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A THING INSIDE
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BY

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REH/RECORD: Studio 3 (CF3) BH Llandaff, Cardiff

Wednesday 15th April 2015 0930-1730
Thursday 16th April 2015 0930-1730

Edit: 17, 21, 23 April 2015

Tape Number: PCF1515/15DC2554

Project Code: PAH-3874-THIN

Transmission: Thursday 11th June 2015 @ 1415 on R4

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A THING INSIDE A THING INSIDE A THING**by IAIN AJ ROSS**I/V

I'm Iain A J Ross, writer of A Thing Inside A Thing Inside A Thing. The play was inspired by a photo I saw of some kids who worked on a shipyard. They seemed to be living within their hulks they were tearing apart. My play is set in space, however. And I wanted to write about the least traditional sci-fi character I could think of, a grumpy 90 year old lady

SCENE 1: THE VOID**JOY BREATHES HEAVILY IN HER HELMET.****AIR HISSES AND SPURTS THROUGH HER BREATHING APPARATUS.**

1. JOY: (V/O) Unreal.
 (V/O) That is the sound of a, of a... skyscraper crashing into a cathedral. Absolute silence! Listen...
JUST JOY'S HARSH BREATHING.
 (V/O) Not a peep.
DISTANT RUMBLE.
 (V/O) And here comes the oil tanker. It's gonna hit the skyscraper... yep, there! Woah... the tanker's buckled, and the oil and chemical waste is flooding out. Great shining globules of weightless pollutants, bursting over everything. It's sort of sexy.

RUMBLE INCREASES.

(V/O) In space, no-one can hear you scream. Loved that film. Really gory.

2. LANA: (DISTORTED) Joy! Joy!

3. JOY: **(V/O) There were sound-effects, though, in the space bits. That's inaccurate. No atmosphere means no sound.**

But here on the Mechanism we're surrounded by a whole sphere of noxious gasses. Our own giant bubble of crud. So as the shipwrecks enter the waste cloud... yes, yes, here it comes...

RISING ROAR.

5. LANA: (D) Joy! I can't, I can't see you! Do you read me? Get clear, get out of there- (BREAKING UP)... (RADIO STATIC)... you'll get crushed- (CUT OFF)

MONUMENTAL EXPLOSION. TWISTING OF METAL.
FIRE BURNING, MASONRY COLLIDING.
ARMAGEDDON.

6. JOY: **(V/O) I've been stuck here forty years... and I have never seen anything... so...**

(V/O) ...Beautiful!

Music

SCENE 2: THE VOID

THE ROAR IS NOW A GENTLE RUMBLE.

JOY STILL BREATHES IN HER HELMET,

DIRECTIONAL ROCKETS ON HER SPACESUIT FLARE
NOW AND THEN.

7. JOY: (SINGING) *'I know an old lady who swallowed a fly, I don't know why she swallowed a fly.'*

(V/O) 'The Phoenix Mechanism'; that's what they call this place.

8. LANA: (D) (STATIC) Come in Joy, I've got no reading on your void suit.

9. JOY: **(V/O) We're a sort of galactic lower intestine, munching up the undigested crap of the solar system. It all passes through here: heat-blackened warships, office blocks ten miles long. Huge statues of deposed monarchs we've never even heard of. All chewed up, spat back out to Earth in a grumbling river of recycled matter.**

10. JOY Which wreck am I looking for, then, genius?

11. LANA: (D) (UNIMPRESSED) Oh... oh, you're safe then

CLICK. JOY SWITCHES OFF HER MUSIC.

12. JOY: I'm a spacewalk pro, doll. If I died out here, you'd slit your wrists. You're not cut out for total solitude.

12a LANA: (D) Try me. The silence would be ecstasy. Head for that cargo ship, that ugly blue one, dead ahead. It should be empty like all the others. But the readings say there's heat in there.

13. JOY: I see it. Heading over.

STRESSING METAL OF PASSING HULKS.

14. JOY **(V/O) Don't get to see the junk convoy up close, normally. A glittering highway of wreckage, stretching off into infinity.**

15. JOY Lana, I'm coming up to the hull now. It's got a name on the side: um... *R.S.S. Jochebed*. Heat signals could be a cracked reactor.

16. LANA: (D) Or Pluto's mag field has scrambled the instruments again. Only way to be sure is to get inside the sardine tin.
CLANK OF BOOTS ON METAL HULL.

18. JOY: Right... Contact. I'm at their airlock. Powering up...
 (HUFFS AND PUFFS) ... the emergency hatch.
HANDLE SQUEAKS, AIR HISSES.
DOOR OPENS

SCENE 3: THE JOCHEBED, CARGO HOLD.

JOY STILL IN HER SPACESUIT, MOVING ALONG AGAINST METAL BULKHEADS.
LOW THRUM OF ELECTRONICS.
HEAT-DETECTION SONAR 'PINGS'.

19. LANA: (D) Don't muck about in there, Joy. There's no way I can stop you getting sucked in once you reach the mechanism's mouth. Just once, try to be professional.

20. JOY: **(V/O) I could have snapped her swan-like neck many times over. But I am strong, I resist.**

20a JOY: I'm inside.

21. LANA: (D) Can you see the cargo hold yet? That's where the heat blips are. Are you even listening?

22. JOY: **(V/O) She was a teenager when they dumped her here. Trouble is, Lana needs a mummy. And I ain't it.**

23. JOY There's breathable air in here. It's pretty dead, though. Oh, hang on, I've triggered a hologram bloke; a recording.

A GLITCHY, FALTERING RECORDING PLAYS. STIRRING ORCHESTRAL MUSIC.

24. JOCHEBED VOICE: Welcome, pioneers, to the final phase of your journey. We've come so far as a people. We've built homes at the edges of the solar system. But back on Earth, our cities are dark and overburdened, left to rot and chaos...So let Phoenix Intergalactic help you make... the Great Leap.

JOY'S SPACESUIT JETS ECHO AS SHE DRIFTS
THROUGH A CAVERNOUS SPACE.

25. JOY: The Great Leap? Oh. The hold is huge. There's hundreds of... caskets.

I'm going to take a look inside – the casket's got windows.

27. LANA: (D) Are there bodies in there? Joy?
28. JOY: Can't quite see yet.
29. LANA: (D) What is it?

JOY WIPES THE GLASS.

32. JOY: A face. A body. It's breathing.
33. LANA: (D) You daft old crone, say again?

34. JOY: It's a boy. A toddler.

35. LANA: (D) What are you talking about?

36. JOY: It's a whole colony. Thousands of... thousands of them.
(CLOSE) They're alive.

SCENE 4: THE MECHANISM, GANGWAY

HEAVY MACHINERY.

42. JOY: **(V/O) The Phoenix Mechanism.**

The crusher gobble up the junk convoy. Enormous buzz saws slice and dice everything. Then, the smelting area. Controlled lakes of lava; you expect to see dinosaurs roaming around down there. Finally, it all channels through to the nano-chambers; huge silos of red and black sand where the waste is broken down at an atomic level. It all poops out the other end of the machine, in giant sausages of carbon and frozen metals.

Then drones steer the recycled matter back to earth. It's automated perfection. It's something from nothing.

TWO BIKES, RACING ALONG. JOY AND LANA PEDAL, BOTH PANTING.

38. LANA: Pedal faster, you bald-headed prune! Come on, Joy!

39. JOY: **(V/O) You have to bike across the complex on a gangway, it's knackered. The Mechanism is miles long, like a giant, fat worm. A huge metallic tallywacker.**

THEY BREAK, STOP. CATCH THEIR BREATH.

40. (BREATHLESS) Stop, stop a minute I, I can't keep up. I want to die.

41. LANA: Any other day, sure, yeah. Hurl yourself into the smelting furnace, be my guest. But it's a two-woman job, I can't shut the crusher down by myself.

JOY UNSCREWS A HIPFLASK, SWIGS.

43. JOY Cheers.

44. LANA: Oh nice, nice. Thousands of oblivious people about to be crushed to death, and you want to get pissed on... on engine-grease moonshine.

45. JOY: You should try some, it might help. Y' know, when you first got here, your hair was all sleek and long. Now it's coming out in clumps. You're a right shambles.

JOY GULPS, BUT LANA SWATS THE HIPFLASK AWAY.

46. LANA: Shut up!

47. JOY: What you do that for?

48. LANA: We've got, I don't know, five minutes before that ship gets eaten.

49. JOY: There's no bloody food left on this whole station, booze is the only thing keeping me going.

50. LANA: You disgust me. Do you understand? You could at least put some clothes on.

51. JOY: What for? I don't like 'em.

52. LANA: Oooh, Just get on your bike!

53. JOY: (MEEK) I've got a flat tyre.

54. LANA: Right, get on mine.

55. JOY Oh No.

55b LANA Hurry up. Try not to touch me with your freakish, body parts, OK?

55c JOY If you should be so lucky

55d LANA God I'm gonna vom.

JOY CLIMBS ON. LANA STARTS PEDALLING.

55e. JOY: (SQUASHED MOUTH) One day, when I'm starving, when I'm absolutely keeling over from lack of food, I will eat you. I will eat you.

SCENE 5: THE MECHANISM, STEM CHAMBER.

'CHOMP, CHOMP' OF CRUSHING MACHINES.

CRUNCHING OF THE JOCHEBED'S STEEL.

LANA AND JOY SHOUT ABOVE THE NOISE.

56. LANA: So. We pull the levers on three, yeah? Ready!

57. JOY: **(V/O) The stem chamber is really just a big junction box; it's the Mechanism's brain.**

58. LANA: What are you waiting for? Joy?

59. JOY: I'm thinking. All the food on that spaceship. Months, years' worth. We could offload it, stash it. Then put the ship back through the shredder.

60. LANA: Are you having a stroke?

61. JOY: They're in an induced sleep, they wouldn't feel a thing-

62. LANA: That little boy, and all his shipmates, will die.

63. JOY: That boy is good as dead already. The crusher hasn't stopped running in fifty years. If we stop it, they'll come here, the men. It's real trouble for us.

64. LANA: I swear. I will squeeze the living breath out of your putrid body unless you pull the lever in three seconds.

65. JOY: This is a mistake.

66. LANA: Just do it! On three.

66a JOY Yes.

66b LANA One, two, pull.

THEY TUG THE LEVERS WITH EFFORT.

THE STATION VIBRATES.

HUGE, SHUDDERING ENGINES SHUT DOWN.

THE CHOMPING AND CRUNCHING CEASES.

SILENCE.

67. JOY: (WHISPERS) It's... so... *quiet*.

68. (V/O) **I can hear my own thoughts again. It's weird. I don't like it.**

69. LANA: It looks ...OK. The Jochebed's OK.

70. JOY: What do you want me to do, breakdance?

71. LANA: You- Why did you wait?! You could've killed them. All of them.

72. JOY: This is Phoenix's cock-up. It's a Generation Ship.

72a LANA What are you talking about?

72b JOY; A city's-worth of eager beavers put in medical comas and crammed in freezers for the Great Leap.

73. LANA: Great Leap?

74. JOY: They blast off from Earth, pointed at a new solar system. Then they wake up hundreds of years later and re-colonise whatever dismal rock they find. Makes no sense that one would drift through here, though...

75. LANA: Where are you going now?

76. JOY: Someone's got to get out there and sort this mess. I'll suit up, glue some limpet rockets to the Jochebed's hull. Maybe we can roll it into space before anyone notices. Can you turn all this back on, when I'm done?

77. LANA: Start it up again?

78. JOY: Of course start it up, it's already a bottleneck.

SCENE 6: THE VOID

JOY IN HER HELMET, BREATHING.

MAGNETIC 'CLANK'.

79. JOY: Limpet six attached. It's too quiet, need some soothing music.

SLAYER'S 'RAINING BLOOD' PLAYS OVER TINNY SPEAKERS.

There

JOY HUMS ALONG, PRETTILY, THROUGHOUT.

MAGNETIC 'CLANK'. JOY WORKS AWAY.

80. JOY: Limpet seven, attached.

82. LANA: (D) Roger.

83. JOY: Wait... Lana?

84. LANA: (D) Yeah, limpet seven, I heard you.

85. JOY: Stop talking. There's a ship coming for us, I can see it.

86. LANA: (D) There's a ton of ships coming. That's our job.

87. JOY: No, not a wreck, a manned ship. It's a little brown bug, a spindly thing. It'll be here any minute. I'm coming in.

SCENE 7: THE MECHANISM, AIRLOCK.

LIGHT MACHINERY. WARNING KLAXONS.

HISSING GAS.

88. LANA: They're docking. Can just about see the hull... Says *RSS Huntsman*.

89. JOY: How are we going to play this?

90. LANA: Let me do the talking. Are you going to put any clothes on, or what?

91. JOY: Why start now?

92. LANA: You're a hundred years old, Joy.

93. JOY: Eighty-nine. *I'm eighty-nine*. I think.

94. LANA: So you really want the first thing they see to be a buck-naked, muddy-legged grandma with black teeth? Head to toe in botched tattoos.

95. JOY: Feast your eyes, kid. This one's my first punk band: *Youth Spew*. Oh, we were vile. This one; the Sydney Opera

House Ballet- all the *Orpheus* dancers got the same tattoo. And Classic Ziggy Stardust on the forearm, here.

96. LANA: Rank.

97. JOY: (ANGERED) There's more living marked out on this body, Lana, than you will ever know. A lifetime of glorious debauchery. Wives, husbands... What have you got to show me? Nothing. Not a fraction of the things I've done. You're stuck here forever and you're just a baby.

98. LANA: I'm only asking you to put some clothes on, don't pop an artery. Look, they're at the hatch, I can see someone.

GAS HISSES. AIRLOCK DOOR OPENS.

KLAXONS FADE.

GREGOR, BREATHING. HARSH AND SLOW.

99. JOY: (V/O) **Just one man. One hulk of a man. Decked out in Phoenix uniform. Young. Arms like an anchor chain.**

100. LANA: Welcome to the Mechanism.

GREGOR BREATHES, IN AND OUT, IN AND OUT.

101. LANA: What's wrong with him?

102. JOY: Thick atmosphere.

103. GREGOR: (BREATHLESS) St-... Go-...I'm-...

104. LANA: Look, mate... *sir*. We had to shut the crusher down. I know we're not supposed to.

HIS BREATHING WORSENS. HE MOANS.

HE SLUMPS TO THE DECK. LIES STILL.

105. LANA: Out cold.

106. JOY: Come on then, clever clogs. What the hell do we do now?

107. LANA: Drag him back on his ship. He can't breathe our air.

108. JOY: Or don't drag him anywhere. You can pilot his ship, right?

109. LANA: Oh shut up. (LIFTING HIM) Help me, then.

110. JOY: Check his pockets, at least. Might have food or fags.

111. LANA: Joy!

SCENE 8: THE HUNSTMAN, BRIDGE.

GENTLE HUM OF COMPUTERS.

AIRLOCK CLOSES.

GREGOR SPLUTTERS BENEATH A GAS MASK. HIS BREATHING STEADIES.

112. LANA: There you go, mate. Fresh oxygen.

113. GREGOR: St-... stem.

114. JOY: Stem? You want the stem? It's like talking to Lassie.

115. LANA: Give him some water.

JOY GULPS AT A WATER BOTTLE.

116. JOY: Hmm, one sec.

117. GREGOR: You... You...

118. JOY: Saved you. Reward would be nice. Food would be nice.

119. GREGOR: So hard to breathe.

JOY HAWKS UP A GRIM BALL OF PHLEGM.

120. LANA: Don't Joy.

JOY SPITS IT OUT -SPLAT- TO THE DECK.

121. JOY: Black mucus. See? Nanomachines, on the Mechanism. They break down the shipwrecks. So wee, they float in the air. You're breathing the stray ones right now. In and out of every pore.

122. LANA: You need to take pills to counteract the nanos. Otherwise; Vikram.

123. GREGOR: Vikram?

124. JOY: Bloke was exiled here too, a few years ago. He didn't keep up with his pills. Nanos ate him away from the inside. Black stuff leaking out of him...

125. GREGOR: They... degrade you?

126. LANA: Oh, you don't even know, mate. She is the physical manifestation of absolute degradation.

(Joy chuckles)

Give him an anti-nano, Joy.

JOY IS RIGHT UP IN GREGOR'S FACE.SHE POPS OPEN A RATTLING PILL CASE.

127. JOY: Machines inside us. Us inside machines. Russian dolls. Over and over. Here, let me-

128. GREGOR: No, it's fine- mmmf

129. JOY: -pop it in your mouth for you. Yum yum.

130. GREGOR: (DISGUSTED) Thank... you.

JOY SMACKS HER LIPS.

131. LANA: I'm Lana, this is Joy.

132. GREGOR: (RISING) Gregor. Just two of you?
 133. LANA: Yes, you're the first visitor in ages. Shake his hand, Joy.
 134. JOY: (SNIFFS) I'm busy.

FLUIDS TRICKLING ON DECK.

135. GREGOR: What's wrong with her?
 136. JOY: I'm peachy. You?
 137. LANA: Oh Christ,
 138. GREGOR: She is actually urinating on my floor
 139. JOY: (OVER) Must be all the excitement.
 140. LANA: I am sorry you have to see this, Gregor.

JOY FINISHES RELIEVING HERSELF.

141. JOY: All better. Now then, what we got here?
 142. GREGOR: I know Phoenix uses convicts as caretakers. But the facility's so automated, what is it that you two actually do here?
 143. LANA: We're trouble-shooters.
 143a JOY Not half.
 143b LANA When the repair robot that repairs the repair robot gets a virus, we fix it with our bare hands.
 144. GREGOR: So we're not talking malfunction, we're talking intervention. You *chose* to shut down the Mechanism.
 145. LANA: We had to. The Jochebed- that ship jammed in the crusher- look, it's stuffed with thousands of induced sleepers.

146. JOY: An old Genship. Your mistake, not ours. You got any grub on this dinghy? We're dry.

147. GREGOR: How do you survive?

148. LANA: This is a workhouse. We get grey goop to eat, squirted out of a hole in the wall, if we clock in enough hours. Sometimes not even that.

149. GREGOR: I can breathe much better now. So please, as a thank you; use my ship's facilities. There's a shower pod, through the hatch. Wash away the, uh, the hard day. Maybe we can find you some clothes, eh Joy?

150. JOY: No ta, I'm good.

SCENE 9: THE HUNTSMAN, SHOWER POD.

RUNNING SHOWER, BATHROOM ACOUSTICS.

JOY AND LANA SCRUBBING THEMSELVES.

151. JOY: **(V/O) It's ecstasy. It's baptism. I haven't felt clean running water on my skin in aeons.**

152. LANA: Turn *around*. Stop looking. Concentrate on yourself, you've got years of dirt to shift.

153. JOY: You've still got your body. Just remembering what that felt like. Not a mark on you. You could use it, you know, on him. It's a way out of here.

154. LANA: Why don't you have a go on him, you're so keen?
(MUTTERING, UNDER) Pimp *me* out like some cheap-

155. JOY: He's a specimen, you'd be lucky.

156. LANA: (RAGE) You know where I came from? A working lodge. A whorehouse. And you're asking me to do that again?

157. JOY: Oh boo hoo forever. We've all been through the meat grinder, dear.

SQUEAK. LANA SHUTS OFF THE SHOWER.

158. LANA: Not one time have you asked me about my life

159. JOY: You really want to sit down and have a, a *chat*? Cup of tea, lovely shoulder rub? You want me to ask you about that tattoo, on your thigh? I know what that little 'x' means.

160. LANA: No. You shut up. She's out of bounds, you got it?

161. JOY: She...?

162. LANA: You wouldn't understand.

163. JOY: Well you don't know anything about me, either.

164. LANA: I know the smell. I know you've lived a life of shame and filth.

165. JOY: I was a ballerina. Bloody excellent one, too.

166. LANA: But no kids.

167. JOY: I-... Brats are a burden. A weakness. That's why they brought in population control.

168. LANA: You're as bad as them. (beat)

They acted like it was a minor procedure, you know, like having a tooth out. I was daft from drugs, from sedatives. Then they brand you, they burn you. One 'x' per baby. (TEARS) Sunday she was born. Phoenix took her away

Monday morning. And Tuesday, I was tied up and shipped here. I didn't even get to name her.

169. JOY: That's... a bummer.

170. LANA: She'll be five. Five years old. Well. There you go, right?

171. JOY: (TENDER) There you go.

172. LANA: (RECOVERING) God, imagine if you'd had offspring. The nightmare.

173. JOY: If they'd turned out like you, I'd have drowned them in a sack.

DISTANT: THE CRUSHER STARTING UP.

174. LANA: When my sentence is up, I'll find out ...

175. JOY: Clam up, listen.

177. JOY: The Mechanism's started up again. It's Gregor.

LANA RATTLES THE DOOR.

178. LANA: The door's locked.

179. JOY: Oh my God, we've got to get out. Kick it down.

180. LANA: You kick it down, it's solid. Why's he started the crusher?

181. JOY: I don't know. ... unless...

182. LANA: What?

183. JOY: Wait. There should be a circuit breaker for the lock. Here, pass me that toothbrush.

184. LANA: Do you know what you're doing?

185. JOY: Not really.

JOY JABS THE TOOTHBRUSH INTO THE
ELECTRICAL CIRCUITS ON THE WALL, VIOLENTLY.
THE DOOR OPENS.

186. Bingo!

SCENE 10: THE STEM.

THE CRUSHING MECHANISM ROARS.

187. LANA: What the hell's going on? The Jochebed'll be crushed!

188. GREGOR: How did you get out?

189. LANA: You've got to stop it now!

191. LANA: There's thousands of sleepers in there, they'll be killed.

192. JOY: Lana – new protocol, right?

193. GREGOR: Precisely.

194. LANA: Protocol? Wait, wait a minute-

195. JOY: Recycle the civvies. Crunch 'em up, spit 'em out.

196. GREGOR: We prefer 'Biomass Resource' as a term, but yes, there's no point denying-

197. JOY: (OVER) Blah, blah blah

198. LANA: No. Not even you lot-

199. GREGOR: (OVER) Blanket processing of live organics is perfectly legal-

200. LANA: (OVER) How can you-

201. GREGOR: You can't stop the machine, ever again. My hand, my genetic print, is the override. If you want to survive, then you do your jobs. It's pretty simple. Even the old woman gets it.

202. JOY: Oh, I get you, pal. Nice toothpaste, by the way.

JOY BEGINS BRUSHING HER TEETH.

203. GREGOR: Is that my, my toothbrush?

204. LANA: We're shutting this place down.

GREGOR UNZIPS A SECTION OF HIS UNIFORM.

205. GREGOR: Stay where you are. Do you recognise what this is? We call it the Last Resort. It's standard issue.

HE CLICKS A SWITCH, AND THE OBJECT HUMS, AS MOTORS WITHIN HEAT UP.

206. JOY: (FOAMY) You gonna use your big giant gun on two tiny women, eh Captain?

207. GREGOR: I wouldn't call it a gun. It's cutting equipment. But you should know, this thing can take you to bits.

208. JOY: (FOAMY) You get much action? Bet you like to bang, eh, Greg? Bang bang bang.

209. LANA: You expect us to just stand here whilst thousands of people die? Just do nothing?

210. GREGOR: It's already done. The Jochebed is processed. Crushed.

GREGOR POWERS OFF THE DEVICE.

JOY LAUGHS; A HEARTY, DIRTY CACKLE.

211. JOY: Ohh, boy. Priceless.

212. GREGOR: What's wrong with her? How do you stand it?

JOY FINISHES BRUSHING. SPITS WATER.

213. JOY: Did you see it, then, Gregor? With your own eyes?

214. GREGOR: See what?

215. JOY: You didn't see it cause the Jochebed isn't there.

216. GREGOR: What? Where is it?

217. JOY: I moved it.

217a LANA What?

218. GREGOR: Impossible.

219. JOY: No, not impossible. I done it! Limpet rockets on the hull.

220. GREGOR: All right? Why did you move it?

221. JOY: There's a tonne of food on there, and I'm starving.

222. GREGOR: (RISING ANGER) Where did you move it to?

223. JOY: I hid it.

224. GREGOR: Where did you hide it?

225. JOY: If I told you where I hid it, it wouldn't be hid now would it?

226. GREGOR: You need to tell me where it is, Immediately. Processing that ship is my priority.

227. JOY: Well you've right ballsed up your first mission then, eh Captain?

228. GREGOR: Give me that.

229. JOY: This? Gregory's little toothy peg brush? Usually I'd tell you to shove it where the sun don't shine. But maybe, maybe I'll shove it up mine instead. Hang on-

230. LANA: Joy!

231. GREGOR: You disgusting hag, give it to me.

GREGOR GRAPPLES WITH JOY.

232. JOY: It's mine now, I found it! Get off me!

233. GREGOR: Utter barbarism. ..ah.

THE LAST RESORT CLATTERS TO THE FLOOR.

234. LANA: Right!

THEY ALL FREEZE.

This is how it is now.

235. GREGOR: (SIGH) Please, please put it down, Lana.

236. LANA: Shouldn't have dropped it, should you? I just want to get off this place.

236a JOY Careful, Lana.

237. GREGOR: You don't know how my gun works.

238. LANA: Oh it's suddenly a gun now, is it?

Start walking.

SHE CLICKS ON THE WEAPON. IT HUMS. + MUSIC

Slowly.

239. JOY We're nicking your ship, mate.

SCENE 11: THE HUNTSMAN, BRIDGE.

LOW COMPUTER HUM. MUSIC

THE 'LAST RESORT' WHINES.

240. LANA: Sit there. Get the launch sequence going.

241. JOY: Or we just shoot him already.

242. GREGOR: Say you escape. There are thousands more Mechanisms, a spider's web stretched along the asteroid belt. Each one being reprogrammed, repurposed for live organics.

243. LANA: How do you get whole colonies to agree to hurl themselves into your wood chipper?

244. JOY: They're all GenShips, like the Jochebed; they think they're going to wake up hundreds of years from now in a new galaxy, a new world. But instead, they end up here.

247. GREGOR: Think about it with some perspective. We're all made up of long dead suns. It's the natural cycle of the universe. Every human body contains carbon, copper, sodium. We can repurpose that matter into metals, munitions. A biomass that plentiful, it's enough to turn the tide of the conflict.

249. LANA: (FAINT) It's making me sick to my stomach, all this...

250. GREGOR: You chose this, Lana, not me. From now on, this was your decision.

251. LANA: The route-...

LANA GASPS. DROPS THE HEAVY WEAPON. SHE SLUMPS TO THE FLOOR.

252. JOY: What's wrong?

253. GREGOR: It's a security measure. The Last Resort can detect a convict's DNA through the palm grip. It's already pricked her hand with poison.

LANA HYPERVENTILATES. THEN CRIES OUT.

JOY GOES TO HER, HOLDS HER.

254. JOY: Try and breathe, calm down.
 255. GREGOR: I warned her.
 256. JOY: She's dying!
 257. GREGOR: Yes. It's touching to see how much you care.

PAUSE. JOY STANDS UP.

258. JOY: I don't care.
 259. GREGOR: Good. Now are you going to help me? Or do I have to kill you too?
 260. JOY: (PAUSE) I'll get the Jochebed for you. But I get to raid her food supplies before you mince the ship.
 261. GREGOR: Fine.

SCENE 12: THE VOID

JOY IN HER HELMET, HEAVY BREATHING.

MUSIC

264. JOY: **(V/O) The Mechanism monitors itself through thousands and thousands of unblinking eyes. Sensors, photoreceptors, spectrum traps. Sometimes I feel like they're all my eyes, and with them I can see out into the void around us. I can see the junk convoy crawling sluggishly into the mouth of the crusher.**
 265. **(V/O) Billions of tons, metre by metre, being pulled closer to my open, greedy mouth.**

266. GREGOR: (D) (STATIC) –coming through, Joy? This is *The Huntsman*.

267. JOY: I read you. I'm on the Jochebed now. Bringing her round.

268. GREGOR: (D) Tracking you now.

269. JOY: I've hit the jackpot with the Jochebed. Limitless food.

270. GREGOR: (D) Is there ever a moment you're not thinking with your stomach?

271. JOY: How could you know what real hunger is? To be *hollow*. Sends you insane. Raging.

272. GREGOR: (D) Five hundred metres from the crusher. Closing. Hold that course.

273. JOY: Once... our supplies ran out. We were weeks without real food, retching with hunger. Properly delirious. Then, the soldiers turned up. Dead soldiers.
 Burnt-out burial ships, from all nations and colonies, I thought they'd never stop coming. The Mechanism took them all in, ship after ship.
 And it recycled them into something... edible. I was too weak to feed myself. But I'm not sorry I ate them. I'm not sorry, because...I'm alive.

275. GREGOR: (D) Three hundred metres. You're bringing her in a bit fast.

276. JOY: That's what this universe is, Gregor. It's about eating and shitting it out again, just to keep going. Survival. My boy knew all about survival.

(D) AN ALARM RINGS (AT GREGOR'S END).

277. GREGOR: (D) Hundred and eighty metres. Watch your proximity sensors.

278. JOY: Oh trust me, I am. The Jochebed is vast, your ship is a tiny insect. I'm going to squash you like a spider!

(D) MORE ALARMS, MORE URGENT.

279. GREGOR: (D) Don't be stupid. You wouldn't. You'd kill us both.

280. JOY: No, no, I reckon it'll just be you, old bean.

INCREASING ENGINE ROAR.

281. GREGOR: (D) Just listen to reason.

282. JOY: Fifty metres.

283. GREGOR: (D) Just think about this.

284. JOY: (OVER) Thirty metres.

285. GREGOR: (D) I can get you out of here!

286. JOY: Ten.

287. GREGOR: (D) I can set you fr- (STATIC)

288. JOY: Zero.

HEAVY METAL MUSIC

290. JOY **(V/O) When two complicated objects collide in zero-G, it's as jagged and violent as you can imagine. But it's also rather lovely. The debris spins off in slow fractals, like a dandelion clock. Like a silent tornado of popcorn.**

291. **(V/O) God I'm hungry.**

SCENE 13: THE MECHANISM AIRLOCK / INTO: (THE MECHANISM GANGWAY).

AIRLOCK HISSES. ALARMS, FADING.

JOY UNZIPS HER VOID SUIT.

AS GREGOR APPROACES:

293. GREGOR: Bravo. You are truly diabolical.

294. JOY: Oh! You still kicking about? Thought I'd finished you off.

295. GREGOR: (BREATHLESS) I barely got out of there. My ship is wrecked. I can't get home.

296. JOY: Sucks, doesn't it?

299. GREGOR: You're taking me to the Jochebed, right now.

300. JOY: Why would I want to do that?

301. GREGOR: I have the anti-venom on my ship – you could still save Lana's life.

301a JOY I told you, I don't care about the girl.

301b GREGOR I don't believe you.

JOY GNASHES AND SNARLS AS SHE BITES.

304. GREGOR: Ah! You troll!

HE SLAPS JOY AWAY. SHE FALLS.

You bit right through the skin. You've probably given me *Rabies...*

306. JOY: (IN PAIN) STD's, no doubt. I did a whole lot of orgies when I was young.

307. GREGOR: There are teeth left in there.

308. JOY: You keep 'em. Gotta go.

JOY SUDDENLY RUNS, MOANING WITH PAIN.

309. GREGOR: Stop! There's nowhere *to* go!

AIRLOCK AMBIENCE FADES TO MECHANISM
GANGWAY

GREGOR BREATHING, STAMPING AFTER HER.

310. JOY: **(V/O) Then I see my salvation.**

JOY PICKS UP HER BIKE, JUMPS ON, PEDALS.

311. JOY: **(V/O) Old faithful, lying there all beautiful and shiny on the deck, where Lana left her. All his physical training, all his fitness and youth, and he's defeated by a five-speed bike.**

(FX BICYCLE BELL)

SCENE 14: THE MECHANISM, GANGWAY

RUMBLE OF SMELTING WORKS.

GREGOR STAGGERS ALONG METALLIC GRATING, A DISTANCE AWAY.

312. GREGOR: (DISTANT, PLAYFUL) Joy! ...Jooooo-oy! I can smell you! I know you're near!

313. JOY: **(V/O) The heat is so intense up here, I can feel it through my void suit. I can feel my body giving up.**

314. GREGOR: (DISTANT) You old mare! I'll smoke you out like a termite. You can't hide forever.

GREGOR STRIKES METAL PIPES WITH HIS HUMMING WEAPON- CLANG!

HE FIGHTS TO BREATHE, COUGHS.

316. GREGOR: (NEARER) I looked you up, your crime file. I know all about you.

Finn. He's called Finn. I can make it happen. You can talk to him, see him.

317. JOY: (WHISPER) I've got nothing to say to him.

320. GREGOR: He's still alive. Grown up. Got his own family.

321. JOY: **(V/O) Last time I saw him, Finn was ten. Phoenix agents stalking through our house, me hiding in the bathroom. I'm trying to flush my booze and pills down the bog before they find me. Unfit mother, see? That was their thing, back then. Grass up your parents. Can't blame him for turning me in- he was just a kid.**

322. GREGOR: I can't protect you when the men get here. Come on, Joy.

323. JOY: **(V/O) He didn't realise what the punishment would be. He didn't realise I'd be gulagged off to this place.**

324. GREGOR: I've got a photo here, a recent one.

THE SMELTING RUMBLE INTENSIFIES.

325. JOY: **(V/O) Couldn't keep any photos of him. The only reminder I have is the scar on my thigh. Population Control, they mark you. A little black 'x', like it's a bad thing, like it's a wrong answer. Should be a tick. Yes, you did right, well done. A beautiful, vibrant baby boy.**

326. GREGOR: I can show you.

327. JOY: (BLURTNG, OUT LOUD) Yes, yes! I'm here.

GREGOR IS SUDDENLY UPON HER. SO LOUD.

328. GREGOR: Come on old girl, out you come.

HE PULLS HER FROM THE PIPES.

329. JOY: Let me see him.

330. GREGOR: Here.

JOY CAN'T SUPPRESS A GASP.

331. JOY: **(V/O) Finn's a middle-aged man, suddenly; how daft.
He's all grey at the temples. And those eyelashes!
Still long like a dairy cow's...**

332. Thank you.

334. JOY: For showing me his face.

335. GREGOR: (MAD) Oh, you're *welcome*.

GREGOR GRABS HER THROAT.

336. JOY: (WINDPIPE STRANGLLED) Sp... soooo-

337. GREGOR: Shh, shh. Please, Joy, be calm. It's your time to go, now.

338. JOY: Spsss...sooo-

HE RELEASES HIS GRIP.

339. (GASPING) Space suit.

341. JOY: You need this void suit, and me, to... get to the
Jochebed. She still flies, she's your only escape.

342. GREGOR: Don't care! You and the suit are going in the smelting fire.

343. JOY: No, no, Gregor-

GREGOR GRUNTS AS HE LIFTS JOY.

344. GREGOR: Up we go, Nana!

HE STAGGERS ON THE METALLIC GANGWAY.

345. JOY: **(V/O) For a second, I'm thinking about letting him throw me over the railings. I'm ready to go. Why not? It's like being sacrificed to a volcano.**

347. **(V/O) But then, it's not so hard to turn the suit rockets on.**

JOY'S SUIT JETS 'WHOOSH' INTENSELY.

GREGOR HOWLS IN AGONY.

JOY CRASHES TO THE GANGWAY FLOOR.

GREGOR STUMBLES, COLLIDES WITH THE RAILINGS, FALLS OVER.

HE PANICS, SCRAMBLES AT THE METAL.

348. **(V/O) He tumbles backwards over the railings, blinded. Just about clings on with his fingers. Then he's dangling over the molten ore below.**

349. GREGOR: **(HYSTERICALLY) What did you do? What did you do to me?**

350. JOY: **(V/O) I pick up his gun.**

351. GREGOR: Don't! Don't. It'll poison you like Lana.

THE WEAPON STARTS UP, BUZZES.

355. JOY: I'm not poisoned. I'm not a convict. My sentence ran out years ago. I just haven't got a reason to leave.

Gregor... Let me take your hand.

356. GREGOR: You'll never lift me you mad old witch, you're too weak.

357. JOY: No, I mean, literally. Let me take it.

THE LAST RESORT HUMS.

358. GREGOR: No, no, Stop! If you cut me, you'll never see your child again.

359. JOY: It's never been about that. It's about *her*. It's about giving the girl a chance. It's way too late for me and you.

SEARING FLESH.

GREGOR GASPS, YELLS IN PAIN.

360. GREGOR: Be decent, Joy! Please!

361. JOY: **(V/O) Hmm, 'decent'. This isn't decency, really, is it; cutting off a man's arm? It works so quickly, so easily, and then it's... done.**

GREGOR BREATHES, BREATHES, THEN...

FALLS. CRIES OUT AS HE TUMBLES AWAY.

362. **(V/O) I imagine a kind of Wile E. Coyote cartoon smoke cloud when he lands in the lava. It's the decent thing, to turn away and not look at Gregor's demise.**

A DISTANT 'SPLOSH' AND RUMBLE OF LAVA.

363. **(V/O) Yeah, wish I'd looked now.**

SCENE 15: THE MECHANISM GANGWAY

LIGHT MACHINERY/MUSIC

364. JOY: Lana. Lana, wake up.

SHE SHAKES LANA'S BODY IN ANGER.

NO RESPONSE. JOY LOSES IT

366. I'm not doing it on my own. Breathe in! Fight back!
 (SOBBING, SLAPPING HER) Stop this, I can't take it.
 Stop it, please.

367. LANA: (WAKING) Wh-... wh-... ow- Ow! You're hurting me.

368. JOY: Good! Good. Just lying about whilst I do all the work.

369. LANA: You look abysmal. Where's Gregor?

370. JOY: Look in that plastic bag.

OPENS BAG.

371. LANA: God, Jesus!

372. JOY: Well, I needed his hand to stop the crusher. The whole Mechanism is powering down.

373. LANA: We need to get out of here. They'll be coming.

374. JOY: You go.

375. LANA: Oh, really, you're going to churn out the whole- (WEAK)
"Leave me here to die. You go on without me" thing?

376. JOY: Bingo. I'm toast.

377. LANA: I'll take your void suit, go get the Jochebed, and we're both off this scum bucket forever. Let's get you out of this-

THEY STRUGGLE WITH THE SPACESUIT.

378. Oh... Oh Joy. There's blood in here. Black nano stuff.

379. JOY: Stop the fuss, I'm ready to go. I stopped taking the pills ages ago. I'm riddled with nanobots. They help me talk to the Mechanism.

380. LANA: Rrrright.

381. JOY: Generations of the little sods, flitting about here in the dust for decades. In and out of me.

382. LANA: . Here, lie down.

LANA HELPS JOY RECLINE.

383. JOY: (FLAGGING) Look, take the Jochebed and piss off. More Phoenix ships will be here soon. If I'm going to die, I want some peace. Don't start praying or singing or something; I might pop off early.

391. LANA: (IGNORING HER) I'm hungry.

392. JOY: Me too. Hey you won't believe what I found on Gregor's ship.

A CELLOPHANE WRAPPER RUSTLES.

393. LANA: Let me see it!

394. JOY: Take a bite. It's real chocolate.

THEY GORGE, TALK WITH FULL MOUTHS.

395. LANA: Unbelievable. Unbelievable!

THEY LAUGH, THEN CRY A LITTLE.

399. LANA: Can I hold your hand?

400. JOY: (MOUTH FULL) No. Get off.

MACHINES POWER DOWN AROUND THEM.

MACHINES STOP.

SCENE 16: THE MECHANISM.JOY'S VOICE IS DIFFERENT, FILTERED.

404. JOY: (SINGING, HOARSE) *'I know an old lady who swallowed a fly. I don't know why she swallowed a fly, perhaps she'll die..'*

405. (V/O) **I'm the ghost in the machine.**

FX MACHINES

Lana's gone now. She escaped on the Jochebed, with a whole colony of rebels, just woken up.

She dragged my body to the nanochambers. Put me to rest in the carbon mounds. Not a trad burial, but it'll do.

And yet... I'm not quite dead.

MUSIC

It's like I'm... merging with the Mechanism. My body is being dismantled by the nanobots as we speak.

My essence is reverberating through her superstructure. I'm her.. She is me.

INCREASING MUSIC

And if she and I are one, then we can talk to the thousands of other Mechanisms dotted along the edge of the solar system. A whole fleet of mighty tallywackers, all at my bidding, can you imagine?

SLOW-BUILDING MUSIC.

Oh yeah! You beautiful old machine!

JOY IS SO ALIVE.

406. JOY (CONT'D): **They're coming. The men. I can feel it. But I will recycle the recyclers! Here they come. Crawling slowly towards my mouth. My wide open mouth. Ready... to swallow them whole!**

MUSIC + CREDITS

In A Thing Inside A Thing Inside A Thing by Iain Ross

Joy was played by Julia McKenzie

Lana by Nina Toussaint-White

And Gregor by Matthew Gravelle

It was a BBC Cymru/Wales Production, directed by James Robinson

MUSIC ENDS ABRUPTLY

THE END
