

MISPLACED PRIORITIES

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. CRAMPED COCKPIT - SPACE

Tandem seats with no visible controls. The scene outside is chaotic, multi-colored, and careening as if an aircraft was barrel-rolling over rough seas.

A nameplate above the front window reads "Temporal Excursion Vehicle *Samuel Madden*".

In the front seat, pilot WAYNE EMIL (37) leans into each of the craft's turns, apparently controlling it by thoughts. His steely demeanor matches his crisp and spotless flightsuit.

In the back seat, DR. NICOLE JAYASHRI (27) fidgets nervously. Each quarter of her long, wavy hair is a different color, and each zipper on her flightsuit is opened for ventilation.

NICOLE

I just know that bastard Ryanson is trying to scoop my study. Can't you take a short-cut that way?

WAYNE

Dr. Jayashri, I don't tell you how to be an anthropologist. Now --

Some kind of "hail" pelts the craft from the side.

WAYNE

We need to set down 'til this storm passes.

Vibrating with frustration, Nicole bites her lip.

The view outside the window settles down with the "hail" swirling overhead, and the engine noise winds down.

WAYNE

We're still in California, but in the middle of Twenty-twenty.

NICOLE

I got eighty-seven immunizations so I could observe the Martis Tribe making petroglyphs in Fifteen Hundred B.C. No one is making petroglyphs in Twenty-twenty!

WAYNE

Looks like there'll be a clearing in a couple hours.

NICOLE

Six of them couldn't even be downloaded. Physical injections!

WAYNE

Hey, you want to wait here or walk around outside? We landed in an entertainment facility, but it's a plague interval. The place should be deserted.

Nicole seethes at the delay, seems ready to scream.

WAYNE

You want out. See what you need.

Text appears before Nicole concerning her immunization status. Amoebas and bacteria show "IMMUNE" while mitochondrial phages show "NOT INVENTED YET".

For viruses, the display says she needs "HIV Group 1, HPV Group 1, HPV Group 2, and Coronavirus Group 5".

NICOLE

All right, Computer, go ahead.

Nicole looks ill for a moment, instinctively grabs for where the immunity implant is in her neck, and swallows hard.

NICOLE

Yuck. Give me an identity from this era that won't attract attention.

Her flightsuit morphs into sneakers, ripped jeans, a tee shirt, and a facemask with a kitty mouth on it. A New York driver's license, a cell phone, and two credit cards appear on her lap.

She peeks at different parts of her hair, shakes her head, and within a moment all of her hair is one shade of green.

INT. GO-KART TRACK - DAY

A well-lit indoor racing arena. Nicole appears to step out of a wall, takes a calming breath.

NICOLE

This year might be the armpit of history, but at least I can get a moment of peace.

A go-kart VROOMS past, scaring Nicole half to death. That VROOM is followed by several more loud VROOMS.

NICOLE
 What the --
 (VROOM!)
 -- are they doing here?!

INT. CASHIER'S BOOTH - DAY

Nicole takes her credit card back from a CASHIER (17) wearing a surgical mask.

NICOLE
 So this plague is still going on,
 but... you're... open.

CASHIER
 Yeah. People are kinda tired of the
 whole pandemic thing.

Nicole spots a vending machine that sells longneck soda bottles. She lightly touches the glass over a bottle clearly labeled as A&W cream soda.

NICOLE
 Beer... is still legal.

INT. WAITING AREA - DAY

In line, Nicole takes swigs from her soda. Her flushness and swagger show she can't tell a sugar rush from a beer buzz.

She chats MOS with several different CUSTOMERS in line, some wearing masks and some not.

Upon reaching the front of the line, Nicole tries to hide her bottle from the ATTENDANT (22) guiding her to a go-kart.

INT. GO-KART TRACK - CONTINUOUS

She glances back at the Customers in the waiting area.

NICOLE
 I am very confused.

ATTENDANT
 It's just like a car. Brake on the
 left, gas on the right.

NICOLE
 Well, I don't have much practice
 with that, either.

The Attendant spots the New York driver's license laying next to her, and he smirks.

She leans back, arms on the sides of the go-kart, until she notices the other drivers holding the steering wheel.

INT. MONTAGE - GO-KART TRACK / WAITING AREA - DAY

-- Nicole stays still when the other go-karts race off.

-- In a new race, she reacts too slow and bumps into a wall.

-- Back in the waiting area, Nicole knocks back another long, cold drink of cream soda.

-- In another race, she almost - but not quite - makes it through a corner.

-- Nicole hurries the Cashier along to refill her pass.

-- She grits her teeth, struggles to edge past a ten-year-old in another go-kart.

-- Nicole comes in third during the next race.

END MONTAGE

INT. GO-KART TRACK - DAY

Nicole sips her bottle impatiently, next in line to get back into the go-karts, and rushes over when called.

WAYNE (V.O.)

The storm is clearing. Get yourself over here.

NICOLE

One last one. I'm gonna win it this time. I know it.

WAYNE (V.O.)

This isn't going to wait.

The race starts, and Nicole jumps out to an early lead.

NICOLE

Woo-hoo!

WAYNE (V.O.)
 I can't tell when the next clearing
 will be, and there's no way to
 refuel here. I have to go.

Nicole's attention is laser-focused on avoiding the sides of
 the track and keeping other go-karts from edging past her.

WAYNE (V.O.)
 You have an emergency beacon. You
 want me to just leave you here?

Nicole rounds the final curve, fixes her eyes on the
 checkered flag. She crosses the finish line first.

NICOLE
 Yeah!

Nicole does a self-congratulatory dance beside the track.

NICOLE
 That... was... awesome! Are you
 ready, Mister Emil? Hello? Pilot?
 Er, Captain? Hello?

Nicole's eyes grow wide with the gradual realization that
 she's been stranded in the "armpit of history."

Terrified, she scurries out of sight, pushes a spot on her
 left collarbone while squeezing her left earlobe. Both spots
 glow briefly, and she sighs in relief.

WAYNE (V.O.)
 Step forward.

INT. SPACIOUS COCKPIT - SPACE

Similar technology, but with a row of seats behind the pilot.

The nameplate reads "Temporal Excursion Vehicle *H. G. Wells*".

Nicole steps from a glowing sheet of light, and right away
 her eyes land on the lone passenger, DR. TOSHIHIRO RYANSON
 (29) relaxed with his arms across two neighboring seats.

WAYNE
 Welcome aboard.

TOSHIHIRO
 We heard your beacon on the way
 back from my observations of the
 Martis Tribe.

Nicole stews over this news, digs her nails into her palms, looks ready to scream.

TOSHIHIRO

Too bad for you, there's no point
having two expeditions to the same
historical event.

The windows show that the craft is flying again.

Nicole calms herself with visible effort, swigs some soda.

NICOLE

That's... okay, Ryanson. I just
found a population with some of
most irrational and self-
contradictory beliefs imaginable.

FADE OUT.