore.

A MOMENT FROZEN IN TIME.

HYDE

(V.O.)

What matters is THAT they exist.

He looks up to the star-filled night sky.

HYDE-BOT

(V.O.)

What matters is that we are not alone in the universe. What we make of it, is up to us.

EXT. DEEP SPACE

Stars fill the screen. The GDOD's ship enters frame.

HYDE

(V.O.)

The GDOD sent scouting ships to the Andromeda Galaxy, hoping to find others like them.

INT. GDOD SHIP

The GDOD crew enters the hibernation chambers.

HYDE

(V.O.)

A million year journey, traveling
near the speed of light. A blink
of an eye, cosmologically speaking.

EXT. DEEP SPACE

Stars fill the screen.

HYDE

(V.O.)

What might they discover? Who will
they contact? We may never know.
But it bestows upon us the
opportunity to exercise our
imagination.

FADE OUT:

THE END