



## Series pitch

PRELIMINARY VERSION

October 2025

Created by and based on the *Chaos* novel from Sofiane Croisier  
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## **I. Logline**

VIVIEN VERT, a 22-year-old luthier-influencer, boards the Orient Express in Venice, en route to Paris.

Halfway through its journey, the train stops in a valley in the heart of the Alps and the driver disappears. The electricity, telephones, then logic, switch off.

Isolated from the world and facing increasingly strange phenomena, VIVIEN will have to reach deep within himself to shepherd the passengers, stay alive, and solve the enigma of their situation.

## **II. Episodes**

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## Episode 1: Voyage

*"If God did not exist, he should be invented."*

- Voltaire, Epistle 104 from *Épîtres*, 1769

The *Mario Kart* video game appears on the screen.

In the background in the living room, a speaker peacefully plays Charles Yang's violin interpretation of *A Change is Gonna Come* by Sam Cooke.

Suddenly, a blonde girl - her back to us -, knocks the television off its table, sending it crashing to the floor and taking the speaker down with it. The music is cut off just before Charles Yang's voice comes on. The girl, still with her back to us, yells at her brother VIVIEN VERT (10 years old, blonde) who was playing the video game and asks him where he hid her iPad.

Their father - also with his back to us - attempts to calm the situation. He calls his wife with his phone and tells her that she is never available for her family since she cheated on him with her yoga teacher.

In slow motion behind the father, the sister continues to yell at VIVIEN and they both run out of the house towards a river that flashes briefly in the distance.

### ***Time jump, twelve years later.***

Four points of view of the same situation are successively presented.

Already seated on the train, OPHÉLIE KLEG (25), a passenger of mixed heritage with blue eyes and wearing a mimosa yellow dress, watches VIVIEN VERT (22, dark hair) on a train platform in Venice. With the soft, nonchalant vibe of a rum-ravaged Timothée Chalamet, VIVIEN looks at the sky.

VIVIEN turns around and their eyes meet. When he boards the Orient Express, she calls out to him: *"I follow you, you know!"*. She asks him for an autograph which he initially refuses,

embarrassed. He ends up autographing "VVV" and talks to her, smiling, about his job as a "wood influencer". The train departs.

VIVIEN sinks in his sit, pensive. He scrolls through several Reels of himself where he seems happy amidst disassembled violins. Like his father, his grandfather, and his great-grandfather, he is a luthier at Violons Vert-Vivants. Unlike them, he has been making Reels about his craft every day for two years. He deletes cruel comments. He then scrolls through his 400,000 followers but doesn't really have anyone to write to.

The train continues its course. After a moment, he records a voice note for his ex-agent for micro-influencers: "*Why drop me overnight, Thomas?*". He deletes the voice note before sending it. He looks absent and empty. As he plays with a wooden figurine of the Orient Express, he notices an old, elderly couple who seem lost. He gets up to help them find their seats and to store a remaining suitcase that they could not manage to fit into their compartment. The conductor of the Orient Express, who is passing by at that moment to say hello to the passengers in the car, thanks him. VIVIEN smiles, sits back down, and puts on his earphones.

Suddenly, the train slows down little by little. In the middle of a valley, the Orient Express finally comes to a sudden halt in the night.

VIVIEN then feels a subtle "wave", like a jolt that ripples through the train. After a slight confusion among the passengers, a voice cuts through over the train's microphone: "[...] *Terminus for Orient 14. Do you copy?*".

MADELEINE HÉDEAULON (65) replies on her walkie-talkie while continuing to walk through the train's corridors: "*This is Madeleine Hédeaulon, chief stewardess of the Orient Express VSOE 14. VHF ID: 60A Bravo. Code orange. Sudden and complete stop of the locomotives. I am clearing to channel 8. Over.*"

★

In another car of the same Orient Express, LUC BLAREL (55, bald) is eating a salmon carpaccio while reading a quantum physics paper written by his colleagues from the University of Oxford. He is sending texts to his brother, who asks him if he still has

his phobia of trains ever since his explosive diarrhea on the Eurostar when he was a young academic.

His brother jokes: *"Still can't believe you broke the lock of the toilet when you closed the door... Remind me how long you waited before you could get out?"*. LUC doesn't reply and mutters into his beard: *"10 hours"*.

Suddenly, the train stops. A glass shatters on the floor near the bar and several passengers' suitcases fall. Outside, the valley is empty. In the middle of a light fog, a few tree branches dance in the wind. A passenger tries to open two of the train's doors, but they are locked. Others start to murmur. OPHÉLIE tries to open some windows but they seem shut. Anxiety starts to rise in the train.

Terminus continues the dialogue with MADELEINE over the microphone: *"What stop are you talking about? Our screens indicate that Orient 14 is moving Northwest at 134 Km per hour and has just passed the Lac de Garde"*. The passengers stare at each other - the train they are on has been immobile for nearly ten minutes now.

★

RACHELLE BLANCHET (27, brunette) sits on the bed in her cabin. She is on the phone with the director of the Paris Opera Ballet, where she is a principal dancer. While changing a bandage on her sore ankle, she tells the director that she wants to keep her role in Swan Lake. *"Everyone saw you fall at the dress rehearsal, Rachelle. It's better for you to rest for a few weeks"*, the director rebukes.

She replies: *"I've already danced through fevers and double sprains, André. Besides, you know that my grandparents are coming from Canada just to see me dance on Monday. And given their current state, it will probably be their last trip..."*.

The train stops. Her phone and the lamps in her cabin go out at the same time. She takes a long breath.

She places her phone in the middle of the nightstand and spins it like a top several times in a row, as if she were used to it. After a moment, it turns back on with one bar of signal.

RACHELLE gets up and wipes the condensation from her cabin window with her left forearm, where a scar of about ten centimeters is visible. For a moment, her gaze seems lost in the fog of the deserted valley outside. As she leaves her cabin, she manages to call the director back on the third attempt.

He informs her that there is no principal dancer named RACHELLE at the Paris Opera Ballet. Stunned, she exclaims aloud in front of the other passengers in the hallway: *"We saw each other yesterday at the dress rehearsal for Swan Lake. You doing this on purpose or what, André?"*.

*"There is no Rachelle at the Paris Opera. I don't know how you got this number, but I invite you to send us an electronic mail if you wish to apply. Good evening"*. The voice on the phone hangs up.

Meanwhile, MADELEINE continues her discussion with Terminus over the microphone and informs them that they are currently in the Alps. *"The Alps?"* the director of the Terminus control center asks.

MADELEINE confirms: *"Yes, the Alps. I don't know how it's possible, Karine. You know very well we weren't supposed to reach here until tomorrow around 6:00 a.m., given our average speed of 68 kilometers per hour and the rail distance of about 600 kilometers from Venice"*. The Terminus director quietly asks a colleague to triangulate the train and display their position on the monitor.

★

ANNABELLE DE RAGUET (55, brunette) is sitting at the main bar of the Orient Express. When the train stops, she is looking at her phone. She has just realised with dismay that her bank account shows 33,000 euros. As her wine glass falls to the floor from the train's abrupt stop, she exclaims to herself: *"33 what? 33 grand? Wait a second, where are my 200 mil?"*. EVA (37), the Orient Express's cocktail-maker, offers her a second drink with her bionic arm. ANNABELLE downs the glass in one go.

After a short silence, ANNABELLE tells EVA that she has been single for about ten years after a shotgun wedding to a crypto-philanthropist from Miami. She adds: *"So there you go, I'm single, alcoholic, and poor. And I have three lines of credit*

*for 3 million euros each to build a carbon house in Switzerland that rotates with the sun all holy fucking day long”.*

Looking at her e-mails, she then notices with dread that her e-mail signature indicates she is a “senior customer success manager” for an online sofa sales company and not co-founder and CEO of the hedge fund DarkLion. EVA reminds her of the remaining travel time and asks her politely if she would like to “move on to a sharper alcohol”.

Putting on a sarcastic air, ANNABELLE shows her the e-mail signature she doesn't recognize: *“Look, another thing that makes sense since I got on your train. Customer service for online sofas. Me, Annabelle, head of the fifth biggest hedge fund in the world, who had to cancel two TED Talks for security reasons. Patient on a headset with some forty-year-old named Jean-Kévin, in Chagrín-les-Eaux, who doesn't understand why 'Woody Velvet' is out of stock and why, no, express delivery will not be available in his godforsaken hole of a village that hasn't appeared in any land registry since Napoleon I”.* EVA smiles and replies: *“I'll show you our three options of absinthe”.*

★

LUC notices several notifications on his phone, including a message from his wife *“Stopped? OK... when will you arrive?”* and several messages from other people. He mutters to himself: *“But who are all these people?”*. He discovers inconsistencies on his phone, like WhatsApp conversations he's never had with people he doesn't know.

In the general confusion, the passengers begin to gather in the first car of the train where the chief stewardess MADELEINE is explaining the safety procedures. Seeming more serene than the others, VIVIEN lets out an enigmatic *“Well, what did we hit this time?”* while looking at MADELEINE, then looks for his wooden figurine of the Orient Express which he seems to have lost.

After talking with a few passengers, LUC has sat down in an armchair in the first car and picked up the train's welcome brochure from a nearby table. In front of everyone, LUC begins to address MADELEINE aloud: *“Orient Express 14... You said the driver is a certain Mister TIRET and that you are... Madame HÉ... DEAU... LON. Yes, HÉDEAULON, if I recall correctly. The chief stewardess of this train, is that right?”*.

Seeing the brochure in LUC's hands, MADELEINE lets an almost imperceptible smile escape her lips. With short white hair and sparkling blue eyes, she radiates the serene power of a lioness observing the savannah.

As the train's second stewardess CLARA RUMET (35) looks at MADELEINE in confusion, LUC reads the first paragraph of the brochure out loud:

*"Welcome brochure for the mechanically propelled train of the Venice Simplon Orient Express (VSOE). Serial number: 14-AE00. Year of commission: 1883. Route: Venice - Paris. Driver: PIERRE RAVAOU. Chief stewardess: CHANTAL LIMET."*

LUC asks MADELEINE: *"Who are you?"*. Silence in the first car.

At that moment, the voice of the Terminus director suddenly breaks through the silence on the microphone: *"We cannot find you, not even by satellite. VSOE 14, confirm your position"*.

The ambient sound then cuts out and the passengers hear nothing. Even the footsteps of the passengers who got up to try to open other train doors no longer make a sound. After only a few seconds, the sound suddenly returns. Everyone is in shock. ANNABELLE looks at her glass of absinthe then raises it in front of EVA with a confused look, but EVA gives a discreet shake of her head.

OPHÉLIE asks MADELEINE why the communication with Terminus is taking place in front of all the passengers. MADELEINE ignores her question and gives the train's coordinates to the Terminus director.

With a somewhat troubled voice, she adds: *"There's something else... We looked at the surveillance cameras, including the one in the driver's cabin. It's... it's very strange"*. LUC sits up from his armchair and places the brochure on a table.

MADELEINE looks at the real-time camera feed from the driver's cabin on an iPad. As VIVIEN looks at her, she moves away from the first car to continue the discussion with Terminus, whispering and away from the passengers, but still in front of the other stewardesses.

As we see the train immobile in the distance in the middle of the dark valley, her voice continues: *"For security and like in airplane cockpits since 9/11, you know that the driver's cabin on all Orient Express trains can only be opened and closed from the inside"*.

VIVIEN looks at his watch and glances outside, as if he wanted to confirm something. It starts to rain. A few raindrops can be heard on the roof of the Orient Express.

MADELEINE's voice continues: *"Our driver-cabin is currently locked. There is no one inside, Karine..."*.

MADELEINE looks up and meets VIVIEN's penetrating glance. The rain outside becomes increasingly steady. *"And... in forty years of service on the Orientals, I have never seen what I am currently seeing on the cabin's surveillance camera"*.

The driver's cabin is flipped on its head and overgrown with vegetation. Ferns, roots, moss, and vines fill the ghost room. The wooden figurine that VIVIEN had lost is crashed, motionless, through the windshield of the Orient Express.

FADE TO BLACK on *It's Raining Again* by Supertramp.

## Episode 2: Visions

*"You meet reality when you crash onto something".*  
- Jacques Lacan, conference at MIT, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1975

We see VIVIEN, RACHELLE, LUC, and ANNABELLE in their respective lives the day before they board the Orient Express.

As all four of them are experiencing a critical moment in their lives that day, we realize that their four trajectories will lead them separately to embark on the same journey on this Orient Express.

VIVIEN has just finished a series of commercial Reels in Venice for a new line of bamboo fiber bags for Hermès. He learns via text that his agent in Paris has dropped him because his Instagram and TikTok videos are now getting "only 300,000 views" on average for the past six months. He calls his mother.

Still mentally stuck on her son's cardinal trio of childhood foolishness - eating snacks in the night, showering intermittently, and pissing on the house's lawn - she tells him on the phone: *"You should continue your studies instead of being like your father. For now, all you have is a Bachelor of Three Stupidities"*.

VIVIEN looks at the calendar on his phone. He starts walking through the streets of Venice with visible frustration. After a moment, he stops walking and taps on his phone. He sends a message to his best friend: *"Change of plans for my birthday, man. Need some fresh air. I'll swing by to see you at Lake Como on the next Orient Express. Tomorrow around 6:00 p.m. Good for you?"*. He puts on his earphones and resumes walking.

★

RACHELLE is replacing the prima ballerina in *The Firebird* at La Fenice. Although she performed well during the show, she doubts herself. RACHELLE is talking with the director, whom she has known for a long time. They talk about ARIELLE's rise at the Paris Opera Ballet. The precision of her fifth position and her *échappés* is such that she has quickly become one of the top dancers. RACHELLE thinks she is threatening her place within the Company and she has been trying to short-circuit her ever since

ARIELLE was scouted at a classical dance school in the 16th *arrondissement* by NADINE, the hypochondriac assistant to BERNARD, the Ballet's director. Leaving the show, she gives her bouquets of flowers to a woman singing a cobblestone alley. The singer thanks her with a big smile.

She then calls RACHELLE back, who had already left, and hands her an envelope from one of the bouquets signed "Your love, Grégoire". RACHELLE discovers that her fiancé has surprised her by sending her a ticket for the Orient Express, so they can meet back at their home in Paris the day after next. She smiles.

★

LUC is strolling through Venice between two panels of the first international conference for "Artificial General Intelligence in the Face of Realities and Time". He buys a 16th-century astrolabe at Campo San Polo as a gift for his wife who lives in the South of France. He then meets his brother CHRISTOPHE BLAREL (49), who is based in Venice and is also a quantum physicist, at Caffè Quadri.

They discuss CHRISTOPHE's upcoming honeymoon. After a moment, the LUC's brother notices an inscription on the object on the table that LUC just bought. Engraved on the astrolabe is a mysterious "Eidôlon" inscription which LUC had not even seen.

LUC and CHRISTOPHE's discussion continues and drifts to love, then to the meaning of personal identity in the quantum world, where the particles inside atoms are theoretically fine vibrating strings. Between two sips of coffee, LUC thinks aloud: "Ultimately, if we are just dancing filaments, we don't know who we really are because we are constantly taking forms that change".

LUC checks the time. His return trip on the Orient-Express, booked for him by the conference's organisers, leaves in an hour. He says goodbye to his brother and heads to the train station.

★

ANNABELLE is freshening her lipstick in the toilets of a gala hall near Saint Mark's Square, where she is invited for the masked dinner-ball of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection. She is

talking to her long-time co-founder REBECCA TEQUORET (43) about the 10 new self-evolving algorithms that their team at DarkLion has developed. +6% average monthly return. She is very happy about it.

When REBECCA talks, ANNABELLE is thinking about something else. Ever since she has started coming to this annual masked ball several years ago, she wins every auction she sets her mind on. Tonight, at all costs, she wants to win her favorite painting: *The Garden of Earthly Delights* by Bosch, painted in 1515, symbolizing the passage from peace to chaos and which she has dreamed of for the last seven years. She loses the auction.

Exasperated at not being able to spend her money as she wishes, she calls her assistant to buy her the most expensive trip he can find to return to Paris the next day.

***Return to the present time, the next day.***

The Orient Express is still dead in its tracks, immobile in the abyss of the valley.

Silence has fallen like a massive stone in the first car after LUC's question. Everyone is wondering if MADELEINE is really the chief stewardess of this train, where the driver has disappeared, and above all, how it is possible that the driver's empty cabin, which VIVIEN and several passengers saw on MADELEINE's iPad, is bottom up and filled with vegetation.

As MADELEINE begins her answer and VIVIEN heads towards the cabin to try to retrieve his wooden figurine, something violently strikes the left side of the first car, which warps the cabin wall inwards by several centimeters along a two-meter distance.

The blow knocks VIVIEN's earphones to the floor. The first notes of *Non, je ne regrette rien* by Édith Piaf start to drift into the air. RACHELLE exclaims: "*Is that the rescue services? Since when do they break doors down to get in?*".

MADELEINE reacts instinctively on the VHF: "*VSOE 14 for Terminus. We have just been hit on the left flank at the level*

*of the first car. The origin of the blow is unknown. Did you send rescue services?"*. Terminus responds in the negative.

The passengers look at each other, worried. Someone or something else is outside next to them and has just hit the train. MADELEINE orders everyone to return to and lock themselves in their cabins immediately. VIVIEN is jostled by several panicking passengers.

At that point, a second blow, precise and massive, slams into the other side of the train with deafening power, only a few seconds after the first. At that moment, the noise cuts out again. Not just the sound of this new strike on the train, but all noise. Sound has vanished from the passengers' ears. They speak and shout but hear nothing. The passengers start to become increasingly panicked.

Looking through a window of the legendary train, VIVIEN breathes increasingly slowly, as if the air were coagulating in a calm that foretells a combustion.

As the sound returns intermittently, VIVIEN methodically rolls up his sleeves and clenches his fists. His eyes focused, he visualizes his cabin door, still open, at the other end of the first car. He takes a deep breath.

Two passengers murmur near a closed door. One of them points to the handle, the other shakes his head. They begin to raise their voices but do not seem to hear each other. Several heads turn towards them. The tension rises. LUC tries to interpose himself, hands raised as a sign of appeasement. One of the two passengers near the door pushes him to the ground. LUC's head hits the edge of the bar and he momentarily loses consciousness. VIVIEN spots him and comes to his aid. A "dzz" sound is heard.

Under MADELEINE's distant gaze, the other passenger near the door violently slaps the one who pushed LUC. In response, that passenger grabs an extinguisher next to the door and throws it at him. Several passengers stand up to intervene. Shouts and punches break out. A crowd movement erupts. Suddenly, the first car, bathed in the sumptuousness of plush carpets and marble, collapses itself into a carnage cage.

The passengers scream without hearing each other, begin to push each other, throw chairs and luggage at each other, tackle and

hit each other to the ground, rip up the carpet, bang their own heads against the windows and explode with rage in an instantaneous blood-soaked madness.

LUC has woken up but is still dazed. VIVIEN helps him get up and walk. For a good two minutes set against the song of Édith Piaf, VIVIEN crosses the first car towards his cabin, shouldering LUC, and clears a merciless path ahead to get him out of the carnage.

At one point, he drops LUC, still semi-conscious, on a seat to knock out three passengers blocking his path with improbable objects he finds along the way and barely manages to catch LUC by the chin before he falls onto the floor.

VIVIEN pushes LUC into his cabin and closes the door behind him without succeeding in locking it. LUC falls on the bed like a dead horse.

Inside his cabin, VIVIEN blocks the door with his back as it trembles under the blows and screams of the passengers who have gone mad. Two bloody forearms of passengers manage to get through the crack of the door and begin to pull his hair. His back is still pressed against the door of his cabin. He closes his eyes and takes a long exhale.

**Time jump, two months later.**

PABLO FLEUR (60) blows on his coffee.

Sitting at *The Economist's* office in Paris, the journalist asks VÉRONIQUE (52) if she wants sugar in hers. She refuses and takes a tissue from her bag. *"I'd gladly do without these damned tissues but as you can imagine it's been a bit complicated for several weeks"*, she adds with a slight nervous smile and tearful eyes.

When PABLO asks her what her last contact with her husband was, VÉRONIQUE shows him her phone: *"There, that's my last message to my husband: 'Stopped? OK... when will you arrive?'. He immediately started to write a reply, but it never arrived"*. PABLO doesn't seem to understand.

VÉRONIQUE clarifies: *"Yes, you know, there are three bubbles when a person is writing a message. The bubbles remained indefinitely"*. She shows PABLO the conversation, where three writing bubbles are still actively displayed.

PABLO gives a discreet facial signal to his colleagues watching him from afar, as if to indicate to them, *"Same testimony as the others"*.

He tells VÉRONIQUE that there were 33 people aboard the train, including her husband and counting the crew members, and that no police, rescue, or rail security service in France, Italy, or Switzerland has found any of these 33 people. He adds with empathy: *"I am truly sorry, Ms Blarel"*.

We hear VÉRONIQUE sobbing, as we see several design options for the front cover of the next edition of the iconic British newspaper, with the headline:

*"TALE OF A DARK TRAIN:  
ORIENT EXPRESS 14 STILL MISSING AFTER TWO MONTHS"*.

***Return to the present time.***

VIVIEN is still blocking the door with his back from inside his cabin.

The passengers' arms have withdrawn and their blows on the door suddenly quiet down, as if they were rapidly leaving the premises.

VIVIEN takes the opportunity to go check that LUC is still alive. Unconscious on the bed in the cabin, LUC is breathing heavily. VIVIEN dampens a hand towel and passes it over his forehead, whispering to him, *"It's going to be okay, don't worry"*.

A few meters away, RACHELLE can be heard trying to open her cabin door in the hallway, but it seems to be stuck. VIVIEN sees through his cabin's porthole that she does not seem insane like the other passengers. LUC slowly wakes up.

VIVIEN opens the door and they exchange a few words. Instinctively, he suggests she come take shelter in his cabin. As MADELEINE's voice blasts through the microphone, *"This is not*

*a drill. Please barricade yourselves in your cabins as quickly as possible. Do NOT open to ANYONE until further notice*", RACHELLE joins VIVIEN in VIVIEN's cabin.

RACHELLE places her hand on VIVIEN's shoulder as she enters the cabin. LUC asks them if they know each other. RACHELLE ignores the question and blurts out: *"This chief stewardess reminds me of Émile Roux..."*.

While LUC interjects that MADELEINE is not the chief stewardess until proven otherwise, RACHELLE continues by explaining that Émile Roux was Louis Pasteur's laboratory assistant: *"When they were working together on the rabies vaccine, Émile Roux kept a loaded revolver in the laboratory to shoot Louis Pasteur in the head if he became infected"*.

She indicates that the passengers were seized by a form of rabies and that MADELEINE, like Émile Roux if he had been led to follow his safety protocol, knew how to react immediately after the train's sudden breakdown by asking them to lock themselves in their cabins. *"Yes, as if she sensed that a contamination was going to spread through the train"*, VIVIEN concludes. They continue to discuss the incomprehensible situation they have just experienced.

★

In the car reserved for the crew, CLARA, the second stewardess of the Orient Express, asks MADELEINE in front of the other stewardesses: *"Why did we make everyone go into the cabins? Where is the driver? Are we calling the police or rescue services?"*.

Outside, on both sides of the valley in the middle of which the train is still at a standstill, two mountains reign opposite one another in serene grandeur.

In the face of MADELEINE's silence, CLARA carries on: *"Simple rundown. Since our stop in the valley, all my photos with Pumpkin have disappeared from my iPhone, as if my cat had never existed. The train hit a wall that doesn't exist. The driver has disappeared. Someone or something is pounding on our walls in the middle of the night, as if playing a game. All the passengers have completely lost it. What is happening on this damn trip and since when is your name 'Madeleine'?"*.

MADELEINE laconically informs the crew that the rescue services she called should arrive soon. She also mentions that she called three police stations within a radius of about fifty kilometers. She makes clear to the other stewardesses that the instruction for everyone to remain locked in their cabins must be maintained.

The other stewardesses continue to talk and put forward several hypotheses about the cause of the train's stop: "*electrical blackout?*", "*cyber attack?*", "*nuclear crisis?*".

Inside VIVIEN's cabin, LUC and RACHELLE do not understand if the danger is outside the train, inside, or both. They end up concluding that there must be a rational explanation for the whole situation.

They start to hear strange and stealthy noises outside the cabin.

Suddenly, a shadow appears on the floor behind the cabin door and the noises stop. "*Knock, knock*". Two crisp finger taps. Cold and determined. In the cabin and the hallway, the lights suddenly go out in choreography, one by one, in a grim electric dance. Outside, the wind howls.

"*I feel like I'm in a dream again*", LUC murmurs, squinting and still in shock. His wrist begins to tremble. RACHELLE observes LUC's wrist with a familiar look and takes his hand to try to comfort him. "*I'm not comfortable on trains*", he tries to justify himself, embarrassed, keeping his hand in RACHELLE's.

"*Knock*".

The sound roars and rattles through the silent hallway. RACHELLE begins to whisper the "*Serenity*" prayer.

VIVIEN positions himself in front of RACHELLE and LUC, as if to shield them from a yet-invisible threat. They exchange tense glances, all three shaken, as if they were bracing for their final moments.

The door handle turns with a demonic click. With an icy creak, the door slowly opens before them.

In the dark, the shadow watches them.

FADE TO BLACK on the music *Apocalypse* by Cigarettes After Sex.

## Episode 3: Volition

*"When you have unlearned how to hope, I will teach you how to want."*

- Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius*, 63-64 AD

### ***Time jump, six months later.***

In a small circular room in New York, PAUL RANET (35) lets out a final wisp from his menthol electric cigarette.

The crystalline voice of CLAUDINE CARROT (50), president of the United Nations' special investigation commission, cuts through the air: *"We have only one question for you today, Mr Ranet. What did you see that night?"*.

CAROLINE, as well as French, Swiss, and Italian ambassadors to the UN, look at PAUL without blinking.

### ***Six hours later.***

In a forest at night, PAUL is leading his team from one of the four sections of the GIGN's Intervention Force. His team was called in for a case of *"potential terrorist attack"* on an Orient Express route with *"possible kidnapping of up to 33 people"*.

His gaze is locked in. He has accumulated during these eight years the quasi-continuous adrenaline concentration of ten people, the existential equivalent of a hundred lives, and the emotional impact of a thousand critical decisions where life has hung by a thread.

In tactical formation, the GIGN team heads towards a valley. As they receive a final communication via earpiece *"Ghost at 11:00. 300 meters. You are reaching the last GPS point emitted by..."*, their radios simultaneously go dark. Instinctively, they adapt and continue to communicate only through gestures. They keep moving and arrive at the edge of a valley.

At that moment, PAUL turns around and looks at his team with a slight concern that their intensive training seldom let out. PAUL moves closer to his teammates and murmurs to them: *"Possible sect hypothesis. Still no visual on Ghost"*.

About a hundred meters ahead of them, three rescue workers come into view. Three dead bodies, arranged in an arrow shape on the ground, pointing towards the phantom tracks of the Orient Express.

***Return to the present time.***

ANNABELLE has entered VIVIEN's cabin after knocking on the door three times: *"Alright, you still look normal to me, I'm going to stay until things calm down if that's OK with you"*, she says as she closes the door behind her.

VIVIEN, RACHELLE, and LUC are flabbergasted but relieved when they realize that the shadow in front of them was the shadow of a passenger who seems sane. As they notice that their phones have turned off, they start to introduce themselves and discuss the situation at length.

LUC attempts a conjecture: *"I wrote this paper a long time ago. About the risk that we are somewhere we are not supposed to be"*.

As the other three passengers confusingly look at him, he continues: *"Do you remember geometry from middle school? Pythagorean theorem, cosine, isosceles triangles. All that stuff. Well, this geometry we all studied is Euclidean geometry. Basic, neat, predictable. But there is another geometry: hyperbolic geometry, based on the 'Poincaré disk'. This geometry is complex, wild, and uncontrollable"*.

LUC explains that they are currently on such a disk next to the Alps - a place where spacetime may bend and disobey the rules of traditional physics. A sort of terrestrial Bermuda Triangle.

ANNABELLE retorts that LUC should stop his *"stoner babble bullshit"* because they are just without phones on a train *"dead-stopped in the deep arse-end of Europe, period"*. Disillusioned, ANNABELLE storms out of the cabin.

RACHELLE ignores ANNABELLE and asks: *"Luc, right? Where... where are we, Luc?"*. The cabin window is then illuminated by a flash. Four seconds later, a thunderstorm breaks.

"1.2 kilometers" VIVIEN and LUC whisper at the same time, in reference to the distance of the storm they've just calculated from the delay between the flash and the sound. They glance at each other, somewhat surprised.

"Believe it or not, I was discussing this with my brother yesterday... The question is not: where are we?", LUC resumes after a long silence, turning away his pensive gaze from the window. "The real question is: who are we?".

★

In the crew car, the discussion between MADELEINE and CLARA intensifies. MADELEINE explains that she can no longer reach Terminus, nor the police, nor any rail security service and adds that the rescue workers were supposed to arrive an hour ago.

At that moment, CLARA's phone turns back on. She spots a text from a certain "H.P.D.A.E". Before she can open the message, her phone turns off again.

As it starts to rain again outside, the stewardesses spot ANNABELLE climbing out of a train window and running into the valley. MADELEINE puts a quick end to the stewardesses' questions and concerns by telling them that "it's too late for her".

### ***Six months later.***

The discussion carries on in the circular room in New York, as journalists and photographers begin to come in.

During the discussion, PAUL, the leader of the GIGN team that responded to the incident still holding the attention of news channels and social media six months later, asks: "Sometimes, planes and boats disappear. The sky and the oceans are so vast, almost infinite. But in both cases, the plane, the boat, or their remains are often found. A plane doesn't disappear, it crashes. A boat doesn't disappear, it sinks. Where can a train fixed on tracks possibly go?".

***Return to the present time.***

Tears of anger and fear stream down ANNABELLE's face, as she continues to run away from the Orient Express. The lightning continues to illuminate the black sky, with the thunder rolling in faster after each flash. The storm is closing in and descending into the valley.

ANNABELLE whispers to herself that she will go get help herself if no one is capable of it. She tries to turn her phone back on, in vain. We hear the voice of VIVIEN, still on the train, calling her in the distance. After a moment, he joins her outside, running, and tries to convince her to come back inside.

As they are talking, a "dzz" is heard, like the one that preceded the carnage on the train. In the blur behind them and without them realizing it, the Orient Express is lying on its back, suspended ten meters above the tracks.

The lights blaze out of every cabin, while the wheels of the legendary train face the sky. The rain beats down on the chassis and the wheels, sparing the space between the tracks and the reversed roof of the Orient Express. A second "dzz" is heard.

In VIVIEN's cabin, RACHELLE and LUC debate whether they should go rescue ANNABELLE and VIVIEN, given the presence outside that has already hit the train twice and could attack them again.

During their discussion, LUC spots a photo on VIVIEN's nightstand. He thinks he has seen this photo before, but he is not certain. In the photo, four people are smiling, sitting on a large rock facing a quasi-turquoise river, bathed in a dark orange late-afternoon sun.

"Do you hear that?", RACHELLE suddenly asks. "What?", LUC responds with concern as he puts the photo back down. "Well, nothing, precisely", RACHELLE replies.

As the storm and the rain rage on, their sounds have stopped abruptly, as if someone had turned off a switch. RACHELLE and LUC notice that it is not the first time this has happened since they got on the train.

After a complete silence of about ten seconds, a deep sound coming from the mountains explodes with virulence. Stopped for several hours, the Orient Express suddenly starts moving again.

Disconcerted in the middle of their discussion, ANNABELLE and VIVIEN turn around upon hearing the violent noise from the mountains and the sound of the train's locomotives, which have restarted. VIVIEN implores her to return to the train, reminding her that they are in the middle of nowhere with phones that no longer work. ANNABELLE resigns herself to returning to the train and they start running under the storm towards the now-moving Orient Express.

At the end of a frantic race, VIVIEN helps ANNABELLE get back up into the Orient Express with the help of RACHELLE and LUC. Right after, he falls beside the tracks. The train has already picked up speed and moves away from VIVIEN.

VIVIEN gets up and runs. He takes off his sweater and uses it as a makeshift rope to tie a knot and hang on to a handle of a side entrance door of the train. He falls a second time and, this time, is dragged beside the tracks for about a hundred meters, clinging to the sleeve of his sweater. The eye of the storm is now only about fifty meters from the train.

With great effort, VIVIEN manages to climb back up with the help of the three other passengers. He joins ANNABELLE, RACHELLE, LUC in the hallway opposite his cabin. VIVIEN wipes his face, full of mud created by the dust and rain. They look around and wonder where all the other passengers have gone. All the cars seem empty.

As RACHELLE serves glasses of water to the two survivors, she takes VIVIEN aside and whispers to him.

LUC interrupts their conversation by handing the old photo to VIVIEN on which we see a couple and their two children. He tells him he has a feeling of déjà-vu.

"*That's normal*", VIVIEN replies as he wipes away a coughing spell that echoes in the ghost train. LUC is confused and asks why.

After a long moment where he drains his glass of water in silence and during which ANNABELLE and RACHELLE hold their breath,

VIVIEN puts down his glass and replies: *"Because that's the four of us in the photo, Dad"*.

FADE TO BLACK on the music *Your Song* by Billy Paul.

## Episode 4: Void

*"The future is never anything but the present to put in order  
[...] you do not have to predict it, but to permit it."  
- Antoine de Saint Exupéry, Citadelle, 1948*

### **Twelve years earlier.**

Near Lac de Castillon, RACHELLE (15, blonde) yells and keeps running after her brother VIVIEN (10, blond) outside a modest family home. In the living room next to the television that RACHELLE just knocked over, LUC (43, bald) continues his phone conversation with his wife ANNABELLE (43, blonde).

Their dog observes the scene. Smiling with two missing canines, an allergy patch on his neck and the trembling paw of a limping devil, the VERT family's Jack Russell seems to oscillate between a quiet eczematous existence and catalepsy.

LUC calms the situation with his children and suggests, once their bags are packed, that they go swim in the *"natural pool"*, a quasi-turquoise freshwater bath in a river next to their house. RACHELLE and VIVIEN make up and go up to their rooms to finish their bags. LUC puts cream on their dog's allergy patch, gives him water and kibble before kissing him on the forehead.

After a moment, VIVIEN knocks on his older sister's door and, shyly, asks her if everything is okay between their parents. RACHELLE tries to reassure him by saying *"don't worry, for once it's probably not your fault, you little shit"*. They laugh at her joke, leave the house and head towards the river.

LUC has already set out two towels and two glasses of violet syrup on a large rock facing the natural pool. RACHELLE jumps into the water and, with a mocking air, slowly says to her brother several times *"catch... and catch... and catch attack"* while increasingly accelerating her words. It's their secret code for bickering if one of their parents is nearby. VIVIEN jumps into the water.

As they play in the river under their father's watch, VIVIEN asks his sister if she thinks they will finally go on the *"big,*

*super nice train*" for their family vacation, which coincides with his birthday.

Meanwhile, ANNABELLE returns from a work trip to New York and apologizes for her absence. To maintain the perception of a functional family, ANNABELLE and LUC hug in front of their children. As they hold each other, their eyes are pained and lost in two opposite distances.

*"I already packed your bag"* LUC murmurs to ANNABELLE in a soft tone. She thanks him. They watch their children who are still playing in the water. Both parents smile.

As the dog sitter MADELEINE (31) parks next to the family home, ANNABELLE and LUC go back into the house with their children and grab their bags.

RACHELLE asks her mother why she left several little gifts in her bag, like her favorite chocolate cakes or a gift package for a tandem parachute jump. ANNABELLE answers: *"So we can create memories, the two of us. I work too much and haven't been present enough for you and your brother... I also left him a few surprises in his bag"*.

The VERT family thanks MADELEINE, who gives an almost imperceptible smile as she watches them leave with the dog in her arms. They all get in the car. At the wheel, ANNABELLE asks: *"So, any idea where we're taking you?"*

LUC makes a few jokes. He and ANNABELLE have saved for the last three years for this trip. RACHELLE watches a ballet video on her iPad. VIVIEN plays with a wooden figurine of the Orient Express, which he has dreamed of riding since he was three years old.

They pulled into a highway rest area for dinner. The atmosphere is peaceful. RACHELLE asks her father questions about the universe. She heard about three columns in the universe recently photographed by a *"very big camcorder"*. LUC answers that they are *"the Pillars of Creation"*, three columns of interstellar dust in the Eagle Nebula and where some new stars are born.

VIVIEN, who was lost in thought but whose intelligence has always allowed him to listen and think about something else

simultaneously, follows up: *"Dad, I'm sure aliens exist. Do you think they're nice or mean? Could they come here?"*

While looking at the sky through the window, LUC remarks: *"There are only three principles to remember, sweetheart. One: if they come to Earth, it means their technology is superior to ours, so if they come to harm us, we are already done. Two: if that's the case, never go where the others go. Three: even if that's not the case"*. ANNABELLE takes LUC's hand and places a kiss on her son's forehead.

VIVIEN smiles and tells his parents that it makes him happy to see them being affectionate towards each other. He says that it's *"actually really good"* because *"you never know if it's the last time you see someone"*.

The VERT family pays the restaurant bill and leaves the rest area. LUC drives. Like ANNABELLE, he knows where they are going even, although it is a surprise for their children. LUC talks with ANNABELLE about their relationship since she cheated on him with her yoga teacher. They exchange quiet jabs through whispers, all while pretending nothing is wrong in the car.

To think about something else, ANNABELLE turns on the radio. A comedian jokes about the renovation of the CERN particle accelerator over the next ten years which will allow for much more advanced quantum experiments to discover *"what the world is really made of"*. She asks her husband if he believes in it.

LUC thinks about the question, then answers that this renovation worries him. He and his Oxford colleagues have been striving for decades to demonstrate the existence of the graviton, that is, the particle of gravity that explains why we are not levitating every day, and which is *"currently the great one that cannot be found in the universe"*.

According to him, the discovery of this ultra-rare particle by the new accelerator could disrupt the balance of reality *"as we know it"*. He calls it the *"anti-God particle"*. ANNABELLE listens to him pensively.

VIVIEN tells his parents he needs to go to the bathroom. His father tells him that he cannot stop the car on the highway. His son insists so much that LUC ends up stopping at an emergency shoulder on the highway. After finishing, VIVIEN opens the door

to get back in the car. He pulls the handle too hard and falls backward onto the highway lane. His both parents quickly unbuckle to go help VIVIEN but at that moment, a truck passes and hits him.

In slow motion and without sound, ANNABELLE and LUC get out of the car and run towards their son's inert body. They scream. They pound on the truck's hood. After a few minutes, they collapse to their knees on the road, trying to revive VIVIEN. In tears and paralyzed by the violence of the scene, RACHELLE does not dare get out of the car.

Outside, in the twilight calm, VIVIEN still holds the Orient Express figurine in his cold hand.

***Time jump, two years later.***

RACHELLE (17) sits on the large rock facing the natural river pool. Her eyes are glistening and staring at the water where she played with her brother two summers ago, like she had every summer before. Despite the ambient heat, the air seems cold and tense. ANNABELLE (45) comes to sit next to her. RACHELLE tells her with a broken voice that *"it makes no sense to go without him... it had always been his dream to ride that train..."*.

With tears in her eyes, her mother replies that on the contrary, it would have made him happy that his family go on that train. Their discussion continues a little, without RACHELLE managing to finish her sentences. Her mother gives her a long hug. After a moment, they stand up.

LUC (45) has already put the bags in the car, which is ready to go. The GPS destination shows the Santa Lucia station of the Orient Express in Venice. Sitting in the driver's seat with his seatbelt on, he waits for his wife and daughter. LUC stares ahead into the void. His hands are on the wheel. He does not move. A tear slowly breaks free and rolls down his face.

ANNABELLE and RACHELLE get in the car. The doors close. Silence sets in. ANNABELLE looks at her husband. RACHELLE looks at the empty seat next to her. They are both crying.

LUC remembers a scene during a family breakfast where his seven-year-old son recounted to him by heart the story of the Orient Express since 1883. When LUC had promised him that he and ANNABELLE would take him on this train for his 10th birthday, he had never seen his son smile so much.

With a voice on the verge of collapsing, LUC murmurs to RACHELLE and ANNABELLE: *"Okay, everyone has their seatbelt on?"*.

His tears fall in silence, dripping one by one on his son's Orient Express wooden figurine nestled in his trembling hand.

FADE TO BLACK on Kina Grannis's cover of *Creep* by Radiohead.

## Episode 5: Vortex

*"Nothing is lost, nothing is created, everything is transformed."*

- Lavoisier, *Traité élémentaire de chimie*, 1789 (apocryphal citation)

### ***Six months after the train's disappearance.***

LUC BLAREL (55, long hair), a doctor in particle theory, enters after PAUL RANET and sits at the round table. This is the final meeting of the UN's special commission of investigation into this incident. LUC is the former director of experiments at LHC Mega, the particle accelerator at CERN renovated about two years ago and which is located near the place where the Orient Express disappeared.

*"We were only working on the graviton"* he begins, *"we never found it and... the experiment didn't exactly go as planned"*.

LUC remarks that the accelerator behaved strangely in the middle of the experiment because the ultra-cold temperature of  $-271^{\circ}\text{C}$  of its electromagnets, which is already colder than galactic cold, began to drop below  $-271^{\circ}\text{C}$ , which is a physical impossibility. He observes that all the computers in the CERN's Control Center then disconnected simultaneously for a few minutes, before displaying an unknown series of data on their screens.

The French ambassador to the UN points out to him that LUC's report indicates that this data does not present any characteristic of a particle. LUC replies that the data indicated the presence not of a particle but of a *"new energy, never before detected"*.

He continues: *"This energy seemed chaotic, rebellious and uncontrollable. We had trouble observing it for more than five or six nanoseconds, before it vanished"*.

The President of the UN's special commission of investigation CAROLINE asks LUC where the Orient Express VSOE 14 went. She reminds him that this train disappeared the same day as his failed experiment at CERN six months ago and remains missing.

The photographers' flashes amplify on the doctor's face as he replies: *"I do not know what happened to that train, Madame President. But I am convinced that the Orient Express lies far beyond where you've been looking"*.

***Back to the present time.***

The train is still moving.

"Dad?" says LUC (bald), stunned. He stares at VIVIEN's still-muddy face in the train corridor, before telling him with a broken voice that his son had blond hair, and that he died in an accident ten years ago. *"Yes, in your world"* points out VIVIEN while touching his dark hair in front of dumbfounded gazes of ANNABELLE and RACHELLE.

ANNABELLE asks VIVIEN: *"I don't have children. I have too much work. Where is this all coming from?"*

After a moment, a glint passes through LUC's eyes. He seems to have understood something. Eyes shining, he says to the group: *"Wait... so we really created a breach with that particle accelerator... And my son would still be alive, in... another form...?"*. He looks at the young man with dark hair in front of him. In his eyes, he briefly sees the sparkle of his deceased son's gaze. Overcome with emotion, he slowly moves closer to VIVIEN, and after a long minute, timidly holds him in his arms. VIVIEN closes his eyes, as if holding back a tear.

Slightly softened by the scene, the hyper-rational financier is starting to lose patience. ANNABELLE indicates that she has her best friend's wedding in Aix-en-Provence the next day.

VIVIEN then tells her three correct details about her life. *"Because we know each other, somewhere"* continues the influencer when ANNABELLE asks him how he knows all this, as she seems to gradually see where he is going with it. *"In fact, we don't recognize each other on this train because we..."* ANNABELLE finishes his sentence: *"...don't live in the same world."*

VIVIEN resumes: *"Exactly. Our choices during our lives have led us down other life paths, so into other worlds. Annabelle, in your reality, you perhaps focused more on your work, you never*

*met Luc and you never had children. But in my reality, you are his wife and you are our mother".*

RACHELLE looks away and wipes a tear that is starting to run down her face. VIVIEN places a comforting hand on her shoulder and continues: *"You told us the question isn't where we are, but who we are, Dad. I think that here, we are... nothing. We don't really exist. We're in a sort of void between our respective lives. And we're going to have to work together if we want to get out".*

RACHELLE glances at ANNABELLE and LUC, as if she wants to observe their reactions to VIVIEN's remark. They did not expect so much insight from VIVIEN. LUC places a hand on a fogged-up window and looks out at a silent plain in the distance.

ANNABELLE sits down, rubbing her temples: *"Can't believe it. This trip is tying my brain in a fucking knot like on my Saturday mornings at the Monte-Carlo casino".*

**Six months later.**

On a sheet of paper with a discreet vertical mention *"Eidōlon"*, a hand waits to check the box for the next question.

*"I am now coming to the question that everyone is waiting for: what happened to the Orient Express 14?"*, says CAROLINE as she stares into the eyes of LUC (long hair).

She points out to the doctor that the European Space Agency is not only still mapping the airspace above the Alps for every minute since the volatilization of the Orient Express, but that the Vatican has also just issued a decree praying for the souls of the 33 passengers aboard the Orient Express 14.

As she indicates that even the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines flight 370 in 2014 did not have such a global impact, CAROLINE insists: *"Do you understand how important the precision of your answers is today, doctor? I therefore ask you my question again: in your opinion, what happened to the Orient Express 14?"*

The doctor in particle theory replies that during their experiment at CERN, the extreme particle acceleration that his

team created that day may have caused a rupture, or perhaps a *"rift of... of reality"*.

CAROLINE asks LUC to repeat. *"Reality is where we live it"*, the doctor cuts in philosophically as he no longer seems able to sit still in his chair. He wipes sweat from his forehead. A journalist shouts: *"What, are you talking about parallel worlds?"*. LUC lowers his eyes and, after a long silence, lifts them again with concern.

LUC answers: *"No. I'm talking about the void between these worlds"*.

At this sentence, several photographers detach their eyes from their cameras and look at each other. Journalists from *The Economist*, the *Financial Times*, the *New York Times*, *Les Échos* and *El País* send texts to their editors to request priority spaces on the next day's front pages.

At this point, we see the train's departure from Venice six months ago. The passengers aboard the Orient Express, happy, rich and carefree. As some passengers say goodbye to loved ones on the platform, LUC's voice-over continues: *"I think that... that the 33 passengers and crew members disappeared into a sort of void, between two or more parallel worlds... They were most probably trapped in a sort of dimensional in-between"*.

In the distance, we see VIVIEN boarding the train with his headphones. LUC continues in voice-over: *"This must have generated an extreme energy imbalance between these parallel worlds, which we do not see. And, quite honestly, I fear that..."*

### ***Back to the present time.***

The makeshift family heads towards the first car, still bloodied from the carnage of a few hours ago. They discuss the hypothesis of the void mentioned by VIVIEN. ANNABELLE and LUC are still in shock. RACHELLE is silent and pensive.

LUC (bald) remarks that *"everything is a question of perspective"* and that in millions of other realities, he did not park the car on the emergency shoulder that night and his son is still alive. He gulps.

LUC steps aside for a moment and sits at four-seater table. He looks at old photos of his son on his phone. His son is sitting and smiling on a rock in front of a lake. LUC's face is torn by a suddenly rekindled sadness. He wipes several tears from his cheeks.

RACHELLE and VIVIEN turn on a few lights. The electricity seems to be working. *"But it's still crazy, where did all the passengers go?"* asks ANNABELLE, looking around.

Still bewildered by their situation, they conclude that they are a family in another reality where ANNABELLE and LUC met and had two children together: RACHELLE (still alive) and VIVIEN (deceased in a road accident). But in the void where they are currently, between several parallel worlds, they do not recognize each other because they come from other realities. They have separate lives, other children or none, and other parents. This void has intertwined their individual worlds. *"Textbook start to another great family reunion"*, ANNABELLE remarks dryly.

As the discussion continues, they talk about their feelings of déjà-vu since the train's departure. They also discuss what they would like to do in their lives if they get out of this alive.

### ***Six months later.***

LUC (long hair) struggles to finish his sentence. He looks genuinely worried. The room holds its breath.

The doctor takes a breath and, after several seconds that seems to suspend time, finishes his thought: *"And, quite honestly, I fear that... to restore balance in this dimensional in-between and preserve it in its pure and original void, where no one is supposed to exist, the energy tasked itself to eliminate everything that has entered it"*.

### ***Back to the present time.***

The VERT family's discussion continues. After a certain time, his eyes still fixed on a plain through a window, LUC exclaims:

"*Wait, what is this...*". Still disoriented by their discussion, the VERTs look through the window and cannot believe their eyes. LUC asks them: "*Are you seeing what I'm seeing?*". They nod in silence, unable to look away.

In the distance in the plain which the Orient Express is passing alongside, a group of dark, still silhouettes watches them.

The Orient Express's locomotives slow their pace until the train stops at the exact level of the silhouettes in the distance.

At that moment, the microphone that had remained off since the exchanges between the chief stewardess and the train's Terminus begins to crackle. We hear a "dzz" followed by a terrifying high-pitched noise on the microphone. The VERT family looks at each other in panic. LUC murmurs: "*Sounds like one of the lyrebird's calls*". Silence. The locomotives are no longer running. The Orient Express seems to have sputtered its last clicks of steel.

Footsteps suddenly pound the roof of the train.

The steps are increasingly powerful. The VERT family is terrified. ANNABELLE begins to tremble. VIVIEN puts his hands on her shoulders comfortingly and tries to reassure her: "*I'm here, OK? I won't let go of you*". ANNABELLE looks at him for a moment in silence, as if she sees in him the kid she has always dreamed of having.

An enormous animal weighing probably half a ton seems to be walking on the roof of the Orient Express, which visibly sinks with each step.

The carnivorous sound then fades about ten meters ahead of them. The beast has stopped walking.

All the lights they had turned on in the Orient Express go out at once. Silence.

The VERT family lets out a sigh of relief but realizes through the train windows that the silhouettes in the plain have started to run towards them.

LUC grabs a long Japanese knife from behind the bar. RACHELLE looks around her. She finds two bottles of whiskey at the bar,

fires up two Molotov cocktails with cloths and positions herself in front of the others, as if she instinctively wants to protect them. In the blue night, the two Promethean flames light up the immobile Orient Express.

The ambient sounds gradually vanish until only that of the flames hisses through, sharp and without echoes, as in an anechoic chamber.

The silhouettes still surge towards them, soundless and at an unreal speed, like silent specters hovering above Earth and bringing death.

VIVIEN, RACHELLE, LUC and ANNABELLE meet each other's eyes. The panic in their terrified gazes seems to soften, making way for a brief and burning glimpse of courage and compassion for one another.

FADE TO BLACK while the flickers of fire continue.

## Episode 6: Vivien

*"Life is a tragedy when seen up close, but a comedy in long-shot."*

- Charlie Chaplin (apocryphal citation)

The mass of silhouettes gets closer to the yet-again immobilized Orient Express.

One by one, several passengers and stewardesses are recognizable, as well as the train conductor. MADELEINE is not there. Their faces seem disfigured. They crash against the train's wall with a din of bone and metal. A passenger dives headfirst against a window to create an opening.

VIVIEN yells to the others: *"There are too many of them. And it looks like they're coordinating!"*. Several passengers start to move the train's wall. Other passengers join them. Then, together, they begin to violently push the wall of the first car until they end up completely overturning it. The VERT family topples over to the side.

In the overturned car, RACHELLE throws one of her two Molotov cocktails at several enraged passengers trying to get in through the smashed window. LUC's knife falls next to a seat. VIVIEN retrieves and extinguishes RACHELLE's second Molotov cocktail which also fell on the floor. *"We have to move"* RACHELLE says, looking at VIVIEN.

VIVIEN and his family manage to sneak towards the next car, which is reserved for the crew. This one is leaning at about 30 degrees, under the weight of the first car which is completely overturned right behind it. There is no one in this car.

Amidst their escape, RACHELLE exclaims: *"Good god, what's with them now..."*. ANNABELLE continues: *"They're insane. This isn't fucking possible!"*. A suitcase from a compartment above the seats then falls towards ANNABELLE's head but LUC manages to catch it just in time.

They think about a solution to get out of what has become a hellscape and a fight for their survival for several hours. They

discuss how it all started, without really managing to make complete sense of their situation.

LUC then remembers something VIVIEN said when the train stopped the first time: *"You said something like 'What did we hit this time?' Why?"*.

ANNABELLE adds: *"And I saw you roll up your sleeves before everyone started freaking out in the first car. As if you already knew what was going to happen!"*.

RACHELLE remains silent. VIVIEN pretends to ignore these remarks. They both move away from their parents for a few minutes to whisper. The passengers can be heard making noise in the first car behind them.

VIVIEN heads to the back of the crew car. After several attempts and with RACHELLE's help, they manage to unlock the coupling of the car they are in from the first car, where the other passengers are still getting in through the broken window. RACHELLE closes the door again.

The coupling hook in hand, VIVIEN returns to his parents and answers quickly: *"Because I feel like I've already lived these moments. Like stubborn dreams that keep coming back until you've understood them. And right now, my gut tells me that we have to get the hell out of here"*.

VIVIEN opens the control panel of the crew car to try to remotely restart the Orient Express' locomotives. In the panel, he discovers and reads a note:

*"The world as you know it is going to change. But first, you must prove you are ready.*

*- M."*

Without ANNABELLE and LUC seeing, he throws a worried glance at RACHELLE and murmurs to her *"We get out and we don't come back this time"*. She nods. Her eyes are fearless.

LUC quickly sits down at a table to jot down his thoughts on the fly in a notebook. We see him writing, with the fervor of a scientist laying out his hypotheses so as not to forget them: *"Voluntary void? The void we are in may be managed by a sort of*

*inter-world energy that exists between parallel worlds to keep them... parallel".*

ANNABELLE sees him writing and asks him if this energy can be redirected to calm the chaos in these parallel worlds. She specifies that pandemics, conflicts, crises and climatic events used to happen every 500 years but that *"that was before"*. She asks them if their worlds are calm and *"therefore perpendicular"* to hers, or if they are parallel, on the same chaotic trajectory as hers. Silence.

We hear a "dzz". RACHELLE looks at the first car through a slight opening in the crew car door. She spots the passengers who managed to get in through the shattered window.

In the darkness, they are all sitting in the overturned first car, hands on their knees.

Their eyes are closed. Concentrated, they sniff and turn their heads in jerks, in the same way, at the same time. LUC has moved closer and RACHELLE murmurs to him: *"Look, they keep sniffing, as if they were navigating by... smell"*.

One of the passengers then turns his head towards RACHELLE and sniffs harder. At that time, all the others turn their heads towards her. RACHELLE and LUC back away from the door, step by step, slowly.

Suddenly, the passengers get up and throw themselves fiercely at the door. After a moment, they manage to knock the door down. Together, ANNABELLE and LUC have already lifted the table LUC was writing on and are holding it up against the doorstep to prevent the feral passengers from entering their car. After several interminable seconds, VIVIEN manages to restart one of the locomotives. The crew car, in front of which is the empty, vegetated conductor's cabin, then detaches itself from the first car. The remaining front of the train starts moving without the enraged passengers managing to get inside. Exhausted, ANNABELLE and LUC drop the table to the floor. VIVIEN and RACHELLE let out a sigh of relief. Silence.

After a while, LUC tries to change the subject. He notes that this theory of the void makes sense: *"When astronauts are in space, they hear nothing. Space is a vacuum where silence is absolute, because there are no molecules to carry sound waves."*

*If we are indeed in a void, it's not surprising that we sometimes couldn't hear anything". ANNABELLE asks: "Yes, but why sometimes and not all the time? And how is it that there are oxygen molecules since we can breathe normally?"*

At that moment, the footsteps on the roof resume, near the emergency exit door of the crew car they are in.

The beast is above them.

Under the power of its steps, the last remaining car seems to be crushing in on itself. The emergency exit door is then smashed in with a massive blow and falls violently to the floor, letting the flamboyant beam of the moon pass through in perfect verticality. The companions look at the opening in the roof with terror.

Suddenly, the train is plunged into total darkness.

ANNABELLE exclaims: *"Shit, what's happening?"*. *"We just entered a tunnel"* RACHELLE reacts, looking out the windows. The Orient Express glides into the dark vortex in silence. After a moment, a few light sniffs are heard in the car. The creature can be heard slowly walking on the ceiling. It seems to be moving towards them, inside the car, still absorbed in absolute darkness.

After a few seconds, the tunnel spits the Orient Express out of its mouth and the moonlight splashes back into the train. A light, misshapen body of about 1m60 has delicately slipped through the roof's emergency exit and positioned itself upside down, feet against the inside of the roof and head down.

*"My god, how can something so frail make so much noise..."* ANNABELLE chokes, backing up behind VIVIEN, who has just relit RACHELLE's second Molotov cocktail.

A woman with short white hair, inhumanly disfigured and stuck to the ceiling with a long Japanese knife in her hand, observes them upside down from two or three meters away, her eyes pierced with an angry red. LUC exclaims: *"Wait, it's her!"*.

MADELEINE lets out a bestial growl and suddenly moves on all fours towards them, still upside down on the ceiling. The moment she jumps on LUC with rage and the knife pointed at his jugular,

VIVIEN throws the Molotov cocktail with all his might, which explodes on the demon's face. MADELEINE instantly bursts into flames and falls onto the ground, on fire.

LUC hastily finds an extinguisher in one of the drawers under a bench and tries to break the blaze, but the Orient Express' chief stewardess is already no longer breathing.

ANNABELLE wonders, crying, what waking nightmare they are trapped in as wisps of flame and smoke leave the human beast's body, collapsed on the ground. LUC struggles painfully to catch his breath and sits down. RACHELLE finds a bottle of water in a nearby compartment and hands it to him.

Outside, the storm has stopped. Through the windows, the black sky continues to sweep past to the rhythm of the train's metallic requiem.

A voice suddenly bursts from the crew car's microphone:

*"Arrival at the Terminus in one minute. May all passengers please get ready to disembark from the Orient Express. We thank you for having made this journey with you".*

***Twelve years earlier.***

VIVIEN (10, blond) and his father are on the large rock in front of the river near their house.

LUC (41, bald) has brought a portable piano keyboard and is showing him the first notes of *A Change is Gonna Come* by Sam Cooke. He hums a few barely perceptible lyrics.

They chat for a while.

After a moment, VIVIEN asks him if he can go inside to play the video game Mario Kart.

Instead, LUC offers to teach him a magic trick to impress his classmates: *"You'll see, they'll stop bothering you after this"*. VIVIEN smiles.

***Back to the present time.***

The four companions arrive at a station where the remainder of the luxurious train stops. They disembark. A voice announces in the deserted station of Santa Lucia: *"Terminus - Eidōlon platform"*.

A powerful light then appears above the four companions on the platform. They look up and feel a warmth on their foreheads. ANNABELLE looks at her watch in confusion. 03:13.

The sun has surged and flares down a fierce midday flame.

VIVIEN (22, dark hair) hears a river sound and a voice in his head: *"Magic is a principle, son. The principle of redirection. A successful magic trick is one that redirects our attention to where the magic isn't happening. The rabbit magically comes out of the hat because it went in when we were watching the magician's hands, right?"*.

We see again, from other angles, the incomprehensible scenes and discussions since they boarded the Orient Express the day before: the banging on the train's walls, the stopping and restarting of ambient sounds and of the train twice, the sudden rage of the passengers, MADELEINE's attack, the sensation of void. And this sun in the middle of the night.

*"To succeed at a magic trick, you just have to control your audience's attention, nothing more. That's how the illusion is created"*.

They observe the place. ANNABELLE asks: *"Did you hear what the voice on the microphone said? It thanked us for having made this journey with 'us', and not 'with them', like any standard thank-you message on a train would say"*.

VIVIEN steps aside to think. A few meters from him on the platform, RACHELLE, ANNABELLE and LUC are talking. He looks at these people who are, without truly being so in this strange reality, his family. He doesn't want to lose them. For the first time in his existence, he doesn't feel alone. His eyes shine.

He rejoins them and they begin to walk side by side towards what seems to be the station's exit. They seem relieved and take long breaths under the sun. The air is fresh. VIVIEN looks at the

sky. This impromptu family, plunged into hell for hours, rediscovers and inhales, for an instant, the scents of nature.

They hear a noise. Behind them, the remainder of the Orient Express leaves the premises in the opposite direction and leaves them in the wild silence of a deserted platform. VIVIEN turns around. Through the windows of the Orient Express, he notices OPHÉLIE sitting on the train in her mimosa-yellow dress. Their eyes meet.

As the train moves away, their phones turn back on. They receive a notification from the same unknown sender: "H.P.D.A.E".

After reading their respective messages, they raise their eyes slowly, very slowly, and look at each other in sublime shock. "Who are we really?" LUC whispers to himself, thinking back to his own question.

At that moment, ANNABELLE, RACHELLE and LUC collapse simultaneously and fall from the platform onto the Orient Express' tracks.

The ghost station's voice rings out mechanically: "Test #2,112. Candidate: Vivien Vert".

Seized by a vertiginous sense of dread, VIVIEN rushes to try to revive the only people left in his life, in tears.

*"Resilience to CHAOS: 88%".*

On his knees, VIVIEN takes LUC's face in his hands. His face is solar, emanating knowledge and wisdom.

*"Sensitivity to reality: maximal".*

He tries to resuscitate LUC through a relentless rhythm of chest compressions. "Come on, please". Drowned in tears, VIVIEN cries and screams. His father is gone.

*"Correlation of resistance to progressive disorientation: confirmed".*

As VIVIEN wails while trying to revive his mother and sister, febrile sounds of waves and applauses are heard in the distance. He looks around him. His family lies dead in front of him. A

song then resonates throughout the Santa Lucia station. Still on his knees, VIVIEN squints, as if he recognizes the melody.

*"Application for the Verðandi mission: accepted".*

VIVIEN, too, collapses on the Orient Express' tracks.

*"Human and Psychological Disposition for Arrival on Earth (H.P.D.A.E): acquired".*

Up close, we see VIVIEN's closed, wet eyes. Slowly, the shot pulls back. A rectangular chip appears on his forehead. He is dressed in a suit, sitting on a grey brutalist chair. Dazzled by drone lights, he gradually manages to open his eyes. His face expression flickers, before shifting in an instant.

Perched on a cliff facing a roaring ocean beneath a strange sky, in slow motion, about a hundred figures sitting around him snap awake in synchrony, remove their frontal chips and rise to applaud him in a shared jolt of jubilant joy.

VIVIEN breathes in the salted air, slowly and silently.

In his moist eyes, there is a sense of caged chaos on the brink of breaking free.

VIVIEN tightens his grip on the wooden figurine of the Orient Express, as if it held the key to something only he understands and is about to unleash.

FADE TO BLACK on Charles Yang's first vocal note in his cover of *A Change is Gonna Come* by Sam Cooke.

- END -

### **III. A series in three potential seasons**

*Chaos* is conceived as the epic journey of a hero, VIVIEN VERT, on a quest through the realities that inhabit us to save his family... and the world.

The story is built around a cascading narrative triptych that will be revealed at the end of each season: the Void, then the Illusion, before concluding with the Rebellion.

At the heart of the story lie three central questions:

- Who are we?
- Where do we come from?
- And where are we going?

#### **First, the Void** (season 1). *Who are we?*

We discover that these four strangers are not only a family, but that they are also trapped in a void between several parallel worlds and in which a manipulative energy is trying to destroy them to avoid the chaos created by their presence.

By design, the audience is led to conclude until the very end of the season that the story is "only" that: a family lost between dimensions and trying to survive.

At the very end of the season, the audience then takes a first step down the narrative cascade of the real story: after succeeding in a mysterious exercise on his 2,112<sup>th</sup> attempt, VIVIEN collapses on the tracks of the Orient Express before waking up at the top of a cliff where he is applauded. At this point, several possible interpretations open up.

This first arc of VIVIEN's story is anchored around:

- *The hero's main objective:* to ensure that his family and himself get out alive from this infernal train journey.
- *The main revelation:* the "real world" in which the hero lives is not at all the one we thought.
- *The audience's latent parting questions:* What is the meaning of the "H.P.D.A.E" message? Who is VIVIEN, who is his family and who are the people applauding him? Humanoid robots? Extra-terrestrial humans, that is, humans who live

on another planet? A cult with access to ultra-advanced technology? Humans in the future? Aliens?

**Next, the Illusion** (season 2). *Where do we come from?*

The story of VIVIEN VERT, a child from a modest family, continues to unfold. He understands that the quest he is leading for the survival of his "reunited" family is not the last.

Their experience on the Orient Express is not trivial, but in fact created by the chief stewardess MADELEINE who turns out to be the "architect" of a world-scale psychological test called *Chaos*.

Traces of this test are sown throughout the first season. For example, the mention "*Eidōlon*" (Latin word for "simulacrum" and a quasi-similar phonetic pronunciation of the chief stewardess' surname "HÉDEAULON") appears subtly several times.

Similarly, the "loop" of a repeated simulation opens and closes the first season when OPHÉLIE in a mimosa-yellow dress sees VIVIEN board the Orient Express (first episode of season 1) and when VIVIEN sees her sitting in the departing train (last episode of season 1).

Little by little, we understand that MADELEINE is at the head of a secret society she founded and which has developed an ultra-rare technology that can simultaneously simulate multiple worlds in parallel.

This "fractal technology", which we hear in season 1 through the "dzz" sounds preceding moments of chaos, is still in an experimental phase. In the 2,112<sup>th</sup> simulation of VIVIEN's test, a critical technical bug occurs and the characters are caught in an unforeseen glitch: the state of void between several parallel universes under active simulation. This explains why the main characters discover their "family bond" across several parallel realities.

The regulating energy of the inter-worlds, conjectured by a parallel version of LUC with long hair, and which takes several forms (for example, sound waves, bangs on the train, enraged

MADELEINE, mad passengers) is in fact simply MADELEINE's code aimed at creating a situation of quasi-permanent chaos.

This exercise is not limited to the passengers of the Orient Express VSOE 14. The "illusion" simulates the entire world, from the Santa Lucia station in Venice to the office of *The Economist* in Paris, including a small room at the UN in New York. CLARA also passes her test thanks to her situational intelligence and her ability to manage the unexpected.

Due to the technological bug that affected the frontal chips of the participants in the exercise, VIVIEN still feels emotions when he exits the simulation, notably his love for his "family". VIVIEN learns that, unlike RACHELLE, ANNABELLE and LUC did not pass their tests and are continuing successive simulation loops.

MADELEINE reveals to him that her secret society neurologically downloads "*human consciousnesses*" in the cold rooms of morgues around the world, often in exchange for payments to grieving families, to make their simulated characters more authentic. VIVIEN (dark hair), of whom a parallel version of him (where he is blond and dies in an accident) was listening to his father play the melody of *A Change is Gonna Come* by Sam Cooke, starts to understand the gravity of the situation.

MADELEINE, who had initially passed herself off as a dog sitter to get closer to the VERT family (season 1), informs VIVIEN that his parents accepted the digital download of his human consciousness in exchange for letting their son live his childhood dream: "*a trip with his family on the Orient Express that he will never forget*".

A new key character is introduced: ÉZELLE, MADELEINE's right-hand woman and with whom VIVIEN will fall in love. VIVIEN manages to send messages into his parents' simulation so they can pass it. He is happy and moved to be reunited with his parents.

Little by little, VIVIEN understands that *Chaos* is much more than a "simple" simulation of the world. It is the preparation protocol for the *Verðandi-001* mission. This mission is a mission of "*systemic invasion of Earth*". Its watchword is: "*They study their past through archaeology. We correct it through simulation. That is how their present will come to be*".

We understand the entropic nature of the exercise: to better prepare their integration on Earth, *Chaos* simulates an extreme level of unknown and unpredictability. This prepares its participants to survive in the face of chaotic episodes in the history of the human world (epidemics, conflicts, financial crises, etc.) and in the face of the psychological chaos they sometimes create themselves in their heads ("s/he hasn't replied in three days... what's happening?", etc.).

The technology behind *Chaos* accomplishes a dual objective: to select the members of MADELEINE's secret society for the *Verðandi-001* mission based on their capacity to manage earthly chaos, but also to better understand how people living on Earth would react to the arrival (and potential ensuing chaos) of an unknown presence on their planet.

This second arc of VIVIEN's story is anchored around:

- *The hero's main objective:* to understand the meaning of this giant theater of parallel universes and to free his family from it.
- *The main revelation:* VIVIEN is unwittingly part of a mission linked to a "recalibration" of the course of humanity led by MADELEINE and which he does not yet fully understand.
- *The audience's continuous questioning:* What is the meaning of this "recalibration"? What is the goal of MADELEINE and her secret society? Can VIVIEN trust ÉZELLE? When and how will they arrive on Earth? Are they all... alien? In this story whose scope keeps expanding, what is real, and what is not?

We also learn MADELEINE's story. Born on another planet (the one with the "strange sky" at the end of season 1) to a half-human, half-extraterrestrial family, passionate about technology and having always dreamed of transforming the world, she developed experimental "reality-fracturing" technologies in a laboratory at her home.

At the very end of the last episode, MADELEINE explains to VIVIEN that her technology predicts a catastrophe of an unknown nature on Earth that will annihilate more than 90% of humanity in two years. She tells him they are going to "*rewrite the course of human history together*" with "*algorithms and targeted*

*psychological interventions*" to avoid this future catastrophe, as well as all the crises, pandemics and conflicts in human history.

As her voice-over continues, we see a man cutting meat with a sharp pebble in a cave near Lake Turkana in Kenya, the place where the first hominid tool was discovered.

As the shot widens, a massive futuristic screen slowly appears and shows in real time the never-before-captured scene. MADELEINE announces to VIVIEN his dispatch to Earth in the past: "*You'll start here*".

FADE TO BLACK and end of season 2.

### **Finally, the Rebellion (season 3). *Where are we going?***

Sent millions of years into the past in Kenya, VIVIEN observes the first hominids. He hesitates to initiate the first changes to the course of human history that are listed by MADELEINE in a notebook to "*improve*" it according to her. He thinks about the crises in the world, notably Covid-19, and thinks back to LUC's son, tragically deceased in a road accident. He refuses to intervene, unplugs himself from the time machine and wakes up in MADELEINE's laboratory.

The last "*rules of the world*" of Chaos are revealed.

Equipped with frontal chips like the simulation participants, spectators pay to "live" their experiences and bet on some of them. At the end of the first season and at the same moment that VIVIEN exits his test, those who have bet on him emerge from the human emotions they still feel and have paid to experience. This grand spectacle has been financing the *Verðandi-001* mission for the last ten years.

We also discover why the enraged passengers on the Orient Express could only find their way by smell. The simulation exercise is calibrated on the pheromones emitted by human emotions, which the extra-terrestrial members of MADELEINE's secret society, the "Simulants", are obsessed with. This is because MADELEINE artificially maintains them in a state of emotional void.

The "Simulants" are recognizable by a scar on their left forearm which is the result of a rite of passage. VIVIEN then understands that RACHELLE, whose scar was revealed at the very beginning of the first season, is a member of this secret society.

We learn about MADELEINE's internal code name: *Kháos*, in reference not to "chaos" but to the Greek mythological god of the void before the creation of the universe and to *"the first thing that was born"*.

MADELEINE's objective, against which VIVIEN will progressively decide to raise a rebellion, is unveiled: assisted by her ultra-advanced technology of simulation and intelligence of parallel worlds and her selected candidates (of whom VIVIEN is one), she wants to provoke a "recalibration" of the course of Humanity. This has the theoretical aim of saving humans from pandemics, crises and conflicts as well as any negative experience, and sparing them a future catastrophe that MADELEINE's secret society predicts.

In this last season, VIVIEN fights against MADELEINE's narrow vision of the world because he believes that human history must continue its *"natural and non-synthetic"* course and that the human experience must remain an experience of balances: *"How can we feel and appreciate moments of joy if we are always joyful?"*.

He rallies to his cause his family, CLARA, PAUL (characters introduced in the first season) and ÉZELLE (MADELEINE's right-hand woman) who has also fallen in love with him.

The layers of VIVIEN's character arc continue to peel away. He reunites with great emotion with his parents after they pass and exit their simulation thanks to his help. He admits to them that he "passed" his test - through his ability to manage chaos and confusion - not on the 2,112<sup>th</sup> time but... on the 74<sup>th</sup> time.

Having made the connection between RACHELLE's scar and the same scar he had glimpsed on MADELEINE's forearm in one of his very first simulations, he had asked RACHELLE for an explanation. She had then explained to him who MADELEINE really was and that she had infiltrated her secret society to overthrow it from within.

When VIVIEN had understood how to pass the simulation on the 74<sup>th</sup> try, he had pretended to fail the exercise 2,038 times after that to buy time to establish a plan with RACHELLE from inside

the simulation. At this point, we revisit multiple scenes from season 1 on the Orient Express where RACHELLE and VIVIEN had stepped aside to whisper to each other.

Behind the scenes, VIVIEN and RACHELLE have been in cahoots for a long time and are simulating their behaviors within the simulation itself (including that of the first season). The *mise en abîme* of a "simulation within the simulation", which MADELEINE does not expect and through which RACHELLE and VIVIEN set up a plan by repeatedly studying MADELEINE's technology, will give the two siblings a decisive advantage in their final quest.

He convinces ÉZELLE to return with RACHELLE and him to the simulation to destroy the source code of the *Verðandi-001* mission protocol for the "recalibration" of the course of Humanity. Once he saved his family trapped for years in the simulation loops in the Orient Express, VIVIEN's main objective is to destroy the mission before it arrives on Earth in prehistoric times.

Within the rebellion that VIVIEN triggers, he is nicknamed *Toumai*, the name of the first human ancestor 7 million years ago and "hope of life" in the Goran language. His rallying symbol is the wooden figurine of the Orient Express. Furious at the risk of seeing her life's work destroyed, MADELEINE unleashes an extraordinary simulation upon them, extremely more chaotic and wilder than the one on the Orient Express in the first season.

This third and final arc of VIVIEN's story is anchored around several revelations and the hero's main objective: to allow Humanity to pursue and live out its natural history.

The last season ends with a scene in a chalet in the Alps where friends are playing *Mario Kart*, as in the opening scene of season 1 where VIVIEN plays this game. In this "closed loop" ending, through the friends' laughing tears, we see how much it is the simple things and human emotions that unite us.

Who won the existential fight: VIVIEN or MADELEINE? The ambiguity remains, but the friends giggle. They suspect nothing. They are happy.

FADE TO BLACK and end of the story.

### ***\*Possible alternative ending\****

A shorter and simpler version of the story in one single season is conceivable, concentrated on the struggle of the four characters led by VIVIEN to get out of the void and return to their respective worlds. The central conflict of the story would no longer be interpersonal (between VIVIEN and MADELEINE), but interdimensional.

Rewriting the episodes would be necessary given the clues left during the first season (for example, the glances between RACHELLE and VIVIEN). There are no simulation, rebellion or ultra-advanced technologies in this alternative version.

The story would end with VIVIEN, RACHELLE, ANNABELLE and LUC who end up loving each other like a family, but who manage to and decide to leave for their own realities, accepting that they will never see each other again.

## **IV. Creator's statement**

The story focuses on the battle of the hero, VIVIEN VERT, to make possible the survival and love of not only his family, but also the world.

VIVIEN (dark hair) feels alone, without real friends around him, simply followers on social networks. He does not get along well with his divorced parents. He would have dreamed of having a sister to help him cope with his parents' divorce, and he finds that person in RACHELLE during the multiple simulations. Through a parallel and younger version of him (10 years old, blond), we see another trajectory his life could have taken.

His nemesis is MADELEINE, who wants to rewrite the history of the world and will try to prevent the main characters from returning to their parallel universes to find their "real" families.

This family is a coincidence. A refracted fruit of several parallel worlds, it reflects the multiple realities and points of view that often exist in a family, blended or not.

This family is also a feeling. The feeling of being attached to one another without knowing why, as the main characters gradually feel it throughout the extraordinary situation they are experiencing together on the Orient Express.

This family is finally a continuous creation. They must constantly reinvent the meaning of their bond amidst chaos, fear and uncertainty. Little by little, even if they come from different universes where they have their own families, they will come to love each other as a family. The VERT family becomes a parable of humanity in all its beauty, complexity and demiurgic power.

Overall, this story explores three main themes:

1) Letting go is the condition for happiness. VIVIEN fights the synthetic determinism of MADELEINE who wishes to make the world "perfect" according to her, since its origin. The world, like people, is not perfect. VIVIEN has accepted this and wishes to preserve this natural imperfection. He emerges from it happy, like the friends carefreely playing a video game at the end of the last season.

2) The human bond is what remains at the end. Not money. Not career. Not prestige. Simply the powerful moments lived with the people we love. In *Chaos*, emotion and transmission have an important place. The extraterrestrial "Simulants" pay to experience the richness and emotional chaos of human life (could MADELEINE's simulation exercise, perhaps, also be a kind of admirative anthropology?). LUC teaches VIVIEN a magic trick by the river. Through their shared experiences, traumas and emotions, the four main characters will, little by little, create a family - not by blood, but by bond.

3) Life has its cycles. The three Buddhist gods, which feature as sections of the novel *Chaos*, form the implicit spine of the story and of the cycle of life: Shiva (Buddhist god of destruction), Vishnu (Buddhist god of stability) and Brahma (Buddhist god of creation). Sometimes life is stable, and sometimes it is chaotic. Sometimes life seems full, and sometimes it feels empty. The void between the parallel worlds is only a reflection of the natural void that is part of human life, like during moments of boredom or after the loss of a loved one (for example, LUC loses VIVIEN and VIVIEN loses LUC in the first season).

Finally, here is an unordered and non-exhaustive list of *Chaos*'s inspirations: *DARK*, *Matrix*, *The Truman Show*, *L'Anomalie*, *1899*, *Black Mirror*, *Love Death Robots*, *Coherence*, *Inception*, *The Butterfly Effect*...

## **V. Remarks**

In the novel *Chaos* and its adaptation into a potential series, all elements, events, people and references are fictitious and the inspirations (books, series, films) as well as subtle tributes are multiple and varied.

The suggested songs are only mood references and will depend on rights availability, script direction and budget constraints.

For the sake of efficiency, this document focuses on the key movements of the story, in particular the main lines and scenes, and makes several narrative ellipses, notably over the "quiet moments" without action.

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