

The Aresine Chronicles

Episode 3 "Year Zero"

Act One

FADE IN:

EXT. IN ORBIT AROUND ARESINE

A long line of a hundred pods, in in orbit around Aresine, begin their descent to the surface led by the Nimble Thimble. As they enter the atmosphere, the pods break formation and spread out across the continents and oceans of Aresine, each heading to its own designated landing site.

BROKA (O.S.)

Members of the Fleet! Today, after wandering through space for thirty three generations and nearly a thousand years, today we begin a new era of humanity. What started out as hope, has at long, long last become reality. Let us give thanks to the Cosmos for guiding us on this journey. Let us give thanks for this new home. And let us rejoice that we are all called to be part of this saga. As Aresinians, we will undoubtedly encounter difficulties, but we will overcome them! We will undoubtedly face challenges, but we will rise to meet them! Let today be known, hereafter, as the first day of Year Zero!

Inside the pods, great cheers go up as thousands celebrate the moment of landing. There are shuttles and video drones buzzing about the landing sites recording the event and watching for potential problems.

The first pod touches down on land stirring up only a gentle dust. Others follow at places around the world in both day and night. The ocean pods submerge into the depths.

INT. SURVIVAL SYSTEMS CONTROL ROOM

Amant is at a monitor with a com in his ear. Other engineers in the room are all engaged in monitoring data feeds from the pods as they land. ALEKS, in his early 40s, sits above and behind Amant at the supervisor's workstation.

AMANT

(on coms)

Aleks, I'm seeing unusual heat buildup under Origami. Does that look odd to you?

ALEKS

(checks one of his side monitors)

I'm seeing it too, Amant. Looks like there is a hot spot about five meters in diameter. It's only a few degrees above ambient, but I can't think of any reason why it would be there.

AMANT

Maybe some type of mild volcanic activity that we missed on the survey?

ALEKS

(to Origami)

Origami, we are looking at a heat issue. We are sending you back up to a safe altitude awaiting an assessment from Geology.

ORIGAMI ENGINEER (O.S.)

Got it! Hope we touch down soon though. We're all pretty excited about landing.

The Origami, an agricultural pod full of growing crops, gently lifts back up into the sky.

AMANT

(reading from monitor)

Ninety seven landings completed.

ALEKS

The three remaining are...?

AMANT

Origami and two of the ocean pods. There is some unexpected current strength coming from a small earthquake. They're just being cautious.

GEOLOGY TEAM ENGINEER (O.S.)
Survival Systems, this is Geology.
We're advising relocation of
Origami to its secondary landing
site.

ALEKS
Affirmative, Geology. We will set
her down at landing site two.

The Origami descends to another site. As it touches down,
modest dust clouds push out from underneath it.

AMANT
(fixated on screen)
So far so good.

ALEKS
Origami, you look good this time.
Go ahead and cycle down gravimetric
engines. We will continue to
monitor.

ORIGAMI ENGINEER (O.S.)
Affirmative. You've got some very
happy farmers out here!

ALEKS
(to Amant)
I don't think we're going to know
for sure about the ocean pods for a
few hours. Why don't you head on
home. We've got it covered from
here. Thanks for helping out.

AMANT
I'm always here for the team.

ALEKS
And you'll think about my proposal?

AMANT
Absolutely! I'll get back to you
soon.

EXT. CAMPUS PARK - NIGHT

Ji-La and her students are seated around the memory dais. A
glowing globe floats above them providing light. The
students pull their tablets out of their packs and turn them
on.

JI-LA

Reading from Ancient
Athenians...who wants to go first?
(Kaleen raises hand)
Good! Kaleen, just the first
paragraph, please.

KALEEN

(reading from tablet)
"We are lovers of beauty yet simple
at heart. We cultivate our minds
without sacrificing our courage. We
use our wealth for the good of all,
not for our own indulgences."

BENERIKA

(to Ji-La)
Did Pericles really say this? It
seems so advanced for his day and
age.

JI-LA

There is some artistic license on
the part of the translator, but it
is an honest attempt to honor the
spirit of the man and his words.
What did you hear in his speech?

VEREK

I think Pericles wanted to remind
the Athenians that democracy
requires selflessness.

THORIN

And he was trying to persuade them
to support the war -- not by
appealing to their self-interest,
but by reminding them of what makes
them special.

PIKAY

Yes, and they were special because
they were part of something
different and noble.

ATEN

It all seems so crass, though! Why
should he have to persuade them to
be selfless? Shouldn't everyone
just know that selfishness is
terrible?

KALEEN

There's a reason we call it the
"Age of Darkness".

ATEN

I'm glad I wasn't born back then!

THORIN

How do you know you weren't born
back then? What about in a past
life?

BENERIKA

Thorin! Don't give him an excuse!

ATEN

(to Thorin)

Good point! I could have been --
(gets up)
-- an Athenian dancer.

Aten performs a humorous dance routine with some vaguely
Greek moves before sitting down again.

JI-LA

Not necessarily accurate for the
period, Aten, but wonderful
nonetheless.

PIKAY

Instructor Ji-La?

JI-LA

Yes?

PIKAY

What will you do after the term
ends? Are you going to continue
your visits to other schools?

JI-LA

That's very kind of you to ask,
Pikay. I'm not sure what I will do,
just yet. My presentation really
depended on the Akashic records.

KALEEN

Do you think you'll get married
this summer, Instructor?

The class starts giggling a bit.

JI-LA
(surprised)
That's a bit off topic! Why do you ask, Kaleen?

KALEEN
(smiling)
No reason...but if you do, will you invite us to the wedding?

JI-LA
I'm not sure how we got from Pericles' Funeral Oration to wedding invitations, but...if I were to get married, of course. You would all be invited!

She puts her arm around Kaleen who is next to her and smiles.

JI-LA (CONT'D)
(to the group)
What does everyone plan to do this summer?

KALEEN
Lots of sleeping!

JI-LA
(surprised)
Is that really a plan, Kaleen?

The class laughs at this.

ATEN
She's studying to be a dream illuminator, Instructor.

JI-LA
(laughs)
Oh, I see. What about you Aten?
Are you going to further your dance career somehow?

ATEN
Of course! I've been accepted to the Academy.

JI-LA
Wonderful! Pikay, I know you're interested in engineering, right?

PIKAY
Yes, I'm hoping Amant will help me prepare for my entrance exams.

JI-LA

I'm pretty certain he will be happy to. Thorin, what about you?

THORIN

I don't know for sure yet. I want to build something--something spectacular! I think my dad is going to help me find a project I can work on.

JI-LA

Good for you! I'll bet there are lots of projects getting started now. This is a good time to be a builder. How about you, Verek?

VEREK

(a little nervously)

This is probably going to be a surprise to everyone.

VEREK (CONT'D)

After Instructor's funeral, I talked to the high priest about becoming an acolyte. It was one of the paths I had a high aptitude for on our harmony exams. He said I could spend the summer at the temple to see if I like it.

JI-LA

That's an admirable calling, Verek.

The rest of the class is happy and supportive.

JI-LA (CONT'D)

And I know what you're planning, Benerika. You're studying with Jereve, aren't you?

BENERIKA

Yes, she's agreed to be my ethics guide.

JI-LA

That could take many years.

BENERIKA

I know. It's a very long and difficult path. I hope I can make it.

JI-LA
I am sure you will.

ATEN
I can read the next paragraph.

JI-LA
Please.

EXT. WALKING ALONG A LONG OAK ALLEE - DAY

Ji-La and Amant walk along a long a bustling corridor amidst the trees lined with the tents of many vendors, each displaying various crafts, food, jewelry, clothing, etc. They stop at a booth displaying small fragrance bottles. Ji-La picks a golden hued vial, unscrews its cap, and waves it under her nose.

JI-LA
Sandalwood! I love this scent.
What do you think?

She holds it out for him to smell.

AMANT
(jokingly)
Profound yet amusing!

She smiles, recaps it, puts it in her pocket and bows with folded hands to the stall keeper. He smiles and Ji-La and Amant continue strolling.

AMANT (CONT'D)
How was class today?

JI-LA
It was good. We talked a lot about what the students want to do with their lives after the term is over.

AMANT
Anything interesting?

JI-LA
Benerika wants to be an Ethicist, which is not surprising given she's the student member on the Council. Verek is thinking about joining the acolytes. First time I'd heard about it, but it fits him. Thorin wants to build something -- he just doesn't know what yet.

(MORE)

JI-LA (CONT'D)

Pikay, as you know, wants to become a gravimetric engineer. Aten is well on his way to becoming "the dance master of Aresine"

(they chuckle at this)

And Kaleen, she surprised me too. She wants to be a dream illuminator!

AMANT

Wow! Do you think she has the right personality for it?

JI-LA

At first, I didn't think so. But I'm starting to see it.

AMANT

What about you?

JI-LA

I don't know for sure yet. The Historical Society and the Education Committee are still figuring out how we teach history without our greatest asset. What about you?

AMANT

Aleks offered me a position with Survival Systems.

JI-LA

(surprised)

That means you would be here on Aresine!

AMANT

Yes. If I stay with the Star System Group, I would be off-world more often than not.

JI-LA

What did you tell him?

AMANT

Nothing yet. I wanted to talk to you first.

Ji-La takes his hand and smiles.

JI-LA
You must go where your heart leads
you, of course. But I hope it
leads you close to me.

Amant is both relieved and happy to hear this. He brings her hands up to his lips and kisses them gently.

INT. JI-LA'S ROOM - NIGHT

The light of the twin Aresinian moons shines through her bedroom window. Ji-La sleeps restlessly, writhing beneath the covers. Her hair is drenched in sweat.

JI-LA
(moaning softly in her
sleep)
Noooooooo!

Suddenly she snaps to attention and sits straight up gasping for air. After letting her racing heart calm down for a moment, she reaches over to her nightstand for a tablet and begins typing out the events of her dream.

INT. TRIANNE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ji-La sits on the floor at a coffee table in a comfortably modern living room. Light streams in through the windows. Trianne serves Ji-La a glass of lemonade and sits with her.

TRIANNE
So how are you doing, Ji-La? It
was hard losing Instructor Sanford,
wasn't it?

JI-LA
Yes. I miss him so much. But the
sadness has mostly passed.

TRIANNE
And how are things going with
Amant? You two seem pretty
serious.

JI-LA
I think I love him, Trianne. Does
that sound silly?

TRIANNE
Everything in life is silly if you
look at it that way. But, love is
also deeply meaningful.

JI-LA

But these feelings are so
primitive, so animalistic.

TRIANNE

(laughs)

Ji-La! The *feelings* of love are,
perhaps. But love itself is
giving. A life of love is a life
of giving.

JI-LA

What if Amant's love for me or my
love for him are only feelings and
not real love?

TRIANNE

Oh, that's easy.

Trianne goes to the kitchen and gets a small, wooden
container with an infinity symbol carved on the lid.

JI-LA

Serenity?

She nods and hands the container to Ji-La. Ji-La looks inside
and sees what look like two, little, flowers, one yellow and
one white.

JI-LA (CONT'D)

How do they work?

TRIANNE

He takes the yellow one. You take
the white one. Put them in your
mouths and let them dissolve.

JI-LA

That's it?

TRIANNE

Yep. It temporarily dials your lust
hormones way down so you can
honestly evaluate your
relationship.

JI-LA

Did you and Jon use this?

TRIANNE

No, we were young and dumb.

They laugh.

JI-LA
You weren't dumb, Trianne, you were
brave. I have worries.

TRIANNE
What else are you worried about?

JI-LA
I'm embarrassed to say.
(beat)
We haven't talked about children
yet.

Trianne takes Ji-La's hand across the table.

TRIANNE
(nods knowingly)
And, are you afraid he will want
children or that he will not want
children?

JI-LA
That he *will*. You're such a good
mother, Trianne. But I'm not sure
that I would be. It seems like so
much responsibility! And being
pregnant and giving birth...it all
seems so, so...

TRIANNE
(laughs)
So "primitive and animalistic"?

JI-LA
I mean, we can travel all the way
across the galaxy...why can't we
just push a button and--boom--
instant baby!

They both laugh uncontrollably for several moments until they
regain their composure.

JI-LA (CONT'D)
(smiles weakly)
Please know that I don't mean to
criticize you or anyone who is a
parent. You know how much I look
up to you, Trianne, and how much I
adore Maisie.

Ji-La bows sincerely with folded hands to Trianne.

TRIANNE
 (smiles)
We know.

 JI-LA
Was having Maisie painful?

Trianne holds up her thumb and forefinger about an inch apart

 TRIANNE
A bit. You could always go the
artificial womb route, if you are
nervous.

 JI-LA
I don't know....that might be right
for some, but I don't think it
would be right for me.

 TRIANNE
I know. It's like asking your
closest friend to visit and then
having them stay in the neighbor's
storage shed.

They laugh.

 JI-LA
Be honest Trianne, do you think I
would make a good mom?

 TRIANNE
Trust me, Ji-La. You would make a
great mom! Maisie loves her Auntie
Ji!

Ji-La smiles.

 TRIANNE (CONT'D)
But children or no children, if
you're serious about this
relationship, you have to talk to
Amant. The sooner, the better.

 JI-LA
 (nods)
I know. I will.

They sip in silence for a moment.

 JI-LA (CONT'D)
There's one other thing that is
worrying me...

TRIANNE

Ji-La! What else?

JI-LA

I've been having nightmares--well,
the same nightmare--three nights in
a row. I'm not sure what it means.

TRIANNE

It's always hardest to analyze our
own dreams. You should see a dream
illuminator.

JI-LA

Do you know anyone?

TRIANNE

Jon went to see someone on the
Wayfarer a long time ago that he
said was good. I believe her name
was Nina.

JI-LA

You're the best, Trianne!

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. ORIGAMI'S ORIGINAL LANDING SITE - DAY

Jon is piloting a one-person drilling rig around the landing site. His thermal imaging scanner shows a five-meter wide patch of dirt in red. A small shuttle floats just outside the patch piloted by a GEOLOGIST, a man in his early thirties. They talk via coms.

JON

I'm still picking up that heat signature. You're sure there's no volcanic activity?

GEOLOGIST

Positive. The geology team can't explain it. We're hoping you can get us some more data.

Jon guides the rig to the edge of the heat zone and begins drilling.

GEOLOGIST (CONT'D)

How about we go down a hundred meters to start.

The rig bores into the ground one five-meter segment of pipe at a time. Once a segment is almost at grade, the derrick platform automatically rotates and the next segment drops and locks into place. While the boring resumes, a mechanical arm picks a new piece of pipe from the rig's stockpile and loads up the empty slot.

Seven segments in, the rig safety alarm sounds in Jon's pod.

JON

What in the world? It looks like we hit a cavity.

GEOLOGIST

Can you get a sensor down there?

Jon shifts the rig's derrick platform away from the borehole so that a cable feed reel is directly above the hole. At the head of the cable is a sensor unit with lights and cameras.

SENSOR'S POV ON JON'S POD SCREEN

We see the inside of the pipe as the sensor makes its way down.

At about thirty five meters, the camera reveals a huge underground cavern. In the center of the cavern is a two meter high cylindrical object glowing orange.

GEOLOGIST

Looks like we found our heat source.

JON

And an even bigger mystery.

EXT. NINA'S FRONT PORCH - DAY

Ji-la approaches the somewhat dilapidated old house. Tin images of a sun and two moons adorn the space above the front door. Just as Ji-La is about to ring the bell, NINA, a woman in her mid to late 60's with streaks of purple in her gray hair, opens the door to let her in.

NINA

You must be Ji-la. I'm Nina.
Welcome.

INT. NINA'S DREAM READING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Nina guides Ji-La through a narrow hallway to a cluttered but cozy room with various psychedelic images on the walls and cushions. The room is lit by a couple of soft lamps and twinges of sunlight peaking in from around the dark curtains. They sit down in two large and well-worn chairs.

NINA

So you were saying you've had this exact same dream three times now?

JI-LA

Yes.

NINA

That seems significant. Alright,
let's go through it scene by scene.

EXT. DESOLATE PLAIN - DAY [JI-LA'S DREAM SEQUENCE]

Ji-La is standing on a vast, desolate plain. Although it is day, the full moon is out.

JI-LA (V.O.)

At first, I'm all alone. Then, my father appears and I've become a little girl again.

YOUNG JI-LA, five years old, is standing with her father, OKIO, a slightly stern looking man in his mid-thirties. He bends down to hand her a red, crepe-paper, toy dragon with an enormously long tail.

Young Ji-La takes the dragon and gently waves it around making it's long tail ripple through the air.

OKIO
Don't let anything happen to her,
Ji-La!

JI-LA (V.O.)
I try to wave it carefully but...

As she waves it, the dragon begins to grow larger and look less and less like a toy dragon and more and more like a real one. Soon she becomes frightened by it. She lets go of it and runs away with the floating dragon in pursuit.

YOUNG JI-LA
(screaming)
Father!

INT. JI-LA'S BATHROOM/BEDROOM

Ji-La is twenty five again and standing in front of a bathroom mirror. As she looks at herself in the mirror she notices some of the skin on her forehead is transforming into red dragon scales.

JI-LA
(horrified)
No! No, no, no, no, no!

Soon her whole body has become red scales and her face has taken on some of the appearance of the dragon. Amant appears behind her in the bedroom next to a crib. She turns to him.

JI-LA (CONT'D)
Amant!

AMANT
(smiling)
I won't be long.

Amant disappears and Ji-La looks in the crib where she sees an infant crying in distress. She picks it up and rocks it lovingly over her shoulder. As the child calms, suddenly, Ji-La is no longer a dragon and the child is gone. Ji-La starts sobbing. As she does, her tears drip on the ground and numerous flowers of all different colors spring up and blossom.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

BACK TO SCENE

Nina ponders the dream.

JI-LA

What do you think it all means?

NINA

Ultimately, you are the only one who can decode your dream. But I have a few ideas. What do you think it means?

JI-LA

I've had so many things on my mind lately. I'm in a new relationship, my role as a historian is uncertain, I recently lost a dear, dear mentor and friend.

NINA

My goodness! You have had a lot going on, haven't you.

Nina reaches over and holds Ji-La's hand for a moment of reassurance.

NINA (CONT'D)

In the first part of the dream, I believe you are given the frame of reference of the problem. The moon is your feminine nature which is bright and full, but the landscape around conveys a sense that you are feeling barren. I believe the next part, where you are a child with your father establishes when the energy of the dream got frozen inside you. Was the toy dragon an actual thing you remember having?

JI-LA

I don't think so.

NINA

Perhaps it is a symbol of your consciousness as a little girl--light, airy, playful.

(MORE)

NINA (CONT'D)
But then your father speaks and you
are suddenly confronted with a
monstrous reality that scares you
deeply.

Ji-LA
He said "take care of her". I
thought he meant the dragon.
But...

Suddenly Ji-La starts crying. Nina hands her a box of
tissues.

Ji-LA (CONT'D)
I don't know why I'm crying.

NINA
It's ok.

Ji-LA
(regaining her composure a
bit)
I think...maybe he meant my baby
sister.

NINA
Can you remember anything about an
event like this when you were that
age?

Ji-LA
I have one image that comes to
mind. It's of me looking into my
sister's crib and feeling very
scared.

NINA
OK. Start with that image and let
others come to your mind if they
want to. Follow the light with your
eyes.

Nina begins waving a simple wand with a small light and a
happy face on the end. She waves it back and forth in front
of Ji-La's face. Ji-La follows the light with her eyes while
keeping her head still. After a minute or so, Nina rests her
wand.

NINA (CONT'D)
Take a deep breath.

Ji-La takes a deep breath.

NINA (CONT'D)
 Only if you're comfortable
 sharing...what were you feeling?

JI-LA
 I felt so much energy moving...in
 here.
 (indicates the areas under
 her ribs)
 And I started seeing more images of
 what happened. I remembered seeing
 a very large closed door in front
 of me and feeling very alone.

NINA
 Ok, let that image come up to the
 surface again.

She repeats the process with the wand. More tears begin
 flowing. Her body is convulsing but her eyes remained locked
 on Nina's wand. Once the convulsions stop, Nina rests her
 wand.

NINA (CONT'D)
 Can you remember more about what
 happened now?

INT. JI-LA'S PARENT'S HOUSE - NIGHT [JI-LA'S MEMORY SEQUENCE]

Five year old Ji-La stands between her father and a crib. We
 see but do not hear him talking to her. Then he goes out the
 door and closes it behind him. She stands on her tiptoes
 watching her little sister in the crib. Nervously, she
 rotates her gaze from the baby, to a clock on a shelf, to the
 door and back again.

JI-LA (V.O.)
 I think my dad asked me to look
 after my baby sister and then left
 me all alone with her. I kept
 checking on her waiting for my dad
 to come back but it seemed like he
 was gone for so long. I was so
 worried that something would happen
 to her and it would be my fault.

NINA (V.O.)
 That must have been frightening for
 a young girl to be given such a
 huge responsibility. Do you think
 that's what the dragon symbolizes?
 Overwhelming responsibility?

END JI-LA'S MEMORY SEQUENCE

BACK TO SCENE

The idea strikes a chord with Ji-La. She nods.

NINA

So the next part of the dream
defines the problem you are facing.
You are looking in the mirror,
trying, perhaps, to see yourself
more clearly. But, the sense of
overwhelming fear has become all
you see.

JI-LA

And now I hear the words of my
father coming from Amant.

NINA

It sounds like you are worried
about another masculine figure in
your life leaving you or giving you
an overwhelming responsibility?

Ji-La cries a little more and wipes her tears away with a
tissue.

NINA (CONT'D)

How do you feel?

Ji-La takes a few deep breaths.

JI-LA

I feel so embarrassed. I've been
carrying this around since I was
five.

NINA

(with a kind smile)

We all carry hurts with us, Ji-La.
It's just part of being human.

JI-LA

What about the last part of the
dream?

NINA

This is the advice that the dream
is presenting to you. The crying
baby is the part of you that still
feels hurt.

(MORE)

NINA (CONT'D)

By allowing the hurt part of yourself to finally feel those feelings from back then, you will be relieved of the feelings of responsibility that you had.

Ji-LA

So much emotional energy for such a little me.

NINA

I believe the flowers are a sign of reassurance. Once you let go of this trauma, wonderful creativity will spring forth.

Ji-LA

That's so beautiful! Thank you, Nina. I feel so much lighter! Exhausted, but so much lighter! Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Ji-La bows with folded hands long and low to Nina who smiles and bows back. They both stand and Nina walks her to the door.

NINA

Go home and be sure to rest for a bit. I'll be here, if you need me.

INT. NIMBLE THIMBLE, LARGE MEETING ROOM OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY - EVENING

The meeting room is a large amphitheater filled with an excited crowd. The walls are adorned with large plaster reliefs, each representing an ancient Earth civilization. Among them are ones for Sumerian, Babylonian, Egyptian, Greek, Vedic, and Shang Dynasty cultures. Each is sculpted with the civilization's name, its system of writing, a pronunciation guide, important dates, and a few iconic images.

In the crowd sit Trianne and Ji-La.

Up on the stage, the historical society, Jon, and a few others sit behind a podium including RITTER, a tall, robust man in his mid-sixties. Instructor Shafer notes the time on his wrist device and walks to the podium.

SHAHER

Greetings everyone. Welcome members of the Historical Society and interested guests.

(MORE)

SHAHER (CONT'D)

As is fairly obvious by the size of the group today, this is not an ordinary meeting. Ritter is here from the Research Council to tell us about a fascinating discovery.

Shafer steps back and Ritter takes the podium.

RITTER

Members of the Historical Society and guests...engineering and geology, working together, detected an underground heat source that caused us to relocate Origami to its secondary landing site. Further investigation uncovered this....

Ritter pulls up a video stream on the screen at the back of the stage. It shows the cylindrical object glowing hot inside a large cavern.

RITTER (CONT'D)

Engineering is working to understand what the artifact is and how it is generating heat. We're asking if the historical society can determine its origins.

Ritter steps back to allow Shafer to approach the podium again.

SHAHER

Do we have any volunteers?

Every historian and student in the crowd immediately raises his or her hand. Among them is Ji-La. Shafer looks at Ritter, nods, and smiles.

SHAHER (CONT'D)

Let's all meet at the Society's main memory dais outside in the courtyard tomorrow morning just after dawn.

The crowd begins to disperse out the exits. Ji-La and Trianne stand and start moving towards the rear exit.

Ji-LA

This will be perfect! I can bring my class tomorrow.

She quickly taps out an invite to her class on her wrist device and sends it.

JI-LA (CONT'D)

Oh, they need to remember to bring
their visors!

She taps out and sends a second message.

EXT. NIMBLE THIMBLE, MEMORY DAIS COURTYARD - JUST AFTER DAWN

As the Aresinian sun rises and shines through the Nimble Thimble's clear dome, the historians gather at a memory dais much larger than the one the students are used to. Despite its size (ten meters long and three wide) it is surrounded by historians and history students three deep. At the end, Instructor Shafer and the other history society members sit patiently until the crowd has gathered.

SHAFER

Good morning everyone. Let us
begin.

There are twelve chalices/bells around the dais and one historian (including Ji-La) seated in front of each. Shafer begins with the supplication prayer. In between the couplets, all twelve of the ritual leaders ring their bells and then silence them by submerging them in the water of the dais.

RITUAL LEADERS

Mother/Father/Spirit
Of Life and Time and Space
(ring and submerge)
Bless us on this journey
Into your memory
(ring and submerge)
Help us to understand
What is and isn't true.
(ring and submerge)

The ritual leaders invert their bells, scoop up water from the dais pool, take a sip, and pass them to those behind them until everyone has sipped. The leftover water is poured into bronze bowls. Shafer, with his visor on, begins typing coordinates into a holographic keyboard. Everyone dons their visors. Shafer then begins the hand signals to initiate the session.

INT. CAVERN WHERE THE ARTIFACT WAS DISCOVERED - MOMENTS LATER
[AKASHIC RECORDS SEQUENCE]

The astral forms of the entire group vibrate into the cavern where the artifact is buried. The space is lit by the warm orange glow of the artifact.

A large digital readout of how many years backward they have travelled appears above them where everyone can see it. It says 144.0000000

JI-LA

(to her class)

We are starting at 144 years ago.
Akasha will not show us anything
more recent than that. So we know
it has been here at least that
long.

Shafer makes a counter-clockwise arc motion with his right hand and time begins speeding up in reverse. What had been drips of water along the cavern walls were now rivulets running up the walls. The light of the artifact never goes out. The number gets larger and larger until it hits 300. He makes another arc motion and their recession in time accelerates again. The display continues to climb. It passes 500, but the artifact remains constant.

A WHILE LATER

The display, now at 11,000 years, continues to climb.

JI-LA

(to her class)

This is why studying history is
called the "Great Sacrifice".
Because the price you pay for
studying the past is the time you
give up living in the present.

At 12,108 years in the past, the artifact disappears in a crash of light leaving the cavern lit only by the reddish glow of the historians' astral forms.

SHAFER

I think we've found something.
Let's take a closer look.

Shafer stops the reversal with a hand signal then plays it forward in real time.

They watch a violent cataclysm unfold as a plasma engine core melts through the side of the cavern and comes to rest on the cavern floor.

Shafer's astral form floats up to the ceiling. He motions for the others to follow before disappearing into the rock. The rest of the group follows until they reappear on the surface.

EXT. DIRECTLY ABOVE THE CAVERN - CONTINUOUS

Metallic wreckage is strewn across the lifeless Aresinian plain and wafts of smoke rise from the huge hole that the engine core melted through the surface. As they watch, the hole collapses in on itself, burying the core below.

SHAFER

I'm going to take us into reverse mode, everyone. Follow the pieces.

JI-LA

(to her class)

Stay close! I've never seen anything like this before.

With another hand arc, backwards this time, the entire scene begins moving in reverse. The collapsed hole de-collapses. The ground shakes and rumbles. The engine core rises out of the hole and flies into the air along with thousands fragments from all over the area. As they rise into the air, the fragments speed through the atmosphere glowing with heat. The higher they get, the more they converge.

The astral group follows.

At the point of convergence, high in the sky, a gigantic reverse explosion coalesces to reveal its origin -- a spaceship now flying away from the planet backwards at a tremendous speed.

The group continues to pursue the ship. Shafer motions for them to follow him inside as he passes through the hull.

INT. ALIEN SPACECRAFT - MOMENTS LATER

Inside their ship, the red shimmers of the historians' astral forms crowd into a large compartment and hover all around.

It appears to be a transport ship with two columns of sixteen seats running lengthwise through the fuselage and a pilot's seat at the front. The craft is empty.

Suddenly there is a blinding flash of light. Where there were empty seats, there are now thirty two humanoid passengers and one pilot watching Aresine recede out the front windows. They look human in size and form but their "skin" is fibrous like the roots of a plant and they radiate a slight, blue-gray luminescence. Their faces have no noses but they do have small oval mouths and three eyes. The third eyes, on their foreheads, blink along with the other two.

The group is mystified by what they have just seen.

Shafer freezes the session.

SHAHER

Let's look at that again going
forwards. Slowly this time.

The scene starts up again in slow-motion and the group watches the ship full of humanoids now move towards Aresine. They are all strapped in to their seats clutching their armrests in silence.

THORIN

(to Ji-La)

They look frightened.

Ji-La nods.

Then, a ripple in the fabric of space washes through the interior from back to front. Each humanoid it makes contact with folds up into its own microcosmic whirlpool of energy and is sucked out of existence towards the back of the ship. The ship, without a pilot to fly it, begins its fatal descent. Alarms blare loudly in the cockpit. As the ship hits Aresine's atmosphere, it explodes in a flash of white light.

Shafer freezes the session again. Everyone is speechless.

SHAHER

Let's go backwards again. Maybe we
can figure out where they came
from.

Again, Shafer motions and the session moves in reverse but very quickly this time. The ship reforms, it begins backing away from the planet, and the humanoids reappear.

The reverse flight continues until the group finds itself passing through the front of the ship like there is an invisible tether tying them to Aresine that has reached its limit. They find themselves outside, floating in space, as the ship disappears into the void.

Akasha appears before them in her gigantic, fiery form. She holds her hand straight out as if to say, "stop, go no further".

The group de-rezzes and enters the rush.

END AKASHIC RECORDS SEQUENCE

INT. RITTER'S MEETING ROOM ABOARD THE NIMBLE THIMBLE -
AFTERNOON

Ritter, the Historical Society, CHASKI, a woman in her early forties, and several engineers sit around a large conference table. The room is adorned with star system maps, collider schematics, and other research paraphernalia.

RITTER

Welcome everyone. Let's start with
Historical.

SHAFER

We learned that the artifact was
part of a spacecraft that crashed
on Aresine approximately twelve
thousand years ago. The ship was
carrying thirty three humanoids. We
were unable to determine where they
came from.

The room is silent for a moment.

RITTER

What about the artifact? Do we
know what it is yet?

ENGINEER 1

We're certain -- it's the
spacecraft's fusion engine core.

CHASKI

Still generating low levels of
heat...after all this time!

RITTER

Hmmm. That means they were most
likely from this star system. We
are going to have to do a very
thorough look around the
neighborhood. Have you found any
other signs of this civilization?

SHAFER

We're searching the Records
forwards and backwards up to the
144 year boundary. So far, no sign
of other landings. We'll keep
looking.

ENGINEER 1

Someone should probably brief
Defense.

RITTER

(nods)

I'll talk to Broka. Thanks
everyone. We live in exciting
times.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. JI-LA'S PARENT'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - EVENING

Ji-La and her father, Okio, now in his mid-fifties, stand around the kitchen island. She is shucking ears of corn and he is washing and chopping broccoli for dinner.

OKIO

How did your class go today?

Ji-LA

It was good. We spent another day looking through the Records for more signs of the visitors, but we couldn't find anything.

OKIO

Have any of the other historians found anything?

Ji-LA

Not yet, we'll be finished in a couple more days. It's hard trying to observe a whole planet for such a long period.

OKIO

I'm proud of you, Ji-La. You are part of something very important.

Ji-LA

Thanks, dad. I don't feel very important though. I'm still struggling with how I can be a historian without access to Earth's Akashic records.

Ji-La's father gives her a loving side hug.

OKIO

What about the "Myth" project you mentioned?

Ji-LA

The class has been working on it. I'm hoping it will ready by the end of the term. We'll go over it together and then submit it to the Culture Council. I'll be thrilled if ours gets picked.

Ji-La goes to the fridge and takes out a bundle of green onions. She washes it in the sink and then readies it on the cutting board.

JI-LA (CONT'D)

Dad, how good is your memory?

OKIO

Not as good as it was when I was your age. But still pretty good. Why?

JI-LA

I wonder if you remember an incident from a long, long time ago when I was about five and Neti was just a baby.

OKIO

Can you give me more details?

JI-LA

Do you remember leaving me alone with Neti? I think you had to go outside for some reason. Mom wasn't home.

OKIO

Hmmm...let me think.

He stops chopping in order to concentrate.

JI-LA

You said "Don't let anything happen to her, Ji-La" or something close to that.

OKIO

Yes! I think I do. Your mom was at work. I'm surprised you remember that. You were young. What about it?

JI-LA

Where did you go when you left us?

OKIO

Do you remember Koka?

Ji-La shakes her head.

She was one of our neighbors, an older woman, very kind but very frail.

(MORE)

OKIO (CONT'D)
I was looking out the kitchen window...

(points out the window)
...and I just happened to see her fall in her front yard. I ran across the street to help her up and helped her inside. I stayed and talked with her for a while. She was more lonely than hurt, really. I was probably gone about twenty minutes or so.

A few tears roll down Ji-La's cheeks. Okio sets down his knife and hugs her.

OKIO (CONT'D)
Why the tears, sweetheart?

Ji-LA
(hugging him tightly)
It must be the onions.

She smiles while wiping her eyes with a towel.

Ji-LA (CONT'D)
I love you, dad!

OKIO
(confused but content)
I love you too, Ji.

INT. Ji-LA'S ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Ji-La is laying on the floor with her arms propping up her head. Her wrist communicator is on the ground in front of her and she is talking to Trianne.

Ji-LA
What a couple of days!

TRIANNE
You have to tell me, Ji-La, what happened?

Ji-LA
Yesterday, we saw the aliens that left the artifact. They were humanoid but definitely not human!

TRIANNE
Wow!

JI-LA

Today, the entire Historical Society reviewed as much of Aresine's history as we could--but, nothing.

TRIANNE

I heard from Jon that the Research Council is going to scan the entire star system.

JI-LA

What if we find something!

TRIANNE

What if we get to meet them?

JI-LA

If we do, I hope they are friendly.

Trianne nods.

JI-LA (CONT'D)

You know what else happened today?

TRIANNE

What?

Ji-La holds up a red rose in front of the screen.

TRIANNE (CONT'D)

Amant?

JI-LA

Yes! He asked me out to dinner tomorrow. It's our three month anniversary.

TRIANNE

This sounds serious, Ji-La.

(smiles)

Are you going to try Serenity?

JI-LA

I haven't said anything to him about it yet. I'm worried it might make things awkward.

TRIANNE

Lots of people go on Serenity dates.

JI-LA
You haven't!

Trianne smiles knowingly.

JI-LA (CONT'D)
I thought you and Jon were matched
by algorithm?

TRIANNE
(coyly)
I had a life before Jon.

They laugh.

INT./EXT. UNDER A TEMPORARY ENERGY DOME OUTSIDE OF THE
ELEGANT ELEPHANT - NIGHT

Amant and Ji-La sit at a picnic table under the stars amidst the vastness of the rocky Aresinian landscape. Their shuttle sits nearby generating a clear energy field so that they can breathe without spacesuits. The lights of the Elegant Elephant shine gently in the distance reflecting in the otherwise clear dome.

On the table is a gingham tablecloth, several lit candles, a vase with roses, a tea set, and an old fashioned picnic basket.

JI-LA
Amant, this is lovely! What a
creative idea!

AMANT
You inspire me, Ji-La.

She reaches across the table and takes his hands in hers.

JI-LA
I have an idea for tonight, if you
are ok with it.

AMANT
What?

Ji-La sets the small container that Trianne gave her on the table and opens the lid.

AMANT (CONT'D)
Serenity?

JI-LA
Do you think it's appropriate?

Amant nods his head and leans across the table to kiss her. He takes the yellow flower his hand and she takes the white one.

AMANT
(holding up his flower)
To Truth!

JI-LA
(smiling)
To Truth!

They each put their flower on their tongue and let them dissolve.

AMANT
I have an idea for tonight, too, if
you're ok with it.

JI-LA
What?

AMANT
Fifteen questions?

JI-LA
(laughs)
That's perfect!

AMANT
Have you ever done it before?

Ji-La shakes her head shyly.

AMANT (CONT'D)
Me neither. It should be fun.

Amant takes out food containers from the picnic basket.

AMANT (CONT'D)
I wanted this evening to be an
authentic, old-fashioned, picnic.

JI-LA
How did you know I love picnics?

AMANT
Let's just say that Jon and Trianne
are very helpful people. And
look...
(pulls out another
container)
Pickles!

JI-LA
(with mock indignation)
If you can't trust your own
friends, who can you trust?

Ji-La takes a pickle and Amant laughs. They bow their heads
for just a moment in appreciation of their food, clink
pickles, and then begin eating.

JI-LA (CONT'D)
OK, what's the first question?

AMANT
(looking at his wrist
device)
Question number one..."what is your
favorite color?"

JI-LA
Hmmm, starting out with a hard one.
For a long time it was yellow, but
now, it's pink. How about you?

AMANT
For a long time it was blue, and
now...it's still blue.

JI-LA
(with mock disdain)
How many more questions do we have
to go?

AMANT
Question number two..."What color
are your date's eyes?"

JI-LA
(laughs looking into
Amant's eyes)
They are blue, maybe blue green.

AMANT
Correct! And your eyes are...

Amant looks into Ji-La's eyes for a long moment.
Embarrassed, Ji-La looks away but then looks back at him. He
pretends to be unsure and continues studying them. Finally...

AMANT (CONT'D)
I'm going to say brown.

JI-LA
You would be correct!

AMANT

Question number three..."Describe the ideal place where you would like to live someday."

Ji-LA

Hmmm. I like my house on the Elegant Elephant. I live in the same neighborhood as my mom and dad. And it's very close to Trianne and Jon too. But I also liked living in an apartment at school. I don't think it really matters that much to me as long as I can see my family and friends now and then. What about you?

AMANT

I like my apartment on the Nimble Thimble. But I've been thinking about maybe homesteading out in the wilds of Aresine.

Ji-LA

After the atmosphere is terraformed?

AMANT

Yes, or even under a dome.

Ji-LA

You would be one of the first.

AMANT

I'm quite the trendsetter, you know!

Ji-La laughs.

AMANT (CONT'D)

Question four..."Do you snore?"

Ji-La laughs hilariously.

Ji-LA

Yes, so loudly!

AMANT

(smiles)

Be serious.

Ji-LA

To the best of my knowledge, I do not snore.

AMANT

Thank goodness! Because...you know.

Ji-LA

I see. That's your dating deal breaker?

AMANT

(with mock seriousness)
Sleep is important.

Ji-LA

(with equal mock
seriousness)
I agree, completely. That's why I've been so concerned by the shape of your nose. You look like a snorer to me.

AMANT

I assure you, I have never **ever** heard myself snoring.

Ji-LA

Phew! That's a huge relief!

They both laugh.

AMANT

Question five and six go together.
Are you ready?

Ji-La nods.

AMANT (CONT'D)

Five..."If you were ever to get married, would you want a big ceremony or a small one?" And, six..." Is there any particular thing or things that would make your wedding special?"

Ji-LA

I guess I haven't thought about it that much. Probably something small? But I would want to invite all my friends and family. And my students too. So I suppose not all that small.

AMANT

What would make it special for you?

JI-LA

I went to a wedding once where there was a harpist. It was the most magical thing ever.

AMANT

Ah! Yes! I haven't thought about it too much either, but I think a medium size wedding with a harpist sounds good.

JI-LA

You have to have your own special thing!

AMANT

Hmmm. That's fair.

(thinks for a moment)

One of my favorite things at weddings is watching little kids eat cake! I've never seen a purer form of joy! So, I would want a big cake.

(with a grin)

Preferably something really messy.

Ji-La laughs. Amant reads the next question to himself.

AMANT (CONT'D)

Oh, this is a big one. Are you ready?

JI-LA

Question seven. Ready!

AMANT

"How many children, if any, would it take for you to feel fulfilled?"

JI-LA

Hmmm. You go first.

AMANT

I wouldn't say that I need to have children to feel fulfilled. But, now that we're on Aresine and the Fleet has lifted all its population regulations...how much fun it would be to have three, or even four?

JI-LA

Three or four! Wow! Girls or boys?

AMANT

Either. Both. That's question eight, by the way.

Ji-LA

I'll be honest with you. I never thought I would want to have children. I think it's possible that I was a renunciant in a past life. But lately, I find myself being more open to the possibility.

AMANT

If you did, would you want girls or boys?

Ji-LA

Hmmm. I would want to be surprised.

AMANT

Good answer! Ok, look at us! We're already on question nine. You want to read now?

Ji-LA

Sure.

He takes off his wrist device and sets it in front of Ji-La, then takes a big bite of his sandwich.

Ji-LA (CONT'D)

Question nine..."Who would you consider your greatest mentor and why?" You already know that about me. What about you?

AMANT

(finishes chewing)

Definitely my father. He got me started on the path to becoming a gravimetric engineer. When I was only five, he brought a small field generator home from work and set it up in the living room. I still remember floating around in zero g's and just having a ball.

Ji-LA

That's really cute! Question ten..."Do you feel that the universe is primarily conscious and loving, or unconscious and indifferent?"

AMANT

Hmmm...that's a pretty deep one.
Can I pass?

Ji-LA

Absolutely not! Twelve is part of it too. "Would it be important to you that your children adopt the same view as you?"

AMANT

I've heard strong arguments from both perspectives, but I'm not completely convinced either way. Maybe the universe is both? I don't know. But, regardless of what I think, I would want my kids to find their own answers.

Ji-LA

All my studies of the past have shown me how unconscious and indifferent humanity can be. We are capable of so much cruelty and suffering. But there is also beauty and wonder in people. My overall feeling is that the universe is ultimately conscious and loving. But, I agree with you. I would want my kids to find their own answers.

AMANT

Alright, we're up to thirteen.
Maybe it's time for a dessert break?

Amant reaches into the basket and retrieves a box which he places on the table in front of them. He motions for Ji-La to open it. Inside are four chocolate covered strawberries.

Ji-LA

Amant! What a gorgeous surprise!
I haven't had chocolate covered strawberries since I was a child.
Where did you find them?

AMANT

The strawberries came from my mom's garden. And she helped me dip them.

Ji-LA

Please tell her how much I appreciate these.

They both enjoy the strawberries.

JI-LA (CONT'D)
Can you tell if it's working?

AMANT
The strawberries or the Serenity?

Ji-La laughs.

JI-LA
The Serenity!

AMANT
Since the very first day we met,
when I'm with you, I have had the
overwhelming desire to hold you, to
kiss you. But right now, I feel
content to be here with you and
just enjoy our conversation.

JI-LA
That's how I feel too.

AMANT
Question thirteen?

JI-LA
"Have you ever been hurt in love"?

AMANT
I've been on dates before that
didn't go so well. Some of them
were disappointing, some were
awkward. I can't really say that
I've been "hurt", though. How about
you? Have you been hurt before?

JI-LA
(seriously)
Yes, very deeply.

AMANT
Who hurt you?

JI-LA
When I was seven years old, I had
the biggest crush on a boy at my
school.

Amant laughs.

JI-LA (CONT'D)

(smiles)

Don't laugh! I really loved him!

AMANT

(smiles)

I'm sorry! What happened?

JI-LA

One day I brought my favorite stuffed toy to school. He was on the playground swinging on the monkey bars. I tried to give it to him so he would know how I felt. But he said he didn't want it. After I got home that day I cried in my room for a long time.

AMANT

Little boys are dumb.

JI-LA

Little girls too, I'm afraid.

They laugh.

JI-LA (CONT'D)

Question fourteen..."What is your greatest goal in life?"

AMANT

Wow! That's another big one.

(thinks for a moment)

Serving the fleet as a gravimetric engineer. That's really it.

JI-LA

So, you've already accomplished your life's goal?

AMANT

Good point! My goal, then, is to retire honorably after serving the Fleet as a gravimetric engineer for many, many, years.

JI-LA

Better. My goal was always to become a historian and teach. But, now, I admit, I'm feeling a bit lost. Without Akasha, I don't feel as valuable anymore.

AMANT

What about the discovery of the artifact?

Ji-LA

Yes, that has helped. But after we've solved the mystery and after the term is over?

AMANT

You are valuable to me Ji-La whether you teach or not, whether you are a historian or not.

Ji-La smiles and holds Amant's hands.

Ji-LA

Last question..."Do you believe in marriage?"

AMANT

What does that mean? Do I believe that getting married is better than not getting married? That depends on the people.

Ji-LA

I think it's more..."Do you believe in a formal, exclusive, committed relationship for yourself"?

AMANT

(jokingly)

Well, I've always considered myself to be somewhat of a "player"...

Ji-La laughs.

AMANT (CONT'D)

...but yes, I very much believe in marriage for myself. What about you, Ji-La?

Ji-LA

I know some people think of relationships as casual things. But, I couldn't be in a relationship unless I was in it a thousand percent.

AMANT

So you are a renunciant and a romantic!

JI-LA
Yes! You have been warned!

They laugh.

AMANT
I think the Serenity is wearing
off.

JI-LA
Why do you say that?

AMANT
Because I feel like holding you,
right now.

Ji-La gets up and sits with Amant on the other side of the table. He puts his arm around her and they stare out at the nighttime landscape under the stars and Aresine's two moons.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

EXT. IN ORBIT AROUND ZAIUR

The defense pod enters orbit around Zaiur, a world completely covered in blue-green swirling clouds.

The defense pod, unlike the biome pods, has no dome. It is a massive, gray, floating fortress adorned with sensor dishes and variety of armaments. The interior cavity of the pod glows with the bluish light of an enormous fusion power source.

INT. DEFENSE POD SHUTTLE BAY

The bay is a large flight deck with a multitude of strikers and fighter drones ready for launching. Outside the clear shield wall is a perfect view of the planet below. Broka and several other advisors, experts, and military personnel are all gathered in front of three six-person shuttles with their loading ramps down. Ritter, Shafer, Chaski, Trianne, Jon, along with their teams are all suited up, holding their helmets in their hands. Broka stands before the clear shield wall looking out at the planet before turning to address the group.

BROKA

There it is everyone, Zaiur.
Ritter, why don't you bring us up
to speed.

RITTER

Thanks to the Historical Society,
we know that the ship that crashed
on Aresine wasn't capable of
interstellar travel. And since
Zaiur is the only other planet in
the system's habitability zone,
we're confident it must have come
from here. Our probes, however, say
Zaiur's atmosphere is incapable of
supporting life.

BROKA

So all three teams, research,
biology, engineering...your mission
today will be exploring the surface
to find out what we're missing.
Good luck, everyone.

The teams make their way toward three waiting shuttles and begin boarding. Towards the back of the group, Jon and Trianne are walking, carrying their helmets, and holding hands. They keep holding hands as long as they can until Jon veers off towards the engineering team shuttle with the other engineers and Trianne heads off with Chaski and the biology team towards the biology team shuttle. They wiggle-wave their fingers affectionately at each other to say goodbye.

EXT. ZAIUR, SHUTTLE LANDING AREA - HOURS LATER

The biology team shuttle explores the surface fighting constant gale force winds blowing heavy dust. Visibility is minimal. At what looks like a dry riverbed, the shuttle deploys an analyzer drone that moves around and prods the soil with a pole mounted sensor.

INT. BIOLOGY SHUTTLE

Chaski pilots the shuttle and Trianne sits beside her monitoring a display. The other crew members sit behind them monitoring instruments of their own.

BIO CREW MEMBER 1
Soil and atmosphere still reading
toxic. No water, no oxygen.

TRIANNE
(to Chaski)
How could life have evolved here --
let alone intelligent life?

RITTER (V.O.)
Chaski, we're a couple of
kilometers north of you. I think
we've found something.

CHASKI
On our way.

The shuttle collects the analyzer and flies off.

EXT. SINKHOLE MOUTH - A FEW MINUTES LATER

The biology shuttle meets the research shuttle at the mouth of a large sinkhole.

INT. BIOLOGY SHUTTLE

Chaski and the team look out the front shuttle windows.

CHASKI
It's a sinkhole...so what?

RITTER (V.O.)
Look around the opening.

Chaski maneuvers her shuttle for a better view. They are floating above a huge, flat, megalithic ring around the sinkhole's rim, worn away by millennia of dust storms.

CHASKI
Wow! I see what you mean.
Definitely not natural.

TRIANNE
(looking in the sinkhole)
There must be something down there.

RITTER (V.O.)
Engineering is on the way.

Just then the engineering shuttle flies over them with full lights on and begins dropping down into the sinkhole.

JON (V.O.)
It's the entry to a tunnel system.
Get ready for a seismic pulse test everyone.

EXT. SINKHOLE MOUTH

Before dropping in too far, the engineering shuttle sets off three rapid pulses that shake the area.

INT. ENGINEERING SHUTTLE

Jon is focused on the screen to his left.

COMPUTER VOICE
Vibrational test complete. The
tunnel structure is stable.

JON
(on coms)
We look good, everyone. Let's see
what's down here.

INT. BIOLOGY SHUTTLE AS IT MOVES THROUGH THE TUNNEL SYSTEM -
A FEW MINUTES LATER

Chaski and Trianne watch out the shuttle windows as they move further underground. They can see the lights of the research and engineering shuttles up ahead as they pass by numerous passageways branching off the main corridor of the maze-like, system.

TRIANNE

Hard to tell if this is natural or
not.

CHASKI

I'm guessing not.

JON (V.O.)

One hundred and fifty meters
down...releasing mapping drones.

EXT. TUNNEL SYSTEM - CONTINUOUS

Two floating drones detach from the engineering shuttle each emitting green laser measurement beams that rotate around the irregular tunnel walls. One proceeds ahead while the other makes its way past the other two shuttles back towards the surface.

The shuttles continue their voyage led by engineering. Up ahead they see a dim glow from around a curve. They follow it until it opens up into a cavern bathed in pale blue light and carpeted with strange, blue-gray, plants. They proceed through the cavern slowly.

INT. BIOLOGY SHUTTLE

Trianne and Chaski gaze in awe at the flora they are seeing.

CHASKI

It's an entire ecosystem! My dear
Zaiur, you just got a lot more
interesting.

TRIANNE

(reading monitor)

The atmosphere down here is almost
breathable. And there's moisture.

CHASKI

(via coms)

Hold up everyone. Let's get some
samples.

EXT. BIOLOGY SHUTTLE

The shuttle approaches the tunnel wall and the service arm extends to with a scraper and a sample collection container. It carefully removes a plant specimen and secures it in the container.

JON (V.O.)

Up ahead! Are you seeing this?

EXT. ENGINEERING SHUTTLE

The engineering shuttle has reached the threshold of a much larger chamber. Inside, lit up by the same bioluminescent flora, is an abandoned city of tower-like structures partially in ruins.

JON (V.O.)

I think we found the home of our
humanoids.

The biology shuttle retracts the service arm and joins engineering and research farther down the tunnel to have a look.

CHASKI (V.O.)

Oh wow! There is no doubt. That
is a city.

RITTER (V.O.)

Broka is telling us to come back.
He wants to let the drones scout
out the system first, just in case
there's anyone still living down
here.

The shuttles turn around and head for the surface. As they exit, a line of a hundred mapping drones whoosh past them and dive into the underground world below.

INT. TRIANNE AND JON'S LIVING ROOM - THREE DAYS LATER,
EVENING

Trianne is preparing dinner in the kitchen while Jon, Amant and Ji-La relax in the living room. The décor is clean and simple with splashes of orange, gray, and tan scattered throughout. Trianne brings a tea tray and sets it down on the low table in front of them. She fills the four elegant teacups for each of them and retreats to the kitchen. A moment later she returns with a basket of bread, olive oil, and plates and sits down.

TRIANNE

We're so glad you could come over tonight! There's so much to talk about.

JI-LA

Glad to be here, Trianne.

AMANT

Yes, thank you for inviting us.

JI-LA

So, what do you two think about the tunnel system on Zaiur?

JON

It's unbelievable! It's been three days and the drones aren't even done mapping half it! If you add up all the space down there...imagine an underground continent the size of Australia!

TRIANNE

And it's all lit up by bioluminescent bacteria and plants.

JI-LA

So you think it's possible an entire advanced civilization evolved in these tunnels?

TRIANNE

Absolutely! There is plenty of warmth coming from the planet's core to support the ecosystem. It's not like Earth at all. There are no tectonic plates...no seismic instability.

JON

It's giving the geology team the thrill of their lives to try and figure out how all this formed.

AMANT

But no idea where the former occupants are?

JON

Still a complete mystery. I don't know if you've heard...the Culture Council is forming an ad hoc archaeology team to try and figure it out.

AMANT

An archaeology team...I guess that's one thing the Fleet didn't plan for.

They laugh.

TRIANNE

I volunteered, by the way.

Ji-LA

Do you know who else will be on it?

TRIANNE

So far there are several geologists, several biologists, a few artists, a star system engineer...you should volunteer too, Ji-La.

Ji-LA

(looks at Amant)

Hmmm, I'm not sure how much I could contribute.

AMANT

(to Ji-La)

I'm sure part of the archaeology team's mission will be figuring out how to access Zaiur's records.

Ji-LA

That's true....

The oven dings in the kitchen. Trianne gets up to check on it.

TRIANNE

(to Ji-La)

Can you help?

Ji-La immediately puts down her teacup and goes with Trianne.

KITCHEN/DINING AREA - CONTINUOUS

Trianne takes a plant roast out of the oven and checks it with a thermometer. She puts it back in and resets the time for two more minutes.

TRIANNE

So, tell me what happened on your date with Amant?

JI-LA

You know how worried I was that he wouldn't be ok with trying Serenity. But, it was just the opposite. And everything ended up being really fun.

TRIANNE

That's so good to hear. Any highlights?

JI-LA

Well, you know I've only recently gotten more comfortable with the idea of kids...he said he thinks **three or four** would be fun!

TRIANNE

And you didn't dump him right then and there?

They laugh.

JI-LA

No...I can't believe how much in love with him I am. He's cute and funny and I always feel so at ease with him.

Trianne motions toward the table.

They move into the dining area, a cozy space with a table just right for four. They start setting the places.

TRIANNE

Do you think Amant seems a little anxious tonight?

JI-LA

Does he? He seemed happy walking over.

Just then the oven dings again.

LIVING ROOM

Amant and Jon are talking. Maisie wanders in a little groggy from a nap. Jon lifts her onto his lap. He bounces her gently while they talk.

AMANT

So Trianne usually makes dinner?

JON

Hah! She wanted to make dinner tonight, but don't let that fool you. I'm the one that loves to cook.

AMANT

(chuckles)

Is it hard dividing up the chores? With both of you still so active in your service and all?

JON

The only thing that's been hard at times has been this little one.

(referring to Maisie)

We tried taking her to work with us but she was so bored. Now she goes to day care and gets to play with her friends all day!

(to Maisie)

Right Maisie?

Maisie nods but is a little shy around Amant.

AMANT

Is it hard being a dad? Everyone says you get no sleep for the first two years.

JON

True, but it's gotten a lot easier. The hardest part is the worrying. There's a part of my mind that is always wondering if she is ok. Thankfully, kids are pretty resilient. And, she's so adorable! Every night when we put her to bed, we can't believe how lucky we are.

Jon hugs Maisie tightly and smothers her with kisses while she giggles.

TRIANNE
(from the dining room)
Come on, guys. Dinner's ready.

EXT. ELEGANT ELEPHANT PATHWAY - A COUPLE HOURS LATER - NIGHT

Ji-La and Amant walk arm in arm through a quiet neighborhood on a well-lit pathway. There are small houses tucked away amidst the trees and bushes as they stroll.

AMANT
It's still early. Do you want to call it a night? Or can I take you someplace special first?

JI-LA
(smiles)
Someplace special.

They take a path off to the side.

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - CONTINUOUS

Ji-La and Amant walk through an open archway in the fence that surrounds a playground full of outdoor play equipment.

JI-LA
This is my old elementary school.

They wander across the playground to the monkey bars.

JI-LA (CONT'D)
And this is where I got my little seven year old heart broken.

Amant places a small container on the ground and unscrews the lid. Tiny firefly bots fly up into the air around them giving the whole area a soft warm glow.

AMANT
I thought this would be the perfect place to give you something.

He reaches into his coat pocket and holds out a small stuffed squirrel.

AMANT (CONT'D)
I wanted to give you this so you would know how I feel about you.

Ji-La takes the squirrel and looks at it lovingly and then holds it close to her heart.

JI-LA

Amant! This is the sweetest thing
anyone has ever done for me.

She cups her heart to him.

AMANT

And...I also wanted to give you
this.

He holds out a jewel box.

AMANT (CONT'D)

I know we haven't known each other
that long, but I'm absolutely sure
about how much I love you, Ji-La.

He opens the box revealing a gold engagement ring inside.

AMANT (CONT'D)

Will you share the future with me?
Will you marry me?

She takes a moment to look at the ring and then look into his
eyes.

JI-LA

I never thought I would love anyone
the way I love you, Amant. Yes,
with great joy I will marry you.

He takes the ring and reverently places it on her right ring
finger.

Ji-La holds her ring up to look at what is inscribed on it
but has difficulty in the soft light.

AMANT

On one side, it's the feather of
Maat, the ancient Egyptian goddess
of Truth, and, on the other...

JI-LA

Mnemosyne! The Greek goddess of
Memory!

AMANT

(nods)

I wanted to honor your love of
history.

JI-LA

It's perfect!

They kiss gently beneath the glow of a thousand tiny firefly bots.

EXT. CAMPUS PARK MEMORY DAIS - DAY - LATER THAT WEEK

Ji-La and her class are seated around the memory dais.

JI-LA

So what did you think about the artifact search? That was a good look at what it's like being a historian.

KALEEN

It was so boring!

Ji-La laughs.

ATEN

Yes, except the part where we got to see--actual aliens!

JI-LA

I agree, that part was very exciting.

PIKAY

Have you ever seen aliens before, Instructor? In the Akashic Records, I mean.

JI-LA

Yes. Ancient Earth was visited by at least two different intelligent species. I'm sorry that we didn't get a chance to see them together.

THORIN

I wonder if we'll ever get to meet Zaiurnians in real life.

VEREK

Wouldn't that be amazing! Especially if we could communicate with them.

JI-LA

What would you ask them about if you had the chance?

VEREK

I'd want to know everything about them.

(MORE)

VEREK (CONT'D)
Mostly, though, what it's like
living their entire lives
underground.

BENERIKA
I'd ask them what it's like having
three eyes!
(beat)
What would you ask, Instructor?

JI-LA
Hmmm...I would ask why they tried
to come to Aresine.

KALEEN
I heard that some people think they
were coming to "seed" the planet.

JI-LA
But why? What would've motivated
them to seed the planet if that's
really why they came?

ATEN
Vanity?

PIKAY
Loneliness?

THORIN
Curiosity?

VEREK
Maybe they just got tired of living
underground.

BENERIKA
Or, maybe they were planning to
colonize Aresine.

JI-LA
I hope the newly formed Archaeology
Group can find answers. Especially
to the question, what happened to
them?

Everyone nods.

JI-LA (CONT'D)
How far have you gotten on the Myth
Project?

KALEEN
We're done!

JI-LA

Great! Who wants to read it?

THORIN

Pikay has it memorized.

JI-LA

(sensing consensus)

Is that ok with you Pikay?

Pikay nods enthusiastically.

PIKAY

Aten, why don't you help?

Pikay and Aten stand up. While Pikay recites the myth, Aten, very focused this time, illustrates it with dance/mime.

PIKAY (CONT'D)

There once was a family -- Father Sol, Mother Space, and eight children. Their third child was a beautiful daughter named Terra. Terra was neither hot like her father, nor cold like her mother, she was just right. Her body was blue and brown and she wore white veils that danced around her. Her long hair was very strong because no single hair grew on its own. They were all twisted together in pairs, and they grew in every color imaginable.

One day she noticed that there were plants growing in her hair. Then there were bugs crawling in her hair. Then there were fish swimming in her hair. Then there were amphibians and reptiles and birds and mammals and people all living in her hair. And she was happy that so many creatures lived with her.

Because she was very kind and very wise, she said "I must share my joy with the universe". So she cut off 108 locks of her hair and threw them into the sky. And Mother Space carried them away for a thousand years, far from Father Sol and Terra's brothers and sisters.

(MORE)

PIKAY (CONT'D)

One day they were found by a little girl named Aresine who was the second daughter of a family that had seven children. Aresine was sad because she had only one tiny strand of hair. She wanted to be as beautiful as Terra, so she planted the hair her mother brought her into her scalp and let it grow together with her own. All her hair grew and grew and Aresine was very happy now with her hair of all the beautiful living things.

Ji-La and the students clap enthusiastically.

THORIN

Bravo Pikay and Aten!

VEREK

Yes! Well done!

BENERIKA

(to Ji-La)

Do you think our myth will be chosen?

JI-LA

I hope so! I absolutely loved it!
This was a perfect way to close out the term.

They all cups their hearts to each other then stand up and hug Ji-La one by one. Kaleen is the last to hug her.

KALEEN

Instructor, I like your ring!

Ji-La holds up her right hand to show her.

JI-LA

Thank you, Kaleen.

KALEEN

Don't forget about our invitations!

JI-LA

I won't. A promise is a promise!

END OF EPISODE