

Before

by

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EXT. A MODERN CITY - DAY, RUSH HOUR

People move about on the sidewalks going about their everyday business. Cars and trucks move through traffic; stopping, turning and driving as one would expect in a busy modern city.

VOICE OVER

Mankind. Civilization. People. The very pinnacle of human development and achievement. With the garish display of all of our technology. We think ourselves kings of our surroundings - masters of our environment. We are the crowning achievement of the species Homo Sapiens! Or so we would lead ourselves to believe.

...

In the late 1980's geneticists embarked on an effort to find "Mitochondrial Eve", the genetic mother of all humans alive today. They succeeded, but in the process they also found that the human species had been wiped out except for a few individuals, nearly to the point of extinction on several occasions since homo sapiens first stood up straight and walked the savannas of mother Africa.

...

No, my friend, the path of knowledge is not a straight one. It is a path with many switchbacks and dead ends. Human kind has forgotten more knowledge than it now possesses.

...

One needs only look at the collapse of ancient Rome and the onset of the Dark Ages to see a manifest example of that.

(MORE)

(CONT'D)

In the space of a few generations
and under the invading boots of
Muslim hordes the glowing,
glorious past of Rome was torn
down to source the building blocks
of hovels. The science and
knowledge amassed in five-hundred
years of the Roman Empire's
existence - gone in flash -
forgotten in the needful pursuit
of day-to-day survival!

...

Yes my friends, we've forgotten
much over the intervening
millennia and this is one such
forgotten tale!

EXT. A LUSH FOREST SETTING - DAY

A stream flows in the distance. Birds and insects sing.
Not far off giant tortoises graze and drink lazily from the
stream. A breeze sways the trees and brush.

ALIAH and HERON are lying naked on a sandy spot near the
creek in the sun, locked in an intense embrace. Their
clothes and effects strewn in an untidy heap nearby.

An unnatural sound for the setting is heard as the
communicator rings.

Heron stirs from the embrace upon hearing it, but Aliah
pulls him back tight to her, wrapping her legs around his
back

ALIAH

Ignore it, Heron. Tell them you
forgot the accursed thing at home.
I need you more than they, my
love!

Heron kisses Aliah passionately. The communicator continues
its incessant chiming. Heron continues his embrace of
Aliah, but is still obviously being distracted from the
task at hand by the insistent device.

At length he sighs and crawls toward the heap of the
personal effects, dragging Aliah who is still clinging to
him, along for the ride.

He rifles through the heap and pulls out the communicator,
then answers it.

HERON

This had better be important!

VOSH

The council is requesting your presence. They're not happy with the delay and they want an explanation or they're going to cancel our grant!

HERON

Damn! How long do I have?

Aliah continues pulling him tight and kissing him each time Vosh speaks on the communicator.

VOSH

They're eating mid-day meal now. They want you there when they get back in session.

HERON

(breaking Aliah's kiss)

I'm on my way. Stall them until I arrive!

Heron shuts off the communicator and tosses it on top of the heap. He returns his attention to Aliah kissing her passionately before breaking the kiss and looking into her eyes.

HERON (CONT'D)

I've got to go!

EXT. POMPASSA'S CAPITAL CITY - DAY

Heron dashes down the cacophonous city streets, weaving between shop stalls with shop-keepers hawking their wares, various citizens and armored men leading smilodons on chains.

Occasionally he darts into the traffic of woolly mammoths loaded with cargo and odd vehicles that hover just off the ground moving in the streets.

Angered citizens curse him as he darts past, cutting them off, frightening their animals or nearly causing collisions.

At length he makes his way into a grand plaza with a fountain at its center. Across the the plaza stands a

monumental building with ornate columns and entrances. He makes a beeline to it.

INT. COUNCIL HALL WAY - CONTINUOUS

Heron dashes along hallways lit by glass globes full of a glowing bubbling liquid.

OTHERS in fine clothes loiter about in these halls slowing his passage.

Heron eventually winds up before a grand door. He adjusts his clothes and slicks down his hair one final time before returning his attention to the door.

He gingerly opens the door and slips stealthily into...

INT. COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CONTINUOUS

Heron sneaks into a large semi-circular room.

Seats filled with well-dressed people surround a central dais in a bleacher-like formation with a central aisle that comes in from the door.

A stately gentleman (DARIAN) is stands in the middle of the dais, pontificating.

Heron ducks down trying not to be noticed and takes the blatantly vacant seat next to VOSH.

Vosh looks visibly relieved and mouths the words "what took so long?"

DARIAN

...our latest intelligence informs us that the, Vahalians are to the point where they already are projecting inanimate objects successfully with their version of the portal technology! I need not remind my fellow counselors of the dire consequences should they complete the task before we do. The vast stores of Protactinium on the fifth planet will be brought back and used to fuel their aggression against us! With that much power at their disposal even our mighty centurions will be powerless to defend us!

The counselor notices Heron's entrance.

DARIAN (CONT'D)

...ah, Heron, how kind of you to join us. Prior to our mid-day meal break your assistant, Vosh was informing us that the portal is not even remotely functional and yet our minister of energy informs us that your project is still drawing its full allotment of 100 pterratherms of power from the city's grids. Do you care to explain?

Heron rises from his seat uncomfortably and clears his throat.

HERON

Counselor Darian, we are making steady progress. As I've reported before, we require the full 100 pterratherms of energy to maintain the singularity seed within the mother crystal's matrix.

...
If we allow the singularity to collapse, we would need to resupply the initial start-up surge of 10,000 pterratherms to reestablish it and even then it might collapse in on itself; requiring additional attempts. Need I remind you that it took eight attempts and a full lunar cycle and a half before we were able to generate the stable singularity seed that we now possess?

DARIAN

(dismayed)

We've heard this all before, Heron! You told us this when we last met a quarter cycle ago. Yet there is no progress and our enemies the, Vahalians seem to march steadily onward toward success!

HERON

(emphatic)

You are correct, counselor Darian! I did report the same information last quarter cycle and it still has not changed.

(MORE)

HERON (CONT'D)

I also reported that the modulator heat sink failed as I had promised you it would due to the lack of palladium that the council refused to purchase. Need I remind you that it was you, yourself who led the opposition to the purchase of the palladium?

...

Now, the palladium has finally been purchased after the council reconsidered the matter last quarter cycle and we still are awaiting its delivery on the next mammoth train from the, Madagel Valley. That mammoth train is not due in before the morrow!

...

Without the heat sink the modulator will overheat and destroy itself and without the modulator we cannot modulate the singularity field and without modulating the field, we cannot project a thing!

...

Not even a single speck of dust!

DARIAN

Need I remind you, Heron, the, Vahalians hold the advantage? They are already ahead of us, projecting matter through their own portal.

HERON

I too read the intelligence report counselor.

...

And I happen to know a thing or two about the topic. Sure, the, Vahalians have projected matter. I can also guarantee that they've destroyed their modulator in the process.

...That's what happens when you rush things.

...

They'll be a full three lunar cycles or more sourcing a suitable replacement crystal and rebuilding their modulator. In the meantime we will have received our shipment of palladium and will have fashioned the new heat sink.

DARIAN

Again with your technical mumbo-jumbo and promises! In a quarter cycle this... in a lunar cycle that! Always the same, always the continued demand on our limited monetary and energy resources and never a tangible thing to show for it!

...

Perhaps if you weren't distracted by so diligently trying to plant your seed in the belly of, Varlo's daughter so you can secure a mate, there'd be more successes for you to report.

HERON

I will court whomever I please in the ample free-time this council insists on providing me by not fulfilling the material requirements of the project they commissioned me to complete! Perhaps if you spent less time investigating my mating practices, counselor and instead concerned yourself with locating the Valhalian spy that keeps feeding them our research we would not be under such ridiculous pressure to rush things!

INT. COUNCIL HALL HALLWAY - DAY

Heron and Vosh exit the council chambers back into the hallway, making their way back toward the exit onto the plaza.

VOSH

Well that was rather cordial as usual!

HERON

They're satisfied for now. Just make sure you get down to the mammoth train bright and early tomorrow to get that palladium back to the lab so we can get started on the new heat sink.

VOSH

So you and, Aliah have plans for tonight?

HERON

You know how it goes, my friend. If she's not with child by the time her cycle completes then the gods want her to be with someone else.

...

No matter how much we wish it weren't so! So we've been trying to show those gods that we mean business!

Heron laughs and half blushes that he's been so public about private matters.

VOSH

Fine! I'll see you on the morrow... you rutting hart!

INT. HERON'S LAB - MORNING

Vosh is in the lab, stacking metallic ingots in one part of the room off of a cargo cart.

In another part of the room there is a huge crystal, the MOTHER CRYSTAL, mounted in a holding mechanism.

From the crystal emanates a very bright light that shimmers and dances and a low hum seems to come from there that varies in tone in time with the changing light.

Various strange devices line the walls of this part of the lab. Some hold other crystals that glow faintly while others hold orbs of glowing, bubbling liquid.

At the center of the equipment seems to be a small circular dais structure above which the light from the mother crystal seems to be focused down into a tight speck of light.

Other parts of the lab seem to serve more of a workshop and fabrication type functions. It is loaded with workbenches and objects that have the look and feel of tools.

It is more toward this workshop part of the lab that Vosh unloads his cargo.

Heron enters the lab smiling broadly.

HERON

So the palladium is arrived then?

VOSH

Aye, fine quality ingots they are too! You seem in a good mood then?

HERON

To be sure, but less on that. Let's get to work shall we? We don't want, Counselor Darian's eyes to bug out if we have no progress to report now do we?

VOSH

We're all setup to pour the heat sink. I was just waiting on you!

The men begin manipulating the controls on a machine near the stack of ingots.

Eventually a dull red glow emanates from within the machine accompanied by a dull hum.

They begin feeding the ingots into a hopper leading into an opening on the side.

After a few ingots have slid in, a stream molten metal begins to pour from a spout on the opposite side into a vessel obviously containing a mold.

INT. HERON'S LAB - MONTAGE:

Various steps in the fabrication of the heat sink are shown... From the breaking of the mold to the cleaning of the raw molding and removal of sprues and flash.

Eventually a crystal is fitted into the heart of the heat sink and it is connected to the machine.

Luminous power connections are made as well as hoses that obviously carry cooling fluid.

Throughout the montage it is made apparent that an appreciable amount of time is passing.

INT. HERON'S LAB - LATE NIGHT

Distant crickets can be heard.

Heron and Vosh stand before the assembled machine.

Their faces and clothes are dirty and sweaty. They appear tired. Their arms are crossed and faces show a sense of accomplishment as they protract their handiwork.

Aliah enters the lab carrying a basket and interrupting their reverie.

ALIAH

Look at the two of you! Are you aware how late it is?

HERON

Huh?

ALIAH

It's late, nearly middle-dark and I'll bet neither of the two of you has eaten a thing since last morrow.

Aliah sets the basket in one of the very few clear spaces on a nearby workbench with a thunk.

ALIAH (CONT'D)

Well I've brought food for the two of you. Come eat.

VOSH

You needn't tell me twice.

Vosh makes a beeline for the basket and begins rummaging through it; pulling various things out and placing them on the bench top; tasting this and that as he does.

Aliah heads toward Heron untying his work-apron and lifting it over his head before tossing it carelessly aside.

She then licks her thumb and makes a vain attempt to wipe some of the dirt from Heron's face before kissing him.

ALIAH

You look like one of the unwashed Urmagogh that live out in the icy wastes hunting mammoth and living in caves.

HERON

...and I've got the hunger of one too!

Heron scoops Aliah up with his hands under her butt lifting her so that she can wrap her legs around his waist. He carries her to the bench where the food is now arrayed and sets her down on it.

HERON (CONT'D)

I'll have a large helping of this tasty morsel!

Heron lowers his head to kiss Aliah's cleavage.

She responds by squealing, kicking her feet and slapping Heron on the back of the head.

ALIAH

Now you behave you savage!
(coily)
We're not alone!

Vosh laughs.

Heron relents and turns his attention to the food, grabbing some sort of fowl leg and taking a huge bite.

Aliah takes a piece of fruit and starts daintily nibbling it while gazing at the portal.

ALIAH (CONT'D)

So what is it, this thing you've built?

HERON

(mouth full, but matter-of-factly)
A heat sink...
It dissipates the heat that builds up in the modulator crystal.

ALIAH

...no, the whole thing...

HERON

...oh the portal? Well it's exactly as it sounds. A door.

ALIAH

A door to where?

HERON

...to wherever the other side is.

ALIAH

Now you're being coy with me...

HERON

...No, no I'm not. Wherever you can see, you can focus the far side of the portal there. So you can open a passage between there and here. Provided you can modulate the singularity into a large enough orifice to pass through that is.

ALIAH

I think I understand

...
Somewhat...

Vosh looks up from a cartoonish mound of food he's amassed and chimes in.

VOSH

Don't get him started, Miss Aliah or we'll be here til the morrow.

HERON

No it's easier that. we can just show you! I mean, we've completed the new heat sink and were contemplating turning it on when you arrived.

VOSH

Not now... I'm eating here and what damned fine food it is too!

Vosh raises a fowl leg in salute to Aliah.

HERON

(jokingly)

Yes now! You've got to do something to earn your stipend!

VOSH

As if slaving away here all day over a hot foundry isn't enough to earn that paltry sum!

Vosh sighs and relents, dropping his food to the bench.

The two men set about adjusting various controls on the machine, eliciting changes in the sounds of the machine and colors and intensities of the lights that emanate from it.

While making the adjustments, Heron continues munching on his fowl leg.

At length the modulator crystal is rotated into a beam of light streaming from the mother crystal.

Controls are adjusted and the modulator crystal begins to spin in its mounting ever so slowly.

HERON

Quick! Increase the coolant flow
to the heat sink!

Vosh rushes to adjust a control and the fluid in the hoses leading to the heat sink is seen to flow more quickly.

HERON (CONT'D)

Modulating for aperture...

Further controls are adjusted and the modulator crystal spins at a faster and faster rate.

As the modulator crystal speeds up, the small point of light focused over the dais begins to change into a larger and larger flattened disk of light.

Eventually the disk becomes about the size of a basketball in diameter.

Heron removes his hands from the controls his eyes darting between the lighted disk and the control panel.

The bone from the fowl leg sticking out of his mouth. Heron pulls the bare bone from his mouth with a pop and looks at Vosh and gestures at the disk with the bone.

HERON (CONT'D)

It's stable! The portal's stable!
...
Keep an eye on the modulator
temperature.

VOSH

It's holding steady at two-hundred
nineteen therms.

HERON

Locking aperture...

Heron slaps a control.

The nature of the hovering disk of light changes. For a moment, it looks like a brightly lit pool of mercury into which something has been dropped.

Circular ripples play across its face. As the ripples subside, the nature of the disk changes slowly back to being just a bright disk of light; losing the metallic sheen.

Heron strides forward until he stands directly in front of the dais and the portal that hovers over it.

With trepidation he furtively moves the tip of the bone forward until just the tip just enters into the portal.

The end of the bone does not emerge from the other side of the lighted disk as one would anticipate, but the humming coming from the machine increases in volume.

The lights in the room flicker.

Eventually, Heron throws caution to the wind and he tosses the whole bone through the portal.

A clack is heard from the direction of the bench where the food is (off screen).

All look to see that the bone has appeared lying on the bench beside the bowl of cooked fowl legs.

HERON (CONT'D)
Vosh, coolant temperature?

Vosh's astounded stare in the direction of the bench is interpreted by the query.

VOSH
Huh?

HERON
Temp? What's the temp?

VOSH
(glancing quickly at the
control panel)
Two-hundred seventy six therms...

Heron swallows a nervous gulp then slowly pushes his hand through the portal.

Everyone looks around at each other nervously as a disembodied arm is seen to appear over the bench.

The arm eventually fumbles around, landing on a fowl leg.

The disembodied hand grabs it from the bowl before retreated back into the nether from whence it came.

Vosh looks at Aliah his mouth agape with awe, only to find her looking back likewise in disbelief.

Both turn to Heron to find him snacking on the fresh fowl leg with a smug grin on his face.

HERON

By Va'al, it appears the cursed
contraption actually works!

Heron throws down the fowl leg, dashes to Aliah and scoops her up in his arms, spinning her about in glee.

Hoots and hollers are heard.

EXT. HERON'S LAB - NIGHT

The exterior of the lab is seen, lights pouring from its windows.

The rest of the city is quiet and mostly dark.

Muffled shouts of joy are heard from within.

EXT. A STREET IN THE CITY - DAY

A HOODED MAN moves among the CROWD.

He appears to be trying to act stealthy without looking like it. At random intervals he stops to look over his shoulder, checking to see if he is being followed.

He pauses at the entrance to a small shaded alley that seems a dark place even in bright daylight.

He nonchalantly leans against a nearby wall long enough to look in all directions and satisfy his anxiety about being followed, before ducking into the alleyway.

EXT. SEEDY ALLEYWAY - CONTINUOUS

There in the shadows is the collected detritus of the city both human and not. Between the festering garbage piles are VAGRANTS, DRUG PEDDLERS and diseased PROSTITUTES.

The hooded man follows the alleyway, ignoring the advances and offers of those he passes.

Eventually he reaches a small wooden door.

After another check over his shoulder, he knocks - three knocks, pauses and then a single knock.

The door is opened and the hooded man ducks hurriedly into the door.

INT. A DARK MEETING PLACE - CONTINUOUS

The hooded man steps into a dimly lit room.

This room seems the indoor continuation of the seedy alleyway without.

A naked PROSTITUTE lies unconscious on a mound of filthy straw along a wall. Her body is covered in bruises from a ferocious beating, but also in open sores. The cause of her unconsciousness is unknown.

Garbage litters the floor and rats run through it.

What little furniture there is, is crudely constructed, tattered, dirty and broken.

Sooty smoke streams from a few distributed fat lamps - the only illumination in the room.

A greasy looking corpulent man (CARR'UK) sits at a table, his sweating, hairy upper body is bare

Carr'uk eats the FOOD arrayed before him, none of which looks in the least appetizing.

CARR'UK
Why are you here?

The hooded man drops his hood revealing Counselor Darian.

DARIAN
Heron has succeeded. He's made the heat sink work. Your master will want to know this.

Carr'uk finishes gnawing the flesh from a bone and carelessly tosses it over his shoulder, then itches his hawk-like nose with his greasy finger, leaving a smear.

CARR'UK
And?

DARIAN
The secret was as, Heron insisted the use of palladium. He said something about its ability to act as a catalyst, but I don't understand the babbling of these followers of, Va'al.

CARR'UK

...and where can the master find
this palla... palla...

DARIAN

...palladium.
That's just it. We purchased it
from a witch on the southern tip
of the mainland; the only one who
knows the secret of its creation.
We bought all she had. I do not
know if and where he can find more
to reconstruct the heat sink that
he destroyed with his ill-advised
test.

...
I told him to wait - but he
didn't.

Darian's manner with the greasy man is sneering and
derisive. He clearly does not like him.

CARR'UK

I will tell my lord. I've never
asked you, Darian. Why do you do
this - betray your own folk?

Carr'uk rises from his seat and paces the room holding his
earthenware cup of wine.

CARR'UK (CONT'D)

(with contempt)

...the others I have to threaten
or pay with gems or gold.

...
Or with drugs...

Carr'uk's path has brought him to loom over the unconscious
prostitute.

He pauses speaking and regards her briefly then throws his
wine on her.

She stirs, struggling back toward consciousness but Carr'uk
kicks her in the face, knocking her back unconscious before
continuing to speak.

CARR'UK (CONT'D)

...or whores. but you...
You I can't figure out. Tell me
Darian, what purchases your
treachery?

Darian visibly recoils at Carr'uk's brutal assault on the
defenseless whore.

DARIAN

(defiantly)

My reasons are my own, Carr'uk,
but if you must know, I'll tell
you.

...

It's those cursed followers of,
Va'al and their haughty pursuit of
knowledge for the "good" of all
mankind!

...

It sickens me!

...

My god, Mahrus, tells me that
strength is the only thing of
value. All else is folly. All of
the knowledge that these fools
wield could so easily be turned to
strength if only they'd aspire to
it. Instead what do they do with
all of their power? If they're
not pumping water from beneath the
Earth to slake the thirst of
commoners, lighting the dark with
their bubbling concoctions or
healing paupers; they're off
chasing the next savory tidbit of
knowledge.

...

With their high-minded concern for
the common man, they have
forgotten they are nobles. They
are like children, chasing after
bubbles on a breeze.

...

What they need, Carr'uk is
leadership to direct their efforts
and that collection of dottering
fools that sit in council are not
leadership.

...

So you remind your master, when
he's sewn enough chaos and
weakened their hold on power
enough for me to seize the reins,
then my cooperation ends.

Darian turns to leave, then pauses and with his face
clearly displaying the calculations running through his
mind.

He partially turns back.

DARIAN (CONT'D)

Oh, and one final thing. You may wish to inform your master that the council has voted to send an expedition of eighteen legions to, Vaha to destroy his portal. He may wish to prepare a fitting reception for them.

With that Darian exits, slamming the door behind him.

INT. HALL OF THE SCIENCES - DAY

A group of learned scientists are assembled in a meeting room, among them:

Heron, Vosh, the astronomers BYLAH and EVORIS, the geologist ELAS, The physicist PLEURIS, Minister of Energy Sogorath and Counselor Darian.

The walls are lined with receptacles housing scrolls and at the center of the room, a large golden STATUE of Va'al.

Va'al is a multi-armed male deity. In two of his hands he holds open an unfurled scroll, reading from it. In each remaining hand he holds a still-closed scroll.

BYLAH

...calculating the orbital period of the fifth planet and correlating it to our own progression around mother Sol, if we timed our attempt for the confluence in our orbits that occurs in four lunar periods and 8 days that should place the two bodies as close together as they get for the next two thousand eighty three annual periods.

SOGORATH

Excellent!

...

And being that much closer, how much does that decrease the energy demands to project the terminus of the portal?

HERON

Roughly three percent.

DARIAN

So let me see if I can put all of this in a little better perspective.

Instead of needing one hundred eighty six percent of the power available of the whole entire city grid, now you need only one hundred eighty three percent and that output level will need to be maintained for seven...

Darian motions to Elas for concurrence.

ELAS

...yes seven.

DARIAN

...seven days before even the smallest amount of Protactinium can be returned from the fifth planet. Supposing we could find a way to build a power grid with one hundred eighty three percent of current capacity of our city grid all the way away on the Southern continent. We'd still need to find a way to get enough Protactinium to fuel this new power grid in spite of the, Vahalians' incessant raids on the shipments from the Protactinium mines.

...

And all of this would need to be accomplished in a paltry...

With a nod of his head, Darian cues Bylah for input.

BYLAH

...four lunar periods and 8 days...

DARIAN

Yes, four lunar periods and 8 days. You're all quite mad, quacking mad I dare venture.

PLEURIS

...and don't forget we need to complete the work on the equipment needed to protect the miners from the terrible cold and toxic atmosphere of the fifth planet in the same amount of time.

EVORIS

Why is it again that we can't simply close the portal while the miner works and reopen it to allow his return?

HERON

(gesticulating as he speaks)

It will be tough enough to continuously adjust the targeting of the terminus of the portal to account for the rotation of our planet, the rotation of the fifth planet and the relative motion of both planets around their stars. If we closed the portal, there would be no way to assure that we could re-target the terminus precisely enough to ensure that it would even be within traveling distance of the miners on the surface. Beyond that, there would be no way to alert the miner of its new location.

DARIAN

...and all of this needs be on the distant Southern Continent so...

BYLAH

...so we can maintain the clear line of sight between our planet and the fifth planet throughout the whole day.

DARIAN

...and after the first seven days...

PLEURIS

...the miners can return enough Protactinium to fuel the power grid, keeping the portal open with enough excess to allow for a second miner to transit the portal and from there, we begin the math of increasing returns.

DARIAN

...the more Protactinium they return, the more power is available to send more miners to harvest more Protactinium eventually yielding enough to fuel the power grids of this and all of our cities for a very long time to come and we all live happily into the morrow.

Vosh gestures trying to get Heron's attention.

When eventually he does, he gestures toward the door and pulls at his shirt emulating breasts in a comedic effort to remind Heron that Aliah expected him elsewhere.

HERON

...and none of this will solve itself here today while we rehash that which has been stated on many occasions before. If you kind colleagues will excuse me, my presence is required in the Earth Mother shrine.

SOGORATH

Ah yes, Heron! Congratulations on your imminent pairing! May the, Earth Mother grant you and, Aliah many fat, happy offspring!

Heron collects his things and makes to leave. As he does, the following exchange is heard in the background:

ELAS

...and what of the, Vahalians? All of this will be for naught if they should first strike the anvil!

DARIAN

Never fear my dear, Elas. That part of this madcap plan we can accomplish.

(MORE)

DARIAN (CONT'D)

Eighteen legions of elite centurions have been dispatched to, Vaha to destroy their portal once and for all! We shall see who is the victor in this race! When we are done with them they will be living in the caves, hunting wild mammoth and megaloceros on the open ice sheets for food like the, Makhluhs.

INT. EARTH MOTHER SHRINE - DAY

A large group of WELL-WISHERS are gathered in the shrine, including Heron, Vosh, VARLO, FORMER SUITOR-1, FORMER SUITOR-2 and FORMER SUITOR-3.

Varlo beams with the pride of a father prepared to marry off his daughter.

Heron fidgets nervously while Vosh looks around the shrine in wonderment at its grandeur.

The main characters wait at the base of a huge mother goddess STATUE, her fecund belly protruding, her hands held aloft and in them large KETTLES of burning oil.

The gathered crowd all hold small OIL LAMPS. These and the burning kettles supply the only light in the gigantic space.

The distant chanting of WOMEN is heard. It grows louder and louder. Eventually it becomes clear that the chanting is coming from inside the opening in the base of the massive mother statue.

At first an ancient crone (Ur-Crone LAGARTHA) exits from the opening in the base of the statue, aided by two young teen-aged MAIDENS who help her walk. Without their aid it is doubtful that the old bent lady could walk.

She is the Ur-Crone the oldest woman of the city, appearing to be aged at least 100 years. Her one eye is milky, white and blind. Her head is covered in a elaborately braided coif of wispy, cream-white hair.

Behind her come two dozen other older, ESTEEMED LADIES of the city, but none so old as she.

Behind them a host of YOUNG GIRLS - all happy and swirling about excitedly as young girls are wont to do.

In the midst of the girls and the center of their attention is Aliah and beside her, her mother, COREIA.

Aliah's hair is arrayed splendidly and decorated with a wreath of flowers. Her midriff is bare and she is quite clearly in the early stages of pregnancy.

Her swelling belly is decorated with colorful geometric designs. Runes are written in henna down the outsides of her arms and legs and a large bejeweled fertility symbol hangs on a necklace around her neck.

The Ur-Crone approaches Former Suitor-1. She motions to Aliah to come closer before addressing Former Suitor-1:

LAGARTHA

Is it thy seed that rests in the
womb of this maid?

FORMER SUITOR-1

Nay mother, it is not!

LAGARTHA

Then bless thee my child the
mother goddess will grant your
seed a fertile field in her own
good time!

With that Former Suitor-1 leans forward. The Ur-Crone paints a rune on his forehead, plies each cheek with a toothless kiss and motions him away.

He retires from the fore, joining the rest of the assembled on-lookers.

The Ur-crone approaches Former Suitor-2 and Aliah follows:

LAGARTHA (CONT'D)

Is it thy seed that rests in the
womb of this maid?

FORMER SUITOR-2

Nay mother, it is not!

LAGARTHA

Then bless thee my child the
mother goddess will grant your
seed a fertile field in her own
good time!

With that Former Suitor-2 leans forward. The Ur-Crone paints the same rune on his forehead, kisses each cheek and motions him away.

He also retires from the fore, joining the rest of the assembled on-lookers and stands next to Former Suitor-1.

The Ur-crone then approaches Former Suitor-3 and Aliah continues to follow:

LAGARTHA (CONT'D)

Is it thy seed that rests in the
womb of this maid?

FORMER SUITOR-3

Nay mother, it is not!

LAGARTHA

Then bless thee my child the
mother goddess will grant your
seed a fertile field in her own
good time!

With that Former Suitor-3 leans forward. The Ur-Crone again paints the now familiar rune on his forehead, kisses each cheek and motions him as well away.

He also retires from the fore, joining the rest of the assembled on-lookers and former suitors. The Ur-Crone then moves to Heron.

Aliah follows, her eyes suddenly alight, a broad smile erupts on her beaming face.

LAGARTHA (CONT'D)

Is it thy seed that rests in the
womb of this maid?

HERON

Aye mother, It was I who laid this
seed.

Heron beams with pride.

LAGARTHA

Maid, is this the man who laid the
seed you now carry?

ALIAH

Aye mother, 'tis he that blessed
my womb with child.

The Ur-Crone gestures toward the other older women.

One produces a ceremonial obsidian dagger and hands it to the Ur-Crone.

Another produces a long supple strip of cured hide, covered in ceremonial runes and holds it at the ready.

The Ur-Crone fumbles blindly, searching for Heron's hand.
Her youthful helper aids her in finding it.

The Ur-Crone draws the blade across Heron's hand, cutting a jagged bleeding gash. She dabs her finger in the blood and uses it to draw a series of runes on Aliah's belly and forehead.

Then she takes Aliah's hand and similarly draws the blade across it. She dips her finger in Aliah's blood and draws a rune over Heron's heart then slaps it using all the might she can muster with her withered claw of a hand.

Finally she takes up both of their sliced hands and places them together.

She wraps them tightly in the strip of hide, binding them together before closing her eyes and tightly grasping their bound hands in her crooked fingered hands.

She then says a long incantation in some ancient unknown tongue.

At length she finishes and opens her eyes regarding the couple with warmth.

LAGARTHA

You two are now one.

...

Her blood flows in thy veins and
his in thine.

...

This cannot be undone.
Your clans now are also one.
Together walk the mother Earth as
one from this day until the last
when she finally reclaims thy
flesh.

HERON AND ALIAH

(in unison)

Bless you mother!

Varlo Steps forward and takes the Ur-Crone's hand, pressing a small leather pouch of jewels and precious metals into it before turning her hand over and briefly kissing the withered skin.

VARLO

Bless thee mother and thank you
for the blessings you have
bestowed.

LAGARTHA

The Earth Mother bless thee as
well my son. May she bless your
house with many healthy
grandchildren from this union.

The Ur-Crone then turns and raises her croaking voice to
address the assembled crowd.

LAGARTHA (CONT'D)

Go ye all from this place with
blessings and know ye that the
Earth Mother has decreed these two
be from henceforth one.

...
All hail the, Earth Mother the
giver of all life.

With that the Ur-Crone & her adolescent helpers turn and
followed by the other crones and very young maidens,
retreat slowly back into the opening in the base of the
massive statue.

The assembled crowd surges forward to greet the newly
paired couple.

Eventually the newly-weds are lifted aloft and born out of
the shrine.

INT. FEAST HALL - EVENING

Following the ceremony everyone assembles in a feast hall
to celebrate.

Heron and Aliah lounge on plush cushions, drinking from
goblets of wine.

Close FRIENDS and family lounge nearby, feasting as well.

Other more distant ACQUAINTANCES are also feasting in the
hall, but seated in groups here and there further away from
the core family and friends.

Occasionally small groups or individuals wander by the
family to express their congratulations.

VOSH

I must say, it was a nice quick
ceremony; not like my sister's!
It took forever for the crone to
get through all thirteen of the
"nay mothers"!

All laugh.

ALIAH

Thirteen tries before she succeeded? Your sister was a driven girl. Most others would have given up by then and joined the Earth Mother Cult as a maid.

...

Speaking of the Earth Mother Cult, can you believe Ur-Crone Lagartha still presides? She was already ancient when she presided over my sister Nadahla's ceremony three annual cycles ago. No doubt she'll still preside when Aema finally decides it's time to pick a mate.

Aliah gestures to an attractive younger girl (AEMA) on a set of nearby cushions.

Vosh takes notice of her.

VOSH

You let me know the very moment she does!

VARLO

Take it easy there lad! Daughters are an expensive folly and I need time to rebuild my fortune before I pair off another! Why couldn't the Earth Mother have granted me sons? They're far less expensive!

All laugh at Varlo's plight as a SERVANT arrives bearing a tray of wine. She leans forward offering fresh goblets to the family. As she does Vosh notices that she has a WEAPON tucked in the folds of her garment.

Puzzlement plays across his face.

Just as Vosh's mode shifts from puzzlement to action, the servant pulls out the weapon and levels it at Heron.

She fires one shot that impacts the cushion directly beside Heron's head. Stuffing from the cushion flies in a small white cloud of feathers.

The servant lines up for another shot and just as it goes off, Vosh arrives, delivering a punishing fist blow to the side of her face.

The shot misses its mark, but still impacts Heron's left shoulder, spraying blood across Aliah's fine clothes.

The force of Vosh's blow knocks the assailant from her feet. His trajectory carries him along with her.

They both land on the cushions where Aliah's younger sister is lounging.

As they land, the assailant and Vosh are struggling over the weapon.

The weapon discharges once more, striking a YOUNG GIRL sitting directly next to Aema in the throat. Blood sprays in jets from the gaping wound in her neck.

Vosh delivers another strong blow across the assailant's jaw, knocking her unconscious and sending several teeth flying from her mouth.

The room in utter bedlam.

Screams emanate from all parts of the room. Blood is splattered everywhere.

The young girl that was struck in the neck slowly slumps to her death as arterial bleeding sprays from her wound.

Some of the guests Rush for the exits, while others rush to help subdue and secure the attacker or to aid the injured. Yet others are simply frozen in place like statues from the shock.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Then as now hospital rooms are ALL the same... sterile and lifeless.

Aliah lies in an uncomfortable heap in a chair near a bed sleeping.

She still wears the same clothes as she did at the feast, though now caked with spots of dried blood. She's obviously not left to change since the attack.

In the bed lies Heron. His wounds are bandaged and he is unconscious.

In the distance outside the room, birds can be heard chirping.

Slowly, Heron begins to stir. His eyes flutter and he tries to speak.

HERON
...Wha? Wha?...

Aliah jolts awake.

ALIAH
Heron?

HERON
(croaking)
...Wha happened?

ALIAH
Vahalians my love. They tried to
kill you. Rest now. You've lost
much blood. I'll go to fetch the
physicker.

Aliah gently kisses his brow before dashing from the room.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Aliah exits the hospital room.

A stern looking armored GUARD with a leashed SMILODON and
armed with a long weapon stands post by the door.

Aliah scurries down the hall to the equivalent of a nurse's
station, yelling as she goes...

ALIAH
Fetch the physicker! He's finally
awake!

The NURSES scurry upon hearing this and Aliah turns to run
back to the room. As she passes, she nods to the guard, who
returns the nod before she ducks back inside the room.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Aliah rushes back into the room and back to Heron's side.

ALIAH
How do you feel my mate?

HERON
Pain... Thirst...

After a moment, the physicker enters the room. She comes
to Heron's bed and peeks under his bandages.

PHYSICKER
Back among the living I see...

She continues her examination, checking his eyes for
jaundice, feeling for a fever & taking his pulse.

PHYSICKER (CONT'D)

The, Vahalian's projectile nicked the axillary artery. You're lucky to be alive. I managed to mend the artery and there doesn't seem to be any infection so it appears you may yet live.

ALIAH

Thank you, physicker. My mate says he has thirst. May I fetch him water?

PHYSICKER

Aye and if he'll take it a light snack.

The physicker then turns her attention back to Heron.

PHYSICKER (CONT'D)

We'll keep you here for another day or two. After that, you'll need to rest and limit your activities. No rushing off to do heavy lifting or strenuous activity or you'll tear the wound back open and bleed out.

Aliah returns with a cup and some flat bread stuffed with olives and cheese.

Heron takes the cup with his good hand and drinks.

PHYSICKER (CONT'D)

For the next five days you'll need to take a dove-shell's measure of this tonic each morrow and sunset to prevent the onset of infection.

...

Your mate will need to keep your dressings clean and massage honey liniment into your wounds to promote the healing of your flesh and until you're fully healed,

...

You'll need to keep your arm in a sling.

ALIAH

He'll be in good hands, physicker.

PHYSICKER

I'm sure he will. I'll be back later to check in on him.

...

When he feels able, you should probably get him up and out of the bed to move around a little. Feed him if he'll eat.

...
You're a tough one. I'll give you that. The gods must favor you.

With that, the doctor turns and leaves the room.

Heron hands the cup back to Aliah and takes the bread.

Aliah leans in and kisses his forehead. Tears begin flowing down her face.

ALIAH
I thought I'd lost you, my love!
If it weren't for, Vosh I would have assuredly.

HERON
(still croaking)
...won't leave you quite so easily.

Aliah nods, wipes her tears and pulls his head tightly to her breast in a loving embrace.

INT. HERON'S LAB - DAY

MEN are packing things in crates.

They scurry here and there, carrying filled crates out, bringing arm fulls of straw in to act as padding, disassembling equipment or devices and placing them into awaiting crates.

Vosh is there directing the workers.

Heron is also there, his arm in a sling. He sips from a steaming cup.

Beside him as if glued to his side is Aliah, her head leaned on his shoulder.

ALIAH
I wish you didn't have to go.

HERON

As do I, Aliah but the council thinks it best if I join the others on the project site down on the Southern Continent and I agree with them. I need to be there to oversee the assembly and initial operation of the portal.

...

They say it will be easier to protect me from any further attacks by the Valhalian's there as well. If all goes as planned, I'll be back here just in time for the birth of my son!

ALIAH

Son? I carry your daughter!

Heron sets his cup on the nearby workbench emphatically and turns to face Aliah.

HERON

You carry my son and we shall name him "Artoles" after my long passed father!

ALIAH

(patiently)

Your daughter will be named "Miri" because I think it sounds pretty! ...Are you sure I can't come with you?

HERON

The Southern Continent is no place for a lady in your gentle condition. Besides, you need to go to the shrine each lunar period to have the crones complete the next part of your mother's mark.

Heron touches a fresh tattoo on Aliah's exposed belly.

HERON (CONT'D)

...and when I return, I expect to see you there, your mother's mark complete but for the birth stroke. It is for you and our child that I do this you know.

ALIAH

I know it is. It comforts me to know that, Vosh will be there to look out for you!

...
So when does the hover ship depart
again?

HERON
On the morrow's slack tide.

ALIAH
It appears that our dear, Vosh has
matters here well in hand. ...Do
you need be here as well? There
are other pressing matters we
could attend to.
(coyly)
...in spite of my "gentle"
condition...

The two kiss amidst the hubbub that surrounds them.

EXT. THE DOCKS - MORNING

The docks bustle with life.

Heron, Aliah, Vosh, Varlo and Elas as well as various other
friends and family members are present, waiting for the
boarding call.

Cargo is being loaded on various vessels including the one
they stand before.

Other ships disgorge their cargo including one not far away
unloading frightened wild mastodons, bound for the training
stables.

Security seems strong on the docks as soldiers and their
smilodons patrol the crowd.

A few SOLDIERS guide bound MAKHLUGHS onto the waiting ship.

ELAS
(gesturing toward the
Makhlughs)
Ah, good I see they've procured
more miners for the project.

VOSH
It still doesn't strike me as
being very ethical for their king
to barter them away like livestock
just for a few shiny baubles.

ALIAH

...and it doesn't strike me as being very ethical for us to have accepted such a deal. They may be brutish savages but are they so unlike us?

ELAS

We have really no other choice. The gravity on the fifth planet is far stronger than ours. We need their strength. A normal man could not work there. They will be treated well.

ALIAH

...and those fetters? Is that the hallmark of being treated well?

ELAS

Those are only for their protection as well as ours. We can't communicate with them.

...
When we stop on the jungle isle of D'ahneis to the east across the ocean from here to pick up the freshly mined Protactinium we've found there, there is one of the diminutive folk that live there that can translate between us. The Ahnak chief has agreed to send his own daughter as our translator. We will after all need the ability to communicate so we can direct the Makhluhgs' actions on the other side of the portal.

ALIAH

I know all of this, I just don't like the looks of it.

HERON

I understand my love. I will do my best to ensure they are treated humanely.

ALIAH

So that's it then? After the journey east to D'ahneis you turn south go straight on to the Southern Continent then?

ELAS

Well we will pass by the land of marsupials. More likely than not, we'll stop there only long enough to hunt for some provisions before continuing on.

...

I'm sure those already working on the portal site will appreciate some fresh meat.

...

The plan is in a few quarter cycles to begin regular shipping runs, but until we have our defenses well-enough established, the council thought it best to limit the traffic so as not to lead the Valhalians to the portal site.

HERON

When the regular ships do begin we can correspond. I'll send a recording crystal with each ship my love.

ALIAH

I suppose that will have to do although I'd much prefer to have here with me.

A VOICE calls down from the deck of the hover ship:

SHIP'S CAPTAIN

All aboard!

All begin their final farewells.

Heron shakes his father-in-laws hand.

Elas embraces his WIFE and CHILD.

Heron turns and hugs Aliah in a long, tight embrace.

HERON

I love you with my whole being my darling. Please take care of yourself and of little Artoles while I am gone.

ALIAH

Miri and I shall be fine. Please have a care for yourself down there. Remember your wounds are not yet fully healed.

She pulls him closer yet and kisses him.

At about the same time, Vosh notices a tug at his elbow. He turns to find Aema standing there with a sheepish grin on her face.

AEMA

Have a care for yourself on the far Southern Continent as well, Master Vosh. I should like it if you corresponded with me occasionally while you were there!

VOSH

(stammering)

I... I shall Miss...

AEMA

Very well then. Perhaps when you've returned, I'll begin the process allowing the Mother Goddess to show me my mate.

VOSH

(still stammering)

I... um I mean you will?

Aema leans in close and pulls his head down so she can whisper into his ear.

AEMA

Perhaps I shall take you as my first.

She leans in closer and kisses him gently on the cheek before spinning about confidently and marching off, leaving Vosh visibly flummoxed as he robotically follows Heron up the gangplank on autopilot.

VOSH

I... She... We.. I um yes I... I shall! um no We shall!

He then realizes he's speaking only to himself and a bemused Heron as Aema had long-since left the scene.

INT. INNER SHRINE - DAY / INTERCUT MONTAGE:

Aliah reclines, occasionally gritting her teeth as a CRONE of the shrine works to add to the tattoo on her belly. She inserts a small crystal into a communicator, leans her head back and listens to Heron's recorded message.

HERON

(recording)

Well my love, we've arrived. The journey was utterly unremarkable.

...

Well unremarkable save one thing. As we were traversing the stormy Southern Ocean, the ship happened into a large pod of gigantic whales. They swam there beneath us majestically for a time. Then they suddenly all scattered. With no warning a great shark burst through the surface, carrying one of the leviathans aloft in its toothy jaws. You could see it still struggling trying to free itself. The shark then breached over sideways down into the waves submerging back to the murky depths, leaving only a slick of whale blood on the surface to mark what it had done.

...

That was only three days before we landed on the ice sheet that blankets the Southern Continent.

...

It is cold here. Very cold. The wind here, howls like a dire wolf and bites twice as keen. The Makhluhs seem at home in it though. Me not so much, in spite of the thick furs we wear. It makes me miss the comfortable warmth of your embrace all the more.

...

The ship has unloaded our supplies here on the edge of the ice. We will trek inland from here by hover cart and mammoth train to the portal site.

...

I must close now so I can send this crystal back with the ship on its return voyage. Until you hear from me again remember that you are ever in my heart and in my thoughts as is little Artoles.

(as an after-thought)

Oh, and Vosh sends you his greetings.

(MORE)

(CONT'D)

Thank Aema by the way for what she's done. The lad is positively useless ever since she spoke to him on the docks... nothing but a stammering, gibbering fool. I fear now I'll get naught for work out of him!

With the end of the recording, the crone finishes her work, wiping a sticky salve over the freshly applied ink.

TATTOOING CRONE

Only three more marks before you receive the birth stroke young maid. The Earth Mother has blessed you with a good strong child. I can tell these things. I could feel it kick my hand as I applied the mark of passing.

EXT. SOUTHERN CONTINENT, ON A RIDGE - DUSK

A long CONVOY comes to a halt on top of a rise. The convoy consists of several hovering VEHICLES as seen in the city. Along with them are MAMMOTHS, some armored a few not - all dragging huge sledges of supplies.

Legions of ARMORED MEN, their armor still evident though cloaked under thick furry cloaks, march in formations some accompanied by their well-trained SMILODONS.

Heron emerges from the lead vehicle into the howling wind and drifting snow along with Pleuris who met them at the sea.

PLEURIS

(pointing)

See there on the distant rise? That's the site we've chosen. It has an unobstructed view of the fifth planet from the summit. We've established the power grid there at the base of the rise along with the modular housing to house us. On the summit we've erected the lab to house the portal and between them, we've constructed a cable trolley to carry us back and forth between the two parts of the installation.

HERON

Well let's be on then. It's
damned cold out here! I fear I
may have frozen off some bits that
I might later need!

INT. SUMMIT PORTAL LAB - DUSK

Initially all is dark.

Heron & Vosh enter carrying a portable light. Both are
bundled in thick clothes.

The walls are covered in ice crystals..

The men's breath creates huge plumes that dance with ice
crystals in the light.

The walls appear to be constructed of individual sections
that were connected together.

HERON

Let's see if you can get some
warmth in this cursed place.

Vosh heads towards a large box-like device in the center of
the room while Heron waits at a small control box near the
door.

Vosh kneels down and checks on the device, ensuring it is
ready for use.

VOSH

Looks good! Send me some power!

Heron actuates the control near the door.

A tubular conduit from the panel to the device in the
middle of the room illuminates.

Vosh manipulates a few controls on the device eliciting a
humming noise. He continues to work on it, cussing under
his breath. Eventually however the device begins
cooperating.

A glow is seen building inside the device, at first a dull
red but over time and with continued adjustment, it
eventually becomes a white hot brightness shining from
within.

As it begins to function, a ring of melting ice crystals
forms on the floor and slowly grows in size, slowly
creeping outwards away from the device.

HERON
(to workers outside)
All right, bring those things in.

A steady stream of PEOPLE file in carrying crates and devices.

Some bring light globes, fitting them into receptacles on the wall intended to hold them. As they place them, they illuminate, better lighting the interior.

The crates are stacked in various spots around the lab.

Heron and Vosh direct the traffic.

As the work progresses the melted spot continues to creep across the floor until it eventually meets the walls. Once there, it begins to creep up the walls and then eventually back across the ceiling.

As the last crates are carried into the room, Pleuris enters the room.

PLEURIS
Ah, making progress I see.

Pleuris strides to one corner of the lab and gestures up through a large circular opening in the ceiling.

PLEURIS (CONT'D)
We placed the aperture for the portal here. I hope that meets with your approval.

Heron walks over and looks up through it, seeing a sparking star field through a transparent dome mounted atop the hole.

HERON
Aye that should suffice. The support scaffolding should fit nicely here below.

Heron gestures toward one adjacent wall.

HERON (CONT'D)
We'll array the miner support equipment along here...

He then gestures toward the other adjacent wall.

HERON (CONT'D)
...and the protactinium ore handling equipment over here.
(MORE)

HERON (CONT'D)

Portal controls will be located toward the center of the structure while storage and fabrication facilities will be arrayed in the far corner.

PLEURIS

Seems a practical layout to me. We'll just need to be cautious with the routing of the power conduits from the distribution node.

EXT. SOUTHERN CONTINENT, ON A RIDGE - DUSK

A man dressed entirely in thick white furs low-crawls through the dark in the snow.

Across his back a long projectile weapon is slung. This weapon is likewise shrouded in white tattered fur strips.

His face is hidden behind white wrappings. His garb camouflages him well in the swirling snow.

As the creeping man reaches the summit of the ridge, he un-slings his weapon and surveys the compound below through the telescopic targeting device mounted on the weapon.

As he scans the valley floor, he pauses briefly on each patrolling smilodon centurion or armored mammoth rider the he sees, appearing to make mental tallies of troop strengths and patrol routes.

Next he surveils the power grid near the center of the camp and the partially completed ice wall that will surround the installation when complete.

His attention then turns to the lab atop the rise.

He then adjusts the optic to increase magnification and pans his optic along the entire length of the cable trolley that spans the gap down to the lower installation.

Satisfied with his reconnaissance, he re-slings his weapon and backs cautiously and silently back from the ridge line, retreating back in the direction from which he had come.

INT. SOUTHERN CONTINENT, MESS HALL - DUSK

A large number of PEOPLE are in the mess hall. Some seated at tables eating and talking. Others are in the process of

retrieving food from a serving line or returning emptied dishes for cleaning.

Some few people man the serving line dishing out food to the hungry.

At one particular table Heron, Vosh, the Ahnak NAHRI, the leader of the Neanderthal miners Gohrmek and Pleuris are seated together.

NAHRI

'Tis strange land, says he and me
too agree. Strange, strange land.
Biting air.

PLEURIS

Yes, I imagine this is quite a
change from the humid jungles of
your home isle.

NAHRI

...not like

HERON

Yes my small friend, I'm not
partial to it either but you would
think it not too different from
the ice sheets where Gohrmek made
his home. Why would he find it
strange?

Nahri turns to Gohrmek and exchanges a few guttural syllables in dialog.

NAHRI

Him say no day... no animal... no
hunt.

HERON

Well thank him again for his help
with his people. Thank you as
well! Without both of your help I
fear we'd never have reached an
understanding with the miners.

NAHRI

Father say "she go. she speaks
them and speaks them too". So I
go. I speak.

HERON

How do you say "Thank you" in your
tongue?

NAHRI
 "Na'anrhi!"

Heron tries saying it but places the emphasis on the wrong syllable.

Nahri coaches him on his pronunciation until he produces a reasonable facsimile.

HERON
 Well Na'anrhi Nahri, Na'anrhi.
 How does our large friend here say
 thanks?

NAHRI
 "Shak'har"

The Neanderthal, hearing the word, turns his fist-full of meat aloft, nods and repeats it:

GOHRMEK
 Shak'har!

HERON
 Shak'har!

Heron notices that Vosh isn't even paying attention, He's vacantly staring at the light refracting through a recording crystal.

HERON (CONT'D)
 Vosh?

VOSH
 When do you suppose the next
 supply shipment will arrive?

PLEURIS
 If all goes as planned the ship
 should arrive at the ice sheet in
 two or three days. They're
 sailing straight from home, not
 taking the circuitous route that
 we did.

VOSH
 Do you think she sent a voice
 crystal?

HERON
 Aliah?

VOSH
 No! Aema!

HERON

Listen my friend. If what, Aliah tells me is true (and she's never lied to me), young, Aema was mightily impressed with how you so quickly subdued that, Vahalian attacker at the feast. So I'd say it's a pretty safe wager that there will be something for you in the shipment.

PLEURIS

On another topic, are we ready for the morrow's test?

HERON

I'll be ready on my part. Will you be ready to vent any poisonous gases that might transit back through the portal from the fifth planet's atmosphere out of the portal enclosure?

PLEURIS

We tested the vent system successfully before this very meal!

HERON

Then I suggest everyone retire and get a hale rest. We begin the test early on the morrow and it may well be a long day.

INT. SUMMIT PORTAL LAB - DUSK

The lab has changed since our last visit.

It is more brightly lit. The walls are lined with instruments and controls. Luminous conduits snake hither and yon across the ceiling and walls connecting equipment to power.

Some recognizable components of the portal from the lab back in the city can be seen, but much has been added. It has been constructed on a lifted platform that allows the targeting prism to be elevated up into the transparent dome.

The whole device has been enclosed in an enclosure of opaque panels with a window that runs around the upper perimeter of the enclosure. A single door with an impressive latch leads into this chamber.

Present are Heron, Vosh, Bylah, Evoris, Elas, Pleuris and a large number of other technicians.

HERON

Increase power grid flow to
thirteen thousand pterratherms.

Pleuris makes an adjustment to the equipment.

PLEURIS

Thirteen thousand pterratherms
available and the grid is stable.

HERON

Adjust distal targeting for right
ascension

Bylah leans forward placing his eye against an ocular. At first he adjusts the ocular, appearing to focus it. Then he reaches for another, more prominent control and adjusts it to his liking.

BYLAH

Right ascension aligned,
maintaining alignment.

HERON

Adjust distal targeting for target
declination.

Evoris leans forward placing his eye against an ocular that matches Bylah's. He too adjusts the ocular focus before adjusting the targeting control into alignment.

EVORIS

Declination aligned.

HERON

Establish targeting range.

Evoris moves his hand to another control while keeping his eye to the ocular and adjusts it.

EVORIS

Range set!

HERON

Heat sink temperature?

VOSH

Two hundred eleven therms and
holding.

HERON

Beginning modulation for aperture.
Vosh you let me know if that heat
sink temperature gets beyond two
hundred sixty five therms and
Pleuris make sure we have ample
headroom on the power grid.

Heron manipulates the modulator control. The modulator
crystal spins within the heat sink with slowly increasing
velocity. As it does the disc of light begins to grow.

When the disc reaches about a basketball sized diameter, he
stops and removes his hands from the controls.

HERON (CONT'D)

Vosh, temperature?

VOSH

Um, two forty four.

HERON

Pleuris, how much headroom do we
have on the power grid?

PLEURIS

We're at eighty two percent of
grid capacity.

HERON

The second I lock down this
aperture and establish the portal
connection demand is going to
jump. Why don't you bring us up
to eighteen thousand pterratherms?

PLEURIS

Increasing protactinium flow into
the power grid-core 4% to
compensate. Grid output at

...

Fourteen.

...

Fifteen,

...

Sixteen,

...

Seventeen,

...

Seventeen, five hundred,

...

Output at eighteen thousand
pterratherms. Grid is stable and
holding. Consumption fifty nine
percent of supply.

HERON

Good.

...

Everyone stand at the ready.
Locking portal aperture in

...

Three,

...

Two,

...

One.

With that Heron slaps a control.

The second he does The portal changes into the metallic sheen phase as it did in his lab back home.

The second the aperture begins clearing again, it is obvious that something is amiss.

The enclosure that surrounds the portal begins creaking. Then of a sudden, the panels of the enclosure flex forcefully inwards drawn by a strong vacuum.

HERON (CONT'D)

Check targetting! Declination,
range, right ascension.
Vosh how are we doing with the
containment?

BYLAH

Right ascension checks out!

VOSH

Containment is holding... barely!

EVORIS

Declination and range are both
correct. We should be dead on
target.

At that moment one of the transparent panels in the containment begins to crack slightly.

VOSH

We're losing containment!

HERON

Gods be damned! Shut it down!

Pleuris smacks a control and the aperture collapses back to a point with a loud crack.

HERON (CONT'D)
How could we have missed
targeting? The only reason for a
vacuum in containment would be if
we missed the surface and opened
the distal end in the void!
Recheck targeting alignment.

INT. INNER SHRINE - DAY / INTERCUT MONTAGE:

Aliah has returned to the shrine, indicating the passage of another month.

She reclines, gritting her teeth less frequently than before as the tattoo crone works to add another mark to the tattoo on her belly.

She inserts the familiar crystal into her communicator, leans her head back and again listens to Heron's latest recorded correspondence.

HERON (CONT'D)
(recording)
Well my love we are closer to
success.
...
The lab is set up. We managed to
establish a new singularity after
only three tries. The power grid
is up and functioning and
yesterday ago we opened our first,
small test portal to what we
thought was the fifth planet.
...
Unfortunately we missed.
...
The far side of the portal opened
up into empty space. We had to
reinforce the containment to deal
with the vacuum. We double,
triple and quadruple checked
everything. We were utterly
baffled until Vosh one day said
"pity we can't just take a peak
and see where are."
...
It was a stroke of brilliance in
its simplicity, really. We
reinforced one of the miner
garments to withstand the vacuum
and dressed Bylah in it. We then
tethered him to the wall of the
chamber and opened portal wide
enough for him to pass.
...

He passed through the portal and took his bearings. We were expecting to be close to where we needed to be. As the gods would have it we were exactly where we aimed.

...

It was the fifth planet that was out of place.

...

After many calculations, Bylah determined that we were in the right place at the wrong time. It turns out that placing the far end of the so far away moves it not only to a different place but also a different time.

...

We need to target the portal to where the fifth planet was a very long time ago not where it now is.

...

There is so much we do not yet know, but with Va'al's help, slowly we are learning.

...

By the time you receive this we will already be mining on fifth planet if all goes to plan.

...

Speaking of mining, with the help of, Nahri the Ahnak, we managed to forge a friendship with the Makhluh miners.

...

I'm learning much in that regard as well. The word for "thank you" in the Ahnak language is "Na'anrhi" and in the tongue of the Makhluh it is "Shak'har".

...

Oh well my love, if I'm to get this on the supply caravan back to the edge of the ice sheet, I suppose I need to start bringing things to a close. I miss you like I'd miss breathing dear, Aliah! I miss the comfort of holding you close and feeling your breath on my chest as you sleep in my arms.

...

When you reply, please tell me more of how things are progressing with my little man, Artoles!

...
 Oh and speaking of replies, please
 tell Aema to stop being cruel. If
 she doesn't reply to Vosh soon, I
 swear he's going to swim all the
 way home through the icy, giant
 shark laden waters to see her!

...
 I must close my love, but remember
 I will soon be back by your side
 and that I love you more than life
 itself!

Aliah shuts off the recording and sobs.

TATTOOING CRONE

Oh how I envy you young maid.
 Your mate, though far will still
 return and you can even yet have
 the comfort of his voice. My
 mate, he is passed back to Mother
 Earth's embrace many annual cycles
 ago. It is long since I last
 heard his comforting baritone or
 felt the warmth of his embrace.

The crone finishes the mark and massages the salve into the
 tattoo.

TATTOOING CRONE (CONT'D)

...add to that the boon of this
 fine strong child the Earth Mother
 has placed in your womb.

The crone pulls aside her garments to bare her wrinkled
 midriff, showing Aliah a half-dozen mother's marks. Each
 in varying stages of completion, but none bore the birth
 stroke, meaning that all of her pregnancies had failed.

TATTOOING CRONE (CONT'D)

...me, she's chosen to leave all
 alone without even the comfort of
 offspring to see me off when my
 time to return to the Earth
 inevitably comes. No, my dear you
 must count your fortunes as the
 Earth Mother smiles upon you!

ALIAH

I'm sorry mother. I do not mean
 to be ungrateful and your plight
 has touched my heart. Fear not
 when your time arrives I will come
 to see thee off. It is just that
 I long for him so.

TATTOOING CRONE

Ah patience, young maid. Remember
the ancient adage: "distance
builds longing and closeness
ill-will".

The crone pulls Aliah close and hugs her to her aged breast
as if hugging a small child...

TATTOOING CRONE (CONT'D)

This too shall pass my child, this
too shall pass...

INT. VAHALIAN COMMANDER'S ENCAMPMENT - DAY

In a sparse room that is obviously a modular construction,
MARSHALL ESKOBAL is seated at a table eating.

The Valhalian scout that surveyed the portal complex enters
through the door in a cloud of blown snow.

ESKOBAL

Close the fucking door!

SCOUT

Many pardons Marshall. I bring
reconnaissance of the Pompaasan
portal site.

ESKOBAL

About time! Speak!

SCOUT

The site appears well guarded. I
saw large numbers of patrols with
cats or riding mastodon. They've
spared no expense, your grace.

ESKOBAL

Go on...

SCOUT

There appears to be enough housing
constructed for about fifteen
hundred people. The living
quarters are all arrayed on the
north side of a tall rise. They
were building ice battlements.
Those battlements should be
complete before we could ever hope
to get enough troops here to do
anything.

...

Atop the rise appears to be where they've placed the portal installation. This is joined to the lower installation by a cable car.

...

I then reconnoitered the south side of the rise. There appears to be a route to the summit that the Pompaasans did not secure.

ESKOBAL

How can you be sure? That seems a glaring oversight, even for a Pompaasan!

SCOUT

I've been to the summit my lord. I've peered into the lab and spied the Pompaasans within working on their device!

ESKOBAL

Very well played! Tell the quartermaster that I've authorized extra rations for you! Go, eat, rest a bit. You'll need to be well fed to lead our assault force to this route you've found.

INT. SOUTHERN CONTINENT, MESS HALL - MORNING

The mess hall is full for the morning meal. Heron, Vosh, Pleuris, Nahri and Bylah are around a table finishing breakfast.

HERON

So how much ore was sent back through the portal on last night's shift, Bylah?

BYLAH

We managed to yield four ore carts full. After processing, that yielded twelve protactinium ingots.

PLEURIS

We needed only ten ingots to satisfy our energy requirements for last night's shift.

HERON

You know what that means right?...It means we've finally turned the corner! We're producing more protactinium than we're consuming. Everyone takes a moment to congratulate each other.

PLEURIS

Shall we place those two ingots on the supply caravan coming in from the coast this morrow?

Vosh's ears perk up at mention of a supply caravan

VOSH

...a supply caravan?

HERON

Yes, Vosh a supply caravan. ...and yes, you should go see if there's a message crystal from Aema for you.

Vosh bolts from the table as if launched.

HERON (CONT'D)

Yes, let's put those two ingots on the out-bound caravan. That will give that cursed, Darian something he can hold in his hands; tangible evidence of our success.

EXT. SOUTHERN CONTINENT, SOUTH OF THE LAB - SAME TIME

Things are cloaked in the near constant purple of the Southern Continent's winter.

Snow is blown on the driving winds.

VAHALIAN INFANTRY, cloaked all in white brave the conditions and move surreptitiously up the treacherous path the scout had found.

EXT. SOUTHERN CONTINENT, AT THE GATES - SHORTLY THEREAFTER

In the driving wind and snow, the supply caravan limps into the gate. They've been attacked en-route.

Some of the MASTADONS are bleeding from projectile wounds or bites.

A few of the hover VEHICLES show signs of projectile impacts or blast burns. The lead vehicle bears two enshrouded forms, clearly dead bodies.

The CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD rushes up to the lead vehicle.

The PASSENGER dismounts.

CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD
What happened?

PASSENGER
Vahalian dire wolf raiders
attacked at the halfway mark!

The captain of the guard motions to a nearby COMRADE.

The comrade sees the signal and turns on an alarm klaxon before running over to the two men.

CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD
(to the comrade)
Mobilize the reaction force!

PASSENGER
We have wounded.

CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD
...and get the physikers out here!

About that time, Vosh arrives.

VOSH
What's afoot?

CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD
...Vahalians. Dire wolf raiders
attacked the caravan en-route.

Vosh reaches inside his coat and retrieves his communicator and calls Heron.

EXT. MAIN GATE/ INT. CABLE TRAM - INTERCUT CONTINUOUS

The communicator rings inside Heron's coat.

He is in the cable car with Pleuris

HERON
Well old friend, did she send you
a voice crystal?

VOSH

The caravan's been attacked! The
Vahalians are here! Where are you?

HERON

I'm in the trolley on the way up
to the portal.

Heron turns to look downwards toward the gate just in time to see a massive projectile impact the walls and explode. He hears the detonation through the communicator.

HERON (CONT'D)

Curse the gods, Vosh! Keep your
head down!

Below an erupting firefight can be seen. Projectiles are being exchanged and explosions small and large erupt sporadically in various spots.

HERON (CONT'D)

Leave the fighting to those
trained to do it. In the meantime
find, Sergeant Brattel and get
those sharpshooters up here to the
roof of the lab like we planned.
It's the best vantage point we
have!

About that time the cable car arrives at the lab.

Heron and Pleuris disembark.

Heron sends the cable car back downwards and then the two move quickly into the lab building.

INT. SUMMIT PORTAL LAB - CONTINUOUS

Inside the lab there are various lab WORKERS.

Some are manning the controls of the portal, others are helping one MAHKLUGH to divest himself of his protective mining suit while others are helping Gohrmek to put his on.

As Pleuris and Heron enter, a concerned LAB WORKER having heard the commotion outside, dashes up to them.

LAB WORKER

What's happening out there?

HERON

(loud enough for all to
hear)

(MORE)

HERON (CONT'D)

The Vahalians are attacking. We execute everything, just as we've planned.

Heron dashes to a cabinet and opens it. Inside are weapons. He hands them out to the lab workers as they file by.

Heron yells to Gohrmek in broken Mahklugh, informing him of what is transpiring as best he can. He then turns to the waiting lab workers and Pleuris.

HERON (CONT'D)

Pleuris, pick someone to stay with you and you know what to do.

Pleuris nods and taps a nearby female lab worker.

HERON (CONT'D)

The rest of us will head up to the roof. Remember, Sergeant Brattel and his sharpshooters will be coming up the cable trolley to join us, so don't shoot them. Be sure of your targets!

EXT. SOUTHERN CONTINENT, SOUTH OF THE LAB - THE SAME TIME

The assault force is still struggling up the path, but the lab can be seen looming above them.

SCOUT

Damned! They've attacked too soon! Quicken your pace boys lest Eskobal have our hides!

EXT. SUMMIT PORTAL LAB, ROOF - MORNING

Heron and the lab workers are dispersing onto the roof of the lab building. Most are headed toward the side of the building that faces the cable car, believing the cable car to be the most likely avenue of attack.

The Mahklughs have been tasked with watching the other direction; the direction from which the scout and his assault team are actually approaching.

HERON

Remember, let's not kill any of our own!

Below the battle is raging. Explosions and firing can be seen all around the ice wall through the gusting wind and snow.

In the occasional illumination of an explosion outside the wall, figures can be seen; some human, some canine, darting hither and yon.

The cable car is then seen leaving the lower station.

It slowly makes its way upwards as the lab workers nervously watch, weapons at the ready.

Heron's communicator rings.

He retrieves it and activates it.

HERON (CONT'D)

Heron here.

VOSH

I'm in the cable trolley with
Brattel and his men.

Heron covers the mic of the communicator

HERON

(yelling over the wind)
It's, Vosh and Brattel in the car.
Don't shoot!

Nervous moments pass as the cable car continues its upwards travel. Eventually the car arrives. The very second the car door opens, the Makhlughs begin firing.

The scout and his assault team have made the summit.

Confusion plays momentarily across the faces of the lab crew on the roof. The confusion is quickly replaced with action as the vanguard of the assault team swarms around the front of the lab building.

The passengers disembarking the car, having heard the Makhlughs shots, are doing so at the ready.

In short order a firefight erupts on all sides of the building. The passengers of the cable car drop to the ground firing at the assaulting Vahalians.

The lab crew distributes around the roof and also fires down on the assault team below them.

Casualties pile up quickly for the Vahalian assault team, but casualties are also happening among the less numerous Pompaasans.

Eventually, all firing from the group that rode the cable car ceases. Those left ambulatory on the roof eventually have expended their ammunition stores as well.

A group of about a half dozen Vahalian still remain, among them the scout. They busy themselves with trying jimmy the lab door open.

Eventually they succeed and push through the opening.

INT. SUMMIT PORTAL LAB - CONTINUOUS

The remaining men of the Vahalian assault team surge through the door, their weapons at the ready, moving in a deliberate, tactical manner.

At first glance the lab appears empty but it isn't. Secreted away behind the equipment is Pleuris and his selected helper.

Pleuris carefully peeks around the edge of his hiding place and spies the Vahalians.

Pleuris retreats momentarily back into hiding and steels his resolve. Then having done so, he springs into action

PLEURIS
(jumping up and yelling)
Now!

Pleuris slaps a portal control, supplying power to the mechanism. Before diving back down into his hiding spot.

The lab worker follows suit, activating the portal before diving back behind her cover. The second she does, the portal begins to open.

The Vahalians at first are caught off guard, but then move to apprehend the hiding Pompaasans. Just as one of them rounds the corner and levels his weapon at Pleuris, all hell breaks lose.

The portal fully opens.

The air begins to be violently drawn out of the room into the portal.

The door to the containment has been tied open.

The Vahalians look at each other, sudden fear and confusion plays across their faces.

Loose objects around the lab begin flying into the portal.

The Vahalian begin being drawn into the portal as well, but they fight it. They grab whatever hand holds as they are drawn ever nearer to the portal's disc.

Eventually they fail and fly into the portal... into the empty space that's on the other side.

Pleuris and the lab worker have bound themselves to the equipment and are safe from being drawn into the portal, but must struggle none-the-less.

After the last Vahalian is drawn through the portal, Pleuris fights the drawing force to hit a control, shutting off power to the portal and immediately dispelling the vacuum pulling things through the portal.

Pleuris takes a deep breath of the now icy cold air, drawn in from outside by the powerful vacuum.

He unties himself before going to check on his helper.

Assured that she is hail, he makes his way to the ladder.

Once there, he scales the ladder, pausing to knock a prearranged signal knock on the hatch.

Pleuris opens the hatch.

EXT. SUMMIT PORTAL LAB, ROOF - CONTINUOUS

Pleuris pops through the hatch, speaking as he does.

PLEURIS
(jubilant)
They're all gone now, the plan
worked.

As he spies the scene on the roof his jubilation is quickly replaced with concern.

Heron begins shifting the wounded back into the lab with the aid of the Mahklughs; both of whom remain relatively unharmed.

Before retreating within, Heron peers over the edge to look at the battle below.

Being mainly a diversion, it too is winding down now.

EXT. SUMMIT PORTAL LAB, FRONT DOOR - MORNING

Heron emerges from the door holding a light aloft. Behind him are the Mahklughs, still armed.

The blood-stained snow is strewn with CASUALTIES Pompaasan and Vahalian mingled together. Many appear badly wounded, many others clearly dead.

The Mahklughs grab ammunition dropped by the fallen. Then move among them methodically dispatching any wounded Vahalians they encounter.

Others of the lab workers come out from the door. They work their way through the fallen Pompaasans, helping the wounded into the lab.

At about that time that Heron finally finds Vosh; direly wounded leaning against a rock, Pleuris approaches.

HERON

Pleuris, we need to get someone down to the main camp to fetch a physicker!

PLEURIS

Aye, I'll go!

HERON

Be quick man!

Heron moves to check on Vosh.

Vosh is still alive but barely.

Blood streams through projectile holes in his coat.

HERON (CONT'D)

Curse the gods, Vosh! I told you to keep your head low!

VOSH

(gurgles
incomprehensibly)

Heron wraps Vosh's arm around his neck and places his own arm around Vosh's back. He hoists him up and drags him toward the lab.

HERON

Hold on, Vosh! The physicker is coming. Stay with me!

INT. SOUTHERN CONTINENT, VOSH'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

Heron sits on Vosh's bed. His head hangs dejectedly.

He is clearly packing Vosh's personal effects. There is a knock at the door.

HERON

Come...

A lab worker pokes their head into the door.

LAB WORKER

Ah, Heron. This was brought by
the attacked caravan for Vosh.

The lab worker holds out his hand presenting a voice
crystal.

HERON

Thank you.

Heron takes the crystal and the lab worker leaves. Once
alone, Heron sobs.

INT. INNER SHRINE - DAY

Aliah has returned for another mark and is lying on the
tattooing table.

She has now grown more accustomed to the pain caused by the
crone tapping the tattoo comb into her skin. She grimaces
less than before but still on occasion twitches slightly
when a sensitive spot is hit.

Her belly has grown quite unwieldy in size and she is
clearly very near time to give birth.

She lies back, listening to Heron's latest recording.

HERON

(recorded)

My love, I long for you. My heart
aches to see you and soon I shall.
We will soon be harvesting more
protactinium than our operations
consume. So I suppose you could
say my part in this folly is
complete.

...

I still have a few loose ends to
tie up, but I will be on the next
supply ship home after the one
that brings you this crystal. Aliah
pauses playback of the recording
and wipes a sudden tear from her
eye.

ALIAH

Oh thank the gods!

TATTOOING CRONE
 Congratulations my dear! Did I
 not tell you that this would pass?

The crone gently pats Aliah's thigh before resuming the task of tattooing.

Aliah continues the playback.

HERON
 Do not be concerned, but the
 Vahalians have attacked us here.
 I am unharmed and portal
 operations continue...
 But
 ...
 (Heron breaks down)
 But
 ...
 Oh Aliah, I am undone!
 (fighting for composure)
 The godless sons of whores killed
 Vosh, Aliah!

A pregnant pause occurs in the recording.

Aliah sobs.

The crone rubs her thigh comfortingly.

TATTOOING CRONE
 I'm so sorry dear.

ALIAH
 Thank you, mother. I am saddened
 for my mate.

Eventually Heron regains his composure and resumes.

HERON
 He never even got to hear Aema's
 message for him.
 (sighs)
 I have lost all taste for this
 project. So I suppose it is good
 that I brought it finally to
 fruition before this happened.
 ...
 I love you my, Aliah. My heart
 longs for the comfort of your
 embrace. I'm sorry this message
 is so brief, but I've much to do
 and honestly, words elude me.
 Besides I will soon enough be with
 you for the birth of my son.

The message ends.

Aliah continues to quietly sob.

INT. A DARK MEETING PLACE - DAY

Darian enters through the door.

A different prostitute lies unconscious on the heap of straw, beaten far worse than the last one that was there before.

Carr'uk is there as well. He is again seated at his table and again eating.

This time however it is clear that at least some of the meat he is eating is human as there are a few recognizable bits mixed into the heaping plate.

Darian approaches and pulls up short of the table. He regards the arrayed feast with disgust.

DARIAN

Why have you summoned me here? I
am not yours to command!

CARR'UK

My lord, Malus is not pleased!

DARIAN

...and this concerns me how? I've
already told you, I am not, Malus'
pawn to command as he wishes!

Carr'uk rises from his seat, leans forward over the table and pokes a greasy finger in the middle of Darian's chest.

CARR'UK

Oh but you're wrong; you
repugnant, disloyal pustule!

DARIAN

Have a care with how you speak to
me, Carr'uk!

CARR'UK

You will do as you are told and
you will do it because you fear
the repercussions should your
fellow, Pompaasans learn of your
selfish treason.

DARIAN

I could have you apprehended by
the city guards!

CARR'UK

Indeed you could and the very
moment my case came before the
council, my first act would be
revealing your duplicity.

DARIAN

I haven't time for your nonsense!
The council would never believe a
Vahalian spy over the word of a
fellow noble counselor!

Carr'uk sits back down and clears his throat, clearly as a
signal. A previously unseen MAN steps from the shadows
behind Carr'uk.

The man is dressed in the armor of the city guard.

CARR'UK

Oh, Captain Detlas! Have you met,
Counselor Darian?

CAPTAIN DETLAS

(sheepishly)

Counselor...

CARR'UK

Well, now that you two have met,
do collect your dear wayward
daughter, Captain. It appears
she's wandered off and gotten lost
in Pompaasa's seedy, drug infested
under-belly yet again.

Captain Detlas collects the unconscious, beaten whore from
the straw heap and exits carrying her.

Darian squirms, knowing his goose is cooked.

CARR'UK (CONT'D)

Now then, with that little family
matter taken care of; where were
we?

...

It seems your, people have somehow
thwarted our takeover of the
portal installation on the,
Southern Continent.

DARIAN
 (swallowing)
 ...and what would you have me do
 about it?

CARR'UK
 Oh not I, Darian. His Majesty
 King Malus...
 (suddenly vicious)
 Now, say it!

DARIAN
 (disdainfully)
 And what would, King Malus have me
 do about it?

CARR'UK
 Now, now, now... Once more, but
 with feeling
 (with emphasis)
 HIS MAJESTY, King Malus!

DARIAN
 What would, His Majesty, King
 Malus have me do about it?

CARR'UK
 ...much better. That didn't hurt
 too much, to recognize your king,
 now did it? What you will do is
 get an operative of ours onto the
 installation, that is all.

DARIAN
 Heron controls the installation's
 staffing; not me.

CARR'UK
 Have faith in yourself, Darian. I
 know you're slimy enough to find a
 way to convince him. Now, run
 along. You will be contacted.

INT. HERON'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - DAY

Aliah sits before a polished mirror. She is dressed
 splendidly, her midriff is bare displaying the mother's
 mark on her full-term belly.

She bites her lower lip while trying to pick which earrings
 to wear.

Aema is behind her fixing her hair.

ALIAH

Which do you think, Aema, the coral or the amber earrings?

Aliah holds them up to her ears and regards her reflection.

AEMA

I've always liked the coral ones...

(jokingly)

...second thought, go with the amber. The coral ones are simply hideous. You should let me dispose of them for you.

ALIAH

Very funny, little sister.

Aliah puts the pink coral earrings in her ears.

AEMA

Do you think that if I come with you to the docks to meet Heron that my presence would uncomfortably remind him of losing poor, dear, Vosh?

ALIAH

No I think...

Aliah suddenly doubles over in pain and the sound of water hitting the floor is heard.

ALIAH (CONT'D)

Oh dear goddess, Aema! I think it's time.

...

Quick! Fetch mother. You and father will need to meet Heron at the docks and bring him to the shrine!

Aema sprints out of the room, leaving Aliah grimacing in pain.

INT. SHRINE, BIRTHING POOLS - DAY

In the floor is a small round pool of water with wisps steam rising from it.

There are lamps and incense burning around the pool.

A few cushions are scattered about.

The pool is enclosed by a circle of fine semi-transparent curtains. Other ladies in labor can be distantly heard in other pools through the thin cloth.

Aliah is naked, sitting on Coreia's lap in the pool. An older lady DOULA is in the water with them, facing Aliah.

DOULA

You need to breathe, child. Your baby is coming anon. You're doing very well.

Coreia dab's Aliah's brow with a cool, moist cloth.

Aliah breathes methodically for a short while. Then she grits her teeth before letting out a loud scream.

DOULA (CONT'D)

It's alright dear. Bear down with this contraction. Take a half breath in, hold it and push.

Aliah does as she's told. She takes a deep breath and holds it while closing her eyes and bearing down.

After a short time of pushing she can do no more. So she relaxes and begins panting, riding out the remainder of the contraction.

DOULA (CONT'D)

That's fine, little one. Take a break, rest a bit and we'll push again on the next one.

ALIAH

...n... next one... here already...

Aliah takes another breath and bears down, pushing for all she's worth.

Just as she tires and begins panting again, a CRONE of the shrine parts the curtains surrounding the pool and shoos Heron in.

Seeing Heron, Aliah loses composure and begins to cry.

The doula gently grabs her chin, redirecting her attention back to the task at hand.

DOULA

You need to pay attention dear. Let's stick to this task for now. I can feel your baby's head.

(MORE)

DOULA (CONT'D)

One or two more good pushes and
we'll get the shoulders out. Then
the worst will be over.

Aliah nods briefly before the next contraction takes her
like a wave.

Not knowing what else to do, Heron plops down on a cushion
near the pool - his look the excited look of a child when
there are presents to be opened.

Aliah screams briefly before regaining composure, holding
her breath and bearing down. After pushing for a good while
her constitution flags briefly and she pants a few breaths
before regaining control and pushing some more.

Then, at length you see her relent. The pain has ebbed.

The doula lifts a new-born INFANT, still tethered to its
mother from the water.

She gives it a brief once-over and sweeps the child's mouth
out with her finger before laying it on the exhausted
mother's breast.

The baby coos softly as Aliah lies back in her mothers
supporting arms, eyes closed and resting.

Coreia sheds a motherly tear of pride looking down at her
newly-born grandchild.

Meanwhile the doula prepares the instruments she needs to
deal with the umbilicus.

HERON

Is it a boy?

COREIA

Nay, 'tis a girl! A beautiful
young maiden.

ALIAH

(eyes still closed &
tiredly)

Miri.

...

Told you so.

INT. DARIAN'S HOME- DAY

An opulent space.

There is expensive furniture and numerous works of fine art.

Darian's wife, REIVA is there, painting a picture of a young male MODEL, wearing only a helmet and holding a spear.

OSETIA, (a scruffy, street-wise young woman) simply strolls in, eating an apple.

OSETIA
Nice place!

REIVA
(surprised)
Excuse me?
...
And you would be?

OSETIA
I've got business with Darian.

REIVA
(angrily)
You don't just barge...

Osetia surges forward snatching Reiva's jaw up in her hand. squeezing her cheeks in with her thumb and fingers

OSETIA
You'll be a dear now and toodle
off to find him won't you?

To punctuate her sentence, Osetia narrows her gaze menacingly, before taking the final bite from her apple.

She releases Reiva's chin, then turns to discard her apple core in a nearby expensive looking vase.

Stunned into silence, Reiva scurries out of the room to look for Darian.

Osetia strolls around the room looking at what there is to see. Pausing here and there to stash small valuables into the folds of her clothing.

Her path brings her up behind the now confused naked model.

She looks him up and down before swatting his naked posterior.

OSETIA (CONT'D)
(to the model)
Look at you trinket.
(MORE)

OSETIA (CONT'D)

You look like you could warm a girl's bed quite nicely! Run along now, but show up at the, Blue Mastodon Inn at sundown and you'll warm mine!

The confused model collects his effects and scurries off in a hurry.

Osetia tilts her head sideways to watch his naked butt as he departs.

Darian storms in from the direction in which Reiva left.

DARIAN

What is the meaning of this?

OSETIA

Carr'uk sent me.

DARIAN

(Emphatic, whispering,
finger to mouth)

Shhh! Can you be any less obvious? You'll get us both tossed in a cell!

OSETIA

There's a hover ship in the harbor headed for the portal. Carr'uk said you were going to arrange my passage on it.

DARIAN

(still whispering)

Quiet please! I will do my best to arrange it. You really didn't leave me much time!

OSETIA

Complain to Carr'uk, he didn't tell me until this morrow.

DARIAN

Where can I find you to give you the details once I've arranged it?

OSETIA

Like I told your wife's adorable, naked side-game; I'm staying at the Blue Mastodon.

Osetia turns to leave but then turns back.

OSETIA (CONT'D)
 Speaking of your wife's bed warmer
 ...
 Get him passage too! I understand
 it's cold where I'm headed and a
 girl has her,
 ...
 Um, needs. I'm sure you
 understand.

With that Osetia exits, pausing only briefly to pilfer one of Reiva's necklaces from a table near the door.

Darian is left, his mouth agape in disbelief.

EXT. HERON'S HOME - DAY

Darian approaches Heron's home carrying a scroll. He stops before the door and knocks, looking left and right nervously.

The door goes unanswered.

Darian knocks again, somewhat impatiently.

Finally Varlo answers.

VARLO
 Counselor Darian! What brings you
 here on this fine day?

DARIAN
 Good day, Varlo! I understand
 you've become a grandfather yet
 again!

VARLO
 I know you didn't come all this
 way to congratulate me on the
 birth of my fourth grandchild,
 Darian.

DARIAN
 Well yes, yes I did. Well that
 and I happened to have run into
 the supply ship's captain on the
 way and knowing your daughter and
 her mate were no doubt predisposed
 with the birth of their child.
 ...
 He asked me to bring the bill of
 lading along to see if I couldn't
 get Heron's mark on it.

Darian hands Varlo the scroll and Varlo takes it.

VARLO

I should have known. Wait here.

Varlo closes the door, leaving Darian unceremoniously standing outside, waiting on the stoop.

Int. Heron's home, Bedroom - Day

Varlo pokes his head in the door.

Heron and Aliah are sitting on the bed, mooning down in adoration at Miri, who's noisily suckling her mother's breast.

On Aliah's now flat stomach the completed mother's mark, covered in salve is visible.

VARLO (CONT'D)

Sorry to disturb, Darian's at the door. Brought a bill of lading from the supply ship's captain for your mark.

HERON

My signet is on the table by the front door.

VARLO

Very well then.
(scrunching his nose in glee)

...

Such a little darling!

Varlo leaves, closing the door behind him.

INT. HERON'S HOME, FRONT DOOR - DAY

Next to the front door, Varlo finds the signet ring Heron had mentioned.

Varlo opens the scroll, he uses a nearby candle to drip wax on the bottom of the scroll, then presses the signet into the still liquid puddle.

Varlo blows on the stamped wax to cool it before rolling the scroll up once again.

He heads to the front door and opens it.

EXT. HERON'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

Outside, Darian is still impatiently waiting, arms crossed, foot tapping.

Varlo hands him the scroll.

VARLO

Very well then, there you are now.
Have a nice day.

Without waiting for a response, Varlo turns and closes the door.

Darian sighs, then swats his hand with the scroll thinking himself lucky, before he turns and heads off down the street.

INT. BLUE MASTODON INN, TAVERN - EVENING

A smallish poorly lit space... certainly not a fine establishment.

The gathered DENIZENS reflect their shabby surroundings with their rough-hewn attire and lack of manners.

Tables and booths are scattered throughout with small groups gathered at them.

In a back corner, trying to be inconspicuous is Darian and next to him, Osetia. Passed out at the table is the model from before at Darian's home.

DARIAN

I have no idea how Carr'uk expects this to work. Do you even know anything about the portal?

OSETIA

I was the one who built Malus' portal in Vaha.

DARIAN

Well that at least is some solace. Tell them when you arrive that you are the daughter of Venseth the Hermit to his fifth wife. That will explain both your abilities and why you are unknown to them.

OSETIA

Venseth

...

Fifth wife, right.

DARIAN

Yes, and do try to be nonchalant.
Perhaps you don't care, but I have
no desire to be fed to the
Smilodons!

INT. HERON'S LAB - MORNING

Some few days have passed.

At the start of a new day, Heron enters the lab, carrying a warm cup. He surveys the lab.

It is empty - very empty.

There are spots on the walls where the paint is lighter than the surrounding paint, highlighting the removal of the machinery that once was here.

Heron leans back sitting on an empty workbench top and sips his drink introspectively.

Aliah enters and hops up next to Heron on the bench.

ALIAH

Miri is finally sleeping.

HERON

(Absently)

Hm, yeah...

ALIAH

What's wrong?

HERON

Where to now?

ALIAH

What do you mean? You just got home.

HERON

I meant that figuratively. Nearly my whole life has been spent building that cursed portal. It started when my father sent Vosh and me to apprentice with Venseth. Then one day Master Venseth told me, "disregard that anomalous reading". From that point on I've pursued that damned puzzling anomaly. I pursued it all the way to the Southern Continent.

(MORE)

HERON (CONT'D)
I pursued it until it took Vosh
and now here I am. Here!

Heron holds his hands aloft and indicates the empty lab.

HERON (CONT'D)
...so where to now?

ALIAH
I see what you're saying.

Their conversation is interrupted by a knock at the door.

Heron drops off the bench onto the floor and goes to answer it.

A young DELIVERY BOY enters, bearing a small crate.

DELIVERY BOY
Delivery from the docks, from the
departed supply ship for you
m'lord. I've been trying to
deliver it for a few days now.

HERON
Thank you.

The delivery boy departs.

ALIAH
What is it?

HERON
Our first two surplus ingots of
protactinium from the fifth
planet.

Heron sets the crate on the workbench. Then with a puzzled look runs his hands over the outside of the crate.

HERON (CONT'D)
Hmm, odd.

ALIAH
What?

HERON
The crate is positively warm.

Aliah reaches over and feels the box.

ALIAH
Oh it is warm. What a puzzle.

A baby's cry is heard in the distance. Aliah hears it and dashes out of the lab.

ALIAH (CONT'D)
Her majesty beckons!

HERON
(absently)
Hm... yes a puzzle, an anomalous
puzzle...

INT. HERON'S LAB - LATER

Aliah returns carrying Miri.

The lab has changed in the short time since she'd left. A few instruments are arrayed on the workbenches and Heron has been joined by two new LAB WORKERS.

Aliah approaches a distracted Heron, leans in and kisses him.

ALIAH
Well, we've eaten, been changed,
had a nap and mama has had a bath.

HERON
(distracted, looking
through an instrument)
Mm-hm...

ALIAH
So, what's happening?

Heron looks up from his work and kisses Aliah and little Miri.

HERON
I have some theories but I'm still
not sure.

A lab worker approaches & presses a slate filled with calculations in Heron's hand

LAB WORKER
M'lord, you need to see this!

Heron reads the formulas. The spinning gears inside his head can almost be seen.

At length a look of realization dawns on his face.

HERON
That's it!

ALIAH
What is it?

Heron brushes off her inquiry and instead jots a few hasty calculations directly on the bench-top.

Finishing his calculation, he hastily draws two heavy strokes under the result for emphasis.

HERON
You need to leave!

ALIAH
(puzzled look)
OK, I'll go home...

About that time, a lab worker pours a large container of water over the now red-hot ingots in an attempt to cool them.

The water flashes straight to steam, burning the lab worker badly.

The lab worker screams in pain, then falls to the floor writhing in agony.

The shrieking startles Miri, who begins to cry.

HERON
No, you need to go now! Take Miri and your family. All of you! Go to the caves at Zarah Pass as fast as you possibly can. Stay there until I come for you! Do not come back!

ALIAH
...bu...

HERON
I mean it! Go!

Heron shoves her toward the door. Realization takes hold and Aliah rushes to leave.

HERON (CONT'D)
(calling after)
I love you!

EXT. HOVER CAR - DAY

Heron tears through the streets at break-neck speed, in a hurry and piloting recklessly.

The uninjured lab worker is in the back, trying to steady the now white-hot ingots as they go.

The ingots are in a metal container, it too is glowing with the heat and smoke is coming from the surface upon which it all rests.

LAB WORKER

Please hurry! I don't know how much longer I can steady this!

HERON

Just around this next corner!

The hover car rounds the corner the comes to a hasty halt, knocking over a planter in front of the power grid generation station.

Heron hops out, stripping off his shirt. He then uses it to protect his hands from the heat as he helps the lab worker to carry the container with the ingots into the entrance.

INT. POWER GRID GENERATION STATION - DAY

Heron and the lab worker enter carrying the over-heating ingots. They are met by an ATTENDANT.

ATTENDANT

Greetings! Can I ...

Heron & the lab worker ignore the attendant's overture and instead press on through a door way leading to...

INT. PROTACTINIUM STORAGE AREA - CONTINUOUS

A worker has loaded a protactinium ingot unto a push-cart. Just as she turns to grab the next one from the stack, Heron and the lab worker enter followed closely by the attendant.

ATTENDANT

...help you?

Heron spots the push-cart and heads for it. No sooner do they begin to lower the container with the ingots onto the cart before the bottom of the container gives way due the heat.

The smoldering ingots and molten metal from the container drop directly onto the wooden deck of the cart, emitting a huge column of smoke.

Not missing a beat, Heron grabs the cart's handle and shoves it forward into the...

INT. POWER GENERATION LAB - CONTINUOUS

The room is filled with a large power generation apparatus and the instruments needed to monitor and control it. The protactinium reaction vessel filling the majority of the room glows a warm reddish-orange.

A low hum is heard.

Along one wall is the fueling port. Several protactinium ingots wait there on a conveyor to be injected into the reaction vessel.

Heron with the cart, followed by the lab worker, the attendant and the worker from the storage area burst into the room.

HERON
(to lab worker,
gesturing at control
panel)
Stand by to inject the ingots!

Heron pushes the now flaming cart up to the fueling port. Thinking quickly, he grabs two of the ingots waiting there and uses them as makeshift tongs to handle the white-hot ingots on the cart.

Heron places first one then the other hot ingot onto the conveyor directly outside the fueling port.

HERON (CONT'D)
Inject them now, both of them!

The lab worker manipulates the controls.

Both of the ingots disappear through the fueling port into the reaction vessel.

The hum in the room increases in pitch and intensity.

The glow from the reaction vessel increases likewise in intensity until there is a blinding white flash.

INT. DARIAN'S HOME - DAY

There is a knock at the door.

At that same moment Reiva is collecting her bags and leaving, so she answers the door abruptly.

REIVA
Oh, it's you.

HERON
Is Counselor Darian in?

At that moment Darian storms into the room.

DARIAN
Reiva, It isn't what you...
...
Oh, Heron
...
Why are you here?

REIVA
Goodbye you lying goat! I'll be
at my sister's and you needn't
come try to fetch me either!

Reiva storms out leaving the two men alone.

HERON
Stormy seas in Paradise?

DARIAN
Reiva can be a little...
...
Incendiary.

Reiva storms back in.

REIVA
(very emphatically)
Incendiary? I'll show you
incendiary!

To punctuate her sentence, she throws an expensive looking vase into shards on the floor and storms back out.

Both men are left dumbfounded, mouths agape and staring at each other for a moment.

DARIAN
I'm sorry Heron. Why are you
here?

HERON
We've a problem.

DARIAN
A problem?

HERON
Time...

DARIAN
 (impatiently)
 I'm sorry Heron, I'm afraid I
 don't follow. Why is time a
 problem for us?

HERON
 We are mining protactinium from
 the fifth planet from a time far
 in the distant past!
 ...
 Eons!

Darian looks more annoyed that this is taking so long.

HERON (CONT'D)
 Protactinium mined here decays at
 a normal steady pace.

DARIAN
 I know this, we often get cheated
 with low-grade decayed
 protactinium that does not yield
 as much power into the grid as it
 should.

HERON
 ...but the protactinium brought
 here from the fifth planet is
 decaying at an ever accelerating
 rate. It's like it's making up
 for all the lost eons that it's
 existed. This rate of decay will
 snowball until it cascades and all
 the energy remaining within will
 be released in a single violent
 instant.

DARIAN
 Wait, are you saying you've
 finally discovered something
 useful?,
 ...
 A weapon perhaps?

HERON
 No
 ...
 Well yes, I suppose, but no!
 ...
 We didn't see this before because
 of two reasons.
 (MORE)

(CONT'D)

First we weren't dealing with large quantities, since the larger the quantity stored together, the faster the rate of decay appears to accelerate.

...

And second, thus far the mined ore has been quickly consumed to fuel the power grid keeping the portal open. So it's not been here long enough to begin the accelerated decay before it's converted to harmless waste products.

Darian's eyes dart back and forth as he mentally digests what he's been told.

DARIAN

So let me see if I have this straight,

...

If we put too much in one place, it will explode.

HERON

Right!

DARIAN

...and even if we don't put it in one place it'll just take longer for it to explode if we don't use it up right away...

HERON

Yes!

DARIAN

So you've essentially built a power grid on the remote Southern Continent that can quite conveniently fuel itself, but is useless here in Pompaassa or anywhere else for that matter...

HERON

(suddenly aware of an unconsidered facet)
Um, essentially!

DARIAN

(laughing)
The council will have your gonads boy!

HERON

I'm afraid it gets worse. I managed to safely dispose of the two ingots that came back on the ship with me. Had they cascaded, the release of energy would have been enough to destroy this entire city and a good bit of the surrounding countryside. The next ship will be bringing fifteen bars, if projections were correct.

...

If that amount cascades, it could end us all!

I need to get back to the Southern Continent as fast as I can and stop them, at least until I can figure out how to fix the problem.

DARIAN

You had better! I'm not taking the heat from the council on this. This failure is totally on your shoulders!

HERON

Never mind the council! If that last supply ship returns with fifteen ingots in the hold, there won't be a council left!

You need to get down to the docks and find me the fastest ship available! I need to catch that supply ship before they push off from the Southern Continent!

INT. SHIP'S BRIDGE - DUSK

The deck of the ship is bucking wildly due to the waves and speed despite the ship skimming along above the water's surface suspended on it's foils.

SHIP'S CAPTAIN

We're making all the speed we can! We're already risking the structural integrity of the rig at this speed!

HERON

How soon will we arrive?

SHIP'S CAPTAIN

If we can hold this pace we should
be there on the morrow's high
tide.

HERON

That's cutting it damned close!
The supply ship is scheduled to
leave on its return trip with the
morrow's high tide.

...

If there's any more speed to be
had, now would be the time to have
it.

SHIP'S CAPTAIN

I will do what I can, m'lord!

HERON

I'm sorry, Captain. This is my
quagmire not yours. I appreciate
the risks you and your crew are
taking.

SHIP'S CAPTAIN

Try to get some rest m'lord.

I'll wake you if something arises. Heron nods, then pats the
Captain on the back before he leaves.

EXT. SHIP'S FORE-DECK - MORNING GREY

Heron stands on the heaving deck and surveys ahead of the
ship with a telescope. He is bundled up in a thick cloak
to ward off the cold.

The magnified image bounces relentlessly with the movement
of the deck making details hard to discern.

Eventually it becomes clear that the supply ship had not
yet departed from the dock, but more details are impossible
to make out. The ship's captain stands next to Heron.

HERON

Appears they've not yet departed.
We've done it, man!
Heron jubilantly claps the captain
on the back.

HERON (CONT'D)

Bring her up on the west side of
the dock.

SHIP'S CAPTAIN
(ordering)
Helmsman, 5 degrees to starboard!
...
Easy on the sheets!
...
Stand ready on the bow line.
(pointing)
...
You, head abaft and ready the
stern line.
...
Prepare to back wind the main!

EXT. FROZEN DOCK - EARLY MORNING

A bundled FIGURE stands on the snow-swept dock, observing the arriving hover ship's approach.

The ship slows, lowering off her foils and settling into the slush-filled surf.

The wind howls raising swirls of frosty snow that hug the ground.

At length the ship pulls carefully alongside the dock, slowing.

A line is thrown from the bow to the waiting figure.

The line is cleated off to the dock.

Tension builds in the line. It creaks and hauls the ship to a stop.

A CREW MEMBER jumps from the ship to cleat off the stern line.

Heron, bundled up, does not even wait for the spring lines to be set before leaping to the dock.

SHIP'S CAPTAIN
(orders from aboard)
Secure the aft spring!

As Heron hastily makes his way down the dock, he is followed by the bundled figure.

The ship's crew continues securing the ship to the dock as he leaves.

INT. DOCK-SIDE WAREHOUSE - MORNING

A large building of modular construction like the portal installation. It is filled with various crates and amphora stacked in neat stockpiles.

A heating unit stands at the center of the space.

Globe lights illuminate the room.

A few WORKERS load wares onto carts to be taken and loaded onto the departing supply ship.

Pleuris is at the center of the action, holding a slate directing the activities. He looks tired.

PLEURIS
 (ordering a nearby
 worker)
 ...careful not to break that!

The door opens. The two bundled figures enter, accompanied by a swirling gust of snow.

The arrival draws the attention of all in the room.

One figure steps forward, lowering his hood revealing Heron.

PLEURIS (CONT'D)
 Heron?
 (suddenly nervous)
 What are you doing here?

HERON
 We must stop the ship!

The second figure lowers their hood revealing Osetia.

OSETIA
 (to Pleuris)
 What the hells is he doing here?

PLEURIS
 (pleading)
 I swear, I do not know!

Osetia orbits Heron, taking him in, measuring him up like a cat stalking a bird.

OSETIA
 So you're this great Heron I've heard so much about. You're sexier than I'd imagined. I'll give ya that!

HERON

It appears my reputation precedes
me and you might be?

OSETIA

Well, I might be the goddess
Vashni but I'm not!

(produces weapon from
her cloak)

Who I am is inconsequential to
you. "What you are doing here?"
That is the far more pressing
question, sweet cheeks!

HERON

We must stop the supply ship. It
cannot depart!

The door again opens and the ship's crew is roughly ushered
in by a group of armed VAHALIANS, commanded by Eskobal.

OSETIA

Why on Earth would we want to
delay King Malus' ship? Do tell?

Osetia presses her weapon to Heron's temple

OSETIA (CONT'D)

(ordering)

SPEAK!

Heron delays with a big sigh.

Osetia quickly points her weapon at Pleuris and discharges
it into his forehead without even looking.

Pleuris falls instantly dead to the floor with a meaty
thud. A stream of blood flows from the wound in his
forehead and puddles on the floor.

OSETIA (CONT'D)

I said, SPEAK!

HERON

(visibly shaken)

The protactinium,

...

It's unstable

...

Dangerous!

(now pleading)

You have to have noticed that the
ingots are growing warm by now!

Eskobal has moved nearer to Osetia and Heron in the room.

OSETIA
 What do you mean, dangerous?

 HERON
 (nervously)
 It will cascade and release a
 cataclysmic amount of energy in
 the blink of an eye!

Eskobal laughs.

 ESKOBAL
 Kill him and be done with his
 nonsense!

 OSETIA
 This one may yet be useful. He's
 the Pompaasan who built the
 portal. I'm certain King Malus
 would be angry if we've allowed
 such a slave to slip through our
 fingers, Marshall.

Eskobal sneers and strikes Heron in the back of the head
 with his weapon.

Everything goes black.

EXT. ZARAH PASS - DAY

The terrain is steep and rocky, covered in low green
 foliage. A huge CLIFF looms in the distance and at its
 base, the yawning mouth of a CAVERN.

A small group of PEOPLE struggle up the rocky path headed
 toward the cavern, among them is Aliah (carrying Miri),
 Aema, Varlo and Coreia.

Miri fidgets in the sling she's carried with.

Aliah stops to free her breast, offering her nipple to the
 fidgeting infant.

 ALIAH
 Oh Miri, settle down. Just a
 little while longer. We're nearly
 there.

The baby latches on and begins to nurse.

Aliah looks backwards, surveying the steep path they've
 traversed to get this far and out over the distant, mist
 shrouded forest that lies in the valley far below.

ALIAH (CONT'D)
 (to Miri)
 It's going to be alright. I'm
 sure your daddy will make
 everything all better. He always
 does!

Aliah turns and continues struggling up the path.

INT. SHIP'S HOLD - DAY

The room is shrouded in STEAM.

On a huge ICE BLOCK, there is a METAL CONTAINER holding
 glowing hot PROTACTINIUM INGOTS.

The deck pitches from the waves.

Heron lies bound and unconscious in a heap against a wall.

Osetia enters leading the boy-toy she pilfered from
 Darian's house on a leash.

A Vahalian GUARD accompanies them, carrying a bucket.

OSETIA
 (ordering)
 Wake him!

The guard unceremoniously tosses the water in the bucket
 onto Heron, then kicks him.

Heron stirs, slowly at first and groans.

GUARD
 C'mon, up with ya!

The guard punctuates his sentence with another kick.

Heron wakes and raises his hand to ward off another blow.

OSETIA
 (to the guard)
 Enough now! Leave us.

HERON
 (still groggy)
 Wha...

OSETIA
 Why is my protactinium doing that?

HERON
 What? How?

OSETIA
 I'm going to ask you nicely only
 one more time, buttercup.
 (draws close, emphasizes
 words)
 Why, is my protactinium doing
 that?

Osetia points at the steaming heap in the corner.

HERON
 (rubbing the knot on his
 head)
 I told you,
 ...
 Dangerous.

OSETIA
 You didn't expect us to just
 believe you. Did you?

Heron sits up, shakes out the cob webs and struggles for sentience.

HERON
 You wouldn't understand, it's
 complicated.

OSETIA
 I built the Vahalian portal, try
 me.

HERON
 That protactinium is not just from
 a very far away place. It is also
 from a very distant time!

OSETIA
 Go on...

HERON
 Nature abhors a vacuum. The
 longer it is here, the faster it
 tries to, in essence "catch up"
 with the time it exists in. It
 ages, normally at first but gains
 speed as its momentum builds.

OSETIA
 ...the inverse square law.

Heron appears to suddenly appreciate that he's under-estimated Osetia.

HERON

Yes

...

Eventually it is aging so rapidly that it experiences thousands and thousands of half lives in an instant. The energy released would be...

OSETIA

(realization dawning)

...cataclysmic!

HERON

...and the more mass in one location...

OSETIA

...the sooner the cascade occurs!

...

What can be done?

HERON

You can react it in a reaction vessel, converting it to Seorite waste. Then it's just an inert rock growing older with little to no energy to release. Or...

OSETIA

...or...

HERON

You could send it back to the fifth planet through the portal.

OSETIA

...eliminating the time differential.

(shaking her head)

No, that won't work.

HERON

Why wouldn't it work?

OSETIA

The nearest reaction vessel and portal happen to be in the same place, behind us on the Southern Continent. We're a quarter day gone from the dock and from there it's a half day over the ice sheet.

HERON

We must at least try! We'll die
just as certainly either way!

Eskobal enters the room.

Osetia's pet cowers, noticeably keeping her between himself
and Eskobal.

ESKOBAL

Has he told you what you need to
know or do I need to carve a few
pieces off of him?

OSETIA

He has, Marshall! We must turn
the ship back.

ESKOBAL

Turn back?
You gullible girl, it's a trick
and you've fallen for this
Pompaasan's ruse!

OSETIA

(pleading)
It is no ruse Marshall. We are in
grave danger!

ESKOBAL

(forcefully)
IT IS A RUSE!

Eskobal draws a blade. Leaving Osetia behind, he
menacingly closes in on Heron.

ESKOBAL (CONT'D)

(threatening)
You will tell us what we need to
know you son of a Pompaasan street
whore and a dog,
...
Or I will carve pieces off of you
until you're nothing but a bloody
sobbing ball! Do y...

Eskobal's threat is cut off amid word by a loud concussion.
A bloody wound erupts on his face, spraying Heron with
blood and bits of grey matter.

Eskobal's corpse falls where it stands, revealing Osetia
behind him.

She holds her still smoking weapon aloft.

OSETIA

We haven't time for that nonsense,
now have we?

(to her pet, dropping
the leash)

Run quick! Tell them I said to
turn this ship around!

Her pet scurries from the room, obeying orders.

Osetia retrieves Eskobal's blade from the deck and cuts
Heron loose.

EXT. SOUTHERN CONTINENT, AT THE GATE - NIGHT

The walls are now guard by Vahalian TROOPS some few
accompanied by DIRE WOLVES.

A HOVER VEHICLE approaches at break-neck speed. It stops
abruptly before the gates.

Osetia emerges, shrieking at the top of her lungs partly
from excitement and partly to be heard over the deafening
howl of the icy wind.

OSETIA

Open the gate you fools! Quickly,
open the accursed gate!

The Vahalian guards comply opening the lumbering gates as
quickly as they can.

Osetia remounts the vehicle.

The vehicle careens through the barely open gate, breaking
pieces off as it recklessly scrapes through.

EXT. CABLE LIFT STATION - NIGHT

Osetia's vehicle careens to a stop, slamming into another
VEHICLE, parked at the cable lift station. Osetia and
Heron stumble out of the wrecked vehicle.

Vahalian GUARDS arrive to check out the commotion.

Osetia and Heron struggle to retrieve the white hot ingots
from the wreck.

The container is melting.

Thinking fast, Heron pulls a loose panel from the wrecked
vehicle.

EXT. EARTH-SEEN FROM SPACE

A bright flash is seen near the southern pole.

A circular shock-wave radiates out from the flash, roiling with material scoured from the surface by its passing.

The shock-wave continues to envelop the globe until it arrives at the northern pole and creates a huge plume of ejecta that is blasted into orbit.

INT. THE CAVE AT ZARAH PASS - NIGHT

A small band of disheveled SURVIVORS huddle around a small sputtering FIRE. They are dressed in makeshift garments of hides and furs.

Aliah is among them. She looks malnourished, worn and utterly defeated. Her once radiant beauty is dulled by soil and fatigue.

Among the group other familiar faces are seen. Varlo and Darian are there as is Coreia. Notably absent is Aema. The rest present are new to us.

A slightly older Miri wrapped in furs still nurses at Aliah's breast, but fitfully so. She is dissatisfied with the meager amount of milk that her starving mother can provide.

The fire must provide very little warmth as each person's breath can be seen.

The worn Aliah looks down upon her child. Her hardened eyes melt and tears well up.

ALIAH

Oh little Miri, your father was
such a great, great man! I wish
that you could know him.

Aliah sobs and cuddles her child close for solace.

EXT. THE CAVE AT ZARAH PASS - CONTINUOUS

Heavy snow falls. The wind howls relentlessly. Occasional bright streaks are seen in the brooding sky as material falls back to Earth and burns up during reentry.

The blasted hulks of TREES from the once verdant valley far below can be seen partly buried in the snow. They were swept here by the wall of water that was driven ahead of the blast.

The small flicker of flame can be seen coming from the depths of the cavern.

VOICE OVER

Indeed the path to the world we know today was not a straight one.

...

Progress and technology are not simple linear progressions of discovery. Knowledge is not timeless,

...

But some things are,

...

Mankind's hubris,

...

Mankind's greed,

...

But above all our tenacity and will to survive.

...

Those things are timeless. So, do not become complacent. Just as surely as we are here today, a time to start over; a time where we need to rebuild may linger undiscovered and unanticipated just around the next bend.

ROLL CREDITS: