

# FIELDS OF COLOR

Episode 3:  
When Most I Play the Devil

by

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EXT. ARATH FIELD - SUNSET

A single flower sways in the breeze of an arid meadow. Two children, YOUNG ASTRID and YOUNG ZIGGY play tag in the grass. Astrid is the one running, and as the camera follows her, she becomes back-lit by the SUN with the glass conservatories of the Arath-Makahni palace in the background.

She begins to approach a shallow cliff.

YOUNG ZIGGY  
Astrid, wait!

She leaps...

CUT TO:

INT. ASTRID'S QUARTERS - SPACE

ASTRID is being shaken awake by ZIGGY. Both are young adults now. Astrid is still in her formal clothes. They are simple in construction, but ornate in decoration. Ziggy wears an Arath-Makahni royal guard's uniform loose, with the collar exposing a golden sun pendant.

ZIGGY  
Astrid, wake up. We're almost there.

Astrid stirs and sits up on the edge of her bunk. The room is spare, but still larger than most quarters.

ASTRID  
(groggily)  
How long was I asleep?

Ziggy sits down opposite her.

ZIGGY  
Since the flip. A couple hours. You  
been getting enough sleep?

ASTRID  
Yes I am, thank you *mother*.

The tone is sarcastic but friendly. These two have known each other for a long time. She rubs her eyes.

ASTRID (CONT'D)  
It's all these transits, I never  
sleep well on these ships.

Ziggy reaches over to a small table and begins pouring a glass of water for Astrid.

ZIGGY

I think your father's trying to train  
you in the less glamorous aspects of  
the throne.

Ziggy passes Astrid the water.

ASTRID

I think my father wants us out of  
his hair. It's just been months  
worth of chores.

She drinks the water, sating a night's worth of thirst.

ZIGGY

Welcome to my world.

ASTRID

I don't want to visit your world.

ZIGGY

(standing up)  
Too late. We're landing.

INT. SHIP HALL - SPACE

The two exit the room into the hallway. Astrid struts with  
authority and Ziggy follows close behind, both have put on  
dignified faces.

ASTRID

(dry, sarcastic)  
So is our esteemed host ready for  
the meeting today?

ZIGGY

They didn't sound thrilled about it  
but everything should be set.

ASTRID

Father sending anyone to help?

ZIGGY

(hesitant)  
I don't think so.

ASTRID

(disappointed, but  
not surprised)  
Yes, me neither.

EXT. ARATH-MAKAH - SPACE

At first, we see ARATH, a large dry planet suspended in space.  
From all sides of the frame, ships from a small fleet come

into view, flipped around and decelerating towards the planet.  
A subtitle reads:

**Arath-Makah: Binary Planet System**

INT. SHIP BRIDGE - SPACE

The main door to the ship's bridge opens and Astrid and Ziggy step in.

The bridge is already populated with a few people who stand upon seeing the pair enter.

BRIDGE OPERATOR  
Good morning, highness!

Astrid gives them a polite salute and continues to the center of the room. Ziggy always stays close behind, but never close enough to seem Astrid's equal.

ASTRID  
Good morning, everyone. Let's get  
this thing back on the ground so we  
can all go home and stretch our legs.  
Radio in for landing.

BRIDGE OPERATOR  
Yes, Ma'am!  
(to radio)  
Ground, this is royal fleet 5  
requesting clearance for landing.

EXT. CAPITOL CITY - DAY

The camera flies over the crest of a hill to reveal the capitol city of the planet Arath. Most of the small structures are stone masonry, but all of the larger buildings are glass conservatories, including the citadel at the center of the metropolis.

GROUND CONTROL (V.O.)  
Welcome back, fleet 5. You are cleared  
for landing in the southwest bays.

The camera pans up into the sky, and we can see the engine plumes from the incoming ships, small but approaching fast. The second planet, MAKAH, is also visible in Arath's skies.

INT. SHIP BRIDGE - SPACE

Astrid looks out the main window to see a Commonwealth carrier ship, just like Starliner 17, in orbit above Arath. She leans in Ziggy's direction and they move up to meet her ear.

ASTRID  
Are the Commonwealth here?

ZIGGY  
Yes, Ma'am. They've been here for a few days. I hear they've brought an archivist with them.

Astrid's face drops into annoyed exhaustion

ASTRID  
Well, I'm sure I'll be getting an earful about *that*.  
(to the bridge operator)  
Take us in!

BRIDGE OPERATOR  
Yes, Ma'am. Requesting vector and berth. Entering atmosphere in 10 seconds.

As the bridge crew carry out their orders, Astrid walks up to the main window and looks down at her home planet, framed from the outside against Arath's reflection.

EXT. ARATH ATMOSPHERE - DAY

The fleet enters Arath's atmosphere, heating up from the friction on the way in.

EXT. LANDING BAY - DAY

The ships finally touch down on the landing pads and come to a complete stop.

EXT. DOCKS - DAY

Crowds of dockworkers and merchants mill about the lively, bustling port. Astrid and Ziggy are accompanied by a cadre of royal guards, further behind.

The people of the port are happy to see Astrid and they wave and shout in greeting as she passes. She is loved by these people, and thus strict guard is not necessary.

Astrid strolls tall down the line of shops along the street and encounters a group of teenagers throwing dice against a post in the middle of the road. She goes over to them, while Ziggy lags behind and walks over to a merchant stall on a nearby side of the road.

Astrid starts to talk with the teens, but we cannot hear the conversation; we are attached to Ziggy's perspective. Ziggy notices a beggar beside the stall. An old man, bearded and gaunt.

Ziggy pays a golden coin to the shopkeep, and in return is handed two fresh loaves of bread. Immediately Ziggy hands one of the loaves to the beggar, who looks up in disbelief. Ziggy takes their eyes off of Astrid long enough to look at the man and nod: its okay to take it.

The man sees the golden sun pendant around Ziggy's neck and takes the loaf. He is on the verge of tears, but begins to eat, savoring what may be a week's-worth of a meal. Ziggy leaves and goes over to where Astrid is playing with the teens.

She rattles the dice in her hand, ready to throw.

ASTRID

Okay...and...here we go!

She tosses the dice and they come up snake eyes. The teens jump up in celebrations, while Astrid feigns disappointment. She reaches into her pocket and pulls out a handful of golden coins to give to one of the teens. Ziggy walks over and places a hand on her shoulder with a look of: we really need to get going.

Astrid, a little disappointed for real now, gets up and begins her walk away.

ASTRID (CONT'D)

(waving goodbye)

Ah, well. I need to go, you kids  
have a nice day and try not to get  
into trouble!

One of the teens, a lanky boy in a jacket, calls after her.

LANKY BOY

Please come anytime! You are always  
welcome to gamble again!

Astrid turns back and speaks to them while walking backwards.

ASTRID

(joking)

I can't! You'd rob the entire  
treasury out of me!

A laugh passes over the nearby crowd, including the teens, who go back to their game.

Ziggy tears the remaining loaf in two, and offers a piece to Astrid. She accepts it, and the two move into the city with the guards behind them once again.

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

In a dimly lit chapel, a giant skylight shines down upon the pulpit, flanked by white-robed acolytes. An ornately dressed man, THE HIGH EVANGELICAL, walks across an artificial puddle of water and steps into the light. We look down on the puddle, almost as if from the sun's perspective. Into frame comes the High Evangelical. He looks up to see the Arath-Makahni sun, KORAI, and raises his hands in praise as his acolytes follow.

HIGH EVANGELICAL  
 Feel, my friends! Feel Korai's light  
 shine upon us, and know that the  
 Joining is close at hand!

The doors of the chapel open, and Astrid and Ziggy walk into the main hall, witnessing the ceremony. Astrid interrupts, not bothering to stop her approach down the aisle.

ASTRID  
 Good morning, High Evangelical.

Everyone on the pulpit turns to view the unwelcome guests. The High Evangelical turns more slowly, shifting a scowl into a friendly mask upon facing Astrid.

HIGH EVANGELICAL  
 Your Highness! What a pleasure it  
 is to see you in our humble halls.  
 To what do we owe the pleasure?

Astrid almost holds back a smirk. She knows this preacher is talking out of both sides of his mouth.

ASTRID  
 I'm here on request of our king, but  
 I'm also curious about this matter  
 myself. We've been holding requests  
 for pilgrimage to Earth for 2 years  
 now, and yet your church has still  
 deferred their journey. When do you  
 think we will be able to start moving  
 people from *outside* your ranks?

The mask slips a little. *He* knows that she is only barely hiding behind propriety.

HIGH EVANGELICAL  
 (apologetic)  
 Ah, my apologies, princess but we  
 cannot afford to move any more  
 pilgrims at this time. Korai has  
 not approved of pilgrimage during  
 these trying times.

ASTRID  
(fake disappointed)  
That's disappointing. I wonder if I  
could hear Korai's reasoning.

Ziggy flashes a look over to Astrid.

HIGH EVANGELICAL  
I'm afraid not, princess. Korai's  
light shines down on all of Arath-  
Makah, but only the chosen few can  
understand its messages, even with  
the aid of the translator programs.

ZIGGY  
(interrupting)  
That's not true.

Both the High Evangelical and Astrid look over at Ziggy, who  
quickly remembers that they should not have spoken out of  
turn, and quiets down again.

HIGH EVANGELICAL  
(more menacing)  
My impropriety. I have all but  
forgotten the proper procedure for  
introduction in the chapel. I believe  
it is custom to kneel before the  
High Evangelical upon meeting, my  
princess.

He speaks to Astrid but looks at Ziggy.

ZIGGY  
These are commandments of The Joining,  
not of Korai. And that rule has never  
applied to the royal house.

HIGH EVANGELICAL  
A commandment of the Joining it may  
be, but in a Joining church you now  
stand, *Captain* Fontane. And you are  
not royalty.

The air is tense. This has become a fully hostile conversation,  
masked only by a thin veneer of politeness. Astrid looks a  
bit uncomfortable, eyes darting back and forth between Ziggy  
and the High Evangelical. She's deferring to Ziggy on this.

After a moment, Ziggy breaks eye contact with the Evangelical  
and looks at Astrid. They then reluctantly kneel before him.



HIGH EVANGELICAL (CONT'D)

I'm afraid we must return to our  
rites, princess. But thank you for  
stopping by. We hope to see you soon.

He turns away and begins back to the pulpit with this acolytes waiting.

Astrid moves over to Ziggy and puts a hand on their shoulder. Ziggy gets up abruptly and they both turn to leave the chapel the way they came in. Right as they are about to exit, the High Evangelical calls back.

HIGH EVANGELICAL (CONT'D)

A word of caution to you both. If  
you lose your faith, when the day of  
Joining comes, you may be left apart.

The two leave and the doors shut behind them.

EXT. CHAPEL - DAY

Astrid and Ziggy are now outside the entrance to the chapel, alone. Astrid growls in frustration and then kicks a nearby stone away. After it lands, she hangs her head.

ASTRID

(sighs)  
I hate dealing with church people.  
(to Ziggy)  
No offense.

She begins walking down the path away from the chapel, and Ziggy follows close behind, and decides to finally broach a topic long ignored.

ZIGGY

Astrid, didn't that seem strange to  
you?

ASTRID

The Joining always seem strange to  
me.

ZIGGY

But that's kind of my point. Think  
about it. The Joining were unheard  
of a few years ago and now they're  
controlling pilgrimage clearance?  
Restricting access to the translators?  
Something's wrong with them, but  
they're being granted more and more  
license.

Astrid stops walking and turns around to face Ziggy.

ASTRID

My father has them under control.

(begins pacing)

They're becoming very popular, we couldn't just ignore them.

ZIGGY

I think you're father might be underestimating them, Astrid. It feels like they have...strange ambitions. You must know that everything about them goes against the teachings of Korai!

ASTRID

No, I don't know that, Ziggy. You know that I never paid attention to those things!

Ziggy hesitates before bringing up the next point. This is not something they want to burden her with, but she should know.

ZIGGY

It's... It's not just me. Members of the guard are acting...evasive lately. I think other people might be sensing something is wrong.

Astrid places a hand on their shoulder and gives a look of comfort.

ASTRID

Look. I know that it's your job to protect me, as a guard. But as a friend, a long friend, try to remember that I'm able to take care of myself. You don't need to worry about me.

Ziggy sighs. The point seems not to have hit home with Astrid, but Ziggy decides to let it go for now.

ZIGGY

(gently smiling)

Fine, let's head back to the palace.

They turn to head back to the palace, obviously.

INT. SECURITY OFFICE - DAY

A member of the guard sits in a dark office, illuminated only by the grey glow of the monitors before them. Each one has a video feed from some part of the palace. A knock at the door, and then Ziggy walks in. The guard is relieved to see them.

ZIGGY  
Evening. How's the watch?

GUARD  
(stretching)  
A bird flew in front of the east  
hall camera. We had to send one of  
the recruits to chase it away. It  
was...stubborn. How was the trip?

Ziggy and the guard trade the seat.

ZIGGY  
Oh, it was fine. The reports wound  
up being nothing, and I'm pretty  
sure she lost a uniform's worth at  
the docks.

GUARD  
Eh, she's had worse days.

Ziggy turns to the guard, to witness their exit from the room.

ZIGGY  
Much worse.  
(waving)  
Have a good night!

The guard exits and closes the door behind them. Plunging  
Ziggy back into lonely, screen-lit darkness.

From within their jacket, they remove a roll of red cloth and  
set it on the desk in front of them. Undoing the knot of  
string binding the roll, they unroll it out into a mat  
containing two items: a small candle and a small metal cup.

They remove the candle and set it in the middle of the mat,  
exactly before them. They snap their fingers on the candle's  
wick, and a spark lights the flame. The room now has a single  
point of golden light amidst the grey haze. Ziggy begins to  
pray.

ZIGGY (CONT'D)  
Thank you, Korai, for the light you  
shine upon us. For the life you  
give our food, for the warmth you  
give our skies.

They take the small cup and place it in front of themselves.  
Next, they pull a canteen from their pocket and unscrew the  
cap. Slowly, with reverence, they tip the canteen over the  
cup and a gentle stream of water falls into it. Once the cup  
is filled, not long after, the cap is re-screwed and the  
canteen tucked back away.

ZIGGY (CONT'D)

I will love the gifts you have given  
me, and I will shine them upon others  
wherever I go.

They quickly move the cup over the candle's flame, but for a brief moment to warm it. Then, straight to their lips, savoring the water as they drink. When they are done, they set the cup back down on the mat and are still for a moment. Once the moment passes, they look up at the monitors and see a room with Astrid practicing her marital arts forms. Ziggy sighs, and continues their post.

INT. TERRACE - EVENING

Astrid moves through her forms on a terrace, high in a tower overlooking the vast expanse of the Citadel. She is practiced, and it's clear that this comes naturally to her. She moves smoothly, like a flowing current being broken up periodically by punctuated, lighting fast bursts. Behind her, her teacher intently watches her movements, looking for any slip up and finding none.

TEACHER

(nodding)

Good. Your forms have gotten  
stronger. You've been practicing.

Astrid casually converses while she practices. These two are very familiar with each other and Astrid vents without filter.

ASTRID

Pilgrimage rights! We've had sixteen  
dockets of passengers ready for two  
years now and Father is still  
conceding to these fanatics!

Teacher pouts a bit and nods. He's not totally on-board with the distraction, but he can't disagree.

TEACHER

Your complaints have gotten stronger  
as well. You've been practicing  
those too.

Astrid stops her routine in frustration, and turns to the teacher.

ASTRID

You know it's been four years...

TEACHER

(interrupting)

Forms.

She gets back to it. Silently scolding herself for breaking form.

ASTRID

Four years since I graduated the academy! But all father does is send me to investigate false insurrection reports. Ziggy won't let me off the leash for so much as a minute. This is embarrassing.

At this, she finishes her forms and comes to a final pose. The teacher looks over her and nods in approval. He begins to walk over to Astrid, while she lets go of her pose and relaxes.

TEACHER

What is the first rule of Balam?

Astrid composes herself and answers studiously, thinking this is a test.

ASTRID

To guide the natural flows in the currents of the world around us. To move with them, so that they move with us.

Teacher looks at Astrid with a bit of pity.

TEACHER

No, that is what Balam IS. This isn't a test, Astrid.

Astrid now looks quite confused but doesn't yet drop her studious demeanor.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

The first rule of Balam is...Don't die! That's the first rule of any marital art. Your father and Captain Fontane are just trying to keep you safe. The captain especially!

At this, Astrid's eyes sink a little in shame. She knows this is true, that she's being too frustrated with Ziggy.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

I've watched you two grow up, and I know that they would give their life to protect you. It's always been that way.

ASTRID

And my father?

Her expression changes ever so slightly into a scowl. She has not softened her resentment on this front. Teacher hesitates before giving a very diplomatic answer.

TEACHER

So why don't you talk to him about this? You are the heir, Astrid. Your word has weight. Why not try to change his mind? Get the Joining's influence out of the throne room.

Astrid shakes her head. She's calmed a bit from her momentary resentment.

ASTRID

(sighing)

No. Much as I hate to admit it, they have their place now. Attempting to oust them would only stir up trouble we don't need. You should have seen Ziggy stand up to the High Evangelical today. He looked like he was about to wring their neck.

Teacher moves over and pats her on the shoulder. They look at each other like a true father and daughter.

TEACHER

Then maybe they would be able to help?

Astrid considers for a moment. A new middle ground is presenting itself to her.

ASTRID

Perhaps. If I could get a better understanding of their actual faith, we might be able to negotiate for better terms on the pilgrimages. That would be a start.

Calmed and hopeful, she smiles at her teacher, who smiles in turn.

TEACHER

That would be a start.

INT. SECURITY OFFICE - EVENING

Ziggy remains looking at the greyscale screen, Astrid and Teacher still smiling at each other warmly, when the silence is abruptly interrupted by a stranger slamming open the door. Ziggy turns to look just as suddenly, on guard for danger. In the doorway stands a young man, clad in white robes: an ACOLYTE of the Joining.

Both stare at each other in shock, Ziggy inquisitively and the acolyte in nervous terror while faint shouting and commotion can be heard outside the office.

ZIGGY  
(accusing)  
Who are you?

The acolyte looks terrified. Ziggy notices that he clutches a dagger in his hand, shaking, trying to steel himself for the task ahead. Ziggy knows the situation now, this acolyte means to murder them.

There is a beat, where both know the score now, and they stare each other down waiting for the fight to begin.

Then, all at once, violence breaks out. The acolyte charges forward towards Ziggy, raising their dagger to gleam in the grey light of the monitors. Ziggy reaches into their coat and flings out a silver blade, suspended by field circuit magnetism as it flies towards its target and hits its mark: the acolytes neck.

The acolyte stops where they were struck, collapsing to the floor. As Ziggy draws their blade back into their coat, they rush over to catch the limp body of the acolyte before it hits the ground. They meet each other's eyes, and the acolyte still looks afraid as the life leaves them. Ziggy can only look in pity and confusion as they become covered in blood.

Ziggy looks out into the hall, hearing the commotion coming from more parts of the palace. Something is happening. They gently lay the body of the acolyte down and go to check the security monitors. Acolytes have invaded many other parts of the palace, accosting and kidnapping people all throughout the staff. Astrid's room hasn't been reached yet, she's still talking with her teacher. Ziggy slams a button on the console and a klaxon begins sounding throughout the palace.

From beneath their jacket, Ziggy draws two more silver blades, suspended at the ends of their fists. They turn and leave the room, headed for Astrid.

INT. TERRACE - EVENING

The klaxon is still sounding, disturbing the otherwise peaceful ambience of the terrace. Furniture has been stacked up into a barricade, blocking the door from opening. On either side of it stand Astrid and her Teacher, pressed against the wall in case they need to engage with an intruder.

They stand in silence for a moment, until an impact shakes the door. They both jump to full attention and adopt a combat stance. Someone tries to shake the door again, and the two share a glance, checking if the other is ready.

Then, from behind the door:

ZIGGY  
(softly)  
Astrid!

Astrid relaxes slightly, but still does not speak. She waits to hear what they have to say.

ZIGGY (CONT'D)  
Astrid...The terraced garden blooms  
with old flowers.

Astrid fully relaxes. This code is what she needed to hear. With a nod to her instructor, she begins clearing the barricade out of the way to open the door. The Teacher does not relax.

After Astrid unlocks the door, Ziggy rushes in and shuts the way behind them, re-locking it. They look Astrid in the eye.

ZIGGY (CONT'D)  
We need to leave.

ASTRID  
(shocked)  
It's that bad already?

Ziggy moves across the room to look out past the railing of the terrace. Sounds of battle ring out across the vista, smoke rises from several buildings cries of anguish can be heard in the distance.

ZIGGY  
I think the entire palace is overrun.  
We need to evacuate you as soon as  
we can.

Astrid is visibly hesitant. She begins to pace.

ASTRID  
No, we can't just leave now. The  
guards might be able to get this  
under control. I'm not just going  
to abandon the palace.

Ziggy turns back and walks quickly over to Astrid, who stops in her path. Their hand goes to her shoulder and they begin to plead quietly.

ZIGGY  
Astrid, the palace is lost. I didn't  
see any guards on my way here, but i  
saw at least fifty acolytes of the  
Joining. I was barely able to make  
it here without being seen.



Astrid is now stunned, shaking her head trying to parse the news.

ASTRID

I knew the Joining was going to be a problem, but I...I never even DREAMED they would go this far.

Jolting them from their debate, a loud impact strikes the door from the other side. Someone is trying to breach it. There are multiple voices coming from the other side, muffled but shouting.

ZIGGY

Oh, shit, I WAS spotted.

The Teacher interrupts the conversation, standing at attention and speaking in formal tone.

TEACHER

(poised)

I'm afraid the captain is right.  
Captain Fontane, please escort the lady to a safe place beyond the edges of the Citadel. I will hold the invaders at bay.

At this, he strides forward towards the two, intent in his mission.

ASTRID

(pleading)

You can't be serious...

He clasps the two by their shoulders and begins pushing them, semi-reluctant, towards the edge of the terrace.

TEACHER

You cannot fall into enemy hands.  
Captain Fontane, perform your duties.

ASTRID

(interrupting, pleading)

STOP! I can help you hold them off!

TEACHER

And Astrid...

He pulls her close and stares her directly in the eyes. He knows these may be his last words to her, and he wants to make them count.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

(almost crying)

Remember rule number one.

While Astrid looks at him, half betrayed and half grieving, Teacher pushes the two of them over the edge, almost blasting them with an unseen force. From Astrid's POV, we see him disappear behind the terrace as she falls, looking on with a face that says, "I wish I could do more than this".

EXT. CITADEL SKYLINE - EVENING

As Astrid and Ziggy plummet to the streets below, they try to angle their bodies to fly towards each other. The two make contact and clasp each other as the ground rapidly approaches. Beneath them, a group of acolytes watches their descent.

Just as they are about to hit pavement, Astrid twists herself around and pushes out with her limbs. Wham! Jets of plasma shoot out from around her body, like a thruster! Ziggy is clinging onto her for dear life, and their fall is smoothly broken. Just as quickly, they rocket back up above the roofs of the street and start flying along the thoroughfare.

Ziggy is grunting and shouting incoherently through all of this, but eventually they regain their composure enough to speak.

ZIGGY

Since when can you do this?

Astrid ignores their question, and speaks without looking back. She's speaking curtly, trying to hide how upset she is.

ASTRID

We're going to the cave on the far  
ridge of Key'ak canyon. The old  
fort.

Suddenly, a bolt of electrical energy streaks past them, almost making contact. Astrid flinches at the near miss and dodges to avoid it midair.

ASTRID (CONT'D)

Did you see that? Where was that?

The two scan the streets beneath them as they zoom by, but a second streak almost hits them. Then a third, then even more. They have become accosted by a rainstorm of electrical bolts being fired from the ground below. Acolytes see them coming and signal to each other to fire, using their field circuits to fling streaks of energy towards their target.

Astrid weaves among the volleys streaking by, and begins to dive closer to the ground, eventually flying along the corridor of a main avenue. There are still acolytes firing, but fewer of them.

But then, the pair are struck by one of the bolts. Immediately they begin to convulse from the shock, and they both tumble out of the air.

WHAM! They strike the road, the crowd around them fleeing to safety. Astrid drags herself up into a sitting position against the face of the building next to her and holds her head in pain. She looks around and sees Ziggy already on their feet, but unsteady and almost crouching to stay stable.

Ziggy shakily moves over to Astrid and lifts her up into a stand, her arm over Ziggy's shoulder for support.

ZIGGY  
(groaning)  
Come on, into the alleys...

They limp along the length of the alley, leaving behind the chaos on the main street. They duck behind a large crate at the other end of the alley and press themselves into the corner to get their bearings.

Three acolytes appear at the entrance to the alley, and they signal to each other to disperse. Only one progresses down the alley towards Ziggy and Astrid.

Astrid hears the approach, and presses herself up against the side of the crate for an ambush. But before she can do anything, Ziggy jumps out into the open and flings a blade at the acolyte's head, killing them instantly.

The two take a moment to look at each other and catch their breath. But before so much as a moment passes, a noise comes from behind them, around the corner to another alley. They ready themselves once more and turn to see two figures, also in battle stance staring back at them: JAINA and ART.

Jaina is standing with her staff at the ready, and Art is just beside her, also at attention. The four stare at each other for a tense moment, sizing each other up. Jaina breaks the silence.

JAINA  
(to Art)  
No robes.

Art keeps his eyes locked on the pair.

ART  
Could be a disguise.

JAINA  
(softer)  
They're clearly hurt.

ART

(cold)  
So we could probably take them.

Astrid adopts her diplomatic voice.

ASTRID

We are not...  
(drops back to casual  
tone)  
Please, we're just trying to leave  
the city...

There is another beat of silence. Ziggy looks at Astrid, surprised by her candor. Astrid and Jaina share a look, and Jaina sighs. Releasing her stance, Jaina relaxes.

JAINA

Come with us.  
(Art briefly looks  
over)  
We have a better chance together.  
And I can give you first aid.

Art cautiously lowers his arms and stands up straight, never quite taking his eyes off of the strangers.

The four leave down the alleyway that Jaina and Art came from, keeping an eye around corners for danger.

INT. HALLWAY - TWILIGHT

We follow behind three men in white robes walking down a hallway. One follows behind the other two, but walks with more authority. They reach the door to the terrace and open it, entering the fading light from outside.

INT. TERRACE - TWILIGHT

The three men enter the room. The first two, unremarkable, part ways like curtains to reveal The High Evangelical, the third man, walking behind them.

He looks ahead of him with poise, and surveys the room. Robed bodies litter the floor, its unclear if they're dead. And at the center of the fallen stands the exhausted Teacher, panting and barely able to keep himself upright. More robed combatants encircle him, ready to strike but waiting. The High Evangelical shifts his eyes around to look at the carnage, but never lowers his nose. Finally, after looking back at the teacher, he breaks his silence and begins to slowly circle him.

HIGH EVANGELICAL  
Well done, old man. You've dispatched  
some of my finest agents. But surely  
you know you can't keep going.

He pauses to wait for a response, but Teacher just keeps  
panting.

HIGH EVANGELICAL (CONT'D)  
Where is the heir?

Finally, Teacher responds.

TEACHER  
(exhausted)  
It's all around you. Can't you feel  
the wind?

HIGH EVANGELICAL  
(chuckles)  
Cute.

TEACHER  
Not cute. She'll drown you with it.  
She's ready...

At this, the High Evangelical stops his circling and steps  
forward directly, but still slowly. He wants to have a  
discussion.

HIGH EVANGELICAL  
Wind cannot stop the light.

TEACHER  
You stole the light. It doesn't  
serve you.

The Evangelical has become slightly annoyed by this. He's  
let slip the usual heir of superiority, and is now engaging  
with the Teacher like a little more of an equal.

HIGH EVANGELICAL  
I serve the light. I bring a torch  
to shine it where it does not reach.  
Does the wind serve you? Does it  
serve her?

TEACHER  
It serves no one. But all breath  
becomes wind eventually. She  
understands that. Things had grown  
stagnant for too long. But the winds  
are moving again, and a storm will  
come to rip you down. I just wish I  
could be there to see it.

The High Evangelical shifts his face into a smirk. With just a touch of anger.

HIGH EVANGELICAL

Oh, I think i can grant your wish,  
old man.

Suddenly, he reaches out his hand and quickly withdraws it into a fist. Two metal bars rip themselves through the walls and impact the Teacher's exhausted body, curling around him to bind his limbs. The High Evangelical pulls his arm back all the way, and the Teacher's bindings are magnetized over to the foot of the preacher's robes, dragging Teacher along with them. Teacher can't fight anymore, he's out of energy and just collapses, succumbing to his captors.

The High evangelical cocks his head sideways to the acolyte nearest him, signaling the defeated man to be taken away. His followers oblige, dragging Teacher out the door and into the dark hallway. The High evangelical stares out into the skyline of the Citadel, ablaze with insurrection, and ponders the location of his target.

EXT. CAVE - TWILIGHT

As the sun has just set upon the Citadel, we find Astrid outside the entrance to a cave in the mountains far outside the city. She surveys the it from a distance, noting the smoke rising from the buildings and the sinister glow of fires, visible even from here. For a moment, she just stares, unable to even remark on the sight.

After a moment, Ziggy emerges from inside the cave and looks at Astrid, noticing her contemplation.

ZIGGY

Astrid.

At last, Astrid breaks her gaze from the horizon and turns to look at her friend.

ZIGGY (CONT'D)

(sympathetic)

Come on.

They nod towards the cave. Astrid reluctantly follows them into the entrance, leaving the sight of the city behind.

INT. CAVE - TWILIGHT

Inside the cave, the walls are covered with old children's drawings of Astrid and Ziggy, as well as various things around them. On the ground, Art is trying to assemble a makeshift fire using the thin twigs and shrubs from the area. It's a paltry pile, but he's trying his best.

He briefly surveys the art on the walls before going back to his work.

ART

You'd think this would all be drier.

Jaina is sitting at the entrance as Astrid and Ziggy pass by, looking at them with confusion as they go. Ziggy kneels down at the twig pile and starts tapping together their fingers, creating sparks and trying to ignite the tinder. Astrid stands in observance, arms crossed out of a bit of nervousness and a bit of chill from the setting sun.

Jaina stands up, her face now breaking into an amazed smile.

JAINA

Wait...Astrid? Astrid Dor-Thaxin?  
As in, heir to the kingdom of Arath-  
Makah?

Art's attention is immediately pulled away from the fire, and snaps to Astrid, alert and slightly on edge. Ziggy notices this immediately and stops trying to start the fire, keeping their eyes on Art.

Astrid sighs and looks at Jaina, who is positively beaming.

ASTRID

Such as it is...

She leans against the opposite wall of the cave, facing Jaina. Art is completely still. Ziggy is now looking back and forth between Jaina and Art, trying to keep an eye on both of them at once.

JAINA

I can't believe this! Why are you  
out here? What happened to you?

ART

More than that...  
(stands up, followed  
by Ziggy)  
Why are ANY of us out here? What  
happened to your CITY?

Astrid closes her eyes, and rubs her brow.

ASTRID

(sighing)  
It was a coup, by the church of the  
Joining.

Jaina and Art share a glance, ever so brief, then back to the princess.

ART  
The High Evangelical...

ASTRID  
What?  
(pause)  
Probably? Why?

Another glance between the newcomers, and Jaina steps forward deferentially.

JAINA  
Your highness, my name is Jaina Reed.  
I'm a Byurimitian archivist.  
(Astrid goes wide-eyed)  
The commonwealth had...

ASTRID  
You're the commonwealth archivist?

Jaina is hesitant to continue. Astrid looks incensed, betrayed even.

ASTRID (CONT'D)  
(turns to Art)  
Are who are you, her bodyguard?

ART  
Pilot.

Finally, Jaina works up the courage to keep talking.

JAINA  
A commonwealth carrier was attacked  
by a biological weapon and it...spoke.  
In the voice of the High Evangelical.

This is not something that Jaina is happy saying, and even more unwelcome to hear. Even Ziggy bristles at this.

ASTRID  
(cautiously)  
What do you mean "Spoke"?

A beat passes while Jaina tries to think of the quickest way to say this.

JAINA  
Through it's victims. That's why  
the Grand Jury sent us to investigate.

Astrid's guard is not fully back up.



ASTRID  
You're spies?

JAINA  
No!

ART  
Pretty much.

JAINA  
(scolding)  
Art!

Art looks over at Jaina, a bit mad that she revealed his name.

ART  
I'll remind you that these were pretty  
much the exact people we were trying  
NOT to get noticed by!

Ziggy's guard, on the other hand, is now at full alert. They  
position their hand near their inner jacket, ready to unsheathe  
their blades.

ASTRID  
(sighs)  
Either way, I don't think it matters  
anymore.

She turns away, to face the opening of the cave. A moment  
passes and everyone relaxes a bit. All except Jaina, who's  
working up to ask something.

JAINA  
What about telescope data?

And the tension is back.

ART  
(cautioning)  
Jaina?

JAINA  
(defiant)  
Art?

Astrid is now fully confused again. She shakes her head,  
looking at the archivist and trying to understand the strange  
girl.

ASTRID  
What? Telescope data?

JAINA  
The investigation. It may be why  
the Commonwealth sent me, but its  
not why I'm here.

ASTRID

You're here for our...telescope data?

Jaina reaches into her pocket, and Art gets up quickly. This leads Ziggy to follow, not quite sure whether they should be watching Art or Jaina more closely.

Jaina pulls out the beacon and shows it for all to see. It gives off an ever so faint glow in the darkening cave. Astrid and Ziggy look at it, almost transfixed.

JAINA

This crash landed on Earth the first day I was stationed there.

At the mention of Earth, Ziggy drops their guard for the first time since the conversation began, though nobody notices.

JAINA (CONT'D)

We know its an old distress beacon, we know it has encrypted data on it, and we know that it came from this direction. And...we think that it triggered the bioweapon.

Astrid finally tears her eyes away from the glowing chunk before her, and looks at Jaina, beginning to understand.

JAINA (CONT'D)

We need access to your telescope records to pin down its exact origin.

ASTRID

(pause to think)

You think this came from us?

JAINA

I...Don't know. It doesn't look like it came from here, but our records can only trace it back this far. That's why we need your help.

Astrid's eyes get wider and wider as she thinks about what this means, and the implications are not good. She turns to Ziggy with a look of fear, and Ziggy surprisingly returns the look. However, they subtly shake their head.

Jaina has caught on to all of this.

JAINA (CONT'D)

What?

ASTRID

(to Ziggy)

Could it have come from..?

ZIGGY  
(quiet, unconvincing)  
No.

JAINA  
Come from where?

Astrid turns back in Jaina's direction but looks past her, eyes still wide.

ASTRID  
...Uldaimn.

Art throws his head back in annoyance and turns around, walking away.

ART  
Oh, come on.

JAINA  
(scolding)  
Art, you are being very unhelpful today.

Art turns back around to talk, almost angry.

ART  
Jaina, this is insane! SHE'S insane!

ASTRID  
(offended)  
What?

ART  
We need to LEAVE, before one of them slits our throats in our sleep.

ASTRID  
Us?! You're the self-admitted spy!

JAINA  
Art, what the hell?!

Art begins to talk, half to the group, half to himself.

ART  
I can't believe this. Every time, this happens. Every time. Royals stay in power for too long and they all lose it, chasing delusions.

Astrid is now looking angrily at the ranting man and Ziggy isn't much less inflamed. Ziggy steps forward a bit, ready to put themselves between Art and Astrid. Art's getting more and more worked up now, slowly walking in Astrid's direction.

ART (CONT'D)

You know, maybe the Joining weren't all wrong. They've probably already killed your father, maybe I should take this opportunity to finish the job. End the royal line once and for all, free the people of this world from your rule.

Astrid is getting more and more upset by this, especially the mention of her father. Art's in spitting distance now, and Ziggy has moved to block his approach.

ART (CONT'D)

(intentionally mocking)

Who knows? They might even build a statue of me.

Astrid snaps. She moves to throw the first bolt of energy but Art dodges and prepares his own stance. However, unbeknownst to him, Ziggy has already drawn their blade and held it, suspended, at Art's throat. Jaina runs forward to intervene.

JAINA

Stop!

She takes out her staff, and aims it at the battle. The four pause, holding their positions. It's a standoff. They all look at Jaina, who is not quite afraid, but definitely desperate.

JAINA (CONT'D)

(to the group)

Stop, please...

After a tense beat, Art is the first to respond.

ART

(calmer, pleading)

Jaina, these are hierarchs. They don't think of us as people, they think of us as tools.

JAINA

Art, please, stop this.

ART

She wants us to go looking in a dead zone.

ASTRID

(shouting)

It's not a dead zone!

This stuns everyone, including Ziggy. We've never seen Astrid this uncomposed before.

ASTRID (CONT'D)

(calmer)

When i was a child...

EXT. BORDER - SPACE

We begin a flashback by seeing a ship moving through deep space. Nothing else is out here, but the craft silently moving along its path.

ASTRID (V.O.)

...I had always heard the ghost stories of Uldaimn. All the ships and probes that went in, and never came out. Entire colony crews vanished...

INT. RECON SHIP - SPACE

Inside the somewhat cramped ship, decorations still cover the walls. A young Astrid stands beside a man in a chair, her father. The rest of the crew attend to their posts, flicking the controls at each of their respective consoles and relaying information to each other, though it is too quiet for us to hear.

ASTRID (V.O.)

So I convinced my father to let me attend a routine border check along the edge of Uldaimnic space. He agreed, because they were usually just a formality...

A beeping sound comes from one of the consoles in front of the bridge. A technician looks at their screen.

TECHNICIAN

Uh, you're highness, we're receiving...A radio signal.

The rooms goes dead quiet. There's not SUPPOSED to be anyone out here. The king swallows and clears his throat.

KING

Let's hear it.

The technician flips a switch and the signal plays over the speakers. It is garbled and incomprehensible, but every so often there is unmistakably the voice of a woman on the other end. She sounds upset, but its impossible to say why. Eventually, the air goes dead. Everyone looks around at each other, looking for some kind of idea what to do.

Astrid is frightened and clutches her father's side. He responds by putting his hand on her head.

KING (CONT'D)  
Was there a transponder code?

The technician looks back at the console, taps a few buttons and becomes ghost-white in shock. The crewman working next to them looks over and goes wide-eyed as well, looking at the king with a slack jaw.

KING (CONT'D)  
Spit it out!

The technician turns to face the king and collects himself to get the words out.

TECHNICIAN  
It was the transponder code for the  
Taljeda-Naru, your highness...

Close up on young Astrid's face, frozen in fear.

CUT TO:

INT. CAVE - TWILIGHT

Back in the present, Astrid's face has recollected itself and looks towards Art in cold defiance. Art doesn't seem to get it.

ART  
(shaking head)  
Is that supposed to mean something  
to me?

Everyone looks at him like he's just said something ridiculous, because he has.

JAINA  
...The Taljeda-Naru? It was one of  
the first colony ships in the Great  
Diaspora? It disappeared and kept  
anyone else from coming this direction  
for ages?

He's thrown slightly off by this. He recognizes he was supposed to know that. Quickly, he tries to recover.

ART  
So something's still out there.

ASTRID  
SomeONE's still out there.  
(MORE)

ASTRID (CONT'D)

And no one seems to care! No one is taking it seriously.

ART

All the more reason to let us see the star records.

Ziggy finally speaks up, causing everyone to remember they were also involved here.

ZIGGY

What you're looking for isn't here.

ART

What do you mean?

ZIGGY

Most of what the royal academy funds are geological surveys. It's for finding the aquifers that we build our cities on. Very little astronomy is done here. For the most complete records, you'll need to speak to the Prophets of Mars on Makah.

Art and Jaina look at each other. This new complication is not what they were hoping to hear. Astrid is also surprised by this news, but is impressed by Ziggy's knowledge.

ASTRID

I'm not asking you to like me, Art. But you need whatever ship brought you here, and I'll need to take my city back for you to do that. For the time being, we share a purpose.

Art's anger has completely worn away and been replaced by reluctant acknowledgement. She's right. Before anything more can be said, though, the sound of mortar fire echos from outside. Everyone breaks the standoff and goes to look.

EXT. CAVE - NIGHT

The sun is almost completely set now, and lights illuminate a few parts of the city, as the fires seem to have died down. Mortar shots burst above the city in sign of victory. Bright spotlights illuminate the highest spire of the palace, where a solid red flag flies in the night wind.

Astrid is barely holding it together at the sight of this. Ziggy is just behind her, and Jaina and Art only barely out of the cave.

JAINA  
What does that mean?

Ziggy turns around solemnly.

ZIGGY  
The king is dead.

Astrid steels herself, barely, and marches back into the mouth of the cave.

INT. CAVE - NIGHT

Astrid moves straight over to the pile of twigs on the cave floor and whips her arm out in its direction, flicking her fingers at the apex of the movement. A bolt of energy flies from her fingertips and sets the pile ablaze.

ASTRID  
We move at dawn.

She turns back around, meeting the others who have come back inside, and tries to walk back out into the night. Ziggy catches her shoulder as she's about to exit. Astrid looks Ziggy in the eyes, and they understand. She needs a moment alone.

Ziggy lets her pass, and motions for Jaina and Art to join them by the fire.

EXT. CAVE - NIGHT

Astrid sits down on a rock just outside the cave, and looks out at the city. Finally her composure breaks completely, and she catches her face in her hands. She begins to quietly let a tear roll down her face, mourning.

FADE TO:

EXT. DESERT - DAY

The same vantage point, but during the mid morning, as the four trudge through the desert back towards the city along a dirt road. Art and Jaina are ahead of Astrid and Ziggy, kept at a safe distance as they move, with Jaina resting her staff across her shoulders. There is an uneasy silence among the group, and Jaina leans over to Art.

JAINA  
(quiet)  
Hey, so what was all that last night?

Art looks over at her briefly, then back forward to avoid looking her in the eye.



ART

(curt)

I'd rather not talk about it.

From behind, Astrid sees their talking, but can't quite hear them.

ASTRID

Hey! What are you too talking about?

ART

(to Astrid)

No need to worry, princess. I know the situation. You won't have any more trouble from me.

Astrid lets them continue.

JAINA

(after a beat, playful)

So...Do you think either one of them knows Balam?

He thinks for a second.

ART

Could be either one really. I'd expect it of the guard though.

JAINA

I'd wager its Astrid.

ART

(smirking)

Oh, you'd WAGER, would you? With all your piles of currency?

JAINA

I'd just rob you. What do you have, a mattress with gold bullion under it or something?

They both chuckle lightly. The mood is lifting now.

ART

So what makes you think its her?

JAINA

Hmm. I don't know. She lit that fire pretty easily last night. She must be good with field circuits.

ART  
(shaking head)  
Nah, field circuits don't mean you  
know Balam.

JAINA  
Okay, fine. Then let's just call it  
dramatic instinct. The princess who  
knows marital arts? That would be  
pretty cool.

ART  
(smiles)  
It's good to see you back in full  
spirits.

JAINA  
I'm just excited. This is exactly  
the kind of thing I came out here  
for. Making a mark on history, you  
know.  
(sees Art a bit upset)  
Not for you?

ART  
Over time, you kinda develop  
this...sense for when you're living  
through an important moment. History  
has this feeling to it, that you can  
recognize sometimes. And you never  
want to touch it. Because its either  
ugly and you don't want to be a part  
of it, or its beautiful and you don't  
want to ruin it.

Jaina ponders this for a moment.

ART (CONT'D)  
Sometimes its both. Those are the  
most important ones.

After a brief pause to let this sink in, Jaina comes back to  
the present moment, and leans tauntingly into Art's direction.

JAINA  
You know, we could just ask them.

ART  
(quizzical)  
I don't think she likes me.

JAINA  
I don't think she likes YOU.

ART

I mean...

Before he can answer, Jaina turns back and yells to Astrid.

JAINA

Hey, Astrid! Do you know Balam?

Astrid can't help but crack the smallest of smiles at the blunt question.

ASTRID

Yes, I do...

Jaina turns back to Art with a smug look of satisfaction on her face. Looking at art, "I told you so".

Back in the rear, Astrid and Ziggy talk themselves.

ASTRID (CONT'D)

(to Ziggy)

What do you think about that one?

ZIGGY

(curtly)

I think she didn't try to kill us.

Astrid is slightly taken aback by the unpleasant response. A brief moment's consideration reveals to her the reason.

ASTRID

You're upset we're going back?

ZIGGY

After everything it took, the lives  
that were sacrificed to get you out?  
YES!

ASTRID

I understand, but the people are  
still in danger. Every minute the  
Joining keep control of the palace  
is going to make it harder to restore  
normality.

Ziggy is actually stunned and a little offended by this remark.

ZIGGY

Normality? Are you serious? There  
was a COUP, Astrid! There's no going  
back to normality after this. The  
king is dead!

Astrid is a bit wounded by this reminder, though not quite painfully. Mostly just melancholy.

Ziggy realizes they went slightly over a line.

ZIGGY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry...

Astrid turns back towards the road.

ASTRID

(consoling)

Let's just get this done.

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

In the still-smoldering streets of the capitol, we once again see the old beggar, hunched against a wall. Things have calmed to the point where no fighting is still happening, and what people remain in the streets are attempting to sift through debris. Beside the old beggar is a ragged stray cat, who cozies up beside the man. Automatically, the man begins to pet the scruffy creature, comforting it.

A pair of Joining acolytes pass by, inspecting the damage with a bit of self-satisfaction. As they pass the beggar, one of them bows to him, while the other keeps their eyes fixed forward. The beggar, surprisingly, hisses at the acolyte as though he were the cat beside him. The cat itself is a bit taken aback at this, as is the acolyte, who takes his upright position back with his partner and continues on. After they leave, he looks back at the cat and smiles.

The camera pans up to the rooftop and we can see four people jumping across a gap between buildings.

EXT. ROOFTOPS - DAY

Astrid, Ziggy, Jaina, and Art leap along the adobe surfaces of the rooftops, weaving around chimneys and antennae until they come to the edge above a large avenue, able to run no further. They duck behind the inner edge of the building's facade where they can view the looming architecture of the palace in the middle distance. Astrid points to a section of roof.

ASTRID

(catching breath)

Okay, look up there.

(others follow her  
finger)

That's the skylight to the main barracks. If we drop down in there, We should have a straight shot to the the generator room, and YOU should have a straight shot to the north hangar. Are you positive that's where your ship is?

ART  
(nodding)  
Yes, I'm positive.

Jaina also nods, smirking and giving a thumbs up.

ART (CONT'D)  
Are YOU positive you want to try  
this absolutely abysmal plan?

ASTRID  
Forgive me if I don't take tactical  
advice from the man who tried to  
kill me yesterday.

JAINA  
At least they won't be expecting it!

ZIGGY  
I can't believe this is how you were  
sneaking out all those years. You  
know we had teams investigating that?

Astrid is getting a tiny bit fed up with all the distraction.

ASTRID  
(waving hands)  
Enough! Are we all on board with  
the plan?

ZIGGY  
(answering immediately)  
Yes.

Jaina once again emphasizes a double thumbs up, with a goofy smile. They all look at art, who rolls his eyes and sighs in defeat.

ART  
Fine. Lead the way.

INT. BARRACKS - DAY

The High Evangelical strides slowly between two lines of acolytes in reverence. He carries a syringe gun in his hand, and slowly raises it up next to his head, readying it for the task ahead. Within the syringe, we can see small white filaments moving about like living cobwebs. As he nears the center of the room, we see his target.

Teacher is beaten and bound to a stone altar, seemingly from another part of the palace. He is wreathed by the columns of light from the nine skylights above, but he and the altar itself are centered, in shadow.

When the High Evangelical arrives at Teacher's side and looks down at him with a bit of derision and a lot of expectation, Teacher yields nothing. He is stoic, cold. After a moment staring at each other:

HIGH EVANGELICAL  
(Without charade. A  
bit disgusted)  
Brave. You will be useful.

He plunges the syringe into Teacher's neck and begins to inject. Teacher, still defiant, barely stifles his pain, though he does begin to writhe a bit on the altar. The High Evangelical's eyes have become wide with the first bit of outright anger we've ever seen from him. All of a sudden:

CRASH! Time slows as Astrid crashes through the skylight above and lands behind the preacher's back, cushioning herself with a burst of plasma as she nears the ground. The High Evangelical turns around to look at her, eyes still wide but a bit more from surprise now. Astrid looks up from her landing to meet his eyes, looking at him with determination as the other three tumble less gracefully to the ground behind her. As she raises her eyes to the scene, however, all the resolve leaves her. She sees her mentor in such a state, with the preacher's needle in his neck and her face turns to shock and pain. She sinks to the floor.

Time moves normally now as the others regain their composure. Ziggy is up first with a knife drawn. Jaina is soon after, with a sluggish raise of her staff. Art is moving like a worn out slug, moaning as he hoists himself off the ground.

ART  
(sarcastic)  
I think they know we're here.

HIGH EVANGELICAL  
(to Astrid)  
Finally you bow.

Jaina has been surveying the room of acolytes, but turns to the preacher. Art looks at him and Jaina leans in.

JAINA  
(whispers to Art)  
The High Evangelical?

ART  
(whispering back)  
That's him.

Ziggy briefly snaps their attention away from the scene to face Jaina and Art.

ZIGGY

Go! Now!

The two snap out of their conversation and begin to bolt towards the barracks door.

HIGH EVANGELICAL

(to the acolytes)

Cut them off!

A throng of robed henchmen convene to block the escape, closing the barracks door and destroying the controls to lock it. Jaina is panting from exhaustion and injury, and Art is also too sluggish from the fall to fight.

There is a tense standoff. Our crew is completely surrounded. Astrid is still staring at Teacher in shock.

HIGH EVANGELICAL (CONT'D)

All my agents cast to the winds to find you and yet you deliver yourself to us willingly. I'd thank you if you had not cost us so much time.

(sees Astrid still shocked)

I understand you cared for the old man, but he is in our embrace now.

The High Evangelical slowly, tauntingly, removes the bindings from Teacher and allows him to rise.

HIGH EVANGELICAL (CONT'D)

He is an acolyte of Korai now, my child. Fear not. We will take care of him.

Teacher stands from the altar slowly, as if waking from a sleep. When we see his eyes, they are wide but distant, dissociating into some vision within his mind that he does not understand. The High Evangelical leans into his ear.

HIGH EVANGELICAL (CONT'D)

Wipe them from this place.

And he steps back into the shadows, his acolytes following him. Without hesitation, Teacher leans forwards and rushes in front of Art so fast it almost looks like teleportation. Art leans back and becomes unbalanced with a look of surprise on his face. Teacher begins building energy in their palm, ready to strike. Jaina moves to help but she is too slow and too far. Right as it looks like Teacher is about to unleash his strike, one of Ziggy's knives flies in from out of frame and connects with Teacher's hand, knocking away the strike.

The battle is on. First up, Ziggy vs. Teacher. Ziggy flings knives at the old master, forcing him to take the back foot as he dodges. Ziggy begins to move the knives remotely with their movements, almost like a conductor guiding an orchestra. Jaina has taken to fighting the remaining acolytes still blocking their escape. They pose no combat threat to her, and she immediately begins work on the door controls to get it back open, tearing away the panel and fiddling with the wires inside. Art stays at a distance, throwing the occasional plasma bolt at Teacher, but not achieving much. Teacher is too adept at his art. Astrid is still essentially catatonic now, though she does turn to watch the battle unfold, still shaken.

Teacher is done playing defense, and moves to attack. As Art throws another bolt of plasma, Teacher deflects it back towards art with even more power. Art is forced to block his attack with his own field circuits, and the impact sends art flying back towards the wall where Jaina is working. Art groans in pain and exhaustion, but is still conscious when Jaina glances over to check on him. Seeing him fine, she continues her work.

Teacher now focuses the brunt of his fury on Ziggy, swatting away their knives and moving forward, eventually reaching them. With a sudden lurch, Teacher palms right in Ziggy's sternum, sending them down with the wind knocked out of them. Everyone is down now. Teacher begins to build up a gigantic amount of energy in his hands, clearly preparing for a deadly final strike. Lighting swirls around his figure as he draws energy from the very electricity in the room. He aims at Ziggy directly and unleashes the bolt.

However, at the very last second, Astrid has shaken from her stupor and joined the fight. She darts between Teacher and Ziggy to block her mentor's attack, sending an explosive amount of energy swirling around the barracks. Only it does not move randomly, not quite. The air is whipping around inside the room as great currents of energy bring the room to a frenzied storm. At the center of it all: Astrid, using the very forms practiced earlier to pierce the oncoming onslaught of the attacks energy and redirect it around her. She waves her arms in precise fashion to move the currents around her and dissipate them. The two are now locked in a dance of raw power. Teacher pouring out energy, Astrid deflecting and diffusing it.

All three others in the party are stunned at this display. Ziggy is silent.

JAINA

What is this?

ART

THIS is Balam...



For a brief moment, we focus on Teacher, obscured on the other side of his immense energy blast, as he watches Astrid practice her art against him. Outside the view of anyone but us, his face becomes one of deep pride and joy, a tear running out of one eye. A part of him could not be prouder of her in this moment. But all too suddenly, that expression is ripped away from him, almost as if by force, into a cold and tactical determination. He steadies himself against the ground and pushes all his might into a final surge of power.

It works, and Astrid is pushed back too, collapsing next to Ziggy as the blast finally dissipates completely. She has succeeded in wearing Teacher out for now, but she's knocked down too. Everyone takes a beat to re-survey the scene. The High Evangelical has been watching this all unfold and is frustrated with his new instrument.

HIGH EVANGELICAL  
(to the acolytes)  
Enough of this. Finish them!

As the acolytes move in to attack, Jaina finally sparks something in the door control panel and the barracks entrance springs to life and opens wide, permitting their escape.

JAINA  
I've got it! Let's go!

She bolts to the front of the battle and begins holding off the acolytes from reaching the other three while they escape. Art starts towards the door but looks back. He sees the state of Astrid and Ziggy and the looming threat of the acolytes. He looks at Astrid in the eyes.

ART  
(after brief hesitation)  
Come with us.

ASTRID  
(strained, recovering)  
I can't leave them...

Ziggy places a hand on Astrid's shoulder, and she turns to them.

ZIGGY  
Astrid...We have to go.

She is pained at the thought more than her injuries. But after a moment, she gets up and limps towards Art and the exit with Ziggy in tow, supporting her weight. Jaina follows quickly after and all four leave the barracks as fast as they can manage.

The acolytes begin to chase them, but they are cut off by a barked order from the High Evangelical.

HIGH EVANGELICAL

No!

Everyone stops. The High Evangelical is furious, all pretense of rhetoric is gone from him in this moment.

HIGH EVANGELICAL (CONT'D)

(growled)

Raze the city again.

INT. HANGAR - DAY

The group has picked up speed now, aided by the fact that no one seems to be following them. As they turn the corner into the hangar, The Lighthouse can finally be seen among the other vessels docked there.

ART

(hurried)

That's the one there.

He rushes to the head of the group.

INT. LIGHTHOUSE - DAY

Art bolts in the door and heads over to the central console.

ART

Computer.

(computer chimes in  
response)

Begin immediate launch sequence.

The others are quickly in behind him as the doors close and the Lighthouse hums to life. The ship begins to rise out of the hangar. As it does so, Art looks out the windows to see the light coming in from the hangar entrance in the roof isn't very bright.

ART (CONT'D)

Why is it so dark out...

He is very quickly answered when the ship clears the hangar and begins to get a full view of the city as it rises. *Everything* is on fire. The city is burning and the smoke is blotting out the sun. Flames are the only light source as the lighthouse rises further and further from the calamity. Jaina moves over to join him, but before they can say anything to each other:

ZIGGY (O.S.)

Astrid...

The two look over to see that Astrid has managed to pull herself up and over to the window, silhouetted against the fires below. She drops to her knees, broken as she surveys the carnage with a beaten stare.

JAINA

Hey...

She begins to move over to Astrid to comfort her, but Art grabs her arm to stop her. In a bit of surprise, Jaina looks over at him, but see's he's silent, wide-eyed, and looking at the scene before them. Jaina realizes what's going on, its one of those moments he was talking about before. The important ones you don't touch. Jaina turns back to watch too.

Ziggy moves over to Astrid's side and sits down next to her, resting a hand on her shoulder.

ASTRID

(on the verge of tears)

Its all burning, Ziggy...Our home is  
burning...

Ziggy can find no words, so instead they just turn Astrid's head away from the city and rest their foreheads together. Astrid is working herself into a fury now.

ASTRID (CONT'D)

I'm going to come back. I'm going  
to find a way to beat them and I'm  
going to come back.

A brief shot of Art, regarding that last sentence.

Astrid tries to find more words, but she's too angry and hurt, nothing comes out. Instead, she breaks and lets out a scream of rage and pain, Ziggy still comforting her, as the Lighthouse rises through the smoke.

FADE TO BLACK: