

Stasis

A play in seven scenes

By

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Adapted from the short story 'Stasis'

By

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ACT I

SCENE 1

STAGE RIGHT SHOWS 10 DIMLY-LIT PODS;
SLEEPING PEOPLE INSIDE. A HEARTBEAT
ECHOES, MONITORING THE CREW.
FLOATING STARS AND PLANETS SLOWLY PROJECT
AROUND THE THEATRE IN THE ROUND. BY THE
TIME THE PLAY STARTS, THE PROJECTIONS HAVE
RAPIDLY INCREASED. THE PLANETS THEN
DISAPPEAR. FOUR LARGE VIDEO SCREENS AIMED
AT EACH ANGLE OF THE AUDIENCE FLICKER
ALIVE WITH WORDS:

VIDEO SCREEN: You are part of the Longreach Programme; a space mission to discover whether the distant planet, Tau Ceti, can host human life in order to save those on the decaying planet Earth. You and the 10 other members of your crew have been asleep, in stasis for 198 years, until today. Should your mission fail, the human race is at stake.

ROBOTIC VOICE: 10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1. Stasis pods open.

STAGE LIGHTS FLICKER TO LIFE. EVERYONE SLOWLY WAKES. FINALLY, COULSON EXITS HIS POD FIRST. HE DRAGS HIMSELF TO THE COMPUTER SCREEN. HE READS THE NEARBY MONITOR.

COULSON: Shit.

HELEN: What, Captain?

COULSON: We're awake early.

JONATHON: How early?

THE CREW SPORADICALLY RISE AND MAKE THEIR WAY STAGE LEFT; A LARGE TABLE & MEETING AREA.

COULSON: Sixty years early.

HARPER: Shit.

COULSON: Yeah. Reports show a malfunction with the pods. The ship is still on course though.

HARPER: So the mission can be completed?

COULSON: It can, we just have the issue of being awake as we wait to get there.

LOUISE: In sixty years' time!

ACT I

SCENE 1

HELEN: (YAWNING) It's OK, I'll take a look at them and see what I can do. I'm sure it's nothing too bad. Probably just precautionary.

COULSON: How long do you think, Helen?

HELEN: Source the issue, fix it, test it...a week, Captain. Enough time for us to share the two hundred year dreams we've all had. (LAUGHTER)

THE PROJECTED PLANETS RETURN, ROTATE SLOWLY, THEN INCREASE AS JONATHON SPEAKS. THE TV SCREENS FLICKER AND JONATHON'S PROFILE APPEARS. THE CREW, UNDER DIM LIGHT, INTERACT AT AND AROUND THE TABLE, SYNCHRONISING IN MIME WITH JONATHON'S MONOLOGUE. HELEN IS STAGE RIGHT TRYING TO FIX THE PODS, BUT THE BLUE LIGHTS ARE WEAKENING.

JONATHON: Earlier today I found a cup of tea I hadn't finished nearly 200 years ago (HOLDS IT TO SCREEN). It looks pretty bad, pretty much dried out, but it's been sitting there for nearly 200 years. Little things like this help put time into perspective, well, for me anyway. I read the last message I had sent back to Earth, amazing to think anyone who had read it at the time would now be dead. In fact, I wonder if there even is a human race on Earth left? You never know, our planet was pretty fucked when we took off. (BEAT) The last few days have been...odd. We've all been pretty quiet. When you think about it, we're in a pretty unique position. It's difficult for the mind to calculate what we've achieved, or haven't yet achieved, whichever way you want to look at it. Nevertheless, we've trained for problems such as this, try 5 years in isolation together just as a practice! We must be mental. Either way, we're natural loners, we embrace it. I think. But this does feel different. Something looms.

STAGE LIGHTS UP. HELEN, TIRED AND DEJECTED, WALKS STAGE LEFT TO THE TABLE AREA. THE CREW TURN TO HER.

COULSON: Well? Update?

HELEN: Umm, I can't reactivate the pods, Captain.

MARIANNE: You must be kidding.

COULSON: You've tried everything?

HELEN: Of course I have, and I can't reactivate them. There's nothing more I can do. I'm sorry.

DURING THIS CONVERSATION, THE BLUE LIGHTS OF THE PODS ARE SLOWLY DYING. SILENCE DESCENDS.

ACT 1

SCENE 2

ANDREW: But the mission...

LOUISE: A message back home? Maybe they can help give advice on fixing them.

COULSON: Oh yeah, ten years to get a message home and another eleven to get back to us? Get real. We're alone on this one. Harper, any idea on how long we could stretch our rations?

HARPER: Ball park figure, nowhere near enough to keep us for 60 years, Captain.

ANDREW: And even if there was, most of us will be dead or too old to carry out our duties when we get to Tau Ceti.

HELEN: Well then, any suggestions?

(BEAT)

JONATHON: Well, if someone picks the best beam, I'll get the rope!

LAUGHTER. ENDS UNCOMFORTABLY.

LUCY: If I was forced to sit around twiddling my thumbs for 60 years, surely the rope wouldn't be completely out of the question.

ANDREW: Are you kidding me?

JONATHON: Yeah, I was only joking, Luce. I wasn't really suggesting we all perform a mass suicide because we have no other ideas.

LUCY: I know, I know. I'm just saying. You said yourself we'll be dead or too old to perform our duties anyway.

MARIANNE: (PLAYFULLY) Speak for yourself, I feel eternally youthful.

LAUGHTER.

LUCY: Let's give at least half of us a fighting chance and ditch the bad fruit.

JONATHON: Wow, pretty irrational thinking from a usually rational mind. Who would you class as bad fruit?

ANDREW: Well, we're gonna be pretty much rotting away anyway for the next 50 years.

ACT I

SCENE 2

HELEN: Come on, guys, stop talking crap, let's look at all our options, huh?

HARPER: Well, to be fair, Lucy's got a reasonable enough point. It's not holiday camp here. The purpose of this mission is not about us, it's about the future of our humanity and if that means, as a last resort, euthanasia, then so be it. Don't let emotions get in the way suddenly. Our lives are miniscule in comparison to the billions relying on us on Earth.

HELEN: Thanks for the job description Harper. You use those lines to get the ladies?

LAUGHTER.

JONATHON: So this ship, whether we kill ourselves now, or wait for another 60 years to die, is our tomb? Kill me now. But really, how would you decide who lives? What lucky person wants to take that mantle?

LUCY: Maybe it should be measured on the use of our individual skills. For example, you Jon, would be exempt as a climatologist...

JONATHON: This conversation is actually happening!

LUCY: I'm just talking here Jon, I just think, for example, your expertise would be far more valued on the new planet, rather than my skills as a psychologist.

JONATHON: Whoopy-doo. I'm the lucky one am I? I just have to spend the rest of my life with that hanging over my head? Count me out!

HELEN: Let's all take a bit of perspective here. Can we please not talk ourselves into doing stupid things when surely more sensible options are on offer?

JONATHON: Thank you, Helen. Common sense would be appreciated.

LUCY: Just relax you two. I'm just making suggestions here, at least I'm the only one that's actually being produc...

COULSON: Hang on, hang on, I may have an idea. Helen, are the floorboards extractable synthetic?

HELEN: Of course, the lightest available.

ACT I

SCENE 2

COULSON: OK, I'm pretty sure there's an organic compound utilised in the construction of the floor in most areas of the vessel. It's a form of rubber and although it's diluted by synthetic material, it's extractable. If we strip the floor layers from every conceivable place, I can extract the organic molecules, and combine them with our existing protein and vitamin capsules, quadrupling our food reserves. On a strict, but not starvation diet, we might have food enough not for 20, or 60, but for 120 years. (BEAT)

ANDREW: Great, all we need now is a bloody good book.

LAUGHTER.

THE PROJECTED PLANETS RETURN, ROTATE SLOWLY, THEN SLOWLY INCREASE SPEED. THE SCREENS FLICKER, JONATHON'S DISHEVELLED AND LETHARGIC PROFILE APPEARS. STAGE LIGHTS DIM. COULSON IS CENTRE STAGE EXTRACTING NUTRIENTS FROM THE FLOORBOARDS. HELEN IS STAGE RIGHT, WORKING HOPELESSLY ON THE PODS. THE OTHERS ARE ON THE OUTER OF THE STAGE, CARRYING OUT TASKS JONATHON LISTS. A SPOTLIGHT GOES UP ON EACH CREW MEMBER AT EACH MENTION.

JONATHON: Day 148. Tick tock, tick tock (FLICKS THROUGH CALENDAR WITH CROSSED OUT DAYS). We've all been keeping busy, if that's possible on a ship - exercising, chatting, tearing up floor strips and sending them to Coulson.
(BEAT)

This won't work. It shouldn't work, it's not a human's natural state. As each day passes, there's definitely an increasing sense of, I don't know, despair, I guess, but no one talks about it, mainly because no one has an answer.

Our minds are emptying as quickly as the bowels of the ship we are ripping up to be eaten. But, of all of us, the Captain is pretty unaffected. He's like a robot, manufacturing his protein tablets, which, I can safely say, taste like shit. He rarely leaves the lab. I've got a feeling he'd carry on as normal long after we've all hung ourselves. And Helen. I worry for her, she seems the most vulnerable in all of this. She keeps blaming herself for not being able to fix the pods, but she shouldn't, she'd never be responsible for a shambles such as this, she's too efficient, kind, understanding...what am I saying? (SMILES) Her obsession isn't as healthy as the Captain's. She's spent pretty much every day in the stasis chambers, working on the pods. But it's no use, we all know they can't be fixed, and I think she does too. Sometimes I visit her, just to keep her company you know? She's so obsessed, I'm not even sure she knows I'm there. I worry she'll be the first to lose it. I hope she doesn't lose it.

BLACKOUT. STAGE LEFT LIGHTS UP AT THE TABLE, OCCUPIED BY THE CREW, IN GROUPS OF CONVERSATION. HELEN ENTERS AND SLUMPS INTO A SEAT. SHE RESTS HER HEAD ON JONATHON'S SHOULDER.

ACT I

SCENE 3

JONATHON: It's OK, no one blames you for any of this.

HELEN: It's frustrating Jon, I know I'm the only person who would have any chance of fixing them, but I can't. I feel like a helpless child. Hang on (PROPS HEAD UP), that's it! Children!

SILENCE.

COULSON: What?

HELEN: Children! That's the answer!

ANDREW: Us? Have children?

HARPER: Hang on a minute, I know we're bored but...

LUCY: (JOVIAL) I'm sick of the sight of you all and now I've got to share a bed with one of you? This gets better every day!

LAUGHTER.

HELEN: Oh come on, use your brains, it's perfectly logical. For the mission, obviously.

LOUISE: So you're saying children to help us get through this?

JONATHON: That's pretty selfish, just having kids to keep us entertained.

LOUISE: That's not what I meant.

ANDREW: I guess they could help us when we get to the planet to carry out our individual investigations.

LOUISE: That's more like what I meant.

MARIANNE: Not even that, we can go one step further.

HELEN: The children can...

COULSON: Replace us! Makes perfect sense. We all have unique skills for the mission. If we can breed two children per female, then all children can cover all ten positions, one for each of us to train.

LOUISE: That's exactly what I meant!

HARPER: That is, if the ladies concur to having two children each?

ACT I

SCENE 3

THE LADIES LOOK AROUND AT EACH OTHER.

LOUISE: For the mission. Of course.

MARIANNE: Not to mention it gives us something to do!

A FEW OF THE MEN SMIRK AT THIS.

That's not what I meant. Bloody men.

JONATHON: So, how do we decide who is best compatible? (LOOKS AT HELEN)

COULSON: Well we're not cherry-picking each other as firstly that's not fair, and secondly, we can't have people coupling up on the basis of emotion. This is a mission-led idea. Don't forget that. I'll compile our DNA strands and work out whose compatibility is most suitable in order to establish filling all ten roles, as well as pairings least likely to produce birth defects or compound physical deficiencies.

ANDREW: Treat it like a breeder considers horses, pedigree must be the over-arching factor. If we don't have each role fully assigned, the mission will falter.

COULSON: Correct, and we can't afford that, it could be the difference between failing and completing the mission, a risk we can't take.

LOUISE: And we all have to agree that, no matter what, the mission is paramount. This is a risky game we're going to play here...

COULSON: But a necessary one.

LOUISE: Let's just get it right, throughout the entirety of this project.

THE SCREENS FLICKER ON WITH JONATHON'S PROFILE. STAGE LIGHTS DIM. THE CREW, MEANWHILE, ACT OUT A SELECTION PROCESS; EACH COUPLE EXIT THE STAGE ONCE ALLOCATED.

JONATHON: For the first time since coming out of stasis, I feel lucky. It's pretty obvious to the crew that I like her and it turns out our DNA matches too! It's all just, like I said, lucky. Nothing much more to

ACT I

SCENE 3

report other than that we didn't really hit the ground running, especially compared to the others, and, as corny as this sounds, I think it's because we actually like each other!

A PILLOW HITS HIS HEAD.

HELEN: (OFF SCREEN) Hey, are you actually saying that stuff on your videoblog?

JONATHON: (SMILING) Come and say hi.

SHE COMES INTO SHOT AND SITS ON JONATHON'S LAP.

HELEN: (PLAYFUL) All of that was as cheesy as hell!

JONATHON: Cheesy? Oh co...

HELEN: Who's watching this?

JONATHON: No one's go...

HELEN: I don't really want the others knowing that we didn't start shagging like crazy (JONATHON STARTS LAUGHING) the first moment we were allocated. Hey stop laughing!

JONATHON: (CONTAINING HIS LAUGHTER) I'm not laughing.

HELEN JUST STARES AT JONATHON, ANNOYED.

JONATHON: Look, I was going to say, until I was rudely interrupted...

HELEN: Come on, get on with it.

JONATHON: (PAUSE) No one's gonna watch this, it's just for me really.

HELEN: It better be. (SMILING)

JONATHON: And anyway, we're at it pretty much all the time now!

HELEN PLAYFULLY HITS HIM.

HELEN: Shut up you! So you mean all what you said just now?

JONATHON: (COY) maybe...

HELEN: Hmm. (SMILES) Lucky. Lucky is a good word.

THEY START KISSING AND JONATHON TURNS OFF THE VIDEOBLOG. THE PROJECTED PLANETS RETURN, INCREASING IN SPEED AS JONATHON SPEAKS. THE STAGE LIGHTS UP TO SHOW CHILDREN WAKING FROM THEIR QUARTERS, AND THEN MOVING THROUGH AREAS ON THE STAGE TO SHOW SOLITARY, REGIMENTAL ACTIVITIES SUCH AS EATING AND LEARNING. THEY THEN VISIT THEIR RESPECTIVE TEACHERS.

SIMULTANEOUSLY, JONATHON'S PROFILE ON THE SCREENS IS WITH HELEN AND ALEX, A FAMILY IN PORTRAIT. JONATHON NARRATES OVER THE ACTION ON THE SCREENS AS WELL AS ON THE STAGE:

JONATHON:

Well, I guess it's been a while since my last blog, but I've been pretty occupied with Alex's birth. To tell the truth, I've spent the past couple of years in a semi-permanent state of amazement. The others recognised that me and Helen had something a little more than just, you know, so when the time came for the second round of conceptions, we were allowed to stay together. The only couple to do so - I think that's saying something, and great news for us, I guess you could call us a family, of sorts. The last eight years for the crew have been crazy, just improvised nappies, naïve parenting and a conveyor belt of breast-feeding. Ten healthy kids later, six girls and four boys, we're coping. As for Helen and me, our second child is a girl - Gemima.

I don't know how the others do it, they're so strict. They keep to the regime we set up to develop the kids as quickly as possible, but still manage to keep emotions out of it. The kids don't spend time with the adults unless it's work related. They have their own quarters, they don't even eat with us. I get it, and it works. It keeps emotions out of it, and keeps the kids focused. I know it's the approach agreed, but, well for me and Helen at least, it's hard to carry out.

Alex has taken after his mother in every way; super smart and loves engineering, so he works with Helen all the time. Alex, I believe, is lucky. He gets his parents, purely by chance. He sees us every day, being raised with love. I know it's against the rules, but it's not wrong is it? He's our son! Gemima, meanwhile, leans toward biology and is assigned to the Captain. (PAUSE) Me? A boy called Stefan; the idea being he is to excel in all matters of meteorology. But these are strange years, and uncertain times. I have my fears, so does Helen.

HELEN AND JONATHON, ALONE ON STAGE, ARE IN THEIR QUARTERS, STAGE RIGHT, TALKING.

HELEN: The stuff I was doing with Alex today, I have to say, no child should be this advanced. He's a freak! I don't know if to slow him down sometimes, I have this weird concept that he's overloading. Today, he passed the Hadron Collider exam as if it was, I don't know, a simple addition test. Mental, huh?

JONATHON: I know. You've said.

HELEN: Jon? OK? Come here. (HE MOVES TO HER AND RESTS HIS HEAD ON HER LAP ON THE SOFA)

JONATHON: You know that none of the other pairings have their children. It makes them autonomous. Distant. I don't know if it helps Alex that he's with us, or works as a burden from the rest. Is it good for just us? It's selfish don't you think?

HELEN: I think you're talking like them, and we're not like them. What's important to us isn't the mission, but this family.

JONATHON: Family? I haven't seen Gemima for months. Months. She's my daughter. She's kept to her area of the ship to focus on her studies which I understand, but, it's all just so...I'm beginning to hate myself for agreeing to this. I think we all may have made a mistake. It's just not....

HELEN: You don't think I miss Gemima? She's my daughter too, Jon. But at least we've managed to hold onto one of our own, which is one more than any of the crew. And you can see Alex is the happiest, because he has love.

JONATHON: Perhaps. That only matters if he feels that way though. I mean, when was the last time he played?

HELEN: You know we can't let him fall behind or the others will notice, and we don't want that. Although, I can't see that happening at all!

JONATHON: Talking of falling behind, I'm worried about Stefan.

HELEN: Is he struggling?

ACT I

SCENE 4

JONATHON: The report I'm putting together doesn't read pretty. He's nowhere near anything of Alex's standard and I'm running out of ideas. He's a wistful little thing, so getting increasingly distant and absent-minded. I don't think he's a scientist. An artist perhaps. A poet. But the fluid motions of cloud systems, the mathematical currency of pressure fronts and tidal patterns are languages I don't think he'll ever speak.

HELEN: You don't think he'll be able to replace you?

JONATHON: What do think would happen if he never did? What would happen to him?

HELEN: I...I have no idea.

HELEN'S WATCH BEEPS.

I got to go, my shift night for kid patrol. See you in a bit.

SHE GETS UP. SHE LEAVES JONATHON WHO TAKES A LOOK AT STEFAN'S REPORT BOOK, AND SIGHS. LIGHTS FADE.

ACT I

SCENE 5

LIGHTS FADE IN. THE CREW ARE AT THE TABLE. COULSON LOCKS THE DOORS AND BEGINS TO TALK. SOMETHING IS NOT RIGHT.

COULSON: OK guys, year nine out of stasis and, after compiling the progress reports, which I want to thank you all for completing, I have the results.

HELEN: So, how's it all looking?

COULSON: Under the circumstances, and considering this plan has been pretty improvised, I'd say we're doing well.

JONATHON: Great stuff, so why the long face? It's like you've been stuck in space for nine years.

HELEN: Yeah, and why are the doors locked? (BEAT)

COULSON: Four are failing in their fields.

JONATHON: OK, well I guess they'll have to be reassigned and it can all be..

COULSON: That's not going to be possible, Jon. We don't have the time or the facilities to take that risk. You knew this when we made the decision to reproduce.

JONATHON: O..K...So what do you have in mind?

COULSON: To try again.

JONATHON: That's f...hang on a minute, what about suppli...

HELEN: Are you fucking kidding me!

HARPER: Helen, calm down.

HELEN: Calm down? I know exactly what this means, how can I calm down!?

ANDREW: There's only one way we can move forward with a chance of success.

COULSON: We need to be rid of the bad fruit.

HELEN: Did you all know you were gonna do this? What's going on?

MARIANNE: Helen, you and Jon were the only couple to actually bring emotion into this plan, and I guess that's not a bad thing, especially when you consider the potential in Alex. But this blindness has led you and Jon to forget the mission.

ACT I

SCENE 5

ANDREW: We knew it would be hard for you two to accept this, but we're not families, we're scientists. We've all kept a distance from them. You knew this day could have come, maybe you should have too.

JONATHON: You can't all possibly agree with this! Louise? Harper? Captain?

LUCY: Guys, you have to understand, if we don't do this, the mission will fail. Yes, some positions will be filled by the children on schedule once they have completed their education, but not nearly enough data can be gathered on Tau Ceti from just the crop of scientists that have kept up, so this entire project would have been pointless, and aimless.

JONATHON: Listen to yourselves, who are you people?

MARIANNE: Why would you destroy everyone's chances for success, for the sake of a few who will destroy it for everyone? It's brutal, I know, but necessary. There's your logic.

JONATHON: You're animals! This is insanity!

COULSON: It will be carried out as humanely as possible. The other children will never know. We need to breed four more scientists Jon to fill the positions the other four aren't fulfilling, which means four more mouths to feed. We have to make the room, and we need them as soon as possible. We can vote if you like.

IT IS AT THIS POINT THE AUDIENCE VOTES FOR EITHER SCENARIO ONE (THEY SACRIFICE THE CHILDREN FOR THE MISSION) OR OPTION TWO (THEY KEEP THE CHILDREN AT THE COST OF THE MISSION). THE PLAY IS CONTINUED FROM THEREONIN.

Scenario One

HELEN: There's no need. Unlock the doors.

SHE AND JONATHON GET UP TO LEAVE.

JONATHON: Which four?

COULSON: Alicia, Justin, Alfie, and...Stefan.

JONATHON: Stefan. (BEAT)

COULSON: I'm sorry Jon. In another world, things would be different. Better. (HELEN AND JONATHON LEAVE)

BLACKOUT. THE SCREENS FLICKER ON. JONATHON IS SEEN TO HAVE BEEN CRYING.

JONATHON: I am a coward. That is my sin.

JONATHON'S FACE REMAINS ON THE SCREEN. THE ADULTS LEAD THE FOUR 'DUD' CHILDREN INTO AN ENCLOSED ROOM ON THE SPACESHIP (STAGE LEFT). THEY ARE GASSED. STAGE RIGHT IS JONATHAN AND HELEN LYING ON A BED IN THEIR QUARTERS LOOKING NUMB. BLACKOUT EXCEPT FOR A NEW SPOTLIGHT ON ALEX, STARING STRAIGHT BACK AT THE LIGHT WITH ALL-KNOWING GAZE.

Scenario Two

SECTION ONE OF SCENARIO TWO:

COULSON: You're making a grave mistake. You understand the consequences of the mission by doing this don't you? We'll all die before we get there without full replacements, so we know the children will fail. What's the point?

JONATHON: That's not necessarily true. They could manage.

COULSON: You idiot! You think it's all gonna turn out roses don't you. Well, it won't happen, you can trust me on that one.

HELEN: Coulson, please. Let's talk about it

COULSON: Talk? Why? It seems democracy rules. I thought you were all scientists, but it turns out you're just idiots who've suddenly grown emotions even though you all agreed to sticking to the plan. I can't run this crew. I don't even know who you all are anymore.

COULSON STORMS OUT OF THE ROOM.

SECTION TWO OF SCENARIO TWO:

THE SCREENS FLICKER ON WITH JONATHON'S PROFILE. STAGE LIGHTS DIM.

JONATHON: Since the vote, we hardly see Coulson. He's always either in the lab or in his quarters. It's either the world's longest sulk or something much worse. I'm not sure; he won't speak to anyone, Harper's more or less taken on Captain's duties. I do keep trying with Coulson, surely no one can go on this long without human interaction.

SECTION THREE OF SCENARIO TWO:

JONATHON VISITS COULSON IN HIS QUARTERS. HE TAPS ON THE DOOR BUT NO RESPONSE. HE TRIES AGAIN. AS HE TAPS THE DOOR VIOLENTLY OPENS.

JONATHON: Oh, so you are alive. (JOVIAL)

COULSON: What do you want, Jon?

JONATHON: This is crazy, Captain. You've got to come out. Talk to us, tell us what we can do to sort this out.

COULSON: You know what I want (TURNS INTO HIS ROOM. JON FOLLOWS HIM IN). When I took on this mission I was sworn in as captain. Do you know what that means?

JONATHON: Yes, I am aware.

COULSON: Then you'll be fully aware that the code of conduct which I willingly signed states that, at all costs, the mission must be completed if possible. Well it is possible Jon, you and I both know it.

JONATHON: I know. But there are some things you just can't do.

COULSON: We agreed before we made this decision to create replacements that it was to be treated as a mission enhancement exercise. Not a day care centre.

JONATHON: They're children tho...

COULSON: They're a means to completing the mission! Don't you forget that.

JONATHON: Captain. Coulson. If you don't change your views now, you never will, which means we can't co-exist.

COULSON: I know some of the crew are with me. But so be it. My purpose on this ship is to guide this crew to a successful mission, by any means possible.

JONATHON: What's that supposed to mean?

COULSON: Any means possible.

ACT I

SCENE 5

JONATHON: Captain, should I be afraid? We voted that the children would be spared.

COULSON: Not all of us voted for that. I think you should leave.

JONATHON DROPS HIS HEAD AND HEADS FOR THE DOOR.

Jon...

JONATHON TURNS.

I'm sorry. It can't be the way you want it.

JONATHON LEAVES, SLIGHTLY CONFUSED AT THE COMMENT.

SECTION FOUR OF SCENARIO TWO:

LIGHTS DIM TO REPRESENT A SLEEPING SHIP. COULSON CREEPS THROUGH THE SHIP TO THE CHILDREN'S QUARTERS. HE WAKES THE 4 UNDERPERFORMING CHILDREN, TELLING THEM TO KEEP QUIET; THEY FOLLOW HIM. HE TAKES THEM TO A ROOM, SITS THEM ON THE FLOOR. HE LOCKS THE DOOR AND FLICKS A SWITCH. HE JOINS THEM ON THE FLOOR AS THE STAGE FILLS WITH SMOKE. COULSON AND THE CHILDREN SLOWLY LOSE BREATH UNTIL THEY BREATHE NO MORE. LIGHTS OUT.

(NOTE: IF SCENARIO TWO WAS SELECTED, HARPER TAKES COULSON'S LINES AS HE HAS BECOME CAPTAIN)

THE PROJECTED PLANETS RETURN, ROTATING SLOWLY, AND INCREASE UNTIL THE LIGHTS COME UP AT THE TABLE, WHERE THE CREW SIT.

COULSON (HARPER): Jon, Helen, any idea what this is all about?

JONATHON: No idea at all, Captain. He wouldn't tell us.

MARIANNE: Got to hand it to him, it's a first for one of the kids.

LUCY: Yeah, I mean, what 11 year old calls meetings?

ALEX ENTERS THE ROOM AND TAKES THE SEAT WAITING FOR HIM.

COULSON (HARPER): Hi, Alex. Thanks for calling this meeting, what is it you need to say? (BEAT)

HELEN: It's OK honey. Whatever it is you need to say, I'm sure it's important, you can tell us.

ANDREW: Well hopefully it's important, I've been dragged away from some serious Asteroid monitoring that's been taking up all my time (LAUGHTER).

ALEX: I fixed the pods. (BEAT. LOOKS OF ASTONISHMENT)

All ten pods are operational and ready for use

ANDREW: So we can complete the mission!

HELEN: That's the decision is it?

COULSON (HARPER): What do you mean? Of course it is. It's the mission.

HELEN: With all due respect, Captain, You must be fucking joking!

ALEX: Mother, we understand what we are. We are now a logistical problem.

JONATHON: Don't be ridiculous, Alex, you're our son!

ALEX: This is just now a problem for the children, and one we'll overcome. Trust me on this, father. Nevertheless, there is something else you need to know quite quickly. I could only recuperate enough energy during the pre-activation stage to keep them

waiting to be used for a maximum of 32 hours. This should give you all enough time to balance your diet, take on enough required fluids, and prepare yourself for stasis.

MARIANNE: So, if there is less energy in them already, we won't sleep for as long?

ALEX: Not necessarily. Once asleep, the energy usage reduces dramatically. I will keep it to its minimum to ensure you all reach the timeframe, but this time you will age slightly because it is at a lower energy outage. Most energy is being used up right now, waiting for you all to return to stasis, which is why taking action sooner rather than later would be best.

LUCY: Umm, not that I'm precious or anything, but how old will we age in the pods?

ANDREW: That was pretty precious. (LAUGHTER)

ALEX: A couple of years. Three years at the most. You won't even notice it.

JONATHON: Alex, you can't possibly be fully confident they won't fail again, surely?

ALEX: I know it won't fail, father, you have to trust me. The energy outage is at its highest during this period when they are waiting for human use. We are losing time. If you don't use them now, you'll lose them forever.

HELEN: This is outrageous! How are you all going to look after yourselves? You're children! It would make more sense if you at least took my place. Everyone knows you're the more gifted one, I mean, look what you've done with the pods. Take my place. Please Alex. Please.

THE OTHERS APPEAR TO AGREE WITH HER ARGUMENT, EXCEPT ALEX. HE TAKES HER HAND. THE OTHERS ARE SHOCKED AT THIS AFFECTION.

ALEX: You forget. This ship is our home. It is the only place we have ever known. For us, it is not a prison, it is our world. You have a different world inside your head which you need to experience once again. I am happy. I can't ask for a better life, as this is the only life I, we, know. Understand this, and you'll understand my decision. We have everything we need, except your acceptance to sleep once more.

HELEN CRIES KNOWING HE IS RIGHT, BUT IT
TEARS HER APART.

COULSON (HARPER): It's hard Helen, but Alex is right. I think we should now all begin preparations to get this mission back on track. As Alex said, we don't have much time.

THE SCREENS FLICKER ON. JONATHON'S
DESPERATE FACE APPEARS.

JONATHON: There's nothing more I can do. This is wrong. So wrong. The others are convinced that the children are more than capable of living alone. They're probably right. All their lives they've fended for themselves, so we know deep down they can do it. Helen was right, Alex is scary, he could do it all on his own I bet. (BEAT) I'm tired. I can't argue anymore.

THE STAGE LIGHTS UP USING ONLY THE BLUE
POD LIGHTS. THE ADULTS ENTER THEIR PODS.

I just hope that Alex has a plan to wake me and Helen. He tells me he will, but don't know. I don't have a clue what his plan is. I really don't know. Helen tells me that he knows how to bypass the security doors and disable the locking codes. I hope he does it. Screw the mission - I want to be with my son.

THE CREW ENTER THE PODS. SPOTLIGHT ON
ALEX WHO HOLDS A LEVER, READY TO PULL.

I know the dream that will haunt me. They never needed to die at all.

ACT I

SCENE 7

BLACKOUT FOR AN UNCOMFORTABLE AMOUNT OF TIME FOR THE AUDIENCE; THEN A VOICE IS HEARD.

ALEX: You're back.

LIGHTS SLOWLY FADE IN, LIGHTING THE SAME TIME IT TAKES JONATHON TO ADJUST HIS OPENING EYES. ALEX, NOW ANCIENT LOOKING, IS LOOKING OVER HIM. JONATHON FINALLY SITS UP, SETS HIS EYES ON ALEX, TAKING SOME TIME TO REALISE IT IS HIS SON.

JONATHON: Alex?

ALEX: Hello, father.

JONATHON: Alex!

JONATHON JUMPS UP TO HUG HIS SON, BUT REALISES ALEX'S FRAILNESS.

How long?

ALEX: Seventy five years.

JONATHON: Seventy five? Hang on. That, that doesn't seem right. (PAUSE) the others?

ALEX: Some are well, some have left us. Gemima...is no longer with.

JONATHON: Gemima. (BEAT) H...Helen?

ALEX: I will revive mother next. I thought you would want to be there for her when she wakes.

JONATHON HUGS ALEX AGAIN.

JONATHON: Thank you, Alex. Thank you so much.

ALEX: Let's wake up mum...

ALEX OPENS HELEN'S POD, JONATHON STANDS OVER IT. SHE TAKES THE SAME AMOUNT OF TIME TO GATHER HER BEARINGS. JONATHON STROKES HER CHEEK AS SHE GAINS SIGHT. SHE SITS UP AND SMILES AT JONATHON AND NOTICES ALEX STANDING JUST BEHIND HIM. IT ONLY TAKES HER A FEW SECONDS TO KNOW IT IS HER SON. SHE GRABS HIM TIGHT, STUDIES HIS ANCIENT FACE, AND BECOMES OVERWHELMED WITH SADNESS.

ACT I

SCENE 7

HELEN: Why, Alex? Why? Why?

ALEX: Mother (HE HUGS HER TIGHT). It happened as it should. My life has been an adventure. I am a scientist, an engineer and so much more. You have given me so much allowing me to exist in this place. Thank you for listening to me all those years ago. It has been worth it. Trust me.

HELEN: I don't care, you should have woken us earlier. That's what we thought you would do.

ALEX: If I had, you never would have lived long enough to see.

JONATHON: See?

ALEX: Come with me.

STILL IN THEIR PURE WHITE SLEEPING NIGHTIES, ALEX LEADS THEM THROUGH THE DIMLY LIT SHIP.

HELEN: (QUIETLY TO JONATHON) The engines...dead.

THEY REACH THE AIRLOCK. ALEX STOPS AND TURNS TO THEM.

ALEX: You were right, father, seventy five years would not make sense to you. We reached the original destination, Tau Ceti, but it's dead. A barren world with no hope for the existence of humans. There was no point in waking you for that. So I redirected the ship, to here.

ALEX OPENS THE AIRLOCK AND A MULTITUDE OF COLOURS FILL THE STAGE. ALEX KEEPS EXPLAINING.

Welcome to Epsilon Indi. We found this small living world in orbit of Tau Ceti, which is now our moon (POINTS TO IT IN THE SKY). Telescopic images indicated methane, and now we know why. There are plants, animals - different to what you told me about Earth animals - but still diverse and wonderful. And gravity. About 0.6 gs, good for old bones. I didn't want to wake you until I was sure we could survive here.

JONATHON: Alex. This is...I don't know. How long have you been here?

ALEX: (SMILES) Long enough to build this...

THEY LEAVE THE AIRLOCK TO WALK STAGE LEFT ON THE NEW PLANET. THE LIGHTING INCREASES DRAMATICALLY, THE COLOURS MOVE AROUND THE STAGE - SPREADING OUT TO THE AUDIENCE. TREES AND SHRUBBERY OF MANY DIFFERENT COLOURS AND SHAPES FILL THE SPACE. THERE IS LIGHTING COMING FROM THE FLOOR TO SHOW THE PLANET'S BRILLIANCE. THE SHIP'S AIRLOCK DARKENS DRAMATICALLY. THEY FIND THEMSELVES IN A SMALL VILLAGE MADE FROM INDIGENOUS WOOD AND PARTS FROM THE SHIP. WARM COLOURS CONSUME IT. THIS IS HOME. THE INHABITANTS OF THE VILLAGE, FROM OLD PEOPLE TO CHILDREN, ENTER STAGE LEFT, INTRIGUED.

These people are our own. You are grandparents, and great-grandparents. I have told them of you - how you fought for us in the Old Time. You are heroes. There are 29 of us now - I improved the efficiency of the water and air circulation systems. Improved Professor Coulson's extraction process. It hasn't been all easy. But we have come this far, at least.

ALEX TAKES THEM AWAY FROM THE VILLAGE.

ALEX: There are two things you should know. Firstly, this world is not perfect. Wait until you experience an Ion storm, they are tough to get through. But, home is home. Forever. And secondly, those that still sleep, they may have no place here among us.

ALL THREE LOOK AT EACH OTHER. THEY UNDERSTAND THE GRAVITY OF THIS DECISION.

THE AUDIENCE VOTE ON EITHER SCENARIO ONE (THE ADULTS ARE KILLED) OR SCENARIO TWO (THE ADULTS ARE WOKEN UP).

SCENARIO ONE

HELEN: Let them sleep on. Let them be.

ALEX WAITS A FEW SECONDS UNTIL HE NODS AT THEM AND HEADS BACK INTO THE SHIP. HE PULLS THE LEVER, THE BLUE POD LIGHTS DISAPPEAR.

SCENARIO TWO

HELEN: We know they are good people. It was dark times. Without forgiveness, what does that make us?

JONATHON: Animals. We're not animals. Alex, wake them.

ACT I

SCENE 7

ALEX WAITS A FEW SECONDS UNTIL HE NODS AT THEM AND HEADS BACK INTO THE SHIP. HE PULLS THE LEVER AND ALL REMAINING PODS SLOWLY OPEN.

DURING BOTH SCENARIOS, AS ALEX MAKES HIS WAY THROUGH THE SHIP, THE SCREENS FLICKER ON TO REVEAL ALEX'S FACE.

ALEX: I wake my parents in three days; the heroes of the Old Time. They are prevalent in my book of teachings I am writing for our people, but something worries me over the gravity of choice they have to make. If they choose life then, in the eyes of our village, they are the true forgivers I perceived them to be. However, if they, the kindest of people, choose death, then our race has no hope, and I fear for our existence.

CURTAIN