

The End of the World

By Dave Stone

Jason Kane

Mira

Azagrazar

Small roles:

Benny

Peter

Brax

Waiter

Alien

Mr Kane Senior

Recording device

Adrian

Scene One

WE'RE IN A GENERIC 'NARRATION SPACE', WHICH I'LL TAG AS SUCH, AS AND WHEN WE COME BACK TO IT.

JASON HAS JUST TRIED CALLING BERNICE, BUT SHE IS BUSY IN HER OWN ADVENTURE ELSEWHERE. SO INSTEAD HE'S LEAVING HER A MESSAGE:

JASON: (TRYING TO BE BREEZY) Benny. Hi. Sorry about before. Just wanted a word. Sure you're busy. I'll try again later. I just think, I really think that ...

(beat)

JASON: I'm doing this for you. I'm doing it so that ... the things that are wrong, all the things that went so wrong, it's long past time I tried to fix them. It's long past time I at least *tried* – and knowing me, there's just no measure for how immensely and spectacularly I'm going to fail. I'm going to try, but I really think I'm just going to crash and burn and die. Dead man talking, here, know what I mean, and I'm making this so that ...

(beat)

JASON: (to self, exasperated) "Dead man talking?" Where did *that* come from? This is going nowhere.

DEVICE: (blip-zip) Deleted.

JASON: Look, let me start from the beginning. Or, to make things a little bit more dramatically satisfying, like, not the very beginning at all ...

SUDDEN CUT TO:

Scene 2

OMINOUS, SUSPENSEFUL MUSIC. OUR HEROES ARE OBVIOUSLY IN SEVERE JEOPARDY WITH SOME CRAWLING AND APPALLING HORROR COMING CLOSER ... EVER CLOSER ...

THE OMINOUS MUSIC CONTINUES UNDER:

MIRA: It's out there ...

JASON: What? What is it, Mira?

MIRA: It's out there. I can feel it ... I can *smell* it ... coming closer. The enormous space octopus. Coming closer, coming now ...

JASON: Look, Mira, how can you ...?

MIRA: I don't know how you ever thought we could handle it! Even both of us together! Something like ... something like this, it's just too big for us to ... it's here! The enormous space octopus is –

A PERFECTLY ORDINARY DOOR OPENS.

(OMINOUS MUSIC CONTINUES QUIETLY UNDER, BUT OBVIOUSLY LESS OMINOUS AND SUSPENSEFUL BECAUSE OF ...)

WAITER: (one-off, putting on a poncey French accent) Sir, Madame ...

MIRA: Ms.

WAITER: Sir, Mademoiselle ...

MIRA: (more pointedly) Ms.

WAITER: (starting to really hate these people, now) Sir. *Mizz*. Allow me to present the *speciality* entrée of the Maison Celestial, for discriminating couples with an appetite – for gourmet food and other pleasures besides – the Maison Celestial Calamari Surprise!

MIRA: The enormous space octopus. All you can eat and more. Can you find room for that final tentacle?

WAITER: I ... understand that certain of the *lower-bred* classes, unable to comprehend the difference between a space-going octocephalopod and a space-going squid, on occasion refer to it in that manner, yes.

MIRA: Well, pardon me for lower-class breeding.

JASON: Listen, uh, mate, I'm not sure I'm liking your tone, much. I was told, by those who were supposed to know, that this "Maison Celestial" was a classy place. Discrete, polite, personal service and private alcoves with a "romantic ambiance" ... I mean, do you call this so-called *music* classy and romantic? It sounds like the sound track when we're in some slimy tunnels or something, in severe jeopardy and waiting for something horrible to crawl up and attack us!

THE THUMP OF SOMEBODY HITTING SOME MUSIC-PLAYING DEVICE. THE OMINOUS MUSIC STOPS, ABRUPTLY, WITH THE CELEBRATED 'NEEDLE SKIDDING OFF THE RECORD'. IT'S REPLACED BY MUTED AND BARELY PERCEPTIBLE AMBIENT 'CLASSY RESTAURANT' SOUNDS TO FIX THE SCENE.

JASON: We might as well be in the humorously anticlimactic prologue to my Next Exciting Adventure. I mean, come on, bring on the *theme-tune*! You know you want to. Bring it on!

THE 'JASON KANE' THEME TUNE COMES UP STRONG. IT SOUNDS LIKE A SLIGHTLY FASTER VERSION OF THE 'SECRET AGENT MAN' THEME SONG, WITH NO VOCALS AND THE TWANGY GUITAR PUT THROUGH A FUZZ BOX.

Scene 3.

'NARRATION SPACE', as before.

THE BLIP-BLEEP OF A RECORDING DEVICE BEING TURNED ON.

DEVICE: Recording.

(THE *DEVICE* HAS A GENDER- AND INFLEXION-NEUTRAL, HIGHLY SYNTHESIZED VOICE. WHILE BY NO MEANS INTRUSIVE, ITS UTTERANCES WILL RECUR AS A MOTIF.)

JASON: Um ... is this working, is this – *dammit!* I promised myself, first damn thing I promised myself, was that whatever else it was I did or said, “Is this working, is this on” would *not* be the first words out of my mouth. It’s one of the oldest clichés in the ... I mean, it’s like the way someone wakes up somewhere and sprains his brain trying to come up with *anything* other than “what happened, where am I”, which has become this total cliché in itself and ... um. Dammit.

DEVICE: (blip-zip) Deleting. (blip-bleep) Recording.

JASON: (Bold) Hi, there. Jason Kane. Jason Peter Kane at your service. Raconteur, bon vivant and occasional part-time somewhat piratical oligarch – these are just some of the words I know. These are the jokes, folks, and if you have a problem with that, I’d say get out while the ... oh sod it, sod it, I mean *seriously* sod it ... I’m done with ... it’s just so ...

DEVICE: (blip-zip) Deleting. (blip-bleep) Recording.

JASON: I’ve been having this problem with technology, lately. I mean in the sad-old-dad-trying-to-work-the-video-recorder sense. I don’t mean just the principles and the concepts. A lot of those went past even genius-level human understanding centuries ago. Everything’s a black box with a button these days, and you just press the button for the desired result. Jump from one star system to another; fix yourself a tasty and nutritious synthi-alcoholic

beverage, gene-skein yourself an instant, fully mobile and animal-level-aware pet ...

(beat)

JASON: Thing is, I'm finding myself getting confused, increasingly, by the number of boxes, the number of buttons, the sheer number of possible options that seem purely out to get me ... take this little recording thing. Case in point. It's a, uh – What are you?

DEVICE: PractiBrabti Technologies 3000i predictive-entry digital storage unit, serial number 0796750B, audio status readout, data slots in use: one, unused data slots eight to the power of –

SOUND OF SOMEBODY ANGRILY AND REPEATEDLY BANGING A PERSONAL DATA STORAGE UNIT ON A DESK. THE DEVICE SHUTS UP.

JASON (great restraint) That “eight to the power of whatever”, incidentally, would have ended with “minus one”. The thing's clever enough, apparently, to come out with the simplest verbal expression of a big number. I ganked it out of the Collection, where it's like a bona fide antique. It can store several months' worth of real-time audio and video – I've set it to audio-only because, frankly, gawd, I've seen what I look like on it, and that's nobody's idea of a good time. Anyhow, point is, it factory-defaults to this whole *raft* of pattern-recognition filters and narrative-editing routines that take the raw data and try to process it into, uh ...

(beat)

JASON: Forget all that. Let me tell you a story ...

DEVICE: (blip-bleep) Story-mode on. Please select from the available options. Fictive Parable. Fictive Cautionary. Non-fictive Anecdotal Contemporary. Non-fictive Anecdotal Reminiscent –

SOUND OF SOMEBODY ANGRILY AND REPEATEDLY BANGING A PERSONAL DATA-STORAGE UNIT ON A DESK.

JASON: Thank you. Let me tell you a story. True story. It's a bit banal and pointless but, what the hell, that's because it's a true story rather than made up. Back when I was a kid, before I got out, before things went so seriously to hell that ... I got one of the first, cheap, consumer word-processors for my birthday. I say, you know, *cheap*, but still quite a lot to blow on a kid – you have to understand, despite everything, despite it all, we were a *nice*, and white, and *middle-class* family, you know what I mean? It was what I wanted instead of a new bike.

(beat)

JASON: Anyhow, long and pointless story short, I was one of those isolated, friendless kids who have it in their heads that no one gets them and they don't have any friends cos they're a *rebel*. Cos they're *special*. And nobody else is special enough to get them. I had it in my mind that I was gonna be Harlan Ellison. With a head full of Lenny Bruce tapes, Richard Pryor stand-up, Derek and Clive records, when I wrote stuff on this laughable little computer, I was all motherf –

DEVICE: (blip) Expletive deleted.

JASON: - this, motherf –

DEVICE: (blip) Expletive deleted.

JASON: - that, motherf –

DEVICE: (blip) Expletive deleted..

JASON: - the other. Of course the automatic spellchecker just didn't have the word motherf –

DEVICE: (blip) Expletive deleted.

JASON: - stored. It had no idea what motherf –

DEVICE: (blip) Expletive deleted.

JASON: - meant. It didn't know what a motherf –

DEVICE: (blip) Expletive deleted.

JASON: - was. So, of course, every time it hit the word motherf –

DEVICE: (blip) Expletive deleted.

JASON: - it changed it to the nearest word in its vocabulary, which for some reason happened to be “money-maker”. God alone only knows why *that* ended up in the lexicon. I had to keep going back over everything I'd written and change it back, which was like a total pain. I mean, all right, being forced to re-read all my deathless prose was bad enough. But if I'm gonna say motherf –

DEVICE: (blip) Expletive deleted.

JASON: - then that's what I want to appear, yes? So, in the end, I got into the spellchecker preferences, deleted “money-maker”, substituted motherf –

DEVICE: (blip) Expletive deleted.

JASON: - problem solved. Hmf. And then we come to the little matter of school work. History and English essays, uh ...

(beat)

JASON: Now, in my nice, white, middle-class and terminally isolated way, I'm like this shrill and clueless, pre-teen political. Physically sick that people could put other people in concentration camps, terrified that Doctor Strangelove-type American nukes were gonna bomb us flat, determined to be really nice to a black guy, if I ever actually met one. Which is a story in itself, incidentally.

(beat)

JASON: Furious that the rich people had all the money and didn't share it with the poor people, livid at what some people apparently did to make money ... I know, I know, but come on, I was just a kid. I sometimes wonder what coherent political stance I'd have developed – you know, appropriate for the time and place – if I'd ever had the chance ...

(beat)

JASON: Anyhow. All that pre-teen, pre-angst wank would find its way into school work, sometimes; history essays and stuff. In my head I was being all heroic and Situationist and fighting the system with a capital 'S'. Sticking it to whichever Man was most usefully required to be stuck. Belligerent, half-understood anti-Capitalist screeds that just might, or might not, have at some point included the term "money-maker" ...

(beat)

JASON: If this were drama, at this point, the humorous consequences would more or less write themselves. Since it's, you know, just my life, the school wouldn't take homework that was typed or printed out unless you were blind or something, for some reason. Yeah, *that* long ago. So I had to copy out anything I'd written on the computer in longhand. I'm the only person, ever, who saw the results of the computer-based mix-up – which ... uh ... rather messes up the whole thing as a story and brings what you might call any *development* of it to a screeching halt. So: The End. Sorry. Um.

(beat)

JASON: The point is, though, that the factory-presets on this little recording thing here are probably going to process things wrong sometimes and mess things about – but if I try to monkey around with them it'll almost certainly make things worse in ways I don't expect. Story of my life, quite frankly. You get into the guts of things and edit them, delete things and change the processes, change the way things basically work ... well you just

don't *know* what you'll end up with down the line, what's going to turn around and bite you on the ...

(beat)

JASON: And *that's* my point, I think – the real and proper, actual point I've been trying to get to with all this round-the-houses babbling crap about school and word-processors and stuff. I have to approach it obliquely, I think I'm starting to realise, because it frightens me.

(Deep breath)

JASON: So. That restaurant... Up on one of the ships that used to be part of the Mim blockade during the war. It's all fashionable little boutiques and things now. Exploiting the Collection's students, who *all* seem pretty loaded these days. Bit expensive, is what I'm getting at, for one who in the general scheme of things tends not to have a pot to piss in. But it also hasn't got all the drones and security and recording devices that make secret meetings a bit of a sod on the planetoid itself, you know?

Scene 4. The Restaurant

AS BEFORE, POLITE AND POSH RESTAURANT FOR DISCREETLY EXTRA-MARITAL MEETINGS.

WAITER: Under what name is the reservation?

JASON: Kane. Jason P. I'm pretty famous round here, you know?

WAITER: I regret I have never heard of you.

JASON: You should get out more.

WAITER: Nor can I locate a credit stream or any other acceptable financial endowment.

JASON: What? Did you just check my credit rating with the power of your mind? Cool.

MIRA: (NERVOUS) We could go somewhere else.

WAITER: That might be best.

JASON: (LOUD NOW) No! This place is supposed to be discreet, and we need to be invisible.

WAITER: You're making a scene, sir.

JASON: (increasingly manic and false, if you get what I mean) Listen, sunshine, I'm sure you make a perfectly good living by luring people into this ... establishment under false pretences – but I'm here to tell you, here and now, that you've misjudged your marks this time! I'm here to tell you, here and now, that up with this I shall not put!

MIRA: Jason ...

MIRA OCCASIONALLY BREAKS IN WITH MORE CONCERNED 'JASON, YOU OKAYS' AND THE LIKE (IMPROV.) DURING THE FOLLOWING ...

JASON: I know people! People of influence! Doctors and dentists! Doctors and dentists and architects! That's a quote, sunshine, from *way* before your time. And a little bit after mine, if I'm honest.

WAITER: Sir. The Maison Celestial prides itself, as you are no doubt aware, upon its accommodation of a certain breadth of demeanour as regards its guests, but I would really quite strongly, not to mention forcibly, suggest that it might be opportune for you and your good lady to make such settlements as might be required and (etc.) ...

JASON: No way! No sodding way!

MIRA: (NERVOUS) Jason. They've got guns. And things. It's probably all these new anti-terror precautions.

JASON: Bah to their guns! And things. And things with guns. I simply *refuse* to eat anywhere else – and no force in the universe can make me!

CUT TO:

Scene Six

A BUSY 'DINER' – BUSIER, FRIENDLIER AND OBVIOUSLY LESS CLASSY THAN THE CLASSY RESTAURANT OF BEFORE.

JASON: (perfectly ordinary, ordering stuff) Couple of synthi-karob Burger Platters, couple of beers, big as you got ...

AUTOMATED BLEEP-CHUNK-CHUNK-CASH-REGISTER-CHING AS APPROPRIATE COMESTIBLES ARE AUTOMATICALLY DISPENSED.

JASON: ... thanks.

MIRA: That went well ...

JASON: Sure did. (chomf-chomf) Mmm. Protein.

MIRA: Our old drinking game, crashing the swankiest place we can find just to get thrown out. Happy days, right. (reminiscently declarative) “I’ve been thrown out of finer places than this, I’ll have you know, you poxy whoreson dogs! And they were much more civilised about it, too!”

JASON: Thought you’d appreciate the trip down memory lane. (chomf)

MIRA: (Increasingly impatient with him as scene progresses) Thing is ... are you all right?

JASON: (chomf) What?

MIRA: It was like you were over-playing it. Going through the motions but it all seemed so contrived.

JASON: If you’re expecting a “contrived, moi?” out of me, Mira, you’ve got another think coming. (chomf)

MIRA: This is *me* saying it, , yeah? How long have I know you? Your heart wasn’t in it but you were pretending that it was, that it was still the same and nothing had changed ... and you were, I don’t know, *forcing* yourself to act – forcing yourself to *think* – like nothing had changed and we were still just having fun freaking out the straights ...

JASON: Mira? Are you ... reading me?

MIRA: (suddenly very, very cold) What?

JASON: I, uh ... just ...

MIRA: I heard what you said. *What?*

JASON: (back-peddalling furiously) Look – I mean, listen – I wasn’t thinking and it just ...

MIRA: Oh, you were thinking. You dot, dot, dot, *considered* and then you *said* it.

JASON: I didn’t mean ...

MIRA: You don’t know what you mean. You’ve known me for, what, how many years, and you know there’s something to get. And you fake how you get it – fake it really well, I’ve just this second realised. And you just don’t get it at all! You know how it is to be a soldier ...

JASON: (Pointed) We both do. [He has killed before – in the battle with the Axis.]

MIRA: I'm talking about the distinctions! Not who's what or what. You take murder. Take a murderer ...

JASON: Murderer? I thought you were talking about soldiers ...

MIRA: Say one more word, Jason – you say one more word until I'm finished – and I swear to god I'm getting up and walking out. You asked for my help. You can listen to me.

(beat of somewhat uncharacteristic Jasonic silence, and Mira composing herself before she articulates ...)

MIRA: You have the murderers, right; you have the men or women who snap and kill their partners ... or the criminals who kill because the crime demands it, or the crime goes bad ... or the sickos who just do it for the hell of it ... that's uncontrolled. By it's very nature. It's stuff that just simply happens. Yes?

JASON: Okay. Yes.

MIRA: That's the same way that so-called *paranormal* talents express themselves in normals. They can read minds, sometimes, or see ghosts, or move things without touching them for no reason anybody knows – there's no real evidence, even now, that they can really do any of that stuff in the first place ...

JASON: Okay. Yes.

MIRA: Now your soldiers, on the other hand ... oh, what the hell, don't look at me like that. Let's just talk. Ask me why soldiers are different.

JASON: Um. Why are soldiers different?

MIRA: Soldiers are taken and trained for specific purpose. They're trained to be the instrument of something other than themselves, some government or state, and – right or wrong – their actions exist on a different moral level.

JASON: “Just following orders?” What about personal responsibility?

MIRA: If you assume personal responsibility, then the appropriate moral values apply. My point is, soldiers don't just happen, they're built within certain parameters – just like the so-called telepaths who come out of the Catan Nebula. When the Manufactories first took me in, they ran every test from Rhine cards to Voort boxes – do you want to guess what they found?

JASON: I dunno. Latent psionic abilities?

MIRA: Absolutely nothing. Random results down the line. That's what they were looking for – they didn't want their work contaminated by so-called

“natural” talent. The nano-worms ate my central nervous system, and they replaced it to design. I come with an inbuilt set of professional ethics – the job is one thing, but, socially, it’s impossible for me to use my skills on someone without their express consent. It’s the way I’m built.

JASON: Yeah, but as I recall, what with being there and all, you got away from the ... people who built you. Got yourself rewired.

MIRA: *That* I chose to keep. Self-preservation. I mean, look at the people in here – they catch a whiff of an uncontrolled psionic in their midst, they’d stone me to death. (chomf) Probably with these damn burgers.

JASON: I’ve seen you, Mira – you can just look at people and come up with insights ...

MIRA: Yes, well, there’s always the possibility that I’ve just lied about everything and you’ll never know. (chomf) Then again, it might just be that I have eyes in my head, and a brain, and I can make two plus two equal four. (chomf) We’re not meeting on your precious Braxiatel Collection. And the gods alone know it’s not for a shag. I know you, Jason. You never do something without a reason. You’re one of those people who always has an agenda – and a tendency to see other people as nothing more than the tools to achieve it.

JASON: Uh ... that’s not what people really think about me, is it?

MIRA: Oh, you have other qualities, too. That’s why so many people put up and go along with it. Fact remains, there’s something up with you, you’re trying to pretend like hell that there isn’t but you still want something from me – so let’s just cut to the chase and tell me what it is, yes?

JASON: So the bottom line is, Mira, you think I just want something from you, that it’s all I really care about, and nothing I say or do will convince you otherwise?

MIRA: Is there an echo in here? I’m sure I just said all that.

JASON: Well, all right then. The fact is, I seem to have picked a fight with someone. I ... won’t say his name. You know that old superstition, where if you say the name of a demon three times it appears? It’s a bit like that. And if you think I’m manipulative, that I treat people like tools, this guy thinks the whole damn universe is his toolbox.

Scene Seven

FADE UP ON THE COLLECTION’S SPACEPORT – THE RUMBLE OF SHIPS’ ENGINES, SOUNDS OF MAINTENANCE, INDECIPHERABLE TANNoy ANNOUNCEMENTS, ETC.

A HOVER-POD ARRIVES AND ITS HATCH OPENS.

JASON: Here we go. Parking Bay Seven Ninety-Two.

MIRA: A lot of this looks high-end military – is that a Draconian warship?

JASON: Don't worry. They're leaving. Right, here's my ship. .

MIRA: What, behind that total piece of haulage crap?

JASON: Mira, what do *you* think.

MIRA: I think, with this total piece of haulage crap we're going to launch an assault on God? A god, anyway, know what I mean?

JASON: He's not a god, he's a dick. He just messes around with everyone's lives because he can.

MIRA: Sounds like the very definition of a god to me. Jason, we're the Plague Dogs, yes? I mean, we have access to a General InfraDynix Hypersystems, military-spec, Pulse-pump Canon Class Interstellar Battle Corvette. If there doesn't happen to be anything better on hand. You get what I'm saying?

JASON: It would just be a waste of a General InfraDynix Hypersystems, military-spec, Pulse-pump Canon Class Interstellar Battle Corvette. Where we're going, the stresses and translation ... well, let's just say that we only need something that'll last just long enough. The cheaper and more disposable the better.

MIRA: Oh-kay ... I just can't see said total hunk of haulage crap being let through the door of any Realm of the Gods, is all I'm saying.

JASON: We're not going to any Realm of the Gods, Mira. We're going in a whole other direction.

MIRA: So where we going, then, boss?

JASON: We're going to the end of the world. We're going to hell.

FX-SEQUENCE AND LINKING MUSIC TO CONVEY A NOT PARTICULARLY ELEGANT SHIP TAKING OFF AND HEADING INTO SPACE.

Scene Eight

A NARRATION-SCENE, POSSIBLY TAKING PLACE IN JASON'S QUARTERS ON THE SHIP, THE MUTED B/G SOUNDS OF A SHIP UNDER WEIGH.

DEVICE: (blip-bleep) Recording.

JASON: The facts. These are the facts as I remember them ... and when you come down to it, that's the problem right there. Just how much of my memory can I validate and trust? It's like trying to revisit a house that's been long-since demolished. You can never go home again.

(beat)

JASON: Not that I'd *want* to go home. The things that happened, some of the things that happened were ... I ... don't know if I can ... I ...

DEVICE: (bleep-blip) End recording.

Scene Nine

THE ENGINE-ROAR OF A SHIP POWERING THROUGH SPACE (OR APPLICABLE STAR-DRIVE SOUNDS) DEVOLVE INTO THE MORE MUTED AMBIANCE OF 'INSIDE' THE SHIP.

MUFFLED ENGINE HUM, THE OCCASIONAL BLEEP AND TYPING AND SWITCHING SOUNDS OF CONTROLS BEING OPERATED.

JASON: ... so for a long time – years, really – I've had these growing suspicion that everything was, well, everything was just *wrong* ...

MIRA: Wrong? Wrong how?

JASON: Our lives and how they ended up. Our lives weren't supposed to be like this ...

MIRA: Sounds like simple paranoia to me. "Oh, boo-hoo-hoo, I'm not rich and famous and I can't get laid. The universe is out to get me." Ya know?

JASON: Hey, the universe is out to get everyone. Man, woman or child, it screws you over, and when it's had enough of doing that it kills you.

MIRA: Nice attitude, there, Mister Sunshine.

JASON: That's just the stuff that happens. I'm not talking about that. The guy is actively manipulating things, changing lives to fit some plan of his own, and the worst thing ...

MIRA: The worst thing?

JASON: The worst thing is that I don't even think he's doing it to be *evil*, if you get me. He's not sitting there going "at last my dastardly planning and

plotting shall bear fruit, muahahah”. Human lives get in the way, he just lops them off and he simply doesn’t care.

MIRA: Taking people out of time? That would ...

JASON: Take it from me. I know for a fact that, this point on my time-line, Benny and me should still be married – and we should have kids. Two of them. A son and daughter.

MIRA: You know this?

JASON: Long story. I just know, okay. They didn’t – they didn’t fit into his precious *continuity*, so they’re just lopped. (bleak) They’re just gone ...

MIRA: You can’t just take people out of time. All the things they did, the connections, the world would just unravel at the ...

JASON: What world have you been living in? Looks like it’s unravelling at the seams to me.

MIRA: You couldn’t do something like that without leaving traces ...

JASON: That’s the thing. That’s what put me onto things. Listen, a couple of years back now, we had a ... friend, I suppose you’d call her. Ms Jones.

MIRA: Ms? Doesn’t sound that friendly to me.

JASON: Yeah, well, I’m stretching it. She was someone I knew, though, someone I thought I knew and had a handle on ... and then she went completely buggy on us. Completely nuts.

MIRA: She went crazy. People go crazy.

JASON: Yeah, but she went nuts in the wrong way, know what I mean? She abducted Benny’s kid, Peter, for no good reason, and in the total mess that followed she wound up dead.

MIRA: Like I said, people go crazy. Sometimes they snap for no reason anyone can see. That’s what crazy means.

JASON: If you say so. Thing is, all through it, I was struck by how uncharacteristic it was. Like it wasn’t her – like she was an actor forced to go along with a script she didn’t like. Like it wasn’t even her. That’s what set me off ...

MIRA: Oh yes?

JASON: Yeah. It was something I could latch on to about how things were just generally screwed up and wrong.

MIRA: Not much to latch on to, really ...

JASON: No. And then this guy Kothar – one of the Draconians – he'd been done over, too. Like he was playing someone else's game. And in exchange for a ... favour, he gave me something tangible.

MIRA: A smoking gun.

JASON: Near enough. Ms Jones was from the future, see. There's lot of us not where we should really be in time: Me, Benny, poor old Bev Tarrant...

MIRA: Well that's because your Mr Braxiatel is a Time – [Lord]

JASON: Because he moves things around. And Clarissa Jones was really born six years ago. Parents worked on the Stonehauser Medical Facility. Which was destroyed in a Draconian raid two months ago. A terrible accident, apparently.

MIRA: And Ms Jones?

JASON: Dead. Like everyone else. Nasty paradox that. The woman we knew never got past eight years old.

MIRA: It was really her? It's not too unusual a name.

JASON: The genetic phenome matched the files perfectly, with absolute precision, no margin for error ...

MIRA: But?

JASON: But. That was just numbers on a com screen. I needed to see it for myself, yeah? The dead girl's body was sent to me. And it never made it. Vanished without a trace, as did the records of all those living on the facility. Lost in the attack, they're saying.

MIRA: Except you'd already seen them.

JASON: And only I know about it. I think, with all I've been through, I'm getting immune to the effects or something.

AFTER A MOMENT'S THOUGHT.

MIRA: So let's recap here, for the people listening at home. Our guy's messing around with time and screwing people's lives – and by the very nature of the act, people aren't even gonna know, let alone prove it. Words like creek, shit and up without a paddle come to mind, there, guy.

JASON: Yeah, well, fortunately I know where there's an out. There's a place where deleted things go.

MIRA: What, the trash bin of the universe?

JASON: The End of the World. And ...

NAVI-COMP BLEEPING.

JASON: ... from the looks of things, , we're coming up on it right now.

Scene Ten

WE'RE 'OUTSIDE' THE SHIP AS IT ZOOMS ALONG.

SPACE-AGEY MUSIC COMES UP TO CONVEY THAT WE'RE APPROACHING SOMETHING REALLY IMPRESSIVE. ONE OF THE SWIRLY, WIBBLY ANOMALIES WE WERE FOREVER GETTING IN STAR TREK.

AS THE MUSIC REACHES A CRESCENDO, IT CUTS OFF ANTICLIMACTICALLY, AND WE CUT TO THE RELATIVE QUIET OF 'INSIDE' THE SHIP.

MIRA: Empty space. Well, la-di-da. All this way for empty space. How very ...

JASON: We're not looking at it from the right direction. Cutting in the dimensional translators ...

CONTROL TYPE-BLEEPING. AN 'ALIEN-TECH' SOUND COMES UP.

MIRA: Hey, what ...?

JASON: Turning us a right-angle to reality ...

CUT TO 'OUTSIDE' AND THE SHRIEKING OF METAL UNDER STRESS, AND THE WAVE OF A CHAOTIC VORTEX WASHES OVER US ...

... AND THE CHAOS CONTINUES, SECOND-HAND, AS WE GO BACK 'INSIDE' TO THINGS JUDDERING AND SPARKING AND VARIOUS ALERTS AND THINGS GOING OFF.

MIRA: (shouting to be heard) Coming apart! The whole *ship* is coming apart!

JASON: (shouting likewise) Yeah! That's why a General InfraDynix Hypersystems, military-spec, Pulse-pump Canon Class Interstellar Battle Corvette wasn't worth it!

MIRA: What?!

JASON: Wasn't worth it! Any physical matter going through translation suffers irreparable damage!

MIRA: What!? Jason, we're *made* out of physical –

JASON: Don't worry about it! The control-cabin's surrounded by a force shield to cushion the effect! Never actually tested it, though ...

MIRA: Oh. Brilliant.

THE SHRIEKING AND JUDDERING STOPS, LEAVING THE SECOND-HAND SOUNDS OF THE CHAOS-VORTEX. THINGS HAVE BECOME RELATIVELY QUIET.

JASON: (relief) There we go. No problems at all. And with any luck, we might even make it back.

MIRA: Did I already say "oh, brilliant"? Brilliant.

JASON: Let's get ourselves noticed, fire off a signal-flare ...

CONTROL-BLEEPING. A FLARE-BEACON IS FIRED.

MIRA: Jason ... this stuff on the ... just where the hell *are* we?

JASON: We've fallen through the cracks into null-time. Fractured time. We're in what you might call a Control Zone.

MIRA: Control? That chaos on the screens ... doesn't look like any kind of control I've ever heard of.

JASON: I mean control like as in "control group", you know? In medical experiments and stuff? One lot goes with the imposed plan, the control group gets nothing and anything goes.

MIRA: Anything goes?

JASON: The control-factor is precisely zero. Chaos is the natural state of the ...

COMMS-BLEEPING.

JASON: ... and here's our ride – well, more like a pilot-boat, really, to take us to ...

THE COMMS BURST OUT WITH STATIC, THROUGH WHICH A TREATED, MANIC AND SOMEWHAT HIGH-PITCHED ALIEN VOICE DECLARES ...

ALIEN VOICE: Attention human ship-type thing! This are Enormous Space Octopus designation six-six-six dash seven-zero-two, vectoring for Station Zero grapple! Cost will be one hundred and fifty Immortal Souls, all same!

MIRA: Enormous space octopus? Did that thing say enormous space octopus?

JASON: That's just the nearest Galactic Standard translation. You get a lot of coincidences and things like that out here. (into comms) Enormous Space Octopus, we read you. Hundred and fifty Immortal Souls for a tow? The prices have gone up.

ALIEN VOICE: Yeah, well things are tough all over, there, boy.

Scene Eleven

WE'RE 'OUTSIDE' IN THE CHAOS-VORTEX. THE GLOPTIOUS ROAR OF WHAT MIGHT BE SOME BEHEMOTHIC SEA-MONSTER, THE WHIP OF SLIMY TENTACLES AND THE CHUNK-CHUNK-CHUNK-HYDRAULIC-HISS OF TOWING CABLES ETC. BEING ATTACHED.

AN OMINOUS MUSICAL LINK TO CONVEY A CHANGE OF LOCALE. IT DEVOLVES TO ...

WE'RE IN, BASICALLY, A TUNNEL-SPACE FULL OF MONSTERS OF VARIOUS SIZES. SMALL THINGS ARE CHITTERING, LARGER THINGS ARE SNARLING, EVEN LARGER THINGS ARE OCCASIONALLY AND SOMEWHAT GLUTINOUSLY ROARING. SNATCHES OF DEMONIC-SOUNDING ALIEN LANGUAGE, THE RING-TONES OF ALIEN COMMS UNITS – THE IMPRESSION IS OF A CROWDED STREET IN HELL.

JASON: Station Zero of one of the few coherent, well, *places* in Fractured Time. Used to be called the Tartarus Gate, but it's under new management these days. One of the multiversal crossover points – one of the few that don't fall under the so-called jurisdiction of those who ... try to lord it over time, anyway. What do you think?

MIRA: (speechless) ... I uh...

JASON: Don't everybody chip in at once.

MIRA: Oh god ... this place ... these *things*! It's pandemonium!

JASON: Well, it's not exactly Tranquillity Island.

MIRA: These are like fiends and demons from Hell. It's like we're in Hell!

JASON: And neither are we out of it. Matter of fact, there's been a few humans found their way here by accident, you know, over the centuries. This is where the human Visions of Hell *come* from, apparently.

MIRA: Lovely.

JASON: This is where I was stuck, those few years when I dropped off the face of the universe. It's just a place.

THE GURGLING, GLOATING SNICKERS OF SOME DEMONIC CREATURES QUITE CLOSE – YOU-GO-FIRSTING IN SOME ALIEN LANGUAGE AS THEY SNEAK UP TO GRAB US ...

JASON: A slightly more dangerous place than most, admittedly. (declaratively, so that everything around can hear) So, Mira, I'm glad I remembered to bring my big gun. Did you remember to bring your big gun, too, Mira?

MIRA: Uh ... (then declaratively likewise) Why yes, Jason. Yes I did. I've got my big gun right here.

JASON: (declarative) And what sort of ammunition do you have in your big gun, Mira?

MIRA: (declarative) Standard clip. First round a blinder – flash-charge and powdered glass – just in case of mistakes. It's easier for someone to get a new set of eyeballs than get alive again after being very, very dead.

JASON: (declarative) But what rounds are in there after that, Mira?

MIRA: (declarative) High-impact frags, Jason. Get inside and bounce around. It's as easy to squeeze off two shots as one, if someone needs to be very, very dead after all.

SOUNDS OF ALIEN THINGS BACKING OFF, NONCHALANTLY BUT SOMEWHAT HURRIEDLY.

JASON: (normally) Nice job. I don't think they'd have done anything, really. Just a couple of guys trying it on.

MIRA: Pesky scamps, with their fangs and claws and seven sets of eyes – oh my God! Is that what I think it is, growing out of that guy's –

JASON: I'm sure I wouldn't like to ask. We're here.

MIRA: What?

JASON: The place we were heading for. We're here.

MIRA: Oh.

JASON: And joking apart, let's not panic and start shooting. We could find anything in there – just be prepared for anything ...

Scene Twelve

A CLASSIC SHOP-DOOR OPENING WITH A TINKLING BELL.

ABRUPTLY, WE'RE IN A CALM AND PEACEFUL AMBIANCE. MUZAK REMINISCENT OF 'THE GIRL FROM IPANIMA' PLAYS QUIETLY.

MIRA: A travel-agents shop? We're in a bloody travel-agents shop!?

AZAGRAZAR: Greetings!

MIRA: A travel-agents shop with a seven-foot tall demon in it, obviously.

(AZAGRAZAR IS A ONE-OFF, ONLY APPEARING IN THIS SCENE. HE SPEAKS WITH A SUAVE 'GEORGE SANDERSON' DRAWL – ONLY IMPOSSIBLY DEEP AND BOOMING AND WITH DEMONIC-SNARL UNDERTONES, IF YOU GET WHAT I MEAN.)

JASON: That seven-foot-tall demon used to be my boss. Hallo, Azagrazar.

AZAGRAZAR: Jason! My dear boy! How have you been keeping?

JASON: I've been better. Listen, Azagrazar, I need a favour – do I still have any back-pay on account?

AZAGRAZAR: Think nothing of it, dear boy. I'm happy to help in any way I can. For what it's worth, I do believe there are a number of Immortal Souls coming to you.

MIRA: Hang on. Immortal Souls ...?

JASON: That's just the name of the currency, here in the Demon Dimensions. (to Agrazar) I need to find specific points out there in the Zone, in Fractured Time. Trouble is, as you know, there could be anything out there ...

AZAGRRAZAR: Including everything that ever has, or will, or will ever have existed. I know what you mean, dear boy. You need to sort the fresh and quivering victim meat from the skins.

MIRA: Er, what?

JASON: I need you to help me with the coordinates, point me in the right direction.

AZAGRAZAR: Say no more, my dear chap! You need the temporal and spatial points that are meaningful and accessible to you personally. They don't call me the finest translocator in seven separate universes for nothing!

JASON: They don't at that, Azagrazar. Indeed they don't.

AZAGRAZAR: So, first we must analyse your particular needs and requirements. Let me just get this ...

THERE'S A SLITHERY SOUND, AND THE 'SKREE!' OF A SMALL, SLIMY INSECTOID ALIEN CREATURE.

MIRA: Eurgh! What the hell is that?

AZAGRAZAR: A perfectly ordinary mind-sucker, fresh from the Slime Pits of Detestable Ghoulies.

MIRA: I'm not gonna say a word.

AZAGRAZAR: Now we just attach this here ... and here ...

SLIMY CLUNCHING SOUNDS.

JASON: Ow! Cold hands!

AZAGRAZAR: And now we see what we shall see ...

SLIMY SOUNDS.

JASON: Gah ...

ALIEN MINDSUCKER: Skree! Skreeskreeskreeskreeskreeeeee!

AZAGRAZAR: What's that, Slippy? Somebody's trapped down a ... oh. Oh, I see. (genuinely worried) This is bad ... this is bad indeed.

SLIMY CLUNCHY SOUNDS AS THE MINDSUCKER THING IS REMOVED.

JASON: Grah ... uh, what's so very bad indeed?

AZAGRAZAR: The mind-sucker acquires a neurological *gestalt*, and extrapolates a coherent timeline, so I can ascertain locations in time and space to which you might be *simpatico* ... Crossing time-streams can be unconscionably dangerous if things are not precisely judged. But there's a problem.

JASON: Problem?

AZAGRAZAR: Significant portions of your timeline have been excised. Not just rediverted or altered – they've been deleted.

Scene Thirteen

WE'RE OUTSIDE IN THE CHAOS-VORTEX. THE HYDRAULIC-CHUNK AND MECHANICAL-WHIRR OF DOCKING CLAMPS AND THE LIKE BEING RETRACTED, AND THE ROAR OF A SHIP'S THRUSTERS.

A MUSICAL LINK TO CONVEY SOME BRIEF TIME HAS PASSED, CONTRIVING TO CONVEY A SOMEWHAT OMINOUS BUILD UP OF TENSION.

CUT TO 'INSIDE' THE SHIP. VARIOUS SOUNDS OF CONTROLS AND EQUIPMENT BEING MANIPULATED THROUGH THE FOLLOWING – JASON IS, BASICALLY, CLAMBERING INTO A HI-TECH SPACESUIT AND CLIPPING STUFF ON TO IT.

JASON: Okay. We're pretty much bearing down on the first set of coordinates Azagrazar gave me.

MIRA: Took long enough.

JASON: Yeah, well, what with one thing and another my timeline's like a bloody switchback. Time to do your thing, Mira. You know, the mind link thing?

MIRA: Okay ...

(WHEN MIRA SPEAKS THROUGH THE MIND-LINK IT HAS AN ECHO AND TWINKLY SONIC UNDERTONES AND OVERLAYS EVERYTHING ELSE. IT'S AS IF WE HEAR IT IN OUR HEADS. FOR THE SAKE OF CLARITY, WE'LL TAG THIS 'MIND-LINK MIRA.')

MIND-LINK MIRA: How's this? My God, Jason, look at the holes in your head. I'm amazed you can even function.

JASON: I think my life is one big autonomic response. Sealing up the holographic suit ...

CLUNK-CLUNK-WHIR-HISS OF A PRESSURISED HIGH-TECH SUIT.

JASON: Testing holo-systems ...

WHUMMM.

(THE VOICE OF JASON, WHEN SUITED, COMES OVER A RADIO-LINK.)

RADIO-LINK JASON: What do you see?

MIRA: Six-foot gerbil in a hat.

MIND-LINK MIRA: And just be sure to reset it before you encounter anyone who'll see.

JASON: I'll do that very thing. I'm activating the Inject Portal now.

THE 'SKRAAAK' OF WHAT IS, BASICALLY, A WIBBLY SCIENCE FICTION PORTAL OPENING UP.

JASON: We're set?

MIND-LINK MIRA: We're set.

JASON: Okay. Let's do this.

THE WHUMM-SKRAAK-SKRAASH OF JASON DIVING THROUGH THE PORTAL.

MUSIC SUGGESTING THAT WE'RE HEADING OFF ON A JOLLY EXCITING ADVENTURE. THIS DEVOLVES TO ...

Scene Fourteen

NARRATION SPACE.

IT'S A BIT LATER THAN THE ABOVE EVENTS. JASON'S NARRATION SOUNDS STRESSFUL AND TIRED.

JASON: The idea is loosely based on what I gather was called "farming". There were computer games, apparently, after my time, where a bunch of players went into some computer-generated environment or other and shared the score for killing monsters and the useful things they dropped.

(beat)

JASON: Farming was when you pared the team down to two, so there were less people who had to share. You'd get a fighter guy doing all the hacking and slashing and stuff, and a healer guy pumping the energy he needed to stay alive. That's sort of what we're doing here – I'm diving into Fractured Time, reconnecting with the parts that were lost and relaying the data, Mira's linked to me as a lifeline ...

(beat)

JASON: Thing is, the thing about *farming* is that it was never meant to be a winning strategy. It was a strategy only ever meant to last just long enough. The job of the fighter guy was just to go in and hack, and slash, and flail about until he died. He was never meant to win the game.

(beat)

JASON: As I'm doing this, as I'm reclaiming the shattered fragments of my life, I've got this growing feeling that there's something I've forgotten. Something important. Not something that was cut away – and not something to do with Benny or myself. There was something I was supposed to do in my life and I just didn't. Never did it, never let myself even think about it, but it –

(beat)

JASON: I'm not making any sense.

DEVICE: (bleep-blip) End recording.

Scene Fifteen

SKRAASH-WHUMP-WHUMM OF JASON APPEARING IN A NODE OF FRACTURED TIME AND FIRING UP ITS HOLO-FIELD.

WE'RE IN A LARGE ALIEN BAR –THE AURAL EQUIVALENT OF THE CLASSIC ONE IN STAR WARS.

MIND-LINK MIRA: Another bar. Dear me how very ... no, I take that back. Another sodding Bar!

RADIO-LINK JASON: Yes, well, I used to spend a lot of my life in bars ...

MIND-LINK MIRA: When you were talking about this guy snipping bits out of your timeline, I thought he was, you know, talking about the *important* bits. Like, what, the first time you and Benny – the so called love of your life – first ever, you know ...

RADIO-LINK JASON: (a bit hurriedly) Removing something like that would be a hell of a job. It would have been noticed. He's being sneaky about it, taking the times where the memories are a little, uh, incapacitated ...

MIND-LINK MIRA: Drunk out of the bleeding skull, is what you mean.

RADIO-LINK JASON: He's taking the things around the edges – the bits that make the important things *mean* something. Over there, there's me and Benny. This was just before we ... oh God, I remember this. I'm remembering ...

A SONIC SHIFT TO CONVEY THAT WE'RE MOVING OUR ATTENTION TO FOCUS ON THE PAST-LIFE BENNY AND JASON ...

Scene Sixteen

WE'RE STILL IN THE ALIEN BAR. I'VE BROKEN THIS INTO A SEPARATE SCENE, SINCE WE'RE FOCUSING ENTIRELY ON BENNY AND JASON AND WHAT THEY'RE SAYING.

BENNY: ... and so after my mother died, I was alone. I never knew him. I never knew my father.

JASON: (flatly) Lucky you.

BENNY: What? I mean, *what?*

JASON: Lucky you.

BENNY: (cold rage) Have you ... any idea what it's like? To grow up without a father? To never even know what a –

JASON: Take it from me, you're well out of it. Let me tell you about fathers –

BENNY: Oh yes. You said. He beat you. You poor dear. At least you *had* one, and ...

JASON: I'm not talking about the odd backhander. I mean the real number. Sustained and ritualised and believe me you don't forget it. You wish you could. It's inside you all the time and it never stops ...

BENNY: If you ...

JASON: The guy had all these little ritual systems of crime and punishment, and he'd go through them, really cold, like it was more in sorrow than in anger, you know? You could work out a kind of crazy logic of them afterwards, but you could never see them coming up ...

BENNY: Uh ...

JASON: There was one time, right. Every day, at the same time, he told my little sister Lucy that he had seen her touching herself in a bad place or something and that she was going to be corrected.

BENNY: What are you ...

JASON: Lucy's something like six; she hasn't got a clue what he's talking about - but she *knows* him. We're terrified, but nothing happens for days. Weeks. It just became routine ...

BENNY: It just became ...

JASON: And then the school holidays started. He has more time to play about with before people have to see her. Over three days, once a day, at the exact same time every day, he breaks one of her fingers. Pops the joints with a mallet and a chisel with the cutting edge blunted with masking tape.

BENNY ... I uh...

JASON: He does it late in the evening just in case his train from work's delayed. The fact that it's always at the same time was part of it. He does it very carefully and he makes her keep ice packs on them and pops an extra one as an afterthought, so when he finally takes her casualty he can get away with saying he slammed the car door on them ...

BENNY: But didn't ...

JASON: I suppose if we were living in some scummy urban housing estate we'd have had the social services spilling out our ears the first time I fell down the stairs. But we were nice and white and middle-class - and the nice, white middle-classes aren't supposed to do stuff like that. The mechanisms to detect and deal with it weren't in place.

JASON: The worst thing was mum. I mean, okay, she was getting her share and she was like permanently shell-shocked and when you come down to it what could she do, right?

BENNY: She ...

JASON: When you're a kid she's one of the two most powerful people in the world, like a goddess or something, and when she doesn't save you and even covers up for him it's like she's *collaborating*. The guy was a bastard and screw him, but with your mum it's like love and hate mixed up inside you, yeah?

JASON: And then of course, sometimes, he'd just totally lose it. In the end he went for my mother with a newspaper. It wasn't like I tried to stop him or anything. I was just in the way and -

BENNY: What? He went for her with a newspaper?

JASON: Roll it really tight, it's like a punching weapon. Do it right and you can punch it through a plank. It's like a trick to deal with muggers and he'd carry one whenever he went to work - like he was going to get mugged between Liverpool Street station and Bank.

BENNY: ...

JASON: So anyway, that night I looked at my face in the mirror and felt the soft bits in my side and looked down into the blood in the toilet and that was it. I suppose I could have stuck the bastard with a kitchen knife and buried him under the patio or something, but I just walked out of the house, walked five miles to the nearest town and hopped the last train of the night.

BENNY: That was when ...

JASON: I didn't even pack. I left mum and little Lucy with him. I shouldn't have done that. I should have looked out for her. I was nearly thirteen, she was only coming up to nine ...

BENNY: Look, when I said, I didn't mean to ...

JASON MAKES A BRAVE ATTEMPT TO CHEER UP AND FAILS.

JASON: Hey, don't worry about it. You weren't to know. (BEAT) I... I never told anyone else any of that before.

BENNY: I guess I'm easy that way.

JASON: (He's going to marry this girl) I guess you are.

Scene Seventeen

WE'RE STILL IN THE ALIEN BAR, BUT OUR ATTENTION IS BACK ON JASON AND MIRA.

MIND-LINK MIRA: Oh, God, Jason ... what you were saying, was it ...

RADIO-LINK JASON: (gagging) Gak! Huk! Mira, get me –

MIND-LINK JASON: Jason!? Are you –

RADIO-LINK JASON: Mira, get me out of here! Now!

THE WHUMM-SKRAAK OF JASON DEMATERIALISING.

Scene Eighteen

THE SKRAAAK OF JASON MATERIALIZING AGAIN.

MIRA: (not mind-linked) Jason!?

JASON: Help me – gah! – help me get this bloody face-plate off!

FACEPLATEY-TAKING-OFF SOUNDS.

JASON: (throwing up) Hoork!

MAYBE A SPLASH OF VOMIT – BUT IT SHOULDN'T BE OVERSTATED.

JASON: I remember, now! That was the thing. That was what I ...

MIRA: Jason? What thing? I ...

JASON: My sister! I got out and I was going to come back for her and ... and I never, ever did. What could make me forget my own sister? How could he do that to me?

MIRA: Jason, that was centuries ago and we –

JASON: We've got the technology. (decisive) What do you reckon it would take to drop me in and have me –

MIRA: Jason, it's one thing to dive in and observe – it's another to drop in and interact. The ship is holding together by a rivet, and –

JASON: I'm doing this. I can drop you off back at Station Zero if you like. You'll be able to get back to the real world from there. Or do you wanna come along for the ride?

Scene Nineteen

THE SKRAAK-WHUM OF JASON MATERIALISING.

WE'RE IN A CONTEMPORARY-ISH (1980s) SUBURBAN ROAD. DISTANT AND SPORADIC SOUNDS OF TRAFFIC. THE OCCASIONAL OWL-HOOT.

THE SOUNDS OF A VIOLENT FAMILY ARGUMENT/STRUGGLE AS HEARD FROM OUTSIDE THE HOUSE IN WHICH IT'S TAKING PLACE. WE CAN'T MAKE OUT THE WORDS, BUT THE PARTICIPANTS SEEM TO BE A MALE AND FEMALE ADULT, AND A MALE AND FEMALE CHILD.

RADIO-LINK JASON: Okay. Back on the ole homestead. Pit of misery, house of pain, take your pick. (subdued) It's going off. I wish I ... wish there was some way to ...

MIND-LINK MIRA: Follow the plan, Jason. I know it must ... we have to wait.

RADIO-LINK JASON: Yeah. We wait.

THE FAMILY FIGHT DIES DOWN. THERE'S A BEAT OF SUBURBAN, OWL-HOOTY PEACE.

THE BANG OF A FRONT DOOR. HURRIED FOOTSTEPS DOWN A GRAVEL PATH.

RADIO-LINK JASON: And there he goes. Little Jason. He's well away ...

MIND-LINK MIRA: You know, we really didn't have to be here at all Here and now, I mean.

RADIO-LINK JASON: Yeah, well, I had to see. (beat) Okay, Mira, blip me forward forty-eight hours.

THE SKRAAK-SKRAAK OF DEMATERIALIZING/MATERIALIZING. THE AMBIANCE IS OTHERWISE UNCHANGED.

RADIO-LINK JASON: Double-check the holographic shield ...

WHUMM.

RADIO-LINK JASON: Yeah, that should do it. Okay. Let's do it.

A SOMEWHAT TWEE MIDDLE-CLASS DOORBELL DING-DONGS.

A FRONT DOOR OPENS.

MR KANE: (one-off) Yes ... hello?

JASON: (not radio-linked) Mister Peter Jonathan Kane? Detective Inspector ... Summerfield. Attached to the Child Protection Taskforce. It's a new initiative. Might I have a word ...?

A PAUSE.

MR KANE: I, uh, guess you'd better come in.

THEY GO IN. SLAM OF DOOR.

SILENCE.

THEN:

JASON: (narrating, shell-shocked) The End of the World

SCENE 20. INT. THE PHONE CALL – JASON'S PERSPECTIVE

(THIS CONVERSATION WILL ALSO FEATURE IN THE NEXT PLAY, BUT FROM BENNY'S PERSPECTIVE AND WITH JASON DISTORTED. WE'LL ALSO FIND OUT WHY BENNY IS SO FURIOUS WITH HIM).

SFX: BERNICE'S MOBILE/COMMUNICATOR RINGS. (THROUGHOUT THE CONVERSATION SHE IS QUIETLY SEETHING WITH ANGER AND DESPERATELY TRYING NOT TO LOSE IT WITH HIM.)

BERNICE (DISTORT): (SHE ANSWERS IT LOUDLY) Jason Bi- (SHE WAS GOING TO SAY "JASON BLOODY KANE" BUT CALMER/BREATHING DEEPLY) Jason?

JASON: (STUNNED) Benny. Hi.

BERNICE (DISTORT): Can I help you? It's just, you know, I'm a bit busy right now.

JASON: Oh... it's just... something's happened. I've done something... (TRIES TO BE CHEERFUL/CAN'T BRING HIMSELF TO SAY WHAT'S WRONG) Sorry, where... where are you?

BERNICE (DISTORT): With an old friend. You know. Catching up on the good old days. You remember the good old days, don't you Jason? When you could trust people!

JASON: (STILL SO STUNNED) Yeah... oh Benny. I need... I really need you.

BERNICE (DISTORT): Yeah, you always do. What have you done this time? Actually, don't tell me. You know, I always give you a second chance! I'm always telling myself that I shouldn't just judge you and that... (CUTS OFF THEN CALMER) It doesn't matter. But, yeah, bit busy right now.

JASON: Benny... please!

BERNICE (DISTORT): Oh just... (SLIGHTLY SADDER NOW) I'm resisting the urge to say "rot in Hell" but... please just go away, yeah? I really haven't got the time to deal with you at the moment. We'll talk when I get back but... you've really upset me. Really Jason, I'm just... look, I'll speak to you later.

JASON: Benny! I love- [you]

BERNICE (DISTORT): Yeah, yeah.

SFX: SHE ENDS THE CALL, CUTTING HIM OFF

CUT TO:

Scene Twenty-one

WE'RE 'OUTSIDE' THE SHIP IN THE CHAOS-VORTEX. THEN ...

NARRATION SPACE:

DEVICE: (blip-bleep) Recording.

JASON: Mira said there were distinctions. A soldier isn't a murderer. Sometimes it's better not to act, and sometimes it's the end of the world.

(beat)

JASON: In the end, there's wasn't much I could do. What, knife the bastard and good riddance? How many lives would be altered – how many lives would be destroyed – by a change like that? I won't be like that. I won't be like *him*.

(beat)

JASON: In the end I told him that the disappearance of little Jason Kane was being actively investigated, all resources used, as a pilot for a new initiative. That would involve constant surveillance of his home – and if they didn't see that surveillance, well that was sort of the point, wasn't it. Didn't want to frighten little Jason off if he ever came back, after all ...

(beat)

JASON: Little things like setting up a trust-fund for Lucy, set up so the parents couldn't get their hands on it ... In the end it ... well, like I said, in the end there wasn't much. I can only hope and pray it was enough. But I think I've finally done right by her. *Did* right by her. Who knows?

(beat)

JASON: And now we're heading home, the data banks replete with data. The genetic records from the Stonehauser Medical Facility, indexed, filed and stamped. Clarissa Jones and her entire family tree. Coherent data on my own life, on events that other people simply don't believe existed. Solid proof of temporal manipulation, proof of how we're being messed with. Bring it on.

(beat)

JASON: You know, Benny ... I wanted to talk to you because I always could. You always understood me, whatever what tried to come between us. And talking to you I can get it all straight in my head. I know what I'm going to do now. I going to -

(beat)

JASON: Ah, what the hell. I'll just tell you when I see you. Delete recording.

DEVICE: (bleep-blip) Deleting. (blip-skreee)

Scene Twenty Two

THE BRAXIATEL COLLECTION. A BEAUTIFUL DAY WITH STUDENTS OUT ENJOYING IT AND EACH OTHER.

JASON: Adrian! Brilliant day.

ADRIAN: (WARY) I guess so. You seem pleased with yourself.

JASON: Yeah. New lease on life. Put some old ghosts to rest. Business as usual, you know?

ADRIAN: Good for you. Peter's keen to see you. You did bring him back something from wherever it is you've been?

JASON: (No he hasn't) Of course I did. What do you think I am?

ADRIAN: Probably best not to ask. I'll send him your way.

JASON: Okay. I just got to catch up with Brax quickly.

ADRIAN: (Surprised) You and him are getting on?

JASON: That's what we're doing now. Think it's time we resolved our differences. I really think it's long past time.

HE GOES.

Scene Twenty-Three

BRAX'S ROOMS, MUSIC PLAYING. BRAX IS HUMMING ALONG. JASON KNOCKS AND COMES IN.

BRAX: (Easy) Hello Jason. My dear chap. How can I be of service?

JASON: You can shove it with the My Dear Chap for starters.

BEAT.

BRAX: And I'm supposed to say "yes" to that?

JASON: No more games. We did this once before and I thought that would be the end of it.

BRAX: Jason, I've said I was sorry about the ... unpleasant business with the Cybermen. If there's anything else I can do to make it better -

JASON: Tell me about Ms Jones.

BRAX: (Taken aback) Clarissa?

JASON: She was just a child, Brax. And her whole family, too.

BRAX: I'm afraid I must have missed something -

JASON: No. No, you haven't missed a thing. You've had it planned forever. A bit of rewriting here, smudging the corners there. Clarissa grew up in this neck of the woods, and she'd have seen it. What you were changing.

BRAX: She would have?

JASON: So you took her out of the picture. You bumped her off. Twice.

BRAX: I did?

JASON: She'd have known, wouldn't she? Being the local girl. (The killer line) That there was never a war between the Draconians and the Mim. Not until you changed things, anyway.

BRAX: Ah.

JASON: Yes, ah. The Mim are all but extinct and there's been thousands of other people killed. Everything's been turned upside down across the galaxy.

BRAX: Or made better. Better worlds. Some might say.

JASON: You've monkeyed around with everyone! Benny and I are meant to have had children. But you had us getting divorced and I even ended up in Hell!

BRAX: I'm really not responsible for everything you've ever done that might be stupid, Jason. What was the phrase: accepting personal responsibility?

JASON: But Rebecca? And Keith?

BRAX: All right. That may have something to do with me.

JASON: (Grabbing him) What! Why!

BRAX: (Reasonably) They would have taken up too much of Bernice's time.

JASON: WHAT?

BRAX: (Dead calm) Bernice is special. She has a role to play. At my side.

JASON: (Lets him go) You think you're in love with her.

BRAX: Don't be so melodramatic. She's useful to me and nothing more – but that is quite enough. Bernice truly understands time, you see, and taking the long view. She's prepared to make the difficult decisions. I could see it in her when we first met. Oh, she'll say she learnt it during her travels. But no. It was there before she ever got to Heaven. It's what ... *he* saw in her, after all. Why he took her with him.

JASON: She's not like that. She's not like you. She's just interested in history.

BRAX: We preserve the past and in so doing safeguard the future. That's what the Collection, ultimately, is for.

JASON: Yeah, and that's something else you've been working on. You've done something to it. With your ship.

BRAX: Oh, Jason, you really are unable to think anything but small. The Collection *is* my ship. The spaceport is a doorway back into time and space. We're quite sealed off here. Safe. Safe as houses.

JASON: So no one else can catch you unawares again. No more unexpected Dalek invasions, for example?

BRAX: And it makes altering the time lines that much easier. I plucked Benny's friend Ker'a'nol from a thousand years in the future, rewrote her whole life as if she'd always been from this time, and not one of you even noticed. I've been wanting to show off about that one for ages.

JASON: But why? (BEAT) You needed Benny out of the way while you wound up Clarissa. Very clever.

BRAX: Thank you. It's not just her. Your young friend Mira was killed during the Axis Occupation. She'd heard you were in trouble and had come here to try and help, apparently. Most unfortunate. But I knew you would tell her anything. So I fixed things. And she keeps in touch. How was your father, incidentally? Did you catch up on old times? Have a nice chat?

JASON: You're a monster!

BRAX: I saved her life. And she was suitably grateful. After I ... persuaded her to see things from my point of view, of course.

JASON: That thing you do ...

BRAX: Interesting to try it on a cyber-modified neurotechture. I was unsure, for a while, if it would hold.

JASON: I don't ...

BRAX: Yes?

JASON: I just don't understand ...

BRAX: Do go on.

JASON: I don't understand how you think you'll get away with it.

BRAX: And just who, precisely, is going to stop me?

JASON: Anyone! Everyone! You can't stop us all. I mean, what about your own lot?

BRAX: What about them? They've gone their merry way. They don't care. They never did.

JASON: They'll... They should... I don't know. *I'll* stop you if I have to.

BRAX: And how will you do that?

JASON: Well I'll ... I could ... Oh what the hell. I'll just tell Benny.

BRAX: Will you, now? Look at me, Jason ...

JASON: You're rumbled, sunshine. You can't hypnotise me any more. You can't stop me.

BRAX: So it seems.

JASON: Scared now, aren't you?

BRAX: (DARK) There are other ways to ensure your silence. Once and for all.

A PAUSE.

JASON: (brisk) Well, it's time I was going. People to do, things to see, stories to tell. You know how it is ...

BRAX: You're not going anywhere.

A PAUSE.

A DOOR OPENS AND SOMEONE BOUNDS IN.

JASON: Peter ...?

PETER: Uncle Jason! Uncle Jason! Daddy says you got me a present!

JASON: Peter! (SCOOPING HIM UP) Yes, yes I have. Come on, let's go and see what I got you. Sorry Brax. You know how he is. Better go. We can catch up again another time, yeah?

BRAX: (LOW) Peter.

PETER: Uncle Brax?

JASON: Benny won't thank you for involving Peter.

BRAX: (HYPNOTIC) But Bernice isn't safe. Uncle Jason is putting her in danger.

JASON: What? You're the one who –

BRAX: Uncle Jason wants to hurt Bernice. He wants to hurt all of us, but it's Bernice he'll hurt the worst.

GROWLING NOW FROM PETER, GETTING MORE AND MORE ANIMAL AND LESS AND LESS LITTLE BOY.

JASON: (Scared now) Peter? Peter, don't listen to him...

BRAX: You have to save Bernice. You have to protect her.

GROWLING IS VERY BAD NOW.

JASON: Peter! Peter! Listen to me!

SUDDENLY PETER IS ATTACKING HIM – A WILD AND SAVAGE THING.

JASON: Peter! Don't! Don't let him control you! Don't let him make you – [do this!]

PETER'S CLAWS ARE ON HIM, RIPPING AND TEARING.

JASON: She won't believe you Brax! You won't get her! Peter! Don't! Please! Argh! Your mum will ... she will...

IT DOESN'T STOP. JASON IS FADING NOW.

JASON: Peter ... I know you don't want to do this! I know it isn't you! Argh! I love you, Peter. I love you like my own. When you remember what he's done

to you... When you remember... just remember that it's all right. That it's okay. I understand. (flash of resigned humour) Story of my bloody life.

THE ATTACK CONTINUES BUT JASON IS GONE NOW.

THEN QUIET.

AFTER A MOMENT:

PETER: (His old self, unsure) Uncle Jason?

BRAX: (musing, utter contempt) You were never good enough for her.

THEN BRAX PUTS ON HUGELY THEATRICAL, MORTIFIED SHOCK:

BRAX: Oh, Peter! Oh my word! What have you done?