

# **TWO WORLDS**

Pitch Deck

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## THE LOGLINE

A geologist discovers two alien civilizations — on Mars and Europa — and watches his employer classify them as non-sentient to justify mining their worlds. He defects. He dies with them. Earth gets its minerals.

**Format:** 8-episode limited series (50-65 min each) **Genre:** Hard science fiction / anti-colonial tragedy

**Tone:** Chernobyl meets Apocalypse Now — in space **Rating:** TV-MA (violence, moral intensity)

## WHY NOW

- **Anti-colonial narratives are dominating prestige television.** Audiences that elevated *Chernobyl*, *When They See Us*, and *Killers of the Flower Moon* are hungry for stories about systemic injustice — not villain-driven evil, but the machinery of complicity. TWO WORLDS delivers that narrative on a planetary scale.
- **Hard SF is underserved and proven.** *3 Body Problem* drew massive global viewership for Netflix. *The Expanse* ran six seasons. *The Martian* grossed \$630M. The audience for scientifically rigorous space fiction exists and is growing — but nobody has combined it with the moral weight of *Apocalypse Now*.
- **The resource extraction debate is urgent.** Deep-sea mining, lithium extraction, rare-earth competition with China — these are front-page stories. TWO WORLDS dramatizes where the logic of "acceptable cost" leads when applied to entire civilizations.
- **Alien life is no longer speculative.** Mars sample-return missions, Europa Clipper data, and the ongoing biosignature debate have moved "life beyond Earth" from science fiction to science policy. The question this show asks — *what happens when we find it and it's in the way?* — is no longer hypothetical.
- **Public domain source material.** Edmond Hamilton's 1932 novelette enters public domain January 1, 2028. Zero rights cost. The adaptation is a wholly original novel by Jeremy Salsburg — clean chain of title, complete manuscript, full production package.

## THE STORY

### Act I — CONTACT (Episodes 1-2)

**2041.** Three friends ship out together: Mark Dowell (geologist), Lena Vasik (resource economist), and James Okoro (security commander). They arrive on Mars under the banner of the Kepler-Aldrin Interplanetary Consortium (KAIC), a multinational extraction body with a government-granted monopoly on interplanetary mining. Mark drills a core sample from forty meters down and finds silicon-carbide crystal filaments — alive, networked, conducting modulated electrical signals across hundreds of kilometers. A distributed intelligence ten thousand years old. He reports it. The classification committee calls it a geological formation and authorizes extraction. The one dissenting scientist is fired and recalled to Earth. Drilling begins. The lithotroph networks fight back with crystalline barriers and subsurface tremors — an immune response, not an attack. KAIC responds with shaped charges, then electromagnetic pulses that scramble the crystal

communication. Over three years, 75% of the networks are destroyed. The survivors are confined to "Protected Geological Zones." Reservations. Mars is celebrated as a triumph. The three friends transfer to Europa. Something is already broken between them.

## **Act II — THE DEEP (Episodes 3-4)**

Europa. Beneath fifteen kilometers of ice, Mark descends to the subsurface ocean and finds a second civilization: bioluminescent cephalopoids, two to three meters long, communicating in dual channels of light and sonar. They build cities from silicate and chitin. They cultivate food. They perform their forty-thousand-year history as group chromatic displays. They approach the observation blister and watch Mark with unmistakable intelligence. He develops a pidgin language with an elder he names Sonder. He documents everything: tool use, architecture, mathematical reasoning, social hierarchy, mourning rituals. His report is unambiguous: sentient. The classification committee, now chaired by Lena, classifies them as "complex pre-sentient colonial superorganism." Extraction begins. The Europeans retreat, settlement after settlement going dark. Then a delegation of twelve elders approaches the blister and asks, in slow red pulses, if the destruction will stop. Mark has no honest answer to give them.

## **Act III — WAR BENEATH THE ICE (Episodes 5-6)**

The Europeans stop retreating and start fighting — coordinated strikes on extraction equipment, tactical communication across hundreds of kilometers. KAIC authorizes lethal force. Mark defects. He descends into the ocean, joins the Europeans, and begins teaching them how human equipment fails, where the pressure suits are weak, how to manufacture explosives from mineral deposits. He is committing treason against his species. He has never been more certain of anything. James is ordered to hunt him. He finds Mark in the deep ocean near a hydrothermal vent. Over short-range radio, they talk — not as soldier and traitor, but as friends who have run out of road. James powers down his weapons and lets Mark go. He reports that Mark escaped in the thermal interference. He is relieved of command and recalled to Earth. Lume — a young European, Sonder's companion — is killed by a hunter-killer drone. Sonder carries Lume's blue-gold chromatophore signature permanently, shot through with ash-gray. The color of grief.

## **Act IV — LAST STAND (Episodes 7-8)**

Two million Europeans are compressed to the polar vent complex — the last warm water. Mark builds defenses and plants mining charges throughout the settlement. He records a final broadcast: a clinical geological survey documenting the European civilization, transmitted on an open channel to the Jupiter system. "The classification of these organisms as non-sentient is a lie maintained for economic convenience. What is happening in this ocean is genocide." The broadcast reaches Earth. It is suppressed. It spreads anyway. Too late. Operation Final Reach launches. The outer defenses hold for sixteen hours. Then they fall. Mark detonates the charges. Two hundred thousand Europeans die with him — by their own consensus, refusing containment. James listens from a desk on Earth. Lena watches from her Geneva office. The surviving 847 Europeans are placed in a research preserve. They do not reproduce. On Mars, the lithotroph networks pulse more slowly each year. The final image: a crystal filament sends one last signal through fractured rock. No one records it.

## WHAT MAKES IT DIFFERENT

| Other Space Shows                | TWO WORLDS  |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Aliens as threat or mystery      | Aliens as civilizations — with art, history, grief            |
| Military protagonists            | A geologist, an economist, a soldier — three friends          |
| Evil corporation drives the plot | The institution works exactly as designed — that's the horror |
| Technology as spectacle          | One fictional leap (VASIMR-X engine); everything else is real |
| Humanity triumphant              | Humanity wins. That's the tragedy.                            |
| First contact as wonder          | First contact as moral test — which we fail, twice            |
| Redemption arc                   | No redemption. Complicity, defection, death, aftermath.       |

## THE HOOK STRUCTURE

**Episode 1** ends with: *Mark's hand on Martian regolith. Beneath his feet, crystal filaments pulse. Something is alive down there.* **Episode 2** ends with: *The Mars campaign in three years of devastation. Three friends board a transport. Something is broken between them that none of them names.* **Episode 3** ends with: *Twelve European elders approach the blister and ask if the destruction will stop. Mark has no answer.* **Episode 4** ends with: *Sonder shows Mark the color of dying — the future as the Europeans see it. Bioluminescence dimming. Going out. Mark begins making a list of equipment.* **Episode 5** ends with: *Human mining charges detonate in a KAIC corridor. Precise. Devastating. No human casualties. James reads the report and closes his eyes.* **Episode 6** ends with: *James lets Mark go in the deep ocean. He ascends alone. He doesn't care if Moyo believes him.* **Episode 7** ends with: *Sonder places a manipulator limb against Mark's faceplate. The chromatic pulse means "family." Mark places his gloved hand against the glass.* **Episode 8** ends with: *A lithotroph network on Mars sends one last pulse through its fractured lattice. 0.3 seconds. It dies. No one records it.*

Each episode delivers a complete dramatic movement while tightening the noose.

## VISUAL IDENTITY

- **Earth / Mars surface:** Naturalistic, documentary-style. Handheld cameras, practical lighting, dust and fluorescent. Reference: *Chernobyl*, *Sicario*. Mars should feel like a mine site, not a frontier — industrial, flat, indifferent.
- **Europa subsurface:** Claustrophobic corridors give way to oceanic vastness. Station Cousteau is cramped, cold, blue-lit. The observation blisters open onto an ocean that glows with bioluminescence — the most beautiful environment in the series, and the one we destroy.

- **European civilization:** The cephalopoids communicate in light. Every conversation is visual — chromatic displays that ripple across mantles, group performances that fill the ocean with coordinated color. The audience learns to read the language alongside Mark. Ash-gray means grief. Blue-gold means Lume. The final chromatic history — two hundred thousand Europeans performing their species' story one last time — should be the most beautiful sequence ever filmed for television.
- **Underwater combat:** Dark, pressurized, disorienting. Submersibles in three-dimensional space. Acoustic weapons that distort the water. Hunter-killer drones moving in coordinated swarms. The violence is not cinematic — it is industrial.
- **VFX approach:** Photoreal, restrained. The Europeans are fully CG but grounded in cephalopod biology — nothing rubber-forehead, nothing anthropomorphic. The lithotrophs are subtle: crystal filaments pulsing in core samples, seismic data visualizations, barriers erupting from regolith. Reference: *Arrival* (alien design), *The Abyss* (underwater), *Annihilation* (biological strangeness).

## AUDIENCE

**Primary:** Adults 25-54. The prestige-drama audience that made *Chernobyl* appointment television and drove *3 Body Problem* to global viewership. Viewers who want science fiction with moral complexity, not space opera. **Secondary:** Hard-SF readers and the science-communication audience — the demographic that made *The Martian* a bestseller before it was a film. Space industry professionals and enthusiasts. **Crossover:** The anti-colonial / historical-injustice audience (*Killers of the Flower Moon*, *12 Years a Slave*, *When They See Us*) who have never been given this narrative in a science fiction frame. The environmental documentary audience (*Our Planet*, *Chasing Coral*) who respond to stories about what extraction costs.

## COMPARABLE PROJECTS — PERFORMANCE

| Title                          | Platform | Viewership / Revenue                               | Relevance   |
|--------------------------------|----------|--|---|
| <i>Chernobyl</i> (limited)     | HBO      | 8M+ viewers, 19 Emmy noms, 10 wins                 | Institutional tragedy, procedural horror, prestige tone     |
| <i>3 Body Problem</i> (series) | Netflix  | 2 seasons, massive global viewership               | Hard SF, alien contact, high-budget VFX                     |
| <i>The Expanse</i> (series)    | Amazon   | 6 seasons, drove Prime subscriptions               | Space realism, political complexity, colonial themes        |
| <i>Apocalypse Now</i> (film)   | UA       | \$150M box office (1979), enduring cultural impact | Defection narrative, anti-colonial, descent into complicity |

|  |                   |                                  |   |
|--|-------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| <i>Avatar</i> (film)                     | Fox               | \$2.9B worldwide box office      | Defection to alien civilization, extraction as villain — but TWO WORLDS has no happy ending |
| <i>Arrival</i> (film)                    | Paramount         | \$203M worldwide box office      | Non-humanoid aliens, communication as drama, moral weight                                   |
| <i>Annihilation</i> (film)               | Paramount/Netflix | Cult following, critical acclaim | Alien biology as genuine strangeness, prestige SF horror                                    |
| <i>Killers of the Flower Moon</i> (film) | Apple/Paramount   | \$157M box office, 10 Oscar noms | Institutional genocide, complicity narrative, no redemption                                 |

## BUDGET & PRODUCTION

**Budget range:** \$12-18M per episode / \$96-144M total **Comparable budgets:** *3 Body Problem* (\$20M/ep), *The Expanse* (\$5-7M/ep later seasons), *Chernobyl* (\$~4M/ep practical-heavy)

### Cost drivers:

- European CG (primary VFX expense — fully digital creatures in every Europa episode)
- Underwater environments (CG ocean, bioluminescence, submersible combat)
- Mars surface (practical sets + VFX extension, comparable to *The Martian*)
- Station Cousteau interior (practical build, modular, reusable across episodes)

### Cost efficiencies:

- No named talent premium — cast for ability, not marquee
- Limited Earth locations (lab interiors, conference rooms, one parking lot)
- Mars campaign compressed to two episodes; Europa is the primary environment
- Practical creature effects supplemented with CG, not replaced by it
- Single limited series — no multi-season budget creep

## RIGHTS & IP

The 1932 source novelette by Edmond Hamilton enters **public domain January 1, 2028**. Zero rights acquisition cost.

The novel adaptation, all screenplays, and all production materials are wholly original work, **copyright © 2026 Jeremy Salsburg**. Clean chain of title. Single author. No estate negotiations. No co-creator disputes.

# THIS IS A TRAGEDY

The pitch is not "can Mark save them?"

The pitch is: **what does it cost to be the one who sees clearly — when seeing clearly changes nothing?**

Earth gets its minerals. The Europeans are destroyed. The lithotrophs go silent. Mark dies with a civilization he couldn't save. James watches Europa set from a parking lot. Lena disappears. The Dowell Protocols work their way through committee. The consumer electronics market is thriving.

The final image is not a hero's funeral. It is a crystal filament pulsing once in Martian rock, and no one recording it.

This is the prestige anti-colonial narrative that science fiction has never delivered at this scale. It is *Chernobyl* with aliens. It is *Apocalypse Now* beneath the ice. It is the show that makes audiences sit in silence when the credits roll.

## NEXT STEPS

1. Complete novel manuscript available for review
2. Pilot screenplay and detailed beat sheets for all 8 episodes
3. Series bible with full canon reference
4. Production bible with VFX specifications
5. Creator available for development conversations

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