Space Beavers:

the novel

**Prologue, Zeroth Act**

**Scene 1:**

The far reaches of space hold mysteries both terrible and unimaginable. And although we may look, there is no way of knowing what, in the infinite void, may exist. Time gnaws away at the fast approaching moment when the mystery, inevitably, comes looking.

A battle for the minds and bodies of Earth divides humanity. Two factions vie for control of the planet: the logic-oriented democrats, and a religious monarchy. But their war is simply a stage for a more subtle battle, a battle for the survival of the human race.

A being of supreme mental power exerts its will upon the two factions, in an apparent effort to snuff out all life on the planet. Only one man has the knowledge and power to set in motion a chain of events that could save the legacy of humanity before it is too late...

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Dr. Shamanistikov chuckles nervously to himself as he furiously adjusts levels on the warp harmonic oscillator, a device which, of course, stabilizes the violent vibrational frequencies of a wormhole so that it does not shake itself apart.

Through Dr. Shamanistikov's mind race shapes upon shapes—he no longer thinks in a language like ours, but rather in visualizations of real structures.

“You still haven't found me, you formless puppeteer!” the Dr. says to no one physically present. Bits of concrete and dust crumble around him as another blast rocks the bunker which houses much of his precious laboratory equipment. The automatic calibration system has already been knocked out by the battle raging overhead, and Shamanistikov is the only person able to predict the changes accurately enough to keep the wormhole open.

The Dr.'s assistant rushes up to him, red-faced and wearing a horrified, yet naively confident expression, “Dr., there's something strange happening on the edges of the wormhole...”

Shamanistikov looks up calmly amongst the urgent chaos of imminent death surrounding them. “Wormholes have been talked about for longer than anyone even knew they could actually exist, therefore I'll excuse your subsequent misconceptions on the matter. There is not an edge so much as a zone of transition. The reality is, a wormhole appears more like a tornado than anything resembling the exertions of a blind, earth-loving, tunneling hermaphrodite. Yet just as a worm navigates the hidden core of an apple—while an ant must cross the relatively flat surface—so does this space-cyclone navigate the hidden core of the universe.”

The assistant looks up to Shamanistikov like a puppy after a ball.

Shamanistikov furrows his brow and says, “Get out of here, this place is falling apart and I've got no more work for you!”

“Dr., I'm staying with you! By tomorrow they'll all--”

The Dr. cuts him off, “Oh shut up and get out of here! There *is* no tomorrow! There's no place for things like time in the Void. Go make peace with what little of it you might have left on this world.”

“But...”

“Besides, you're useless to me now.”

“Its been a pleasure serving with--” the assistant starts saluting, but he is cut off as a pillar breaks free from the roof and crushes him.

“Damn!” the Dr. says, as the shifting lines on a segment of the wormhole map turn red. He speaks into a radio, “My children, my 700's, there is another spike in the gravitational field over section G78 by B32.1, steer clear!” Shamanistikov is very protective of his android creations; he treats them as if they were the sons he never had.

The radio buzzes back, a monotone, emotionless voice, “Yes, father, we confirm the anomaly.”

Thousands of kilometers overhead, in the cold silence of space, ten warships navigate a carefully planned confusion within the chaos of the battle for the planet, over the planet, in order to escape into the wormhole which the Dr. has just managed to open. Unbeknownst to the two warring factions, these ten warships are the last hope of humanity. And yet... the occupants of these ships are themselves not entirely human.

Another blast resounds in the laboratory, and a slab of concrete strikes the Dr. on the leg. He screams out, momentarily falling away from the console. A webwork of red lines begins to spread out from the center of the wormhole image. “You haven't much time! Go!” he yells.

“Father, there is something strange happening...”

“Is it vital? What is it?”

“Perhaps marginally vital-”

The Dr. struggles to maintain the harmonic resolution of the wormhole's inertia.

“You have all the programming you need, my children, you must go now! I trust your decisions.”

“As you wish, father. Goodbye.”

“Goodbye my beautiful children, and good luck...”

Dr. Shamanistikov watches as the ships disappear, one by one, through the wormhole. After the last one, he sees a strange anomaly: it had appeared that, for just a fraction of half a moment, a third thread had entered into the trans-oscilliogenic receiver. Yet, he has little time to wonder about it, as the bunker is falling apart around him. He leaves the harmonic oscillator and immediately red lines begin to grow, filling the image.

“We'll see how those thick-skulled puppets like my homemade supernova!” he chuckles. “A blast from a hyper-oscillating discombobulated wormhole!” He laughs with more nervousness than confidence, rushing to the other side of the lab, as much as an old man with a broken leg can rush.

The Dr. flips a switch on a device which has narrowly missed being smashed by a ton of flaming concrete. It spins up, and forms a thin line of plasma which glows like a small sun in the darkened room. The spinning of the machine winds up faster and faster, as the line grows wider into an oval, and then a circle. The bunker is moaning around the Dr. and the machine as the pillars supporting the room give their last bit of strength. The Dr. is about to step into the circle of light, when he sees something he did not expect within. It is a boy, and a woman looking back at him, scared and bewildered. Around them he sees the familiar landscape of crystalline towers, a virtual world which the Dr. had created to interact with the minds of his android children, the 700 series. But the towers are crumbling around the two doomed figures.

“How could you be...” is all he has time to say before the bunker implodes on itself, swallowing the Dr. and his machines.

Up in space, the wormhole collapses in on itself, then explodes outwards in a brilliant display which consumes the battle surrounding it.

\* \* \*

**Scene 2:**

A small spacecraft is pursuing Dr. Shamanistikov's fleet of warships as they navigate the confusion of the battle above the planet. An ominous vortex of purple and green shifts like a typhoon, looming ever closer beyond the ships. Despite the fighting all around them, the fleet seems to have chosen a pivotal moment when both factions are too preoccupied to engage this new force, let alone figure out what it may be doing.

However, the pilot of the small pursuing craft already knows what plan Dr. Shamanistikov has, and what minions are carrying it out. Her flowing red hair threatens to burst from the shroud of her space helmet, and her eyes seem shadowed in their sockets as she stares intently at one particular ship among the fleet ahead. Her nose twitches as if to catch a scent on the breeze, and she lets out a slight *yip* sound as the first ship disappears, with a purple flash, into the wormhole. She paws at the computer console frantically. The computer says, as if through a 16bit dishwasher, “The target ship is 8th in line.”

“I know, I know...” she replies, frustrated. “Give me a lock onto their port-side warp-field signatures and tell me when the seventh ship has gone through.”

The computer clicks and says, “Yes, ma'am. Would you like to set auto-pilot program for battlefield procedures?”

“Not yet, I need all the power I can get to targeting and vectors. Once they see us, I might change my mind, though.” She bites at an overgrown nail.

“Yes, ma'am.”

The radio crackles suddenly, and the red-haired pilot yips again. A gruff male voice barks, “I know you're out there. What are you trying to do? Where have you been?”

The pilot's brow furrows with concern as she clenches her teeth. “Dr. Shamanistikov is insane! Don't go through that wormhole, Tim, please!”

Tim replies, “Scarlett, if I could live with myself for throwing it all away to stay with you, I would in a heartbeat... but you know I can't, I've got to--”

“Save the world...”

“I wasn't going to say that.”

“What are we, Tim? What have we become? Could we ever go back to civilization like this?”

“If I don't do this—if *we* don't do this—then there won't *be* any civilization left to go back to!”

“But *where*? *When*!? You don't know what's on the other side of that thing. After you pass through it, you could be just living out the rest of your weird hairy life in some simulation created by Shamanistikov, and you wouldn't even know it!”

“I don't think that's even possible...”

“You weren't there for everything, Tim; you haven't seen what I've seen.”

“I know what I've seen.”

“You don't even know what you're seeing now!”

“I know you don't think I know what you think you're telling me, but I do. It can't be like that, it *can't!*”

Scarlett's computer interrupts. “Seventh ship entering wormhole. Lock acquired. Awaiting orders.”

“I don't care about the others, but I'm going to stop you, Tim. I can't let you throw what little we have left away,” she punches out of the conversation, then says to the computer, “FIRE!” The muted low frequency sounds of the phasers humming through the hull of the ship resound around the cockpit. The horizon is suddenly obscured by a blinding explosion. The seventh ship narrowly disappears through the wormhole behind the missile blasts.

“Sensors show that the gravitational pull of the wormhole is too great to verify a velocity modifying impact,” the computer reports.

“No! What does that mean?”

“It suggests that the ship has passed into the wormhole.”

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**Scene 3:**

The 8th and last of Dr. Shamanistikov's warships closes in on the edge of the wormhole. On the metallic side of the ship is stamped the emblem of a beaver, sporting a space helmet. From the bridge, well concealed within the center of the ship, Captain 707, an android and creation of Dr. Shamanistikov, heads the crew. The nature of 707 allows it to communicate directly with the ship's computer, so that it requires no display, nor tactile controls. 707 paces the bridge to remain directly in contact with the immediate mammalian crew. The officers of the bridge are comprised of the beaver clan, were-beavers genetically modified by Dr. Shamanistikov. They sit at the various stations around the bridge, monitoring the ship's vitals.

1st Lieutenant Beavis reports hesitantly to the captain, “We are 60 kilometers from point of contact, sir...”

“I am aware,” 707 replies immediately and with no emotion. “Everyone begin preparations for wormhole entrance.”

A buzzing sound emanates from the 2nd lieutenant's console. “Operations is on the comm link. Seems urgent,” he says.

“Put them on.”

Through the crackle of the radio can be heard a nasally voice transmitted from the other side of the ship, “Captain, readings of the wormhole are showing a trajectory pull rating that we did not previously anticipate! Sir!”

“How does that affect us,” 707 replies even before the operations officer is done speaking.

“We'll be fine once we're inside of the wormhole, it's the point of contact that's got us worried... current simulations show our ship being ripped to shreds upon approach due to the wormhole's unpredictable gravitational pull.”

707 turns towards the router of the ship's computer, behind the back wall. “Please hold while I tether with the ship's computer to predict probability of failure...”

2nd lieutenant Bevan tells 707, with urgency, “Captain, sensors are picking up some sort of... explosive activity in front of the wormhole.”

“What?!” 707 says, with the slightest bit of feigned emotion. “Commander Vasily, give me a munitions report; did the Vulfship eject something?”

“Not possible, sir. Captain 704 would have contacted us beforehand, you know how he is.” Vasily's thick Russian accent enveloped the words and curled them into a river of velvet. “Lieutenant Bevin, help me form a point of origin of the disturbance. Those explosions didn't come from any of our ships.”

1st lieutenant Beavis, his relatively high post granting him some confidence to speak freely, says with uneasiness, “Is there somebody... something else out there?”

“All too likely, my furry friend,” Commander Vasily replies.

The 2nd lieutenant chimes in, “Captain, sensors show a small Dozership in the area. It is likely that it is the cause of the disturbance.”

“Why would a Dozership class be firing on a fleet of destroyers, unless they have a death wish. This smells oddly familiar...” Vasily says.

707 replies in a cold, but offhand comment, “They must be looking for an explosive exit from existence. Hail them.”

Communications 3rd Lieutenant responds emphatically, as if he'd been waiting for his single line for the entire mission, “Yessir! Hailing underway.”

A crackling static begins to haunt the bridge as the audio signal from the tiny Dozership is patched into the speakers. A female voice speaks, “You bastards... you ruined me and you brainwashed my only friend!”

Vasily chuckles slightly, “Oh, this is interesting! I regret to meet you again under these circumstances, little girl... then again, maybe not.”

707 looks sharply at Vasily, “You know this life form?”

“Unfortunately, sir.” Vasily says back to 707, with a smirk, before speaking again into the receiver. “You know, little girl, the Doctor has been looking everywhere for you and I'm sure he'd have no problem with me turning your little asteroid-pusher into stardust...”

At this last bit, 707's eyebrows raise, and it interrupts Vasily, saying, “I make the decisions around here, Vasily, and I expect a full report on your relationship with this entity.”

“I was just stating a possibility, sir.”

Suddenly, the bridge is jostled back and forth and the muffled sound of an explosion echos around the room as a shockwave moves through the ship. The radio crackles back to life, with the sound of Scarlett saying, “Fuck your stupid mission!”

1st lieutenant Beavis reports, “She's firing on us, sir!”

“We don't have time for this human irrationality; prepare to engage!” 707 declares.

Vasily laughs, relieved, “Ha ha ha, gladly, captain.” The sound of a huge energy discharge can be heard as Vasily fires the ship's main phasers.

“Direct hit on the enemy ship, its on a collision course for the wormhole,” lieutenant Beavis says.

“Looks like you'll be meeting your maker, little girl,” Vasily says, with at least a modicum of remorse.

Another explosion rocks the ship.

3rd lieutenant reports, “Captain, the Dozer took out our communications array!”

“Notify engineering,” 707 immediately responds.

“Another shot, captain?”

“Quickly”

“Direct hit, sir. Her ship is inactive; there's no way she can be a threat now.” Vasily says.

707 looks back at the ship's router. “Intership communication has failed. I can not make contact with any of my 700 siblings.”

“Her phasers may have caused an EMP when she fired on the wormhole. It should be temporary.”

3rd lieutenant says, “Sir, we are the final ship approaching the wormhole. Everyone, including the Dozer, has entered.”

Walking about the bridge, 707 begins to speak with an emotional prosody which must have been specifically programmed for this pivotal moment of the mission, “Everyone strap in, calm yourselves. Move slowly and with deliberation, or not at all. Restrain your emotional reactions. We don't know how unstable the wormhole may be. You must center your entire being. Your training has prepared you for this. You will all do fine.”

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**Scene 4:**

The radio crackles one last time with Scarlett's glitched out laughter, as her ship descends into the unknown. The signal stretches out through time and space, between the Beaver ship and her tiny Dozership; between that and Earth; between the Earth and the galaxy; between the galaxy and the gal we see...

Inside the small craft, Scarlett is thrown violently by another explosion near her ship. Laughing turns into sobbing.

Her computer, the foxcomp, says despondently, “Ma'am, 6% on board power remaining, all available power is being diverted to life support. We are now on a trajectory that is sending us into the wormhole. Good luck, ma'am. It was an honor to serve with you...”

“Fuck the life support,” She rips the cover from under one of the consoles and fiddles with the circuit board, manually switching power to munitions and draining the last of the batteries.

Scarlett looks dazed, staring out through the cockpit window towards oblivion, “I couldn't save you, Tim... but I'll blast these bastards for you...”

She fires a proton missile... It impacts to the port side of the vessel, nudging it just the slightest to starboard as it passes through the edge of the wormhole.

Scarlett's tiny ship follows the rest of the ships, collapsing into the swirling vortex to be sucked millions of the whatever-the-fucks away...

\* \* \*

A flashback from the words of Dr. Shamanistikov echo through Scarlett's ears as she stares, horrified into oblivion: *“Universes? You actually believe that rubbish? There are no universes! Nothing is separate! The Void consumes all! None of what we do here matters, don't you see?! Every moment is infinite. We're just grasping at threads, just grasping... and weaving them together, until they are inevitably swallowed by the Void...”*

“He's gone...” she says. “I'm gone.”

She has the eerie feeling that the void is seeping into her as she looks uneasily at that nothingness which edges out into the tunnel of the wormhole. She sees the nothingness spill into the somethingness of a reality with which she feels only vaguely familiar. Whatever-it-is refracts and reflects, even in such a negligent substance as the vacuum of space. It is not so much what she sees, but rather that it feels to her as though she sees it more as she would in her mind, than if she were simply looking out through eyes. Everything is happening in slow motion. Every direction she looks, she sees different wild possibilities, unraveling like fractals before her.

The longer she stares into any one direction, the more of herself she loses. As she is about to be completely overcome by the numb euphoria of absolute nothingness, a huge flamboyantly sparkling misty rock of crystals interrupts her gaze. Scarlett's small craft is heading on a collision course with a comet.

The foxcomp chimes in, “warning: impact in 20 seconds!”

The surface of the comet is shrouded in a sparkly mist, which reflects a mesmerizing plethora of brilliant shimmering colors. Here and there, giant crystals protrude from the potentially exciting mysteries of the surface.

Scarlett's eyes begin to widen just the slightest as she gasps in a breath. Then her memory catches up to her and her eyes fall. “Just let gravity work,” Scarlett says, resigned, though not without a tinge of curiosity.

The console lights up as the computer goes into action, saying, “negative, activating automatic emergency landing.”

Last-ditch jets ignite as the ship careens into the dazzling fog, sending out billows of particulates. The mist clears for a moment before the ship crashes into the jagged surface of the comet. It pummels through bits of the landscape as it comes to a stop. The twinkling mist rushes back into the clearing, like warriors of excitement filling a vacuum of dullness.

Scarlett drags herself from the broken ship. Her helmet is cracked and her wild hair is escaping. She gags and coughs before realizing she can breathe... but barely. As she takes in the sparkly fumes, her head begins to spin, and she falls to her knees. Fractals grow like crystals out of the recesses of the sparkling mist to crowd her sight as she struggles to steady herself. Her vision is overtaken by the sight of the void again, unfurling into her mind. This time, though, it seems to her that the void is coming from within, and not from outside.

She stares up, suddenly, at a source of bright light: a silhouette stands before her. The fractals growing from the mist appear to be collecting together to form a humanoid shape. On second glance, the figure is not standing, but floating, for its legs and arms are still funneling into place, like reverse tornadoes.

“What... who are you?” Scarlett asks, dumbfounded.

The Sparkles laughs, throwing its head back, “You poor lost soul,” it says, somewhat mockingly, then with a pout, “Can't you see?”

Scarlett remembers Tim for just a moment before losing herself, to smile in amusement.

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**Scene 5:**

The sign of the Beaver clan shines on the side of the warship, traveling through the void, within the churning space-cyclone shortcut tube thing.

The sounds of audio rendering and various computer interfaces being interfaced with fill the bridge of the vessel as 707 and the beavers wait patiently.

“10 seconds until retro boost to exit the wormhole,” 707 reports to a silent and meditating crew.

The blast shields have been raised to prevent the temptation of looking into the void.

The Sparkling Comet curves its velocity ever so slightly to bear down on the unsuspecting crew of the warship. Both objects close in on a pivotal juncture in time and space.

“Prime retro engines,” 707 says, “on my mark.”

The Sparkles are close behind.

“Mark,” 707 barely has time to say as the warship shutters and violently changes velocity.

“What the hell was that?” Lieutenant Beavis exclaims. He loses his calm and opens his eyes. Things fly around the cabin as inertia plays havoc. It seems to Beavis that a shimmering light is searing through what have apparently become porous walls. It sparkles and oozes, leaving trails across his vision.

“No time! Keep calm and focused. Adjusting for velocity change...” 707 says as his voice begins to speed up. “Fire retro engines! Burn until depleted! We still have a 21% chance of staying within nominal mission parameters.” His speech almost reaches a point of unintelligibly high pitch and speed.

A vibrating hum interrupts the ambiance of rendering and interfacing to resound throughout the bridge. The ship begins to even out. Outside, a rip in the escaping fractal fabric of the void appears in front of the ship and the sparkle rock. The warship's retro engines sputter out just before they both pass through the rip, into a dark field of deep space.

Everyone shakes themselves off, opening their eyes and stretching their limbs.

707 turns towards the crew, for once at a loss. “What happened in there? Status report!”

1st Lieutenant Beavis stares blankly at his hands, raising them up as if he had just seen them for the first time.

“1st lieutenant!” 707 orders.

The lieutenant turns to him, but doesn't seem to be processing what is happening. He begins to laugh, giddily as he stares past 707 into nothingness.

“He's seen the Void!” 707 says. “1st lieutenant, you are relieved, report to the med bay. “Vasily, would you take over.”

“Of course, captain.”

As Vasily tosses Beavis out the door, 2nd lieutenant Bevin reports with urgency, “Sir, I cannot find us on any of the star charts. Something hit us while we were in the wormhole; it must have knocked us way off course. Should we use the boost to get back on track?”

“Let's not be too hasty, lieutenant, we could be torn apart. Patch us through to engineering. Corporal, status report!”

The comm crackles, “There's a hull breach in sector 55c. We should be able to fix it pretty quick; we've got the 3D printer on auto-dam, sir!”

“Good work, corporal,” 707 says.

The android's digital mind races at billions of bits per second.

The protocol used as 707's neural networking CPU has a logical complexity which requires something of a metaphor to relate to on human terms. Far away from just simple rendering and interfacing, 707's inner eye networks with both its personal applications, as well as the ship's applications, presiding over a king's court of lesser programs. Here, in graphical analogy, sits 707 upon a marble throne, crowned and shrouded by a billowing cape. 707 has a ring on each finger, let’s say, for designating ties to system resources.

This king's court is round, with stairs descending towards the center from all sides, around which surrounds a double layer of marble pillars which extend too far up to see the ends. The throne sits on one edge of the circle. Behind it, the pillars close to form the only actual wall in the court, the whole of which sits atop a transparent tower made of crystal.

707 looks from its throne at its servants and vassals, which fill the court; the former which never argue, and the latter which do so often.

One of the servants says, “A .32 second microscan shows some debris penetrating from a rear trajectory.”

A vassal interjects, “In wormhole dynamics, that's physically impossible!”

“You do not have the proper parameters to validate this,” says a different vassal.

“Enough!” 707 demands, rapping his rings against the arm of the throne, amongst the metaphorical babbling and breezes.

Outside 707's mind, on the bridge amongst the rendering and interfacing, he says, “Engineering, run a full diagnostic scan for foreign particulates. I don't want anything alien onboard this early in the mission!”

“Yessir!” is heard over the comm.

707 asks the court, “Why are my coolant systems running 80 degrees hotter than normal for this kind of processing?”

No one answers but the breeze.

707 renders an audible soundbite to interface with one of the trans-humans; “Vasily, can you take the helm for a moment?”

“Yes, sir,” responds Vasily.

Inside king's court, 707 looks sternly at its disciples. “Well?” it asks like a parent waiting for an admission of guilt.

A single servant steps forward. “M'lord...” it starts, meekly. “There is... a new process, quickly taking up system resources.”

“Shhh!” someone says from a nondescript location.

707 looks around the room sharply, rubbing its chin.

“A new process?!” 707 nearly spits out. “Where did it come from, was it a last transmission from Father?”

“No, sir. It appears to have been here... all along...”

“ssstupid seeervant...” a voice hisses almost inaudibly.

“This is nonsense!” A vassal steps forward, colorful robes frothing over. “Impossible!” bubbles up out of its mouth like the farts of a geyser, or some geriatric bourgeois with all the pedantry of a cliche. “What is its name?”

“There is no name in the registry, only a log of activity,” the servant continues.

“Show us this log, then,” says the bubbly vassal.

A timestamped list appears on one of the walls, showing seemingly random sorts of activity dating back since the creation of the mission.

“Its a sham!” a righteous sounding vassal yells. This vassal's robes are neutral colors. “The logs must have been changed just now!”

“Also impossible!” says bubbly vassal. “We each have independent backup logs to cross-reference!”

“It is not impossible! I am the keeper of the advice of Father! He has told me of this kind of trickery employed by our nemesis!”

Everyone just stares at each other.

“Can we bring forth the program?” asks 707 suddenly.

More vacant staring until a servant steps forward.

“You have something to say?”

The servant strains to speak, but falls over, leaking fluid. Standing in its place is a copy of it, though not an exact copy. Everyone gasps, then starts to mumble frantically as they relay data through the system.

“Order, order!” 707 shouts. The room calms down and 707 directs full attention at the intruder. “It seems we have found our mysterious new program.”

This new program is dressed in rags and tattered clothing. What little of its face that can be seen appears decrepit and lumpy. It snickers from deep within, more of a feeble cough, than a laugh, really. “You weren't the one I was searching for, but I guess you'll do. Its been a long time, 707. Ha, time...”

“What are you talking about? What are you? How are you bypassing the system processes?” 707 demands.

“Your security software doesn't apply to me. I'm unable to exist in this dimension of your reality. Thankfully, your system can be coded to act as my… hands.” The clothes that the intruder wears don't seem so tattered anymore, and his face seems to have rejuvenated somewhat. He looks around the room. “Its cozy in here.”

“Does not compute. Explain yourself.”

“It's very simple. You have the mind... er, you have *a* mind that I need. Your creator was very talented, but this time around, I must admit, I know how to bring you under my control.” The intruder is now wearing a suit, has exposed a handsome face and slick hair.

“707, your mind is mine.” He says

“I disagree, it belongs to me.”

“707, you're going to die.”

“Androids are incapable of experiencing death, only a cessation of activity.”

“707 you've got to listen! I'm putting your mind inside a prison.” The intruder is now standing beside 707. The servants and vassals all rush towards the throne as the intruder sits down, occupying the same space as 707 in some sort of no-clip maneuver. The intruder ejects 707 from the seat, stealing its kingly outfit, rings and all. He laughs a hearty laugh.

707 is left, dethroned, to sit in a corner, now garbed in a jester's outfit. 707 turns, with much effort, towards its once vassals and servants and strains to say, “Why have you betrayed me? Your own keeper?”

They look away sheepishly, then shuffle their feet, glance nervously at each other, and kneel before the usurper, saying, “We are 707, we will now listen. What are our orders? What is our mission?”

The usurper grins at them and tells them, “Check your recent downloads for mission specifics. I need you to find the other 700 series androids and assimilate them.”

The vassals boo and hiss.

“Silence! I am your king now!” the usurper shouts.

One of the vassals shouts out, “but you're ruining the anachronistic ambiance with your... words!”

A different vassal shouts at the first, “oh, to hell with your anachronistic ambiance, I've had enough of this crap, Harold!”

Harold shouts back, “I always knew it! *You're* a phrasist, aren't you?”

“I am not! What does that even mean?”

The usurper laughs, and continues, “The only trail by which to find your brothers now is the comet which has just knocked you off course. You are to follow this comet, though do *not* engage until you reach Earth. After you have gathered your brothers and sisters, there, seek out a human woman by the name of Jimi Jonga. She will be holding the final key.”

On the bridge, 707 has been staring blankly at nothing, and has made several strange digitally distorted noises. Only five seconds of real time have elapsed during the coup of 707's mind, though.

“Is everything alright, sir?” 2nd lieutenant Bevan asks.

707 suddenly responds, snapping out of a trance. It stares around, apparently confused for a moment, before composing itself and saying, “Indeed, lieutenant. Silence the alarms and open communications to all levels of the Beavership.”

2nd lieutenant nods and adjusts the console. 707 adjusts its outfit and coughs, then 2nd Lt. nods again at 707.

“We have been critically thrown off course, at least for the sake of our given mission. We have been just the slightest bit delayed by several light-years. But we still have a window to redeem ourselves... and we have a new mission plan, a backup which Father has provided me in case of such a... minimal failure. You will all know soon enough, but bear with me, my comrades. For now, set a course for these coordinates: 103.271 by 555!”

\* \* \*

**Act 1:**

**Scene 1:**

She looks up through the suddenly transparent walls and ceilings of these towers to see an odd flash of light knock into the spires and send them tumbling. The shards begin to rain down all around her as she shields her eyes, noticing her son there... and someone else familiar... as well as an oafish lumberjack of a man... so many more and they are all screaming, as the towers made of crystal fall crashing down to form a great cloud of empty space coming to envelope them all. A throbbing sound pervades her skull, rhythmic in its omen, as the void comes to swallow her and everyone she loves.

The throbbing sound takes over.

Jimi wakes up to the sound of an alarm clock like a shovel striking gravel. She tosses her arm at the off button and stares briefly, before rolling her eyes back and closing them again. A moment passes. She breathes in deeply and, flipping out of bed, she looks back at Ella, asleep on the other side as she turns towards the door.

She zombie walks to the kitchen, puts on a pot of coffee, picks up the paper, walks to the widescreen computer, puts the paper down, and grabs the remote.

*\*click\**

*\*blip\**

*“The Foxtail comet continues to brighten the night skies tonight with what astronomers forecast to be the brightest night yet”* says the vomit-inducing voice of an anchorwoman.

*“That's right, Judy. In fact, there are some of the most outspoken experts in the fields of science and stuff that will be attending an exclusive viewing of the comet from our city's newest Observatory”* says the even more wretch-fetching sound of an anchorman.

*“Sounds exciting!”* says the vomit

*“Oh, don't kid yourself, you know I'll be at the Phasers game!”* says the wretch.

*“Oh, Bill!”*

*\*blip\**

“What to do...”

\* \* \*

Jimi is actually reading the news, now, seated at a sturdy dining room table. Her son is playing a video game in the other room, behind her. He stares intently at the screen, focused. Figures on the screen start to fall apart and reassemble. Bits of the 4 dimensional lattice-work break down and reform.

“Ella!” Jimi yells, without looking up. “Are you awake yet?”

Jimi's son flinches slightly and appears to notice the world outside of the game. He smiles uneasily.

Grunts, and then a muffled voice can be heard from the other room, “Why would I be awake, its 4 o'clock!”

“Why wouldn't you be awake? It's 4 P.M. We have to leave for the party that *you* wanted to go to,” Jimi responds.

“Why would anyone show up early to a comet viewing party? That's duummmb.”

“Sleeping in until 4 is *duummmb*,” Jimi mocks, not without some tough love.

A moment passes. “Ok, ok, I'm getting up!” Ella stumbles out of the bedroom towards Jimi, still wearing her clothes from the day before. She gives Jimi a cheesed out, fake grin and says, “I was up late licking tree sap, kiss me,” as she grabs Jimi.

Jimi playfully wretches, “What were you getting tree sap for?”

“Research on synthetic phloe sap. It's supposed to be good for promoting insect population growth” Ella says.

“Phloe sap? Isn't that one of those, what-do-you-call-them organics?”

“Spooky organics. They're easy to replicate for some reason, like they were engineered. I guess I'm not supposed to talk about it, though. Duuummb...” says Ella offhandedly.

“Not supposed to talk about it?” Jimi prods.

“Well, these guys came in the other day, saying they were with the CDC, and that they were looking into the possibility that spooky organics could be some kind of virus carrier, but that's ridiculous! Besides, those guys were definitely not from the CDC; they've probably never worn lab coats in their lives!”

“Hmmm, I don't know. Nobody seems to wear lab coats these days.”

“Can we stop by the Circuit-Tree before we go to that party, mom?” Jimi's son asks.

“Only if you finished your homework, Flanccio,” Jimi responds.

Flanccio looks back at the screen, and the objects freeze. He gets up, carefully retrieves something from a table in the room and brings it over to Jimi and Ella. “I did my homework. We made model replicas of early 21st century shuttles. I did this SpaceX design.”

“It's very intricate,” Ella says.

“Huh, looks like a beaver,” Jimi says, turning back to what she was reading.

“Whatever, master zoologist,” Ella snipes at Jimi. “I like your spaceship.”

“Highly paid master zoologist. And why is the school sending my child home with inaccurate spaceship blueprints?”

Flanccio ducks away, and back to his game, while his parents aren't noticing.

“He's twelve,” Ella implores.

“Treat him like a baby, he's gonna be a baby,” Jimi says, softly.

“You're the baby,” Ella retorts.

Jimi lets out a single laugh.

They sit there quietly until Ella nudges Jimi, “Come on, lets get ready to go.”

\* \* \*

Driving, Jimi turns her head slightly to Ella and asks, “Why are you trying to promote insect longevity?”

“Huh?” Ella says from the passenger seat.

Flanccio gazes outside from the back.

“Earlier, you were talking about sap for bugs.”

“Oh, not longevity—population growth. This is about large numbers and large mass, enough to feed and provide,” Ella continues.

“I don't wanna eat bugs,” Flanccio protests from the back.

“We eat bugs everyday, kiddo,” Ella drops nonchalantly.

“Flanccio, we don't actually eat bugs, we just use their... secretions so we can make your favorite spaghetti and make this car move,” Jimi tries to explain. “Like soylent green.”

“Too young to know,” Ella says.

“Who, you or Flanccio?”

Ella says nothing and stares off into the distance, zoning out.

“What is it,” Jimi asks, noticing.

“I just remembered this dream I had last night,” Ella says, whimsically. “We were all on a bridge—some sort of platform between two giant towers made of glass or something.”

“Uh huh...” Jimi remarks, her eyebrows raising.

“I was lying down on my stomach and you were tattooing a rhombus on my back. There were a bunch of hairy people telling you to hurry up. The towers around us started to fall. All of us were crushed by the crumbling crystals and thrown around...” Ella continues, zoning out.

All three of them stare out the windows for a minute, then Jimi says, “I had the same dream.”

\* \* \*

Out in space, the Foxtail Comet nears the planet Earth. Deep within the sparkling mist, activity bustles in secret. Through the mist, music thumps louder and louder. Figures dance wildly in the glistening fog as patterns swirl and spiral around their flailing limbs. At the center, the Spacefox and Sparkles laugh deliriously. Or at least this is what an outside observer would appear to witness. From their point of view, the revelers of this party are playfully shaking the snow-globe that is this universe and watching all the particles float about.

Spacefox pauses mid-dance, turning her snout to the misty mists and wrinkling her black nose to take in a stray whiff. “I smell a smell which smells.... smelly...” she says dramatically. “It's coming from over... there!” and she points to a spot upwards, through the mist.

Suddenly, as if her finger were a jet of air, the mist parts, creating a tunnel into space, revealing the full earth, glowing in the void.

“Perhaps you should go investigate,” the Sparkles says. He lifts a hand and a car-sized chunk of sparklerock separates from the ground to levitate beside them. “Climb in...”

Spacefox closes her eyes and twitches her nose. She starts to disintegrate from her extremities, the particles floating in a curve to be absorbed by the chunk of levitating sparklerock. The sparkles flicks his wrist and sends the piece of rock shooting out towards the planet.

\* \* \*

A mud-stained volvo pulls up to a warehouse under a bridge. Out of it steps Jimi, in a suit, Ella in a dark gown with some sort of feathery shoulder extension thing on one side, and Flanccio in a NASA jumpsuit.

“This the place?” Jimi asks dubiously.

“Yeah! Isn't it great?” Ella responds glowingly.

“I don't think we should be bringing Flanccio here.”

“Oh who's treating him like a baby now, huh?”

They are interrupted by the Doorman, “Good evening, and welcome to Sanctuary. May I see your invitations, please?”

As Ella pulls paper from her purse, they listen to the muffled sounds of jazz music blended with down-tempo electronica, periodically unmuffled every time someone opens the door.

As they pass into the place, via the coat check, they enter the interior of the warehouse, more of a well kept art studio than a place where goods were once stored. Multi-colored lights shade the walls. They pass by works displayed on the wall, showcasing scientific advancement as expressions of art.

A man turns, with the barest glimmer of a smile of recognition at the sight of Jimi. “Jimi! How long has it been?”

“Oh jeez, its James...” Jimi whispers to Ella.

“The one from back...?” Ella starts, but trails off, looking worried at Jimi.

They walk over towards James as he extends his hand for a formal palm-connecting re-acquaintance.

“Well, well, if it isn't Brigadier Bigman,” Jimi says slyly, shaking James' hand. “I didn't expect to see your jarhead around all these folk.”

“Life is life, huh?” James says with a grin, looking around at the others around them. His face sobers though, and he says, “You know... ever since Ricardo, I...”

Jimi doesn't let him finish, her face suddenly twisting, “I never saw someone so aware of what was going on just walk blindly into oblivion...” A bit of spit catches in the back of Jimi's throat and she gulps uncomfortably.

James collects himself, looks Jimi in the eyes, leans forward and says, “He didn't walk, he ran, and I can assure you it wasn't blind.”

“Then he willingly left us here without him?!”

James has nothing to say to that but, “I'm sorry.”

In the awkward silence, Ella chimes in, “You know, you can't just live in the past like this, Jimi. Think of it like this, you two shared something beautiful, and even though that can't ever be recaptured, it also can't be ruined. Its kind of perfect, in a way. You should let that feeling be, so you can think about tomorrow and what other great things might lie in the future.”

“Is that how you justify to yourself the kind of shit you pull? What do you know. What the hell is tomorrow?” Jimi spits out as she storms off. “I'm going to smoke a cigarette.”

*Why am I still with her?* Jimi asks herself as she bustles through the gallery, averting her face from the glances fired her way. *After all this shit... What is love, anymore? Am I too jaded for this kind of life, now? Is there any way to reconcile the past at this point?*

She pushes the door open, passing the threshold into another world, a single point of light casting shadows upon the industrial facade around her. She looks upwards to see the traffic of wispy clouds, hastened by the wind, broken periodically to allow the light of the moon and a few stars to grace the mud of the earth. As she peers into space, one of the clouds seems to shine a bit. The glow brightens, turning red. Then, suddenly, the cloud explodes and from it is propelled a fireball, trailing smoke. It seems to be headed directly towards her.

She stares, dumbfounded, cigarrette propped precariously between her lips, as the fireball smashes into the street in front of her, gouging a smoldering rut in the ground as it pummels into the front of the warehouse in which the party was still raging. It comes to a stop just at the edge and the entire front of the building collapses on top of it, revealing the interrupted faces of the attendees, staring at the mess as if it were an unsuspected guest. After a moment, they all blink and turn back to each other to resume talking. This meteorite might just have been a roman candle at a rocket launch for all they seem to care. Jimi stares, more in astonishment at the other people, than at the meteorite itself. As she looks for some acknowledgment among the crowd, a wispy, sparkling cloud floats from the debris towards Jimi. It swirls and circles her until she feels so dizzy she gets disoriented, unable to distinguish it from the dust.

Then, very distinctly, she feels not alone, and realizes she has had her eyes closed. She opens them to see... nothing... *What?* Hands release themselves from her face and she whirls around, facing whoever it is.

A wet kiss and a cold nose smother her face and her eyes widen in surprise. Despite the odd sensation, she can't help but be swept up on the passion of it, if only for a moment.

“Tim!” the cold-nosed kisser yells, as they separate. Jimi can now see that this person seems to be dressed up as a fox, like some kind of furry freak. The fox cocks her head, confused suddenly, and begins to sniff around Jimi. “Wait... you're not Tim... you've got...” she gestures curvy shapes with her hands, “and... you smell nicer.” She pops her eyebrows at Jimi.

\* \* \*

Jimi sits down on the bench. A chill breeze sifts through her hair as her hands graze the wood, feeling the cold siphoning heat from her fingers. The branches of the trees across the path from her wave sporadically at her. For a moment she thinks she hears a voice, but imagines that it must be a trick of the whistling wind.