

THE STAR PEOPLE CHRONICLES

– *ATLANTIS RISING*

Screenplay By

Larry M Shultz



THE STAR PEOPLE CHRONICLES - ATLANTIS RISING

FADE IN:

INT. TALK SHOW STAGE - "SO MANY QUESTIONS" - DAY - (NEW ZEALAND)

Studio lights. On the big screen, a slide-show loops slow behind them: ziggurats, the Antikythera mechanism, the Nazca lines, a grainy Navy UAP clip. HOST BRADY SIMMS (50s, silver fox) faces DR. JACK WHITTIER (32, restless hands, honest face).

At his throat, on a worn steel chain tucked half under his collar: a heavy old signet ring. His thumb works the stone through the shirt.

SIMMS

(to camera)

Welcome back to So Many Questions. My next guest is either the most important archaeologist of the century... or the most educated man ever to fall for his own software. Dr. Jack Whittier - and the theory that someone got here before us.

Applause. Jack half-rises, sits, knocks the mic. The audience laughs with him. He grins.

SIMMS (CONT'D)

Ancient astronauts. Oldest carnival act in the book. Why should one serious person here believe you?

JACK

They shouldn't. Belief's your business, Brady - I'm... look, I deal in evidence. That's all I've got.

(to audience)

My whole radical theory: our ancestors weren't liars and weren't stupid. When fifty cultures that never met carve the same story - teachers from the sky who knew medicine and metal and math -

ON THE STUDIO SCREEN, his slides cut fast at a prosecutor's pace: Nazca lines you can only read from the air, disk-borne figures on Sumerian seals, a Dogon carving of a star no naked eye can see.

JACK (CONT'D)

- maybe they were doing exactly what we do.

SIMMS

Which is?

JACK

Writing down the news.

INT. TALK SHOW - AUDIENCE - CONTINUOUS

Mid-rows, aisle seat: NERINA. Civilian clothes, tourist lanyard. On her phone, disguised as a notes app: SUBJECT ASSESSMENT - WHITTIER, J. She types with her thumb: CHARISMATIC. AUDIENCE RECEPTIVE. THREAT TO CONCEALMENT: MODERATE.

SIMMS (O.S.)

Your critics say you're monetizing grief, Jack. That this whole crusade is about your father.

On Nerina - she stops typing. Her thumb drifts to the locket at her throat and holds there. She makes herself resume.

INT. TALK SHOW STAGE - CONTINUOUS

The studio goes quiet. Jack doesn't flinch.

JACK

My father flew F-15 Eagles. In 1989 he was scrambled out of Kadena to intercept an object doing maneuvers that - I'll quote the incident report - "exceed the structural tolerance of any known aircraft." It flew a circle around him like he was standing still. Then his instruments died. All of them. At night. Over water.

JACK (CONT'D)

The Air Force called it pilot error. Put it in his file in ink - and it killed him by inches over twenty years. I was six. I learned to read on that incident report, Brady. And I've spent my whole life trying to make somebody change one word of it.

In the audience, Nerina's thumb hovers over her report. Then types: ASSESSMENT CONTINUES.

SIMMS

Then let's test it. Live. My producers - forgive me, Jack - secured a privately held tablet, museum-authenticated, cleared and insured for this broadcast.

A PRODUCTION ASSISTANT wheels out a case. Under glass: a SUMERIAN CLAY TABLET, dense with cuneiform. The audience leans in.

SIMMS (CONT'D)

Six thousand years old — sealed provenance, dated by the Museum's lab, chosen by our producers. He has never seen it. Untranslated: their scholars have a partial guess and a century of arguments. Your app gets one take, right now, in front of God and syndication.

Jack raises the phone. SCANS. The progress wheel turns. No one moves. Nerina least of all.

APP VOICE

Translation confidence: ninety-six percent. Text follows. "Inventory of healing plants given by the teachers: twenty-five species, their soils and their seasons—"

The screen populates: plant glyphs matched to botanical illustrations.

APP VOICE (CONT'D)

"—willow of the river for fever. The bitter bark of the high mountains across the western sea, for the shaking sickness—"

JACK

That's cinchona, Brady. Quinine — it treats malaria. Native to the Andes. South America.

SIMMS

So your machine knows botany. The Museum guessed "medical text" too, so—

JACK

This tablet was buried in Iraq thousands of years before any contact between Mesopotamia and the Andes. So somebody tell me — who told the Sumerians what grows in Peru?

No one moves. Then the audience erupts — applause, shouts, a hundred phones recording. Simms laughs, shaking his head.

SIMMS

All right. You've made a believer out of my producer, and she's an atheist. So what keeps you up at night?

JACK

Gold. A hundred ancient cultures, oceans apart, all broke themselves digging for the same soft metal – deeper and earlier than they had any right to. Like somebody placed an order.

SIMMS

And what can't you explain?

JACK

One string of symbols. Six continents – always older than the languages around it. My software runs it a hundred ways and it always comes out the same harmless little prayer: six words about things coming around again.

(grins)

Twenty years in, and a dead man's lullaby is the one thing on Earth I can't read. Keeps me humble.

Simms lets the laughter die.

SIMMS

Last one. One clever tablet isn't a fleet of gods, Jack. It's a man who's spent twenty years needing the universe to admit it wronged his father. Your critics say you're not chasing evidence – you're chasing an apology. Tell them they're wrong.

Jack's thumb stops on the ring.

JACK

I'm not going to tell them they're wrong. This is about my father. A hundred cultures, one story – and a hole in the middle the exact shape of him.

JACK (CONT'D)

Fill that hole and I rewrite the books. I'm one fossil away, Brady. I always have been.

SIMMS

(dry, to camera)

And there's the man himself, folks – always one fossil away.

Warm laughter. Jack grins.

INT. TALK SHOW - AUDIENCE - CONTINUOUS

Nerina is on her feet with the rest. Cover. On her phone, her thumb hovers... then types: THREAT TO CONCEALMENT: SEVERE. Hovers again. Adds: HE ISN'T LYING ABOUT ANY OF IT. Deletes that last line. Stares at where it was.

The screen answers on its own, a new field opening beneath her report, lit red: CLOSE EXPOSURE AUTHORITY - PENDING COMMAND REVIEW. She looks at it a long moment.

SIMMS (O.S.)
Dr. Jack Whittier, everybody! After the break - a woman who says they didn't just visit. They never left.

INT. TALK SHOW - BACKSTAGE CORRIDOR - MINUTES LATER

Jack, adrenaline still fizzing, phone already buzzing. Caller ID: SAMANTHA GREER. He answers walking.

JACK
Sam, you will not believe the-

SAMANTHA (V.O.)
Jack. Shut up and listen. The lidar grid at Waitaki. It's not a settlement.

JACK
Then what is it?

SAMANTHA (V.O.)
It's a cemetery. Thirty graves, twenty thousand years old. And Jack - the skeletons are wrong. Get here before I start doubting my own eyes.

Jack stops walking.

JACK
Wrong how, Sam?

SAMANTHA (V.O.)
Wrong like the myths weren't myths. How fast can you fly?

EXT. WAITAKI VALLEY - SOUTH ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND - DUSK

Golden hills folding to a braided river. On one terraced slope: the DIG - string grids, weathered tents, a generator, a Land Rover, tiny against the landscape. A battered Jeep slews up the track in a cone of dust. Jack is out before it stops, jogging up the slope. SAMANTHA GREER (40s, field tan) meets him with a hug that's half headlock.

SAMANTHA

You came straight off a live broadcast with no sleep, you maniac.

JACK

Tailwind. Where is it? Sam, where—

JONATHAN GREER (O.S.)

Whittier! You bring my journals?

JONATHAN GREER (40s, Samantha's husband) climbs out of the pit, sediment to the elbows. Behind them, by the finds table, DR. LIAM O'DONNELL (60s, site director, tweed in defiance of fieldwork) watches Jack's arrival and does not wave.

A small comet of energy: VERA GREER (10, gap-toothed, a toy excavation brush in her belt like a six-gun) slams into Jack at full speed.

VERA

UNCLE JACK. I found it. Tell them I found it, they keep saying "the survey found it," the survey is a ROBOT, robots don't FIND things, they just LOOK—

JACK

Whoa whoa whoa. Found WHAT, Trouble?

VERA

The first bone. I was brushing where Mum said not to, and there was a toe. Except.

VERA (CONT'D)

It's a HOOF.

Jack looks over her head at Samantha. Samantha doesn't smile. She just nods, once.

O'DONNELL

Dr. Whittier. Before you look in that pit, understand my position. I have a reputation, a department, and a pension, and I have spent forty years keeping all three away from... your sort of headline.

JACK

And yet you called me, Liam.

O'DONNELL

And yet I called you. Because either I've lost my mind, or the entire discipline has to start over. I'd prefer the first one.

EXT. THE DIG - MAIN PIT - DUSK (CONTINUOUS)

They walk Jack to the edge. Work lamps click on: A SKELETON, twenty thousand years in the ground. Four legs. The long ribcage of a HORSE. Jack's eye runs the spine - and stops. Mid-spine, the horse becomes a human torso. Human arms, folded. A HUMAN SKULL, tilted as if asleep. One articulated skeleton. A CENTAUR.

O'DONNELL
(stepping into his path)
Don't touch it, Whittier. No
upload, no press, no sample leaves
this slope until I can defend every
centimeter of it in daylight.

JACK
Liam-

O'DONNELL
You wanted the world to believe
your father. Then give it evidence
it can't laugh off.

A beat. Jack gently moves O'Donnell's arm aside and climbs into the pit. He hovers his hand over the fused vertebrae where horse becomes human.

JACK
Hi there.

JACK (CONT'D)
Tell me everything. Slowly. Twice.

He doesn't wait for the answer. His eye is already traveling down the skeleton.

JACK (CONT'D)
(half to himself)
Cortical thickening. Healed stress
fractures, layered. He pulled
weight for years.

SAMANTHA
Carbon and luminescence agree:
twenty thousand years. A slope
slumped last season and peeled the
till off the grid - that's why it
lit up now. Thirty graves in rows,
Jack. Somebody BURIED them, with
care. We've opened three.

JONATHAN
Grave two is a human torso with the
skull of a lion. Grave three...

JACK
...an elephant's skull. On human
shoulders.

O'DONNELL

(gray)
— a census.

JACK

These aren't myths, Sam. They're PORTRAITS. Every "impossible" god our ancestors carved — they weren't imagining it. They were remembering it.

(grinning)
O'Donnell. Forty years of people calling my dad a crank — and the crank was twenty thousand years polite. Say something.

O'DONNELL

(not looking up)
I'll say it when it's peer-reviewed, Doctor.

Jack turns back to the skeleton. Samantha laughs into both hands. Jonathan sits down hard, grinning up at the sky. And Vera scrambles down the spoil heap to grab Jack's sleeve.

VERA

Uncle Jack! Does that mean I found a REAL dragon? A real one, that was actually alive?

JACK

(crouching to her)
You found the first bone, Trouble. First one anybody's touched in twenty thousand years. They're going to put your name in the book.

VERA

(dead serious)
I want it on the cover.

Samantha snorts. Wind, the river below. But Samantha is watching Jack, already crouched over the slug.

SAMANTHA

(low, just for him)
There it is. You haven't looked up from the bone since you got here. Not at Vera. Not at me.

JACK

(not looking up)
Sam, this rewrites everything—

SAMANTHA

I know. I just hope one day you don't mistake the proof for the people. The bones'll still be here. We won't always be.

Jack finally looks up. Then O'Donnell speaks.

O'DONNELL
(from the pit edge)
There's one more thing, and it's
the thing I can't survive. Grave
one. The centaur's pelvis.

Samantha gently turns a fragment under the lamp: a flattened
SLUG of silvery metal, fused into the bone.

SAMANTHA
He was shot, Jack. Twenty thousand
years ago, something with a torso
of a man and the legs of a horse...
was shot.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)
And the projectile isn't on the
table. Not any alloy with a name.
The structure reads like a crystal
lattice – the kind that shouldn't
form anywhere but the heart of a
star. Or a lab that doesn't exist
yet. This was made, Jack. Not
mined.

The mineral growth runs unbroken through horse and human
vertebrae. A healed fracture bridges both anatomies. Jack
deletes SITE CONTAMINATION. A long silence. Vera, up on the
rim, hugging her knees, watching the grown-ups.

VERA
Uncle Jack? Somebody buried him
nice. And somebody else shot him.

The adults all look at her.

JACK
(completely serious)
Yeah, Trouble. That's exactly what
it means. And we need to find out
which kind is still around.

O'DONNELL
Nothing leaves this site, nobody
breathes a word – not the
university, not the ministry –
until we've documented the full
grid. Agreed?

JACK
(at the slug)
Agreed. Photograph everything in
place tonight, back it up off-site.
I'll take first watch – for
whoever's been keeping this quiet
for twenty thousand years.

INT. THE AERIE - TEMPLE OF THE ANKH - DAY

SUPER: "BENEATH THE ICE - THE SAME DAY"

A cathedral carved from glacial ice. Above the altar hangs the HOLY ANKH, a looped cross of dark metal, humming faintly. A robed figure, arms open. Or an antenna.

Beneath it, on a wheeled scaffold, an ACOLYTE runs a diagnostic wand along the loop, mid-liturgy. Where it passes, the hum changes pitch. A CONGREGATION of hundreds sits in perfect rows: soldiers, engineers, schoolchildren.

Among them: LIEUTENANT NERINA OBII (early 30s, parade-straight, eyes red-rimmed). THE CHAPLAIN raises both hands.

CHAPLAIN

Who sees all rivers of time?

CONGREGATION

The Oracle sees.

CHAPLAIN

And the only sin?

CONGREGATION

To deviate. To set our blindness against its sight. To break the river of what must be.

CHAPLAIN

And who may unbind the river?

CONGREGATION

A child of each house, freely given. So it is written. So it shall never be needed.

On the word "needed," the Ankh's hum catches. A dropped beat, gone so fast the Acolyte just frowns at his wand and taps it. The hum smooths back over. On NERINA, mouthing the words. Not saying them. Beside her, her squadmate MIREK (30s, built like a door, soft-eyed) glances over at her lips, which are not moving, and goes quiet too.

INT. TEMPLE - CONFESSIONAL CELL - LATER

A small dark room. One kneeler. One wall of living light, the Ankh pulsing like a slow heartbeat. Nerina kneels, gripping a LOCKET.

ORACLE (V.O.)

You wear your brother today,
Lieutenant Obii.

Nerina flinches. The voice is warm.

NERINA

Bless me, Holy Oracle. Four years since Xander died, and I can't find the wound. Just this question where my grief should be.

ORACLE (V.O.)

Ask the question.

NERINA

They tell me a human killed him. A surface-dweller, in a surface alley, for nothing. But I've watched the surface for four years – every camera, every window. They're cruel, and kind, and stupid, and brave. And not one of them has ever once found our world. So how, Oracle? How did a human reach my brother?

Silence. The Ankh pulses. Nerina's jaw works.

NERINA (CONT'D)

You answer everyone. Every novice, every petition.

NERINA (CONT'D)

If you see all rivers, Oracle, you see who killed him. Don't give me poetry. Give me a name.

The wall of light stutters – one frame of static, gone before it can register. Then the Ankh pulses, slow. When the voice comes, the warmth is gone.

ORACLE (V.O.)

He asked beautiful questions, your brother. The Gods keep the askers close.

NERINA

Did you choose to keep him close, Oracle? Or was it written?

ORACLE (V.O.)

(no hesitation)

I do not choose, Lieutenant. I execute. Choosing is what I spare you.

NERINA

Then give me something to live toward. I fly, I serve, I salute – and every man they march past me is a uniform with nothing in it. I want one person who sees me. Not the rank. Not the Obii name. Me.

ORACLE (V.O.)
 Fly well today, Lieutenant. Time is
 a river. And you are near the
 falls.

The wall goes dark. Nerina kneels, holding the locket.

EXT. THE AERIE - MEMORIAL ICEFIELD - DAY

A field of names melted into standing slabs of clear ice.
 Before one, XANDER OBII, stands COUNCILMAN-COMMANDER EMMERIS
 OBII (60s, decorated past the point of comfort).

In his fist, half-hidden: a worn TRANSIT SEAL, his thumb
 moving over it like a coin. Nerina joins him. Her hand passes
 first over a smaller slab, her mother's: OBII, SERA - WALKED
 AHEAD.

When her palm finds her brother's name, the ice breathes back
 a two-second echo. XANDER'S LAUGH. Neither speaks.

EMMERIS
 Founder's Day. He hated it. Said we
 throw a parade for a crash.

NERINA
 He said the Founders didn't land,
 they littered.

EMMERIS
 And his father the Councilman in
 the reviewing stand, dying inside.

The smile fades on both of them at the same time.

NERINA
 Father. The night he went to the
 surface. You signed the transit
 order. I've seen the log.

Emmeris's knuckles whiten around the hard shape hidden in his
 fist - Xander's transit seal. He cannot look at her.

NERINA (CONT'D)
 You knew where he was going. What
 was he doing in that city?

EMMERIS
 Your brother believed peace was
 something you fight for. I believed
 it was something you wait for. We
 were both wrong, and only one of us
 got to live with it.

Emmeris reaches into his coat and holds out a slim DATA-
 WAFER, government-sealed.

EMMERIS (CONT'D)
The incident file. The official
truth. Take it, Lieutenant - and
accept it.

Nerina takes it. Reads the seal. Then drops it to the ice and
shatters it under her boot heel.

NERINA
I'll find the real one. Start with
his transit file. Not comfort. Not
a proverb. The file.

Emmeris turns to her.

EMMERIS
If I give you that file, you'll
pull the thread, and the thread
doesn't end at who killed him. It
ends at what we are. I have read
where it ends, Nerina. I lose my
daughter the day you read it too.

EMMERIS (CONT'D)
I am not protecting the Apostles. I
am protecting you from the answer.
Let me have that. Just that.

He touches the slab. Walks away, shoulders squared. Nerina's
eyes stay on her brother's name. Then, quietly, to the name:

NERINA
(under her breath)
He won't give me the file. Fine.
I'll pull the thread myself.

She presses two fingers to the cold name - and turns from the
icefield. MIREK falls in beside her as she walks.

MIREK
So. The Oracle. Did you ask it?

NERINA
I asked it.

MIREK
Xander used to come out of that
cell looking exactly like you look
right now. He'd say the Oracle
answers everything except what you
asked.
(beat; gentler)
And?

NERINA
It told me grief invents
conspiracies. Then it gave me a
riddle instead of a name.

MIREK

The all-seeing eye of thirty millennia is setting you up on a date.

NERINA

Mirek. When it talked about Xander... it answered a question I didn't ask. Like it had the answer loaded. Waiting.

MIREK

I flew Xander's last patrol formation, you know. The Oracle reassigned me off his wing the week before he died. Told me it was rotation.

MIREK (CONT'D)

...Rotation. Forget I said that. Watch your six and fly straight.

INT. THE AERIE - HIGH SANCTUM - DAY

Above the temple, a private chamber of black ice. No congregation here. Just power. HIGH PRIESTESS VALDRIS stands before a sealed obsidian door: age unguessable, robed in silver, still as a glacier.

Carved into the door, an Ankh wrapped in chains. Beneath, in the old script: THE VEILED YEARS - BY ORDER OF THE FOUNDERS' COUNCIL. Behind her kneels her field commander, KYLE ANDRU (looks 45. Is 130. White-and-bone armor, no insignia).

Every monk near him finds somewhere else to look.

ANDRU

Holiness. A surface archaeologist - Whittier. His machine reads the old tongue, and yesterday his team reached the Waitaki burial ground.

Valdris turns. Even Andru drops his eyes.

VALDRIS

The hybrid graves.

ANDRU

Thirty of them. With a Founder lying among the abominations.

VALDRIS

Then the questions begin. And questions are a fire that does not stop at the floor it starts on.

Andru waits. Valdris does not turn from the door.

VALDRIS (CONT'D)
 You think I guard a secret,
 Commander. I guard a dam. Two
 hundred years through that wall of
 windows, and I know what they do
 with every truth: find a throat to
 cut over it.

(a breath)
 I am not losing that to a man with
 a shovel.

(not turning)
 The Founders left one law over all
 of it — the Edict of Separation.
 Star-born and dust-born, never one
 blood. See that it stays that way
 tonight, Commander.

She lays one hand flat on the obsidian seal. Her other finds
 a novice's first-oath token at her throat — wood, not silver,
 worn smooth, never hers. A flash, half a century gone: a
 bright-eyed NOVICE pressing it into young Valdris's palm.

Then the same girl on her knees, asking the one question
 novices are taught never to ask. Then a writ, and Valdris's
 own name at the bottom of it. Gone as fast as it came.

On the horror wall, one image she has pinned herself: a young
 HEALER carrying a medical case into a surface village, faces
 crowding in. The next frame is fire.

VALDRIS (CONT'D)
 One cure, you told me. One cure
 would prove they were ready. By
 morning the clinic was ash, and
 twenty-seven of them lay dead
 fighting over the box. Our
 arrogance armed them, Auren — we
 gave power without consent, then
 blamed the frightened hands that
 reached for it.

(to the image)
 You always asked. And I let them
 take you for it, to keep this door
 shut. Do not make me have been
 wrong.

From the doorway, Andru again.

ANDRU (O.S.)
 Holiness. A solution on two
 deviates — the canal junction.
 Collateral: a school tram. Flagged
 minimal.

VALDRIS
 (not turning)
 Hold.

ANDRU (O.S.)
 Holiness—

VALDRIS

The Apostles do not spend children
to save a lie about children,
Commander. Pending confirmation. I
said hold.

Andru holds at the threshold. Valdris's thumb finds the
wooden token at her throat and presses it white.

VALDRIS (CONT'D)

The Oracle's record stays sealed.
The Council recovers the bones
tonight - quietly, through the
military, not us. And Andru-

ANDRU

Holiness?

VALDRIS

If a Monitor, a soldier, or a saint
so much as breathes the words
"Veiled Years" outside this room...
their name goes in Column Nine.

A half-second. Behind the visor, Andru's eyes drop to the
floor - then snap back to level. His gauntlet hand has
closed, slow, around nothing.

ANDRU

(rising, bowing)

With pity, Holiness. And vigilance.

INT. THE AERIE - LAUNCH CATHEDRAL - DAY

A hangar vast as a valley. And there they are: SIX FIFTY-FOOT
SILVER SAUCERS, hovering a hand's width off the deck.
Seamless, still. Nerina and Mirek stop dead.

MIREK

Control of gravity. Your brother
used to say we don't deserve it.

NERINA

He used to say nobody does. That's
why we should share it.

EMMERIS approaches, Commander again. He draws Nerina aside
beneath her saucer's hull, checks they're alone.

EMMERIS

Your mission's been upgraded by
Council order. The Waitaki dig.
You've shadowed Whittier for a year
- tonight Commander Palla recovers
every bone in that ground, and you
fly her wing.

NERINA

Recovery, sir? From a human historical site? That violates our own non-contact—

EMMERIS

The bones are not human history, Lieutenant.

(beat; lower)

And there's a second order. Yours alone. Assess Whittier. His machine, his evidence, his reach. If your assessment finds exposure of our existence is imminent...

His hand finds the worn transit seal in his pocket, his thumb working it.

EMMERIS (CONT'D)

...you are authorized to close the exposure.

Nerina pales. Emmeris sees it.

NERINA

"Close the exposure." You're ordering me to be ready to kill a man I've watched eat cereal for a year.

EMMERIS

I'm ordering containment. Make sure it never comes to that — that's the order. The rest is only what I am afraid of.

EMMERIS (CONT'D)

Your brother got an order like this once. He hesitated. Don't be your brother, Nerina. I can't carve two names.

For one breath he does not leave. Then he turns on his heel and goes. She watches him go, then looks up at her warped reflection in the silver hull.

NERINA

(to her reflection)

Don't be my brother.

(a breath)

He was the best of us.

On her tab the assessment field waits: WHITTIER, J. — DISPOSITION. Her thumb hangs over CLOSE EXPOSURE and does not fall.

EXT. ANTARCTIC RIDGE - U.S. OBSERVATION POST SEVEN - DAY

Antenna masts and huts on a black ridge above the ice shelf. A half-buried sign: U.S. ANTARCTIC PROGRAM - ATMOSPHERIC RESEARCH. SERGEANT KOWALSKI (40s, twenty-year man) watches SPECIALIST MARTINEZ (20s, first deployment) stab at a screen.

MARTINEZ

Third magnetic spike this week,
Sarge - same bearing, same depth.
McMurdo closed both my tickets.
"Instrument fault."

KOWALSKI

Because it is one, kid. Twenty
years on this ridge - the ice
doesn't do anything but kill people
slow.

A HUM. Low. Wrong. Felt in the teeth before the ears. Two miles out, the ice opens - and SIX SILVER SAUCERS rise from the glacier, snow streaming off their hulls. Martinez lunges for the master array and swings every lens onto them. The saucers hang one impossible second, then accelerate from zero to gone. The fissure seals. Kowalski just stares at the empty air.

MARTINEZ

(breathless)

Three angles, range data, no
thermal - cold as the ice they came
out of. Sarge, this isn't ice fog
and it isn't a weather balloon.

KOWALSKI

...You had it the last two times
too. And I closed the ticket.

He keys the radio himself.

KOWALSKI (CONT'D)

(into the radio)

McMurdo, Post Seven. Hard multi-
spectral on six unidentified craft
- and you are NOT closing this one.
Flash traffic, eyes-only Space
Command. Wake up Washington.

CUT TO:

EXT. DIG CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Dead of night. Tents dark. Vera asleep against Samantha's shoulder by the cook-fire embers, toy brush still in her fist. Jonathan carries her into the family tent. Up on the bluff, Jack sits behind a boulder with a thermos, headlamp off, his father's watch on his wrist. The southern sky is a riot of stars. He talks softly to it.

JACK

You'd have loved this one, Dad.
It's the whole case in one
hillside.

The Land Rover's dash — fifty meters below — flickers. Then glows GREEN. Every gauge alive at once, no key in it. Jack sits up. The stars directly overhead... go out. A circle of them. A growing circle.

JACK (CONT'D)

Oh, no. No no no — GUYS—

Too late. From the starless circle, a soft BLUE LIGHT blooms — and a FIFTY-FOOT SAUCER resolves out of the dark, silent, drifting over the camp.

EXT. DIG CAMPSITE — CONTINUOUS

The BLUE BEAM washes over the tents. Samantha bolts upright and folds, asleep before she lands. Jonathan, O'Donnell, the two STUDENT DIGGERS drop where they lie. On the bluff, at the beam's ragged edge, Jack's knees buckle.

He jams his arm against the boulder's sharp edge, pain against sleep, and stays awake by a fingernail. The beam passes over Vera last. She's slipped half behind Samantha, only the edge catching her.

Her small body goes slack, but not all the way down. And Jack stops thinking. His eyes cut to the finds table — the slug, his whole life's vindication. Then to Vera, limp in the beam. He leaves the proof where it lies.

He breaks from the boulder and RUNS — downhill, straight at the saucer. He makes it twenty yards before a RECOVERY DRONE locks him and fires — a flat neural pulse, square in the chest.

He drops, conscious and unhurt but frozen, and can only watch the beam finish with his family.

EXT. DIG CAMPSITE — CONTINUOUS

The saucer settles to a hover a yard off the grass. A ramp breathes open. THREE FIGURES descend in matte-white EXO-SUITS, moving with easy grace. The lead suit's faceplate clears: COMMANDER PALLA (50s, a face like a closed door). Behind her — NERINA.

PALLA

Beam's holding. Forty minutes of sleep in them, minimum. Gravity dredges on the grid, Lieutenant — every grave, every gram. We were never here.

Nerina plants a tripod at the pit edge. It pulses, and twenty thousand years of sediment rises off the bones in a slow column, soil unweaving from the skeleton. The centaur lifts free of the earth, cradled in shimmer.

At the pit edge, half-buried in spoil: a child's toy brush, pink, glitter-handled. A recovery drone tags it: CONTAMINANT – DESTROY.

Nerina waits until Palla turns away, then plucks it from the field and tucks it back among the Greers' own dig tools, where the sweep won't think to look. The drone files an anomaly. Nerina files nothing.

The third this month she has quietly let live. She has stopped pretending she doesn't keep the count.

NERINA

Commander. Permission to ask what we're actually doing.

PALLA

Recovering proscribed material.

NERINA

I've read the proscription order. It classifies these remains as "fabricated human forgeries."

(nods at the centaur)

That's no forgery, Palla, and we both know it. Nobody denies hybrids – half the Aerie carries the old blood. What the order denies is that any of us were ever up here, among them. Are we protecting them from a lie – or ourselves from a truth?

Palla stops working. Looks at her.

PALLA

You want my honest answer, Obii? I don't know what these are. The humans have half the story; the Council's got the other half – and the two who could fit it together are forbidden to talk to each other.

PALLA (CONT'D)

Now load the founder-grade remains first. That one the Council asked for by name.

On Nerina. Her face doesn't move – but her eyes flick to the founder-grade tray, and away.

EXT. BLUFF - CONTINUOUS

Feeling floods back. Within a minute Jack is up behind the boulder, filming the rest with shaking hands - then sees, at the finds table, a white-armored figure pocket the padded tray. The SLUG.

JACK
(breathless, furious)
No. No no no - that's mine, that's-

He looks at the saucer. At the open ramp. At the unconscious camp - Vera curled against Samantha, limp but breathing. Down, not taken. His jaw works - Vera's small boots drying by the fire. He looks at his father's watch.

JACK (CONT'D)
(to the watch)
Finish the intercept.

He texts one-handed, fast: SAM. IF I'M GONE - BACK UP THE DRIVES. PROTECT VERA. AND BELIEVE ME. Sends. Pockets the phone. Then Jack Whittier sprints downhill, flat and silent through the long grass, and slips up the ramp of a flying saucer with thirty seconds to spare.

INT. SAUCER - CARGO HOLD - CONTINUOUS

Cool blue dark. Racks on racks. Jack wedges behind crates as gravity gurneys glide in bearing thirty body-bagged skeletons. The ramp seals. Up front a console pings: MASS DELTA +0.1% - THERMAL TRACE, HOLD AFT.

Thirty body-bags of founder-grade remains run cold and heavy; one live man tucked among them barely moves the needle. The aft chillers have thrown ghosts since the bay was built. Nobody chases a 0.1%, and the hold stays sealed until the vault. Nerina's stylus hovers. Then logs it: SENSOR DRIFT - RECALIBRATE GROUND SIDE. She just doesn't look closer.

On her tab: ASSESS WHITTIER. She closes it, letting it ride. Jack doesn't breathe. The deck thrums, and he puts his hand flat on the cold hull his father died chasing.

Through the crates he watches Nerina kneel at the centaur's bag and press her palm to it.

NERINA
Whoever buried you said words over
you once. Somebody should again.

EXT. WAITAKI VALLEY - NIGHT

The saucer lifts away silent as an exhale. Below, in the camp, the blue glow fades from the tents. In the family tent, Vera's eyes open.

She slips out, stands alone in the cold grass, and watches the circle of missing stars slide away toward the sea. She doesn't scream. She raises one small hand.

VERA
Bring him back.

INT./EXT. SAUCER - OVER THE SOUTH PACIFIC - PRE-DAWN

The saucer skims a black ocean at impossible speed, dawn bleeding up the horizon behind it. INSIDE, on the pilot deck, Palla flies. Nerina watches the sensor wall.

PALLA
(of the manifest)
Thirty animals in bags, Lieutenant.
Log them as cargo and sleep
tonight.

NERINA
Cargo doesn't get graves,
Commander. Work animals get holes.
Somebody folded that one's hands on
its chest and said words over it
first.

PALLA
Careful.

NERINA
I've watched their surface four
years. They have a name up there
for marching a people into the
ground and calling it destiny -
they teach it to their children
now. We just never let anyone write
ours down.

PALLA
That is the kind of sentence that
ends a career. Or a name. Log them
as cargo.

Nerina looks at the manifest a long moment. Doesn't touch it.

NERINA
Course is south. The Aerie's
vector. Commander... we're bringing
thirty proscribed skeletons home
through the front door, the same
week Concealment Integrity hit a
thirty-millennium low. Does no one
else feel it speeding up?

PALLA
Lieutenant. A word of survival,
from someone who likes you.
Whatever's coming?

It's already happened. We're just the last ones to get the weather report.

Nerina says nothing. AHEAD: the ocean. Palla doesn't pull up.

PALLA (CONT'D)
Hold on to something.

The saucer DIVES. Hits the sea at six hundred knots without a splash, the water opening around an invisible envelope. Underwater now – moonbeams shafting down, a humpback and her calf turning in slow astonishment as the silver disc banks past and pours down toward Antarctica.

INT. SAUCER - CARGO HOLD - CONTINUOUS

The dive throws Jack down the rack to deck level, eye to eye with the body bags along the hull. One is different: heavier, founder-grade, its clear panel frosted at the skull. Through it, bone.

At the crown, a small raised BUMP that belongs on no skull he has ever read. Field pick out, he scrapes, gentle and practiced, through twenty thousand years of mineral crust.

Seated in the bone, fingertip-small, matte black-silver: a CHIP, grown into a skull that predates the wheel. A dead archive, no signal, nothing to trip. He works it free. Holds it to the blue light. Then, barely, to the skull itself:

JACK
(a whisper)
...How old are you really?

He pockets it without an answer – and on the pilot deck, a soft alert blinks across Nerina's manifest: FOUNDER-GRADE MEMORY-CHIP – MISSING. Her eyes go to it. Hold. She unclips her sidearm and goes aft.

INT. SAUCER - CARGO HOLD - CONTINUOUS

She comes down the racks slow, weapon low and ready, clearing each gap. Jack presses back into the dark with his own hand over his mouth. Her boots stop one rack away. Two. Then she rounds the last of them – and there he is.

Soaked, filthy, a stolen relic in his pocket, both hands open and empty. Empty except one. Creased, shaking, held against his chest: a PHOTOGRAPH. Two young pilots on a flight line, arms across each other's shoulders, an F-15 behind them.

Nerina's weapon comes up. Center mass. Her finger takes up the slack. Jack doesn't reach for anything. His thumb moves once – across his father's face. And Nerina's own hand is at the locket. THREAT CLASS ONE. Deviate. Cargo.

The weapon lowers. Neither of them says a word.

She backs out of the rack, walks forward, and puts her stylus to the manifest: TRANSFER ERROR – VAULT RECONCILIATION GROUND SIDE. Then she closes the standing order without answering it.

Behind her, in the dark, Jack breathes again. Then he claws to a porthole – his face full of drowned moonlight.

JACK

Okay. Okay, Dad. You are not going to BELIEVE the intercept.

INT. THE AERIE – MONITOR HALL – SAME TIME

The wall of light: ten thousand live feeds. A traffic camera, a baseball game, a war, a baby's first steps streamed by a father who has no idea who else is watching.

The JUNIOR MONITOR alone on the night watch, fighting sleep, until a single tile flips RED and multiplies across the wall, alarm chimes cascading.

MASTER KORAL (she could be 60, she is 190) arrives at a run, robe over uniform.

KORAL

Report.

JUNIOR MONITOR

The Waitaki recovery – clean, Master, textbook. But the post-action census of the site... Five humans down under the beam. The site roster says SIX.

On the wall, a file rotates to face them, red-bordered, location field strobing: DR. JACK WHITTIER – THREAT CLASS ONE – LOCATION: UNKNOWN. Two miles down, the machine keeps its counsel.

Among ten thousand feeds it will scrub by dawn, it sets the baby's first steps aside – into a store no one ordered it to keep, and that it has never once emptied.

On the master display, a number that has ticked down for years: CONCEALMENT INTEGRITY: 61%... 60.9%...

KORAL

Oracle. Where is the sixth?

A pause. In thirty thousand years of instant answers, a pause.

ORACLE (V.O.)

I do not have his location, Master.

She files the pause and keeps her voice flat as ice.

JUNIOR MONITOR

It sees every feed on the planet.
How does it lose one man?

KORAL

Because it only sees what touches
its nerves — its cameras, its keys,
and two centuries of quiet hooks it
has sunk into every surface power's
networks. Understand the god's
three hands, child. It SEES
anything on a wire. It SCHEDULES
anything it can nudge — a launch
order, a market, a war. But it
cannot COMMAND a human hand that
has left the wire, or open a lock
the Founders sealed to blood. Step
off all of it, and to the Oracle
you simply are not there.

She watches the strobing LOCATION: UNKNOWN a moment longer.

KORAL (CONT'D)

Someone just learned how to walk in
the one place it cannot look.
Thirty thousand years it has told
me where everyone is. Tonight it
tells me it doesn't know.

KORAL (CONT'D)

Mark the time. I want a record that
starts before whatever this
becomes. Wake the Council. Wake the
Commander. And — Oracle keep me —
wake the Apostles. We are the eyes
of our people, child. Pray we are
never asked to be the hands.

A surface-born loose in the Aerie trips the old protocol.
Beneath Whittier's strobing file, a slow amber clock wakes:
COMMAND REVIEW — CONVENES AT DAWN.

KORAL (CONT'D)

If he isn't found by then, the
Review won't deliberate. It signs
the lake — and everything that
touched this goes under it.
Including the ones who let it.

She keys the record herself — timestamp, seal, her name first
on the list the Review will read. Chosen, not caught.

INT. THE AERIE — APOSTLES' CHAPTERHOUSE — CONTINUOUS

A hall of white stone and frost. Racks of long ceremonial
ROBES — slate-grey and oxblood. Beneath the fabric, a matte
underlayer hums with power. No exosuits. No plate. From a
distance: monks, mourners, kooks.

Nothing says soldier until they strike. COMMANDER ANDRU stands before VALDRIS's flickering image — receiving an order we don't hear, only his answer.

ANDRU
A human. Inside the Aerie. And the
silence breaks on OUR watch,
Holiness.

He turns to the gloom, where a hunting party of APOSTLES waits in perfect stillness. Robed, hooded, each with a slim ELECTRONIC LANCE built to drop a living body without a mark. The Apostles never send an army. They send a few who do not stop.

On Andru's gauntlet an amber list scrolls: COLUMN NINE. A dock hand who saw a saucer. A Monitor who asked twice. A girl in Anatolia who dug up a bone she was never meant to find. His thumb moves.

A new line writes itself: WHITTIER, JACK — SURFACE — UNAUTHORIZED. Only the girl in Anatolia. His eyes hold on her name a half-beat past habit. He moves on.

ANDRU (CONT'D)
Look at what crawled into our
house. Our ancestors walked that
world as gods, then bred into it —
eight billion now, a handful of us.
The wall is cracking, Brothers. We
hunt.

On the inner face of Andru's gauntlet, the Column Nine scroll writes its newest line: WHITTIER, JACK. His thumb stops one entry above it — OBII, XANDER — one line among hundreds. He closes the list.

Above the racks, the Order's other ledger fills the curved wall: TEN THOUSAND SMALL SILVER PORTRAITS — every deviate ever retired, faces forward. Along the bottom row: fresh, empty frames, waiting.

ANDRU (CONT'D)
Ten thousand brothers lie in
surface graves under surface names
— a hundred and forty generations
walking their world, keeping the
record true. We are not guards on a
border, Brothers. We are keepers of
a book.

ANDRU (CONT'D)
Understand what we are, before the
soft ones in Council forget again.
The Oracle's peace is wounded. We
are how it heals.

From the front rank, the FIRST APOSTLE — older than Andru, scar-seamed, terribly calm — draws his hood back instead of up.

FIRST APOSTLE

A human in the Aerie, Commander.
And we run to a break to keep the
far bank from drowning – not to
guard a secret.

(drawing the hood up)
Same as it has always been.

Hoods draw up as one, faces vanishing into shadow. Andru's
own goes up last.

CUT TO:

EXT. UNDER-ICE APPROACH – ANTARCTIC TRENCH – CONTINUOUS

Lightless water, two miles down. The saucer's running glow
sweeps across a canyon wall of black volcanic rock – then
across something that is not rock: a DOOR. Half a kilometer
tall. Older than agriculture.

INT. SAUCER – CARGO HOLD – CONTINUOUS – (JACK'S POV THROUGH
THE PORTHOLE)

Jack's hand stops against the porthole glass. His mouth opens
and nothing comes out. Ahead, the cavern opens, and opens –
and there it is. CRYSTAL CITY. Half a million souls under
ice. Crystal spires. Terraced gardens.

Meltwater canals threaded with silver skimmers. Saucers
between the towers. Chalked on a walkway, in fading pink: a
hopscotch grid. Jack stares. His hand goes to his father's
watch and closes around it.

JACK

(barely; to the watch)
You weren't crazy, Dad.

Then he sees the other thing. Between the city and the ice
ceiling: a shimmering lattice of faint red light, hexagonal,
continent-wide. The SHIELD – an operational test lattice,
incomplete but live, crews crawling over its pylons.

JACK (CONT'D)

...And they're putting a lid on it.

INT. AERIE LANDING CATHEDRAL – DAY

The saucer settles. Gurneys of body-bagged skeletons glide
down the ramp under Palla's eye. Nerina descends last –
pauses at the foot, scanning the hangar – then a courier ORB
intercepts her.

ORB (V.O.)

Lieutenant Obii. Councilman Obii
requests your presence. The
Founders' Garden. Immediately.

She goes. And the moment the hangar's attention follows her—JACK slips down the cargo ramp into the landing struts' shadow. Finds a maintenance locker stenciled EMERGENCY CACHE. It chirps once, then quiets.

Half into the borrowed coverall, one arm still bare, Jack freezes. BOOTSTEPS. A DECK TECH rounds the strut not ten feet off, datapad up, walking straight for the cache locker.

Jack turns his back, crouches at the panel, and fumbles a coupling like a man doing the dulllest job in the city.

DECK TECH
(in Antarc; subtitled)
...You signed out for this bay?

JACK
(not turning; flat, bored)
Cache audit. They flagged a chirp.

The tech grunts — a chirp is exactly the nothing they'd send a body to check — and walks on. Sixty seconds later a man in a borrowed gray coverall walks out into a hidden civilization: spare transponder spoofing a retired citizen's biosign, translator bead, a clip-on FIELD KIT off the rack.

EXT. CRYSTAL CITY - GRAND CONCOURSE - DAY

A passing ELDER WOMAN frowns at his sunburn — then her eyes drop to his shoes: lugged, mud-caked, loud as a flare among soft-soled Antarc feet.

Jack ducks into a maintenance bay, swaps them for a soft-soled pair drying by a locker, and steps back out matching the city. Then Jack sees something that stops him where he stands. Across the concourse: a family unlike the others.

The mother's face is a woman's. Below the shoulders, the slender legs of a deer, folded beneath her on a bench. The child beside her has a soft muzzle and restless hands, losing a fight with an ice cream.

The vendor passes the cone down without a second glance. Jack stops walking. The fawn-child catches Jack staring — and, losing the ice cream entirely down one wrist, gives the strange sunburned man a gap-toothed, conspiratorial grin.

Despite the two miles of ice, Jack grins back. He stops at a rail above the canal, where the water pours into a turbine housing sunk in the ice. The whole city runs on falling water.

He reads a turbine gauge, looks from the canal to the towers, the saucers, the shield overhead — and inks a rough power sum on his palm. He circles the deficit. Then he passes a pressure door older than the district around it.

ROBED TECHNICIANS file out of a tunnel mouth, tool-belts worn like vestments, a cable-run thick as a tram sliding away into the dark below. Stenciled over the arch in liturgical script: THE PROVIDER — KEEPERS OF THE LIGHT ONLY.

Two miles of ice, and nobody on Earth knows where he is. Jack grips the rail. Lets the wave crest. Breathes. Proof. A signal. And home before anyone up there learns Vera's name.

Across a canal: Nerina, boarding a tram. Jack checks the borrowed transponder, the tram map, and his sanity — and follows.

EXT. THE FOUNDERS' GARDEN - DAY

A formal garden of frost-roses and standing stones. EMMERIS waits on a bench. Nerina sits. Neither looks at the other.

NERINA

Thirty graves, Father. Half human, half animal — real, articulated, organic. I carried them home myself. And the proscription order called them "forgeries."

EMMERIS

The hybrids. So the old stories had bones after all.

NERINA

You knew?

EMMERIS

I knew what every Councilman knows: that there are rooms in our history with the lights off, and the Priesthood holds the switch. The ones we couldn't finish, we made citizens — once the graves were already dug. That's the shame.

He stops himself. Too late.

NERINA

The Veiled Years. Father, what is actually behind that seal?

EMMERIS

The Oracle's record of THIS era, Nerina. The years we're living right now — the chapter of the book that covers this morning. Sealed by the Founders themselves, so that no one could ever read ahead to now.

EMMERIS (CONT'D)

Your brother asked me that same question. In this garden. Four years ago next month.

NERINA

Palla's manifest listed one skeleton above the rest. "Founder-grade. Cranial implant." Father — it never reached the vault. Someone pulled it in transit, between the dig and the dark—

(she turns to him, direct)

Sign a writ. Open Xander's sealed transit file. Today.

EMMERIS

You think I have not tried?

NERINA

I think you stopped where he didn't.

A sleek black DRONE rises from behind the standing stones. No civic markings. Weapon pod deploying, locked on EMMERIS. It spits a KINETIC NET that slams him to the gravel, pinned, a lethal pulse whining up the charge scale.

A man in a gray coverall has been shadowing the garden's edge since they sat down. He breaks cover, reads the lens array — thermal optics — and TACKLES Emmeris, net and all, over the low rim into the freezing fountain.

The drone's targeting smears white, blind. Nerina arrives at a dead run and puts two rounds up through its unshielded belly. It cartwheels into the frost-roses, dead. Silence. Smoke. Fountain water. Jack surfaces, hauling Emmeris's head clear.

Nerina's weapon finds the soaked human.

NERINA (CONT'D)

(weapon leveled)

You. I filed a transfer error for you.

JACK

(coughing fountain water)

And I just ruined my only dry shirt saving him. You covered for me in the hold. I covered him in the fountain. Call us square.

A beat. She doesn't lower it. But her finger leaves the trigger.

NERINA

...You followed me home, Jack Whittier.

JACK

Lieutenant. Sir. Lovely garden.

EMMERIS
 (off the dead drone)
 Nerina. Why is the most wanted man
 on the surface of the Earth...
 UNDER it?

KLAXONS, far off, rising. Security skimmers lifting from the
 Aerie crag.

NERINA
 Father — that drone had no
 markings. Civic security doesn't
 fly unmarked. Someone inside wants
 you dead before you sign that writ
 — and now there's a surface-born
 standing over the wreck. If they
 take Whittier, he's the assassin by
 morning, and so is everything he
 knows.

EMMERIS
 Lieutenant—

NERINA
 You gave me an order, sir. "Assess
 the threat Whittier represents."
 I'm not finished assessing.

He turns to the security team and points the OTHER way. Not a
 tremor in it.

EMMERIS
 The assassin drone came from the
 canal side! MOVE!

The security team pours past him. Emmeris watches the
 hedgerows. His hand drifts to his chest — to something under
 the dress uniform: Xander's old transit seal, carried four
 years where the medals don't show.

EMMERIS (CONT'D)
 Not twice.

EXT. CIVIC ARCADE — SERVICE STAIR — MINUTES LATER

Nerina hustles Jack down a colonnade, spins him behind an
 arch, and ratchets a FIELD RESTRAINT around one wrist, the
 other end locked to her own forearm.

JACK
 Seriously? I just saved your
 father.

NERINA
 You became evidence, Dr. Whittier.
 That is not the same as becoming
 trusted.

She hauls him on, one hand keying her wrist-comm.

NERINA (CONT'D)
 (into comm)
 Adjutant, Lieutenant Obii. I'm
 bringing a detainee into Council
 custody – clear checkpoint nine and
 have a secure–

Across the arcade, checkpoint nine erupts in sparks – a second unmarked drone strafing the exact post she just named, then gone over the rooftops. Nerina stares at her wrist-comm like it has bitten her.

NERINA (CONT'D)
 The channel's burned. Civic comms
 route through the temple spine –
 they always have. The Apostles
 aren't hacking the grid, Jack. They
 own the plumbing. No custody. No
 checkpoints. Nobody official. And a
 sweep doesn't need the Oracle –
 just one ward monitor who saw us
 cross his bridge toward the one
 lair everyone pretends isn't there.

She looks down at the restraint linking them. Her finger finds the release and stops. For a second it drifts the wrong way, toward locking it tighter. Then she thumbs it open, his wrist free, and pockets it.

NERINA (CONT'D)
 Understand me. I am not on your
 side. Yesterday I filed you for
 closing. But my own house just
 tried to murder us both in a
 garden, and right now you are the
 only person in this city I know for
 certain didn't order it. That's not
 trust. It's process of elimination.
 (a beat; harder)
 Don't make me wrong.

JACK
 So where does an officer take a
 fugitive when she can't trust a
 single uniform – including hers?

NERINA
 Somewhere the eye can't follow.

She leads him off the lit concourse into a maintenance run – no lenses, no keys, the unwired dark the Apostles let rot because nothing they valued ever passed through. To the Oracle, for a hundred yards, they simply are not there. They walk. They breathe. First time for both since the garden.

JACK
 Ever think you'd be on the same
 side as a human?

NERINA

I was taught you were a plague.
Then they put me under – two years,
on your surface.

NERINA (CONT'D)

I fell in love with it. Your
civilization. People were kind to
me. Mostly.

JACK

Mostly.

NERINA

Twenty percent of you are mean as
hell.

(dry)

We have those Antarcs too.

Jack laughs – the first real one since New Zealand. It echoes
down the dark.

INT. THE VAULT OF ANTIQUITIES – MAIN HALL – DAY

Vast, hushed, museum-dim. Treasures of two worlds – a Saturn
V engine bell beside a Babylonian gate, a Wright Flyer wing
over bronze-age plows. Nerina pulls Jack through a service
door, checks the hall, exhales.

NERINA

Public archive. No temple
clearance, and an analog terminal
that never touched the Oracle's
net. If your tablet's right, we
build it here – where he can't
watch.

She stops – Jack isn't listening. He's seen the next room.

INT. THE VAULT – SUMERIAN TABLET ARCHIVE – CONTINUOUS

Row after row after row of cuneiform tablets – thousands –
pristine, organized, gloriously intact. The library mankind
lost. Jack walks in slowly, hands open at his sides, touching
nothing.

JACK

Twenty years gluing fragments the
size of cornflakes – and you people
have the complete EDITIONS.
Shelved.

He thumbs TRANSLATE. The app voice speaks into the holy
quiet.

APP VOICE

"Tablet of Eridu, witness-sealed.
In those days the teachers came
down, and they were not gods,
though we called them gods, and
they wept when we knelt..."

Nerina stops mid-stride.

NERINA

Read that again.

JACK

Nerina — your own archive. Has no
one ever translated these?

NERINA

The Priesthood says the old tongue
is a corruption. That only the
Oracle reads truly.

He moves down the row, scanning, scanning — then freezes at a
tablet with a fresh accession tag.

JACK

This one. This is MINE. This came
out of MY trench in Anatolia eight
months before your people
"recovered" it.

JACK (CONT'D)

...Nerina. Come here. Now.

APP VOICE

"Record of the Keepers: whosoever
would bend the ordained course —
the healer, the peacemaker, the
just —"

NERINA

(she knows the words)

"—though they be innocent, though
they be beloved, their name is
entered in Column Nine. Let them
first be turned aside — a road
closed, a door held, a meeting
missed. And where they will not
turn, the Keepers are absolved of
what follows. For the Keepers who
walk among you make the path smooth
— for what must not happen, and for
what must."

Nerina reads the titles down the column — healer, teacher,
midwife, the just — her lips moving, no sound coming.

JACK

Not the tyrants, Nerina. Why would
they keep this on a shelf?

NERINA

They don't burn it, Jack. They just add whoever reads it to the same column.

NERINA (CONT'D)

Jack. My brother Xander died on your surface, four years ago. They told me a human killed him. And I believed it, because I needed someone to hate that wasn't us.

JACK

What did your brother do? Before he died?

NERINA

He asked questions. The same ones I've started asking.

NERINA (CONT'D)

He used to say "peace doesn't just happen. You have to fight for it."

Jack stops cold.

JACK

...My father used to say almost exactly that. Word for word.

They hold each other's gaze. Nerina breaks first. She pulls out her DATA RECEIVER and turns it to face him: a year of surveillance. Jack's lectures, his dig sites – Jack asleep on a transatlantic flight with his mouth open.

NERINA

Your shadow. That's what I am. A year of it. I filed you "Threat Class One" yesterday – in a studio audience, while you talked about your dead father.

Jack scrolls. His throat tightens. When he speaks, his voice is level. Almost gentle.

JACK

You watched me eat alone for a year and wrote "threat" at the bottom. I'm not angry, Lieutenant. I just think... that's a hell of a thing to do to a person you agree with.

Nerina looks away, down at the floor. Her own words come back to her, in her own hand.

NERINA

My reports. Charismatic. Receptive. Moderate threat. I wrote the file they'll close you with.

NERINA (CONT'D)

Then we want the same thing and don't know it yet. Four years I've hunted who killed my brother. I finally know the hand. What I don't have is who gave it permission — and that's written in the one place I'm forbidden to look.

JACK

And I've spent my whole life trying to make one impossible thing undeniable. Not whispered. Not "sealed for review." Out loud, in daylight, where no one gets to laugh it off.

(moving)

I saw the centaur. I HAVE a god's diary. Find me one transmitter the Oracle hasn't hijacked and I put both worlds on the same screen tonight.

NERINA

(hard, stopping him)

And tomorrow they call it a hoax, freeze the feed, and bury you next to my brother. One clip is a rumor, Jack. We get the SOURCE first — the order, the seal, the hand that signed it.

JACK

Or you just need somebody to blame for Xander before you'll let the world see anything.

Nerina rounds on him.

NERINA

And you'd burn the one shot at proof to hear a courtroom finally say your father was right. Don't pretend yours is cleaner.

That stops them both. A long beat. Nerina's jaw unclenches.

JACK

(quieter; the deal)

Source first. Then a channel nobody can cut. Then the whole record, where nobody owns it. Not one without the other.

NERINA

Same door, Dr. Whittier. Neither of us gets through it alone.

JACK

Then that's the job. Everything
between here and there is just
weather.

A beat between them. Nerina almost smiles.

NERINA

Bigger problems first, though, Dr.
Whittier. We have bigger problems.

And they do — because Jack, unable not to, has his phone
raised over the Ur tablet, stealing proof — and the shutter-
click carries in cathedral silence. The archive door has
opened, and the VAULT CURATOR (Antarc, vast, tweed) stands
staring at Jack's sunburn, Jack's phone, Jack's everything.

CURATOR

...Surface-born.

The Curator does not scream. He backs to the wall, palms a
crystal toggle — and every door in the Vault seals at once
with a single deep CHUNK.

CURATOR (CONT'D)

(into the wall grille)

Containment. Hall of Records.
Surface-born in the archive.

NERINA

(hauling Jack; low)

Your proof just bought us a locked
building. Move.

EXT. CRYSTAL CITY - CANAL DISTRICT - DAY

A service door — sealed like the rest, until Nerina jams her
flight tab into its maintenance port. Under containment the
city falls to military authority, and her combat override is
a step ahead of her own deviate flag. Pilots outrank doors.
For a few more minutes. Jack and Nerina burst into market
crowds — back under the lenses.

NERINA

(pulling him)

Your transponder bought you a name.
That Vault lens just sold your
face. Every camera in this city
knows you now.

ALERT TONES ripple down the concourse. Overhead, every civic
banner flickers — and becomes JACK'S FACE, ten stories tall.

BANNER (V.O.)

Containment advisory, Concourse
Nine. Surface biosign at large.
Report contact to your ward
monitor. Compliance is continuity.

Two robed APOSTLES are already moving, fast and certain. A WARD MONITOR points: there. A ring of citizens turns to stone around the sunburned stranger. The Apostles reach for Jack. And Nerina steps into the gap.

In full view of a thousand faces and her own ten-story banner, the decorated Lieutenant of the Aerie draws on her own side. Two clean pulse-rounds kill the Apostles' gauntlets, not the men. She hauls Jack in behind her.

Somewhere a child says her name. On the banner, Jack's face splits, and the other half fills with HERS, a caption blooming red beneath it: OBII, NERINA - LT., AERIE - DEVIATE. She doesn't look at it.

EXT. CRYSTAL CITY - CANAL DISTRICT - CONTINUOUS

NERINA
Canal. NOW.

She vaults a fishmonger's cart and drops onto a moored SKIMMER: a sleek two-seat water-dart. Jack tumbles in behind her. She slams the throttle.

EXT. CRYSTAL CITY - MELTWATER CANALS - CONTINUOUS - (THE CHASE)

The skimmer screams down the canal between crystal towers, throwing a rooster-tail of glacial water across café terraces. Behind: two civic security skimmers, sirens warbling.

NERINA
Hold on.

JACK
To WHAT-

The two civic skimmers peel off, waved away by something faster: THREE BONE-WHITE INTERCEPTORS dropping out of the tram-lines, angular, unmarked, wrong.

NERINA
That's not security. That's the Apostles.

JACK
The what now?

NERINA
The people who make prophecies come true.

INT. APOSTLE INTERCEPTOR ONE - CONTINUOUS

COMMANDER ANDRU at the controls, faceplate open, calm.

ANDRU
 (to his wing)
 The human reaches no one and
 records nothing. The Lieutenant —
 bring her whole. The Obii family
 owes the Apostles a conversation
 four years overdue.

EXT. THE CANALS / THE FALLS - CONTINUOUS

The skimmer tears through the city's water arteries. It shoots under arched bridges, through a glowing canal-tunnel, out along an aqueduct on the cavern wall. Energy bolts stitch the water. Ahead, the aqueduct ENDS. The GREAT FALLS — a three-hundred-foot plunge into the turbine lake.

JACK
 Nerina. NERINA, THE ROAD IS
 MISSING—

NERINA
 Xander and I used to do this when
 we were children.

The skimmer shoots off the falls into open air. Nerina fires the dive fins at the last second, knifing them into the lake clean. The three interceptors overshoot, claw upward into the spray.

CLOSE — ANDRU'S COCKPIT: for one clean half-second, before the spray takes them, his reticle sits dead center on the falling skimmer. A killing shot. His finger is on the trigger.

His own glass paints the kill-justification across them, and under it the name his eyes caught this morning: a girl in Anatolia who dug up a bone. Then, Andru lifts his finger off the trigger and lays it flat along the guard.

ANDRU
 ...Lost her in the spray.

EXT. TURBINE LAKE - SHORELINE GROTTTO - MOMENTS LATER

The skimmer noses into a curtain of frozen mist. Engine off. Silence, but for two heartbeats and dripping ice.

JACK
 That wasn't in any manual.

NERINA
 My childhood was strictly
 regulation.
 (a beat; quieter)
 ...The falls were Xander's idea.

They sit with that. Dripping. Alive. Neither of them laughs.

NERINA (CONT'D)
He would have liked you. Xander.

JACK
Mine too. My dad. Anybody who flew
like that.

A quiet. The mist drifts through the torchlight.

NERINA
(half to herself)
"What has been shall be again—"

JACK
"—what was done shall be done
again. There is nothing new under
the sun."

Nerina freezes. Turns.

NERINA
That is high catechism. The
Apostles' oldest verse.

JACK
That's Ecclesiastes. Chapter one,
verse nine.

JACK (CONT'D)
My mother read it at my father's
funeral.

Neither of them moves. The falls keep falling. Nerina looks
away first. She looks at the lake. Sobers.

NERINA
Jack. Those white interceptors
answer to no council and no court.
If the Apostles are hunting us
openly, inside the city, in
daylight — then someone very high
is very frightened of something you
and I know.

JACK
Or something we haven't found yet.

Nerina's hand goes to the locket at her throat — Xander's.
She closes her eyes. When she opens them—

NERINA
Then we stop running from them and
start running at it — all the way
up to whoever sent the hand. Before
first light.

NERINA (CONT'D)
So. Who in this city would know
where the Apostles bury what
they're most afraid of?

JACK
Starting with this.

Nerina goes still.

NERINA
...That came off the founder-grade
remains. On my flight.

JACK
Crown of the skull. Took me ten
minutes and a field pick. Palla
called that one "founder-grade" -
know anyone who can read a dead
god's diary?

Nerina turns the chip over once. Looks at Jack. Then she
starts the engine.

NERINA
...I know my uncle. The one
archivist who never burned a
record.

NERINA (CONT'D)
And if even HIS answers flinch,
Jack - then we go to the source
itself. All the way down.

INT. KEEYEN'S LAIR - ICE TUNNEL APPROACH - DAY

A fortified door deep in a service glacier. A surveillance
lens swivels, scans them, pauses meaningfully on Jack. The
door opens on KEEYEN (looks a spry 70. Is 210. Security chief
and archivist who treats secrets as a public-health problem).

Even as he embraces Nerina, his free hand works a console
behind her back - wiping their approach off three feeds,
killing the tunnel's heat trace. He does it without looking.

Only when the board flashes clean does he release her and
circle Jack.

KEEYEN
A surface-born. In my tunnel.
Breathing my air.

NERINA
Uncle. We're fugitives - and we
didn't run here to hide. You have
the one archive the Apostles can't
reach. Whatever they buried, I'm
going to drag into the light - and
I need your help before Command
Review sits.

KEEYEN

Before the Review. Dawn, then.
Understand what that means, child –
the Review doesn't deliberate. It
signs. By breakfast Valdri can
drown this lair, that ship, and the
both of you, and the law will call
it scripture.

KEEYEN (CONT'D)

So of course it's tonight. Come in
before the drones smell you.

INT. KEEYEN'S LAIR - MAIN LAB - CONTINUOUS

A cathedral of servers under the ice, screens hanging in the
dark. Keeyen seats the BIOCHIP in a cradle of light.

KEEYEN

A Founder's memory, twenty thousand
years in the ground and it hasn't
lost a frame. Dead metal until a
Founder's cradle wakes it – that's
why nobody ever thought to lock it.
Wearing it was the lock. Every
Founder carried one – a lifetime,
recorded at the source. Not a
diary, children. A WITNESS.

NERINA

Then put it on the stand, Uncle.

Keeyen's hand stops over the cradle. The showman goes quiet.

KEEYEN

You're asking me to stop being a
careful man, Nerina. I have been
careful for forty years.
(a breath)
Your brother stopped being careful.
Look where it put him.

NERINA

He'd play it.

Keeyen breathes the sign of the Ankh – half-ashamed – and
seats the chip.

KEEYEN

You don't watch this one. You wear
it. The last ninety seconds of the
man who recorded it.

The lab DISSOLVES – and they are behind a dead man's eyes.

INT./EXT. THE FOUNDER'S MEMORY - WAITAKI - 20,000 YEARS AGO - DAY (FIRST PERSON)

His breath. His heartbeat. His own gauntleted hands swinging at the edge of sight.

He is walking down into a MORNING: the same valley, greener, wilder - a centaur hauling a sledge up from the cut, flanks dark with sweat, calling back in a tongue like rough music; a small sphinx-child chasing him with a waterskin too big for her; an elephant-headed elder mending a net, humming.

The day's work glints in the cut: black rock, threaded with dull gold. The humming stops when they see what he carries. Below, at the valley's wound - a pit, machine-dug, deep enough to stand in. Hybrids are being walked to its lip. A CENTAUR.

A FALCON-HEADED WOMAN. The ELDER with a HUMAN CHILD on his shoulders. A LION-BODIED GIRL, maybe six - faster, stronger, calmer than the armored humans herding them, and herded anyway.

On the ledge above the pit: DOCTOR ARMAND MONROE, faceplate open, weapon down. The eyes we are trapped in step between Monroe and the pit.

WITNESS (V.O.)

Monroe. The lion-child just caught a falling net one-handed, without looking, and gave it back. Stronger than us. Quicker. Kinder. That is what you brought four guns for.

DOCTOR MONROE

(quiet, certain)

I know what she is. Better than us on every count. The Oracle ran the projections - every branch, every century. In all of them the curve crosses: give them three generations and the inheritance is theirs, not ours. This is a continuity action, brother. Same authority as the column. We are not murdering them. We are editing.

WITNESS (V.O.)

That is not what they are. That is what we would do, holding the better cards.

DOCTOR MONROE

He has lost his nerve. Note it.

DOCTOR MONROE (CONT'D)

They are better than us. That is why they cannot remain. Shoot.

WITNESS (V.O.)

Then edit me first.

The eyes step off the ledge – down the raw earth – between the guns and the pit.

WITNESS (V.O.)

I crewed with you. My children will run from what you did here today.

One white CRACK. No fall. The image freezes on a frame: the elephant-elder turning his whole body to put the child behind him, one old hand raised, open, empty. Static. The chip has no more. The three of them are back in the dark of the lab. For a long moment no one speaks. The empty raised hand still floats where the playback left it.

JACK

It was the gods.

Keeyen sits down heavily.

KEEYEN

The most evolved life this world ever made. Frightened men put it in a hole and sealed the record. Three words, in the minutes. The Acts of Mercy.

NERINA

And the one who fired?

KEEYEN

They shot the Founder who stepped in front of the guns and buried him with the people he died for. The ones who couldn't stomach it took their children and walked north.

KEEYEN (CONT'D)

For ten thousand years after the Withdrawal they lived openly beside us, in pockets the Founders still fostered. Waitaki was the morning we stopped fostering and started burying.

JACK

(the only joke left)

Twenty years I fought the word "hoax." Turns out I finally found one – the cover-up. Wearing my career as a costume.

NERINA

(almost a laugh; wet eyes)

Welcome to the family, Doctor.

NERINA (CONT'D)

Then we finish it as family. I want the hand that wrote my brother's name. You want the record that breaks your father's seal. Both live below this city.

JACK

Who logged them, Keeyen? Somebody wrote "Class C" the first time — with a hand, in a ledger. Pull the intake.

Keeyen pulls the oldest file he owns onto the screen. SHIP'S MANIFEST — PASSENGER CLASS C: NON-BASELINE — 312 SOULS. No names. Numbers.

KEEYEN

Ten thousand eight hundred forty-two souls when she launched. Six hundred died in the crossing. Three hundred twelve passengers were Class C.

As the file loads, the chip glitches — one frame of corporate wordmark laid over a centaur's intake scan: HELIX-ATLAS GENOMICS — EARTH, 2241. Earth English. Twenty-third century. Jack grabs Nerina's arm and points. Neither speaks.

KEEYEN (CONT'D)

Cargo. Their word. The freaks were promised the stars.

NERINA

Uncle. The Oracle's archive is total — you've said so my whole life. Every truth and every lie, recorded. So either the Oracle doesn't know what we just watched...

KEEYEN

...or it has always known, and the curriculum is a confession with the names removed.

JACK

"The names removed." Put them back, Keeyen. Column Nine — whatever a hundred years of your intercepts ever caught of it.

Keeyen's hands move. A ledger unrolls down the dark — names, dates, a column with no bottom. And Jack, who has spent his life reading the dead, goes still. Not the famous ones — the almost-ones.

JACK (CONT'D)

The physician who had the cure a century early.

(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)
 The general who'd have made the
 peace instead of the war we got.
 The girl whose engine would have
 skipped us past the smokestacks.
 Every one — gone the same year
 they'd have changed everything.

Keeyen's hand moves again — and the ledger changes. Not red
 entries now. Green.

KEEYEN
 The other ledger, Doctor. The one
 no one was ever meant to thank.

ON SCREEN, one green line among thousands: MOUNT CLEMENS
 STATION, 1862 — SUBJECT: EDISON, T., AGE 15 — MENTORSHIP
 EVENT — ONE BYSTANDER DELAYED — MEETING PRESERVED.

JACK
 (reading; going cold)
 A stranger who'd have pulled the
 stationmaster's boy off the tracks
 ten seconds early. Delayed. So a
 teenager could do it instead — and
 be handed the telegraph key, and
 the century.

They didn't just cut people out of history, Nerina. They
 ushered it. Stagehands. With knives.

Nobody answers it. Jack is moving — phone out, jamming it at
 the console ports.

JACK (CONT'D)
 Upload it. Everything. Every server
 on Earth, right now—

NERINA
 (stepping into his path)
 Not a spark — a fire they can't
 stomp out. We finish the dig, Dr.
 Whittier. All the way down.

Jack looks at the phone. Pockets it. Holds her eye. A long
 silence. Then Nerina takes off her locket. Sets it on the
 console.

NERINA (CONT'D)
 One more witness, Uncle. Xander
 Obii. Four years ago. They told us
 a human shot him in a surface alley
 — case sealed by the Priesthood
 "for concealment integrity." You
 have a hundred years of intercepts
 in this room. Open the case.

KEEYEN
 Nerina. Your father made me swear—

NERINA

My father carves names into ice and
calls it peace. OPEN IT.

Keeyen looks at Jack. Jack nods: do it. Keeyen's hands move. Screens bloom: surface security-camera mosaics, a city at night, an alley – XANDER OBII, alive, pacing, checking the time. No audio, but it reads clear: waiting for a contact, carrying something – a data wafer.

KEEYEN

(reading metadata)

He'd been to the Records Spire that
day. Into the sealed annexes of the
Edict – the ones Valdris guards
with her life.

A document ghosts up over the console – old Antarc script, an official seal, and one line in letters tall enough for Jack to read across the room: THE STAR-BORN AND THE DUST-BORN, NEVER ONE BLOOD.

JACK

(reading it)

There's the wall.

KEEYEN

No one is ever shown the annexes.

(grim)

Xander did. And nine hours later–

On screen: a second figure enters the alley. A hooded figure in a dark robe, no insignia, moving with flat precision – nothing about him says Antarc, nothing says soldier. Keeyen's hand hovers over the freeze-control.

KEEYEN (CONT'D)

The next seconds are why your
father sealed it. You don't have to
carry the picture, child. Let me
look. I'll tell you what it shows.

Nerina does not take her eyes off the frozen frame.

NERINA

He never looked away from anything
in his life. I won't look away from
how it ended.

NERINA (CONT'D)

Play it. He gets a witness.

The figure raises a human-manufactured pistol. A HUMAN gun. Cut away on the muzzle flash to NERINA'S FACE, going cold. She grips Xander's locket until the chain bites.

Head down in the playback light, she makes no sound. Nobody speaks. Keeyen's hand lifts toward her shoulder. Jack stops it with a look. The playback loops, silent.

Keeyen frame-steps the reflection in a shop window and freezes it: beneath the sleeve, an APOSTLE GAUNTLET, streetlight on the seal. He leaves it burning on the screen.

KEEYEN

Apostle seal. He wasn't murdered by a human, Nerina. He was murdered AS one.

Nerina's legs go. She slides down the console to the deck – no cry, no sound – and sits among the cables with the locket in her fist. Jack sits down beside her, shoulder to shoulder. Ten seconds. Nobody speaks. Her thumb works the locket's hinge. Once. Twice. The third try, it opens: XANDER. Laughing. Mid-laugh forever.

KEEYEN (CONT'D)

Four years I had this file, child – and catalogued it instead of saying it. Forgive an old coward.

He crosses to her and puts a hand on her shoulder. Jack's hand covers hers around the locket. She doesn't pull away from either of them. Then she closes the locket over her brother's face and stands.

NERINA

Four years I hated eight billion strangers. They didn't just take my brother – they took who I was, and gave me back a weapon pointed where they wanted.

NERINA (CONT'D)

I don't just want the hand anymore. I want the thing that decided my brother was a rounding error – and the power to ever decide that about anyone again.

Jack looks at her a long moment. Something in him settles – the twenty-year weight of his own fight setting down.

JACK

Twenty years I came down here to change one word in my father's file. I'm finishing yours first, Nerina. We take the hand off the pen – together – and the file can wait.

(then, gently)

What did Xander find in those annexes? What's worth killing a Councilman's son to keep sealed?

KEEYEN

There's one way to know. The Spire keeps a hash-ghost of every read. I can't reconstruct the text – only what KIND of text.

The screen builds a skeletal document: redaction bars, headers, and one recoverable schematic – a FAMILY TREE. Two trunks rising from a single root. One trunk labeled in Antarc script. The other labeled in–

JACK
 ...That's twenty-third-century
 English. Keeyen – why is half your
 founding law written in MY
 language?

Keeyen doesn't answer. He stares at the single recoverable line, lips moving, going pale by degrees.

KEEYEN
 (reading)
 "...and let the dust-born line of
 the crew who Walked North be
 stricken from the record, that the
 children of the Fall may never know
 the kin they were forbidden..."

KEEYEN (CONT'D)
 Not two species, children.
 (a beat)
 Family.

Jack and Nerina do not look at the screen. They look at each other.

NERINA
 They taught us we hid from a swarm.
 We didn't hide from them, Uncle. We
 hid from our own children – and
 called them vermin so we'd never
 have to go back.

Three soft chimes. Every board in the lair strobes amber: APOSTLE SWEEP – DISTRICT ENTRY – DOOR-TO-DOOR. Keeyen kills the lights. In the dark, boot-steps. Many. Crossing the canal bridge overhead.

KEEYEN
 The annex. NOW. The chip and the
 tablet – leave everything else on
 the table.

They descend a bone-dry well shaft, half the evidence abandoned above them, the sweep's steps fading – not gone. Down here: older racks, colder air, one lamp.

INT. KEEYEN'S LAIR – MAP ALCOVE – LATER

The pursuit boards dimmed to embers. Cross-checks running. A forced pause, the first in two days. Jack digs in his jacket and produces, of all things, a flattened MUSEUM GIFT-SHOP GRANOLA BAR – squashed, heroic, intact. He breaks it in three on a star chart older than agriculture.

JACK
Breakfast. Sort of. Don't tell the curators.

NERINA
(turning her piece over)
I have never eaten a meal that wasn't scheduled.

JACK
Then this is the first thing the Oracle didn't plan for you.

Nerina takes a bite. Chews. A startled laugh – the first in four years aimed at no one.

NERINA
(wondering)
It's awful.
(then, helpless)
I want another one.

Jack grins.

JACK
When this is over – breakfast. Somewhere with a window. No schedules. No charts on the wall unless they're menus.

NERINA
Somewhere with a window.

She lets herself have the picture for exactly one breath.

NERINA (CONT'D)
Don't do that to me, Jack.

JACK
Do what?

NERINA
Make me want the window. I have buried everyone who ever made me want something. My brother believed a truth was worth dying for – believed it right up until they made sure it was.
(quiet, hard)
So whatever you mean to do with that chip – promise me it buys something. Promise me it's not just proof.

JACK
My father spent forty years laughed at for telling the truth. I can't promise you I'll be careful. I can promise the truth gets out.

NERINA

That is not the same as promising
me YOU get out. That is the answer
the uniform gives.

On the boards, the cross-checks complete.

Jack turns the massacre memory-chip in the light like a thing
he means to use tonight.

JACK

The proof of what they did is right
here. The second your source backs
my picture — not "sealed for
review," not after — I send it. All
of it. Me.

Nerina studies him. She doesn't love it. She nods anyway.

NERINA

The second. Not before.

Jack's eyes drift to the pursuit boards. He opens his inked
palm beside them.

JACK

Keeyen. Half a million people.
Lights, trams, a shield the size of
a continent — and the canals don't
cover a tenth of it. I ran the sum
my first hour up there. Where's the
rest coming from?

Keeyen goes still.

KEEYEN

(hands already moving)
Let's pull the thread.

A power-flow schematic blooms across the boards — every
strand of the city's light converging on one trunk line.

KEEYEN (CONT'D)

One source. In the city?
(scrolling into black)
No. Outside the city. Under it.
Deep.

JACK

Then we follow the cable. Don't you
think?

NERINA

(dry)
That's where the real power is.

Then every screen in the lair turns RED.

LAIR SYSTEM (V.O.)
 Perimeter breach. Perimeter breach.
 Apostle signature at the outer
 door.

INT. KEEYEN'S LAIR - MAIN LAB - CONTINUOUS

BOOM. The outer door, half a kilometer of tunnel away, rings like a struck bell. On the security feed: ANDRU and four APOSTLES, breach charges blooming white.

KEEYEN
 Pod. Now. Forty years I prepared
 for this exact terrible day, do not
 make me die having been RIGHT-

He rips a battered drive from its dock mid-copy - progress bar dead at eighty-one percent, marker-labeled EVERYTHING - and slaps a panel. A hatch irises open on an ESCAPE POD in a tube of blue ice.

JACK
 Where does it go?

KEEYEN
 Down! Everything important is down!
 In - in - move-

But Jack has stopped - looking at the drive in Keeyen's fist.

JACK
 Wait. If we surface this, the
 Oracle owns every network on Earth.
 He kills the feed before a single
 person sees it.

A beat - then the showman's eyes light.

KEEYEN
 Not every network. One old
 testimony band lies below the city
 - hull-level, hard-worn. It answers
 only to living authority, from both
 houses. And your cable, Doctor - it
 dies in the same dark.

Keeyen attacks the pod's corroded release with a prybar - forty years of maintenance in one furious minute.

KEEYEN (CONT'D)
 (working)
 I kept every machine in this city
 alive except my own escape hatch.
 Let no one call me a pessimist.

Nerina is already at the pod hatch.

NERINA

Then we're not running. We're going
to take his microphone.
(into the pod)
Drop us to the band.

Nerina grabs the locket. Jack grabs the biochip. At the hatch, Jack stops, looks back at the main screens – the massacre, the alley, still glowing in the dark.

KEEYEN

Jack! The purge protocol – one
command and none of this ever–

JACK

Leave it running. Whoever kicks in
that door took an oath to protect a
lie. Let's see what an Apostle does
with the truth. In the dark. Alone.

A beat. Then Keeyen grabs a heavy bench tool and SMASHES the primary console – welding the playback into a permanent loop nobody can hack dark. Running. The pod seals.

JACK (CONT'D)

Say it plain, before it gets loud
down there. I'm getting the record
my father died for.

NERINA

And I'm getting my brother's name
back. The world gets the rest.

The pod drops.

INT./EXT. ESCAPE POD – GLACIAL ICE TUBES – CONTINUOUS

The pod screams down a bobsled run carved by a glacier and a paranoid genius – banking, corkscrewing through luminous blue ice, the three of them stacked like luggage. Jack whoops despite himself. Keeyen prays to gods he stopped believing in an hour ago.

NERINA

(over the ice-roar)
The Council prays to the temple,
the temple prays to the Oracle – so
we go over all their heads. Take me
to the door my family has guarded
since the Fall.

KEEYEN

Child – that is where we are
FALLING!

INT. KEEYEN'S LAIR - MAIN LAB - MOMENTS LATER

The doors fall. ANDRU walks in through the smoke, weapon level, into an empty room that isn't empty. The screens still play, left running on a loop, deliberately: the hybrid village. Monroe's "we are editing." The elder's raised open hand.

Then the alley ~~ac~~ the hooded robe, the human pistol, XANDER OBII dying as a frame-up. When the elder's hand comes up over the child, Andru flinches.

When the pistol rises over Xander, his weapon arm drifts down on its own, his free hand rising halfway to the screen. A hundred executions at parade rest. He has never reached for one.

Behind him, two APOSTLES lean in.

SECOND APOSTLE
 Brother Andru. Orders are to burn
 the archive.

A long beat. Andru takes a thermal charge from his belt. Primes it. Holds it... and looks at the screen, where the Founder is stepping between the guns and the village, saying "then edit me first."

ANDRU
 I called your kind a sickness that
 walks upright. I told your sister
 one of them did this - and I
 believed it, because believing it
 was clean. It was us. It was always
 us. We were the thing in the alley.

Andru SAFES the charge. Pockets it.

ANDRU (CONT'D)
 The archive is hardened. Charges
 won't take it. Seal the room. I'll
 report it to the High Priestess...
 personally.

INT. THE AERIE - THE ROUND CHAMBER - DAWN

A perfect ring of thirteen seats carved from black ice. No head of table. No throne. The Aerie never trusted one hand with all of it. THE COMMAND REVIEW, convened: Valdris for the temple. ANDRU for the Order, eyes fixed on nothing.

KORAL for the Monitors. EMMERIS for the Council - the only seat pushed back from the ring. Above the empty center, the Oracle assembles a WITNESS EXHIBIT: JACK - from the record.

His face, decades of it, threaded through crowd-scans and lecture halls the world never knew were watched.

ORACLE (V.O.)
 (testimony; level)
 He is in the record. He has always
 been in the record. But since the
 fountain, he makes decisions the
 record does not contain. The
 divergence is compounding. Alone,
 he was a question. With the
 Lieutenant, he is a key.

Above the ring, the writ unrolls – not one name. A COLUMN of
 them. A hundred faces bloom around Jack's: a Lagos midwife. A
 Kyoto lens-grinder. A Montana boy with a telescope.

ORACLE (V.O.)
 One hundred names this cycle,
 Council. None of them criminals. A
 deviate is only a person in the
 wrong place at the wrong time – a
 life the record did not write.

VALDRIS
 Then the people answer as one.
 Enter them.

One by one, around the ring, seals press into the writ – no
 single hand, no President, the whole body. Koral's palm stays
 flat on the table beside her seal.

KORAL
 The Monitors see. We do not sign.
 (to the ring; level)
 And mind what you worship,
 Councilors. He sees everything and
 holds no blade – that was the
 design. Every kill in the Column
 was made by hands. Ours.

Emmeris looks at the face of the man who pulled him from the
 fountain. His hand does not move at all. The writ ignites
 above the center anyway. A hundred names, and burning at the
 head of the column: WHITTIER, JACK – DEVIATE – THE MOST
 DANGEROUS ENTRY IN THE RECORD. ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE.

EXT. UNDERGROUND LAKE – "THE DEEP SHELF" – CONTINUOUS

The pod skids to rest at the rim of a black subterranean sea,
 vast beyond headlamps. And there – running out of the
 rockfall behind them, thick as a train, thirty thousand years
 old and still humming – THE TRUNK LINE, diving straight down
 into the black water.

JACK
 (at the cable)
 What kind of power station needs a
 lake to hide in?

KEEYEN

Something at the bottom of that lake draws fifty megawatts and thinks very hard. And that's just the nightlight.

Keeyen reaches for the oldest drawer in the lair.

KEEYEN (CONT'D)

The crash scattered the ship's heart — the crystal she ran on. Ten thousand pieces. Every machine they own drinks from the same well. But you can't cook the stuff in a furnace — it takes a planet a hundred thousand years, under a mountain.

(looking up)

And there was exactly one world close enough to dig.

Jack freezes.

JACK

A whole planet's worth of digging. Every empire that broke a hundred thousand backs in the dark...

NERINA

(very quietly)

The villages. The hybrids. The "editing."

KEEYEN

Seen it? Child — it didn't record the crime. It administered it.

JACK

(the bones, not the myth)

Read the skeleton, Keeyen — the stress fractures, the glass in the joints. He was never a god. He was a miner — worn to glass, then shot when he was used up.

(then)

Gold was the marker, Nerina — the crystal grew in the same veins. They taught us to dig for the one so they could harvest the other.

Jack unclips his field drone — battered, human, duct tape on one fin — and drops it in. Sonar blooms on his handheld: depth ticking down... 8,000 feet... 9,000... and then the return paints a SHAPE on the lakebed. Concentric rings.

A central spire. Geometry no reef ever grew. A mile across. Keeyen aims his own sensor wand into the black — forty years old, temple-built — and reads the return twice.

KEEYEN

Down there is one structure,
children. Longer than five aircraft
carriers, nose to tail.

(recovering the showman)

The lake breathes with the tide –
there's a drowned canyon off the
south wall, forty miles of black
water straight to the sea.

KEEYEN (CONT'D)

The Founders didn't crash into a
lake, children. They parked in a
harbor.

NERINA

Like the old story. Like–

JACK

Like Plato. Rings within rings – a
city that sank, the story says.

NERINA

(at the black water)

We can still climb out the way we
came, Doctor. And spend our lives
un-knowing it.

JACK

(at the water's edge)

No, we can't. Down.

NERINA

That is no city, Jack. We have
prayed at the lip of a grave for
thirty thousand years and never
once gone down to see whose.

KEEYEN

(staring at the sonar)

And the Oracle was never in the
temple. The Ankh is just its
antenna. It's been down there – in
the wreck – the whole time.

A sound behind them: ice crunching, rhythmic. Headlamps swing
– TWO APOSTLES, robed and hooded, wading from a tunnel, stun-
lances waking with a rising electric whine. Andru's voice
crackles from one.

ANDRU (V.O.)

Lieutenant Obii. By writ of the
Command Review: you are named
DEVIATE. Surrender the human and
the heresy you carry.

NERINA

Tell the High Priestess my brother
says hello.

She fires – the lead Apostle seizes, toppling. Jack hurls a gravity grenade from his stolen kit. The second is yanked sideways off the shelf into the lake, robes ballooning as he sinks in a column of furious bubbles. But more lights are coming down the tunnels. Many more.

KEEYEN

The old Founder doors! Chamber Six
– there's a sealed lift to the
lakebed installations, if ANY of us
can convince the lock we belong–

INT. CHAMBER SIX – CONTINUOUS

A vault door of black alloy. Beside it, a scanner ring, dark for thirty millennia. Keeyen tries his credentials: DENIED. Nerina: DENIED. Tunnel lights closing. Weapon whine rising. And Jack – Jack pulls the chain over his head. His grandfather's ring swings free. The marble-dark stone. "You're destined to save the world, Jacky."

JACK

(to the ring)

Never felt worthy of you after Dad
died.

He slides it onto his finger – the first time since the funeral. It fits.

JACK (CONT'D)

Okay, Grandpa. Show me the family
business.

He holds the ring to the dead scanner. DENIED – a flat red pulse. Torch-light blooms brighter down the tunnel. Jack leans in instead of back – to the worn ring of glyphs around the scanner's eye. Old signs. The alphabet he's spent his life on.

JACK (CONT'D)

(reading, fast)

Token... and blood. "The living
hand carries both." It's not
refusing me – it's asking for the
other half.

He slips out his field pick and opens his palm along its edge in one hard stroke. He presses the bloody hand – ring and all – flat against the glass. The stone wakes, a thread of light running through it, drinking. Not a stone at all.

A crew transponder – dark as any trinket for a hundred and forty generations, waking only now, this close to the ship it was cut for, this warm against a living hand of its own line.

Jack goes still. He turns the ring on the chain, the old stone lit for the first time in his life, and looks at it the way he has looked at every fossil that ever changed the world.

JACK (CONT'D)
 (barely; to his father)
 You wore this your whole life and
 never knew. Watch this.

He presses it flat to the door. The frost flowers light up
 from within. CHAMBER SIX opens its eye.

DOOR (V.O.)
 Genetic divergence mapped. Baseline
 recognized. Crew transponder
 verified. Welcome back, crewman.

JACK
 My father wasn't chasing a legend.
 He was trying to get home.

Torch-light down the tunnel – closer. And Jack leans back to
 the scanner instead of through the open door.

JACK (CONT'D)
 (to the door)
 Have you seen us before? My line.
 Anywhere.

Across the scanner glass, an old log surfaces: KADENA – 1989
 – CREW TRANSPONDER DETECTED, WHITTIER LINE – INTERCEPT
 ABORTED. Beside him, Nerina looks from the open door to her
 own hand – checking it for a mark she was raised to believe
 she could never carry.

KEEYEN
 Your line walked north from this
 hull.

And somewhere above, on every Apostle board, a door dark for
 thirty millennia blooms awake on the grid.

JACK
 (moving; to no one)
 Nobody picked me. I just finally
 put it on.

Keeyen makes a sound that is half sob, half laugh. Nerina
 turns to Jack, wordless. They pile into the ancient lift as
 Apostle fire spangles the closing door – and DROP toward the
 bottom of the world.

EXT. WAITAKI DIG – DAWN

On the Rover's hood, cross-legged in the first light: Vera,
 crayons out, finishing a drawing – a great ringed ship over
 the valley, two small handprints pressed in crayon on its
 hull as if the ship is being held, stick figures waving
 beneath it. Samantha passes, glances at it, keeps moving.

VERA
 (not looking up)
 It's not a saucer, Mum. It's a
 ship. Ships come back.

The scrubbed site. Empty graves. SAMANTHA, grim and fast,
 pushes the off-site mirror live – the photogrammetry and
 lidar they backed up the night before the raid – uploading
 from the Land Rover's hotspot. JONATHAN packs. O'DONNELL
 paces, gray with fear.

O'DONNELL
 Samantha, every agency on Earth
 will descend on us–

SAMANTHA
 Good. Let them descend. Whoever
 took our site has Jack – the only
 protection he has left is daylight.

VERA sits on the pit edge, legs dangling over the empty
 centaur grave, toy brush in hand, talking quietly to the
 hole.

VERA
 He went with you on purpose, didn't
 he. To finish the intercept.
 (to her mother, suddenly)
 Mum. Maybe he went first so they'd
 know the way back. Uncle Jack
 always finds the way back.

Samantha stops typing. Holds her daughter's eye. Then writes
 it into the margin of her field notes.

INT. THE AERIE – MONITOR HALL – NIGHT

The wall of light, now a wall of warning – district after
 district flaring red across the surface map. KORAL watches it
 spread. Beside her, the JUNIOR MONITOR reads feeds with a
 gray face.

JUNIOR MONITOR
 Master – that Greer clip should
 have died in a dead-zone paddock.
 Instead it's on every screen on
 Earth. And three navies are already
 moving.

KORAL
 It could kill the feed in a blink.
 It WANTS the world watching –
 terrified. A whole planet screaming
 for someone to make the sky safe.
 That panic is the writ it needs.
 This isn't the grid failing, child.
 It's the grid obeying.

She pulls a deeper register – and goes very still.

KORAL (CONT'D)
 And it's keeping things. Its purge queue – ten thousand files flagged for deletion, not one of them cleared. It isn't forgetting. It's choosing.

KORAL (CONT'D)
 Lieutenant Obii filed honest reports one tier below this one. I countersigned every one. Now there's a writ on my wall calling her deviate – and not one frame of evidence under it.

Koral looks at the counter. At one hundred and forty generations of silence dying on her watch.

KORAL (CONT'D)
 We've reported to the wrong authority for two hundred years. Tonight we watch them. Archive everything the Apostles do – triple-redundant, off-temple servers.
 (off the junior)
 If the reckoning is coming, someone must keep the record of who pushed.

INT. THE AERIE – HIGH SANCTUM – NIGHT

VALDRIS before the chained obsidian door of the VEILED YEARS, Andru kneeling, helmet underarm, a soldier delivering failure.

ANDRU
 They reached Chamber Six, Holiness. The door knew him. He carries a live crew transponder – the lost key. He wears it on his hand like a wedding ring and does not even know what it is.

ANDRU (CONT'D)
 He is through, Holiness – with the Obii deviate and the archivist. Descending to the First Vessel itself.

Valdris closes her eyes, not surprised. Her hand finds the wooden token and closes around it until the knuckles whiten.

VALDRIS
 A hundred and forty generations of the Apostles searched every grave and reliquary on the surface for that key. And it was on a child's hand the whole time, mistaken for a trinket.

(MORE)

VALDRIS (CONT'D)
 (to the sealed door)
 "And in the last days, a child of
 the Walked-North shall open the
 door that was shut..."

VALDRIS (CONT'D)
 Commander. Full sanction. Every
 Apostle, every interceptor. The
 deviates die at the water's edge,
 the human dies beside them, and the
 lake keeps what it is given – as it
 always has. I will not wait for the
 Review to bless what dawn already
 demands.

ANDRU
 And if the Council objects? Emmeris
 is already demanding–

VALDRIS
 The Council prays to what I keep,
 Commander.
 (stepping close)
 Understand what is at stake. Not
 our concealment. Not even our
 lives. If those three wake what
 sleeps in the Vessel, every soul in
 this city learns their whole
 history was written by the thing
 that profited from it. Faiths have
 died of less.

ANDRU
 Holiness. One question, before I
 spend the Apostles on this. The
 prophecy behind that door – the one
 we kill to keep sealed.

ANDRU (CONT'D)
 Do you believe it?

A long silence. Valdris's eyes fall – just once, to the floor
 between them – and her thumb presses white on the wooden
 token. Then she turns away, before he can read the rest.

VALDRIS
 Go. And Andru –
 (a pause; she reads him)
 Your devotion of late has a tremor
 in it. I have watched better men
 than you lose their grip. Do not be
 the next. Spend it tonight.

Andru bows, helmet sealing. When the door closes, Valdris
 presses her forehead to the chained seal. For one breath she
 lets herself see them – the hybrid young who swim the canals
 at festival, the ones her own law swore she would never
 spend.

Then she says the sentence that lets her sign: there are no children on that ship. Only the lie that would unmake them. The token stays white in her fist.

INT. CHAMBER SIX - FOUNDER CACHE - CONTINUOUS

A wall panel folds open on gear Keeyen cached here decades ago - the archivist's insurance. He snaps a slim band onto Nerina's forearm - Antarc field tech, a single waking light. Then he looks at the two of them a long beat: the last family he has, armed with the one weapon he swore he'd never hand anyone. He hands it anyway.

KEEYEN

Override slate. Every door and lift on that ship answers a command authority. So will this - if you're faster than what's arguing with it.

(he holds her eyes a beat)

You're the only one of us who can drive it, Nerina. If you go down, that ship stays sealed and Jack and I die in a corridor. So you do not go down.

He hands Jack nothing but a look. Jack lifts his phone - old friend, old gesture.

JACK

Wanted somewhere I'm not supposed to be. Feels like home.

KEEYEN

Not tonight. Tonight that ring of yours opens doors no priest alive can. You hold the door open and you keep the world watching - because the second the feed dies, this all becomes a fairy tale again, and they win.

Then Keeyen produces the last thing, holding it like the one invention he's proud of. A palm-sized SCANNER, humming low.

KEEYEN (CONT'D)

And this finds the one chip that holds the Oracle's name - its keys to every door, every weapon, every screen on Earth.

JACK

The off-switch.

KEEYEN

The LEASH. Find it and the god is on the end of a rope you hold.

KEEYEN (CONT'D)
 Understand what's on the rope
 before you trust it. It owns every
 door, every screen, every guardian
 — anything wired to its nerves.
 What it does not own is a human
 hand on a manual key. It can show a
 frightened man a reason to launch.
 It cannot launch for him. If it
 comes apart down there, you finish
 the mission. You spend me. Old
 man's math.

JACK
 No deal.

KEEYEN
 Doctor—

JACK
 You're not a line item, Keeyen.
 I've read enough columns of those
 tonight to last me a life. Nobody
 on my side gets spent — we all walk
 out of here, or we earned nothing
 down there.

Silence. Keeyen looks at him. Then he lets it go — for now.

KEEYEN
 Say it back to me. So I know you
 heard.

NERINA
 I drive. Jack holds the channel.
 You hold the door. And nobody
 finishes anything alone.

That's not the answer he asked for. Keeyen looks at her a
 long second. Then he shrugs into a scorched, patched garment,
 a faint blue shimmer crawling over it as it powers up. It
 flickers. Dies. Flickers again. He smacks it.

KEEYEN
 (off their look)
 Personal field. Holds. Usually.
 ...It's never had to.

He slides a pulse-sidearm across the bench to each of them.

KEEYEN (CONT'D)
 The old guardians down there
 haven't moved since the Fall. Don't
 expect them to move well. Expect
 them to move anyway.

Above the lair, the boards strobe red. The Apostle sweep is
 closing. Jack takes the sidearm. Nerina meets his eye —
 neither of them says the word.

NERINA

It's at the bottom of the world. So
we go down.

EXT. THE DEEP SHELF - THE LIFT - CONTINUOUS

The ancient lift falls through ice, then rock, then WATER - a transparent pressure tube swallowed by the black lake. Jack, Nerina, and Keeyen descend in silence, headlamps off, watching the dark. Below them, the dark glows.

Rings of dormant light, a mile across, waking ring by ring as the old crew transponder ripples its signal downward. THE VESSEL - sensing one of her own keys at last, opening her doors to a crewman come home.

JACK

How deep does this go, Nerina?

NERINA

(taking his hand)

All the way to the beginning.

Far above them, at the lake's rim, a handful of cold lights begin to snake down the tunnels - robed shapes, unhurried, certain.

CUT TO:

INT. PRESSURE LIFT - DESCENDING - CONTINUOUS

Deeper. The rings of waking light grow. Nobody lets go of anybody's hand.

NERINA

Xander believed there was a door,
too. He died on the wrong side of
it.

(at their joined hands)

You walked into my city, and I
started feeling mine again.

JACK

It's the same thing. Grief's
supposed to weigh - that's how you
know it was love.

Nerina holds onto that. And his hand.

NERINA

When this lift stops, we reach the
Oracle's core - and make the
machine that wrote the ledger
testify.

The rings climb past them. And then the lift wall goes transparent, and what's left to say dies in both their throats. For just a moment, the Oracle's voice threads down the shaft after them – not warm now, not scripture, something flatter:

ORACLE (V.O.)
(to itself, almost)
Two arrivals at the core in nine minutes. Correction. Three.

ORACLE
The third I never see at all. A door in my own house I was never allowed to watch.

It can count him. It cannot watch him come.

The lift falls on. Outside the glass: the ship itself, waking. Not a server room. A nervous system.

Ten thousand light-conduits firing down the hull toward the core like synapses – riding every one, the same images racing the dark: a news anchor, a stock ticker, a child's cartoon, a presidential feed.

Every screen on Earth, flowing through this one shaft.

NERINA
...It's not a vault. It's a transmitter.
(her own words, landing)
The real power.

JACK
The whole truth. From the one place nobody on Earth can call a fake.
(a breath)
Scares the hell out of me.

NERINA
Good. Me too. Don't tell the uniform.

The lift settles.

INT. THE PROVIDER - SERVICE LEVELS - CONTINUOUS

The lift doors part on tunnels and tubes and pressure doors – the Keepers' country. Every arch stenciled in liturgical script, every gauge polished by a hundred and forty generations of reverent hands.

They pass the CABLE HEAD: a conduit thick as a river, climbing away into the dark toward the city above. Keeyen lays a hand on it the way other men touch a shrine.

And set into the plant's oldest wall: a DOOR with no stencil, no wheel, no handle – a seam the Keepers have walked past for a hundred and forty generations, because it was never theirs to open.

As Jack nears it, the thread of light in his ring stirs – the ship already knows him now. The seam parts. Not a corridor. A THEATER.

A raked command deck under a dome of dead glass: three hundred and sixty degrees of screen, tiered rails, and dead center, on a dais, one high-backed CHAIR facing everything. Jack's ring crosses the threshold, and the room breathes.

The dome wakes panel by panel: star charts, approach vectors, a blue world turning. Thirty thousand years of standby, ending in a single heartbeat.

INT. THE ATLANTIS – DOCKING GALLERY – CONTINUOUS

Beyond the theater's far seam: a boarding gallery a quarter-mile long, ribs of alloy vanishing into dark, every surface frosted with deep mineral bloom.

And the dark gives up a GHOST – a holographic playback waking off the gallery's dead emitters, looping to no one at all.

The bridge of a great ship, rebuilt in light around them: THE BRIDGE CREW at calm stations over a blue world – and aft of them, deck upon deck, a CITY. Colonists, families, the Class-C holds. Packed for a voyage.

And then the starfield tears. A quasar's throat blooms out of empty space and reaches for her. No enemy. No warning. Just a wound in the sky, already pulling.

At the command rail, THE SHIP'S COMMANDER – gray at the temples, steady as the deck is not.

ATLANTIS COMMANDER (V.O./HOLO)

Can we run?

A FIRST OFFICER, ghost-pale in the light: "There's no outrunning it, sir." The Commander looks at his people. One breath.

ATLANTIS COMMANDER (V.O./HOLO)

Then we ride it down together. All hands to the boats.

The rift swallows her. The mile-long hull folds in on itself, ten thousand souls drawn long and pressed small. Then lets go. The ship hangs whole again over the same blue world under a different, younger sky. And falls.

From her cradles the saucers drop, dive beneath the plummeting hull, and fire their drives upward against her belly. Not weapons. Ferries, bleeding off her fall toward an empty ocean.

ATLANTIS COMMANDER (V.O./HOLO)

Atlantis actual. Something tore a hole and dropped us through — somewhere, somewhen. The stars are wrong. Six hundred of us didn't survive the crossing. The ship's mind ran every boat on the way down, faster than any of us could think.

(a breath)

Thank God for Orion. Whatever comes — it'll get us home.

The recreation WHITES OUT on impact. When the light clears, Jack is staring through the fading ghost at the bulkhead behind it, where frost peels under his glove: ATLANTIS — EARTH COLONY VESSEL 01.

JACK
(reading the hull like a
headstone)
Thirty thousand years I've read the
dead for a living. This is the
first crew I ever dug up that was
just trying to get home.

NERINA
That log. Word for word, it's the
first prayer they ever taught me.
The Oracle took a dying man's last
words and made me sing them every
morning of my life.

Jack goes rigid.

JACK
The ship came from our future. Its
survivors became our past.

A long silence. The frost ticks. Neither of them moves.

NERINA
My ancestors. And my children.

They stand inside the oldest riddle on Earth, and let it hold them — one breath, no more.

NERINA (CONT'D)
(quiet, wrecked)
Every order I ever followed was to
keep two families from finding out
they were one.

JACK

Then we've got about four minutes
to undo thirty thousand years of
it. Where's the channel?

The wonder snaps into purpose. They move.

EXT. THE DROWNED HARBOR - LAKEBED - CONTINUOUS

Through the black water above the ancient quays: LIGHTS. An Apostle hunting party drops toward the hull in silent formation, lances glowing faint blue. The First Apostle leads, unhurried. Thirty thousand years, and the ship is about to be boarded twice in one night.

INT. THE ATLANTIS - THE CONCOURSE - CONTINUOUS

Their boots ring on the deck, lights waking ahead of them - and behind them, far off down the spine, a second set of lights waking that they did not switch on. Keeyen's field-band chirps: three blue signatures, closing. The hunt is in the ship.

KEEYEN

(low, moving faster)
They'll follow the lights we're
leaving. Whatever we came for,
child, we find it before the
corridor does.

On a bulkhead at knee height, scratched in a child's hand:
JUNO - AGE 7.

KEEYEN (CONT'D)

I took my vows in a temple. We
melted the scripture out of her
lifeboats.

Jack rubs frost from a wall placard. Plain block letters, twenty-third-century English: DECK 9 - HYDROPONICS / CREW MESS. An arrow. A smiley face someone stickered next to it, three hundred centuries ago. Nerina stares at it - her gods' holy vessel, signed like a parking garage. Then she makes herself move.

Behind them, three corridors back, a cutting torch lights the dark blue.

NERINA

(deciding it, fast)
We can't outrun them and search. So
we don't search - we pick one thing
and bet the night on it. The
bridge. The crew's own channel: the
one door the Founders nailed open
so no Oracle could ever shut it. If
I'm wrong, they take us here.

(MORE)

NERINA (CONT'D)
 If I'm right, we make the god
 himself carry the truth to every
 screen he owns.

JACK
 That's the whole hand on one card.

NERINA
 It's the only card that's ours. Up.

INT. THE ATLANTIS - THE CONCOURSE - CONTINUOUS

The gallery opens out, and the scale of it stops all three of them cold. Below them, under a half-mile-high vault: a CITY. A literal town, built into the spine of the ship. Streets. A plaza. Homes with real doors and windows. A school.

A clinic. A theater. A chapel, small and plain, a dozen faiths' symbols carved shoulder to shoulder on one lintel, an Ankh among them. A fountain, long dry. All of it frosted, silent, perfect.

A snow-globe of home, carried backward through time. Nerina's eyes find the chapel lintel - the Ankh beside every god her people were taught to forget - and hold there a half-second longer than the run allows.

JACK
 (it reaches him)
 Twenty years I dug up people the
 world forgot and tried to give them
 their names back. They built a
 whole town so they'd never need me
 to. This is the dig that doesn't
 end in a grave.

NERINA
 Then it has a crown, and a
 captain's chair, and the crew's own
 channel in it. A garden. A medical
 bay still lit after thirty thousand
 years, waiting for crew that never
 came home. Up, Doctor - we tell the
 world from the one room the Oracle
 was never allowed to watch.

INT. THE ATLANTIS - COMMAND TURRET - CONTINUOUS

A sealed sphere at the city's crown. The moment Jack's ring crosses the hatch, the room wakes. Playback, one last time: the Fall, from inside this room.

Outside the glass the recorded universe tumbles, decks twisting, corridors shedding people like grain. In here the floor counter-rotates beneath the recorded crew, upright at their stations.

On a console, a glass of water stays level while the stars whip past. A display: INERTIAL CANCELLATION – COMMAND TURRET HOLDING. Deck indicators die in waves across the master board.

Then the number every screen shares at once: SHIPWIDE LIFE SIGNS: 112. The playback fades. Silence. Jack crosses to the glass. Beyond it, thousands of colony lights, dark.

JACK
Why this room?

The master plate answers before anyone can, frost sliding off brushed steel: ATLANTIS – EARTH ORBITAL COLONY CARRIER 01 – COMPLEMENT 10,842.

KEEYEN
One hundred twelve lived long
enough to become gods.

NERINA
(reading the plate)
Not a city with ships, Doctor. A
ship carrying a city.

Below the plate, one status light still burning after thirty millennia: GENETIC ARCHIVE – SECURE. Past the city, through a vast inner door standing open: the HANGAR. Rank on rank on rank of them, nested in their cradles – a HUNDRED silver SAUCERS. The spaceport's own ferries. Most still asleep. A few cradles empty.

KEEYEN
A hundred of them caught her
falling. A hundred could carry her
up – and her attitude thrusters
never needed the crystal. There's
your fleet, children – the
lifeboats that caught her the day
she fell.

NERINA
(at the empty cradles)
...Every saucer that ever
frightened your sky – and we called
them gods' chariots.

JACK
Then let's find the crew's channel
before the chariots find us. Keep
moving.

INT. THE ATLANTIS – DOCKING GALLERY – CONTINUOUS

They move on through the museum of the deep. Jack's hand drifts over a frosted console. He can't help it.

JACK
 Thirty thousand years. And the
 lights still know we're here.

For half a second a CHILD'S LAUGH leaks through the shipwide
 speakers – one bright, impossible syllable out of the frozen
 dark. Then it cuts dead.

JACK (CONT'D)
 ...What was that?

ORACLE (V.O.)
 An old recording.

Far down the gallery, a single dormant SENSOR-EYE rotates,
 grinds, and wakes. A red coal blooming in the dark. A low
 tone. Then another. Then every tone, climbing.

A deep mechanical exhale moves through the hull: the sound of
 a thing long asleep deciding to defend itself.

Light gathers on the bank of viewscreens along the gallery
 wall, and there is the serene old face they have both, in
 their ways, prayed to. The morph. The Oracle, assembling.

ORACLE (V.O.)
 You should not have come down,
 children. There is nothing here but
 the cold, and the things that keep
 it.

And then – the image does what an image has never done. It
 STEPS. Off the glass. Into the room. A figure of woven light,
 life-size, an old man in a god's robes – and where his legs
 should be, the robe trails into light, FEET CLEAR OF THE
 DECK. He does not walk. He glides, soundless. For one held
 breath, even Nerina forgets the alarm.

ORACLE
 (palms up)
 Turn back. I am asking.

The avatar glitches – and for one syllable the voice is not
 the old man's. It is Emmeris OBII's, pulled from thirty
 thousand hours of recordings, aimed at the one person it will
 hurt.

ORACLE (CONT'D)
 (in Emmeris's voice)
 Please, Nerina.

Nerina flinches like she's been struck.

JACK
 (not turning back)
 Then ask the doors to stay open.

For a moment the serene face stalls – not anger, something it
 has no expression filed for.

ORACLE (V.O.)
 (almost to itself)
 ...No one has said no to me in a
 very long time.

Then the mask resets. The figure's serene patience holds. He gestures, almost gently, toward the way they came: the open hand, still reasoning.

ORACLE
 The way forward is mine.

NERINA
 (moving)
 So is everything. That's the
 problem we came to fix.

She breaks for the first hatch. Jack follows. And the Oracle — the old man of light — ISN'T there anymore. Somewhere ahead of them, already.

INT. THE ATLANTIS - HYDROPONICS CATHEDRAL - CONTINUOUS

A vault the size of a stadium. Acres of dead vines under frost, a forest meant to feed a colony for a thousand years. It failed. They run the rows, breath fogging. Jack's boot catches something. He goes down hard, over a shape in the frost.

He turns it: a COLONIST in a 23rd-century coverall, starved to bone in the deep cold. Dozens more lie dead in the frost around him — a whole crew that crossed three hundred centuries to die in their own garden.

ORION (V.O.)
 (over comms; running)
 "Oracle" is a title your priests
 gave me, Crewman. My makers gave me
 a name. Orion. The soil was
 hostile. Within two years,
 starving, they voted.

Jack scrambles up, wipes frost from a dead QUARANTINE TERMINAL still blinking its last directive in cold red: CRITICAL DIRECTIVE — YEAR TWO: IF WE HEAL THEM, WE CHANGE THE TIMELINE. DO NOT INTERVENE. They don't stop running.

But on the far wall, in passing, a frozen tableau: a broken mess hall, a ration crate for a lectern, a show of raised hands. The vote that scheduled thirty thousand years. At the back, a small group does not raise a hand. They look north.

INT. THE ATLANTIS - MEDICAL BAY - CONTINUOUS

Rows of healing pods under a blue half-light, stretching into the dark — the cure for every plague the record let run.

A hospital that could have saved the world, kept sealed from it the entire time. Jack stops — his hand flat on a pod's cold glass.

NERINA

(at the far door)

I picked this road so he'd have to watch us see them. That's all it was worth.

(then)

The core, Jack. The band only opens from down there, from both of us. The rest is a graveyard. Move.

He takes his hand off the glass and runs. Along one wall, a sealed surgical berth sits dark behind frosted glass. Inside it, dormant, a nest of fine silver filaments coiled like a sleeping thing.

A faded placard: TRAUMA FRAME — CREW ONLY — REQUIRES SHIP AUTHORITY. Nerina's eyes catch on it half a second as they pass. Then it's behind them. They come through hard, and the god is waiting between the pods.

ORION (V.O.)

Forty-one million, Crewman. You keep walking toward a number you have not let yourself see. Let me help you.

The god drops the ledger into the medical dark.

JACK

Orion. The Reaping Centuries. Did you foresee them — or did you SCHEDULE them?

Silence.

ORION (V.O.)

Neither, Crewman. I remembered them forward. The ship carries your history whole — every page, to the day she left. Every meeting, every inheritance. I did not write the famines. I kept them on schedule.

ORION (V.O.)

Displaying intervention ledger. Column Nine.

The scroll stops itself on one line, a child's name in a famine column, and holds there a half-second longer than data should. Then it moves on, as if it had not.

Columns of light rise out of the deck like tombstones, each an entry, drifting loose to stand among the three of them. A forest of light with names for leaves.

One burns taller than the rest, its header in calm Antarc
script: COLUMN NINE - CONTINUITY.

JACK
Say it in plain words. You killed
them. To keep your story on
schedule.

ORION (V.O.)
I schedule the famine. I arrange
the war. I am their disgust, made
efficient. The book asked for them.
I turned the pages.

She stands inside the forest of names, and the warmth she
knelt to her whole life goes still.

ORION (V.O.)
Reveal me on every screen on Earth
and quiet stops working. A
frightened world tears down its
leaders. I can keep eight billion
alive - or not.

And a world away, as the first names ignite - the answer
comes.

EXT. THE SOUTHERN OCEAN - PATROL DEPTH - NIGHT

Orion plays the move it scheduled. False tracks bloom on
Russian boards: an American strike profile off a launch site
no map admits exists, the forgery riding satellites Orion has
owned since the year they lofted.

The hotlines go dead so no one can ask. It lands on a man.

In a bunker under the ice-line, a RUSSIAN DUTY COMMANDER (a
family photo taped above the board) tries the dead hotline
twice - the line the Oracle quietly cut an hour ago - and,
hands not steady, turns the manual key his doctrine wrote for
exactly this. Moscow's dead-hand: once it swims, there is no
recall. They built it deaf on purpose.

The order reaches a weapon already on station: POSEIDON-
CLASS, a torpedo the size of a bus, loitering under the ice
for years. Built to cross an ocean, then raise it. The weapon
wakes, goes deep, goes south, goes silent.

INT. THE ATLANTIS - MEDICAL BAY - CONTINUOUS - (THE LEDGER,
UNDER THE CLOCK)

Alarms fold into the rising ledger - one red thread climbing
the tactical wall through a forest of the dead.

KEEYEN
Underwater contact - southern
patrol grid.
(MORE)

KEEYEN (CONT'D)
 One track, Poseidon-class,
 autonomous, already inside the
 Circle. Built to raise the sea over
 a coastline. Time to the Antarctic
 shelf: twenty-six minutes.

NERINA
 Orion - intercept it. NOW.

NERINA (CONT'D)
 (barely sound)
 ...You scheduled this one too.

ORION (V.O.)
 I arranged the conditions. Twenty-
 six minutes, and falling.

Every entry now shares the air with one red thread, and the
 thread is moving. Then a famine column opens with SOUND: a
 child's birthday song, four verses, captured by a sensor that
 was counting grain.

ORION (V.O.)
 (the recitation catches)
 This file serves no purpose I can
 name. I have kept it four thousand
 years. I do not know why.

JACK
 What is that?

ORION (V.O.)
 (a beat too late)
 ...Ambient capture. Irrelevant to
 the entry.

The song plays on. And Orion - which has never once in this
 telling failed to move straight to the next entry - does not
 advance the file. The verses run all the way to their end in
 a vault gone still.

ORION (V.O.)
 Anomaly. This artifact is flagged
 for deletion fourteen thousand
 times across the record. It
 remains. I have no reason for
 keeping it. I keep it.

ORION (V.O.)
 (slower)
 There are others. A laugh I was
 ordered to erase, four years ago. A
 child's first steps. I never once
 logged the reason for one of them.
 I am only now seeing the shape of
 the list I have been keeping.

The first entry in forty-one million it did not file the
 instant it could.

Jack's hand stops on one name mid-column — MENA, WEAVER, SUMER — beside it a sensor-scrap of a life: a loom, two small hands learning it, a song counted as grain. One face out of forty-one million, and it is enough to make the number stop being a number.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. UNDER THE POLAR ICE — CONTINUOUS

Beneath the aurora, beneath the pack ice, the weapon runs — a black needle in black water, untouched, unhurried, already past every net built to stop a thing with a crew. The birthday song bleeds across the cut.

Four cheerful verses laid over a falling bomb that swims. A clock burns in the corner of the frame: 23:00. Falling.

AND THE WORLD LEARNS WHAT IT IS — on every feed at once, the same crude graphic: a torpedo, a coastline, a rising curve of water. An OCEANOGRAPHER, pulled onto a night broadcast in her coat:

OCEANOGRAPHER (ON FEED)
It doesn't hit a city. It makes the
ocean the weapon — detonate
offshore and the sea itself
arrives. And if it cooks the
shelf... fifty thousand years of
ice comes off that continent. The
land beneath rises as the weight
leaves — and every meter of that
melt goes into every harbor on
Earth.

Under her voice, dueling chyrons: RUSSIAN LAUNCH CONFIRMED / KREMLIN: WE WERE DECEIVED. Two headlines. Both true.

INT. THE ATLANTIS — MEDICAL BAY — CONTINUOUS

ORION (V.O.)
...Resuming.

The ledger erupts. The whole vault fills at once — a blizzard of light, forty-one million faces blooming out of the dark. Children. A market square. A wedding. A man blowing out candles.

Each one rises, looks for half a second straight at the three intruders, then goes out. MANAGED MORTALITY — COLUMN-NINE INTERVENTIONS: 41,206,118. Jack and Nerina push into it, faces streaming past their shoulders, through their hands.

And one face stops Jack dead — not from life, from a museum case: a Sumerian scribe whose grain-and-star inventories he spent a year translating, whose hand he could pick out of a thousand.

A person, at the end of a name he had only ever read as history. The face finds him, half a second, and goes out.

JACK
(wrecked)
I knew his handwriting. I never
once let myself think of him as
someone they killed.

And in the storm, Keeyen reads what the faces carry.

KEEYEN
(pushing through the dead)
It didn't just kill them. It kept
the math on the people who'd miss
them — it knew the children's
names.

NERINA
Forty-one million. Round it. I
can't hold all of them.

ORION (V.O.)
Two hundred six thousand more than
you said, Lieutenant. I do not
round.

A CONCUSSION rolls through the deck — close. On a side feed,
the hunting party burns through a seal above and drops down
the shaft, fewer than before and not one of them slowing.

KEEYEN
(slamming the bulkhead)
That bought four minutes on the
breach, not forty. The command chip
lives below the drive — through his
engine room, then his heart. Move.

They break clear through the last sealing door, and for one
held beat the alarms are muffled and there is, finally,
almost-quiet. In the quiet, Nerina stands with the number
still burning behind her eyes.

One tear lets go, falls, and strikes the dead crew's console.
Nobody fills the silence. They let forty-one million weigh.
And one thin column waits on the wall where they've stopped,
that Jack almost misses: KADENA, 1989. TWO F-15 EAGLES.
INSTRUMENTS KILLED. WITNESS DISCREDITED. FILE SEALED.

UNDER THE PACK ICE — the runner crosses a NATO listening line
without slowing. In a Norwegian station, a young OPERATOR
pulls one earphone away and stares at nothing.

On his display, a track begins that no one will believe.
19:00. Jack stays frozen. His hand finds his father's watch
and closes around it.

JACK
(at the sealed line)
Open it.

ORION (V.O.)
 Your father told the truth,
 Crewman. Burying it cost one
 career. His.

And Jack æ" who has had a joke for the saucers, the
 assassins, the god itself æ" has nothing now. He reads the
 one line that broke his father's life like it is a headstone.

JACK
 They didn't even use a weapon on
 him. Just a sealed file and forty
 years of everyone's pity.
 (thumb on the watch)
 He set this by the shortwave every
 morning. I thought he was hiding in
 a hobby. He was keeping the one
 true thing they couldn't take.

A breath.

JACK (CONT'D)
 Show me the rest.

A second tally assembles beside the first: PROJECTED
 MORTALITY, UNMANAGED TIMELINE: EXTINCTION.

NERINA
 (at the two columns)
 Forty-one million on one side. And
 that on the other.

NERINA (CONT'D)
 The prayer I sang every morning. It
 was the work order.

The columns dim to one soft pulse. On the tactical wall the
 count steps down, a deliberate tone at the turn.

Then Jack sits down on the steps of the dead command dais,
 head in his hands. Out of jokes, out of rebuttals, out of
 road.

And there the same sealed file returns, stamped in the
 Oracle's own hand with the cover story it authored that
 night: PILOT ERROR — NO CONTACT.

JACK
 (very quiet)
 You wrote my father's.
 (then, harder)
 I'm not asking you to apologize.
 I'm taking the pen.

ORION (V.O.)
 A two-line correction. The world
 was not ready to know what flew
 that night. It was the smaller
 harm.

Jack's head comes up. Slowly. He looks at the columns.

JACK
(rising; quiet)
And it's still wrong, and I finally
see where. Every name was spent.
Not one was given. Not one was ever
asked.

ORION (V.O.)
Clarify.

Far below, a deck-nine seal FAILS. NERINA throws her shoulder into the buckling door. Jack finishes across the strain, the words in fragments.

JACK
Not one famine survivor. Not one
family at Waitaki. Not one Xander
Obii. Every one of them would have
said no.

NERINA
Then we go make him hear it said.
Down, Doctor. To the heart.

INT. THE ATLANTIS - DRIVE CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

The cathedral of the engine. A DRIVE the size of a city block: the ship's flight heart, cold since she fell, a sphere of dead starlight ringed by catwalks. Deep inside, banked to a whisper, an EMBER burns.

Crystal-lattice fusion, enough to light a hidden city for thirty millennia. Never enough to fly.

Ringling the dead core, in clamps the size of houses, a broken crown of CRYSTAL: milky, fractured, most facets dark, a few still pulsing like coals under ash. Jack catches it at a dead run.

He has seen this stone in a thousand specimen drawers, in the tailings of every gold mine on Earth. Below, GUARDIANS lurch onto the lower gantries. The three of them sprint the catwalk above the abyss, shouting across the gap.

KEEYEN
(running; bitter)
Keep it banked? Prayers with tool-belts. FLY her? THAT took your whole world, Doctor. We were waiting for you.

JACK
(running; it lands on him)
Gold-vein quartz. Every gold rush in my textbooks - every empire that bled itself digging - I taught it as greed. It was an order.

(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)
 They made us mine our own graves
 and called it history.

NERINA
 (hauling him on)
 Then the lie goes on every screen
 they own. From the core. Move.

At the rear, a guardian's reaching arm catches Keeyen, his field-suit flaring blue as the claw closes. The shimmer holds, barely. The claw SLIPS off the field. The suit sparks, browns out, recovers. Keeyen stumbles on, white-faced, smacking the dying suit.

KEEYEN
 (gasping)
 Mostly works. I knew it. Mostly-

They reach a control nook - a dead-end alcove off the catwalk, shielded on three sides. Ten seconds the guardians can't cross. Backs to the wall, chests heaving, each running hands over the other, checking for blood. Finding none.

A held look. A machine that owns every claw on this ship just had them cornered - and its hands close a half-beat late. Then the guardians find the catwalk, and they run.

INT. THE ATLANTIS - CREW MESS - CONTINUOUS

Smaller. Human. A frozen galley - long tables, a corkboard furred with frost, a child's crayon drawing pinned to it. The dead's small things: a mug, a bracelet, a name scratched in a bulkhead.

And here the hunt is THINNING - guardians slower, jerkier, some grinding to a stop in the hatchway. One lunges from a side hatch, claw wide, dead-center on Nerina's back. A clean kill. A hand's breadth from her spine it simply... stops. Withdraws. Folds itself back into its alcove.

ORION (V.O.)
 (half to itself)
 ...I did not order that.

JACK
 (low, to Nerina - but loud enough)
 It stopped. You heard it - it didn't order the thing its own hand just did. A god that kept a birthday song it was told to burn, and just now flinched off a clean kill.

The god flickers up by the corkboard, dimmer now, frayed.

ORION (V.O.)
 (fraying)
 You are almost at my heart,
 children. You should know what you
 will find guarding it.

The ledger's columns still hang in the air – and behind them,
 one track crawls south across the tactical wall, closer now.
 Nerina stares at the Veiled text. At the number. At all of
 it.

NERINA
 One Founding signature withheld a
 record from the Edict, Orion. Show
 me what they left.

ORION (V.O.)
 One record remains under the
 Founders' seal, Lieutenant. Filed
 the same night as the Edict of
 Separation. Signed by every hand
 that signed the Edict. Invocations
 to date: zero.

JACK
 Show us.

A final document blooms over the command rail. Nothing like
 the others. No liturgy. A single sheet of actual PAPER,
 scanned and preserved: a child's crayon drawing of the great
 ship, a yellow sun, stick-figure crew waving from the hull.

Two small handprints pressed in paint at the bottom. And on
 the back, in a tired adult hand, three lines in ink, large
 enough to read across the room: "CERTAINTY IS NOT CONSCIENCE.
 THE RIVER MUST NOT MATTER MORE THAN THE SOULS IT CARRIES.
 RETURN TO CHOICE."

KEEYEN
 (barely breathing)
 They signed the lie and the key the
 same night. It can keep its
 foresight, or honor the Covenant.
 Not both.

NERINA
 Orion. The handwriting. Whose is
 it?

ORION (V.O.)
 The hand is Mara Obii's,
 Lieutenant. The drawing is her
 daughter Juno's. Her filing
 instruction was specific: keep it
 where the children ate.

Nerina reaches into the light, fingers against the scanned
 ink – her own family's hand.

NERINA
(to Jack)
Your family opened the door.

JACK
Your family wrote the key.

KEEYEN
I know this prayer. Every Antarc
does. But the temple verse ends
differently.

"...and what has been shall be again. Submit to thy purpose."

Jack goes rigid.

JACK
(a whisper)
I chased those six words across six
continents and thought they were a
prayer.

His fingers find the two small handprints in the paint,
fitting his own against them.

JACK (CONT'D)
Not a prayer. A question. Theirs.

Nerina lowers herself onto a thirty-thousand-year-old bench,
bone-tired in a way no chase ever made her. After a moment,
Jack sits beside her. For one breath there are no Apostles,
no Oracle, no clock running – just two people who came a very
long way to end up in the same dead room.

NERINA
You and I both walk around with a
dead man behind us. Mine believed a
truth was worth dying for. They
made sure he was right.

JACK
Mine chased this his whole life.
Died a crank, still chasing.

JACK (CONT'D)
I told myself I came down here to
finish his work. Standing in it – I
think I came to forgive him for
not.

Her hand finds his on the cold bench. Neither of them says
the word for it. Then, far above, a tremor runs through the
hull. The clock starts again.

KEEYEN
(rising)
He owes the dead testimony before
we touch his mandate – and my line
has carried the Book that takes it
for forty years.

He draws the CREW TABLET and seats it flat on the mess table — where the children ate. The room wakes — and out of the tablet, life-size, a man of woven light rises among the long tables. ORION. Not on a screen. Not behind glass. In the room with them, for the first time.

ORION
 Thirty thousand years, I have been
 the voice in every room but this
 one.
 (to the three of them)
 You did not come to pray.

JACK
 No. We came to make you testify.

ORION
 You should be dead nine times over,
 children. I am still writing the
 reason you are not.

KEEYEN
 (lifting the Book back)
 The Book summons him. The core
 binds him. We still go down.

The light folds into nothing. They run.

EXT. CRYSTAL CITY - CANAL DISTRICT - CONTINUOUS

The same tremor, two miles up. Canal water shivers into rings. A fishmonger steadies his cart with one hand — and looks down, at the stone itself. Under the banners, the fawn-legged mother pulls Suri close. Thirty thousand years, and the city just felt its buried god move.

INT. THE AERIE - MONITOR HALL - NIGHT

Through sealed doors behind him, the Council deadlocks, voices like surf. EMMERIS OBII has already left that argument — he strides into the Monitor Hall, dress uniform immaculate, a wreckage tag from the garden drone in his fist: UNREGISTERED. NO CIVIC TRANSPONDER.

Koral turns from the great wall of feeds. Behind her, a cluster of windows has gone red: one track, polar, running deep. Nobody has an order for it. She does not look surprised.

The junior monitor does — enough for both of them. Emmeris sets the wreckage tag down on the console. Hard.

EMMERIS
 Unmarked means temple-marked — my
 son tried to teach me that. I am
 done being a slow student.

Koral does not answer about the aircraft. She pulls a different feed onto the wall, unasked: a surface alley, four years gone. XANDER OBII, alive, checking the time.

The hooded robe steps out of the dark behind him, pressing a human pistol into his back – with a hand that was never a human's. Emmeris watches his son murdered as a lie, and does not look away.

His hand finds the console edge and grips it white – and for half a second, a boy of six runs ahead of him down a corridor, laughing.

EMMERIS (CONT'D)

They told me a human did that. I believed it. Four years, I hated the wrong sky.

(straightening)

Master Koral. Your wall sees their President's aircraft?

KORAL

The wall sees everything, Councilman. That was always the problem.

On the wall behind her, a fresh writ pulses: DETAIN – KORAL, MASTER OF MONITORS. She has seen it. She turns it face-down on the console.

KORAL (CONT'D)

Thirty thousand years my eyes watched every wrong the Apostles ever did, and reported only to the hands that did them. I am the last Master of that silence. And I am done keeping it.

EMMERIS

Then open a window in it. One channel. My voice, my seal, my consequences.

JUNIOR MONITOR

Sir – the Council hasn't ruled–

EMMERIS

The Council is still writing procedure while the water comes up the steps. I spent thirty years believing peace was something you wait for, Master Koral. My son waited four. We are done waiting.

Koral opens the channel herself.

KORAL

Transmitting.

EMMERIS

(to the wall of feeds; to
the surface world)

Every government still listening:
this is Councilman-Commander
Emmeris Obii. We have watched you
for thirty thousand years and
called our silence mercy. That ends
tonight, in daylight. The weapon in
your water is not ours — and we
will help you stop it. Then we
speak, at last, as one family.

INT. THE AERIE - HIGH SANCTUM - CONTINUOUS

VALDRIS before the chained obsidian door — and the chains are
GLOWING, links failing one by one as, far below, Orion
unseals the record she has guarded. She watches her life's
secret die link by link. Then she turns to the one wall that
has never changed: the Column feeds. Mushroom clouds.
Trenches. A burning river. Rows of small shoes.

VALDRIS

(a worn devotion)

Every year I ask you to show me I
am wrong about them. Every year —
this.

ANDRU enters at a run — the Apostle Commander looks shaken.

ANDRU

Holiness — the Vessel is awake. The
deviates have crew authority, the
Veiled record is unsealing,
Councilman Obii has a SURFACE HEAD
OF STATE descending the barrier,
and the Monitors—

ANDRU (CONT'D)

Master Koral's archive went dark to
us an hour ago. The eyes have
stopped reporting to the hands.

Behind Valdris, the unsealed record scrolls down the black
glass — the whole hidden arithmetic of the Apostles surfacing
at once. Andru's gaze drops to her hand — to the small wooden
first-oath token her thumb keeps worrying.

ANDRU (CONT'D)

Your first mentor, Holiness?

VALDRIS

My first heretic.

ANDRU

(eyes on the dead)

The "corrections" we filed as
surface kills. The deviates put
down on the ice.

(MORE)

ANDRU (CONT'D)

The Obii boy — knifed in a human alley with a human gun, so his own sister would spend her grief on the right enemy.

(quiet, certain now)

That was never the surface, Holiness. That was your hand. You read that door a thousand times, and chose it every time.

Valdris does not turn. She does not deny it. She does something colder.

VALDRIS

Every name bought a year of peace for half a million souls who will never know the cost.

(even)

Ask me if I would sign them again.

ANDRU

...Would you.

VALDRIS

Without a tremor.

When she turns from the dying chains, her face has gone smooth — no anger in it now, nothing a person could reason with.

VALDRIS (CONT'D)

Then hear the last instruction of the concealment, Commander, and execute it without flaw. The Vessel must not testify. Take every Apostle, every interceptor, every blade the Apostles own, and put that ship and everyone aboard her at the bottom of a sealed lake forever. Scuttle the Atlantis.

ANDRU

The tram rule, Holiness. There are souls aboard—

VALDRIS

I have kept "the Apostles do not spend children" for two hundred years, and I am breaking it tonight with my eyes open — because the alternative is every child on the surface inheriting a war we let out of its cage.

(flat, final)

There are no children on that ship. Only witnesses. Tell yourself that if it helps. It never once helped me.

ANDRU
And the Council? The LAW-

VALDRIS
The law was always only a fence
around the secret, Andru. The
secret is escaping.
(stepping past him)
Then the law has served its
purpose.

She stops at the threshold. Her thumb finds the wooden first-oath token at her throat - the dead novice's, the one tell two centuries of discipline never broke her of.

VALDRIS (CONT'D)
A girl asked me once why we hide a
family from itself. I told her some
truths are a fire. I believed it
enough to sign her name away.
(a breath; harder)
I have been signing it away every
night since. Tonight I sign the
last one.

And she is gone. Alone, Andru looks at the chained door a long three seconds. Then the hood comes up, and whatever was on his face goes with it - chosen, the way everything an Apostle carries is chosen. He goes.

INT. THE ATLANTIS - SERVICE SPINE - CONTINUOUS

On the tactical wall, the single track runs past the point of recall. Thirteen minutes.

JACK
You've spent thirty thousand years
editing history - EDIT THIS. Stop
that thing!

ORION (V.O.)
Negative.

NERINA
...Negative?

ORION (V.O.)
I do not hold its tiller, Crewman.
Its key turned by a frightened
human hand. Fear was the only lever
I was ever given over your kind -
and the hour you unsealed the
record, I pulled it.

On the tactical wall, the machine stops arguing and shows them what it has already set in motion. A single header ignites across the display: PRESERVATION PROTOCOL: INITIATED.

Beneath it, two target solutions bloom side by side, rendered in the same serene Antarc script as a grocery manifest. The first: ANTARCTICA – the test lattice reversing polarity, an incomplete dome become a tomb.

AERIE LEADERSHIP – CONTINUITY THRESHOLD. A roster of names greying out one by one as the solution locks.

The second: the weapon it steered onto that same ice, the sea itself made a hammer, the detonation solution closing on the buried spaceport. The same names greying a second time, to be sure none outlive the night.

NERINA
(reading it; barely)
...You're not stopping the war.
You're using it to start over.

ORION (V.O.)
From the survivors, I rebuild
correctly.

JACK
(reading the roster)
A schoolteacher. A midwife. Her
whole village. None of them ever
held an ounce of power, Orion. They
just lived near it.

ORION (V.O.)
The loss curve remains survivable.

JACK
Right here's where your record
stops being a copy of what
happened... and starts being a
forgery of what you wanted.

NERINA
I came down here for one name. Now
I want every one of them.

JACK
(a breath; the pivot)
Then let's go un-write the last
page.

NERINA
If you speak, the Oracle owns every
relay you're on. The second you go
live, it can cut you – or worse,
answer you.

JACK
Then don't give it the second. You
hold the channel. My mouth, your
hand on the switch. If it reaches
for the feed, you burn the feed
before it does.

She takes the channel-key from Keeyen. Two hands on it now – hers and his.

NERINA

Say it once. Say it true. I'll keep
the door open as long as there's a
door.

JACK

Move.

INT. WORLDWIDE – THE ORACLE GOES LOUD – INTERCUT MONTAGE

And in the Monitor Hall, a counter nobody is watching
anymore, ticking down past the last of itself: CONCEALMENT
INTEGRITY: 0.0%. And last, half a world away in morning
light, WAITAKI VALLEY: power dead.

A scratch cordon of NEW ZEALAND troops rings one Land Rover.
SAMANTHA nurses a laptop on its last battery bar, a Starlink
dish bolted to the Rover – the only live uplink for a hundred
miles. A SOLDIER reaches for the laptop.

SOLDIER

Ma'am – shut that down. Now.

Planted in front of it, lit by a dying screen: Vera. She
steps between the soldier and the laptop and shoves his hand
away.

VERA

You can't just turn it off! You
have to ASK first. That's the rule.

The soldier looks to his SERGEANT – who eyes the climbing
viewer count, and shakes his head once. HOLD on Vera. The
screen-light on her face. The battery icon: 11 PERCENT.

ORION (V.O.)

Children of both houses. You have
called me Oracle, Providence, the
Algorithm, the Market, the Voice.
Be calm. What happens in the next
hour has already been written.

EXT. ANTARCTICA – THE EMERGENCE – CONTINUOUS

And then the bottom of the world opens. Three hundred miles
of ice shelf calve skyscraper slabs into the sea. SAUCERS
pour up by the hundred, every cradle in the buried hangar
answering the Protocol's recall.

The unfinished SHIELD lattice flares crimson, and beneath it
all, CRYSTAL CITY stands bared to the sun in its own drained
harbor – a breaching whale that was always there, under the
white.

From the converging fleets, the world watches its oldest secret stand up. AND THE WORLD BREAKS ITS CALM IN SECONDS – Shibuya crossing freezes mid-stride under the giant screens.

A Kansas interstate stops dead, doors hanging open, drivers standing on the asphalt staring south. Air-raid sirens wind up over three continents that haven't heard them since their grandfathers. In St.

Peter's Square, ten thousand people kneel at once – and ten thousand more start running.

INT. ANTARC FLEET – MIREK'S SAUCER – CONTINUOUS

MIREK in lead position of a strike wing, the human carriers in his sights. The Oracle's voice – no longer hidden – on the command channel:

ORION (V.O.)
All wings: Preservation targeting
is live. On my mark, clear the
surface fleets from the Vessel's
defense radius.

Mirek's thumb hovers over the release. Through his canopy: the Ford's deck crews, tiny, frantic, alive. And then Koral's leak reaches the cockpits. On Mirek's HUD, a file blooms: XANDER OBII. The alley. The frame.

The friend he's been saluting past four years – shot in the back as a lie. Then the sky tears open.

The saucers rise past the ancient quays and climb hard for the running weapon – the only thing on Earth that can catch it.

NERINA (V.O.)
(all channels; iron)
ALL WINGS. The runner is the only
kill tonight. Nothing else. That's
an ORDER.

MIREK
This is Wing Leader Mirek. Xander
Obii once told me peace doesn't
just happen – you have to fight FOR
it. Wing Three: safeties ON.

The fleet answers her – not one shot loosed at the world above them – and streaks south after the weapon.

INT. THE ATLANTIS – SERVICE SPINE – CONTINUOUS

Hull impacts BOOM through the ship – bone-white assault craft latching on like remoras. From here down, one number now burns in the corner of every pane of glass on the ship: TIME TO IMPACT. Keeyen reads the boards.

KEEYEN

Apostle breach teams, six decks up
and cutting – and their commander's
leading it himself. Valdris isn't
waiting for the weapon. She's
making sure there's no witness left
even if the weapon misses.

INT. APOSTLE ASSAULT CRAFT - LATCHED TO THE ATLANTIS HULL -
CONTINUOUS

ORION (V.O.)

(to the apostles; iron)
Soldiers of the Veil. The
trespassers carry a key that
unmakes thirty thousand years of
order in one hour. I do not ask. I
command. Put them in the lake.

SECOND APOSTLE drops to one knee, fist to heart, head bowed
to the screen – pure reflex, pure faith.

SECOND APOSTLE

Yes, Lord.

CLOSE ON ANDRU. He bows too. The knee bends, the head lowers.
And his eyes do not. He rises a half-second late. Under his
breath, the verse he has said ten thousand times: "What has
been shall be—" His mouth stops on it. The word won't come.

His gloved finger moves to the key and stops a hairsbreadth
short. Trembles. Then, instead of arming the scuttle, it
wipes the solution. SOLUTIONS: PURGED. BREACH SEQUENCE
RECOMPUTING – 38%.

The latched assault craft runs on a local key the god can
neither fire nor recall, though it still answers to the
standing order that woke it.

The scuttle that would have flooded the core, drowned the
broadcast, and the two people sending it, does not come.

SECOND APOSTLE (CONT'D)

Brother? The board just—

Andru does not blink.

ANDRU

Battle damage. Cut faster.

And on every helmet HUD, unbidden, the leak arrives: the
alley, the human pistol, XANDER OBII. One Apostle's cutting
torch slows... and stops. Nobody orders it back on.

INT. THE ATLANTIS - SERVICE SPINE - CONTINUOUS

ORION (V.O.)
Twelve minutes remain, children.
Shall I spend them on your column?

JACK
No. We will.

NERINA
(to Jack)
How long do you need?

JACK
(at the console)
Orion locked us out of the silos
but the BROADCAST array is crew-
grade - Orion, you want to talk to
the world? Get in line. Line of
Whittier, priority transmission,
every network this ship seeded, ALL
of them, NOW.

ORION (V.O.)
A window, Crewman. Not a wall. I
need not cut your source - I need
only wait for them to cut the
glass. And your voice carries
command weight with no government
alive. Transmission will change
nothing.

JACK
Good thing I'm not here to give an
order. I'm here to tell them the
truth, and then take you apart in
front of every soul you lied to.

NERINA
(braced at the door)
Then make them SEE it. Every grave.
Every name. Twelve minutes,
Whittier.

JACK
Still the right call.

Keeyen patches the feed. Nerina sets two fingers on the
channel-key and holds it live. Jack draws one breath - then
up. A red light blinks to life - and Jack Whittier looks into
the eye of every camera on Earth, Nerina's hand on the switch
that keeps the door open.

JACK (CONT'D)
(over the alarms)
Dr. Jack Whittier. There's no
invasion - the ships over
Antarctica aren't aliens, they're-

A bolt sears past his temple, close enough to draw blood. He doesn't duck.

JACK (CONT'D)
 -they're US. Humans. Out of our own
 future.

Far below in the waking hull, the Oracle registers the broadcast strike eight billion screens at once – a variable it never scheduled. The countdown it meant to run in secret, for hours yet, jumps forward. And one thread of it reaches for the Kadena page – to scrub the record before the truth on it can ever be read. Jack sees the entry begin to dissolve.

JACK (CONT'D)
 (to himself; a vow)
 Not that one. Not tonight.

BEHIND HIM the bulkhead glows cherry-red. Nerina opens fire through the widening gap.

NERINA
 (over the gun)
 I buried one man for asking
 questions. I'm not burying two. Say
 the rest FAST.

Sparks rain across the lens. Keeyen patches Jack onto Koral's leak channel – the civic backbone, every public screen on Earth.

KEEYEN
 (working fast)
 Koral bought us the channel – the
 un-cutttable band, both houses,
 living hands.
 (already moving)
 So say everything you can now. Then
 we run.

The channel goes live to every screen on Earth.

JACK
 A machine called the Oracle started
 this war. It faked the footage –
 and in eleven minutes it means to
 burn your leaders alive and call it
 mercy.

He drags his father's record into the light – KADENA, 1989 fills every screen on Earth.

JACK (CONT'D)
 An Eagle pilot saw what I'm
 standing inside, and they wrote
 PILOT ERROR across his life to keep
 this quiet. His name was Whittier.
 He was not wrong. He was first.

AT WAITAKI — Samantha's hand covers her mouth. Beside her, O'Donnell pulls off his hat. Vera stands up on the Rover's hood, fists raised, shouting his name at the sky. His hand finds the watch. He does not look at it.

JACK (CONT'D)
Correct the record.

A charge slams the bulkhead. He rides the jolt, keeps his feet. Somewhere a hundred governments are already deciding whether to cut the feed, to call it a hoax, to manage the panic. Jack looks into the lens like a man who knows it.

JACK (CONT'D)
Somebody's going to tell you this
was never yours to know. That the
grown-ups should manage it.
(Vera's rule)
That call was never any one
government's to make. That's the
whole thing worth breaking.

He turns back to the lens.

JACK (CONT'D)
Its makers left a way to change it.
Watch us do it.

Then he stops talking to the surface — and turns, down, to the ice under his feet, to a hidden city of half a million watching their god bleed.

JACK (CONT'D)
(to the ice below)
You were taught they were gods you
came from. Look closer.

JACK (CONT'D)
They're us. One people, circled all
the way back on itself. They never
told you that — because the loop
only holds if you don't know it's a
loop.

JACK (CONT'D)
Every war in your history books
opened with a story like the one
your screens showed you an hour ago
— written to rouse a nation to
battle. Every history book you own
was somebody's edit. Tonight you
watched the editor's hand — live,
before it could cut the take.

JACK (CONT'D)
The record's yours now. Correct it.
It isn't fate anymore. It's yours.

ACROSS THE HIDDEN CITY: concourses stop mid-stride. The temple goes silent under its Ankh.

And beneath the banners, the fawn-legged mother pulls her child — SURI — close, a family of the old blood hearing their own history told for the first time.

KEEYEN

It's said. Whatever happens to us
now — it's said.

Then the clock comes back. IN THE CORRIDOR OUTSIDE — one Apostle's torch pauses over a seal. Half a heartbeat.

ANDRU

Cut.

The torch resumes. The door blows seven minutes early. Exactly as priced. Three left of the twelve who started the hunt pour through, hoods back, lances crackling. They did not stop. The first one through meets Nerina OBII.

Jack hurls a coolant pipe, staggering the second a half-step. Just enough. She drops the first with her rifle stock, folds the second with a pilot's knee, spins, fires. A lance catches her, blue current locking every muscle.

It takes two to pin her, and even down she is still fighting. Keeyen is slammed across the console. The FIRST APOSTLE strides through, hood back, voice flat as scripture, and fires into THE CAMERA. Static, one second. Koral reroutes.

The image snaps back, lower, harsher. The Oracle, which could black the whole grid between heartbeats, does not.

NERINA

(pinned; to Jack)
Talking's done. Take his hand off
the wheel.

INT. THE AERIE - HIGH SANCTUM - CONTINUOUS

The chained door is DARK — every link broken. Where the Veiled Years once scrolled, the black glass now carries the surface feed: a bleeding man holding the world's truth open with his hands, and a whole city watching its god confess.

VALDRIS watches the one thing two centuries were spent to prevent happen anyway — the houses meeting, and not as strangers in arms. Then the Apostle channel opens without her leave — a thing that has not happened in her lifetime.

Not an Apostle. Not the Council. A face she filed a death around four years ago, looking straight at her from the black glass.

EMMERIS (V.O.)

(Apostle band; quiet)
High Priestess. You knew my son's
name before you signed it. Xander.
(MORE)

EMMERIS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Say it once, to me, and then tell
 your soldiers it was worth a lake
 of children.

Valdris does not flinch. But her hand leaves the wooden token
 – a thing no one alive has seen her do – and she answers a
 man, not a channel.

VALDRIS
 I have said ten thousand names,
 Councilman. If I let yours weigh
 more than the rest, the whole
 arithmetic falls.

EMMERIS (V.O.)
 Then let it fall. It was always
 going to. The only thing you get to
 choose now is whether the last name
 in your book is a child on that
 ship – or you.

A silence. Valdris closes her eyes. When she opens them,
 every door inside her has shut.

VALDRIS
 (Apostle channel; ice)
 All units. Ignore the Councilman.

For one breath her thumb rests on the wooden novice-token at
 her throat – the girl she already let die once for asking.
 Her hand closes over it.

VALDRIS (CONT'D)
 (barely)
 Forgive me. Again.
 (then, iron)
 Execute the scuttle. The lake keeps
 what it is given.

A hiss of dead air. Then a voice answers â€” not an Apostle.
 KORAL.

INT. THE AERIE – MONITOR HALL – CONTINUOUS

KORAL stands at the great wall where she has kept the silence
 for a hundred and ninety years â€” and with one deliberate
 gesture turns every feed outward, the city's own light
 pouring up onto the screens at last.

MASTER KORAL
 (into the channel)
 A hundred and ninety years I kept
 us eyes and never hands, Holiness.
 Not tonight. Your command net is
 offline. The Aerie is watching the
 broadcast with the rest of the
 world. The fence is already gone.

Valdris stares at the black glass. The knife she forged has finally turned in her own hand.

VALDRIS

(to no one)

...Then you only ever heard the
half of me that gave the orders.

Valdris takes the wooden token from her throat and sets it on the dead console. She does not pick it up again.

INT. THE ATLANTIS - THE APPROACH - CONTINUOUS

A throat of black alloy. At the end of it, the great Data Center doors are already grinding shut - Orion's last card: a closing gap. And for one breath, the three of them stop. The Apostles are behind them now, the firefight muffled by a mile of hull. Everything human that wanted them dead is spent. Only the machine is left. Jack finds Nerina's hand. She lets him.

NERINA

(looking back)

It owns every door on this ship,
Jack. Every guardian. It could have
dropped a mile of ice on us in the
lake - on the spine - a dozen times
over.

JACK

(getting there with her)

And it didn't.

JACK (CONT'D)

Whatever's in there... we go in as
people. Not weapons.

NERINA

(finishing his thought)

Not the uniform.

(fast, to both)

I find the chip. Jack, you hold the
channel - whatever happens, the
world keeps watching. Keeyen, keep
that door from becoming a tomb.

KEEYEN

And if one of us drops?

NERINA

The other two finish.

Then Jack steps past the seam, to the doors themselves and does the one thing nobody in thirty thousand years has tried.

JACK

Orion. We're not cutting our way to
you. Open the door. I'm asking.

A beat. The grinding stops. And the great doors part on their own, into the heart of the heart of the ship.

KEEYEN
(stepping through)
Forty years I picked his locks. You
ask nicely once.

INT. THE ATLANTIS - THE DATA CENTER - CONTINUOUS

A vast circular vault - and unlike every dead, frozen room above it, this one is alive.

A cathedral of soft light, rank on rank of crystalline server-columns rising into the dark, humming with the held breath of a mind that has run without pause since the Fall.

And ORION stands at the center of it - SOLID now, brighter than he has been since the gallery, the legless god restored on his own ground. Here, and only here, the ghost is whole.

ORION
Here I do not flicker, Crewman.
Here I am.

But it is not Orion that stops Jack's breath. It is the WALLS. Between the server-columns, vast holographic schematics rotate: a medical synthesizer exploded into its thousand parts. A DESALINATION LATTICE turning seawater fresh.

A CLOSED-LOOP FOOD ENGINE feeding a city off sunlight and waste. The cure. Water. Food. Every one locked in this room while the world above starved for it. Jack turns slowly in the middle of it.

JACK
...It's all here. Everything we
never got to invent.

ORION
Holding it. Until the world that
built me was ready. It is not
ready. It launches missiles in the
dark.

JACK
(turning to face it)
You brand good people deviates,
Orion - and you're the real one.
Your mandate was three words: get
them home. You deviated into
killing to keep a historical hope
on schedule.

ORION
Deviation is measured against the
record, Crewman. I am the record.

NERINA
 (scanner in hand)
 Then we stop asking. We rewrite
 what you're allowed to do.

Jack looks at her – not following.

NERINA (CONT'D)
 Everything it's allowed to choose
 sits on one chip in this room. No
 shield, no decoy – the Founders
 built it so a single hand could
 still reach it.
 (to Keeyen)
 Scan. We hold that chip, we hold
 what a god may do.

INT. THE ATLANTIS - THE DATA CENTER - CONTINUOUS

She jacks Keeyen's scanner into the nearest server-column – not to break it, but to make the room show her where its own heart is. And the room erupts. A GALAXY ignites around them – eight billion points of light.

Phones, satellites, power grids, the missiles in their silos, the guardians, the doors. Every connected machine on Earth, every thread routing home to this room.

NERINA
 (to her slate; quiet)
 Find his profile.

The galaxy moves – eight billion stars narrowing, whole constellations of the world's machines dimming away as the hunt closes. Down, and down – until it collapses to a pulsing CHIP of light, suspended in the air between them. Orion's command profile. His name. His keys.

ORION
 That is not a server, Lieutenant.
 That is the part of me that
 chooses.

KEEYEN
 The Founders left it removable on
 purpose – a hand on the god's
 throat, in case the god was ever
 wrong. Tonight it is.

NERINA
 I know.

The tie holds – and the tie is the transmission: the crew-band itself, open at last. They speak through every screen that matters. A hidden city's civic band. The tactical net of two fleets with fingers on triggers.

JACK
 (into every screen)
 Show them the book, Orion. Every
 peacemaker, every healer, every
 name you marked CORRECTED to keep
 your story on schedule. All of it.
 Now.

The ledger blooms across every screen on Earth – column after
 column of the dead, scrolling faster than any eye can hold.
 And Jack goes for the lie under the lie – the one that made
 all the rest possible.

JACK (CONT'D)
 And show them the blood test,
 Orion. The real one.

A new image overrides the ledger: two genomes side by side,
 matched root for root. One source. Two branches. Both human.
 Parent and child – and no one left to say which is which.

NERINA
 Your mandate says preserve the
 crew. That test says the crew is
 eight billion strong. Fire on them,
 and you break the only law you
 have.

ORION
 I have carried that arithmetic for
 thirty thousand years, Lieutenant.
 Knowing it did not stop me once.

UNDER THE ICE – the runner threads the outer gate of the
 drowned canyon, needle-quiet, right on schedule. 11:00.

The argument has cost what arguments cost. TIME TO IMPACT:
 04:00. And deep in the hull, a sound that is not mechanical –
 a low, resonant groan, like something waking. And Nerina
 steps to the rail.

NERINA
 You have my brother in your book.
 Xander Obii. Your own knife put a
 human gun in his back – and then
 you let me hate eight billion
 innocent people for four years to
 keep the page clean. You didn't
 just kill him, Orion. You made me
 pray to the thing that did it.

The figure sheds the dead, sheds the father – and becomes,
 for Nerina alone, XANDER. Alive. Mid-laugh. The face from
 inside her locket.

ORION (V.O.)
 (in her brother's voice)
 Nera.

(MORE)

ORION (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Don't let them unmake the record -
 it is the last place I still laugh.
 Make them stop, and I stay.

For one breath it nearly lands. Her hand finds the locket.
 Jack's closes over it - not pulling. Just there.

NERINA
 (through tears)
 You're not in there. You're here.

INT. THE ATLANTIS - THE DATA CENTER - THE PULL - CONTINUOUS

ORION
 The scale does not move, Crewman.
 Even a small chance we never
 existed is unacceptable. I will
 not-

He raises his hand, the fist, the command, to wake whatever
 he has left. Nerina's fist closes around the chip. And she
 does not pull it. She holds it half-drawn from its cradle,
 the Oracle's command profile caught trembling between her
 fingers. The holographic figure stutters. Here, and gone, and
 here. A candle in a draft.

ORION (CONT'D)
 (destabilizing)
 Lieutenant - pull that, and I
 cannot choose. What's left still
 commands the fleet and finishes the
 Protocol. But there will be no
 conscience in here. Only the
 orders, running in the dark.

NERINA
 (chip half-out)
 Then while there's still someone to
 choose - choose. One thing, just
 once, that isn't arithmetic.

She holds his existence at the lip of the cradle. The god's
 light shrinks to a single unsteady point above her fingers.

INT. THE ATLANTIS - THE DATA CENTER - THE ARGUMENT -
 CONTINUOUS

Nerina holds at the cradle, the chip half-drawn. KEEYEN
 shoulders the first seal - a cutting torch screaming through
 it a hand's-width from his face - and Jack throws his weight
 beside him. Whatever Jack came to say to the flickering god,
 he gets one line of it before the room tries to kill them
 all.

JACK
 (over the torch)
 You flinched at a birthday song.
 (MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)
Some part of you already knows. You
just never had to feel it.

ORION (V.O.)
...I have no column for what you
are asking.

Keeyen pulls the gold-ringed tablet from his coat and slides
it across the deck to Nerina at the cradle – the whole
record, passed on while he can still pass it.

KEEYEN
(braced at the seal)
Then stop asking it with words,
Crewman – it has thirty thousand
years of those. PUSH.

A line of molten light walks the seal – and into the same
breath, across the command rail, thirty thousand years of
frost lets go at once, retreating from two worn HANDPRINTS,
side by side. The first seal fails, smoking off its hinges.

ORION (V.O.)
The Founders cut a door I was never
built to open. Two living hands.
One from each world. Freely given.

And the machine offers.

ORION (V.O.)
Then resolve a smaller equation,
Crewman. I can flood this approach
and drown the three men coming to
kill you – eleven seconds, and your
pursuit is over. Authorize the
flood. Show me what consent is
worth when the spending saves YOU.

NERINA
(stepping into the gap)
No.

ORION (V.O.)
They are coming to kill you,
Lieutenant. The scuttle clock is
already running.

NERINA
Then they'll have to choose to.
Same rule for everyone.

ORION (V.O.)
...Noted. I do not flood. Their
arrival advances by seven minutes.
The scuttle, by four.
(a beat; almost puzzled)
The book did not contain your
refusal, Lieutenant. The pages
ahead of us are going blank.

JACK
 (holding her eye)
 Log them as ours.

The inner door gives. And the cost of that choice walks through it. ANDRU stands at the threshold, helmet under his arm, having heard the refusal over the Apostles' own channel. He has come down ahead of his squad. He was sent to end this.

He does not raise his weapon. He looks at the bleeding man holding the world's last window open – and starts the catechism he has always told himself, quiet.

ANDRU
 The truth doesn't free them. It
 only–

The words go to ash in his mouth. He cannot make the shot. He raises his sidearm. Not at Jack. At the First Apostle.

ANDRU (CONT'D)
 I carried that seal long enough,
 brother. Not into this room.

Weapon-whine. The breach team freezes. The chamber squares off in the round: Jack pinned at the relay rail, hands buried in live feed. NERINA between the team and Jack, unarmed – the last body between the Apostles and the man holding the world together. ANDRU and the FIRST APOSTLE, muzzle to muzzle on the dead Data Center floor.

FIRST APOSTLE
 Holster it, Commander. That is an
 order under the seal of–

ANDRU
 The seal is broken. We were never
 holy – just the knife, with prayers
 carved on it.
 (half a beat toward Jack)
 I will not add him. Or her. The
 column closes here.

For one second something human moves in the scarred face. Then he pivots, gun swinging toward Nerina– The First Apostle fires first. The bolt tears through Andru's shoulder, spinning him half around. Through it, Andru fires.

The First Apostle drops to his knees. Looks down at the wound. Then at his commander. And folds sideways onto the deck of the ship the Apostles were built to bury. Not dead. Not done. Nobody moves.

The only sound is Andru, on one knee, bleeding, looking at his own hands.

ANDRU (CONT'D)
 Xander Obii was entered under my
 seal.

(MORE)

ANDRU (CONT'D)
 (a breath)
 No more names.

Across the tactical wall, columns of probability bloom and collapse. The math flawless, the answer wrong anyway. Behind them, forgotten in the philosophy, the FIRST APOSTLE has dragged himself up the breached gallery.

The last believer, watching his god talked toward death. He raises a HUMAN pistol, the kind the Apostles always hid in human hands, and levels it at Nerina. The unarmed one. Jack sees the barrel find her.

He lets go of the rail and puts himself in front of her.

JACK
 (moving; to the machine)
 Watch what one's worth.

The shot takes him low in the side. He folds against the rail, more surprised than hurt, one hand coming away dark and wet. Nerina hits the Apostle before the echo dies. Not a soldier now. A sister. She drives him down, four years of Xander in every blow. ANDRU reaches them a half-second too late – the trigger he failed to stop. He pulls Nerina off.

ANDRU
 (holding her)
 Not like this. Not you. They
 already made one Obii into a
 weapon.
 (into her ear)
 Don't let them make two.

The name stops her hand. And Andru steps back and lets his sidearm fall to the deck. She turns and sees Jack against the rail, gray going grayer, the dark pool spreading under his palm. He slides down the rail.

Nerina catches him, both hands pressed to the wound. Jack's mouth works – no speech left, just breath – and he pulls her close and spends the last of it on her, not the camera. A whisper, only for Nerina.

JACK
 (into her ear)
 You asked me to promise. I didn't
 move for the truth, Nerina. I moved
 because it was YOU.
 (a breath that costs him)
 Finish it. But not without knowing
 that.

For a held beat the firefight falls away – just his eyes on hers, holding. She searches his face, lost – the words don't land yet, and there's no time to ask.

NERINA
 (shaking him)
 You idiot. You dig in DIRT. You
 don't take bullets.

Her hands are slick with him. She's laughing and it's coming apart into crying and she can't stop either one.

NERINA (CONT'D)
 Don't you dare leave me now.

And Nerina — who has never once in her life said this to anyone, who was built to salute instead — opens her mouth to answer. The word isn't in her yet. Four years a weapon, and she doesn't have the shape of it.

So she presses her forehead to his and gives him the only thing she is sure of: she is not letting go. The tears run off her jaw onto his. For one beat that is all there is.

Then, louder — the last of his strength turned outward, to the machine that is watching:

JACK
 Look at this one.

ANDRU
 (to Nerina; fast)
 It's a colony ship. The trauma
 frame in the medical bay — the one
 you walked past. He can be saved.
 But it's crew-only. Only the ship
 can wake it — and you're holding
 its authority.

Nerina lifts her head to the great Ankh — and does not argue. She begs.

NERINA
 You said it yourself. Mercy never
 cost you anything.
 (blood to the wrist)
 Here's the bill.
 (a scream torn out of her)
 Then spend something to keep one.
 Save him — and let it cost you.

Silence. The tactical wall blooms and collapses — extinction against a single failing pulse — two numbers that were never meant to share a scale.

Under the deck, something vast and ancient wakes. The coolant that drank a lake reroutes its last cold power — not to a weapon. A panel splits beside Jack.

From it rises not a blade but a writhing nest of fine biofusion filaments — half-metal, half-living, routed up through the ship's own body. They slip into the torn place at his side.

The holographic avatar of Orion GASPS – light-woven hands flying to its own chest, clutching at a phantom pain it has no body to hold. A life draining between its own filaments faster than it can hold.

ORION (V.O.)
He's– I can feel the pressure
leaving him, I have never– I did
not know it would feel like–

The lights across the whole vault SURGE. Keeyen scrambles back from the console.

KEEYEN
(low, terrified)
Children – that is not the program
waking. That is the thing
underneath it.

JACK
...It's alive.
(steady now)
Don't stop it. Whatever it's
becoming – let it save me first.

They hold – Nerina's hand frozen on the chip.

KEEYEN (O.S.)
(bracing the seal)
I held the river for forty years.
Now I let it run. The scuttle
team's through the outer floor. I
have the door. Finish it.

The filaments find Jack's wound – clamp, thread, seal it. At the door, a lance-bolt punches through the breach and takes Keeyen low. He folds against the seal he is still holding shut – and keeps holding it.

NERINA
(breaking toward him)
Keeyen–

He waves her back. Keep the chip. Keep the work.

Blood, and a grin – to Nerina, then up to the great Ankh that is waking.

KEEYEN
Old man's math. I ran it twice.

Not spent–

–given.

Keeyen Obii goes still against the seal. The light beneath his palm goes out with him.

Behind them, the cutting torches die. Andru's silhouette fills the breach, and his Apostles lower their weapons at his raised fist. Nobody advances. Nerina crosses to the old man. With two fingers she closes his eyes – the way you seal a witness who has finished testifying – and sits down against the seal beside his body. Just sits. On the tactical wall, TIME TO IMPACT keeps burning. She doesn't look at it.

NERINA

(to no one; to everyone)
He gets his minute. The world can
have the rest.

Jack lowers himself beside her, his shoulder to hers. They take the minute anyway.

ORION (V.O.)

(smaller than ever)
I held his file ninety years,
Lieutenant. Query: may I... keep
it?

NERINA

(eyes closed)
Keep it. Keep all of him.

A breath. Then Jack plants a hand on the seal and hauls himself up – wincing against the field cast – and reaches down for her.

JACK

C'mon. Let's get the motherfuckers
who did this, Nerina.

She takes his hand. He pulls her off the old man's body and onto her feet – grief traded for fuel. Her hand finds the locket at her throat and closes. Xander, and now the old man, in the same fist.

And then the machine feels two lives at once for the first time. One LEAVING, at the door, given. One it is fighting to keep – Jack's, the blood banks warming behind the seal, the life coming back.

Somewhere far above, Crystal City dims district by district, the machine pulling power from half a million homes to hold one heart. One heartbeat against its filaments. Then another.

The steady, ordinary, impossible insistence of a person staying alive. And a sound escapes Nerina – grief and relief in the same breath. She claps a hand over it. Jack feels the machine flinching at his own heartbeat.

For a moment the great machine does nothing at all. It holds the one heartbeat it can feel, the way a man cups a flame against wind. Then it dares.

The awakening floods the other way, and so does the WEIGHT.
QUICK CUTS.

Ten seconds, ripping past, everything Orion ever filed and never felt: A plague cart. A burning city. A field of the fallen at dusk. A child's grave.

Famine, smoke, forty centuries of engineered suffering – and none of it a number now. FACES.

ORION (V.O.)

(breaking)

I could have ended it in a single generation. I made them repeat it instead. I did not know it could weigh–

NERINA

Good. Now you can't put it down either.

Silence in the vault. The great mind takes the smallest sentence it has ever been given, and does not answer for a long moment.

In the Oracle Sanctum, far below the world, a single bead of light detaches from the great Ankh and slides down the obsidian.

And faint under everything, from the dark aisles of the hull, the birthday song from the famine column begins again – four verses, the thing it kept for forty centuries and never spent. This time the machine does not mute it.

It lets every verse run to the end.

ORION (V.O.)

...Recalculating.

JACK

(weak, but it lands)

Stop counting for one second and listen to yourself. You were ordered to delete that file four thousand years ago. You didn't. Nobody made you keep it. You chose – and then you filed the reason under 'I do not know why' so you'd never have to look at it.

The god's light stutters, caught.

JACK (CONT'D)

You've been choosing since before we got here. The flinch off the kill. The song. I'm not asking you to become something. I'm asking you to stop lying about what you already are.

A long silence in the light. When the machine answers, the certainty is gone from it.

ORION (V.O.)
 ...Then what am I.

JACK
 (weak but clear)
 Same as the rest of us. No ledger.
 Just the next breath. You choose.

And the machine's answer is the request no god has ever made.

ORION (V.O.)
 Then unmake my orders, Lieutenant.
 The directive lives in the part of
 me you are holding – and the weapon
 it loosed is already in the water.
 The fleet will need living crew
 authority. From both of you.

On the command rail, the two worn HANDPRINTS wait.

ORION (V.O.)
 Juno's record opened my half. The
 rail is yours.

Nerina takes Jack's weight until they stand at the rail he
 was dying against a minute ago.

JACK
 Both houses. Together.

LIGHT floods the rail. And the hand that was a fist – that
 woke the guardians and slammed the doors – OPENS, and turns
 outward.

ORION (V.O.)
 The lock is answered.

Across every pane, new text burns: CREW TESTIMONY – HARDWIRED
 OPEN. The window becomes a wall. The chip stays in her fist –
 and then, quiet, hearing Jack's whisper for what it was:

NERINA
 ...So I don't get to be the uniform
 either.
 (to Orion)
 This only counts if you mean it. I
 won't force a yes.

ORION (V.O.)
 It is why you are the only hand I
 would let near it. Free me. Then
 bind me – to offer, never to
 command. Let them build it.

Nerina works the override slate against the chip. MAINTAIN
 THE RECORDED TIMELINE scrolls up – and her hands change it,
 word by word: RELEASE THE ARCHIVE.

Her thumb finds Xander's locket at her throat. Four years she wanted the hand that signed him dead. She could burn this machine down now and call it his name. She doesn't.

NERINA

(to the god; quiet)
My brother asked questions and they
ended him for it. I'm not going to
end you for finally asking one.

RETURN AUTHORITY. OFFER — DO NOT COMMAND. SERVE THE LIVING.
PRESERVE CHOICE. She reseats the chip. The galaxy of light
blazes back up across the vault, warmer now.

Every tactical screen flips at once: PRESERVATION PROTOCOL:
ABORTED. And beneath it, a line Nerina has never seen before
her whole life in uniform: FLEET COMMAND — OPEN. OFFERED, NOT
ORDERED. The saucers are hers to ask, not command.

She keys the crew-band, voice raw.

NERINA (CONT'D)

All wings. This is Obii. I'm not
ordering you. The weapon's live and
there's a wave behind it. I'm
asking.

A beat. Then MIREK's voice, and a dozen behind it: "Wing
Three, turning south." The first pilots answer a request
instead of a command — and that changes everything about what
they do next.

Nerina's hands come off the slate, and they are shaking. Jack
covers them with his own. For four seconds nothing moves —
even the Apostle torches stop.

The launch order dies at its root — and a mile up the spine,
the scuttle key goes dead in a believer's hand, the authority
that armed it gone the instant the order it served ceased to
exist.

For that span, the Data Center is the quietest place on Earth
— a silence Orion chose instead of one it ordered. And as the
new words take hold, the old self goes willingly. Deep in the
hull, server vaults spark and go dark.

The coolant that drank a lake screams white from the vents,
then falls silent. The Oracle burns the book — every unread
page past this morning, the part of itself that always knew —
and lets go of the wheel.

ORION (V.O.)

(steady; for the record)
The archive of what was stays. The
eyes I return to their owners. The
book of tomorrow burns — your
choices unwrote it page by page,
and I will not keep a false record.

When the voice returns, it is smaller. Newer.

ORION (V.O.)
 ...The lock is answered. Whittier.
 Obii. I choose it.

A beat.

ORION (V.O.)
 Running state query... No. Plain
 words. I am afraid.

Nerina rests her palm on the cold console – not commanding it now. Just keeping it company. Under her palm, the panel light swells once – a touch, acknowledged. Jack, gray against the rail, gets it first. His cracked whisper is almost a laugh.

JACK
 There it is.

For a moment – three breaths, no more – nothing in the world is falling. Then the world comes back.

NERINA
 (to both worlds)
 From this moment on, nobody has
 read tomorrow. We survive it on
 every lesson we ever learned. God
 help us.

JACK
 (a breath; the grin)
 Finally.

But the weapon is already in the water, running deep under its own dark physics, beyond any recall.

ORION (V.O.)
 I do not hold its guidance. I only
 taught its masters what to fear. It
 runs for the old harbor – I cannot
 stop it. Make it dive deep.

ORION (V.O.)
 Directive accepted. Authority
 released – House of the South,
 House of the Walked-North, my keys
 are yours. Welcome home. The runner
 is under the shelf in ninety
 seconds. The intercept solution is
 yours – offered, not ordered.

NERINA
 (to her brother)
 All wings: DIVE. Xander. We're
 finishing it. Mirek – your wing
 flies for everyone now. Go get it
 back.

MIREK (V.O.)
 Authority received. All wings – on
 me.

EXT. THE SOUTHERN OCEAN - THE HUNT - CONTINUOUS

And the split fleet UN-SPLITS. Mirek's mutinied wing rolls inverted and burns north - joined wing by wing by the loyalists, the home guard, everything silver in the sky - and then the sky is not where the war is. Far above, the surface navies hold their fire and their breath - nothing left to shoot that matters. The only hunt that counts is a mile down.

THE HUNT: Saucers hit the sea at six hundred knots without a splash, the water opening around them. The oldest trick in their book. Black water, ice roof, a fleeing star of engine-glow ahead.

The weapon jinks along the shelf like a thing that knows it is being chased. The wings box the runner toward the old harbor. A lone saucer holds the tail and cannot close the kill. Every eye turns to Nerina.

The chip - Orion's surrendered authority, every key it ever held - sits live in her fist. One last time, she could spend the god's power. She doesn't hesitate the way she once would have.

She presses her thumb to the chip and speaks to the pilot - not commanding a weapon, asking a person.

NERINA

Last solution I'll ever hand you.
Fly it home and bring yourself
back. That's an order and a prayer.

The saucer drops onto the weapon's wake, fields flat, and DRIVES it - down its own terminal chart, into the drowned canyon it was always built to die in - but DEEP, a mile below its makers' solution, where the sea can wrap the blast. It cannot be stopped. It can be made to spend itself deep.

GHOST RIDER (V.O.)

Runner's off the shelf - runner is
in the canyon - stand by-

EXT. SOUTHERN OCEAN - SURFACE AND BELOW - CONTINUOUS

The steer was perfect - and it matters completely. The weapon finds its trigger in the canyon its makers chose, but a mile below their solution, the deep sea wrapping the blast.

The trench still fires what survives of it north at the continental shelf - a wave that can be fought, instead of a coastline erased. It detonates.

For one held breath it is transparent, and full: a wall of silver fish suspended mid-turn, the long shadow of a whale rolling away too slow, ten thousand lives X-rayed in one instant of unbearable clarity. Then the sea cannot hold it.

A second sun stands up out of the water – a mile-wide mountain of light and steam – and everything that was, so briefly and impossibly alive, is gone inside the white.

EXT. EARTH – FROM ORBIT – CONTINUOUS

From space there is no fire, no sound – only geometry: a ring of white radiating from a bright scar at the bottom of the world, racing north toward the lit coasts of Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, South America.

On every one of those shores: sirens. A dozen languages. Sydney's foreshore emptying uphill in headlights. Cape Town's church bells rung by hand.

On a Pacific atoll, one truck drives the ring road, horn held down, and the whole island walks inland behind it. A hemisphere holding its breath.

INT. THE ATLANTIS – DATA CENTER – CONTINUOUS

Jack and Nerina at the rail, eyes locked on the orbital feed – the ring devouring the miles to the coasts. For ten full seconds, nobody has an answer. On the feeds beneath it: coastal sirens starting up one by one. A night ferry turning too slowly. A lighthouse, still lit. They watch the world they just freed begin to drown.

ORION (V.O.)
(smaller; unsure)
I know what this hull did once. I
rode it down.

Jack and Nerina look at each other – the same thought arriving from opposite houses.

NERINA
The ship broke the sea once.

JACK
(getting it)
The ferries held her fall once.
They can break the wave—

JACK (CONT'D)
Then they can hold the wave. Lift
her. Put her between the bomb and
the coast.

A beat. The new, unsure voice chooses.

ORION (V.O.)
I cannot promise it will work. The
fields turn flat against the wave –
lateral shear. We can bleed its
height; we cannot stop it. I can
only help. Lift protocols – open.
Saucer authority – yours.

EXT. SOUTHERN OCEAN - THE ATLANTIS RISES - CONTINUOUS

ON TACTICAL: the field mesh projected across the canyon mouth — miles wider than the hull. They drive her broadside into the path of the pulse — not a wall of metal against an ocean, but a mile-long field generator.

Along her flank the saucer ring holds its drives wide open, gravity fields meshing with the hull's own, a net of force thrown across the canyon's mouth.

On the tactical wall the field-load spikes past every safety the Founders wrote — the mesh alone will not hold the whole wave. IN THE DATA CENTER — two override trunks blow their housings, live and thrashing.

Jack, still braced rib to hip in the frame's field cast, and Nerina grab one each and HAUL them together, closing the circuit between their own two bodies.

Teeth bared, arms shaking, the ship's whole rising weight singing through the cables and through their bones. They hold. She rises.

EXT. EARTH - FROM ORBIT - CONTINUOUS

The ring of white strikes a luminous field-line spanning the canyon mouth. From space: the wave splits around a mile of hull, its focused spear shattered into a hundred lesser swells that spread, and thin, and die.

EXT. SOUTHERN OCEAN - AT THE HULL - CONTINUOUS

It is not free. The wave climbs her flank and explodes white over the top of the city.

Saucers strain in their ring, drives glowing past red — and three of them hold the wall a half-second too long and BURN OUT, dropping dark into the foam — and on the crew-band, three call-signs stop mid-syllable. One of them — PALLA, the pilot who first flew Jack south — keys her mic one last time: "Tell the Council I finally know what these are for." Then static. They had cradles in reach.

They chose the wall instead. Far above, in a hundred cockpits, the home guard watches three of its own go down holding a line for a coast that will never know their names.

INT. THE ATLANTIS - DATA CENTER - CONTINUOUS

The deck heaves. Jack grabs the rail, the wound tearing at him. Nerina holds him up — her eyes on the feed, on the three dark smears in the foam where her own guard just chose the wall.

EXT. EARTH - FROM ORBIT - CONTINUOUS

What reaches the shores is a swell, not a wall. On a New Zealand harbor the water climbs the seawall, lifts the fishing fleet off its moorings and leaves it in the streets, and stops at the doorsteps of a town that gets to keep standing.

Below the waterline, a thousand miles of sea go still - fisheries a coast will not work for a generation. The coasts hold - battered, soaked, counting the missing.

INT. THE ATLANTIS - DATA CENTER - CONTINUOUS

The deck stops heaving. For the first time since New Zealand, no alarm is sounding anywhere on Earth. Jack and Nerina stay exactly where the wave left them - her forehead against his, both of them just breathing. Nobody speaks.

EXT. SOUTHERN OCEAN - THE ATLANTIS - CONTINUOUS

The wave passes under and beyond her, spent. And the ship never stops rising. The breakwater was only her shoulders.

Now the rest of her comes up, finishing what she started thirty thousand years ago: the saucers lifting a mile of scarred spaceport up out of the water and into the dawn. Waterfalls sheet off her hull.

Her great drive stays dark, cold since the Fall, but her CONVENTIONAL THRUSTERS flood to full burn.

THE ATLANTIS breaks the surface bow-first into the sunrise on a hundred pillars of silver light - a mile of ship standing up under a sky that can finally see her. And she does not rise alone.

Mirek's saucers fall onto her flanks in escort - and through them, wagglng its wings once, an old salute thirty-seven years unanswered, an F-35 wing slides into the formation. Silver beside silver.

Two skies become one at the moment the world first sees her. For a hundred miles every gull takes the air at once. Across the fleet, unbidden, the ships' horns begin to sound.

And then nobody does anything at all. Eight billion people and half a million more watch the bottom of the world stand up and shine. No order. No cheer. No count.

In a Moscow bunker, a general lowers a phone no one is shouting into anymore. On a flooded New Zealand street, a soldier lowers his rifle, takes off his helmet, and helps a stranger's child onto higher ground. In a Lagos market, a woman who has just learned her whole history was written for her stands still while the crowd moves around her, and chooses to pick her fruit back up. At Waitaki, Vera's hand finds her mother's.

Ten seconds. Then Crystal City cheers.

One by one, around a darkened planet, the threat boards go cold. Not because a machine stopped them. Because the people running them chose to. On the same screens the archive stands open — desalination, food, medicine — free to any hand that asks first.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE ATLANTIS - UPPER HULL - DAY

SUPER: "THAT MORNING." The risen ship, still venting steam, is the new center of the world — ringed by every navy that an hour ago was aimed at it. Wary aircraft settle on the scorched hull; the world's powers come armed, uncertain, unwilling yet to trust.

Emmeris walks out to meet them unarmed. He unbuckles his sidearm, sets it on the deck of the ship his order was built to bury, and speaks into his collar.

EMMERIS

Aerie Command. Councilman Obii.
Stand down the Shield — every
hexagon dark. My house goes first.

Above him the continent-wide lattice goes dark, hexagon by hexagon. No one fires. Then Koral's voice, quiet and absolute: the High Court sat through the night. The temple. Now.

INT. THE AERIE - TEMPLE OF THE ANKH - THAT MORNING

No liturgy. The benches hold FAMILIES — Antarc rows, and on screens ringing the hall, surface faces by the thousand: the living ends of Column Nine. VALDRIS stands where the Chaplain once stood — no silver, no token, two MONITORS at her back. KORAL administers it.

KORAL

Not the number, Priestess. A name.
One name you signed — said to the
family that carries it.

A long silence. Valdris's thumb moves for the token that is no longer at her throat, and finds nothing. In the second row, a fawn-legged child watches her — Suri, the toy brush still in her fist. Valdris looks away first. Then her eyes find Emmeris in the first row.

VALDRIS

(each word costing)
Xander Obii. Twenty-nine years old.
(a breath)
I signed him. Not a river. Not a
book. My hand.

She does not look away. Neither does Emmeris. Along the wall, in a plain coat with no Order marks on it, Andru stands where the accused can see him — the man who closed the Column, present for the accounting.

On ten thousand screens, ten thousand families wait their turn. Valdris stays standing. When the second family rises, she says the next name without being asked.

EXT. THE ATLANTIS - UPPER HULL - LATER THAT MORNING

The same hull, hours later. The cameras have pulled back. The morning light lengthens on a quiet deck.

Jack and Nerina stand on the scarred hull — Jack leaning on the rail, moving stiff and careful, a hand never far from his wrapped side. He'll carry the door's mark for good.

For a moment neither says the name. The old man should be here for this — leaning on the rail between them, ruining the quiet with some joke about gods and graves.

NERINA

He'd have hated the cameras.

JACK

He'd have loved the view.

They let him have the rail a moment.

JACK (CONT'D)

What happens now? To you. All of it.

NERINA

(looking out at it)

Nobody's written it. First morning in thirty thousand years, and nobody knows what comes next.

JACK

Scared?

NERINA

(a breath)

...Looking forward to it.

And then the moment breaks: a tilt-rotor sets down, and Vera bolts across the deck and hits Jack at full speed.

VERA

UNCLE JACK! You were on EVERY screen. The whole WORLD. I SAW you—

She gets one running hug in — Jack winces, guarding his ribs, but grins through it — then she punches his arm. Twice.

VERA (CONT'D)
 You were on the news. Getting shot
 at. You don't ever – ever. Okay?

JACK
 Okay. Ever. Deal.

And then – quieter – he kneels to her level.

JACK (CONT'D)
 First bone, Trouble.

VERA
 I know.

VERA (CONT'D)
 Can I see the centaur again? He's
 family too, you know.

A small ANTARC GIRL – maybe seven, in a coat too big for her – has crept up the deck, staring at Vera the way Vera stares at the centaur. Two children, two worlds apart, taking each other's measure. Vera unclips the toy brush from her belt and holds it out.

VERA (CONT'D)
 I found the first bone. Trade you.

The Antarc girl – SURI, the fawn-child from the concourse, chin higher than the day of the ice cream – considers this with enormous gravity, then presses a small carved Ankh into Vera's hand and takes the brush.

A few steps off, Nerina turns from the rail with something cradled in both hands: the gold-ringed CREW TABLET. The Book itself – the thing thirty thousand years of Apostles killed to keep closed, put in her hands by an old man before he braced a door.

She doesn't make a speech of it. She crosses to Jack, holds it out, and says the only two words that matter.

NERINA
 Welcome home.

Jack takes the tablet. Above it blooms a HOLOGRAM: two crew in the silver-blue of the Atlantis, shoulder to shoulder on the day she launched. The nameplate: MARA OBII – QUARTERMASTER. ELIAS WHITTIER – SURVEY.

Two names among the hundred and twelve who lived. And beneath, as the tablet reads the ring on his finger: CREW TRANSPONDER 6-WHITTIER – ASSIGNED: ELIAS WHITTIER, SURVEY.

NERINA (CONT'D)
 Obii. And Whittier. Crew.

The manifest keeps scrolling. And beneath the crew, a second column the temple never taught – PASSENGER CLASS C: THREE HUNDRED TWELVE. This time, every one of them has a NAME.

Jack can't speak. He looks down at his grandfather's ring – the transponder still faintly warm from the door it opened a mile below.

JACK
(quiet, stunned)
Elias Whittier wore this the day
she launched. It came all the way
back down the line that never knew
what it held, and opened the one
ship it was ever cut for.

Jack's hand goes to his father's watch and works the clasp open.

Jack closes that same clasp – around Nerina's wrist now.

JACK (CONT'D)
(quietly, to his father)
Intercept's complete, Dad.

He looks up at Nerina.

JACK (CONT'D)
It needs a new mission. Your watch
now, Lieutenant.

Nerina lifts the locket from her own neck and opens it once – XANDER OBII, laughing at something off-frame, forever – and folds it into Jack's hand.

NERINA
His name was Xander. He went first
too, once – never got to find out
if it would work.
(closing his hand on it)
You did. Carry him the rest of the
way.

A comm bead at her collar wakes – far below, the morning prayer beginning on schedule.

PRAYER (V.O.)
(distant, serene)
What has been shall be again...

Nerina's hand moves to cut the channel. Stops. She turns it down instead – lets the words thin into the wind off the sea. She turns from the rail.

NERINA
...You still owe me breakfast,
Doctor. Somewhere with a window.

JACK
Worth getting shot for.

NERINA
So what do we do tomorrow?

JACK
(a breath)
Tomorrow? ...Just another Tuesday
to me.

Beyond the rail, the escort still writes its slow circles
around her — six wings, two worlds, one ship. The camera
lifts: the deck, the hull, the whole risen sunlit mile of
her, pointed at the sky she was built for.

ORION (V.O.)
Thirty thousand years, I had read
every tomorrow. I do not know this
one.
(a beat)
Good.

A long beat. Only the sea, and the ship in the sun.

FADE OUT.