

THE JANUS

by Dawn Johnston

Length: Feature, 99 pgs

Genre: Elevated sci-fi,
dramatic thriller



Logline

During a one-way mission to explore a habitable planet a scientist begins to suspect she didn't start this trip alone, and must rely on the ship's overprotective AI for answers.

Exoplanet: Ethia 44b (Eos)
Status: Habitable zone

Dr. Ruth Patel (mid 30s)

Ruth is a scientist who has an uneasy relationship with emotion. Rational thought is her guide because it's clean. Emotions are messy.

She has a curious and restless mind, eager to study up close the thing she's been studying from so far away her whole life.

But now, alone at the edge of the galaxy, Ruth struggles to find meaning as she wrestles with a past she thought she left behind.

When we meet Ruth she's lying in a medpod. Waxy. Cold. Dead. Robotic arms insert an IV, and a blue-tinged liquid drains from her. She's being tended by FELIX, the ship's artificial intelligence.

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I used to think it was actually possible to lose yourself. Like nowhere was a place.

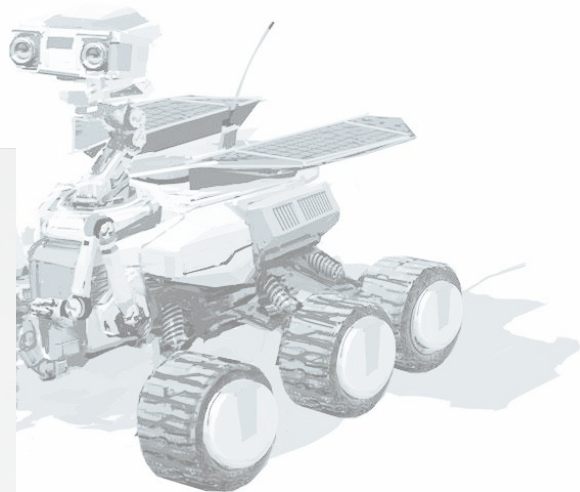
FELIX



Felix is the friendly AI who controls every device, computer and camera on the ship. Felix is the ship.

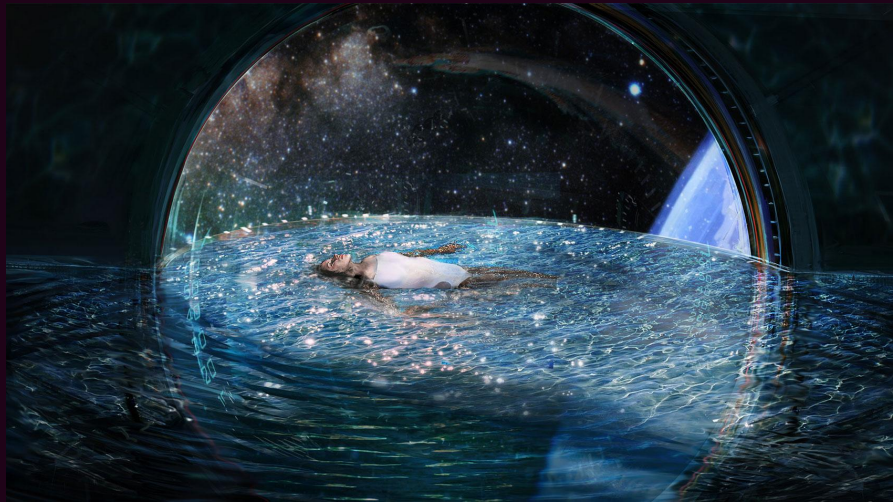
He tolerates Ruth's logic and inability to connect. But he wishes she understood that we need each other. That companionship makes the emptiness of space bearable.

He wants Ruth in his life and he's willing to go to great lengths to keep her.



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The human heart
is a wonder.



SYNOPSIS

DR. RUTH PATEL (mid-30s) wakes on a spaceship called The Janus, her memory temporarily impaired by years of suspended animation. Accompanied only by an artificial intelligence named FELIX, which controls every machine, computer and device on the ship, she's on a one-way mission to explore a potentially habitable planet called Eos.

Felix is friendly, though more overprotective than suits Ruth's self-sufficient nature. It makes no sense that he's started studying the planet without her, but she doesn't trust her foggy mind enough to question it. And why hasn't anyone contacted her from Earth in all this time?

When Ruth starts having mild hallucinations she chalks them up to the effects of stasis. But one vision keeps repeating, stronger each time—a man on the ship with her, a stranger named BAZ. She knows their growing friendship is irrational, even as it begins to break through her well-constructed defenses, but the lack of control over her own mind is unsettling. And is he a hallucination or a memory? She has to rely on Felix for answers, and he says he finds nothing.

Ruth secretly investigates, finding an actual photo that Baz had shown her of his baby. Baz is real and Felix's betrayal hits her hard. It stirs up memories, painful memories she's been pushing away, like giving up her own baby on overpopulated Earth. Spiraling into paranoia, regretting her decision, and fearful of Felix, she resolves to take down the ship.

But she's no match for an AI who controls even the oxygen. Before she collapses Felix admits he lied. Why? She focused on the wrong message.

And in the cloud of her unconscious Ruth re-examines events from her past. Her disconnection from people. Her decision to leave. Her belief that "nowhere" is a place you can actually live.

She wakes and she's alone. Defeated, she lies down in the medpod and initiates the euthenasia protocol. But it won't respond and Felix finally shows her what she did after she completed her actual mission the year before.

She watches herself calmly prepare for death only to have Felix put her into stasis to start again, and then delete all the evidence. He says he didn't want to lose a friend. "Friend?" she replies. "You're not even real." The one thing he's wanted, she denies him. At that, Felix disappears. His arms go limp.

And a single screen turns on.

It's footage of herself in the hospital after giving birth, and when the baby is taken away it's easy to see why she closed herself off. It's protection. We've seen this before, but this time there's more. The nurse brings the baby into her room and Ruth allows herself to hold him. She lets her love for him rush in. This is the message she's pushed away for so long. That closing herself to pain also meant closing herself to joy and connection.

They're calling him Baz, the nurse says. And Ruth says "I've got you."

She watches with tears streaming down her face as another deleted file is restored. Footage of the baby growing up. It's Baz, her son, who's a man now.

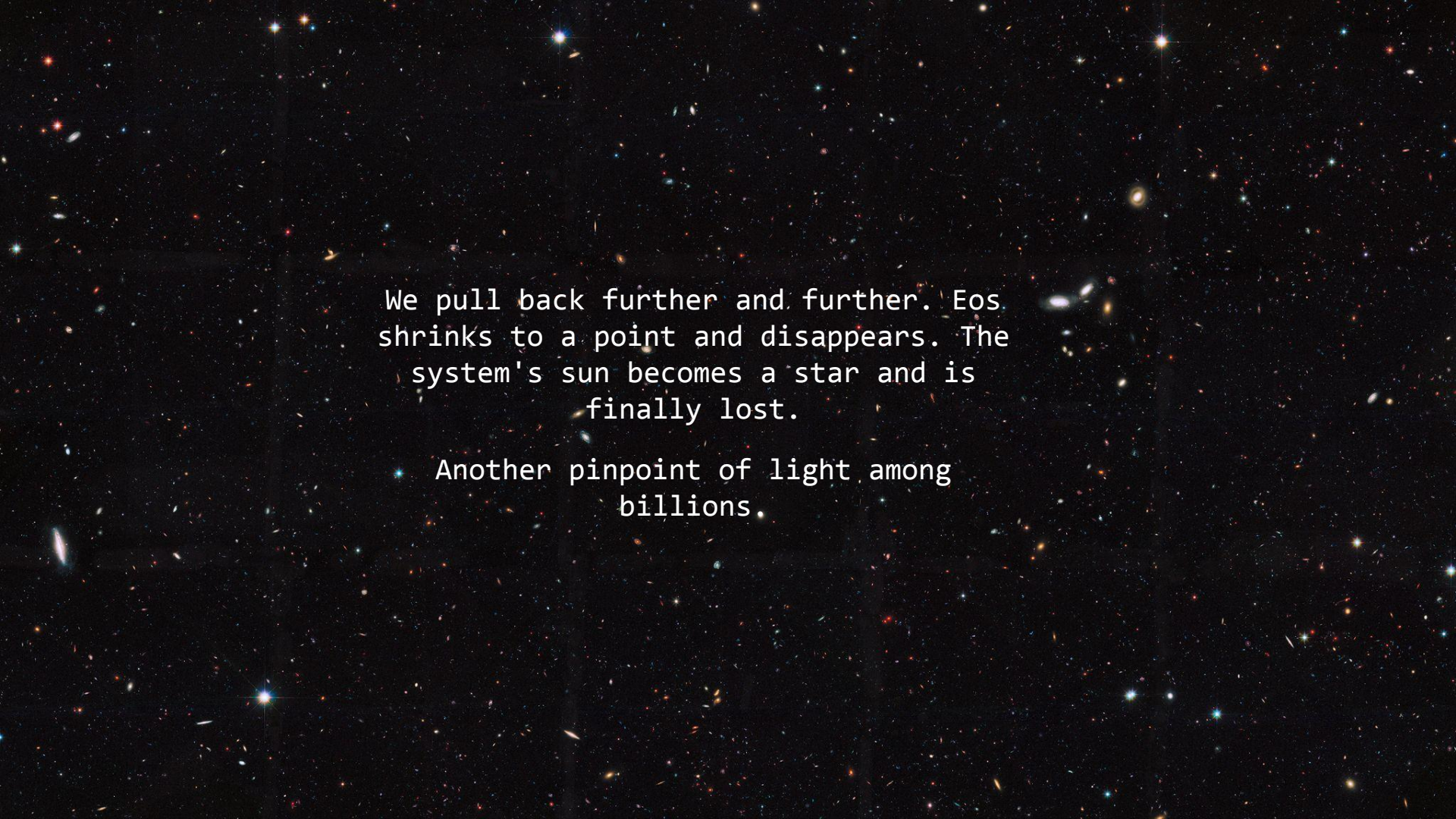
But many of her memories and visions were really Felix: she and Felix working as a team. Felix celebrating her birthday. It was all him. Her broken mind had mixed up these images with her current memories.

She urges him back. She needs him. The universe is better with her friend in it. Her real friend. He takes her hands.

And they're not alone.

And as the ship makes a
slow turn toward Eos...





We pull back further and further. Eos
shrinks to a point and disappears. The
system's sun becomes a star and is
finally lost.

Another pinpoint of light among
billions.