

TEMPUS ACCELERARE

“Tempus Accelerare” is a forty-minute science-fiction drama intended for an adult audience. It begins in the not too distant future where mankind’s technological progress has been nothing short of exponential and ends with the answer to the Fermi Paradox. The story follows Jason Wodlinger and the crew of the Icarus as they attempt to start a colony outside our solar system. In the end, they discover that during the decades they spent searching, technology on Earth progressed to the point that Mankind was able to bypass the physical and move on to sapient energy lattices. At this next logical stage of evolution, they joined all the other sapient races that had ever emerged from the galaxy. In short, the crew of the Icarus was now alone in the Universe.

TEMPUS ACCELERARE

The sun rises over the curve of the earth and a hypersonic space shuttle emerges from its corona to dock with an expanded version of the International Space Station. Beyond the station is a strange craft shaped like toilet plunger with two suction cups. The shuttle docks with the station and Jason Wodlinger, an earnest young man in his late twenties, emerges to be greeted by Dr. Malay, a researcher on the station. Dr. Malay rushes him through a quick orientation where we learn that Jason is the backup planetologist who was sent up at the last minute due to an illness. He is quickly shuttled over to the Icarus, the Earth's first starship, on a mission to establish an extra-solar colony in the 47 Ursae Majoris system (or 47 UMa). Greeted by his Captain, Jason is ushered into a corpsicle chamber where the crew and colonists will remain for the voyage in order to limit their consumption of valuable resources.

The suspended animation process is not perfect, however, and they will continue to function at a one-fifth metabolic rate. In order to operate the ship and perform useful research on their new home, they exist in a virtual reality generated by the onboard computers. This is made possible by the biocybernetic implants they all have which allow them to directly interface with all onboard systems and each other.

Jason awakes in a brand new world that doesn't seem quite real, but still responds to his senses with satisfying solidity. He meets his new exec, Marta Jonsson, who immediately establishes their business-like relationship. Since every crewmember on board serves in at least two capacities, Jason is sent to be debriefed by the Medical Doctor on his duties as Second Medical.

After the tumultuous events of his first day, a quiet year passes - year for him in virtual time, but actually five years in ship time and eight years back on earth. As the ship accelerates to its cruising speed of 0.9c or ninety percent of the speed of light, time passes more slowly on Earth (at 0.9c, the time dilation factor is 2.3, i.e. 10 years on the ship = 23 years on earth).

After the first year, the bridge crew plus a select few are told that researchers on Earth have made great advances in the biocybernetic implants – they now amplify intelligence. The people on the ship, however, can't incorporate the changes while in transit since it would require surgical facilities. Marcus believes that the mission controllers may now think them to be idiots, but Jason wonders if they will even be the same species by the time they get to 47 UMa.

Marta comes to see Jason on the pretext of gauging the reaction of the crew, but she is actually very worried about the future. Jason reassures her in his own way and refers to the time of the Troubles back on Earth. The Troubles emerged from a religious conflict and ended with the death of billions and the temporary halt to all research. The

survivors and children of survivors remain deeply affected and can never fully trust the future.

By year three (year 18 shiptime and year 41 earthtime), the Icarus receives a data drone through a collapsar jump. The small craft has clearly exceeded the speed of light by a considerable margin to reach them and serves to emphasize the rapid changes in technology on Earth. Now the crew must wonder if a colony will already be established on Trinity (the earth-like moon of a Jupiter-class planet orbiting in the temperate zone of 47 UMa) by the time they get there. What research can they do? What can they accomplish that hasn't already been done? They attempt to decipher the data in the drone, but their efforts prove fruitless. Marta again comes to Jason for comfort, but he supplies none. Disappointed by his reaction, Marta remains focused on her job to the exclusion of all other questions.

They finally arrive at 47 UMa in the sixth year of their mission (year 32 shiptime, year 68 earthtime) and begin a careful examination of the system and their final destination, Trinity. All goes well: they find life and it's compatible with their own, but no sign of visitors from Earth. It's not long, however, before they find the Pearl Necklace, a string of moons orbiting Trinity in a perfect ring connected by a thin golden strand – a sign of alien intelligence. Shocked, they prepare as best they can and Marta remains ready to blow up the ship, if necessary to protect Earth, using the deadman failsafe. She can trigger it voluntarily or it will be triggered automatically upon her death.

Jason is equally shocked by the discovery, but can't understand why we've seen no sign of intelligence in the galaxy when aliens lived right next door. Their technology seems to have been more than sufficient for space travel so why wouldn't they come for a visit? For that matter, why didn't they fill the galaxy with their progeny as we would have done? With even modest projections of our population growth and capacity to colonize star systems, we would fill the galaxy in only a few million years, making us difficult not to spot. It's a mystery that he can't solve with debate.

Eventually, Jason is revived to explore Trinity and help determine a suitable colony site. He and his team enjoy their time exploring on an unspoiled terrain until their sojourn is interrupted. Marta arrives and finally asks Jason to take a look at one of the moons. He learns that the moon termed "Noon" is actually a message of some kind, but the team is making little headway interpreting it. Jason's job is to determine the age and anything else he can discover about it.

During his time on Noon, they finally break the code and are able to interact with a central computer using their implants. Jason is able to talk to the computer directly and suspects the truth, not only of the whereabouts of the former inhabitants of Trinity, but also of his own people. Eventually, the data on the drone from Earth is deciphered with the help of the central computer.

Marcus comes down to the small colony on Trinity and announces the Truth: the former inhabitants of Trinity and all of humanity, have followed what appears to be the normal

process of evolution: from animal to man to man/machine hybrid to pure energy. The final stages are very quick and the Icarus missed the boat, they are alone in the universe – Mankind has evolved beyond them.

Initially a sad note, but there is still a colony to found and the knowledge that eventually they or their descendents will transcend and join the other intelligences of the Universe.

"Tempus Accelerare"
(formerly entitled "The Fermi Paradox")

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"TEMPUS ACCELERARE"

FADE IN:

1. EXT. EARTH ORBIT - DAY

The sun is just visible over the curve of the Earth as we see a next-generation space shuttle emerge from the corona. We follow the shuttle until it docks with an expanded version of the International Space Station - the fresh UNASA logo clear on one side. Just off the station is a ship that dwarfs it in size. The rear of the ship is a bell-shaped cup large enough to make the station seem like an olive in a martini. A circle of fuel tanks surrounds the central spindle emerging from the bell. Heading all this is a comparatively small crew section, protected from the engine by another, smaller curved bell. The shuttle docks with the station.

2. INT. SPACE STATION - DAY

The interior is cramped and appears aged and well used. Components are installed in a slapdash fashion and the BANGING and SHOUTING of a maintenance crew can be heard offscreen. A man in his mid-thirties dressed in loose overalls waits floating outside the docking tube. He has vaguely Asian features, but is very American in style and attitude. He opens the hatch when the light above it switches from yellow to green and holds out a hand to greet and help the first passenger to a handhold.

DR. MALAY

Hello, You must be Jason.
I'm Dr. Malay.

DR. MALAY smiles good-naturedly as JASON WODLINGER, 28, steadies himself with a handhold. He is wearing a form-fitting shipsuit with an attached helmet dangling behind his head. Other PASSENGERS leave the docking area with practiced ease.

DR. MALAY

I know it's a little tricky
at first, but you'll get the
hang of it. Everything's
behind schedule now, so
there's only time for a
quick briefing before we
shuttle you to the Icarus.

DR. MALAY launches himself down the corridor to the next

hatchway. JASON gamely follows, but without the doctor's grace. DR. MALAY slightly cushions Jason's impact as he hits the hatchcover.

DR. MALAY

Whoa there. Just take it easy. They've had enough troubles without damaged goods to worry about.

DR. MALAY ushers a somewhat shamefaced JASON through the hatch and carefully guides him to the next handhold.

DR. MALAY

(continuing)

How's Dr. Kolaric?

JASON, concentrating on not making a fool of himself, speaks over his shoulder to Dr. Malay.

JASON

Doing better. Cancer's in remission. Prospects look good.

DR. MALAY

(to himself)

Damn shame.

(to Jason)

Nothing on you Jason. Just a shame for a man to devote ten years of his life to a project, then lose the chance just when the probes find a lifeplanet.

JASON makes no reply, but tenses up slightly and misses the next handhold. He manages to recover before DR. MALAY can intervene. DR. MALAY shrugs and smiles at him again. They pass a group of TECHNICIANS trying to fit a new instrument panel that just won't fit in its assigned hole.

DR. MALAY

Well unlucky for him, lucky for you. Guess you never thought you'd make it out of the backup team.

JASON attempts to reply, but DR. MALAY is already moving on.

DR. MALAY

(continuing)

You're the last one to board
and we're a week behind

DR. MALAY

(continuing)

schedule so you'll have to
get the final orientation in
transit. Don't worry about
the makeshift repairs-

(nods to the technicians)

She made it through the
Troubles, she'll make it
through our clumsy hands.

(slaps a bulkhead affectionately)

As old as my grandma and
just as feisty.

He stops suddenly as if listening to something. JASON
spies the biocybernetic implant in the back of Malay's
head and gently fingers his own fresh scar.

DR. MALAY

Launch window's only open
for another day so that's it
for the ten-cent tour ...

He stops at another docking hatch and waves at a man
wearing a full spacesuit in the pilot's seat of a small
transport shuttle.

DR. MALAY

(continuing)

... and here we are.

JASON pulls up beside the doctor and nods at the
spacesuit as the man turns away.

DR. MALAY

(continuing)

Mr. Lauden over here will be
your chauffeur for this leg
of the trip.

(aside to Jason)

Don't make him mad, remember
he's driving.

(to all)

Goodbye me boyo and try not
to be so quiet, you don't
want to get lost in the
shuffle.

JASON tries to say something.

DR. MALAY
(continuing)
No time now. All aboard!

DR. MALAY gives JASON a light shove into the hatchway and dogs the hatch behind him. Shaking his head, he takes the copilot's seat in the two-man shuttle. WALTER LAUDEN, a brusque man in his late thirties, dogs the internal hatch and pulls himself into the chair beside Jason.

LAUDEN
Don't worry about it.
They're not all like Malay...
should harness him for the
trip.

JASON
Better than any ion
propulsion.

They both smile at that as LAUDEN finishes preflight. He makes no overt movement toward the manual controls or any sounds, but the shuttle engines begin warming up and various indicators flash. JASON puts on his helmet and checks the seals. That done, he closes his eyes and connects to the datastream. Numbers and readouts appear superimposed before the view in front of him and he sees a note from Lauden.

LAUDEN:

HEY KID. JUST GOT THE IMPLANT?

JASON:

STILL GETTING USED TO IT.

JASON shakes his head in wonderment and LAUDEN grins at him.

LAUDEN:

THINK OF IT LIKE SEX, YOU'VE JUST GOT TO
RELAX AND LET IT FLOW.

LAUDEN CHUCKLES as the text in front of Jason clears. With preflight finished, the controls move and the shuttle shudders away from the station without anyone touching anything. Once away, they see the vast bulk of the Icarus through the viewshield.

3. EXT. SPACE STATION AND REAL ICARUS (EARTH ORBIT) - DAY

Like a minnow circling a whale, their tiny shuttle maneuvers around the Icarus. Once at the nose, the docking is smoothly completed without a single false start. The curve of the Earth is visible behind the shuttle.

4. INT. VESTIBULE (REAL ICARUS) - DAY

BENJAMIN MARCUS, a burly man in his late fifties with a clean-shaven head, undogs the hatch and pokes his head in before LAUDEN is even finished cooldown. He is in his early forties and has a gruff, blocky appearance. JASON unstraps while MARCUS talks.

MARCUS

Hello, I'm Captain Benjamin Marcus. You must be Jason Wodlinger, the Primary Planetologist and Secondary MD. Nice to meet you.

MARCUS reaches out and shakes JASON's hand while pulling him into the ship.

MARCUS

(continuing)

Sorry for the bum's rush, but our launch window is closing fast.

JASON

The Jupiter gravity assist.

MARCUS smiles slightly as he guides JASON through the narrow confines. The corridor is dimly lit, with wires and instrument packages sticking out randomly. No one else is about.

MARCUS

Bang on the first time. Guess they do give you a solid preflight. Anyway, we've got to get extrasolar yesterday.

They pass a branch and take the downward one. A cramped control room is visible above. JASON picks up MARCUS' clipped rhythm and tries to impress.

JASON

Can't engage the drive

insystem so gotta go solid
fuel to 3 AUs.

MARCUS

(nods agreement)

Don't wanna take a dump in
our own backyard. And I want
that reserve, so it's now or
wait another couple of
years. Been waiting ten
years for a

MARCUS

(continuing)

goodstar like the big bear
and that's long enough.

They go through another hatchway at the end of the
corridor.

5. INT. CORPSICLE CHAMBER (REAL ICARUS) - DAY

It is a large cylindrical room that seemingly stretches
to infinity. JASON stops and stares around. Every square
centimeter is filled with what appear to be metal coffins
- thousands of them. Each has a monitor screen and a
blinking green light. Faces are visible through the tiny
window on top of each one.

MARCUS

Welcome to your home for the
next generation or two.
Gotta coffin all warmed up
for you.

MARCUS gestures to one open coffin above their heads. He
waits a moment.

MARCUS

(continuing)

Any time in the next couple
of minutes.

JASON

Sorry, it's all a little
fast. Where?

MARCUS gets a little annoyed as Jason looks around.

MARCUS

Nobody here but us chickens.
Save the facilities...

He motions to a cleansing area near the hatchway.

MARCUS

(continuing)

... for when you get out. The coffin will take care of all your waste and I'll toss your stuff into space with the other excess cargo.

JASON

Uhhh... right.

MARCUS

Got your personal data disk?

JASON reaches into a pocket and pulls it out.

MARCUS

(continuing)

Pop it in the slot and I'll tuck you in.

JASON removes his clothing and pushes off to the handhold next to the coffin. He inserts the disk into the waiting slot and, after a deep breath, maneuvers with some difficulty into the open coffin. MARCUS approaches and grabs hold of the cover.

MARCUS

Just breathe deeply and you'll be a corpsicle before you know it. My exec should be waiting for you in VR.

MARCUS stares into space, concentrating.

MARCUS

(continuing)

Final implant check.

JASON looks up and streams of data are superimposed on his vision. The data end with:

ALL SYSTEMS ARE GO

Then his vision clears.

MARCUS

I'll be staying Real until we're past Jupiter, but all being well, I'll see you on the other side in a couple of days.

JASON
(grins weakly)
Lifeplanet or bust.

MARCUS shakes his head and closes the cover, automatically shutting off the light. He pushes off and JASON is left trapped in the contained, dark space. He hears VENTILATION NOISE and a slight HISSING SOUND. His breath rattles in his throat so he tries to calm himself by taking long, slow breaths. Eventually, his eyelids droop and his vision fades.

FADE OUT:

6. INT. JASON'S QUARTERS (VR ICARUS) - DAY

A face suddenly appears in front of him and JASON tries to jerk back, but the pillow on the bed blocks the movement. His quarters are small, but functional. There's a closet at the end of the bed and to his right, a small desk with a flat-screen monitor. The face smiling above him is that of MARTA JONSSON, a woman in her early thirties with short, cropped hair. All the images don't seem quiet real, almost like computer animation. MARTA extends her hand.

MARTA
Hello, I'm Marta, the exec
hereabouts. Welcome to the
Icarus.

JASON sits up, feels his arms, feels the bed and looks around quickly, jerking his head back and forth.

JASON
Top of the line.

MARTA chuckles.

MARTA
Thank you. I had a small
part in the design if I do
say so myself. Hard to
believe you're still a
corpsicle?

JASON stands up and bounces on his feet.

JASON
It feels so real.

MARTA
Get used to it. And get used

to the time scales. VR time is five shiptime so we'll be past Jupiter in about 8 hours. Then it's on to 47 Ursae Majoris for the next six years or so. The only Lifeplanet we've ever found.

The capital 'L' is clear in her reference to, or perhaps reverence for, the lifeplanet. JASON thinks about it for a moment.

JASON

Will we go Real then?

MARTA

Who knows? Depends what our nearprobes find. The deepprobe data all look good: Terranormal climate, temperate star. I think this is finally it.

She can't keep the excitement out of her voice and JASON smiles.

JASON

The first extrasolar colony.

MARTA

Damn straight. And we're it.
(recovers herself)
But we've got a thousand colonists to herd and a lot of work to do before then.

MARTA hands him his assignment and duty sheets. As she walks out the door, she calls back over her shoulder.

MARTA

Doctor's waiting for you to report for Second Medical duty.

JASON, still stunned by the pace of events, simply nods. He explores the room, touching each surface as he passes it.

7. EXT. REAL ICARUS - DAY

The Icarus is traveling through interstellar space.

A GRAPHIC APPEARS:

YEAR 1 - VIRTUALTIME

YEAR 5 - SHIPTIME

YEAR 8 - EARTHTIME

A corona of blue spectrally-shifted light cascades off the front of the ship. The sun (Sol) remains the brightest star behind the ship.

8. INT. MEDICAL BAY (VR ICARUS) - DAY

The Medical DOCTOR is standing in front of a group of thirty CREWMEMBERS, including MARTA and MARCUS, with JASON at his side in his role as Second Medical. The DOCTOR is in his early forties, with an easy, genial manner. The medical bay has no beds, only a large monitor screen on one wall and a conference area. All are staring into space, deep in the datastream. Stunned expressions appear on their faces as they emerge.

DOCTOR

Those are the latest updates to our biocybernetic implants. Just uplinked from Earth.

MARCUS

Well Doc, what's the scoop?

DOCTOR

As you can see, the enhancements are extensive... especially the Intelligence Amplification.

MARCUS

Tell it straight. What does it mean for us?

DOCTOR

Not a lot right now. We can install some of the software upgrades, but the hardware, particularly the Intelligence Amplification circuits, will have to wait until we have an established hospital in the 47UMa system.

The CREWMEMBERS look at each other uncertainly.

JASON

I know the improvements are incredible, but I've sampled and resampled the transmission - there's no mistake.

DOCTOR

Things are changing fast, but we'll have to get used to it. It's only going to get worse now that we're close to light speed.

MARCUS shakes his head and stands up in front of them.

MARCUS

Face it boys and girls. Pretty soon mission control's going to think we're complete morons. But we've got to much work to do to worry about that for now.

He exits and the other CREWMEMBERS string out after him. JASON talks with the DOCTOR.

JASON

I know at point nine c we're hitting serious time dilation, but it's still only been eight years on Earth. I have a hard time believing they made so many improvements.

DOCTOR

And don't forget, it took two years for this signal to reach us. Who knows what they've done since then.

JASON sits down in a chair. The DOCTOR pours a cup of coffee for him and Jason from the coffee machine in the corner.

DOCTOR

(continuing)

We got the first generation implants. You know how much

easier learning became... and
that was without IA.

JASON
So when the designers
enhanced their own
intelligence -

The DOCTOR puts a cup in front of Jason and sits down
himself.

DOCTOR
- it was exponential after
that.

JASON looks thoughtful as he leans back in the chair. He
stares at the status monitor.

JASON
How are we doing today?

Nonplussed for a moment by the shift in conversation, the
DOCTOR responds.

DOCTOR
Bodies are still doing fine.
Maintaining one-fifth
metabolic. Neurochemistry's
a little off in the crew
after our little show and
tell, but nothing to worry
about.

JASON scans the status monitor in front of him and points
at one graph.

JASON
We need more simsleap.

The DOCTOR nods agreement and takes a sip of coffee.

DOCTOR
Best coffee I've never had.

JASON smiles weakly at the old joke. The DOCTOR becomes
the physician again.

DOCTOR
(continuing)
I tweaked our serotonin
levels before the show, so
that should keep us
balanced.

JASON nods absentmindedly and continues to stare at the status monitor without really seeing it.

JASON
I don't know... I wonder how
the latest news will affect
the colonists.

DOCTOR
What do you mean?

JASON
The fact that by the time we
get to 47 UMa, or any other
system with a lifeplanet, we
won't just be morons - we
won't even be the same
species.

JASON turns to look at the DOCTOR.

9. INT. PLANETOLOGY LAB (VR ICARUS) - DAY

JASON is sitting in a chair in a small lab with an experiment running in one corner, supervised by the SECOND PLANETOLOGIST. On one wall is a large monitor screen showing images of an Earth-class body. JASON is deep in the datastream, studying images and data on the Jovian-class planet circling 47 Ursae Majoris (47UMa) and the Terra-class moon circling it. A note appears in front of him:

MARTA:

MAY I COME IN?

JASON emerges from the datastream and rises to greet MARTA as she enters.

JASON
Long time no see.

MARTA nods at the monitor screen.

MARTA
Still studying the data from
the last uplink?

JASON motions her to a chair and nods agreement.

JASON
They packed a lot of stuff
in. They've learned a hell

of a lot more about 47UMa
and its planets than we
thought possible.

MARTA

I'm getting the same
response from a lot of the
researchers. We may never
have to physically explore
again.

JASON tries to make light of it.

JASON

If it weren't for the
colonists, we could just
turn back.

They both try to smile, but the joke hits too close to
home. They sit silent for a moment, then JASON breaks the
mood with his quiet resolve.

JASON

But we're here and they're
still on Earth.

MARTA

Why are you here Jason?

At JASON's quizzical look, MARTA elaborates.

MARTA

(continuing)

I mean why did you sign up
for the mission? Sacrificed
everything you knew and
loved.

JASON thinks seriously for a moment, still unsure what
Marta wants.

JASON

My parents were killed in
the Troubles so I had
nothing to lose.

MARTA doesn't buy it so JASON relaxes his pose.

JASON

(continuing)

All right. I would have
given my right arm to come.
Traveling to the stars was a
stupid dream I'd had ever

since I was a kid.

MARTA

Still chasing adolescent
dreams?

JASON initially takes offense at the remark, but MARTA's
smile defuses the situation.

JASON

Aren't we all?... All progress
depends on the unreasonable
man.

MARTA

(smiles)
... or woman.

JASON nods touché.

JASON

When I was selected, I
couldn't believe my luck had
changed... and then to find
out I was on the backup
team...

MARTA

And you weren't sure there
would ever be another
mission.

JASON

That's right. We're supposed
to only be the first, but
after the Troubles - I knew
no plan for the future was
safe.

MARTA

Half the world over a
goddamn religious dispute.

MARTA shakes her head.

JASON

Why did you come see me
Marta? It wasn't to hear my
biography.

MARTA

I'm just trying to get an
informal consensus.

JASON

Maybe everything we discover
from now on will just be
repeating work already done,
but we're the ones pushing
the frontier. We're the ones
who'll walk on another
planet, around another star.

JASON puts a hand on her shoulder and she smiles.

MARTA

And that's enough?

JASON has no ready answer for that.

10. EXT. REAL ICARUS - DAY

The Icarus is traveling through interstellar space.

A GRAPHIC APPEARS:

YEAR 3 - VR TIME

YEAR 18 - SHIPTIME

YEAR 41 - EARTHTIME

A corona of spectrally shifted light cascades off the front of the ship. There is no significant visible star. A large region of distorted space appears behind the ship. The region coalesces into a hole in spacetime surrounded by a brilliant bright blue event horizon. An object emerges from the hole just before it collapses.

11. INT. PLANETOLOGY LAB(VR ICARUS) - DAY

JASON is deep in the datastream. Holographic images of the Terra-class moon, along with reams of data, appear before his eyes. He is simultaneously carrying out a physical experiment with a piece of rock being subjected to a laser beam. Deep in concentration, he doesn't notice MARTA walk in. A note appears superimposed on his view.

MARTA:

SORRY TO BOTHER YOU, BUT COULD YOU GIVE ME A
MOMENT?

JASON emerges from the datastream and turns to her.

JASON
What's up?

MARTA looks worried and leans on the desk near the experimental apparatus.

MARTA
Have you seen the latest uplink data?

JASON
No. I'm still working on last shipyear's. They sent another one already? That wasn't on the mission plan.

MARTA debates with herself for a moment.

MARTA
They sent a data drone with the latest.

JASON turns to face her, shocked.

JASON
What? How?

MARTA
Through a collapsar jump.

JASON
What the hell is that?

MARTA
It's just a theoretical construct... or at least it used to be theoretical... to cheat Einstein.

JASON absorbs that for a moment.

JASON
But now they can do it?

MARTA nods.

JASON
(continuing)
God damn. What data does the drone have?

MARTA
We don't know. We can't even decipher the index. It's

completely incomprehensible
gibberish. The signal's so
dense we don't even know
where to start.

MARTA sits down in the chair beside his workstation.
JASON joins her on the other side.

JASON
(to himself)
Like apes trying to
understand Relativity.

MARTA gives him a sharp look.

MARTA
What?

JASON
Nothing.

MARTA
We don't want word to spread
to the colonists until we
know more, that's why I came
here personally. You had
some luck deciphering your
part of the last uplink.

JASON nods.

JASON
That was just a fluke, and
it still took a full two
months of computer time to
make sense of it, but I'll
give it a shot if you want.

MARTA closes her eyes for a moment as she accesses the
datastream.

MARTA
The index is in your private
database. The rest won't
fit.

JASON nods for a moment, then realizes there's more she's
not saying.

JASON
How much data is there?

MARTA

More than our entire
capacity - much more.

JASON

But our onboard drives could
practically hold everything
written in the last three
hundred years. How big is
the drone?

MARTA closes her eyes for a moment and JASON joins her
in the datastream. An image of a small torpedo-shaped
craft about the size of a large dog appears in front of
them.

JASON

Jesus. Where's the
Enterprise?

MARTA nods at that, not fully understanding, but too
tired to care. JASON stews, growing more frustrated with
each passing moment.

JASON

Collapsar jumps? What the
hell's to stop them from
already being there when we
arrive. What if our whole
mission's for nothing?

MARTA turns steely.

MARTA

That's why we can't tell the
colonists...

JASON stands and paces. MARTA hesitates, watching him.

MARTA

(continuing)

...until we figure something
out. Whatever happens, the
Captain's decided to carry
on.

JASON

But what's the point?
They'll probably have a
billion people there who
know more about the moon
than I could ever find out.

MARTA wearily stands and turns a steely façade to Jason.

MARTA

They might not be there and
we'll still have to survive.
We need to know everything
we can about that moon.

JASON

But-

MARTA

(interrupting)

The Captain doesn't want to
make a general announcement
until we've had a chance to
talk privately to the crew.
We have no idea what we'll
find at the goodstar. We
have to be ready.

JASON glances up and sees what her single-minded
determination is costing her. She gives him a
disappointed look and leaves.

12. EXT. REAL ICARUS - DAY

The Icarus approaches a star system. A yellow star glows
brightly ahead. To one side, only the Jovian-class planet
is visible from this distance. Several small probes
emerge from the Icarus and descend to the gas giant and
to a small blue moon.

A GRAPHIC APPEARS:

YEAR 6 - VR TIME

YEAR 32 - SHIPTIME

YEAR 68 - EARTHTIME

13. INT. BRIDGE (VR ICARUS) - DAY

The bridge of the VR Icarus is modeled on that of an
aircraft carrier. MARCUS is pacing the bridge,
simultaneously watching the holostage and accessing the
datastream for more detailed information. On the
holostage in front of him is a 3D image of the Terra-
class moon, Trinity, of the gas giant 47 Ursae Majoris 3
(all visible as superimposed information). There is a
small BRIDGECREW of five at various positions around him.

MARCUS

Anything?

The FARSENSOR sits with his upper torso engulfed by what could be a giant hairdryer a.k.a. the Farsensor Dome.

FARSENSOR

I can't see any other ships.
The atmosphere smells good,
just like the deepprobes
reported.

MARTA sits tensely at her position behind Marcus. Her datastream overlay displays:

DEADMAN AUTODESTRUCT ACTIVATED, AWAITING
DISCONNECT TO PROCEED.

MARCUS waits impatiently. The moon has only one large Pangea-type continent. The image shifts around as the nearprobes change position. The CREWMAN to Marcus' emerges from the datastream.

CREWMAN

It's like the Earth in the
Triassic era.

MARCUS glances back and makes a quick check of his own in the datastream.

MARCUS

We'll call it New Pangea.

He smiles and turns to the Farsensor.

MARCUS

(continuing)
What about life?

FARSENSOR

Can't hear any com. No
surface tech. I taste water,
plenty of it... and life, too.
Adenine-based carbolife!
It's chlorophyllic and left-
handed!

The BRIDGECREW cheers, MARCUS smiles.

MARCUS

All right. I guess we're not
getting sleep any time soon.
Marta, have you got a list
of corpsicles to thaw?
We'll need biologists,
technicians...

MARTA relaxes into her chair, her datastream overlay changes to:

PREPARE TO DISENGAGE DEADMAN AUTODESTRUCT.

In the Farsensor Dome, the image surrounds the FARSENSOR, as though he were swimming in deep space like the nearprobe. The view switches to the output of another nearprobe providing a more distant view of the moon and a ring of asteroids in geosynchronous orbit. The asteroids range from a few to thousands of kilometers in diameter and are connected together by a thin gold strand. In perfect alignment, they encircle the globe like a black pearl necklace.

FARSENSOR

... and you'd better throw in
a few archeologists and
contacters.

Everyone stops talking and turns to the Farsensor. Marta half rises out of her chair. The image on the holostage changes to the more distant view of the necklace.

FARSENSOR

(continuing)

Trinity here has hundreds of
orbiting natural satellites
of its own, marching like
West Point cadets on a drill
field. We could never manage
anything close to that... at
least not when we left.

MARCUS turns toward MARTA and she nods while her overlay changes:

DEADMAN AUTODESTRUCT ACTIVATED

She sits down again and tensely clutches the armrests.

MARCUS

Shut down all nonessential
systems. Lets walk softly
here until we know what
we're up against. Farsensor,
pull back the nearprobes if
it's not already too late.
Marta, keep the deadman
active, if we can't handle
this, we don't want any
evidence left to lead them
to Earth.

MARTA

I'll datavise my Second Exec
to be ready to take over if
this goes on too long.

MARCUS nods and concentrates before talking again.

MARCUS

This is a full sensory
datavise to all crew and
colonists. Things have just
gotten interesting. We've
discovered evidence of alien
artifacts.

14. INT. MEDICAL BAY (VR ICARUS) - DAY

JASON and the DOCTOR listen to MARCUS' image finish the
announcement via the datastream.

MARCUS

(continuing)

We will post regular updates
to the stream as information
comes in. The Exec...

(looks to Marta)

... or Second Exec will post a
revised thaw schedule. That
is all.

MARCUS slumps back in his chair and the image blinks out.
JASON turns to the DOCTOR.

JASON

I can't believe it.

The DOCTOR holds up an imaginary wine glass.

DOCTOR

May we live in interesting
times.

JASON

For more than a hundred
years we've been searching
for intelligent alien life,
scattering deepprobes in
hundreds of star systems and
found nothing.

The DOCTOR gets a cup of coffee for himself and JASON and
they sit down at the conference table.

DOCTOR

Intelligent life must be pretty rare. We could've gone for millennia without finding anything.

JASON

And we just happened upon alien artifacts at the first lifeplanet we've found? I don't buy it.

DOCTOR

Maybe we just weren't looking carefully enough.

JASON becomes agitated.

JASON

Maybe, but we've seen enough evidence to suggest that there are thousands of G-class temperate stars in the galaxy, teeming with potential living worlds.

DOCTOR

Maybe they just weren't interested in exploring. Stayed on their own worlds.

JASON

But if it were us, with even modest projections of our growth rate and technological capacity, we would have filled the galaxy in only a few million years, making us impossible not to spot.

DOCTOR

But they're not us. And maybe they're not that old. Hell maybe they just made that thing.

JASON thinks about it and scans the datastream. Data flow across his vision and he comes back.

JASON

No. Initial data suggest the formation is a hell of a lot older than that.

JASON pauses thoughtfully.

JASON

(continuing)

Maybe they're not us, but if they were even close, they should be everywhere.

DOCTOR

Where are they? Why is there no evidence of aliens ever colonizing or even visiting Earth? For two billion years, the only lifeforms were crude single-celled organisms. Even the spit from one alien would have forever altered Earth's chemistry.

JASON

But that didn't happen.

JASON sips his coffee and thinks about it.

JASON

(continuing)

Even if they were following some kind of "Prime Directive" not to interfere in our development. They still would have colonized the empty lifeplanets.

DOCTOR

(chuckles)

I think you've been watching too many of your old sci-fi shows.

JASON

(shakes his head)

Call it whatever you want. Now that we know intelligent alien life exists...

DOCTOR

There hasn't been much debate about this issue since the Troubles. I don't even have a solid medical protocol for first contact. Just a bunch of thought experiments.

JASON

The planners just never thought it would really happen. Even the whole Deadman Autodestruct failsafe to keep the enemy from learning about us was just a kneejerk military response.

DOCTOR

Well I've at least got to review those thought experiments.

JASON doesn't really hear him.

JASON

They were right next door. And with the technology to create that ring, why didn't they come for a visit?

DOCTOR

Maybe they aren't really alien artifacts. Who knows what's happening with Earth now. Maybe they came and left.

The DOCTOR stands.

DOCTOR

(continuing)

Anyway, we've got some corpsicles to ready for thawing and I could use your help.

JASON smiles ruefully.

JASON

Maybe it's all just an elaborate practical joke.

He stands and slaps the DOCTOR on the back as they walk towards the status monitor.

15. INT. CORPSICLE CHAMBER (REAL ICARUS) - DAY

Jason's coffin hisses open and he immediately stares down at Captain MARCUS and the gap between himself and the floor. Momentarily take aback, he grabs onto the coffin

door to keep from falling out. His viewpoint shifts and he thinks of himself as lying down and MARCUS looking down at him in zero G. A little embarrassed, he pulls himself out. MARCUS grins at him.

MARCUS

Takes getting used to after
six years at a full G... or at
least a virtual G.

JASON finishes pulling himself out, but feels dizzy and grabs a handhold. He is completely naked and his skin flakes off with every movement. MARCUS puts a hand out to steady him. JASON tries to pull himself, but cannot.

MARCUS

(continuing)

Take it easy. You've been
asleep for 32 years, it'll
take a while for things to
come back.

(waves his hand)

And you could use a bath and
a shave pronto.

He motions to the shower room near the hatchway. MARCUS hands him a foodpaste tube.

MARCUS

(continuing)

Eat it all, but only a bit
at a time. The concentrate
should have you functional
in an hour. We'll talk
later.

JASON looks a question at him.

MARCUS

(continuing)

You get the royal treatment
from the old man himself

MARCUS

(continuing)

today, but don't let it get
to your head. Doc was busy
with some complications and
I'm excess baggage now.

He shrugs and points JASON to the washing area before giving him a light shove. MARCUS flips and dives out the hatchway while JASON, moving like an arthritic ninety-year old, maneuvers himself to a mirror. A befuddled old

man with a scraggly beard and a corpse-like pallor punctuated by blotchy red patches stares back at him. He pulls a hunk of dead skin from his face and stares at it. His voice crackles like dry leaves and he COUGHS up thick, yellow phlegm.

JASON

Welcome to the 22nd Century.
Not too bad for a ninety-
year old... I guess.

He slowly makes his way to the sonic shower. Once he closes the door, he luxuriates in the humming wash.

16. INT. CONTROL ROOM (REAL ICARUS)

JASON, now appearing to be a concentration camp victim in his forties, enters while MARCUS stares at the image of Trinity and its Necklace on the viewscreen. MARCUS turns around when he hears him.

MARCUS

You're looking better! In
another week, you'll be a
hale and hearty seventy-year
old.

MARCUS slaps JASON on the back and JASON cringes from the sting. He croaks in reply.

JASON

Good to be Real again.

MARCUS

And with a whole planet to
explore, not to mention the
Necklace.

JASON

Anything more on that?

MARCUS

We confirmed the
unbelievable smoothness of
the orbit, but

MARCUS

(continuing)

we don't know what the hell
the links are made of. There
are artifacts, but we
haven't landed on one yet.
No sign of any inhabitants

either.

JASON sucks on the foodpaste tube and grimaces. MARCUS chuckles at him.

MARCUS

Just remember: it's fuel,
the engine needs fuel.
That's my mantra.

JASON stares at Trinity and the shining pearls as the sun emerges from behind the planet. The gold links twinkle in the light.

JASON

I never thought I'd get the
chance to see anything like
it... So what's next?

MARCUS

In a couple of days, we'll
finish waking your
planetology team so you can
confirm our colonization
site.

JASON turns to MARCUS.

JASON

But what about-

MARCUS

(interrupts)
the Necklace. I know
everyone wants to see the
Pearls for themselves.
Security needs to finish
assessing the danger. You'll
get your chance. But one
thing at a time.

JASON sucks absent-mindedly from the tube while staring at the Necklace.

17. EXT. TRINITY - TWILIGHT

JASON, now looking more like his physical age of twenty-nine, watches the sun go down with a group of PLANETOLOGISTS. The nearby Jovian-class planet dominates the sky, creating enough light that there is never true darkness on Trinity. The rays continue to shine over the ridge even after the sun slips behind - creating pink streaks in the sky. The Pearls in orbit glow against the

maroon sky and Jovian background.

JASON
(quietly)
I forgot how beautiful it
was.

His SECOND, standing next to him, wipes a tear from her eye.

SECOND
My whole life... my whole life
I've lived under the Frisco
dome. Never saw the sunset
before. Not for real. Not
with my own eyes.

JASON
And never like this. No one...
no human has ever seen a
sunset like this.

From out of the last dying rays, a flivver drifts down to a landing next to the group. MARTA steps out and strides determinedly toward JASON.

MARTA
Jason. We've found
something.

JASON waits for her to continue, then simply nods and joins her in the flivver.

18. EXT. TRINITY ORBIT - NIGHT

The Icarus is visible in the background only by its running lights. JASON, MARTA and a group of TECHNICIANS approach one of the Pearls in the shuttle.

MARTA
We've named this one Noon.
The other large moon on the
opposite side is called Six
and so on around the ring.
There are 178 moons in all,
but this is where we found
the Message.

JASON
The whole thing is one large
tablet inscribed with runes
of some kind?

MARTA

It's a metal with properties we've never seen. We can't cut it, burn it, tarnish it in any way. Who knows how long it's been there.

She turns to JASON.

MARTA

(continuing)

That's what we want you to find out.

JASON nods at that.

JASON

Any luck deciphering the runes?

MARTA smile ruefully.

MARTA

Better luck than we've had deciphering that last message from Earth. They left an obelisk as some kind of Rosetta stone. Main computer's been cranking away at it for a couple of months now. Should have it all soon.

As they get close to Noon, the markings on the rocky surface become visible. For thousands of kilometers, every surface is covered with this metallic material inscribed with runes.

19. EXT. NOON SURFACE - DAY

The shuttle lands gently in a marked off area. JASON, MARTA and the TECHNICIANS emerge in full vacuum suits. The suit consists of a thin flexible material that covers them from head to toe, topped with a compact helmet. A thin backpack provides oxygen through tubes connected to the helmet as well as power for the electronic systems. JASON stops to view the vast tableau.

JASON

Any luck figuring out why there are no artifacts at all on Trinity? Plenty of evidence of genengineering

in the flora and fauna, but why sweep the whole place clean?

MARTA

We're hoping it's all in the Message. But I think maybe they left it as some kind of nature preserve. You know, an ecovacation spot.

JASON

Popular among the bug-eyed yuppies of Tau Ceti Prime.

JASON grins at her and they continue to explore.

20. EXT. NOON BASE - NIGHT

The shelter resembles a cluster of soap bubbles scattered randomly. Flood lights illuminate the area immediately around the base and there is a diffuse light from the gas giant which dominates the sky, cut by the Pearl Necklace.

21. INT. NOON BASE - NIGHT

MARCUS, JASON, MARTA and a group of SCIENTISTS sit around a conference table.

MARCUS

What have we got?

MARTA

Still no luck deciphering the Message, but it should be any day now.

JASON

I managed to get enough of a sample off some dust at one of the seams in the tablet. Isotope dating puts it at roughly three million years old.

There is a silence around the table. MARCUS clears his throat.

MARCUS

Son of a bitch... What about asteroid impacts? Wouldn't they have marred the surface

after three million years.

LEAD SCIENTIST

There seem to be some kind of force field keeping fast moving objects away. Only a gentle approach like we made will get through.

MARCUS

But -

LEAD SCIENTIST

We have no idea what it is, how it's generated or what it's power source is.

(agitated)

What kind of power source could last longer than the Stone Age?

MARCUS and the others think about that, then he speaks up.

MARCUS

While we were still figuring out what to do with flint, they were exploring their solar system.

He shakes his head.

JASON

Or more. We don't know yet if they had extrasolar colonies.

MARCUS

All right, I want extra caution from now on. Constant monitoring of every exploration team. I don't know if they'd set up booby traps, but I get the feeling we'd never know it until it was too late. I want a record of everything and full backups every hour. Dismissed.

He leaves and the SCIENTISTS disperse, leaving MARTA and JASON at the table.

JASON

So we're the canaries in the mines.

MARTA

Isn't that what you wanted?
Someone always has to go first.

She smiles at him and lays a hand on his arm.

22. EXT. NOON SURFACE - NIGHT

JASON is working on an exposed fragment of a rocky outcropping that is not covered with the metallic material. Carefully chipping at it with his hammer, he is interrupted by a datastream overlay.

EVERYONE. COME TO THE OBELISK. I'VE GOT SOMETHING TO SHOW YOU.

DR. GARCIA

JASON motions to his PLANETOLOGISTS and they make their way to the Obelisk in long, loping strides. The Obelisk is the only object marring the level surface, and it stands one kilometer high with a base of 100 meters on a side. In short, difficult to miss. The PLANETOLOGISTS are the last team to make it. There are about eighty EXPLORERS there, with DR. EMANUEL GARCIA, a thin, precise man in his late forties, standing in front of the Obelisk, nervously shuffling his feet. MARCUS opens the discussion.

MARCUS

Now that we're all here...

He nods in Jason's direction.

MARCUS

(continuing)

... let's get on with the show.

DR. GARCIA

(somewhat apologetic)

I just wanted to tell you with the appropriate backdrop.

MARCUS gives him a look that says, "get on with it."

DR. GARCIA
(continuing)
Main computer has finished
deciphering the Rosetta
stone and the index.

JASON
Index?

DR. GARCIA
The obelisk is the Rosetta
and the index to all the
data inscribed on Noon.

MARCUS
Well?

DR. GARCIA motions to the base of the obelisk.

DR. GARCIA
It's really fiendishly
simple, but my IQ tests two
standard deviations above
the norm and I still didn't
get it.

DR. GARCIA shakes his head while JASON rolls his eyes.
MARCUS grows more impatient, but restrains himself.

DR. GARCIA
(continuing)
The runes are merely the
first layer of data, just
the précis if you will. The
real information is being
continuously broadcast using
a powerful broadband
transmitter.

JASON, caught up in the explanation in spite of himself,
interjects.

JASON
But why didn't we pick up
the broadcasts on Earth?

DR. GARCIA is delighted by the question.

DR. GARCIA
Because we were so stupid
that we thought aliens would
broadcast on one frequency
like we do, so we searched
for something intelligible

on one frequency, assuming
all the static was just the
echoes of the Big Bang.

MARCUS jumps in to stop him.

MARCUS
Garcia, just get to the
point.

A bit flustered since he was just hitting his pedagogical
stride, DR. GARCIA stumbles.

DR. GARCIA
Well... yes... ummmm... instead of
being on one frequency,
these aliens smeared their
message over every
frequency. That way it could
get past black holes,
neutron stars, anything in
its way without losing
complete integrity.

Taking a breath, DR. GARCIA motions to the array of
instruments behind him.

DR. GARCIA
(continuing)
The runes told us what to do
and now we've rigged the
message for full sensory
playback. Log on to the
datastream and I'll activate
it.

JASON and the others log on and Jason's view of the
Obelisk is overlaid with:

AWAITING INPUT

As he stares, his vision of the Noon surface transforms
into the image of an old man standing amidst a forest of
pine trees.

23. EXT. FOREST - MORNING

The OLD MAN strides casually toward him, taking a deep
breath, filling his lungs with the scent of pine.

OLD MAN
To correct your first
impression, I am not here,

you are not here, the Ataraj
don't look like this and I
am just the friendly index,
designed to suit your
mentality.

JASON (O/S)
What happened here?

OLD MAN
Of course. The answer is as
simple as it is complex. We
were just beginning to
explore

OLD MAN
(continuing)
the galaxy. The planet you
see below us was one of our
early colonies and we ask
that you hold it in trust,
along with the other three
worlds we inherited from the
Naroon.

JASON
More lifeplanets?

OLD MAN
Yes. All empty and awaiting
colonization.

Text appears on the Old Man's image for a few seconds.

COORDINATES AVAILABLE

JASON
But-

OLD MAN
As I said we were just
beginning to colonize when
we discovered that we could
use our technology not just
to change the world around
us, but to change ourselves.

JASON
Why didn't you use the
worlds for yourselves?

OLD MAN
We did, for as long as we
needed them.

JASON
What happened?

OLD MAN
We transcended physical
form.

JASON
But that's impossible.

OLD MAN
Judging by the neural
interface I am using to
broadcast this to you, I
believe you are well on your
way to the same goal.

JASON breaks out of the datastream broadcast and stumbles backward on the rocky slope. MARTA breaks out next and they look at each other, knowing the truth.

24. EXT. TRINITY SQUARE (TRINITY) - SUNRISE

A square in the center of a small village is filled with over a thousand COLONISTS, SCIENTISTS and CREWMEN. To one side, a young woman is nursing a baby, drawing many smiles. MARCUS turns away from the YOUNG MOTHER and looks out at the crowd from the small raised dais he stands on. He appears relaxed and well rested, dressed in a casual long-sleeve shirt instead of his uniform. MARTA and JASON hold hands in the front row.

MARCUS
I wanted to gather everyone,
except for a small skeleton
crew on Icarus, and speak to
you personally. I guess I'm
still primitive enough to
think that this needs more
than a cold datavise.

He smiles ruefully and stares at the YOUNG MOTHER.

MARCUS
(continuing)
I'm glad to see that some of
you have decided to reverse
the prophylactic implant and
make this your home.

He turns back to the crowd and they stare curiously back at him. He makes a decision.

MARCUS

(continuing)

With the help of the Index,
we finally managed to
decipher the data drone from
Earth. It wasn't simply a
mission download... It was
goodbye.

JASON and MARTA hold each other, encouraging MARCUS.

MARCUS

(continuing)

Humanity has left us behind.
First, they adopted
silicon/nanonic processing,
then organized plasma
matrices.

He pauses and CLEARS his throat.

MARCUS

(continuing)

Physical form was no longer
required... They have evolved
and left us behind.

(CLEARS his throat)

As a result, I am no longer
your Captain. We will have
mayoralty elections soon to
choose a new leader.

He descends from the dais, met only by silence. JASON
begins CLAPPING and MARTA follows, soon it spreads until
all are clapping. JASON hugs MARTA and pats her belly.

JASON

To a new world and a new
frontier.

They kiss and we rise from the small village on the huge
continent to the small moon of the huge Jovian to the
small system in the Milky Way.

- THE END -