

WELCOME TO NOWHERE

Written by

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FADE IN

EXT. SPACE

There are a few stars, just points of light, off in the distance. Empty, blank, nothing. No sound and very little movement. Something is moving! What was it? A star vanished. A nebula gone. Feeling alone.

Suddenly a light snap's on and there is an astronaut helmet very close. The reflection is so bright the astronaut's face cannot be seen in the glare.

RIDER (V.O.)
897 Permission to come aboard.

897 (V.O.)
Permission granted.

Inside of a space station airlock, small, bright, white. The astronaut moves very slowly and puts their right foot on a floor pad.

RIDER (V.O.)
Right foot down.

Left foot on floor pad.

RIDER CONT'D (V.O.)
Left foot down.

897 (V.O.)
Affirmative. You are locked
in. Welcome to nowhere.

The doors slowly close and silently lock. A pressure gauge reads positive the astronaut starts to unsnap the suit. The pressure gauge reaches 100% and there is a brief flicker in the lights. The astronaut stops, checks more gauges, then pulls off the helmet.

The inner door opens and JESSE RIDER, 25, female, sits and removes the rest of the space suit. She very carefully hangs it in a dock in the wall and hooks it up for recharging. She puts everything in place. As she turns, she brushes against one of the sleeves. The arm and glove shuffle just a bit. Or was it something else.

INT. MAIN HALL (DECK 3)- DAY

Rider walks down the main hallway of the station. It is surprisingly big, and every inch is used for something, a monitor, a gauge, yet it doesn't seem cluttered. There is a hole in the floor and a ladder going down and as she steps over it.

MICHAEL BARTO, 26, male, the station engineer, is waiting for her.

RIDER

Hey, Mike.

BARTO

Good morning.

RIDER

Lights flickered in the airlock.

BARTO

Not likely. Not on my ship.

RIDER

They did. Just as I was taking the suit off.

BARTO

You hit something by mistake. On my ship lights do not flicker!

RIDER

Your ship? Don't let Commander Karter know that.

BARTO

He knows it's my ship. I just let him use it once in a while.

RIDER

Ok, now, I suppose, you are going to go investigate that light flicker that didn't happen.

BARTO

Just to prove how wrong you were.

Barto exits. Rider walks on and stops when she hears animal noises from a lab off to one side. She listens for a moment and then enters.

INT - ZOO (DECK 4) - DAY

This lab is full of various plants all on exam tables with various wires, diodes and scanners on them. All the plants are edible. There are a surprising number of cages with small animals nested in them. Squirrels, rabbits, mice, and a few birds on one side.

There are also several cages filled with chickens. One chicken clucks noisily. KEN SHAW, 45, male, the farm chief, is seated looking intently at something. He does not notice Rider approaching him.

KEN

Almost there. Just one more thing.

(there is an ear of corn, good sized but discolored, on his desk)

What do you need?

(there is a notebook with lots of notes, formula's etc.)

Something simple? Something obvious? What do you need?

RIDER

Have you ever thought of singing to it?

KEN

There are some theories that talking to plants helps them grow.

RIDER

Maybe it cheers them up. Makes them feel important.

KEN

The belief is you produce carbon monoxide when talking

(MORE)

KEN (CONT'D)

to them that helps promote photosynthesis in the plant's cycle. Anything else would be silly.

RIDER

Oh, just a joke.

KEN

The real trick is creating enough carbon monoxide to affect them. Some people on this station won't have any problem with that. Maybe even too much.

RIDER

Well, I suppose I'll leave you to your chickens and things. I'll get to my other job.

KEN

Yes, I'm sure you have responsibilities somewhere.

Ken picks up his notebook, the ear of corn, and exits down a ladder. There are rows of corn stocks on a larger layer of the station.

Rider glares after him, cursing under her breath, and turns and goes to the covered cages along one wall. She pulls the cover back on the top right cage and there is a small white mouse inside.

RIDER

Hey, sweetie, at least you are a better listener than some.

She makes sure no one's around, opens the cage and pets the mouse for a moment, then puts it back in the cage, covers it and exits. The mouse runs in a few circles and shadow boxes.

As Rider walks past a ladder, she crosses paths with BARNABY LINKS, 30, male, dressed in overalls that are a bit dirty. He easily climbs down the ladder.

INT. THE FARM (DECK 4)- DAY

This area is the most complex of the station. Various crops, corn, potatoes, carrots, etc., are grown here. Lots of lighting and chemical systems set up to nurture growth.

Fresh, fully grown carrots are marked at 16 days. Potatoes are tagged at 20 days. The only thing not looking good is the corn. Anything over 23 days is discolored and unhealthy. Barnaby carefully cuts through a few rows of corn to meet SCOTT MUFFIN, 23, male who is digging into the one-foot-deep dirt base with his hands.

MUFFIN

Make sure the lovejoy valve is good. Make sure the lovejoy valve is good? Don't need a damn PHD to know a lovejoy valve. Don't need a PHD to think to check the f-ing lovejoy valve. Really want this to grow faster give it better fertilizer. Give it human fertilizer. Give it a--

He finds a pipe/valve connection in the dirt, looks, starts to cover it back up.

LINKS

Now, now, now. We are on a way station. The third in a series of stops ships make before heading out of the solar system. Station 1, tech stop, station 2, medical, and station 3, stocks. Each short trip from station to station testing ship systems. Regularly ships carrying the best of mankind leave Earth Base, go through system checks, make a final stop here then go out into the universe. Do you want mankind to take that attitude and hostility with them?

MUFFIN

Shaw stopped by.

LINKS

In theory I was on a roll.

MUFFIN

In his case all of mankind is hoping to get rid of him. Dump him on to someone else.

LINKS

On the other side his research in genetically modified food saved millions. Here, 67,000,000 miles from home we get fresh potatoes and carrots from seed to harvest in 3 weeks. Corn in two months. He's brilliant.

MUFFIN

You're missing one thing.

LINKS

Such as?

MUFFIN

Brilliance and likability do not go hand in hand.

LINKS

Well, yes, he has proven that fact, as well.

INT. COMMAND (DECK 1)- DAY

This is a busy, yet not overly complicated, command center. Very well organized with every inch of space being used but plenty of room to move around it. Very few personal items. There are the occasional SOUNDS of radio calls in the background but nothing steady or unusual. There are no windows. Plenty of lights.

There are seven stations in command. Two on each side of the walkway and one at the end. Currently two of the four are occupied.

Doctor EMANUEL PARZA, 35, male, is comparing the health records of the crew and specifically looking at heart rates and blood pressures that are recorded on monitors constantly. Commander JOHNATHAN KARTER, 40, MALE, is going through a timeline for the

next arrival. Communication Officer MANDY BAUER, 24, female is finishing up a dispatch.

MANDY

(to headset)

Recycle filters are rated at 74% and maintain 61% efficiency. All batteries are charged to 100% and are being cycled down according to schedule. Technofix services are also working as expected. Repeat for confirmation. Station status: nominal. Crew status: nominal. Mission status: nominal. 897 over and out.

(MORE)

She presses the dispatch button and lots of information is being broadcast in a very short time. Several confirmation signals that indicate the dispatch will reach earth in 43 minutes.

MANDY (CONT'D)

(to Karter)

Daily report dispatched and confirmed.

KARTER

Thank you, Mandy.

MANDY

Sixty-seven million miles in under 45 minutes.

KARTER

I know. I remember, when I was a kid, trying to grasp the meaning of the four second delay from Earth to Moon City. It took a while to understand the effects of all that.

MANDY

It was Mars that always frustrated me. 20 minutes one way. It seemed so slow. 5 weeks rocket time, RT, to get there.

PARZA

And your adventures there,
Johnathan Karter.

KARTER

Adventures that took place
in someone else's imagination.

PARZA

Did you ever imagine they
were yours?

KARTER

I never read them.

MANDY

Still, 13 days RT to get a
person from Earth to here.
Sure, supply and recheck here
then off to the stars. Boldly-

PARZA and KARTER

NO!

MANDY

Oh, come on, just once?

KARTER

It's the only thing worse
than the repeated Mars jokes.

PARZA

I don't know, I thought of this
rather nice one last night. How
many John Karter's does it take-
(Karter glares at him)
Never mind.

Parza quietly giggles to himself as Karter exits and Rider
enters. She moves directly to Mandy.

RIDER

I replaced the new filters on
light side.

MANDY

Great. I'll keep an eye on clarity over the next few days. It should be good. What about dark side?

RIDER

Barto said they wouldn't be ready until tomorrow. He said they were fine tuning the cutters. It appears .6222114 of a millimeter is too far off for him.

MANDY

Even an ant would look at that gap and say it's no big deal.

RIDER

Well, you know Barto. It wouldn't surprise me if he caught that by eye.

MANDY

I wouldn't bet against you. So, I'll schedule it for tomorrow?

RIDER

Yeah, about a half hour extra going dark side. The spotlights on the fins should be good for it. Easier to maneuver that way. I'll make sure it gets tagged. Did you copy that, Mandy?

MANDY

10-4. Logging it in and good.

MUFFIN (O.S.)

On the log is always good. Best place for you to be is on my log!

They turn and see Muffin enter the command deck. Mandy rolls her eyes and Rider just ignores him.

MANDY

Shift change already.

MUFFIN

Your favorite time of day,
too. The time you get to
see me.

(MORE)

Mandy quickly types in the log out codes and gets out of the chair. Smiling like he owns the place Muffin sits down. Mandy turns to leave but he stops her. Muscles tense she turns to face him. He makes a big deal out of doing several minor adjustments on the chair. Finally, he relaxes and smiles.

MUFFIN (CONT'D)

There. My chair needs to be
perfect for putting my log in.
My chair, my position, my log.
Speaking of positions-

He bursts out laughing as Mandy, spitting nails at him, turns and walks out.

INT. STATION HALLWAY (DECK 2)- DAY

Mandy marches through the hallway grinding her teeth and trying to avoid contact with anyone.

She climbs up a ladder to the top floor, the RESIDENCE LEVEL, and as soon as she steps off the ladder one of the lights goes out. Frustrated, she kicks the floor and marches to a panel and pushes a switch. The light doesn't come back on. She pushes it again and gets the same response. Angrily she punches the controls and the light comes back on, she marches off. She doesn't see it, but something very small and black is moving near the light fixture. It appears to crawl inside the fixture.

Mandy goes down the hallway to her private room. Enters the code and enters the room closing the door behind her.

INT. MANDY'S ROOM (DECK 2)- DAY

The room is surprisingly personal and comfortable. Very homey and very dark for now.

Mandy almost kicks her boots off in frustration and takes a deep breath to calm her down. There is a figure in the dark. She finally reached for a control panel and suddenly Links steps out from the shadows and stops her.

She looks at him and her rage disappears. He kisses her on the cheek. She passionately kisses him on the lips and they undress.

INT. ENGINE ROOM (DECK 3)- DAY

This is the most complex area of the station. It is also a stark difference as there have been quite a few changes and add-on. Lots of equipment needs to be monitored every second so there are lots of monitors and graphs.

Despite the complexity there is a sense of order, everything needs to be there for a specific reason. There is also no sound from the equipment. Barto is seated at the center table. There are lots of instruments around them and a surprisingly large amount of papers with handwritten notes on them.

Rider enters.

RIDER

Figure out what happened to the lights?

BARTO

No. Not a peep on the system anywhere. No power loss, overload, or interruption either before or after your entry. Every ounce of energy we generate is carefully monitored. If the lights went off without being turned off we'd know.

(glances at a flash on a panel)

Shaw increased circulation pumps in the farm 12%.

RIDER

Mike, I'm serious about the lights.

BARTO

Is it possible you could be mistaken? What about your EVA?

RIDER

Well, I'd been out on light side for some time. Coming into the shadows to enter the station, the brightness of the airlock, then taking off the suit could cause an effect.

BARTO

I've been trying to think of some way to make a light out. Seriously. I've been over all the possibilities and there are none other than smashing them with a Ginnybar. I was part of this station's design from the beginning and even I couldn't cause a light out on purpose. It just doesn't happen in this cycled system.

RIDER

I would have sworn the lights flickered.

BARTO

When was the last time you went through the vision sensors?

RIDER

Six weeks ago, just like normal.

BARTO

Can we at least not rule that out?

RIDER

(reluctant)

Okay, I'll see Parza tomorrow, if you promise to look for other options than my sight.

BARTO

I promise. So how are we for Mission 28A?

RIDER

They are scheduled to leave Earth Base in 23 hours. 13 days later they'll start final prep on station 1.

BARTO

The last two X-LR-8 ships that came through the gauntlet all needed work on the semi-structure. Earth Base said they were working the problem.

RIDER

Like they worked on the electrical balance in Mission 12?

BARTO

That's what I thought. How long to prep for it?

RIDER

17 hours.

BARTO

Ok, prep it just in case. Try and get one more follow up on how they're working on it.

RIDER

Got it. I'll check with some of my cohorts and see if they worked on it.

BARTO

I think your cohorts are better informed than my cohorts.

They all laugh and are interrupted by two tones from a panel.

897 (MUFFIN) (V.O.)

897 to tech.

BARTO

Go ahead 897.

897 (MUFFIN) (V.O.)

We got a call from the farm.
They say they had some light
loss at the Zoo.

BARTO

On my way.

INT. ZOO - DAY

There are a few brief flickers of light from one of the fixtures
about midway down the room. Shaw is nearby watching.

For a brief second it looks as if there is something inside the
fixture then the light completely goes out for several seconds.
It comes back on bright at 100% before Barto enters the room.
They immediately start their examination and scan the fixture
and checking circuits. They work intensely for a moment.

BARTO

Nothing on flow chart. Nothing
on timers.

(to Shaw)

How long do you think it was
out?

SHAW

It flickered on and off for
4 or 5 seconds.

BARTO

Was it 4 or 5?

SHAW

4 at the least. 5 at the
most.

Barto connects wires between the fixture and the scanner.

BARTO

Getting history. Nothing.

Barto looks up at the fixture and the equipment.

SHAW

What caused it?

BARTO

Are you sure it went out?

SHAW

Don't be ridiculous.

BARTO

All the info we get from the readers, including the history, says nothing happened. No registration from flow or manipulators.

SHAW

Yet, it went out.

BARTO

Everything on this station is monitored and recorded every second. I can tell you when any door was opened. I can tell you when the lights are turned on or off. These lights didn't go out.

SHAW

You think I'm making this up?

BARTO

I'm saying there's no record of it.

SHAW

So, you think I dreamed it?

BARTO

That's not for me to decide. I'm not saying you're making it up. I'm just saying you've spent a lot of time under these heavy lights of the farms and zoo. Maybe you should get your eyes checked.

SHAW

Are you serious? We got checked
Regularly even before getting
accepted to this station.

BARTO

Still, staring at seeds can
play with your vision.

SHAW

My vision is fine! Your ability
to use your equipment is a big
question. It went out! I saw it!
There was something up there.

BARTO

What do you mean?

SHAW

Well, there was something inside
the fixture. I saw it, or at least
a shadow of it, when it stopped
flickering.

BARTO

That's not possible. There's
no access in the fixture.
They are completely sealed.

SHAW

It sure looked like it.

INT. AIRLOCK (DECK 3)- DAY

There are three complete suits hanging here in docket. Human
shaped but dark and lifeless makes them eerie figures. Two have
their reflective face plates up while the third is down and
closed. It sounds like something, somewhere, is breathing.

INT. MEDICAL (DECK 2)- DAY

The medical unit is a smaller space but seems big enough to
handle whatever is necessary. There are two bays with each
having a bed and several chairs. There is a locker with tags on
it that indicate the types of medication within.

At the far end is a desk, chair and quite a few monitors. Despite the technical there is still the feeling of humanity and life as this is a medical center.

Doctor Parza is looking over readouts of each member of the crew, noting them, clicking them to archive. Another monitor turns on with a camera view of the airlock. He looks at it, adds a layer of information and several rates show up. He looks confused, changes it, studies it, looks at it a few moments. His shoulders drop. He adjusts it and some of the monitors go flat. He studies it a bit, types in some information, then shuts it off and goes back to the screens. Karter enters.

PARZA

Welcome to my parlor.

KARTER

My parlor.

PARZA

Yes, commander, you're the spider.

KARTER

On a very thin web out here in the middle of nowhere.

PARZA

But a very important web between here and there. Between our past and our future.

KARTER

Yes, the future. I've been thinking a lot about that.

PARZA

I think we all have, being out here.

KARTER

In a few days we'll get another arrival, load them up with everything we have, then send them off.

PARZA

To introduce us to the universe.

They both smile.

KARTER

I never thought about that before.

PARZA

There was a professor in med school who talked about it that way. There's always been that big push to get out into the universe. Develop this ship, go that fast, search that far. Then do what?

KARTER

Teach them how to be human?

PARZA

Oh, good, grief. Why force that on the universe?

KARTER

Why did you become a doctor?

PARZA

It's a family tradition. Someone in the family has been a doctor for 200 years. It was my destiny. From birth I was groomed by my family to be a doctor. I learned how to count by looking at charts of anatomy and counting. When they wanted me to read, they'd Have me do it alphabetically. Before I was old enough to really make the decision it was already made. I just didn't have the courage to change it.

KARTER

You don't like it? So, you came out here?

PARZA

Oh, it has its moments. You see the great things in people, but you also see the worst. The results of human anger and hatred. At least out here we avoid that. Despite the occasional disagreements no ever hurt anyone. Nothing, out here, wants to hurt us.

KARTER

We can leave that part of humanity behind.

PARZA

Why did you come out here?

KARTER

In my case it was just the opposite. I wish I'd had support or guidance from the family. I got nothing. Bad conditions, a miserable existence, early on I got the need to run. I've been running since. Simple as that.

PARZA

Running away from the light.

KARTER

Not really. Where I come from it was hard to tell the difference from the light to the dark.

PARZA

I tell you what, some day, before our next launch. We'll have a drink.

KARTER

Recycled urine?

Parza pulls a bottle from his desk and smiles. It is authentic.

PARZA

57-year-old brandy. Made by my
grandfather. Grandma was a surgeon.

KARTER

You know how many rules you broke
getting that here?

PARZA

Seven.

KARTER

Eight, I should turn you in but,
on the other hand, it'd take to
long to report it to anyone.

They both laugh and toast in silence.

INT. DINING ROOM (DECK 2)- DAY

This is the most furnished room on the station. It's very nicely
decorated, calm, relaxing, the only tell that this isn't on
Earth is and large monitor on the wall holding an image of Earth
at the second. It's very calming and gentle to be above the
terminator allowing visibility of both day and night.

Everyone in the crew is here except for Shaw. They are all
"casual" with the exception of Muffin who has his headset
on to monitor communication. There is a general sense of
community here despite anything that happens across the
station.

Karter, Parza, Links and Mandy are at a table. Barto, Rider and
Muffin are at a third table. Two tables are empty.

The meals look surprisingly good. The vegetables are fresh.
There is something that looks like meat, but you can't really
tell what it is.

BARTO

I've got a buddy passing
through on the next flight.
We went through flight
training together. I asked
him to bring us some good
old fashioned Chicago deep
dish pizzas.

RIDER

Mmmmmm. There was a small
Restaurant outside of Philly
that had the best thin crust
pizzas. I'd put them up
against your deep dish any
day of the week.

MUFFIN

You're both wrong! We don't
need no pizzas! Tell him to
bring us steaks! That's what
we need out here.

There are general cheers of agreement from the table.

Mandy is still glaring nails at him from her table.

RIDER

So, another walk into the
dark side.

BARTO

As if you needed the light.

RIDER

Well, I do know every inch of
outside. I could do it with
my eyes closed.

LINKS

Considering how far out we
are there isn't much difference.

MANDY

True.

BARTO

That is why only 31.452
percent of our power is solar.
Two power plants in pods take
care of the rest.

MANDY

Amen. Thank you, Einstein.

They all laugh.

LINKS

Brother, Einstein.

They clink their glasses in a toast.

MANDY

Brother, Einstein.

BARTO

At least the advantage we
have is we can control everything
that comes in or out.

MUFFIN

Every watt?

BARTO

What?

RIDER

He said what?

BARTO

Watts. We control every one of
them every second of every day.
They are all accounted for.

Karter, Parza, and Mandy are having a deeper conversation.

MANDY

The temps have gone down,
on average, 2 degrees in the
last decade. Within the next
decade the mid-west should
be able to produce again.
Add an extra 3-5 years before
a full harvest.

KARTER

And we can get a harvest in
a month at the most. We definitely
are the future.

PARZA

If Shaw makes it work, we'll get
harvests in weeks.

MANDY

Can't deny his theories have
panned out. Millions of miles
from the home planet and we're
getting fresh carrots.

KARTER

Excellent. If only his theories
applied to chickens and cows.

They laugh.

LINKS

Chickens! Stick with the
chickens!

PARZA

You wouldn't want a cheeseburger?

LINKS

I'd devour a cheeseburger in
one breath. It's just the
methane from cow dung we
couldn't handle.

Karter and Parza cringe at the thought.

KARTER

Well, there's always the
squirrels and rabbits in
the zoo if we get really
hungry for something.

PARZA

Squirrel au jus? Fillet of
squirrel?

LINKS

Bunny omelet. Maybe we could
manage a bunny burrito!

They burst out laughing.

INT. ZOO (DECK 4)- NIGHT

The lights are dimmed through most of the zoo, but they are still on. The brightest light is at a desk where Shaw is working taking notes. He has a rather extensive chemical formula written on a pad. He looks at it, taps it in frustration, then stands up.

SHAW

What is it I'm missing?
Something simple, every day,
but it's just not there.

He finally puts his work in a folder and exits. Silence. Then from the cages of several mice where Rider had been, we hear rustling. They are agitated. The light above them goes completely out. Then another. The rustling stops.

INT. MUFFIN'S QUARTERS (DECK 2)- NIGHT

A few lights. Muffin is in bed, rustling back and forth, trying to get to sleep. In the darkness he gets up and stumbles to a desk. He sits, after a pause turns on the desk light and we see tears flowing down his face.

INT - AIRLOCK (DECK 3) - NIGHT

The suit Rider used is still hanging. The legs are slightly different. A foot is not where it was before.

INT. RIDER'S QUARTERS (DECK 2)- NIGHT

There is music, slow, and gentle. Something is moving in the dark. A moment. We see Rider gracefully dancing, arms extended as if she had a partner close to her.

INT. COMMAND (DECK 1)- DAY

It is the morning meeting. Everyone is there. Everyone is staring in shock looking at Shaw.

SHAW

In fact, two of the mice are
missing.

BARTO

There's no sign of any
disruptions in the system yet.

KARTER

How is that possible?

SHAW

I don't know. The cages were
empty this morning.

KARTER

Ok, anyone take them? Anyone
need a pet?

Silence from the crew. They are not guilty.

MUFFIN

What makes you think someone
Adopted them? What about just
nibbling through wires or
the door?

SHAW

That occurred to me, but,
there are no wires in the
cage to nibble trough and
there is no damage to the
door. I did investigate it
this morning.

BARTO

There're no blips on the
system that would indicate
a power loss.

SHAW

That also occurred to me,
but a power loss wouldn't
cause the door on the cage
to open. It doesn't work
that way either. I figured
you'd know that.

Barto rises and Karter intervenes.

KARTER

OK, so the only option left is that someone took them. Now, I need whoever did that to come clean. No harm, no foul, if you did it. Maybe a little joke to liven things up. It's okay.

(He pauses, no one confesses or looks guilty.)

Now, we've got some serious work to do. You know, as well as I do, just how much damage they could cause.

Very aware of what he means everyone rises.

BARTO

I'll start scanning all the environmental meters for anomalies.

(to Shaw)

What about the optics? Did you check them?

SHAW

No.

KARTER

Ok, you know the protocols for Outbreak Status.

Everyone starts moving, they know their job. Rider approaches Karter.

RIDER

Commander?

KARTER

Yes.

RIDER

What about the EVA for filters on dark side? Should I reschedule?

KARTER

Are the filters finished?

RIDER

Ready and packed up.

KARTER

Ok, we should be done in time
so we'll try and get you out
on schedule. How about you
check there to make sure
it's good?

Rider smiles.

INT. COMMAND (DECK 1)- DAY

Barto is looking over environmental systems and records.

INT. FARM (DECK 4)- DAY

Links is investigating the crops. They are very well aware of
Shaw monitoring their progress.

INT. AIRLOCK (DECK 3)- DAY

All is still, the suits and EVA equipment are in their cradles.
Something moves just off screen, a shadow, small, the size of a
mouse. The helmet shield is open. It looks as if a dark smoke is
drifting inside.

INT. MANDY'S QUARTERS (DECK 2)- DAY

Karter and Parza enter scanning for any movements or signs
of life. They find nothing and are about to leave when Parza
looks at the bed again. He slowly approaches as if he's trying
to sneak up on something then rapidly pulls a pillow away.
Nothing. He looks guiltily at Karter and the smile and exit.

INT. ENGINE ROOM (DECK 3)- DAY

Muffin is reporting to Barto.

MUFFIN

Everything's sealed tight.

BARTO

Ok, let's start in the hallway
and work our way forward.

They grab scanning and sensor equipment and head out.

Barto stops at the exit, thinks, then comes back to the main desk. He turns to one of the monitors and enters info on the keyboard. On the monitor we see the Zoo. A few more keys are tapped, it jumps to a view from the night before.

It shows Shaw leaving the area like before from a different angle. Barto comfortably watches. After a moment he freezes as he looks at the screen. Something big. He taps a few keys to watch it again. In shock he calls Muffin to come back.

INT. COMMAND (DECK 1)- DAY

Mandy is scanning the station. There are meters and levels on the screen and whenever she reads a location with people searching the levels go up. Empty rooms zero out. She methodically scans from room to room.

She gets to the airlock and despite there being no one there the levels go up. She looks at it puzzled and stops forwarding. She types in commands and the screen reloads with no changes. She adjusts scans and gets the same thing. She can't make any sense of it. Suddenly the ratings peak.

INT. AIRLOCK (DECK 3)- DAY

Rider and Links enter the airlock with scanners ready. Rider immediately goes to the cradle and starts checking it out. She looks inside the suit but doesn't see what appears to be a shadow of something apparently slithering out of an open sleeve. They are methodically scanning and searching the area.

LINKS

Wait a minute...

RIDER

You got something?

LINKS

There's something in the suit.

Rider freezes glaring at the other suit, finally joins him and reads the scanner.

RIDER

It's small enough to be
a mouse.

LINKS

Yes, but the readings don't
quite fit. There's no heat
coming from it.

RIDER

OK, let's get it down.

Carefully they take the suit off the cradle and lay it on the floor. Slowly they press down on the suit up from the feet herding anything inside up to the helmet. The legs are flat, anything in there would have moved up. They keep the legs down and do the same on the arms. Finally, they start on the chest and Links suddenly freezes.

LINKS

There it is!

There is a lump in the suit as if something were hiding there. They continue slowly, expecting a mouse to come into the helmet. Closer. Steady. Closer. They look back on the suit but see that the lump is gone. They look at the empty helmet in confusion.

RIDER

What the hell?

LINKS

What?

They check the empty helmet and quickly press on the suit. Nothing. Links opens the helmet face and scans the interior of the suit. She reads the scanner then repeats. They sit back and look at each other. Something moves from under the suit to Rider's suit.

INT. COMMAND (DECK 1)- INT

Everyone is here watching Karter.

KARTER

No clear signs of mice. But you picked something up in the air lock?

RIDER

Something. I was scanning the rooms and there are levels that go up caused by the presence of something living in the room. The levels in the airlock were pretty high, but I could see no one was in there.

KARTER

Could it be ghosting? Maybe a fluctuation causing a gap between sensors and picture?

RIDER

I've been checking on that. Time sync is good on the system so it's doubtful.

KARTER

(to Rider)

You had the mouse in the suit?

LINKS

We had something.

(pause)

There was something inside the suit. We were trying to herd it out. We pressed on the suit to get it up to the helmet.

SHAW

How did you lose it?

RIDER

That's what I can't figure out. It was there then it wasn't.

SHAW

A gap between the suit and helmet?

RIDER

Not on my suits.

LINKS

Whatever it was I don't believe it was a mouse. I scanned the interior of the suit. Even something as small as a mouse would have left a heat signature. When I scanned it there were no anomalies. It hadn't been touched.

RIDER

There was something in the suit. We were herding it up from the legs.

MANDY

Could there have been something else?

SHAW

All the other animals in the zoo are accounted for.

LINKS

Could they have breed without you knowing?

SHAW

Not enough time for that.

KARTER

So, they spotted something in the suit. Something solid. What was it?

Rider and Links glance at each other.

RIDER

Well, we never actually touched it.

LINKS

We pressed down on the suit
to get it to move. We never
actually pressed on the lump.

MUFFIN

Could it be an air pocket in the
suit?

RIDER

I doubt it. Those suits are
pretty tough.

MUFFIN

But it could have been?

LINKS

I suppose it's possible.

RIDER

Remember? We didn't get any
heat signature, either. You
wouldn't from an air bubble

KARTER

After the meeting take a look.
Go over all the suits in detail.

RIDER

Like my life depends on it.

KARTER

(to Shaw)

Any ideas on how they got
out in the first place?

SHAW

Nothing.

BARTO

I've been over the footage
in detail.

SHAW

Who stole my mice?

BARTO

Nobody did.

SHAW

Don't be ridiculous.

KARTER

What do you mean?

BARTO

It's hard to explain.

Shaw starts to speak but Karter cuts him off.

PARZA

What are you saying, Mike?

BARTO

I watched the footage, synced and checked it then back again. We went over the records but there is no other indication of what happened. You can see Shaw leaving, he heads out, the cages are closed and the mice inside. The lights flicker a few times and go out.

(they all look shocked)

They go out, it's black enough you can see the cages but not inside them. They are in shadows. 17 minutes later the lights go full and the cages are empty. Absolutely empty. We've been over every second of every record on the station. No one was there, no one took them, they were just gone.

KARTER

You all saw the same thing? Have there been any other instances of lights going out?

BARTO

Rider reported one after her EVA yesterday. Shaw reported one on the farm.

MANDY

There was a third. Yesterday the hub was out. I got inside and before anything happened it came back on. Everything was fine, lights were good.

KARTER

Why didn't you report it?

MANDY

I was...distracted. In a hurry to get back to my quarters.

Karter, Barto, and Rider glance at Links.

BARTO

Thanks.

MANDY

I was busy. It just-

KARTER

We'll talk about it later. Any other options?

BARTO

Something from outside.
(pause)
Maybe something came in.

They all glance at Rider. Who looks back at them defensively.

RIDER

Wait a minute. Don't think that.

KARTER

She's right. We can't start down that road yet. We got something happening here
(MORE)

KARTER (CNT'D)

we don't understand yet.
Don't panic. We'll get on
top of this right away. So,
we can try and figure out
what it is let's start by
ruling out what it isn't.
Mandy, put together a dispatch
for Earth Base with as many
details as possible. I'll
check the other stations.

INT. CORE (DECK 3)- DAY

This is the most extensive and complicated part of the station.
Everything is here for a reason and everything is necessary.
Barto, and Muffin are here inspecting every inch of every part.

897 (MANDY) (V.0.)

Earth Base this is 897, with
dispatch...987...Priority Attention.
Status Outbreak continues.
There is no trace of the
missing mice. No tracks or
deposits anywhere in the
station. Also, no visual
record of them being taken
due to outage of light sources.
Investigation has shifted to
that and a detailed diagnostic
of the core symptoms is under
way. There are no records or
causes of light loss found
anywhere despite both visual
and digital inspection.

(MORE)

INT. FARM (DECK 4)- DAY

Shaw, Links, Parza are investigating the cages and the stocks in
the farm. Links and Shaw are crawling around in the dirt and
examining anything they find, which, for now, isn't much.

897 (MANDY) (V.0.) (CONT'D)

Also continued search and observation of the farm. As of current report no signs of the mice. All storage and food stock areas have been sealed and cleared.

(MORE)

Shaw is holding a shovel and staring at it. He walks past Links and Parza towards an exam table. They are shocked at his look and follow him.

897 (MANDY) (V.0.) (CONT'D)

Condition of food stocks unchanged. Preserved and monitored continuously. Searching for source of deterioration utmost priority. Request all data backup.

Shaw dumps the contents of the shovel on the exam. There are several cobs of corn brown and rotted.

Sometime has passed. Shaw, Parza and Links are examining the corn cobs, stalks and leaves with various instruments and scanner. Karter has now joined the group.

KARTER

How many stalks?

SHAW

4 that are like this. They have gone completely bad. 3 others are definitely showing signs of degradation.

(looks in electronic microscope)

There's no infestation. No micro infection.

LINKS

Nothing's eating on them. It's not connected to the mice.

KARTER

What does it look like?

SHAW

This doesn't make any sense.

They all sense the urgency in his voice and come closer.

KARTER

What is it?

SHAW

It looks like there hasn't been any light on it.

Barto has now joined them.

BARTO

Those lights are regulated 100% of the time.

LINKS

He's right. They weren't getting enough light.

A monitor has a split screen display of corn.

SHAW

The left sample is from documented experiments on light effect. It is given only 5% exposure over 48 hours. The right is one of ours from right now.

KARTER

There's no doubt to the results?

BARTO

Well, the doubt isn't what happened but when. If the lights were out for two days we'd have noticed it.

SHAW

I can't argue with you.
We can see the condition
of the fibers now, we can't
deny that.

KARTER

What else could make it happen?

BARTO

Could it be any effect of
the genetic modification
done on them? They are
designed to grow faster
than normal, an incredible
rate. Could that inadvertently
cause them to decay faster?

SHAW

I doubt it, but it's definitely
something we need to check out.
There's never been a case of
this happening before.

(to Links)

Get a healthy stalk from the
positive row. We'll also get
some sections and have the dark
booth ready.

Links exits.

PARZA

There are no signs of genetic
contamination at all. I'd
recommend isolation so we
have a constant match.

SHAW

Agreed.

Shaw and Barto exit. Karter and Parza examine the display on the
screen.

KARTER

What do you think happened?

PARZA

I don't know, honestly. It wouldn't surprise me if it's a result of all the genetic modifications. It's something we've never done before. If we can make them grow faster, I suppose, they can die faster.

KARTER

Some ways I hope so. Something big but controllable. I hope. Have to see what happens with a test sample in the dark booth for a few hours.

PARZA

Yes, start with a plan.

INT. LAB (DECK 3)- DAY

Muffin enters the lab with several pieces of corn in a clear tray. He goes to a sealed booth and puts them on a table. Enters commands on a keyboard and sets the program in motion. The booth closes and seals tight. The corn is in pitch black.

INT. AIRLOCK (DECK 3)- DAY

Suits being opened, examined, and put back together. One of the gloves is hanging motionless on a sleeve. Finally, the glove starts moving on its own. A woman's hand locks it in place.

Rider is preparing for her EVA. Barto and Karter are with her helping her suit up. Muffin is also putting on a suit.

BARTO

Feel good?

RIDER

Like a glove.

BARTO

It better.

RIDER

Yeah, this is good. Almost as if it was made for me.

KARTER

It was made for you.

RIDER

Makes me feel special.

MUFFIN

I feel like the ugly sister.

RIDER

You are.

KARTER

Everything on all the suits has been checked?

RIDER

Yes. We went over them in detail. No breaks, no cuts, no air bubbles in any anything. Primary suit, mine, is good. All the secondary suits are adaptable, anyone can use them, and they are also good. Nothing unusual in or out.

The suit is almost completely finished. Since it was made specifically for her, she is able to move smoothly.

KARTER

Alright, simple walk. Barto set the filters in the transfer chamber so they are good to go.

RIDER

Ok, I asked him to add a set of brackets from the last time to side D so I can hook it up easier.

KARTER

He put them at the 6 mark. Muffin will be inside monitoring. I know, you're

(MORE)

KARTER (CONT'D)
just going along the station
and you've got plenty of
experience. But just this time.

RIDER
(pause)
OK.

They hook a cord from just inside the airlock door to her suit.

RIDER
Perfect.
(checks cord on belt)
Ok.

Barto turns to the cradle and quickly pulls the helmet off
the mount. Something, or a shadow of something, moved, but he
did not see it.

KARTER
Come home soon.

They attach the helmet to her suit, lock it in place, then the
rest of them exit as she moves to the door. She looks at
the foot pads and gets in position.

RIDER
897, this is Rider.

897 (MANDY) (V.O.)
Go ahead, Rider.

RIDER
Right foot down and left foot down.

897 (MANDY) (V.O.)
Affirmative. Emptying airlock.
Stand by.

The air pressure drops slowly in the airlock.

EVA SEQUENCE - INTER CUT

Barto is seated in engineering with a headset hooked up.

Parza is in the medical room watching monitors from Rider's suit.

Mandy (897) is at her station on a headset.

Karter enters the command room and puts on his headset

Other members of the crew are at various stations, all paying attention to the EVA. Rider is heard on the intercom throughout.

MANDY

Stand by, Rider, you'll have vacuum in 2 minutes and 32 seconds.

RIDER

Standing by.

PARZA

Suit readings are nominal. How does it feel?

RIDER

Ready to go.

PARZA

10-4.

Airlock pressure is down to zero. Light goes green. Rider manually releases the lock and it slides open. Rider

The exterior of the station. Dark and shadows interrupted by light from the air lock.

MANDY

Go exterior lights.

BARTO

Go lights.

Lights come on along the exterior of the station. We see handrails along the surface from the airlock off to giant collectors outside the station. Rider exits the station into the darkness. Muffin stays just inside the door watching her cord.

KARTER

How's line of sight?

RIDER
Bright as the sun.

KARTER
Perfect.

Rider floats to a stop and reaches down towards a transfer hatch, long, thin, and partially in shadow. She twists and unscrews a handle and pulls at it. The hatch stays in place.

RIDER
It's jammed.

Barto is instantly on the move to the interior of the transfer hatch.

KARTER
What's going on?

BARTO
It's reading fine here. There's nothing in the chamber for it to hook to.

KARTER
The new bracket?

RIDER
No, it's clear.

KARTER
Can you check the pressure settings?

BARTO
I got it. They're reading good.

RIDER
Hold on.
(adjusts her grip and pulls
the hatch open)
Ok, its open.

Everyone relaxes as she opens the hatch all the way, hooks the cord from her belt to the filters inside, and pulls them out. She closes the hatch and it seals easily. The filters float behind her in the darkness of space as she pulls herself along the handrails.

Barto scans the controls and nodes his head. Everything reads okay.

MANDY
Stand by fin lights.

Barto goes back to the control station.

BARTO
Standing by on the fin lights.

RIDER
At station.
(closes outer shield on her
helmet)
Shields up.

MANDY
Go fin lights.

BARTO
Go.

The lights on the fins go on and everything changes. The fins are giant, extending out from the station, some to collect light and the others to dissipate heat. It's a beautiful yet cold sight. Rider moves into an area with several slots on the side of the station. She unscrews the slots and pulls out the used filters from the interior, hooks them to cords on the station, then pushes them off so they move out of her way. They quietly float into the darkness.

Inside the station they hear various knocks and scrapes from the surface.

KARTER
How's it feeling, Rider?

RIDER
It's going easy. Will have it
changed in a few minutes.

KARTER
Great job, Rider.

Rider makes sure the slot is clear and checks the cord attached to her belt. The new filter has floated out and is partially in

shadows. She tugs the clean filter and looks back at the station as it starts to come inward. It stops. Instinctively she tugs the line again and it snaps tight. The filter isn't moving.

RIDER
What the hell?

MANDY
Rider, report.

Rider pulls the cord again but gets nothing.

RIDER
The filter's tagged.

The crew on the station are all on edge.

BARTO
That's not possible.

KARTER
On what?

RIDER
I can't see. Part of it
is dark side.

BARTO
(running the length of
the station)
It can't be tangled. There's
nothing out there close enough
to hook on to it.

KARTER
Can you see where it's caught?

Muffin leans into the darkness outside the airlock as far as he dare.

MUFFIN
I can't see anything from here.

BARTO
It shouldn't catch anything.

Rider has one hand holing on to the station and is struggling to pull in the filter.

Shaw is on the command deck.

MANDY
There! It's loose.

Barto is in command.

BARTO
It never should have been caught.

Rider turns her attention back to the hatch when suddenly the cord goes tight around her arm and yanks her back. She curses in shock.

KARTER
What's happening?

RIDER
It's pulling against me.

Despite the cord being held tight the filter is starting to float in and over her. She is in shadow. Trying to kick free.

KARTER
Can you get back to the station?
Muffin, guide her back.

Muffin starts pulling on the cord.

BARTO
Hang on to the handrails.

RIDER
The cable is caught on something!

MANDY
That doesn't make sense.

Karter is tearing through the station.

Rider is screaming in horror.

MANDY

Jesse! Hang on! On the way.

Rider is completely covered in shadow and can't be seen. She is horrified

BARTO

What's she fighting out there?

Muffin is desperately pulling on the umbilical cord. It's held tight outside.

Rider screams out in fear. It's cut short. Silence

Horror on the faces of people on the station.

Karter is at the airlock.

KARTER

Get her back.

The cord loosens and Muffin starts frantically pulling on it.

MUFFIN

She's coming!

KARTER

Jesse Rider, do you copy?

MANDY

Jess Rider, please respond.

KARTER

Doctor, what are you reading?

PARZA

Nothing.

Muffin is pulling Rider in and as the motionless suit gets to the airlock door, feet first, he gasps in shock. The suit helmet is open. Closes his eyes for a moment.

KARTER

The helmet face is open.

Parza looks at the monitors, they are still active.

Mandy drops her head.

Links sits on the floor in grief.

LINKS

A helmet leak? Losing oxygen?

PARZA

It's open. She's exposed to space.

KARTER

I'm going to bring her in.

Muffin pulls Rider inside. Rider's helmet, the face plate open, is empty.

The suit is now lying on the airlock floor. It is completely empty. Occasionally there are shadows crossing helmet as people talk.

KARTER

No, it was already open.

PARZA

But we were still reading something on the monitor.

BARTO

How long until it went blank?

PARZA

Muffin was pulling her in.

KARTER

But she was gone when I got there.

BARTO

Where did she go?

Pause.

KARTER

And how?

INT. DINING ROOM (DECK 2)- NIGHT

Karter, Parza, Barto, Mandy, Shaw, Links, and Muffin.

PARZA

I'm sure we're all aware
explosive decompression
doesn't work that way. Only
when they used to make movies.
We got proof of that from the
Russian lunar lander disaster.

BARTO

We've checked the suit since
it got back inside. It's perfect.
There are no malfunctions or
faults in the system.

LINKS

There were no problems here.

KARTER

No suit problems, no system
problems here. I'm not even
going to consider it was
a source problem.

MANDY

No. Not from Jesse.

MUFFIN

So, we've ruled out all the
knowable reasons.

MANDY

The obvious ones.

SHAW

What does that leave?

MUFFIN

The possible ones. What possibly
happened?

SHAW

Contact. We were all thinking it.

KARTER

Yes. That's one of the possibilities we must consider. I contacted the other station Commanders. They've had nothing to report. No anomalies, and are offering any help.

There is a noticeable change around the room as they all consider this is a first contact situation.

MUFFIN

There are more things on heaven and Earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy.

Silence.

INT. COMMAND (DECK 1)- NIGHT

Karter is recording his report to Earth base.

KARTER

No other explanations for her disappearance can be made at this time. The only option left is to declare status as Contact. Additional, tomorrow we plan on finishing the filter replacement she was involved in. We are going full scale and all three suits will be in use. S.O. is to always keep at least one suit in standby but, in this situation, it is the best way to keep everything under observation. The best way to watch our backs. 897 out.

Karter turns off the recording. Muffin is at his station and finalizes the report.

MUFFIN

Ready to dispatch at your command.

KARTER

Go.

Muffin enters the code and the dispatch is launched.

MUFFIN

I didn't know there was such a status.

KARTER

Yes, it's been in the system for a long time. It's always been a possibility. I suppose it was something we should have expected. We finally got noticed.

MUFFIN

It shouldn't be a real surprise to anyone, should it?

KARTER

The most important thing is to avoid prejudging anything. Let's say it is something extraterrestrial. They most likely know as much about us as we do about them. Approach calmly. Don't judge anything. Don't assume anything. We need to get the filters changed. EVA in five hours.

Karter exits. Muffin scans the readings on the station.

MUFFIN

Our history of not prejudging doesn't give me much confidence.

INT. MUFFIN'S QUARTERS (DECK 2) - NIGHT

Muffin is sitting at a desk, tired but unable to sleep. He's watching videos on a screen, almost dozes off, then finally gets into the bunk. She turns off the lights and curls up in bed. Turns. Adjusts. Rolls. She sits up and looks around the room. Listening. Looking. Finally, he turns the lights on and lays down to sleep.

INT. MANDY'S QUARTERS (DECK 2)- NIGHT

Mandy and Links are together in bed. The lights are out but they are both awake looking into the darkness.

INT. ZOO (DECK 4)- NIGHT

More lights than usual are on. Shaw is walking along the cages looking at all the animals.

INT. AIRLOCK (DECK 3)- DAY

Karter, Barto and Muffin are getting out of their suits.

BARTO

That was good.

KARTER

Yes. We had it covered.

MUFFIN

Nothing going on out there we didn't know about.

BARTO

Not a sign of whatever took her.

Muffin pauses and they both look at him.

KARTER

What do you think happened?

MUFFIN

I don't know. At best there was something out there, who knows what, that's taking an interest in us. Benevolent. Nothing hostile. Just taking an interest.

BARTO

Yes, just an interest. Despite it being the center of our universe we have to remember our sun is just a small,

(MORE)

BARTO (CONT'D)

unspectacular star way out
in the middle of nowhere.
Anyone coming out here would
have to be, technically, far
more advanced than we've ever
seen, maybe even imagined. If
they can travel this far suits
like these are ancient to them.
In and out, no problem.

MUFFIN

No problem. Get comfortable.

KARTER

I hope. I wish. In the meantime,
we have to try not to make any
premature judgments. Neither out
of fear nor hope. Just try and
maintain the status quo as long
as possible.

MUFFIN

Do what we can to keep us safe in
here and keep whatever they are
out there.

KARTER

It's not a question of keeping
it outside. Whatever it is it's
already here.

INT. STATION - DAY

Muffin working his way through the station manually turning on
all the lights.

Shaw is in the zoo and has discovered another empty cage.

Links and Shaw are in the farm with more dead stalks of corn.

Mandy is at her station reluctantly watching Muffin turn the
lights on with the monitors.

Parza checking his readings.

Barto is in Engineering checking levels. turning collectors up and putting more power into the system.

INT. COMMAND (DECK 1)- DAY

They are all gathered in command. Karter is at his station, Parza is at one of the other stations, and Mandy monitoring communications with Muffin nearby. Ken has an empty cage with him. Links is holding yellow and wrinkled crops. Barto has trays with portable lights on them.

MANDY

We have a dispatch from Earth Base.

KARTER

Go ahead.

MANDY

They acknowledge Status Contact. Are assembling a diplomatic mission that will launch within 48 hours. Until their arrival 897 Command has full authority for representation.

PARZA

Full authority for representation?

MANDY

Also, good luck.

KARTER

Standard procedure, still, I hoped for more.

MUFFIN

Offer them West Virginia and North Dakota.

Laughter from the group.

LINKS

Toss in Iowa and it's a deal.

KARTER

I was thinking more along the lines of Mars. It's a family thing. Ok, we all know the situation. As far as we can tell there is something out there. Something that may or may not be hostile and we're the first to have to deal with it. Whether we are ready for it or not. It seems that, whatever it is, it's extremely sensitive to light. It stayed in the dark out there when it encountered Rider. It pulled her into the darkness of the filter and stayed on dark side. It took the mice in the dark. It was night when most of the interior lights were dark. Keep the lights up and get us all the power we can. Maybe that will keep it at bay for now. Until further notice, try to stay in pairs as much as possible.

MUFFIN

Other than Mandy and Links?

She glares at him and he laughs.

KARTER

Yes, other than Mandy and Links.

BARTO

These are portable lights. There's two per person so you should be covered. It should be enough to cover you any place you go. Recharge only takes a few minutes so use them as you wish.

The group starts to break up. They all take portable lights with them even if they are staying in the area.

BARTO
(to Links)
Get back to engineering.
Collectors on max, get all
systems up to full storage.
Generators and all
backups on.

They nod and exit.

KARTER
Are there more lights in
storage?

BARTO
A few, but I want to keep
them in storage for replacements.

KARTER
Good. Make sure we have an
accurate count.

BARTO
You bet. When I was 4, I
rewired the lights in my
bedroom. When I was 14 I
had so many lights around
our house lit up the local
airport complained. Pilots
mistook our house for their
outer marker. If whatever
this is works best in the
dark it might as well pack
up and go home.

KARTER
Let's make sure we can scare
them out of the light if need be.

BARTO
Brighter than the sun.

INT. MEDICAL (DECK 2)- DAY

Parza is monitoring his station. Muffin is nearby looking at secondary systems. He has the portable lights wrapped around his

wrists. He is protecting them like jewels. Parza scans the readings. Something catches his attention.

INT. STATION WALKWAY (DECK 3)- DAY

Barto is walking through the hallway. Though there is plenty of light and very few shadows here he has the portable lights in his hands. He stops dead in his tracks, eyes wide, looking ahead of him. Lights from a door to one side are flickering on and off.

He is astonished by this. This isn't supposed to be happening. He bursts into a run and is quickly to the inner door of the airlock chamber. Wide eyes he looks inside. One of the suits is standing, awkwardly moving to the airlock as if it were hanging like some bumbling puppet. Inside is pitch black.

It turns to face the airlock, Barto's eyes follow it and his face freezes when he realizes the outer door is open.

Breathing heavy Barto finally is able to think and move. He pounds on the window and yells for attention. The suit pauses and turns back. We see inside the helmet, the face plate is open, and there is darkness inside. Nothing in there.

Shaw comes running down the hallway to look inside and see the suit as it turns back to the outer air lock.

SHAW

Who the hell is it?

BARTO

Nothing. It's just nothing.

They both watch the suit move. Barto finally looks and sees the portable lights in his hands. He turns one on and shines it inside on the suit. The suit falters where the light hits it but keeps moving. A second light hits it, then two more. Both Barto and Shaw are hitting it with lights and trying to control the suit and prevent it from reaching the door.

Steadily a second suit moves into position between them. They try to adjust their hand lights, but the first suit is in shadow now. Shaw is looking at the controls in the hallway and can't see as the suit manually opens the air lock doors and the interior is flooded in darkness. Barto puts his face to the door

window and jumps back as the suit, the face helmet open, steps directly up to the observation plate.

This shocks Barto back into action. He jumps to the wall, opens a security panel, and starts manually engaging the emergency safety door. A solid wall slowly moves into place and locks in place.

Barto sits on the floor in shock. Shaw bends over breathing heavy.

Karter and Parza join them at a full run.

KARTER

What happened?

SHAW

It was in one of the suits.
Covered in it. It opened
the airlock door.

PARZA

In one of our suits?

KARTER

What was? What was it?

SHAW

I couldn't tell. It was smaller
than the suit. It was hidden
inside.

KARTER

According to the indicators
the airlock was manually
released but the air pressure
was still high.

SHAW

So, the suits are gone?

KARTER

The pressure would have taken
everything out the door.

BARTO

No. If the door was opened without the air pressure stabilized it'd be expelled into the vacuum.

SHAW

What did you see?

PARZA

Did you see whatever was inside the suit?

BARTO

There wasn't anything in the suit. I saw it when the outer door opened. Nothing was ejected into space but something from out there came in. There isn't a...thing...there. It's no monster. No creature. No limbs, eyes, or face. It's worse than that. There's nothing in the dark. It's the darkness itself.

INT. STATION - DAY

Various shots of the station, slowly, smoothly, places visited before but this time they are empty. Shadows everywhere.

INT. COMMAND (DECK 3)- DAY

The remaining crew are all here.

KARTER

We're turning on all the interior and exterior lights. Turning generators and collectors to full and picking up all the power we can store, and then some. Shaw and Links secure the Farm and Zoo. Barto, same for you in engineering. If you can't stay in pairs make sure someone knows where you're at. Doctor.

PARZA

I won't lie to anyone. We are all on the same level in that whatever this is we don't know anything about. It's showing up on life form and life cycle readings. It's also reading on heat registers, but, in both cases, the intensity is variable. Really for now all we know about resisting whatever it is it is resistant to light. Not sure what effect it has but it's the only defense we have.

KARTER

There's something else I need to say and you all need to listen. Keep in mind this is something brand new, something we've never dealt with before and we really don't know anything about it. We don't know where Rider is or what happened to her. At this point there is always the possibility this could be a benign event. They could just be someplace else and return just fine at some point. It's very easy to be afraid of the unknown, to distrust or hate something that you know nothing about. Don't forget that exploring the unknown is a desire we all share. We wouldn't be here if that wasn't a part of our psyche. Here it is, we are facing the unknown, so stay smart, stay in control, and don't let fear or imagination get in your way.

MANDY

Thank you.

There is a moment of relaxation then there is a change in the lights, a flicker, that gets their attention. Red lights on some of the consoles start flashing and Karter quickly reads the information.

KARTER
Cycle systems in the Zoo just
faulted. Go.

Everyone gets moving to their stations. Mandy takes her place at her communication console. Muffin almost beats her to it and she glares at him and he moves off.

MANDY
897 is online.

KARTER
(to Mandy)
Constant dispatches to Earth
Base. Every two minutes no
matter what's happening.

MANDY
Status?

KARTER
Critical.

INT. ENGINEERING (DECK 3)- DAY

Karter, Barto and Muffin come running in to the area and go to stations.

BARTO
Output's only at 95%.

MUFFIN
I got it. Stockpile is 108%.

BARTO
It is reading a loss on section 7B.

KARTER
The Zoo. Source?

BARTO

I can't narrow it down.

INT. CORRIDOR (DECK 3)- DAY

In the hallways by the airlock door all is quiet and calm. Finally, darkness dripping like water from the manual controls.

INT. ZOO (DECK 4)- DAY

Shaw and Links are examining the animal cages. One mid-sized cage is empty. They are looking at it in a mix of emotions.

LINKS

Like before. The door wasn't opened and there are no breaks in the system. The rest of them are ok.

SHAW

Ok, let's try and think it through.

LINKS

What do you mean?

SHAW

Like Karter said keep the fear at bay. Don't let the unknown scare you. What does it want?

LINKS

Why is it here? Food?

SHAW

What else?

LINKS

Most likely not air. Most likely it doesn't need air. It can survive without it.

SHAW

Possibly.

LINKS

It took Jesse. It could operate
and survive out there.

SHAW

Ok, perhaps that could come
to our advantage at some point.
It survives without air. What
if air is a hinderance to it?

LINKS

Another difference?

SHAW

Gravity.

As they are talking a shallow puddle of darkness starts to form
under one of the cages. There is a chicken inside.

SHAW

Of course! This is all good.
This is very good. Say it's
something that lives in space.
It's home environment. Air
and gravity could be something
it's not used to.

The puddle of darkness starts to rise around the cage.

LINKS

What else is there?

SHAW

What else is alien to it?
Heat?

SHAW

Ok, a baseline? At least
something that we can build on.

LINKS

It could be our advantage. It
was able to overpower Jessie
out there, in space, its own
environment. Perhaps that
can help us.

The cage with the chicken is now empty.

INT. ENGINEERING (DECK 3)- DAY

BARTO

What about heat?

MUFFIN

Doubtful. If, whatever it is, survives in space it wouldn't need heat. Most likely wouldn't be attracted to it, either.

BARTO

It does give us the possibility of using heat to ward it off.

MUFFIN

I'd say that is pretty likely, too. If it is something that survives in the cold vacuum it most likely won't need heat. Maybe it'll take some curiosity in it, the discovery process, but I doubt there'll be any more than that.

BARTO

I hope everything you just said is 100% true. That would indicate what we're facing has some sort of intelligence to it. Instead of just a hungry animal searching to feed it could be an intelligent being exploring the cosmos. Maybe even something capable of communicating with us.

MUFFIN

A true contact situation. Nothing at all to be afraid about?

INT. CORRIDOR (DECK 3)- DAY

In the hallways by the airlock door all is quiet and calm. Darkness is flowing like a steady stream of liquid into a vent.

INT. FARM (DECK 4)- DAY

Shaw, Links enter the farm compartment and freeze in shock. More than half of the lights in the area are out. Most of those that remain are flickering at random. There are lots of random shadows in the corn field. Shaw bolts and jumps onto a stand. He sees several corn stalks that are old and withered.

SHAW

Portable lights! As many
as you can!

LINKS

Got it!

Links runs to lockers along a wall and opens them up. There are several portable lights inside and they start to unpack lights. Shaw runs to a control panel and starts entering commands. Some of the ceiling lights come on, some flicker, some remain out. For a few moments it's almost like a game. Changing power from light to light as if he's trying to outmaneuver the darkness. It subsides and he seems to have a victory. He stands and looks into the field and sees more damaged stalks.

SHAW

Leave my corn alone!

Links is moving to the cornstalks with the portable lights. Shaw starts running into the field desperate to save his corn. He dodges through the stalks and rows and quickly slips on a patch of soil and drops to his knees. He starts to rise but can't.

He finally looks down and sees he has fallen into a puddle of darkness that is steadily expanding. He tries to pull himself out of the puddle, but it slows his movement. Tendrils of shadows wrap around his arms and legs and start to restrict him.

Links sets up two of the lights in the field and turn them on. The lights on the edge of the field unfortunately create more shadows from the corn stalks and they pull Shaw into the dark puddle faster. He calls for help.

Links starts running. Shaw loses his balance and falls forward into the darkness. Links tears through the corn. A strand of darkness has wrapped around Shaw's throat. He's gasping for breath. Desperate, Shaw grabs for help. He wraps his hands tightly around a thick stalk of corn to stabilize himself. He's

choking and his calls for help are muffled. He's in the pool of darkness up to his shoulders when Links arrives.

They stop themselves to not fall in and grab the end of the cornstalk Shaw's desperately hanging onto. They battle for control, but Shaw is in full panic as he goes under. Darkness climbs up Shaw's hands starts to wrap around Links. He release's the stalk as Shaw, struggling, he goes under. There is silence.

Links stands and looks around and see pools of darkness spreading across the field. He stumbles and his foot slips into a pool. The darkness tries to hold him, but he kicks and pulls out. He grabs all the lights as he can carry and exits the farm closing the door behind him.

Once outside he stops and turn on the portable lights concentrating their beams on the door. The light is so intense they can barely see the door. He can't take his eyes off the door and stumbles briefly hitting the floor.

LINKS

Damn! The Zoo!

INT. THE ZOO (DECK 4) - DAY

Most of the lights are out. There are so many things in the room it is hard to tell what is shadow and what is darkness. Two of the cages have their doors open.

Barto and Links are at the entrance. They have their portable lights with them and are shining them across the room creating more shadows.

BARTO

Hold it. Hold it! Follow my lights.

Left to right.

(MORE)

Barto holds his light steady facing to the left side of the room. Links aligns his lights above and below and, in unison, they scan across the room. Their panning gives a ghostly appearance in the room. There is a moment they pause as they catch something moving. They hold the area then move on when nothing happens.

BARTO (CONT'D)

One of the animals?

LINKS

Could be.

BARTO

Ok, listen, this is what we're going to do.

Moving as one, back to back, Barto and Links are headed for the cages. It's a slow process and the shadows, moving lights, and darkness flowing from place to place make it scary. At one point they encounter a loose rabbit and it scuttles off into shadow in a dead end.

By the time they get there it's gone. It couldn't have taken any way out. Darkness took it. They finally get to the cages. The cages that are still closed are completely empty.

LINKS

Nothing. It took everything.

BARTO

Ok, Let's keep moving. Links, grab anything you can, anything you think we might need, then get between us and we're out of here. You ready?

LINKS

Damn right.

Links grabs some equipment, whatever he can carry, and they head to the exit. They are almost there when Links feels a tug on his arm. He shouts and they hurry for the lighted hallway. Darkness is tangled around his wrist and there is a frantic battle to free him and they all stumble into the hallway and manually close and lock the emergency doors behind them.

INT. COMMAND (DECK 1) - DAY

Mandy is at her station. Karter is at command

MANDY

Priority message from Earth Base.

KARTER

Let's hear it.

MANDY

It's targeted for you only.

KARTER

Put it through.

(MORE)

Mandy hits the command and Karter puts on a head set and listens intently. His face is still but the way his eyes dart around the room gives the impression it's not good news. He finally pulls of the headset.

KARTER (CONT'D)

(to Mandy)

Keep the reports going.

MANDY

Understood. Any requests?

KARTER

All the information you can give them.

Karter exits.

INT. HALLWAY (DECK 3) - DAY

There are plenty of lights here. It feels safe.

Barto, and Links come up the ladder and are surprised to find Karter there. They reported to him what happened.

KARTER

Ok, get to engineering. Stay there.

They all head off but Karter grabs Barto and indicates for him to wait. The rest go off and Karter makes sure they are alone.

BARTO

I think we should concentrate on sealing off Deck 4 right now. Every light and all the energy we got focused here to make a barrier.

KARTER

Ok, but there's something else we have to look at.

BARTO

Sure. What?

Karter points him to the airlock doors. Darkness is slowly leaking through the seals.

INT. DINING (DECK 2) DAY

Karter, Parza, Barto, Mandy, Links, and Muffin.

KARTER

No one's coming. We're on our own. There are protocols for contacts in place. Procedures and responses for fleets of otherworldly, the proper terminology, visitors. Whatever this is, whatever we're facing, we are on our own.

PARZA

Did they suggest anything?

KARTER

Quite a few things. Unfortunately, they involve being able to communicate with whatever it is we're dealing with.

MANDY

Anyone have any ideas on how to communicate?

MUFFIN

Is it possible to just talk to it? Could it be listening to our signals?

MANDY

I thought of that. Yes, I sent dispatches hoping it was listening.

PARZA

Brilliant.

KARTER

Yes, very good. Does anyone have any other suggestions? Any ideas of possible ways to contact it?

MUFFIN

How about sign language.

Mandy spits nails at him and is tempted to give him one sign.

PARZA

I suppose we could try anything. There are countless languages.

MUFFIN

What happens we if accidentally say something about its mother.

MANDY

Just shut up! Really! Just shut up for once!

Muffin glares at her.

KARTER

Pull back, Mandy! Pull back. Knock it off, Muffin. This is not going to help us. We need to concentrate on options. If we don't have one, create one. Contacting it! Repelling it! Killing it!

PARZA

Well, we know that light repels it. We know that it stays away.

KARTER

Yes, light is our biggest defense.

BARTO

That's something we can get plenty of. We do it right and we can make this place brighter than the sun.

There is a moment as they all realize what he's talking about.

LINKS

Is that our only option?

KARTER

No, just one to consider.

LINKS

As long as we are going to die we might as well take it with us? There has got to be some other way. I can't accept that.

MUFFIN

I agree.

MANDY

Communication. There has got to be some way to communicate with it.

KARTER

Agreed. Let's make that the priority for tonight. Communicate, some way, whatever you can think of. We'll make a decision tomorrow morning.

He looks at them all, decides not to say anything else, then they walk out.

INT. MANDY'S QUARTERS (DECK 2) - NIGHT

Mandy comes into her quarters and quickly closes the door behind her. She stands there for a moment, intent, then screams in anger and pounds on one of the walls. Finally, she sits at a desk and cries.

INT. KARTER'S QUARTERS (DECK 2) - NIGHT

Karter solemnly looks at personal items, pictures, mementos, etc.

KARTER

Can you hear me? Whatever you are, wherever you are, can you hear me? I don't know if you

(MORE)

KARTER (CONT'D)
can hear or understand me,
but there is something important
I want you to know. Something
I really wish you could be
aware of. We meant you no harm.

INT. ENGINEERING (DECK 3) - NIGHT

Barto checks equipment carefully, cleans the dust off of controls, etc.

INT. MEDICAL (DECK 2) - NIGHT

Parza sits alone at his desk. Writing reports on the crew and sending them to Earth.

INT. COMMAND (DECK 1) - NIGHT

Muffin sits at his station doing his job. He is sweating uncontrollably. Looking over his shoulder for darkness.

MUFFIN
Personal Dispatch - 347.81
Transferred everything to
night cycle except the lights.
Don't suppose that has ever
been a matter of importance before.
Here we are, out here in the
middle of nowhere, sending people
out into the universe, and dealing
with what's coming in. I think I
always knew we'd make some sort
of contact sooner or later. I guess
I just figured it'd be ships of
different kinds with all sorts of
strange beings. Tall ones, short
ones, three eyes, four noses and
a tentacle or two. Tentacles,
tentacles, tentacles! We always
used to joke about that in school.
What would an alien really
look like? Just count the tentacles.
There's nothing in the dark, here.
It isn't hiding anything. It's darkness
itself that's come for us.

(MORE)

MUFFIN (CONT'D)

In the middle of nowhere, I suppose,
what else would we find? We found
darkness, and it's killing us.
347.81. Final dispatch.

INT- HALLWAY (DECK 3) - NIGHT

Links looks at the ladders going down. The hatches are closed and there are no signs of darkness. He finally stands and walks off.

INT. MEDICAL (DECK 2) - NIGHT

Levels on the monitors are going up. Parza sees it and starts comparing readouts. He knows something is happening. It spikes for a few moments and then settles down. He is recording information on the "Entity" that they have encountered. The levels start to rise again.

INT. MANDY'S QUARTERS (DECK 2) - NIGHT

Mandy and Links are embracing in the middle of the room rocking back and forth. She has cried on his shoulder and is finally starting to settle her nerves.

MANDY

I love you.

LINKS

I love you too. You don't know how long I've wanted to say that.

MANDY

Me, too.

LINKS

Seriously.

Links sees a shadow of something and looks up to the ceiling. Darkness is dripping from gaps in the ceiling panels to the floor. Mandy doesn't know it yet, so he keeps rocking and looks at the portable lights on a desk and the shadows growing on the floor around it.

MANDY

What's going on?

LINKS

Nothing.

(MORE)

He guides her a few more steps and sees darkness spread across the ceiling above him. It spins like a spider web in front of the door.

LINKS (CONT'D)

Mandy, when I tell you to run, run.

She looks up and is instantly aware of what is happening.

MANDY

You're coming with me.

LINKS

I'll get the lights off the desk. We'll need them to get to the doors.

Links looks deeply into her eyes then darts a few giant steps over the shadows to the desk. He grabs the portable lights and tosses some to Mandy. She catches them and turns them on as she spins to face the webs of darkness on the door.

MANDY

Come on!

She flashes the lights and some of the darkness recedes from the door then turns back to for Links. He struggles, his legs entangled in shadows from the desk, and falls forward.

LINKS

GO!

MANDY

NO!

Links turns on the lights and shines them on max at the door controls. The webs pull back and the controls are clear.

LINKS

Get it! Get the door open.

MANDY

I won't let you go!

LINKS

The door! Open it! Into the light!

Reluctantly Mandy steps to the door and intensifies the light on the controls. The web pulls back and she easily opens the door. The light helps wear off the web around the door but isn't strong enough to help Links.

Mandy looks at him, desperate to reach out to him. He's losing the battle; darkness has wrapped itself around his legs and is pulling him in. She starts to go back in the room to help him and darkness reached out to grab her.

He tosses the portable lights at her and they land safely at her feet and brush the darkness away. She is ready to enter when Karter arrives and holds her back.

Tendrils of darkness constrict around an arm and he calls for help. Karter uses his portable lights to try and force the darkness to release Links but the darkness is too massive. He forces Mandy back and immediately closes the door.

MANDY

(pounds on door)

DAMN YOU! DAMN YOU! DAMN YOU

(to the door)

Let's do it. Let's burn brighter than the sun and destroy the darkness.

INT. ENGINEERING (DECK 3) - NIGHT

The survivors, Karter, Parza, Barto, Muffin and Mandy are all here.

PARZA

I can tell you very little about...whatever it is. Nothing like it has ever been reported on any scientific, biological or zoological records. It appears that its natural state is as a cloud of some type. Maybe a shadow is a better word. This

(MORE)

PARZA (CONT'D)

allows it to move freely
wherever it can find a gap.
That's how it gets through
decks and doors. It can, when
it needs to, solidify into a
physical shape.

MANDY

When it wants to take someone.

PARZA

When it wants to take someone.
It can also use natural shadows
to hide in, and avoid detection,
perhaps it needs to build strength,
before it can interact with us.

MUFFIN

Is it feeding on us?

PARZA

That's a possibility.

MANDY

More than possible.

BARTO

We know what it wants.

PARZA

We think we know. One thing
we have to consider is this
all would indicate some sort
of intelligence. If it thinks
it can communicate and, perhaps,
we can communicate with it. It
could be learning. We don't
actually know what it wants or
what it's doing here.

MUFFIN

You talked about science and
biology. What about the other
possibilities? What about
mythology? Could we fight
it that way?

KARTER

Yes, we did consider that.
There are some similar traits.
It appears to be attracted to
the warmth of a living being.
By its nature it avoids the light.

MUFFIN

You're think of it as some kind of
space vampire?

KARTER

Until we know better it could be
something like it.

MANDY

What about the corn?

PARZA

That is something else we have to
take into account.

MUFFIN

It isn't impossible. Remember where
we are. We're out here in the middle
of nowhere. Science may have brought
us here, but it doesn't mean we were
the first...or the only... So, what
do you think we should do?

KARTER

We have two options right now.
One is to take every opportunity
to communicate with it. Anything
could work.

MANDY

I vote for option 2. If it could
communicate it would have by now.
It either can't or won't. It's
shown no mercy to us and there's
no reason for us to expect any.
Burn it out of the dark.

KARTER

I agree. The doctor and Mike have looked at it as well. We think taking it out is our best option. We also have to take into account what if this thing is here hunting. At least we can stop it before it gets any further.

MUFFIN

There has got to be some other option.

MANDY

If you have any suggestions I'd be happy to hear it.

MUFFIN

How long will it take?

BARTO

We've already been building up all the power we can and piping it into the system. It's at 113.456% right now. We can control it and the automatic releases kick in. When it hits 114% that won't be enough. We'll get alarm signals across the board. After that we shut down the buffers and it's 4 minutes.

INT. AIRLOCK (DECK 3) - NIGHT

There is a noticeable change in the darkness seeping through the door. A vibration of some kind. Waves.

INT. MEDICAL (DECK 2) - NIGHT

The life science monitors start to increase, more vibrations. The darkness is moving.

INT. ENGINEERING (DECK 3) - NIGHT

MUFFIN

So now what?

KARTER

I will make one last dispatch
to Earth Dock informing them
of our fate. In the meantime,
you are all relieved of duty.

Karter exits. Parza looks at the rest of them.

PARZA

If anyone needs anything, anything
at all, I'll be in my office.

Parza exits.

MUFFIN

I'll go to my station.

Muffin exits. Mandy watches him then gets up and leaves. Barto
looks around engineering, brushes some dust off a console, then
sits at his station.

INT. CORRIDOR (DECK 3) - NIGHT

The floor hatch is leaking darkness.

INT. CORRIDOR (DECK 2) - NIGHT

Mandy walks down the corridor to her quarters and then stops.
She looks at the door for a moment, gently lays her hands flat
on the surface, then pulls it back. Darkness wisps through a
small gap in the door and settles like a thin dust. She looks
at it and in a wave of anger is about to pound her fist on it,
freezes, then turns away.

INT. LINK'S QUARTER'S (DECK 2) - NIGHT

Mandy enters, emotionally exhausted, and looks around the room.
In a state of shock, she stands for a moment looking but not
really seeing things. Suspiciously she looks at the shadows and
starts to sweat. She suddenly runs off.

INT. COMMAND (DECK 1) - NIGHT

Muffin is at his station, headset on, doing his job. He monitors
several aspects from the station and reports it to Earth Base
regularly.

Mandy marches into the command deck with a blanket from Links's bed wrapped around her. She sits in a chair with her back to him and starts typing. Muffin listens for a moment and, when she stops typing, starts typing faster. When he stops she almost punches and enter key with her fist.

INT. KARTER'S QUARTERS - (DECK 2) - NIGHT

Karter is recording his final report.

KARTER

We are on the count down now. We can only just wait. About the same time the decision was made, and execut--ed, the life science reading from the darkness started to spike. I'm unsure of the connection. It could be the increase of power into the system and cycling as it builds or, possibly, the changes in our own systems as we realized what we were facing. It would be nice to know which one of those it reacted too. If any. The responses of the crew were...tempered. There has always been a great deal of unknown in space travel. A greater deal of risk. Whether it's mentioned openly or not all the space travelers before of us have thought about that possibility. Have had to face it. When Armstrong set foot on the moon more than a century ago that possibility had to have crossed his mind. We aren't the first ones who've faced that. However, I suppose, we are the first ones to face it like this. When Challenger exploded, or Columbia disintegrated, they had no time to realize what they were facing. In some ways I can't help but envy them. I'd like it to be known, for the record, that in the 6-year life

(MORE)

KARTER (CONT'D)

span of transfer station 897-KRUI, we provided support for 28 missions out from Earth. 4 of them arrived at their destinations and have begun establishing life in the universe. 3 of them arrived at their destinations and found conditions unsuitable for colonization and returned. 18 are still in transit. The remaining 3 were aborted. I hope our contribution to those missions will be remembered in the history books.

(pauses)

Jonathan Karter, 897 Commander, signing off.

(pause)

We came in peace for all mankind.

INT. ENGINEERING (DECK 3) - NIGHT

Barto is systematically cleaning engineering and putting everything in place. Lost in thought, concentrating on cleaning, he occasionally glances at a timer counting down.

INT. MEDICAL (DECK 2) - NIGHT

Parza is at his station looking at the monitors. The readings are spiking across the board. He is speaking into the headset.

PARZA

Since the decision was made and the process began activity increased. It's constantly moving from place to place, heat has increased, life science increased. I would suggest that it is aware of what's happening but it could be from instinct, a response to our changes, or awareness. My gut reaction is it knows something is going on. It is possible it could be preparing to react to what's going on. Trying to build up strength, store up energy, to protect itself from the explosion. I'm trying not to deal with

(MORE)

PARXA (CONT'D)

the possibility that the only way to do that is to feed and the only way to do that is to come after us. Sadly enough, that's all the information I can give you. I'll keep streaming the readings we're getting in the time we have left. Perhaps, whatever it is, will move on by the time anyone gets this message. Perhaps, after an investigation, ships will just avoid this area of space for a while. Parza, over and out.

(takes off headset, thinks,
then puts it back on)

Additional. There is a possibility that some of the responses to our actions are signs of intelligence. If it has intelligence, could it be afraid?

He takes off the headset, dispatches his report, looks around the room, then exits.

INT. AIRLOCK - NIGHT

Rider's suit is hanging neatly in a dock. Darkness is forming at its feet.

INT. COMMAND (DECK 1) - NIGHT

Mandy and Muffin are sitting back to back with dueling keyboards. Mandy is frustrated. Muffin is loving it.

MANDY

(hands in the air)

What is your problem?

(Muffin laughs)

What is it with you?

MUFFIN

Now that was funny?

MANDY

No, dammit, it wasn't. Nothing about you is funny.

MUFFIN

Come on! We need a good laugh.
What else have we got to do?

MANDY

Well, we've got- Well, just
leave me alone.

MUFFIN

Come on! What was it?

MANDY

What?

MUFFIN

You were out for me on day one.
What was it?

MANDY

You come in here like you're
the boss. It's your chair, your
station and it should all be
the way you want it to be.
No matter what I thought! No
matter what I did it was all
about you.

MUFFIN

Just having some fun.

She turns to face him.

MANDY

You think this job is fun?
I worked hard to get here!
I spent hours in training
knowing how these systems
worked. I sacrificed a lot
to get here and it wasn't
easy. Too hard to be swept
aside by you.

MUFFIN

What?

They don't see it, but darkness is forming just outside command.

MANDY

On day one, you acted like you were the boss.

MUFFIN

I'm sorry.

MANDY

Well, let me tell you!

MUFFIN

I apologize.

MANDY

I worked hard to get here, and I deserved to be treated as an equal.

MUFFIN

I always thought you were a bit more than equal.

MANDY

What?

MUFFIN

Are you kidding? I knew about you. Everyone did.

MANDY

What?

MUFFIN

You're brilliant. Nobody in the core classes could even come close to you. I knew I had to come on strong to be compared to you.

Darkness is getting thicker in the corridor outside. It is starting to seep into command.

MANDY

I never knew that.

MUFFIN

Of course, you didn't. You were always so centered, so intense.

MANDY

I had to be. It's never been easy for me. Studying has always been hard. It was easy for me to get sidetracked.

MUFFIN

You could never tell. You set a standard for us.

MANDY

Thank you.

MUFFIN

It was kind of a surprise that you requested assignment at the stations. You could have gone anywhere.

MANDY

I thought about that a lot, where I wanted to go, I figured there would be fewer distractions out here.

MUFFIN

That makes perfect sense.

MANDY

So, what about you? Why did you come out here?

MUFFIN

My great grandfather flew on Discovery, Endeavor and Atlantis. Every generation in my family has had someone in space. Grandparents both surveyed moon craters. Mom was astromech on Mars 1. Kind of a family tradition for me.

MANDY

Whew. That's quite a tradition to live up to.

They see darkness now flooding into the room. They turn to face each other, eyes locked together.

MUFFIN

I was also jealous cause you had such a cool name. Mandy Bauer. Quick and easy to remember. Everyone could say it.

MANDY

Never thought of that. Well, you had--

MUFFIN

Yeah, Muffin, of all the names in all the universe I have to get Muffin.

Darkness is moving in on them.

MANDY

Ouch.

MUFFIN

Believe me, there is an infinite supply of jokes when you have that name. Breakfast, Muffin? That's only funny the first million times.

MANDY

I suppose you could find comfort in the fact that everyone loves muffins.

Darkness is circling around them, moving in.

MUFFIN

Just to mess with people I carried a muffin recipe book with me in college.
(they are both laugh)
You know how many kinds of muffins there are?

MANDY

I imagine an unlimited supply.

MUFFIN

Apple-cinnamon Muffins, banana muffins, blueberry muffins...

Darkness completely surrounds them.

MANDY

Chocolate chip muffins, cornbread
muffins...

MUFFIN

Honey Muffins...

MANDY

My favorite!

Darkness starts to fill the gap between them, their eyes locked
on each other.

MUFFIN

Morning glory muffins, very popular!

MANDY

Pumpkin and cream cheese Muffins...

MUFFIN

...with pecan streusel...

They vanish in the darkness.

INT. AIRLOCK - NIGHT

Rider's suit is standing on it's own in the center of the
airlock.

INT. DINING/COMMON ROOM - NIGHT

Karter and Parza are here. They are sipping 57-year-old brandy.
They are drunk.

KARTER

The clock is ticking.

PARZA

Let's drink to our own demise!

They drink. The time is running down.

KARTER

Who deserves it better than us?

PARZA

Damn right.

They drink. The time is running down.

KARTER
My first and last command.

PARZA
To your first and last command.

They drink and laugh. The time is running down.

KARTER
Well, let's see. Established Way
Station 897 KRUI!

PARZA
Good.

KARTER
Multiple missions passed through
here on their way out across
the galaxy.

PARZA
Good.

KARTER
Hand selected crew.

PARZA
Good. Especially your pick of
station medical. You really hit
the mark with that one.

KARTER
Mark who? I never hit anyone
named Mark.

PARZA
No, seriously, I was really
flattered when you contacted
me about this position.

KARTER
I read your record. I saw the
places you'd practiced and got
(MORE)

KARTER (CONT'D)

the impression you would take
the time to look closer at
things. Look at your patients
in detail. Most of the other
candidates had been in bigger
situations, hospitals, clinics,
etc. Lot of different people
coming through. I didn't think
they'd be used to the same routine,
same people, day after day.
You would adapt to this pace
easier.

PARZA

I didn't even know I was on a
list for a position like this.

They drink. The time is running down.

KARTER

It didn't take you very long to
say yes.

PARZA

No. I wasn't going to miss this
assignment. No way.

KARTER

Why?

PARZA

Cause you are exactly right. I
never liked the hurried pace
of some of the assignments
they offered me. All to fast,
people in and out in a few hours,
it felt to hurried. This was
much better, getting to know
people.

KARTER

Including Shaw?

PARZA

Including Shaw. What was your logic in him?

KARTER

Part of it was that I wouldn't have to manage him. He worked alone, most of the time, and didn't really get along with anybody. I could just leave him with the farm and that'd be it.

PARZA

What was the other part?

They drink. The time is running down.

KARTER

He was brilliant. He was leaps and bounds ahead of everyone else in modifying growth.

PARZA

Even peripherally we could have all been a part of that.

KARTER

We could have.

They drink. There's very little time left.

PARZA

Instead we get this. A first encounter with an alien life form. Or something.

KARTER

Yes.

PARZA

Tell me one thing. Honestly. We know so little about what this is. You really think blowing up the station, brighter than the sun, will destroy it?

KARTER

No.

PARZA

Why then?

KARTER

For the last two hours, deep
down, you felt like, in some way,
you were going to beat it.

They drink. The bottle is empty.

Darkness is spinning like a web around them.

INT. ENGINEERING - NIGHT

One-minute left on the count down. The entire area is spotless.
All the lights are on full blast and there is no darkness in
this room.

BARTO

(to nobody)

Engineering report, final. Countdown
proceeding as planned. All systems
nominal. That means everything's
going fine. If you consider blowing
up your own station as fine. 897
was a beauty. She did what she was
supposed to do and she did it well.
We were safe here, she took care
of us, and she helped mankind reach
for the stars.

(pauses, gently put his hands
on the console to comfort it)

She deserved better.

(pauses)

He doesn't realize Rider's suit is standing behind him until it
reaches out and touches his shoulder.

TITLE: 4 days later

INT. STATION - NIGHT

Dark, silent, still. A few emergency lights and the station in standby mode create countless unsettling shadows. All the crops are dead, the animal cages are empty.

Finally, lights are sweeping back and forth moving through the station. A rescue party searching for any signs of survivors. Command is quiet and empty, so is medical and the engineering section.

Lights quickly scan the airlock and all the suits are properly in their docks. The lights move on.

Rider's suit steps forward and follows them.