

it, but I left it in my office in Texas. There's only so much you can take with you to Mars.

So I felt like Samuel L. Jackson was pretty much under control for most of the training, and the crew seemed to like him a lot. Like Evans kept telling me how smart the guy was, and I'd just shake my head, because smart is all well and good, but if he's not some kind of experienced physicist or electrical engineer, what can I use him for? He's taking up a slot where we could have taken Teresa Adams or Asif Khan or someone like that. I mean these are serious scientists and engineers we're talking about now. So when Gabe's telling me how smart Jackson is, I'm thinking, Yeah, sure, but what use will he be when something malfunctions? Can he calculate an escape velocity? Can he help us get to Mars? I mean beyond simply paying for it? I doubt it.

I know the rest of the crew really enjoyed him. He was like a kind of mascot for those guys, and maybe I should have just looked at him like that too, but for me there was another side to Samuel L. Jackson, a side that I don't think he really revealed to anyone else. With the guys, he'd run through whole scenes from his movies. Mostly it was with Ed Yu because, like I said, those guys got pretty close, and you could hear Jackson's voice from anywhere—I mean that guy's voice carries anyway, but in a little compartment like that it's really loud. So you'd hear Ed say something and then Jackson's voice would shout like: Yes, they deserve to die, and I hope they burn in hell! And it wouldn't just be Ed Yu or Malcolm laughing, but like everyone would crack up. It just seemed unprofessional. I mean that's the easiest way to put it. It just seemed unprofessional.

You know, there was this one time he was with Frenchy—that's what we called Johnson on account of him living in France at some point—and anyway, Frenchy was supposed to be working on the medical kit in the cargo hold, getting it all organized in case something happened, and I come passing through and there's Frenchy and Samuel L. Jackson and they're apparently acting out a scene from one of his movies. I mean really. I come floating to the edge of the cargo bay, and there's Frenchy saying I ain't climbin' into no dirty-ass trunk, man. I got a problem with small places. And then Jackson saying, I got a problem with spending ten thousand dollars to get some peanut-

head niggers out of jail, but I did it. Frenchy's a quiet guy most of the time. I mean he's not one to expend words on trivialities, and now all of the sudden he's talking like the worst stereotype of a black man I can imagine. And Samuel L. Jackson is standing there with a big grin on his face, running through his lines.

I just floated there in the entryway for a moment. The ship is tight, so there's not a lot of room, so we were all close up on each other. Those guys both fell silent right away. Then Samuel L. Jackson said, *Jackie Brown*, as if that somehow gave them the license to do whatever they wanted to do. There was another moment of silence, and then Samuel L. Jackson said, You haven't seen it?

Frenchy wouldn't even look at me. I mean this is one of the top medical guys in the world. MD and PhD both. He's the one that did that surgery on the deep space mission a few years later—the *top guy* and he's talking like that. On my ship? I don't think so. But I'm not even angry at him. I've got my eyes on Jackson. Finally, I say, Can you give us a moment?

Who? Jackson says. Me or him?

You, I say, and now Frenchy looked up sheepishly, his eyes full of guilt.

Ah, shit, man, Samuel L. Jackson says. We was just playing. Frenchy knows all the lines. I didn't even have to teach him or anything.

Give us the room, Frenchy, I said again.

I had to slide sideways to give Frenchy enough space to pass. Beyond Samuel L. Jackson, I could see stars through the window, their shapes luminous against the long blue-black of space.

I know what you're gonna say, Samuel L. Jackson said then.

Do you?

Yeah, you're gonna tell me that I need to be quiet or be more serious or some bullshit like that.

That's pretty close to it, I said.

Well, that's not happening anytime soon, Jackson said. It's just not. You can tell me what you want me to do but you can't tell me how I communicate with my fellow crew members.

I don't want you to talk about them like they're your crew members, I said. I'm pretty angry now. There's no denying it.

## VANESSA WOODS

*(In)Visible #17, 2014*

Original Cut Paper Collage, 10.25 x 13.5 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST