

FIREFLY

"AIR"

The pain caused by the bounty hunter, Jubal Early, in the finale of Season Two still echoes. When the crew of Firefly are infected with a mysterious and deadly airborne virus with dark links to River's past, Simon must choose between saving the crew and saving his sister.

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FIREFLY

"AIR" (Set after the end of season 2)

OPEN

INT. SERENITY, SIMON AND RIVER'S BUNKS - MORNING

DR. SIMON TAM sleeps in his bunk. In only loose pants, his hair is messed, body curled in an almost childlike pose and his expression is unguarded and relaxed. A moment of tension flits across his face and he rolls to his back.

In the adjacent room, RIVER TAM asleep in her bunk WHIMPERS.

RIVER

There's no air.

Simon sits bolt upright - tense and alert as if he wasn't asleep a moment before.

He crosses to River and wipes the hair away from her face. She WHIMPERS again.

SIMON

(in part Chinese)

Shhhh, xiao meimei [little sister].
Shhhh.

RIVER

The canary falls first.

River calms.

Simon stares at his weary eyes in the mirror. He sighs and splashes water on his face.

--He slips on a freshly pressed shirt.

--He buttons his waistcoat.

--He smoothes down his hair.

Simon takes a deep breath - preparing - for what? He lets the breath out.

River wakes clutching her chest and GASPING FOR AIR.

Simon's head snaps towards her.

END OPEN

ACT ONE

INT. SERENITY, INFIRMARY ANTECHAMBER - LATER

Simon supports a GASPING River towards the infirmary.

RIVER

The molecules aren't joined.

KAYLEE FRYE rounds the corner and helps Simon with River through the door.

KAYLEE

What's happening?

INT. FIREFLY, INFIRMARY - CONTINUOUS

Simon guides River, who's sucking in SHORT FRANTIC BREATHS, to sit on the gurney. Simon clips a monitor onto her finger. She tries to shake it off, but Simon stills her hand.

SIMON

No, keep it on. River, look at me.
Slow deep breaths.

KAYLEE

What can I do?

Simon examines the oxygen monitor then puts an oxygen mask on River, who at first tries to push it away.

SIMON

No, it will help. Slow breathes.
In. Out. That's right. Nice and
easy.

RIVER

(muffled)
Too early.

KAYLEE

What did she say?

SIMON

Her oxygen stats are low. Is there
something wrong with the...
(waves his hand around)
...air?

KAYLEE

I... No.

River pushes the mask off and flips the monitor off her finger sending it flying. She looks up at the vents, searching, scared.

RIVER
Early. Too early.

Kaylee goes very still.

SIMON
What's early?

RIVER
Too early for Early.

SIMON
(to Kaylee)
I think you should check our air supply.

Kaylee gulps, nods and speeds out of the infirmary.

INT. SERENITY, DINING AREA - LATER

A panel is open on one wall revealing a carbon dioxide scrubber dripping in black gunk.

Kaylee, wearing a jumpsuit and covered in grease, stands on a ladder next to another open panel in the ceiling. CAPTAIN MALCOLM "MAL" REYNOLDS stands beside her looking up. Kaylee pulls out a filter from behind an air vent. It's also dripping in the black gunk. Kaylee is visibly upset, her words tumbling over each other.

KAYLEE
I didn't know. She didn't tell me.
19 per cent and she didn't say. I shoulda checked.

Kaylee shakes the filter and black gunk flicks off.

KAYLEE
It's everywhere. I shoulda-

MAL
Kaylee, take a breath. Explain it to me.

KAYLEE
That's the problem. Her carbon dioxide scrubber's barely workin'. She's...

Kaylee gestures towards the carbon dioxide scrubber.

KAYLEE
...infected. Some sort of
contamination got into her. She's
dirty with it. It's through all her
air filters.

Kaylee holds out the air filter.

KAYLEE
She can't breathe.

MAL
Can we?

KAYLEE
For now. But River...

MAL
Ain't like everyone else.

Mal picks up the filter and examines it.

MAL
Ain't no accident.

Kaylee shakes her head.

KAYLEE
Huh? Who? Oh.
(her face tightens)
Early.

MAL
He wanted River, not survivors. Not
that I want to be a-thinkin' too
hard on a mind like that. But he
struck me as the kind of man who'd
rather not spoil his dainty hands.
If he could be helping it.

Kaylee turns back to the filters.

KAYLEE
(under her breath)
Seemed pretty comfortable with
spoilin' things.

Mal's eyes harden as he looks up at Kaylee. He unconsciously
rubs his jaw.

MAL

We can't be knowing the motivations of a mad man - or a dead one. Can you fix it?

Kaylee climbs down the ladder.

KAYLEE

I can nurse her some, maybe. But I can't fix her without atmo.

MAL

Boreas station is half a day.

KAYLEE

Tell Wash to fly fast.

INT. SERENITY, INARA'S SHUTTLE - LATER

Inara's shuttle is half packed. Full of boxes and with gaps in the furnishings. The drapes are missing from one wall - the cold metal intruding into the warm space. INARA SERRA folds a scarf, smooths the edges with her fingers and places it into a gilded box with other delicately folded cloth. Mal appears in the doorway.

MAL

You're packin'.

INARA

I assume you won't be stopping long in New Melbourne.

Mal clears his throat. Inara looks up, sharply.

INARA

Mal? We are going to New Melbourne?

MAL

A small spot of trouble with the scrubber. We'll be dry dockin' at Boreas awhile.

Inara flies to her feet.

INARA

You're doing this on purpose.

MAL

You're the one fixin' to go. I'm not standin' in your way.

INARA

I'm not seeing anyone else.

MAL

The bounty hunter messed with the ship. Can't go blamin' me.

INT. FIREFLY, CARGO BAY WALKWAY - CONTINUOUS

Kaylee is up another ladder pulling out another gunk infested filter. She hands it down to JAYNE COBB.

INARA (O.C.)

(angry)

And I suppose our stop at St. Albans was strictly necessary.

Jayne rolls his eyes and drops the filter into a soapy bucket and jumps and curses when it splashes his leg.

JAYNE

Gorram.

MAL (O.C.)

Business is business.

Jayne has black gunk on his hand. Disgusted, he tries to shake it off but just gets gunk on his other hand.

INARA (O.C.)

Why are you making this so difficult?

INT. SERENITY, INARA'S SHUTTLE - CONTINUOUS

Mal and Inara are squared on each other - neither giving an inch in this familiar battle.

MAL

Why are you?
New Melbourne ain't that special.
Transports leave from any'a dozen planets or moons we've flown by.
Not seeing you departin'. It starts me thinkin' why that is.

INARA

I'm not staying.

Mal's body slumps. Looking at Inara is too much. He picks up a horse figurine from a shelf plays with it a moment, puts it back down.

MAL
I never asked you to.

INARA
(softly)
I know.

WHOOSH. The shuttle door closes and the bolt CLICKS locked. Mal spins and tries to open it - it won't budge.

INT. SERENITY, CARGO BAY WALKWAY - CONTINUOUS

Kaylee looks through the window into the shuttle. The window is filled with Mal's face. He's mouthing angry words.

Jayne is about to pull the door, but his hands are still covered in gunk. He shakes them again with no luck, shrugs and pulls at the unyielding door anyway.

JAYNE
Does he know we can't hear him?

Kaylee flicks a switch.

MAL
(in part Chinese)
...Liou coe shway duh biao-tze huh
hoe-tze duh ur-tze [stupid son of a
drooling whore and a monkey] door!
Ràng wo baituō zhège [Get me out of
this] claustrophobic, da-shiang bao-
tza shr duh lah doo-tze [the
explosive diarrhea of an elephant]
emotional prison!

JAYNE
You kiss your mother with that
mouth?

MAL
(in part Chinese)
Kaylee, why's this mother Bèndàn
[fucker] locked?

KAYLEE
I... uh... It's automatic... if...
uh...

MAL
If what?

KAYLEE
There's no air.

EXT. SPACE, SERENITY - LATER

Empty space stretches around the tiny Firefly transport, Serenity.

INT. SERENITY, INARA'S SHUTTLE - CONTINUOUS

Inara sits with her back against the wall, legs bent up in front of her. Side-on she watches Mal at the other end of the shuttle tinkering at the door. There couldn't be any more space between them. Inara's face is inscrutable.

Mal fiddles with the mechanics within a panel next to the door. They WHIR and then fall silent.

MAL
Demon-spawn door!

Mal moves to the door and tries a more direct approach of trying to open it with a crowbar. THE METAL SCREECHES.

INARA
Don't break it.

MAL
Why do you care?

Inara draws her legs to her chest. She looks very young.

INT. SERENITY, CARGO BAY - LATER

SHEPARD BOOK, Jayne and Kaylee gather by the cargo bay door. Jayne is pacing. Each time he passes the button that opens the cargo bay door his hand hovers over it.

JAYNE
Worked a scavenger job on a ship
that had gone run out of air.

BOOK
(warningly)
Jayne.

KAYLEE
Shoulda taken better care of her.

BOOK
You couldn't have known.

Simon leads a calm River down the stairs. She's wearing an oxygen tube in her nose that runs to a small tank.

JAYNE

Them folks just lying there.

As River and Simon sit, Jayne eyes the oxygen tank and his fingers twitch.

KAYLEE

She woulda told me. If I'd thought to ask.

JAYNE

All sorta mumificated. Dried out.

Jayne's eyes go white and unconsciously grasps at his throat - scaring himself with his story.

SIMON

No oxygen, no decomposition.

RIVER

Serenity.

BOOK

(snaps)

That is not happening.

EXT. SPACE, BOREAS STATION - LATER

Serenity approaches Boreas Space Station. A mostly dark metallic floating ring dotted with a few lights. There is no space traffic or other movement.

INT. SERENITY, BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

HOBAN "WASH" WASHBURNE is at the controls flying the ship. ZOE WASHBURNE stands behind him peering out through the window.

ZOE

It's awful quiet.

Wash flicks a switch and presses the comm.

WASH

Serenity to Boreas Station.
Requesting emergency dock.

The COMM FIZZES in response.

WASH

(growing more desperate)
Maybe they're sleeping.
(MORE)

WASH (CONT'D)

Like they all had a big night,
maybe a goin' away party for some
lovable grease-monkey - you know
one of those lovable folks that
everyone finds so lovable... Maybe
the station master's given them the
morning off... and cancelled all
incoming traffic... and turned off
the lights...

Wash looks up at Zoe worried. She's not humouring his flight
of fancy. Wash presses the comm again.

WASH

Boreas Station come in. We're
runnin' out of air. Please respond.
(pause)
Pretty please?

EXT. SPACE, BOREAS STATION - MOMENTS LATER

As Serenity approaches, it becomes clear how enormous Boreas
Station is in comparison. A giant docking bay door many times
the size of Serenity opens silently when they near.

INT. SERENITY, BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

Zoe and Wash look at each other. Wash grasps the controls and
pushes the ship forward.

EXT. SPACE, BOREAS STATION - CONTINUOUS

Serenity flies slowly into the cavernous mouth of Boreas.

INT. BOREAS STATION, DOCKING BAY - MOMENTS LATER

The massive docking bay is silent. Ships parked. Tools out.
No people. Serenity flies into view.

INT. SERENITY, BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

Zoe and Wash look out through the window - up, down and
around - no one.

INT. SERENITY, CARGO BAY - CONTINUOUS

Jayne, Kaylee, Book, Simon and River wait expectant. River's
eyes widen in horror.

RIVER
(whispers)
Serenity.

INT. BOREAS STATION, DOCKING BAY - CONTINUOUS

Serenity hovers towards a landing pad.

INT. SERENITY, INARA'S SHUTTLE - CONTINUOUS

Inara and Mal look out through the shuttle's window.

INT. SERENITY, BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

Wash brings Serenity into land.

INT. BOREAS STATION, DOCKING BAY - CONTINUOUS

Serenity touches down on the landing pad sending an REVERBERATING CLANG through the silent space.

INT. SERENITY, CARGO BAY - CONTINUOUS

The CLANG STILL ECHOING within the ship, Jayne, Kaylee, Book, Simon and River jolt forward. As Jayne slams his hand on the button to open the cargo bay door, River jumps up.

RIVER
Don't!

The CARGO BAY DOOR RUMBLES OPEN and the SHIP SIGHS as it breathes deep.

INT. SERENITY, CARGO BAY WALKWAY/INARA'S SHUTTLE - LATER

Mal looks out through the interior window of Inara's shuttle, craning his neck to look down at Kaylee bent on the floor working to release the lock.

MAL
Kaylee, why am I still in here?

KAYLEE
She's just trying to protect you.

MAL
She's got air.

Kaylee stands and looks through the window.

KAYLEE

Station air. The class threes are a bit sensitive. She's been through a lot. She wants to know she can give you what you need before she'll open up.

Mal turns back to look at Inara who TAPS HER FOOT, annoyed. He turns back to Kaylee.

MAL

Can we force her?

KAYLEE

She wouldn't thank me for it. But if I take care of her and refit the scrubbers, she'll open up no problem. Probably quicker.

Mal nods, resigned. Zoe's face replaces Kaylee's.

ZOE

Painful quiet out there, Sir. I'd like to size things up. Best know what we're up against if we're stuck here awhile.

MAL

Take Jayne... And Vera.

Jayne stands on the steps with Vera (his mother of a gun). He gestures towards the door.

INT. SERENITY, CARGO BAY - MOMENTS LATER

Heavily armed, Zoe and Jayne exit to the station. By the cargo bay door, Simon sits with River trying to calm her.

SIMON

We're safe now. We're breathing the space station's air.

RIVER

So cold. Their hands are blue.

SIMON

(despairing)
You were doing so well.

INT. BOREAS STATION, DOCKING BAY - MOMENTS LATER

Zoe and Jayne walk through the empty docking bay. Their FOOTSTEPS ECHOING in the massive space. There's a small camera on Zoe's suit.

ZOE

I don't like it.

JAYNE

An evacuation?

(realisation)

Or Reervers? There ain't enough in the 'verse to take a station. Is there?

Zoe shakes her head.

INT. SERENITY, INARA'S SHUTTLE - A SHORT TIME LATER

Mal impatiently watches a small screen showing the feed from Zoe's suit. Inara packs boxes, but her attention keeps flicking to Mal. Even sat in the corner he's taking up way too much space.

INT. BOREAS STATION, CORRIDOR - A SHORT TIME LATER

Zoe and Jayne stalk the silent corridor to where it opens on:

INT. BOREAS STATION, MAIN HALL - CONTINUOUS

A multileveled space: shops, communal areas and flashing billboards - a futuristic dystopian departure lounge. On the ground thousands of black body bags in neat rows. Each bag has a little blue tag.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. BOREAS STATION, MAIN HALL - CONTINUOUS

Zoe and Jayne stare in horror at the lines of bodies.

JAYNE

(in Chinese)

Tai-kong suo-yo duh shing-chiou sai-
jin wuh duh pee-goo. [Shove All the
Planets in the Universe Up my Ass.]

Their entry must have triggered something because moments later lights start to flash and a SIREN WAILS.

VOICE (O.C.)

(dispassionate)

Code Four. Total Quarantine. Code
Four. A deadly virus of unknown
origin has been detected. Ships are
not permitted to leave or land. Do
not panic. Help is coming. Code
Four. Total Quarantine.

INT. BOREAS STATION, DOCKING BAY - A SHORT TIME LATER

The siren follows Zoe and Jayne as they hurry back towards the ship. Jayne has his top pulled up over his mouth. He swings Vera (his gun) wildly like he can shoot at the disease. Zoe scans behind them.

MAL (O.C.)

Get back to the ship as fast as you
can. And don't touch anything.

ZOE

Not thinking of it, Captain.

Jayne lets out a sigh of relief when he sees Serenity and he hurries his steps.

JAYNE

I'm gonna shower so hard.

ZOE

First time for everything.

JAYNE

Gonna scrub and scrub, till my
skin's red raw, then I'm gonna
scrub me some more.

ZOE
Open your skin for infection, like.

Jayne swings around.

JAYNE
Huh?

ZOE
Look out!

A pale and sickly WOMAN stumbles from behind a ship into Jayne. She collapses onto him. As he tries to disentangle himself, she vomits blood down his side.

INT. SERENITY, INFIRMARY AND INFIRMARY ANTECHAMBER - LATER

The woman lies unconscious on the examination table, her breath coming in SHORT GASPS. Simon, in full protective clothing with white rubber gloves, shines a torch into her mouth and blood-shot eyes. A trickle of blood drips from her eye and falls down her cheek.

Simon listens to her heart with a stethoscope and frowns.

Outside the glass doors Wash and Book look in.

WASH
Not good. I'm as like as any other folk to laugh in the face of danger, and then probably run and hide. But this is not good.

Jayne comes down the stairs, hair wet and skin pink from what appears to be a very vigorous scrubbing. He looks in. Through the window the woman has started to shudder.

JAYNE
You let her onboard!?

WASH
We let you onboard.

JAYNE
All that time out there, breathin' in the sick and now you bring the sick in here. You gorram do-gooders'll kill us all.

BOOK
We've been breathing their air since we landed.

JAYNE
I'm going back to my room.

Jayne goes back up the stairs.

INT. SERENITY, INARA'S SHUTTLE - LATER

Mal paces, his FOOTSTEPS DRUMMING A BEAT on the floor.

INARA
Sit down, Mal. You're like a caged
lion. It's exhausting.

Mal looks at Inara and continues pacing.

INARA
They can cope without you.

Mal stops.

MAL
You would say that.

INARA
What does that mean?

Mal shakes his head and resumes pacing.

INT. SERENITY, INFIRMARY - LATER

The STEADY BEEP OF A HEART MONITOR. Simon scrolls through data on a screen. He leans over and looks through a microscope.

The BEEP of the heart monitor speeds up. The woman GASPS and opens her eyes. Simon rushes back to the woman who stares at his masked face, confused and scared.

WOMAN
Who are you?

She grabs his hand and looks at it.

WOMAN
Your hands aren't blue.

SIMON
What?

Her body jerks into convulsions.

SIMON
What did you say?

Simon grabs a syringe and injects her neck. Her body shudders and stills. The BEEP OF THE HEART MONITOR slows. Simon breathes out.

She breaths normally for a bit then - takes a STRANGLED BREATH CUT SUDDENLY SHORT.

The heart monitor makes steady BEEEEEEEEEP - A-systole (a wavering shockable rhythm). Simon injects her with a syringe of adrenaline.

MONTAGE

- Simon delivers a shock to her chest. Her body arches off the table.

- Simon kneels on the table, pumping her chest, sweat on his brow.

- The BEEP cuts out. Her heart rhythm has flat-lined. Simon stops.

- He gets down. Shines a torch in her eye, checks the pulse on her neck.

- Simon sheds his protective gear as he heads to the door.

END MONTAGE

INT. SERENITY, INFIRMARY ANTECHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

The DOOR SWOOSHES OPEN. Simon walks out - face dejected and exhausted. Waiting by the door, Book and Wash step back, keeping a good distance between themselves and Simon.

INT. SERENITY, CARGO BAY WALKWAY - MOMENTS LATER

River sits on the stairway staring towards the cargo bay door. Kaylee pulls filters from the ceiling further along the walkway.

As Simon comes out from the Infirmary both Kaylee and River turn to look at him.

SIMON
(to River)
Go to your room. Lock the door.
Don't come out until I tell you.

River stands up.

RIVER
I can help.

SIMON
(firm)
No. Go, now.

River looks like she might protest, then walks towards her bunk.

INT. SERENITY, INARA'S SHUTTLE/CARGO BAY WALKWAY - CONTINUOUS

Simon taps on the window of Inara's shuttle.

SIMON
Captain.

Mal comes to the window.

SIMON
She's dead.

MAL
You figured on what's causing this?

SIMON
A virus. But I've never seen anything like it. I've heard about massive outbreaks on the border planets, but none like this. Wash downloaded the med data from the station. Mal, it hits fast and hard. Airborne. As far as I know everybody on the station got sick and in all documented cases... it ended with mortality.

MAL
Everyone dies.

SIMON
We have to leave. We might already be infected...

Kaylee has come up behind Simon. So on edge, Simon flinches when she speaks.

KAYLEE
She'll be ready in a few hours.

SIMON
We need to go now.

MAL
No oxygen will kill folk quicker
than any virus.

Kaylee nods and leaves.

MAL
Wash's data should help you in case
one of us falls ill.

SIMON
Help me?

MAL
To fix it.

Simon gives a bitter laugh.

SIMON
A whole station with advanced
equipment couldn't find a cure and
you think I can?

MAL
I thought you were very very
clever. Start with an autopsy - you
like cuttin' on people.

Simon looks down at his hands.

SIMON
There's something else.

MAL
Shiny.

SIMON
It might have been fever ravings,
but she mentioned blue hands.

MAL
So?

SIMON
River talks about blue hands - when
she's really upset. I think it has
something to do with the people
that took her. She said it again
this morning.

MAL

We should all take to listenin' to your sister. I had some feelin' to us siffin' another whiff of Alliance stench afore long.

Simon looks confused.

MAL

Someone lined up and labeled those body bags.

INT. SERENITY, CARGO BAY - LATER

Zoe stands by the cargo bay door with her gun trained outwards towards the station.

WASH

I was lookin' for you.

ZOE

I'm here.

WASH

Yeah. Um, the woman died.

Zoe says nothing.

WASH

I mean I thought you'd want to know. Not that I like to bother you when you're doin' your, ah, warrior thing... Ah, what are you doin' exactly?

ZOE

My job.

INT. SERENITY, INFIRMARY - LATER

Simon performs an autopsy on the woman.

INT. SERENITY, FORE-PASSAGE - LATER

Wash and Book scrub filters in a bucket. Kaylee steps down off a ladder and plonks another in.

INT. BOREAS STATION, DOCKING BAY - LATER

Book and Simon carry the shrouded dead woman down the gangway and lie her on the floor of the docking bay. Book holds a bible and makes a small silent prayer. As he turns to go back to Serenity he notices Simon isn't following - just standing over the body.

BOOK

You did your best.

SIMON

I don't even know her name.

Simon looks up at Serenity and then back at the body.

SIMON

Kaylee fixes machines. I fix people. I've worked on so many. Some lived, some died. But I did my best.

(pause)

When we get sick. *If* we get sick. It's not going to be some nameless woman on the table. Not just a job. It's going to be Kaylee... or River... I don't know if...

BOOK

You've been taking care of your sister a long time.

SIMON

And she's still sick.

BOOK

She's alive. She's free.

SIMON

So far.

Simon turns and walks back up the gangway.

INT. SERENITY, INFIRMARY - LATER

River moves through the infirmary - runs her hand across the bed, peeks in the microscope. She picks up the stethoscope and listens to the air as if she hears music.

Simon enters, mad, distressed.

SIMON
(shouts)
River! No!

River flinches away.

SIMON
(yelling)
What are you doing in here? Put
that down! You'll get sick.

River puts down the stethoscope.

RIVER
I'm not sick.

River picks up an empty syringe.

SIMON
Stop touching things. With all they
did to you, you're probably more
susceptible. Out of here, now!

River reluctantly walks towards the door. Simon takes the
syringe from her hand.

RIVER
(pleadingly)
Simon. The lines are tangled. I try
to talk but the radio fizzes.

Simon ushers her the rest of the way. As soon as she's out
the door, she tries to go back in but Simon bars her way.

RIVER
I'm not sick.

SIMON
River, back to your room and close
the door!

RIVER
You're not my Dad.

SIMON
No, I care. He didn't.

River swallows a sob - clearly hurt. Simon face drains of
anger. He reaches a hand out to River.

SIMON
River, I'm didn't mea... I'm sor-

RIVER
You care, but you don't listen.

River storms off.

INT. SERENITY, DINNING HALL - LATER

Kaylee, Wash and Book clean the parts of the carbon dioxide scrubber spread across the dinning table. A small screen, with a view of Mal and Inara in the shuttle is propped on the table.

They look to Simon who stands at the head of the table. He clears his throat.

SIMON
Mal, Inara, can you hear me?

MAL
(on the screen)
Clear and loud.

SIMON
(nervously)
Well ah... the um... virus has an hemogenic impact on ah... dissolved nitrogen...

Book clears his throat.

SIMON
It forms air bubbles in the blood.
Um... She died of massive internal bleeding and lack of oxygen.

KAYLEE
But we got oxygen now.

SIMON
Her blood couldn't use it.

KAYLEE
(scared)
Are we getting sick?

SIMON
Ah... considering the transmission vectors and incubation rates we should expect, ah...

Simon shakes his head. From the back of the room Zoe (previously unseen) speaks, her voice dangerous.

ZOE
Speak plain, Doctor.

SIMON
I don't know if we're infected. But
if we are, some of us will start to
experience symptoms over the next
few hours.

MUTTERING from the crew.

SIMON
And if one of us is sick, it's
likely we'll all get sick.

They look at each other. Distrust? Fear?

BOOK
What should we be looking out for?

SIMON
Ah, the station documented the, um,
progression.

MAL
(warningly)
Simon.

SIMON
First a rash, itches.

Kaylee and Wash start scratching and then try to hide it.

SIMON
Pain in the joints or muscles.

Book rubs his elbow.

SIMON
In some cases, there may be some
confusion or paranoia.

WASH
We're on a plague ship, I think a
little paranoia's more than called
for.

SIMON
Stage two, dizziness, weakness,
numbness, shortness of breath. Some
experienced hallucinations or
delusions.

WASH
Oh fun.

SIMON
Stage three...

BOOK
Like the woman.

Simon nods.

SIMON
Like the woman.

MAL
So if you experience any of these
symptoms - tell Simon.

ZOE
And what will he do?

MAL
Fix you.
(to Simon)
Yes.

Simon looks at Kaylee who looks up at him with hope.

SIMON
(reluctant)
Yes.

Kaylee smiles, then frowns and looks around.

KAYLEE
Where's Jayne?

They all look around. Jayne isn't there.

INT. SERENITY, JAYNE'S BUNK - A SHORT TIME LATER

Book opens the door to Jayne's bunk.

Jayne is curled into a ball, breathing in SHORT GASPS. His hands jerk forward, trying to catch something that's not there.

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. SERENITY, INFIRMARY - LATER

Jayne lies on the gurney. Simon, wearing a mask and protective gear, leans over him and shines a torch in his eyes. Jayne blinks, confused and scared.

JAYNE

The stars are too bright, Mommy.

Jayne blinks again and focuses on Simon, some lucidity returning. He's scared.

JAYNE

Simon?

(pause)

Doctor. Am I sick? Did it get in me?

SIMON

It did.

Jayne looks around the Infirmary.

JAYNE

Where's that woman?

Simon contemplates the question for a moment then:

SIMON

She died, Jayne.

JAYNE

Oh.

Simon turns away but Jayne grabs Simon's sleeve and he turns back.

JAYNE

I know I haven't always had your back.

Simon snorts and tries to gently remove Jayne's hands.

JAYNE

Please, Simon - don't be lettin' me die.

SIMON

(pauses)

I'll do what I can.

Book enters.

SIMON
No visitors.

BOOK
(nervous)
It's not that. I, ah, have this...

Book pulls up his sleeve, there is a clear red rash.

INT. SERENITY, DINNING HALL - LATER

Kaylee is finishing cleaning the reinstalled carbon dioxide scrubber with an air compressor. She shuts the panel and gives it a satisfied thump.

KAYLEE
That's ma girl. All better.

She steps down off the ladder and staggers, her head spinning. She shakes her head - she's not sick, she's fine...

INT. SERENITY, INARA'S SHUTTLE - CONTINUOUS

Inara and Mal are folding one of Inara's wall hangings.

There's a WHIR then a METALLIC THUNK. The bolts on the door release. Mal and Inara turn towards the sound.

MAL
Kaylee's fixed her.

INARA
What are you waiting for?

MAL
If I open it, the infection will
get in.

INARA
That doesn't scare you. You've been
trying to get out the whole time.

Mal continues folding the wall hanging. Inara, confused, also continues to fold. They step towards each other drawing the ends of the hanging together. Their eyes hold a moment too long. Inara turns away first.

MAL
Why are you leavin'?

Inara without looking at Mal finishes folding the wall hanging.

INARA
I've told you.

MAL
You really haven't.

INARA
This is ridiculous.

Inara crosses to the door and grasps the handle, but before she can pull it open. Mal grabs her hand.

MAL
Do you do this with your clients?

INARA
(nervous)
What? Fold hangings?

MAL
Distract 'em so you don't got to answer a direct question. Is it worth dyin' for?

Inara turns to Mal, she's a little out of breath.

INARA
No, Mal. I don't distract my clients.
(beat)
With them I lie.

EXT. SPACE, BOREAS STATION - LATER

Serenity exits the station and flies away towards the stars. A vessel, sleek, black and shaped like an arrow, pulls away from the dark surface of Boreas and follows Serenity.

INT. SERENITY, INARA'S SHUTTLE - CONTINUOUS

Inara and Mal stand slightly apart by the door, both short of breath.

INARA
Can we just get out of here?
They're dying. We need to help.

MAL
And die with them.

INARA

That never stopped you. You're
Captain Malcom Reynolds - you laugh
at danger even as it punches you in
the face.

Mal says nothing. Inara nods. This isn't about him.

She pulls the handle and the door slides open.

MAL

(horrified)
What did you do?

INARA

I'm still part of the crew until we
reach New Melbourne.

INT. SERENITY, ZOE AND WASH'S ROOM - LATER

Zoe and Wash enter their room. Wash starts pacing and
throwing his arms around.

WASH

This is bad. In a whole lot of
darin' danger and bad badness this
is real real... bad. Do you feel
sick? I don't... But how would we
know. We can't even trust our own
minds. The crazy could have us. It
could have any of us. We're in the
bughouse and we're thinkin' it's
all dandy.

Wash turns to face Zoe.

WASH

I mean I know you're a soldier and
all taciturn and enigmatic, but
you've gotta agree with me. This
is... bad.

ZOE

You don't need to worry.

Zoe pulls Wash into an embrace. On her face - calm determined
paranoia. She lifts her gun and brings it down on the back of
his head. Wash slumps into her arms.

ZOE

I'll protect you.

INT. SERENITY, BRIDGE - LATER

Mal's at the controls. Inara enters.

MAL

I'm surprised to see you.
Considerin' you was so eager to
risk your life just to escape my
charmin' presence.

INARA

It's not like you to be so
childish.

MAL

Am not.

Mal pauses, quirks his mouth in embarrassment, then his face falls serious. He takes a deep breath and turns to face Inara front on.

MAL

I wanted you safe.

INARA

I never asked you to protect me.

MAL

It's getting less and less like
that I can.

INARA

What do you mean?

Mal turns back to the controls and touches a blinking spot on the radar.

MAL

Alliance, I'm thinkin'. We're bein'
followed.

INT. SERENITY CARGO BAY - LATER

Zoe crouches behind one of the crates holding Wash's limp body in one arm and a rifle in the other. With the scope of her gun she follows Kaylee crossing the walkway.

ZOE

(mutters)
Friendly.

She resumes scanning the cargo bay and River, sitting at the top of the stairs, falls into her scope. Kaylee walks past River giving her a wide berth.

Wash's head bobs up - semiconscious.

WASH
Honey?

ZOE
Shhhh... They might find us.

WASH
Who?

ZOE
The enemy.

Zoe returns her eye to the scope of her rifle, looking at River.

INT. SERENITY, INFIRMARY - A SHORT TIME LATER

Jayne sleeps on one gurney, while Book lies on another watching Simon.

At the bench Simon pours through the data, occasionally scribbling into a notepad. The bench is crowded with labeled vials and lab equipment. There's tension in every line of Simon's body; he's sweating, breathing fast and unconsciously scratching at his arm. Simon pulls his shirt to loosen it.

BOOK
Do you need a break?

SIMON
If I take a break, you die.

BOOK
(laughs)
Then by all mean continue.

Simon doesn't laugh.

BOOK
Can I help?

SIMON
Do you have a medical degree you haven't mentioned? Maybe something in the biosciences? Virology? Epidemiology? No?

BOOK

I'll leave you to it.

SIMON

Sure - surgeons are great at finding cures to viruses. Everyone knows that all doctors know everything there is to know about the body.

Kaylee comes in, pale faced.

KAYLEE

Simon?

SIMON

I mean for all I can do here I might as well be a butcher. I can't fix this. It's just like River's head - only in this case we all die.

KAYLEE

Simon?

Simon spins around and snaps.

SIMON

What!?

KAYLEE

I don't feel so good.

Simon looks at her. Shocked. Dismayed. Overwhelmed.

SIMON

Not you... I, I, I can't.

Simon is struggling to breathe. The world tilts around him. He pushes past Kaylee and staggers out the door.

INT. SERENITY, CARGO BAY WALKWAY - CONTINUOUS

Simon staggers onto the walkway just as Inara is coming down from the top level. He sees River, grabs her and pulls her up.

SIMON

River, What are you doing? You'll get sick.

RIVER

Simon, you're hurting me.

Inara comes down.

INARA
Simon, let her go.

SIMON
You can't take her.

INARA
I'm not trying to take her.

SIMON
It's my job to protect her. No one
else is going to do it.

Holding a squirming River, Simon inches along the walkway towards the spare shuttle. Inara gently moves towards him, holding out her hand.

INARA
I know, Simon. You're doing a
really good job. Now just let your
sister go.

From the infirmary, Book stumbles out with Kaylee following.

BOOK
Let her go, Simon.

Simon swings towards Book.

SIMON
You all want her to get sick too!
Would solve all your problems. You
wanted us gone since day one.

RIVER
Simon.

KAYLEE
That's not true.

Simon is breathing really heavy now. His back hits the door to the spare shuttle. He looks at it a moment then swings to face them.

SIMON
(despairingly)
We can't stay here. There's no air.

Simon releases the door and pulls River inside.

RIVER
(screams)
Simon!

INARA
No!

Inara rushes forward, but the door locks behind Simon and River.

INT. SERENITY, SPARE SHUTTLE - CONTINUOUS

Simon manhandles River into the shuttle. There's an open cargo hold in the floor.

SIMON
Get in there.

RIVER
No.

SIMON
You'll be safe.

Simon brings River towards the cargo hold. She's whimpering and pushing back against him.

SIMON
It's my job.

RIVER
Simon.

River's distraught but she allows Simon to guide her into the hold - there is hardly any room and she needs to curl her body to fit.

RIVER
I'm not a job. I'm your sister.

Simon closing the hatch over River. She tries to get up but the hatch THUNKS CLOSED and a BOLT SLIDES HOME.

RIVER
No! No! No!

All is dark.

INT. SERENITY, CARGO BAY - LATER

Inara bangs on the door of the spare shuttle.

INARA

Simon!

She turns back to Book and Kaylee in despair.

A LOUD CLUNK and the ship shudders.

BOOK

What now?

EXT. SPACE, SERENITY - CONTINUOUS

The black vessel is docked against the tail of Serenity. Metal tentacles twine out from the vessel and hold fast to Serenity.

INT. SERENITY, CARGO BAY - CONTINUOUS

MALE VOICE (O.S)

(over the loud speakers)

This is ship has been classified by the Alliance as a plague ship. You are about to be boarded. Comply with all officers and no one will be harmed.

The airlock in the cargo bay door bursts open.

END ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. SERENITY, CARGO BAY - MOMENTS LATER

Wearing rebreathing masks the alliance enter through the cargo bay doors: An ALLIANCE SOLDIER. Two men in black suits with blue plastic gloves. Let's call them BG1 and BG2.

And finally IVY (early 20s), who isn't wearing a mask. She moves with a grace similar to River. Despite her youth she's clearly in charge. She steps to the front of the group and looks around with a sardonic grin. She sniffs the air.

IVY

Can you smell that? It's floating everywhere, waiting, taking.

Behind the crate Zoe trains her gun on Ivy, her finger on the trigger. Wash tries to focus. Zoe's finger squeezes... But-

Ivy twirls, pulls a gun from her hip, and shoots first Zoe and then Wash with darts. Both slump to the ground. With the same movement she returns the gun to her holster and spins to face Inara, Book and Kaylee.

IVY

My babies, don't cry. They're just having a little nap.

INARA

What are you doing here?

Inara reaches for a rebar lying amongst some other junk. The Alliances Soldier cocks his weapon and Ivy waggles her finger at her. Inara drops the rebar back down.

Ivy climbs up the stairs to Inara. She strokes the side of Inara's face, while Inara forces herself not to flinch.

IVY

Lovely lady.

Ivy leans over and whispers in Inara's ear.

IVY

I'm not going to kill you. I only want to watch you die.

INT. SERENITY, SPARE SHUTTLE - LATER

Simon, eyes wide, crazed and paranoid, looks out through the window of the spare shuttle onto the ship. The Alliance Solider and BG1 carry Wash up the steps on a stretcher. Simon jerks backward when BG2 walks past the door.

INT. SERENITY, INFIRMARY/INFIRMARY ANTECHAMBER - LATER

Inara and Kaylee sit on the couch in the Infirmary Antechamber, their hands bound in front of them. The Alliance Solider stands nearby scanning the area, gun held ready. Kaylee leans over to look into the Infirmary.

Inside BG1 examines Book on a gurney while BG2 takes notes.

BG1

Oxygen saturation 92%. Pulse 120.

Jayne unattended on the other gurney shakes uncontrollably. A trickle of blood drips from his ear. Ivy stands beside Jayne swaying to music no one else can hear.

Kaylee and Inara begin a whispered conversation.

KAYLEE

Why do crazy people keep boardin' our ship?

INARA

Particularly when there is enough crazy already on it.

KAYLEE

Where's Mal?

INARA

Probably preparing to do something ridiculously stupid and heroic.

INT. SERENITY, ARMOURY - CONTINUOUS

Mal is preparing to do something ridiculously stupid and heroic. He's loading himself with armaments: guns, grenades, smoke bombs. He picks up a rocket launcher, shakes his head, and puts it back down again. He exits with a grim and kinda heroic look on his face.

INT. SERENITY, FORE PASSAGE - CONTINUOUS

Mal strides down the corridor, but... Lights start to flicker in his eyes. He raises his hand to block out the glare. Everything starts to swirl around him.

MAL
(in Chinese)
Jiàn tā de gu. [Dammit.]

Mal wobbles and collapses to the floor.

INT. SERENITY, SPARE SHUTTLE - A SHORT TIME LATER

River in the cargo hold BANGS on the bolted hatch.

RIVER (O.C)
(muffled)
Simon!

Simon, shuddering and breathing fast, sits at the controls trying to work them out. Besides him an hallucination of River appears.

HALLUCINATION RIVER
You should learn to sail a ship.
We're pirates now.

SIMON
River?

A few BANGS from the cargo hold. Hallucination River points at a button.

HALLUCINATION RIVER
Press that one.

Simon presses it. The SHUTTLE ENGINE RUMBLES.

EXT. SPACE, SERENITY - CONTINUOUS

The spare shuttle detaches from Serenity.

The shuttle shudders. Hallucination River fist pumps the air.

HALLUCINATION RIVER
Go, Simon!

Simon takes the control wheel and steers away from Serenity and then applies the throttle. Their bodies push back into their seats. WHOOSH.

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUOUS

The spare shuttle flies away from Serenity.

INT. SPARE SHUTTLE - CONTINUOUS

HALLUCINATION RIVER

All hands ahoy! With a stiff wind
and a stiff gin we'll soon be on
the open seas.

Simon looks at Hallucination River and then with
determination back to the controls.

INT. SERENITY, FORE-PASSAGE - LATER

Mal lies sprawled on the floor, eyes squeezed tight in pain,
his breath coming in SHORT GASPS.

FOOTSTEPS. Out of Mal's view, BG1 approaches. Mal's eyes open
in panic.

BG1 looks down at Mal, casts an impartial eye over his body
and then kicks Mal's foot. Mal's eyeballs swing wildly,
desperately trying to catch a glimpse of who it is.

BG1 steps over Mal and crouches down in front of him. Mal's
BREATH HITCHES. BG1 lifts Mal's limp arm by the wrist. He
releases his hand and Mal's arm flops to the floor. THUMP.
BG1 smiles.

BG1 stands and talks into a wrist comm.

BG1

We've got another one up here.

BG1 turns and takes a few steps away from Mal. Mal face
pinched in strain pushes himself up to his hands and knees.

BG1

Come up the stairs and then follow
the passage towards the bridge.

Like a predator BG1's head swings towards Mal. Mal pushes
himself to his feet breathing heavily.

BG1 smiles and in one smooth deliberate movement he draws out
two ear plugs from his pocket and places them in his ears.

Mal fumbles for his gun, fingers clumsy with the holster,
unable to set it free.

BG1 pulls out his BLUE AND WHITE STICK OF DEATH.

MAL

Huh. Mines bigger.

Mal lunges towards BG1 taking him by surprise. BG1 staggers backwards and Mal, following the inertia of his lunge, slams BG1 into the wall dislodging BG1's mask. BG1's face fills with panic and he wildly brings the stick upwards.

BANG

The stick drops from BG1's hand. His mouth opens in a silent gasp. Mal's gun is pressed to BG1's chest.

Mal presses his free hand to the wall holding himself upright. BG1's body slumps to the floor.

Mal staggers towards the infirmary.

INT. INFIRMARY ANTECHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

On the couch, Kaylee sleeps against Inara's shoulder. Inara is trying to scratch herself despite bound hands. Ivy stands watching Inara.

IVY

It's beginning... It's no fun if
you miss the start.

Ivy tilts her head listening. A dark smile crosses her face as BG2 approaches.

IVY

(to BG2)
Number One is dead.

BG2's lips curl.

BG2

We need to leave now if we're going
to catch the shuttle.

Ivy pushes out her bottom lip and looks down at Inara.

IVY

But I'll miss the show.
(sighs)
Oh, alright. Maybe we'll make it
back for act three.

INT. SERENITY, CARGO BAY - A SHORT TIME LATER

Mal staggers down the stairs only to see Ivy and her crew walking across the Cargo Bay to the airlock. He holds himself up with the railing, waves his gun and weakly shouts:

MAL

That's right. You better go!

He slumps to the ground looking out through the railing as Ivy and her crew step through the airlock.

MAL

And don't come back.

INT. SPARE SHUTTLE - A SHORT TIME LATER

Simon is almost falling asleep at the controls. Beside him Hallucination River sings.

HALLUCINATION RIVER

(singing)

Way hay and up she rises

Way hay and up she rises

Early in the morning!

On the other side of Simon a hallucination of his father, GABRIEL TAM appears.

HALLUCINATION GABRIEL

You call this looking after your sister?

There are a few BANGS from the cargo hold. Simon blinks at Hallucination Gabriel.

SIMON

Dad?

HALLUCINATION GABRIEL

I expected more of you, Simon.

SIMON

You're not real.

Simon is shaking fiercely.

HALLUCINATION GABRIEL

No, you're sick.

HALLUCINATION RIVER

Shiver me timbers.

SIMON
(with a small voice)
It's getting awfully crowded in
here.

INT. SERENITY, INFIRMARY ANTI-CHAMBER - A SHORT TIME LATER

Mal picks the lock on Inara's handcuffs. Kaylee sleeps
against her.

INARA
Who were they?

The lock releases and Inara immediately scratches at her
arms. Mal shrugs.

MAL
Blue gloves.

INARA
What does that mean?

MAL
Nothin' good.

INARA
Well, at least we'll all die before
we find out.

They look at the crew - all sick or unconscious.

EXT. SPACE, SPARE SHUTTLE - A SHORT TIME LATER

The tiny shuttle flies through the emptiness.

INT. SPARE SHUTTLE - CONTINUOUS

HALLUCINATION GABRIEL
You've got to come home, Son.

SIMON
But I don't know where that is,
Dad.

Hallucination Gabriel points and Simon corrects his course to
that direction.

HALLUCINATION RIVER
That's the wrong way.

HALLUCINATION GABRIEL
It's the right way for my son. Head
surgeon. A man of substance. a
person of importance.

HALLUCINATION RIVER
You make a better pirate.

SIMON
I'm not either of those things. Not
anymore.

Simon stares out through the window his expression bleak.

SIMON
(quietly)
I don't know who I am.

HALLUCINATION RIVER
You'll never find out if you keep
going that way. That's for land
lubbers.

HALLUCINATION GABRIEL
You'll never be anything if you
don't come home.

SIMON
It's all over anyway. We're all
dead, we just don't know it yet.

HALLUCINATION RIVER
I'm not sick.

SIMON
But you're an hallucination.

HALLUCINATION RIVER
I'm not sick.

Simon blinks at her, trying to focus - then he smiles in
pleased understanding.

SIMON
You're not sick.

The hallucinations disappear and Simon staggers to the cargo
hold and opens it. River is not happy. Simon beams at her.

SIMON
You're not sick.

RIVER
No.

Simon staggers to the floor.

SIMON

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
Can you take us home?

END ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

EXT. SPACE, SPARE SHUTTLE/ALLIANCE VESSEL - LATER

The spare shuttle flies towards the Alliance vessel.

INT. ALLIANCE VESSEL - CONTINUOUS

The Alliance Soldier flies the vessel while Ivy stands behind him looking out the front window.

ALLIANCE SOLDIER

Taking aim.

EXT. SPACE, SPARE SHUTTLE/ALLIANCE VESSEL - LATER

The Alliance vessel approaches the Spare Shuttle which is mid turn. Through the window River is clearly visible at the controls.

INT. ALLIANCE VESSEL - CONTINUOUS

Ivy mouth opens.

IVY

River.

Ivy yanks the Alliance Soldier's hands away from the gun controls.

IVY

No! No!

INT. SPARE SHUTTLE - CONTINUOUS

River sees Ivy.

RIVER

Ivy.

River turns the steering wheel.

EXT. SPACE, SPARE SHUTTLE/ALLIANCE VESSEL - CONTINUOUS

The shuttle veers into a head-on collision with the alliance vessel.

INT. SPARE SHUTTLE - CONTINUOUS

River grits her teeth, holds the throttle and watches the Alliance vessel approach.

INT. ALLIANCE VESSEL - CONTINUOUS

IVY
Clever girl. Hold position.

The shuttle pulls closer and closer. The Alliance Solider veers out of the way at the last moment.

EXT. SPACE, SPARE SHUTTLE/ALLIANCE VESSEL - CONTINUOUS

The Alliance vessel spins out of control while the shuttle continues on.

INT. SERENITY, INFIRMARY ANTECHAMBER/INFIRMARY - LATER

Wash and Zoe sleep on the floor of the antechamber and Kaylee sleeps on the couch. All shake, looking pale and clammy.

In the Infirmary, also shaking, Book sleeps on one of the gurneys.

Mal sits on a chair, struggling to stay awake and focused.

On the other gurney Jayne is on his side taking deep GASPING BREATHES. Blood seeps from his eyes, ears and nose. Inara sits on the other side of him rubbing his back.

INARA
I don't know what more we can do
for him.

Mal looks up at her miserable. Inara laughs.

MAL
What?

INARA
Looks like I won't be leaving
Serenity after all. You're a very
hard man to walk away from.

MAL
You shoulda never left the shuttle.

INARA

I should have never left House
Madrassa.

(pause)

No, that's no true.

Inara pulls herself up and with weaving steps crosses to Mal.
She wipes a hair from his sweaty brow.

INARA

I'm glad I knew you Malcolm
Reynolds.

MAL

I-

Simon and River appear in the doorway, River supporting
Simon. Inara rushes over to help and together River and Inara
lower Simon onto a seat by the bench.

SIMON

Grab that syringe.

Simon points to the syringe River was holding before.

MAL

You came back.

River grabs the syringe.

SIMON

River's not sick.

River hands Simon the syringe and he draws blood from her
arm.

MAL

Good??

SIMON

She's immune. Maybe something to do
with what they did to her.

INARA

Like that woman.

SIMON

I can make antibodies with River's
blood.

MAL

A cure.

SIMON

A cure.

EXT. SPACE - LATER

Serenity accelerates towards the stars.

INT. SERENITY, MONTAGE VARIOUS - LATER

- In the Infirmary a centrifuge spins to a stop and Simon removes a vial of separated blood.

- In the Infirmary antechamber, Simon (still ill, but not shaking as much) bends down to Kaylee on the couch to inject something into her arm. She smiles at him and touches his hand.

- In the Infirmary antechamber, Mal (looking a bit better) helps Wash up off the floor. Wash looks a bit bewildered and dizzy. He looks down at Zoe who was still lying beside him.

- In the Infirmary, Jayne sits up in bed (looking better but very weak and drawn). Simon hands him some pills and some water. Jayne swallows them.

INT. SERENITY, BRIDGE - LATER

Wash sits at the controls. He looks pale but better. Through the doorway the silhouette of Zoe appears. She steps forward slowly. Wash hears her and turns. The look on his face enigmatic as he turns back to the controls.

Zoe opens her mouth to speak as she reaches him. But as she does Wash bends his hand back to hold hers. She closes her mouth and clutches his hand.

It's hard to tell in the darkness but there is perhaps the glimmer of a tear in the corner of her eye.

EXT. SPACE, SERENITY - LATER

Serenity flies through the starlit sky.

INT. SERENITY, DINNING AREA - LATER

River is in the kitchen area cooking. Wash and Book at the table eating. They're both drawn, but a lot better.

Zoe comes to the table with a bowl of food and sits down.

River leaves the kitchen area with a bowl of soup and comes up to Simon who's resting on the couch. He's pale but his breath is even and he is no longer shaking. She offers him the bowl. He takes it, surprised.

SIMON
You made me this?

RIVER
Salinity might be high.

River sits down beside Simon. Simon tastes the soup, he smiles and nods.

SIMON
(a little surprised)
Mmmm. It's good.

Simon looks at River.

SIMON
I'm so sorry.

RIVER
You didn't listen.
(pause)
I know my words get tangled and the connections are muddy.

SIMON
But you're still smarter than all of us put together.

Simon takes another sip of the soup, then puts it down on the side table.

SIMON
River, I've been trying to save you for so long. Sometimes it's like I'm trapped inside cotton wool. I can't hear, I can't breathe.
(beat)
I'm sorry.

RIVER
I can help.

Simon nods and bends his head sideways to rest on River's shoulder.

INT. SERENITY, INARA'S SHUTTLE - LATER

More wall hangings are down. Inara kneels on the floor packing ornaments into a box. Mal enters.

MAL
You still going?

INARA
Yes.

MAL
I thought...

INARA
I talked to Wash, we'll be in New Melbourne tomorrow.

MAL
(voice almost breaking)
Inara, don't go.

Inara stands up and faces Mal.

INARA
I'm glad we're alive. I'm glad you're alive.

Inara bends down and resumes packing the box.

INARA
But I can't stay.

MAL
Why?

Inara's face is pain. She won't look at Mal.

INT. ALLIANCE VESSEL - LATER

Ivy plays a complex holographic chess-like game with BG2. The Alliance Soldier approaches Ivy and salutes.

ALLIANCE SOLDIER
Sir.

Ivy moves a play piece but doesn't look up.

IVY
You found them.

ALLIANCE SOLDIER
Firefly-class vessel, classcode 03-
K64, designation Serenity on a
landing trajectory towards New
Melbourne.

BG2 moves a play piece.

BG2
They survived.

IVY
Of course they did.
(with a touch of sadness)
River Tam wouldn't let her friends
down.

BG2
We should intersect before they
reach New Melbourne. I'm eager to
complete her... ah... "training".

Ivy's lips twist with a hint of disgust and she rubs the back
of her head, as if remembering past pain.

IVY
Always so eager to cut people up.

Ivy moves another play piece.

IVY
No. I won't risk a botched boarding
of a healthy ship with one soldier
and one of... you.

Ivy twirls her hand to indicate BG2 with a touch of distaste.

BG2
Our patience is not infinite.

IVY
For her it is. My sister is the
most special. The tracker's in
place. For now, we follow.

EXT. SPACE, SERENITY - CONTINUOUS

A red light flashes on a small black tracker attached to the
hull of Serenity.

END EPISODE