

TREACHERY

An original screenplay by Richard Alexander Hall

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FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE - NIGHT

A triplet of distant, relatively faint, blue stars illuminate the crescent of dawn on a lonely blue planet with its small moons.

EXT. PLANETARY ORBIT - NIGHT

Orbiting in the region of this dawn, a tremendous battle rages in the silence of space, between opposed fleets of spaceships, far too many to count. Laser fire, flack and explosions plaster the scene like neon spaghetti and popcorn thrown every direction.

One side of the battle appears to be living ships. Cruisers undulate and turn like giant worms, while smaller organic fighters zip around like flies. The other side of the battle is of bulky shapes that range in size from colossal cruisers to smaller fighters.

INT. JANUS' FIGHTER - NIGHT

The human squadron leader JANUS THADDEUS (male, 23) - wiry, weathered, and sharp but glacially calm - pilots a fighter jet, and dovetails and dodges flies. He destroys one with laser artillery, another with seeking missiles...

EXT. PLANETARY ORBIT - NIGHT

Janus heads a squadron of six dozen fighter jets. They move loosely along the underbelly of a giant worm, which spews massive, vacuum-defying flames at them, from ports and crevices of its belly. The fighter jets' otherwise invisible shields light up as they deflect the flames.

A squadron of flies emerges from the worm, in far greater numbers than the humans. The flies approach the humans very quickly, but the humans outmaneuver and whittle them away ship by ship.

In the thickest part of the battle - with a thick swarm of human fighter jets and flies in dogfights around it - is the immense Command Battleship.

INT. COMMAND DECK - NIGHT

Fleet Commander NEREUS THADDEUS (male, 45) - brown hair, stout frame, chiseled, and sharp - looks over hologram tactical displays. OPERATORS swarm the deck in busy activity. Nereus crosses to his station, raises a corded communicator to his mouth, and presses a button to send his voice through the ship and the entire fleet.

NEREUS

Fleet, this is Commander Thaddeus.

EXT. PLANETARY ORBIT - NIGHT

As dogfights around a worm continue, we hear Nereus continue over fleet-wide radio.

NEREUS (O.S. RADIO)  
All squadrons begin irritations.

INT. JANUS' FIGHTER - NIGHT

JANUS  
Squadron Alpha this is Alpha One.  
Irritate the mouth with anything,  
but especially napalm. Let's wrap  
it in a ball.

EXT. PLANETARY ORBIT - NIGHT

While they dodge and destroy flies, Janus' squadron also manages to bombard one end of the worm with lasers, missiles, and bombs. Lasers scorch, explosions gash, and huge fireballs open gapes in the worms' flesh - but in the vacuum of space, these pyrotechnics quickly snuff out.

Enraged, the worm opens its mouths on both ends to reveal giant rows of teeth behind a triad slit (just like "DUNE" worms), spewing giant flames that defy the vacuum of space.

Both mouths chase the squadron, seeking the source of irritation. The squadron splits to lure both mouths, and winds the worm into an approximate ball shape.

NEREUS (O.S. RADIO)  
Fleet, this is Command. This is it!  
On mark, begin closed nuclear attack.  
Squadron leaders will relay my mark.

INT. JANUS' FIGHTER - NIGHT

Nereus speaks to Janus directly, over radio.

NEREUS (O.S. RADIO)  
Son, confirm fleet radio and ciphers  
are working and ready.

Janus glances over panel instruments and monitors - and effortlessly dogfights flies the whole time.

JANUS  
This is squadron leader Thaddeus.  
Confirmed, sir. Sir, why are you  
addressing me as "son"?

NEREUS (O.S. RADIO)  
Well, I don't know whether you've  
noticed - but just between you and  
(MORE)

NEREUS (O.S. RADIO) (CONT'D)  
me - we've got the same surname. I  
think you may be my son.

Janus smiles.

JANUS  
Thanks pop. Think this will really  
end it?

NEREUS (O.S. RADIO)  
I can only hope so. I'm sending the  
signal now. Kill 'em for me.

JANUS  
You got it. Squadron leader Alpha  
One out.

Janus switches to squadron radio.

JANUS (CONT'D)  
Squadron, this is Alpha One...close  
on the surface...

A red light blinks in the cockpit.

JANUS (CONT'D)  
NOW!

EXT. PLANETARY ORBIT - NIGHT

All squadrons in the fleet suddenly drop closer to the  
surfaces of the various worms, each worm wrapped roughly  
into its own ball.

The worm under Janus' squadron squirms in rage, directionless.  
More flies launch from it and close on the humans, who  
outmaneuver and outgun them.

INT. JANUS' FIGHTER - NIGHT

JANUS  
Alpha One to Squadron, acknowledge  
ready.

On a monitor in his cockpit, a series of messages transmit  
from his squadron, then a sound and blinking indicate "READY."

A blue flash envelops his ship, and the sights and radio  
sounds of the battle--

INT. JANUS' FIGHTER - DAY

--are suddenly replaced with a silent, empty star field.  
The planet is below, but it is the day side of the planet.  
Janus' fighter approaches a cube array of parked fly fighters.

JANUS

What?

His ship approaches, hovers over, and descends upon the corner fighter of the array, and an indicator lights on a monitor in his cockpit: "TOW SECURED".

JANUS (CONT'D)

What?!

He moves the joystick. The ship doesn't respond.

In a blue flash--

INT. JANUS' FIGHTER - NIGHT

--he is back in the noise and environment of the battle. An indicator lights on his monitor: "TOW RELEASED". Lights on the fly fighter illuminate, jet-fire erupts from its boosters, and it flies off to join the fray of battle.

Janus tries the joystick again. Now his ship responds.

JANUS

Alpha One to Squadron--

A quick series of many radio static bursts are followed by many human screams, then moments of silence - in which Janus' cool breaks a bit. He shakes off his puzzlement over the impossible events - no time - and scans a monitor.

JANUS (CONT'D)

Alpha One to Squadron - all Alpha fighters still present and ready. Keep it together! Preparing warhead!

He toggles a switch and moves a lever.

JANUS (CONT'D)

Break from the surface...NOW!

He pushes hard forward and port on the joystick, and pushes a button on it.

EXT. SPACE - NIGHT

Janus' fighter abruptly turns port and DROPS straight toward the mouth of the worm. The remainder of his squadron abruptly turn and scatter further away from the worm, into a sphere formation. Janus' fighter is lost from view for a moment, then...

CLOSE ON JANUS' FIGHTER as it flies quickly away from the worm.

JANUS (O.S. RADIO)  
 Alpha One to squadron - warhead is  
 away! Discharge and activate  
 generators!

Each fighter in the squadron discharges a polygonal ball. The balls collectively and quickly generate a mesh-sphere shield around the worm. The mesh-sphere leaves an ovoid opening above Janus' ship - and in a powerful blast of aft thrust, he breaches the opening, which immediately closes behind him.

Panicked flies swarm after the escaped human squadron, too late - a nuclear blast first rips at the seams of the worm, then completely destroys it, with all the trapped flies. The blast fills the mesh-sphere with a blinding, furious, but contained ball of light.

The blast ends, the mesh-sphere contracts, and the debris inside collapses toward rocky clumps. The shields disengage, and fighters effortlessly reclaim the shield generators.

Fleet-wide, many worms die, and have died the same way.

NEREUS (O.S. RADIO)  
 (war whoop)  
 Excellent work, fleet! Finish these  
 up and then take the stragglers!

INT. JANUS' FIGHTER - NIGHT

Slowly, then more rapidly, Janus animates in reverse, and his ship, and everything in the battle around him, all appear to ripple like a disturbed pond. Also they appear to tear, as they animate simultaneously forward and in reverse. Finally motion coalesces, and everything animates uniformly again in reverse.

All recent events reverse: the nuclear blast (so that the worm reforms), the motions of his ship, the nuclear warhead retracts and rejoins his ship etc. He comes back and up from the surface of the worm, to where he began his plunge to the surface.

A blue wall of light approaches and passes through Janus' ship, and where the wall passes his vision, the mesh-sphere shield reforms around the worm, and Janus is outside the sphere.

JANUS  
 What?! Squadron, are you seeing  
 this?!...

An indicator lights up on his control panel: "WARHEAD AWAY". His ship's lights and engines shut off. He tries the joystick, and the ship doesn't respond.

His ship faces the planet, and moves quickly toward it. He plies at the ship controls in vain.

JANUS (CONT'D)

Alpha One to Squadron, do you read me? MAYDAY!...Alpha One to fleet, do you read me?! MAYDAY!

He turns to look at the battle behind. No ship is near him. The worms are all whole and intact, with shields around them. Weaponry from his fleet pounds these shields in vain, in many small brief flashes of light. But the shields remain.

As his ship enters the outmost layer of the planet's atmosphere, a small, turbulent tremor overtakes it.

Wide eyed in helpless terror, he turns back and stares at the planet in front of him, which looms larger as he approaches it.

Behind him, and from behind the intact shield of the worm his squadron assaulted, a blinding glare and fire sweeps across the sky, to envelop his entire fleet.

The turbulent tremor of his ship increases. The light from behind casts a great round shadow on the planet, like that of an eclipse, but light in the shadow undulates like reflections in a pool.

His ship violently impacts the planet's more dense inner-upper atmosphere, which ignites around his ship in multicolored and white-hot flames.

CUT TO:

INT. DARKNESS - NIGHT

FADE IN:

EXT. PLANETARY HIGH ATMOSPHERE - DAY

Janus lies unconscious in the cockpit of his ship, which orbits the planet on autopilot, at a cruise 60 miles above the planet's surface.

He awakens.

He looks around and gathers the situation. A light on the dashboard is on: "AUTOPILOT". He tries to turn and accelerate the ship. It responds, and "AUTOPILOT" shuts off.

A sudden bright light flashes behind the cockpit with a metallic, smashing impact sound. A throaty, liquid voice comes over his radio.

ALIEN VOICE (O.S. RADIO)  
 Human Thaddeus, you will follow us  
 or die. We must not be heard. We  
 will block your radio.

A HUNDRED "FLIES" - alien fighter jets - rise above the horizon of his field of view in the cockpit, on all sides of him.

JANUS  
 Well, that isn't really what I'd  
 choose, but--

Two more blasts hit his ship - lights and metallic smash sounds.

ALIEN VOICE (O.S. RADIO)  
 Your radio is jammed. But we should  
 avoid transmissions. *Leave it off.*

He rolls his eyes, and sighs to himself:

JANUS  
 Ah, diplomacy.

The fly escorts veer right and down, and he obligingly follows.

EXT. AIRFIELD - NIGHT

It is near sundown and a faint blue light casts over flat concrete, which stretches many miles in every direction. The fly escorts and Janus' ship descend and land at an airport outside an expansive military compound.

Hatches in the flies open, and A HUNDRED SALAMANDERS emerge, one from each fly. They walk close to the ground. They are of a wide variety of colors and patterns, but most are bright green with dark blue spots.

They wear light brown and green military garb, and those who point guns at Janus' ship walk upright.

INT. JANUS' FIGHTER - NIGHT

Janus unstraps himself and maneuvers out of his cockpit to the loading area of his fighter. He operates some controls to open the hatch, then descends it, arms in the air.

EXT. AIRFIELD - NIGHT

A circle of TEN SALAMANDERS approach and surround him. Two take and handcuff him.

A SALAMANDER in bright yellow military garb at the head of the troops moves to, and rises to stand before, Janus. He has the same voice which Janus heard earlier over radio.

SALAMANDER

I am Commander Andab. I regret this treatment of you but it is necessary. There is a misunderstanding between our peoples. We seek your liberation, and freedom. Others of my people do not. But you must recover and we will begin explanations and tests tomorrow.

Janus examines Andab with curiosity and surprise.

JANUS

Tests?

ANDAB

You exhibit signs of a most rare and useful ability. Come. You may tell us how well we imitate your human foods.

Andab turns and leads the way, but Janus doesn't follow. The guards prod him to.

JANUS

Why would I eat anything you offer me?

Andab sighs heavily, turns back to Janus, and looks over him sorrowfully.

Janus is taken back a bit.

ANDAB

Quite right. I understand why you might say that.

Janus looks more closely into the salamander Commander's eyes.

Are they actually more wet? Water thickens and pools around the base of the eye sockets. Is it...he...crying?

INT. PRISONER QUARTERS - DAY

Asleep in a bed, Janus now wakes with a start. He quickly rises and stands.

JANUS

Damn!

He is in a resplendent, colorful, cushy, and charmingly decorated room. He is dressed in simple pajamas.

O.S. there is an unlatching sound, then footsteps. Janus twirls to face an open passageway, then stands still, alert. A voice sounds from within the passage.

GUARD (O.S.)  
Human Thaddeus--

JANUS  
Please, call me *prisoner!*

GUARD (O.S.)  
Very well then, prisoner, if you must be called that - the Commander requests your presence for a pleasant breakfast.

Janus does not answer, but looks over himself. He finds a bandage over the inside of his elbow, rips it off, and finds a small welt and scar there.

JANUS  
What have you done to me?

GUARD (O.S.)  
We have intravenously fed and re-hydrated you. You may wish not to eat, but we are determined that you survive. You may soon also find an urgent need to dispose of internal solid wastes.

Janus turns to another open doorway, pauses, and pays attention to his own body...Then bolts for the door and quickly closes it.

INT. MILITARY COMPOUND HALLWAY - DAY

Four salamander guards flank a doorway. Timidly, Janus opens and emerges through the door, dressed in light brown garb much like the salamanders'. He doesn't look at them, and they stand guard without looking at him.

JANUS  
So...pleasant breakfast,  
huh?...well...haven't got anything  
to lose. Why not?

He perks up, and turns and looks at one of the guards expectantly. The guard returns a smile, raises a hand-held radio, and presses a button on it.

GUARD  
Guard A2 to Commander Assistant.

COMMANDER ASSISTANT (O.S. RADIO)  
This is Commander Assistant.

GUARD  
Our guest seems to have changed his mind. Request breakfast.

COMMANDER ASSISTANT (O.S. RADIO)  
 Acknowledged, guard. Good work. We  
 will prepare. Please bring him.  
 Commander Assistant out.

The guards turn to lead the way down the hall, two behind  
 and two in front of Janus.

INT. COMMANDER QUARTERS - DAY

The guards escort Janus into a large room, then stand  
 attention against a wall. In addition to the Commander and  
 Commander Assistant, SEVEN SALAMANDERS are seated around a  
 table, with an empty seat for Janus. The Commander stands  
 and bows.

ANDAB  
 Squadron Leader Thaddeus, so glad to  
 see you.

He indicates the eight other salamanders around the table.

ANDAB (CONT'D)  
 These are some of my chief officers.

Janus returns a blank stare at Andab, and doesn't even glance  
 at the others.

The Commander gestures to an empty seat.

ANDAB (CONT'D)  
 Please be seated. Your food is ready,  
 it happens, just now. Gentlemen,  
 let's begin.

A SALAMANDER WAITER arrives with a large bowl of dull green  
 soup and a large loaf of bread for Janus. Janus sits and  
 the waiter serves him, then leaves. The Salamanders begin  
 to eat. They simply stoop and drink from their bowls.

JANUS  
 I don't suppose there are any flies  
 in this soup?

ANDAB  
 Why would there be flies in this  
 soup?

JANUS  
 Never mind. So how many times have  
 I passed out now?

ANDAB  
 You have attempted to starve yourself  
 three times. This is the first sign  
 you have shown us that we have gained  
 any of your trust.

Janus again blankly stares at the Commander, then regards his meal. He looks for but finds no spoon. He raises his bowl and drinks slowly at first, then as quickly as he can.

ANDAB (CONT'D)

I'm glad you enjoy our attempted human food.

JANUS

It tastes like mud. And I don't know what you fed me with after I passed out, but I'm starved.

INT. COMMANDER'S LOUNGE - DAY

Janus, Andab, and the Commander Assistant sit, each in their own cushy chairs, and the four guards stand attention. Janus sits upright and forward, and looks at Andab.

JANUS

My fleet is wiped out. Entirely.

ANDAB

Not just your fleet.

JANUS

My race. I may be the last of my kind.

This stark statement settles in. Panic, loneliness, and terror overwhelm Janus. He appears suffocated. Suddenly weak, he slumps as if to faint, but then regains himself, and determinedly shakes the terror and weakness off - with anger.

JANUS (CONT'D)

Why aren't you celebrating? Why am I here? Why prolong this? There's no one for me to have children with, my species - no, that's too demeaning, my kind, HUMANITY, is at an end! What is my purpose? I'm empty! I'm void! NOTHING!

He recomposes himself, first in gasps against the suffocation, but then he manages even and deep breaths.

ANDAB

You are not the only of your kind. In fact, in another reality...all of your fleet is alive, or can be, and they have a chance to survive, if you help them.

Janus pauses and furrows his brow, skeptical.

ANDAB (CONT'D)

Time travel. Your people have not exploited this. Yet.

JANUS

Exploited? How about discovered? You can time travel?

ANDAB

Our enemies used it against you.

JANUS

(puzzled)  
Your enemies.

ANDAB

As I told you when we first met, we seek your freedom. Most of us. Those you've been fighting don't, and they fought us on their way to destroy you.

JANUS

You?...

ANDAB

Yes. Our people are at civil war, about whether to destroy your people, or seek to live in peace with you.

Janus is dumbfounded.

EXT. HOUSETOP - NIGHT

JANUS (14) lies on his back atop the roof of his house, in a sleeping bag. His father (36) lies beside him, in a separate sleeping bag. Both stargaze.

A meteorite brilliantly flares in the sky above. One second later it splits in two: a smaller meteorite that burns up faster, and a larger that burns three seconds more, in hot blue, green, yellow, and finally white before it vanishes.

JANUS

Holy cow!

NEREUS

Wow!

They continue to stargaze. Five seconds of silence.

JANUS

Dad?

NEREUS

Yes son.

JANUS

D'yever wonder whether we'll meet anybody else?

NEREUS

You mean out in space? On some other planet? Some other intelligent life?

JANUS

Yeah.

NEREUS

All the time. It's half of what interested me in joining Star Fleet.

JANUS

What do you think they'll be like?

NEREUS

Your guess is as good as mine.  
(chuckles)  
With your imagination, probably better.

JANUS

Do you think they'll be friendly?

NEREUS

I also couldn't guess that. I hope they are. But the part of me that's a military man is afraid they won't be. If we aren't getting along with each other on our own planet, why should we get along with others who might be completely different from us?

JANUS

But they won't be.

NEREUS

Why are you so sure?

JANUS

If they're intelligent, if they're like us in that way, we'll find some ways to understand each other. And be friendly.

This gives Nereus pause, and he sits up and turns to look at his son in admiration.

NEREUS

Son, if we do ever meet anyone else out there, I hope with all my heart that you're right.

INT. COMMANDER'S LOUNGE - DAY

JANUS

But our people - we don't even know -  
we thought you were all bent on...

He looks around at all the Salamanders, aghast, but also moved.

JANUS (CONT'D)

We have friends among your people we  
don't even know of! You're...for  
me, you're one of us! There's no  
difference!

For some moments he doesn't know what else to say.

JANUS (CONT'D)

Thank you for fighting for my people.

Water thickens and pools around all the salamanders' eye  
sockets.

ANDAB

You're welcome. To hear you speak  
this way of our efforts, Janus...it  
is our greatest honor. So we thank  
you as well.

Another pause.

JANUS

What are your names? Who are your  
families? Where are your homes?

ANDAB

You can get to know us better on the  
way.

Andab stands and heads toward an exit.

ANDAB (CONT'D)

You must wonder about this other  
reality I speak of. Time travel.  
We'll demonstrate.

INT. FLIGHT CONTROL DECK - DAY

Janus, Andab, and the Commander Assistant sit in functional  
chairs behind a glass wall that overlooks the airfield. The  
four guards stand at ease.

EXT. AIRFIELD - DAY

A lone fly, piloted by a salamander, ignites thrusters which  
raise it vertically into the air.

At fifty feet, horizontal thrusters ignite, and the craft rapidly accelerates and flies high and far, to a speed that produces a sonic boom.

EXT. PLANETARY ATMOSPHERE - DAY

The terrain below the fighter jet is evergreen forested mountains that border a valley. The military compound is in the valley.

Five miles out from the flight control tower, the fighter jet performs a deft half-loop, half-roll, and heads straight back for the control tower.

INT. FLIGHT CONTROL DECK - DAY

ANDAB

In a few moments, you'll see the fighter jump back in time ten seconds.

After a short time, the fighter vanishes in a bright blue flash, appearing into existence ten seconds' distance ahead.

ANDAB (CONT'D)

To show you more clearly what we want to, we'll need to jump back to a while before that fighter jumped. So you'll need this.

Andab straps a small, flat, boxy device onto Janus' forearm, and works some controls on his own - they all have the device.

ANDAB (CONT'D)

We're all going to jump.

Andab presses a button on his device. In a bright flash, a bright blue wall appears between them all, then vanishes.

The fighter is twenty seconds' distance back from where it was.

ANDAB (CONT'D)

In about ten seconds, you'll see what we just saw - the fighter jump back. But for us now, it will jump back from further ahead in time.

In a few moments, a copy of the fighter appears, ahead of the first by ten seconds' distance.

ANDAB (CONT'D)

In ten more seconds, you'll see the "first" fighter - the one in the rear - vanish, jumping back in time to become the "second" fighter that appeared just now.

(MORE)

ANDAB (CONT'D)

But you won't see it appear right now, because it appeared before now.

In a few moments, indeed the "first" (rear) fighter vanishes, in a flash. Now only the "second" (front) fighter is visible.

ANDAB (CONT'D)

This is the question, Janus: while the fighter jets appeared at the same time, which of them was real? Or are they both real? Or neither? I'll show you how we found out. Let's get up closer to it.

EXT. AIRFIELD - DAY

Andab, the Commander Assistant, the four guards, and Janus stand at the edge of a runway.

The jet fighter slowly descends and lands fifty yards from them, then shuts down.

ANDAB

You'll want to keep your eye on the pilot now.

The PILOT emerges from the fly and walks in Andab and Janus' direction. Andab calls out to him.

ANDAB (CONT'D)

He is watching! Please demonstrate a merge!

The pilot breaks into a run, rapidly scuttling on all fours, toward the right of the group. He maintains full running speed for a few moments, then suddenly vanishes through glowing blue ripples, to appear a good distance ahead, at a continued run, near them. He passes them.

JANUS

Uh, did he just jump...from ahead? In time? Again?

The pilot slows and turns around, and walks toward the group.

ANDAB

Actually, he "merged" forward in time, but that will take some explaining. We just saw two fighter jets, and two pilots - one in each jet. But are there in fact two fighter pilots? Do you think that if a person travels in time, they can copy themselves, or have two souls or spirits?

JANUS

Hmm.

ANDAB

Our experiments show a person can't. When the pilot jumped back ten seconds and coexisted with himself as a copy, their time-streams overlapped. And since the pilot only has one soul existing in two different times, he decides which time his soul will reside in. When he makes that decision, he merges into that stream, and destroys the other stream. His soul can exist in both streams for a while, maybe even a very long time - but not forever. He is one soul, and he must merge into one or the other stream. One of the streams dies, at his choice.

Janus considers this for some moments. The pilot arrives and joins the group, and stands attention.

ANDAB (CONT'D)

(to pilot)

Thank you. At ease.

The pilot stands at ease.

JANUS

How does he decide which time-stream to merge into? And how does he merge into one stream or the other?

ANDAB

Here, the time-streams of the two pilots overlapped for ten seconds. There was a back-stream, which is the pilot we came back to watch, and a forward-stream, which was created by the pilot jumping back from further ahead in time. When those streams overlapped, because the pilot is one soul, he had access to all information available to both pilots. Which means new information became available to the back-stream pilot.

Janus stares at Andab in amazement.

JANUS

What new information?

ANDAB

Think it through to the end.

(MORE)

ANDAB (CONT'D)

What changed as a consequence of the pilot jumping back ten seconds?

JANUS

When he landed, it would have to be ten seconds later, and he also started to run ten seconds later. But I just saw...he jumped instantly across a distance that would take him ten seconds to run across. Was he merging into the forward time-stream, destroying the stream where he was ten seconds back?

Andab smiles.

JANUS (CONT'D)

But he did that long after he jumped out of his own time-stream, to ten seconds back in time! Wouldn't he only...Be able to decide which stream to merge into during the ten seconds of overlapped time?

Andab smiles more broadly.

JANUS (CONT'D)

He can decide which time stream to merge into long *after* the ten seconds of overlapped time?

ANDAB

Yes. The time streams never stop overlapping. After the back-stream pilot vanished, the forward-stream pilot continues to have the opportunity to merge into whichever time-stream he chooses. You might think he is already in his forward-time stream, so he has nothing to choose. But remember, he is both pilots. He can only choose the forward-stream by destroying the back-stream. And when he destroys the back-stream, the pilot back in time merges forward in time ten seconds. This is how, at any point of his choosing, the back-stream pilot can jump ten seconds ahead.

JANUS

Ugh. You did not write that on the back of a napkin, I think.

Andab misses the irony, and looks imploringly at Janus.

JANUS (CONT'D)

Never mind. So...the pilot did that when he ran and instantly disappeared, then appeared ten seconds' running distance ahead. He destroyed the back-stream.

ANDAB

Correct. There is more to explain, but we best do it in the setting of you practicing for your run.

JANUS

What run?

ANDAB

Until I explain, trust me please, that you will want to do this. Or I hope you will.

INT. FLY - DAY

Janus is fastened in the passenger seat of a fly jet fighter. It is part organic, part machine. Andab pilots the fighter. Two miles up, it flies a circle around the military compound.

ANDAB

There is a fine point, which may be very important for your situation.

JANUS

What's that?

ANDAB

The pilot we watched time travel - when he merged, he could have merged into the original time stream by any distance *up to* ten seconds ahead. He could have merged half-way, if you will - five seconds ahead. Also, the process works in reverse. If a time traveler first jumps *forward* in time to create a copy of himself, he then has the opportunity to merge into a time-stream *backward* in time, up to the point he jumped forward from. Now, your test. We are going to jump back in time ten seconds. Please tell me what you experience.

Andab turns a dial, pulls a lever, and presses a button.

Slowly, then more rapidly, they involuntarily fly in reverse. The fighter jet, clouds, and planet below all appear to ripple like a disturbed pond. Then all these appear to tear, and glow white and blue at the seams, as they animate simultaneously forward and in reverse.

Finally motion coalesces, and these all animate uniformly again in reverse.

Everything over the previous ten seconds of time rapidly reverses.

A blue wall of light approaches and passes through their ship, then vanishes. Janus sees, from a rear-view mirror, a copy of their own fighter jet ten seconds' distance behind.

JANUS

This is what happened! This is what I saw before I crashed on the atmosphere of the planet! Just before - no, after - I destroyed the worm! Everything moved backward and forward at the same--

Behind them, the original fighter, or copy of themselves, vanishes in a blue flash.

JANUS (CONT'D)

--Whoa...anyway...it was just like this. Rippling and tearing like that, and bright blue, then finally moving backward.

Andab appears relieved, but also smiles.

ANDAB

Let's see now if you can do this.

JANUS

Do what?...wait...you mean *I* could...

ANDAB

Merge.

JANUS

Back to then? To the time before my fleet was wiped out? That's my chance to save my fleet?

ANDAB

Yes. But first, you must learn how. One effective way we have learned is to--

JANUS

I can sense...a sort of tow, ahead. And still sense the copy of ourselves behind. Even though we're not up there, ahead, the opportunity to merge there, ten seconds ahead - I can feel that. It's extremely freaky, actually.

ANDAB

Yes. We've described it as a tow,  
or possibility to pull, ahead. If  
you can sense it, then--

JANUS

I know what to do. It's in my gut.  
I just...it's like flexing a muscle  
I don't have. That tow is like a  
phantom muscle. I don't have it,  
but I can flex it.

He glances forward, then over at Andab, then forward again,  
then concentrates, closes his eyes, and inhales deeply.

A blue flash and wall of light passes over and past them.

Andab looks at a monitor. Then he looks over at Janus, and  
smiles broadly.

ANDAB

The time is ten seconds ahead. We  
just jumped ten seconds ahead.

JANUS

I know.

ANDAB

You were supposed to try it on the  
ground after we land.

JANUS

Do it again.

EXT. AIRFIELD - DAY

The fly lands and shuts off, and Janus eagerly emerges from  
it and bolts for a run. He quickly gains top speed, and  
moments later, he instantly vanishes in a flash of blue  
ripples, and appears at the same moment ten seconds' running  
distance ahead.

JANUS

Woohooohooo! What a rush!

Andab, who has emerged from the ship and stood to watch,  
appears relieved, but smiles.

Janus heads in a quick jog back to Andab.

JANUS (CONT'D)

Okay, so what's my deal? I mean  
mission? Why did you bring me here?  
How do I save my fleet?

ANDAB

I'm sorry to say that's a dubious proposition, but it is why we brought you here. There's one more test. Do it in reverse. We did our demonstration with a time machine in a ship because it's more fun - but you can use that.

Andab points to the portable time-machine strapped to Janus' forearm, then approaches and works some controls on it.

ANDAB (CONT'D)

Now that's set to jump you ten seconds *forward* in time. When you're at a run, push the big orange button on it, and you'll see how a forward time-jump works.

Janus turns and breaks into a run away from Andab. He quickly arrives at top running speed, and slaps the button on the time-machine - on his forearm.

In a bright blue flash, Janus' own body splits from within itself, ripples, tears, and glows white-hot at the seams.

The forward copy slows to a freeze, suspended a short distance ahead of the back-copy, as the back-copy animates very quickly through ten seconds of forward action.

Then Janus, as the forward-copy, animates to normal speed again, detects the motion behind, and turns around to see the back-copy finish rapid forward-animation, to vanish back into himself.

Also from the rear, a blue wall of light approaches and passes Janus.

He calls back to Andab, a distance away.

JANUS

Now what?

ANDAB

Now remove that time-machine from your arm, to prove to yourself you can merge back now that you've time-traveled forward.

Janus unstraps the device from his arm and tosses it a short distance to his side.

ANDAB (CONT'D)

Can you sense the tow? The potential to merge back?

JANUS

Yes. Same as before, but the tow is behind me. And there's this almost...noisy...hangover...from rapid forward movement.

ANDAB

Try this at a run. Run straight toward me, and while you run, try to flex that phantom muscle, as you describe it, to merge back in time ten seconds.

Janus turns, dashes twenty paces back, turns back around to face Andab, and then stands upright, closes his eyes, breathes deeply, and concentrates.

He opens his eyes, fixes them on Andab, and bolts into a run. When he arrives at top speed, he maintains it for ten seconds, then...

In a flash of blue light, Janus and the world animate backward and forward at the same time, tear at the seams, ripple, then coalesce and reverse-animate very quickly over the last ten seconds of action.

Janus slows to a stop.

ANDAB (CONT'D)

You can!

Janus stops to reflect.

JANUS

So when I merge back, I physically move back. But when I merge forward, I simply keep moving forward, while everything else freezes for whatever lapse of time I merge.

ANDAB

Also, when you merge back, all other motion merges back with you, or the universe animates in reverse. Merging back is the only way to truly reverse time, including even physical age.

Janus considers for a moment, remembers, deduces...

JANUS

You connected to my ship to pull me back in time.

ANDAB

It's time to explain that.

INT. STRATEGIC COMMAND CENTER - DAY

Janus, Andab, the Commander Assistant, Andab's seven military officers, and four guards all overlook a holographic display over a large table.

ANDAB

This is our recording of the battle where your people all but completely wiped out our people. The battle we pulled you out of.

The display is frozen or paused. Andab zooms the display up close to two fly fighter jets.

ANDAB (CONT'D)

Our fleet joined your fleet against our enemies in battle. This is one of our ships, with those markings--

He points to alien lettering on the side of one fly.

ANDAB (CONT'D)

--and that is one of their ships, with those markings.

He points to different lettering on the side of another fly. In the display, frozen laser fire streaks from the one fly to the other.

Janus turns from the display to regard Andab again.

JANUS

But...to me they look exactly the same, except this lettering, now that I look, but that's hard to see anyway.

He turns regretful, and hesitates to speak.

JANUS (CONT'D)

Were our people killing your people alongside your enemies?

ANDAB

That was a risk we decided it was worth taking on.

Janus shakes his head.

JANUS

I'm sorry I don't mean to...what, minimize? - that sacrifice. It just makes me sad. But how could you pick out your enemies in battle?

(MORE)

JANUS (CONT'D)

Isn't it hard for you to see the difference between their fighters and yours?

ANDAB

Actually, no. There are many more differences than those markings. You've probably noticed that our ships are part-biological. Our fleet was bred from a different gene base, and we can tell the difference at a glance.

JANUS

Wow.

ANDAB

This is the enemy fly that hijacked your ship to alter your time-line. This may sound like magic to you, because it's more technology your people don't have yet - but you'll see this enemy fly dispatch something that clings to the shield of your ship.

He plays the recording for a bit, and a small whitish web-looking thing ejects from the enemy fly, and is apparently absorbed into the shield of Janus' ship.

ANDAB (CONT'D)

That thing they attached to your shield behaves like a parasite, and it burrowed through your ships' shield. Once it passed through, it jumped from the shield to your ship.

In the display, Andab plays a sequence that shows a whitish, foggy, web-looking creation jump from the inside of Janus' shield to his ship, then ooze through the hull.

ANDAB (CONT'D)

From there it burrowed into your ship to alter it, so that our enemies can take remote control of it. It also planted a time-travel device which your enemies were able to control.

JANUS

Did they do this to my ship only?

ANDAB

I'm afraid not.

(MORE)

ANDAB (CONT'D)

From what we can tell, they were able to do this to most of the ships in your fleet, including the Command Battleship.

JANUS

Then why didn't they simply shut off all our ships and clean us up?

ANDAB

Because we jammed their radio transmissions so they couldn't take control of your ships.

JANUS

Oh. But then why did they apparently gain control of my ship, and...pull me back? In time?

ANDAB

Because we began to lose the battle, and couldn't block their radio the whole time. So they began to control what ships they could manage. Starting with your Squadron Leaders. They began controlling the Squadron Leaders just moments before your fleet began to obliterate many worms.

JANUS

And when they saw this, they compelled my ship to go back in time a bit, fail to jump inside the shield we generated around the worm, and then launch the nuclear warhead *outside* the worms' new shield.

ANDAB

Ending not only your battle, but your race - except for you.

JANUS

Why didn't that nuclear blast destroy me? And how did you rescue me from this?

ANDAB

When you fell planet-side, you were very fortunate to fall into the shadow of the worm's shield. The worm's shield protected you, indirectly. As for our rescuing you - we had planted our own parasites on many of your fleet's shields, which fought our enemies' parasites for control

(MORE)

ANDAB (CONT'D)

of your ships. Our parasite and the enemy parasite apparently destroyed each other in your ship, so that neither of us could gain control of your ship. Then your ship free-fell, survived in the shadow of the nuclear blast, and--

JANUS

This is beyond nuts.

ANDAB

This doesn't even begin to cover what our technology and tactics can do. But you only need to know two more things.

JANUS

Okay.

ANDAB

One: we have reason to believe that our enemies intended to use your hijacked, time-traveling ships as ferries to go back in time, physically pick up fighters, and bring them forward in time to create an army so numerous it would dwarf even the extremely large army your people were already battling.

JANUS

That's what that was! They did that! There was a flash, my ship docked a fly against my will, and then there was another flash!...But if they could time-travel to create an army, why use human ships to do it? They could just use their own.

ANDAB

Easier to do in secret this way. Salamanders expect each other to time travel - but they don't expect humans to. And it appears they used your ship to ferry a fighter from the past to our time. Just before our parasite neutralized their parasites' control over your ship.

JANUS

Okay. But if you all time travel, why is this great end-battle even taking place? Couldn't you just go back in time and kill Adam, so to speak?

ANDAB

Who is Adam?

JANUS

The first human, according to many.

ANDAB

Ahh. With everyone time-traveling, strategic advantages equalize. Whatever one side does the other can undo. It's even more difficult to trick your enemy in multiple time-streams than it is to trick them in one. We still try, though. But on to point two: you appear to be the only human with the gift of merging time-streams.

JANUS

What?

ANDAB

A salamander can regenerate a limb if it loses one. Cut off a hand, and we'll grow an identical hand back. And when we have traveled by way of a time machine, we either lose time forwards or backwards, in a sense. But we salamanders are able to regenerate that time, like limbs. Human time travelers instantly merge into whatever time-stream they are cast into, destroying others. Except you. You retain the ability to "regenerate" yourself into an alternate time-stream, if it is your will. This is an enormous advantage because your enemies sent you back in time, and then forward in time - and apparently never noticed the appearance of jumping time-ripples around you as a sign that you were innately resistant to the process. Part of you fought a bit automatically, against the imposed time-changes - tearing against the alterations, as if to merge, but then not merging, as you had no conscious awareness or control of the process.

JANUS

Those ripples and tears during travel don't happen to every human when they time travel?

ANDAB

You are the only human we've ever seen that happen to. With salamanders who have the gift of merging - we don't all have it - those ripples appear. The ripples appear for you because you have that gift. And because your enemies sent you back in time, then forward, you have an alternate time-stream to merge into. In the past. And it seems your enemies do not suspect you could merge back.

JANUS

But I wouldn't gain any possible time that way. Lose a thousand years, gain a thousand years, and I'm at zero net gain years - doesn't it work that way?

ANDAB

It would if you hadn't brought anything back from the past with you. But you did. Or rather, your enemies caused you to. By forcing you to tow a fly fighter from the past, they gave you a physical connection from the past, a tow, a potential back time-stream to merge into.

Andab takes a step forward to look intently into Janus' eyes.

ANDAB (CONT'D)

You have the opportunity to merge back in time as far as you wish, for your purposes. Do you feel it? Do you sense a potential back-stream?

Janus pauses and closes his eyes in concentration for a moment, then opens them again, and stares, wide-eyed, at Andab.

JANUS

Andab, you said that merging back is the only way to truly reverse time, including physical age.

ANDAB

Yes. Why?

JANUS

Well, when I merged back in my test, I still remembered everything that had happened.

(MORE)

JANUS (CONT'D)

If time truly reverses in a back-merge, my knowledge doesn't reverse with it. I'll remember all this. And I can stop all of this right where it began. I'm sure I'll see you later, and I'll explain. Or if not...it's been great to be friends.

ANDAB

Please tell me what you're planning. We've thought that we could turn the tables of the battle, by--

JANUS

I can turn the tables way more than anything like that. This war won't even happen.

ANDAB

Janus, whatever you mean, there is no way, with these dictators among our people, that war doesn't happen.

JANUS

Okay, then we get on your side before it's too late. I bet. I'll point out the signs.

ANDAB

What signs? Please, tell us what you're planning.

JANUS

The signs that you are our friends...green and slimy, even, just like we always imagined...except friendly.

Janus merges. He, his history, and the universe animate backward through an incredibly fast blur. He stops at the time and location of his heart's desire.

EXT. HOUSETOP - NIGHT

JANUS (14) lies on his back atop the roof of his house, in a sleeping bag. His father (36) sits beside him, turned toward him, and looks at his son with admiration.

NEREUS

Son, if we do ever meet anyone else out there, I hope with all my heart that you're right.

Janus smiles at his dad.

FADE OUT:

THE END