

THE KUIPER ANOMALY

Rough Draft 1

Written by

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EXT. NASA SPACE TELESCOPE OPERATIONS FACILITY - DUSK

A small black government vehicle pulls up to the security gate at the facility's entrance. A SECURITY GUARD scans the vehicle's encoded license plate with his portable security computer. It displays the vehicle's government status and related information.

The driver-side window rolls down, revealing MERCER LAMBERTY, a dour, prematurely-balding government official in serious apparel and expression. Three other men, in official slightly-military dress, are in the other seats.

SECURITY GUARD

You picked a helluva night to visit. You're cleared for entry, but I don't know who's going to have the time to...

MERCER

I'm here to see the Director of Operations.

SECURITY GUARD

Mr. Radtke? Tonight? The new scope's going live and...

MERCER

Now.

SECURITY GUARD

Okay, okay...

The security guard activates the gate, which opens.

SECURITY GUARD (CONT'D)

Does he know you're...

Mercer speeds off through the gate.

SECURITY GUARD (CONT'D)

Asshole.

INT. NASA SPACE TELESCOPE OPERATIONS FACILITY HALLWAYS - NIGHT

Mercer and his three companions are walking down the facility's hallways at a fast pace while a thin, pale research assistant hurries after them.

RESEARCH ASSISTANT
You can't just show up here
unannounced and expect to... hey!

Mercer and his companions turn sharply down a hallway,
leaving the assistant to catch up.

RESEARCH ASSISTANT (CONT'D)
Mr. Radtke is not available right
now, it's just not possible. The...

MERCER
New scope is going live. I know.

They push through large double-doors and into...

INT. TELESCOPE OPERATIONS CONTROL - NIGHT

The room is a flurry of activity. Rows of workstations are
manned by various operators and astronomers, some moving
about checking different systems. A huge screen fills the
forward wall, currently blank. EDWARD RADTKE is supervising,
moving from station to station. He is in his early 50's, fit,
and very on top of things.

The three military officials head to different parts of the
room, noting various pieces of equipment and recording their
observations into their small touchscreen computers.

MERCER
Mr. Radtke...

Edward doesn't even notice Mercer and his companions.

EDWARD
I want those cells checked and
rechecked the minute we're live on
the high-gain. Marvin! Get that
secondary antenna running at full
bandwidth, I don't care how much
interference you're getting.

MERCER
Mr. Radtke, I...

Marvin, a gangly bright college graduate, is rapidly punching
away at his computer station.

MARVIN
Not my fault you guys picked the L2
point. We're not in the umbra, you
know.

EDWARD

Just do it. Where's my primary
signal, people?

RANDOM OPERATOR

Got it!

The large screen comes to life, showing various telescope
stats off to one side.

MERCER

Mr. Radtke, I'm here to...

EDWARD

All right everyone, full systems
check. I want an orientation
calibration as soon as we're there.

(to a nearby astronomer,

GEORGE KABZINSKI)

Please tell me you've finally
settled on some test targets.

George cheerfully waddles over, awkwardly holding a sheaf of
images that he seems constantly on the verge of dropping. He
is bearded and chubby with thick round glasses. He speaks
rapidly and excitedly.

GEORGE

Oh yes. Flipped a coin to narrow it
down to three. It just took us
awhile to find an unbiased coin.

EDWARD

That would explain all the popped-
open vending machines. Whaddya got?

MERCER

(irritated)

Mister Radtke, I need you to...

GEORGE

(leafing through grainy
images of small blurry
dots)

Lessee, we got a possible pluto-
sized body in the 2:5 zone on the
edge of the scattered disk, large
enough for the preliminary optics
check, a uh... small icy body with
an odd rotation profile, and a
really tiny oblong thing with a
wonderful set of spectral lines.

EDWARD

Small enough to test the Ulrich
focals?

George hands the photos over to Edward.

GEORGE

(babbling away)

We're guessing two kilometers,
maybe a bit smaller. I've got a bet
with Mike on that one. He thinks
its an iron-nickel fragment, but I
doubt something that dense would
form out there. It's in the 1:2
zone and dynamically cold so it
didn't migrate out from near
Jupiter where...

EDWARD

(desperately interrupting)

Fine, good. Get the coordinates
over to Clara's team.

George rushes off with his papers and images.

MERCER

(loudly)

So I'll just come out and say it.
The project's cancelled.

The whole room dives into silence.

EDWARD

What?

MERCER

They've pulled the plug. It's over.
You've got a week for the paperwork
to go through.

Edward stares at Mercer in disbelief.

EDWARD

You finally went and did it, didn't
you.

MERCER

You're spending billions of dollars
to look at rocks, Eddie. I would
have ended it three years ago if
you hadn't got Senator Pullman all
excited about this nonsense.

EDWARD

How'd you change his mind?

MERCER

He's been nervous ever since
Iceland got the bomb. It didn't
take much to convince him your
funding would be better used
building up our forces on the
Atlantis base.

EDWARD

But we've already built the damned
thing!...

MERCER

And the remainder of your budget
will be spent elsewhere.

Edward tosses the photos in his hand to a nearby desk.

EDWARD

We're trying to add to the sum
total of all human knowledge, and
all you care about is your floating
mechanical island of death you call
a peacekeeping mission.

MERCER

It does bring in the votes from the
heartland.

EDWARD

I will *never* understand people like
you.

Marvin awkwardly interrupts from his station.

MARVIN

Uh, sir?

EDWARD

What?

MARVIN

We're live.

Edward stands in silent thought for a moment, then yanks the
photos back from the desk.

EDWARD

Okay people, we have one week to get as much data as we can before Mr. Lamberty here sends us out into the streets. Lets make the most of it.

Everyone springs to their stations.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

(to Mercer)

You want to see some space rocks before you go back to inducing fear and panic in the general populace?

Mercer motions to the three military men moving through the room.

MERCER

I'm stuck here until these gentlemen finish taking inventory.

EDWARD

(to the room at large)

Open 'em up!

EXT. L2 EARTH-SUN LAGRANGE POINT

The Kuiper Space Telescope Array is a giant lattice of struts supporting a dozen large, widely-spaced telescopes all aimed in the same direction. The front covers slowly open in silence.

INT. TELESCOPE OPERATIONS CONTROL - NIGHT

EDWARD

Let's see that first target.

ORIENTATION OPERATOR

Sending the rotation command for first coordinates.

Everyone just stands there.

MERCER

(smugly)

Is uh... something supposed to be happening?

EDWARD

(annoyed)
(treating Mercer almost
like a child)

The telescopes are almost a million miles away. It takes our command signals five seconds just to get there and then another five for the confirmation signal to get back due to the "speed of light".

MERCER

I've heard of it.

EDWARD

You should sign up with my undergrads next semester. You might learn something.

ORIENTATION OPERATOR

Orientation confirmed!

EDWARD

Let's get an image!

The giant screen remains blank for just a moment, then a grainy image of a cratered dwarf planet fades in.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Nice! A bit noisy, can we clean that up?

MARVIN

Just a sec, gotta readjust the processing unit's temperature by a few degrees. Give it about twenty seconds.

MERCER

That's great Eddie. A rock, in space, that looks like all the other rocks in space.

Edward just shakes his head, then addresses the room.

EDWARD

It's our first discovery, we should name it.

CLARA

How'd we find it?

George looks over at her.

GEORGE
Random chance.

CLARA
Fine, let's call it Petra.

MERCER
(incredulous)
Petra?

EDWARD
It means "rock" in Latin.

MERCER
Taxpayer money well-spent.

EDWARD
Better than finding new and
horrifying ways to kill people.

MERCER
There is a whole world going on
right here, Eddie. Out in the
Atlantic? That's a real situation
with real consequences. You want to
wind up speaking Icelandic?

EDWARD
(in Icelandic)
<You have a brain the size of a
walnut and you smell like a dead
walrus.>

MERCER
Real funny. I could have you
brought up for treason.

MARVIN
Cleaner image, comin' through!

The image on the main viewscreen becomes noticeably less
grainy.

EDWARD
Good! I like it. Let's see that
second target.

ORIENTATION OPERATOR
On it!

EXT. L2 EARTH-SUN LAGRANGE POINT

The Kuiper Space Telescope Array slowly rotates a few degrees.

INT. TELESCOPE OPERATIONS CONTROL - NIGHT

The image on the giant screen makes a blurry streak as it pans off to the side and fades. A shattered planetoid fades in, sporting an enormous impact crater that covers nearly half of its surface. There is an audible reaction from the room.

EDWARD

(to Mercer)

One week. You've set back astronomy by several decades, you know.

Mercer shrugs.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

(to the room at large)

Okay, we're solid on the larger bodies, lets focus on something really small and then go over our preliminary results. We need to make a list of what we want to image over the next seven days, and we need that list tonight. Third target!

ORIENTATION OPERATOR

Third target, tracking in!

EXT. L2 EARTH-SUN LAGRANGE POINT

The telescope array once again slowly rotates and adjusts.

INT. TELESCOPE OPERATIONS CONTROL - NIGHT

GEORGE

(calling across the room)

Hey Mike, hundred bucks says it's a chondrite with interesting surface chemistry!

MIKE

You're on!

The ghostly image fades in on the screen. It is an enormous derelict alien space station pockmarked by a ages of micrometeorite impacts and general space weathering. There are a many gaping holes punched through the structure.

Small gasps are heard around the room. Everyone is still, staring at the image on the wall.

The room bursts into activity.

EDWARD

Can we sharpen that up a bit?

MARVIN

(staring at the image of
the alien station)

I uh... A little, I think...

Marvin rapidly punches commands into his computer.

MERCER

Is this a joke?

EDWARD

George, get on an analysis of the debris and probable impact rates, I want to know how long that thing's been out there.

GEORGE

Already on it.

MERCER

Tell me this is a joke. You're just trying to save your project!

EDWARD

I didn't know it was cancelled until you got here. Clara! Tell me what that's made of!

Clara, a wiry woman in her mid 40's with her iron hair sharply pulled back, is pouring over graphs and lists of numbers on her screens along with her assistants.

CLARA

It's... what the hell *is* that?

ASSISTANT #1

Some kind of alloy? But the albedo is all wrong, and these lines here don't make any sense.

CLARA
(across the room to
Edward)
It looks metallic but it's not!

EDWARD
That's a start!

CLARA
(to her assistant)
Filter these and see if you can
tease them apart. Start here and
work your way up the ladder.

Edward studies the alien station intently. Mercer stands next to him, very unnerved.

MERCER
That's *real*? It's... it's a real
thing?

EDWARD
(with a small grin)
We're going to need more money.

Mercer staggers backwards, staring at the screen. He abruptly turns and dashes out of the room. Edward watches flee the room, then turns back to the ancient alien relic on the screen.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
(softly)
Wow.

EXT. FEDERAL BUILDING - DAY

George and Marvin pull up in a car. They exit and scurry towards the building, haphazardly carrying documents and schematics.

INT. FEDERAL BUILDING HALLWAYS - DAY

George and Marvin scuttle down the hall. George is on the verge of dropping all the items he is carrying.

MARVIN
Did he say why he wanted all this
stuff here?

GEORGE
Nah, he just said to print out what
we had and bring it to room 402.

George and Marvin arrive outside room 402. Clara and Mike are standing by the door.

MARVIN

Hey, have they said yet? We're going to be sending probes right?

CLARA

We don't know yet.

MARVIN

We don't *know*? How could they not?

Mike shrugs.

MIKE

They've been in there for three hours.

The door to room 402 opens as Edward comes out. The room behind him is filled with governmental advisors.

MARVIN

Well? How many probes do we get to send?

EDWARD

None.

Everyone reacts in disbelief and confusion.

MIKE

Why the hell not?

EDWARD

They've decided on a manned mission.

The astronomers are happily shocked.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

We'll get the resources to build a ship over the next two years. The crew will be a select group of astronauts and air force personnel and a sizable research team. That'll be our department.

GEORGE

Who gets to go?

A huge smile erupts on Edward's face.

EDWARD

Everyone.

INT. NASA SPACESHIP FACILITY - DAY

Blueprints for a large space vessel are displayed on a large touchscreen table. Engineers are taking notes, pointing at various sections and occasionally arguing.

INT. NASA COMPONENT FABRICATION ROOM - DAY

Various parts for the spaceship are being machined and assembled.

EXT. ROCKET LAUNCHPAD - DAY

Spaceship components are loaded into an enormous rocket. It is launched into orbit.

EXT. NEAR-EARTH-ORBIT SPACESHIP ASSEMBLY SITE

The ship, THE ATHENA, is assembled over two years. It is a huge, narrow spacecraft 300 meters long. In the center, a 100-meter wide rotating habitat ring sits between two elliptical radiation shields that surround the reactors and engines. In the middle of one of the radiation shields is an observation dome protected by a retractable covering.

EXT. NASA CENTRAL COMMAND - DAY

January 4th, 2039

INT. MISSION BRIEFING ROOM - DAY

The large briefing room is packed with astronauts, air force, and scientists. Edward stands before a large widescreen display that is showing images of the alien station.

EDWARD

Our destination is Kuiper-1, a two-kilometer wide space station of unknown origin roughly 4.4 billion miles from the sun, right on the outer edge of the Kuiper belt. Based on the amount of weathering we see on the hull, we estimate its age to be around 1.2 billion years.

(MORE)

EDWARD (CONT'D)
To put that into perspective,
multicellular life didn't yet exist
on Earth.

The screen switches to a grainy enlarged image of the alien space station, centered on a large impact hole in the hull.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
This large impact hole in the outer hull will be our main entrance to the station. Our mission is nothing less than to study this object as thoroughly as we can for as long as we're there.

Edward nods at Captain Harris.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
Captain Harris.

Captain Harris moves to the front of the room with a serious precision that's almost frightening. He throws a steely gaze over the room.

CAPTAIN HARRIS
There is one thing you *must* understand: your odds of survival on this mission are 83%. *Eighty three percent*. That means there is a very good chance that two in ten of you won't be coming back.

The scientists in the room look slightly shocked while the astronauts all nod to themselves in grim, thoughtful agreement.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)
This mission is strictly volunteer. Anyone still wishing to reconsider has three weeks to do so. After that you won't set foot on Earth for four years, if you make it back at all.

Captain Harris pauses and looks over the room. Several people quietly get up and leave the briefing room. The rest of the room is still.

Captain Harris nods and pulls up a display of the Athena.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)
The Athena will be our home for the next four years.
(MORE)

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)
We'll be under low but constant acceleration for most of our journey via this array of nuclear-powered ion drives. Athena's rotating habitat section will simulate Earth-normal gravity for the majority of our trip, allowing us to avoid most of the major zero-G related health issues.

The screen switches to a map of the solar system.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)
We will leave Earth's orbit for Jupiter, using it as a gravitational slingshot to alter our trajectory and shave a few months off of our journey. Fourteen months out from Earth we will arrive in the vicinity of Kuiper-1 where you will carry out your scientific expedition for a year and a half, and then return to Earth.

Captain Harris again looks around the room, frowning slightly.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)
At our furthest we will be over six light-hours away from Earth.

He lets that sink in for just a bit. A few more people quietly get up and leave the room.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)
(through a barely-showing smile)
For those of you who choose to go: this time next week you'll be orbiting the planet.

Smiles break out amongst the scientists and astronauts, and there is excited murmuring.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE THE MISSION BRIEFING ROOM - DAY

Edward and his astronomers, Clara, Mike, George, and Marvin walk out of the mission briefing room. George is visibly excited.

GEORGE

I never thought I'd get to go into space! And now we're going to travel across the solar system!

MIKE

I know! I know!

They all round a corner to see Mercer slumped against the wall. His face is pale and he looks terrified.

MARVIN

(to Edward)

What's with him?

EDWARD

(to Marvin, quietly)

He volunteered to go.

CLARA

He doesn't look too happy about it.

EDWARD

He doesn't even like to fly. No idea why he did it.

GEORGE

Hundred bucks says serious pressure was applied.

MARVIN

Pffsh. Two hundred dollars says that's just his ambition having some serious conflicts with his fear of screaming through the void at 150 miles per second.

They leave Mercer in the hallway, staring at nothing.

EXT. ATHENA IN FAR-EARTH-ORBIT

A reusable cargo rocket slowly approaches The Athena.

ROCKET ASTRONAUT (COMMS)

CTL-87 calling Athena, this is the last rocket from Earth. Hope you didn't forget anything.

ATHENA COMMS OFFICER (COMMS)

(amused)

Copy that. Head on in.

INT. ATHENA DOCKING BAY 3 (WEIGHTLESSNESS)

The rocket slowly enters the docking bay. In the hallway outside the bay, George floats by, a big smile on his face.

INT. ATHENA CORE TRANSIT CORRIDOR (WEIGHTLESSNESS)

George drifts along in the standard blue jumpsuit/flight suit that all personnel wear aboard the Athena, thoroughly enjoying weightlessness. Marvin comes floating out of the entry hatch from the docking bay.

GEORGE

Marvin! Isn't this *great*?

MARVIN

Makes me sick to my stomach. I threw up for an hour.

GEORGE

We're on a spaceship!

MARVIN

Wait, when did you get here?

GEORGE

Two weeks ago. How's Mike taking it?

MARVIN

He's *still* throwing up. I don't know how you do it.

GEORGE

Bad inner ear; I'm constantly disorientated anyway. Hey, you joining the game tonight? Small stakes, we won't take your house or nothing.

MARVIN

I dunno...

GEORGE

You'll do fine. Most of these guys have no head for randomness. But watch out for Clara, she'll take you to the cleaners.

MARVIN

Huh. I'll keep that in mind.

Marvin's stomach heaves a little.

MARVIN (CONT'D)

I... think I'm going to go back for
a few more of those little bags...

GEORGE

Bring Mike back with you. I owe him
a hundred bucks anyhow.

George floats off down the hallway as Marvin heads back
towards the docking bay.

DOCKING BAY OFFICER

You play cards with that guy?

MARVIN

Sometimes, yeah.

DOCKING BAY OFFICER

He's a real shark. Half the crew
owes him three weeks of kitchen
duty already and we haven't even
left orbit.

MARVIN

Ask him about the time he almost
got shot in Vegas. You'll learn
more about probability in three
minutes than most people do in a
lifetime.

EXT. ATHENA IN FAR-EARTH-ORBIT

The Athena has been moved to half a million miles from Earth.
The Earth is a brilliant blue marble in the inky black of
space.

MISSION CONTROL (COMMS)

Athena, you are cleared for ion
drive activation.

INT. ATHENA BRIDGE (WEIGHTLESSNESS)

The bridge is a spherical room with terminals and controls
covering the interior surface. The captain's chair is
suspended in the middle.

CAPTAIN HARRIS

Copy that, mission control.
Initiating ion drive first stage
protocol.

(to the bridge crew)
Start it up.

ATHENA PILOT

Yes sir!

The pilot begins launch procedures.

INT. ATHENA ROTATING HABITAT SECTION (GRAVITY)

The station crew goes about setting up their new home in the rotating habitat section of the station. The curved floor bends upwards and out of sight in both directions. Mercer is seated by a table. He looks ill. Edward, George, Clara, Mike, and Marvin all approach him.

EDWARD

They'll be powering up the ion drives soon.

MERCER

What does that mean?

EDWARD

Well, The Athena's nuclear reactors will be throttled up to full power...

INT. ATHENA NUCLEAR REACTOR CORE

Atoms are undergoing fission, the reaction becoming more and more intense.

EDWARD (V.O.)

... generating an enormous amount of electrical current...

INT. ATHENA POWER CABLEING

EDWARD (V.O.)

... which is routed to the ion drive cluster...

INT. ATHENA ION DRIVE INTERIOR

EDWARD (V.O.)

... where it creates a massive charge imbalance which is used to ionize lithium...

Lithium atoms have their electrons violently ripped away.

EDWARD (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The ionized lithium conducts
electricity between the charge
nodes, forming a powerful magnetic
field...

The magnetic field accelerates the lithium atoms at great
speed down the length of the ion drive.

EDWARD (V.O.) (CONT'D)
... accelerating the lithium atoms
to tremendous speeds, flinging them
out of the drive and into space...

The lithium atoms are flung into space at horrifying speeds.

INT. ATHENA ROTATING HABITAT SECTION (GRAVITY)

EDWARD
... pushing us forward.

Mercer has turned pasty white. His hands are tightly gripping
the table he is seated at.

MERCER
When will this happen?

EDWARD
(looking at his watch)
Oh, in about ten.

MERCER
Ten what? Ten hours?

EDWARD
Nine.

Mercer begins frantically looking around.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
Eight.

MERCER
Shouldn't we strap ourselves into
something?

EDWARD
Seven.

MERCER
You're all just standing there!!

EXT. ATHENA IN FAR-EARTH-ORBIT

ATHENA PILOT (COMMS)
Six... Five... Four...

INT. ATHENA BRIDGE (WEIGHTLESSNESS)

The pilot and copilot are busy at their controls.

ATHENA PILOT
(busy at his console)
Three... Two... One... Launch.

The pilot presses a control which lights up green.

EXT. ATHENA IN FAR-EARTH-ORBIT

The ion drives ignite with a vivid violet-blue light. The Athena does not visibly move.

INT. ATHENA ROTATING HABITAT SECTION (GRAVITY)

EDWARD
And we're off.

MERCER
W... buh...

MARVIN
(to no one in particular)
Ion drives are so anticlimactic.

CLARA
(to Mercer)
We'll have built up some real speed
in about a week. Enjoy your flight.

Clara tosses the trembling Mercer a small packet of salted peanuts. The scientists walk off, chuckling.

INT. VARIOUS SECTIONS OF THE ATHENA (WEIGHTLESSNESS AND GRAVITY)

The crew busy themselves setting up their new home and enjoying the novelty of spaceflight. Reading. Preparing meals. Unpacking equipment.

INT. ATHENA REC ROOM (GRAVITY)

George is decimating the others at a lively game of Texas Hold-em.

INT. ATHENA MERCER'S QUARTERS (GRAVITY)

Mercer sits on the edge of his bunk -- bored, alone, and afraid.

INT. ATHENA WEIGHTLESS REC ROOM (WEIGHTLESSNESS)

George and Mike are trying to toss racquetballs through little hoops at the far end of the room.

MIKE

Almost had that one!

GEORGE

You have to aim straight at the target. You can't throw in an arc.

(mockingly)

Free. Your. Mind.

George gives his ball a tiny push. It slowly drifts towards the hoop and bounces off its edge.

MIKE

Hah!

He gives George a playful shove, sending them both spinning.

EXT. ATHENA - INNER SOLAR-SYSTEM

The Athena cuts a tiny distant figure through the immense emptiness of space, ion drives blazing blue-violet at the very edge of visible light.

INT. ATHENA DINING ROOM (GRAVITY)

Edward, Clara, George, Marvin, Mike, and a few other astronomers are eating around a table, talking and laughing.

EDWARD

... and he knocks over the nitric acid into the tank! We're all backing up, you know, ready to bolt for the exit, and he's just standing there, staring at the reaction, and he says

(MORE)

EDWARD (CONT'D)
(imitating)
"I don't think I've ever seen that
color before."

Everyone erupts into laughter. An astronomer arrives at the door.

RANDOM ASTRONOMER
They're opening the observation
dome! Come on!

Everyone hurries for the door.

EDWARD
Hey, someone go get Mercer. I want
him to see this.

INT. ATHENA OBSERVATION DOME (WEIGHTLESSNESS)

A large percentage of the crew are drifting into the observation dome. Edward and Marvin enter, escorting Mercer who is not doing very well in zero gravity. He looks up through the observation dome.

Jupiter hangs there, an immense presence.

MERCER

...

EDWARD
Isn't that something?...

Everyone finds a spot to watch from.

MERCER
How... how large is that?

EDWARD
About eleven Earths wide.

Mercer gapes at the giant planet.

EXT. ATHENA SLINGSHOTS AROUND JUPITER

The Athena shrinks to a tiny brilliant speck of light slowly arcing around Jupiter.

EXT. ATHENA - OUTER SOLAR SYSTEM

The Athena moves through the outer solar system. The sun's light is noticeably dimmer.

INT. ATHENA BRIDGE (WEIGHTLESSNESS)

Scriabin plays quietly over the intercom. Captain Harris is halfway through a well-worn copy of "Watership Down". The pilot is drawing in a sketchbook.

INT. ATHENA ROTATING HABITAT SECTION (GRAVITY)

An astronomer is doing math. Several scientists are running diagnostics on some of their machinery. An astronaut is practicing sleight of hand.

INT. ATHENA OBSERVATION DOME (WEIGHTLESSNESS)

Mercer is contemplating the access card he holds in his hands, looking unsettled. He pockets it and stares out at the stars.

INT. ATHENA WEIGHTLESS REC ROOM (WEIGHTLESSNESS)

Clara, Marvin, George, Mike, and a few other astronomers are trying to invent new weightless sports. They are dressed in pads and goggles and are whacking a racquetball around with ping-pong paddles, trying to fling it through several hoops they have set up.

GEORGE

New rule! You can only score a goal
off a ricochet!

He whacks the ball at a wall. It rebounds, glances off the edge of the hoop, and pelts him in the head. Clara flies through the air after the ball.

RANDOM ASTRONOMER

Is that a penalty or a foul?

CLARA

(gleefully)
Who cares?

Clara hits the ball off of two walls and through a hoop.

CLARA (CONT'D)

Hah! Two-nuthin'!

The intercom beeps.

EDWARD (INTERCOM)

It's in sight!

Everyone looks at each other, then make a mad scramble for the door, shedding goggles and pads, leaving them floating in the room.

INT. ATHENA OBSERVATION DOME (WEIGHTLESSNESS)

Personnel are squinting out from the dome. Some are pointing.

GEORGE
(to Mike)
There! I can just make it out!

Marvin pulls out a pair of binoculars and looks through them. Far off in the distance is the derelict alien station. It is wheel-shaped, with a huge dish antenna attached to the station's core.

MARVIN
(softly)
Holy cow.

Clara floats over to him.

CLARA
Hey, let me see those.

Marvin hands over the binoculars.

INT. ATHENA BRIDGE (WEIGHTLESSNESS)

A video feed of Kuiper-1 is displayed on a large monitor.

CAPTAIN HARRIS
Let's move to within half a
kilometer and come to a full stop.
Put us in line with that large hole
there.

The pilot and copilot move about their controls.

EXT. ATHENA NEAR KUIPER-1

The Athena sits half a kilometer away from the 300-meter tall rim of the alien station, facing a gaping hole ripped through the station's pitted hull.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (O.S.)
I know you're all excited to get
started, but this first trip will
be a minimal excursion. Minimal.

INT. ATHENA BRIEFING ROOM (GRAVITY)

There are disappointed "awww"s from the assembled scientists, half in jest.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (CONT'D)

A base of operations will be staked out, and despite the station's immense age, quarantine procedures will be strictly followed until we have determined that there is nothing here that poses a threat.

RANDOM ASTRONOMER

(muttering)

After a billion years? We'll be lucky if we can determine original chemistry.

RANDOM ASTRONOMER #2

That's assuming the place wasn't completely abandoned.

RANDOM ASTRONOMER #3

Or picked over by space pirates!

There is scattered, nervous laughter.

CAPTAIN HARRIS

Edward, have you selected your team yet?

EDWARD

I have.

CAPTAIN HARRIS

Meet us at airlock 3. The rest of you monitor from your stations here.

INT. ATHENA HABITAT SECTION MAIN THOROUGHFARE (GRAVITY)

The crew members head for their stations along the wall of the wheel section. Edward, Clara, and Marvin walk down the habitat section's main thoroughfare towards a section with an elevator. Clara and Marvin are nervous, but excited.

EDWARD

You two ready for this?

CLARA

Oh, you better believe it!

MARVIN

I'm surprised you didn't pick George. He really wanted to go on the first trip.

EDWARD

I know, but he's... excitable. I need calmer heads right now. He'll get his chance soon enough.

They head into an elevator that takes them to the Athena's weightless core.

INT. ATHENA CORE TRANSIT CORRIDOR (WEIGHTLESSNESS)

Edward, Clara, and Marvin exit the elevator and float down the long corridor that runs most of the length of Athena's core.

CLARA

Who's the lead for this excursion?

EDWARD

Nadezhda.

MARVIN

Hoo boy...

INT. ATHENA SPACEWALK PREP ROOM (WEIGHTLESSNESS)

They enter into the spacewalk preparation room which contains spacesuits and personal space maneuvering packs. Already present are Captain Harris, team leader NADEZHDA (she has a heavy Russian accent), flyboy test pilots KEVIN and REDBURG, and two spacesuit technicians who are helping them into their spacesuits.

NADEZHDA

(shoeing off her suit technician)

You get wrong way round. This slot first, then this. Better seal, less fogging. I design these, you know.

Kevin and Redburg are trying to hide their grins. The technician goes to help Clara and Marvin get into their spacesuits.

NADEZHDA (CONT'D)

Edward! You making historic trip with us?

EDWARD

No, but these two are.

NADEZHDA

We put Marvin in front, get eaten first.

MARVIN

(sarcastically)

Ha ha.

CLARA

Aww, you don't want to go down in history as the first human being to be eaten by aliens?

MARVIN

I suppose it *would* get me higher billing in the history books...

KEVIN

(to Marvin and Clara)

Alright, you've been trained to use the Extravehicular Space Pack but as this is your first actual trip in space, we'll be taking it easy. We have half a klick to cover with a lot of gear in tow, so nothing fancy.

TECHNICIAN #1

Lets get those helmets on and run a comms check, then we're ready to go.

EXT. ATHENA NEAR KUIPER-1

The bay door opens. Nadezhda leads her team out into open space. Each person has a space maneuvering system attached to their spacesuit. They head towards Kuiper-1, bringing with them a carrier pod full of equipment.

INT. ATHENA WHEEL SECTION MAIN THOROUGHFARE (GRAVITY)

The crew of the Athena monitor the excursion team at their stations.

EDWARD

(via microphone)

Looking good.

MARVIN (COMMS)
Permission to do a barrel-roll,
sir.

EDWARD
Denied, Marvin.

INT. ATHENA BRIDGE (WEIGHTLESSNESS)

The pilot and copilot are monitoring the excursion team.
Captain Harris looks slightly annoyed.

MARVIN (COMMS)
Aw, you never let us have any fun.

Captain Harris activates the intercom.

CAPTAIN HARRIS
Let's keep our minds on what we're
doing.

MARVIN (COMMS)
Yessir.

EXT. KUIPER-1 OUTER RIM

The team is dwarfed by the 300-meter high wall of the outer
rim. They slowly approach the impact hole.

NADEZHDA
(to the Athena)
We are approaching rim.
(to the team)
Lets get with lights to see.

They all detach tethered flashlights from their suits and
cautiously approach the hole.

EDWARD (COMMS)
Nadezhda, lets look around for a
good location. Clara, I'd like you
to collect a some samples.

NADEZHDA
(to the Athena)
Copy that.
(to the team)
Lets stay away from edges. No
puncturing suit until base is set,
okay?

They slowly drift through the center of the large hole, looking around with their lights.

INT. KUIPER-1 WRECKED HANGER BAY

The team investigates, aiming their lights in various directions.

MARVIN

(to the Athena)

Looks like a large chamber, maybe a hanger. It's pretty empty. I see some hatchways... those might be lighting rigs. The outer wall is mostly flat, some kind of equipment I can't identify is attached to it... yeah, I'm betting that was the floor. This whole place used to be rotating.

CLARA

Tells us they didn't have artificial gravity.

REDBURG

Also tells us they weren't aquatic.

CLARA

No it doesn't.

NADEZHDA

There is some debris floating around, not much. There is clear space on floor wall, good place to set up. Kevin, Redburg, get fill lights on perimeter there and there. Marvin, you help me with Base 1 and Clara get samples, yes?

INT. ATHENA WHEEL SECTION MAIN THOROUGHFARE (GRAVITY)

GEORGE

Any aliens?

CLARA (COMMS)

Just us.

INT. KUIPER-1 WRECKED HANGER BAY

Kevin and Redburg attach wide lights to the walls, bouncing the light off of them, diffusely illuminating the hanger.

Marvin and Nadezhda take the pod over to a clear area on the outer wall and begin unpacking, tethering equipment to clips they attach to the floor. Clara drifts around to various sites collecting material samples.

Marvin and Nadezhda are unpacking spare air tanks and other gear. Marvin spots something and goes to investigate.

MARVIN

Hey, I've got an open passageway here. It looks like... like the door was cut through.

REDBURG

Let me see.

Redburg maneuvers over to Marvin.

MARVIN

See the melting here along the edges?

REDBURG

This was definitely cut.

EDWARD (COMMS)

How far can you see?

MARVIN

The passage is about 20 meters. There's an opening beyond it but I can't tell what's in there.

EDWARD (COMMS)

Save it for the second trip. Get everything you have secured and head on back to the Athena.

Clara takes scrapings and pieces of debris and puts them into containers.

CLARA

There's a thin icy layer of something on all the exposed surfaces. It might be their atmosphere, frozen when this place cooled down. Could tell us what they breathed. Assuming they did that sort of thing.

NADEZHDA

(to the Athena)

We are starting return journey.

(MORE)

NADEZHDA (CONT'D)
Have hot cocoa ready please.
Shaken, not twirled.

Kevin and Redburg crack up at Nadezhda's attempt at English phrases.

KEVIN
Stirred. Shaken, not stirred.

NADEZHDA
Is not same thing?

This sends Kevin and Redburg into fits of laughter.

INT. ATHENA OBSERVATION DOME (WEIGHTLESSNESS)

EDWARD
(trying not to laugh)
Head to decon. We'll see you in a
few minutes.
(to Mike)
Mike, Clara's bringing some samples
in. I want them analyzed right
away.

MIKE
I warmed up the materials lab hours
ago.

INT. ATHENA DECONTAMINATION CHAMBER (WEIGHTLESSNESS)

Captain Harris and Edward watch through a large window as the excursion team (still in their spacesuits) undergoes the decontamination procedure.

EDWARD
You look nervous.

CAPTAIN HARRIS
Are we *sure* this is enough?

EDWARD
If it makes you feel any better,
they'll be staying in the isolation
rooms until we've put the samples
they brought back into nutrient
dishes, and we'll be exposing some
rats, too.

CAPTAIN HARRIS
I know the procedure. It still
makes me nervous.

INT. ATHENA ISOLATION LAB (GRAVITY)

There are several Plexiglas cages with rats in them on a table. Alongside are various labeled petri dishes with nothing growing in them. The spacesuits from the excursion are laid out on another set of tables.

A robotic arm lifts a petri dish and carries it over to a video microscope.

INT. ATHENA ISOLATION LAB CONTROL ROOM (GRAVITY)

Mike is looking at the petri dishes via remote video microscope. Edward watches over his shoulder.

MIKE

Nothing. The dishes are empty, the rats are fine, and the suits are clean.

EDWARD

You sound disappointed.

MIKE

Only a little. That's expected for something that's been out here for so long.

EDWARD

All right, I'll go release the captives.

INT. ATHENA ISOLATION ROOM EXIT (GRAVITY)

Edwards inserts his access card and opens the door to the isolation room. The excursion team is playing a racing game on a console.

EDWARD

All clear. You're free to go.

MARVIN

Just in time. Kevin and Redburg are kicking our collective asses.

CLARA

Yeah. Now we can go from being cooped up in this room to being cooped up in all the other rooms.

EDWARD

We're getting ready for the first
long-term exploratory mission.
Anyone want to go back out?

Nadezhda raises her hand with gusto.

NADEZHDA

Oh! Oh!

CLARA

As if you could stop us.

EDWARD

I figured as much. Your suits are
waiting for you in airlock 2.

EXT. KUIPER-1 OUTER RIM

There is a line of astronauts moving from the Athena to the
large impact hole in Kuiper-1, some transporting large
amounts of equipment.

INT. KUIPER-1 WRECKED HANGER BAY

Many more bounce lights have been set up. The scientists are
busy setting up their research base and investigating the
hanger. A team has gathered at the passageway with the cut
door. George, Marvin, Edward, and Redburg are in front,
inspecting the passageway.

EDWARD

George will lead, Marvin and
Redburg will be the secondaries. I
want lights every five meters.
Double-check your comms, air
levels, and batteries.

Everyone checks their equipment and spacesuits.

GEORGE

(excited)

Here we go...

George eagerly drifts down the passageway, followed closely
by Marvin and Redburg. The rest of the team follows,
periodically placing lights on the walls. The rear group
brings along a small pod of equipment.

INT. KUIPER-1 SAMPLES LAB

George exits the passageway, shining his light around. Marvin and Redburg are right behind him. The room is filled with short platforms topped with transparent domes with rocky samples that float inside. Alien research machines are scattered throughout. The volume of the room is filled with sparse particulates that glitter in the beams of their flashlights.

GEORGE
(looking at the samples
domes)
I see rocky fragments in these
things. Maybe an analysis lab?

MARVIN
There *is* an awful lot of machinery
in here.

REDBURG
Hey Andrew, you're going to love
this!

A computer technician, ANDREW, floats out of the passageway and into the room.

ANDREW
What?

Redburg points at a machine that has what appears to be a screen.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Oh, that is *definitely* a computer!
(via comms)
I need a scanner in here!

A SCANNER TECHNICIAN enters the room with a bulky terahertz scanner. Andrew is inspecting the base of the device.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Lets try here first. Looks like an
access panel.

The Scanner Technician puts the scanner very near the alien computer.

SCANNER TECHNICIAN
Looks like it's supposed to slide
out of the way. It's cemented in
place, we'll have to cut it.

ANDREW
I came prepared.

Andrew pulls out a cutting device and begins carefully cutting out the panel.

More astronauts enter the room, setting up lights and affixing draglines that run back down the passageway.

George is shining his light through the transparent domes.

GEORGE
(activates intercom)
Clara, you there?

CLARA (COMMS)
Yeah, what is it?

George aims a video camera at a dome.

GEORGE
Check your video. We're in some kind of lab. It looks like they were studying these.

INT. KUIPER-1 WRECKED HANGER BAY

Clara is looking at George's video feed with great interest.

CLARA
Bring me a few of those. Be sure to label what sections they came from.

INT. KUIPER-1 SAMPLES LAB

CLARA (COMMS)
Oh, and get some scrapings from the interior. I want to see if they used to be pressurized, and if they're different from the other samples I took.

GEORGE
Got it!

George motions to two technicians who drift over and begin carefully cutting into the dome.

Marvin is moving about the room, investigating. He shines his light on a large double door.

MARVIN

This looks like the only other exit.

EDWARD

They look pretty hefty. Who's got that scanner?

SCANNER TECHNICIAN

Right here.

The Scanner Technician drifts over and runs the scanner over the doors.

SCANNER TECHNICIAN (CONT'D)

They're pretty thick. We can cut through them, just not quickly.

He scans the wall right by the doors.

SCANNER TECHNICIAN (CONT'D)

There's empty space here, we might be able to pry them open.

INT. KUIPER-1 HALLWAY OUTSIDE SAMPLES LAB

It is completely dark. A shaft of light appears as the doors are silently pried open a few halting inches at a time. George makes his way through, followed by Marvin, Redburg, and Edward. The passage quickly terminates in a hallway running perpendicular to it. George shines his light down both passageways, each terminating in darkness.

EDWARD

Left or right?

GEORGE

(activates intercom)

Mike, you on?

MIKE (COMMS)

Yeah.

GEORGE

Where are you? Got gravity?

MIKE (COMMS)

Athena analysis lab.

GEORGE

Flip a coin.

MIKE (COMMS)
... tails.

GEORGE
Right it is.

EDWARD
(via comms)
I need a dragline and some lights
in here.

Some astronauts come through the doors bringing their equipment. They all head down the right-hand hallway. It eventually opens up into...

INT. KUIPER-1 FEEDING ROOM

The corroded room's ceiling is very high. Troughs make parallel grooves covering the floor. There are some counter-like structures, a few closed doors, and an open passageway. Part of the floor has been torn away in jagged strips and some holes have been burned into the walls.

MARVIN
Some kind of explosion?

REDBURG
Or one hell of a party.

Edwards takes scrapings from the edges of the ripped floor.

EDWARD
Clara will definitely want samples
of this. *Something* went down here.

Redburg shines his light over the grooves in the floor.

REDBURG
What do you suppose these are for?
They almost look like troughs... or
urinals or something...

George is looking over some of the counters.

GEORGE
Kinda looks like a high-tech salad
bar.

The other astronauts are busy setting up lights and attaching the draglines. George drifts over to the open passageway. He shines his light into it and freezes.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Hey! HEY! I found one!

George is shining his light on the calcified/fossilized remains of a very non-human alien the size of a large dog at the far end of the passageway. It is chemically cemented to the wall due to eons of slow chemical reactions. Hundreds of withered stalks protrude from its surface.

MARVIN
(over intercom)
Clara, get in here! We found an alien!

CLARA (COMMS)
Holy shit! I'll be right there!

Everyone in the room is gathering at the entrance to the passageway, shining their lights over the alien.

GEORGE
Think that's skin or clothes?

MARVIN
Damned if I know. Look at all those stalks. I don't see eyes on them... spongy antennae? External lungs?

GEORGE
Feelers, maybe.

EDWARD
Looks pretty desiccated. I think we're seeing a lot of skeletal structure.

NADEZHDA (O.S.)
Out of way! Be move to side!

Nadezhda pushes an equipment pod into the room.

NADEZHDA (CONT'D)
Help to clear off, please!

Everyone helps Nadezhda clear equipment off of the sled. Clara floats into the room.

CLARA
Where is it?

GEORGE
(motioning with his light)
Right in there.

Clara floats over to the passageway and carefully enters it, shining her light on the alien.

CLARA

Ooohhhh! Bilaterally symmetrical,
multiple limbs with what looks like
many dexterous phalanges; is it
wearing something or is that skin?
Appears to have calcified to the
floor and wall, we'll have to cut
it out, Someone get me a cutter!
Those stalks look delicate, be
careful not to touch those!
Endoskeleton, some plates... also
an exoskeleton?

Marvin hands Clara a cutter.

MARVIN

Here.

CLARA

Thank you.

Clara cuts the floor and wall surrounding the alien.

CLARA (CONT'D)

George, you and Marvin help me lift
this. Easy does it...

Clara, Marvin, and George carefully lift the floor section
with the attached alien, glide it over to the equipment pod,
and secure it into position.

INT. KUIPER-1 WRECKED HANGER BAY

Nadezhda and Edward exit the passage into the hanger,
followed by the equipment pod now carrying the fossilized
alien, guided by Clara, Marvin, and George. The rest of the
team is close behind.

EDWARD

(via comms)

Captain, we need an iso-lab cleared
to vacuum.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (COMMS)

Already done. You've got this whole
place swarming. They can't wait.
Get that thing over here so they'll
stop pestering me.

EDWARD
(to Captain Harris)
We'll be there in a few minutes.

CLARA
I'll take it over. You'll continue
on from the room we found it in?

GEORGE
Yeah, I want to get a few more of
those for you.

MARVIN
How do you know it wasn't the last
one on board?

GEORGE
This place is huge. We've explored,
what, three rooms and we've already
found an alien? Either we're
astoundingly lucky or there's a lot
more of these.

INT. ATHENA ISOLATION LAB (GRAVITY)

The fossilized alien and attached floor section are laid out
on a scanning table. A robotic arm runs a scanning device
over the alien.

INT. ATHENA ISOLATION LAB CONTROL ROOM (GRAVITY)

Mike and Clara study a fuzzy 3D reconstruction of the scanned
alien fossil, rotating and zooming the model.

MIKE
You're right, it does look like
both endo and exo skeletons.

CLARA
But look at the separation of these
plates. I doubt it gained much
structural support from those...
maybe the exoskeleton was
vestigial?

MIKE
Possibly. From the branching we see
here, I'm guessing this was the
brain... if these are feelers then
this all along here would be its
nervous system.

CLARA

Hey, can you isolate that blob
right there?

MIKE

Yeah...

Mike manipulates some controls, changing the orientation of
the model and highlighting different parts of the interior
structure.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Whoa...

CLARA

Right through the bone. Shrapnel?
(via comms)
Edward, I think our fossilized
friend here was killed in the
explosion that tore up that room.

INT. KUIPER-1 FEEDING ROOM

Edward, George, Marvin, and Redburg are cutting through a
thick door at the end of the passageway the alien was found
in.

EDWARD

(to Clara)

Copy that. We're almost through to
the next room, we'll let you know
if we find any more.

(via comms)

Nadezhda, what's your status on
that hanger?

INT. KUIPER-1 WRECKED HANGER BAY

Nadezhda is floating in the middle of the hangar, supervising
technicians as they cut along an enormous door in the ceiling
of the room.

NADEZHDA

We are cutting through main door.
Should lead to upper level. Very
thick, but we make good progress.

EDWARD (COMMS)

Keep an eye out for conduits,
ducts, anything that might lead to
a control area.

NADEZHDA
Will keep eye out for ducks... some
geese, little kittens...

INT. KUIPER-1 FEEDING ROOM

George, Marvin, and Redburg continue to cut through the door.

EDWARD
(starts to respond to
Nadezhda, but isn't sure
what to say)
(via comms)
Andrew, what's your status?

EXT. KUIPER-1 DISH ANTENNA

Andrew and Team 3 drift towards the enormous dish antenna attached to the core of the station. The dish's focal point receiver is on a curved arm that arcs below the dish, attaching to the station's central core.

ANDREW
(to Edward)
We're just about to the dish. Kevin
and Team 4 are checking out the
core, looking for a good entry
point. We'll keep you posted.
(to Team 3)
Lets get a marker on the rim there,
and then cross to the other side.
Let's find out how wide this thing
is.

They attach a measuring device to the rim of the dish, then start to head across the dish towards the opposite side.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
This has to be at least a kilometer
across.
(via comms)
Kevin, can you see where this
armature attaches?

EXT. KUIPER-1 CORE

Kevin and Team 4 are drifting along the length of the central core.

KEVIN
(to Andrew)
We passed it on the way down. Looks like it's hooked up at or near the base of the dish. You're thinking it's mobile?

EXT. KUIPER-1 DISH ANTENNA

ANDREW
(to Kevin)
Yeah, it would allow them to look in different directions without having to re-orient the whole dish.

KEVIN (COMMS)
We'll take another look when we pass back that way.

Andrew looks up at the focal point receiver that looms high overhead as they pass by.

ANDREW
(to Kevin)
Do you think this place was flown in, or was it built here?

EXT. KUIPER-1 CORE

KEVIN
(to Andrew)
I've been wondering that. We haven't seen anything that looks like a means of propulsion. Maybe they're indigenous to this solar system.

Kevin and Team 4 continue to drift along the station's core, heading towards the end opposite the dish.

ANDREW (COMMS)
If they were, you'd think we would have found evidence of them before now.

KEVIN
(studying Kuiper-1)
It's *large* enough for interstellar travel, I suppose... enough room for a self-sufficient ecosystem;
(MORE)

KEVIN (CONT'D)
they'd be travelling for thousands
of years. Wanderers in the grandest
sense.

Kevin spots an open bay.

KEVIN (CONT'D)
(to Team 4)
Hold up! That looks like a good
spot.
(to Andrew)
Andrew, we may have found a way
into the core. We're going to check
it out now.

EXT. KUIPER-1 DISH ANTENNA

Andrew and Team 3 arrive at the opposite edge of the dish.

ANDREW
(to Kevin)
Stay in touch.

Team 3 attaches another measuring device, aiming it at the
first one they placed across the dish.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
I'm going to move down into the
shadow of the dish.

TEAM 3 ASTRONAUT #1
What for?

ANDREW
When my eyes adjust I should have a
pretty spectacular view of the
galaxy.

Andrew clears the rim of the dish and maneuvers downwards
into its shadow. His eyes slowly adjust to the darkness.
Beyond the alien station stretches the Milky Way galaxy
behind a veil of countless stars.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
You guys have to see this.

TEAM 3 ASTRONAUT #1
(adjusting the measuring
device)
Just a sec... there. The dish is
1.37 kilometers across. I wish I'd
had one of these during my master's
thesis.

Andrew starts to rotate to face the dish.

ANDREW
You were working on magnetars,
right? Did you ev...

Andrew's flashlight illuminates an alien spacesuit tethered to the underside of the dish right in front of him, its faceplate mostly frosted over.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
(surprised yell)
GAHWHOAHAAH!

TEAM 3 ASTRONAUT #1
What?? What is it? Are you alright?

ANDREW
Yeah! I'm fine... just startled...

Andrew shines his light into the frosted faceplate. He can just make out a fossilized alien inside.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
There's an alien in a spacesuit
down here. It's tethered to the
underside of the dish, right at the
rim. It's... there's another one!

Andrew moves his flashlight about. There are a dozen aliens in spacesuits all tethered to the dish.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
(via comms)
Andrew to Athena! I've got maybe
twelve more aliens here, underneath
the dish.

The Team 3 astronauts reach Andrew, illuminating the group of aliens with their lights, investigating the tethers.

TEAM 3 ASTRONAUT #2
What were they doing here?

CAPTAIN HARRIS (COMMS)
Did I hear that right? Twelve
aliens under the dish?

ANDREW
Yes! They're all tethered to it.
Just... just sitting there.

TEAM 3 ASTRONAUT #1
(shining his light over
the aliens)
Creepiest goddamn thing I ever saw.

EDWARD (COMMS)
I might be able to top that.

INT. KUIPER-1 SUBSTATION CONTROL ROOM

Edward, George, Marvin, and Redburg have cut their way into the next room.

TEAM 3 ASTRONAUT #1 (COMMS)
How's that?

EDWARD
You'll never believe what we just found.

The room is crammed full of about a hundred aliens. Several float near a wall, one impaled on a wicked-looking metal spear. Some of the aliens are grappled together. Some obviously died curled up in pain. Remnants of dark stains are splashed over the walls. One group is piled up at a sealed door, as if they were trying to claw their way through when they died.

George is aiming his video unit at various parts of the room.

GEORGE
(to general comms)
You all getting this?

INT. ATHENA WHEEL SECTION MAIN THOROUGHFARE (GRAVITY)

Scientists and astronauts are gathered around monitors showing George's video feed. Mercer watches from a distance, particularly disturbed. Clara is dragging Mike out of a room and towards the monitors.

CLARA
C'mon!
(via microphone to George)
Yeah, we see it. Pan left a bit...
is that one impaled on something?

INT. KUIPER-1 SUBSTATION CONTROL ROOM

GEORGE
(to Clara)
Yes. I'll get you a closer look.

George floats over to the impaled alien. Marvin and Redburg are shining their lights over the pile of bodies by the door.

MARVIN
What do you think, Ed?

EDWARD
I think I want to know what's on
the other side of that door.

INT. KUIPER-1 SUBSTATION ACCESS ROOM

Marvin and George cut through the door and peer into the small room.

MARVIN
Fuck. Me.

Five alien fossils are in the room. Two are in a corner, cradling each-other. Another is in an oddly-shaped chair by a computer system, its several arms frozen together, aiming a bizarre-looking gun at the door. One lies amidst severed wiring pulled from behind a control panel and the last is at the door, welding torch in hand.

George inspects a dark stain underneath the welder alien.

GEORGE
I think the door guy bled to death.

MARVIN
You notice something odd here?

GEORGE
What, besides the total fucking
holocaust?

MARVIN
These ones don't have all the
little feelers that the others do.

INT. KUIPER-1 SUBSTATION CONTROL ROOM

Edward moves his light over the roomful of massacred aliens, highlighting the stalk-like protrusions. A small group of astronauts brings in draglines and lights, helped by Redburg.

GEORGE
Different subspecies, maybe?

EDWARD
I don't know. Lets get a few back
to Clara.

INT. ATHENA ISOLATION LAB (GRAVITY)

The isolation lab is now packed full of aliens. One side of the room has aliens with the stalks, the other side has the non-stalk-bearing aliens plus three spacesuited aliens. The robot-controlled scanner is busy systematically scanning all of the aliens.

INT. ATHENA ISOLATION LAB CONTROL ROOM (GRAVITY)

Clara and Mike are at the displays. George, Marvin, Andrew, Edward, George, Redburg, Mercer, and a whole slew of astronauts are crowded in behind them. They are looking at 3D computer scans of the aliens, revealing their interior structures. Everyone looks tired but fascinated.

MIKE
See, look! The ones in the suits
froze before they could decompose.
We've got a lot more body structure
here.

CLARA
They don't have the protrusions
either. Bodies seem identical
otherwise.

EDWARD
Maybe they were two castes that got
into a fight? A differentiated
species?

CLARA
I'd like to manually dissect one of
them.

GEORGE
Can you *do* that in a pressure suit?

CLARA
No, not enough dexterity. We'll
have to slowly bring the lab up to
one atmosphere.

MIKE

Argon?

CLARA

I was thinking an argon/neon mix.

MIKE

It'll take a few hours.

Mike rubs his eyes. George yawns.

EDWARD

When was the last time anyone
slept?

Everyone looks at each other with weary eyes.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

We'll come back to this in eight
hours. I want everyone in their
bunks and unconscious in the next
twenty minutes.

(via microphone)

Nadezhda, Kevin, return to the
Athena. We've been up too long, and
I don't want anyone making any
stupid mistakes out there.

KEVIN (COMMS)

We're pretty wired up. I don't know
if any of us are going to be able
to sleep.

INT. ATHENA BUNKS (GRAVITY)

Everyone is completely passed out. A few are snoring softly.
Marvin is curled up with Nadezhda.

INT. ATHENA WHEEL SECTION MAIN THOROUGHFARE (GRAVITY)

The main thoroughfare is deserted. It is quiet.

INT. ATHENA ISOLATION LAB CONTROL ROOM (GRAVITY)

The room is empty. Machines hum quietly. A few lights
sporadically blink.

INT. ATHENA HALLWAY BY ISOLATION LAB (GRAVITY)

Mercer quietly slips through the lab section's doorway. He looks around to verify no one is in sight. He fishes out an access card from his pocket and looks at it with trepidation. He walks over to a first-aid kit on the wall and fiddles with it. The entire kit swings out on hinges with a click, revealing a secret access card panel and a small breathing apparatus hidden behind it. Mercer checks one more time over his shoulder, dons the breathing mask, then inserts his access card and enters a code on the panel's keypad.

EXT. ATHENA NEAR KUIPER-1

All is quiet. A few lights flicker on. There is an announcement beep.

EDWARD (COMMS)
Rise and shine everyone! Up and at
'em.

INT. ATHENA BUNKS (GRAVITY)

Everyone groggily slides out of their bunks, yawning and stretching.

INT. ATHENA BRIEFING ROOM (GRAVITY)

Everyone is eating breakfast and talking excitedly amongst themselves. Edward and Captain Harris stand before a screen displaying a map of the explored parts of Kuiper-1.

EDWARD
We'll spread out from this room
here. Nadezhda will continue
cutting through the main door in
the ceiling of the hangar. Kevin,
you found an entrance to the core?

Kevin walks up the screen, swallowing the last of this food.

KEVIN
Yes, here near the end. There are a
few hatchways we can start with.
We'll try to head towards the
middle, see if we can find some
kind of center of operations. We're
also looking for any means of
propulsion or energy generating
systems. I'd really like to know
how they powered this place.

EDWARD

Sounds good. Andrew, any updates on their technology?

Andrew walks up to the head of the room as Kevin heads back for seconds. Andrew pulls up an electron microscope image of degraded circuitry on the screen.

ANDREW

We see remnants of microscopic circuitry in the 23 nanometer range. It appears they were using balanced ternary instead of binary; that threw us off at first. We haven't been able to recover any stored data, it's all deteriorated.

EDWARD

Any writing or diagrams?

ANDREW

No, none that's survived. Even the buttons on their input devices are blank.

EDWARD

Damn.

ANDREW

Frustrating as all hell, actually.

CAPTAIN HARRIS

Any indication as to how advanced their technology is compared to ours?

ANDREW

We haven't seen anything incomprehensible yet. Sophisticated, sure, but I'm more surprised at the sheer logistics of the place.

EDWARD

I want you with Kevin today. See if you can find any primary systems. It might give us a better idea of what they were up to out here.

Andrew lights up at this and goes dashing off to find Kevin, nearly colliding with Mercer who is walking up to Edward.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Mercer.

MERCER

I uh... well, I was wondering when I could send out my reports.

EDWARD

The Earth will be behind the sun for another two weeks. After that we should be able to get a clear signal through.

Mercer nods uncertainly.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

You holding up okay?

MERCER

Yeah. I just... well... there's not much for me to do here... and...

(lowering his voice)

I ah... my hands shake sometimes... I...

Mercer takes a deep breath.

MERCER (CONT'D)

I have nightmares about Jupiter. I don't like how far away we are. When I think about it... I mean...

Edward smiles in understanding.

EDWARD

No no, I get it. I've spent my life trying to comprehend these kind of distances, but to actually be out here... it's terrifying. I know.

MERCER

What do you do?

EDWARD

I keep busy. Hey, I'll find something you can do, help out with one of the teams.

(calling)

Mike!

Mike comes jogging up to Edward and Mercer.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Need a hand?

MIKE

Yes!

(to Mercer)

How are you at organizing things?

Mercer lights up.

MERCER

I don't know how much help I can
be, I'm not a scientist, or...

MIKE

No problem. Computers can only take
things so far, and we have a lot of
pieces that need sorting out. Come
on, I'll get you set up.

Mike and Mercer walk off.

EDWARD

(to Captain Harris)

There's hope for him yet.

CAPTAIN HARRIS

You going back out?

EDWARD

With George and Redburg.

Edward indicates a section of Kuiper-1 on the display.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

We're going to cut through here and
see what's adjacent to these rooms.
We're trying to figure out if this
was a focal point for the conflict
or if it was more widespread than
that.

CAPTAIN HARRIS

Good. I've got some routine tasks
to take care of, so I'll be on the
bridge. And... you handled that
well, with Mercer. I understand you
two don't really get along.

Edward shrugs.

EDWARD

He's killed off seven projects I've
been involved with. We have...
different priorities.

(MORE)

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Had a shouting match with him in front of congress once. They kicked both our sorry asses out of the building.

Captain Harris shakes his head, chuckling. He ambles off towards the elevators.

INT. ATHENA HABITAT SECTION MAIN THOROUGHFARE (GRAVITY)

Marvin, Nadezhda, and Kevin enter an elevator which proceeds to lift them to the core of the Athena.

INT. ATHENA ELEVATOR (GRAVITY -> WEIGHTLESSNESS)

As the elevator moves towards the center of the station, gravity slowly lessens to weightlessness.

NADEZHDA

To think they have nerve to call those "waffles".

KEVIN

The eggs weren't too bad. You almost couldn't tell they had been freeze-dried.

MARVIN

She's right about the waffles. Wrong kind of spongy.

NADEZHDA

Like cushion padding, but with more chewy.

KEVIN

They nailed the syrup, though.

MARVIN

That's because it was real.

NADEZHDA

Cowshit!

MARVIN

Seriously. George and I bribed some of the transport guys, got a few bottles of the real stuff on board.

KEVIN

Awful lot of trouble to go through for maple.

MARVIN

I can't stand that artificial corn
syrup shit.

NADEZHDA

Except for Mz. Butterworths. Is not
bad.

KEVIN

She's got a point.

MARVIN

You two have no taste at all.

NADEZHDA

Oh no! Pozvonite v politsiyu!

Kevin laughs.

MARVIN

You speak Russian?

KEVIN

No, but that's what they were
shouting when Redburg and I got
chased out of that bar in Zuyevka.

The ceiling of the elevator opens. Nadezhda exits head-first.

INT. ATHENA CORE TRANSIT CORRIDOR (WEIGHTLESSNESS)

Nadezhda gently launches herself out of the elevator and
spirals down the hallway. As Marvin leaves the elevator, some
dirt from behind the elevator's hand rail smudges across his
hand. He looks at it in annoyance and wipes it off on his
outfit.

NADEZHDA

Woo! Ha ha!...

KEVIN

She's in a good mood this morning.

Marvin grins, blushing.

KEVIN (CONT'D)

So *that's* what that was. I thought
maybe a ventilator panel had come
loose.

Marvin smiles and shrugs.

EXT. ATHENA NEAR KUIPER-1

Astronauts make their way from the Athena to the rim of Kuiper-1, hauling various pods of equipment with them.

INT. KUIPER-1 WRECKED HANGER BAY

Nadezhda and Marvin are supervising a team of astronauts that are cutting around the edges of the large door in the ceiling of the hanger. Other astronauts, under the direction of Clara, have set up a large amount of lab equipment and lights throughout the hangar.

CLARA

Hey, this power cell is dead.

HANGAR ASTRONAUT #1

That's the third one today. Must have been a bad batch. I'll try another set.

CLARA

Have they brought in the winch yet? They're almost through the door.

HANGAR ASTRONAUT #1

Coming in now.

A group of astronauts carefully guide in a winch through the hole in the outer hull. Each cable emanating from it has a circular attachment at the end.

NADEZHDA

(to her cutting team)

Hold up for moment. Must get cables attached.

Marvin and Nadezhda drift down to the winch to help with the cables. They all carry up the ends and attach them to points around the perimeter of the large door while the other astronauts secure the winch to the floor.

NADEZHDA (CONT'D)

Okay, to be cutting through now.

The cutting team finishes cutting the large door free.

MARVIN

Good. Slowly now, let's pull it out of the way.

Two astronauts at the winch activate it. It yanks a corner of the large hangar door partially out of the ceiling, sending small scraped fragments flying. The astronauts frantically stop the winch.

MARVIN (CONT'D)

Slowly! That means less than fast!

They readjust the settings. The winch gently pulls the door all the way out.

Several astronauts skirt the edges of the door, guiding it away from the ceiling. The hole in the ceiling reveals nothing but darkness.

Nadezhda pulls out a large flashlight and drifts up through the hole.

INT. KUIPER-1 TRANSIT CAVERN

It is completely dark. Nadezhda floats upwards, shining her light around. It does not illuminate anything.

NADEZHDA

Is very big up here. Can not see walls.

Marvin follows her up into the vast empty space.

MARVIN

Boy, there's a whole lot of nothing up here.

(via comms)

Lets haul up some of the spots, see what we've got.

Some astronauts float up some very bright spotlights and attach them to the floor of the cavernous tunnel. They turn them on, revealing an enormous tunnel over a hundred meters wide that appears to circle along the circumference of the station. There are tracks and rails that follow the walls, stretching off into the darkness.

MARVIN (CONT'D)

Think this goes all the way around?

NADEZHDA

(via comms)

Need many pod lights up here.

HANGAR ASTRONAUT #2 (COMMS)

How many do you need.

NADEZHDA
How many you have?

HANGAR ASTRONAUT #2 (COMMS)
Uh... a lot?

NADEZHDA
Maybe enough. Bring all.

INT. KUIPER-1 WRECKED HANGER BAY

HANGAR ASTRONAUT #1
Did she really say to bring all of
them?

Hangar Astronaut #2 is already getting boxes of hemispherical
lights together.

HANGAR ASTRONAUT #2
You going to argue with her?

HANGAR ASTRONAUT #1
Hah. Here, you take these up, I'll
get another batch packed.
(via comms)
Athena, we're going to need more
pod lights out here.

INT. ATHENA BRIDGE (WEIGHTLESSNESS)

CAPTAIN HARRIS
(to hangar astronauts)
I've got another team leaving in
five, I'll have them bring some
over.

HANGAR ASTRONAUT #1 (COMMS)
Send over as many as you can,
Nadezhda's going for broke.

CAPTAIN HARRIS
(to hangar astronauts)
Understood.
(to Edward via intercom)
Ed, how's your lighting situation?

INT. KUIPER-1 PRIMARY HALLWAYS

EDWARD

(to Captain Harris)

We're fine for now, but we could
use a few more air tanks.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (COMMS)

Copy that. Harris out.

Edward looks around the hallway as astronauts attach lights to the walls. There are fossilized aliens sporting stalks sprawled down the entire length of the hallway along with a wide assortment of what appear to be weapons. There are jagged holes torn in the walls and doors. Ancient remnants of dark stains are everywhere.

Redburg is peering through any doors that have holes, trying to discern what lays behind them. George is inspecting some of the weapons.

GEORGE

Huh. No two guns are the same. I
mean, some are similar, but they
don't look mass-produced or
anything.

Edward looks down at the weapons nearest him.

EDWARD

Strange...

A garbled, static-filled voice on the comms channel breaks in.

KEVIN (COMMS)

(unidentifiable)

...zsssssch Cbzzzn -ou hssszzch...

EDWARD

(via comms)

Who is that?

KEVIN (COMMS)

zccchhbzz-eading this? Come in!

EDWARD

This is Ed. You're coming through
now.

EXT. KUIPER-1 CORE ACCESS HATCHWAY

Kevin is emerging from the hatchway back into open space. Behind him are Andrew and four other astronauts making up the Core exploration team.

KEVIN

Finally! Ed, whatever they used build this core section completely blocks our comms channel. We even tried running a wired antenna. We've got a lot of spare air tanks and batteries and we've doubled up on draglines. Permission to proceed?

EDWARD (COMMS)

Granted, but be careful! If anything, and I mean *anything* looks the slightest bit off I want you back out. I don't care if it's a broken dragline clip or a faulty readout indicator, you get your ass out of there, understand?

KEVIN

You got it. Kevin out.

Kevin floats back through the hatch.

INT. KUIPER-1 CORE ACCESS HATCHWAY

Kevin, Andrew, and four other astronauts are in a small enclosure sporting openings of several access tunnels from all directions, just large enough for the suits to fit through them.

They have spare air tanks strapped to their suits and have hooked up draglines to the main hatch entrance. They are shining their flashlights down the tunnels.

KEVIN

What do you think?

ANDREW

This one here looks like it maybe heads towards the center.

Core Team Astronaut #1 shines his flashlight down the tunnel.

CORE TEAM ASTRONAUT #1

I don't think we're going to make it through this one.

His flashlight illuminates a large number fossilized aliens ten meters down the tunnel, completely blocking it.

ANDREW
(shining his light over
the fossils)
Damn.

CORE TEAM ASTRONAUT #2
Has anyone come up with a name for
these things yet?

KEVIN
I don't think so. "Kuiperians"?

ANDREW
Not bad. Kinda catchy.

CORE TEAM ASTRONAUT #3
With all the death and destruction
out here, maybe we should call 'em
"Mercernauts".

Andrew stifles a snicker.

KEVIN
Hey now, he's been pretty well
behaved since we got here. Cut the
guy some slack.

ANDREW
You just say that because you've
been kicking his ass at Hold-'Em
for the past couple of weeks.

KEVIN
Yeah, but I lost it all to George
so it all balances out.

Kevin peers down the tunnel at the aliens, then shines his light down a few of the other tunnels. He motions to the tunnel closest to the blocked one.

KEVIN (CONT'D)
This one runs in the same general
direction. Get these lines
attached, I'll let Ed know where
we're headed.

Kevin floats back out through the hatch.

INT. KUIPER-1 PRIMARY HALLWAYS

Edward, George, and Redburg have braced themselves against parts of the hallway and are trying to carefully pry open a deteriorated doorway. The other astronauts are inspecting and cataloguing the fossilized aliens' weapons.

KEVIN (COMMS)
Edward, this is Kevin.

Edward moves away from the doorway.

EDWARD
Go ahead.

KEVIN (COMMS)
We're taking a passage that might head to the center of Kuiper-1. We've marked it in case of an emergency. We'll check back in after we've done our initial sweep.

EDWARD
(via intercom)
Sounds good. Edward out.

REDBURG
Shit!

Edwards turns around to see Redburg grabbing at his glove. There is a hissing noise over his comms channel and a small stream of gaseous vapor is streaming from his glove. George is scrambling for a small box attached to his suit.

REDBURG (CONT'D)
(motioning to the doorway)
Sharper than it looks.

George has pulled a patch kit out of the small box and begins applying it to Redburg's glove.

EDWARD
(via comms)
Athena, Redburg's cut his suit.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (COMMS)
I'm pulling up the pressure monitors now. How bad is it?

GEORGE
Almost got it!

EDWARD
(to the Athena)
Pretty small. How's his pressure readings?

CAPTAIN HARRIS (COMMS)
Looks like they're stabilizing.
Heart rate is pretty high.

REDBURG
(inspecting his newly-
patched glove)
(shakily mocking the
cliche)
Looks like that's my rookie mistake
for this mission.

Edward inspects George's handywork.

EDWARD
(to Redburg)
Feel okay?

REDBURG
Yeah... wow. I think I just got a
month's worth of adrenaline.

EDWARD
Want to head back for the day?

REDBURG
Nah, I'm just a little shaky. Give
me a few minutes, I'll be fine.

EDWARD
(to the Athena)
I think we're in good shape. We're
going to rest a minute and then try
to get through this door.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (COMMS)
Stay alert. Any more problems, head
back in. No need to rush, we're
going to be here for a year.

EDWARD
Copy that.

George is pushing on the doorway. It suddenly gives way,
tumbling weightlessly into the room. George shines his
flashlight through the opening.

GEORGE
Whoa, look at this!

INT. KUIPER-1 HATCHERY

George drifts in, followed by Redburg and Edward. The room is large with a low ceiling. It is filled with regularly-spaced elevated open metal baskets. An alien fossil lies in a corner, a gun in one of it's many hands. Its head has been blown off.

George shines his light over several of the baskets. Each contains three tiny baby alien fossils. The stalks that protrude from their bodies have grown out over the baskets like ivy.

REDBURG

(looking nervously at the stalks)

Ed?...

GEORGE

Maybe... maybe those aren't feelers?

EDWARD

They remind me of...

(via comms)

Clara, check your video. I need your opinion on something.

Edward detaches his portable video camera and aims it at one of the baskets.

INT. KUIPER-1 WRECKED HANGER BAY

The hangar is full of astronauts going about their various tasks. Clara is supervising a group taking samples from the walls of the hanger.

CLARA

(to Edward)

Just a sec.

(to her team)

When you're finished with this grid I want you to get some samples from there and there and get them back to Mike.

Clara grabs a video monitoring unit from a rack of various pieces of equipment, and activates it. A video feed of the Hatchery appears on its tiny screen.

CLARA (CONT'D)

(squinting at the video)

Okay, what do you want me to...

(MORE)

CLARA (CONT'D)
are those *babies*? What are those
things coming out of...

Some astronauts enter from outside bringing in an equipment sled full of lights.

HANGAR ASTRONAUT #3
Hey, where do you want these?

CLARA
?... oh!
(indicating the open
doorway in the ceiling)
Up there, then get another load of
air tanks for B team.

HANGAR ASTRONAUT #3
You got it.

The astronauts head up to the hole in the ceiling as Clara turns back to the video feed.

CLARA
(to Edward)
Okay, get me a closer shot of that.
Put all your lights on it.

INT. KUIPER-1 TRANSIT CAVERN

Many pod lights have been set up inside the transit cavern, illuminating its great size. Various astronauts are unpacking even more lights and are floating down the cavern to attach them to the walls. The two astronauts with the equipment pod full of lights drift up through the hangar door.

HANGAR ASTRONAUT #3
Got another load of... this place
is huge!

TRANSIT CAVERN ASTRONAUT #1
I know! Go ahead and take the whole
pod down to...

The Transit Cavern Astronaut looks down the length of the transit cavern. Far off in the distance past the last of the pod lights and astronauts drifts Nadezhda who is wielding a powerful spotlight as she floats down the center of the cavern. Marvin is a ways behind her, checking out the walls.

TRANSIT CAVERN ASTRONAUT #1 (CONT'D)
Damnit!
(via comms)
(MORE)

TRANSIT CAVERN ASTRONAUT #1 (CONT'D)
 Nadezhda! You're too far past the
 line!

NADEZHDA (COMMS)
 (laughing)
 Where is sense of adventure?

TRANSIT CAVERN ASTRONAUT #1
 Back here where it's not instant
 death if something goes wrong.
 C'mon, you know the rules! What if
 you have a suit malfunction?

INT. KUIPER-1 TRANSIT CAVERN CONT.

Far away from the hangar door and lights, Nadezhda floats along with her powerful spotlight. Behind her, Marvin has come to a halt by the wall, his flashlight illuminating an intricate piece of machinery.

NADEZHDA
 (to Transit Cavern
 Astronaut, resigned)
 You have point.

She works the controls of her suit, slowing down.

NADEZHDA (CONT'D)
 Am returning to...

Nadezhda squints forward, aiming her light down the tunnel. At the very edge of the light, large withered grey trunks block the entire cavern.

NADEZHDA (CONT'D)
 Wait a moment, am seeing
 something...

As she slowly drifts forward her light illuminates the trunks clearly. They are identical to the withered stalks seen on the fossilized aliens, but as thick as redwoods. They appear to have sprouted from the floor and have grown up to fan out against the ceiling. At their base, smaller stalks have pushed their way upwards. It looks like a giant impenetrable fossilized alien mushroom forest.

NADEZHDA (CONT'D)
 (wonder, awe, a little
 disturbed)
 (in Russian)
 <What the fuck am I looking at?>

TRANSIT CAVERN ASTRONAUT #1 (COMMS)
Say again?

NADEZHDA
(excited)
Send team! Many big team! Wow...

She shines her spotlight up and down the trunks.

A gurgling and sputtering voice comes in over the intercom.

MARVIN (COMMS)
ghrrk... hk... grnnhschlck....

NADEZHDA
(looking around)
Who is...

She sees Marvin off in the distance. He is still facing the wall, twitching and convulsing, just barely able to trigger his suit's comms channel with his hand. Nadezhda throws her suit into full throttle, heading towards Marvin at high speed.

NADEZHDA (CONT'D)
(via intercom)
Need patch kit and air tank at end
of tunnel!
(to Marvin)
Marvin! Marvin, can you hear?!
(via comms)
Athena, Marvin have maybe suit
leak!

INT. ATHENA BRIDGE (WEIGHTLESSNESS)

CAPTAIN HARRIS
Ah shit.
(via comms)
All hands, we have an emergency in
the tunnel! All medical supplies to
the tunnel! Damn it people, be
careful! That's two rips in one
day!

The bridge pilot pulls up the suit pressure stats on his monitor and turns to Captain Harris, confused.

ATHENA PILOT
His suit pressure's fine.

INT. KUIPER-1 TRANSIT CAVERN

Nadezhda is rapidly approaching the convulsing Marvin. Two astronauts hauling medical kits are also nearing him from the opposite direction.

NADEZHDA

You hang on Marvin! Can last many
minutes, you be okay!

Nadezhda slams her suit thrusters in reverse as she reaches Marvin. She grabs his shoulder and spins him to face her.

ALIEN FUNGAL STALKS have erupted from Marvin's face. Some of the stalks are so large they have mushroomed out against the inside of his suit's faceplate. He is gasping and twitching in pain, his eyes dilated to different sizes.

MARVIN

Khhchgrrrk!

NADEZHDA

(screaming)

AAAAHHHHH!!!

INT. ATHENA WHEEL SECTION MAIN THOROUGHFARE (GRAVITY)

Dozens of scientists are going about their tasks. Mike appears from the upward curve of the floor, running full tilt down the thoroughfare, dodging people left and right.

MIKE

(shouting)

Out of the way! Out of the way!

INT. ATHENA ISOLATION LAB CONTROL ROOM (GRAVITY)

Mercer is at a workstation overlooking a window into the isolation labs, cataloging various pieces of information. One section of the labs is filled with various pieces of alien technology and several stalk-covered alien fossils. The other section is empty and dark.

Mike comes skidding to a halt by Mercer.

MIKE

(visibly shaken)

Is Bay 2 clean?

MERCER

What?

MIKE
Bay 2! Has it been used at all?

MERCER
No, it's...

Mike begins frantically hitting controls at the workstation, shoving Mercer aside in the process.

MIKE
Sorry, it's an emergency!

Mike hits the intercom button.

MIKE (CONT'D)
(via intercom)
Bay 2 is clear!

CAPTAIN HARRIS (COMMS)
They're on their way. I'll make a general announcement.

Mike stands back, uncertain with frustration.

MIKE
Aw hell...

MERCER
What the hell is going on??

A brief alarm sounds and some red lights around the interior light up. Captain Harris's voice comes out of the ship-wide intercom system. Everyone stops what they are doing.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (INTERCOM)
This is a Priority 1 Contamination Alert. Crewman Marvin has been infected with an unknown alien organism and is being brought to Isolation Lab Bay 2.

INT. KUIPER-1 WRECKED HANGER BAY

Clara and the other astronauts have clustered around the convulsing Marvin, who is being strapped in an equipment pod.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (COMMS)
Everyone will stay where you are until we have determined the level of dispersal of the organism. Quarantine will be activated immediately.

INT. ATHENA WHEEL SECTION MAIN THOROUGHFARE (GRAVITY)

Everyone is looking at the intercom speakers. Main doors all along the thoroughfare begin to close, cutting the rotating wheel section into sealed-off segments.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (COMMS)

If you are near an emergency medical kit, follow the quarantine instructions listed on the back of the container. Do not open it until deemed necessary by quarantine procedures.

EXT. KUIPER-1 OUTER RIM

Nadezhda, Ed, George, and Redburg are transporting Marvin towards the Athena as fast as they can.

NADEZHDA

(horribly distraught)

We have lab set up, we fix you! You be okay! We make you okay!

Marvin is barely twitching now. Spittle is foaming out of his lips. His eyes stare at nothing.

INT. ATHENA ISOLATION LAB BAY 2 INTERIOR (GRAVITY)

Marvin lies dead on the operating table. His suit has been cut open to expose his body. The alien fungal stalks now cover every inch of his skin, their continued growth just visible to the naked eye.

Beyond the lab's window to the isolation lab control room are Nadezhda, George, Redburg, Mercer, Edward, and Mike. Nadezhda is sobbing uncontrollably, staring at Marvin's body. The rest stand in a state of shock.

INT. ATHENA ISOLATION LAB CONTROL ROOM (GRAVITY)

There is the sound of a security code being entered. The segment's main door opens and Captain Harris hurriedly walks through. The door closes behind him.

EDWARD

He didn't make it.

Captain Harris looks through the window at Marvin's body, then through the window into Bay 1 at the fossilized stalks on the alien bodies.

CAPTAIN HARRIS
It's the same organism?

MIKE
Yes.

Mike pulls up some images on his workstation's screen reminiscent of an electron microscope image. He motions to some of the displayed spiky blobs.

MIKE (CONT'D)
This stuff we thought was dust?
They're spores. These...

He pulls up another image of similar-looking spiky blobs.

MIKE (CONT'D)
... are the live spores from Marvin. The computer is still running the molecular comparisons, but it looks like almost all of the old spores are degraded. Completely non-viable. The tiny fraction that haven't fallen apart from age don't grow on any of the nutrient samples we have. That's why nothing turned up in our petri tests.

CAPTAIN HARRIS
(motioning to Marvin)
What makes these different?

MIKE
We'll know in 10, maybe 15 minutes when the computer's finished its analysis.

Captain Harris stands in thought.

CAPTAIN HARRIS
We need to know how widespread the contamination is, and how these got loose on the ship.

EDWARD
We've sent a sample up to the decontamination room. They'll...

The intercom beeps.

DECONTAMINATION OPERATOR (COMMS)
Edward, we've got the results in.

EDWARD

Go ahead.

DECONTAMINATION OPERATOR (COMMS)

The decontamination procedure kills it dead. Completely, 100%, just like it was designed to.

EDWARD

You're absolutely sure.

DECONTAMINATION OPERATOR (COMMS)

We turned down the strength to just 1% and it's still fully effective. However it got onboard, it didn't come through here.

Mercer, standing in the back, looks noticeably uncomfortable.

EDWARD

Understood.

CAPTAIN HARRIS

(to Edward and Mike)

I'll be on the bridge. Let me know when you've got the molecular analysis. George, I want you in section 4 going through the personnel system. Find out exactly where Marvin went this morning.

Captain Harris punches his security code into the door. He and George exit the isolation lab control room. The door automatically closes and locks behind them.

Nadezhda is sitting down, her back against the wall, her body wracked with the occasional sob. Redburg is sitting with her in silence.

Mercer is staring in horror at the growing stalks covering Marvin's body.

Edward and Mike are busy at Mike's station, pulling up various pieces of information.

EDWARD

We need some sort of detection method. Is there any chemical signature we can key off of?

MIKE

Not that I can see. The spores are in a very low-energy configuration...

(MORE)

MIKE (CONT'D)

probably why some of them managed to survive this long. There's no way to test for that, short of giving them something they can grow on.

EDWARD

That's also something we need to know. I want you to pull a sample of every single chemical we have in the library, see if any of the spores on the aliens activate.

Mike enters various commands into the computer. Inside the isolation lab Bay 1 robotic arms begin retrieving petri dishes delivered through portals in the walls and systematically placing various tiny samples of the aliens into them.

MERCER

How long...

Edward and Mike look over at Mercer, who is still staring at Marvin. The stalks covering his body have begun to fan out across the table.

MERCER (CONT'D)

How long does it take? If we're infected... how long do we have?

MIKE

Marvin was isolated in his suit since he left this morning, so that gives us a window of at least a few hours.

MERCER

A few...

Mercer breaks off suddenly. He is now staring into Bay 1.

MERCER (CONT'D)

But.. but...

Edward follows Mercer's gaze. Inside Bay 1, a tiny fungal stalk has already sprouted from one of the petri dishes and is very slowly continuing to grow upwards. It is similar but not identical to the stalks growing out of Marvin.

MIKE

Holy shit.

Redburg stands and moves over to look into Bay 1.

REDBURG

That fast?

EDWARD

What's it growing on?

MIKE

(checking the computer)

Ammonia. I'm going to place some of
it on a dish containing earth-
normal nutrients.

Mike enters some commands into the computer. The robotic arms
in Bay 1 take a sample of the new fungal stalk and drop it
into the new petri dish. Mike focuses the video microscope on
it.

They wait.

Nothing happens.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Nothing.

EDWARD

Try an ammonia sample with the
strain from Marvin.

Mike enters more commands. A robotic arm in Bay 2 retrieves
the delivered petri dish, takes a sample from Marvin, and
drops it in the dish.

They wait.

Nothing happens.

MIKE

Two strains that are *that*
different?

REDBURG

Waitwaitwait... we see this thing
all over Kuiper-1. Say it infected
the aliens, wiped them out.
Quickly, by what we've seen. They
weren't prepared for it at all.
What if this isn't native to
wherever they came from?

EDWARD

I don't follow.

REDBURG

I mean they probably didn't bring it with them. What if they found it out here?

MIKE

What, just floating along on a rock?

EDWARD

(thinking)

We've got viable spores after a billion years. That's not an accident, it grows too well to be an accident. I think you're right, this organism evolved to survive in deep space over vast amounts of time.

MIKE

... and something like that is going to have to be able to adapt to wildly different environments!

REDBURG

It would explain why the ammonia strain grows so quickly -- it comes from a place where that chemical is common. This other strain...

(indicating Marvin)

... must be a mutation that doesn't like ammonia but feeds off of other nutrients.

The computer beeps. Mike looks over the newly-displayed information.

MIKE

We can put that theory to the test; we've got our first molecular analysis results.

NADEZHDA

Fluorescence.

Everyone looks over at the sniffing Nadezhda who is doing her damndest to pull herself together. She shakily stands up and makes her way over to the rest of the group.

NADEZHDA (CONT'D)

You want to find spores, maybe fluoresce in UV.

MIKE

That's not a bad idea.

Mike enters more commands. The lights in Bay 1 dim as a robotic arm pulls out a UV light and turns it on. Thousands of tiny spores all over the interior of Bay 1 light up as brilliant white pinpricks under the UV light.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Brilliant! Score one for Nadezh...

Mike notices the constellation of tiny white pinpricks on his hands. He leaps out of his chair towards the Bay 1 window. Closer to the UV light, he sees his entire body is covered with thousands and thousands of spores. He stares at them in horror.

Mike rushes back to his console and commands the robotic arm to bring the UV light right up to the window. The UV light reveals that they and the entire room are all covered in spores. Mercer begins frantically trying to brush the spores off of himself in a panic.

MERCER

Oh no, no no no...

A video screen on the console pops up, showing Captain Harris on the bridge. His eyes are focused on something to the side of his screen.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (VIDEO CONFERENCE)

I just got the growth report from
Isolab Bay 1. If it grows that fast
in ammonia then...

Captain Harris finally notices the shocked astronomers covered in white pinpricks over the video feed.

CAPTAIN HARRIS (VIDEO CONFERENCE)
(CONT'D)

...?

EDWARD

The spores are visible under
ultraviolet light. The whole room's
covered in 'em, and I'll bet it's
the same all over the ship.

Captain Harris gets a strange look on his face.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

We just got the molecular analysis
back from the computer.

(MORE)

EDWARD (CONT'D)
We're going to find out what this
thing doesn't like, and we're going
to use that to kill it.

Captain Harris nods and turns off his video feed.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
Who here is up on their biochem? I
only remember a little. Redburg?

REDBURG
Top of my class.

NADEZHDA
Second in mine.

Mercer just shakes his head. He is trembling and his speech
is wobbly from fright.

MERCER
I can organize. I'm good at
organizing.

Edward points to another chair.

EDWARD
We'll send the labeled fragments to
that station, you keep everything
we send you in order.
(indicating Mike, Redburg,
and Nadezhda)
We have two incompatible strains.
Knowing the difference between them
is our best shot at finding
something that will kill it but not
us.

Mike beings frantically pulling up various pieces of
information from the computer-generated analysis of the
spores for side-by-side comparison.

INT. ATHENA BRIDGE (WEIGHTLESSNESS)

Captain Harris sits alone on the bridge. He still wears the
strange and deathly-serious facial expression.

He slowly reaches forward and presses a button. A small
drawer quietly slides open, revealing his copy of "Watership
Down". He removes it, letting it float away. Underneath it is
a gun in a holster that is velcroed to the inside of the
drawer.

Captain Harris carefully removes the gun and a loaded clip. He inserts the clip and loads a round into the chamber, then attaches the gun and holster to his flight suit.

He presses another button and an picture of the Earth is displayed on one of the monitors. He stares at it, his face falling into extreme sadness, then pushes away from his chair and floats to one of the many control stations lining the interior of the bridge room.

The intercom crackles to life.

GEORGE (INTERCOM)
Captain, this is George. I've put
together the best reconstruction I
can on Marvin's movements from
yesterday to t...

Captain Harris hits a button, silencing the intercom. He enters some commands into the console, bringing up a list of security overrides. He begins activating each one in turn.

INT. ATHENA WHEEL SECTION MAIN THOROUGHFARE (GRAVITY)

A few dozen astronomers wait anxiously. George is frantically hitting the intercom.

GEORGE
Captain, do you read me? Captain
Harris!

There is a loud whirring noise followed by a locking clank from the section doors. The door panel lights shut off as the astronomers look at them with worry and confusion.

INT. ATHENA ISOLATION LAB CONTROL ROOM (GRAVITY)

The isolation lab control room's door goes through the same whirring and locking noise and its panel lights go out as well.

MIKE
... the hell was that?

EDWARD
(pointing to Mike's
screen)
Keep at it. I'll take a look.

Edward goes over to the door's control panel and tries a few buttons.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
Completely sealed off and powered
down.

He rushes over to the intercom.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
(via intercom)
Captain Harris, our doors have gone
into full lockdown and powered off.
What's going on up there? Captain?

INT. ATHENA BRIDGE (WEIGHTLESSNESS)

EDWARD (INTERCOM)
Harris! Do you read me? What the
hell is going on up there??

Captain Harris pulls up a list of all the comms channels. He
selects a control and all the channels rapidly switch over to
"Disabled" one by one.

He then floats over to another section of the bridge and
removes a panel, exposing circuitry and wiring. He begins re-
wiring certain sections.

INT. ATHENA ISOLATION LAB CONTROL ROOM (GRAVITY)

The intercom lights click off.

EDWARD
Shit.

Edward spins around and pulls up some information on a
display.

REDBURG
What's happening?

EDWARD
Harris has sealed all the doors,
cut off the comms channels... he's
even locked out my override status
in the computer! I can see what
commands he's sending but I can't
do a damned thing. What is he...

Edward enters a few commands into the system.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
That can't be right. He'd have to
rewire some of the systems on the
bridge, physically... like he's...

His display of computer commands goes blank.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
... cutting us off entirely.

INT. ATHENA BRIDGE (WEIGHTLESSNESS)

Captain Harris finishes his rewiring. On the main viewscreen a large alert pops up with a beep that says "WARNING: Spacesuit Safety Protocols Off-Line".

He pulls up a command-line window and begins typing in specific commands by hand. A text message pops up in the console window that reads "Purge".

INT. KUIPER-1 WRECKED HANGER BAY

All of the astronauts are together in a group. Clara is trying all the different comms channels on her suit.

CLARA
(to the Athena)
Come in! Anyone!
(to the other astronauts)
Still nothing. I can't reach them.

HANGAR ASTRONAUT #1
Should we go over there?

Red lights activate on each spacesuit's air tank holder. All of the air tanks evacuate their contents. Everyone struggles in their suits but they are unable to stop the oxygen purge. The struggling dies down and they all drift motionless throughout the hangar.

INT. ATHENA BRIDGE (WEIGHTLESSNESS)

Captain Harris grabs a tool case and an emergency spacesuit from an equipment locker and stuffs them under his arm. He then floats over to the bridge hatchway, opens it, and drifts through. The door closes behind him with a locking sound and the bridge systems power down, lit now only by emergency lighting.

INT. ATHENA ISOLATION LAB CONTROL ROOM (GRAVITY)

Mike, Redburg, and Nadezhda are frantically running molecular simulations and analysis on the isolab's workstations. Mercer is collating the results on his screen. Edward has ripped a panel off the wall opposite the computer workstations and is investigating the various different wires, pipes, and circuits buried within.

MIKE

Mercer?

MERCER

They look kinda similar on the surface, but these interior... uh... things... are completely different.

MIKE

Try this set.

Mike hits a control and new information and molecule diagrams appear on Mercer's screen. Mercer gets busy rearranging and rotating the molecular diagrams.

NADEZHDA

(to Mercer)

Wait! Stop! Bring back last compare.

Mercer obliges and two different molecular assemblies appear on his screen.

NADEZHDA (CONT'D)

(pointing at the screen)

Is evolved for different places, yes? Will have very much different replication structure! Only few same things!

REDBURG

You think that's its genetic structure? That twisty bit there?

MIKE

Can't be. We looked at that part. It's almost completely different in every spore we l...

Mike, Nadezhda, and Redburg all stare at each other in understanding. Mike rapidly pulls up a dozen different molecular diagrams on the screen.

MIKE (CONT'D)

I'm so stupid, of course they're different. It has to be able to feed off of whatever it lands on so its spores are going to be highly mutated all over the place!

Mike has the computer highlight molecules in the displayed structures that are similar.

MIKE (CONT'D)

It's evolved to survive high mutation rates by only having the mutations take place in these specific areas, but these markers here remain stable so that the spores won't mutate to the point of unviability!

Edward accidentally shocks himself with the innards of the wall he's digging into and flies backwards across the floor.

EDWARD

Agh! Son of a...

He gingerly picks himself up off the floor.

REDBURG

Progress?

EDWARD

Still can't get communications on-line. What did you find?

Mike has pulled up many different molecular diagrams on his screen.

MIKE

All these spores we thought were degraded? They're not, they're all just different mutations on a common theme. Try out enough chemicals and I bet you could get almost all of them to grow.

Nadezhda studies the information on the screen.

NADEZHDA

It will be maybe vulnerable in parts that are same. We focus on structure here and here.

EDWARD

What about the outer coating? Can we attack that with regular disinfectants?

Redburg throws open a supply cabinet and starts digging through it.

REDBURG

Maybe. We don't have enough computing power to simulate it so we'll have to use trial and error. And these...

He dumps out several emergency medical and cleaning kits.

REDBURG (CONT'D)

... are what we have to work with.

EDWARD

Mike, you and Mercer focus on the living organism, see if you can find any non-toxic chemicals we can ingest that will kill or neutralize it.

(to Redburg and Nadezhda)

You two focus on the spores, and I'll keep trying to contact the bridge.

Edward goes back to fiddling with the ship's innards as Nadezhda and Redburg go through one of the cleaning kits. Redburg discards one container after another.

REDBURG

Ammonia... ammonia based... contains ammonia... Doesn't leave a whole lot we can use.

Nadezhda holds up a bottle and quickly reads over its label.

NADEZHDA

Start with this, maybe?

REDBURG

Worth a shot.

INT. ATHENA TRANSIT CORRIDOR (WEIGHTLESSNESS)

The corridor entrance opens and Captain Harris floats through in his spacesuit. His gun holster has been attached to his spacesuit and he carries a tool case with him. His face is cold and serious.

He drifts down the corridor to another door and starts entering his security code.

INT. ATHENA CONDUIT CORRIDOR (WEIGHTLESSNESS)

The sealed corridor contains two technicians who have opened an access panel and are rummaging through the various conduits, pipes, and wires.

TECHNICIAN #1

I'm telling you, this one is just coolant. We can't drink that.

TECHNICIAN #2

There's got to be a water conduit in here somewhere. I'll be damned if I'm going to die of thirst before they open those goddamned doors.

The door opens, revealing Captain Harris. He carefully lets go of his tool case and steadies himself inside the door frame.

TECHNICIAN #2 (CONT'D)

Boy am I glad to see you! I thought we'd be trapped here forever!

Captain Harris removes his gun, takes careful aim, and fires.

EXT. KUIPER-1 CORE ACCESS HATCHWAY

Draglines disappear into a hatchway access tunnel that has been marked with florescent orange tape and surrounded by pod lights.

INT. KUIPER-1 CORE LARGE-SCALE SAMPLE FACILITY

Kevin emerges from a hole in the wall and shines his flashlight around.

KEVIN

Now we're getting somewhere!

Andrew emerges from the hole, followed by the four other Core Team astronauts.

ANDREW

Finally! Pipes and tubes, pipes and tubes... what's it all for?

CORE TEAM ASTRONAUT #1
 Maybe it's a playground for their
 kids. Or... larvae, or... hell,
 maybe they just clone themselves.

CORE TEAM ASTRONAUT #4
 Maybe it's for exercise in
 weightlessness and they had to
 scuttle around to do it.

CORE TEAM ASTRONAUT #3
 Great. We've discovered the
 galaxy's first interstellar hamster
 cage.

ANDREW
 You don't know that for certain.

They drift out into a huge empty space, trailing draglines
 behind them. Their flashlights are only able illuminate small
 parts of the enormous room at any one time. Rounded shapes
 loom up out of the darkness. Large pipe sections with panels
 and various odd pieces of machinery run through the center of
 the chamber. Tubes and ducts branch out of it to large
 hemispherical chambers that line the walls.

CORE TEAM ASTRONAUT #2
 I almost prefer the claustrophobia.

They shine their lights around as they continue to drift
 through the cavernous room.

CORE TEAM ASTRONAUT #4
 (frustrated)
 Nothing in this place is labeled!
 Didn't they have writing? You'd
 think that would be a fundamental
 discovery for any civilization.

ANDREW
 Makes you wonder how they did math.

KEVIN
 For all we know, they're
 bioengineered explorers made by
 some other species. Math could be
 built-in.

CORE TEAM ASTRONAUT #3
 Okay, say that's true. How did they
 record their discoveries?
 Pantomime?

ANDREW

Works for bees, doesn't it? Hold
up! What is *that*?

Andrew shines his light over an opening in one of the large hemispherical chambers that line the walls. Giant desiccated alien fungal stalks the size of trees are fanned out from the chamber's interior and hug the walls.