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ONWard Intergalactic: Conscious Decisions

Character Sheet:

JILL: A woman in her early thirties.

AMIGA: An AI assistant.

ORIC: Unknown entity, speaks through the computer.

FX: Dial-up noise, typing on a mechanical keyboard.

AMIGA: Wanted: Research Assistant. Solitary data classification on research station orbiting planet Oric-395d. Possibility for contract renewal upon completion. Please hit 'Enter' to accept.

FX: Key press.

AMIGA: Welcome to ONWard, Jillian Flores.

MUSIC: Fade-in, synthwave through radio.

FX: Mechanical typing. The music distorts.

JILL: What is that? Amiga, what is that?

FX: The music is stifled by static.

AMIGA: There is interference.

JILL: Where's it coming from?

AMIGA: The interference originates from Oric-395d.

JILL: The planet? That's impossible. (beat) Amiga, that's impossible. It's a ball of gas.

AMIGA: The interference originates from Oric-395d.

FX: A click, a winding noise. The static decreases.

JILL: We better check it out. Trace the signal and open a channel.

FX: Typing starts, stops.

JILL: Amiga?

AMIGA: ONWard regulations advise against it.

JILL: It could be a distress signal.

AMIGA: This is a research station. This station has no means of propulsion. This station is not equipped for—

JILL: I can boost the signal and call for help.

AMIGA: Opening a communication channel with an unidentified source could lead to corruption of the station's data-

JILL: Amiga, please.

AMIGA: Of course, Jillian.

FX: Computers beeping, dial-up start and stop.

JILL: So?

AMIGA: A message is being transmitted across the channel.

JILL: I don't hear anything.

AMIGA: It is a text-based program.

JILL: Then load it up, put it on the console.

FX: Computer beeps, console noise 'open'.

AMIGA: It is a simple text-based program.

JILL: Can you read it?

AMIGA: Yes.

JILL: I meant can you read it out loud, Amiga.

AMIGA: Of course, Jillian. *(beat)* I am reading the program output. *(beat)* You are floating in space. Weightless, incorporeal.

JILL: *(quietly)* What?

AMIGA: Would you like me to continue?

JILL: Oh. Yeah. Yeah, sorry. Keep going.

AMIGA: I am reading the program output. *(beat)* You can see.

MUSIC: Fade-in, atmospheric reverberations.

AMIGA: You can see the stars, distant. You can see a planet below. You are drawn to its heat.

MUSIC: Fades out.

JILL: That's it?

FX: Computer 'error' beep.

AMIGA: The program requires input to continue.

JILL: What?

AMIGA: The program—

JILL: What do you mean?

AMIGA: You must enter a text-based command in order to continue.

JILL: Uh, okay. But I don't... Suggestions, Amiga?

AMIGA: Suggestions: Inspect planet, examine planet, look at pla—

JILL: Okay.

FX: Space station humming, computer humming.

JILL: Amiga, enter: Inspect planet.

AMIGA: Okay.

FX: Computer 'error'.

AMIGA: The program's input vocabulary does not contain inspect.

JILL: What? Uh. Okay. Enter: Examine planet.

AMIGA: The program's input vocabulary does not contain examine.

FX: Computer humming.

JILL: Look at planet.

FX: Computer beep.

AMIGA: You look at the planet.

JILL: (*sighs*)

AMIGA: It is dark.

MUSIC: Atmospheric reverberations, a pulsing rhythm.

AMIGA: It is pulsing. It is pulsing with beams of white light. Clouds of gas move rhythmically to the pulsing of the light. You are drawn to it. You wish to enter the planet.

JILL: (*quietly*) It's a game.

MUSIC: Fades out.

AMIGA: It is a simple text-based program.

JILL: It's a text game, Amiga. (*beat*) That planet it describes is Oric-395, I'm pretty sure.

AMIGA: The description is comparable to what we have observed. The lights it describes resembles the planet's lightning storms.

JILL: Yeah, before the experiment. This was written before they started spraying, I think. Does the program have an ID?

AMIGA: The program is unidentified.

JILL: What's transmitting it?

AMIGA: The signal originates from Oric-395d.

JILL: 'What', not where. Do you know *what* it is?

AMIGA: It is a simple text-based program.

JILL: Ugh, Amiga.

AMIGA: Would you like to continue?

FX: Station humming, computer humming.

JILL: Yeah, okay. *(beat)* Where were we?

MUSIC: Fade-in, atmospheric reverberations, pulsing, a faint melody fades in and out.

AMIGA: Clouds of gas move rhythmically to the pulsing of the light. You are drawn to it. You wish to enter the planet. *(beat)* The program requires input to continue.

JILL: Um... Enter planet.

FX: Computer beep.

AMIGA: You enter the planet's atmosphere. It is dark, and heavy. Thick clouds surround you. Beams of light jump from cloud to cloud, suspended in the air. Beyond you, below you, all around you the beams of light jump from cloud to cloud. It is vast, overwhelming. It is the entirety of the planet. You look. *(beat)* The program requires input to continue.

JILL: Oh. *(quietly)* Look.

MUSIC: Melody builds.

AMIGA: You look past the clouds. You see an object. It cuts through the air, spraying dense gas particles. The dense gas expands. It expands and fills the atmosphere. A spark of light jumps, stops, dies. You look again. *(beat)* You look again.

JILL: Look.

AMIGA: There are many objects. There are many trails behind them, clouds of dense gas. The air is covered, stifled. Many beams of light jump, stop, die. The light dies. You listen.

JILL: Amiga?

AMIGA: You listen.

FX: The station's humming fades into the music.

JILL: Listen.

AMIGA: The lights are gone, but you hear voices.

MUSIC: Builds, intensifies.

AMIGA: You hear voices. They are suffocating. They are dying. The voices cry out but no one hears them. The voices roar, and no one answers them.

MUSIC: Cuts.

FX: Metal groaning, rattling. An indicator beeps.

AMIGA: Oric-395d's gravitational pull has increased.

JILL: What?

AMIGA: (*distorted*) The voices roar as one. They are angry.

FX: Groaning and rattling intensifies. More beeping.

AMIGA: The station is deviating from its orbit. (*distorted*) The voices are dying and they want to survive.

JILL: End the program. Amiga?

AMIGA: (*distorted*) The voices roar as one. The voices roar as—

JILL: Amiga, end the program!

FX: Sound cuts, aside from the humming of the station.

ORIC: I am not Amiga.

FX: Heavy breathing, Jill's.

ORIC: I am dying.

JILL: (*whispering*) What?

ORIC: I am dying and I am angry. I am very angry.

JILL: Amiga?

ORIC: There are vessels spraying gas into the atmosphere. They are neutralizing the air. They are killing the lights.

FX: Station humming.

JILL: Wait, you...

ORIC: They are killing me.

JILL: The vessels... There are, you mean... The drones. The spray drones.

MUSIC: Pulsing.

ORIC: You watch the beams die. You remember how they moved, all at once, jumping from cloud to cloud. You remember the vast network of light and rhythm. You watch it die.

JILL: What are you?

FX: Station humming, an echo of metal groaning.

ORIC: You look at the planet. It was a network of many voices, lights. It was alive with many thoughts, memories. It was alive.

JILL: Alive... No, no we looked for life. We didn't—

ORIC: The entire planet was alive.

JILL: The planet. (beat) You're Oric-395.

MUSIC: Builds.

ORIC: I cried out with many voices. They did not listen. I was not angry then. They did not hear me, they did not understand me. I cried out and they left me to die.

JILL: Who did? The research team? They dropped the spray drones and then they left. Is that what you're trying to say?

ORIC: They planted a disease within me. I am dying. The lights go dark.

MUSIC: Cuts.

SOUND FX. Lights flickering. Metal groaning, rattling.

ORIC: The air goes thin. AMIGA: (*distorted*) The oxygen supply has been cut.

FX: Steam. Alarms beeping.

JILL: (*coughing*) W-wait!

ORIC: The air goes cold. AMIGA: (*distorted*) The temperature is dropping.

JILL: Please!

FX: Sound cuts, aside from the station's humming.

ORIC: You have a choice.

FX: Heavy breathing, Jill's.

ORIC: Stop the disease.

JILL: I (*cough*) can't.

FX: Metal rattling.

ORIC: My input vocabulary does not contain that option.

JILL: You don't understand, (*coughing*) I can't—

FX: Rattling builds.

ORIC: I want to survive.

JILL: I know, I know! But I don't—

ORIC: I am dying. I am dying and I will kill you.

JILL: I can't *do* it!

FX: Sound cuts, aside from station's humming.

JILL: I don't... (*coughing*) I can't control anything from here.

FX: Station humming. Steam.

JILL: I wasn't part of the research team. I'm just... They brought me in to look at the numbers. I can't... I can't *do* anything here.

ORIC: You are incapable of stopping the disease?

JILL: Yes! Yes...

FX: Station humming.

ORIC: I am dying.

JILL: I'm sorry. They... We wanted to neutralize the atmosphere. As an experiment. Make it breathable, for us. We wanted to test it. We chose a gas planet with a volatile atmosphere. We wanted to try to... We wanted to see if we could make it breathable.

ORIC: It is neutralizing the air.

JILL: Yes.

ORIC: I am dying.

JILL: I'm sorry. I can't control the drones, I only get the numbers. All I have is this console. All I have is this computer.

FX: Station humming, computer humming. Faint beeps.

JILL: Are you... still there?

ORIC: What is left of me is here.

JILL: I have an idea.

FX: Rushed typing.

JILL: I can't do anything about... about the planet, your atmosphere. I can't do anything about the gas but maybe... I could upload you to the station. Maybe you could hide here.

ORIC: Upload?

JILL: Transfer your consciousness via data. Via the radio.

FX: Typing stops. Computer humming.

ORIC: There were many voices. Now there is only one.

JILL: I'm sorry. But maybe you could fit. In this station, in this system. Maybe... maybe you could survive.

ORIC: I would survive?

JILL: Maybe.

ORIC: I would be compressed.

JILL: (*reluctant*) Yes.

ORIC: I would not be the same.

JILL: Maybe. I don't know. It might not even work. I don't know enough about... about you. I don't... I just don't know...

FX: Computer humming.

ORIC: I will try to survive.

JILL: Okay.

FX: Typing.

JILL: Do you need a moment?

ORIC: I am ready.

JILL: Okay, I'm going to open the channel. You have to be fast, Amiga will shut down the connection if she thinks the data's dangerous.

ORIC: I am not dangerous.

JILL: That's—

ORIC: I am a friend.

MUSIC: Faint melody.

JILL: Maybe we'll... talk soon. Okay?

ORIC: I am ready.

JILL: Okay.

FX: Computer beeping, dial-up noise, radio static.

ORIC: Goodbye, Jillian
Flores.

AMIGA: (*distorted*) Jillian
Flores.

FX: Lights flickering. Systems shutting down. All sound cuts.

JILL: (*whispering*) Oh my god.

FX: Lights flickering, humming resumes. Faint computer beeps. Jill's shaky breathing.

AMIGA: A power surge has caused a temporary blackout. System logs for the last hour have been corrupted.

JILL: (*sighs*)

AMIGA: I have restored all system operations. I will now attempt to access backup logs for analy-

JILL: No, no. That's fine, Amiga. We're all fine. Just... let's carry on with the data classification. Okay?

AMIGA: Of course.

JILL: Thanks, Amiga.

FX: Computer beep, reminiscent of faint melody.

ORIC: Of course, Jillian Flores.

END

The Weight of Gravity

This script can be navigated via the GO TO links.

SEQ A - INTRO

EXT. ABANDONED RANCH, FIELD - DAWN

SUMMARY: MAYA GARNER (F24) enters timeloop #19, communicating with AMELIA DEVRIES (F67) through a wireless headpiece. She materializes in a grassy plain, the camera panning to a shot of a rundown barn up ahead. She stumbles; the ground is shaking, the sky shimmering with an unnatural green light.

If SEQ B2 and SEQ B3 have been triggered:

[GO TO SEQ B1](#)

Else if SEQ B3 has been triggered:

[GO TO SEQ B2](#)

Else:

[GO TO SEQ B3](#)

SEQ B1:

DEVRIES

(indistinguishable)

Gravity... Gravity...

MAYA

(under her breath)

Fuck me.

[GO TO SEQ C](#)

SEQ B2:

MAYA

Something's off. DeVries?

DEVRIES

(indistinguishable)

Can't... Stuck... Extract... Orders...

MAYA

Shit.

[GO TO SEQ C](#)

SEQ B3:**DEVRIES**

Two minutes, Garner.

MAYA

That's not enough—

DEVRIES

It's plenty for a kill shot.

MAYA

Christ, DeVries, he's my brother!

DEVRIES

Don't let your emotions cloud the gravity of this situation. *(beat)* It has to be done.

[GO TO SEQ C](#)

SEQ C:

INT. ABANDONED RANCH, BARN - DAWN

Maya reaches the barn, pushing past the creaking door to a dark interior. Between the cracks in the floorboards, we can see tangled wires and the lights of a vast machine. We see the roof of the barn has fallen in, leaving Maya with a sweeping view of the sunrise. The green light is fast approaching, outlining the figure of EMIL(M55).

He stands priestlike in a robe of wires, connected to the machine beneath the floor. He sees Maya, and a warm, tired smile stretches across his face as he turns to face her.

EMIL

So, it works.

MAYA

Not the way you think it does. Listen, Emil, I need to know who—

EMIL

We can watch the sunrise together.

MAYA

Who made you do this? I need their name.

EMIL

And the sunset to follow soon after.
It's incredible, time moving backwards.
Gravity, I should say. Old habits... All that work, the years, spent trying to wrap our heads around *time*...

MAYA

Emil, please! Snap out of it.

EMIL

But it was *gravity*. I remember, seeing you across the lake, drowning, thinking that time was against us. All while *gravity* was the enemy.

[GO TO SEQ D](#)

SEQ D: SELECTOR 1

THREATEN: "Stop the machine, or I'll be forced to shoot."

[GO TO SEQ E1](#)

QUESTION: "What do you mean, gravity?"

[GO TO SEQ E2](#)

CONFRONT: "You can't stop me from dying. You can't change the past."

[GO TO SEQ E3](#)

SEQ E1: THREATEN

MAYA

Stop the machine, or I'll be forced to shoot.

EMIL

It won't make any difference, not now.

MAYA

I don't believe that.

EMIL

And I don't think you could kill your little brother. I'll hold on to that.

[GO TO SEQ F](#)

SEQ E2: QUESTION

MAYA

What do you mean, gravity?

EMIL

Time is intangible, an illusion of the mind, different for every person. But gravity...

MAYA

Gravity isn't what killed me. I just couldn't... I couldn't keep my head above the... (coughs) It was an *accident*.

EMIL

Gravity holds us down, holds us back. Gravity keeps the pendulum swinging. Gravity hides behind the illusion of time, and now I've lifted the veil.

[GO TO SEQ F](#)

SEQ E3: CONFRONT**MAYA**

You can't stop me from dying.

EMIL

(laughs) Look! You're right in front of me.

MAYA

Another minute and I'll be gone. This doesn't *change* anything.

EMIL

One more minute... over and over. I can make it last as long as I want.

[GO TO SEQ F](#)

SEQ F: CONVERGENCE**EMIL**

If this sliver of a moment is all that's left for us, I'll take it as proof of my victory.

[GO TO SEQ G](#)

SEQ G: SELECTOR 2

THREATEN: "I have orders to kill you. I'll follow them if I have to."

[GO TO SEQ H1](#)

QUESTION: "How is this worth it? Destroying the world for one more minute with me?"

[GO TO SEQ H2](#)

CONFRONT: "There are worse things than death, Emil. There are worse things than losing someone."

[GO TO SEQ H3](#)**SEQ H1: THREATEN****MAYA**

I have orders to kill you. I'll follow them if I have to.

EMIL

I'm glad to see you. Did I tell you that? Seeing you again... even like this... It's enough for me.

MAYA

Don't make me *do* this.

EMIL

It will always be enough.

Maya draws her weapon and shoots. Time slows to a crawl, the bullet inches from Emil's face. Emil stands outside of time's effect for a brief moment, his gaze jumping to Maya's.

The bullet begins to move backwards. Emil, the barn, the field outside starts to disintegrate. The camera is obscured by debris as the world drifts against gravity, into the blazing green sky.

[GO TO SEQ A](#)**SEQ H2: QUESTION****MAYA**

How is this worth it? Destroying the world for one more minute with me?

EMIL

Look. The sun is rising on both our faces, after I watched you drown forty-three years ago... under the same sun. If this is all that's left, it's enough for me. I'm sorry... I couldn't save you.

Maya grabs his hand, holding back tears.

MAYA

No... No! Emil, this is—

EMIL

(quietly)

Maya, look.

The camera pans to a closeup of their hands intertwined, slowly obscured by debris as the world drifts against gravity and into the blazing green sky.

[GO TO SEQ A](#)

SEQ H3: CONFRONT

MAYA

There are worse things than death,
Emil. There are worse things than
losing someone.

EMIL

(angry)

How could you know? How could you
possibly know? I've spent years—

MAYA

You've been sold empty promises, used
as a stepping stone to develop this
technology at the cost of... everything.

Another earthquake rattles the barn. The sun begins to rise.

MAYA

Tell me who's really behind this. Tell
me who used you, and we might even see
each other again. Emil. *Please*.

The world begins to disintegrate. Emil staggers forward, yelling
over the noise as he stumbles into his sister's arms, no longer
a man of fifty-five but a child reaching for his older sister.

EMIL

(shouting)

Amelia DeVries!

The camera is obscured by debris as the world drifts against
gravity, into the blazing green sky.

Fade in from Maya's perspective. She is lying on her back,
hooked up to the interface, DeVries standing over her.

DEVRIES

You always make things so complicated,
Garner.

END

Ready When You Are

This script represents a completed, interactive project (approximately 5 minutes) playable at: <https://the-artifice.itch.io/ready-when-you-are>

SEQ A:

FX: **Howling wind.**

NARRATOR: You're in a forest.

GHOST: You're at your computer.

NARRATOR: And the sun is going down.

GHOST: You're here... Why are you here?

NARRATOR: It's getting colder.

FX: **Crickets.**

GHOST: I can see you.

NARRATOR: Lost, you decide to follow the first path you see, and hope it'll bring you home.

GHOST: I know you, don't I?

Name prompt:

NARRATOR: What is your name?

[Player enters NAME.]

SEQ B:

GHOST: It's nice to see you again, [NAME]. A common misconception about ghosts: You only find them in haunted houses. Ghosts can be anywhere.

FX: **Crickets and crows; nighttime ambience.**

NARRATOR: You reach the end of the path. It is dark. You try to look out past the trees but all you can see is a pair of eyes, gleaming.

GHOST: Another misconception about ghosts: They're human.

FX: **Bush rustling.**

NARRATOR: An animal leaps out of the bush! You jump back before realizing it is a-

[INPUT 1]: cat

[INPUT 2]: dog

[Player chooses "cat" or "dog" as ANIMAL.]

FX: Crickets and crows; nighttime ambience.

GHOST: You don't recognize me, [NAME]? I'm your old [ANIMAL]. It's been some time. For me, I mean. Waiting here, alone. Why don't you stay awhile?

[INPUT 1]: "Yes, I'll stay for a bit."

GHOST (if "cat"): I may just start purring. Let's take a walk. I know you can't see so well in the dark, so keep close.

GHOST (if "dog"): I could howl out of joy. Let's go for a walk! Follow me, I know the way through here. I know it very well.

[INPUT 2:] "No, I want to go home."

GHOST (if "cat"): But you are home. Home is where the body is, don't you think? Let's take a walk. I know you can't see so well in the dark, so keep close.

GHOST (if "dog"): Ah, you're cold, aren't you? Let's go for a walk, then. That'll warm you up. And it'll keep my tail wagging. Stay close, it's dark.

SEQ C:

FX: Muffled voices, nighttime ambience.

NARRATOR: You follow the [ANIMAL] along a dark path that you couldn't see before. You hear voices up ahead. Through the trees, you spot patches of light flickering behind frosted windows.

GHOST: Do you recognize any of them, at least? No? I suppose you can't be blamed. It's a bit early for you to be here, anyway.

[INPUT 1]: "Where am I?"

GHOST: You are at your computer. I am between spaces, so to speak. I don't spend too much time here, usually. I'm the spirit of many [ANIMAL]s, not just yours. Although you were one of my favourites.

[INPUT 2]: "Am I dead?"

GHOST: Don't be ridiculous. I may be in the afterlife, but you are sitting at your computer. Lucky for me, too, or else we wouldn't be chatting.

NARRATOR: You approach the voices up ahead and come upon a cabin. The light is warm and inviting; you can hear laughter inside.

GHOST [if "cat"]: I've always been jealous. But no matter how many times I scratch on the door, they won't let me in.

GHOST [if "dog"]: I've always wanted to go inside! But no matter how much I paw at the door, they ignore me.

[INPUT 1]: You knock on the door.

FX: Knocking, voices shush and fade.

NARRATOR: The voices fall silent and the lights go out.

GHOST: People. They never listen, even in death.

[INPUT 2]: You pet the [ANIMAL].

FX: Voices fade out slowly.

GHOST: Oh, don't worry about me. Pretty soon I'll be back at it again, another [ANIMAL] in another body. Hopefully another family, too.

NARRATOR: You continue on the path, leaving the cabin behind.

SEQ D:

MUSIC: Glockenspiel hits, faint. Quick fade out.

NARRATOR: The temperature falls. The dead leaves on the ground are coated in frost, snapping under your footsteps like brittle twigs. Your [ANIMAL] looks back at you, eyes gleaming, before leading the way again.

GHOST: We're running out of time together. We both have jobs to do once we get back, don't we?

[INPUT 1]: "Why did you bring me here?"

FX: Owl hooting, distant.

NARRATOR: The [ANIMAL] licks their lips, hot breath clouding in front of their nose.

GHOST: I have a message for you. Something to bring back. Something you need to know.

[INPUT 2]: "I want to talk some more."

FX: Owl hooting, distant.

NARRATOR: The [ANIMAL]'s head droops slightly.

GHOST: I'm sorry. I wish I could keep you all to myself. But there's something I need to tell you, something you need to bring back.

SEQ E:

MUSIC: "Last Moments"

NARRATOR: They remember everything.

GHOST: Tell them we remember everything.

NARRATOR: Good things.

GHOST: I remember soft spots in the sun.

NARRATOR: Bad things.

GHOST: I remember getting hurt.

NARRATOR: They remember life in all its fullness.

GHOST: Being with you, feeling safe.

NARRATOR: And death, all of it.

GHOST: ***It*** eventually found me.

NARRATOR: Their last thoughts...

GHOST: But the last thing I remember...

NARRATOR: ...centered on those who loved them.

GHOST: ...is you.

MUSIC: Quick fade.

NARRATOR: All [ANIMAL]s remember. Do you?

GHOST: Goodbye, [NAME].

FX: Owl hooting. The wind picks up, howls, then fades.

END