

After the End: Fertile Soil

by
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AFTER THE END: FERTILE SOIL

FADE IN:

Blurry, faded visions. Memories. Garbled intercom announcements.

Glimpses of corridors. Running. Yelling. Explosions.

In an infirmary. Blood. Doctors scrambling to work.

Blackness.

NURSE

Doctor? He's waking up.

INT. HOSPITAL TENT - DAY

We find Ensign DANIEL ROSTAM. Early 20s. Square-jawed, military poster boy. Dressed in a medical gown; he's obviously been here a while.

LANNIK

Ensign Rostam? Can you hear me?

Rostam's eyes gradually creep open as he moans.

He's looking up at Dr. SIMON LANNIK. Older, grizzled yet fatherly, exuding compassionate authority.

LANNIK (CONT'D)

Easy, easy. You know who you are?

ROSTAM

(woozy, dry-mouthed)

I'm . . . Daniel Rostam. Ensign. Solar Confederation Spacefleet. Personnel number 437-259. . . Where am I?

LANNIK

You're safe, Ensign.

Rostam turns his head to look around. He's in a cobbled-together frontier medical camp --a high-tech MASH unit. Other cots surround his, mostly empty. Nurses and medics move past on their rounds. Sunlight streams in through some windows, but we can't make out what's outside.

ROSTAM

This isn't the *Agincourt*.

LANNIK

No, son. I'm Dr. Lannik. You're on. . .
Well, I guess we're calling it Providence
colony.

ROSTAM

Colony?

He looks around again, noting the sunlight.

ROSTAM (CONT'D)

(confused)

We're. . . on Earth?

LANNIK

You don't remember?

ROSTAM

I was. . . On the *Agincourt*. In Mars-
space. There was an emergency. Something
exploded.

LANNIK

You were badly injured. You've been in an
induced coma for a little over a week.

ROSTAM

A week? How-- What happened?

LANNIK

You've missed a lot. And no, in answer to
your question. We're. . . We're not on
Earth right now.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

EXT. VILLAGE - MEDICAL TENT - DAY

Rostam and Lannik emerge from the tent. Rostam looks
around, struggling to take it all in. He's dressed in a
somewhat battered-looking uniform.

We're in a VILLAGE, a ramshackle mix of military survival
shelters (like the MASH tent) and pre-fab buildings. This
is a community recovering from a disaster, and rough
construction work is clearly going on, transitioning the
refugee camp to a permanent town. It looks like Earth,
but it's not; there's a second moon in the sky.

LANNIK

We're still sorting things out. We don't know where exactly they came from. How they managed to just show up. Why now.

ROSTAM

I remember. . . The news conference. From Titan.

LANNIK

Then you know how it all started. This way.

Lannik gently begins leading Rostam through the village.

ROSTAM

We all thought. . . I mean, it was a hoax or something, right? Some kinda viral thing.

LANNIK

You weren't alone. None of us really believed it, I don't think.

ROSTAM

(disbelieving)
Aliens.
(beat)
This-- It just. . .

LANNIK

I know, right? But yeah. Turns out it was real. Next thing anybody knew, everything was going pear-shaped. Some people thought it was the apocalypse. Others said it was. . . Well, *another* apocalypse. Some people declared war, Holy or Otherwise. Some people suddenly declared independence, some people tried to join the aliens. . . Some people kept right on believing it was a hoax.

(beat)
Next thing we knew, these alien ships started just. . . Appearing. The military launched a coup d'etat--

ROSTAM

(interrupting)
Earth?

LANNIK

Reports are. . . Conflicted. I was on Bolivar orbital colony.

INT. MESS TENT - CONTINUOUS

The food-tent/cafeteria is open-air; we watch Rostam and Lannik walk past, still following their conversation.

The tent is mostly empty now, but we see teenaged FELICIA behind the counter, helping prepare the night's dinner. We'll see her again later.

ROSTAM

Bolivar. We were sent to rescue. . .

LANNIK

I know. Neo-Vinland's fleet attacked us for. . . some reason known only to them. The *Agincourt* vectored in to help. When the alien fleet showed up, it turned into an evacuation.

ROSTAM

But how did we get. . . Wherever here is?

LANNIK

I don't know the details. You'll want to talk to Commander Jackson.

ROSTAM

The Commander? He's here?

LANNIK

Him and a few others. There were too many of us on the *Agincourt*, so your captain--

ROSTAM

(interrupting)

Captain Tuttle?

EXT. VILLAGE - TOWN HALL - CONTINUOUS

We leave the mess tent, still following Lannik and Rostam.

LANNIK

Right. He had to split the group. Commander Jackson volunteered to stay with us while the *Agincourt* moved on.

ROSTAM

Moved on where?

LANNIK

Don't know. Here we are.

They've reached a large town-hall-like tent that is in fact the town hall. Lannik pulls the flap open. . .

INT. TOWN HALL - CONTINUOUS

And we enter a crowded, raucous town-hall meeting. Most of the community is packed in here, and everyone is shouting to be heard over everyone else. At the centre of the room are Commander Ephram JACKSON, the ranking military officer, Bishop Duncan OBIS, the magistrate of Ganymede colony's refugees, and Maxwell ABRAMS, a wealthy CEO from Earth --each has his own entourage and is trying to maintain some sort of order.

These are all characters we'll get to know better in the future, but the first one we focus on is HENRIETTA, a matronly "true-believer" type. She's in mid-diatribes as we enter. Her husband FALMAN is nearby, as is NESTOR, a young fundamentalist zealot. Off to one side are KATHERINE Rayley, a haggard-looking woman, and her teen daughter KRIS.

HENRIETTA

They brought us here to save us!

Countering her is Colonel Zachary DONELLY, a hard-edged military man, working himself into an apoplectic fit trying to get through to these useless civilians.

Standing nearby is Jasper CARTWRIGHT, a blowhard news reporter who obviously sympathizes with Donnelly and loudly assents to whatever he says

DONELLY

We are in enemy-held territory on a planet none of us knows. What we need is to assume that we are under threat and act accordingly!

HENRIETTA

Under threat from what?

DONELLY

Exactly my point! We have no idea what these beings are capable of! What they want from us, how dangerous they are--

HENRIETTA

They just travelled across hundreds of light years to rescue us and--

CARTWRIGHT

(interrupting)

They invaded us!

FALMAN

We can't know if these are the same--

HENRIETTA

(louder, ignoring them)

Hundreds of light-years in DAYS!
Everything we know tells us that's not even supposed to be possible! Do you really think anyone capable of that much power hasn't mastered their own dark side?

DONELLY

You can't seriously think--

HENRIETTA

(interrupting)

These people are our SAVIOURS!

CARTWRIGHT

They aren't PEOPLE! They're--

NESTOR

(interrupting)

They're demons is what they are! This is a trap! Don't you see? They--

CARTWRIGHT

(under)

Seriously? It's the 22nd century! Aren't we past believing in boogeymen?

Falman touches Nestor's shoulder, calming him down.

DONELLY

(interrupting Nestor)

Until we know more, we need to defend ourselves. We can NOT--

Finally, Commander Jackson intervenes.

JACKSON

ENOUGH!

(beat)

(MORE)

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Regardless of what these aliens want, or what they mean for us, the FACTS are that --one, for the moment, they're playing nice.

Rumbles of argument ripple through the crowd, but Jackson bulls onward.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

And two, if they wanted us dead right now, we would be.

NESTOR

Let 'em come!

KRIS

(under, sarcasm)
Yeah, that's the spirit.

KATHERINE

(under, to Kris)
Hush, dear.

JACKSON

We have limited resources, no means of producing more, no knowledge of this planet's environment or the local technology, and very little control over our current situation. As such, our first priority is to learn--

COLONIST 1

(interrupting)
What about food and water?

COLONIST 2

Yeah! How are we supposed to survive here?

COLONIST 3

They're soldiers! They don't care what we eat! They just want someone to fight!

COLONIST 4

They're trying to start another war!

CARTWRIGHT

We're already AT war! We were the moment they arrived!

JACKSON

We are already working to inventory--

COLONIST 1
 (interrupting)
 Inventory?! We need FOOD, what do you
 need to inventory?!

COLONIST 3
 Probably deciding who to let starve while
 they feed their own faces!

Seeing his opportunity, Maxwell steps forth, a well-
 dressed, well-manicured, well-fed politician.

MAXWELL
 I believe what Commander Jackson is
 saying, ladies and gentlemen, is that the
 remaining food stocks are being divided
 up equitably to ensure that we ALL
 receive a fair portion.

JACKSON
 Yes, thank you, Mr. Abrams.

COLONIST 4
 Who gave them the right to--

MAXWELL
 (interrupting)
 While the Commander's men continue to see
 to our physical safety, we need to
 establish a proper power structure to
 allow us to deal with these aliens on
 proper terms

CARTWRIGHT
 I'll tell you what the proper terms are;
 we gather up all the weapons we can find
 and we FORCE these things to--

COLONIST 5
 (interrupting)
 To what? We don't even know if our guns
 will--

DONELLY
 (to Maxwell)
 This is a military situation. We don't
 have time to--

COLONIST 4
 (interrupting loudly)
 Since when!? How is this a military
 situation? I don't see any of us wearing
 uniforms!

CARTWRIGHT

They have been the ones keeping us alive
for--

MAXWELL

(interrupting)

I am certainly open to discussing the
proper structure for a democratically-
elected leadership.

KRIS

(under)

Here it comes.

KATHERINE

(under, to Kris)

Kris, honey.

KRIS

(under)

Sorry, mom.

MAXWELL

Given my experience as leader of Fortuna
Enterprises, I would be happy to--

COLONIST 4

(interrupting)

We can handle this ourselves, just like
we always have!

OBIS

That's enough.

At Obis' words, everyone grudgingly settles down. He's
clearly the patriarch of this community, and he has the
VOICE of a seasoned leader.

OBIS (CONT'D)

I know that you are all confused and
scared, and I know that we are in a
difficult situation. Regardless of what
these aliens intend, we owe it to
ourselves to behave reasonably and
calmly. We owe it to ourselves, and we
owe it to the many who could not be with
us here.

(beat)

We have all lost much, but we cannot
allow those sacrifices to be in vain,
just as we cannot allow our own fears to
tear us apart.

(MORE)

OBIS (CONT'D)

We are still human beings, and now more than ever, we must stand together.

(beat)

Commander Jackson has shepherded us this far, and he is correct that we need to know more. Whether these aliens are our saviours or our enemies, we can't yet say. The Commander and his men will be in charge of gathering what information they can, while the rest of us will focus our attention on building a home here.

BETHANY, Maxwell's wife, sneers in quiet disgust.

OBIS (CONT'D)

Whatever Earth's fate, we are here now, and we can only move forward.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. TOWN HALL - DAY

The town hall meeting is breaking up. Jackson makes his way over to Obis.

OBIS

Commander.

JACKSON

Mr. Obis. I wanted to thank you for your support. I know how you feel about the military.

OBIS

You've taken good care of us so far, Commander; my support is well-deserved. I'm sorry if my people seem a bit. . . Disgruntled.

JACKSON

I understand. Everyone's a bit tense right now.

Obis lets himself get pulled away. As he leaves, Donnelly sidles up to Jackson.

DONELLY

Abrams is right, sir, we need to put a real leader in place.

JACKSON
Colonel. . .

DONELLY
Abrams will be easier to manage than
these holy rollers, sir. We can use him.

JACKSON
Abrams is power hungry, Colonel. He's
exactly what we don't need throwing a
wrench into this.

Lannik and Rostam finally make their way through the
crowd to the Commander.

ROSTAM
(saluting)
Sir. Ensign Daniel Rostam, reporting.

JACKSON
Good to see you back on your feet,
Ensign. Thank you, Doctor.

LANNIK
Commander.

Lannik exits.

JACKSON
Walk with me, Ensign.

ROSTAM
Sir.

They start toward the door.

JACKSON
How much do you remember?

ROSTAM
Not a lot, sir. I remember the distress
call from Bolivar Station. They'd started
rioting. The Neo-Vinland attack. . .
Doctor Lannik said there was an
explosion.

Jackson nods.

JACKSON
That's right, you were in section four
when it blew.

ROSTAM

Doctor Lannik tried to catch me up. He said there was a coup, or an invasion or--

JACKSON

(interrupting gently)
It's a bit complicated.

They exit. . .

EXT. VILLAGE - TOWN HALL - CONTINUOUS

. . . Into the sunlight. We get a full look around the village as they stroll.

JACKSON

You saw the news conference, right? Out of Titan?

ROSTAM

Yes sir. I didn't put much thought into it, though.

JACKSON

Well, from what I've been able to piece together, the. . . First Contact, came from a civilian science group. They were experimenting with a faster-than-light engine.

ROSTAM

That's. . . possible?

JACKSON

We're here, aren't we? But yeah.

(beat)

You're technically not cleared to hear this, but I suppose it doesn't matter now; for the past year or so, fleet command has been quietly outfitting every ship in the fleet with these new engines. Project Starfire, they call it. The whole thing is above-top-secret; only the Captain, myself, and Agent Stern knew about it. We don't know how these civvies got their hands on one.

ROSTAM

So they. . . What? Got followed?

JACKSON

Apparently these civilians managed to capture a couple of alien refugees. That's what touched off the riots.

(gestures behind them)

You got a taste of it in there; some people think they're angels, some people think they're devils, some people think it's the rapture, or a hoax, or a war, or any other conclusion they can jump to.

ROSTAM

So. . . What is the real story, sir?

JACKSON

We're all still trying to piece that together. Within about a day of the broadcast, SolCon declared martial law on Titan Colony. Mars took it as a violation of the Zeloss Treaty, and suddenly we were at war again.

(beat)

Turns out one of the alien refugees was a fugitive, and next thing we knew a whole alien fleet just. . . Appeared. They were everywhere. No approach from outsystem, no communication. Obviously, they had their own FTL engines. We didn't stand a chance.

ROSTAM

So, Earth is. . .

JACKSON

We're not sure. Admiral Sundaram assassinated the President and declared a coup d'etat, people rebelled. . . Hell, I'm not sure if the aliens ever actually fired a shot.

ROSTAM

A coup? So we--

JACKSON

(interrupting)

Captain Tuttle refused to participate. Said our job was to serve the people, not the other way around.

Jackson eyes Rostam, checking his reaction. He's satisfied with what he sees; they agree with the Captain's call.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

About a day or so later, the rest of the fleet was gone.

ROSTAM

Destroyed, sir?

JACKSON

No, just. . . Gone. We think they activated their FTL en masse. Don't know where they ended up.

ROSTAM

So they just. . . Abandoned Earth?

JACKSON

It was a losing battle. Even before they cut and ran, the aliens had us outmatched.

ROSTAM

So what happened?

JACKSON

We fought guerilla style for a few days, one step ahead of the invaders. On about the third day, we got a transmission. Two transmissions, actually; one was a wide-beam broadcast in the alien language. The other was in English, rattling off a string of coordinates and telling us to make an FTL jump. When we arrived, there were half a dozen ships. The *Agincourt* was the biggest, but the *Perseus* was there too, and a few bigger civilian ships that had salvaged their own drives. Once we'd regrouped, we made another couple of jumps. After about a week, we met some more aliens. These were different. Apparently one of the refugees had come with us and negotiated our way in.

Jackson and Rostam have reached the COMMAND CENTRE; a prefab structure with a pair of armed GUARDS standing out front. The guards salute as Jackson approaches.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Welcome to our command centre.

INT. COMMAND CENTRE - CONTINUOUS

Jackson and Rostam enter. The room is a military-designed field bunker (dropped from the *Agincourt*). A handful of personnel are at work. Donnelly is already here, receiving inventory and security reports.

In the centre of the room is a table, with a MAP-display on a touch-screen.

JACKSON

It turns out that, while these "Hishiin" were willing to grant us refugee status, they weren't willing to give us a whole planet. Captain Tuttle had to split the *Agincourt's* group. Colonel Donnelly and I volunteered to remain behind on. . . "Ni-eh-wah?"

Donnelly glances over.

DONELLY

Near as we can tell. We're calling it "Nineveh" for now. Our. . . reservation, here is about 10 square miles.

While they talk, Jackson gestures and an aide brings over an earpiece, which Jackson issues to Rostam.

JACKSON

Last we heard, the *Agincourt* is en roue to some other planet with an unpronounceable name.

ROSTAM

So, we're out of contact, sir?

JACKSON

Whole other solar system, Ensign. No human has ever needed to communicate over that kind of distance.

Jackson touches a few controls on the map, and it turns into a starchart. Some stars are flagged.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

As far as we know, the entire human race is now scattered over a dozen or so solar systems. Wherever they could find habitable space and drop a few survival shelters.

ROSTAM

So they're not. . . Are they monitoring us?

DONELLY

They've got us corralled like livestock, Ensign. We'd damn well better assume they're monitoring us. We've got guards posted as lookouts, but the locals haven't made a move yet.

JACKSON

No communication, no medical help. We don't even seem to have a language in common. And no, if they have any sort of. . . translator technology, we haven't seen it.

Donelly finishes what he's reading.

DONELLY

Sir, stretching resources as much as we can, we've got about a month before something gives.

Jackson nods.

JACKSON

(to Rostam)

On that note, we don't have enough military forces here to maintain order. Between the spooked colonists and a few angry blowhards, we're sitting on a tinderbox, and we don't know what else this planet or these aliens might throw at us.

(beat)

I'm sorry for throwing you into the middle of this, ensign, but we need every able body we can get. I've read enough of your file to know you're good for it, so I'm offering you a lieutenant's bars.

ROSTAM

(surprised)

Sir. Yes, sir. I'm. . . honoured.

JACKSON

Well, don't be. We've got a hell of a lot on our plates.

INT. RAYLEYS' SHELTER - DAY

This is the shelter of Katherine and Kris Rayley. It resembles a high-tech version of a FEMA trailer; a metal box with the basic amenities but not much else. These survivors haven't dressed it up much, though Katherine has hung a cross on the wall. Katherine is sitting alone, looking haunted, scared, and sad.

The door opens and Kris enters, carrying a tray from the food-tent.

KRIS

Sorry I took so long. The Stupid was really bad today.

KATHERINE

I wish you wouldn't blame people, honey.

Kris rolls her eyes, but starts separating her and her mom's meals.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)

I know you're just acting out.

KRIS

I'm not acting.

KATHERINE

It's okay to be scared, sweetie.

KRIS

I'm not scared, mom.

Kris pauses fractionally; she hadn't even realized it until she said it. Naturally, her mom doesn't notice.

KATHERINE

Everyone's just. . . We don't know what's going on. We're not in control of our own lives. We just get shuffled around and told it's for our own good, even when we know it's not.

KRIS

I have no idea what that feels like.

KATHERINE

I just wish we could. . . Wake up. Everything could go back the way it's supposed to be. This is like a nightmare--

Kris has had enough.

KRIS

A nightmare?! How can you say that?! What we left behind? THAT was the nightmare!

(beat)

Dad's dead. He's NOT going to find us. He's NOT going to hurt us. I'm sorry mom, but you've been afraid for so long that you've forgotten how to be anything else.

She storms out.

KATHERINE

Kris. Kris! Honey!

EXT. VILLAGE - QUARTERS - DAY

This part of the camp is given over to can-shaped pre-fab shelters. Rostam is wandering around, carrying a DUFFEL of personal kit and studying a DATAPAD, looking for his assigned address. He spots Kris, walking fast.

ROSTAM

Uh, excuse me, do you--

KRIS

(not stopping)

No.

He balks as she leaves. After a bit more searching, he finds his quarters.

INT. ROSTAM/EXETER'S QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

Inside, Rostam finds THOMAS EXETER, an army Lt., about Rostam's age. Cold-eyed, hard-edged, and dangerous, Exeter is clearly career military. We find him stripped to a tank-top, doing push-ups. As soon as Rostam enters, Exeter jumps to his feet and stands at attention.

EXETER

Sir.

ROSTAM

Uh, at ease, Lieutenant. . . Exeter, right?

Exeter catches sight of Rostam's Lieutenant bars and relaxes.

EXETER

That's right. Thomas Exeter. USC Army.

Rostam reaches out to shake hands. There's a pause before Exeter takes it.

ROSTAM

I'm Daniel Rostam. USC Spacefleet.

EXETER

Navy, huh. I'm sorry.

Rostam looks around; the place doesn't look lived-in.

ROSTAM

I take it this side's mine?

EXETER

Make yourself comfortable, roomie.

(off Rostam's bars)

They said you were an ensign.

Rostam unpacks as they talk.

ROSTAM

Yeah. Commander Jackson gave me a promotion. Said we needed the help. You're a--

EXETER

Second Lieutenant, sir. Which puts you two pay-grades above me.

ROSTAM

Does that matter here?

EXETER

Matters to me, sir.

ROSTAM

Got it. Just, don't call me "sir." Still not used to it.

(beat)

Your accent. Martian?

EXETER

Yeah. From Cyrax. That gonna be a problem?

ROSTAM

No. No problem. We're all in this together.

Exeter goes back to his push-ups.

EXETER

That we are, Navy. That we are.

INT. MEDICAL TENT - DAY

Most of the beds are empty, and a few nurses are on cleanup duty. Lannik is talking to Jackson.

LANNIK

(mid-conversation)

And Mr. Rostam was the last serious case.
It looks like we're getting to what will
be the new normal.

Jackson nods, clearly mulling something over.

JACKSON

Excellent. Carry on, Doctor.

He exits.

INT. BRIG - DAY

A GUARD is watching over a single prisoner. The prisoner is AGENT STERN, a (former) government man. He's still wearing his black suit, though the jacket is off, the collar is opened, and he's clearly been wearing it for several days.

Jackson enters and nods to the GUARD.

JACKSON

Clear the room, crewman.

GUARD

Sir.

She steps outside. Stern rises to his feet to face Jackson.

STERN

You've reached a decision, I take it.

JACKSON

I have. On one hand, I would be within my
rights to kill you. That is the
punishment for high treason under fire.

STERN

I had no intentions of seizing command of the *Agincourt*, Commander.

JACKSON

Only because the Captain locked you up before you could. On the other hand, there aren't that many humans left, and I'd prefer not to lower that number if I can avoid it. Nobody here will trust you anyway, so--

STERN

(interrupting)

The rest of the fleet is still out there somewhere.

Jackson is wary and suspicious.

JACKSON

You know this for a fact?

STERN

I have faith. Just as I have faith that they're trying to locate and liberate us as we speak. We just have to give them time.

JACKSON

"Us" who?

STERN

The human race, Commander. All of us.

He steps closer to the bars, intense.

STERN (CONT'D)

Project Starfire has always been about ensuring our future as a species, whatever it takes.

JACKSON

Are you telling me you sons of bitches knew this was coming?

STERN

I don't know. I wasn't cleared for that information. All I know is that Starfire has been in progress since before I joined the UIA. I have to assume there was a plan in place. This isn't the end of history, Commander. It's just a new chapter.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

EXT. ABRAMS SHIP - DAY

Establish: The Abrams' family "estate" is a full-sized space-yacht, currently grounded (and visibly patched into the colony's power and water supply). It is the largest and wealthiest "building" in the colony.

INT. ABRAMS SHIP - DAY

We're in the "lounge" area, with Maxwell, Bethany, and their daughter ALINE. In the next room, a SERVANT is preparing a modest (by their standards) dinner.

Bethany is lounging on the couch, while Maxwell paces. Aline is sitting near a window, ostensibly studying. Maxwell is wired, his mind working furiously.

MAXWELL

As long as the military is propping up Obis, I can't make any headway. I need that reporter. Cartwright. Obis is too popular; if I can turn his people against him, make it look like he's a puppet of the military, I'll be able to ride the backlash. . .

BETHANY

Maxwell, this isn't one of your business trips. We need to get back to Earth. We have obligations to--

MAXWELL

(interrupting)

Honey, please, we've been through this. We can't go back to Earth, it's gone.

BETHANY

Oh, don't tell me you're buying that load. We're talking about trillions of people scattered across half-a dozen worlds. We OWN the solar system. These, these things couldn't have wiped us out.

Neither of them see Aline look up, searching for reassurance.

MAXWELL

Which is all the more reason to take advantage of this! Think about it, honey. If we come back to Earth as heroes, as the ones who opened up trade with an entire new civilization, we really COULD own the solar system. We could make the Confederation President look like the leader of a Boy Scout Troop.

BETHANY

Unless someone else gets there first, Maxwell. You know full well that the longer we're away from Earth the less current our information will be. We need to gather intelligence.

MAXWELL

Which we can't do without access to alien technology, which we can't get with the military and that old priest blocking us.

Still unseen, Aline looks out the window at the camp below.

MAXWELL (CONT'D)

Look, I don't like it either, but right now, this is the only card we have. We have to treat this as an opportunity. There has to be a way to turn this to our advantage.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

We find Nestor, wandering through the camp, obviously unwell. He's jittery, sweating and nervous.

HIS P.O.V.: Voices babble semicoherently. The world seems blurry. We get split-second glimpses of monsters. . .

Nestor staggers into an alleyway, flinching as though he's being attacked. He fishes in a pocket and produces a PILL BOTTLE. It's half-full.

He stares at the bottle, starts to open it, then stops. His hands shake, and he covers his face, whimpering.

Outside the alleyway, Rostam passes, but stops when he sees Nestor. Everyone else is ignoring him, and Rostam looks around nervously before stepping closer.

ROSTAM

Um, hello? Sir? Sir, are you alright?

NESTOR

Too much. It's too much, man. I can't take it.

ROSTAM

It's all right. We can--

NESTOR

(interrupting)

No. No, it's all wrong. They shouldn't be here! WE shouldn't be here!

ROSTAM

It'll be okay. We-- We'll find a way home.

(beat)

Okay? Now, let's just get you to Doctor Lannik.

NESTOR

No. No, not him. Father Darius. I need to see him.

INT. DARIUS' TENT - DAY

Father DARIUS' tent is dark and cozy, like a confessional. Darius himself is an older priest, with a gentle face and genuine compassion. We can see Rostam waiting outside. Darius pours Nestor a cup of tea and hands it to him.

DARIUS

Are you off your medicine again, Nestor?

NESTOR

They make my head. . . Fuzzy. Can't think straight.

DARIUS

You know you shouldn't do that. It's dangerous.

NESTOR

We're all in danger here though, Father. I-- I need to make them last. Make the medicine last, until. . .

He starts to weep again.

DARIUS

Shh. Sh. I understand, Nestor. Things aren't at their best right now, but we need to trust each other, okay? Each other is all we have left.

NESTOR

Okay.

DARIUS

Do you trust me, Nestor?

NESTOR

I trust you, Father.

DARIUS

That's good, Nestor. I'll take care of you, alright?

NESTOR

Alright, Father.

DARIUS

Now then, finish up that tea, and we'll go visit Doctor Lannik. I'm sure he has plenty of meds, still. We'll find a way to deal.

NESTOR

Okay, Father.

EXT. VILLAGE - DARIUS' TENT - DAY

Darius emerges to speak to Rostam.

DARIUS

Thank you for bringing him in, Lieutenant.

ROSTAM

It's no problem, sir. uh, Father.

(beat)

Will he be okay?

DARIUS

Nestor comes from Harlan township. It's -- it was a frontier settlement, even by Martian standards. Not the best medical resources. By the time he came to us, he was. . . Delusional. Paranoid schizophrenia, coupled with mild depression.

(MORE)

DARIUS (CONT'D)

Doctor Lannik's been treating the chemical imbalances, but there is a psychological factor that I've done my best to help with. That poor boy has had a difficult life.

ROSTAM

I'm glad I could help.

DARIUS

You did a good thing today, Lieutenant Rostam. Many would've just kept walking.

ROSTAM

I had to, Father. I overheard what you said, and you're right; all we have left is each other.

DARIUS

Yes, that's true. Either way, you're a good man. A humanitarian.

Rostam nods in acceptance, and starts to leave.

DARIUS (CONT'D)

Interesting word, that. So. . . Human.

INT. CHAPEL TENT - DAY

The colony's "church" is basically just a tent containing a card-table "altar" and scattered folding chairs/benches, small crates, and a few small ornaments/decorations brought along during the evacuation.

Obis sits near the altar, visibly drained. Falman approaches, having just arrived.

FALMAN

Duncan? Is everything alright?

OBIS

Everyone's terrified.

FALMAN

People have been terrified before. We'll manage.

OBIS

People have never been through anything like this before. For all we know. . .

He trails off.

FALMAN

This isn't the end, Duncan.

OBIS

How can you sound so sure?

Falman smiles.

FALMAN

Too obvious. I don't believe we get to see the end coming.

OBIS

Earth is. . . Our world no longer exists.

Falman takes a seat and counsels his friend.

FALMAN

Some of my ancestors were part of the first Mars colony. The real first, I mean. Before the war. No pre-established infrastructure, no medical support, no agriculture, limited food. One-way travel, not even any reliable communication with Earth.

(beat)

They died there. Never seeing Earth again. Their children lived, and died, then their grandchildren, great-grandchildren. All those generations died to make Mars what it eventually became. Even in the most inhospitable environment they'd ever seen, they found a way. Duncan, we're not the first to have our bridges burned behind us. Probably won't be the last.

Obis has slipped into a reverie of his own.

OBIS

We were supposed to be better.

FALMAN

Sorry?

OBIS

Remember when we were kids? The shows we used to watch? They always said that, by the time we met aliens we'd be. . . Older. We'd have gotten a grip on at least some of our problems. But this. . . Fighting amongst ourselves, the political backstabbing, the wars, the plagues.

(MORE)

OBIS (CONT'D)

This wasn't how it was supposed to happen. Nothing has changed since Cain and Abel.

FALMAN

Perhaps nothing needed to.

(off his look)

True, we have not managed to control our darker sides. Cain still walks beside us. But so to does Abel. For all of our. . . weakness, there is that still, small voice, reminding us of what we are capable of being. We still hear it, if we listen. Perhaps even in the voices of aliens.

OBIS

Do you think they mean what they said?

FALMAN

My wife does.

OBIS

And you?

Falman thinks it over.

FALMAN

I think they definitely know things we don't. Not just technologically, but socially. They had no reason to aid us as they did, yet here we are. Clearly, in some way, they are more evolved than we are. They took us into their home. Perhaps, by learning from them, we too can learn to be better. . . human beings, than we are.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

A dirt road about a mile away from the settlement. We see an alien TRANSPORT approaching; a wheeled SUV-like vehicle, somehow both alien and mundane.

Ahead on the road is a FENCE, with a GUARD POST.

INT. TRANSPORT - DAY

Inside the transport, we see four HISHIIN: humanoid, but with horn-ridged faces. One is the driver, the others are GARRIS (the jaded government man), ZHALAHN (his wide-eyed aide --young female), and IA'OUN (their security guard).

They pass the guard post and are waved through. When they speak, it is their own language, with subtitles.

ZHALAHN

(to Ia'oun -subtitled)

Uh, sir? Are the guards really necessary?

IA'OUN

(subtitled)

They're as much for the aliens' protection as for ours, ma'am. There are concerns that the natives may lash out at the refugees.

ZHALAHN

(subtitled)

Why would they do that?

GARRIS

(subtitled)

For reasons that should be obvious. There's a planetwide food crisis, and the last thing anyone wants is more mouths looking for hand-outs. Nobody wanted these primitives here in the first place.

ZHALAHN

(subtitled)

But shouldn't we be trying to help them assimilate instead of just walling them off? They don't have anywhere else to go.

GARRIS

(subtitled)

Which isn't our problem. They shouldn't be on this planet to begin with. The sooner we get this over with, the sooner we can begin relocating them. We just need signatures. Or whatever they use to establish consent. The king wants them here so badly, HE can deal with them.

Zhalahn is troubled by this.

EXT. VILLAGE - COMMAND CENTRE - DAY

Rostam and Exeter are approaching the command centre when Jackson and Donnelly emerge. With them are a squad of armed soldiers/crewmen.

JACKSON
Lieutenants; both of you arm up and meet
us in the square. One of our lookouts
just radioed in, we're having company.

As Rostam and Exeter move off, Stern approaches from the
street.

STERN
Commander, what's the situation?

JACKSON
I'll let you know as soon as it concerns
you.

Jackson and Donnelly exit, leaving Stern alone;
irrelevant.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY

Soldiers hustle the civilians clear as the TRANSPORT
arrives. During the commotion, Obis, Abrams, and their
entourages arrive, but are held back by Donnelly's men.

Abrams grabs the nearest colonist.

ABRAMS
(soft, intense)
Town hall. Get inside, now.

The transport door opens, and Ia'oun is the first one
out. For many of the refugees, this is the first alien
they've ever seen (the soldiers/leaders might have seen
pictures, but not face-to-face); they recoil in fear and
revulsion.

Donnelly and Ia'oun instantly register each other as
threats (alpha dogs), and bristle. Soldiers start to
raise their weapons.

JACKSON
Stand down. Everybody stand down!

The guns go down. The tension doesn't.

At Ia'oun's signal, Garris climbs out, looking around in
disgust. Zhalahn follows, looking worried.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. TOWN HALL - DAY

Jackson enters to find the tent already occupied by a handful of settlers (the ones Abrams sent in). He's about to usher them out, but Obis, Falman, and the envoys are right behind him. He scowls, realizing that they're going to have an audience.

Obis and Falman usher Garris, Zhalahn, and Ia'oun into the tent. Exeter and Rostam follow as security. Donelly tries to seal the door behind him, but Abrams forces his way past.

Garris looks around.

GARRIS
 (subtitled)
 Not very impressive.
 (to Zhalahn)
 Translate: Greetings, on behalf of the
 Ni'eh-wah planetary government and the
 Hishiin Crown.

Zhalahn takes a moment to translate in her head.

ZHALAHN
 (hesitant English)
 We. . . greet you, on behalf of Ni'eh-wah
 government and Hishiin Royal Crown.

The colonists react in mild surprise.

OBIS
 You speak English.

ZHALAHN
 I translate. Yes.

JACKSON
 No universal translators?
 (off her look)
 Sorry.

He defers to Obis.

OBIS
 I am Reverend Duncan Obis. This is Falman
 Biddle, my second. This is Commander
 Jackson, and his second, Colonel Donelly--

Abrams steps forward and extends a hand to Garris.

ABRAMS

I'm Maxwell Abrams, and I welcome you to our settlement on behalf of the people of Earth.

Garris stares at him like a zoo exhibit, then ignores him. He addresses himself to Obis.

GARRIS

(subtitled)

I am Mr. Garris na'Skyll, of the Planetary Settlement Bureau. This is my assistant, Zhalahn Streeb.

ZHALAHN

This is Garris na'Skyll, of the Planetary Settlement Bureau. I am Zhalahn Streeb, his assistant.

GARRIS

(subtitled)

We would like to formally welcome you to our planet, and to assure you that we are dedicated to your continued wellbeing...

ZHALAHN

We welcome you, and assure that we are dedicated to your safety.

GARRIS

(subtitled)

However, we require your authorization to relocate your settlement to a better location.

ZHALAHN

But, we need permission from you to relocate you to another location.

OBIS

Relocate?

DONELLY

(soft, to Jackson)

Sir, we're barely settled. They're--

JACKSON

I know, Colonel.

Abrams assumes the floor --this is a business negotiation and he's in his element, playing to the audience.

ABRAMS

Well, as I'm sure you've seen, we're still getting settled here. Now, I'm not saying a move is off the table, but you're gonna need to sweeten the deal.

ZHALAHN

(halting, subtitled)

You have seen, we are getting settled. He's. . . Uh, he says we must "make the deal sweeter."

ABRAMS

We'll need to know exactly how this other location you want to move us to is better.

ZHALAHN

(subtitled)

They need to know how the other location is better than this.

GARRIS

(subtitled)

The new location in Sector 15 has far better farmland for your needs. It also offers better access to modern technology and education.

Zhalahn hesitates.

ZHALAHN

(subtitled)

Uh, isn't Sector 15 farther from--

GARRIS

(interrupting -subtitled)

Just translate, Miss Streeb.

ZHALAHN

New location has better land, for farms, and better technology and schools.

JACKSON

(soft, to Obis)

This sounds like a roll. Relocating everything now would put us at their mercy.

OBIS

I understand.

ABRAMS

I want land ownership. You want to resettle us, then we need full ownership of that land and anything we can pull from it.

The audience nods in support.

ZHALAHN

(subtitled)

They want to own the land we settle them on. The land and anything they grow or build.

Garris scowls.

ZHALAHN (CONT'D)

(subtitled)

It is fair, sir. After--

GARRIS

(interrupting -subtitled)

Tell them I'm not authorized to make that decision.

(off her look)

With all the datawork that would entail we'd never be rid of them. Go on.

Zhalahn looks crestfallen as she continues.

ZHALAHN

No, we are sorry. We cannot promise that.

The crowd rumbles, but Abrams keeps going.

ABRAMS

In that case, we'll be needing some other sort of collateral.

The crowd starts shouting: "FOOD!" "FRESH WATER!" "MORE SHELTERS!" etc

COLONIST 2

Let us talk to Earth!

COLONIST 1

Yeah! Why won't you let us go home?!

COLONIST 4

We want to go back to Earth!

COLONIST 1

Let us go! Let us go!

A chant starts up.

Ia'oun tenses (as do Rostam and Exeter, watching him).
Zhalahn's head swivels as she tries to keep track of what
people are shouting --her translation falters.

ZHALAHN

(subtitled)

It's. . . They want. . . Fertile soil?

Obis and Jackson are trying to restore order.

OBIS

Quiet down! Everyone!

Abrams keeps right on going.

ABRAMS

(to Garris)

Look, friend, I'm trying to be
reasonable, but these people are scared
and hungry. All we want is some assurance
that our needs will be met.

Garris is at the end of his patience.

ZHALAHN

(subtitled)

All they want is assurance that--

GARRIS

(interrupting -subtitled)

Before we can provide you with ANYTHING,
you need to understand US! This planet is
OUR home, and you are asking for OUR food
and OUR medicine. You don't get to make
demands here!

EXT. VILLAGE - TOWN HALL - DAY

Darius is lurking around the crowd, Nestor by his side.
Cartwright is pestering the tent guards.

CARTWRIGHT

We need to know what's happening in
there! What gives you people the right to
decide our collective fates in a closed-
door pow-wow?! Who's accountable for
this?! The people need a voice!

Rostam exits first, and the CROWD immediately begins shouting questions. Rostam and the two guards immediately start clearing a path.

Garris storms out in mid-rant, Zhalahn at his heels.

GARRIS
(subtitled)
Unbelievable, backwards, inbred savages.

ZHALAHN
(subtitled)
Sir, what about the supplies? They're stockpiled in Glendan and--

GARRIS
(interrupting -subtitled)
No supplies! If these. . . Things want to squat here, then they'll get no help from me.

ZHALAHN
(subtitled)
But we were supposed to--

GARRIS
(interrupting -subtitled)
To negotiate with their leadership, but they HAVE no leadership. Look at them! They're practically a mobocracy! We can't negotiate with herd animals!

He storms off toward the transport.

ZHALAHN
(subtitled)
We need to connect with them. To show them that they are not alone here. We--

GARRIS
(interrupting -subtitled)
We can't show them anything unless they want to be shown.

ELSEWHERE, Cartwright is pestering Jackson. Donelly is nearby, as are Obis and Falman.

CARTWRIGHT
Commander Jackson! Mr. Obis, on behalf of the people of New Providence, I demand to know the terms of any deal being struck with these aliens! Public--

Donnelly has had enough. He rounds on Cartwright.

DONELLY

You demand?

JACKSON

(under)

Donnelly.

DONELLY

Let's get one thing straight; you don't make demands, when we have information that people need to know, we will announce it. You do not ask questions, you do not get in the way, and--

JACKSON

(sharper)

Colonel.

Donnelly reigns himself in, but it's too late; the colonists within earshot have heard him, and are muttering darkly.

OBIS

There has been no deal, Mr. Cartwright.

Cartwright gives no indication of having heard Donnelly.

CARTWRIGHT

No deal? So. . . What? Are they just going to leave us here? Do we get to go home? What does that mean?!

ABRAMS

It means there's no deal at the moment, but we're still negotiating. The whole reason we're here is because we are useful to them, and we just have to convince--

CARTWRIGHT

(interrupting)

Useful? Useful for what?! What are they planning to do to us?

The crowd starts responding; the muttering spreads.

Elsewhere, Exeter's hand tightens on the trigger. He's sidling closer to the aliens (who are looking around, realizing they're in trouble), wanting to ensure a kill-shot. Ia'oun is staring him down.

COLONIST 5
They're trying to enslave us! . .

COLONIST 3
How can we even be thinking of trusting
them? LOOK at them! . .

COLONIST 4
Keeping us here against our will. . .

As the rumbling grows, we find Nestor, clearly verging on
another breakdown. From behind him, SOMEONE (we don't see
who) slips a rock into his hand. . .

COLONIST 5
Gotta show them who's in charge! We're
human beings!

COLONIST 4
We will NOT be treated like this!

GARRIS
(to Ia'oun -subtitled)
Guardsmen!

Ia'oun reaches for a comlink (to call for backup). Exeter
snaps his gun up.

EXETER
Drop it! NOW!

Nestor finally reaches his breaking point. He hauls back,
about to throw. . .

Rostam sees Nestor move.

JACKSON
Hold your fire! Hold your fire!

ROSTAM
Stop!

The thrown rock strikes Garris in the head. He crumbles.
Zhalahn screams. Ia'oun immediately turns to assist, but
Exeter pokes him with his rifle. Ia'oun responds by
shoving the rifle away, and he and Exeter grapple.

RIOT: The crowd moves in every direction at once; some
charging the aliens, some running away, some trying to
see, some of them even attacking the soldiers.

The soldiers struggle to hold back the crowd while covering the aliens --a couple move to help Exeter, and the Hishiin driver tries to intervene and gets knocked to the ground. This is humanity at its worst.

Rostam shoves through the crowd to reach Nestor, who has charged forward. Nestor manages to get to where Zhalahn is cowering, trying to protect Garris. Rostam arrives just in time and takes Nestor down with a submission hold.

There's the sound of a burst of GUNFIRE, and everyone turns to see Jackson lowering his sidearm.

JACKSON

STAND DOWN!!

OBIS

(Righteous indignation)

THAT IS ENOUGH!

(beat)

LOOK at yourselves! Is this what we have become? Are THESE the principles that we are meant to represent? With the loss of Earth, it falls to us to represent the human race. If we have EVER called ourselves civilized, then surely NOW is the time to PROVE IT! This is our first contact! For better or worse, THIS is how the wider universe will see us. Are we to face it as violent, mindless savages, or as civilized men and women? Beings who, though flawed and inexperienced, struggle to be better than we are?

As Obis speaks, we get glimpses around the crowd; civilians pull back, soldiers restore order. Rostam gets Nestor's hands bound and pulls him away. Zhalahn helps Garris to his feet. Ia'oun and Exeter are clearly still up for a fight --but Ia'oun will not endanger his charges, and Exeter will not disobey Jackson.

Rostam presents Nestor to Jackson.

ROSTAM

Sir, this is the man who started the fight.

JACKSON

Understood. Good work, Lieutenant.

Garris, bloodied and dirty from the attack, shakes himself free from Zhalahn.

GARRIS
 (subtitled)
 Guardsman; get us out of here.

ZHALAHN
 (subtitled)
 I'm staying.

The words surprise her as much as anyone.

GARRIS
 (subtitled)
 Are you insane?! Look around! These. . .
 These "people" are FERAL!

IA'OUN
 (subtitled)
 It is not safe here, ma'am.

GARRIS
 (subtitled)
 They will kill you and defile the corpse.
 At absolute BEST, they will use you as a
 hostage.

ZHALAHN
 (subtitled)
 Then I will be their hostage. Our whole
 purpose here is to help them. We may not
 agree with what brought them here, but
 they are here now, and they have nowhere
 else to turn.

GARRIS
 (subtitled)
 Again, that is not our responsibility.

ZHALAHN
 (subtitled)
 Isn't it? We call ourselves civilized
 beings, but what is the point of being
 civilized if we care only for ourselves?
 Any society that looks only inward will
 collapse.

GARRIS
 (subtitled)
 Don't quote Korad's Maxim at me! WE may
 be civilized, but THEY are animals!

ZHALAHN
 (subtitled)
 Why? Because they inconvenience you?
 (MORE)

ZHALAHN (CONT'D)
 These PEOPLE have lost their homes! I
 would welcome them into mine.

GARRIS
 (subtitled)
 But it's not just YOUR home, is it?

Beat. Staredown. Garris blinks first.

GARRIS (CONT'D)
 (to Ia'oun, subtitled)
 We're leaving.

He strides off. Ia'oun hesitates.

ZHALAHN
 (to Ia'oun, subtitled)
 Go.

Ia'oun gives her a deep bow, then follows Garris.

Zhalahn stands alone, surrounded by aliens.

Elsewhere, Donnelly and Jackson are having a quiet
 argument.

DONELLY
 (midsentence)
 . . . it's a military scenario.

JACKSON
 On a civilian colony, which makes it
 Obis' ballgame. We will follow his lead,
 and I will expect you to follow mine,
 Colonel.

DONELLY
 . . . Yes, sir.

ROSTAM
 Uh, sirs?

JACKSON
 Yes, Lieutenant?

ROSTAM
 She's not leaving.

They all see Zhalahn, left behind as the truck leaves.

Obis approaches her. She fights back tears.

ZHALAHN

My people want to help. But some of us are. . . I am sorry. We try to be. . . better. . . I ask to stay here. I would like to. . . To learn. To teach, maybe. This is your home, and mine. We are family, now. I have no place to go.

Gently, Obis extends a hand. Soldiers look to Jackson for guidance, and he smiles. Donnelly scowls.

MUSIC UP: something sad-yet-hopeful.

MONTAGE:

INT. ZHALAHN'S QUARTERS - EVENING

A military style barracks, unfurnished. Zhalahn has the clothes on her back and a small duffel (shipped in from outside), and nothing else. As the door closes we hear a lock engage.

EXT. VILLAGE - ZHALAHN'S QUARTERS - EVENING

Guards are posted outside. Exeter is among them, cradling his rifle like he's working up the guts to use it. From a distance, children watch before being pulled away by their parents.

INT. COMMAND CENTRE - EVENING

Donnelly rechecks the map, moving troops to strengthen the perimeter. He takes a moment to glare at Jackson's back.

EXT. VILLAGE - CIVILIAN QUARTERS - EVENING

Stern stands gazing up at the stars. For a brief moment, we see genuine fear and helplessness on his face. Then someone walks past, and Stern's mask returns.

INT. MESS TENT - EVENING

Cartwright pours himself a mug of coffee-like liquid, tastes it, and winces. Abrams approaches and introduces himself. They shake hands.

Elsewhere, Aline stands in line for leftovers. Her clothes are finer than everyone else's, but she's still hungry.

INT. BRIG - EVENING

Nestor and Obis are in Nestor's cell. Nestor is sobbing, while Obis consoles and counsels him.

Darius stands at the prison's door, watching Obis quietly. Behind him, Falman enters, catches sight of him, and Darius tries to slip away casually. Falman lets him pass, but knows he's up to something. . .

INT. ZHALAHN'S QUARTERS - EVENING

Zhalahn responds to a knock on the door. She opens it, and we see Felicia, holding a dinner tray. An armed guard stands behind her, but Felicia doesn't look frightened.

EXT. WATCHTOWER - EVENING

The "watchtower" is a small tent perched atop a metal shelter. Rostam climbs up the ladder, then trades salutes with the guard he's relieving. As the guard leaves, Rostam looks outwards and up.

PULL-OUT: we truck away from Rostam, rising up, seeing the entire camp, then the countryside around it. . .

We end up in SPACE, looking down on alien continents dotted with city lights, on our new home.

FADE OUT.