

(Printed with the demonstration version of Fade In)

So Far

Written by
Greyson Smith

Copyright (c) 2020

Draft
information

Contact
information

(Printed with the demonstration version of Fade In)

CHARACTERS

M - no free will

R - no clue what he's doing

A - no motivation

E - nothing else

D - everyone else

SETTING

M - distant future, privately owned deep space colony ship

R - near future, dense urban sprawl, tiny studio apartment

A - recent past, French countryside, idyllic cabin

E - distant past, equatorial marsh, late Fall

D - everywhere

M - SCENE ONE

M is lying in a nice bed, with tubes connected to her face and stomach. She is asleep and has been for many decades aboard this ship. She very slowly begins to wake up. It takes a very long time, slow enough to be comfortable for a luxury passenger. Before the process is completely over, she sits up and pushes some buttons to speed it up. She lies back down, then starts to work on removing the tubes. She gets out of bed, puts on her clothes, and heads down the hall. The ship is silent; everyone is asleep. Lights turn on as she passes, then back off once she's gone. She eventually makes it to the ship's control room, a big area with plenty of screens and buttons, a wall of switches, glowing bits, all of which are currently off. She turns on the main console, turns on the lights, turns on the main heaters. She sits in one of the chairs and straps herself in by habit. She's very comfortable. She falls asleep. She catches herself. She exhales, alone, happy, doing her job.

M

Hermes.

She waits. She goes back to the wall of switches and flips a couple.

M (cont'd)

Hermes.

HERMES

Good morning.

M
Good morning. Time to autopilot
shutdown finish?

HERMES
Time to autopilot shutdown finish is
forty minutes.

She yawns.

M
Alright.

She goes to the coffee maker and makes some coffee.

M (cont'd)
Hermes, time to destination?

HERMES
Time to destination is five days.

She lies on the floor and stretches.

M
Hermes, play Clair de Lune.

HERMES
Playing Clair de Lune.

As she stretches and the Debussy's ancient harmonies unfold, her shoulders relax, and M finds herself completely at peace with her purpose and unconcerned with anyone else who ever has existed, does exist, or will exist. The coffee machine beeps like an alarm clock. She pushes a button, the beeping stops, and she pours herself a cup of black coffee, noticing a weird tag on the machine and pulling it off, flicking it away. She sits back down and closes her eyes. Clair de Lune ends.

HERMES (cont'd)
Autopilot shutdown, finished.

M opens her eyes. She checks the clock on the wall. She double checks the clock on the wall.

M
Huh.

She begins typing on the internal automation panel, which is back-to-back with the automated navigation panel. She yawns. She takes a sip of the coffee. It's very cold. She gets back up and pours it out and gets another cup. She places it on top of the monitor and sits back down. She types some more.

She reaches up for her coffee and knocks over the cup, spilling coffee all down the automated navigation panel.

M (cont'd)

Shit! Fuck!

She runs to the navigation panel and swipes the coffee onto the floor, but it's seeping into the keyboard. She takes off her shirt and presses it into the keyboard to soak up the coffee from between the cracks.

HERMES

Input not recognized.

She wipes off the screen and tries to turn it back on, but it is unresponsive. She tries again and again. She goes back to the wall of switches and manually reboots the whole console, but the navigation screen doesn't turn on. She lies on the ground.

M

Hermes.

HERMES

Good morning.

She sighs.

M

Good morning. Automated navigation system status check?

HERMES

Automated navigation system is inactive.

M

Boot automated navigation system?

HERMES

I'm sorry, I wasn't able to boot automated navigation system.

M

Hermes automated navigation access check?

HERMES

Hermes automated navigation access is full.

M

Port automated navigation system to
internal automation panel.

HERMES

This will deactivate: on-board voice
commands, flight assistance, crew
DeepSleep systems, and seven more.
Are you sure you want to port
automated navigation system to
internal automation panel?

M puts her head in her hands.

M

No.

She sighs again.

M (cont'd)

Hermes autopilot features?

HERMES

What do you want to do with Hermes
temporary autopilot control features?

She is relieved.

M

Enable Hermes autopilot control,
destination: Kepler 184.

HERMES

Are you sure you want to change your
destination?

M

No.

M sits up. This time she over-enunciates.

M (cont'd)

Hermes, enable Hermes autopilot
control, destination: Kepler 184.

HERMES

Are you sure you want to change your
destination?

M

No.

M goes back over to the coffee maker and begins looking through the cabinets for the engineer's notebook. She finds it behind a box of coffee grounds. She flips through the whole notebook, double checks the planet's name; she's right, it is Kepler 184. She repeats herself again, enunciating even more clearly.

M (cont'd)

Hermes, enable Hermes autopilot control, destination: Kepler 184.

HERMES

Are you sure you want to change your destination?

M

No. (beat) Hermes, what is our destination?

HERMES

Our destination is Kepler 194, we will arrive in five days.

M freezes. She looks in the notebook again, really makes sure she isn't misreading it. She reads the average surface temperature of Kepler 184 in the notebook.

M

Hermes, what is the average surface temperature of Kepler 194?

HERMES

The average surface temperature of Kepler 194 is 65 degrees Celsius, 149 degrees Fahrenheit.

M expediently sits on the ground, face in her arms, curled into the fetal position.

M

Hermes, how long would it take to get to Kepler 184?

HERMES

Projected time to Kepler 184 is 3805 days.

M runs over to the sink beside the coffee machine and heaves. Her heaves turn into sobs. She double checks the notebook again.

M

Hermes, what is the average surface temperature of Kepler 184?

HERMES

The average surface temperature of Kepler 184 is 15 degrees Celsius, 59 degrees Fahrenheit.

She returns to her position on the ground.

M

Hermes, enable Hermes autopilot control, destination: Kepler 184.

HERMES

Are you sure you want to change your destination?

M takes a deep breath.

M

Yes.

An alarm begins to ring. She gets up off the ground and begins to return to her seat at the console, but she trips on the step up and falls. Right as she is about to hit the ground-

R - SCENE ONE

R jolts awake in his own bed. What a crazy dream. He checks his surroundings and makes sure that he's still in his apartment because of just how real that dream felt. He searches on his bed for his phone, then his nightstand, then finally the floor, where he finds it ringing like an alarm. He quickly exhales and picks up the phone.

R

Hello?

Yes hi! Hi this is him.

Yeah that sounds great, I'm available to meet any time after 1:00pm tomorrow or any time on Wednesday if those work for you.

Sounds great. I look forward to talking to her.

Thank you. Babye.

R hangs up the phone and falls back into bed. He groans. He slowly stretches and hesitates to check the time. He gets up and starts to make coffee. He whistles the main motif of Clair de Lune repeatedly, but he can't remember what the song is called. He tries to look it up on his phone, but he plays Fantasie-Improptu. He tries again but plays Chopin's Nocturne in E-flat major. The coffee machine beeps, not like an alarm. R pours himself a cup of coffee. He adds a random amount of cream and sugar. He's about to take a sip when he looks at the calendar on his wall then on his phone to confirm the date. He slams his mug onto his desk, spilling some of the coffee. He starts his laptop booting up. He goes to take off his shirt but sees a used towel on the floor that he uses to soak up the coffee instead. He has déjà vu. His laptop finally boots up completely, and he opens his working draft of a short story he's writing for a competition that is due in less than an hour. He takes a sip of his coffee and begins reading aloud.

R (cont'd)

(reading)

I remember seeing you from the back seat on a rainy day. I remember wondering if you'd always been there. I remember wondering if someone lived inside. Your aged, gray exterior felt so impossible. Your cladding seemed to hold on out of habit over design, having abandoned the pragmatism of its structure long ago. Long since. Long before. Having abandoned the pragmatism of its structure long before.

R changes a word.

R (cont'd)

I walked past you twice every day of middle school. I saw your eyes, looked deep inside them to see if I could make out your soul through their drooping eyelids.

R changes the sentence.

R (cont'd)

I looked past your drooping eyelids and tried to make out your receding soul. Even then it seemed like you wanted to go. I remember the year it snowed. I remember feeling ridiculous because I had the passing thought that you might be cold.

(MORE)

R (cont'd)
I saw the snow in piles on your roof.
I saw your white hat. I saw your. I
watched you don your frozen bonnet.

R changes the sentence.

R (cont'd)
I remember the year it snowed, when
you wore that giant white bonnet. I
remember feeling ridiculous because I
had the passing thought that you
might be cold. I wondered what your
roof looked like - if the snow, when
it melted, would run off the sides or
fall straight through - if you ever
got any sunlight. I thought that I
should go inside to see, that at noon
on a Saturday I should walk right in
and lie on the ground and see what it
felt like. I remember seeing myself
in you: my sadness and isolation so
perfectly captured in one glance at
your faded walls.

R sighs.

R (cont'd)
I remember seeing myself in you, a
reflection of my adolescent ennui.
Your walls a mirror for my adolescent
ennui.

R changes the sentence.

R (cont'd)
I remember seeing myself in you, your
walls a mirror for my adolescent
ennui.

R gets a notification on his phone and sees the time.

R (cont'd)
What?

He cross-references it with the time on his laptop.

R (cont'd)
Shit. Fuck.

He quickly saves the file and opens his browser, waiting for
the page to load slowly. He impatiently checks the time on
his phone again. The page loads.

He submits his story for the competition quickly and immediately shuts his laptop, catching his head in his hands. He picks up his phone and calls his boyfriend, puts him on speakerphone as he makes a late lunch. Over the phone, the voice sounds a lot like Hermes.

VOICE

Hey.

R

Hey man what's up?

VOICE

I'm headed back to work- I'm getting off my lunch break, did you just get up?

R

Um.

Pause.

VOICE

Hello?

R

Yeah! Uh no, I've been up for a while, sorry I'm making a sandwich I've got you on speakerphone.

VOICE

Oh okay. Hey when's that thing due today? The short story?

R

Like two minutes ago.

VOICE

Did you do it?

R

Yeah I did it.

VOICE

Sorry. How do you feel about it?

R

Um.

VOICE

From what you read me, it sounds pretty good.

R

Yeah we'll see I guess. Hey are you doing anything Wednesday?

VOICE

I mean I've got work until 5 but other than that, no.

R

Can I come over and use your wifi for this video interview with the residency lady?

VOICE

Why aren't you just going to the campus?

R

Well she's on some sabbatical or research trip or- I don't know she's in Paris or Berlin or Vienna or somewhere, so I have to do this stupid video thing, and my internet sucks. And I wanna wear that green sweater I have because it seems fun but professional and I think it's at your house.

VOICE

It is.

R

Yeah.

VOICE

Yeah that's fine. Do you still have the key?

R

It's in my pocket. Alright I just finished making this sandwich, so I'm going to hang up.

VOICE

I'm just pulling into the parking lot.

R

Alright I'll see you Wednesday if not sooner.

VOICE

Okay bye.

R

Babye.

R sits down at his desk and continues watching a casual informational video about impressionism as he eats.

DOCUMENTARY

-was notorious for his insecurity in his own creative decisions. It's said that he waited four years to start working on his most famous piece, this landscape of the hills near his childhood home, spending his days staring at a blank canvas, brush in hand, without making a stroke. It's a shame, since his technical skill was far beyond his peers, encompassing both the ephemeral light flitting across his subjects and their uncompromising weight and solidity. Currently, there are only four of his pieces in existence to our knowledge, commonly referred to as "Les Quatre Vies," French for "the four lives." The paintings earned their name not because of a commonality, but rather because of their stark contrast. Each image seems to depict an abstract landscape of a different fictional lifetime. Many suspect that there is some hidden narrative through-line to the four pieces, but the theories that have been proposed are mostly pure speculation.

He takes a sip of coffee, which is now incredibly cold along with having a horrible ratio of coffee to cream to sugar. He gets up and pours it out.

DOCUMENTARY (cont'd)

Eerily, the third of the series strongly resembles a mid-twenty-first century cityscape, with these large gray blocks and zigzagging black lines, but the artist's early death in 1902 makes the similarity a mere coincidence.

R glances at the screen, then quickly skips back in the video to look at the painting again.

DOCUMENTARY (cont'd)
In either case- zigzagging black
lines- twenty-first century-

R pauses the video. He sits down and looks at the painting for a long time, leaning in close to his laptop screen. He stands up and looks out his window. He looks to his screen again, then back to his window.

R
Huh.

He goes back to make another cup of coffee, but as much as he presses the button, the machine won't turn on.

R (cont'd)
Oh come on man, you were working a
second ago.

He unplugs the machine, plugs it back in, empties the water, pushes the button some more, turns the machine upside-down, and more, but the machine refuses to see his side of the story. He sighs and puts on big boots and his trendy coat. He grabs his keys, does a once-over to make sure he isn't forgetting anything, then leaves his apartment while his half-eaten sandwich remains half-eaten on his desk. The sun begins to set outside his window. Winter days.

A - SCENE ONE

The sunrise glows across fields, hills, and cottages, streaming through A's window as he looks out across the grass. The orange light silhouettes him, reducing him to an obscure shape. The sun rises further, creating a more or less regular morning daylight in the kitchen. A looks under his counter in a cabinet to retrieve a small, nearly empty paper package tied with hemp twine and stamped with ink. He takes a ceramic saucer, and empties onto it the contents of the paper package: dried, unroasted coffee beans. A studies the beans very closely and discards any that do not meet his standards. Once he is pleased with the quality of his beans, he retrieves a roasting device, a sort of lottery-cage contraption with a brass mesh cylinder spun by a rotating handle. He positions the roasting drum over a grate in his cast iron stove, on the front of which is a door. A opens this door, removes the ash and charcoal from the previous fire, and brings in fresh firewood from outside. He strikes a match and lights a scrap piece of canvas that was lying on his table to use as tinder. He enjoys cutting and stretching his own canvasses, and he is interested in looking into the manufacturing of textiles, though he has not had the time or resources to do so yet.

Pigments are getting cheaper, but paints are getting more expensive. Part of the burden of a modernizing world, he supposed. The fire from the stove peeks out of the grate and licks the bottom of the brass drum, which he slowly rotates for a very long time. The skins of the dried beans crackle and glow, sending embers floating through the air, which remind A of the sunrise. He thinks of campfires and childhood and old grassy hills and wind and trees and the smell of a home-cooked meal and fresh bread and Italian cheese and Paris and communal sympathy and holding hands and feeling at one with humanity and history and his ancestors and his family and his family's families and the families of everyone and fire and invention and the scale of human existence. He stops rotating the beans and carefully empties them back onto the saucer, being careful not to burn himself. He opens a different cabinet to get his coffee grinder, a burr mill with a glass jar to hold the unground beans and a spout at the bottom to deposit the grounds. He loads the warm, freshly roasted beans into the jar on top of the mill, before positioning the saucer underneath to catch the coffee grounds. Before he grinds the beans, A gets his coffee pot, a slender, tall tin thing with an upside-down spout on the top half and two handles. He removes the top portion of the pot and the central canister and fills the bottom with water, which he starts to heat on the same grate of his stove. A patiently begins to turn the handle of the mill, all the while carefully watching the grounds coming out of the machine to make sure they are not being compromised. He loads the grounds into the central canister of the coffee pot, before placing the canister into the bottom section, still on the stove-top, and screwing on the top portion of the pot. He takes the coffee pot off of the stove and inverts it, setting it onto the saucer and allowing the water to drip through the grounds, making his morning coffee. He waits for the water to stop dripping before pouring his coffee into a handmade ceramic mug. He takes immense pleasure in smelling and looking at the coffee. He spends a while looking back and forth between the coffee and the world. A closes his eyes and takes a long sip of the coffee. It is the best coffee he has ever had and will ever have. It is the perfect temperature. It is the perfect combination of bitter and floral and slightly sweet. It fills him with warmth in a way few things can. He suddenly finds himself disappointed that he will never be able to enjoy this coffee for the first time, or indeed ever, again. He takes a second sip, and it is just like the first. He is compelled to write to his sponsor.

A

(written) Dear friend - I have just made perhaps the best cup of coffee I have ever drunk with those beans you and I found in May.

(MORE)

A (cont'd)

I cannot stress enough how much pleasure I have derived from doing this simple task, though it is not particularly useful or valuable. This routine of making coffee comforts me; perhaps I am missing clear direction in other parts of my life. I am feeling rather contemplative this morning. Maybe it is because I did not sleep very well last night - I woke up before sunrise again, a bittersweet issue, as I do love to watch the sunrise.

Bittersweet much like this coffee.

One can only see so many sunrises in one's lifetime. I hope I will be able to get you another painting some time soon. I have begun planning my next canvas, and the prospect of working on something new excites me. After so long working on such a thing as my last piece, I find myself wanting to turn my gaze outward to give my memory some rest perhaps. There is only so long a person can stare at a blank canvas thinking of their mother before they have a nervous breakdown. That is maybe the lesson I have learned most vividly through all this. Maybe I will paint some fruit or something simple like that.

Hope you are well.

-A

A folds up his letter and places it into an envelope, sealing it with some wax in a somewhat old-fashioned gesture. He puts on his shoes and coat, and he brings his letter and coffee with him out to the mailbox.

M - SCENE TWO

M lies on her mattress, which she has pulled all the way down the hall and into the control room. She stares at the ceiling. A day has passed. Her eyes are bloodshot, and her hair is messy. She has been asleep for most of the past 24 hours, only waking long enough to drink some water and eat. She has been crying quite a lot. She presses her fists into her eyes until she sees stars.

M

Hermes.

HERMES

Good morning.

M

Way to. Automate- uh.

HERMES

Input not recognized.

M

Hermes, is there a way to automate daily navigation automation refresh?

HERMES

Input not recognized.

M exhales.

M

Hermes automate daily navigation automation input.

HERMES

Do you want to access Hermes temporary autopilot control features?

M

Yes.

HERMES

What do you want to do with Hermes temporary autopilot control features?

M

Enable Hermes autopilot control for thirty days.

HERMES

Long-term automated navigation controls can be accessed using automated navigation system.

M

Automated navigation system status check.

HERMES

Automated navigation system is inactive.

M

Yep.

M puts her head in her hands.

M (cont'd)

Hermes.

HERMES

Good morning.

M

Enable Hermes autopilot control for five days.

HERMES

Long-term automated navigation controls can be accessed using automated navigation system.

M

Enable Hermes autopilot control for two days.

HERMES

Long-term automated navigation controls can be accessed using automated navigation system.

M crawls under her covers. She punches her mattress and screams into her pillow. She flails and kicks like an animal under the covers until her sheets get tangled and bind her. She balls them up and throws them at the wall.

M

Hermes.

HERMES

Good morning.

M

Good morning. Enable Hermes autopilot control for one day.

HERMES

What is the destination?

M

Kepler 184.

HERMES

Hermes autopilot control enabled for: one day, destination: Kepler 184.

M very slowly gets up and starts making coffee. She presses and holds the button to start the machine, then takes her finger off the button once it starts. The machine turns off. She presses the button again, but again it turns off after she takes her finger away. She presses and holds the button, and the machine stays on. She looks around for something to weigh the button down, but when she tries to balance a container on the machine, it isn't heavy enough, and she has to restart again. She presses and holds the button. The machine makes coffee. She looks behind the machine to see if anything is wrong, but nothing seems to be wrong. She looks through the cabinets and drawers one-handed for the coffee machine manual. Eventually she finds it and struggles to open it to the right page. She reads and rereads the page. Finally she sees it:

M
(under her breath) Power button
locking pin. That's stupid.

M looks at the machine, and the button locking pin isn't there. She looks back at the manual page to double-check. She begins to look around the machine on the counter, and she tries to look on the floor, but she has to continue holding her finger on the button. She considers letting go of the button, so that she might be able to find the pin and make coffee properly without holding the button down; however, she also recognizes the possibility that she will not find the pin and thus will have to restart the process and make it take longer for no reason. It occurs to her:

M (cont'd)
Hermes-

HERMES
Good morning.

M
What is your- uh. Fail-safe procedure
for no destination.

HERMES
Fail-safe procedure for no
destination is: return to long-term
automated navigation destination.

M holds her breath.

M
What is current long-term automated
navigation destination?

HERMES

Current automated navigation
destination is Kepler 194.

M

Change automated navigation
destination to Kepler 184.

HERMES

Long-term automated navigation
controls can be accessed using
automated navigation system.

M puts her head on the counter for a long time. The coffee machine beeps. She slowly pours herself a cup of coffee, sets it on the counter, and begins looking for the button locking key. She crawls around on all fours, wondering where it could have gone between yesterday and today. She goes over to the wall of switches and looks in some cracks, then moves on to the consoles, where she crawls along the ground through the row, but she finds nothing. Eventually she stands up near the automated navigation panel, where the pin is lying openly on the keyboard, still a little sticky from the coffee. She sighs and brings the pin over to the machine, where she tries to figure out how to fit it on and keep the button down. However, as much as M tries, she can't find a place for the pin to go. She looks closer at the pin and realizes that it's broken, holding it up to a similarly colored piece of plastic on the machine; they match. She remembers on the previous day when she woke up, when she pulled that piece of plastic off the coffee machine. She places the pin very gently on the counter, then calmly walks over to her mattress and slams both of her fists into the wall. She cries and sits on the floor.

M

Hermes.

HERMES

Good morning.

M

How long to destination?

HERMES

Time to destination is 3804 days.

M

What is 3804 divided by 365?

HERMES

3804 divided by 365 is 10.4219; to
adjust rounding and float settings,
ask for calculation result settings.

M

What is 0.4219 times 365?

HERMES

0.4219 times 365 is 153.9935; to
adjust rounding and float settings,
ask for calculation result settings.

M does some quick addition of days-in-months in her head.
She gets back in bed.

R - SCENE TWO

R is on the phone with his boyfriend again, but this time he has headphones in, so we can't hear the other side. R scrolls through images of on his computer of green fields and rainy landscapes. His room is messier than the last time we saw it, empty cups and plates are on most surfaces. It's not the most disorganized room in the world, but he'd be embarrassed to have unexpected company.

R

Right.

I mean that totally makes sense why
that would be frustrating.

Yeah. Hey do you know what southern
France looks like? Or uh...

He clicks on a different tab and looks at a map. He zooms out.

R (cont'd)

I guess like central France? Like
just off the top of your head.

Okay. I just wanted to see- does that
seem like common knowledge? Like is
that something I could know and not
remember learning?

He's a little frustrated.

R (cont'd)
Right but like people who don't know
about geography like me like I don't
know about geography.

Long pause.

R (cont'd)
Yeah. I dunno I've been thinking
about France a lot.

R puts his hands on his face.

R (cont'd)
I don't know.

Uh... fine. I mean I never sleep so.
Oh! I had this crazy fucking dream.

Yeah it was a space one again.

I was like- I was floating in this
void, and I saw the whole universe in
front of me, and I knew I couldn't do
anything - or I had to do nothing -
but not just nothing like- like a
material, tangible nothing, like a
nothing of tasks and purpose. I don't
know it's kind of slipping. It was
just really weird and specific but
generic. I mean you know how my
dreams are.

How'd you sleep?

Oh god I forgot about that, how'd it
go?

R goes to get a drink

R (cont'd)
Yeah?

Yeah. Well that's good.

Eh, it's going. I'm still editing it,
but I'm honestly focusing on other
stuff until I hear back from the
competition people because if I keep
looking at it, I'll just start
obsessing over making it perfect, and
the damage in that respect is already
done.

(MORE)

R (cont'd)

So I'm working on this screenplay, or maybe it's a stage play or something, I'm not sure. It's sort of a spoof- or like a pastiche of a heist genre, but I want it to feel different and really like elevate the form into a different style, 'cause I find that regular heist movies have really boring characters, and I think having sympathetic characters is sort of my strong suit, so- but that's not really a big thing. I mean I'm really thinking about doing some kind of historical thing about this painter.

Yeah. I sent it to you.

Well I was watching it, and like- I dunno. I'm just interested, 'cause it's like. I feel really... I don't know, we'll see if something comes from it. I'm still researching.

Yeah, they said they're probably not going to take me. I mean that's not what they said, but that's what they said. My interview sucked anyway, I just kept talking about the same thing over and over without a clear end to any of my statements, which I think is just because I was nervous because I mean you know all that.

R smiles.

R (cont'd)

Yeah I guess my sweater didn't save me. But I guess there's always next year, if I improve by then or get some other credits on my resume.

He lies on his bed.

I know. It's just so hard to keep trying when there's no clear progress happening. Like I keep writing and writing and writing, but it's like I'm not getting any better, or I'm not paying enough attention to my mistakes.

I think my ideas are good! Maybe I'm ahead of my time.

R laughs.

R (cont'd)
I'll be a misunderstood genius, just
like everybody else.

I know. I'm sorry. I guess I am the
one who chose this.

Yeah.

He puts his head into his hands and groans.

R (cont'd)
I just have to email so many people.
Work is hard.

Okay.

I love you. Thank you for letting me
put my stress somewhere.

Okay babye.

R lets his boyfriend hang up, remaining still on the bed. He slowly gets up and goes to his computer, looking at a third tab, where he is scrolling through images of "Les Quatre Vies." He clicks on the third image: the cityscape. He stares at it for a long time, then orders a large and rather expensive print of it. He closes the tab like he's ashamed. He gets up and looks out the window. An idea is sitting in his head that he finds unrealistic and uncomfortable. He's always been a spiritual person, but he's never really believed in destiny. He sees all the other people, all the other windows, and thinks about them, thinks about their lives and their abilities. He ignores the instinct of his individuality and tries to embrace the collectivist whole. He tries to think of his one-ness with humanity, the single global consciousness, the betterment of all people. He wants to do that for the world, to do something so that people will know that he matters, even though he knows he does, just like he knows everyone does. The thought still sits in his mind. He tries to ignore it. He sits down at his laptop and opens a blank document. In the header he writes:

"HEIST"

He looks at it. He types.

"HEIST PLAY"

He backspaces.

"HEIST"

He types.

"HEIST MOVIE"

He backspaces. He types.

"Heist"

He backspaces. He types.

"heist"

He types.

"heist film"

He backspaces. He types.

"HEIST (a play)"

R (cont'd)
(quietly) Heist. Is heist German?

R looks up the etymology of "heist."

R (cont'd)
Oh! Huh.

R crosses his arms, staring at the blank document, so empty and waiting. This shouldn't be difficult for him. He pushes through. He begins typing.

R (cont'd)
(typing) We see a dark stage, until a single light penetrates the void. The light is blinding and shocking and loud. We see

R raises his hands in the air and inhales, shaking his head.

R (cont'd)
(typing) FREDERICK standing center stage, holding a bundle of rope. The rope uncoils from his hands like a viper, and he throws it upward. We see now that he is in an elevator shaft, but gray and uneasy.
(aloud) This is stupid. This is stupid.

He closes the document without saving. He gets his drink and continues looking through the images of France.

A - SCENE TWO

A sits at his workbench/dinner table. He has a very large sketchbook spread out neatly in front of him, with a fountain pen, a few different pencils, a small set of paints, several rulers, a protractor, and a pair of calipers. Both open pages of this notebook are covered in sketches of rectangles, all with slightly different orientations and ratios. There are also several canvases in various degrees of completion in a stack by the front door; some of them are just the basic frame, while others are fully stretched and primed. He has just leaned back from his page to observe his rectangles. He looks at them for a very long time. He takes the sketchbook to one side of the room and sets it on the floor, where he places it on the ground, leaning up against the wall. Keeping his eyes fixed on the pages, he slowly stands up and walks backward step by step, until he reaches the other side of the room. He does the same action walking back toward the sketchbook. He frowns.

A

Hm.

A takes the notebook back to the table, and he flips the page. He picks up one of his pencils and begins to draw similarly sized rectangles of new orientations and ratios on this page. Each rectangle is a choice; none are haphazard or hastily drawn. Again he carefully takes his sketchbook and leans it up against the wall, slowly walking backwards to the other wall. As he walks back, A smiles. He picks up the sketchbook and brings it back to the table. He takes his calipers and measures one of the rectangles, then on a scrap piece of paper, he works out the ratio between the sides. The ratio of width to height is 14:31. A measures the sides of his sketchbook and realizes that he'll need four pieces to put together to make a sheet big enough. He carefully tears out one page. He draws out a little diagram so he won't get confused. He begins cutting out the pieces he needs to create the larger rectangle, measuring and marking each side. He clears his workbench, closing his sketchbook and putting his pen and pencils into a small tin container. He arranges the pieces of paper into their proper positions, then takes a pot of glue and brush and glues them together with smaller strips of paper. The full rectangle is 28" wide by 62" tall. He waits for them to dry. He begins flipping back through the rest of his sketchbook, where dozens of pages of these rectangles are revealed; he double-checks and triple-checks to make sure this is the right one.

He hesitantly puts his sketchbook aside and begins to draft a letter.

A (cont'd)

(written)Dear friend - I am sorry it has been so long since I have written. This new piece has been testing my patience as well. I try to be objective in my work and allow observations to guide my hand, but this piece has been battling in my dreams.

I sleep in a land of obelisks, tall and intertwined, smudged and smooth. I am lost in these faceted giants who loom and intimidate. My feet run, but I am locked in place.

I sleep also with a box of stars, with alien walls of glass. The box presents only one side to me, and as much as I try to turn it, it remains consistent, as a plane.

All of this opaque nonsense is to say I am struggling with what size to make the painting.

I found some more of that coffee, by the way, but I have not been able to bring myself to make it.

I am locked, overwhelmed maybe.

I hope you are well.

-A

E - SCENE ONE

E stands in a wet field, watching birds fly overhead. She is dressed in animal skins and plant fibers. She looks into the distance and tries to see the last straggling silhouettes of her family as they travel inland for the storm season. From behind her, groans can be heard. E's mother lies against a slumped tree, her right leg broken mid-thigh. She is in intense pain. She breathes very heavily. E walks over to her mother and offers her hand as a final effort to get her to walk with them. Her mother cannot stand. E crouches next to her mother and presses her face against hers. Their breathing synchronizes.

E begins to lift her mother, straining her back, until she has her in a kind of hold on her shoulders. P's mother screams in pain, but P lifts her completely onto her back, so she can balance slightly by hunching forward. Step by muddy step, E brings her mother to the side of a large hill, into a small rock alcove, somewhat sheltered from the weather. E is now shivering from the cold, her mother unconscious from the pain. E gathers dead leaves and sticks to make a small bed for her mother to lie on. The wind is nearly unbearable, and the rain has started to pick up. She cannot feel her fingers. E removes a layer of her garments and lays them on top of her mother, so that she might stay warm in the night. The sun has begun to set. E's mother wakes and, eyes still closed, groans and purses her lips for water. Without thinking, E takes her waterskin and gives her mother the last of her clean water supply. E lies next to her mother and embraces her, knowing she is doing what she can.

M - SCENE THREE

M is in the control room again. Many days have passed. She is dirty and dissolving. A pile of empty food containers sits next to her bed. She lies on the floor asleep. On the wall, she has written "I AM GOING TO" in large block letters with a thick marker. She wakes up slowly.

M

Hermes.

HERMES

Good morning.

M

Good morning. Hermes, enable Hermes temporary autopilot control for one day, destination: Kepler 184.

HERMES

Hermes autopilot control enabled for: one day, destination: Kepler 184.

M goes to make herself a cup of coffee.

M

Hermes, play Clair de Lune.

Hermes begins playing Clair de Lune. M presses and holds the button for the full duration it takes to brew the coffee, remaining completely still as Debussy's harmonies fill the air.

M (cont'd)

Hermes, when was this song written?

HERMES

Clair de Lune, the third movement of Claude Debussy's Suite Bergamasque, was first published in 1905.

M

Tell me more about Clair de Lune.

HERMES

Part of the Impressionist movement, Clair de Lune characterizes the Lydian sound now so well associated with dreams. The song itself was based on a French poem of the same name.

M takes her coffee and sits on the floor, stretching and taking sips alternately.

M

Hermes, tell me more about Old Earth.

HERMES

Humanity's reign on Old Earth lasted thousands of years, before multiple crises compounded into the dissolution of the nation-state borders that held together their society, including storms, disease, and poverty. Many have tried to rebuild, but their efforts-

M

Hermes, I know all that. Tell me about the height of human civilization.

HERMES

Humanity is widely considered to have reached its cultural high point around the turn of the twentieth century, also considered to be the ethical low point. Inequality allowed for the complete abstraction of thought in only the richest nation-states, so that modern life began the slow process of disconnecting itself from concrete reality.

(MORE)

HERMES (cont'd)

This abstraction foreshadows the growing divide in the following century. Would you like me to continue?

M

Yes.

HERMES

As the world globalized, psychologists speculate, humanity could not understand their ever-expanding world. This led to simplification and assumption, which led to division, which led to conflict and dissolution. Humanity idolized progress for hundreds of years, so much that they did not see their self-destruction. Their evolutionary instinct ultimately tore humanity to pieces.
From Indulgence and Innovation: A Brief History of Modern, Post-Modern, and Contemporary Society.

Silence.

M

Hermes, what's it called when a person sacrifices themselves and gets famous?

HERMES

Do you mean martyr?

M

Define martyr.

HERMES

Martyr - a person who suffers and usually dies for a greater cause, typically leading to fame or worship.

M

How do you spell "martyr"?

HERMES

Martyr is spelled M-A-R-T-Y-R.

M picks up her thick marker from before and goes to the wall. She adds a "NOT" between "AM" and "GOING" and finishes the sentence: "I AM NOT GOING TO BE A MARTYR".

R - SCENE THREE

R is in his room, hunched over his computer. In what little floor space he had, R has set up an easel, on which sits a canvas he has painted black. In his window is hung a canvas print of A's painting of the gray obelisks, so that only faint light enters the room from around the edges. The room is lit only by the glow of the screen and dashes of sunlight. R's hands sit primed on his keyboard, but no strokes can be heard. This image persists for a long time. His phone rings. R picks up, puts him on speakerphone.

R

Hey.

VOICE

Hey, how's it going?

His voice is delicate but impatient.

R

I'm good! I think I'm really breaking ground on stuff. I'm figuring out what I want to do with my art.

VOICE

Are you still thinking about- what you said before?

R

Yeah.

Pause.

R (cont'd)

I think it's true.

Another pause.

R (cont'd)

I know you think it's stupid.

VOICE

I don't think it's stupid!

Carefully.

VOICE (cont'd)

I just- I don't know. Do you even believe in reincarnation?

R

I believe in souls.

VOICE

Do you? How do you measure a soul?
What does it look like, where is it?

R

You can't measure a soul. It's like
beyond observation.

VOICE

Okay. I guess I just don't understand
believing in something you can't
observe.

R

What do you mean?

VOICE

Like everything has to be observed or
else there's no evidence it exists.

R

You don't only believe in things
you've observed.

VOICE

Sort of.

R

Have you ever seen atoms and cells
and shit?

VOICE

Well no, but there are a lot of
people who have, and their accounts
are all consistent.

R

What about people who've felt dead
family members and known things from
past lives? Is it just because there
isn't a picture of it?

VOICE

Look- I'm sorry I don't want to yell.

R

No it's okay I'm sorry. I just. I
feel so close, like he's pulling me
in.

VOICE

Okay.

He doesn't say anything else.

R

I think I've realized what I'm lacking.

Silence.

R (cont'd)

It's patience. He spent so many years perfecting his paintings. I just need more patience. I'm so quick to jump at a new idea, to think that *this* is the big thing, but I need to stop. To let go. To be patient and allow inspiration to come where it may. I think that's what he's teaching me.

VOICE

And you... And- Okay.

R

I know you don't like this. I'm sorry, I'll stop talking to you about it.

VOICE

No I want you to talk to me. I'm just worried.

R

I know.

Pause.

R (cont'd)

I love you.

VOICE

I love you too.

Long pause.

VOICE (cont'd)

Just- do you think maybe it isn't patience? Maybe it's acceptance. Maybe it's not waiting for *the thing* to happen, it's accepting what happens, regardless of whether or not it is *the thing*. Maybe he spent all that time on those paintings because he was busy doing other stuff. Maybe he was sad or unmotivated.

(MORE)

VOICE (cont'd)

Maybe it's not about being patient and awaiting your breakthrough, but instead understanding that progress is something that happens slowly over time. Maybe he was making lots of paintings and threw them away or they got lost or he didn't sign them or whatever. Maybe he was just learning by trial and error, and that's what made him so good, not some innate quality of his soul, just practice.

Pause.

VOICE (cont'd)

The PT at my work always says- "Stretching only works if you get off your ass and do it, every day." So maybe it's like stretching. Maybe writing or painting or music or anything is just a process with no end point or success. Maybe you'll never *make the thing* because every thing is just an individual step in a series of evolutionary changes leading nowhere in particular. Even he was part of a larger movement; his ideas weren't unique; he was building on the ideas that everyone was exploring then. And that's okay! That's good! That's what made him a good painter!

Pause.

VOICE (cont'd)

And I don't know about the painting in the window. Coincidences happen, a lot actually. There are a lot of cities. Occam's razor. I'm sorry.

Silence.

VOICE (cont'd)

Or- I don't know. I just think- Maybe holding yourself up to this expectation isn't healthy. And maybe the reasons don't matter. And I love you.

R

Yeah I love you too. I'll think about it.

R hangs up. He looks toward the print on the window.

A - SCENE THREE

A sits at his table, writing a letter. Two easels stand in the room, one with a blank canvas the same dimensions as his perfect rectangle, the other painted black. He is unkempt, and when his pen scratches the paper, it does so in a feverish rhythm.

A

(written) Dear friend - I'm afraid I have been lying to you in some respects. Work is not moving forward at all on the piece I started months ago. Though I occupy myself with pointless tedium, all I can do is wish it finished. I see its final picture with clarity, but I cannot catch the first stroke.

I have begun a second painting, pressed by a revelation from a dream.

The box of stars is not what it seems. I am inside the box, and the stars surround me on all sides, ever present and never changing. The blackness of forever choked me at first, but now they bring me great comfort. I have begun to paint them.

Perhaps they only comfort me because of their contrast with my gray towers, which mock me in my sleep. So simple, but these too slip away.

I fear my mind is beginning to stretch in two directions, neither promising. Desperate fever frightens me, as does nihilistic lethargy.

I hope I can be well soon.

On a lighter note, I have a song in my ear that I must have heard many years ago, but I can't identify it. Rather annoying.

My apologies and many thanks for your continued support.

-A

A stands, hands shaking. He lies on the floor and stretches. He hums the melody from Clair de Lune. He does this for quite some time. He stands. With a steady hand, A brings a palette knife loaded with white paint delicately to the black canvas's surface. He dots a handful of stars. A then brings his brush and palette along and mixes two different shades of black, which he adds in curling ringlets among the stars. He sets down his supplies, looks at the painting, and smiles.

BLACKOUT

INTERMISSION

DREAM

E lies next to her mother. It is the middle of the night now, and it is finally dark and quiet. She falls asleep. She dreams. She dies.

DREAM

E lies next to her mother. It is the middle of the night now, and it is finally dark and quiet. She falls asleep.

There is nothing.

There is a swirling mix of matter.

The mix expands and continues expanding forever.

The mix cools and forms very small bits.

Some bits form very large clouds of bits.

The bits collide to form small clumps.

The clumps form into large clumps.

The large clumps become larger, eventually becoming very large.

Some of the clumps expand and collapse.

Eventually the clumps fall into a relatively consistent pattern.

The clumps form planetary systems.

(All above should take roughly 65% of the overall duration of the dream)

One of these systems has one hot clump in the middle, with several very small clumps of various matter around it.

Cells form.

These cells become a diverse, larger whole, living under the water, forming an evolving and balanced system.

(All above should take roughly 87.5% of the overall duration of the dream)

Some cells start living inside other cells.

These cells specialize and become smaller parts of a functioning whole.

The whole grows.

The whole becomes proficient, branching into hundreds of smaller branching wholes.

Some of the wholes become animals and plants.

There is an explosion of new kinds of wholes.

Certain wholes start going out onto the land a couple times.

Eventually, some wholes start living only on the land.

The system has grown to envelope the land, and the wholes continue to specialize and find systems of balance.

(All above should take roughly 95% of the overall duration of the dream)

Some wholes have become mammals.

Dinosaurs appear and disappear.

Some tree-dwelling mammals start using tools and forming packs.

These wholes fracture and several different species of this kind go extinct.

They lose their fur and hunt and gather.

They build things to live in.

They begin to develop distinct cultures from other packs of these mammals.

The earth gets colder, and they begin to farm.

(All of the above should take roughly 99.999914% of the overall duration of the dream)

They build bigger things to live in for certain members of their packs.

They find new ways of making tools with certain clumps of bits on the earth.

They build a pyramid and a circle of large rectangular stones.

They have made ways of drawing symbols that represent ideas.

They write down things that aren't true on purpose.

(All of the above should take roughly 99.999973% of the overall duration of the dream)

Robust civilizations all over the world, philosophy, democracy, ancient conquest, paper, Abrahamic religion, middle ages, denser cities, religious warfare.

(All of the above should take roughly 99.9999927% of the overall duration of the dream)

Near global trade, E, empire, industrialization, modernity, A, destruction, globalization, R, climate disaster, interplanetary colonization, M, human expansion into other solar systems, governmental collapse, human extinction.

E wakes up. She looks around. She checks on her mother. She dies.

END OF PLAY