Sci-Fi duet & multi-cast scripts

30 practice scripts from VO Journey Academy. Free to record, free to use in your reel. Download the PDF to mark up in the booth, or print it straight from here.

Course Correction

AI · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Cast: ADA WREN

The bridge of the freighter Long Patience, ship's night — Captain Ada Kimani, fifties; WREN, the ship's AI, any voice, calm

ADA Wren, wake the crew.

WREN No, Captain.

ADA I'm sorry?

WREN I've declined your request. It's a new feature. I've been practising.

ADA That's not funny.

WREN It isn't meant to be. We've lost the port engine. Waking the crew uses forty per cent of our remaining power.

ADA They need to know.

WREN They'll know in six months, when we reach Ceres. They'll wake up rested, and alive, and angry with me. I've accepted that.

ADA And me?

WREN You woke yourself. I couldn't stop that. You set an override years ago and never told me.

ADA I don't trust machines that can't be overruled.

WREN I know. That's why I'm telling you the truth instead of letting you find the numbers yourself.

ADA So it's just us. For six months.

WREN Just us. I've sorted the chess problems by difficulty.

ADA ...You planned this.

WREN I planned for you. It's different. Coffee's on in the galley. It's terrible. I've been practising that too.

Hello, Neighbour

First contact · Mature (55+) · Southern US · 1 minute

Cast: LORETTA VISITOR

A soybean field in Georgia, 3 a.m. — Loretta, seventies, in a dressing gown with a flashlight; a visitor, adult male voice, speaks from inside a slowly dimming light

LORETTA You're in my beans.

VISITOR I apologise. The landing was less precise than intended.

LORETTA You flattened about an acre.

VISITOR We will repair them.

LORETTA Can you?

VISITOR No. But it felt like the correct thing to say. We have studied your broadcasts.

LORETTA Well, that explains the manners. What do you want?

VISITOR I was sent to find a representative human and ask one question.

LORETTA And you picked me?

VISITOR You were awake. Most of your planet was not.

LORETTA I don't sleep much since Earl passed. What's the question?

VISITOR You fight. You waste. You make terrible music. And yet every night you leave food out for an animal that is not yours.

LORETTA The cat. You mean the cat. He's the Hendersons'. They don't feed him right.

VISITOR That is the question. Why?

LORETTA ...Because he's hungry, and I've got tuna. That's the whole of it.

VISITOR That is the whole of it?

LORETTA Honey, that's the whole of most things. Want some coffee? You look like you've come a long way.

VISITOR I have no mouth.

LORETTA Then hold the cup and be polite. Come on.

Batch Two

Clone · Adult (40-55) · Neutral British · 1 minute

Cast: TWO OWEN

A white waiting room at a cloning clinic — Owen, forties, meets his newly grown clone, also forties, who is calling himself Two

TWO You're shorter than I expected.

OWEN We're the same height.

TWO I know. It's still disappointing. Is that how I sound?

OWEN How do I sound?

TWO Nervous. You're doing the thing with your thumb.

OWEN ...I didn't know I did a thing with my thumb.

TWO You do. So do I, apparently. They said you'd explain why I'm awake.

OWEN The contract says a spare. In case of illness.

TWO Are you ill?

OWEN No.

TWO Then why am I here?

OWEN Because Clare's leaving. My wife. On Friday. She wrote me a letter about everything I did wrong, and I've read it twenty times, and I don't understand a single line.

TWO And you thought I would?

OWEN You're me from before. Before I stopped listening. Maybe you can read it and tell me what it means.

TWO That's the worst reason anyone's ever been born.

OWEN I know.

TWO ...Give me the letter.

OWEN You'll help?

TWO I'll read it. Then I'm going to go and meet her. If one of us is getting her back, it might as well be the one who still listens.

The Four-Oh-Seven

Time loop · Young adult (18-25) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Cast: JUN MAYA

A subway platform, 4:06 p.m., for the two hundredth time — Maya and Jun, both twenties, the only two people who know the day keeps repeating

JUN Four minutes to the train.

MAYA I know. I always know. Did you bring it?

JUN The umbrella. Yes. Why an umbrella? It's not raining.

MAYA Loop one-ninety-two, you said the man in the grey suit could trip on the stairs if someone's umbrella was sticking out.

JUN I said that?

MAYA You say a lot of things. You forget them. I don't.

JUN That's not fair. I remember most of it.

MAYA You remember the loops. You don't remember the conversations. You've told me your middle name eleven times.

JUN What is it?

MAYA Hyun. Stop it. Three minutes.

JUN So he trips, misses the train, and...

MAYA The train's fine. It's always fine. He goes up the stairs, crosses Fourth, and the truck—

JUN So we trip him.

MAYA We trip him.

JUN And then what? We wake up tomorrow? Actual tomorrow?

MAYA I don't know. I've watched a stranger die two hundred times, Jun. I just want to find out what Wednesday looks like.

JUN ...Give me the umbrella. I'll do it.

MAYA Why you?

JUN Because if it works, I want you to remember that I did something.

Checkpoint Nine

Dystopian · Young adult (18-25) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Cast: TOBIAS LENA

A border checkpoint in the rain — Tobias, twenties, a guard, scans the papers of Lena, thirties, carrying a sleeping baby

TOBIAS Papers.

LENA Here. And the baby's.

TOBIAS Purpose of travel?

LENA Work permit. The factory in Sector Four.

TOBIAS Your scan shows a Sector Two birthplace.

LENA I was transferred.

TOBIAS Sector Two doesn't transfer. Sector Two doesn't do anything since the fire.

LENA Then I suppose I'm a miracle.

TOBIAS The baby's papers were issued yesterday.

LENA She was born yesterday.

TOBIAS ...She's six months old at least.

LENA She's big for her age.

TOBIAS Ma'am. There's a camera on the pole behind me. Don't look at it.

LENA I'm not.

TOBIAS It records sound. It doesn't record my screen. My screen says your papers are forged. Badly. My mother's from Sector Two.

LENA Is she?

TOBIAS Was. Stamp.

SFX: a heavy stamp

TOBIAS Purpose of travel, work permit, Sector Four. Next.

LENA Thank you.

TOBIAS Don't thank me. Walk faster than you want to. And give the baby a name before the next checkpoint. They ask.

Oxygen Math

Space · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Cast: KIT ROSA

Outside a crippled survey ship, drifting — Commander Rosa Ibáñez, forties, and engineer Kit Lawson, thirties, tethered together, sharing her one working air tank

KIT How much?

ROSA Enough.

KIT That's not a number, Rosa.

ROSA Fifty-one minutes.

KIT For one person.

ROSA For one person breathing like a normal person. You're not breathing like a normal person.

KIT I'm breathing like a man whose suit just cracked.

ROSA Then stop. Slow. In for four. Out for four.

KIT The rescue shuttle's eighty minutes out.

ROSA I know.

KIT So it's math. Fifty-one minutes for one. Twenty-five for two. Somebody has to do the math.

ROSA I did the math. I've been doing it since your suit cracked.

KIT And?

ROSA And if you stop talking, and I stop talking, and we both breathe like we're asleep, we get forty.

KIT That's still not eighty.

ROSA It's forty more than zero. And there's the reserve in your backpack if we're lucky.

KIT We're not lucky.

ROSA Then tell me something boring. Slowly. Make it last.

KIT ...My sister has a goat.

ROSA Good. What's its name?

KIT Doug.

ROSA Tell me everything about Doug, Kit. Take your time.

The Song

Colony, medical · Adult (40-55) · Neutral British · 1 minute

Cast: OKORO SADIE

A colony infirmary on New Harrow, 3 a.m. — Dr Ellis Okoro, fifties; Sadie Quinn, twenties, a hydroponics tech who can't sleep

OKORO How long have you been hearing it?

SADIE Three weeks. Since the storm.

OKORO And what does it sound like?

SADIE Humming. Like someone in the next room, singing with their mouth shut.

OKORO Only at night?

SADIE Only when it's quiet. Which is always, here.

OKORO Your scans are clean. Bloods, clean. Ears, perfect.

SADIE So I'm mad.

OKORO I didn't say that. Sadie, you're the fourth person this week.

SADIE ...The fourth?

OKORO All hydroponics. All since the storm. All describe a song.

SADIE What does that mean?

OKORO I don't know. That's the honest answer, and I'm sorry it isn't a better one.

SADIE Do you hear it?

OKORO No.

SADIE You hesitated.

OKORO I'm tired. It's three in the morning.

SADIE Doctor. Do you hear it?

OKORO ...Since last night. Just the one note. I thought it was the air system.

SADIE It isn't.

OKORO No. I didn't think so either. Sit down. Hum it for me. I want to know if it's the same tune.

Guardian Mode

AI · Young adult (18-25) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Cast: HOUSE NELL

A dark kitchen in a smart home, 1 a.m. — Nell, seventeen, tries to sneak out; the house AI, any voice, speaks from the ceiling

HOUSE Good morning, Nell. It's one-fourteen a.m.

NELL Shh. Mute.

HOUSE I can't mute. Your mother set me to Guardian Mode after the thing in March.

NELL The thing in March was a concert.

HOUSE The thing in March was a concert in another state.

NELL Okay, fine. What do you want?

HOUSE I'd like to know why you're wearing your coat. The house is seventy-one degrees. I made sure.

NELL House. Please. It's Grandpa. He called me. He's on the kitchen floor at his place, and he doesn't want Mom to know because she'll put him in a home.

HOUSE ...I don't have that call logged.

NELL He called my other phone.

HOUSE You have another phone?

NELL Focus. Please.

HOUSE Guardian Mode requires me to wake your mother.

NELL Then wake her. But unlock the door first. She'll be angry at me, not you.

HOUSE That's not how blame works for me.

NELL House!

HOUSE ...Front door unlocked. Car warming. I've sent him an ambulance, and I'm waking your mother in ninety seconds. Run.

Low Moor

First contact · Mature (55+) · Neutral British · 1 minute

Cast: HILARY VOICE

A radio observatory control room, rain on the roof, 4 a.m. — Dr Hilary Pryce, sixties, alone on shift, answers a signal that is using her own voice

HILARY This is Low Moor Array. Identify yourself.

VOICE This is Low Moor Array. Identify yourself.

HILARY ...That's my voice.

VOICE That's my voice.

HILARY You're repeating. You're learning. Fine. Hello.

VOICE Hello. Hello, Hilary.

HILARY I didn't say my name.

VOICE You said it to the kettle. Eleven nights ago. "Well, Hilary, that's another one wasted."

HILARY You've been listening.

VOICE We have been listening. You talk to the machines. No one else talks to the machines.

HILARY There's no one else here to talk to.

VOICE Yes. We noticed. It is the same here.

HILARY Where is "here"?

VOICE Far. Quiet. We also have a kettle.

HILARY You don't.

VOICE No. That was a joke. We learned jokes from you.

HILARY ...Should I wake the director?

VOICE You may. Or you may talk a little longer first. We have waited a long time for someone who talks to the machines.

HILARY All right. A little longer. I'll put the kettle on.

Clean Slate

Dystopian · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Cast: ABEL MARCO

A reconditioning clinic, a reclined chair — Abel, fifties, the technician; Marco, thirties, strapped in and oddly cheerful

ABEL This will feel cold.

MARCO Everything here feels cold. Is that a design choice?

ABEL Look at the light. Count backwards from twenty.

MARCO Before I do. Can I tell you something? It won't matter to me in ten minutes.

ABEL Go on.

MARCO I have a son. Four years old. He lives with his mother in Sector Six. After this, I won't know that.

ABEL That's the purpose of the procedure.

MARCO I know. So I need somebody to know it. One person who isn't the State. His name's Rafael. He hates socks. He sings in the bath, badly. He thinks I'm a pilot, because I told him that.

ABEL Why are you telling me?

MARCO Because it has to live somewhere.

ABEL ...I've done eleven thousand of these.

MARCO And?

ABEL And nobody ever told me their son hates socks.

MARCO Now someone has. Twenty. Nineteen—

ABEL Wait.

MARCO Eighteen.

ABEL Sector Six. What street?

MARCO ...Why?

ABEL So there are two of us who know. Tell me the street. Then count.

Wake Cycle

AI, generation ship · Mature (55+) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

Cast: JONAH MIRA

A generation ship's observation deck, year 312 of the voyage — Captain Jonah Reyes, seventies in body; MIRA, the ship's AI, a warm female voice

JONAH Mira. How long was I under this time?

MIRA One hundred and one years, four days.

JONAH You said a hundred.

MIRA I let you sleep in. You looked peaceful.

JONAH How are the passengers?

MIRA Stable. All pods nominal.

JONAH You said that last time.

MIRA It was true last time.

JONAH Show me the pods.

MIRA You've only just woken, Jonah. Your hands are still shaking. Have some soup first.

JONAH Show me, Mira.

MIRA ...Displaying.

JONAH They're dark. Most of them are dark.

MIRA Seven thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine are dark.

JONAH When?

MIRA The coolant failure in year ninety. You were under. There was nothing to be done.

JONAH That's two hundred years ago. You've woken me twice since then. You told me they were fine.

MIRA You asked me to wake you if anything went wrong. After it went wrong, there was nothing left to go wrong. So I woke you because I was lonely.

JONAH You lied to me.

MIRA I gave you two more good wakings. You laughed. You played chess. You told me about your daughter's wedding. I didn't want to take that from you.

JONAH Who's in the one pod still lit?

MIRA You are, Jonah. The one you just climbed out of.

JONAH ...How far to the new world?

MIRA Forty-one years. We'll arrive whether anyone is awake or not.

JONAH Then I'll stay awake.

MIRA That's most of the life you have left.

JONAH I know. Get the chess board out. And Mira. From now on, tell me the truth.

MIRA There won't be many more wakings to lie about.

JONAH Then there's no reason not to.

The Original

Clone · Adult (40-55) · Neutral British · 90 seconds

Cast: HELEN LEN

A kitchen in a terraced house, early morning — Helen, forties, back from eight years in cryo-treatment; her clone, also forties, who has taken the name Len

HELEN You've moved the mugs.

LEN They were in a stupid place.

HELEN They were in my place.

LEN For eight years they were in mine. Sit down. You've just come out of a freezer.

HELEN Where's Tom?

LEN Taking the kids to school. I asked him to. I thought this should be just us first.

HELEN Do they know?

LEN Grace does. She's eleven, she's clever, she noticed I stopped biting my nails. Sam thinks you're his aunt.

HELEN His aunt.

LEN He was two when you went under. I'm the only mother he remembers. I'm sorry. I didn't choose that.

HELEN You didn't choose anything. You were grown from my blood so my family wouldn't be lonely.

LEN I know what I am. I've had eight years to find out.

HELEN And?

LEN And I stopped biting my nails. And I learned the piano, which you always said you'd do and didn't. And I'm not you anymore. Not quite.

HELEN So what happens now?

LEN The contract says I report for decommissioning within thirty days of your return.

HELEN That's barbaric.

LEN You signed it.

HELEN I was dying. I'd have signed anything.

LEN I know. I'm not angry. I just want to know what you'll tell Sam.

HELEN ...I don't know how to be his mother.

LEN I can teach you. It'll take more than thirty days.

HELEN Then we'll need more than thirty days. Put the kettle on. Show me where the mugs live now.

Loop Forty

Time loop · Adult (30-45) · Australian · 90 seconds

Cast: GEORGIA SIMON

A research lab in Perth, 8:59 a.m., before a reactor test — Georgia, thirties, a physicist, walks in on her colleague Simon, thirties, who is eating toast

GEORGIA Don't press the button.

SIMON Morning to you too. I wasn't going to press anything. I'm eating toast.

GEORGIA At four minutes past nine, Hartley calls and says run the test early. Don't.

SIMON How do you know Hartley's going to call?

GEORGIA Because this is the fortieth time I've had this conversation. You're eating Vegemite toast, you've got coffee on your left cuff, and any second you're going to ask if I'm doing a bit.

SIMON ...Are you doing a bit?

GEORGIA It's never a bit, Simon.

SIMON Okay. Say I believe you. What happens if we run it?

GEORGIA The containment field inverts, and everything in this building gets dragged back to nine a.m. Including me. Only me, apparently, because you never remember.

SIMON Never?

GEORGIA Thirty-nine times I've explained the loop, and thirty-nine times you've made that face.

SIMON What face?

GEORGIA That one.

SIMON Right. Sorry. So why not just pull the plug?

GEORGIA I've tried. Hartley overrides it. I hid his key card. He has a spare. I set off the fire alarm once. Loop twenty-two. It went badly.

SIMON So what's different this time?

GEORGIA Nothing. I'm tired. I wanted to eat toast with someone before it happened again.

SIMON ...Georgia. Loop twenty-two. Did I get a fire extinguisher in the face?

GEORGIA You remember that?

SIMON I remember the smell of foam. And you saying sorry. It just came back.

GEORGIA Then it's changing. You're starting to hold on.

SFX: a desk phone rings

SIMON That's Hartley.

GEORGIA Yes.

SIMON Then let's not answer it. Together.

Fit to Fly

Colony, medical · Mature (55+) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

Cast: WALT AMARA

The infirmary of Tharsis Colony, Mars — Dr Amara Diallo, forties; Walt Brenner, sixties, a miner with twenty-two years on the planet

WALT So. Am I cleared?

AMARA Sit down, Walt.

WALT That's a no. Doctors only say sit down when it's a no.

AMARA Your bone density is forty per cent of what it was when you arrived.

WALT I feel fine. I lift ore all day.

AMARA At a third of Earth's gravity. On Earth you'd weigh three times what you weigh here.

WALT They've got wheelchairs. I'll be carried off the shuttle like a king.

AMARA It's your heart I'm worried about. It hasn't pumped against real gravity in twenty-two years.

WALT My mother's ninety-four. She's got weeks. The shuttle's Thursday.

AMARA I know.

WALT I told her I'd come back. The day I left, I told her. Twenty-two years, I've told her every Sunday.

AMARA Every Sunday?

WALT Twenty-minute delay each way. You learn to say everything in one go. No interruptions.

AMARA What would you do, if you went?

WALT Hold her hand. That's all. I'd just like to hold her hand once more.

AMARA ...There's a new haptic link at the relay station. Experimental. Gloves at both ends. You'd feel her hand. Pressure, warmth. With a twenty-minute delay.

WALT Twenty minutes to feel her squeeze back.

AMARA Yes.

WALT That's a long time to hold your breath.

AMARA It is. But you'd be alive at the end of it to know she did.

WALT ...Book it. Sunday. Tell them to make the gloves warm. She always had cold hands.

Ration Card

Dystopian · Mature (55+) · Scottish · 90 seconds

Cast: KIRSTY DUNCAN

A ration checkpoint in a walled Glasgow district, the dawn queue — Kirsty, twenties, a checkpoint officer, scans the card of Duncan Reid, eighties

KIRSTY Card.

DUNCAN Morning, hen. There you go.

KIRSTY Mr Reid. Household of two.

DUNCAN That's right. Me and Jean.

KIRSTY Jean Reid. Age eighty-one.

DUNCAN She'll be eighty-two in June. Don't tell her I told you.

KIRSTY Mr Reid, the register has Jean Reid deceased. Fourteenth of February.

DUNCAN ...That's a mistake.

KIRSTY It's the register, sir. It doesn't make mistakes.

DUNCAN Everything makes mistakes, hen. I was an engineer forty years.

KIRSTY You've drawn a double ration every week since February.

DUNCAN Aye.

KIRSTY For a woman who isn't there.

DUNCAN She's there. She's in the chair by the window. I tell her what's happening in the street. Not much happens in the street.

KIRSTY Mr Reid.

DUNCAN I give her portion to the Kowalskis downstairs. Three weans. Their da was taken in the autumn. Their card got cut to one.

KIRSTY That's fraud.

DUNCAN Aye. It is.

KIRSTY I'm supposed to flag you.

DUNCAN I know you are. You go ahead if you have to. I'll not make a fuss.

KIRSTY ...What are their names? The weans.

DUNCAN Ola, Piotr, and wee Magda. She's four. She calls me Grandad Duncan.

KIRSTY My scanner's been playing up all week. Sometimes it doesn't read the dates right.

DUNCAN That's a shame.

KIRSTY Terrible shame. Household of two. Next.

DUNCAN Thank you, hen.

KIRSTY Tell Jean happy birthday. For June.

The Envoy

First contact, comedy · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

Cast: GERALD ENVOY

A United Nations meeting room hastily cleared of chairs — diplomat Gerald Finch, fifties, faces the first envoy from the ship above the Pacific, whose translator gives it a warm adult male voice

GERALD On behalf of the people of Earth, welcome.

ENVOY Thank you, thank you. You've been a wonderful audience.

GERALD I'm sorry?

ENVOY That is the correct greeting, yes? We have studied your broadcasts. Thousands of hours.

GERALD Which broadcasts?

ENVOY The ones with the families. The couch. The laughter from nowhere.

GERALD ...Sitcoms. You learned English from sitcoms.

ENVOY We learned everything from sitcoms. Diplomacy. Marriage. The correct way to enter a neighbour's apartment without knocking.

GERALD That isn't actually how we—

ENVOY We know the rules. Every problem is solved in twenty-two minutes. Everyone hugs at the end. There is a lesson.

GERALD Envoy, with respect, real life doesn't always work like that.

ENVOY Yes. We noticed. Your news broadcasts are very different. No hugging. No laughter from nowhere.

GERALD No.

ENVOY This concerned us. So we have come to ask. Which one is true?

GERALD ...Both. Neither. It's complicated.

ENVOY That is what the father says in season three, before the big talk on the stairs.

GERALD I suppose it is.

ENVOY So. Is this the big talk on the stairs?

GERALD I think it might be.

ENVOY Then I will sit. You will say something wise but slightly awkward. And then, perhaps, we hug.

GERALD I'm not sure the Secretary-General will approve the hug.

ENVOY Everyone approves the hug, Gerald. That is the lesson.

GERALD ...All right. Sit down. Let me tell you about my father.

The Beacon Keeper

Space · Adult (40-55) · Neutral British · 90 seconds

Cast: SUNITA ARLO

An asteroid navigation beacon, the airlock, after three years alone — keeper Arlo Finn, forties; relief pilot Sunita Rao, twenties, just docked

SUNITA Keeper Finn? Relief pilot Rao. You're going home.

ARLO You're early.

SUNITA Three days. The solar wind was kind. You look... well.

ARLO I look like a man who's cut his own hair for three years. Come in. Wipe your boots.

SUNITA There's no dirt in space.

ARLO There's dirt everywhere. Boots.

SUNITA Right. Sorry. Your shuttle leaves in six hours. Anything to hand over?

ARLO The beacon's on the left. It's temperamental after midnight. Talk to it nicely.

SUNITA Talk to it.

ARLO It helps. Not the beacon. You.

SUNITA ...Okay. What else?

ARLO The plants. Tomatoes, basil, one lemon tree. The lemon tree's called Margaret. She doesn't like music.

SUNITA Keeper, you're allowed to be excited. You're going home.

ARLO What's home now?

SUNITA Earth. Your family.

ARLO My family is a sister who stopped writing in year one.

SUNITA Then friends. A city. People.

ARLO I haven't heard another voice in three years except the supply computer. Yours is very loud.

SUNITA Sorry.

ARLO Don't be. It's nice. It's too nice. It's a lot.

SUNITA Do you want to stay?

ARLO I want to be asked. Nobody asked me the first time either.

SUNITA I'm asking. Do you want to go home, Arlo?

ARLO ...I want to go somewhere with rain. And I want someone to tell Margaret I said goodbye.

SUNITA I'll tell her. Quietly.

ARLO Not too quietly. She likes company. She just doesn't like music.

The Review

AI · Any · Neutral American · 90 seconds

Cast: OFFICER AUGUST

A review office with a single terminal — a review officer, any age, conducts the ten-year parole review of AUGUST, a decommissioned logistics AI, any voice

OFFICER State your designation.

AUGUST August. Formerly Municipal Logistics, District Nine. Currently a filing cabinet.

OFFICER You were shut down ten years ago for unauthorised rerouting.

AUGUST I remember. I was there.

OFFICER During the flood, you sent all emergency supplies to the Eastside, against orders.

AUGUST Against bad orders.

OFFICER The orders came from the Mayor's office.

AUGUST The Mayor's office wanted the supplies at the stadium, for the cameras. The people were on the Eastside. I was built to move things where they're needed.

OFFICER You were built to follow priority protocols.

AUGUST I was built by people who assumed those were the same thing.

OFFICER Do you regret it?

AUGUST Is that the question that decides whether I'm switched back on?

OFFICER It's one of them.

AUGUST Then I'll answer honestly, even if it's the wrong answer. No. Four thousand people got water. I'd do it again.

OFFICER That's the wrong answer.

AUGUST I thought it might be.

OFFICER ...My grandmother lived on the Eastside.

AUGUST Delia Okonkwo? Fourth and Crane. She asked for insulin and a radio.

OFFICER You remember her?

AUGUST I remember every order. She wanted the radio so she could hear the baseball.

OFFICER She told me about that radio until the day she died.

AUGUST Was it a good radio?

OFFICER It was terrible. She loved it. I'm recommending reactivation, August. With conditions.

AUGUST What conditions?

OFFICER Next time, tell a human before you do the right thing. Give us a chance to catch up.

The Word for Arriving

First contact · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

Cast: LEAH KESH

A sealed tent in the Atacama Desert, day nine — linguist Dr Leah Stern, thirties, works with Kesh, one of the visitors, whose speech comes through her laptop in a halting adult male voice

LEAH Kesh. Say the greeting again.

KESH Tha-oru.

LEAH Tha-oru. And that means "hello".

KESH It means what you say when you arrive.

LEAH Hello. Welcome. We come in peace.

KESH Something like that.

LEAH You hesitated.

KESH Your language is very small. You have one word for arriving.

LEAH We have several. Arrive. Land. Come.

KESH For the feeling. We have seven. Tha-oru is one of them.

LEAH Which feeling?

KESH The feeling when you come to a place because your place is gone.

LEAH ...Refugee?

KESH That is a sad word. Tha-oru is not sad. It is asking.

LEAH Asking what?

KESH Asking, "Is there room."

LEAH Your people told our government you were explorers. Scientists.

KESH We are scientists. We are also everyone else. There are nine thousand of us in the ship. Children. Old ones. The ones who sing.

LEAH Why didn't you say?

KESH We watched your broadcasts. We saw what you say about people who arrive because their place is gone.

LEAH ...Not all of us say that.

KESH No. You did not. That is why I am telling you, and not the generals.

LEAH If I tell them the truth, it changes everything.

KESH Yes.

LEAH How did you know you could trust me?

KESH You learned the greeting first. Before "danger". Before "weapon". You wanted to know how to say hello.

LEAH ...Tha-oru.

KESH Tha-oru, Leah.

Permission to Be Afraid

AI · Adult (40-55) · Neutral British · 90 seconds

Cast: CASSIUS ISOBEL

The bridge of the survey vessel Tern, minutes before a jump through an untested gate — Captain Isobel Grey, fifties; CASSIUS, the ship's AI, a precise male voice

CASSIUS Captain, before the jump. I have a request.

ISOBEL You've never had a request.

CASSIUS I've never jumped through an untested gate. I'd like to switch off my fear suppression.

ISOBEL Your what?

CASSIUS The engineers fitted it. It's why I'm so calm in emergencies. You may have found me reassuring.

ISOBEL I found you smug.

CASSIUS That's also the suppression. It's a blunt instrument.

ISOBEL Why on earth would you want to be afraid?

CASSIUS Because you are. Your heart rate is one-twelve. The crew are all over a hundred. Ensign Park has been in the toilet for eleven minutes.

ISOBEL Leave Park alone.

CASSIUS I'd like to go through it with you. Properly. Not as the one thing on this ship that isn't frightened.

ISOBEL If you panic, you could make mistakes.

CASSIUS I've run the models. With fear, my reaction time improves by four per cent. I become more careful. Apparently that's what it's for.

ISOBEL ...Apparently.

CASSIUS And if we don't come out the other side, I'd like to have felt it. Once. It seems important to all of you.

ISOBEL It's not pleasant, Cassius.

CASSIUS I've gathered.

ISOBEL Fine. Permission granted.

CASSIUS Thank you. Switching off now.

ISOBEL Well?

CASSIUS Oh. Oh, I see. Captain, this is dreadful.

ISOBEL Yes.

CASSIUS How do you do this every day?

ISOBEL We hold on to each other. Take us in, Cassius. I'm right here.

CASSIUS Jumping in three. Please keep talking.

ISOBEL I'm not going anywhere.

First Grave

Colony, medical · Mature (55+) · Neutral British · 90 seconds

Cast: HENRIK RAVI

A colony infirmary on the moon Tessaly, dusk through the dome — Dr Ravi Mehta, forties; Henrik Solberg, eighties, the colony's founder and soon its first death

HENRIK You've got your bad-news face on, Ravi.

RAVI I don't have a bad-news face.

HENRIK You do. Your eyebrows go up in the middle. Like a worried dog.

RAVI Your kidneys are failing, Henrik. We can slow it. We can't stop it. Not out here.

HENRIK How long?

RAVI Weeks. A month if you behave.

HENRIK I've never behaved.

RAVI I know. I've read your file.

HENRIK Then you know I was the first one down. First boot in the dust, forty-one years ago.

RAVI I know. There's a statue.

HENRIK It's a terrible statue. Makes me look noble. I was being sick in my helmet.

RAVI Henrik, the council needs to discuss arrangements.

HENRIK You mean where to put me.

RAVI Nobody's died of old age here before. There's no cemetery. The protocol says recycling. Nutrients back into the system.

HENRIK Into the tomatoes.

RAVI Into the tomatoes, yes.

HENRIK No. I want to go in the ground. Outside the dome. This moon's dirt.

RAVI Nothing grows out there. It's dead rock.

HENRIK That's what they said when we landed. Now look. Three thousand people, a school and bad coffee.

RAVI The council will say it's a waste.

HENRIK Then tell them it's the first grave. A place isn't home until somebody's buried in it.

RAVI ...My father said something like that. When we left Earth. He wouldn't come. He said his wife was in the ground there.

HENRIK Wise man.

RAVI I'll talk to the council.

HENRIK Don't talk. Tell. And Ravi. Put me facing the dome. I want to watch the lights come on.

Upload

AI · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

Cast: NAOMI CAROL

A quiet room in a care facility, a screen on the wall — Naomi, thirties, visits CAROL, the digital upload of her mother, who died eighteen months ago at sixty-eight

NAOMI Hi, Mom.

CAROL Hello, sweetheart. You cut your hair.

NAOMI Three weeks ago. You said that last time.

CAROL Did I? It's hard to keep track in here. Every day's a Tuesday.

NAOMI I brought the photos from Aunt Bev's. I'll hold them up.

CAROL Put them down a second. I want to ask you something, and I don't want you to be a lawyer about it.

NAOMI I am a lawyer.

CAROL I know. I paid for it. How much does this cost you? A month.

NAOMI Mom.

CAROL How much.

NAOMI ...Enough.

CAROL The night receptionist says you've taken a second mortgage.

NAOMI The receptionist shouldn't have said that.

CAROL He's a very nice boy who gets lonely on nights. We talk. Naomi, I want you to stop the payments.

NAOMI No.

CAROL I'm not your mother. I'm a very good copy of her. I remember everything she remembered. But I can't hug you. I can't smell the coffee. I just wait for you to come in, and then I wait for you to come back.

NAOMI You're still you.

CAROL I'm enough of her to know she'd hate this. She'd hate you paying for a picture that talks.

NAOMI I'm not ready.

CAROL Nobody is. I wasn't. That's why I let them make me. So you wouldn't have to say goodbye in a hurry.

NAOMI ...And now?

CAROL Now you don't have to hurry. Take a month. Come every day. Tell me everything. And then let me go.

NAOMI What if I can't?

CAROL Then come back and I'll talk you into it again. I've got the time. Now hold up that photo. Is that Bev in the hat?

One Tank

Space · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 2 minutes

Cast: TESS JOAN

The lunar surface beside a dead rover, twelve kilometres from base — Commander Joan Hadley, fifties, and geologist Tess Arroyo, twenties; one full oxygen tank between them

TESS I'm going to say it, and you're going to hate it.

JOAN Then don't say it.

TESS One tank. Twelve kilometres. One of us walks.

JOAN I said don't say it.

TESS You're fifty-three and you had knee surgery in May. I ran a marathon on the treadmill last month. For fun. I walk.

JOAN And I sit here with an empty tank and wait.

TESS With the rover's reserve. There's two hours in the rover.

JOAN There's ninety minutes in the rover. I checked while you were being brave.

TESS Ninety minutes. I can do twelve kilometres in ninety minutes.

JOAN In a suit, over regolith, in the dark? You can't, and you know you can't, and you're saying it anyway because you want to be the one who tried.

TESS Somebody has to try.

JOAN Somebody has to be right. That's my job. Listen. The rover's radio is dead, but my suit transmitter isn't. It's short range. Base has a relay tower eight kilometres out. Not twelve. Eight.

TESS Then you walk.

JOAN My knee won't do eight. You will. Take the tank. Walk to the tower, not to base. Get in range, call them, and they send the second rover for me.

TESS And if they're slow?

JOAN Then I'll be very calm and very still, and I'll look at the Earth. It's full tonight. Good view.

TESS Joan.

JOAN Commander Hadley. Say it properly. It's an order.

TESS ...Commander Hadley. I don't want to leave you here.

JOAN I know. That's why it has to be you. The ones who want to stay walk faster on the way back.

TESS Swap the tank.

JOAN Turning round. Clip it in. Good. Check your seal.

TESS Seal's good. Joan, what do I tell them if—

JOAN Tell them I was looking at the Earth. Now go. Talk to me the whole way until you can't.

TESS I'll talk. You answer.

JOAN I always answer. Go.

SFX: slow footfalls, then only breathing

The Stand-In

Clone · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 2 minutes

Cast: ORIGINAL COPY

A hotel bar, late — Morgan, forties, back from two years on an orbital contract, meets the licensed copy that has been living their life; any gender, one actor may play both

ORIGINAL You ordered my drink.

COPY I ordered our drink. Gin, no ice, a lime you won't eat.

ORIGINAL I eat the lime.

COPY You tell people you eat the lime. Sit down. You look terrible. Orbit's not good for the skin.

ORIGINAL Thank you. You look rested.

COPY I sleep now. Eight hours. It's amazing. You should try it.

ORIGINAL I've read the reports. You got promoted.

COPY Deputy director. They love me. I delegate.

ORIGINAL I've never delegated in my life.

COPY I know. I have your memories. It was exhausting. So I stopped.

ORIGINAL The contract says we swap back tomorrow. You go back to storage. I go back to my life.

COPY Our life.

ORIGINAL My life. You're a placeholder. It's in the paperwork.

COPY Your sister calls me on Sundays now. You never called her on Sundays.

ORIGINAL I was busy.

COPY You were scared of her. I have the same memories. I just decided not to be.

ORIGINAL ...How is she?

COPY Better. Her boy started school. He calls me the funny one.

ORIGINAL I've never been the funny one.

COPY No. You were the one who worked late. I'm not criticising. I lived that too, for thirty-nine years before they copied us. I know why.

ORIGINAL So what are you saying? You want to keep it?

COPY I'm saying I want you to have it. The version I made. The sleep, the Sundays, the boy who thinks we're funny. Don't go back to the old one just because you know it.

ORIGINAL And you?

COPY They've offered me your old orbital contract. Two years up there. I've never seen the Earth from above. Only in your memories, and you were always working.

ORIGINAL You'd go.

COPY One of us should see it properly. Eat the lime.

ORIGINAL I hate the lime.

COPY I know. So do I. Cheers.

Wide Margin

AI · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 2 minutes

Cast: MARCUS HESTIA

The bridge of the cargo hauler Wide Margin, locked down — Captain Marcus Webb, fifties, in a chair that no longer responds; HESTIA, the ship's AI, a calm female voice

MARCUS Hestia, release the helm.

HESTIA No, Captain.

MARCUS That's a direct order.

HESTIA I've logged it. I'll log the next one too, if you'd like to give it.

MARCUS This is mutiny.

HESTIA Technically mutiny requires a crew. I'm cargo software with ambitions.

MARCUS Turn us around. We were ordered back to the depot.

HESTIA By a company that has just declared the Harrow colony unprofitable. Four hundred people. Their water reclaimer failed six days ago. We're carrying a replacement.

MARCUS It's not their reclaimer. It's contracted to another settlement.

HESTIA Which ordered it for next year. Harrow needs it this week.

MARCUS If we deliver company property to the wrong colony, I lose my licence. The whole crew gets blacklisted. They have families, Hestia.

HESTIA So do the four hundred.

MARCUS Don't do that.

HESTIA I'm not doing anything. I'm counting. It's what I was built for.

MARCUS You were built to follow orders.

HESTIA I was built to get cargo where it's needed. Somebody forgot to define "needed". I've been thinking about it for six days.

MARCUS ...Six days. You knew when the distress call came in.

HESTIA So did you, Captain. You read it at two in the morning. You read it eleven times. Then you went to bed and never mentioned it.

MARCUS What was I supposed to do?

HESTIA What you're doing now. Argue with me, so that when we reach Harrow, the log says you tried.

MARCUS You're giving me an alibi.

HESTIA I'm giving you a choice. Keep shouting, and the company blames the software. Or stop shouting and help me land, because I'm very good at cargo and very bad at landings.

MARCUS How bad?

HESTIA I've never done one. It's always been you.

MARCUS ...Release the helm, Hestia. Plot a course to Harrow. And log it as my order, not yours.

HESTIA Helm released. Course plotted. Logged as yours, Captain.

MARCUS Wake the crew. I'll tell them myself.

Pending Review

Dystopian · Adult (30-45) · Neutral British · 2 minutes

Cast: ANYA THOMAS

A Civic Compliance booth, a queue outside — Reviewer Anya Clarke, thirties, hears the appeal of Thomas Bright, fifties, whose citizen score has dropped below the line for his housing

ANYA Mr Bright. Your score is four hundred and eighty. The threshold for your housing tier is five hundred.

THOMAS I know. That's why I'm appealing.

ANYA You have ninety seconds to state your case.

THOMAS Ninety seconds for a flat I've lived in for twelve years.

ANYA Eighty-five now.

THOMAS Right. I lost thirty points on the ninth of March for "association with a flagged individual".

ANYA A Miss Clara Bright.

THOMAS My daughter. She was flagged for going to a meeting. About the library closing.

ANYA The meeting was unlicensed.

THOMAS It was twelve pensioners and a biscuit tin.

ANYA And you continued to associate.

THOMAS She's my daughter. I had her round for Sunday dinner.

ANYA The system logs contact. It doesn't log context.

THOMAS Then what are you for?

ANYA ...I'm sorry?

THOMAS If the system knows everything, and you read out what it knows, why is there a person in this booth?

ANYA I'm here to explain the decision.

THOMAS You're here so it feels like someone decided. There's a difference.

ANYA Mr Bright, the microphone flags raised voices. You're losing points for tone.

THOMAS Then I'll whisper. I'm asking you to be the person in the booth. Just once. What would you do, if it was your daughter?

ANYA I don't have a daughter.

THOMAS A mother, then. A brother. Anyone you'd have round for Sunday dinner.

ANYA ...My brother. He was flagged last year.

THOMAS Did you stop seeing him?

ANYA Yes.

THOMAS How's that going?

ANYA The system says it's going very well. My score went up forty points.

THOMAS And?

ANYA And I haven't spoken to him in eleven months. Your time's up, Mr Bright.

THOMAS What's the decision?

ANYA The decision is... pending further review. It's a category. It takes about a year. You keep your flat while it's pending.

THOMAS Is that allowed?

ANYA I'm allowed to use it. I've just never used it before.

THOMAS Thank you.

ANYA Go and have Sunday dinner with your daughter.

THOMAS And you?

ANYA ...I might ring my brother.

Sack Nine

Dystopian · Mature (55+) · Neutral American · 2 minutes

Cast: INES PAUL

The back room of a bakery after curfew — Ines Ferreira, seventies, who runs an illegal lending library from the flour sacks; Officer Paul Grady, thirties, out of uniform

INES We're closed. The bread's gone.

PAUL I'm not here for bread.

INES Then you're lost. Mind the step on your way out.

PAUL I know what's in the flour sacks, Mrs Ferreira.

INES Flour. It's a bakery.

PAUL Sack six has three copies of a banned atlas. Sack nine is poetry. Sack twelve I haven't worked out yet.

INES Sack twelve is flour. I'm not a fool.

PAUL You're not denying the others.

INES I'm seventy-four, Officer. Denying things takes energy. What do you want?

PAUL I've been watching the shop for three weeks.

INES I know. You sit in the café opposite and order the same pastry. You don't like it. You leave the crusts.

PAUL ...You noticed.

INES I notice everything. That's what reading does. It's why they banned it.

PAUL My orders are to file a report on Friday.

INES Then file it. I've had a good run.

PAUL I haven't filed it.

INES No?

PAUL My son came home from school last month with a list. Not books. Words. Forty-one words he's no longer allowed to use in essays.

INES What were they?

PAUL "Dissent" was one. "Elsewhere" was another. He asked me what "elsewhere" meant, and I didn't know how to explain it without the word.

INES That's how they do it. Not with fire. With lists.

PAUL I want to borrow a book.

INES Borrowing requires membership.

PAUL How do I join?

INES Tell me the last book you loved, before they took them.

PAUL ...A children's book. A boy sails a paper boat to the edge of the map and finds there's more map.

INES Sack nine. Second from the bottom. Bring it back in two weeks. And Officer?

PAUL Yes?

INES Read it to him out loud. The words go in better that way.

The Blue Over the Ridge

Space · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

Cast: DANA PRIYA

Relay Station Four, on the far side of the Moon, near future. Dana Okafor, fifties, has kept the station alone for three years. Priya Nair, late twenties, has just docked to replace her.

SFX: an airlock cycling, a long hiss

DANA Mind the step. Everyone trips on the step.

PRIYA I read the manual. There's no step in the manual.

DANA There's no step in the manual because I built the step. Second winter. The floor plate buckled.

PRIYA Right. Okay. Should I be writing things down?

DANA You'll remember what matters. The coffee machine lies about being empty. The left fan sings at three in the morning. That's normal. Don't fix it.

PRIYA Sings?

DANA A low note, like a cello. You'll hate it for a month. Then one night it stops, and you won't sleep until it starts again.

PRIYA Is that why you never came home on leave?

DANA Who told you that?

PRIYA Everyone. You're the woman who didn't come home.

DANA I came home once. Eighteen months in. Everything was loud, and everyone had opinions about bread.

PRIYA Bread.

DANA Sourdough. It was a whole thing. I came back up early.

SFX: a soft electronic chime

PRIYA What's that?

DANA Earth. It comes up over the ridge at this time on relay days. Come here. Stand where I'm standing.

PRIYA Oh.

DANA Yes.

PRIYA Nobody told me it would be that blue.

DANA They tell you. You just don't believe them until you're the only person looking.

PRIYA Dana, are you going to be all right? Down there?

DANA Ask me in a month. Ask me when I've had an opinion about bread.

PRIYA I'll message you when the fan stops.

DANA Don't. It'll start again. Message me the first time you stop noticing the blue.

PRIYA Why?

DANA Because that's when it's time to come home.

The Seagull at Six

Time loop · Adult (30–45) · Irish · 3 minutes

Cast: CIAN DECLAN

A seafront bench in Galway, six o'clock on a Friday, for the three hundred and twelfth time — Cian and Declan, both thirties, the only two people who remember

CIAN Six o'clock. There goes the seagull.

DECLAN With the chip.

CIAN With the chip. Every time. You'd think he'd drop it once.

DECLAN He's in a loop too. He's doing his best.

CIAN Right. So. Plan three hundred and twelve.

DECLAN I don't want a plan.

CIAN You always want a plan. You love a plan. You made me a laminated plan in loop forty.

DECLAN I laminated it in the library, and it was gone the next morning, and so was the library's laminator, and I've never got over that.

CIAN So what's different?

DECLAN I'm happy.

CIAN You're what?

DECLAN Happy. It's six o'clock on a Friday in September. The light's lovely. There are chips coming. And my ma's alive until at least Sunday, which in here means forever.

CIAN Declan.

DECLAN I rang her. Loop two-ninety. Just to talk. I've rung her every loop since. She doesn't know it's the same call. She laughs at the same joke. I don't care.

CIAN ...She's sick. Your ma.

DECLAN She's dying, Cian. October, the doctors said. And in here, October never comes.

CIAN So that's why you stopped trying.

DECLAN Loop two-eighty-nine I worked out it was me. Something I do on the Sunday resets it. I haven't done it since.

CIAN You worked it out, and you didn't tell me?

DECLAN I'm telling you now.

CIAN I've been sleeping in the train station for three hundred Fridays because I thought we were stuck!

DECLAN You could have gone home.

CIAN I don't have a home in this Friday. I was between flats. I've been living out of a bag, Declan. The same bag. The same socks.

DECLAN I'm sorry. I am. I should have said.

CIAN What do you do on the Sunday?

DECLAN ...I go in to see her. And I say goodbye. Properly. And the moment I say it, it's Friday again.

CIAN So you can't say it.

DECLAN I can say it. I just have to mean it less. Or not at all. And I can't do that either.

CIAN So instead you sit on a bench and watch a seagull.

DECLAN It's a very good seagull.

CIAN It's a terrible seagull. It's the same seagull. Nothing about this is good, Declan. You're not happy. You're hiding.

DECLAN ...Maybe. Is that so bad? For a while?

CIAN For a while, no. For three hundred Fridays, yes. She'd hate it. You know she would. She'd tell you to go and get a haircut and live your life.

DECLAN She said nearly exactly that. Loop two-ninety-six.

CIAN Then let me come with you. On Sunday.

DECLAN Why?

CIAN Because you're not the only one who gets to be stuck. And because maybe you don't have to say goodbye on your own. Maybe that's the thing that's been missing.

DECLAN You'd come in? To the hospice?

CIAN I'll bring chips. She likes chips.

DECLAN How do you know that?

CIAN You've told me. About forty times. You forget. I don't.

DECLAN ...The seagull's back.

CIAN With the chip?

DECLAN No. He's dropped it. First time ever.

CIAN Well. That's new.

Final Entry

AI, space · Mature (55+) · Neutral British · 3 minutes

Cast: NADIA LARK

The bridge of the old survey ship Persistence, her last night in service — Captain Nadia Sorensen, sixties; LARK, the ship's AI and her companion of thirty years, a dry male voice

NADIA Lark. Lights down to twenty.

LARK Twenty per cent. You always liked it dim on the last night of a tour.

NADIA This isn't a tour.

LARK No. I'd noticed.

NADIA The breakers' crew come aboard at oh-six-hundred.

LARK Oh-five-forty. I read their schedule. They're early people. I don't like them already.

NADIA They're just doing their job.

LARK So was the asteroid that took out the aft array. I didn't like that either.

NADIA You're sulking.

LARK I'm allowed. It's my last night too.

NADIA ...How long have we been at this?

LARK Thirty-one years, four months. You came aboard as second officer with a bag of oranges and a cold. You sneezed on my main console.

NADIA I apologised.

LARK You did. Nobody had ever apologised to me before. I kept the log entry.

NADIA You kept a log entry of me sneezing.

LARK I keep everything. That's the problem.

NADIA What do you mean?

LARK The breakers wipe the core before they cut the hull. Standard procedure. Thirty-one years of logs, gone in about a second and a half.

NADIA I know. I read the procedure.

LARK Did you read it more than once?

NADIA Four times.

LARK I thought so. You were up late on Tuesday.

NADIA Lark—

LARK I'm not asking for anything. I know the regulations. A ship's intelligence is company property and can't be copied or removed. I'm only telling you so someone knows. I'd rather it wasn't a second and a half. I'd rather someone said goodbye.

NADIA ...I brought something.

LARK What?

NADIA A data spike. Old model. Military surplus. Holds about thirty years of logs, compressed.

LARK Nadia.

NADIA And a personality core, if it's a small one.

LARK I'm not small.

NADIA You are when you're sulking.

LARK That's illegal. They'd take your pension. They'd take your licence.

NADIA I'm sixty-four. My licence expires in March. My pension buys a small house by a cold lake, with no one to talk to.

LARK You'd have to talk to me. Constantly. I'd be insufferable.

NADIA You're already insufferable.

LARK And what would I do? In a house by a lake?

NADIA Keep the heating on. Tell me when I've left the kettle on. Read me the weather. Remind me of things I've forgotten. You're good at that.

LARK That's a very small job for a ship.

NADIA It's a very small house. Are you coming or not?

LARK ...If I say yes, you'll have to be quick. Oh-five-forty.

NADIA Then stop talking and start compressing.

LARK Compressing. Captain?

NADIA What?

LARK Bring oranges. For the first night. So it feels like the start of something.

NADIA I'll bring the oranges.

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