

ANTARES

Episode 1x01-02

"The Beginning, Part 1"

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ANTARES

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TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. KL'TOR - SPACEPORT - DAY

The spaceport is comprised of several buildings, the largest of which is the passenger terminal. The other building of note is the luggage processing building, right next to the terminal.

It is rush hour. Shuttles and bigger spacecraft are taking off and landing constantly.

The entire complex is not so much unlike an airport, except that there are no runways.

Caption:

THE TORFE SPACEPORT, PLANET KL'TOR

ASHTAR TERRITORY

INT. KL'TOR - SPACEPORT TERMINAL - DAY

The large arrival area of the spaceport is packed with people swarming to and from the shuttle entrance walkways and customs desks. A glass wall gives the commuters unobstructed view down to the large area where the shuttles are taking off and landing. The baggage processing building is also in clear view.

Note: All of the passengers and officials are Ashtar. The Ashtar are mostly identical to humans, except that they have a grey tint in their skin color and they have albinism.

A smartly dressed man, KALEFF, enters the large customs area from a shuttle walkway. He looks like an average businessman, but his demeanor differs from the rest of the commuters.

As he marches towards the customs desks, an equally smartly dressed woman, SOLAR, comes to his side and matches his speed.

As they talk with hushed voices, they try to appear as if they're walking beside each other purely by chance.

KALEFF

Everything set?

SOLAR

Yes. I'm reading about 2 minutes.

KALEFF

Good. Was the building clear?

SOLAR

Faen said that there might be a maintenance team on duty, but they should be at lunch.

KALEFF

She's in position?

Solar nods.

KALEFF (CONT'D)

Then I guess we're all go?

SOLAR

As go as we'll ever be. Good luck.

They separate from each other and they head for different customs desks.

Kaleff puts his charm on overdrive as he comes to a desk and hands over his papers to the female OFFICIAL.

OFFICIAL

Welcome to Kl'tor, Mr Kaleff. I hope you had a pleasant journey.

KALEFF

Very, thank you.

OFFICIAL

Do you have anything to declare, sir?

KALEFF

Yes. But my trunk is still being processed.

OFFICIAL

That's ok. We can still get your paperwork done while you wait. You'll get your bag once you're through and we've done the scans.

KALEFF

Excellent.

OFFICIAL

What is it that you want to declare?

KALEFF

Well, my trunk has quite a significant amount of Beryldahide packed in it.

The Official is slightly taken aback.

OFFICIAL

You are aware that that is a highly combustible substance?

KALEFF

I am indeed. And it's a really big trunk too.

OFFICIAL

Might I then presume that you have the proper permits to transport it?

KALEFF

I'm afraid that I do not.

OFFICIAL

I see. You do know that transporting explosive materials without proper permits is against the law?

Kaleff smiles broadly.

KALEFF

To be perfectly honest, I do.

OFFICIAL

I'll have to ask you to accompany me to the detention center. I'm forced to hold you in for questioning.

KALEFF

I understand completely. But before we go, I'd like to show you something. It'll just take a second.

OFFICIAL

What is it?

Kaleff takes a dramatic pause.

KALEFF

...this.

They stare each other for a beat. Nothing happens.

OFFICIAL

I'm afraid I don't understand.

KALEFF

(nonchalantly)

Ok, so I was off by a few seconds. But you have to admit, it would've been very cool if I had been on que.

OFFICIAL
(slightly worried)
For what?

And as if to answer, the entire luggage processing building suddenly EXPLODES.

The glass wall implodes from the shockwave and people start running away from it in panic. The Official ducks behind the desk for cover. Alarms start blaring on the PA system and most of the lights go out. It's a pandemonium.

The official quickly rises from behind the counter to grab Kaleff, but he is gone. She looks towards what used to be the glass wall and sees that Kaleff is running towards it through the people as fast as he can.

She starts to run to towards Kaleff.

OFFICIAL (CONT'D)
Stop that man!

But it is too late. Kaleff reaches the ledge and leaps...

EXT. KL'TOR - SPACEPORT TERMINAL - CONTINUOUS

...to fall right through the open top hatch of a small shuttle awaiting below.

The shuttle roars to life and immediately launches away from the mayhem.

The official reaches the ledge and can't help but watch as the suave perpetrator makes his escape. A couple of police shuttles shoot past in hot pursuit.

Off her expression, we...

FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

BLACK SCREEN. SILENCE.

A white title FADES IN:

PROLOGUE

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SPACE - GANYMEDE

The largest moon of Jupiter looms large. A SHUTTLE emerges from Quantum Tunnel and begins the breaking maneuver to insert itself to orbit.

INT. GANYMEDE BASE - CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

CAPTAIN PERTUL BAXTER, a middle aged man who desperately tries to look younger, marches down a corridor of the unfinished station. He carries himself with dignity, very aware of his rank.

Several wall panels are open, the floor is filled with tools and equipment and engineers are working to complete construction. It's organized mayhem.

Baxter looks mildly annoyed as he dodges the equipment while trying to keep his pace.

He comes to a door and pushes the panel beside it. After just a couple of seconds, the door opens and Baxter steps TO:

INT. GANYMEDE BASE - ADMIRAL'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The office isn't quite as unfinished as the corridor, but it has signs of just having been taken to use. There are only few personal items on the desks and there are boxes of unpacked stuff laying everywhere.

ADMIRAL BAXTER, a well groomed man approaching his 80's, seems delighted as he sees the arrival. He is the kind of a man who has been at the top of the food chain for so long that he isn't bothered with the formalities of military life.

ADMIRAL

Pete!

Captain Baxter smiles back to him. The Admiral comes from behind his desk to embrace the Captain.

ADMIRAL (CONT'D)

It's good to see you, son! Eight years is a long time.

BAXTER

It sure is. Especially where I had to spend it.

The Admiral breaks the embrace.

ADMIRAL

Don't start with me. You know I had to get you somewhere out of sight for my hearings.

BAXTER

I know, I know. But at least the justice was served.

The Admiral smiles as he returns to his desk. Baxter sits down as well.

ADMIRAL

It always is when Baxters are involved.

BAXTER

I guess you have good news about my next command, then?

Admiral shifts in his chair, clearly uncomfortable.

ADMIRAL

It's complicated.

BAXTER

What do you mean? You promised I would be the first name on the list to command the new Dexter class.

ADMIRAL

I know. But the dust hasn't completely settled and I'd like to avoid the attention that posting my son to command a battleship would attract.

BAXTER

I thought you were cleared.

ADMIRAL

The truth be told... I was officially cleared, but I did get a slap on the wrist. That's why we're talking here on this shamble of a base instead of my old offices on Earth.

BAXTER

So I can wave the Dexter goodbye?

ADMIRAL

In a word: Yes. But there is a silver lining to all this.

BAXTER

How so?

The Admiral presses a couple of buttons and a three-dimensional map of the galaxy appears between them over the table.

The map is divided in two sections marked with colors. The other side is completely filled with red while the other is divided into countless subsections of different shades of blue. The border between them is marked with a white line.

ADMIRAL

I don't know how much of this was reported to you, so I'll give you the full rundown. A lot has been going on since the destruction of the Ashtar Homeworld and the breakup of the Empire four years ago.

The Admiral presses another button and the single red portion of the map morphs into countless small subsections of different shades of red.

ADMIRAL (CONT'D)

The complete anarchy between the emerging autonomies and tiny planet states has been slowly subsiding. Almost all of them have merged with each other to form larger independent states, and these days a lot of the former Empire is actually starting to be pretty stable.

The Admiral pushes more buttons and a number of the smaller red subsections merge with each other. Some of them are quite sizable, but there are still hundreds of them.

ADMIRAL (CONT'D)

So stable in fact that we're reopening the border.

BAXTER

What? Why haven't I heard of this?

ADMIRAL

Because it's still highly classified. We negotiated secretly with the largest Ashtar autonomies and border worlds for nearly a year to make it happen.

BAXTER

Why the secrecy?

ADMIRAL

For security reasons and because making it happen was actually quite a long shot. Nobody wanted the political embarrassment of a failed attempt. The Ashtar autonomies still do not have a centralized governmental structure as our Earth Consortium has. So we had to negotiate with all of the relevant states separately.

BAXTER

When is the border due to open?

ADMIRAL

In six weeks.

BAXTER

So soon?

ADMIRAL

The deal was actually signed months ago. We knew that all of this would attract a lot of attention and fuel the fire of terrorist groups, so we've kept this a secret as long as possible. But now that we're just weeks away from the actual opening, we're about to go public. And that is where you come in.

The Admiral presses some more buttons and the map fades out. It is replaced by a rotating image of a space station of cylindrical design. The station rotates to create artificial gravity.

ADMIRAL (CONT'D)

This is Antares, the largest of the border stations placed in strategic lagrangian points across the border. Or rather, this is what it looked like before the border was closed. Once we started the talks to open the border, we've expanded the station with both Earth Consortium and various Ashtar government modules.

The Admiral fiddles with the buttons again and the image of the station is updated.

The size of the station almost triples with all kinds of modules and additional sections that don't really fit together.

Only traces of the original design are visible and the station definitely does not rotate anymore.

ADMIRAL (CONT'D)

I've pulled a lot of strings to keep the command open for your return. I'm going to put you in command.

Captain Baxter is not impressed.

BAXTER

What? You're giving me a civilian command? During a time when I could influence the future of the galaxy from the bridge of a battleship!

ADMIRAL

Don't be an idiot, son! You'll be in command of the most important border station while the Ashtar region is reforming itself. Can you even imagine how many possibilities that can open to both of us?

BAXTER

I don't buy it. What good can I do babysitting a meaningless civilian station, regardless of where it is?

ADMIRAL

You'll get your promotion in time, don't you worry about that. It just isn't a good time for me to pull any stunts right now.

Baxter considers this for a moment.

BAXTER

Ok, fine. It's not like I have a choice on the matter anyhow. So why don't you just go ahead and tell me more about these possibilities you mentioned?

The Admiral grins slightly.

ADMIRAL

I can do better than that. Watch.

From this...

FADE OUT.

BLACK SCREEN. SILENCE.

A white title FADES IN as before:

THE BEGINNING

THREE WEEKS LATER

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SPACE - ANTARES STATION

The station looks exactly as it did in Admiral Baxter's office. Some ships and shuttles are slowly moving around the station and engineers in space suits are still installing the various systems to the station.

INT. ANTARES - RECEPTION AREA

The reception area is a huge space where the incoming passengers pass through customs and sign themselves in. The area is divided in two by a row of customs desks.

While this area is usually a flurry of activity, it is currently empty except for one man who looks stranded.

The lone man is UDAY DEMIDOV, a fit man in his late thirties. His gentle complexion softens his hot jock look considerably. He is holding his identification documents in hand and tries to see where he should be going.

TANITH (O.S.)

Haven't you heard? The border
isn't open yet.

Uday turns to see COMMANDER TANITH YANN, an established woman in her late forties, approaching from a side door. Her uniform has been tossed on pretty casually and while she certainly isn't neglecting her overall appearance, it's evident that it isn't one of her priorities.

He's not sure as to what he should do, so he just shoves the papers to her.

UDAY

I know... I - I was just trying to
find where I can sign myself in.

TANITH

(stern)

You won't find anyone in here for
a couple of weeks. I'm afraid
I'll have to detain you for
questioning until then.

UDAY

No, you don't understand. I'm...

Tanith holds up her hand to stop him and finally cracks a smile.

TANITH

...Sergeant Uday Demidov, shuttle pilot first class. You know, it would've been a lot easier to find you if you had used the staff docking.

UDAY

(slightly embarrassed)
I'm sorry, I didn't know where I was supposed to go. There seems to be construction everywhere and half the doors won't work. Say, how did you recognize me?

TANITH

As the first officer, I make it a point to know everything about the people working under me.

UDAY

Really? I'm impressed.

TANITH

No, I'm only yanking your chain. I took a glance at these papers you seemed so eager to get rid of. And since I knew our shuttle pilot was scheduled to arrive today, it wasn't exactly hard to figure out who you were. We just send somebody to deal with the little preliminary cargo traffic we have. That's why there's nobody here.

She hands the papers back to him and they shake hands.

TANITH (CONT'D)

Commander Tanith Yann.

Tanith gestures towards a door and they start walking.

TANITH (CONT'D)

Shall we? Normally we could use any of those lifts right there, but those aren't hooked up yet.

UDAY

I'm really sorry if I caused any inconvenience, Commander.

TANITH

Don't sweat it. I'm new here too, so I'm taking wrong turns all the time.

UDAY

How long have you been here?

TANITH

Arrived last Thursday.

They arrive at the door and step in.

INT. ANTARES - CORRIDOR(S) - CONTINUOUS

During the following, Tanith and Uday walk through various corridors, halls and sets of doors as time and budget allow. As they do, they dodge equipment and tools that still lay on the floors and they occasionally pass by an engineer.

TANITH

It's been pretty hectic since we're trying to get everything ready before the border opens up again. It's going to be a bit of an effort, but I think we'll make it.

UDAY

Shouldn't I have signed myself in back there?

TANITH

Never mind that. I think it's enough that the first officer has personally welcomed you to the station. Just don't tell the Captain, I hear he's one of those people who wants rules followed to the letter.

UDAY

Really? I thought the officers on the civilian arm of Space Corps took things more easy.

TANITH

They do. But this one is transferring from the military arm. Could mean trouble.

UDAY

Yep. I used to serve under the military arm myself until I got tired of flying fighters.

TANITH

I thought fighter pilots never get tired of it.

UDAY

I'd like to count myself as one of the wiser ones who do before the G-forces liquefy the little brain cells you have left.

They finally arrive at a lift and enter it.

TANITH
Marketplace.

The doors close.

INT. ANTARES - MARKETPLACE - MOMENTS LATER

The marketplace is where all sorts of vendors and boutiques try to attract potential customers. Much like most of the station, this area is still being prepared for use. People are setting up their booths and decorating display windows. Some engineers are assisting them.

Tanith and Uday walk out from a lift and stroll through the marketplace.

TANITH
This is the marketplace. We have several commerce centers around the station, but this is the largest one of them.

UDAY
Very nice. But why are we here? I doubt it's a part of your job to give me a tour of the station.

TANITH
The omni-lift system is a bit more complicated than what you're probably used to. Because of the refits and expansions to the station, the omnis can't take you anywhere on the station. You'll have to connect at various points.

UDAY
Let me guess, most of these connection points are filled with shops and vendors.

TANITH
You'd be correct.

UDAY
That's what I thought. I guess that commerce, like nature, will always find a way.

Tanith smiles at this while they enter another lift.

TANITH
Officer's quarters.

The doors close.

INT. ANTARES - OMNI - CONTINUOUS

A low hum is heard as the omni lift is in motion.

TANITH

The new Captain is coming aboard today as well. There's a formal reception and change of command at the staff docking entrance at 1900 hours, I suggest you study the layout of the station so you'll find your way there.

UDAY

Ok, I'll be there.

TANITH

And make sure you're on time. He's the kind of guy you whose bad side you don't want to end up on the first day.

UDAY

Right. By the way, it's amazing how well you get around if you've only been here less than a week. I bet it takes me a month to get any sense of the place.

TANITH

Thanks. But to let you in on a little secret, it helps to memorize the route you have to take in advance and hope that all the lifts and corridors are actually open.

The doors open.

UDAY

Could have fooled me.

TANITH

When in doubt, cheat.

Tanith exits the omni.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE - ANTARES STATION

As before.

INT. ANTARES - STAFF DOCKING ENTRANCE

The staff docking section is completely separate from the rest of the public docking ports. This portion of the station is completely finished.

The staff has formed a line next to the entrance, but it is fairly loosely formed. Present are Uday, LIEUTENANT WENDY RADAHER, a handsome young female officer, ARTESH, a middle aged Ashtar man, and several n.d. crew members.

A doorway opens and Tanith comes running into the room, panting.

TANITH

Is he here yet?

ARTESH

Nope. The shuttle pulled in, but he hasn't come in yet.

Tanith lets out a sigh of relief.

TANITH

Oh, thank goodness. I thought I was toast. I got lost in a subsection that was shut down and I had to take a "small" detour to get here.

(assures herself)

But I'm here, on time.

UDAY

Good thing too. I heard from someone that the Captain is the sort of person whose bad side you don't want to end up on the first day.

Tanith is about to answer, but she is stopped by the sound of the airlock PRESSURIZING. Moments later, CLICKS can be heard and the hatch opens to reveal Captain Baxter.

He steps in. Tanith steps forward.

TANITH

Welcome to Antares, Captain. I am Tanith Yann, your executive officer.

BAXTER

Thank you, Commander.

Baxter salutes. Tanith is a little taken aback by the gesture and clumsily responds.

TANITH

Let me introduce the senior officers. This is Sergeant Uday Demidov, our resident shuttle pilot.

BAXTER

Sergeant.

Baxter is about to salute again, but Uday firmly offers his hand instead. They shake hands.

TANITH

And this is Wendy Radaker, our chief security officer.

Baxter and Wendy shake hands as well.

BAXTER

Miss Radaker. I was surprised to see that you've spent your entire service in the civilian arm of the Corps. You're quite an exception to a rule when it comes to security officers.

WENDY

I am fully qualified, if that's what you're implying.

Baxter smiles.

BAXTER

Not at all. Just making an observation.

A look from Wendy tells that she's not completely convinced, but Baxter and Tanith have moved on.

TANITH

And this is our communications officer, Artesh.

BAXTER

(surprised)
An Ashtar?

ARTESH

Very perceptive, Captain. Is that a problem?

Baxter takes a beat. Does he have to think about it?

BAXTER

Not at all.
(MORE)

BAXTER (CONT'D)

I was just surprised because your personnel file listed you as Artesh Smith. I though Ashtar didn't have last names.

ARTESH

We don't. They assigned one to me when I joined the Space Corps. It was just to help with the bureaucracy. And we all know how much humans enjoy that.

BAXTER

Well, let me just assure you that I have no problems with Ashtar serving under my command.

ARTESH

Is that so? Then why is it that I'm the only one you haven't shaken hands with?

Again a beat, but Baxter tries to hide it with a smile and offers his hand.

BAXTER

I was just getting to it.

ARTESH

I see.

They shake hands.

TANITH

And those are the bridge officers. The rest are various crew members from different departments who came to welcome you.

Baxter turns to the group as a whole.

BAXTER

Thank you for coming. Let me just tell you that it is an honor serving with all of you. There will be a formal change of command ceremony a little later, for now you are dismissed.

The group starts to disassemble.

TANITH

Shall I show you to the bridge, sir?

BAXTER

Please.

Tanith gestures towards the omni-lift and they walk in. As the doors close in front of the two, Artesh remains to see them go and shakes his head.

INT. ANTARES - OMNI

The lift is already in motion.

BAXTER

Why weren't the heads of engineering and medical present in the reception?

TANITH

Oh. Well, the chief was probably in Engineering. He's one of those types who don't like to leave Engineering once they get their foot in the door.

BAXTER

What about the chief medical officer?

TANITH

Technically we don't have one, as you probably know. You're supposed to promote our temp chief.

BAXTER

We'll see. I want to review the records and qualifications of this supposed replacement. I don't particularly like being told who I'm supposed to promote and when.

Tanith is taken aback by his attitude.

TANITH

Yes, sir.

BAXTER

We'll definitely have to talk to them about proper procedure.

The lift slows down and the doors slide open. They exit.

INT. ANTARES - BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

The room is oval in shape, except for the straight viewscreen at the front of the room. At the front of the Bridge are two semicircular work stations. At the back of the room, a door to the Captain's office and to the omni-lift. The walls are lined with various work stations and panels. A few n.d. crew members man some of the stations.

Tanith and Baxter enter the Bridge.

TANITH

This is the Bridge. The walls incorporate twelve security, science and engineering consoles. The bigger consoles at the front are the main communications and ops consoles where Artesh and I spend most of our days.

BAXTER

Very well. Take your station, please.

As Tanith goes and sits down at her console, the omni doors open and Artesh walks in.

BAXTER (CONT'D)

Ah, Mr Artesh. You're just in time. I'd like to make a station wide announcement.

ARTESH

Yes, sir.

Artesh sits down at his console and pushes a few buttons.

ARTESH (CONT'D)

You're on, sir.

Baxter nods and then clears his throat.

BAXTER

Attention all hands, this is the Captain. As of this moment, I have assumed the command of the station by the general order of the Space Corps. I know that you're all working as hard as you can to get the station ready in time and I am convinced that you will rise to the occasion.

INT. ANTARES - VARIOUS LOCATIONS (MONTAGE) - CONTINUOUS

Reaction shots of the station's personnel as they listen to the captain.

BAXTER'S COM VOICE

And I know that a lot of you are probably looking forward to completing this work so that you can take it easier for awhile. But I have to remind you that our work is literally just beginning. When the border opens and we are officially open for business, I expect each and every one of you to display the same commitment and
(MORE)

BAXTER'S COM VOICE (CONT'D)

dedication to their duties as I'm sure you have so far. I'm sure you know that there will be a lot of eyes on us. We are the largest of the border stations and I intend to make sure that this will also be the one that sets an example to the others.

INT. ANTARES - BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

As before.

BAXTER

You will probably find that I'm more strict of a leader than you're used to. But this is simply because I want all of you to perform at to the best of your abilities. I expect nothing less from you, just as I expect nothing less from myself. That is all.

Baxter nods at Artesh and he pushes a button.

ARTESH

Channel closed.

BAXTER

Good, thank you. I'll go to my office now. I have quite a lot of unpacking to do. You have the conn, Commander. We will meet in a couple hours to visit the absentees from the reception.

TANITH

Yes, sir.

Baxter leaves for his office. When he is gone, Tanith turns to Artesh.

TANITH (CONT'D)

You really didn't need to be so harsh with him, you know.

ARTESH

(surprised)

Excuse me?

TANITH

You know, with the Captain during the reception.

ARTESH

No offence, Commander, but I know the type. I've had to deal with his kind before.

TANITH

I know he's a little stiff, but he's coming from the military side of things. You should give him some time to adjust.

ARTESH

Adjusting I can deal with. It's racism I have a problem with.

TANITH

Aren't you being a little unfair?

ARTESH

Look, I'm sorry, but you really don't have a clue what it's like to be the only Ashtar around. You learn to read the little signs and gestures that people can't hide when they really don't want you around. It's been like that ever since I got stranded on this side of the border. That's why I enlisted to the Space Corps in the first place, I couldn't get any other work. It's a small miracle that I've advanced this far.

TANITH

I'm really sorry, I didn't mean to sound insensitive. Are you planning to go back now that the border is about to open again?

ARTESH

I have no home. Not anymore.
(off Tanith's
questioning look)
I used to live on Balehh.

TANITH

Oh, I'm so sorry. I didn't know.

Artesh waves it off.

ARTESH

It's alright. I know that you're one of the good guys. And I am planning to move back to an Ashtar world some day. I just want to wait for it to get more stable first.

TANITH

Still, I'm really sorry if I drudged up painful memories.

Artesh smiles weakly.

ARTESH

The memories are the good part.
It's the reality that's painful
sometimes.

Tanith looks at him with sympathy, but Artesh turns away,
concentrating on his work.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE - ANTARES STATION

Establishing.

INT. ANTARES - MEDICAL CENTER

The medical center is a huge space with over 200 beds in different sections divided by transparent walls and several examination rooms. However, the largest and most prominent feature of the center is the large laboratory immediately next to the entrance.

LISA RUMFOORD, the acting chief medical officer, is paperwork in the laboratory. She is an older woman, with facial features telling a tired tale of life lived long and hard.

Baxter and Tanith enter the room. Tanith points Lisa out for him and he marches to her.

BAXTER
Colonel Rumfoord?

Lisa doesn't turn to him.

LISA
Yes, what is it?

BAXTER
I'm sure you are aware who I am.

LISA
Sure, I read the memos.

BAXTER
Then you probably know what I'm here to do, Colonel Rumfoord.

Now Lisa turns to him.

LISA
You know, I really prefer Doctor.

BAXTER
Really? I thought you served in the military arm and we usually prefer the rank.

Lisa stares at him for a beat.

LISA
That was a long time ago.

BAXTER

It really is all the same to me,
Doctor. I just thought you might
be proud of your history.

Lisa turns back to her paperwork.

LISA

(dry)
I don't do pride.

BAXTER

Well, be that as it may, you
probably know that you're up for a
promotion for the position of the
chief medical officer.

LISA

Yes. I think I already said that
I read the memos.

BAXTER

And you're not interested in the
matter?

Lisa turns back to Baxter again.

LISA

Look, I've been the acting chief
ever since the previous guy got
thrown off the job. Okay, there
hasn't been much to do what with
the border being closed and all,
but I've been doing this for a
quite a while now. So I'm sorry,
but dropping one word from my
illustrious title isn't going to
be the highlight of my day.

BAXTER

I see. Well in any case, as of
this moment you are officially the
chief medical officer of the Antares
station.

LISA

Thank you. Can I get back to my
work now?

BAXTER

Of course. Commander Yann and I
will head to Engineering.

LISA

Good luck with that.

Baxter and Tanith leave the medical center. Lisa continues
her work like nothing happened.

INT. ANTARES - CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Baxter and Tanith walk down the corridor.

BAXTER

I really hope that everybody on this station doesn't have as bad an attitude.

TANITH

Everybody's a little testy because we've been working so hard to get the station ready in time. They are all great officers, really. You just need to take it a little easier with them.

BAXTER

I just don't appreciate my senior officers talking back to me.

TANITH

Remember that this is a civilian station. We take things a lot easier and a lot more informal. That's just how it goes.

They arrive at the lift and enter.

INT. ANTARES - OMNI - CONTINUOUS

The doors close.

TANITH

Engineering.

The lift hums to life.

BAXTER

Look, I can appreciate the difference between a warship and a civilian station but I'd still like to maintain some level of discipline. It's not my intention to be an ogre, but I need to know if I can trust my closest subordinates.

TANITH

There's no question about that, believe me. I don't know about discipline, but from what little time I've been here, I know that they're all dedicated on getting their jobs done. We're all professionals, and that's what counts on a civilian station.

BAXTER

I'll try to keep it in mind.

The doors open and they step TO:

INT. ANTARES - ENGINEERING - CONTINUOUS

The main engineering is basically a huge open corridor that is over a hundred meters long and fifteen meters wide. One side of the corridor is a wall of consoles that are attached to the main computer core.

The other side of the corridor is filled with storage cabinets and various equipment as well as several access hatches to the actual engines and machinery of the station.

There are dozens of engineers working furiously, most of them using several consoles at the same time and some are lugging around equipment. It's a whirlpool of activity.

BAXTER

How are we supposed to find anybody in this chaos?

TANITH

Simple. We call him.

Tanith goes taps a button on the wall.

TANITH (CONT'D)

(amplified)

Larry Bruley to the starboard omni.

Moments later, LARRY BRULEY, the thirty-something chief emerges. An easy going fellow, he doesn't wear a uniform that would distinguish himself from the other engineers. He wipes off his hand and offers it to the captain.

BRULEY

Hey there! You must be the new head honcho around here. Glad to meet you, I'm Larry.

They shake hands.

BAXTER

I am indeed the new captain and I'd like to know why you weren't present in the welcoming ceremony earlier today?

Bruley laughs a little.

BRULEY

Are you... are you serious? You do know that the station is still far from complete?

(MORE)

BRULEY (CONT'D)

There's tons of work to do if we intend to open this joint for business in a few weeks.

BAXTER

I can appreciate that, but it's really not your call. The reception is mandatory for a reason.

BRULEY

Look, at the time of the reception, I was probably fixing a busted power distributor down on the engine core. Levels 4 to 7 were completely out of power and I think the life support on those levels is still a priority over reception ceremonies.

BAXTER

Very well. But I'd appreciate it if in the future you'd assign someone else for that kind of work so that you can attend the mandatory functions. As the chief, it's your job to set an example to your subordinates and this is not my idea of a good one.

BRULEY

I'd really rather call them my colleagues. We're all working together here.

BAXTER

Call them what you please. I'm sure you get my point.

BRULEY

Sure, whatever.

BAXTER

So I can trust you to be present when required from now on?

BRULEY

(not likely)
Yes, sir.

BAXTER

Excellent. I will leave you to your duties, then.

Bruley nods to him. The Captain and Tanith enter the omni-lift and the doors close. Bruley lets out a breath, he's not too happy about the new captain.

He then looks around and sees an idle engineer and waves his hand at her.

BRULEY

Hitoshama!

The young engineer, KAIYA HITOSHAMA, looks a little surprised to hear her name. She comes to Bruley.

BRULEY (CONT'D)

You're new, right?

HITOSHAMA

That's right. I graduated a couple of months ago, arrived last Tuesday.

BRULEY

So you haven't been to the engine core yet?

HITOSHAMA

No, they said that I'd have to wait for special training before going down there.

Bruley starts collecting gear from a cabinet and stuffs the tools to his pack.

BRULEY

I'd say that this is the perfect time. I want to get to the bottom of these power relay failures, so we need to check out a power generator in sector C7.

HITOSHAMA

What, now? I thought the training was more formal than this.

BRULEY

It is. But we don't have time for that, so I'll teach you on the job.

Bruley jumps feet first to an access hatch so that his upper body is still visible. He sees that Hitoshama looks quite apprehensive about the prospect.

BRULEY (CONT'D)

Come on! Believe me, you're going to love it.

He disappears through the hatch. Hitoshama follows closely after him.

INT. ANTARES - ENGINE CORE - CONTINUOUS

The engine core is comprised of massive machinery crammed in as tight as they possibly can. Between the monstrous machines are dimly lit corridors just wide enough for a person to walk. Ladders and various crossroads make the corridors a huge maze.

Hitoshama watches around in amazement as they slowly walk forward.

BRULEY

These are the famous engineering corridors. They speak about them in the academy, but you can't have the slightest idea before you've actually been here. You probably visited and trained on ships, but those are nothing compared to what you have on a station. And especially on this station because of the upgrades. The engine core contains over 600 kilometers of these corridors on 25 levels. To memorize all of it is impossible so you'll have to have your hand console with the map with you at all times. I hope you brought one.

Hitoshama gets a horrible feeling when she realizes that she didn't bring one.

HITOSHAMA

No, sir.

Bruley throws one to her over his shoulder. Hitoshama catches it.

BRULEY

Never, ever come to the engine core without one. It will tell you where you should be heading and always points you to the nearest exit.

Hitoshama fiddles with the hand console.

HITOSHAMA

I'm really sorry about not taking a console with me. We came down here all of a sudden and I just blanked on it.

BRULEY

Don't worry about it, learning is what we're here to do. I bet you're not going to make that mistake again any time soon.

Suddenly, Hitoshama stops on her tracks.

HITOSHAMA

Hold on a minute! This is odd.

Bruley stops as well and looks at her.

HITOSHAMA (CONT'D)

I'm picking up an unusual signal.

His curiosity peaking, Bruley goes to her to look.

BRULEY

That is strange. What do you make of it?

HITOSHAMA

I don't know. I've never seen anything like it. What is it?

BRULEY

I'm not sure, but that looks like something from the history books. It just might be radio waves.

HITOSHAMA

Radio?

BRULEY

It's an antiquated communication system. But it hasn't been used in ages. We better check it out.

HITOSHAMA

You think it's something dangerous?

BRULEY

Unlikely. But whatever it is, it shouldn't be here.

HITOSHAMA

Right.

BRULEY

You have the coordinates, lead the way.

Hitoshama nods and then starts walking. Bruley follows her.

Moments later, they come to a massive cavern. There's nothing around them in any direction except the railings of the corridor that bridges the gap.

Hitoshama admires the sight.

HITOSHAMA

Why so much wasted space?

BRULEY

It's because of the Ashtar machinery that we've had to incorporate. Consortium technology is designed to pack the machines as closely as humanly possible.

(MORE)

BRULEY (CONT'D)

And so is the Ashtar machinery,
but the designs aren't exactly
compatible. That's why we've had
to leave several gaps like this
one.

They come to the middle of the bridge when Hitoshama stops.

HITOSHAMA

I hate to tell you this, but the
signal is coming right from
underneath us.

BRULEY

Of course it is...

Bruley peeks over the railing, but the bottom of the cavern
is pitch black.

BRULEY (CONT'D)

Well, I guess I'll just have to go
down there and take a closer look.

HITOSHAMA

How are you going to get down there?

Bruley pulls out a stack of rope from his bag.

BRULEY

It helps to have a ladder.

HITOSHAMA

Are you sure that the machinery is
shielded enough for you not to fry
yourself?

BRULEY

It should be. And if the thing
down there hasn't been fried,
there's a good chance that I won't
be either.

Bruley attaches the ropes to the railing and tries his
weight on it.

BRULEY (CONT'D)

But just to be on the safe side,
if I scream, pull me up.

(beat)

On second thought, if I scream,
there's probably no point.

Bruley throws the ladder over the railing. Hitoshama looks
down, worried.

HITOSHAMA

Shouldn't I go? I'm lighter than
you.

BRULEY

Are you making insinuations about my weight.

HITOSHAMA

No, I just...

BRULEY

(interrupts)

I'm sure you're right. No offense, but I think this calls for a little more experience. We have no idea what's down there.

HITOSHAMA

(playful)

I don't know about experience. Which one of us forgot about the flashlight again?

Bruley sighs as he climbs over the railing and on to the ladder.

HITOSHAMA (CONT'D)

How are you going to see anything down there?

BRULEY

No worries, I'll just adjust the brightness of my console to full. If I let my eyes adjust, I should be able to see enough.

HITOSHAMA

Very clever.

Bruley starts his descent. He's clearly done this for years, so it doesn't take him very long to reach the bottom.

He feels the ground with his foot to see if it's level. It is, and he steps away from the ladder.

He turns on the console and sure enough he can see just enough to see a strange package with an antenna sticking out of it.

He kneels down in front of it and scans it. He presses a few buttons on the console but gets a disapproving BUZZ. He looks up to see Hitoshama.

BRULEY

Can you get a connection? There's too much interference down here.

Hitoshama fiddles with her console.

HITOSHAMA

Yeah, it works fine up here.

BRULEY

Ok, good. Make a cross reference on the database for me. I found a package that has some kind of powder in it. I'd very much like to know what it is.

HITOSHAMA

Ok.

Bruley double-checks his console.

BRULEY

I'm reading a composition of about 76% potassium nitrate, 13% carbon and 11% sulfur.

Hitoshama copies down the numbers and pushes a few more buttons.

HITOSHAMA

Ok, got it. Searching.

BRULEY

I guess the radio broadcasts some sort of a homing beacon, although I can't understand why. We never picked it up on our normal scans since we don't look at these frequencies anymore. How did you stumble on it?

HITOSHAMA

I was just fiddling with the console, trying out the different functions since I've never been down here.

The console BEEPS. Hitoshama starts reading.

HITOSHAMA (CONT'D)

I have a match.

BRULEY

What's the diagnosis, doc?

HITOSHAMA

It's apparently an ancient substance known as black powder.

BRULEY

Never heard of it. What does it do?

Hitoshama reads on, when suddenly her eyes widen in surprise.

HITOSHAMA

It explodes!

Bruley jumps back from the package, loses his balance and falls.

When he gets back up, he approaches the package more carefully and takes more scans. His mind works in overdrive

BRULEY

Tell me more. How powerful is it?
Does it combust easily? Anything
I should know about just how
terrified I should be.

HITOSHAMA

It's extremely weak by modern
standards. It was mainly used in
low-powered weapons.

BRULEY

Ok, I think I'm on top of one of
the main air vents and it should
be shielded very well. Can you
calculate if this could do any
damage to it? There's a few kilos
of the stuff.

Hitoshama fiddles with her console furiously.

HITOSHAMA

If I'm getting this right, the
most it can do is scratch the paint.
But if it explodes while you're
down there, there won't be much
left of you.

BRULEY

How very soothing to know.

HITOSHAMA

According to this, the resulting
smoke and heat would cause a series
of fire alarms that would pretty
much shut down this sector. The
radio device is most likely the
detonator.

BRULEY

Yeah, I figured as much.

Bruley stands up, lets out a sigh and scratches his head.
A beat.

BRULEY (CONT'D)

Hitoshama.

HITOSHAMA

Yes, sir?

Bruley looks up at Hitoshama.

BRULEY

Okay, here's what we're going to do. I'm going to stay down here and try to get as much information as I can. You head back to Engineering and analyze the radio signal with the folks up there. If we can duplicate the homing beacon, we should be able to move the bomb out of here.

HITOSHAMA

Shouldn't you at least come up here?

BRULEY

I can't do scans from up there because of the interference. And we need to know all there is to know about this thing. Fast.

HITOSHAMA

What if the bomb goes off while I'm gone?

Bruley pauses. He looks at the bomb for a moment, then back at Hitoshama and shrugs.

HITOSHAMA (CONT'D)

Right. I'll be quick.

Hitoshama starts to leave.

BRULEY

Hitoshama!

She turns back.

BRULEY (CONT'D)

You'd better inform the Captain.

Hitoshama nods and runs off. Bruley looks at the bomb and sighs. He casually sits beside and continues his scans.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

INT. ANTARES - ENGINEERING

The omni doors open and Wendy steps into Engineering to see Bruley climbing out of an access hatch.

The engineering is almost deserted. Just a handful of engineers are present, all of them watching anxiously at the proceedings. Hitoshama is among them.

Bruley is carrying a box, keeping as far from him as possible. Wendy comes to him.

WENDY

Glad to see you're still in one piece, Chief. Is that the bomb?

BRULEY

It's inside. Hitoshama and her team constructed it while the rest worked on the fake homing beacon that's now where this thing used to be.

Bruley puts the package on a table.

HITOSHAMA

It's a Faraday cage. I stumbled on the concept while doing research for the transmitter.

WENDY

A Faraday cage?

HITOSHAMA

It's an enclosure that blocks out external static electric fields, including radio signals.

BRULEY

In theory, it shouldn't be able to receive any signals. Hopefully that includes the one that tells it to blow up.

WENDY

In theory?

Hitoshama shifts uncomfortably.

HITOSHAMA

Well, I'm pretty sure nobody's built one of these in centuries so it isn't exactly what you'd call a tested design.

WENDY

Right.

BRULEY

Right is right. And that's exactly why I'd like to shove this thing out of the nearest airlock before the design is field tested with my internal organs. It's a very good sign that whoever's tracking the signal hasn't noticed us moving it. But I'd still rather be safe than dead.

WENDY

The Captain wants for us to locate the receiver first now that the bomb has been contained. Shooting it out of an airlock might alert them. Do you think you could modify the sensors so we can track the signal and see where the receiver is?

BRULEY

Sure, but I'm sure that a scan so specific will alert them. They'll know we found it and I'm pretty sure they'll try and blow it up.

WENDY

I don't think we have much choice. All hell will break loose when they try to detonate the bomb in any case. I'd much rather we force their hand and not the other way around. Do you have a blast chamber?

BRULEY

This is engineering, not a bomb lab!

Wendy looks at him, bemused. Then she looks at the bomb and grabs it.

BRULEY (CONT'D)

Hey, where are you...?

Bruley doesn't have to continue as he sees Wendy throwing the bomb into the waiting omni-lift.

WENDY

Level 9, sector C.

The doors close and the omni leaves.

WENDY (CONT'D)

That sector is empty at the moment,
right?

BRULEY

Yes, the refit crews finished there
yesterday.

WENDY

Then it sounds like the perfect
place for a bomb, doesn't it?

BRULEY

Truly spoken like a person who
doesn't have to fix it all.

WENDY

We're wasting time. How about
doing those sensor modifications?

Bruley, Wendy and Hitoshama move to the nearest wall
computer console.

BRULEY

There's nothing much to it, really.
We're perfectly capable of scanning
the frequencies. We just don't
because usually there's no point.

WENDY

So we can do the scan at any time?

BRULEY

Sure. I just need to check the
exact frequency.

HITOSHAMA

It was 103.9 megahertz on the FM
band.

Bruley nods and starts to enter the appropriate commands.
Then he pauses. He turns to Wendy.

BRULEY

Are you sure you want me to do
this? The bomb might still puncture
a bulkhead and we might have
decompression to deal with.

WENDY

Do you have any better ideas?

Bruley thinks for a moment, then shrugs.

BRULEY

Not really, no.

WENDY

Then do it.

Bruley punches in the final commands.

INT. ANTARES - BRIDGE

Tanith, Artesh, Baxter and several ND crewmembers are at their posts.

Tanith works her console.

TANITH
I have located the receiver. It's coming from a cargo ship docked at bay 42.

BAXTER
Ashtar?

TANITH
Yes, Captain.

Baxter punches a button on the small console in his chair.

BAXTER
Security!

WENDY'S COMM VOICE
We're on our way.

Artesh's console BEEPS.

LARRY'S COMM VOICE
Engineering to Bridge.

Artesh opens the channel.

ARTESH
Speak.

LARRY'S COMM VOICE
We just noticed a strong carrier wave being broadcast on the same frequency. I'd say it's a pretty sure bet that they just tried to detonate the bomb. Fortunately for the crews that just finished Level 9, it seems that our Faraday cage worked.

BAXTER
Get rid of the bomb, now!

LARRY'S COMM VOICE
Gladly, sir. Engineering out.

As the channel closes, Tanith's console blares an ALARM. The station starts to shake slightly.

TANITH

The cargo ship is trying to break free from the docking clamps, Captain! It looks like they got on to us.

BAXTER

Where's security? They should be there by now!

TANITH

I don't know, but they won't be able to do much if the cargo ship is leaving. We should let it go before it tears off the docking clamps.

BAXTER

No! Do not disengage the clamps! Under no circumstances am I going to let those bastards get away. Have the security forces blow their way into the ship if they have to.

TANITH

Captain, I really have to advice against this. The clamps aren't designed to take this much force. They might rip half the station apart!

The station shakes more violently and more ALARMS start to sound.

LARRY'S COMM VOICE

Bridge? What the hell is going on up there? Just about every single system is blaring out alarms down here. The station can't take much more of this!

TANITH

We have to let the ship go!

The shaking increases even more and violent jolts nearly knock people from their chairs.

Baxter hits more commands on his chair panel.

BAXTER

Security, are you able to make your way to the ship?

WENDY'S COMM VOICE

Are you kidding me?! We just had to evacuate the entire sector.

Tanith looks at her console, which by now is practically pulsating in red. She has to make a decision, fast.

She exchanges a glance with Artesh and punches in a few commands. The shaking ceases immediately.

Baxter looks in horror as the cargo ship can be seen on the viewscreen, flying away.

BAXTER

What happened?

Tanith replies without hesitation.

TANITH

The docking clamps failed. There was nothing I could do.

BAXTER

Fire! Everything you've got!

TANITH

Firing a torpedo.

EXT. SPACE

The cargo ship is flying away as fast as it can when a bright torpedo is launched from the station. The torpedo is a lot faster and it's aimed perfectly.

The impact is imminent, when suddenly a Quantum Tunnel opens in front of the ship and it jumps just in the nick of time.

INT. ANTARES - BRIDGE

As before. Baxter kicks his chair in frustration.

BAXTER

A torpedo? Are you serious?

TANITH

(calmly)

As I've explained before, Captain, this is...

BAXTER

(cuts in)

...a civilian station. Yes, I think it's painfully obvious to everyone by now.

He calms himself for a couple of seconds, lets out a breath and then speaks with more control.

BAXTER (CONT'D)

Ok, let's try and get a track on the ship. If we're lucky, we can dispatch a...

ARTESH

(interrupts)

Captain, the cargo ship has dropped out of the Tunnel. It appears that the torpedo was close enough to make the jump with the ship and damage their Tunnel drive.

BAXTER

Where is it?

ARTESH

Just 11 thousand kilometers from us, but taking distance as fast as she can under normal propulsion.

Baxter punches more commands on the console.

UDAY'S COMM VOICE

Shuttlebay.

BAXTER

Prepare the shuttle for immediate launch, Sergeant! We will meet you there.

UDAY'S COMM VOICE

Roger.

Baxter closes the channel and looks at Tanith.

BAXTER

Commander, you're with me. We're going to pursue.

Tanith nods and rises from her console. Another crewmember immediately takes her place as they head out of the bridge.

INT. ANTARES - SHUTTLEBAY

The shuttlebay consists of a row of airlocks to the waiting shuttles. There are only a few crewmembers in the shuttlebay and they are working at the nearest airlock, getting the shuttle ready for flight.

Uday is standing outside the airlock. He is in full flightsuit, waiting and eager to go.

Tanith enters from an omni-lift and joins Uday.

UDAY

Where's the Captain? I thought he would be joining us.

TANITH

He is. But he had to attend to some business in his quarters first.

UDAY

Really? The way he rushed us here,
I thought he didn't want to waste
any time.

TANITH

I think that he just didn't want
us to waste any time. I'm starting
to feel that he's not the kind of
a Captain who lives by his own
rules.

UDAY

No shit. I heard that...

Uday is interrupted when Baxter enters from another omni.
He walks quickly to the airlock and nods to Uday.

BAXTER

Sergeant.

Uday nods back and they all enter the airlock.

EXT. SPACE

The shuttle detaches itself from a small docking port and
flies off as fast as it can in hot pursuit.

INT. SHUTTLE

Uday and Tanith are seated in the two forward stations,
Baxter is standing behind them, as close as possible to
the control panels. He has to bend over slightly in the
cramped confines of the shuttle.

BAXTER

How far are they now?

TANITH

Only about two million kilometers.

UDAY

But their speed matches ours, so
we can't get to them under normal
propulsion.

BAXTER

Weapons?

TANITH

It's a civilian cargo ship. Why
would they have weapons?

BAXTER

Probably the same reason they
brought the bomb. Have you scanned
them?

TANITH

Yes, there's no weaponry that I can detect.

BAXTER

Could we fire from this distance?

UDAY

This is a shuttle, Captain, not a fighter. We only have about a fifty kilometer range on the weapons.

Baxter takes a step back, deep in thought. Then he comes to them again.

BAXTER

Could we outrun them with a Quantum Tunnel?

UDAY

Sir?

BAXTER

Could we form a Tunnel just for a few seconds to get in range?

TANITH

That's not possible. Even the shortest of Tunnel jumps would overshoot by millions of kilometers.

UDAY

And even if we did catch them, there's not much we can do. The weapons on this shuttle won't do much to a ship of that size. I assumed that we're just going to track them.

BAXTER

We don't have to damage them, but if we're able to Tunnel in front of them and attack with what we have, we might be able to slow them down...

Baxter punches in a few commands to the navigation console and it highlights certain coordinates on it.

BAXTER (CONT'D)

...around here.

UDAY

Ok... Why? There's nothing there.

TANITH

It doesn't matter because the Tunnel jump is impossible. The safeties won't allow us to disengage the drive fast enough.

UDAY

Unless...

Uday veers off.

BAXTER

What? What is it? This is not the time to hesitate. If you have an idea, spit it out!

UDAY

Well, we could destabilize one of the Casimir buffers to create an unstable Quantum Tunnel. It would still allow us to jump, but it would shut down in less than a second.

Baxter looks at Tanith.

BAXTER

Is that possible?

TANITH

I suppose, theoretically. But I don't think it's something we can actually...

UDAY

(interrupts)

I've done it. Once. It will work, but it's going to be one hell of a ride. And it was in a fighter, I don't know if it'll work with a shuttle.

BAXTER

How long would it take to modify the buffer generators?

UDAY

Not long. The last time I did it, it was an act of desperation.

Baxter pats Uday on the shoulder.

BAXTER

I like your way of thinking. Get to it.

Uday gets to work, clearly not all that eager to do it.

UDAY

All right, then. I suggest you strap yourself to a chair. This is not going to be pleasant.

As Baxter sits down to one of the aft chairs, Uday and Tanith exchange a worried glance.

EXT. SPACE

The shuttle is still at full speed when a Quantum Tunnel opens in front of it. It dives in.

FLASH CUT TO:

INT. SHUTTLE

Baxter comes back to consciousness, finding himself lying on the floor in a puddle of vomit. He quickly gathers himself, wipes away the vomit from his face and stands up.

Tanith and Uday are already working feverishly, feeling the effects of the jump as well.

BAXTER

Status?

UDAY

The jump was successful. We emerged from the Tunnel only about 20 000 kilometers in front of them. We've reversed course and are closing in, fast.

BAXTER

Excellent. Fire at will as soon as we are in range.

TANITH

And then what? Our weaponry won't do much and we can't board the ship.

BAXTER

As I said, we only need to get them to slow enough for a few seconds.

UDAY

We're in range in 20 seconds. They're starting to slow down.

BAXTER

Fire!

EXT. SPACE

The shuttle is approaching the large cargo ship extremely fast and commences firing.

Shrapnel flies off where the rounds hit the exterior of the ship, but the damage is minimal.

Both ships are decreasing their speed as they close each other.

INT. SHUTTLE

As before.

UDAY

They've slowed down almost to a full stop.

TANITH

But they won't stay that way for long. As soon as they plot in a new trajectory, they'll be out of here like a bat out of hell.

BAXTER

They won't have that long.

TANITH

Why?

Baxter motions outside.

BAXTER

That's why.

EXT. SPACE

At each side of the shuttle, two Quantum Tunnels open and massive battlecruisers emerge.

They remain motionless as everything halts. Both the cargo ship and the shuttle stop. The ships remain static for a long while, hanging in space.

INT. SHUTTLE

As before. Uday and Tanith are stunned at the sight of the two ships.

BAXTER

Basic battle tactics, Commander. A ship that size could easily outmaneuver and outrun battlecruisers, so we needed to slow them down for an ambush. They're not going anywhere.

TANITH

A very slick move. Is this why you needed to visit your quarters before we set off?

BAXTER

I had to make a few calls to set this up.

UDAY

Why didn't you just tell us?

Baxter smiles slightly.

BAXTER

No need to tell you about the plans that might not work.

TANITH

So saving face is more important than keeping us in the loop?

BAXTER

Something like that. Please open channels to both battlecruisers.

Tanith punches in a few commands.

TANITH

Channel open.

BAXTER

Thank you.

(loud)

This is Captain Baxter, commanding officer of Antares. Fire at will!

Tanith jumps from her seat in horror.

TANITH

NO!

EXT. SPACE

The massive ships open fire. The cargo ship is caught in the ruthless crossfire and is ripped to shreds in a matter of seconds.

INT. SHUTTLE

Still in shock and almost in tears, Tanith turns to Baxter.

TANITH

Why the hell did you do that?! We had them! There was no reason to murder them all!

Baxter shoots an icy glance at him.

BAXTER

Sit down, Commander!

TANITH

I will not sit down! We don't even know how many people were in that ship! Who knows how many innocent people you murdered?!

BAXTER

That is enough! It was my decision to make and I do not have to take this from you! This wasn't a question of arresting them, but of stopping them before they can put more people in danger!

TANITH

How could they possibly have done that? By planting more harmless bombs around...

BAXTER

(interrupts)

You're not a military officer, so don't ever pretend to understand what's at stake here! You have absolutely no right to question my command. Now, return to your station and do your duty or I will relieve you.

Tanith stares at Baxter coldly.

UDAY

Umm, sirs?

They turn to Uday with irritation.

BAXTER

What is it, Sergeant?

UDAY

I'm picking up a transponder. It seems that it's coming from an escape pod.

Tanith returns to her chair and begins scans.

TANITH

Confirmed. I'm reading a single life sign on board, very faint.

BAXTER

Set in an intercept course and prepare to tractor it on board. We'll take the occupant into custody.

UDAY

Shouldn't we let the battlecruisers handle it?

BAXTER

No, it's on our jurisdiction.
Commander, contact Antares and
have them be meet us with a medical
crew.

TANITH

(stern)
Yes, sir.

EXT. SPACE

The shuttle approaches a small dot in space, the escape
pod. From this...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE - ANTARES STATION

Establishing.

INT. ANTARES - MESS HALL

A very frustrated Tanith is joined by Wendy, Lisa and Larry at a table. A large glass of something presumably alcoholic is in front of her. The others are quite somber as well.

TANITH

I mean, there was no point. They didn't even have weapons. They weren't going anywhere. We didn't even try to make contact with them!

Tanith takes a huge swig from her drink.

TANITH (CONT'D)

And then he just started to pull some military bullshit on me. Sure, I can understand that he's more accustomed to military procedures, but it's the condescending attitude I can't stand. Just because I didn't spend years learning how to stand in a line doesn't mean that I can't do my job. Why the hell is he here anyway? If he needs to prove himself to be a big man with a gun, there's plenty of places for him to do that.

LISA

Come on, that's not fair and you know it.

TANITH

What? Are you seriously taking his side in this?

LISA

No, I'm not taking his side. I don't agree with his decision and I don't like the guy, not that has nothing to do with it. I don't know why he was assigned here, but there's nothing we can do about it. So we're just going to have to learn to deal with him. Just remember that he's probably having just as much trouble adjusting as we are.

LARRY

Well, at least he finally let you release the docking clamps. A few seconds more and it would've left, half of the module with them.

TANITH

Oh, right, I forgot to tell you. The clamps did fail. It takes two weeks to repair them.

LARRY

(beat)

I see.

They remain silent for a beat.

LARRY (CONT'D)

I don't know. I guess he's just the type of person who's the happiest when he's got a big gun and someone to point it at.

LISA

Don't you start that too. You guys keep blaming him for treating you unfairly just because you're not part of the military while you keep doing the same to him just because he is.

MALCOLM (O.S.)

(drunk)

Why don't you just drop the act! He's a bastard and you know it. Him and all the likes of him.

The group turns to see the very drunken man. He is MALCOLM SCOTT, a middle aged man who looks like he could be handsome, but whose every move gives the impression of a man who has given up on everything. He doesn't wear a uniform.

Tanith just looks at him bewildered, while the others recognize him and seem embarrassed. Lisa turns her gaze to her drink.

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

That's right, I actually took the time to look into his so called "career", which seems to be more than the rest of you have bothered to do. He bought a career with his father's money and influence! He and his father have been under investigation dozens of times, but somehow the investigators and judges tend to be reassigned before

(MORE)

MALCOLM (CONT'D)
anything is carried through. He is the kind of a man who prays on others just to benefit his own worthless existence. He won't hesitate for a second to get rid of you any way he can if he should so choose.

(beat, full of sorrow)
Believe me, I know.

Lisa has heard enough. She throws a glance at Malcolm, full of disappointment, before she storms out of the room.

MALCOLM (CONT'D)
He will poison this station until there's nothing more for him to gain from doing it. This Captain is the worst thing that could ever happen to this station.

Malcolm halts as he notices the group looking behind him, the color drained from their faces.

He slowly turns to see Baxter standing in the doorway, looking at him with a murdering glare but very controlled.

Malcolm shuts up and Baxter walks to him. The tension of the moment makes everybody feel extremely uncomfortable.

He looks Malcolm directly in the eyes for a moment.

BAXTER
Security chief, I'd appreciate if you'd do your duty and escort this gentleman to the nearest brig.

Wendy hesitates for a second, but seeing no alternative, she rises from the table and gently starts to escort Malcolm out.

WENDY
Come on, let's get you somewhere you can sober up.

Malcolm doesn't resist as they move out of the room, Baxter's gaze never braking contact until they move out of view.

Once they are gone, Baxter takes a last icy look at Tanith and Larry before leaving without a word.

TANITH
Do you think Lisa has a point?
Are we treating him and his supposed "type" unfairly?

Larry shrugs.

LARRY

I don't know. Lisa's former military herself. Maybe it's still in her blood to defend them.

TANITH

Another unfair generalization?

LARRY

As I said, I don't know. We've been serving on this station for nearly a decade together, but I can't say I really know her. She's not the socializing... "type".

TANITH

I gathered.

A beat as they take another sip from their drinks and mull over the events.

Larry shakes his head.

LARRY

It's really sad, what state he's driven himself to.

TANITH

Who?

LARRY

Malcolm.
(off her look)
The drunk.

TANITH

Oh! You know him?

LARRY

Very well, we all do. He's Malcolm Scott, the previous medical chief.

TANITH

Really? I didn't know he was still on the station.

LARRY

Where would he go? He was here from before day one. He directed the medical unit when the station was being built, so he's spent most of his career around this station. It's no wonder he couldn't see himself leaving after he got booted out.

TANITH

How does he make a living?

LARRY

Mostly, he doesn't. He gets something from the space force for his service years, but mostly he just does odd jobs here and there to keep himself going. None of us feel right about what happened to him, so we let him eat here. We try and help him out, but he's going to be in a world of hurt as soon as the border opens again and the rents will skyrocket.

TANITH

I can't believe the force left him out to dry like that. What did he do?

LARRY

It's complicated. Let's just say that someone very politically sensitive died on his operating table at an inopportune time. They needed someone to blame and he was the most convenient choice.

(beat)

But hey, I thought you wanted to wind down. All we've talked about is death, corruption and miserable fates. Maybe we should talk about something more chipper before you get too drunk?

TANITH

I'm not drunk.

She takes a swig of her drink to prove the point.

LARRY

Maybe not, but you're getting there.

TANITH

Probably. There's just something I really don't want to do that I'd rather forget.

EXT. SPACE - ANTARES STATION - LATER

Establishing.

INT. ANTARES - CAPTAINS QUARTERS

The large quarters are dimly lit. Baxter sits behind his desk, reading something intently on a computer screen. He doesn't look the least bit happy about what he's seeing.

After a few moments, the door chime rings. He ignores it.

The chime rings again. With some annoyance he pushes a button on the desk and the door slides open.

Tanith enters. He quickly glances to see who it is and returns to his reading.

BAXTER

What is it, Commander? It's late.

TANITH

I know, I'm sorry. Sir, I'd like to request permission to interrogate the prisoner. Wendy told me that you've restricted all access to him.

BAXTER

(absent-minded)

To who?

TANITH

The Ashtar man we picked up from the escape pod.

BAXTER

(alarmed)

Is he awake?

TANITH

Not yet, but Doctor Rumfoord said that he could wake up at any time and should be strong enough for questioning.

BAXTER

No.

TANITH

Sir?

BAXTER

Inform the Doctor that the prisoner is to be held under artificial unconsciousness as long as he is on the station for security reasons. I've arranged for a military transfer to pick him up. They should be here in about a week.

TANITH

Captain, I must object. We need to begin an investigation immediately. If we wait a week, there might be nothing left to investigate. I must urge you to reconsi...

Baxter slams his palm on the desk.

BAXTER

Damn it, Commander! I gave you an order! This station doesn't even have the bare minimum of a security staff. We can't take even the risk. We're simply not equipped to handle a terrorist threat at the moment, so our best option is to keep him sedated and then let the security forces deal with him. Besides, we can proceed with the investigation as best as we can without him.

TANITH

But Captain, it's just because of the skeleton security crew that we can't investigate this properly. He could give us invaluable information that can put us in the right direction.

BAXTER

I don't know if the concept of an order confuses you somehow, but you've already disobeyed a direct order once today. I assure you, you don't want to do it twice. Just relay my orders and please don't bother me anymore today. I'm off duty and so are you.

Tanith clenches her fist to control her fury.

TANITH

Yes, sir.

She walks out of the room.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FIVE

ACT SIX

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE - ANTARES STATION

Establishing. A lot of the lights have been turned off and a lot of the windows are dark as the night period sets in on the massive space outpost.

INT. ANTARES - MARKETPLACE

The shopkeepers and various vendors are closing shop everywhere, while a few still keep their doors open. The general lighting is somewhat dimmer than before.

Artesh walks in from an omni and through the marketplace, paying little attention to the people around him. He continues TO:

INT. ANTARES - CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

The corridor is also dimly lit. There are no people around as Artesh walks along the corridor before stopping in front of a door.

He rings the chime and the door opens almost immediately to reveal Tanith in casual attire.

TANITH

Did anyone see you come here?

ARTESH

I don't think so. Why?

TANITH

Never mind. Come on in.

Tanith lets Artesh enter.

INT. ANTARES - TANITH'S QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

Tanith's quarters are far from Spartan. It is full of personal items, eastern furniture and a lot of the walls are covered with colorful drapes. A cat is sleeping on a divan.

Artesh is quite surprised by the onslaught of color in the room as Tanith shows him in.

TANITH

I'm not exactly popular with the Captain at the moment so I'm sure he wouldn't be all that excited about our little meeting.

ARTESH

Little paranoid, are we?

TANITH

Maybe. But something tells me it's better to be. So, how do you like my world?

ARTESH

It's... different.

Tanith looks at him, clearly expecting something more. He isn't very good at this.

ARTESH (CONT'D)

It's very nice.

Tanith smiles at him.

TANITH

I'm glad you like it. I worked like mad on it.

ARTESH

I see you have a cat.

Tanith sits on the divan next to the cat. It doesn't react.

TANITH

Yes, I've had her for about seven years. I've had one ever since I was a child, can't really imagine life without one. Her name's Eight.

ARTESH

Eight?

TANITH

I'm terrible at names. It was either going to be a number or a silly acronym since I'm used to both in this line of work. The number seemed more personal.

Artesh doesn't see the logic.

ARTESH

I see the logic. I'm more of a dog person myself.

TANITH

Well, nobody's perfect. You want anything to drink or something?

ARTESH

No, I'm fine. Thank you.

Artesh sits to a wicker chair opposite to the divan.

TANITH

Did you get the information.

ARTESH

It wasn't too easy. I was just your average bureaucrat back in Ashtar, so I don't have that many connections. So I had to do it the hard way. It happens that one of my old colleagues was promoted to a governmental job in one of the larger sovereignties. So I called her.

TANITH

And?

ARTESH

And her boss asked from his relative who had a friend in the travel ministry.

TANITH

And?

ARTESH

And then that person had to go to the Deep Space Network logs to see if they could find any mention of our cargo ship.

TANITH

And?

Artesh takes a data unit from his pocket and hands it to Tanith.

ARTESH

And there you have it. Six degrees of separation in action.

TANITH

Fantastic. I can't thank you enough.

She takes the data unit and goes to a wall. She moves one of the drapes aside to reveal the computer console behind it. She ties the drape aside.

She puts the unit in the socket and the console blinks to life. A huge amount of data is displayed on the console along with diagrams of the cargo ship.

Artesh joins her at the console.

TANITH (CONT'D)

Have you looked through all this yet?

ARTESH

No, I came here as soon as I got it.

TANITH

And you're sure that the Captain doesn't know about this?

ARTESH

It was a personal call. I don't think even he is that suspicious.

TANITH

I wouldn't put it past him.

ARTESH

You are paranoid, aren't you? I fully agree that he's an ass, but you're acting as if he's a criminal.

TANITH

That's exactly what I'm trying to find out.

Tanith starts to dissect the information on the screen.

TANITH (CONT'D)

The heavy transport vessel Grosh, registration 01938-2388. Built by the Sherton Corporation...

She starts to skim through the screens of information.

TANITH (CONT'D)

Yes, yes, yes, yes, we know all that. But where did it come from? Where was it going?

They both read through the information in silence for a moment, until Tanith finds something she likes.

TANITH (CONT'D)

Here we go! Operating from Kl'tor. Does that sound familiar?

ARTESH

Vaguely. It's one of the small border worlds.

Tanith continues to scan the information on the screen.

TANITH

That's odd.

ARTESH

What?

TANITH

It looks like the Grosh has recently been renamed even though it's still under the same ownership. According to this, it was formerly known as the Gorputz-adar.

ARTESH

Are you serious? I know that ship!
It's one of the few ships that
visited regularly even when the
border was closed.

TANITH

Really?

ARTESH

Yes, they used it a lot for what
little commercial traffic they
could during the lockdown.

TANITH

What did it do here?

ARTESH

Nothing. We were just the border
station.

TANITH

Where was it heading?

ARTESH

I don't know. It should be logged
in the station logs.

TANITH

Easy enough to check.

Tanith punches in some commands and the computer shows
another log.

TANITH (CONT'D)

Let's see if I can actually spell
Gorputz-adar.

Once finished, the computer fills with search result.

TANITH (CONT'D)

Wow. You weren't kidding, it really
was a regular visitor. You didn't
notice the similarity between that
and the Grosh?

ARTESH

They all look the same in traffic
control. Besides, we've had so
much traffic lately that I probably
wouldn't have noticed even if it
still had the same name.

TANITH

Let's see where the cargo is
heading.

Tanith punches in a few more commands, but the computer
makes a disapproving BEEP.

TANITH (CONT'D)

That's odd.

ARTESH

What?

TANITH

I can't access that part of the logs. It's encrypted.

ARTESH

That is odd.

TANITH

Let's see if we can make an educated guess.

Tanith punches in more commands and the data changes once again.

TANITH (CONT'D)

That's odd.

ARTESH

You say that a lot.

TANITH

According to this, practically all of Kl'tor's economy is based on export of Beryldahide. The odd thing about it is that all of the export seems to be to Earth Consortium.

ARTESH

That is odd.

TANITH

You say that a lot.

ARTESH

I don't think I've ever heard of something like that. Even the border worlds prefer to trade with Ashtar governments, if not for any other reason than to save face.

TANITH

My thoughts exactly. And it isn't like the the Earth Consortium is that keen on trading with the Ashtar either.

Artesh reads more as they talk.

ARTESH

This doesn't make any sense. It shouldn't be possible to do all this with the border closed.

TANITH

I agree. So that probably means that the government has to back it up on both sides of the border.

ARTESH

Now wait a minute. I admit that this all looks suspicious, but there's not enough evidence for any conclusions.

Tanith pauses for a moment to mull over the facts. The she smiles slightly.

TANITH

Want to go on a little trip?

ARTESH

What do you mean?

TANITH

I don't think there's much more do here. That's why we need to go over there to investigate.

ARTESH

Where?

TANITH

To Kl'tor. And I want you to come with me.

ARTESH

What? Why me?

TANITH

It's an Ashtar world. I've never been in one, so I don't know what to do when I get there. I need someone to guide me.

ARTESH

I really don't think that's such a good idea. I'm still not convinced, and even if I were, it's not our problem.

TANITH

It becomes our problem when I see a civilian ship blown sky high in front of my face!

ARTESH

But that really doesn't change anything. You've gone and created this entire conspiracy, but we don't have anything to back it up!

(MORE)

ARTESH (CONT'D)

I get it that you don't get along with the Captain, but that doesn't make him a criminal.

TANITH

This has nothing to do with the Captain!

ARTESH

How couldn't it? Who else could've blocked the logs so that even the First Officer can't access them?

TANITH

That's it! That's why the Captain didn't want the prisoner interrogated. He must know something about this and the Captain's afraid that he'll talk.

ARTESH

Now you're really being paranoid.

TANITH

Ok, so what if I am? What's there to lose by going? If I'm right, we can shed some more light into this and maybe find out why those people had to die today. And if it turns out to be a wild goose chase, we'll get a few days off the station and visit Kl'tor.

Suddenly Artesh turns very somber.

ARTESH

I...

He can't finish the sentence.

TANITH

What is it? Did I say something wrong?

ARTESH

No. It's just that... I haven't been back to Ashtar ever since the border was closed. I don't know if I can go back. Not like this.

TANITH

Oh. I didn't realize. I didn't mean to be insensitive. I fear that this is becoming a running theme between the two of us.

ARTESH

No, it's alright. I'd be more offended if you watched your every word around me. It's just that the thought of going back all of a sudden is... Well, to be perfectly honest, I don't know what to think.

TANITH

I understand. And I really am sorry that I have to put you on the spot. But I really need to do this and I don't think I can without you.

Artesh looks Tanith directly in the eyes.

ARTESH

This really is that important to you?

TANITH

It is. I know myself. I can't live with myself if I don't at least try to find out why those people had to die.

Artesh thinks for a long while. Tanith does not brake the eye contact at any point.

Finally, Artesh drops his gaze.

ARTESH

All right. If it really means that much to you, I'll go with you.

TANITH

You can't imagine how much I appreciate this. Really. I promise I'll make it up to you some day.

ARTESH

I think you should worry more about how you're going to get us there. I can make all the arrangements for our visit, but if you're right, I don't think the Captain will let us go very easily.

Tanith smiles meekly.

TANITH

Fortunately, you're not the only one who is six degrees away from someone useful.

EXT. SPACE - ANTARES STATION

The station is fully light again and swarming with activity.

INT. ANTARES - SHUTTLEBAY

Baxter comes from an omni, steaming with rage.

Tanith is waiting for him at the shuttle airlock. Uday and Artesh immediately vanish inside the shuttle.

Tanith smiles politely as Baxter comes to her.

BAXTER

Just what the devil do you think you're doing, Commander?

TANITH

What do you mean? We're going to visit the planet Kl'tor as part of our investigation.

BAXTER

That is out of the question! You're not assigned to this investigation. Space Corp teams will be here in a week to conduct it.

TANITH

You know full well that we can't wait that long. You yourself said that we need to stop this threat at any cost. Giving the bad guys a week to clean up after them is not stopping them.

BAXTER

That is not for you to decide. Besides, this station is due to open in three weeks and I need every available officer here!

TANITH

I'm sure they'll manage. Artesh doesn't have very much to do before the border opens anyway, Uday is doing his job flying the shuttle and Lieutenant Davis is covering for me while I'm gone.

BAXTER

I'm giving you a direct order to stay on the station!

TANITH

You can't really do that, I'm afraid.

BAXTER

What?

TANITH

You see, I have contradicting orders to go on a diplomatic mission to Kl'tor. It's one of the border worlds and we want to be that they're ready. If it just happens that something about the attack would happen to surface while I'm there, it's just an added bonus. And since these orders are from Admiral Calter, I'm afraid they outrank you.

BAXTER

You can't be serious.

TANITH

Feel free to check for yourself.

Tanith hands Baxter a document. He scans through the contents and finally looks at Tanith.

BAXTER

I'll have your head for this.

With that, Baxter turns away and leaves. Tanith lets out a sigh of relief as she enters the shuttle.

INT. SHUTTLE - CONTINUOUS

Uday is at controls at the front of the shuttle while Artesh meets Tanith at the back of it.

ARTESH

That was quite a performance.
Congratulations.

TANITH

Thanks. I have to admit that I quite enjoyed it. We should probably head out before he finds a way to stop us.

ARTESH

Agreed.

UDAY

We're all set for launch.

EXT. SPACE

The shuttle detaches itself from the docking port and starts to fly away from the station.

INT. ANTARES - BAXTER'S OFFICE

Baxter watches from the panorama windows of his office as the shuttle flies further. After a few moments, the shuttle jumps to a Quantum Tunnel and disappears.

He turns to the computer on his desk and taps a button.

BAXTER

Get me Admiral Baxter on a secured
line immediately.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT SIX

ACT SEVEN

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE - PLANET KL'TOR

The shuttle emerges from the Quantum Tunnel and commences the orbit insertion.

INT. SHUTTLE

Tanith and Uday are at the front stations of the shuttle. Artesh closes a computer console at the back of the shuttle and joins them.

TANITH

What's the word?

ARTESH

It's pretty amazing. Not only did I manage to get us a hotel room on a short notice, but I actually got through to the president of Kl'tor.

TANITH

Are you serious?

ARTESH

I was pretty damn surprised myself. Even though Ashtar governments are usually more accessible than Earth Consortium ones, it's still pretty unusual to get a meeting just like this.

TANITH

Wait, you got us a meeting with the guy?

ARTESH

Yes. It didn't seem to go so well at first, but when I explained that we were serving under Baxter, they immediately agreed to arrange the meeting.

TANITH

That's odd. Well, I guess there had to be an upside to having him around. Good work.

Artesh goes back to one of the aft seats as Tanith directs her attention to the controls.

UDAY

Kl'tor orbital control, this is Earth Consortium shuttle Jules Verne. Requesting deorbit clearance.

COMM VOICE

Roger, Jules Verne. What is your planetary destination?

UDAY

Kl'tor central.

COMM VOICE

Stand by, Jules Verne. We'll transfer the deorbit parameters and approach vector to you. You're cleared for deorbit and landing.

UDAY

Huh. That was easy. Usually it'll take a couple of orbits to get clearance.

TANITH

I guess having the president waiting gives us priority.

EXT. SPACE - PLANET KL'TOR

The shuttle slows down and begins its long deorbit maneuver.

EXT. KL'TOR - SPACEPORT - DAY

The very same spaceport that we saw in the teaser. The passenger terminal has been repaired and restored to its former glory, but the new luggage processing facility is under construction.

INT. KL'TOR - SPACEPORT TERMINAL - DAY

As busy and crowded as before. The main difference is that the simple customs desks have been replaced with more restrictive gates with all sort of scanning devices. The officials are behind a transparent wall.

Ashtar is sitting at a bench, waiting patiently. Tanith comes to him from the customs station.

TANITH

I can't believe it took that long!
I don't think there's an inch of
my body they didn't poke or scan.

Artesh rises from the bench and they start walking through the crowd.

ARTESH

It's your first time in Ashtar space. If they don't have anything about you in their records, they'll want to make sure they get everything.

TANITH

It seems quite an overkill.

ARTESH

It's nothing compared to when I first came to Consortium space, believe me.

They come to the far end of the terminal, where the entire wall is lined up with one person pods that shoot away at incredible speeds through tubes they're in. Most of the people there are heading to the tubes as well.

TANITH

What are those pods?

ARTESH

They are the primary transportation system in the city. A lot like omni-lifts, but the network is more complex.

She watches a couple of pods shoot away at incredible speed as they start to line for their turn.

TANITH

The speed seems a little... excessive. Are they safe?

ARTESH

Completely. Under normal circumstances the acceleration would be too much for a person to handle, so the passengers are induced to unconsciousness for the journey. It feels like it all happens in a blink of an eye.

TANITH

Wow. Why haven't I heard about these before?

ARTESH

They're not very widely used, because the operation is quite expensive. But in huge cities like this, they're quite practical.

TANITH

I guess they're putting the Beryldahide money to use. I don't know if I like the idea of going into one, though.

ARTESH

What do you mean?

TANITH

I don't like the idea of being put to sleep so casually. What if I don't wake up?

ARTESH

It's very rare that that happens. And I haven't heard of a single case where a doctor wasn't able to revive the passenger if something went wrong. Believe me, it's the safest way to travel.

TANITH

They say that about flying.

ARTESH

It's not the same thing. You'll get used to it.

TANITH

I don't think I'll want to.

ARTESH

It's the only practical way to travel within the city, so you'd better.

TANITH

Fantastic.

They come to the pods. Two pods open their doors for them.

ARTESH

Just dial in the address and you'll be there before you know it. The presidential reception area is 394-48932.

TANITH

394-48932, right.

Tanith settles into the pod. The door shuts immediately.

INT. PRESIDENTIAL RECEPTION ROOM - DAY

The reception area is a huge room designed to comfortably house large amounts of people, but there is nobody there except Artesh and a RECEPTIONIST behind a desk.

A pod arrives to the tube in the wall and the doors open to reveal Tanith. She looks a bit baffled.

Artesh takes her hand and helps her from the pod.

TANITH

Incredible. That really was like a blink of an eye.

ARTESH

I told you.

They go to the receptionist who smiles politely at them.

RECEPTIONIST

May I help you?

ARTESH

Yes. This is Commander Tanith Yann and I am Lieutenant Artesh from the Earth Consortium space force. We have an appointment with president Kri.

Receptionist checks something from her computer.

RECEPTIONIST

That is correct. The President is already expecting you. You can go right in.

TANITH

Thank you.

Tanith and Artesh walk open the door beside the receptionists desk and walk TO:

INT. PRESIDENT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The office is a surprisingly small, but a tidy room. PRESIDENT KRI is sitting behind a large desk with two chairs set in front of it.

The President is an aging man, who looks like the life in politics has been good to him. His fixated smile is the result of the kind of training only politicians seem to get for it.

KRI

Welcome to Kl'tor. Forgive me for not standing up, but I've been on my feet all day.

TANITH

It's quite alright, Mr. President. Thank you for agreeing to see us in such short notice.

KRI

Nonsense. It's so rare that we get such extinguished guests from the Consortium, the pleasure is all mine. Please do sit down.

Tanith and Artesh sit down.

TANITH

You're flattering us, we're just regular officers.

KRI

May I offer you something? A drink, perhaps?

TANITH

No, thank you. I'm fine.

ARTESH

I wouldn't say no to Ridellian tea if you have any at hand.

KRI

Excellent.

President Kri presses a button on his desk.

KRI (CONT'D)

Could you bring a cup of Ridellian tea for my guest and a glass of brandy for myself, please.

RECEPTIONIST'S COMM VOICE

Certainly, Mr. President. Is that all?

Kri looks at Tanith again.

KRI

You are sure that you don't want anything, Commander?

TANITH

No, thank you.

KRI

As you wish.
(to comm)
That is all.

RECEPTIONIST'S COMM VOICE

I'll bring it in a minute.

Kri closes the channel.

TANITH

If you don't mind, I'd like to go right down to business.

KRI

Of course.

TANITH

I presume that you've heard about the incident on our border station Antares.

KRI

Indeed. Such a terrible turn of events, and right before the border opening. It's fortunate that nobody got hurt.

Tanith and Artesh exchange a confused look.

TANITH

Unfortunately we weren't that lucky. I'm sure you're aware that one of your transports was completely destroyed and the crew perished, save the one we picked up from an escape pod.

There is a quick crack in the President's smile, but he immediately covers that up.

The Receptionist comes in carrying the tea and brandy. She gives the mug to Artesh and puts the glass on Kri's desk. Kri doesn't touch it.

KRI

Thank you.

The Receptionist leaves.

KRI (CONT'D)

But of course I meant that it was fortunate that nobody on the station got hurt. I assure you that I was quite shocked to hear that the terrorists were on our transport and we have commenced an exhaustive investigation.

TANITH

May I inquire about your progress? Have you found out anything we should know?

KRI

We don't have anything concrete at this point of the investigation. But all evidence seems to point to a terrorist organization we've had trouble with before.

TANITH

What organization is that?

The President seems uncomfortable with the direction of the conversation.

KRI

It's simply a local group that has made occasional strikes around the planet.

TANITH

Do you know what their goals are?
Have they made any demands?

President grows more uncomfortable by the second and now has trouble hiding it.

KRI

We don't know exactly, but I'd expect it's about independence, honor, religion and the other usual stuff. I'm sure you know the drill.

TANITH

You mean you've had no contact with them?

Kri shifts in his chair, leans forward.

KRI

May I ask you a question, Commander?

TANITH

Of course.

KRI

What is it that you're trying to achieve here? I hope this isn't too rude to ask, but I was under the impression that you were sent here by Captain Baxter.

TANITH

Not exactly. We are formally serving under his command, but we were sent here by Admiral Calter.

The smile on Kri's face slowly vanishes.

KRI

I see.

He glances at the computer screen on his desk.

KRI (CONT'D)

I'm afraid that I have to cut our meeting short. I just realized that I have a previous engagement. I'm sure you understand.

TANITH

Just one last question, please. It won't take long.

KRI

Fine, but quickly.

TANITH

We've examined your trade shipments and found out that all of your trade is directed to Earth space. This is quite unusual, isn't it?

KRI

It isn't very common, but there's nothing wrong with it. Quite the opposite. We're a border world and it's been favorable for us to direct our trade to the other side of it.

TANITH

Even when the border was closed? I imagine it was quite hard to deal with all the restrictions.

Kri rises up from his chair and a phony smile appears on his face again. He starts to lead Tanith and Artesh out of the office.

KRI

Yes, well, we all manage somehow. Now, if you don't mind, I really have urgent matters to attend to.

Tanith stops at the opened door and shakes Kri's hand.

TANITH

Of course. Thank you for your time.

KRI

Not at all. Are you staying on Kl'tor for long?

TANITH

Just a few days. I'd like to look into some things before we leave.

KRI

Then please, enjoy your stay. And if you need any further assistance, don't hesitate to call any time.

ARTESH

Thank you for the tea.

KRI

My pleasure. Good day.

The President closes the door behind Artesh and Tanith. As soon as he's alone, the smile disappears.

EXT. KL'TOR - CITYSCAPE - EVENING

Establishing.

INT. HOTEL CORRIDOR - EVENING

Tanith and Artesh emerge from a regular elevator to a luxurious corridor as you'd expect from a five star hotel.

They look at the room numbers and start to advance down the corridor.

TANITH

I wonder why they only gave us one key. Do you think it'll work for both rooms?

ARTESH

Probably. I've never been in a hotel this fancy.

TANITH

It has only one number in it, though.

ARTESH

Perhaps the suite is divided into two separate apartments.

TANITH

That's got to be it. I think we're there.

They stop at a door. Artesh puts the key to the slot beside the door. The door opens.

COMPUTER VOICE

Welcome, Mr. & Mrs. Artesh.

Artesh and Tanith look at each other in horror. A large luxurious suite is revealed, perfect for a married couple. To top it off, an enormous double bed is placed in the middle of it.

They watch looks at the room in silence for a moment.

Then Artesh turns to Tanith.

ARTESH

You're sleeping on the floor.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT SEVEN

ACT EIGHT

FADE IN:

INT. SUITE - NIGHT

Tanith is working on a console as Artesh comes from the bathroom, looking revitalized.

He sits to a chair and starts to read a book. Tanith looks to him.

TANITH
How are you holding up?

ARTESH
Pretty well, I guess.

TANITH
Any trouble with being back?

Artesh shrugs.

ARTESH
I don't think so.

TANITH
What do you mean?

ARTESH
While I was in the shower, I realized that it's too soon for me to deal with this. I'm not ready. So I'm just a visitor, just like you. I don't have to deal with anything until the time is right. Does that make any sense?

TANITH
I think it does.

ARTESH
Are you making any progress?

Tanith turns back to the console.

TANITH
I think I am. At least I've broken a bunch of laws.

ARTESH
Say again?

TANITH
I broke into the government shipping logs.

Artesh comes to the console.

ARTESH

You did what?! How?

TANITH

Well, it helps that the esteemed President was logged into all of the government systems. I just needed to make a wireless scan when we were in the office to get his credential signature.

ARTESH

What the hell did you do that for? We could be in serious trouble if someone finds out about this. Are you sure nobody's tracking you?

TANITH

No.

ARTESH

Fantastic.

Tanith looks at Artesh for a moment, enjoying his discomfort. She smiles.

TANITH

So, you want to know what I found out?

Artesh sighs in resignation.

ARTESH

No, but you're going to tell me anyway.

TANITH

You bet I am. Turns out that the final destination logs for the transports are blocked in here as well. I'd need a separate password to get into those.

ARTESH

Nice to know that they at least protect some data over here.

TANITH

But I did find a lot of other data that gives me a pretty good idea of what's going on. You know, flight control reports, fuel vendor receipts and deep space tracking data, stuff like that. Turns out that the transports are not only directed to Earth territory, but they in fact have the same destination, even though they try

(MORE)

TANITH (CONT'D)
to hide it by using several routes.
Antares isn't the only border
station they've been using.

ARTESH
So where are they going?

TANITH
Sol.

ARTESH
So?

TANITH
So that means that Kl'tor isn't
only directing all of its export
to Earth space, but most likely
has just a single buyer. That
can't be good for the local economy.

ARTESH
I admit that it's very odd, but
that does it have anything to do
with anything?

TANITH
I want to talk to the President
again.

Tanith starts to work on the console.

ARTESH
What, now?

TANITH
Now.

ARTESH
It's kind of late for that.

TANITH
So? He said that we could call
any time.

ARTESH
You know that's just an expression.
I don't think he'll like this.

TANITH
And I don't like him. That makes
us even.

Tanith punches in the commands.

INT. PRESIDENTIAL BEDROOM - NIGHT

The luxurious bedroom is completely dark. Two figures are
sleeping soundly, one of them snoring loudly.

A CHIME rings out and the snoring ends violently. The chime rings again.

KRI
(muttering)
You've got to be kidding me.

Kri leans to activate a console right beside the bed. A presidential AIDE appears on the screen, quite nervous.

KRI (CONT'D)
This better be important!

AIDE
I'm sorry to wake you, Mr. President, but there's a call for you.

KRI
What?! Do you know what time it is? I'm not taking any calls.

AIDE
But, sir, the call is from the delegates from Antares. It says here that you gave direct orders to be notified about anything they do.

Kri's expression turns to stone. He does not reply.

AIDE (CONT'D)
Should I tell them to call again later or maybe arrange a meeting?

KRI
(quickly)
No.
(beat)
I'll take the call from my home office.

AIDE
Very well.

The console turns itself off as Kri gets up from the bed.

INT. SUITE - NIGHT

Tanith and Artesh are still waiting at the console. Then President Kri appears on the screen.

He is a bit of a mess, but he is back in his presidential posture, his static smile fixated on his face yet again.

TANITH
I'm terribly sorry to bother you at this hour, Mr. President.

It takes a few seconds for Kri to get back into his presidential posture, but his static smile appears again.

KRI

Not at all, Commander. How can I help?

TANITH

I'd like to ask you a few more questions about the terrorist.

KRI

I believe I already told you all I know, Commander.

TANITH

Maybe, but there was a couple of things that I'd like to clear up, if you don't mind.

KRI

Very well.

TANITH

Do you have any idea why the attack was targeted at Antares? You said they've only been working on Kl'tor up to this point.

KRI

I really can't speculate. I'm sure you know that there is little logic to terrorist activities in general. It's probably just a reaction to the border opening.

TANITH

I disagree. Terrorists always have a goal. They want something so badly that they're willing to go to extreme measures to get their message heard. That's why they usually select their targets very carefully.

The smile on Kri's face starts to slowly vanish again.

KRI

That is your opinion, Commander.

TANITH

It's an observation, Mr. President. But I also found an interesting fact about these cargo ships.

KRI

And what would that be?

TANITH

I already knew that your entire export is directed at Earth territory, but I was surprised to find that all of it is going to Sol. Why is that?

Now Kri's smile vanishes completely.

KRI

How did you happen to come across this information?

TANITH

Let's just say that it was easier than I thought. I also found that Antares is the border station that you've been using most often, so it's really hard for me to believe that it was just a random decision to target it.

KRI

Commander, I'm trying to be as cooperative as I can, but I'm afraid these are matters of national security and aren't really any of your business.

TANITH

It is my business when it compromises the security of my station! I want to know all you know about these terrorists, now! I have a full security clearance and the treaty between our governments clearly dictate that you can't withhold any information that might compromise our security!

KRI

I'm sorry, but I can't give you any more information right now!

TANITH

Then tell me why are all the cargo ships going to the same place?! Since when has it even been plausible for an entire planet to deal with just a single trade partner?

KRI

That is enough, Commander! We are an independent government and how we use our own natural resources is none of your concern! Interplanetary Corporation has simply given us the best deal!

Tanith halts as the pieces of the puzzle fit together all of a sudden.

TANITH

Did you say the Interplanetary Corporation?

Kri looks quite annoyed and distraught, clearly knows he's said too much.

KRI

Look, if you insist on this line of questioning, I suggest you turn to General Kroshtam. She's in charge of our internal security, so she can give you more information about the terrorist activities. I'll even arrange the meeting for you, but please leave me alone for the night. Good night!

The line shuts off before Tanith can say anything. She looks at the blank screen for a moment.

ARTESH

What's the Interplanetary Corporation?

TANITH

It's a refinement company that processes all sorts of materials to usable forms, most often for power generators and weapons.

ARTESH

So what's the big deal?

TANITH

The big deal is that it was founded by Tetsuzo Baxter. The father of Admiral Baxter.

ARTESH

How the heck do you know all this?

TANITH

Well, I dug a little into the past of our good Captain before we left.

ARTESH

I thought that the Admiralty aren't allowed to have connections to private industries.

TANITH

They aren't. But nothing prevents you from being a relative to someone.

(MORE)

TANITH (CONT'D)

You know, maybe this is why Captain Baxter was assigned to Antares. He's not interested in commanding a civilian station, I bet he's there to ensure that the shipments get through.

ARTESH

I don't know. I know that all of this looks pretty weird, but doesn't the President have a point? Aren't they free to trade with anybody they want?

TANITH

Yes, but when every single cargo container has the same address on it, it can't be a healthy economy and it can't be good for the people. Who decides all of this? Where is the private industry? I'm sure they do have a great deal, but I'm also pretty sure that only a select few actually benefit from it.

ARTESH

Ok, that's a theory. Now where's the proof?

TANITH

That's what we're here to find. And we better hurry, because I'm sure that once Admiral Baxter's investigators turn up, they'll bury all of it.

ARTESH

So what's the plan?

Tanith considers for a moment.

TANITH

I don't have one. But I need to call Antares.

EXT. SPACE - ANTARES STATION

Establishing.

INT. ANTARES - MEDICAL CENTER

Wendy and Lisa are beside the bed of the unconscious Ashtar prisoner. He has been restrained to the bed, but he is blissfully unaware of his surroundings. The bed has been isolated from the rest of the medical ward with screens.

Lisa is checking his vital signs, using various equipment when Baxter walks in.

BAXTER

Is everything as it should be?

LISA

Nothing out of the ordinary. It's safe to keep him in this condition for now.

BAXTER

Good. I arranged a warship to pick him up tomorrow ahead of schedule, just in case. They'll decide when to wake him up.

LISA

I'll make the arrangements for his transfer.

WENDY

Has headquarters made any progress identifying him?

BAXTER

Not as far as I know. It's really not our concern anyway.

WENDY

You know, I could make some checks pretty easily and maybe run it by the Ashtar officials...

BAXTER

(interrupts)

No. This investigation has been officially transferred out of our jurisdiction. I don't want you to waste any of our scarce resources.

WENDY

All right, if you say so.

BAXTER

I'll leave you to it, then.

Lisa nods at Baxter as he takes his leave. They look at him go and make sure he's actually gone before Lisa puts down the instruments.

LISA

So, you want to go through with it?

Wendy sighs.

WENDY

I really don't know.

LISA

Well, it has to be pretty soon.

WENDY

I know.

(beat)

If he finds out, this could be considered mutiny.

Lisa shrugs.

LISA

Hasn't stopped me before.

WENDY

So you think we should do it?

LISA

We'll need someone to distract him.

WENDY

Larry?

LISA

No, it's too obvious. Captain's not dumb, you know.

WENDY

Right. So we need someone he doesn't really know all that well. Someone who could get close to him without rousing suspicion, but who would still be willing to help us.

LISA

Right.

A sly smile appears on Wendy.

WENDY

I think I know just the guy.

INT. ANTARES - MESS HALL

Malcolm Scott is seated at a table in the corner. Severely hung over, he doesn't pay any attention to his surroundings as he quietly consumes a bowl of soup.

Suddenly, a shadow falls on him. He looks up to see Wendy towering over him.

WENDY

We need your help.

EXT. KL'TOR - CITYSCAPE - DAY

Establishing.

INT. KROSHTAM'S OFFICE - DAY

General Kroshtam's office is pretty similar in design to President Artesh's. However, the room is larger and there are more seats around. The walls are decorated with pictures and medals.

GENERAL KROSHTAM herself is tall in stature and is quite an impressive sight in her uniform. She appears to be in her sixties but has taken the age with dignity. Her impatient nature is reflected from her every gesture. She does not like to waste time.

An assistant shows Artesh and Tanith in the room. Kroshtam stands to greet them. They shake hands.

TANITH

I appreciate for meeting us on such a short notice, General.

Kroshtam doesn't smile or seem too pleased about the meeting, but remains very proper.

KROSHTAM

Of course. Could we get this over with as soon as possible? I have a war to prepare.

Tanith is sitting down, but halts as she hears this. She just stares at the General, who is already seated.

KROSHTAM (CONT'D)

(stoic)

I was joking. Feel free to sit down.

They do.

KROSHTAM (CONT'D)

You wanted to know more about the terrorists?

TANITH

Yes. I really haven't been properly briefed about the situation. Are we dealing with a single terrorist organization or several?

KROSHTAM

That is still under investigation.

TANITH

I thought that you've been dealing with the problem for quite a while now.

KROSHTAM

We have.

(MORE)

KROSHTAM (CONT'D)

But it is hard to track the movements of these groups. We're not sure if they work under the same leadership or individually.

TANITH

Do you know how they get their funding?

KROSHTAM

That is under investigation as well.

TANITH

Really? Or maybe you just don't want to tell me.

KROSHTAM

Are you accusing me of something?

TANITH

Not really. I'm just getting a little frustrated by the lack of cooperation. Is there anything that you actually can tell me?

KROSHTAM

Most of their attacks target the civilian infrastructure, but very rarely result in casualties. They often use outdated technology to thwart our scans, much like in the case of the attack at your station. We've updated our databases and widened our scans as much as possible, but they seem to be a step ahead of us.

TANITH

Is there a pattern to the attacks?

It is apparent that the General is growing more and more impatient at the questions.

KROSHTAM

None that we've found.

TANITH

And you have no idea what their aims are?

KROSHTAM

No. We haven't been in any contact with them and they've made no public announcements.

TANITH

That is very strange. Why do you think that is?

KROSHTAM

I really can't say.

TANITH

I read from media reports that the attacks have been targeted mainly at space ports, fuel depots and mines. Wouldn't that suggest that they're trying to disrupt the export industry?

KROSHTAM

Commander, please. This is Kl'tor. You can spit on the street and you'll disrupt the export.

TANITH

Have you had any military or police operations against the terrorists? I think I read that...

KROSHTAM

(interrupts)

Look, Commander Yann, I've been at this job for over ten years and I really don't appreciate you marching in here questioning my ability to do it. We have done all there is to do and we are making progress. That is all you need to know.

TANITH

I assure you that it wasn't my intention to...

Kroshtam stands, Tanith and Artesh follow the lead.

KROSHTAM

(interrupts)

I'm sure it wasn't, but that's what you did. I'm afraid I can't help you any further. I really have other duties to attend to.

She starts to lead them to the door.

TANITH

We appreciate your time, General. Just one last thing. Would it be possible to get a list of all the recorded attacks?

KROSHTAM

That might be extremely difficult. It's highly classified.

TANITH

I understand, but I was wondering
if...

KROSHTAM

(interrupts)

I'll see what I can do. Goodbye.

Kroshtam shuts the door before Tanith can answer. She sighs with irritation as she walks back to her desk.

She sits down and starts to go through the papers on her desk. After a few moments, a computer console BLEEPs at the desk.

She immediately turns to the console and reads something from the screen. For the first time, she smiles.

She turns around to another console on the wall behind the desk. She taps in a few commands.

President Kri appears on the screen.

KROSHTAM (CONT'D)

We got them.

KRI

Excellent. I'll inform the others.

The screen turns off. The General turns back to her desks and continues going through the papers as if nothing had happened.

INT. STORAGE SPACE - DAY

The storage cavern is light dimly with a blue tint. It houses mostly featureless containers and other ordinary items. It doesn't appear to be in any way remarkable or even interesting.

But at the back of the cavern, two travel pods slowly emerge from a tube. They settle to the floor.

The front windows reveal that there are still passengers inside. Tanith and Artesh are laying in the pods, completely motionless.

At their unconscious faces...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT EIGHT

TO BE CONTINUED...