

FADE IN:

SUPER: "The first human FTL travel was not a brave vault forward across impossible distances. It was a timid step backwards to safety." - Dr. Yulianna Chento

(Audio of this interview quote plays as the text appears on the screen, slightly scratchy and with an audible scoff.)

EXT. SPACE

SUPER: "UNS CAVALIER

Position: 1.2 million km from Mars

Destination: Sun-Mars L2

Cargo:

1) Colony construction supplies

2) Communication satellites

3) Object 31-A

Crew - 2"

INT. UNS CAVALIER, MISSION BAY

A blocky spaceship interior - made for function, not for cool. NASA plus a few hard-fought decades. Gray boxy equipment, stenciled warnings about ventilation paths and anti-static cautions. The ship THRUMS softly.

Inspecting the racks of computers and mission equipment is BHAVINI PATEL (36), a disciplined astronaut technician with bright eyes in clean orange coveralls. Her gaze bounces between the panel and a laminated flip-book in her hand.

Buttons labeled "TEST" make sharp CLICKS as she presses them, checks items complete, and flips to the next page.

Behind her, of no special notice to Bhavini, MARS looms outside a large viewing window: large, red, imposing.

ALFONSE (34), a slender and solemn astronaut in baggy orange coveralls, steps into the mission bay and scratches at a panel with his thumbnail. Bhavini does not look up as he approaches. A sad smile flashes on her face before she forces herself back to her task.

BHAVINI

Don't scratch my equipment. Some  
of us have to stay behind and live  
here.

ALFONSE

We don't have to do this.

BHAVINI

Pre-mission checks are mandatory.  
Especially the final one.

ALFONSE

The final one.

BHAVINI

(whispering)  
Stop it.

Bhavini straightens and faces Alfonse. Her eyes dart  
meaningfully to a mounted CAMERA watching the mission bay.

ALFONSE

I could stay. I could stay here  
with you. We could send the pod  
back empty.

INT. UNS CAVALIER, POD

A spherical chamber. The hatch is ringed with dozens of  
bolts labeled "Warning - Explosive." Bhavini and Alfonse  
are visible in the distance through a small porthole in the  
hatch. A sturdy flight chair is mounted to the center of  
the pod above an ominous heavy-duty green box (like a  
Pelican case) stenciled "Object 31-A."

BHAVINI

(muted through the  
porthole)  
We will not do that.

ALFONSE

(muted through the  
porthole)  
We. Us.

INT. UNS CAVALIER, MISSION BAY

BHAVINI

We knew this was coming. For a  
long time. Eighteen months  
crawling from Earth to Mars.

ALFONSE  
Eighteen months on this ship  
because I begged. I called in  
every favor, made promises I can't  
keep, all to get here with you. To  
be close. To stay.

BHAVINI  
And eighteen months to prepare for  
separation.

ALFONSE  
In less than a heartbeat I'll pop  
back home. I'm not ready to go.

BHAVINI  
(brightly for the  
cameras)  
Nonsense. All tests indicate that  
we're ready.

ALFONSE  
Don't...

MONTAGE - WHAT THE BOX WILL DO

INT. UNS CAVALIER, POD

-- Alfonse climbs into the pod chair, numb.

BHAVINI  
You will enter the pod...

-- Alfonse buckles himself into the seat. We see his feet  
and the green box under the chair, labeled 31-A.

EXT. EARTH OBSERVATION AREA, DAY

-- A matching box labeled 31-B in the center of a large  
outdoor observation area (clearly Earth by the background)  
riddled with cameras and observers. They look at clocks and  
hold their breath.

INT. UNS CAVALIER, POD

BHAVINI  
And we will release the entangled  
containment...

Indicator lights on box 31-A under Alfonse's chair flicker

with increasing speed...

BHAVINI

And Box A and Box B will no longer  
be held back. Inside the boxes,  
their entangled hearts, yearning  
to be together.

Cut from Box 31-A to Box 31-B, identical twins.

ALFONSE

They're meant to be together.

INT. UNS CAVALIER, POD

-- Alfonse in the pod chair opens his mouth to say  
something at the final moment as the pod brightens, washing  
him out. Before he speaks...

BHAVINI

Entangled forever by forces they  
can't hold back.

EXT. EARTH OBSERVATION AREA, DAY

-- The observation room with Box 31-B flashes with bright  
light as observers gasp in astonishment and all is obscured  
in a white FLASH--

BACK TO UNS CAVALIER, MISSION BAY

Alfonse and Bhavini are close now. Bhavini's bright eyes  
are watering. Inches separate them.

BHAVINI

We're prepared.

ALFONSE

I'm not ready to go. Are you?

BHAVINI

Worry about it after.

ALFONSE

You say that every night.

BHAVINI

My brave Alfonse. The first FTL  
traveler, jumping from Mars all  
the way back to Earth.

ALFONSE

Alone.

BHAVINI

Yes. Alone.

ALFONSE

It could be years before the next mission out here. How do I know they'll even assign me to that crew? How do I--

She moves even closer to him. Their faces almost touch.

BHAVINI

You'll be famous. Use it. Demand that next flight to the Mars colony. I'll wait for you. Come back to me. They can't refuse you.

ALFONSE

(scoffing)

Right.

She kisses him.

During the prolonged kiss, we switch to a low-fidelity camera view. All is observed by the mission bay cameras.

Outside Alfonse's view - but not ours - Bhavini slips a folded piece of paper into a pocket of Alfonse's jumpsuit.

EXT. SPACE, OUTSIDE UNS CAVALIER

A bulky gray spaceship, so small compared to MARS looming in the background. One end of the ship is a round ball - the POD.

Clamps release and the explosive bolts pop in sequence like teeth on a zipper, parting. All of this happens SILENTLY in space.

Small thrusters nudge the pod away from the ship in controlled bursts.

INT. UNS CAVALIER, POD

Alfonse stares straight ahead. He winces with each gentle burst of the thrusters.

Bhavini monitors a panel, watching an indication of the pod's position on a computer screen.

EXT. SPACE, OUTSIDE UNS CAVALIER

Thrusters on the opposite side fire to stop the pod at a safe distance from the rest of the ship.

A sequence matching the earlier montage.

--Lights on the "31-A" box flicker with increasing speed.

--Lights on the "31-B" box on Earth do the same.

--The observers on Earth visibly tense with anticipation.

--Alfonse's eyes widen.

--Bhavini chokes back her emotion as she looks sidelong towards the pod. Her neck quivers as she swallows hard.

--Light in the pod intensifies to a whiteout as Alfonse opens his mouth in a silent scream...

EXT. OBSERVATION AREA, DAY

The whiteout fades, giving way to intense lights flashing like paparazzi taking hundreds of photographs. As the lights die down we can see the tiny UNS Cavalier pod, perfectly centered in the arena-like space.

Alfonse emerges from the pod hatch to the ecstatic celebration of the observers. Photographers, journalists, and officials scream and embrace each other with tears of joy.

Technicians wearing contamination suits converge on the lonely pod in the center of all attention. They scan with RADIATION DETECTORS as they walk forward to support him. Alfonse is dumbstruck, then collapses in sobs.

INT. UNS LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Alfonse looks down in surprise at a folded piece of paper - the one Bhavini slipped into his jumpsuit.

A passing astronaut in a jumpsuit claps a hand on his shoulder. Alfonse hides the folded paper and manages a fake smile.

Alfonse returns to reading.

INT. UNS CAVALIER, MISSION BAY

Bhavini (52) moves a wisp of gray hair away from her eyes.

She looks silently through the observation window. MARS looms large, but she looks elsewhere - towards Earth.

She puts her hand to the window.

BHAVINI (V.O.)  
"Though seas and land betwixt us  
both, / Our faith and troth, /  
Like separated souls, / All time  
and space controls."

INT. UNS OFFICES - DAY

We move through an office hallway, passing large framed photographs of UNS administrators. One of these is Alfonse wearing a suit and tie... and a weak smile.

INT. ALFONSE'S OFFICE - DAY

An expensive but cluttered varnished desk. A sign on the desk says "UNS VICE ADMINISTRATOR."

Alfonse (48) stands at the window and brushes a hand through his receded hairline. He looks up across the beautiful spring day and cityscape to a point of nothing in the sky - towards Mars.

BHAVINI (V.O.)  
"Above the highest sphere we meet  
/ Unseen, unknown, and greet as  
Angels greet."

Alfonse puts his hand to the glass.

FADE OUT.