

FADE IN:

INT. SCION HALL - DAY

A tall, windowless room made out of concrete and metal.

A gunmetal array of three circular panels are linked together on the floor, large conduits linking them to the walls.

A different hologram floats above each panel.

VESPER, the green hologram, stands firm, hands drawn behind her back with flowing cloth obscuring her aging body. Her eyes are severe and accentuating the wrinkles above her cheeks.

MARCUS, the red hologram, snarls behind crossed arms and reflective cuff-links. From behind a tri-cornered hat and powdered wig, his beady eyes dart around the room.

Finally, SPARK, the orange hologram, stands about two feet behind his projector, staring off at the wall. A short buzz cut pokes out his two-tone hoodie, hands are perched firmly in paint-stained jeans.

The silence has grown awkward.

VESPER

We mustn't let fear guide our
actions. I understand-

MARCUS

(interrupting)

Do you? Do you understand because I
don't think so.

VESPER

Marcus, we've all know what hap-

Marcus points a trembling finger towards her projection.

MARCUS

But you weren't there. You never
had to watch a Volaar battle
cruiser decimate an entire city.
You never witness it, the
decimation, the destruction. How
far a people must be pushed to even
consider destroying their own home.
Trust me, diplomacy means nothing
to an opponent seeking your death.

Vesper takes another moment to let the room settle.

VESPER

But surely Marcus, the Endari
deserve to be judged by their own
actions, not ghosts from our past.

MARCUS

That may be. They may not be a
threat. But I will always do
everything in my power to ensure we
never go down that path again.

VESPER

Spark? What do you think?

Marcus scoffs and turns away.

MARCUS

And we entrust our future to the
boy.

Spark looks between the two.

SPARK

If we aid the Endari, they may
unite all Augeum tribes under one
banner. Making them powerful
allies.

Vesper nods.

MARCUS

Powerful, yes. Allies only until
they aren't. We mustn't give them a
knife and be surprised when they
choose to slit our throats with it.

SPARK

And you suggest we ally with the
Enclave instead.

MARCUS

The Endari may well unite the
Augeum without our help. If that's
the case, the Enclave will not
stand idly by.

SPARK

You don't wish to make ourselves a
target.

MARCUS

Not only that. There is a reason
the Nightlings have survived
centuries of war against the Aurem.

He reaches into thin air and pulls out a brass-topped cane. With a snap, he locks it in the crevasse of his armpit.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Enclave technology is vastly superior and their relationship with the Posari is invaluable. If we can get the Enclave and the Commonwealth on our side, we can easily quell any threat the Collective may pose.

VESPER

(snide)

Or maybe just start another System war.

MARCUS

War is inevitable.

VESPER

To a general maybe. But peace and trade are more than just interludes to fighting, Marcus. These are tools for building strong nations, ones not built on fear and which don't rely on conquest or sabotage.

MARCUS

Well, Vesper, I pray your peace and trade serve you well when an Endari battle armada hovers over Riande. Maybe they'll accept your diplomacy then.

Marcus and Vesper each compose themselves.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

What say you boy?

VESPER

Yes, Spark. You'll have the deciding vote here. Where do you stand?

He stares back at the wall.

SPARK

I'll need time.

MARCUS

Don't think too long boy. I can hear the cruisers roaring up their engines now.

VESPER
(chastising)
Marcus.
(to Spark)
Take your time, dear, and consider
it well. Many lives rest in the
balance.

INT. SPARK'S STUDIO - DAY

The iridescent glow of Spark's pupils flick on.

He disconnects a small cord jutting out from his right temple. It retracts into a compartment on the chair which slides backwards into the wall.

The studio used to be an average loft. There is no bed. The kitchen and bathroom are both overtaken with art supplies and filled canvases.

He walks over to the balcony and stares at the cityscape.

SUPER: BABEL, RIANDE, LEONIS II System
SUPER: Year 427 A.V.

Flying cars fill the air and lush green wilderness can be seen over the city walls.

On the streets below, humans and machines shuffles past one another going about their busy lives.

The door opens and ADAM, a skinny man with graying brown hair, enters.

He crosses his hands in the middle of the room.

SPARK
What can I do for you?

Adam approaches the balcony.

ADAM
(gravelly)
The Council wishes to know...

He grabs a tissue from his pocket and coughs.

ADAM (CONT'D)
Pardon me, half the family is sick.
Anyway, the Council wishes to know
if the Scions have reached a
decision.

Spark laughs.

SPARK

They have made their decisions and it is up to me to make mine. Yet again, our future rests in my hands.

He stares down at his palms.

ADAM

I imagine that's the reason for a third Scion. To serve as tiebreaker and end their constant deadlocks. Although I doubt that makes you feel any better.

SPARK

Feeling is a luxury we A-Cogs do not have.

He grabs the tissue from Adam's hand.

SPARK (CONT'D)

Sickness, happiness, embarrassment. Even anger, jealousy, fear. From the day I was created to this very moment now, nothing has changed within me.

ADAM

Some would call that a blessing.

SPARK

A blessing would require a soul, which I don't think is an option at the factory.

They share a laugh.

ADAM

You say that but I think you're more human than you imagine.

He faces the paintings on the wall.

ADAM (CONT'D)

They say art originates from the soul. These images. They come from somewhere.

He walks up and touches one of the paintings.

ADAM (CONT'D)

We still don't fully understand the A-Cog brain. Despite what some may say, I believe somewhere in there, beneath the ones and zeroes, something lives. Makes sense to me at least.

SPARK

Thank you, Councilor. Still, this decision carries weight and ramifications. What would a "human" thing to do?

Adam contemplates and smiles.

ADAM

Ask for help. I have someone who I've always consulted during difficult times. He may be able to help you.

Spark stares back at the city as the sunsets.

[Sequence 2]

EXT. THE PIT - NIGHT

SUPER: SYONIS, COMORO, LEONIS II

The open-air stadium howls with cheers and jeers.

ARENA

In the center, a sand pit with two gladiators, an Aurem and a Nightling, battling to the death.

Between the pit and the crowd sits the Emperor's box. Seated inside are the following:

EMPEROR POOSUS: Aurem, large even by Aurem standards, wearing ceremonial silver-plated armor and a skull-crown with spikes jutting through the top.

ENYOK BARLOW: Aurem, wearing fine robes with a nervous look on his unmarked face.

ELDRIC WEEMES: Human, 60s, bald with white beard, cream colored tuxedo.

ALEC-JON KERBEROS: A-Cog, 30s, clean-shaven and chestnut spiky hair.

Alec-Jon is scanning the fight. His optics zoom in to capture every detail.

The Nightling jabs the Aurem with it's spear.

The Aurem swings a three-headed flail, the Nightling rolls to the side. His leg is nailed, he's wounded.

Alec-Jon excuses himself from the box and heads to the arena concourse, Weemes watching him.

MAIN CONCOURSE

The darkened hall is filled with a few vendors barely tending to their shops focusing instead on the battle.

Weemes finds Alec-Jon sitting on a bench, his hands folding and unfolding an old butterfly knife with superhuman speed.

WEEMES

Quite barbaric, you must think.

ALEC-JON

I don't know how you can stomach it.

Weemes sits beside the A-Cog.

WEEMES

What's bothering you?

Alec-Jon stops flicking.

ALEC-JON

Poosus is an animal. If he doesn't get his way tomorrow...
(gesturing towards the arena)
what's to stop him from throwing us in there.

WEEMES

(smirking)
Ye of little faith, Alec-Jon.

ALEC-JON

I have faith in us. Faith in you to find the best solution. I don't have faith in some Augeum warlord not to bite the hand that feeds him. It's what they do.

WEEMES

The Augeum may have different needs than us but they have needs just the same. If we take the time to learn those needs, we may have a chance to make a deal work.

The arena starts to roar, louder than before.

ARENA

Weemes and Alec-Jon return to their seats.

EMPEROR POOSUS

Amazing finish. In all of my years..

In the pit, the Aurem has the Nightling pinned underneath it's gigantic foot, crushing it's pelvis and thighs. Meanwhile, the Nightling has thrust the spear through the eye-socket of the Aurem. They both seem to wither in place, frozen in time as life fades from them both.

EMPEROR POOSUS (CONT'D)

(into a microphone)

It appears we have a double victory. What an exciting battle!

The other Aurem, Enyok Barlow, turns to Weemes.

BARLOW

Let's be done with this.

WEEMES

Patience, Ambassador. We mustn't rush their customs.

BARLOW

The Collective doesn't care about some back-world tyrant's feelings.
(leaning in closer)
We need that ore.

Emperor Poosus's eyes turn up as he overhears this.

EMPEROR POOSUS

Well, Collectivizer and Coalition-scum, enough games. Tomorrow we meet at the palace, get to business.

WEEMES

Excellent.

Alec-Jon watches, concerned.

INT. EMPEROR'S PALACE - DAY

MEETING HALL

A large stone dome with holes in the top. The air is filled with smoke from torches on the walls.

The Emperor sits in a polished metal chair, gigantic palms crossed in his lap, in front of a round metal table.

Barlow sits across from him, eyeing the room.

Edged between them is Weemes.

Alec-Jon standing up tall near the door.

WEEMES

I hope you don't mind if Alec-Jon records this. In old age my memory is spotty and he helps me keep my details straight.

The two Aurem's nod.

BARLOW

So, where shall we begin?

WEEMES

Well, let's start with the basics.

EMPEROR POOSUS

Endari wish to use us, mine our ore and in return they offer us toys and trinkets.

BARLOW

This is first grade firearms technology. Hardly trinkets.

EMPEROR POOSUS

We outgun and outnumber the other tribes. They have not contested us for years. The only threat posed to our people is your "Collective" and you'd never give us advantage over yourselves. You need our metal and you offer useless firecrackers in exchange. Hah. If you really want to trade, why not the designs to a battle cruiser.

Barlow scoffs.

BARLOW

In your dreams. You brutes couldn't handle technology on that level. You'd blow yourselves up.

EMPEROR POOSUS

Someone would be blown up, certainly.

WEEMES

Alright, alright. Let's calm a moment.

BARLOW

Listen, Weemes. The Collective trusts that you'll be impartial which is why we accepted his request to have you mediate. But know that the Endari will not have their time wasted or time kindly to threats.

WEEMES

Like you said, the Emperor requested that I mediate. To me that shows someone willing to negotiate.

EMPEROR POOSUS

But we have other ways to get what we want if need be.

Poosus bares his large fangs.

BARLOW

Ah, I'd like to see that face when it's staring down an orbital ion strike. Won't be so pretty then.

EMPEROR POOSUS

(jumping on the table)

I can make you not pretty now!

Barlow rises and assumes a defensive stance.

Alec-Jon rushes to Weemes's side to block him from danger.

WEEMES

Calm!

The two Aurem panting, staring at each other.

[Sequence 3]

EXT. EMPEROR'S PALACE - DAY

PALACE OUTPOST

An Aurem is sleeping at his post, overlooking the wall.

Something wakes him.

He looks over the wall and around the rampart.

Nothing. He closes his eyes again.

A large frigate grazes the wall, flying right over him. The shockwave knocks his out of his chair.

COURTYARD

We see the Aurem running slowly, wheezing heavily.

MEETING HALL

The Emperor and Ambassador are at each others throats literally with Alec-Jon and the Weemes trying to pry them apart.

A loud knock comes from the door.

Another knock.

Finally, the door falls down with the AUREM GUARD laying on top of it.

He gets up in a panic.

AUREM GUARD

My liege! Alert, alert! Intruder alert!

As he says this a shadow blocks the holes above the dome roof, darkening the room.

COURTYARD

Everyone assembles outside as a small frigate lands in the courtyard across from the meeting hall. They all stare in disbelief.

The ramp lowers.

Out walks two Coalition naval officers. CMDR. WILKINS (50s, gray, hardass) and LT. RUBY CHO (30s, black hair with streak of purple).

Wilkins strides forward towards Weemes while Cho follows close behind, eyes darting to the palace guards rushing to surround them.

WILKINS
Eldric Weemes?

Alec-Jon and Weemes exchange glances.

WEEMES
Yes.

WILKINS
Commander Wilkins, this is
Lieutenant Cho. You've been
summoned by the Scion council.
We're here to escort you to them
immediately.

WEEMES
I'm sorry?

WILKINS
We can explain on the ship, sir.
Gather your things quickly. We have
a deadline.

Weemes turns to Alec-Jon.

ALEC-JON
The Scion Council wishes to see
you. What an honor.

WEEMES
An honor indeed.

He turns to face the dumbstruck Emperor and the Ambassador.

WEEMES (CONT'D)
It seems as if I am urgently needed
at home.

POOSUS
They tell me Weemes is a man of his
word. Must be lies.

BARLOW
This is most unsatisfactory Mr.
Weemes. The Collective will not be
pleased to have this negotiation
fail, especially because you have
"errands" to run.

WEEMES

But fail it shall not. I leave you
in the best of hands.

He throws a hand around Alec-Jon.

WEEMES (CONT'D)

Alec-Jon will take of these
negotiations in my stead. I trust
him without equivocation and I hope
you show him the same respect
you've shown me.

Alec-Jon twists his neck and leans into Eldric's ear.

ALEC-JON

(whispering)

Sir, I don't think this is a good
idea.

WEEMES

It most certainly is not. But I
have faith in you. Remember what I
taught you and you will excel.

ALEC-JON

I doubt it, sir.

WEEMES

Consider this. If you fail, Poosus
will probably have everyone killed.
So believe in yourself. You have
nothing to lose and everything to
gain from it.

Poosus approaches Barlow with one of the rifles of his
guards.

The Lieutenant rests her hand on her pistol, watching the
situation closely.

POOSUS

No Weemes, no deal.

Barlow backs away, hands up.

WEEMES

I assure your Emperor, that is not
necessary. Everyone can still come
away from this a winner. Just trust
me.

Poosus stares down the sights and then back to Weemes.

POOSUS

Fine.

He approaches Weemes.

POOSUS (CONT'D)

But if your machine tries to cheat
me. I'll crush him, the
Collectivizer and I'll track you
down and crush you.

Poosus leaves, nudging Alec-Jon out of the way as he walks
back into the palace.

Ambassador Barlow rises to his feet and dusts himself off,
trying to play it off.

Alec-Jon looks at the ship's crew and back at Weemes.

ALEC-JON

I can't do this.

WEEMES

For both of our sakes, I hope you
are wrong.

The guards in the courtyard disperse and Lt. Cho holsters her
sidearm.

[Sequence 4]

INT. C.S.S. STORMWIND - NIGHT

CAFETERIA

Inside a Nautilus-class battle cruiser.

SGT. NEFFARI ONYX (40s) and CORP. BLAKE (30s, A-Cog) are
sitting at a table.

Neffari eats.

Blake monitors the room.

ONYX

You ever think about life outside
of the forces?

BLAKE

I'm sorry?

ONYX

I don't know. I was just thinking...

She twirls an empty cup in her hand.

ONYX (CONT'D)

Back when I was a kid, 6 or 7, my
parents took us to go see this
troupe in Millennium City.

Blake listens with a blank expression.

ONYX (CONT'D)

The way they moved. I swore when I
grew up I would be a dancer. I
would move like that and make other
people feel what I had felt that
day.

Blake turns his head.

ONYX (CONT'D)

I wanted that. So bad. I convinced
my parents to pay for dance
lessons. I did all the school
plays. I got accepted into an art
school where I would learn from the
best dancers. And then Harvest got
glazed and I got conscripted, the
rest is history.

BLAKE

Your point, ma'am?

ONYX

Sometimes I wonder what life
would've been like if I had become
a dancer.

BLAKE

The war ended over a decade ago.
You could still become one.

ONYX

Yeah, I suppose. But my entire
adult life has revolved around
this. All of my friends, my family.
My world revolves around the
Hellknights. I wouldn't know how to
begin anything else.

BLAKE

I believe it begins with a choice.

Onyx raises an eyebrow.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Unlike you, I was constructed in a factory. My personality generated by a seed template created by another A-Cog. I was determined to be a suitable combat model and given that designation upon activation. I've never had any alternative presented. Even the thought of a life outside of this seems surreal. Combat unit is literally etched into my command module. But even then, I know that I have a choice. I serve not for those reasons. I serve because the men and woman and A-Cogs who serve beside me. I serve because I can. But that's my choice.

Onyx nods.

ONYX

You're pretty wise for a bucket of bolts.

The A-Cog smiles.

Klaxons start firing overhead.

An automated voice calls everyone to their battle stations.

Onyx and Blake look at each other.

BLAKE

I believe our official role in a combat scenario is to run-and-hide.

ONYX

Yeah, where's the fun in that.

BRIDGE

Sgt. Onyx enters the darkness of the bridge.

The large viewport reveals a snow-laden planet made of ice and metal.

A suited ADMIRAL addresses her as she walks into the room.

ADMIRAL

Sgt. Onyx, glad you're here. My men and I are having a bit of a discussion.

ONYX
In the middle of combat?

ADMIRAL
Admittedly, didn't mean to alarm
anyone but protocol must be
followed.

He turns to one of the other officers.

ADMIRAL (CONT'D)
Bring it up.
(to Onyx)
We found the source of the signals.

A real-time feed pulls up from the surface of the planet. It
shows a large encampment built around what appears to be
mining equipment.

ONYX
Have you identified them?

The Admiral takes a deep breath.

The image zooms in and revealing a red and white circular
flag.

Underneath it stands an armed sentry with purple skin and a
large crest in the crown of his head.

ONYX (CONT'D)
Lord, is that...

ADMIRAL
Correct. We've identified the flag,
the camp, the technology and the
operators. Volaar.

ONYX
Shit. Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit.

ADMIRAL
Correct.

ONYX
I don't know about Naval engagement
but with us, the standing orders
with Volaar are shoot on sight.

ADMIRAL
Likewise.

ONYX
Have you reported this to Command.

ADMIRAL

The gravity well surrounding this world is inundated with ionized radiation which disrupt our long-range comms. But we're preparing comms to relay once we return to clear space.

ONYX

So what's the debate?

ADMIRAL

No debate. Just pondering.

He walks closer to the viewport and stares at the image.

ADMIRAL (CONT'D)

None of us are old enough to remember the Volaar invasion. In fact, I wager this is the first time our two species have encountered each other in over four centuries.

He turns to Onyx.

ADMIRAL (CONT'D)

In all of my years of service, I've never been more conflicted about an order than the one I must issue now.

Onyx clenches her jaw.

ONYX

Protocol must be followed, sir.

ADMIRAL

Lord, I know. And I don't regret it. But to think, here we are so close to our race's mortal enemies. The destroyers of our homeworld. The sins of the father carry on. May God have mercy on us all.

He nods to one of the officers on deck who presses a button.

The ship's ion cannon fires a streak of white energy towards the planet.

The screen flashes white.

The mining camp has been reduced to a crater surrounded by the remains of a some burning fortifications and buildings.

He takes a deep breath.

ADMIRAL (CONT'D)
You may wish to prepare your team,
Sergeant. We're gonna need boots on
the ground for recon and intel.

ONYX
Indeed, Admiral.

ADMIRAL
And, remember, Onyx. They took our
home from us. Whatever you find
down there, remember that.

Onyx leaves the Admiral to stare stoically at his screen.

[Add Scene: Volaar soldiers and their families, working at the camp, enjoying themselves. A child kneels down to pick up their dropped doll while their mother prepares a meal. An ion beam appears in the sky as she stands up.]

[Sequence 5]

INT. SYONIS - NIGHT

[Modify: Poosus announces plans to execute Barlow if they do not agree to terms by tomorrow. Alec-Jon uses the water purification plant as a tool to buy Poosus's patience.]

CENTRAL BOULEVARD

Syonis is an small capital city.

The houses are rustic and the technology is outdated by Coalition standards. This is juxtaposed by stunning monuments and ornate facades of clean, crafted metal.

A family of burly Aurem watch Alec-Jon as he passes down the street. One of them lifts a flap of clothing, revealing 6 dangling testicles.

Alec-Jon averts his eyes as he hears several rising grunts which he can only take to be Aurem laughter.

He sits on a bench underneath a glowing street-lamp.

He reaches into his skin and pulls a small rod from in front of his ear.

Twisting the rod down from it's base, a small lens folds out and lights up.

INT. C.S.S. SORAKI - NIGHT

WEEMES'S CABIN

Eldric is laying in bed staring up at the ceiling.

He hears a chime.

He walks over to the communication panel across the room.

Waving it open, he seems Alec-Jon's warmly lit face.

INTERCUT - VIDEO CONVERSATION

ALEC-JON

Sir, how glad am I to reach you.
All is well on your journey, I
hope.

WEEMES

Indeed it has been, my boy.

They share a brief silence.

WEEMES (CONT'D)

They tell me this is one of the
fastest ships in the galaxy and we
should expect to arrive within a
few mordents.

ALEC-JON

Amazing. How has the crew been?

WEEMES

I've yet to be introduced to anyone
aside from the two officers we met.
The Lieutenant says I'll be
required to stay in my room until
she can my access has been cleared
with Naval Intelligence. So, for
now, it would seem I'm a prisoner.
But, alas, the accommodations
aren't worthy of complaint.

He waves around the room.

WEEMES (CONT'D)

What about yourself, Alec-Jon? How
are the negotiations going?

Alec-Jon looks away.

ALEC-JON

How do you do it? How do you make them listen to you? How do you make them interested in your proposals?

Weemes chuckles.

WEEMES

A fundamental law of human, and it would seem alien, interest is this: if you want someone to pay attention, talk about their favorite topic.

Alec-Jon turns up an eyebrow.

WEEMES (CONT'D)

Themselves. Discuss their problems, their needs, their desires and you can captivate even the most hostile audience.

ALEC-JON

But how can I learn their needs if they refuse to speak of them? The Collective would never trust an outsider with details of their weaknesses. And Poosus is so prideful, he would be loathe to admit such a weakness.

WEEMES

Then don't ask him. Ask those around him. Better yet, use your own eyes and look around him. Place yourself in the mind of a Augeum warlord and his people. What would you want? What would you need?

Alec-Jon nods.

WEEMES'S CABIN

The door slides open.

Lt. Cho walks in, looking tired.

CHO

The Commander...

She notices the video conference and pauses.

WEEMES

It would seem I have to go.

ALEC-JON

(on monitor)

Thank you. As always, Alderman,
you've been a great help to me.

WEEMES

Remember, my son. Believe. Believe
in hope. And one believe in
yourself, as I believe in you.

Alec-Jon nods.

The connection is closed.

Weemes turns to the Lieutenant.

CHO

Sorry to interrupt, sir.

WEEMES

Think nothing of it, dear. You'll
pardon an old man for being crass
but when was the last time you
rested, dearie?

Cho laughs.

CHO

Didn't mean to eavesdrop but I
noticed he called you Alderman?

WEEMES

Indeed.

CHO

They didn't tell us you were a
member of the Star Council?

WEEMES

That was ages ago, probably before
you could even walk.

CHO

I had no idea, sir.

WEEMES

For some that was half a lifetime
away. For some, a full lifetime.

CHO

Well, Alderman, I just came to tell
you that you've been cleared for
level 1 access to the ship's
facilities.

(MORE)

CHO (CONT'D)

Mess hall, the lounge and observation. The bridge, barracks, armory and weapons bay are off-limits without supervision, obviously.

WEEMES

(with a smile)

I doubt I'll be needing anything from the armory, thank you.

She smiles.

WEEMES (CONT'D)

So, I hear this ship is quite extraordinary. To be able to make the trek in such a short period of time...I didn't think we had ships that fast.

CHO

The Soraki is state-of-the-art and beyond bleeding edge. There are some things I can show you but others...

She looks down.

CHO (CONT'D)

Would you like a tour?

Weemes smiles and nods.

EXT. SYONIS - NIGHT

PARK

Alec-Jon people watches from the same bench.

He notices the babbling of a small stream.

He stands and looks off the stone-faced bridge overhanging the water.

It crests underneath him and leads off towards a distant river which he can hear but lies obscured by the jungle.

His eyes catch a reflection and zooms in.

A vendor he passed earlier is capturing water from the stream in a small contraption being held on a hovering platform.

It appears to be a water distiller.

Alec-Jon zooms in on the muck in the flask. It's black as tar.

Alec-Jon returns to his normal vision and stares for a moment, contemplating.

He then takes off back towards the large palace in the background.

INT. EMPEROR'S PALACE - DAY

COURTYARD

Alec-Jon catches the Emperor leaving his quarters.

ALEC-JON

Water!

Poosus stops in his tracks, surprised by his tone.

His guards grip their weapons.

ALEC-JON (CONT'D)

I don't know why I didn't realize it.

Poosus watches him, confused.

ALEC-JON (CONT'D)

The metals from the ore. The very thing that makes your planet valuable is the thing that makes it unsustainable.

Poosus looks around.

His guards calm down.

POOSUS

Aurem physiology strong. Stronger than weak human. But still. Without good water, Aurem no good.

ALEC-JON

I've been authorized to provide water sanitization designs.

POOSUS

In exchange for?

ALEC-JON

In exchange for patience. Patience and trust as we move forward.

(MORE)

ALEC-JON (CONT'D)

We all want to come away from this deal with something. I ask that you remain patient with the Endari and myself. Do we have a deal?

POOSUS

Deal? No deal until plans in hand.

ALEC-JON

I'll do you one better. Coalition is sending a portable decontamination plant as we speak. It will be here in a few days. You can test it for yourself.

POOSUS

If that true, you will have trust. Until then, we wait.

He turns to a guard.

POOSUS (CONT'D)

Tell Collectivizer we don't negotiate today. Human scum may have saved his life.

Alec-Jon smiles.

[Sequence 6]

[Modify: Show the crew being overworked.]

INT. C.S.S. SORAKI - NIGHT

CREW KITCHEN

Cho is showing Weemes around.

CHO

NARA, the ship's internal Cognizance, dispenses meals throughout the day but help yourself to the cupboards at anytime.

WEEMES

Lieutenant, you've been so gracious. And I must say, in all of my years, I've seen few so enthusiastic about their work as you are.

Cho smiles and relaxes a bit.

CHO

Pop hated ships growing up. He said if Man were meant to fly, we'd have wings. He about lost it when I told him I enlisted.

She looks around the compartment with glee.

CHO (CONT'D)

I've always loved ships. I used to sit at the port and watch them take off and land all day. At six years old, I knew one day I'd explore the galaxy in one.

WEEMES

How precocious.

CHO

I'm doing it, aren't I?

WEEMES

Indeed.

Cho smiles.

The disembodied voice of the NARA chimes in over the speakers.

NARA (V.O.)

*Command to the Bridge. Repeat.
Command to the Bridge.*

Cho grimaces.

CHO

Wilkins is off-cycle. I'm up.

COMMAND DECK

Cho and Weemes walk into the dimly lit room.

Empty space fills the viewport.

All stations lie empty except for two junior officers, monitoring different stations.

An ENSIGN with bags under his eyes looks up at her from the navigation terminal.

ENSIGN

Officer Cho, some kind of anomaly on the slipstream sensors, ma'am.

CHO
Pull it up.

A 3D overlay appears to show a circular rift with lights dispersing from it in a spiral pattern.

CHO (CONT'D)
What is it?

ENSIGN
No idea, ma'am. Doesn't match any
of the markers of known
interstellar phenomena.

CHO
Are we on a course for collision?

ENSIGN
No ma'am. We're already passing it.

CHO
Make note and we'll report to—

NARA (V.O.)
Pardon me, Lieutenant Cho.

CHO
Yes, Nara?

NARA (V.O.)
My threat analysis subroutine is
triggering a class 1 threat
response according to that
signature.

CHO
What kind of threat response?

NARA (V.O.)
An immediate action, ma'am.

CHO
Well, what is it?

NARA (V.O.)
I'm sorry, ma'am, I'm unable to
determine that. My analysis
protocols are disabled, as are my
response protocols. Otherwise, I
could determine what immediate
action is being recommended.

CHO
Well, enable them.

NARA (V.O.)
Unfortunately, I can not.

CHO
Why not?

NARA (V.O.)
They were explicitly disabled by
Commander Wilkins and can only be
re-enabled by his orders.

HALLWAY

Cho stands by the doorway, Weemes still following behind.

She engages keypad by the door, a chime goes off inside.

A few moments pass.

The door slides open and Commander Wilkins stands there in
his casual dress.

WILKINS
What is it?

CHO
Sir, we've found a slipstream
anomaly and NARA has classified it
as a class 1 threat. She needs your
authorization to identi-

WILKINS
No.

CHO
I'm beg your pardon?

WILKINS
Have the Staten note it and we'll
report it back to Command when we
return.

CHO
But, sir, NARA programming suggests
an immediate action response. We
don't know how sever-

WILKINS
We're not enabling the protocols.
That's final.

CHO
I don't think that's a good idea,
sir.

WILKINS

Well I do. End of discussion.

CHO

But, sir...

The door slides shut leaving her winded.

Cho turns to Weemes. They both look puzzled.

WEEMES'S CABIN

Weemes pours himself a glass of brown liquor.

CHO (CONT'D)

I'm sorry you had to witness that,
Alderman. I'll-

WEEMES

Pardon me for asking, but why does
your Commander not wish to enable
the protocols.

CHO

He has his reasons, sir.

WEEMES

And they are.

Cho looks away.

WEEMES (CONT'D)

I can tell from your reaction that
you don't agree with those reasons,
whatever they are.

CHO

No, sir.

WEEMES

Let me guess, Wilkins is the type
who prefers human engagement to A-
Cog? He limits reliance on
Artificial Cognizants to trivial
tasks. A blood and bone type.

Cho turns her head.

CHO

He says certain things require a
heart to accomplish.

She shakes her head.

CHO (CONT'D)

But it's ridiculous. This is state of the art technology. By limiting those protocols, we're crippling not just her functionality but our own effectiveness. We're limiting ourselves. Not to mention, the increased strain on the crew, having to manually run tasks which are designed to be automated and...

She stop herself and looks at Weemes.

CHO (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. Commander Wilkins is fine leader and I respect his orders.

WEEMES

Loyalty is admirable. But remember, in the end, we all must know for ourselves the difference between right and wrong in order to exercise that discretion when lives are at stake. I commend you for voicing your objection back there. Regardless of your role or position, your loyalty to your crew must always prevail.

Cho nods.

WEEMES (CONT'D)

Now, if you'll leave an old man to enjoy his libations. It would seem you have a ship to attend to.

[Sequence 7]

EXT. VOLAAR MINING CAMP - DAY

EDGE OF CAMP

Silver scorch marks cover the ground.

Smoke creates a haze in the air.

Burning debris surrounds the crumbling remains of the makeshift buildings and shacks.

Charred and bloody remains are peppered amongst the debris.

The camp is quiet and still.

Dirt crunches below a heavy boot, disturbing the peace.

NIEEMA VHO (Volaar, purple-skin, short blue hair) trudges forward at a snail's pace. Eyes wide and lips trembling.

She tries to speak but her voice only cracks.

She falls to her knees.

To her left, a singed plush doll along with the charred little fingers that used to hold it.

Tears mix with the soot-encrusted dirt.

A piece of metal rattles nearby.

She whips out her blaster and aims.

An alien quadruped with a pink snout and long ears stares back at her through orange-green eyes.

She's hands tremble as she lowers the gun just an inch.

It tilts it's head to one side.

The dog slinks over to the doll and takes a sniff. It then walks towards her.

She clenches her blaster tighter.

It gets closer and licks her cheek.

She can see sympathy in it's large fluorescent eyes.

She forces a smile.

The dog's eyes jump upwards.

Ship thrusters are getting louder and louder.

Nieema grabs the doll and tucks it into her satchel.

She smiles one more time at the dog and then runs towards the edge of camp.

She finds a building that is partially intact and climbs through the missing facade over a pile of rubble to the second floor.

She ducks behind a metal radiator and waits, blaster ready.

CRATER

A COALITION SHUTTLE lands on the edge of the largest crater.

Out walks Sgt. Onyx and Corp. Blake followed by a dozen other Marines, each suited and booted for combat and warfare.

ONYX

I want every inch of this place
combed. Any survivors I want
collected for questioning. Tag
everything.

BLAKE

Will do, ma'am.

The Corporal reaches into his rucksack and pulls out three small pyramids.

He places them on his palm where they light up and begin to float.

They expand to the size of a large ball and start to fly around in different directions.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Drones deployed.

The forward tips glow a hot white and a vertical white line is emitted as they scan the surroundings.

The rest of the soldiers begin to fan out.

ONYX

What does this look like to you?

She walks through a destroyed tent.

BLAKE

A mining installation. Gathering
resources to fuel their ships
maybe.

Blake analyzes what appears to be piece of fabric that survived the blast.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Cobbled together. They look like
they've been having a rough go of
it.

ONYX

Ironie.

Onyx kneels walks over to a mass of burned bodies.

She pulls back the top one to reveal the bodies underneath.

Two adults corpses shielding the dead remains of a toddler and an infant.

Blake walks over behind her.

ONYX (CONT'D)

These are the monsters who attacked our homeworld?

BLAKE

This looks like a civilian operation. I'm not seeing much evidence of a military presence. From the remains it looks like they were desperate for resources.

ONYX

These are the monsters...

BURNED-OUT STRUCTURE

Nieema eyes dart between the three drones in the air. She doesn't notice a Marine approaching the first floor of her building.

A low-pitched bark/screen attracts her attention along with that of the other Hellknights.

She sees the space dog pressed over the Marine on the landing below her. It's barking viciously in it's face.

The other Hellknights are getting closer.

Nieema shuffles out of the back window of the building onto a pile of debris below.

She turns as she hears a blaster firing behind her.

She peeks around a corner

The soldier pushes the dog's limp body off of him.

She pauses for a moment.

She readies her blaster, when she hears voices in the distance.

HELLKNIGHT #1

Armed Contact! Armed Contact!

Blaster fire disintegrates the wall in front of her.

She stumbles backwards.

Half a dozen boots are now bearing in her direction.

Nieema sprints towards the barren wasteland she had returned from earlier.

Hellknights take potshots at her from out of range.

Blake stands next to Onyx, still back in the center of the camp.

BLAKE

Ma'am.

Blake produces a large SNIPER RIFLE from over his shoulder and aims it towards the noise.

Nieema is nothing but a mere dot on the horizon as he takes aim but his scope magnifies her to full size.

His robotic reflexes make his aim perfect and true.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Shall I take the shot?

He continues to follow the Volaar through the scope.

Onyx grits her teeth.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Shall I, ma'am?

Onyx looks down at the charred bodies again.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Ma'am.

Nieema disappears behind a rock enclosure.

ONYX

Take the shot.

BLAKE

It's too late, ma'am. She's gotten away.

Sgt. Onyx shakes her head.

Blake pulls away his rifle and approaches her.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Ma'am. Shall we pursue her?

Onyx wipes a tear from her eyes.

ONYX

(sternly)

Yes, follow her. If the Volaar have a camp, they also have a ship. We can't let her report in. Find her. Stop her.

BLAKE

Yes, ma'am.

Sgt. Onyx looks one last time at the charred bodies.

ONYX

God Helps us.

Nieema sloshes through muck and dirt in the wastelands as Hellknights follow close behind her.

[Sequence 8]

[Modify: Condense the next two scenes into one.]

INT. BABEL PORT - DAY

Weemes strolls down the ramp of the Soraki.

Adam greets him with a smile.

ADAM

Eldric, it is so good to see you.

WEEMES

You as well, Adam. Or should I say Councillor?

ADAM

Ah, you know me too well to rest on ceremony. Lord knows my position with the Star Council would be a mere fantasy without your guidance.

WEEMES

Regardless, how are you and the family? Does Lucilli still make that terrific tart with those Nulinga berries?

ADAM

Indeed. I'll make sure she whips one together for our dear old friend before you leave.

WEEMES
(smiling)
Spectacular. And old is right...

They grasp each other in a tight embrace.

WEEMES (CONT'D)
So I must ask, why fetch an old bag
of bones from so far away with such
haste?

Adam turns dour.

ADAM
It's a matter of grave importance,
I'm afraid. A friend of mine is
facing a dilemma.

Weemes smiles.

WEEMES
Well, to summon me with such
urgency and resources, it must
truly be a matter of life and
death.

Adam looks around.

ADAM
I can't say much in these auspices,
you know the walls have ears. But
suffice it to say...
(leaning in closer,
whispering)
The fate of humanity may rest in
the balance.

Adam steps backwards and returns to his normal volume.

ADAM (CONT'D)
I'm hoping you can offer him your
wisdom and counsel as you have done
for me so many times.

Weemes lets the words soak in for a moment.

WEEMES
Well, we best get going then. What
is your friend's name?

INT. SPARK'S STUDIO - DAY

Adam enters followed by Eldric.

Spark is at his easel, hands engaged and moving with inhuman speed.

SPARK
I'll be with you in one moment.

The two enter and wait.

Weemes looks around the room, surveying the collection of paintings.

With a sudden jerk, Spark is finished.

ADAM
May we?

Spark nods.

The two humans walk over and begin staring at the finished artwork.

ADAM (CONT'D)
Magnificent, Spark. It's beautiful.

SPARK
Thank you, Councillor.

WEEMES
What is it about?

Spark tilts his head, staring deeply at it.

SPARK
I do not know.

He turns to Weemes.

SPARK (CONT'D)
Do you?

The old man smiles.

SPARK (CONT'D)
Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, correct?

WEEMES
True but art without intention can hardly be called art at all.

Adam turns to his mentor with a sharp look.

ADAM
I—I believe what the Alderman is
means to say is—

SPARK
(interrupting)
No, he's correct. I must do better.

Adam looks confused.

SPARK (CONT'D)
So this is your mentor?

ADAM
Yes. Spark, meet former Alderman
Eldric Weemes. Alderman Weemes,
meet Spark, the youngest of the
Scion Council.

Weemes smiles.

WEEMES
It's a great honor, dear boy.

They shake hands.

SPARK
The honor is all mine.
(turning to Adam)
Has he been informed of the
situation?

WEEMES
Yes, but I'd like to hear your view
on it.

Spark nods and turns to Adam.

SPARK
That will be all, Councillor.

Adam nods and leaves the room.

SPARK (CONT'D)
Make yourself at home.

Weemes takes a seat.

SPARK (CONT'D)
If you would like something to eat
or drink, just ask. We can have
something brought in.

WEEMES

Gladly. Thanks for your hospitality. Now, please Scion, explain to me your troubles.

Spark walks towards the balcony and stares at the setting sun.

SPARK

Are you familiar with the other Scions? Vesper and Marcus?

WEEMES

Indeed, back when I was an Alderman, they were the only Scions. Marcus didn't know of a problem that couldn't be solved with a well-placed bomb. And Vesper preferred honey to his vinegar. Never seen two people so at odds.

SPARK

People?

WEEMES

Forgive me, I don't put much stock in this blood versus circuitry nonsense. My assistant, Alec-Jon, is as honorable a man as I've come across in my many years. He's an A-Cog. For that, I see no need to draw lines based structural anatomy.

SPARK

You have a very progressive view. I wish others shared it. It's why we have to keep this meeting a secret. Many have a hard time accepting the power of the Scion Council as it is. I suppose I can empathize. An A-Cog Council making decisions for the Human Coalition. If I were a Human I might find it difficult. And yet, to know one was receiving advice, from a Human no less, would cast doubt on our very existence. At the very least, they would seek to reassess my template code to determine if I'm unfit for my role.

WEEMES

Well, from what I understand, your role is to serve Human interest on the council. Marcus will seek the protection and advancement of the species at all costs. It's in his programming. Vesper will always seek the diplomatic solution. It is in her programming. You seem to take the human approach. And, in order to do that you must think like a human. There's no programming for that. Humanity is an acquired perspective.

Spark nods and looks at his canvas.

SPARK

And maybe that's why I'm so troubled by this. Both alliances are valid. Vesper is right. Strengthening the Endari and uniting the Augeum would make them powerful trading partners. Without the resources they can provide, our growing colonies would suffer. Immensely. And yet...

He turns away from the canvas.

SPARK (CONT'D)

A united Collective turned against us would be a death spiral. Allying with the Enclave would provide us with a fighting chance, not to mention the benefits gained from trade with the Simr'rak Commonwealth.

Spark rubs his hands.

SPARK (CONT'D)

Both options can potentially lead to disaster and the destruction of our species. And yet both could also turn out to be the very thing that saves us.

WEEMES

Quite the dilemma, indeed.

Spark turns to him.

SPARK
What would you do?

WEEMES
Do you have any books here?

Spark looks at him, confused.

[Sequence 9]

INT. C.S.S. SORAKI - DAY

COMMAND DECK

Lt. Cho sits in the command chair, appears nervous.

The door slides open. Commander Wilkins followed by 4 grunts who begin to swap seats with those already sitting down.

Cho rises to her feet and gives Wilkins a salute.

CHO
Commander on Deck.

WILKINS
At ease, Lieutenant. Anything to report.

CHO
Yes, sir. A slipstream anomaly has been detected...

WILKINS
You've already informed me of this Lieutenant and I gave a course of action.

CHO
Yes, sir, but I believe it's in our best interest to reconsider.

The grunts swapping out terminals pause for a moment.

WILKINS
Excuse me?

CHO
I think--

WILKINS
I didn't ask you what you think, Lieutenant.

He takes a step closer.

WILKINS (CONT'D)

I think you've been up too long. I think you need to take some time and reassess your position aboard this vessel.

CHO

Sir, your mistrust of A-Cogs is not only irrational but it's putting the entire ship at risk. Not to mention, it's in violation with the Coalition Naval bylaws.

The room quiets and eyes dart away.

WILKINS

Lieutenant, you are relieved of the deck. I suggest you get some rest and return when you have a grasp of who runs this ship.

CHO

Sir-

WILKINS

That's an order.

Cho looks around, teeth clenched.

She storms out of the room.

CREW QUARTERS

Cho lays rigid in her cot, eyes glued to the ceiling, hands crossed.

She sits in silence and darkness.

The door opens and someone walks in, she doesn't move.

She stays still, eyes concentrating.

She hears a voice in her head.

WEEMES (V.O.)

*...we all must know for ourselves
the difference between right and
wrong in order to exercise that
discretion when lives are at stake.*

Suddenly, she stands up and gets dressed.

TECHNOLOGY BAY

As she walks in a half-asleep MIDSHIPMAN nearly spills out of his chair.

CHO

At ease.

He nods.

She looks around, scouring the room for a moment.

CHO (CONT'D)

What are your duties?

MIDSHIPMAN

Monitor ship vitals.

He points to a screen of blinking lines and gauges.

CHO

Anything *vital* happening?

He stares blankly.

CHO (CONT'D)

It was a joke. Get it? Vital, *vital*.

MIDSHIPMAN

No ma'am. Nothing vital happening.

CHO

So nothing would fall apart if you stepped away for about twenty minutes?

He furrows a brow.

MIDSHIPMAN

No ma'am. Is there something wrong?

CHO

Awesome, can you do me a solid?

MIDSHIPMAN

Step away for about twenty minutes?

She nods.

MIDSHIPMAN (CONT'D)

Umm, I guess.

CHO

And can you do me a really big solid? And not tell anyone you saw me.

MIDSHIPMAN

What's going on?

CHO

Nothing bad. I just need to look into something.

MIDSHIPMAN

And you can't have me around when you do.

CHO

It's nothing bad, I swear.

He looks around and exhales through his nose.

He stands up and walks away.

CHO (CONT'D)

Many thanks.

As the door closes behind him, she runs over to a large red cylinder, perched in the corner of the room.

She flips a switch and a holographic panel appears. Cho begins typing.

The ship's A-COG greets her.

NARA

Hello, Lieutenant. You have accessed my primary cortex. How may I be of assistance?

CHO

Nara, I would like you to pull up the response and identification events for the slipstream anomaly we spotted earlier.

Cho continues typing.

NARA

I'm sorry, Lieutenant. As I stated, those protocols are blocked by Commander Wilkins, I cannot.

CHO

True, you can't access your protocols. But I'm granting you access through my comms channel to the central Coalition Intelligence hub. You should be able to access all standard response protocols through there. Scan them and find out which ones would've triggered your response.

NARA

The Commander will not be happy.

CHO

The safety of the crew is at stake.

Cho finishes typing.

Silence for a moment.

NARA

It is complete.

CHO

And?

NARA

I've scanned through all 14,087 response protocols triggered by slipstream anomalies. Only one matched the signature that we discovered.

CHO

What's the response?

NARA

Level 1 Threat Report to Central Coalition Command, along with High Alert notification to all military forces. Followed by a mandatory immediate evacuation order to all civilian bodies within a two sector radius.

CHO

What are we to reporting?

NARA

The slipstream anomaly that we witnessed holds the signature of a dreadnaught-class Volaar cloaking shield.

CHO
What?

NARA
A Volaar dreadnaught, ma'am. That's
what the signature belonged to. It
was cloaked behind the anomaly.

CHO
The Volaar? Are here? In Leonis?

NARA
It would appear so, ma'am. Shall I
report the sighting.

The door whooshes open.

Behind it are Commander Wilkins and two grunts, along with
the Midshipman being held with his arms behind his back.

Cho's eyes are wide.

[Sequence 10]

**[Modify: Show the STRANGER (A-Cog) getting accosted by a
Human before sneaking past them into the cargo hold.]**

EXT. BABEL PORT - NIGHT

Alec-Jon shuffles down the shuttle dock.

He stops at the end of a line leading to a small booth with
an A-Cog standing there.

His attention turns to a STRANGER, dressed in dark brown
leather who brushes past him.

This stranger repeatedly looks around, scarf obscuring her
face and neck.

She locks eyes with Alec-Jon who stares back.

He detects an imperceptible smile.

The stranger then hops over a small barrier marked KEEP OUT.

Alec-Jon makes a small chuckle to himself.

He watches the reflection of the cruiser docked in the next
berth.

The stranger crouches down past a couple of dock workers
unloading cargo.

They stop as they hear a port guard coming their way.

The guard passes by, they continue.

Alec-Jon smiles as the stranger finesses their way into an empty baggage rack and shuffles inside a small utility compartment.

He shakes his head.

The person standing in front of him disappears and now at the front of the line.

He approaches the BAGGAGE ATTENDANT.

ALEC-JON

You guys catch a lot of stowaways?

BAGGAGE ATTENDANT

More than you'd think.

ALEC-JON

I'm not surprised.

He claims his baggage ticket and leaves.

EXT. SCION GARDENS - DAY

[**Modify: Condense the next two scenes into one.**]

Alec-Jon sits in front of the downtown plaza.

Inside the multi-building complex the 100ft monument at the center lies visible.

The entrance is crowded.

A crowd stops in front of Alec-Jon.

An A-Cog TOUR GUIDE points to the building and enunciates at a high volume.

TOUR GUIDE

Inside these halls, the Artificial
Cognitives known as the Scions
reside and convene to work out
legislation and accords to protect
the Coalition as a whole...

Alec-Jon turns as the tour guide points to a nearby statue of an A-Cog and a Human lifting a wall together.

TOUR GUIDE (CONT'D)

A monument to the vast trust and bond that has been forged between the centuries between humans and A-Cogs.

Alec-Jon smiles as a finger taps his shoulder.

He turns to see Alderman Weemes.

ALEC-JON

It's a pleasure to see you again, sir. I must admit, I was afraid we'd parted ways for the last time back on Komoro.

WEEMES

Indeed, it was tense. But you made it through, as I knew you would. And what do you have to report?

Alec-Jon stands.

ALEC-JON

The Endari and the Emperor have officially come to terms and signed the agreement.

They both smile.

ALEC-JON (CONT'D)

It was all thanks to you, sir.

WEEMES

Not true, my boy. You did this and you shall tell me all about it now, over drinks.

ALEC-JON

Yes, sir.

Weemes turns to hail a cab when he bumps into a small child, knocking their toy to the ground.

WEEMES

Oh dear, terribly sorry.

The picks it up and hands it to the child who smiles and walks away.

He stays kneeled for a moment, watching the child leave and then shakes his head.

INT. BRAYBURY LOUNGE - DAY

The bar is almost empty, save for a few regulars in power suits.

Weemes and Alec-Jon are quietly chatting in a corner booth.

WEEMES

Ah, and the plant?

ALEC-JON

I received confirmation that it arrived last night and has already started producing.

WEEMES

Excellent. You've done extraordinarily well. This is what happens when people listen to one another. Excellent things happen, indeed.

Weemes eyes drift off.

ALEC-JON

Is everything alright, sir?

Weemes twists his head.

ALEC-JON (CONT'D)

You seem distracted. Is it your assignment? You never did explain why the Coalition stole you off in a such a hurry? What have you been up to?

Weemes sits, hands crossed as if contemplating.

ALEC-JON (CONT'D)

If you don't wish to-

WEEMES

I think I've made a grave error.

ALEC-JON

I'm sorry, why?

WEEMES

I was summoned me here for my council and I gave the best I could, but I'm afraid I've misled someone.

ALEC-JON

I'm sure that wasn't your intention. I know you well enough to know you would most certainly never give anyone bad advice. Not consciously at least.

WEEMES

True, but all in the same, I feel like I've steer them down a dark path and many may suffer because of it.

ALEC-JON

Wait? Is this why you were at the Gardens? Is this person associated with the Scions or the Star Council?

Weemes laughs nervously.

WEEMES

I've already said more than I should have.

He caresses Alec-Jon's hand.

WEEMES (CONT'D)

You're a good man, Alec-Jon. A wise and humble man. I look at you and feel pride that in some way I helped shaped you into that but in all honesty, I must admit that I had no part in such a thing. You were always a good and wise and humble man. It's just taken many years for us to notice. In a world so easily corrupted, I'm truly honored and grateful to call you my friend.

Alec-Jon smiles.

ALEC-JON

Thank you sir. But please, tell me about what is troubling you? Who did you mislead and why will others suffer?

Weemes grins.

WEEMES

Ah, dear boy. Let's forget the past ramblings of an old coot.

(MORE)

WEEMES (CONT'D)

Let's celebrate your first
successful negotiation.

(to bartender)

Barkeep, another round, please.

Alec-Jon looks at him and smiles.

ALEC-JON

You know alcohol has no effect on
me, sir.

WEEMES

Indeed, so I'll have to drink twice
as much to make up for it.

They both laugh.

[Sequence 11]

INT. C.S.S. SORAKI - NIGHT

COMMAND DECK

Lieutenant Cho stands, head down.

The commander stares up at her from his Command Chair.

A starry abyss shows on the screen behind her.

WILKINS

This is your first command position
aboard a vessel this size, that
right?

CHO

Yes, sir.

WILKINS

Now, they told me when I took ova'
that you were the most familiar
with the crew an' the ship. They
said you would be an asset and mah
right-hand, help me keep 'er in the
air.

He pauses for a moment.

WILKINS (CONT'D)

They tol' me you wuz loyal to a
fault. That you place the mission
before all else.

For the first time, he looks up at her.

WILKINS (CONT'D)

Now, I have a question for ya. Look at me when I talk.

Cho drills her eyes forward.

WILKINS (CONT'D)

My question is: did they lie to me?

CHO

No, sir.

WILKINS

I'm sorry?

CHO

No, sir. They did not lie to you.

WILKINS

Well, that's awful confusing, don't you think? Cuz if they ain't lyin' and you so loyal, why did I find you going around my back and disobeying orders.

He waits.

WILKINS (CONT'D)

Huh? Answer me, girl.

CHO

I'm loyal to the crew and the Coalition, sir, not to you.

WILKINS

Woman, on dis ship, I *am* the Coalition. As long as we in the air, my word is that of the Council isself.

CHO

I humbly disagree, sir.

WILKINS

You what?

CHO

I said, I humbly disagree.

She drops her hands.

CHO (CONT'D)

On this ship, you are a human. Just like me, just like them and everyone else on this crew. As such, you are subject to mistakes and errors of judgment which is what you made when you let your irrational fear of A-Cogs take over this ship. That fear chose to disregard a class 1 threat warning which has not only put this ship and it's crew at risk but the also the Coalition as a whole.

The rest of the crew stands, watching with undivided attention.

WILKINS

How long ya been a member of the Coalition's Navy, Cho?

CHO

Six years, sir.

WILKINS

How old that make ya?

CHO

25, sir.

WILKINS

Well, I'm a lot older than that miss. And the thing you don't seem to understand is that while you were in underroos watching Posari telenovelas, I was out here in the void, blowing holes in real-life monsters and bogeymen.

He stands to face her directly.

WILKINS (CONT'D)

I fought the real fight and put down some of the baddest of the bad. Meanwhile, back home, a bunch of cog-heads decided, like you, they had had enough of taking orders. They went into a small town with a buncha guns and explosives and blew themselves and a buncha innocent humans sky high.

Cho's jaw is clenched.

WILKINS (CONT'D)

Mah little girl was born in that town. Raised in that town. Died in that town. Right next to mah wife. They both got blown to kingdom come because of some A-Cog with some screwy code. So, excuse my language, but I'll be damned before a machine steers any ship I'm in command of.

Cho jaw drops.

CHO

Sir, I didn't know that.

WILKINS

No, you didn't Lieutenant. You just got tired of following orders and acted against my wishes Lieutenant, just like them A-Cogs.

Cho pauses a moment.

CHO

I'm sorry for your loss...but that's just not good enough.

WILKINS

I'm sorry?

CHO

I get that you don't like A-Cogs, I get that now. But the Coalition does. After the revolt on Turtle Island was put down, new measures were put in place to prevent future generations from developing the same flaws. And this ship was designed and built to be operated by one of those A-Cogs. The Coalition has forgiven and moved on. Now, if you don't want to, I understand. But then you shouldn't be commanding this vessel if you aren't willing to enable the protocols. If you won't do it for the Coalition, look around you.

She raises her hands.

CHO (CONT'D)

The men on this ship are sleep-deprived, burnt out and malnourished.

(MORE)

CHO (CONT'D)

We were not allocated the resources to run a manned-crew around the clock. It's just not possible. The Soraki was never built for that and it can't be run like that forever.

WILKINS

I think you'll find that a ship requires one thing above all else to run properly: Trust. Without it, everything falls apart.

He waves over one of the guards.

WILKINS (CONT'D)

And I'm afraid, Miss Cho, that I simply can't trust you. As such, you have been relieved of your command pending a court martial back on Riande. For the time being, you'll be remanded to the guest cabin. Meals will be brought to you.

CHO

Sir! You can't do this.

WILKINS

Take her away.

CHO

But the alert. The Volaar are here! A Volaar Battle Fleet. Nara detected it. We have to warn Babel.

A wave rolls over the crew. They start mouthing silently to each other.

WILKINS

You need time to figure out how command works on a ship like this.

INT. C.S.S. SORAKI - NIGHT

Cho is sitting on the floor, staring at the wall. Her dress jacket is off, revealing a white tank top.

Her knuckles are bleeding.

Her eyes are bloodshot and puffy.

The door slides open.

She turns.

The Midshipman walks in with a platter of food and sets it on the table.

He looks at her and then looks around for anyone else.

He walks over to the comms panel and starts typing.

CHO

They deactivated it.

MIDSHIPMAN

No, ma'am. They just removed your access.

She stands up and walks towards him.

CHO

What are you doing?

The Midshipman turns around, leaving the terminal activated.

MIDSHIPMAN

You're connected using my access codes. You need to see the communication on channel 9.

CHO

What is it?

MIDSHIPMAN

The Commander almost shit himself when he heard it. I don't think he can court martial you after this, but he's still gonna try.

CHO

What?

He turns and leaves, the door locks behind him.

She walks over to the terminal and tunes it to Channel 9.

An automated distress signal chimes out from the speakers.

VOLAAR ENCAMPMENT FOUND IN DELTA QUADRANT. ALL FORCES ARE SUMMONED TO BASE FOR FURTHER INSTRUCTION AND ALL CIVILIANS ARE TO EVACUATE IMMEDIATELY.

Cho eyes widen.

A tear falls down her face.

She smiles.

[Sequence 12]

INT. ASCENDANT DRAGON - NIGHT

WARMASTER'S QUARTERS

The room is quiet and dark.

A beam of light emanates from a glass pod in the center of the room.

Floating in the middle is a 7 foot purple being known as WARMASTER XARD. He is muscle-bound and shirtless. Appears unconscious.

The door slides open.

In walks CONSIG NARTE, a feeble humanoid with purple skin and gold robes.

He walks towards the pod and taps the glass.

Xard's eyes snap open.

The pod opens and Xard exits.

XARD

I told you never to disturb my
meditat-

NARTE

It's your sister, master. I'm
sorry.

Xard walks over to a stand and puts on a shirt.

BRIDGE

Xard pushes past a subordinate who drops a datapad.

XARD

What happened Consig?

Narte gestures towards the screen.

An aerial view of a large smoking crater.

NARTE

The camp's been wiped out, master.

The room is quiet for a moment.

XARD

Nieema?

NARTE

Long-range scanners suggest there were no survivors.

Xard smashes a console in front of him.

XARD

Who did this?

NARTE

That's the other thing, master. We did a subspace scan and found only one ship in the area.

A freeze-frame of the Stormwind appears.

NARTE (CONT'D)

We believe this vessel bombarded the camp from space.

XARD

Who is responsible for this?

Narte looks around.

NARTE

Now, on your orders we have yet to make contact with any species in the system. The entire fleet has remained in cloak except for your sister's expedition. But some of us immediately recognized this ship's insignia--

XARD

Who are they, Narte?

NARTE

See for yourself, sir. The insignia. Here, let me pull up a log from the historical catalogs.

He pulls up two images on the screen.

On the left, the ship with an insignia of a blue orb with green oblongs overlapping it.

On the right, the same insignia from the catalogs.

NARTE (CONT'D)
It's them, Warmaster. We have
finally found them. The
humiliators. The animals. The
Humans.

Xard looks at the screen and a grin creeps over his face.

NARTE (CONT'D)
I'm so sorry for your loss but
Warmaster, this—

XARD
I'm already a legend. But now. Now,
I will be a god.

He turns to Narte.

XARD (CONT'D)
Send a destroyer group to
investigate. I want to learn more
about the humans and whoever else
resides in this system.

NARTE
Indeed, sir. We shall not rest
until your sister has been avenged.

Narte scurries off.

Xard stares at the screen a little longer.

XARD
I'm sorry Nieema. I have failed to
protect you. But your death shall
not be in vain. This is the final
chapter of my mortality and the
beginning of Xard the Immortal.

EXT. WASTELANDS - NIGHT

Nieema is sprinting through a swamp.

She has new cuts and scrapes on her arms and legs.

She stops behind a rock and crouches in the muck.

She sticks her head out and looks behind her.

Nothing.

She takes a moment to catch her breath.

A piece of warm metal places itself next to her head.

HELLKNIGHT #1
Gotcha sweetie.

She closes her eyes for a moment.

When she opens them, she unleashes hell upon the Hellknight.

She grabs the blaster from his hands and yanks him over the front of her.

She holds it trained on his face and he stares up at her, foot on his chest.

She lets out a breath and hears shouting voices nearby.

She turns back to the soldier and looks at him one last time.

She starts running again.

More blasters fire behind her.

She runs into a small ravine with multiple paths.

She follows the one on the right.

As she steps forward, the ground gives out and she collapses into a cavern below.

The light from the moon shines through as she crawls out of view.

She leans against a small boulder and catches her breath.

A noise comes from the darkness of the cavern.

She turns on the light at the end of the rifle.

A humanoid-figure in tattered cloth appears for just a moment before it vanishes.

She screams.

FADE OUT.