

The Gellar Program

By
Justin Cien

EXT. OUTER SPACE - EARLY MORNING (EARTH STANDARD TIME)

A massive spacefaring vessel floats weightlessly against various astrological phenomena.

INT. LECTURE HALL - SIMULATED EARLY MORNING

Cadets file into a huge, futuristic lecture hall chatting nervously as they fill in the seats and wait. The room suddenly goes silent as KURIGAWA, 65, a grizzled war hero in decorated military attire enters the room. He walks with a limp across the room to the lecturer's podium, a metallic clanging echoing with every other step. As he nears the podium a CADET lurches from their seat in the front row and gives Kurigawa a standing salute.

CADET

Thank you for your service, sir!

Kurigawa stops and turns towards the cadet with an intense glare. He grabs the chest of the cadet's jumpsuit and tears a patch of rank from it.

KURIGAWA

Leave!

CADET

But-

KURIGAWA

I said leave! Report to your quartermaster and inform them of your demotion. Now!

CADET

Sir, I was just-

Kurigawa grabs the cadet by the collar.

KURIGAWA

I said now!

The cadet hesitates briefly, waiting for a punchline. Kurigawa glares back, putting a hand on his holster. The cadet looks to the holster and back to Kurigawa in horror. Kurigawa unholsters the gun and pulls back the hammer. The cadet sprints for the exit and just as they reach the door a gun fires off and the cadet drops dead. Kurigawa addresses the room.

KURIGAWA (CONT'D)

That is your first lesson. If you think the Theronids will show you any more mercy then now is your final chance to slink back to whatever spawning slum you crawled from.

The room is frozen in silence as Kurigawa reaches for his hand radio.

KURIGAWA (CONT'D)

Janitorial staff to Turrigan
Lecture Hall.

The radio warbles in response.

KURIGAWA (CONT'D)

You are all here thanks to the outstanding commendations of your sergeants on whatever backwater homeworlds you come from. Now is your chance to forget your homeworld. You will not be returning. There you were special. Here you are not. You will not speak in my presence unless given express permission. You will hang onto every word that comes out of my mouth as if your life depended

(MORE)

KURIGAWA (CONT'D)

on it. It does. Becoming a part of the Gellar Squadron is not easy. Some of you will die trying. The rest of you will not recognize yourselves by the time you advance.

At the back of the lecture hall, FREEMAN, 25, an overconfident cadet, lets out a soft chuckle. THERMAN, 20, a scrawny and insecure cadet, shoots him a terrified glance as he frantically scribbles down notes. Freeman leans past Therman and looks to the cadet sitting past him.

FREEMAN

You getting a load of this, sis?

ERIN, 25, matching her brother's overconfidence, leans over Therman.

ERIN

Tell me about it, this guy is a total crock of shit. Who does he think he is, Colonel Tully?

FREEMAN

Ha ha! I was thinking he was more like Captain Rorey, but I totally see that!

ERIN

I know! Geez, what an asshole!

Therman's eyes dart back and forth in silent fear.

ERIN (CONT'D)

How much do you want to bet that he gives us the "you haven't seen anything yet" speech?

FREEMAN

Oh hands down he will! There's no way he-

THERMAN

Shh!

ERIN

Excuse me? Did you just shush my brother?

FREEMAN

Woah now, calm down, Erin, I'm sure he has his reason. What's your name, partner? What's got you in such a twist?

THERMAN

I'm not trying to get my brains blown out, so could you please just shut up?

ERIN

Oh give me a fucking break, this guy's a fucking pansy!

FREEMAN

Now, now, sis. Look, buddy, you don't really think he's gonna pull the trigger on another cadet, do you?

Therman shakes in silence.

FREEMAN (CONT'D)

Let me guess, you must have been a technician, am I right?

ERIN

Of course! Look at him, he hasn't seen a battlefield a day in his life!

Freeman looks down at the name badge on Therman's uniform.

FREEMAN

Alright, look here, Therman. Let me explain something to you. These big shot captains are all the same, okay? He can't just go around blowing cadets' heads off or he's got no one to fight his wars. He gets three intimidation shots max before they pull him out of there. He's gotta strut around and show his feathers but underneath it all he's just a bird.

ERIN

A chicken!

THERMAN

Have some respect! General Kurigawa is a hero and you owe him your lives!

ERIN

Oh give me a break! We don't owe him shit!

FREEMAN

As far as I'm concerned he owes us just as much as we owe him.

THERMAN

How could you say that? His actions at the Battle of-

FREEMAN

Yeah, yeah, the Battle of Vorhut, blah, blah. Look he did what any well-trained soldier would have done so as far as I'm concerned he doesn't deserve anything just for being in the right place at the right time.

ERIN

But I'm sure that pay raise is nice.

FREEMAN

And that's what it's all about, Therman, buddy. He's got a seat at the war table.

THERMAN

You two make me sick! How could two money-grubbing mercenaries like you have been recommended for the Gellar program?

ERIN

Guess we're just that good.

FREEMAN

Some might say we're the best. But don't you worry, you'll find out once we hit the training grounds. You know, you'd probably do well to stick with us if you really wanna make it with these Gellar recruits. We wouldn't mind making sure a little willow like yourself doesn't get maimed before he even makes it to the battlefield.

ERIN

Oh, come on, Freeman! No way, this guy's a lost cause.

FREEMAN

Now, now, I'm sure a technician in the Gellar program is bound to have some useful skills.

THERMAN

You can forget about it! As if I would ever team up with the likes of you.

FREEMAN

Well, we'll just have to see about that, won't we?

Freeman stands up, looming over Therman, who shrinks in response. Other students begin getting up and filing out of the lecture hall. Freeman and Erin chuckle as they glare down at Therman and exit the lecture hall with the rest.

INT. RECRUIT'S BARRACKS - SIMULATED EVENING

Therman lays on his bunk looking over a datapad which displays the cadets' training regiments and schedules. His finger lingers briefly on the battlefield training itinerary. He puts down the data pad and rolls over to fall asleep.

INT. RECRUIT'S BARRACKS - SIMULATED MORNING

Therman rises early from his bed ready to tackle the day. In a bunk nearby, Freeman can be seen struggling to get up early.

INT. RECRUIT'S WASHROOM - SIMULATED MORNING

Therman looks at himself in the mirror, reassuring himself for the challenges to come. Freeman exits the showers.

FREEMAN

Hey, Therman.

Therman tries to ignore Freeman, but the older cadet is persistent. Therman responds, irritated.

THERMAN

What do you want?

FREEMAN

(sarcastic)

Nothing much, just wanted to wish you the best of luck out there today. I know you'll need it.

THERMAN

Just leave me alone. I don't have anything to say to you.

Freeman laughs heartily as he exits the washroom.

THERMAN

I'm going to be just fine.

SERIES OF SHOTS

A) Therman aims a pistol in a shooting range, hitting his mark with each shot

B) Therman sits in a simulated cockpit, successfully destroying the enemies in the simulation.

C) Therman pants heavily and sweats profusely as he runs on a treadmill with sensors attached to his body. Freeman runs on the treadmill beside him with ease.

D) Therman struggles to lift weights over his shoulders. Freeman does so with little effort.

E) Therman is commended as he fully disassembles and reassembles a weapon faster than anyone else in the room. Freeman eyes him suspiciously from the back of the room.

INT. WORKSHOP - SIMULATED EVENING

Therman sits at a workbench, mechanical components strewn about him. He smiles slightly as he works to solder wires together. Freeman approaches from behind.

FREEMAN

Well if it isn't the little
wonder-boy.

Therman jumps in his seat as he turns to see Freeman.

THERMAN

What do you want, Freeman?

FREEMAN

(sarcastic)

Just wanted to come check in and
see how you were doing. Tomorrow's
the big day, you know. But what am
I saying? You've done so well with
everything else so far, I'm sure
combat training will be a breeze
for you, won't it?

THERMAN

Look, what is your problem with
me? We're supposed to be on the
same team, you know?

FREEMAN

You know what, that's my problem with you. You think we're all on some little team. You just want to suit up and play soldier and save humanity from the Theronids. This isn't a game, kid. You think people like Kurigawa are heroes, but they're just as selfish as anyone else. And you all wave around your banners and say you fight for humanity. You don't know the first thing about war, Therman. You don't know what it means to end a life. We don't need more do-gooder soldiers like you, we need leaders. Leaders who will actually see an end to this war.

Freeman shoves Therman's project off the workbench and storms off. Therman's face twitches in anger as he picks pieces from the floor.

INT. TRAINING BATTLEFIELD - SIMULATED MORNING

Therman squints his baggy eyes as iridescent light pours over the training grounds which are filled with battlefield terrain. Other cadets file onto the grounds as a loudspeaker crackles to life, carrying Kurigawa's gruff voice across the battlefield.

KURIGAWA

Today begins your first bout of tactical combat training. Today's training will serve as an assessment of your current skill levels. You will each be assigned a squadron which it will be your

duty to ensure the survival of.
You will be issued standard

(MORE)

KURIGAWA (CONT'D)

wargear to assist you in this
mission until the enemy is routed.
Keep your wits about. You won't
have the chance to make the same
mistake twice.

Cadets begin murmuring confusedly as Kurigawa begins listing off squad assignments. Therman's heart sinks as he hears that he and his adversaries Freeman and Erin have been assigned to the same squad. He reluctantly approaches his squad to see that the siblings have already settled into leadership roles. The siblings notice as Therman nears and engage him.

ERIN

Well look who it is.

THERMAN

Look, can we please put whatever
it is you two want from me aside
while we're on the battlefield?

FREEMAN

No, I'm afraid we can't just put
it aside, Therman.

THERMAN

You know what, I'm done with-

FREEMAN

We owe you an apology.

THERMAN

Wait, what?

FREEMAN

You heard me. I want to apologize.
We come from different places but
(MORE)

FREEMAN (CONT'D)
here we're allies. It wasn't my
place to force my viewpoints on
you and I'm sorry for the
situation I've put you in. Now
that we're going to be sharing a
battlefield all that matters is
that we have each other's backs.
What do you say?

Freeman offers Therman his hand as Erin looks apologetically
over his shoulder. Therman's face warps in confusion.

ERIN
Come on, Therman. Take it from two
seasoned soldiers, trust is what
matters most when our lives are on
the line.

Therman hesitantly takes Freeman's hand and shakes it. Freeman
and Erin offer Therman a smile of acceptance and he smiles back.

The squadrons are each issued their wargear then take to the
battlefield, scouting for danger and enemies. The battlefield is
silent save for smouldering ramparts until a shout echoes from
far across the arena.

Therman nervously surveys the area for danger but finds nothing.
Suddenly an awful shriek sounds off to Therman's side and he
turns to see a hulking mutant monstrosity rip through a cadet
like nothing. Therman falls to his ass, trembling, and fumbles
for his weapon. Erin and Freeman bark orders in collected
coordination. With the siblings' leadership, the squad makes
quick work of the abomination. The siblings share a knowing look
and Freeman addresses the squad.

FREEMAN

Great work, squad, you're soldiers
now! Now move out, it's not safe
here. Turn north and keep your
eyes trained on anomalies.

As the squad heads the other direction, Erin approaches Therman with an arm outstretched in aid. Still shaking, Therman gingerly grabs hold of Erin's hand and attempts to get to his feet.

THERMAN

Th-thank you.

ERIN

Not so fast, baby bird.

Erin reveals a wicked smirk as she tears a combat knife from her hip and plunges it through Therman's chest. Therman howls in pain and disbelief as Erin sends the pommel crashing against Therman's temple, quieting him. Therman's vision begins fading as Erin turns and runs back to the rest of the squad.

ERIN

We've lost cadet Therman, forge
ahead!

Therman's vision fades altogether and he loses consciousness.

INT. MEDBAY - TIME UNKNOWN (ONE WEEK LATER)

Therman blinks in and out of consciousness to a series of muddled gunshot noises and flashing red lights. As he finally becomes fully aware, he hears the trill of emergency alarms and distant sounds of battle. Panicked, he grabs a scalpel from the table next to him for self-defence. Regaining himself he surveys the stark red carnage of the medbay workers and finds no immediate threat. He tucks the scalpel in his waistband and begins pacing back and forth in panicked deliberation until he spies a technician's toolbox across the room. Therman springs to action, grabbing the toolbox and rapidly disassembling medical equipment, forging a makeshift weapon which crackles with unstable energy. He measures the

weapon in his hands and raises it as if to shoot, a determined expression written on his face.

INT. HALLWAY - TIME UNKNOWN [CONTINUOUS]

Therman strides confidently into the hallway. He sees flashing red arrows directing him to the ship's escape pods. He follows the trail of lights, the sounds of combat getting nearer as he does. He reaches a battered blast door which reads "Evacuation Pods." A battle rages on the other side. Therman levels his blaster at the door and incinerates them, revealing a warzone.

INT. EVACUATION ROOM - TIME UNKNOWN [CONTINUOUS]

Dead bodies litter the floor. Theronid invaders launch projectiles at a group of soldiers and cadets pinned behind a burning pile of rubble. Looking at the opposition's post, Therman levels his weapon and fires indiscriminately, drawing their attention. With his ingenious weaponry, Therman decimates the enemy squad. The other soldiers look to their savior in amazement.

THERMAN

Get to the evac pod!

The soldiers leap to action, moving towards the pods. Among the soldiers are a wounded Kurigawa and Freeman, who carries the corpse of Erin on his shoulder.

Therman continues firing in the direction of the enemy until his weapon begins whirring violently. He hitches his arm back and throws it to the enemy post where it explodes. He sprints forward to Kurigawa's side and helps the limping general towards the pod. Just as they reach the pod doors, the sound of a gun being cocked emanates from behind Therman. He turns to see Freeman with a pistol leveled at Kurigawa's head.

FREEMAN

Where do you think you're going,
General?

KURIGAWA

What is the meaning of this?

The other soldiers, already inside the pod, turn to fire at Freeman, but he quickly fires his pistol, hitting the launch button in the escape pod and sending it off into the void.

FREEMAN

Well, Therman, I can't say I'm not impressed. You've done more in the last five minutes than I'd have thought a whelp like you could've done in a lifetime.

THERMAN

Did you have something to do with this?

FREEMAN

What, you think I let Theronids on the ship? Don't be a fucking idiot Therman!

THERMAN

Then why are you doing this?

KURIGAWA

Drop your weapon now, cadet,
that's an order!

FREEMAN

And let you board another escape pod and be on your merry way? I don't think so, General. The way I see it, it's a captain's duty to go down with his ship. So just

think of this as me helping you to fulfill that duty, captain.

THERMAN

Just put the gun down!

FREEMAN

You still don't fucking get it, do you Therman? What do you think is going to happen as soon as you get on that escape pod? The instant you're outside the blast radius he's going to order for the ship to be destroyed. He should be helping evacuate all the soldiers and cadets who are still trapped on this fireball, but instead he's going to save his own skin then blow the whole thing to hell just to spite the Theronids!

THERMAN

Freeman, you fucking bastard, put the gun down now or-

FREEMAN

Or what? There's not a damned thing you can do about it Therman! Now, if you don't shut your whiney mouth this instant I'll have no choice but to speed things up.

Freeman steps forward and presses the gun against Kurigawa's forehead. Therman suddenly reaches into his waistband and yanks free the scalpel he had stowed. Before Freeman pulls the trigger, Therman rams the blade deep into Freeman's throat. Freeman gurgles and turns to Therman in disbelief before collapsing to the floor. A brief moment of silence passes until Kurigawa clears his throat.

KURIGAWA

Well done, cadet. Humanity owes
you a great debt and I'll
personally see that you are
commended for your bravery.

THERMAN

Thank you, general, but let's get
you out of here first.

INT. EVACUATION POD - TIME UNKNOWN [CONTINUOUS]

Therman helps Kurigawa to another escape pod and straps him in. He launches the escape pod into the vacuum of space. Kurigawa is breathing heavily and closes his eyes. Therman grabs the pod's first aid kit and begins tending to Kurigawa's wounds. Therman dissociates as he works on Kurigawa's injuries but is stirred as he hears a hand radio crackle to life.

KURIGAWA

Do it.

A white light explodes through the pod windows, momentarily blinding Therman. As the light fades, Therman meets Kurigawa's tired gaze, horrified.

THERMAN

How could you?

KURIGAWA

It had to be done.

Therman stands and walks towards the weapons crate on the escape pod. He pulls out a pistol and cocks it.

EXT. SURFACE OF FOREIGN PLANET - DAY

A thrashed escape pod lies smouldering in a crater. Theronid soldiers approach the steaming heap, their guns drawn and ready.

As they near the escape pod the door suddenly hisses open revealing a silhouette with its arms raised in surrender. The smoke clears to reveal Therman. The Theronid soldiers begin shouting angrily in an alien tongue.

THERMAN

I mean you no harm! Please don't
shoot, I surrender!

The Theronids squawk back in their alien tongue.

THERMAN

Forgive me I do not speak your
language, but I come in peace! I
have an offering!

Finally, a large and imposing Theronid COMMANDER steps forward, shouting in his tongue and then addressing Therman in broken English.

COMMANDER

Theronids not take human soldier
prisoner. You die here.

The Commander barks orders and points at Therman. The other soldiers aim their guns at Therman and begin to fire. As the projectiles reach Therman, a force field springs to life, deflecting the projectiles.

THERMAN

Please, I mean you no harm. I come
with an offering of peace, let me
show you.

The Commander shouts in defiance, leveling his own weapon and firing as his soldiers continue doing so. But it is to no avail as the force field continues deflecting the projectiles.

THERMAN (CONT'D)

Please just listen to me, your weapons can't pierce my Gellar Field. It will protect me until you run out of ammo... at least that's what it was designed to do.

The Theronid soldiers try many different weapons, each one increasing in its destructive force. Therman's Gellar Field holds strong. Therman sits on the floor waiting until their ammo runs out. Upon running out of ammunition, the Theronid Commander rushes at Therman, brandishing a combat knife, but as he reaches the bubble of the field he is held back.

THERMAN (CONT'D)

Please listen to me... or else there is no hope for either of us.

COMMANDER

Gah! What power is this?

Therman turns and grabs the corpse of Kurigawa from the floor behind him. The Commander's eyes shoot open in recognition and disbelief. He stops his assault momentarily.

THERMAN

This is my peace offering: General Kurigawa, Destroyer of Vorhut.

COMMANDER

No! This dirty human trick!

Therman produces a pistol and fires several bullets into Kurigawa's corpse to prove he is dead.

THERMAN

There, dead, you see? I killed him myself, I promise you.

COMMANDER

But... why? Who are you?

THERMAN

My name is Therman Frederickson,
former cadet of the Gellar
Program. And I did this because I
saw with my own eyes. I saw that

(MORE)

THERMAN (CONT'D)

the atrocities are never going to
stop. I thought that we were the
ones protecting ourselves... but as
long as we humans wage wars, we
will make human mistakes. And
we'll carry those mistakes to the
ends of the universe before we
learn from them. If this cycle is
ever going to end, we need to
learn to make shields, not spears.
And so I defected. I defected so I
could attempt to right the wrongs
of my people. I defected so I
could try and bring some peace to
this galaxy instead of war. You
asked what this power was. It's
called a Gellar field. Up until
this point it was purely
theoretical but being trapped in
an escape pod for weeks on end
with nothing but your dead
commander to talk to was enough to
change that. It's a theoretically
unbreakable forcefield. One that
was meant to protect humanity. And
though it wasn't real, the idea
inspired humanity. I'm hoping it
can do so again.

COMMANDER

What do you want, human?

THERMAN

I want you to take this technology
and I want you to use it to bring
peace, not war. Maybe if our
weapons don't work anymore we
won't be so inclined to use them.
And if not, we can send ourselves
to oblivion trying.

Therman reaches into his pocket and pulls out a strange spherical device. He presses a button on the orb and the Gellar Field crackles and fades. As soon as the forcefield goes down the Commander lurches forward and subdues Therman who does not fight back. The Commander pockets the Gellar Sphere. The other Theronid soldiers rush towards Therman and restrain him. They pick him up and begin carrying him away from the wreckage and towards their ship. They take him up the loading ramp and the door hiss shut behind them.

THE END.