

Black Albedo

By

S. Y. Affolee

(c) 2010, S. Y. Affolee

syaffolee@gmail.com

INT. MCMURTY'S BAR

The bar is dark and dingy with red Martian sunlight filtering through a few slitted windows barred with a special steel alloy. A few twisted tables and chairs are scattered about the room. An old fashioned pool table stands in the center, its green felt peeling. There are a few scruffy looking patrons about. An equally scruffy patron is sitting at the bar counter where the bar owner cleans some glasses.

ARI

Lay another one on me, McMurty.

MCMURTY

That would be the third one you've had this afternoon.

ARI

You think I can't take it like a man?

MCMURTY

I think that if you do take another one, we'll have to carry you out on a stretcher. This stuff isn't water, you know.

ARI

Oh, so you think you're peddling high quality stuff, huh? I'll tell you why you think I can't take it. It's because it's adulterated!

MCMURTY

You're sloshed, mate. Let me get you some water. Or better yet, coffee.

ARI

(banging his empty glass on the bar top)

I am not going to drink that swill you call coffee. Why, when I was flying the Endeavor, we were given the high quality stuff. I remember when...

BAR PATRON #1

Give it up, Captain. Your glory days are far behind you. And we've heard the stories about a million times already.

(CONTINUED)

ARI

You're just saying that to shut me up.

BAR PATRON #2

Maybe he was.

BAR PATRON #1

Yeah. Maybe I am.

BAR PATRON #3

Will you guys shut the hell up? I'm trying to concentrate here.

ARI

I am not going to shut up, Bub. If you want me to be quiet, get some damn earplugs. This is a free planet and I can say whatever I wish.

BAR PATRON #1

(to Bar Patron #3)

There, you got him going again.

Bar Patron #3 tries to concentrate on a shot at the pool table but misses.

BAR PATRON #3

Damn it!

MCMURTY

(placing a new, filled glass
in front of Ari)

There you go. Don't say I didn't warn you.

ARI

This isn't water masquerading as vodka, is it?

MCMURTY

Would I try to trick you?

ARI

On occasion.

MCMURTY

Oh come on. Don't look so surly, Captain. You're usually not this moody. Or rude.

(CONTINUED)

ARI

Easy for you to say. Most of the time, I'm just drinking.

MCMURTY

You're not usually this vocal. What's the matter?

ARI

Are you some shrink, now?

MCMURTY

Well, now that you mention it, I do have a degree in psychology from the University of Dublin, before I got booted out here.

ARI

Figures.

MCMURTY

Come on, Captain. You can tell ol' McMurty. Women troubles?

ARI

I wish.

MCMURTY

So it isn't your ex?

ARI

Ha! After she was done with me, I've heard nothing from her. No, it was Williamson.

MCMURTY

A friend of yours?

ARI

"Friend" is such a strong word.

One of the bar patrons finally gets his ball into the hole. There are some cheers and a bit of cursing from the loser. Some credits exchange hands.

MCMURTY

An enemy, then?

ARI

Do I look like the sort of guy who would have an enemy? If I did, he's already had his revenge.

(CONTINUED)

MCMURTY

If it isn't an enemy, then who is it? I'm on tenterhooks here.

ARI

It's Ron Williamson.

MCMURTY

(stops wiping the glasses)
Ron Williamson? The Ron Williamson? The guy who headed the first manned expedition to Titan and found...

ARI

Yeah, the same one. He sent me this.

Ari takes out a slim data pad from his badly creased coat and slides it over to the bartender. McMurty takes it up and pushes a few buttons and lets out a whistle as he reads the message.

MCMURTY

Wow, that's a doozy. Pardon my skepticism, but why is he contacting you, Captain?

ARI

When I was much younger, right when I got out of Training, I had a few missions with him. There was a time when I was considered his successor, but...

Ari spreads his arms, indicating the bar. A few of the other bar patrons glance up curiously, but almost immediately go back to either watching the pool game or a sports show on the holo vid.

ARI

I made a terrible mistake and here I am.

MCMURTY

Aw, don't be so hard on yourself, Captain. Mistakes happen. You just haven't dug yourself out of your funk yet.

The bartender slides the data pad back to Ari who pockets it.

(CONTINUED)

MCMURTY

So what are you going to do?

ARI

Drink myself into a stupor. Like always.

MCMURTY

No. Really. The guy was your mentor, whether you still believe it or not. The Ron Williamson at one time thought you were his successor. Perhaps he still thinks you have promise...

ARI

You're dreaming, McMurty. The man has just discovered that he has a terminal disease. Perhaps that has changed his mind.

MCMURTY

Perhaps so. But I think it'll do a world of good to at least set an old man's mind at ease. You're not doing anything important now, are you?

ARI

Don't try to guilt trip me into doing this.

MCMURTY

But it's the right thing to do.

ARI

Damned armchair psychologist. Just get me another drink.

MCMURTY

If you've noticed, I don't keep armchairs here.

The front door to the bar bangs open and a cloud of red dust billows inward into the establishment. The rest of the bar patrons momentarily stop talking to watch the entrance of the new stranger. A man in dusty gear walks in. He has something long and metallic strapped to his back and his hair is also long and dusty. The stranger saunters towards the bar counter and takes a seat next to Ari.

(CONTINUED)

MCMURTY
Welcome, stranger. Your
preference?

CONRAD
Gin.

The stranger pulls out a credit chip and hands it over to the barkeep to scan. McMurty hands the credit chip back to the stranger.

MCMURTY
I didn't catch your name.

CONRAD
Does it matter?

MCMURTY
(shrugging)
It might.

ARI
Oh, come on. You never asked
anyone's identification before. As
long as the money's good...

MCMURTY
Right. As long as the money's
good. Well, John Doe or whatever
your name is, a gin it is.

McMurty turns to get the stranger his drink. In the meantime, Ari turns his attention to the stranger, giving him an assessing look.

ARI
Haven't seen you around here
before.

CONRAD
Just passing through, sir. Just
thought I'd get a drink and be on
my way. I didn't know that all the
inhabitants of this small town were
so nosy.

BAR PATRON #1
That's "Captain" to you!

CONRAD
(raising an eyebrow)
Captain?

(CONTINUED)

ARI
Ex-Captain.

BAR PATRON #2
You'll always be Captain to us!

ARI
Pay no attention to them. They're drunk. And as you say, nosy. Haven't you ever heard of the stereotype that small townspeople are nosy?

CONRAD
Can't say that I have. Captain.

Ari gives out an exasperated sigh just as McMurty returns with a tumbler filled with golden colored gin.

MCMURTY
Here you go, sir.

CONRAD
(taking a swallow of gin)
Thanks.

ARI
So where are you headed?

CONRAD
You guys are talkative, aren't you?

MCMURTY
Oh, we're a fount of words. Why ol' Captain Ari here is just getting ready to head off himself, aren't you?

ARI
I don't...

MCMURTY
The Captain just found out that his mentor is about to kick the old bucket and well, Williamson had a last request so how could anyone refuse him?

CONRAD
Who indeed?

(CONTINUED)

ARI
Why you son of a...

MCMURTY
So where did you say your mentor
was living right now?

ARI
(muttering)
Olympus Mons City.

CONRAD
How interesting.

ARI
I have half the mind to smash this
pitcher across your head, McMurty.

MCMURTY
You wouldn't dare. So, stranger, I
didn't catch where you were
heading.

CONRAD
Oh, I didn't tell you? Olympus
Mons City, of course. I have some
business with an old...friend.

ARI
Right.

At that moment, the door to the bar slams open again, but instead of a man entering, it is a security robot with a very slick design. It swivels its head to survey the bar patrons.

BAR PATRON #3
Who let that bucket of bolts into
here?

SECURITY ROBOT
(drawing what looks like a
weapon)
I am not a "bucket of bolts",
human. I am a ARMR-626.

BAR PATRON #2
What the hell is a ARMR-626?

SECURITY ROBOT
All you need to know, human, is
that I am in search of a man who
goes by the name Conrad. He is
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SECURITY ROBOT (cont'd)
wanted by the Interstellar Corps
for violating Penal Code 72-892...

MCMURTY
Look, ARMR-62-whatever your
designation is. Criminals don't
frequent this fine
establishment. Go search
elsewhere.

The robot swivels its head toward McMurty's voice and fixate
on the trio at the bar counter.

ARI
I have a weird feeling about
this...

CONRAD
Whoops, I gotta go.

As the stranger gets off of his bar stool to make a quick
exit, the robot raises its armored arm and a red light
begins to flash ominously.

SECURITY ROBOT
Stop where you are human. A scan is
required to verify your identity.

CONRAD
This is a free planet,
metalhead. I'm going where I want
to go. Involuntary scanning is an
invasion of my privacy.

SECURITY ROBOT
Not if you're a criminal under
apprehension.

The security robot shoots a laser above Conrad's head and a
bit of the bar's roof caves in. Conrad briefly halts and
turns to face the security robot.

CONRAD
That was not a nice thing to do.

MCMURTY
Of course not.

The barkeep briefly disappears underneath the bar counter
before reappearing with a laser cannon on his arm. He
trains the weapon on the robot.

(CONTINUED)

MCMURTY

I will not tolerate anything
destroying this fine establishment
for no reason at all!

BAR PATRON #1

Here, here, McMurty! We'll be
witnesses in court that the bucket
of bolts started it all!

As the other bar patrons withdraw their own weapons, various laser pistols, Conrad tries to turn away again. The robot fires another warning shot and this incites McMurty and the bar patrons to yell at the security robot.

ARI

Jesus. And I thought you all were
pacifists! Haven't you guys
thought about an on/off switch.

MCMURTY

There's only one way to deal with
machines controlled by the damned
authorities. And that's not an
on/off switch.

McMurty fires his laser cannon at the robot, but it's already on the move and the barkeep ends up blasting out the front door instead. The bar patrons are in a riot but are temporarily disorganized due to the cloud of dust that billowed into the bar.

ARI

Oh for Christ's sake. I'm probably
the most drunk of you all and I
have to do the reasonable thing?

CONRAD

Captain, I wouldn't do that if I
were you.

Ignoring the stranger's warning, Ari dives towards the floor and pulls out a small laser pistol and aims it towards the robot's middle where a control panel is located. Ari fires and the outer hull of the robot explodes in a shower of sparks.

ARI

Well, that was easy. Put down the
cannon, McMurty. Everything is all
right.

(CONTINUED)

CONRAD

I don't think so, Captain. We have to get out of here before the reinforcements come.

BAR PATRON #2

(peeking out of a window)

Holy hell. There are more of them out there. I'm getting the hell out of here.

The other bar patrons agree and hastily stampeded out of a side door.

MCMURTY

Damn it. That's the hazard of operating a respected bar out in the boondocks. There's bound to be these kinds of things happening every month or so.

ARI

Wait. Where are you going?

MCMURTY

My secret underground bunker for one. Sorry, Captain, but you'll have to fend for yourself. After all, you did shoot the bucket of bolts.

ARI

It is not my fault! I just...wait a minute, get back here!

McMurty disappears below to his underground bunker located underneath the bar counter. Ari bangs on the counter with his fists in frustration.

ARI

Damn it. Get back here, McMurty! You can't expect us to face them here alone.

MECHANICAL VOICE

(from outside)

Surrender now. We have you surrounded.

ARI

They don't have any right to surround this place. It's just a bar!

(CONTINUED)

CONRAD

Take my advice, Captain, but this isn't the time to make a stand, not since we're woefully unarmed. I think we'll have to run.

ARI

It's your fault! I should just haul you out there and feed you to those scrap heaps.

CONRAD

Whoa there Captain! I'm just as innocent as you are. We should just...

A robot similar to the one that had entered the bar earlier rolls towards the entrance threshold of the bar. It swivels its head, scanning for the inhabitants. At the moment, it does not sense Ari or Conrad who are standing behind one of the pillars.

ROBOT #2

Come out and surrender! You are wanted under several violations. You will not be hurt if you come out now, but we have instructions to eliminate you if you prove to be troublesome.

ARI

(whispering)

Troublesome? Are robots programmed to say that?

CONRAD

(whispering back)

They're just mouthpieces. Their controllers are doing the speaking.

At the sound of Conrad's voice, the robot swivels towards their hiding place.

ARI

Damn it, he's heard you.

ROBOT #2

Surrender now!

CONRAD

Never, metalface!

(CONTINUED)

Conrad whips out the weapon strapped to his back in a lightning fast move and blasts the robot with a powerful stream of energy that is completely unlike that of laser-based weapons. Charred metal explodes.

ARI
What the hell is that thing?

CONRAD
No time for questions now,
Captain. We have to get out of
here. Do you know if there's any
transportation around nearby.

ARI
Well, there's...

CONRAD
Great! Lead the way.

ARI
This is crazy.

MECHANICAL VOICE
(outside)
Surrender! Surrender!

Conrad and Ari dodge as several laser blasts emanate from the bar entrance. Quickly, the two weave through the debris towards a back door. Ari yanks it open and both of them scramble behind a dumpster with wheels. Some of the robots waiting outside blast at the dumpster sending up sparks.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF MCMURTY'S BAR

CONRAD
I hope this isn't our vehicle of
conveyance. Isn't it a bit smelly?

ARI
The ride's over there. We can use
this as a shield.

The two men take hold of some handles at the back of the dumpster and wheel it towards the small parking lot at the side of McMurty's bar. There are several vehicles parked there already. One of them, noticeably, is an open air lunar buggy--the design hailing back to the 1960s. However, there are some noticeable modifications, especially that of a combination jet and hover engine attached to the back.

(CONTINUED)

CONRAD

Which one?

ARI

(indicating the lunar buggy
with a tilt of his head)

That one. I know it doesn't look
like much, but...

A bit of laser fire obliterates a nearby hovercycle.

ARI

It'll get us to where we want to
go. If we can get to it first.

As one, the two men run out from the cover of the dumpster
as laser fire erupts around them. Miraculously, they vault
into the lunar buggy and with a few quick pulls of a lever,
the vehicle speeds out of the parking lot, heading towards a
rising cliff at the edge of town.

CONRAD

(looking backward)

How fast can this thing go?

ARI

I have no idea. I just bought this
thing from some old timer two weeks
ago. I've only used it to go to
get groceries.

CONRAD

You'd better floor it,
Captain. Those buckets of bolts
are gaining on us.

ARI

You asked for it.

The robots are chasing them by using some sort of
antigravity propulsion. Conrad takes out his strange weapon
again and starts shooting. Several robots fall and Conrad
yells in excitement.

ARI

Damn it. I forgot about that.

CONRAD

Forget about what?

ARI

That.

(CONTINUED)

Both men look ahead. There is a deep ravine right before the cliff.

CONRAD

Shit. Does this over-sized jet pack work?

ARI

There's only one way to find out.

CONRAD

You're a brave man, Captain.

ARI

More likely, suicidal.

Ari slams on the accelerator and suddenly the lunar buggy blasts off a little faster than before. The robots chasing them adjust their pace as Conrad continues to shoot at them. They close in a couple hundred meters towards the ravine and Ari's hand hovers above a red button near some gauges.

ARI

Brace yourself.

CONRAD

(turning back to grip a bar near his seat)

Funny, that's what I always tell my former girlfriends when I...

Ari presses the button and the jet propulsion kicks on. The lunar buggy careens through the last hundred yards kicking up an enormous plume of red Martian dust as it launches itself across the ravine. The robots chasing the lunar buggy momentarily race through the dust fog and see the ravine too late. Several of them fall in and explosions are heard just as the lunar buggy lands on the other side with a jolt.

CONRAD

Woohoo! Now that's what I call a landing.

ARI

We're not out of the red yet, stranger. It won't take them that long to figure out a way over here. And by the time they do, I hope to be far away from here.

(CONTINUED)

CONRAD

You're right, of course. Name's Conrad, by the way. And I'm headed off to Olympus Mons City, same as you.

ARI

I figured. Are you in trouble with the law?

CONRAD

Don't worry. It's just a misunderstanding which will be all cleared up once I get to our destination.

ARI

Well, if you're going to do any explaining to the authorities, don't drag me into it.

CONRAD

No problems, Captain. I owe you one back there.

EXT. 5 KM OUTSIDE OF TESSERACT

The buggy is going at a good clip across the Martian plains, a thin trail of dust the only thing that is marking its passage. There are no signs of pursuing robots, but the Martian night is falling fast and the two moons, Phobos and Deimos are already out, low crescents near the horizon. A few kilometers away, there is a small lighted settlement.

ARI

That can't be Herschel.

CONRAD

(absorbed in reading the lunar buggy's navigational equipment)

You're right. Herschel is still about 200 kilometers to the east. We're approaching a small town called Tesseract, population thirty. I doubt there's any hope we can blend in there.

ARI

Mm. Well, there's always camping beneath the stars. That is, if you don't mind the chill.

(CONTINUED)

CONRAD

I've been forced to do worse things
in my life than sleep in the
Martian freezer.

ARI

Oh? Exactly what do you do again?

CONRAD

Just a freelancer. So what is this
about going to Olympus Mons City to
see your mentor? What do you think
he's going to ask you to do?

ARI

Don't know. We didn't exactly part
on the best of terms.

CONRAD

Maybe the old man wants to make
peace with you. I've heard that
the end usually does that to
you--change your perspective.

ARI

Perhaps. Here we are. This looks
like a mining compound. From fifty
years ago.

The lunar buggy slows down as they approach the buildings in Tesseract. There are a few other vehicles parked along one of the larger buildings which has one sign indicating that it is a tavern of some sort. Ari parks the lunar buggy somewhat close to the tavern (for easy access in case they need another quick getaway) and the two men hop off. and head into the tavern.

INT. THE TESSERACT TAVERN

The tavern itself is a bit smoky from the inhabitants using some illicit drugs. There are three large holoscreens mounted on one side of the wall, each showing different programs. One is an antigravity football game being played on Luna. The second is a reality show where the contestants are arguing about who would go out on a space walk. The third screen is showing some commercials.

The tavern is packed with patrons, about half of them staring at the holoscreens. The other half are sitting at metal tables conversing and having dinner. There aren't very many tables and all of them are completely crowded, except for one in the corner where a young woman with blue hair is dining alone.

(CONTINUED)

WAITRESS

Well, hello there boys. Just the two of you?

ARI

Yes.

CONRAD

(trying to wave the smoke away)

Is there a non-smoking section?

WAITRESS

Of course there is. Right this way. Sorry, it's a bit crowded. You'll have to share.

The waitress weaves through the tables with Ari and Conrad trailing her. The other patrons briefly look up at the two men since they are strangers in this small town, but since they aren't dressed all that much differently from everyone else, they soon go back to their meals.

WAITRESS

Excuse me, miss, but I'm afraid you'll have to share this table with these gentlemen. We're a bit crowded tonight, as you can see.

REZ

It's not a problem. I'm almost done anyway.

CONRAD

(looking pointedly at Rez's still full plate)

Please don't leave on our account. We won't bite. Honest.

ARI

He's right. Just ignore us.

WAITRESS

(putting the menu-pads in front of them)

Any of you gentlemen care for a drink?

CONRAD

Gin, if you have any. I never got to finish that glass back at McMurty's.

(CONTINUED)

ARI
Entirely your fault, if I
recall. I'll have some water
please, ma'am.

The waitress walks away to fill their drink orders. The young woman eyes them suspiciously, but decides to take their advice and ignore them as she eats her dinner. The two men take up the menu-pads and scan the items listed on it.

CONRAD
Ma'am? You called her ma'am. Man,
you're a throwback, Captain.

ARI
You have a problem with me being
polite?

CONRAD
Oh no, I have no problem. Just
surprising, that's all. It's just
been my experience that most people
these days don't bother with the
niceties at all.

ARI
It's a changed world these
days. Or maybe I'm getting too
old.

The waitress comes back with the drinks and sets them on the table before taking out an old fashioned stylus and pad.

WAITRESS
So what will it be, boys?

ARI
I'll have the Number 1.

CONRAD
I'd like the Number 2.

WAITRESS
All right then. (shouting) Bubba,
we need a number 1 and number 2!

As the waitress takes up the menu-pads and walks away to attend to another table, Ari and Conrad exchange looks at the waitress's outburst.

REZ
The power source on her
communication device is running
low.

(CONTINUED)

ARI

Excuse me?

REZ

(pointing to her ear,
indicating where a device was
located on the waitress)
Her communication device. It's an
old one. The cook can't hear her
unless she yells into it.

CONRAD

Oh, so that's what that outburst
was about. I thought she had an
undiagnosed disease or
something. I suppose you're one of
the locals then? You know everyone
here?

REZ

Hm.

CONRAD

What's that supposed to mean?

ARI

Leave her alone, Conrad. Can't you
see she's trying to eat her dinner
in peace?

CONRAD

Our conversation isn't hampering
her dinner, is it, sweetheart?

REZ

(raising a hand outstretched
towards Conrad's neck, small
thin blades erupting from her
fingernails)
I wouldn't try to use endearments
to me again.

CONRAD

Whoa.

ARI

You heard the lady. You wouldn't
want to get into any more trouble
than you are.

REZ

(hiding her hand)
I'd imagine that trouble is
probably his middle name.

(CONTINUED)

The waitress arrives with two hotplates, one of them with a steak and mashed potatoes, the other with a stir-fry dish.

WAITRESS

Well, boys, here you go. Just holler if you need anything else.

As the waitress walks away, Ari immediately digs into his steak. Conrad briefly plays with his chopsticks, but his attention is focused on their female dinner companion.

CONRAD

So you never did answer my question.

REZ

Didn't I?

CONRAD

You're not a local are you? Just passing through as well?

REZ

You're really nosy. I don't like nosy.

ARI

(to Conrad)

Do you have some sort of death wish?

CONRAD

I always live as if it's my last moment. You can't be certain of life.

REZ

That's an interesting philosophy, mister.

CONRAD

Conrad.

REZ

Excuse me?

CONRAD

It's Conrad. And my buddy here is Captain Ari. What's your name?

ARI

Don't drag me into this.

(CONTINUED)

REZ

Some people call me Rez. Captain,
eh? Retired?

ARI

In a manner of speaking.

REZ

Got kicked out, huh? No wonder
since you're with this lug.

CONRAD

Hey!

ARI

I've only met him recently. He has
nothing to do with my
"retirement". Now you, on the
other hand, have some very
interesting enhancements.

CONRAD

Now look who's nosy!

REZ

They come in useful sometimes. One
could say I'm, uh, quitting my
previous job. I'm headed off to
Olympus Mons City.

CONRAD

That's where we're headed, too,
darl...

Rez shoots Conrad a warning look and wiggles her
fingers. He immediately looks down and concentrates on
eating dinner.

ARI

In no time at all, she'll have you
trained like Pavlov's dog.

REZ

That's assuming that I'll be
sticking around long enough to see
to his training, Captain.

CONRAD

My former girlfriends never tried
to train me. They called me the
wild man...

(CONTINUED)

REZ
That's disgusting.

ARI
He generally is.

CONRAD
Captain, you wound me.

ARI
Enough about him. You don't happen
to know if this town has a hostel
of some sort, do you?

REZ
This place does have some rooms in
the back, but I'm not sure if any
of them are vacant. You'll have to
ask...

The entrance to the tavern slides open revealing three figures, heavily armored and armed, walking into the place. A second waitress hurries up to them and makes frantic gestures, indicating that the tavern is already very crowded.

WAITRESS #2
Sirs! How wonderful of you to drop
by. Unfortunately, all of our
space is used up...

BOUNTY HUNTER #1
Actually, we do not wish to eat out
here. You do have some private
rooms?

WAITRESS #2
Well, yes. But they're more like
bedrooms...

BOUNTY HUNTER #1
That is fine. We'll pay you extra
for our brief use of it.

While the second waitress is talking to the bounty hunters, Rez spots them and noticeably freezes. She tries to move her body so that it is hidden behind Conrad's.

REZ
Shit. Shit. Shit. They can't be
here.

(CONTINUED)

ARI
Who?

CONRAD
An old flame of yours?

As Conrad tries to turn around, she grabs his shoulder, forcing him to stay put.

REZ
They'll notice you if you do that!

ARI
They look like bounty hunters. Exactly what are you wanted for, Miss Rez?

REZ
Why should I tell you?

CONRAD
Or they could be after us.

ARI
Damn, you're right.

REZ
Let me get this straight. You two think those bounty hunters might be after you?

CONRAD
Well, there was this incident earlier today.

The first waitress walks over to them, startling the three from their conversation.

WAITRESS
Is everything all right here? My, it looks like you've all become fast friends, here.

ARI
(taking an exaggerated look at his chronometer)
Why look at the time. We have to get going. You wouldn't mind if we get this to go, would you?

WAITRESS
Why not at all, sir.

(CONTINUED)

CONRAD

(pulling out a credit chip and
handing it to the waitress
with a flourish)

Please put everything on my
tab. Including this little lady's
meal.

REZ

What?

The waitress turns her back to them a moment to retrieve
some portable containers. Rez shoots Conrad a black look,
but he ignores it.

REZ

I am not going to be indebted to
you.

CONRAD

You're headed out to the same place
we are. And if my guess is
correct, you're eager to get
yourself as far away from those
bounty hunters as we are.

WAITRESS

(handing them the take out
cartons and Conrad's credit
chip)

Here you go. And thank you, Mr.
Smith. You know, the weather's
supposed to be mighty cold
tonight. You might want to stay
overnight in our fine establishment
before you head on your way.

ARI

Thank you, but no. We're eager to
be on our way.

As the waitress finally retreats, Conrad and Ari get up from
their seats. Rez remains seated.

CONRAD

Aren't you coming with us?

REZ

I don't even know you.

ARI

Leave her be. Besides, she could
slit our throats while we sleep and
we'd be none the wiser.

(CONTINUED)

REZ

If it eases your mind, Captain, I don't think you'll be much of a threat. But him. I would trust him even less than a Martian desert viper.

CONRAD

That's harsh.

ARI

Leave it, Conrad. The buggy's already too crowded with you in it.

CONRAD

We can always put her in the back storage.

REZ

I am not going into someone's trunk.

At that moment, some yelling breaks out between some tavern patrons watching the holovids. There was some betting on the sports games and someone is convinced that someone else cheated. A punch is thrown.

ARI

I'm getting out of here. You follow if you want.

CONRAD

Come on, it's just a bar fight.

ARI

Need I remind you that it was a bar fight that eventually landed both of us here?

There is more yelling, but the second waitress had briefly disappeared towards the back to rouse the bounty hunters, hoping that they might be able to restore some order. One of the bounty hunters emerge and fires a laser pistol toward the rowdy group. This only insenses the patrons even more.

TAVERN OWNER

Hey! No shooting weapons in here. You'll have to pay for the damage you've caused.

BOUNTY HUNTER #1

I'm not paying for anything. It was your stupid waitress who told me to stop the fight.

(CONTINUED)

TAVERN PATRON

Have you now common sense?

The other tavern patrons roar in agreement and the bounty hunter raises his laser pistol threateningly. In the meantime, Ari and Conrad have already slipped away through a side door. Rez finally gets up to follow them.

REZ

(muttering to herself)

Fine, fine. You're right. Might as well blow this joint even if I do have to ride in a storage bunker.

The bounty hunter notices some movement out of his eye and he swings towards Rez.

BOUNTY HUNTER #1

Hey you there. I need to talk to you. You look familiar.

Rez doesn't answer. Instead, she moves more quickly, shoving people out of her way.

BOUNTY HUNTER #1

Hey there, stop!

Rez doesn't stop. One of the tavern patrons inadvertently bumps into her and her hair briefly flies out of her face. The tavern light glints on a strangely colored scar below her ear.

BOUNTY HUNTER #1

(speaking into a communications device)

I have the subject in sight. She's heading outside.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF TESSERACT TAVERN

REZ

Wait up.

CONRAD

So, you've decided to come with us?

REZ

Like I have a choice. It's was getting a little crowded in there.

(CONTINUED)

Just as Rez reaches Ari's lunar buggy, a bright light suddenly illuminates the parking lot. Reflexively, Ari and Conrad bring their arms up to shield their eyes. Rez doesn't do anything except glare into the darkness in surprise. There is the faint growling of vehicles just beyond their periphery. The other two bounty hunters had slipped out of the tavern to confront them.

BOUNTY HUNTER #2
(on a loudspeaker)
We have you surrounded
RZ-594. Come with us peacefully
and you won't be hurt.

REZ
Never. I am not going back to that
lab. Or what's left of it.

ARI
RZ-594?

BOUNTY HUNTER #2
Then you leave us no choice.

CONRAD
That doesn't sound good at all.

The sound of the bounty hunters' vehicle gets louder. Ari jumps into the driver's seat of his lunar buggy. Conrad grabs Rez and shoves her into the back passenger seat before he gets into the vehicle himself.

REZ
Damn it! Don't manhandle me.

Ari quickly handles the controls and the lights on the lunar buggy turn on and the vehicle blasts off into the Martian darkness. The bounty hunters follow, their vehicle easily visible with the headlights.

CONRAD
I ordinarily wouldn't dream of
it. But it was either that or see
you turned into chopped liver.

REZ
Huh. Well, I suppose I should thank
you for your quick thinking.

CONRAD
Really?

REZ

Don't read too much into it.

ARI

(looking at his instruments)
They're still trailing us. I'm going to turn off the lights and turn on the shield. Unfortunately, we'll be driving blind.

REZ

We can drive by the stars.

CONRAD

I like how you think. It'll be like the olden times when sailors on Earth steered their ships by the skies. Romantic, you think?

REZ

It was practical, not romantic.

ARI

She's right. I can configure the computer here to help me do that. Which brings up the interesting point, why did those bounty hunters call you by a serial number? Are you a robot?

CONRAD

Come on, Captain. You know there are no RZ series.

REZ

I'm not a robot.

CONRAD

See? She's just like us.

REZ

No. I'm not just like you. I have a number because I was just one of many experiments in...well, let's just say the lab is no more.

INT. GEOTECH ENTERTAINMENT HQ, CONFERENCE ROOM

Several Geotech Entertainment executives are seated around a table listening to the head of the marketing department give his talk about his department's latest project. Everyone seems attentive except for the CEO of the company, Carlise,

(CONTINUED)

who is sitting at the head of the table. Carlise is a clean-cut, well dressed man, but at the moment he is frowning, his fingers steepled in front of him in concentration.

HARRINGTON

As you can see, our department projects that ratings for this newest venture will go through the roof. After all, if we start now, we will be riding on the wave of the newest hot thing.

OLDENGOOD

That's very well, Mr. Harrington, but how much will all of this cost? The accounting department will not be very happy if it goes over the allotted budget for new ventures.

PURDUE

And judging for what you planned for the new venture, it is going to cost a lot indeed. Especially if it is anything like the production costs of shows today.

OLDENGOOD

Quite right, Ms. Purdue. Have you heard the rumored costs of that latest show on Makemake? What's it called?

PURDUE

"Airlock Island", I believe. Not that I've watched the dreck, but the latest financial news on that show is fascinating.

HARRINGTON

Mr. Oldengood, Ms. Purdue. Those are very good observations. But may I point out that this venture will indeed cost less? It will, of course, be here on Mars rather than Makemake.

The rest of the executives murmur among themselves after Harrington's remark. But the consensus is that they're beginning to be persuaded to his side.

(CONTINUED)

CARLISE

Actually, I would like to make an observation.

A hush falls into the conference room as the CEO speaks up. Harrington suddenly looks nervous.

HARRINGTON

Yes, sir?

CARLISE

Geotech Entertainment has always prided itself on being cutting edge. Even before I took over, the previous owners always looked towards the next best thing. We should keep that in mind. This new venture...

HARRINGTON

Is definitely cutting edge! No one has ever thought to use polar bears on the Martian ice caps. The viewership will totally eat it up. Man against bear. Who will win? Why...

CARLISE

Do not interrupt me.

HARRINGTON

Sorry, sir. I got carried away.

CARLISE

As I was saying, this venture is not original. Oh sure, that silly reality show on Makemake may be the most popular thing now, but if we make a reality show, we would be seen as just riding on the wave of popularity. You might think that polar bears and airlocks are totally different things, but the core concepts are the same.

The other executives murmur to themselves, in agreement with Carlise. Harrington clenches his hands.

HARRINGTON

You don't understand...

(CONTINUED)

CARLISE

No, you don't understand, Harrington. You've forgotten the motto of this company--the same motto that was read to you on the contract that you signed as employee. The same motto that was supposed to be pounded into your head at all the motivational seminars I put all of you through. Innovation, Harrington. And you haven't shown it.

HARRINGTON

If you want a new idea, sir, I have plenty of others.

CARLISE

If you had other ideas, you should have been showing those here now. Not this blather about polar bears. Besides, as I recall, none of your previous projects ever made it through the preliminary phases, did they?

HARRINGTON

No sir, but...

CARLISE

Refresh my memory, Ms. Tang, what was the outcome of those other projects?

TANG

They were scrapped, Mr. Carlise.

CARLISE

Ah, yes. And why did we give Mr. Harrington another chance?

OLDENGOOD

As I recall, he said that he would bring one of his other ideas to the table in the next meeting.

HARRINGTON

I do have other ideas! I'll...

CARLISE

No, Harrington. Your chances are up. You've wasted an opportunity

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CARLISE (cont'd)
with this thing about polar
bears. Geotech Entertainment
cannot afford to keep on employees
who do not make an effort towards
innovation. You're fired,
Harrington.

HARRINGTON
What?

CARLISE
(turning toward the other
executives and ignoring
Harrington's agitated waving)
Mr. Oldengood, you will temporarily
take over the position as head of
marketing. Tomorrow, you will give
me a list of candidates to
permanently take the job. I want
candidates who are motivated and
innovative.

OLDENGOOD
Yes, sir.

HARRINGTON
Mr. Carlise, you're not giving me a
chance! I'll prove it to you with
my next idea! It's a holovid
series about robots that shoot
lasers out of their eyes...

CARLISE
(pressing a button on his
console)
Get out, Harrington.

HARRINGTON
No, listen to me. The robots that
shoot lasers, they're not your
ordinary robots. They have
emotions. And they're in
love! People will eat it up.

The door to the conference room slides open and two security
guards enter. Ms. Tang, Mr. Carlise's secretary, motions
towards the agitated Harrington. Everyone watches as the
security guards take Harrington's arms and forcibly escorts
him out of the conference room.

(CONTINUED)

HARRINGTON

I know robots are considered retro,
but it'll be cutting
edge! Everyone loves the dichotomy
of robots with emotions. And think
of the angst--people love...

The security guards drag him out the door and the door
slides closed as the guards cross the threshold. The
executives turn, almost as one to look at Carlise.

CARLISE

Well, ladies and gentlemen, are
there any pressing news that any of
you need to report?

Some of the executives shake their heads as others respond,
"No sir."

CARLISE

If there isn't any news so far,
this meeting is adjourned.

The executives silently file out of the conference
room. Finally, the only ones remaining are Carlise and Ms.
Tang. His secretary is making some final notes on her
dictating pad before she gets up.

TANG

If there isn't anything else, sir,
I would like to remind you that you
have a meeting scheduled one hour
from now with the head executives
from the Sing Syndicate in the
Green Room. The reports you
requested for the meeting have been
downloaded to the appropriate
channels.

CARLISE

(getting up and pacing towards
a window)
Thank you, Ms. Tang.

TANG

(walking to the door and
pausing)
Do you wish that I handle the
report from Mr. Oldengood about the
marketing head replacement?

(CONTINUED)

CARLISE

Send the report to me, directly. I wish to have a more personal view on the matter after the debacle today.

TANG

Mr. Harrington's record had been spotless before. By all accounts, his latest idea could have worked.

CARLISE

Do you want to be fired, too, Ms. Tang?

TANG

No, sir.

CARLISE

Very well. I will explain something to you. Harrington's idea might have worked, but it is not innovative. His notion of innovation is a rehash of the old.

TANG

Sir?

CARLISE

I gave him an idea. You know Olympus Mons?

TANG

How can anyone forget, sir? That geological feature is the reason for the name of this city.

CARLISE

Well, I told Harrington about my idea about making an amusement park with Olympus Mons as its feature. And he shot it down.

TANG

That is certainly an original idea, Mr. Carlise, but as to its feasibility...

CARLISE

Feasibility is why we hire engineers, Ms. Tang.

(CONTINUED)

TANG

I see your point. I'll direct all of Mr. Oldengoods reports to you, sir.

CARLISE

See that you do.

Tang exits the conference room and Carlise turns back to the window to gaze outward onto Olympus Mons City. Not too far distant, the dormant volcano looms.

CARLISE

I'll see my dream realized, even if I have to fire everyone in the company to do it.

EXT. HERSCHEL, D STREET

After a winding pursuit, Ari, Conrad, and Rez have finally lost the pursuing bounty hunters. It is late morning and they've arrived in the farming town of Herschel--a bucolic town thriving underneath a dome of glass. The town itself has expanded beyond the dome and at the moment, the lunar buggy is on one of the outer streets, passing various buildings.

REZ

I'm starving. What does the navigation say?

ARI

(looking over to the instrument in front of Conrad)
There should be a restaurant up a few blocks.

CONRAD

(waking up)
Huh? What?

REZ

I was asking about food, you dunderhead.

CONRAD

I thought you just ate back in Tesseract.

REZ

That was over two hundred kilometers from here.

(CONTINUED)

ARI

Way more than two hundred kilometers. I didn't drive in a straight line, did we?

CONRAD

As I recall, you only drove part of the way. I took over a bit in the middle of the night because you wanted your beauty sleep.

ARI

Beauty sleep? Are you kidding? I'm an old man. I can't keep up as I used to.

CONRAD

A likely excuse. Hey, look there, it's a QuickiWaffle.

REZ

I'm game. I've only heard about maple syrup, but I really want to try some.

ARI

It's synthetic. Real maple syrup costs an arm and a leg.

CONRAD

Because it needs to be imported from Earth?

ARI

No. Because there aren't that many maple trees left, especially after the Brazillians went on the Rampage of 2074.

REZ

Really?

CONRAD

You haven't read any Earth history?

REZ

I didn't study any history while I was growing up. Mostly, I was too busy trying to survive these tests.

CONRAD

They weren't academic tests, I take it.

(CONTINUED)

REZ

No.

Ari finally pulls the lunar buggy towards the breakfast restaurant, but instead of parking, he pulls through what looks like a drive through.

REZ

We're not going in?

ARI

Not after what happened the last two times with us. We're going to eat and run this time.

CONRAD

Sure, but we will need to stop somewhere to refuel.

REZ

Why? I thought with all these solar panels here...

ARI

This is an old antique, Rez. It still needs liquid fuel. Especially for these enhancements I had added to it.

REZ

I don't know. I mean, wouldn't it just take some rewiring or something?

CONRAD

Don't pretend to be some engineer, honey.

REZ

(gives Conrad the finger,
sharp enhanced nail up)
So you have engineering skills?

CONRAD

I can shoot.

ARI

Children, stop it.

They finally pull up to what looks like a receiver and speaker. Strange static noises erupt from it as they approach.

(CONTINUED)

QUICKIWAFFLE ATTENDANT
How may I help you?

ARI
I'll have a continental with
coffee.

REZ
I'll have two servings of
strawberry waffles with maple
syrup. And a cup of tea.

CONRAD
Scrambled eggs, kippers, and Jovan
grapefruit juice.

Ari and Rez gives Conrad baffled looks at his strange order.

ARI
Jovan grapefruit juice?

QUICKIWAFFLE ATTENDANT
That will be 7000.

Ari takes out a credit chip and plugs it into a slot near
the speaker. A light glows green and he takes the chip
back.

QUICKIWAFFLE ATTENDANT
Thank you sir. Your order will be
ready in a moment at the window
around the corner. Have a nice
day.

The lunar buggy edges foward to the Quickiwaffle window
located just beyond the speaker.

CONRAD
Jovan grapefruit juice is the
best. I think it has something to
do with the fruit being grown in a
high gravity environment.

The lunar buggy briefly stops at the window where a small
platform with their orders is extended. Ari grabs the meal
bags and hands them over to Conrad to separate them out.

REZ
High gravity? But how do they grow
the fruit on Jupiter if the planet
is entirely made of gas?

ARI

I believe they are grown in suborbital greenhouses. It's a big industry there.

CONRAD

(handing Rez her bag of waffles)

Yeah. It got started in the late twenty-first century. It was originally out of necessity, but it became sought after because for some reason, things taste better after being grown there.

REZ

Mm. I like these waffles. I wonder if they make these in Jovan factories?

CONRAD

Probably.

As Ari maneuvers the lunar buggy down D street, a dark hovercraft of nondescript design pulls out from a side street and begins to follow them at a discrete distance.

ARI

The navigation says here that there's a park-and-go not far from here. Ah, there it is.

Ari parks and takes the food bag that Conrad hands him. Conrad and Rez are already eating their breakfast, but Rez turns in her seat to watch the dark hovercraft pass by them, heading in the direction of Herschel's main dome.

REZ

I think it would be best not to stick around this town for too long.

ARI

Getting antsy already? Let me finish breakfast first.

CONRAD

She's right. Although not much happens in these suburban places, that also means that the authorities would be bored. And bored cops would be excited to jump on anything that smacks of out of the ordinary.

(CONTINUED)

ARI

We haven't done anything here.

CONRAD

Oh yes we have. What we've done is to enter this city. And this lunar buggy isn't helping any, either. It's an antique and it sticks out like a sore thumb.

REZ

And it's a bumpy ride.

ARI

But it's a ride, nonetheless.

Ari finishes his meal and pulls out of the park-and-go, heading down a parallel street that would skirt around the city dome. They pass the dark hovercraft which had stopped a block away. The officer in the hovercraft is issuing a citation to an even more unusual vehicle.

REZ

What is that?

CONRAD

I don't know. That thing looks ancient. Maybe someone is doing a historical reenactment.

ARI

That's an ice cream truck from the mid twentieth century. It looks exactly like one I saw in a period holovid.

CONRAD

Wow, really?

REZ

I've heard about ice cream. I've never actually seen the thing, though. What is it?

CONRAD

What, you've never heard of ice cream? First, you've never had maple syrup and now ice cream? Where did you grow up?

REZ

In a lab. Sure, the scientists there taught me stuff, but I was

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

REZ (cont'd)
only allowed to consume nutritional supplements. Some of the scientists did feel sorry for me and smuggled in some real food, but they were soon found out and, uh, terminated.

ARI
That sounds awful.

REZ
If you grow up with it, it's just life.

CONRAD
Well the next time we stop somewhere, I'm going to find you some ice cream. You'll love it.

REZ
That sure, are we?

CONRAD
Yeah. I've never encountered a woman who didn't.

EXT. 100 KM NORTHEAST OF HERSCHEL

The Martian terrain between Herschel and Eddie is extremely hilly and the ride is bumpy. While Ari is concentrating on his driving, Conrad is trying to hold on. Rez, somehow, is sleeping through the entire ride.

CONRAD
I don't know how she does it. Your driving is terrible.

ARI
It's not me. It's the road. Or the lack thereof. Besides, she did say that she was created in a lab. Maybe her creators made her tougher. Or tougher than you, at any rate.

CONRAD
You're just trying to make excuses.

ARI
If you continue to complain, I might just dump you here in the middle of nowhere.

(CONTINUED)

CONRAD

Fine, be that way. At least according to these instruments, it won't be that much longer until Eddie. And maybe there, we might find faster transportation.

ARI

I don't know if I want to leave this baby behind. I've put a lot of work on it.

CONRAD

Personally, I find it a bit hard to muster up some sentiment about this old piece of junk. Anways, what do you think your mentor will want from you once you get to Olympus Mons City?

ARI

Not sure. Although Williamson is sometimes difficult, when he wants to be.

Behind one of the hills, a long thin metal object targets the lunar buggy in its sights. A small light at the end of it starts blinking and something shoots out the tip of the metal object and lodges into one of the front wheels of the lunar buggy. The wheel blows out and the vehicle abruptly stops, jolting the passengers.

ARI

Damn it. It must have hit something.

CONRAD

I can jury-rig a hovercraft, but I have no idea how to change a tire. But I can get out and perform diagnostics if you'd like.

ARI

(pulling out a small kit)

No, I've got it. It shouldn't take that long to repair if the wheel hit some rock.

Ari gets out of the lunar buggy and pulls out a diagnostic tool which starts beeping as he scans. Engines, some distance away, are heard.

(CONTINUED)

CONRAD

What's that?

ARI

What? You mean this tool
here? It's a...

CONRAD

No. I think someone's approaching.

ARI

From out in the middle of
nowhere? We've seen no one for
kilometers.

The engines become louder and with the sound of the engines is laughter. Hoverbikes crest over a hill, about ten of them.

CONRAD

Captain, I think we've got company.

ARI

What? I'm working right now.

CONRAD

I said company, Captain!

REZ

Huh? What's all the ruckus? And
why are we stopped.

CONRAD

(pulling out his weapon)
Get down. I'm going to scare them
off.

Conrad fires his weapon in the air, but this on seems to incite the hoverbikers. The bikers continue to zoom toward them and circle the downed lunar buggy. The bikers are all wearing black and their faces are obscured by helmets.

REZ

Good thing I woke up when I
did. I've got a laser right here.

At Rez's comment, the hoverbikers take out their own weapons and train them on the trio. One of the bikers move closer. In reaction, Conrad points his weapon at the biker, but the biker doesn't seem fazed.

(CONTINUED)

CONRAD

We're just travelers. Just leave us alone and we'll leave you alone.

The bikers laugh and the closest one grabs Ari before he can make any move.

ARI

Get your hands off me! I didn't do anything...

CONRAD

Leave him alone!

Rez fires a warning shot into the air, but the biker roughly hits Ari in the head, rendering him unconscious. The biker uses Ari's body as a shield as the biker drags him back. The rest of the biker gang laughs and speed away on their hoverbikes as Conrad attempts to shoot them down.

REZ

It's no use, Conrad. They're quickly getting out of range. We have to fix the buggy ourselves.

CONRAD

Damn it. I don't know anything about changing wheels.

REZ

The Captain isn't going to appreciate that attitude, especially when he wakes up in the company of those bikers. We'd better get this up and running as quickly as we can.

CONRAD

You know how to rig this?

REZ

I can probably figure it out. Hand me that diagnostics probe, will you?

EXT. MARTE VALLIS, GEOLOGICAL STATION #47

Marte Vallis is a deep fissure in the Martian landscape. Geological Station #47 is located at the edge of the fissure. The station itself is equipped with many sensors to monitor the fault line. Most of the geologists stationed here are inside the station, but there are two

(CONTINUED)

people standing outside near the fissure, surrounded by more equipment. There is a thick line anchored to the ground and going down into the fissure.

WENDY

I'm ready to call it a morning. I hope lunch isn't beef burginon again.

TAD

I don't know. Paco claims that beef burginon is his specialty. He loves making it. I kind of feel bad if I complain about anything.

WENDY

True. Compared to the last graduate student sent out here, Paco is a pretty decent cook.

TAD

Speaking of grad students, what's taking Ellis so long?

WENDY

Don't know. Maybe she found something really interesting down there. She does still have about one hour of power left before we have to reel her back up.

TAD

Yes, but I get antsy when things don't go as planned.

WENDY

Sometimes science doesn't go as planned. That's the beauty of it. Unexpected things can get you a paper. Preferably in the Journal of Martian Geology.

TAD

I suppose so. But still...

WENDY

Wait, there's Ellis now.

The rope pulls taut and Tad hurries over to the equipment to help reel it up. A figure in a bright metallic hazard suit climbs up out from the side of the fissure. Once the figure is safely over the side, she pulls her head covering off.

(CONTINUED)

ELLIS

Dr. Gold, Dr. Case you won't believe the readings I got from down below.

WENDY

What readings? We also were doing some seismic recordings up here. I doubt that your hand held device had anything much different.

ELLIS

(showing Wendy and Tad her hand held recorder)
No, look. Can you believe it? It's like all of the previous theories are blown out of the water.

TAD

I don't know, Ellis. Could just be an anomaly.

ELLIS

No, it's real. I had these instruments recalibrated this morning myself.

WENDY

I'm with Tad. It could just be an anomaly in this region. An interesting one, to be sure, but I don't think it will rewrite all the geological theory that's accumulated in so many hundreds of years.

ELLIS

But Dr. Gold, all of that geological theory was based on Earth's geological history. Mars is completely different.

TAD

Well, you'd have to admit that she's got you there.

Wendy, Tad, and Ellis finish gathering up the monitoring equipment and head to back to the geological station.

INT. GEOLOGICAL STATION #47, CENTRAL MONITORING ROOM

The central monitoring room in the geological station contains monitoring equipment and stations at the far side of one wall. On the other side of the wall is a bank of windows overlooking the Marte Vallis fissure. A long conference table is in the middle. Several scientists are working either at the monitoring stations or at the conference table. Wendy, Tad, and Ellis enter after divesting their equipment in another room.

DENVER

Dr. Gold, we recently recorded some anomalies in the fissure the past hour. We'd like for you to look at them.

ELLIS

Ha! What did I tell you? The readings that I got were true.

TAD

So it would seem. Oleana, what's your take on Denver's data?

OLEANA

I'm not sure. I've never seen anything like it. I'm currently combing the database for any previous readings that are similar that have been recorded on other Martian stations.

DENVER

I vote for contacting the President of the Geological Sciences Association for Sol. He'll know what to say.

WENDY

Oh, I know what he'll say all right. That you're an idiot for wasting his time on erroneous data. We need to take some more measurements to make sure that this isn't a fluke.

TAD

Since you seem so excited out there in the field, Ellis, what do you think?

(CONTINUED)

ELLIS

Maybe this would be blasphemous, but I think Mars is beginning to undergo some major geological restructuring. Why or how, I don't know, but it's there.

DENVER

You mean you think Mars is going to blow up?

OLEANA

No, you dunderhead. You should read more papers rather than those ancient graphic novels in your spare time. What she means is that Mars is having a geological reawakening. The core of the planet, for some reason, is becoming more thermally active.

DENVER

In plainspeak, you mean it's going to blow up.

ELLIS

All this talk of blowing up is making me hungry. Who has kitchen duty this week?

WENDY

Paco.

ELLIS

Aw man. I want something other than beef burginon.

PACO

(entering the central room with a large tray in his hands)

You must have read my mind! Here's beef burginon! This time, I experimented a little on the rosemary sauce.

OLEANA

(whispering to Denver)

I'm sick of this stuff.

ELLIS

I'm going to the kitchen to make myself an omelette. I have a, uh, craving for one.

(CONTINUED)

WENDY

So what do you think about these readings, Tad?

TAD

You know, the grad students might be right.

WENDY

I have the sinking feeling that I'll have to agree with you on this one.

TAD

So what should we do? We can't just announce it to the geological societies. They'll think we're crackpots.

WENDY

Then we won't announce it. We should probably gather more data first. If there aren't any more anomalous readings, we'll table it. But if there are, I know of someone we could contact for a second opinion.

TAD

Who?

WENDY

Jack Morales.

TAD

The head of the Martian Geological Society? That sounds like a good idea. I've met him once and he seemed like a nice, open guy.

WENDY

My thoughts exactly. Now if you'd excuse me, I find that I also have a craving for omelettes.

TAD

How did you guess? Me, too.

PACO

Wait a minute. Where is everyone going? This beef burginon is in special rosemary sauce! Made from rosemary specially grown in a Jovan hothouse!

INT. GEOTECH ENTERTAINMENT HQ, CARLISE'S OFFICE

Carlise's office is located on a top floor with a view to Olympus Mons. Carlise is sitting behind a desk looking through a data pad. Ms. Vivian Tang, his secretary, is standing near the door.

TANG

I wanted to let you know, sir, that Oldengood has filed his report on the marketing department. I have forwarded a copy of the report to you, sir.

CARLISE

Good. I will probably look at it later today. Do you have any thoughts on it?

TANG

Oldengood has suggested several replacements. His top nomination is himself.

CARLISE

Hm. That would make one wonder if perhaps he deliberately positioned Harrington to lose his job.

TANG

One could speculate, but I would not draw any firm conclusions without proof.

CARLISE

Very true. What about the other candidates?

TANG

They are others in the marketing department. They seem to have spotless records.

CARLISE

I see. I'll inform Oldengood of my decision tomorrow.

TANG

Very good, sir.

CARLISE

Anything else?

(CONTINUED)

TANG

There is one more thing, Mr. Carlise. The Sing Syndicate sent you a message that they appreciated the report that you gave them in the previous meeting. They look forward to any subsequent progress on your current project. I have also forwarded this message to you.

CARLISE

Hm, did they? I must admit, I did have misgivings on how they would receive it, but they did seem optimistic. Good thinking about bringing a geologist on board. I think those types appreciate having an expert at the helm.

TANG

Thank you, sir. And that is all the messages of note that I have to report.

CARLISE

You may go, Ms. Tang. Oh, and one more thing. Could you please inform Mr. Pavlova that I am planning to visit his division after lunch?

TANG

Yes, sir.

INT. GEOTECH ENTERTAINMENT HQ, ENGINEERING DIVISION

The engineering division at Geotech Entertainment is dominated one one main room with three levels. Instruments and stations line the walls and workers in black uniform are monitoring all of the instruments. On the first level, off to one side, is a glass enclosure where the main officers of the engineering division work.

PAVLOVA

I'm sorry, Mr. Carlise, but I quit.

CARLISE

You've been saying that for the past month, yet you still continue to work. What seems to be the problem?

(CONTINUED)

PAVLOVA

I can't do this any more. My conscience demands that I get out now before my principles are completely compromised. I am not going to do this.

CARLISE

Please don't beat around the bush. Is it some sort of structural problem? I can transfer some of the engineers from the operational division to help you. Or better yet, give Dr. Morales a call. After all, he's the expert on the geological formations of this area.

PAVLOVA

You haven't been listening, sir. This is impossible! I doubt Dr. Morales will be able to help. And all the engineers in the solar system--if they have any scruples--will agree with me. This whole amusement park idea is a joke.

CARLISE

It is no joke, Pavlova. This amusement park idea will bring in a lot of money. People will pay to see Olympus Mons erupt. I have investment firms lined up for this. If this doesn't fall through, the entire company may fail.

PAVLOVA

I understand how important this is to you, but sometimes, there are other things more important than money. I quit. Effective now.

Pavlova storms out of the room, leaving Carlise and some of the other executive officers of the engineering department temporarily speechless.

CARLISE

(fisting a hand and pounding it on the table)
This is ridiculous. A major investor is eager to see progress
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CARLISE (cont'd)
on this and Pavlov was the best
that we've got.

ALORS
If I may say, sir, Pavlov did leave
all of his work behind. I'm sure
we can continue this from what he
left.

CARLISE
Well, that's something. We need to
see progress on this soon. I need
something to present the marketing
deparment so they can start working
on a campaign. And more
importantly, something to show the
investors so that they don't think
we're throwing money down a black
hole.

ALORS
Yes, sir. But who will be head of
the engineering division, now?

CARLISE
Do you know anything about what
Pavlova had planned?

ALORS
Yes, sir.

CARLISE
Well, then, effective now, you're
the head of the engineering
department. Pavlova was reluctant
to work with outsiders, but I won't
tolerate that from his
successors. You will contact Dr.
Morales about his opinion. Oh, and
also contact HR about the change.

ALORS
Yes, sir.

Carlise and all of the executive officers of the engineering department file out of the engineering office, leaving Alors alone. Alors smiles as he watches the others leave and finally sits down at the table. He pulls out a small communicator.

(CONTINUED)

ALORS

This is Alors. I would like to let you know, sir, that our first objective has been achieved.

VOICE ON THE LINE

Very good. Implement the plan for the second objective.

ALORS

Yes, sir.

INT. PRISON CHAMBER, CAVERN, 2 KM WEST OF MT. HIBES

The cavern is smallish, dark and dry. It is sparsely furnished with a wash basin, table, chair, and bed. A light source sits on the table. There is an entrance of to the side that leads to the rest of the cave system. Ari is lying on his side with his hands tied with rope.

ARI

(moaning as he wakes up)

Ugh. Where am I? This doesn't look good.

Ari tests his bonds which easily disintegrates with some tugging on his part. He gets out of bed to briefly look at the room.

ARI

I guess I better get out of here.

Ari takes the light source and walks towards the entrance of the room, but a woman appears before he can step across the threshold. She is holding a hand-held laser weapon, trained on him.

MONA

Where do you think you're going?

ARI

Where do you think I'm going?

MONA

(motioning with her weapon)

None of that. The Queen wouldn't like that.

ARI

The Queen?

(CONTINUED)

MONA

Her majesty, Thema of Tyrrhena
Patera.

ARI

We're in Tyrrhena Patera? That's
like fifteen hundred kilometers
where of where we were!

MONA

I never said that we're in Tyrrhena
Patera. This is Mount Hibes.

ARI

Really? There supposedly isn't
anything out here except desert.
Who are you? Where are we? And
how did I get here?

MONA

(shooting her weapon at a
wall)

No more questions! The Queen will
deal with you.

ARI

(cringes when the weapon
dislodges some sediment from
the walls)

I'm sure she will.

MONA

If I were you, little man, I'd stay
nice and quiet here until the Queen
comes. Otherwise, you'll have a
nice stump where your head once
was.

The guard walks away to guard the entrance of the tunnel
leading into Ari's underground cell.

ARI

Itchy trigger finger, huh? Well,
we'll see what I can scrounge up.

Ari checks his pockets, pulling out credit chips and
assorted odds and ends.

ARI

Damn it, I don't have a weapon on
me. But it looks like they didn't
take anything else, either. I
don't think a credit chip will be
that useful down here.

(CONTINUED)

Ari continues to search his pockets. In one pocket, on the inside of his coat, he finds a small device the size of a fingernail. It is glowing red.

ARI

Ah! I knew I had this somewhere. Hopefully those two will realize they can track this.

EXT. 100 KM NORTHEAST OF HERSCHEL

Rez is busy rewiring some components of Ari's lunar buggy while Conrad is in the driver's seat checking some of the diagnostics instruments inside the vehicle.

REZ

All right, I think I've got this fixed. Try starting it again.

CONRAD

(gunning the engine)
This sounds promising. Ah! It worked! Fantastic.

REZ

(jumping into the lunar buggy)
See, I told you it would be trivial. It just took a long time.

CONRAD

So I was wrong. Who knew they taught you engineering courses in that lab you grew up in?

REZ

I just read a lot.

Conrad maneuvers the lunar buggy over the hilly Martian terrain, heading in the direction that the hoverbikers took Ari.

CONRAD

Unfortunately, they have a head start of about six hours. Who knows where they are now? They could have doubled back without our knowledge.

REZ

It seems that way, doesn't it? But look at this.

(CONTINUED)

Rez points out a small navigational map displayed on one side of the control panel. There are two lights blinking on the map.

REZ

This is us right here. And this looks like it might be the Captain. He probably has a homing device on his person somewhere.

CONRAD

Well I'll be. The old man was quick thinking.

REZ

It looks like they headed east. Which in a way is good because that's the direction we were originally headed in. But it also looks like they took the Captain to Mount Hibes.

CONRAD

What's wrong with Mount Hibes? Granted it's in the middle of nowhere, but...

REZ

Originally, the Captain planned to drive northeast through the Elysium Mons Reserve before heading back south to Olympus Mons City. Going to Olympus Mons City via Mount Hibes is theoretically faster, but it's also more dangerous.

CONRAD

Why?

REZ

Three words, flyboy. Mongolian Death Worms.

CONRAD

You've got to be kidding me. Those tiny leeches? We're not trekking to the place on foot.

REZ

You don't understand. They're not ordinary death worms. They're mutated ones, that escaped a lab. I overheard people talking

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

REZ (cont'd)
about it before I managed to make
my own escape.

CONRAD
How are they mutated?

REZ
Well, imagine the worm. Now
imagine it a hundred thousand times
larger than the original.

CONRAD
Holy shit. Really? And there are
more than one of them on the
loose? Who in their right mind
would create such a thing? And why
isn't it on the news?

REZ
As far as I know, they were created
as a secret government weapon. And
you know how that goes. Of course
it hasn't leaked into the
media. If there are any mysterious
disappearances in the Tartarus
Range, people will just chalk it up
to idiots.

CONRAD
Unfortunately, we're idiots if
we're heading there. You want to
go on our originally planned
course?

REZ
Hell, no. We owe it to the Captain
to rescue him. Who knows what
those bikers want with him.

CONRAD
Well, the Captain did mention to me
that he was the protege of Ron
Williamson, famous outer solar
system explorer. Maybe they
recognized him and are going to use
him for ransom.

REZ
If that's the case, we'll get the
Captain without the ransom.

EXT. EDGE OF A RAVINE, 500 KM WEST OF MT. HIBES

The Martian evening has fallen. The lunar buggy is parked a few hundred meters away from the edge of a ravine. Conrad and Rez have put up a thermal tent over the lunar buggy and are warming up food packs with the brief blast of a laser.

REZ

I hate camping.

CONRAD

Oh come on, it's romantic. The stars are out. Even the two moons are out--even though one is lopsided.

REZ

You have a weird sense of humor. No, when I get to Olympus Mons City and do my business, I'm going to hop on a transport to Luna and find an honest job. I'd like to get my own apartment. And maybe a cat.

CONRAD

A cat? Aren't you afraid you might skewer the poor animal with your claws?

REZ

Shut up. These are retractable.

CONRAD

I'm just saying.

REZ

As I was saying, I want a regular life after we get the Captain out of this mess. The Captain said that he was heading to Olympus Mons City to see his mentor. The question, of course, is why are you here?

CONRAD

Oh, I was just heading in the same direction.

REZ

You're running from something?

(CONTINUED)

CONRAD

The law. Isn't everyone?

REZ

That's not the only reason you're heading to Olympus Mons City.

CONRAD

Hm.

REZ

But what are you running from?

CONRAD

I'm not running from anything. In fact, one could argue that I'm running to something.

REZ

(pause)

You sound angry.

CONRAD

(stops eating)

I'm not angry. Just annoyed. I used to work at one of the lab facilities on Lycus Sulci.

REZ

Really? I heard that the place imploded a year ago due to some natural disaster.

CONRAD

It wasn't a natural disaster.

REZ

A man-made disaster?

CONRAD

Hm.

REZ

What happened in that lab?

CONRAD

The higher ups wanted my department to start work on something that I thought was unacceptable. I further learned that the entire company was doing shady dealings. Some other agreed with me and we arranged a way to get out.

(CONTINUED)

REZ

You made the place go boom, didn't you? Okay, so it makes sense that you're running, but why to Olympus Mons City?

CONRAD

I've gotten some information that the Sing Syndicate is meeting there soon for a large conference. Particularly the people in charge.

REZ

The Sing Syndicate? What do you know about the Sing Syndicate?

CONRAD

Why do you want to know?

Before Rez can respond, there is a large thumping noise which causes the lunar buggy to vibrate.

REZ

What's that?

CONRAD

According to these readings, there's some sort of geological disturbance not far from here.

REZ

Quake?

CONRAD

Maybe. We should probably park elsewhere if this keeps up. I wouldn't enjoy getting thrown into that canyon behind us.

Conrad hops into the driver's seat and guns the engine without bothering to put the thermal tent down. Rez is hurridly putting up the food packs as the lunar buggy zooms across the lurching ground.

REZ

If I didn't have an iron stomach, I'd be hurling all over the place by now.

CONRAD

Are you complaining about my driving skills?

(CONTINUED)

REZ

Well, yes. Oh shit, look out for that...

Up ahead, the ravine further cracks in front of them. Conrad tries to swerve, but fails. The lunar buggy falls into the chasm.

INT. GEOLOGICAL STATION #47, CENTRAL MONITORING ROOM

In the geological station central monitoring room, Denver is sitting at the conference table surrounded by data pads and sleeping. Ellis is at one of the stations listening to something on her headphones while reading a novel.

One of the monitors starts beeping.

ELLIS

Crap! What's that? Holy canoli, will you look at this?

DENVER

(yawning)

What? Did Doctor Gold set off the fire alarm again for trying to boil an egg?

ELLIS

No, it's these readings again. (speaking into a communication device) Dr. Gold? We've got an unusual reading. You should probably look at this.

DENVER

(walking over to the monitors)

You're right. They look like the readings like last time, except it's west of here, in the Tartarus Range.

ELLIS

That's out in the middle of nowhere. Too bad there aren't any stations in that sector except ones on remote. And Mongolian Death Worms.

DENVER

Mongolian Death Worms. Those tiny leeches?

(CONTINUED)

ELLIS

It's probably just an urban legend. Anyway, we should inform Dr. Gold and Dr. Case about this. They did say that if these unusual readings happened, we'll have to do something about them.

DENVER

Like going on world-wide holovid and telling everyone that this planet's so unstable it's going to blow up in the next month?

ELLIS

Don't be so overdramatic. I overheard Dr. Gold say that she was going to see one of her colleagues at Olympus Mons City to see what he says.

The door to the monitoring room opens letting in Dr. Gold and Dr. Case.

WENDY

What's our status, Ellis?

ELLIS

Marte Vallis is fine, Dr. Gold. But we got some unusual readings from the Tartarus Range sector. On the surface, it looks like a mid-range seismic tremor, but look at this.

TAD

That is unusual.

DENVER

From these readings, it appears that something rather large had started on the other side of the planet and simply traversed the planet to hit the Tartarus range.

WENDY

That's impossible.

ELLIS

That's what you said when I came out of the ravine earlier.

(CONTINUED)

TAD

I don't think it's a coincidence
that we see readings that look so
similar.

The ground beneath the station starts rumbling. The scientists quickly try to grab something stable as the place sways and knocks the data pads off the conference table. Alarms from the monitors go off. After a second, the ground stops.

ELLIS

Now what did I tell you? It's the
same exact thing right here.

DENVER

I definitely felt that one.

TAD

We have to do something, Wendy.

The doors to the monitoring room open again and the rest of the scientists at the station enter the room.

WENDY

What's the status of Marte Vallis,
Ellis?

ELLIS

Not good, Doctor Gold. If we do
some recalculations from what we
know so far, there will be another
seismic event hitting the station
in within the next hour. There's a
ninety percent possibility that it
might be strong enough to destroy
the station.

WENDY

All right. I'm going to make an
executive decision. We
evacuate. Everyone off to their
assigned tasks, now.

Everyone immediately heads off to implement emergency procedures at Wendy's command. The monitoring room empties except for Tad and Wendy.

TAD

So where are we going?

After Tad's question, the room shakes for one second, a warning that something bigger may be coming.

(CONTINUED)

WENDY

We're going to Olympus Mons
City. This is way too big to
discount as anomaly any more.

INT. PRISON CHAMBER, CAVERN, 2 KM WEST OF MT. HIBES

Ari has dozed off on the cot. Mora and another woman enter
the prison cell. Mona prods Ari with a boot.

MONA

Get up, scum, and bow to the queen.

ARI

What?

MONA

(about to hit Ari)

I said, bow!

ARI

This is a free planet. No one's
the queen to me.

MONA

(hitting Ari)

That's just some damn propaganda.

ARI

Ow!

QUEEN EDITH

That's enough Mona. He's just
ignorant scum. He trespassed on
our territory and he's going to pay
for it.

ARI

Trespassed? I didn't see any signs
that the land belonged to you.

QUEEN EDITH

Quiet! I did not speak to you.

MONA

Do you want me to hit him again?

QUEEN EDITH

No. We don't want to bloody him
too soon. I just wanted to see if
he had anything that would be
useful to us.

(CONTINUED)

MONA

Percy and Ida checked his person before we put him in here. He had nothing of use.

QUEEN EDITH

And it looks like he is too old for other uses.

MONA

We could always try.

QUEEN EDITH

No, Rita would kill him before we got any of that out of him. What about the other trespassers that you had mentioned?

MONA

Percy and Ida said that they were armed and that if we tried to take them, it would be too much work, effort, and risk.

QUEEN EDITH

Very well, then. Tomorrow morning when the Cycle starts, we will feed him to the Mass as an offering.

ARI

That really does not sound pleasant.

MONA

(ignoring Ari)

That would be interesting.

QUEEN EDITH

Good. Now that it has been decided, tell me about the latest dispute.

MONA

It's a lot of drama over nothing, your majesty. Why...

The two women walk out of the prison chamber. Ari lurches to his feet and tries to escape, but a force field prevents him from exiting.

ARI

I have to get out of here. With the way my luck is going, Rez and

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ARI (cont'd)
Conrad have forgotten about me and
are on their way to Olympus Mons
City.

INT. GEOTECH ENTERTAINMENT HQ, CARLISE'S OFFICE

Carlise is sitting behind his desk reading a report while
his secretary, Ms. Tang, stands by the door and Dr. Morales,
a consulting geologist, sits in the guest chair.

CARLISE
So let me get this right. You say
that my ex-engineer was right?

MORALES
Yes, Mr. Carlise. At the moment,
the geological structure beneath
Olympus Mons is stable, but only
just. If we were to implement your
idea, it would not just be a
controlled eruption. The results
could be catastrophic. You could
possibly shift the planet by a
degree or more.

CARLISE
I don't like hearing about
this. Besides, it's just a degree!
No one will notice. The success of
the project depends on this.

MORALES
The same objective could be
achieved if you put your effort
into making an optical effect that
would look like the volcano was
erupting...

CARLISE
No, that's impossible, Dr.
Morales. Anyone can make an
optical effect on their own home
holovids. We need something
real. Real makes an impression.

MORALES
It would certainly make an
impression, with a detriment to the
stability of the planet and more
importantly, to everyone who lives
on Mars.

(CONTINUED)

CARLISE

I understand your concern. But the world doesn't spin because we're playing it safe. It spins because of money.

MORALES

Then I'm afraid I can't help you. If you proceed with this project, I have no choice but to report it to the Martian Geological Society and the Environmental Department.

CARLISE

Do so. But I will have to warn you that even the government can be corrupted by money.

Dr. Morales shakes his head and exits Carlise's office. When the geologist is gone, Carlise throws the data pad that he had been gripping onto his desk.

CARLISE

The nerve of the man to tell me what is right and what is wrong! I'll tell you what he opinion is shaped by--his own self righteousness! The project will go one whatever he says. My own engineers have assured me that the project will go without a hitch. What is your view on this, Ms. Tang?

TANG

My view, sir? I am hardly a geologist or an engineer.

CARLISE

You may not be a geologist or engineer, but you have a degree from a technical university. And you've read all of their reports. What do you think?

TANG

(pause)

I'm not sure you would like my answer, sir.

(CONTINUED)

CARLISE

What?

TANG

I have to agree with Dr. Morales, sir. This plan of yours is extremely risky. While there may be a chance that you might pull this project off, there is an overwhelming probability that this could literally blow up in our faces.

CARLISE

Business is not without risk, Ms. Tang. Is there anything else you have for me today?

TANG

Your new engineering director is scheduled to meet with you next, sir.

CARLISE

Good. Send him in. You may go as I wish to have a private chat with him. I'm sure he has made some progress after those few mishaps on those test runs last night. After all, that's what test runs are for, right?

Tang exits the office. On her way out, she briefly greets Alors who walks into Carlise's office with a confident swagger. Just outside the office, Dr. Morales is talking to another secretary.

MORALES

He's going to continue his project, isn't he? I just talked with his new engineering director.

TANG

Yes he is. I don't know what will dissuade him from this insane venture. Surely he's seen all the scientific evidence that it isn't feasible.

MORALES

He reminds me of some older scientists I knew who were very stubborn about their pet

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MORALES (cont'd)
theories. He'll cling to it
because it's his idea.

TANG
You may be right. Carlise didn't
get to where he is by not being
tenacious.

MORALES
Well, cheer up. The worst thing
that could happen would be that
there might be some magma seepage
and a shift of the planet's
balance. And I hate to say it, but
Carlise is right in a way--who
would really pay attention to a
degree shift in the axis.

TANG
Actually, it might be more serious
than that. There have been
incidents last night.

MORALES
Incidents?

TANG
I'm not quite sure of their nature
and Carlise and Mr. Alors seemed to
have shrugged it off, but it makes
me nervous.

MORALES
I'm curious now.

TANG
If you want to see the data on
these incidents, I might be able to
arrange it. I do have access to
the engineering department in my
capacity as Mr. Carlise's personal
assistant.

MORALES
Then what are we waiting for?

EXT. 100 KM WEST OF MT. HIBES

It is late afternoon. Something bright blasts out of the widening ravine in the Martian wilderness. The object is the lunar buggy with its hover jet propulsion engine enabled. The buggy lands on a strip of stable land.

Rez is on the driver's seat as Conrad is studying the onboard instruments.

REZ

I do not want to do that again. We'll have to add "unstable land" to those Mongolian Death Worms.

CONRAD

Or maybe just unstable land. I have to see any of those Mongolian Death Worms you keep harping about. But look on the bright side, we're getting closer to Mt. Hibes.

REZ

After a damned detour when that second ravine opened up after we got passed the first one.

CONRAD

It was just a detour in the larger scheme of things. But we made it through. Now all we have to do is to get the Captain.

REZ

What do you propose we do? More than likely, Mt. Hibes is their hideout. We'd be outnumbered.

CONRAD

We need to figure out where they're keeping the Captain.

REZ

Assuming he's still alive.

CONRAD

Of course he's still alive. Well, I'd like to believe so. We'll find out where they're keeping him and we'll break him out. In the meantime, we might blow out their hideout, too.

(CONTINUED)

REZ

Well, that sounds totally reasonable.

EXT. SOUTHWEST SLOPE OF MT. HIBES

The lunar buggy approaches the southwest slope of Mt. Hibes in a crawl. Rez parks the vehicle behind a large boulder. Rez and Conrad get out of the buggy. Conrad has his large laser cannon strapped to his back and several other weapons on his person. Rez has a few handheld weapons on her person, but is holding a scanning instrument.

REZ

According to this, the Captain is being held underground in some sort of chamber. There's an opening to a cavern system about a hundred meters from here, south.

CONRAD

Does that thing tell us who we should be expecting?

REZ

It has detected several other life forms. One is guarding the entrance.

CONRAD

One?

REZ

Well, if you had a hide out in the middle of nowhere, would you waste a lot of personnel to guard an entrance that normally wouldn't be seen anyway?

CONRAD

I suppose you've got a point there. Is there anyone else we should keep an eye out on?

REZ

This says that there are some people underground, but there's too much interference with the minerals in this rock to really tell us where they might be moving. We need to get underground first.

(CONTINUED)

CONRAD

All right, then. I'll distract the guard and you dispatch 'em.

Rez and Conrad creep around the rock on the mountain. They come up behind an outcropping that is the entrance to the caverns. Conrad makes a motion with his hand to Rez and he moves forward towards the entrance.

Conrad moves across the entrance and a guard appears, trying to aim at him. From behind the guard, Rez moves quickly and dispatches the guard with a taser mechanism.

Rez and Conrad quickly enter the cavern.

INT. CAVERN UNDERNEATH MT. HIBES

The interior of the cavern is dry and dusty. Old fashioned electrical lights are strung up about a meter above head height. The front entrance is a shallow cave with several winding tunnels to the interior of the mountain.

REZ

I'm getting a better signal down here. It seems that the guard was alone. The only other people I'm detecting are several hundred meters away.

CONRAD

What about the captain?

REZ

He's a little further away. Ah, here we go. This is the map so far.

Conrad and Rez look at the map of the top level of the cavern system on the diagnostics tool that Rez is holding. There are several white dots moving around and one stationary red dot--indicating Ari.

REZ

Unfortunately, this indicates that the Captain is actually in a cave a little bit below this one. We'll have to try to dodge all of these people.

CONRAD

Not if we take this route. It's a bit longer, but we can remain

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONRAD (cont'd)
undetected if we go here. Then all we'll have to worry about is taking out the guard where they're holding the Captain.

REZ
That makes sense. But hopefully once we get the Captain, we can get out.

CONRAD
We'll just go back the way we came in.

REZ
What if that way gets blocked?

CONRAD
Then we'll do Plan B.

REZ
You have a Plan B?

CONRAD
Not really. But I can try to think of one while we get going.

Rez and Conrad head down a tunnel, but halfway through it, Rez suddenly stops as she stares at her hand held device.

REZ
Damn it. I think we need that Plan B earlier than anticipated.

CONRAD
What's wrong?

REZ
The Captain is moving. They're taking him somewhere. It looks like they're going to a lower level that is outside the scanning range of this device.

CONRAD
Well, if the Captain is moving, we'd better get moving, too. Who knows what they're planning to do.

INT. SUBCHAMBER 250 M BELOW MT. HIBES

The enormous cavern in the bowels of Mt. Hibes is as large as a football field. The walls are strangely smooth as if something unnatural had carved out the rock. Several tunnels lead into the cavern which, unlike the rest of the cave system, is lit by primitive torches. The floor of the cavern continues midway through the chamber and then drops precipitously into a ravine where steam and gases waft upward.

About twenty women, members of the hoverbike gang, are standing to the side with their arms arranged in a prayer like pose. Queen Edith stands about a hundred meters from the precipice while operating a strange hand held device. Beside her is Ari who is held in place by Mona with a hand held laser aimed at the base of his neck.

Rez and Conrad stealthily enter the room and hide behind some boulders near the tunnel.

REZ

They look like a bunch of crazies. How are we to get the Captain out of this while everyone's here?

CONRAD

It's a cult of some sort. Perhaps we should wait until they end the ceremony.

REZ

What if the end of the ceremony entails killing the Captain?

CONRAD

Then we'll just have to go in and stop it, won't we?

REZ

It'll be suicidal. I'll never get the ice cream you promised me at this rate.

CONRAD

Oh, don't worry, I'll get you that ice cream.

The bikers begin a loud chant and the Queen turns something on the device that makes it cackle in static.

(CONTINUED)

ARI

That sounds awful.

MONA

You, shut up. There'll be hell to pay if you disrupt the ritual.

QUEEN EDITH

(raising her arms)

Oh Great Ones, hear our prayers! We are here to offer you a sacrifice to express our gratitude.

REZ

I don't like the sound of that. When someone says sacrifice, I think blood and guts.

CONRAD

That guard behind him might be waiting for the priestess's signal to blow the Captain's head off.

Conrad takes out his laser cannon and carefully aims it at Mona. In the meantime, the chanting grows louder and the Queen continues to manipulate her instrument until it screeches in static. The ground begins to move.

REZ

What the...

A hissing sound erupts from the drop below the precipice. The steam wafting upward becomes thicker.

REZ

It's an earthquake! Let's grab the Captain and get out of here, pronto.

A long, writhing mass suddenly bursts outward from below the precipice. The mass is a knot of gigantic worms studded with strange black spikes and equipped with several rows of sharp teeth. The saliva dripping from their mouths hit the ground with a sizzle.

CONRAD

Holy shit, you weren't kidding about those mutant Mongolian Death Worms.

(CONTINUED)

QUEEN EDITH
Great Ones, come get your
sacrifice!

Conrad shoots and the laser weapon in Mona's hand flies out of her fingers.

MONA
Who...?

In the next second, Ari twists in his captor's grasp and jabs Mona in the ribs.

QUEEN EDITH
Come back here, scum!

ARI
I don't think so.

As Ari gets away, the Queen accidentally shoots Mona. Sensing prey, one of the Mongolian Death chomps on Mona's body.

QUEEN EDITH
Bring him back, now!

The bikers spring into action, ready to block Ari's way to freedom. Rez jumps out of her hiding place and starts shooting, felling several of the bikers. Conrad gets out as Rez covers him and meets Ari halfway.

ARI
You guys definitely waited until
the last minute to show up.

CONRAD
Well, we had a little run in with a
quake. We'll tell you about it
later.

Rez motions with a hand as she continues shooting. The bikers have started returning fire.

QUEEN EDITH
Get them all!

Just as the trio reaches the threshold of the tunnel out of the place, several shrieks, unrelated to the laser fire, are heard. The Mongolian Death Worms have started to eat everyone in their path.

INT. CAVERN UNDERNEATH MT. HIBES

Rez, Conrad, and Ari start running down the tunnel.

ARI

There must be guards stationed in all these tunnels. I don't think they'll let us get out alive.

REZ

According to my readings, there isn't anyone. Except...Conrad, to your right!

Conrad automatically shoots to his right. A guard screams as she topples over.

CONRAD

Thanks.

REZ

No problem.

ARI

So where are we, anyway? My captors didn't tell me anything.

REZ

This is Mount Hibes. Don't worry, Captain, we'll get you to Olympus Mons City in no time.

Behind them, a loud hissing sound could be heard.

CONRAD

Shit.

ARI

I should have never answered my mentor's summons.

The trio runs faster and soon, they exit the cavern system.

EXT. SOUTHWEST SLOPE OF MT. HIBES

Rez, Conrad, and Ari stumble onto the rocky slope of Mt. Hibes and soon find the lunar buggy hidden behind a boulder. They jump in with Conrad at the wheel. Conrad turns on the hover jet engine and they blast away.

(CONTINUED)

ARI

Holy crap. What the hell were those things? If this is Mt. Hibes, we're actually in the middle of nowhere. Nothing is supposed to be living here.

CONRAD

Mongolian death worms, Captain.

REZ

Mutant Mongolian death worms. They were developed by the government but escaped the lab.

ARI

Well, that figures. Everything is part of some secret government project.

CONRAD

Not always. Sometimes things are the result of evil private corporations.

The lunar buggy finally touches down on the ground and speeds east. The ground begins to rumble and vibrate. A few of the Mongolian death worms wriggle out from the cave entrance on Mt. Hibes and make frustrated noises as potential prey escape.

ARI

If I were a reporter, this would be big news. This whole area would be quarantined, at the least.

CONRAD

You thinking about telling a reporter about this once we get back to civilization?

ARI

Nah. No one will believe me since I don't have proof.

REZ

(indicating a diagnostics device)

We have some proof right here.

CONRAD

Someone could claim that it was doctored.

(CONTINUED)

REZ

True. Besides, even if people did believe us and decide that the rumors were true, there would be planet wide panic. Those things won't be easily quarantined into one place without extreme force.

ARI

Environmentalists wouldn't hesitate to use extreme force, especially since those things would be considered invasive species with no stretch of the definition.

REZ

But that's if you think the Mongolian death worms are destroying the ecosystem in the Tartarus Range. Officially, nothing lives out here.

CONRAD

But then how did they manage to survive?

REZ

By eating stupid travelers like us.

INT. GEOLOGICAL SCIENCES CENTER, UNIVERSITY OF OLYMPUS MONS

Wendy and Tad are walking along a corridor to Dr. Morales' office.

WENDY

I'm really worried about these new developments. I just got word from a friend who works for the Mars Mining Corporation in Korolev about unusual tremors. And Pilar who works on Station #56...

TAD

In Pickering? That's practically the South Pole!

WENDY

Yes. Pilar's communication clearly says that her station was reading some anomalies.

(CONTINUED)

TAD

Then it's not just us. Our instruments didn't suddenly go fubar on us.

WENDY

Well, if there is any consolation, yes, our readings did get independent corroboration. But I'd hate to think what all of this is a portent of.

Something in Tad's pocket beeps. Tad pulls out a small communications device from his pocket as Wendy and Tad reach Morales' office door. They momentarily stop as Tad reads the message.

TAD

It's Ellis. She and the others are currently in the labs monitoring our station from some satellite linkages. Another tremor just hit the station. It looks like half of it has been destroyed.

WENDY

My God. We'd better let Morales know.

Tad and Wendy enter Dr. Morales' office. Morales was seated behind a table stacked precariously with data pads, but at the other two scientists' arrival, he stands and motions for them to take a seat.

WENDY

Hello, Dr. Morales. I'm Wendy Gold and this is Tad Case from Station #47.

TAD

Good morning, Dr. Morales.

They shake hands and then sit down.

MORALES

Please, please. Just call me Jim.

WENDY

We want to thank you for agreeing to meet us at such a short notice.

(CONTINUED)

MORALES

That was no problem, after the report you sent me. And especially after the reports you forwarded to me this morning. So you believe that this isn't an isolated phenomenon?

WENDY

No. It's quite obvious that something is triggering the geological instability in Marte Vallis and perhaps even elsewhere if our colleagues in Korolev and Pickering continue to get similar data.

TAD

We believe that something quite catastrophic might happen if this keeps up.

WENDY

The only problem is that we have no idea why all of this is happening. It just appeared, suddenly, out of nowhere. It's as if all the tremors were generated by something man-made.

TAD

A few of our graduate students had even gone so far to suggest that the anomalous readings from the tremors were related to bombs. They've even dug out old Earth data from the twentieth century in an attempt to convince us.

WENDY

I'm afraid the grad students were a little overimaginative, especially after all the excitement of the station evacuation. We all know that the government hasn't used something as crude as a bomb on Mars since the late twenty-first century.

MORALES

(sighing)

Yes, as far as I know, that's still true about the government. I have

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MORALES (cont'd)
a friend who has access to certain military intelligence and I'm sure he would have let me know if that were the case. But I'm afraid I would have to confirm one thing.

WENDY
What?

MORALES
It may indeed be manmade. I have no proof, of course. Just my gut instinct and a meeting I had yesterday with the CEO of Geotech Enterprises.

TAD
Geotech Enterprises? Aren't they the outfit that specializes in spelunking adventures and cliff climbing on Olympus Mons?

MORALES
Apparently, they're branching out. Last month, the company's engineering department called me in as a consultant. The CEO has this new idea about building an amusement park.

WENDY
An amusement park in Olympus Mons City? Well, I suppose I could see one. Did the engineering department want your expertise about the geological stability of the area?

MORALES
In a way. But it's no ordinary amusement park. They are planning to reactive Olympus Mons.

TAD
What?

WENDY
Are they crazy?

MORALES
My thoughts exactly. The CEO wants something unique to draw visitors,
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MORALES (cont'd)
even if I told him that it would be risky. Recently, I heard that one of his head engineers quit when he finally figured out how dangerous this is.

TAD
How is Geotech Enterprises thinking about reactivating the old volcano? They aren't actually using bombs, are they?

WENDY
They might very well be.

MORALES
I don't know what's happening at R & D over there. I quit being a consultant when I realized that they were going ahead with the plan no matter what I said.

WENDY
We have to try to stop them.

TAD
But we're just scientists. We don't have any pull against huge corporations.

MORALES
You know, I've just been thinking about the problem. I think my friend with the government might be able to help. Unfortunately, he's rather ill so time, on that front, may be of the essence.

WENDY
Who's your friend?

MORALES
Ron Williamson.

WENDY
Damn.

MORALES
What's wrong?

TAD

She already knows Williamson. He was her ex-husband's mentor.

EXT. GORDII DORSUM'S FAMOUS KOREAN BBQ, GORDII DORSUM

The lunar buggy is pulling into a parking lot right outside of a restaurant named Gordii Dorsum's Famous Korean BBQ, located in Gordii Dorsum, a suburb just southwest of Olympus Mons City.

CONRAD

Man, I'm starving. I'm going to get some galbi and bulgogi with plenty of soy sauce. And a cold beer to chase it all down.

REZ

What's that?

CONRAD

Meat. And plenty of.

ARI

Speak for yourself. I'm ready to find some hotel, take a shower, and sleep like the dead for the next twenty-four hours.

CONRAD

Food, first.

The trio enters the restaurant.

INT. GORDII DORSUM'S FAMOUS KOREAN BBQ, MAIN DINING ROOM

The restaurant is dimly lit, but sparsely decorated. There are a few plants dangling from the ceiling in hydroponic holders besides the lights. A few Korean prints decorate the walls.

The restaurant is crowded with locals, mainly families, and people who just got out of work. The waitresses for the restaurant are actually robots circulating the room with trays of food.

BBQ RESTAURANT WAITRESS ROBOT

Good evening. Three?

(CONTINUED)

ARI

Yes.

BBQ RESTAURANT WAITRESS ROBOT

This way.

The robot rolls through the restaurant to direct Rez, Conrad, and Ari to a booth situated at one side, in the corner. No one pays attention to them as they sit down.

BBQ RESTAURANT WAITRESS ROBOT

Our menu is on the table. Will you want anything to drink?

CONRAD

Beer for me.

ARI

Me, too.

REZ

Do you have a vanilla milkshake?

BBQ RESTAURANT WAITRESS ROBOT

We have two kinds. A plain vanilla milkshake and one made with kelp extract.

REZ

Maybe I'll try the one with kelp extract.

BBQ RESTAURANT WAITRESS ROBOT

Very good, ma'am. Are you also ready to order or would you like a little time to study the menu?

CONRAD

I know exactly what I'm getting. I would like galbi, bulgogi, and the regular barbecue. Oh, and some extra soy sauce on the side.

BBQ RESTAURANT WAITRESS ROBOT

And you, sir? Or do you need more time?

ARI

I think I'll have what he's having. Except hold the soy sauce and include a pajori.

(CONTINUED)

BBQ RESTAURANT WAITRESS ROBOT
And you, ma'am?

REZ
I'd like the samgyeopsal, the spicy galbi, and the pajori as well.

BBQ RESTAURANT WAITRESS ROBOT
Very good. Your orders will be out shortly.

The robot rolls away. A second one arrives with a drink tray. A robotic hand sets the drinks on the table and the second robot also rolls away.

CONRAD
We've been thinking, Captain.

ARI
Both of you?

REZ
Well, while we were looking for you. We're probably too much trouble for you.

ARI
I don't know about that. You two managed to bail me out of trouble.

CONRAD
We're just paying you back for giving us rides on the lunar buggy. No, we have people after us for various reasons. And you're just heading to Olympus Mons City to see your mentor.

REZ
You're a law abiding citizen, for the most part. Not like us.

ARI
What are you guys talking about?

REZ
There's an industrial park not far from here. You can drop us off there before you head into the city proper.

(CONTINUED)

ARI

I don't understand. Where are you two headed off now? I don't really feel right abandoning you when you two did not abandon me.

CONRAD

Aw shucks, Captain. You really are a good guy.

ARI

Not really. I'm just a middle-aged chump.

CONRAD

Well, you see it's this way. You know I mentioned those evil private corporations?

ARI

Yeah? What do those have to do with anything? Excuse me for saying so, but you strike me more as the crude mercenary type rather than some corporate suit.

CONRAD

Fortunately for me, I was never a corporate suit. Before all of this, I was just your regular Joe, working in a lab. But then those evil private corporations had to mess everything up and here I am. Let's just say it's payback for everything they've done to me and all my colleagues.

ARI

This is all about revenge? And what about you?

REZ

(smiling with sharp fingernails glinting in the light)

Of course it's revenge. I was born in a lab funded by the same evil corporation that had employed Conrad. For most of my life, I was treated as less than a person. So you understand how it is.

(CONTINUED)

One of the waitress robots finally arrive with the food. Rez, Conrad and Ari dig in without any comment as the revelations sink in.

ARI

May I ask who this evil private corporation is?

CONRAD

Probably not a good idea, Captain. If you know, they might be after you, too. You might as well just drop us off. You probably don't want to get on their radar.

REZ

Your mentor probably wouldn't like you to get on their radar.

ARI

Thanks for that last guilt trip.

EXT. 25 KM OUTSIDE OF OLYMPUS MONS CITY

Ari is driving his lunar buggy while Conrad sits shotgun and Rez in the back.

ARI

I don't feel right just dropping the two of you out in the middle of nowhere. The best I could do is to take you both to civilization. Didn't you say that you wanted to have a normal life, Rez?

REZ

Sure, Captain. But before I can do that, I have to do this thing. Besides, you're not dropping us off in the middle of nowhere. It's more like a suburb.

CONRAD

Industrial park.

REZ

Semantics. The thing is, you're not abandoning us. We're getting to our destination. Besides, Conrad and I have decided to stick together.

(CONTINUED)

CONRAD

Like two peas in a pod.

REZ

You must be kidding.

CONRAD

Okay. So that metaphor doesn't really work. How about Siamese twins?

REZ

That's worse. What happened to the nice and normal? Like war comrades or something?

CONRAD

I'm not sure war comrades plan on getting a house together with a white picket fence.

REZ

Is that a marriage proposal?

CONRAD

Er...hey, we're there! Stop, Captain!

ARI

And I was so interested in seeing where that conversation was going. Drat.

Ari brakes and the lunar buggy halts in front of a sprawling gated community that is partly residential and partly industrial.

ARI

Hm. This says that it's "Gigas Sulci, Home of Mars Alator Engineering."

CONRAD

Yep, that's it.

Conrad and Rez get out of the lunar buggy.

REZ

Thanks, Captain. I don't know how I would have gotten across the Tartaros Range without you--or your lunar buggy.

(CONTINUED)

CONRAD

Much appreciated, Captain.

ARI

Eh. It wasn't anything. You rescued me. I provided the transportation. We'll just call it even. And here.

Ari tosses Conrad and Rez each a communicator.

ARI

You might need this.

REZ

Don't be such a mother hen. We'll be fine. I mean, just look at this place.

ARI

Appearances can be deceiving. Look, it's just in case, okay? I just have this feeling--you two aren't the types to wander into some place without some purpose.

CONRAD

I'd have to admit, that's true.

ARI

Just don't blow anything up, unintentionally.

Ari drives away, heading towards Olympus Mons City.

REZ

So, did you really mean it about the house with the white picket fence?

CONRAD

Rez...

REZ

Because I'd rather want one painted blue. Sky blue.

INT. HOTEL ROOM, GIGAS SULCI

Rez and Conrad are sitting at a table that is next to a window that is overlooking part of the industrial park. On the table, there are several data pads. Conrad is reading one of the pads while Rez is working on some sort of device. In the background, a holovid is playing. A reporter is talking about the recent earthquakes being felt in Korolev.

REZ

I'd have to say that this will work, but whether or not it'll work inside the compound is another story.

CONRAD

What are you worried about?

REZ

During my time in the lab, I've heard about a lot of things. There were rumors that someone--they weren't clear if it was the government or some other private corporation--had developed some sort of defensive weapon that could neutralize certain electronics.

CONRAD

You're the one with the engineering skills. Couldn't you design something that could circumvent such a thing?

REZ

Yeah, but it'll take time. I think it would be more efficient use of my time if you found out if the compound has such a thing.

CONRAD

Hey, I've cracked into the building plans, but I need time, too, to get into the building security. There are all sorts of other firewalls I'd have to figure out.

REZ

Well, if we want to be as efficient as possible, maybe we should think about a Plan B.

(CONTINUED)

CONRAD

Plan B?

REZ

Why am I not surprised that this did not occur to you?

CONRAD

Hey, I'm the master improviser.

REZ

Not at everything. Look out there. What do you suppose that is?

They both look out the window. One of the large garages in the industrial park opens and several people walk out. After them, a huge object, covered in a white concealing wrap, is wheeled out and taken to the next building.

CONRAD

Their latest toy, probably. But that won't matter after we're through with them, tonight.

REZ

Hm.

INT. GRADIVUS CAFE, OLYMPUS MONS CITY

Wendy and Tad are in the Gradivus Cafe eating lunch.

WENDY

You know, I think it would be best if you took the lead.

TAD

What do you mean? What are you talking about? We're partners. Once we get everything sorted out, we'll all go back to Marte Vallis. I thought the collaboration was going so well.

WENDY

Tad, I'm not talking about our scientific collaboration and you well know it. I'm talking about our upcoming meeting with Ron Williamson.

(CONTINUED)

TAD

I thought Morales was going to take the lead. After all, he has had more recent contact with him.

WENDY

I shouldn't even be there. You know all the details. You can tell all of this to Williamson.

TAD

Wendy, it's not like you to be so evasive. I know you told me that your ex-husband's mentor was Williamson. I've never heard anything bad about him.

WENDY

Who, Williamson or my ex-husband?

TAD

Williamson. Oh come on, they're two different men! You can't impose your own dislike of your former spouse to someone who had no hand in your former marital troubles.

WENDY

You don't understand, Tad. Oh sure, my ex had his faults and eventually we split--but Williamson blames me for everything. Right before I left town after the divorce was finalized, Williamson contacted me to tell me exactly how he felt about the matter.

TAD

Really? But why?

WENDY

My ex was Williamson's successor. He was on the up and up as they say. But that was just professionally. Personally, our lives were going downhill. So we split. It was, as far as divorces go, a rather amicable split.

TAD

So what's the problem?

(CONTINUED)

WENDY

Williamson thought that all the time that my ex had to spend filing out the forms for the divorce and attending all the proceedings was impeding his own career. Which was ridiculous, of course. My ex could very well take care of himself. Why would I have to worry about any of it?

TAD

Indeed. But perhaps Williamson was being protective. After all, your ex was his protoge.

WENDY

Perhaps so. But I have no intention of letting that son of a bitch berate me again.

TAD

But Wendy, this has nothing to do with your personal life. This has to do with the stability of this world. Do you really think that Williamson would really not listen to you and let Mars rot simply because of a personal grudge?

WENDY

(pause)

Well, no. With this information, Williamson could pass it on and further cement the notion that he is a hero--before he passes on. Any reasonable person would do it.

TAD

There you go. You should be thinking the same thing. You should put aside your personal grudges to do this.

WENDY

Fine. I'll do this. But that doesn't mean that I'm going to forget.

TAD

Good. So what do you think about the latest readings that Ellis and Denver sent us?

(CONTINUED)

Meanwhile, two other people are having lunch at the cafe at the opposite end of the room. Alors, who was recently promoted by Carlise at the Geotech Entertainment engineering department, is having a meeting with his contact who works at the Sing Syndicate.

SING SYNDICATE AGENT

You say that everything is currently going to plan?

ALORS

Absolutely. You can tell your boss that Stage Two is progressing swiftly and that we may be gearing up to Stage Three really soon.

SING SYNDICATE AGENT

You say that it is progressing swiftly. What do you mean by that?

ALORS

We've performed several tests the past couple of days. Of course, there were some glitches, but that's to be expected. That's why anyone with any sense runs tests. But we're confident that we'll get all the bugs out soon.

SING SYNDICATE AGENT

It sounds good that the bugs will be ironed out soon. But hopefully your next tests won't cause such a large splash as your previous tests.

ALORS

Oh, it won't. Those were just anomalies. They had nothing to do with the tests that we did.

SING SYNDICATE AGENT

That wasn't a coincidence. The boss was not particularly happy that the side effects of those tests got into the news. Take very good care that it doesn't do so in the future.

ALORS

Of course.

(CONTINUED)

SING SYNDICATE AGENT

And by the way, I hope Carlise has been kept in the dark about all of this.

ALORS

That's easy. The poor lump still thinks that his stupid amusement park is being built. But we're just feeding him what he wants to see. He's not questioning anything as long as no obstacles are thrown in his way.

SING SYNDICATE AGENT

Very good. Keep it that way.

INT. GEOTECH ENTERTAINMENT HQ, THIRD FLOOR OFFICE

The third floor of Geotech Entertainment mainly consists of office space. However, there is one office guarded by a security officer. Tang walks up to the security officer and flashes her identification to be scanned.

TANG

I'm here to gather some reports for Mr. Carlise.

After scanning her identification, the guard nods and steps aside as he keys in something next to the door. The door slides open and Tang walks through.

This particular office has several terminals, all of which are not occupied. It is a central computer node which can access all the databases kept at Geotech Entertainment. Tang sits down at one of the terminals and begins to access files.

She begins to access the files on the most recent tests that the engineering department had conducted.

TANG

Hm. These look perfect. Maybe too perfect. These results look like something that would deliberately make Mr. Carlise happy.

She taps a few keys and turns up the date on which the files were last modified.

(CONTINUED)

TANG

Aha! Someone did alter these recently. I wonder what the original tests showed.

She taps some more keys, but the screen flashes that access is denied.

TANG

Now isn't that interesting.

Tang takes out a communication device.

TANG

Hello? It's me. It looks like they are going through with the tests. But the results have been faked. Someone's hidden the real results.

She pauses to listen to the other end.

TANG

I know. Look, I can't try to get through this block without raising more suspicion. I'll tell Carlise about this, but I doubt he knows.

The door to the database room opens revealing the guard.

GEOTECH GUARD

Ms. Tang? Have you gotten everything you needed in here?

Tang hastily presses a few buttons to turn off the terminal.

TANG

Yes, I've gotten everything.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF OLYMPUS MONS GENERAL HOSPITAL

Ari parks his lunar buggy in front of the hospital and jumps out of the vehicle. He strolls into the front lobby.

RECEPTIONIST

Good afternoon, sir. How may I help you?

ARI

I'm here to visit a friend. Ron Williamson.

(CONTINUED)

RECEPTIONIST

Hm. Mr. Williamson seems to be on a restricted visitor's list. My I have your identification, sir?

ARI

(letting the receptionist scan him)
Certainly.

RECEPTIONIST

Ah. I seem Mr. Williamson has been expecting you for the past week, Mr. Gold.

ARI

I know. I ran into some, uh, unfortunate circumstances while I was trying to get here.

RECEPTIONIST

I can see that. Well, Mr. Williamson's room is on the third floor. Three-thirty-five.

ARI

Thank you.

INT. OLYMPUS MONS GENERAL HOSPITAL, THIRD FLOOR

Ari has found his way to a lift up to the third floor and is strolling down a white, sterile corridor until he comes upon Room 335. He gets scanned once again before he enters the hospital room.

The room itself is bright, with the shades open, letting the sunlight in. There is a screen on one side with the news on where the reporter is talking about some recent earthquakes on Mars.

Ron Williamson is sitting up in his bed, watching the news, but he turns the volume down when he notices that Ari has entered the room.

ARI

Hello, Ron.

WILLIAMSON

You're late.

(CONTINUED)

ARI
I got delayed.

WILLIAMSON
Delayed? I thought you weren't that far from Gigas Sulci. That would have taken you a couple minutes.

ARI
Actually, I was on the other side of the world. And then I got delayed by one thing or another--completely out of my control.

WILLIAMSON
I suppose you're going to be blaming your tardiness on the recent earthquakes.

ARI
Since you mention...

WILLIAMSON
Why am I not surprised? You were well on your way to being a drunk on that last mission.

ARI
(pause)
Look, Ron. I was doing okay until you sent the message. What is it that you want of me?

WILLIAMSON
If you haven't noticed, Ari, I'm dying.

ARI
I'm sorry.

WILLIAMSON
No. It's nothing to be sorry about. The time for me to blow this popsicle stand is coming real soon anyway. I've been on this mortal plane long enough. But despite all the differences we've had, I think I'd better make my peace with everyone. Better for my state of mind, anyway.

ARI
I understand.

WILLIAMSON
I don't want your pity, Ari. I've lived a full life. You, on the other hand, shouldn't be squandering yours.

ARI
I don't know about my own life. I don't think anyone really cares what I do.

WILLIAMSON
You idiot. Now listen carefully. I've got a safety deposit box in the Martian World Bank. It's keyed to a chip I have back in my apartment. You remember the mission I sent you to Makemake?

ARI
How can I forget? It was a disaster.

WILLIAMSON
Well, remember that and you'll find the chip. The safety deposit box has some of my unfinished business. I think it'll do you some good to find another mission.

ARI
I don't know about this. You're still here. Why don't you just send a note to this unfinished business, just as you did to me, and make them come to you?

WILLIAMSON
It's not as easy as that.

There is a beep in the room indicating that another visitor is coming to see Ron Williamson. Wendy and Tad enter.

ARI
What are you doing here?

WENDY
I could say the same about you. It looks like you've sunken even deeper into the depths than the last time I saw your sorry hide.

(CONTINUED)

TAD

Wendy, isn't that a bit harsh?

ARI

Yeah, Wendy. You should listen to your boyfriend. He's trying to be reasonable.

WENDY

And I'm not?

TAD

Whoa, whoa, whoa. I'm just Wendy's colleague, not her boyfriend.

WILLIAMSON

(to Tad)

One suggestion, son: take her out so she can cool down. She's always been unreasonable when it has come to Ari.

WENDY

I knew you'd side with him, old man!

ARI

Don't talk to him like that. He's dying.

WILLIAMSON

Yeah, I'm dying. If you yell much more, I'm probably going to have a heart attack right here and right now.

TAD

You heard him, Wendy.

WENDY

Good God. You men are overdramatic.

ARI

Look, Wendy. I know you hate my guts. But if you're going to ream me, at least wait until we're in private. So why are you doing here?

WENDY

Certainly for more important reasons than your little brain can fathom. You can leave now while I talk to Mr. Williamson.

(CONTINUED)

WILLIAMSON

Unless it's of some global importance, I'd rather he not leave.

WENDY

It is of global importance.

WILLIAMSON

Huh.

TAD

Wendy, I really don't see what your problem is. Even if Mr. Gold knows everything you're going to tell Mr. Williamson, it's not like he's going to stop you.

WENDY

I suppose that's true. Fine. Here's the problem, Mr. Williamson. Several geologists, including us, have discovered that the earthquakes we're currently experiencing around Mars are not natural. They're man made.

WILLIAMSON

I don't see how I can help you with that. Why don't you just ask whoever's making the quakes to stop?

WENDY

We think it may be governmental. The head geologist at the University of Olympus Mons, Dr. Jim Morales, said that we could talk to you since you have a voice at the government agencies.

WILLIAMSON

I'm a dying man, Wendy. I don't work as a consultant to the government agencies officially any more. But if it's as serious as you say...

WENDY

It is serious.

(CONTINUED)

WILLIAMSON

Then I'll see what I can do.

WENDY

Thank you, Mr. Williamson.

INT. INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX, GIGAS SULCI

Rez and Conrad are inside one of the engineering buildings in the industrial park at Gigas Sulci. They are inside a small room hacking into one of the data centers through a couple of terminals.

REZ

Wow, there's tons of stuff here. I don't think we can read all of it while we're in here. We should just download this and sift through what we need once we get out.

CONRAD

Good idea. How much time do we still have?

REZ

About fifteen more minutes. And then we'll have to head out before the security scan catches us.

CONRAD

That's just enough time for me to finish downloading this packet. I had heard rumors that the Sing Syndicate had their fingers in a lot of ventures, but I didn't know it was this extensive.

REZ

I don't think anyone knows it's this extensive. They're like some shadow government secretly controlling the entire solar system. If any of this evidence got out...

CONRAD

They'd quash us like bugs.

REZ

That's not a very nice picture.

(CONTINUED)

CONRAD

But you have to admit, that's true. Anyone with this data will have to be sneaky if they want to get it into the hands that would do the most good with it.

Rez taps a few more buttons on the terminal and pulls out the chip where she had downloaded her data. She tucks it into a hidden pocket and then looks at her scanner.

REZ

Five more minutes.

CONRAD

Yeah, yeah, I'm almost done. Ah! Here we go.

Conrad takes his chip out of the terminal and tucks it into a pocket. Rez quietly motions that the coast is clear and they both silently slip out of the small terminal room into a dimly lit service corridor.

When Conrad and Rez are halfway down the corridor, the whole place begins to shake. They both grab some nearby support pillars to keep themselves upright. An alarm in the facility begins to sound.

REZ

What the hell was that?

CONRAD

Another quake. There were the recent news reports about them.

REZ

Sure. And maybe if we're lucky, this quake will turn this place to rubble without us having to blow it up first.

CONRAD

Don't say it so soon, especially since we're not out of this place yet.

The pounding of feet can be heard from an intersecting corridor. Rez and Conrad duck into a small alcove and watch as some workers and security guards rush by towards an exit for the evacuation.

(CONTINUED)

CONRAD

Let's go.

REZ

This way. There's a small escape hatch two hundred meters this way. It doesn't look like anyone's using it.

Conrad and Rez head down another corridor but before they can reach the hatch, a pair of security guards block their way.

GUARD #1

Halt! You're not allowed down here.

REZ

Get out of our way. If you haven't noticed, there's a quake going on.

GUARD #1

Trespassing is not allowed. You will have to come with us.

CONRAD

No we don't.

Conrad takes out his a smaller laser weapon at his hip and fires on the first guard. Rez slashes at the second guard before he can do anything and he screams, clutching his throat. Conrad opens the hatch.

CONRAD

Ladies first.

REZ

Geez. Did you study some ancient manners manual or what?

CONRAD

It's just a saying. Otherwise, move it!

Conrad shoves Rez through the hatch since she was not moving fast enough. She falls through the other side with a shriek before Conrad himself crawls through the hatch. He locks the hatch behind him.

Some more security guards enter the small alcove. They spot their fallen comrades.

(CONTINUED)

GUARD #3

There must be tresspassers down here. Armed and dangerous. We have to find them.

GUARD #4

But what about the evacuation procedures?

GUARD #3

Fine. Get these two outside for medical attention. We'll find the ones responsible once we get out and contact the command center.

GUARD #4

The head honchos of Sing Syndicate won't be happy about this.

GUARD #3

They'd have to suck it up. It's just a damned coincidence that a natural disaster has struck at the same time.

INT. OLYMPUS MONS GENERAL HOSPITAL, THIRD FLOOR

The hospital briefly shakes as the occupants of Room 335, Ron Williamson, Ari, Wendy, and Tod, hold on to various parts of the room from getting flung around.

Once the shaking stops, they cautiously straighten up.

WILLIAMSON

I see that...

A beeping communications device interrupts Williamson. Williamson picks up a small device on his bedside table.

HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ALERT

(over the intercom)

Code Yellow. Please stay at your stations. Code Yellow.

TAD

What's Code Yellow?

WILLIAMSON

I think it's for the quake. Hm. Looks like I've gotten a message from Damerstadt.

(CONTINUED)

ARI

Damerstadt? I thought he was stationed on Luna.

WILLIAMSON

No. He got another job in the defense research department. Says here that the government is not conducting any experiments currently that would cause these recent seismic events. Seems like they're as baffled as the geologists here.

ARI

What if it really is a natural event?

WENDY

No, it couldn't possibly. My research team has run the numbers and scenarios. A natural cause isn't possible.

WILLIAMSON

Well, if it isn't the government, maybe it's some research lab in the corporate sector.

TAD

That's an idea. I'm not too familiar with all of the corporate companies that might be doing geological research here, but I'll put some of our grad students onto the search.

ARI

Grad students?

TAD

Yes. They're good for the grunt work.

ARI

It's a good thing I never considered going to grad school. I'd go mad doing someone else's grunt work just to get some fancy degree.

(CONTINUED)

WENDY

Heathen.

Ari's communication device beeps in his pocket.

ARI

Hold that thought.

WENDY

(to Williamson)

Of course he's not listening to me. Why did I think the divorce would make anything different?

ARI

(reading his com device)

Damn it. Rez and Conrad are in trouble. I have to go now.

WILLIAMSON

Who's Rez and Conrad?

ARI

Friends of mine. I owe them for saving my life.

WILLIAMSON

Huh. It looks like you still have that spark.

ARI

What are you talking about? Look, I'll see to that unfinished business you told me about before these two barged in after I see about this emergency.

WILLIAMSON

I might be gone by the time you get around to that.

ARI

Don't talk like that. You're the strongest person I know. You'll still be here when I get back from this.

Ari leaves the hospital room.

TAD

We'll go see what other stuff we can dig up. If it's some corporate entity doing all of this, we can call in the government regulators.

(CONTINUED)

WILLIAMSON

I have a bad feeling about this. It might be something even bigger than what the government could handle. Perhaps some sneakiness would be in order.

WENDY

Undoubtedly. We just witnessed it in the most recent quake. Do you think Ari will be all right? Maybe his friends have been victims of the quake...

WILLIAMSON

Ari will be fine. As for his friends, I'm sure he'll get them out of trouble. He's always been good at saving people.

TAD

Just as he's been here saving you, Mr. Williamson. Haven't you considered that perhaps Mr. Gold might one day want to be saved himself?

WILLIAMSON

Hm. You have a good point. I'm not too keen about her...

WENDY

Hey!

WILLIAMSON

But you keep me informed on what your grad students find. If you need help, I'll be the direct line to some government enforcement.

INT. SING SYNDICATE WAREHOUSE ON THE SLOPE OF OLYMPUS MONS

Rez and Conrad are in a small cell located in the basement. There are no guards in sight since there is a forcefield in place, holding them in.

REZ

Talk about out of the pan and into the fire.

(CONTINUED)

CONRAD

How was I to know that more of them would be waiting outside for us?

REZ

I'm not blaming you.

CONRAD

Sorry...

REZ

(walking toward the opening of their cell, yelling)
I'm blaming all those yellow-bellied cowards who wouldn't even fight us face to face!

CONRAD

Aw, come on, Rez. No need to get them angry. They're going to kill us in their own good time.

REZ

They might kill you, but I'm going to be sent straight back to the lab if they figure out who I am.

CONRAD

Geez.

REZ

But you're right, maybe we should try something more constructive.

CONRAD

I did manage to get a message out to the Captain.

REZ

Let's hope he's got reinforcements.

INT. GEOTECH ENTERTAINMENT HQ, ENGINEERING DIVISION

Alors is out on the rest of the floor directing some of the engineers in charge of the main instruments.

ENGINEER #1

From our readings, the flow on the inner magma chamber has increased by point zero six four percent.

(CONTINUED)

ALORS

That's not enough. Jack up the power on that thing.

ENGINEER #1

I have to warn you, sir, the last time we increased the power to the seismic inducer, there were some rather significant side effects.

ENGINEER #2

The last one registered a four point three on the Modified Richter.

ENGINEER #3

And it wasn't just on the other side of the world, either. It was in the city.

ALORS

That's all very enlightening, but we need real results, soon! Mr. Carlise would not like it if we don't take to him a report about improvements.

ENGINEER #1

I thought point zero six four percent was an improvement.

ALORS

We have to try again. Turn the seismic inducer again, this time for ten milliseconds at an amplitude of fifty-six.

ENGINEER #2

That's really coming in close to the limit, sir.

ALORS

It won't do any harm. So do it!

ENGINEER #1

Yes, sir.

The engineers concentrate on their instruments and key in the alterations that Alors suggested.

ENGINEER #2

Here we go.

(CONTINUED)

ENGINEER #3
Holding steady.

ENGINEER #4
Flow is increasing by point zero
six percent. Point zero six
one. Point zero six two. Point
zero six three. Point zero six
four...

The building starts to faintly shake.

ENGINEER #2
Sir, shouldn't we stop?

ALORS
No! Keep on going!

ENGINEER #1
Point zero six five, point zero six
six...

The shaking becomes more severe and alarms start going off.

ENGINEER #3
We have to stop or this place might
blow!

ALORS
Fine, fine. We'll stop.

The workers and engineers scramble to shut off all of the
instruments.

ENGINEER #3
We can't do this any more. We're
approaching the limit, Mr. Alors.

ALORS
There might be a limit, but we have
to break through! I want you to
find a fix for this so we can start
the tests again as soon as
possible!

ENGINEERS (ALL)
Yes, sir.

ENGINEER #2
(aside to Engineer #1)
Are you sure Carlise is putting the
pressure on him to continue these
experiments? They're getting
dangerous.

(CONTINUED)

ENGINEER #1

I don't know about Carlise, but if
it is, he's gone nuts.

INT. GEOLOGICAL SCIENCES CENTER, UNIVERSITY OF OLYMPUS MONS

Wendy and Tad's team of grad students have borrowed a student laboratory on the first floor of the Geological Sciences Center and are monitoring parts of Mars where it appears to have the most seismic activity. Wendy and Tad soon arrive after their visit to the hospital.

DENVER

Dr. Gold, Dr. Case, we recently
picked up some activity on the
southeast side. It's really
strange. All of these readings are
from quite random places.

OLEANA

Maybe they just appear random.

WENDY

Tad and I have had this brainstorm
while we were getting back
here. Perhaps these seismic
phenomena aren't actually natural.

ELLIS

What? Are you going to be
subscribing to a conspiracy theory,
now?

TAD

It won't be a conspiracy theory if
it's true. Hey Paco, since you're
not doing anything at the moment...

PACO

I'm doing plenty! I was just
looking up a recipe on orange
chicken.

ELLIS

Ew. Gross.

PACO

It is not gross! It's the height
of early twenty-first century
cuisine!

(CONTINUED)

TAD

That's enough, Paco. Look on the intranet and search for companies here on Mars that have anything to do with geological research.

PACO

Yes, sir.

TAD

And who's looking at the trajectory of all of these seismic events?

OLEANA

I am, sir.

TAD

Good. I want you to extrapolate where all the events would have started. I want a theoretical point of origin for all of them. If it isn't natural, there should be only one.

WENDY

Denver and Ellis, have any of you gotten any other unusual reports other than what Denver had just told us?

ELLIS

A few. Do you want me to list them?

PACO

Dr. Case, I have a list of companies here. On the top of the list is Geotech Entertainment. But they are mostly into entertainment like holovids.

WENDY

It doesn't matter. If they have anything to do with Mars geology...

PACO

Well, they do have an engineering department, although what exactly they do, I'm not so sure.

OLEANA

Dr. Gold, Dr. Case, I have the source pinpointed.

(CONTINUED)

TAD

Please put it up on the projection screen, please.

On one side of the room, a holovid lights up bringing up a three-dimensional projection of the planet of Mars. Bright red dots appear where all the seismic events have occurred.

OLEANA

I've put up all the locations where we've seen the seismic phenomena so far. Next, here is the projection.

Lines appear going from all of the red dots to the epicenter of the seismic events. The lines all converge to one place.

WENDY

So it is in one place. And most likely artificial.

TAD

Yeah. Natural phenomena wouldn't map so precisely.

WENDY

Can you zoom into the location where the epicenter is? It looks awfully close to Olympus Mons.

The projection zooms closer, revealing Olympus Mons and approximately one kilometer below the extinct volcano.

OLEANA

As you can see, it is Olympus Mons. One kilometer below, to be more precise.

DENVER

That's just where a magma chamber might be located.

WENDY

Is there any way to tell exactly what's in that location?

PACO

(looking at the information he has pulled up on an intranet)
According to this, on the surface, there are some geological stations around Olympus Mons as well as some warehouses owned by Geotech Entertainment.

(CONTINUED)

ELLIS

That sounds rather suspicious.

DENVER

I've got some invasive satellite scans up. I'll superimpose this data on the projection.

On the projection, several square-like boxes appear underneath Olympus Mons.

WENDY

What the hell are those things?

DENVER

They look like sensors.

ELLIS

They're definitely not sensors put by the Geological Society, that's for sure.

DENVER

Sensors. And some sort of sonic inducer?

TAD

Holy mother of...

WENDY

We'd better get out there and see what we're dealing with. If we can get a positive ID on those things, we can take the evidence to the proper authorities.

ELLIS

Woohoo! This is getting exciting. Do you think we'll encounter any bad guys?

WENDY

Let's sincerely hope not.

OLEANA

If we do, we can always pelt them with Paco's special enchiladas.

PACO

Hey!

INT. GEOTECH ENTERTAINMENT HQ, CARLISE'S OFFICE

CARLISE

Come in.

The door to Carlise's office slides open, revealing Ms. Tang. She is holding a data pad in one hand.

TANG

Good afternoon, Mr. Carlise.

CARLISE

Is this about an unscheduled meeting?

TANG

No, sir. The next staff meeting is at the end of the week and the next meeting with the Sing Syndicate officials is at the end of the month. However, I have some updates that you should probably look at.

CARLISE

Updates? On which department?

TANG

The engineering department.

CARLISE

Really? I just talked with them the other day. I was just assured by Alors that they were on track for activating Olympus Mons and building the amusement park.

TANG

I know you just met with them, sir. But I don't think the engineering department, or rather Mr. Alors, really has your dream to heart. You might want to look at this.

Tang hands Carlise the data pad.

CARLISE

What do you mean they don't have my dream at heart? You've been listening to that geologist again, haven't you? You disapprove of all of this.

(CONTINUED)

TANG

This is beyond anyone's
disapproval, sir.

CARLISE

(looking at the data pad)
Are you sure? This
looks...outrageous. I mean, I
wanted it activated...but not
this! This would kill the
amusement park.

TANG

That was exactly what I thought,
sir.

CARLISE

I don't know why Alors didn't tell
me this before. I have to talk to
him. Now.

TANG

Yes, sir. I'll inform the
engineering department.

CARLISE

No. I want this to be a surprise
visit.

EXT. WAREHOUSE DISTRICT, SLOPE OF OLYMPUS MONS

Ari is driving into the warehouse district in his lunar
buggy. He slows down and parks behind one non-descript
building and studies the tracker in his vehicle. He takes
up a communication device.

ARI

Hello? Rez? Conrad? Are you
there? Come on, are you there?

The communication device spits out static.

ARI

Damn it, the building they're in
must be blocking the audio
frequencies somehow. I guess I'll
have to go in.

Ari gets out of his lunar buggy and quickly makes his way
across a few warehouses to where the Rez and Conrad's
tracking devices indicate their location. The warehouse
where Rez and Conrad are located is unmarked. There does not
appear to be any guards about.

Ari takes out a scanner and pinpoints an entrance. He manages to break in after hacking into the security computer and enters the warehouse.

INT. SING SYNDICATE WAREHOUSE ON THE SLOPE OF OLYMPUS MONS

The warehouse is dark except for a few emergency lights. The warehouse is packed with large shipping containers.

Ari makes his way towards the interior to a small corridor after turning a corner, he finds the cell holding Rez and Conrad.

ARI

Well, it looks like you two got into a fix.

CONRAD

Captain!

REZ

Thank God you're here. How did you get past the guards?

ARI

Surprisingly, there weren't any. What's keeping the two of you here? Secret honeymoon?

CONRAD

Yeah, it was. It was perfect until you came by to spoil it.

REZ

Ha ha ha. Look, there's a force field keeping us in here. We don't have the equipment to break out of here ourselves, otherwise we would already be out.

ARI

Hm. Well, I suppose with the force field in place, they didn't need to waste guards on you two.

CONRAD

There's that. But I think someone's planning something that would in the end render our little incarceration moot.

(CONTINUED)

Ari looks at the panel next to the cell that is controlling the force field. With his scanner, he manages to hack it in seconds and the force field winks off. Conrad and Rez step through to the other side and grab their weapons that had been confiscated and stashed on a side table.

ARI

Who's planning what?

CONRAD

You haven't noticed where we are?

ARI

No. There's no sign to this place. It's just an anonymous warehouse at the foot of Olympus Mons.

CONRAD

Oh. Well, we assumed that they took us to another section of that industrial complex. The goons that got us were from the Sing Syndicate.

ARI

The Sing Syndicate? Isn't that the company that...

REZ

Forget what you've already heard about the company. That company has its fingers in everywhere. I think whoever is in charge of it is so egomaniacal, he wants to rule the universe.

ARI

You can't be serious.

CONRAD

We're deadly serious. And we've got evidence that they're going to start with Olympus Mons City real soon.

ARI

I'm not going to get sucked into your conspiracy theories. I got you two out of a situation and we'll call it even. The sooner we get out of here, the sooner I can start working out my other obligations.

(CONTINUED)

CONRAD

Oh yeah. Your obligations to your mentor. So I guess you didn't have a chance to meet him yet before you got our distress signal?

ARI

Oh, I've already met him. He told me to...

SECURITY GUARD #1

Freeze! What are you two doing out here? And who are you?

Conrad, Rez, and Ari look at each other once before they immediately dive behind some bulky shipping containers. The first security guard and two others with him immediately open fire with laser guns.

REZ

I thought you said that there weren't any guards in here.

ARI

I did. The scanner didn't detect any. But maybe my hacking into the computer triggered some sort of alarm that alerted them.

CONRAD

Well, whatever the case, we have to get past them. I vote we give them some of their own medicine.

Conrad arms his laser cannon and quickly peeks over the shipping containers to deliver a blow to the security guards.

EXT. WAREHOUSE DISTRICT, SLOPE OF OLYMPUS MONS

Wendy, Tad, and the grad students arrive in the warehouse district on a hoverbus.

DENVER

This will be a piece of cake. Why this scanner right here says that we're almost on top of it.

WENDY

Which way?

(CONTINUED)

DENVER

Over there, to the east. According to this, it's just underneath this building.

TAD

If it's underneath a building, I'm sure there may be lower levels or tunnels leading down. We have to get in to examine it.

PACO

Not so fast, boss. This warehouse building is owned by the Sing Syndicate according to this.

TAD

The Sing Syndicate? That doesn't make sense. They don't concern themselves with geological engineering, do they? They weren't on your list.

PACO

You're right, they aren't. So maybe they don't know about the thing beneath their building. Maybe someone else rented it out from them. Or someone built the lower levels or tunnels from somewhere else.

TAD

Whatever the case, we have to go inside.

WENDY

I don't suppose we have to call up the Sing Syndicate company to just voluntarily open up their warehouse to us. They'd think we're all mad scientists.

ELLIS

(peeking past another
warehouse corner)
Shh! Did you guys hear that?

TAD

Hear what?

(CONTINUED)

ELLIS

Noises, coming from over there in that building.

WENDY

Now that you mention it...

A loud explosion is heard from the next warehouse over. The entrance bursts open with a beam of laser light and three figures emerge from the entrance.

DENVER

Who are they? They look like mercenaries.

OLEANA

And they're armed.

WENDY

Good God, that's Ari. What the hell is he doing here?

TAD

Didn't he say that he had some friends to rescue?

WENDY

Disreputable friends, by the looks of it. Did he fall in with some criminals.

More guards have appeared from behind the warehouse, heading towards the trio.

PACO

Holy crap, there are guards over there. You think they're going to capture the criminals?

WENDY

I have a bad feeling about this.

Conrad and Rez seem to sense that they are being watched from behind. They immediately whirl around to take down the guards in a blaze of laser fire.

But as the geologists watch, they do not notice that another contingent of security guards have come toward them. One of them grabs Oleana, the nearest grad student.

OLEANA

Help!

DENVER

Oleana!

Paco and Ellis look at each other and simultaneously bring up their scanning devices and try to bash the guard in the head. But as the geologists struggle, more guards rush in.

Wendy screams.

ARI

It's Wendy!

REZ

Who?

CONRAD

Ari knows those people over there. We have to help them.

REZ

If I get to shoot more goons, I'm all for it.

INT. GEOTECH ENTERTAINMENT HQ, ENGINEERING DIVISION

Carlise enters the Geotech Entertainment engineering division. At his entrance, the engineers working at the controls immediately turn to look at him.

CARLISE

Alors!

ENGINEER #1

He is in his office, sir.

Carlise walks into the glassed in office.

CARLISE

Alors, we need a talk.

ALORS

What do you need, sir? I believe I gave you my report the previous day.

CARLISE

Oh yes. You gave me a report yesterday. But you neglected to tell me about some critical results.

Carlise flings the data pad that Tang had given him onto the desk. Alors takes a cursory look at it.

(CONTINUED)

ALORS

I don't understand, sir. These are simply the test results from that previous trial. I told you that we are working to improve it.

CARLISE

I suggest you take a closer look at those figures, Mr. Alors. This was not what I wanted you to do. I wanted you to activate the volcano enough so that there would be a spectacle. Not to blow apart the entire planet in a series of devastating earthquakes!

ALORS

You don't understand the seriousness of what you're saying, sir.

CARLISE

Oh, I understand it clearly, all right. It's obvious--even to my little knowledge of engineering--that you don't know what the hell you're doing. You're fired.

ALORS

But...

Carlise walks out of the glassed in office and addresses all of the engineers in the division.

CARLISE

Everyone, stop what you're doing. The current phase of testing is suspended until further notice.

Alors suddenly comes up behind Carlise and grabs him in a choke hold and points a laser gun at Carlise's temple.

ALORS

If any of you stops your work, I'll kill him.

ENGINEER #2

(stepping forward)

Mr. Alors, you're making a mistake.

(CONTINUED)

ENGINEER #3

Have you gone mad?

CARLISE

Yes, Alors, have you gone mad? Put that weapon down.

Carlise moves his hand almost imperceptably toward his pocket. He activates a small device. One of the engineers at the edge of the room notices a light blinking at his panel. Covertly, he turns to rapidly access a panel.

Alors tightens his grip on Carlise.

ALORS

Don't move any further! Go back to your stations and continue the tests. If you don't, I'll blow his head off.

INT. SING SYNDICATE WAREHOUSE, BASEMENT

Ari, Conrad, Rez, and the geologists have been imprisoned inside one of the cells in the basement of another Sing Syndicate warehouse.

CONRAD

Great. We're back where we've started. Except this time, we don't have anyone to contact. And there are guards out there.

TAD

If it's any consolation to you, I did manage to contact Williamson. If he's any good, the authorities will come and get us.

ARI

What do you mean, if he's any good? The man is a legend.

WENDY

Come off it, Ari. According to you, the old man can never do wrong.

ARI

I know you've always resented the influence he's had on me, Wendy. But just this once, he may be the only one who can help us.

(CONTINUED)

REZ

Let's hope he does. I can think of a lot worse things.

TAD

Like what?

REZ

Like the fact that it's quite possible that the Sing Syndicate has bought out the government. In that case, you can kiss any possibility of us getting rescued goodbye.

WENDY

The Sing Syndicate has nothing to do with this. We've figured out that Geotech Entertainment is behind this. They've made some sort of sonic enhancer that's going to reactivate Olympus Mons and blow this planet apart.

CONRAD

Close, but no cigar, doctor. We have proof that it's the Sing Syndicate.

WENDY

What proof? We've managed to pinpoint the recent earthquakes. The epicenter tracks back to Geotech Entertainment.

CONRAD

It only looks that way. Before we got here, Rez and I managed to crack a few databases. Geotech Entertainment is just a front. A dupe. The Sing Syndicate has got agents inside that company that are in charge of blowing up this place.

TAD

That's beginning to sound like a conspiracy theory.

CONRAD

It's not exactly a theory, is it, if it's true?

(CONTINUED)

The geology grad students are clustered around a panel of wall close to where the force field at the entrance to the cell has been set up. Beyond the force field, there are two guards patrolling the hallway, but they are too far away to hear their conversation.

ARI

What exactly are they doing?

WENDY

Trying to find another way to get out of here in case the calvary doesn't show up. That's what grad students are for, you know.

ARI

Really? Maybe I should get myself some lackeys.

WENDY

They're not lackeys. They're grad students.

ARI

Kind of difficult to tell. You treat both the same way.

WENDY

(to Tad)

God. You see what I had to put up with?

TAD

I don't know. In a way, he's right.

WENDY

I can't believe you're siding with him!

DENVER

I think there may be a way to deactivate that force field if we get rid of this panel. Unfortunately, we don't have anything to pry it off. They took all of our stuff.

REZ

It's just that panel?

(CONTINUED)

ELLIS

Yep.

REZ

Well, that's a piece of cake.

Rez holds out her hands and claws extend out.

PACO

Whoa.

OLEANA

Did you get some sort of plastic surgery? Or are you one of those cyborgs that the government has been rumored to have created?

REZ

Neither.

Rez rips out the panel exposing circuitry.

DENVER

Awesome! Now, if we only try to get this...

WENDY

If that's not plastic surgery or cybernetic enhancement...

REZ

I'm a genetic freak commissioned by the bastards, the Sing Syndicate.

CONRAD

You are not a freak.

REZ

Whatever.

DENVER

Aha!

Denver manages to rip out a piece of the circuitry and the force field flickers off. Immediately, Ari and Conrad rush out of the cell and take the two guards by surprise.

Everyone finds their equipment in the next cell over. But as they get their stuff, an evacuation alarm goes off in the warehouse.

Ellis accesses a nearby control panel.

(CONTINUED)

ELLIS

Uh, guys, all the guards are getting out of this place. It doesn't look good.

TAD

What do you mean it doesn't look good? This means we're free.

OLEANA

(looking at her scanner)

No it doesn't, Dr. Case. Everyone's leaving because there's something on this level that's armed. If we don't do anything, Olympus Mons, as well as this place, is going to blow.

PACO

It's over here!

Paco gestures towards the center of the basement where there is a large machine connecting to nodes and sensors underground. Denver hurries over to access the machine's control panel.

DENVER

This thing is the thing directly controlling the sonic enhancers beneath Olympus Mons! There's some sort of count down sequence. We have to stop it.

Denver taps furiously on the control panel in an attempt to access the programing.

DENVER

Damn it. It's protected somehow.

ARI

Let me see that. I have some experience cracking computer systems.

As Ari takes over the control panel and Conrad and Rez examine the rest of the machine, Tad and Wendy try to access another control panel against the wall of the basement.

OLEANA

Wouldn't it be a better idea for all of us to just get the hell out of here?

(CONTINUED)

ELLIS

Maybe. But that would also mean that we'd just be letting the thing blow this planet apart. Are you willing to do that?

OLEANA

My brain says no, but my gut is telling me that I should have some sense of self preservation.

DENVER

Well, look at it this way. If he doesn't stop this and this place blows, we're not going to feel anything because we're pretty much on top of it. And if we leave and the planet blows--well, we might be dead there, too.

ELLIS

God. You both are depressing.

INT. GEOTECH ENTERTAINMENT HQ, ENGINEERING DIVISION

ALORS

We're going to get ready for another test.

ENGINEER #1

But the last one did not go well at all.

CARLISE

You should listen to him. He's an actual engineer.

ALORS

Shut up. Everything was going perfectly before you had to butt your nose into this.

An evacuation alarm suddenly goes off. All of the engineers abandon their stations to get out of the room.

ALORS

What the hell?

Carlise takes the opportunity of Alors' distraction to punch Alors and twist out of his grip. He dodges a bit of laser fire.

(CONTINUED)

ALORS
You son of a bitch!

CARLISE
Everyone, out now!

The engineers stream out and Carlise follows them as Alors fires his weapon wildly. Once Carlise steps across the threshold of the engineering division entrance, he turns around to stare at Alors.

CARLISE
The Sing Syndicate is never going to get away from this.

ALORS
You're an idiot, Carlise. The Sing Syndicate covers themselves very well. It is you who will get the blame for everything.

CARLISE
I don't think so.

Alors takes aim with his laser gun again, but the door closes before he can hit Carlise.

ALORS
Damn him. Well, who cares now. I have this whole place to myself. And the tests will continue.

Alors takes a small communications device from his pocket.

ALORS
There have been some minor setbacks, but I have them all taken care of. I will soon start phase three.

INT. SING SYNDICATE WAREHOUSE, BASEMENT

Five minutes are remaining on the countdown.

ARI
Oh God, I can't figure this out. I really am an idiot.

WENDY
No you aren't. You're just misguided. At least you've tried.

(CONTINUED)

ARI

I'm sorry.

REZ

Come on, Captain. You can't give up now. It's not over until, well, it's over.

OLEANA

We're doomed, you mean.

CONRAD

Wait a minute, what is this?

REZ

That lever could just as well blow us up even quicker.

CONRAD

Well, I have a feeling.

Conrad jerks down the lever. The countdown on the machine's control panel suddenly stops.

DENVER

It looks like you did it.

REZ

Oh Conrad.

CONRAD

Does this mean I get a kiss?

The control panel flashes again and a different screen pops up.

DENVER

Wow, that's weird.

ELLIS

What is it?

DENVER

I think he's pulled a switch. I mean, yeah, that's obvious, but as a result, he's neutralized the threat underneath Olympus Mons and lit the fuse underneath the Geotech Entertainment Headquarters.

ELLIS

Someone planted a bomb under a business building?

(CONTINUED)

WENDY

We have to try to contact someone!

Wendy tries to activate her communication device but there is nothing.

WENDY

Damn it. I think this building is blocking all the signals. We have to get above ground.

DENVER

I don't think it'll do any good, Dr. Gold. That place is set to blow in one minute. We won't be able to get up there to warn them in time.

EXT. 1 KM OUTSIDE OF GEOTECH ENTERTAINMENT HQ

The employees of Geotech Entertainment HQ are milling outside after being transported outside by emergency pod vehicles. While the heads of each department are trying to calm everyone down, Carlise and Tang stand to the side, looking at the headquarters building.

CARLISE

Is everyone accounted for?

TANG

Yes, sir. I'm glad you made it out alive.

CARLISE

Me too. You were right. Alors was an agent. And it was a good thing we have everything recorded. It will be evidence.

TANG

I'm afraid that it might not do much good. The Sing Syndicate was, in fact, our funding. They have infinite pockets and even more influence. They may bankrupt us after this.

CARLISE

I admit now that maybe my dream may have been a little overly ambitious. But if there was justice in this world...

(CONTINUED)

The headquarters building abruptly implodes. Everyone freezes and watches the destruction. As the cloud of dust begins to slowly settle, the sound of sirens from emergency vehicles can be heard from the distance.

CARLISE

Did someone call the authorities?

TANG

Yes. Oldengood called emergency.

CARLISE

Where there's an emergency of this magnitude, there's bound to be news crews on the heels of the authorities.

TANG

What are you going to say, sir?

CARLISE

We're going to rebuild. Bigger and better.

EXT. OLYMPUS MONS CITY, RIDELL STREET

Conrad and Rez are strolling down Ridell Street wearing ordinary clothes and eating ice cream.

REZ

I have to admit, this is good.

CONRAD

See? I told you, it's the best. Next time, you should try chocolate.

REZ

I don't know about best.

CONRAD

What's better than ice cream?

Rez looks around to see if anyone else on the street is paying attention to them. And then leans over to whisper in Conrad's ear.

CONRAD

You're killing me, Rez.

(CONTINUED)

REZ

Thought so.

CONRAD

So, uh, you're still planning on heading to Luna to get that normal life of yours?

REZ

Well, I'd have to admit that the Captain's mentor helped make everything happen. Now I'm a person like everyone else on the logs rather than an escaped experiment. So yeah, maybe.

CONRAD

What's that's supposed to mean?

REZ

Didn't you say you might want to visit Makemake?

CONRAD

That was a joke. Besides, I recently got a message from a friend of mine. Apparently the headquarters for a certain corporation isn't where we thought it would be.

REZ

Oh? It's not on Earth?

CONRAD

No. According to my source, it's on Titan.

REZ

It's going to be pretty hard explaining our presence there since that place is no tourist destination.

CONRAD

No kidding. We need some other excuse to get there.

Rez and Conrad arrive at the front of the Martian World Bank. Ari exits the building and waves at them.

(CONTINUED)

ARI

Fancy seeing you here.

CONRAD

We were just out for a stroll. And I wanted to introduce Rez to ice cream.

REZ

(looking at the Martian World Bank sign)

Didn't your mentor say that he had something for you here?

ARI

Yeah. He left me a data pad in his safe deposit box. It's a journal of some sort. Some unfinished business of his.

CONRAD

Is it difficult?

ARI

I'm not sure. It's something that he left on a previous mission and I might need some help retrieving it. Although I would have no idea who in their right mind would want to go to Titan of all places.

Rez and Conrad look at each other. And then turn back to Ari.

REZ AND CONRAD

We would.

THE END