

# Generation Red

by Alexander Utz

## Characters:

ERICA	The first person to be born on Mars. (W/NB, early 20s)
ALAN	The second. (M/NB, early 20s)
TRISH	The third. (W/NB, early 20s)
DENVER	The fourth. (M/NB, early 20s)

**Time:** Someday.

**Place:** Mars.

## Notes on the text:

- This play must be cast with diversity in mind.
- During the Simulations, have fun playing with the cliches and story tropes. The Simulations should be childlike in their openness and simplicity. The broader the better.
- The costumes and props that MARVIN provides for the Simulations could reference famous movies.

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*Lights up on a room, a table and some chairs. A door. After a moment, ERICA enters through the door and looks around. A computer's voice, MARVIN, is heard.*

MARVIN

Subject One, you have completed your Test. Please stand by for results.

*ERICA paces, looks out the window, sits. Then, TRISH enters. MARVIN is heard again.*

MARVIN

Subject Three, you have completed your Test. Please stand by for results.

TRISH

I guess we're officially Martians now.

*ERICA doesn't respond. After another moment, DENVER enters.*

MARVIN

Subject Four, you have completed your Test. Please stand by for results.

*DENVER smiles at the others.*

DENVER

Ha. "Subject Four," thanks for that, MARVIN.

Well, I'm all done! You're looking at the next legendary space pioneer, the next Neil Armstrong.

"We're not worthy!"

— Are we allowed to talk?

ERICA

I don't know.

DENVER

Got it. Okay. Shut up, Denver.

Ha.

*DENVER sits. Pause.*

TRISH

Do you think you did well?

ERICA

I don't know if we should be talking or not.

TRISH

Alright, sorry. Geez.

*ALAN enters.*

MARVIN

Subject Two, you have completed your Test. Please stand by for results.

ALAN

— Are we allowed to talk?

DENVER

We don't know.

ALAN

How did it go for you all?

DENVER

Neil Armstrong.

ALAN

"We're not worthy!"

ERICA

Guys.

MARVIN

All Subjects have now completed the Test. Please stand by for results.

TRISH *mocking*

"Please stand by for results."

ERICA

Trish.

TRISH

What? I'm sure we can talk.  
Hey, MARVIN, can we talk?

MARVIN

Subjects are permitted to do as they please. Please stand by for results.

TRISH

Okay, we're standing by for results. We get it.

ALAN

So we can talk.

TRISH

What did I tell you? It's fine.

MARVIN

Incoming message from MRV-Explorer.  
"Attention: MRV-Explorer initiating M-1 Compound return sequence."

ALAN

Explorer? Is that —?

TRISH

Our parent's ship.

ERICA

Do you think they're finally coming back?

*A message plays through MARVIN; a woman's VOICE.*

VOICE

Hi kids, we wanted to send a message saying we're returning to the compound today. We'll be docking shortly, in Terminal B-2. Can't wait to see you soon!

ALAN

— Mom? You're coming back!

ERICA

Can we talk to everyone?

DENVER

We miss you!

VOICE

I'm sorry, kids, but there's a lot of work to do here. I have to go. But we'll see you soon! We're all so excited! Love you.

ALAN

Love you, Mom.

*The message ends.*

MARVIN

Connection to MRV-Explorer terminated.

ERICA

They're coming back. After all this time.

ALAN

I can't believe it. Can you believe it?

TRISH

Why didn't they tell us sooner?

DENVER

Maybe they wanted it to be a surprise. For our Test day.

TRISH

It's been years. And they tell us now? Don't you think that's weird?

ERICA

Aren't you happy about it?

TRISH

Of course, but —

ALAN

This is incredible. They'll finally be back!

ERICA

When do you think they'll get here?

DENVER

MARVIN, how much longer until MRV-Explorer returns?

MARVIN

I'm sorry, Denver, that information is only available through Command at this time.

ERICA

Maybe we can go to Command to find out.

ALAN

Would we be allowed in? We haven't passed the Test yet.

ERICA

Yeah, but this is a special occasion.

DENVER

Plus, we're just waiting for the results.

MARVIN, can we go to Command?

MARVIN

I'm sorry, Denver, but M-1 Command is only accessible with Test completion credentials.

ALAN

See?

DENVER

But we did all *complete* the Test. So we should be allowed in!

MARVIN

I'm sorry, Denver. Test results are still being calculated.

DENVER

Come on, just this once? We won't tell anyone.

MARVIN

Please stand by for results.

DENVER

Ugh, so we just have to sit here?

TRISH

Who knows, maybe this is even still part of the Test.

DENVER

What would the point of that be? To see how well we can sit in a room?

TRISH

They're more interested in preparing us for the outside.

DENVER

Right, and who knows what's out there! Aliens, probably. Deadly killer aliens.

We're being bred as expendable lives in a great war of the worlds!

ALAN

If that's the case, I don't mind staying inside.

ERICA

There aren't killer aliens out there.

DENVER

You don't know that for sure. That's what their mission could have been.

ERICA

Our parents were not out fighting killer aliens.  
And even if they were, I'm sure they would've told us by now.

DENVER

"Alright you alien assholes, in the words of my generation: Up yours!"  
Right? From *Independence Day*?

ERICA

Their mission was to start work on a new landing zone for ships coming from Earth.

TRISH

No, their mission was to repair one of the backup water processing systems.  
Is that really what they told you? A new landing zone?

ERICA

Yeah, that's what they said.

TRISH

Why would they have told us different things?

DENVER

They didn't tell me anything.

TRISH

Alan, what about you?

ALAN

My mom just said there was an important mission that they were all going on.

TRISH

Okay, something weird is going on here.

ERICA

What do you mean?

TRISH

I mean there's something they aren't telling us.

DENVER

To be fair, they didn't tell me anything.

ERICA

Maybe they're doing both, as a part of the same mission.

TRISH

Do you really believe that, or —?

ERICA

I'm just saying it's possible.

DENVER

Or it's a cover-up for the fact that they're fighting killer aliens.

TRISH

Ha. I doubt that.

ALAN

Whatever it is, we can ask them to tell us the truth when they get back.

TRISH

What if they don't tell us?

ALAN

I mean, I'd rather stay in the compound anyway. Not have to risk going outside.

TRISH

Really? You're not even a little curious about what's out there? What they're doing?

DENVER

It's killer aliens.

ALAN

I don't know. I like the compound.

DENVER

Boring.

ALAN

It's safe, though. Familiar. That's nice.

DENVER

Yeah, and boring.

TRISH

I can't wait to be out there. Actually *doing* something, like them.  
I wonder how long we'll have to wait for our results.

ERICA

We'll see, I guess.

ALAN

I hope I'm assigned to botany. I'd like growing the food.

TRISH

Except MARVIN takes care of that.

ALAN

I could help.

ERICA

I'd want to to be assigned to be a field researcher. Sending samples and stuff back to Earth, being in contact with the people there —

TRISH

Yeah.

ERICA

How exciting would that be?

DENVER

It'd be boring. I'm bored.  
MARVIN, I'm bored.

ALAN

Our parents are finally coming home and you're bored??

DENVER

Yeah, because we have to *sit* in a boring *room* until the results are done. Boring.

MARVIN

Would you like to watch a film?

ALAN

I don't think I'd be able to focus on watching a movie. I'm too excited now.

ERICA

At this point, haven't we seen them all anyway?

MARVIN

No.

DENVER

It's fine, MARVIN. We won't watch a movie.

MARVIN

You're welcome, Denver.

ALAN

Hey — I have an idea for how we can pass the time.

ERICA

What?

ALAN

Simulations.

ERICA

Oh, fun!



DENVER

Now that's an idea.

TRISH

Ha. No thanks.

ALAN

Why not?

TRISH

We're not kids anymore.

ALAN

So?

DENVER

You don't have to be a kid to have fun, Trish.

ERICA

Yeah, it's entertaining. It's something to do.

DENVER

Let's do it!

TRISH

No, we should be —

ALAN

I'll start.

ERICA

Opening?

TRISH

This is silly —

ALAN *standing and exiting*

Wild West! Um — a saloon!

There's an outlaw on the loose. I'll be the brave Sheriff protecting the town.

TRISH

Ha. You're more likely to be terrified than brave.

ALAN

"Courage is being scared to death, but saddling up anyway." John Wayne.

TRISH

"It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to your enemies, but a great deal more to stand up to your friends." Dumbledore.

ERICA

Okay, okay, enough quotes, let's get it started.

Places!

DENVER

MARVIN, set us up!

MARVIN

Initiating American West Simulation #553.

*MARVIN starts playing classic Western movie style music. A drawer in the wall opens.*

DENVER

Ooo, what did we get?

*DENVER pulls out some Western style costume pieces. And three guns. DENVER, ALAN, and ERICA start playing dress up.*

TRISH

Come on, really?

ERICA

Yes!

TRISH

Alan always picks Wild West.

DENVER

Yeah, because it's fun!

ALAN

Remember, "The frontier is a place —"

ALAN / DENVER / ERICA

"Of endless possibility!"

TRISH

"Of endless possibility," yes, of course, because we've only heard that a million times.

ALAN

Because it's true.

DENVER

I'm excited. We haven't done this in forever!

ALAN

You can wear this cool vest, if you want.

TRISH

And a gun?

ALAN

And a gun.

TRISH *taking a vest and a gun*

Alright, fine.

Let's get it over with.

*ALAN, DENVER, and TRISH exit. ERICA mimes being a barkeep at one of the tables. After a moment, ALAN enters and sits.*

ALAN

Feel like I've been all over God's creation. Hey, Sally.

ERICA

How's the day, Sheriff?

ALAN

Long.

ERICA

See anything out of the ordinary?

ALAN

Stopped a bank robbery before the bank had the chance to be robbed.

ERICA

No need for Wanted posters, I guess.

ALAN

I need a drink.

ERICA

The usual?

ALAN

Make it stiff.

*ERICA mimes making a drink.*

ERICA

I've heard tell that Crazy Wes Wyatt's makin' his way through these parts. You run into him yet?

ALAN

Not yet. I'm keepin' my eye out.

ERICA

I'll let you know if I see him, Sheriff.

ALAN

We ain't lookin' for any more trouble around here.

ERICA

No, sir.

ALAN

Simple folks tryin' to lead simple lives, ain't that right?

ERICA

That's right.

ALAN

You certainly are. When're you gonna settle down, Sally?

ERICA

I've got no plans.

ALAN

You could make plans with me.

ERICA

Sheriff, stop.

ALAN

Call me Bill.

Ever since your daddy passed on and you took this place over, seems like you think of nothin' else.

ERICA

Why should I?

ALAN

There's more to life than runnin' a bar, Sally.

ERICA

Not for an enterprisin' woman like me.

ALAN

Is that right?

ERICA

Yes, sir.

ALAN

You'll come around to my way of thinkin' one of these days.

ERICA

Don't sound so sure of yourself, Sheriff.

ALAN

I told you to call me Bill.

ERICA

I'm choosin' to ignore that instruction.  
That won't get me arrested, will it?

ALAN

You're testin' your luck.

ERICA

I don't think it'll run out anytime soon.

ALAN

And why's that?

ERICA

Just a hunch.  
Would you arrest Crazy Wes Wyatt, if he came into town?

ALAN

I'd shoot him on the spot.

ERICA

Oh yeah?

ALAN

Yeah. We don't need his sort of trouble.

ERICA

Wouldn't you be causing "his sort of trouble" by shooting him?

ALAN

Not if you do it in the name of the law.

ERICA

And that's what you'd be doing.

ALAN

It's why I have this badge, ain't it?

ERICA

I suppose you're right.

ALAN

Damn right I'm right.  
Why d'you ask?

ERICA

Just curious.

ALAN

It's not a woman's business.

ERICA

Neither is runnin' a bar.

ALAN

You better be careful, never knowin' who's going to walk through those doors.

ERICA

I know, I know.

ALAN

Some of Crazy Wes Wyatt's cronies shot up a tavern in Redwood just last month. Barkeep was killed.

ERICA

I know it's dangerous, Bill. I can take care of myself.

ALAN

— What'd you call me?

ERICA

Nothing, Sheriff.

ALAN

I think you might be getting fond, Sally.

ERICA

Don't get any ideas.

ALAN

Don't you worry.

TRISH *off*

Alright, I'm coming, but only because I don't want to listen to this crap anymore.

ALAN

— Sounds like old Slim is grumblin' outside.

*TRISH enters and sits nearby, quiet.*

ERICA

How're you doin' today, Slim?

TRISH

Yeah, I'm not interested in full participation, thanks. I'll just sit here.

ALAN

— You alright, Slim? You're actin' a bit off.

ERICA

Slim's always quiet like that. Lots on his mind, I bet.

ALAN

Did you hear about his wife leavin' town?

ERICA

Everyone was talkin' about it.

ALAN

No note, nothing. Just up and disappeared.

ERICA

Maybe she got spooked by Wes Wyatt's gang roamin' about.

TRISH

Oh my god. Are you idiots having fun yet? How much of this do I have to sit through?

ERICA

Now that's no way to speak to a Sheriff, Slim.

ALAN  
Stand down, Sally, it's alright.

TRISH  
I mean, this might be the dumbest one we've ever done.

ALAN  
Hey, I like it.

TRISH  
Yeah, because it was your idea.

ALAN  
Come on. Trish. Play along.

TRISH  
Why should I?

ERICA  
It's our tradition.

ALAN  
"You gonna do something —"

ALAN / ERICA  
"Or just stand there and bleed?"

TRISH  
We're not children anymore.

ALAN  
So?

TRISH  
So I don't see the point.

ERICA  
The point is that it's making us happy. Isn't that enough?

ALAN  
Plus we have the time to kill.

ERICA  
So let's keep going. Yeah?

TRISH  
Fine. Whatever.  
I can hear you idiots talkin' about my wife, you know.

ERICA  
What are you drinkin', Slim?

TRISH

Whatever the Sheriff's havin'.

ERICA

Comin' right up.

*ERICA mimes making a drink.*

ALAN

Didn't mean to offend, Slim.

TRISH

Don't mention it.

ALAN

It was a real shock when Clara left.

TRISH

Yeah.

ALAN

She was used to the city, though, I guess.

TRISH

I guess.

ALAN

It's dangerous for ladies in these parts.

ERICA *handing TRISH the "drink"*

It's dangerous for ladies everywhere. No different here.

ALAN

That's not what I meant.

TRISH

She said she missed "civilization." Probably just meant she missed the pretty shop windows downtown.

ALAN

Would you ever live in a city, Sally?

ERICA

That life's not for me.

TRISH

I thought I could buy her whatever she wanted, keep her happy, but —

ALAN

She wanted more.

TRISH

Let's change the subject.



ERICA

I was never one for fancy clothes or jewels.

ALAN

Never thought of a pretty ring on your finger?

TRISH

Seriously, Alan?

ALAN

What?

TRISH

Just, give the marriage thing a break. Geez.

ERICA

It does seem like we're going in circles.

ALAN

Well, excuse me for playing the role.

TRISH

Oh, is that what you're doing?

ALAN

We're just starting out. We have to establish character.  
Denver hasn't even come in yet.

TRISH

Yeah, what's the holdup with that?

DENVER *off*

I'm waiting for the perfect moment!

ERICA

Okay, don't tell us, or you'll ruin the surprise!

DENVER *off*

Don't worry!

ALAN

This isn't going well.

TRISH

I told you, that's because it's a dumb idea.

ERICA

Let's just see it through, okay?

TRISH

I know, I know, I'm cooperating.

ERICA

Thank you. I mean, this used to be your favorite thing to do, what happened?

TRISH

Yeah, *used* to be. People are allowed to change.

ALAN

Can we please continue?

TRISH

Maybe we can come up with a different game. One that will actually be useful in the real world.

ALAN

Sounds super fun and not at all soul-sucking.

TRISH

You know what would be fun? Playing a Simulation that everyone enjoys, and isn't just fulfilling some weird power fantasy for dudes.

ALAN

It is fun for everyone.

TRISH

I hate to break it to you, Alan, but you're not John Wayne.

ALAN

I never said I was.

ERICA

Okay, let's keep going. Where were we?

TRISH

Alan was asking you about getting a ring on your finger. See, I'm paying attention.

ALAN

I never said I was John Wayne.

ERICA

Alright, alright, let's pick it back up.

ALAN

— You've never thought of settling down, Sally?  
Or would you just run away, like Slim's wife?

TRISH

Sally doesn't want a pretty ring on her finger. She's been propositioned by plenty of men better than you already, Sheriff, so don't go makin' a fool of yourself.

ALAN

— I'm just havin' some fun, Slim.

TRISH

Your idea of fun, Sheriff.

ERICA

Now come on, no hard feelings here.

ALAN

I ought to take you in to spend a night behind bars for talkin' to an officer of the law that way, Slim.

TRISH

Try that business on me, Sheriff, and I'll knock that jaw of yours clean off.

ALAN

Alright, that's it, let's go.

TRISH

You're not really gonna lock me up for usin' my right to free speech, are you?

ALAN

I said let's go.

ERICA

Hey —

TRISH

I ain't goin' anywhere, Sheriff.

ALAN

That's what you think.

*ALAN lifts TRISH out of her chair.*

TRISH

What do you think you're doin'?

ERICA

Listen here, that's enough —

ALAN

Sorry to be disruptin' your day like this, Sally.

TRISH

Get your grimy hands off of me!

ERICA

You can't arrest him, he's done nothin' wrong!

ALAN

He's done plenty.

TRISH

Alan, this is kind of bullshit.

ALAN

Oh, now you're sorry, is it?

TRISH  
Dude, it's just a stupid game. Calm down.

ALAN  
Nope. You're goin' behind bars, Slim.

ERICA  
Sheriff — Alan —

ALAN  
I said call me Bill.

ERICA  
This is getting out of hand, I think.

*DENVER bursts in.*

DENVER  
Everybody shut your goddamn faces!

*ALAN lets go of TRISH. ALAN, TRISH, and ERICA drop to hide.*

ALAN  
Crazy Wes Wyatt —

DENVER  
That's damn right, Sheriff.

ALAN  
How do you —

DENVER  
Oh, I know you. I've been waitin' on meetin' you for a long time.

ERICA  
You're not welcome in my establishment, Wyatt!

DENVER  
Well, well, well. Who's this pretty little thing?

ERICA  
You don't speak to me that way.

DENVER  
Then I don't speak to you at all.

*DENVER points his gun at ERICA.*

ALAN  
Wait —

DENVER *"shooting"*  
Pow!

*ERICA drops to the ground.*

ALAN

Sally! No!  
You son of a bitch!

*ALAN points his gun at DENVER. DENVER drops and hides.*

DENVER

What're you gonna do, Sheriff?

ALAN

You're not gettin' away with that, Wyatt.

DENVER

Please. Call me Crazy.

ALAN

I'm gonna put you away for a long time.

DENVER

Ha. Good luck with that.

ALAN

Slim, help me capture this outlaw and I won't lock you up.

TRISH

Why would I agree to that?

ALAN

Because —

TRISH

Yeah, no thanks.

*TRISH stands.*

Hey, Crazy. Go ahead and shoot me so I can be done with this.

DENVER

— Really? But that's not as much fun.

TRISH

Denver. What would Crazy Wes Wyatt do?

ALAN

Wyatt, you shoot that man and I shoot you.

DENVER

What good am I to you dead? Don't you want the reward money for my capture?

ALAN

— Reward money?

DENVER

Yes sir.

How much was a lot back then? Like, 500 million dollars?

TRISH

I think like one million would've been a lot.

DENVER

Ha. That's it? Insane. Okay.

Don't you want the reward money, Sheriff? Think of what a million dollars could buy.

ALAN

I ain't tempted by money, Wyatt.

TRISH

He doesn't care if you're alive or dead, Crazy. So go ahead and shoot me.

ALAN

Trish —

TRISH

That ain't my name, Sheriff.

DENVER

I could shoot both of you here and now before either of you even blink.

TRISH

Then why don't you?

ALAN

He's not as crazy as his name suggests.

DENVER

Want to try me?

"Go ahead, make my day."

TRISH

Where are your cronies, Wyatt? Don't you usually travel with a gang?

DENVER

I didn't need them hangin' around anymore.

TRISH

They're not waitin' for us outside?

DENVER

Nah, they're all dead. I killed 'em.

They do call me Crazy for a reason, Sheriff.

ALAN

I don't believe you.

DENVER

Hey, we all meet our Maker one way or another, ain't that right?

TRISH

I bet they're waitin' outside to fill us with lead.

DENVER

Would I lie to you, Slim?

TRISH

Wouldn't be the first time, Crazy.

ALAN

What're you talkin' about?

TRISH

Don't you know, Sheriff?  
Crazy Wes Wyatt's my brother.

*ALAN gasps.*

DENVER *laughing*

That's right. Good to see you again, brother.

ALAN

Is that why your wife up and left, Slim?

TRISH

She knew Crazy'd be back for me.

DENVER

And here I am. I want my face to be the last thing you ever see.

TRISH

Not if I have anything to say about it.

DENVER

Oh yeah?

TRISH

Yeah.

*TRISH moves to draw her gun, but DENVER is faster.*

DENVER

Pow!

*TRISH drops to the ground. ALAN "shoots" DENVER.*

ALAN

Pow!

*DENVER, stunned, looks at ALAN.*

DENVER

You son of a bitch. Did you just —

*DENVER grabs his side, as if he's been shot.*

ALAN

"You gonna do somethin', or just stand there and bleed?"

DENVER

You missed, though.

*DENVER points his gun at ALAN. A moment of standoff. MARVIN plays "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly" theme.*

ALAN

Crazy Wes Wyatt. Killed your own brother. Why?

DENVER

He stole my horse.

ALAN

— And?

DENVER

That's it. I told you, they call me Crazy for a —

ALAN *"shooting"*

Pow!

*DENVER pauses, then drops to the ground.*

Didn't miss this time.

*DENVER makes a show of dying. ALAN surveys the bodies and goes to ERICA.*

Oh, sweet sweet Sally. You didn't deserve this. Why, God, why???

*MARVIN stops the Simulation music.*

MARVIN

American West Simulation #533 has concluded.

*TRISH gets up.*

TRISH

Well that got very violent very quickly.

ALAN

It might've lasted longer if you hadn't *asked* to be shot.

*ERICA and DENVER get up.*

ERICA

I thought it was cool.

DENVER

Yeah, Crazy Wes Wyatt was — well, crazy!



ERICA

You were convincing, Denver. I felt like I was really there.

DENVER

Why thank you.

TRISH

Except there's no such thing as "really being there" for the Wild West.

ALAN

Okay, why do you keep saying that my Simulation was dumb?

TRISH

Because the Wild West didn't happen like the movies. They're made up.

ALAN

How do you know that? You weren't there.

TRISH

Because it's pretty common knowledge. In real life, those sheriffs and outlaws you idolize so much weren't actually that cool.

ALAN

But you didn't live at that time, so you can't know for sure.

TRISH

I'm pretty sure.

ALAN

Anyway, can't I just enjoy it? It makes me happy.

ERICA

The Simulations *are* just a way to have fun.

TRISH

I know, I know. MARVIN, how long until we find out our results?

MARVIN

Test results are currently being calculated. Please stand by.

DENVER

— Are you guys nervous about it? I'm a little nervous.

TRISH

I hope I do well. The first ones to ever take it, that's a lot of pressure.

DENVER

Hence, nervous.

TRISH

"You'll be one of the first to take it, so don't let us down."

ERICA

I think we'll be okay.

ALAN

We're about to have our futures basically decided for us, how can you be relaxed about that?

ERICA

We're all competent, so I don't think we should be too worried.  
Plus, it's our parents. They designed it. And they already know we're all capable.

TRISH

Ha. Have you met my parents? "Don't let us down."

ERICA

You know what I mean.

TRISH

Yeah, and based on how they prepared me for this, passing isn't a guarantee just because we're their kids.

ERICA

We'll be okay. It's going to be fine.

TRISH

Do you not understand, or something? If we don't pass, we're still stuck in the compound until the next Test. Five more years of not being able to go outside. Or seeing anyone else.

DENVER

I can't imagine.

ALAN

You say that like it's a bad thing.

ERICA

I'm sure they wouldn't make us wait that long.

TRISH

How do you know?

DENVER

I just want something different. Than this. Something exciting!

TRISH

I want to know what's out there. And I'm so ready to have some semblance of freedom.

ALAN

We're pretty much free to do what we want here.

TRISH

Yeah, but aren't you tired of the same thing every day? Being cooped up in the compound your entire life?

ALAN

It's for our own safety.

TRISH

Right, of course. I forgot the manly man needed to stay safe.

ALAN

Anyway, there's probably nothing out there.

TRISH

What about the labs, the farms, and all that?

ALAN

I mean there's probably nothing outside of what our parents built.

ERICA

Sometimes I think, I wish I grew up on Earth instead.

TRISH

Why? So you can grow up and inherit a dead planet? Both options suck, but at least here you have a future.

ERICA

But do you ever think about it? Like, if your parents hadn't chosen to come here?

DENVER

I've thought about it.

ERICA

We could be on Earth right now. Outside. We didn't get a say in the matter.

TRISH

Neither did the kids on Earth. I think, in the long run, we're in the better place.

ERICA

But how long is the long run?

*MARVIN interrupts them by playing "Don't You (Forget About Me)" by Simple Minds, which seems to calm them in a Pavlovian way. The song stops, and the tension in the room has gone. A pause.*

ALAN

You know what I just realized? We didn't do a Closing.

ERICA

You're right, we didn't.  
Who wants to go first?

MARVIN

I imagine that to a human, the climate of the American West in the 19th century would feel like —

DENVER

No, MARVIN. You don't get a Closing.

MARVIN

I'm participating.

ERICA

We should let him do one sometime.

DENVER

But he's not an actual part of this.

ERICA

It might be interesting, though. To hear what he thinks.

DENVER

You know what's even more interesting? To hear what I think. Okay, what do I imagine — ?

Oh! I imagine that horses would be soft, and huge, bigger than they look in movies. I imagine that their eyes are full of loneliness.

Wait — MARVIN, can you get us a horse?

MARVIN

No I cannot.

DENVER

Damn it.

ERICA

Trish? What about you?

TRISH

I don't have anything.

ALAN

Come on.

ERICA

There has to be something.

TRISH

Fine. I imagine that being inside a bar is dark and cool and isolating, even on a hot day. I imagine that having a stranger come to town is exhilarating, like taking a breath too quickly.

ERICA

Thank you, Trish. Those are good ones.

— I imagine that looking into a row of shop windows, all lined up on a city street, must be better than watching anything on TV. I imagine seeing all the people in the stores, shopping for clothing and food and presents for their families. I imagine the nervous and excited feeling of running away from one place to go somewhere else, even though you might not know where you're going. I imagine being in a city, surrounded by all those tall buildings and people going places. Maybe they're running away somewhere too. I imagine owning a whole building and a piece of land that you can call your own, something that's been passed down through generations until it reaches you. I imagine being in charge of a place. That must feel nice.

ALAN

Yeah.

ERICA

What about you? This one was your idea.

ALAN

This is going to sound dumb, but — I imagine living in a small town like that would be a lot like living here. You'd see the same people all the time. It'd probably feel like the rest of the world was just part of your imagination, some distant made-up idea outside the borders of what you know.

ERICA

That doesn't sound dumb.

DENVER

You could go *crazy* thinking like that.  
— Get it? Crazy Wes Wyatt?

TRISH

We get it, Denver.

DENVER

Pow! Pow! Ha.

TRISH

You all having fun acting like children?

ERICA

When are we going to get to feel like kids again?

DENVER

I hope I feel like a kid all the time.

TRISH

We know, Denver.

ERICA

Anyway, who wants to do the next Simulation?

DENVER

Ooo, I'll have to pick something good.

TRISH

You really think this is worthwhile? We could be doing *anything* else.

ALAN

I do. It's a great idea, Erica.

DENVER

Spies. No, nuclear apocalypse. No, spies in the nuclear apocalypse!

ERICA

We need something to take our minds off the Test. Something to do until our parents get back.

TRISH

Until they can tell us what's going on.

ERICA

*Plus*, it'll be fun.

DENVER

Yeah, come on, Trish.

TRISH

I'm not trying to be the bad guy here, but —

ERICA

We know.

DENVER

She's just jealous that I got to be Crazy Wes Wyatt.

ERICA

What I'm saying is, it's something we can agree on. We all like it. It's like our last hurrah.

TRISH

— Okay. Yeah.

ERICA

Yeah?

TRISH

Yeah, a last hurrah. That's something I can get behind.

ERICA

Perfect! Sound good to you guys?

DENVER

I'm going to think of the best Simulation ever.

ERICA

So you've got the next one?

DENVER

Yeah! I still have to decide though. Nuclear apocalypse spies who are also robots?

ERICA

Actually, let's give you some more time to make up your mind.

ALAN

You should come up with the next one, Erica.

TRISH

Yeah, that'd be good.

ERICA

Sure, if you guys think so.

DENVER

Just don't choose nuclear apocalypse robot spy dinosaurs.

ERICA

I don't think I would've thought of that anyway.  
But how about this — a daughter and her date come home late from a high school dance.

ALAN

I see what you're going for, yeah.  
Kind of like a John Hughes thing.

DENVER

Ooo, those are good ones. "Don't mess with the bull, young man—"

DENVER / ALAN

"You'll get the horns!"

DENVER

Classic.

ERICA

Right, so they come home, and her parents are waiting up for her.

TRISH

Isn't that a bit cliché?

ERICA

Maybe, but —

ALAN

It's her decision, we do whatever Erica decides.

DENVER

Who's who? Can I be the boyfriend?

ERICA

If you want.

ALAN

Does that make me the dad?

ERICA

I guess so. Sure. That works out.  
Trish, do you want to be the mom?

TRISH

Do I have to?

ERICA

You could be the daughter instead.

TRISH

I don't really like when Simulations feel like they're ripped straight from movies we've seen.

ERICA

It isn't, though. We get to make it our own.

DENVER

That's the fun part!

ERICA

I tried to pick something simple, so everyone would be happy. And we can take it wherever feels right. Is that okay?

TRISH

It's fine.

ERICA

It isn't ripped straight from movies.

TRISH

Okay. I get it. Let's start. You doing the Opening, Erica?

ERICA

Are you the mom?

TRISH

Sure. I'll be the mom.

ERICA

Great. Thank you. And yes, I'll start the Opening.

DENVER

Yeah, set the stage. Paint a picture.

ERICA

Alright. We're in the living room of a house. Like a traditional, all-American house in a — um — suburb? Am I thinking of the right word?

DENVER

MARVIN, is suburb the right word?

MARVIN

A suburb is an outlying district of a city, typically residential.

ERICA

Right, so, a car in the driveway, a couch and chairs across from a TV, that sort of thing. I'm thinking somewhere like Ohio. Or Michigan? Maybe Illinois. They're all in that same Midwest region. But that sort of idea.

DENVER

Is that close to Texas?

ERICA

No.

DENVER

Oh. I have no idea where that is, then.



ALAN

Didn't you ever pay attention in Earth History?

DENVER

Honestly, listening to your mom talk about that stuff kind of put me to sleep.  
MARVIN, where is the Midwest?

ERICA

It's literally in the name, it's in the midwest of America —

MARVIN

The Midwestern United States is a region which occupies the northern central part of the country.  
It comprises twelve states: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas —

TRISH

Okay, MARVIN, that's enough.

ERICA

I think it would be cool to live in the Midwest. It seems so interesting. And all-American. I'm pretty sure my mom told me once that she's from Kansas.

TRISH

You'd *want* to live there? Why?

ERICA

I don't know. I just like learning about that sort of thing. What different places on Earth are like.

TRISH

It doesn't matter, though. It's not like it makes a difference to us, we'll never go to those places.

ERICA

Who's to say we won't?

DENVER

My parents were from Denver! Which is a — state.

ERICA

City.

DENVER

That's why they named me —

TRISH

Denver, yes, we know.

ALAN

Anyone have more details they want to add?

ERICA

Um — family photos on the walls going up the stairs.

ALAN

Maybe a fireplace?

ERICA

Could be.

ALAN

Where they put knick-knacks and candles and things on the mantle. And where they hang their stockings for Christmas.

TRISH

Maybe they don't celebrate Christmas.

ALAN

Sure, but you think all-American living room fireplace and you think stockings.

DENVER

I like the fireplace. The dog curls up in front of it during the winter, when it gets cold out.

ERICA

But this is the spring.

DENVER

I wish I had a dog.

ERICA

What else?

DENVER

A cat, too. And an elephant!

ERICA

No, what else is in the living room? For the Simulation?

ALAN

A big window that looks out onto a front yard where the kids used to play when they were little.

ERICA

Yes. Perfect.

TRISH

How many kids do they have?

ERICA

Two. But only one's living at home. The other one —

DENVER

Ran away. To work in the circus.

ERICA

Absolutely not.

DENVER

Why not??

ALAN

The other one's away at college.

ERICA

Yes, that sounds right.

DENVER

Essays and toga parties and, um — hangovers!  
"Toga, toga!"

ERICA

But that kid isn't here. They're not a part of the Simulation.

DENVER

Maybe I'll do a toga party for mine.  
Dinosaur spies in the zombie apocalypse take a night off and throw a toga party!

TRISH

That isn't a cliché, at least.

ERICA

What else? We've got the living room, couch, TV, fireplace, family photos —

DENVER

Dog —

ALAN

And a "Home Sweet Home" sign. Or, "Home is Where the Heart Is". Something like that.

TRISH

Oh my god.

DENVER

Ooo, that's good. That's perfect.

TRISH

It's awful.

ALAN

Do you think everything I suggest is bad, Trish, or —

TRISH

No, awful in a good way. Ha. Like it's so vague and terrible that it tells you exactly who these people are. It's great.

ALAN

Oh. Thank you.

ERICA

Is that everything? I think we have enough to get started.

ALAN

It's up to you. It's your Simulation.

ERICA

Alright, I'm calling it. We're ready to start.

DENVER

Can I say "places" this time?

ERICA

Go for it.

DENVER

Places, everyone!

MARVIN, take it away!

*MARVIN dims the lights to make it look like night. A drawer in the wall opens, with high school dance type costumes for DENVER and ERICA, who take them and exit. ALAN and TRISH set up a few chairs to represent a living room sort of setup. ALAN and TRISH sit.*

ALAN

Honey, relax.

TRISH

I'm fine.

ALAN

I can feel how tense you are.

TRISH

I'm not tense.

ALAN

It's going to be okay.

TRISH

How do you know?

ALAN

Just relax.

TRISH

How am I supposed to relax? Have you seen the time?

ALAN

I have, but —

TRISH

She was supposed to be home from the dance by midnight. It's almost two in the morning.

ALAN

I know when she was supposed to be home.

TRISH

It's not like her. Being this late isn't like Liz.  
We should try calling again.

ALAN

What makes you think it'll work this time?

— Wait, we didn't say when this was. Do they have cell phones?

ERICA *entering*

Sorry, sorry. Um — yes. Let's make it the beginning of the century. So they have cell phones. But no virtual intelligence yet. Right?

DENVER *off*

So no MARVIN?

MARVIN

How can I help, Denver?

ERICA

Never mind, MARVIN.

Did we miss anything else?

ALAN

I don't think so.

ERICA

Cool. Let's keep going.

*ERICA exits.*

ALAN

So. Calling her didn't work.

TRISH

I know that.

ALAN

Let's go to bed, then. She'll come home.

TRISH

I'm worried.

ALAN

Ricky's a good kid. I'm sure they're fine.

TRISH

But what if they aren't?

ALAN

— She isn't answering her phone, so we don't have a way of knowing for sure. I say let's go to bed.

TRISH

I don't think that's a good idea.

ALAN

Well, what do you want us to do?

TRISH

I'm taking the car, I'm going to find her.

ALAN

Alright, no.

TRISH

Greg. *We don't know where our daughter is.*

ALAN

And I'm sure it won't be the last time, Karen! I need you to relax, please.

TRISH

Stop telling me to relax!

ALAN

You're stressing me out.

TRISH

You *should* be stressed!

You know what, Greg, I'm going whether you like it or not. If you don't care about Liz's safety, then I don't know what to say to you.

ALAN

Can't we just go to bed? I'm sure she'll be here in the morning.

TRISH

It *is* the morning, Greg. The time is two. *In the morning.*

ALAN

You know what I mean.

TRISH

I'm not doing this right now. I'm going to get our daughter.

ALAN

From where?? You don't even know where she is!

TRISH

*Well I'm going to try to find out!*

ALAN

I won't let you do that!

TRISH

Why do you insist on being the one in charge all the time??

DENVER *off*

Ding dong!

ALAN

— Hello?

ERICA *off*

Mom? Dad? Sorry, it's me. The door's locked, I forgot my key.

TRISH

One second!

*TRISH lets ERICA and DENVER in.*

ERICA

Sorry it's so late.

TRISH *sweet*

Don't worry about it, sweetheart.

DENVER

Hi, Mr. and Mrs. Remington-Waters-DeMille.

ALAN

— Remington-Waters-DeMille?

DENVER

Yes sir. It's your name?

ALAN

Oh. Great. Of course.

ERICA

We lost track of time. You were probably worried sick.

TRISH

Don't mention it.  
We knew you'd be okay.

ALAN

Your mother was definitely worried.

TRISH

Greg.

ALAN

What?

ERICA

Sorry, mom.

TRISH

No, no —

ALAN

She was going to take the car and scour the city to find you.

TRISH

I wasn't that bad. Greg, I wasn't —

DENVER

It was my fault, anyway. Don't get mad at Liz.

ERICA

Ricky.

ALAN

— Why? What was your fault, Ricky?

ERICA

Nothing.

DENVER

Well, we had to talk about —

TRISH

Greg, they're home. It's okay.

ALAN

No, I'd like to know.

TRISH

Honey, relax.

ALAN

Ha! I hope you recognize the irony in *you* telling *me* to relax, Karen.

ERICA

Dad —

DENVER

It's okay. They know. We should tell them.

ALAN

What do we know?

TRISH

Tell us what?

ERICA

The dance was fine. Okay, goodnight!

ALAN

Not so fast, young lady.

MARVIN *interrupting*

Attention: Incoming message from MRV-Explorer to M-1 Compound Command.  
"Cue Compound Emergency Simulation #4481, to be initiated in —"

*The message abruptly cuts off.*

ERICA

— What was that?



ALAN

Simulation? Is MARVIN trying to play a Simulation with us?

DENVER

MARVIN, no.

ERICA

MARVIN, play the full message.

MARVIN

I'm sorry, Erica, you do not have the proper authorization to access this message.

ERICA

Not authorized?

DENVER

Access message, MARVIN.

MARVIN

I'm sorry, Denver, you do not have the proper authorization to access this message.

TRISH

What's going on?

ERICA

I mean, it sounded like an instruction from our parents —

ALAN

Going to Command, though. Do you think something's going wrong?

ERICA

Whatever's going on, they'll probably be able to figure it out.

TRISH

MARVIN, play the message.

MARVIN

I'm sorry, Trish, you do not have the proper authorization to access this message.

ERICA

Should we just continue with the Simulation?

ALAN

I want to know what that was. A compound emergency?

TRISH

I don't think it was meant for us. It said it was going to Command.

DENVER

Then why did it play in here?

TRISH

I don't know, but I'm sure it was cut off for a reason.

ALAN

Do you think we can send a message back?

DENVER

MARVIN, send reply.

MARVIN

I'm sorry, Denver, this function is not available while Test results are being—

*MARVIN cuts off. Static.*

DENVER

MARVIN?

ALAN

Did he shut off? I thought that wasn't possible.

DENVER

It shouldn't be.

TRISH

I bet we weren't supposed to hear that message.

ERICA

What do you mean, we weren't supposed to hear it?

TRISH

Do you really think we've ever been told *anything* important that goes on here?

DENVER

MARVIN, are you there?

ERICA

Well, probably not, but —

TRISH

You can't be *that* naive.

ALAN

What are you getting at?

TRISH

It's like not telling us what they were actually doing on this mission of theirs.  
I'm saying I wouldn't be surprised if there were things our parents don't want us to know.

DENVER

Like what's in the message we just heard.

TRISH

Right. Or why they're coming back the same day as our Test, without warning, after being away for years. There has to be a reason they aren't telling us.