GENERAL INFORMATION

I. A new play written by Caltech writer Hillary Bhaskaran. Hillary has been developing this play through Mach 33: The Festival of New Science-Driven Plays at Caltech (staged reading April 30, 4pm). I think this show eminently deserves to be seen in a full performance at Caltech!!! It would be a huge draw: a play about the discovery of Pluto, written entirely in verse form!

II. Proposal submitted by
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III. Project description
   - Planet Between the Stars
   - Verse comedy
   - 3M, 3F

In “Planet Between the Stars,” Percival Lowell launches an epic quest for Planet X. Eccentric lovers and astronomers follow his lead, struggling with research and relationships while asking, “Why persevere?”

In Scene One, it is 1916 and Percival is certain that his calculations will lead to the discovery of a ninth planet. His failing health triggers two bitter quarrels, one with his beautiful wife, Constance, over how he’ll distribute his fortune, and the second between Constance and Wrexie Leonard, Percival’s beloved secretary and a scientist in her own right. As love and loss find expression in iambic tetrameter, Percival sets the stage for his followers to continue the nearly impossible search for Pluto.

In Scene 2, self-taught astronomer and Kansas farmer Clyde Tombaugh arrives at the observatory in 1929 and is assigned by its director, Vesto Melvin Slipher, the task of completing Lowell’s search for Planet X. By Scene 3, it becomes apparent that the work is both thrilling and devilishly arduous, causing 23-year-old Clyde to suffer self-doubt and wrestle with imaginary demons. Earthly obligations pull at Clyde and lead him to accept money from Constance, which would lead him out of Flagstaff and the search. Scenes 4 and 5 witness the resolution of Clyde’s crisis. Back on the farm for vacation in Scene 4, Clyde’s mother, Adella, helps him alight upon the strategy and strength needed for a successful search. In Scene 5, the new planet is found and named, as Clyde strengthens one relationship, strains another, and questions the nature of Pluto itself.

Jumping ahead almost to present time, Scene 6 finds Clyde, an old man contemplating death, receiving good news. NASA has granted his request for his ashes to be flown to Pluto on a soon-to-begin space mission. In the seventh and final scene, the “New
Horizons” spaceship carrying Clyde’s ashes approaches Pluto and its largest moon, Charon. Planet and moon embody the spirits of Percival and Constance respectively, and a struggle over the fate of Clyde’s spirit ensues, pitting human passions against science.

IV. Director (not required)
   o no director recommended at this point

DETAILED INFORMATION
I. Reasons for the proposed show
   o Very relevant to Caltech/JPL as it is written by a Caltech writer and is about the discovery of Pluto. New Horizons is mentioned, as is the debate about the 9th planet. Excellent science in the play. Very funny, a perfect gem of a play! Written in verse form!

II. Technical Aspects
   o I feel that this should be performed inside so we can see the magnificent projections of the planets and stars that are important to the show. Or the projections could be eliminated (not ideal).
   o Minimal props but the science and equipment need to be right; great period costume possibilities.