

ESCAPE FROM EARTH

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FADE IN:

MONTAGE - 2273 CE

- EARTH seen from orbit—an almost cloudless atmosphere—with no icecaps—continental shapes unrecognizable.

MEC (VO)

Most of earth is covered by desert or ocean, with a narrow band of scrub forests around the equator, and patchy scrub in the far northern and far southern climes.

- Watched by big-bellied, club-wielding, goggle-wearing GUARDS dressed in dirty black and white uniforms, emaciated PRISONERS haul empty nets aboard a long, muscle-powered boat.

MEC (VO)

The oceans are near death. Down from 25 percent in 1958, atmospheric oxygen levels are at 18.9 percent and rapidly dropping. The near future promises an uninhabitable planet.

- Skeletal REMAINS of a city and hulks of bridge pillars protrude through drifting sands. Decayed BRIDGES span bone-dry riverbeds.

MEC (VO)

Hordes of rulebreakers live and breed below ground in abandoned mines or in subway and maintenance tunnels—slave labor for strip mines, extraction of protein from oceans, and for the salvage of refined metals for orbital habitat construction. Farming is dead ... possible solely on tiny plots in former Siberian and Canadian lands.

- Bare FEET lope through sand and around sage: hairy human feet ... yet with inch-long CLAWS that curl from toenail beds.

MEC (VO)

Life expectancy is 37 years. Escape impossible: For humans who try, a short life becomes breath-takingly shorter. Rulebreaker and clone hunts are broadcast live, though surface winds often render flight risky for airborne nanocameras.

— Massive orbhabs circle the earth.

MEC (VO)

4.6 million humans live in orbhabs owned by male-dominated, but female-run corporations. Life expectancy in orbit? 135 years of soft and decadent living for the descendants of 21st century celebs, bureaucrats, corporate executives, bankers, and politicians ... smug addicts who believe they have reached the pinnacle of evolution.

TO BLACK & FADE ...

APPLAUSE mixed with cacophonous background CHATTER.

ANNOUNCER (VO)

At Orbital Broadcasting Services our watchwords are: fair, just and objective.

MEC (VO)

Unlike most humans, I read rather than scan, and history fascinates me; so I understand that three centuries of passive entertainment has shortened attention spans and destroyed desire to learn.

Applause and chatter fizzles into the CHIRPS of crickets and CROAKS of frogs.

IN:

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT - 2021 CE

Breathing hard, CLOSE (30s), BLAKE, and CURRY pause for a rest. They wear jailhouse-orange coveralls.

CLOSE

To hell with this shit. I'm gonna
disarm one of those creeps an'
fight my way out.

BLAKE

You know I can't let you do that.
Damnit, you'll get us killed!

Close delivers a well-placed fist to Blake's soft belly.

Older, Blake chokes and gags.

CLOSE

Your money let you run a crew of
thunks and thuds in prison. Out
here, you're lost. So zip it.

Curry pulls a shank to defend his boss and steps forward.

Close grasps the back of Curry's hand and forearm, jerks down
while he drives a knee upward into the wrist. Bone SNAPS. Curry
screams.

CLOSE

(to Curry)

If you try, Curry, you an' Blake
can turn yourselves in an' get some
medical attention.

TO BLACK & FADE ...

The sounds of crickets, frogs, gagging, and choking diminish,
then fade out; APPLAUSE and CHATTER return, almost drown out the
Announcer's words.

ANNOUNCER (VO)

With our watchwords in mind, we now
proudly bring you ...

Applause abruptly halts. Chatter dies more slowly. Silence.

LOUDER FEMALE VOICE (VO)

Did he say Justice For All is
coming on live? I heard they're
executing a killer clone!

... IN

INT. ORBHAB CABIN - DAY - 2273 CE

Com-helmeted and vid-visored, a MAN and WOMAN burst through the entry hatch, into a small, yet plushly furnished cabin. They stop before a huge, bulkhead vid screen. The woman gobbles and handful of capsules.

ANNOUNCER (VO)
You heard me correctly; we are
broadcasting live!

At the outside edges, the helmet VISORS have small screens which throw flashing lights onto gaudily made-up FACES.

The woman taps keyboards on the sides of her helmet while the man punches buttons on a wrist device. The woman also monitors her visor screens and listens to Jerica's voice. All three chatter non-stop:

WOMAN
I know what I heard! Not
you, Marchelle! Jerica
heard it, too!

MAN
One minute, Randy. You're
always hearing stuff nobody
else hears.

JERICA (VO)
Heard what? I didn't hear anything.
Did Marchelle say she heard it,
too?

Genetically enhanced muscles bulging, earrings hanging from lobes to collarbone, the man sports eye make-up, lip paint, and an electric green suit. Matching green hair sprouts from his helmet.

WOMAN
Hear what? Marchelle is
always on OBS. You aren't
talking to her! I am!

MAN
I know I'm talking to you!
I'm trying to get OBS
because a chase is coming on!

JERICA (VO)
I know I'm not talking to
Marchelle. David, get out of your
your clothes! We are not finished.
You're not going out till you get
me off!

The slim woman wears a suit the same color as the man's, but she has bright yellow hair, plus genetically enlarged, grossly overdone breasts and buttocks.

ON THE BULKHEAD SCREEN:

A SHADOW looms over desert sand. A light-skinned, elephant-like trunk sniffs the sand.

The SCREEN goes dark.

BACK TO SCENE

WOMAN
... Gorgeous shade of
green with beige high-
lights and this dress
is positively slinky ...

MAN
I would love watching a MEC-
Class female get eaten alive
by a spoor stalker ... after
I had sex with the clone.

JERICA (VO)
If you think you'll pop off then
leave without doing me ...

The man frantically punches buttons on his wrist device, then
speaks into its mike.

MAN
Hambly? Are the odds 50 to 1? ...
Good. I want four credits on the
MEC ... to survive four days. If
the over/under is eleven and a
half, gimme three credits on the
over for the body count.

The woman slaps at his face, but cuts her ...

HAND

... On the bottom edge of his visor.

ANNOUNCER (VO)
... Apologize for technical
difficulties. The Vacu-Grav cameras
covering the search for this
fugitive, a MEC-Class clone ...
yes, you heard me correctly ... are
currently out of service.

When BLOOD wells, the man takes one look and faints.

EXT. FOREST - DAY - 2021 CE

Amidst the sounds of distant GUNFIRE and the WHINE of passing
bullets, running four FEET kick up dead leaves, feet covered with
cheap, slip-on deck shoes and attached to legs draped in
jailhouse orange. Then they stop.

BLAKE (OS)
Don't shoot! We surrender!

On full-auto, several M-16s CHATTER.

INT. ORBITAL SURVEILLANCE CENTER - DAY - 2273 CE

Stacked panopticon screens circle the rotunda.

INSERT - PANOPTICON SCREENS

The upper screen covers desert terrain where lower four screens display various orbital habitat scenes—PEOPLE out shopping or in their PRIVATE quarters.

BACK TO SCENE

ANNOUNCER (VO)

Until we re-establish service, we
shall bring you live coverage of
the actual hunt and executions from
spoor stalker cameras.

More women than men. Flashy clothing. More overdone breasts,
butts, and muscles. Facial jewelry on all.

AUDIENCE (VO)

(a chorus of boos)

GLEEBOK stands in the pod's center. He studies the circling
desert scenes.

GLEEBOK

On your toes, people. We know this
MEC-Class clone has many talents,
but it cannot simply disappear.
Find the damned thing!

Most of the many TECHNICIANS also study the desert image flow.

At one station, SEPH isolates a few feet of imagery, spins her
chair to make an across-the-pod comparison.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Small running FEET churn sand—feet encased in tan colored cloth.
Human feet.

INT. HELICOPTER - DAY - 2021 CE

PILOT (Comlink)

You got something?

A Thermal-Imaging TECH studies a bright DOT on her monitor's
green field.

TECH (Comlink)
 No. It's gotta be a U.S. Marshal
 ... one of the recon guys.

PILOT (Comlink)
 I better check.

TECH (Comlink)
 No need. He's walking toward the
 Mobile Base Post ... not running
 away from it.

EXT. DESERT - DAY - 2273 CE

ANNOUNCER (VO)
 Speed-enhanced, this clone has
 reflexes as fast, or faster than
 the newer model spoor stalkers. And
 should it somehow defeat those, it
 has been pledged to the Planetary
 Guard Cadre ... if the exiles can
 capture it ...

Wearing a brown body suit, a small young woman (MEC) runs over
 barren ground. She carries a fist-sized stone in each hand, and
 though her goggled eyes scan the terrain ahead, every few strides
 she checks her backtrail.

ANNOUNCER (VO)
 ... Which should provide some
 rather sexy viewing.

EXT. FOREST - DAY - 2021 CE

Many running FEET wearing combat boots. Rifle FIRE. Brass
 cartridge CASES clink against each other as they hit the ground.

Running FEET. A pair of BOOTS.

FBI AGENT (OS)
 Roble Close! Halt! This is the FBI!

Close runs for his life. He now wears cammies, Nike sunglasses,
 and totes a Bureau of Prisons backpack. He carries an M-16 in his
 hands and has a pistol strapped to his waist.

ANNOUNCER (VO)
 In addition, no fewer than seven
 dangerous Death Watch rulebreakers
 will have their punishments meted
 out today.

Slugs knock BARK from trees, kick up dust GEYSERS.

Close ducks behind an oak tree, steps out and fires one round.

Four PURSUERS dive for cover while the FBI Agent drops in his tracks. He screams, presses both hands to a bloody hip.

FBI AGENT
Help me! I'm hit!

Far down the path, other MANHUNTERS return fire.

EXT. DESERT - DAY - 2273 CE

From high ground, Mec spots a loping figure, indistinct in the distance: a SPOOR STALKER.

She ups her speed a notch.

EXT. FOREST - DAY - 2021 CE

Close stands on a bluff fifteen feet above the river. When he empties the M-16 at a hovering HELICOPTER, the machine veers away.

He reloads while all around him, bullets churn DIRT and chew BRUSH.

Close jumps for the water.

EXT. DESERT - DAY - 2273 CE

Mec sprints down a dry river bed, toward a patch of exposed stones. Almost there ...

ROBLE CLOSE

... Drops into deep sand ... in her path.

Without slowing, Mec leaps over him. She stops, quickly scans the spread of rocks.

Disoriented, Close blinks, rises and looks around before his attention settles on Mec.

MEC
Lie down!

INT. ORBITAL SURVEILLANCE CENTER - DAY

While Gleebok scowls at the screen, Seph frantically taps keys on her spherical boards.

GLEEBOK
What is it, Seph?

SEPH
A Subatomic Frequency Signature,
just a flash, but sufficient.
Thermal Signature, too.
(turns to Gleebok)
Neither is in our data banks.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Mec's gaze, just for an instant, notes the KNIFE hung upside down on Close's backpack shoulder strap. Then, right-handed, she hurls a ...

STONE

... Which sails over Close.

GLEEBOK (VO)
That's apt to be rulebreaker-
offspring, some lowlife born
underground.

Too quickly, she throws a second with her left hand before snatching more rocks from the sand.

Behind Close, the ...

SPOOR STALKER

... Bellows.

SEPH (VO)
I understand that, Gleebok, but how
did it vanish?

Close springs to his feet.

CLOSE
What the hell!

Two more rocks WHIZZ past his head, slap into the pelt of blond hair below the stalker's neck.

Close gawps:

The monster bellows again, brushes at his chest with clawed, but clearly human HANDS.

Human eyes set in a big skull. A foot-long, writhing, elephant trunk-like nose extends beyond a baboon-like snout. Long FANGS. Muscles to make Mr. Universe look downright girlish.

In a flash, Mec flits by Close, snatches his knife in passing. The stalker swipes at her, nicks her ear. The knife BLADE arcs upward, slices an artery under its arm. Mec cat foots away.

Close shuts his opened mouth.

CLOSE

What the hell am I waitin' for?

He fires the M-16. BONE and GORE erupt from the huge skull. An EYE pops from a socket, lands at Mec's feet.

MEC

Gunpowder weapon! Are you insane?

INT. ORBITAL SURVEILLANCE CENTER - DAY

INSERT - PANOPTICON SCREEN

A desert scene jerks and jigs. Then freezes with blood DROPLETS clearly visible and identifiable. A few feet along the stream and still in motion, similar imagery turns topsy-turvy.

BACK TO SCENE

MALE TECH (OS)

Stalker down! We've lost vital signs!

Gleebok steps closer to examine the frozen imagery.

SEPH

No clone has ever killed a spoor stalker.

MALE TECH (OS)

God! What if that thing gets away?

Chatter cranks to a high volume among the techs, until a ...

DOOR

... Slides open in a wall.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

When Mec turns to a wide-eyed Close, he levels the 16 at her.

CLOSE
Nobody moves that fast. So you stay
the hell back.

MEC
Habitat fugitive?

She studies him, obviously puzzled. Then, she motions him to follow her, and ...

Gets an emphatic headshake for an answer.

When Mec drops the knife, Close glances down, and small ...

FEET

... Dance forward and ...

HANDS

... Dart ... snatch his rifle.

The knife sticks in the sand.

Close draws his pistol, but ...

No threatening gesture from the woman. She simply examines the weapon, then ... hands it back. She retrieves the knife, cleans the blade in sand, then offers it haft first. She again motions him to follow.

CLOSE
Jesus-freakin'-Christ!

MEC
If you wish to live, you must
follow me. Remain near me, within
ten feet. No time for talk.

CLOSE
What the hell is that thing?

MEC
You actually do not know? Must
follow me. Not follow, you will be
eaten.

She stops, curiously eyes him.

CLOSE

Back. Stay the hell back! What kind of accent is that?

MEC

I apologize. I speak old American English, but among other ... engineers ... I use an abbreviated patois. Please forgive me if I lapse.

CLOSE

Where the hell am I? An' who the hell are you?

Mec points to the dirt at his feet.

MEC

Come closer, please. You are in the Tennessee River Basin. I cannot permit your death. Follow me ... please.

CLOSE

Bullshit! I jumped into water!

She urges him forward.

MEC

Then why are you not wet?

Close stops three feet away, checks his shirt and pats his dry trousers.

MEC

Water has not flowed here for one hundred fifty years.

(points to her own chest)

Am called Mec.

She pronounces the name with a short e.

CLOSE

I'm Close, an' despite your cool name, you're fulla shit. This river was fulla water five minutes ago.

Mec's brow knits. She cocks her head to one side, stares at Close while she processes the information.

MEC

Another stalker will come soon.
They are released at ten-minute
intervals. Please stay near me.

Then, she motions him to follow and breaks into a jog.

CLOSE

A hundred fifty years, huh? What
freakin' year is this?

MEC

Is 2273. You must not delay. Under
orbital surveillance.

She points skyward.

CLOSE

Bull-squirtin'-shit! It's 2021, an'
everybody knows about the
surveillance. NSA, CIA, the damned
Defense Department, you name it, we
have it watchin' our assess.

INT. ORBITAL SURVEILLANCE CENTER - DAY

PA SYSTEM

Supervisor Thelma Rigby!

Through the door and the streaming imagery steps THELMA RIGBY, a trim woman of indeterminate age and ethnicity. Gold peace symbols decorate the sleeves of her otherwise unadorned cobalt blue uniform.

Tech CHATTER instantly ceases. Fear returns tech attention to the image flow.

GLEEBOK

Rigby. Welcome. We are making—

RIGBY

I want results ... today.

Rigby casually about-faces. The image stream through which she exits shows the man and woman in green, chattering into microphones while they masturbate each other.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Close gasps where Mec seems to be out for a stroll.

CLOSE

Gotta ... s-stop. Too hot t-to
breathe.

MEC

Rest. Five minutes. Then we must
move.

Close drops the backpack, then drops to his butt beside it. He
digs around inside, comes out with two cans and two beefsticks.

He hands the can and a piece of jerky to Mec.

She hesitates, on point to see what he does.

When Close pops his TAB, she pops hers. He drinks; she drinks.

MEC

Is tasty!

She examines the aluminum can and watches Close open the package
and gnaw the beefstick.

CLOSE

You don't have cola here?

Mec bites into the beefstick. Makes a face that morphs into a
radiant, child-like smile.

MEC

(headshake)

No cola but have seen vids.

(waves the jerky)

Is what?

CLOSE

Beef.

MEC

Extinct. Never tasted meat. Humans
have none. Use chemical substitutes
to placate instincts.

CLOSE

Look, Mec, I don't—

MEC

You have seen me run. You have seen and killed one spoor stalker. After I took your weapon, you trusted me sufficiently to follow my direction. Why would you not assume, for now, that I know this environment?

He shuts his eyes for a moment, then nods.

CLOSE

I've been chased by K-9 cops, some with bloodhounds. That thing's olfactory membranes have to work the same way. It follows the dead skin cells we shed, an' if we ...

He lets his words trail off as Mec shakes her head.

MEC

If 2021, then faulty 2021 evidence applied to 2273 is lethal. ... Stalkers possess more intelligence than extinct chimpanzee. A stalker can follow a trail of only fifty molecules per mile. Too, your skin cells are linked with mine.

She squints down their backtrail.

MEC

How proficient are you with that gunpowder weapon?

CLOSE

Average. The rifle was designed to turn thunks and thuds into drive-by killers.

MEC

Drive-by? Thunks and thuds?

CLOSE

It's not important ... unless you live in Chicago.

MEC

(nods)

Follow me, please. Shall walk, not run.

No sooner does Close turn, he spots two FIGURES in the distance.

CLOSE
Who the hell is—

MEC
Nearest is rulebreaker. Farthest is
very fast spoor stalker.

Close unslings the rifle.

CLOSE
Come, on, we—

MEC
Are too late to help human.
Stalkers eat meat, voraciously,
fugitives or each other. They can
eat themselves to death.

CLOSE
So if we kill this one, the next
will eat until he's sick.

MEC
Or slowed. Stalkers rip arteries,
then sit—contentedly—and lick
until the victim is drained. Is
cola to stalkers.

CLOSE
Come on.

Far away, the figures come together, and Close hears the faint
SCREAMS of the prisoner. He drops the pack, breaks into a run.

Mec catches him almost instantly, points to his chest.

MEC
YOU must remain next to me! Or die!

MEC
That poor slob—

Mec forces him to stop, holds out a hand.

MEC
Is dead. Give me one projectile.

Close detaches the magazine, thumbs out a round and passes it to
her.

Mec throws it into the sands.

CLOSE

Shit! You could play center field
for any pro—

MEC

Wait!

A thin trail of light streaks through the sky, right to the
cartridge. A grenade-sized explosion blows sand high into the
air.

CLOSE

Holy shit!

MEC

Gunpowder/brass detector. Electro-
magnetic launchers fling ceramic
missiles from orbit. Stay next to
me.

CLOSE

Gotcha! I may crawl into that suit
with you.

MEC

Sex later. Dangerous now.

His mouth drops open, but Mec's attention is on the PRISONER and
SPOOR STALKER. The screams have faded away.

Mec breaks into a slow jog.

A hundred yards from the feeding stalker, Close grabs her arm.

CLOSE

Good enough.

He lies prone, aligns his sights.

The bloody stalker rises, clearly more interested in protecting
his kill than in gathering more meat.

Close fires, hits the stalker in the sternum.

The animal wilts, collapses like a rag.

MEC

No one must discover how stalkers
die. Your weapons are life ...
perhaps freedom.

Close rises.

CLOSE

Follow me.

Close drops to a knee between the stalker and an emaciated old WOMAN with her guts ripped out.

CLOSE

That's some kind of mutant. Built in a lab. Right? It can't be natural. What's this?

He points to a projection on the stalker's head.

CLOSE

Shit! That's a camera lens.

He places a thumb over the lens.

CLOSE

Who the fuck is watching us?

INT. ORBITAL SURVEILLANCE CENTER - DAY

A span of desert IMAGERY that includes the old woman's body goes BLACK.

MEC (VO)

The stalkers hunt me. My execution is being televised ... entertainment for all citizens.

Gleebok moves closer to have a look.

CLOSE (VO)

Ain't happenin'. Not while you're with me. So, you're a criminal?

GLEEBOK

Explanations?

SEPH

I haven't seen anything like this.

GLEEBOK

Think, goddamnit! We have millions of viewers on hold who want to watch and to hear the resolution of this case. Fix it! Or would you rather explain your ineptitude to Thelma Rigby?

EXT. DESERT - EVENING

Close is beginning to stagger ... but the sight of water energizes him. A small lake. He takes off.

Even though Mec carries the pack, rifle and pistol, she easily runs beside him.

MEC

Stop! Observe. Is desert, yet
plants should grow near the shore.

The entire shoreline is barren.

MEC

Lakes common. Spring fed. Is good
water far below ground. Is toxic on
surface.

CLOSE

Thanks.

MEC

Night winds lift surface soil,
which contains deadly chemicals.
Winds die at dawn. Toxins fall into
water. Must also protect your eyes
in wind. Chemicals burn. Sometimes
damage sight beyond repair.

CLOSE

So, how do we drink?

MEC

Tomorrow, we shall find PGC guards
and steal their water. Now we must
find shelter for the night.

CLOSE

Why is their water okay? What's a
PGC guard?

MEC

Comes from springs deep
underground. No pollution.
Planetary Guard Cadre is comprised
of prisoners who now guard other
prisoners.

CLOSE

Kapos ... again.

LATER:

Mec stops on a low hill, and Close stumbles into her. She points.

A box car a quarter mile away: The tracks are covered with drifted sand and the car's wheels are buried.

MEC

Shelter.

Close perks up ... a little. He trudges forward.

INT. RAILCAR - LAST LIGHT

Three feet of fine sand covers the floor.

MEC

Dig ... here. Make a hole so you
can lie lengthwise. Halfway through
the sand.

Close stands mesmerized by the walls. Each holds eighteen-inch wide plank BUNKS—all the way to the ceiling—and each is equipped with HANDCUFFS and SHACKLES.

CLOSE

(snarls)

Slave cars.

Mec studies Close for a beat, then drops to her knees. She puts the pack and weapons aside.

MEC

Close? You must dig. Now. We have
less than one hour ... then ...

LATER:

Outside wind howls: Close lies on his back in the bottom of the hole. He shivers and every exhalation freezes.

Mec eases facedown on top of him.

MEC

My suit will warm you ... soon.
Place your hands between our
bodies. I shall cover our heads
with your pack. Breath inside will
save our faces, but we must move
often to prevent frostbite in your
feet.

Close tucks hands under her belly.

CLOSE

G-God, that's w-warm. T-tell m-me
about the s-suit.

She pulls the empty backpack over their heads.

MEC

My suit cools during in the daytime
and generates heat for the night.
Neither cameras nor detectors can
read signatures because my program
disrupts subatomic frequencies at a
ten-to-twenty-foot radius.

CLOSE

So, you're a computer programmer?

MEC

A maintenance engineer. Another ...
a friend programmed. Warm now?

CLOSE

Damned near cozy ... except for my
feet.

MEC

Feel your erection. Your body wants
sex but the brain knows the cold
will kill us.

CLOSE

I apologize, but in self defense, I
hafta say that you are the most
eye-pleasing woman I've ever seen.

MEC

Sleep. Shall wake you in thirty
minutes to warm your feet.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Close halts at the railcar's corner, bends to read an aluminum ID
tag on the frame: U.S. GOVERNMENT PROPERTY - HOMELAND SECURITY
2041.

CLOSE

Goddamned slavers!

MEC (OS)

Am slave. MEC-86-512. MEC means
Maintenance Engineer slash
Courtesan.

Close wheels. He gazes the length of the car at her ... then shakes his head.

MEC

Eighty-six is my model number, and I am the 512th manufactured. Brain imprinted for mechanical and electronic engineering.

CLOSE

Not any-goddamned-more, you aren't. I don't do slavery.

MEC

Am MEC-Class clone. My primary duty is ore-ship maintenance. My secondary function is sexual pleasure for the pilot, owner, or their designees.

Close gawks, obviously thinking she's a nutcase.

CLOSE

Neither do I do forced sex.

LATER:

Close lugs the backpack and weapons, follows Mec at a leisurely pace.

CLOSE

Why aren't we hurrying?

MEC

Winds killed the stalkers outside and scattered our molecules.

Mec makes a sweeping gesture with her arm.

MEC

Many eyes out there, and periscopes. Stalkers will have our trail by midday.

Mec touches his arm, halts. She points:

Far out, a half dozen FIGURES jog toward them.

MEC

Planetary Guard Cadre. They wear remnants of PAS uniforms.

CLOSE

PAS?

MEC

Peace Assurance Staff ... in orbital habitats. Orbhab residents are on camera at all times. Data collectors continuously record sonic, particle frequency, thermal, and electromagnetic signatures.

CLOSE

What do they want?

MEC

Me. Peace Assurance Staff can locate and stun any resident at any time and send them to The Surface.

Close gives her a perplexed look.

MEC

If PGC can capture me, they will be permitted to keep me until I reach twenty years of age.

CLOSE

How old are you?

MEC

Am ELEVEN.

While she studies at his expression of disbelief, he silently mouths the word eleven.

MEC

Clones are permitted to live twenty years ... then we are dismantled.

Mec cocks her head.

MEC

You do not believe me. Most humans would kill for sex with any clone.

CLOSE

What were you supposedly cloned from?

MEC

Human and synthetically manipulated genetic material. I am, Close, a genetically engineered male fantasy, but most fantasy holders are far too fearful to indulge themselves.

CLOSE

As far as I'm concerned, even if I swallow your tale, you're human.

Close unslings the rifle as the PGC draw near.

MEC

No. You must not harm humans. Shall be obliged to stop you. Pre-adolescent psycho-conditioning leaves me no choice.

CLOSE

Bullshit.

When he shoulders the M-16, she snatches it from his hands.

CLOSE

Look, Mec, we hafta—

MEC

They are overweight, but nonetheless malnourished. We shall run. They cannot follow.

Close plops to the sand.

CLOSE

I'm not goin' anywhere. So ... you gonna let them hurt me?

Mec stares into his eyes, then turns to watch the PGC thugs.

While she's distracted, Close thumbs several rounds from a pistol magazine. He rises.

Plainly in a quandary, Mec looks back at him. When she again looks to the goggled guards ...

CLOSE

... Throws three nine millimeter cartridges

Mec wheels as he draws the pistol and aims at her leg.

CLOSE

You try to run, I shoot you. I may
hafta carry your ass afterward, but
without you, I die.

Mec turns back as the missiles stream in ... and Close hits her
behind the knees ... tackles her.

Missiles explode behind, in front, and in the center of the pack.

INT. ORBITAL SURVEILLANCE CENTER - DAY

An alarm SHRIEKS.

Image FLOW isolates and stops in front of Seph's station:

INSERT - PANOPTICON SCREEN

Six Planetary GUARDS lie scattered and bleeding around a small
CRATER. Another crater behind the men and one in front.

One guard has no head. Another is missing much of the left side
of his body. No sound, but two men writhe in pain. The last two
show no visible wounds, but are clearly dead.

BACK TO SCENE

GLEEBOK

Night winds no doubt uncovered some
ancient munitions.

SEPH

No, Sir. Were that the case, those
missiles would have been launched
shortly after dawn. Something's
amiss there.

GLEEBOK

Don't argue with me. Get on with
it.

INT. OFFICE - SAME

Thelma Rigby sits at a desk ... watching a monitor.

INSERT - MONITOR

Gleebok stalks away from Seph's station.

BACK

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Close follows Mec among the bodies. Near the headless corpse, he finds a pair of two liter BOTTLES full of water. He hands one to Mec.

They guzzle. When Mec surveys the surrounding terrain, Close palms the pistol and shoots both wounded guards.

Mec pivots, hands up, ready to restrain him.

Close holsters the piece. Then continues his search.

MEC

Take goggles. Superior protection.

INT. ORBITAL SURVEILLANCE CENTER - DAY

IMAGERY streams by Seph: She isolates several feet, then places her hands on keyboard spheres and manipulates the images.

SEPH

Gleebok. Quickly!

Gleebok rushes over.

GLEEBOK

What now?

Seph points:

INSERT - PANOPTICON SCREEN

Two GUARDS near each other, in pain but clearly alive. The comparison image: Both have HOLES in their foreheads.

GLEEBOK (OS)

That could be bleeding delayed by shock.

BACK TO SCENE

SEPH

No. Someone other than the MEC killed them. That same someone emptied two water bottles over there and took goggles from that body.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Close spots a plastic bag, pulls it from a guard's pocket, then scowls at Mec.

CLOSE

I thought you said nobody has meat.

He holds up the bag so Mec can see.

MEC

Among outcasts, other outcasts exist. Rumor is that sometimes outcast families disappear—especially families with children.

Close drops the bag, looks as though he might barf.

CLOSE

Thanks. I really needed to hear that.

Mec appears perplexed.

Close finds three more bottles among the dead guards. He hefts one.

CLOSE

Damned thing feels familiar.

Mec turns him around, takes the containers and loads them into his pack.

MEC

Bottles are more than two hundred years old.

CLOSE

Yeah ... right.

MEC

Do not understand theoretical physics. Do you?

Close shakes his head.

MEC

Then how can you deny that an anomalous occurrence has placed you here?

She pinches his arm.

CLOSE

Ow!

MEC

You are real. You are here. To remain alive, you must start from NOW ... on this sand.

Mec holds out her hands.

MEC

Give me the weapons, please.

CLOSE

No way.

MEC

Could take them, but shall reason instead. I cannot hurt you. Neither can I fight you. You cannot survive without knowledge I possess. Fair assessment?

Close warily nods, studying Mec, clearly seeking an edge.

MEC

CAN run you, Close, severely deplete energy you will sorely need. Then, could easily take the weapons ... and protect you as best I can. I die ... you die.

Close takes his time, unloads both the rifle and the pistol. He stuffs the magazines into the pack and hands it to her.

CLOSE

Are you sure you can get us out of here?

MEC

If we live, then we shall escape. Have plan.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

A caravan snakes across sands and through windblown gullies. Humans, the beasts of burden: RULEBREAKERS, each thin to the point of starvation, each loaded with salvaged steel.

MEC (VO)
 Death by Work. Guards supervise
 hundreds scavenging details, and
 they always travel in groups of
 six.

GUARDS in cast-off PAS uniforms: Skinny herders with distended bellies.

A bundle of rusty rebar on the back of a young male PRISONER breaks apart. Rods fall and scatter. The man looks around, visibly scared.

A CLUB clips him under his ear. He drops onto the steel.

Other PRISONERS refuse to look.

SANFORD bends, checks the downed man's pulse.

SANFORD
 Reavis! Git this sucka back to tha infirmary.

Sanford winks at REAVIS.

REAVIS
 (grins)
 I gotta question, Lt. Sanford: you gonna invite me over for dinner?

Sanford winks again.

Another GUARD jogs up, whispers in Sanford's ear.

SANFORD
 Round 'em up. We move in ten. Take Reavis with you. I'll git somebody else for this chore.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Mec and Close lie on their bellies among rocks. Below and near a bluff half a mile away ...

CLOSE
 (demonstrating)
 Shade the goggles with your hands.
 We don't need reflections.

... A SPOOR STALKER lopes toward Sanford, Reavis, and four other GUARDS.

CLOSE (OS)
Nobody can be that stupid.

MEC
Sex drives humans. Know the stalker
is on my trail. Am the prize.

CLOSE
No. For those morons and that
stalker, we are the SURPRISE.

Mec looks his way, sees he's focused on the stalker. She snatches his knife and rolls away, springs to her feet, then dashes toward the coming melee.

INT. SURVEILLANCE CENTER - SAME

Seph stops a SECTION of vid stream.

SEPH
Gleebok! Now!

When Gleebok arrives, Seph points to Close's image and enlarges.

SEPH
That man's signatures are the ones
I caught yesterday.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

GLEEBOK (VO)
Where did his clothing come from?
Is that a weapon in his hands?
Where the hell is that goddamn
clone?

Close takes off after Mec.

CLOSE
No! Mec, stop! Think!

The guards rush the stalker with clubs swinging. One opens a gash on the stalker's forehead. Others strike at elbows and knees.

The stalker BELLOWS.

A guard SCREAMS, stumbles backward ... holding his escaping intestines both hands.

Down on his side, Sanford swings, connects with the stalker's ...

ANKLE

... Drawing another BELLOW.

Rage: The stalker swipes, rips out a THROAT.

Sanford bangs the stalker's knee as he rises.

Then comes Mec: Her blade flashes, a long slash that severs the superficial temporal and facial arteries. BLOOD erupts.

But a CLUB thumps Mec above her ear. She drops. Lights out.

Reavis yells to another guard.

REAVIS

I got the MEC! I got the clone! I—

A HAND reaches over Reavis's head from behind. CLAWS pierce his eyes. He SCREECHES. Then the claws dig through the sockets and into his brain.

Another guard goes down. A hairy FOOT works like a scythe. CLAWS rip through facial muscles, then a jugular vein and carotid artery.

HANDS grab Sanford by the head. Massive jaws open and sharp TEETH chew into his face. His screams are muffled in the stalker's mouth.

The last two guards flee.

The stalker chews into Sanford's neck, then drops the body.

INT. SURVEILLANCE CENTER - SAME

INSERT - PANOPTICON IMAGE FLOW

Close disappears.

BACK TO SCENE

SEPH

I lost the image and the
signatures. Something is disrupting
the energy fields.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

The stalker looks after the fleeing guards, then to ...

CLOSE

... Who stands over Mec, the unloaded M-16 at port arms.

CLOSE

Come on, asshole. Let's get this done.

Close kneels. When the stalker charges, Close throws a handful of sand into its eyes. He rolls out of its way.

SEPH (VO)

There it is again!

BELLOWING, the stalker paws its eyes.

CLOSE

Yeah, sucker. I fight dirty, an' blood loss has slowed your dumb ass.

Close rolls back to cover Mec, jams the 16's steel buttplate into a knee. He tries to rise, but the stalker blindly swipes, sinks claws into his shoulder.

Close stoops again while the stalker tries to clear its vision.

Close scoops more sand, throws it between the hairy hands. Then, he drives the buttplate between those hands ... into the stalker's throat.

Sucking air, the animal spins away, but the damaged knee cannot support its weight. When it falls, Close drives the buttplate into the other knee, then into an ankle.

Close methodically breaks clavicles and smashes elbows. An opening: He slams the buttplate into skull.

Bone CRACKS. Mucus spews from the stalker's trunk. The beast goes limp.

Close slumps to his knees, gulps a deep breath, then begins shaking all over.

Trembling almost uncontrollably, he crawls closer to Mec, checks her pulse. He mounds loose sand to pillow her head.

Then, gasping, he stretches out beside her.

LATER:

Mec blinks. She slowly sits up and looks around: the dead STALKER, the GUARDS, the KNIFE lying in the sand.

She looks down at Close ... eyes his blood-splattered clothing,
his bleeding shoulder.

MEC

You fought this stalker? To protect
ME?

CLOSE

(deep breath)

You were right about the chemicals
in the sand. Lucky he didn't know
that.

(chokes)

S-so d-damn s-scared ... Mec.

She helps him sit up, removes his t-shirt.

MEC

You are fortunate. The wounds are
not serious.

She opens a bottle, drops water over several PUNCTURES.

CLOSE

Fortunate that you cut the bastard.
Later, I'll show you how to use the
handgun. You carry it ... loaded.
We can't risk fightin' those damned
things.

MEC

No human has ever risked his life
for a—

CLOSE

Maybe no human ever realized that
you are human. Maybe it's time I
teach the ignorant clods some
manners.

Mec daubs the wounds with his shirt.

CLOSE

Thanks.

He pulls another too-large t-shirt from the pack.

CLOSE

We need to eat.

MEC

Two days more. We can search the guards. Need more water. Shelter soon. Two hours.

Close points to a crevice in the bluff.

CLOSE

That work?

At the crevice, Close shucks the pack and his shirt.

MEC

Yes. I saw one guard with a binocular.

CLOSE

I hafta clean up. Get this stink off me.

MEC

No water. Use sand. Avoid the open wounds, and stay in my suit's field.

CLOSE

Oh, I guess you want to watch.

MEC

No. Help. Trousers. Off.

Mec sits by Close's head, pressing his t-shirt to his eyes while she scrubs his face with fine sand.

MEC

Same with wounds. Must cover.

When Mec finishes, Close stands, dons sunglasses and uses the shirt to lightly brush away the remaining granules. He looks up just as ...

MEC

... Shucks her suit.

MEC

Me, too.

She lies face down in the sand. Close's mouth drops open:

From neck to knees, SCARS crisscross Mec's back: bulging scars, thin scars, thick scars, some faded, some new. Four welts are scabbed.

CLOSE

I think I could have fun killing
the man who did this.

MEC

Men. Many men. Some women. Clean,
Close. Then, we have time for sex.

CLOSE

No. We don't.

MEC

You dislike or fear me?

CLOSE

No. But no sex ... until you want
sex ... with me.

INT. SURVEILLANCE CENTER - SAME

MEC (VO)

Most female clones are lesbian ...
because we far outnumber males, and
because we cannot trust humans.

PAS MEMBERS storm into the rotunda and fan out, the LEADER
barking orders.

LEADER

On your feet! Let's go! Let's go!

MEC (VO)

Most males are confined to pleasure
centers for corporate executives,
the exceptions being hunters, which
are solely males, and used solely
against other clones.

One slow TECH gets stunned. She drops to the floor.

LEADER

Move it! Move it! We can do this
the easy way, or we can do this the
hard way.

PAS troops herd everyone out ... except ...

SEPH

... Who stands at her station ... trembling from head to foot.

LEADER
I prefer the easy way.

Thelma Rigby enters, stops before Seph.

RIGBY
Is my message clear?

Seph nods.

RIGBY
This pod is yours to command.
Recruit your own staff. Use your
imagination. ... But you find that
clone and see to its destruction.
No excuses.

SEPH
I will.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

MEC (VO)
Computers threaten severe penalties
for failure to dismantle a clone on
schedule. Genetic failsafes are
engineered-in; may live two months
into my twentieth year, then crash
into old age and death.

Wind howls. Sand drifts. Dim light seeps through the layer of
swirling dust.

MEC (VO)
Many residents tease clones about
early dismantling. Owners and
pilots use the threat for
extortion.

Shivering, eyes closed against airborne chemicals, a STALKER
squats beside the stalker Close killed. He contentedly gnaws meat
from a thighbone.

MEC (VO)
We are organic learning machines,
designed to perform complicated
scientific and technical tasks too
time-consuming, or too far beneath
the dignity of habitat residents.

EXT. CREVICE - DAY

Close emerges from the fissure first. One look, he throws the rifle to his shoulder and SNICKS the safety.

CLOSE
Bullets! I need—

MEC (OS)
Silence, please.

She sidles through the opening, pistol belted at her waist, binocular slung from her neck.

Before them, the stalker sits. He holds a meat-laden femur in a fist ... both frozen, but with no signs of frost.

Close steps behind Mec, opens the backpack. He pulls out an M-16 clip and slams it into the magazine well. He chambers a round, engages the safety and glares at her.

CLOSE
If you're mad, act like you're mad.
I got lucky yesterday. Luck runs out.

Mec scowls, but says nothing.

CLOSE
Either I've earned your trust, or we fight. No middle ground.

Mec shucks the backpack, hands over the remaining magazines.

Close lets a sigh escape, grins at her.

CLOSE
I probably would've had a better shot against a fresh stalker.
(looks away, embarrassed)
Last night, when we were talkin' about sex ... you never told me if—

MEC
I have never had enjoyable sex with a human.

CLOSE
No. I'll bet you haven't. That, Mec, is a cryin' damn shame ... an' not your fault.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Mec crawls on all-fours, Close beside her. They rapidly climb a high dune, then, staying below the rim, they use hands to cut sight notches in the sand.

Ever so slowly, they raise their heads for a look-see:

Watched by six GUARDS—who wear colorful clothing over their PAS rags—thirty PRISONERS swarm over the skeletal remains of an ancient building. They salvage anything made of metal.

MEC

Large detail. Guards will have
nutrient wafers.

To demonstrate wafer size, Mec holds a thumb and index finger half an inch apart. Then forms a large circle with her small hands.

MEC

Sufficient energy for three days in
each. Trade this metal for more
wafers at Spaceport.

CLOSE

Why the hell do you talk like that?

MEC

Apologize. Three clones on mining
ship. Abbreviated speech becomes
habit because seconds are often
critical.

CLOSE

Cool. What are the wafers made
from?

MEC

Soybeans and chemical sweeteners.
Reeducation farms above and below
the Arctic and Antarctic Circles.

Close slides down. Rolls onto his back. He gasps, grabs his shoulder.

CLOSE

Shit!

Mec eases down beside him.

CLOSE

So, what do you have in mind?

MEC

I can run, Close ... for short distances, much faster than a spoor stalker. I can steal—

CLOSE

Jesus, Mec. Count the eyes. If the cons don't rat you out, they'll give you away by gawkin' like tourists.

MEC

Suggestions?

CLOSE

You told me you had no blocks against suicide. Lookin' at your back yesterday, I figured you for about the toughest son of a bitch I've ever met. So, how smart are you?

MEC

I cannot allow you to—

CLOSE

Robbery, Mec, that's what I do. If you don't help me disarm the slavers, I am goin' to shoot them.

He raises sunglasses to his forehead, stares at her goggles.

CLOSE

I don't know how to quit. So you'll hafta seriously hurt me to disarm me. That's a no-no. You help, I promise I won't kill anyone. But we hafta hike back to that bluff.

EXT. BUILDING/DESERT - DAY

A guard, BUELL, straddles a rusty girder, watches prisoners dig in hard ground.

CLOSE (OS)

Why don't they make knives, kill the guards?

MEC (OS)
 Death sentence. No bladed weapons,
 no technology permitted on The
 Surface. Sole exception is
 transport ships.

Buell looks up, wipes dust from his goggles ... and smiles.

BUELL
 Fresh ass!

Two figures approach in the distance:

CLOSE
 I can't under ... I ...

MEC
 Comprehend the scope of the
 disaster you see?

Buell shimmies down to his rallying guards.

MEC (OS)
 Twelve to fourteen billion humans
 in 2090. Orbhab quarters were
 already being built for selected
 government elite and the extremely
 wealthy. Drought struck the
 northern hemisphere.

BUELL
 Let's bring in them two.

The guards fondle clubs ... anticipation.

MEC (OS)
 War came with southern hemispheric
 countries over grain. The United
 States, the strongest police state,
 was the last to collapse.

GUARD
 Buell, we can't be leavin' them
 prisoners alone.

BUELL
 They wouldn't have tha balls to
 squawk if you was chewin' off their
 titties. Right, Vasquez?

VASQUEZ
 (grins)
 We could use a little recreation.

A guard nods; another smiles; one raises a fist. When Buell lofts his billyclub, all five cheer.

MEC (OS)
 War. Starvation. Chinese,
 Pakistani, and Indian governments
 announced that the Russians had a
 five-year supply of food in Kara,
 on the Baydarata Bay in Siberia.

The guards form an aisle for Buell.

MEC (OS)
 Hundreds of thousands of humans
 died trekking to Kara in summertime
 ... and hundreds of millions froze
 to death when winter arrived.

As Buell swaggers through his men, each pats him on the back.

CLOSE (OS)
 Fuckin' government creeps. They
 never change.

MEC (OS)
 They are coming. I must remind you
 of your promise.

CLOSE (OS)
 You leave the talkin' to me. Not
 one word from you.

Eager for action, the guards practically jog behind Buell. When he stops, they run into him.

All gape at the oncoming pair:

Wearing the backpack, M-16 slung over a shoulder, Close could be out for a stroll ... except he carries a stalker ...

HEAD

... By its blond hair.

Mec carries the damaged stalker ...

HEAD

... In a similar manner.

Both have a pair of guard's regulation ...

NIGHTSTICKS

... Tucked into their belts.

Mec halts, tosses her head at Buell's feet. Then Close drops his.

Buell stands visibly amazed, but warily eyeing them.

Close and Mec pitch nightsticks into a pile off to the side.

CLOSE
(to guards)
Put your clubs next to ours.

Terrorstruck, Buell's minions seem unable to move.

Close indicates the stalker heads.

CLOSE
We ate their hearts for breakfast
this mornin' ... been savin' the
brains for later ...

Mec slips behind him, has to rise on tiptoes to reach into his pack.

CLOSE
... Learned that from Hannibal
Lecter ... but you have food. Less
weight to lug.

Close nods to the nightsticks.

Mec drops the gutted guard's head between those of the stalkers.

CLOSE
We had his and three other hearts
for dinner last night. You wanna
live, ditch your weapons.

Five nightsticks clatter to the pile. Buell holds out.

CLOSE
Schoolyard tough, huh? I figure you
gotta heart about the size an'
about as soft as a pimple ... not
much nutrition there.

Close pulls the knife from the packstrap sheath.

CLOSE
But I'll enjoy measurin' the damned
thing for myself.

GUARD

Buell, that thing hasta be a clone.

CLOSE

MEC-Class, Model 126 dash four. The geneticists got too shaky to make more than four of us. I got away, without psycho-blocks, an' I nullified hers.

Buell tosses his club.

CLOSE

You in the rear ... give your pack to my partner.

The guard sets his pack on the ground in front of Mec, then scuttles out of Mec's reach.

She checks the contents ... nods.

Close points.

CLOSE

That direction. Run ... till we're outta sight.

The guards run, Buell in the lead.

MEC

What if the man had challenged—

CLOSE

No nerve, Mec. That's why he does what he does.

MEC

And the reason you do what you do?

CLOSE

I never looked for a reason. I guess I never liked havin' the simple-minded tellin' me what to do.

She shoulders the pack.

MEC

We have food and water. Now, we must let the prisoners see us travel east rather than west.

CLOSE

I think I jus' gotta small taste of
the fear people have of you.

MEC

Serious taste. The human with the
pack urinated when you ordered him
to come forward. Could smell it.

Mec and Close don't get far before a near naked Gleebok and his
crew of techies cut them off.

GLEEBOK

We were sent here because of that
clone.

Dried blood speckles Gleebok's EARS, BROWS, and NOSTRILS. Bruises
cover his face and airborne chemicals have reddened his EYES.

CLOSE

Committed a heinous crime, did she?

Gleebok's swollen muscles seem deflated.

GLEEBOK

It tried to escape.

CLOSE

No. She escaped. Looks to me like
somebody else escaped with losta
pretty face jewelry.

GLEEBOK

If we turn in the clone, I can
negotiate pardons and big rewards
for all of us. We'll never have to
work again!

CLOSE

An' I'd bet that you're a real good
worker, aren't you?

Gleebok almost snaps to attention and salutes.

GLEEBOK

Damn right, I am!

CLOSE

Take her.

Gleebok looks dumbstruck.

CLOSE

Mec, you take one step, I'll kill
this human.

TECHIE

My God! It's another clone!

CLOSE

(grins at Mec)

Come on, let's leave these good
workin' slaves to their next chore.

LATER:

Mec leads Close up a dune, but halts halfway.

MEC

You shocked me ... MEC-Class 126-4.
I thought you would kill—

CLOSE

I made you a promise.

She nods, thoughtful, then pushes up her goggles, and removes his
sunglasses so she can watch his eyes.

MEC

Why do you help a clone rather than
your own kind? Those humans will be
blind soon.

CLOSE

You are MY kind, Mec. An outlaw ...
you are worth more than a whole
planetful of thunks and thuds like
those behind us.

MEC

I must think about this
declaration. For now ... am
pleased.

Mec tugs down her goggles, takes two steps up, but turns back to
Close.

MEC

I accept.

CLOSE

Accept what?

MEC

That you mean what you said. I
shall endeavor to earn your
respect.

CLOSE

Good. I'll try to earn yours ...
an' you are still one tough son of
a bitch.

Mec turns and climbs.

MEC

Am not son. Am female.

Close clambers after her, grins as he ogles her butt.

CLOSE

Yeah, I noticed.

LATER:

Mec uses the binocular to check ahead of them and behind. She
lowers the glasses and scans the sky:

A thin streamer of tan-colored CLOUD forms a long, horizontally
laid arc.

She pulls Close up by his packstrap ... gets in his face.

MEC

You follow me. Run! Not walk! Not
jog! Dustcane comes this way!

She takes off.

No hesitation. Close follows.

Mec slows her pace to match his.

LATER:

Mec stops and takes cover from the quickening wind behind a wide
masonry bridge pillar. Close drops, gasping. A portion of another
column pokes through sand sixty yards away.

MEC

Shelter. Now. Help me!

She digs in sand next to the column.

MEC

Need deep hole!

CLOSE

N-no. N-not. Th-there. T-toward the
bank. This is ... o-old railroad
br-bridge s-support. There's a
maintenance room b-buried here.

They sprint to the next column. He shucks his pack and digs.

MEC

Storm forms over water. Ashore,
moisture dissipates quickly. Then
high winds pull heavy sand aloft.
Will destroy skin in minutes.

Mec encounters wood first ... the top of a thick door. They clear
a space.

CLOSE

Get back.

He shreds old wood with M-16 fire, then widens his hole with the
buttplate.

INT. MAINTENANCE ROOM - DAY

Dim light and howling wind from outside: Ancient tools hang from
hooks or lie half-buried in fine sand.

MEC

Storms generate heat. Warm tonight.

Close glances up to the hole in the top of the door.

CLOSE

You're sure?

MEC

Not comfortable warm. Survivable
warm. Wind chill diminished.

CLOSE

How big are the storms?

Close noses around, finds an ancient carpenter's PENCIL and
slides it into his pack.

MEC

Many miles. Wind and sand will
scour our trail. If you stay near
me, and if my suit does not fail,
free of pursuit for hours.

EXT. BONE FIELD - DAY

Dead still. Blazing sunlight and blistering heat.

Sharing soybean cakes and a water bottle, Mec and Close sit hip to hip on a tiny patch of sand ... surrounded by a thick layer of human SKELETONS.

CLOSE

Helluva place for a picnic.

He makes an encompassing gesture with his arms.

CLOSE

I still have trouble believing
this.

Mec turns, studies him from the light-colored mask where the goggles protected her face from the sun.

MEC

In your time, Close, this disaster
was a logical outcome of too many
humans. Your thunks and thuds
should have foreseen these bones.

CLOSE

So, you listen and learn ... pick
up old words.

MEC

Content-defined usages. Inflection
revealed your guilt.

CLOSE

My guilt?

MEC

Because you have the will, but did
nothing.

CLOSE

You're saying I should have
predicted this?

MEC

Yes.

She paws through his pack, extracts the carpenter's pencil. Then she blackens a spot on a child-sized skull.

MEC

Is black. Does what with heat?

CLOSE

Absorbs it.

MEC

Is carbon. Cee Oh Two: One carbon atom. Big deal, your leaders claimed, manageable problem. Bullshit, as you say.

Mec replaces the pencil in the pack.

CLOSE

Why is it bullshit?

MEC

Methane molecule: One carbon atom, also. In 2021, more than nine billion humans, billions of animals to feed them, billions more animals employed to amuse them and to assuage their loneliness ... all expelling intestinal gas.

CLOSE

People an' animals farting killed the Earth?

MEC

No, Close. Propaganda killed Earth; rendered discussing an overly populated planet politically incorrect.

CLOSE

That got by me.

MEC

Seventy-two degrees in room. I crowd people inside. What happens to temperature?

CLOSE

It rises.

MEC

Humans are heat engines. Genius not required to answer question.

CLOSE

And the atmosphere forms the planet's walls.

MEC

Rulers have no power to minimally
alter, much less repeal, laws of
thermodynamics.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Mec and Close climb a low ridge and halt on the top.

In spite of the heat, Close involuntarily shivers as he surveys
the terrain:

MEC (OS)

The United States Government
learned from Asians; Homeland
Security used a similar trick to
lure citizens to FOOD DISTRIBUTION
POINTS. Humans exhausted
themselves.

A field of human bones stretches ahead ... for miles; to the left
and to the right ... for miles. Adult skeletons, but many, many
children.

MEC

Wind uncovers these bone fields.
OBS broadcasts vids to warn
residents of the evils of humans
who espouse the formation of
governments.

CLOSE

As if corporations were any better.

LATER:

Mec and Close hobble through bones, completely surrounded now,
unable to take a step and have a foot actually touch sand.

CLOSE

Hussein had this thing about
stashin' American dollars. I
thought the information was solid,
so I took off for Iraq. The CIA
pinched me at the airport, took me
to Romania.

MEC

They tortured you?

CLOSE

Off and on for three years ...
until I escaped. The yo-yo's
couldn't believe I was a solitary
robber lookin' for a score.

They climb another rise, up and out of the sun-bleached bones.
Close points:

CLOSE

Is that the Mississippi River?

MEC

Is salt water. The Gulf of Mexico.
River perhaps one hundred years
ago.

CLOSE

Shit! I hate it ... that I'm
starting to believe. Mec, do you
have any idea what could have
happened to me?

Mec opens a bottle, shares with him, then they strike out toward
the water.

MEC

Theoretical physicists claim that
time is a medium, as in space-time.
No evidence for this ... but if
true, then you emerged in this time
via a phenomenon I would call a
Time Rift.

CLOSE

If that's true, it could still be
open. What's that?

Close points again, to two dark and distant bulges near the
horizon.

MEC (OS)

In your time: Millington Naval Air
Station.

INT. ORBITAL SURVEILLANCE CENTER - DAY

A male TECHIE plots markers on a screen.

TECHIE

That's the last.

Seph stands behind the man, Thelma Rigby beside her.

SEPH
Each is a sighting.

Seph points and makes a circular motion.

SEPH
The MEC made a circle, about eighty miles in diameter, then returned to its point of escape ... the Millington Spaceport.

Thelma Rigby purses her lips ... frowns.

RIGBY
Human intel from The Surface is not reliable; it's purpose is always to curry favor. Rely on the science. Get PGC and Spoor Stalkers into that area.

SEPH
But PAS troops are ... they might be killed.

RIGBY
Warn no one.

Thelma Rigby pivots and marches out.

EXT. SPACEPORT - DAY

Mec beside Close, bellies to the ground, he studies the layout through the binocular:

INSERT - BINOCULAR POV

CLOSE (OS)
A flat patch of dry ground is a spaceport?

MEC (OS)
Ships make a port, not the PAS troops.

Six black and white uniformed GUARDS walk around two battered-looking ships ... each over a hundred yards long and sixty wide.

MEC (OS)
Believe only one is loaded. Troops
sleep inside that one tonight.
Other closed by brain and computer.
No entry.

The ships are oval-shaped, and doubled, a twenty foot oval
stacked on top of the cargo holds.

CLOSE (OS)
Brain?

BACK TO SCENE

MEC
Need to explain. Talk later. Must
work now. Show you after dark ...
when we go inside. No pilot. No
PAS.

CLOSE
You mean we're staying OUTSIDE ...
after dark?

MEC
You must wear goggles.

CLOSE
And if we don't get inside?

MEC
We die. Forty-five minutes to one
hour. Cannot warm faces, brain will
freeze.

CLOSE
And I thought you were gonna be an
albatross around MY neck.

MEC
Albatross?

CLOSE
A dead bird in a dynamite poem.

He tugs Mec over onto her back, then props himself on elbows,
face near hers.

CLOSE
You have a plan.

Mec points to the far ship.

MEC

Came to surface on that transport.
Owner dismantled a MEC. Ship needed
work. Sent me. I had suit ready.
Waiting. Two years.

CLOSE

Your enhancements increase your
chances of survival in this time.
But think about this: in my time,
those enhancements would guarantee
survival for both of us ... if ...
we can find the Time Rift.

MEC

Will think. Can find Rift. But
perhaps leads to different time.

Mec reaches up, raises his sunglasses up on his forehead, then
raises her goggles.

MEC

Close, are you proposing long-term
alliance with a clone?

CLOSE

You're more or less programmed to
protect humans in this era. I see
you as my lifeline ... maybe a
lifeline for the planet. So, I'm
not about to let you go down.

Mec's expression forms a question.

CLOSE

We fight, Mec. You cover my ass; I
cover yours.

EXT. SPACEPORT - NIGHT

Wind drives sand into the air, roars in the process.

Goggled and shivering, Close has both hands tucked into the front
of his pants and old shirt wrapped around his head.

He keeps watch while Mec works under one of the ships. When she
drops a hatch, he quickly squeezes inside.

INT. SHIP - CONTINUOUS

Mec crowds into the maintenance shaft, pulls the hatch shut, then wraps herself around Close.

MEC

You will be warm soon. Hug tightly.

CLOSE

P-pleasure. D-damned c-c-cold.

Mec tightens her arms around his neck.

MEC

Warm carotid arteries. Difficult passage for you here. Maintenance shafts small ... to accommodate engineers my size.

CLOSE

T-tell m-me about that b-brain.

MEC

Human experiments gone awry. Genetic. Brains weigh five to six pounds ... too much weight for the spine. They are used in ships to directly interact with computers. Must trust you ...

LATER:

Mec sidles through a port into a cargo hold. Scavenged metal bundles cover the floor, each strapped in place, but the bulkheads hold Close's attention:

MEC (OS)

Bring humans to surface, return to orbit with metal. Three hundred thousand rulebreakers in orbit. Two special factories. They never leave.

Black, composite handcuffs and shackles every two feet.

CLOSE

After I escaped this time, I made myself a promise: that I would kill the next man who put handcuffs on me. No matter how long it took.

INT. BRIDGE - NIGHT

Minimal hardware and gadgetry: A panopticon screen runs around the upper edge of the bulkhead. On a turntable, two chairs face forward, but forward could as well be rearward.

Spherical keyboards are attached to swing-arms to accommodate the pilot or co-pilot.

In the center of the deck stands a four foot pedestal with a transparent dome on top.

CLOSE

High-impact plastic, I'd bet.

Mec follows him across the deck.

Inside the bubble in a reddish liquid bath rests a brain—human-shaped, but twice normal size.

A VOICE issues from unseen speakers:

TRANSPORT BRAIN (VO)

MEC-Class Clone number 86-512: You
are to institute Process ...

Mec stops in her tracks, her face blank.

TRANSPORT BRAIN (VO)

Eight-ten, forty-six dash four
four. Instantly.

One glance at Mec, Close drops to a knee, thumbs the M-16 safety and aims at the pedestal supporting the dome.

TRANSPORT BRAIN (VO)

You will proceed to the infirmary
and immediately begin the
dismantling.

CLOSE

Hey, asshole! You know what a
gunpowder weapon is? I have one
aimed at your support mechanism.
She moves, you die.

TRANSPORT BRAIN (VO)

Mec-Class 86-512, belay previous
order.

Mec remains frozen in position.

CLOSE
How did you know she was here?

TRANSPORT BRAIN (VO)
Weight, stride, Motion Recognition
System in the deck.

CLOSE
Release her now.

TRANSPORT BRAIN (VO)
It will kill both of us if I do
that.

Close taps the pedestal with the flash suppressor.

CLOSE
Sounds hollow an' thin, bub. That's
bad ... for you. So, do you know
the shutdown signals for all
clones?

TRANSPORT BRAIN (VO)
I have complete control.

CLOSE
You can nullify all her blocks?
Permanently?

TRANSPORT BRAIN (VO)
Do you not understand the concept
of COMPLETE?

CLOSE
I figure you want to live ...
somebody with a brain that big
would've found a way to kill
himself. Right?

TRANSPORT BRAIN (VO)
Correct.

CLOSE
So, here's my deal: You remove all
of Mec's blocks an' you get to
live. You refuse, I kill you, an'
the PAS creeps when they show up.

Close checks on Mec, who has not moved.

CLOSE

Mec weighs maybe a hundred pounds.
I carry her to the next ship,
explain to the brain there what I
did to you, I think he might be
cooperative.

Silence that stretches.

TRANSPORT BRAIN (VO)

MEC-Class Clone number 86-512: You
are to institute Process ...
seventy-seven point three five six
dash one.

Mec blinks. Looks around.

Close rises, lightening fast, he slaps at her.

Mec catches his hand with her left, cocks her right fist ... her
expression, unalloyed fury.

CLOSE

(smiles)

Beautiful.

Mec releases his hand.

CLOSE

Can you fly this thing?

MEC

Can fly ANYTHING capable of flight.

Close wheels, kicks the brain's bubble and separates it from the
support pedestal.

Liquid leaks and electrical sparks fly.

When the glass hits the deck, the ...

BRAIN

... Spills out.

Mec watches Close. He slings the M-16 onto the deck, unsheaths
his knife, then slices the brain in half.

LATER:

Mec and Close occupy the two chairs, Mec busy with the pilot's
dual keyspheres.

MEC

Why did you kill him? May have been useful.

CLOSE

I can run my own risks ... kill or die. I have no business leavin' risks for you to run. Your choices, not mine.

MEC

Learning experience for me: That freedom is not merely a useful word to you.

CLOSE

We couldn't have taken the chance; maybe he had more tricks to use on you.

He studies the co-pilot's keyspheres but does not touch them.

CLOSE

I've been a slave, an' I don't like the feelin'.

MEC

Shocked, Close. Several times by you. ASTOUNDED when I realized that I had reacted instinctively to defend myself. For giving me that one instant, I shall be in your debt ... forever.

CLOSE

Maybe we can do better ... than debt.

MEC

Cinch belts.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

An ugly oval ship sets down on a desert plain. The rear port/ramp lowers.

Four PAS GUARDS escort Thelma Rigby and Seph to the ground. They remove handcuffs and shackles, then march back up the ramp.

Rigby and Seph look around, Rigby trembling.

The ramp raises and the ship silently lifts.

RIGBY

What do we—

SEPH

Oh, I understand; NOW you want to listen to me. What I do is no longer your concern.

Seph slides a bicep bracelet down her arm. She twists and pulls, and frees a tiny hook-shaped blade.

RIGBY

I cannot permit you to—

SEPH

I am not about to become a sex toy for hundreds of smelly men. You—

RIGBY

I order you to desist!

(tears)

You must not leave me alone!

Seph scowls at Rigby, shakes her head in pity. Then, she raises the knife and slices deeply into her own neck.

EXT. ORBIT - DAY

CLOSE (Comlink)

I don't understand why we couldn't use the ship we had.

Tethered to each other and to backpacks, two space-suited figures drift away from the battered transport ship.

MEC (Comlink)

Phoenix Habitat Corporation is wealthy. Fields superior equipment. Has ship I want. Clones die on long voyages. Sometimes must be replaced.

CLOSE (Comlink)

I don't guess you've heard the bird-in-hand cliché.

MEC (Comlink)
 To initiate genetic alterations
 requires sophisticated lab. On some
 ships, brains have knowledge but
 not means. Quantum computers
 control the data, but lack
 awareness.

Light reflects from a distant habitat.

CLOSE (Comlink)
 Alterations? For yourself?

MEC (Comlink)
 Close, I want to live. If I can
 have one more year, or only one
 week ... I want those minutes.

CLOSE (Comlink)
 Is that Phoenix ahead?

MEC (Comlink)
 Yes. When time comes to maneuver,
 you hold onto me, stomach to
 stomach. No room for error.

The habitat's metal skin becomes defineable.

CLOSE (Comlink)
 Mec, what's to keep these people
 from blowin' us into little pieces?

MEC (Comlink)
 My suit. We are invisible ...
 electronically. Also, neither ships
 nor habitats have weapons. Weaponry
 is personal and used solely by
 Peace Assurance Staff.

CLOSE (Comlink)
 Cops! No war, huh?

MEC (Comlink)
 Profits rule. War became obsolete
 because it is not profitable from
 orbit. No plunder. No natural
 resources.

More LIGHT reflection: A small ship leaves the habitat while
 another comes in.

CLOSE (Comlink)
What kind of weapons do the cops
carry?

MEC (Comlink)
Particle beam handhelds defaulted
to stun. Coded to a staff member's
DNA. Resetting to lethal mode
requires an elaborate entry code.

CLOSE (Comlink)
Figures.

MEC (Comlink)
To maintain mass-destruction
weapons is too expensive. Plus,
focus is required. In habitat
society, few humans have the
attention span to remain angry for
longer than ten seconds.

CLOSE (Comlink)
So, distraction is a weapon for us.

A long pause while Mec studies his expression.

MEC (Comlink)
Think I am pleased that you are not
angry at me.

INT. HABITAT - DAY

Close has to scuttle sidewise to follow Mec through the
maintenance shaft. He carries the backpack in front with one
hand, a chore that has him breathing hard. At an exit port, a
dull background ROAR fills the tunnel.

CLOSE
Stop. What's that noise?

Mec touches a button on the bulkhead. A cover slides back on a
porthole offering a view through a one-way mirror:

MEC
Humans.

PEOPLE, fifty or so, crowd into a small space. All talk at once
... to each other, into headsets, into handheld devices.

MEC

Multiracial, but monocultural. Old
American English mandatory.
Corporation is family. Politically
incorrect offenders sent to
surface.

She pauses ... studies his expression.

MEC

You seem ill.

CLOSE

I want to throw up, but I won't.
(deep breath)
Before I escaped, I read an old
book by Neil Portman called AMUSING
OURSELVES TO DEATH. He predicted
something similar to this.

MEC

If you wish to rest, we should. We
have a distance to go.

CLOSE

An' I'm gonna be useless when we
get there ... too tired if we hafta
fight.

MEC

Shall carry packs.

CLOSE

On my Earth, I used to steal cars
when I needed to travel ... fix 'em
up to look like police vehicles.

She gives him a blank look.

CLOSE

Mec, in a police state, people
avoid lookin' at cops. Dress like
cops, we can go anywhere we want.

Mec slides down the bulkhead ... squats.

Close follows suit, but has to wedge himself sideways to get all
of the way down.

MEC

You have no fear?

CLOSE

I have a healthy amount ... which
means a great deal ... but I'll do
what has to be done.

Mec studies his face for a long time ... finally nods.

MEC

Discard nonessentials now. I shall
locate a PAS locker room.

INT. MAINTENANCE TUNNEL - DAY

Although Mec never ventures more than a few feet from Close, she
flits through the conduit where he gets stuck, has to fight for
forward progress. She finally stops before a wall of waist-high
panels.

MEC

(points)

Need silence now. PAS lockers.
Access here so supervisors can
search.

One tiny red light blinks a dozen feet away.

CLOSE

What? ... Somebody has a locker
open?

Mec nods toward the light, then crosses her lips with her index
finger. She taps numbers onto a keysphere.

MEC

(whispers)

Humans unaware clones have access.

CLOSE

(whispers)

So ... you're trusting me?

She plants hands on hips, turns slightly and looks up at him.

MEC

(whispers)

Close, twice you had a choice
concerning this life. I continue to
breathe.

Before he can answer, she opens the panel, pulls a jacket through
and checks the size against her body, then his. She returns it.
Closes the panel and moves to another locker.

CLOSE
(whispers)
Thanks. I ... I feel ... HONORED.

A gaudy red thing, the next jacket doesn't swallow him. She slops a matching helmet with a tinted visor over his head, a metal-flake red with gold pinstripes.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

Mec and Close walk along a thickly carpeted deck.

CLOSE (Comlink)
Why does this feel strange?

MEC (Comlink)
Eighty percent of pseudo-gravity generated by centrifugal force. Ten percent by magnetism. Your boots have metal.

CLOSE (Comlink)
So, I'm stronger than the muscled-up dipshits?

MEC (Comlink)
Muscles for display. Posturing. Not work. Babies.

CLOSE (Comlink)
Well, that hasn't changed since 2021.

A PAS MEMBER observes while two showy, muscle-bound MEN argue.

Visors up, the men stand three feet apart, but lean toward each other, almost face-to-face—like quarreling roosters.

MEC (Comlink)
Carpet dampens sound. Disrupts the frequencies at which refined metals resonate.

MAN
You sleazy piece of shit, don't you ever ...

Mec and Close pass by.

CLOSE (Comlink)
That cliché is garbage from my time.

MEC (Comlink)
 American English universal. Frozen.
 Mandatory after corporations
 captured Britain and invaded
 Canada.

CLOSE(Comlink)
 Muscled-up clowns.

MEC (Comlink)
 Human males strive to impress other
 males. Women enhance buttocks and
 breasts because they believe they
 must compete with clones for sex.

CLOSE (Comlink)
 Compete? I got news for 'em: on a
 beauty scale of one to ten, the one
 clone I've seen is at least a
 Fourteen.

MEC (Comlink)
 All fourteens. Some perhaps,
 fifteens. Is compliment?

Mec edges away from Close, forcing a pair of PAS TROOPERS to walk
 between them.

CLOSE (Comlink)
 Yes, that was a compliment, and
 your move was slick. Most women
 would have stepped closer to me.

LATER:

Mec and Close pass through a narrow, deserted corridor.

Ahead, two PAS COPS enter the passageway, big guys who dwarf Mec.

MEC (Comlink)
 When they touch weapons, charge.

CLOSE (Comlink)
 But—

MEC (Comlink)
 Do as I say.

The second a hand touches a stunner, Mec is on the Trooper, has
 his arm twisted, and her hand over his ... in control of his
 weapon.

Close grabs gunhand, knees a crotch, turns the guard loose as the man bends.

Mec zaps Close's opponent.

MEC (Comlink)
Hold him upright! Must not fall!
Body alarm!

She stuns her captive, then slides his weapon back into its holster.

MEC (Comlink)
Follow me.

She holds her guard around the chest, drags him to a maintenance port, then through.

INT. MAINTENANCE SHAFT - CONTINUOUS

Mec wedges the body upright, then helps Close with his.

CLOSE (Comlink)
What do we—

She holds up a hand for silence while she compares his physique to that of the guards.

Close draws his knife.

MEC (Comlink)
What do you intend—

CLOSE (Comlink)
You told me those weapons are DNA-controlled. I AIN'T goin' out there again without somethin' lethal.

Conscious, horrified, the PAS trooper looks on while Close compares their hand sizes.

MEC (Comlink)
Close, they are—

CLOSE (Comlink)
Can it. Human nature, Mec: Low class, no class thugs usually claim to be an elite class over skin color, uniforms, or badges. Right now, I need some elite skin to operate an elite stungun.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

Hands bound at the back, Mec trudges down the passageway, escorted by a bulked-up Close in a PAS uniform. They pass orbhab RESIDENTS, but curious gazes never linger.

MEC (Comlink)
You loathe them, do you not?

Close carries the red helmet in his left hand.

CLOSE (Comlink)
That they don't have the balls to question anything. For all these thunks know, I could be about to roast your ass over an open fire.

MEC (Comlink)
This reminds you of your time?

CLOSE (Comlink)
Same sheep pretendin' to be human.

MEC (Comlink)
Next intersection, slip my binding so we can drift apart. Then follow me.

INT. OBSERVATION DECK - DAY

MEC (Comlink)
The two big ships: Automated mining and processing units able to range Solar System. Infrasound to reduce ores to powder. Separation into useful material without energy deficit.

From the orbital habitat, dock wings spear outward—nothing more than an enclosed corridor. Docked to one arm are the two large mining ships and dozens of smaller vessels.

MEC (Comlink)
Run by quantum computer. Staffed by a human, a brain, as many as two to four clones, for maintenance and entertainment on long voyages.

CLOSE (Comlink)
I can't believe those ports won't be locked.

Close and Mec stand at opposite ends of the viewing port.

MEC (Comlink)
Only locks controlled by security
supervisors who spy on PAS. Small
ships private yachts. Residents
enjoy SAILING, but panic if they
lose sight of habitat.

A pair of PAS thugs enter, scan the deck.

CLOSE (Comlink)
Watch reflections ... so, the meek
have finally inherited the earth.
The corporations saved deadbeats
when the world needed adaptable
doers.

Mec tenses, fingers the pistol.

MEC (Comlink)
I see them ... deadbeats afraid to
steal ... or to question your
presence.

CLOSE (Comlink)
You sure these hacks can't hear us?

Close turns to check on them.

The men nod to him, then step back through the port.

CLOSE
But you weren't stealin'?

MEC (Comlink)
Not running from theft. Close, am
first clone to attempt escape.
First ... ever.

CLOSE (Comlink)
We're gonna hafta see that you set
a good example for others.

INT. MINING SHIP - DAY

MEC (Comlink)
Ships deliver to and are serviced
at habitat ports ... never on
surface or near facilities that
hold outcasts.

Mec leads Close through the airlock port. She immediately turns and hits a switch.

MEC (Comlink)
 From surface, from moon mines, ores
 and metals are delivered to
 factories in remote-controlled
 containers without life support
 capability.

The entrance ramp rises and shuts with a HISS.

MEC (Comlink)
 No one can enter from outside. Know
 this ship. Two trips. Learned
 codes. MY ship now.

He holds out his left hand.

CLOSE (Comlink)
 Aye, aye, Captain. Let's do this.

Mec shucks her helmet, then lays the pistol in his palm.

Close sheds his helmet, sets it on the deck, then winks at Mec.

CLOSE
 Never would've gotten this far
 without you. I got your back.

Close tucks the pistol under his right arm, then rolls bloody PAS
 skin off his right hand.

A female VOICE issues from unseen speakers:

MEGA (VO)
 MEC-Class Clone number 86-512: You
 are to institute Process eight-ten,
 forty-six dash four four,
 forthwith.

Mec listens, her face blank. Then she awkwardly returns his wink.

Close's mouth drops open:

ISOC and MOC enter, tall, blonde women in cobalt blue coveralls
 who might be sisters.

MEGA (VO)
 Mec-Class Clone num—

CLOSE

Ah, shut up! You speak again, I'll
disconnect your ass ...
permanently.

Silence: Four sets of wary eyes scan for danger.

Mec turns, nods to them, and smiles.

MEC

Designations?

Close goggles: The women are constantly on point, like Mec,
watching, learning ... curious to the extreme.

ISOC

Isoc. Am—

MEC

Am Mec. New pilot-slash-captain.

(to Close)

Isoc is Infrasound Operator slash
Courtesan.

(to Isoc)

No future sexual duties.

As though silently communicating, Isoc and Moc glance to each
other often.

CLOSE

God ... they'd put Victoria's
Secret models outta work.

(to Mec)

Couple?

Mec nods to Close, then looks to Moc, does not speak.

MOC

Am Moc.

MEC

(to Close)

Machine Operator slash Courtesan.

Mec marches by the clones.

CLOSE

I'm Close. I'm human. You're human.
No more slave shit. No more
courtesan crap.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

Isoc and Moc stifle grins as they follow Close, who stays on Mec's heels.

The setup is like that of the transport they stole, but has six work stations. Plus, this layout is so plush it's decadent.

Another transparent dome sits in the center of the deck, but one decorated with gold flake.

This time Close follows Mec's lead.

Inside the dome in a reddish liquid bath rests another brain—human-shaped, slightly smaller than the one Close destroyed.

MEC

The last brain I encountered ...
but you should know about that by
now. How are you called?

MEGA (VO)

Megabrain.

MEC

You are Mega from this point
forward, unless you prefer another
name.

MEGA (VO)

I shall have you know that I was
named by my employer and—

CLOSE

You're a prisoner now. Live
captive, dead meat. Your choice. It
would be a real good idea to let me
know where you stand.

MEGA (VO)

Live captive.

CLOSE

Great, Mega. First order of
business: Mec calls the shots. She
can fly this ship, so we don't need
you. That'd be a damn good thing
for you to keep in mind.

MEC (VO)
(to Close)
You understand freedom; convince
her to cooperate. Your job.

LATER:

INSERT - PANOPTICON SCREEN

The view shows open space, no other ships, no habitats.

CLOSE (OS)
That AIN'T rocket science, girl,
just a little applied thought.

GIGGLES. Polite CHUCKLES from Moc and Isoc.

CLOSE (OS)
What the hell's so funny?

BACK TO SCENE

Mec reclines on the pilot's chair.

MOC (OS)
Rockets obsolete.

Stripped of PAS clothing, wearing a pair of Isoc's cobalt blue coveralls and clean, Close props himself against Mega's pedestal, his elbows on the dome.

CLOSE
My bad. ... So, Mega, I figure if
you were truly free, you'd be able
to move around freely.

The two clones occupy acceleration chairs ... both listening.

CLOSE
With the technology available, plus
corporate resources, somebody,
somewhere could have designed a
spine capable of supportin' your
extra brain weight.

MEGA (VO)
I am an employee of—

CLOSE

Employee my ass! You are a dumb-ass slave who's helped slavers enslave these three women. You don't have sight, but I can assure you that they are human.

MEGA (VO)

I do not have to listen—

CLOSE

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay. What you hafta do is this: Part of your job is clone control; so nullify the psycho blocks on these women.

Passive until now, Isoc and Moc seem dumbstruck.

CLOSE

Do it now ... or I'm gonna turn your gray matter into a greasy spot on this deck.

INT. MAINTENANCE SHOP - DAY/NIGHT

CLOSE (OS)

Why don't you jump into a worm hole an' disappear? You know ... warp speed ... that stuff.

Mec huddles between Moc and Isoc. The women perch on stools at a work table. Moc has the PAS stunner opened before her.

MEC

Is myth: Faster than light travel. Vast distances. No exploration beyond Heliopause. Since Collapse, no meaningful research in astrophysics. All science chaotic.

Isoc works on a volleyball-sized sphere that appears to be composed of nothing but electronic circuitry.

MOC (OS)

Voyager spaceprobe launched in August 1977. Speed, thirty-eight plus thousand miles per hour. Needs fourteen thousand years more to travel one light-year.

Close hovers, watching and studying, but obviously out of his element.

CLOSE

Three hundred years. So, how fast—

MEC

Two hundred twenty-two thousand miles per hour. Good ship.

CLOSE

Weapons?

MEC

None. Mining tools. Perhaps Ultra-Focus Laser. Constructed for work in dense atmosphere.

CLOSE (OS)

Infrasound. You said so.

Mec scans his expression, as though wondering if she were speaking to the dumbest human in the solar system.

MEC

Must create small atmosphere to use infrasound. If firearm, then pistol, not rifle.

CLOSE

Shit! In other words, we're hit.

Isoc spins to face him. She points to the sphere.

ISOC

Mec's idea: Reconfiguring Surface Geological Analyzer to mimic ship's electromagnetic emissions. Amplified signal. Will launch near sun, too near for other ships to follow.

MEC

Pursuing ships have no weapons.

CLOSE

I gotta question ... for all of you.

Close looks to each face while he chooses words. His gaze returns to Mec.

CLOSE

I finally get it. Okay? This is 2273 AD. Other than clones, brains, computers, an' ships, is there anything here worth salvagin'?

MEC

Anticipated implications of question. Chose this ship. Hull designed to withstand sulfuric acid corrosion on Venus. Explain purpose of question to Moc and Isoc.

CLOSE

You'll always be on the run in this time. In 2021, if we can get there, you can live as you damn well please. Your technology guarantees that.

MEC

You, however, would be the fugitive.

Close shrugs a what-the-hell shrug.

CLOSE

I gotta bad attitude. Cops shootin' at my ass comes with the territory.

Isoc twists, looks up to Mec. Both glance to Moc.

MOC

(to Close)

WE shall protect you.

INT. CLOSE'S QUARTERS - DAY/NIGHT

Close kicks back on his BUNK, an elaborate double bed hinged to a bulkhead. A polite KNOCK sounds at his port.

CLOSE

Come in.

Moc and Isoc enter.

CLOSE

Welcome. What can I do for you?

Moc and Isoc look to each other, then back to Close.

CLOSE

Isoc, I hafta tell you that your coveralls look better on you than on me.

The women again look to each other, clearly puzzled by his words.

CLOSE

(pats the bed)

I always thought useless weight violated some kind of law in space. An' that's gotta be heavy.

He points to the thick carpet.

MOC

Hedonists.

ISOC

Weight important before Vacu-Grav discovery. Not now.

CLOSE

When it comes to physics, I'm the village idiot. You'll hafta explain vacy-grav.

Not a word from Moc or Isoc. They drop coveralls and step out of them.

Close gulps ... ogles bodies for long seconds before his brain takes over ... then he blinks ... studies the women:

Between Moc's breasts, a jagged scar runs diagonally from shoulder to hip.

Instant anger: Close almost growls.

CLOSE

What kind ... a right-handed thug with a knife?

MOC

Broken wine glass stem.

Close swallows a lump. His eyes moisten. He raises a hand, motions them to turn around:

More scars. Fresh welts and long bruises on both.

CLOSE

Put on your coveralls.

ISOC
We do not please you?

CLOSE
YOU please me jus' fine. Hell, I
could take you two an' Mec an' go
steal a whole planet ... an' sex
with you two'd probably turn me
religious. But ...

MOC
You fought for Mec. Because she
lives, we are free. In your debt.

ISOC
Is Mec-truth. Am eighteen. Two
years more. Two years free.

Close silently mouthes the word "eighteen," then addresses Moc.

CLOSE
How old are you?

MOC
Am eight.

CLOSE
Put your clothes on ... please.

Close takes a deep breath while they don coveralls.

CLOSE
You listen to me; life isn't about
pleasin' me, or anyone else. It's
about Isoc an' Moc. You got that?

Moc examines his expression.

MOC
(to Isoc)
In love with Mec.

Isoc brings a hand to her mouth ... horrified.

CLOSE
What's wrong?

Moc opens the neck of her coveralls, fingers the diagonal scar.

MOC
Humans who fall in love with clones
do this.

CLOSE
I am not in love ... with Mec or
anybody else.

ISOC
(to Moc)
Does not understand self.

INT. BRIDGE - NIGHT

Close reclines on the co-pilot's chair.

Moc and Isoc occupy acceleration chairs at keysphere terminals
where Mec stands near Mega.

CLOSE
So, Mega, what you do is this:
search that computer; pull out all
the stops. She dies, you will die
seconds later.

MEGA (VO)
Why do you hold me responsible?

CLOSE
YOU went along with the program.
All these women are scarred ...
because you an' those like you went
along with the goddamn program!

MOC
Stop! Is slave!

MEGA (VO)
I am not a slave! I am an employ—

CLOSE
(to Moc)
What the hell do you wanna do? ...
slap a Support Your Local Sheriff
sticker on her goddamn dome!

Mec looks askance at Close, steps to his chair. She bends, gets
in his face, then she points a finger and gently touches his
chest.

MEC
Slavemaster?

Furious at first, Close suddenly looks contrite—the kid caught
with a burning kitchen match in hand.

CLOSE

Mega, please accept my apology ...
an' while you work on extending
Isoc's life, look into ways to
build yourself a body.

Awestruck, isoc and Moc look on as Mec backs off.

MEGA (VO)

I shall accept your apology, but
both are a waste of time. No clone,
no human has survived the necessary
gestation period for a Quanta
Frequency Transfer.

Mec drops into the chair beside Close.

MEC

Mega is QFT experiment gone awry.

ISOC

Gestation period ten months ... but
full consciousness comes in fifth
week.

Close is obviously lost.

MEGA (VO)

Neither human nor analog possesses
the psychological strength to
endure that degree of sensory
deprivation. Most opted for death
at six to nine weeks. I lapsed into
a coma after thirteen.

CLOSE

I'm not all that smart, but I'm
quick, an' I'm good at improvisin'.
You women are engineers. Mega's a
big brain hotwired to a bad-ass
computer that has damn near all
human knowledge on tap.

He looks around ... every face ... then toward Mega's protective
dome.

CLOSE

(to Mec)

You assign grunt work to me to free
up your time an' theirs.

(to Isoc)

'Cause you are not gonna die!

(scowls at them)

You get to work on this. All of
you. Every minute you can spare ...
an' that's a goddamn order!

INT. CLONE QUARTERS - DAY/NIGHT

Austere and cramped: Four narrow bunks folded against bulkheads;
a table in the rear with attached seats; a privacy curtain down
the center.

Mec, Close, Isoc, and Moc sit at the table.

ISOC

Mec the first free clone. Has sole
right to use MEC designation for a
proper name.

MOC

No others have earned that right.
Isoc and I wish to change our
names.

Moc and Isoc rise, then reverently bow to Mec.

CLOSE

(to Mec)

Tell 'em to cut the slave mentality
crap!

(to Moc and Isoc)

Straighten the hell up!

The women back away from the table.

CLOSE

You don't bow down to anybody!
Never! Mec had to fight to free
herself. You think you gotta free
ride comin'? Isn't happenin'.

Moc and Isoc turn to Mec.

MEC

Think we must learn to be free.
Think Close correct. We cannot bow.
Must learn to respect rather than
fear, and learn never to confuse
the two.

Close nods, bows slightly.

CLOSE

First thing:

(to Moc and Isoc)

You wanna change your names, you
change them. You don't hafta ask
anyone for permission.

(to Mec)

You are Captain of this vessel. I'm
in your cabin. I'll move. Find a
spot where I don't invade their
space.

MEC

Comfortable here.

CLOSE

We need a pecking order that allows
us to function. I'm at the bottom
of that order, the flunky, b'cause
I lack experience in space.

MOC

Cannot give orders to human!

CLOSE

You don't have a choice.

(to Isoc)

You two either tell an' show me
what to do, or I make mistakes ...
mistakes that could cripple this
ship.

Isoc and Moc again turn to Mec.

MEC

I shall stow my gear in the cabin.
(to Isoc)

Lab has storage space. Is flunky
now ... Captain in his time.

Mec nods to Close, mimics his slight bow.

CLOSE

Now that that's settled, where are we goin'?

MEC

Last voyage on this ship, probe discovered gold deposit on Venus. Kept secret because the owner wants to rule orbhab. Larger deposit than any total in Earth history.

INT. MEC'S SHIP/BRIDGE - NIGHT - NINE MONTHS LATER

INSERT - PANOPTICON SCREEN VIEWS

The layered surround scan shows swirling brown clouds on the bottom ... with reflected sunlight on the perimeter.

CLOSE (OS)

Can radar find us if we go down into that stuff?

MEC (OS)

Radar is used solely for contour mapping. Ships are constructed radar-proof to avoid confusion on mineral-rich asteroids.

The upper scan tracks four distant lights closing on the ship.

MOC (OS)

Seven miles to surface.

BACK TO SCENE

Close and Mec recline side-by-side. Moc and Isoc prowl, both nervously eyeing the upper scan.

CLOSE

So, all they have goin' is the ability to hover an' block our ascent.

MEC

That is not possible.

MOC

Dropped g and d!

ISOC

Speak in complete sentences, please.

No blue coveralls: All four wear tan and brown body suits.

CLOSE

Apologize. Should've studied in school.

MEC/MOC/ISOC/MEGA

(unison)

Speak in complete sentences, please.

Mega's voice interrupts the women's laughter.

MEGA (VO)

Captain, you are being hailed by Eleanor Rigby, Captain of the lead pursuit vessel.

Now, Close bursts into laughter.

CLOSE

Put her on the screen. No! ... Wait!

He catches himself, looks to Mec.

CLOSE

(still chuckling)

Please excuse my protocol breach, Captain.

MEC

What is humorous?

CLOSE

ELEANOR RIGBY is the name of a song ... from BEFORE my time.

MEC

Mega, let me see this human's face. Do not power bridge cameras.

Thelma Rigby's twin: ELEANOR leans over the Captain's console ... hard eyeing the camera.

In view behind Rigby: Two HULKS—men without facial hair, but with lots of overly developed muscle.

ISOC (OS)
Hunter/Courtesan Class clones.
H/CCs are designed for killing
MECs. Sexual pleasure secondary
function. Humans fear MEC-inspired
rebellion.

Isoc and Moc both turn to Mec, then salute.

RIGBY
I assume I'm addressing MEC-86-512.

MEC
Assume whatever you like.

RIGBY
You are responsible for my sister's
exile.

Mec stares at the upper screen.

RIGBY
I have leave to extend your life
and the other clone lives by ten
years. I intend to do just that ...
before presenting you as gifts to
the outcasts on The Surface.

Isoc and Moc glare at the screen IMAGE. Resolute ... ready for a
fight.

RIGBY
You will share Thelma's fate.

Close again looks to Mec.

CLOSE
Thelma Rigby?

MEC
... Surveillance Director for
televised fugitive hunts.

CLOSE
Permission to speak to this dumb-
ass cop.

MEC
Activate cameras, Mega.

CLOSE

I'm gonna have somethin' to say
about what you do or don't do with
my friends.

RIGBY

And you are?

CLOSE

Doesn't matter ... not to a dead
woman.

MEC

Mega, sever link!

(to Close)

Are you insane? ... To threaten a
human who has had nine months to
prepare for our—

CLOSE

Mec, I'm gonna kill her.

INT. RIGBY'S SHIP/BRIDGE - DAY

A layout exactly like Mec's pirated craft, but more functionally
furnished.

NINETY-SEVEN, a tiny MEC-86 with Eurasian features, occupies the
pilot's chair.

Nearby, SIXTY-ONE, another MEC with black skin, stands as though
guarding Ninety-Seven.

RIGBY

(to Ninety-Seven)

When we near that ship, you will
mesh Vacu-Grav fields. Forewarned,
you will be able to correct and
avoid collision.

NINETY-SEVEN

Pardon me, Captain, but in weak
gravity of space, MEC-86-512 best
pilot alive. Will have ample time
to recover.

RIGBY

Then we shall try the maneuver near
The Surface.

NINETY-SEVEN

Fugitive ship contains one human,
perhaps more. Am not permitted to
risk human life. Certainly not
permitted to endanger Captain's
life with intentional collision.

Rigby seethes.

RIGBY

And if I turn you over to them?

Rigby hooks a thumb toward the Hunters.

Sixty-One sets her feet, goes on point.

NINETY-SEVEN

Therefore, with all due respect,
compliance with your order is
impossible for me.

EXT. EARTH/TENNESSEE RIVER BASIN - DAY

The green-black HULL of the fugitive ship emerges from the dust
cloud. The craft leaves an oval-shaped HOLE that rapidly closes
as dust swirls into the pressureless void.

INT. FUGITIVE SHIP/BRIDGE - DAY

As the Western Hemisphere slowly rotates out of solar light ...

INSERT - PANOPTICON SCREENS

... The SCREENS clear ... the bottom revealing a narrowing view
of limestone bluffs as the ship descends.

BACK TO SCENE

Mec approaches the screens, points.

MEC

That is the cliff where you
appeared.

CLOSE (OS)

How do you know? It looks similar
to me, but I can't be sure.

MEC

Accustomed to extrapolating views from various angles. Pilot work. Dustcane reshaped basin floor, but large landmarks same.

(to Mega)

Mega, deflection shield out, then extend limited vacuum field to fifteen feet below ship. Maintain this altitude.

EXT. TENNESSEE RIVER BASIN - DAY

MEGA (VO)

Affirm, Captain.

Suddenly, vacuum sucks fine SAND into the air, around the HULL and upward.

Above the craft, a high PARABOLOID fills with dust, which as though inside a transparent pipe, streams toward the cloud.

INT. FUGITIVE SHIP/BRIDGE - DAY

Mec points to a frozen image on the lower screen:

INSERT - SCREEN

First to appear is the exposed SKULL of the spoor stalker Close shot, then the little patch of rocks.

BACK TO SCENE

MEC

(to Close)

I stood there. You were six feet in front of me.

(to Mega)

Mark, Mega, then, calculate the arc. Close must have followed to land there. You have controls.

Close leans forward in the pilot's chair.

CLOSE

Jesus Christ, that's a human skull.

MEGA (VO)

Affirm, Captain. Maneuvering and extending laser and sonic probes.

Isoc and Moc don wraparound headsets.

EXT. TENNESSEE RIVER BASIN - DAY

A probe telescopes from the nose of the ship. A dark green BEAM leaps outward from the tip, and slowly tracks up the dust-covered cliff face ... but then also tracks laterally in small increments.

ISOC
I have it. Correct probe straight
upward one half degree. There ...
zero sonic return.

The laser BEAM disappears ... seemingly into the atmosphere.

MEGA (VO)
Following beam, Captain.

The ship eases forward ... until half the probe vanishes.

MEC (VO)
Rift status, Mega.

MEGA (VO)
Sensors cannot determine. Seems
stable. Limited data. Assessment,
unreliable.

MEC (VO)
Hold position, Mega. Time to
confer.

INT. FUGITIVE SHIP/BRIDGE - DAY

As Mec leans against her console, Moc points to the center screen:

INSERT - SCREEN

Four SHIPS surround and attempt to pin them to the bluff.

CLOSE (OS)
What should—

ISOC (OS)
Deportation penalty for landing on
The Surface—a rule no pilot dares
violate.

BACK TO SCENE

MOC
 Vacu-Grav prevents assault from
 above.

CLOSE
 Why?

MOC
 Ship like liquid in vertical tube;
 a bubble rises to point of
 equalized pressure.

MEC
 Two fields touched after Vacu-Grav
 discovery. Prisoner transport
 ships. No survivors.

Close unfastens a pocket on his chair. He removes the pistol,
 rises and tucks the weapon into a body suit pocket.

On the upper screen's STREAM:

INSERT - SCREEN

White limestone cliff—clean limestone—no desert dust. Toward
 the top of the bluff, oak BRANCHES and green LEAVES.

BACK TO SCENE

On the lower view:

INSERT - SCREEN

A wide expanse of flowing WATER.

BACK TO SCENE

Isoc and Moc goggle.

MOC
 (whispers)
 Is not possible.

MEC
 Then Close is not possible.
 Situation not possible.

Isoc shucks her headset, grabs Moc by the hand.

MEC
 Time for decisions: May NOT be
 Close's time ... though could be
 similar. Go ... or stay?

CLOSE
This is YOUR ship, Mec.

MEC
Shared work. Shared danger. OUR
ship. OUR cargo. OUR lives. OUR
freedom.

Close points to the upper image stream.

CLOSE
Our world.

MOC
Question for Mega: Can ship sustain
Vacu-Grav field through Rift?

MEGA (VO)
Unknown without intense study.
Perhaps unknowable.

Close thumps his chest, then taps the top of his head.

CLOSE
My system also works on electricity
... if that matters at all. But it
doesn't look like we have room to
turn or get up that cliff.

ISOC
Atmosphere. Can detach and slide
cliff under ship. Is risky.

MOC
I say run risk.

MEC
Agree.

CLOSE
Go for it!

ISOC
Concur.

MEC
Mega?

MEGA (VO)
I ... have a vote?

CLOSE
You're one of us.

During a long silence, eyes glance to Close, clearly seeking reassurance.

MEGA (VO)
Isoc, cut path.

ISOC
(deep breath)
Before I cut rock, and perhaps die,
I wish to thank Mec and Close—

MOC
... Also me ... for this taste of
free life.

CLOSE
Captain, we need to hold off till
sundown. If this is 2021, people
may be fishing on the river.

MEC
Your command, Captain Close.

As though to emphasize the order, Mec circles to shoo him from the pilot's chair.

CLOSE
Old files, Mega: We can hide the
ship at the bottom of Chamberlain
lake in northwestern Maine
—Piscataquis County, I think.

EXT. TENNESSEE RIVER BASIN - DUSK - PRESENT DAY

On the far bank, GROVER SIMPSON (50s) sits in a rowboat watching three fishing lines while he nips at a pint bottle. When he swallows, his face squinches and his mouth opens to vent volatile fumes, then he gawks:

On the other bank, the fugitive SHIP, black and round, noses out of the water. A white cloud rises above it.

While Grover blinks to clear his alcohol-blurred vision:

Under the CLOUD, the ...

CLIFF

... Gently slides into the river.

EXT. TENNESSEE RIVER BASIN - DAWN

A ragged, thirty degree slope extends upward from the water on top, a two-acre plot leveled: Massive trees cut off the ground.

JANINE LYNN (VO)
... Bizarre scene on the Tennessee
River near Perryville. Grover
Simpson witnessed the event last
evening. Grover, could you please
tell our viewers what you saw?

TECHNICIANS in biohazard suits scan the ground with assorted
instruments, sift debris, and scoop samples into plastic
containers.

EXT. HIGHWAY - SAME

Grover has no eyes for the eye-pleasing JANINE LYNN. He stares at
the microphone as though she holds a tarantula under his nose.

GROVER
Wal, that spaceship come rahght up
outta tha river! I seen it! Nary a
sound! Hit turnt that bluff ta dust
an' climbed rahght up it!

JANINE LYNN
You're certain this was an
aircraft?

GROVER
One o' them UFOs ... went through
that cloud o' white dust ... it
did.

JANINE LYNN
Thank you, Mr. Simpson. That was
Grover Simpson, a local farmer who
was fishing at the time ...

EXT. CHAMBERLAIN LAKE - DAWN

The fugitive ship slowly sinks into calm, clear water.

JANINE LYNN (VO)
UFO aficionados have gathered in
droves to camp around this
Tennessee site.

INT. ICE CREAM PARLOR - DAY

Banana splits, cones, and assorted dishes ... all being dragged and pushed back and forth over the table under Close's nose; Mec, Moc, and Isoc gleefully sample each other's flavors.

JANINE LYNN (VO)
Geologists who examined the cliff
believe the limestone simply
fractured and slid into the river.

EXT. ZOO - DAY

Plainly disgusted and angry women follow Close from cage to cage.

JANINE LYNN (VO)
Fugitive Roble Close leaped from
this very cliff and vanished nearly
a year ago. When asked if there was
a suspected connection between the
two events, an FBI spokesperson
laughed.

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

Laughing, Close shakes his head and restrains Mec, who opens wide to bite into a whole cantaloupe.

JANINE LYNN (VO)
... Informed me that Mr. Simpson
regularly and unsuccessfully treats
the county jail as his personally
rehab facility.

EXT. CHAMBERLAIN LAKE - DAWN

Mec, Close, Moc, and Isoc shiver and splash in frigid water.

JANINE LYNN (VO)
... Topside, sheared and twisted
trees lead investigators to believe
a small, abnormally powerful
tornado touched down ...

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Isoc, Mec, and Moc gather around a writing table where Close unloads a cheap briefcase ... three nine millimeter pistols and extra magazines.

CLOSE

Not weapons I would choose, but
none of the pushers had .45s or
rifles. The best I could do in this
town.

Close places two boxes of ammunition near the clips.

CLOSE

Not enough ammo for practice, but—

ISOC

Surface dwellers speak in complete
sentences.

CLOSE

(deep breath)

We don't have enough ammo for
decent practice sessions, but I can
show you some basics.

INT. FUGITIVE SHIP - DAY

Close occupies the Captain's chair, watching Isoc, Mec, and Moc
gaze at the lower screen, where:

INSERT - SCREEN

FISH swim by in dim light.

Mega's voice breaks the spell.

MEGA (VO)

Detect atmospheric reactions to
Vacu-Grav. Rigby followed.

BACK TO SCENE

Mec cuts her eyes to Close.

MEC

Confrontation inevitable, Roble
Close ...

Obviously perplexed and wide-eyed, Isoc and Moc turn to study
Mec.

MEC

... Cannot survive Hunters and MECs. You must kill Rigby ... first and quickly. Should you fail, the MECs will be compelled to protect her.

CLOSE

Why did you use both my names?

MEC

You can do this?

CLOSE

I'll nail the Hunters.

MEC

Once Rigby is dead, the MECs must help me kill the Hunters, or die with me.

Close grits, glares at Mec.

CLOSE

I'm gonna object to that ... strenuously—

She glowers right back.

MEC

You are too slow. NOT injured spoor stalkers, Roble Close. Faster by far. Muscle and bone extremely dense ... designed as armor. Projectiles may not penetrate sufficiently to ... you stay back. Use your firearm ... and mine.

ISOC

Trusting you with her life ... ALL our lives.

Moc lifts her Tec-9 ... by its barrel.

MOC

Shall—

CLOSE

Guard this ship ... with Isoc. If we lose this ship ... we lose all. I go to jail ... then the U.S. Government will turn you into laboratory animals.

Close looks from Moc to Isoc and back. He patiently waits.

MOC
Affirm, Captain.

ISOC
Affirm, Captain.

Neither woman looks happy about the order.

MEC
Understand your anger, but—

CLOSE
You'll get your fight. We're gonna
be at war with a while goddamn
planet.

INT. RIGBY'S SHIP - DAY

The Hunter/Courtesan Class clones dwarf Rigby as she issues threats to Ninety-Seven and Sixty-One.

RIGBY
I can promise immediate dismantling
... for all of you ... if you fail
...

EXT. CHAMBERLAIN LAKE - DAY

A goose-bumped Close shivers while he washes his head in shallow water.

In the woods beyond the rocky shoreline, Mec and Moc examine insects on the south side of a tree trunk.

Close wipes his eyes ... scans south:

Far away, but over in water, a mining SHIP hovers above the lake.

CLOSE
Mec! You and Moc stay under cover!
Rigby's comin' this way.

MEC
Must move our ship! Quickly!

CLOSE
No. They're a long way away. If I
can ease into—

MEC
COMPUTER will match your face!
Must—

INT. FUGITIVE SHIP/BRIDGE - DAY

Mec and Close huddle with Moc and Isoc.

CLOSE
Mega ... play an imagination game
with me: Pretend you work for
Rigby. She orders you to develop a
means to track this ship. How do
you complete that task?

MEGA (VO)
Obsolete premise: You have been
seen and identified. Therefore—

MEC
Yes.

CLOSE
YES. What?

MEGA (VO)
Rigby will land, but will fear
hiding in water. Hunters can track
at night ... on The Surface ... my
time. She will send them to capture
you. Brain will advise her that Mec
will attempt rescue.

CLOSE
How can the brain assume—

MEGA (VO)
Exo-Thermic, -Kenetic, and -Sonic
Inflections. Body language ... in
this era. I know that ship's brain.
He lived during The Collapse.
Nelson Will. Sentimental and
predictable.

MOC
Not assumption. ROBLE CLOSE is term
of endearment.

Isoc grins at Moc, then turns to Close.

ISOC
If I say MOC FOUR TWENTY in quiet
moments?

MOC
I understand that ISOC SEVEN FORTY-
ONE treasures the still moments
shared with me.

ISOC
(to Close)
Mec independent. Fierce. When in
danger ... wants YOU at her side.
No other.

Close turns to Mec ... who studies his face for long seconds ...
then nods.

CLOSE
That's a heavy load to think about.
Okay ... the Hunters may be faster,
and smarter, but movin' through a
northern forest takes experience
they don't have.
(to Moc)
Can you—

MOC
Can reconfigure geological radar
probe to track Hunters.

CLOSE
If you can do that ...

MEC
As we were, Rigby will be terrified
of water. Can use?

CLOSE
No. We don't want to FIGHT these
people ... just kill them.

INT. RIGBY'S SHIP/BRIDGE - DAY

Rigby springs to her feet:

The second Mec and Close rush through the port.

Close instantly opens fire on the Hunters, who merely flinch as
nine millimeter rounds punch into the CHESTS.

Mismatches: As Mec sprints by Close, nine millimeter lead rips CHEEKBONE from a Hunter's face. Seemingly oblivious, he stalks forward to engage Mec.

Unable to fire in Mec's direction, Close pumps round after round into the other clone:

Tears away an EAR and leaves a deep GOUGE in its skull. The man shakes his head, as though to dislodge a gnat.

Close wheels, simply puts his last round dead center under Rigby's nose, then ejects the magazine from the Beretta.

A male voice (NELSON) booms from the speakers.

NELSON (VO)
Brain function has ceased for
Captain!

The two MECs race by while Close slams a magazine into the Beretta. He wheels back seeking another target ... in time to see a Hunter throw Mec.

The MEC clones attack the Hunters as ...

MEC

... Slams into a bulkhead. Limp as a rag, she drops to the deck.

Close fires four rounds into the other Hunter's head. The fifth finds entrance through an ear.

The big clone collapses into spasms.

Close rushes forward.

The remaining Hunter has Sixty-One on the deck, punching her while he fights off Ninety-Seven with his other hand.

Close moves, tries to get off a shot without hitting one of the women. Instead, he catches a massive fist in his ribcage. Bone SNAPS. Air GUSHES from his lungs. He drops the pistol and backup magazine.

Ninety-Seven lands solid BLOWS that have zero effect ... other than distraction.

Close blinks, spots ...

MEC

... And grits. He grabs the pistol ... lurches to his feet.

The Hunter snatches Ninety-Seven by the arm, pulls her in, then slams a fist into her ribs. Several bones SNAP.

Close grabs the hunter's skull, jerks backward, jams the Beretta ...

BARREL

... Into the clone's bloody ...

EYE

... Pulls the trigger. Internal pressure pops the other ...

EYE

... From its socket.

Close drags the body off Sixty-One. Then, he pivots ... can't get to Mec quickly enough. He kneels beside her.

She's out, bent in a way that leaves no doubt her spine is broken just below her ribcage.

Close checks her pulse, then calls the MECs.

CLOSE

I know you're hurt. Get her to the infirmary. Now!

He rises, wobbles toward the brain's life support pedestal.

CLOSE

Nelson Will. You can die now, or you can contact Mega and put her on your comlink.

NELSON (VO)

I am hailing Megabrain.

MEGA (VO)

Close, are you—

CLOSE

Mec is on the way to this ship's infirmary. I know brains don't feel pain. But I will slowly cut Will into small pieces and feed him to the fish if he lets Mec die. Convince him, Mega.

INT. INFIRMARY - DAY

When Close staggers in, the two MECs have Mec in a capsule. In obvious pain, they nonetheless work nonstop ... a clear reverence for MEC-512.

CLOSE
Names?

The black woman straightens.

SIXTY-ONE
Am called Sixty-One.

Close looks to the Eurasian woman.

NINETY-SEVEN
Called Ninety-Seven.

CLOSE
Am Roble Close. Mega, is Mec stable?

MEGA (VO)
Stable ... but, Close, she has massive, irreparable spinal damage.

CLOSE
Ship command is yours. I need—

MEGA (VO)
You trust me to—

CLOSE
I need Moc and Isoc here at dusk to transfer Mec to your ship.

Over shoulders, both MECs stare at him, looking hurt.

CLOSE
We have bodies to get rid of; two women who need ...

He arcs a brow at the women.

NINETY-SEVEN
As you, fractured ribs.

CLOSE
Mega, how long to treat us?

MEGA (VO)

Six hours to render you functional.
Less than half that for any MEC.

CLOSE

Isoc stays here to help me. These
woman return with Moc ... to help
care for Mec. I want a comlink open
so I hear the instant Mec is
conscious.

MEGA (VO)

Affirm. Captain Close, Nelson Will
is trustworthy and will cooperate.

CLOSE

Tell him to remove the
psychological blocks from these two
women.

Close makes a turning motion with his hand.

CLOSE

Lower coveralls to your waists.

Their backs are covered with fresh whip marks ... torn open
during the brawl, and bleeding.

CLOSE

Okay. Sorry. But I had to know.

The women turn again to study Close, plainly wary.

CLOSE

Mega, you and Moc treat their backs
as well as their ribs.

NELSON (VO)

The women are busy at the moment,
Captain Close. The instant they can
spare a moment, I shall free them.

CLOSE

Are you suckin' ass?

NELSON (VO)

According to Mega, you and I have
much in common ... we like girls.

CLOSE

I'll take you at your word AFTER
you treat Mec. Meantime, she dies,
I'll do exactly as I said I'd do.
For now, I can help. So tell me
what to do, and let's start with
fixin' these women.

NELSON (VO)

You may not have forgotten the Age
of Chivalry, but sensors tell me
your injuries are more severe.

CLOSE

That doesn't count. They can become
functional faster than I can.

EXT. CHAMBERLAIN LAKE - DAY

Holding hands, Moc and Isoc stroll along the shoreline listening
to Close finish his spiel.

CLOSE

You could Isoc ... no question
about that.

ISOC

(looks to Moc)
Will you—

Moc raises a fist ... thumb up.

MOC

Will reconfigure tank.

INT. FUGITIVE SHIP/INFIRMARY - DAY

Mec opens her eyes to find Close holding her hand and the
newcomers hovering. Three relieved smiles welcome her to
consciousness. She looks to Ninety-Seven.

MEC

Pilot?

NINETY-SEVEN

(slow nod)
Ninety-Seven. Am honored.

Mec looks to Close.

CLOSE
 Captain, now. This ship.
 (to Sixty-One)
 Are you a pilot, too?

SIXTY-ONE
 Ninety-Seven far more skillful.

Sixty-One almost bows to Mec.

SIXTY-ONE
 Sixty-One. Am likewise honored.

CLOSE
 Captain Sixty-One. Rigby's ship.

MEC
 Will die soon. Can feel energy
 dissipating and—

CLOSE
 Ain't happenin', Mec. We can—

MEC
 Cannot survive gestation, Roble
 Close.

When Mec calls him by both names, the women immediately cock
 heads to study them.

MEC
 Too inexperienced, too little
 psychological grounding to endure
 ten mouths' sensory deprivation.

CLOSE
 I had already decided to take Isoc
 through gestation ... to make sure
 she survives ... and I had already
 planned on accompanying you when
 your time came.

SIXTY-ONE
 Cloning possible because no
 awareness involved until last week
 of gestation.

CLOSE
 One tank. The three of us will go
 together ... not to worry, Mec. I
 got this.

NINETY-SEVEN

Human dream: Immortality. Second life. Not possible. All who tried opted for death. The strongest endured a few weeks.

Close fearfully glances at Mec, who accepts Ninety-Seven's brutal observation without sign of fear.

CLOSE

(sighs)

I was a stone cold loner when the CIA shipped me to a Romanian prison: sole contact with guards during torture. No reading material. No outside contact. No light. I talked with mice I could hear but couldn't see.

MEC

How long?

CLOSE

Three years. I went to Iraq to rob a crooked clerk in the Ministry of Finance. The CIA thought I was a spy.

Mec shifts her gaze to Sixty-One.

CLOSE

Hey, I got this.

MEC

(to MECs)

Is difficult to understand right now ... but this human is like none we know. He will fight ANYTHING to protect you and others on these ships.

MEGA (VO)

Does this include Nelson Will?

Close turns to Ninety-Seven and Sixty-One, his expression a question.

MEGA (VO)

Nelson Will was alive, in human form during Collapse. Valuable insights.

CLOSE

Captains, answer the question.

SIXTY-ONE

Ship of pain ... the Rigby ship is called. MECs seldom live one year without dismantling.

NINETY-SEVEN

Nelson Will provided medical care in ship's infirmary ... against orders, against corporate policy. Also treated H/CCs after sex sessions with Rigby sisters.

SIXTY-ONE

Either sister would have dismantled him.

CLOSE

Conference. Here. Tonight. Everybody comes. Nelson Will included.

LATER - NIGHT

Mec lies on a bunk, from diaphragm down, her body encased in a heavy-duty, clear plastic BAG that seems to breathe.

MEGA (VO)

... To precisely reestablish each subatomic particle's frequency. Thus, a growing brain reorganizes memory into already familiar patterns ... in addition to enhancing function and capacity.

Ear cocked and listening, Close sits beside the bunk, again holding Mec's hand.

NELSON (VO)

Your suggestion with music has been tried, Captain Close. It failed.

Moc holds Mec's other hand, while Isoc, Sixty-One, and Ninety-Seven listen and hover like hens over a nest.

CLOSE

We're talkin' about engagin' minds
in social animals who won't be able
to speak to each other. Music
wasn't tried with enhancements for
that, for math, and for languages
on brains working to engage each
OTHER.

NELSON (VO)

That is new, however—

MEC

Want Isoc and Close enhanced to MEC
Class specifications.

ISOC

Life expectancy ... if we survive.

MEGA (VO)

In Earth gravity, one hundred to
one hundred fifteen active years.

NELSON (VO)

(emphatic)

You MUST survive! Mega and I are
experimenting with the Hunter-Class
skulls ... to develop brainpans, so
to speak. Someday, if Mega permits,
I would love to frolic in her
undergarments.

Dead silence. Then Ninety-Seven and Sixty-One burst into
laughter—the first heard from either.

When Mec joins in ... the others follow.

MEGA (VO)

I extend that invitation now.

LATER:

Close and Mec alone: He paces, counts off items on his fingers.

CLOSE

Invasion of government computers to
create deep ID's for each of us;
virus under construction; cargo
stashed on dark side of the Moon
and poured into ingots; and
gestation is a go.

MEC

Roble Close ... do not attempt
this.

He halts ... scowls.

CLOSE

Mec, I'll come out of this with
different DNA, fingerprints, and
retinas ... and I'll be smarter to
boot.

Mec opens her mouth to speak, but he holds up a hand to stop her.

CLOSE

Look, I know you believe you're
some kind of mock human, but—

MEC

Analog is word.

Close sits, takes her hand.

CLOSE

Bullshit. You are the most complete
human being I know, that I have
ever met. That means TOUGH, Mec ...
and tough gets us through
gestation.

MEC

Dissuading you not possible?

CLOSE

I never expected life to be this
good because I grew up around weak
people. Am surrounded by strong
people now.

MEC

Isoc will—

CLOSE

Is gonna need you to be as tough as
she is. So am I. Am scared, Mec.

She squeezes his ...

HAND.

MEC

Go. Must speak with Mega.

LATER:

Mec drinks through a straw, then passes the container to Isoc.

MEC

Afraid?

The woman's expression says words cannot describe the fear.

MEC

Mega? Risk assessment.

MEGA (VO)

Captain Close is x factor. Skews results. I believe he assures success ... one hundred percent.

MEC

But?

MEGA (VO)

You had zero chance of escape. You escaped. Zero chance of surviving hunt. You are here. Zero chance to survive Hunter-Class clones and MECs. You are here.

MEC

You trust Roble Close?

MEGA (VO)

Did not state such. I BELIEVE he can complete task.

ISOC

In love with Mec. Love strong.

MEC

May also be in love, Mega. Must discuss this.

(to Isoc)

Excuse us, please.

INT. FUGITIVE SHIP/LABORATORY - NIGHT - NINE WEEKS LATER

Sixty-One, Moc, and Ninety-Seven crowd around the gestation TANK.

MEGA (VO)

Captains, Moc, encephalous activity spiking in Isoc embryo. Normal range.

Ninety-Seven lays a hand on Moc's shoulders where Sixty-One loops an arm around her waist.

Mesmerized, Moc can't pull her eyes from the tank.

MEGA (VO)
Close embryo spiking. Normal range.

Inside the TANK, three well-developed EMBRYOS float in light red fluid. Each has an umbilicus attached to a plastic junction BALL ... into which many tubes carry nutrients, meds, programming data.

NINETY-SEVEN
Status on Mec.

MEGA (VO)
Nothing yet.

SIXTY-ONE
Mega, check her—

MEGA (VO)
Excuse me, Captain. AM checking ... constantly.

SIXTY-ONE
Accept apology?

MEGA (VO)
Apology NEVER necessary, Captain.
All anxious. All want to succeed
... Isoc aware ... Mec spiking.

Ninety-Seven places both hands on the glass, as though offering a prayer.

MEGA (VO)
Captain Close aware. Mec spiking
beyond normal range ... dropping
... return to normal. Is conscious.

NELSON (VO)
Mega, you should do the honors.

Notes from Rachmaninoff's ETUDE TABLEAUX IN A MINOR flood the lab.

All eyes on the TANK:

A tiny ...

HAND

... Touches the glass, then struggles to make a ...

FIST

... And raise its ...

THUMB.

FADE OUT.