



COMMANDER RO'NOCH, I PRESUME? QUITE THE ENTRANCE, SIR...

AHH! FIGURED WE MIGHT NOT BE BACK FOR A WHILE, HAD TO GIVE THE OLD GIRL ONE LAST ROMP!

YES SIR, BUT THE PRESIDENT HAS REQUESTED OUR PRESENCE.. I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR NEARLY AN HOUR.

THE COMMANDER SAID, SLAPPING THE SIDE OF THE CAR.

WELL, YOU SHOULDN'T BE KEEPING HIM WAITING THEN! LETS GO!

RO'NOCH JOKED AS THE TWO HURRIEDLY MADE THEIR WAY TO THE NEARBY ONDINBURR HOTEL WHERE THEY WERE ESCORTED BY THE PRESIDENTS SECURITY FORCES TO HIS SUITE ON THE TOP FLOOR, OVERLOOKING THE LAUNCH SITE.



GENTLEMEN, IT'S AN HONOR TO MEET YOU BOTH. THE MISSION YOU SET OUT ON TODAY CARRIES THE HOPES OF A FUTURE FOR THIS ENTIRE WORLD OUT INTO THE STARS WITH YOU.

THE UNDERTAKING OF BUILDING THESE VESSELS HAS REQUIRED THE UNPREDICTED COOPERATION OF ALL THE PEOPLES OF ASPARIA.

YOU TWO KNOW AS WELL AS I DO HOWEVER, THAT THIS MISSION IS NOT.. WELL..



GOING TO WORK, SIR?



I WAS GOING TO SEE
"LIKELY TO SUCCEED"
BUT YES..

THERE IS NO EVIDENCE
ANY WORLDS EVEN EXIST
OUTSIDE OF THIS SYSTEM,
SO MUCH ONES WE CAN
MOVE OUR POPULATION
TOO.

EVEN IF, SOMEWHERE OUT
THERE IN THE INFINITE VOID YOU
DO HAPPEN TO FIND A PLACE OUR
PEOPLE CAN MIGRATE TOO, WE
CAN'T POSSIBLY HOPE TO
RELOCATE MORE THAN A FEW
THOUSAND. IF THAT MANY.

WHAT IT CAN DO, WHAT IT HAS DONE IS BROUGHT OUR ENTIRE WORLD
TOGETHER, ALL OF THE GREATEST MINDS WORKING A SINGLE PROBLEM. MAYBE
OUR SCIENTISTS WILL FIND A WAY TO REVERSE THE EFFECTS OF THE BOMBS, TO
SAVE OUR BIOSPHERE. BUT RIGHT NOW, AS IT STANDS. ASPARIA WILL BE
UNINHABITABLE WITHIN A DECADE.



I AGREE SIR,
THIS MISSION IS A TERRIBLE IDEA
AND WILL ACCOMPLISH NOTHING.
ASSUMING WE DON'T ALL DIE THE
INSTANT WE FIRE UP THAT ENGINE.

IF YOU REALLY
FELT THAT WAY, WHY DID
YOU ACCEPT COMMAND,
COMMANDER?

YOU KNOW AS WELL AS
ANYONE THAT OUR BEST CHANCE FOR
SURVIVAL IS TO WORK TOGETHER, AND YOU
KNOW THIS MISSION IS THE GLUE KEEPING
OUR FRAGILE ALLIANCE WITH THE BRETAI
UNION AND ALL OF IT'S VASSAL STATES
TOGETHER.

I WANT THIS TO BE CLEAR, COMMANDER.
YOUR MISSION IS NOT TO SUCCEED IN
FINDING ANOTHER HOME FOR OUR PEOPLE.
IT'S TO GIVE OUR PEOPLE THE STRENGTH
TO REMAIN UNIFIED IN TRYING THESE
TIMES.



TO BE HONEST SIR. I TOOK THIS COMMAND BECAUSE LIKE YOU SAID. WE'LL ALL BE DEAD IN A DECADE ANYWAY AND I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO SEE OUTER SPACE.

I BELIEVE THAT'S TRUE. BUT NOT THE WHOLE TRUTH.



IT'S MY PERSONAL BELIEF, MAYBE HOPE.. CALL IT A GUY FEELING THAT YOU WILL FIND SOMETHING THAT WILL SAVE US. IF NOT YOU, ONE OF THE OTHERS.

THAT'S WHY I CALLED YOU HERE... I'M NOT NORMALLY A SUPERSTITIOUS MAN. IN POLITICS, THERE'S NO ROOM FOR SUCH THINGS..

I ACTUALLY CAN'T BELIEVE I'M EVEN TELLING YOU THIS, BUT I HAD A DREAM LAST NIGHT. IT WAS ABOUT YOU, COMMANDER.. YOU WILL MEET AN ANGEL..

AN ANGEL, SIR? REALLY?

CLAD IN HOLY ARMOR WITH BRILLIANT, BLACK WINGS AND GLOWING BLUE EYES.

I'VE NEVER HAD SUCH A DREAM BEFORE.. IT WAS SO VIVID, I WAS NOT ABLE TO GET BACK TO SLEEP.

I BELIEVE YOU WILL SUCCEED COMMANDER.. I THINK ALL YOU NEED IS A LITTLE FAITH.

OK, SIR.. ILL KEEP THAT IN MIND.

RO'NOCH SAID, BUT INSIDE WAS THINKING THE PRESIDENT WAS LOOSING HIS MIND AS HE CONTINUED WITH THE REST OF HIS SPEECH.



A FEW HOURS LATER, THE LAUNCH CLOCK WAS RAPIDLY APPROACHING ZERO.

COMMANDER RO'NOCH WAS THE LAST TO BOARD, AND WATCHED AS THE AIRLOCK HATCH CLOSED BEHIND HIM. TURNING AROUND, HIS CHIEF ENGINEER TER'VAA AND CHIEF COMPUTER OPERATOR AND TECHNOLOGY SPECIALIST DR. ON'DAO WERE WAITING FOR HIM.



CHIEF TER'VAA, CHIEF ON'DAO. HOW'S MY SHIP?

ISOTOPE GENERATORS ARE ON-LINE AND STABLE, WE'VE GOT GOOD PRESSURE ON ALL SIX BOILERS, SIR. SHIPS LOCKED, STOCKED, AND READY TO ROCK!

EXCELLENT! DOCTOR ON'DAO, HOW'S THAT FANCY GADGET OF YOURS?



WE'VE GOT THE TAKE-OFF PROGRAM INSTALLED INTO THE CONTROL COMPUTER AND ARE READY ON YOUR ORDER, SIR!

PERFECT, LETS GET THIS THING IN THE AIR, THEN!

A scene from a movie showing three crew members in a control room. One is in the center, flanked by two others. They are all wearing flight suits. The room is dimly lit with green screens in the background.

OHH, YEAH! THIS IS GONNA BE FUN!

PREP FOR LAUNCH!

COMPUTER ROOM! RUN TAKE-OFF PROGRAM!

A close-up of a crew member in a flight suit, seen from the side, interacting with a control panel. The background shows a blurred control room with other crew members.

BRIDGE! COMPUTER ROOM! TAKE OFF PROGRAM INITIATED!

A crew member in a flight suit is sitting in a chair, looking towards the right. The background shows other crew members working at consoles.

RETRACT ALL MOORINGS AND GANGWAYS, CHARGE THE PRIMARY!

MOORINGS RETRACTED! GANGWAY CLEAR!

PRIMARY IS ON-LINE AND CHARGED



DISENGAGE
GROUND SAFETIES
AND ACTIVATE THE
HELM!

AYE, SIR. HELM IS
ACTIVE!



TAKE US OUT,
STATION KEEPING
THRUST ONLY, ALL
THRUSTERS UP
SLOW.

ALL THRUSTERS UP
SLOW, SIR

SILENTLY, WITH ONLY THE MUFFLED SOUNDS OF THE MANEUVERING THRUSTERS POPPING OVER THE ROARING OF MACHINES; SUNRISE LURCHED INTO THE SKY AND QUICKLY BEGAN TO RISE.





EVEN AMID THE EVERY WORSENING ATMOSPHERIC CONDITIONS, MASSIVE CROWDS GATHERED FROM ACROSS THE GLOVE TO WATCH SUNRISE LAUNCH. ROARING CHEERS FILLED THE CITY AS THE LARGE, BLUE VESSEL CLIMBED UP ABOVE THE BUILDINGS AND PRESSED ONWARD INTO THE CLOUDS



AS SHE ROSE, HER SPEED SLOWLY INCREASED WITH THE THINNING AIR. TWO MINUTES AFTER TAKE-OFF, SUNRISE BREACHED THE HEAVY, HIGH-ALTITUDE CLOUD LAYERS AND EMERGED INTO A DARK, PURPLE SKY WHICH QUICKLY GAVE WAY TO BLACKNESS.



PASSING 210,000 SIR! SPEED IS 1750!



ENGAGE ORBITAL ENGINES!

THE OBITAL ENGINES: CRUDE LIQUID FUELED ROCKET ENGINES PROVIDED ENOUGH THRUST TO PUSH THE STARSHIP UP-TO ORBITAL VELOCITIES.



WITH HER WARP DRIVE RING NEGATING MUCH OF HER MASS, THE RELATIVELY SMALL FUEL TANKS PROVIDE ENOUGH FUEL FOR UP-TO TEN ORBITAL INSERTION BURNS THROUGHOUT THE SHIP'S PLANNED 1-YEAR MISSION.



WITHIN A THREE MINUTES, SUNRISE WAS PLACED IN A STABLE LOW ORBIT OVER ASPARIA. MAKING HER CREW ONLY THE 2ND MANNED ASPARIAN SPACE CRAFT TO REACH ORBIT.



IN THE MEANTIME, SIR. I RECOMMEND A FULL SYSTEMS ANALYSIS TO VERIFY ALL SHIPS SYSTEMS.



THAT WAS AWESOME! DOCTOR ON'DAO, GET YOUR TEAM WORKING ON THE CALCULATIONS FOR OUR FIRST DESTINATION!

YES SIR! GIVE US AN HOUR TO MAKE THE CALCULATIONS AND CHANGE OUT THE TAPE.



GET IT DONE.

SO, WHAT DO YOU THINK THE ODDS ARE THIS NEW ENGINE DOESN'T JUST, YOU KNOW. EXPLODE.



THAT'S RE-ASSURING.

EXPLODE? VERY LOW. I'M MORE CONCERNED ABOUT THE MATH.. IF ANY OF THE MATH DEPARTMENTS CALCULATIONS ARE OFF, EVEN BY A FRACTION OF A PERCENT, WE COULD END UP WHO KNOWS WHERE.



THEN YOU'LL LOVE THIS, SIR. EVEN IF IT DOES WORK. WE DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENS TO LIVING TISSUE AT SUPER-PHOTONIC VELOCITIES. SOME SCIENTISTS THINK OUR MOLECULES WILL CEASE TO FUNCTION AND WE'LL BASICALLY TURN INTO WATER INSTANTLY.



THAT'S LOVELY. LETS ASSUME WE DON'T DIE, AND IT DOES WORK. WHAT DO YOU THINK WE'LL FIND OUT THERE?

HONESTLY SIR? I'LL BE SURPRISED IF WE FIND ANYTHING AT ALL. IF WE DON'T DROP OUT OF SUPER-PHOTONIC IN THE VICINITY OF A PLANET, WE HAVE TOO LOOK OUT THE WINDOW TO FIND ONE.. THERE COULD BE A PERFECT WORLD OUT THERE AND WE'D HAVE NO WAY OF SEEING IT.

2ND COMMANDER.. IF THIS IS GOING TO WORK OUT, I'M GOING TO NEED YOU TO BE A LITTLE LESS DREADFUL..

SIR, YOU WERE THE ONE WHO TOLD THE PRESIDENT..

HEY! LESS DREADFUL, THAT'S AN ORDER.

YES SIR.. WELL, HOW ABOUT THIS? I THINK WE'LL FIND AN ENTIRE PLANET THAT'S ONE BIG NUDE BEACH, AND IT'S FILLED WITH EXOTIC ALIEN WOMEN.

THAT SOUNDS CONSIDERABLY BETTER, 2ND COMMANDER.

SIR, COMPUTER ROOM REPORTS LAUNCH TAPE CLEARED FROM COMPUTER AND BEING SPOOLED FOR STORAGE.

THANK YOU DOCTOR. HOW LONG UNTIL WE CAN GET UNDERWAY?

MY TEAM WILL HAVE THE PROGRAM LOADED IN A FEW MINUTES, WE'RE JUST WAITING ON THE CALCULATIONS.



LAUNCH CONTROL, SUNRISE. FINAL CHECKS COMPLETE. ALL SYSTEMS ARE GO.

MATH DEPARTMENT CALCULATES 17 DAYS TO DESTINATION, WITH 34 TAPE CHANGES.

PRIMARY IS CHARGED AND READY. CURRENTLY AWAITING OPTIMAL LAUNCH POINT. TIME TO TARGET, 3 MINUTES.



DID WE MISS ANYTHING?

PROBABLY, 2ND COMMANDER. HOW COULD WE NOT?

I DON'T KNOW, SIR, DID YOU?

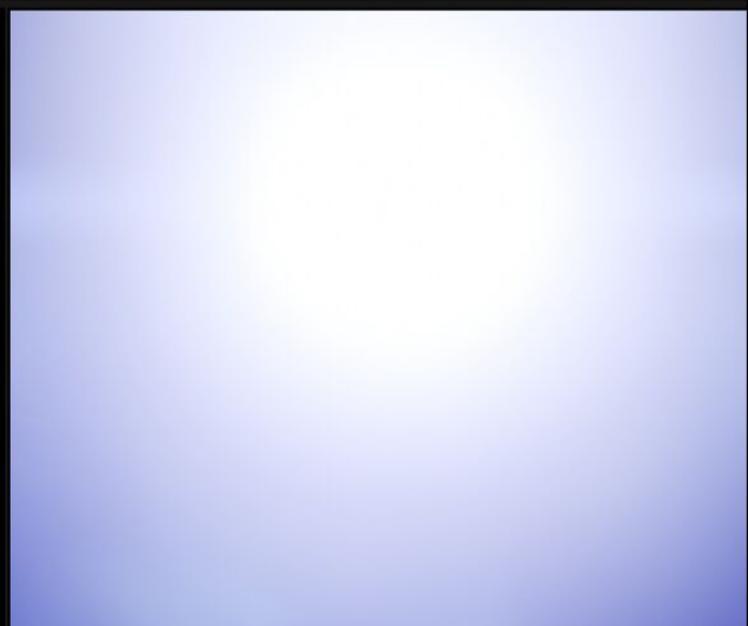
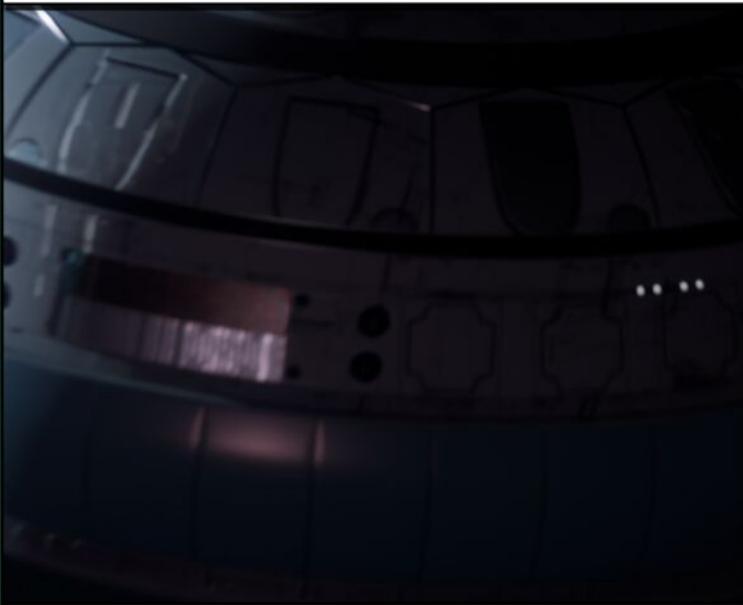
EITHER WAY SIR, WE'RE APPROACHING THE LAUNCH POINT.

ALRIGHT, LETS SEE WHAT HAPPENS I GUESS... 2ND COMMANDER, INITIATE SUPER-PHOTONIC DRIVE.

SUNRISE USED A SHORT BURST FROM IT'S ROCKET ENGINES TO SEND ITSELF ON A TRAJECTORY OUT TOWARDS THEIR PLANETS MOON.



ONCE IT WAS ON IT'S WAY OUT OF ASPARIAS ORBIT, 2ND COMMANDER MIAN'ESS PITCHED SUNRISE UP 90 DEGREES TO ALIGN THE DRIVE WITH THE DESIRED DIRECTION OF TRAVEL AND INITIATED THE LAUNCH SEQUENCE.



IN A FLASH OF BLUE LIGHT, SUNRISE WAS PULLED INTO THE DEPTHS OF DEEP SPACE AT AROUND 50 TIMES THE SPEED OF LIGHT.

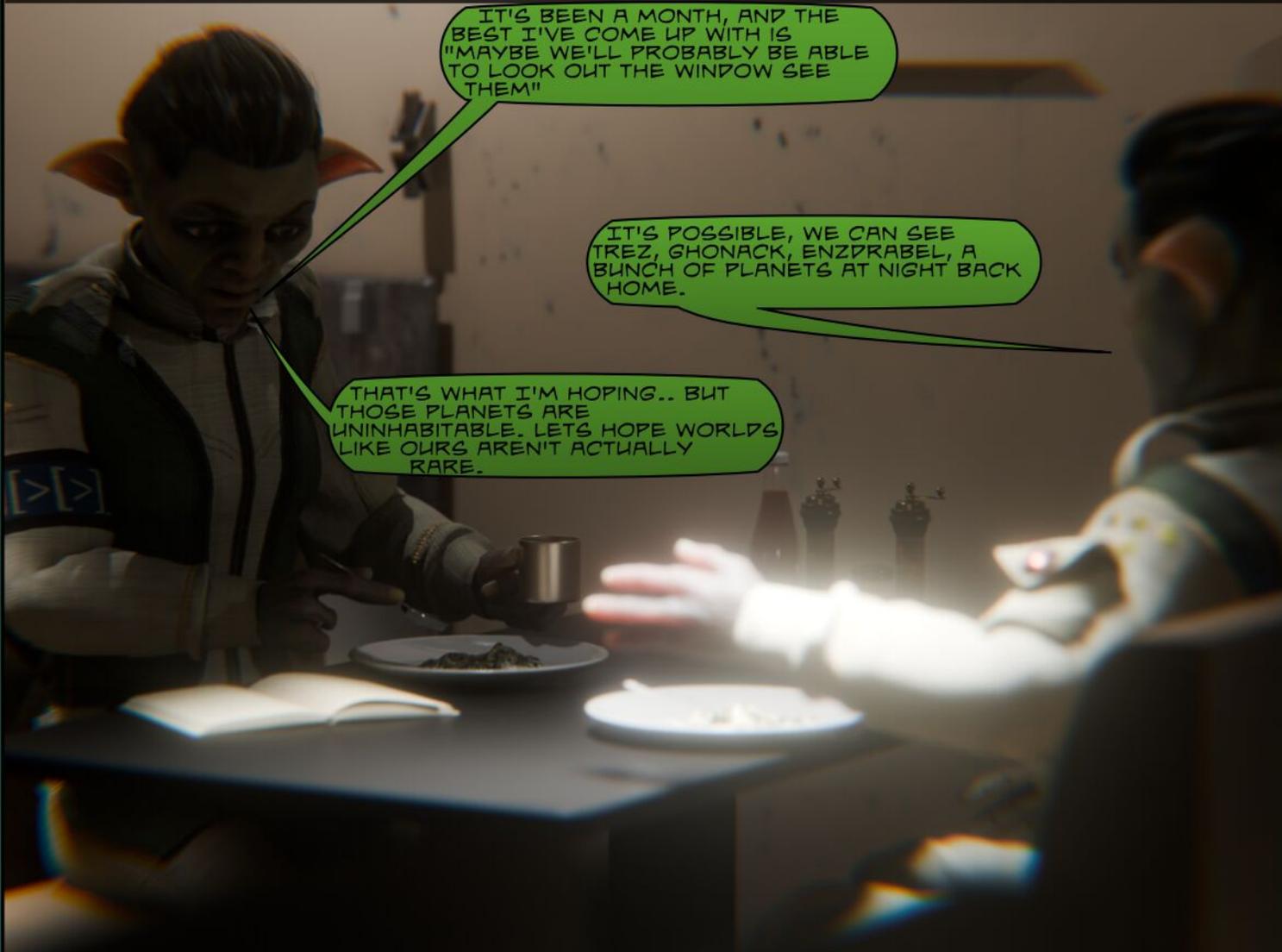
DURING THEIR FIRST FASTER THAN LIGHT VOYAGE, SUNRISE WOULD ENCOUNTER A FEW MINOR ISSUES RELATING TO HER EXTREMELY RUDIMENTARY ATTITUDE CONTROL SYSTEMS CAUSING HER TO DRIFT OFF COURSE SEVERAL TIMES, REQUIRING THE ENTIRE SYSTEM TO BE RESET.



THESE DELAYS NEARLY DOUBLED THEIR EXPECTED JOURNEY TIME. WHAT INITIALLY WAS EXPECTED TO BE JUST OVER 17 DAYS, TURNED INTO A NEARLY 30 DAY JOURNEY.

WITH NO FIX FOR THE ISSUES FOUND OTHER THAN TO MANUALLY COMPENSATE, IT WAS ABUNDANTLY CLEAR TO COMMANDER RO'NOCH THAT THE MISSION WOULD FALL DRASTICALLY SHORT OF ITS INTENDED TARGET GOAL OF EXPLORING TEN POTENTIAL WORLDS.

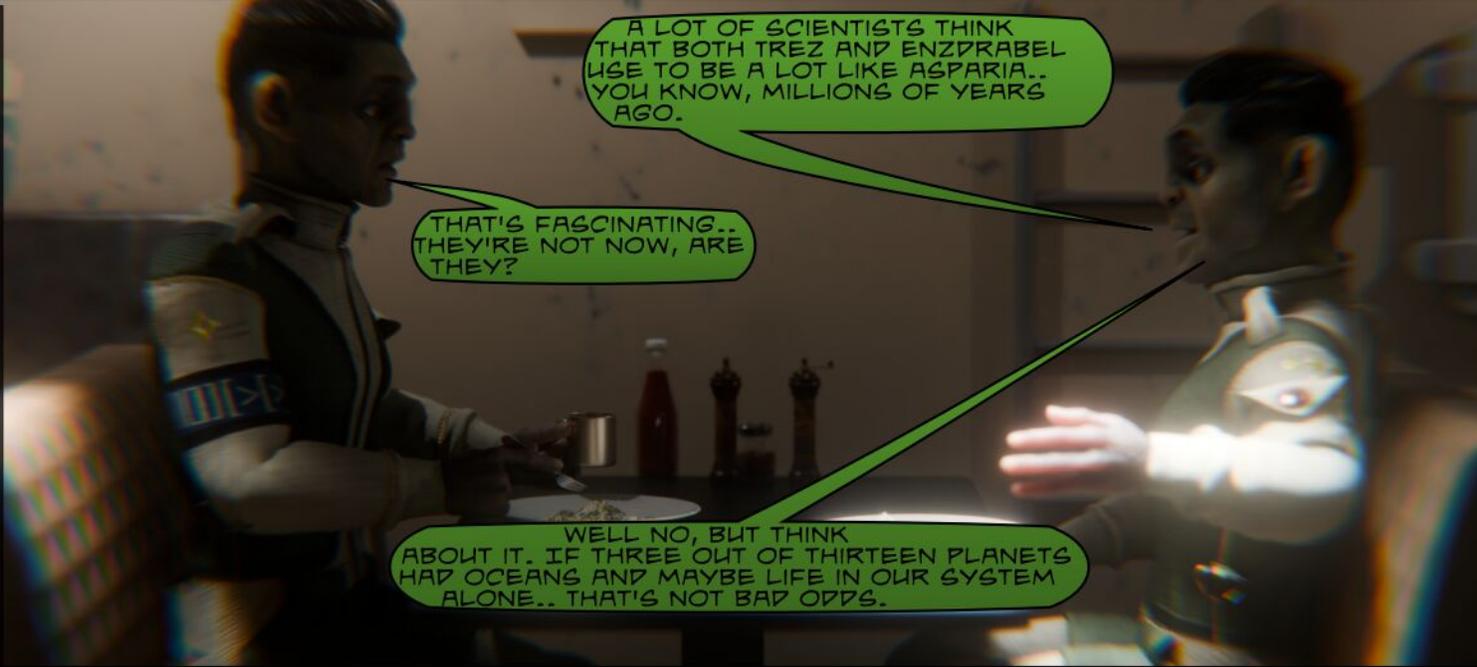
WORSE YET, COMMANDER RO'NOCH HAD THOUGHT MORE ABOUT WHAT 2ND COMMANDER MIAN'ESS HAD SAID, AND HAD REALIZED IT WAS A MAJOR OVERSIGHT IN THE SHIP'S DESIGN. MAYBE EVEN THE ENTIRE CONCEPT OF SPACE COLONIZATION. HIS SHIP'S RADAR WAS NOT CAPABLE OF ANY MEANINGFUL, LONG RANGE SCANNING. ONCE THEY ARRIVE AT THEIR DESTINATION, ASSUMING THERE EVEN ARE ANY PLANETS THERE. HOW WOULD THEY FIND THEM?



IT'S BEEN A MONTH, AND THE BEST I'VE COME UP WITH IS "MAYBE WE'LL PROBABLY BE ABLE TO LOOK OUT THE WINDOW SEE THEM"

IT'S POSSIBLE, WE CAN SEE TREZ, GHONACK, ENZDRABEL, A BUNCH OF PLANETS AT NIGHT BACK HOME.

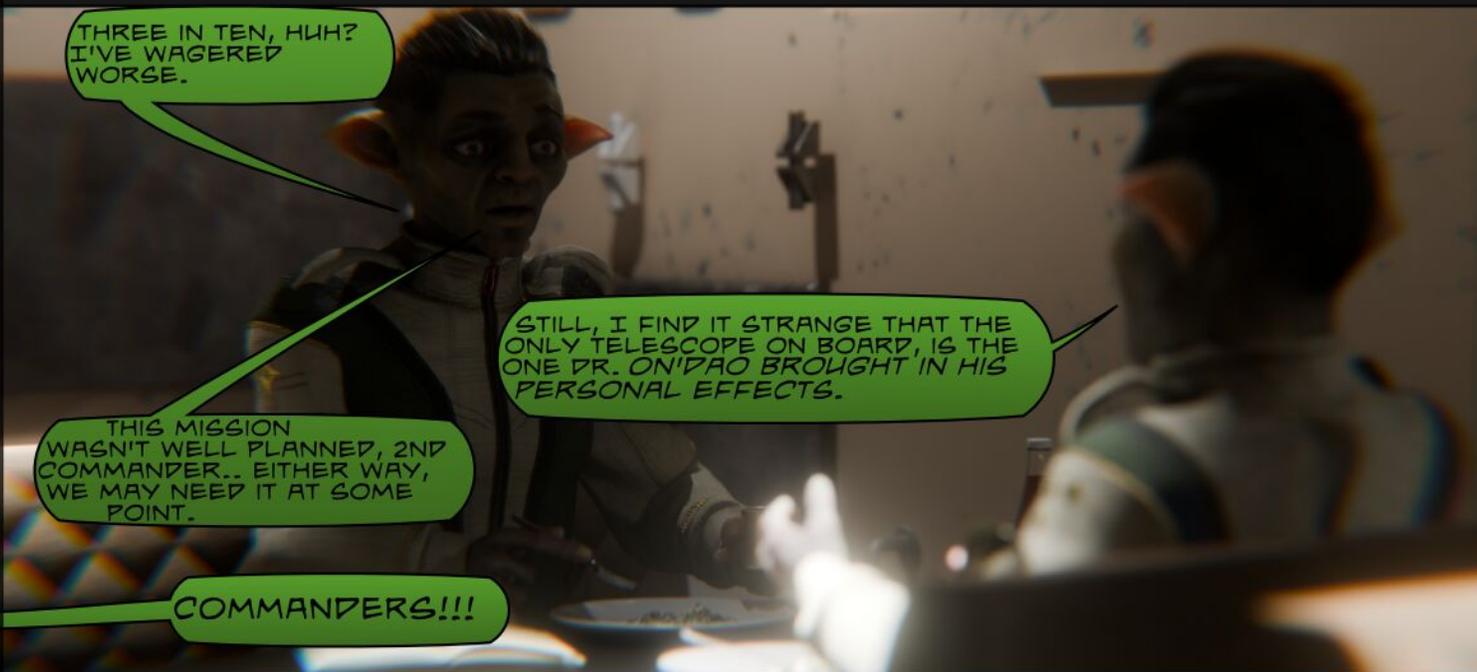
THAT'S WHAT I'M HOPING.. BUT THOSE PLANETS ARE UNINHABITABLE. LET'S HOPE WORLDS LIKE OURS AREN'T ACTUALLY RARE.



A LOT OF SCIENTISTS THINK THAT BOTH TREZ AND ENZDRABEL USE TO BE A LOT LIKE ASPARIA.. YOU KNOW, MILLIONS OF YEARS AGO.

THAT'S FASCINATING.. THEY'RE NOT NOW, ARE THEY?

WELL NO, BUT THINK ABOUT IT. IF THREE OUT OF THIRTEEN PLANETS HAD OCEANS AND MAYBE LIFE IN OUR SYSTEM ALONE.. THAT'S NOT BAD ODDS.



THREE IN TEN, HUH? I'VE WAGERED WORSE.

STILL, I FIND IT STRANGE THAT THE ONLY TELESCOPE ON BOARD, IS THE ONE DR. ON'DAO BROUGHT IN HIS PERSONAL EFFECTS.

THIS MISSION WASN'T WELL PLANNED, 2ND COMMANDER.. EITHER WAY, WE MAY NEED IT AT SOME POINT.

COMMANDERS!!!



DR ON'DAO.. WE WERE JUST TALKING ABOUT..

YEAH, YEAH! SIRS! WE JUST DROPPED DROPPED OUT OF SUPER PHOTONIC! YOU'VE GOT TO SEE THIS!

QUICKLY REACHING THE BRIDGE, THE CREW STARED WITH SURPRISE AT THE MAGNIFICENT SITE THAT LAY BEFORE THEM.



THAT'S NOT ALL SIR.. THE AIR, IT'S BLUE.. THAT MIGHT MEAN..

IS THAT... WATER?

IT CERTAINLY LOOKS LIKE IT, SIR!

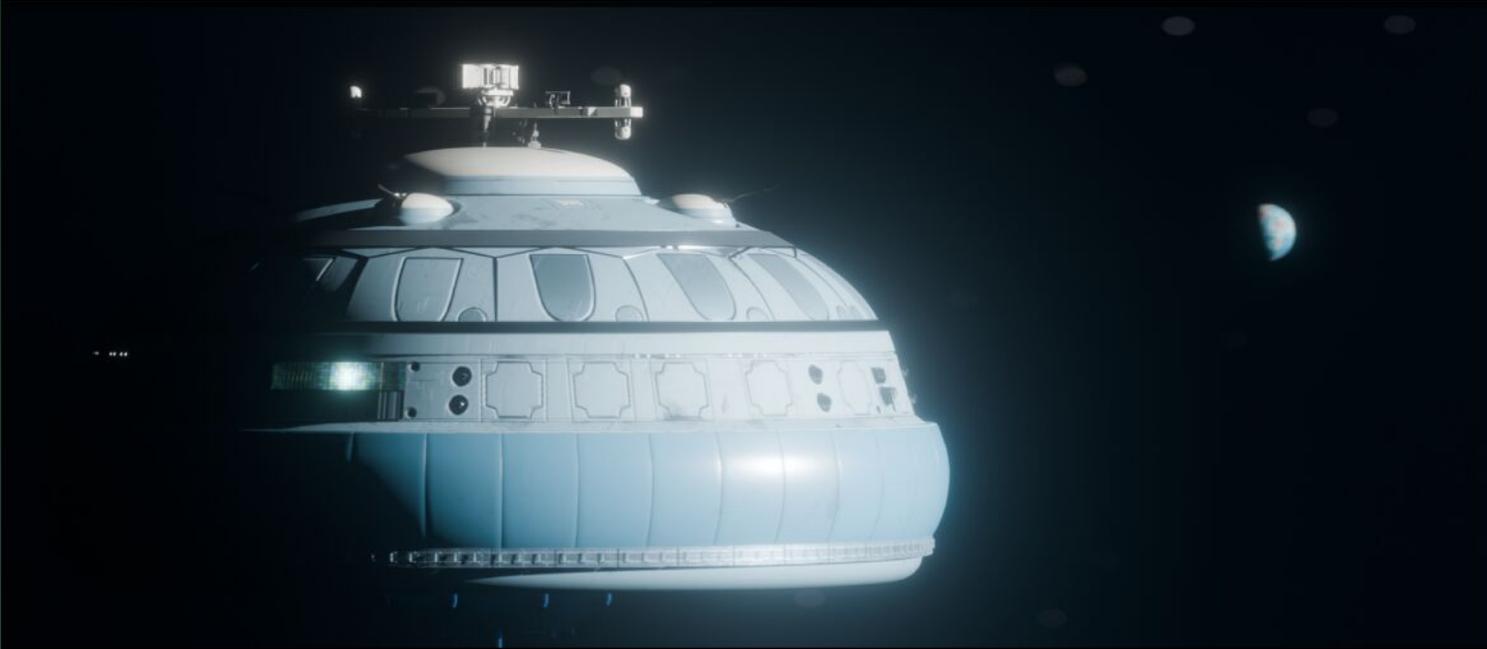
OXYGEN.



2ND COMMANDER, TAKE US IN CLOSER. AND LETS GET A MINI-DISC PREPPED FOR LAUNCH, FOUR MEN, FULL ENVIRONMENT SUITES.

I'D LOVE TO BE ON THAT AWAY TEAM, SIR!

BE IT BY PURE LUCK, OR FATE, OR A BIT OF BOTH. SUNRISE DROPPED OUT OF FTL VERY CLOSE TO A SHINING BLUE WORLD HANGING IN THE VOID.



AS THE GOT CLOSER, THE REDISH HUE THEY'D ORIGINALLY THOUGHT TO BE IRON-RICH DESERTS WERE IN FACT LUSH FORESTS AND GRASSLANDS. AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT IT APPEARED TO BE FROM SO HIGH ABOVE.



IT WASN'T THE PLANT LIFE, OR ALIEN PLANET ITSELF THAT WAS DRAWING THE MOST INTEREST FROM THE CREW OF SUNRISE THOUGH, RATHER IT WAS A MYSTERIOUS RADIO SIGNAL COMING FROM THE SURFACE.

SIR, LET ME GO WITH THEM! NO ONE ON BOARD KNOWS MORE ABOUT RADIOS THAN ME!

CAN YOU PINPOINT THE LOCATION?

SIR! WE'RE PICKING UP A RADIO SIGNAL FROM THE SURFACE. IT'S FAINT BUT IT'S THERE.

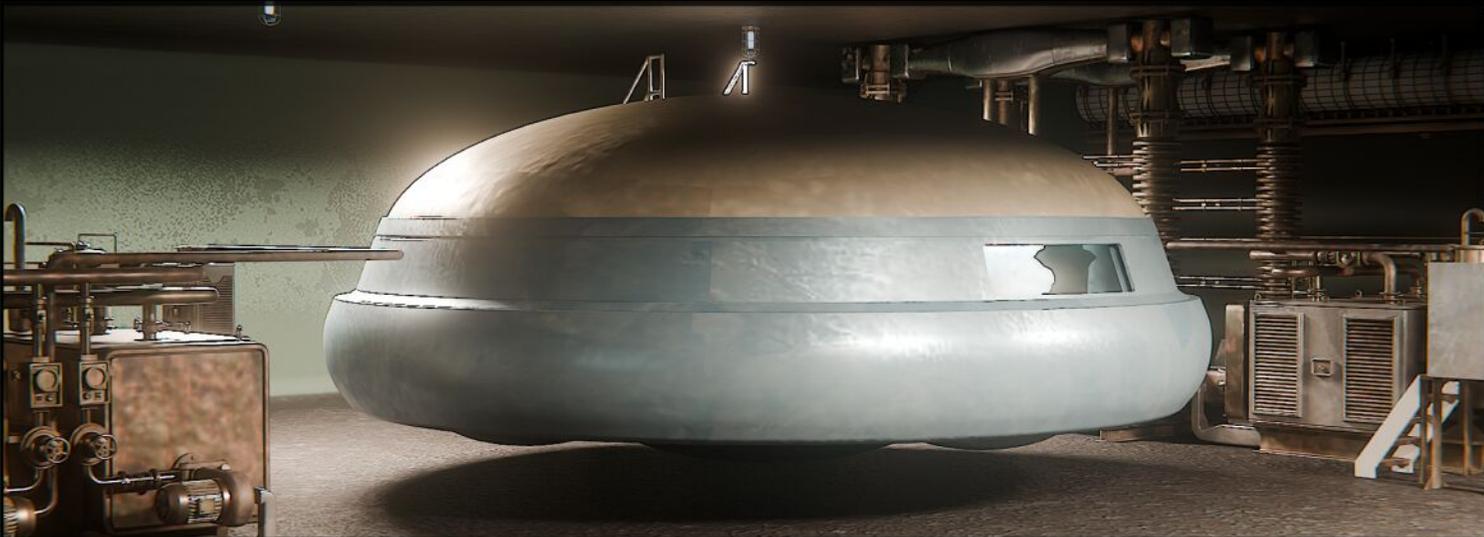
YES SIR! I'LL GET AS CLOSE AS I CAN.

TRANSMIT THOSE COORDINATES TO THE LANDING PARTY AS SOON AS YOU HAVE THEM.

YEAH, APPROVED. GO DOCTOR.



INSIDE SUNRISE'S HANGAR, FOUR OF THE ASPARIAN CREW MEMBERS PILED INTO ONE OF THE SHIPS "MINI-DISC" AUXILIARY CRAFT AND PREPPED THE MULTI LAYERED HANGAR DOORS. FOR LAUNCH.



CHIEF OF SECURITY 3RD SARGENT ENO'MAJ WOULD LEAD THE MISSION WITH ANOTHER MEMBER OF HIS SECURITY TEAM, 1ST SARGENT NES'DESNA BEING IN COMMAND OF THE AWAY TEAM. BOTH OF WHOM HAD A COMBINED 20 YEARS OF MILITARY EXPERIENCE DURING WAR THAT DEVASTATED ASPARIA.

BECAUSE OF THE HIGH POSSIBILITY OF A TECHNOLOGICAL ORIGIN TO THE SIGNAL THEY DETECTED. DR. ON'DAO INSISTED HE BE INCLUDED ON THE MISSION. HIS EXPERIENCE AND EXTENSIVE KNOWLEDGE IN ALL THINGS "HIGH TECH" WAS WELL KNOWN ON ASPARIA.



FINALLY, THE PILOT FOR THE MISSION WAS TOV'JANTA, A CIVILIAN RESEARCHER WORKING UNDER DR. ON'DAO. HE WAS THE ONLY MEMBER OF DR. ON'DAO'S TEAM TO QUALIFY ON THE MINI-DISC.

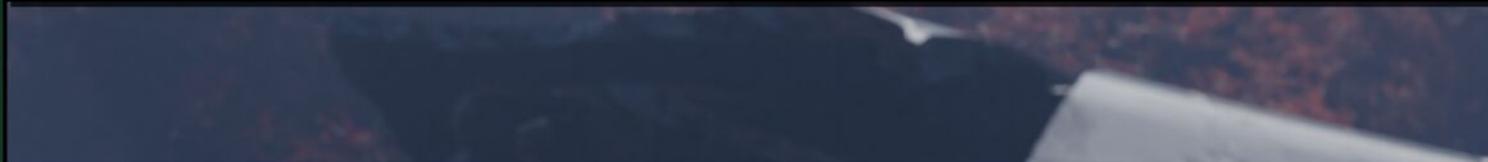


EVEN WITH THEIR RUDIMENTARY TECHNOLOGY, SUNRISE WAS EASILY ABLE TO TRACK THE LOCATION OF THE SIGNAL AND GUIDE "DISC ONE" DIRECTLY ONTO THAT LOCATION.



SUNRISE.. DISC ONE..
UHUU.. YOU'RE NOT GOING
TO BELIEVE WHAT WE JUST
FOUND DOWN HERE..

THE UNAMBIGUOUS SITE OF A CRASHED SPACE CRAFT ON THE SURFACE LAY STREWN ACROSS THE GROUND BEFORE THEM AS THEY DESCENDED. IT WAS SMALLER THAN SUNRISE, WITH A VERY DIFFERENT DESIGN THAT LOOKED AS THOUGH IT MAY HAVE BEEN OPTIMIZED FOR ATMOSPHERIC USE.. THE SHIP WAS TORN COMPLETELY IN TWO, WITH THE AFT SECTION WEDGED INTO A BERM, AND IT'S FORE SECTION WAS SITTING AT THE END OF A LONG TRAIL OF OVERTURNED DIRT AND DEBRIS.



THE ASPARIAN LANDER QUICKLY MADE IT'S WAY TO THE SURFACE AND TOUCHED DOWN ON THE STRANGE, RED GRASS THAT MADE UP A CLEAR MEADOW WITHIN A DENSE, BLOOD-RED FOREST.



3RD SARGENT ENO'MAJ EMERGED FIRST FROM THE MINI-DISCS HATCH...

...AND QUICKLY TOOK UP A DEFENSIVE POSITION FACING THE SHIP, NOT KNOWING WHAT TO EXPECT.

ALRIGHT, LOOKS GOOD..

3RD SARGENT ENO'MAJ SAID AS THE OTHERS STARTED TO SLOWLY CLIMB OUT. HE WASN'T SURE IF IT WAS JUST THE RED PLANTS AND STRANGE, HAZY ATMOSPHERE, OR THE SIMPLE FACT THAT HE WAS ON AN ALIEN PLANET, ABOUT TO BOARD A CRASHED ALIEN SHIP. BUT HE FELT INCREDIBLY UNEASY.

YOU KNOW? THEY COULD HAVE PUT A DAMN LADDER ON THIS THING!

TELL ME ABOUT IT, DOCTOR! ESPECIALLY IN THESE SUITS! HERE..

AFTER A COUPLE MINUTES OF STRUGGLING THEIR WAY DOWN THE SLICK SIDES OF THE CRAFT, ALL FOUR MEMBERS OF THE LANDING PARTY, 3RD SARGENT ENO'MAJ WAS THE LAST TO CLIMB DOWN.



ALRIGHT.. CRASHED ALIEN SPACE SHIP. RIGHT.. LOOK, GUYS, I GOT N IDEA WHAT THE RIGHT MOVE IS...



MAYBE WE SHOULD JUST GET BACK IN THE DISC AND GO... WHAT IF THERE'S SOME SORT OF HORRIBLE, TENTACLE MONSTER IN THERE OR SOMETHING?

IF I RECALL, DR. YOU INSISTED ON COMING DOWN HERE..

I KNOW BUT I WAS THINKING, MAYBE THERE'S A REASON THEY CRASHED.. I, MEAN, OF COURSE THERE'S A REASON BUT..



..WHAT IF IT WAS ATTACKED AND THE PEOPLE WHO DID IT ARE STILL AROUND, OR WHAT IF THE CREW CAUGHT SOME KIND OF VIRUS? ALIEN VIRUS?

THAT'S A POSSIBILITY, BUT WE DIDN'T COME ALL THIS WAY TO RUN AWAY AT THE FIRST SIGN OF DANGER EITHER, SO DOCTOR, AFTER YOU.

AFTER ME.. YEAH.. UMM.. TOV, AFTER YOU..

UGHH! FINE..



YOU KNOW, I'M NOT SURE ABOUT THIS..



HEY! I SHOULD GRAB SOME PLANT SAMPLES FOR DOCTOR TEI'ESS TO STUDY.



SERIOUSLY, DOC? I THOUGHT YOU'D BE EXCITED TO LOOK AT THE INSIDE OF AN ALIEN SPACE SHIP.

I AM, BUT IT'S DARK AND I'M.. SCARED OF SEEING A BUNCH OF ROTTED, DEAD ALIENS, OK? I'M GONNA GRAB SOME SAMPLES, JUST LET ME KNOW IF IT'S FULL OF DEAD BODIES OR NOT..

OHH, LORD.. FINE. JUST DON'T GO FAR..

AS DR. ON'DAO SPLIT OFF TO "COLLECT PLANT SAMPLES", THE REST OF THE LANDING PARTY CONTINUED TOWARDS THE WRECKAGE.

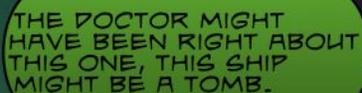


THE CLOSER THEY GOT, THE CLEARER IT BECAME THAT THIS SHIP HAD BEEN THERE FOR SOME TIME.

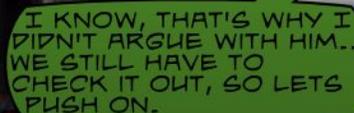


WELL...

THE DIRT HAD CLEARLY BEEN WEATHERED DOWN, AND THE AREA SOMEWHAT SMOOTHED OVER, INDICATING THE SHIP HAD BEEN THERE ON THE ORDER OF SEVERAL MONTHS. THERE WAS EVIDENCE OF RECENT ACTIVITY AROUND THE SIDE THOUGH. WITH SOME OF THE DEBRIS HAVING BEEN CLEARLY PILED UP AFTER THE CRASH.



THE DOCTOR MIGHT HAVE BEEN RIGHT ABOUT THIS ONE, THIS SHIP MIGHT BE A TOMB.



I KNOW, THAT'S WHY I DIDN'T ARGUE WITH HIM.. WE STILL HAVE TO CHECK IT OUT, SO LETS PUSH ON.



THAT'S PRETTY HIGH UP. I DON'T KNOW IF WE CAN EVEN GET UP THERE. NOT MUCH TO GRAB THAT LOOKS STABLE.

RIGHT, BOSS!

LET'S USE SOME OF THIS DEBRIS, IF WE CAN GET HIGH ENOUGH, I THINK I CAN GET MYSELF UP. NES, HELP ME.

WHILE THE OTHER THREE WERE STACKING JUNK IN AN ATTEMPT TO CLIMB INTO THE CRASHED SHIP, DR. ON'DAO TOOK SOME SAMPLES OF A STRANGE, BLUE FLOWER NEAR-BY. DOING SO DELIBERATELY SLOWLY, BELIEVING ANY DANGER ON THIS WORLD WOULD BE INSIDE THE WRECKAGE OF THAT SHIP.



HE WAS JUST ABOUT TO STAND UP AND START WALKING TOWARDS THE REST OF HIS GROUP WHEN HE SAW A LARGE SHADOW QUICKLY ENVELOP HIM.



BEFORE HE COULD EVEN REACT, HE FELT AN IMMENSE PAIN IN HIS SHOULDERS AND CHEST, ACCOMPANIED BY THE MOST HORRIFIC CRUNCHING SOUND HE'D EVER HEARD.



HAD TOV'JANTA NOT BEEN LOOKING IN THAT DIRECTION AT THE TIME, HE WOULDN'T HAVE SEEN IT HAPPEN, BUT HE WAS AND HE DID. SWINGING AROUND AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE IN HIS BULKY, PRIMITIVE EVA SUIT, HE SCREAMED.

SIRG!!! HELP!!!

WHAT THE!??

WOAH! IT'S GOT THE DOCTOR!



DO SOMETHING! SHOOT IT!

HE'S RIGHT, TAKE IT DOWN!



AS THE TWO SOLDIERS OPENED FIRE, TOV'JANTA SIMPLY FROZE IN FEAR, STARING IN SHOCK AS THIS ALIEN CREATURE LIFTED INTO THE SKY WITH HIS FRIEND AND MENTOR IN IT'S CLUTCHED.



THE SMALL CALIBER "PATROL CARBINES" THE ASPARIANS HAD WITH THEM WERE SMALL, BUT THE 9X23MM ROUND THE FIRED WAS A VERY FAST MOVING ROUND, AND PACKED A DECENT PUNCH.

AS THE ROUNDS BEGAN TO TEAR INTO THE ALIEN CREATURE, IT LET OUT A TERRIFYING, ANGERED CRY AS IT RELEASED PR. ON'DAO AND MADE A B-LINE FOR THE REST OF THE AWAY TEAM.



DR. ON'DAO FELL LIMP TO THE GROUND BELOW, WITH THE ALIEN CREATURE CRUMPLING TO THE GROUND NOT FAR AWAY BEFORE STANDING UP AND CHARGING AT THE AWAY TEAM.

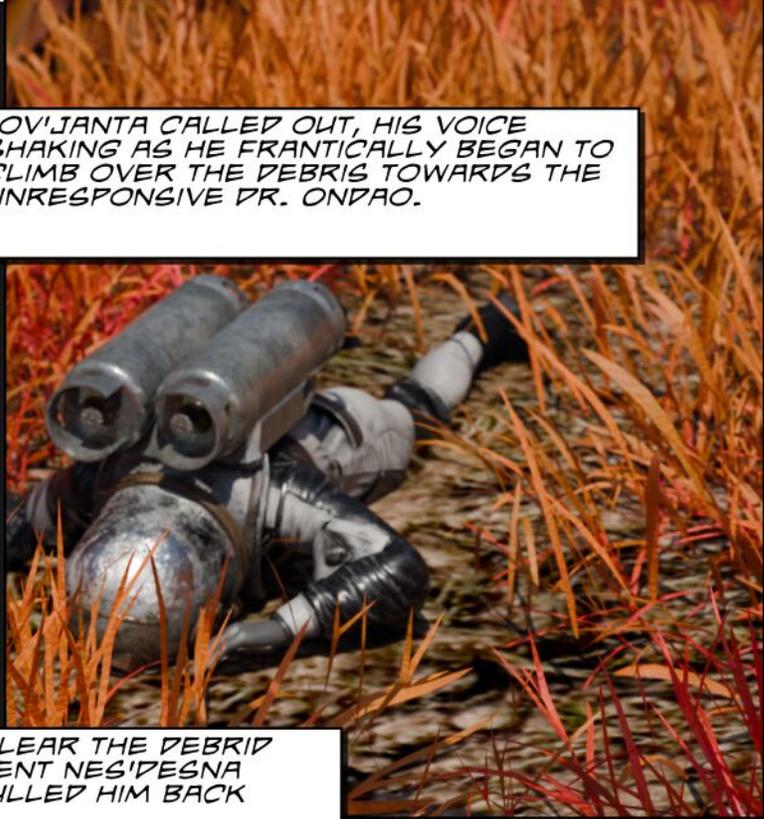
ALL THREE OF THEM WOULD ALL BUT EMPTY THEIR RIFLES INTO THE CREATURE AS IT ADVANCED WITH AN ALARMING PACE. ONLY FEET FROM THE REST OF THE ASPARIANS, IT SUCCUMB TO IT'S INJURIES AND COLLAPSED.

IS IT DEAD?

I THINK SO..



DR. ON'DAO! ARE YOU OK!? WE'RE COMING TO GET YOU! HANG ON!



TOV'JANTA CALLED OUT, HIS VOICE SHAKING AS HE FRANTICALLY BEGAN TO CLIMB OVER THE DEBRIS TOWARDS THE UNRESPONSIVE DR. ON'DAO.

BEFORE HE COULD CLEAR THE DEBRIS HOWEVER, 1ST SARGENT NES'DESNA GRABBED HIM AND PULLED HIM BACK DOWN.



I'M OUT OF AMMO..

I'VE GOT A FEW SHOTS LEFT.. NOT ENOUGH.

3RD SARGENT ENO'MAJ WAS ABOUT TO TELL 1ST SARGENT NES'DESNA THAT IT HAD BEEN AN HONOR TO SERVE WITH HIM ALL THOSE YEARS WHEN THE SOUNDS OF GUNFIRE AGAIN RANG OUT.

PWADADADADADA!

WHOA! WHAT THE!?

THE ASPARIANS WATCHED AS AN UNKNOWN ALIEN MAN BEGAN OPENING FIRE ON THE ALIEN CREATURES WITH A VERY IMPRESSIVE ALIEN GUN THAT SEEMED TO DO SIGNIFICANTLY MORE DAMAGE TO THE CREATURES THAN THEIR OWN WEAPONS.

PWADADADADADA!

PWADADADADADA!

ONCE THE REMAINING CREATURES HAD FLOWN OFF, THE ALIEN JUMPED DOWN FROM HIS ELEVATED POSITION AND QUICKLY APPROACHED THE ASPARIAN AWAY TEAM.



WE NEED TO LEAVE THIS PLACE. AT ONCE!

WHO ARE YOU!??

I AM JYTOO.. THIS IS.. WAS MY SHIP.. WILL YOU ALLOW ME TO LEAVE THIS PLACE WITH YOU? PLEASE!



WE OWE YOU THAT MUCH I GUESS, BUT WE HAVE TO GET DR. ON'DAO! HE'S HURT! AND WE DON'T LEAVE PEOPLE BEHIND!

DOCTOR! TALK TO ME! SAY SOMETHING!

UNDERSTOOD. PREP YOUR SHUTTLE, I'LL GET YOUR FRIEND!

DOCTOR!?



DOCTOR!?
CAN YOU
HEAR ME!?
IS HE OK!?

HIS INJURIES ARE
SEVERE...





ARE YOU SURE IT'S WISE TO MOVE HIM?

I AM QUITE SURE IT IS NOT, BUT WE MUST LEAVE NOW. THE PETRAPACTS WILL RETURN IN LARGER NUMBERS. TIME IS LIMITED.

EVEN WHILE CARRYING DR. ON'DAO IN HIS HEAVY EVA SUIT, THE ALIEN JYTOO HAD VERY LITTLE TROUBLE OUT-PACING THE ASPARIANS. HAVING TO SLOW DOWN MULTIPLE TIMES DURING THE SHORT RUN TO THE MINI-DISC.





TOV'JANTA, GET
IN AND GET THE
DRIVE STARTED!

I'M GOING.. OHH,
GOD! THERE'S
MORE!

HMMM.. OWWW!!
WHAT'S HAPPENING?
WHO ARE YOU!?



GAAAAHHH! STOP!
AHHHH!

I KNOW, DOCTOR!
WE'RE GETTING YOU
TO THE INFIRMARY,
JUST HANG IN THERE!



GET INSIDE, START THE SHUTTLE, AND DO NOT LEAVE WITHOUT ME! YOU'LL BE SAFE INSIDE, I WILL RETURN IN A MOMENT.

WHAT!?



WHERE ARE YOU GOING!?

GET INSIDE! WAIT FOR ME!

AGHH! HURRY!

3RD SARGENT ENO'MAJ AGAIN CLIMBED ONTO THE ROOF OF THE MINI-DISC AND TOOK UP AN OVER-WATCH POSITION AS JYTOO RAN BACK TO THE WRECKAGE OF HIS SHIP.



SUDDENLY FEELING THE URGER TO CHECK BEHIND HIM, 3RD SARGENT ENO'MAJ SWUNG AROUND JUST IN TIME TO SEE ONE OF THE CREATURE APPROACHING RAPIDLY FROM BEHIND.



OHH FU...

HEARING A SINGLE GUNSHOT, JYTOO TURNED, PREPARING TO UNSLING HIS RIFLE BUT BEFORE HE COULD, HE WATCHED THE ALIEN PREDATOR PITCH UP HARD IN THE AIR BEFORE CRASHING DEAD INTO A NEAR BY TREE.



NICE SHOT, FUNNY LITTLE MAN..

JYTOO QUICKLY CLIMBED BACK INSIDE THE SHIP AND MADE HIS WAY TO THE FRONT WHERE HE'D BEEN STAYING SINCE THE SHIP WENT DOWN.



PILED UP, READY TO GO WHERE TWO LARGE BAGS WITH AN ORANGE AND BLACK CAMOUFLAGE PATTERN



ON THE FLOOR NEXT TO THEM WAS A SMALL, STONE PYRAMID WITH GOLD TRIM AND A CIRCLE WITH A CROSS, ITSELF INLAID WITH PURE GOLD WAS CARVED INTO ONE OF THE FACES.



JYTOO RAN HIS FINGERS OVER THE CIRCLED-CROSS FOR A MOMENT BEFORE TUCKING THE ENTIRE OBJECT TIGHTLY INTO ONE OF THE BAGS.

WITH HIS BAGS IN HAND, JYTOO ONCE AGAIN LEAPT DOWN FROM THE SHIP, STOPPING FOR A MOMENT TO LOOK BACK AT IT BEFORE SPURTING BACK TOWARDS THE ASPARIAN SHUTTLE.



LOOKING OVER HIS SHOULDER AS HE RAN, JYTOO SAW THE FLYING CREATURE APPROACHING, AND KNEW HE DIDN'T HAVE TIME TO RETRIEVE HIS WEAPON.



A GLINT IN THE GRASS, AND A SPLIT SECOND DECISION. JYTOO TOSSED BOTH OF HIS BAGS AND DROVE FOR DR. ON'DPAO'S RIFLE THAT WAS STILL SITTING ON THE GROUND WHERE HE WAS ATTACKED.



THE SMALL WEAPON, DESIGNED FOR SMALL HANDS FELT UNWEIDLY IN JYTOO'S HANDS, BUT HE HAD NO CHOICE. WITH A DESPERATE BATTLECRY, HE BEGAN PULLING THE TRIGGER.



DIE BEAST!



OH! OK..

BEFORE JYTOO COULD EVEN ASSESS IF THE CREATURE WAS DEAD OR JUST STUNNED, HE GRABBED HIS BAGS AND BEGAN SPRINTING YET AGAIN BACK TOWARDS THE MINI-DISC, KEEPING THE ASPARIAN RIFLE IN HIS HAND AS HE RAN.



SEEING JYTOO RUNNING BACK WITH TWO LARGE BAGS, 3RD SARGENT ENO'MAJ FELT A BIT FRUSTRATED AND CONFUSED. "WHAT COULD BE WORTH RISKING HIS LIFE FOR LIKE THAT?" HE THOUGHT.



ARE YOU SERIOUS!?

THESE BAGS CONTAIN THE FATE OF MY PEOPLE!

HEARING THAT, AND UNDERSTANDING THAT HIS PEOPLE WERE ON A SIMILAR MISSION, TO SAVE THEIR PEOPLE. ENO'MAJ DECIDED NOT TO ARGUE AND HELP JYTOO LOAD THE BAGS THROUGH THE SMALL HATCH.

UGHH! FINE! HERE, HURRY.

JUST FORCE THEM IN IF YOU MUST! YOU WONT DAMAGE THE CONTENTS!

WITH THE LAST BAG, AND ALL THE ASPARIANS ON BOARD, JYTOO CLIMBED ONTO OF THE MINI-DISC AND STARTED TO WORK HIS WAY INSIDE THROUGH THE NARROW HATCH.



AS HE DID HIS BEST TO WORK HIS WAY THROUGH THE NARROW OPENING DESIGNED FOR A BEING HALF HIS SIZE, JYTOO LOOKED UP TO SEE THE CREATURE WAS RIGHT ON TOP OF HIM.



OHH NO..

HE MADE IT ALMOST ALL THE WAY IN, BUT BEFORE HE COULD GET FULLY INSIDE, THE CREATURE SLAMMED IT'S LEGS DOWN HARD ON THE HATCH, CRUSHING JYTOO'S HEAD BETWEEN IT AND THE HATCH RIM. KNOCKING HIM IMMEDIATELY UNCONSCIOUS AS HE FELL LIMP TO THE FLOOR OF THE MINI-DISC, BLOOD POOLING UNDER HIS HEAD..



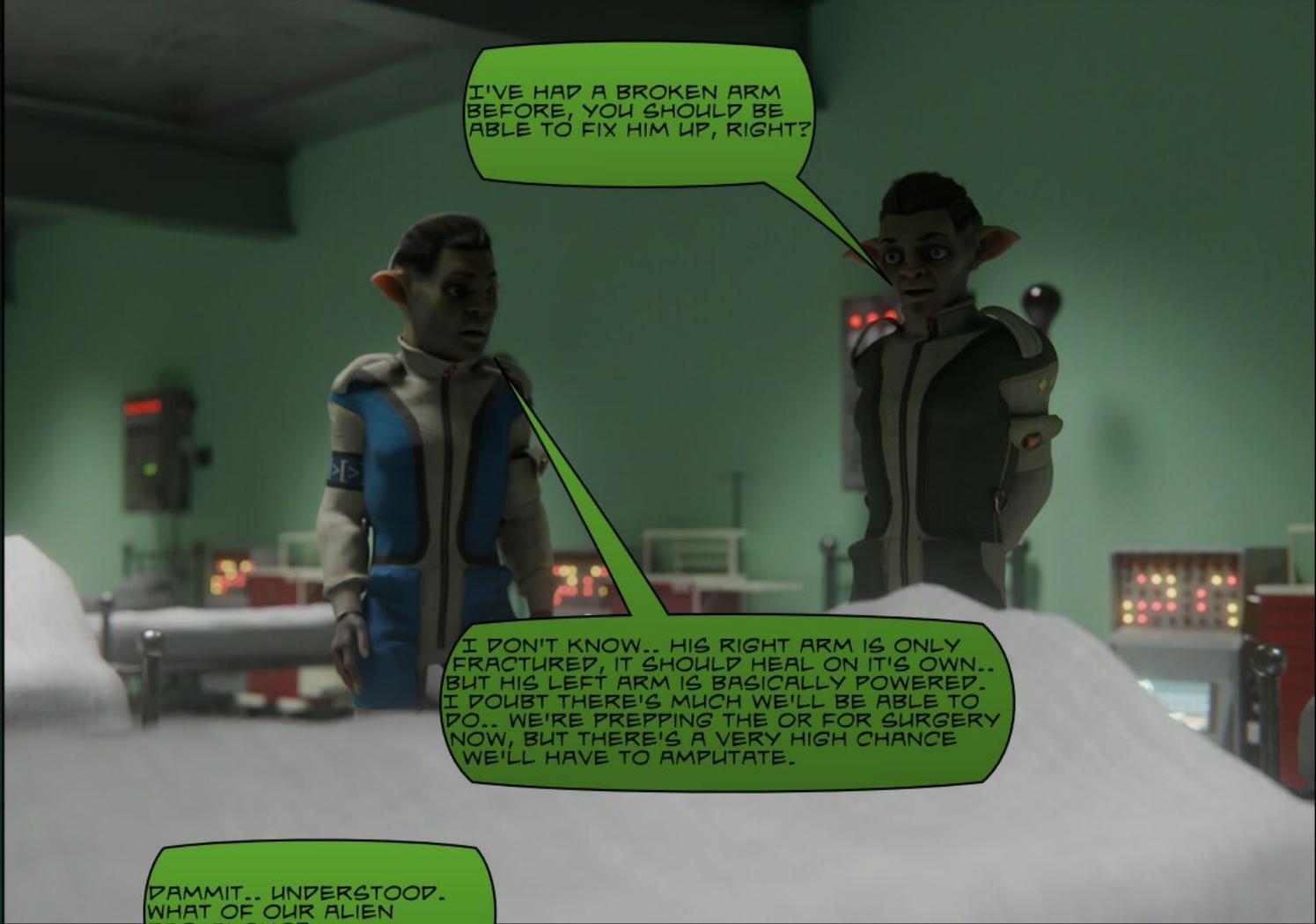
UPON THEIR RETURN, BOTH JYTOO AND DR. ON'DAO WERE RUSHED TO THE SHIP'S INFIRMARY.



WHAT'S THE PROGNOSIS, DOC?



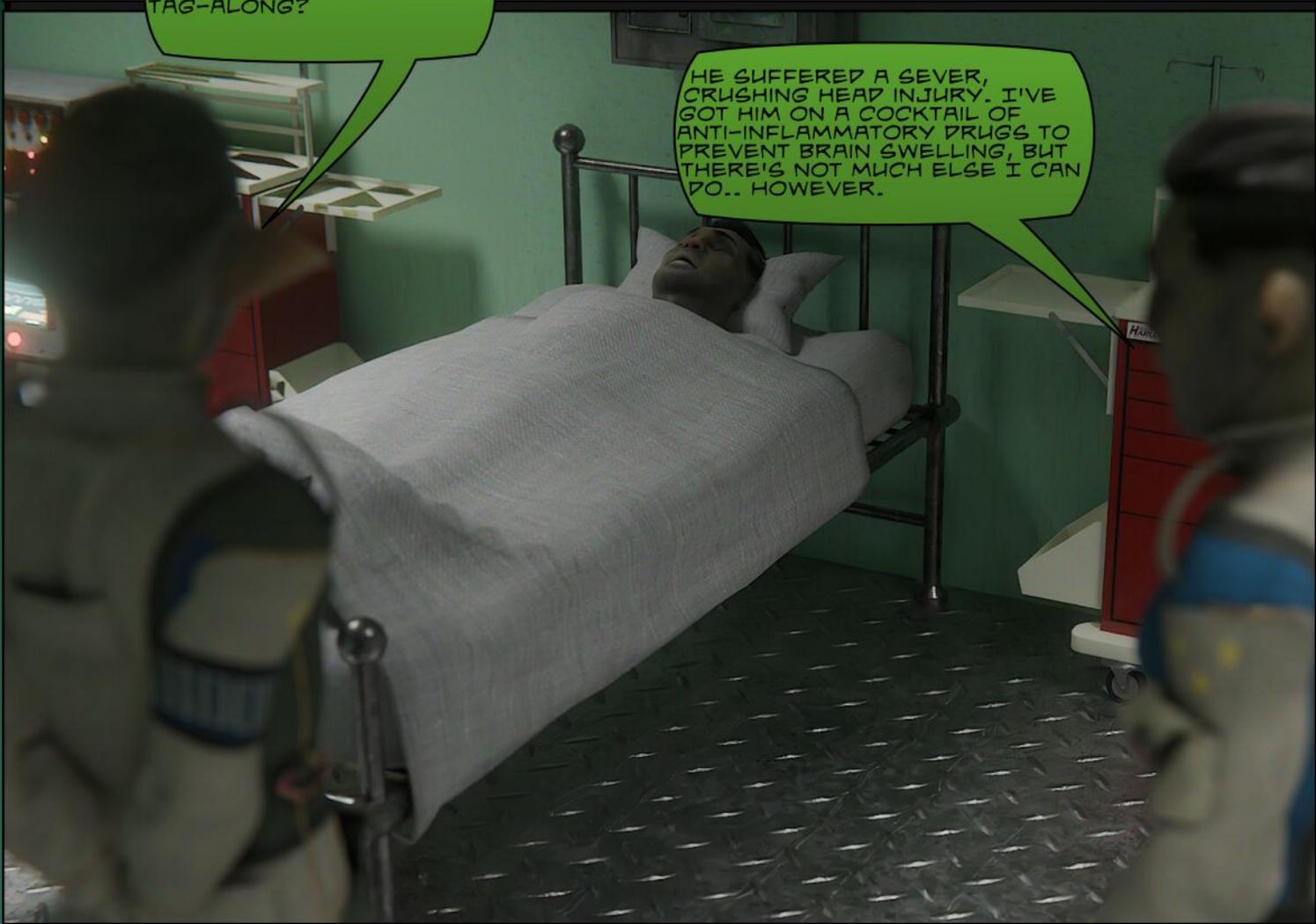
BOTH HIS ARMS ARE BROKEN, THE LEFT ARM IS SIGNIFICANTLY WORSE..

A scene in a hospital room with two alien medics. One is wearing a blue and white uniform, the other a grey and white one. They are standing near a patient who is mostly covered by a white sheet. The room has medical equipment and a greenish light.

I'VE HAD A BROKEN ARM BEFORE, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO FIX HIM UP, RIGHT?

I DON'T KNOW.. HIS RIGHT ARM IS ONLY FRACTURED, IT SHOULD HEAL ON IT'S OWN.. BUT HIS LEFT ARM IS BASICALLY POWERED. I DOUBT THERE'S MUCH WE'LL BE ABLE TO DO.. WE'RE PREPPING THE OR FOR SURGERY NOW, BUT THERE'S A VERY HIGH CHANCE WE'LL HAVE TO AMPUTATE.

FAMMIT.. UNDERSTOOD. WHAT OF OUR ALIEN TAG-ALONG?

A patient lying in a hospital bed, covered with a white sheet. Two alien medics are visible in the foreground, looking towards the patient. The room is dimly lit with medical equipment.

HE SUFFERED A SEVER, CRUSHING HEAD INJURY. I'VE GOT HIM ON A COCKTAIL OF ANTI-INFLAMMATORY DRUGS TO PREVENT BRAIN SWELLING, BUT THERE'S NOT MUCH ELSE I CAN DO.. HOWEVER.



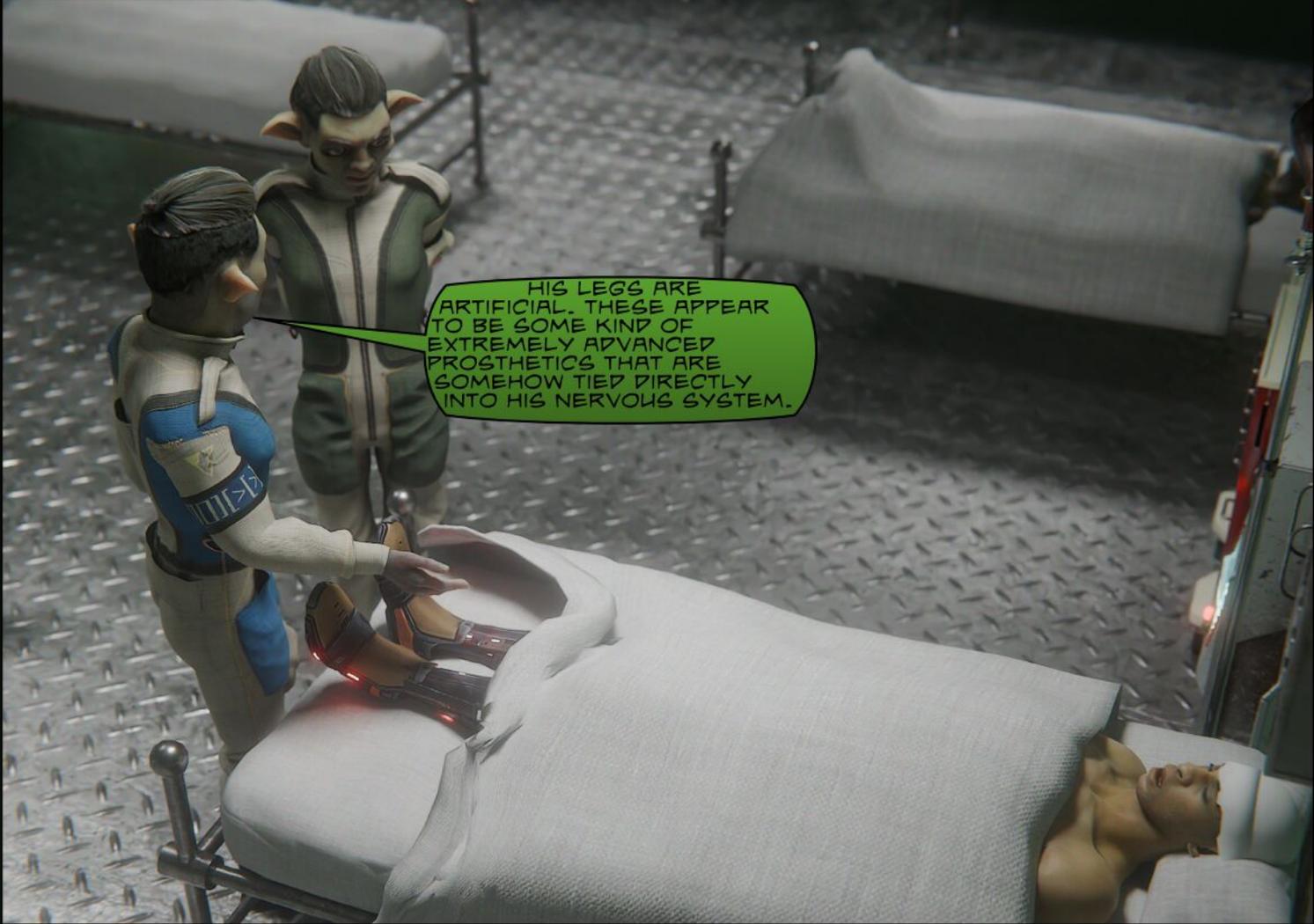
THERE'S SOMETHING YOU
NEED TO SEE... HIS LEGS.



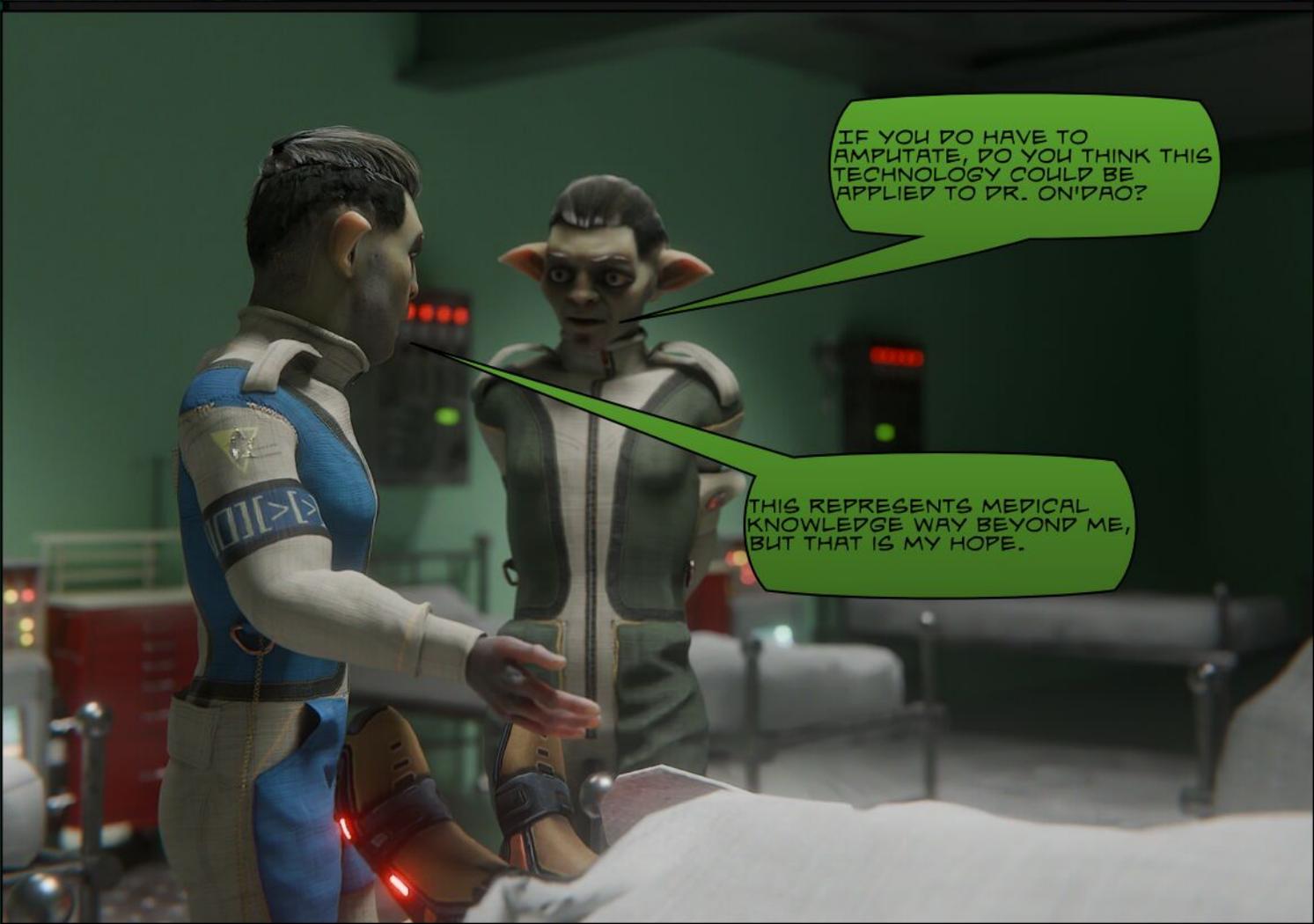
HE'S WEARING ARMOR?



THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT,
UNTIL I TRIED TO REMOVE IT.



HIS LEGS ARE ARTIFICIAL. THESE APPEAR TO BE SOME KIND OF EXTREMELY ADVANCED PROSTHETICS THAT ARE SOMEHOW TIED DIRECTLY INTO HIS NERVOUS SYSTEM.



IF YOU DO HAVE TO AMPUTATE, DO YOU THINK THIS TECHNOLOGY COULD BE APPLIED TO DR. ON'DAO?

THIS REPRESENTS MEDICAL KNOWLEDGE WAY BEYOND ME, BUT THAT IS MY HOPE.

ASSUMING HE SURVIVES, WE'LL ASK HIM. BUT RIGHT NOW WE HAVE TO ACT AS THOUGH HE CAN'T AND WON'T BE ABLE TO HELP.

UNDERSTOOD, DOCTOR. AS SOON AS DR. ON'DAO IS OUT OF SURGERY, FOCUS ALL YOUR EFFORTS ON SAVING THIS MAN.

OF COURSE, COMMANDER. BUT AS I SAID, HIS INJURY WAS SEVERE. I'M NOT EXPECTING HIM TO SURVIVE.. FRANKLY, I'M SURPRISED HE'S STILL ALIVE.

COMMANDER RO'NOCH, PLEASE REPORT TO THE BRIDGE AT ONCE!

DUTY CALLS, DOCTOR. DO YOUR BEST.



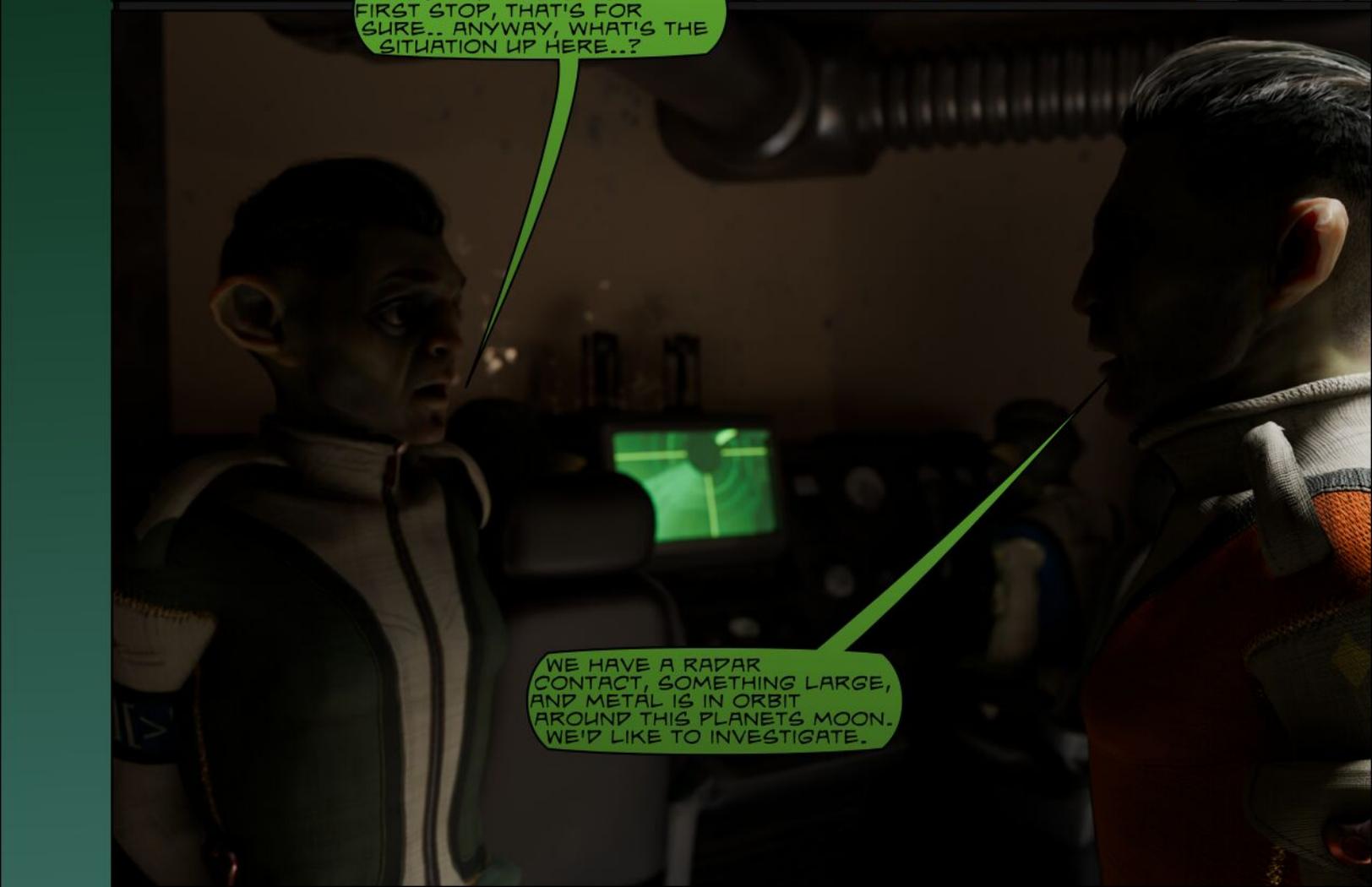


COMMANDER! HOW'S DOCTOR ON'DAO?

NOT GOOD, HE'S PROBABLY GOING TO LOOSE HIS LEFT ARM..

MY GOD! THAT'S AWFUL!

I WASN'T EXPECTING THIS ON OUR FIRST STOP, THAT'S FOR SURE.. ANYWAY, WHAT'S THE SITUATION UP HERE..?



WE HAVE A RADAR CONTACT, SOMETHING LARGE, AND METAL IS IN ORBIT AROUND THIS PLANET'S MOON. WE'D LIKE TO INVESTIGATE.

A comic book panel showing two alien characters in a spaceship cabin. The character on the left is wearing an orange and white jumpsuit, while the character on the right is wearing a green and white jumpsuit. They are standing in the aisle between rows of seats. The cabin has a metallic, industrial look with overhead pipes and a door in the background.

LARGE AND METAL? A SPACE STATION PERHAPS? MAYBE WHERE OUR ALIEN FRIEND "JYTOO" CAME FROM?

THAT'S THE LEADING THEORY AT THE MOMENT, SIR.. BUT..

WHEN I SAY IT'S LARGE, IT'S TRULY ENORMOUS. THE SIZE OF A SMALL CITY.

DO THEY SEE US?

I WOULD ASSUME SO.

IT'LL ONLY TAKE A FEW SHORT BURSTS FROM THE MAIN ENGINES TO GET US THERE, FUEL USE WILL BE NEGLIGIBLE.

I THINK WE SHOULD CHECK IT OUT, IT COULD BE THE ANSWER TO HELPING DR. ON'DAO AND OUR ALIEN FRIEND.

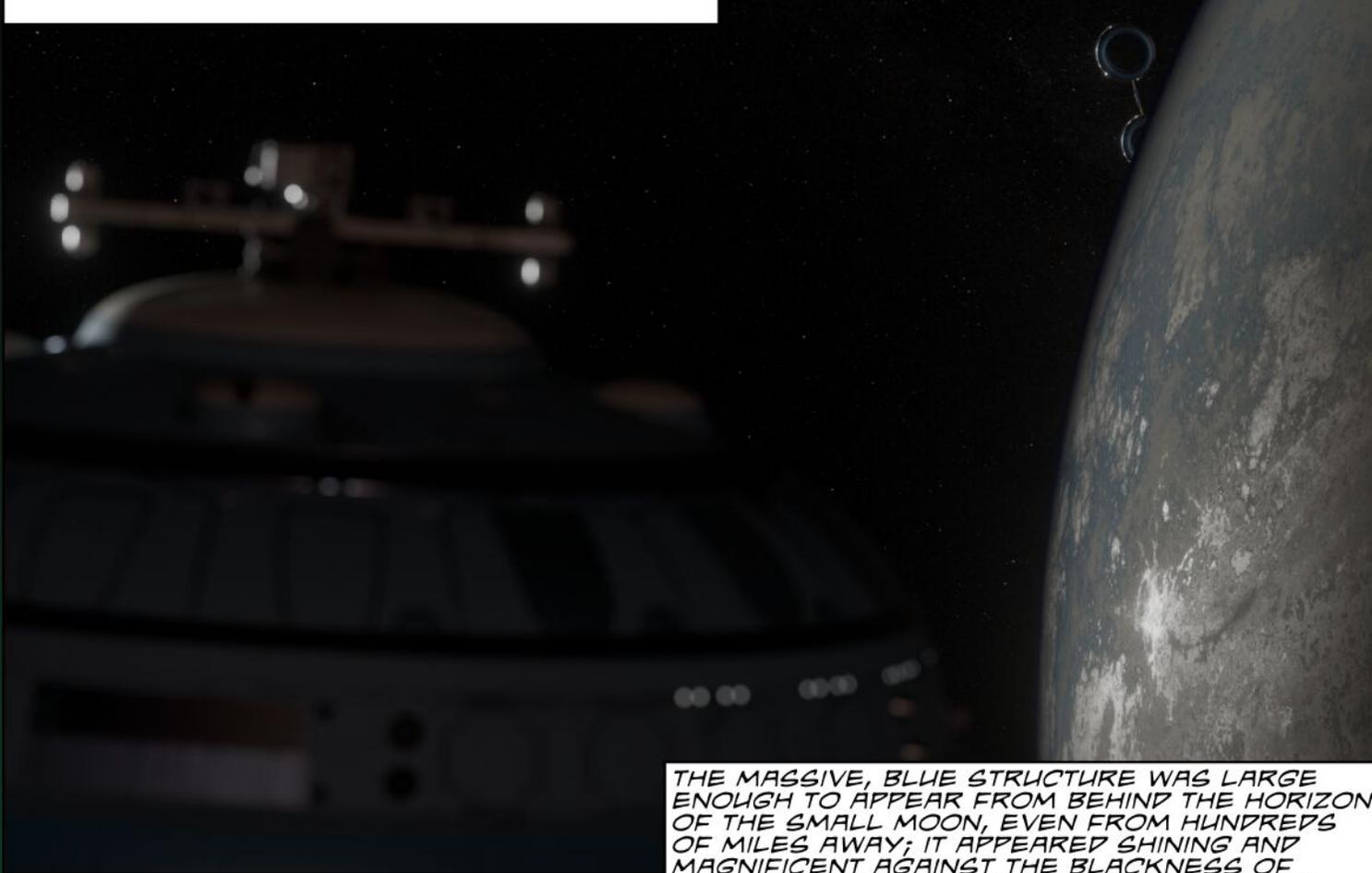
I HAVE TO AGREE, SET A COURSE, BEST POSSIBLE SPEED. AND TRANSMIT OUR UNIVERSAL GREETING THE ENTIRE WAY.

COURSE PLOTTED, EXPECTED TRAVEL TIME IS 32 MINUTES. FIRING ENGINES..

SUNRISE BURNED IT'S MAIN ENGINES AND WAS QUICKLY SENT OUT ON A DIRECT TRAJECTORY TOWARDS THE ALIEN MOON.



AS THEY APPROACHED, THE RADAR CONTACT CAME INTO VIEW, THE SIGHT OF THE MASSIVE STRUCTURE LEFT THE CREW OF SUNRISE SPEECHLESS FOR A FEW MOMENTS.



THE MASSIVE, BLUE STRUCTURE WAS LARGE ENOUGH TO APPEAR FROM BEHIND THE HORIZON OF THE SMALL MOON, EVEN FROM HUNDREDS OF MILES AWAY; IT APPEARED SHINING AND MAGNIFICENT AGAINST THE BLACKNESS OF SPACE AND AGAINST THE DULL GRAY OF THE MOON.



STRUCK WITH AN OVERWHELMING SENSE OF AWE AND WONDER, COMMANDER RO'NOCH FELT HIS LEGS BECOME WEAK AS HE STUMBLERD FORWARD TOWARDS THE SHIP'S FRONT WINDOWS WITHOUT SAYING A WORD.



FOR WHAT FELT LIKE HOURS, THE COMMANDER STOOD SILENTLY AND STARED OUT AT THE NEARLY INCOMPREHENSIBLY LARGE ALIEN STRUCTURE. AS THEY RAPIDLY GOT CLOSER, HE COULD MAKE OUT MORE DETAIL, INCLUDING 16 MASSIVE CROSSED RINGS REMINISCENT OF CROSS-HAIRS SPREAD EQUIDISTANTLY AROUND THE CIRCUMFERENCE OF EACH OF THE MASSIVE RINGS. THERE WAS ALSO SOME SORT OF TRUSS STRUCTURE WRAPPED AROUND EACH RING, CONNECTED IN THE MIDDLE BY WHAT APPEARED SOME SORT OF MACHINERY, BUT IT'S FUNCTION WAS UNKNOWN.

HE COULDN'T HELP THINK TO HIMSELF THAT HE WAS STANDING IN THE PRESENCE OF SOMETHING HIS PEOPLE WERE NEVER MEANT TO SEE. SOMETHING BEYOND VASTNESS, SOMETHING BEYOND COMPREHENSION. BUT HE DID HIS BEST TO PUSH THOSE THOUGHTS AWAY. AFTER ALL. IT'S JUST A REALLY BIG SPACE STATION. HIS PEOPLE MAY NOT HAVE ANY YET, BUT THE CONCEPT WASN'T NEW TO HIM.



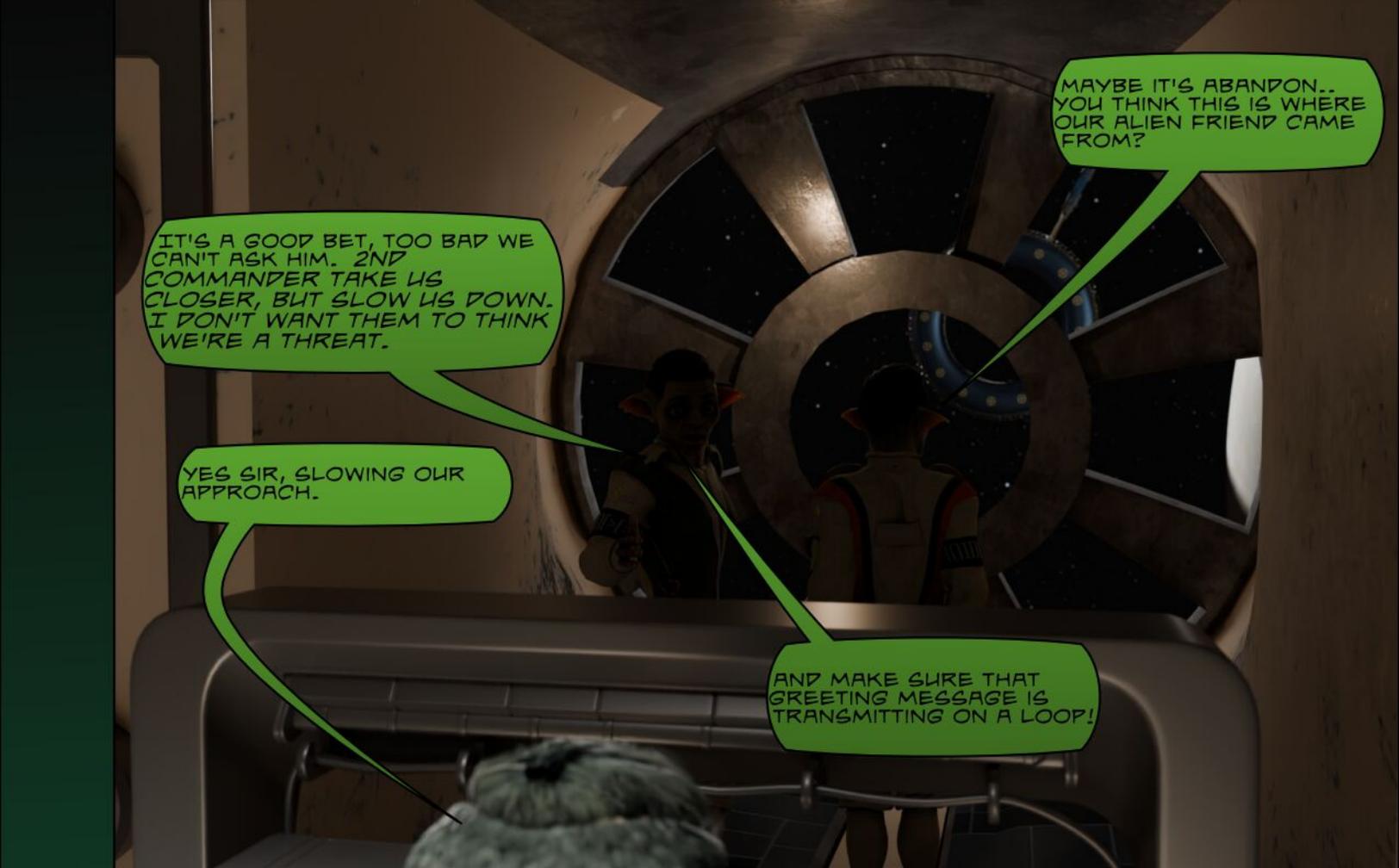
IN THEORY, WITH ENOUGH TIME. HIS PEOPLE TOO COULD BUILD A SPACE STATION OF THAT SCALE. IT'S JUST A METAL RING, AFTER ALL. THIS IDEA GAVE HIM SOME COMFORT, BUT EVEN SO. A KNOT IN HIS CHEST GREW EVER TIGHTER AS THE STRUCTURE GREW LARGER AND LARGER THE CLOSER THEY GOT.



MY GOD! IT MUST BE A COUNTER-ROTATING, SPIN-GRAVITY STATION! RIGHT? WHAT ELSE COULD IT BE?

I... BUT... IT'S NOT SPINNING, CHIEF TER'VAA

TWO BIG RINGS, SPIN THEM THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION FOR STABILITY, THAT'S GOTTA BE IT!



MAYBE IT'S ABANDON..
YOU THINK THIS IS WHERE
OUR ALIEN FRIEND CAME
FROM?

IT'S A GOOD BET, TOO BAD WE
CAN'T ASK HIM. 2ND
COMMANDER TAKE US
CLOSER, BUT SLOW US DOWN.
I DON'T WANT THEM TO THINK
WE'RE A THREAT.

YES SIR, SLOWING OUR
APPROACH.

AND MAKE SURE THAT
GREETING MESSAGE IS
TRANSMITTING ON A LOOP!

FOR THE NEXT COUPLE OF HOURS, SUNRISE DRIFTED GENTLY AROUND THE STRUCTURE, GATHERING WHAT LIMITED INFORMATION THEY COULD WITH THEIR SENSORS AND THEIR EYES. BUT TO THEIR SIMULTANEOUS DESPAIR AND RELIEF, NO ONE RESPONDED TO ANY OF THEIR ATTEMPTS TO MAKE CONTACT.



THE MORE THEY LOOKED, THE STRANGER THE STRUCTURE APPEARED TO BE. IT HAD NO DOCKING PORTS, NO HANGAR BAY, NO SIGN OF ANY RADIO OR ELECTRONIC SIGNALS OF ANY KIND. IT TRULY APPEARED THAT, WHATEVER IT WAS. IT WAS DEAD AND LONG ABANDONED.

EVEN SO, THE CREW OF SUNRISE HAD BECOME CONVINCED THAT THIS WAS A MASSIVE, ARTIFICIAL SPACE HABITAT. AND IF IT WAS TRULY ABANDON, MANY OF THEIR PEOPLE COULD LIKELY BE RELOCATED THERE, OR MAYBE WHOEVER BUILT IT COULD HELP IN SOME OTHER WAY. AS SUCH, THEY REFUSED TO GIVE UP THE SEARCH, DETERMINED TO FIND A WAY INSIDE.

KEEP TRANSMITTING THE AUTOMATED MESSAGE, BUT LETS TRY JUST TALKING TO THEM.

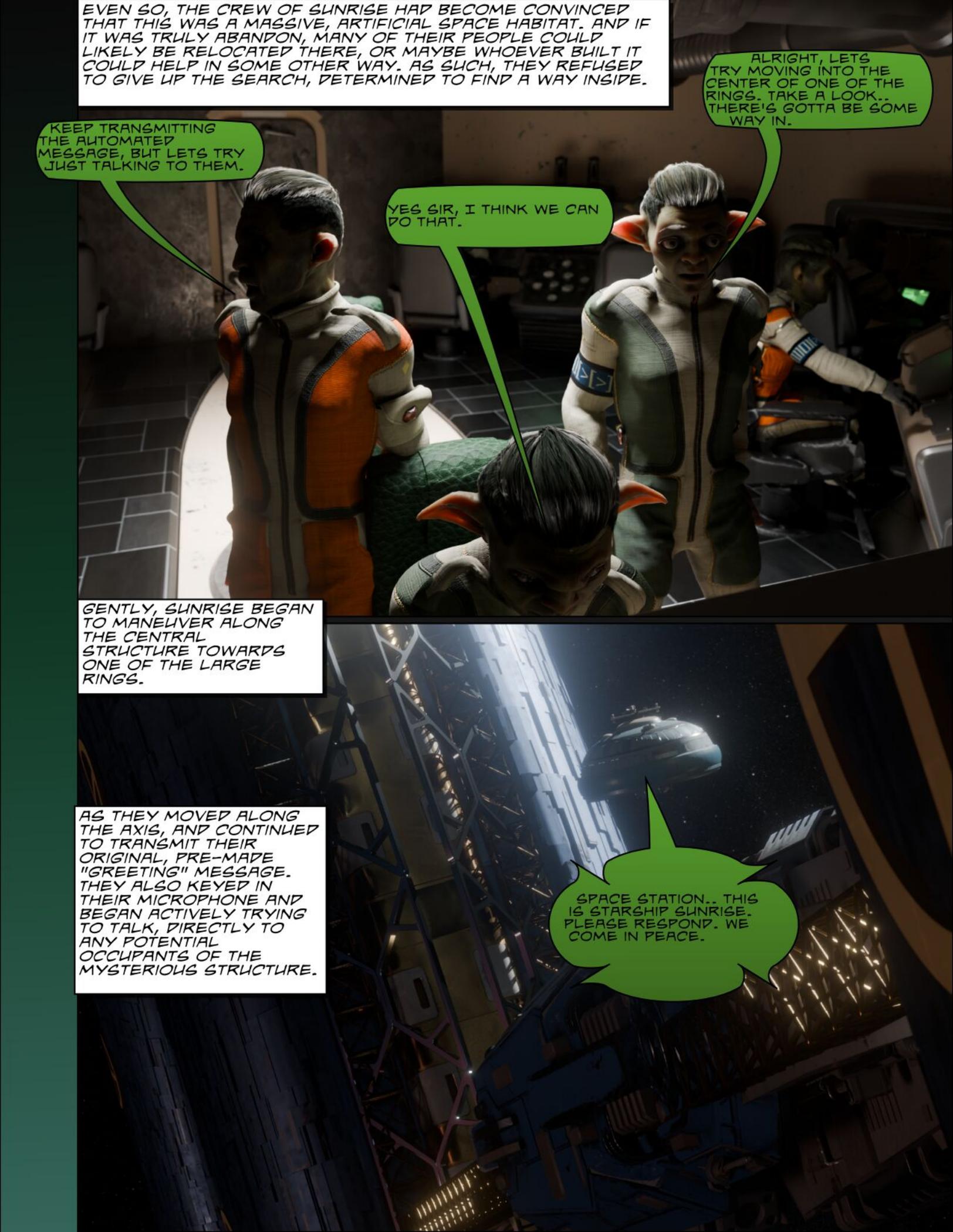
ALRIGHT, LETS TRY MOVING INTO THE CENTER OF ONE OF THE RINGS. TAKE A LOOK.. THERE'S GOTTA BE SOME WAY IN.

YES SIR, I THINK WE CAN DO THAT.

GENTLY, SUNRISE BEGAN TO MANEUVRE ALONG THE CENTRAL STRUCTURE TOWARDS ONE OF THE LARGE RINGS.

AS THEY MOVED ALONG THE AXIS, AND CONTINUED TO TRANSMIT THEIR ORIGINAL, PRE-MADE "GREETING" MESSAGE. THEY ALSO KEYED IN THEIR MICROPHONE AND BEGAN ACTIVELY TRYING TO TALK, DIRECTLY TO ANY POTENTIAL OCCUPANTS OF THE MYSTERIOUS STRUCTURE.

SPACE STATION.. THIS IS STARSHIP SUNRISE. PLEASE RESPOND. WE COME IN PEACE.



THE MOMENT THE OFFICER ON THE BRIDGE BEGAN TRANSMITTING, SUNRISE SHOOK VIOLENTLY AND THEN BEGAN TO REVERBERATE WITH A LOW HUM, AS IF THE ENTIRE HULL HAD BEEN CONVERTED INTO A TUNING FORK.

CEASE TRANSMITTING!

THIS ISN'T RIGHT, 2ND COMMANDER, EMERGENCY SUPER-PHOTONIC JUMP. TAKE US ANYWHERE BUT HERE!

I'M TRYING, SIR! THE HELM ISN'T RESPONDING!

THE LOW HUM CONTINUED AS SUNRISE WAS PULLED BY AN INVISIBLE FORCE TOWARDS THE CENTER OF ONE OF THE GIANT, BLUE RINGS.

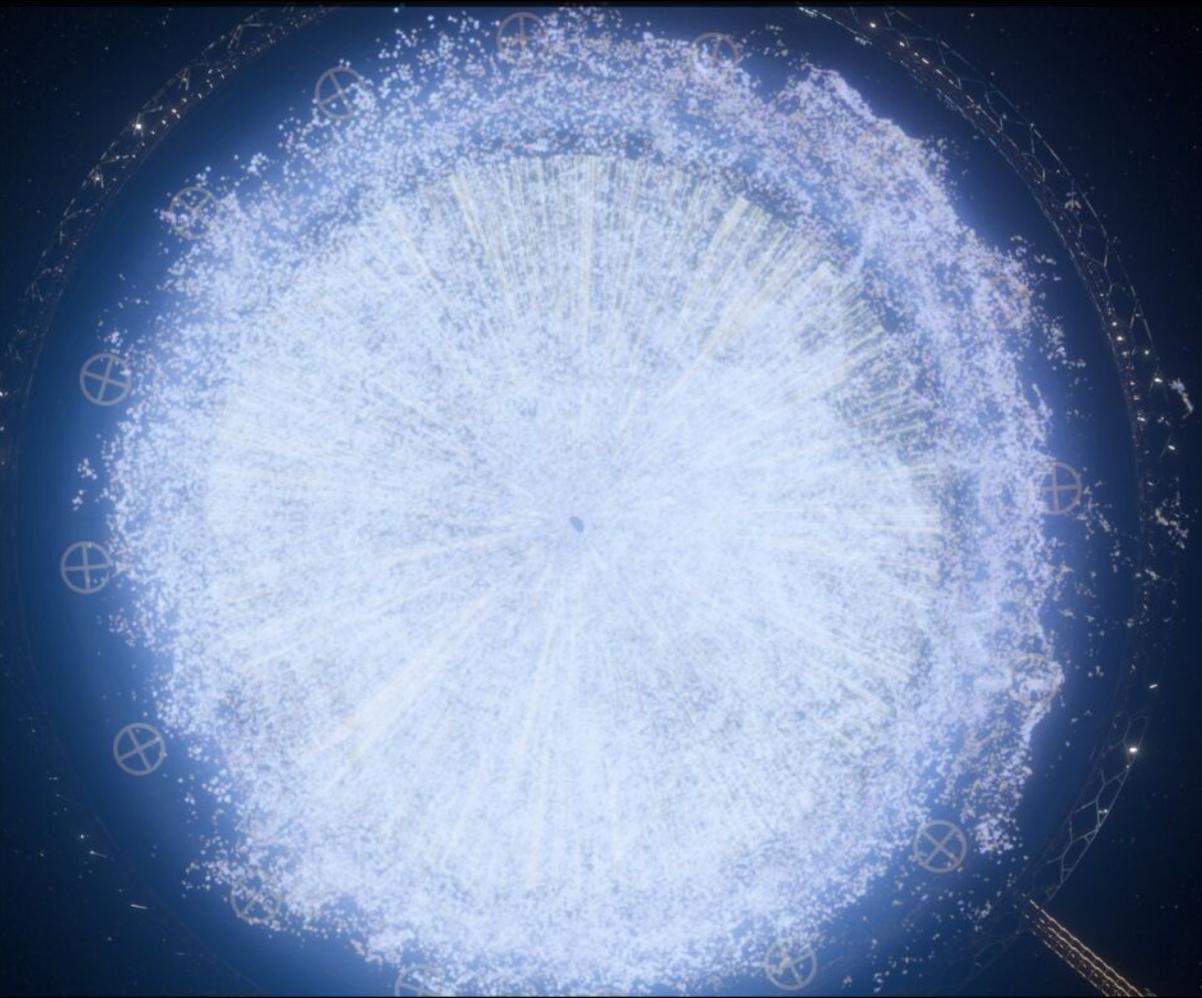
AS THEY REACHED THE OUTER EDGE OF THE RING, IT BEGAN TO ROTATE AT AN UNBELIEVABLE SPEED AS A BRIGHT, BLUE LIGHT FORMED ALONG THE INNER EDGE.

ENGINE ROOM! MANUAL FIRING! AFT QUADRANT! DO IT NOW! GIVE IT EVERYTHING SHE'S GOT!

WE'RE UNDER ATTACK! READY THE GUNS!

MAIN BATTERY REPORTS, READY TO FIRE ON YOUR COMMAND!

BEFORE COMMANDER RO'NOCH COULD GIVE THE ORDER TO FIRE ON THE STRUCTURE, THE ENTIRE BRIDGE WAS FILLED WITH A BRILLIANT SHOWER OF BLUE AND WHITE LIGHT, FOLLOWED BY WHAT APPEARED TO BE SOME SORT OF PLASMA RAPIDLY STREAMING TOWARDS THE CENTER IN STRAIGHT LINES.



AS THESE LINES OF UNKNOWN ENERGY CONVERGED AT THE CENTER, A BLACK SPHERE APPEARED AND RAPIDLY GREW TO A SIZE AT LEAST 25 TIMES THAT OF SUNRISE. AS THIS SPHERICAL HORIZON OF BENT SPACE SHOWING AN UNKNOWN GALAXY ON THE OTHER SIDE EXPANDED, IT ENVELOPED SUNRISE.



A MOMENT LATER, A FINAL FLASH OF LIGHT FILLED THE AREA AS THE DEVICE POWERED DOWN. SUNRISE WAS NOWHERE TO BE FOUND...



TO BE CONTINUED...