

Episode One: Pilot

The emptiness of space. No planets or traffic in this out-of-the-way region, just distant stars and belts of dust; beautiful in its own, serene, way. A flicker of purple. SWHUMP! A space freighter - the Grover - arrives as if from directly out of the nothingness. Battered, smoking - with random plumes of gas lancing from the hull - she's clearly just escaped a firefight. A few moments later NORTH's ship is joined by two comrades; DOGGER and STENZ, arriving in their respective ships, equally battle-scarred.

Over comms it's established they've just pulled a heist of sorts against a "Commonwealth" force, the Grover escaping with a cargo-hold of loot. They await the fourth member of their posse, hoping to patch their ships up, transfer the cargo, and set off to market with it. Here he comes - COLE, flying the Deke. He arrives further out. His ship appears unscathed. They chat briefly as the Deke makes her way towards the others. Setting his repair drones in action, leaving Cole in charge, North heads for his bunk to catch a little much-needed rest.

Just as he drops off, unbeknownst to him, some new ships arrive. They attack, Cole seemingly in cahoots with them. The Grover is destroyed, automatically ejecting North in his escape-pod out into the desolation of empty space.

The title sequence hints at the passing of time; an evolution which all makes sense come season's end.

Episode title: "01x01 Pilot"

Title: Seven years later.

KIERAN - slightly out of his comfort-zone - leads a commando / espionage team along the corridors of a massive N-Core Sector Command Ship, the Juno. Him, MAC, JAY-GEE. Mac's their tech guy, here to do the hack. Kieran and Jay-Gee are his pilot and backup. Jay-Gee one of the few non humanoid races left in this universe. The Juno itself is overseeing a mining operation, her Commander (MAPLIN) clearly unhappy at what he considers baby-sitting duty.

The espionage squad are discovered on CCTV. A Juno security team - led by KESTRY, deep under cover on a mission of her own - are

dispatched to neutralise the intruders. During the hack, now pressed for time, Mac seems to lapse into a coma-like state, delaying things. To give sufficient time for completion, Kestry blows her cover - taking out her security team in hand-to-hand combat. The hack is completed. With Kestry's assistance they make their way to a hangar, and escape into space.

TOOVEY, a small squad of fighter ships, and a container of drones arrives in the space around the Juno. The hack having temporarily disabled weapon systems, the new arrivals quickly take out the transport under escort, drones snaffling up the hyperium cargo as she disintegrates. Maplin is left furious and impotent as Kieran and co warp away to the relative safety of their staging rendezvous.

Within sight of a Stellar Acceleration Gate, the Rough Riders reconvene. Waiting already for them is North, with his corvette Roosevelt, alongside a massive hauler - the Albatross, and a disposable-looking docking gantry. The latter more a beacon marking this otherwise empty portion of space than a structure in and of itself.

The remainder of their plan unfolds. Market forces. The risks. The long way round the Albatross must take to avoid potential piracy. North quizzes Kestry on her incomplete mission, her cover obviously now blown. He initially tasks her immediately back out into the field, but an indication off her flashing ID badge persuades him otherwise. The flashing marks Kestry not only as a fugitive, but also vulnerable to perma-death; if her escape-pod is shot at in this state it's literally game-over for her. She needs to return to orbit North's clone / resurrection facility first - Havana Base.

Kieran transfers to his fighter, the Lowflyer. Back in his element at last, he flies patrol, and reconnaissance as close to the gate as prudence permits. Jay-Gee takes the Albatross. As soon as the new, and final, load is deposited in her massive hold Jay-Gee pilots the hauler off towards the gate. Toovey and his squad fly a token escort duty towards 'safe' Alpha space.

As North goes to pack up the gantry, everyone else underway, the situation goes completely to hell. The Juno arrives practically on top of him, an intimidating array of weapons blasting away

mercilessly under Maplin's orders. Kieran makes to turn back and help, but is ordered away: North, Kestry, Mac, already fleeing the scene.

Simultaneously, a couple of dozen Federated Union fighters arrive through the gate, attacking the Albatross on sight. Toovey's small squad is overwhelmed. Kieran throttling up and heading to assist. Kieran arrives. His exceptional piloting skills manage to turn the tide. They hold the FU and pirate forces off long enough for the Albatross and Toovey's squad to also clear the gate.

Satisfied, and with the Juno yet bearing toward them, North, Kieran, Kestry, Mac peel off on new vectors. Still all under full throttle, they each wink away SWHUMP! SWHUMP! SWUMP-SWHUMP! - off on some clandestine route to their secret home base at Havana Station.

Reminiscent in design, but larger in scale and comfort, to the gantry, the orbital station around Havana Base acts as clubhouse of sorts to the Rough Riders. The four dock, and meet aboard. They start to unwind, relax: apart from North himself. He needles Mac about the hack, and some secondary objective the others were unaware of. North then exits, alone, to the bridge of the Roosevelt - ostensibly to fix up Kestry's cloning status. Seating himself, he scans the displays there - including a barely started progress bar of Mac's secondary Juno exploit. North taps a few keys, easily bringing up a familiar video: it's a tactical recreation of the opening scene, cobbled together from sensor data. He watches it play out.

As he does, the audience are transported to an eerily similar scene. Here a doppelgänger of North sits, before an identical set of monitors, in a dark, real-world, New York apartment. His partner pads in, beckoning him to bed instead of his game. He waves her away. He'll be through soon. But he doesn't make a move.

This episode establishes the key players (initial hints at their motives / relationships), the dual-universe setting, and most of the series' internal logic.

Episode Two: Escape

Kestry's real-world persona, TILLY, sits through a growingly depressing montage of first-dates and Tinder meet-ups, set against a dreary London backdrop. Ultimately, she reaches for the bottle of wine; the weekend starts here for her.

The title sequence repeats.

Episode title: "01x02 Escape"

In the Roosevelt, docked alongside Havana Station, North again bitterly reviews the footage of his ancient 'betrayal'. The lights go on in Lowflyer as Kieran logs on to the game. North summons him to the station. Upon entering, Kieran questions on the progress of Jay-Gee and the Albatross, only receiving a dismissive wave to the displayed map, and a new order, in response. North would like a battle-plan drawn up - an attack on a ground base. A ground base which, on closer inspection, looks to have a cloning / resurrection facility hidden away in it. Kieran clicks: this must be Dogger's base. Insightfully, he suspects there's some history there between the North and Dogger; this proposed action is more severe than a bit of 'aggressive' hyperium mining, or 'creative' business practice. Keeping his insight to himself, Kieran notes the extra defences, the additional risks involved, and - quite naturally - asks where the base is. He zooms out the details to find them blank. North doesn't know. Yet.

Kestry exits a distant Stellar Acceleration Gate, flying a fairly bog-standard configuration of her ship the Harpy. She's on-mission to complete her intel and get the exact location of Dogger's base. Her lead takes her, with distaste, into Omega space - a less anarchic, and less profitable, sector than the space the Rough Riders usually operate in. It's therefore frequented more by the less-experienced or less invested players. Straight away she starts to receive local chatter of a sexual harassment nature. She threatens a few, blocks some more, and focusses on her jump point.

Kieran is now up to speed, and briefed about Kestry's mission parameters. He tries his best to run battle-scenarios with the information available. It's a difficult task. Each iteration ends in an unknown risk, or likely heavy losses.

Kestry enters her final system. She heads her ship towards the trade hub there, and docks. Using some subtility, leveraging her target's proclivity for collecting frozen corpses, posing as a supplier, she locates the man she's after: a strange recluse-like character. She accosts him in his lodgings there at the hub, threatening him to disclose the information on Dogger's base. He calls her bluff, claiming she'll never get off-base alive if she aggresses him here - in a station, in Omega sector space. She reveals her ID to him, showing she's got an active clone all set back at North's base. Perhaps getting off the base wasn't part of the plan? Perhaps her employer has deeper pockets than his? The target backs down and supplies the data. She shoots him anyway. And steals his ship - it's a sweet-looking ship.

Sure enough, Kestry doesn't get far in the stolen ship, with Authorities on her tail trying to shoot her down. She honestly never intended to. As she whizzes about, maniacally dodging the barrage of weapons which will soon end her, she notices some unusual activity. She transmits the recording of that along with the intel back to Havana before the joyridden vehicle explodes out from under her.

Moments later Kestry appears on Havana Station, looking slightly less buff, enhancements lost, and ID badge flashing red / black again. She joins North and Kieran. The latter is pleased to see her, but questions if the suicide method of crossing interstellar distances is really in the spirit of their strict role-playing corporation. She replies it was a really long way. And a **really** sweet-looking ship.

The final information in place, Kieran will now be able to prepare the assault-plan. It'll need to wait a few hours, though. He's expected at the Arcadia Café back in the real world. For this mention he's docked some credits by the station and their corp's 'swear jar'. Given Kestry's exploits this strikes him as unfair, but he drops it with a smile to her.

TOM arrives at the café, no obvious resemblance to Kieran but implied to be him. He opens up. After a while his nameless assistant turns up. She flashes a wry grin at her timekeeping. The pair get on well-enough it's clear, and her slight tardiness isn't a problem. It's quiet, even for a Saturday. Time passes. Both Tom

and his assistant read when there's no customers; the assistant on a tablet. Sometimes she plays Angry Birds.

Not long before closing-time, one of Tilly's previous suitors arrives - likely the last customer of the day. He's a friend of Tom, as it happens, but tries to chat up the assistant all the same - using the same dreadful line on her as he had on Tilly. He goes on to mansplain for a bit about Esc.(ape). The assistant doesn't seem impressed. Tom lets her shoot off a little early, to release her from his embarrassing friend in truth, offering to shut up shop himself.

This episode uses Kestry's mission to finalise the internal logic of the online world - long-distance communication, Sigma / Omega / Alpha sectors, the unfortunate prevalence of harassment within the game. It establishes the strict role-playing element of the Rough Riders group. Also explained are the in-game 'resurrection' mechanism - its expensiveness, disadvantages, rarity outside of the military - and the overall stakes.

Kieran is specifically identified as playing without the safety net of such insurance.

The real-world bookends help to establish Kestry's attraction to the Esc.(ape) Online experience. She's somewhat lonely, even when surrounded with people. She's a massive Romantic, but tries to hide it. Instead, she finds herself rotating around on the London dating scene, populated as it is with Social Justice Warriors, Mansplainers, Corporate Tools, Drunks, and other undesirables.

Episode Three: Mercy

This autumn morning in London's Golders' Green finds an exhausted bee sitting - dying - on the window-ledge of a shared flat. MIRANDA - Ezra's real-world incarnation - notices it. She goes to help. Firing up her computer, she skilfully googles some advice. Meanwhile, automatically, The Esc.(ape) Online logo spins in the bottom of her screen: reporting an update is downloading. The search returns.

"It's true, a simple solution of sugar and water helps revive exhausted bees. To create this energy drink for bees to revive tired bees, The RSPB suggest mixing two tablespoons of white, granulated sugar with one tablespoon of water, and placing the mix on a plate or spoon."

"Don't be tempted to offer tired bees honey - in most cases the honey isn't suitable as a lot of honey is imported and may not always be right for native British bees. And only ever offer white granulated sugar - never offer demerara, or any artificial or diet sweeteners."

Miranda darts to her breakfast bar; only vegan / demerara sugar there, of course. She squats down by the kitchen sink, opens the cupboard underneath, and roots around. A neglected tin of sugar is found. It's opened, revealed to be empty. Miranda quickly throws a coat on, dashes out, downstairs, and into the street. Arriving in her local store - a specialist health-food place - she's recognised by a friendly staff-member; a smile and a wave. Miranda rushes to the sugar isle, distracted. Her frantic search reveals no 'regular' sugar there, either. She ponders for a moment before a lightbulb moment strikes.

We next see her reluctantly standing before the iconic McDonalds arches. With a deep breath, and visible unease, she heads in. There's a queue. She tries politely waiting, all the while nervous about her bee back home. An attempt to make her way direct to the counter to make her inquiry is blocked by an ignorant, obese, patron. She waits her turn. Arriving at the head of the queue, Miranda is still unable to garner the attention of the staff. Frustrated, with the sachets of sugar in sight, she abandons any attempt to ask, grabs a handful and bolts for the door. Upon

reaching it she pauses for a fraction, ejaculating back into the restraint, "You're murdering the planet!", before dashing home.

The bee sits on a saucer now, lapping the mixture, warming in the sunlight. Behind, in the room, Esc.(ape) Online has finished updating on the computer. Miranda logs in. Her avatar appears - distinctly similar to her in appearance, yet somehow unrecognisable in the drab N-Corp uniform, ready to resume her duties on the Juno.

The title sequence repeats.

Episode title: "01x03 Mercy"

This episode puts a human face on N-Corp / the Federate Union, and acts as the proper introduction to Ezra. Through her character the audience are introduced to this bizarre gaming choice many people do actually make; players who, effectively, interact with their online game as if it's a job, or a career: a tour of duty! Following Ezra we're privy to scenes which leave no shadow of doubt that N-Corp - and by extension the Federated Union - are a ruthless, evil, entity. Ezra's corruption and conditioning begins the moment she started to show promise in her Juno duties.

Now armed with Kestry's intel, the Rough Riders prepare for an assault on a ground installation - Dogger's home base, including his cloning / resurrection centre. Kieran has set out the battle-plan, emulating a sort of stellar-version of The Battle Of Cannae. Drawing the forces out from the base in their overconfidence, then flanking them into destruction. The commander of the defending forces is Maplin, sent there in punishment for his mistakes on the Juno. Any pretence is gone from N-Corp that he's anything more than a token gesture now. They are thoroughly routed, leaving Kieran free in the Lowflyer to bomb the ostensibly empty ground-facility.

Only one thing goes against the expectations of the plan: Dogger is evidently visiting the base, perhaps regenerating from a battle elsewhere. He flees the site early in the battle, trying to scurry away.

The first hints of North's relentlessness are shown here, too. He breaks off from the planned formation to chase down Dogger. Not

only is North fully prepared to pod-kill him upon destruction of his base, but breaking ranks in the Cannae manoeuvre risks inviting absolute mission failure! Kieran manages to get Kestry in to plug the tactical gap, and none of the Rough Riders are lost to North's recklessness. Then the team (Kieran foremost) persuade North not to kill Dogger. They leave him ruined, homeless, stranded... but alive. Then warp away to Havana Station.

Dogger is eventually found by the Juno, reacting to Maplin's brief distress calls. He reaches out to Cole for assistance. The latter considers his former ally a liability now. As Dogger pleads for his life - how important his character is to him - and it's revealed to the audience he's restricted to a wheelchair, Cole orders Ezra to take him out. She considers the order, regarding the bee-like black-and-yellow pod. Reluctantly, she obeys, and obliterates Dogger from existence.

As the others back at Havana Station celebrate their successful mission, North skulks away to re-review his 7 year old sensor footage, and the progress bar of the buffer exploit. In his real-world apartment his partner Kat returns from an office party; tipsy and fliting. She practically throws herself at him. He shoes her off dismissively.

Episode Four: Boundaries

CARLOS packs a U-haul, somewhere in a Californian suburb. He slides a desktop computer snugly in, a child's sketch of JAY-GEE proudly taped to its side. His young family are in the background, ostensibly helping, but he has to do the lion's share himself - and evidently all the driving beyond that. They are moving east, out of the Western States. Some light chat indicates the motives are both financial and political. Hollywood-centric creative industries have stagnated. Left and Alt-Left influence - backlash against the Trumps, Weinsteins, and Paddocks of this world - has turned everything on the West Coast into a homogeneous slush. Moving to the central north states is a departure from that, and affords more room for the kids to grow up. They hope to arrive and be settled in for Xmas, just a few weeks off.

The kids themselves are bordering around the pubescent age; JASON and GINA. Carlos' partner STEPHANIE - the mother of his children, but not his wife - tries to keep Jason and Gina productive, but out from under Carlos' feet. She deftly removes items of Carlos' vintage toys collection from out of the children's reach, replacing them with modern, disposable, tat - bound to get lost or damaged during the long trip ahead. Carlos surveys his final load; the tools of his trade - his delicate collection of music equipment, most predominantly a series of ukuleles. He pulls the U-haul shutter closed, hollers for the family to join him in the cab, and fires up the engine.

The title sequence repeats.

Episode title: "01x04 Boundaries"

The scene flashes back in time, to the first episode, and the Rough Riders' parting of ways: staying with Jay-Gee and the Albatross as they pass from the frantic battle, and into the first Stellar Acceleration Gate. Soon after, a few jumps and another couple of gates later, the Albatross enters Alpha sector space. Toovey and his little squad peel off home, back to Sigma space and the Havana Base.

Jay-Gee carefully charts the Albatross' slow, uneventful, course to the planned rendez-vous on the other side of the sector. The

alien hands confirm the first stage, initiate the ship's drives, and it begins lumbering off, in a semi-automatic capacity.

Carlos and family arrive at a roadway checkpoint, crossing into the central states. Though the officers are professional and courteous enough, other travellers are not so much. Carlos and his slightly Hispanic-looking, mixed-race, children are certainly getting unfriendly looks from certain vehicles as they trundle slowly through the formality. Carlos feels added pressure, and anger, at this. He fumbles with the old-fashioned paper maps a little. Gina cheerfully offers directions from her smartphone. Stephanie shooshes her kindly, trying to diffuse the situation. Jason, however, grows more and more the hyperactive, distracting, pest. Stephanie suggests they find a place to stop before too long.

Across the world, in London, evening draws close. Tilly prepares for another outing. She's using a work's Xmas function as an excuse to spend some time with a colleague she has feelings for. By her excitement it's clear this character strikes her as exceptional, she has an existing, very real, attraction to her prospective partner.

A routine BEEPING inside the Albatross indicates an input required by the pilot. It goes on a little too long, Jay-Gee finally bouncing in to survey the alarm and the charted course. Paying no real attention to what he's doing, Jay-Gee clicks OK, taps a few confirmation keys, selects the first suggested continuation of the ship's path, and engages. He bumbles away again looking for something more fleeting and entertaining to occupy himself with.

Tilly's at the party, a few drinks down. She approaches her office-crush, and surrounding colleagues. Everyone gushes the mandatory festive welcome, in various states of merriment and inebriation.

The action cycles between these scenarios as they continue to unfold.

Tilly's seems to make a good initial connection with the object of her affection, but after some time, too much booze is consumed by all. Boundaries are crossed. Tilly gives a senior member of staff an ill-advised piece of her mind. Someone else is sick, on her. Some of the office boys start a scuffle together on the dancefloor.

The photocopier is abused. A randy couple are discovered in a side-office. Reeling from all this, and even more of the open-bar, Tilly confesses her adoration of her colleague to said flame. They kiss, and ultimately do leave together. But by then Tilly is doing herself no favours.

Carlos finds himself lost. He's gotten distracted under pressure, taking a mis-turn somewhere on his map. To get back on track, coaxed by Stephanie, they resort to asking some locals at the next settlement they come across. Again, the reaction to the family is not a warm one. Carlos hopes they've not made a terrible mistake. They get the directions they need, but as it's late, elect to stop there overnight.

Jay-Gee returns to the controls of the Albatross. There's a genuine look of astonishment at what the screens show. The ship has followed the path designated, but is way off course... approaching dangerous non-Alpha-space territory. Frightened at the possible repercussions if North or Mac find out, an attempt is made to contact Kieran for help. He appears out of range for live communication, though. Tentatively, Kieran contacts North to confirm this.

Sitting, as always, at his New-York apartment desk, North takes the call. Kat enters whilst he converses with the unusually timid, awkward, teammate. She's putting on the finishing accessories to her glamorous evening outfit; she signals North one last time - does he want to tidy himself up and join her? She scrawls a note to him: his agent will be there, doubtless expecting an appearance. North refuses. She leaves. Jay-Gee's told to just drop Kieran a Esc-mail if it's as unimportant and trivial as conveyed.

Jay-Gee waits for a response, tensely, floating in unknown space. Keeping busy, the current system is scanned for any potential threat. And the logs showing the chain of events leading to this are reviewed. Jay-Gee realises the earlier unfocussed console input is to blame; berating himself in the third person upon the discovery. That's not only one of three discoveries, though. The scan of the system reveals an unusual, unexpected, vein of resources. Jay-Gee takes quiet note of that. And - alarmingly for Jay-Gee - a ghostly hint that they are not the only vessel nearby.

Kieran ultimately receives Jay-Gee's message. He replies: he'll send some support out - old friends based in the systems nearby. They will escort the Albatross back on track, whilst Kieran arranges to meet it with some of the Rough-riders - as originally planned - on the boundary back into Omega space.

Kieran's associates arrive, potentially scaring away the spectral ships lurking just out of the Albatross's range. If they did even ever exist outside just Jay-Gee's imagination. Together they set off.

Daylight with them, Carlos and family hit the road again - back on track, towards their new home.

The episode ends with Cole making an appearance, not North, reviewing game-footage, alone, at night. A dog enters. Cole strokes it pensively, channelling the essence of a Bond-villain. He regards the images before him: the battle at the mining outpost, the destruction of Dogger's facility, and the seven-year-old footage from his own vantage point on the Deke. He recognises the actions of his old comrade North in the contemporary skirmishes, "Come out from under your rock, have you, old friend?". He strokes the dog once more. "No. You've crossed a line now, I'm afraid."

A call comes in from the Juno - it's Dogger, begging for his life. Cole gives the order for the Juno / Ezra to kill him, returning the audience back to a unified timeline.

Episode Five: Bounty

With Xmas proper looming imminent in the real-world, it's party season in the cities. Tilly (Kestry) drops into the Arcadia Café for breakfast, in the previous night's clothes, hungover. Her take on the 'walk of shame' after the fairly disastrous evening - the 'stride of pride'. She's surly and uncommunicative, nevertheless: struggling from the excess. The proprietor, Tom, tends to her with professionalism and sympathy. In the background, Tom's assistant arrives, quietly setting about her tasks.

The title sequence repeats.

Episode title: "01x05 Bounty"

A fairly straightforward 'mission' is presented in-game: Kieran, must lead the Rough Riders to rendez-vous with the Albatross, and escort it through the potentially hazardous Omega and Sigma space, to reach the market hub and sell their hard-won loot.

This allows more focus on the character interactions this episode. The full complement of the Rough Riders meet up again for the first time since the premier episode. Kestry's unquestioning devotion to North starts to waver. Even she points to his instability, and indicates to Kieran that he'd make a far better leader. Kieran shies away awkwardly from the suggestion of such a clear leadership position. Something in his past haunts him there.

The crux of the online focus is to demonstrate this relationship building between Kieran and Kestry, now they finally have some time to interact together. Kieran's captainly actions / dialogue present him as a strong, positive, inspiration to the feisty Kestry.. herself actually crumbling under the hard exterior she projects into both worlds. Jay-Gee in contrast, is particularly erratic, almost schizophrenic. The others put this down to his nerves and the long solo haul in the Albatross. However, the strange sensor readings, and his exaggerated behaviour do nothing to allay the group's sense of some unknown catastrophe looming just out of reach - the uneasiness of being spied upon.

The episode ultimately reveals that even Kieran adopts an aspect of façade and masquerade. 'He' is actually a she; Tom's assistant, not Tom as hitherto implied. Kieran / Ciaran is cowed by the cyber-

sexism so prevalent online, hiding her true gender online and 'gamer-girl' interests from almost everyone in the real world. This revelation could obviously have significant implications on the Kieran-Kestry relationship were this now to be revealed!

A voicemail plays to North in his apartment. Kat is nowhere to be seen. It's from his agent, who wishes a merry Xmas, and a prosperous New Year. However, he'll no longer be representing him when the New Year does come around: pull yourself together, man! North eyes the progress of the buffer exploit hungrily.

Episode Six: Net-worth

Opening online for the first time since the inaugural scene, this episode begins with North chewing out Mac back at Havana Station. The former is desperate for some sort of acceleration on the buffer exploit left behind installed on Juno. Mac defends his position, visibly miffed and feeling unappreciated. There genuinely is nothing they can do but wait, short of another commando-like infiltration onto the ship. North actually considers it. Mac is furious. Mid-sentence he locks up again. North is furious.

The title sequence repeats.

Episode title: "01x06 Net-worth"

Mac swears. His home-network has gone down again, disconnecting him from the game. He pulls at cables and WiFi access points, obviously an over-ambitious DIY install.

This deliberately real-world-heavy episode acts to really connect the audience with the core of the main ensemble's characters - really suggest what makes them tick. It shows many of them in post-Xmas blues, money tight, especially the UK-based characters. Mac, in the Australian sunshine, is instead revealed as overconfident, arrogant - especially about IT / game matters - yet, ultimately, mediocre in his actual abilities. This sets him up for a degree of general mockery, a crucial miscalculation in the following episode, and his ultimate season comeuppance.

Miranda (Ezra) is shown flipping between her environmentalist / vegan activism and roller-derby. Her Esc.(ape) Online duties to the Federated Union, it's uniform, and her dismissal from real-world hospitality jobs. She's a wonderful, expressive, enigma of a person.

Mac, in sharp contrast, is seen in his helpdesk role; posturing and being unnecessarily rude to unenlightened customers. When confronted by his superiors about negative feedback he quickly buckles, and all but rolls over. Though unable to connect to the game, he is seen doing some online stalking. Details go down in a special file with a satisfied - icky - grin.

Of specific note, this episode makes it clear that Tilly (Kestry) is disillusioned in general. Her online time together with Kieran is a massive motivating force in her life at this point.

Carlos unpacks his vintage toys and work studio. The kids run about excitedly, pestering him for something. He'll get around to it as soon as he can.

As events draw to this episode's conclusion, North sits alone in his apartment, teetering on the edge of a possible breakdown. There are signs of disarray, discarded takeaway containers, unwashed laundry. It's clear he's been alone there for days now. Kat is long gone. On his displays, Mac's buffer exploit finally indicates 100%. They're ready to proceed.

Episode Seven: Revelation.

This episode opens with a revelation to the audience that North was **not** betrayed by Cole and Co all those years ago. North has simply misconstrued the fragment of events and evidence available to him!

The title sequence repeats.

Episode title: "01x07 Revelation"

It then sees the Rough Riders preparing and setting out to fulfil the first real gambit in North's audacious master-plan; one he imagines as a brutal blow, and a public warning to N-Corp. Dogger and Stenz dispatched, North is locked on a course of total, humiliating, revenge against Cole. This is the payoff to the clandestine secondary objective aboard the Juno way back in the first episode. Assured by Mac that his exploit will allow them to disable the Juno's warp-disruptors on demand, North aims to throw their full forces into this battle. He dismisses proposals of a stealthy or commando alternatives as out of the question. The goal is not just to destroy the Alcazar Class Battle-station Revelation, which Juno and her armada patrol, but to hold off the N-Corp forces whilst the Rough Riders board, take over, and publicly steal it away! Audacious indeed. The others do agree it's quite the prize if they do succeed, though, and agree.

It comes to the light of the audience, however, that Ezra has discovered Mac's exploit in advance. The discovery is brought to Cole's attention. He gives Ezra, this up-and-coming-officer, her own small command (an assault frigate) as a reward for her service. Cole personally transfers to the Juno's crew set to defeat North's entire posse in one swift stroke. In a call-back to the uneasy sense of being tracked / followed / monitored back in episode 5, Cole has located the Rough Riders' Havana Base. So, when they leave it effectively undefended to launch their attack on the Revelation, Cole has it - and their cloning / resurrection capabilities - utterly destroyed.

In the middle of their ferocious battle on the Revelation, the Rough Riders suddenly find themselves in the same, unenviable, life-or-death scenario as Kieran. In fact, as they're unprepared, and haven't chosen this... they're potentially in a far worse

position. They don't, typically, deal well with the revelation. Then the Juno re-enables her warp-disruptors. The Rough Riders are in dire straits.

In a magnificent display of piloting and bravery, mirroring the skills displayed in escorting the Albatross in episode one, Kieran whirls her fighter - spinning, twisting, <> - against all odds, close enough to the Juno for a torpedo run. He manages to damage the warp-disruptor, releasing his friends. But the Lowflyer is destroyed. Kieran's escape pod fires out of the wreckage. Where, now without a flicker of hesitation, Ezra's assault-frigate annihilates him.

Episode Eight: Restitution.

Kestry sits at Arcadia Café, a minor rapport with Tom now in place as he comes over to serve. He asks what's up, and she alludes to Kieran's exit from the game. Mac has hinted he knows Kieran's real-world details, and is willing to reveal them to her.. for a price. She debates the moral dilemma, but only half-heartedly. It would be an invasion of privacy, it could destroy the foundation of their relationship, it's certainly against their corp's rules - and it would be, in some way, letting Mac get the better of her.

The title sequence repeats.

Episode title: "01x08 Restitution"

Fleeing the debacle of the previous episode, devastated by the loss of Kieran and their base, with Ezra and the other N-Corp forces hot on their heels, things look bleak for the remaining Rough Riders. Kestry in particular pines for her lost friend and captain as they try distance themselves from the Revelation. Mac motions off her sadness, rubbing his fingers and grinning suggestively. Kestry looks away.

North formulates a plan, though. He notes the pursuing flotilla, speculating that the Revelation must only be left supported by the still semi-functional Juno. He proposes they return; Mac piloting Kestry on a stealth-mission, in a stubby augmented with Toovey's recent new technology. He'll navigate the presumed impassable rubble, the planet's ring-field, to approach the station from its relatively undefended side; certainly out of reach from the Juno. She'll then capture the Restitution, allowing the others to board, and turning its weapons against the Juno. If they manage to hold the station for a pre-determined period, it becomes theirs (warping away to set it up as their new home)!

The Rough Riders are at first reluctant. The plan seems desperate, dangerous, and indicative of North's utter loss of perspective and restraint: his supposed vengeance could destroy them all, as it did Kieran in the previous episode. However, that point itself turns Kestry - she'll do it: payback against Cole / N-Corp. The others fall in line with similar reasoning.

The plan is implemented, initially going well. Indeed, only Juno remains in space near the Revelation. Mac navigates the impossible ring-field... an impressive feat. Be he only just manages it. This raises suspicions over on the Juno. So, even though Kestry boards the station, captures it, and turns it on the Juno, a crucial element of surprise is lost. The station takes a pounding from the Juno in reply. Its drives are destroyed; unable to leave even if our heroes manage to wrest control long enough for the countdown to expire. North throws everything he has left into the fray - all the available corporation resources and lives - despite Kestry and the landing-party advising against it. As North sees it, this will be to the death. Again, he's screwed them all in the chasing of his selfish, pointless, vendetta. Without Kieran to prevent him, and with stakes at their highest ever, it looks like this time it will be fatal. The Rough Riders give as good as they get. It's a valiant battle. But the Juno has them on the ropes.

SHWUMP! An unknown fighter appears from hyperspace. It streaks towards the battle. Fear grabs at the hearts of the Rough Riders; the killing stroke? SHWUMP! SHWUMP! SHWUMP! An entire battle-force follows, arriving on the tail of the fighter. Then, suddenly, Kestry recognises. The markings on the lead ship, the manoeuvre it's pulling... red/black, and something straight out of Angry Birds. It's Kieran!

And, indeed, it is. Kieran - or, rather, Ciaran - has returned to the game. She's collected Kieran's old cache of equipment from the Alpha sector, rustled up some old acquaintances from his / her previous dealings and business. These friends are very definitely aligned with the Commonwealth military faction. All weapons turn on the Juno, now massively outgunned. The tide turns.

Cole orders the Juno to warp away (whilst it still can). The Commonwealth can have this worthless region of space, and North the immobile, heavily-damaged, station. N-Corp and the Federated Union have bigger fish to fry. Elsewhere.

In this finale to season one, the audience are given satisfying conclusions to each of the character's arcs, the underlying revenge plot, thematic payoff on the 'reveals'.

North has his 'victory', but it's Pyrrhic at best. He's left with no crew, no allies, chief over a sector of worthless, desolate, space. Back in the real-world, his addiction - quite deservedly - leaves him broken, broke, and alone.

Kieran returns to the game.. as Ciaran - proudly playing a female character, inspired by Kestry.

Kestry resigns from the game. But keeps a real-world relationship (as Tilly) with Ciaran going.

Jay-Gee is revealed to be a couple of kids, not as had been implied Carlos. That's their father. Having moved from the West Coast to the more Central states, they, as a family, have enough space at home that each kid now has their own room and Esc.(ape) access. They set up as Jay and Gee, with Mac no-longer having any hold over them.

Mac loses most of his power over the Rough Riders, everyone's secrets being revealed. He continues to play, nevertheless - the ethics of his 'exploits' still dubious. In the real-world, he shows no signs of having learned any humility. He carries on content with an attitude of mistaken superiority.

Cole - though the figurehead of evil in-game - is revealed to be a nice, family man... wildlife volunteer. The antithesis of North, he appreciates balance. To him, Esc.(ape) is just a game. A harmless pastime. Albeit one he plays to 'win'.

Some of these go on to establish opportunities for seasons 2, 3 and potentially further. Eg,

Ezra advances to be the chief antagonist, an important lieutenant in N-Corp. Ultimately she can't resolve the discrepancy between online and real-world personas, ending up aligned with Ciaran and Co.

With the audience now familiar with the in-game world, invested in and attached to the existing characters, exploration opens up into Zeta space. This provides opportunity for new characters, threats, and surprises there. But, perhaps more interestingly by this stage, gives a new window into the real-world aspects of the corporation

behind the game. This can explore the near-future reflection of our own world as the backdrop; revisiting the divided USA, zero-hour contracts in UK and Oz, a fragmented Europe, global conflict, the 1%, space-travel... the precipice we find ourselves on with Millennials coming of age. (Mac is left a functional IT-berk as the potential gateway into leveraging this plot.)

Carlos has difficulty finding work / support in the creative fields, having left the West Coast; and the **online** market saturated already with other ukulele ditties for animated infographics. This, the outsider status, and misunderstood side-line in vintage toy restorations do him and his family no favours towards fitting in. Defining himself as father and provider, he struggles to deal with this; internalising. As the pressure builds up, misplaced and resentment grow targeted on the kids and their mother.

Jay & Gina set up their own operation mining / refining the strange teal-coloured fuel they discovered, Matt now very much their whipping boy. However, unbeknownst to them, this technology ties to a third military faction - the Science-Coalition; and a grasp for power long-planned, backed by the scientific breakthrough of an alternative to (the purple) hyperium. In fact, that plot relates right back to Dogger's mysterious enterprises in the seven-year gap.

The Science-Coalition do go on to seize power, to be revealed in season 3 as predominantly led by advanced, AI, androids. There's real-world uproar, claims of non-player-characters, player-cheating, corporate interference, etc. Mac, doubtless, ends up embroiled in all of this. The experience and perspective this opens him up to means he might even learn not to be such a dick... over time. He does have to lose all his hair, though. Karma and all that.