

Love Space

A SciFi Valentines One-on-One Zoom Monologue by Joe Zarrow

The actor plays **Captain Talosi** - 30s-50s. Captain of the Interstellar Starship Hieronymus several centuries from now. Square-jawed, metaphorically if not literally. Dressed as space-aged as the performer's wardrobe allows. Any race/gender/etc. Feel free to change pronouns and other gendery words throughout.

[Words in brackets are mouthed, but unheard.]

The performer must have a device strong enough to handle Zoom virtual backgrounds. To get the "full screen" effect, hiding the performer entirely, turn on a zoom background and then block your device's camera. On a laptop, it's easy to do this with a folded index card hanging on the top of the screen. To get a fade in/out effect, *partially* block the camera, maybe by waving the tines of a fork right in front of it. It'll look stupid. That's fine.

This monologue was commissioned by Open Book Theatre Company in Trenton, Michigan (Krista Schafer Ewbank). In their original production, Captain Talosi was played by Jeremy Kucharek, the director was K Edmonds, and the stage manager was Maria Tejada.

(All we see on the performer's screen is static chaos. Muted. The CAPTAIN's face, frantically mouthing something, flickers gradually into view. The CAPTAIN successfully unmutes.)

CAPTAIN:

--connection? Have we got a connection? There, can you [hear me now? Can you h]ear me now? Yes. [Yes!] We're connected. We haven't much time.

(The CAPTAIN's face has stopped flickering. We now see them on the bridge of a starship, perhaps something similar to a popular, much-spun-off American TV show from the late 1960s.)

My name is Captain Talosi of the Starship Hieronymus. This may be my final message. I can no longer hear the clang of the titanium alloy boots of the Vorgan Shock Troops. That means they've reached the bridge hatch. Meanwhile, the rubidium fuel gauge is on E, "E" standing for empty, while we're drifting away from the boundaries of the galaxy's interstellar communications network at twenty-three percent of c, "c" standing for the speed of light. We've got maybe seven minutes. Dammit, if there were just more time!

(The CAPTAIN slams their fist down, shaking the webcam.)

Apologies. That wasn't an ionized torpedo strike shaking the camera. That was my temper. Maybe you remember that about me. Probably not.

(The CAPTAIN winces and hunches down a little.)

They've started using low-frequency arc cutters to slice through the armored bridge hatch. You won't be able to hear it -- too low for the compressed sound transmission. It's less a sound you hear than one you feel, in your sternum. If you have one.

But this is not about what my body is experiencing now, light years away from you. Look, I know you don't recognize me. I know I just introduced myself to you. I don't know what planet they've stationed you on -- looks like you're quite comfy there in your civies. But you and I go way back. Your real last name is Lacuna. And you, Captain Lacuna, once sat in this captain's chair on this, the bridge of the Starship Hieronymus. And by gum, we had a lot of adventures together. I was your first mate then. Well, maybe not your *first*. Ha.

I digress. On a particularly dangerous mission to the crab nebula, chasing a divider-class vorgon vessel, we were sucked into some kind of wormhole. Our science officer said it was a rare phenomenon known as a Proteus Rift, leaving travelers with a chronic epigenetic condition whereby --

None of this is ringing a bell, is it? I would expect as much. How I retained my memories through the shifts while you didn't, well, that's a scientific mission which I will not be completing today.

The Proteus Rift affects the molecular bonds in DNA, causing them to spontaneously mutate when put under the duress of a hyperspace jump. So I look different than you remember me. Not that you remember me. But you look very different than I remember you.

The first time it happened, everyone on board freaked. Our uniforms didn't fit, some of our anatomies felt unfamiliar. But we soldiered on. You were great at fostering a can-do spirit amongst the crew. "Whatever shape our bodies might be, the shape of our mission has not changed!" When you said that, you tried to shake your fist in the air, but you didn't have fists, because your DNA had just shifted into that of a Gelatinoid. You instead shook a pseudopod and flecks of green shmutz got *everywhere*. It was so gross and so hilarious. Oh, the things you remember.

You don't remember our last mission together. It was less a mission than a vacation. Our first together. Our relationship was still purely professional at that point, but it felt high stakes. It was a little stressful, planning this thing together, using all our surface

leave to visit Condor Five, of all places. See the migration of the aurora ice hive. Fascinating species. Their bodies are composed of tiny ice crystals, like snowflakes, but together they form a sort of murmuration, roving the surface of Condor Five in search of hospitable temperatures. The individuals can't do much on their own but they're connected to each other as something greater. If they're ever trapped in a **warm** zone, they can actually fly up and survive outside the planet's atmosphere, waiting for the climate to turn back in their favor.

By the time of our Condor Five trip, you and I had shifted our DNA so often that we barely remembered what the original us looked like anymore. Whatever our bodies were in that moment, we lay their backs on the tundra and watched the aurora ice hive flutter and shimmer above us. And we held hands, or pseudopods, whatever they were. And that's when we knew. It was a beautiful time.

But then, on our shuttle ride back, we hit an asteroid belt. You and I ejected in separate lifepods, and your lifepod got caught in another darn wormhole.

I can't quite say how long ago that was. Time is relative. And I've gone through many shifts since then. I can't even remember what I looked like when I first realized that I could no longer remember what I used to look like.

(The CAPTAIN starts prodding at their own face with fingers.)

The face I have on now feels human. Roughly symmetrical and pleasantly fleshy. So hopefully I don't look too scary. Since that dreadful accident that wormholed you away from me, I have had but one mission: finding you. That mission has taken me to the edge of the galactic rim. It looks as if it's about to take me into death, but I just wanted to say--

(beat.)

Ugh. I can't do this like this. I want to connect with you, but I've got a lot on my mind, what with my impending death at the hands of cruel vorgons who, once they're done slicing into the bridge hatch with their low-frequency arc cutters, will turn their tools on my neck. Okay, focus. Computer! Please replace bridge holographic presence with -- Captain Lacuna, do you prefer mountains or beach?

(If the audience expresses a choice, the CAPTAIN says “that’s what I thought you’d choose,” and selects a new zoom background - a peaceful panorama of either a beach or some mountains. If the audience member expresses no choice, the CAPTAIN says ‘You know what? I’ll choose. I’m asking you to process a lot right now.’ and does the same.)

That’s better. Romantic, maybe? Ugh. Look: I never said this when we were together in space and time. When we could touch each other. But I love you. I always have loved you and I always will. You are the connection that gives my life meaning. Even if you don’t remember any of our times together, even if you’re stuck in a room somewhere, numbed with sameness and cold and separation. That connection still exists for me. Thank you. Computer, you can turn the hologram back off.

(The hologram background goes from the nature setting back to the bridge.)

Gosh, when it at all comes out in one go like that, it feels a bit anticlimatic.

(The camera shakes a little)

That also wasn’t an ionic torpedo strike. The vorgons have almost cut into the bridge. I have just a few seconds until I’m killed. Captain Lacuna, I love you so much that my only hope is that you find love again. Once I’m gone for good, which will be soon. You might want to turn off my video feed for this. I’m shaking. I feel so cold.

(The “flickering” camera effect returns, with the CAPTAIN coming into pieces, in and out of view.)

Wait, I’m not just cold. It’s another epigenetic shift. Oh, what am I becoming this time? I hope I don’t die as something embarrassing. Wait -- I know it, I can sense it. My insides are going from blood to, not ice, but snow....tiny crystals. Separate but together, thinking as one. My DNA is changing to that of the aurora ice hive. The aurora ice hive can survive the rigors of the vacuum of space. I can open the airlock, go out there into the vacuum of space. It’ll be weird. But I’ll be thinking of you. I love you. Goodbye....

(The CAPTAIN fades entirely from view.)

END.

Pronunciations

Talosi	Rhymes with “Pelosi.” This is unintentional.
Rubidium	roo-BID-ee-yum
Proteus	PRO-tee-us
Hieronymus	First syllable can be “hi” or “huh.” Rest of it rhymes with “anonymous.”
Lacuna	luh-KOO-nuh