

## **Destination 6:** The Wall, St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands

The Wall is a two mile vertical drop off to the ocean floor. As one wades through the water in St. Croix, tiny colorful fish dart about scattered coral formations that dot the ocean floor. Not even a quarter mile from the beach is The Wall. The depth is recorded from a mere 1,000 foot drop off to 2 miles straight down. The deep blue boundary between the clear turquoise water and the black abyss parallels an event horizon.

**Related Film: Movie:** *Event Horizon* (1997)

### **Synopsis**

Taking place in 2047, *Event Horizon* depicts the events surrounding the ill-fatal rescue mission of the Lewis and Clark in response to distress signals dispatched by the Event Horizon, a ship that disappeared seven years prior. The vessel had ventured into an experimental flight to test a gravity drive, which if successful, would decrease the travel time between two points in the universe. Upon reaching the Event Horizon, many sinister events take place revealing the remnants of the crew from the previous mission. Slowly, the crew of the Lewis and Clark are pulled into the hallucinogenic trances of the Event Horizon with some of the lives of the crew being claimed. Desperate measures are taken to return to earth, [spoiler alert] which unfortunately prove futile.

### **How it relates to the field of psychiatry**

One of the most striking parts of *Event Horizon* is the universal perceptual disturbance experienced by the members of the Lewis and Clark. While hallucinations are often synonymous with psychotic disorders, general medical conditions and substance abuse must first be ruled out. In the film, it is possible that the hallucinations be due to delirium induced by hypoxia. Many of the hallucinations of the crew members began when they entered the event horizon and had less than a day of usable oxygen for the entire crew. The impact of being in stasis, whether from hypoxia or electrolyte abnormalities (inadequate intake), could also have contributed to the onset of delirium. Of note, at the end of the film, Starck awakens from a prolonged stasis with a delusion that Dr. Weir is impersonating one of the rescue workers. This particular type of delusion is known as Fregoli syndrome.

While hypoxia may have been a precipitating factor, pathologic grief is likely a predisposing element to the delirium. While adaptive bereavement may include guilt over not spending enough time with the deceased while they were still alive and to hear the voice of the deceased, it is pathologic when the guilt becomes pervasive and persistent or when psychotic features develop. In Dr. Weir's case, his immense guilt over his wife committing suicide results in hallucinations of her insisting that he stay on the Event Horizon.

Lastly, the character of Ensign Justin depicts the use of dissociation as a defense mechanism. After witnessing horrid images from the gravity core, he enters a catatonic state. When the catatonia resolves, he demonstrates Acute Stress Disorder, constantly reliving the images he saw. This leads him to attempt suicide. His method of suicide underscores the principle that men use more lethal mechanisms as evidenced by his trying to leave the ship without a space suit. It's interesting that a crew member on a ship named Lewis and Clark would prompt a discussion of suicide, as its namesake, Meriwether Lewis, was found with two self-inflicted gunshot wounds at a roadside inn at Grinder's Stand, Tennessee on October 11, 1809.

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