

RAVEN'S SEED

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A physical comedy

By Stephen Most

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

### ANIMALS:

Salmon

Bear

Raven

Coyote

Loon

### HUMANS:

Dr. Nova Opportune, a health physicist

Dr. J. Stanley Opportune, her father, a theoretical physicist

Dr. Oliver Liverwurst, a nuclear physicist

A ROBOT

## THE STORY

"Raven Steals the Sun" could be the first story ever told in the Western Hemisphere. Traditional among tribes in Siberia as well as in Alaska and the Pacific Northwest, it may have crossed the Bering Strait with the original immigrants. Haida, Tlingit, and Kwakiutl artists depict Raven on totem poles, ceremonial masks, rattles, and paintings.

## ACT ONE

## SCENE ONE

The Time: future imperfect, one morning.  
The Place: a forest meadow beside a stream

A clicking sound. Animal masks appear among the trees. NOVA enters wearing an airtight suit with a bubble helmet and holding a Geiger counter.

NOVA

Eight point six rems in the forest. Nine point two in the meadow.

NOVA approaches the stream, and the clicking intensifies. A SALMON briefly appears with a splash.

NOVA

Eleven point three!

NOVA exits. SALMON pops out of the water and watches NOVA go. Coming from the woods, BEAR sneaks up on SALMON and grabs her.

SALMON

Hold it, Bear! You can do more with your face than feed.

BEAR

I never talk with my food. It's disgusting.

SALMON

(slipping free)

I'll make a better friend than a meal.

BEAR

Said the lamb to the lion. I'm higher on the food chain.

SALMON

But not on the brain chain. You saw that bubblehead.

BEAR

So what?

SALMON

Something strange has come into our world.

BEAR

Your world, not mine. I'm from the mountain.

SALMON

That's where it was going, upstream.

BEAR

Don't flip out, Salmon, you won't make it upstream.

BEAR lunges at SALMON, who slips  
from her grasp.

SALMON

You've slowed, Bear. What happened to your hair?

BEAR

Not so fuzzy any more. See, it comes out.

SALMON

You're sick!

BEAR

A salmon steak would make me feel much better.

SALMON

No, much worse. You see, there's something wrong with the  
water.

BEAR

Stay out, then!

They struggle. SALMON slips away  
again and submerges. Enter RAVEN.

RAVEN

You'll never catch Salmon like that.

BEAR

Why not?

RAVEN

The old ways don't work any more. You need a new technique.

BEAR

Like what?

RAVEN

Do as the humans do. They catch lots of fish.

BEAR

Well, sure. They use nets.

RAVEN

They use their minds. They understand fish.

SALMON  
(surfacing)  
Do you understand them?

RAVEN  
Sure, I do.

SALMON  
What are they doing upstream?

RAVEN  
What aren't they doing? You should see the huge machines and buildings the humans have up the mountain. One of them is like a giant egg.

SALMON  
One of the humans?

RAVEN  
One of the machines!

SALMON  
First it was rock piles, then log jams, then power dams. Now a giant egg! What happened to my birthright?

RAVEN  
Progress is what's happening, Salmon. Get with it. Go with the flow.

SALMON  
What flow? The river's never been lower. This stream will soon run dry. I'd better spawn before it's too late.

BEAR sneaks up on SALMON, lunges  
and falls.

RAVEN  
Nice try.

SALMON  
I've had it. Sayonara.

BEAR  
Don't go. I'm so hungry.

SALMON  
Sorry, Bear. I need to breed in the gravel bed where I was born. That's where my eggs will glisten and quicken.

BEAR  
Come dine with me. It will be a dinner to die for. My spoor will please the trees.

RAVEN

Who cares what bears do in the woods? The things humans make go farther than the Raven flies, rise taller than the trees, have more power than the river.

SALMON

Not so fast, Raven. What comes around goes around. That's the way it's always been. That's the way we've always lived.

RAVEN

I say we adapt.

SALMON

You try to spawn in a hot tub.

RAVEN

I see the big picture, the dawn of a new day.

SALMON

Don't be so cocksure, you arrogant—

RAVEN

You ignorant—

COYOTE rises from his lair.

COYOTE

Callense! Qui-ett! Can't a beast get any sleep around here? Oh, hel-lo there, Bear. Encantado de verte. You're worth waking up for.

BEAR

Doctor Coyote, I was looking for you.

COYOTE

A tus ordenes. Your command is my wish. What can I do for you?

BEAR

I've got a fever in my blood.

COYOTE

So do I. Hot blood, la cola loca. And I've got just the cure: a laying on of the paws that refreshes. O, how I feel for you! Does it hurt there?

BEAR

No, not there.

COYOTE

Te duele. . . aqui?

COYOTE grabs BEAR's breasts.

Not there! BEAR

How about—here! COYOTE

COYOTE reaches for BEAR's groin.  
She flips him.

COYOTE  
What do you take me for, a wolf? You need some bodywork!

BEAR  
You're nothing but a horny dog!

COYOTE  
We mammals ought to stick together.

BEAR  
I've heard that one before.

COYOTE  
I've got just the thing for you.

BEAR  
It better be a cure, Coyote.

COYOTE  
It's a sure cure: peniscillin.

BEAR stomps on him.

COYOTE  
Yi yi yi yi yi!

COYOTE hobbles offstage.

BEAR  
O wow.

RAVEN  
What's the matter?

BEAR  
I'm all worn out.

RAVEN  
Don't expect any help from that quack.

BEAR  
Why do I feel so weak?

SALMON  
I'd tell you, but you don't want to talk to me.

BEAR

No, I do. Why am I sick?

SALMON

Something new is rippling through the water: a strange tide coming from the land.

BEAR and RAVEN look at each other  
as SALMON dives and exits.

SCENE TWO

The Time: Synchronous

The Place: Liverwurst Laboratories

DR. OLIVER LIVERWURST paces as DR.  
J. STANLEY OPPORTUNE enters

STAN

Hello, Ollie.

OLLIE

Stanley! What took you so long?

STAN

I got lost. But I'm here now.

OLLIE

You certainly are. Welcome to my headquarters. How did you get lost, anyway? It's simple to go from your think tank to my lab. There's a sign that shows which path to take.

STAN

I know. I took it.

OLLIE

The path?

STAN

No. The sign.

STAN pulls from his coat a sign:  
FUSION LAB.

OLLIE

Why did you do that?

STAN

So I wouldn't get lost. But then I forgot which way it was pointing.

OLLIE

How long were you in the think tank?



STAN takes a tape measure from his coat and measures himself.

STAN

This long, relatively.

OLLIE

You've been thinking too long, my friend. How are you feeling?

STAN

Famished. I haven't eaten for three days: yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

OLLIE

I'll get you something to eat.

STAN

No, thank you. That would spoil my appetite.

OLLIE

You must be thinking hard, to go without eating.

STAN

I'm thinking about the big questions.

OLLIE

Like what to order?

STAN

Like what is order? Do all black holes suck? Is charm the color of the universe?

OLLIE

I think so.

STAN

And, where was the Big Bang?

OLLIE

I have a little Bang for you to think about. We ignited Prometheus — the laser fusion reactor.

STAN

Congratulations, Ollie! That's the best thing since sliced atoms.

OLLIE

Soon, the world will have a limitless source of energy, using the gas that powers the stars. But there's one wee problem.

STAN

Filling the tank?

OLLIE

Paying for it. This machine cost billions. But if we can wrap a blanket of uranium around the pellet that the lasers ignite, Prometheus will produce ten times more plutonium than the most advanced fast breeder.

STAN

And when that plutonium goes into nuclear power plants, energy will increase exponentially.

OLLIE

Exactly! Plutonium, fueling power plants around the world, will electrify civilization at a negligible price. There will be energy to burn. Check these equations out.

STAN

They're very sweet. But to wrap a uranium blanket around the hydrogen pellet at the core of a fusion reactor—

OLLIE

That's the problem I hope you will help me with.

STAN

I'm a theoretical physicist, Ollie. I don't deal with radioactivity.

OLLIE

Your daughter Nova does.

STAN

Nova? What's she got to do with it?

OLLIE

I hired her to be the health physicist for Project Prometheus.

STAN

O, she can't do that. She has to stay in the university, or she'll ruin her experiment.

OLLIE

She didn't think so. And I thought you two might like to work together.

STAN

Nova's got to stay inside her lab. Where is she now?

OLLIE

She went outside to look around.

STAN

Outside? What was she wearing?

OLLIE

Don't worry. She's perfectly suited for this job.

STAN

You like the outfit?

OLLIE

And her in it. We'll be one happy family.

STAN

Relatively.

OLLIE

Relative to what?

STAN

To me. She's my daughter!

SCENE THREE

Place: The forest meadow.

SALMON

What are the humans doing to us, Coyote?

BEAR

Why did you make them?

RAVEN

That's a myth. Don't you know about evolution?

COYOTE

Evolution, my tail! Coyote made all the animals, including the humans.

RAVEN

You coyotes make it with everything you can, we all know that. But you mate with coyotes only, your own species. Same with humans. Humans make humans just like ravens make ravens.

SALMON

What is your method, hunt and peck?

BEAR

Can you make me well?

COYOTE

I don't know any animal who can help you. Except maybe Loon.

ALL BUT COYOTE

Loon!

COYOTE

And Loon won't do it. She's been afraid of her power ever since she destroyed the world long ago.

SALMON

The humans are destroying the world now!

BEAR

That's heavy. Why did you make them, Coyote?

COYOTE

It was one of those unintended consequences. You see, long ago, the animals were all alike, like eggs in a nest or buds on a bush. Life was easy, but boring. So my ancestor, the great Don Coyote, asked each one of the buds a crucial question. "How do you want to grow," he asked them, "and what do you want to do? Do you want to fly or swim or prowl the mountains? Do you want strong claws or lightning speed or clever ways to hide? Every one of you will be some body. Now go and decide what kind of body you are." All of the buds but one went off to turn into some kind of creature. When they came back, some had horns, some had fins; there were shields and stingers and stinkers and many other features. They still had a lot in common. Many put their senses near their mouths to know their food, got rid of waste at the other end, put their sex where they move their tails. But there were so many kinds, it was amazing to see them all strut their stuff. Except for the one who stayed behind. "I just can't decide how I want to be," she said. "You need hooves and antlers on your head like me," said Elk. And Beaver said, "With buck teeth and a broad, flat tail, you'll be making dams in no time." The birds were flapping, the monkeys flipping, the hippos flopping. It was wild! Until the creature said, "Thanks for all your advice. But I think I'm going to stay like this." Well, Don Coyote looked at her: a helpless blob. "How do you think you're going to make it, human?" he asked. "Whatever I need," she said, "I'll pick up as I go along." That human looked so pathetic, so vulnerable that my ancestor took pity on her.

SALMON

What did he do, Coyote?

COYOTE

All those animals that went off to choose their special shapes had left behind plenty of the best stuff, and Coyote had some to spare. So he gave the human smarts. But he didn't give her enough!

The clicking sound returns.

SALMON

The bubblehead!

The ANIMALS hide. BEAR lags behind.

RAVEN

Hurry, Bear!

Heading back upstream, NOVA sees BEAR and halts. Then she points the Geiger counter at BEAR as if it were a weapon. The other ANIMALS come out of hiding and confront her.

SALMON

What are you doing here?

RAVEN

What's that wand?

NOVA

You talk! Animals talk!

COYOTE

Since you listened!

RAVEN

What is your name?

NOVA

Nova. It's been real. Bye now!

COYOTE

No va! No te vayas!

NOVA tries to go but BEAR blocks her.

NOVA

You must be ursus americanus.

BEAR

Bearrrrr!

NOVA

Pleased to meet you.

BEAR

Your pleasure. My meat.

RAVEN

Lay off the peasant under glass.

NOVA

Thank you, Crow.

RAVEN

Raven! Can't you tell?

NOVA

O, Raven, I'm so sorry. Excuse me if I seem astonished. I thought animals talked only in stories.

COYOTE

Where do you think stories come from? Don Coyote, para sirvirle.

NOVA

It's an honor.

SALMON

What are you doing here?

NOVA

Checking to make sure your environment is safe.

ALL BUT RAVEN

Bullshit!

SALMON

You poison lakes, dam rivers, foul the ocean!

BEAR

You tear down forests and cut up the mountain. There's not enough to eat. What's more, you make me sick.

COYOTE

Hold the bearclaws. And you, cut the crap. You rule the land and stink up the air. Animals that used to be here aren't around any more. And you are making sure our environment is safe? What are you going to destroy next? That's what we need to know.

NOVA

I don't know what to say. This is so strange.

SALMON

You're saying that we're strange?

RAVEN

Where do you come from?

NOVA

Liverwurst Laboratories. It's up the mountain.

SALMON

The giant egg!

NOVA

We have harmed the environment, I know that.

(Nova turns the Geiger counter on.  
The animals recoil.)

NOVA

But we have the solution to your problems.

COYOTE

Your solutions are our problems.

BEAR

Why am I sick? What have you done to me?

NOVA

I'm not a vet.

COYOTE

Go ahead, eat her. Save me some leftovers.

RAVEN

Let her go!

NOVA

O, thank you, Raven!

RAVEN

Back off. We need to listen to her. We'll never deal with all the changes unless we find out what's happening to the world.

NOVA

The changes may be hurting you in the short run, and I'm sorry about that; but in the long run, they are going to help the environment. They're going to help the whole planet. Or at least, stop it from getting worse. Or, keep it from getting worse so fast. We're not sure. But one thing we know is, the energy we've been using to make things and move things and do things like keep us warm when it's cold and cool when it's warm, well, that energy we've been taking from things that lived long ago has caused some harm. But now we'll have enough energy for all the things people do. And we won't have to tear up mountains or pollute the air and the waterclassified. Because we have a new, limitless way to make energy.

RAVEN

What will you make this new energy from?

COYOTE

Their limitless bullshit.

NOVA

Well, yes, and bovine flatulence, but that's not what we're doing on the mountain.

We're taking the energy that makes the Sun shine, that burns within all the stars, and we're bringing it to Earth. It will produce all the energy people will ever need.

COYOTE

I like the Sun where it is. You should learn to play with fire safely, mocosa.

BEAR

One spark and a forest is wasted. What will a star destroy? What will be left? What will become of Bear?

BEAR tears out a clump of hair.

NOVA

O no. You've got radiation sickness, Bear. I'm so sorry. We had a spill. A storage tank burst, and radwaste got all over the place. That's what I've been monitoring. But once we start using hydrogen for fusion power—

SALMON

Don't try your confusion power on us.

NOVA

There are ways to treat this. We have clinical studies. Let me go back to the labs, and I'll see what can be done to help! To help you.

RAVEN lets NOVA escape.

COYOTE

They've really done it this time.

RAVEN

The power of the stars. What a breakthrough!

COYOTE

What a bring-down. When will those babies ever learn?

RAVEN

This is no time for stories. This is the time for science. We need to know who we're dealing with. Human beings are not babies. They're full-grown hyperactive apes.

COYOTE

Ridiculous! They're infants. They don't even have the fur of a grown animal.

RAVEN

They've evolved beyond us, Coyote. They've got the power of the stars. We've got to learn their secrets.

COYOTE

You're as crazy as she is.



RAVEN

We need their knowledge to defend ourselves. Look at Bear. Her sickness came from something they have. Something the clicking wand was picking up on. We can't see it, we can't taste it, but they can tell how much of it there is. And they may know how to cure it.

COYOTE

We can steal a chicken or a sheep easy. But their knowledge is twisted. Look what it's done.

RAVEN

I think bigger than you do, Coyote. I'm going to take their power: the power of the Sun!

SALMON

I'm going upstream to spawn and die. That's my destiny. But you'd better stay away from them. Don't go there, Raven. Goodbye. Adios, compañeros de mi vida.

BEAR

Catch you later.

Submerging, SALMON exits.

RAVEN

Taking the power from the humans is my destiny. Do you remember the time long ago when humans kept the Sun captive within a box inside a cave, and my great ancestor Raven disguised himself as a man, entered their cave, and stole the Sun from them?

COYOTE

I remember the story.

RAVEN

It's history, Coyote. Everybody knows how the Sun got back in the sky.

COYOTE

Tell me, bird of destiny, how did old Raven handle the Sun without getting burned?

RAVEN

He got burned. Why do you think my feathers look scorched? This is no pigment of my imagination.

COYOTE

What makes you think you can do what your great ancestor did?

RAVEN

He rose to the occasion. So will I. In his day, every day was night. In our day, the future is dark.

Will the Sun rise on Salmon again? On Bear? It is time for me to do what Raven did of old so the Sun will rise on us in times to come.

COYOTE

All right, hotshot. Follow Nova to her medicine lodge and take that starfire from her if you can.

RAVEN

I'll put it back into space where it belongs.

COYOTE

You'll be doing a great service to animalkind. Now buzz off.

A piercing scream.

ALL

Loon!

Another scream. LOON enters and is about to scream again.

COYOTE

Okay. We know you're here.

LOON

Last night I dreamed. I saw strange beasts do strange things. I saw power that destroys the world, as I once did, only worse. This time there will be no warning and no escape.

COYOTE

So you had a bad dream. You don't have to lay it on us.

BEAR

Loon, what will become of Bear?

LOON

When the weakest beast is the strongest, the strongest becomes the weakest. Action is the cure for your despair, but death's the only cure for your disease.

COYOTE

You're no fun to be with.

RAVEN

Hear Raven speak. When I go to the giant egg up the mountain, will I find the power of the Sun and take it from the humans?

LOON

Only by overcoming an incredible danger. The very small contains the very great.

RAVEN

Then Loon, give me the wisdom and Coyote, the cunning; Bear, lend me the strength and Salmon, the resolve I will need to do what my great ancestor Raven did.

LOON

To you, Raven, I say: your seed will be poison, your death a living nightmare. To know the beginning is to know the end. Soon I will add a new charm to my necklace to put beside Grizzly's claw, Buffalo's hoof, Beaver's tail, and Condor's feather. The animals whose charms hang here have vanished from the land.

LOON screams and exits.

COYOTE

She could at least prescribe some pills.

RAVEN

Loon doesn't frighten me. No matter what the danger, I will do what must be done.

RAVEN caws heroically and exits.

COYOTE

Well, Bear, that leaves you and me. Two mammals alone together in this crazy mixed-up world.

BEAR

I'm not as strong as I used to be, Coyote, but if you lay another paw on me, I'll bite off your doctor power.

COYOTE

Hasta la vista, baby. It's siesta time.

COYOTE returns to his lair. BEAR stumbles offstage.

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

Time: Later that day.

Place: Liverwurst Laboratories

OLLIE

Nova, you're looking radiant.

STAN

Nova just got back from the environment.

OLLIE

How was it?

NOVA

Amazing! But there was a difficult moment. In a clearing by a stream, I was surrounded by wild animals.

STAN AND OLLIE

Wild animals!

NOVA

I felt I was on trial. It was very trying.

OLLIE

Naturally, on your first day—

STAN

What data did you register?

NOVA

There were some scary levels out there.

STAN

"Scary." That's hardly scientific, my dear.

NOVA

In hard numbers, contamination levels of 8.6 rems in the forest, 9.2 in the meadow, more than eleven in the stream.

STAN

That's scary!

NOVA

That can mean only one thing: radwaste is polluting the entire watershed.

OLLIE

Luckily, it's a wilderness area. Nobody lives out there.

NOVA

What about the animals? Radwaste is toxic to them too.

OLLIE

You are so right, Nova. We can never be too careful. That's why I hired you. You're dressed for success under stress.

NOVA

What's next?

OLLIE

Now that you've established that there is contamination, we need to clean up the uranium we're storing around here.

NOVA

There's no other place to put it.

OLLIE

We'll burn it in the fusion chamber. This will be the first fusion-fission hybrid: Project Prometheus!

NOVA

A fusion-fission hybrid? That's confusing.

STAN

It's efficient. We wrap a blanket of uranium around the fusion reaction so that when the pellet shoots off free neutrons in every direction, they bombard the uranium, producing plutonium.

NOVA

Plutonium!

OLLIE

Enough plutonium to fuel nuclear fission reactors around the world. Isn't that right, Stanley?

STAN

Right as rain, Ollie. Using the hybrid technology, 400 megawatts from fusion will generate four gigawatts of fission power.

OLLIE

And that will solve the world's energy problem, will it not?

STAN

Let's see: If a lightbulb is 100 watts, and 4 gigawatts are four billion watts, and there are seven billion people who seek illumination, how many lightbulbs will they need to screw in?

OLLIE

My breakthrough technology will end our dependence on fossil fuels and reduce the threat of climate change in one fell swoop. Consider the spread of knowledge and the advances in science as countless servers keep all the information in the world humming ad infinitum.

STAN

You're assuming that the powers-that-be fuel nuclear power plants around the world with the plutonium you'll generate.

OLLIE

An elementary assumption. Already I have twice been nominated to win the Nobel Prize.

STAN

How odd.

How even!

OLLIE

How now—

NOVA

How now?

STAN AND OLLIE

NOVA

How now are you going to get the uranium from the storage tanks to the reactor?

OLLIE

I assume you will tell the workers how to do it, safely.

NOVA

That's going to be a problem. When I got back from the environment, I told them about the levels of contamination.

OLLIE

That's tightly classified. You should never—

NOVA

And they all walked off the job.

OLLIE

They did what?

OLLIE exits.

STAN

It's a no-brainer.

NOVA

What?

STAN

The number of 100-watt lightbulbs seven billion people need to see the light.

NOVA

How many is that?

STAN

None. If they're all outside.

NOVA

Why did you leave the think tank, Father?

STAN

Ollie is an old school chum who asked me to solve an interesting problem for him.

And then he told me you were working here. Why didn't you tell me you took this job? Have you abandoned the Experiment?

NOVA

Dr. Liverwurst told me you were working with him. He said I would have time to do my own research, so I figured, that meant with you.

STAN

He doesn't know about the Experiment.

NOVA

He doesn't—?

STAN

Mum's the word. Mum!

NOVA

But Father, there's a lot I don't know about the Experiment. You never explained it, and Mother died too soon for me to understand. I've always told people I'm allergic to the environment. But I don't know what the real reason is

STAN

It's extremely classified. But now that you've left your alma mater, it's time I told you everything.

NOVA

O Father, I've been waiting so long for this moment when you could explain the Exper—

STAN

Mum, mummum mum mum mum!

OLLIE enters

OLLIE

You're right. There's not a worker out there.

STAN

Now what are you going to do, Ollie?

OLLIE

That's not the right question, Stanley. The right question is, what are we going to do?

STAN

What are we going to do, Ollie?

OLLIE

First of all, did you figure out how to keep a uranium blanket wrapped around the thermonuclear reaction at full force?

STAN

That's a piece of cake: yellowcake, to be exact.

OLLIE

Then all we have to do is get the yellowcake into the lab. Someone with a protective suit could do it safely.

NOVA

That's not my job, Dr. Liverwurst.

OLLIE

How about you, Stanley, dear friend? Will you please feed uranium to Project Prometheus?

OLLIE opens a door leading to the fusion chamber. There's a weird glow.

STAN

No wonder your urinals glow in the dark.

OLLIE

You'll be perfectly safe. At your age, you'll be dead before you get any symptoms.

STAN

A gram of prevention is worth a megaton of cure, I always say.

OLLIE

If we're going to solve the world's energy problem, we need the plutonium.

NOVA

If you start mass-producing plutonium and transporting it around the world, you'll create a bigger problem than lack of energy. What if a terrorist got ahold of it?

OLLIE

Our security is air-tight. You can breathe easy, without your helmet. Stanley, do you have any bright ideas?

STAN

Before producing anything, you need to test the method. Put just enough uranium into the chamber so that you breed only one chunk of plutonium, just enough for one little bomb. Hire someone to handle the radioactive materials, a new hire who'll be supervised by the health physicist on your staff. That would be a suitable job for you, Nova.

NOVA

I suppose.



OLLIE

A clever solution, Stanley.

STAN

You'll have your yellowcake and eat it too.

OLLIE exits

NOVA

I may have to quit my first job. This is not what I expected.

STAN

If you didn't want to learn, you should have stayed in the university. Now let's see: How many neutrons would it take to breed—?

NOVA

Father, I need to know— Father!

STAN

About the Experiment?

NOVA

How Mother died.

STAN

As you know, Nova, your mother was a space physiologist. She believed that human beings will someday conquer the vertical frontier.

NOVA

In space?

STAN

On Earth.

NOVA

But why? But, what?

STAN

Your mother was upwardly mobile. She thought that to cope with the combination of swelling seas and increasing population, millions will have to live above the atmosphere, at higher altitudes than ever before. Think high rises, only really high.

NOVA

Is that why I've never been exposed to the atmosphere, Father?

STAN

You are preparing the way for humans of the future.

NOVA

My life is an experiment?

STAN

All of life is an experiment, dear. Your mother ran some experiments in a light-weight plane that rode piggyback on a supersonic jet high above the stratosphere, almost into space. One day, as she was accelerating and her face was twisting under the pressure of 4, 5, 7 G's, your mother decided to meet the challenge of gravity.

NOVA

How could she?

STAN

Laghima yoga.

NOVA

What?

STAN

Levitation meditation.

NOVA

O.

STAN

The jet slingshot her craft into the highest reaches of the atmosphere where it glided in sub-orbit. And your mother, in her high-altitude cockpit, attained her center of levity. But the plane went into a spin and – gravity won.

NOVA

That must have been terrible for you.

STAN

And for you. I have always been faithful to her memory. And since you were small, you have kept her life's work alive. Now Nova, it is up to you to choose. Will you too be upwardly mobile?

NOVA

I will continue the Experiment. Of course, I need to learn more about it. A lot more.

STAN

That's my girl! I don't believe in an afterlife, but like your mother, I believe that humanity has a future no matter what we do to this planet. And if she were here, I know you would be making her glad.

NOVA

Well, I'm feeling very strange.

STAN

That's only normal.

OLLIE enters.

OLLIE

I posted the job on the Interstellarnet.

STAN

I hope there's intelligent life out there.

OLLIE

Someone who is brave and foolish will do just fine.

A ringtone.

STAN

What's that?

NOVA

I'm being tweeted. It's someone who wants to apply for the job.

OLLIE

How odd. Job-seekers are supposed to contact me.

NOVA

Shall I twitter back?

RAVEN enters without his bird mask.

RAVEN

Hey, man, what's happening?

NOVA

Who are you?

RAVEN

Ray's the name, progress is my game. I've come to fill your opening.

OLLIE

We have an opening for a quantum mechanic.

RAVEN

I fill the bill.

STAN

I thought affirmative action was kaput.

OLLIE

Allow me to introduce ourselves. I'm Dr. Oliver Liverwurst, and these are my colleagues Dr. J. Stanley Opportune and Dr. Nova Opportune.

You're all doctors?

RAVEN

Of physics.

STAN

Do you give physicals?

RAVEN  
(to NOVA)

No, but our employees get insurance. Our policy has a very good dental plan.

OLLIE

Do you have a mental plan?

RAVEN

Of course not. There is no sanity clause.

STAN

As a health physicist, I have to tell you that this place is hot.

NOVA

Hot is how I like it.

RAVEN

We have to make sure he's qualified.

STAN

Of course we do. Mr. Ray?

OLLIE

Whazzup?

RAVEN

Before we can hire you officially, we have a little test for you to take.

OLLIE

Lay it on me.

RAVEN

That's the spirit. First question: Are you familiar with the properties of plutonium?

OLLIE

Plu-who-nium?

RAVEN

Second question: How does one arrive at critical mass?

OLLIE

RAVEN

Isn't that a place near Boston?

OLLIE

Finally, what is the solution to global warming?

RAVEN

Chill, man!

OLLIE

Congratulations! You pass with flying colors.

STAN

Not by me he doesn't. He could be an illegal alien. Do you have a birth certificate?

RAVEN

A birth certificate? Do I have to prove I was born?

STAN

We're physicists, not biologists.

RAVEN

Well, I don't have one.

OLLIE

You see? He's perfectly legitimate, Stanley. Only an illegal alien would carry a birth certificate.

STAN

All right, then, I need to know if you have any experience working in a place like this.

RAVEN

I have a lot of experience in winging it.

NOVA

I'll take him under my wing. Come with me, Ray.

NOVA exits with RAVEN

STAN

But Nova— Nova!

SCENE TWO

NOVA

All right, Ray, let me show you what to do.

RAVEN

First, I have a question.

NOVA

Okay. Sure.

RAVEN

Every quest begins with a question. I want to know what's going on in this giant egg of yours.

NOVA

Giant egg?

RAVEN

What do you call it?

NOVA

A dome. A containment structure. Why—?

RAVEN

That's what an egg is: a round containment structure. And like every egg, this has got to be protecting something on the inside from what's outside.

NOVA

It does. But what's your point?

RAVEN

This egg is different. Because you want to protect what's outside from what's inside here. Am I wrong?

NOVA

Well, no. How do you know?

RAVEN

A little bird told me. So what are you hatching inside this giant egg?

NOVA

What are you doing?

RAVEN

And what's with that outfit? I've seen you with the bubble on top.

NOVA

Where did you—

RAVEN

In a different life. And I saw that it removed you from the life around you. But that's where joy comes from. With a bubble on your head you'll never feel the wind ruffling your—hair.

NOVA

Do you want this job or not?

RAVEN

O yes. This is important work. And you know, that bubble keeps you from seeing the horizon that expands as your vision soars.

NOVA

You're no job applicant.

RAVEN

O, but I am. I'm your man.

NOVA

You're impossible!

RAVEN

Let's say, highly unlikely. Give me one more chance. Please! It's true, I've never applied for a job like this before. I may be a bit quirky. But I really want to do this, and I know I'll be great at it.

NOVA

If you don't pay attention to what I'm telling you, and if you don't do what I tell you perfectly, you're out. Immediately. Do you hear me? This job is too dangerous for someone whose mind is obviously all over the place. Now listen closely. Not that close.

RAVEN

I'm just trying to learn. Trying very hard.

NOVA

All right. What makes stars shine, what ignites them and keeps them burning for billions of years, is fusion.

RAVEN

Fusion.

NOVA

That's the force that comes from an intense concentration of gravity that collapses the atom's internal structure and releases thermonuclear energy. Do you follow me?

RAVEN

Atom who?

NOVA

Okay. You need to think inside the box.

RAVEN

That's how I'm thinking.

NOVA

Then look at this. What's this?

RAVEN

Nothing.

NOVA

It's air.

RAVEN

Is that what's there when the wind blows, and when the wind stops blowing, it's still there, the air there? I got it.

NOVA

Ok-ay. Now take the smallest part of air you can imagine and draw an imaginary box around it. What do you see?

RAVEN

Still nothing.

NOVA

Still nothing, but it's not still. If you could see inside there, or inside anything, there would be billions of tiny atoms, moving about. In water, you'd see mainly hydrogen atoms, the most abundant substance in the universe. And inside those atoms-

RAVEN

Is this how you spend your time? You really need to get out more.

NOVA

That's it. You get out of here.

RAVEN

O, please. My mind is completely focused on nothing, just like you say.

NOVA

I'll give you one more chance. In this lab we put a tiny pellet at the center of an array of intense lasers, or beams, that concentrate so much pressure on the pellet that the atoms within it collapse, making it ignite with the thermonuclear power of a star.

RAVEN

Really? I get it now! You haven't taken the Sun out of the sky, but what you have done is brought the power of the Sun to Earth.

NOVA

Well, it's a tiny star compared to the Sun, but that's right.

RAVEN

Awesome. So what is my job exactly? Tell me what to do. Give me the tools. This is my destiny.



NOVA

You are a strange bird.

SCENE THREE

STAN

Tell me, Ollie: Don't you think Ray is a bit cuckoo?

OLLIE

Not at all. He's as mentally sound as you or I.

STAN

I think he's either extremely clever or a complete imbecile.

OLLIE

We do have to watch him like a hawk.

STAN

He seems like a dove to me.

OLLIE

Luckily, I'm prepared for any eventuality. In the event that Ray gets out of hand, I want you to activate this safeguard.

STAN

What does it do?

OLLIE

Be my guest.

OLLIE gestures toward an emergency switch. STANLEY pulls it. A ROBOT rolls into the chamber.

STAN

(reading its label)

Ah, an anti-tourist device.

OLLIE

Not anti-tourist. Anti-terrorist!

STAN

How does it work?

OLLIE

Why don't you test it?

STAN

You're the experimental physicist. After you.

OLLIE

No, go ahead. After you.

STAN

All right then.

STAN approaches the ROBOT. A gloved fist punches him out.

STAN

Ow!

OLLIE

You see, we're well armed.

OLLIE releases the switch, and the ROBOT rolls. STAN kicks it as it goes. The ROBOT punches him again, then exits.

STAN

That hurts!

OLLIE

If you're going to make noise, do it quietly.

NOVA enters.

NOVA

Father, are you all right?

OLLIE

He was testing a security device.

STAN

The only thing we have to fear is our security.

OLLIE

Speaking of security, how is Ray doing? What is he doing? And where is he?

NOVA

Ray is loading uranium into the chamber.

Ollie opens the hatch, exposing its radioactive glow.

OLLIE

Did you tell him how much we need to produce one ball of plutonium?

NOVA

Exactly, according to my father's calculations.

RAVEN enters unseen by the physicists.

STAN

We have to be careful once that plutonium comes out of the ignition chamber. It's enough to power a bomb.

NOVA

Like the one that wiped out Nagasaki? I read that on that August day, it was as if the Sun rose twice.

OLLIE

These days, little A-bombs like that are used to trigger H-bombs.

NOVA

What will happen when the plutonium is generated?

RAVEN

Let's have a run-through.

STAN

On your marks, get set—

OLLIE

What are you doing here?

RAVEN

Waiting for my next assignment. The uranium's loaded and ready to be fired up.

NOVA

Watch your step, or you'll be fired before anything else is.

OLLIE

Come here.

RAVEN walks toward OLLIE watching his feet.

OLLIE

Look at the machine, Ray. Your job is to put the ball of plutonium that comes out right here into this super-secure storage bin.

RAVEN

Got it.

NOVA

You'll wear these radiation-proof gloves.

RAVEN

They fit my mitts.

NOVA

They'd better fit. You'll be handling enough plutonium to give cancer to everybody on Earth.

OLLIE

If broken into fragments and distributed evenly. Which would never happen.

RAVEN

Every human being would get cancer?

NOVA

That's right.

RAVEN

No problem.

OLLIE

You're the man for the job. Now imagine this 8-ball is the plutonium. Once it's produced within the fusion reaction, it will roll down this ramp and stop right here. You will carry it carefully to the bin and place the plutonium inside.

RAVEN

Looks easy to me.

OLLIE

Are you ready for a test run? I flip the fusion lever, the lasers zero in on the target, we have ignition, neutrons bombard the uranium, transforming it and breeding plutonium, which rolls down the ramp, and plo-

RAVEN

Eye on the ball.

OLLIE

Into the bin.

RAVEN

And it's in.

OLLIE

Splendid! Now, are we all ready for the real thing? The first fusion-fission hybrid reaction?

STAN

I suppose so.

RAVEN

Go for it.

OLLIE

This is an historic occasion. For a billionth of a second, Project Prometheus will generate a temperature six times that of the Sun's interior. And, for the first time ever, a fusion reactor will produce fuel for nuclear fission: just a sample for now.

But someday, civilization will look back on this moment as we look back on James Watt's steam engine, Thomas Edison's lightbulb, and the Wright brothers' airplane as the start of a new era of technological achievement. And someday, people will look back on this moment as the beginning of the end of humanity's greatest problems.

RAVEN

You can say that again.

OLLIE

And someday, people will—

STAN

Just turn the machine on, Ollie.

OLLIE

All right. Stand by.

OLLIE flips a lever. Lights flash,  
sounds sizzle, and a ball rolls  
down the ramp.

OLLIE

It's working! It's working!

BLACKOUT.

STAN

You must have blown a fuse.

OLLIE

No problem. I always carry an extra. But I can't find the fusebox.

NOVA

Open a window.

OLLIE

There are no windows. This place is hermetically sealed.

STAN

I have a flashlight.

NOVA

So do I.

OLLIE

Wait a minute! Where's the plutonium? It's not here. It's not in the bin.

NOVA

Where's Ray?

OLLIE

He's got to be here somewhere. I'll get him!

Ollie pulls the emergency switch.  
The ROBOT rolls in and punches him.  
STANLEY kicks it, and it punches  
him. NOVA releases the switch, and  
the ROBOT exits.

NOVA

He got away.

STAN

With enough plutonium to destroy a city.

OLLIE

He couldn't have gotten away. This chamber is sealed tight as  
a drum.

NOVA

Where is he then?

STAN

We have to find the plutonium.

OLLIE

We've got to find Ray.

NOVA

You'd better alert the authorities.

OLLIE

They'll leak the news and cause a panic and that could have  
dire consequences, like the loss of my funding.

STAN

Where could he be?

OLLIE

Even if he got out of this building, he didn't leave the  
grounds. The fences are electrified.

NOVA

Not if you've blown the fuse.

OLLIE

I'll head for the gate. You go toward the radwaste. Follow  
me, Stanley.

NOVA exits.

STAN

I'm taking a different direction.

OLLIE

The door is this way.

STAN

After you.

They do a brief lazzo that begins politely and ends with shoving.

OLLIE

This is a fine mess you've gotten us into!

OLLIE pushes STANLEY out the door, then exits.

ACT THREE

SCENE ONE

The Time: Sunset

The Place: Somewhere in the Forest

COYOTE enters and looks for a spot to sleep in.

COYOTE

What are you staring at? Beautiful tail, hah? La cola loca! Hottest thing since the burning bush. What's that? Show some respect! Coyote made the world, and don't you forget it. If it weren't for Don Coyote, you would be helpless. Even more than you are now. So you invented the wheel. Big deal! That wheel that's setting now is greater than all your tricknology. Asi es la vida. La vida loca. Now it's bedtime. Forest, keep watch while I sleep. Ground, I stand upon your face. Let me rest undisturbed. Good night, grass people, you'll be my blanket. Buenas noches, sierra. Good night, fleas.

LOON enters.

LOON

Where do you think you're going?

COYOTE

To sleep. Where else?

LOON

To sleep? When Raven's in danger? When a new disease has taken Bear from us? Bear is gone, Coyote.

COYOTE

That's the way the buffalo chips fall. Lighten up, Loon. Do you know why we coyotes have been around since the beginning of the world?

LOON

Don't tell me. It's 'cause of your clean habits.

COYOTE

It's because we catch a few years' nap whenever we can. Buenas noches, compañera.

LOON

You want a nap? Nod out now and you'll never wake up again.

COYOTE

Your bum talk can foul a man's dreams. No wonder you sleep alone.

LOON

I want to be a loon.

COYOTE

You do that. Osmosis, palomita.

LOON

If you don't use your doctor power soon, Raven will be a dead duck.

COYOTE

Doctoring is too much work.

LOON

You let Raven go after the humans' power, and now you don't care what happens to him. Or to me either. Or to your own foolish self.

COYOTE

I'll get by. I always do. Why, when you burned the whole world up, who was it survived and made the world again? Coyote! I know what happened after the before and before the after.

LOON

You don't even remember what happened.

COYOTE

When you burned the world? You were mad.

LOON

I was blazing mad. Wouldn't you be? Some creep stole my beautiful bead necklace. You bet I was pissed. With the power of thought, I filled the sky with lightning. I stomped in the blaze laughing. The trees popped with flame.



Thunderclaps sound, lights flash.

COYOTE

Hey, take it easy!

LOON

Get off your butt, Coyote.

COYOTE

Not in a thousand lifetimes. I'm bushed, and that is that.

LOON shows COYOTE the charms on her necklace.

LOON

Buffalo, Condor, Beaver, Bear. Do you know who's next?

COYOTE

Let's talk about it. We are mature animals. We do have a familial relationship. I'm your brother, you're my little sister. Besides, I'm okay, you're okay.

LOON begins to scream.

COYOTE

Shut up and go away! You're ruining my sleep.

LOON

You'd better wake up and do something.

LOON pulls COYOTE's tail off.

COYOTE

Hey! Give me my tail back.

LOON

Use your power for once. Then you'll get your tail.

COYOTE

Ay, mi cola. Mi cola.

LOON

Use your power, Coyote. If you don't, you will be alone, like at the beginning of the world. And then, there will be no one.

LOON exits with a weird scream.

COYOTE

Loon, you are one stubborn bird. Where are my fleas? Vamos!

COYOTE exits.

## SCENE TWO

The Time: Early evening

The Place: On the grounds of Liverwurst Labs

RAVEN lies still, apparently dead. He has his mask and is wearing the lab gloves. The plutonium pellet is lodged within his beak. COYOTE enters.

COYOTE

O no! This calls for snout-to-beak resuckitation. Yuck!

(COYOTE tries to suck the ball from RAVEN'S beak. Then, wielding a rattle, COYOTE dances.)

I, the song, I walk here.

I, the song, I walk here.

Pain rises into the sky.

Pain rises into the sky.

What do I take from his mouth?

What do I take from his mouth?

The pain I take from his mouth.

The pain I take from his mouth.

What will I suck out?

What will I suck out?

The pain I'll suck out.

The pain I'll suck out.

What will I blow about?

What will I blow about?

The pain I'll blow about.

COYOTE puts his snout to RAVEN'S beak and sucks hard. Then, lifting his face as if to howl, he shrieks. Blood pours from his mouth. He falls and writhes as if possessed, then slowly rises. RAVEN sits up.

RAVEN

Croak!

COYOTE whacks him on the back.

COYOTE

Cough it up.

RAVEN shits out the plutonium pellet. It rolls away from him.

RAVEN

Was my seed poison?

COYOTE

Was your death a living nightmare?

RAVEN

I don't remember.

COYOTE

Shmuck! Remember Bear? She's extinct.

RAVEN

My mission has failed.

COYOTE

And my ass is grass.

RAVEN

Wait! There it is. The plutonium.

COYOTE

That pain over there?

RAVEN

That pain is like nothing you could even imagine.

COYOTE

Try me.

RAVEN

It's like the seed of a star: small but so powerful that when it ignites, it makes a star explode into being, right in front of you. Or I think that's what it does.

COYOTE

And why did they make that?

RAVEN

I don't know, but they did it with the stuff that's been making us sick. And now, yes, I can take this poison out of our world. I can fly away with it just like the great Raven of yore!

COYOTE

Doctor's advice: If you don't want to join Bear and Condor in Neverneverland, keep it out of your beak. ¿Comprendido? Capiche?

RAVEN

(extending the gloves)

Okay. I've got protection.

They hear STANLEY coming as the light from his flashlight rakes the stage. COYOTE flees. RAVEN drops back down as if dead.

STANLEY enters. OLLIE enters behind him unseen.

STAN

O my God! Deja vu!

OLLIE

Gesundheit.

STAN

A talking feathered vertebrate!

OLLIE

It's me, Stanley.

STAN

O Ollie. You scared me. I thought you were heading toward the gate, and I was going— And then this!

OLLIE

I am heading toward the gate. You got lost again.

STAN

Look what I found.

OLLIE

A dead bird. So what?

STAN

It's wearing gloves from our lab.

STAN takes one of the gloves.

OLLIE

I've heard of a bird in the hand but never a hand on the bird. That's anatomically impossible.

STAN

Or highly improbable, according to current theory. Still, facts are facts. And when we last saw this glove, Ray was wearing it.

OLLIE

If you think I hired a bird, you have the brain of a bird.

STAN

And you hired me for my brain. So if I have the brain of a bird, what's in your cranium?

OLLIE

Don't be silly, Stanley. We have an emergency. Think, man, think!

STAN

Let's postulate that this glove is a clue to Ray's disappearance.

OLLIE

Do you suppose he put it on the bird to cover his tracks?

STAN

Or he has fellow travelers. You know what they say about birds of a feather.

OLLIE

While we're dithering, Ray is getting away. I'm going to the gate.

STAN

I'll go this way and look for more clues.

OLLIE

Good plan.

OLLIE exits. STAN exits in the opposite direction. RAVEN sits up and is about to go for the plutonium when STAN returns, searching the ground with his flashlight. The glove is on his hand. RAVEN flops back into his dead position. STAN sees the plutonium and heads for it. Hearing the clicking of NOVA's Geiger counter, STAN grabs the pellet and exits in a rush. The clicking stops. Cautiously, RAVEN sits up. But when NOVA enters wearing the bubble helmet, he plays dead again. She hurries to his side.

NOVA

Raven! Speak to me.

RAVEN

Nevermore!

NOVA notices the gloved hand.

NOVA

Ray! Raven? What are you, a bird or a man?

RAVEN

What kind of animal are you?

NOVA

You stole the plutonium. You did, didn't you? Where is it?

I don't know. RAVEN

Are you a terrorist? NOVA

NOVA pushes a button on her phone.

What are you doing? RAVEN

Calling for help. NOVA

I saved your life. Remember? Don't let them put me in a cage. RAVEN

Where's the plutonium? NOVA

I flew away with it but fell sick and fell. It dropped out. Someone took it. I don't know who. RAVEN

You don't expect me to believe that. NOVA

When your help arrives, will they believe you were talking to a bird? Cause I'm out of here. RAVEN

Wait! Help me find it. Whoever has it was here a minute ago. NOVA

All right, Nova. I will help you once again. With that clicking stick of yours and my sky vision, we'll find the ball of starfire. Head this way. RAVEN

Give me that glove. NOVA

They exit.

### SCENE THREE

The Time: Synchronous  
The Place: On the grounds of Liverwurst Labs

OLLIE is speaking into his phone.

OLLIE

Hello. Hello? A call for help! Maybe she found it. I can find her position. Where is that thing? There. No, under Tools.

COYOTE enters wearing dark glasses  
and a hat.

OLLIE

Hold it! Who are you?

COYOTE

A top dog from headquarters. And from hindquarters. Dr. Liverwurst, I presume.

OLLIE

Show me your badge.

COYOTE

What did you say, cabrón?

OLLIE

Your badge. Show me your badge.

COYOTE

I don't have to show any stinking badges.

OLLIE

How did you get past the gate?

COYOTE

That's my secret, but I'll tell you this much: it's all in the hips. You're in a pickle, aren't you, boss man?

OLLIE

I'll say.

COYOTE

You can tell me all about it. I'll make sure that what happened in Liverwurst stays in Liverwurst.

OLLIE

We had an incident.

COYOTE

An incident or an accident?

OLLIE

It wasn't an accident. A ball of plutonium just got stolen from my lab.

COYOTE

A pickle of purloined plutonium. How careless of you.

OLLIE

One of my workers took it.

COYOTE

Too bad.

OLLIE

But he didn't get away, I'm sure of that. It must be on the grounds here somewhere. Another worker just signaled she needs help. And I'm going to help her wring his neck.

COYOTE

You do that, and I'll find out who his people are. In case he's a—

COYOTE AND OLLIE

Terrorist!

OLLIE

She's this way. Let's go.

COYOTE

Are you sure? I hear her clicking over there.

OLLIE

I don't think so.

COYOTE

I've very sharp ears, all the better to hear her with.

OLLIE

But this has a GPS locator—

COYOTE grabs the phone and throws  
it away.

COYOTE

It's a piece of junk. Use your senses, man! Hear that?

OLLIE

Where'd you throw my locator?

COYOTE

You'd need a locator to locate it. Don't worry. With your brains and my ears, we'll be there in no time.

OLLIE

With my ears and your brains, we'll never get there. Isn't there a swamp in this direction?

COYOTE

If you were hiding plutonium, where would you go?



OLLIE

That's so obvious, it's brilliant. I would never have thought of that.

COYOTE

You can relax. You'll get your fireball back without anyone ever knowing you had an incident. It's your good luck I'm under cover.

OLLIE

That's a nice coat you have.

COYOTE

It's genuine.

OLLIE

You should have someone fix that overbite.

They exit.

#### SCENE FOUR

The Time: That night.

The Place: A secret site on the lab grounds.

A rocket stands on its launchpad. With his gloved hand, STAN tosses the ball of plutonium to the ROBOT, which tries to insert the fuel into a receptacle at the bottom of the spaceship.

STAN

There you go, Zorg. Put it in there. No, it has to go in exactly. Righty tighty. Let's try again.

The ROBOT returns the ball to STAN, who tosses it again, and the ROBOT catches it. The Geiger counter's clicking sound precedes the entrance of NOVA and RAVEN.

NOVA

Father! What are you doing? The plutonium!

RAVEN approaches the ROBOT, wanting to get the ball.

ROBOT

Grrrr!

RAVEN backs off.

STAN

The plutonium is in good hands, Nova, and it will serve an excellent purpose, just as I have planned. Now put it in the onboard reactor, boy. That's it. Give yourself some grease. You deserve it. Now go inside. Test the computers. Thata boy.

After putting the plutonium into the rocket, ROBOT exits inside the craft.

NOVA

What is this, Father?

RAVEN

That bird will never fly, no matter what you stick up its butt. Look at those wings. Pathetic!

NOVA

You never told me you were a rocket scientist.

STAN

This project is top secret. Not even Ollie knows. I joined his lab to acquire enough plutonium to power this spacecraft into the future. The human future. The future that your entire life has been a preparation for.

NOVA

You mean, the Experiment?

STAN

An experiment that is soon to be reality. Only now can I reveal to you the true nature of your mission: the most important expedition in human history. Plutonium will power this rocket beyond our solar system. Once you are in deep space, sails will unfold to use the power of light to propel you forward.

RAVEN

It's starsails now. Nothing beats wings. Nothing!

NOVA

What are you talking about? Forward to where?

STAN

An earthlike planet that orbits a nearby star.

NOVA

You'd send me to another solar system?

STAN

It's close in lightyears. At the rate this rocket will be going, you'll be there, cosmically speaking, in the blink of an eye.

NOVA

How long will that be in human years?

STAN

It will take thousands of Earth years, but you, on the space craft, relatively speaking, will be much younger than that. You will age, naturally, and also synthetically.

NOVA

Synthetically? I'm not into that. I don't like the way women turn their sagging boobs into Silicon Valley.

STAN

You don't understand. You see, I've programmed your personal genome into the computer, and whenever one of your body parts gets damaged or worn out, whether it's your bladder or your heart, even your blood cells, the computer will produce tiny robots to replace it.

NOVA

Father! What are you thinking?

STAN

I'm thinking you will be practically immortal. That dream will become your reality. You'll even be able to download your memories, your personality—

NOVA

Do you really—?

STAN

I know it's hard for you to imagine what a wonderful mission I've planned for you. Your computer contains the entire sum of human knowledge, and it's programmed to learn everything from now on. You'll be able to communicate with Earth via the Interstellarnet. For as long as there are people to communicate with.

NOVA

The sum of human knowledge? You think you can put that on a chip? Look at me, Father. You don't know me. You have no idea who I am. Isn't that human knowledge? Recognizing who I am? Your daughter.

STAN

We always have more to learn. Knowledge is an island in the sea of ignorance. And you will be an island traveling through space bringing human knowledge where it's never gone before. Onboard, you'll find a well-stocked refrigerator. Very well stocked. Whatever you do, though, don't defrost!

NOVA

But Father—

STAN

Within the freezer compartment, you'll find a selection of ice cubes, each of which – get this: each of which contains the spermatozoa of a great man.

NOVA

What?

STAN

You'll combine our genes with their genius; our genius with their genes.

NOVA

You expect me to procreate with a popsicle?

STAN

Think of it: you will be the new Eve! By the time the spacecraft reaches Alpha Tsauris, you will have created a new human race. You will be the mother of all intelligent life. In that solar system anyway. Assuming we survive here. Which isn't likely.

RAVEN

He's got that right.

NOVA

Father, listen to me. How could you prepare all this without telling me?

STAN

How could I tell you before I was sure it was ready and you were ready? Consider the risk: exposing the future of human genes, the product of millions of years of evolution, to the emotional response of one woman.

NOVA

That's how human evolution happens: one woman at a time.

STAN

And that is where an even more advanced species will come from, now that you know. You could name the new humankind homo sapiens sapiens sapiens: homo cubed, tethered no longer to a single planet, peopling places yet to be discovered throughout the universe.

RAVEN

Up in the air, junior birdmen! Up in the air, upside down!

STAN

Stuff it!

NOVA

Father, I won't go. I'll have nothing to do with this.

STAN

What do you mean, you won't go?

NOVA

My future is on Earth. I live here. Life lives here.

STAN

But Nova, you are our only hope. No, don't take that off.

NOVA removes the bubble helmet.

NOVA

Your experiment is over. Ah, the air. That's what it smells like. Natural air.

STAN

I'm so disappointed. First, I lost your mother, who flew too high. And now you won't fly at all. The Answer is now out of the question. The human future is out the window, up for grabs, in the hands of chance. Or is it necessity? I guess I'll go back to the think tank.

NOVA

Try not thinking for just a moment, Father.

She embraces him.

STAN

(crying copiously)

My little girl has grown up!

OLLIE and COYOTE enter. OLLIE has swamp grass on his hat and his clothes.

OLLIE

There you are, Stanley. Have you found the plutonium? And what's that bird doing here?

RAVEN

Awk!

OLLIE

Not so dead, I see.

COYOTE

Mr. Ray is actually my colleague. He's deeply under cover. Nice disguise, eh?

STAN

You don't have to worry about the plutonium, Ollie. No terrorist took it. I did, for a project even more secret than Prometheus. You don't have clearance for it. But I do.

OLLIE

I don't care how much clearance you have, that thing won't fly.

RAVEN

Didn't I tell you?

STAN

Propelled by plutonium, it will. It was going to take Nova to an extrasolar planet. Except she doesn't want to go.

OLLIE

When I hired Nova, I thought I was manipulating you. But you were actually manipulating me. And you kept it under your hat. Very clever, Stanley.

STAN

I outsmarted you, didn't I?

They do a hat lazzo.

OLLIE

And you're pleased as punch.

STAN

That's my hat, Ollie.

OLLIE

Your head doesn't fit it any more. Try this for size.

Ollie puts NOVA's helmet on STAN's head.

OLLIE

Nova, you can work with me on solving the world's energy problem with the fusion-fission hybrid. That's the cutting edge. Civilization will make a quantum leap once we bring power to the people!

NOVA

It's not for me, Dr. Liverwurst.

COYOTE

For me neither.

OLLIE

What about you? Who are you, anyway?

COYOTE

The fur is real. So is the bite.

Ollie heads for the rocket.

OLLIE

(to STAN)

Is that thing open? Let me in!

STAN

Sorry, Ollie, I can't hear a thing you say.

OLLIE takes the helmet off STAN's head. STAN whistles for the ROBOT, which scoots out of the rocket and takes a position between OLLIE and COYOTE.

ROBOT

Woof, woof, woofwoofwoof!

STAN

Good boy.

RAVEN

I have seen the future, and it's worse.

NOVA

Not if I can help it.

NOVA removes her space suit.

NOVA

It's a small step for a woman. But a giant step for me. It's time I learn how to live.

STAN

With them?

COYOTE

Welcome to animalkind.

STAN

But there's no intelligent life out there!

NOVA

That's what I intend to find out.

STAN

O Nova, you have a mind of your own, just like your dad.

OLLIE

A chip off the old blockhead.

The ROBOT turns away from COYOTE to face OLLIE.

ROBOT

Watch your mouth.

COYOTE

We've got great benefits, including my doctor power. Now every end must have its tail. Loon, where are you? Owooo!

LOON enters wearing COYOTE's tail  
like a fur stole.

LOON

All right, Coyote. That thing's going nowhere. His machine has no one to work it. And she's joined our biotic community. Here's your tail back.

LOON puts the tail on COYOTE.

COYOTE

Ahora si! That's more like it!

RAVEN

I'm the one who stole the power of the Sun from the humans. What do I get?

COYOTE

You get rescued is what you get.

LOON

Didn't I tell you your seed would be poison, your death a living nightmare?

RAVEN

I know. I should have listened. I get it.

COYOTE

Ay chihuahua. I'm getting some sleep.

LOON

(removing her mask, she turns  
to the audience)

To know the beginning is to know the end. And this is the end.