

THE RED PLANET
By Fareine Suarez

Christopher Williams (Matt D): Late 20s, someone's husband

Sophia Williams (Rachel): Early 20s, no one's wife. She was left behind on Earth at age 10 when she had to give up her seat on the Pilgrimage for a rich dignitary's partner. Ten years later, she finally won a spot on the Pilgrimage to the Red Planet.

Clerk (Matt J): Works for the Intergalactic Peace Federation's Department of Transportation

Press Corps #1 / Security Guard (Mak): Member of the Press / Security Guard for the Federation's Department of Transportation

Press Corps #2 / Mystery Passenger (Jared): Member of the Press / Protester from the Resistance

SETTING: A waiting room, similar to an airport or DMV waiting area from 2017. On stage right, CHRISTOPHER WILLIAMS is checking in with the CLERK. At center stage is a waiting area, where SOPHIA WILLIAMS is sitting.

PRESS CORPS #1 (PC1) and PRESS CORPS #2 (PC2) are standing downstage.

(Lights up on PC1 and PC2.)

PC1. Reach new heights on the Pilgrimage to the Red Planet, brought to you by the Intergalactic Peace Federation. The Pilgrimage offers passengers the greatest luxuries, commodities, and comforts of the 21st century.

PC2. Each ship is outfitted with a newly remodeled kitchen featuring marble countertops, platinum appliances by Koch, and hand-crafted cabinets made of wood from New Zealand's rare *Pennantia baylisiana* trees! And don't forget, each ship also showcases 20 unique living areas custom designed by Martha Stewart!

PC1. And now, as part of Provision 26.3 of the Equal Opportunity for Earthlings Act, the Intergalactic Peace Federation is now offering vouchers for the Pilgrimage for Federation citizens who make less than 60% of Earth's median income.

PC2. The application process is simple. Just update your information in the Federation's registry, and you'll automatically be entered into the voucher lottery! Then attend your district's annual lottery event, and we'll randomly select up to 10 households from each district's registry! You must be present to win.

PC1. Don't miss your opportunity to fly high with Pilgrimage to the Red Planet. Start your new life today.

(PC1 and PC2 exit. Lights up on entire stage.)

CLERK. Thank you for choosing the Intergalactic Peace Federation for your Pilgrimage needs.

CHRISTOPHER. (takes his documents back from CLERK) Thank you so much.

(CHRISTOPHER takes a seat next to SOPHIA. He nervously glances at the waiting room entrance every few seconds, as if he is waiting for someone to arrive. Meanwhile, SOPHIA gets her documents in order and walks over to the CLERK.)

CLERK. Can I see your proof of citizenship with the Intergalactic Peace Federation? (SOPHIA hands her citizenship card to the CLERK.) Verify your name please.

SOPHIA. Sophia Williams.

(CHRISTOPHER turns his attention to SOPHIA.)

CLERK. Alright. I'll need your interplanet travel documents, your vaccination record, and your affidavit for the Federation's Pilgrimage to the Red Planet voucher program. (SOPHIA hands him her documents.) Now stand here for your retina scan. Look at the camera. Thank you, Miss Williams.

CLERK. (Gives SOPHIA her documents back and hands her a ticket) This is your ticket to the Pilgrimage. We'll make an announcement when it's time to board. Please have your ticket and citizenship card ready for the attendant to check you into quarantine. Until then, you can have a seat in the waiting area.

SOPHIA. Thank you.

CLERK. Thank you for choosing the Intergalactic Peace Federation for your Pilgrimage needs.

(SOPHIA returns to her seat as CHRISTOPHER frowns and walks over to the CLERK. As the two of them are talking, SECURITY GUARD enters.)

CLERK. Citizenship card please.

CHRISTOPHER. I was just here.

CLERK. It's protocol to verify citizenship before all formal interactions. (CHRISTOPHER hands him the citizenship card. CLERK checks it, then hands it back.) Welcome back, Mr. Williams.

CHRISTOPHER. Did that woman just say she was Sophia Williams?

CLERK. Sir, I'm not at liberty to give out the personal information about our passengers. If you have a question or concern, please submit it to our helpdesk using the keycode at the bottom of your ticket.

CHRISTOPHER. She's not Sophia Williams.

CLERK. Mr. Williams, if you have an issue, you must go through the helpdesk.

CHRISTOPHER. I can't contact the helpdesk. They confiscated my comms device at the security gate.

CLERK. I'm sorry, Mr. Williams, I can't help you. If you have a question, you must exit the waiting area, go back to security and use one of their secure comms devices to reach our helpdesk.

(CHRISTOPHER paces, walks back to SOPHIA.)

CHRISTOPHER. You're not my wife.

SOPHIA. No, I'm not.

CHRISTOPHER. My wife is Sophia Williams, and you're not my wife.

SOPHIA. Well, my name is also Sophia Williams, and I'd appreciate it if you quit speaking to me in such a threatening tone.

CHRISTOPHER. You stole her spot.

SOPHIA. No, I earned my spot fair and square.

CHRISTOPHER. I can have you arrested.

SOPHIA. Look, I don't know who the hell you think you are, but Sophia Williams is a pretty common name, and it's the name I've had for the past 20 years, so please back the fuck off.

CHRISTOPHER. Let me see your documents.

SOPHIA. No.

CHRISTOPHER. Let me see— (CHRISTOPHER reaches into her bag and pulls out her documents. SOPHIA grabs his wrist and tries to wrestle the documents out of his hands.)

SOPHIA. What the—give those back. Those are my property, how dare you—

SECURITY GUARD. (rushes over to them, weapon out) Sir, I'm going to have to ask you to step back, or else I will use excessive force to detain you, and you will forfeit your spot on this flight.

(As all of this is going on, MYSTERIOUS PASSENGER (MP) enters the waiting area.)

CHRISTOPHER. She took my wife's spot!

SOPHIA. I told you, it's MY SPOT!

SECURITY GUARD. You too, miss. Both of you are in violation of code of conduct 7014b, no physical contact with another IPF citizen without consent. And if you continue

with this disruption, neither of you will be going to the Red Planet, There's a long line of people on our waiting list, just dying to take your seats.

(SOPHIA snatches her documents back from CHRISTOPHER. Both of them sit down and the SECURITY GUARD patrols the area once more. MP walks over to the CLERK, and quietly goes through the entire check-in process while the dialogue below occurs.)

SOPHIA. ... There are 108 ships leaving for the Red Planet in this pilgrimage. She could be on one of them.

(CHRISTOPHER ignores her.)

SOPHIA. And 17% of the spots are reserved for voucher holders this time around. That's 1652 people. That's over 1500 more people than ten years ago.

(CHRISTOPHER continues to ignore her.)

SOPHIA. What I'm trying to say is that the voucher program is bigger than ever. It was probably an administrative error. They probably got our citizenship ID numbers mixed up. She's probably on another flight.

(CHRISTOPHER walks back over to the CLERK.)

CHRISTOPHER. Look, is there anything I can do to find my wife? Anything?

CLERK. Citizenship card.

(CHRISTOPHER hands his card to the CLERK, who checks it and hands it back)

CLERK. I told you, I can't give you that information. It's in violation of our privacy policy.

CHRISTOPHER. All I want to do is confirm that she's on another ship.

CLERK. And you can go back through security and—

CHRISTOPHER. I know, you've said it several times already. But you know if I leave, I'll forfeit my spot.

CLERK. It's the rules.

CHRISTOPHER. Goddammit—

(CHRISTOPHER returns to his seat as SECURITY GUARD exits. As soon as SECURITY GUARD exits, MP rises and stands on top of their chair.)

MP. Attention citizens of EARTH. The propaganda that the Federation has been feeding you all of these years is a lie. There is no paradise on the Red Planet. Earth is not on the brink of extinction. The voucher program is a fraud.

The Red Planet's wealthy need more indentured servants to perform manual labor. You will be exposed to Red Planet toxins. You will be test subjects to learn about the

diseases of their world. You will die. Do not get on this flight. Join the resistance. Save the citizens of Earth. Save yourself—

(SECURITY GUARD returns to the waiting area and shoots MP point blank, killing them. Move the body off stage.)

SOPHIA. Fucking protesters.

CHRISTOPHER. ... what if they're right?

SOPHIA. What?

CHRISTOPHER. What if the protesters are right? Once the Pilgrimage starts, no one hears from any of the passengers.

SOPHIA. That's because they're in stasis. The trip to the Red Planet takes eight months.

CHRISTOPHER. I'm talking about once they land on the Red Planet. We don't hear from anyone except the Federation and the media.

SOPHIA. That's because they don't have the infrastructure to handle everyone having their own personal comms devices. That would crash the satellites.

CHRISTOPHER. But what about physical mail? Like FedEx used to do back in the day. Sure, it would take about a year to get from one planet to another, but at least we'd hear firsthand accounts from the people. Where are all the people?

SOPHIA. Hey. You're worried about your wife. I get that. But those are all conspiracy theories that the resistance cooked up to get people to stay on Earth. And Earth is a dying planet. There are too many people, and not enough resources.

The only way to the Red Planet is through the pilgrimage. And the pilgrimage only happens once a year. And the chances of them having this many seats for voucher holders like us again in the near future? They're very slim.

CHRISTOPHER. You know a lot about the pilgrimage.

SOPHIA. I've had a lot of time to study up on it.

CHRISTOPHER. What do you mean?

SOPHIA. I've been applying to the voucher program every year for the past decade. I was supposed to have a seat on the inaugural flight of 2065.

CHRISTOPHER. Damn. The year California collapsed into the Pacific. What happened?

SOPHIA. Well, if you know your history, they only had 30 ships that year. Almost all of the seats were reserved for the wealthy and the STEM educated. Luckily, my father was one of the most respected press reporters for the government so they gave him a seat, along with seats for me and my two younger brothers.

CHRISTOPHER. So what happened?

SOPHIA. Some dignitary fell in love and requested a seat for her partner at the last minute.

CHRISTOPHER. And your family had to surrender their seats.

SOPHIA. My family had to surrender a seat. My dad was the entire reason we were even there. My brothers were 6 and 5. So that left me. I was 10.

CHRISTOPHER. ... Did you have any other family on Earth?

SOPHIA. The rest of my family was in California.

CLERK. Attention passengers. The quarantine for Pilgrimage 10 to the Red Planet is now open. Only passengers with tickets redeemed from the Federation voucher program may enter. Please have your tickets and citizenship card ready upon entering. Passengers who do not have the necessary documents will not be admitted and will be escorted out immediately.

SOPHIA. (stands up) So what's the verdict?

CHRISTOPHER. I can't leave without knowing if she's on another ship.

SOPHIA. So you're going to stay?

(beat.)

SOPHIA. It took me ten years to get another seat. In those ten years, North Korea dropped a nuke on China, the plague wiped out most of India, the UN disbanded, the western powers basically abandoned all of Africa and the Middle East, and Canada built a wall with state of the art security cameras across the entire northern US perimeter. Can you imagine what could happen in another ten years?

CHRISTOPHER. We could all be dead.

CLERK. This is the last call to enter the quarantine for Pilgrimage 10 to the Red Plane. If you fail to enter the quarantine in the next 30 seconds, your seat will be forfeited, and you will be escorted out of the building immediately. Thank you, and have a nice day.

SOPHIA. Your wife could be on another ship. The ultimate question is, do you really want to risk it?

(Lights transition to the same setup as the opening scene, with spotlight downstage as PC1 and PC2 reenter.)

PC1. Thank you for choosing the Intergalactic Peace Federation's Pilgrimage to the Red Planet.

PC2. All Federation citizens will be granted permanent residency upon landing on the Red Planet. In this new world, all men, women, and everyone in between will share

equal rights, equal pay, and be given full access to healthcare, regardless of pre-existing conditions.

PC1. Start your new life today. Join the Pilgrimage to the Red Planet, where we put our people and our planet first.

(BLACK OUT)