

The Aresine Chronicles
Episode 2 "Life and Death"

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. HYDROTHERMAL VENT - DAY

TRIANNE along with several other divers, approaches an underwater plume of smoke arising from a hydrothermal vent. They examine the colorful rocks around the vent and scrape samples into collection tubes. A digital readout on Trianne's tube begins displaying rapidly changing hexadecimal numbers. The digits resolve until there is a sequence of nine stable pairs that begin blinking green. One by one, all the diver's tubes resolve and blink green as well.

EXT. ARESINE, SNOW COVERED MOUNTAIN TOP - DAY

Ji-La and Amant, wearing spacesuits, sit on a rock outcropping overlooking a distant valley below.

AMANT

What do you see, Ji-La, when you
look out across Aresine?

Ji-LA

(thinks for a moment)
I see thousands of years of history
waiting to unfold.

AMANT

(amused)
What a magnificent vision!

Ji-LA

What do you see, Amant?

Amant pretends to look at the valley, but he is actually looking at Ji-La. Entranced by the vista, she is unaware of his gaze.

AMANT

I see...something amazing,
something beautiful, something that
makes me feel that the future will
be more wonderful than I thought
possible.

Ji-La turns back to him and smiles.

JI-LA

What do you see yourself doing in this amazing and beautiful world?

AMANT

Good question! After the orbital adjustments are made, I guess I'll go back to gravimetric engineering. But my personal dream has always been to build a house.

JI-LA

You mean *actually* build a house?

AMANT

Yes, you know...hammer and nails and all that.

JI-LA

Really? Don't we have bots for that?

AMANT

I know. It just seems like it would be fun. To be a true craftsman... like in the days of old.

(beat)

What about you? What deep and profound desires do you envision for your life on Aresine?

JI-LA

(laughs)

I've talked to the Historical Society about teaching.

AMANT

May I ask what made you want to become a historian?

JI-LA

(smiles)

I know! Why would anyone want to live their life in the past?

Amant smiles gently to say that wasn't what he meant.

JI-LA (CONT'D)

I just wanted to do something meaningful...to contribute something good to the fleet.

(MORE)

JI-LA (CONT'D)
I know most people don't feel as much love for the past as I do, but I think it's important. The Truth is important.

Amant folds hands and bows gently to Ji-La.

JI-LA (CONT'D)
What about you?

AMANT
My dad was a gravimetric engineer so I was practically raised to be one too.

JI-LA
Do you like it?

AMANT
I love it! But after Aresine is terraformed and the bot factories are set up, I'm not sure how much there will be for me to do.

JI-LA
(laughs)
There's always entertainment day!

AMANT
What did you do for your last entertainment day?

JI-LA
I was in a play for little kids about the Polynesian migration. I played the "Great Octopus of Prosperity".

They laugh.

AMANT
Did you wear an octopus costume?

JI-LA
(proudly)
Yes I did.

They laugh.

JI-LA (CONT'D)
How about you?

AMANT
I sang in a choir.

JI-LA
Did you also wear an octopus
costume?

They laugh again.

AMANT
It's getting late. We've spent
nearly the whole day exploring. Do
you think we should signal for a
shuttle to come pick us up.

JI-LA
I suppose it's time. This has been
fun. I hope we can do it again.

AMANT
(smiles)
Me too.

EXT. ABOVE ARESINE - THE NEXT DAY

The Fleet waits silently in orbit.

INT. NIMBLE THIMBLE ORBITAL ENHANCEMENTS TASK GROUP ROOM -
DAY

The eighteen members of the Orbital Enhancements (OE) Task
Group sit around a large u-shaped table. AMANT stands behind
a small podium in the gap. Visiting observers sit around the
outside of the room. Aresine is visible outside a large set
of windows.

OE TASK GROUP LEADER
Amant, please share with us your
team's findings.

AMANT
Group members. The Strike Team has
identified three critical
terraforming objectives that need
to be addressed before the landing
begins. Our calculations indicate
that all three adjustments are
critical but relatively minor.

OE TASK GROUP LEADER
That's encouraging! And you have
coordinated your plan with the Star
System Group?

AMANT

Yes, Group Leader. The Star System Group is extremely confident that ice and minerals from the inner asteroid belt can be utilized without jeopardizing overall star system stability.

OE TASK GROUP LEADER

Any details?

AMANT

We believe that three coordinated asteroid strikes can...

Just then, the doors to the chambers open and Trianne walks in. Her stride and demeanor suggest a degree of urgency. Amant takes notice of her entrance, but continues with his reply as she takes a seat behind him.

AMANT (CONT'D)

We believe that three, precision, coordinated asteroid strikes can slow Aresine's rotation speed and increase its axial tilt to create a climate that can sustain our biomes. We also plan to introduce water from the asteroid belt, in the form of rain, to increase the planet's mass, dampen the dust clouds from the asteroid strikes, and favorably alter ocean salinity levels.

OE TASK GROUP LEADER

We are also allowing for the mass of the pods themselves, correct?

AMANT

(smiles and nods)

Yes, Group Leader.

OE TASK GROUP LEADER

(also smiles)

Just checking!

OE TASK GROUP MEMBER

How will this impact the fleet landing schedule?

AMANT

With the use of seven of the eight service pods, we believe we can accomplish these enhancements in twelve fleet days.

OE TASK GROUP MEMBER

Remarkable!

OE TASK GROUP LEADER

Thank you, Amant!

(to the members)

Other questions before we forward the plan to the Executive Board?

Trianne stands up and steps forward to address the Task Group.

TRIANNE

Greetings members. I'm Trianne.

(her name badge glows when she speaks her name)

I'm with the Biological Compatibility Team. May I interrupt?

OE TASK GROUP LEADER

Trianne, of course. What would you like to share with the Task Group?

TRIANNE

The Biological Compatibility Team has made an unexpected discovery.

(beat)

There is life on Aresine.

The audience collectively gasps at this news. After the chatter subsides, the OE Task Group Leader mentally assesses Trianne's announcement for a moment and confers briefly with the members to his immediate right and left.

OE TASK GROUP LEADER

(to Trianne)

You have informed the Executive Board?

TRIANNE

Yes. I've just come from their meeting. They've asked for the advice of the Ethics Council. There will be a discussion on-screen before the entire fleet tomorrow afternoon.

OE TASK GROUP LEADER

It appears that we should reconvene
after the Ethics Council
discussion. Thank you Trianne.
Thank you Amant! Thank you
everyone!

As the chamber empties, Amant accepts folded hand gestures
from several of the audience and replies in kind. He makes
his way to the back of the room where Ji-La is talking with
Trianne. He approaches somewhat nervously. Trianne nods to
Amant and smiles.

TRIANNE

(to Amant)

Sorry to interrupt your report.

AMANT

That was a very worthwhile
interruption!

TRIANNE

(to Ji-La)

I'll wait outside.

AMANT

Ji-La! Nice to see you! I hope
you found the meeting
interesting...short as it was!

JI-LA

(sincerely)

Very interesting!

AMANT

I have some work to finish up with
the Task Group, but it looks like I
will be free this afternoon. Would
you like to...um...would you be
able to...maybe, spend some time
together?

JI-LA

Yes! That would be great! Where
should we meet?

AMANT

How about the park? In an hour?

JI-LA

That's perfect!

Amant and Ji-La wave goodbye to each other as he leaves via doors at the front of the room with other members of his team, and she walks out the main doors in the back where Trianne is waiting.

INT. HALLWAY - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

They start walking down the hallway.

TRIANNE

I see you've taken an interest in the Orbital Enhancements Task Group!

Ji-LA

(laughs)

Yes, it's really very fascinating!

TRIANNE

(wryly)

Yes, he is, isn't he?

Ji-La smiles.

Ji-LA

Tell me about your team's discovery!

TRIANNE

We were searching for a site for underwater pod three, the deep water pod, and found a thermal vent that supports life.

Ji-LA

A new planet, and now an entirely new form of extra-terrestrial life! After a thousand years amongst the stars, our generation is truly the most fortunate!

They arrive at the front doors.

TRIANNE

Do you want to get something to eat?

Ji-LA

I told Amant I would meet him in the park a little later.

TRIANNE

Sounds like a date!

JI-LA
We just ran into each other.
Nothing was planned.

TRIANNE
Ji-La! Is there some chemistry
developing between you two?

JI-LA
All I know is it was so much fun
exploring Aresine with him the
other day.

TRIANNE
I suppose you noticed how good
looking he is, as well?

JI-LA
I might have noticed...a little.

They laugh.

EXT. BUILDING STEPS - CONTINUOUS

They open the doors and begin walking down.

JI-LA
How long did it take before you and
Jon "developed chemistry"?

TRIANNE
The Truth? It wasn't until after we
got married. I saw him playing with
his little nephew and I could see
how great a father he would be.
That's when I really fell in love
with him.

JI-LA
Wasn't that scary? Getting married
before you knew?

TRIANNE
We were matched by algorithm so I
knew the odds that we would get
along were good. Plus I've always
known I wanted a baby!

They laugh as they reach the bottom landing.

JI-LA
Can I tell you something very
personal.

TRIANNE

Of course!

Ji-LA

I've never dated before.

TRIANNE

I'm very surprised to hear that, Ji-La! I'm sorry.

Ji-LA

No, it's not a sad thing...I've just never felt that I needed to be with someone.

TRIANNE

Has that changed?

Ji-LA

I'm not sure.

TRIANNE

All I can tell you is that Amant seems like a pretty great guy.

(checks time on wrist
device)

Oh, I've got to go! I'll see you later.

Ji-La and Trianne cup hearts and Trianne walks away. Ji-La heads off in the other direction.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Ji-La and Amant walk slowly through the park.

AMANT

Are you worried about the Ethics Council Meeting tomorrow?

Ji-LA

A little. What if they advise that we don't land after all?

AMANT

(smiling)

Aren't you the one who was saying you were going to continue wandering the stars?

Ji-LA

(laughs)

Yes, I was considering it.

(MORE)

JI-LA (CONT'D)

And now I'm dreaming about the day
the atmosphere is ready and we
power down the dome shields. In my
mind I can see the animals slowly
discovering their freedom and
venturing out into their new home.

AMANT

Any animals in particular?

JI-LA

Squirrels, mostly.

AMANT

(laughs)

Squirrels!

JI-LA

What about you?

AMANT

Hmmm...I'm going to say elephants!

Ji-La laughs hysterically.

AMANT (CONT'D)

What? What's so funny?

JI-LA

I was just imagining my squirrels
riding your elephants out into the
new world!

Amant chuckles and looks at her fondly.

AMANT

Ji-La, you always find ways to
surprise me!

Just then they are interrupted by the soft tones of Ji-La's
communicator. Amant motions for Ji-La to take the call.

JI-LA

Hello?

Instructor SHAFER, a friendly looking man in his fifties,
appears on her wrist screen.

SHAFER

Hi Ji-La, this is Instructor
Shafer.

JI-LA

Instructor Shafer! So nice to hear from you! Is there anything I can do to be of service to the Historical Society?

SHAFER

Yes, Ji-La. Instructor Sanford is ill, I'm afraid. Would it be possible for you to fill in and teach his class tomorrow?

JI-LA

Oh my! Yes, of course. I was just with him the other day. I would be happy to help. Is he going to be ok?

SHAFER

We don't for sure just yet. If you have to fill in for a few classes, would that be alright?

JI-LA

Yes, of course. I will be there tomorrow morning.

SHAFER

Thank you Ji-La! It will mean a lot to his students.

JI-LA

Goodbye Instructor!

SHAFER

Goodbye!

Ji-La turns her attention back to Amant, who has heard everything. The mood is now heavy.

JI-LA

I'd better go. I'm going to have to prepare a lesson.

AMANT

Of course! I hope everything is ok.

JI-LA

(worried)

Me too.

AMANT

Will I see you at the Ethics
Council meeting tomorrow afternoon?

Ji-LA

Yes! Save me a seat!

Ji-La bows slightly while cupping her heart. Amant bows slightly too but with folded hands. They see the mismatch and laugh and each reverses their gesture. They laugh again. Amant, instead reaches out with his pinky finger. Ji-La smiles and touches her pinky to his. They lock eyes for a long moment.

Ji-La waves goodbye and takes off running.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. CAMPUS PARK - MORNING

Ji-La and her class of six students sit somberly around the memory dais in the campus park on board the Elegant Elephant.

KALEEN

Instructor has never missed a class before. I'm really worried.

ATEN

So am I. He's so old.

(to Ji-La)

Is there anything else you have heard?

JI-LA

I'm sorry, that's all I know right now.

Pikay wipes away a tear.

THORIN

He's not so old! He'll be back soon.

Verek looks stoically at the water.

BENERIKA

We are lucky we have you, Ji-La. Thank you for being here today.

JI-LA

Thank you Benerika.

(beat)

I know we are all worried. Would you rather we skipped the lesson today? We can just talk if you want.

VEREK

Instructor would want us to keep going. He never made class about himself.

THORIN

Verek is right. And when he comes back, we can tell him all about what we've learned.

PIKAY

That's true, Thorin. I shouldn't assume the worst.

ATEN

(to Ji-La)

Do you have a lesson planned for today?

Ji-LA

Yes, I thought we would do something a little different today in honor of the discovery of life on Aresine.

KALEEN

That's a great idea! What is it?

Ji-LA

I thought we would go all the way back to Earth's abiogenesis event.

The class sits in stunned silence.

KALEEN

But that's billions of years ago! Can we really go that far back?

Ji-LA

Akasha willing, yes.

ATEN

To the very origin of life?

Ji-LA

Uh huh.

PIKAY

And how would we even know where to look?

Ji-LA

It took many historians searching for many years to find the coordinates.

THORIN

This sounds amazing!

EXT. PRIMORDIAL POND - DAY [AKASHIC RECORDS SEQUENCE]

The astral forms of the class stand at the water's edge as a steam of bubbles rise from deep below the pond's surface.

The pond is encircled by rocky outcroppings of the rugged shoreline. In the distance there are active volcanoes sending slight plumes of smoke into the atmosphere.

Ji-La motions for the others to follow her as she dives into the soupy water. They follow her like wisps of light through the briny medium. Twenty feet down they encounter a tower-like formation of hydrothermal vents perpetually spewing out white smoke into the water.

The class looks on with wonder.

Ji-La brings her hands together then, with intention, separates them apart. When she does, the class's view of the vents is magnified. She does this again and again until at last we are seeing the microscopic view of a film of molecules wrapping around itself enclosing several other molecular structures. As it does its hue changes slightly from Gray to green.

They watch the scene for a few minutes seeing many such polyyps form.

JI-LA

These are the first cells.

KALEEN

Miraculous!

ATEN

The spring of all life!

After awhile Ji-La motions for them to return to the surface. They all sit on the shore of the pond.

Ji-La types on the virtual keyboard and suddenly the class begins moving through time faster and faster. The days and nights alternate rapidly. The clouds move across the sky in the day time, and the moon moves across the sky in the night. The volcanoes continue to smoke even as the decades pass.

The pond turns green as the newly emerged cells completely overgrow the water. Then they make their way across land into another pond and overgrow it. Soon the entire landscape, which was once barren and desolate, is a greenish hue.

END AKASHIC RECORDS SEQUENCE

INT. NIMBLE THIMBLE ETHICS COUNCIL MEETING ROOM - DAY

Five Ethics Council members sit around a semi-circular table in an unimposing room. JEREVE (late sixties), a tall wispy figure with cloud white hair, holds in her hand a talking stick. Benerika, a student council member, sits at the table with the others.

The room is full with onlookers packed into the limited space all around the table. Ji-La sits between Trianne and Amant, all three eager to hear what will unfold.

Jereve lifts the talking stick and the mild chatter in the room completely halts.

JEREVE

Let us begin! Glad to have so many visitors here today for this unplanned meeting of the Ethics Council. My name is Jereve.

(her name badge flashes)

Today the Ethics Council has been tasked by the Executive Board with a question of great importance. Shall the terraforming of Aresine begin knowing that it may destroy the life that is already present here? I've asked Marcus, leader of the Biological Compatibility Team, to share with us facts of the situation. Marcus?

MARCUS (late thirties), rises from the audience with a tablet-like device and stands at the podium addressing the Council. Jereve passes the talking stick to him.

MARCUS

Greetings Councilors.

He salutes the crowd with folded hands then addresses one of the cameras above.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

And greetings to all those watching throughout the fleet. I'll be as brief as I can.

While searching for a home for one of our sea pods in the equatorial ocean our divers came across a formation of thermal vents. Upon investigation, they discovered life akin to bacterial life.

I say "akin to" because the DNA is not like anything found on Earth.

(MORE)

MARCUS (CONT'D)

It consists of five, not four, base pairs.

He manipulates the interface on his tablet and brings up an elaborate, holographic display at the center of the table. It resembles a tree of millions of tiny branches and leaves. It's colored in many different shades of blue that differentiate entire epochs of evolution.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

This is the representation of all life of Earth from the tiniest prehistoric microbes to present day humanity and every step along the way. The leaves are species and the branches are their relationships. This...

(taps on the tablet)

...is the life we discovered.

There are a few tiny red dots at the bottom of the display.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

And here...

(taps on tablet again)

...is an initial projection of how this life would develop on its own.

Multiple branching lines begin emerging from the tiny red dots growing into a new tree primarily red with some pink, and orange here and there that rivals the bluish tree in size and complexity. The two together combine to give it a purple appearance. Marcus passes the talking stick back to Jereve.

JEREVE

Fascinating Marcus, thank you.

Another member raises his hand and Jereve hands the talking stick to him.

ETHICS COUNCILOR 4

Amant, can you give us the perspective of the Orbital Enhancement Task Group?

He passes the talking stick through the audience to Amant.

AMANT

(stands)

We believe that the proposed asteroid strike and subsequent introduction of large amounts of water into Aresine's oceans have a roughly 99.97 percent chance of destroying these newly discovered life forms. But without the adjustments to Aresine's orbit, our biomes will collapse before they can adapt.

Amant sits back down. The room is dead quiet while the talking stick is passed back to Jereve. She offers the talking stick to the other members. Benerika raises her hand meekly and Jereve slides the stick across the table.

JEREVE

Benerika, please. What would you like to say?

BENERIKA

Clearly there is great consequence to us all, if we extinguish an entire life matrix in its cradle. But in a thousand years this is the first planet that we've found that can be a new home for us. Are we to continue to wander the stars for all eternity?

Ethics Councilor 2 raises her hand and Benerika hands the talking stick to her.

ETHICS COUNCILOR 2

I think this is what all of us are feeling. Two paths, two forms of life, both precious and, unfortunately, at odds with each other.

Ethics Councilor 5 raises his hand and Ethics Councilor 2 hands him the stick.

ETHICS COUNCILOR 5

There were celestial events that shaped the evolution of life on Earth. Comet strikes, coronal mass ejections, etc. Can our arrival here be compared to such an event? Good or bad, can we not consider ourselves part of Aresine's evolutionary history?

The council ponders this for a moment.

JEREVE
 (receiving the stick back)
 Hmmmm...perhaps there is one more
 path to consider -- coexistence.
 What if we build another pod?

ETHICS COUNCILOR 4
 (excitedly)
 Jereve is right! We could save the
 entire thermal vent area from the
 cataclysm.

Excited, the group forgets the talking stick protocol.

ETHICS COUNCILOR 2
 Yes! Of course! We could share the
 planet!

ETHICS COUNCILOR 5
 Evolution will have a new play. Two
 whole trees of life evolving
 together. But can it be done?

ETHICS COUNCILOR 4
 A new pod...I don't see why not.

BENERIKA
 Will the two forms of life be
 compatible?

The group looks to Ethics Councilor 3. Jereve passes the
 talking stick to her.

ETHICS COUNCILOR 3
 As a biologist, I can only guess.
 It's possible that Earth's micro-
 organisms will overwhelm Aresine's.
 It's also possible Aresinian life
 could evolve to dominate the
 Fleet's biomes. We would need to
 run an eco matrix simulation to
 truly know.
 Can the Biological Compatibility
 Team help us answer these
 questions, Marcus?

She passes the talking stick to Marcus.

MARCUS

Council Members. Even with the full resources of the calculation pod, it could take years, perhaps decades, to develop an integrated matrix that would answer these questions. There are just too many factors to consider.

The group pause for a moment in thought.

JEREVE

(to fellow members)

Let us, then, consult the Friend. Everyone, may we please have quiet while the Council members direct our awareness inward.

The council members close their eyes and sit upright. They become as motionless as statues. The members of the audience sit in respectful silence. Some of them close their eyes as well.

HALF AN HOUR LATER

A small ting begins pealing through the room growing deeper and more complex summoning the Councilors back from meditation. They have dispensed with the talking stick formality now.

JEREVE

(with eyes half open)

The Friend has spoken. What did we perceive?

ETHICS COUNCILOR 5

I saw a great purple tree growing in the soil of Aresine. It was magnificent to behold!

ETHICS COUNCILOR 2

Yes! The tree was a beautiful purple! And the roots were both red and blue.

ETHICS COUNCILOR 4

I saw the purple tree as well. It was surrounded by generation after generation of children. There was great joy, but far in the future, there would also be great sorrow.

(MORE)

ETHICS COUNCILOR 4 (CONT'D)

Many, many generations passed at which point, some of the children did not look completely human to me.

ETHICS COUNCILOR 3

I saw the tree too. It grew so large that in its branches hung an enormous wind chime. And on each of its strings where the chimes should have been was one of our pods. As the pods blew in the wind, they played a beautiful melody until the patterns in the stars shifted and the melody, still beautiful, became tinged with darkness.

BENERIKA

(to Jereve)

What does it mean?

JEREVE

The purple tree is our two genetic expressions, the blue of Earth and the red of Aresine, merging into one. The beautiful melody is the harmony of our two biomes. What the future sadness is or who the strange looking children are, who can say? But it was hundreds, maybe thousands, of lifetimes in the future.

There is a pause while the council reflects for a moment.

JEREVE (CONT'D)

With the Council's permission, I will share the recommendation with the Executive Board and the whole Fleet that a pod be built to preserve the planet's native biota.

All nod their assent. Jereve holsters the talking stick into a well in the table to end the meeting.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Ji-La, her class, Trianne, Jon, and Amant are crowded into the Instructor's hospital room. It is a comfortable space much like a large, well lit, bedroom. They are surrounded by warm but muted colors and simple but beautiful furniture.

There is a moveable electronic device by his bedside and a silvery metallic band around his forehead. The group looks on stoically. He is barely conscious.

JI-LA

Instructor, we have come to wish you well. It's me, Ji-La, and your class. Trianne, your former student and her husband Jon are here. And my friend Amant is here too.

INSTRUCTOR

(weakly)

Ji-La! So wonderful to see you! I heard you have stepped in to teach the class. I am very grateful.

THORIN

This morning, instructor Ji-La showed us the beginnings of life on Earth.

ATEN

It was in honor of finding life on Aresine.

KALEEN

It was profound!

The Instructor smiles generously despite his struggle.

PIKAY

Instructor, do you remember when we studied the ancient peoples of the Himalayas? Would it be alright if we sang to you in a healing circle?

The Instructor nods gently. Pikay directs the others to surround the bed and join hands. Ji-La takes Pikay's hand on one side and Amant's on the other. Ji-La and Amant share a momentary glance.

Pikay begins chanting the cosmic syllable "aum". The others all join in. This continues for several minutes in a rolling cascading fashion as voices fall in and out. The Instructor closes his eyes and lets the waves of sound wash over him. When the waves subside into stillness, the Instructor amazes them all by managing to lift his arms to his chest and cup his heart to them.

NURSE

It's best if we left him now. He's had quite a few visitors today and should rest.

INT. OUTSIDE THE HOSPITAL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

In the midst of everyone hugging each other goodbye, small LEDs light up on their wrist screens.

BENERIKA

The Executive Board is asking everyone to vote on the plan to build a new pod.

They each touch their screens to vote and then continue.

JI-LA

(to the students who are leaving)

I will see you all at our next class.

Ji-La, Amant, Trianne, and Jon are left.

AMANT

Would you all like to get something to eat together?

TRIANNE

(taking Jon's arm)

I'm afraid we have to get back to Maisie. Why don't you two go.

Amant looks at Ji-La. She nods yes.

INT. DINING AREA - NIGHT

Ji-La and Amant are seated in the middle of a crowded dining room under a clear glass roof with the stars above.

JI-LA

I feel sad seeing Instructor in so much distress. He's like a second father to me... and to so many others. He inspired me to become a historian. It was he who taught me the Akashic rituals.

AMANT

He is very old, now. Are you prepared, if his time comes soon?

JI-LA
(with a tear in her eye)
No!

They both smile meekly.

AMANT
Have you lost anyone close before?

JI-LA
No, I have been blessed. Have you?

AMANT
My father passed away when I was
twenty. But my mother is still
alive.

JI-LA
Was it hard when he died?

AMANT
I don't know. I've still never
cried for him. I'm not sure if
I've really grieved yet.

JI-LA
In my wanderings though the past, I
have seen countless deaths and
countless ways that loved ones
mourn.

Amant nods.

AMANT
What did you think of the Ethics
Council meeting today?

JI-LA
I was in awe! They were able to go
so deep so easily.

AMANT
And you could feel how the
vibration in the room became so
high! I'm glad we went in person to
feel that.

JI-LA
I'm glad at the outcome too. It
would be inauspicious to start our
life on Aresine having destroyed
new life.

AMANT

If the vote is in favor, it will push back the landing date. It could take a week or so for a new pod to be built.

JI-LA

Look at us! After a thousand years... and now we are so impatient!

They laugh.

AMANT

Yes, but only because we are worried about the poor squirrels and elephants longing to be free.

They laugh again.

JI-LA

What will your team do in the meantime?

AMANT

We'll check our calculations several more times and prep the asteroids. Once the Executive Board gives the word, we will put the plan into action.

JI-LA

Doesn't it ever overwhelm you knowing what an awesome responsibility you have?

AMANT

(chuckles)

Part of me knows what an incredible privilege it is to be on the team terraforming a new world. But for another part of me, it's just my job. We've gone over the plans and backup plans and backup of backup plans so many times.

JI-LA

I know what you mean. I showed my class the abiogenesis event. I've seen it many times now so to me it seemed so...ordinary. But seeing the class get excited made me fall in love with history again.

AMANT

Maybe you could watch the
bombardment with me? Your awe and
exuberance might help me fall in
love with solar system dynamics
again.

Ji-LA

(laughing)

I am happy to share my awe and
exuberance with you!

A food cart arrives and serves them two plates. Amant reaches
across the table to Ji-La's plate while at the same time
presenting his plate to her.

AMANT

May we? It's our first time eating
together.

She accepts his plate and he takes hers. They then stand up
and lean against each other back to back. They close their
eyes and count silently to nine. Once done, they return their
plates to each other, smile, and sit down. They clink forks
before starting to eat.

Ji-LA

The trust ritual? I never took you
for being so old-fashioned, Amant.

AMANT

(smiling)

Sometimes I'm old fashioned. Other
times I'm new-fashioned. Sometimes
I'm just here-and-now-fashioned.

Ji-La almost chokes on her drink laughing.

AMANT (CONT'D)

Oh! I'm sorry! I'm sorry!

Ji-La recovers but is still smiling.

Ji-LA

You should be! Dumbest joke ever,
Amant!

AMANT

But you laughed!

Ji-LA

Perhaps neither one of us is
particularly smart.

At this they both laugh again.

AMANT

It's fun being dumb with you, Ji-
La.

She smiles, sets down her fork, and briefly cups her heart to him.

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. JI-LA'S AKASHIC IMMERSION ROOM - DAY

Ji-La is wearing a visor and making the hand motions to initiate an Akashic Records session.

FLOATING IN SPACE [AKASHIC RECORDS SEQUENCE]

Ji-la finds herself floating in space. Before her is Aresine and off in the distance is Earth. They are connected to each other by a shining silver cord.

Beside her stands Akasha with her flaming sword.

Ji-La is confused as to why she is seeing this scene. She calls out to Akasha.

JI-LA
Where am I, Akasha? This isn't
where I'm supposed to be. I'm
trying to prepare for a lesson.

Akasha looks at her without emotion. She swings her sword and slices through the cord. The cord and Earth dissolve into nothingness. She then directs Ji-La's focus to Aresine with an outstretched hand.

END AKASHIC RECORDS SEQUENCE

BACK TO SCENE

Ji-La removes her visor. She is flustered and confused.

JI-LA
(to herself)
What does this mean?

INT. HOLO-MEETING - LATER THAT DAY

The holo-space is a Gray room with virtual windows overlooking a pleasant forest background. There are five Historical Society members in virtual form standing in a circle along with Ji-La and a few other history students.

SHAFFER
How many of us have tried to access
the Akashic Records this morning.

Almost every hand goes up around the room including those of the Historians.

SHAHER (CONT'D)

And how many have seen Akasha
severing our connection to Earth's
past?

The same hands remain held up.

Ji-LA

What does it mean, Instructor
Shafer?

SHAHER

This is something new, Ji-La.

HISTORIAN 2

It seems pretty clear what it
means, though.

HISTORIAN 3

It would seem so. Why now, though?

SHAHER

I don't know. But, I think we can
safely assume that Earth can no
longer access the Akashic records
of the Fleet either.

HISTORIAN 4

If this is true, the loss is
staggering!

There is general pessimistic acceptance in the room.

Ji-LA

Instructors, I have a class on
Monday...what will I do with my
students?

SHAHER

Can you come up with an alternative
lesson by then? Something that
doesn't involve Akasha?

Ji-LA

(beat)

I have one idea. It's not history
per se.

SHAFFER

I'm sure it will be fine. All of us...we will have to improvise for a little while until we've had time to come up with a plan.

INT. JI-LA'S LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ji-La looks at her wrist computer.

Ji-La

(to computer)

Amant.

AMANT

(via wrist cam)

Ji-La! What's up?

Ji-La

Hi Amant, I have a favor to ask...

EXT. CAMPUS PARK - DAY

Ji-La and the students sit around the memory dais in the park. Each student has their hand outstretched towards the center so that their wrist screens are pointed at Ji-La. Their parents' faces are on their screens for a quick group call.

Ji-La

Today for something special, I thought I would take the class to help prep the asteroids with gravimetric engines for the bombardment. It's more engineering than history, but I thought it might count as "making history". Is everyone ok with that? We might be back a little later than usual.

THORIN'S DAD

Sounds like fun. Just be careful, Thorin.

THORIN

(excited about the field trip)

I will dad!

ATEN'S MOM

Make sure you thank your instructor for such a fun opportunity, Aten.

ATEN
Of course, mom!

There is general consensus with the plan. The students are excited.

Ji-LA
Great! Thanks everyone.

The students retract their arms and disconnect.

Ji-LA (CONT'D)
Ok, everyone grab your stuff.

The class gets up and walks over to a waiting shuttle hovering above the grass.

EXT. ASTEROID 21197 - LATER

The shuttle has landed on a twenty mile long asteroid in the midst of an asteroid belt far from Aresine. Amant and a three person crew are setting up a large gravimetric engine that is easily three times the size of the shuttle.

Amant and Pikay are working on mounting it to the asteroid using a six wheeled drilling rig with a three meter high auger bit. Amant is patiently and happily showing Pikay how to operate the rig -- a fact that Ji-La takes note of.

Ji-LA
(to Pikay)
Are you sure you don't want to come explore with us, Pikay?

PIKAY
Yes, instructor! Amant is showing me all about the gravimetric engine.

ATEN
(to Ji-La)
She's interested in becoming an engineer.

VEREK
What are you interested in becoming Aten?

ATEN
The dance-master of Aresine!

Aten busts out a couple of quick moves. The students laugh hysterically. Even Amant and Ji-La can't help but chuckle.

THORIN

Come on, everyone. I'm setting my
boots at point five g's.

Thorin starts jogging/bounding off towards the asteroid's
horizon. Ji-La and the class race after to catch him.

Minutes later they come to the edge of the asteroid and can
now see a beautiful green gas giant that seems astonishingly
close. They gaze in awe. After a minute....

KALEEN

Look, Aten! There's a crater.

BENERIKA

So...?

ATEN

Pogo bop! C'mon!

Aten starts racing towards the crater and the others follow.
Ji-La is a little confused but also follows along. Once
there, Aten directs them to take positions around the
crater's rim.

ATEN (CONT'D)

Point one G's everyone.

JI-LA

What are we doing?

Verek launches a small camera drone.

VEREK

It's just a stupid thing that Aten
came up with. But it should be
fun. Set your boots.

Ji-La and the others all reach down to controls on the
outside of their space boots.

KALEEN

Like this, Instructor.

Kaleen stands up straight, lifts one leg up as high as she
can without bending her knee and grabs it with one arm. Her
other arm is stretched out as straight up as she can get it.
The others have all adopted the same pose to varying degrees
and wait until Ji-La is also set.

ATEN

Ok, on the count of three, everyone
jump toward the center. One, two,
three!

With their one grounded leg, they all jump and float into the crater. The result is a jumble of awkward chaos as the stiffened participants float, twist, and tumble until they slowly crash into each other in the center. The collisions send them floating off in all directions like flying stick figures.

ATEN (CONT'D)

Woohoo!

At this they all break their poses, reset their grav-boots, and rush back to the center. Verek projects a hologram of their escapade above them.

THORIN

That was perfect! We even got the planet in the background!

BENERIKA

Oh my! Did you see how ridiculous we looked!

Aten gives Ji-La a hug.

ATEN

Thank you for helping fulfill my artistic dreams, Instructor. You are the most fun historian ever! I'm going to use this as part of my entertainment day presentation.

VEREK

I'll send the vid to you Aten.

BENERIKA

(laughing)

Can we really call this particular dream "artistic"?

Aten streams some bouncy, bass-heavy, tunes to the group and then starts into some more energetic dance moves back at a higher G level.

ATEN

(singing)

Yes. We. Can!

VEREK

Go dance-master! Go!

Kaleen and Thorin join Aten, picking up his routine very quickly. Benerika rolls her eyes but joins in as well. Verek and Ji-La clap their hands in time to the music and look on.

BACK AT THE ENGINE SITE

Amant and Pikay are drilling their final hole but the bit gets stuck.

AMANT
Ok, shut it off.

Pikay shuts the drill off. Amant addresses the bit, grabs it down low, and gives it a good heave upwards.

AMANT (CONT'D)
Ok, try again.

Pikay presses the go button on the machine's control unit. This time the rig drills down successfully. Once fully bored into the ground, Pikay retracts the bit and moves the rig away from the hole.

AMANT (CONT'D)
Good, now hand me a post, head side up, please. Carefully....

Pikay grabs the lone remaining post from behind her. It's easily three meters high, but, in the low gravity it's trivial to move it and position it into the newly drilled hole. On the ends of the poles are bulbous connector sections with red warning labels that say "Caution: Explosive Bolts".

PIKAY
Good?

AMANT
Perfect!

Pikay nods. Amant motions for the crew to bring the engine to the posts they have just planted. They walk the huge machine over like they were moving a blimp on a windless day. Once in place Amant, Pikay, and the others all crank down the fastening system so that the engine is firmly attached to the posts.

AMANT (CONT'D)
There we go! It should be ready now.

Ji-La and the class return from their excursion just as the engine is being locked down.

Ji-LA
Wow! You're already done.

AMANT
(smiling)
Just have to test it. Pikay is a natural.

He motions for the class to gather around him.

AMANT (CONT'D)
Pikay, can you announce the warning?

Pikay enthusiastically steps up to the interface screen next to Amant. She reads off the screen.

PIKAY
(adjusts coms)
Attention all spacefarers on or in the vicinity of asteroid 21197. Gravimetric engine test to commence immediately. Please take appropriate action to secure yourselves.

VEREK
(to the class)
Hold on to your horses people.

AMANT
(to Pikay)
OK, let's spin it up.

Amant punches in his authorization code and steps aside and motions for Pikay to touch the big green button on the screen. When she does, the engine rumbles to life sending vibrations through the ground.

AMANT (CONT'D)
(smiles)
Come and put your hands on it.

The students all reach out and put their hands up to the cold steel casing. They can feel a rhythmic pulsing with a peculiar series of beats that don't fit into a regular pattern. The class is in awe.

AMANT (CONT'D)
Look! We are already moving.

The entire asteroid is turning so that the green gas giant is now partially visible to them. Nearby asteroids recede slowly as the asteroid begins moving towards the inner solar system.

AMANT (CONT'D)
(to crew)
How are the harmonics looking?

One of the crew members, focused on a wrist monitor, gives him a big thumbs up.

AMANT (CONT'D)
(to class)
What do you think?

KALEEN
Wow!

BENERIKA
Yes! Wow!

ATEN
This is almost as cool as the pogo
bop.

AMANT
(shakes his head and
smiles)
Alright everyone, back to the
shuttle.

INT. SHUTTLE - ON THE WAY HOME

Amant and Ji-La sit at the front of the shuttle with the class behind them. They've all taken off their helmets now. The students are amusing themselves watching Verek's video of their dance antics. Ji-La leans over and whispers to Amant.

JI-LA
You were so good with the students
today!

AMANT
I was thinking the same thing about
you!

As they sit, their hands rest on the center console together with their little fingers barely touching as if by accident.

Kaleen notices and points it out to Thorin. They both smile.

END ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

EXT. JOGGING TRAIL ON THE ELEGANT ELEPHANT - DAY

Ji-La is jogging along a wooded trail. It is a beautiful day and there are other people running, riding bikes, walking their dogs, etc.

As she makes her way over a bridge a loud bell tolls three times, ringing out across the whole pod. Ji-La stops suddenly at the sound and bends over weeping. She sits on the ground holding her knees with tears flowing freely down her cheeks.

Her communicator buzzes. She wipes away her tears and answers.

AMANT

Ji-La! I just heard. I'm so sorry!

Ji-La can't contain her self and bursts into tears once again.

AMANT (CONT'D)

I'm on the Nimble Thimble. I can come over, if you feel up for it.

JI-LA

Yes, thank you Amant!

INT. JI-LA'S LIVING ROOM - TWENTY MINUTES LATER

Amant is sitting quietly with Ji-La holding her hand. She is still very distraught. Now and then she wipes tears away with a cloth.

JI-LA

I knew how old he was, but I never thought this day would come.

AMANT

(a small tear in his eye)
I remember what you said about Instructor Sanford being like a second father to you.

JI-LA

I will miss him so so much! He was my guide in life.
(beat)
He came so close to seeing Aresine!

AMANT

The funeral will be in a couple of days. Maybe we could ask that it be held on the surface.

Ji-LA

Yes! We could scatter his ashes there. He would be the first.

AMANT

I will talk to his family to see if they agree.

Ji-LA

Thank you! I will be alright, but right now I'm very sad. My mom and dad are coming over later.

Ji-La leans over and puts her head on his shoulder. He wraps his arms around her, tears still running down her face.

INT. HOLO-MEETING - NIGHT

The meeting room is empty except for Ji-La and Instructor Shafer.

SHAFER

We are all as heartbroken as you Ji-La. He was the history instructor for most of us here in the Society too.

Ji-LA

I know. It's such a loss for all of us.

SHAFER

The Historical Society met to discuss what to do with Instructor Sanford's class -- in light of his passing and the fact that Akasha has withdrawn our access to Earth's history.

Ji-LA

I understand, Instructor. I have already been thinking about other ways I can serve the Fleet.

SHAFER

We are hoping you will continue to teach the class, Ji-La.

JI-LA

You are?

SHAFER

At least for the rest of the term.
Some of the parents of your
students reached out to tell us
that they have already become quite
fond of you.

JI-LA

I don't know what to say! Thank you
Instructor! But...history without
Akasha...is it possible?

SHAFER

I know it seems primitive, but we
still have e-books in the history
department archives.

JI-LA

It will be like a historical re-
enactment of a history class.

SHAFER

Yes! What a great way to think
about it!

JI-LA

One of my greatest fears when we
discovered Aresine was that our
history would no longer be
relevant. Do you think it will
prove true?

SHAFER

Not anytime soon. Besides, what is
a historian, if not a lover of
Truth? And lovers of Truth will
always be needed by humanity.

Ji-La salutes Instructor Shafer with folded hands.

SHAFER (CONT'D)

There has also been talk of a
special project that seems all the
more urgent now. One that we would
like for you and your class to help
with. It needs the input of both
young and old.

JI-LA

Yes...what is it?

SHAFER

Now that we have lost access to Akasha, we have been thinking about how to preserve the memory of Earth. It must be something that can carry this memory through great expanses of time even if, someday, we lose our technology. Because who knows what ups and downs we will go through as a species? In the eyes of the Historical Society, there is no more durable form of knowledge than a myth.

Ji-La pauses to consider this for a moment and nods.

SHAFER (CONT'D)

We're asking groups from the entire community to come up with a myth that encompasses the essence of where we have come from and who we are. It has to be something that can be taught and remembered easily and faithfully.

JI-LA

I will share it with my students. I'm sure they will be as excited about this project as I am. We will help in any way we can.

SHAFER

Perfect!

(beat)

You should know too...it was Instructor Sanford that first proposed the idea.

Ji-La smiles.

JI-LA

Instructor Sanford! Gone, but still giving my life purpose!

EXT. ARESINE SURFACE - DAY

On a huge rock shelf overlooking the ocean, hundreds gather for Instructor Sanford's funeral underneath a large energy shield. Everyone is dressed primarily in white but with at least one element of black. It is a perfect day with a calm blue sky.

There is a platform set up at the front of the gathering with a podium in the center. To the side is an oval screen with images of Instructor Sanford from infancy to old age smoothly morphing into each other revealing the history of a kindly smile. To the other side, sits a harpist playing gentle melodies on a gold harp. There is also an array of drums including one enormous drum elevated on a stand. In front there are hundreds of white chairs arranged in neat rows. On the podium sit the HIGH PRIEST, a group of young acolytes, dressed in orange robes, the eleven remaining members of the Historical Society, and an empty chair.

Out in the audience, Ji-La greets her class members with hugs. Amant joins them and they stand in a circle together.

JI-LA

I'm so glad we can all be here today.

KALEEN

Me too, Instructor Ji-La. Is it true that you will continue to teach our class?

JI-LA

Yes Kaleen! I am very glad about that!

VEREK

Is it also true that Akasha has abandoned us?

JI-LA

Abandoned? I hope not! But it appears that she wants our focus to be on Aresine now. We will finish out this term with something special, though! I will tell you all about it at our next class.

The acolytes stand and raise conch shells to their mouths to blow a loud and long summons. Once they do, the members of the crowd find their seats and quickly quiet down.

Amant and Ji-La sit with her students. The HIGH PRIEST of the Fleet, wearing long yellow robes, makes his way to the podium.

HIGH PRIEST

Welcome everyone! Today is a sad day. Instructor Sanford has rejoined the Great Spirit, the Eternal Friend.

(MORE)

HIGH PRIEST (CONT'D)

Through his love of history and the Truth, he touched many, many lives. He was even my history instructor when I was in school, if you can believe it.

(tugs on his long gray beard)

But his time with us is over and he has returned to Infinite Spirit.

In unison the crowd responds to the call line.

THE CROWD

Wave of the sea, dissolve in the sea.

HIGH PRIEST

He shared so much light in his years with the fleet. He served on the Historical Society Leadership Team for nearly sixty years! And how many of us remember that he served on the Education Council before that?

(beat)

But his time with us is over and he has returned to Infinite Spirit.

The crowd responds in unison.

THE CROWD

Wave of the sea, dissolve in the sea.

HIGH PRIEST

Ever humble, he walked with us always as a friend. He never belittled or mocked, or judged or discouraged. His words were kindness and strength. His smile was peace and wholeness. All of us who knew him know how much he loved, how much of himself he gave. All the way up to the end.

(beat)

But his time with us is over and he has returned to Infinite Spirit.

The crowd responds in unison.

THE CROWD

Wave of the sea, dissolve in the sea.

HIGH PRIEST

Today we have two students of his to share with us. Anaya, one of his first, and Thorin, one of his last. I invite them up to the platform at this time.

Thorin and ANAYA, a woman easily in her late seventies, rise and make their way towards the front. Thorin offers her an arm to help her up the steps up to the platform which she accepts with a smile.

Anaya takes podium first and Thorin waits behind. She stands silently gathering her thoughts for a moment. When she speaks her words are heartfelt.

ANAYA

Goodbye Instructor! When I heard the bells ring out on the Elegant Elephant, I could hardly believe it was true. No matter how old I've gotten, I could always count on you to be older!

The crowd laughs.

ANAYA (CONT'D)

And I could always count on having you around to make me feel proud of being part of the Fleet. You made me and all your students feel special. You encouraged us in our curiosity. You showered us with your wisdom. You gave freely of your time and energy. And what amazed me...generation after generation...you always found ways to relate to our young people and share yourself all over again. Good bye Instructor!

(with folded hands)

We wish you a safe journey.

Everyone bows with folded hands.

As Thorin approaches the podium, there are many in the crowd wiping away tears. He is a little nervous and a little sad. But once he starts, his words flow from deep within.

THORIN

This was my fourth term with Instructor Sanford.

(MORE)

THORIN (CONT'D)

Every time I've seen his name on my school schedule I've been grateful that I could spend more days with him. I never knew that much about him outside of the classroom because he always preferred to listen to the concerns of others rather than talk about himself. But, I knew that, although he had many relatives, he had never married. I guess, in a way, that made us feel like he was a second father. One of the last things he said to the class was that history was "a glimpse of the fullness of human potential". For me, he was a glimpse of the fullness of human potential because he was an example of how to be kind and happy; of how to appreciate life and how to give every day. I hope I can take that glimpse with me for the rest of my life.

Everyone bows with folded hands again and the High Priest makes his way back to the podium.

HIGH PRIEST

But his time with us is over and he has returned to Infinite Spirit.

The crowd responds in unison.

THE CROWD

Wave of the sea, dissolve in the sea.

HIGH PRIEST

Thanks you for those beautiful remarks Anaya and Thorin. The task of scattering his ashes has been given to the Historical Society Leaders with whom he worked so closely for so many years. Historians, please proceed.

Shafer and two other historians, each carrying small urns, rise and walk down the platform to a temporary walkway erected out over the cliff's edge. While they move, the harp plays again. One by one they walk to the end of the walkway and send the urns floating out over the water where they gracefully spread their ashen contents. When they are done, the historians walk back to their seats on the platform together.

HIGH PRIEST (CONT'D)
 Now, let the drummers begin. And
 let us all sing, together, the song
 of release.

The acolytes begin drumming. The sound grows and grows until it feels like a powerful, unstoppable, band of running horses.

Led by the High Priest, the group begins singing. It is only four syllables: ah-ee-ah-oh. They hold each one across several measures while the drums thunder on.

Great sadness washes over the whole crowd like waves on the beach. There are tears everywhere. The unison of the chant cannot hold, though, as each person feels the syllables move inward into his or her own sadness and surface as tears, or wailing, or stoic resolve according to each person's individual rhythm and grief.

Ji-La remains teary eyed but stoic and serene while Amant weeps freely. The students participate and shed tears too, but, of them, Thorin is the most deeply affected.

At the point the grief has washed over the crowd and the emotional energy of the ceremony is spent, the drums grow softer and slower until there is only a perfect stillness of inner and outer peace.

Shortly after, when the moment is right, the High Priest again takes to the podium.

HIGH PRIEST (CONT'D)
 Go with Spirit, everyone.

Ji-La holds onto Amant's hand firmly while he wipes away his tears. Kaleen and Aten come over to hug him. Pikay and Benerika hold onto each of Thorin's hands as he regains his composure, and Verek puts his hand on Thorin's shoulder.

VEREK
 That was perfect, Thorin. Thank
 you.

Thorin smiles gently. He, and everyone else, is emotionally exhausted.

Above them shuttles are already starting to return to the fleet. The students say their goodbyes and depart leaving Amant and Ji-La on their own.

JI-LA

I think maybe you finally let go of
some of the sadness you felt for
your father?

AMANT

I think so too. Why is it so hard?
Why does it take another funeral to
finally let go?

JI-LA

I don't know.

Ji-La hugs him tightly for a good long moment. He hugs her
back with his eyes closed.

AMANT

It's probably not the right time
after what we just went through....

JI-LA

For what?

AMANT

A friend of mine on the Geological
Survey Team told me about a place
not too far from here that I
thought would be fun to go to with
you.

JI-LA

Yes! Let's go.

AMANT

You don't even know what it is yet!

JI-LA

I'm sure it will be perfect! I
feel so much relief right now. Fun
sounds like fun!

AMANT

Alright, then. We'll have to put
our spacesuits on, but it's close
enough that we can walk.

INT. LAVA TUBE JUNCTION - HALF AN HOUR LATER

Crouching through the ragged opening, Amant and Ji-La enter a
large cavern deep inside the planet. They make their way
over to the edge of a ten foot wide circular shaft running
straight up and down from them.

It is illuminated by the lights on their spacesuits and from sunlight coming in from the top of the shaft.

JI-LA

I've never even imagined anything like it! This is natural?

AMANT

Completely! It's a lava tube. I was worried that if we didn't see it before the bombardment, we might not have another chance.

Ji-La peeks over the edge of the tube and looks up and down. The tube extends hundreds of feet up to the surface and hundreds of feet down into the darkness. She is genuinely in awe. She puts her gloved hand out into the space before her and feels a current of air blowing upwards.

AMANT (CONT'D)

Do you trust me?

JI-LA

I think so?

AMANT

Set your boots to point zero eight.

They both set their boots and start gently floating. Amant takes her hands and pushes off the side wall with his foot to start them spinning. They float into the shaft and are taken up by the air current. They rise gently going round and round traveling up into the tube. In parts where it gets tighter, the current speeds up. The unexpected rush takes them both by surprise. They grab hold of each other tightly.

JI-LA

Oh my goodness!

EXT. TOP OF LAVA TUBE - MINUTES LATER

They emerge from the tube at the surface and spin out of the up-current until they slowly fall back to the ground like they are waltzing on air. They lie down on the sandy ground next to the lava tube smiling and thoroughly at ease. They look up at the sky with their arms behind their heads. Ji-La looks over at Amant.

JI-LA

That was my favorite thing ever!

AMANT

I will definitely have to thank my
Geologist friend for sharing this.

Ji-La rolls on her side to look at Amant.

JI-LA

Do you trust me?

AMANT

(smiles)

I think so?

Ji-La pushes a button on her belt. The energy shield which surrounds her body expands until it encompasses both of them. Then she pushes a button on her helmet and it retracts. She rolls on top of him and pushes the same button on his helmet and it retracts. She looks him in the eyes with deep love and kisses him.

EXT. OCEAN ABOVE THE THERMAL VENTS ON ARESINE - DAY

Just off the shoreline, one of the service pods hovers several meters above the ocean. The skies are gray and cloudy and the sea is a bit rough but the service pod is rock solid. Several hoses dangle down into the water.

Underneath the water the structure of the new pod is taking shape. A large drilling rig bores into the seabed at an angle. One of the dangling hoses is attached to it vacuuming up debris.

Four divers guide the drill while many others work on other parts of the huge structure. The leader of the team, Jon, is consulting with another diver.

JON

Is the heat recirculation system in
place?

ASSISTANT DIVER 1

Almost. The heat system engineers
are still running preliminary
tests. We're mapping out ambient
temperature fluctuations one final
time too. We should be able to fire
up the shields tomorrow.

Jon gives him a thumbs up then swims back to the control center.

INT. CONTROL CENTER - MOMENTS LATER

Jon emerges from the access well and climbs up into the office area still dripping. Two other divers follow close behind carrying equipment. Jon doffs his helmet and gloves and makes his way into the communications area. He sits down in front of a large monitor where an Executive Board Member in his sixties, BROKA, is waiting for him on screen.

BROKA

How's it going?

JON

So far, so good. I'm still a little concerned about the seismic stability of the whole area, but, so far, the tests look good.

BROKA

Whatever you do, don't rush it. This is some pretty important cargo.

JON

Understood.

(beat)

Has the Board come up with a name for the new pod yet?

BROKA

We decided that one of the kids should name it--just like the fleet pods were originally named by the kids of that era. We're going to ask for submissions. You think Maisie might have any ideas?

JON

Oh, I'm sure she will.

BROKA

Alright then, good luck!

JON

Thanks. I'll keep you informed.

The call disconnects and Jon taps on the table screen a couple of times. It rings and MAISIE answers.

JON (CONT'D)

Hi Maisie! How are you doing?

MAISIE

I'm doing good, daddy.

JON
Are you and Mommy doing school
today?

MAISIE
Yes.

JON
What are you learning about?

MAISIE
Trees! There are so many!

JON
Oh! Trees are wonderful, aren't
they?

MAISIE
Yes.

JON
Is your mommy there?

MAISIE
Yes.

JON
Can you get her for me?

MAISIE
Yes.

She runs off screen and comes back a few moments later
tugging Trianne by the hand.

TRIANNE
Hi Daddy! How's it going?

JON
Hi Hon! It's going good. We're
expecting to launch tomorrow but
nothing for sure yet.

TRIANNE
Wow! It's going so quickly!

JON
I talked to Broka a minute ago. He
says they're asking for submissions
for the name of the new pod. They
want the kids to come up with it.
Do you think Maisie might have any
ideas?

TRIANNE

(to Maisie)

Oh! That sounds super amazing! What do you think, Maisie? What should we name the new pod that daddy is working on?

Maisie thinks about it for a moment and flips through the book about trees she and her mom have been studying. She finds the poplar page and points to it.

MAISIE

My favorite tree is a poplar!

TRIANNE

Like the tree they talked about on screen the other day?

MAISIE

Yes! The purple tree! It should be the Purple Poplar!

Maisie giggles when she says the name. Trianne and Jon look at each other over the screen.

JON

(genuinely amazed)

That's perfect! I'll send it to Broka.

TRIANNE

That's it?

JON

That's everything. See you tonight!

TRIANNE

Bye, love.

END ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

INT. ORBITAL ENHANCEMENTS COMMAND CENTER - IN THE SHADOW OF
ARESINE

Ji-La and Amant stand in front of the Orbital Enhancements command center's huge solid glass window. It's two stories high, fifty feet wide, and seamless. Aresine, directly in front of them, is completely blocking the sun's light leaving only a glow around its edges.

The pods of the Fleet, visible to both the left and right are all watching from a safe distance.

Fifty or so team members sit behind sleek desks each with a variety of displays. The room is dark except for the light of the many control screens. Everyone wears com devices in their ears.

Amant and Ji-La watch the scene in front of them intently.

EXT. THERMAL VENT SHORELINE - DAY

Out of the water, a huge pod emerges with a full load of seawater under its dome. Below it huge vortices form as water rushes in to fill the missing portion of sea.

BACK TO SCENE

Amant and Ji-La continue watching out the viewport. They can see the Purple Poplar making its way into orbit with the rest of the Fleet.

ENGINEERING COORDINATOR (V.O.)

The Purple Poplar launch is successful. I repeat, the launch is successful. Internal geological structures are intact and thermal vent heat pump simulation system is operational. Full orbit in approximately three minutes.

OE TASK GROUP LEADER (V.O.)

Good to hear, engineering. Orbital Enhancements Task Group is beginning pre-strike checklist.

ENGINEERING COORDINATOR (V.O.)

Planetary scans complete. You are clear on this end strike-team.

INSERT - STRIKE TEAM CONTROLLER'S MONITOR

The monitor displays symbolic representations of Aresine and its solar system along with graphs of various task group systems.

STRIKE TEAM CONTROLLER (V.O.)
 Solar radiation levels normal.
 (beat)
 Ambient gravitation levels normal.
 (beat)
 Strays and patterns check complete.
 Calculation pod redundancy check
 confirmed.
 (beat)
 Solar system monitoring team
 reports all clear.

EXT. HIGH ORBIT AROUND ARESINE - CONTINUOUS

Seven on the eight service pods wait just outside of Aresine's orbit surrounded by trillions of icy asteroids.

PLANETARY CARE TEAM CONTROLLER (V.O.)
 Planetary after care systems in
 place awaiting after-strike
 assessment.

BACK TO SCENE

Amant monitors his screen closely.

AMANT
 Speed, trajectory, and engine
 performance are 100%.
 (beat)
 Engines one, two and three coming
 up on decoupling window.
 (beat)
 Blasts initiated. Decoupling
 complete.
 (beat)
 Telemetry looks stable.

OE TASK GROUP LEADER (V.O.)
 We are passing the turnback
 threshold in three, two, one. We
 are now fully committed.

Nervous for Amant, Ji-La holds onto his arm tightly.

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUOUS

Three enormous asteroids close in on Aresine. As they streak through space, they rotate and send showers of dust out behind them making it look like they have wriggling tails.

BACK TO SCENE

The coms go silent. Everyone stares out at the planet.

For an instant, there is a trail of light in the northern hemisphere that becomes a bright flash once it hits the atmosphere and an even bigger flash on impact. A few seconds later, slightly south of the first impact, there are two even bigger explosions in quick succession.

EXT. SURFACE OF ARESINE - CONTINUOUS

Tsunamis of molten earth radiate outward from the impact sites.

The oceans become massive tidal waves.

The skies are filled with gigantic debris clouds.

BACK TO SCENE

Several silent minutes pass. Amant puts an arm around Ji-La's shoulder and holds her close.

OE TASK GROUP LEADER (V.O.)
Readings are in range everyone!
Looking phenomenal!

There are cheers over the coms and from the crew around them.

OE TASK GROUP LEADER (V.O.)
This is OE Task Group control, we
have confirmation of new orbital
dynamics. Planetary Care Team, you
are clear. Make it rain!

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUOUS

Six service pods, using gravimetric fields, tow a storm of uncountable ice fragments into Aresine's orbit. Upon release, they fall and dissolve into mist in the atmosphere. Torrents of rain begin falling over the impact zones.

BACK TO SCENE

Amidst the backdrop of a planet in chaos, and congratulatory cheering of the crew, Amant and Ji-La remove their coms. He puts both arms around her and kisses her. They whisper in each other's ears with eyes closed.

AMANT

I glad you could be here with me
for this moment, Ji-La.

Ji-LA

I am too. Now, everything begins.

END OF EPISODE