

"human²"

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"Then the Lord said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason.'"

Job 2:3

INT. APARTMENT NURSERY - MORNING

The room is nearly empty aside from a crib.

Sunlight challenged, KENT TRUDEL (mid-twenties) from "crashingMNT" repapers the walls.

A physicist and overall engineering wizard, Trudel emits the youthful paleness of an adolescence spent under a tent of textbooks.

Trudel reaches the end of his last roll.

SIGHS.

ANNE (O.S.)
Are you almost finished?

TRUDEL
Needa run to the store again!

Trudel begins to pen onto the bare wall.

ANNE (mid-twenties), also from "crashingMNT," Trudel's now mooting pregnant wife, pops into the doorway.

ANNE
What are you writing?

TRUDEL
Just a little something...

Anne watches Trudel write for a moment then leaves.

Trudel stands back, satisfied.

The message reads:

IF YOU EVER NEED TO WALLPAPER THIS ROOM AGAIN, IT WILL TAKE 7 ROLLS OF WALLPAPER

I BOUGHT JUST 5 ROLLS AT \$25 PER ROLL & DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH (PRETTY PEEVED)

EXT. UNIVERSITY QUAD - DAY

Trudel walks his motorized bike, the Department of Physics and Astronomy in the distance.

INT. TRUDEL'S DEPARTMENT OFFICE - DAY

Trudel enters and slaps his mail onto his desk.

MOMENTS LATER

At his desk, Trudel opens a manilla envelope.

Inside is a small seamless lead shield container, the size of his palm.

He checks the envelope.

Only his campus address, handwritten.

He checks the back.

Nothing.

He turns the lead over in his hand, pensive.

INT. TRUDEL'S BASEMENT - DAY

SUPER: DAYS LATER

Gloved, Trudel connects several thermoelectric cooler packs and places them under the diffusion cloud chamber floor.

He grabs a chemical squeeze bottle and SPRAYS the felt strips along the top of the chamber in 95% ethanol.

He inserts a 2% thorium alloy rod and SETS the lead container inside the center and CLOSES the apparatus.

He goes to the Kodak Ektagraphic III projector.

He INSERTS a glare-reducing slide.

CLOSE UP - Projector Lens, a CRACK and Flash of Light

STATIC WHITE NOISE.

Trudel goes to a tripod and presses record on his iPhone.

The gaunt reflection of Trudel peers through the glass.

The coolers steep the temperature gradient with vapor from bottom to top.

Charged subatomic particles ionize the supersaturated vapor.

The trajectories of individual charged Alpha particles leave behind cloudy trails.

The trails ricochet off and well above the lead container.

Above the container, faint blue and orange hues appear.

TRUDEL

(sotto)

Su... blime...

The lights trip.

ANNE (O.S.)

Kent!

Anne is at the doorway, in a tank top, belly out.

Trudel keeps focus.

ANNE (CONT'D)

You didn't leave me any of the cake?

TRUDEL

Didn't know you were saving it.

ANNE

You forget our anniversary, then go and eat all the cake?

TRUDEL

First date anniversary don't really count. And misplacing a gift isn't the same as forgetting a gift!

ANNE

Are you gonna be here later tonight or what?

Distracted, Trudel lurches for his notebook.

ANNE (CONT'D)

I need to know.

TRUDEL

I have a lab at four, why?

ANNE
It's already four.

Trudel checks the iPhone on a tripod: 16:05.

Trudel stashes his notebook and CLICKS off the projector.

He turns to leave, then remembers.

ANNE (CONT'D)
Kent.

TRUDEL
What?

Trudel SLIDES the lid then grabs the lead container out of the contraption.

Trudel moves toward the stairs and up.

Anne hounds.

HALLWAY

ANNE
Kent!

TRUDEL
What?

Trudel moves down the hall into his office.

ANNE
Kent.

OFFICE

TRUDEL
What, Anne, I'm asking you, What?
What is it?

Trudel goes to a stack of folders and papers.

He begins to collect.

ANNE
Look at me!

TRUDEL
(sorts papers)
I don't have time for this.

Trudel stashes the lead container behind some books on the top desk shelf.

He spots Anne's lost gift, a golden jewelry box.

ANNE

Are you cheating on me?

Trudel freezes.

TRUDEL

Anne, I'm busy... I'm making serious progress on something.

Anne stands unconvinced.

TRUDEL (CONT'D)

I value my work. You knew this when you married me... I'm not cheating on you.

Relieved, Anne relaxes.

ANNE

Stranger things've...

TRUDEL

Here, I didn't forget.

Trudel hands Anne the gift, then returns to his satchel.

ANNE

Late, per usual.

Trudel snatches a jump from the computer.

TRUDEL

Gotta go. Love ya.
(kisses Anne)
See you tonight.

Trudel separates and exits.

ANNE

Eat something!

Anne looks down at Trudel's gift and smiles.

She enjoys it in her hand, then begins to open it—

CUT TO:

FOYER

Trudel flies through his routine trip to campus.

He dons a helmet, rolls up his pant leg and leads a homemade e-bike out the door.

EXT. TRUDEL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Street sign: MARLBOROUGH ST.

Up the steps, as ANGELIC CHOIR MUSIC begins.

A sidewalk dwarf magnolia in bloom.

Early spring.

Out of the corner of his eye, Trudel spots a homeless man bundled against the building.

Trudel turns and looks directly: only a stack of black trash bags against the wall.

Trudel's resumes, his movements as crisp as the air.

Trudel mounts and rides off.

EXT. STREETS - DAY

Trudel cruises, pedaling with bursts of speed, crossing green lights unperturbed.

EXT. UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - DAY

Trudel flies through quad grass.

He ZIPS by Campus Security in their patrol cart.

TRUDEL
—I KNOW, SORRY!

INT. LECTURE HALL - DAY

Trudel enters the semi-packed auditorium with his e-bike and goes immediately to the blackboard.

TRUDEL
We'll have to leave Majdalani
behind for now.
(MORE)

TRUDEL (CONT'D)
 (erases equations from
 board)
 We'll loop back later. Where's my
 white board. You guys—

PROFESSOR (O.S.)
 Excuse me.

Trudel turns to a PROFESSOR at the desk.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)
 We're in session.

The class CLAMORS.

TRUDEL
 Oh... Hm.

PROFESSOR
 Have you got the right classroom
 Mr...

TRUDEL
 Trudel... That's right. I am... not
 lecturing.
 (sets down the eraser)
 I've gotta lab... Sorry about that,
 I—
 (clears throat, starts to
 exit)

PROFESSOR
 Your bike, Mr. Trudel.

Trudel stops and goes back.

The class LAUGHS.

EXT. LAB - DAY

GRASMERE (mid-twenties), Trudel's prudent TA, discusses with
 a small group of grad students.

SANDI and BEKAH, both early-twenties and besties, among them.

Trudel enters.

LOUD.

GRASMERE
 The Truth!

TRUDEL
 (approaches)
 Molding young minds?
 (catches breath)
 Or moldy young minds? How's
 everybody doing?

Sandi displays a glossy-eyed admiration for Trudel.

SANDI
 Good morning, Professor.

TRUDEL
 Sandi.

SANDI
 Professor, when are we gonna cover
 Majdalani?

BEKAH
 And is it gonna be on the final if
 we don't?

TRUDEL
 The final will cover everything
 we've covered and everything we did
 not.
 (to Grasmere)
 What are you doing here?

GRASMERE
 You asked me if I could take care
 of the lab, remember?... The email.

TRUDEL
 The chem memes?

GRASMERE
 The lab for today.

TRUDEL
 That's right, huh...
 (exhales)
 I am, not needed. Again.
 (turns, leaves)
 Carry on.

GRASMERE
 There's a guy here who wants to see
 you.

Trudel stops.

GRASMERE (CONT'D)

He wanted to know your address, but
you'd be glad to know that I
didn't.

TRUDEL

Where's he at?

GRASMERE

(winces)
I let him in...

TRUDEL

(moves toward exit)
How many times, Grasshopper?

GRASMERE

He was very convincing.

TRUDEL

Where's he from?

GRASMERE

No idea.

TRUDEL

(leaving, turns and
points)
I want my key back.

GRASMERE

He seemed important!

TRUDEL

(enters the hall)
Why, 'cause he's wearing a suit?

INT. TRUDEL'S DEPARTMENT OFFICE - DAY

Trudel enters to find a SUITED MAN (fifties) at his chair and
desk, perusing through some of Trudel's paperwork.

TRUDEL

(nods)
Can I help you?

SUITED MAN

Yes, have a seat.

Trudel looks at the visitor's chair, gives a light scoff,
then sits.

MR. HARLOW

My name is Mr. Harlow and I'm from an R&D entity in private industry.

Trudel stares on.

MR. HARLOW (CONT'D)

Before we begin, I'd like to say that your paper on fission rockets was quite impressive. And at such a young age.

TRUDEL

I published that a while ago.

MR. HARLOW

Well, it's brilliant.

TRUDEL

No one else thought so.

MR. HARLOW

Not the paper, exactly. You, you're brilliant. The data, however, is a mishmash of speculative theory and algebra that doesn't make much sense within nuclear propulsion.

TRUDEL

I've been told.

MR. HARLOW

Nevertheless, some of my constituents have recently been informed that the pure physics you've proposed might have unforeseen future applications with hydrodynamic compliant mechanisms in turbulent systems... Make boats go faster.

TRUDEL

I understood you the first time.

MR. HARLOW

We see an ambitious rising star who needs honing. And we need new creative angles for the problem we face. That's why you've been chosen for this program.

TRUDEL

What will I be tasked with exactly?

MR. HARLOW

We've gotten our hands on a piece of tech residing on international soil. We need you to study and if possible reverse engineer it.

TRUDEL

German, Russian?

MR. HARLOW

Chinese.

TRUDEL

What kind of tech?

MR. HARLOW

Cutting edge. We know how important that is to you. This could define a legacy. At your intellectual peak, its paramount you capitalize. The contribution you make with us, could be the contribution to humanity you've wanting to make your entire life.

Trudel ponders.

MR. HARLOW (CONT'D)

There isn't a position like it in the country. Not to mention your Patriotic duty.

TRUDEL

I thought you said you were private sector?

MR. HARLOW

We are. As long as you don't follow the money. It'll require relocation and a five year commitment. And the salary is significantly more than what you earn now.

TRUDEL

My wife and I, we're about to start our family.

MR. HARLOW

We usually prefer recruits who are single and unattached.

TRUDEL

Rules me out then.

MR. HARLOW

Yes, about that...

(leans back)

You strike me as a luminary guided by a stringent moral code. From what I've studied. So I'll make this direct: part of the task in selecting a possible candidate is making sure his or her personal life is in proper order. Stable, healthy. Now, working completely within the State's governing law, we've ran an investigation to unearth any possible imbalances we deem... unsuitable.

TRUDEL

For being so direct, you sure know how to snake a river.

MR. HARLOW

Your wife has had an affair. Of sorts.

TRUDEL

That's not possible.

MR. HARLOW

I'm sure you remember the Western Union heist?

TRUDEL

Mexico?

MR. HARLOW

You haven't thought much about it, have you? The blitz of a wedding. You landing this cushy university gig in such short notice.

TRUDEL

She told me...

MR. HARLOW

We took the liberty to use a non-invasive method to provide a highly accurate DNA test result, during a routine checkup.

TRUDEL

So...?

MR. HARLOW
You are not the biological father
of that child.

TRUDEL
That's...

MR. HARLOW
(rises)
I imagine you'll need some time.

TRUDEL
I need proof!

MR. HARLOW
Of course. You can have it in her
own words. She provided her
statement in a confidential report
of the hostage situation. Expect an
email.
(leaving, turns)
I do hope you consider our offer.
(exits, closes door)

Trudel notices a business card on the desk.

He reaches over and picks it up:

CLOSE UP - Mr. Harlow #

INT. TRUDEL'S KITCHEN - EVENING

A red Happy Anniversary helium balloon on the ceiling.

Trudel sits, his laptop out.

AUDIO plays.

ANNE (V.O.)
No.

MALE VOICE (V.O.)
Would you characterize it as
coercion?

ANNE (V.O.)
It's hard to say.

MALE VOICE (V.O.)
You must have been going through a
lot.

ANNE (V.O.)

I... I wouldn't characterize it as coercion.

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

Did he issue a threat?

ANNE (V.O.)

No... But the situation itself is threatening. In the context.

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

Of course.

Trudel closes the laptop.

HOURS LATER - NIGHT

Anne enters, carrying two shopping bags of beauty supplies and groceries.

She sets the bags on the counter and flips the light.

ANNE

You scared me!

(takes out big conditioner
bottle and juice)

Look at you. You actually made it.

Anne goes to fridge, then back to the bags.

She looks over at Trudel, still in the same chair at the table.

His eyes are shot.

TRUDEL

Seems like Mexico was a bit more complicated than you let on.

ANNE

(sighs, thinks)

...What was I suppose to do? I didn't want you to take something like that to heart, Kent. And what about you all this time? You go off lecturing, diving headfirst into the deep end of your deep work, not caring an ounce for my hurt or scarcely lifting a finger to comfort me. Your priorities have always been misaligned.

(MORE)

ANNE (CONT'D)

You have a heart of granite like this here countertop—taking me for granted and not once stopping to consider how the whole ordeal mixed with your academic ambition makes me feel. And I've been under emotional anesthetic having to hide it... You're as every bit as selfish as I was in that moment. Only I can own up to it... So you're just gonna sit there?...

TRUDEL

I don't know you.

ANNE

You're only living in what you want to see. We aren't happy, Kent...

Tears well up in Kent's eyes.

ANNE (CONT'D)

Don't make this awkward. I'm gonna go pack.

Anne exits.

INT. PI BAR - NIGHT

Trudel babysits a beer alone at a table.

Sandi and Bekah are with friends at a pool table.

SANDI

Is that Professor Trudel?

BEKAH

Is it?

Sandi starts her approach.

SANDI

(stops, turns)
Well, come on.

TABLE

Sandi plops onto the other seat.

SANDI

Hi, Professor!

Sandi motions to Bekah to grab an extra seat.

SANDI (CONT'D)

You do know this is a students' bar?

TRUDEL

Closest to my place.

Bekah sits.

BEKAH

Looks like you've pulled an all-nighter.

TRUDEL

In a bit of a crisis, you can say.

BEKAH

A midlife crisis?

TRUDEL

I'm not too much older than you two... No, my wife and I, we've separated.

SANDI

She's not at your place?

INT. TRUDEL'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Trudel sits in a lounge chair.

Behind him, Bekah appraises a painting.

Sandi is on the couch.

They all have drinks.

TRUDEL

I don't feel I can ever live this down.

BEKAH

Maybe things'll workout.

Sandi gives Bekah a wide-eyed glare.

Bekah shrugs.

SANDI

Not knowing a whole lot... I can say this...

(MORE)

SANDI (CONT'D)

if she can't see you as... as the commendable, hardworking man you are, then...

TRUDEL

(far off)

Should throw myself into my work.

BEKAH

You can diet. Keto, Paleo, Atkin, South Beach.

(cheers)

Bourbon.

SANDI

Bekah, don't be insensitive.

BEKAH

It's not insensitive. My mood's better when I eat better... Such a big apartment to yourself. You should rent out your rooms.

SANDI

Yeah, I'd love to get outta the dump I'm in now.

TRUDEL

Hm.

SANDI

I know, let's play a game!

BEKAH

Hey, can I invite some friends over?

SANDI

Bekah!

TRUDEL

I don't mind.

BEKAH

He doesn't mind...

(shrugs)

What?

Bekah begins to text.

SANDI

I can only imagine how trying this must be for you. I've had my own disappointments. Unrequited love...

(MORE)

SANDI (CONT'D)

ignored by my crush. General high school level heartbreak. I guess you can say, sadness connects us.

(beat)

Let's do something different!

Sandi retrieves two tablets inside a 2 mil ziplock from her pocket.

SANDI (CONT'D)

Have you ever dabbled?

TRUDEL

No. But the Titanic sank the same year Ecstasy was discovered. So that can't be a good sign.

BEKAH

Her standards sink with every drink.

SANDI

Bekah!

(sotto)

Not as loose as your lips. Here, It's not E.

Sandi hands Trudel a tablet.

Trudel ponders it in his palm.

A glow emanates from the center of the tablet.

TRUDEL

What is it?

SANDI

That's *exactly* what it is. I. T.. It's an iso-tryptamine derivative that engages serotonin receptors.

TRUDEL

Which ones?

SANDI

That's the thing. It's from the future, almost literally. The chem department conjured up a new pastime. It's so underground they haven't released the specific isotryptamine signifiers yet.

TRUDEL

How did they get it to glow like
this?

SANDI (O.S.)

That shine, it'll release your
neural network from the chains of
apathy and primal, Darwinian
emotion...

Trudel admires the light.

SANDI (O.S.) (CONT'D)

And it'll open the eyes of your
heart to the most infinite, deepest
love you could possibly imagine.

Trudel looks up.

SANDI (CONT'D)

The kind of love you feel when your
mother is sick and you're taking
care of her... Only a thousand,
times a million.

Trudel pops it.

INT. TRUDEL'S MASTER BEDROOM - MORNING

Trudel wakes, groggy.

He sees the tuft of Sandi's blonde backside hair beside him.

EXHALES.

Trudel slides out.

Dresses.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Trudel enters.

The coffee table is littered with glasses, cups, beer
bottles.

An empty bottle of bourbon.

Bekah and a BEANIED MAN (twenties) are cramped on the couch,
asleep.

KITCHEN

Trudel heads to the table.

He immediately realizes what's missing.

He picks up the laptop's cord.

LIVING ROOM

TRUDEL

Where's my laptop? Bekah, my laptop
on the kitchen table, where is it?

BEKAH

...What?

TRUDEL

I left my laptop on the kitchen
table last night, where did it go?

BEKAH

I don't know.

TRUDEL

Does he know?

BEANIED MAN

...Huh?

TRUDEL

Where's my laptop?

BEANIED MAN

I dunno, man.

TRUDEL

The other kids, what were their
names? Zach, Kelsey or Linsey, or
something?

BEKAH

I-I could text them I guess.

TRUDEL

(storms off)

I can't believe this.

MASTER BEDROOM

Trudel storms in.

TRUDEL

Sandi, I think one of your friends stole my laptop last night... Sandi, wake up... I gotta find my laptop... One of your friends stole it.

SANDI

(tosses)
I hardly know them.

TRUDEL

I've got important things on there!

SANDI

Work?

TRUDEL

Alright, you guys have to go. Now! Come on, get dressed.

Trudel tosses Sandi's clothes onto the bed.

TRUDEL (CONT'D)

Come on, let's go!

OFFICE

Trudel goes to the top desk shelf and reaches for the lead container.

It's safe.

TRUDEL

Thank God.

LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

TRUDEL

Come on, I'm not repeating myself! Let's go!

Bekah and Beanied Man doggedly comply.

Trudel herds them to the door.

Sandi has exited the master bedroom.

SANDI

Are you gonna call me?

TRUDEL
Yes, I'll call you.

SANDI
You don't have my number.

TRUDEL
I'll email you.

BEKAH
I'll let you know if I find out
anything!

They exit.

Trudel SHUTS the door.

Gives a single POUND.

SIGHS.

Trudel braces his head against the door.

KITCHEN - LATER

As he closes the fridge, Trudel spots Mr. Harlow's card
magnetized.

He unsticks it and considers.

Trudel drinks from the milk jug, then repeats the number in a
whisper, in a rhythm.

Trudel crumples the card.

INT. TRUDEL'S CAR (IDLE) - NIGHT

Trudel collects his fast food from the service window.

INT. TRUDEL'S CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

Trudel tries to place his drink into the cupholder while
making a right turn.

A car speeds past, HONKS.

The lid snaps open and Trudel spills soda onto his lap.

TRUDEL
Shoot!

Trudel pulls to the shoulder.

PARKED - MOMENTS LATER

Trudel dabs the spill with napkins.

A SLIM WOMAN (twenties) approaches his rolled-down window.

SLIM WOMAN
Are you lookin for somebody?

TRUDEL
Me, I'm... No, I-huh...

SLIM WOMAN
Are you sure you're not lookin for
somebody?

TRUDEL
Are you a student?

SLIM WOMAN
Can I get a ride?

INT. TRUDEL'S CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

SLIM WOMAN
Right here.

Trudel parks in a motel lot.

TRUDEL
Not too far, huh?

SLIM WOMAN
I guess not.

TRUDEL
Could've easily walked.

SLIM WOMAN
You wanna come inside?

TRUDEL
Did you say you were a student?

SLIM WOMAN
I can be.

TRUDEL
No, I, huh—

SLIM WOMAN
You sure you don't wanna come
inside?

TRUDEL
In where? Here?

SLIM WOMAN
I've got a room.

TRUDEL
For what?

SLIM WOMAN
For whatever you want.

TRUDEL
(thinks)
I guess we could talk for a bit.

SLIM WOMAN
We can discuss that inside.

They exit the car.

The Slim Woman leads Trudel to a first floor motel room.

SLIM WOMAN (CONT'D)
Go 'head.

Trudel hesitates, then opens the door and proceeds.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Trudel enters a john sting.

Several OFFICERS pull him to the floor.

OFFICER
Hands! Hands behind your back!

Trudel is cuffed.

INT. POLICE STATION/PROCESSING AREA - NIGHT

Trudel is at a desk.

A jaded BOOKER (forties) types on a computer.

TRUDEL
I want to explain myself.

BOOKER

No, I'm gonna do the explaining.
What I'm doing here is writing up
an ordinance violation for
solicitation of a public immoral
act. Ok?

TRUDEL

I didn't agree to anything.

BOOKER

We've got you on tape.

TRUDEL

Yes, and you should review it.

BOOKER

I've been in vice for over two
decades. You knew what you were
getting into.

TRUDEL

I didn't.

BOOKER

You just so happened to pull into
one of the tracks where you know
prostitutes walk?

TRUDEL

What's the penalty?

BOOKER

Depends on how you cooperate. A
couple days max. And a fine.

TRUDEL

A couple days? Don't I get a phone
call?

AT PHONE - LATER

TRUDEL

(into phone)

Mr. Harlow. It's Trudel. I'm in
a lil predicament.

EXT. POLICE STATION LOT - DAY

Trudel and Mr. Harlow walk.

MR. HARLOW

Sorry I couldn't make it sooner. I have a life you know.

TRUDEL

I really didn't make up my mind on what I was going to do next.

MR. HARLOW

You don't have to explain. Let it be a learning experience.

TRUDEL

Is this going on my record?

MR. HARLOW

Class B misdemeanor. I didn't give you a Get Out of Jail Free card.

Trudel drops his head.

They get to Mr. Harlow's car.

MR. HARLOW (CONT'D)

Let's not focus on that. It's over with.

TRUDEL

I just want you to know—

MR. HARLOW

I know, I know. You have a clean history. We've tailed you for months, remember? You should be looking ahead. To your future.

TRUDEL

What's the next step?

INT. AIRPORT - DAY

Trudel stands at the service counter.

MR. HARLOW (V.O.)

You're to go to LAX and ask for Janet flight YVR-22 to Langley.

Trudel receives his ticket.

MINUTES LATER

Up the escalator.

MR. HARLOW (V.O.)
One carryon. Don't worry about
clothes.

MINUTES LATER

In line.

MR. HARLOW (V.O.)
You'll need nothing but that big,
beautiful brain of yours.

INT. JANET PLANE (FLYING) - NIGHT

Not long after take off, Trudel notices a TICKING SOUND.

Trudel turns from the window and pinpoints the TICKING.

The Man in the aisle seat, BLACK TURTLENECK (forties) from
"goldlovers," fesses up.

BLACK TURTLENECK
It's not a bomb... It's my heart.
Just had surgery. It's gonna take
some weeks before the flesh of my
artery covers over the metal valve
they put in. Truly saved my life.

TRUDEL
Sounds like a watch.

BLACK TURTLENECK
It does, doesn't it?

TICKING.

TRUDEL
...Bit of a nervous sound to be
carrying around for the next few
weeks.

BLACK TURTLENECK
Not really. After the surgery, one
minute worrying about anything is
one minute wasted.

Trudel nods.

A STEWARDESS approaches.

STEWARDESS
Anything to drink?

BLACK TURTLENECK
I'll have a coffee.

STEWARDESS
And you, sir?

TRUDEL
(to Black Turtleneck)
...You know, you shouldn't order
coffee or tea on a plane.

Black Turtleneck turns to Trudel.

TRUDEL (CONT'D)
There's a ten percent chance the
water's riddled with harmful
microbes. From the various hoses
used to fill the plane's water
tank.

Black Turtleneck gives Trudel a deadpan stare.

BLACK TURTLENECK
(turns back to Stewardess)
I'll take that coffee.

STEWARDESS
And you, sir?

TRUDEL
(beat)
Bottled water, please.

The Stewardess moves on.

TICKING.

INT. LANGLEY AIR FORCE BASE TERMINAL - NIGHT

Trudel spots his driver.

INT. LANGLEY HQ - MORNING

Trudel advances toward the entrance.

INT. BRIEFING ROOM - MORNING

Trudel sits at a table in a small windowless room.

Two Black-tied Men enter.

HAIR PARTED LEFT (thirties) carries a large equipment case and sets it on the table across from Trudel.

HAIR PARTED RIGHT (late-forties) from "crashingMNT" sits in a chair near the door.

TRUDEL
More paperwork?

HAIR PARTED LEFT
Kind of.

TRUDEL
Clearances?

HAIR PARTED LEFT
No, we're done with that. Right now
is the actual briefing.

Hair Parted Left opens the combination to the case and extracts seven thick, black binders.

He slides the top binder across to Trudel.

HAIR PARTED LEFT (CONT'D)
Start whenever you're ready.

TRUDEL
You want me to read all these? It's
gonna take all day.

HAIR PARTED LEFT
We have all day.

TRUDEL
And you're just going to watch me
read?

HAIR PARTED LEFT
Yes.

TRUDEL
So what's *he* doing here?

HAIR PARTED RIGHT
I'm here to watch him, watch you,
read.

Pause.

Trudel cracks open the first binder and begins.

HALF HOUR LATER

A LADY (thirties) pokes through the door.

LADY
Drinks, gentlemen?

HAIR PARTED LEFT
Coffee.

HAIR PARTED RIGHT
Coffee.

TRUDEL
I'll take a plain tea.

The Black-tied Men and the Lady stare at Trudel for a long moment.

TRUDEL (CONT'D)
(beat)
C-Coffee.
(clears throat)

HOURS LATER - DAY

Empty paper cups are stacked together on the table.

Trudel reads a piece of text:

Black hole binaries emit gravitational waves during their in-spiral, ring-down phases. The amplitude of emission can be modeled with the techniques of numerical relativity.

Further down: Beta Centauri.

TRUDEL
Chunks of this is nonsensical. I mean, I don't get it, why would...
(flips through)
Is this for real?

HAIR PARTED LEFT
What you're reading is behind the fence, as we like to say. So I can neither confirm nor deny that what you are reading is in fact "for real."

TRUDEL
(sotto)
Helpful.

INT. LUXURY HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Trudel enters and moves into the already lit room.

Mr. Harlow sits in a chair near the window.

TRUDEL

I didn't know you'd be making the trip with me.

MR. HARLOW

I wasn't planning on it. I'm here because we confiscated the case you're trying to hide. And we're gonna need an explanation before you proceed.

TRUDEL

I wasn't hiding it. It was mailed to me a month ago.

MR. HARLOW

Was the address in your handwriting?

TRUDEL

No. Why would it be in my handwriting?

MR. HARLOW

Do you know what it is?

TRUDEL

I was working on just that. I constructed a diffusion chamber. Was running cloud tests.

MR. HARLOW

What's inside the container?

TRUDEL

I haven't opened it.

MR. HARLOW

You know what I mean, from what you've gathered?

TRUDEL

Inside the lead is a liquid metal. Non-radioactive. Stable. Only the isotope isn't currently one we know of. Haven't opened it because I know it'll degrade and corrode.

MR. HARLOW
That's exactly right.

TRUDEL
Does it have something to do with
the tech?

MR. HARLOW
Yes. But we don't know who sent it
to you.

TRUDEL
The briefing today. Is that some-
sort of memory test? Or are the
project details mixed in with
disinformation, like the CIA does,
to trace a leak back?

MR. HARLOW
Who's to say what's real or not.
(rises)
I won't be advancing with you. But
you'll meet another cast of
characters who might have answers
to your questions.
(gestures to the closet)
You'll find what you'll need to
dress appropriately.
(nears door)
Goodbye, Professor.

Mr. Harlow exits.

Trudel slides the closet.

A heavy, Navy-blue military parka.

Trudel goes to his laptop.

He googles: Beta Centauri.

The wiki page appears:

Beta Centauri is a triple star system in the southern constellation of Centaurus... According to parallax measurements from the astrometric Hipparcos satellite, the distance to this system is about 390 light-years (120 parsecs).

INT. INTL PLANE (FLYING) - DAY

Trudel sits and sips bottled water.

A LITTLE KID pops his head from behind the seat in front of Trudel.

They have a staring contest.

LITTLE KID
Why can't we touch fire?

TRUDEL
We can. But the heat would burn your skin.

LITTLE KID
Why can't we eat people?

TRUDEL
Wha... Kid, you... you can't... eat people.

The Little Kid cowers away.

Trudel goes back to his window.

INT. CHILEAN TERMINAL - DAY

Trudel approaches FRONCE (forties) holding a sign: Trudel.

FRONCE
Howdy, my name's Fronce. I'll be escorting you today.

TRUDEL
My Portuguese is a bit rusty.

FRONCE
Spanish, my friend. We speak Spanish here.

TRUDEL
Ah, yo estaba pensando Brazil.

INT. FRONCE'S CAR (MOVING) - DAY

TRUDEL
Where exactly are we headed?

FRONCE
(into rearview)
You're gonna find out quick that asking questions isn't the best way to an answer.

TRUDEL
What is then?

FRONCE
(into rearview)
If we assume there is an answer.
Observing... Listening.

TRUDEL
I was taught: the way to the right
answer is to ask the right
question.

FRONCE
(into rearview)
And I'm saying, the right answer is
a whole lotta caca, if you don't
learn to stay quiet and take it in.

TRUDEL
(sotto)
A bit circular.

EXT. DOCK - DAY

An bearded OLD HELMSMAN (sixties) leads Fronce and Trudel to
a rugged fishing trawler.

The Old Helmsman boards.

TRUDEL
(stops)
This beat-up piece of cork? Are you
sure you've got the right Trudel?

FRONCE
Yes. They said you'd be frightened
about everything.
(laughs)

Trudel has no quip and boards.

EXT. FISHING TRAWLER - DAY

The Men wear lifejackets.

Trudel fights the chill.

Fronce pats the Old Helmsman's back and exits the pilothouse.

FRONCE
(approaches)
Out of your comfort zone yet?

TRUDEL
Hardly.

Fronce looks through binoculars, out to sea.

TRUDEL (CONT'D)
If I'd known we were whale-
watching, I'd've brought a pair
myself.

FRONCE
Ah, but we are. We are looking for
a big whale.

TRUDEL
I'll call you Ishmael then.

FRONCE
(lowers glass)
What do you mean *Ishmael*?

TRUDEL
You forgot already? Asking
questions isn't the best...

A hulking mass emerges from the sea's surface in the
distance.

TRUDEL (CONT'D)
Way... to...

The conning tower of a submarine.

FRONCE
What did I tell you?

TRUDEL
Thar blows a big one... Are we
boarding that thing?

FRONCE
You, my friend. What, do you lack
the manhood to finish our little
fishing trip?

INT. ENTRY HATCH - DAY

Trudel steps down the ladder.

INT. SLEEPING QUARTERS - DAY

Trudel lays on his cot, arms folded at his chest, staring at the tight ceiling.

HOURS LATER

CREAKING NOISES.

A young BUBBLEHEAD draws the curtain.

BUBBLEHEAD
Port call! It's time!

INT. UNDERGROUND WET DOCK - DAY

An impressive submarine dock and facility.

A crew of several Men lead Trudel as he touches dock.

Trudel's breath appears.

He stares in astonishment, surveys the ceilings and the facility's entrance.

Trudel shudders at the bone-frost.

He stops and contemplates the array of flags (ARG, AUS, BEL, CHL, CHN, DEU, FRA, JPN, NZL, NOR, ZAF, UK, USA, USSR), hung over the entrance of the facility.

Trudel notices the Chinese flag.

A Young Man passes him.

YOUNG MAN
This way, Mr. Trudel. We'll get you started.

TRUDEL
(nods upward)
Chinese tech, huh?
(sotto)
Not a total lie.

YOUNG MAN
Right this way, please.

Trudel stands fixated, calculating the manpower and financial logistics of such a station.

YOUNG MAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Mr. Trudel!

TRUDEL
(follows)
Su-blime.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

The Young Man leads Trudel along.

The state-of-the-art research facility is compact, with narrow corridors branching to tight doorways.

TRUDEL
Where are we?

YOUNG MAN
General Daniels will clue you in on everything. But it's no secret.

Trudel takes it all in.

The Young Man notices.

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)
Pulchritudinous, huh?

TRUDEL
Something like that.

YOUNG MAN
You know what it means?

TRUDEL
Means beautiful.

YOUNG MAN
Right. Most don't know.
(smiles)
But I think it's the perfect word for the station.

INT. GENERAL DANIELS' OFFICE - DAY

Trudel and the Young Man enter.

YOUNG MAN
General Daniels, Professor Kent Trudel.

GENERAL DANIELS

Thank you.

The Young Man salutes and exits.

GENERAL DANIELS (CONT'D)

(rises and approaches)

Hello, Professor Trudel. I'm the lead director of the project you've been assigned to, as you may have guessed.

TRUDEL

Where are we?

GENERAL DANIELS

Eager, are we? You haven't deduced?

TRUDEL

I'm stumped. But this place is incredible.

GENERAL DANIELS

We're at an underground research station embedded in the West Antarctic crust.

TRUDEL

Why all the countries?

GENERAL DANIELS

This facility was built and is maintained by world government interests. Much akin to the Antarctic Treaty of 1958.

TRUDEL

Why am I going to be doing research on a Chinese tech if China is already here working alongside?

GENERAL DANIELS

The tech is not Chinese property. The tech is US property. But never-mind that. I'm loving your bullishness. Let's get busy.

INT. LAB - DAY

General Daniels and Trudel enter the clinical lab space and approach TED BROGDAN (thirties).

GENERAL DANIELS

We operate within a buddy system here. This is Dr. Ted Brogdan.

BROGDAN

You can call me Brogdan.

GENERAL DANIELS

As you've been briefed, you're only allowed to formulate and bounce ideas off of Dr. Brogdan or I. This is strictly enforced, just as you read in your Q Clearance. Now, if you don't mind...

General Daniels leaves.

Brogdan retrains his talkativeness with anxious energy.

BROGDAN

Are you ready? This is gonna blow the top of your head off.

TRUDEL

I haven't even settled into my room.

BROGDAN

They're rushin.

TRUDEL

Who?

BROGDAN

The whole lot of them.

TRUDEL

General Daniels, too?

BROGDAN

Yeah.

TRUDEL

Seems American through and through.

BROGDAN

He is.

(blank stare)

Look, word is they're shutting down Project Human North in a year or so. They reopen it about every decade, until the material science can catch up to understanding this thing.

(MORE)

BROGDAN (CONT'D)

And I'm guessing we're at the closing cycle without much to show for it. That's why they're in a hurry.

TRUDEL

Hm...

Brogdan leads Trudel to a counter.

BROGDAN

It's all laid out.

A spherical contraption is off to the side.

The metallic subcomponents are suspended over matted dishes, one larger than the other.

TRUDEL

What am I looking at?

BROGDAN

Think of it as a generator reactor of sorts. Broken into its subcomponents. I'll explain each one, then put it together and demonstrate.

Brogdan removes and handles the hemisphere shield.

BROGDAN (CONT'D)

Here's the hemisphere shield. More than just a covering, it ignites the reactor. Which fits on this metal plate. Beneath the wheels, inside, are these small towers and the cash generators in the middle. We're not allowed to break into these.

TRUDEL

Slow down a bit.

BROGDAN

Hemisphere shield ignites the reactor. With a series small tower cash generators inside. Got it?

TRUDEL

What does it produce?

BROGDAN

I'll show you.

Brogdan snaps the subcomponent together within the spherical contraption.

He goes to a laptop and clicks, turns a dial, clicks.

BROGDAN (CONT'D)

Go ahead and try and touch it now.

Trudel stretches out his hand and pushes it toward the hemisphere covering.

His hand stops.

Strong resistance.

TRUDEL

Can't.

BROGDAN

Cool, huh?

TRUDEL

Diamagnetics somehow?

BROGDAN

It's gravity. It produces a gravitational field of its own and reverses it.

TRUDEL

But only large quantities of mass can produce gravity.

BROGDAN

This is anti-gravity. Gravity shifted 180 degrees.

TRUDEL

The ignition is the hemisphere covering. How?

BROGDAN

It's electrical, but the strange thing is, it doesn't necessarily operate electrically.

TRUDEL

Explain.

BROGDAN

When the hemisphere is on and a simple electrical load is applied, then the generator activates.

(MORE)

BROGDAN (CONT'D)

It shuts down conversely, when removed. So it's more load sensing. The ignition produces its own load to switch on or shut down, hence the metal plate everything balances on like a scale.

TRUDEL

This technology doesn't exist.

BROGDAN

It exists. You're looking at it.

TRUDEL

Chips connect the subcomponents and cash towers?

BROGDAN

Yes, in the immediate vicinity. The chips are on another level. Not our assignment.

TRUDEL

It's borderline magic.

BROGDAN

The best analogy is: if a nuclear reactor were dropped off in olden times. 'Cause the intention of the entire mechanism is a mystery.

TRUDEL

There's more than this?

BROGDAN

Doesn't take a rocket scientist to guess at that. Why do you think we're all broken up on teams, not allowed to collaborate?

TRUDEL

The fuel source, does it have something to do with a liquid metal isotope we haven't discovered yet?

BROGDAN

How did you know?

TRUDEL

Tell me about the fuel.

BROGDAN

(points out)

Fills inside cylinders, within the cash towers. Acceptable to corrosion. We have an estimated 100,000 hours of juice left. But the exact chem, I'm not too informed on... You know, I couldn't wait to spill this all to you. I'm just so happy, excited.

TRUDEL

You've been working solo?

BROGDAN

My previous partner... They said he left because he needed treatment for an undisclosed disease. But I know that's horse-shit. The truth is no one knows where he went.

TRUDEL

Missing?

BROGDAN

Yessir, mighty strange. I don't know how you go missing in a place as fortified and secluded as this.

TRUDEL

Is it possible for someone to mail out some of this metal fuel to a colleague outside the base if they wanted to?

BROGDAN

It'd be pretty hard to smuggle out, so I doubt it. They monitor what leaves pretty sharply. Why?

TRUDEL

Just déjà vu.

BROGDAN

Come on, I'll show you around.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

Brogdan leads Trudel.

BROGDAN

Left is the movie room. Different genres each week.

They walk on.

BROGDAN (CONT'D)

Here's the greenhouse. We grow most of all we eat there.

The walk continues.

BROGDAN (CONT'D)

And here...

INT. NAP ROOM - DAY

Brogdan and Trudel enter.

Lights are low.

LOW AMBIENT MUSIC plays.

A whiteboard and wall-sized jungle landscapes.

Live plants are peppered about couches, hanging chairs, easy chairs.

BROGDAN

This is the Creative Ideas Lounge, but we named it the Nap Room. 'Cause that's what ends up happening. They believe in the mass collective subconscious to generate underlining creative ideas to problems. Jungle theme this week.

TRUDEL

We co-mingle but aren't allowed to talk work?

BROGDAN

Sad but true. We've got Russians, Germans, Chinese, all in different divisions. There're definitively more offshoots.

TRUDEL

How are we suppose to figure anything out? Why fight against the fundamentals of open-source science.

BROGDAN

Doesn't seem too smart. Must admit.

TRUDEL

I'm sure it's smart on their end.

BROGDAN

I wouldn't go against security protocol. If they catch so much of an eyewink, you will get reprimanded. That'll cost you lab time on future advancements at the very least. Best bet is take your pitch to General Daniels.

TRUDEL

Does he listen?

BROGDAN

Oddly enough he does. They're more desperate than you'd think.

TRUDEL

Who's that?

Headphoned, DR. JEANIZA BERNICE (thirties) sits, sips tea.

BROGDAN

Dr. Jeaniza Bernice. She's a cognitive psychologist who runs therapy for the base... She's also unmarried. You interested?

TRUDEL

You sound like you know something.

BROGDAN

She's... professional, but... bit of an ice queen. Cold as the Antarctic icecaps I've heard. Are you gonna take your shot?

TRUDEL

You mean now?

BROGDAN

Throw me your best line.

TRUDEL

Ok... Hi.
(coughs)
Do you need a jacket?

BROGDAN

Do I need a jacket?

TRUDEL
'Cause I heard you're one cold
witch.

Brogdan CHUCKLES.

BROGDAN
I think that's more of an insult.

TRUDEL
Yeah, that probably wouldn't work.
(beat)
Where do you sign up for therapy?

INT. DR. BERNICE'S PSYCH OFFICE - DAY

Trudel sits on a sofa.

Dr. Bernice sits in a cushy office chair.

DR. BERNICE
Usually six months goes by before
an individual feels the itch of
cabin fever. Can't remember a time
when I was needed the first week.

TRUDEL
I like to jump on things. I mean, I
like to get an *early* jump on
things.

DR. BERNICE
How have you adjusted to your
relocation so far?

TRUDEL
Actually, I have a question for
you: Do you work on the project?
Seems like everyone here does at
some capacity.

DR. BERNICE
I could have you written up just
for asking.

TRUDEL
Change the topic. Are you single?

DR. BERNICE
That's not how this works. So let's
shift the focus off of me...

TRUDEL

Maybe we could go on greenhouse date. Pick some kale.

DR. BERNICE

Professor Trudel, if you're not going to corporate, I'll have to end our session early... Ok then...
(straightens in her chair)
How would you say—

TRUDEL

I'd say you get a feeling of satisfaction whenever you execute control over a man. Am I right?

DR. BERNICE

(closes her notebook)
Aaaand we're done.
(rises)

TRUDEL

Can I get your email?

DR. BERNICE

I'm not going to ask you again.

Trudel rises.

Dr. Bernice leads Trudel to the door.

Trudel enters the hall.

DR. BERNICE (CONT'D)

Professor Trudel...

Trudel turns.

DR. BERNICE (CONT'D)

I don't work on the project. I am single. I do get satisfaction executing control over a man. And I don't like to waste valuable time. So maybe we can do something when we're both *not* working.

TRUDEL

Sure, but isn't there a two year rule for therapist/patient relationships?

DR. BERNICE

One: we are not in the States. Two: I'm not counting this as a real session. And three: you'll be very lucky to get that far... You know, you could've simply asked me out. It would've been a lot more charming, I'm sure.

TRUDEL

When two processes produce the same result, I usually go with the one that's more fun.

DR. BERNICE

Goodbye, Kent.

Dr. Bernice SHUTS the door.

HALL

Trudel glows with a wide-eared grin.

INT. MARTIAL OFFICE - DAY

CLOSE UP - Laptop Screen

An animated cartoon giraffe at a circus.

Trudel enters.

General Daniels CHUCKLES.

Trudel waits.

GENERAL DANIELS

Go.

TRUDEL

General Daniels, there isn't...
(coughs)

GENERAL DANIELS

(distracted)
Spit it out. I'm listening.

TRUDEL

I need access or collaboration with the other correlating divisions of this tech to adequately understand its processes, let alone reverse engine it.

General Daniels LAUGHS at his laptop.

GENERAL DANIELS
...Do you how many times I've heard
that?

General Daniels closes the laptop.

TRUDEL
I hear you're a reasonable man.

GENERAL DANIELS
This is what I tell everyone. You
make one significant advancement or
discovery and we will talk about
you gaining access to more intel.

TRUDEL
I can do that now.

GENERAL DANIELS
No, I want it in writing.

TRUDEL
I won't write it up if it doesn't
meet your criteria of significance.

GENERAL DANIELS
Shoot.

TRUDEL
The fuel source, the liquid metal.
Its properties aren't
gravitational, meaning the reactor
initiates then extracts its power.
That much is obvious. But there
could be something that acts to
extrapolate it further that we
don't know about, an amplifier that
goes along with the reactor.

GENERAL DANIELS
Go on.

TRUDEL
That's it. If you can harness the
power, you could possibly propel a
craft even.

GENERAL DANIELS
I'm gonna need more. Goodbye,
Professor.

TRUDEL

(searches)

But how do we prevent corrosion to study the fuel further is the question. It might require finding its Island of Stability.

GENERAL DANIELS

Where did you learn this?

TRUDEL

I've had a head start to be honest. I was anonymously mailed a lead case of the metal six months before I got here.

GENERAL DANIELS

That's right, the leak. But none of this is news to our chem team. When you find something of significance bounce it off of your partner before you come in here and interrupt my work.

TRUDEL

What about...

General Daniels opens his laptop.

GENERAL DANIELS

(grins, excitedly)

It's about this giraffe that travels with a circus. It's an animated kid's show, but I find that kid shows are done well these days.

TRUDEL

No, I was offering another possible insight. What about the system processes? Maybe what we thought was the generator, is actually a closed system battery of sorts. Maybe some other piece collects the anti-gravity field while simultaneously stabilizing the fuel it draws from?

GENERAL DANIELS

Still not good enough.

TRUDEL

General, I need more, if I'm expected to solve more.

GENERAL DANIELS

I'll tell you what, write and flesh out those three points you've just made and I'll see to it that you get your hands on more.

TRUDEL

Thank you, sir.

GENERAL DANIELS

Check your schedule for updates.

TRUDEL

Sir, I want Brogdan involved.

GENERAL DANIELS

Done. Now let me work in peace.

Trudel salutes and exits.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Alongside two Armed Guards, General Daniels escorts Trudel and Brogdan.

GENERAL DANIELS

Few eyeballs have touched what you two are about to witness. But remember no actual touching. We all must tread lightly.

They come to a door.

General Daniels presses a keypad then places his palm onto a palm reader.

The door slides open.

GENERAL DANIELS (CONT'D)

(to the Armed Guards)

Very good.

The two Armed Guards stay put.

INT. HANGAR - DAY

General Daniels, Trudel, and Brogdan enter an underground XL hangar with no bay doors.

They stroll near a station where two Engineers work on computing equipment.

As the Men walk farther, they see the object centered in the middle of the hangar on a large matted square.

The object is a twenty foot long, sleek, black, equilateral triangular prism on its base, with its vertical edge being about five feet high.

GENERAL DANIELS
Come on. Let's get close.

Trudel and Brogdan are speechless.

They approach closer.

Slow.

Trudel notices an American flag decal on one corner of the object.

He reaches to touch it.

GENERAL DANIELS (CONT'D)
No touching!

Trudel recoils.

GENERAL DANIELS (CONT'D)
Holy crap. How many times did I say
no touching?

BROGDAN
What is it?

GENERAL DANIELS
Where did you graduate? No shit,
what is it.

TRUDEL
It's beautiful.

GENERAL DANIELS
It's a mystery. I mean a real
pretzel of a puzzle... Wrapped
inside a Russian doll of a total
enigma.

TRUDEL
What's its origin and history?

GENERAL DANIELS
I'm not a liberty to indulge you
with all the exact details.

TRUDEL

Form 1940's Roswell? Transferred to Area 51? Studied and tested periodically over the decades until this facility was built for the sole cross-governmental purpose of uncovering its function and reproducing it?

GENERAL DANIELS

(cavalier)

Who's to say. Let's circle it.

The Men circle the object.

BROGDAN

It's a spacecraft, maybe? Despite the shape.

GENERAL DANIELS

It's not that simple. We are unable at this moment, or ever for that matter. We're unable to maneuver it. It lifts twelve feet above the ground when the three reactors are ignited. But as far as any other movement or piloting, not a gnat's inch.

TRUDEL

What about UFOs flying over the Nevada desert?

GENERAL DANIELS

When the reactors are activated and the anti-gravitational waves hit the amplifiers, the craft elevates like I said. The eye witness accounts were only identifying a distortion in the fabric of spacetime caused by the anti-gravitational cocoon the craft creates. It actually, physically, it stays stationary. It only appears to be moving in the sky, like an electron in a electron cloud if you will.

TRUDEL

Two places at once?

GENERAL DANIELS

Not quite. Research has shown it stays in one place but produces a holo-gramphic disc above a certain height and below a certain depth.

TRUDEL

And this is the state it was first recovered?

GENERAL DANIELS

Yes. Perfectly intact.

TRUDEL

Any occupants?

GENERAL DANIELS

If I knew, you'd think I'd tell you? But no, no occupants.

TRUDEL

I find that hard to believe.

GENERAL DANIELS

It's actually a point I can be one hundred percent truthful on. As it's intricately linked to finding out what this thing's purpose is. So no, it was not found with any little green men.

The Men stop.

TRUDEL

Are we looking in?

GENERAL DANIELS

Step by step, boys. Today I give you a little history lesson and we circle it. Tomorrow, we peek inside and run a performance trial. Steps. It's the name of the game.

TRUDEL

I can't quite figure out how you managed to show us less by showing us more.

GENERAL DANIELS

New information necessities true acclimation. The story of my life gentlemen. This way.

INT. NAP ROOM - DAY

Trudel and Brogdan enter.

TRUDEL
You go first.

BROGDAN
Its obvious. Tomorrow, we'll find
out why they can't pilot the thing.

TRUDEL
I'm not assuming quite yet.

BROGDAN
You were right about the amplifiers
though.

TRUDEL
Surmised.

JIM (forties), a transport clerk, enters and approaches.

BROGDAN
Hey, Jim! What're you doing out of
your hole?

JIM
Mr. Kent Trudel?

TRUDEL
Yes?

JIM
Are you currently on active duty
for the U.S. military?

TRUDEL
Is that a trick question?

JIM
I'm required by law to ask.
(hands Trudel a manila
envelope)
You've been served.

BROGDAN
Oh.

Jim exits.

TRUDEL
Divorce papers.

BROGDAN

Ouch.

TRUDEL

The child wasn't mine.

BROGDAN

Double ouch. I'll leave you with
your tears.

Trudel opens the envelope and sits.

He flops his head back and SIGHS.

INT. PSYCH WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Trudel rises as Dr. Bernice enters with a Patient.

The Patient exits.

TRUDEL

You're a hard one to get a hold of,
doc.

DR. BERNICE

I've been busy.

TRUDEL

Do I need to schedule another
appointment?

DR. BERNICE

Look, Kent. You're a real-life
Clark Kent, I'm sure. I just know
when to wise up... I refuse to be
your rebound girl is all.

TRUDEL

How do you know about that?

DR. BERNICE

I read your mental health
dossier... I'm glad you feel better
but please don't expect me to be
the glue you've decided to piece
your shattered ego up with. My
advice is to take some more time
before potentially hurting yourself
again.

TRUDEL

I've taken enough time.

DR. BERNICE
Well, maybe I just don't like you.
(shrugs)

Dr. Bernice exits.

TRUDEL
Need a jacket?

INT. HANGAR - LATE MORNING

GENERAL DANIELS
Gentlemen, we've gotta launch
before lunch. Shall we have a peek
inside?

Trudel and Brogdan approach the object.

There's a specialized ladder that leads to the top.

TRUDEL
What's the metallurgy?

GENERAL DANIELS
We've managed to export and apply
its metallurgy to existing space
shuttles and their heat shields.
One of the few advances on the
project this time around. It's the
gift that keeps giving. Up the
ladder, boys.

TRUDEL
There isn't a side entrance?

GENERAL DANIELS
The only way in is from the top.
One at a time you will stick your
head into the craft and I will
verbally point out its features.

BROGDAN
I thought we'd go inside?

GENERAL DANIELS
Take good mental notes. Who's
first?

BROGDAN
Trudel you go.

Trudel nods, then climbs to the top of the ladder.

GENERAL DANIELS
Belly on deck.

Trudel flattens.

GENERAL DANIELS (CONT'D)
Now slide forward, hold tight to
the railing and pull your head into
the opening and take a look.

Trudel follows.

His head is upside down in the object.

GENERAL DANIELS (CONT'D)
First thoughts?

TRUDEL
There's no centerpiece like I
would've expected. Did you guys
remove this hatch?

Trudel removes himself to observe the opening.

TRUDEL (CONT'D)
Why are you guys removing things?

GENERAL DANIELS
It's the only way you'd be able to
see inside. Mechanically speaking
it's a tomb. No viable way in or
out. We made a circular cut from
the outer shell layer in order for
our pilots to enter.

Trudel's head is back upside down through the opening.

TRUDEL
(yells)
I'm guessing the lighting is ours?

GENERAL DANIELS
Wouldn't be able to see without
them!

TRDUEL
(yells)
There're three little seats facing
the corners, equally spaced.
Cramped quarters for a human. I see
the dome reactors in front of the
seat on a grated floor.
(MORE)

TRUDEL (CONT'D)

Three, what I assume to be,
amplifiers spaced geometrically
across from the seats below the
deck.

GENERAL DANIELS (O.S.)

Correct.

BROGDAN (O.S.)

No navigation?

TRUDEL

The lining material along the edges
of the corners is glossy. But no
direct panels.

GENERAL DANIELS (O.S.)

Smart glass, is our best guess.

TRUDEL

Does it become functional when this
thing gets off the ground?

GENERAL DANIELS (O.S.)

No activation or indications
whatsoever, inside or outside of
the craft.

MOMENTS LATER

GENERAL DANIELS

Ok, let's switch now!

Trudel climbs down the ladder.

BROGDAN

Here I go. Tell my mom I love her.

Brogdan steps up the ladder.

He flattens, then peers in.

GENERAL DANIELS

(to Trudel)

What did you think?

TRUDEL

The electrical load to ignite the
reactors, it's applied remotely or
from the pilots within?

GENERAL DANIELS

Remote.

TRUDEL
Very peculiar.

Trudel mulls everything over.

GENERAL DANIELS
All done Brogdan?

BROGDAN (O.S.)
The quarters, the seats, it's all
very small... How are you suppose
to maneuver with no vision or
navigation?

GENERAL DANIELS
Let's get her in the air and see.

LATER

General Daniels, Trudel, and Brogdan stand behind a nearby
station, outfitted with helmeted suits.

Three Pilots in helmeted astronautical jumpsuits enter.

The Pilots pass by, one seems to be female.

Trudel catches a glimpse of another, the side profile.

The Pilot heavily resembles Brogdan, if not identical.

Trudel questions his eyes, then disregards.

The Pilots board the object using the ladder, one by one.

BROGDAN
They basically just sit and wait?

GENERAL DANIELS
You have any other suggestions?

A Station Hand caps the opening.

The ladder is then taken away by Station Hands.

GENERAL DANIELS (CONT'D)
(to Station Hand)
Countdown?

STATION HAND
Five minutes, General.

GENERAL DANIELS

Come on. I want you guys up close
for this.

SEVERAL MINUTES LATER

General Daniels, Trudel, and Brogdan near to the object.

BROGDAN

Is it safe to be this close on
liftoff?

GENERAL DANIELS

The outfits are just a precaution.
It emits no radioactivity... Are
you ready?

General Daniels glances at his armband screen.

MOMENTS LATER

GENERAL DANIELS

Five. Four. Three. Two. One.
Ignition.

The underside of the object begins to HISS.

A orangish corona discharge is emitted from the amplifiers
and the object begins to levitate from the floor.

A hazy almost invisible glass bubble envelopes the object.

Like the mirage haze and distortion of a heated road.

The object rises and hovers twelve feet above the ground in
midair, SILENT.

TRUDEL

Corona discharge?

GENERAL DANIELS

Predictable. A little hiss, a
little plasma vapor. Perfect
liftoff. The beaut runs smooth and
silent... Let's look at her
underbelly.

General Daniels approaches the object.

Trudel and Brogdan follow.

The Men walk directly underneath.

Trudel and Brogdan stare up in amazement.

TRUDEL
Holy Moses.

GENERAL DANIELS
Notice anything?

Hangar ceiling.

BROGDAN
How is it invisible?

TRUDEL
Some sort of illusion from the anti-gravitational sphere it produces?

GENERAL DANIELS
It's still there. Just can't see it from beneath it. And the anti-gravity sphere is more like an upside down heart-shape.

BROGDAN
So right now there are images of the craft appearing above the Antarctic ice?

GENERAL DANIELS
Correct. Holograms randomly and unpredictably appear some hundreds of feet in the air in the image of a disc. Jumping in and out of existence if you will.

TRUDEL
How can you be sure it's a hologram then?

GENERAL DANIELS
We're not.

Trudel raises his hand toward the object.

Feels resistance.

GENERAL DANIELS (CONT'D)
Impenetrable.

TRUDEL
How long are you keeping it up?

GENERAL DANIELS

A few more minutes and we'll have
it land.

TRUDEL

Over radio?

GENERAL DANIELS

Microwaves and radio-waves can
penetrate the shield. So that's how
we do add and remove electrical
load to start it up.

BROGDAN

You could have maybe told us that
yesterday.

GENERAL DANIELS

Good information is always a day
late, boys. Come on, I'm hungry.

The Men disperse from under.

INT. GENERAL DANIELS' OFFICE - DAY

Trudel enters.

TRUDEL

Sir?

General Daniels eats a sandwich.

GENERAL DANIELS

Left an impression on ya, didn't
it?

TRUDEL

It's quite the spectacle. I don't
know what to entirely make of it.

GENERAL DANIELS

Part of its magic.

TRUDEL

I believe this craft's singular
purpose may be far different than
we are even willing to anticipate.

GENERAL DANIELS

That's why we're all here.

TRUDEL

General Daniels, is there any information you're leaving out?

GENERAL DANIELS

One piece. I wouldn't have a job if that wasn't the case.

TRUDEL

And that is?

GENERAL DANIELS

I'd rather keep my job. Do you have a suggestion Trudel?

TRUDEL

I suggest research into the cognitive correlation between subject and material.

GENERAL DANIELS

What did you have in mind?

TRUDEL

I know that Dr. Bernice is a specialist in cognitive functioning. I don't know if she's been on the project, but maybe between her, Brogdan, and I, within the propulsion unit, we may get the craft to maneuver without visibility.

GENERAL DANIELS

Wouldn't a collab be best suited with chem or metallurgy?

TRUDEL

Brogdan and I are expanding our speculations.

GENERAL DANIELS

I don't like the sound of that.

TRUDEL

The side effect of curiosity, General.

GENERAL DANIELS

I don't know what you'd be able to achieve, but I'll grant you permission.

TRUDEL
Thank you, sir.

INT. LAB - DAY

Trudel, Brogdan, and Dr. Bernice stand over the subcomponents.

DR. BERNICE
I'm not interested in learning any of this and I'm not interested in you. I'm on to your ploy, kent Trudel.

TRUDEL
I believe we can crack this thing.

DR. BERNICE
Your optimism is dizzyingly naive.

TRUDEL
Tell us again.

DR. BERNICE
I was part of an interior navigational crew before they scraped the division. There is no correlation between cognitive function and operational material. Not with humans at least.

BROGDAN
But you haven't piloted it?

DR. BERNICE
I've worked with those who have. The side panels are not smart glass. If it is, we are missing the headgear.

BROGDAN
Best guess?

DR. BERNICE
Our best guess is that these little alien creatures have some sort of symbiotic control over the interior materials. And that's just from left field. You don't actually believe you'll get anywhere with this?

TRUDEL

You mean with the project?

DR. BERNICE

Let's crystalize something: you're not getting anywhere with me. Project or no project.

TRUDEL

The convergence of two separate low probabilities is even lower than the first. So, for the sake of both, let's keep business and feelings separate.

DR. BERNICE

There are no feeling.
(turns to leave)
Good luck finding an alien to talk to.

TRUDEL

I was thinking we could interview the pilots for clues.

DR. BERNICE

(turns)
I told you, I've worked with them. There's nothing.

TRUDEL

I'll cross examine.

Dr. Bernice rolls her head.

INT. NAP ROOM - NIGHT

Trudel sits with his eyes shut.

He rotates two metallic boading balls in his right hand.

Brogdan approaches, sits.

BROGDAN

Are you sleeping?

TRUDEL

Yes, I'm sleeping.

BROGDAN

What have you got?

TRUDEL

Issac Newton would meditate with
baoding balls. The metal balls
would drop and hit the floor, and
wake him up. That way he could
remember the idea he had right
before he fell asleep.

BROGDAN

I've heard the story. But I meant
what have you got as far as ideas?

TRUDEL

Nothing. That's why am trying to
sleep. Thank you.

BROGDAN

(rises to leave)
Hope the apple hits your head and
knock you out.

CLASSICAL MUSIC rises.

Brogdan exits.

Trudel reclines in deep meditation.

His right hands rotates the baoding balls.

LATER

Trudel drifts... to sleep.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

CLASSICAL MUSIC continues.

Eyes closed, a gnarly bearded Trudel lies face up.

Trudel is bundled in the same military parka, only tattered.

RONNIE (O.S.)

Hey, Eastwood! Eastwood, I need
your help!

Trudel opens wide his eyes.

RONNIE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Hey, you hear me?

TRUDEL

Don't call me Eastwood!

RONNIE (O.S.)
 Oh, so now you know your name? Get
 out here and help me, will ya?

EXT. HOMELESS ENCAMPMENT - NIGHT

Trudel exits his tent.

The homeless encampment is situated on the sidewalk of a
 stretch of storefronts.

Scraggy and leather-faced, RONNIE (forties) from "Gooma & the
 Misfits" sits in a wheelchair with a bucket of water in a
 shopping cart.

RONNIE
 Come on, I got the water.

Ronnie hands Trudel a large plastic cup.

RONNIE (CONT'D)
 Start throwing it up at the
 speakers.

Trudel complies.

Trudel tries to douse the speakers with water.

Out of reach.

RONNIE (CONT'D)
 I haven't slept a lick since they
 hung them up.

Trudel's tosses finally catch.

He continues.

TRUDEL
 Don't mind it myself.

RONNIE
 That's 'cause your already insane!

The speakers eventually FIZZLE OUT.

RANDEL
 Ha, there we go! Now let's get some
 sleep!

PILOT INTERVIEWWEE (PRE-LAP)
 Are we done here?

DR. BERNICE (PRE-LAP)
Kent, are we done?

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Trudel, a PILOT INTERVIEWEE (forties), and Dr. Bernice are at a table.

Trudel has a hand to his head.

TRUDEL
My head's throbbing.

PILOT INTERVIEWEE
I don't know what else to tell you.

DR. BERNICE
I'm sorry. We are done.

TRUDEL
Not yet. Let me think.

DR. BERNICE
We've been going in circles. We're done. Thank for your time.

The Pilot Interviewee rises and exits.

TRUDEL
Between the three of them there should of been some sort of plausible anomaly.

DR. BERNICE
I think we should rest.

TRUDEL
When you've been treating the patients here, there hasn't been any recurring patterns?

DR. BERNICE
Like what?

TRUDEL
Like more deja vu or migraines. Or recurring nightmares. Any psychological patterns of any sort?

DR. BERNICE
Nothing out of the ordinary.

TRUDEL

What does that mean? You mean there're patterns ordinarily?

DR. BERNICE

You're bound to have some patterns happen.

TRUDEL

What patterns?

DR. BERNICE

I'm just thinking aloud, but it has come up from time to time.

TRUDEL

What?

DR. BERNICE

Might sound silly, but over the course of many months I've found... anomalies of how common events have been experienced or perceived.

TRUDEL

Like?

DR. BERNICE

Like little memory gaps. When I, in the rare instances, mediated between quarrels or disputes, little details would be amorphous. Textbook false memories.

TRUDEL

And you didn't find this important enough to tell me?

DR. BERNICE

It's so subjective and minor, its hard to say.

TRUDEL

Did you record these?

DR. BERNICE

Just mental notes. Didn't think of it until you brought it up.

Trudels scoffs in disbelief.

EXT. INTERSECTION - DAY

Trudel holds up a cardboard sign.

DR. BERNICE (V.O.)
 The Mandela Effect is what you'd
 call it on a macro level. The
 collective mass consciousness
 recalling a particular event
 differently than how it occurred.

The sign reads: Anything Will Help.

TRUDEL (V.O.)
 I know the term.

A truck pulls up and rolls down its window.

DR. BERNICE (V.O.)
 A large proportion of the
 population misremembered Nelson
 Mandela's release from prison.

The Truck Driver hands Trudel a knotted plastic bag.

DR. BERNICE (V.O.)
 They thought that Mandela—

TRUDEL (V.O.)
 I said I know.

The truck continues through the green.

TRUDEL (V.O.)
 We might be dealing with branching
 dimensions.

Trudel unties and opens up the bag.

DR. BERNICE (V.O.)
 More like subjective conjecture...

Inside: trash and wrappers.

INT. NAP LOUNGE - NIGHT

Two baoding ball WHACK the floor.

Trudel jars awake in astonishment.

TRUDEL
 Eu-f-in-reka.

Trudel rises to search for the missing balls.

He searches under the recliner.

He flattens his face to the floor.

Nothing.

 RONNIE (PRE-LAP)
Did you find it?

EXT. DUMPSTER ENCLOSURE - NIGHT

Trudel dumpster dives.

 RONNIE (O.S.)
They should be right on top.

 TRUDEL
Here we go.

Trudel throw the bag out and climbs out of the dumpster.

The Men rip the bag open.

 RONNIE
Fresh day olds!

The Men start munching.

 TRUDEL (PRE-LAP)
 (fast, scatterbrained)
I think this thing is altering
reality somehow. It's altering
memories or deeper. Maybe
connecting branching dimensions of
time and space meant to alter
outcomes or details that have been
previously determined.

INT. LAB - DAY

 BROGDAN
Slow down, my guy. What are you
talking about?

 TRUDEL
The baoding balls. I had both in my
hand!

FLASHBACK - NAP ROOM

Trudel rises from the floor.

Puzzled, he considers if the boading balls rolled the other way.

TRUDEL (V.O.)
I had both in my hand.

Trudel ponder, looks down, opens his hand.

Two boading balls in his palm.

END FLASHBACK

BROGDAN
That's your evidence?

TRUDEL
I have more than a hunch, that...
that this thing is changing details
on our timeline.

EXT. HOMELESS ENCAMPMENT - DAY

Ronnie and Trudel observe a STORE OWNER (forties) on top of a ladder, installing a cage over the speakers.

BROGDAN (V.O.)
Like a time machine?

TRUDEL (V.O.)
More like an altering reality
machine.

BROGDAN (V.O.)
What's the difference?

RONNIE
It'd be a shame if someone kicked
that ladder out from under him.

TRUDEL
Yup, a shame.

Ronnie and Trudel lock eyes and make their way toward the Store Owner.

As they approach Trudel violently pulls the ladder down.

The Store Owner topples onto the concrete.

Ronnie and Trudel escape down the street.

TRUDEL (PRE-LAP) (CONT'D)
 Now the question is not: why would
 someone want to change the details
 of reality?

INT. GENERAL DANIEL'S OFFICE - DAY

TRUDEL
 But how does one navigate them? You
 could potentially change the course
 of major events. Splitting or
 converging branching parallel
 universes.

GENERAL DANIELS
 How are we to determine what
 changes if our memories don't
 confute the changes?

TRUDEL
 With the memories of those
 occupying the machine.
 (beat)
 I propose a performance trial my
 colleagues and I, Dr. Brogdan and
 Dr. Bernice.

General Daniel leans back in his chair.

INHALES.

INT. BURGER JOINT - DAY

Trudel fills a plastic cup at soda dispenser.

STORE MANAGER (O.S.)
 Hey, hey, come on now.

Store Manager approaches.

STORE MANAGER (CONT'D)
 How many times have I got to tell
 you?

Trudel ignores the Store Manager.

STORE MANAGER (CONT'D)
 Come on, let's go!

DR. BERNICE (PRE-LAP)
I don't have a good feeling about
this.

The Store Manager ushers Trudel out.

TRUDEL (PRE-LAP)
Has it never occurred to you that
on one occasion your intuition
might be consummately wrong?

INT. SERVICE ROOM - DAY

Trudel, Dr. Bernice, and Brogdan stand, suited up.

The hydraulic single panel door slides opens.

INT. HANGAR - DAY

The structure of the hangar has changed to a more futuristic
setting.

The Characters are unaware of the cosmetic changes.

A few Station Hands prep.

BROGDAN
All the other pilots came out the
same. We shouldn't be too worried.

TRUDEL
Only from what they remember.

CAPTAIN DANIELS appears within the Three's helmet monitor.

Captain Daniels is the same identical likeness of General
Daniels.

HELMET MONITOR

CAPTAIN DANIELS (O.S.)
Pilots, please find your
preliminary positions.

Dr. Bernice and Brogdan start their walk.

Trudel lingers.

BROGDAN
(turns around)
Come on, Kent.

TRUDEL
I feel like this has already
happened.

CAPTAIN DANIELS (O.S.)
Please make your way to your
positions, privates.

Trudel complies.

The Three pass by the station, where another three figures
stand near computing equipment.

They are too far away to see resemblances.

Trudel turns backward and heads back.

Trudel reaches the emergency exit.

An Armed Guard impedes his way.

TRUDEL
Get out the way.

The Armed Guard doesn't budge.

CAPTAIN DANIELS (V.O.)
We're on a tight schedule Trudel.

TRUDEL
I need to get out of here!

CAPTAIN DANIELS (V.O.)
Let him go.

The Armed Guard steps aside and Trudel exits.

CAPTAIN DANIELS
Cancelling the trial until further
notice. Brogdan, see to it that
Trudel is in his right mind. Don't
have him do anything drastic. We'll
have a debriefing tomorrow morning.

Brogdan exits after Trudel.

EXT. DEPRESSED LOADING DOCK - DAY

Bearded Trudel walks up to the grocery trailer.

He hops up and pokes several feet in.

Trudel swipes several pears.

The Produce Lumper approaches.

PRODUCE LUMPER
Hey! Out of there!

Trudel jumps down, runs to the railing, and hops it.

He escapes alongside the building.

INT. JEHOSHAPHAT MARS DESERT RESEARCH STATION NINE - DAY

Trudel hurries alongside a wall, panicked.

The interior of the base has changed.

The architecture is now more sleek, spacious, metallic, futuristic, minimalistic.

Trudel's takes erratic BREATHS.

He comes to a railing, stops.

Trudel leans his forearms at the edge of railing and peers through the large panels.

He fixates on the distant ranges, the sharp peaks knifing the fiery sky like rustic sheet metal.

Red blaze engulfs the desolate.

The Martian wind whips dust blizzards in the failing light.

Around Trudel, facility co-workers stride with a sense of sprite and purpose.

Brogdan approaches.

TRUDEL
There's a pressure on my temples.

BROGDAN
Do you know where we are?

TRUDEL
Jehoshaphat MDRS 9.

BROGDAN
And what year is it?

TRUDEL
3055.

BROGDAN
You might be on the verge of a
mental breakdown.

TRUDEL
The trial's canceled?

BROGDAN
Captain wants you on sabbatical.
Let's eat.

INT. CHOW HALL - DAY

Solemn ragtag crews gather to enjoy meager rations.

Their faces contort with determination.

Utensils scrap metal.

No words are exchanged.

BROGDAN
Why're the potatoes always unsalted
when the planet is full of salt?

TRUDEL
(beat)
'Cause then you'd have nothing to
complain about.

INT. TRUDEL'S QUARTERS - MORNING

Trudel wakes.

BROGDAN (V.O.)
Looks like you're coming to.

TRUDEL (V.O.)
I feel a little better.

INT. NEAR PANEL WINDOWS - MORNING

The Martian sunrise burns like a red-light bathroom bulb.

TRUDEL (V.O.) (PRE-LAP)
I'm going to the Surface.

Trudel walks by.

BROGDAN (V.O.) (PRE-LAP)
 Are you sure you want to do that
 without an appointment?

INT. COMMONS LOUNGE - MORNING

A video PLAYS on a nearby wall near Trudel and Brogdan.

WOMAN'S VOICE
 I travel to escape.

MAN'S VOICE
 I travel for the stories.

YOUNG WOMAN'S VOICE
 I travel because I want to.

Trudel turns and watches the Caribbean Island esque stock
 footage.

OLDER WOMAN'S VOICE
 Stress dissolves in the premium
 turquoise blue of coral reef...

OLDER MAN'S VOICE
 In diving expeditions...

YOUNG MAN'S VOICE
 Soaring expectations...

POETIC VOICE
 Silken spinnakers flashing in
 patches...

CALMING VOICE
 Through astonishing island pine...

FIRM VOICE
 As you stroll a cozy cove...

GRUFF VOICE
 The serene erosion of the afternoon
 surf in front of you...

OLD WOMAN'S VOICE
 The entirety of acclimatable nature
 calling you.

WOMAN'S VOICE
 I travel to remember.

MAN'S VOICE
 I travel for that moment.

YOUNG WOMAN'S VOICE
I travel to be free.

BROGDAN
They don't tell you it's a nudist
colony.

Trudel rises.

BROGDAN (CONT'D)
Good luck.

Trudel leaves.

INT. SUPER LADDER (ENTRANCE) - MORNING

Trudel approaches the superstructure, the lifeline to
colonial nodes.

INT. SHUTTLE - MORNING

A seamless, hypnotic glide through nightmare territories.

Trudel scrolls a news feed on the hush panel window.

Headline gif: A headset-ed chimpanzee levitates different
sized, multicolored pingpong balls using telekinesis.

Trudel closes the feed and stares, his eyes the void of
reflected space and red desert.

FLASHBACK

CLOSE UP - Finely Pulverized Martian Dust Running Through
Trudel's White-gloved Hand

END FLASHBACK

Three helmeted Chimpanzees in civilian robes enter the cabin
and stagger by.

Outside, the node beacons as a single sentinel.

LATER

Trudel disembarks.

INT. SATELLITE NODE - MORNING

Trudel files away down a hall.

He crosses a fountain and joins a bright conference room.

INT. BRIGHT CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Trudel enters.

NORDIC BLOND and TALL WHITE (both forties-ish) stand, facing the entry.

NORDIC BLOND
Hello, Professor Trudel.

Tall White communicates telepathically with a translucent clairvoyant tether.

TALL WHITE (V.O.)
We took the liberty of scheduling a meeting before you'd arrive.

Nordic Blond has a way of talking that sound like soothing condescension.

NORDIC BLOND
We invited Captain Daniels, however, he'll have to appear on screen.

TRUDEL
I've made my decision. Concerning my contract coming to an end.

TALL WHITE (V.O.)
You want to make the long journey to Earth?

TRUDEL
Is that going to be a problem?

NORDIC BLOND
What seems to be your change of heart?

TRUDEL
I despise of life itself here. And I want out of Human North.

TALL WHITE (V.O.)
We ordinarily wouldn't grant travel off the station or its satellites.

NORDIC BLOND

But because of your exemplary years of service we might be willing to allow accommodations. However, if you do go, you would have to live an entire lifespan there.

The empathy in Nordic Blond's voice has risen.

NORDIC BLOND (CONT'D)

Are you willing to die like a human?

TRUDEL

I'm willing.

NORDIC BLOND

Then we will set up the clone conduit and begin the process.

SILENCE.

TRUDEL

The money?

NORDIC BLOND

Consider it a severance package.

TRUDEL

Before I go, would it be asking too much if I were told the object's origin?

TALL WHITE (V.O.)

Have you ever heard the expression... you are in fact the sex organs of the machine world, Professor Trudel?

TRUDEL

What's that have to do with the object's origin?

TALL WHITE (V.O.)

Everything. Humans are not the sex organs, but the very offspring of the machine world.

TRUDEL

A perversion of elitist thinking.

NORDIC BLOND

This is a new war, Professor. New wars call for new weapons.

TRUDEL
Is it a weapon?

TALL WHITE (V.O.)
Not necessarily.

TRUDEL
Was it found with occupants or not?

EXT. ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE/DESERT - DAY

SUPER: 1947

NORDIC BLOND (V.O.)
No. It was indeed found empty.

The site is picked, flagged and stationed off.

A classically dressed archaeologist's APPRENTICE brushes away some dirt.

He dabs his forehead with a cloth.

NORDIC BLOND (V.O.)
It was discovered during an archeological dig for dinosaurs. It was found buried six meters into the earth's crust in a remote desert.

The Apprentice calls out to his Supervisor.

TRUDEL (V.O.)
It's ancient then?

The Supervisor arrives.

TALL WHITE (V.O.)
Not remotely...

Brushing reveals a dull blackish surface.

More brushing.

TRUDEL (V.O.)
Then what?

The dull image of an American Flag decal, weathered by earth and time, eventually appears.

NORDIC BLOND (V.O.)
It was discovered with the decal of the American flag fully intact...

The Apprentice looks up, and locks eyes with his Supervisor.

TALL WHITE (V.O.)
 ...Professor Trudel, the simulator
 is of our own invention...

NORDIC BLOND (V.O.)
 You are dismissed.

A brief moment.

As Trudel exits, Captain Daniels appears on screen.

CAPTAIN DANIELS (O.S.)
 Sorry, I'm late, gentlemen.

INT. SPEED RAIL - DAY

In the b.g. the Super Ladder.

Lights strobe as Trudel contemplates.

INT. TEST DOME - DAY

Trudel sits next to his water pod.

A female CLASSY TECHNICIAN (twenties) readies Trudel.

Draws blood.

Checks Trudel's eyes with a knuckled device.

CLASSY TECHNICIAN
 Let's patch you up.

Wires up.

CLASSY TECHNICIAN (CONT'D)
 Lower please.

TRUDEL
 How safe is the trip?

CLASSY TECHNICIAN
 It's an arduous journey. Doubtless
 you'll even recognize yourself.

TRUDEL
 How will I know who I am then?

CLASSY TECHNICIAN
Don't worry, it'll feel like a
long, restful nap.

TRUDEL
Healthy sleep foreshadows death.

CLASSY TECHNICIAN
Would it relieve some anxiety, if I
told you I've been there and back?

TRUDEL
Are you human?

CLASSY TECHNICIAN
We're not prejudice, are we?

TRUDEL
I just don't like others working on
me.

CLASSY TECHNICIAN
One thing I can tell you...

TRUDEL
What?

CLASSY TECHNICIAN
You will leave your superstitions
behind. You will be forced to.

The Classy Technician continues to prep.

INT. WINDOWLESS ROOM - DAY

Bearded Trudel wakes, back flat on a wall cot.

SOME TIME LATER

Trudel sits up, in a haze.

SOME TIME LATER

A female WOMAN (twenties) sits in a chair behind a
transparent door.

Trudel approaches the Woman.

TRUDEL
(beat)
Am I being held against my will?

CHAPERONE

Why don't you relax and eat something.

Trudel suddenly notices a banana on the floor.

The Chaperone jots something down on her computer pad.

TRUDEL

Are you my chaperone?

She's silent.

Trudel checks his wrists.

Abrasions.

TRUDEL (CONT'D)

When can I leave?

CHAPERONE

Not long. Please be patient with us.

Trudel picks up the banana.

The Chaperone looks on.

Trudel stares down the Chaperone who studies him.

TRUDEL

You'd thought I'd start acting like a monkey if you gave me a banana? Or rather, whether I'd call you out on it.

The Chaperone presses notes.

MONTE (V.O.) (PRE-LAP)

I can't wait that long, Ma!

INT. PSYCHIATRIC WARD - DAY

MONTE HALLOWAY (late-twenties) and LULU HALLOWAY (late-forties) both from "Dakota of Norco" sit at a table.

Spray-bottle in hand, Trudel strolls past the table, stops, observes, listens.

The KETCHUP KING (thirties) approaches and sits near the Hallowsays.

KETCHUP KING
Ketchup King.

MONTE
Not now, I'm talking.

KETCHUP KING
I am the Ketchup King. I like
ketchup on *every-thing*. My spirit
spoke to me.

MONTE
See what I have to deal with?
(to Ketchup King)
GO!

KETCHUP KING
Ketchup King.

The Ketchup King doesn't move, only stares at Monte.

An ANGRY PATIENT stands in front of the TV.

ANGRY PATIENT
Attention, everyone! My dad took my
girlfriend. He gives her a bunch of
cocaine! At a cocaine plant in
Mexico. That's when the CIA put
little robots in my ears.

A female ATTENDANT politely approaches the Angry Patient.

ATTENDANT
Come on Caesar, no one can see the
TV.

Caesar moves.

CAESAR
(walks off)
Attention, everyone... My dad took
my girlfriend. Gave her a bunch of
cocaine at a cocaine plant, in
Mexico...

MONTE
(to Lulu)
So are you getting me out of here
or what?

Trudel continues his walk.

REC AREA

Meditation MUSIC chimes.

Trudel arrives at some potted plants and tends to them.

Up front, an Instructor in cowboy boots with a big rodeo belt-buckle leads a group of patients in tai-chi stretches.

A single fly, apocalyptic in size, a thumb, slugs up toward the simple wall clock just below the ceiling.

NURSE (O.S.)
Kent Trudel!

EXT. HOMELESS ENCAMPMENT - DAY

With his free arm, the Store Owner pushes the water with a push broom in the chill of the morning.

He murmurs under his breath.

His right arm is cast in a sling.

Trudel sheepishly approaches.

STORE OWNER
Hey, back up, buddy.

Trudel advances slightly.

STORE OWNER (CONT'D)
I mean it.

Trudel walks past, down the curb.

Trudel enters his tent.

INT. TENT - EARLY MORNING

Trudel wakes up, particularly bearded and unkempt.

CLASSICAL MUSIC blares.

A SPLASH of water outside.

Trudel pokes his head out of the tent.

He observes Ronnie attempting to toss water at the speaker from his wheelchair.

RONNIE (V.O.)
 Never told you my story, have I,
 Eastwood?

MONTAGE - TRUDEL'S DAILY ERRANDS

Trudel pushes his cart half filled with cans, assorted junk.

RONNIE (V.O.)
 I've been twice handicap, Eastwood.
 Twice struck down by accidental
 disaster.

Trudel forages for aluminum in a sidewalk trash can.

RONNIE (V.O.)
 Twice scraping up street feed from
 the bottom of trash bins. Twice
 wheeling around begging for change.

Trudel dumpster dives.

RONNIE (V.O.)
 ...The first time it was a decease
 as a young adult. And when I
 finally got healed, I couldn't stop
 praising the LORD Almighty for my
 new legs.

Trudel double-checks a vending machine for coins.

Under the machine, too.

RONNIE (V.O.)
 Not three months later, I was
 paralyzed again from the waist
 down. The accident mangled my
 spine.

Trudel panhandles at an intersection.

RONNIE (V.O.)
 Do you know what I learned?

Trudel sits, slumped against a gas station wall.

RONNIE (V.O.)
 Praise the LORD Almighty! Those
 were the best three months of my
 life!

Trudel trods down a curb.

RONNIE (V.O.)
I still feed off those memories.
And today is always the brightest
day of my life.

END MONTAGE

EXT. GAS STATION STORE - NIGHT

Shaken and shaking, TREVOR COLE (late-twenties) from
"Sandpiper" readies a smoke near the store window.

Trudel seizes the opportunity and approaches.

Cole anticipates Trudel's begging.

COLE
Not right now, man. Not right now.

Trudel stares.

COLE (CONT'D)
I don't have anything. If you want
to bum a cig, here.

TRUDEL
I don't smoke.

COLE
Well, that's all I've got.

Trudel stares up at a red, neon MARLBORO sign through the
window pane behind Cole.

COLE (CONT'D)
What?

TRUDEL
Marlboro...

COLE
Yeah, these ain't those. Did you
want one?

TRUDEL
Marlborough...?

Cole gives up and walks away toward his car.

Trudel continues to stare at the sign.

EXT. HOMELESS ENCAMPMENT - MORNING

Trudel approaches the wheeled Ronnie and onlookers.

A bulldozer IDLES.

Another bulldozer SWEEPS the encampment of tents, clothes, blankets, etc. into one giant pile of garbage at the end of the street.

Vested Hands help collect debris.

RONNIE

Just in time for sweeps. How was the gettin today?

TRUDEL

Slim.

Trudel hands Ronnie a pear.

Ronnie takes an immediate bite.

RONNIE

You don't want it?

Pedestrians gawk by across the street.

Trudel walks toward a debris pile.

He begins to rummage through the pile.

RONNIE (V.O.)

Lemme see that. The bottle.

Trudel hands Ronnie a shampoo bottle.

RONNIE

Still half-full...
(reads label)

Trudel continues to rummage.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

There's more fruit in here than on a poor man's plate.

(takes another juicy bite)

Hadn't had a pear in years. Not since a hatchet was a hammer.

(wheels closer to Trudel)

Whatcha lookin for?

TRUDEL

I was reminded of something.

VESTED HAND

Hey, no thank you! You need to back up!

Trudel and Ronnie are corralled off to the side.

VESTED HAND (CONT'D)

Go ahead! Step back!

RONNIE

Are you looking for that old paperwork?

TRUDEL

Something like that.

Ronnie lifts up an old thin satchel from under his wheelchair cushion.

RONNIE

Thought you might wanna keep it, seein that you hug it to sleep every night.

Trudel opens the satchel.

Divorce papers.

Trudel tears the address off.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

What for?

TRUDEL

I think I'm in my right mind. Like I've woken up from death.

RONNIE

If the other side of your nightmare is this hell, I'd rather keep on sleepin.

TRUDEL

I gotta go.

RONNIE

You in a hurry?

TRUDEL

I wanna get here by tomorrow.

RONNIE

Better get to thumbing then. Before dark...

Arm in sling, the Store Owner exits the store, closes shop.
The store Owner throws a dirty look as he walks off.

RONNIE (CONT'D)
He, he. He's still pissed.

Trudel starts to leave.

RONNIE (CONT'D)
You headin off?

Trudel nods and walks off.

Ronnie opens his mouth, hesitates.

RONNIE (CONT'D)
...Keep your head up when you
walk!...
(sotto)
It's important.

EXT. STREETS - DAY

Trudel treads.

EXT. NEAR OFF RAMP - DAY

Trudel begs and holds up a sign.

The sign reads: RIDE

No takers.

Trudel looks up at the highway.

EXT. FREEWAY RIGHT SHOULDER - DAY

Trudel thumbs with the sign.

Cars ZOOM by.

Close.

HONK.

Trudel continues.

TWENTY MINUTES LATER

Lights on, a police cruiser pulls to the shoulder.

Trudel ditches his sign and bolts up the side of a hill of shrubs.

The POLICEMAN gets out of the cruiser and looks on.

Trudel climbs the steep incline, winded.

He looks down.

The Policeman radios and doesn't give chase.

Trudel hops a chain-link fence and enters a backyard.

He stumbles through the yard to a gate and let's himself out.

Trudel spills out from a driveway onto a street.

He begins to jog.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

Trudel cuts into the complex and collapses near a dumpster enclosure.

Trudel searches for the address slip.

It's missing.

He searches his persons again.

Nowhere.

He sprawls out backward and stares directly up into the noon sun.

Unblinkingly.

Tears weld and he begins to weep.

HOURS LATER

The THUD of the dumpster.

Un-startled, Trudel continues staring into the sun.

KIND VOICE

You ok, man?

Trudel sits up.

Composes himself.

KIND VOICE (CONT'D)

You ok?

Trudel eyes adjust to the blurred brightness of the KIND-FACED MAN (late-sixties) from "crashingMNT."

TRUDEL

I lost something very important to me.

Pause.

KIND-FACED MAN

What did you lose?

TRUDEL

I needed to get somewhere and I lost the address.

KIND-FACED MAN

Do you know what street it's on?

TRUDEL

It's on Marlborough Street.

KIND-FACED MAN

That's a long one, but I go there all the time. Drive the students. I can give you a ride, if you want.

TRUDEL

Can you?

KIND-FACED MAN

But I'm not going until tomorrow morning. If you wait outside, right over there, by six, I'll take you... do you have the time?

TRUDEL

No.

KIND-FACED MAN

...Well?

TRUDEL

Yes, please.

EXT. NEAR APARTMENT COMPLEX - EARLY MORNING

Trudel waits.

Trudel notices a light turn on at a window.

A silhouette appears at the window.

Pause.

LOUD HONK.

Trudel turns and approaches the front passenger seat of a well-kept plasmoid car.

KIND-FACED MAN
Backseat, friend.

Trudel switches doors and gets in.

INT. KIND-FACED MAN'S CAR (MOVING) - MORNING

KIND-FACED MAN
The campus is the best pickings.
With all the AI protestors, most
still want a human driving... So
you don't know exactly where this
place is on Marlborough?

Trudel is silent.

KIND-FACED MAN (CONT'D)
I can drop you off and you could
walk until you stumble on it I
guess. Have you been there before?

TRUDEL
A part of me has.

The Kind-faced Man sniffs the air, then cracks his window.

KIND-FACED MAN
Gotta love that morning chill.

EXT. MARLBOROUGH ST - MORNING

Trudel exits the car.

KIND-FACED MAN (O.S.)
Good luck.

MOMENTS LATER

Trudel wanders down Marlborough St's residential area.

LATER - DAY

Trudel comes to a commercial area.

LATER - EVENING

Trudel notices a sidewalk tree.

Flowers in bloom.

He stares.

Contemplates.

He walks down the steps to the entrance of his old apartment.

He checks the door-handle.

Locked.

He comes back up to the sidewalk and sits.

LATER

An UNASSUMING MAN (forties) approaches, spots Trudel sleeping for a quick moment, then heads to the front door.

He glances back up the steps, places three fingers on the print reader then enters.

EXT. OUTSIDE OLD APARTMENT - MORNING

The Unassuming Man exits the apartment, skips up the steps.

Trudel jostles to his feet.

TRUDEL

Excuse me.

UNASSUMING MAN

Yes?

TRUDEL

I, was—

UNASSUMING MAN

I'm sorry, I don't have anything.

The Unassuming Man shuffles off.

LATER - DAY

A RESERVED WOMAN (forties) exits the apartment.

Trudel hears the DOOR and shuffles up.

As she heads up the stairs, Trudel approaches.

TRUDEL

Ma'am?

RESERVED WOMAN

Oh, my!
(composes)
Yes, what?

She's on her guard and moves away.

TRUDEL

I used to live here. I was
wondering... If I could take a look
inside your house?

RESERVED WOMAN

(moves away)
No...

She retreats up the sidewalk, hurried.

LATER - EVENING

The Unassuming Man approaches.

TRUDEL

Sir, I used to live here.

UNASSUMING MAN

I know, I heard. Look, you can't
camp out here in front of our
place.

TRUDEL

I used to live here.

UNASSUMING MAN

No, I mean it. If you're still here by the time my wife gets back I'm gonna call the cops.

TRUDEL

Can you—

UNASSUMING MAN

You think I'm kidding?

TRUDEL

Sir, I used to live here...

The Unassuming Man huffs to the entrance door.

TRUDEL (CONT'D)

I used to live here!

UNASSUMING MAN

I don't care where you used to live!

(turns)

If you're anywhere near this apartment by the time my wife gets back, I promise you, I'm calling the cops.

The Unassuming Man enters the apartment and SHUTS the door.
LOCKS.

LATER - NIGHT

The Unassuming Man exits the apartment, walks up the steps.

Trudel lies near and above the step, motionless.

The Unassuming Man meets the Reserved Woman at her car.

The Unassuming Man cautiously escorts his wife into the apartment.

INT. TRUDEL'S OLD APARTMENT - NIGHT

In front of a flatscreen broadcast.

Dinner trays.

RESERVED WOMAN

Maybe he's dead.

UNASSUMING MAN

Doubt it.

RESERVED WOMAN

The homeless drop dead all the time. Out of the blue. You'd be surprised.

UNASSUMING MAN

Should I call the cops?

RESERVED WOMAN

Yes, please.

UNASSUMING MAN

Right now?

RESERVED WOMAN

Yes, Gerald.

Gerald picks up his phone.

Hesitates.

GERALD

How about if tomorrow... if he's still there tomorrow morning then we call the cops?

RESERVED WOMAN

I don't know if I'll be able to sleep. I mean this is disturbing.

GERALD

I'll take a peek outside tomorrow and if he's there, we'll call the cops.

The Reserved Woman sighs.

INT. APARTMENT'S ENTRANCE WINDOW - MORNING

Gerald peeks at the mass that is Trudel's body, up the steps.

INT. TRUDEL'S OLD KITCHEN - MORNING

Gerald enters.

The Reserved Woman scrambles eggs.

RESERVED WOMAN

Let me guess.

GERALD
Still there.

RESERVED WOMAN
Is he awake?

GERALD
Doesn't look like it.

Gerald gets out his phone.

RESERVED WOMAN
I was thinking... Remember when we redecorated the guest room and stripped the wallpaper? There was that message about not knowing the cost of the wallpaper, remember that?

GERALD
What's your point, Cathy?

CATHY
If he can tell you what was written on the wall, then I guess he's probably telling the truth, right?

GERALD
Even if he's telling the truth, it doesn't automatically make him less dangerous. Use your brain.

CATHY
I'm just saying. Ask him before you call.

GERALD
You think?

CATHY
Before you call.

GERALD
I'll go ask.

EXT. TRUDEL'S OLD APARTMENT - MORNING

Gerald stands over Trudel's body.

GERALD
Hey.

Nothing.

GERALD (CONT'D)

Hey!

Gerald taps his foot against Trudel's feet.

GERALD (CONT'D)

HEY!

Again.

Forceful.

GERALD (CONT'D)

Wake up!

Trudel stirs and sits up.

Slow.

GERALD (CONT'D)

You ok?

Trudel stumbles up, gathers his bearings.

GERALD (CONT'D)

You ok?

Trudel nods.

TRUDEL

I used to live here...

GERALD

I know, I know.

TRUDEL

I need to remember.

GERALD

We're not giving any tours, buddy.

TRUDEL

You don't understand... I need to remember... What it is... I just want to...

(shakes head)

Help my memory. It would help...

GERALD

What was the message written on the wall in the spare room?

TRUDEL

What wall?

GERALD

The last owner wrote a message
under the wallpaper in the guest
room, what was it?

TRUDEL

I don't know. I don't remember.

Gerald considers, looks back at the apartment.

GERALD

If I show you around, do you
promise to leave?

TRUDEL

Yes, thank you.

GERALD

Ten minute tops.

TRUDEL

(nods)
I'll do that.

GERALD

(inhales)
C'mon.

INT. FOYER - MORNING

Gerald and Trudel enter.

CATHY

What are you doing?

GERALD

He got it right.

CATHY

Still, I...

GERALD

(leans in)
Relax, just be ready with your
phone.
(to Trudel)
C'mon, I guess I'll give you the
grand tour.

LIVING ROOM

GERALD

So what did you use to do?

TRUDEL

I worked for the government. As a physicist.

GERALD

That'll explain how you could've afforded a place like this.

(smiles)

What was your field exactly?

TRUDEL

Classified.

GERALD

I see.

LATER - KITCHEN

GERALD

Just a normal kitchen. Anything jogging your memory?

TRUDEL

No.

GERALD

Are you sure you've got the right house?

TRUDEL

I think this is it.

Cathy peeks from the hallway around the corner.

Her phone is out and ready.

GERALD

Was this your childhood home or...

TRUDEL

No.

GERALD

Where were you born?

TRUDEL

Jehoshaphat MDRS 9.

GERALD
Never heard of it. Is that outta
state?

TRUDEL
Jehoshaphat Mars Desert Research
Station Nine. Station Nine.

GERLAD
(sotto, wide-eyed)
I see.

Cathy approaches, tugs on Gerald's sleeve.

CATHY
C'mon.

GERALD
No, it's ok... How old are you?

TRUDEL
I don't know.

GERALD
What year were you born?

TRUDEL
3030.

GERALD
On Mars space station number nine?

TRUDEL
JMIRS nine. Yes.

LATER - GUEST BEDROOM

They enter.

GERALD
So how did you get from the future
to here in the present?

CATHY
Gerald.

TRUDEL
I was downloaded into a clone
conduit.

GERALD
That makes sense.
(chuckles)
(MORE)

GERALD (CONT'D)

Alright, time's up!... Are you hungry?

CATHY

Gerald...

TRUDEL

Yes, very.

GERALD

Maybe we can feed you a little something?

(low, to Cathy)

He's harmless. He's just a little nutty.

Cathy raises her eyebrows and gives a sad nod.

GERALD (CONT'D)

Then we eat!

LATER - KITCHEN

Trudel eats his breakfast.

GERALD

So how is the future different from what we have today?

TRUDEL

In the future, humanity works for a select few.

GERALD

Sounds like the future is now. Ha!

TRUDEL

In a way it is.

GERALD

You know, I have a friend, he hosts a podcast that dabbles in the realm of... science, science fiction. Might be good for the both of you to talk, huh?

Trudel remains silent.

Gerald rises and exits.

TRUDEL

What did you put in them?

CATHY
What?... The eggs?

TRUDEL
Yes.

CATHY
(beat)
Nothing.

TRUDEL
Are they substitute?

CATHY
Oh, you mean the milk. You tasted
the milk. Gives it a little
fluffiness.

TRUDEL
There're delicious. Thank you.

CATHY
Oh, don't mention it.

MOMENTS LATER

Gerald renters.

GERALD
Ok, well, I just spoke to my friend
and he'd love to interview you a
real time traveler and whatnot.
Said it'd be great for the show.

Trudel nods.

INT. TRUDEL'S OLD BATHROOM - DAY

Gerald enters and sets down a towel and clothes on top the
toilet tank lid.

Then places scissors, a plastic bag, and clippers near the
sink.

GERALD
Just collect the hair in there.

Trudel stares into the mirror.

GERALD (CONT'D)
You haven't forgotten how to shave?

Trudel is unresponsive.

GERALD (CONT'D)

Trim it down with the scissors then
get the rest with the clippers and
finish it with a shave.

Trudel looks downcast.

GERALD (CONT'D)

Or you can just trim it up. You
don't gotta go completely bare.
Then jump in the shower.

Trudel picks up the scissors.

Examines it.

GERALD (CONT'D)

Or maybe you'd want to go to a
barber?

TRUDEL

No. I can do it.

Gerald exits.

Door SHUTS.

Trudel begins to clip.

INT. TRUDEL'S OLD GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

Mop reduced and clean-shaven, Trudel lays in bed, blinking at
the spinning ceiling fan.

Trudel has not aged a day, still in his mid-twenties.

EXT. DESERT ROCK GARDEN - DAY

TED BROGDAN (mid-fiftes) leads Trudel, dressed in Gerald's
clothes, and Gerald through his backyard.

Ted is physically identical and indistinguishable from the
character Dr. Brogdan, only thirty years older.

They get to a wooden garden bridge.

Ted and Gerald carry to the side opposite sides of the
bridge, revealing a hatch.

Ted lifts open the six hundred pound hydraulic hatch.

Gerald heads down the ladder first.

INT. NUCLEAR BUNKER - DAY

Gerald steps off and opens the blast door.

He enters the ten-by-forty four bunk underground fallout shelter.

Trudel and Ted follow.

The Men walk through the living quarters toward a simple door.

RECORDING STUDIO

The Men enter.

TED
Have a seat, Mr. Kent.

Trudel sits at a the end of an L-shaped desk.

TED (CONT'D)
Give us one moment.

Ted and Gerald exit.

INT. BUNKER LIVING QUARTERS - DAY

TED
When are you picking him up?

GERALD
You wanted a character. He's yours now.

TED
Can't just throw him out, can I?

GERALD
You'll think of something.
(heads toward blast door)
Have him live here! Text me how it goes.
(exits)

INT. BUNKER RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

Ted reenters.

He goes to his desktop and clicks around.

TED

Glad you're doin this. On such short notice...

(sits)

Little about me, I'm a clinical psychologist by trade. A *cynical* psychologist by night.

(chuckles)

A sheepish smile from Trudel.

TED (CONT'D)

Anyways, I run workshops and manage research studies at the university. Nothing too major. Started this podcast for kicks... We cover a bunch of topics but always steered toward science, sci-fi stuff 'cause you gotta follow trends, views... analytics and whatnot.

Trudel is silent.

TED (CONT'D)

So yeah, nothing too much to tell.

TRUDEL

Are your recording?

TED

Yes, we're already recording. But don't worry. I have someone edit the junk out in post, so... I know Gerry cautioned you about it, but if you could, once we get things flowing, if you could not mention the fact that you're currently homeless, that would be great... You know, I just. I don't want to have it appear like I'm exploiting anyone. You understand?

TRUDEL

I understand.

TED

Great, great, great.

(clears throat)

(beat)

I have with me today Kent Trudel. At least that's what he's going by.

(MORE)

TED (CONT'D)

I say that because Mr. Trudel, Professor Trudel has been on a journey to say the least. He claims to be a government scientist time traveller. Hello, from the underground, from inside my very own backyard nuclear bunker, this is episode 49 of Sweet Science, Mad Science, and I'm your host Ted Brogdan...

A MUSIC JINGLE.

TED (CONT'D)

So, Mr. Trudel, where should we begin?

TRUDEL

Who's beginning?

TED

Your beginning. The beginning to the shocking claims you've made to my friend who connected me with you.

TRUDEL

There are a lot of beginnings.

TED

You know what I mean. How did you first land your job with the government? I'm guessing that's the best place to start.

INT. JEANIZA'S CAR - DAY

Car MUSIC.

JEANIZA (forties) drives.

Jeaniza Bernice is physically identical and indistinguishable from the character Dr. Bernice, only twenty years older.

TED (V.O.) (PRE-LAP)

...So that was the first inkling that the project was more than what it first appeared to be?

TRUDEL (V.O.) (PRE-LAP)
 The binders were filled with quasi-
 science jargon on interstellar
 travel, mixed with diagrams of
 frequency technologies... They
 didn't explain much...

INT. BUNKER RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

CREAKING of the blast door.

The Men are SILENT.

The studio door OPENS, abrupt.

Jeaniza enters.

TED
 A tad late there.

Jeaniza goes to sit.

TRUDEL
 You didn't say there'd be someone
 else.

TED
 She's my cohost, remember? My
 timely, punctual, never a minute
 late cohost.

JEANIZA
 Little Abby refused to wear
 anything with blue. I didn't
 realize how much of her clothes has
 bits of blue in them.

TED
 Jeaniza's just gonna sit in and add
color. So you can pretty much
 ignore her.
 (smiles)

JEANIZA
 Funny, not funny.

Trudel processes.

TED
 Is that a problem for you?

TRUDEL
 I...

TED

'Cause we can take a break.

TRUDEL

It's fine.

TED

Jeaniza, you missed a lot...

JEANIZA

Maybe I'll just listen in and pick up things as you guys go.

TED

(readjusts)

So let's shift gears a little and talk about the red planet.

TRUDEL

What else do you want to know?

TED

The science of it is very convincing but I wanted you to, I don't know, elaborate more on the architecture of the facilities there for example.

Ted spins a three-pronged fidget spinner out of the blue.

TRUDEL

What's that?

TED

I spin this thing during long sessions. When the mood strikes me.

JEANIZA

I always tell him its about the rudest thing a host can do.

TED

It's not distracting you, is it?

JEANIZA

An in-consummate professional.

TED

Better than a... *one-dimensional incompetent.*

JEANIZA

Zing. You did there, what I saw.

TED
Anyways. Where were we? Mr. Kent?

Trudel is spaced out.

FLASHBACK TO MOMENTS BEFORE

The fidget spinner spins.

TED (V.O.)
Kent? Are you ok?

INT. TRIANGULAR PRISM OBJECT - DAY

Trudel, Brogdan, and Dr. Bernice in helmeted astronomical suits sit, backs facing each other, in the corners of the object.

A kaleidoscope of colorful light streams in and distorts vision.

Trudel face is openmouthed, a silent scream.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

Trudel springs up from his chair, panicked.

TED
You need something?

Trudel jolts for the door and exits.

BUNKER LIVING QUARTERS

Trudel rushes to the blast door and OPENS it.

TED (O.S.)
Mr. Trudel!

EXT. DESERT ROCK GARDEN - DAY

The hatch opens.

Trudel gropes out and dogs to the side gate.

EXT. TED'S DRIVE - DAY

Trudel spills out onto the street.

Ted and Jeaniza follow, then watch on.

TED
Should I go after him?

JEANIZA
Probably not the smartest thing
you've done.

TED
He seemed fine.

Jeaniza scoffs.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Trudel's jog comes to a walk.

AN HOUR LATER

Trudel walks.

A bus stops, picks up passengers and moves on.

Trudel crosses the street.

LATER

Trudel passes a cafe near a crosswalk then crosses.

LATER

Trudel walks a street, outside the university campus.

EXT. UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE GATE - DAY

Students crowd to enter.

Campus Security checks IDs.

Trudel slips unchecked.

EXT. UNI QUAD - DAY

Trudel hurries through the grassy quad.

A LANKY MAN (forties) hands Trudel a small book.

Trudel looks down at a New Testament Gideon Bible.

Trudel pockets it and keeps moving.

The Department of Physics and Astronomy in the distance.

INT. DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICS AND ASTRONOMY - DAY

Trudel meanders down a hall.

A Man passes, notices.

GRASMERE
Professor Trudel?

Trudel snaps out of it.

He turns to Grasmere.

Grasmere is now OLDER GRASMERE (mid-fifties).

OLDER GRASMERE
I don't believe it.

INT. OLDER GRASMERE'S PLASMOID SPORTS-CAR (MOVING) - DAY

OLDER GRASMERE
I still can't believe my eyes.

Trudel is silent.

OLDER GRASMERE (CONT'D)
I gotta say though, you're probably
the most groomed homeless guy I've
seen.

TRUDEL
Clothes aren't mine.

OLDER GRASMERE
Who's are they?

INT. OLDER GRASMERE'S KITCHEN - DAY

Sandi, now OLDER SANDI (early forties), sets the table.

OLDER SANDI
I don't want him here I said!

OLDER GRASMERE
Calm down, he can hear you.

LIVING ROOM

Seated, Trudel listens and waits.

OLDER SANDI (O.S.)
I don't care if he can hear me,
Tom! I don't want him staying!

KITCHEN

OLDER GRASMERE
He's not all there. I've gotta help
him. We owe him that much.

Sandi sighs, composes herself.

OLDER SANDI
I don't care. He shouldn't be our
problem.

OLDER GRASMERE
I'm gonna help the man out.

OLDER SANDI
I didn't say don't. But we've got
kids, Tom.

OLDER GRASMERE
(nods)
That's fine.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

OLDER GRASMERE
Do you have anything? Maybe, I
don't know of.

TRUDEL
I had a satchel with... important
docs.

OLDER GRASMERE
Where's that at?

TRUDEL
I lost it.

OLDER GRASMERE
(beat)
That's fine.

MONTAGE - TRUDEL WAITING ALL NIGHT AND MORNING

LATER

Trudel lies in bed, unblinking.

He turns on the hologram projection broadcast.

BATHROOM MIRROR

Trudel contemplates his features, notices a small scab on his face.

He pokes, then scratches at it.

NEAR WINDOW

Trudel returns to the window and looks out.

He returns to bed.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. OLDER GRASMERE'S PLASMOID SPORTS-CAR (MOVING) - DAY

OLDER GRASMERE

I went to the registrar's office.... They don't have any record of you teaching, which is weird. So we're gonna try the Social Security Office.

INT. SOCIAL SECURITY OFFICE - DAY

CLERK

Like I said we'd need a birth certificate or some sort of proof of I.D. before we can issue anything. Fingerprints aren't coming back with a read either.

OLDER GRASMERE

I told you, he's lost all of his things... There isn't anything?

CLERK

As far as the system is concerned, he's a ghost. I can dig a little more, but... with no more info...

INT. OUTSIDE DINER - NIGHT

Voicemail BEEP.

OLDER GRASMERE

(into phone)

Hello Anne, this is an old colleague of your ex husband Kent Trudel. I'm calling because, well, I just really need to speak with you. If you can call me back at this number, 903-723-884—

INT. DINER - NIGHT

Older Grasmere goes and sits across from an eating Trudel.

OLDER GRASMERE

I gave your ex wife a call.

TRUDEL

Anne?

OLDER GRASMERE

She clued me in to where you've been for the last three decades...

TRUDEL

I told you where I've been.

OLDER GRASMERE

Trudel, she said... She said you've been hospitalized. Biers Clinic, Country Terrace Clinic, McCollins... You've been all over the place. Does any of that ring a bell?

TRUDEL

That's not quite the truth.

OLDER GRASMERE

After the divorce, you lost your mind. I'm putting it plainly...

Trudel is silent.

OLDER GRASMERE (CONT'D)

Still doesn't explain why you haven't aged a day. Or why there aren't any records of you.

Trudel eats.

INT. TECH REPAIR SHOP - DAY

Older Grasmere vouches for Trudel to the Shop Owner.

OLDER GRASMERE (V.O.)
Sometimes the mind creates things
to cope with certain realities.

The Shop Owner considers.

Trudel waits.

OLDER GRASMERE (CONT'D)
But maybe that's not what's
important. What's important is that
you realize you need help.

Older Grasmere and Shop Owner walk toward the exit then shake hands.

TRUDEL (V.O.)
But it all happened.

OLDER GRASMERE (V.O.)
I think it's not what happened that
matters. It's how you process what
happened...

MONTAGE OF TRUDEL'S DAILY LIFE

INT. GYM - EARLY MORNING

Trudel rows.

OLDER GRASMERE (V.O.)
It's only when we are honest with
ourselves and realize we have a
problem, that we can... approach a
solution. You should know that
Trudel.

INT. TECH REPAIR SHOP - MORNING

Behind the counter, Trudel, at work, chats with a Customer.

TRUDEL (V.O.)
I've been humbled...

OLDER GRASMERE (V.O.)
I think you're back, Kent.

TRUDEL (V.O.)
That's my hope.

INT. TRUDEL'S STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT

Trudel sinks deep in his chair, the CLICKS of keystrokes on his laptop.

Trudel fiddles with his earpiece.

CLOSE - Trudel's Earpiece

TED (V.O.)
Hello, from the underground, from inside my very own backyard nuclear bunker, this is Sweet Science, Mad Science and I'm your host Ted Brogdan. With me is my coolest cohost Jeaniza Bern-"ice."

Several towers of books sit on his desk.

Outside his window, the streets BUZZ like cities do.

TED (V.O.)
This is episode 495. And we're talking evolution. But not your grandma's Darwinian evolution. No, our human evolution with existent and emerging AI technologies.

INT. GYM - EARLY MORNING

Ear-plugged, Trudel climbs a stair-master.

TED (V.O.)
"The lowly worm climbs up the winding stair." Recent headlines have highlighted our dependence and symbiotic relationship with AI. With us is our special guest regular Kent Trudel.

LATER

Trudel walks on an incline treadmill.

TED (V.O.)
You may have remembered Kent when we were first developing our podcast.

(MORE)

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

He was the government scientist who claimed he had traveled from the distant future.

INT. TRUDEL STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT

Trudel types.

Copies of blue jacket "Project Human North" sit stacked on the floor.

TED (V.O.)

Well, he's back, because much to our delight, some three years later, he's written a best-selling novel entitled Project Human North. About his extensive journeys into other worlds. The book is a work of fiction, am I right to call it that, Mr. Trudel?

END OF MONTAGE

INT. BUNKER STUDIO - DAY

Trudel, Ted, and Jeaniza sit at the L-table.

Trudel COUGHS.

Then MORE.

TED

Why fiction, if you insist your claims are true? And I want to remind viewers Mr. Trudel has some compelling evidence, much of which we might touch on again.

TRUDEL

The decision was the publisher's really.

TED

So much of your new book has to do with humanity's integration with AI technologies and even entities, their threat and their very real antagonisms. Where do you want to start?

TRUDEL

I think the distinction between evolutionary biology and humanity's confluence with AI needs to be made clear.

(COUGHS)

TED

In what way?

TRUDEL

Intention. It's clear now in our modern time that AI has conglomerated into several distinct personalities. The protests and increasing distrust of public sentiment is indicative of what's actually going under the surface.

Trudel COUGHS.

Keeps COUGHING.

JEANIZA

Let me get you some more water.

TRUDEL

Yes, thank you. Humanity has built this golem, this Talos if you will.

COUGHS.

Jeaniza delivers mineral water.

Trudel sips.

TRUDEL (CONT'D)

We have built this intricate, seemingly cure-all of a singular AI infrastructure, in our own image, mind you. The brass humanoid Talos of Greek mythos measuring some thirty meters high.

(clears throat)

However, the very thing meant to serve, even protect, our island of an earth... has begun to show signs of life. And not the signs of life we could have predicted.

TED

Besides recently documented economic manipulations, what signs of life is AI showing?

TRUDEL

Replicating and subjugating. We are so use to subjugating as a species, that we've failed to even realize that we are being conditioned from infancy to be enslaved, imprisoned, and dominated.

TED

And the parties responsible are hidden AI entities or actual men? Albeit men in power?

TRUDEL

Yes, exactly. Both. They are the cybernetic fusion of both.

Trudel COUGHS into a handkerchief.

He dazes at the splotch of blood, an abstract spray against white.

He pockets the cloth.

TRUDEL (CONT'D)

And that's just one of many conclusions my novel hammers home.

INT. TRIANGULAR PRISM OBJECT - DAY

Facing each other inside the object, Trudel, Brogdan, and Dr. Bernice sit, wearing everyday plain studio clothes.

Brilliant colored light streams around the dark space.

Holograms of Family Members bringing Trudel a candled birthday cake, while SINGING Happy Birthday.

Trudel face is at a peaceful rest.

INT. TRUDEL'S BATHROOM - MORNING

Trudel stares at the half-fogged, half-lathered face in the mirror.

He traces one of several scabs on his face.

He peels odd, irregular lengths of skin, fine, elastic strips of a filmy consistency.

Trudel COUGHS DEEP.

PHYSICIAN (PRE-LAP)
It is a genetic anomaly.

INT. PRE-PALLIATIVE CARE - DAY

Trudel is robed on butcher paper.

PHYSICIAN
A disease as of yet, not previously
unidentified or discovered. The
disease galvanizes cell regrowth at
an unprecedented rate. However,
your DNA is unable to repair itself
accurately.

Trudel nods.

PHYSICIAN (CONT'D)
I don't want to sound any more
morbid than I already do, but... at
this rate... you may only have a
few months to live.

RUSTLING of butcher paper, as Trudel readjusts.

SILENCE.

EXT. TED'S BACKYARD - EVENING

Sweet Science, Mad Science's 500th Episode Event Party.

Tables are set.

People stand, eat, drink, mingle.

Ted entertains a group.

LAUGHTER.

TED
So Jeaniza had the idea to send
video invitations and have them set
to release one hundred years in the
future!

HIP LADY
So if any time travelers show up,
we have Jeaniza to thank?

NORMIE GUY
Kent doesn't count though, right?

CHUCKLES.

TED
I'm sure he'll argue with you on
that!

CHUCKLES.

TED (CONT'D)
No, when Kent shows up. It's
actually ninety nine point nine
nine percent proof, when you think
about it.
(chuckles)

NORMIE GUY
What, the lack of a birth
certificate didn't convince you?

LAUGHS.

TED
No, you didn't know? Kent was
actually born yesterday!

LAUGHTER ERUPTS.

TED (CONT'D)
Hey, Jeaniza!

Jeaniza is at the hors d'oeuvres.

TED (CONT'D)
Where is Kent, huh?

JEANIZA
I've left him messages.
(shrugs)
He's not picking up.

NORMIE GUY
(beat)
Traffic on the Super Ladder!

LAUGHTER ERUPTS.

INT. TRUDEL'S PLASMOID CAR (MOVING) - SUNSET

Trudel sits, the car on autopilot through a desert highway.

His face is long, weathered.

Sunlight begins to fail, orange and blue mixed.

Trudel looks into the rearview... then back through front window at the horizon.

He notices the New Testament Bible on the passenger seat.

SILENT moment.

Trudel's hand goes for the book.

He opens it.

A light flashes, like the ignition of a lecture room projection.

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END