

SPACE ODDITY

"MARSIDE: One Small Step"

by  
Gary Davidson

Titan-Rainbow Media Productions

SPACE ODDITY: -1A: "MARSIDE: One Small Step" 1.

BEGIN OPENING ACT:

EXT. SPACE - JUPITER ORBIT - LONG BOW CORRIDOR

The giant red spot on the "surface" of Jupiter is visible. The running lights of a large vessel can be seen in the shadow of the planet moving toward the CAMERA POV. When it comes into the light it will reveal a TANKER SIZED TRANSPORT SPACE CRAFT.

The top side of the TANKER is facing the surface of JUPITER. It moves toward the distant SUN with increasing speed thanks to the slingshot effect of close Jupiter fly-by that the "Long Bow Corridor" affords.

At the bottom the caption "KENBY MINING TRANSPORT MARU LISA. JANUARY 13, 2138, 12:28 zenith. JUPITER LONG BOW CORRIDOR" appears in blue lettering and then slowly fades out as the MARU LISA passes CAMERA VIEW accelerating.

INT. MARU LISA - BRIDGE

A dark, enclosed squarish BRIDGE with CONSOLES and people in brown jump-suits operating the ship.

NAVIGATOR

We've passed second marker on  
LONGBOW CORRIDOR. Proceeding  
normally.

COMMANDER

Stand by for phase course  
correction.

HELM starts keying in the course correction.

HELM

Standing by for phase course  
correction.

COMMANDER

Count off.

NAVIGATOR

Five, four, three, two, one...

COMMANDER

Phase course correction, HELM.

HELM togs in the commands and the MARU LISA starts a climb. ALL react accordingly.

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The VISITOR is the only person on the BRIDGE not wearing a corporate suit. She is MAJOR WELLS and apparently on her first long range space transport and her lack of familiarity with a "slingshot" is evident when she almost loses her grip and rolls across the DECK of the BRIDGE.

EXT. SPACE - AT MARU LISA

The NOSE of the TANKER arcs up the widest as the Reaction Control Thrusters attempt to take maximum advantage of the gravity of the giant planet for the final slingshot home.

INT. MARU LISA - BRIDGE

The deck levels as the ship completes the maneuver. The crew relaxes and the COMMANDER moves forward to MAJOR WELLS.

COMMANDER  
Your first time pulling a  
slingshot, Major?

MAJOR WELLS  
Is it that obvious?

COMMANDER  
Green is not a normal colour for  
the face, sir.

MAJOR WELLS  
This trip has not been quite what I  
expected.

COMMANDER  
They never are.

From the other end of the BRIDGE the COMMUNICATION OFFICER calls out.

COMMUNICATIONS  
Sir? You should see this?

The COMMANDER and WELLS moves across the BRIDGE to COMMUNICATIONS.

On the DISPLAY there are scrambled images, pixelating all over the place, graphics are superimposed over the original source and the speed seems wrong but not enough of the image can be recovered to even guess what it was or even what type of animal's head is supposed to be dead center, if indeed that is an animal at all.

ALL three look at it.

COMMANDER

Signal shouldn't be that bad this close.

COMMUNICATIONS

It's not from Earth, sir. And we're not the intended receiver.

MAJOR WELLS

Then who is?

COMMUNICATIONS

I don't know. It goes behind us, past from where we came, out near... Pluto.

COMMANDER

PLUTO? We don't have any operations out there.

MAJOR WELLS looks at the COMMANDER with controlled reservation.

COMMANDER (CONT'D)

Where's it coming from?

COMMUNICATION

It looks like Mars, sir?

COMMANDER

Mars?!

MAJOR WELLS nods the COMMANDER over to a part of the BRIDGE where they can talk privately.

MAJOR WELLS

We're not operating around PLUTO but the New SOVIET are?

COMMANDER

New SOVIETs, huh?

MAJOR WELLS

Yeah, but all they've got are a few mining concerns, nothing military.

COMMANDER

That we know of.

MAJOR WELLS

With the way talks have been going I'd doubt its anything more, but this does warrant closer scrutiny.

The COMMANDER looks at MAJOR WELLS with reservation.

COMMANDER  
I'm on a tight schedule, Major.  
That sort of thing is not my call.

The COMMANDER turns to COMMUNICATIONS.

COMMANDER (CONT'D)  
Are you recording that, SKINNER?

COMMUNICATIONS  
Aye, sir.

COMMANDER  
Then we'll forward a copy to the  
Information Management with the  
next packet.

COMMUNICATIONS  
Aye, sir.

The COMMANDER turns to MAJOR WELLS.

COMMANDER  
I hope you're right, Major. This  
area of space is hazardous enough  
without another war.

MAJOR WELLS stands there solemnly as the COMMANDER moves back to his station.

EXT. SPACE - AT RIGEL III

The RIGEL III is a long cylindrical submarine shaped craft. Fifty six meters long, twelve and half high and a little more than eleven meters in width.

RIGEL III has a front nose cone that more resembles a twentieth century Jumbo jet than a space ship. And like the jumbo jet the COCKPIT sits on top and half back of the forward LIVING SECTION of the ship.

RIGEL III moves slowly through space, somewhere half way to MARS heading back to the LUNAR ORBIT.

At the bottom the caption "SCR-RIGEL3 - Registry UNSC 105662. MARCH 30, 2238 - 17:21 universal. Between MARS and the Moon" in blue lettering that slowly fades out.

The CAMERA is TRUCKING in on the PORT SIDE of the CRAFT. It passes through the solid bulkhead and into the MISSION CONTROL HALL on DECK D.

The MCH is a thin long corridor running from the COCKPIT at the top down through the CORE ACCESS LADDER of the RIGEL III to the BOTTOM SHUTTLE DOCK.

INT. RIGEL III - DECK D-OPERATIONS PLANNING AREA

At the bottom of the MCH and just above the SHUTTLE HATCH is the MISSION PLANNING area is a QUAD-DISPLAY on one side, MINI-CONN beside it and a BENCH COUCH opposite.

Primarily it is designed for TEAMS to review MISSION Plans although currently it has a bulky and apparently makeshift KEYPAD hard wired through an open access socket while three of the FIVE PEOPLE on the RIGEL III are trying to by pass something. Their actions look somewhat tense.

Each is wearing an UNSC Flight Uniform, black tunics except for the YOKE and SLEEVES of each uniform which is a different color depending on the department.

Working on the MINI-COMM attached to the MONITOR is MAGELLAN in his PILOT BLUE tunic. Behind him, HENRY James in Operations Yellow is watching the MONITOR expectantly, while TRAVIS Ingrouille in his Dark Blue of Patrol/Tactical Ops tunic sits at the edge of the BENCH quietly scrolling through a MINI-CONN.

MELbourne Girney in Engineering Orange at the FEED CONNECTOR linking the signal from the wall socket the KEYPAD. Off near the CORE ACCESS LADDER is MacMANUS, in Pilot Blue with a white collar denoting Command.

MacMANUS has a first generation PAPER-WATE in his hand, a blocky portable display unit with a curved metal band arcing across the top acting as the antenna. MacMANUS is engrossed at the display.

MAGELLAN

Nope. That's not it.

MEL moves the CONNECTOR CABLE to another INTERFACE CHIP in the wall panel.

MEL

OK, what about now?

MAGELLAN is looking at the MONITOR which has something starting to come in, he starts typing alternator commands on the KEYPAD.

MAGELLAN

I think....

There is a pause as they wait for something to happen.

HENRY

...therefore I am. That's how it ends, Bill.

MAGELLAN turns to HENRY and makes a mocking face.

MAGELLAN

Ha, ha. Been working on that one have you, HENRY?

HENRY

No... They come to me naturally.

MAGELLAN

You're a peach, pally. A real peach.

Suddenly a burst of static cuts across the MONITOR, all focus returns to that.

MAGELLAN (CONT'D)

Go back to that one...!

MEL readjusts back.

MAGELLAN (CONT'D)

I think we've got it...!

MEL

What?

The STATIC starts fluctuating, MAGELLAN is typing to compensate.

MAGELLAN

It's... it's...

MEL

Come on World Cup Soccer!

MAGELLAN

It's... it's....

The image solidifies and someone in showing you how to make something with couscous.

HENRY  
... a cooking show!

They're speaking Portuguese.

TRAVIS  
It's Brazilian.

HENRY  
A Brazilian cooking show. Wow!

MAGELLAN  
Couscous isn't Portuguese!

MEL  
Maybe they're branching out?

HENRY  
And to think I questioned your ability to pull it off.

HENRY pats MAGELLAN on the shoulder as he rises and heads to MacMANUS.

MAGELLAN  
OK, MEL, let's go onto the next one.

TRAVIS flicks off the DISPLAY in disgust and falls back into the seat.

TRAVIS  
Well, our careers are officially dead.

MAGELLAN  
What are you talking about, we're the best Squad of test pilots Command has.

TRAVIS  
Which is getting us what, exactly? None of us has had a grade increase or placement offer in years.

MACMANUS  
Didn't know you wanted one Travis...

TRAVIS

I had different plans than test  
piloting forever.

MACMANUS

It won't be forever.

TRAVIS

Oh really, how are you planning to  
avoid that?

MACMANUS

Just because I don't know yet  
doesn't mean I'm not trying.

TRAVIS

We've been stuck in the test corps  
ever since you ran FAR SIDE.

MEL

We stopped a war!

TRAVIS

Yeah, and COMMAND was really  
grateful for that too apparently.  
Look, I'm just saying I want to do  
something more challenging than  
jogging about the system trying to  
keep experimental craft I'm in from  
breaking up, that's all.

MAGELLAN

That recovery operation on TEMPER  
STATION was challenging.

TRAVIS

Rescuing little kittens from a  
backwater VENT system isn't what I  
had in mind Bill!

MAGELLAN turns to the others deflated.

MAGELLAN

I thought it was interesting.

MEL pats his shoulder as she rises and stretches out.

MEL

You're opinion is the only one that  
counts Bucko. Let Lieutenant  
Grumpy Butt complain all he wants,  
I like the job we've got.

TRAVIS

Let's hope so, you'll be doing it a long while.

Things sort of settle down a bit as MEL and MAGELLAN return to trying to get World Cup Soccer on the DISPLAY. HENRY, who has been trying to view the PAPER-WATE MacMANUS is still intent on finally gives up and asks.

HENRY

What are you doing there, Chief?

MacMANUS doesn't look up as he scrolls down the list on the PAPER-WATE display.

MACMANUS

Homework.

HENRY

I have it on good authority, old friend, that you graduated years ago.

MACMANUS

RIGEL Aerospace homework.

MAGELLAN

Those shares they gave you are more trouble than their worth.

MACMANUS

I don't agree.

MEL

What's five per cent of RIGEL going to get you?

MACMANUS

Six point three percent.

MEL

How?

MACMANUS

I have it set up so that everything I earn is used to buy more shares.

MEL

Big deal. RIGEL's a pretty stagnant company right now. What with peace breaking out all over the place.

(MORE)

MEL(CONT'D)

How much return can you get on shares in a space fighter company these days?

MACMANUS

They build more than just fighters.

MAGELLAN

Engine parts for Cargo Transports, drivers for tugs. Thrusters for stations. Big deal.

MACMANUS

I'm not worried. Historically peace doesn't last very long. As soon as the next war breaks out I'm going to start seeing serious returns.

HENRY

There's a comforting thought.

MAGELLAN

Well, I wouldn't bet on it. The entire world economy has been soft since we converted to the GEO-BUCK.

MEL

Oh, here we go again.

MAGELLAN

It's true! The whole thing's been plummeting since currency exchange stopped happening. A lot of money circulating kept the economy going.

MAGELLAN gets the signal that their looking for. He motions to MEL who stops fiddling behind the MONITOR and joins MAGELLAN and HENRY sitting watching it.

MACMANUS

Right. It's such a shame that people now have to trade only in things that actually exist, isn't it?

MAGELLAN

I'm just saying...

MACMANUS

Look, these shares I got were free,...

MEL

It pays to be the son of the owners.

MACMANUS

But the condition for keeping them is that I have to review the minutes of the board meetings.

MAGELLAN

So, just sign the bottom and get it over with.

HENRY

It's not that easy, once he's done he has to answer a questionnaire to prove he was paying attention.

MAGELLAN

Are you kidding?

MACMANUS

Unfortunately not... My mother has a great deal of faith in me.

MEL

Or a whole lot of experience.

MACMANUS

What does that mean?

MEL

Where am I from again?

MACMANUS

Australia.

MEL

And when did you finally read my report?

MACMANUS

I didn't, but you keep telling me you're from Australia.

MAGELLAN

Like the name isn't a clue.

MACMANUS

Girney?

ALL

MELBOURNE!!!

MACMANUS

Oh, right. Huh...

MEL

Three years now.

HENRY

Well at least we stopped calling  
you "new guy".

MEL

No end of thanks there HENRY.

MACMANUS

Oh!!!

HENRY

What?

MacMANUS looks up for a calendar or CHRONO.

MACMANUS

What's the date? The Thirtieth?

HENRY

Yes sir.

MACMANUS

Three, Thirty, thirty eight?!

MAGELLAN

Last I checked...

MacMANUS rushes over to the KEYPAD and starts typing in something. The signal they had fuzzes out and all are not impressed.

ALL

What'd you do that for?!!

MacMANUS motions for MAGELLAN to get on the KEYPAD, for some reason MAGELLAN obeys.

MACMANUS

Type in ZED ZED ALPHA DELTA DELTA  
GIMLI BY BY SIX ONE THETA.

MAGELLAN

What for?

MACMANUS

Do it!

MAGELLAN

OK! ...you want me to type in  
what?

MACMANUS

ZED ZED ALPHA DELTA DELTA GIMLI BY  
BY...

MacMANUS has looked up at the KEYPAD DISPLAY and he leans in  
correcting MAGELLAN.

MACMANUS (CONT'D)

No, no!! GIMLI with an "I" on the  
end and BY as in "built by".

MAGELLAN

Oh.

MACMANUS

SIX ONE THETA.

MAGELLAN types it in and they all look at the screen  
expectantly. There is nothing but static.

MAGELLAN

We had that before.

MEL

Hello?!! We had the World Cup  
finals!

HENRY

Yeah. What gives, Robert?

MacMANUS is back at the KEYPAD trying to punch buttons at  
random hoping to find the one that stops this.

MACMANUS

It must be encrypted.

MAGELLAN

I've got the most sophisticated  
illegal decryption compressor in  
this thing that there is.

MEL

Unless this is a HELIX Encryption.

MAGELLAN

A who what?

HENRY

You'd need the code sequence to  
break it down.

MEL

And those are infamously hard to  
get.

MacMANUS is looking at the PAPER-WATE. He starts rambling  
off numbers.

MACMANUS

Try one zero one one zero zero one  
one one one zero zero one zero one  
zero.

MAGELLAN and MEL are staring at MacMANUS as if he just grew  
an antenna.

MAGELLAN

Binary? You're kidding me right?

MacMANUS hands over the PAPER-WATE so MAGELLAN can read the  
code.

MACMANUS

Try it.

MEL

Binary is a dead language, like...  
Latin.

HENRY

Which is why the International  
Latin Committee just approved the  
word RAEBIUS for Sentient  
Artificial intelligence?

MEL

Just because they keep adding words  
to it doesn't mean it's alive.

MACMANUS

Regardless... Bill?

MAGELLAN is still typing.

MAGELLAN

I'm still typing.

Suddenly the static disappears and on all the available  
monitors appear various shots of something and reams of  
technical data.

ALL, including MacMANUS and TRAVIS stand back in awe at this sudden spectacle.

MEL  
Strewth! What's that?

MACMANUS  
That... should be the Arrowhead Project.

HENRY  
In English dear boy. If you please.

MACMANUS  
The first run of RIGEL's Proto-type Ion Drive faster than light test ship.

ALL are now looking at MacMANUS in awe.

MAGELLAN  
Run that by me again.

TRAVIS  
That ship is going to go faster than light?

MACMANUS  
That's the plan.

HENRY  
But isn't that impossible?

MEL  
That's my driver!!

Everyone looks at MEL in shock.

MAGELLAN  
What?!

MEL is pointing at a GRAPHIC DISPLAY at one of the far MONITORS.

MEL  
This is the DRIVER CONFIGURATION I delivered before transferring from the SHINDAR team to you lot.

MAGELLAN  
That was three years ago.

MEL  
That's my DRIVER,... and the  
bastard slapped his name on it!!  
I'll kill him.

HENRY  
Which bastard?

TRAVIS  
There are sooo many.

MEL  
SHINDAR, Dr. SHINDAR, head of the  
Arrowhead Design team.

HENRY  
The faster than light ship design  
team?

MEL  
With my driver! The little rat  
bastard!

MACMANUS  
It's RIGEL's driver MEL.

MEL  
Does it fall under your five per  
cent?

MACMANUS  
Yeah, sure, whatever.

HENRY  
OK, does someone want to explain to  
me how you go about breaking a  
pretty hard and fast law of physics  
held firm these last two hundred  
and fifty years now?

MACMANUS  
It's amazingly simple HENRY.

HENRY  
OH? Of course. I guess it would  
be. Should have been doing it all  
along I suppose.

MEL  
The technology didn't exist...

MACMANUS

Not until you delivered that  
DRIVER, MEL.

HENRY

So???...

MACMANUS

It has to do with relativity and  
the position of the observer, the  
increasing of mass at near light  
speeds, the warping of space around  
a large gravitational mass and the  
forward firing of highly charged  
ION Energy directly from the  
engines.

HENRY

You have no idea, do you?

MACMANUS

Well, I was there for the  
presentation, I just didn't  
understand half of it.

MEL

So is anyone on board that thing?

MACMANUS

Not for the first few runs. If it  
works then they have a team set.

MAGELLAN

Why isn't that team us?

MACMANUS

They gave it to this other guy.

MEL is reading from another screen.

MEL

Lieutenant Commander Paul CHEROK.  
According to this.

MACMANUS

Yeah, it was seniority or  
something.

HENRY

More likely they were looking for a  
nice stable pilot who doesn't have  
a history of crashing his ships.

MACMANUS

I resemble that remark!

HENRY

As well you should.

MAGELLAN

Shouldn't this be on the news? I mean, isn't this kind of historic? Shouldn't they be broadcasting it on the channels? Preempting soap operas or something?

MACMANUS

Only if it works.

HENRY

Otherwise it's embarrassing.

On screen TELEMETRY can be heard as FLIGHT CONTROL gives the go.

FLIGHT CONTROL (V/O)

Engaging SHINDAR DRIVERS.

MEL, looking at the screen growls at this term.

MEL (WHISPERING)

It'll be a slow death, too.

Everyone "shhh's" her as they take seats watching the event.

FLIGHT CONTROL (V/O)

Reading active on SLIPSTREAM PROJECTOR. ARROWHEAD is ready for launch.

FLIGHT COMMANDER (V/O)

Stand by for launch. FLIGHT ESCORT is coming on range. Advise mark.

FLIGHT ESCORT LEADER (V/O)

FLIGHT ESCORT is go. T-minus thirty eight seconds to mark.

EXT. SPACE - OUT PAST THE MOON - AT FLIGHT ESCORT

A very sleek looking FIGHTER CRAFT moves at high speed through the vastness of space. With each second it accelerates.

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OFF in the distance another FIGHTER CRAFT is doing the same thing and farther off another still.

FLIGHT ESCORT LEADER (V/O)  
FLIGHT ESCORTs are in position.  
Ready for ARROWHEAD.

EXT. SPACE - SPACE CARRIER VICTORY - TWO AU's LEEWARD OF MARS

The CARRIER VICTORY, loaded with SIDE LAUNCH BAYS and CONTAINER UNITS moves silently through space along the path MARS takes, though far behind the red planet. The CAMERA TRUCKS in on the CONNING TOWER of the massive craft.

EXT. SPACE CARRIER VICTORY - FLIGHT CONTROL CENTER

Similar to current Aircraft Carrier FLIGHT CONTROL CENTERS. There are two rows of CONSOLES all facing banks upon banks on DISPLAYS. At the AFT MIDDLE is the FLIGHT CONTROLLER.

On a VIEWSCREEN, reading off displays from the LAUNCH PLATFORM, is Paul CHEROK the mission FLIGHT COMMANDER. At the AFT, watching from the back wall are SHINDAR, the PROJECT ENGINEER and other dignitaries and Command Grade officers of UNCA.

FLIGHT CONTROLLER  
Roger, ESCORT. FLIGHT CONTROL is  
now in the hands of the FLIGHT  
COMMANDER.

CHEROK (O/S)  
FLIGHT COMMANDER is on line...

EXT. SPACE - AT LAUNCH PLATFORM

The boxy LAUNCH PLATFORM sits in open space, directly between EARTH and MARS.

CHEROK (V/O)  
... and in control...

EXT. LAUNCH PLATFORM - CONTROL CENTER

The CONTROL CENTER is a smaller more cramped version of the VICTORY CENTER. Lieutenant Commander CHEROK is one of three people manning the CONTROL CENTER and the only one present who isn't an engineer or maintenance staff.

CHEROK

...Ready to engage ARROWHEAD test  
ship drivers.

Just before he togs the ARROWHEAD CRAFT ACTIVATOR, CHEROK  
leans into his console, speaking into the SIDE MIC attached  
to his ear.

CHEROK (CONT'D)

For I tossed a stone, far as the  
eye could see, not knowing if it  
would skip the surface or sink  
below the sea.

CHEROK togs the button with satisfaction. On the displays  
the ARROWHEAD CRAFT can be seen moving off in the direction  
of the ESCORT CRAFTs heading out toward MARS.

On the VIEWSCREEN facing CHEROK the face of the FLIGHT  
CONTROLLER on the VICTORY leans toward CHEROK.

FLIGHT CONTROLLER (O/S)

Sink below the sea?

CHEROK

I had more important things to do  
than write poetry.

FLIGHT CONTROLLER (O/S)

But "sink below the sea"? Is that  
the best you could do?!

CHEROK

Off the top of my head? Yes!

INT. RIGEL III - DECK D - MISSION PLANNING AREA

The lot of them are watching the DISPLAYs intently.

MEL

Sink below the sea? Who writes  
this garbage?!

HENRY

Someone who doesn't get out much, I  
bet.

MacMANUS shrugs his shoulders unable to come up with anything  
better.

EXT. SPACE-AT ARROWHEAD CRAFT

The ARROWHEAD CRAFT starts projecting ahead of it the high density ION STREAM causing the SLIPSTREAM JACKET to form allowing the resistance of Einstein's Relative universe to warp around the craft.

As the JACKET gains strength the CRAFT accelerates. It soon passes the farthest back of the three ESCORTS which struggles to get back on path after being startled by that fly by.

THIRD ESCORT (V/O)  
Wuuuu-weeee!!!

INT. VICTORY - FLIGHT CONTROL

ALL are monitoring the progress of the ARROWHEAD craft with great interest. On one of the FORE DISPLAYS shows a graphic of the CRAFT can be seen crossing space at never before accelerations while the image of CHEROK on the MONITORS counts off.

CHEROK (O/S)  
ARROWHEAD has passed ESCORT one,  
speed is point four six light and  
accelerating.

GENERAL WOMBAT  
Very impressive...

EXT. SPACE - AT FLIGHT ESCORT TWO

The middle ESCORT craft is chugging along at full steam. In front of it the ARROWHEAD craft passes, faster than it did the last one and as if the middle ESCORT craft wasn't even moving.

MIDDLE ESCORT (V/O)  
Holy mother of pearl. That's one  
fast puppy.

INT. LAUNCH PLATFORM - CONTROL CENTER

As before.

CHEROK  
ARROWHEAD has passed ESCORT two,  
speed is point six one light and  
climbing.

EXT. SPACE - AT FLIGHT ESCORT LEADER

The front leading ESCORT FIGHTER is going flat out having had the most amount of time to accelerate.

INT. FLIGHT ESCORT LEADER FIGHTER - COCKPIT

The Spartan craft is running with a full head of steam while inside the PILOT, in full gear even though the simple act of ejecting would turn him to jelly before he cleared the TUBE OPENING above him, tries to focus on the DISPLAYS ahead of him.

The MONITORS are tracking one very fast object coming up from behind him. Warning indicators are going crazy but that's hard to tell as the whine of over strained engines drowns nearly everything else out.

CHEROK (V/O)

It's alright DEL, ARROWHEAD will pass you in excess of point seven five light.

FLIGHT ESCORT LEADER

Soon I hope, I'm red-lining seriously here.

CHEROK (V/O)

In three, two, one...

The view out the FORE PORT of the COCKPIT is pretty undramatic. A flash and already FLIGHT ESCORT LEADER is left in the dust of the passing ARROWHEAD CRAFT.

A mild shock wave resulting from degenerating ION PULSE WAKE is felt countered by a stronger tug from the warped gravitational field.

INT. VICTORY - FLIGHT CONTROL

The tension is mounting as the ARROWHEAD CRAFT passes the foremost of the ESCORTS and charges after it's target speed.

CHEROK (O/S)

Passing point seven six light.

At the back of the room Dr. SHINDAR turns to the dignitaries.

SHINDAR

At point eight five the FIELD  
should slip the ship into other  
space.

GENERAL WOMBAT

Other space?

SHINDAR

The ship will jump to light speed  
and move faster than you can scan.  
We'll have to wait until the timer  
ticks off and the craft shuts down  
before we know if it was  
successful.

MAJOR WELLS leans in to GENERAL WOMBAT whispering.

MAJOR WELLS (WHISPERING)

Package seven should not be  
affected.

GENERAL WOMBAT nods as he joins the other UNCA Brass turning  
back to face the DISPLAYS.

CHEROK (O/S)

Point eight three, eight  
four...eight five.

The ARROWHEAD CRAFT on the DISPLAY lunges into nothingness.

INT. RIGEL III - DECK D - OPERATIONS PLANNING AREA

ALL are watching at what just happened. MAGELLAN is the  
first to jump to the obvious visual conclusion.

MAGELLAN

It blew up!?

MEL

No. It's just made the transition  
to light speed.

HENRY

How do you know that?

MEL

That's what he said.

HENRY follows MEL's gaze to MacMANUS. His eyes are wide in  
amazement.

HENRY

You understood that gobbledegook he spouted about this?

MEL

Yeah!

HENRY

That advanced physics theory course you just completed didn't hurt either, huh?

MEL

Well, yeah. The whole SLIPSTREAM theory was part of the second module.

HENRY

Well, that's a relief.

MAGELLAN

Why?

HENRY

Because if he starts understanding physics well enough to give lectures then we're all in serious trouble. Not just the team, I mean the whole of the human race.

MACMANUS

What?!

HENRY

No offense Robert, but the limitations of reality do very little to limit your tactical shenanigans. I shudder to think of what you'd try to pull off if you knew the mechanics of it all.

MACMANUS

Thank you!! And they're not shenanigans by the way, they're strategies.

HENRY

Excuse me.

MACMANUS

Besides, did it ever occur to anyone here that I wouldn't frighten you as much if I understood enough about physics to know what not to ask for?

MEL

Nice theory.

MAGELLAN

Yeah.

MACMANUS

What?!

MEL

You disregard the limits of military strategy, which you understand quite well. You invent your own rules whenever you see fit.

MACMANUS

I never break a rule.

HENRY

That's true. You only bend them half way around Venus and back.

MAGELLAN

No kidding.

MACMANUS

Oh, come on!!

MAGELLAN

You're the guy who tears open panels in mid flight and starts yanking at cables and wires looking for the one connected to the problem!

MACMANUS

It worked, didn't it?

MEL

Doesn't it worry you that one day it won't?

MACMANUS

No.

MEL

Why?

MACMANUS

Because... I'll be dead?!

HENRY

And if you ever actually understand physics I'm positive you'll take the rest of mankind with you.

MEL

Besides, you inspire us with your ignorance.

MACMANUS

Whoa... what?

MEL looks at him as if he's being deliberately dense, which is entirely possible for him.

MEL

It's true! You don't know what NOT to suggest so you suggest the impossible, but often it leads us toward something we simply wouldn't have thought about otherwise.

MAGELLAN

And it makes for really funny conversation later, during coffee.

MACMANUS

During coffee?! What coffee?

HENRY

The coffee we always seem to need immediately following a mission with you.

MACMANUS

And where am I during this coffee?!

MEL

Usually in a de-briefing with the brass.

There's a pause as MacMANUS watches the MONITORS for a moment. The others join in.

MACMANUS

I'm very unnerved by all this.

MAGELLAN

Good. Now you understand how I feel about the fact that a ship just exploded and no one seems to care.

MEL

It didn't explode, Doopey!! It just went to light speed!

MAGELLAN

So?

HENRY

It's now travelling faster than the scanners... can scan.

MAGELLAN

Ahhhhhhh.....

MEL

You understand now?

MAGELLAN

No. But I'm getting a headache so let's not continue this.

MACMANUS

Amen to that.

INT. VICTORY - FLIGHT CONTROL

The tension is very palpable now as people wait for something to happen. The FLIGHT CONTROL CREW sit at their CONSOLES waiting. SHINDAR has moved forward and is talking with the FLIGHT CONTROLLER at the CONSOLE where CHEROK's face is.

SHINDAR

It's quite possible there's something affecting the system.

FLIGHT CONTROLLER

Keeping it from meeting the planned schedule?

SHINDAR

The next run should probably proceed to the second phase.

CHEROK (O/S)

I don't think that's wise.

SHINDAR

Why not? If it's a mechanical problem the only way we'll know is to run someone on board.

CHEROK (O/S)

And what if that same something affects the pilot? It could kill him... ME!

FLIGHT CONTROLLER

It's OK, Paul, we're not proceeding to that step unless the bio-meters read clear when this ship comes out.

SHINDAR

But I think we should proceed with the prepping of the second Prototype so we can get underway as soon as we know.

CHEROK (O/S)

We should we recover this one first. Run it through some stress tests, download the records, study the bio-meters thoroughly. Why rush into things?

The FLIGHT CONTROLLER glances back at GENERAL WOMBAT who is following this whole conversation quite thoroughly. The FLIGHT CONTROLLER looks back at the image of CHEROK sternly.

FLIGHT CONTROLLER

That will be our call Lieutenant Commander! If we make it then we will proceed to the next phase.

The image of CHEROK shakes his head in a huff and turns away from the DISPLAY LENS.

FLIGHT ENGINEER FOUR pulls up beside the FLIGHT CONTROLLER.

FLIGHT ENGINEER FOUR (WHISPERING)

Sir, I'm getting echoing on a whole series of VIDEO LINKS.

The FLIGHT CONTROLLER looks at him with annoyance.

FLIGHT CONTROLLER

VIDEO LINKS?

FLIGHT ENGINEER FOUR (WHISPERING)  
Well, not just VIDEO, sir, the CORE  
EXCHANGE.

FLIGHT CONTROLLER  
Bounce an echo back. Find out  
where the problem is.

FLIGHT ENGINEER FOUR  
Yes sir.

FLIGHT ENGINEER FOUR looks at SHINDAR then turns and returns to his seat. GENERAL WOMBAT moves forward, slightly alarmed by what he just heard.

GENERAL WOMBAT  
What would be causing that?

SHINDAR  
Probably a misconnection somewhere in the recording feeds to RIGEL Aerospace. The RAEB CORE is probably multi-tasking the quarterly financial audit or something.

SHINDAR moves away, toward an AFT CONSOLE CONNECTOR.

SHINDAR (CONT'D)  
Dr. NEWVILLE has a reputation for sloppiness.

Once SHINDAR is out of earshot the FLIGHT CONTROLLER looks at GENERAL WOMBAT and comments quietly.

FLIGHT CONTROLLER (WHISPERING)  
Yeah right... that's exactly how you create the most sophisticated artificial sentience...

SHINDAR  
He has a good crew working for him, for the most part.

The FLIGHT CONTROLLER shows only slight amounts of guilt at being over heard. GENERAL WOMBAT brushes the internal conflicts aside and leans into the FLIGHT CONTROLLER.

GENERAL WOMBAT (WHISPERING)  
When should the ARROWHEAD reappear?

SHINDAR  
Ten minutes ago, GENERAL.

SHINDAR moves to lean on the railing separating the AFT from the PIT where the CONSOLES are.

SHINDAR (CONT'D)  
Yes, GENERAL. It is late.

MAJOR WELLS moves forward somewhat alarmed.

MAJOR WELLS  
And this doesn't concern you,  
Doctor SHINDAR?

SHINDAR  
Something we built is travelling in  
a never before visited medium of  
space, MAJOR. As we have no idea  
what to expect why would I be  
concerned?

The MILITARY just doesn't get it.

EXT. SPACE - RIGEL III

As before.

INT. RIGEL III - DECK D - OPERATIONS PLANNING AREA

Most are still attentively watching the DISPLAYS. TRAVIS has moved to a SEATCON near the DISPLAY and is reclining. MEL is playing with a lock of her hair, looking at MacMANUS who is back reading his PAPER-WATE.

MAGELLAN comes down via the CORE ACCESS LADDER with a tray of food, he moves toward the open space directly in the middle of the BENCH and almost trips over HENRY on the way.

MAGELLAN  
So? What did I miss?

TRAVIS  
Nothing.

HENRY doesn't like being nearly covered in food, he yelps as MAGELLAN nearly falls on him helping him over to the open space.

HENRY  
What did you get that stuff for!

MAGELLAN  
I was hungry!

HENRY

But there's a dispenser right there! What did you go all the way to the FOOD BAY for?

MAGELLAN

That doesn't serve the kind of food I eat.

MEL

The four basic food groups.

MAGELLAN

What?

MEL

Bottled, bagged, packaged and canned.

MAGELLAN

You forgot take-out.

MACMANUS

He means deep fried.

HENRY

And frozen.

MEL

You can't forget frozen.

MAGELLAN

And tomato based.

MEL

Tomato based?!

MAGELLAN

I like tomato based stuff.

MACMANUS

But you hate tomatoes?

MAGELLAN

Urgh! Yeck. Of course.

HENRY looks at MEL not getting it.

MEL

Not enough preservatives.

HENRY

Ah...

MAGELLAN sits down and looks at the screens all displaying essentially nothing.

MAGELLAN

So tell me again how it is that I'm wrong in my belief that ship just blew up.

MEL

Well, for one none of the people on the FLIGHT team are panicing.

MACMANUS

Nor have any recovery vessels been launched.

TRAVIS

It's overdue.

EVERYONE looks over at the sulking TRAVIS.

MAGELLAN

How do you know that?

TRAVIS

The counter was counting down until about ten minutes ago.

MACMANUS

At launch?

TRAVIS

After launch. At launch the counter was at five minutes.

MacMANUS moves closer to TRAVIS to see what he's looking at. He sees the counter.

MACMANUS

OK, so the counter started to run up ten minutes forty seven seconds ago?

TRAVIS

Five minutes ago one of their engineers logged into the scan net system.

HENRY

They're searching the area for something.

TRAVIS

And the ESCORTs have resumed course  
for MARS.

MACMANUS

At full speed that would take  
nearly a day!

TRAVIS

Twenty one hours at the rate  
they're going.

MacMANUS moves back to a seat and watches the information  
DISPLAYS now trying to figure out what is going on.

MACMANUS

I wonder what's going on?

INT. VICTORY - FLIGHT CONTROL

As before. Tension is thick. SHINDAR moves to the back  
where GENERAL WOMBAT is conferring with the MAJOR.

SHINDAR

I don't suppose you have anything  
closer to that area?

GENERAL WOMBAT

There are two merchant ships less  
than a day away.

SHINDAR

Then why don't you have them...?

GENERAL WOMBAT

The security level of this mission  
is Alpha One!

SHINDAR

And the sooner we recover that  
craft the faster you'll have your  
answer.

MAJOR WELLS

If we announce on open frequencies  
what's going on then we'll defeat  
the purpose.

SHINDAR

You can't possibly believe the New  
SOVIET doesn't know what we've done  
here today?

GENERAL WOMBAT  
It's not the New SOVIET that  
concerns me, Doctor.

SHINDAR turns around and faces the DISPLAYS in a huff.

INT. RIGEL III - DECK D - OPERATIONS PLANNING AREA

As before.

HENRY  
Well something's got them riled up.

For the first time TRAVIS leans forward pointing at a monitor.

TRAVIS  
There!!

The CAMERA closes in on a MONITOR shot of open space near MARS.

EXT. SPACE - AT MARS

There is a visual shift as something drops from the non-visual faster than light to slower than light, it makes one more very fast trip around the red planet before running turbulence as it passes one of the weaker magnetosphere's around MARS and shoots out into space.

The end of the turbulence and the break away doesn't mean the ride is over for the ship now tumbles and spins as it streaks away from the planet, bit's of it come loose, shrapnel flies off it and as it's high speed continues to exert very high mass on it the ARROWHEAD craft starts to break up.

EXT. SPACE - AT ESCORT CRAFT

The three FLIGHT ESCORT's are continuing toward MARS though they are still well off from the red planet which is very much a tiny dot way off in the distance.

INT. FLIGHT ESCORT LEADER - COCKPIT

As before, watching displays while on course.

FLIGHT ESCORT LEADER  
We read it, CONTROL. Heading this way.

CHEROK (V/O)  
Veer off, Biggs!

FLIGHT ESCORT LEADER  
Say again!

CHEROK (V/O)  
It's breaking up, get out of the  
way, fast!!

FLIGHT ESCORT TWO (V/O)  
Range is nearly a million clicks  
off.

FLIGHT ESCORT LEADER  
We've got plenty of time.

CHEROK (V/O)  
Negative, it's speed is still  
double yours. Get out of there!  
Pronto. It's breaking up...

FLIGHT ESCORT LEADER  
What does that have to do with  
anything?

CHEROK (V/O)  
Some of it's going to be where you  
are sooner...

FLIGHT ESCORT LEADER  
Say again, CHEROK?

From outside the ship starts to rumble from micro impacts of high speed and very light particles, the forward part of the disintegrating proto-type which has already arrived at FLIGHT ESCORT LEADER. The shaking gets worse.

EXT. SPACE - AT FLIGHT ESCORT GROUP

A mist starts becoming more solid, the turbulence the FIGHTERS come across gets worse.

FLIGHT ESCORT LEADER (V/O)  
Veer off FLIGHT, get out of here.

The FLIGHT ESCORT LEADER starts moving off. This is apparently the worst thing he could do right now as the incoming particles increasingly resemble shrapnel.

It's attempt to climb out of the swarm is cut short as the incoming flak strike the oblique angle of the craft and knock it back with great force sheering through it.

FLIGHT ESCORT TWO-COCKPIT  
The pilot narrowly escapes direct collision with the passing wreckage of the FLIGHT ESCORT LEADER.

CHEROK (V/O)  
LUKE! MARCUS! You can still get clear. But take it slow. Climb out, but do not increase your angle more than five degrees!

During the above the PILOT of FLIGHT ESCORT TWO starts to notice that all around him are increasingly larger high speed particles from the disintegrated ARROWHEAD starting to pierce the hull of the COCKPIT, and what little atmosphere that was inside starts blowing out into space.

FLIGHT ESCORT TWO  
Losing cabin pressure!

INT. VICTORY - FLIGHT CONTROL

ALL are watching the rapidly unfolding disaster before them on the MONITORS.

GENERAL WOMBAT  
He's going to asphyxiate?!

MAJOR WELLS (WHISPERING)  
He's wearing a space suit General.

INT. FLIGHT ESCORT TWO - COCKPIT

The PILOT is still struggling to ease out of the stream. One of the high speed particles pierce the cabin making a pre-existing hole larger and then directly into the Pilots' suit. The PILOT yelps in pain. Loses control of the board for a moment.

EXT. SPACE - AT FLIGHT ESCORT TWO

During the brief moment the PILOT lets go of control the FIGHTER is at the whim of the turbulence, it swivels into the stream like an airborne craft would to ride out the wave which puts it momentarily back in the path of particles.

INT. FLIGHT ESCORT TWO - COCKPIT

The PILOT catches himself long enough to see a larger than normal chunk of the ARROWHEAD craft slam into the front of his COCKPIT and faintly through the tinted face plate of the SPACE SUIT HELMET we see the look of surprise on the PILOT's face just before the chunk slams into that.

EXT. SPACE - AT FLIGHT ESCORT TWO

The craft, now PILOT-less starts swaying at the whim of the incoming wave until it too is knocked back and starts to disintegrate.

EXT. SPACE - AT FLIGHT ESCORT THREE

The farthest back of the three craft FLIGHT ESCORT THREE is in the narrowest part of the stream. He has already been guiding his craft away from the path of the destruction and only the side of the craft receives any damage as high speed particles spray along the fuselage like mud, piercing-the-outer-shell-of- the-craft-mud but mud none the less.

FLIGHT ESCORT THREE (V/O)  
I'm clear. I'm alright. CONTROL,  
this is FLIGHT ESCORT THREE moving  
out of range.

INT. VICTORY - FLIGHT CONTROL

GENERAL WOMBAT moves to SHINDAR who is hunched over a CONSOLE and speaks with great sarcasm.

GENERAL WOMBAT  
Very impressive demonstration  
Doctor. That's the most number of  
lives lost in a test mission this  
year.

SHINDAR waves him off impatiently.

SHINDAR  
Not now, GENERAL!!

On the DISPLAY CHEROK's expression borders on rage. Unable to contain it he explodes.

SHINDAR tries to ignore him instead moving to another CONSOLE and looking up a DISPLAY.

CHEROK (O/S)

Those were good pilots, Doctor! My pilots!!

SHINDAR

You have a job to do Lieutenant Commander, get back to your console and do it!

GENERAL WOMBAT

SHINDAR?...

SHINDAR

GENERAL WOMBAT! The BLACK BOX is still transmitting telemetry, we're getting the full flight recording right now and we may be able to recover the whole trip before the thing is completely destroyed!!

FLIGHT CONTROLLER

Too late Doctor. It just went white.

SHINDAR smashes his fist into the CONSOLE.

GENERAL WOMBAT

So what happened?

SHINDAR

It's too early to tell!! There's days worth of information to review.

GENERAL WOMBAT

I believe you know just how incredibly important this is Doctor.

SHINDAR

You'll get it when I do, GENERAL. Not a moment sooner.

EXT. RIGEL III - DECK D - OPERATIONS PLANNING AREA

ALL watching intently the conflict drama on screen before them. MacMANUS moves to MAGELLAN.

MACMANUS

Is it possible to get me that BLACK BOX transmission?

MAGELLAN

I...

RAEB (V/O)

The CORE RAEB at RIGEL Aerospace is linked to this test.

MACMANUS

It is?

RAEB (V/O)

The feed you're watching wouldn't be possible without it, yes.

MACMANUS

Can you get me the Flight Recorder Data?

RAEB (V/O)

I'm working on it right now.

MacMANUS waits patiently for RAEB to do his magic. MAGELLAN  
is standing in front of him, neither having moved. MAGELLAN  
looks at MacMANUS and finally answers his question.

MAGELLAN

Yep. Apparently it is possible.

MACMANUS

Gee, thanks. I never would have known.

MAGELLAN

You're welcome?

HENRY

What do you want with the Flight Recorder Data?

MACMANUS

Because RAEB can run through anything it takes SHINDAR days to do... in minutes.

MAGELLAN

Just what do you think you can do with the telemetry from an obliterated proto-type?

MACMANUS

Depending on the conclusions RAEB comes to, I think I can use it to be the first person to break the light speed barrier.

There is a brief eruption from the rest of the SQUAD about how stupid this is. It culminates with MEL saying.

MEL

Don't they already have a pilot?

MACMANUS

Based on what you just saw would you want to get in the sister ship?

MEL

No! Of course not, are you crazy?

MACMANUS

Exactly. I'm betting that this level headed and stable pilot they picked thinks the same as you do.

TRAVIS starts snickering.

MACMANUS (CONT'D)

What's so damn funny, TRAVIS?

TRAVIS

So, what you're saying is if you can't be the first person to break the light barrier you'll at least be the first person killed trying?

MACMANUS

Yeah. Something like that.

TRAVIS

Fame is a fickle mistress, Robert.

MACMANUS

Maybe. But I have a feeling that RAEB's going to give me something good to work with.

MAGELLAN

What makes you say that?

MACMANUS

Because I didn't survive testing the last fifteen lemons we've flown because I'm a good pilot.

HENRY  
RAEB found the possible  
weaknesses...

RAEB (V/O) (CUTTING HIM OFF)  
Probable weaknesses...

HENRY  
Whatever, you found them and Robert  
used that information to prepare  
against them.

MACMANUS  
Exactly.

MacMANUS turns and starts for the COCKPIT.

MEL  
Which is why the flight pool calls  
him the Bugs Crusher.

MacMANUS cringes at the name. He pauses, straightens up and  
tries to continue past the CORE ACCESS LADDER without  
commenting.

HENRY  
Where are you going now?

MEL  
To call the FLIGHT CONTROL CENTER  
we've been watching and tell them  
what they're doing wrong.

MacMANUS swivels around the CORE ACCESS LADDER stopping on  
the other side and flamboyantly facing his crew.

MACMANUS  
Exactly. Anyone interested in  
watching?

MacMANUS opens the HATCH and MEL, HENRY and MAGELLAN rises  
and trot out. MacMANUS looks down at the still reclining  
TRAVIS.

MACMANUS (CONT'D)  
TRAVIS?

TRAVIS  
No thanks. I'm busy.

MACMANUS  
Busy?

TRAVIS

Yeah. People to see, pencils to sharpen, papers to shuffle. You know... busy.

MACMANUS

Busy. Right. Well, good luck.

MacMANUS shrugs and turns to continue his trip.

INT. RIGEL III - COCKPIT

Consider that the RIGEL III travels through space and that the constant and well controlled rate of acceleration provides a gravity close to if not matching that of Earths. Now consider that because of this the DECKS on RIGEL III are designed to take advantage of this.

The "TOP" deck of RIGEL III, DECK A is actually at the front of the ship and the "BOTTOM" deck, DECK H is just ahead of the ENGINE CORE.

The CORE ACCESS LADDER connects from FORE to AFT or Up to Down leading from the RAEB BRAIN CORE to the ENGINE CORE. Despite this the COCKPIT runs at a ninety degree plane to the rest of the ship and the crew walking across DECK D to the "bottom" of the COCKPIT then has to climb ladders to get to the COCKPIT seats.

MacMANUS is the last one into the COCKPIT but none have started up the ladder to their seats. MacMANUS climbs up the ladder to his COCKPIT seat and loads himself in before looking ceiling-ward and speaking.

MACMANUS

So, how we doing?

RAEB (V/O)

There's a very great deal of information in the Flight Recorder file.

MAGELLAN starts up the ladder and take the PILOT seat beside MacMANUS.

MACMANUS

Let's concentrate on what caused the ship to disintegrate?

MEL climbs into the seat behind MAGELLAN and fastens herself in.

MEL

Stress.

HENRY is having difficulty crossing over from the ladder to the seat behind MacMANUS, he apparently has a slight fear of heights.

HENRY

Don't anyone offer to help me or anything.

MACMANUS

Stress?

RAEB (V/O)

That is correct.

MacMANUS reaches back, offers a hand to HENRY while looking at MEL. HENRY uses the support to cross into his seat.

MACMANUS

How did you know that?

MEL

It's simple physics, Robert. A ship which managed to get to light speed using a high energy stream in front of it would disintegrate if that stream stopped while it was still going that fast.

MACMANUS

RAEB?

RAEB (V/O)

The data from the Flight Recorder supports that. The ARROWHEAD craft came out of MARS orbit when the GENERATOR failed, causing the stream to stop, causing mass and drag to have a rather accelerated effect.

MAGELLAN

No pun intended.

RAEB (V/O)

Actually, Bill, I choose my words very carefully.

MACMANUS

OK. That answers that.

MacMANUS chews his bottom lip while trying to decide what the next step will be.

MACMANUS (CONT'D)

Why did it stay in MARS orbit until the GENERATOR failed?

RAEB (V/O)

According to the Flight Recorder, at least based on the data, it would seem that every attempt to correct the course back to the Flight Plan was blocked. Judging by the distance I would say it was the planet's magnetic field.

MAGELLAN

MARS hardly has a magnetic field.

RAEB (V/O)

True, but according to the Flight Recorder data it was strong enough to keep the Craft from leaving orbit.

MACMANUS

But what about it was causing that?

RAEB (V/O)

Sorry?

MACMANUS

What was reacting with the Magnetic Field of MARS?

RAEB (V/O)

Hmmm. The most likely culprit appears to be the SLIPSTREAM EMITTER FIELD.

MAGELLAN

The what?!

MACMANUS

The HIGH POWER ENERGY that ship was projecting in front of it to warp space back around it.

MEL

Without which the ship disintegrates.

MACMANUS

But it doesn't disintegrate right away.

RAEB (V/O)

It travelled nearly a million kilometers from MARS before the field had collapsed enough to allow the forces of nature to take over.

MACMANUS

Wait a minute. I think you just hit on something RAEB, old boy.

RAEB (V/O)

I did? What?

MACMANUS

...I'm.... not sure, but a light just went off above my head so it's somewhere in there.

MacMANUS moves to a CONSOLE and starts cueing a link up there.

MACMANUS (CONT'D)

Put the hard numbers of what you just said on this screen.

MEL moves to his side as he starts looking at the display.

MEL

Do you understand any of that?

MACMANUS

No. Not really.

MEL

So what are you doing then?

MACMANUS

Looking for the answer.

MEL

How do you expect to do that?

MACMANUS

What?

MEL

How do you expect to understand an answer or even recognize that one is there without knowing what makes you think that?

MACMANUS

You ever get deja vu?

MEL

Yeah. All the time. It's a normal human thing.

MACMANUS

I never get it. But subconsciously I am able to understand things I just don't consciously get.

HENRY

So what have you got then?

MACMANUS

Well...something surprising like intuition.

MEL takes over from MacMANUS at the CONSOLE and starts looking at some of the hard numbers.

MEL

Hell, even I've got that.

MEL is looking at the numbers, she looks up at MacMANUS who has already started drifting into a plan you can almost see forming.

MEL (CONT'D)

Any idea what I'm looking for?

MACMANUS

OK... The ARROWHEAD craft travelled nearly a million kilometers from MARS orbit before the effects of nature crushed it.

HENRY

You never get deja vu?

MACMANUS

No. Never.

MAGELLAN

But... it couldn't leave the orbit  
of MARS until the SLIPSTREAM  
PROJECTOR quit.

MEL

So somewhere between full power and  
failure is the ability of the  
ARROWHEAD craft to leave MARS  
orbit!

MACMANUS

That's it!!

HENRY

Whoa. Can someone slow down for  
the "C" physics student?

RAEB (V/O)

I understand. That works.

HENRY

What works?! What?!!

MACMANUS

If the SLIPSTREAM EMITTER is  
powered down, not completely but  
part way then the ship CAN leave  
MARS orbit. The magnetic field has  
no effect.

MEL

But the ship won't break up because  
the field is still there to protect  
it.

HENRY

OK, but when do you do it and how?

RAEB (V/O)

That's tricky. There's little in  
this information to indicate what  
exactly is the correct amount.

MACMANUS

But empirically we know what the  
level was when the ARROWHEAD craft  
left MARS orbit, right?

RAEB (V/O)

Well, empirically, no. But we can  
estimate.

MACMANUS

And based on the Flight Recorder data can you also figure out what the minimum field strength needs to be?

RAEB (V/O)

Well, yes. I believe so.

MACMANUS

Can you transfer that data to an express PIP FILE?

RAEB (V/O)

One moment.

MEL

So? What now?

MACMANUS

Now we call Dr. SHINDAR.

MAGELLAN

You really think you can convince them to let you fly it?

MACMANUS

What do you think?

HENRY looks over at MEL.

HENRY

Not a chance.

MEL

I'm not putting it past him.

MAGELLAN

He can be pretty persuasive when he wants.

HENRY

What makes you say that?

MAGELLAN

We're still here, aren't we?

HENRY shrugs.

EXT. SPACE - AT CARRIER VICTORY

As before.

INT. VICTORY - FLIGHT CONTROL

SHINDAR is reviewing the material while in a heated discussion with three of the FLIGHT ENGINEER STAFF. At the back GENERAL WOMBAT and MAJOR WELLS are talking with ADMIRAL KOSS, updating him.

ADMIRAL KOSS

And he has no idea why it failed?

GENERAL WOMBAT

They're reviewing the Flight Recorder Data looking for that sir.

ADMIRAL KOSS

What about the PACKAGE? Did it get anything?

GENERAL WOMBAT

No word on that yet sir.

MAJOR WELLS

It wasn't hooked up to the BLACK BOX so it's possible we've lost that for good.

ADMIRAL KOSS

We've got a pilot on scene, don't we?

GENERAL WOMBAT

In a damaged CRAFT, ADMIRAL.

ADMIRAL KOSS

Get a crash team is on its way out there but have that ESCORT turn around and scan for debris. Not close enough to make his situation worse just close enough to find something.

Down in the pit with SHINDAR and his ENGINEERS...

SHINDAR

Can we confirm that?

FLIGHT ENGINEER ONE

The BLACK BOX data confirms. Ninety-nine per cent confirmation. It was simple stress that tore up that craft.

SHINDAR

OK, the next step is why did the field collapse.

FLIGHT ENGINEER THREE

The data from the run is... involved. We've got to feed into a dynamic graphic model and run it a few times.

From off sides a COMM-OFFICER turns and interrupts.

COMM OFFICER

Excuse me, Doctor SHINDAR. I have a Robert MacMANUS from the RIGEL III on line.

SHINDAR

Take a message, Ensign.

COMM OFFICER

He says he knows what happened to the ARROWHEAD Craft, Doctor. And how to prevent it.

SHINDAR looks at the COMM OFFICER stunned. Actually, all the ENGINEERS look surprised while the MILITARY looks nervous. GENERAL WOMBAT is the first to move to SHINDAR who shrugs and nods to the COMM OFFICER to put the call through.

GENERAL WOMBAT

This is a restricted project, SHINDAR. Who authorized Lieutenant Commander MacMANUS access?

MacMANUS appears on the LARGEST VID-SCREEN in the room before the GENERAL completes his sentence.

MACMANUS (O/S)

No one GENERAL. It was an unauthorized link up.

SHINDAR looks back at the ENGINEERS.

SHINDAR

Which would explain the echoing on the VID LINKS.

One of the ENGINEERS tosses his pen in disgust.

SHINDAR (CONT'D)

I've warned you about that, Robert? Where'd you run it from this time?

MACMANUS (O/S)

Uh.. RIGEL III...Check out FILE R-  
Three-Seven one a.

SHINDAR moves to the CONSOLE and enters the retrieval  
command. He starts reviewing the material which comes up.

MAJOR WELLS

You mean your whole crew knows what  
happened?!

GENERAL WOMBAT

Young man, the number of  
regulations you've violated...

MAJOR WELLS

How'd you even know about this,  
Lieutenant Commander?

MACMANUS (O/S)

Uh... I hold five per cent of RIGEL  
Aerospace stock. ...

SHINDAR raises a hand up trying to silence them.

SHINDAR

... and he could've been here as a  
visiting dignitary if he simply had  
asked...

MAJOR WELLS

How many people are on his crew?

SHINDAR

Four more people, all test pilots,  
all under level one secrecy oaths  
to begin with. Immaterial...

SHINDAR taps the DISPLAY with the file from RIGEL III  
indicating to FLIGHT ENGINEER TWO that he should read it.

GENERAL WOMBAT

Immaterial?!

SHINDAR

It doesn't matter, GENERAL.

ADMIRAL KOSS

It's a serious security breach,  
Doctor. It matters to us.

SHINDAR

Pity then, because his RAEB is the single most sophisticated artificial intelligence ever built and he's just given us use of it for free.

MAJOR WELLS

So?

SHINDAR

It's already isolated the problem and found a solution for the next run.

While MAJOR WELLS and GENERAL WOMBAT move to the DISPLAY to see the information for themselves. CHEROK, still on a smaller DISPLAY of the VID-LINK from the LAUNCH PLATFORM looks directly at the CAMERA rather alarmed.

CHEROK (O/S)

The next run!! You're not going to try that again are you?

SHINDAR

I don't see why not, Mister CHEROK.

GENERAL WOMBAT

We've got unanswered questions still CHEROK.

CHEROK (O/S)

At the cost of how many more lives!?!

SHINDAR

MAJOR?...

MAJOR WELLS straightens up from the DISPLAY very impressed.

MAJOR WELLS

Prepare the second Proto-type Doctor.

SHINDAR turns to another ENGINEER and nods. She moves off to start coordinating.

MAJOR WELLS (CONT'D)

How soon can we get under way then?

SHINDAR

Well, we've got to recruit another ESCORT TEAM.

MAJOR WELLS

Tell us how many and you'll have them.

SHINDAR

And there one other little problem, sir.

SHINDAR motions back to the DISPLAY from RIGEL III.

SHINDAR (CONT'D)

I can have the second PROTO ready by tomorrow but the model done by MacMANUS' RAEB indicates that the only way of ensuring that the test runs properly is to run with a pilot on board.

CHEROK (O/S)

OH NO! There's no way I'm getting in there after what just happened. Not without more unmanned test runs.

GENERAL WOMBAT

Lieutenant Commander CHEROK!!  
(calming) Paul... You are an UNCA Officer, a top flight pilot, you've been specially trained to operate this mission.

INT. LAUNCH PLATFORM - FLIGHT CONTROL

As before with CHEROK very uptight, facing the CONSOLE with DISPLAYS showing the VICTORY FLIGHT CONTROL CENTER, some of the interface screens to the first ARROWHEAD Craft which are now snow, the screens to the FLIGHT ESCORTS one of which shows the surviving pilot, the SCREEN of MacMANUS on RIGEL III and the SCREEN showing the RAEB analysis of the first TEST FLIGHT.

CHEROK

GENERAL. I do not have the confidence in MacMANUS' RAEB that the rest of you share. I would prefer proper modelling analysis by these ENGINEERS and then at least one more remote run of the ARROWHEAD.

On the VICTORY, SHINDAR can be seen moving closer to the CAMERA.

SHINDAR (O/S)

We've only got the one Proto-type left. If we lose that we're got to rebuild another. Three months minimum.

He pulls back and GENERAL WOMBAT leans in a bit, not as far.

GENERAL WOMBAT (O/S)

I assure you sir that we do not have that time luxury.

CHEROK tenses up, shoulders tight, arms stretched out encompassing the entire CONSOLE.

CHEROK

Sir? Anything could happen to someone in that cockpit. We didn't get the BIO-PACK back, we don't know what the effects of faster than light travel are on a human? And whatever happened the first time could easily repeat. I lost two of my Squad, GENERAL!

GENERAL WOMBAT (O/S)

I sympathize with you, son. But we do not have the luxury of another unmanned tests.

CHEROK

Sir...perhaps if I knew...?

GENERAL WOMBAT (O/S)

Lieutenant Commander CHEROK!...

INT. VICTORY - FLIGHT CONTROL CENTER

The GENERAL is surrounded by SHINDAR and MAJOR WELLS facing the image of CHEROK on the DISPLAY SCREEN before him.

GENERAL WOMBAT

...I am asking you if you will PILOT the second Proto-type on the next run tomorrow morning.

CHEROK (O/S)

Sir. I...

GENERAL WOMBAT

Commander!!! Will you fly it?!

The image of CHEROK's face on the DISPLAY pauses and takes a deep breath before answering. In his expression you can see that CHEROK honestly believes he has the upper hand in this negotiation.

CHEROK (O/S)  
... No sir. I will not.

ADMIRAL KOSS  
Do you realize what you are giving  
up?

INT. LAUNCH PLATFORM - FLIGHT CONTROL

CHEROK is honestly surprised by this statement.

CHEROK  
ADMIRAL?

ADMIRAL KOSS (O/S)  
The mission is go... tomorrow  
morning.

CHEROK allows only the faintest hint of a smile to cross his face, realizing that he holds a very powerful card.

INT. VICTORY - FLIGHT CONTROL CENTER

As before.

CHEROK (O/S)  
There's no way you can get a PILOT  
trained on the mock up quickly  
enough.

MAJOR WELLS  
You think you can force us to  
wait?!

SHINDAR  
I'll fly it myself before I allow  
him to set my schedule!

ADMIRAL KOSS  
You don't have the right training,  
Doctor. However...

ADMIRAL KOSS turns to face the DISPLAY of MacMANUS.

ADMIRAL KOSS (CONT'D)  
There is someone else here who  
does.

On the DISPLAY MacMANUS is caught off guard by this sudden directed attention. Especially since he hasn't yet done anything to get it.

ADMIAL KOSS  
Did I hear correctly that you head  
a SQUAD of test pilots?

MACMANUS (O/S)  
And support staff, sir.

ADMIRAL KOSS turns to face the rest, especially the DISPLAY of CHEROK who looks stunned at MacMANUS' audacity.

ADMIRAL KOSS  
How long will it take you to get  
your crew to the LAUNCH PLATFORM,  
MacMANUS?

MACMANUS (O/S)  
We can be there by... oh six  
hundred zenith tomorrow, ADMIRAL.

ADMIRAL KOSS  
Thom, make sure Lieutenant  
Commander MacMANUS here has access  
to all relevant flight information.  
Launch will proceed at oh seven  
hundred zenith tomorrow. If that  
meets with your approval Doctor?

SHINDAR looks at the VID-LINK image of CHEROK and nods.

SHINDAR  
Yes, ADMIRAL. It will do nicely.

ADMIRAL KOSS turns and starts off.

ADMIRAL KOSS  
See you tomorrow then.

The ADMIRAL, GENERAL and MAJOR depart. SHINDAR turns to his staff.

SHINDAR  
Get the crews working on Number  
two. We've got a deadline people.

INT. LAUNCH PLATFORM - FLIGHT CONTROL

CHEROK, slowly, deliberately leans into the CAMERA broadcasting his image to RIGEL III and MacMANUS

CHEROK

We're not done yet, you and I.

MacMANUS, on one screen, doesn't respond. From the other DISPLAY SHINDAR appears, full face in the screen.

SHINDAR (O/S)

Mister CHEROK. Seeing as you are no longer flying this mission do you mind telling me why you're still on my screens?

CHEROK sneers at the image of MacMANUS, snorts and then gets up and huffs off out of the FLIGHT CONTROL room.

INT. RIGEL III - COCKPIT

Ahead of MacMANUS are the various DISPLAYs. SHINDAR's on one of them and he moves in closely to it looking directly at MacMANUS.

SHINDAR (O/S)

Robert, what do you think the chances are that your RAEB would be interested in an "official" link up?

MACMANUS

Very good sir!

SHINDAR (O/S)

Oh, please! Stop with the sir's will you? The officer's have left.

MacMANUS relaxes.

SHINDAR (O/S) (CONT'D)

Besides half of us here have changed your diapers.

Behind him are snickers. Behind SHINDAR on the VICTORY the same occurs. MacMANUS blanches at the remark but tries to recover without indicating it bothered him.

MACMANUS

Not recently, SHIN.

The image of SHINDAR glances back at him and smiles.

SHINDAR (O/S)

Thank god for that...

Then solemnness crosses his expression.

SHINDAR (O/S) (CONT'D)  
You'd better get to work on those  
flight manuals. Tomorrow is a more  
important day than you can imagine.

MACMANUS  
How so?

SHINDAR (O/S)  
Need to know, Lieutenant Commander.  
Need to know. Now get going,  
you've got enough to read.

MACMANUS  
Will do.

The line goes dead. MacMANUS turns to face the others.

MACMANUS (CONT'D)  
Told you.

He gets up and starts climbing down the ladder.

MEL  
Where are you going now?

MACMANUS  
We've got reams of information  
coming to us and TRAVIS is down in  
the MISSION PLANNING AREA.

He stops at the bottom and looks up at them.

MACMANUS (CONT'D)  
Come on! We've got a mission to  
plan.

MacMANUS starts off down the DECK. MAGELLAN looks at MEL who  
looks at HENRY and then he too starts climbing down.

REAB (V/O)  
Should I change course for the  
PLATFORM?

MAGELLAN  
You can put money on that, RAEB.

INT. RIGEL III - DECK D - OPERATIONS PLANNING AREA

All arrive and sit around TRAVIS who is a little caught off guard by all the sudden determination. Especially MacMANUS. He leans back and looks at him with his arms behind his head.

TRAVIS

Well?

MACMANUS

Tomorrow at oh seven hundred zenith  
I break the light speed barrier.

TRAVIS

You what?

MACMANUS

And all of you are running point  
guard.

HENRY

Wait a minute?! ALL of us?

MACMANUS

Well, Bill and TRAVIS.

MacMANUS moves to the BOARD and cues up the LAUNCH PLATFORM and FLIGHT PLAN MAP.

MACMANUS (CONT'D)

You two will stay in the FLIGHT  
CONTROL Center looking out for my  
best interests.

HENRY

Well, that's a relief. I was  
concerned he'd ask one of us to fly  
the third point.

MACMANUS

Yeah, well I haven't figured that  
one out yet.

MEL

Maybe you can get that PILOT you're  
replacing to fill in.

MACMANUS

Ah...I don't think so.

TRAVIS

Why don't you try Gregory?

MACMANUS

I doubt his New SOVIET bosses would permit that.

MEL

So?

MacMANUS sits and starts reading the FLIGHT MANUAL for the ARROWHEAD craft.

MACMANUS

RAEB. Patch a note to SHINDAR that we're a pilot short. It's his project....

RAEB (V/O)

Done.

MEL and MAGELLAN are watching MacMANUS become engrossed.

MEL

It frightens me how quickly he does that?

MAGELLAN

What do you mean? The quick trip to very-focused land?

MEL

Yeah.

MAGELLAN

It frightens me too.

A pause as they all look at MacMANUS focusing on the DISPLAYED information. MAGELLAN then looks at MEL and HENRY.

MAGELLAN (CONT'D)

I'm hungry. You guys want to get something to eat?

TRAVIS

Is that all you do is eat?

MAGELLAN

No!

MEL

He can sleep pretty good too!

SPACE ODDITY: -1A: "MARSIDE: One Small Step" 61.

EXT. SPACE - AT RIGEL III - APPARENTLY LATER

The ship is moving through space at a faster than previous rate. En route for the LAUNCH PLATFORM.

INT. RIGEL III - DECK D - OPERATIONS PLANNING AREA

MacMANUS is alone, reading the manual from the DISPLAYS ahead of him, well, actually at this point he's reclining, stretching and yawning.

RAEB (V/O)

You should get some rest.

MacMANUS rises and takes the PAPER-WASTE over to another CONSOLE on the other side of the HALL.

MACMANUS

I'm fine.

He moves to a beverage dispenser and takes a cold WATER-GELL, a collapsible plastic clear container that has a negative pressure mouth piece, ideal for single serving drinks of water in zero gravity. He takes a sip.

RAEB (V/O)

Oh... Umm, Robert? I have your mother on line. She wishes to speak with you.

MACMANUS

Now?

RAEB (V/O)

I have her on hold.

MACMANUS

What took her so long? Put her on.

EXT. SPACE - STATION THREE - UPPER DECK OFFICE TOWER

The CAMERA TRUCKS in toward the one VIEWPORT in this section of the STATION that has more than just the cleaning lights on. In it is a figure, moving over to a far counter.

INT. STATION THREE - UD OFFICE TOWER - NEWHAVEN'S OFFICE

Pamela NEWHAVEN is standing there drinking from her brass negative pressure mug. On a VID-DISPLAY near her is the RIGEL III IDENT. MacMANUS appears on the screen.

MacMANUS doesn't say anything. Neither does she. Both wait for the other, then, finally, she picks up her PAPER-WATE and starts back for her seat behind her desk.

NEWHAVEN

You're grand-father used to caution me not to speak when I was angry.

She sits.

NEWHAVEN (CONT'D)

I'm fuming now.

The image of MacMANUS looks at her, waiting. She picks up the PAPER-WATE and holds it up for him to see. She then reaches forward and togs the file back along the line to him. Information appears at the bottom of the screen. He appears to be glancing down, looking at it from his side.

NEWHAVEN (CONT'D)

Why is your name on this?

INT. RIGEL III - DECK D - OPERATIONS - MISSION PLANNING AREA

MacMANUS reads the text at the bottom of his screen.

MACMANUS

I'm flying it tomorrow.

NEWHAVEN (O/S)

WHY?!!

MACMANUS

They need a pilot and I'm the best qualified.

NEWHAVEN (O/S)

No, you're not!

INT. STATION THREE - PAMELA NEWHAVEN'S OFFICE

As before.

NEWHAVEN

...CHEROK is, that's why I picked him!! So why are you on this list instead of him?!

MACMANUS (O/S)

He declined the second flight.

NEWHAVEN

And why do you think he did that?!

The image of MacMANUS starts looking off, desperately wanting to get off this call.

MACMANUS (O/S)

I've got a big day tomorrow, I don't have time for this...

NEWHAVEN slams down her mug and stands exploding at him.

NEWHAVEN

Answer me!!!

The image of MacMANUS pauses.

NEWHAVEN (CONT'D)

He turned it down because of what happened to the first ship! Isn't that the reason?

MACMANUS (O/S)

Largely that's what it comes down to.

NEWHAVEN

Robert. He's been with this project since day one. No pilot knows that Proto-type better. Don't you think that his reasons might be valid?

MACMANUS (O/S)

No. I don't.

NEWHAVEN

Oh really. Why?

MACMANUS (O/S)

Because RAEB went over the data and made recommendations and tomorrow we're flying based on those.

NEWHAVEN

CHEROK saw these?

MACMANUS (O/S)

Yes, Mother, he did. And he didn't agree with RAEB's analysis of the flight data. Which is not an uncommon bias of pilots.

NEWHAVEN

What?

MACMANUS (O/S)

The pride thing. They have a hard time believing a sentient intelligence can be more right than their gut.

NEWHAVEN calms down a bit. She sits.

NEWHAVEN

Why can't you have that problem?

MACMANUS (O/S)

I grew up with RAEB, remember. He's my best friend.

NEWHAVEN

I could have you pulled off.

MACMANUS (O/S)

You've already tried.

NEWHAVEN

How do you know that?!! Did SHINDAR warn you?

MACMANUS (O/S)

If he had I wouldn't have answered your call!

NEWHAVEN

Then how?

MACMANUS (O/S)

Because it's not your style to try and talk me out of doing things. It's much easier for you to simply pull the strings.

NEWHAVEN

I never!!

MACMANUS (O/S)

I saw the file, Mother! I'd be on my way to Barnard's Star right now if it weren't for you.

NEWHAVEN

Alright. It did it. I did it that time. I've done it many times.

(MORE)

NEWHAVEN(CONT'D)

I can do it just about any time.  
Except when it really matters!!

MACMANUS (O/S)

My choice, mother, my decision!  
And you'd better start getting used  
to that!

NEWHAVEN sits in a huff and turns away. Possibly crying, at least that's what MacMANUS suspects because his tone softens.

NEWHAVEN

Try not to be too angry with me...  
Sometimes, I....

MACMANUS (O/S)

I know why you're doing this,  
Mother. I just want you to stop  
it.

NEWHAVEN

It was different before... You  
could do what you want then...  
When Jack...!

MACMANUS (O/S)

I know. But I've been doing my own  
thing too long. I'm not going to  
change.

A pause, then...

NEWHAVEN

I've lost too much to that mistress  
of yours.

A momentary pang of guilt washes over his face. He is suddenly confused and alarmed.

MACMANUS (O/S)

Pardon?

NEWHAVEN

Space... That fickle bitch of a  
mistress.

MacMANUS nods, a little relieved, understanding at least a bit now.

NEWHAVEN (CONT'D)

I can never compete.

More than anything right now, MacMANUS just wants off this call.

MACMANUS (O/S)

Look. I've got a busy day tomorrow and a lot still to review. If you don't mind, can we continue this after...?

NEWHAVEN

You be careful.

MACMANUS (O/S)

I've got Grandma Janes' luck. You know that.

NEWHAVEN smiles, while wiping the tears from the sides of her eyes.

NEWHAVEN

I never was very fond of her, but she's taken good care of you.

MACMANUS (O/S)

Yeah. Now why don't you move everything liquid you have into RIGEL stock when the markets open tomorrow.

NEWHAVEN

It's going to be that good, is it?

MACMANUS (O/S)

They're going set their own speed record when I'm done.

NEWHAVEN straightens up, more comfortable back talking business.

NEWHAVEN

They better, we've had a soft quarter.

The image of MacMANUS smiles, nodding as he reaches forward to terminate the call. As his image disappears NEWHAVEN calls out softly.

NEWHAVEN (CONT'D)

I love you, Robert.

INT. RIGEL III - DECK D - OPERATIONS - MISSION PLANNING AREA

MacMANUS pulls away from the COMM-CONSOLE and takes a deep breath as he pulls the LIQUID-PAK back up to his lips and takes another sip.

RAEB (V/O)

You will be flying the first manned  
faster than light craft in just  
over seven hours from now. You  
really should get some rest.

MacMANUS takes another sip as he leans back against a wall in  
solemn thought.

MACMANUS

Little chance of that happening  
tonight.

RAEB (V/O)

You're mother is still quite upset  
about the death of your older  
brother.

MACMANUS

I don't know if you can ever get  
over losing your first born.

RAEB (V/O)

I take it she fears losing you in  
the same way.

MACMANUS

There are parallels...

RAEB (V/O)

Robert? Aren't you just a little  
bit nervous about the flight  
tomorrow?

MACMANUS

Truthfully I'm scared silly. I'm  
going to do the biggest thing ever.  
I just wish I knew if it was going  
to be the biggest success or the  
biggest failure.

MacMANUS finishes sipping, returns the container to the  
refuse bin and returns to the seat.

MACMANUS (CONT'D)

I guess we'll find out in eight or  
so hours.

The CAMERA pulls away slowly as he resumes his research.

SPACE ODDITY: -1A: "MARSIDE: One Small Step" 68.

EXT. SPACE-AT RIGEL III

The ship continues through space. Very far off in the distance is the red planet MARS.

FADE TO BLACK