

# NEWTOPIA RISING, BOOK I: The Search for a New Utopia

by H.T. Yim

“It’s *Tommy* by way of Cirque du Soleil, set in space with heavy erotic overtones ... I call it *Newtopia Rising, Book I: The Search for a New Utopia*.”

–Todd Chavez, *BoJack Horseman*

## **ACT I**

[Part I](#)

[Part II](#)

## **ACT II**

[Part I](#)

[Part II](#)

## **ACT III**

[Part I](#)

[Part II](#)

## **ACT IV**

[Part I](#)

[Part II](#)

## **ACT V**

[Part I](#)

## ACT I; PART I

### \* SPACECRAFT UNITY 10 \*

[Fully clad in spacesuits, eight crew members sit in quiet anxiety. Behind them loom three backdrop screens, showing a cockpit view from a spaceship as it approaches a blue-and-green planet]

[One man, LINLEY YAMAGUCHI, appears to be praying. AIDA DESALEGN, a small woman, breaks the silence]

AIDA DESALEGN

Travelling on a spaceship  
So far away from home,  
To find a new and better place,  
A planet rich with loam.

LINLEY YAMAGUCHI

[Looks up from prayer, smiling at Aida]

The first two we used up,  
Bled each 'till it ran dry.  
Drained and purged 'till naught remained,  
But this time we must try.

BLAKE MEGAN

[Scoffs]

Try not to fuck it up  
Quite so hard this time around.  
I'm sure we'll change, third time's a charm,  
Pretend we're better than we sound.

SONNY DARLING

So spoke the pessimist,  
One with the bitter heart.  
Just watch and see, this time we'll change,  
We'll all each play our part.

BLAKE MEGAN

Missions have failed before

Despite whatever specs were read.  
Or like the crews before us,  
We may end up simply dead.

And if we win it's only  
A matter of time before we burn  
Through the planet's resources:  
We're humans, we never learn.

SONNY DARLING

You can't blame this generation  
For the deeds of the entire race.  
All we want is a place to land,  
We homeless, adrift in space.

You'll see, it will be different,  
The Council has decreed  
That every human work the land;  
To respect the soil and seed.

CEDRIC CHAN

All we need is another chance,  
A world with water, air,  
And a certain type of ground –  
Then we'll take it from there.

ALL except BLAKE  
Everyone is waiting  
Suspended, fast asleep.  
Dreaming of lives spent on a farm,  
Of crops to sow and reap.

BLAKE MEGAN

We had a world so perfect,  
Old Utopia or Earth.  
Then we went and killed it so we're  
Without a land or hearth.

TWYFORD ATIF

How were you elected  
As Seeker, or so called?  
Any more of your Cynic views,

I'll beg Aida crashes us all.

[Enter CAPTAIN BROOKE]

BROOKE FITZGERALD

Time to go, all hands on deck,  
Crew members look alive.  
The moment for which we've all trained,  
Prepare for what ahead lies.

With luck we'll find a suitable world,  
Perhaps a gruesome death.  
All in the name of humankind,  
This day won't be meaningless.

Here we are, your time to shine,  
Desalegn, take the helm.  
The rest of you brace yourselves  
As we venture in this new realm.

AIDA DESALEGN  
Aye aye, Captain.

[Exit Aida. Everyone straps in for a rocky yet safe landing, Linley praying and Blake swearing profusely]

ALL except BLAKE  
We've really gone and done it,  
We've really made the grade.  
May it be, against all odds,  
The world for which we've prayed.

BROOKE FITZGERALD  
[Unstraps and stands]

Time to go, all hands on deck,  
Crew members look alive.  
The moment for which we've all trained,  
Prepare for what ahead lies.

[The crew unstrap and stand alongside Brooke. Enter Aida. Everyone claps her

on the back, Brooke ruffling her hair]

ALL except BLAKE  
With luck we'll find a suitable world,  
Perhaps a gruesome death.  
All in the name of humankind,  
This day won't be meaningless.

[Together, they step out onto the planet]

\* UNDISCOVERED PLANET \*

[Part of the ship's exterior lies on one side of the stage. There is a moment of silence as the Seekers stare in awe at the new world, a rolling plain completely covered in moss. It is beautiful. Brooke turns around to face the crew]

BROOKE FITZGERALD  
Waste no time, begin prelims:  
Gather surface soil, rocks,  
All details on the atmosphere,  
All knowledge to unlock.

BROOKE FITZGERALD and BENJIRO SARA  
Geology!

AIDA DESALEGN and CEDRIC CHAN  
Chemistry!

TWYFORD ATIF  
Meteorology!

ALL except BLAKE  
[Point to Blake, who scowls]

And botany!

We'll use our strengths and pit our wits,  
We'll cooperate and strive  
To defy all odds, all obstacles;  
We will, we will survive.

TWYFORD ATIF

[Scans the atmosphere with his Personal Operative Data Sphere (PODS), a metal contraption worn around everyone's necks, and shares the reading emanating from its holographic screen]

Insulating magnetic field,  
Gravity .84g,  
Pressure 10.1psi,  
.9g/L density.

.01% CO2,  
24% oxygen,  
1.99% argon,  
74% nitrogen.

[The crew stare at each other in disbelief. They begin to embrace, swaying as they link arms and touch foreheads. Brooke pulls a reluctant Blake into the group hug]

ALL except BLAKE  
We've really gone and done it,  
We've really made the grade.  
Against all odds we found it:  
The world for which we've prayed.

TWYFORD ATIF

[Looks down at PODS]

Captain, I have a reading  
For something unrecognized.  
A trace substance detected,  
The system can't identify.

BROOKE FITZGERALD

Thank you Atif, noted,  
Continue to assess.  
Return to Unity,  
The Worldship we must address.

[They walk back to the other side of the stage. All their data devices light up and whirl for a second when in proximity to the ship. The three backdrop screens read

“Video transmission requested”, and then “Video transmission answered”]

WORLDSHIP COMPUTER

Suspension systems deactivated.

[A holographic video emits from their data spheres -- also displayed on the screens. The Council of Nine Arbiters, all elderly men and women draped in white regalia, begin to rouse and exit from animation tanks]

BROOKE FITZGERALD

Unity 10 to World Ship Two,  
Come in, Council of Devoted Nine.  
The land, the air, it's all we've hoped  
And no detected life signs.

THE NINE ARBITERS

All hail, praise be with you,  
You've saved us, Unity 10.

[One Arbiter presses controls]

We've sent the first wave of settlers,  
Wake us in two years hence.

[Step back into tanks]

And so we must now bless you,  
Our brightest and the best.  
Our Seekers of New Utopia,  
Our fate in your hands will rest!

[Tanks close and hiss]

TWYFORD ATIF

But of course, no pressure!

LINLEY YAMAGUCHI

And now to set up camp  
On humankind's new world.  
But first thing's first, let's get the flag,  
Our pride and joy unfurled.

BLAKE MEGAN

[Knocks on Linley's helmet]

You must be fucking kidding,  
When we have myriad duties.  
First thing's first, inflate the Hab;  
Sort your priorities.

BROOKE FITZGERALD

[Knocks on Blake's helmet]

You are not their leader,  
Miss Number Third in rank.  
You go and set up the Hab,  
Yamaguchi, tend the oxygen tanks.

[Blake follows her orders, sulking visibly]

ALL except BLAKE  
We'll use our strengths and pit our wits,  
We'll cooperate and strive  
To defy all odds, all obstacles;  
We will survive and thrive.

BROOKE FITZGERALD

Megan, once you've done the Hab,  
Go dig up some more dirt.  
Then you may – manually –  
Urination convert.

[Blake rolls her eyes and digs into the ground. Immediately, she falls screaming in agony]

[The lights go off but for a spotlight on Blake and the backdrop screens]

[Blake stops screaming and writhing. Shaking, she stands up and turns to face the screens, which play scenes from her life]

[In humanity's last moments on Earth, plagued by natural disasters, a young Blake spends most of her childhood in floating survival capsules. During adoles-

cence, she and her mother prepare to join the first wave of interstellar colonizers. But as she steps aboard the first Worldship, her mother says goodbye in tears, remaining behind -- Blake has been tricked into abandoning her only family, along with the only planet she's ever known]

[On the new human planet, she is elected to join the Transcendents – a group devoting their lives to history and progress, waking up every 30 years to analyze societal states and make recommendations. She falls in love with a colleague but neither act on their feelings. After the Transcendents' first suspension, they awake to a hostile political environment, with disputes over territory and resources. They give counsel before reluctantly re-entering suspension. When they awake, the planet has been devastated by unrestrained consumerism and war]

[The Transcendents now identify as the Cynics. One by one they commit suicide, including Blake's love. Standing over his corpse, she clutches a note which reads, "You were the single gleam of light in an abysmal world." In the fashion of ancient samurai, Blake makes to kill herself by disembowelment but at the last moment stabs herself in the shoulder instead. She joins the military of a random side after flipping a coin, and spends years deftly killing scores of "the enemy"]

[More spotlights turn on, revealing more and more humans, stealing, destroying each other and the planet with waste. The backdrop screens play a montage of the most traumatizing moments on loop. The fighting humans converge to form a grotesque giant skull which chases and eventually consumes Blake]

[The screens and lights turn off]

### \* SPACESHIP UNITY - MED CABIN \*

[Blake lies on a stretcher, surrounded by the crew]

ISAAC RIVERA

[Hovers over Blake, scanning her body with his PODS]

Pulse elevation,  
Pupil dilation,  
Blood vessel congestion,  
Tremors, perspiration.

BLAKE MORGAN

[Pushes Isaac away, runs her hands over her face and body, stands up, walks

briskly towards the med supply cabinet and grabs a bottle]

ISAAC RIVERA

[Rubs his hand where Blake slapped it away]

But otherwise all clear.

[Blake leaves towards the rec room. An alarmed crew follow her. She takes a packet from the ration cupboard and, with trembling hands, empties its contents into the bottle]

TWYFORD ATIF

Fruit powder with pure ethanol ...

Do you really think that wise?

ISAAC RIVERA

An act which as Chief Medic

I simply can't advise.

BLAKE MEGAN

Oh go fuck yourselves.

[One by one, the crew try to physically restrain Blake, who flips each on the ground. Only Brooke and Benjiro stand back, watching and shaking their heads. Blake gulps her makeshift cocktail, gasping for breath and glowering at the crew. The crew glower back]

CEDRIC CHAN

[Clearly unnerved]

Captain, I ran the diagnostics

On all of Morgan's gear.

The trace substance Atif found ...

It's inside, it surrounds us here.

ISAAC RIVERA

Impossible, how could it

The airlock permeate?

[The crew turns to Brooke]

BROOKE FITZGERALD  
Megan, prepare for an EVA.  
We are to investigate.

BENJIRO SARA  
Captain! I volunteer  
To assist and survey the land.

BROOKE FITZGERALD  
Don't be ridiculous,  
You're second in command.

[Turns to leave]

Act like it.

[Brooke and Blake exit.]

\* CAVERN \*

[Brooke and Blake enter an underground cave lined with glowing crystals, their colour constantly changing. As they slowly walk across the stage, the clusters of crystals grow larger and their PODS beep with increasing intensity. The backdrop screens show the atmospheric scan, a high concentration of the mystery compound]

BLAKE MORGAN  
[Grinning mischievously]

Cap, are you not frightened,  
On a planet unexplored?  
Perhaps within these hollows  
Is ET life, all prepped for war.

BROOKE FITZGERALD  
How many captains have  
A prime crew like I've got?

[Places hand on Blake's helmet affectionately, almost maternally]

After all, beside me is

The military's best shot.

[Suddenly, what appeared to be large rocks turn out to be dancers, as they unfold their previously contorted bodies and begin a sequence. They are the physical manifestation of harmony, balance, mutual dependence, and love – limbs entwined, every movement part of a larger cycle. Behind, the screens shows the anatomy of the planet, all its resources and their pace of renewal]

[The lights turn off except for a spotlight on a suddenly nude Blake. A second spotlight reveals Blake's deceased love, also naked, moving towards her. Blake drinks in the sight of him, takes his hand and kisses it, falling to one knee. The lights go off]

[The spotlight now falls on Brooke. A new spotlight shows Benjiro, who approaches her slowly]

BROOKE FITZGERALD  
I ordered you to stay back,  
What are you doing here?  
I told you once, commanded,  
I –

[Benjiro kisses her. After a moment of hesitation, Blake wraps her arms around him. They do not part]

[The lights turn off and on again, revealing Brooke and Blake on the floor. They awake, stare at each other for a beat, then scramble to their feet and exit the cave, running]

\* BACK AT CAMP \*

BENJIRO  
[Pacing back and forth]

We should go, they've been too long.

[Points at rest of crew]

Follow emergency protocols.

[Brooke and Blake pull up abruptly on their shuttle-ship and clamber out. Benjiro

draws back his arm bashfully]

BROOKE FITZGERALD

Medic, you'll need to inspect us both,  
But first: attention, all!

It seems that what we've found  
Is a planet sentient.  
Aware of its own surfaces,  
And armed with self defense.

With a psychoactive substance:  
I went, I saw, I felt it.  
To use any of its resources we must  
Its balance understand, commit.

[Brooke and Blake each take a shovel and penetrate the ground. Nothing happens]

BLAKE MORGAN

[Quivering with excitement]

This could not be more perfect,  
Unlike most planets, it's active.  
The big picture we must bear in mind,  
Our only way to live.

BROOKE FITZGERALD and BLAKE MEGAN

Against all odds, all obstacles,  
We've found our panacea:

ALL

We must be the planet's keepers,  
We'll make this our Newtopia!

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## ACT I, PART II

### \* SETTLEMENT OF LOCKE, TOWN SQUARE \*

[On the left side of the stage, a crowd of people dance and feast. On the other, Benjiro relaxes in front of a picnic]

[Enter a child, holding hands with her parents]

CHILD

Festival! Festival!

Today's the day, the Festival!

A day of fun, a day to eat

Delicious treats so plentiful!

FATHER 1

We rest and laugh and sing

[Twirls into husband's arms]

And dance among the pretty floats,

FATHER 2

[Dips husband]

All day we celebrate

And then we cast our Votes.

[They kiss, then together with their daughter run to join the dancing crowd]

CITIZEN

I have here my Reasonings,

Will you be one of my Nine?

CITIZEN

You know I love to read your Votes.

Now please be one of mine.

[They both bow and transmit their essays through their respective Personal Operative Data Spheres]

[The crowd begins to sing]

## CITIZENS

This is how we make decisions,  
Share all citations and notes.  
Only read and merited can they  
Count as valid Votes.

It's really rather simple,  
Write at min two-fifty words  
Explaining why say "Yea" or "Nay"  
And let your voice be heard.

It must be read by at least nine,  
UpVoted by five unknowns.  
It must be based on evidence;  
Its logic, soundness shown.

[All stop and stare at holographic screens emanating from their PODS, their content depicted on the backdrop screens. The results are in for the latest vote, with submitted ideas from the public flooding the screens, keywords fluctuating in size relative to their popularity.]

[Vote B84: A Vote to decrease the age of the Cavern Rite of Passage from 18 to 12]

[Top Reasonings:

“YES: Earlier exposure will increase later planet-sustainable behaviours. Corroborating Evidence: Formative years proven to be crucial in determining behaviours exhibited as adult”

“NO: Subjection of children to psychedelic experience and ensuing risks. Corroborating Evidence: Small yet discernible increase in stress level after exposure; anxiety most commonly reported side-effect of exposure; reported earlier onset or exacerbated symptoms of schizophrenia”]

[Voting Participation: 69%]

[Results: 65.32% Yes, 34.68% No]

[The music and the lights on the left side of the stage dim, the dancing crowd now silhouettes. On the right side, Sonny approaches Benjiro]

SONNY

I have here my Reasonings,  
Will you be one of my Nine?

BENJIRO

[Smiles]

You know I love to read your Votes.  
I've already sent you mine.

[Sonny sits down, helping himself to a snack. Both men read in silence. The screen reads: COUNCIL PROPOSITION 19: The second Settlement, and all Settlements here afterwards, possess freedom to develop individual public policies with exception of those in violation of the Fundamental Principles]

BENJIRO

And now for time to have  
Our oral discussion.  
First of all, the recap:  
On the 19th Proposition

Permitting settlements to have  
A degree of sovereignty,  
You believe it ill-advised,  
Preferring uniformity:

For segments of society  
At the same rate to progress  
Or otherwise run the risk  
To stagnate or regress.

SONNY

And you, my friend Benjiro,  
Conversely seem to think  
That societies should be different,  
That there's no need for them to sync.

But I must beg to differ:

Discrepancies only breed  
Socioeconomic inequalities –

[Smiles wryly]

History's lessons we need heed.

BENJIRO

It's in the nature of time  
To paint any society  
Backwards and retrogressive  
In the eyes of posterity.

But only through comparison  
Can evolution be assessed:  
It's through experimentation  
That we ultimately progress.

I believe forced conformity  
Impedes human activity.  
As is with genetics,  
There lies strength in diversity.

[Sonny stares in silence with a softened smile. Pressing his PODS, he casts his vote from NO to YES, linking to the other man's Reasoning. He kisses Benjiro, who pulls away. Benjiro stands and places a hand on the back of his neck, vexed]

SONNY

[With a pained expression]

Did you really not know?

BENJIRO

I confess that I've suspected –  
Perhaps coldly chose to ignore.  
While you're certainly attractive ...  
There is someone whom I adore.

[Suddenly, the sky is covered in projections depicting a humanoid species and moments from their lives. They are shown cradling offspring, moving rhythmically

to music, collaborating to mould landscape into habitats, developing technological innovations, attending what appear to be ceremonies and school]

[Benjiro abruptly turns and breaks into a sprint, running as fast as he can off stage while the others remain dumbstruck]

[Suddenly, a transparent sphere with blue lights -- resembling a spherical jellyfish -- descends steadily from the sky, as if down an invisible elevator. Inside is one of the creatures – a hairless, slightly shorter bipedal being with a pointed face, large opaque eyes, extra leg segment and kneecap protruding backwards. They are ghostly pale except for a brown circle on their forehead]

[Enter Brooke, immediately followed by Benjiro]

ALIEN

[They point a small silver contraption at the humans. When they speak, their speech is translated]

Greetings, Class 2 species,  
With Interstellar Expansion.  
Free to enter trade under the  
Galactic Proclamation.

We set course for this planet  
With certain resources to find –  
From a neighbouring world  
Where it seems we've over-mined.

[The backdrop screens display the same glowing crystals seen in the cave]

We require Thunium crystals  
For which it seems you've yet no use.  
In turn we will barter  
The plenty potions we produce.

[Glances at a nearby civilian. They step out of the clear sphere which contracts into a withered branch and throws a flat metal disc on the ground. It expands and unfolds into a work station, and the alien begins combining various chemicals with dexterous hands, with four pointed fingers]

For instance, we can change

The neoplasm in your brain  
From one malignant to benign,  
And spare damage to your DNA.

Or any potion conceivable,  
Guaranteed and effective on  
All carbon-based life forms  
With centralized neurons.

[Finishes the mixture with a flourish. They slowly place it on the ground in front of the civilian and back away]

[The humans stand gaping, stunned speechless]

BROOKE  
[Clears throat]

We ... we call our home Newtopia,  
We welcome you with ... grace.  
We will convene to think and to  
Consider your offer of trade.

ALIEN  
We await in our vessel above  
As your species deliberates.

[Takes what appears to be a dark gray stone and a miniature violin bow and rubs them together in demonstration before placing them – with great care – on the floor]

Send a superluminal transmission  
Should you wish our Sovereigns to meet and trade.

[Exit alien, ascending via the invisible beam back towards the sky. The crowd stands in silence]

CITIZEN  
[Slowly]

For over three hundred years now  
We've ventured into space.

Expected yet still shocking,  
To have proof stare us in the face.

CITIZEN

We've long since discovered life,  
But just bacteria or bones.  
At last we see for sure,

That we are not alone.

ALL

[Linking arms]

At long last, it's been shown  
That we are not alone.

BROOKE

[Presses her PODS which triggers a projection through every PODS unit -- both of civilians and Seekers. Everyone stops to watch Brooke's Government Interruption, displayed on the backdrop screens]

As per Protocol One, we call  
An Emergency Vote.  
While we await the Council  
We should the composition note.

[All citizens gather round, eyeing the alien concoction warily]

CEDRIC

[Scans container]

Three predominant compounds:  
Thienopyridine,  
Acetylsalicylic acid,  
And imipramine.

[Citizens all search on PODS]

CITIZEN

"Antiplatelet" and  
"Tricyclic antidepressant".

CITIZEN  
Chemicals familiar,  
They're nothing aberrant.

CITIZEN  
[She squints at her PODS screen, slightly confused]

So ... it's a blood thinner  
And outmoded depression cure?

CEDRIC  
And yet could prove dangerous,  
With various compounds obscure.

CITIZEN WITH BRAIN TUMOR  
The whole thing could be a sham,  
The whole lot, deceiving spacemen.  
But when faced with cancer, I think I'll  
Take one for Team Humans.

[Before anyone can react, he kisses his wife and drinks the concoction. The crowd stares as the couple look at each other nervously. A beat. As they sigh in relief, something begins to ooze from his pores. His wife and onlookers scream and panic as he is slowly frozen, covered head to toe in a thin white film]

ISAAC  
[Runs over and scans the inanimate body]

Heart rate 40 beats per minute,  
BP 70/40.  
Weak yet steady respiratory,

[Incredulously]

And ... and tumour autophagy.

CITIZEN  
[Reads her own PODS screen with a furrowed brow]

"Impaired proliferation of

Glioblastoma cancer cells.”

CITIZEN

[Reads own screen]

So, essentially,  
The cancer is eating itself.

[All touch PODS and begin typing madly on projected keyboards. Keywords appear on the backdrop screens, growing according to popularity until framed as a Public Emergency Contention: “Should Newtopia exchange resources with alien species?”

[Top Reasonings:

“YES: Potential for technological advancement from mutually beneficial interaction with intelligent life. Corroborating Evidence: Promising preliminary medical trial”

“NO: Potential for exploitation by intelligent life. Corroborating Evidence: Lack of long-term observations”]

[Voting Participation: 98%]

[Result: 57.81% Yes, 52.19% No]

[Chaos ensues as the crowd bursts into a near riot, all bickering, pushing, shoving, some even throwing punches]

[The lights flicker and fanfare music blasts as the members of the Council of Devoted Nine glide onto the stage. The mob falls still, and for a moment there is silence]

THE NINE ARBITERS

It is true the use for Thunium  
Remains a mystery.  
But it remains a substance  
Of relative rarity.

To engage in commerce  
Without proper gauge of value,

Before potential utility  
Can be imagined or construed,

Would grand folly constitute  
And possible exploitation stage –  
Like selling Crystalline Silicon  
Before the Solar Age.

Yet the aliens' offer of trade  
Without doubt shows great promise  
Of unprecedented advancement –  
A catalyst to change the way we live.

To continue medical trials  
On legal adults with their consent;  
To be mindful of resource quantities  
And deplete no more than 10%;

And to generate with diligence  
A monthly evaluation:  
With these three Addendums,  
We thus proclaim our Arbitration.

CITIZEN

This may be our turning point,  
Perhaps our longevity prolong.

ALL

An evolution of our species,  
Nothing can go wrong!

[One Arbiter takes the alien stone and bow and rubs them uncertainly against  
each other]

[Immediately, a group of aliens descend from the sky. QUEEN DARNEESA –  
larger than the others with long animate hair, metal ornaments, exposed mamma-  
ry glands and a shimmering, translucent cape draped around her from the waist  
down]

ALIEN ATTENDANT

We present our Heart, our Monarch,

Darneesha IV, by the Grace of Ameen,  
Of Khanaan and of Her other Realms  
and Territories Queen,

Defender of the Craterman kingdom,  
Royal Mother to 70 billion.

QUEEN DARNEESA

It is with great gaiety We greet you;  
With exultance and elation.

We name ourselves 'Turbidian' –  
With outstanding Galactic credit.  
We propose a practical alliance  
And trade of reciprocal benefit.

In exchange for Thunium crystals,  
The myriad elixirs our kind produce.

NINE ARBITERS

With respect, may we inquire  
As to Thunium's intended use?

QUEEN DARNEESA

It is expected that we vary  
In technological advancements.  
But to answer quite succinctly:  
For a mode of entertainment.

We will leave Masters of Potions  
As a sign of favoured esteem,

[Four aliens dressed in bright yellow robes step forward]

And have each forget the existence of  
Your Cave of Swollen Dreams.

TWYFORD

Cave of swollen what?

TURBIDIAN ATTENDANT

An underground cavern  
Common in sentient planets,  
Storing planetary data,  
Resource quantities and coordinates.

We presumed you knew, for you built  
Around its central radial nerve ring.

AIDA

[Without hesitation]

We built our base here because  
It had the smoothest landing.

[Turbidians turn towards Aida in curiosity. The human crowd glare at her, many shaking their heads in disbelief and resentment. Linley steps slightly in front of her]

QUEEN DARNEESA

To assuage lingering doubts  
And illustrate good intentions,  
We will have our subjects take  
An Elixir of Failed Remembrance.

ATTENDANT

[Places bottles with clear liquid on the potion station]

To soothe reasonable fears,  
We would first like to demonstrate.  
Do any of your subjects possess  
A memory they wish to negate?

[Silence. Everyone stands very still. Tentatively, a middle-aged man steps forward. He picks up a bottle nervously]

ATTENDANT

Take potion to lips and conceive in mind  
The memory to be renounced.  
To ensure clear mental image,  
The name can be explicitly pronounced.

CITIZEN

My ... my last babysitter.

[Drinks elixir. As he draws the bottle away from his lips, he seems to stand a little straighter, his wrinkles suddenly less visible. He looks around at the sea of faces peering at him, confused by the attention]

... Is there something on my face?

[Many in the crowd exchange concerned, awkward looks]

MASTERS OF POTIONS

[Step forward, pick up bottles and raise them in unison]

The Cave of Swollen Dreams.

[The Council of Nine and the Turbidians step towards one another. The Turbidians incline their heads and the Humans bow in turn. The crowd bursts in unified dance around them]

ALL except ARBITERS, SEEKERS and TURBIDIANS

This may be our turning point,  
Perhaps our longevity prolong.  
An evolution of our species,  
Nothing can go wrong!

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## ACT II, PART I

### \* NEWTOPIA \*

[The stage is dark but for a capsule with a bar of blinking lights and a clear panel showing an unconscious human inside, their face coated with a white film. The backdrop screens turn on to show a clip of the man, who we now see has an amputated leg, drinking from a bottle labelled ELIXIR OF REGENERATED LIMB and stepping into the capsule. The lights stop blinking and the door hisses and opens. The man breaks free of the thin film covering him, stumbles out of the capsule and reaches down to touch his newly grown leg in disbelief. He jumps in the air, exhilarated, and twirls in a ballerina-esque dance of pure joy]

[A new spotlight falls on the next capsule. The screens show an x-ray of a failing heart, and a woman who drinks a potion, labelled ELIXIR OF REPLENISHED ORGAN, and steps inside. The door opens and she walks out and checks her pulse. After a few moments she falls onto her knees, in prayer position]

[Third capsule. The screens show a breast cancer survivor drink a concoction labelled ELIXIR OF ENGORGED MAMMARY GLANDS and step in. When she emerges, she is newly endowed with enormous breasts]

[Fourth capsule. The screens display a lanky man. He steps out, now rippled with muscles. He strips completely nude and admires his own reflection, striking various bodybuilder poses]

[Fifth and sixth capsules open simultaneously. A woman and a man emerge, turn to each other and begin an acrobatic erotic dance]

[Final capsule. The screens show an elderly man, frail and nearing life's end, stepping in with the help of a walker. When the door opens, though he remains leaning on the walker, it is as if he is in his early twenties]

[The stage is flooded by dancers, with couplings – hetero and homo alike – as well as individuals showing off their newfound physical abilities]

[All dancers begin climbing on top of each other, at first to demonstrate physical prowess and acrobatic skills, then clambering, pushing and stepping on each other, to climb the highest]

[The human pyramid begins to collapse on itself as the curtains close and lights fade]

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## ACT II; PART II

### \* SETTLEMENT OF LOCKE, TOWN SQUARE, SIX MONTHS LATER \*

[On one side of the stage leaning against a moss-covered boulder, Aida sits huddled over a book, the lines of text scrolling upwards steadily as she reads. Once it stops scrolling, she turns the page]

[On the other side, a crowd of humans and a few Turbidian Masters feast and dance to the Voting Festival song in the distance. The backdrop screens show a 91% Vote in favour of increasing the cap on Thunium mining to 30% of reserves]

[Enter Turbidian Master ZHAVVORSA, who walks in the direction of the crowd but stops when they notice Aida. They observe her for a moment and then approach]

ZHAVVORSA  
Officer Desalegn,  
May I join your company?

AIDA  
[Looks up and smiles]

Only if, Master Zhavvorsa,  
You call me 'Aida' outside of duty.

ZHAVVORSA  
May I join you, Aida?

AIDA  
[Turns off and closes her book]

On this day of recreation,  
Your company would please me.

ZHAVVORSA  
[Bows slightly]

Your species is much gracious;  
I commend your hospitality.

AIDA

[Returns bow]

We're honoured to receive First Contact,  
And hope for mutual education.

ZHAVVORSA

[Sits down directly across]

Then how would you like to partake  
In a Turbidian tradition?

In which we each present inquiries  
In alternating succession.  
To be answered with just one word,  
In a singular expression.

Otherwise with no limitations,  
Optional explanation and one pass.  
The ultimate opportunity  
To any question ask.

AIDA

I'd be delighted.

ZHAVVORSA

I oblige you go first.

AIDA

[Thinks a moment]

How did you come by such propensity  
With the practice of chemistry?

ZHAVVORSA

'Design'.

Our compound eyes are capable  
Of polarization vision.  
And the science is taught from early age,

Entrenched in our socialization.

Should you not mind the repetition,  
I'd like to pose the exact same question.

AIDA  
'Everything'.

As a child I dreamed to understand  
The entire universe,  
And saw chemistry as the bridge  
Connecting all the sciences.

If chemistry was obligatory,  
What did you do normally?

ZHAVVORSA  
'Travel'.

Spacecraft operation  
And interstellar navigation.

AIDA  
[Surprised]

I was a pilot, too!

ZHAVVORSA  
[The corners of their lips lift]

And what made you so choose?

AIDA  
'Freedom'.

As a child, first travelling by air jet,  
And gazing through its window  
At our homes, our roads and borders  
Growing infinitesimally small,

I saw an invisible cage, escaped –

And my perspective forever changed.

[Shifts bashfully]

I guess in present time  
We're excluded from our preferred fields.  
Or was it once again obligation –  
What made you choose your occupation?

ZHAVVORSA

[Smiling]

'Liberty'.

To ascend beyond the reach  
Of daily realities;  
To see firsthand the Open Void  
And all its possibilities.

AIDA

Is 'Open Void' how you refer  
To what we understand as space?

ZHAVVORSA

Space?

[For a moment, the two stare at each other blankly, their heads tilted in the same direction. Despite the Turbidian's lack of pupils, their expressions are strikingly similar, as if a mirror image of the other's. They burst into laughter, Aida audibly so, Zhavvorsa silently yet with the same crinkled eyes, upwardly curved lips and a rhythmic shaking of the body]

AIDA

I mean, the universe.

ZHAVVORSA

There is no need to be embarrassed.

AIDA

I am not embarrassed.

ZHAVVORSA

'Lie'.

Surely, you've not forgotten:  
All neurons, our eyes detect.

AIDA

[Turns away, flustered]

Well, that is just unfair,  
Since your lies I cannot suspect.

ZHAVVORSA

Turbidians do not lie.

Each of us is capable  
Of neuroimagery.  
Subtle yet detectable,  
Lies increase prefrontal activity.

AIDA

[Slowly]

And would it be unethical  
To pose questions exploiting this fact?

ZHAVVORSA

'Both'.

As with all social constructs,  
Ethics are flexible.  
What constitutes 'Wrong' and 'Right' for one,  
For another is amenable.

AIDA

Why are you here?

ZHAVVORSA

'Service'.

To serve my world and queen,

And in history glorify Her reign.

On making first alien contact,  
What was your initial thought, reaction?

AIDA  
'Irrelevance'.

"It's only a matter of time",  
Our scientists for centuries forewarned.  
We were to accept, continue and strive  
For progress, as always planned.

[Grins]

But simultaneously, 'Lucky',  
To bear witness and participate.

Does it not cause grief to spend your life  
In constant servitude?

Our leaders devote their lives  
In our system of democracy –  
And are afforded no exemptions  
Nor material luxuries.

ZHAVVORSA  
'Irrelevance'.

Personal feelings matter not  
So long as the species survives.  
And even if they did,  
It is moot to wish otherwise.

Privileged ruling classes:  
A pattern transcending through time,  
It's how most societies exist –  
Always the same, in varying form.

AIDA  
[She struggles to her feet, agitated]

And what, to history just surrender?

[Begins to pace]

Breaking persisting patterns  
Is admittedly improbable.  
But just because it's happened thus far  
Doesn't render change impossible.

Add magnesium to air and heat  
And watch the combination set alight –  
All it takes is a single chance,  
One reaction to forever alter.

ZHAVVORSA  
Why does this topic cause you  
Such passionate distress?

AIDA  
[Blinks, taken aback]

'Fear'.

More than anything, than death,  
My fear is stagnation.  
That one day, I'll stop evolving,  
In one state doomed to be, forever.

The same applies to humankind.  
It may take several generations –  
Entire lives spent in waiting  
For collective adaptation.

But with time, we've learned and grown.  
Such is my faith within my species:  
Our most redeeming trait  
Lies in our capacity for change.

[Zhavvorsa stares at Aida in silence. Aida meets their gaze evenly]

ZHAVVORSA

I –

[They are interrupted as the lights flicker and fanfare music blasts to present the results of the latest Vote]

[Vote D48: A Vote to establish the mining of Thunium as a form of penal labour exclusive to perpetrators of the Capital Offence]

[Top Reasonings:

“YES: The severity of punishment is proportionate to the crime of causing mass harm, including deaths, injuries and planetary destruction, via distribution of fraudulent information in pursuit of financial profit. CORROBORATING EVIDENCE: The same punishment is applied to both perpetrators of the Capital Offence and conventional mass murder, while the average number of casualties compares 2256 to 1, respectively.”

“NO: To make any treatment that causes suffering or harm exclusive to prisoners constitutes cruel and degrading punishment. CORROBORATING EVIDENCE: Any extraction of natural resources that exceeds necessary and sustainable levels inflicts a traumatizing psychedelic crisis]

[Voting Participation: 79%]

[Result: 77.44% Yes, 22.56% No]

AIDA and ZHAVVORSA, in unison  
How it always begins.

[Both turn and look at each other in surprise. They lock eyes, intrigued, as the lights fade]

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## ACT III, PART I

\* NEWTOPIA, TOWN SQUARE -- SIX MONTHS LATER \*

[It is yet another picnic. Aida and Zhavvorsa lie comfortably -- remarkably at ease with each other -- side by side with Aida reading and Zhavvorsa seemingly asleep]

[The backdrop screen displays results of the latest Vote]

[Vote E74: A Vote to categorize Turbidian elixirs with demonstrated technological benefit as Universal Goods, available to all the Public]

[Voting Participation: 98%]

[Result: 94.23% Yes, 5.77% No]

AIDA  
Zhavvorsa.

ZHAVVORSA  
[Opens eyes]

Aida.

AIDA  
May I be honest, no reservations?

ZHAVVORSA  
[They sit up to face Aida, giving her their full attention]

'Always'.

AIDA  
After careful consideration,  
This conclusion have I drawn:  
The nature of our relationship  
Is fundamentally flawed.

ZHAVVORSA  
[Smiling]

Is this so?

AIDA

[Stands and begins to pace, as if making a presentation]

'Fact'.

You have visited my planet  
And been exposed to my culture.  
You observe all of our activities  
In both neurons and behaviours.

A one-sided exposé,  
Inherently unfair.  
To correct this grave inequity,  
There's much information you should share.

So today I ask that you grant  
All requests and inquiries,  
And demand that you satisfy  
My every curiosity.

It's really only fair.

ZHAVVORSA

'Granted.'

What would you first ask?

AIDA

Is it at all feasible  
To show me your vessel?

ZHAVVORSA

'Affirmative.'

AIDA

[Grins]

You've seen mine,

And so should show yours.

ZHAVVORSA

[Grins back]

Your argument is valid,  
Hold close and don't let go.

[Stands and pulls Aida close, grabbing her by the waist]

While ascending anti-grav beacons,  
It is prudent not to look.

[The two rapidly begin their ascent, as if flying. The backdrop screens show clouds passing down. Aida looks down and gasps. Her legs falter but she is laughing. Zhavvorsa tightens their hold on her, laughing as well]

I predicted you would look.

### \* TURBIDIAN SPACECRAFT \*

[They soar into the spaceship, several gates closing beneath them as they pass through, and remain floating midair as they reach the control room. Once the last doors have hissed and sealed, the pair fall to the ground, Zhavvorsa keeping Aida steady. They stand there for a moment, until the human is distracted by the craft's interior]

[The walls encasing the control room are transparent, offering a 360-degree view of outer space. It is empty except for a layer of interwoven branches which lowers from the ceiling and hovers in the air]

AIDA

Tell me, tell me, please,  
However does it work?

ZHAVVORSA

Turbidian crafts operate  
By synthetic telepathy.

[Guides Aida below the centre of the branches. One lowers itself in front of them and extends into a clear sphere with pulsing blue lights, encasing them. Once it

has sealed tight, it becomes weightless, with the pair now floating inside]

[Zhavvorsa pulls two small brown tendrils from the ceiling of the sphere]

Electrode sensors measure  
Electromagnetic activity.

The pilot only need concentrate  
On mental navigation.  
The craft responds to neural signals,  
Run on intent and deliberation.

Apply sensors and focus on the map,  
Conceiving the craft's location.  
Then imagine it now shifted;  
Slightly forward with great precision.

[The Turbidian places the tendrils on Aida's temples. The cabin darkens and is filled with a three-dimensional rendering of space. A speck of bright light pulses on the outskirts of Newtopia's atmosphere, depicting the Turbidian ship. Using their controls, Zhavvorsa highlights an empty space just in front of the speck. As Aida concentrates, the ship moves forward. She laughs in delight]

AIDA

[Pulls the tendrils off. The hologram disappears and the cabin lights turn on again]

And what of fuel limitations?

ZHAVVORSA  
'Irrelevant'.

It runs on stellar energy  
Captured in reserve aplenty.

[Grinning mischievously, Aida places the sensors back on her temples. The ship thrusts a bit farther, then to Newtopia's North Pole, covered in ice, before zipping towards the opposite end. She removes the sensors and exits the sphere, walking to the window to gaze at the glow of the Southern Lights of her planet]

ZHAVVORSA

[Following the human, they smile and lightly -- without having Aida notice -- strokes the ends of her hair]

How would you like to see  
Something of significant rarity?

AIDA

'Always'.

ZHAVVORSA

[Enters the control sphere. As they touch various controls the 3D map zooms out, more and more stars filling the room, until Newtopia and eventually its entire solar system becomes a miniscule speck. In the center of the map, two black holes circle each other in constant, steady rotation, the surrounding stars of each appearing to swirl as space-time is distorted]

[Zhavvorsa exits the sphere to join an awestruck Aida]

Behold the dance before they merge --  
A binary supermassive black hole.

[Riff from Supermassive Black Hole by Muse]

AIDA

[Beams at Zhavvorsa]

Now, in terms of cultural lessons  
This is what I request.  
A one-sided barrage of questions,  
But this time you receive no passes.

ZHAVVORSA

Consented.

AIDA

What do you do for recreation?

ZHAVVORSA

'Vicariism'

[Exits the tube. They bring out a shard of Thunium and puts it in Aida's hand. They pull two tendrils from the brown circle on their forehead and gently places them on the human's temples, where they begin to glow]

[The backdrop screens show various scenes from a convex, first-person perspective, as if filmed through a fisheye lens -- of a ship's liftoff, of a marketplace bustling with diverse aliens, of two Turbidian lovers, their limbs and tendrils entwined. Through it all, Zhavvorsa's voice is loud and clear]

Each of us is capable  
Of extracting our own memories  
To upload into The Hive Mind --  
Its access to all Turbidians, free.

[Still from a first-person perspective, the screens show different Turbidians, flashing from one to the next. We can see the flow of blood, leaving distinct patterns swirling in the brain and body]

It's more than simple knowledge,  
More than tribute to history.  
We can feel whatever we choose to feel,  
Can see what we choose to see.

AIDA  
[Faces Zhavvorsa]

And what do you see  
When you look at me?

ZHAVVORSA  
[The screens show Aida -- mostly a dark outline, yet with a swirl of blue, black, crimson and gold throughout her body]

'Intricacy'.

Life -- colour, vibrancy --  
With warmth, compassion, empathy,  
And rare complexity.

AIDA  
[Clears her throat and looks down at her feet]

Your lifespan and most common cause of death?

ZHAVVORSA

'Century' and 'Age'.

AIDA

[Lifts eyes]

And ... reproductive process?

ZHAVVORSA

'Fluid'.

[Aida blinks several times]

With the exception of our Queens

We are androgynous:

Without a single sex

Assigned from birth to death.

We are gender neutral

Until presented with a partner --

With reproductive organs determined

In reaction to the other.

Everyone has a receptacle

Inside which the male counterpart is put.

The pair move in back-and-forth action

Until egg and seed can meet.

AIDA

And the touching of lips ...

Is it at all significant?

ZHAVVORSA

A common show of affection

Used to develop social bonds

Between parents and their offspring

Or between potential mates.

[Pauses]

I perceive much activity  
In your caudate nucleus.

AIDA  
[Draws closer]

Can you hypothesize why?

[They kiss]

[After a few moments, Zhavvorsa pulls away and slowly bends down, as if stretching to reach their toes. They lie down and curl into the fetal position. When they rise again, they shed a layer of skin to reveal a female body]

AIDA  
[Confused]

I thought you were supposed to change  
In reaction to me?

ZHAVVORSA  
[Looking down at her new body]

We change in response to hormones  
And not anatomy.

AIDA  
[The music stops and for a long moment, Aida stands silent]

That ... would explain a lot.

[The music starts again as Aida takes Zhavvorsa by the waist, kissing her deeply. They slowly lie on the ground where Zhavvorsa spins them over, now straddling Aida. The pair hold hands and Zhavvorsa lifts herself in the air. They begin a dance -- a visual representation of sensuality, mutual exploration and reciprocity -- taking turns lifting each other. When the music stops they join in embrace, Zhavvorsa pressed against Aida, her head thrown back, Aida lifting Zhavvorsa's thigh high against her hip]

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## ACT III, PART II

### \* SETTLEMENT OF LOCKE, TOWN SQUARE -- SIX MONTHS LATER \*

[The stage is dark. The backdrop screens flicker on to show an enormous mine. With chained ankles, men and women in black dig into the ground. One man is forced into the driver's seat of a crane attached to a giant drill. After struggling in futile to open the door, he takes a deep breath and presses the control. As the drill descends, he slumps in his seat, screaming and convulsing]

[As the screens continue a montage of different prisoners, a spotlight turns on to reveal a dancer, painted black and contorted into a ball. As they unfold their limbs and rise to their feet, we see the other side for their face and body is painted with a psychedelic pattern of colours. They begin to sing in a throaty voice, their sex difficult to distinguish]

SPEAKER

We must, we must remember  
The chains, the noose, the lash,  
The guillotine, the Iron Maiden,  
Brands burned upon the flesh.

Never let us forget  
Human rights once ripped asunder.  
Limbs torn apart by dogs,  
Bodies packed in gas chambers.

Remember solitary confinement,  
Remember systemic rape.  
Remember 12-year-old boys,  
Small bellies full of sperm.

Remember all the travesties,  
Each one back then a norm.  
Their horrors clear as day today,  
Yet once to standard practices conformed.

No matter how wicked,  
However heinous the crime,  
Remember that our own morals

Evolve with passing of time.

Since we made the mining  
Of Thunium a penalty,  
We've observed causal reactions,  
Its harms lain plain to see:

Among the Capital Offenders,  
Insomnia skyrocketing,

[Another spotlight shines to reveal a person next to them, also contorted with one side painted black, who unfolds and stands up. Their other side is also painted with bright swirling colours, completely unique from the first pattern. They hold the first speaker's hand and join them]

Violence for centuries unseen,

[Another light reveals several contorted and painted individuals who rise, hold hands and sing]

Suicide rising at rates alarming.

[More light, more people]

Retributive justice,  
When it claims so many lives,  
Is cruelty begetting cruelty  
And cannot be justified.

[All those standing gather together and lift one another, so that they compose the profile view of a human head, the lips of which move in sync with the lyrics]

To ever permit group suffering  
With passive observation  
Is to revert to our old apathy  
Before our Interstellar Expansion.

If there's ever a general need,  
A dependence upon a substance,  
The Public should each of us contribute  
And help secure its acquisition.

[A spotlight falls on the other side of the stage to reveal another gender-ambiguous speaker]

SPEAKER

The rise in self-inflicted deaths  
Among the criminal party,  
While certainly unfortunate  
And invoking sympathy,

May surely be offset  
By the reality  
Of the potential of Thunium,  
Its benefits lain plain to see:

Soaring citizen satisfaction  
And economic productivity.  
And quite unexpectedly,  
An exploding art industry.

[The light falls on a person next to them, who rises, joins hands and sings]

And most of all, above all else,  
The eradication of disease

[More light, more people]

And of the unsightliness of aging --  
What we mortals have always dreamed.

[The light extends to show many dancers, making the second crowd larger than the first. Together, they form a second speaking head]

Yet to extract it from our planet  
Provokes painful hallucinations.  
Why not leave the task to those who harmed us,  
As a fitting condemnation?

[More dancers enter to join the second group, crowding around the giant head and pushing the first group off the stage]

They never gave pause to care,  
When they hurt thousands for compensation.  
And if they know the law when they break it,  
That's implicit mutual agreement.

[More dancers join and continue to push the first crowd]

We could stop progress in the name  
Of vague notions of morality.  
Or we could push the very bounds  
Of our own mortality.

[The crowd grows larger and larger]

But no need to be so heartless --  
I propose we provide these offenders  
With a means to manage their distress,  
With Dopamine Elixirs.

[The first group disappears from view and the now-dominant crowd erupts in cheer and dance]

[Enter Captain Brooke. She stares at the celebrating crowd, shaking her head, and drapes a hand over her face. The crowd, still cheering and dancing, exit the stage]

[The music changes to a light and flitting melody as Benjiro enters the stage, not disturbed by the debate as his captain is. He approaches Brooke from behind and takes a deep breath before speaking]

BENJIRO

Cap ... Brooke, a moment please.

[Brooke turns around, brows raised at the use of her first name]

BENJIRO

I was hoping you would join me  
For an important discussion.  
For guaranteed privacy,  
I've booked a Cavern Reservation.

BROOKE  
Certainly, I'd love to.

BENJIRO  
[Dumbstruck]

You would?

BROOKE  
Yes, and I'll add that you are brilliant.

BENJIRO  
[Continues to stare with wide eyes, blinking in disbelief]

I am?

BROOKE  
Of course, as First Officer,  
I expect no less of you.  
In these troubled times,  
Let's gather the old crew.

BENJIRO  
[For an awkward moment, he says nothing. Then he clears his throat and regains  
official composure]

Aye, Captain.

### \* RESOURCE CAVERN \*

[The Cavern has been transformed into a sacred space, furnished with lights,  
several different religious icons, incense and a single large cushion]

[The Seekers are gathered in a circle]

BROOKE  
When the solution is the problem,  
When the snake consumes its own tail,  
When the answer contributes to the cause --  
A systemic loop prevails.

BLAKE

Self-perpetuating pigshit.

BENJIRO

With such a list of benefits,  
With so much to gain in trade,  
With unprecedented luxuries,  
The Public is difficult to persuade.

LINLEY

We could always emphasize  
The uncertain and unknown.  
How we lack long-term observations,  
Yet too quick to trust have grown.

The Elixirs are still mysteries,  
Still substances we don't understand.  
And they yet remain aliens,  
Perhaps with our own enslavement planned.

What do we really know about  
These so-called miracle potions?  
They could contain molecular robots --  
Some sort of alien latent poison.

BLAKE

[Rolls eyes]

Straight out of a sci-fi comic.

TWYFORD

[Lists off her fingers]

... Sentient planets.  
First alien contact.  
Impossible potions.  
Did you seriously just say that?

[They hear a sudden noise. Something -- or someone -- is in the Cave with them, which by law should be empty for the duration of their Reservation. Pulling their blasters out, the Seekers go to investigate, Brooke and Benjiro leading the way]

[The Seekers come upon one of the Turbidians -- wearing a metallic armoured vest and lowered to their first pair of knees, as if prepared to pounce]

[Instinctively, Benjiro steps in front of Brooke, half raising his blaster. The alien rushes forward, gracefully diving into a handstand and wrapping their legs around Benjiro's neck. We hear a crack as Benjiro drops to the floor]

BROOKE  
Ben!

[She shoots her blaster at the Turbidian. With remarkable speed, the alien dodges and again dives headfirst, swinging their legs to wrap around Brooke's neck. In a smooth motion, Brooke dives forward so that the pair fall, a jumble of limbs rolling to the ground, the Turbidian's back ending flat on the floor. Brooke rolls them -- legs over head -- onto their face, then swings behind and wraps her arms around their neck in a choke]

BROOKE  
This is where you disclose your business here,  
In the cave you swore to have forgotten.

[Tended to by Chief Medic Isaac and Nurse Linley, Benjiro groans, injured but alive]

Ben! Oh, Ben.

[Blake steps forward and puts her knee on the Turbidian's torso, pinning them down to free Brooke, who rushes to Benjiro]

BLAKE  
Speak or I'll have the distinct pleasure  
To try history's longest vivisection.

[The alien struggles, and Blake puts more pressure on them]

TURBIDIAN INTRUDER  
A vital resource without which  
The foundation will wither, crumble, fall.

[Suddenly, the alien gasps and falls to their knees. There, they sway for a mo-

ment, then collapse to the ground. They do not move again]

[For a long moment, the Seekers stare in silence]

BROOKE

Seekers, with me now, and bring the body --  
It's time to make a call.

\* SETTLEMENT OF LOCKE, STATE HEADQUARTERS \*

[The remaining Masters of Potions work diligently, aided by human assistants, hands flying across each chemistry station. The atmosphere is symbiotic and amicable, both species engaged in a pleasant dance. After concocting and bottling each new potion, they place it in a box which begins to churn out exact replicas on a conveyor belt, with both container and liquid content]

[The doors slide open. The Seekers barge in, Benjiro in a neck brace yet on his feet, and, with the exception of Aida, pull out their blasters]

AIDA

Zhavvorsa!

[Frowning, Linley turns and stares at Aida]

[In uniform motion, the rest of the Turbidian Masters, with the exception of Zhavvorsa, slide into their natural crouching states, prepared to pounce]

ZHAVVORSA

[Stepping between their colleagues and the Seekers]

No!

[The Turbidians do not move, but remain in crouching position. Zhavvorsa turns to face the Seekers]

May we ask with respect, dear Officers,  
What we might do for you?

BROOKE

You might disclose information  
As to what a member of your team

Was doing in our Resource Cavern --  
What you once called the Cave of Swollen Dreams.

And why they would commit assault  
Against our First Officer.  
For the reason behind these events  
You will now provide an answer.

ZHAVVORSA  
We know nothing of this cavern  
Of dreams, of which you just spoke.  
But nonetheless assure you  
Our kind is nonviolent unless provoked.

LINLEY  
[Points his blaster at Zhavvorsa]

“Nonviolent”! What a joke!  
Don’t believe their lies, their venom.

AIDA  
We raised our weapons first.  
Captain, I believe them.

LINLEY  
Would you stake your life?

AIDA  
[Fiercely]

Yes.

BROOKE  
And the lives of all Newtopians?

AIDA  
[In a whisper]

Earth help me, yes.

BROOKE  
[To Zhavvorsa]

Though true we raised weapons first, the question  
Of your presence in the Cavern remains.

ZHAVVORSA  
Neither intentions nor significance  
Are we able to explain.

But this we know for sure --  
For Class 3 Civilizations,  
An attack against one is sufficient  
To justify full retaliation.

This is what we propose --  
A diplomatic invitation.  
Let us all travel to our planet  
And conduct a joint investigation.

BROOKE  
Our decision will be made  
As always -- with sage counsel.

[One by one, each Seeker projects the recordings from their PODs, together creating a multi-view replay of the incident in the Cavern, which plays on the back-drop screens]

[The centre screen shows the Council of Nine, its members unrecognizable for their appearance of youth]

Vexation and dismay surrounds  
This unexpected scandal.

While difficult to accept the words  
Of those with uncertain machinations,  
We must nonetheless trust them, if we wish  
To join this Galactic Federation.

Hear our collective advice,  
A policy of diplomacy:

Send forth our best and brightest  
And hope for resolved harmony.

[The screens fill with the most popular submissions from the population:

["Find the truth."]

"Seekers, we need you once more."

"Find out for us."

"Go find out!"

"Please."]

[The screens fade to black]

BROOKE

[Turning to face her crew]

There may be traps and unknown perils  
To uncover this mystery.  
I won't ask you to uproot all,  
To again leave your families.

BENJIRO

I knew what I signed up for,  
The burden's all of ours to bear.  
Danger is no stranger, and...

[Looks directly at Brooke]

My family is right here.

[One by one, the Seekers begin holding hands. Dancers, representing the general Public, enter the stage from both sides to join them]

ALL

Lift the veil and dispel the mist,  
The truth we'll track and sleuth.  
We exercise our most basic right,  
We demand the truth!

\*\*\*\*\*

## ACT IV; PART I

### \* SPACESHIP UNITY 10 \*

[The entire stage is pitch black. The screens show Unity's interior and exterior]

[In the ship, the Turbidians and Seekers sit in tense silence, strapped in securely. In the cockpit, Aida manoeuvres the landing. The centre screen shows the pilot's view as they hurtle into the atmosphere of a brown planet]

[The terrain is barren and treacherous, covered with craters -- Unity is headed towards the largest of them. At the edge of the planet's stratosphere hovers a fleet of uniform spacecrafts, from which hundreds of thousands of Turbidians beam up and down]

[As they descend, we see that the aliens have carved a concave city into the natural crater. With the exception of a single, circular patch of green in the centre, everything is brown and covered with giant translucent domes -- an overwhelmingly populated urban city]

[The coordinates on the pilot's screen leads them to the largest dome, on top of which various spaceships are parked. The screens fade to black as Unity lands on this alien parking lot]

### \* TURBIDIAN VISITOR STATION \*

[There is a gate with a line filled with various alien species -- mostly humanoid, several insectoid, one amoeboid. The Masters lead the Seekers, bypassing the line and going through the gates until they reach an elevated platform. On top stands a smiling Turbidian]

#### TURBIDIAN TOUR GUIDE

With great gaiety I greet you,  
With much joy and great privilege.  
As a Galactic Mandatory Tour guide,  
Your safety and learning, I will pledge.

At the end of our excursion  
Our laws you'll each be prompted to agree.  
Refusal returns you to this station,  
Consent grants free mobility.

[All lights except a spotlight on the platform turn off. The backdrop screens show a third-person view of a circular platform separating from the roof and descending]

Behold below, Khanaan,  
The capital planetwide city  
Of the Craterman kingdom,  
In its twenty thousandth-year glory.

The oldest of seven worlds,  
The first to use Planetary Domes.  
The epicentre of our kingdom,

[As we draw closer to ground level, we see Turbidian citizens in the midst of their daily routines. A staggering percentage are hooked to their virtual Hive Mind, billions of their glowing tendrils twinkling together like starlight]

To twenty billion turbidians a home.

Who enjoy the highest life expectancy,  
Our greatest collective achievement;

[The video stops moving downwards and starts to move forwards, exiting the dome through a connecting tunnel]

And the second largest economy --  
Our main export virtual entertainment.

[They exit the tunnel and are welcomed by open land with lush greenery and waterfalls]

As with most Federation members,  
A democratic monarchy.

[The tour moves around the circumference of this land, giving a 360-degree view. As we turn round the bend, we see in its centre an enormous structure -- a building with ancient walls and columns and a metal convex roof shining brightly in the light]

Behold the Garden Palace,

Home to the Imperial Families.

Upon whom we bestow the luxuries  
Of disproportionate space and nature,  
In exchange for their burden of ruling --  
A fair sociopolitical structure.

And we, the Civilian Body,  
Are in turn guaranteed  
Justice and protection,  
And provision of all our basic needs.

Of shelter, food, and health,  
Of education and recreation --  
Safe and free from any stress or concern  
Of planetary operation.

It's ultimately with us Civilians  
Where you can find true sovereignty:  
We proudly possess the power  
To choose the Ruling Family.

Throughout the Federation we're renowned  
For our system of transparency,  
And boast the highest Voter Turnout  
In the entire galaxy.

We are obliged for your patience  
As we thus conclude our tour,  
And now request telepathic consent  
To legal compliance ensure.

[There is a giant wall covered with alien inscriptions and the same brown circles on each Turbidian's foreheads. Tendrils sprout and attach themselves to each Seeker's temples, and the centre backdrop screen shows a scrolling translation. Once there are no more words to scroll, the tendrils retract into the wall]

And now that we possess  
Agreement clear and explicit,  
We may lead you to the Palace  
For your diplomatic visit.

[The backdrop screens show a first-person perspective as the platform draws steadily closer to the palace]

\* GARDEN PALACE, THRONE ROOM \*

[The interior of the palace is covered with greenery, with fantastical flowers and natural crystals. Unlike in the residences outside, there are no Thunium crystals to be seen. On an elevated platform sits Queen Darneesa, surrounded by attendants. The Turbidians Masters prostrate themselves onto their topmost knees, and the Seekers follow example, kneeling]

ZHAVVORSA

Your Radiance, we bring You  
A matter of great gravity.  
We --

QUEEN DARNEESA

[She raises a hand and Zhavvorsa falls silent]

We are made shocked, aghast, appalled,  
By such blatant discourtesy.  
Though not our usual ambassadors,  
We should not deny formalities.

Though admittedly a Class 2 species,  
These are most valued trade partners.  
Why to the Interspecific Games  
Should we not an invitation proffer?

[The Seekers look at one another, bewildered and wary]

BROOKE

With all respect... "Your Radiance",  
We did not travel here for games.

ATTENDANT

They are much more than merely games,  
But a standard in the Federation:  
It is on species' capabilities  
Which they base a weighted voting system.

[The centre screen shows a chart of various planets and their rankings, while the other backdrop screens depict scenes from past games. They show various alien participants racing, engaging in close combat, and standing victorious in front of cheering crowds]

Deciding Member Planet influence,  
They are part diplomatic tradition.  
And part interspecific bonding  
Via friendly competition.

Of course, as a Class 2 species  
Humans are under no obligation.  
Yet participation is essential  
To join the Galactic Federation.

QUEEN DARNEESA  
Come, deny Us not Our desire  
To see beloved, hallowed tradition,

To symbolize and celebrate  
Mutual beneficial relations.  
Your concerns We shall address afterwards --  
We promise upon Our divine name.

BROOKE  
[For a moment, she stares at the alien queen]

... With respect, may we inquire  
As to the nature of these games?

ATTENDANT  
Testing physical reflexes and strength,  
Requiring endurance, agility,  
Challenging comrade co-operation,  
Gauging observation and strategy,

[The screens show the aerial view of a square arena rearranging itself into five trajectories -- resembling to those of League of Legends and Defense of the Ancients. The map divides into smaller windows which show first-person perspectives travelling through each path, with varying terrains. The top, centre, and

bottom paths are unobstructed, while the two lanes surrounding the centre are muddled with what appear to be bare white trees]

The Games take place within an arena  
Divided in territories.  
Each team possesses Markers --

[The screens display closeups of two circular pads -- one flat and one with a sphere embedded in the centre, pulsating with light]

Five in their base and one on their bodies.

The objective is to hit these with Orbs,  
Projectiles which launch in straight direction,  
Which require 10 pulses to recharge,  
And return to their point of origin.

Hit a player's Marker to freeze them,

[Screens display two aliens. One hits the other with their Orb, freezing them for one light pulse. They hit them again, this time stunning them for two pulses]

Stun duration increasing exponentially.  
Infiltrate the opponent's base

[Travels from one end to the opposite -- where there is a giant pad on the wall]

And hit the End Marker for victory.

[Screens - light in centre of each territory]

Each side has three protective structures

Which render stun durations shorter,  
And which -- while in their home territory --  
Recharges each player's Orb much faster.  
If Markers on all three are struck

These benefits are nullified.  
Yet the structures remain invulnerable  
Should an unstunned home player be nearby.

Finally, regarding physical damage,

There is no reason for worry:  
All trauma, including death,  
Can be reversed if done immediately.  
Do we have your consent?

[The Seekers look at each other uncertainly. Brooke nods curtly. Grimly, the crew nod back]

BROOKE  
Yes.

QUEEN DARNEESA  
Marvelous! Let us play and bear in mind  
Competing should further our acquaintance,  
And incite neither insult nor outrage,  
Nor, as on primitive planets, violence.

[Attendants surround the Seekers, equipping them]

ATTENDANT  
We provide non-telepathic species  
With communication devices --  
As well as time and targets  
Suggested for strategy and practice.

[A thin red light draws a line across the stage, separating the aliens from the Seekers]

Proceed to this point when prepared  
To begin the Interspecific Game.

[The platform beneath the Seekers elevates and the rest of the stage darkens. The backdrop screens show a 2D map with a cluster of lights in one corner, each light depicting a player]

**\* GAME ARENA \***

[The humans move around. Once they've determined whose light is whose, they practice hitting the targets and then take turns freezing one another]

BROOKE

Veterans, to my right by rank,  
Newest soldiers, across by name.

[Benjiro Sara, Blake Morgan, Linley Yamaguchi and Cedric Chan stand next to her. Across them, Twyford Atif, Aida Desalgn, Sonny Darling and Isaac Rivera face them]

Divide into five units,  
Fireteam 2 commanded by Sara.  
Sara: cover the bottommost ground  
With Atif and Rivera.

Your lane's terrain is roughest and the longest,  
Mind the bend and tread carefully.  
Darling and Desalegn,  
Form Fireteam 1 under me.

Megan: take centre lane as our Guard,  
The shortest, a strategic key.  
Never leave your structure's vicinity,  
You will play defensively.

Supporting from above and below  
Are Chan and Yamaguchi:  
In the obstructed paths as Sentinels,  
You will listen and move quietly.

Stay alert and attentive,  
Of your surroundings constantly aware.  
Recall all your physical training,  
And attack with certainty and care.

Risks and outcomes always calculate,  
Opportune moments observe and choose.  
And above all else, remember:  
To panic, in games or life, is to lose.

[The stage is covered in a red light. White curtains fall and divide the stage into five sections]

[The Seekers split up and begin jogging in place. On the backdrop screens, their respective dots begin moving across the map]

[Section 1:

A black rectangular prism -- one of the protective monoliths -- rises from the ground under a blue spotlight. Brooke signals silently and Sonny remains behind]

[Brooke and Aida press on. A blue spotlight falls upon them as their dots on the map cross the midpoint, into hostile territory. The enemy's monolith rises and they approach it cautiously. As they get within firing distance, a pair of orbs shoot from above and hit their markers, freezing them for a moment, and two Turbidians jump from the trees. Now unfrozen, Brooke and Aida fire their orbs, but miss and get frozen once more. The aliens draw closer, attacking, and the Seekers retreat]

[Behind at the monolith where Sonny stands guard, a Turbidian jumps from above. He spins out of reach, moving away just in time. The alien attempts to strike him continuously, one attack after another, but he gracefully evades them. The enemy dives into a handstand and aims a kick at Sonny's head, which the human blocks, and simultaneously shoots at his marker. Sonny is frozen for a second. He dodges a second shot but takes a kick to the side and is frozen again. He moves discernibly slower and is stunned easily for a third time. The alien turns towards the monolith and takes aim. At the last second, Sonny throws himself in front of the monolith, getting frozen once more. The Turbidian spins and with a vicious kick sends his body flying out of the way, and hits the monolith's marker. The light loses its blue hue and the alien runs in the direction of its teammates. After eight seconds, Sonny is unfrozen. He shakes his head, climbs to his feet and follows, holding his side]

[Section 2:

Behind a white tree, Cedric waits in hiding, listening intently with his eyes closed. His eyes snap open and Brooke and Aida fly past, the Turbidians close on their trail. He ambushes them, kicking one to the ground then tackling the other, and his teammates close in, both stunning the enemies from a distance. The third Turbidian attacks from behind, freezing Aida. They fire at Brooke who rolls away. Sonny joins them from behind and returns fire. The three Seekers take aim and freeze the aliens again and again]

[Section 3:

At the second monolith, Blake walks towards a white tree at the edge of her pathway. She touches it lightly, then smacks it hard on the side. She jumps and hangs for a few moments from a branch. It does not wobble. She walks away then runs back, climbs high and waits]

[An orb shoots at her from across -- the Turbidians are in the branches as well. Blake lets her body fall -- almost sleepily -- and catches a lower branch. She swings herself onto a higher level and targets where the orb came from. Three aliens disperse from their hiding spot, shooting. She is an acrobatic wonder -- spinning, jumping, weaving through the branches, dodging shots and returning fire. By the time she has stunned all of them nine times, she casually leans against a tree and waits, counting the pulses. When they unfreeze, she shoots them again for the tenth time and waits once more, sitting down comfortably]

[Section 4:

Linley waits alertly behind a white tree -- vigilantly looking around and above, and at the 3D map for his teammates' positions]

[Section 5:

At the third monolith, Benjiro makes a silent gesture and Twyford stands guard as the others move forward without her]

[As Benjiro and Isaac nearly reach the midpoint, they slow down and lower their centre of gravity, moving with their backs to each other. A pair of orbs hit their markers from above and two Turbidians jump from the trees, flying towards them. Instead of moving out of the way, the two men stand their ground and catch each alien by a limb. The Seekers pivot and fling their opponents away, and the Turbidians somersault onto their feet. They charge each other headfirst and engage in close combat. Little by little the Seekers retreat, drawing their opponents close to the back of the stage]

[Back at the monolith, an enemy drops from above Twyford and she spins, throwing them over the shoulder. She pounces on them and the Turbidian grabs her by the head with their feet and throws her over in turn. The pair begin to grapple on the ground, their strength and speed relatively matched]

[Twyford and her opponent roll away from each other and onto their feet, panting. The Turbidian circles Twyford like a predator and the human rotates in the same position, always facing her foe. The alien feints reaching for her arm then tackles her low -- and Twyford pulls her feet from underneath herself, dropping her weight on their back and flattening them. She chokes them by the neck and rolls like an alligator onto the ground, where she remains until the Turbidian grows still]

[Automatically, the limp alien body begins to float upwards and is lifted from her grasp and out of view. Twyford lays there for a moment, then checks her teammates' positions. She gets up and runs in place, her dot heading towards the rest of her Fireteam]

[Once Benjiro's and Isaac's dots move farther into the Seekers' territory, Linley ambushes the Turbidians from behind, immobilizing one for a moment and cutting off the road behind him. He makes a kick at their head but they are unfrozen and dodge it. The two lock in a one-on-one fight, kicking and evading. The other alien jumps and kicks Isaac with both feet, sending him flying into a tree and stunning him twice. Benjiro chokes him from behind but gets flipped on his back. He pivots his body, swinging his legs, sweeps the Turbidian off their feet and shoots them. They dodge his second shot, rolling onto their feet, shoot him and charge forwards. Benjiro takes two strikes to the head but parries a third and elbows them in the face repeatedly]

[Twyford joins them from behind. Kneeling on the ground, she snipes the aliens twice from a distance. She misses on the third round and they spin and shoot Benjiro and Linley midair. As soon as they land on their feet they somersault away from Twyford's orb. One tackles Benjiro and they begin to grapple; the other freezes Linley and picks him up, using him as a shield as they approach Twyford. She keeps shooting and hits them in the head with her orb, then scrambles to her feet. In the same moment, Benjiro immobilizes his opponent and rushes to help her. The Turbidian throws Linley's frozen body at Twyford, who grabs him and rolls over, laying him on the ground, and hovers over him protectively. Just as the humans and alien are about to clash, the latter is frozen -- Twyford and Benjiro turn to see Isaac, clutching his side and smiling weakly. They rush forward to support him, and are joined by an unfrozen Linley]

[In all the sections except for Blake's, the Seekers catch their breath]

BROOKE  
Pincer manoeuvre!

[Everyone, again except for Blake, start running. Their dots move across the centre screen, converging on the middle lane. Once they reach Blake's position, the curtains separating the stage lift]

BLAKE

[As her teammates join her, she stands up, stretches in exaggeration and dusts herself, grinning]

What took you so damn long?

[The others laugh and whoop, a few shaking their heads. Brooke smacks her upside the head then pulls her into an affectionate headlock. The rest of the group join them, slapping Blake on the back]

TWYFORD

Does anyone else feel like a victim  
Of gross underestimation?

BROOKE

Time for a Counter-offensive,  
To punish miscalculation.

[They all run in formation. Deep in enemy territory, they spot the now unfrozen Turbidians charging towards them. The Seekers stand their ground. When they clash, six of the aliens focus their attacks on Blake and Brooke. The other three form a defensive line, isolating the two Seekers from the rest of the team]

BROOKE

[She fends off two attackers, kicking one behind their lower knee. She takes a blow from the second but spins in the same direction and rolls away. She runs, her face bleeding, and the two Turbidians go after her]

All hands assist Megan!

[The other Seekers obey and run towards Blake -- except for Benjiro, who immediately chases after Brooke's attackers. Together, back to back, they fight]

[The remaining four aliens and Blake attack each other relentlessly. Blake strikes one down, takes a kick to the face from another, twirls midair and rolls away. She blocks another kick and punches the offender down. Both human and Turbidians

are constantly rolling, cartwheeling and somersaulting, looking for all their physical differences as if they are the same species, engaged in a martial-arts dance]

[The other Seekers work together to immobilize the defensive line]

[Once the Turbidians have been frozen or incapacitated, they all sprint deeper into Turbidian territory. Once they reach the wall, Blake takes aim and fires at the End Marker, ending the game]

[While the rest cheer and jump on Blake in celebration, Brooke and Benjiro awkwardly stare at one another]

BROOKE

[She pulls Benjiro into a hug. He stands dumbfounded for a moment. Just as he puts his arms around her, she steps back]

A token of appreciation.

[She punches him in the gut]

And one for insubordination.

[She turns to join the group hug]

BENJIRO

[Holding his stomach yet smiling, Benjiro follows]

[The lights lose their red hue and the platform descends. The rest of the stage is lit again]

\* THRONE ROOM \*

[There is complete silence, with a break in the music]

QUEEN DARNEESA

Absurd, impossible, outrageous!

The little Humans dare -- you dare!

You are but a lowly Class 2 species

So this game does not even matter!

[Laughs hysterically]

You are a lesser species  
A nonsensical species -- a great jest!  
You attained interstellar expansion  
Before Planet-Species Symbiosis!

Imbeciles, you skipped a crucial step!  
By Galactic Law, you may be enslaved  
Without any legal repercussion --  
Too dumb to be worthy of protection.

[She takes deep breath and suddenly regains composure. The music begins again]

And so it shall be.

No more gentle benefactor,  
No more benevolent queen.  
No more guise or pretence,  
We shall do precisely what We mean.

We henceforth establish Newtopia  
Vassal state to the Craterman Kingdom --  
Sovereign yet expected to export  
All reserves of Thunium.

Attendants, hold the offending Humans  
Within Palace Species Exhibition,  
And give Counter Potions to the Masters,  
Along with laurels and compensation.

[An attendant gives each Master an elixir. They all drink it at once except for Zhavvorsa, who glances at Aida before drinking hers]

ATTENDANT

Selected for your uncommon levels  
Of affective empathy,  
In gaining trust and even affection,  
You rendered infiltration quite easy.

For far surpassing expectations,

For your fealty and your service,  
We offer each one of you a garden  
And rights to freely enter the Palace.

[A crowd of surrounds the Masters, tittering happily. Another group of attendants gently guide the Seekers to the other side of the stage]

AIDA

[She turns and rushes towards the queen, and the attendants form a wall between them]

Wait! Darneesa!  
If they're so empathetic,  
How could you have been so sure

That they would not betray you?  
Are you such a psychopath?  
Could you not consider that affection  
Might be a two-way street?

[Several attendants grab Aida, but Darneesa raises a hand and they let go]

QUEEN DARNEESA

Primitive, young and underdeveloped,  
You know nothing, and yet you bleat.

Every Turbidian prior to their birth  
Undergoes genetic modification  
The mere thought of betraying the species  
Triggers a lethal neural reaction.

[Aida falls silent, deflated. The attendants resume leading the Seekers away]

ATTENDANT

There is no reason for worry --  
Our system of incarceration  
Is among the very best,  
Praised for comfort and compassion.

ATTENDANT

[Pulls out a piece of white plastic]

If I may inquire, what is this here?  
It is a substance never before seen.

AIDA  
[Mechanically]

Very common in our world,  
That is polyethelene.

TWYFORD  
[She smacks Aida on the arm, then turns to the attendant]

If I may inquire, where did you acquire?

ATTENDANT  
From your repurposed ship,  
Dissected for parts that we may use.  
As with all Class 3 species,  
We advocate perpetual re-use.

### \* SPECIES EXHIBITION \*

[They have reached the prison. Once all the humans have entered, the Turbidians step out and the doors slide together and form a seamless wall. The back-drop screens change to show the audience what lies on the other side -- young Turbidian royals observing the strange aliens on display. They grow bored and walk away, leaving the Seekers unguarded]

[For a long moment they sit in silence. Isaac lies in fetal position, holding his side]

TWYFORD  
[Slowly, she rises to her feet. One by one, the rest of the crew stare up at her expectantly. In a melodramatic falsetto, she sings]

And that's why this planet sucks.

[Suddenly, they all break into hysterical laughter, which dies off as the stage and screens fades to black]

TWYFORD

Seriously, what do we do now?

\*\*\*\*\*

## ACT IV; PART II

### \* TURBIDIAN PALACE -- SPECIES EXHIBITION \*

[The Seekers' accommodations are pristine and comfortable. There is plenty of space, furniture to lounge on, food and water constantly replenished in individual dispensers, and even stationary exercise contraptions -- a hamster cage, for humans]

[In the centre, the humans huddle together. They all stand normally, their wounds apparently healed. Aida stares off distantly]

CEDRIC

Still restless legs, soothe itching hands,  
We must make our escape.  
They've left us alone and absent guards,  
Our plan we should formulate.

LINLEY

Break the chains, silence screaming souls,  
We must make our escape.  
An entire day, we've been far here too long,  
Our planet, our kind awaits.

BLAKE

[She laughs loudly and slightly maniacally]

You must be fucking kidding,  
As if we stand a single chance.  
There is no way off this rock,  
Understand your own circumstance.

BENJIRO

There may be too many dangers,  
Perhaps no possibility.  
Yet without attempt there remains no point,  
Life is not life, without liberty.

[Suddenly, a metal square falls from the ceiling -- the Seekers jump into combat stances, a few yelling in surprise -- and is followed by an armoured Zhavvorsa, who lands and rolls gracefully into standing position. Aida immediately races for-

ward and the two embrace]

ZHAVVORSA

After much intense debate  
I have arrived at this conclusion:  
Democracy likely holds the key  
To optimized evolution.

[All stare in stunned silence. Zhavvorsa continues]

A marked cultural schism  
Will change genetic sequence:  
Eons of repeated behaviours  
Will end in physical adaptation.

Two groups, the Ruled and Ruling,  
Subject to static conditions  
Will over time grow vastly different --  
An evolutionary division.

The current system jeopardizes  
Integrity of our genetic link.  
So in helping you, I commit no betrayal,  
My answer is to doublethink.

[The Seekers continue to stare. Blake breaks the silence]

BLAKE

Okay... This is all well and good,  
But some obstacles yet remain.  
How will we get off your planet --  
Is there a ship you can obtain?

ZHAVVORSA

I yet possess access to my craft,  
To which I can easily beam us up.  
All we need is to reach the open air,  
Which we'll reach through ventilation ducts.

[She walks away from Aida and pulls out a small grappling hook. She throws it up in the direction she came from, hooking it to the side of the grate]

[As Zhavvorsa makes to start climbing, Aida throws her arms around her from behind]

AIDA

I knew that it wasn't all a lie,  
That you wouldn't stop caring for me.

ZHAVVORSA

I know now I possess no other choice --  
Meeting you has altered me.

[She turns and they kiss deeply. The others shift awkwardly, several looking away, some smiling. Linley stares and crosses his arms]

[The Turbidian and human part. Zhavvorsa leads the way and begins to climb, and the rest follow]

[Lowering herself to her first pair of knees, Zhavvorsa navigates through the enclosed ducts comfortably. Aida is small enough to try and imitate her crouching gait, while the others crawl on all fours. The backdrop shows them making their way through the vents from several angles]

[When they reach a side opening, the Turbidian stops]

ZHAVVORSA

Until my express signal  
I would have you here remain.

[She pulls out a robe and puts it on. She jumps out and moves around the corner to check that the coast is clear. Just as she goes to clear the other side, she collides with one of the other Masters]

MASTER

Greetings, Master Zhavvorsa,  
I did not mean to frighten!  
I presume you are visiting, as I,  
To check on precious, awarded gardens?

ZHAVVORSA

Greetings, Master Shierakee,

How the Stars shine upon this hour!  
More than the whole garden I must confess,  
I checked on one particular flower.

SHIERAKEE  
[Stares intently]

Master, pardon me but you seem to be  
In a state of mental anxiety.

ZHAVVORSA  
Palace visits can be overwhelming --  
A state of neither interest nor worry.

SHIERAKEE  
[They pause, but then looks Zhavvorsa up and down and smiles]

And with closer look I now see  
You are once again gendered.  
Funny, we only returned yesterday!  
When did you have time to find new partner?

[For a long moment, Zhavvorsa does not answer. As she finally opens her mouth, all the lights start flashing. The tendrils from both aliens' foreheads extend to their temples and the backdrop screens flash images of each Seeker and their now empty enclosure. The montage and flashing stops and the tendrils retract]

ZHAVVORSA  
We should go our parting ways,  
In this state of emergency.

[She makes to pass Shierakee]

SHIERAKEE  
[They turn and block Zhavvorsa]

I believe we should remain together,  
Simply for sake of security.

ZHAVVORSA  
Two pairs of eyes perceiving same sight,

We would decrease search efficiency.

SHIERAKEE

A single view yet different perspectives,  
We may spot what the other cannot see.

ZHAVVORSA

[Pauses a moment]

You know I know that is not true reason --  
Comrade, speak with more veracity.

SHIERAKEE

I cannot help but find it all strange --  
Brain activity, remaining gender.  
Now we learn of prisoners escaped,  
Amongst them former, alien partner.

ZHAVVORSA

Master, come and think and reason,  
Look with your eyes and see.  
To betray our kind yet still stand breathing,  
You know is an impossibility.

SHIERAKEE

[Their voice loses its previous pleasant tone]

I do not question reason,  
I am questioning what I see.  
Though I cannot understand the logic,  
You must regardless come with me.

[They make to grab Zhavvorsa. Quick and fluid as water, Zhavvorsa dives, grabs hold of the other's neck with her thighs and brings them down. She squeezes until they stop moving]

ZHAVVORSA

[She goes back to the duct opening. One by one, the Seekers land on the ground, and she pulls out a large, thin black blanket]

It's wise to cluster and cover yourselves

In improvised disguise.  
Then grab what limb of mine you can reach,  
Cling close and we will begin to rise.

[They all huddle, grabbing what they can of the alien and wrapping the sheet over themselves. A few Seekers yell as they quickly soar through the air and into the Turbidian ship]

### \* TURBIDIAN CRAFT -- CONTROL ROOM \*

[Zhavvorsa moves beneath the hovering branches and the largest pulsating sphere lowers around her. She places its tendrils on her temples and the 3D map turns on. Aida pushes the others to follow and a sphere for each of them descends, suspending them midair]

[Zhavvorsa controls the speck of light representing the ship and highlights the human's planet. The backdrop shows their journey's progress]

[The Turbidian removes the tendrils and the spheres all recede]

BENJIRO

In shock that we really made it,  
And so grateful that you came through.  
Yet I cannot help but wonder --  
Zhavvorsa, what will you now do?

ZHAVVORSA

I confess for all my scheming,  
I did not quite expect  
To see it all go so smoothly,  
That we'd be met with such success.

I did not care to think of the future  
And cared only that Aida was not hurt.

TWYFORD

So much warmth and comfort  
To be found in those words.

[The others chuckle and walk to one side of the stage, pointing at and admiring the open view of space. Zhavvorsa takes Aida's hand and leads her to the other

side, and a curtain drops to separate them from the rest]

[They draw closer and begin a slow and sensual dance, spinning each other. They remove each other's clothing. The Turbidian lifts the human, wrapping her around her waist]

AIDA

[She presses her forehead against the alien's]

We could find a little farm,  
We could become partners, wives.  
We could settle down,  
We could share our lives.

[Zhavvorsa suddenly cries out and drops her. They both tumble to the ground]

[Aida scrambles to her feet and rushes to Zhavvorsa]

Zhavvorsa?

[She holds her partner in her lap. In her arms, Zhavvorsa gazes up at her]

ZHAVVORSA

'Beauty'.

[She falls very still]

AIDA

[Screaming]

Isaac!

[The medic rushes to her]

Help her, help me, fix it,  
Something's wrong, make it better please.

ISAAC

[Scans the Turbidian with his PODS]

There's no sign of life as I can detect --

Aida, I'm so sorry.

BLAKE

I can't imagine what happened,  
Why she would die so suddenly.

ISAAC

From what their queen explained, my best guess  
Is that something made them feel guilty.

[For a few long moments, no one says a word. The 3D map turns back on, and the speck of light changes colour and ripples through the entire map repeatedly]

LINLEY

It seems we have no means to land  
And we've reached the outskirts of our planet.  
So tell me, are we to hover here,  
To resort to a cannibal diet?

BROOKE

Desalegn, do you have a clue  
As to this vehicle's operation?

[Aida does not respond. Brooke picks her up onto her feet]

Aida, did Zhavvorsa ever tell you  
How to work the navigation?

[Aida nods slowly]

Then your mission here is entirely clear,  
To fly and land us safely.

AIDA

Yes, Captain.

[She walks beneath the branches and is encased in the centre sphere. She pilots the alien craft through Newtopia's atmosphere, but the descent grows more and more turbulent. Just as they are about to crash, the ship pulls up. The bottom hits the ground, sending the whole craft spinning as it finally lands upside down]

[Aida pulls off the tendrils and the spheres recede, sending them all falling to the former ceiling. Picking up reception, all their PODS light up and whirl]

BROOKE

[She runs off stage, speaking into her PODS]

The Seekers here to declare  
A state of emergency!

[One by one the crew follow her off stage, except Aida who remains on the ground. Linley backtracks and pulls her up and away by the hand, and the stage fades to black]

### \* TOWN OF LOCKE - STATE HEADQUARTERS \*

[The stage is divided into a small and large section, a residential bunk and the hallway outside. Inside the bunk Aida, now clothed, sits on a bed, her lap covered by a blanket. Linley hovers in the hall, pacing back and forth]

LINLEY

Now it's clear for me to see  
What she means to me.  
I thought time was without limit,  
Thought we'd be together eventually.

Yet while I was getting ready,  
This woman, she was changed  
By no other than an alien --  
The mere thought is so deranged.

All I need is another chance,  
A brand-new, fresh, clean slate.  
I can fix her, I can fix this,  
I know it's not too late.

[He pulls out a clear Elixir of Failed Remembrance, pours it into a cup and enters the bunk]

[Linley sits on the bed next to Aida]

Rest your weary eyes and sleep,

And get a little bit of peace.

[Aida makes no response or acknowledgement]

I know happiness seems impossible,  
Like there will never be another chance --  
But trust me when I assure you  
That you'll again laugh and sing and dance.

If they truly loved you,  
They'd only want the best.

[He places the cup in her hands]

Now drink the medic's concoction,  
I promise it'll help you rest.

AIDA

[After a moment, she takes the cup and gulps its contents down]

Linley, what are you doing here  
And why do I feel so terrible?

[Blake enters the stage. She stands awkwardly in the hallway in front of the bunk]

LINLEY

Do you not remember  
Saying how you felt ill?

AIDA

[She rubs her eyes and lies down]

Strange, I feel so tired,  
And can't seem to recall.

[Blake knocks and enters the room]

BLAKE

I came to check up on you,  
Aida, how are you doing?

AIDA

I think I may have the flu,  
I can't explain this pain I'm feeling.

BLAKE

[She stares for a long moment. She looks at Linley, the cup, then back at Aida, her eyes slowly widening in horror. Her voice is hoarse when she speaks]

Yes, the flu -- and what you need is sleep.  
Come Linley, let us leave her in peace.

[As soon as they exit and the curtains close behind them, she turns on Linley]

BLAKE

What have you done?!

LINLEY

I made things right.

[Blake stares as if seeing Linley for the first time]

Don't you, can't you see it,  
That she's better off this way?

Even if we had brought it back,  
Even if it had lived,  
Aida would have been ostracized --  
Certainly no way to live.

BLAKE

What pigshit are you spouting,  
When you and I are fully aware  
That when it comes to personal affairs  
Outsiders don't interfere nor care?

According to our Civil Rights  
Instilled due to human history which still haunts --  
So long as your choice does not harm another,  
You can do whatever the fuck you want.

LINLEY

All very good in theory  
Yet imperfect in practice.  
And you're naive to think society  
Would have left those two in peace.

She would have ended up in quarantine  
For fear of transmittable infections.  
And it would have taken generations  
Before complete, mainstream acceptance.

What I've done was to spare her  
From the memories and the pain.  
What I've given her is another chance,  
To start life once again.

BLAKE

It may be that we did not understand,  
That we fundamentally could not see.  
But to Aida, it clearly held meaning,  
Something to respect and let be.

Few things in life are worth  
Risking, forsaking all.  
To forget the pain is to forgo the joys --  
A decision which should have been her call.

LINLEY

[With a hardened voice]

This argument may have had a point  
Before the fact, not after.  
What's done is done, it can't be changed --  
And it doesn't even matter.

[Blake looks at Linley in silence and revulsion. As he turns to leave, Blake grabs his shirt and punches him in the face, knocking him down. Linley spits blood to the side, stands up and leaves. Blake stares after him, backs against the wall and slides down to the floor]

[Simultaneously, Blake and Aida hug their knees, becoming very small in the

fetal position, and disappear as the lights fade]

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## ACT V; PART I

### \* SETTLEMENT OF LOCKE \*

[The screens show a montage of footage showing what happened on the aliens' planet. On the stage, the humans are gathered with the Seekers and Council of Nine in the centre of the crowd]

BROOKE

Now it's clear for us to see  
They were never friends to believe.  
They thought us weak and simple-minded,  
Thought to exploit us easily.

They thought to use and to abuse us,  
To make us do their dirty work.  
They planned to control and to distract us  
And not mind which of us they hurt.

NINE ARBITERS

They thought to buy us off with comforts,  
To pacify us through our greed.  
Yet they cannot place a price tag  
On our rights, our sovereignty.

CITIZEN

I thought it too good to be true,  
All their promises and potions.  
So they were weapons of infiltration,  
To run and rig the system.

[One by one they start throwing elixirs in a pile on the ground]

CITIZEN

Volition is what makes us human,  
Having a choice is what makes us free.  
And we choose to struggle and to fight  
For our own liberty.

[Rows upon rows of blasters and armour slide onto the stage, and the people arm themselves]

ALL

We may be fragile creatures,  
But just challenge us and see  
How we'll fight to the very bitter end --  
This is our Propaganda of the Deed.

Try to conquer and divide us,  
To bring any of us to harm.  
Try to control and to subvert us,  
And as one we'll raise our arms.

We may not have nighttime vision,  
May lack retractable teeth or claws --  
But when we come together,  
You won't underestimate us for long.

[Everyone's PODS begin to glow and the backdrop displays various citizens and their physical and mental statistics, and one of the following labels: Strength, Speed, Accuracy, Support, and Strategy. Most of the Strengths are men, most Speeds women, and the other categories roughly equal]

Of our own advantages and weakness,  
Of our own statistics we are aware.  
We optimize this information  
And so invaders should beware.

Both conscious and quite confident,  
We are prepared for self-defense.  
And while our bodies may be delicate,  
We are armed and competent.

[Now all fully prepared, the humans line up facing the audience]

Try to control and to oppress us,  
Just challenge us and see  
We will fight to the very bitter end --  
This is our Propaganda of the Deed.

[A single Turbidian attendant descends. Unlike during First Contact, they remain within their protective sphere when they reach the ground]

ATTENDANT

On behalf of the Craterman Kingdom  
I offer sincere congratulations --  
For achieving certain prerequisites  
Set by the Galactic Federation.

Any species that can demonstrate  
Cognizance of its own oppression  
And the willingness to retaliate  
Must be exempt from exploitation.

By assembling together as you have,  
Prepared to fight and to defend,  
You're under protective legislation  
And so our relationship must end.

I also offer apologies --  
It was never malice, just commerce.  
And express hopes to reconcile  
And resume trade in the future.

BLAKE

And just like that, you'll leave us  
Without any confrontation?

ATTENDANT

We could continue to dominate  
But then would face economic sanctions.

So with this we bid you farewell  
And speedy evolutionary progression,  
And will attempt contact once more  
With your new, unbiased generation.

[They bow and ascend]

[The humans all look at one another, murmuring and chattering]

NINE ARBITERS

While we are still gathered here

There remains an issue to address --  
This sequence of events has shown  
We have room for social progress.

No matter how great the benefits  
To be reaped by the majority,  
There should never be a comfort  
At the expense of a minority.

And no matter the good intentions  
Of trusted authorities,  
We ourselves acknowledge  
No one is exempt from vanity.

So the Council of Nine Arbiters  
Declares our abdication  
After this Arbitration,  
Our final legislation:

Human society is henceforth  
Self-ruling and self-governing  
With the stipulation  
That no group is subject to suffering.

[They remove their robes]

ALL  
We embrace this social change  
With grace and swelling hearts,  
And for the progress of our species  
We will all each play our part.

[Everyone begins to remove their armour and put away their blasters]

CITIZEN  
I confess slight disappointment  
That we did not get to fight --  
While relieved we are all unharmed,  
We were eager to demonstrate our might.

CITIZEN

What should we do with pent-up energy  
Reserved for violent confrontation?

CITIZEN/FORMER ARBITER

Well, the ancient Bonobo primates  
Used coitus to diffuse tension.

[For a moment, there is silence. Then we hear armour drop to the floor with a clang as Brooke jumps on Benjiro, and the two kiss passionately, ripping each other's clothing]

[With their cue, the stage breaks into a giant erotic dance, with hetero-, homo-, and polysexual partners stripping]

ISAAC

Try to limit activity to two partners!

Most venereal diseases  
We've managed to eradicate.  
There's no need to try actively  
To new infections create!

[A nude Twyford shuts him up with a kiss and he responds keenly]

CITIZENS/FORMER ARBITERS

And so we'll dance and celebrate  
The Day of the Opposite of War --  
A day to shamelessly indulge in  
What our bodies were made for.

[They join in as well]

SEEKERS

[One by one, the Seekers come to the front of the stage, all completely nude, their hair dishevelled]

We learned a lot and had some laughs,  
But they couldn't make us slaves.

ALL  
Oh, no!  
No, they couldn't make us slaves!

\*\*\*\*\*

END

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