

SHOW SCRIPT  
Aeon Drifter (a themed attraction by Eric Larkin)

INT. AERO-ARCHAEOLOGICAL PLATFORM, ST. LOUIS - DAY

The CAPTAIN, attired with some status, but also ready-for-action, has led the guests into a service passage on their way outside to where their balloon waits.

CAPTAIN

Okay, adventurers. You are here because of your known qualities: your courage, your intelligence, your commitment to your fellow human beings, and because we're *really desperate*. These qualities alone do not guarantee you placement with a research team, but you still got further than your friends back home.

The reason we are in such need of help - both here and at the other research centers, all over the world - is that recently we made a discovery that vastly increased our workload. We went from knifing each other in the back for the chance to scabble around in the dirt for tiny shards of pottery, to drowning in oceans of *extremely* high quality data about the ancient civilizations we study. We simply don't have enough personnel to do the work. That's why you're here. I can hear some of you now, "blah blah *data*, blah blah *research*, blah blahdy did they say *work?!?*"

Yes, don't worry, we'll get to the fun part: no, not the knives - the ride in a hot air balloon.

But before that, some basic safety rules: stay in your seat. That's it. That's all you have to do.

Anyone have to pee? Yeah? Well, you're too late. Pretend you're an astronaut. I'll explain more about our trip once we're underway. Okay candidates, follow me! And hey: once we go through these doors, *stay on the path*.

Captain leads the guests through the doors at the end of the hall, into the load area.

EXT. AERO-ARCHAEOLOGICAL PLATFORM, ST. LOUIS - DAY

A fully inflated hot air balloon waits on a launch pad a few yards away from the building. There is a ring of trees at some distance around most of the load area. Small service roads feed this and other launch pads visible along the building. Birds fly by overhead. It's a lovely day - a great day for flying. They usher the guests down a narrow path, straight into the balloon, where they file into and around the basket, taking every seat on all four sides.

Once everyone is belted in, the Captain takes a position at some very basic controls (the burner, some unseen 'steering flaps', all located overhead), and connects with the control tower. The balloon lifts off with no delay.

CAPTAIN

[to Control Tower]

Alright, Control - this is Captain Reynolds in Balloon 5. We're good to go. Lifting off now. ...

Clearing 30 feet, 50, aaand clear of perimeter. *We're away*, Control. Proceeding to Rift Ceiling.

EXT. IN THE AIR, OVER ST. LOUIS - DAY

That *view*. Any direction the guests look, there is sky, city, river, and the vast plains of the Midwest. They can look up and see the sky or down and see the Aero-platform shrinking beneath them.

CAPTAIN

St. Louis, folks! Not bad, not bad...

There's the arch, the Mississippi, the stadium... lots of... Midwestern stuff. And there - off to the right - that's Cahokia.

Alright - let's get started:

Raise your hand if you know what Cahokia is...

A thousand years ago, this whole area was the largest city north of Mexico. 15,000 folks lived right here. They built around 120 *massive* mounds - and did it without horses and without the wheel. They traded with folks a thousand miles away. It was a very complex society. They did astronomy, they played sports, - *they grew a lot of corn*. They were around for longer than the United States has even existed, so... pretty amazing.

Guess where we're going?

Well, remember that discovery I mentioned earlier?

We *were* using these balloons to map the Cahokia site. One day, a researcher noticed a weird, quivering, shining thing, just floating in mid-air, up near where the balloon was drifting. There was a sudden breeze, and the balloon was *pushed* through that quivery spot in the sky.

At first, everything seemed normal, but then they looked over the edge of the balloon basket...

There was the entire city of Cahokia - not just those few mounds we see over there and *not ruined, but basically new* and filled with people! Eventually, we figured out that they had actually traveled back in time.

That thing in the sky is some kind of *dimensional overlap*, like, well, a time portal. Naturally, we started going through it regularly, to study Cahokia. They have gotten used to us, and we stay out of their way.

We are learning a *lot* about them, and - man, the corn is *incredible*.

Word spread, and many more of these dimensional overlaps have been found - all over the world.

This has given us so many new opportunities for learning about our great predecessors, there are not enough folks to get the work done.

Anyway - wanna go back in time? Cuz there's the time portal, *right there!*

They point up at a pulsing patch of air, and - the guests? - yeah, of course they want to go.

A few manipulations to the balloon controls, an extra flame-thrust, and the balloon surges towards the time portal.

CAPTAIN

ETA, 10 seconds -- aaaand

[the balloon zips through, in a quick flash of weird light/sound]

Welcome to the year 1100 (or thereabouts)!

EXT - IN THE AIR, OVER CAHOKIA - DAY

The ancient city of Cahokia - alive with activity, sound, scents - is now visible, stretching out in all directions.

The Captain guides the balloon closer and around the edges and across the city, making sure all four sides of the balloon have great views. Sometimes it seems like he's getting too close. Some of the Cahokians wave, and the Captain waves back. There is *a lot* to see.

CAPTAIN

You might be wondering if it's such a great idea to zoom in this close. Well, it's impossible to change the past, so don't worry about that. And they don't seem to feel threatened by our presence, so we haven't had any trouble or misunderstandings, so far. If you're lucky, in fact, you might get a wave. Last week, a guy threw me a plum. At least... I think he was throwing it to me rather than *at* me... hmm...

The zooming around the city continues.

CAPTAIN

The temptation, for us, is to look at all this as a kind of paradise. Well... it wasn't. It's just a city, with people very much like us - there's good and bad. They ended up building a wall around the city at one point; there must have been some kind of threat. They also deforested some of the best areas nearby, leading to less wildlife, and a lot of erosion of their farm lands. There's some dark stuff, but, as you can see, the good stuff is pretty amazing. There's a far-ranging exchange of trade and culture - who knows how many languages are spoken, how many different kinds of food, clothing, art -- ah! Look there! It's *chonkey* - it's a sport!

Moving in for a closer look, the Cahokians are engaged in an athletic event where they throw javelins at a rolling, stone disc.

CAPTAIN

Yeah, it's a weird game, but it is *massively* popular during this time period. The really good players are treated like royalty. Some things never change, right? Well, here's the bad news. Within about 200 years, Cahokia collapses. We don't really know why, but despite all of their accomplishments, they somehow let it all slip away. It's something we've seen every great civilization do. At some point, they lose the ability to adapt and grow. I'm sure none of these folks can imagine that it'll all be buried under dirt and grass by our time.

The sky has darkened with an approaching storm. The Captain reacts, obviously disappointed, but also, very serious - storms are dangerous for balloons.

CAPTAIN

Ah, I don't believe it. Rotten luck. It looks like a storm is kicking up - a nasty one. Unfortunately, that means we have to get back through the rift. Sheesh, that was a short trip.

Oh, hang on -- do you see that weird shimmery spot back there on the right? Higher than the one we came in through? That's another rift! Huh. Never seen that one before.

Ok then, we've got a choice: we can go back to base *or* ... we could go exploring through that new rift. Who knows what we'll find? We should be able to make it before the storm gets here. Maybe. What do you say?

Obviously, the guests clamour for the adventurous route.

CAPTAIN

Love to hear that -- you folks have got what they used to call "the right stuff". Unknown destinations... here we come!

EXT - STORM CLOUDS - DAY (but *dark*)

The storm has quickly caught up and enveloped the balloon, as the Captain manipulates the controls. With a massive blast from the burner, the balloon surges up towards the new rift. They push up through towering dark clouds, through wind and even spritzes of rain - it is a harrowing trip --- but they make it through the rift...

EXT - IN THE AIR, OVER FUTURE ST. LOUIS #1 - DAY

...and are stunned by what they see on the other side: a sort of grayscape of worn-out Midwest nothingness. Stale air, neglected city fringes, a slag-like horizon, and a tortured Mississippi. It's not exactly a stench, just a bland, empty odor, like an ashtray.

CAPTAIN

...holy smokes... what is this? When are we?

[does some frantic calculations]

Ok, uh, looks like we're in the year... 2100.

That's not good. This is *our* future? I guess that's St. Louis there, but wow - it looks run down. Is it night? No - it's not - look, there's the sun... sort of, smothered in those... clouds, I guess (sheesh, are those clouds or smoke?) Is that the Mississippi? This can't be our future -- maybe... no, my calculations are spot on. This is 2100. I don't know what to say.

Hang on - what's this ---?!

EXT - IN THE AIR, OVER FUTURE ST. LOUIS #2 - DAY

There is a sudden, all-encompassing, electrically-charged, wave crash of color change that washes over the balloon and *everything* - almost as if a much bigger rift had spontaneously formed right on top of them - and then... the entire scene has changed *radically*.

In place of the shattered landscape, there is a really quite lovely city+horizon+river+air, just laid out around them. St. Louis looks not completely unlike in our own time, but somehow upgraded. There is *a lot* of green - both agriculture and empty land. The "Mighty Miss" looks gorgeous. The air is crisp -- and the scents from all of this are life-giving.

CAPTAIN

Oh wow - *now* when are we? Hang on -

[fast and fierce calculations]

How can that be-? It's still the year 2100. But it looks completely different... And that smell... Look at that river! I feel amazing - I just... wish we could all do a group hug right now. (Nope. Stay in your seats. Hyperbole.)

Seriously, though, I don't understand....

[figuring things out]

-unless... yeah, I guess that makes sense...

Okay, you notice how everything just abruptly changed? I think the future *itself* was changing - I think the future is always in flux. It's always shifting, *because we're constantly creating it in the present*. We are making the future as we go. In fact... hmm, I wonder... is it possible that that one bold choice to go through the rift is what created this particular shift in our future?

A flying car has lifted quietly up to the balloon, dipped around, given a little wave, and scooted off into the distance.

....oh mY goodNESS A FLYING **CAAAAR!**

[The Captain is overawed by this. It is obviously a dream of theirs that flying cars would exist in the future. (Well, duh, right?)]

- quiet as a whisper, must have some new kind of propulsion system - wow -  
[snaps out of it]  
I hate to leave this possible future - But I've got to get you folks back. We're  
already out past our time.

With a few manipulations to the controls, they lift the balloon back up to the rift, and through it.

EXT - IN THE AIR, OVER ST. LOUIS - DAY

Back in our time, there are fresh views of the areas around St. Louis.

CAPTAIN

You research candidates have a *lot* of paperwork waiting for you. Plus the  
examination, the physical fitness test, portfolio review, obstacle course, the psych  
eval... Or, if you're still not sure you want to join our endeavor, you can just  
sneak out through the gift shop. All this boring historical research isn't for  
everyone.

Still, I hope you've enjoyed our brief adventure. Remember: whatever happened  
in the past, *right now* is when we're making our future.

So start working on that flying car.

EXT - AERO-ARCHAEOLOGICAL PLATFORM, ST. LOUIS - DAY

The balloon sets down safely.

Exit thru gift shop.