

HEAD RUSH

an animated film by T. L. Ouzts



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...headrush...

Rainbow graphics highlight the cargo shuttle's metallic skin as it glides silently through the vast emptiness of inner space; its twin occupants anxiously homeward bound with a routine haul from the pharmaceutical plantations of the Bristol-Meyers system. The pilot of the craft felt obligated to relieve the boredom:

"Feel like pluggin' a dreamer? We've got a long ways to go."

"Are you crazy?!" replied his somewhat startled co-pilot in a static-hindered voice, "We could lose our license! You know every molecule of this shit's inventoried."

"Made my own deal with one of the Drones. Scored twelve vials. No one'll know," insisted the pilot.

"It does sound tempting, but... out HERE? in the middle of NOWHERE?!" He paused briefly to evaluate the possibilities of such an excursion, and then acquiescently, "All right, you drug-gie. Let's go for it. But make DAMN sure this ship's on compu-lock! I'd like to make it home."

With that, the two astronauts attached the two tiny canisters to their respective life-support systems.

* * *

The space shuttle continued on its journey, now the instru-

ment of a euphoric, intergalactic joyride, engaged in wandering maneuvers while its mindless parasites seethed with delirium. What was to come lasted for an immeasurable period of time, assuming, of course, the relevancy of such a concept.

The stars faded from view. The confused co-pilot conjectured the possibility of a black hole, but was informed that such a phenomenon did not exist in this quadrant. Then a distant sphere materialized in the darkness.

"What the hell?!" blurted the co-pilot, "We're off course!"

"Impossible," the pilot assured, "It doesn't register on sensors. Just a hallucina-" The craft lurched suddenly toward the planetoid as if yanked by an invisible leash, now on a collision course with the unknown.

"Tractor beam. Get a vector on the source," ordered the pilot, "Gonna try to break free."

The ominous planetoid drew the ship closer and closer, as its three powerful engines screamed in agony as they exceeded redline in the futile attempt to escape.

A short pause, a bleep of instrumentation, and the co-pilot's adrenalin-pumped voice, "I've got the coordinates, but I can't identify the energy type!"

"No use. Disengage engines, or we'll burn out. Transmitting distress sequence and ship's log," said the pilot, "We're coming down."

Moments later, the shuttle entered the planetoid's acidic atmosphere, and somehow managed to survive a reasonably smooth

crash-landing on the abrasive surface.

The hatch opened hydraulically, and the ill-fated astronauts climbed out to scope their imposing environment. Nothing but sand stretched to the horizons, and a light mist clung low to the ground. The surface seemed to generate a strange, but appreciated phosphorescence, while the pitch-black sky remained uncomfortably starless, the thought of which was bone-chilling.

"I can't EVEN believe this, man!" exclaimed the distraught co-pilot.

"Well... we're here. And we will be until we find that power source and get some answers, so I suggest we get moving. What direction did you last compute?"

Motioning to the horizon, "That way... about twenty or thirty kilometers. I - I'd better stay here and guard the ship, right?"

"Wrong. Let's go."

Clad in graphically opposite black and white pressure suits, and helmets with mirrorized face shields, the two lost souls set out on foot to find their destiny, while producing a steady stream of footprints in the cold sand. Tempers grew as short as the distance had grown long. The co-pilot continued his babblings of how insane their current predicament was, and so irritated the pilot that he was ordered to lead a few paces ahead. He felt an insuppressible wave of rage and fear, and shortly after, it struck.

The huge human hand exploded silently from beneath the sand, engulfed the helpless pilot, and returned to the depths of the

granular ocean it came from. Hearing the muffled scream, the co-pilot spun around just in time to see the empty space his "leader" had occupied a split second before. All he saw was the double trail of footprints dotting their path, but now there were only his own. There was no sign of a disturbance.

After a brief investigation, and convinced that the pilot had indeed disappeared, the lone astronaut felt the necessity to resume his mission, and did so with extreme caution. He soon became completely unaware of the fact that his feet still propelled his body across the ground; he was a dis-embodied mind hovering aimlessly above the sand. A mind in search of something. But for WHAT? The lack of sensory input forced it to turn inward on itself, projecting obscure visions of perhaps its own memory, manifesting in vivid, nightmarish images. Anxiety...

He didn't know whether it subsided or intensified as he found himself staring at the link to his quest. It was a round, black metallic platform resting on a crystalline floor, and surrounded concentrically by ten symmetrical sand sculptures. He stood and stared, and finally dared to touch its smooth surface. What was its purpose? As if to answer his unvoiced question, another image appeared. It was that of the pilot, floating weightlessly above the platform. It remained visible for only a short time. In fact just enough time to utter three words in a distant, echoing voice:

"I... don't... KNOW... ", and it was gone.

The co-pilot lept onto the platform and grabbed two handfuls

of nothing. He then became aware of the surrounding sculptures rising in unison from the sand, forming a decagonal chamber which was to hold him captive. As they locked into place, a brilliant white light illuminated the translucent floor. Escape was hopeless, but he was used to it by now.

Nothing happened for what seemed like an eternity. Perhaps it was his move? After succeeding in controlling his pounding pulse, he cautiously slid down the smoothly beveled edge, and his feet touched the hard floor. It pulsed bright red, accompanied by a deep, thunderous sound. He watched as the platform slowly de-materialized, allowing an intense beam of light to escape from the orifice. Suddenly, it happened:

The gigantic transparent cylinder shot straight up from below the floor and locked into place, filling the central third of the chamber. The astronaut felt his spinal cord turn to liquid with terror. He gazed in awe at the oracle that loomed ominously above him, completely unaware that they were now actually one and the same; only physically distinct. The floor throbbed on as a heartbeat, certainly the only one that existed.

The luminous cylinder contained a translucent bluish fluid, through which a semi-bouyant green substance flowed, forming random globule patterns. Heat transfer caused the substance to rise and fall, producing the hypnotic effect that enveloped its spectator.

After perhaps a minute, the flow subsided, releasing the astronaut. He felt mentally drained, and staggered a moment before

adjusting his balance. Then to his amazement, it spoke to him. Its voice was deeply synthesized, but clearly enunciated.

"Your knowledge is mine," it said with authority. With each syllable, the globule patterns re-appeared in random sequences. "You, my friend, have many questions."

The astronaut had to muster up every last bit of courage to speak back, and finally managed to utter in a weak and trembling voice, "What the hell ARE you?!"

"I am all that you perceive; all levels of your conscious being. Your soul." The floor throbbed on.

"Where is my partner?" he demanded.

"He was weak, and allowed his most evil fears to become a reality," it informed.

"Why were we brought here?"

"Ah, but YOU have come of your own free will. You are special, and are here for a purpose: To explore and learn about yourself, and thus... life itself."

"WHAT GIVES YOU THE RI--"

"Enough," it interrupted, "You have made it this far, while so many others have failed. To turn back now is inexcusable."

"NO!" the defiant astronaut screamed.

"Yes... Now, enter a tangent dimension of your imagination, and experience your creative potential..."

A mirror appeared on one of the ten walls, covering the entire surface between the vertical beams as large as the oracle. It began to jump from wall to wall in random order, slowly at

first, and increased in velocity while a whining, piercing sound heightened in pitch. The effect was becoming unbearable, and the confused astronaut finally pleaded, "STOP!". And stop it did. The mirror held its place as one wall, as the noise climaxed in a crescendo of thunder. The pioneer felt his body and mind flow through the mirror like a lightning bolt through a time warp.

He had been reflected into a world of glistening metallic crystals, and plush, black velvet surroundings. But he was not alone, for now he was in the presence of an alien, but wondrous device. The Synthitar, as he would eventually describe it, was a sleek musical instrument of sorts, but played in a very unconventional manner as he soon discovered. He slipped into the cordless headset, and respectfully cradled the black sound-box both by the handle and the slender neck. The astronaut marveled at its simplicity as the instrument translated his very brain-waves into pure musical ecstasy, and with delicate precision. He was composing and realizing passages to reality he had never dreamed existed, as he found a brilliant extension of self-expression and satisfaction. The sheer beauty of the music was elevating him to new heights of consciousness; one moment he was soaring blue skys with majestic birds of prey, the next he was on fire, and his music was the key to the threshold of existence. It was art... And he loved it passionately. Emotion...

He opened his eyes to see what was invading the sanctity of his ego-trip. He had long since forgotten about the oracle's

presence, and to be reminded made him uneasy for reasons he did not quite understand.

"You have done well, my friend," it commended. "But now it is time to move on. Many such lessons await you, and life is urgently short."

The astronaut paused to collect his thoughts. What few he had left.

"I must have this," he demanded, referring to the Synthitar he grasped protectively in both hands. His voice was toned with desperation.

"It is not possible to possess the intangible, for the Synthitar does not yet exist," the oracle decreed. "Come now. You must not keep Master waiting!"

The term "MASTER" echoed painfully through the astronaut's mind, triggering a reaction so violent that his blood boiled, and without giving it a second thought, or a first for that matter, he instinctively took aim with the Synthitar and unleashed the intensity of his rage: A blinding blast of laser energy ignited the vacuum directly between the weapon's barrel and the oracle, disintegrating the one-way mirror that obstructed the target.

He turned and ran into his crystal-and-velvet fantasy realm, and eventually made his way onto the familiar terrain of the planetoid's surface. He had not heard the oracle's forewarning of, "You will not like what you find." Nor did he much care. With his sacred Synthitar in hand, he tore across the sand backtrack-

ing his way to the crippled cargo shuttle. Where else could he run to? The refugee passed all of his previous hallucinations in succession, as perhaps they remained permanently engraved in the memory of the planetoid's atmosphere. But now they seemed to take on confusing, twisted, and frightening new meanings as they came to life to confront him. Emotional Anxiety...

The now survivor had spent his last provision of strength, when he crawled atop the last sand dune that blocked his view of the ship. Somewhat relieved, he collapsed for a moment to reflect on his insane situation. What to do now? His efforts to decide were all in vain, as he realized when he lifted his head. He watched with gut-wrenching terror as the ship's hull simply melted away, revealing its skeletal frame while its internal organs continued to pump blood, breathe air, and stink. He felt the urge to puke violently, saved only by the fact that he was still wearing his helmet. The heartbeat stopped, the lungs collapsed, and the innards dried up, leaving the dry bones of the astronaut's last hope.

The astronaut found himself back in the chamber, but he did not care. The heartbeat emanating from below the floor was very slow, and very weak.

"What IS it that you want from me?" asked the astronaut in a solemn voice.

The oracle waited indefinitely, and then answered, "Nothing

more than true companionship... A virtue that this entity has been deprived of for two milleniums. I have been oh so lonely, and you were yet another bright star of hope..." It seemed to actually be sobbing, and the astronaut was speechless. "...in my dark sky of solitude. Your instinct for independence and freedom of expression is a much valued human quality, and you will always do well by it."

"But, I--"

"Shh... my friend," it softly whispered, "All has been said. Now it is time for you to leave..."

The oracle faded away, and the astronaut jumped atop the platform, remaining reverantly silent. So many thoughts. He felt the force of negative gravity as he was lifted up out of the chamber, and into the darkness. He watched with deep remorse as the planetoid faded in his gyroscopic wake, now traveling through the universal dimensions of time and space at untold speed toward the pinpoint of light that would eventually take the recognizeable form of the cargo shuttle. He was overwhelmed with mixed emotion as he rapidly approached the craft; his anticipation to tell the pilot of his excursion heightened.

Everything was going to be all right...

Something was wrong. Dead wrong! The astronaut was not slowing down! Why, he might even have been splattered on the side of the moving ship like an insect on a windshield. But instead he passed over the cockpit window just close enough to distinguish the black silhouette of his Former Pilot, strapped safely in his seat. And yes, he did seem to be waving and laughing insanely as the two projectiles veered off in opposite directions.

Well, it didn't take him long to figure the whole thing out, and by the time he did, he was witness to the grandest insight of all! His home planet of Earth was coming into view now, and he felt better than ever as it quickly filled his entire field of vision. He entered its cool layer of life-supportive gases and graciously allowed the moist, white clouds to bathe him clean. The omni-skydiver saw the familiar outline of the California coast and angled his descent with transcendental accuracy. By now, he recognized the various landmarks he'd grown up amidst, and right on target was... home. He crashed painlessly through the red tile roof and the second floor, and came to a restful stop on a welcome bed and pillow.

The dormant planetoid suddenly snapped its position in space and spun a full 180 degrees on its axis, revealing a human eyeball socketed in its unexplored hemisphere while the alarm clock buzzed incessantly on. The Man, known to his generation only as 520-88-2664, awoke to see the dawn of yet another beautiful day...

Life.

