

TWENTY-FOUR MINUTES
FROM HERE TO THERE

BY

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Characters

- A Female: 40-70. Talkative, eager to be liked, not too bright, naive.
B Male: 30-50. Busy with his work; doesn't want to talk.
C M: 20's-30's. Nerdy, smart, on the border between endearing and annoying.
D M/F: Late teens. Easy going, normal, interested.
E M: 40-70. Affable, talkative; pokes fun at everything.
F M: 30-60. Mildly discontented.
FLIGHT ATTENDANT M/F, 25-40. Can double as Voiceover.

Setting

A jet airplane on a 24-minute flight from Tucson to Phoenix.

Time

The Present

TWENTY-FOUR MINUTES FROM HERE TO THERE

Scene: Six passengers sit in a cabin row on an airplane, with a gap separating two groups of three. Curtain directly in back of them, with slit in center. They could be the last row in the cabin before the kitchen/restroom.

At Rise: Seating is as follows: A at SL window; B in middle; C at aisle. Across aisle: D at aisle, E in middle, F at SR window.

VOICEOVER

Ladies and gentlemen, at this time the use of your portable electronic devices is now permitted. If you will be listening to an audio device, please make use of your headsets so as not to disturb your fellow passengers. The use of cellular telephones is not permitted at any time during our air travel. Due to the short duration of the flight there will be no beverage service, so please sit back, relax, and enjoy your 24-minute flight to Phoenix.

During voiceover:

A: Reads the laminated “emergency directions”;

B: Studies paperwork;

C: Carefully arranges newspaper, etcetera, to his liking. Takes out little lotion bottle from ziplock bag; rubs into face and hands. Starts blowing up inflatable neck pillow. This may last well past the announcement; fine.

D: Takes out ipod; starts listening.

E: Just sits there, looking out window now and then. Has newspaper or crossword puzzle on his lap.

F: Pops two gigantic pills, peers out window, gradually closes eyes.

20 seconds elapse, as people continue adjusting themselves.

A

(Reading aloud from “emergency directions”)

“If you are unable to read these instructions, please notify a flight attendant immediately.”

(Laughs. Looks at B. B doesn’t react. To B)

Did you read this?

B

Mmmh .. what?

A

The emergency exit directions. “If you are unable to read these instructions, please notify a flight attendant immediately.” *(Laughs. Pause.)*

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B

Ah ..

E (To F)

Whatdja pop there?

F

What did I pop?

E

Those pills.

F

Oh. Tylenol PM.

E

Jeeze, for 24 minutes?

F

Oh, it's fine if it lasts longer than that. My wife's picking me up from the airport. We're going to her college reunion.

E (Laughs)

Gotcha. Say no more.

(F closes eyes. E realizes F is done talking, so tunes into conversation going on across aisle.)

A

(Continues to B after B's last line. After E and F start talking, the two conversations should be timed so that, although they overlap, the audience can understand each.)

Don't you get it? How are you supposed to know that you're supposed to notify a flight attendant if you can't read what it says?

B

(Cordial but clearly wants to minimize length of this conversation)

Ah, yes, I guess that is a funny oversight, isn't it.

A

Really! You'd think they'd have enough staff at a giant corporation like this, to proofread their publications.

(B nods, goes back to his work.)

So are you from Phoenix?

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B

No.

A

Tucson?

B

No. (*Pause.*) Boston.

A

Oh, Boston. I *love* Boston.

B

It's a great town.

A

I have cousins there I visit now and then. Oh, it's a marvelous city. Last time we went we ate lunch at that restaurant on top of the world. Do you know the one I mean?

B

I'm not sure.

A

Oh, well, it's not *really* on top of the world, you know, that's just an *expression*. It's just a very tall building. It was called something from outer space. The Spaceship. No. (*Thinks.*) Space .. capsule .. needle! The Space Needle. What a divine view, you could see the layout of the entire city.

B

I'm glad you had a good time.

A

Oh, absolutely, absolutely, we're planning another trip in early autumn when the rain isn't so intense –

VOICEOVER

Ladies and gentlemen, the captain has informed us that we have reached our cruising altitude and the fasten seatbelts sign has been turned off. If you need to use the lavatory, you may do so at this time. If you do leave your seat, please bring your safety belt with you, in the event of unexpected turbulence during your walk down the aisle. For your convenience your safety belt snaps off on both sides of your seat cushion. Once in the lavatory you may continue to use your seat's safety belt, or you may switch to the toilet safety belt, which conveniently pulls out from the wall underneath the sink. (*Pause.*) In just a few moments we will be offering you, for your enjoyment, five full minutes free from flight deck announcements, airline merchandise propaganda, and useless emergency instructions. We are pleased to offer you this opportunity, and hope you use it to your

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VOICEOVER (cont'd)

full advantage: whether it be for light reading or pointlessly obsessing over how uncomfortable you are in your non-reclining emergency exit row seat.

(Pause for ~ 10 seconds.)

D *(To anyone)*

Do they usually talk that way?

C

Well, that's always what they mean, but they're not usually so honest about it.

E *(To A)*

I think that must have been Seattle where you ate lunch.

A

I'm sorry?

E

The Space Needle. It's in Seattle.

A

Yes.

E

You were talking about Boston.

A

(Embarrassed, flustered)

No, I was telling him about my trip to Seattle. He lives there, so I thought it was a funny coincidence.

E

He said he lives in Boston.

A *(To B)*

It was Seattle, wasn't it?

B

Boston.

A

I thought you said Seattle.

B

No, I said Boston.

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A

Well, isn't that funny. Hm. I wonder how I could have made that mistake. Well. *(To E)*
Are you from Seattle, then?

E

No, Denver.

A

Oh. Denver. *(Pause)* I've never been to Denver. I'm Holly.

E

Good to meet you. Koony Mogman.

D

Really?

E

No, actually. No. I just made that up.
(Pause)

C

Why would you do that?

E

Well, in a situation like this, you aren't accountable. Any of us could be anybody. Don't you think that's interesting?

C

So you deliberately lied?

E

Oh, no offense intended. It's just – whatever I tell you, doesn't make a bit of difference. You know? *(Pause; no responses.)* I mean, here we all are, randomly smushed up against each other for 24 minutes, we can completely ignore each other's existence or we can talk like we're best friends. And then at the end either we're all the last human beings any of us ever sees, or we arrive safely and probably none of us will see any of the others of us ever again. Isn't that weird?

(Pause)

C

Wh .. why would we be the last people any of us ever sees?

(By now C has gotten out two things: a spill-proof beverage container, a sharp knife, a slice of bread, and a small tub of cream cheese. B has begun eating sushi with chopsticks.)

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E

Oh, c'mon, I'm just kidding, kid. I mean, of course, it's *possible* that the plane would crash, and that'd be it. But really, we'll all get off –

D

Do you really have to talk about that on a plane?

(Enter FLIGHT ATTENDANT through curtain slit. Surveys passengers.)

C

Yes, I find it rather inappropriate.

E

Sorry, hey, I didn't mean to upset you. I didn't even really mean to bring up planes crashing, I was only kinda pointing out how our meeting is intense and transient at the same time.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT *(To C)*

Sir, I'm afraid I will have to ask you to give me your re-sealable container.

C

My cup?

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Your re-sealable container, Sir.

C

My cup?

A

Yes, I think she means your cup.

C

Why?

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

We remove items that the airline deems a potential safety threat to yourself and/or others, Sir.

C

But .. it's a cup.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Call it what you wish, Sir, but as far as this airline is concerned it is a re-sealable container. And as neither I nor anyone else aboard this flight has any prior experience

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FLIGHT ATTENDANT (cont'd)

handling it or the contents thereof, we cannot merely take your word on its intended use. I'm afraid I will have to take it.

C

Can't I just finish my juice? It's orange juice. Here, you can even try it –
(*Motions it toward FLIGHT ATTENDANT's mouth.*)

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

(*Backs away, slightly alarmed*)

No, thank you, Sir, that won't be necessary.

C

Well might you bring me some water?

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

I'm afraid not, Sir. If I were to bring you water then I would then naturally have to bring everyone on the plane water, and we do not have a beverage service scheduled on flights of this duration.

A

Oh, you wouldn't have to bring me water, Miss, I'm quite all right.

C

See? Not everyone needs water.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

I'm sorry, Sir, but again I must ask for your cup.

(*Pause. C takes one huge gulp from his cup and reluctantly hands it to her. FLIGHT ATTENDANT takes cup, leaving him with sharp knife.*)

E (*To C, quietly*)

You know, Kid, you can always go into the bathroom and take a few handfuls from the faucet.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

(*To B, regarding chopsticks*)

And Sir, I'm afraid I will have to remove those objects while you are on board the aircraft.

B (*Mouth full*)

But they're just – ... Why?

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

I do apologize Sir, but sharp wooden objects are a violation of airline regulations.

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FLIGHT ATTENDANT (cont'd)

(B, unmiffed, hands them to her, and starts rummaging in bag.)

Thank you, Sir.

(Quickly surveys other passengers; Exit. B removes plastic spork from bag and continues eating, clumsily.)

C

Oh, here, you don't have to do that.

(Removes a metal fork wrapped in saran wrap from his bag.)

Here, I haven't used it; it's clean.

B

Oh. Well, thank you. *(Uses fork.)*

VOICEOVER

Ladies and gentlemen, the captain has illuminated the Fasten Seatbelts Sign, indicating his unease that you are growing too comfortable with your surroundings. To guard against the unlikely event of a mutiny, we ask that if you are up and about the cabin to please return to your seats and fasten your seatbelts securely around you.

E

I don't think that was our full five minutes of silence.

A

(Looking at her watch.)

Oh, it was. It was fifteen.

D

Dude, there's no way that was fifteen minutes.

(As dialogue continues, A inspects her watch, realizes that it's upside-down, and takes it off and puts it on the right way, hoping no one notices.)

Sorry about your drink, Man.

C

It's absurd, isn't it? I brought it intentionally, knowing that we would not have the beverage service. Actually, I usually bring it on flights regardless of beverage service, because they give you so much ice. You barely get anything to drink.

D

I don't know ... you get a whole can of soda for free.

C

Oh, but you don't. Consider the price you pay for the ice in it. Consider this. A can of soda is twelve ounces, yes? Now, one of their little plastic cups is more like five ounces. So right off the bat you lose 7/12ths of what you *think* you are getting for free. Then they

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C (cont'd)

fill the cup with ice before adding any soda. Can you estimate what fraction of the volume of the cup the ice takes up?

D

Um ..

C

Somewhere between 70 and 90 percent.

(Pauses for emphasis.)

So let's say 80.

(Now he's really warming up.)

Now. As we just said, 5/12ths is the fraction of an eight-ounce soda can you would get with *no* ice. That's

(quick pause as he calculates)

41.7%, so let's say 42. Then you add ice – and you've lost 80% of that 42%, so you're left with just 20% of 42%, which is just about *(thinks)* 8%. 8% of the original twelve ounces. That's just barely *one ounce*. You are getting *one* fluid ounce of liquid in that glass.

(Pause. These last two lines were delivered with such dramatic implication that no one is quite sure how to react to their unimportance, without offending his obvious earnest fascination.)

D

Um. Wow. I .. I never thought about it like that before.

C

Well, you need to pay attention to what you're paying for.

D

Well we're not really paying for it.

E

So how'd you work all the algebra out there?

(B has begun taking an interest in what C is saying.)

C

Oh, well most of it's rather straightforward – you can look up standard cup and can sizes. The only figure that required empirical evidence was the fractional volume of ice. I've worked it out six times on three different flights. The first flight was six hours, and they had two beverage services and I ordered two drinks each time. And then I did it once more each on two other flights. So I have six data points to draw from. Not statistically significant, maybe, and not equally weighted since the first four were all delivered by the same flight attendant. But at least it gave me a rough estimate.

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E

So you sat there measuring the volume of the ice in your glass?

C

(Pause. Defensive.)

I was also reading Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*.

E

But how'd you do the measurement?

C

I asked for only ice in my cup, and I let it melt. Then I poured it into my graduated cylinder. I compared that to the full amount of water you could pour into one of those cups. And all six measurements were between 70 and 90% of the maximum.

A

You carry a graduated cylinder with you?

C

For my medications.

B

Did you take into account the fractional decrease in water volume as it contracts from solid to liquid state?

C

No. I assumed that was negligible.

B *(Considers)*

You may be right. *(Back to his work.)*

D

I kinda like my soda watered down. It weakens the carbonation. You get free water that way. Did you think about that?

E

But you get free water anywhere.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

(Enter. To E)

Sir, several of your fellow passengers have voiced discontent regarding your mention of a plane crash. I'll have to ask you to please cease to discuss potentially inflammatory topics of conversation aboard the aircraft while we are in flight. *(Pause.)*

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E

Really?

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Yes, Sir.

E

Who was complaining?

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

I am not at liberty to disclose that, Sir. Some fellow passengers happened to overhear and voiced concern.

E

Might I suggest that if they don't like my conversation that they stop eavesdropping in on it?

B

(Moves to stand up. To C)

Excuse me for a moment, please.

(C stands to make way for him.)

A

Oh! But the fasten-seatbelts sign is still on.

B

Be right back. *(Exit.)*

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

(Does not notice B leaving. Continues line directly after E's last line. Again – these two interchanges should overlap but not damp each other out.)

Well, this is a confined space, Sir, and voices do carry, and often it is difficult to tune out people around you in such an enclosed area.

E

I appreciate your concern for your customers, Miss. But I don't get how it's fair of you to just take their word for it that I was talking about planes crashing –

(she tries to shush him)

Oh, sorry -

(whispering:)

planes crashing -

(normal voice again)

without even asking me for my side of the story.

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FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Excuse me, Sir. *Were you talking about (whispering) planes crashing?*
(Pause)

E

Yes. In passing.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

In that case, Sir, I'll have to ask you to please cease to discuss potentially inflammatory topics of conversation aboard the aircraft while we are in flight.
(Pause)

E

Okay.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Thank you, Sir, and enjoy the remainder of your flight to Phoenix. (Exit)
(Pause)

E

(Hushed, to everyone)

Do you think she talks like that all the time? I thought it was just the thing she put on over the intercom. But .. do you think she just goes around talking like that?

A

What was she talking like?

E

"I'm going to ask you to cease to discuss potentially inflammatory topics of conversation?"
You didn't hear that? Can't she just tell me to shut up?

A

I think she is a considerate girl and presents herself in a very professional manner.

E

I think she sounds like a friggin' alien.

C

Shh .. Are - are you allowed to talk about (*whispers*) *aliens* on a flight?

E

Why shouldn't you be able to talk about aliens?
(*C glances around, paranoid.*)

E

Man, loosen up, kid. What are you paranoid about?

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I – I don't know. C

Someone as antsy as you shouldn't fly at all, ever. What are you doing here? E

I'm starting a job. (Lightening up) C

Where? In Phoenix? E

No, San Diego. C

Oh, I *love* San Diego! A

I got a job there. C (To E)

Congratulations! E

Thanks. I'm actually quite excited about it. It's a research position at Scripps Oceanographic Institute. That's what I studied in college. Well, I got my degree in biology. I got a bit off track for a few years – I've been a systems analyst for a tech company. It paid well, but this is what I really want to do. C

Oh that's marvelous, congratulations. A

Thanks. C

Where are you from originally? A

Vermont. C

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A

(Seaching for a memorable association)

Vermont ...

E *(Chuckling)*

You're flying in a completely new direction, my friend.

A

Be careful of sharks, though.

(Pause. Realizes no one understands. Elaborating)

I mean, if you like to go snorkeling or anything like that. I hear you need to watch out for the sharks. I guess they'll just come right on up to you when you least expect it.

VOICEOVER

Ladies and Gentlemen, the captain has notified us of our initial descent into the Phoenix-Sky Harbor area. If you blatantly ignored the previous announcement asking you to return to your seats and securely fasten your safety belts, please do so at this time. Thank you, and enjoy the remainder of your flight to Phoenix.

(Pause)

E

Why is it you think some people are so afraid of flying?

A

That's funny, isn't it? They say that more people die in car accidents than on planes.

C

(Looking around for FLIGHT ATTENDANT)

Careful, you're going to bring her back.

D *(To A)*

Who says?

A

Uh, well –

(Enter B, who sits back down through E's following lines; C stands up again for him.)

E

I think it's the lack of control. With a car, you know where you're going, how you're getting there. If it starts snowing hard, or there's an asshole right behind you, you can pull over. But in here – you're completely at the mercy of strangers. There's nothing we can do. If we complain, we get cited as a terror suspect.

C

Be careful, will you!

VOICEOVER

Ladies and gentlemen, the captain has informed us that the Phoenix-Sky Harbor Airport seems to no longer be in the Phoenix-Sky Harbor area. We will consequently be diverting our flight to Tempe in hopes that the airport has not migrated terribly far from its expected location. Our originally scheduled landing of 5:45pm local time will be delayed. We apologize in advance for any inconveniences this may cause you. For now, please sit back, relax, and enjoy the remainder of your flight to Tempe.

(Passengers exude confusion, mild concern, and annoyance.)

E

They apologize “in advance”? That was in advance?

D

Dude, how can an airport just not be there?

A

Indeed. This sounds made-up. I’ll bet it’s one of those mix-ups. Have you heard about this? They mess up the itinerary and they’re embarrassed to tell us, so they blame it on the airport. Things like that can hurt business for years.

E

But do we ever really find out where we’re going, anyway? I’ve connected through Phoenix ten times and never left the airport. How do we know we’re landing in Phoenix? We could be miles out over Mexico right now, for all we know.

C

Would you please not talk like that?

E

How do we know there even *is* a Phoenix? Maybe it’s just an airport in the middle of nowhere.

D

Phoenix is on the map.

E *(Mocking)*

Oooh, it’s on the map. So there’s a black dot on a piece of paper and I’m supposed to believe that it’s a tangible place?

F

(Groggy from his pills)

I’ve been to Phoenix once. It’s there.

E

And so I should take your word for it? You? A perfect stranger?

F

Why would I lie about whether there's a Phoenix?

E

I don't know, maybe you're in on the scam. Maybe thousands of people are in on this big hoax, purporting to be from some mythical Land of Phoenix.

D

You think it's a government conspiracy?

E

Maybe.

A

(Truly taking this discussion seriously)

You think Phoenix is code for something? Like an alien base?

E

Why not?

F

I'll tell ya what, if Phoenix is an alien base, that'll explain a lot about my wife's college friends.

E *(To F)*

Man do you seem excited about this gig.

F

(Finally venting his frustration)

They get together and they're all a bunch of cheerleaders again. She's so – my wife – she's so stuck in the past, and the past wasn't even that good! It's like I'm not even there when I go to these things. I don't know why I'm going.

(Pause)

A

Well, it'll be nice for her, though, at least, won't it?

E *(To D)*

Where are you flying to?

D

Man, I don't really know. I'm going with a couple friends to .. Portland?

(Says it as if it's a foreign word and he's unsure of the pronunciation)

D (cont'd)

and we're going on this youth retreat to Find Ourselves. I know that sounds lame, but we get to camp for a week. Without parents. And my parents are paying for it because they think it'll be "good for my growth", so .. you know, it'll be a good time.

A

That will be a wonderful experience for you.

D

Yeah. *(To E)* Where are you going?

E

Oh, I'm just passing the time.

F

You're passing the time?

E

Sure.

F

Hah.

(Pause)

E

What?

F

So you talk everyone's ear off for the entire trip, but when it comes to yourself you're not saying a word, are you?

C

He didn't talk our ears –

VOICEOVER

Ladies and Gentlemen, the captain has informed us that the Phoenix-Sky Harbor airport does not appear to be anywhere in the vicinity of Tempe, either. As we are running short on fuel at this point in time, we have decided to land in Tempe anyway, so as to avoid any serious disruption to the well being of everyone on board. We again apologize in advance for any inconveniences to your travel plans, and assure you that wherever your ultimate destination may be, you can still get there from here. In preparation for landing, please discontinue use of all portable electronic devices, be sure that your seatbacks and tray tables are in their full upright and locked positions, and that your safety belts are securely fastened.

(Pause.)

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D

So – was anyone here actually going to Phoenix anyway?

E

Yeah, him (*referring to F.*)

D

Oh, reunion, right.

F

Frankly, I could skip it. (*Pause.*) Maybe I will skip it.

D

So it doesn't matter that we're going to Tempe. (*Gazes out window.*)

A

I'm rather disappointed. I was hoping to see the Space Needle again.
(*A few of them glance at her oddly. Long pause.*)

C

Connecting flights will be an issue. (*Takes out book.*) But I guess the airports sort these things out amongst each other. (*Pause*)

A

(*Wistful and slightly pained, but childishly curious and excited*)

I was also thinking of taking a day trip up to the Grand Canyon. I'd like to take one of those mule rides down to the bottom, with a guided tour. So long as someone would tell me what to bring. I saw a picture where the Sun is setting in the distance, and the caption said it's all you can see. It goes on as far as you can see. And I think about the ocean, and I wonder how all these things fit on this one surface and still be so far away from each other.

(*Stares out window.*)

At night I guess you can see so many stars that they all blur together into a big white patch, and you can't pick them apart from each other anymore. And there are animals. I saw a picture of an owl's silhouette in a tree. (*Pause*) I saw an owl in a zoo once, but it was sitting on a block and it couldn't really go anywhere.

E

I lived in the desert when I was a kid.

A

You did?

E

Yeah, near an Indian reservation.

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A
Was the air dusty?

E
I'm sorry?

A
Did the air smell dusty?

E
I guess it did, a little.

A
My husband took a trip through the desert when he was young, before we met. He said the air smelled dusty in the evening. He said the world was flat and you could see the edge of it. He felt like he could pick a direction and start running, and just keep going. (*Laughs. Pause.*) I think I'd like to do that. (*Pause*)

E
Grand Canyon's pretty far for a day trip from here, you know, Ma'am.

A
Oh, that's okay. I've never really been anywhere; I'd be happy to spend just one day. I hear it's beautiful enough to make the trip.

E
Maybe better if you made a couple overnights out of it.

A
Oh .. oh, I don't have time for that. (*Laughs.*) I wouldn't know how to go about doing that. But I'll do it someday though.

E
You should. It's a spectacular place.

A
Is it?

As VOICEOVER begins: our passengers look:

A: Wistful

B: Poker face

C: Excited, anticipatory

D: Curious

E: Relaxed

F: Unhappy, a little bitter

VOICEOVER

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to Tempe where the local time is approximately 6:05pm. We would like to thank you for flying with us today, and wish you a pleasant stay in the Tempe area or wherever your final and ultimate destination may find you. For those of you traveling to the Future, your connecting gate will be C32. The Past: C33. Nowhere in Particular: C55. Nowhere at all: C40. Anywhere: C9. For additional connecting flight information please consult the departure and arrival monitors located inside the terminal, and do not hesitate to ask our flight events coordinator if you need further assistance.

(Gradual FADE TO BLACK during this final line)

Please remain in your seats until the captain has turned off the fasten-seatbelts sign; this will be your only indication that it is safe to move about the cabin. Take care in opening overhead bins, as contents may have shifted during flight. Once again, thank you for flying with us, and we look forward to seeing you again in future instances on your trajectory through the spacetime continuum.

END OF PLAY