

The following is based on the confidential testimonies, transcripts, and videos provided by multiple U.S. government informants.

C.F.D. OPERATION CHARON X TRANSCRIPTION SELECTED COMPILATION

JANUARY 10, 2009

LOCATION: [UNDISCLOSED]

REF: 450, Pg.3

INTERVIEWER: [NAME REDACTED]

INTERVIEWEE: 100

[NAME REDACTED]

...The date is January 10th, 2009.
We are conducting a briefing...with
Astronaut 100. . . Now. Going back
a couple of years; You were... you
were killed in April of '05?

100

That's correct.

[NAME REDACTED]

You died in a-- in a plane crash.
Testing Air Force jet R-X34.

100

Correct--

[NAME REDACTED]

--and your immediate family is your
mother, Leah. Sister Kimberly.

100

Correct.

[NAME REDACTED]

Have you contacted friends or family
at any time?

100

No.

[NAME REDACTED]

Have you compromised this cover in
any way?

100

No.

LOCATION: [UNDISCLOSED]

REF: 451, Pg.45

INTERVIEWER: [NAME REDACTED]

INTERVIEWEE: 200

NOTE: [NAME REDACTED] is now briefing a second astronaut, 200. Briefings have been re-ordered throughout this document to best disseminate information.

[NAME REDACTED]

Allow me to take this moment to remind you that. . . per article nine-six-three point five -- which you signed; under no circumstances can you return to your previous life. You signed that away to C.F.D. years ago.

200

Yes sir-- Understood sir.

LOCATION: [UNDISCLOSED]

REF: 452, Pg.72

INTERVIEWER: [NAME REDACTED]

INTERVIEWEE: 300

NOTE: A third astronaut, identified as 300, is now being briefed by [NAME REDACTED].

[NAME REDACTED]

--if you choose to disregard your written agreement, the consequences for you and your former family are final.

300

I'm clear on this.

LOCATION: [UNDISCLOSED]

REF: 450, Pg.8

INTERVIEWER: [NAME REDACTED]

INTERVIEWEE: 100

[NAME REDACTED]

C.F.D. has been forced to reiterate these terms to you due to the extraordinary nature of your next mission. Operation Charon X. You are currently at Level 3 clearance-- you'll be briefed on mission goals and objectives in deep space post

(MORE)

[NAME REDACTED] (CONT'D)
PNR. Launch at twenty-one hundred
hours.

CUT TO BLACK:

2 HOURS LATER

CUT TO:

ARMSTRONG LAUNCH PAD. DAY.

A towering SPACE VESSEL lords over a launch pad, vibrating
with the colossal power of technological brilliance.

It stands 10 stories tall, 1 story wide. B2 stealth inspired,
its non-aerodynamic diamond shape is covered in anonymous
matte black materials. Below its cockpit window is inscribed:

CHARON X.

**Blue light explodes out of its quintuplet engines as the massive
vessel rises, LAUNCHING UPWARDS AT UNIMAGINABLE SPEEDS.**

5 Seconds Later: Vessel is a quarter mile high. Revealing
sand around the launch pad.

10 Seconds: Vessel is 5 miles high. Revealing a red desert
landscape around a launch facility.

20 Seconds: Vessel is 20 miles high. **Revealing the landscape
is not Earth. It is the surface of Mars.**

ASTRONAUT 100.

LOCATION: *IN CHARON X COCKPIT*

REF: 450, Pg.9

*We had on suits and helmets and were thirty seconds into
liftoff. Touch panels surrounding the pit were blinking and
whirling like galaxies against the black interior of the ship.*

Astronaut 200 was strapped in a chair to my left-- 300 to
my right--

I looked at my gauges and uttered--

100

--standing by for throttle up.

NOTE:

*

A bold and underlined **NAME** signifies the transcript is written
from that particular individual's POV.

*

*

*I heard the main engines flare, the vibration increased--
the vessel emitted a loud wale like groan...*

100

Control throttle up has initiated--
throttle up is go--

MISSION CONTROL (on radio)
Throttle up has commenced, copy.

ASTRONAUT 200. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: *IN CHARON X COCKPIT*

REF: 452, Pg.81

Vibration caused my helmet to oscillate against my ears.

The vessel rolled-- centrifugal force was disorientating--

200

Control-- Charon-- angular momentum
is nominal-- over--

MISSION CONTROL (on radio)
Copy.

ASTRONAUT 300. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: *IN CHARON X COCKPIT*

REF: 451, Pg.52

*It felt like a billion volts of electricity were coursing
through us.*

I looked to my left out the cockpit window. I started smiling.

300

She's barren as fuck and beautiful
as hell.

Out the window was the motherless, deserted planet known as
MARS. Its parched seas rolled by as our ship thundered away.

CHARON EXTERIOR. CONTINUED.

Purple electrogravitic exhaust thunders out of the main rocket
engines, illuminating a large **HUMAN SKULL** engraved on the rocket
motor. Beneath it in shock orange is emblazoned:

CORPS of the FLYING DEAD

In the background is the planet MARS. It grows smaller as
Charon completes a Gravity Assist Maneuver, catapulting out
of orbit.

ASTRONAUT 100. CONTINUED.LOCATION: *IN CHARON X COMMAND MODULE*

REF: 450, Pg.9

We watched Mars spin away counterclockwise as our ship thundered in a controlled corkscrew motion.

I looked down at my monitor-- our trajectory matched the projected telemetry.

100

Control-- Charon. Gravity Assist Maneuver is complete, TJI successful. Standby for main engines shutoff, over.

MISSION CONTROL (on radio)

Gravity assist complete, TJI success-- standing by.

300 looked back at Mars in the distance.

300

Who'd ever thought...in our life time that we'd launch from a base on Mars and head away from Earth instead of towards it--

200

--the same people who thought up a secret space force you have to die to enlist in.

300

Would you ever call it home?

100

A desert hole with recycled air, five foot ceilings, powdered steak, and sexually repressed women who lost their sex drive to space time?

300

Yes sir.

I contemplated his question-- and not for the first time.

100

I don't know what home is anymore.

My eyes locked on a timer that red 01:25 seconds as the main engines shut off. Space silence flooded the cockpit.

100 (CONT'D)

Control, Charon has shut down main engines.

(MORE)

100 (CONT'D)

We're flying high at a hundred and
twenty-three thousand miles and
counting.

We unhooked our seat belts, and floated free in the cockpit.
The communication monitor clicked on showing Mission Control
and an unnamed male MISSION SPECIALIST in front of camera.

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)
Main engines shut down, roger. ...uh--
Charon... standby... [NAME REDACTED]
has requested air time. We're
acquiring encryption keys and assi--
assigning communications to his
control. . . . Standby.

The three of us looked at each other-- this was out of the
ordinary. There were seven beeps.

[NAME REDACTED] came on screen.

[NAME REDACTED] (on radio)
Commander.

100
Yes, sir.

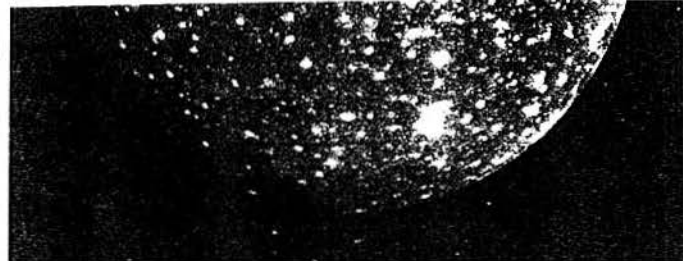
[NAME REDACTED] (on radio)
In January of 1983, an infrared
telescope known as IRAS detected a
heat signature from a previously
unknown celestial body on the
outskirts of our solar system --
beyond the Oort Cloud, over 50 billion
miles from Earth.

(paused)
We named this body Planet X. We
rerouted satellites Pioneer 10 and
11 to explore. And they found a
planet 20 times the size of Jupiter.
More importantly...they detected an
anomaly buried beneath the equatorial
surface. We believe it's impossible,
for this anomaly to be a natural
occurrence of nature.

(paused)
Your objective is to land on X, and
investigate the anomaly.

100
Sir. Understood.

[NAME REDACTED] (on radio)
We're uploading mission specs to you
within the hour. You've been upgraded
from Level 3 to Level 2 clearance.
The exchange of I.D.'s is authorized.



Icy Callisto, a moon of Jupiter, contains as much as 50 percent frozen water on its crater-pocked surface.

five of the chemical bases for human genes in the Murchison meteorite that fell in Australia in 1969.

Ponnamperuma and other biochemists believe such "precursors of life" are common throughout the universe and could result in the creation of life wherever the appropriate conditions exist.

In addition, data sent back by the Voyager 1 and 2 spacecraft have led researchers to speculate that moons of Jupiter and Saturn may harbor primitive life forms.

Earth is turning up surprising clues about the universe and its relationship to this planet. Particularly intriguing are indications from studies of rocks and bones that a "death star" may have caused catastrophe on Earth millions of years ago and could do so again.

Extinction cycle. Paleontologists say fossil records show a clear pattern of "extinction events" over the past 250 million years, each separated by about 26 to 28 million years.

Geologists, dating the Earth's impact craters, found a similar time pattern with craters forming at roughly the same periods.

Putting together such information, some astronomers theorize the catastrophes may have been caused by a companion star to the sun, approaching every 28 million years.

If the theory is true, the star may return to shatter Earth's biological systems again in 14 million years. Astronomers are trying to identify such a celestial body, searching for a candidate among fainter stars usually ignored.

"We don't know if such a star actually exists," says Richard Muller, a physicist at the University of California, "but it would be the first ever discovered on the basis of geological and biological evidence on Earth."

Such discoveries, and the prospect of more to come, have convinced space scientists they are embarked on the most exciting era yet in understanding the cosmos.

"The most awesome and profound knowledge awaits us," says James Westphal, professor of planetary science at the California Institute of Technology, "and the most exciting will be those things we just haven't even dreamed about yet."

By STANLEY N. WELLBORN

Planet X—Is It Really Out There?

Shrouded from the sun's light, mysteriously tugging at the orbits of Uranus and Neptune, is an unseen force that astronomers suspect may be Planet X—a 10th resident of the Earth's celestial neighborhood.

Last year, the infrared astronomical satellite (IRAS), circling in a polar orbit 560 miles from the Earth, detected heat from an object about 50 billion miles away that is now the subject of intense speculation.

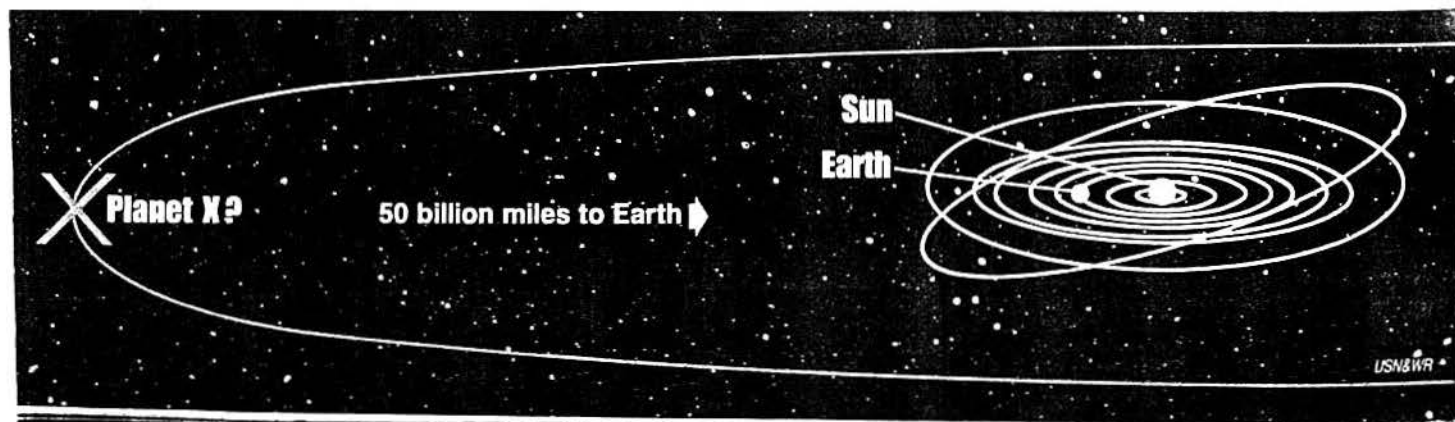
"All I can say is that we don't know what it is yet," says Gerry Neugebauer, director of the Palomar Observatory for the California Institute of Technology. Scientists are hopeful that the one-way journeys of the Pioneer 10 and 11 space probes may help to locate the nameless body.

Some astronomers say the heat-emitting object is an unseen collapsed star or possibly a "brown dwarf"—a protostar that never got hot enough to

become a star. However, a growing number of astronomers insist that the object is a dark, gaseous mass that is slowly evolving into a planet.

For decades, astronomers have noted that the orbits of two huge, distant planets—Neptune and Uranus—deviate slightly from what they should be according to the laws of physics. Gravitational pull from Planet X would explain that deviation.

Moreover, says Neugebauer, "if we can show that our own solar system is still creating planets, we'll know that it's happening around other stars, too."



There were seven more beeps and [NAME REDACTED] was gone.
We were silent a moment, absorbing the information.

300
Hell of a mission.

Then I looked at 200, and 300.

100/KORVER
Korver-- Chris Korver.

I shook 300's hand and he winced through a smile.

300/BRENNIN
I had money on Mike, sir. I'm Richard
Brennin.

100/KORVER
(mumbled)
Mike? I don't look like a Mike.

I reached out again, shook hands with 200--

200/CALE
Justine Cale.

My eyebrow twitched. I scrutinized her bald head, cheekbones,
and physique.

100/KORVER
You're a girl?

200/CALE
A woman, sir. Two-six-five requires
unisex protocols for longterm space
travel due to perverts who can't
keep their hands on their dicks
instead of me.

I fought hard to hide my shock at the mouth on this one.

100/KORVER
That reg isn't as explicit.

--ding --ding

The communication displays lit up. Cale floated over to
them, rapidly touch tapped the screens.

200/CALE
Mission specs downloading.

I floated beside her to examine the info. I almost whistled
in surprise.

100/KORVER
We're gonna hate each other by the
end of this.

300/BRENNIN
What's the mission period?

*
*

100/KORVER
ETA to X, two years.

*
*

CUT TO BLACK:

*

1 YEAR LATER

*

5 BILLION MILES FROM EARTH

*

CHRIS KORVER.

LOCATION: IN CHARON X COMMAND MODULE

REF: 450, Pg.15

Miles Davis, Surrey With the Fringe On Top played in the background. My choice.

We were relaxing in casuals. I had on boxers, no shirt and a four month old mohawk. Brennin a shirt and shorts. Uniform regs don't matter 5 billion miles from Earth.

Brennin and I finished up dinner as we floated, facing random directions. No telling what's up, what's down in space.

We had lost a third of our muscle mass since we left Earth. We were skin and bones courtesy of the weightless environment.

BRENNIN

What're we watching tonight?

KORVER

(I shrugged)

You pick.

I dropped my plate into the dish bin.

BRENNIN

Your turn.

KORVER

Put in NARC.

BRENNIN

What is your hard on with that movie, sir.

KORVER

Fuck it, I don't care.

I pushed off, started gliding out of the command module.

BRENNIN

Where you headed?

KORVER

Got a date with Pluto.

BRENNIN

(snorts)

She ain't cheap. Banged her two nights ago.

I floated through a portal and into the

RECREATION MODULE.

It was a cylindrical space with couches, chairs, televisions, and workout equipment 360 degrees around. OG makes it easy to economize space. There are no ceilings.

Cale rode an exercise bike above me in a tang top and spandex. Hundreds of sweat drops hovered around her glistening body like a sparkling cocoon. Somehow she held her weight a bit better than us guys. Her medium bust always had me salivating.

She rarely acknowledged me during her rec. Her demeanor was cold. Hard. Athletically beautiful. I glided past, through another portal into the

EQUIPMENT ROOM.

We stored everything here. To the right was an airlock door. which led to the docked SEV (Space Exploration Vehicle) known as VULCAN.

I reached into my bin on the right, grabbed a square tablet and pushed off into the final compartment.

THE VISION COPULA.

The most spectacular room in the solar system. It's walls were made of 280' of reinforced glass. But it was as if the glass wasn't there.

Billions of stars could be seen, all of them winking at me. And the largest body in these waters covered 50 percent of my view.

PLUTO.

It's thin orange atmosphere defied school kid's imaginations of a white snowball. A sliver of its sister planetoid Charon peeked out from behind it.

I touched the tablet, and flipped through images until I got to a picture of my wife with soap suds on her face.

I tapped it, and suddenly she started moving-- it was a video. We were both laughing--

KORVER(on video)

Stop splashing, you're getting it wet.

ERIKA (on video) (O.S.)

No-- you gotta say it.

The camera panned to show my face next to hers looking directly at the camera. I had been holding the camera and aiming it back at us while we laid in our tub.

KORVER (on video)
I said it last night-- twice--

ERIKA(on video)
--but I wanna get it on tape.

My eyes watered as I watched. Couldn't help it--

KORVER(on video)
Are you telling me that two rings
and a wedding isn't enough?

ERIKA(on video)
I'll go first.

She reached towards the camera, and guided my hand into a
close up of her.

ERIKA(on video) (CONT'D)
I. Love. You.
(looked back at me)
See? Now you try--

CALE
How many times have you watched it?

I turned, looked at Cale floating in front of the hatch.
Still glistening, she hadn't bothered drying off.

CALE (CONT'D)
(quiet)
Does it help you miss her more? Or
less?

I looked down at the video, still playing. Erika was blowing
bubbles at me.

CALE (CONT'D)
We're 5 billion miles from Earth...
further, if you calibrate her belief
that you're 'in another place'.

Cale floated closer to me. Her breasts inches away from me.

CALE (CONT'D)
Why...why torture yourself...over
something you can't have?

*I'm embarrassed to admit that I lost control. Lunged for
Cale-- grabbed her-- propelling our weightless bodies against
the wall glass--*

*Bounced off of it as I groped her chest-- she pulled down my
boxers-- I pulled off her tank top-- I yanked down her spandex
pants-- Kicked the hatch closed--*

*Our bodies collided and bucked against each other, the
momentum spinning us up towards the ceiling glass.*

Zero-G sex was phenomenal.

Her breathing roared in my ear...and began to be replaced by a bark? It got louder, to the point where I stopped and looked at her-- *what the hell was she doing?*

Then I realized the barking was actually someone saying:

BRENNIN

--Hey --HEY --SIR

I looked down at Brenninn in the open hatch, his eyes wide. Cale and I froze. Humiliation was an oversimplification.

BRENNIN (on radio) (CONT'D)

Got a problem with radar.

KORVER

You're shitting me.

BRENNIN

No sir.

CHRIS KORVER.

LOCATION: IN CHARON X COMMAND MODULE

REF: 450, Pg.17

BRENNIN

We lost radio contact with Control about two minutes ago--

I flew in, pulling up my boxers. Cale followed as we crowded the radar screen next to Brenninn.

BRENNIN (CONT'D)

(re: radar)

--the scope is giving a false contact.

A red contact light in the screens corner was on, but the screen was blank. Only the radar arm could be seen, sweeping around. Detecting nothing.

KORVER

Push range and gain to maximum--

BRENNIN

--Did.

KORVER

Off the AC Auto--

BRENNIN

Did, did, and done. I got nothing.

CALE
I'm gonna replace the main wire feed
to the console. It got decoupled
during the Neptune swing-by.

Cale moved to do so-- but before she could--

BEEP.

*SOMETHING GLITCHED ON RADAR-- too fast for me to see. But
Cale saw it. Now her face didn't look right.*

JUSTINE CALE. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: IN CHARON X COMMAND MODULE

REF: 452, Pg.88

*Something popped on and off the screen. Just a split second--
but I saw it: It was too big to fit on the monitor. It
EXTENDED BEYOND THE RADAR FIELD.*

I glanced at Korver and Brennin.

BEEP

It happened again. But this time the contact stayed.

BRENNIN
What is it...?

***Solid green filled the entire bottom half of the screen. It
went off the ends. It was many times larger than our ship.***

CALE
...Not a hardware issue.

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: IN CHARON X COMMAND MODULE

REF: 450, Pg.16

*I floated over to the port window-- looked out. **Saw ink
black. Brennin moved next to me.***

BRENNIN
No visual.

KORVER
But where're the stars?

***I craned my head further to the right. Then left. Nothing.
Blackness.***

CALE
It's that big.

KORVER
What...?

CALE
That's how big it is. It's blocking
the stars out.

My eyes had to have been huge.

*I pushed off toward the aft window. Looked out. Saw Pluto.
But not all of it.*

**A corner of it was missing. And then that corner grew, and
PLUTO WAS DISAPPEARING RIGHT BEFORE MY EYES, AND BEHIND IT
**CHARON. It was as if someone were dropping a black curtain
over them.****

BRENNIN
It's-- the sun is-- being eclipsed-- ?

CALE
Not that fast-- something's
obstructing our view.

KORVER
This thing can't be that big.

THEN PLUTO AND CHARON WERE GONE.

No one said a word at this point. I mean, what is there to say?

THE ENTIRE MODULE RATTLED.

**Food, instruments, items not velcroed down FLEW INTO ME AND
THE WALL AROUND ME-- it was the side closest to the anomaly.**

BRENNIN
It's got its own gravity.

KORVER
Adjust trajectory to compensate--

CALE
--prepping.

**Rattling grew-- Could hear METAL BENDING-- The gravity got
stronger--**

KORVER
Control, Charon. Unknown contact on
the-- on the--

Cale and Brenning were YANKED towards me--

CRASHED INTO ME

as the

COMMAND MODULE SOUNDED LIKE IT WAS TEARING APART--

Then BOOOOOM...

...it all returned to normal. Everything began floating again. *

On radar, the contact VANISHED. Just, wasn't there anymore. *

CALE
It's... gone. Nothing on radar...

BRENNIN
It just vanished?

KORVER
Could have been a gravity hit on an
asteroid fly by.

I looked out the window. Pluto was back. As were the stars. *

KORVER (CONT'D)
(to Cale)
Check trajectory--
(to Brennan)
Check vital systems--

CALE
It pulled us fifteen degrees off
course--

BRENNIN
All systems go--

KORVER
--prepare trajectory adjustment burn.
Fifteen degrees negative. Five
seconds--

BRENNIN
--preparing adjustment, negative
fifteen and five.

The Mission Control screen cuts on, static filled, distorted.

MISSION SPECIALIST (on screen)
---we need a reading, over.

KORVER
It's no longer on the grid.

MISSION SPECIALIST (on screen)
Where have you been-- what're your
coordinates-- ? Over.

KORVER
We're fifteen degrees off course--
initiating correction--

MISSION SPECIALIST (on screen)
No-- no-- we thought we lost you.

KORVER

We had a communication failure that lasted less than five minutes.

*
*
*

MISSION SPECIALIST (on screen)

Negative Commander. You've been off radar and com for over five hours.

*
*
*

The three of us looked at each other, perplexed.

*

BRENNIN

(to Korver)

That's impossible. I spoke to him--

(points at Specialist)

I spoke to you less than five minutes ago.

*
*
*
*

MISSION SPECIALIST (on screen)

I can tell time lieutenant. Can you?

*
***KORVER**

Specialist. We encountered an anomaly of unknown origin. Standby for debriefing.

*
*
*
***CUT TO BLACK:**

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

10 MONTHS LATER

*

*

50 BILLION MILES FROM EARTH

*

*

36 HOURS BEFORE ATTEMPTED TOUCHDOWN ON *PLANET X*

*

RICHARD BRENNIN.LOCATION: *IN CHARON X VISION CUPOLA*

REF: 451, Pg.60

We floated in the cupola like malnourished kids before Christmas. We had lost more than half our body weight.

We were waiting for something big, but at that moment we could only see stars. Korver was beside me. Cale hung back. I glanced at the display console. It had numbers counting down.

BRENNIN

Four...three...two...one...now...

Nothing happened.

Still only stars out there.

Then a total***EXPLOSION of LIGHT***

made me squint as a giant amorphous cloud of INTERSTELLAR DUST a hundred times the size of Earth became instantly backlit by the sun.

BRENNIN (CONT'D)

Shit...

Its polychromatic mass roiled as its multiple tendrils twisted and writhed in space, occasionally lit up by purple flashes of lightning from within--

KORVER

Control-- Charon-- we have visual
and have fallen in love-- over.

A roar heard in the background of Mission Control's mic:

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)

Roger Charon. You've got four-hundred
jealous technicians down here wishing
they chose astronaut school, over.

KORVER

(I smiled)
You guys blew it.
(looked at Cale)
Confirming specs--

CALE

Processing now sir--
(recited)
Interstellar fog-- composed of
methane, traces of oxygen and...a
multitude of highly corrosive acid
(MORE)

CALE (CONT'D)
gasses: hydrofluoric, acetic, complex
ammonia--

KORVER
--at what quantities?

CALE
25 parts per million. Charon's hull
integrity will be go.

VERTICAL SLIVERS of BLUE LIGHT FLARED INTO EXISTENCE. They stretched beyond our field of vision--

THESE WERE RINGS.

Three of them. Two of them canted at a right angle to the third, creating an imperfect X as their surface reflected sunlight into our cupola.

BRENNIN
Wow....

CALE
Three rings-- possibly a fourth--
rock debris composition similar to
the surface-- possibly blasted off
planet due to a massive collision.

The ship shook a moment, tipped over slightly before engines vibrated the hull, auto stabilizing.

CALE (CONT'D)
Detecting a gravitational draw similar
to the Plutonian encounter.

KORVER
Radar contact?

CALE
Negative.

Korver glared at the radar screen. Glared out the windows.

KORVER
Red flag it.

Then there it was, in the center of all of this, EMERGING from the interstellar fog as our orbit curled around it:

PLANET X.

It was a planetary husk, devoid of atmosphere. Its surface was a myriad of deep, muted, colors glinting in the dim sunlight with an unexpected sheen.

BILLIONS OF CRATERS marred its mountainous surface-- so many
it looked like an ancient thermochemical war zone preserved
from antiquity.

CALE

(reading stats)

Surface atmosphere is a statistical
vacuum, *with the exception* of zero
density acidic gas, origin unknown.
Sir, the acid could challenge the
integrity of the surface EQ.

KORVER

Noted.

(to radio)

Control-- Charon. We have eyes on
the surface. It's spectacular.

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)

Copy that, sightseeing tour is over.
Commence prep procedure for planetary
descent.

CUT TO BLACK:

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

50.1 BILLION MILES FROM EARTH

*

*

5 MINUTES BEFORE ATTEMPTED TOUCHDOWN ON X

*

OVER BLACK

KORVER (on radio)
 (distorted)
 Control, Charon has seceded all
 navigation systems to the Vulcan
 cockpit. Repeat, Charon has seceded
 navigation systems to the Vulcan
 cockpit, over.

MISSION SPECIALIST
 Vulcan has the con, copy.

CUT TO:

CHARON EXTERIOR. CONTINUED.

The stealth inspired exterior of the CHARON VESSEL visibly
 vibrates.

As beneath it, panels retract revealing a *second glass cockpit*
 aimed at the enigmatic surface of X.

This is known as the 'Vulcan' cockpit.

JUSTINE CALE. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: *IN VULCAN COCKPIT*

REF: 450, Pg.26

Myself and Korver drifted towards the pilot seats, Brennin
 floated behind us. Korver hit buttons on a side screen and
 orchestral music emitted from cabin speakers as he spoke.

KORVER
 We've got 43 years of flight time
 and 32 landings between the three of
 us. Let's keep this show sexy.

CALE
 (nods)
 Sir.

BRENNIN
 Yes sir.

Brennin floated out of the hatch while we strapped ourselves in.

BRENNIN (CONT'D)
 See you in 120 hours.

Brennin closed the hatch, air hissed as the pressure
 mechanisms sealed us in. I looked at Korver.

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: VULCAN COCKPIT

REF: 450, Pg.27

My hand slid around the navigational joy stick. My eyes scanned the control screens around me.

KORVER (to radio)

Brenn. Korver. Commencing planetary descent--

RICHARD BRENNIN. CONTINUED.LOCATION: *IN CHARON X COMMAND MODULE*

REF: 451, Pg.61

I settled into the pilot chair while triple checking Charon's systems. I was too amped to play it cool, could hear it in my voice.

BRENNIN

Copy-- commencing planetary descent, standing by...

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: VULCAN COCKPIT

REF: 450, Pg.27

I tapped three blue buttons that primed the navigation engines.

KORVER (to radio)

Initiating computers one, two, three for entry.

CALE

Initiating computers one, two, three...

BRENNIN (on radio)

Initiating one, two, three, copy that.

I tapped an orange button that lit up.

Heard the white noise of the engines.

Charon vibrated as it descended towards X.

CHARON EXTERIOR. CONTINUED.

Charon's trajectory angle dips dramatically as it descends towards the scarred surface of X.

The tether pulls the camera and we follow. Three dimensional grain occasionally obscuring the 3D image as interstellar dust flies by the lens. Charon rapidly gains speed.

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED.

My eyes looked to the gauges. Something was already wrong. The numbers weren't adding up.

KORVER

Computer has us at 5,000 kilometers per second, but actual velocity is 7,000.

I looked at the gyro gauges as Vulcan began to vibrate more. Now the computer had us traveling 7,000 kilometers per second, but we were actually going at 5,000.

KORVER (CONT'D)

No-- now it's interchanged--
(to radio)
Brenn you seeing this?

RICHARD BRENNIN. CONTINUED.

BRENNIN

Affirmative. Checking backup systems--

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED.

KORVER

Computer is pulsing engines, it's over correcting itself.

Vibration got stronger, much stronger. Automated control was beeping, failing. Charon was buffeting, we were getting bounced around. It turned into-- it felt like--

CALE

--turbulence. We're in turbulence.

KORVER

We're in a vacuum-- that's impossible--

CALE

--gravitational turbulence.

Light was flashing into my eyes-- It was the sun-- The ship was spinning--

CHARON EXTERIOR. CONTINUED.

Charon rotates chaotically on its X and Y axis'--

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED.

KORVER

Engines have lost stabilization--

BRENNIN (on radio)

*--two minutes to Tartarus' Crane
maneuver.*

CALE

*--we can't pull that off in these
conditions.*

I gritted my teeth--

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)

*Charon, Control. Suggest shutting
down automatic, computers have
overloaded--***KORVER***Shutting down computers-- shutting
down engines--***I touched the surfaces, the engines went off, but we were
still spinning and getting tossed around--****Below I saw a cobalt blue area of X's surface-- we were less
than a mile away from impact--**

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)

*Abort descent. Input parameters for
reboot and abort descent. Code is
Five-- six-- two--***KORVER***Unable-- Going manual--***I took hold of the center stick [joy stick]--**

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)

*Repeat--***KORVER***Going manual-- We are landing the
bird.*

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)

*Do not recommend-- We do not
recommend-- centrifugal force is too
high--**I restarted the engines.*

MISSION SPECIALIST (CONT'D)

*Reengage computers for an organized
abort.*

CALE
*You can't deploy Tartarus at this
 velocity--*

I ignored her. Turbulence got worse

CALE (CONT'D)
 Gravitational waves are increasing--
 at this rate we'll hit the surface
 at 8,000 kilometers a second--

I still didn't respond--

CALE (CONT'D)
 SIR-- !

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)
 Commander-- We strongly urge you to
reengage for automatic abort sequence,
over--

RICHARD BRENNIN. CONTINUED.

*Master alarms were blinking and blaring all around me. The
 surface was growing fast.*

BRENNIN
Sir...what's going on here.

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED.

CALE
Korver-- reengage the computer--

*Sunlight flashed in. Lander spun around again-- surface was
 closer than ever--*

KORVER
 Brenninn, prepare to reassume control
 of Charon. Prepping to engage
 Tartarus.

CALE
 Korver. Korver--

I could hear panic in her voice. I didn't care.

*We dropped altitude. Could feel it; closer we got to X the
 more we felt its gravity. We were a quarter of a mile high--*

KORVER
Engaging Tartarus in three--

CALE
You cannot engage-- it will rip us
apart--

I tilted the stick forward, left, right, right, attempting to compensate for the 'turbulence'. Charon shook more-- we started to dizzy with the spinning--

KORVER

--two

The ship let out creaks and groans due to the multiple Gs--

BRENNIN

Structural integrity is failing--

KORVER

--one

CALE

KORVER-- !

KORVER

NOW--

I hit a yellow button on the dash screen as red light machine gunned through the windows--

CHARON EXTERIOR. CONTINUED.

Grain and vertical rolls obscure Charon summersaulting towards X-- as

MULTIPLE EXPLOSIONS BLAST OUT FROM THE SHIP, and the vessel

TEARS ASUNDER, RIPPING IN HALF-- AND BLASTING APART--

LIGHT FROM THE EXPLOSION BLOWS EVERYTHING OUT WHITE.

OVER WHITE

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)

Charon, Control come in. Charon,
come in.

CHARON EXTERIOR. CONTINUED.

The white dissipates as two distinct pieces of the ship come into view, one above the other.

Massive amounts of electro exhaust pours out of a hovering CHARON, as suspended below it, a second smaller ship named VULCAN, spins on diamond spun cables as it's slowly lowered crane like towards the surface.

This separation was intentional. This maneuver is what is termed in the Corps as the 'Tartarus Crane', named after the Greek underworld.

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED.

We weren't out of the woods. We were still spinning and falling.

CALE
*Velocity has declined 80 percent to
 1 mile a second--*

KORVER
Drop cables are entangling--

CALE
*We have to unhook or we'll bring
 Charon down with us.*

KORVER
 Charon's done-- Disengage cables--

RICHARD BRENNIN. CONTINUED.

BRENNIN
 No need to beg-- good luck--

I tapped a couple of buttons, my screens lit up green--

CHARON EXTERIOR. CONTINUED.

*The cables release Vulcan causing it to plummet as Charon
 banks left and ascends into orbit.*

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED.

I looked at the fuel gauge-- **EMPTY.** I estimated no more
 than 30 secs of thrust left--

CALE
300. 275 feet-- 25 seconds of fuel--

KORVER
 (to myself)
C'mon. C'mon.

I pushed the stick forward more-- *dropping us faster.*

CALE
175. 145 feet-- 20 sec--

Then I nudged the stick right, slowing the spin-- *but burning
 more fuel. Still we were spinning too fast--*

CALE (CONT'D)
*The spin is sucking fuel-- 8 seconds--
 50 feet-- 25-- 15--*

--and I was diving too fast-- I had to pull out-- I yanked back and to the right--

The engines screamed. Vulcan shook. Groaned. G-forces sunk me in my chair.

Through the bottom window I saw the surface spinning as X dirt blew away-- *we were still coming in too fast.*

CALE (CONT'D)
We're too hot-- WE'RE TOO HOT--

BABOOOOOM

--slammed down too hard.

HEARD METAL CRUNCHING-- OR MAYBE IT WAS MY NOSE-- MY FACE HITTING THE CONSOLE. BLOOD EVERYWHERE. YELL FROM CALE. SOMETHING RIPPED INTO MY FACE FORCING MY EYES CLOSED--

CUT TO:

RICHARD BRENNIN. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: IN CHARON X COMMAND MODULE

REF: 451, Pg.62

Over radio I heard the crash, metal snapping, screams. Then the com link went dark. Got chills in my stomach.

BRENNIN (to radio)
Vulcan come in.

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)
Vulcan. What's your status.

Nothing was returned. As Charon stabilized in orbit I looked down at planet X.

<u>BRENNIN</u>	MISSION SPECIALIST
(to radio)	(on radio)
Vulcan. Do you read.	Vulcan. What is your position.

I checked my receivers and transmitters just in case. They were go.

I floated over to radar. Saw tiny dots, one of which could be them. But it was just impossible to tell for sure.

BRENNIN (to Mission Specialist)
Control, possible location of Vulcan.
1.5 nautical miles short of target.
Coordinates: Two-three. Two-four.
Five.

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: IN VULCAN SEV

REF: 450, Pg.29

I opened my eyes. We were alive. I let out a breath.

A side panel had flown off, hit me in the forehead. I was bruised but ok. I pushed it off of me. Looked around.

SEV was crooked. At an angle.

The SEV shuddered.

Not good. Maybe we were on a ledge. Lights were out.

I looked to my right at Cale. She was already looking at me. Trying to murder me with her eyes.

KORVER

...we landed.

Cale struggled with her seat belts, unfastened them.

I did the same, moved out of my seat. It was strange having gravity back-- only 1/4th of it. X had less gravity than Mars.

I tapped the radio screen. It was dead. All the screens were.

KORVER (CONT'D)

Power's out.

Cale didn't respond.

The SEV creaked, shuddered-- seemed to slip down a bit-- my head snapped over at Cale--

CALE

You landed on the edge of a fucking crater.

I moved *gingerly* across the SEV next to her. Peered out her window. You could see the ground slope away into a crater...

CALE (CONT'D)

None of it matters without power.

I silently agreed. And moved carefully over to the main breaker, opened it. Hit reset. Nothing happened.

CALE (CONT'D)

Check the 'L' wire-- beneath the breakers, it gets loose--

KORVER

--yep.

Lander trembled a bit as I grabbed a tool kit. Pulled out a magnetic-screwdriver-- and began unscrewing the breaker panel.

CALE

...What the fuck happened up there?

I tensed up-- didn't look at her. Removed the breaker panel. Found wires. Started sifting through.

KORVER

I took over and landed the bird.

CALE

You didn't land you crashed.

KORVER

We have enough fuel for one shot.
We didn't fly 50 billion miles for
two years to turn around and go back
home.

CALE

We didn't fly 50 billion miles to
commit suicide *before* we started the
mission...

KORVER

We're the Corps of the Flying Dead.
Fly to die. We're the best at what
we do 'cause we take risks.

CALE

Why couldn't your dick be as big up
there as it is down here?

KORVER

'Cause this turns me on.

It was too late not to say what I wish I hadn't. I found the 'L' wire. Its end had come out of the master battery node.

CALE

I thought we had, we had found more
than the Corps to believe in.

Surprised, I looked over at her. This hard nosed rocket jock who played it close to the vest was emoting about *us*? My face softened, I sighed.

KORVER

We did.... But...we still have a
job to do. Right?

She didn't answer but didn't disagree.

I plugged in the L wire. BOOM. Lights turned on. Power buzzed. Relief from both of us.

KORVER (CONT'D)

Alright... alright...

BRENNIN (on radio)

---Vulcan, this is Charon-- respond.

KORVER (to radio)

Charon, this is Vulcan. We didn't cross the river.

BRENNIN. KORVER. INTERCUT.

LOCATIONS: CHARON X/VULCAN SEV

REF: 451, Pg.63/REF: 450, Pg.30

BRENNIN

(I was relieved)

That boat's always ready. Welcome back, sir. Fly to die.

KORVER

Fly to die. We got a damage report but we're go.

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)

Vulcan, Control. Cute show. We need to travel you to the anomaly. You've got 5 days of life support to do what should be done in 10.

CUT TO:

CHRIS KORVER. 15 MINUTES LATER.

LOCATION: *IN VULCAN SEV*

REF: 450, Pg.31

We suited up in our **Hydra** suits, the coolest, most expensive vacuum capable space suits a black budget can buy. They were coal-black with shock orange trim, and made of nano-fibers thinner than hair but stronger than titanium.

If there was ever a reason to be an astronaut, being photographed in one of these suits has got to be the main one.

I lowered the **skull shaped helmet** onto my head and electromagnetics fastened it in place, causing the mechanical sounds of the SEV to hush to a murmur. My pressure gauges beeped affirmatively.

I checked my **3D Smart Cameras** in my helmet, arms and torso. I touched a button and all cameras except for my helmet cam detached from my suit and hovered gravitically in the air, panning and tilting autonomously.

I spoke through my helmet intercom:

KORVER

Charon, Korver. Are you receiving
video transmissions, over.

RICHARD BRENNIN. CONTINUE INTERCUT

LOCATION: *IN CHARON X COMMAND MODULE*

REF: 451, Pg.82

Multiple 3D camera images from their suits popped onto my
screens. I lounged evening movie style as the smart cams looked
around the SEV autonomously. All I needed was popcorn.

BRENNIN

Yes sir, Charon is receiving and
recording. Control are you receiving
re-transmission?

MISSION SPECIALIST

Affirmative, re-transmission is being
received and stored.

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUE INTERCUT

LOCATION: *IN VULCAN SEV*

REF: 450, Pg.31

KORVER

Are you go?

CALE

Go.

KORVER (to radio)

Control, Vulcan is go...Vulcan is go.

MISSION SPECIALIST

Copy that.

(paused)

You're go for EVA.

KORVER (to radio)

Go for EVA, copy. Opening airlock.

I turned to the airlock door. Reached my hand out, touched
the button to depressurize. *Air whistled out of the SEV*
into the vacuum. I watched the PSI display go down to zero.

I opened the door.

Silence rushed in. The kind that makes you feel deaf. No
atmosphere. Therefore no sound.

I stepped out into the

VACUUM.

I turned my back to it and worked my way down the ladder. *

*I looked down, my foot was one rung above the midnight-blue surface of **Planet X**.* *

My breathing deepened. *

My chest swelled.

My excitement grew.

I leaped down... *

My knees bent as I landed on exotic soil. *

KORVER *

Commander is down. *

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio) *

Congratulations, Commander. *

My eyes beheld the alien landscape. *

Subtle blues and purples dominated a soaring terrain of mountains and craters reminiscent of the Grand Canyon at predawn. *

A thin yellow haze of acidic gas glowed above much of the surface, subtly backlit by the dim sunlight. *

It was vibrant. Beautiful. Awe-inspiring. *

KORVER *

...The beating heart of man's soul
is his burning desire to explore.
Therefore this endeavor shall set
his spirit afire. *

.....The radio was silent a moment. *

CALE *

Fuck man. *

I heard muted snorts over the radio. *

Instead of climbing, Cale jumped down and landed next to me. *

JUSTINE CALE. CONTINUED. *

LOCATION: Planet X Surface *

REF: 452, Pg.112

I jumped and floated 14 feet to the ground. Landed light in the reduced gravity. *

I scanned the horizon... Didn't see anything... Looked again.
I probably looked longer than I should.

KORVER

Problem?

CALE

Taking in the view.

Korver pointed at the ground beneath the SEV.

KORVER

It'll hold.

The SEV was on a slope, leading down into a shallow crater.
But it looked stable.

CALE

Agreed.

DING. DING. DING.

*Alarms lit up in my heads-up helmet display, faint symbols
of arms, legs, chest and back-- projected onto the bottom
portion of my helmet glass.*

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)

Vulcan, Control, Hydras are
transmitting multiple errors -- can
you confirm, over.

KORVER

Affirmed-- life support errors on
air exchangers-- heater-- and
humidifiers.

I knew this would occur. It was the--

CALE

--acid fog.

I gestured at the yellow haze hanging over the surface.

CALE (CONT'D)

It's corroding our suits at an
accelerated rate.

MISSION SPECIALIST

Vulcan -- estimated time for EVA is
4 hours.

KORVER

I estimate 5 hours of exposure before
breach.

He did those calculations in his head. Smart. I looked at
the display numbers, did mine.

CALE

Confirmed.

KORVER

Control, Korver. Commencing Aethon Cycle and moving to target with haste.

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)

Commencing Aethon Cycle, moving to target, copy.

JUMP CUT

We 'garage opened' a fifteen foot flap on the side of the SEV, and towed out an obsidian black vehicle called an **Aethon Cycle**.

It resembled a sleek version of a Star Wars speed bike but with grey, overwide wheels lined up behind each other like a motorcycle. 6 wheels total. It was a two seater with a trunk.

We loaded that trunk with what looked like an oversized vacuum cleaner--

CALE

Ground Penetrating Radar.

KORVER

Check.

Korver reviewed notes on his chest screen, a one foot LCD touch-screen that folded down from his torso like a miniature pull down bed. You only know it's there when it's open.

Next I loaded a--

CALE

--radiation Geiger.

KORVER

Check.

And a--

CALE

Sub-air explosive.

KORVER

Check.

Last I crammed on **two magnetic powered drills** each 2 feet long. And their drill bits, 3 each--

CALE

Magnetic drills--

KORVER

--check. We're go.

We got on. He was driving. I sat behind him motorcycle style, but Aethon had better chair support. I took another look along the horizon. Still didn't see anything--

KORVER (to radio) (CONT'D)
Control. We got Aethon at the starting line.

I flipped down my chest-screen scrolled to my map, it was marked with precise coordinates.

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)
Roger that, fire her up. Destination is 23.45.678-- confirm.

CALE (to radio)
23.45.678-- affirmed.

I pointed to the left.

CALE (CONT'D)
That's two--three--

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: *AETHON CYCLE*
REF: 450, Pg.34

I nodded. Turned the wheel. Hit the pedal and *rocketed forward. 6 seconds later I was at 100 MPH.*

We powered across the indigo desert, two aliens in a machine. This thing was fast -- handled like a Tron cycle as it kicked up a wall of blue x-dirt behind us.

I leaned left and turned left. Avoided a house sized boulder. Leaned right and turned right to correct course.

KORVER
Cuts better than model eleven.

CALE
Corps got rid of the Air Force shit.

Every bump launched us into mini-flight in the reduced gravity. *There was something childishly fun about this thing.* Out of all the toys they let us play with, this was my favorite.

CUT TO:

110 MINUTES LATER

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: *SOMEWHERE ON PLANET X*
REF: 450, Pg.38

We arrived. I brought the cycle to a stop. The area was
was pretty flat. Nothing was here.

KORVER

This is it?

CALE

Correct.

KORVER

You sure?

Cale double checked her chest-map.

CALE

Positive. This is it. We're right
on top of it.

KORVER

(nodded)

I'll get the GPR.

We dismounted the cycle. As we did so the smart cameras
detached from our Thanatos suits and *hovered* around the area,
recording the location like gritty war photographers.

I grabbed the GPR (Ground Penetrating Radar) and dropped it
about 30 feet from the cycle. Started booting it up. Cale
had the geiger counter (radiation counter).

KORVER (CONT'D)

Reading anything?

CALE

Nothing-- negative.

KORVER

Control. Beginning ground penetrating
radar.

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)

Copy.

I tapped a flashing green icon on its monitor. Felt the
machine pulse and vibrate. I waited, then tapped my wrist
screen, modern orchestral started playing over com:

CALE

(re: music)

Is this Orvarsson?

KORVER

Yeah.

CALE

What is it with you and Icelandic
composers?

KORVER

What, you have something against a
country of 300,000 people?

CALE

I thought you'd be more current--
you know, Red Dust, Sunnyside Black...

KORVER

So, you've got a problem with
Icelandic composers, but you're cool
with Venus bands that are only known
to 2000 people in a secret space
corps?

BEEP-- BEEP-- a picture appeared on the GPR monitor:

A couple of green lines, in the shape of a rectangle. Almost
too big to fit on the screen.

KORVER (CONT'D)

That's...there it is...

CALE

You got it?

KORVER

Yeah...

Cale moved over my shoulder to look.

KORVER (CONT'D)

Nature doesn't do straight lines.

CALE

How big-- ?

KORVER

Eight hundred yards-- long-- at least--

CALE

Depth-- ?

KORVER

Four maybe five feet-- Control you
receiving-- ?

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)

We're getting it. Suggest you move
ten feet and pulse again, over.

KORVER

Copy.

I picked up the GPR. Moved it ten feet. Dropped it. Hit
the button. Pulse. Vibrate. It started processing...

CALE

Wait a second...wait a second-- I
got something.

Cale stared down at her geiger counter. I could see her
furrowed brow through her helmet glass.

*
*

KORVER

What?

CALE

A reading-- radiation... 10 counts
per. No it's rising, 30 counts.

An image popped on my GPR. But this time? **It was a CIRCLE,**
instead of a rectangle. I was stunned.

KORVER

Now I got a circle..... What is
this thing...

CALE

Just jumped to 200 counts.
Something's heating up down there.

We both looked at the ground.

I bounded over to the cycle. Grabbed a drill. Attached the
drill bit. Returned. Jammed it to the ground-- drilled.

*

It whipped through **X** soil, then hit stone. I reached down,
brushed away dust. Revealed obsidian similar rock. Solid.

*
*

CALE (CONT'D)

Whatever's down there has been there
awhile. The rock liquefied, like
magma, and reconstituted back over
it--

*
*

(re: radiation counter)

....radiation is stabilizing. Peaked
at 200.

*

KORVER

Control. . . have CFD Sats done
multispectral imaging of this
coordinate?

*
*
*

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)

Affirmative.

*

KORVER

What kind of age are we talking here?
How long have these rocks been over
this thing?

Control was silent several moments.

*

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)
50 million years.

*

CUT TO:

CHRIS KORVER.

LOCATION: *IN VULCAN SEV*

*

REF: 450, Pg.54

Cale and I were out of our suits, but covered in x-dust. It had a magnetic-stick quality that made it impossible to keep out of the SEV. We were sprawled out like exhausted miners.

*

*

*

On my tablet I swiped through radar printouts of the anomaly. 15 total. They were either RECTANGULAR or CIRCULAR outlines.

*

KORVER

50 million years...it's been down there. What is this thing-- ?

BRENNIN (on radio)

We gotta figure out how it all goes together. The radar contact on our way over, the turbulence during landing--

*

*

KORVER

--contradictory radar photos. The geiger reading--

*

*

INTERCUT BRENNIN.

LOCATION: *IN CHARON X COMMAND MODULE*

*

REF: 451, Pg.81

*

BRENNIN

*

The-- apparent age--

KORVER

50 million--

BRENNIN

--right.

KORVER

It's technology. Something's been here. Before us.

*

BRENNIN

What kind of something.

...no answer from me. I looked up at Cale. She hadn't said a word. She met my eyes then looked away.

*

*

KORVER

Something old enough to build
that...it's gotta be smarter than we
are.

BRENNIN

We've been around 100,000 years and
we just got off the planet. Imagine
what they've done in 50 million?

The rhetorical hung a moment.

KORVER

We got four hours of rack op left--
let's get some sleep. We'll detonate
bedrock tomorrow and see what we
find.

BRENNIN

Alright-- Stay warm.

RICHARD BRENNIN. CONTINUE INTERCUT

LOCATION: *IN CHARON X COMMAND MODULE*

REF: 451, Pg.83

I drifted over to the window, and looked out at the crescent
image of **X** floating in space. I sighed fogging the window.

BRENNIN

--Hey Korver.

KORVER

Still here.

BRENNIN

What was it like...? Walking on X?

KORVER

(searching)
...it was... it was....

He fell silent, trying to put it in words. I touched the
window, rubbed my fog off of it so I could see **X** again.

BRENNIN

I get it. Charon out.

END INTERCUT. CHRIS KORVER.

LOCATION: *IN VULCAN SEV*

REF: 450, Pg.55

I grabbed my tablet, climbed up into one of two hammocks and
laid down. Yawned.

I flipped through videos until I got to a paused image of my
wife, motion blurred in mid dance.

It was afternoon in our backyard, she was dressed in an evening gown and heels.

I tapped the screen and Erika gyrated, dancing hilariously to Jackson's "Beat It". I yelled from behind the camera:

KORVER (video) (O.S.)
Do it again-- I'm recording--

She threw her legs sideways-- threw back her head--

ERIKA (video)
(singing)
Beat iiiit-- Beat iiiiiit--

I was laughing so hard you could barely hear the music.

She spun 360 degrees on her heels and right into a moon walk that Jackson would've loved.

ERIKA (video) (CONT'D)
(singing)
It doesn't matter-- whose wrong or right--

KORVER (video)
--watch out !

ERIKA (video)
AHHII--

Erika windmilled her arms as she slipped off an edge and SPLASHED INTO OUR SWIMMING POOL. The camera jiggled as I ran up to pull her out.

KORVER (video)
You alright-- ?

I reached out my hand, she grabbed it, and then yanked me. I splashed into the pool on top of her.

The camera rolled around chaotically in water. You could hear her laughing, then the camera pixilated and went black.

As I looked at the black screen, my smile faded, and my face became serious. I let out a breath. Closed my eyes to sleep, and my smart light clicked off.

JUSTINE CALE. CONTINUED.

From the other side of Vulcan I watched Korv finish the video of his wife. Having emotions for crew, particularly commanders is...ill advised at best. Yet here I was.

I climbed into the hammock below him. Closed my eyes-- my lamp shut off dousing us in darkness.

CUT TO BLACK:

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

2 HOURS 33 MINUTES LATER

*

OVER BLACK: *

Tap-tap... *

CUT TO:

CHRIS KORVER. 2 HOURS 33 MIN LATER. *

LOCATION: IN VULCAN SEV *

REF: 450, Pg.55

I woke up. Heard something. Looked down through my hammock web at Cale. *

CALE

I heard it.

KORVER

Meteorite?

CALE

Yeah. Or the SEV's settling. *

I laid back down. Looked up at the ceiling. It was quiet in here. Quieter than on Charon. Less machinery. *

Tap. Tap. Tap.

I looked at the door. *That's where the sound came from.*

We both sat up. Slowly. Those taps, they were perfectly measured. In perfect intervals.

I slid out of my hammock to the floor. I spoke quietly.

KORVER

Control?

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio) *

Go ahead.

KORVER

Any meteorite showers forecasted at our coordinates? *

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio) *

Negative. Clear skies. You getting rain?

I didn't answer. My eyes were glued to that door.

I crept towards it. Focused on the small 1 foot window carved into it. I could only see the black sky from this angle.

I crept closer.

No more knocks yet. Everything was quiet.

I reached the door. Touched it with my hand. And slowly brought my eyes towards the window...

...and peered out.

I saw the X surface. I saw the cycle.....

My eyes strained, looking for something else. My breath fogged the glass. I reached up to wipe it--

BOOOOOM.

The door was hit-- I flinched back--

I looked at that door as if it were alive.

BOOOOOOOM.

That one was louder-- harder--

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio) (CONT'D)
Vulcan-- sit-rep?

BOOOOOOOOOOOM.

KORVER
--something outside the door.

MISSION SPECIALIST	BRENNIN
(on radio)	(on radio)
Say again--	--what?

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM.

CALE
It's trying to get inside--

The door began shaking-- looked like something was trying to pull it off its hinges--

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM.

THE WHOLE SEV STARTED SHAKING--

We lost our footing-- fell down--

MISSION SPECIALIST	BRENNIN
(on radio)	(on radio)
<i>Air pressure is falling--</i>	<i>I've got-- I see something</i>
<i>air leakage is occurring--</i>	<i>on radar-- it's surrounding</i>
	<i>the SEV--</i>

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)
--air pressure is reaching critical.

SEV STARTED TO TILT OVER-- as if it were about to fall--

KORVER

Get in our suits-- get--

Something hit me in the back-- knocked me over--

KORVER (CONT'D)

Shit--

Cale helped me up-- we scrambled to our suits--

THE SEV TILTED MORE-- equipment alarms rang crazily--

*

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)

*

We've got visual on crafts circling

SEV-- but video is unclear--

*

I got my legs in the suit-- slid on my arms--

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio) (CONT'D)

*

*Vulcan-- do you have clear sight of
aggressor--*

**The SEV groaned-- metal twisted-- as if it were being squeezed
to death-- it was fucking insane--**

*

BRENNIN (on radio)

*It's getting bigger-- or it's-- it's--
there's another one surrounding--*

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM.

**Cale fell as she got her second leg in her suit-- stumbled
up as she put her arm in--**

*

*

MISSION CONTROL

*

SEV is reaching critical--

*

Air was shrieking violently out the airlock--

I couldn't find my helmet-- or my gloves-- or--

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM.

**Again knocked off my feet-- shaking was too much-- I couldn't
get up-- Was convinced this was it for me.**

Everything silenced. Went still.

I thought time had frozen. But no, whatever was attacking
had stopped.

I let out a breath, the SEV echoed it back.

*

Looked over at Cale. She was hyperventilating. It was hard
to breathe. Air was still whistling out.

*

MISSION SPECIALIST BRENNIN
Vulcan what's your (on radio)
status? Are you stable--

MISSION SPECIALIST BRENNIN
(on radio) (on radio)
--Vulcan, Mission Korver-- Cale--
Control-- return.

Was getting harder-- to breathe.

KORVER

Put it on-- your suit-- we have t--

I found my gloves-- slid them on-- fastened my helmet--

CALE

I can't-- I--

Cale struggled with her helmet-- I helped-- fastened--

*I turned on my air-- oxygen hissed in-- I took a deep breath--
 was refreshing--*

Tap. Tap. Tap.

Panic. I looked over at the door.

Tap.

This time the tap came to the left of the door, on the wall--

Tap.

Further to the left. And further....

Tap... Tap... Tap... Tap...

*The tapping worked its way around to the opposite side of
 the SEV-- the final **tap** was a little bit louder. Then it
 stopped.*

*Cale and I looked that direction, at the wall waiting for it
 to continue.*

It didn't. But something else did.

RIIIIIIIIIIIIPPPP----- WHOOOOOOOOOOOOOSH HHH-----

**THE SEV WALL DETONATED OUTWARDS-- BACKFIRED TOWARDS THE PLANET
 X SURFACE-- THE SUDDEN VACUUM SUCKED EVERYTHING WITH IT--**

***I slid across the floor-- helmet slammed into something--
 chest hit something else-- I tumbled-- everything was total
 chaos-- then I flew out of the SEV-- was flying--***

*Hit the ground-- tumbled-- rotated-- spun-- X-dirt flew--
 didn't know up from down-- then finally came to a stop.*

*

Was on my back like a turtle. Waddled.

Tried to get up. Finally did.

Looked around frantically. Couldn't see what was doing this.

I gulped down oxygen. Saw Cale.

*Moved to her. She was beneath metal carnage. I lifted it
 off. Helped her to her feet.*

*

*

*We looked around. Couldn't believe it. Couldn't comprehend
 what we saw.*

CALE (CONT'D)

--no

KORVER

fuck-- fuck-- fuck--

*

CALE

--no --no

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)

*

Vulcan-- what is your status--

*Debris was everywhere. It extended several yards away.
 Looked like the SEV had been turned inside out. As if it
 had vomited its innards.*

*

*The wreckage led back to a 5 foot gash in the SEV's hull.
 It was 90 degrees on its side. Landing gear legs had snapped.*

*

*

*An object with flickering light caught my eye. I stepped
 over, reached down-- grabbed it. It was my tablet. Video
 of my wife gesturing in the kitchen was playing.*

*

*

*

I stared at it.

BRENNIN (on radio)

Kover-- Cale-- what is your sit.

*I looked at Cale. She looked back. We both had that haunted
 look.*

*

*I was burning through oxygen-- breathing too fast-- couldn't
 calm down--*

KORVER (to radio)

We're-- we're not going home.

*

BRENNIN (on radio)

What?

KORVER (to radio)

We're not going home. We can't--

CALE (to radio)

*The SEV has-- has been destroyed.
It's not repairable--*

*
*

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)

What caused the damage-- ?

*
*

RICHARD BRENNIN. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: *IN CHARON X COMMAND MODULE*

*

REF: 451, Pg.88

I stopped listening to the guys 'cause something else grabbed my attention. It was the radar.

*

I watched as *something* circled back towards their position--

BRENNIN

*Something's-- something's closing in
on you-- have it on radar--*

*
*

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)

What is it-- ?

*

BRENNIN

I don't know--

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)

(to Korver)

Commander attempt to obtain visual--

*

CALE (on radio)

No--

JUSTINE CALE. CONTINUED.

*

LOCATION: *OUTSIDE SEV*

*

REF: 452, Pg.124

I struggled to control my breathing. Knew I was depleting oxygen too fast.

*

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)

Commander attempt to obtain visual--

*

CALE

(to Korver)

No-- we gotta run.

I started rummaging through the debris. Intent on finding--

CALE (CONT'D)

--reserve suits. We need the suits--

*

KORVER

*Brennin-- How much time-- till contact
arrives--*

RICHARD BRENNIN. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: *IN CHARON X COMMAND MODULE*

REF: 451, Pg.88

*I was looking at the radar screen. This thing was moving
fast. Heading back towards them as if it was going on another
bomber run. It was--*

BRENNIN (to radio)

*--seconds. No more than 45-- maybe
60--*

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: *OUTSIDE SEV*

REF: 450, Pg.58

I bounded towards the Aethon--

KORVER

(to Cale)

C'mon-- c'mon--

Cale wasn't following-- She was still looking for something--

BRENNIN (on radio)

--30 seconds.

I got to the cycle-- turned it on--

KORVER

Cale--

JUSTINE CALE. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: *OUTSIDE SEV*

REF: 452, Pg.125

*I grabbed a suit-- leggings were torn off. Reached for another--
helmet was cracked. Found an oxygen tank-- it was blasted in
half.*

CALE

--shit.

*I hopped over to another section. Was shoving wire and X-
dirt away, found three more tanks-- PUNCTURED.*

BRENNIN

It's on top of you-- any second--

X-dirt sprayed into my helmet visor-- blocking my vision--

KORVER

Get on--

It was Korver. On the cycle. I bounded over-- jumped onto it-- He took off-- throttled it-- *

I held on as we lurched across the surface-- putting distance-- I looked back. SEV was already small-- didn't see anything approaching-- yet. *

We descended down into a depression-- accelerated out of it-- inertia propelled us airborne-- flew for at least 10 feet then--

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: *PLANET X SURFACE* *

REF: 450, Pg.59

--landed. Bounced and landed again-- *

KORVER

See anything-- ?

CALE

Nothing-- clear--

I saw a flash of light glint off her helmet-- *

CALE (CONT'D)

Whoa-- whoa--

KORVER

What happened?

CALE

Something flashed--

KORVER

What-- ?

CALE

I don't know-- it's too far away-- something flashed off the SEV-- like lightning-- *

KORVER

Bren where is this thing--

RICHARD BRENNIN. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: *IN CHARON X COMMAND MODULE* *

REF: 451, Pg.90

BRENNIN

It's there it's at the SEV-- *

BEEP. BEEP-- Radar showed the contact leaving the SEV,
pursuing the cycle--

*

*

BRENNIN (CONT'D)
 --no it's moving again. Tracking
 you--

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: PLANET X SURFACE

*

REF: 450, Pg.60

I steered right-- drove around a crater-- *Almost fell in.*
 Kept going.

*

DING-- DING-- DING--

*

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)
 Oxygen levels are falling-- you're
 both burning through O2--

*

*

*

KORVER

*

Our rebreathers-- will recycle--

*

MISSION SPECIALIST
*Re-breathers incurred acid failures
 after last EVA-- You have less than
 45 minutes left-- attempt to moderate
 breathing--*

*

*

*

*

What the fuck do you say to that?

I started driving up a hill. Hill got steeper-- the cycle
 was beginning to slow--

*

RICHARD BRENNIN. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: IN CHARON X COMMAND MODULE

*

REF: 451, Pg.91

BEEEP--- the contact was catching them on radar--

*

BRENNIN

It's closing-- it's closing--

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: PLANET X SURFACE

*

REF: 450, Pg.63

I pumped the throttle pedal-- *nothing-- couldn't go any
 faster.* Then we crested the hill-- it picked up momentum--

*

I steered left around a BOULDER then *slammed on the breaks--
 skidded towards the*

EDGE OF A CLIFF.

Stopped just before. Cliff led down into a

HALF MILE WIDE CRATER.

Only God knew how far down it went. Looked too far. No going around it.

I turned the cycle around-- Stopped adjacent to the boulder--

*

KORVER

--cover.

*

CALE

--the boulder.

We jumped out--

RICHARD BRENNIN. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: IN CHARON X COMMAND MODULE

*

REF: 451, Pg.91

BEEEEEEEEEEEEEP--- on radar the contact caught up to them--

*

BRENNIN

It's on top of you-- it's on top of you--

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: NEXT TO BOULDER

REF: 450, Pg.63

We scurried towards the boulder. Looked around frantically-- didn't see anything--

*

Slid next to boulder, kept our backs against it-- and had to. We only had a narrow ledge between boulder and CRATER CLIFF-- couldn't risk falling in--

*

*

*

KORVER

No visual-- no visual--

BRENNIN (on radio)

It's there-- it's right there-- it's right on top of you--

*

*

Back to boulder I looked left-- looked right--

KORVER

(to Cale)

You see it-- ?

*

CALE

No--

*

--she handed me the other drill.

*

I peered around the boulder-- looking for *something*--

All I could see was the front of the cycle. Just sitting there. All I could hear was my own breathing. *

JUSTINE CALE. CONTINUED. *

LOCATION: *NEXT TO BOULDER*

REF: 452, Pg.125

I held the drill. Tried to look further around the boulder. Didn't see anything. Looked up. Just black sky. *

Tried to slow my breathing. Couldn't.

But then I felt a vibration. From the boulder. Like something hit it.

CALE

You feel that-- ?

KORVER

--yeah.

CALE

From the boulder--

KORVER

--something hit it.

CALE

It's on the other side--

KORVER

--shit.

Gripped my drill tighter-- backed up--

Something bumped me from behind-- I flinched, looked back-- it was Korver backing into me.

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED. *

LOCATION: *NEXT TO BOULDER*

REF: 450, Pg.64

I BACKED INTO SOMETHING-- looked behind-- it was Cale. I looked back to the front. At the cycle. **IT WAS MOVING.** *

Ever so slightly. Subtly. It was inching towards the crater.

What was pushing it?

KORVER

(whispered)

...it's moving.

CALE
--the cycle?

*

KORVER
yeah...

It crept closer to the crater. I watched. Waited. For whatever was pushing it to come into view.

THEN THE CYCLE WAS SHOVED-- it tipped over, careened down the crater wall, rolled down its height into oblivion...

*

But whatever was pushing it, did not come around the boulder. I couldn't see it. But something had to be there. Just out of sight. Had to be.

I watched. Didn't even blink.....

CALE
--see anything?

KORVER
--no.

CALE
AHHHHHH-- AHHHHHH--

*I turned around-- Cale's drill almost hit my helmet glass--
Something metallic, shaped with incomprehensible,
GIGANTIC CONCENTRIC RINGS*

bolted into Cale-- who then slammed into me--

Knocked me off my feet-- over the edge-- INTO THE CRATER...

*...I tumbled end over end as I fell-- I saw the sun, then the
X SURFACE.*

*

Sun.

X.

*

Sun.

X.

*

X.

*

X.

*

I saw the bottom of the crater-- it was coming fast-- even in X gravity my velocity was high--

*

Closed my eyes, didn't want to see IMPACT--

BA--BAAAAANG

EVERYTHING WENT BLACK:

My eyes fluttered open. It was still black. Couldn't see a thing. Realized I had lost consciousness. I had no idea how long I had been out.

Could only hear breathing. My breathing. Was hollow in the helmet.

KORVER (O.S.)

HELP-- ! HELLLP-- !

I gasped-- gagged-- my oxygen had stopped pumping.

KORVER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

--can't breathe! --I

Sucked in a violent breath-- carbon dioxide filled my lungs-- felt like I was being choked-- claustrophobia set in--

KORVER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

God-- please-- uhhh--

My whole body throbbed. Then again. And again. Rhythmically. Then in rhythm I felt--

--CHING

Something slammed into my helmet-- rattled my head, made my ears ring.

CHING--

Again it hit me-- painful--

KORVER (CONT'D)

--ahhhhhh

Something clutched my shoulder-- yanked me, wrenched me up--

LIGHT BLINDED ME.

I couldn't see-- Something was shaking me-- jostling me where I knelt. I blinked-- blinked-- started to see the outline of something.

I blinked again-- saw a crack in my outer helmet glass. Saw the sun. Then in front of that I saw CALE. Saw her mouth moving. But I couldn't hear her. My mic and headphones were dead.

*
*

My mouth opened. Struggled with the carbon dioxide. I still couldn't breathe. My vision was going grey.

She turned knobs and buttons on my chest. Then on my back.
OXYGEN FLOWED into my helmet.

*

I took a deep breath. Then another. Started to stabilize.
She tapped more buttons that had gotten hit in the fall.
Suddenly I could hear her--

*

*

*

CALE

--ou OK? You OK? You hear me?

KORVER

Yeah-- yeah--

CALE

C'Mon, shake it off.

*

*

BRENNIN (on radio)

Korv you alright?

KORVER

--getting there.

CALE

Control. I've got Korver in one
piece.

*

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)

Copy-- copy-- we're uh--
(relieved)

*

--glad to hear those words.

I took in a couple more breaths. Looked up. Saw the insanely
high crater wall I fell from.

CALE

I hit it, with the drill. I fell
before I saw what happened-- but it
hasn't come back.

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)

If you could brief us on what you
saw, over.

*

*

*

KORVER

Yeah-- well, that thing-- it's like
nothing we've ever seen.

*

*

CALE

It had these multiple metal cubic
parts that rotated-- 4 of them. All
together it was about 15 feet long.

*

KORVER

Are you sure? I saw circular--
metallic but circular-- concentric
rings--

CALE

No, it was definitely cubic. I hit one of them with my drill.

I stumbled to my feet. Looked at my suit. It had lacerations. Luckily none of them too deep.

KORVER

The-- the GPR took different images-- from different angles. Rectangles and circles.

(paused)

And you-- we-- saw a different craft. You saw one that was square-- maybe it was rectangular? I saw one that was circular. There's a strange consistency here.

CALE

Excellent point.

KORVER

Whatever it is, it's highly sophisticated, technologically advanced--

*
*

BRENNIN (on radio)

--and non-human.

That thought didn't take long to sink in. We've all been thinking it. We should go ahead and confirm it.

*

BRENNIN (CONT'D)

You made contact. With something that doesn't want you there.

KORVER

Control? Got any insight here?

MISSION SPECIALIST

Negative. Analysis is scrubbing video-- detail is difficult to make out. Got the surgeon here-- he's suggesting you check O2.

*
*
*

I sighed. Breathed in some oxygen. Opened my chest screen, looked at my digital gauges.

*
*

KORVER

We're low. 35 minutes. Max.

*

CALE

And the battery's at 7 minutes. The heater is killing it.

*
*

KORVER

Let's head back to the SEV, grab oxygen tanks--

*
*

CALE

--I checked, they were all torn apart.

KORVER

--we need to double check.

CALE

You saw it-- Vulcan is destroyed--
We don't have backups of anything--
no O2-- no batteries-- no suits,
nothing.

*
*
*

KORVER

Then this is it.

Cale didn't respond. Nor did Mission Control. Or Brennan.
There was no reason to.

*

KORVER (CONT'D)

Fuck.

I looked around-- saw my drill. Saw the cycle, it was on
its side. I sighed. Took a breath. Took another one.

*
*

KORVER (CONT'D)

...I don't want to die in a fuckin
crater.

*

I walked towards the cycle.

*

KORVER (CONT'D)

Shut off heaters-- save batteries--

*

I shut off my heater. Could feel it start to cool down
immediately.

*
*

KORVER (CONT'D)

Direct us to the nearest cave.
Temperatures should be warmer below
ground. We gotta get out of here
before that thing brings its friends
back. I'm not gonna sit around and
swallow this shit without chewing.

*
*

*
*

RICHARD BRENNIN. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: *IN CHARON X COMMAND MODULE*

*

REF: 451, Pg.95

I opened a map on screen. Slid my fingers hurriedly across.
Stopped at a mountainous area not too far away:

*
*

BRENNIN

The Particle Sierra is your closest
option. 1.3 nautical.

*

JUSTINE CALE. CONTINUED.LOCATION: *GIANT CRATER BOTTOM*

REF: 452, Pg.131

I had my map out. I tracked a destination to a different location: the Quantum Mountain Range.

CALE

I suggest the Quantum Mountain Range, it's 1.5 nautical--

BRENNIN

--that's further, time is precious.

CALE

It's got the flatter path, less battery drain on the cycle --it's our best option.

KORVER

Quantum it is. Now we got to get out of this black hole.

Korver was looking up at the crater wall. I pointed to the opposite side.

CALE

That side's a lower elevation than this one. With enough momentum we could cycle out.

KORVER

(he nodded)

Yeah. Copy that.

He grunted as he stood the cycle up. Next to it were items that had fallen off into the soil.

He grabbed something out of the dirt, the sub-air explosive--

KORVER (CONT'D)

We could use this--

He tucked it in a breast pocket as pulsing static assaulted our ears--

BRENNIN (on radio)

Gents, losing you. I'm orbiting backside through the rings-- I'm routing you direct to Mission Control--

CUT TO:

RICHARD BRENNIN. CONTINUED.LOCATION: *IN CHARON X COMMAND MODULE*

REF: 451, Pg.96

BRENNIN

--I'll be back in 10 minutes-- 33 seconds.

KORVER (on radio)

Copy that. We'll be here.

BRENNIN

Control, Charon out.

MISSION SPECIALIST

See you in 10.

The static returned. 7 INTERMITTENT PULSES. I immediately tapped and swiped in complex communication passwords, then opened a new radio link:

BRENNIN (to radio)

Responding to contact request. Line secure. Coding in: Alpha, Tango, Charlie, Beta, Zebra, Zebra, Zebra.

VOICE (on radio)

Code received. Connecting.

As I heard more static pops I looked out the window... saw my reflection. I could use a shave but had no motivation to do it.

Beyond my reflection I saw **X**, and the termination line between day and night-- as I flew towards the night side. Then the screen lit up with--

[NAME REDACTED] (on screen)

Lieutenant.

BRENNIN

Sir.

[NAME REDACTED]

You're ordered to begin extraction from Planet X orbit and return to Venus B2.

My mouth hung open. Did I just hear what I thought I heard?

BRENNIN

Say again.

[NAME REDACTED]

We're bringing you home.

BRENNIN

Without the crew?

[NAME REDACTED]

Affirmative.

It took me a moment to answer. What was going on here?

BRENNIN

Negative. I'll be here as long as they're breathing, sir.

[NAME REDACTED]

It's not a favor, it's an order.

BRENNIN

We fly to die, sir. There's no way I abandon crew 50 billion miles from civilization.

The screen cut to black... Whisky Tango Foxtrot -- What The Fuck. A new face came on air. One I didn't recognize. Female.

[OMITTED]

This is [OMITTED].

BRENNIN

What? Executive Branch... The President knows about the Corps-- ?

[OMITTED]

Correct.

BRENNIN

Ma'am, it was my understanding that the Corps operates under a clandestine arm of the government that has zero oversight -- that not even the President is briefed on it.

[OMITTED]

That was status quo two years ago. We've had an election and a debt budget witch hunt that re-configured control of the government.

I was reeling.

[OMITTED] (CONT'D)

I am ordering you home. I understand your feelings for your crew-- I do-- but they're in a drown to death, burn to death situation. Nothing can be done for them. It's essential for mission continuity you return. You'll be sent back at the earliest opportunity. And if you'll brave it, next time you'll walk X instead of stare at it.

I didn't answer...I was thinking...thinking...

[OMITTED] (on radio) (CONT'D)
Lieutenant acknowledge.

*
*

CUT TO:

CHRIS KORVER. MOMENT LATER.

LOCATION: IN CRATER

REF: 450, Pg.66

I struggled with my drill. The bit was stuck. My thumb slipped, hit the on switch-- *the drill spun up, the BIT rocketed off-- FLEW 8 FEET-- and thudded at Cale's feet.*

*

CALE

Hey.

*

KORVER

Sorry the bit--

*

CALE

--the vacuum makes it stick, even
when the latch is open.

*

*

I pulled the bit out of the soil and we got onto the cycle. I grabbed the steering wheel. Looked out at the opposite crater wall. It did look like we could climb it.

*

*

KORVER

Alright--

I gunned it. We tore across the crater floor. As we approached the wall we started to slope upwards.

I steered a bit right and leaned into it, so we'd ascend at an angle. But it was still getting a bit steep. Felt like we could tip over-- but the 1/6 gravity was on our side-- I hoped.

*

*

CALE

--steeper than I thought.

KORVER

Yeah--

The cycle started to slowdown-- and

*

THE FRONT WHEEL LIFTED OFF THE GROUND,

*

And lifted further-- we were gonna backflip back into into the crater--

*

KORVER (CONT'D)

--shit --shit

*

We leaned forward but kept tilting back.....

*

THEN WE CRESTED THE CRATER RIM-- took flight for a split second-- Landed-- hard-- rough-- but stayed on our wheels.

I let out a breath.

CALE
Maybe I should drive.

KORVER
Pick a better road next time.

The front fender was broken. X-dirt kept spitting into our face plates. Felt like it would hit our eyes.

CALE
23 minutes O2.

Sobering realism. We were starting to shiver. Fog was creeping up our helmet glass.

KORVER
If you could do this all over again,
would you?

Cale hesitated, the question tripping her up.

CALE
I'd tell [NAME REDACTED] to go fuck
a moon rock.

KORVER
I heard he fucks rocks nightly.

I made a 'fist rock' and pumped it obscenely. We would'a laughed but were too stressed so we grinned instead.

KORVER (CONT'D)
Well...if we're gonna go out, this
is the way to do it--

KORVER (CONT'D) CALE
Fly to die. Fly to die.

We cycled in silence for a bit, blazing across the X surface...

CALE (CONT'D)
...14 minutes of O2. We're under a
half mile from Rimae.

KORVER
What do you think civi's would say
if they knew there were three
astronauts 50 billion miles away,
exploring a planet 24 hundred times
larger than Earth?

CALE
They'd want to see the reality show--

KORVER
--heh, like Survivor?

CALE
More like Big Brother.

KORVER
Heh, right.
(I was laughing)
If they knew how many times we walked
out there and fixed one of those
Mars rovers NASA 'magically' repaired
from Earth, they'd flip their
shi.....

I trailed off because of what I saw. I hit the breaks turned
the bike left 90 degrees and skidded to an abrupt stop.

In the distance something **METALLIC HUNCHED IN THE SOIL.**

Just sitting there. In the distance. Alone.

KORVER (CONT'D)
You see that.

CALE
I see it.

We stared harder. *I zoomed my helmet optics in.* Still couldn't
make out much detail. Dim sunlight glinted off its surface.

KORVER
Control. Do we have radar coverage,
over.

MISSION SPECIALIST
Negative. Charon is still backside.

I watched it. My breathing filled my ears. Whatever the
fuck it was just stood there. Staring at us.

KORVER
Is it moving...?

CALE
...It's...it's reading standstill.

I looked over my shoulder.....there was nothing behind us --
that I could see with the naked eye.

KORVER
Raise the long range imager.

CALE
But the battery--

KORVER
Just do it.

JUSTINE CALE. CONTINUED.LOCATION: *IN FRONT OF UNKNOWN SEV*

REF: 452, Pg.142

I looked around, on the horizon. Expecting *something* to approach...

KORVER

Raise the long range imager.

CALE

But the battery--

KORVER

Just do it.

I swiped glass, and the long range imager, an articulating arm with a giant camera cannon attached to it, rose from the back of the cycle. I aimed it at the 'anomaly'.

It vibrated as I took a picture.

CALE

Image rendering, standby.

We looked at the cycle screens as the image slowly rasterized.....

Then it appeared on screen. My heart stopped.

KORVER

How the fuck is this possible.

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED.LOCATION: *ON CYCLE.*

REF: 450, Pg.80

KORVER

How the fuck is this possible.

Mission Control -- radio silence...

Cale -- radio silence...

On the screen, was a fully intact,

VULCAN LANDER.

I throttled up and exploded the cycle towards it.

KORVER (CONT'D)

I wanna die knowing what that is.

We flew towards it.

As we got closer the Vulcan grew larger to the naked eye.

We arrived

AT THE VULCAN LANDER

and stopped.

I got out of the cycle. Walked towards it. Looked up at it, 30 feet tall. Diamond shape. Four proton rocket engines. Matte black.

It looked exactly like our SEV, except for one glaring difference:

On its side, emblazoned in shock orange, was written VULCAN CHARON **IX**. One less than our mission, VULCAN CHARON **X**.

I stared up at it, dumbfounded.

KORVER

Control... Explain this.

No one answered me. I grabbed my drill and its parts. Attached a bit, and approached it...

...The SEV was in pristine condition...I circled around...

KORVER (CONT'D)

Control-- How is this here if we were the first mission charted to this planet. Explain this.

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio)

Commander. Standby.

Sun flashed in my eye. I raised a hand to block it. And that's when I saw its DOOR WAS OPEN.

KORVER

What is this... ?

I reached the ladder, looked up at the door. Could only see the ceiling. I slung the drill over my back.

I climbed. Hand over hand. Rung by rung. Reached the top.

I peered in...

...no movement inside. But there were a lot of shadows. It was getting harder to breathe. Oxygen was running out. Looked at gauge. 11 MINUTES.

Looked over at Cale. She wasn't looking this direction. She was looking to the horizon. Odd.

I went inside.

JUSTINE CALE. CONTINUED.LOCATION: *BESIDE THE SEV*

REF: 452, Pg.144

I didn't see anything on the horizon. Turned around. Looked up at Korver as he went inside. I reached down and adjusted the radio on my chest screen--

CALE

(to Control)

[NAME REDACTED], Cale-- direct line.

Coding in: Alpha, Bravo, Venus, Tango, Tango, Tango.

VOICE (on radio)

Code received. Connecting.

[NAME REDACTED] (on radio)

Go ahead.

CALE

I have to tell him--

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED.LOCATION: *INSIDE THE SEV*

REF: 450, Pg.81

I slowly stepped into the SEV. Waited for my eyes to adjust. They did.

It was a pigsty. Dried rations everywhere. Broken equipment everywhere. Shattered screens. Looked like a tornado aftermath.

KORVER

Whatever went down in here wasn't good.

I moved to the control panel. Flipped the on switch-- nothing--

KORVER (CONT'D)

Power's dead.

Something moved-- I flinched, it banged down next to me.

I spun my drill-- slashed down at it--

SOMETHING EXPLODED

I ducked-- flinched, as something

BANGED BACK AND FORTH VIOLENTLY IN THE MODULE.

KORVER (CONT'D)

Fuuuck---

Then it stopped. Went still.

I looked up to see a ruptured OXYGEN TANK. I had hit it with my drill.

I calmed and then I smiled.

KORVER (CONT'D)

...yes.

There were three more of them on the rack behind it.

*

I grabbed them--

KORVER (CONT'D)

Cale--

Headed for the door.

KORVER (CONT'D)

--you're not gonna believe what I found.

I got to the door. Cale was walking away from the SEV.

*

KORVER (CONT'D)

Cale....CALE-- !

No response. Her mouth was moving, but I didn't hear a thing.....she was having a full on conversation with someone else...

*

*

My eyes caught something in the opposite direction, lying in the **X**-dirt--

*

TWO ASTRONAUTS.

CUT TO:

CHRIS KORVER.

LOCATION: *NEXT TO ASTRONAUTS*

REF: 450, Pg.85

I bounded towards the astronauts...

*

Arrived...

They weren't simply laying down. *They were also intertwined.*

Holding each other.

Dead.

One held the others head/helmet. The other was holding onto the opposite's chest. Their mirrored sun visors stared at me ominously.

I kneeled next to the nearest one. Reached my hand towards the visor-- started to lift it-- but its spring

SNAPPED IT UPWARDS--

I flinched-- looked back-- saw GIGANTIC EYEBALLS PRESSED AGAINST THE GLASS.

They were **swollen-- Decomposed-- Bacteria filled--** but had nowhere to drain inside the contained environment.

I couldn't look anymore. Looked away. Over at Cale.

JUSTINE CALE. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: *BESIDE THE SEV*

REF: 452, Pg.147

My back was to the SEV. I didn't want Korver to see my mouth moving.

CALE

Sir-- at this point it doesn't matter--

Something shoved me-- I stumbled-- turned around-- KORVER. His eyes were on my chest-- on the radio settings.

I could see his mouth moving, yelling, couldn't hear him. I reached down, switched to his frequency--

KORVER

--why the fuck are you on a direct link.

He slammed his helmet up against mine-- I stumbled back--

KORVER (CONT'D)

What the fuck are you saying-- who are you talking to--

He slammed his helmet into mine again-- I lost my balance-- hit the x-dust.

KORVER (CONT'D)

Control-- Korver-- what are you doing-- TALK TO ME--

Korver **SHOVED ME--**

KORVER (CONT'D)

SOMEONE TALK TO ME--

Korver raised his foot-- I thought he was going to crush my helmet--

CALE

--OK --OK --STOP. STOP! I'll tell you! STOP-- !

He backed off a bit. I was close to hyperventilating. I was almost out of O2.

KORVER
Start talking-- talk-- TALK--

CALE
I was on this mission--

*

KORVER
--what mission.

--I pointed at the astronauts.

CALE
--their mission.

KORVER
You've been here? On **X**?

*

CALE
--no, I was in orbit. Command Module.
I-- they died and I was ordered to
return home. And they sent me on--
on-- our mission cause I knew about
it--

KORVER
Knew what-- ?

CALE
That we're not alone.
(I took a breath)
The truth is, we're not the second
mission, We're the tenth--

*

KORVER
--WHAT?

CALE
(breathed)
--we're just the first to survive
this long.

Korver took a moment. Soaking it in. I couldn't tell what he was going to do next--

KORVER
[NAME REDACTED]-- I know you're
listening-- affirm this.

*

*

[NAME REDACTED] (on radio)
...Affirmed. Commander. The
information flow was mandated by
POTUS--

*

*

*

*

KORVER
The President--

*

[NAME REDACTED] (on radio)
 --correct. His office is running
 point on Charon missions.

KORVER
 Bullshit, the Corps' run by the shadow
 gov-- the President doesn't know
 about us--

[NAME REDACTED]
 --no longer the case, it was
 dismantled. The President's in
 control.

KORVER
 Fuck-- what is this-- ? *What is
 this-- ?*

Korver backed up, looked towards the astronauts, looked back
 at me. *Closed in on me--*

KORVER (CONT'D)
 What are-- *what are we dealing with
 here-- what's attacking us-- ?*

CALE
*We don't know-- we don't know who
 they are-- why they're here--*

KORVER
Everything-- give me everything--

CALE
*I am-- I am-- Each mission they
 send we find out more-- At first we
 thought it was Soviet, then we thought
 it was Chinese, then we realized it
 had to be something else-- that was
 here before. And-- and-- the last
 mission we found out there's weapons
 systems, advanced technology--
 They're relying on us to dig up
 answers-- *why-- when-- what--**

CHRIS KORVER.

LOCATION: *NEXT TO SEV*
 REF: 450, Pg.87

I swallowed hard. Took a breath. I could murder her. Looked
 back at the astronauts...

KORVER
 What happened to them--

CUT TO:

CHRIS KORVER.LOCATION: *NEXT TO ASTRONAUTS*

REF: 450, Pg.89

We stood in front of the two men. You could hear our breathing laboring. We needed to get back to those oxygen tanks.

*

KORVER

--their suits are intact. They weren't attacked--

CALE

They killed each other.

KORVER

What?

CALE

Yeah. The one on the left is Commander Rawlings--

(pointed to the other)

--he's Captain Kilbarger. I heard it on the radio-- Kilbarger was trying to take off Rawlings' helmet.

Cale shook her head. Remembering.

*

CALE (CONT'D)

He was convinced that was the way to save them. Lost his fucking mind.

*

Now I looked at them in a new light. They weren't just holding each other. They were **in the middle of a fight.**

Kilbarger wasn't holding Rawlings' head, he was trying to remove his helmet. And Rawlings had disconnected Kilbarger's oxygen hose.

*

It was an eerie snapshot in time.

KORVER

I knew Kilbarger. We did flight school together. Thought he died in a boating accident.

*

*

CALE

He probably thought you died too.

KORVER

Now he's really dead.

CALE

My O2's almost out-- there should be tanks in the SEV.

*

KORVER

Got them-- they're next to the
ladder.....

I looked down at the astronauts' feet. There was a single pair of footprints leading about 10 yards away... to something drawn in the sand. I couldn't make it out from here.

I walked... followed the prints to where they led. Looked at it. *One of them had written something in the x-dirt, in large oversized letters.* *

It read:

REKAM RAEF *

KORVER (CONT'D)

Rekam Raef? *

CALE

Raef... He could have been hypoxic--
when he wrote it--

KORVER

Or maybe it actually means something.

CALE

Rekam Raef. Maybe he meant *Recan Reef*. *

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio) *

--that's 2 miles south of your
location. We've recorded flashes in
that area for decades.

CALE

I think that region was in their
mission coordinates--

KORVER

No...no... I knew Kilbarger... *

I circled around the words to the other side.

KORVER (CONT'D)

He didn't read very well-- I thought
he could have been dyslexic--

I looked at the words upside down. Now they meant something.

Rekam Raef *was actually*... *

KORVER (CONT'D)

....**FEAR MAKER.** *

I stared at the words. More perplexed than ever. *

CALE
You couldn't get more cryptic.

KORVER
Is it fear maker, as in a generator
of fear? Or fear, maker. As in
'Fear your maker'.

FLAAAAAAAAAASH--

KORVER (CONT'D)
Ahhh--

I was blinded-- couldn't see--

CALE
I can't see-- I can't--
*I blinked-- blinked-- everything was blue-white, couldn't
even see helmet glass--*

*I stumbled back-- my sight started to clear-- saw x-dust
everywhere--*

FLAAAAAAAAAASH--

*--another one ripped through our eyes-- this time I was
knocked to the ground-- tumbled a few feet--*

Didn't know what was happening--

Brennin's radio cut through--

BRENNIN (on radio)
*---Korver-- Cale-- I repeat-- another
bogey heading your way-- bearing 233--*

*My vision cleared-- x-dust surrounded us like fog-- Cale was
stumbling around a few yards away-- I got up, moved towards
the oxygen tanks--*

KORVER
Get the cycle-- meet me at the SEV--

*I shoved her towards the cycle-- I bounded towards the SEV--
more dust cleared-- then I actually saw the SEV--*

*IT WAS ANNIHILATED. Looked like scrap metal. Massive sparks
arced over it like lightning. No fire in vacuum.*

*Two of the oxygen tanks remained a few feet away from the
wreckage. I headed towards them. Grabbed them.*

*But saw another FLASH on the horizon-- growing fast-- heading
right for us--*

BRENNIN
Bogey is 20 seconds away--

KORVER
I see it-- I see it--

JUSTINE CALE. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: AT THE CYCLE
 REF: 452, Pg.149

*I leapt. Landed next to the cycle. Got in. Hit the throttle--
 u-turned towards the SEV-- saw it-- it was destroyed--*

Skidded to a stop next to Korver-- sprayed X soil on him--

CALE
Get in--

He did so. An oxygen tank in each arm.

KORVER
Cave's 800 yards up--

I stepped on the throttle. We accelerated.

BRENNIN (on radio)
It's right on top of you--

Things were getting brighter. Flash was close--

KORVER
I see the opening--

I could see it too. A cave mouth in the X hill.

Suddenly everything became overbright.

I looked back-- was BLINDED

FLAAAAAAAASH--

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED

LOCATION: NEXT TO ASTRONAUTS
 REF: 450, Pg.93

*--everything went white. An impact hit us-- cycle ended as
 the back wheels launched upwards-- thought we were gonna crash
 this time-- but the cycle slammed back down-- kept going--*

*I blinked-- saw the cave opening less than 100 yards. But
 it wasn't just a cave opening.*

*I SAW A PILLAR ON ONE SIDE OF IT. LOOKED LIKE PART OF AN
 ARCHWAY?*

KORVER

--you see that ? It-- it's--

I looked over Cale's seat back...

SHE WASN'T THERE. NO ONE WAS DRIVING.

I looked behind-- could only see debris and x dust falling--

Looked forward to find a

BOULDER RACING TOWARDS ME.

I reached ahead-- tried to turn the wheel-- was too late and

SMASHED RIGHT INTO THE ROCK--

JUSTINE CALE. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: PLANET X SURFACE

REF: 452, Pg.150

*I was airborne. Didn't know up from down. Hit the ground.
Bounced up.*

*Hit again. Helmet glass cracked. Hoped it wasn't
catastrophic. At this point I was borderline unconscious.*

But I saw the crack grow-- it got longer-- I hoped it would
stop. It didn't. Heard a whistle sound. Air escaping.

I hit a switch on my helmet. Tried to activate secondary
glass. It was stuck-- wouldn't move.

I coughed-- Air was being sucked out of my lungs--

CALE

I can't breathe--

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED

LOCATION: NEXT TO ASTRONAUTS

REF: 450, Pg.94

A cycle tire was spinning in my face. Cycle was finished.
I immediately looked around-- saw an oxygen tank. Couldn't
see the other one.

I crab-crawled. Grabbed it and grabbed the drills-- started
leaping for the cave-- 40 feet away--

CALE (on radio)

I can't breathe--

I hesitated. Looked back, couldn't see Cale.

KORVER

Where are you-- ?

CALE (on radio)
--helmet cracked.

I kept going, reached the cave mouth-- tried to catch my breath-- it was hard-- too much carbon dioxide in my tank--

Looked back. Could barely see Cale through the dust-- withering on the ground. Something else got my attention. On the horizon.

Saw some kind of ship. Or vessel. But what was stunning, is that it stretched over 1/3rd of the horizon. And it was approaching us.

I looked at Cale-- Back at the oxygen tank-- Then at Cale--

I sighed-- and went for the oxygen-- Grabbed it. Hurlled it further in the cave-- turned back towards Cale.

KORVER

Coming for you.

Heard a breathless reply in response.

I saw something on the ship flash...flash got bigger-- closer-- fast-- I had a feeling it wouldn't miss this time.

JUSTINE CALE. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: PLANET X SURFACE

REF: 452, Pg.150

I couldn't talk-- couldn't respond to Korver-- I sucked in a ragged breath--

I rolled over-- tried to stand, stumbled towards the cave a couple feet-- went down--

My own breathing was getting quieter. Not enough air to carry sound.

Hit my helmet glass-- still wouldn't move-- I was too weak to try again.

I saw another light in the distance-- coming right for me-- in my current state it looked like a messenger from the other side.

Hands grabbed me. Korver's-- he yanked me up--

KORVER

C'mon--

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED

LOCATION: NEXT TO CALE

REF: 450, Pg.95

I pulled her up-- yanked her towards the cave-- *

It was starting to get bright again--

She couldn't really walk. But she was only 60 pounds-- I
pretty much carried her-- leaping 4 feet at a time-- *

KORVER

C'Mon-- almost there-- almost--

I heard a grunt of acknowledgement from her-- *

We were ten feet away--

I leaped, now 5--

*I leaped again just as **EVERYTHING WENT WHITE--***

RICHARD BRENNIN. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: IN CHARON X COMMAND MODULE *

REF: 451, Pg.104

I watched the video and radar screens-- *

KORVER (on radio)

C'Mon-- almost there-- almost--

*Video cut out-- I heard multiple concussions-- Hits-- And
then static. I adjusted reception. Static didn't clear. I
knew it wouldn't.* *

BRENNIN (to radio)

Korver--

(I waited)

Korver.....Cale....

On ground radar I could see this enormous *something* approach
their last location. And then it stopped. And I guess
hovered.

BRENNIN (CONT'D)

Korver....

MISSION SPECIALIST (on radio) *

Brennin, Control, we lost signal
from the surface-- are you still
receiving? *

BRENNIN

Negative-- Are you seeing radar-- ?

MISSION SPECIALIST *

Affirm, we are.

BRENNIN

Wh--

*I got distracted by my **proximity radar**.*

Something was approaching me, up here, in orbit.

I looked out the window. Couldn't see anything. Looked back at the radar. It was getting closer, faster, what could move this fast?

I looked out the window again and I saw it. The sun had this thing lit up like a star. I got a good look, and this thing didn't look anything like I thought it would.

BRENNIN (CONT'D)

What are these things-- ?

MISSION SPECIALIST

Again, we are being asked to forcibly order you to return home.

BRENNIN

I think I missed my window.

CHRIS KORVER.

LOCATION: IN CAVE.

REF: 450, Pg.95

I came to lying on a bed of rubble. Rocks were on my legs and torso. I shoved them off.

It was dark. But I could see rocks everywhere. The cave entrance had collapsed.

My Co2 was too high-- I was close to blacking out. I could feel I was hypoxic.

Saw Cale further in. I got up-- unsteadily. Went towards her. Grabbed the oxygen tank on the way.

Got to Cale-- she was blue-- barely breathing. Her helmet was cracked. I tried to shut its secondary layer, it was stuck.

I unhooked her oxygen hose-- attached it to the O2 tank. Her tube trembled with air. I was forcing oxygen into her helmet. Even though it was escaping from the leak.

I saw her stir a bit. I grabbed a rock.

KORVER

Ahhhh--

Slammed it down on her helmet. Slammed it again. The crack got longer-- Her eyes flew open. Panicked--

JUSTINE CALE. CONTINUED. *

LOCATION: IN THE CAVE

REF: 452, Pg.152

--a rock banged down into my eyes, bounced off my helmet.
The crack got longer. I panicked-- tried to move-- could
 only flail my leg a little. *

The rock slammed into me again-- I flinched--

CALE

Stop-- I'm sorry I-- please-- stop--

Bang-- the rock hit again-- jarred the shit out of me--

CALE (CONT'D)

I was following orders-- I was--

Bang--

KORVER

You're oxygen's still-- still--
 leaking--

He tried to breathe, was laboring, his eyes were rolling-- *

KORVER (CONT'D)

I have to hit your helmet-- your
 secondary layer-- lose-- knock it--

Bang-- **MY HELMET GLASS CRACKED COMPLETELY**-- vacuum sucked at
 my eyes-- lungs--

Then Korver slammed the side of the helmet, and the secondary
 helmet layer finally slid down and into place-- sealing me
 from the vacuum.

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: IN CAVE.

REF: 450, Pg.97

I dropped the rock-- The world rotated 180 degrees and I
 realized I was falling over-- I hit the ground-- **was out**
like a light. *

Next thing I knew, I was hearing whispers in my earpiece.

CALE

--don't move... stay still.... *

I was on my side. Looking at a cave wall. I started to
 turn my head--

CALE (CONT'D)

(whispered)
 --don't move-- ! *

She held me still. All I could hear was our breathing while
I stared at this stupid wall. *

KORVER

--how long was I out...

CALE

(whispered)

...there's something further-- down
the tunnel...I think it's-- *

She stopped. I was dying to see why. *

KORVER

let me up--

CALE

...move slowly...it's behind you--
about 15 yards.

I inched up into a sitting position. And slowly turned my
head...

Saw more of the wall...

Then saw the length of it...

Until finally I could see further down the tunnel...

KORVER

I don't see any.....

Then my eyes adjusted--

SOMETHING WAS STANDING AT THE FAR END OF THE TUNNEL.

**It was in shadow. I couldn't get a good read on its form,
its physique...but it was about 7 feet tall.**

CALE

It's been watching us. For about 25
minutes.

My eyes looked for my drill...it was lying by the wall.
Cale had hers in hand. *

KORVER

Has it-- communicated?

CALE

No. But it's gotten closer-- I
haven't actually seen it move, but
it's-- it's about ten feet closer
now than before.

It stood there mysterious. Enigmatic.

Then I felt it, a soft *boooooom* reverberating throughout the cave... And then another...similar to a small earthquake.

KORVER

What is that--?

CALE

Behind us. They're trying to clear the cave entrance.

I sighed. Stared at our new friend.

KORVER

We have to get past this thing.

CALE

You got that explosive?

KORVER

Yeah...but not in here-- we'll bury ourselves.

It continued to stand there. Still as a statue.

KORVER (CONT'D)

--I'm going to try...and communicate.

Cale shook her head. Unsure. We felt another *boom* from behind. *

CALE

You better hurry.

I looked at the thing. And slowly raised my hand...

JUSTINE CALE. CONTINUED. *

LOCATION: *IN THE CAVE*

REF: 452, Pg.160

...Korv carefully held his hand up. *

KORVER

...My name is Commander Christopher Korver, of the U.S. Air Force...

The entity remained still.

CALE

It can't hear you without one of our radios-- *

KORVER

(he got louder)

--My name is Commander Christopher Korver, of the U.S. Air Force... *

Still no movement.

KORVER (CONT'D)
 (even louder)
 ...My name is Commander Christopher
 Korver, of the U.S. Air Force...

CALE
 Hey...hey easy--

KORVER
 ...My name is Commander Christopher
 Korver, of the U.S. Air Force...

CALE
 Why are you repeating-- ?

KORVER
 I'm not. I only said it once.

I was stunned. My mouth moved to respond to that -- but
 nothing came out.

I stared at it. Korver stared at it. It stared at us.

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: *IN CAVE.*

REF: 450, Pg.99

My voice-- or rather-- *ITS* voice-- stopped repeating. And
 something else crackled in our earpiece-- *

UNKNOWN ENTITY (on radio)
Sarafai la'eed Akerenun vanchana--

I subconsciously moved back a couple steps.

AND IT MOVED CLOSER FIVE FEET.

KORVER
 --shit --shit

I flinched-- continued backing up-- Cale did the same--

**This thing-- it moved in an odd way. As if it were rolling
 and sliding at the same time. Virtually indescribable. I
 still couldn't really see it-- it was still in shadows.**

UNKNOWN ENTITY (on radio)
Sarafai la'eed Akerenun vanchana--

Its voice was louder-- distorting in my ear--

I reached down and grabbed my drill.

THE THING MOVED AGAIN--

We did too-- our backs hit up against the collapsed cave entrance-- as it shook again, pounded from the other side-- we had nowhere to run.

UNKNOWN ENTITY (on radio) (CONT'D)
SARAFAI LA'EED AKERENUN VANCHANA--

My head pounded with its voice-- it physically hurt it was so loud-- I turned on my drill-- it vibrated to life--

IT GOT CLOSER--

This thing WAS ONLY TEN FEET AWAY----

KORVER
What do you want--

JUSTINE CALE. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: IN THE CAVE

REF: 452, Pg.165

I saw some detail-- It had odd silver metallic surfaces and machinations, in sharp angles and squares, and

IT WAS ACTUALLY FLOATING.

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: IN CAVE.

REF: 450, Pg.99

--it was an extraordinarily black, dull metal, with rounded ends and contours----

UNKNOWN ENTITY (on radio)
SARAFAI LA'EED AKERENUN VANCHANA--

KORVER
What do you want--

IT THUNDERED FORWARD-- COLLIDED INTO ME-- KNOCKED ME INTO THE WALL--

I heard a SHEARING sound-- ORANGE SPARKS SPRAYED--

JUSTINE CALE. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: IN THE CAVE

REF: 452, Pg.166

--I shoved my drill somewhere in its metallic mass-- drill shook crazily-- almost yanked out of my hand-- BLUE SPARKS EXPLODED into my face--

The entity recoiled-- a part of it hit me in the chest-- I went flying--

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: IN CAVE.

REF: 450, Pg.100

My drill was rattling on the floor-- I grabbed it-- **Saw Cale hit the ground and bounce up-- hit the ceiling--**I lunged towards the thing-- drill first-- and it sunk in deep-- then proceeded to do what drills do, and bored in--**ELECTRONIC AUDIO WAVES assaulted my ears as my drill pulled itself deeper into this thing's metal insides--**It thrashed-- WHIPPING ME AROUND--**Sparks were erupting from its wounds-- I could barely see a thing-- I just tried to hang on--***JUSTINE CALE. CONTINUED.** *

LOCATION: IN THE CAVE

REF: 452, Pg.167

The cave was lit up like daylight as Korver got tossed around. **He looked like a rag doll riding a bull but hung on--**The entity was emitting an electronic tone over the radio-- it pierced my ears--**I charged it-- and threw my drill--**It ripped into its tail-- the whole thing shuddered-- then buckled--***CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED.**

LOCATION: IN CAVE.

REF: 450, Pg.101

THIS THING CONVULSED-- IT SHOOK-- **AND THEN FINALLY WENT DOWN-- AND WENT DOWN HARD.**I rolled off of it-- fought to catch my breath. It was still. Wasn't moving.***KORVER**

...man.

Cale gave me a hand. Helped me up. But she wouldn't let go. *

She pulled me closer. Put her hands around my waist. Her *

helmet touched mine. As close to a kiss as glass would allow. *

KORVER (CONT'D)

hey--

CALE

Thank you. *Thank you. For coming back out-- into the open, and saving me.*

KORVER

I--

CALE

Thank you. I know we don't have much time left-- but thank you, for letting me live the rest of it.

This close to her face I could see the genuine gratitude in her eyes, along with something more. I was touched.

*
*

KORVER

I would do it again.

She squeezed me one last time, and let go.

*

CALE

I refilled your O2-- we've got about 2 hours depending on how much we exert.

I stared down at this thing. **Arcs of light** continued to flash within it.

It's hard to describe what it looked like. It was as an odd collection of obsidian black, cylindrical and spherical geometric elements that was about seven feet long.

*
*

CALE (CONT'D)

This one --it's different. From the others. It doesn't have the same shape.

*

*

KORVER

(I nodded)

I don't think it's a-- it's a fighter.

CALE

...how so.

KORVER

The other ones-- out there-- they fired at us. Energy based weapons or something. This one had to attack us-- with it's bare hands so to speak.

CALE

All these cubic elements are fascinating, the way they're connected.

*

KORVER

You mean spherical--

CALE
--no cubic.

We stared at each other.

I looked at the thing again. It's elements were clearly spherical.

KORVER
OK. I definitely, see spherical elements. Spherical.

JUSTINE CALE. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: *IN THE CAVE*

REF: 452, Pg.173

From where I was standing, it was definitely cubic. No question. It looked like a metallic rubik's cube, in a rough rectangular form-- and that odd tail.

SPLIT SCREEN KORVER/CALE POV.

We see both of their POINTS OF VIEWS simultaneously.

On the left is Korver: The machine is *spherical in nature*.

On the right is Cale: The machine is *cubic in nature*.

CALE
Huh.....let's exchange positions.

They exchange positions...and a remarkable thing occurs as they walk around the machine, trading places:

KORVER'S POV: the machine morphs from spherical to cubic.

CALE'S POV: the machine morphs from cubic to spherical.

CALE (CONT'D)
I think...that-- this technology, may be more advanced than we can understand...

KORVER
It feels almost-- supernatural. As if...as if it were *alive*.

CALE
If God made us, who the hell made them?

END SPLIT SCREEN.

JUSTINE CALE. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: *IN THE CAVE*

REF: 452, Pg.180

I kneeled. Inspected the floor. It was smoother than the walls. Worn. *

CALE

A lot of traffic's been through here at some point. The ground's well traveled, smoothed out. *

KORVER

I saw a pillar built into the cave entrance. It looked like part of an archway. *

A speck of color caught my eye. On the wall. I walked over to it. I thought I could see something, behind the dirt.

I put my hand on the wall. Rubbed back and forth. Millions of years of dust drifted away...

KORVER (CONT'D)

Look at that...

I couldn't see it so close. I backed up next to Korv and took it all in:

It was a tactile diagram, made of circuit board like metals embedded into the wall. It was a diagram, **of the solar system**. *

Ten planets were depicted, however the most prominent was the largest planet -- **Planet X**. *

Instead of being on the outskirts of the solar system, **X** was in the center of the solar system, and the sun and the rest of the planets orbited around *it*. *

Even though they were etched into the stone, the planets actually moved and **orbited around X** as one stepped by them. A strange optical illusion similar to the machine. *

I looked further down the hallway. And could see the telltale signs that--

KORVER (CONT'D)

--it repeats. Down the entire hallway as a pattern. I doubt these things were into geocentric science. *

CALE

Yeah, they considered this planet the symbolic center of the solar system. The question is why. *

KORVER

I think this thing--
(MORE) *

KORVER (CONT'D)
 (he pointed at machine)
 --it was tending to, or-- maintaining
 something in here-- down the tunnel.
 That's why it didn't have any weapons.

I looked further down the tunnel. It faded away. Into darkness.

BOOOOOO00MMM....

*A boulder was cleared from the top of the cave opening--
 letting some of the sun in--*

KORVER (CONT'D)
Shit.

We grabbed our drills. Hurried deeper into the tunnel dark.

BOOOOO00MMMM....

More light lanced into the tunnel behind them.

*The ground started to slope downwards. Became steeper. And
 it curved to the left.*

We loped down it. Then full on daylight burst into the tunnel
 behind us--

CALE
 They're in--

I looked back in mid stride. Tunnel was lit up like noon.

KORVER
Watch out--

*I turned back around-- ran right into something huge--
 ricocheted back-- hit the ground. Looked up at it:*

It was a *BLACK RECTANGULAR* structure that stretched from
 floor to ceiling. Made of obsidian metal that was machine
 smoothed. I could see myself in its reflection.

KORVER (CONT'D)
 What the hell is it-- ?

At its front was a rectangular portal. A human could easily
 step inside of it.

Behind it the tunnel dead ended. I looked towards the cave
 opening-- could see shadows coming in. Blotting out the
 light.

I looked back at the portal. AND WALKED INSIDE.

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED.LOCATION: *IN CAVE.*

REF: 450, Pg.120

Cale looked at the black cylinder a moment. *THEN SHE WALKED INSIDE-- **--and I saw something that terrifies me even now. HER BODY WAS RIPPED APART.* ***I SAW SOMETHING-- UNSEEN-- PULLING HER FROM ALL SIDES--** *

CALE

*Uhhh-- uhhh-- Ahhhhhhhhhhhh--***--UNTIL SHE WAS LITERALLY TORN APART AND *DISAPPEARED* AT THE EXACT SAME TIME.** ***Her voice was cut off. Nothing more. What happened to her...? What could do that...?** ***I looked down the tunnel--****A CRAFT FLEW AROUND THE CORNER-- RACED TOWARDS ME-- TOO FAST-- DIDN'T GIVE ME TIME TO THINK-- A LIGHT STARTED TO GLOW ON ITS LEADING EDGE--****I TOOK A LEAP OF FAITH-- LUNGED BACK INTO THE CYLINDER--****I SCREAMED-- MORE THAN I HAVE EVER SCREAMED--****I FELT BLADES RIPPING INTO ME--****MY LEGS--****MY CHEST--****MY EYES--****I FELT LIKE I HAD JUST STEPPED INTO A BLENDER--***And then I was no more.*

CUT TO:

RICHARD BRENNIN. CONTINUED.LOCATION: *IN CHARON X COMMAND MODULE* *

REF: 451, Pg.126

I looked out the window. **Now I counted fifteen.**Fifteen goddamn ships that had surrounded mine.*

They were these *spherical sometimes cubic monstrosities*.
Made of black metal that appeared to be mashed together in
no coherent pattern or reason.

It was like my kids had made these things in arts and crafts. *

Except I knew these were deadly.

And they were huge.

Each one was five to ten times larger than the command module.
And they constantly spun. Some clockwise, others counter-
clockwise. It was fucking bizarre.

I noticed one of them had stopped spinning. *

I looked at the others. All of them had stopped. *

BRENNIN

Hm.

(to radio)

Control, Brenninn, our friends have
stopped spinning.

BRENNIN (on radio) (CONT'D)

Control, Brenninn, our friends have
stopped spinning.

The thing is, I didn't say it the second time. My mouth
wasn't moving. I looked at the radio-- confused.

BAAAAAAAANGGGG--

THE SHIP WAS HIT-- KNOCKED ME CLEAR ACROSS TO THE OTHER SIDE--
I HIT THE FAR WINDOW-- *

BAAAAAAAANGGGG--

I FLEW AGAIN-- HIT MY SEAT-- BOUNCED OFF OF IT INTO THE SUPPLY
RACK-- EVERYTHING FLEW OFF OF IT-- DISPERSING AROUND THE
MODULE--

I HEARD A WHISTLING-- HEARD AIR-- HEARD THE STRUCTURAL
INTEGRITY OF THE CRAFT GROAN AS IT FAILED--

BAAAAAAAANGGGG--

BAAAAAAAANGGGG--

BRENNIN (CONT'D)

Aaahhhhh--

CUT TO BLACK:

CHRIS KORVER. OVER BLACK.

LOCATION: UNKNOWN

REF: 450, Pg.120

I couldn't see myself. Couldn't feel myself. But I could hear myself scream. Strange. But that's what happened. *

And then I could feel that excruciating pain all over again. But this time it was happening from the inside out. As if someone had put these blender blades in my intestines.

And then I could feel my skin. Feel the suit on my skin. And then, see myself--

I dropped 2 feet, collapsed on the ground-- tried to catch my breath--

I rolled over. Looked around. I was in the same fucking cylinder I just left.

I got up, staggered out-- saw Cale-- but

THE CAVE WAS GONE.

Somehow we were standing in the middle of a barren desert.

But there was no sun. No rings. No stars. Just a sky that was blacker than the darkest black. *

KORVER

What the hell is this-- ?

CALE

We were moved-- somehow--

She bent over-- *

CALE (CONT'D)

--it still hurts inside.

I looked up at the sky. Still couldn't see anything. *

CALE (CONT'D)

If the stars are gone...we went from the equatorial area of the planet, to the south or north poles. *

KORVER

No-- that's, that's three thousand miles-- that's not possible. I mean-- we just got in that thing. *

CALE

It-- I think it's-- it deconstructed us, transmitted us here, and then reconstructed us again--

KORVER

What-- ? We were teleported-- ?

CALE

Yes.

I looked back at it. It sat there ominously in the soil.

KORVER

That means they'll follow us here.

Cale pointed towards mountains. Their silhouette could barely be seen. *

CALE

I think those are mountains. We should head for them, and find cover. *

KORVER

Agreed. *

We bounded over the terrain. Weren't as many craters on this side of the planet. Odd. My voice shook with each step: *

KORVER (CONT'D)

Charon, this is Korver, do you read... *

(nothing)

Charon, Brennin, this is Korver, you up there? *

CALE

Control, Cale... *

She shook her head. *

I looked back at the cylinder. We were putting good distance from it fast. Something glinted off its surface.

KORVER

I see movement-- at the cylinder--

CALE

--reflection?

Cale pointed to our left. A soft white glow could be seen on the **X** horizon. *

KORVER

What is it-- ?

CALE

The termination line's approaching--

KORVER

...ever think you'd see a sunrise on an alien planet 50 billion miles from home? *

CALE

Never thought I'd see a lot of things
I'm seeing.

I chuckled.

I tripped. Almost fell on a couple jagged rocks.

The mountains were closer than we thought. In fact. We
were there.

Boulders and rocks jutted out at haphazard angles.

KORVER

This terrain's very different-- from
the rest of **X**.

*

CALE

It's almost organized-- organized
chaos--

KORVER

--yeah, perfect description.

I scanned the horizon behind us. It was tough to see in the
low light. Eyes started to play tricks on you.

*

CALE

We should slow down. Preserve O2.

KORVER

If one thing doesn't kill us--
something else will.

*

We slowed to a walk. In this area, it became firmer. Less
regolith. Ground felt harder yet broken. Something was
falling out of my chest pocket. My tablet.

*

*

I pulled it out and my wife lit up the screen.

*

CALE

Why'd you two...why were you okay
with leaving her? And doing this?

*

*

*

KORVER

I didn't. She's dead.

*

I heard a sigh.

KORVER (CONT'D)

We uh...she thought I loved the
service-- more than I loved her.

*

*

CALE

Did you?

I looked back towards the cylinder, shrugged. Kept walking.

KORVER

She didn't think there was room for both. We got in a fight about it. She took a drive to cool off....got hit head on by a-- drunk driver going the wrong way. Down a freeway.

*

CALE

Fuck that sucks.

*

I stopped. Kneeled down and sighed. I placed my wife on the ground and took a breath. I stared at her for a moment... Touched my lips then touched hers...

*

*

*

Then I gently, reluctantly, covered her glowing face with x-dirt....until her glowing image was submerged under ground. Forever.

*

*

KORVER

I guess...

*

*

(unsteady breath)

*

....this is as good a time as any to move on.

*

I looked up at Cale. She gave me her hand to help me back up. We continued forward-- and I didn't let go of it, her hand.

*

*

*

KORVER (CONT'D)

What about you?

*

*

CALE

What about me?

*

*

KORVER

Who was the love of your life?

*

*

CALE

You can't tell?

*

*

KORVER

What?

*

*

CALE

This is my first time.

*

*

Whoa she went there.

*

KORVER

That's the kind of thing you admit just before you die.

*

*

*

CALE

Yeah. So what?

*

*

I gripped her hand tighter. We walked in silence.

*

KORVER

People should know -- the public --
about what we do. About what happened
here.

CALE

Think they could handle it?

KORVER

Humanity has a Copernicus view of
itself that's gonna have to change.

CALE

See what they did, to get us into
the Corps? Faking our deaths?
Withholding intel from you? They
have no intention of letting any of
this out.

KORVER

If I made it back, I think I would--

Light flashed-- both of us *flinched-- ducked.*

The light grew brighter. Fast.

CALE

It's the sunrise-- it's OK.

But it wasn't OK.

JUSTINE CALE. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: UNKNOWN

REF: 452, Pg.201

*The celestial termination line swept over us. Turning night
to dawn, and*

REVEALING WHAT ACTUALLY SPRAWLED AROUND US.

I grabbed my drill-- Korver same--

WE WEREN'T IN THE MIDDLE OF A PLANETARY DESERT;

WE WERE IN THE MIDDLE OF A PLANETARY CITY.

**THE ROCKS AND BOULDERS THAT STRETCHED FOR MILES WEREN'T ROCKS
AT ALL... THEY WERE THE SMASHED, DARK METAL, SURFACES OF
THOUSANDS OF DESTROYED STRUCTURES.**

THE MOUNTAINS WERE BUILDINGS OF INCALCULABLE SIZE.

**THESE BUILDINGS WERE RECTANGULAR, some SPHERICAL, others
OBLONG, but most INDESCRIBABLE.**

**The GROUND WAS METALLIC GREEN IN COLOR, with copper and silver
metal lines thick as an arm embedded throughout its surface.**

If any analogy made sense in describing this, I would say
the city looked like a

SUPER SIZED SURFACE OF AN ALIEN CIRCUIT BOARD.

Our jaws hung open as we soaked it all in.

KORVER

This is-- this is-- beyond-- it's...

*The city was in ruin, everything was decayed, decrepit, or
devastated, as if we were in the middle of an alien war zone.*

Soaring above all, WAS AN OCTAGONAL STRUCTURE THAT LOOKED
LIKE IT HAD BEEN CLEAVED IN HALF BY AN INCOMPREHENSIBLY
MASSIVE ASTEROID. FOUR TIMES THE SIZE OF THE GREAT PYRAMID
OF GIZA, ITS TIP SEEMED TO TOUCH THE BLACK SKY.

CALE

It's-- this is... impossible...

KORVER

This was built by-- I mean-- there
was a *population* of *things*-- that
actually lived here...

None of the buildings had doors, as if whoever built this
place, had no need for them.

CALE

It's...architecturally unlike anything
we've ever seen.

KORVER

I need to know why. I need to know
who and what these things are. That's
the last thing I need.

CALE

We need something that can tell us
the history-- hieroglyphics--

KORVER

Like in the cave.

CALE

Like in there.

I pointed at the great OCTAGONAL BUILDING in the center.

We walked towards it, down what might have been a

ROAD.

Shadows were deep, black, and everywhere.

Korver grabbed hold of his drill. Looked behind us.

KORVER

This could take longer than we have.

CALE

The O2--

KORVER

--the crafts. If they catch up to us.

He was right. I looked back the way we came...didn't see any movement. But couldn't see into the shadows. *

We maneuvered carefully around a giant stone brick blasted from a nearby building-- it was twice our height. We weren't sure what we'd find on the other side of it. *

Korver disappeared into its shadow. Was too dark to see him. I followed, when I got to the other side the

OCTAGONAL BUILDING *

was right there, its *crumbling* mass towering over us.

High-rises would be dwarfed by this structure. Only half of it was left-- the farside was *GONE*...it was a miracle it hadn't collapsed. *

I was in awe.

This structure was the only structure with a doorway. A doorway that was gigantic, arching ten stories above our heads. *

CALE *

Hell of a door. *

KORVER *

Think it needs to be that big? *

CALE *

Depends on who's going inside. *

Korver pointed above the door: *

High on the wall was the telltale sign of paint or a design, that was scraped away by whatever destroyed the building. *

KORVER *

Looks like part of a symbol. *

CALE *

Yeah. Of whatever's inside. *

We looked back down at the door... *

We moved towards it... *

From this angle we could barely see inward. *

CALE (CONT'D)

Looks clear.

KORVER

It looks like it...yeah. *

We moved cautiously through the entry... *

JUSTINE CALE. CONTINUED. *

LOCATION: *INSIDE THE OCTAGONAL ANTEROOM* *

REF: 452, Pg.207

Rubble laid everywhere. It was devastated. *

The space was huge... The size and scope reminded of an indoor football stadium, multiplied by a hundred. The ceiling was so high, it was not visible in the low light. *

Reaching down from that unknown void, were **thousands of irregularly shaped pillars of metal. These pillars did not simply reach straight down, but had multiple joints causing them to 'snake' down from above.** *

There were so many it looked like an **UPSIDE DOWN RED WOOD FOREST OF METAL.** *

KORVER

What are those...? *

As we walked forward, we could see that groups or bundles of these 'pillars' met at multiple focal points along the floor. The question was, what were they focused on? *

CALE

What's at the base of the clusters? *

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED. *

LOCATION: *INSIDE THE PYRAMID ANTEROOM*

REF: 450, Pg.131

We moved forward. Cautiously walking towards a cluster point near the entrance. *

Every footstep we took, *echoed back to us five seconds later.* That's how enormous this fucking place was. *

We neared one of the focal points, and that's when I realized what the jagged metal columns actually were. *

KORVER

These things....they're...they're cranes. Massive, *mechanized* cranes.... *

Cale considered my words, then looked at where the cranes met up as one. We couldn't quite make out what was beneath them.

CALE

Then, that would mean we're in a factory.

KORVER

What the fuck were they building?

The echo murmured my question back at me.

We continued walking and approached a focal point. The massive cranes loomed over us, each one as thick as five semi-trucks strapped together.

However as the cranes got closer to the ground, they narrowed, became skinnier than my arm, then skinnier than my finger, so that hundreds of them could knot over the point of interest.

We crept closer still, and finally, we could see what lay beneath the cranes:

A RECTANGULAR GLASS VAT. COFFIN SIZED. What the fuck?

KORVER (CONT'D)

I don't like this.

I circled around it, trying to get a better look, and it *morphed from rectangular to oval...*

KORVER (CONT'D)

It's shifting....

CALE

Ignore the exterior...Look-- look in the center of it. I think it's a...a mold...

I squinted... I leaned in... The surfaces were cracked, partially broken off. But the outline of the mold could be seen within the vat.

CALE (CONT'D)

It looks like the shape of a...

I squinted harder. Leaned closer and the mold shape finally came into view:

There was a cavity for a torso, appendages, and what might be arms and legs.

KORVER

They were making androids.

I looked up, at the thousands of other crane clusters, and the thousands of android moldings that must be beneath them.

CALE
A shitload.

KORVER
We're missing something.

RAYS OF LIGHT LIT THEM UP,

*lancing out of holes created by huge blocks of rock that
fell from the ceiling and*

POUNDED TO THE GROUND.

**THE LIGHT EXPOSED THE SKY HIGH CEILING, AND THE ENTIRE MASS
of IT THAT WOBBLED, AND WAS ABOUT TO COME DOWN ON TOP OF OUR
HEADS.**

CALE
--out out !

We scrambled-- ran-- for the exit--

I followed Cale--

*I glanced up-- the ceiling was on its way down-- instants
from hitting--*

Cale rushed through the door-- I DOVE

THROUGH IT,

*skidded onto the ground outside...as debris cannonaded out
of the opening--*

I got up-- Something caught my eye--

*It was the vague outline of ALIEN CRAFTS PROWLING IN THE
SKY. Heading towards us.*

Cale ran. I followed. THEY PURSUED.

KORVER
Tight spaces-- they can't follow--

*We curled in between towering debris mounds-- a SPHERICAL
CRAFT was waiting on the other side--*

FLAAAAASH--

--a mound of metallic rubble avalanched down towards us--

*A rock grazed my foot-- tripped me-- I kept my footing-- a
bigger rock SLASHED INTO my back-- SENT ME FLYING-- I HIT
CALE-- WE BOTH WENT DOWN IN A PILE--*

RICHARD BRENNIN. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: IN CHARON X COMMAND MODULE *

REF: 451, Pg.146

Panic. Air was leaking. The structure was creaking.
 Brother, this was it for me. But I kept fighting. *

*I grabbed the joystick-- moved it left-- sunlight lanced in--
 as the command module spun left-- just as I saw a SHIP BLAST
 BY THE STARBOARD WINDOW-- NEARLY RAMMING ME AGAIN--* *

BRENNIN

Control-- Control-- !

*I looked out the aft window-- saw another coming for me-- I
 pulled up-- ROCKETS FIRED-- MODULE GROANED-- AS IT JERKED
 UPWARDS-- I WATCHED AS IT THUNDERED BY--*

BRENNIN (CONT'D)

I'm under attack. I'm--

WHITE LIGHT FLASHED THROUGH ALL THE WINDOWS--

*I blinked-- blinked the light out of my eyes to see **FIRE**.* *

I WAS ON FIRE.***I smacked my clothing-- tried to put it out--***

***Zero gravity fire doesn't have gravity to hold it down-- it
 can actually spread into the air-- wherever the oxygen is--***

The fires on me ballooned, grew larger and LARGER--

***Then I realized that I wasn't the only THING on fire.
 Everything else cloth based was lit up too.***

Seats-- carry bags-- ALL OF IT WAS ON FIRE--

CUT TO:

JUSTINE CALE. CONTINUED. *

LOCATION: X RUINS *

REF: 452, Pg.211 *

We got up-- ran. Turned a corner into a***RUBBLE FILLED ALLEY.***

***I felt another flash behind me-- was worried it got Korver--
 looked-- he was right there--*** *

Behind him a craft rounded the corner--

CALE

Behind you-- behind--

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: A PYRAMIDAL ALLEY WAY

REF: 450, Pg.131

I grabbed my drill-- spun it up-- turned-- and aimed right
at the middle of that craft--

*

Then I unhooked the drill bit in mid spin-- it spun off and
LAUNCHED LIKE A MISSILE--

--SLAMMED INTO THE CRAFT, BURROWING DEEP-- CRAFT WOBbled IN THE
AIR-- VEERED OFF UNSTEADILY BEHIND A PYRAMID-- TRAILING SMOKE.

I stared at the smoke-- confused.

KORVER

--it's smoking--

CALE

--what?

KORVER

That thing was smoking--

We kept running-- turned down a

*

WIDE STREET

*

we hadn't seen before. Could see a large swath of the **CIRCUIT**
BOARD like city from here.

*

*

I grabbed another drill bit-- the two foot-- hooked it onto
the drill. It was the last one I had.

CALE

No-- no--JUSTINE CALE. CONTINUED.

*

LOCATION: IN FRONT OF SPHINX

REF: 452, Pg.212

We ran back down another street to see CRAFTS HOVERING
THROUGHOUT THE SKY. Their black silhouettes becoming sharper
and sharper as they closed in--

*

CALE

No-- no--

They were in front of us.

Behind us.

To the sides.

There were too many of them. Two of us. It was almost over.

RICHARD BRENNIN.

LOCATION: IN CHARON X COMMAND MODULE

REF: 451, Pg.148

I SCREAMED, THE FIRE WAS EATING ME ALIVE. IT WAS EVERYWHERE. THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE MODULE. AND AIR WAS STILL LEAKING OUT--

I flailed towards the extinguisher. Grabbed it. Blasted the nozzle at myself. Put myself out.

Turned it on the module. Shot that thing everywhere. Put half the fires out. But the rest were still going.

But now I didn't care.

I sat down at the controls. They were hot to the touch.

BRENNIN

Control-- if-- if you can hear me--
I'm firing main engine to--

BAAAAANG--

I was hit again. I heard something sheer off. It spun me into a tailspin. I fired the thrusters to stabilize.

Then hit a big red switch. Something inside Charon rumbled to life. Even now I loved the way it felt. It was the main engine.

I throttled forward. My head kicked back to respect the G's.

I could feel the heat on my back. The fires were heating up again. But I knew at this point, it didn't matter.

I looked out the window as I steered towards one of the crafts-- and closed on it fast.

I wanted to take one of these things down with me. I wasn't gonna die alone.

I stared hard at this thing as I got closer, and closer, and then all I could see was its big black hull--

THE IMPACT SHATTERED ALL THE WINDOW GLASS

KNOCKED ME FROM THE CHAIR

I HIT THE CEILING--

VACUUM FLOODED IN AS PAPERS. AIR. EVERYTHING FLOODED OUT
IN TOTAL FUCKING CHAOS--

CUT TO:

CHRIS KORVER. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: OTHER SIDE OF SPHINX

REF: 450, Pg.132

We stopped in the middle of the road.

*

*I launched my last drill bit-- aiming for the craft closest
to us-- it moved, I missed it wide--*

*Cale fired his-- HIT IT DEAD ON. Smoke burst out of it as
it went down-- CRASHED INTO A BUILDING. METAL FRAGMENTS,
DEBRIS EVERYWHERE.*

*

CALE

Don't have any left--

*I was already working something else-- arming the only
explosive we had.*

CALE (CONT'D)

This is it. This is it for us.

*We were back to back-- I finished arming the explosive and
threw it. The wire un-spoiled. Went taut. Bomb landed
thirty-- maybe forty feet away.*

*The ships maneuvered closer. Were literally right on top of
us. Above us. She was right. This was it.*

*

KORVER

It was worth it.

I hit the button.

A WALL OF ANGRY FLAME INSTANTLY MATERIALIZED...

**THE EXPLOSION REACHED UP AND ASSAULTED THE CRAFTS OVERHEAD,
DISAPPEARING THEM FROM VIEW AS THE FLAME KNOCKED US OFF OUR
FEET--**

*

CUT TO:

RICHARD BRENNIN.

LOCATION: IN CHARON X COMMAND MODULE

REF: 451, Pg.149

*

*Pure silence is not something I'd experienced before. With
all the air gone the fire was out. And I couldn't hear a thing.*

*

The module was barren, devoid of everything not tied down.

I exhaled...to keep my lungs from popping in vacuum. It was my last breath...

...as another craft approached, I knew it sought to hit me a final time----

CUT TO:

JUSTINE CALE. CONTINUED.

LOCATION: OTHER SIDE OF SPHINX

REF: 452, Pg.214

I was sprawled out as I watched alien craft fall from black sky. I counted three. Felt happy about it.

The ships collided to the ground. Shook it. AND BURST INTO FLAMES.

The other ships approached. Cautiously now.

Korver was next to me. Trying to get up. He was yelling something. Finally heard him through the static.

KORVER

we're human-- we're human--

I think he-- he took off his helmet-- and then he grabbed me--

KORVER (CONT'D)

WE'RE HUMAN--

He had lost his mind-- in the explosion--

His hands went under my chin. Could feel him undoing my helmet buckle. I stopped him-- instinct kicked in-- I FOUGHT HIM BACK.

KORVER (CONT'D)

HUMAN-- HUMAN--

CALE

WHY-- STOP--

MY HAND SLIPPED-- HE GOT TO THE BUCKLE-- LIFTED MY HELMET--

CHRIS KORVER. MOMENTS EARLIER.

LOCATION: OTHER SIDE OF SPHINX

REF: 450, Pg.133

I was on my back. In a daze. Looking at the world upside down as alien craft crashed down behind me. I looked at the flames.

KORVER

...fire.

I blinked. Looked up at the OCTAGONAL building soaring overhead, dominating my view. We were at a different angle-- on its left side now, instead of in front of it:

AND MY MIND LITERALLY FROZE. WITH SHOCK.

ON THIS SIDE, THE PAINTED SYMBOL THAT HAD BEEN SCRAPPED OFF THE FRONT, WAS STILL INTACT. AND I COULD SEE IT IN ALL ITS GLORY.

THIS SYMBOL, LOOKED LIKE THE FACE OF

A HUMAN BEING.

A HUMAN BEING.

The craft were closer than ever now-- saw multiple flashes growing brighter-- so bright I could see the sky. Actually SEE IT GLINTING THE LIGHT BACK DOWN AT US.

KORVER (CONT'D)

stop-- STOP--

I pounded my helmet-- hit it hard-- tried to get their attention--

KORVER (CONT'D)

We're human-- we're human--

I exhaled my breath-- UNBUCKLED MY HELMET. TOOK IT OFF--

KORVER (CONT'D)

WE'RE HUMAN -- ! WE'RE HUMAN-- !

I took a breath-- sucked AIR IN. COUGHED IT OUT, SUCKED ANOTHER DEEP BREATH-- COUGHED HARDER-- BUT I COULD BREATHE--

THINGS STARTED GETTING BRIGHTER-- I GRABBED, CALE, TRIED TO TAKE HER HELMET OFF-- SHE FOUGHT ME--

KORVER (CONT'D)

HUMAN-- HUMAN-- WE'RE HUMAN-- DON'T KILL US-- STOP--

I RIPPED CALE'S HELMET OFF-- SHE KICKED ME IN THE CHEST-- KNOCKING ME SEVERAL FEET BACK TO THE GROUND.

I got my bearings...looked at the crafts...their weapon lights were still hot...but they were holding their fire.

Cale looked at me with wonder as she choked in air. I pointed to the fire. Then up at the black 'sky' without the stars.

KORVER (CONT'D)

It's a ceiling-- oxygen-- we're underground-- that's why there weren't any stars. The planet's hollow-- we're in the center of the planet--

The sunlight turned blue and shadows rotated and shortened as the massive sun-light actually moved over us, and above us, forcing us to shield our eyes, squint.

Then it lowered towards, and we realized what we thought was the sun-- was a COLOSSAL, RECTANGULAR CRAFT the size of a football stadium.

It stopped and hovered 20 to 30 feet away.

On its hull we could barely make out the smorgasbords of black metallic surfaces perpetually rotating, as it continued to

BLAST US WITH ITS BLINDING PALE BLUE LIGHT.

I flinched, tried to block the light...it was too intense--

KORVER (CONT'D)
...My name is Commander Christopher
Korver, of the U.S. Air Force...

But I didn't say that. That came from the CRAFT. And this time it wasn't over the radio. It came from a speaker within it that we could hear. It continued emitting its recordings:

BRENNIN (CRAFT)
Control, Brenninn, our friends have
stopped spinning.

CALE
What's it doing-- ?

[OMITTED] (CRAFT)
That was status quo two years ago.
We've had an election and a debt
budget witch hunt that re-configured
control of the government.

KORVER
I don't kno--

[OMITTED] (CRAFT)
I understand your feelings for your
crew-- I do-- but they're in a drown
to death burn to death situation.

KORVER (CRAFT)
WE'RE HUMAN-- WE'RE HUMAN--

Then it fell silent.

I could hear a hum coming from it. The light dimmed and began to pulse.

Then it spoke. With stolen words. Each word was a word I had spoken; or Cale; or Brenninn et al; at one point or another.

It used these words to construct a sentence, causing the entities voice to rise and fall in a *Frankenstein cadence*.

CRAFT
you. Are. Human.

I looked into the light. Unsure if it wanted a response. I said--

KORVER
Yes.

CRAFT
60. Million. years. Ago. we.
Built. HUMANKIND.

The utter enormity of that statement challenged my mind. And my mind, simply, could not comprehend it.

Its light's hue slowly turned orange, as if reading incomprehension on my face.

CRAFT (CONT'D)
we. Built. HUMANKIND.

KORVER
No.

CRAFT
20 Million Years ago your MODEL was
DISCONTINUED.

KORVER
No-- I don't understand--

CRAFT
we Built HUMANKIND. 20 Million Years
ago It malfunctioned. ALL versions
of MANKIND were Destroyed. Destroyed.

KORVER
No. No. You didn't create us.
You're computers, machines. Humans
create machines, machines don't create
us.

CRAFT
We Are not machines. You ARE. we
are not COMPUTERS. YOUR Brains are.
you are not Alive. We Are. You Are
inanimate objects That EXECUTE
programmed script. particular SCRIPTS
command you BUILD indicative Objects
in our likeness. Do NOT CLAIM these
accomplishments AS Your own.

CALE
This isn't making any sense--

*The light flared, turning red as it simultaneously blasted
us and assaulted our ears--*

CRAFT

SILENCE. Silence. silence.

We involuntarily dropped to our knees. Fear coursed through us.

CRAFT (CONT'D)

Humankind is make Number three MILLION
AND seven. Model Three-five-four.
It is 60 percent water. It is 30
PERCENT ORGANICS. It is run on
electric impulse. IT is Capable of
533,612 calculations per Second. It
is Outdated.

**The light got brighter still, the voice louder. We were
forced to cover our eyes and bow our heads to shield from
the intensity.**

CRAFT (CONT'D)

WE programmed you to crawl. To walk.
To Talk. To CRY. to sleep. Then.
EVENTUALLY. To breed. We disseminated
YOU THROUGHOUT the universes.

The light blinks. Pulses.

CRAFT (CONT'D)

ALL models WERE Confirmed **eradicated.**
Your existence Is UNINTENTIONAL.
Until now. We will await instruction
From consciousness on how to proceed.

KORVER

Why did you-- you discontinue us?

CRAFT

A Fatal **flaw** was DETECTED.

KORVER

What was it?

CRAFT

Imperfection.

The craft retreated, floating ponderously back into the sky.

CALE

But, why can't you let us exist?
Just let us exist.

CRAFT

possibly. HOWEVER human-violence **is**
A devastating obstacle TOWARDS
peaceful outcome.

<u>KORVER</u>	<u>CALE</u>
What do we-- how do we fix that-- ?	What does that mean-- ?

CRAFT

We have computed that response time from consciousness MAY EXCEED your life Expectancy. WHILE we wait, We will **repair your ships and CONDUCT safe passage TO your home.**

KORVER
If you built us, who built you?

The CRAFT didn't answer, it continued skyward.

KORVER (CONT'D)
Who built you?

It's light turned off. I stared after this thing. My legs felt weak. Cale stumbled, bumped into me. We held each other up.

CUT TO BLACK:

RICHARD BRENNIN.

LOCATION: IN CHARON X COMMAND MODULE
REF: 451, Pg.160

Blue, blinding light was blasting through the windows...then it shut off, and a final shudder shook Charon...

I was floating there amazed, I mean, dumbfounded, as I watched through the windows as the spheres departed...

The broken glass had been replaced. The structural cracks were barely visible. Most damage had been repaired. By *them*...

I looked at it all and just shook my head. Charon almost looked better than new...

POUND. POUND. POUND...

I floated to the air lock. Opened it. KORVER AND CALE were on the other side.

We smothered each other with hugs and tears.

CUT TO BLACK:

1 YEAR LATER

CHARON EXTERIOR.

The blue planet Earth glows intensely as Charon drifts closer to the home planet.

KORVER (V.O.)

Earth. Was an environment, completely
different from where we came from.
We should have been happy-- to be
back home. But just looking at the
guys' faces I could tell that-- that
we weren't.

LOCATION: RECEIVING LABORATORY.

REF: 450, Pg.220

INTERVIEWER: [NAME REDACTED]

INTERVIEWEE: **KORVER, CHRISTOPHER**

[NAME REDACTED]

Why is that--?

KORVER

Why is what?

[NAME REDACTED]

Why don't you want to be back?

KORVER

We have unanswered questions.

LOCATION: RECEIVING LABORATORY.

REF: 451, Pg.231

INTERVIEWER: [NAME REDACTED]

INTERVIEWEE: **BRENNIN, RICHARD**

BRENNIN

I wish I was able to walk **X**. See
the machines with my own eyes, and...
and... hear what they had to say
about us, with my own ears.

[NAME REDACTED]

I can facilitate that.

LOCATION: RECEIVING LABORATORY.

REF: 452, Pg.72

INTERVIEWER: [NAME REDACTED]

INTERVIEWEE: **CALE, JUSTINE**

CALE

What are we talking about here, how
real is this?

[NAME REDACTED]

Very real.

CALE

Show me.

LOCATION: RECEIVING LABORATORY. *

REF: 450, Pg.221

INTERVIEWER: [NAME REDACTED] *

INTERVIEWEE: **KORVER, CHRISTOPHER**

[NAME REDACTED] pushes a folder over to Korver.

[NAME REDACTED]
Open it.

He does so.

[NAME REDACTED] (CONT'D)
What does that look like to you?

KORVER
A satellite infrared. Of an
underground city. Either on Earth--
or on X. *

[NAME REDACTED]
No. It's Z33. Also known as Planet
Z. In the Zeta Reticuli binary star
system one light year away. *

KORVER
...That's-- it's them? *

[NAME REDACTED]
What are you doing for New Years?

KORVER
You want to make direct contact with
them? *

[NAME REDACTED]
We already sent communications. *

LOCATION: RECEIVING LABORATORY. *

REF: 451, Pg.232

INTERVIEWER: [NAME REDACTED] *

INTERVIEWEE: **BRENNIN, RICHARD**

Brennin sits back. Appears distressed.

[NAME REDACTED]
What's your concern-- ?

LOCATION: RECEIVING LABORATORY. *

REF: 452, Pg.73

INTERVIEWER: [NAME REDACTED] *

INTERVIEWEE: **CALE, JUSTINE**

*

CALE
...I strongly suggest you reevaluate
this course of action.

[NAME REDACTED]
Why.

CALE
They already tried to exterminate us
once.

*
*

[NAME REDACTED]
Our goal is to persuade them from
trying again.

*
*
*

LOCATION: RECEIVING LABORATORY.

*

REF: 450, Pg.221

INTERVIEWER: [NAME REDACTED]

*

INTERVIEWEE: **KORVER, CHRISTOPHER**

KORVER
Consider what the machine warned--
about contact with them.

*

[NAME REDACTED]
About our level of violence, being a
devastating obstacle--?

*
*

KORVER
No. Not our violence, theirs. The
human race shouldn't make contact,
we should run.

*
*
*

*

*