

"DIASPORA "

by

John R. Woodruff

WGAw1250468

24272 S.4090 Road  
Claremore,OK 74019  
918-342-1524  
jrwood97@aol.com

FADE IN:

EXT. APPALACHIAN TRAIL - NIGHT

Dimly visible: two lightweight tents and a pile of camping gear. Nearby, a small campfire flickers in a circle of stones.

Silhouetted against the fire, four hikers in their early twenties sip wine from coffee mugs, their faces turned skyward.

Thousands of stars sparkle with a cold sobering brilliance imposing a reverential hush the hikers are hesitant to violate.

SAM, tall and athletic even in this light, checks the contents of the bottle against the glow from the fire and refreshes his cup.

He looks over at AMY, his college girlfriend, with her dark hair and darker, serious eyes.

SAM

Amy?

AMY

Shhhh!

SAM

Sorry.

Deep in the Creation, a STREAK of light.

AMY

(hushed voice)

A shooting star.

Amy's energetic best friend, KEIRA, searches the heavens, shading her eyes against the firelight.

KEIRA

Where?

AMY

Gone now. Wait, there's another one.  
See?

Sam follows Amy's pointing finger.

SAM

Think you're in for a treat tonight.

AMY

Oh, what kinda treat?

SAM

The Perseid meteor shower is tuning up.

KEIRA

The what?

SAM

The summer sky's best show. Happens every August and we've got front row seats. Watch the Big Dipper.

(pointing)

There's one.

KEIRA AND AMY

YES.

JOSH, a bespectacled grad student who belongs to Keira, places his arm around her shoulders and gives her a little squeeze.

JOSH

Comet debris, right?

SAM

Right, we're passing through some of the debris thrown off by Swift-Tuttle.

AMY

Swift what?

SAM

Comet Swift-Tuttle. It's the largest object to make repeated passes near Earth. The meteorites are actually small fragments of its tail.

Keira looks at Sam with admiration.

KEIRA

I'm impressed.

AMY

Pleeze, don't feed his ego.

SAM

What ego?

Amy reaches for the wine. Keira sticks out her cup and Amy divides the last of the bottle between them.

KEIRA  
 Sam, do you think there's  
 intelligent life out there--  
 somewhere, maybe?

Josh takes a sip from Keira's cup.

JOSH  
 Are we alone?

KEIRA  
 Right.

Sam picks up the bottle, checks it, sets it back down.

SAM  
 An ancient question. My feeling is:  
 why should we be? I mean...look.  
 Just look at all of THAT.

Sam points low on the horizon to a faint starry vapor.

SAM(O.C.)  
 That smear of stars across  
 there...that's the Milky Way-- or  
 part of it any way.  
 (pause)  
 Millions of stars...millions upon  
 millions of planets--a small  
 percentage of which may support  
 life. And that's just OUR galaxy.  
 (pause)  
 Beyond that....

KEIRA  
 But will we ever know?

JOSH  
 Ah, there's the rub.

A sudden, BRILLIANT trail of light.

AMY  
 WOW. See that?

KEIRA  
 Yes, yes. Oh God, it's so amazing.

AMY  
 You make a wish?

KEIRA  
 I will.I will. I'd almost forgotten.  
 How wonderful.

Silence as the group scans the heavens.

AMY  
So what did you wish for?

KEIRA  
Don't think I'm allowed to say. Am I?

EXT. APPALACHIAN TRAIL - DAY

Four slightly grubbier backpackers negotiate a narrow trail leading to a little town below. Sam forges the way followed at a fingertips distance by Amy, Keira and finally Josh.

KEIRA  
Lovely Lewiston!

AMY  
Hey, they have showers.

KEIRA  
(laughs)  
LOVELY Lewiston.

Sam helps Amy over a log. She trips but he grabs her arm, hoists her back up.

SAM  
Okay. Game plan: quick shower, lunch and head back.

JOSH  
Works for me.

AMY  
Rules say girls shower first.

Sam takes her backpack, throws it over his shoulder. He walks on ahead as she holds onto his shirt.

JOSH  
What rules?

KEIRA  
Our rules, Josh boy. Read the fine print.

Josh and Sam exchange looks. They've been here before.

JOSH  
One condition...First Samuel and I grab a couple of beers cause I know the water's gonna be FREEZING by the time you two get through.

KEIRA

Okay. Fair's fair but only two.  
It's a long drive back and I want  
to be the one sleeping--not you.

JOSH

Rules again?

AMY

Well yeah.

INT. JOSH'S CAR - NIGHT

Josh drives as Sam dozes in the passenger seat. The girls,  
in the back are totally out. A soft CD PLAYS in the b.g..

Sam stirs, changes position, blinks.

SAM

Umh. Where are we?

Josh glances over.

JOSH

About thirty miles out. Don't worry,  
you'll make it in plenty of time.

Sam cranes his head out the window. There's a clear panorama  
of stars overhead.

SAM

Good night for it.

EXT./INT. JOSH'S CAR - LATER

Sam prepares to exit holding a small backpack. The girls are  
still out.

SAM

(hoarse whisper)  
Hey, enjoyed it. I'll pick up my  
other stuff tomorrow...no pointing  
in waking the girls.

JOSH

Right. Catch you later.

Sam quietly closes the car door.

He turns and gazes up at the huge concrete and steel dome  
with its eye pointed toward the heavens. Stars glisten in the  
crisp night air as immutable as the day Earth was born.

Shouldering his pack, Sam begins a trudge up the steep concrete stairs leading to the observatory entrance.

INT. OBSERVATORY - CONTINUOUS

Sam nods to the yawning night watchman and continues into the center room where computer consoles, high-def plot printers and sophisticated monitors HUM with cold efficiency.

TOM HIGHTOWER, fellow grad student and star gazer, enters a few keystrokes and looks up from the computer keyboard with weak blue eyes. He rotates his rotund shape to stare upward.

Far above, a huge telescope responds by retracting in on itself as a slit in the side of the dome scissors slowly shut.

Satisfied all is in order, Hightower acknowledges Sam.

HIGHTOWER

Evening.

SAM

Evening Hightower. Good session?

HIGHTOWER

Great. I'm just logging off. Funny, there's a lot of Net noise tonight about a "group of asteroids" entering our system.

Sam walks to the console, stares intently at the screen over Hightower's shoulder.

SAM

"Group of asteroids?"

HIGHTOWER

It's got everybody jazzed up.

SAM

Must be junk from some deep space breakup.

HIGHTOWER

Here.

Hightower gets up to give Sam his seat. He points at the screen.

HIGHTOWER(CONT'D)

Check it out.

Sam leans into the screen scanning the threads of messages bouncing back and forth between professional star gazers.

SAM

Lotta monkey chatter all  
right...Wilson at UCLA is really  
fired up...says number is worrisome.  
(beat)  
I'm gonna sneak a peek.

HIGHTOWER

Don't get caught.. old high-horse  
Riggs will have your ass for  
unapproved scope deployment.  
But...I think maybe the coordinates  
are already sorta dialed in.

He reaches over Sam's shoulder and punches a few keys.

Immediately, the large dome WHINES and rotates a few degrees.  
The slit in the dome opens and the scope ratchets out.

SAM

How'd that happen?

Hightower chuckles under his breath.

HIGHTOWER

No sense in Professor Riggs only  
having one ass to kick.  
(checks new screen)  
What's this?

Hightower hops over to another computer console and begins  
rapidly typing in information. The screen opens displaying a  
series of numbers in columns.

He lasers in on the digital sequences as they continue  
displaying in rapid succession.

Sam scoots his chair over for a closer look himself.

HIGHTOWER

Can't be. Lemme plot those.

CLOSE ON COMPUTER SCREEN: As the screen refreshes, a mass of  
dots appear, similar to a school of small fish.

BACK TO SCENE

HIGHTOWER

(nervous energy)  
What's Wilson think?

Sam pecks away at the keyboard, talking over his shoulder.

SAM  
Man's going a little bonkers.

HIGHTOWER  
Saying what?

Sam continues pounding away on the keyboard.

SAM  
...saying we're definitely in the  
line of fire here.

Sam stops typing, swivels in his chair to eye Hightower.

HIGHTOWER  
Line of fire HELL. If these  
trajectory plots hold we're DEAD  
CENTER my friend. Duck and cover.

SAM  
I'm calling Riggs.

Hightower furiously enters data into the computer with one hand and fumbles behind him for more printouts with the other.

EXT. OBSERVATORY - DAY

The same imposing structure as last seen with one exception: a small contingent of soldiers carrying assault rifles are deployed at strategic points around the building.

A group of students warily approach the entrance.

INT. OBSERVATORY - SAME TIME

PROFESSOR RIGGS, a small man with an imposing scowl, paces in a circle surrounded by a dozen or so students sitting on the floor, seated in chairs and standing in the back. The standing group includes Hightower and Sam.

PROFESSOR RIGGS  
Let me then summarize. As of  
approximately one hour ago these  
facilities were federalized and are  
now under the direct control of the  
Department of Homeland Security.

Hightower shoots Sam a look.

HIGHTOWER  
That would explain the camo.