



EPISODE 2x07
"IN THE SHADOWS"

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Teaser

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE

CLOSE-IN on the eyes of CAPTAIN MALCOLM REYNOLDS. We hear the distant sounds of shouting and a bouncing ball.

We pull back and see that Mal is sitting in the pilot's seat, staring forward. He wraps his coat around him like a blanket, tilts his head back, and SIGHS at the ceiling.

KAYLEE (VO)

Here! I'm open!

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – SAME TIME

The rest of the CREW of Serenity run around the cargo bay playing their future version of basketball - '*Ring-Ball*' - this time with two rings hanging by chains on either end of the cargo bay.

WASH passes the BALL to KAYLEE. She catches it and dribbles alone towards the HANGING RING on the far side of the cargo bay.

KAYLEE (cont'd)

Haha! Never stop me now!

RIVER sweeps in from behind the shadow of a large crate and effortlessly removes the ball from Kaylee's grasp.

RIVER

Never say never.

She continues on to the opposite end of the cargo bay.

KAYLEE

Gorramit, you're quick! Jayne! Catch her!

JAYNE runs to cut River off, getting between her and the ring on the near side of the cargo bay.

JAYNE

S'just you and me, li'l wing-nut.

River, without breaking stride, bounces the ball through Jayne's OPEN LEGS and SPINS in a ballerina-style move around him to collect it.

JAYNE (cont'd)
Ruttin' slippery...

RIVER
(running away, laughing)
You forgot. It's you, me, and the ball.

SIMON
Here *mei mei!*

She tosses the ball across the bay to SIMON, who wastes no time launching it up in the air. ZOE leaps up and, with a closed fist, nails the ball through the ring.

HIROKU, sitting on a crate on the sidelines watching, claps enthusiastically.

KAYLEE
(smiling at Hiroku)
Hey! Who's side'r you on, Fishpaste?!

Kaylee picks up the dead ball. Zoe and Simon high-five.

ZOE
That's five a piece. Golden ring time now.

SIMON
Golden ring? What's that?

ZOE
Something someone neglected to give me when he proposed.

WASH
(out of breath)
Har. I chortle inwardly.

KAYLEE
(to Simon)
Means this's the last point.

Zoe steps up to Kaylee, ready to play defence. Their eyes meet.

KAYLEE (cont'd)
The last game.

Beat. Everyone looks to Zoe and Wash.

ZOE
Let's go, Kaylee. Don't wanna drag things out.

Kaylee manages a small smile. She tosses the ball to Wash, who punches it to Jayne.

Jayne bullrushes Simon, who stands his ground... but not for long as Jayne mows him down, connecting hard.

Simon crashes onto the floor with a thump and Jayne claims the ball.

JAYNE
Ha-ha! You core-folk sure do fall nice.

SIMON
River!

Jayne takes aim. Shoots. River leaps up off of Zoe's intertwined hands and catches the ball before it makes it to the ring.

JAYNE
Oh, you *chwen joo* <retarded pig>!

Jayne chases after River, who turns to wink at him, then throws the ball backwards and across the entire length of the cargo bay. It SWISHES through the ring without touching the metal rim.

RIVER
(without turning around)
We win.

JAYNE
Wo bu shin wo dah yan jing! <I don't believe my eyes!>

SIMON
(grinning)
Believe it!

Zoe looks at everyone with her hands on her hips.

ZOE
Good game...
(beat)
It's been fun.

An uncomfortable silence, broken by:

MAL (via com)
Wash – where are you?! Autopilot can only do so much 'fore we crash headfirst into this planet coming up faster'n I care to say.

Wash bounds up the stairs.

SIMON
(to River)
How did you do that?

RIVER
(looking up at the ceiling)
I didn't look...

EXT. SPACE – SAME TIME

Serenity moves silently through the black. A SMALL ONE-MAN SHIP trails close behind. Suddenly, the small ship launches a ROUND DEVICE, which magnetically sticks onto Serenity's hull, and on it, a green light blinks to life.

INT. SMALL SHIP – COCKPIT – SAME TIME

A DARK-HAIRED WOMAN in her early twenties sits in the cramped cockpit, dressed in a black SPACE-SUIT. Aside from a line of track-marks running down either side of her neck, she is a flawless, exotic beauty.



She hits a button on her com unit, and noisy STATIC fills the small space. The static smoothes, and a familiar voice fill the void.

RIVER (cont'd, filtered, via com)
I listened...

The monitor changes suddenly – “INCOMING WAVE”.

DARK-HAIRED WOMAN
(upper-crust Core accent)
How fine the timing.

She punches another button and the display glows brightly with the image of BADGER.

BADGER
I am becoming rather impatient, Trystan.

TRYSTAN
Oh how poor are they who have not patience. What wound did ever heal but by degrees?

BADGER
Ain't the least interested in your fancy psychobabbled poetry, little girl. I was assured that Trystan Xun was the best of the best, and would do right where the Orion Recondos `ave failed.

TRYSTAN
(calmly)
Oh fool, in action lies eloquence. I lay no claim as to my abilities. Only to their results.

BADGER
I'll take no sass from a whelp of a girl who was barely on the potty when I was running a monopoly of great import. Best you remember who it is that's paying your wage. You will show me proper respect. You will look up to me.

TRYSTAN
It costs a man little to prattle polite. A hunter of skill was revered in the old `Verse. Kreed made certain of that. Now, this... How time a fickle beast can be.

EXT. SPACE – SAME TIME

The small ship maintains the same velocity as Serenity – some distance behind.

BADGER (VO)
You best bring me more `n a few fancy words next we chat, or you'll *jin joh buh chi chi fah joh* <be sipping the wine of penalty over that of respect>. Poetic enough for ya, darlin'?

TRYSTAN (VO)

A cornered prey is a deadly prey. Track them in their own comfort, and they waltz into your web...

INT. SMALL SHIP – COCKPIT – SAME TIME

Badger sighs on the monitor.

BADGER

Look girlie—

Trystan calmly cuts short the Wave and flicks a switch on her console.

TRYSTAN

Too true the empty vessel makes the greatest sound...

WASH (VO, filtered)

You know, Mal, you really oughta learn to fly this thing better yourself— uh, that's not Haven.

TRYSTAN

...The irony of it all.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Wash and Zoe stand on the bridge, flanked by Jayne. We see a large GREEN PLANET coming into view through the front window.

ZOE

Verbena? Captain, what—

MAL

Just a small, profitable detour.

ZOE

Care to elaborate, sir?

MAL

Juniper raspberries, Zoe. Should net us some pretty. Twenty pounds at three thousand creds per, to be precise.

Jayne starts counting on his fingers, his lips moving.

ZOE

You do know this is a Core world, sir? 'Rejuvenation Project' ringing any bells?

Hiroku runs onto the bridge, laughing hysterically. He circles round Mal, and hides behind Wash's console.

Jayne stops counting. Shakes his head in frustration. Starts over.

MAL
Hardly Core. Still a border world no matter how much the Alliance try'n make it look different.

Kaylee bursts through the bridge door at pace.

KAYLEE
(laughing)
I'll find you, you slippery little fish!

Kaylee tiptoes around the bridge, peeking in every dark corner.

INT. SMALL SHIP – COCKPIT – SAME TIME

Trystan listens intently, a finger curling mindlessly through her hair.

MAL (VO, filtered)
We got us a nice 'n legal milk run for your last job. Jorgensen just loves his raspberries. Verbena's the one place in all our 'Verse they grow nice enough for his refined and well-payin' tastes.

Trystan's head snaps up, looking out her forward window. Here eyes go wide as she sees something we can't.

TRYSTAN
There exist as many farewells as be stars in heaven. Farewell. Farewell. Farewell...

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Jayne's stops counting. His eyes widen.

JAYNE
Sixty thousand! For fruit!? He is *shaing jing* <nuts>!

MAL
Decent nest egg for a couple startin' out fresh.

Zoe looks over questioningly at Wash.

WASH

Does seem a milkish run to me, hon'. And it isn't even a bunch of stinky cows this time.

JAYNE

But, um, they ain't getting' it all, right?

Kaylee abruptly jumps behind Wash's console – and shrieks of laughter ensue as Hiroku jumps away, trying to avoid Kaylee's grip.

MAL

For all the— Will you two stop!

Mal hefts Hiroku by the shirt-collar and marches him out the door.

KAYLEE

Cap'n! You can't just—

Mal silences her with an icy stare.

MAL

The bridge ain't no place—

Kaylee pulls Hiroku into her arms and marches out the bridge.

MAL (cont'd)

—for playin' about and screamin'...

Suddenly River bursts onto the bridge in a flat panic.

RIVER

It's raining! Get the umbrella! Quick!

MAL

(sniffing his underarm, annoyed)
Is it me? Do I attract them? What—

A large JOLT and loud CLANG shakes Serenity.

MAL (cont'd)

What was that?

Wash punches buttons, and a RADAR GRID appears on-screen.

WASH

A meteor, Mal. Only the one. Hull's intact. We're good.

Zoe stares, transfixed by the view out the window ahead of them. Jayne is still checking his math.

ZOE
(softly)
No... We're not.

As Mal and Wash look up, we pan around to see what they all see out the window – hundreds of GOLDEN BROWN STREAKS coursing through the atmosphere, with multiple EXPLOSIONS across the planet's surface.

WASH
Woh duh tian ah.



Act One

INT. SERENITY – SAME TIME

The reflection in Mal's eyes shows hundreds of bright explosions across the planet's surface.

MAL
Take us down.

JAYNE
Down!? Whadda ya mean ruttin' down!?

EXT. SERENITY – MOMENTS LATER

Serenity bobs and weaves quickly through an atmosphere crowded by falling METEORITES.

There is hardly any room amongst the densely packed storm to manoeuvre, but manoeuvre she does, until a METEORITE suddenly HITS the body of Serenity hard, causing her to pitch.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

The SHOCKWAVE reverberates through the bridge.

WASH
(less than calm)
We're okay! Wasn't more than a graze!

JAYNE

Helluva graze. You are *he shen hai li de dan shui shui mu yi yang feng*<crazy as a freshwater jellyfish in the deep dark sea> Mal – takin’ us into this!

ZOE

There’s people down there—

Serenity takes another HIT. This one throws Jayne across the bridge and onto his face.

JAYNE

(face pressed into the floor)

Right, my point exactly. We don’t got to be those people!

WASH

(calmly)

This is going to be another interesting landing, so—

JAYNE

(looking up from the floor)

Heard that before.

WASH

So would everyone who’s not having a meteor-dodging epiphany at this very moment, kindly <shut the holy hell up>!?

EXT. VERBENA - SIENNE – BIRD’S EYE VIEW - ESTABLISHING

SIENNE, the capital city of Verbena, sprawls out as a glinting modern contrast to the surrounding dense TROPICAL JUNGLE. A multitude of FRUIT ORCHARDS thrive in the equatorial climate, situated in concentric circles around the city. Older BROWN BUILDINGS are littered amongst newer REFLECTIVE SILVER DOMES.

EXT. VERBENA - SIENNE CITY CENTER – MORNING – MOMENTS LATER

One of these domes is on fire - a tall, glass SPIRALLING SKYSCRAPER, surrounded in concentric circles by many smaller HOUSES.

A METEORITE crashes down with massive force into a parked hover-vehicle on the busy street adjacent to the skyscraper, sending PIECES everywhere.

What was, until recently, an idyllic panorama of technology fused with nature, is now a battleground. The sky is filled with the BROWN TAILS of fallen meteorites in the morning sunrise, as a somewhat DENTED Serenity lands in the middle of a street, under a long red BRIDGE.

All around, people are running, screaming, crying and lost in the destruction. Buildings and roads are rubble, and FIRES are starting in many places simultaneously.

EXT. SERENITY

Mal and Zoe, at the foot of the ramp, take in the scene.

ZOE
'Milk-run.' Yeah.

Jayne and Wash follow them down the ramp. Simon, holding River's hand, and Kaylee, a protective arm around Hiroku, stay further back.

A long beat, as everyone is transfixed by the landscape before them.

JAYNE
Enough to make God crap his pants.

Everyone turns and stares at him.

JAYNE (cont'd)
Well, it is.

INT. BINOCULARS – SAME TIME

We see Serenity and her crew through a set of DIGITAL BINOCULARS, with "22X Zoom" written along the left margin in red, and CHINESE LETTERING along the right margin.

EXT. VERBENA - SIENNE CITY CENTER – SAME TIME

The crew stares, not knowing where to start.

KAYLEE
We gotta... We gotta do somethin'. Captain, we gotta—

JAYNE
<Prairie's Piss>, woman, jus' what exactly you want us to do?! Politely ask them rocks to stop smashing down on us?

VOICE
(far away)
Help! Please God someone help!

JAYNE

T'were my call, we take our sorry behinds off this target-of-a-planet faster'n you can—

Mal turns in the direction of the VOICE – towards the skyscraper in flames at the end of the block. A FIGURE waves from a tenth floor window.

MAL

Ain't your call. Wash, Kaylee – get Serenity in the air, over that building. Zoe, with me.

Wash and Kaylee rush back into the ship.

Mal and Zoe head off down the street, with Simon a few steps behind.

Jayne hesitates, rolls his eyes, then follows after them, leaving River alone on the ramp.

JAYNE

Gorramit! Wait up!

EXT. SKYSCRAPER – MOMENTS LATER

Serenity hovers over the skyscraper, as frantic people run out the main entrance.

Mal, directly beneath Serenity, is finishing strapping himself into the HARNESS that dangles from the doors open in the floor of the cargo bay.

KAYLEE (via com)

You sure you don't want goggles? Or a hat?

MAL (into com)

Just go!

Serenity rises, lifting Mal up alongside the building. Mal recoils from the flames.

MAL (into com, cont'd)

To the left. Good... Good... Okay. Hold!

The skyscraper buckles and sways – WHINING under its failing frame. Directly below Mal, ten floors down, DOZENS OF PEOPLE pour out of the lobby and onto the street in sheer panic. Zoe tries to herd them to safety.

Two floors above Mal, the windows SHATTER from the heat. SHARDS of glass fall past him, one knife-like shard catching him in the left shoulder.

Mal winces but grabs the MAN hanging from the window ledge with his wounded arm. He pulls the man out the building.

MAN
No! No, wait, my—

Serenity's engines REV as she lowers both of them to the ground. When the man's feet touch the ground, he starts to run back towards the burning building. Mal tackles him and holds him back. The two bounce somewhat ludicrously as Serenity bobs, yanking on Mal's harness.

MAN (cont'd)
Let go! My daughter!

Zoe rushes over.

ZOE
There's someone else in there?!

MAN
My little girl—

A LOUD WHINE fills the air – the sound of an object hurtling through the atmosphere, getting louder.

MAL
Everybody down!

Zoe drags the man behind a wall and Mal unsnaps his harness, rushing after them as the meteorite hits the skyscraper.

The sparkling, flaming building SWAYS drastically with a massive CREAK, then suddenly gives way as the top twenty floors of the building CAVE IN with a thunderous CRASH. DEBRIS falls to the ground and onto crowds of people fleeing the scene. WHITE DUST, mingled with BLACK SMOKE fills the entire area, limiting visibility. Flames dance higher out of the remaining ten floors.

MAN
Jenny!
(to Mal)
Please! You, you have to do something!

Simon steps out of the dust and smoke, looking at the injured around him.

SIMON
Captain... Those people need my help...

MAL
Go. Do what you can. Jayne, you go with him.

Simon rushes into the wall of smoke and dust, Jayne stomping after him.

MAL (into com, cont'd)
Wash, keep her up. We need to play fireman.
Dump all the water. Drinking, washing. Even the waste.

ABOVE, Serenity swiftly zooms off into the distance.

Mal rushes toward the entrance of the burning building.

ZOE
Sir!

ABOVE, Serenity LOOPS vertically to fly back towards us, and ROTATES the right way round.

Zoe, about to follow Mal, spots River walking through the area, apparently intent on following her brother.

ZOE
River!

River does not react, keeps walking.

ZOE (cont'd)
(grabbing River by the collar)
Uh-uh. Too dangerous. You can't—

RIVER
But I can. I have a reason... I know sometimes I'm
confused, but sometimes...
(looks Zoe in the eye)
I can help.

A beat, and then Zoe lets her go. River – now holding Simon's RED MEDICAL BAG -
chases after her brother.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Wash looks down at the radar, focused and determined.

WASH (into com)
Okay, Kaylee, on my mark.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – SAME TIME

Kaylee stands by a CONTROL PANEL on the wall.

WASH (via com, cont'd)

Mark!

Kaylee pushes three BUTTONS one after the other. Mechanical RUMBLING sounds rush through the bay.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Wash looks outside.

WASH (cont'd)

Mark-ing my territory...

EXT. VERBENA - SIENNE – STREET – SAME TIME

Serenity swoops in low over the building and a torrent of hundreds of gallons of WATER pour out of Serenity's undercarriage, flooding the upper level of the building, and smothering all flames.

INT. BINOCULARS – MOMENTS LATER

“10X Zoom”: Mal carries a FOUR YEAR OLD CHILD out into the street.

FAST ZOOM IN - “16X Zoom”: Mal holds the child out to the waiting arms of the desperate father.

EXT. VERBENA – SIENNE – STREET – SAME TIME

Mal shoves the child into the man’s open arms—

FATHER

Oh god thank you so m—

MAL

Uh-huh.

—and runs off.

EXT. SKYSCRAPER RUBBLE – SAME TIME

Simon leans down next to an unconscious OLD MAN, his head BLEEDING profusely, his right leg twisted and mangled. A BROKEN FEMUR protrudes through the skin. Simon leans in and listens to the man's mouth.

JAYNE (OS)
Wha... What can I do?

Simon opens the old man's eyes as Jayne comes up behind him, coughing.

SIMON
There's nothing we can do for him. He's fixed and dilated.

Simon stands and slowly walks away, moving through the dust and ash.

JAYNE
But he's still breathin'.

SIMON (cont'd)
Move on. Look for others.
(beat, looks back at the man)
Only stop if they're moving.

Jayne stares at the old man.

EXT. VERBENA - SIENNE CITY STREET – SAME TIME

Mal and Zoe stand motionless amidst the WAVE OF PEOPLE evacuating the smoky chaotic area. Some crawl or are helped by their fellow man. Some walk in circles – panicking, looking for their missing loved ones.

Mal climbs up onto the roof of a large damaged HOVER-BUS, as Serenity drops in low over Mal's head.

MAL (into com)
Listen up, people!

Mal's voice booms over the entire area via Serenity's loudspeaker as the ship lands behind him.

MAL (into com, cont'd)
My name is Sam Pilensky and I am... chief... fire marshal here. All who can, get into a basement right now. Anyone who's hurt, head for the ship. We'll get you to a hospital.
(softly, down at Zoe)
There's a hospital here, right?

EXT. SKYSCRAPER RUBBLE – SAME TIME

Simon pushes his way through the dust. Jayne, not far behind, COUGHS repeatedly. MAL'S VOICE can be heard in the distance, repeating the message.

JAYNE
(shouting above the crowd)
I ain't found no one! S'too ruttin' dark!

RIVER (OS)
Simon! Over here!

Simon turns and sees a SILHOUETTE of his sister digging through RUBBLE.

He runs over, through a wall of dust, but all he finds is a pile of rubble. No body. River tosses piece after piece of debris off with her small hands.

RIVER (cont'd)
(softly)
Here.

Jayne arrives, and as he does, Simon hoists a large piece of concrete into Jayne's arms. A HAND is visible, poking through.

SIMON
Dig!

EXT. SERENITY – SAME TIME

Kaylee stands at the base of the ramp, herding the walking-wounded in toward the cargo hold. Some carry those who can't walk.

KAYLEE
This way, everyone!

Hiroku stands at Kaylee's feet, playing with pieces of broken reflective GLASS.

KAYLEE (cont'd)
Everyone onto the, um, ambulance!

INT. BINOCULARS – MOMENTS LATER

"10x Zoom" reads along one side. Through the dust, we can barely make out Serenity. The image is SHAKY – as if the hands holding the binoculars are trembling.

Abruptly, the scene changes to the ground, coming up rapidly. Things GO BLACK with the sound of SHATTERED GLASS.

EXT. VERBENA – SIENNE – ALLEY – SAME TIME

Trystan Xun (in a black jumpsuit), shaky, sweating, tired, stands in the rubble-filled alley, looking down at the broken binoculars lying on the concrete paving at her feet.

Hands shaking, she leans awkwardly against the alleyway wall, and pulls out a SYRINGE – one of many clipped on her UTILITY BELT – filled with a FLUORESCENT GREEN LIQUID.



TRYSTAN

Circle slowly, Trystan... Have patience.

(struggling as she raises the syringe)

How... poor are... are they who have not... patience.

She injects herself in the side of her neck, and closes her eyes as her body spasms and jerks for a second. She pushes energetically off the wall and stands dead-straight, opens her eyes, and smiles.

She looks down at the binoculars again, crouching down toward them. She doesn't pick them up, however, but leans very close over the SHATTERED GLASS of the lenses, seeing her hypnotizing reflection in the shimmering shards.

ANGLE ON: The SHARDS as Trystan's hand reaches down and snatches up a handful of broken glass.

TRYSTAN (cont'd, OS)

What wound did ever heal but by degrees...

Blood drips down, painting the shards left behind.

EXT. SKYSCRAPER RUBBLE – SAME TIME

The Tams, Jayne, and a pair of shell-shocked CITIZENS have cleared the rubble.

Simon leans over a pretty YOUNG BLONDE GIRL, with burns to her face and neck. He tries to give the girl mouth-to-mouth, but can't get any air in.

SIMON

She's obstructed! Give me a needle. Quick!

Jayne fumbles with the med-kit.

Simon sees a PEN in the pocket of one of the citizens. He quickly stands, snatches the pen, lowers again, and STABS the young girl, midline through her neck.

JAYNE
(jumping backwards)
What the!?! You ruttin' crazy?!

Simon carefully removes the inside of the pen, leaving only a HOLLOW PLASTIC TUBE, which he blows into. After a few beats, he puts a finger to her neck.

SIMON
She has a pulse. I need adren—

The NEEDLE is in Simon's waiting hand before he can complete the request.

RIVER
Here.

EXT. SERENITY – SAME TIME

Hiroku creates a mirror-mosaic in the dirt with the glass shards while Kaylee ushers wounded people up the ramp.

FEMALE VOICE (OS)
Help me...

A dark-haired YOUNG WOMAN, dressed in an incongruously bright pink sweater, stumbles toward Serenity. She has a large GASH across her forehead, down across her left eyelid, and left cheek, that is bleeding profusely across her face.

KAYLEE
Oh, you poor thing! This way!

Kaylee helps the young woman up the ramp, and into:

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – CONTINUOUS

The scene is chaos. INJURED FOLKS lie, set, or lean against every available surface. Zoe and Wash move about the floor, adjusting folks, while Mal circulates on the upper catwalk.

WASH
We're almost full, Captain!

EXT. SERENITY – SAME TIME

Hiroku plays with the pieces of broken reflective glass. A large SHADOW moves overhead, reflected in the glass. He looks up, and what he sees frightens him enough that he stands and backs toward nearby rubble and shadows.

Kaylee, coming down the ramp, looks up, too, and we now see what she sees: a large ship, twice the size of Serenity, hovering overhead - an ALLIANCE PATROL BOAT.

KAYLEE
(back up the ramp)
Cap'n! Zoe!

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – SAME TIME

Mal bounds down the stairs, nimbly avoiding stepping on the injured.

KAYLEE (OS)
Out here now, Cap'n!

Mal almost knocks down the young woman in the pink sweater as he rushes out the ramp.

YOUNG WOMAN
The irony of it all...

The young woman – Trystan – smiles as she watches Mal run past.



Act Two

EXT. SERENITY – SECONDS LATER

Mal and Zoe stare up at the Alliance Patrol Boat as TROOPS deploy in HOVER-VEHICLES.

MAL
Remind me again we are doing a good thing here.

ZOE
A very good thing, sir. Kinda like the old—

YOUNG MAN (OS)
Is this your ship!?

Mal turns. A YOUNG MAN in a decorated blue Alliance uniform stands behind him. With him is a whole BATTALION OF TROOPS.

MAL

Yes, Yes it is. I'm Sam Piten-
(looks the young man up and down)
Is that uniform even real?

YOUNG MAN

(taken aback, stuttering)
What do you— why—
(beat)
I am Commander Roland, and I am in charge of this rescue operation. The Alliance thanks you for your efforts to this point, but we've no need to complicate matters with *mei yong* <worthless> civilians.

MAL

Hear that, Zoe? Us *mei yong* civvies ain't needed no more. The commander here's got it all under his pretty blue buckle. Well, s'fine by me—

ROLAND

I will, of course, be commandeering your ship.

MAL

Wha-!? Whoa now, you can't just—

ROLAND

As I've said, the Alliance thanks you for your assistance.

ZOE

Got a boatload of injured we were preparing to take to the nearest hospital.

(beat)

Sir.

ROLAND

You'll just get in the way.

MAL

Now, see here, junior—

ZOE

(stepping in front of Mal)

What he is trying to say, Commander, is that we both have battlefield experience.

(she motions over the harsh scene)

And ain't no mistakin' it... This is a battlefield.

(beat)
In the war, Sergeant Pitensky here commanded an entire platoon.

ROLAND
(studying Mal's dusty coat)
That's not brown under all that dust, is it?

MAL
Times like these, it's all gray...

Roland looks at them once more – then looks out at the sheer scope of the anarchy before him, and takes a step backwards.

ROLAND
Very well... Help me get these people on the bus, but remember, 'Sergeant' – this is my show now.

Mal gives Zoe a dirty LOOK – *'thanks a lot'*, as Kaylee, looking frantic, feverishly scanning the surroundings, comes up to Zoe.

KAYLEE
(to Zoe)
Have you seen him? Please tell me you've seen him!

ZOE
Who?

KAYLEE
Hiroku. I can't— I can't find him!

Mal walks toward them.

ZOE
Kaylee, are you telling me you lost an eight year old? In this!?

Mal just stares Kaylee down. She can't bear to look at him.

KAYLEE
Don't have to say it, Cap'n.

MAL
I don't?

She turns away, crushed.

Mal's face falls, too. He looks at Kaylee's back, uncertain.

BACK AT THE RAMP

Simon, River, Jayne, and a handful of refugees arrive through the fog of dust. Jayne, still coughing, carries the young girl. Roland steps up to help him.

SIMON

Thank you. There are more people back there. If any of you can help—

ROLAND

(notices Simon holds a med-kit)
You're medically trained?

SIMON

I'm a doctor.

ROLAND

Report to Freedom General Hospital immediately. We have hundreds of people coming in from all corners of Sienna.

SIMON

But there are more—

ROLAND

Let us handle them. You're needed at the hospital, doctor.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO HOLD – SAME TIME

Wash approaches the open airlock doors, winding through the injured throng. He pokes his head out.

WASH

Mal! We're full up here! I got people strapped to the dining room table!

Wash takes a sudden step back as a half-dozen ALLIANCE SOLDIERS enter the cargo bay, accompanied by Simon and River.

WASH

Well, there's always room for a few more...

EXT. SERENITY – SAME TIME

Mal, watching the soldiers enter, turns to Jayne.

MAL
Go with them to the hospital and keep an eye on things.

JAYNE
I ain't no orderly, Mal.

MAL
(indicates the soldiers)
Jayne!

INT. SERENITY – SAME TIME

Wash rushes through the crowd and up the stairs to the UPPER CATWALK.

WASH
Everyone who can grab something, grab something!
We're taking off!

Trystan scans the crowd, looking increasingly agitated. She heads back toward the airlock doors, but it's rough going through the piles of wounded.

EXT. SERENITY – SAME TIME

Serenity's engines start up.

ROLAND
This vessel is heading directly to Freedom General
Hospital! If you are injured, please board immediately!

Kaylee steps up to Mal, desperate.

KAYLEE
What about 'Roku!?

MAL
You heard the commander. He's in charge now.

Kaylee jumps forward towards Mal in a panic. Before she can get within arms reach, Zoe catches her in a lock and holds her back.

KAYLEE
Don't you care? Don't you care about anything anymore!?

Mal holds her gaze for a beat, then turns his back.

Kaylee struggles against Zoe's grip to get free.

ZOE
Kaylee...
KAYLEE
Let me go!

Kaylee breaks free from Zoe, looks at Mal.

KAYLEE
'Roku needs me! I'll find him, with or without your help,
Cap'n!

Kaylee turns away and runs off into the chaos.

MAL
Kaylee!

ROLAND
Sergeant! I have some questions.

For a beat, Mal looks in the direction Kaylee ran, but then moves toward Roland.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – SAME TIME

Trystan is almost to the airlock when Jayne steps in front of her.

JAYNE
Inside, li'l girl. We're takin' off.

Trystan sees Mal, Zoe, and Roland talking outside the ship and then—

The ramp pulls up, blocking her view.

TRYSTAN
The irony of it all...

Jayne slams shut the inner airlock door.

EXT. VERBENA - SIENNE – STREET – SAME TIME

As Serenity takes off in one direction, the HOVER-MULE, with Zoe at the controls, Roland in the passenger seat, and Mal and a SOLDIER in the back, moves in the opposite direction, toward the worst of the fires, which seem to be gaining momentum on the city's eastern border.

ROLAND

As soon as he drops those people at the hospital, your pilot is to join us at the waterfront to assist in the firefighting, understood, sergeant?

Mal, distracted, looks back in the direction Kaylee ran away.

ROLAND

Sergeant?

MAL

Whatever you say.

EXT. VERBENA – EASTERN SIENNE – WATERFRONT – MINUTES LATER

Eastern Sienna is built across a picturesque BEACHFRONT, with the larger, more opulent HOUSES at the bottom of a HILL, opening right onto the beach. At the top of the hill is a luxurious street-front MALL.

The neighbourhood is anything but inviting, as raging fire consumes twelve houses simultaneously.

The mule speeds down the hill and past the last affected building, does a u-turn at top speed, and comes to a stop in front of a sign that says 'BLUE SUN CONSTRUCTION'.

Roland, stares at the inferno, horrified.

MAL (cont'd)

(calmly)

What's the plan, commander?

Nothing.

MAL (cont'd)

Zoe, get on the horn with your husband. Tell him to hurry. Operation *cí bēi*, just like at Du Khang.

ZOE (into com)

Honey, when you finish playing ambulance, we're gonna need you to build a sand castle.

WASH (via com)

Sounds like fun. I love the beach.

Mal looks around at five giant fires fast surrounding him.

MAL
It's gonna be one big sand castle.

INT. FREEDOM GENERAL HOSPITAL – E.R. – SAME TIME

Injured patients fill the large emergency room.

In four sections of the large room, the WALLS GLOW LCD-style in different COLORS – red, green, yellow, and black.

'Red' has the most activity – holding the most seriously, life-threateningly injured, while 'green' houses the walking wounded. The black area is sealed off, with no medical effort being expended on the dead, and only pain relief for those too far gone to save.

Simon and Jayne briskly wheel the young girl with the pen in her neck to the RED AREA.

A barefoot River follows slowly, through the trauma – taking it all in – glancing this way and that. On her way, she walks past a CORVUE:

CORVUE
...worst natural disaster in our system's history since the Londinium quake of 2482. Parliament has issued an emergency protocol sanctioning the A.R.B. and the four closest cruisers to...

While wheeling the GURNEY:

JAYNE
Don't know why I gotta be here. Cap'n wanted a wet-nurse he shoulda hired hisself a fat lady with *bo ba*.

SIMON
Oh, I requested you. Can't get enough of that warm inner charm.

JAYNE
(looking around, anxious)
M'just sayin'... S'enough to gag a maggot.

SIMON
Poetic.

Simon stops a passing ORDERLY.

SIMON (cont'd)
You! I need an E.T. tube. Now!

ORDERLY
(looking Simon up and down)
And you are?

SIMON
A doctor. Now get me that tube.

Jayne, for only a moment, looks surprised at Simon, then looks around the red area: dying, bleeding, unconscious PEOPLE piled everywhere, with PARAMEDICS and DOCTORS performing C.P.R. and attaching cortical electrodes. Family members in tears SCREAM on the sidelines. He looks back at Simon, obviously uncomfortable.

Simon threads a thin metallic WIRE through the pen in the girl's neck, until it comes out of her mouth. He then grabs the ENDOTRACHEAL TUBE from the orderly, and railroads it over the wire - into her mouth, and down her trachea.

He grabs the STETHOSCOPE off the orderly and listens to her chest as the orderly attaches the tube to a ventilator. Simon stops, and wipes his forehead.

SIMON (cont'd)
(smiling at the girl)
There. You'll be alright now.

From across the room in the yellow area where the lesser-injured lie, comes a fast BEEPING SOUND.

PARAMEDIC (OS)
Doctor! This man's crashing!

Simon runs over to the yellow, leaving Jayne and River alone and nervous – the red glow on their faces. River grabs Jayne's hand tightly.

EXT. SERENITY – SAME TIME

Serenity flies low along a coastline with a beautiful beachfront, inner and outer airlock doors wide open. She dives and dips into the beach, scooping up a hold-full of sand in one swoop.

KAYLEE (VO)
It worked, Wash!

WASH (VO)
Woo-hoo! Was that fun or what!? I'm gonna miss this...

EXT. VERBENA – EASTERN SIENE – WATERFRONT – MOMENTS LATER

Mal stands on the mule, looking down from the top of the hill at one specific house. Serenity sails over his head.

MAL (into com)
'Bout time you got back! There! Empty over that one!

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Wash pilots, concentration, mingled with beads of sweat alight his face.

WASH (into com)
You got it, Mal. Uhm, exactly how, exactly?

ZOE (via com)
You just tip the ship's nose down, honey. I'll handle the rest.

WASH
You mean a 'lazy scarecrow'?

MAL (via com)
Don't much care what you call it, just do it!

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – SAME TIME

SAND fills the cargo bay. Zoe stands on the upper catwalk, a CONTROL PANEL in one hand, holding tightly onto the wall with the other, as Serenity weaves and shakes.

WASH (via com)
Gotcha, Mal. Okay... Now, mutton-buns!

Zoe presses a button, and the airlock doors open.

Serenity PITCHES almost vertically into the atmosphere, nose straight down, engines inverting to drive her backwards into the sky.

Zoe holds on confidently as the sand falls out of the open doors.

EXT. VERBENA – EASTERN SIENE – WATERFRONT – SAME TIME

The sand falls from an ascending Serenity. The patrol boat dumps more sand. Between the two of them, they suffocate the fire.

MAL (into com)
(smiling)
Zuo de hao<Good job>! Fire – zero, 'mei yong' civvies -
One. May just save this town from a singeing after all. Fill
her up for round two.

Roland looks at Mal, impressed.

INT. FREEDOM GENERAL HOSPITAL – E.R. – SAME TIME

Simon stands over a MAN with a massive head LACERATION, holding two small PADDLES.

SIMON
Clear!

Simon puts a paddle on either side of the man's head, and presses a BUTTON. The man's head rolls backwards. His PUPILS dilate.

ATTENDING
Neural rhythm flat. No response.

SIMON
Dammit! Alright – two milligrams propoxin push! Let's try
it again... Twenty joules. Clear!

Simon jams the paddles up against the man's head once more, and pushes the button.

ATTENDING
Delta wave! We got him back!

SIMON
Continue with the stims. We're still deep in the woods
with this one.

NURSE (OS)
Doctor! Come quick!

SIMON
Am I the only doctor here!?

ATTENDING
(points)
No, there's that new lady doctor over there.

Simon turns and looks across the length of the E.R, to see: River – attaching pulmonary stimulators to a patient’s chest. River smiles and waves at a surprised Simon, who jumps and heads off in her direction.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Mal, Zoe and Roland stare out the front window at a mammoth fire consuming five houses at once.

ZOE
Too big to smother.

ROLAND
So what? Your ‘grand plan’ only works for small fires!?
Bloody civilian incomp—

MAL
We create a barrier with the sand. Let it burn itself out.
(points)
There, and there.

ROLAND
No – it has to be behind the fire. South. That’s the
direction of spread.

MAL
One thing you learn on a coastal campaign, son – winds
shift at night. You block the south now, save a few
houses, and give that fire an all-you-can-eat invitation to
your city centre. No – we go north. Wash—

ROLAND
No, Sergeant. I must insist. Those houses belong to
important state officials. You will release on the south. No
debate.

MAL
I wasn’t aware of the Alliance hierarchy on property
versus life.
(lunges forward)
“Sir.”

Zoe takes Mal’s shoulder, holding him back.

MAL (cont’d)
(staring Roland down)
Wash – take us down. Now.

ROLAND
(getting close to Mal)
This ship is currently not your property, sergeant. Put me on the ground and I will make certain that becomes a permanent arrangement.

MAL
Ain't you that's getting off.

Serenity settles on a street with a jolt.

MAL (cont'd)
Alliance commandeered my ship, but not my mule.

ZOE
Sir?

MAL
(without taking eyes off Roland)
Zoe, you stay here. Help out your husband and our esteemed house-savin' commander. Do what needs to be done for Serenity... Whatever needs to be done.

Roland meets his gaze for a beat. Then Mal turns, whips his coat on, and heads for the door.

MAL (cont'd)
Me, I'll be saving lives.

EXT. SERENITY – MOMENTS LATER

The mule darts out through the airlock with Mal driving. Serenity takes off.

EXT. VERBENA – CITY CENTRE – STREET – LATER

Kaylee walks through the smoke and dust, her eyes searching the rubble. The wind blows her hair. She hugs herself, watching panicked people run about, staying out of their way. Some look like looters, stolen goods in hand.

KAYLEE
Hiroku!

Her voice ECHOES. She listens, and starts as a SINGLE GUNSHOT rings out. Her eyes widen, and she hides behind a large chunk of concrete, watching the street.

KAYLEE (cont'd)
(whispering)
Where are you, Fishpaste?

INT. FREEDOM GENERAL HOSPITAL – E.R. – SAME TIME

A fresh gurney is wheeled in Simon's direction. He stands to meet the new patient, and his face drops.

SIMON
Oh no...

The patient is Hiroku.

ORDERLY
Don't trouble yourself with this one, doc. He's too far gone.

The orderly doesn't slow, as he wheels an unconscious Hiroku past Simon... to the black area.



Act Three

EXT. VERBENA – CITY CENTRE – MOMENTS LATER

Kaylee walks the street. The sound of ENGINES REVVING comes from behind. She turns around, and watches as the hovermule emerges through the smoke and dust. Mal stops it next to her, but she keeps walking. Mal drives the mule forward slowly to keep up with her.

MAL
Care for a lift?

KAYLEE
Come to take me back to Serenity, Cap'n?

MAL
Just get in, Kaylee. Please.

KAYLEE
Give me one good reason.

MAL
It's a long drive and I'd get all lonely.

They come around a bend where small fires struggle in the debris alongside the road. Kaylee hesitates, and Mal idles the mule.

KAYLEE
(muttering)
Never bothered you before, being all alone.

MAL
Well, that and four eyes'd be better'n two when looking for one little boy in a big grey world.

Mal holds a hand out to her, offering assistance in getting on the mule. Kaylee eyes him suspiciously for a beat, arms crossed.

Then she sighs and takes his hand.

INT. FREEDOM GENERAL HOSPITAL – E.R. – SAME TIME

Simon sits in the black area, hunched over a gurney, surrounded by the dead. He wipes his sweating forehead; his clothes drenched in blood.

He shoots an eye over to the other side of the large room – where River is now suturing a young woman's forehead laceration. It's Trystan.

Shaking his head, Simon ties a tight knot around an exposed squirting ARTERY in the leg of an unconscious Hiroku, stopping the bleeding. He ungloves, and motions for an orderly's attention.

SIMON
This boy's going to need a vascular shunt to save his leg. Take him to the O.R.

ORDERLY
All the O.R.'s are full, doctor.

Simon runs his hand over the head of the sleeping child, then begins to walk off.

SIMON
(assertive; to orderly)
You were going to let him lie here and die. Told me he was too far gone.
(staring him down)
So you MAKE A PLAN.



Simon looks around - the chaos has calmed down now, particularly in the red and yellow sections of the E.R. No new critical patients are being wheeled in. He moves briskly in River's direction, in the green section.

ACROSS THE ROOM IN THE GREEN SECTION, River HUMS while suturing Trystan.

RIVER
Does it hurt?

TRYSTAN
(giggling)
When you skewer me with that needle? Yeah, it does.

Simon arrives, and stands close next to River.

TRYSTAN (cont'd)
But you know, a girl's gotta be brave - 'assume a virtue, if you have it not.'

RIVER
That's not what I meant. And you know it.

SIMON
Uh, are you okay here, 'doctor'?

Simon examines River's sutures closely.

RIVER
(winking)
Fine, thank you, 'doctor'.

SIMON
Suturing seems sound. Not bad work.
(to Trystan)
That quote - that's so familiar...

RIVER
You never did do your homework, Simon. My turn.
'He's mad that trusts in the tameness of a wolf.'

TRYSTAN
Very good! Yes, that was Shakespeare, from Earth-that-Was. I am a— I used to be an Earth-that-Was literature grad student, back on Osiris. Name's Camomile. But everyone just calls me Cammy.

Simon looks around the E.R. Quiet. No new patients. Jayne stands in the yellow area, chatting up a nurse.

SIMON

Osiris? Me too! Capital City, southern suburbs.

TRYSTAN

Wow. A Southie! You guys <sucked carrots> at watersports, you know.

SIMON

Whoa - careful with that wound edge, 'doctor'. Keep the symmetry. Wouldn't want to distort a... nice face like this.

RIVER

We wouldn't want that.

TRYSTAN

(touching her wound)

This isn't going to leave a scar, is it?

SIMON

I doubt it. The dermal bonder makes a good seal. So, where on Osiris does a nice face like yours from come from, Miss High-and-Mighty? Kulin?

TRYSTAN

New Ceylon. Tried and true. Small 'Verse, huh?

RIVER

Not small enough today... Today, tomorrow, or Tuesday.

River takes a needle and injects a colorless solution into Trystan's sutured wound. Trystan passes out immediately - completely unconscious.

SIMON

River!? What the— You doped her!?

RIVER

It's for the best.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

ROLAND

(staring out the window)

That wall of sand will contain the fire?

ZOE

Should do, sir.

The screen on Wash's console flashes with 'Incoming Wave'. He punches a button, and an ALLIANCE SOLDIER appears.

WASH
(to Roland)
It's for you.

ROLAND
(moving towards the console)
Yes, Lieutenant?

LIEUTENANT (OS, via Wave)
Sir, the ETA on the reinforcements is still fifteen min—
Sir! Spotters report another volley of meteorites are
incoming!

Roland and Zoe are thrown across the bridge as Wash begins evasive manoeuvres.

INT. FREEDOM GENERAL HOSPITAL – E.R. – SAME TIME

Simon, leading River by her forearm, steers her toward Jayne, who rolls his eyes on seeing River come his way.

SIMON
Watch her.

BACK AT TRYSTAN'S BEDSIDE, Simon returns and draws a syringe with another clear fluid, and injects her.

TRYSTAN
(waking)
Wha— what happened?

SIMON
You passed out for a minute. Must have been the pain.

Simon starts to wrap her head in a bandage. Trystan's eyes roll back as she begins to pass out again. Simon taps her cheek.

SIMON (cont'd)
Stay with me here, Cammy. Tell me a story. Tell me how
come you're all the way out here on the border?

TRYSTAN
Life... got in the way, so to speak. The irony of it all.
(staring into the distance)
We wait for life to begin only to push the brakes the rest
of our fleeting shadows.

Through the windows, the SKY suddenly lights up around them, and a massive JOLT rocks the building. CEILING TILES fall and smash to the floor. Everyone looks up at the roof. A beat. No more.

SIMON

I can relate... I mean, me, my life. I also had a, a—

The roof caves in as half the building collapses under its own weight, suddenly burying Simon, Trystan, and half the people on the red side of the E.R.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Zoe and Roland right themselves as Wash continues to fly.

LIEUTENANT (via Wave)

Freedom General, sir... It's been hit.

ROLAND

<Good God>!

(beat)

Pilot – take me—

WASH

Gotcha. Hold on.

Roland is tossed into Zoe as Serenity arches violently sideways in a sharp turn.

WASH

(looking over his shoulder)

Or not.

INT. FREEDOM GENERAL HOSPITAL – E.R. – SAME TIME

Chaos.

Dust and debris fill the red side of the room. There is a large gaping hole in the roof and north wall.

Jayne and River frantically lift pieces of bent metal and concrete, trying to find Simon.

Trystan lies in the corner, her leg trapped under a metallic BEAM. Her sweater is torn to shreds – uncovering a BLACK JUMPSUIT beneath.

An ELECTRICAL CABLE sparks with live current close to her head.

River closes her eyes.

The intense noise suddenly dies down as she cocks her head left, then right, then moves forward and to her left. She opens her eyes, and pushes a random PIECE OF CONCRETE over, to reveal—

Simon coughing and gasping for air.

RIVER

I listened.

Jayne moves towards Trystan, and with all his strength, struggles against the heavy beam to free her leg. It hardly budes.

JAYNE

Talk about the worst luck – gettin' dead in a hospital!

TRYSTAN

The worst is not, so long as we can say, "This is the worst."

JAYNE

(struggling with the beam)

Huh? You talk funny. Good thing you're *swai*-lookin'.

With that, the beam lifts barely an inch – but enough for Trystan to pull her leg free, just as the electrical cable swings down where she was lying.

TRYSTAN

(standing up, dusting herself off)

I thank you. So much.

JAYNE

(grinning)

Well, as my daddy used to say, 'Jayne, always save the pretty girl first.' S'plain good manners.

River has uncovered a bleeding Simon, who is holding his head in pain. Trystan, using Jayne as a crutch, limps forward to join River and Simon.

TRYSTAN

Is everybody alright? I was all the devil worried!

River moves protectively in front of Simon.

SIMON

I... think so. Nothing broken as far as I can feel. But...

He looks around at the E.R. staff fighting to free all the poor buried souls.

SIMON (cont'd)
We've got to—
(winces as he tries to stand up)
Got to help them.

The walls visibly sway as the building creaks.

RIVER
(looking at Trystan)
No, Simon. You're hurt.

The roof creaks as more ceiling tiles crash down.

JAYNE
(looking up)
Think we're the ones like to be in need of help, anyhow.

SIMON
(stands up, and moves off)
I have a duty to—

As he steps forward, the GROUND where he stood GIVES WAY in a crash.

Trystan and Jayne struggle to balance as the floor disappears beneath them.

River jumps backwards acrobatically, grabbing onto an IV STAND.

Jayne and Trystan fall, and claw the ground as they slide into the growing hole in the floor.

EXT. VERBENA – SIENNE - CITY ROAD – SAME TIME

As the mule speeds down the street, Kaylee stares out at the bleak scene – empty of all life.

No sign of Hiroku.

Kaylee occasionally glances towards Mal, who is all business - until he glances over and spots a small TEAR stream down her cheek. He softens.

MAL
We'll find him. I'm sure he's okay... I'm sure.
(beat)
But this ain't no life for him. He should be someplace else. Haven, maybe. Could be happy there. Safe.

Beat as Kaylee wipes her eyes, but does not respond.

MAL (cont'd)

You know the water we's like to wade. You know well as I do Serenity ain't the place for him.

KAYLEE

Then maybe it ain't the place for me either, Cap'n. You're gonna end up all on your own, you know. Carry on the way you are, and you got no one come day's end.

Mal brings the mule to a complete stop on the side of the road, and sits in silence for a few beats, looking down at his shoes.

MAL

Sometimes I... lose my way a spell.

KAYLEE

I know how rough things've been without... Well, I know. But even still—

MAL

I'm sorry, Kaylee.

(beat)

Don't go.

Kaylee takes a breath, then takes Mal's hand tightly in hers.

KAYLEE

Ain't planning on it.

(beat)

You're stuck with me t'the end, Cap'n.

Mal holds her hand for a few beats, then looks forward and let's go.

MAL

We still gotta let him go, you know. For him.

KAYLEE

Gotta find him first.

MAL

(certain)

We will.

He guns the engine.

INT. FREEDOM GENERAL HOSPITAL – E.R. – SAME TIME

Jayne holds onto a firm PLUMBING PIPE between two floors of the hospital, Trystan hanging onto his leg. Jayne looks down into the darkness below.

SIMON
(looking down at Jayne)
You okay down there?

JAYNE
Git me out! Doc, git me out `n I swear I'll never eat your share of the meals again!

SIMON
We're looking for some rope but— hey, you ate my food!?

TRYSTAN
Maybe now is not the best time to—

RIVER
(speaking into the chasm)
Or spit in it.

SIMON
You spat in my food!?

Despite the desperate situation, Jayne manages a smile.

JAYNE
Well, just the once.

Another section of the roof caves in suddenly. A beam catches River across her head, knocking her into the hole. She connects hard with Jayne, and all three fall to the floor below.

SIMON
River!

EXT. VERBENA – SIENNE - CITY CENTRE – MINUTES LATER

The city centre is deserted as the mule zooms by.

MAL
He's not here, Kaylee. Maybe he was picked up, taken to—

KAYLEE
Keep going.

MAL
Kaylee—

KAYLEE
Keep going!

A massive noise fills the sky, and they both look up to see four ALLIANCE SUPERCRUISERS moving into the lower atmosphere, and dozens of FIGHTERS on escort.

Mal's COM UNIT beeps. He absently answers it, staring up at the supercruisers.

WASH (via com)
Mal! We're at the hospital. You better head over here. You won't believe what I'm seeing!

MAL (into com)
(looking up)
...I might.

WASH
The hospital, Mal. It's been hit.

KAYLEE
Oh, no. Simon... River...

Mal looks at Kaylee a beat. She nods.

He guns the engine, whipping the mule around.

EXT. SERENITY – MOMENTS LATER

Wash, Zoe, and Roland walk down the ramp, pausing to stare at the injured crew (Simon, carrying an unconscious River, Jayne, hobbling with a badly bleeding arm and leg, and Trystan, carrying an unconscious Hiroku) stumble toward them.

WASH
Ma de tian tang <Horse's Heaven>! Is anyone not bleeding!?

ROLAND
(to Zoe)
Your vessel, ma'am. The Alliance thanks you for its use. As you can see, our reinforcements have arrived. We have no more need for this Firefly.

ZOE

Thank you. Was honestly expecting to have to steal her back.

With that, Roland smiles awkwardly, turns, and heads out to the waiting platform of a patrol boat, brushing past the injured.

JAYNE

Friendly guy.

WASH

Least he let us refill our water tanks free of charge.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO HOLD – CONTINUOUS

The battered group enters the cargo hold, the floor of which is still covered in a layer of sand, drifting in some places to more than a foot deep. Zoe helps Simon with River, and Wash assists the hobbling Jayne.

JAYNE

We was buried, n'then I fell into this hole with this here weird-mouth looker, but they roped us out and we barely got clear—

(beat, looks around)

Looks like a beach in here.

WASH

Goes with the fish smell. It's a motif.

ACROSS THE CARGO BAY, Zoe and Simon start to lay down River, Simon checking her vitals.

ZOE

There anything else we can do here, Doctor?

SIMON

It's... I wish there were, but with the hospital damaged, I think it's best we leave as soon as the captain is back.

ZOE

Who's our new friend?

BACK AT THE OPEN AIRLOCK, Trystan is still holding Hiroku.

TRYSTAN

(to Jayne and Wash)

Do you think you can help me with him?

As the two men start to move forward, Trystan THROWS the unconscious Hiroku at them. They both struggle to catch him.

Trystan dives to the side acrobatically, whipping out a SONIC PISTOL, firing it in Zoe and Simon's direction.

Act Four

INT. SERENITY – CARGO HOLD – CONTINUOUS

Trystan has the sonic pistol pointed at Jayne and Wash (who has caught Hiroku). Zoe and Simon are unconscious on the floor.

TRYSTAN

Track them in their own comfort, and they waltz into your web... Now, where is your captain?

WASH

Zoe...

TRYSTAN

Don't worry, she is alive. As will all of you be, should you be compliant.

JAYNE

(eyes wide)

How— who— But I saved you!

TRYSTAN

And if you play your tiles right, I may return the favour. I've no intention to inflict myself unwantedly.

She pulls the trigger suddenly, hitting Jayne with the sonic pistol. He drops like a sack of rocks.

TRYSTAN

Well, perhaps a little unwantedly.

Trystan pulls five sets of thin BLACK METALLIC HANDCUFFS from across her belt and tosses them to Wash.

TRYSTAN (cont'd)

Cuff your friends.

WASH

How about 'no'.

With her free hand, Trystan pulls out a PISTOL, small and dangerous-looking. She aims it toward Zoe.

Beat, then Wash moves toward River, bends down, and starts to cuff her to the wall-grating of the cargo bay.

TRYSTAN (cont'd)

I shall take my quarry, and will be upon my merry. The rest of your crew I've no need to force a harm upon...

(pointed look)

Unless you decidedly furnish me with that need.

EXT. VERBENA – SIENNE CITY STREET – MOMENTS LATER

The mule approaches the hospital at breakneck speed. Mal spots Serenity parked on the roof.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – SAME TIME

Wash is gone, and Jayne, Simon, River, Zoe, and Hiroku, all handcuffed, are beginning to stir.

River looks at Simon.

RIVER

(quietly)

Told you it was for the best. You really never listen, Simon.

Trystan paces, visibly sweating and shaking again. She stops near the wall-mounted COM-UNIT.

WASH (via com)

Where are we going, oh mighty ship-jacker?

Trystan injects herself in the neck with another green syringe, spasms a moment, then collects herself.

TRYSTAN

Take me to your captain.

WASH (via com)

That's going to be pretty hard, seeing as how I don't know where he is.

Trystan walks closer to Zoe, who is just starting to rouse, and points the pistol at her. River watches with great interest.

TRYSTAN (toward the com)
I have a weapon pointed at your wife as we speak.

WASH
I can't go somewhere I don't—

RIVER
(yelling at Zoe)
Tell that husband of yours to do whatever she says! Tell him to stand on his raggedy head if that's what she needs!

Zoe, still bleary-eyed, looks at River. Something clicks.

ZOE (into com)
Wash, you do whatever she says. It's okay. I love you, scarecrow.

TRYSTAN
Wise words. Cute nickname. Touching.

EXT. VERBENA – SIENNE CITY STREET – SAME TIME

On the ground, Mal and Kaylee arrive at the hospital, only to see Serenity lift off into the sky, and zoom off.

MAL
What the—!?
(into com)
Wash? Wash!? Hello?

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Wash is at the controls, puzzled.

WASH
Scarecr—?
(light dawns)
OH!

He jerks the controls.

EXT. VERBENA – SIENNE CITY STREET – SAME TIME

Mal and Kaylee watch wide-eyed as Serenity suddenly jerks VERTICALLY in the sky, nose straight down, performing a 'lazy scarecrow'.

MAL
Kaylee, does Wash have a drinking problem I'm unaware of?

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – SAME TIME

Trystan suddenly finds the ground gone beneath her, falls, and hits the inner airlock doors with a thud – HARD – the syringes on her belt all shattering, green fluid spilling everywhere. Sand piles on top of her, burying her.

The crew is saved from gravity by their cuffed hands.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

ZOE (via com)
We're okay! She's down!

Wash sits in the chair, grinning ear to ear.

MAL (via com)
Wash!?

WASH
Here. I read you, Mal! Where are you?

MAL (via com)
Look down. Now will you quit the airshow and land my gorram ship, please!?

EXT. VERBENA – SIENNE CITY STREET – SAME TIME

Serenity swoops in for a landing.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – MOMENTS LATER

Mal and Kaylee have joined the others, who are now uncuffed. Kaylee hugs Hiroku tightly.

Simon examines Trystan, who is bleeding profusely from a chest wound. River joins her brother, bending over Trystan curiously.

ZOE
Doctor?

SIMON
(to Zoe)
She'll die.

RIVER
(softly to Trystan)
You'll live.

JAYNE
Uh... so?

TRYSTAN
(weakly)
'tis but the *cough* shadow of
a life you see... I am but
shadow of myself... *cough*...

TRYSTAN (cont'd)
(grabs River's hand)
...As are you.

RIVER
A shadow proves the sun shines.

Trystan's hand drops to the floor in a growing pool of blood as she falls unconscious. Simon puts his hand over a bubbling open hole in her chest. Everyone else looks on.

SIMON
I'm not... I can't leave anyone to die.

MAL
No. Of course not... Who is she, again?

INT. SERENITY – MEDICAL BAY – LATER

Trystan is cuffed to a gurney, her chest bandaged, looking pained and ill-at-ease. Simon, pulling off his bloody gloves, walks away from her toward Mal and Zoe, who are in the doorway.

MAL
She stable?

SIMON
One of her lungs was punctured. I had to—

MAL
Not what I asked. She stable?

SIMON
Yes. For the moment anyw—

Mal moves in, pushing Simon in out of the way. He stands over Trystan.

MAL
(angry)
You wanna tell me who's payin' you to snatch River?

TRYSTAN
(smiling weakly)
There is no vice so simple as an assumption.

Mal suddenly puts his hand on her bandaged chest and pushes down. She howls.

MAL (cont'd)
How 'bout now?

Zoe rushes forward and grabs Mal, pulling him back. They stare at each other.

ZOE
(softly)
You wonder why we're leaving, sir. This is why.

Mal glares at Zoe, then can't meet her eyes any longer. He walks out.

MAL (OS)
Get us in the air. We still got a job needs doing and I'll be damned if I leave this heap of a planet empty-handed.

EXT. VERBENA – ORCHARD – DAY – LATER

Serenity sits in an open field adjacent to a fruit orchard – rows and rows of berry bushes. Overhead, dozens of Alliance RELIEF VEHICLES move in all directions.

One heads straight for the orchard.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – SAME TIME

Mal and Jayne each carry a box into the middle of the bay.

JAYNE
That's fifteen pounds, at three thousand a pop. We are gonna be swimmin' in it Mal!

MAL
Least we got something outta all this. Maybe no good deed really does go un—

ROLAND (OS)
Sergeant Pitensky.

Mal spins around, to see Roland with FIVE SOLDIERS behind him.

Zoe and Kaylee watch from opposite sides of the upper catwalk.

Zoe's hand edges to her pistol.

ROLAND (cont'd)

I'm afraid I can't allow you to take those.

MAL

Was that a thank you? Zoe, did you hear a thanking for savin' all those lives and all?

ROLAND

Please. You didn't do much in the grand scheme of things. When history looks back on this disaster, not a one will remember the little Firefly that prolonged the odd insignificant life. You think you matter. But in truth, you don't.

Mal drops the box loudly, anticipating a fight.

ROLAND (cont'd)

(looking at the box)

All consumable provisions are to stay on-world to support the relief effort here on Verbena.

JAYNE

Wha... Are you kidding me?!

Roland signals two soldiers – who take the two large crates of berries.

Jayne whips his handgun out and takes aim at Roland. All the soldiers then reflexively take aim at Mal and Jayne.

A standoff.

Mal looks over at Jayne and rolls his eyes.

JAYNE

What? Five against two. Had worse odds before.

MAL

And the rest of the ruttin' fleet hanging up there in the sky?!

JAYNE

Oh. Them.

MAL

I do appreciate how you're a mite plumb weak north of the ears, so I'll be plain – you're either part of the solution... or you're a fat pain in the ass.

JAYNE

(turns to Mal)

You know, you are just the turd of misery lately. Did something just crawl 'n die up your—

Mal pulls the gun angrily from Jayne's hand.

ROLAND

Goodbye, sergeant.

Mal stands silent and seething as Roland and his men exit the cargo bay with his goods.

Then he lets out a frustrated scream, punching the wall.

Beat.

He begins kicking crates, slamming and throwing things, and cursing incoherently.

Jayne edges back, and Kaylee, on the upper starboard catwalk, looks down - a new tear in her eye.

Zoe, on the upper port catwalk, turns and walks away.

INT. SERENITY – MEDICAL BAY – SAME TIME

The bed lies empty – puddles of blood on the floor around it. Attached to the gurney hang the closed end of a black set of HANDCUFFS. The other end - open.

INT. SMALL SHIP – COCKPIT – SAME TIME

Trystan – bleeding, out of breath, and sweating profusely, falls back into the cockpit chair. With a severely trembling hand, she punches a number on the touchscreen before her: "CONNECTING...", then the face of a MIDDLE-AGED MAN appears.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN (via Wave)

Trystan? What is it? What's wrong?

TRYSTAN

(struggling with the words)

I need... more. I... ran out.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN (via Wave)
You had more than en—

TRYSTAN
It's gone. Please...

A beat. The middle-aged man doesn't react.

TRYSTAN (cont'd)
(lashing out at the screen)
The irony of it all! You did... this to me! This is... all your...

She recoils and cringes back into her chair. The middle-aged man sighs.

TRYSTAN (cont'd)
(whispering)
Please...

INT. SERENITY – COMMON AREA – LATER

Hiroku lies on the couch, left leg in a mess of bandages. River sits up next to him. They play a child's game, repetitively slapping each other's palms and laughing.

Kaylee stands up against the wall, watching sadly.

HIROKU
Okay, my turn!

Hiroku slaps River's palms three times in a complicated pattern.

Simon wanders in and stands next to Kaylee.

SIMON
How's he doing?

KAYLEE
(staring at Hiroku)
He's fine. Forgotten all about his leg already.

SIMON
And you?

KAYLEE
(looks at Simon)
I... don't know how you do it, Simon.
(looks at River)
How you have the strength, the resolve. I couldn't...

RIVER
(giggling)
Hey! You cheated!

HIROKU
(laughing)
Did not!

Simon holds Kaylee against him as they watch another round of slaps.

SCENE MONTAGE - MOURNFUL BACKGROUND MUSIC THROUGHOUT:

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE

Wash sits in his chair, hands on the wheel. He taps the wheel softly, then stands, picks up his T-Rex, and looks at it for a beat, then puts it in a box.

SIMON (VO)
Sometimes these things... they're for the best, you know?

A beat. He takes the T-Rex out the box, and puts it back in place, pats it on the head, and heads for the door.

INT. SERENITY – KAYLEE'S BUNK

Hiroku lies on Kaylee's bed, wiggling his toes. Kaylee holds his hand and reads him a story.

EXT. HAVEN – ESTABLISHING – DAY

Serenity lands in dusty open area, with SHEPHERD BOOK watching her touch down.

EXT. HAVEN – DAY

Serenity sits on the dusty ground, airlock doors open.

Mal and Kaylee stand at the entrance to the cargo bay.

Wash, Zoe, Hiroku and Book stand outside, next to a big pile of luggage.

Jayne slaps Wash on the back. He heads up the ramp and into the cargo bay.

Kaylee runs forward and hugs Hiroku very tight.

Book takes Hiroku's hand as Kaylee follows Jayne inside.

Mal, stonefaced, salutes Zoe.

Zoe returns the salute.

Mal turns and heads into the cargo bay.

The doors close, and Zoe continues to hold her salute.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE

Kaylee stands with her hand to the glass, watching Hiroku, Wash and Zoe get smaller as Serenity lifts off.

INT. SERENITY – WASH & ZOE'S BUNK

The bunk is stripped empty, save for the bed, and Zoe's MARE'S LEG RIFLE, on it. Mal picks the gun up, studies it a moment, then falls backwards onto the bed, staring up at the ceiling.

BLACKOUT

