

## Unsweet Perdition

---

A full-length play

By Evan Spreen

### Contact:

Evan Spreen  
Espreen@gmail.com  
682-256-8230  
4322 Normal Ave.  
Los Angeles, CA  
90029

### **Synopsis:**

Astrid shows up for her first day of work at the Danbury Hydroelectric Power and Treatment facility. What follows is a descent into madness. Astrid meets the strange folks who work at the Dam. They take her on a journey that culminates in a trip all the way to oblivion.

Unsweet Perdition is an abstract science fiction play in two acts. The action takes place in a vast complex which is very much a character in this piece. This play is written in the genre of the “New Weird” and draws its influence from works such as Annihilation, SCP Foundation, Control, House of Leaves, Patriot (2015), and the X-Files. It aims to create an augmented reality piece where the character’s dreams, presence, and true motivations are visible on a heightened scale.

### **Author Bio:**

Evan Spreen is a playwright based in Albuquerque and Los Angeles. His work has been performed in the US, Europe, Japan, and Australia. Recently, his play Amelia? was part of PEP Productions Best of 2020 festival in Orange County, NY. His one-act Lost Oceans was selected as Best of Festival at Know Theater’s 2022 festival in Binghamton, NY. His horror play The Vast and Unknowable Oven was performed at Kent School in Connecticut in 2023. In New Mexico, his play Decision Makers was part of the New Mexico Seven 2023 at the Fusion Theater company. He enjoys writing Sci-Fi and Horror the most. Plunging into the uncanny depths of alternate dimensions and strange worlds one play at a time. Evan is a proud member of the Dramatists Guild of America.

**Characters:** 3M3F (Ethnicity is completely open.)  
 ((Diverse casting is super encouraged.))

**Astrid Kelvin:** F (early 20's) Recent graduate. New hire. Water treatment solutions. Likes 80's synth instrumental and Japanese jazz.

**Mike Broom:** M (30's) General labor. A kind man. Someone who doesn't do drugs but is somehow stoned anyway. Likes the slow Simon and Garfunkle ballads.

**Dr. Paul Morgan:** M (50's) Lead Hydrologist. Attuned to a different frequency. 30 years of service to the Dam. Likes exactly three Elton John songs.

**Julia Steinberg:** F (late 30's) Environmental Biologist. Avid Birdwatcher. No relation to facility. Enjoys fruit leather and X-files reruns. A fan of They Might Be Giants.

**Erin Reynolds:** F (early 40's) Dam supervisor. Creases her jeans. Military background. Doesn't listen to music often but when she does it's probably James Taylor.

**Adrian Caligos:** M. (late 40's) Jaded FBI agent. Wears sunglasses at night. Mentally and physically wounded, but still thinks he's the main character. Listens to the B-side of ELO.

**Note:** Caligos's role should be titled only as "Inspector" in all programs and audience side information.

**Setting:**  
 Northwest Danbury Hydroelectric Power Facility.  
 April 2024.

**NOTE:**  
 I don't know how a hydroelectric power plant works because that's not the point of this play. However, if I should figure it out halfway through writing this, any reflection of that spontaneous clarity should be interpreted as such.

**Location List:**

## ACT ONE

Sc 1. Unsweet Perdition	Dam Interior	Astrid, <b>Mike</b> , Dr. Paul
Sc 2. Junelings	Dam Exterior	<b>Julia</b> , Erin
Sc. 3. Tasteless Memories	Dam Interior	<b>Mike</b> , Astrid
Sc. 4. The Caligos Incident	Dam Interior	Erin, <b>Dr. Paul</b>
Sc. 5. Malgo's Mansion	Dam Exterior	Astrid, <b>Julia</b>
Sc. 6. Dirtfart, CT	Dam Interior	<b>Caligos</b> , Dr. Paul

## ACT TWO

Sc. 1. Mamma Rambo	Dam Interior	<b>Dr. Paul</b> , Erin
Sc. 2. Skittles and Brutalism	Dam Interior	Astrid, <b>Julia</b> , Mike
Sc. 3 Sub-level X	Dam Abyss	Dr. Paul, <b>Erin</b>
Sc. 4 The Ampresand Conjecture	Dam Abyss	<b>Caligos</b>
Sc. 5 Puppy Breath Eulogies	Dam Abyss	<b>ALL</b>
Sc. 6 Cormorant Gate	Dam Center	<b>Astrid</b> , Julia

**ACT 1 SC 1 - UNSWEET PERDITION**

LIGHTS UP on the Northwest Danbury Hydroelectric Power Complex and Dam. Two workers, MIKE and ASTRID enter.

ASTRID

Nice truck, by the way.

MIKE

Hey, thanks! Just finished paying it off.

I feel at peace when I'm behind the wheel. Not only does it convey me to my destination whilst proudly declaring my manhood, but that 2007 Dodge Ram 1500 out there gets me as close as I'll ever come to true enlightenment. Like I could sail over the horizon, park on a cloud, step out, and shake God's hand while the engine idles and the door goes bing bing bing. Does that make sense to you?

When I top out around 120, my cerebellum rapidly contracts before it expands and my vanilla mindscape suddenly blossoms, chocolate, strawberry, and banana. It stretches as infinite as the road before me.

I exit the 510 loop and merge onto US Interstate 95 South. I don't turn on the radio. Why would I need to? The music is all around me. The asphalt gods of the interstate howl and demand supplication. Bursting with reverence, I roll down the windows in tribute.

What that comes rushing in. Can I hear something in it? A whisper of something more? I am overcome with possibility. Something is coming. Something benevolent. Something that cares what happens to me. Something that loves me.

Picture a bubble. A warm soap bubble. Floating innocently at the edge of the bathtub. Encapsulated within is my everso-fragile masculinity. Don't get me wrong, it's an aggressive and powerful bubble. A bubble that says "Screw you everybody". But it's floating away, and I'm not in that bubble. Where am I? I'm still in the tub because someone has thrown a turn-of-the-century rope-fishing net over me. "Help! Help!" I cry. "My bubble bath has become an ocean!" But no one comes to my aid. I am at the mercy of three crusty old fishermen peering down at me with sunken eyes full of terrible secrets and little concern for the plight of one small, powerless fish plucked from an endless bubbling ocean.

Distant thunder. My savior springs from the depths, a great Ram bearing the long and powerful tail of a sea creature.

With spiral nautilus horns, he crashes into their fishing vessel, and one by one, the three ghouls sink into the murky blackness below.

He scoops me up like a child and holds me close to his wet and shaggy goat chest. My fingers splay out, trying to feel all of him. He lowers his head to me, I fall into those ebony rectangles, I tumble through the dead space between stars. Toward an answer.

You know?

ASTRID

Yeah.

MIKE

Tell me, friend, do you have something that makes you feel such contentment? Something that rushes deeply inside your consciousness and bubbles it all the way up to the fill line?

ASTRID

I'm not sure.

MIKE

Well, it is imperative that you find it. Do you like the color?

ASTRID

The color of what? Your truck?

MIKE

Yes.

ASTRID

It's orange?

MIKE

Burnt Sienna. I can almost taste it. It tastes like the tiny freedom you keep stuffed away in your most secret heart place.

ASTRID

(beat) I'm Astrid.

MIKE

Mike. Nice to meet you.

ASTRID

At this moment, I feel I am out of my element.

MIKE

First day? Bet you feel like a critter come straight out of the primordial soup.

ASTRID

I suppose so.

MIKE

Soon these halls shall become as familiar as your own skin.

Astrid glances at her own skin.

ASTRID

Okay.

MIKE

Mark this day as passage into a new state of being.

Mike exits. DR. PAUL enters wearing a lab coat and hard hat. He looks Astrid up and down.

DR. PAUL

You will need the equipment. Don't follow me.

Paul exits and returns with hard hat for Astrid.

DR. PAUL

Now you may follow.

He leads her across the stage. The sound of rushing water intensifies.

DR. PAUL

Astrid Kelvin, Welcome to the DHP. I'm Doctor Paul Morgan. Lead Hydrologist. You are currently standing on the Main floor of the Primary Re-uptake Reservoir and Hydraulic Floodgate Control Center. Look around you. This is what we do. You will be expected to do the same. I don't expect much at first. Improvement will be slow. I assume you can read?

ASTRID

Yes. I can read.

DR. PAUL

But can you properly infer the micro-fluctuations within the PH levels? Are you fluent in neo-salinity and what it means in the greater scope of the water palette?

ASTRID

(beat) Yes. Of course.

DR. PAUL

You will be required to check the PH at current regulatory intervals as mandated by the State. There are several indicators of standard decimal equilibrium in the logarithmic acid concentration scale measuring base ion conductivity. The first can be calculated in your head or by use of a reflexive thermodynamic spectrophotometer. Once you have the artificial fluoride count, you can move on to the unified absolute aqueous value which is not affected by any deviation of the Neurston nucleation slope. Volatility is measured by a conventional pro-alkaline inhibitor index and can be adjusted by potentiometric titration. In addition, it is your duty to note any fluctuation in the hydropower output ratio as a result of ongoing treatment measures. You'll need to adjust your formulae for the induction loss that occurs regularly from spillway seepage. A phenomenon that is common with fixed-crest dams as well as arch-gravity dams such as this one.

ASTRID

Where does that door lead?

DR. PAUL

Outside.

ASTRID

Okay.

Dr. Paul gets close and conspiratorial.

DR. PAUL

Listen carefully. I have seen many come and go during my tenure as lead hydrologist of this facility. There have been those whose minds wander from hydroelectricity and aquaculture to ... darker places. We must remember that the hydroelectric pulse is the sacred lifeblood of the Dam, to stray from it would be most perilous. That is the reality of our carbon cycle.

(Beat. Less conspiratorial.) There will be an inspector arriving soon. As early as three hours from now. We are all subject to this inspection. I expect you to conduct yourself in the same manner as the most senior among us. If you find yourself unable to function in this capacity, see me at once. When in doubt, ask yourself: Is this soluble? Am I soluble? Where am I? Someone, please help me.



Exit Paul in a great hurry.

ASTRID

Is this soluble? Am I soluble? Where am I? Someone, please help me.

BLACKOUT

**ACT 1 SC 2 - JUNELINGS**

LIGHTS UP. ERIN and JULIA stand on the edge of the dam. Julia holds a pair of binoculars and passes them briefly to Erin. We hear the occasional pip of nearby birds.

JULIA

There they are.

ERIN

Birds.

JULIA

Not just any birds. Renbocker Junelings. *Sacra Stellatica*. So exceptionally endangered you can tell it just by looking at them. Thought to be entirely extinct for much of the 20th century. Rediscovered in the 90's by Ornithologist R.F. Peterson, known amongst birdfellows as "The mad birdwatcher" on one of his final drug-fueled treks across North America. Peterson, brimming with unbridled enthusiasm and peyote sweats; wrote the following concerning the return of the Renbocker Juneling: "Simple bird. I see you. Can see me? Hello?" Naturally, many thought this rediscovery was just a hallucination.

But, in a letter to his ex-wife Ruby Eleanor Peterson, he was notably more eloquent: "They were here all along. We thought they left us. As if they flew through the elusive Cormorant Gate. And yet here they are. Please don't leave me again. I doubt my heart could take it this time."

ERIN

Cormorant Gate?

JULIA

A myth. An urban legend. A door to an alternate dimension outside of time and space full of seagulls and other oceanic birds that flew through a tear in reality somewhere around the Bermuda Triangle. There are rumors that Peterson eventually found it. His career ended under mysterious circumstances.

I like to picture him on a raft in the middle of an endless otherworldly ocean, floating above the wreckage of barnacled airplanes, jotting down notes on the variation in wingspan as it pertains to environments within pocket dimensions.

ERIN

Sounds like he got where he was going.

JULIA

That's the rumor.

ERIN

How long will you be with us, Julia?

JULIA

I would very much enjoy a full month of observation. The University has given me three months, should I need them. Are we in the National park here? What is the zoning like?

ERIN

No. We exist outside of the park. Industrial class 113 intermediary land. That's why the birds presented us with such a conundrum. They are not under the park's purview. They nest within the dam and block ventilation systems. We originally campaigned for their immediate removal. The state gave us a waiting period. Then they sent a team of experts to remove and relocate the birds, that's when they discovered that these are what they referred to as "special".

JULIA

They are incredibly special.

ERIN

And then they sent you. When can we expect a decision?

JULIA

A decision?

ERIN

Concerning the removal of the wildlife from the Dam.

JULIA

Remove the dam and leave the birds.

ERIN

(dour)

I'll get right on that.

JULIA

It seems we are at an impasse. I will observe them and report any indicators that they will leave the dam by their own means. If they should vacate, it will become possible to refit the ventilation in question, leaving the Junelings far more likely to nest in the surrounding vegetation.

ERIN

That's a sit down and wait. Got it. A reminder: Please restrict your activity to the outer dam and labeled observation platforms. You do not have the necessary permissions to enter the hydroelectric facility or surrounding DHP campus at this time.

JULIA

I will do my best to stay out of the way, Ms. Reynolds. I'll try to convince the Junelings to do the same. But I doubt they will listen.

ERIN

I sincerely hope they do.

Erin exits. Julia looks through the binoculars.

JULIA

So much for a relaxing birdwatching trip. Should've known.

You guys are still awesome though. Wow. There's so many of you. I mean, don't get excited you're still endangered. (beat) What brought you to this place? Weren't you happy enough being extinct? Why come back now? Were the Dodos bad company? I bet they were. Big fat turkey penguins.

Plenty of the mad watcher's finds ended up being strange visitors from the nowhere in his head. Ruby-throated Kingfisher, Northern Shag Owl, Cornsucker water hen. All from the genus *nonsensica*. But you're not a hallucination at all. Maybe we should double-check the Shag Owls.

Personally, I think you're the coolest birds this side of the Archaeopteryx. No, it's true. I wouldn't say it if it wasn't. I'm so glad you guys are real.

Julia takes a photograph.

JULIA

There. That's the first non-blurry picture since 1910. Welcome back to earth I guess. As far as Wikipedia is concerned. I'm sure there's been no great change from your perspective. If only you knew.

Julia takes notes in a small leather book.

JULIA

Flashes of color. Swooping down, then climbing back up. Blue. Yellow. Blue. It's like a subtle key change. There it is again. Into a seventh with no resolution. Angelic.

Wingspan: approximately 13 inches. Three to four tail streamers based on sex. Yellow tips on wings and streamers. Blue velvet hood on males. Glossy with age. I bet you roost communally. That's why you're swarming these holes in the dam. No, that can't be right. That's entirely against your taxonomy. You'd have to be solitary nesters. Why are you staying so close to the dam then?

We hear the pip pip pip of a shrill alarm call.  
Something has startled the birds.

JULIA

What is it? What startled you? Is there something out there? I don't see any predators. What was it?

Beat.

JULIA

(low)

There's a reason you chose this place. There's something here isn't there?

Julia squints over the edge of the dam. She's dangerously close to the edge.

JULIA

The concrete is strange. Almost like it has an aura. If I unfocus my eyes I can almost see movement there. A strange undulation. Like the dam is drawing breath. (beat) No. No. No. I just got spooked. You guys got spooked, then I got spooked. It's fine. I'm fine.

Julia steps away from the edge and composes herself.

JULIA

What the fuck is wrong with this place?

BLACKOUT

**ACT 1 SC 3 - TASTELESS MEMORIES**

LIGHTS UP. Astrid is dipping equipment off the edge of the stage. She retracts it and writes down the results. She is getting frustrated. She has several binders and manuals on the ground next to her, trying to cross-reference the data to somehow be able to “read” the PH levels. Mike enters carrying a large bottle of water.

MIKE

Hey. How’s it going?

ASTRID  
(not looking up)

Hi.

MIKE

(beat) That bad, huh?

ASTRID  
(looking up)

I can’t do this. I can’t read the PH.

MIKE

You’re trying too hard. You can’t force it.

ASTRID

What?

MIKE

Here. Try some of this.

He hands her the bottle. She drinks.

MIKE

Well?

ASTRID

Well what?

MIKE

What do you think?

ASTRID  
It's water.

MIKE  
(Disappointed)  
Oh.

ASTRID  
What?

MIKE  
Nothing.

ASTRID  
No, what? What is it?

MIKE  
You're right. It's water.

ASTRID  
It tastes fine.

MIKE  
Fine?

ASTRID  
Yes!

MIKE  
Okay.

ASTRID  
What was I supposed to say?

MIKE  
Nothing.

ASTRID  
What was in it? Did you poison me?

MIKE  
Did I poison you??

ASTRID

Sorry.

MIKE

You can't just throw the word poison around. We're in a water treatment facility. Anyhow, why would I do that to you? Do you think me so deranged?

ASTRID

No, that's not it.

MIKE

It's not poison.

ASTRID

I just don't know what kind of water it is!

MIKE

I know you don't know. I haven't told you yet.

ASTRID  
(between gritted teeth)

Well, tell me then.

MIKE

It's special water.

ASTRID

Okay. Why?

MIKE

It's been filtered.

ASTRID

It's filtered water.

MIKE

Yes.

ASTRID

What's so special about that?

MIKE

It's been filtered. And filtered. And filtered. And filtered. And filtered. And filtered. And--

ASTRID

I get it.

MIKE

I ran it through the filter 347 times. And then you drank it.

ASTRID

I did.

MIKE

Did it taste filtered?

ASTRID

I don't know water doesn't really have a taste.

MIKE

(stunned)

Doesn't have a taste. Everything has a taste. A taste like a memory.

ASTRID

Huh?

Mike drinks some water. He sits next to Astrid.

MIKE

It tastes like the morning before my high school graduation. I celebrated prematurely the night before and woke up next to a pond clutching an empty bottle of jalapeño-flavored vodka.

ASTRID

Jalapeño?

MIKE

Now, don't get me wrong. I know this water doesn't taste spicy. It tastes like the bit of the memory that comes at the end of this memory. Just hold on a minute. (beat) I woke up and had the slow, terrifying realization that I had to give a speech at the graduation ceremony in twelve hours and hadn't memorized it yet.

Another startling realization: I swam completely naked in the pond the night before. A very public pond in a nice neighborhood. Big fountain in the center. Real upscale fancy people neighborhood. I'd taken my clothes off and folded them neatly, but I guess I must've dipped in before that, because they were still very wet that morning. My friends: nowhere to be found. Dizzy memories coming in from distant stations. Howling at the moon. Finally accepting my werewolfian nature I guess. Denouncing the names of my friends one by one. Feeling hopeless. Unwanted.

But that was night before business. That wasn't now. Now was a choice. Do I memorize the speech, struggling to do so, gracelessly hungover?



Or do I show up clutching a square of paper that trembles in my hands in front of the entire graduating class? This isn't the taste, though. This is all pre-taste. But we're getting closer.

Then I'm walking back to the house. My friend's friend's house. We were there because my friend really really liked the girl who lived in this house. She wasn't graduating. She was a year younger and went to a completely different school. I hadn't wanted to go to her house, and in retrospect, I would have been better off spending that time as I wanted to rather than as he wanted to, but I liked that friend a lot. Or at least I thought I did. I think I had fooled myself into serving a friendship that didn't serve me at all.

So, sometime around midnight, I got bored and wandered listlessly off into a foggy suburban limbo, swigging from a bottle of jalapeño vodka. Which I then proceeded to drop on the concrete sidewalk as I walked back to my friend's friend's house the next morning. It shattered into a thousand glittering pieces. That's when I remembered the plea of my friend's friend from the night before: "You can have the rest of the jalapeño vodka, as long as you bring the bottle back."

I returned empty handed. I walk into her southwest ranch-style home, and I confess my terrible midnight indiscretions and the fate of the jalapeño-flavored vodka bottle. She just shrugs and says, "Oh well, that's okay."

And here's where the taste is. I went to sleep in the converted garage gameroom. Stinking of pond water, I threw off my clothes and covered myself with a scratchy southwestern style blanket. I thought I'd nab a little sleep and somehow be able to figure out my predicament with the graduation speech if I got my head back on the right way. I passed out immediately.

The next thing I know I'm waking up because my friend's friend's friends: two girls, a bit older than me, are standing in the doorway into the kitchen and looking at me and whispering. I sense that the scratchy southwestern style blanket has shifted as I slept. I don't let on that I'm awake. I keep my eyes shut. I make no move to pull the southwestern style blanket back up. I don't know how much is still covering me.

They're looking and whispering to each other. And one of them says two words that threw a wrench in the perception of myself that I'd had my entire life: "He's cute" she says in a whisper I can barely make out. Which was something I didn't know up to that point. And so many days after that, I continued not to know it. But in that moment, they took in my shame and decided I was okay. More than okay, desirable-adjacent. I think back and feel more intimate with those two than I think I've ever felt with anyone else. And I never ever even kissed either of them. Despite wanting to. (beat. softer) That's what it tastes like.

Astrid takes another sip of water.

ASTRID

(beat) It just tastes like water to me.

MIKE

I wonder what it will taste like after I filter it for the 348th time.

ASTRID

Yeah. (she nods a bunch) Be sure to let me know.

MIKE

Okay. (beat) You can keep that bottle. It's from a whole vat that gets filtered.

ASTRID

Thanks.

MIKE

No problem.

ASTRID

I'm not sure I know what to say now.

MIKE

Whatever you'd like I guess.

ASTRID

I don't know if I know how to be here.

MIKE

At the Danbury Dam facility?

ASTRID

Yes.

MIKE

Well that's an easy one. You're already doing it.

ASTRID

Do you know how to read PH?

MIKE

Gosh, no.

ASTRID

Shit.

MIKE

But you don't have to. You just have to feel it. Make your brain real quiet. So you can listen, and taste too.

ASTRID

But I don't taste anything. What if all my memories are all tasteless?

MIKE

That would be really sad.

Astrid takes another sip.

ASTRID

Nothing.

MIKE

On a scale of one to ten - how empty was your brain just then?

ASTRID

Ugh. Three.

MIKE

Gotta give me at least a seven.

Astrid takes a deep breath. Then a big sip.  
Disappointment.

ASTRID

Another tasteless memory.

MIKE

You'll get there, friend.

ASTRID

Hey, where does that door go?

MIKE

Outside.

BLACKOUT

**ACT 1 SC 4 - THE CALIGOS INCIDENT**

LIGHTS UP. Dr. Paul is center stage in a rolling office chair facing upstage. Erin enters. He spins to greet her.

ERIN

The birdwatcher says she'll be here for a month.

DR. PAUL

She won't last that long.

ERIN

Her frequency indicates that she is amenable.

She approaches him and walks alongside him, while he scoots along in the chair.

DR. PAUL

There's nothing to be done for her at this moment. We have bigger problems. The stringent R index has skyrocketed in the last 3 hours. Inspection is imminent. We must prepare for the ramifications of end-use. Can we begin phase separation in 40 minutes?

ERIN

I don't see how that would be possible. We're seeing a great deal of coagulation within the SPT unit. Very little sedimentation overall. Effluent disposal is rendered nonviable as a result of reduced volume. Corrosion may be an inevitable side effect.

DR. PAUL

Can we commence induced air flotation?

ERIN

Not without risk of explosion. The distribution rods can't take it.

DR. PAUL

Then we need an immediate flocculant introduced at the nucleation barrier.

ERIN

Already done. It has scarcely made a difference. Tank 4 is turbid. Tank 7 seems to be set on a repeating filtration cycle, though I'm not sure why. Tanks 9, 2 and 37 are diffusing as normal. The rest are in varying degrees of petrochimerical decay.

DR. PAUL

How many monitors on site?

ERIN

We have a team of four in double shifts.

DR. PAUL

That won't nearly be enough.

ERIN

Then I will need to be less selective with personnel.

DR. PAUL

Use the new hire. I'm sure she's acclimated by now.

ERIN

It can take weeks for someone to shift frequencies.

DR. PAUL

Then she'll have to get there on her feet. With imminent inspection, I don't believe we have much of a choice.

ERIN

Understood. I will assign her immediately.

DR. PAUL

But keep an eye on her. Should she begin to show signs of forward synaptic manifestation, we will have to isolate.

ERIN

And the birdwatcher? She mentioned the Cormorant Gate.

DR. PAUL

Then she must operate on a parallel frequency. Anyone who studies the migration patterns of the rare Renbocker Juneling would have to. (beat) The Dam will decide. Do you trust in the Dam, Ms. Reynolds?

ERIN

Explicitly. But if there is a manifestation event, this close to an inspection--

DR. PAUL

The last event was before your time. Twenty years ago.

ERIN

I know, but if what I've heard is true--

DR. PAUL

What have you heard?

ERIN

Only the case number. And reports of the aftermath.

Sound of rushing water intensifies.

DR. PAUL

Case number: 456-32C. The Caligos incident. Adrian Caligos. 27 years of age. A junior dam technician. Low thalamocortical sensitivity. Not considered an integration risk. Described as having a somewhat scattered, yet otherwise stable psychological nature. I didn't know him formally. I was too busy climbing the DHP ladder under Hydrologist Matthews at the time. But I do remember all the inter-departmental memos.

Caligos had ideas. Ideas about the dam. Ideas that didn't sit well with those above him. He had theories on formation, purpose, intent, and possible communication.

These theories covered everything from the potential of liminal hydrostasis to substructure isolation and what the arch-gravity well truly contains. He went on and on about the hyper-agoric branch divide and how to solve it. As if no mind greater than his had ever tackled such a problem.

He had to be gently reminded time and time again that his primary function within the Dam was one of infrastructure repair and general maintenance. But that didn't stop him. He just stopped sending memos about it.

One day he woke up convinced the Dam was speaking to him. He thought the resonant ambient frequency was meant for him and him alone. Thought something 'down there' was reaching up to him. He was chosen. The rest of us were lackadaisical acolytes attending arbitrary paths of indifference to the truth he had suddenly realized.

Started wearing sunglasses inside. I remember that. Thought he looked like an idiot.

On the day of the event. You can see him on the security camera. As he boards the elevator. Bastard was smiling. He makes that stupid gesture. Finger gun. Right at the camera. With a wink for good measure. He knew what was coming. What he was about to unleash, but perhaps he didn't appreciate what the magnitude would be. A class seven event. I bet he had that stupid smile on his face all the way to the bottom. Still grinning as the water flowing through the Dam turned crimson.

Manifestation began approximately when Caligos reached sub-level 81. 9:26 AM. Interstitial amalgamation was slow. Nothing happened for the first 12 hours.

Nothing ever does. Then the mosquito manges started popping up. That's urban terminology for what we would typically refer to as an altered gravity event. On that day 74 people died from stepping directly into manges. How could they have known that the hallway in front of them contained hundreds of little pinprick spots of air with self-contained gravity fields 1,000 times the value of earth.

230 deaths as a result of shifting structures. The Dam rearranging itself into different formations. 24 were later found in particulate form within the reservoir and spillway. Another 100 were victims of slew-calcification directly into the concrete. 150 more boarded the lifts and descended blindly into the depths, never to return. Hydrologist Matthews himself was among that number.

Maybe I could've done something. I keep telling myself that. Although it makes little sense. I was on a conference team at the time. When we returned there was no one left. Save Caligos. Naked and screaming in the cafeteria. Covered in blood that was not his own. Begging for someone to kill him.

In exit interviews, Caligos had regained some composure, though he claimed that part of the dam was in his head now. And always would be.

ERIN

What happened to him?

DR. PAUL

Need to know and I didn't need to know. I hope he's locked up somewhere alone with his mistake for the rest of his life. (beat) Everything we do here is for the Dam, Ms. Reynolds. Don't ever forget that. After the Caligos incident, I became lead Hydrologist. There have been no manifestations under my watch and I intend to keep it that way.

ERIN

How?

DR. PAUL

Trust in the Dam.

BLACKOUT

**ACT 1 SC 5 - MALGO'S MANSION**

LIGHTS UP. Julia is seated in a fold-out chair on the dam exterior, taking a break from birdwatching. She is reading a dog-eared copy of Asimov's "The End of Eternity". Astrid enters and approaches cautiously. Astrid carries the bottle of memory water from Mike.

Hello?

ASTRID

Oh, hi!

JULIA

Awkward beat.

Can I help you?

JULIA

I don't know. I walked through the door. And now I'm outside.

ASTRID

I can see that.

JULIA

Do you work here too?

ASTRID

No. Well, sort of. For the moment I do. But I'm not allowed inside. Can you do me a favor and fill up my water bottle?

JULIA

Sure. I have some with me.

ASTRID

Astrid approaches and pours water from Mike's bottle into Julia's canteen.

What are you doing out here?

ASTRID

Birdwatching.

JULIA



ASTRID

Cool. Birds are cool.

JULIA

Yeah. They are.

ASTRID

What are you reading?

JULIA

Oh, some old sci-fi. End of Eternity. Asimov. It's his prequel to Foundation.

ASTRID

Cool. That's cool.

JULIA

Why do you look like you're about to turn tail and run? You're practically shaking.

ASTRID

I'm just having a rough first day.

JULIA

Got it. I don't envy you. The people who work here are mega weird. No offense.

ASTRID

They are so weird. **THEY ARE SO WEIRD.** There's this guy I met this morning who practically had an orgasm talking about his pickup truck. I don't even think he works here. He told me that seven years ago, he just started showing up because it's where his truck decided they should go, and apparently, they just started paying him. And my boss is 100% an extra-terrestrial.

JULIA

Reynolds? Erin Reynolds?

ASTRID

No. I don't think I've met her yet. Dr. Morgan is my boss.

JULIA

Hmmm. Well there's more than one alien working here then. That lady was intense.

ASTRID

Dr. Morgan keeps insisting I should be able to read PH levels. Like it's a language.

Julia takes a sip of water.

JULIA

WOAH. What the fuck was that? What did you put in this?

ASTRID

Shit. You can taste it too.

JULIA

Did you drug me? What's in it?

ASTRID

It's not toxic. I think. It's just water. Filtered water. It's been filtered over and over again.

JULIA

That doesn't explain what just happened.

ASTRID

What did it taste like?

JULIA

My third grade computer classroom.

ASTRID

Was jalapeño flavored vodka involved?

JULIA

Huh? No. I was nine. Who drinks jalapeño-flavored Vodka?

ASTRID

Never mind. What was the memory?

JULIA

Memory? Yeah. I guess it was a memory. It's hard to describe the taste. It's a clean taste. A cold taste. I haven't thought about that in years.

Julia smells the water cautiously and takes a small sip.

JULIA

It's like I'm there again. Mrs. Nesbit. She was so old that she didn't really know how to use a computer. She just had us play educational games for an hour. I remember getting lost in them. Some of them were scary. Not at first, but they became scary. That's the memory. The memory is that change.

As a little girl, I really loved halloween and spooky stuff. I was nuts about it.

I wanted to be a witch. Every Halloween, I was a witch. The games I would pick would reflect that. Even on a school computer they had a few lightly spooky games. Just silly spooky haunted house kinda stuff. Ghosts with big dumb smiles.

But there was a time when things stopped being silly spooky and transformed into real dread. When I think of that classroom. I know it happened there. I learned what fear was - staring at the screen of an old Macintosh.

On that day, an icon appeared on the desktop. A game I'd never seen before. It was called Malgo's Mansion.

It was an old pixel game. I'm sure if I saw it now, I would have no idea how I even got past the blocky graphics. The narrative was confusing. It made a strange mockery of reality. I've never been able to track down the game again. There's nothing online. Perhaps it doesn't exist and my nine-year-old brain just made the whole thing up.

It was a haunted house full of endless doorways you would click through. It makes me anxious even thinking about it. If you opened the wrong door you would have to close it quickly or a monster would come after you.

The hallways went on forever. Strange paintings on the walls. The sky outside is unnaturally black. The sense that someone is just beyond the next corner. A man with blue skin and a big smile. His name was Malgo. He knows how to abuse this reality. Knows how to hurt you with it. Begging you to consider that your own reality is false.

He played the role of the friendly mansion caretaker. But you could see that something strange lurked beneath this smile. Something malicious. Hateful. Abusive.

I think about that game and wonder what kind of messed up people put that together. Someone made a bad dream come to life.

After that change, I was a wreck. Maybe I had internalized some sort of trauma and it triggered for the first time in that class while I played that game. I started showing signs of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. Never diagnosed. But that's clearly what it was. I know early childhood OCD is a common thing, but to have it happen so suddenly. Without ever having experienced it before. I thought I was possessed. I would have to turn the light switch in my bedroom on and off again until the number of times was not only an even number but also "felt right". Sometimes the number was 4. Sometimes it was 384. I had to close doors the right number of times or I was sure something would get in and come after me. Just like in the mansion.

My dad got really mad about it. About the slamming doors and flickering lights. Said I was wasting power, and I believed him. Even though that's not how electricity works.

But I was starting to see my dad for what he really was. Hateful. Abusive. (beat) Scared.

I had a shitty childhood. I think that was the moment I realized what was going on. Not just with my dad but with everything. I became aware of my own mortality. I lost my innocence in Mrs. Nesbit's third-grade computer class. I don't think I realized how big that moment was until now. Things got really bad after that.

ASTRID

I like the way you talk.

JULIA

What?

ASTRID

You just have a really nice voice.

JULIA

That's really sweet. (beat) What do you taste when you drink it?

ASTRID

Nothing. It's just water to me.

JULIA

Oh.

Astrid takes a sip. She shrugs.

ASTRID

Just water.

JULIA

I don't get this place. I can't even imagine what it must be like inside. Even out here it feels like that. Like Malgo's Mansion. Like an old computer game you have no idea how to play. But you keep playing anyway and it just makes you feel worse and worse. Less in tune with reality.

ASTRID

That actually makes sense.

JULIA

Oh shoot, I don't even know your name.

ASTRID

It's Astrid.

JULIA

Astrid. I like it. Julia.

ASTRID

Nice to meet you, Julia. I'm sorry you had a tough childhood.

JULIA

Growing up isn't easy. Everyone struggles in their own way.

ASTRID

Why are you out here watching birds?

JULIA

It's kinda my job. I'm a biologist. But between you and me, the reason they called me in is because I wrote a couple books on avian cryptozoology. These birds I'm watching are a species thought to be unreal.

ASTRID

So you're a bigfoot scientist. A bigbird scientist.

JULIA

Ha. Both fake. But Bigbird is real in my heart. OG PBS fangirl. But, Cryptozoology is just the study of animals whose existence is disputed. It's not always pseudoscience. The core of what I do is halfway between documenting folklore and verifying taxonomy. Usually, it's more of a hobby, I normally work in the realm of environmental biology. I rarely call myself a cryptozoologist. But here I am, working for the State as a cryptozoologist.

ASTRID

So these birds don't exist.

JULIA

That's the long and short of it. They appear on the official registry but people consider it a joke. How can they be endangered if they don't even exist? But there is some evidence. I mean it's in front of us right now. Even more evidence now that I've taken some pictures. They're called Junelings.

Astrid and Julia move to the edge of the Dam.  
They share the binoculars.

ASTRID

Wow. There are so many.

JULIA

I know! They're nesting in the Dam ventilation. Your bosses want them gone. I'm still trying to wrap my head around the fact that they even exist. Aren't they incredible?

ASTRID

Yeah. The way they fly. It's almost like music.

JULIA

Couldn't have said it better myself.

ASTRID

Can I kiss you?

Beat. Beat. Beat.

JULIA

Yes.

They kiss. It's a kiss of comfort. Like old lovers reuniting. The sounds of the birds grow in volume.

BLACKOUT

### ACT 1 SC 6 - DIRTFART, CT

LIGHTS UP. CALIGOS walks on wearing sunglasses. He speaks to the dam.

CALIGOS

I missed being inside you. Nothing compares to you. The black pyramids beneath the Denver International Airport. The reptilian tunnels under Detroit. The Heigelman Atmosphere. The backrooms, the frontrooms, the siderooms. The Polish forest outside of Wroclaw with the dismemberment fairies. The antimemetic discfoot giraffes on the equator. I've seen it all.

The last thing on my list is hidden somewhere deep inside you.

You weren't ready for that before. But god you're gonna love it now. I feel it down there waiting for me. A quiet place. Filled with starving birds. A place that shouldn't exist. An extension of yourself. Holding the waters there as still as you do here.

I'll tell you a secret. I think we've got you figured out. 'Was it the meteorite samples?' Of course, it was the meteorite samples! We found a piece of you on three separate planets in the solar system, not to mention the moon. Tell me, how does happen? That's a hell of a long way for an inanimate object.

I think I've got the answer. Wanna hear it? Here's my leading hypothesis: you killed those planets. I know! Right!? Hard to believe. But what if you're the reason we're surrounded by nothing but empty space and desolate rocks? You wiped out the whole universe and we're just the last one on your list.

...

Yeah, I don't believe it either. Don't get me wrong I love a good conspiracy theory as much as the next tinfoil hat nutjob. But I don't think you're genocidal. I think your motives are only visible on a much smaller scale. Why else would you be out here in the middle of Dirtfart, Connecticut? Why do you bring in all these strays? There's no correlation between any of them. Fuck. It's just question after question and we know nothing. Well, that ends today.

After twenty years of begging to take another stab at you, they finally roll out the red carpet. They kept me away. Knew I was the last resort. O5-7 told me - "This might be our last chance". Isn't that funny? Because it feels like this is your last chance. To open up. To show me you're more than just a monolithic eyesore.

I spent so long trying to get over you. You cast me out. You peeked inside my little head and thought "what the hell is this trash?" before reducing me to nothing. A shivering mass of pain. I wasn't even good enough to die. Wasn't good enough to be smashed to a pulp and drip slowly out your runoff. You denied me. YOU DENIED ME THAT.

But here's your second chance: we both know I'm not walking out of here again. And maybe I'm okay with that. I'm at peace with it. "He who rides the tiger cannot dismount" - Kung Fu Panda said that. And he was right. It's now or never.

I'm coming down there. And we're gonna see what you're really made of. We both know it's more than polymer concrete. And when I'm at your center. I'm going to do what you couldn't. I'm going to kill you.

But soft, someone approaches. Oh, never mind. It's just that guy. I forget his name.

Dr. Paul enters

DR. PAUL

Hello! I'm Doctor Paul Morgan. It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Danbury Hydroelectric power facility.

CALIGOS

It's not my first time.

DR. PAUL

In that case, welcome back! We hope you find it up to the high standards you've grown to expect from us. Your formal inspection may begin whenever you are ready.

CALIGOS

Give me a complete status report.

DR. PAUL

Of course! The DHP is functioning as predicted in the forecasts made 60 years ago. We have refined hydromanufacturing and PH processing. The greater facility has grown to nearly 600 on-site personnel. Treatment is, of course an ongoing operation and cyclical in nature, but we have made leaps and bounds during my tenure as Hydrologist. Zero manifestations have occurred, and we plan to keep it that way.

CALIGOS

Except for this one.

DR. PAUL

Sorry?

CALIGOS

The current manifestation.

DR. PAUL

What?

CALIGOS

It's already begun.

DR. PAUL

Caligos.

CALIGOS

Agent Caligos.



DR. PAUL

You can't be here.

CALIGOS

Home at last.

BLACKOUT  
**END ACT ONE**

**ACT 2 SC 1 - MAMMA RAMBO**

LIGHTS UP. Dr. Paul sits in roller chair with bottle of very expensive scotch and an intercom.

DR. PAUL

Hello staff. Dear beloved staff. Are you working comfortably? We are currently experiencing a Class 9 event. The real deal. The whole mamma rambo. Manifestation readings are climbing into the triple digits. Hold onto your pants, Dammers. This is going to be a big one.

I'm sure it just feels like a regular Tuesday afternoon to you. The molecular hydromanic induction phase is slow at first. But just you wait. Give it approximately twelve hours and boy howdy we're all gonna be crapping our pants.

For your safety, I have initiated a full quarantine. The National Guard is en route. Anyone leaving the facility will be considered a contamination risk and shot on sight. Woooooah! Say it isn't *so* director doctor Paul. Well, I am sorry to say it is very *so*. The dam is on complete lockdown! And I've locked myself in conference room D. So, what the hell am I going to do to help you!

Sub-level elevators are completely offline. Access to sublevels 1 to 81 are suspended until further notice. Pretty sure that's fine, though, because I doubt anyone here is messed up enough to waltz headfirst into the jaws of oblivion. Except our dear inspector.

Caligos! Do you hear me out there? Why would you come back now!? Who the hell signed off on this? Didn't they know this would happen? Didn't they know the second you walked in it would generate the deadliest manifestation in Dam history? Do they want to kill us all? (beat) I know you're down there somewhere responding to this as if I can hear you. I can't hear you!

Shit. Everything was going so well. It was just a matter of time.

Beat. Dr. Paul starts to sob.

DR. PAUL

Erin. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I held it together for so long. I couldn't have done it without you. You hear me? You're special. You're just so special. Dammit! From your first day. From your very first day. From the first induced flocculant all the way to our final general dam power output report. Respectfully, I love you. Like a colleague that is. Not with romantic intentions. But somehow that means even more. Doesn't it? I don't want to marry you or start a family. I want to run a complex hydroelectric power plant with you, and only you. Doesn't that have infinitely more weight? Doesn't that mean so much more?

But it's too late. Now we sit and wait for the walls to grow teeth and chew us all up. Maybe it's for the best. Let it rise. Let it be the world's problem. That giant hellmouth on the horizon? Oh, that used to be New York City. Whoopsie! Big oopsie doodle over here!

It's all over.

This is Doctor Paul. Signing off. For the last time.

Dr. Paul lowers the intercom. Sobs slightly.  
Then picks it back up with one last plea.

DR. PAUL

(beat) Caligos Please. I know I just said I was signing off for the last time but I wasn't really and now I need you to listen to me please just listen to me right now.

It knows you. It spared you once. Please find a way to reason with it. Our lives are in your hands.

Erin enters. Dr. Paul is startled.

DR. PAUL

How'd you get in here?

ERIN

The door was unlocked.

DR. PAUL

Oh.

ERIN

We have work to do.

DR. PAUL

We're dead already.

ERIN

I have reason to believe Caligos is attempting to destroy the Dam.

DR. PAUL

He's what? Who gave him that kind of authority? He can't do that. We're all supposed to go down with the ship! If someone's destroying anything, it's me! I'm the lead hydrologist! Why didn't they tell us he was coming!?

ERIN

They didn't tell us because one loose thread could affect the overall plan. Standard compartmentalization.

DR. PAUL

He'll flood all of Northern Danbury.

ERIN

I know. We have to get down there. I don't know what exactly we'll find. But we're already seeing the ramifications up here. Don't tell me you can't see them. The patterns forming on the backs of your eyelids.

DR. PAUL

I can see them.

ERIN

Then you know we have to hurry.

DR. PAUL

I've never gone past sub-level 7.

ERIN

Few have. But we'll face whatever's down there together.

DR. PAUL

Did you hear what I said about you? On the intercom?

ERIN

Yes.

And?  
DR. PAUL

I'm flattered.  
ERIN

Dr. Paul smiles. Then he grabs the intercom and addresses the Dam once more.

DR. PAUL  
Attention Dammers. Disregard everything I said earlier. I wasn't seeing this clearly. I've been a fool. But Mrs. Reynolds here has sounded the war horn. We're not gonna let Caligos take over our show. Assemble all personnel to staging area 12. Tell Satan to make some room, we're on our way down. We're gonna save the goddamn Dam.

Dr. Paul lowers intercom and looks to Erin.

How was that?  
DR. PAUL

Brilliant. Let's go.  
ERIN

BLACKOUT

## **ACT 2 SC 2 - SKITTLES AND BRUTALISM**

LIGHTS UP. Astrid leads Julia on stage holding her hand.

I'm not sure I should be in here.  
JULIA

Safer in here than out there.  
ASTRID

JULIA

Are you sure? This feels wrong.

ASTRID

I'm not sure what a manifestation is supposed to feel like. I don't even know what one is. No one's told me. But maybe you're right, It does feel like *something* is happening.

JULIA

No, I mean being in here at all. I think I've had bad dreams about this place. Dreams I can barely remember. Somewhere in the back of my brain. I dream I'm in a place like this. Like a massive parking garage. I'm searching for a swimming pool. Or maybe I've just come from a swimming pool. I'm awkward in a one-piece swimsuit. I can smell chlorine.

Massive walkways suspended between buildings. Forced perspective. Recessed lighting. Cold steel railings. Skylights in the ceiling every so often. My shoulders wrapped in a towel. Wet footprints behind me. I shouldn't be here.

You know that material they make swimming goggle bands out of? The plastic super stretchy ones. Why does that material feel even more real in my memories? Within my dreams. This place feels like that. Like somewhere I know I've never been before, but I can feel it there where my eyes don't go. Hands on wet glass. Concrete echoes. A sense of order in chaos. Is this place a temple? Do people worship here?

I ate skittles and it stained my hands like a rainbow. A strange contrast to this lifeless place. There are no rainbows in this world. I want out so badly. But it goes on forever. I'm afraid I'll wake up only to find I'm still sleeping.

Where's my dad? The swim meet is over. He was supposed to pick me up hours ago. I did okay, I think. I've got a pretty good backstroke. But I'm tired of people looking at my changing body that I haven't even come to terms with yet and my skin feels weird and I want to go home and lay in bed and watch the Muppet Show reruns until the chlorine is a distant memory.

It's like that fucked up version of the Wizard of Oz. The one that was a strange industrial nightmare. Do you remember that? It would come on the Disney channel a lot. I remember thinking I didn't want to live in that world. The Wizard of Oz on cocaine and brutalism. The Wiz. That's what it was called. Was Michael Jackson in that?

ASTRID

He was the scarecrow?

JULIA

I think so. That movie tapped into something. Something dark. Peeling back layers. We're off to see the wizard, and all I can feel is this terrible sinking dread that pervades my entire being. (beat) Astrid? Where are we? Are we still on earth?

ASTRID

I don't know. I haven't seen any swimming pools.

JULIA

That doesn't mean there isn't one. I can feel it somehow. Calling to me.

Julia looks to the ceiling.

JULIA

Oh, shit. Look. One of my birds got in. He's trapped, too. How did he get in? There's a few more over there. Wait. Do you think they could be coming from inside?

That's it. They aren't nesting in the Dam. They're coming out of it. Feeing from it.

How are the birds coming out of the dam? What's down there, Astrid?

Julia sits for a moment.

JULIA

Just give me a minute. This is a lot.

ASTRID

It's okay. I'm here with you.

Mike enters with a large hiking backpack.

MIKE

Hey. Did you hear the big voice? We're going down.

JULIA

Is this the truck guy?

ASTRID

Yeah. This is Mike.

MIKE

Who's your friend?

ASTRID

Julia.

MIKE

An outside person.

JULIA

Yes?

MIKE

You brought an outside person inside.

ASTRID

Is that okay?

MIKE

(shrugs)

We're going down.

ASTRID

I guess we don't have much of a choice. Are you sure it's safe down there?

MIKE

No.

JULIA

Is there a swimming pool?

MIKE

Never seen one. Doesn't mean there's not one though.

ASTRID

How many people are coming?

MIKE

I don't know. Pretty much everybody who's anybody ignored the quarantine and left. It's just a few of us now.

ASTRID

How is that possible? This place is massive.

MIKE

It always feels emptier than it is. Come on. I've got overrides for the elevator.

Mike exits.

ASTRID

Are we sure we should do this?

JULIA

No. But I kinda want to see where the birds are coming from.

ASTRID

Me too.

JULIA

That can't be a bad place. Can it?

Julia takes Astrid's hand. They exit.

BLACKOUT

### ACT 2 SC 3 - SUB-LEVEL X

Erin and Dr. Paul walk across a dim stage wearing survival gear and large hiking backpacks. They both hold flashlights. Erin holds a pistol.

ERIN

How deep do you think it goes?

DR. PAUL

I don't know. This is as far as they dug the shaft for the elevator.

ERIN

What would you call this? Sub-level 81 continuous?

DR. PAUL

Sub-level X.

ERIN

Sounds like a bad plot in a super hero movie.

DR. PAUL

I'm in charge. I get to name it.



ERIN

Fine.

DR. PAUL

We should consider setting up camp.

ERIN

You're right. There's no point in going forward in any direction. There's nothing here. It's just empty space. I don't know what I expected but I guess I expected *something*.

DR. PAUL

The planar geometry goes fucky the deeper you get. We're in the 73rd dimensional groove. It's a conceptual space. The floor seems to be made out of some kind of resistant polymer. The temperature is pleasant enough. And if you kept going that way, I'd wager you'd be walking for the rest of your natural born life.

ERIN

Caligos is out of his mind. What's he expecting?

DR. PAUL

Ascension? Godhood? A pat on the back? Let's face the truth of this situation. The DHP or whoever's pulling the strings wants the Dam terminated. And Caligos is probably the only one who could actually pull it off.

ERIN

What do we do if we run into him?

DR. PAUL

Shoot the bastard.

ERIN

Really?

DR. PAUL

No. I don't know. I'm just really frustrated with him right now.

ERIN

Me too.

DR. PAUL

But more than that. What if the Dam blames us? For what he's about to do.

ERIN

(beat) What is it, Paul? What is it really?

How long has it been here? Did some county surveyor stand on a hill next to his theodolite and mark it on a map, and no one in Danbury, Connecticut even noticed that there was suddenly a Dam parting a river where there wasn't one yesterday?

Then it needed people. It needed people like us. Am I on the right track? One day, all these people show up, and from that moment on, they work here. That's what they think at least. It digs deeper and deeper into their minds they begin to think they're on some kind of mission. That there's a grand design set in place by those above them who care and oversee their work. But that's not the case at all. We're all just people on the way down. All of us. Even Caligos.

He was close to getting out before. But it brought him back. He was never truly free. The people who left? The ones that ignored the quarantine? They'll be back tomorrow. We both know they will. Just another Wednesday workday at the Dam. They are all going to end up down here one way or another. Once it gets hungry again.

I can feel it trying to get in. Testing the borders. Softly, Carefully probing my skull a little harder each time. There's an intelligence there. Can you feel it? I don't know how much longer I can keep it out.

I think we've both been under its influence for longer than we realize. But I'm glad it was you. Respectfully, I love you. And I don't mean romantically either. I mean I'm happy it was you. I'm happy you were the one who was inexplicably drawn into this terrible otherworldly deathtrap with me. That means more right? That means more than sex. Or babies. Or whatever. That means I'm glad I get to die with you. My last thoughts will be with you. And I'd rather it be you than anyone else.

She takes Paul's hand.

ERIN

The truth is I feel I've been here before somehow. In the shadow of something inanimate, uncaring, and deadly. Something that shaped me.

I was Navy back in the day. Flight deck crew on an Aircraft Carrier. The world's deadliest ballet. Every day was constant stress. Even the slightest little error could be your last mistake. I saw it happen. Greg Howard. 10 years on the job. Got just the slightest bit complacent. Training exercise in the Atlantic. Launching F-18's off the waist catapults. Greg lifted his torso up a fraction of a second too early on launch, to start prepping for the next one. And that was it. The Missile stanchion of an F-18 went straight through his head. The plane rocketed off the deck at 160mph. His body spun and fell. No one moved. Until we had to. We had to ignore his body lying there and do our job to catch the planes coming back in. Our footsteps painting the deck red. When the plane was back on approach we saw his green safety helmet stuck up there.

And we all knew his head was still in it.

I don't think I've ever heard a silence like the one in the mess hall that night. 5,000 people. Completely silent. I'm trying to lose myself in my meatloaf when suddenly I have this little insignificant, irrational, intrusive thought: The USS Galahad had a bad day. Caught a bad mood. Somehow we hadn't been little good boys and girls. And it was taking it out on us. Making us watch an F-18 do circles with a severed head stuck on its wing and demanding we sit in silence and think about exactly what we each did to deserve that etched in our memory for the rest of our lives.

I know it was just nerves. I know that now. It was just a ship. It was just a place where we lived and worked. But now ... I'm starting to doubt that. Because I feel the same dread now that I felt for months after the incident on the flight deck. "Don't piss it off, or it'll take your head."

We're powerless in the face of the Dam. All of us. It could take us at any moment and I doubt we'd even feel it. But in those last few seconds, I bet we'd both know exactly why we deserve it. Even if we don't truly deserve it at all.

Because there's one thought that keeps repeating over and over in my head and I can't get rid of it no matter how hard I try and I swear I'm trying but it's there with every breath and it just keeps getting louder and louder and louder.

DR. PAUL

Say it.

ERIN

I think we might belong down here.

BLACKOUT

#### **ACT 2 SC 4 - THE AMPERSAND CONJECTURE**

LIGHTS UP on Caligos center. He's shambling through sub-level X. He is visibly more disheveled and manic.

His firearm is in his hand. There are moments where he's almost dancing out of exhaustion and rage.

CALIGOS

I'm standing beneath your window with a boombox and you aren't even home, are you? Gotta pull it together. Breathe. 1... 2... 3... 45678910. WHERE ARE YOU?

We hear a few birds fly by. Caligos takes a few shots with the pistol. All miss.

CALIGOS

How long have I been down here? Longer this time. Yes. Forever is longer than just a little while. Part the waters. Let me in. Don't do this to me, baby. It was just a fight. Just a stupid fight. We'll get through this. I'll be better this time. I didn't mean to yell. YOU JUST--

Okay. No. You're right. No, I'm not yelling. I just think that-- No. I don't want to see other people. I only want to see you. I'm opening my third eye for you baby. Perceive me. Perceive me all the way down to my RNA strands. String them around your little finger. Now pull.

Caligos spasms.

CALIGOS

Assessment. God-like entity. Class 214. Contact failure. Awaiting judgment. She won't talk to me. Took the kids to her mom's house. Containment procedure. Complete termination. Just have to isolate ... A target that is everything. Everything. How do you kill an everything?

Bought the ticket. Now we take the ride. And once it's over I'm going to disembark, shoot the hideous phantasmal conductor in the face and put an end to this god-forsaken nightmare trolley because we took one hell of a wrong turn past the world of make-believe, let me tell you.

Just be quiet and listen for the birds. Yeah. That's right. Great idea. Maybe you should stop shooting at them. Just. Listen. Pip pip pip pip pip pip.

I'm sorry. I was young. I was stupid. I didn't know what you were back then. Not really. When you last saw me I didn't--

Birds fly by again. He shoots at them with extreme prejudice. No hits.

## CALIGOS

I want to see the colors again. The secret colors. The ones they don't make crayons for. Will you show me?

I've seen your sister. Yeah. The one they keep in Cheyenne Mountain. Hell, she IS Cheyenne Mountain at this point. The one NORAD is a cover for. I've seen her. Her colors aren't as bright as yours. You know what they did to her? She's a goddamn supercomputer. They plugged her in. LIKE A TOASTER.

They've got her calculating how many licks it takes to get to the center of a Tootsie Roll Pop.

But you. You're the problem child. The infinity symbol you look at too closely, and you realize it's a sleepy ampersand. Or just the number eight. This is where the sidewalk ends. I remember standing on this precipice. I was down here for thirty minutes and in truth it was an eternity. Am I in that same eternity? Does it ever end? Is this a hard restart?

I remember clawing my way out of this hell past the broken bodies of all those you deemed worthy. The ones you let die. Hundreds of people marched down here after me. Following your siren song. And now it's happening all over again.

Am I worthy now?

Will I ever be?

Birds fly by once more. Caligos lifts the pistol to shoot them. But he's exhausted, he drops the gun. He laughs weakly.

## CALIGOS

Forget it.

You set me up. You measured this out already.

You knew we'd end up here. Because you can see it all happening at once.

And I only know that I only know completely jack shit.

I wanted to talk to you. I really really wanted to.

But it seems like you're always on the saxophone.

Caligos collapses.

BLACKOUT

**ACT 2 SC 5 - PUPPY BREATH EULOGIES**

LIGHTS UP. Erin and Dr. Paul have set up camp on sublevel X. There are several tents, backpacks and survival gear. They have set up lanterns around the perimeter.

ERIN

Sometimes I think I can almost see people out there. Who are they?

DR. PAUL

I'm not sure I want to find out. Maybe one of them is Caligos. Or Hydrologist Matthews. Or all the people I used to work with. Maybe I'm out there too. Some version of me.

ERIN

I didn't see you specifically.

Dr. Paul laughs.

DR. PAUL

I don't think we're going to be able to fix this.

ERIN

I know.

Mike, Astrid, and Julia enter with hiking gear. Erin pulls out a pistol and levels it at them.

ERIN

Stay back!

MIKE

We're cool! We're cool!

Erin lowers the gun.

MIKE  
Don't shoot!

ERIN  
I'm not going to.

MIKE  
Okay.

ASTRID  
Sorry. You guys left before us and we had to wait for the elevator to come all the way back up.

Mike begins to unpack. His bag is full of only water bottles. He stacks them by the tents. Julia and Astrid sit with Dr. Paul and Erin.

ERIN  
This is a restricted area, Ms. Steinberg.

JULIA  
I think we're a little past that.

DR. PAUL  
Ms. Kelvin. Ms. Steinberg. And who are you?

MIKE  
Mike Broom.

DR. PAUL  
Mike Broom. Alright. Well. Thank you for coming to witness the end of the Danbury Hydroelectric plant and Water Treatment facility. May she rest in peace.

Mike passes a water bottle to Dr. Paul.

DR. PAUL  
Thanks?

He takes a sip.

DR. PAUL  
Apricots. Breakfast with my grandparents. July 5th 1994. A diner outside of Richmond, Virginia. The floors are sticky. I order blueberry pancakes and decaf coffee. The waitress screws up and brings me someone else's order. I eat it anyways.

A bowl of oatmeal and a slice of Apricot pie. The pie is the most delicious thing I've ever tasted. My grandfather had a stroke three days later. He survived but he couldn't speak anymore. Some switch in his brain had been turned off. He died the next year.

Always a very quiet, soft spoken man. But he got this look in his eyes after. Like he had something to say. Something he'd just remembered.

He passes the bottle to Julia. She sips.

#### JULIA

Tastes like a papercut. Last year. A small bookstore in Sarasota. Looking for a book on hummingbirds that's out of print. I found it between a book on prehistoric crustaceans and one on Peruvian ecology.

When I opened it, I looked down in surprise at the thin red line appearing on my index finger. Quite deep. My initial thought was infection. In this forgotten dusty back section of an old book store in Florida. But what could it have infected me with? Dust particles?

But it still felt like there was something among those old books that I didn't want in my body. Like I'd picked something off the floor in an antique store and promptly eaten it without checking to see what it was. I looked at the culprit. Page 29. Sure enough, the top corner of the page was stained crimson. So thin you could barely even tell it was there. I forgot all about that until now. Why would it have mattered? Unless something really did get inside of me.

Do you think it's still there? Not a real thing. Some kind of literary tumor. Like a bad idea. Stuck somewhere inside me. Just one bad thought. That turns into more. And eventually, it takes over entirely and shuts down my liver and my kidneys. My brain goes dark. My final thought is the hummingbird on page 29.

Julia passes the water bottle to Mike. He sips.

#### MIKE

Tastes like a Thursday. The bar isn't crowded. She's caught me staring a few times already. She's impossibly gorgeous in a way that says I was a Psychology major until I changed it to Performing Arts. The setting sun lights up a smoky halo behind her as she leans over and says "Do you have a car?"

She lets me into her life. I do my best not to track muddy footprints all over it. I tell her I love her. I mean it.

And she never loses that Thursday taste. The smoky bar room sunset halo. Even when we fight she still has that glow. When she cries she's got it.



When she packs her bags and leaves it's still there.

She leaves me on a Friday afternoon. Fridays are okay but never as good as Thursdays and that particular Friday sucked really bad. I called her a year later . Tried to get some closure. Asked her if she ever loved me at all and she said "No". She says to me, "we weren't together long enough for me to love you" and I tell her, "I loved you on Thursday and every day after that one." And then she pauses and I know she doesn't know what I mean, because sometimes I don't even know what I mean. She says she has to go because she has a Yoga class. So I hang up, but in my head sometimes I think I'm still having that conversation that never got finished.

It hurts from time to time.

But I think I've come to realize that I gave her that power. Through my own power of passive perception.

The Thursdays were always mine. And never hers. She's got her own days.

Thursday was part of me all along.

Mike passes the bottle to Astrid. She takes it reluctantly. She takes a sip. Then shakes her head sadly. She then passes the Bottle to Erin. She sips.

ERIN

Puppy breath. I'm not even kidding. Kind of weird to drink it, though. It tastes like Melissa's puppies. How they'd follow her around the house when she got sick of nursing them. How they all snuggled up in the laundry room in front of the dryer.

Big clumsy puppy feet.

Melissa. Shit. I loved that dog. Yellow lab.

Caligos has slinked in and joined the circle during the above monologues. He sits in the circle with them. No one reacts to his presence. Erin passes the bottle to him. He sips.

## CALIGOS

It tastes like a dream. Starts out mundane. The location isn't important. It changes.

In the dream I can walk through walls. If I concentrate hard enough I can stretch through them. It feels like I'm stretching against the fabric of life itself. Pressing against the walls of a womb. And then I pop out the other side. Sometimes I need a running start though. Sometimes I bash into the wall a few times before I can properly go through it.

But I know that if I keep doing it I'm eventually going to get stuck. The more aware I am of this power, the harder it is to keep going.

And that would be really bad because there's something chasing me. Something too terrible to mention. Something I can't mention now, in real life, because there would be consequences.

And now I think it's time I let it catch me.

Caligos stands. He simply walks off.

Beat.

Mike stands. He walks off in a different direction.

Beat.

Dr. Paul stands as if he's heard something. He walks off.

Beat.

Erin stands and walks off in a different direction.

Beat.

Julia stands and walks to Astrid. She pulls Astrid up. They walk off hand in hand.

BLACKOUT

Transition: A dripping sound.

Starts slow and builds until it's rushing water. Crescendos to the sound of a waterfall before suddenly cutting out.

**ACT 2 SC 6 - CORMORANT GATE**

LIGHTS UP. Astrid and Julia sit on the edge of the stage in one-piece swimsuits. We hear the pip pip pip of Junelings in the background.

JULIA

I knew it was here.

ASTRID

I never doubted you.

JULIA

I wish I had met you back then. Instead of now. Don't get me wrong. I love now. I'm huge proponent of now. But holy shit where have you been?

ASTRID

I think we've always been here. Some part of us at least.

JULIA

You're cute when you make absolutely zero sense.

ASTRID

ME? Make zero sense? Me!?!?

Julia laughs.

JULIA

So, this is it?

ASTRID

This is it.

JULIA

Go ahead.

ASTRID

Go ahead what?

JULIA

Take a sip. It's your turn.

ASTRID

A sip? Of pool water?

JULIA

It's more than a swimming pool. Let's see just how far it goes.

Astrid leans down and takes a sip. During the following monologue we steadily hear the rise of ocean waves and the sound of many different varieties of oceanic birds.

ASTRID

It tastes like water. No, I mean it really tastes like water. Pristine and clear. I'm twelve years old standing in the kitchen of the house I grew up in. The afternoon sun is casting sunbeams and lazy particles are drifting through them. My mom's calling me, but I'm so thirsty and water has never tasted this good. I can feel my bare feet on the kitchen tile. I'm using the water dispenser on the fridge and it's got this deep hum when it's working that's soothing.

I walk into the living room. There's my mom. But for just one second, one brief moment in time, a veil was lifted. I could see past the curtain. I saw her as she really was. Past everything else to a clear picture outside of my own perception. Outside of the woman I had learned to see. I finally saw her. In her entirety. Some strange breed of primate—the strange primate who gave birth to me. She existed in that one moment of clarity as she really was. I forgot that. One of those important memories that just flies away. I don't even remember what she had to say.

That's the only time it happened. But now. Now that I know the taste. Now that I've tasted it again, I can see it was everywhere. Every second of my life. Every single day. Every day I was on a planet hurtling through space. Every day my hearts been beating in my chest. Every day I've seen the color green at least once. Every day I've been a part of symphony I can't hear. And someday I won't be.

I can see every sunset I've ever had. Every one I ever will have.

Orange making way for purple. Then black. Then stars.

I can see it all happening at once.

And I like what I see.

BLACKOUT

**END PLAY**

### NOTES AND REFERENCES

#### **DAM PLAYLIST**

(Just songs I attributed to each scene during the writing process. They are not intended for use in the play. But could be used as house music or something.)

#### ACT ONE

Sc 1. Unsweet Perdition - Let's Get This Over With - They Might Be Giants

Sc 2. Junelings - Parade - Rone

Sc. 3. Tasteless Memories - Barrier Reef - Old 97's

Sc. 4. The Caligos Incident - Nakt - Rone

Sc. 5. Malgo's Mansion - We Were Kids - Carter Vail

Sc. 6. Dirtfart, CT - Pentagram - Cake

#### ACT TWO

Sc. 1. Mamma Rambo - When the Lights Come On - They Might Be Giants

Sc. 2. Skittles and Brutalism - Slow West Vultures - Mountain Goats

Sc. 3 Sub-level X - Labyrinth - Miracle Musical

Sc. 4 The Ampersand Conjecture - You Part the Waters - Cake

Sc. 5 Puppy Breath Eulogies - End Times Daily - Papercuts

Sc. 6 Cormorant Gate - The Trip - Still Corners