

Act I.

OPENS

With a MAN and a WOMAN running in a claustrophobic dark space lit at intervals by shafts of light. Each carries a gun. They are out of breath. He is scratched, wounded. She stumbles, is dying. We HEAR strange flute-like sounds of their pursuers.

She falls. He hovers over her as she dies. The ominous, scary sounds draw near.

Leaving her corpse, he decides to run. He empties his gun at the unseen pursuers, then throws the gun aside and sprints toward an opaque WINDOW in a steel WALL. He paws the window with bloody hands, screaming soundlessly (unheard by those inside) until his pursuers overcome him and he sinks out of sight leaving bloody streaks on the glass.

FADE TO:

Inside the CREW QUARTERS aboard Neptune Express, heading on a routine run from Luna to Neptune's moon Triton and back, with supplies for the colonists.

While the eight ENGINEERS and TECHNICIANS of Work_Pod_01 sleep, we SEE holographic displays of their professional and personal info. It's a cozy scene as we pan each, one by one, seeing their personal effects and photos of their loved ones back on earth.

The captain wakes them with a short speech on an overhead screen. His image is staticky--one of many disquieting hints that something is fundamentally wrong under the surface. The captain sets them up for an easy day's work. They'll fix light meteorite damage that members of another work pod have already spent long hours repairing.

The group leisurely breakfast and banter at the table in a scene reminiscent of Ridley Scott's Alien--only nothing pops out of anyone's chest. The reality of this ship is far more horrifying on a personal level--though there will be no shortage of monsters, both us and the 'others.'

When we exit Work_Pod_01, the strange realities of the ship intantly become apparent. Nothing is what we expected. It's not the clean, well-lit ship full of happy, busy people we remember from yesterday. Instead, it's a rotted wreck eons old, much of it hollow and empty, with wet, dripping walls that are covered in growths and rotating with a grinding sound as mixed rust, broken glass, ceramics, and rock roll down like in a vast concrete mixer.

As we approach the work area (riding on a slow, monorail work platform) we hear gunfire. We arrive at a scene of carnage--dead bodies strewn about, torn uniforms suggesting another work pod, but the killers are only elusively glimpsed: weird 'mudmen' (like terrifying kachina dolls that emit strange fluting sounds from heads only vaguely human, like dirty and torn baseballs stitched up).

Under fire, the group retreat. We glimpse a pack of hostile mudmen (Cleaners) huddled under the platform, ready to climb up and massacre everyone.

Under the leadership of Ridge, senior engineer, they return to Work_Pod_01--but again, nothing is what it seems.

Each of the group has a family (spouse and two kids) back on Earth, but Ridge and Brenna are obviously on the brink of a hot and steamy extra-marital romance--or is it something else? As an unusual touch, Tango culture and music play an important role in the story.

Act II.

Ridge tries to get them back into their safe, comfortable, 'normal' crew quarters at Work_Pod_01—but learns it was all an illusion. They find only stark walls, streaked plate glass windows, and no access to the empty room beyond. They glimpse eight tanks in which a new group like themselves are about to be born into the world for another day's work.

Already, team member Nguyen has figured out what is going on (but tells nobody), and commits suicide by jumping to his death from the platform. That leaves seven of the original eight.

The Cleaners clamber up and attack. They are repulsed in a fierce battle.

It is starting to become obvious to Ridge and his group that they are what they call 'day flies,' farmed people who are born fully grown, and only live for one day. That in itself is a terrifying discovery to make--that they will fall asleep at the end of their first day and never wake up--but there is worse to come.

As they fight for their survival, they begin to realize that everything they know is an illusion poured into them in the birthing tanks of Work_Pod_01.

Also, they learn that there is no Neptune Express. The solar system was destroyed by a collision with a rogue star. The earth and the human race were destroyed--except for one ship, thousands of years ago, which has gone from being a Neptune Express to being a Nebula Express streaking at near light-speed from star to star seeking a habitable planet that will be New Earth.

The lowest moment comes (half-way through the script, minute 60) when Brenna discovers that her husband and her beloved children ('babies') Andres and Romela - in Buenos Aires - never existed. As a mother, she is shattered. The others suffer similar personal catastrophes, but hers is most visibly felt.

Ridge and Brenna decide that their spouses and loved ones are real indeed, at least in their minds, even if they themselves are nothing more than 'day flies.' They decide they are human, and have rights, and will fight the ship and the universe itself. If nothing else, they want to die with dignity at the end of their short one-day lives, and maybe prevent endless generations of victims like themselves from meeting the same grisly fate. Ridge and Brenna declare love for one another here and now - desperate, passionate.

The ship was long ago taken over by a malevolent genetic concoction called 'the Queen,' mother of the Cleaners, the horrid mudmen who infest the ship's dark spaces and engage in a putrid corpse trade involving the generations of engineers and technicians issuing from Work_Pod_01.

One by one, the team members are killed while Ridge tries to lead them to safety and sanity. Ridge says we must 'face the truth' in order to conquer our reality.

The extramarital relationship between Ridge and Brenna is consummated and becomes a driving theme of the story--now that both their spouses and children have turned out to be dark illusions painfully cherished. This love for Brenna now becomes the driving force in Ridge's brief life.

Ridge is in contact with Captain Venable, the enigmatic leader of the ship, whom he cannot meet face to face. We get strong hints that there is something even more horrifying about Captain Venable, who seems to both help and hinder Ridge--trying to save mankind by any means at his disposal.

Act III.

Venable seems strangely incapable of action, but he guides Ridge toward a final confrontation with the Queen (a horrifying monster who births Cleaners and runs the ship).

In their first foray into the forward (bow) section of the ship to destroy the Queen and find the mysterious, earth-like Largo, Ridge and Brenna are separated. Last he sees of her is when she is swarmed by hordes of Cleaners.

Having lost her love, his driving quest is a bitter one--to finish off the Queen, even if it means destroying the last members of the human race--1,000 infants being kept in cryo-sleep, deep inside Largo, until the ship can find a New Earth among the stars, a process that has already taken centuries...and thousands of generations of 'day flies' like Ridge and Brenna.

The key seems to be Largo--a moody and atmospheric 'city' that Venable describes as 'practice for us to remember how to be human.' It is a faux urban environment, complete with rain and neon and sodden streets, along with cozy restaurant pubs and designer clothing stores and a mysterious, Tango-drenched Hotel Largo with a fateful swimming pool in one of its lobbies.

While Ridge seeks the royal chamber of the horrifying Queen of the mudmen or Cleaners, he doesn't know that Brenna and another woman have escaped the mudmen and found their way into Largo. There, amid glitz and Tango music in the deserted shops and restaurants, one of the two women meets her sad and signature 'day fly' fate in the grand swimming pool, and the other finds her in a dramatic scene.

Moving toward the climax and the end of Act III, Ridge manages to destroy the Queen and her jelly chamber in an explosive, violent eruption of flames and personal courage.

Confirmed as the hero and new master of the ship, Ridge penetrates into the ship's deepest mysteries and confronts the horrifying nature of what Captain Venable has become--and how he can be redeemed.

Venable, who had become part of the Queen's network as she ran the ship, now tells Ridge that Brenna is still alive. The captain tells Ridge to hurry and find her in Largo, for (as 'day flies') their time is almost over. They should check themselves into a grand hotel suite and relish their last few hours and minutes making love.

Instead, Ridge figures out a clever way to not only save the dying Brenna (and himself, and Venable) in their original birth pods, but to also preserve them with much of their faux identities so that they will eventually wake up and be part of the New Earth when the ship finally locates a habitable planet.

FADE TO:

The film ends in the steamy jungles and busy cities of New Earth, when all the labors and terrors and efforts aboard Nebula Express have resolved and paid off, and Ridge and Brenna have arrived at a rewarding conclusion. It's a happy ending to a grueling saga, but could also set up a sequel--e.g., we glimpse a mudman or two lurking in the jungle, looking toward the New City.

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