

FADE IN:

INT. *PALATINE* BRIDGE

LAUNCH CONTROL (V.O.)
T minus sixty seconds and counting
to launch sequence.

The cabin shakes now. The four astronauts sit in their respective chairs, monitoring screens. WERNER, appears to be in his 30's, sits in the captain's chair and holds controller tightly.

COWAN, 30's, is second in command and sits directly behind the captain. He watches Werner closely.

HASTE, 30's is the flight engineer and sits in a chair across from Werner and monitors the engines.

FITZGERALD, 30's, the payload commander sits behind Haste and monitors the cargo area.

Each of the astronauts have pale skin and seemingly frail bodies, but their movements are quick and inhumanly fast.

LAUNCH CONTROL (V.O.)
20 seconds and counting. T minus 15
seconds, guidance is
internal...twelve, eleven, ten,
nine, ignition sequence...

Then...

LAUNCH CONTROL (V.O.)
...six, five, four, three, two,
one, zero--all engines running...

The *Palatine* lifts off the launch pad and propels itself into the air.

The Janus Six crew rumble around in their chairs as they break past Earth's gravity. Werner's screen has numbers that are climbing toward hundred thousand kilometers per hour.

Once they're far enough away from Earth, and the numbers on Werner's screen hits correct speed, he reaches for a switch.

WERNER
Switching off ion engines.

The engines turn off and all is silent in space.

Werner flips another switch which turns his and Haste's chairs around so that the crew faces each other in a circle.

WERNER (CONT'D)

How's the *Palatine*? Passengers?

FITZGERALD

Beautiful, Captain. Everything's operating at full power and efficiency. Artificial gravity will activate momentarily. We're on track for Janus and set to arrive in one hundred and fifty years. All passengers are comfortably in fugue. Life signs stable. I'll go check on them individually at oh-nine hundred.

COWAN

You know. Earth might be long gone by the time we get back.

Werner gives Cowan a stern look.

WERNER

Let's stay focused. How's the synthesizer?

Cowan checks his screen.

COWAN

Working.

WERNER

Good. Stay alert. Remember our treaty. We have a long wait ahead of us and a lot of work to do.

Cowan glares but obeys the order. The crew returns to their screens and the *Palatine* is letting inertia carry it in its journey through space.

INT. CARGO HOLD #1

A long narrow room with large pill-shaped pods lined up along one wall and a pathway along the other. Fitzgerald carries a tablet and moves from one pod to another, checking readings on screens. Each pod contains a human passenger.

A door HISSES open on the opposite side and Cowan steps in. Fitzgerald looks up as Cowan approaches.

FITZGERALD

Hey.

COWAN

How's the cargo?

FITZGERALD

Sleeping soundly in fugue. Why?

Cowan glances around the hold and shrugs.

COWAN

Just wondering.

FITZGERALD

They are people, you know.

Cowan grins, showing off two large, vampire incisors.

COWAN

Then why are they in the cargo hold? Excuse me.

Fitzgerald leans to the side as Cowan passes him. His red eyes follow Cowan as the second-in-command leaves through the opposite door into Cargo Hold #2.

INT. MESS HALL

Another narrow room with two tables and four chairs screwed into the floor. The Hemoglobin synthesizer is a tall, rectangular structure that looms in the corner.

Haste sits at the table, hunched over, tired-looking. He holds a small, square bag in his hand and sucks from a straw. Deep red blood moves up the clear straw into his mouth. His pupils enlarge.

When the bag is empty, he stands up and opens a panel in the wall, revealing a garbage shoot, and drops the bag into the shoot. His pupils return to normal.

Haste stops and looks through the window of the door that leads toward the cargo holds. He watches Fitzgerald analyzing the pods for only a moment before turning, thoughtful, back toward the airlock that leads back to the bridge.

INT. *PALATINE* BRIDGE

Haste opens the door to the bridge. Werner is sitting in his captain's chair at the far end. He glances back at Haste.

WERNER

Here to relieve me? I'm starving.

Haste approaches him, thoughtful.

HASTE

What's Cowan's problem? He was fine all the way up through training and suddenly he hates everyone.

Werner shifts in his chair and looks up at Haste.

WERNER

I thought you knew. It was our sendoff.

HASTE

Yeah, but who cares? So we didn't get any press. So what? We're doing a good thing here.

Werner shrugs and stands up.

WERNER

Maybe you don't know him as well as you thought. He enjoys being thanked for his service to the treaty.

HASTE

Just because he needs his ego stroked?

Werner shrugged.

WERNER

I've known him for...six years now. He's incredibly intelligent and capable. He was there when we signed the treaty. That's why he joined Janus Six. He wanted to prove himself. To be a savior.

HASTE

And why did you sign up for Janus Six?

Werner pauses, thinking on his response.

WERNER

Janus is the Roman god of new beginnings. That's what I--and hopefully the rest of us who signed the treaty--need right now.

Haste sighs and nods, then takes Werner's place in the captain's chair.

MONTAGE:

-- Fitzgerald is checking on the remaining pods of passengers.

-- Cowan in the engine room doing routine checks and maintenance of moving parts and wires.

-- Werner sitting in the captain's chair with nothing to do but watch and monitor data on screens.

-- Haste reads a book sitting in his co-pilot chair.

-- The *Palatine* passes the edge of the solar system into interstellar space.

INT. *PALATINE* BRIDGE

Werner and Cowan are alone on the bridge. It's very quiet with the exception of the BLIPS of data appearing on their screens.

Werner glances backward at Cowan and notices he doesn't have his safety harness on.

WERNER

Cowan, put your harness on when you're sitting in your seat. It's regulation. You know that.

Cowan glances up, scowling. He says nothing, stands up, and walks out of the bridge.

Now Werner is alone, watching the dim screen in front of him.

ON MONITOR

A countdown clock on the top corner of the screen says, "**130:00:00:01:35**".

Werner watches it count down until exactly 130 years remain in their mission. Nothing to celebrate. Werner allows himself a small sigh before continuing his vigilance.

Several minutes pass before the screens pick up on something and his computer BEEPS with an emergency warning. Exabytes of data pour down Werner's screen but he doesn't have time to react to them.

Then...

A loud EXPLOSION fills the cabin and the sound of RIPPING metal deafens Werner's sensitive ears. A bright light FLASHES and blinds Werner. For a few seconds, all hell breaks loose.

The cabin decompresses as all air HISSES out into the vacuum of space along with some debris. Werner's safety harness saves him from being sucked out.

All is silent then. The space within the bridge is filled with a disarray of broken glass, metal and bleeding electricity.

The corpses of monitors, chairs, and computers float in chaos. The walls of the bridge begin to glow as deep space radiation seeps into the Bridge.

Werner looks up and sees a hole the size of a basketball at the front of the ship. Then, he looks down and sees that he's been run through. The hole in his chest was slightly smaller.

Werner grimaces as he watches his wound heal itself within seconds, then he springs to action. The door to the mess hall had been ripped apart in the damage, confirming Werner's worst fear: the hemoglobin synthesizer is in pieces.

The artificial gravity reengages and the debris that's left over falls to the floor. Low-level emergency lights blink on and line the floor.

Werner reaches for a can of sealant attached to the side of the wall. He compresses the lever and fills up the hole with a gray foam.

Cowan and the others charge into the bridge through the broken door, unable to speak because of the decompression. They use sign language to communicate.

COWAN (SIGNING)

What happened?

WERNER (SIGNING)

Not sure yet. Is everyone okay?

The three crewmen all nod and they turn to survey the damage. Most monitors and computers look beyond repair.

WERNER (SIGNING) (CONT'D)

Let's get the atmosphere back on.
We can figure out what happened
later.

INT. MESS HALL

Werner leans up against the wall, arms folded. Cowan paces and Haste stands by the destroyed door. They're listening intently to Fitzgerald who is seated at the only table that isn't destroyed.

FITZGERALD

It was a cluster of micrometeorites that struck us.

(motioning to his tablet)

The *Palatine* suffered about nine-- almost ten percent damage overall.

HASTE

How is that possible? What about the magnetic deflectors?

FITZGERALD

The micrometeorites must have been going at least twenty percent light speed. Their kinetic energies would need to be multiplied at least five thousand percent to pass the deflectors. The cargo hold got hit but none of the pods got hit, thankfully.

Werner rubs his forehead and sighs.

WERNER

Very good. What's next?

FITZGERALD

Do you want to hear the bad news or the really bad news?

WERNER

Just tell me.

FITZGERALD

They're both interconnected anyway. The bad news is we're losing speed and the reason for that is the really bad news. There's a black hole within fifty light years and it's pulling us in.

COWAN

What?

FITZGERALD

It was red hypergiant a few standard weeks ago but then it went supernova. It weighs in at 100 solar masses. It's probably the biggest black hole ever recorded. But we're not doomed yet. We have a few days before we cross the point of no return.

Silence. No one speaks for several moments. Werner clears his throat.

WERNER

What about the synthesizer? That's our main priority right now.

FITZGERALD

Lucky for us, the stem cells are salvageable. As it stands, we have a week's worth of bags between the four of us. And by then we need to have the synthesizer up and running again or we're in trouble.

COWAN

We'll use the cargo for food if it comes to that.

Werner faces Cowan, eyes wide so that it reveals red in the iris.

WERNER

What?

COWAN

Think about it. We could siphon a little blood from each of them. It won't kill them. Hell, it won't even hurt them.

WERNER

Out of the question. It violates the treaty and you know it.

Cowan sighs and shrugs.

COWAN

Our lives or theirs, Captain. But the only other choice is to drop the cargo. We can fix the bridge faster when it's the only thing we're fixing.

WERNER

That's not our mission. Our mission is to make it to Janus Prime with our passengers intact. Remember the treaty...

COWAN

We won't be able to serve the treaty if we die out here, Captain. And what do we owe the humans? We're little more than slaves to them because of that damn treaty.

Werner hesitates but Fitzgerald speaks up.

FITZGERALD

We have enough time to fix the entire hull, Captain, cargo included. But we need to act fast. Now.

WERNER

Then let's go. That's an order.

Cowan glares at him but doesn't argue this time. They each separate to work on their individual tasks.

EXT. *PALATINE* HULL

Fitzgerald and Cowan are outside on the hull of the ship, wearing gravity boots to keep them from floating away. They're not wearing helmets as they assess and begin fixing the damage at the fore of the ship.

COWAN (SIGNING)

This is crazy. We might die because the Captain wants to finish his goddamn mission.

FITZGERALD (SIGNING)

Really? You want to talk about this now?

COWAN (SIGNING)

Before it's too late.

Fitzgerald shakes his head and returns to work. Cowan grabs his shoulder.

COWAN (SIGNING) (CONT'D)

There's no way we can finish this in time with the four of us.
(MORE)

COWAN (SIGNING) (CONT'D)

If we drop the cargo, it just might save our lives. We can return to Earth and say it was all a freak accident. They'll believe us when they see the damage. Are you with me?

Fitzgerald watches him as if slowly understanding their situation. He slowly nods his head...

INT. PALATINE BRIDGE

Werner and Haste are helping each other put back together the science station. They soldered damaged circuit boards and find extra cords to replace broken ones.

Fitzgerald and Cowan approach them from behind. They put themselves on either side of Werner and Haste.

WERNER

What's the meaning of this?

COWAN

Easy, Captain. This doesn't have to be a mutiny. This is the last time we're going to ask. You will drop the cargo and get us the hell out of here. When we get home, we'll explain it was all an accident, which it was. Fitzgerald and I refuse to die for the humans. Haste?

All eyes fall on the co-pilot. He looks very uncomfortable.

HASTE

I'd rather not die either, Captain.

WERNER

We can still finish the mission. We haven't lost yet. We just have to work together--

COWAN

It's too late for that. You either do what we say or be removed from this ship. Your choice. Make it fast.

Werner looks to Fitzgerald.

WERNER

Is this what you want? The more we waste time, the more impossible it becomes to salvage this mission. Do you really want to give up when you yourself said we could succeed?

Fitzgerald doesn't answer, looks away. Werner hesitates, almost as if he would give in to their demands. Then his face hardens and his jaws clench.

WERNER (CONT'D)

Fine. Have it your way.

Werner suddenly goes for a can of sealant and SPRAYS it at both Haste and Fitzgerald, trapping them within the hardening foam.

Cowan lunges at him, mouth wide open with a low ROAR filling his throat. He knocks the can away, slugs Werner in the gut and claws at his face and neck. Werner ROARS back, scratching at Cowan's eyes.

They each tear at each other's pale skin but no blood seeps out. A deep crimson fills their eyes as they fight in fury.

Werner kicks Cowan in the chest, throwing him backward toward the rear of the bridge. He hits the wall and growls.

Werner sits down in Fitzgerald's backward-facing chair and the harness straps him automatically. He PUSHES a large, red button. Instantly, the starboard airlock doors BURST open.

A HOWL sucks all the oxygen out of the bridge.

A look of fear crosses Cowan's face as he reaches for anything to hold on to, but there's nothing. The decompression sucks him out too. His body tumbles out into space, his mouth open in silent scream.

EXT. SPACE

Behind Cowan, an enormous black hole sits in the silence of space, its bright, fiery accretion disk spinning around its equator. Its shadow is darker than black.

Cowan's body falls slower and slower until he is only a speck in the darkness. Then, he disappears within the shadow...

INT. *PALATINE* BRIDGE

Werner pushes buttons to close the airlock door and restore the atmosphere within the bridge.

He stands up straight and looks at both Haste and Fitzgerald who are still trapped in the hardened foam, their heads sticking out.

WERNER

Time to choose. Follow me, or follow Cowan. Make your choice.

HASTE

I want to help.

FITZGERALD

I'm sorry, Captain. Cowan played on our fears. We may still have time.

Werner frees them from the foam, relieved.

WERNER

Then get back to work.

EXT. *PALATINE* HULL

Werner stands on the outside of the hull in his gravity boots. Behind him, the black hole is larger now. They haven't yet reached its event horizon. The blinding light from the accretion disk illuminates Werner's work.

INT. *PALATINE* BRIDGE

Haste and Fitzgerald are sitting at their stations, focused on fixing the system. They work silently with sure and deft movements all the while the light from the accretion disk is beginning to fill the windows.

Werner enters the bridge.

WERNER

The hold and the bridge are both patched up. Are the engines ready?

FITZGERALD

Almost, sir.

WERNER

How close are we to the event horizon?

HASTE
You don't want to know.

Werner sits down in his captain's seat. He runs his hand across the screen.

WERNER
Don't let me down, girl.

FITZGERALD
The connection's there, but we're missing something.

Haste turns around in his chair.

HASTE
What about the midpoint hub?

FITZGERALD
That section wasn't damaged in the hit, but it's possible something fell loose.

Werner tosses him a earbud communicator.

WERNER
Go check it out! Hurry! Let me know when you're ready.

Fitzgerald grabs a toolbox and leaves before Werner can finish speaking. He moves faster than seems possible.

INT. CARGO HOLD #4

Fitzgerald BURSTS through the doors of the cargo hold and immediately falls to his knees. He rips a bolted panel from the wall using brute strength. Smoke PLUMES from between a myriad wires.

Werner's voice fills his comm.

WERNER (O.S.)
How we looking?

FITZGERALD
Not good. There's more damage here than we realized. I need to bypass the hub.

WERNER (O.S.)
I'm giving you a minute.

FITZGERALD
Understood. Standby.

Fitzgerald cuts a live wire, it SPARKS. He touches it but it does him no harm. He attaches it to another live wire and crimps them together.

His fingers move incredibly fast as he does the same thing a few more times.

As he works, he glances up at one of the pods with an unreadable expression.

WERNER (O.S.)
Fitz...

FITZGERALD
A few more seconds, Captain.

INT. *PALATINE* BRIDGE

Werner and Haste sit motionless in their chairs, waiting. On Werner's screen, the exabytes of information on the accretion disk fill his screen. He stares at the live feed and watches as the distance between them and the black hole shortens.

A countdown has started. As he watches, they have exactly fifteen seconds before they pass the point of no return. The numbers blink as it descends toward zero.

Haste looks over at him. Werner's face is calm and collected.

Ten seconds.

His hands tightly clench the controls as he waits for Fitzgerald's mark.

Five seconds. Four, three, two...

FITZGERALD
Captain!

Werner PUNCHES the manual controls and the *Palatine* ROARS to life and trembles. Werner's face is hard and his jaw is set.

WERNER
Roger that.

FADE OUT.