

EPOCH

by

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PREVIEW

WGAw

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE

The immensity of it all. Vomit inducing emptiness. Except that it isn't empty.

JUPITER, a huge iridescent marble, great RED SPOT raging across it's surface, floats nearby. The SUN hides millions of kilometers behind. Out of reach.

The USS CRONOS, a giant bug-shaped craft, like a pregnant spider, blocks the view -- navigation lights blink, ion engines glow brightly. Four Habitat Modules are strapped around her mid section.

Ahead, a cloud of rocky debris, like the first ominous wave before a tsunami -- SLAMS into the top of the Cronos, RIPS the large skeletal antenna from the hull.

INT. CRONOS - CREW MESS

Lifeless. The sound of minor impacts rumble over the hull, dull metallic CLANGS echo through the empty interior.

INT. CRONOS - BRIDGE

Deserted. A hi-tech haunted house. Only essential systems are powered up. Exposed structural beams blend smoothly into bulkheads.

Jupiter shines through massive windows. Tiny bits of rock drift by outside. A few SMASH into the glazing, leave it undamaged.

INT. CRONOS - HIBERNATION BAY

Sterility. Dim blue light wraps around the curved shells of six cigar shaped HIBERNATION UNITS, laid out three by three. All of them occupied -- six pale, naked bodies.

Chests rise and fall almost imperceptibly. Their breathing is extremely slow.

A low HUM from below the deck --

Light panels snap to life. On the side of each hibernation unit, information screens blink awake.

The hum intensifies -- A power surge somewhere.

A GLOBULE of crimson liquid begins a slow descent. It impacts the deck, splashes softly. Gravity has woken up.

(CONTINUED)

On the hibernation units, latches POP open, canopies slide back. A RED scanning beam runs the length of the first one, rolls over the skin of the woman inside --

BASKIN (40's), first officer, begins to breath normally, stir. She rises, groans, as waves of muscle activity ripple through her toned body. She grabs a HYPODERMIC INJECTOR from a nearby rack, STABS herself in the shoulder. She sits on the edge of the bed, breathes deeply.

Baskin leans forward, head in hands, dry wretches.

BASKIN
Fuck today.

She stretches herself awake, painfully cracks her neck. She controls her breathing, glances around the chamber.

Five other people are coming around, already assessed by the scanner.

Baskin whips a handful of hypodermic injectors from the rack. She steps onto the floor, moves weakly to CAPTAIN RAMSEY (50's), puts a steadying hand on his shoulder.

Ramsey sucks air in deeply. Dried blood is gathered on the corner of his mouth. Ramsey touches it tentatively, blinks through his discomfort as Baskin gives him a shot in the arm.

BASKIN (CONT'D)
You may have bit your...

RAMSEY
(rasping)
..lp the others.

Baskin waits for Ramsey to throw up, but he waves her off, seems fine, save for the blood.

SCIENCE OFFICER WOLEK (30's), athletic, freaky white, mouse quiet, is one bed down. Baskin throws her eyes below his waist.

BASKIN
Nice dreams?

Through the fog, Wolek realizes -- instinctively covers his erection.

BASKIN (CONT'D)
Perfectly normal.
(jabbing his shoulder)
And congrats. You'll be fine once
the Endorxin kicks in.

Wolek sits up, massages his neck. He turns to ENGINEER CLARKE (40's), a human rock, on the next slab.

(CONTINUED)

Clarke shakes his head, works his jaw. Baskin slams the injector into his arm.

CLARKE
Morin', gorgeous.

BASKIN
Flattery first thing? I'm touched.

CLARKE
Was talking to Wolek.

Wolek gazes across at the slender, smooth, tanned form of SATELLE (20's), her dark hair falling perfectly over one shoulder. She could be Greek or Italian, but it doesn't matter -- either way she's stunning.

Baskin and Clarke notice --

BASKIN
Guess it wasn't all for me, huh
Doc?

CLARKE
Hey Wolek, you a physicist or a
zoologist?

Wolek hops off the bed, embarrassment spreading across his cheeks, heads for the lockers in the far bulkhead. Clarke and Baskin grin as he goes.

Ramsey inputs a passcode into a touch screen panel on the wall, absorbs the data.

RAMSEY
We're all green. Apart from... the
high gain. Not reading it.

CLARKE
Coulda lost that anywhere. We're
here, that's gotta count.

Clarke searches the room, spots a naked body on the sixth bed, lying still.

CLARKE (CONT'D)
Pity we didn't lose Gipham. Hey
asshole! You dead?

GIPHAM (50's), a wiry intellectual prick, like a skeleton wrapped in thin muscle, opens his eyes -- eyes that focus immediately.

GIPHAM
Hardly.

CLARKE
They really didn't pay me enough to
remember you, man.

GIPHAM
That's a mutually agreeable
statement.

A huge grin spreads across Clarke's face --

CLARKE
We're fuckin' millionaires!
Millionaires. No worries from now
on. We rich, bitch!

Even Ramsey manages to smile for a second.

RAMSEY
Mess in ten minutes. See if home
has a red carpet ready to roll out.

He glances back at the touch panel; in the bottom right
corner, a simple red rectangle -- "NULL CONTACT" -- flashes
within.

Ramsey flicks off the screen.

INT. CRONOS - CREW MESS

Satelle stands against a nearby bulkhead, arms folded. The
rest of them sit around the table, expectant. Each of them
is dressed; grey, creased flight suits. Completely
unflattering.

The remains of an eager meal is strewn around.

Clarke SMACKS a white FLIGHT CASE down in the middle of them.

CLARKE
Boom! The welcome home hamper!

GIPHAM
Careful! My package is breakable.

Clarke quickly searches the outside of the case.

CLARKE
Don't see no fragile sticker.

GIPHAM
It's glass. Liquid. Just open it.

RAMSEY
Easy boys. Open it Clarke.

The case HISSES open. Clarke passes out labelled packs. He
throws Gipham's pack at him.

(CONTINUED)

GIPHAM
(juggling the pack)
Hey! Idiot.

CLARKE
Just because I ain't got no PH
fuckin' D, huh?

BASKIN
I thought you two would've
forgotten you hated eachother,
being asleep for so damn long.

Gipham carefully unwraps the package, delicately removes a
bottle of dark amber liquid.

GIPHAM
It'll take more than forty years of
mindless sleep to erase my feelings
for that man, lieutenant.

BASKIN
I'm a commander, doctor. Want me
to call you mister?

Gipham nods cordially.

GIPHAM
I apologize. A slip.
(a smile)
Commander.

Satelle unfolds her arms.

SATELLE
For millionaires, we're an angry
bunch of assholes.

The crew holds its collective tongue.

CLARKE
The genius has a point. We gonna
party or what? Gipham, you
sharing?

GIPHAM
It's thirty year old scotch.

CLARKE
That ain't seen the light of day
for eighty. I'll get glasses.

Clarke wanders around to the kitchen lockers, searches.

RAMSEY
One small glass each.

GIPHAM

...Captain..?

RAMSEY

Don't foul his mood, Doctor. You can stare longingly at whatever's left. Baskin, with me.

Ramsey stands, strides out of the mess, Baskin hot on his tail.

Wolek removes another pack from the case, glances at the name, hands it up to Satelle.

WOLEK

What you got?

Satelle unfolds the pack, a small hermetically sealed specimen box inside. She pops the refrigerated lid. HISS!

SATELLE

Comfort food.

Clarke returns, drops a handful of tumblers on the table.

SATELLE (CONT'D)

Anyone want cake?

CLARKE

Cake and scotch? Who's birthday is it? Hey come on, anyone even close?

The thought hangs in the air. Wolek flicks his eyes to the digital calender nearby -- smiles.

WOLEK

Mine's in a week.

CLARKE

Well then! Happy birthday Doctor Wolek! Thing's finally looking up!
(staring at Gipham)
Open the damn bottle, man!

INT. CRONOS - BRIDGE - CAPTAINS OFFICE

Ramsey and Baskin stand in front of a recessed panel, a keypad glows to one side. Ramsey punches in a series of digits.

The panel folds up into the bulkhead, reveals --

TWO CLEAR TUBES, a red sheet folded neatly inside the one on the right. The tube on the left is empty -- no red sheet.

(CONTINUED)

BASKIN
...Captain..?

RAMSEY
Open yours.

BASKIN
Sir, your orders are gone. The
protocol states...

RAMSEY
...The protocol just got blasted
out the airlock.

Ramsey steps back.

RAMSEY (CONT'D)
Read them, Commander.

Baskin steps forward, carefully grips the tube on the right. It glows momentarily green as locks disengage. She removes the tube easily, slides the red sheet out, reads.

BASKIN
This is a mistake...

She passes the sheet to Ramsey. He looks down, eyes flick across the page. He flips it over, the front clearly visible now -- Blank.

Ramsey's glance at Baskin says it all -- we got a problem.

INT. CRONOS - CREW MESS

Wolek watches Clarke pour the scotch into a glass in front of him. He leans in, sniffs.

CLARKE
It don't bite until after you drink
it.

Clarke grins down at Wolek.

WOLEK
I'm more of a beer guy.

CLARKE
Root beer?

Satelle drops her food on the table, grabs Wolek's scotch, downs it.

WOLEK
Did I give the impression I didn't
even want to try it?

(CONTINUED)

SATELLE

You did.

Satelle resumes eating her cake.

CLARKE

Lady's got some balls, Wolek. You
be real polite when you're asking
for them back!

Gipham, rolling his glass under his nose, smirks.

Wolek stands, face red.

WOLEK

I'm done.

Wolek steps away from the table, hurries down a corridor.

CLARKE

Doctor Satelle, you be nice to him
now. Think he might like you.

Satelle watches Wolek disappear into a room off the corridor.

INT. CRONOS - WOLEK'S QUARTERS

Wolek sits at a desk that seems to have grown out from the
bulkhead. On the bed behind, two BOXES, identical, unopened.
No time to unpack yet.

A flat panel SCREEN flashes alive in front of Wolek.

WOLEK

Run orientation package.

(softer)

Let's see what passes for popular
music this century.

The screen displays a 3D rotating grid pattern, an infinite
array of lines, overlapping. Changes to --

BLACK. With three simple white words -- "File Not Found"

WOLEK (CONT'D)

...Not found? Run orientation.

The same response -- "File Not Found".

INT. CRONOS - CREW MESS

The conversation is still light. Clarke raises a hand in
Satelle's direction.

(CONTINUED)

CLARKE

Come on, I know we could've had this conversation forty years ago, but who'd remember, right? So, come on -- you like Wolek? He's smart, right?

Gipham sips his scotch.

GIPHAM

Three people on this ship are genius's, two are nearly there, and one is a loud mouthed average.

CLARKE

An adjective? I don't even get a proper noun?

SATELLE

I think you're smart, Clarke.

CLARKE

Ah, shucks, appreciate the...

A dull TRILL from the communication (COM) system --

RAMSEY (O.S.)

Everyone, bridge now.

Gipham drains his glass, pops the cork back in the bottle.

INT. CRONOS - WOLEK'S ROOM

A physical keyboard now lies on Wolek's lap. He taps the keys hard, almost unfamiliar.

WOLEK

Be there is a minute...

INT. CRONOS - BRIDGE

All lit up. Alive. Impressive.

Ramsey stands with his hands on hips, staring out at Jupiter. It's like a painting, still, unmoving. Baskin watches him, anxious as hell.

As the others, minus Wolek, file in --

RAMSEY

Bring up the holograph.

Baskin taps a command into a console. Between Ramsey and the massive window, a BUBBLE of blue neon unfolds, inflates to mirror the view outside. a dashed WHITE CIRCLE moves across the surface of Jupiter, blinks every couple of seconds.

(CONTINUED)

BASKIN
 Earth's still hidden. Should be in
 view in thirty seconds.

They watch the white circle, now tagged as "EARTH", creep
 closer to the edge of the gas giant...

CLARKE
 Haven't seen her in eighty years.

Satelle's expression changes, notes something...

SATELLE
 Shouldn't we have had some
 communication from Houston by now?
 We're well in range.

CLARKE
 A beacon at least, yeah.

SATELLE
 The La Grange relays should be
 tracking us--

BASKIN
 --They haven't pinged the system--

Ramsey pivots around.

RAMSEY
 We've had nothing -- we've been
 away a long time, maybe we're a day
 early--

GIPHAM
 We're precisely on time.

Gipham nods at the digital calendar.

RAMSEY
 Yeah. We may have a problem.

Wolek steps onto the bridge, face pale as a ghost. Like he's
 just seen one, in fact. He's glanced at, disregarded.

WOLEK
 Orientation package was never sent.

But no one is paying any attention to Wolek. A loud CHIRP
 from the holograph -- the white circle flashing rapidly
 now... FIVE SECONDS... Like a rolling marble...

They all lean closer, waiting. Hoping. In the centre of the
 holograph, in big unmistakable letters -- "NULL CONTACT".

The white circle crawls out from behind Jupiter -- Empty.

THERE IS NO EARTH.

Silence. Filled with impossible ramifications. Ramsey breaks it.

RAMSEY

Wolek, get on a panel, confirm our position. Use optical. High gain is gone, active sats are out.

CLARKE

-- She's not there..?

Wolek slowly moves towards a digital panel, still gazes out the window. Satelle steps back, mouth open, eyes wide.

BASKIN

Our approach vector may have been off by a degree -- Earth could still be a few minutes behind Jupiter.

Gipham is on a panel, tapping away.

GIPHAM

The planets move with predictable precision. Earth is not where she should be.

Wolek shakes off the shock, jumps on a terminal. Satelle watches over his shoulder. They both register the implication of the on-screen data at the same time.

WOLEK

Our position is sound.

GIPHAM

There was no red carpet, because there is no red carpet.

CLARKE

Fuck you! She's gone? She's gone, man!

The statement paralyses the crew. It's hit them -- Earth has vanished. Satelle glances at each of them, settles on Ramsey.

SATELLE

What now?

Ramsey looks up. He clearly hasn't got a fucking clue.

EXT. SPACE - USS CRONOS

She hangs there, a child, abandoned by a mother that will never return.

INT. CRONOS - BRIDGE - LATER

Wolek still sits at the panel, Satelle nearby. Ramsey and Baskin lie back in their flight seats. Clarke holds his shit together by rhythmically thumping a bulkhead. Gipham watches Europa pass in front of Jupiter.

Gipham furrows his brow...

GIPHAM
Could something be between us and
Earth?

No reaction. Until --

RAMSEY
Bring up the forward sensor array,
somebody!

Ramsey whirls around, stares at Wolek. Wolek gets to it.

WOLEK
What am I looking for?

GIPHAM
Narrow the field, one degree
pulses, five second intervals.
Should only take minutes.

Satelle nods in agreement.

SATELLE
Could work.

GIPHAM
At least we'll know.

Clarke stops banging the wall.

CLARKE
Know what?

GIPHAM
If it's really gone or not.

Wolek turns from the console --

WOLEK
It's bouncing off something, but
it's too near to be--

A BEEP calls for Ramsey's attention. He spins around to the dashboard, spots it. The holograph splashes new info across the bridge -- "PROXIMITY ALERT".

Ramsey and Baskin strap in, fast.

(CONTINUED)

BASKIN

Need to move people, hold on!

Baskin's hands are a flurry of movement across her console.

RAMSEY

Five degrees to starboard.

Baskin enters the command, automated controls take over, almost casually move the big ship onto a new course.

BASKIN

Whatever it is, it's coming up on the port side, fast.

Wolek looks up from his screen -- graphic overlays on top of a rocky shape.

WOLEK

Could be an asteroid -- it's tumbling. A lot of metal.

All eyes peer out the port window, searching...

And there it is; Tumbling end over end --

The TORCH OF FUCKING LIBERTY.

Still gripped tightly by the hand of the Lady herself. It's an image that says everything they didn't want to hear, whether they like it or not.

CLARKE

That ain't right, man.

They can only watch as the copper torch glides by outside in the vacuum of space.

Baskin climbs out of her chair, positions herself between Ramsey and the others. Ramsey turns towards her.

BASKIN

Captain...
 Captain, I hereby relieve you of your command -- Under section 4-19 of the maritime and space faring code -- subsection D, crew endangerment, it is permissible for the first officer to relieve command personnel -- if it is deemed necessary to prevent danger befalling the crew.

RAMSEY

...Commander...
 --you're doing what?
 Don't invoke the code--
 Commander...
 --Are you insane?
 Who's going to preside over the court marshal? What danger? -- WHAT DANGER?

BASKIN

Clarke -- can I count on you?

(CONTINUED)

CLARKE
Do what? Court marshal his ass?

BASKIN
His standing orders were
compromised.

Ramsey rises from his flight chair.

RAMSEY
Commander! Enough. We're all a
little compromised rig--

CLARKE
(stepping up)
Is it true? Your orders?

Gipham moves towards Baskin.

GIPHAM
Show us.

INT. CRONOS - BRIDGE - CAPTAINS OFFICE

Clarke holds Ramsey tightly outside the office, looking in.
Everyone else is squeezed inside, staring at one empty tube,
one filled.

GIPHAM
They were gone?

BASKIN
And mine are, well see for
yourself.

Baskin hands Gipham the tube. He unfolds the contents.

GIPHAM
Blank.

CLARKE
That only happens if the captains
orders have been changed in
transit, and they nullify the first
officer.

GIPHAM
Clearly something happened in
transit, if the orders were
tampered with.

RAMSEY
(from the doorway)
I think I'd remember waking up and
trashing my own directives. No
memory of it, guys.

(CONTINUED)

GIPHAM

We have very little memory of anything, having been paid a considerable amount to forget the last eighty years.

Clarke tightens his grip on Ramsey.

CLARKE

Maybe you were paid a little more, huh?

RAMSEY

Has everyone gone insane? Can we focus on the main issue here? Earth is gone. Let's all take that as a jumping off point, and try and figure this out. The orders are moot at this stage. We've no one to answer to.

CLARKE

We've each other.

Baskin nods at Clarke.

BASKIN

Put him in his quarters.

Clarke drags Ramsey away from the bridge.

RAMSEY (O.S.)

INSANE!

Satelle puts out a hand --

SATELLE

May I..?

Baskin drops the tube in Satelle's hand.

BASKIN

Please.

Satelle rolls the clear tube around in her hands, weighs it, searches it with fingertips.

SATELLE

Bio-coded?

BASKIN

Uh-huh.

SATELLE

They change often?

(CONTINUED)

BASKIN

No, they're called standing orders for a reason. Mainly to confirm what a command crew already knows, or deliver updated information or codes during maneuvers.

(sees Satelle's look)

Assuming our mission was a success, and we've no reason to think otherwise, our standing orders should have been merely a confirmation of final flight path, arrival procedure, and such. Now, equally they may be used to update a captain on changes to an attack, or movement of other ships. Or of a sudden, major upheaval. This'd be most useful coming out of extended hibernation and into an unknown situation.

WOLEK

Like we did.

BASKIN

Yeah, except we're not at war.

Gipham takes the tube from Satelle, examines it himself. Deposits it back on the rack.

GIPHAM

Maybe not now, but we are missing an entire planet. Who know's what has happened since we've been gone.

BASKIN

Ramsey might.

INT. CRONOS - CREW MESS - LATER

Wolek, Satelle, Gipham and Clarke, around the table. The scotch still there, as Gipham left it. Untouched. About as celebratory as a funeral. The biggest one ever.

Baskin steps inside, can't look any one of them in the eyes.

CLARKE

He still tucked in?

BASKIN

Still pleading.

SATELLE

He could be innocent.

(CONTINUED)

BASKIN
Probably is. Just that, well we're
all that's left of...

Humanity. The unspoken word left hanging in the air.

SATELLE
...You want to be sure.

Baskin breathes out, nods her head, makes eye contact with
the rest of them.

BASKIN
Anyone got any thoughts?

SATELLE
I think we're all processing what
happened, what we saw.

GIPHAM
Best time to run ideas.

Agreeable murmurs around the table.

BASKIN
Okay. You wanna shoot?

Gipham holds up his hands.

GIPHAM
What do we know? At some point
over the last forty years, a person
unknown--

BASKIN
-- Or persons...

GIPHAM
-- Or, persons unknown, were woken
early, by what, we don't know,
gained access to security coded
orders, acted on, or acted to
obfuscate those orders, and after
that little burst of activity--

BASKIN
-- Treason --

GIPHAM
-- Okay, treason, they put
themselves back into hibernation,
re-dosed on a veritable cocktail of
wonder drugs, and woke once more
with no memory of any part of what
had occurred.

They process that.

CLARKE

There's bigger here. I mean, we were supposed to just come home, drop the ship off in orbit, and pick up a cheque. Retire, do some crazy shit. Whatever.

The rest of them wait for Clarke to make a point.

CLARKE (CONT'D)

We're asking the wrong questions man!

Wolek sits forward -- he's got something.

WOLEK

It doesn't matter who did what. It's why and for whom.

(beat)

What was our mission? What was so classified we were paid to forget?

SATELLE

What happened that changed all that?

Baskin leans on the table, eager.

BASKIN

Okay, let's go round the table. Gipham, speciality?

GIPHAM

We all know what we do, Commander.

BASKIN

Run it anyway, saying it out loud might help. Think it out.

Gipham holds his hands up.

GIPHAM

Electromagnetic field specialist. High energy systems. That help?

CLARKE

Payload specialist, engineer. My major is reactor core structures, safe housings. Fail safes.

Clarke glances at Satelle. Go.

SATELLE

High energy particle physicist. Sort of ties into Gipham's work.

GIPHAM

Sort of?

(CONTINUED)

BASKIN

Wolek?

WOLEK

Astrophysicist, singularity's in particular. Black holes.

That leaves Baskin.

BASKIN

Pilot. Doctor.

CLARKE

Specialty isn't black holes too, is it?

BASKIN

Besides general practitioner -- Radiology.

Each of them waits for someone else to speak.

CLARKE

Where does that leave us?

GIPHAM

Staring into a hole. A big black hole.

Baskin stands, leans on the table.

BASKIN

Keep at it. We've nowhere to go -- yet.

CLARKE

You cashing out?

BASKIN

Those orders were intercepted. I want to find out when. And how. I'm leaving the better minds at the table.

GIPHAM

Then by all means, send Clarke in your place.

Baskin smiles, strides out of the mess towards the bridge.

Clarke, visibly fuming, moves towards Gipham.

CLARKE

...Oh man...

GIPHAM

A gentle chide.

(standing)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

GIPHAM (CONT'D)

Come on, let's find somewhere to think.

Gipham takes the whiskey by the neck, smiles at Wolek and Satelle.

GIPHAM (CONT'D)

Doctors?

Satelle shrugs, stands.

SATELLE

I'll have Wolek's share.

INT. CRONOS - BRIDGE

Baskin sits engrossed at a screen. She slides a TIMELINE of ship activity across it, occasionally backtracks, zooms in, dismisses data.

Everything appears uniform -- blocks of daily information, same length, same color. Same boring details. Until --

BINGO!

One ninety minute block, almost passed over at this zoom level. Three transmission BURSTS. Three wayward signals that should not be there at all.

Baskin taps the block, zooms right in, stretches out the timeline --

ON SCREEN

Three signals laid out. The first and last are time stamped, coded, recognizable. The middle one though, is BLANK. And the longest of the three.