

Solar Episode 5: The Anniversary Party.

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-TITLES-

MAIN TITLE MUSIC

ELECTRONIC "ERROR" BLIP.

ALI:

(ELECTRONIC) Aethon Operating System Timer Failure has resulted in terminal error. Audio packets are unable to be compiled chronologically. Please reset A.O.S. internal clock. Manual Whiskey Foxtrot One fifty six Delta two.

ELECTRONIC "INTERNAL" BLIP.

Emergency audio packet 22 dash Echo 2045.

ELECTRONIC "END TRANSMISSION BLIP.

NARRATOR:

CurtCo Media presents...

SOLAR.

MAIN TITLE MUSIC ENDS

Episode 5: The Anniversary Party

FADE:

SCENE 1.

ALI: Pre Solar Event. Mission day: three hundred and fifty three.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

WE HEAR SOME SOUNDS OF A DIGITAL CALCULATION. WE
ARE ON THE BRIDGE.

ALEX: Ali?

ALI: Yes, Commander Alex Tawley?

ALEX: Can we restart the calculation? This seems wrong.

ALI: What do you mean?

ALEX: Just--restart the calculations. This time include the initial Earth-Orbit test of the CimmTech Payload functionality.

KNOCK ON A METAL DOORFRAME.

Wren?

MARGARET: (CORRECTION) Chief Scientist Cohen, Commander.

ALEX: (NOT THRILLED, CURIOUS WHAT SHE HEARD) Oh--good morning, Margaret. How are you?

MARGARET: I wanted to make a suggestion.

ALEX: I'm fine, thank you for asking.

MARGARET: I'd rather forego formalities and get to the point at hand.

ALEX: Okay, then. The payload one launch was a complete disaster, yesterday.

MARGARET: The more satellites we deploy, the more stable the system will become.

ALEX: Or is the CimmTech experiment *causing*--

MARGARET: The CimmTech experiment was ultimately successful. Any problems were either a coincidence or have already been resolved.

ALEX: (A BEAT) I'm tired of fighting you, Margaret. Please get to whatever you wanted to talk about this morning.

MARGARET: ...I think we should have an anniversary celebration.

ALEX: (DISBELIEF) ...An *anniversary party*?

MARGARET: In twelve days. On day three six five.

ALEX: We agreed on the holidays before launch.

MARGARET: I'll give up Yom Kippur. I'd be the only one observing it, anyway.

ALEX: For a *party*?

MARGARET: We can use some of the long-term food storage for snacks. Ali knows a lot of music. We can use Capsule 5. It's larger than mess and there aren't any tables. But we'll need to move some boxes to sit on, I suppose--

ALEX: I'm sorry--this is kind of coming out of left field for me--

MARGARET: Commander--yesterday we had our first 'hiccup.'

ALEX: We've been having 'hiccups' a long time. False readings, glitchy dish positioning on the network arm--

MARGARET: Whatever happened yesterday was a non-event.

ALEX: We keep feeling shudders.

MARGARET: We can't definitively say the shudders are tied to the CimmTech satellites.

ALEX: Can you promise me it won't happen it again?

MARGARET: No. But I promise you we *will* be able to fully deploy CimmTech's experiment without endangering the mission *and* without delaying our timeline. (A BEAT) You have my word.

ALEX: Why an anniversary party?

MARGARET: So the crew won't fight like we do.

FOOTSTEPS APPROACH; ANOTHER KNOCK ON THE METALLIC FRAME.

WREN: Alex?--Oh, Chief Scientist Cohen. Good morning.

MARGARET: ...Good morning, Specialist Guerrero.

WREN: (A COVER) You...you wanted to speak with me, Commander?

ALEX: I did...Cohen, may I have a few hours to think it over?

MARGARET: Of course, Commander. I'm sorry I intruded--I didn't know that you were *expecting* anyone--I can always come back later if you--

ALEX: You're going to come back later, Margaret. You always do.

MARGARET: ...Thank you, Commander. (A GOODBYE:) Guerrero.

FOOTSTEPS AWAY.

ALEX: ...Ali?

ALI: Yes, Commander Alex Tawley?

ALEX: Please close the bridge door.

THE BRIDGE DOOR SLIDES SHUT.

WREN: I hope that was okay...I figured it would sound more urgent if I said you had asked for me.

ALEX: It was fine. Thank you.

WREN: What did she want?

ALEX: (AMUSED) She...wants to throw an anniversary party.

WREN: (CONCERNED) What?

ALEX: That's what I said.

WREN: Why?

ALEX: That's also what I said.

WREN: If she's asking for it, there must be an ulterior motive.

ALEX: I don't think so. I think she is genuinely concerned about the longevity of this mission and just wants to do what she can to hold it together. I think the vote scared her yesterday.

WREN: ...I wanted to talk to you about that.

ALEX: About the vote?

WREN: I wanted to apologize.

ALEX: I thought it played great.

WREN: ...I'm sorry, what?

ALEX: I had made up my mind before the vote.

WREN: Then why ask for one?

ALEX: I needed to know where people stood.

WREN: I voted with Margaret, but I stand with you, Commander.

ALEX: Is the air stale in here to you?

WREN: No.

ALEX: Ali, please turn up the fan on the air cooling system on the bridge.

ALI: Yes, Commander Alex Tawley.

ALEX: I hate being cooped up in here with all *that* out there.

WREN: You mean the crew?

ALEX: No, the out there out there...What did the Big Bang give us more than anything else?

WREN: Energy.

ALEX: *Space*. Can you imagine *all* of this on top of itself? Light needs space to shine...energy needs space to expand...(A BEAT)...That's what I think Antarctica must be like. Space and time enough to really think, you know?

WREN: It is. And it isn't. There's safety in being alone in a room...but the out there out there...the nothingness can remind you how insignificant you are.

A BEAT. ALEX'S ACCENT SLIPS OUT HERE AND THERE.

ALEX: Wren, I need to know when our mission has gotten out of hand. And you told me yesterday, in the vote, that we could continue, is that correct?

WREN: I believe so, yes.

ALEX: ...I don't care *who* you side with. I just want to know the truth. As much as I can. And if I can't know the answers, I at least want to know what *you* think.

WREN: (A BEAT) You have an accent when you care.

ALEX: Ah, shit. Really?

DIGITAL BLIP.

ALI: Now displaying CimmTech Processor and Power Usage since day fifty one.

ALEX: Ali--please hide display!

DIGITAL BLIP.

A BEAT.

How much of that did you see?

WREN: I didn't see anything.

A BEAT.

WREN: ...A party might not be a terrible idea. People needed parties in Antarctica. Anything to pass the time and make everyone--...

ALEX: Feel less 'insignificant.'

WREN: Yeah.

ALEX: ...Ali, Open the door.

ALI: Yes, Commander Alex Tawley.

DOOR OPENS.

WREN: Have the party. I might show up.

FOOTSTEPS WALKING AWAY.

ALEX: ...Ali, please close the door.

DOOR SLIDES SHUT.

Display the results again.

DIGITAL BLIP.

Are these calculations taking into account the earth-synchronous orbit required of the reactor?

ALI: Yes, Commander Alex (GLITCH) T-t-t-tawley.

ALEX: You just glitched again.

ALI: I did not detect a glitch.

A BEAT.

ALEX: Can you please bring up Wren's collected data along with what Jamal has been showing her?

DIGITAL ERROR SOUND.

ALI: You have selected to view confidential information for Doctor Wren Guerrero. Please enter four digit security code.

WE HEAR FOUR ENTRIES ON A KEYPAD.

ELECTRONIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.

Now displaying confidential information for Doctor Wren Guerrero.

ALEX: Thank you, Ali.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

END RECORDING.

END SCENE.

SCENE 2.

ALI: Pre Solar Event. Mission day: three hundred and fifty seven.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

WE ARE IN CAPSULE 8--JAMAL IS TYPING AND MUMBLING
NUMBERS TO HIMSELF.

SOME UNHURRIED FOOTSTEPS APPROACH--AND WAIT BY
THE DOOR. THEN A KNOCK.

TAAJ: Jamal? Can I talk to you for a second?

JAMAL: (ANNOYED SIGH) Ali--please stop the render recalculation.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

TAAJ: What are you working on?

JAMAL: What do you think?

TAAJ: Payload one and how Ali said the reactor shut down.

JAMAL: I'm working on making sure CimmTech doesn't kill all of us.

TAAJ: I am, too. We're not on different sides, Jamal.

A BEAT.

TAAJ: (CHANGE OF TACTIC) Whose idea was it to get tattoos?

JAMAL: We never got the tattoos.

TAAJ: But whose idea was it?

JAMAL: Yours.

TAAJ: Can you imagine if we *had* gotten them? For a stupid mock rover rescue mission? How weird would it make things now? (SHE CHUCKLES TO HERSELF)

JAMAL: The only reason we had the lowest time is because the other groups were handicapped.

TAAJ: No--correcting the handicap was part of the trial.

JAMAL: It wasn't supposed to be. The number of GPS locational pings were too low to navigate the terrain on purpose. The only reason I knew *that is* because Eli wouldn't shut about the lag time so--

TAAJ: (ODD TONE--A REALIZATION TO HERSELF) The pings...

JAMAL: (UNSURE)...but the *point* wasn't the fastest time--the point was successfully completing the mission. We just had the best time because we went last and got competitive while we were waiting--

TAAJ: (UNRELATED) Ali?

ALI: Yes, Specialist Taaj Azi?

TAAJ: When I return to my bunk, please share a reminder--the word 'pings.'

ALI: Yes, Specialist Taaj Azi.

A BEAT.

TAAJ: ...Go on.

JAMAL: (ANNOYED) *You* were the one that came in to talk about something.

TAAJ: I was. I got distracted.

JAMAL: I think you were just chumming the waters.

TAAJ: And what am I fishing for?

JAMAL: My help?

TAAJ: ...You still know me pretty well. (CUTTING TO THE CHASE) ...I need to know what information you're giving Wren every day.

JAMAL: I'm allowed to grant authorization--

TAAJ: (STERN, NOT HARSH) I don't have a problem with you helping Wren. All I'm asking for is the *same* information. (A BEAT) You ever learn about the double-slit experiment? Thomas Young. 1801.

JAMAL: I think so. Is light a particle or a wave?

TAAJ: Right. Along comes this double slit experiment. You take a single source of light, you shine it through two parallel vertical slits...any sane person would say 'You get two slits on the other side.' Like a shadow.

JAMAL: But no.

TAAJ: But--*no*. You get a series of slits, brightest in the center, drifting off towards darkness on either side. And why?

JAMAL: Because light is a particle moving as a wave.

TAAJ: The light coming from each slit was creating concentric expanding ripples moving towards the projection surface.

JAMAL: Like two small stones dropped in a pond.

TAAJ: Correct. When the ripples met--they changed the other pattern. Some parts, where the wave amplitude was the same, we'd get stronger slits of light. But when the amplitudes were at opposites, they'd cancel each other out. So no slit of light. But what happens when you send photons individually through the double slit experiment?

JAMAL: The same thing.

TAAJ: *The same exact thing*. (A BEAT) A light particle, on its own, will still be affected by the waves of other photons--even if they weren't present.

JAMAL: What does this have to do with me?

TAAJ: Wren and I--we're each slits in this experiment. And I think our waves are canceling each other out.

JAMAL: And you think that's what happened on Payload 1?

TAAJ: I think it contributed. If I knew what she was basing her measurements on, I can work around it.

JAMAL: You voted to go home.

TAAJ: I did.

JAMAL: So why are you defending CimmTech now?

TAAJ: I'm trying to fix the problem. And I think I know how. I'm almost there. I just need your help.

A MOMENT. TAAJ SIGHS CONSIDERING HER OPTIONS.
THEN SHE DECIDES.

TAAJ: ...Wanna see something cool? Ali, please open folder Waymaker612 point 11 files AA and AX.

ALI: Pilot Jamal Davis does not have authorization to view those video files.

TAAJ: Close the doors to Capsule 8, Ali

DOORS CLOSE.

JAMAL: Wait a sec--

TAAJ: I give authorization to Pilot Jamal Davis to view Waymaker612.11, files AA and AX. Display them side by side, please, but I want to play them individually.

ALI: Yes, Specialist Taaj Azi.

WE HEAR AN ELECTRONIC CONFIRMATION AND DISPLAY
OF THE VIDEO ON A NEARBY CONSOLE.

JAMAL: I was in the middle of something.

TAAJ: It can wait. This experiment was ten years ago. 2035. Let's watch AA first.

A BLIP AS VIDEO PLAYBACK BEGINS--WE HEAR SOUNDS
OF A SMALL CREATURE SQUEAKING ON THE CONSOLE.

That's Algernon. (BRAG) I got to meet him shortly after this.

JAMAL: Good for you.

TAAJ: He's a big deal...watch...See how he's on a metal plate? Everything is rigged for an electrical and radiation discharge in a few seconds...look at the clock--

JAMAL: Wait--it's aimed it at a living animal--?

TAAJ: That's right. Watch. Here's the countdown. 10-9-8...

JAMAL: It's gonna kill the mouse!

TAAJ: Watch it!

JAMAL: He's going to die! What is this?

TAAJ: Trust me! 3--2--1...

WE HEAR A ZAP IN THE VIDEO FEED COORDINATING WITH
THE COUNTDOWN. THE VIDEO SCRAMBLES OUT. TAAJ IS
AMUSED AND JAMAL IS DISTRESSED, BUT RELIEVED.

JAMAL: ...Great--so...CimmTech did an experiment and the mouse survived.

TAAJ: Okay okay okay. How much do you understand about quantum mechanics?

JAMAL: ...Entangled particles 'determine' each other when measured. They can effect each other no matter how far apart they are. Some say realities collapsing. Or it's creating parallel universes but--It's...it's--

TAAJ: --complicated... *This* is file AX.

TAAJ BEGINS PLAYBACK WITH DIGITAL CONFIRMATION
FROM ALI.

See the clock--same timecode--same experiment--different angle...yeah?

JAMAL: Okay...

TAAJ (RECORDING) 5-4-3-2-1--

WE HEAR THE ELECTRICITY SPARK, THE MAMMAL
SQUEAL, AND EXPLODE IN A GUSHY AND VIOLENT
DEATH. THE VIDEO FEED SHORTS OUT.

JAMAL: Holy fuck!

TAAJ: (LAUGHING) Yeah--it's gross!

JAMAL: It exploded!

TAAJ: It did! But--!

JAMAL: Why did you make me watch that?!

TAAJ: Because it didn't happen!

JAMAL: I just watched it!

TAAJ: The mouse was fine!

JAMAL: It exploded!

TAAJ: *It didn't.* Remember the other video? The mouse survived. I *met* Algernon. Remember? *He was never in any danger.*

JAMAL: He was the test subject!

TAAJ: He wasn't. The mouse was not the test subject.

JAMAL: Then what was?

TAAJ: The cameras.

A BEAT.

JAMAL: Why didn't CimmTech release this video?

TAAJ: No one would believe it. Also, it would make it seem like CimmTech put the mouse in danger. The mouse was never in danger. (MORE TO HERSELF) ...*The mouse was never in danger...*(A BEAT)...So...I just blew your mind. Questions?

JAMAL: ...I want to know what it is you're studying.

TAAJ: Give me the same readouts that you give Wren every day. With this video--with this glimpse into what I--what we are studying...you have to believe me that it will be worth it.

A BEAT.

JAMAL: ...Ali?

ALI: Yes, Pilot Jamal Davis?

JAMAL: I grant authorization to Taaj Azi to get the same print readouts that Doctor Guerrero gets each day, as requested. Please only print them out in console eight and only when I am present.

ALI: Yes, Pilot Jamal Davis.

ELECTRONIC BLIP OF VERIFICATION. WE HEAR A PRINTER BEGIN.

TAAJ: Thank you, Jamal. (A BEAT) You hear about the anniversary party?

JAMAL: Dumbest thing I've ever heard.

TAAJ: Well--you *know* I'm fun at parties.

JAMAL: I know...That's how we almost got tattoos.

TAAJ LAUGHS. JAMAL RETRIEVES THE PRINTOUT.

TAAJ: Thanks again. Oh! And--uh...this is between us. Don't tell Wren I showed you anything. The Waymaker experiment is still highly classified.

JAMAL: No problem.

THE DOORS OPEN. TAAJ LEAVES WITH A STEADY PACE AS SHE ENTERED. JAMAL RETURNS TO HIS CONSOLE.

Ali--please continue rendering where I left off.

ELECTRONIC BLIP OF CONFIRMATION.

END RECORDING.

END SCENE.

SCENE 3.

ALI: Post Solar Event. Approximate mission day: five hundred and forty nine.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

ROOM TONE FOR CAPSULE 8. JAMAL IS WHISPERING TO HIMSELF.

INCOMING MESSAGE BLIP.

ALI: Incoming message.

JAMAL: '--there is an honored shelf--' Decline, Ali.

ELECTRONIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.

ALI: You've declined 6 incoming messages.

JAMAL: Thank you, Ali.

JAMAL KEEPS WHISPERING TO HIMSELF.

ALI: (OVER A GENERAL INTERCOM) Capsule eight temperature is currently eighty five point seven degrees Fahrenheit. Twenty nine point eight degrees Celsius.

INCOMING MESSAGE BLIP.

ALI: Incoming message.

JAMAL: (QUICKLY FINISHING THE POEM) '--pilgrim of sorrow--' Fine--fine--Ali, Accept.

ELECTRONIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.

(ANNOYED) Good morning, Wren.

WREN: It's afternoon, I checked.

JAMAL: We were up late so I slept in.

WREN: You were asleep this whole time?

JAMAL: No, I was reading.

WREN: ...What were you reading?

JAMAL: (CALMING DOWN) Alice Walker, right now. Czeslaw Milosz. Joy Harjo. Amanda Gorman...Things I hope I'll remember.

WREN: For what?

JAMAL: I used to have this teacher. Mr. Bamberg-Johnson. He'd say, 'Memorize as much poetry as you can...You'll be dead a long time.'

WREN: Don't talk like that.

JAMAL: You have to let me. (A BEAT)...Did you figure out how to contact Mission Control?

WREN: ...No...But I had a new idea.

JAMAL: Wren.

WREN: If we trigger the capsule seal closure between Capsules 8 and 9. Then I can use Capsule 9 as an airlock.

JAMAL: Capsule 9 isn't designed to regulate air pressure and oxygen flow like an airlock.

WREN: When Capsule 9 was first assembled in space, there was programming to fill the room with oxygen.

JAMAL: We've lost most of the compartments where the excess oxygen was being stored.

WREN: Then we wait for the reactor to generate enough excess oxygen.

JAMAL: It'll take weeks for the reactor to generate that much.

WREN: For *two* people?

JAMAL: And we still only have one suit.

WREN: But we have the radiation suit.

JAMAL: That isn't designed for the vacuum of space.

WREN: I'll wear it. As long as we keep the exposure to under five minutes, we should--

JAMAL: And none of it will matter if you don't contact Earth before we get to the far side of the sun!

ALI: (DISTANT, CAPSULE 3 INTERCOM) Capsule three temperature is currently seventy nine point four degrees Fahrenheit. Twenty six point three degrees Celsius.

JAMAL: ...Is there any way you could pretend the wires are yarn and maybe knit a more logical tangle to get us out of this?

WREN: I told you never to mention that again.

JAMAL: Don't worry. There's nobody here but us 'ghosts.'

AUDIBLE ANNOYANCE FROM WREN.

WREN: ...Why did you have to lie, Jamal?

JAMAL: Why did *you*?

WREN: I thought I was helping a friend.

JAMAL: ...So did I.

ALI: (CAPSULE 1 INTERCOM) Capsule one temperature is currently seventy nine point two degrees Fahrenheit. Twenty six point two degrees Celsius.

JAMAL: ...My mother's church always did up this Christmas Garden Lights Festival thing...they lined all these trees in the woods, covered the paths with these decorations, people would pay a little and get to walk around...you ever done anything like that?

WREN: No, but I know what you're talking about.

JAMAL: She would let me and my sister go off on our own since we were there most every night and she was handing out the tickets...and there was this one part where--the path was lined by lights--and then there were these other strings of lights above us--zigzagging carelessly over the path. And if you followed the path, you'd get to this 'Christmas Star'--glowing in every imaginable pattern. Flashing and pulsing...

But what made it special was when you turned around and looked back. You couldn't make out the main path--not with the zigzags you just traveled and the lights swooping over us in different directions. When you made it to the center--to the star--you were essentially lost to the world. But the path was lined. It was well-lit.

You were never lost in the moment. Only in retrospect. (A BEAT) I miss Christmas...

A BEAT. HE SNIFFS AND WIPES AWAY A TEAR.

WREN: Are you crying?

JAMAL: I cry a lot.

WREN: Why?

JAMAL: I've never felt so alone...and I'm going to die.

WREN: But you could be doing something to prevent it.

JAMAL: We all die, Wren.

WREN: I know you want me to give up--

JAMAL: I don't want you to give up--

WREN: Then what do you want?

JAMAL: I want you to stop caring so much about me! I need you to let me go when the time comes. And I don't know if you'll be able to. I'm not 'abandoning' you. I just need to know that--...I need to know that my death won't result in yours.

A BEAT. WE CAN ALMOST HEAR WREN STUFFING THINGS
DOWN TO PUT ON A STIFF UPPER LIP.

WREN: ...We should listen to the Satellite 2 pre-deployment meeting.

JAMAL: Didn't the anniversary party come first?

WREN: That's not important. Nothing happened. We need to focus on *important* things. We *both* can't afford to sit around reading poetry all the time.

JAMAL TAKES THIS PERSONALLY.

JAMAL: Ali, terminate messaging.

WREN: Jamal--

MESSAGING DEACTIVATED.

JAMAL: Ali...bring up the file 'Margaret'.

ALI: Yes, Jamal.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

JAMAL: Scroll down to where I left off in the programming.

ELECTRONIC SCROLL...

Woof...'Miles to go before I sleep.' (A BEAT) Ali--can you make me some coffee?

ALI: We are out of coffee, Jamal.

JAMAL: Right...okay...just water then.

ALI: Yes, Jamal.

WE HEAR THE WATER BEING DISPENSED.

ALI: (IN CAPSULE 9--DISTANT) Capsule nine temperature is currently ninety three point three degrees Fahrenheit. Thirty four degrees Celsius.

A SMALL SHUDDER PASSES.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

END RECORDING.

END SCENE.

SCENE 4.

ALI: Post Solar Event. Approximate mission day: five hundred and forty nine.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

WE ARE NOW IN CAPSULE 1--MID CONVERSATION:

JAMAL: (OVER SPEAKER) I just need to know that--...that my death won't result in yours.

WE CAN ALMOST HEAR WREN STUFFING THINGS DOWN TO PUT ON A STIFF UPPER LIP.

WREN: ...We should listen to the Satellite 2 pre-deployment meeting.

JAMAL: Didn't the anniversary party come first?

WREN: That's not important. Nothing happened. We need to focus on *important* things. We *both* can't afford to sit around reading poetry all the time.

JAMAL TAKES THIS PERSONALLY.

JAMAL: Ali, terminate messaging.

WREN: Jamal--please!

MESSAGING DEACTIVATED.

WE HEAR WREN HIT THE CONSOLE WITH HER FIST IN FRUSTRATION.

A BEAT.

ALI: Would you like for me to access the recording of the Satellite Two Pre-Deployment Meeting?

WREN: Maybe, I don't know...

A BEAT.

ALI: You should get some sleep.

WREN: Thank you, Ali. I can't.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

ALI: Incoming personal audio packet from mission control.

WREN: ...Have you located mission control?

ALI: No.

WREN: Then what is this audio packet?

ALI: I am unable to answer that question.

WREN: Who is it from?

ALI: Chelsea Richardson.

WREN: That's an old audio packet for Jamal.

ALI: Would you like to listen to it?

WREN: No...Send it to Jamal

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

WREN: How frequently is he using air cooling since the event?

ALI: Jamal has been using air cooling 57% of the time since the event.

WREN: If he continues to use air cooling and water generation at his current rates...how much time does he have left?

ALI: One day, 23 hours, 47 minutes, and 32 Seconds.

A BEAT

ALI: Would you like for me to access the recording of the Satellite Two Pre-Deployment Meeting?

WREN: No...Maybe the anniversary party after all.

ALI: Where would you like to begin playback?

WREN: From...Alex's speech, I guess.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

ALEX: (SPEAKER) Thanks everyone for being here tonight. I believe this is the first time in our mission that all of us have been in the same room...*not* working. And with everyone being in one location--I think we can definitely say that Schrodinger's cat is *not* dead in the other room. Since...Since no one is working on anything else right now...Sorry--didn't land how I was hoping.

TAAJ: (DISTANT) Woo!

ALEX: Thank you, Taaj...that joke was inspired by one Jamal told me...just didn't want to steal his punchline...but most importantly this evening...

BY NOW THE AUDIO IS FULLY IN CAPSULE 5.

On behalf of the crew, thank you Margaret for gifting us this night...

LIGHT CLAPPING.

Ali!

ALI: Yes, Commander Alex Tawley?

ALEX: Begin the anniversary playlist!

QUIET MUSIC--WITH A SUBTLE COUNTRY FLARE BEGINS TO PLAY IN THE SPACE. WE HEAR MULTIPLE PEOPLE

START TALKING AMONGST THEMSELVES--WE CAN'T MAKE ANYTHING OUT.

WREN: Pause, Ali.

AUDIO PAUSES AND WE SNAP BACK TO CAPSULE 1 ON BOARD THE BROKEN AETHON.

Where was the microphone in Capsule 5?

ALI: Capsule 5 had seven microphones.

WREN: Can you isolate different microphones?

ALI: Yes.

WREN: Playback Margaret and Alex. Right after the speech. I saw them talking for a second.

ELECTRONIC BLIP. THE AUDIO BEGINS AND WE'RE TAKEN BACK INSIDE THE RECORDING.

ALEX: Begin the anniversary playlist!

MUSIC BEGINS.

MARGARET: Commander.

ALEX: Margaret.

MARGARET: I want to wish you well before I said good evening. It's already past sundown and I have to--

ALEX: You're really committed to this thing.

MARGARET: What thing?

ALEX: Your...beliefs. Your traditions. I mean, *sunset*? The sun is literally right outside the window! We only have sunsets because of the rotation of the earth.

MARGARET: My beliefs *are* my reality, Commander. I honor the traditions because they give order and purpose. They give meaning to reality. We have sunsets on Earth. And humans have evolved to live by that cycle. The meaning we found in it cannot be by accident.

ALEX: But you don't have to follow that out here.

MARGARET: Meaning isn't removed even if the context is lost. Meaning just has to be found again. (A BEAT) What do you believe in, Commander?

ALEX: ...I'm agnostic.

MARGARET: You don't believe.

ALEX: I don't *know*. I'll believe in a god when I see their face.

MARGARET: (BAITING)...But, Commander. The sun is literally right outside the window.

A BEAT.

ALEX: Goodnight, Margaret.

MARGARET: Goodnight, Commander.

SHE WALKS AWAY AND JAMAL APPROACHES.

JAMAL: Is Margaret leaving?

ALEX: Yup.

JAMAL: Didn't she give up her holiday for this?

ALEX: Yup. What can I help you with?

WREN: Pause, Ali.

AUDIO PAUSES AND WE SNAP BACK TO CAPSULE 1--
PRESENT.

WREN: Can you isolate Taaj and Eli?

ALI: They were talking with Jamal initially.

WREN: I wanna hear it all.

ELECTRONIC BLIP--THE AUDIO RETURNS TO CAPSULE 5,
OTHER CONVERSATIONS IN THE BACKGROUND...

ALEX: (DISTANT) Begin the anniversary playlist!

MUSIC BEGINS. A BEAT.

TAAJ: This music sucks, right?

ELI: Oh, thank god you said something.

JAMAL: (ALMOST SIMULTANEOUS) Yeah it's bad...

TAAJ: Well, you can take the man out of Alabama...(A BEAT) None of us feel like having a party now, right?

ELI: No.

JAMAL: Nope.

TAAJ: Why are we having a party?

ELI: Probably a pitch to improve the psychiatric evaluations. After the payload one event, my readings are way off.

JAMAL: Is that because of the flash? Or is it because you lied to everyone.

ELI: *Point is--NASC can't afford these 'hiccups.'* They need to prove they're worth government funding. Or else...go extinct.

JAMAL: NASC is at the forefront of human exploration--

ELI: NASC is suckling at the government's teet while companies like CimmTech are paving the way to the future. The actual future.

JAMAL: You're mixing metaphors. And the Commander told me that NASC specifically put *this* crew together--

ELI: *This crew?* (LAUGHS) You weren't even the first choice, *Secondary Pilot* Jamal Davis!

JAMAL HITS THE TABLE AGGRESIVELY.

TAAJ: Jamal! Eli! Shut up. What the hell is wrong with you? Jamal--take a walk...go ask Alex to change the music.

A BEAT.

JAMAL: Fine.

JAMAL WALKS AWAY.

TAAJ: (TO ELI) What is your problem?

ELI: He's an asshole.

TAAJ: We need him, Eli.

ELI: (A BEAT) Why?

TAAJ: We need Jamal on our side. He can help us.

ELI: Didn't you vote to go home?

TAAJ: Yes--but we're not going home yet. So...how do we prevent another flash?

ELI: You know what the shudders are, right?

TAAJ: Yeah, I figured it out. I can redo the dish measurements. Increase the number of locational pings. But that's not the only problem is it?

ELI: ...I mean--I can redo the programming to account for energy deflection. It will take a while because the auxiliary programming is so ass-backwards on this junk heap. How soon do we have to do this?

TAAJ: Well--it'll take a few weeks, right? I say we start tonight--Margaret's left already. Alex can't leave his own party. We have some time. Let's start while no one's watching. We have to fit it in where we can. Stay up late. Use our off hours.

ELI: That'll make it take longer.

TAAJ: All the more reason to start tonight.

A BEAT.

ELI: I thought you were Jamal's friend.

TAAJ: Who says I'm not? (A BEAT.) Let's go.

THEY WALK AWAY.

WREN: Pause, Ali.

AUDIO PAUSES AND WE SNAP BACK TO CAPSULE 1 ON BOARD THE BROKEN AETHON.

Can you play the conversation between Jamal and Alex?

ALI: Yes.

ELECTRONIC BLIP.

MARGARET: Goodnight, Commander.

SHE WALKS AWAY AND JAMAL APPROACHES.

JAMAL: Is Margaret leaving?

ALEX: Yup.

JAMAL: Didn't she give up her holiday for this?

ALEX: Yup. What can I help you with?

JAMAL: I was just wondering if we could change the music.

ALEX: Will that get people to dance?

JAMAL: With all due respect, Alex, no one's gonna dance tonight. And definitely not to this.

ALEX: Why not?

JAMAL: I don't think you read the room. We almost died two weeks ago.

ALEX: You voted to keep going.

JAMAL: I did. That doesn't mean I want to have a party.

ALEX: But why did you vote to keep going?

JAMAL: ...Honestly, because Wren did.

ALEX: (REGISTERING A DIFFERENT BIT OF INFORMATION)...I can understand that...Wren told me this party was a good idea.

JAMAL: *Wren did?*

ALEX: *You* trusted her vote!

JAMAL: Because of her *science* background. Not because she understands parties.

ALEX: Fair point. Hey hey hey--

WE HEAR TAAJ AND ELI LEAVING.

Where you going? The party is just beginning. One sec, Jamal--

TAAJ: (APPROACHING) Thanks for the party, Alex! I just wanted to get a jump start on some figures for tomorrow. But I'm taking a glass of 'orange beverage' for the road!

ALEX: C'mon--please--I'll change the music.

ELI: No, we gotta run. But still change the music.

ALEX: Taaj! Eli!...Eli!

ELI: (AT A DISTANCE) What?

ALEX: Come back.

ELI: (CLOSER) What?

ALEX: You don't have to stay, but I want to make one thing clear...

ELI: And that is?

ALEX: You can talk to me.

ELI: ...What?

ALEX: I know you answer to Margaret. But you can talk to me if you ever need to...I need to know when this mission has become unsafe.

ELI: We're going to be fine. I promise.

A BEAT.

ALEX: Alright.

ELI: That's it?

ALEX: Yup.

ELI WALKS AWAY.

WREN: Pause, Ali.

AUDIO PAUSES AND WE SNAP BACK TO CAPSULE 1 ON BOARD THE AETHON.

A BEAT

ALI: I have played all of the audio in which you weren't recorded.

WREN: I know.

A BEAT.

ALI: What can I assist you with now?

WREN: Playback the audio in which I was recorded.

ALI: Yes.

ELECTRONIC BLIP. AGAIN WE MOVE 'INTO' THE RECORDING.

ALEX: (SPEAKER, AT A DISTANCE) Begin the anniversary playlist.

MUSIC BEGINS.

WREN: So...this is fun, I guess.

JESSA: Is it?

WREN: Didn't you used to have hang-outs on Earth with the crew?

JESSA: Wren--we had a near disaster two weeks ago. *No one* is in the mood to be social.

A MOMENT.

WREN: ...Crap. I was the one who told Alex to do this.

JESSA: I thought it was Margaret's idea.

WREN: It was...I told Alex I thought it was a good idea.

JESSA: (LAUGHING) Wren! It's a *terrible* idea!

WREN: In Antarctica, people *liked* having parties!

JESSA: Wren!

WREN: It's *Margaret's* idea! Why did I think people would like it?

JESSA: Look, Margaret's leaving.

WREN: What?! That...(HUSHED)...that bitch.

JESSA: Wren!

WREN: (MOCKING THE TONE) Jessa! (NORMAL) You don't trust her, do you?

JESSA: We all have to trust each other to get home alive.

WREN: (ANNOYED) Yeah, but...CimmTech is up to something. You can't deny that.

JESSA: I won't even try to deny that with you. (A BEAT) Wanna hear a joke?

WREN: Yeah, sure.

JESSA: There once was a man on trial for the murder of his wife.

WREN: This took a turn.

JESSA: Bear with me. There once was a man on trial for the murder of his wife. Only her body had *not* been found.

The day of the trial, the lawyer stands and explains that with no body, the man cannot be charged with murder. 'In fact,' he boldly states, 'the wife is alive and is going to walk through that door in one minute!' And he gestures at the double doors at the back of the courtroom.

Everyone turns to the door and waits. A minute passes. Finally the lawyer turns back to the jury and says, 'The very fact that everyone stared at the door for that long proves that there is reasonable doubt.'

The jury deliberates briefly, and the head juror stands to read the verdict: "Guilty."

'That's outrageous!' yells the lawyer. 'Everyone was looking at the door waiting for the wife because there's still a chance she was alive!'

'Yes,' said the head juror, 'But from the juror's box, we noticed that the only person who never looked back at the door, was the man.'

A BEAT.

WREN: That's not how the legal system works.

JESSA: It's a joke!

WREN: Not a very funny one, though.

JESSA: You're all the people looking at the door! Do I need to spell it out? That's what you do, Wren. You focus too hard on one thing when something else is threatening you. You said you had to do library studies so you could avoid being bullied at recess. You changed your doctoral studies plan when your birth mom reached out to you so you could graduate early.

WREN: That isn't why I told you those stories.

JESSA: No, but that's what I learned about you. You can learn things just by listening and watching other people.

WE HEAR TAAJ AND ELI LEAVING AT A DISTANCE--SOME OF THEIR DIALOG AS THEY WALK PAST.

WREN: (SHUTTING DOWN) Taaj and Eli are leaving.

JESSA: I wasn't trying to make you uncomfortable.

WREN: (IT'S NOT) No. It's fine.

JAMAL APPROACHES.

JAMAL: Jessa, Wren. This party is...not going well.

JESSA: (TRYING TO BE ENCOURAGING) I've been to worse.

WREN: It's a disaster.

JAMAL: Did you suggest the music, too?

WREN: What's wrong with the music?

JAMAL: I'm gonna take off.

JESSA: Please don't.

WREN: (SIMULTANEOUS WITH PREVIOUS LINE) No! Jamal!

JAMAL: This party isn't really a thing...and Chelsea sent me a personal message about her fiancé and she needs some advice. I haven't responded in a while, so I should use a night off to do that.

JESSA: What's wrong with her fiancé?

JAMAL: His dad isn't feeling well and they might need to move and she's just worried about it.

WREN: She's scared to move?

JAMAL: Yeah, she's scared to move. To leave her family. To leave Florida. To leave everything she's ever known for this...guy she's gonna marry. It's scary.

WREN: Is it?

JAMAL: Some people have roots. Not everyone can be like us...Did you know that Cowbirds don't build nests?

WREN: I am absolutely not going to be called Cowbird over Wren.

JAMAL: Noted. I don't think Bluebirds or cuckoos do either.

WREN: Strong no to both.

JESSA: What are you talking about?

WREN: (STILL A LITTLE COLD) Nothing.

ALEX APPROACHES.

ALEX: I'm sorry, this party was a bad idea.

JAMAL: Mostly the music.

ALEX: (SIMULTANEOUS WITH WREN) What's wrong with the music?

WREN: (SIMULTANEOUS WITH ALEX) What's wrong with the music?

JAMAL: (LAUGHS) Look, I'm heading back to my bunk.

ALEX: No! Then the party will be over for sure.

JAMAL: This party ended right after your speech, Alex. Have a good night, all.

JESSA: Goodnight, Jamal.

ALEX: Goodnight.

WREN: Bye.

JAMAL LEAVES.

JESSA: Well, there's no point in staying on ceremony, I'm heading out, too...if that's okay with Wren.

WREN: Why wouldn't it be?

AWKWARD BEAT.

ALEX: Well, thank you for coming at all.

JESSA: (A KIND JOKE) I had a blast...for all five minutes of it!

JESSA LEAVES...

WREN: ...I'm sorry.

ALEX: For what?

WREN: I should've known better.

ALEX: Me, too. Thank you for coming though.

WREN: That's the other thing I'm sorry for.

ALEX: What?

WREN: I *tried* to come to dinner. Months ago. But I was late. And I...never tried again.

ALEX: Don't worry about it. The dinners stopped being a thing a long time ago.

WREN: But maybe if I wasn't so wrapped up in my work, I'd be better at reading people.

ALEX: It's not your fault. I've been doing the same thing. Being trapped all day has my emotional sensors way off.

WREN: You feel trapped?

ALEX: And with that kind of stress it's hard to focus sometimes, you know?

WREN: I know.

ALEX: But then sometimes I get so razor focused I almost forget to do my daily physical.

WREN: I know.

ALEX: And then sometimes I just daydream.

WREN: About what?

ALEX: Anything, really. (A BEAT) But mostly about what I'm going to do when I get home.

WREN: To earth?

ALEX: To earth. Like this is a thing people might remember me for. Maybe my life will have an impact on space travel and stellar research but right now my life on earth has barely left a footprint. You end up reconsidering what you're doing with your life at every mile marker. Don't you?

WREN: ...I don't...I don't really consider my life like that.

ALEX: You don't?

WREN: I never met my parents. I grew up going through the foster system, which is better than it used to be but still...

ALEX: Not good.

WREN: I had to fight, tooth and nail, to keep my own things. To get my own rooms. To get into school. And no one ever adopted me so...try telling

yourself you matter when there is very hard evidence pointing to the idea that, in fact, no one wants you.

ALEX: Wren--

WREN: I fought my way into science, as a woman, which is still awful because sometimes I think nothing ever changes or evolves...And I fought to do my own research. My own experiments. To make a name for myself. To be known...Do you know what it felt like when Aarav called me and offered me a spot? What it meant to me to hear him say they were reconfiguring the whole mission because they *needed* me? You worry about 'leaving footprints' and my fingers are bloody from trying to claw my name into the wall.

A BEAT

ALEX: ...You're right...

WREN CLEARS HER THROAT

ALEX: (SMILING)...But now there's no question whose wall it is.

WREN:: You're goddamn right.

ALEX LAUGHS. WREN SMILES.

WREN: ...So...so what are you going to do?

ALEX: When?

WREN: When you get back to Earth?

ALEX: I think I might try my luck and ask you to come to dinner again.

WREN: You mean like a crew reunion?

ALEX: No...

A BEAT.

WREN: Oh, I don't know, Alex--

ALEX: No no. Don't answer yet. I haven't asked you yet. We have a long way to go before future-me asks future-you to dinner--and until then, you can think about it. But know that now-me finds now-you one of the hardest working, most reliable, and confident women he's ever known. Just promise me you'll think about it. Over this *next* year. I won't ask you again until we land. Safe and sound. I promise.

WREN: (A BEAT)...I don't know that I'm looking for that.

ALEX: ...Understood. Even if I haven't asked you yet?

WREN: Even then.

ALEX: ...Okay.

WREN: But ask me again, anyway. After we land...

WE CAN ALMOST FEEL THEM SMILE AT EACH OTHER. A
BEAT.

ALEX: Well, I'm gonna clean up...you can head back to your bunk and--

WREN: Alex...would you like to dance with me?

ALEX: Now?

WREN: Now.

ALEX: Why?

WREN: Because this party is a disaster and it will help us feel better. And because I don't think either of us have danced with anyone in years. Would you like to dance with me...Alex?

ALEX: I very much would like to dance with you...Wren...

THEY STAND UP AND MOVE AWAY FROM THE MIC.

THE MUSIC TAKES OVER--A SUBDUED, DARK VERSION OF
'YOU ARE MY SUNSHINE'.

THE MUSIC CONTINUES UNDER THE CREDITS.

END RECORDING.

END SCENE.