

Arc of the Phoenix

by

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inspired by characters created by Dan O'Bannon and John Carpenter  
and lyrics by Bill Taylor

SCREEN FLASHES RED:

*ATTENTION! ATTENTION! ATTENTION!*

Then, COMPUTER READOUT types:

*INCOMING TRANSMISSION*

*COMMANDING OFFICER EYES ONLY:*

*United Planets Space Corps council report.*

*Funding for Colonization Clean Sweep: EXPIRED.*

*Search for sentient non-terrestrial life: INCONCLUSIVE.*

*Effective immediately, all Atomic Destruction Craft and Explorer-class scout ships: TERMINATED.*

*Sorry to break this to you, guys.*

*Please keep this frequency clear to advise your own revised mission parameters.*

*Sincerely,  
General R.T. Parsley  
UPSC Explorer Mission Command.*

*TRANSMISSION ENDS.*

EXT. SPACE

A squat United Planets ATOMIC DESTRUCTION CRAFT floats above a swollen RED SUN. READOUT TYPES OVER:

*UPSC Dark Star, ADC 2239-5531*

*Crew: 5*

*Location: Veil Nebula, NGC 6960.*

*Mission time: 4 years, 6 months,  
3 days, 12 hours, 23 mins, 5 seconds.*

A filtered RADIO VOICE -- PINBACK -- is heard as the mission time ticks down. 6 seconds. 7 seconds....

PINBACK

Lieutenant Doolittle? Lieutenant?  
We have a problem with Bomb  
Number-- Augh!

The RADIO abruptly cuts off. Silence, then FEEDBACK and blowing into mike.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
 Lieutenant? I'm getting some  
 really funny readings down here,  
 and I think the Bomb Number 20  
 might be about to--

The Dark Star silently EXPLODES. Fire and debris blossom, once, twice, three times WHITING OUT THE SCREEN. Twisted, twirling objects fly out into space. One twisted, twirling object is a space-suited MAN.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
 Aaaaaaugh!

The man tumbles, flailing, collides with a spinning girder.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
 Ooof!

He grabs hold, catches his breath and depolarizes his faceplate. He is 30, moon-faced, paunchy, bearded; name tag: PINBACK, V.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
 What do you know? I made it.

Pinback notices debris float past: a toilet tank, a copy of Playboy, a scorched teddy bear with one eye missing. Pinback reaches for the bear, but only succeeds in batting it into a fast spin. A GLOW OF COLORED LIGHTS makes him look round.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
 Hey...

A LUMINESCENT GAS CLOUD is visible through the debris, growing bigger, pulsating.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
 I'm saved! Over here! Yoo hoo!

A final bright EXPLOSION.

Pinback loses his grip, shoots off again with a hundred times more speed and dwindles until he disappears, a speck among the stars.

TACTICAL DISPLAY

The image DIGITIZES to a COMPUTER SIMULATION, with Pinback depicted as a BLIP, tracing an arc across the stars.

The display ZOOMS BACK from the CYGNUS CONSTELLATION, through giant nebulae and galaxies, plotting Pinback's trajectory, which becomes less and less significant.

ON-SCREEN DATA counts down magnitudes of space: 1,400 light years... 1,500... 1,600....

In parallel, a second set of DATA shows MISSION TIME: 15 years... 20... 25... 30... and upward.

#### A TRACKING BEACON

Rotates, scanning the constant howl and crackle of DEEP SPACE STATIC. The beacon is part of a porcupine array of antennae floating above a moon. STATIC abates, tunes in, and gives way to a faint but constant BEEP.

Other larger antenna turn to face the same direction and the BEEPING noise grows stronger to a SLOW HEARTBEAT.

Far out in space, a tiny speck approaches. Floating closer, it is visible as FROZEN PINBACK.

GENERAL PARSLEY (V.O.)

How long has it been, gentlemen?  
From their last reported call-in  
to where we picked him up on the  
outer spiral arm: that's sixty  
years, at least. How long do you  
think a man could survive on his  
e.v.a.-pack alone? Anybody?  
Doctor Boron?

#### INT. MEDLAB - VIDEO DISPLAY

Numbers and medical charts scroll past, then Pinback slides into view, nude, hair and beard grown enormous, eyes closed, mouth hanging open. A thin robot arm taps his cheek. Pinback snaps awake, screen displays jump to life. He cannot move his facial muscles, but his eyeballs dart about in fright.

DOCTOR BORON (V.O.)

That's difficult to answer,  
General Parsley. A man in this  
condition, with little or no motor  
function and limited brain-wave  
activity -- I'd have given him,  
oh, twenty weeks.

The robot arm holds open one of Pinback's eyelids. Another reaches in with a needle and drops water in the eye. Robot arms continue probing and prodding, Pinback reacting all the time like a frightened laboratory animal.

GENERAL PARSLEY (V.O.)

Yet none of us can explain what  
kept him alive?

DOCTOR BORON (V.O.)  
At this point, no. Sergeant  
Pinback is either an extraordinary  
man, or extraordinarily lucky.

DOCTOR HAYDEN (V.O.)  
There's nothing extraordinary  
about his intellect. He's nearly  
fifty points below the standard  
U.P. rating. Even by the standards  
of sixty years ago, that would  
have put him cleaning toilets.

DOCTOR BORON (V.O.)  
Don't be so quick to judge him,  
Doctor Hayden. Sergeant Pinback's  
record is exemplary. The stellar  
detonation atomic destruction  
craft embodied the pioneer spirit.

DOCTOR HAYDEN (V.O.)  
Bombing 'unstable' stars? What  
kind of mission is that? And  
whoever heard of this 'Dark Star'?

DOCTOR BORON (V.O.)  
I stand by my report. Neural decay  
is to be expected after protracted  
deep space exposure. Give him time  
to recoup. Besides, he could be  
useful to the program.

Electrodes are applied to Pinback's face. A hypodermic follows.  
His muscles twitch and spasm. He begins to gibber. More robot  
arms hold him down.

GENERAL PARSLEY (V.O.)  
Are we agreed, gentlemen, that he  
is no threat to himself or to the  
Corps?

DOCTOR HAYDEN (V.O.)  
He's no use to us.

GENERAL PARSLEY (V.O.)  
Doctor Boron?

DOCTOR BORON (V.O.)  
Sergeant Pinback is no threat.  
Keep him supervised. Send him  
home.

DOCTOR HAYDEN (V.O.)  
Just get him out of here.

Pinback breaks free for an instant. Robot arms restrain him, but he grabs a microphone and SCREAMS.

EXT. PLANET EARTH

Ringed by an equatorial space station. Space traffic flits about.

INT. EARTH STATION - DAY

A light above an airlock PINGS. The door opens.

Around the airlock, REPORTERS jostle behind a barrier with bright lights and cameras.

Flanked by a buzz-cut UPSC ESCORT, Pinback steps out of the airlock in full Space Corps uniform, a medal on his chest, his hair and beard now trimmed. Lights blaze in his face. Cries of 'There he is!' And 'Sergeant Pinback!' Pinback stares back at the reporters, bewildered, as he is led past. He gives them a little wave. The reporters go wild.

EXT. MAIN STREET, BENSON, ARIZONA - DAY

A huge banner 'Welcome home, Sergeant Pinback' spans the street.

Ticker tape is everywhere, crowds line the streets, cheering and waving flags. A marching band with teenage majorettes adorned with UPSC livery parades past, preceding an old-fashioned open top limo.

Pinback is propped up between his escorts, now growing more adept at smiling and waving, although still bewildered.

PINBACK

Like this?

ESCORT

Doing good, sir.

Pinback waves more enthusiastically and throws a kiss into the crowd. A female bystander swoons.

EXT. DUPLEX - DAY

In a residential street, banners and balloons festoon a single-story home with a chain-link fence and a grubby lawn. Cheers from onlookers as Pinback's limo arrives.

MARTHA and EVAN - a homey couple in their 40s - emerge from the duplex with a gaggle of small children and other family members.

The U.P. escort opens the limo door. Pinback steps out, and is confronted by a sea of faces staring at him, waiting for him to make the next move. One catches his eye, a sexy 23 year old girl with a shock of glorious red hair.

This is MIRANDA, and there is little doubt about what she would like to do to the prodigal space traveler.

Pinback raises his hand, in uncertain greeting. Martha runs forward and throws her arms around him, blurting tears. Evan shakes Pinback's hand and then joins in the hug. Crowd all cheer.

INT. DUPLEX, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Faces of grubby children peer in the windows, trying to catch a glimpse at the scene inside.

Martha leads Pinback into a gloomy living room crammed with family members. Pinback continues grinning and nodding at everyone, giving little waves. Miranda squeezes past and gives Pinback a sly smile.

MIRANDA

Very pleased to meet you.

MARTHA

(a mile a minute)

Of course you won't remember  
Miranda, your second cousin once  
removed. Her husband, my son  
Grady, was in space, you know, God  
rest his soul. He's dead now.  
Miranda here, she baked you this  
darlin' cake.

MIRANDA

Hope you have a sweet tooth.

Pinback sees a cake decorated with an icing sugar spaceman astride a pink rocket. Somewhere a DOG starts to bark.

EVAN

We have a surprise for you now,  
Virgil. Brace yourself, okay?

Children are pulled aside to reveal VIRGIL JR. -- a frightening fossil of an old man, somewhere in his 90s, seated in a wheelchair, a cane across his lap.

Pinback starts to smile until he notices the old man is decked out in an old Space Corp uniform, his chest full of medals.

MARTHA

Virgil, meet your brother, my granddaddy, Virgil Junior.

A hush falls on the room, although the BARKING DOG continues. The old man fixes Pinback with a steely glare and whirs forward, squinting critically.

VIRGIL JR.

(yells)

Will someone silence that dog?

The unseen dog is silenced. Pinback tries to speak but, instead, emits a croak that turns into a coughing fit.

MARTHA

Oh, my! Miranda darling, go get a glass of water, toot sweet!

MIRANDA

Yes, mama.

VIRGIL JR.

This here ain't Virgil!

The old man stabs Pinback with his cane then hits him across the knees. Pinback shrieks, fending off the blows.

PINBACK

Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow!

Shock and bafflement all around. Evan pries the cane from his grandfather-in-law. The U.P. escort looks in through the screen door.

EVAN

Pappy, please. This here is your brother. It's an Einstein time dilation. He's been lost in space for years. He's a hero now.

VIRGIL JR.

I'm tellin' you, it ain't him!

The MAD DOG from outside bounds into the room.

VIRGIL JR. (CONT'D)

Sic him, Gus!

'Gus' goes for Pinback's legs. Pinback jumps up onto the table, which upends and catapults the cake into the air --

SLOW-MO

-- As sugar spaceman and pink rocket sail across the room.

FAMILY

-- Scream and dive for cover.

MARTHA

-- Pulls the dog away from Pinback, and then looks up to see

VIRGIL JR.

-- Receives the cake, full face.

EXT. TRAILER PARK - DAY

The Space Corps limo pulls away from a mobile home, viewed by a small gathering of other trailer residents.

INSIDE THE LIMO

The escort removes his sunglasses, touches his ear and speaks into a tiny microphone:

ESCORT

Ithaca Base, the Virgil has  
landed.

INT. MOBILE HOME - DAY

Martha and Evan, now in a change of clothes, show Pinback his new home and marvel at the surroundings.

EVAN

Gotta hand it to 'em. The Corps  
looks after its own.

Pinback remains standing as Evan tests a low-slung couch, still factory-plastic-wrapped, then moves to the kitchen where a fruit basket sits, with a bottle of fancy wine and Space Corps flags. Evan opens the refrigerator, finds it filled with food, and is more impressed by a large stock of beer. He helps himself and passes one to Pinback. Martha frowns, disapproving.

MARTHA

We'll leave you to settle, Virgil  
honey. Why don't you call, after  
you freshen up? You know how to  
work it, sugar?

She points to a large dormant TV screen recessed in the ceiling. Pinback gawks up but sees no obvious controls.

EVAN

Come on by for dinner. We'll do ribs. Miranda will be there. You met Miranda, right? She'll set your feet back on the ground, Virge, know what I mean.

MARTHA

Evan!  
(then, to Pinback)  
Will you call us, hon?

PINBACK

I will. Thank you.

Evan pops the seal on the beer in Pinback's hand. Martha drags her husband out, scolding him before they are out of earshot.

MARTHA

What kind of talk is that about your own daughter-in-law?

EVAN

Gimme a break. After eighty years, a guy's gotta clean his pipes.

Pinback stares at his beer, closes the door, sits on the couch, which crinkles nosily under him.

He notices a small computer pad 'Tee Vee Gyde' on the coffee table. Pinback sets his beer down, picks up the pad. It is not a book, has no buttons or controls.

PINBACK

How do you turn it on?

On Pinback's 'on' SOUNDS OF EXPLOSIONS AND MACHINE GUN FIRE. Pinback cowers, then sees the ceiling screen playing an OLD WAR MOVIE. Pinback examines the remote again, yells into it like a walkie-talkie.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Change it!

The screen above changes to a ROAR AND FLASH OF TEETH as a lion floors an African gazelle in a nature documentary.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Change it!

BASEBALL. Pinback lays back with his beer.

EXT. TRAILER PARK - NIGHT

Pinback's new home flickers from within with TV light.

INT. MOBILE HOME - NIGHT

The ceiling screen plays ABBOTT AND COSTELLO. Pinback is still prone on the couch, his beer propped on his stomach, his head thrown back, eyes closed, mouth open. He SNORES.

Abbot and Costello RECEDE INTO THE CEILING, STARS APPEAR BEHIND THEM, MOVING OUT OF THE SCREEN TOWARDS--

Pinback, on the couch. He opens his eyes.

THE STARS EMANATING FROM THE CEILING accelerate, surrounding Pinback.

PINBACK

Cool.

Pinback gently waves his hands before his face, like a kid in a 3D movie, until he notices a red glow above him. The view through space approaches a RED SUN.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Oh, no, man...

Pinback fumbles for the remote.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Change it! Change it!

Closer, above the sun, a SHIP: the Dark Star.

TALBY (V.O.)

What's the problem, Pinback?

INT. DARK STAR, OBSERVATION DOME

Inside a plexi bubble under stars on the dorsal fin of the Dark Star, Pinback is lying as he was on his couch in Arizona, facing TALBY - bearded, 28, skinny, in Dark Star fatigues - seated opposite in the observation chair.

TALBY

I said, what's the problem?

PINBACK

Talby?

TALBY

No-one ever comes up here to see me unless they have a problem. Not even you, Pinback, and you're the sanest of them all.

Pinback sits up. He still has his beer and remote.

PINBACK

I am?

TALBY

I like you, Pinback. You're different. The others, they were always jerks, but no-one's been the same since Commander Powell died.

Pinback tries to stand and, BONG, hits his head on the transparent dome. He rubs his head.

PINBACK

Where am I? How did I get here?

TALBY

It's the Phoenix Asteroids. She'll take you there.

PINBACK

Huh?

Suddenly, panic and klaxons --

INT. DARK STAR, CORRIDOR

-- And Pinback finds himself below decks, dressed in his space suit, amid flashing lights and jets of steam. BOILER - a portly, longhaired crewman, 34, with a walrus moustache and a Hawaiian shirt - runs up, distraught.

BOILER

Where the hell you been, Pinback?

PINBACK

I don't know.

BOILER

You're not going out there, are you?

PINBACK

What? No, I was watching baseball, and then-- I mean, this all happened years ago, Bomb Number 20--

BOILER  
Don't do it! You'll kill us all!

EXT. SPACE

The Dark Star EXPLODES.

INT. MOBILE HOME - CONTINUOUS

Pinback jolts awake, tumbles off the couch and hits his head on the coffee table. A shrill WARBLING SOUND begins. Pinback blocks his ears. He looks up at the ceiling.

Back-lit against stars, the silhouette of a DARK-HAIRED GIRL is staring down at him.

Pinback is transfixed, then closes his eyes. The WARBLING SOUND continues, TV SOUNDS gradually resume. Pinback looks up again.

Abbott and Costello have returned, with a graphic that flashes red in the corner of the screen in time with the WARBLING: 'You have a call.' Pinback stands, wet from spilt beer. He discovers the remote flashing a graphic of a telephone. He speaks into it, experimentally.

PINBACK  
Hello?

MARTHA (O.S.)  
Up here, Virgil!

Pinback looks up at the ceiling, where Martha has replaced the TV broadcast.

MARTHA (CONT'D)  
Look at you. Your head, it's  
bleeding.

PINBACK  
Oh, I guess I fell asleep. Look,  
Martha, I'm not up to ribs  
tonight.

MARTHA  
Want me to come over? I'm  
supposed to keep an eye on you,  
you know.

PINBACK  
You are? No, that's okay.

MARTHA  
Breakfast then? Tomorrow: eight  
o'clock?

PINBACK  
Breakfast will be fine. Bye bye.

Pinback fumbles the controller, trying to hang up, then whips around in fright, as

-- Above him, the TV AUDIENCE LAUGHS.

EXT. TELESCOPE ARRAY - NIGHT

A giant radio telescope beneath the stars is overgrown with vegetation. Another dish beside it has fallen off and become home for a community of cats.

INT. DINGY CORRIDOR - NIGHT

FEET march along concrete, stop at a door: 'General R.T. Parsley.' KNOCK KNOCK.

INT. CLAUSTROPHOBIC OFFICE - NIGHT

GENERAL PARSLEY - bullish, ruddy, 50s - looks up from his copy of Field and Stream as HADLEY - a youthful aide - enters and presents a computer printout.

HADLEY  
They confirmed.

Parsley grabs his coat. Hadley helps him with it. They gather up other documents on the General's desk.

GENERAL PARSLEY  
Give me the short version.

HADLEY  
VLAs in Tsiolkovsky crater,  
Jo'burg and Mileura all  
corroborate a 94-percent  
probability NTI. A definite  
unknown. Out of the Veil Nebula.

GENERAL PARSLEY  
The pink one?

HADLEY  
Yes, sir. Very pretty. Right out  
on the rim. Local traffic are  
scanning to see if we have anyone  
out there. General, does this mean  
we'll be going back to Langley?

GENERAL PARSLEY

Hadley, my boy, if this all goes  
to plan, the President herself  
will be inviting us to tea.

EXT. SPACE

The lumbering space tug 'Wanderer' slowly blots out stars as it  
chugs through space.

The sound of a subspace frequency CRACKLES WITH STATIC, then  
tunes in to the same TV SHOW that Pinback was watching.

INT. WANDERER

CLOSE ON A COMPUTER MONITOR

ABBOTT AND COSTELLO clown around on a viewscreen beside a pair  
of sneakered feet. The unseen viewer (SPRINGER) takes a swig  
from a bottle of Jack Daniels. An intercom BEEP interrupts.  
Both voices are female.

SPRINGER (O.S.)

What?

REISS (O.S.)

Incoming. Channel Five.

SPRINGER (O.S.)

I'm busy.

REISS (O.S.)

It's the Corps.

SPRINGER (O.S.)

Shit. What have we done now?

EXT. DUPLEX - DAY

Miranda walks up to Martha and Evan's house, carrying a bag of  
groceries. The children are playing spacemen on the lawn.

INT. DUPLEX, KITCHEN - DAY

Miranda boots the kitchen screen door and peers in.

MIRANDA

Someone gonna let me in?

Martha and Evan are seated eating breakfast, Evan dressed in his Buy Big manager's uniform. Martha lets Miranda in and signals her to shush.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)  
What's with the long faces?

Evan jerks a thumb toward the living room.

EVAN  
Buck Rogers crash landed last night.

MARTHA  
Virgil's having problems. We had to rescue him. He's talking with his counselor. They told us not to leave him alone.

MIRANDA  
They did?

Martha takes the groceries from Miranda, who goes to the kitchen serving hatch and peeps through.

INT. DUPLEX, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Blinds have been drawn, a sofa bed extended. Pinback is seated, hunched, before the wall-sized family TV. He is dressed in sweats and an oversize plaid shirt, his forehead bandaged, and he is wringing a paper napkin to a pulp, addressing a CompuCounselor™ HOLOGRAM onscreen.

PINBACK  
I've always had a problem getting through to people, you know? Four years on the ship, that's like 20 here on Earth. You try to share a little joke, friendly conversation, you know? No-one would even....

The hologram image is frozen.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
Hello?

HOLOGRAM  
Please continue, Virgil.

PINBACK  
I can't. That's just it. I can't go on like this. I've been having dreams. I think I'm losing my mind.

The hologram gives a sympathetic frown, then JUDDERS and PIXILATES a little. A WHIRRING from a vidphone on an end- table by the sofa, and a long strip of paper begins printing.

HOLOGRAM

These should stop your dreams.  
Take three in addition to your  
usual medication and we will speak  
again next week.

PINBACK

But, I'm not on any medication.

HOLOGRAM

You're not?

PINBACK

Just one beer.

The hologram JUDDERS and PIXILATES again.

HOLOGRAM

Virgil: alienation, dislocation,  
dreams, these are common side  
effects when home is no longer  
home. You need kindness, you need  
warmth. You need 30 milligrams of  
chlorpromazine hydrochloride three  
times a day.

The printer finishes printing. Pinback tears off the strip,  
very glum.

HOLOGRAM (CONT'D)

(sympathetic)

What is it, Virgil?

PINBACK

I just want to know... why me?

HOLOGRAM

Why you, alone, survived?

Pinback nods, starts to sob.

PINBACK

There was an accident on the ship,  
Lieutenant Doolittle... he tried  
to save us. Bomb Number 20 would  
not respond. I tried to... warn  
him.

HOLOGRAM

Virgil, nothing can bring them  
back. Take your medication and  
accept the kindness of your  
family, okay?

Pinback nods, wipes his eyes. The hologram grins.

HOLOGRAM (CONT'D)  
And don't be a stranger!

EXT. DUPLEX, KITCHEN - DAY

Evan and Martha have joined Miranda to eavesdrop at the serving hatch. They hurry back to their breakfasts, but Miranda remains standing as Pinback enters with his prescription. He brightens, seeing Miranda.

PINBACK  
Oh, hi.

MARTHA  
Virgil, won't you have some  
breakfast with us now?

PINBACK  
No, I really got to be going. Real  
sorry about last night.

MIRANDA  
What happened to your head?

PINBACK  
Oh, just bad dreams. Guess I'm  
still a little loopy. Ha ha. Is  
there a drug store near here?

EVAN  
I'll drop you.

MARTHA  
Why don't you walk him, Miranda?

Miranda smiles. Pinback looks uneasy.

MARTHA (CONT'D)  
It's only a few blocks, if you cut  
through the park. Go see what's  
become of your home town!

Miranda steals a piece of toast, feeds it to Pinback, links her arm in his and drags him out. Evan laughs.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Pinback walks, eating toast, studying the trees. Miranda watches him closely.

MIRANDA  
My husband was in space.

PINBACK  
Mhm, Grady, right?

MIRANDA  
Yeah, he was up on the Ring, in construction. They say he floated off one day an' died like a shootin' star. You know the Ring? You come through it on your way down.

PINBACK  
Oh, that. Yes, it's huge. Amazing. I'm sorry that he died.

MIRANDA  
I never been off-world. Grady always said he'd take me. Closest I got was livin' out at Ascension Station, then little Grady Junior came along, and Clovis and Monique....

Miranda squeezes his arm.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)  
You ever do it weightless? I hear it's wild.

PINBACK  
Do it?

MIRANDA  
You know. Sex.

PINBACK  
Look, Melinda...

Miranda stops him with a smile.

MIRANDA  
'Miranda' -- it means 'worthy to be admired.'

PINBACK  
Miranda. This is difficult for me.

MIRANDA  
Don't you like girls?

PINBACK  
Oh, sure I do. Everyone's been great. I just don't feel... that I fit in.

MIRANDA

Let me help you, Virgil.

Miranda kisses him and pushes him into undergrowth surrounding a statue of an Indian Chief.

IN THE BUSHES

Miranda pins Pinback up against a boulder, kissing and nibbling, raking at his shirt.

PINBACK

Miranda, please, there's been a big mistake.

MIRANDA

I don't care, you're gorgeous!

She slinks down out of view. The sound of a small ZZZIP. Pinback gasps, looks down, then buckles at the knees.

BACK ON THE PATH

a jogger passes by and sees the bushes shaking.

IN THE BUSHES

Pinback is on his back, Miranda astride him in a frenzy. Behind her, the statue of the Indian Chief DISSOLVES AWAY and A VORTEX OF STARS APPEARS IN THE SKY.

PINBACK

No...

MIRANDA

Yes! You -- fit -- perfect!

The stars behind Miranda rush forward, then EXPLODE. Pinback chokes back a cry. The DARK-HAIRED GIRL has appeared, staring down, her hair blowing in a corona.

DARK-HAIRED GIRL

Tell me, Virgil, how does it feel to be home?

Pinback SCREAMS.

INT. MOBILE HOME - DAY

The ceiling screen has been covered with a sheet. Martha brings hot soup to Pinback in his bed. Miranda is applying a compress to his head.

Pinback tries the soup and sees a gang of children watching from the doorway. Evan shoos them out of his way as he enters, carrying an old portable TV.

EVAN

Quite a mileage on her, but she's a push button beauty. See if you can resist throwing a chair through this one, eh, Virge? Just here okay?

Pinback sits bolt upright in alarm as Evan plants the TV by his bed.

MARTHA

It's not going to hurt you, hon.

EVAN

Jeez, what did you do to him, Miranda?

MARTHA

Evan, don't start.

EVAN

Me start?

A little boy runs in and aims a toy ray gun at Pinback.

CLOVIS

Space alien broked his tee vee with a ray gun. *Pwee! Pwee! Pwee!*

Miranda disarms the child.

MARTHA

I think it's time Virgil had a little alone time, from all of us. Miranda?

Miranda exits with Clovis and pokes her tongue out at Evan. Martha swats Evan on the butt, dismissing him, too, then switches on the TV: a DAYTIME SOAP OPERA.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Oh, it's 'The Family,' my favorite. Did you have them in space? It's interactive. When they look at you, you answer.

PINBACK

No, I... oh, gosh.  
(becoming emotional)  
I don't know why I'm here.

Martha shushes him.

MARTHA

Honey, don't fret. The nice man from the Corps said he'd stop by later. Just remember we love you, okay? Whoever you are. Get well.

Martha kisses him and then exits and shuts the door behind her. The door BEEPS, followed by a CLICK. Pinback jumps up, tries the door, then windows. Locked. Outside, a CAR starts up and drives away.

PINBACK

No! Wait! Come back!

Pinback paces, notices the TV: members of 'The Family' are frozen, staring at him, a graphic flashing: 'WHAT DO YOU THINK, VIRGIL?' Pinback turns off the TV.

INT. WANDERER, CORRIDOR

CLOSE ON

COMBAT BOOTS, a pair of ROBOT FEET and SNEAKERS march along a metal grid floor. These people mean business.

The mysterious trio stops at a door which POPS open revealing BLINDING COLORED LIGHTS. Pinback emerges from the light, dressed in ducky pajamas, and salutes.

INT. MOBILE HOME - DAY

Pinback wakes, perspiring and saluting. He is wearing the same pajamas from his dream, sitting up in bed, RAIN falling outside. He sees Miranda seated nearby, knitting. The smallest of her children is by her feet with a robot toy. The TV is playing a NEWS REPORT about local celebrity astronaut Virgil Pinback, now convalescing.

MIRANDA

Feeling better?

PINBACK

No. What day is it?

MIRANDA

Wednesday, no, it's Thursday. Martha slipped a mickey in your soup. Lord knows it worked. You've been out for hours. I have your medication.

PINBACK

Oh. Thank you.

Pinback sees a medicine bottle on his bedside. He picks it up, opens it, shakes out a caplet as fat as a cockroach, regards it as if it might be one.

Miranda stands and pours a glass of water. She sits on Pinback's bed, strokes back his hair.

MIRANDA  
You were talking in your sleep.

PINBACK  
What was I saying?

MIRANDA  
Muhmm mummma mummmbla Dably penis.

PINBACK  
Talby Phoenix?

MIRANDA  
Virgil, I don't know. Are you gonna drink this or am I gonna have to stick it where the sun don't shine?

Pinback beckons Miranda close.

PINBACK  
Did Martha say anything to you?

MIRANDA  
About what?

PINBACK  
I'm not... who you think I am. Not that guy on the TV news.

MIRANDA  
Virgil, we love you for who you are, not what you are.

PINBACK  
No, listen: there was a mixup on the Dark Star. I was out in space, but I'm not... him. You and I, we're not related.

MIRANDA  
It's okay, Virgil. Second cousins is not blood relations. There's nothin' weird in that.

Pinback grabs Miranda's arm, becoming slightly manic.

PINBACK  
I'm not Virgil!

MIRANDA  
You're scaring me.

PINBACK  
Help me, Miranda. I've got to get  
back out there. Back to space. Can  
you help me, please?

Miranda looks afraid. Pinback releases her, distressed. He  
tries to touch her but she pulls away and hides her face.

MIRANDA  
I'm sorry, I can't do this.

Miranda starts to cry. The UPSC escort lays a reassuring hand  
on her shoulder, startling Pinback.

ESCORT  
Move aside, please, ma'am.

PINBACK  
Who let you in here?

MIRANDA  
I'm so sorry, Virgil. I guess this  
is goodbye.

Miranda dabs her eyes, picks up her child and leaves in floods  
of tears. Pinback glimpses Evan and Martha waiting outside with  
umbrellas. A second UPSC escort closes the door. The first  
escort produces a high-tech-looking hypodermic. Right on cue,  
LIGHTNING FLASHES.

ESCORT  
Sir, please pull down your pants.

PINBACK  
What the hell is that? You get  
away from me. Miranda! Martha!  
Help!

Escort #1 nods to his partner, who swiftly overpowers Pinback,  
flipping him face down on the bed, muffling his screams, and  
pulling down Pinback's pajama pants.

ESCORT  
Should've listened to the lady,  
sir.

Escort #1 administers the hypodermic to Pinback's buttocks. As  
Pinback's struggle subsides and a silly grin spreads over his  
face, the TV NEWS ANCHOR continues:

## TV NEWS

Sergeant Pinback, who is scheduled to be decorated as Major next week at the White House, is enjoying long overdue r&r, in the bosom of his family in Benson, Arizona.

ON TV: Parade footage, stock shots of the town:

## TV NEWS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Local spokesmen report that golf and water sports number among the spaceman's agenda. Insiders meanwhile indicate that love may be in the air, before the Major's next mission.

ON TV: Back to the studio:

## TV NEWS (CONT'D)

But don't be too concerned, ladies: Space Corps sources just recently confirmed details of a new Explorer mission, the first in over thirty years. Details remain classified. More at eleven.

## INT. BACTA TANK - UNDERWATER

Pinback's body plunges into soupy liquid. Bubbles cascade around his pale body, which is naked but for a pair of billowing shorts and a tangle of electrodes wired to his skin. He twitches, snorts big bubbles.

## INT. ASYLUM, CELL - DAY

Blinds snap back to emit morning light, revealing Pinback in a nightshirt, curled in a fetal position on a cot.

## NURSE (O.S.)

Good morning, Virgil. Time for your walk.

## EXT. ASYLUM - DAY

A glorious day, green lawns, flowers, trees in blossom.

The NURSE, a metallic android, pushes Pinback in a chair. Pinback is wearing sunglasses and hospital pajamas. Other inmates are seated or wandering about. Pinback's nurse stops before a group playing ball, supervised by ANDROID ORDERLIES.

NURSE  
Would you like to play?

PINBACK  
I want to see a doctor.

INT. ASYLUM, ACTIVITY ROOM - DAY

Still in his wheelchair and wearing sunglasses, Pinback wheels himself around an antiseptic white room, keeping his distance from other inmates. He skirts a game of ping pong, stops before a tough-looking android orderly seated by a metal door.

PINBACK  
I want to see a doctor.

No reaction. Pinback steers himself away, views the faces of the other inmates. An OLD MAN in baggy pajamas goes up to the orderly and repeats, "I want to see a doctor. I want to see a doctor."

Pinback moves off into a corner. A man playing a STRINGLESS GUITAR nods a greeting and then hands Pinback a harmonica.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
I just want to see a doctor.

Stringless strums the air, SINGS: "I just want to see a doctor." Other inmates clap along and sing. Some begin to dance. The android orderly gets to its feet but cannot stop the uprising. Pinback joins in with the clapping.

INT. ASYLUM, CELL

Two android orderlies throw Pinback into his cell. The nurse enters with a hypodermic.

PINBACK  
No!

Pinback SCREAMS as the orderlies hold him down. The nurse jabs him in the buttocks, they all exit, then the door slams to BLACK.

DARKNESS

is pierced by a narrow beam of light that reveals Pinback's bloodshot eyes.

Three figures stand looking over him in silhouette.

Pinback flails feebly and hunkers up against a wall. He squints against the light as he hears them confer. Humans. One raises his voice:

DOCTOR BORON  
Sergeant Pinback?

Pinback opens his mouth, cannot speak.

DOCTOR HAYDEN  
He's too far gone, we've lost him.

PINBACK  
No!  
(coughs)  
That's me! I'm Pinback! Who are you? Am I dreaming?

The silhouettes confer again, nodding, shaking of heads. They step aside to emit two orderlies with glowing eyes. Androids. Pinback WAILS, scuttles away.

A hypodermic is pressed into Pinback's arm. He falls limp again, losing focus as GENERAL PARSLEY LEANS IN OVER HIM AND SMILES.

GENERAL PARSLEY  
Welcome back, son.

EXT. SPACE

The Wanderer drifts against a belt of asteroids, moored to a MINING PLATFORM, Orcon Waystation 59.

INT. WANDERER, AIRLOCK

An airlock opens, revealing Pinback in immaculate UPSC fatigues, a kit bag at his feet, a folio under his arm.

A well-worn NAVBOT-class automaton - man-sized, nuts and bolts design, resembling a motorcycle cylinder on legs - steps forward to greet him. Navbot CLICKS and WHIRS. Pinback displays his Space Corps i.d.

NAVBOT  
Welcome aboard, Major Pinback, V.  
I am Navbot. Please follow me.

The robot clanks and starts to march off down the corridor. It halts, seeing Pinback hesitate. CLICKS and WHIRS.

NAVBOT (CONT'D)  
Something wrong, sir?

PINBACK  
I know this place.

Navbot strikes a pose:

NAVBOT  
Trans-stellar freight hauler,  
registration 180924610, Class B.  
2.8 terawatt fusion reactor. Twin  
Bison lifters. Crew: 3. Capacity:  
16 million tons. Wanderer -- named  
after the song, sir.

INT. WANDERER, CORRIDOR

Navbot leads Pinback down a long, low corridor, carrying Pinback's kit bag and SINGING, in mechanical staccato:

NAVBOT  
*Oh, I'm the type of guy who will  
never settle down. Where pretty  
girls are well, you know that I  
will be around. I kiss them and I  
love them 'cause, to me, they're  
all the same. I hug them and I  
squeeze them, they don't even know  
my name. Call me the wanderer.  
Yes, the wanderer. I roam around,  
around, around.*

They pass an abandoned bicycle, an upturned chair, stacks of magazines. Pinback regards the mess, and the unself-conscious robot, and absentmindedly hums along.

CLOSE ON A COMPUTER MONITOR

Seen from a high angle, security camera point-of-view, Pinback and Navbot stop outside a door.

REISS (O.S.)  
Can you believe it?

SPRINGER (O.S.)  
Yes.

INT. WANDERER, NAVIGATION ROOM

The door opens and Pinback steps in, speaking back to Navbot.

PINBACK  
Thank you, my good fello--

Pinback stops in shock.

The Dark-Haired Girl, EDIE SPRINGER - trim, 33, completely uncompromising - is seated at a command post with the remains of a half-eaten meal before her. Her co-pilot, ESTHER REISS - butch, African American, 42 - sits across from her, smoking a cigar. Nobody moves or speaks as Navbot enters and dumps Pinback's kit bag with a loud CLANG.

Pinback is unable to take his eyes off Springer. Reiss glances at her captain, uneasy. Navbot WHIRS and emits the sound of a BOATSWAIN'S WHISTLE.

NAVBOT

May I introduce, Major--

SPRINGER

We know who he is. Are those our orders?

Pinback looks down at his document folio.

PINBACK

It's classified. I'm supposed to fill you in when we get under way, After that, I'll liaise with Space Corps through your Navigation robot.

A sarcastic LAUGH from Reiss. She blows smoke at Pinback, who COUGHS.

SPRINGER

You'll 'liaise'?

PINBACK

Yes, has he been patched in?

REISS

He's been malfunctioning since your people did whatever they did to him.

PINBACK

Oh. Well, he's our link with Corps control. They have him hooked into their network. As long as he's in touch with your on-board computer, he'll be their eyes and ears. We will make reports every 14 hours.

REISS

Great.

PINBACK

Control suggested we make Navbot mission commander--

Reiss gives Springer an incredulous look and stubs out her cigarette. Springer stands and faces Pinback, very close.

SPRINGER

As far as I'm concerned, you guys are paying me to rent my ship. This is my vessel, I'm the captain. I'm not having my own hardware pulling rank on me, Major.

Navbot WHIRS agitatedly.

PINBACK

You don't have to call me 'Major' -- 'Virgil' will be fine.

SPRINGER

No, deal, Virgil.

Reiss smothers LAUGHTER. Springer is far from joking.

PINBACK

Perhaps we could discuss this once we're under way? Maybe over dinner?

SPRINGER

Are you kidding me?

Pinback clasps his folio defensively to his chest.

PINBACK

As soon as we get out of here, I'll tell you everything I know.

Springer scrutinizes Pinback's face, then turns and exits through an adjoining doorway. Reiss views Pinback with dismay then stands and follows Springer. Pinback, looking lost, turns to Navbot.

NAVBOT

The flight deck, sir.

INT. WANDERER, FLIGHT DECK

Navbot leads Pinback through to where Springer and Reiss are seated, powering up displays. Lights come on all around, revealing further clutter, coffee cups, discarded food.

SPRINGER

I thought I told you to get Navbot to clean this place up?

REISS

I did. Navbot, get your ass in here!

Navbot extends a hand to Pinback, WHIRS.

NAVBOT

The mission file, sir.

Pinback opens his folio, hands over brightly-colored info keys. Navbot takes position at the navigator's terminal and begins to insert the keys, closely watched by Reiss.

Springer points Pinback to a spare seat below her. He clears away garbage, straps himself in. The HUM of engines rises.

SPRINGER

Tell me, Virgil, how does it feel to be home?

Pinback looks at Springer strangely.

Reiss speaks into her comlink.

REISS

OrCon Waystation 59, this is UPSC. Wanderer waiting to disengage.

ORCON VOICE

(filtered)

Roger that, Wanderer, you are clear to disengage.

REISS

Disengaging. Mark.

A dull CLANG, far off in the ship.

REISS (CONT'D)

We have separation.

SPRINGER

Take us out then, navigator.

Navbot CLICKS and WHIRS.

EXT. SPACE

The Wanderer leaves its payload moored to the mining platform and maneuvers into space.

ORCON VOICE  
 (filtered)  
 Wanderer, this is Orcon fiver-  
 niner. You are clear for sub-light  
 ignition. Repeat: you are clear  
 for sub-light ignition.

REISS  
 (filtered)  
 Roger that, Orcon.

The tug's engines IGNITE and shunt the ship away.

INT. WANDERER, FLIGHT DECK

SPRINGER  
 Can we cut this sub-light crap and  
 stop farting around?

REISS  
 Not my flight plan, baby.

NAVBOT  
 Hyperdrive sequence begun.

Pinback grips his chair as HYPERDRIVE KICKS IN, momentarily  
 scrambling his molecules and powering him back into his seat.

EXT. SPACE - TRAVELING

The Wanderer streaks off into hyperspace.

INT. WANDERER, CORRIDOR - LATER

Pinback looks a little shaky, still not on his space legs, as  
 he follows Navbot, Reiss and Springer to another deck.

NAVBOT  
 May I assist you, Major?

PINBACK  
 No, no. Thank you. Ha ha. I always  
 hated hyperspaaa--

Pinback trips and falls like a sack of potatoes.

## INT. WANDERER, CAPTAIN'S LOUNGE/QUARTERS

A large lighted screen displays mugshots and biometrics of a much more youthful, smiling Pinback and other members of the Dark Star crew:

Communications officer: PINBACK, V.

Navigator: BOILER, T.

Science officer: TALBY, R.

Chief engineer: DOOLITTLE, S.

Mission commander: POWELL, G.

Pinback stands before the screen, a new contusion on his head.

PINBACK

These were the crew, my friends,  
from the original Dark Star  
mission. We were four years in  
space, looking for habitable  
planets and gathering samples of  
non-terrestrial life out in the  
Veil Nebula.

He clicks a button. A fuzzy, orange BLOB appears on screen.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

This is what we found.

Springer and Reiss are seated in a conversation pit in the dim-lit room. Navbot is standing behind them, hooked up to a computer.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

We called them 'farks,' or at  
least that is what I thought our  
commander called them. We ran into  
thousands of these little things,  
like bags of air floating around  
one planet. They were alive, but  
completely mindless and we found  
out that they bite. At least, I  
did. And I thought they were cute.  
Oooh, boy. Ha ha.

Springer and Reiss remain impassive as Pinback laughs at his own joke. Reiss takes out a new cigar. Pinback frowns.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Do you mind?

Reiss shrugs, puts the cigar back into her pocket.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Anyway. We sent our data back to Earth. Everyone went gaga for it at first, then, well, they lost interest. We were gone so long. Other missions turned out the same. Either space was just too big, or there was really nothing out there but bags of air.

REISS

You knew my old man?

Pinback is confused, until he realizes Reiss is being sarcastic.

SPRINGER

Major, this is fascinating, but how does any of this interest us?

PINBACK

They found another alien. Non-terrestrial intelligence.

Pinback clicks again. A STAR CHART appears on screen, showing two BLIPS -- one red, one yellow -- both traveling along projected arcs, toward each other.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

This one's moving, self-propelled. You were the nearest ship on intercept. We should meet them here.

Pinback points to a circled intercept point on screen.

REISS

Sounds fishy.

SPRINGER

Yeah, how come we hear rumors this is a military mission?

PINBACK

That's the cover story. You're right. There's no funding for this kind of mission any more. This object, they call it 'X,' might be a real alien. One that talks and thinks. Someone's got to check it out. Here's our course 'Y,' we meet at 'Z'.

SPRINGER

What do they know about X?

PINBACK

It's a non-ballistic arc, self-guided, mostly mineral. I guess they figured I'm their best shot to make contact with it.

REISS

God help us.

SPRINGER

Esther, cut it out.

PINBACK

Can we have the lights up, please?

Navbot BEEPS and disconnects from the ship's computer. Lights flicker on, revealing a split-level lounge full of books and clutter adjoining Springer's private quarters.

SPRINGER

What I want to know: is that really all you can tell us, or is that all you are allowed to tell us?

Reiss stands to stretch and rub her back.

PINBACK

Can we talk in private?

Reiss stops in mid-yawn.

SPRINGER

No, we cannot, Pinback. Reiss, sit down.

REISS

I'm not going anywhere.

PINBACK

I need to talk to you, man to man. Or woman. Off the record.

Navbot WHISTLES in alarm, entangled in wires at the computer link. Springer considers this a moment and then directs a warning glare at Pinback.

SPRINGER

Esther, see if you can lend our navigator a hand, will you? I think your tool kit was on the flight deck.

Reiss hesitates.

SPRINGER (CONT'D)  
Go on, I can handle this.

Reiss wrenches Navbot from the computer terminal and, with some difficulty, coaxes him out of the room. Springer waits until the doors close and she is alone with Pinback.

SPRINGER (CONT'D)  
Drink?

PINBACK  
Ah, um, ooh, sure.

Pinback follows Springer into the

SPRINGER'S QUARTERS

A neat and ordered haven with a roll-top-bureau, library, leather couch, and a window onto stars. An open doorway leads to a BEDROOM. Springer crosses to the bureau and opens it to reveal a cocktail cabinet. Pinback peers at an antique GLOBE of planet Earth, and then takes a seat.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
Nice.

Springer sets out two glasses, pours Scotch, downs a shot, pours another.

SPRINGER  
What's eating you, Major?

She hands him his drink and sits opposite. Pinback downs his Scotch in one and COUGHS. Springer sips her drink.

PINBACK  
(recovering)  
I've been... sick.

SPRINGER  
Want another?

PINBACK  
No! No, thanks. Smooth.

SPRINGER  
What kind of sick?

PINBACK  
They thought it was a side effect  
of my time in space.

SPRINGER  
I read about it.

PINBACK  
You know about my illness?

SPRINGER

I make it my business to know who I ship out with. All I know is they stuck you in a hard core sanitarium. You weren't playing golf.

She sips her drink, not taking her eyes off him for one moment.

PINBACK

They said I shouldn't tell you.

SPRINGER

Maybe they were right.

PINBACK

I'm not crazy.

SPRINGER

You volunteered to be here.

Pinback hesitates.

PINBACK

I think I will have another drink.

SPRINGER

Only if you tell me what really happened on the Dark Star.

Pinback looks at her again. She takes his empty glass, returns to the bar and refills both glasses.

SPRINGER (CONT'D)

You left out a few details from your little show and tell. Like your captain being dead and frozen in the ice box.

PINBACK

He wasn't dead completely. And that wasn't my fault!

SPRINGER

Yeah, it's all over the news. Your thermonuclear device got stuck in the bomb bay. Your C.O. tried to save the ship. Boom. You were miraculously thrown clear in a Zen-like dream-state that somehow saved your life.

She sits again, hands Pinback his drink and clinks 'cheers' with her own.

SPRINGER (CONT'D)

What a crock.

She sips her drink, but is unnerved by Pinback who is now staring at her intently.

PINBACK

I hate golf.

SPRINGER

What?

PINBACK

You saw the news. Sergeant Pinback had a three handicap. I don't know what end of the stick to hold. I never played a game.

SPRINGER

You're not making sense, Pinback.

PINBACK

I wish I could explain. I don't remember anything about the man I was supposed to be. All I know is I am meant to be here. I'm meant to be here with you.

Springer becomes annoyed.

SPRINGER

Okay, I don't want to hear this. I don't want to get involved. I was very happy running my own life on my own ship before you came along.

PINBACK

No, you weren't.

Springer glares at Pinback. He will not back down.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Edie, I know all about you. I know about this ship. Your robot was a cook before you had him reprogrammed. I know your co-pilot has a thing for you and her father dressed her like a boy. How do I know that? How do I know you ran away to space when you were 17? None of that is on your record.

Springer is becoming more and more enraged.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

You were in the Corps. You wanted to be a pilot since you were a little girl. There was an incident at boot camp. One of the C.O.s--

Springer grabs him by the collar.

SPRINGER

Is that what this is all about? They sent you here to dig up dirt on us?

PINBACK

No, Edie, I swear! I don't know how or why I know these things. The only reason that I'm here is no-one could explain how I know so much. Suddenly, I'm an expert on you, this ship, the alien. That's the truth!

Springer stares Pinback in the face and then pushes him away. She goes over to her bureau with her glass. Her hands are shaking as she pours another drink. Pinback coughs, regains his breath.

SPRINGER

Any theories?

PINBACK

General Parsley told me the doctors think I might be receiving transmissions from this object X. Pretty crazy, huh?

Springer looks back at Pinback. Shakes her head.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

I was wondering if you'd experienced anything yourself, like dreams?

Springer holds his gaze a moment, impenetrable, back to her poker face.

SPRINGER

Get out of here, Pinback.

PINBACK

Are you going to report me?

SPRINGER

Get out.

Pinback stands.

PINBACK

If you change your mind-- I mean,  
if you want to talk-- I mean--  
Sorry. You shouldn't drink so  
much.

Pinback walks out.

EXT. WANDERER, CORRIDOR

The door to Springer's cabin pops open. As Pinback walks out, he slaps himself about the head.

PINBACK

Idiot, idiot, idiot.

EXT. SPACE

The Wanderer travels on (MONTAGE BEGINS TO THE TUNE OF THE PLAINTIVE COUNTRY BALLAD 'BENSON ARIZONA').

INT. WANDERER

COMPUTER MONITOR

Yellow arrow on vector 'Y' slowly closes in on point 'Z'. Red arrow 'X' blips closer.

SPRINGER

watches the desktop display in her quarters, lost in thought. She goes to her bookcase, removes a few thick flight manuals and, hidden behind them, takes down a dusty PHOTO ALBUM.

PINBACK

crawls into a coffin-sized sleeping cell inset in the wall of his CABIN where he has stuck pictures of Earth: trees, fields. He adds another: baseball, then lays back and takes out his harmonica.

REISS

has Navbot in pieces on the COMMISSARY TABLE. She is smoking heavily, humming Dion's 'Wanderer' to herself. Robot pieces CLICK and WHIR.

Navbot's eyes light up, he joins in with her humming.

REISS  
Cut it out.

EXT. SPACE

As the Wanderer travels, a small POINT OF GREEN BEGINS TO GLOW BRIGHTLY, far off behind.

INT. WANDERER

SPRINGER

turns the pages of her photo album. Spaces inside, pictures missing. She stops at a holopic of a LAUGHING GIRL IN A YELLOW DRESS among a field of flowers. The picture BRIEFLY COMES TO LIFE, wind blowing the flowers, the girl laughing. Springer stares back, eyes dead, looks out to space.

PINBACK

lays with his harmonica to his lips, also deep in thought.

EXT. DUPLEX - EVENING

Lights are on in Evan and Martha's home, where,

VIEWED THROUGH THE WINDOW

Miranda is in the kitchen. She takes a bowl of popcorn through to the living room, where Evan and his BUDDIES are drinking, watching baseball on the wall-screen. One guy grabs at Miranda and she swats him away, flirtatiously.

BACK TO SCENE

PINBACK

blows into his harmonica, producing a LONG NOTE, full of angst (END MONTAGE).

INT. WANDERER, NAVIGATION ROOM

Reiss punches a combination into a food and drinks dispenser. A cup plops out, fills with coffee. Back on the table, Navbot's head starts to HUM again, his voice changing, becoming deeper, more paternal.

REISS  
I said cut it out.

NAVBOT  
(deep voice)  
*That you, lovebug?*

Reiss turns and stares back at the table. Navbot WHIRS and starts to HUM again in his new voice.

REISS  
Navbot, shut it!

NAVBOT  
(deep voice)  
*Essie, babe, that you?*

Coffee overflow into the cup in the dispenser, but Reiss pays no attention, staring incredulously at the partially disassembled robot on the table.

REISS  
Papa?

NAVBOT  
(deep voice)  
*I hear you, sugar. Where are you?  
It's awful dark in here.*

Reiss steps closer to the table, wrenches out a power plug. Navbot's eyes go dim and his humming SLURS.

EXT. SPACE

The GREEN GLOW expands, gaining on the Wanderer.

INT. WANDERER, CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS

Springer wakes at her desk, rubs her eyes, sees the photo album. The little girl has vanished from the holopic, leaving just a field of flowers. A sound of MOVEMENT in the room, then A CHILD'S LAUGHTER. Springer sits up, suddenly awake. The LITTLE GIRL IN A YELLOW DRESS is peering in at her from the lounge. Springer does not move. The Little Girl darts away. Springer stands and follows.

INT. WANDERER, NAVIGATION ROOM

Reiss noisily clears away her tools, giving Navbot's head a wide berth. She notices her coffee in the drink dispense, goes to clear up the mess. Sound of a CHILD'S LAUGHTER. Reiss looks over at Navbot, then back toward the corridor. The same LAUGHTER, unmistakable.

REISS  
What is this shit?

Reiss goes to the door, it pops open, she looks out.

INT. WANDERER, CORRIDOR

Empty. Reiss stands, looking around. A BEEPING from the command deck calls her back inside.

INT. WANDERER, ANOTHER CORRIDOR

Pinback bounds out of his cabin, dressed in shorts, a 'Team Player' T-shirt and a headband. He flexes, bends, runs on the spot and then starts off down the corridor.

Pinback jogs, punching at the air, head down and making sharp exhalations like a prize-fighter. He is in the moment, when Springer runs out of an adjoining corridor, not looking where she is going. Pinback lands her a punch on the jaw.

PINBACK

Oh my gosh. I am so sorry. Are you hurt?

Springer pushes him away, regarding Pinback's attire.

SPRINGER

What the hell?

PINBACK

I totally didn't see you. Can I get you ice? What were you running from?

Pinback follows her glance back down the intersection. There is no one there.

SPRINGER

Just back off, okay?

A HAILING TONE interrupts. Springer stabs at a wall-mounted comlink, speaks into it.

SPRINGER (CONT'D)

What?

REISS

(filtered)

You guys okay down there?

SPRINGER

Why? What is it, Esther?

REISS

I don't know. Something weird. You better get up here. You and Pinhead.

Pinback is still staring, totally confused.

PINBACK  
Now, that's not nice.

Springer keys the comlink.

SPRINGER  
On our way.

INT. SPACE

The point of GLOWING GREEN is now much closer now, traveling at a parallel distance to the Wanderer.

INT. WANDERER, FLIGHT DECK

Springer and Reiss are lit up by

A VIEWSCREEN: the view of stars receding, aft. The image MAGNIFIES to show the GLOWING PHANTOM.

REISS  
Don't know how long it's been  
there, but it sure as hell ain't  
one of ours.

Springer frowns, YELLS over her shoulder:

SPRINGER  
Pinback, get in here!

INT. WANDERER, NAVIGATION ROOM

Pinback is standing, dumbfounded, before the chaos of parts that once was Navbot. He continues through to the flight deck. Navbot's hand twitches, then starts to grope around the table.

INT. WANDERER, FLIGHT DECK

Pinback joins Springer and Reiss.

PINBACK  
We've really going to have to get  
that robot back in one piece.  
General Parsley will be expecting  
my report.  
(re: viewsgreen)  
What is that?

REISS  
Your call, Major.

PINBACK  
Oh, well, gee...

SPRINGER  
Okay, Reiss, take the helm.

Reiss runs to take her place at the controls.

PINBACK  
Wait a minute, ladies--

SPRINGER  
Shut up and sit down. Reiss, give me a vector off our charted course: one-one-five.

REISS  
One-one-five, mark.

PINBACK  
You're not changing our course?  
We've got to clear this with control!

Springer switches her screen to TACTICAL DISPLAY: the Wanderer's course shifts, the SHADOW BLIP starts to slip out of view, but then corrects to match their move.

REISS  
He's ghosting us. Vector one-on-five. Range holding.

PINBACK  
Maybe it's an echo?

SPRINGER  
Pinback, sit!

Pinback takes a seat.

SPRINGER (CONT'D)  
It's not an echo.

REISS  
It's a berzerker.

SPRINGER  
It is not.

PINBACK  
What's a berzerker?

REISS  
Alien unknown. Follow you for days, then vanish.

PINBACK  
Right, like an echo.

REISS  
Negative. Sometimes, this far out,  
ships go missing. Some folks  
reckon they are sentient  
unfriendlies. Tear a ship apart.

SPRINGER  
There is nothing out here.  
(a beat)  
Screw this sentient life shit.  
It's probably an atmospheric  
locked onto our ion trail. Give me  
spectral analysis.

Reiss throws switches.

REISS  
Way too localized for an  
atmospheric.

PINBACK  
So it's an echo, right?

SPRINGER  
Pinback, the only echo here is in  
the cavernous space between your  
ears.

Reiss LAUGHS. Pinback appears hurt. Springer switches her  
viewscreen aft: the GREEN GLOW is the same distance. A crash  
and shriek from aft (O.S.) makes everybody look up.

SPRINGER (CONT'D)  
Make yourself useful, Major, go  
check on our navigator.

PINBACK  
But I'm your liaison officer.

SPRINGER  
Then go liaise with him! Come  
right back when he's secured.

Another CRASH (O.S.). Pinback goes out, muttering.

INT. WANDERER, NAVIGATION ROOM

PINBACK  
Pinback, sit. Pinback, stay. What  
am I? A dog?

Pinback halts. Navbot has gone, only a few robot parts remain on the table. Pinback picks one up, goes out to

INT. WANDERER, CORRIDOR

Pinback stops again. WHIRS and CLUNKS ahead. He looks back to the flight deck, frowns, then heads down the corridor in pursuit of Navbot.

PINBACK  
Berzerker my ass.

INT. WANDERER, FLIGHT DECK

REISS  
What's the deal with lover boy?

SPRINGER  
I'll tell you later. What was up with Navbot?

REISS  
Not sure. The link with Corps Control has really messed him up. Edie, this is no atmospheric. You wanna have the Major call it in?

Springer SIGHS.

SPRINGER  
Take us down to sublight and cut the back-chat, will you?

Reiss backs off, in surprise.

REISS  
Yes, sir.

EXT. SPACE

The Wanderer drops out of hyperspace. The GREEN GLOW does the same, grows closer.

INT. WANDERER, CORRIDOR

Pinback nears an intersection and slows, hearing Navbot up ahead. The robot speaks with a new, smooth synthetic voice.

NAVBOT (O.S.)  
*Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.*

PINBACK

Navbot? Buddy? It's me: Pinback.

NAVBOT (O.S.)

*Dinner will be served in the  
starboard lounge this evening,  
where diners will be serenaded by  
Martin Segundo and his Scintilla  
Strings. Please, be sure to make  
your reservation.*

Pinback peers around the corner. A heavy door is half open 'Restricted Access Only,' its locking system scorched and blown apart. WHIRS and BEEPS within, followed by a WHOOSH and FTOOM of another door opening and closing.

Pinback ventures in.

EXT. SPACE

The GREEN GLOW approaches.

INT. WANDERER, FLIGHT DECK

REISS

Sub-light and falling.

SPRINGER

Range?

REISS

Closing. No, he's holding.

SPRINGER

All stop.

Reiss does not respond. A stern look from Springer.

REISS

Okay, okay!

Reiss eases back the helm.

EXT. SPACE

The Wanderer slows. The GREEN GLOW does the same.

INT. WANDERER, CORRIDOR

Pinback follows the Restricted Access hatch to a closed door at its end. The door has a small, dark window. Pinback peers through.

COMPUTER ROOM

A cocoon of winking lights, a command chair at its center. Empty.

BACK TO SCENE

Pinback nervously looks over his shoulder, looks back at the computer room, sees a red 'Emergency Access' handle, goes to touch it, peers back in the darkened window--

The computer room door POPS OPEN and Navbot leaps out with a MECHANICAL SCREECH, eyes blazing. He lands on top of Pinback and pins him to the floor.

PINBACK

Argh! Get off me! Get off!

Navbot grabs Pinback's throat. Pinback GAGS and SCREAMS. Navbot's head does a 360-degree rotation.

INT. WANDERER, ANOTHER CORRIDOR

The din resounds.

EXT. SPACE

The Wanderer comes to rest.

The GREEN GLOW does the same.

INT. WANDERER, FLIGHT DECK

Springer sits tense above her viewscreen.

Reiss waits for her next order.

Springer sits up, frowns.

Reiss sees it on her own monitor.

REISS

Oh, shit. Oh, holy shit.

EXT. SPACE

The GREEN GLOW begins to close on the Wanderer.

INT. WANDERER, FLIGHT DECK

SPRINGER

Hit it.

Reiss throws switches. Nothing.

SPRINGER (CONT'D)

Light speed, Reiss. Get us out of here. Now.

Reiss' viewscreen shows INTERFERENCE.

REISS

I'm trying! There's no response. Something's jamming my controls.

Springer jumps up from her chair, but before she can get to Reiss' console, Reiss' viewscreen clears to show a GHOSTLY IMAGE OF A BEARDED MAN'S FACE. The ghostly face winks.

Reiss leaps back in fright, colliding with Springer.

REISS (CONT'D)

What in hell is going on here? Did you see that? My freaking father's face just winked at me from that screen.

Springer grabs her, makes her sit. All viewscreens have become obscured by INTERFERENCE AGAIN. Springer toggles controls, to no avail.

SPRINGER

It must be internal. A virus in our crew files.

REISS

I have another theory.

SPRINGER

Like what?

REISS

Ever since that clown came on board, this whole place has gone to crap. I'm hearing spooks, I swear, like laughter. About half an hour ago.

Reiss now sees Springer starting to look pale.

SPRINGER  
You're imagining things.

REISS  
I know what I heard.

Springer YELLS into the navigation room.

SPRINGER  
Pinback!

She stabs at a comlink.

SPRINGER (CONT'D)  
Pinback, report!

Very faint over the comlink, the SOUNDS OF PINBACK'S SCREAMS.  
Springer looks back at the viewscreen.

REISS  
What is that it, Edie?

ON SCREEN: the GREEN GLOW fills frame, hypnotic.

SPRINGER  
I don't think anyone on this  
mission knows what in hell they  
are getting themselves into.

Springer reaches under a console, pulls out an ugly PULSE GUN,  
punches at a desk control.

SPRINGER (CONT'D)  
Computer, locate Major Pinback.

A pause, then the ship'S COMPUTER VOICE replies:

COMPUTER  
*In a medium-size skillet, sauté  
mushrooms and shallots in two  
grams of butter until the  
mushrooms give up their moisture.  
Allow the liquid to evaporate. Add  
Madeira, salt--*

Reiss stabs at a control, talking over the computer voice.

REISS  
Navbot used to work a cruise line.  
He must be in the brain room.

Springer cocks the gun, heads out with Reiss.

EXT. SPACE

The GREEN GLOW looms huge over the Wanderer.

INT. WANDERER, CORRIDORS

All is quiet now.

SPRINGER AND REISS

search the ship, Springer with the pulse gun, Reiss with a large flashlight. They round a corner.

THE RESTRICTED ACCESS DOOR

still stands half open. Reiss' flashlight beam falls on a small, metallic object near the door. She picks it up: the piece of Navbot that Pinback found in the navigation room. Springer leads the way in.

INT. WANDERER, ENGINE ROOM

Pinback is unconscious, his head banging against metal as he is dragged, feet-first, on his back. A collision with a bulkhead brings him round. He blinks in pain, still being dragged, looks toward his feet.

Navbot has him by one leg, plodding along a catwalk leading to a stairwell.

PINBACK

Hey, uh, Navbot. Hey!

Pinback grabs a railing, jolting Navbot to a halt. The robot turns to regard the snag.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Where are you taking me?

Navbot WHIRS, then speaks, its voice GARBLED and DISTORTED:

NAVBOT

Pin Back?

PINBACK

Yes, that's me!

NAVBOT

Mission under jeopardy since liaison officer arrived. Eliminate malfunction. Add garlic and paprika and broil for 20 minutes.

Navbot gives Pinback a sharp tug, and continues to drag him along. Pinback claws frantically at the catwalk.

PINBACK  
I am not a malfunction!

EXT. SPACE

The GREEN GLOW fills frame.

INT. WANDERER, CORRIDOR

Springer aims her gun into the computer room.

SPRINGER  
Pinback?

The LITTLE GIRL from Springer's holopic peers from the command chair. Springer freezes. Reiss tries to peer in. Springer pushes her back.

REISS  
What is it?

SPRINGER  
It's not Pinback.

Reiss shoves past. The Little Girl runs out of the computer room. Springer SCREAMS. Reiss dives at the Girl, but misses. The Girl darts away, down the corridor.

REISS  
Pinback brought his kid along?  
Why didn't you grab her?

Springer avoids eye contact with Reiss. Reiss barges past into the computer room. She discovers wires pulled, screens blown open.

INT. WANDERER, ENGINE ROOM

Pinback flails, dangling by a foot as Navbot hauls him up the stairwell.

PINBACK  
Navbot, let me go! Navbot, let me--

Pinback sees steaming machinery below.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
Don't let me go!

INT. WANDERER, CORRIDOR

Reiss drops a charred lump of computer hardware at Springer's feet. Springer is still shaken.

REISS

Whoever she was, she's left us deaf, dumb and blind. Can you tell me, please, what is going on?

SPRINGER

It must be... a hallucination.

REISS

Eddie, I am not a hallucinating kind of gal. Is Pinback the cause of all of this? What did he tell you about this mission? Is that thing outside following him?

SPRINGER

I don't know. We're just his ride.

REISS

Well whatever it is. we're not going to let him drag us any deeper, okay? Now let go of the gun, Eddie. I'm going to get some answers.

Reiss pries the gun from Springer's fingers, checks its safety catch.

SPRINGER

There's no way he could know.

REISS

Know what?

SPRINGER

He knows... stuff he couldn't know. It's not Pinback's kid. It's mine.

REISS

Okay, honey, you be quiet now and leave the flipping out to me. I'm going after Navbot.

SPRINGER

No, don't leave me.

REISS

(sighs)  
Come on, then.

Reiss help Springer to her feet.

EXT. SPACE

The GREEN GLOW, very close now, is a pulsing cloud of energy with something solid at its core.

EXT. WANDERER, ENGINE ROOM

Pinback rises from between a row of SCREAMING turbines, chained upside-down by his hands and feet.

PINBACK

I really think you missed the point I was trying to make.

Navbot operates the winch controls.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

You might be surprised to know, not long ago, people thought I was insane.

Navbot pulls a lever. The winch begins to swing Pinback sideways.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

But I had the strength of will and foresight to stand by my convictions, and now....

Pinback sees he is being swung out over an open funnel venting steam: Reactor Core #3.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

I'm a Major, goshdammit!

The crane CLUNKS to a halt above the vent. Navbot pulls another lever. The chain begins to unwind. Pinback descends, and SCREAMS.

INT. WANDERER, CORRIDOR

Reiss leads the way, flashlight and pulse gun aimed ahead. She halts, sees Springer staring, then raises her weapon to shoot. Springer stops her.

Ahead of them, the Little Girl is standing, staring back, then darts off into an intersection.

Reiss and Springer approach the intersection, peer around.

The BEARDED MAN - a tall black man, mid-50s, plaid shirt, dungarees - is waiting for them. He smiles, points the way down another corridor, then steps out of view.

REISS

Papa?

They go after the Bearded Man.

INT. WANDERER, ENGINE ROOM

The chain continues to unwind. Pinback lowers into the reactor funnel.

PINBACK

Navbot! You're being foolish!

Navbot stares. The chain unwinds.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

You're confused. No-one ever listens to you, right?

Pinback descends into rising steam

PINBACK (CONT'D)

This is so unnecessary! All you need's a little human warmth and kindness. I can help!

Navbot pushes the lever. The chain stops.

NAVBOT

Help?

PINBACK

Yes, I can help you! But first you let me down. You don't want to hurt me. They'll turn you into scrap!

Navbot, WHIRS, pulls the lever again. Pinback continues his descent.

NAVBOT

Human warmth and kindness. My ass.

PINBACK

Navbot, it's not ass! Navbot! Stop!

REISS AND SPRINGER

appear on a lower catwalk and see the scene above them on the gantry.

REISS  
Navbot! Over-ride!

Reiss aims her weapon at Navbot.

PINBACK  
Don't shoot him!

NAVBOT  
*Ladies and gentlemen, enjoy your  
meals. Thank you and goodnight.*

Navbot goes up to a conduit, rips out an electrical cable, which emits a shower of sparks, and lifts the live power line to his head. Suicide.

REISS  
Navbot! Don't do it!

SPRINGER  
Shoot the winch!

Reiss aims at the cable in Navbot's hand, trying to get a clear line of fire through the steam and railings. Springer grabs at the pulse gun.

THE WINCH

unwinds.

PINBACK

screams and tries to swing himself away from the funnel, only a few feet below him.

REISS AND SPRINGER

struggle for the gun.

NAVBOT

slumps to the floor, still holding the sparking cable before his face.

EXT. SPACE

The GREEN GLOW engulfs the Wanderer.

BACK TO SCENE

Pinback jolts to a halt as--

ALL POWER CUTS

Turbines wail to silence. Room lights dim and red emergency lights kick in.

NAVBOT

remains seated, forlorn, eyes dim, the cable now dead in his hands. Distant METALLIC GRINDING NOISES deep in the hull. The robot twitches, its eyes light up.

REISS AND SPRINGER

stare around them.

PINBACK

Will someone let me down from here?

Navbot stands, looks down at Reiss and Singer, then at Pinback, turns to the winch, throws a lever and begins to operate a hand-crank. Pinback WAILS. Reiss grabs the gun from Springer.

SPRINGER

No, wait.

As Navbot cranks the winch, Pinback swings away from the reactor funnel. Navbot pulls another lever, lowers Pinback to the deck. GRINDING NOISES from the hull are followed by a basso profundo CLANG.

REISS

It's controlling Navbot.

SPRINGER

Somebody is. Meet me on the fight deck. Bring the Major, if you can.

Springer exits, leaving Reiss with the gun.

REISS

What? Edie, wait!

Reiss returns her attention upward.

Pinback hits the catwalk, head-first. He struggles to free himself from his chains, evading assistance from Navbot, who is now ominously silent.

EXT. SPACE

GREEN GLOWING ENERGY swarms across the Wanderer's hull, PLASMA TENDRILS snake around, forming a giant claw of energy that connects the ship with a colossal egg-shaped ALIEN SPACECRAFT.

INT. WANDERER, FLIGHT DECK

In red emergency lighting, Pinback enters the flight deck with Navbot tagging behind, Reiss holding them at gunpoint. All stop as they see Springer seated at her command post, looking very conflicted.

PINBACK

What is going on here?

The Little Girl is seated at the navigator's station, peering at the blinking lights and readouts.

SPRINGER

Behind you.

Reiss and Pinback turn to see the Bearded Man step out of shadows behind them in the navigation room. Pinback, startled, gives a little YELL. Navbot regards the apparition more thoughtfully, and WHIRS. Reiss shoves Pinback forward, points him to his secondary command chair.

PINBACK

Is someone going to explain to me who these people are?

REISS

None of your business. Navbot, get in here.

Reiss takes her own seat, giving the Little Girl a wide berth. Navbot steps up to the navigator's station, the Little Girl joins Springer at the viewscreen, which displays a hull-camera view of the alien ship. More METALLIC NOISES from the hull.

SPRINGER

Systems failures across the board. I think we're being probed.

PINBACK

Probed by what? Oh my....

Pinback and Reiss see their own viewscreen images of the alien ship.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

How big is that thing?

SPRINGER

Big enough to swallow us.

The Bearded Man steps up behind Pinback to view the image on screen and casually lays a hand on the back of Pinback's chair. Pinback stares closely at the hand, which appears to be large and hairy, and perfectly real.

Navbot CLICKS erratically.

REISS  
Oh, shit.

PINBACK  
(alarmed)  
What?

Reiss stares, helpless, as her helm controls move by themselves. Navbot WHIRS and BEEPS, as if in conversation with an unknown entity.

SPRINGER  
Me and my big mouth.

EXT. SPACE

The Wanderer slowly spins, turning about-face, and then fires its thrusters briefly.

A HOLE opens in the underside of the alien ship. The energy field creates a tunnel leading toward it. PLASMA TENDRILS nudge the Wanderer toward the orifice.

INT. WANDERER, FLIGHT DECK

Navbot WHIRS and BEEPS, operating controls.

REISS  
Navbot, over-ride.

Navbot continues WHIRRING.

REISS (CONT'D)  
Navbot, over-ride!

SPRINGER  
Esther, let's assume we're guests here.

The Bearded Man makes eye contact with Pinback, benign.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, DOCKING BAY

The Wanderer floats up through an entry tube resembling an alimentary canal and comes to rest in a gloomy chamber. The tunnel irises shut behind the ship, closing out the stars.

INT. WANDERER, FLIGHT DECK

Reiss folds her arms, sulking. Springer clicks her fingers in Navbot's direction, causing the robot to look round.

SPRINGER

How about some light out there?

EXT. ALIEN SHIP, DOCKING BAY

Wanderer's SEARCHLIGHTS illuminate a JETTY leading to an oval arch.

BACK TO SCENE

Pinback joins Springer at her viewscreen. The Bearded Man and the Little Girl also press in close to see.

PINBACK

(lowering his voice)

Clearly an alien spacecraft of advanced design. I suggest we remain calm and make no threatening moves.

Springer ignores Pinback's analysis, and turns to the apparitions crowding her controls.

SPRINGER

Do you mind?

The Bearded Man backs off, pulls the Little Girl away.

REISS

Something's happening out there. An atmosphere is forming. We got nitrogen, oxygen, hydrogen, trace elements of argon and other crap. Localized around the ship and that structure up ahead. It's breathable.

Navbot WHIRS and CHIRPS.

SPRINGER

Let's go take a look.

PINBACK

Do you really think we should? I mean, maybe we should sit here and just wait to see what happens?

INT. ALIEN SHIP, DOCKING BAY

A RAMP opens in the Wanderer's underside and comes to rest, against the jetty. An inner airlock door opens, and light streams out of the Wanderer. WHIRRING and CLANKING, then Navbot appears.

He descends the ramp, stops on the jetty and stands motionless, staring ahead.

Springer follows, with Reiss and Pinback close behind. All wear goldfish-bowl breathing helmets that FILTER their voices.

PINBACK

I still think it would be prudent to bide our time and wait on the ship. We don't want anybody to misinterpret our actions.

SPRINGER

You really want to stay with them?

Springer jerks up her thumb back overhead. Above them, peering out through an observation window, the Bearded Man and Little Girl have their faces pressed up against the glass.

PINBACK

I'm beginning to wonder if you ladies appreciate what I might be able to contribute to this mission.

Springer and Reiss join Navbot on the jetty. Navbot waits until Pinback catches up. As soon as he steps off the Wanderer ramp, the ramp retracts and Pinback teeters on the jetty edge. Springer grabs his arms, pulls him to safety.

The Wanderer airlock SLAMS SHUT, the ship pitches violently, UPENDING. The faces of the Bearded Man and Little Girl are briefly seen, peering out of the observation window, despairing, then the Wanderer ZOOMS UPWARDS, the chamber ceiling rapidly DISTENDING INTO BLACK. With a flash of jets, the Wanderer is gone.

REISS

Oh, great! That's just great! Major, you owe us one ship.

Springer stands, numb, peering up into the black void.

PINBACK

You'll be fully compensated.

REISS

Yeah, posthumously, no doubt.

Navbot walks toward the oval archway. Springer glares at Pinback, then follows the robot.

PINBACK

Maybe they'll return our ship once they've checked us out? For all they know, we could be hostile.

REISS

They'd be right.

Reiss goes after Springer. Pinback tries to put a hand to his head in desperation, but bangs his knuckles on his breathing helmet.

PINBACK

Ow! I don't see why we have to wear these things, if the air in here is breathable. Hey, at least we don't have those creepy ghosts following us around, whatever they were.

HIGH ANGLE

They proceed along the jetty like ants, voices ECHOING. Particles of GREEN ENERGY flit back and forth in the massive architecture, unnoticed above them.

REISS

Pinback, will you ever shut up?

PINBACK

Someone needs to be the voice of reason. We could be dealing with an intelligence far beyond our own.

REISS

No shit, Sherlock.

THE OVAL ARCHWAY

leads to a sealed oval door three times Navbot's height. Again, the robot waits motionless for the others to catch up, then the door opens, revealing a TALL, THIN CYLINDRICAL ROOM with no other doors or windows. Navbot enters.

PINBACK  
Elevator!

SPRINGER  
Be my guest, Major.

PINBACK  
Ladies first.

Reiss shoves Pinback in. The cylindrical room appears stable. Navbot WHIRS and CLICKS. Springer and Reiss step in. The door closes.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, ELEVATOR

A soft HUM, no sense of motion, no controls. The three humans stand in silence, glancing up at the ceiling way above their head.

Pinback reaches for the clasp around his helmet, closes his eyes, unfastens the seal. HISS. Reiss and Springer stare, a little shocked. Pinback takes a breath, opens his eyes, and grins. He removes his helmet. Navbot WHIRS. A slight jolt and the door re-opens.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, VESTIBULE

The elevator opens onto a tall, narrow vestibule that appears to curve off to infinity, like a nightmare from Dr. Suss. Navbot leads the way.

Pinback tucks his helmet under his arm and follows. Reiss and Springer exchange glances, remove their helmets and walk out beneath the high ceiling. Hundreds of other elevator doors line the walls.

REISS  
Homey.

Navbot steps onto a central section of the floor that is a moving walkway. Pinback hops on, nearly losing his balance.

PINBACK  
This way, I guess?

The others run to catch up and also hop on, to be transported down the corridor

REISS  
You realize this whole place could be some kind of automated life-form harvesting system.

PINBACK

Do you have some other plan of  
action in mind?

REISS

Maybe I do.

Reiss reaches inside her jacket, as if for a weapon.

PINBACK

You didn't bring a g- g- g-?

SPRINGER

Pinback, shut up.

Navbot CLICKS and WHIRS, looks back at the humans.

PINBACK

I didn't say any word.

The moving walkway branches off toward a doorway that opens  
like a ghost train ride.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, HIGH BRIDGE

The moving walkway carries them out above a dizzying drop  
crisscrossed with other walkways, all empty.

Pinback peers down, and then up. The view above is much the  
same.

At the end of the bridge, they reach a giant set of double  
doors and the walkway stops. Navbot turns to face them, WHIRS  
and CLICKS.

NAVBOT

Wait here.

They stand, nervously, looking about them.

REISS

What are we waiting for?

PINBACK

I think we should do as we are  
told.

(to Springer)

Don't you?

Springer waves her fingers in front of Navbot's face. No  
reaction. She walks past the robot to the double doors. There  
are no handles. She presses the door surface and, with a silent  
breath of air, the double doors swing open.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, CONTROL ROOM

Springer, Pinback and Reiss enter. Navbot follows and remains by the double doors, which close silently behind them.

Curving surfaces everywhere. Sterility and grace. A large, kidney-shaped shuttered window dominates the room, beside a nook of THRUMMING readouts. A transparent STAR MAP divides this area from the rest, behind which is seated the ALIEN PILOT.

The humans are transfixed by their first sight of the alien being.

The thin, bipedal alien does not appear to notice them, working at its controls. It is unclothed, sexless, flat-footed and vaguely blue with an elongated Giacometti-like physique. It is too far off to tell, but there is something wrong about its head.

Springer eyes the star map, which shows a display similar to Pinback's trajectory of 'X' with two glowing blips converging at a projected interception point. Pinback sees it, too.

PINBACK

Hey, he's got one like us!

The alien turns to regard them, revealing piercing yellow eyes in a flattened HAMMERHEAD.

Reiss backs up, unnerved. Springer stands her ground. Even Pinback is silent.

The alien rises from its chair, walks over and halts a few yards away. It has no ears or nose, its mouth a tiny lipless slit halfway down its throat. It is 12 feet tall.

SPRINGER

Your move, Major.

PINBACK

Oh, uh, yeah.

Pinback hesitates, then steps forward and extends a hand.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Major Pinback, planet Earth. How are you?

The alien regards Pinback's outstretched hand critically, then repeats the gesture. It has six elegant fingers. Pinback enthusiastically grabs the alien's hand, to shake, but the alien pulls away, alarmed.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Oops. Easy, there, big fellah.  
(to Springer)  
Guess that didn't go so well.

SPRINGER

The map.

PINBACK

The what? Oh, yeah.

Pinback grins at the alien, points at the star map, makes an inquisitive gesture. The alien frowns. Pinback points at himself and then the alien, and then indicates two points moving through space and colliding, with a KABOOM noise. The alien appears confused.

REISS

He's a complete idiot.

The alien turns its attention toward Reiss, looks her up and down, then makes eye contact with Springer.

PINBACK

They brought me here to you. Well, not to you. We weren't expecting this. I think we've both been traveling in the same-- nuuh.

The alien turns sharply toward Pinback and pokes its finger at him. Pinback's body goes rigid. The alien walks quickly away, peeved, returning to its map.

SPRINGER

(lowering her voice)

Pinback...? Pinback, speak to me!

Pinback is glassy-eyed, his tongue protruding slightly from his mouth.

REISS

Personally, I think it's a big improvement.

SPRINGER

Snap out of it, Pinback!

REISS

Let's get out of here, Edie. We've got to find our ship.

PINBACK

Nuuuuuuuuuhhhh.

Springer slaps Pinback's face. Pinback blinks and regains composure, then has a delayed reaction to the pain.

REISS

Dammit, Edie.

PINBACK

I can hear them.

SPRINGER

What?

PINBACK

I don't know how, but I can understand them. What they're saying. I can...

(touches his head)

...hear them in here.

SPRINGER

'Them'?

Navbot WHIRS, having walked up close. The alien looks back at them again with suspicion. Navbot CLICKS and WHIRS.

REISS

What are they saying?

PINBACK

Big blue, he's the pilot, he wants to invite us to dinner. No... he wants us to be dinner. I'm not sure.

REISS

You'd better work on your alien e.s.p. a little harder, Major.

Reiss puts a hand on the gun inside her jacket. Springer glares at her to keep it hidden.

SPRINGER

Pinback, don't blow this.

PINBACK

But you're not going to--?

REISS

If Bluey won't give us our ship back, we are taking his.

PINBACK

But we don't know the first thing about what makes this thing fly!

REISS

How hard can it be with our autopilot wired into the ship?

Navbot stops WHIRRING. They look around to see the alien still staring at them. It waves a hand at the window.

Shutters fall away from the window to reveal a mind-bending view of REDSPACE: a hurtling cone of ruby light, coagulated to white at its vanishing point, spilling stars that slip past the ship.

PINBACK  
I'd say pretty hard.

REISS  
Screw this.

Reiss pulls out her plasma gun, aims it at the pilot.

PINBACK  
No!

REISS  
Okay, buddy, fair's fair. You gonna give us back our ship, or what?

The alien waves its hand again. Simultaneously, the gun flies out of Reiss's hand and Navbot grabs her arms. Another flick of the alien's wrist and Reiss SCREAMS, clutching her wrist, and falls to her knees in pain.

PINBACK  
Please, don't hurt her!

The alien narrows its eyes at Pinback, and points its finger again. Reiss collapses in the background. Pinback walks up to the alien and kneels, holding out his space helmet as if it were an offering.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
Dinner sounds great.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, LOWER LEVEL

Another endless, curving corridor, this time streaked with filth. Heavy metal doors are interspersed with thick, translucent windows, MOVING SHADOWS within, and a constant murmur of ALIEN ROARS and HOWLS. One window contains three human shapes, one with his face shielded up against the glass.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, CELL

Pinback tries to peer out the grimy window. He uses his sleeve to wipe clean a space, regrets it. Springer paces, Reiss seated on a scattering of straw, looking groggy.

SPRINGER  
Any theories, Major?

A muffled, blood-curdling HOWL goes up from a neighboring cell.

PINBACK

It's a biological survey ship. The alien is a zoo-keeper.

SPRINGER

I meant escape plan.

PINBACK

I'm going to reason with it, one highly evolved life-form to another.

The women regard Pinback in mute incredulity.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

My instinct is he's not interested in us. It's object 'X' he wants. A specimen.

REISS

This could just as easily be a prison ship. 'X' could be a penal colony. A slave market. A slaughter house.

SPRINGER

Well, I'm open to suggestions. Any more e.s.p.?

Pinback frowns, then shakes his head. Springer continues pacing. Pinback goes to lean against the glass, changes his mind and leans against a wall, hands in his pockets. He takes out his harmonica. Springer halts, Reiss glances up; stern looks from both. Pinback puts the harmonica away.

CLANK then CLICK from the door. A circular peephole irises open and a glowing eye peers through.

NAVBOT

Pin Back?

PINBACK

(overjoyed)  
Navbot! Buddy!

NAVBOT

You are to come with me, please.  
The others must stay. I am armed.

Further CLANKS and CLICKS. Pinback looks to Springer.

PINBACK

I'll get us out of here, I swear.

SPRINGER  
That's very reassuring.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, LOWER LEVEL

Navbot SLAMS shut the cell door and turns a huge key in its lock. Pinback waits nearby, a chain around his neck and feet. Navbot leads him off, wielding an ALIEN CATTLE PROD. HOWLS from other cells as they walk by. Something VERY FIERCE throws itself at one murky window.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, CONTROL ROOM

The double doors swing open. Navbot herds Pinback in, unfastens the neck chain once the doors have closed, and leaves him standing.

An elegant DINING TABLE has been set up by the main window before the view of REDSPACE. The alien pilot, already seated, beckons Pinback over.

PINBACK  
I wish I'd know it was formal. I  
would've dressed. Ha ha ha!

Pinback trips over his chains and stumbles as he starts to cross the room. The alien watches, unblinking. Pinback laughs again, then notices the star map. the alien graphics show object 'X' much closer now.

Pinback shuffles over to the table. The pilot beckons him to sit. Pinback complies. Navbot steps up with a bulging sack of liquid slung over one shoulder. The robot extends a pouring nozzle to a large goblet on the table in front of Pinback.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
Ah, oh, well. Sure, yes, thank  
you.

Navbot fills Pinback's goblet with dark wine, and then attends to the pilot. The alien raises its goblet in a toast. Pinback responds in kind. The pilot waits for him to drink. Pinback smiles, nervous, takes a small sip. His smile broadens.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
It's good!

The pilot waits. Pinback takes another mouthful, sees the alien still watching, drinks his whole glass. The pilot does the same. Pinback laughs too loud, relieved. Navbot refills his goblet.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
 What a strange and wonderful part  
 of the galaxy this is, eh?

Navbot refills the alien's goblet, deposits the wine sack on a nearby frame and heads for a serving trolley containing ominous domed trays.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
 I mean, at least for us. Us  
 humans.

The alien drinks. Navbot returns with a tray, unveils the appetizer: something that could be deviled toads. Navbot serves up two small, limp amphibians each. The pilot waits for Pinback to eat.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
 We don't get out much, you know.  
 Not this far anyway. Ha. Ah, do  
 you...?

Pinback mimes using a knife and fork. The pilot takes a slimy morsel in its fingers, lifts it to its mouth and sucks it down like an oyster. Pinback stares, dismayed. The pilot licks its lips with a snake-like tongue, revealing tiny needle teeth.

Pinback takes one portion in his fingers, breaks off a leg and nibbles. His eyebrows go up. He finishes the leg, more eagerly starts another.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
 (with his mouth full)  
 Still I expect you know all about  
 us from Navbot, here, right?  
 We're just another race to you.  
 Boy, if the guys back on the Dark  
 Star could see me now!

The alien reacts to the words 'Dark Star'. Pinback is oblivious, enjoying his meal.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
 Mmm-hmm! You would not believe how  
 good this is. I've been on  
 recycled god-knows-what since I  
 came offworld. And let me tell  
 you, that is one part of human  
 culture you do not want to--

A bubbling, musical SOUND stops Pinback's prattle. He looks up from his food.

The alien pilot is CHUCKLING.

Pinback smiles, uneasy.

The pilot's shoulders shake in merriment. The creature raises its glass and drinks another toast. Pinback nods enthusiastically and then does the same.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, CELL

The peephole GRINDS open. Reiss and Springer look up. Navbot's eye peers in at them, then the peephole shuts. A second later, a slot near the base of the door snaps open and a tray slides through containing two chunks of raw, unidentifiable meat.

Reiss and Springer exchange looks.

Navbot pokes through two bowls of water. Springer dives at the slot and grabs Navbot's hand. Navbot SCREAMS (O.S.) and then his hand detaches. Springer tumbles back with the hand. The slot snaps shut.

REISS

Damn robot!

Navbot's hand flips the bird at Reiss and springs to the floor.

SPRINGER

Grab it!

They jump at the robot hand, but it scuttles away like a lunatic crab and hides in the straw bedding.

Reiss leaps up and down, stomping at the straw, until she makes contact. Navbot SCREECHES (O.S.). The robot hand grabs Reiss's foot. Springer pries it off. The two of them hold it flat.

REISS

Be my guest.

Springer grabs a digit and bends it back. Navbot WAILS (O.S.). Springer snaps off the digit. Navbot SCREAMS. She takes the finger to the door and knocks. The peephole opens. Springer pops the finger through.

SPRINGER

You want the rest?

Another forlorn robot WAIL (O.S.).

SPRINGER (CONT'D)

Sorry, Navbot, didn't catch that.  
You know I have three more fingers  
here. What do you say?

More robot WAILING (O.S.), then Navbot's eye appears at the porthole.

NAVBOT  
Ma- ma- ma- may I have my hand?

SPRINGER  
For that, you get the finger.

Springer rips off another digit. Navbot SCREAMS. She pops it through.

SPRINGER (CONT'D)  
Never flip off your commander,  
okay?

NAVBOT  
Y- y- y- yes, Captain.

SPRINGER  
This is tough love, Navbot. It's  
good to have you back.

NAVBOT  
Good to be back.

SPRINGER  
We'll see about that, huh?

Springer waves the remains of the robot's hand in front of the porthole. Navbot WHINES.

SPRINGER (CONT'D)  
Open.

Navbot CLICKS, WHIRS, SPUTTERS, falls silent. CLANKS and CLICKS and then the cell door POPS open. Navbot steps in, hands its alien cattle prod to Springer and extends the stump of its truncated wrist.

NAVBOT  
A little warmth -- and human  
kindness.

Springer regards Navbot curiously.

SPRINGER  
Where is Pinback?

NAVBOT  
Dining, ma'am. Level 116.

REISS  
He's dining? That does it.  
(MORE)

REISS (CONT'D)

Edie, I don't know what strange attraction you have for our friend the Major, but I am finding it increasingly difficult to believe anything he tells us. He's demented. We've got to forget him and go find our ship -- wherever that is.

NAVBOT

Level 137.

REISS

Thank you, Navbot. Welcome back aboard.

NAVBOT

Thank you, Esther.

Springer fastens Navbot's hand back into place and reattaches its fingers.

SPRINGER

You better be right.

REISS

Why would I not be? He's a sweet and harmless guy, and a total loser.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, CONTROL ROOM

Pinback is inebriated, attempting to fill his own goblet with wine and spilling most of it.

PINBACK

So I says to them: I'm not who you sink I am. I did. I told them.

The alien, completely sober, its hands folded on the table, regards Pinback with curiosity.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

But they couldn't find Sergeant Pinback. He died. So there I was, in his uniform, they froze me and stuck me in the ship! You can't believe how freaked out I was when I woke up four light years later.

Pinback hiccups.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Oh me, oh my. In venus veritas!

Pinback gets the Latin wrong, attempts a toast and slips off his chair. The alien shakes its head in disbelief, picks up a small silver servant bell, rings it, and looks around for help. No Navbot.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

S'okay, nothing broke. 'pologies.

Pinback regains his chair and smirks.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

I know. I'm a little drunk. But now you know my secret. I'm not Sergeant-- oops, excuse me, Major Pinback. I'm really Bill Fruge.

The alien regards Pinback intently.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Bill Fruge, Fuel Maintenance Technician, from Saint Louis, Missouri. No one really cares. All they wanted was a hero. And that hero was me!

Pinback loses his chipper mood as he sees the alien scrutinizing him. Suddenly, a PIERCING TONE penetrates Pinback's head, he clasps his head and falls backward again.

Pinback crashes to the floor and curls in a fetal ball until the PIERCING TONE DESISTS. He looks up and sees

The alien towering over him.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Why did you do that? I was only making conversation.

The alien's lips do not move, but ITS LILTING, MUSICAL VOICE IS CLEARLY HEARD IN ENGLISH:

ALIEN

Why you?

PINBACK

Why me? Why me what? Hey, how come I can hear you?

The alien gestures with its hand and an unseen force HOISTS PINBACK TO HIS FEET AND THRUSTS HIM BEFORE THE STAR MAP. The alien map shows object 'X' much closer.

ALIEN

Why has it brought you here?

PINBACK

Why has what brought me here? You mean that thing out there?

Still hanging by his armpits, Pinback cranes his neck to see the alien very close, its yellow eyes burning with irritation. The alien thrusts a finger at object 'X' and then points out the window at the view of REDSPACE.

ALIEN

It seeks Pinback.

PINBACK

It does?

The alien mutters a single, untranslatable expletive and turns away from Pinback. It rings its dainty silver bell again, then tosses the bell aside in irritation.

Pinback drops to the floor, lands heavily on his knees and tries to recover, still groggy from the wine.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Can I get a glass of water?

ALIEN

Look at me.

PINBACK

I will, if you don't stand by that window, it makes me nauseous--

The alien gestures at Pinback again. Pinback flips onto his back, spread-eagle on the floor. The alien stands over him, viewing him with contempt.

ALIEN

Why does it seek Pinback? You are... a barbarian.

PINBACK

I thought I was your guest?

Frustrated, the alien shakes its head.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, VESTIBULE

Navbot leads Reiss and Springer along a section of long curving corridor flanked by giant STATUES OF ALIEN CREATURES. One particularly DEMONIC BIRD has a double phallus.

They give the statue a wide berth and take an adjoining corridor.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, LABORATORY

Pinback hangs in mid-air, half-unconscious, suspended by his wrists and neck, at the center of a dim-lit room of metal and glass. The STRANGE HUM of unseen alien devices is everywhere, instruments hanging from the ceiling, focusing on Pinback in a beam of light.

Pinback squints, tries to see.

The alien stands beyond the rim of light, a filter mask over its mouth.

PINBACK  
Let's talk. Seriously.

The alien attends to instruments resembling dental tools.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
You're right. I must look like a barbarian to you. I know about that thing out there. I knew that it was calling me. Instinctively. Okay?

The alien moves closer to the light, which reflects brightly off a long gleaming tool.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
I'm telling you the truth! I'll tell you anything you want to know! You don't need to do that! Please!

The alien tool begins to BUZZ and VIBRATE.

Pinback SCREAMS and SOLARIZES.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, DRY-DOCK

Navbot pushes open a heavy door. Reiss and Springer step through to stop at a gantry railing.

Before them, in a giant zero-gravity well, the Wanderer hangs, stripped to its support struts. Other ships of untold origin float in pools of light beyond, in various states of disarray, attended by tiny FLITS OF LIGHT like worker bees.

Springer bows her head, defeated.

REISS  
I'll rig something. I can do this.

SPRINGER  
Knock yourself out. Navbot help  
us.

Springer looks around. Navbot is nowhere to be seen, the door standing open, the vague sound of NAVBOT SINGING 'WANDERER' emanating from the corridor behind it.

SPRINGER (CONT'D)  
I'll be back.

Springer runs out. Reiss stands before an alien control panel.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, LABORATORY

Pinback hangs, frozen in mid-scream, wreathed in CRACKLING GREEN ENERGY BOLTS.

INT. DARK STAR, CORRIDOR

Pinback, in his space suit, wrestles with Boiler.

BOILER  
Don't do it, Pinback! You'll kill  
us all!

PINBACK  
Let me go, you big ape! I have to  
get out there! Commander Powell  
was wrong! Phenomenology won't  
stop the bomb exploding!  
Doolittle, help!

INT. ALIEN SHIP, LABORATORY

Pinback SIZZLES, in a different frozen scream.

INT. DARK STAR, CORRIDOR

Pinback breaks free from Boiler and punches at a comlink beside an airlock door.

PINBACK  
Lieutenant, Doolittle? Lieutenant?  
I think we have a problem with  
Bomb Number-- Augh!

Boiler tackles Pinback, knocking him off his feet.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, LABORATORY

Pinback frozen in another scream.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, DRY-DOCK

Pinback's manic expression appears on AN ALIEN VIEWSCREEN on the dry-dock console that Reiss is operating. She stops what she is doing, tries to tune the picture clearer, suddenly gets a BLAST OFF SOUND WITH PINBACK SCREAMING, which she quickly mutes, as she realizes what she has found.

REISS

Oh -- my -- God.

Reiss goes to call for Springer, but thinks better of it. She cautiously turns up the sound:

PINBACK (O.S.)

(filtered)

--some really funny readings down here, and I think the Bomb Number 20 might be about to-- No, wait. It didn't happen like this. It was not my fault. I did not blow up the ship! Lieutenant Doolittle? Talby?

INT. ALIEN SHIP, VESTIBULE

Navbot teeters along, SINGING drunkenly to himself, taking in the sculpture exhibition. Springer catches up with the robot, who regards her with a series of WHIRS and CLICKS and pats her on the head.

NAVBOT

He really likes you.

SPRINGER

What?

Navbot WHIRS again and tunes into the same audio that Reiss was listening to:

NAVBOT/PINBACK

(filtered)

*I'm not even Pinback, but I truly thought I'd come here just to be with her...*

INT. ALIEN SHIP, DRY-DOCK

NAVBOT/PINBACK  
 (filtered)  
*But maybe I was wrong. Maybe I am here for another reason, a higher purpose. To face this thing...*

INT. ALIEN SHIP, LABORATORY

PINBACK  
 I have to face it, if I ever want to understand... why we must be... so lonely.

Pinback breaks down into tears, blubbing like a baby. The alien looks on.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, DRY-DOCK

REISS  
 What a jerk.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, VESTIBULE

Navbot dabs at imaginary tears, pantomime-fashion, as he continues to broadcast Pinback's emotional meltdown.

SPRINGER  
 Snap out of it, Navbot.

The robot snaps out of it.

SPRINGER (CONT'D)  
 You're still connected to Pinback?

NAVBOT  
 Intermittently, ma'am.

SPRINGER  
 Why did you walk off and leave us back there?

Navbot WHIRS, gestures like a waiter.

NAVBOT  
 Time for dessert?

SPRINGER  
 Navbot, concentrate. Can Major Pinback get us off this ship?

Navbot WHIRS.

NAVBOT

Yes.

SPRINGER

How?

NAVBOT

Estimated impact with object 'X'  
in T-minus 16 minutes.

SPRINGER

What?!

NAVBOT

Estim--

SPRINGER

I heard you the first time. We're  
going to hit that thing? Even at  
light speed, we were weeks away!

NAVBOT

Redspace quantum shift operative.  
Estimated impact: T-minus 15  
minutes, 47 seconds.

Springer grabs Navbot by an arm and runs with him, heading back  
the way they came.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, DRY-DOCK

Springer, out of breath, bursts back onto the gantry where  
Reiss is still viewing the alien control panel. Springer sees  
the VIEWSCREEN IMAGE OF PINBACK, steps up close to surveys the  
alien console. It is alive with blinking lights and confusing  
readouts. One SCREEN GRAPHIC displays the trajectories of the  
ship and object 'X' about to connect.

Navbot peers in from the corridor.

NAVBOT

Estimated impact in T-minus 13  
minutes.

EXT. SPACE

The alien ship GLOWS GREEN, hurtling through REDSPACE, the  
vanishing point ahead now coalesced into an INTENSELY BRIGHT  
POINT OF WHITE AND RAINBOW-COLORED LIGHTS.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, CONTROL ROOM

Pinback, still groggy from debriefing, is wheeled out into full view of REDSPACE. Pinback opens his eyes and focuses, then SCREAMS.

Pinback is on an upright gurney, directly in front of the main window, where the dining table has now vanished and the window completely fills his field of view.

PINBACK

Why are you doing this to me?

The alien, busy with its controls, throws a switch. A DEEP HUM resonates through the ship as if the universe was unwinding.

Pinback MOANS, but then sees REDSPACE drop away to NORMAL SPACE before him. The view ahead still travels at great speed, approaching an INTENSELY BRIGHT, FLUCTUATING STAR.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, VESTIBULE

Springer and Reiss hurry along, Springer carrying her weapon, Navbot doing his best to keep up, Reiss attempting a cross-examination while running.

REISS

What I don't get -- if we see  
ghosts -- from our past -- and  
he's not Pinback -- what's this  
thing -- that we're about to hit?  
-- It must be something -- big for  
him. Oh, crap.

Springer arms her cattle prod.

SPRINGER

Keep running.

Just ahead, the Bearded Man and Little Girl are wandering, hand-in-hand, staring all about them. Springer, Reiss and, eventually, Navbot run past. The Bearded Man and Little Girl start to follow.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, HIGH BRIDGE

Springer, Reiss and Navbot run across the bridge toward the alien control room.

As they reach the double doors, an ALIEN KLAXON begins: obviously not good news. Springer, peeved, thrusts her weight against the doors and they obediently swing open.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, CONTROL ROOM

Springer steps into the room, FLASHING KALEIDOSCOPIIC LIGHTS strobing all around, the KLAXON continues.

The alien is standing in the center of the room, lit up by the light show emanating from the window, streaming around Pinback on the gurney.

PINBACK

is squinting, staring into the lights, aghast.

PINBACK'S P.O.V.

the window is filled with a NEBULA OF GLOWING CRYSTALS AND INCANDESCENT GAS, blotting out the stars: object 'X'.

EXT. SPACE

The CRYSTALS are huge, rotating, planet-sized, multicolored. Immense ELECTRIC ARCS dance from rock to rock like synaptic activity in a giant brain.

BACK TO SCENE

Springer walks into the room, still holding her cattle prod, and stops a short distance from Pinback. The alien pilot turns to regard her.

SPRINGER

Let him go.

The KLAXON changes frequency, becoming more insistent, attracting the alien's attention back to its controls. Springer looks back to the crystals and then at

THE ALIEN STAR MAP

The two converging symbols have met, one intensely bright, the other starting to disintegrate.

A SHUDDER shakes the ship. Window shutters slowly close, shutting out the crystals. Springer tries to free Pinback from the gurney. Navbot steps in and uses a BLASTING TOOL attachment on his arm to remove the shackles.

REISS

You're full of surprises, aren't you, Navbot?

Reiss pats Navbot appreciatively on the shoulder.

PINBACK

Wha-- wuh-- Doolittle?

The alien can make no sense of its controls, which are blinking and wailing, sits in its command chair and fastens itself in. A transparent OVOID begins to close around the control nook, sealing the alien inside.

Another TREMOR shakes the ship.

REISS

We're screwed.

SPRINGER

No. Rise and shine, Pinback!

Springer smacks Pinback in the face. He revives and smiles drunkenly at Springer. With Reiss and Navbot's help, Springer hauls him from the gurney and they help him stand. In the doorway, the Bearded Man and Little Girl are now looking in.

THE ALIEN PILOT

sees the new intruders through its ovoid shield, which muffles klaxon and engine noise. Springer yells irately at the alien, MUTED.

BACK TO SCENE

SPRINGER (CONT'D)

--asshole alien! He's the reason we're here! He can save us! Let us in!

The alien, safe inside its bubble, activates a control. The control room doors SLAM shut. A second door SHOOTs DOWN, sealing the room, TREMORS increasing all the time.

REISS

Forget it, Edie.

SPRINGER

No! Goddamn it, Pinback!

The alien presses another control and GREEN CRACKLING ENERGY shimmers across the surface of the control room ovoid, sealing it off like a smaller version of the main ship.

Springer grabs Pinback by the scruff of his neck and shakes him.

SPRINGER (CONT'D)

Do something, you worm!

A HUGE TREMOR shakes the ship.

The window shutters CRACK, BLINDING ENERGY knives into the room and atmosphere is sucked out.

SLOW-MO/ZERO-G

-- Reiss is blown backward.

-- Springer slams into a bulkhead.

-- Navbot grips a railing with one arm, grabs Pinback in his other.

Shutters splinter. Light streams through. The control room is torn apart as cracks expand, causing the alien escape pod to jettison prematurely and crash into the room.

SPRINGER

hangs on for dear life.

THE ESCAPE POD

smashes into the shutters, lodges momentarily and then is sucked out with a large chunk of hull.

REISS

is also sucked out.

NAVBOT

loses his grip, hits the ceiling, taking Pinback with him, grabs a ceiling fixture.

SPRINGER

goes flying, too.

PINBACK

sees Springer fly out toward the crystals, tumbling end over end. He smiles, lets go of Navbot. Navbot grabs him by the collar. Pinback chokes. The ceiling fixture gives way and they both fly out.

EXT. SPACE

The alien ship rotates majestically on its axis as the crystals suck energy from its hull. The ship CRACKS like an egg and EXPLODES. The nebula reacts ecstatically, multicolored synaptic lightning dancing feverishly between the glowing rocks.

THE ALIEN ESCAPE POD

bounces like a pinball between the lightning bolts.

SPRINGER, REISS, NAVBOT AND PINBACK

cartwheel through the flashing void, flailing, mute.

PINBACK

opens his eyes to see

ALIEN ZOO CREATURES

flapping, twirling, spinning by.

PINBACK

amazed, serene, smiles, inverts, then mutely SCREAMS.

A HUGE CRYSTAL

barrels toward him.

PINBACK

curls into a ball.

THE HUGE CRYSTAL

rolls by, extremely close, then deflects to reveal a SMALL BLUE MUD-BALL PLANET rapidly approaching on the same trajectory.

PINBACK

looks up, then hides his head again. Navbot hurtles past and starts to FLARE against the mud-ball planet's upper atmosphere.

FORKED LIGHTNING

hits Springer and Reiss, altering the vector of their fall.

PINBACK

falls, a fetal ball. A CORONA BLOSSOMS around him, but his skin and clothing do not burn.

EXT. MUD-BALL PLANET - DAY

High in the sky, lights flash above a curving blue terrain, TWO FIREBALLS descending, leaving trails of vapor. A short way behind them, ANOTHER TWO FIREBALLS IGNITE and descend on a more distant trajectory.

WIDE VIEW

The terrain is a featureless sun-baked plain of cracked blue mud, the horizon visibly curved the planet is so small.

PAF! PAF!

Two fireballs hit foreground and throw up dust.

CLOSER,

smoke rises from two deep black holes in the mud. Not a sound, then another FIREBALL IMPACT shakes the ground close by. More IMPACTS further off. It is raining fireballs.

PINBACK

climbs out of one of the larger craters, totally unscathed. He stands on the brim, hands on hips, and views the scenery.

IN ANOTHER CRATER,

the ALIEN ESCAPE POD is smoking but intact, its surface now opaque. A bedraggled ZOO CREATURE hobbles past.

PINBACK

watches the zoo creature go about its business, then goes to investigate a closer smoldering crater. He scales the closer crater's brim, peers in.

IN THE CRATER

Navbot is face-down, half-buried and extremely charred.

Pinback clambers in beside the robot, digs earth away with his hands and finds the dirt is hot. He touches Navbot, scalds his hand.

PINBACK

Yeeow!

Navbot jolts to life and sits up, spraying dirt, caked in blue mud. One eye is unlit.

Pinback looks around, finds a small blue rock, goes to pick it up and winces. He sees a gruesome burn blistering his palm. Pinback uses his other hand to pick up the rock, holds the rock to the side of Navbot's head and gives it a hard GONG. Navbot's dead eye lights, he CLICKS and WHIRS.

NAVBOT

Thank you. Do you need assistance?

Pinback looks at his injured palm. The burn has miraculously healed, the skin rejuvenating.

PINBACK

I guess not.

PINBACK AND NAVBOT

climb out of the crater and stand. The alien has emerged from its escape pod, dazed and shaken. Navbot WHIRS.

NAVBOT

Pin Back. How are we alive?

PINBACK

I don't know. But the first thing I want to do is to find the girls. Commander Reiss and Captain Springer.

Pinback walks away from the alien pod.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

This way.

WIDE VIEW

Navbot follows Pinback away from the three craters.

EXT. MUD-BALL PLANET - CONTINUOUS

Pinback muses as they trek.

PINBACK

I know this place....

Pinback glances up at the sky of flashing lights, sees Navbot dawdling, pauses for him to catch up.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

You remember when I first came on board your ship?

NAVBOT

Distinctly, sir.

PINBACK

I had this same feeling. Except it seems much clearer now. I know that I'm not crazy. Everything that's happened has happened to bring me here.

Pinback looks to the sky again.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

I just can't figure gosh darn why.

They continue walking, Pinback staring up. Just in front of them, the ground HEAVES, SWELLS and solidifies into a six-foot-tall blue MENHIR. Navbot sees it, halts, WHIRS, CLICKS.

NAVBOT

Sir....

Pinback walks right into it. He rebounds and holds his nose in pain, then regards the strange protuberance now jutting from the ground. Navbot stands, WHIRRING and CLICKING in confusion. Pinback views the standing stone with suspicion and walks around it.

PINBACK

Keep walking.

Navbot sidesteps the menhir and follows Pinback, who quickens the pace. Pinback glances back.

The menhir stands monolithic, then SHRINKS INTO THE GROUND.

Pinback halts abruptly. Navbot stops short.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Did you see that?

Navbot glances back. They continue on and Pinback slams straight into the identical menhir now risen up before him.

NAVBOT

Sir....

PINBACK

Damn stupid place to put a rock.

Pinback sidesteps and walks on, pursued by Navbot across the featureless terrain.

The menhir stands alone as Pinback and Navbot depart, and then GLIDES FORWARD, following at a distance with the cracked- earth planet surface flowing over it. Navbot glances back.

NAVBOT

Sir....

PINBACK

(sharply)

What?

NAVBOT

The rock is following us.

Pinback halts, Navbot halts. The menhir halts. The human and the robot regard the completely stationary rock.

Pinback shakes his head, and marches on, resolute. The menhir follows. Navbot WHIRS and hurries after Pinback. Pinback continues walking, then suddenly springs and spins around in a martial-arts-style move. The menhir comes to a standstill the exact same moment.

PINBACK

Aha!

Navbot WHIRS and looks back and forth, confused, between Pinback and the rock.

NAVBOT

Sir?

PINBACK

Navbot, don't -- you -- move.

Pinback turns slowly and walks on a few more paces. Navbot regards the menhir and then BEEPS, alarmed, as the monolith GLIDES FORWARD and INCREASES IN SIZE.

Pinback repeats his karate spin and is terrified to see the menhir racing at him. Pinback cowers, the giant rock shadow hangs over him, THE SIZE OF A HOUSE. The sound of a MAN'S LAUGHTER makes Pinback look up.

The GIANT MENHIR towers over him, LAUGHING.

Navbot skirts the rock, catches up with Pinback, helps him to his feet.

The menhir recovers from its laughing fit.

MENHIR

I'm just messing with you,  
Pinback.

PINBACK

Do I know you?

MENHIR

Let's just say, I'm not the guy  
you used to know.

(laughs)

Come onnn, I thought you'd nearly  
figured it all out. You must be  
even dumber than you look.

PINBACK

I'm not going to stand here--

The menhir SHRINKS and blobs into the shape of a BLUE CLAY EASY CHAIR. Pinback frowns.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
 I'm not going to stand here and be  
 patronized by a rock. Navbot,  
 let's go.

Pinback and Navbot walk away. The chair rolls forward and rises  
 up into an amorphous MASS that flows along beside them.

MENHIR  
 Sorry.

PINBACK  
 Pardon me?

MENHIR  
 I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings.

Pinback takes an abrupt turn, Navbot tags along. The BLUE MASS  
 HALTS.

MENHIR (CONT'D)  
 You're heading in the wrong  
 direction.

Pinback changes direction again.

MENHIR (CONT'D)  
 She's cute, you know.

Pinback stops and faces the blue mass. The object sculpts  
 itself into human form -- short, bearded, thin, a Golem in Dark  
 Star fatigues -- a BLUE CLAY TALBY.

Pinback is stunned and disturbed to see the image of his former  
 ship mate. He squints and steps toward him.

Blue Clay Talby smiles and fakes a karate move.

TALBY  
 Pretty nifty with the martial arts  
 back there. They put you in  
 training before they sent you out  
 to find me?

PINBACK  
 (incredulous)  
 Talby?

TALBY  
 Good to see you, bud.

PINBACK  
 How did--? What did--? Is that  
 really you in there?

Blue Clay Talby looks down at himself, then COLORIZES into human flesh and clothes. He gestures at the sky.

TALBY

It's the Phoenix Asteroids. Aren't they beautiful?

Pinback GASPS and suddenly turns weak at the knees. The BLUE CLAY CHAIR and a matching OTTOMAN pop up out of the ground behind him. Pinback sits and stares at Talby in a mixture of shock and dawning recognition. Navbot regards the ottoman and sits.

PINBACK

It is you! It really is.... And somehow...

TALBY

Somehow you knew it all along?

PINBACK

Right!

Pinback is overjoyed, almost near tears. He jumps up and steps close, staring at Talby's clothes, his face, his beard. Talby smiles and holds out his hands for Pinback to touch.

TALBY

We're all here, Pinback. Me, Boiler, Doolittle, Commander Powell.

PINBACK

(excitedly)  
Commander Powell?! But... how?

TALBY

After the ship blew up, the Phoenix Asteroids came right through our debris field. I don't even remember how I got out there--

PINBACK

I blasted you out of the airlock by mistake!

TALBY

You did? Well, thanks. Because I was out there with Doolittle--

PINBACK

He was trying to fix the bomb!

TALBY

Yeah, and then the Phoenix Asteroids came right through the debris field and they picked me up.

PINBACK

You've been out here all this time?

TALBY

Circled the universe. That got pretty lonesome, so I put the old crew together. You like?

Pinback stares around him.

PINBACK

You built this?

TALBY

We all did....  
 (lowers his voice and leans close)  
 It's the landscape of your dreams.

A BREEZE blows out of nowhere and a SEMI-NAKED GIRL grows up out of the ground like a Botticelli angel. Pinback is agog as the girl takes form, wreathed in flowing hair and a wispy veil, bearing a striking resemblance to Springer.

PINBACK

Heyyyyy....

The Semi-Naked Girl drifts close to Pinback, takes him by the chin and kisses him softly on the mouth. Pinback starts to enjoy it, but then pulls away. The Semi-Naked Girl looks sad as she SPLATS INTO A POOL OF BLUE CLAY. LAUGHTER nearby.

DOOLITTLE and BOILER have appeared, enjoying the joke and looking exactly as they did on board the Dark Star.

TALBY

Guys, cut it out!

PINBACK

Very funny. I see nothing's changed.

DOOLITTLE

Aw, come on, Pinback, don't be so up tight.

BOILER

Yeah, live a little, dope!

Navbot WHIRS, perplexed, as Boiler and Doolittle start to poke and prod the robot, goading it. Pinback frowns at Talby.

PINBACK

Is this why you dragged me here?

TALBY

Dude, I saved your life!

PINBACK

Did it ever occur to you I might not need saving?

TALBY

What kind of attitude is that? You're a hero now. You even got a girl.

PINBACK

I'm perfectly capable-- Oh, I don't even know why I am having this conversation. You guys treated me like an old washrag! Why would I want to be part of your weird planet? All I want is to find my friends!

NAVBOT

Major Pinback, sir.

BOILER

Oooh, Major Pinback?

DOOLITTLE

More like Major Pain In The Ass!

Pinback, fuming, turns to Navbot and then follows the robot's gaze down to his feet.

Pulsing, blue-veined ROOTS have grown up out of the ground and embedded themselves in Pinback's boots.

Pinback SHRIEKS and kicks free.

The roots SHRINK BACK into the mud.

PINBACK

What in heck's name was that?

TALBY

If you're going to stay, you'll have to be absorbed.

PINBACK

That's disgusting.

TALBY

It's painless.

PINBACK

I can't believe this. Lieutenant Doolittle, I used to look up to you, but now.... You guys are a disgrace! Come on, Navbot. We're going home.

Navbot stands and follows Pinback away from Talby and the others.

Talby glowers, the sky behind him FLASHING VIOLENTLY.

DOOLITTLE

Bummer.

BOILER

No kidding -- Aww, mannnn!

Boiler is annoyed as his moustache GROWS LONG VINES. Doolittle is likewise irritated as his own fingers SPROUT LEAVES. Talby's hair CURLS INTO VEGETATION, like a demonic Arcimboldo vegetable man painting.

EXT. RAINFOREST - CONTINUOUS

PLANTS GROW UP ALL AROUND, shooting up from the planet surface, snaking out and blanketing the ground.

TREES block Pinback's path and close in overhead, blotting out the sky. Pinback looks back to see

IN A CLEARING

Talby, Doolittle and Boiler now stand as HUMAN PLANTS.

TALBY

This is home, Pinback.

PINBACK

Not if I can help it.

Pinback thrashes off into the undergrowth. Navbot follows.

DOOLITTLE

Talby, what's with the foliage?

BOILER

Yeah, man. Not cool.

TALBY

Oh, be quiet.

Vegetation CLOSES IN around the Dark Star crew.

INT. RAINFOREST - DAY

Dark, primeval, alien. HOOTS and SCREECHES all about.

Pinback and Navbot struggle through the choking brush. A thick branch THWACKS Pinback in the face, and knocks him on his butt in a muddy puddle. A flurry of ALIEN BIRDS take flight above. Navbot helps Pinback regain his feet.

PINBACK

I'm fine.

Pinback removes his sodden crew jacket and hangs it on a tree. A long, feral GROWL makes them both spin around in opposite directions. Pinback sees nothing, shadows in the trees, then more BIRDS.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Everything is fine.

Navbot WHIRS, nervous, eyes glowing bright in jungle. Pinback pats the robot's shoulder and they continue.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Let's both keep calm about this.  
If this place is made up of stuff  
from my brain, we've got nothing  
to be afraid of.

Navbot WHIRS.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Wait, that did not come out right.  
Whatever. We've got to focus on  
finding Captain Springer and  
Commander Reiss, then we're--

A DEEP SEISMIC RUMBLE shakes the forest.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Then we're out of here. Okay?

Navbot WHIRS repeatedly.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Stay focused, Navbot.

Pinback picks up the pace and they are soon blazing a trail. Then stop.

Pinback's sodden crew jacket is hanging on a tree: they are back where Pinback fell in the puddle. Another RUMBLE, followed by the same feral GROWL, closer now.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
Nothing to be afraid of. We'll  
just try a different--

Movement in the trees makes Pinback stop. He signals Navbot to be silent and then hears a GURGLING GROWL. He looks up.

An ORANGE BALL WITH CLAWED FEET -- the FARK from Pinback's Dark Star mission report -- is perched in a tree, GURGLING and quivering in a threatening fashion. It gives a shudder and then spits out a small object.

The object lands at Pinback's feet. He picks it up and sees it is a small rubber CHEW TOY. He gives it a squeeze and it SQUEAKS. More GURGLINGS make Pinback look up into the trees.

NAVBOT  
Sir: Farks.

The trees are FULL OF FARKS, all excited to see Pinback. The aliens go silent and then all TAP THEIR FEET IN UNISON. Pinback very carefully sets down the chew toy, and whispers to Navbot.

PINBACK  
Yes, Navbot. I know what they are.  
They're harmless. Just very  
playful. When I give the word....  
Run!

Pinback flees. Navbot is left standing, WHIRRING, and then follows.

Up in the trees, farks leap from their branches.

Pinback and Navbot hurtle through the forest. Pinback looks back.

Hordes of farks are bouncing after them, bounding through the trees.

Navbot lags behind. One fark latches onto the robot's head. Navbot is blinded as the alien's claws clamp around his eyes and he crashes into a tree. Pinback runs up, waving a large branch, and starts batting at the fark. Other farks keep coming from all directions. Pinback whacks at them with the tree branch, but they are overwhelmed. Suddenly, farks start to pop and deflate in midair. Pinback looks around.

The ALIEN PILOT is standing pointing a WEAPON, taking potshots at the alien air bags.

Farks pop and shoot around, deflating with farting noises. Others scatter, leaving Navbot unharmed but very confused.

NAVBOT  
Major Pinback? Sir?

The alien pilot lowers its gun. Pinback sees Reiss nearby, gagged and bound with vines, tied to a tether. She is filthy, cut and bruised, and glares at Pinback fiercely.

PINBACK  
It's okay, Navbot. Let me do the talking.

The alien points its weapon to stop Pinback advancing.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
There's no need to be hostile. Did you find Captain Springer?

More grunts and protests from Reiss. She indicates 'back there' by gesturing with her head. Navbot steps out of the bushes, WHIRS, and then translates.

NAVBOT  
Major Pinback, Commander Springer... she's been captured, sir.

THE ALIEN PILOT

leads the way, like a hunter, through the trees, Reiss un-gagged but still on a tether, and Pinback following with Navbot.

REISS  
After all the trees appeared, there was this huge rumble and a big ugly bird swooped out of the sky and took her to its cave. I saw it happen.

PINBACK  
It's my fault.

REISS  
What?

PINBACK  
The rumble, this planet, all of this--  
(gestures around them)  
--it's built out of my brain. It's complicated. The guys from my old spaceship, they're alive here, in the Phoenix Asteroids.

The alien glances back at Pinback.

REISS  
Phoenix asteroids, huh? Does any  
of this make sense to you, Navbot?

NAVBOT  
Yes, Ma'am. Major Pinback is going  
to take us home.

EXT. RAINFOREST PERIMETER - DAY

They halt at the perimeter of a clearing where trees give way to a grassy rise beneath a rocky incline. They pause behind a rock. The alien unclips a telescopic site from its weapon and offers it to Pinback. Pinback peers through the scope.

REISS  
How about you untie me now, huh?

PINBACK'S P.O.V.

The ELECTRONIC SITE reveals a large, dark CAVE at the foot of a craggy blue-mud MOUNTAIN, at the top of which, wreathed in clouds, is a ruined TEMPLE. Lighting flickers in the sky, followed by a ominous RUMBLE.

PINBACK  
What is that?

REISS  
That was not up there last time we  
were here.

A prehistoric SCREECH (O.S.) makes Reiss look skyward in fear. Pinback gawks up. The alien clips the site back onto its weapon and stares at Pinback expectantly. Navbot WHIRS, translates.

NAVBOT  
Captain Springer is up there, sir,  
in the temple.

PINBACK  
That's what I thought. Navbot,  
wait for my signal.

Pinback hurries forward.

REISS  
Pinback, no, you idiot!

The alien aims its weapon skyward.

PINBACK

scampers out from the forest and rapidly scales the incline toward the cave.

THE ALIEN PILOT

scans the sky with its weapon.

PINBACK

continues his ascent and reaches the cave.

INT. CAVE - DAY

Pinback stands silhouetted, peering into darkness. Total darkness inside the cave, then he makes out a small figure: the Little Girl from the ship. He turns and waves back to the others.

EXT. RAINFOREST PERIMETER - DAY

Navbot stands and follows Pinback. Reiss can almost not bare to look. The alien continues scanning the sky.

REISS

There is no way you are getting me to go anywhere near there.

PAPA (O.S.)

Essie, baby, you comin' home?

The alien and Reiss both turn to see the Bearded Man from the Wanderer -- Reiss' PAPA -- standing behind them.

REISS

Papa, leave us alone. We're busy.

PAPA

You want me to help?

REISS

How can you help me? You've been dead for years. Leave me alone!

The Bearded Man gestures at the vines binding Reiss' wrists, which fall off.

PAPA

Anything is possible, baby.

INT. CAVE - DAY

Pinback takes a few steps into the cave and sniffs, smelling an offensive odor. Navbot appears behind him and turns on a chest lamp built into his torso. The lamplight frightens the LITTLE GIRL and makes her run away, deeper into the darkness. Navbot WHIRS, ECHOING.

NAVBOT  
Captain Springer's child.

Pinback shushes the robot, then looks round, in surprise.

PINBACK  
(whispering)  
You mean that's her kid?

NAVBOT  
Yes, sir. Her dead child.

PINBACK  
(whispering)  
That is interesting. I'm sorry to hear it. Follow me. Try not to make a sound.

Pinback and Navbot venture deeper in, Pinback holding his hand over his nose. Navbot's lamp scans the floor as they round a bend. Pinback makes him halt. The lamp has illuminated the Little Girl, who is crouched in a corner, looking terrified, hiding beside a small rock.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
Hi.

Pinback smiles. The child does not. Pinback takes a step toward the Little Girl. The Girl bares her teeth, emits an ALIEN GROWLS then runs off again into the darkness. Pinback halts. He looks around and notices the ground is littered with guano and remnants of giant feathers.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
What do you think, Navbot? Do you think we're really going to meet some big giant monster bird, or is this all part of my imagination?

Navbot WHIRS.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
Don't answer that.

NAVBOT  
Sir: up ahead.

Navbot casts his light forward to reveal a small stream in a channel carved into the floor. Very faint, the sound of RUNNING WATER. Pinback signals Navbot to take the lead and follows, close.

Navbot's lamp reveals a twisted Escher staircase carved into the rock. The stream running alongside the stairs, UP to where it cascades into a POOL OF WATER IN THE CEILING.

Pinback picks up a small rock, tosses it toward the pool. It falls UP and splashes, reflecting light around the walls. Pinback steps forward to have a closer look, teeters, and then falls UP himself.

INT. UNDERWATER

Pinback plunges, flailing, into an inverted cascade of bubbles. The ANGLE INVERTS, up becoming down. Pinback swims toward an ethereal light ahead.

INT. GLEAMING POOL ROOM

Pinback surfaces, gasping, treading water. He has emerged into an ornate, white-tiled bathing pool resembling a Turkish bath. Fountains, pristine architecture, windows onto clouds. Pinback splashes toward poolside, beaches himself on steps and lays there coughing.

SITAR MUSIC makes Pinback stop spluttering (an eerie instrumental refrain of 'Benson Arizona'). He climbs to his feet and sees Doolittle and Boiler, dressed in glowing white versions of their Dark Star uniforms, both playing sitars and both apparently as high as kites. Neither notice Pinback. He does not disturb them, sees a fancy Oriental screen nearby. The faint sound of a BASEBALL GAME (O.S.). Pinback walks over, peers round.

Talby is reclining on a couch with Springer, both in glowing white attire, Springer's very short and low-cut. She is curled up, eating popcorn, glassy-eyed, watching TV.

ON SCREEN: the 1955 WORLD SERIES CHAMPIONSHIP: Brooklyn Dodgers versus the New York Yankees, Yogi Berra on the last innings.

PINBACK

This is not my idea of Heaven.

TALBY

(his eyes on the game)  
It's not?

PINBACK

Commander Powell liked the  
Dodgers. I was always a Yankees  
fan.

SITAR MUSIC stops (O.S.) and Yogi Berra FREEZES IN MID-PLAY.

TALBY

Have you spoken to Commander Powell lately?

PINBACK

Of course not. He's been dead for 80 years.

TALBY

You want to?

PINBACK

No!

TALBY

He loved you like a son.

PINBACK

Talby, my own father did not love me like a son. That's not why I'm here. You know that.

TALBY

I'm sure he'd like to see you.

PINBACK

Talby, whatever you have done to Commander Powell, I don't want to know, okay? It took me long enough to get over him practically blowing up right next to me. I was not exactly happy about keeping him alive in our deep freeze for a year.

Talby clicks his fingers. Springer puts down her popcorn, opens a fancy lacquered cabinet and takes out a small, rectangular box. She presents the box to Pinback. Pinback stares into Springer's eyes, snaps his fingers. No sign of recognition.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

What have you done to her?

TALBY

Anything I like.

(off Pinback's reaction)

Relax, I didn't touch her. Open the box. It's a gift, from me to you.

Pinback takes the box and opens it. COMMANDER POWELL is inside, miniaturized and alive, encased in frozen crystal.

POWELL  
(ghostly, filtered)  
Pinback? Is that you?

Pinback snaps shut the box. A TREMOR shakes the room.

The pool RIPPLES AND BUBBLES.

Doolittle and Boiler exchange worried looks and put down their sitars.

PINBACK  
Talby, I am not impressed. How can  
you be happy here?

Doolittle and Boiler appear from behind the screen.

DOOLITTLE  
Pinback -- I should've guessed.

BOILER  
It's good to see you, man! The  
team is all together!

Boiler goes to punch Pinback on the arm. Pinback pulls away.

PINBACK  
No!

He brandishes the miniaturized space-traveler-in-a-box at Talby.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
Commander Powell was a great man!  
You've turned him into a Popsicle!

The water in the pool CONTINUES TO BOIL.

TALBY  
Pinback, we love you, man. Come  
back to us, please. You can have  
the girl.

Pinback grabs Springer, holding her close, backing away from his Dark Star crew mates.

PINBACK  
I am going to take this young  
woman, and am going to leave here  
with her and my friends. And, let  
me make this clear, I do not want  
to be party of this crazy, sick  
charade!

THE POOL ERUPTS

and a GIANT, UGLY PREHISTORIC ALIEN FLYING CREATURE rears from the water with a hellish SHRIEK.

BOILER  
Holey moley.

DOOLITTLE  
Awesome.

TALBY  
No!

Talby leaps from his couch, trying to grab Springer from Pinback.

The FLYING CREATURE SHRIEKS again and snaps at Doolittle and Boiler, who stumble back, blocking Talby's path as Pinback runs with Springer, dragging her toward the pool.

TALBY (CONT'D)  
Out of my way!

The GIANT BIRD rears up before Pinback and Springer, spreading its wings. Springer appears to regain her senses, staring at the bird in terror, just as Pinback propels her forward with him into the water.

Talby cowers behind Doolittle and Boiler as the bird snaps at them.

DOOLITTLE  
Heavy duty, man.

BOILER  
That Pinback always was a great big turkey.

TALBY  
Nice birdy. Pretty bird.

INT. UNDERWATER

Pinback swims into the depths with Springer. Behind them, the GIANT BIRD dives after them, beak thrust forward, bubble streaming, eyes burning, searching for them.

Pinback swims faster toward an opening ahead. The opening is blocked by a grating with a sign: 'No Way Out, No Way, Man.' Pinback rips off the grating, and enters

AN UNDERWATER PIPE

Pinback and Springer are sucked into a tube by the underwater current. Behind them, the GIANT BIRD'S BEAK crashes into the opening of the pipe, unable to fit through.

EXT. WATERFALL - DAY

Water spews from the mouth of a giant stone effigy of Pinback carved into a blue-rock cliff face. Two tiny figures burst out of the waterfall and plummet --

SIX HUNDRED FEET BELOW

-- into a plunge pool in a lake at the foothills of the mountain.

EXT. PLUNGE POOL - DAY

The cascade thunders down.

UNDERWATER

Pinback and Springer plunge into the foam, Springer starts to sink, unconscious. Pinback grabs her and kicks toward the surface.

Pinback surfaces with Springer, gasping, and swims toward the shore. A FLASH OF LIGHT and DEEP BOOM. Pinback glances up as

THE MOUNTAINTOP

EXPLODES with another BOOM and flames jet out from Talby's temple, which crumbles.

EXT. LAKESIDE - DAY

Reiss and Navbot help Pinback drag Springer from the water. They lay her on dry ground and Pinback looks down at her body, preparing for CPR.

PINBACK

I got this.

Reiss shoves Pinback aside and covers Springer with her jacket. Springer COUGHS, regaining consciousness.

SPRINGER

Jesus, what a dream.

Springer sees Pinback staring down.

PINBACK

It's not a dream. It's a rescue.

## THE GIANT BIRD

appears like a phoenix from the flames of the ruined temple, Talby astride a saddle on the creature's back. He reigns it forward, off the mountaintop.

## EXT. RAINFOREST - DAY

Pinback runs with Springer, Navbot and Reiss, dodging debris falling from the trees.

## THE GIANT BIRD

carries Talby down, swooping over trees.

## EXT. CLEARING

Pinback, Springer, Navbot and Reiss run out of the trees into a denuded patch where all forest life has given way to a hummock of blue-cracked mud.

An immense egg-shaped ALIEN spaceship, a blue-clay version of the alien's former ship, is sitting on its end, rising high above the tree-line, its based supported by blue roots. The ship appears to have grown out of the ground. A ramp stands open in the spaceship belly, a glowing light within.

PINBACK

How--?

REISS

He grew it.

The alien pilot steps out of its new space craft and beckons to them. They hurry over, run up onto the ramp.

Another TREMOR makes Pinback look round. He is the last to board.

Trees SHRIVEL to reveal the MOUNTAIN NOW DECAPITATED and in flames, the planet dying around it.

TALBY

Stop!

ALL TREMORS CEASE.

A sudden, eerie silence, with only the sound of CRACKLING FLAMES. Talby trots out of the decimated forest. He stops in the clearing, dressed in his original Dark Star fatigues.

TALBY (CONT'D)

Pinback, I... I just had to say...  
(emotionally)  
It doesn't have to be like this.

Pinback views his old ship-mate, and SIGHS.

TALBY (CONT'D)  
 You're right. I hate it here.  
 (steps forward)  
 Take me with you, Virgil.

PINBACK  
 My name's not Virgil.

TALBY  
 It's not?

PINBACK  
 I'm Bill Fruge.

Talby looks confused.

TALBY  
 Well, Bill, I appreciate you  
 leveling with me. And I'm sorry  
 that I stole your girl. I'll level  
 with you, too. It's boring living  
 like a god. All I wanted was some  
 conversation.

PINBACK  
 What about Doolittle and Boiler?

TALBY  
 They're imbeciles.

TALBY (CONT'D)  
 They love it here. Come on, what  
 do you say... take me with you?

PINBACK  
 I don't know, Talby.

Springer grabs Pinback from behind, pulls him on board and the  
 ramps SLAMS SHUT.

TALBY  
 Pin-baaaaaaaaaack!

The MOUNTAIN ERUPTS behind Talby. The sky DARKENS, and TREMORS  
 RETURN with increased ferocity, FIERY HAIL and WIND.

ROOTS SNAKE UP TALBY'S LEGS, encasing half his body.

Talby's face TURNS BLUE, his eyes BURN ORANGE, agonized and  
 pleading:

TALBY (CONT'D)  
 Don't leave me!

INT. MUD-SHIP, AIRLOCK

Pinback pulls away from Springer, the sound of ENGINES powering up around them.

PINBACK  
I wish you hadn't done that.

SPRINGER  
There was no way he was going to  
let you go.

PINBACK  
(peevd)  
I guess we'll never know that now,  
will we?

Exasperated, Springer walks away. Pinback goes after her, following her through a blue-vine corridor.

SPRINGER  
Keep away from me.

PINBACK  
Is that all the thanks I get?

SPRINGER  
Thanks? You want me to thank you  
for dragging us all this way and  
losing me my ship? Some hero you  
turned out to be -- Bill.

Pinback grabs her by the arm, stopping her, mid-rant. She pulls away and SLAPS HIM.

Then she grabs him back and kisses him very hard on the mouth. Pinback's knees buckle. She shoves him away. Pinback goes to speak. She silences him with a warning finger, then storms off, wiping away tears. Pinback slumps onto the deck, decimated.

EXT. MUD-BALL PLANET

The alien mud-ship rises, crackling with blue-white energy, leaving the erupting planet below. Reiss's Papa, the Bearded Man, appears from the tree to wave goodbye.

Talby SCREAMS again:

TALBY  
It's so lonely out here!

INT. MUD-SHIP, CONTROL ROOM

The alien pilot operates its controls among vines and creepers. Reiss and Navbot are strapped into seats behind the alien, terrified as the SHIP JUDDERS and SHAKES around them. Springer fastens herself into a seat behind them. SUDDEN SILENCE as they break free of the planet's atmosphere. No one says a word.

EXT. SPACE

The mud-ship powers away from the Phoenix Asteroids, the crystals FLASHING WILDLY all round, then the astral phenomena EXPLODES in a chain reaction erupting from its core.

One vicious ELECTRIC ARC hits the departing mud-ship.

INT. MUD-SHIP, CONTROL ROOM

The ship is ROCKED VIOLENTLY. The pilot rips away some creepers from a large RED GLOWING BUTTON and punches it.

EXT. SPACE

The mud-ship shoots off into REDSPACE, evading the DETONATION as the Phoenix Asteroids rip themselves apart in a final cosmic cataclysm.

WIDE VIEW

The crystals expand to form a NEBULA.

WIDER VIEW

Viewed from afar, the nebula is a SMUDGE OF LIGHT.

EVEN WIDER VIEW

The smudge of light GLIMMERS for a second against a hundred billion other points of light.

EXT. REDSPACE

The mud-ship travels along.

INT. MUD-SHIP, CONTROL ROOM

The alien pilot is slumped with relief at his controls. Pinback appears behind Springer and crawls into his chair. He smiles. She glares at him, lowering her voice.

SPRINGER  
This alien.

PINBACK  
Possibly the first truly sentient  
life we've ever--

SPRINGER  
(cutting him off)  
I want your word.

PINBACK  
Anything.

SPRINGER  
I want a ship. No alien  
interference. Just get us back, I  
don't care what it takes. After  
that, I never want to hear from  
you or the Corps again.

PINBACK  
I was going suggest...

Reiss turns and frowns at him.

PINBACK (CONT'D)  
Maybe he could drop us off.

SPRINGER  
Sounds good to me.

#### EXT. SPACE

A bright FLASH then WARP OF RED and the mud-ship drops into  
normal space.

A porthole IRISES OPEN in the side of the ship and a tiny  
vessel pops out --

#### THE WANDERER

-- rebuilt, and draped in moss and vegetation. The mud-ship  
nudges away and then WARPS TO RED and zips away.

#### INT. WANDERER, FLIGHT DECK

Springer, Reiss and Navbot take their seats, which are covered  
in moss and vines, going through per-flight checks. Pinback  
occupies the spare seat by the door, looking glum.

PINBACK (V.O.)  
My mission may have seemed like a  
total failure. But I knew  
otherwise...

INT. MUD-SHIP, CONTROL ROOM

CLOSE ON

a small piece of card bearing a crude, hand-drawn map of the terrestrial solar system, with an arrow pointing to the third planet indicating 'Earth.'

The alien pilot flips the card, revealing it to be Major Virgil Pinback's Space Corps business card. The alien narrows its eyes and the CARD INCINERATES. The alien YELPS as it burns its fingers.

PINBACK (V.O.)

I knew that, some day, truly evolved beings would be back to see us. I made sure of that.

INT. SPACE CORPS OFFICE

Pinback faces a Space Corps officer identified by his nameplate as MAJOR DICK, seated at a panel with DOCTORS, AIDES and GENERALS, including General Parsley and other earlier proponents of Pinback's case.

MAJOR DICK

You gave this alien our coordinates?

PINBACK

Just Earth. And our home system. You know, the Sun, Mars and planets.

One of the generals GROANS. Pinback looks up and down the panel for a friendly face, finds none.

MAJOR DICK

Thank you, Major Pinback. You may step down.

GENERAL PARSLEY

Major Dick, I don't see why we should jump to conclusions about the intentions of these clearly superior, highly evolved new beings.

MAJOR DICK

Thank you, General Parsley. We are all familiar with your views on this subject. Major Pinback, I repeat, you may step down.

PINBACK

Actually, I wasn't finished.

MAJOR DICK

Really.

PINBACK

If it's okay?

MAJOR DICK

Be my guest.

PINBACK

Thanks. I know how all this is going to look to the funding board. You took a chance to send me out, and what do I bring back? A lot of cockamamie stories. Nothing really you can use. Like the Dark Star, and all them other missions.

MAJOR DICK

We appreciate your concern.

PINBACK

Wait, there's more.

Major Dick shifts uncomfortably. Pinback unzips his jacket, fishes around inside and takes out a bundled rag.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

I hid this until now because I wanted you to be the first to see it, Major Dick.

Pinback unwraps Talby's crystal containing Commander Powell.

POWELL

Hello? Hello? Where am I?

Aides and Generals crane forward, amazed. Pinback stands and grins at General Parsley, then places Commander Powell on the table in front of Major Dick.

POWELL (CONT'D)

Pinback? Are we home yet?

EXT. EARTH STATION

The giant space station rings the globe, spanning left and right, viewed through the window of--

## INT. PRESENTATION HALL

Pinback steps up to a podium, framed against the window overlooking Earth. He is dressed in full Space Corps Major's garb, his first medal on his chest. General Parsley takes another, even larger, medal and pins it beside the first. Pinback salutes and shakes the General's hand.

Flashbulbs FLASH. Pinback grins. Crowd APPLAUD.

## RECEPTION, LATER

General Parsley embraces Pinback, tears in his eyes.

PINBACK

Will Commander Powell be restored  
to normal size one day?

GENERAL PARSLEY

No, son, he'll be small the rest  
of his life. But he's a very happy  
little man, as am I. You did us  
proud! We'll just have to figure  
out a way to get you integrated  
back into the program. You're our  
new hero now.

PINBACK

Thank you, General. Have you seen  
Captain Springer? You know, the  
girl I came with?

GENERAL PARSLEY

Her? I think they left already.

PINBACK

What?

GENERAL PARSLEY

You might just catch them, if you  
ask my aide--

Pinback runs out, leaving the General standing.

## EXT. EARTH STATION, GANTRY

The Wanderer, now cleaned of vines and extra-terrestrial planetary growth, drifts in dry dock.

Pinback runs up to where Springer is reviewing inventory with Reiss and Navbot. Navbot WHIRS and CHIRPS, seeing Pinback. Reiss appears less enthused.

PINBACK  
She's looking great. The ship.

REISS  
She'll run.

PINBACK  
You missed the ceremony.

SPRINGER  
No, we didn't.

An awkward pause.

PINBACK  
It's good to see you, Navbot. Glad  
to be home?

Navbot WHIRS, CLICKS. Reiss takes the robot by an arm and leads him on board before he can start to speak.

REISS  
(to Springer)  
See you on board.

SPRINGER  
Nearly done here.

Reiss and Navbot disappear inside.

PINBACK  
You got your money?

SPRINGER  
Paid in full.

PINBACK  
Oh, well. Good. I just wanted to  
say--

MESSENGER  
Major Pinback! Major Pinback!

A young MESSENGER runs up, out of breath.

MESSENGER (CONT'D)  
Urgent orders, sir. General  
Parsley must see you immediately.

PINBACK  
What's so urgent?

MESSENGER  
Sir, I think it's a new mission,  
but that's not for me to say.

Springer pats Pinback on the arm.

SPRINGER  
Count me out.

She walks up the landing ramp. As soon as Pinback realizes she has gone, a nearby EXHAUST vents steam onto the gantry. He yells up into the ship.

PINBACK  
Edie!

Even if she heard him, Springer does not stop. The ramp RETRACTS, the Wanderer disengages and then ZIPS AWAY.

As Pinback stares, forlorn, the ship's departure causes a ZERO GRAVITY pocket. The Messenger grabs a handrail, stopping himself from drifting away. Pinback dislodges from the gantry and FLOATS OFF into space.

MESSENGER  
Major Pinback, sir! The General is waiting!

Pinback looks drifts further away over the giant blue GLOBE OF THE EARTH.

PINBACK  
What's your name, son?

MESSENGER  
Private Hurl, sir. Private Charles Hurl. My buddies call me 'Chuck.'

PINBACK  
Chuck Hurl. I like it.

MESSENGER  
Don't move, sir, I'll go get help.

PINBACK  
Relax, Chuck. I've got this under control.

MESSENGER  
Sir?

PINBACK  
You go tell the General, I think I've figured out a way.

Pinback does a little pirouette, floating off towards the Earth, then strikes a pose like Superman, gives a little wave and sails off into the sunrise.

And over the END TITLES, 'Benson Arizona,' plays:

A million suns shine down,  
But I see only one.  
Tryin' to think I'm over you,  
I find I've just begun.  
The years move faster than the days,  
There's no warmth in the light.  
How I miss those desert skies,  
Your cold touch in the night.

Benson, Arizona,  
The warm wind through your hair.  
My body flies the galaxy,  
My heart longs to be there.  
Benson, Arizona,  
The same stars in the sky.  
But they seemed so much kinder  
When we watched them, you and I.

FADE OUT.