

MOONFISH

a film by
DANIEL ZVEREFF





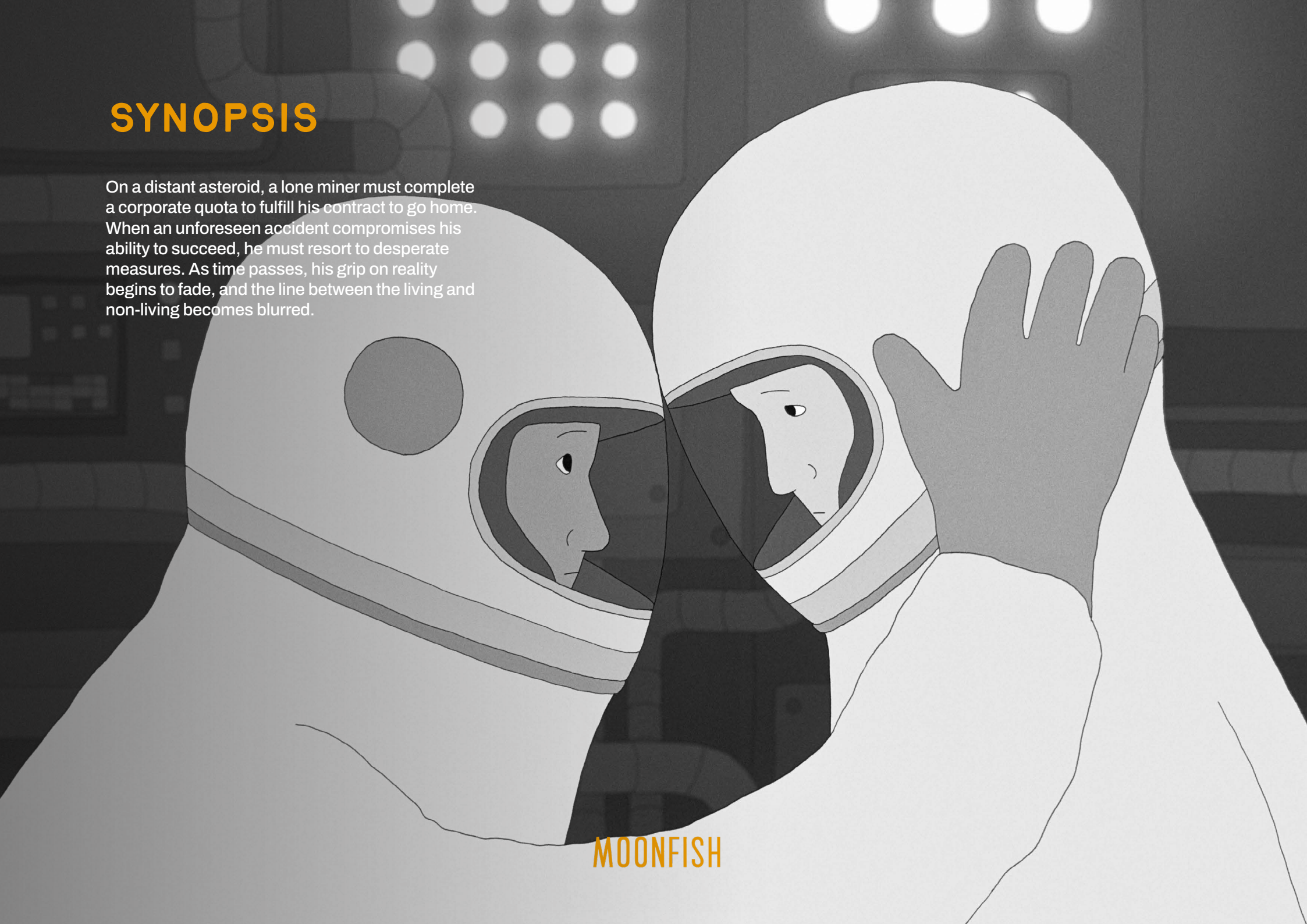
LOGLINE

A grieving astronaut isolated on a deep-space mining mission must fulfill a strict corporate quota to return home. As his solitude deepens, a mysterious presence awakens in the deep, shifting him toward an unexpected pulse of hope.

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SYNOPSIS

On a distant asteroid, a lone miner must complete a corporate quota to fulfill his contract to go home. When an unforeseen accident compromises his ability to succeed, he must resort to desperate measures. As time passes, his grip on reality begins to fade, and the line between the living and non-living becomes blurred.

A stylized illustration in a limited color palette of greys, blacks, and oranges. It depicts two astronauts in space suits. The astronaut on the left is shown in profile, looking towards the right. The astronaut on the right is shown from the chest up, with their right hand raised and pressed against a large, white, spherical object that dominates the right side of the frame. The background is dark with a grid of small, glowing white circles, suggesting a distant starry space or a technical interface. The overall mood is somber and mysterious.

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Why did you want to talk about loneliness in space?

It was important to me that the environment reinforced the character's isolation. He's alone, surrounded by lifeless rock, floating on an asteroid through the solar system. I was also thinking a lot about how we, as humans, are migrating from an offline to an online existence. I wanted to write something that felt like it was set in a place that was an allegory for the current human experience, with increasing physical social isolation and our growing entanglement with the techno-oligarchy.

Moonfish is also a political film. You discuss exploitation and the idea that people are considered "cheaper" than robots. Was it your intention to show that technological progress doesn't always equate to real progress?

It's interesting because that part of the film started coming to fruition before AI became such a dominant topic of conversation. I knew I wanted to talk about technology. As a millennial, I experienced a time when these modern technologies hadn't yet consumed us or exploited our addiction. Now, we've kind of reached a point where we're being exploited to such an extent

that technology is no longer offering us a better world. Instead, we have found ourselves in a dystopia. Nevertheless, the human spirit, our hope, identity and dreams will still exist, no matter how bad things get.

The Biennale College Cinema, which promotes new talent, comes with a modest budget. Was it challenging, especially when making an animated film?

Our production schedule was around nine months long, and ultimately only three of us were working on the animated element of the film [with Devin Grover and Hoss Wheeler]. Every single minute of labor had to be accounted for very carefully. When writing the script, I really had to write within the limitations of what I could achieve.

In some ways, these limitations aligned with my personal belief in how I wanted to make my first film. I didn't want to lose my way and create something overly complicated. I wanted the tone and mood to be an integral part of the story, capturing and mirroring the characters' internal state. The film's simplicity is also reflected in the way it's "shot." The camera is mostly locked, and there is a certain visual restraint. In animation, we're used to big, sweeping

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movements, but I was trying to do something pared back that really focused on the story. Animation is such an incredible medium for expression. There is something about it that subconsciously draws me to it. I really believe that when you make a film, you remove a little piece of yourself, send it out into the world and never get it back. Drawing is a particularly unique way to express this idea. It reminds me of skateboarding in the late '90s and early 2000s; it has this subculture and punk rock element that isn't widely explored right now. The possibilities are almost endless because you can craft with your hands. There's something so human about it. It's as if you're watching a director's dream unfold or the subconscious visibly on display.

Although it's not an autobiographical film, it's still very personal. Could you talk about it?

The journey to completing a first feature can be quite brutal and long, but I found that writing something very personal helped me maintain the level of obsession required to cross the finish line. One thing that has plagued me for the last 10 to 15 years is chronic heart palpitations. All day, every day. They're actually related to a nerve in my stomach that gets irritated. It's called the vagus nerve. Everything I eat bothers it, so my heart constantly beats oddly. It's a perpetual reminder that our time is limited. When I first started experiencing these symptoms,

I had Medicaid, which is a free healthcare in the US. I visited a doctor and he did an ECG of my heart to check its rhythm. He misdiagnosed me, saying that I could potentially die because my heart wasn't pumping blood effectively through my body. He read the failing mechanics of my heart from a Google search with his back to me. It was a cold and terrifying experience. My next appointment, scheduled for two months later, was for a more sophisticated scan of my heart. But I lasted about two weeks before I had a complete breakdown.

I had a proper panic attack – I thought I was dying. I went to the emergency room where they did the same scan on my heart. They said: "You do have an arrhythmia, but it doesn't increase your risk of death. If it stays as it is, you're fine." When I got home, it felt like waking up from a dream. It's so hard to describe those two weeks. You try to make sense of everything, your entire past life, and maybe the future you will never have. The experience of thinking I might be dying changed everything for me. In *Moonfish*, I also wanted the main character to be stuck in a waiting room, a kind of purgatory. I wanted the flow of time to feel disrupted.

He's in space, but everything feels very claustrophobic.

Shooting the film in a 4:3 aspect ratio, and creating

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this sense of claustrophobia, was really important. It's as if the walls are closing in on him. When I was really young, my parents took me on one of these tourist submarines. You learn that different colors are unable to penetrate at different depths underwater. I was wearing a brightly colored shirt, and as we were descending, different parts of it lost their color. Something about that experience poked holes in my understanding and perception of our shared visible reality. It has stuck with me my entire life.

When I was thinking about the lighting and color in this film, I definitely wanted the setting to feel very black and white, and very confined. I was also thinking about what is denied to you depending on your social class. In their case, it's color, nature and real air, this feeling of experiencing life in its natural setting. Despite this, they still have to find their identity, fight for their dreams, and maintain their humanity. In this film, I'm trying to strike that balance between hope and despair.

You tell the story of how a fish once saved astronauts - by observing it, they realized there was a serious technical issue. Did you want to reference it here?

My inspiration for the fish was quite simple. I was thinking about the canaries that the miners would bring down the mine with them. If the bird died, they

knew they needed to get out. I did experiment with a few other things that it could be. At one point, it was even a cactus [laughter].

I definitely wanted it to serve a purpose other than just being a sidekick. I wanted it to be something that astronauts might take with them in the future – also as good luck tokens. As human beings, we need connection and to share our experiences. This astronaut needs this fish because he's holding onto something that he has lost. The fish is definitely a survival mechanism.

Why did you want to work with Morgan Spector and Lucy Liu, who are voicing the film?

This is the first project that I've ever worked on with dialogue. My previous shorts were dialogue-free narratives. When we began our search for actors, I knew I wanted the voices to sound very different from each other. It was important that each of them represented a different perspective on what it means to "be" and how things "work" in the universe. It was crucial that the character's journey could be heard in the voice, since we were limited in what we could do with facial expressions based on the minimalist animation direction. They're both just so good at what they do, and we were so lucky to have them join the project. I am eternally grateful to all our collaborators.

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DANIEL ZVEREFF

Daniel Zvereff (1985) is a Brooklyn-based animator, writer, and director whose films explore intergenerational displacement and the mysterious undercurrents of reality. Moonfish is his debut feature, premiering at the 2026 Venice Film Festival.

DIRECTORS'S FILMOGRAPHY

MOONFISH	2026	Feature
DRAGO	2024	Short
LIFE IS A PARTICLE TIME IS A WAVE	2022	Short
GOLDFISH	2019	Short



MOONFISH

CAST



**MORGAN
SPECTOR**

Cassius



**LUCY
LIU**

Vesper/Fish

MOONFISH

FILM INFORMATION

World Premiere	Venice International Film Festival
Original Title	Moonfish
International Title	Moonfish
Genre	Animation, drama, sci-fi
Duration	89 min
Year of completion	2026
Countries of production	USA
Original language	English
Available subtitles	Italian, English
Exhibition format	DCP
Framerate	24 fps
Aspect Ratio	4:3
Sound format	Stereo

CREW

Director	Daniel Zvereff
Screenwriter	Daniel Zvereff
Music	Sami Jano

PRODUCTION COMPANIES

Lucky Accident Productions	Mireia Vilanova
Present Company	Rebecca Wyzan
Cartuna	James Belfer

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PRODUCTION COMPANIES

LUCKY ACCIDENT PRODUCTIONS

Lucky Accident Productions is a Los Angeles-based production company founded by Barcelona-born producer Mireia Vilanova. Her credits include *Moonfish* (Venice Film Festival), *Sender* (SXSW), *By Design* (Sundance) and *I Live Here Now* (Locarno). She is the recipient of the Berlinale Talent Highlight Award and the Sundance Jury Award for Animation.

PRESENT COMPANY

Present Company is a Brooklyn-based production company run by Paul Mezey, Andrew Goldman, and Rebecca Wyzan, focusing on the development and production of bold, carefully crafted work helmed by auteurs in the film and tv space. Our credits include *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, *Marcel The Shell With Shoes On*, *After Yang*, *We The Animals*, *Beach Rats*, *Sugar*, *Half-Nelson*, *Maria Full Of Grace*, *A Love Song*, *Janet Planet*, and *Rebuilding*.

CARTUNA

Cartuna is a full-service animation studio based in New York, specializing in services film, television, and digital content. Our television portfolio includes work on some of the world's most beloved animation franchises, such as *Spongebob Square Pants*, *Monster High*, and *Dora The Explorer*.

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