

Encapsulated Season 5 - Episode 1

FADE IN:

INT. BLANK WHITE ROOM - DAY

There are nine people sitting on green chairs in a circle: eight adults, and one boy.

Most of them seem to just be waking up, and they're all rather confused. Except for PEARL (35), a kind woman who's watching and waiting patiently.

One of them, NATE (21), gets up in a panic.

NATE

Whaaaaat the hell is happening? What the-  
(he looks around in horror)

I was just in my apartment, and I- what the-

He starts pacing, while the others get their bearings, struggling to make sense of where they are. Pearl calmly tries to settle them down.

PEARL

Everyone, if I could have your attention please.  
I know you're probably all very disoriented.  
But I promise this will all make sense.

They all start complaining louder, a cacophony of panic and confusion. Finally, MIKE (63), whistles loudly, and they all go silent.

MIKE

Alright. Let's listen to-

He gestures to Pearl for her name.

PEARL

Pearl.

MIKE

Pearl. Let's all listen to Pearl, she seems to actually know what's happening.

PEARL

Thank you. Now, I promise, this will all-

NATE

This has to be a dream... This can't be real...  
Wake up, Nate, come on... Wake up...

He's pacing and ignoring everybody, but Pearl carries on.

PEARL

This is not a dream - although I'm sure you're  
confused how you suddenly appeared here, and  
I'll explain it all shortly.

NATE

You better, you fucking-

MIKE

Hey! Language, buddy. Let her talk.

Nate glares at Mike, leans against the back wall, then  
gestures impatiently for Pearl to continue.

PEARL

Alright. So, the first question: where are we?  
Now, this may be hard to believe, but we are in...  
Heaven. This is Heaven. And in case-

They all start talking over her. Once again, Mike whistles  
to rein them in.

MIKE

Come on guys, let's just hear her out.

Pearl smiles gratefully at him, then continues.

PEARL

Thank you. Now, I want to be very clear: you are  
NOT dead. You did not DIE. This is TEMPORARY.  
And, most of you will be going back to Earth,  
within the next 24 hours. Okay?

NATE

This is ridiculous... It's a fucking dream...

He starts pacing again. One of the women, SAVITRI (45), interjects politely.

SAVITRI

I'm sorry, but did we do something wrong? Are we being punished?

PEARL

No, no, you're not in any trouble, I promise.

(Savitri smiles and nods)

However, currently, you're 'missing' from Earth because your bodies are here. Which is why I'm trying to explain this quickly. The sooner that we cover everything, the sooner most of you can go back to normal life.

NATE

So you abducted us? So you're aliens?

PEARL

Not exactly... But if that's a helpful way for you to make sense of what's happening-

NATE

Don't patronize me. What's HAPPENING is that I'm having a very lucid dream, and-

MIKE

Or maybe she's telling the truth... Because this feels pretty real to me too. Right? You all feel like this is actually happening, not a dream?

(the others all nod in agreement)

Okay. So let's hear her out.

Nate sighs, but keeps quiet while Pearl continues.

PEARL

Like I said - in less than two days from now, most of you will be back on Earth, reunited with your friends and family, with no recollection of what happened. Only one of you will be staying.

NATE

This is insane, this has to be a dream...

Another woman, HELENA (37), pretends to be surprised.

HELENA

Wait, what? You think this is a dream? Well, I-  
I'm SHOCKED that you would say that.

Some of them laugh. One of the men, HAOXUAN (31), also makes fun of Nate by pretending to be surprised.

HAOXUAN

Wait, everyone - I think this might be a dream!

HELENA

What?? This is all a dream?  
(she gasps exaggeratedly)  
What next? It's all actually a DREAM??

Now everybody's laughing, except Nate, who's fuming at their impersonations of him.

NATE

Laugh it up, subconscious. I get it. Move on.

HAOXUAN

Oh wait, I think-  
(he pretends to have an epiphany)  
I think this is a dream!

They all laugh again. Nate rolls his eyes, and soon after, the laughter dies down.

MIKE

Alright - so, to recap. We're in Heaven, and, most of us are going back to Earth soon. So-  
(he looks at Pearl quizzically)  
That makes you an angel?

PEARL

Right you are.

NATE

Aren't angels supposed to be terrifying?  
(Pearl chuckles to herself)  
Isn't that part of the LORE, or whatever?

PEARL

That's a myth: we're essentially just humans, but immortal, and, HERE, instead of Earth.

NATE

Ah. Of course.

(he scoffs at her)

So why are WE here if we're not dead?

MIKE

Great question, which I suspect Pearl was about to address if she hadn't been interrupted.

Nate sneers at Mike, Mike looks smugly back, and Pearl continues her spiel.

PEARL

Well, yes, we should discuss the 'why' next. Essentially, you are all here for a... A sort of job interview. To replace God.

(everyone is dead silent)

Now I know that may come as a shock, because, well, he's GOD. Or Yahweh, Allah, however you-

One of the women, MILLY (23), interjects dismissively.

MILLY

I'm sorry... HE?? Why is God a HE??

PEARL

I meant 'he', 'she', 'they', however you want to conceive of an omnipotent deity - I didn't mean to offend anyone.

Milly smiles with relief. Nate rolls his eyes, but doesn't say anything.

PEARL

But yes, THEY - i.e. GOD - will be retiring. Which means they'll need a replacement, and so, one of you will be taking on that role.

NATE

Why is he retiring? That makes no fucking sense.

MIKE

Come on, the man's been doing this for eternity.  
Give him a break.

(several of them laugh)

Okay. So God's retiring, and one of us will be  
replacing him.

(he looks at Milly)

Or her. Or them.

PEARL

Exactly.

SAVITRI

Why would you replace them with a human?

PEARL

Excellent question. It's because... His role is to  
serve and protect humanity, so, who better to  
fill that role than a human?

HELENA

Do we get to meet him first?

PEARL

Unfortunately no, not unless you get chosen.  
He's- well, as you can imagine, he's very, very,  
very VERY busy.

Several of them nod understandingly. Nate just laughs.

NATE

Ah yes, poor Allah, he's so overworked. He just-  
he wants to retire in a timeshare on a beach.  
Finally free from the bonds of being infinite,  
exhausted from all the pressures of divinity,  
realizing that humanity isn't worth it anymore.

PEARL

That's NOT the case. Admittedly, his motives are  
somewhat complicated, but please rest assured  
that he has not given up on humanity. He simply  
needs a respite is all. In fact, humanity is  
VERY important, which is why we're making sure  
that he has a replacement. Make sense?

Most of them nod. Haoxuan raises his hand curiously, and Pearl motions for him to ask his question.

HAOXUAN

So... Why us? Why were we chosen?

PEARL

Another excellent question. You all were chosen at random. We determined that a random selection was the only fair, impartial choice. That way, nobody develops a-

NATE

A god complex?

Some of them laugh, including Pearl.

PEARL

That is a great way to put it, yes. This way, nobody can claim superiority based on merit, because you're all here by chance.

NATE

That explains why there's a fucking CHILD..

He glances at the boy, who hasn't said anything, and looks embarrassed (and confused). Mike fires back at Nate.

MIKE

You know what Jesus said: if you humble yourself like a child, you'll be the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven...

PEARL

Very true. Now, that doesn't mean you're all equally qualified - you'll still have to pass a series of tests, challenges, and tasks before becoming God. But you all have an equal chance.

SAVITRI

What if we don't want the job?

Several of them seem surprised, but Savitri is very matter-of-fact about it. Pearl isn't fazed.

PEARL

Do you not want the job?

SAVITRI

I didn't say that. I'm simply curious. What if somebody isn't interested?

PEARL

Well, we wouldn't coerce you to stay, but it's- think of it like jury duty, a civic obligation to help all of humanity. However, if you really don't want to participate, you may leave.

(there's silence)

Does anybody want to leave?

They all look around the room at each other. Most of them seem interested in staying. Mike glances at Nate.

MIKE

That's your cue, if you want to test your theory that you're dreaming. Just say the word.

NATE

I'm... I'm intrigued... I still think I'm dreaming, but if I'm NOT, then...

MIKE

(chuckles)

So what you're SAYING is... The offer of being God is too good to refuse.

NATE

In a manner of speaking...

PEARL

Well, so I should be clear: while it may sound enticing and even tempting to be divine, it's-

(she tries to think of an analogy)

It's like being the president. Or a king.

MILLY

(quick to clarify)

Or queen!

PEARL

Or queen. Yes. It sounds nice in theory, and there are certainly a lot of perks, and power, and influence. But it is also thankless, stressful, and carries an enormous burden.

(she pauses)

It's not a job to be taken lightly.

NATE

Fair enough. I'd still regret it though if it weren't a dream.

(he looks at Mike)

And the thought of SOME of you being God is...

MIKE

(chuckles)

Right back at you.

HELENA

Alright, I'm glad you're both motivated, but let's try and take this seriously, please.

NATE

Oh I'm very serious now. If the fate of humanity is in one of our hands? I would much rather it be mine than his.

MIKE

Right. Back. At. You.

HELENA

Oh my goodness...

She and the other women exchange looks of annoyance, while Pearl tries to refocus them.

PEARL

Okay, let's bring it back. There's nothing wrong with a little friendly competition, but let's remember the stakes.

HELENA

(nodding in agreement)

Yes please...

MILLY

I just noticed that we're all speaking English. Isn't that, like, a little anglo-centric?

PEARL

Oh, about that - you're all actually speaking your native language, we just- it's translated, so you all can communicate more easily.

(Milly nods)

Great question. So, now we-

MILLY

Thank you!

Pearl is slightly thrown by Milly thanking her, but then carries on.

PEARL

So. Now, assuming nobody wants to leave?

(nobody does)

Now we'll do official introductions, and again, we're trying to move this along quickly because we don't want you missing for too long.

NATE

Why doesn't time just slow down...?

PEARL

That would be more convenient, yes, however, unfortunately time here moves the same speed as on Earth. It doesn't run differently.

NATE

I gotcha. Celestial planes, relativity, science...

(he rolls his eyes)

Please proceed. Don't mind me, just trying to make sense of everything.

MIKE

Don't overthink it. You'll be back on Earth in 24 hours anyways.

(he chuckles)

Alright, I can start. What do we- just, name, where we're from?

PEARL

Mm-hmm. Maybe a little about yourself and your religious background. And just to keep it easy, we can stick to first names only.

MIKE

Sure thing. Alright, my name's Mike, I'm from Gary, Indiana - USA all the way. I have a wife, two grown kids, and... Oh, and I'm a Methodist, and I'm actually the pastor at our church.

PEARL

Excellent. Great to have you, Mike.

NATE

(pretending to be in AA)

Hi Mike... It works if you work it...

Several of them laugh. Nate finally sits down (he had been standing the whole time).

NATE

What is up, everyone? I'm Nate. Formerly known as Nadeem, but fuck my Muslim upbringing, and fuck all organized religion. I'm an atheist now, and I live in Toronto with my cats. Suck it.

MIKE

I love how you use profanity around a child.

NATE

Oh I'm sorry, Mike, I wouldn't want him to get the wrong idea about the real world. It might put you pastors out of a job...

(he turns to the boy)

Church is for sheep, God is dead, and reality is what we make of it. Not what some old book of-

MIKE

Alright, hold on. Hollllld on.

(he looks at Pearl skeptically)

Are we really going to allow this? An atheist? I'm not saying God has to be Christian, or even from a Western religion, but come on...

NATE

It's not like 'God' has done much for us.

SAVITRI

I do agree though, if you don't BELIEVE in God..

NATE

Okay, but I wouldn't mind BEING God, and maybe teach humanity that, you know, we need to move beyond the idea of God. Right? Maybe that's what we NEED, moving into a post-God era.

MIKE

Except clearly there IS a God, so..

NATE

Well maybe there shouldn't be. Maybe my first act in office will be to kill myself.

(he looks at Pearl)

If I'm not qualified, send me home.

The room is awkwardly silent. Finally, Pearl speaks up.

PEARL

I would encourage you all to trust the process that we've come up with, trust that we will find the most qualified person, and weed out anybody who isn't. Everything will work out in the end.

(this answer seems to satisfy them)

So, who wants to go next?

SAVITRI

I can go. I'm Savitri. I'm from Kalaburagi, and I'm married with four children: three daughters, one son. And I'm a Hindu.

They all smile politely. Haoxuan raises his hand next.

PEARL

Yes, go ahead.

HAOXUAN

Thank you. My name is Haoxuan, and I live in Lijiang, Zhongguo, with my wife and son.

PEARL

And what is your spiritual background?

HAOXUAN

Oh yes, my apologies. I believe in Ren, which is a sort of benevolent, charitable human-kindness, and while I am somewhat familiar with the teachings of Confucius, I am always learning, and open to new teachings. I am very excited and eager for this opportunity.

(he pauses)

Unless it's all a dream!

They all laugh; even Nate chuckles. Haoxuan's sincerity and enthusiasm are contagious.

PEARL

We're very happy to have you. Okay, next is...?

HELENA

I'll go next. I'm Helena, I'm from La Serena, Chile, and I'm a mother of four as well.

(she exchanges smiles with Savitri)

The opposite for me: three boys, one girl.

SAVITRI

Ah. Very different dynamic, I imagine.

HELENA

Tell me about it...

(they laugh)

And I am a lapsed Catholic, but, I'm hoping that it won't count against me.

PEARL

(chuckles)

Don't stress about it. We're glad you're here. Who wants to-

MILLY

Hey, I can go. I'm Milly. I'm from Bristol, annnnnd... Oh. I'm into New Age stuff, astrology, recently got into crystals and essential oils, so, yeah... And I'm in an open relationship.

Mike and Nate briefly bond over their mutual shock at how shallow Milly seems - Milly doesn't notice - and Pearl carries right along.

PEARL

Alright. Good to have you. And...

She focuses on the two group members who haven't spoken this whole time: the young boy, JORGE (7), and AYANO (22), a quiet, shy woman.

PEARL

Who wants to go first?

After a few seconds, Ayano introduces herself softly.

AYANO

My name is Ayano. I'm from Esashi, where I live with my parents. And I'm agnostic, but I try to borrow the best of all religions.

PEARL

Welcome, Ayano. Glad to have you. And...

(she turns to Jorge)

That just leaves you. You want to tell everyone your name?

JORGE

... Jorge...

PEARL

Nice to meet you, Jorge. How old are you?

JORGE

... Seven...

PEARL

And where are you from?

Jorge is silent, still confused, embarrassed, overwhelmed. Mike takes over.

MIKE

What do you like to do for fun, Jorge?

JORGE  
(shrugs)  
Football I guess...

MIKE  
Football? Neat! Who's your favorite player?

JORGE  
David Beckham!

MIKE  
Ooooh, good choice.  
(Jorge grins)  
You play offense or defense?

JORGE  
Defense.

MIKE  
You struck me as a defense guy. And do you go to  
church or anything, or just school?  
(Jorge shrugs)  
Do you go to Mass?

NATE  
Wow, way to automatically assume he's Catholic  
because he's Hispanic.

MILLY  
Excuse me, it's Latinx.

HELENA  
Oh my goodness...

MIKE  
I believe it's still Jorge's turn.  
(everyone quiets down)  
You go to Mass every week?  
(Jorge nods)  
Neat. What's your favorite subject in school?

JORGE  
Umm... P.E.!

They all chuckle. Jorge is grinning now, and he fist-bumps with Mike.

MIKE

Good answer. He's got my vote for God.

NATE

Same. I'll take him over you.

He and Mike stare down; Helena rolls her eyes.

HELENA

Alright, alright. Nice to meet you, Jorge. So...  
(she looks at Pearl impatiently)  
Now what? The tests, or whatever?

PEARL

Yes. If you'll all please follow me.

They all stand up, and a panel opens in the wall. It leads to a smaller room.

Pearl gestures for them to enter - they all crowd in, there's just enough room for everyone.

PEARL

Everyone in? Alright, good.  
(she presses a button, the door closes)  
And... Going up...

The room starts moving upward.

PEARL

Now, in an effort to make the process more relatable and easy to understand, we'll be using a format that you're familiar with. That way, it'll be more engaging, more entertaining, and not a boring job interview.

NATE

So... Battle royale?

PEARL

No, thankfully. Nobody's dying today.

She sighs exasperatedly.

PEARL

Of course, I think this format is unnecessary, frivolous, and a waste of resources... But nobody asked me. Well, they did, and then ignored me...

Helena and Savitri exchange knowing looks, as if to say, 'somebody's in a mood...'. But they don't say anything.

As they continue to ascend, they can hear a faint voice getting louder.

VOICE

...will compete for the title of king of kings, lord of lords, the alpha and the omega...

PEARL

I apologize in advance.

VOICE

And now, introducing our contestants!

The elevator stops, the door opens. They're blinded by the lights and roar of a studio audience.

They're on the set of a game show. The host is wearing a bedazzled suit, and he hypes up the crowd as the humans stare out like deer in the headlights.

VOICE

Welcome, HUMANS! I'm your host, Gabriel, and THIS is an exciting episode of-  
(a neon sign lights up)  
THE GOD-ITION!

NATE

(quietly)

What. The. F-

He's drowned out by the blast of a full orchestra playing the opening theme song, and the cheering of the crowd.

FADE OUT.