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WEEK OF NOVEMBER 19-25, 2014

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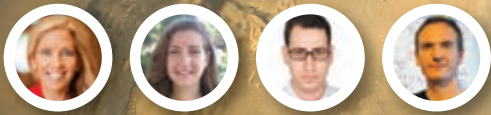
Vol. VIII, No. 31 • FREE

INSIDE

A look at the Floridians who are planning a mission to Mars

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NUMBER OF FLORIDIANS IN CONSIDERATION TO BE THE FIRST TO MAKE THE TRIP TO MARS



ESTIMATED MILLIONS OF DOLLARS IT WILL COST TO TAKE THE FIRST TRIP TO MARS

ESTIMATED MILLIONS OF DOLLARS IT WILL COST TO TAKE THE FIRST TRIP TO MARS

7

AMOUNT OF MONTHS IT IS ESTIMATED IT WILL TAKE TO GET TO MARS



MARS AND EARTH MAY BE WORLDS APART BUT OUR TIME TO TRAVEL THERE IS GETTING NEAR

BY EVAN WILLIAMS . EWILLIAMS@FLORIDAWEEKLY.COM

IT'S EASY TO FORGET HOW POWERFUL THE OBSESSIONS OF childhood can be. Years later those dreams might seem as distant as Mars, at this writing about 162.6 million miles from Earth. Lennart Lopin has already closed that gap when it comes to recalling just how badly he wanted to leave the earth as a boy after finding an outdated Star Wars toy catalogue at a store in Austria where he grew up. It sparked a desire that resulted in his attempt to commune with aliens via meditation when he was 7

SEE MARS, A8 ▶

- ▲ Mars
- ▶ Earth



'Food Chains,' on Coalition of Immokalee Workers opens Thanksgiving Day

SPECIAL TO FLORIDA WEEKLY

"Food Chains," an expose about America's farmworkers that focuses on "the intrepid, highly lauded" Coalition of Immokalee Workers, opens in theaters nationwide and via iTunes on Friday, Nov. 21. The film will be released on VOD starting Thanksgiving Day, Thursday, Nov. 27.

"Food Chains" highlights myriad problems still present in the agriculture system and how big conglomerates at the top reap huge profits the expense of those at the other end: the farmworkers.

The documentary stars Eva Longoria and Eric Schlosser, who are also executive producers,



and is directed by Sanjay Rawal. Academy Award-winning actor Forest Whitaker narrates the English version; the Spanish language version is voiced by the Academy Award-nominated actor Demian Bichir along with

SEE FOOD CHAINS, A12 ▶

INSIDE



Newcomers guide

Everything you need to know to get around. **INSIDE** ▶



Distinguished Citizen

And more society shots around town. **C25-28** ▶



Lending's slow return

Mortgage industry on the mend. **B1** ▶



Hospital food

Concocting tasty, healthy choices. **A24** ▶

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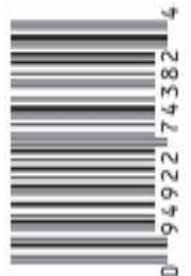
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WEATHER & TRAFFIC
EVERY 10 MINUTES ON **2 NEWS TODAY**



RENDERING ON TOP BY MARS ONE; PHOTOS OF MARS, SPACEMAN AND EARTH FROM NASA; PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY ERIC RADDATZ / FLORIDA WEEKLY

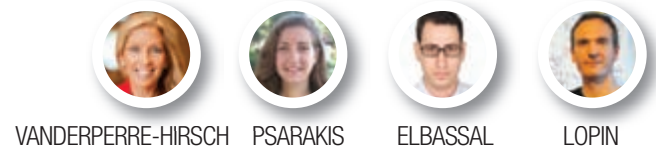
THE MISSION: MARS ONE, A PRIVATE COMPANY, PLANS TO BE ON MARS BY 2025.



THE TEAM:

THE MARS ONE GROUP IN THE NETHERLANDS CONSISTS OF ENTREPRENEURS, SCIENTISTS, MARKETERS, ARTISTS AND A MEDICAL DOCTOR.

THE POSSIBLE TRAVELERS:
IT IS DOWN TO 700 NOW; 19 LIVE IN FLORIDA



PROPULSION:

A. NASA IS SET TO LAUNCH AN UNMANNED MULTI-PURPOSE CREW VEHICLE USING A DELTA IV HEAVY ROCKET ON DEC. 4. THE CRAFT COULD EVENTUALLY CARRY PEOPLE TO MARS. **B.** SPACEX, A PRIVATE COMPANY BASED IN CALIFORNIA, PLANS TO LAUNCH THE FALCON HEAVY ROCKET NEXT YEAR. MARS ONE STATES THAT IT INTENDS TO USE THIS ROCKET TO REACH MARS.

MARS

From page 1

or 8 (it didn't work), and in a long, winding way become a monk — all long before he became a software engineer in Sarasota, where he lives with his wife and four young children.

In 2024 and 2025, he hopes to make up the rest of the distance to his dream, traveling for seven months and millions of miles on a daring, one-way trip to Mars as one of the first four people to colonize the rust-red planet. It would mean leaving his family behind, which he and they say they are prepared for. They could communicate but not in real time because of light-speed delay across space. There is a chance the settlers could one day return to Earth, but there's no plan for that.

Mr. Lopin, who is 36, is one of 19 men and women in Florida and 705 worldwide who were selected by Mars One from an original pool of thousands of applicants. The private nonprofit is based in the Netherlands and founded by entrepreneurs Bas Lansdorp and Arno Wielders in 2011. Mars One reports that 202,586 people originally applied, about 24 percent of them from the U.S., although that number has been disputed. Many dropped out or in video applications it was clear they were not suitable for the mission, although Mars One has not made it entirely clear how they whittled down so many so quickly.

"Apparently people applied naked, supermodels applied," said candidate Lisa Lynn Vanderperre-Hirsch, Ph.D., 44, who lives in Vero Beach. "When I saw that I was like, 'is this real?' And then when I saw the caliber of the people selected I was like, OK."

Her husband Eric, and her two grown stepchildren are supportive of her hope to go. Her friends have mixed reactions to the plan.

"I would imagine the second the rocket takes off that everything would hit you: that you would never see your home or family again, you would never eat a McDonalds hamburger again, nothing would ever be the same again," she said. "Anything could happen at any point. But we could get run over by a car tomorrow. You can't look at it that way, you just have to live in the moment and look at it as an opportunity."

Although some see Mars One as a long shot, it is arguably the most ambitious, single-minded space exploration program in the world and if successful would potentially have huge implications culturally, politically and econom-



A look back at a dune where NASA's Curiosity Mars rover passed in 2014.

NASA PHOTO

ically. Incremental steps toward the 2024 launch include choosing a core group of candidates for the first and successive missions to Mars, and rocket testing and cargo missions ahead of sending men and women.

"I feel like it's a very very big challenge and has a lot of risk," said Mars One candidate Esmail Ahmed Elbassal, a 27-year-old living in Boca Raton and a Ph.D. chemistry student working on Alzheimer's research at Florida Atlantic University. "Now (colonizing Mars) seems optional, but I feel it will be mandatory later. We should take the steps early rather than later."

Candidates plan to deal with the isolation of space and a confined, stressful life on Mars, creating civilization from the ground up, in various ways. Catherine Anne Psarakis, a 20-year-old chemistry and music student living in Winter Park, plans to bring a good pair of headphones to listen to music.

"Having to leave my family would be difficult," she said. "I don't think that means friends and family aren't close or important. It means you have an inner stability that allows you to go beyond physical and immediate relationships and continue into something that will give you more insight and wisdom than you would get in any other situation."

Candidate Holly Abernethy, a 20-year-old (the minimum Mars One age is 18) who hails from Cape Coral



Nadine, Colin, Jared, Summer, Lennart and Kaylee Lopin at home in Sarasota.

EVAN WILLIAMS / FLORIDA WEEKLY

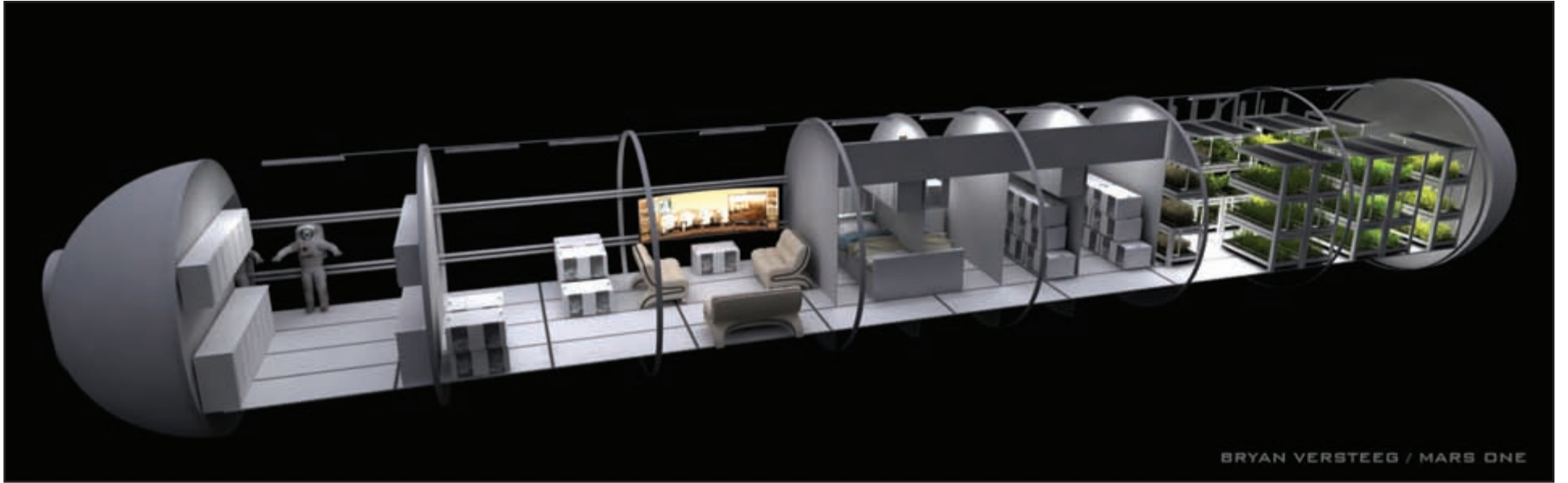
and is a student at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, is taking the first steps to prepare if she goes.

"I am also trying to get involved with the Mars Desert Research Station in Utah for 2015 or '16 as a group of Embry-Riddle students. And next summer I have an internship with Frontier Design, in Brooklyn, N.Y., whose main focus is making space suits," she said.

Surreality TV and known unknowns

Mars One has drawn criticism and become a curiosity, as well as inspiring interest, fascination and hope, from the

scientific community and the media. It estimates the cost of the initial mission at \$6 billion, with additional crews sent in the years to come. That is far lower than previous estimates to send people to the Red Planet, which have ranged from about \$30 billion to \$450 billion. Mars One plans to raise most of the money by creating a reality television show about the mission. Darlow Smithson Productions, an Endemol company, which created "Big Brother" and "Survivor," will document the ongoing selection process. Broadcasting is expected to start at the beginning of next year. If all goes as planned (and



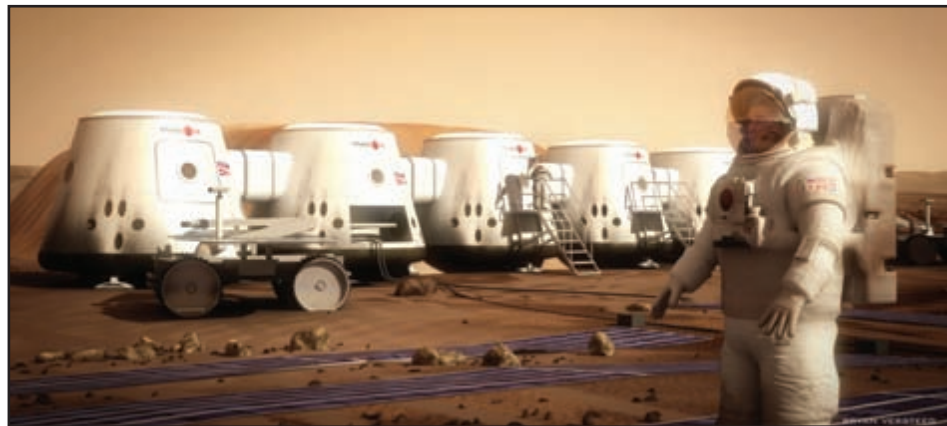
BRYAN VERSTEEG / MARS ONE

RENDERINGS COURTESY OF MARS ONE

The inflatable Mars One living space for four includes bedrooms, work areas, a living room, a place to grow food, bathrooms and a kitchen.



Four colonists would share a total of 3,200 square feet of living space.



Suits worn outside would protect colonists from extreme temperatures and radiation.



planet's frozen ice and, hopefully, liquid reservoirs of water underground; growing food indoors.

by the nature of such a plan it won't) viewers around the world will be able to follow on TV the daily dramas of the first settlers off Earth. The Real Housewives of... Mars? Well, not exactly. If it will work is a point of debate. A lack of funds is the group's Achilles heel, Mr. Lopin and others agree.

"One has the right to be skeptical if Mars One is ever going to happen," said Robert Zubrin, Ph.D., an astronautical engineer who has worked with NASA, founded The Mars Society and authored "The Case for Mars: The Plan to Settle the Red Planet and Why We Must" (1996). "They don't remotely have the resources to send people to Mars."

But he also believes the one-way mission has advantages.

"Going to Mars one way is easier than going round trip and cheaper and lower risk," he said. "It is a slander that someone says, 'you're doing a suicide mission.' No, it's a colonization mission. Life is a one-way trip. We're all going one-way somewhere."

Other challenges to Mars One include a study by MIT researchers, who found that under current plans the Mars One settlers would produce deadly amounts of oxygen in their living habitats, in the course of growing food hydroponically, and start dying off in 68 days. One reporter who followed Mars One for a year, Elmo Keep, concluded that the program is a moral and ethical failure: An underfunded, ego-driven project that even if it does get off the ground is sending hopeful participants away from their families on a mission so hellishly lonely that it gave her nightmares in the course of writing the story.

"Isolation is not just house arrest, being prevented from going out and talking with people and going skiing or whatever," said Mr. Zubrin. "Isolation is being separated from the worldwide network of civilization that supports your existence. You and I are supported by a support network of seven billion people right now. You want a cantaloupe? They'll get you a cantaloupe. A spare part? They'll get you a spare part. On Mars that won't be true."

Mars One responded to criticisms in an email: "We are aware of the fact that our project has raised a discussion in certain areas, and we only applaud that. Although some might not believe in our mission, or even think negatively

about it, we are proud to be supported by many experts, including Nobel prize laureate Gerard 't Hooft, and former NASA chief technologist Mason Peck."

Why go?

Although it is a one-way trip, Mars One, Mr. Lopin and other candidates believe it is worth the risk. As Mr. Zubrin wrote in "The Case for Mars," "For the science, for the challenge, for the future; that's why we should go to Mars."

Since NASA began in 1958 to counter the former Soviet Union's space program, for instance, its technological achievements have taken shape in numerous products from the miniaturization of the computer industry to Corningware, points out Curt Witthoff, coordinator of K-12 science and environmental education for Collier County Public Schools. Students learn about how space research and exploration impacts the culture and economy, he said, "Whether it's advances in communication or advances in weather data or weather analysis or even just the ability to keep tabs on what's happening around the planet in terms of ocean temperatures."

However hubristic Mars One's plan may sound, Mr. Lopin sees the project as at least a tangible goal that will fuel imaginations. At a time when NASA has been seen by some as floundering for decades under presidents who failed to articulate or carry out a grand vision in the manner of President John F. Kennedy, this wildly ambitious, dramatic risk reminds Mr. Lopin of JFK. In 1961, he made plans to get to the moon before the decade was out, "not because they are easy, but because they are hard."

Mr. Zubrin believes government agencies such as NASA as well as private groups such as his Mars Society, Elon Musk's SpaceX along with Mars One could all play a role in pushing humanity toward the Red Planet, and as they become more viable to "billionaires who grew up watching Star Trek." The current tension between the U.S. and Russia could also "put an urgency behind the space program that hasn't existed in a while."

At least, Mr. Lopin argues, Mars One

has articulated such a mission, and mobilized a worldwide group interested in seeing the plan carried through to completion.

"Mars One's idea is JFK-like in the sense that, let's just set the target and work towards it," he said. "If we fail, so we fail. So what? But why not set the target."

When NASA inspired the world

David Hanson, now 73, recalls watching the Apollo II moon landing on television as a boy: the first men on the moon had aspects of awe and novelty.

"It was pretty awesome," said Mr. Hanson, director of the James and Barbara Moore Observatory at Florida SouthWestern State College in Punta Gorda. "It was pretty short. It was like OK, there we are, we did it. I think everybody had in a way a personal stake in that. It wasn't just NASA or the government it was us that did it. And that may have been PR from NASA and from the media but I don't think it was just we, meaning the U.S., because when that happened there were TVs on around the world."

Like many, he is skeptical but unwilling to be outright dismissive of Mars One's audacious mission.

"Something may come of it. Who knows?" he said.

Even in the 1990s, Mr. Zubrin argued, the technology was available to carry a crew to Mars.

In 1989, the Bush administration looked at Mr. Zubrin's roughly \$30 billion plan to send people to Mars and back and begin to colonize the planet. A NASA man-to-Mars mission was later estimated to cost \$450 billion, a figure which Mr. Zubrin writes had ballooned because of the desire to bring all the fuel, food and other supplies along on the mission instead of traveling light. The resulting sticker shock kept such a plan from consideration ever since, he believes.

"Living off the land — intelligent use of local resources — is not just the way the West was won; it's the way the Earth was won, and it's also the way Mars can be won," he wrote.

That would mean deriving fuel from an atmosphere made mostly of carbon dioxide; drawing water from the

"Cosmic rays, solar flares, zero-gravity health effects, psychological factors, dust storms, life support systems, excessive cost — the list of alleged showstoppers put forward by the naysayers goes on and on. They're wrong on every point."

Mars or bust

It is generally agreed that among our solar system's planets, Mars is the only real option for human habitation (aside from the moon) because it is most similar to Earth. The fourth planet from the Sun, it is about 50 percent farther out than Earth, and was once warmer, with oceans, ponds and streams, Mr. Zubrin writes. Now much of that water, the key to potential life that excites researchers is ice or frozen mud.

The landscape includes sharp-edged rocks, small hills and dunes, skies the color of salmon, and dust storms that can envelope the planet. Settlers would need to live underground or protect their dwellings from radiation and couldn't go outside without a spacesuit. Temperatures range from 86 degrees Fahrenheit to -284 compared to between 136 and -126 on Earth.

Mars has stark but undeniable beauty, including two moons. It's about half the size of Earth, but contains the largest known volcano in our solar system. Olympus Mons is about the size of Arizona in diameter and 16 miles high.

Much of what we know now about Mars has come from NASA's robotic exploration of the planet, Mr. Zubrin explained in the preface to a 2011 reprint of his book, even if the idea of sending people there remains a fuzzy goal.

NASA's Orion

NASA is preparing to test fly its new Orion spacecraft. There won't be a crew inside this time, but the vehicle is designed to carry astronauts to deep-space asteroids, and eventually to Mars and back. Orion is set to launch from Cape Canaveral on Dec. 4. NASA employees as well as contractor Lockheed Martin will monitor Orion as it rockets to 3,600 miles above the Earth and makes two laps, testing numerous functions such as its parachutes, how radiation effects electronics, and the heat and acoustics inside the cabin as it reenters our atmosphere at close to 20,000 miles per hour with tempera-

MARS

From page 9

tures up to 4,000 degrees Fahrenheit. "This is really our first step in our journey to Mars," said William Hill, NASA deputy associate administrator for Exploration Systems Development.

If you go

Above the Lopins' kitchen table is a whiteboard where his children, who are homeschooled, are learning new mathematics lessons each Saturday; a recent week's lesson was on cubed roots. Mr. Lopin talked about an electronic currency that a new colony could use on Mars, similar to Bitcoin. He discussed why the peril associated with the mission is not unlike that of explorers past such as Christopher Columbus, whose crew had small, cramped living spaces aboard the ship that carried them to the Americas — an unknown, unplanned destination. When he mentions Elon Musk of SpaceX, his 9-year old, Colin, adds "And he's my hero." Colin is the biologist of the family. His daughter Kaylee, 5, is the mathematician, sleeping with

a math book under her pillow. Jared, 8, wants to be an engineer. The Lopins' daughter Summer is almost 2 years old.

After Mr. Lopin found the Star Wars toy catalogue, he soaked up science fiction and astronomy books at the library before moving on to the adult section when he was 9 or 10, reading Albert Einstein, Charles Darwin and others. After reading parapsychology books he studied meditative yoga so intently, first as an effort to commune with aliens and later for personal reasons, that his parents became concerned. They still don't understand why he would want to go to Mars.

After graduating from high school, with a strong interest in Buddhism because he found it the most science-like of all religions, he went to Sri Lanka to become a monk. He would go down to the village in the morning for food, he said, and sit in a cave the rest of the day and night meditating. He did this for months, using techniques he believes could help on a planet that has been compared to living in Antarctica.

"The worst thing for the mind is lack of information. It's terrible, it's frightening," he says. "And you kind of see what you're made out of, what's

inside of you, and the mind is trying like crazy to find sense impressions. And if it can't find them, it will generate them by itself. And it will come up with all kinds of crazy stories to keep you going. I think it's similar to people who are in prison, people who are in solitary confinement...

"You let all the sense impressions that come and even the thoughts, you just accept them as they are and you don't hook on them, you just let them pass through your brain... If the mind produces something and you have no way of detaching yourself from it and you really think and believe it's true then you run into big problems."

After three years living the life of a monk, he left Sri Lanka in 1999. He returned to studying computer science, and about seven years ago was able to land a job in Florida after visiting a relative here. He currently lives in the United States on a work visa, with plans to obtain a green card and eventually citizenship.

His son Colin sat at the table as he talked. Eventually we got around to what it would be like if his dad left.

"Ehhh, I wouldn't like it too much," Colin says. "Well I would like it but I would like you to stay here a bit more."

"All of you, right?" Mr. Lopin says. "Yes, especially Mom." "Yeah, I'm actually blessed with very understanding kids and my wife (Nadine)," Mr. Lopin says. "Um, she knows that I'm not normal. She kind of married me for that, too. There are even times when I thought I would like to go back to the jungle (in Sri Lanka) and she was like, 'well, go if you need to.' So she's that kind of person, which, you probably have to be strange yourself."

"Thank you!" Nadine Lopin says sarcastically from the kitchen, laughing. He asks how she feels about him going.

"I know it would make you happy," she says. "So, of course I would like him to stay. I mean, also it's 10 years. The kids will be grown up by then."

"I'll be 19," Colin said. "But I know that if I'd ask him to stay he would stay so I don't ask," Ms. Lopin says, "because I'm not that selfish. I want him to be happy and if that makes him happy..."

"And you think of mankind," Mr. Lopin said. "The greater good."

"And of course, yes, you're doing it for everybody," she said, "not just yourself." ■



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