

STARHOUND

Sam M. Smith

**EXT. COSSEA**

A gigantic, sprawling city on an earth-like planet.

A massive shadow eclipses the twin suns.

People (all varied species of anthropomorphic animals) stop, look up, and stare. A family of dholes (Asiatic whistling canids with a similar but softer look than a coyote) look up from their shopping. A young pup, LANCE, 6, looks up from holding his mother's leg.

The momentary freeze reactions give way to flight as people scream at the sight.

Some flee into nearby buildings. A bearded dragon grabs the hand of a rabbit father, who herds his children, and they all run for cover.

A gigantic Precursor ship overshadows the city. It's ancient, imposing, and angular, far from the bright, rounded designs of the city's sky-ships.

The STARHOUNDS [SH], the galaxy's police force, scramble to comms.

COMMANDER

Do you read me? State your intent!

The ship fires a laser beam that violently cuts the planet in two.

No survivors. The ship warps away as the SH starship fleet arrives en scene.

**EXT. SPACE**

The SH follow the Precursor Vessel on its path of destruction. The Vessel turns to face them.

COMMANDER

Why are you killing what you have made?!

There is no response. The standoff lasts only a moment.

The ensuing laser blast leaves a debris field behind.. and a lone fighter craft on the far edge of the debris field.

Inside is Captain Whitehaus, 20s, a young spotted lion, terrified. He spurs his battered craft behind a chunk of the Command Ship as the Precursor Vessel slowly searches the scene for any survivors—and comes very close to finding him.

Then its green scanner passes over his ship. The Precursor Vessel primes its laser once more.

Just as the Precursor Vessel is about to fire on him, Whitehaus turns his laser guns on and fires enough blasts to cripple the engines. The engines explode, sending cracks throughout the Vessel before it breaks apart.

NARRATOR (O.S)  
And so, the courageous Cadet Whitehaus  
defeated the Precursor menace and  
brought safety to our sector.

The scene zooms out to reveal: a holographic image projector, a podium, and 20 new SH cadets of many species watching the video.

One cadet, Lance, now 20s and an overzealous upstart, watches the young Captain Whitehaus on the screen with admiration.

Captain Whitehaus, now mid-40s, sans spots, with a full, grizzled mane, enters the room to a shower of applause. There's a micro-expression of regret and shame on his face which he hides behind a stern smile.

#### **INT. SH COMMAND ACADEMY**

A formation of 12 SH recruits, Lance included, head to lunch. As Lance grabs a tray of food and looks for a seat, he gets cornered by GREYSKIN, 30s, a rhino.

GREYSKIN  
Got something to prove, pirate spawn?

LANCE  
Well, I'm not here to prove it to you.

Greyskin pushes him in frustration, causing Lance to dodge and bump into a RAVEN passing by with a tray.

RAVEN  
Hey!

LANCE  
Sorry!

KALI, 30s, a hawk with dyed plumage, gets between Lance and the Rhino.

KALI  
You've got nothing better to do than  
huff insults?

Greyskin grunts at him.

GREYSKIN  
Hmph, found your parrot.

Kali leads Lance away from them to a dark corner of the cafeteria.

KALI  
Don't let those guys get to you. They  
act tough 'cause of their size.

LANCE  
(joking)  
Thanks. I could've taken them head on if  
I had warning.

Kali laughs and winks at him.

KALI  
You'd *better* if I take you under my  
wing!

They both laugh.

**EXT. SH COMMAND ACADEMY - AFTERNOON**

In the locker room, Lance and Kali both dress in civilian attire.

KALI  
I'd kill for a bite to eat.

LANCE  
Not one of the rats, I hope?

Kali laughs.

KALI  
With our salary... heh, you do it for  
love.

LANCE  
So you're in love with the galaxy?

KALI  
You just keep 'em coming, don't you?

LANCE  
Either that or whine about my mistaken  
species' reputation the rest of my life.

Kali laughs, amused.

KALI  
So you're *not* a coyote?

LANCE  
Nah.

Kali raises an eyebrow.

KALI  
You know anyplace a bird can find some  
real good food on the cheap? Not *stolen*.

Lance perks up.

LANCE  
I think I can arrange that.

#### **EXT. COSSEA - EVENING**

A thriving city with the center fallen to ruin. There's a massive series of plates bridging the two halves of the planet where the slum is concentrated. The ramshackle, crammed housing units shelter wary families, thieves, and malcontents alike.

Lance, exhausted and with a nervous Kali in tow, trudges up to the door of an upper room above a restaurant.

The door opens and Lance's MOM smiles and embraces him. She looks back and sees Kali.

MOM  
Oh, you brought a friend!

#### **INT. LANCE'S HOUSE**

It's a noodle restaurant with a dormer upstairs. Two parents, six kids crammed together like chirimen-sansho (dried sardines) into a single bedroom divided by repurposed wood panels.

Lance's Mom places bowls of ramen in front of them. Kali tentatively tries some. Then he looks genuinely surprised.

KALI  
Hey, that's really good!

He grins at Lance.

KALI (CONT'D)  
You didn't tell me your parents had a  
restaurant!

Lance blushes.

**INT. LANCE'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

The dinner table is full. Lance helps serve his boisterous little siblings (and Kali) as his parents finish cooking the meal.

MOM  
Enjoying your new job?

LANCE  
...Yeah. How's the new server?

Lance's Mom smiles and ruffles his head fur. He ducks and blushes.

MOM  
Not as good as you.

After dinner, Lance shows Kali around. Kali looks shocked—and amused by their scavenged decor.

Lance's small room and rickety balcony are of particular interest to Kali.

Several pieces of scrap metal are screwed together into the form of rudimentary model spaceships, hung on a wire.

Lance's siblings run by, trying to rope either of them into their game of tag. Kali is enamored.

**EXT. STAR-RAIL STATION - DAWN**

Lance walks with Kali to the run-down interplanetary Star-rail station on a hill overlooking the slums.

LANCE  
Didn't expect you to actually show up.

KALI  
What, and pass on a free dinner?

He laughs.

KALI (CONT'D)  
You need a girlfriend, Lancelot.

Lance blushes.

LANCE  
It's *Lance*.

KALI  
'Bout what that big oaf said today..

LANCE  
We're not related to the pirates. Though I can't blame anyone for thinking that.

KALI  
Yes, you can.

Lance blinks.

KALI (CONT'D)  
Your family's nice. I like them.

LANCE  
Really? They didn't annoy you?

KALI  
Nah.

Lance looks confused. Kali scoffs and shakes his head, watching the suns rise.

KALI (CONT'D)  
Where I live, you can't even see the suns. *Precursors*, I don't know why I'm telling you this. I got kicked out of the nest early. Seeing your family, it..

He chuckles and looks out at the city.

KALI (CONT'D)  
Nah. I'm kidding. I just like the food.

Lance watches him for a moment, then lets out a long, amused breath and lightly punches Kali's shoulder.

LANCE  
Nah.

Their train arrives.

In the backdrop, the massive GATE NEXUS looms. Several star-rails stretch through it, and a steady stream of space traffic

comes and goes...

**EXT. REMOTE SPACE - GATE STATION**

Coyote pirates raid a busy Gate Station in a neighboring system, stripping off the decorative stylings. One pirate haphazardly switches the Gate's antimatter battery—accidentally leaving the replacement half-attached.

The SH chase the pirates but are unsuccessful in capturing them. Shortly after the pirates escape, the replacement battery gets wrenched free by scraped debris from a freighter passing through the Gate...

The Gate glitches and becomes unstable, a bubble of VOIDSPACE slowly consuming everything around it—including the Station.

**INT. SH COMMAND SHIP - SIMULTANEOUSLY**

We see the scene fast-forward on a holographic display in front of Captain Whitehaus.

A dense white dwarf star erupts from the Gate, then goes supernova, scorching the solar system beyond recognition.

**EXT. LILAGOS MOON - RUINS - NIGHT**

Futuristic ruins litter a nondescript moon orbiting the third planet in the Twin Sun System: the tropical Lilagos.

An ASTRONAUT in a Precursor spacefaring suit, with a helmet modeled after a lioness, walks between the broken pillars. A truly massive PRECURSOR vessel looms behind them.

The Astronaut reaches a massive stone DOOR, made of circular slates and etched with representations of the planets, moons, and suns. One clicks as it rotates on its own, mirroring the shadow of Lilagos crossing the Suns.

The Astronaut watches the Door's positional clock rotate. Notably, there is one sun portrayed on the engraved moving pieces, not two.

From the side, a singular red eye blinks awake in the darkness and watches as the Astronaut leaves.

**EXT. KEPLER 51B - OVERHANG BALCONY**

Lance and Kali exit the train. Lance looks around as Kali leads him to a view overlooking a very different city. This one is comprised of platforms suspended above roiling storm clouds, sandwiched between two unpleasant atmospheres. Neither the twin

suns nor Cossea are visible.

Lance sniffs and massages his forehead.

LANCE  
It's really muggy here.

Kali smirks and taps a struggling atmosphere generator with his shoe. It's caked full of dust and falling apart.

KALI  
Blame the Precursors. Their weather tech's been degrading, along with the atmosphere. You can't even see the suns anymore.

LANCE  
Nobody's keeping it up?

Kali shakes his head and leads Lance to a small apartment building, similarly maintained.

**INT. KALI'S APARTMENT - EVENING**

He unlocks the top apartment. It's a messy one-bedroom strewn with art supplies. A dirty, copper-polluted water distiller and full water jugs occupy one corner of the disused kitchen.

LANCE  
You have to buy water?

KALI  
Didn't use to.

The bedroom is tidier, with the soft furniture circling the beanbag "nest" styled bed. Geometric animal art canvases plaster the walls, some adorned with natural branch frames.

An easel holds an unfinished scene of the slums in Cossea. Despite the drab conditions, the figures are working to beautify the neighborhood with building materials and greenery.

The central figure is headless, with the scratches and paint thinner marks of a frustrated artist. A shorter under-painted figure next to it is similarly smudged.

LANCE (CONT'D)  
Whoa. You did this?

Kali blushes and hides behind a smirk.

KALI  
Eh, yeah but... I think I'll redo it.

LANCE

I don't think you have to. It's like I'm back home. You got a photographic memory?

Kali's blush deepens. He taps his head.

KALI

Heh. Thanks. I just can't figure out what I'm trying to say with this.

Lance smiles.

LANCE

It's clear to me.

**EXT. STAR-RAIL STATION**

They wait for Lance's train.

Lance smiles and hands Kali a necklace: a smooth stone with a cluster of holes in the middle. As Kali takes it, it pulses, shimmering in tune with Kali's heartbeat.

KALI

What's this?

Lance grins.

LANCE

A song-stone. Whistle to it, and it'll always guide you home.

Kali cocks his head, looking at him.

KALI

To here, or...

LANCE

Isn't it obvious? I'm inviting you over again.

Kali laughs, endeared.

KALI

Good, cause I was afraid you were into me.

LANCE

Eh, they make good engagement gifts too.

Flustered, Kali lightly shoves him, and Lance amusedly shoves back. Both laugh.

**INT. SH COMMAND ACADEMY - AFTERNOON**

The instructor, a chinchilla, slips an official notice to Lance after briefing. Lance reads it and stares in shock, then hands the note to Kali.

KALI  
Captain Whitehaus wants to see you?

He blinks.

KALI  
Sounds like he's making you a *special assignment*.

LANCE  
Wait, that's not a good thing, i-is it?

KALI  
I dunno.

**EXT. LILAGOS MOON - RUINS**

Suited up, Captain Whitehaus waits as Lance's craft lands. Lance approaches him, awed by the massive Door.

LANCE  
Precursor ruins.

He runs a gloved hand over the Door, stone as polished and smooth as metal.

LANCE  
It's tracking the position of planets and our suns. But why...?

WHITEHAUS  
I believe it predicts something dire.

He leads Lance to a blank wall.

WHITEHAUS (CONT'D)  
Does anything stick out about this?

Lance examines the wall. Tiny pores in the wall, almost imperceptible, contain beads which shine like black mirrors.

LANCE  
There's something here.

Whitehaus pulls out a strange, triangular device. He slots it into a depression in the wall he was blocking from Lance's view.

The ruins come to life, revealing blue and red holographic, geometric shapes and scenes sprawling over the walls. A canvas of stories, hidden.

One half of the room is bathed in blue holographs, the other, red. Two Precursors, both suited up, with massive warships and drone armies at war. The blue Precursor wears a lioness helmet. The red one, a triangular helm.

Their war devastates Cossea and spills out across the system.

WHITEHAUS

The Precursors were not all united, nor were they all-knowing. Their war devastated us.

Lance examines the ruins, fist clenched, disquieted.

WHITEHAUS (CONT'D)

I've been trying to make sense of it. These two halves... do they remind you of anything?

LANCE

Yeah. When our ship engines start up.

WHITEHAUS (CONT'D)

Like redshift and blueshift. Time speeds up... time slows down. Two sides of a coin.

LANCE

So, what does this all mean?

WHITEHAUS

Patience, pup. I believe war is at our doorstep once again. When the Door opens...

LANCE

We take on the Precursors? Teach them to stay away and leave us alone?

Whitehaus sighs and looks behind Lance.

WHITEHAUS

Never mind, kid. You're not ready.

His eyes meet the lioness-helmeted Astronaut who watches them from afar.

**EXT. COSSEA - EVENING**

Down the street from Lance's house, Whitehaus walks with Lance.

WHITEHAUS

Look around, kid. This is what they didn't show you. When Cossea was split by the Precursor's laser, the government couldn't fix it. So the people did. We did.

LANCE

Yeah. Uh, Captain... I... I live down the street.

Whitehaus looks embarrassed. They stop at a small flower shop. Lance appears confused, but watches as Whitehaus crouches and rubs his hand over a carving in the wood frame of the door:

W ♥ S

Whitehaus forcefully exhales.

WHITEHAUS

I see. You want to be a top-level Hound, huh?

Lance hesitates, unsure.

LANCE

Y-yeah.

Whitehaus taps his finger twice and stands up.

WHITEHAUS

How can we make life better for everyone?

LANCE

One person at a time?

Whitehaus sighs, disappointed.

WHITEHAUS

There's not one answer, kid.

Lance winces. They move on. Whitehaus stares for a long moment at the distant Gate, barely visible beyond Cossea's atmosphere. He sighs.

**EXT. LILAGOS MOON - RUINS**

The ruins, dark and silent, save for the clock. A swarm of red-eyed drones flood out of the shadows.

**EXT. BROKEN KEPLER MOON**

These RED DRONES start congregating on the dark side of the broken moon orbiting Kepler.

**EXT. SH COMMAND SHIP**

The Command Ship registers the drones as red dots on its radar. The WATCH COMMANDER, a coyote, walks up to the ADMIRAL, 30s, a black panther.

WATCH COMMANDER  
Hostiles from the ruins approaching  
Kepler.

Admiral scowls as she watches the drones.

ADMIRAL  
Keep an eye on them. Their master is not  
far behind.

**EXT. SPACE**

CAP: GATE NEXUS VOIDSPACE

A black sea peppered by bright pinpoints.

The debris of a massive, sun-eclipsing spaceship drifts into view, then the frozen, somewhat visible bodies of many Starhounds. Many destroyed ships lie scattered, abandoned in the darkness.

**EXT. DEBRIS FIELD**

...A tiny fighter slips past the wreckage, its thrusters damaged.

**INT. LANCE'S SHIP**

Inside is Lance.

He starts to rouse. Flashes of the moments before make him grimace:

PAST

**EXT. GATE NEXUS - PAST**

Pirates attempting to breach Gate security as a freighter passes through the Gate. The SH arriving en scene.

Lance's overconfidence in chasing down a pirate craft, leaving his partner Kali to fight off two pirate ships as they whip around the besieged freighter.

Both partners come too close to the freighter and Lance accidentally shoots it with his rockets in the crossfire.

The red drones appear and begin to violently rip the Gate apart, causing the Gate to destabilize--and the space around them to warp and change.

They--and the Gate--fall into an expanding bubble of Voidspace, where the navigation equipment goes haywire.

SH PILOT  
More hostiles!

The red drones and the pirates fight each other and the Starhounds.

Along with pirate fire, Lance's blast is enough to start a chain reaction...

The freighter scrapes against the Gate, dislodging the star battery and causing it to further destabilize. The orbit of the suns outside appears to swing wildly. Time destabilizes.

SH PILOT  
Voidspace?! It's gonna collapse on us!  
We gotta get out of here!

LANCE  
Not until we stop them!

The SH continue to chase pirates and drones until Kali's craft's wing is hit.

A white dwarf star emerges from the Gate and begins to suck in everything.

Kali's stuck on the side of the large craft, unable to steer his damaged ship.

Lance hooks his craft's wing to Kali's to help the crippled vessel out of the blast zone. They rush to make it out of the Voidspace.

The Gate implodes and sucks in large chunks of debris, its star rapidly outgrowing the Gate.

They narrowly escape the supernova, but both of the crafts are severely damaged.

LANCE  
And you said I'd get you killed, Kali.

There's only static over the comms.

LANCE  
Kali?

He looks over and sees Kali slumped forward, singed like him.

LANCE  
(panicked)  
Kali?!

He whistles once. There's no movement, no response.

The Voidspace begins to close in front of Lance. He unhooks his tether to Kali and uses the last of the ship's thrusters to make it out.

PRESENT

#### **EXT. SPACE**

Lance escapes the Voidspace as it collapses, just before the supernova rips out of it like a dragon's flame.

Lance is alone, drifting among the remaining debris and twisted metal innards of the freighter which escaped the Voidspace before the star went supernova.

More red drones swarm him and prepare their lasers. Lance's guns spark and jam.

LANCE  
No no no no NO!

A laser blast cuts through the drones. Before Lance can react--

Slower, possibly slow motion:

[A shadow falls over him. He's about to drift into a large metal chunk fifteen times the size of his craft.

He braces himself but still the blow comes. His ears ring as darkness follows.

Cracks appear in space, splintering out of the flaming tear. It won't hold much longer.

WHUM. WHUM. WHUM. A strange, pulsating humming sound signals the approach of something.

A bright, neon-drenched Precursor colossus explodes into view, warping the space around it. It's a similar model to the first one, but has fewer guns and more antennas—a research vessel.

A precise mechanical arm extends from its underside, adjusts itself, grabs Lance's ship, and pulls it into the docking station.

The colossus again warps space around itself, speeding towards a distant, black object devoid of stars.]

Regular speed:

The supernova breaks open the Voidspace, escaping and scorching everything behind them.

FUTURE

#### **INT. COLOSSUS MED-BAY - FUTURE**

Lance jolts awake, breathing heavily. He's inside a medical machine of concentric triangular scanners. He's confused, struggling in restraints.

A chime and a moment later, the triangles slide back into place and the restraints disengage.

He pulls himself up and bolts to the window, looking for a landmark, a constellation, a planet—anything. None appear.

Lance looks closer and gasps as they pass the dark, charred husks of the primary planets: Lilagos, then Kepler, then... Cossea... barely visible against the empty backdrop. The system's twin stars are nowhere to be seen.

He nervously fingers the edge of his GH badge, then fumbles for his radio, finally opening the channel in a blast of static.

LANCE

Kali!

There's no response. He waits an impatient moment and switches channels.

LANCE (CONT'D)

Anyone...

Only the electronic screams of nonexistent connection answer.

He turns the radio off and shivers.

The Vessel hits a wave of turbulence and emerges into a star field. The stars are moving backwards...

LANCE

The stars...

The hologram of a fuzzy, glitched-out figure, appearing to be a lioness in a SH Commander uniform appears behind him.

Rells, mid-20s, enigmatic female (the Astronaut). Her voice is calm, distant, even alluring. She seems amused by him.

LANCE

They're... they're going backwards.

RELLS

Yes, that is what they do when being pulled into a black hole.

He panics, reaching for his gun. It's not there.

RELLS

Do not panic. We have disarmed you.

LANCE

"We"?

RELLS

My crew and I were unable to save your friend. Though such a tragedy nonetheless saves us from making a... difficult decision.

LANCE

Commander, where am I? What ship is this?

Rells smiles and casually glances outside.

RELLS

A seized Precursor Colossus. We would hold onto something.

She snaps her fingers.

The electronics shut down, but the med-bay's restraints come alive and wrap him in an embrace.

A bright wave of light invades the entirety of the ship. Then, loud turbulence follows as the ship passes into the black hole--into VOIDSPACE.

...Into the same room, dark, dim, silent, lit only by flickers of paltry light from the windows. Lance picks himself out of the disengaged restraints.

The electric hum of the ship gives way to a pulse in the cadence of a heartbeat.

Strange, transient giggles beckon outside the ship. Lance glimpses odd forms that disappear in a blink. The sea of stars blink out, one by one. All that's left is...

The void, dark and eerily silent. The pinpricks of light are gone. There is nothing but dust, gas, and ghosts out there.

Rells' hologram stands behind him again. A crew of twelve scruffy Starhounds, mostly coyotes, stand at the ready next to her.

LANCE

What... what is this?

RELLS

What will come to pass.

LANCE

What happened? Where is... everything?

Rells points out a massive torus of metal, scorched beyond recognition. A dead Gate in the dead center of the Nexus.

RELLS

Burnt-out. That interconnected highway allowed something unprecedented to happen. When the Gates starved... The entire galaxy went dark. Lost in Voidspace.

LANCE

You've been sending your crew after us to prevent us from constructing the Gates? Disguised as pirates?

Rells turns and fully looks at him. She examines his face.

RELLS

The Gates must be fed. The Transit Authority builds more than they can maintain, but when we told them, they would not listen. So we tried another tactic.

She sighs.

RELLS

Obviously, it was not enough. Last time I came here, you could still feel the heat.

They drift towards one of many black holes. The accretion discs rapidly grow brighter amid the clouds of dust and gas. Lance looks suspicious.

LANCE

Unless...

RELLS

Unless you help us stop it.

LANCE

You want *me* to sabotage the intergalactic transit system?

RELLS

*Repair* it. Just the Gate Nexus. If we power one side of the Gates, the other side will stabilize for a while. It's not a perfect solution, but it buys us time.

LANCE

Why not talk to the rest of the higher-ups?

Rells smiles sadly.

LANCE

You've tried. Not even Captain Whitehaus? Your drones?

She shakes her head.

RELLS

They trace back to this ship.

LANCE

But... why me? To them, I'm a *coyote*, they're already suspicious of me.

Rells turns her head and stares forward, still smiling.

RELLS

Is not brief enmity better than guaranteed death? One fighter can slip in and out of the Gate Stations quickly. Among my crew, there is not such a pilot as you.

Waves of red-and-blue-shifted light pass over them, faster and faster, until the sight becomes overwhelming.

They slip into the black hole. Back to the PRESENT time, but in a different place.

PRESENT

**EXT. LILAGOS - SUN SIDE - PRESENT**

Space near the jungle-covered, tropical planet with cruise and commerce vessels crowding around a brilliant white satellite ring.

The Colossus hovers behind a nearby moon, somewhat hidden in its shadow.

LANCE

If that's our future... Could you go back to the past? Could you save Kali?

RELLS

There were attempts. But the window closes faster each time. We may try again when the Gates have been sufficiently recharged.

LANCE

How many?

Rells hesitates.

RELLS

Prepare to depart.

The doors open. Lance looks down the hallways, carefully. He walks through the endless, cavernous sprawl, passing strange machinery.

Rells GIGGLES, the sound bouncing off the walls from no particular direction. Everywhere and nowhere at once.

He begins to walk faster. As he reaches a dock, he sees his ship, fully repaired. He approaches it.

The ship starts up on its own. He takes a step back.

RELLS (CONT'D)

Your mission begins immediately. You have one antimatter battery.

**EXT. SPACE - GATE NEXUS**

Lance hesitates as he approaches the Cossea Gate Nexus. It's there. No tear in space. No supernova. It's like... the Gate was never attacked. Like Kali never died.

Lance swerves to a stop as he fumbles to load the antimatter battery into the delivery hatch. Greyskin's ship slams into Lance's, throwing the battery into the Gate Station itself, severely damaging it.

The Gate goes supernova.

**INT. COLOSSUS MED-BAY**

Scorched, Lance gasps awake in the med-bay. Rells stands over him, unamused.

RELLS

That was your last mistake. There are no more time jumps to save you.

Lance gulps and runs to board his ship. The Gate is intact, but fluctuating. Her hologram follows him into the ship's cockpit.

RELLS (CONT'D)

I jumped *ten minutes* into the past. Yet now even such a short disparity shows itself on your wounds.

He pilots his ship in a much more deliberate manner. Rells has her crew follow and support him, distracting the SH cadets.

**INT. COLOSSUS BRIDGE**

Rells watches the events unfold with gritted teeth. She takes a deep breath and sighs, glancing at the Colossus energy indicator: 5%.

Rells types on a keyboard, then sends a command.

**EXT. SPACE - GATE NEXUS**

Greyskin whips his ship around and accidentally rips the battery away from the Gate and intertwines his weapons with Lance's.

GREYSKIN

I'm gonna kill you, pirate scum!

This confuses Lance.

LANCE

"Pirate scum?" How are you going to do that without blowing us both up?!

They try to wrestle their ships away from each other. The Raven grabs Greyskin's ship with a flexible hard-light tether and yanks it free, sending Greyskin spinning. Lance's ship slams into the Station and bounces back, tumbling into space.

The Gate's star erupts and grows, causing the SH to peel back from its heat.

As Lance struggles to regain control of his ship and the SH Command ship struggles to rein in their cadets via comms, Rells' white angular Kerfur drone passes by Lance's cockpit.

The drone deploys a white, glowing object and drags it, building momentum. It prepares to slingshot the object.

RELLS (CONT'D)

A white hole. To be used sparingly, as it pulls from the Voidspace...

The drone fires it into the enlarged star, and the space where it engulfed the Gate Station reverts to a previous time--stabilized. The void around it "shifts" (red-and-blue shifting).

Lance glimpses a shifting ship out of the corner of his eye. When he looks at it again, it's gone. The drone tethers Lance's ship and tows it back to the Colossus.

#### **INT. SH COMMAND SHIP - SIMULTANEOUSLY**

Whitehaus watches this from the Bridge but does not alert any of the other crew.

The Admiral follows his eyes as the drone and ship slip behind the moon.

ADMIRAL

They'll be back.

#### **EXT. COLOSSUS MED-BAY**

Singed, embarrassed, and grumpy, Lance peels himself off of the medical table as Rells watches.

LANCE

Why did he call me "pirate scum?" I thought we went back in time to before Cossea's Gate Nexus blew up!

RELLS

We did. But the Gate had already slipped into Voidspace. That which is lost in there--besides the Gate--does not return, even if time is wound back.

LANCE

...So Kali is still... dead.

RELLS

Unfortunately, yes.

LANCE  
So, why do you need *me*?

RELLS  
The materials to create batteries or even white holes are exceedingly difficult to accumulate and isolate. It takes centuries. We have none of *either* left.

LANCE  
How long have you been doing this...?

Rells does not respond, but glances at the Iteration counter on the monitor. It's in the millions. Lance looks aghast.

LANCE  
So we can't let any other Gates go supernova. Got it.

**EXT. KEPLER 51B - OVERHANG BALCONY - DAY**

It's storming, again. Lance leans on the railing of the city's edge, watching the clouds roil both in the near-endless chasm beneath and the sky above.

He taps a clogged atmospheric condenser with his boot, then wipes a bit of dust off and shakes it from his hand in disgust.

LANCE  
Heh. Can't even see what I'm trying to save.

Lance looks up at Kali's apartment.

**INT. KALI'S APARTMENT**

Lance enters by climbing up the window. He notices molted, shifting feathers on the beanbag. He picks one up, glances at the others, and when he looks back, it's gone.

LANCE  
Is that what she was talking about? Time gets weird?

He follows the feather trail into the bedroom. The figures on the easel have been somewhat refined, but are still vague. He whistles, listening with a perked ear for a response. Then he gives up.

LANCE (CONT'D)  
I miss you.

A very faint, distorted whistle returns his. He perks up his ear but cannot find the source of the sound. The quantum "ghost" of Kali watches, then destabilizes and disappears.

**INT. COLOSSUS - RELLS' ROOM**

Rells dusts a collection of souvenirs. Notably, we don't see her face or hologram, just her clothes and fur-covered hands.

The environment is noticeably sterile, with a couple of carbon-printed engineered plants and tourist posters.

She pauses when she picks up the COSSEA souvenir and a regretful SIGH is heard.

She turns to look at a Lilagos poster featuring frolicking tourists on a beach.

A carbon fabricator with a faded splash poster of hot food beeps. She opens it and picks up a tray with a bowl of bland-looking ramen.

**EXT. LILAGOS MOON - DARK SIDE**

The Colossus hovers in the shade of a shattered moon. A crack goes so deep chunks of landmass are suspended, rocking gently with the pull of the faraway suns and the moon's gravity.

**EXT. LILAGOS MOON - RUINS**

Near the impact crater, Lance exits his ship and nervously approaches the ruins of a Precursor construction complex. Kerfur hovers near his shoulder, Rells' digital eyes surveying the landscape.

Lance repeats the mission objective to himself.

LANCE

Get in. Get a battery. Get out.

The complex is somewhat like a modern construction site, though the automated machinery is twisted and buried in mounds of dust and rock.

He steps closer to the logo on a corrugated piece of metal and wipes away the moon dust coating it.

LANCE

Why are we looting an abandoned...  
"Ferranti Corp"?

RELLS

We only need one antimatter battery to finish stabilizing the Gate Nexus.

**INT. COLOSSUS - SURVEY ROOM**

Rells watches him through Kerfur's eyes.

**EXT. LILAGOS MOON - RUINS**

Rells sighs.

RELLS

The Colossus does not have enough power to produce the batteries, but Ferranti Corp keeps a stockpile of them.

Lance checks the door. Locked. The padlock crumbles upon further inspection, though. He enters.

**INT. PRECURSOR RUINS**

He sweeps his light over everything. Dust-covered, but clearly an administrator's office. Shards from broken mugs and computer monitors litter the cracked ground. A long counter erupts out of a massive crevice in the center of the floor.

The remnants of a moonquake, long ago since passed.

Lance picks his way over the debris.

LANCE

Were these... Precursor ruins?

Kerfur scans a barricaded door farther in the complex.

RELLS

Yes. Recent ones. Only a thousand years old.

Lance follows Kerfur deeper inside to another locked door. This one is slanted, but intact. He kicks it open. A storeroom, with endless rows of shelves, all full of dust and preserved supplies.

LANCE

You know this company?

Kerfur examines a hanging lanyard. As they scan the name, Kerfur's digital expression turns sullen, mirroring Rells.

RELLS

I am... well-acquainted with their  
relics.

Kerfur tucks it into a mechanical side pouch and continues scanning. Rells grumbles.

RELLS

So much interference...

Lance watches Kerfur, suspicious.

LANCE

Guess we're close.

A red digital eye watches him. Like those of the Precursor drones.

Lance brushes dust away from a shelf and grabs the antimatter fuel cell.

LANCE

Got it.

A metal can hits the floor and rolls. His ears and hackles perk up.

LANCE

I don't think we're alone here.

#### **INT. COLOSSUS - SIMULATION ROOM**

A simulated beach, with artificial sand, a small shack, and a hammock with an umbrella. A pair of catlike toes stretch from behind the fabric of the hammock. Her helmet is on the side table.

Rells holds the bowl, preparing to dig in. Her cat tail flicks and curls in anticipation.

An alert blares, shattering the simulated environment and startling her. She jumps and falls out of the hammock, dropping the bowl on the sand, which quickly is sucked into holes in the floor.

#### **INT. COLOSSUS BRIDGE**

Dressed, Rells runs up to the bridge. She looks at the heat-map of the Ferranti ruins. Three red dots and one blue. Lance.

RELLS

(annoyed)

Always one step ahead.

**INT. PRECURSOR RUINS**

A long, segmented metal tentacle whips and straightens as it grabs the rack behind Lance. He tucks the fuel cell under his arm and runs. Another pulls the shelf next to him down, blocking his escape.

He squeezes through the shelves, knocking rocks and machinery parts to the ground. A third arm splays three long, metal claws on its tip across the doorframe.

Lance gets a good look at the metal menace in front of him:

A Ferranti logo and a model are visible under worn, dusty-laden paint. Its three limbs are equivalent, its head large and extending backwards like a squid's. A singular red eye scans him with the same light as the medical scan earlier.

Lance cocks his head at the model name.

LANCE  
Tri-pod?

Rells (through Kerfur) looks *terrified*.

RELLS  
Lance, GET OUT OF THERE NOW!

Her voice snaps him out of it and he dashes to the other door. The Tripod follows him, ripping chunks off the walls and knocking over shelves as it does. Kerfur attempts to distract the Tripod, which swipes at the drone.

Kerfur tumbles through the air and recovers.

Lance fakes the Tripod out and darts back to the doorway. It's buckled inwards and won't budge. The Tripod easily catches up with him. A shot from his pistol merely deflects. He quickly stows it and runs again.

The Tripod follows in the most efficient path.

LANCE  
It's not being piloted.

He shoots the door off the hinges and barrels through it. The Tripod chases him through the hallway and out of the ruins.

**EXT. LILAGOS MOON - RUINS**

Lance pants heavily as he runs. Kerfur struggles to keep up.

The Tripod skitters across the buckled terrain like an agile spider after them, quickly gaining. Lance makes it halfway to his ship before a laser blast singes his tail.

He yelps and zig-zags. Several moonquakes send him sprawling to the ground. More Tripods erupt from the rock, eyes trained on him. He scrambles to his feet and runs to grab the battery.

LANCE

*More?!*

The Tripod is unaffected by the emergence of its brethren and cuts off his escape, smashing the battery with its foot.

**INT. COLOSSUS BRIDGE**

Rells sweats, trying to aim the lasers.

SYSTEM

Error - Proximity To Target

She growls and maneuvers the Colossus. Every effort to target the Tripods results in an error.

Suddenly, she loses sight of Lance. The Tripods converge at the bottom of a cliff.

RELLS

Lance?

**EXT. LILAGOS MOON - CAVE**

Lance slips through a crevice and hides in a small cave. The Tripods slam their arms against the cliff, splintering the rock.

LANCE

A little--busy--here!

RELLS

I'm working on it. They've got targeting shields...

LANCE

They destroyed the battery.

Rells takes a deep breath.

RELLS

Our activity disturbed them. They're powered by solar energy, so they've lain dormant for a while--

The Tripods begin excavating the cave. The cracks deepen. The walls sound hollower.

LANCE

--Not the time for a history lesson!

She grits her teeth and Kerfur hovers in front of him.

RELLS

Listen--This is important! They have *backup* energy cells. Antimatter batteries. Take one out and we'll be able to fix the Nexus.

LANCE

How am I supposed to kill one?

Rells struggles to respond to that. She pulls up a schematic of them on her screens.

RELLS

Come on, come on... there's gotta be a weakness somewhere...

LANCE (CONT'D)

Can they fly?

RELLS

No.

LANCE

Then I've got one advantage.

The crack in the cave has widened. Holes appear in the wall, shining red lights directly onto Lance.

Lance runs and slips through the crack again. The Tripods notice immediately, but take a moment to stop their excavations and pursue.

Lance whistles. His ship answers, hovering and kicking up dust. Kerfur *just* grabs onto the ship as he boosts *backwards* away from the Tripods.

RELLS

Lance, are you sure about this?!

LANCE

Don't have a choice.

RELLS

...Aim for the joints!

The Tripods quickly catch up to him. He powers on the lasers. They whine as they charge up. The ground passes quickly under them as he continues to boost backwards... towards the ruins. The Tripods keep pace, clambering over rocks with more agility than his ship bumps and hovers over them.

RELLS

Lance?!

LANCE

Almost... full power.

The facility ruins are right behind him.

Lance locks onto the joints of the Tripods. The Tripods lunge for him. He fires, searing off the joints of two limbs of the first one, cracking the metal casing of the head.

Kerfur swoops in and rips the first antimatter battery from the exposed casing. Two other Tripods grab onto Lance's ship.

He guns it, boosting forward. The other Tripods on the ground slam into the ones on the ship, sending them--and Lance's ship--spiraling. Several robotic arms rip the ship's armor off as he wrests control and boosts forward.

Kerfur grabs on as his ship boosts away from the surface.

One Tripod still clings to the bottom. It prepares to drill into the ship. Lance rolls the ship, but it holds on.

RELLS

Allow me.

Kerfur fires a mini-laser at the ship's plating where the Tripod holds on, breaking it off and sending the Tripod PLUMMETING to the moon's surface.

#### **INT. COLOSSUS HANGAR**

Lance exits his ship. Beneath her helmet, Rells smiles at him, a bit proud. He strikes a heroic pose, then deflates, panting hard. Rells takes the battery and pats him on the shoulder.

RELLS

Good job. Now let's save the galaxy.

#### **EXT. LILAGOS SPACE**

The Starhounds intercept them on the way to Cossea's Gate Nexus. Rells doesn't initially react. She seems prepared for this.

RELLS

Go fix the Nexus. I'll hold them off as long as I can.

LANCE  
But--

                  RELLS  
Go!

Lance boards his ship.

**INT. SH COMMAND SHIP**

The Admiral steps forward, tail flicking in annoyance.

                  ADMIRAL  
Fire!

The SH ships attack the Colossus. The red drones swarm and try to stop Lance from reaching the Nexus.

Rells lasers a pathway through the drones for Lance. The shockwave from their destruction distorts Rells' crew's appearance. They're pirates, not SH cadets.

Lance passes one of them, stunned. In his distraction, he gets hit and boosts away from his pursuers.

**INT. COLOSSUS BRIDGE**

Rells nervously types commands and accidentally makes an errant keystroke, turning on her video camera for both the SH command and Lance.

Rells' uniform looks *exactly* like the Admiral's, which causes Lance to do a double-take.

                  ADMIRAL  
How dare you impersonate me?!

Rells hides a shocked frown with a nervous chuckle and disconnects.

                  ADMIRAL  
One of ours is with the Precursor!

                  LANCE  
Precursor...?

He takes heavy fire from the SH troop but manages to swing past the Gate Nexus and secure the battery.

                  LANCE (CONT'D)  
Only here to change out the batteries.

He abandons the pirates and boosts back to the Colossus, attempting to lose the SH in the asteroid field.

The drones swarm the Gate and dislodge the battery.

**INT. COLOSSUS BRIDGE**

Rells sees this and slumps over, horrified.

**EXT. ASTEROID FIELD**

Lance weaves between the asteroids, skirting within meters of their surface.

Several Hounds in pursuit attempt to perform the same maneuvers and find themselves with battered ships spinning out of control. Red drones chase both Lance and the Starhounds.

The SH Command Ship's shield smashes through asteroids as it chases him.

**INT. COMMAND SHIP BRIDGE**

Admiral is livid.

ADMIRAL

She *had* to corrupt our fastest pupil...

Captain Whitehaus throws up his hands and shrugs. Admiral growls in his direction, then throws her cloak off her shoulders and marches to the helm.

ADMIRAL (CONT'D)

*Typical.*

She shoves the gunner aside and flips a few switches. Whitehaus panics.

WHITEHAUS

Do you want the Precursor to fire back?!

ADMIRAL

Better to just end this whole charade.

**EXT. COLOSSUS**

Lance notices the Command Ship preparing a laser blast and panics, diverting all systems to boost his craft's speed. He holds his breath as he switches off the oxygen.

**INT. COLOSSUS**

Lance swerves his battered craft into the Colossus' bay.

**INT. COMMAND SHIP BRIDGE**

The laser is fully charged. Admiral fires it and Captain Whitehaus tackles the navigator, sweeping the laser in a wide, shallow arc across the surface of the Colossus instead of a deep penetration.

Admiral SCREAMS and claws at him.

ADMIRAL  
You FOOL!

**EXT. COLOSSUS**

After that "warning shot", Rells warps before the Hounds penetrate the weakened shields.

**INT. COLOSSUS BRIDGE**

Lance storms up to Rells.

LANCE  
You're a Precursor. Why did you lie to me? Was time travel just another illusion?

Rells stands up and walks toward him. A moment passes and she disappears, then reappears behind him, but he puts his laser pistol up to her chin.

RELLS  
I tried honestly, I tried hard truth. This was the only timeline I found where you would listen to me at all. So yes, I lied.

She sighs and looks him in the eye.

RELLS  
In all of the other timelines, no choice of cadet resulted in survival. Not even your friend.

Rells pushes the muzzle of the pistol away from her face.

LANCE  
I'm your last shot?

Rells looks disgusted.

RELLS

Yes. This ship will not survive fighting off the Hounds in every sector. Therefore subterfuge was necessary. And the Yur-- the red one's drones--have undone our work on the Nexus.

He's livid, barely listening.

LANCE

The "rogue Hounds" are your pirates. So you're the reason my family is hated!

Rells is genuinely taken aback.

RELLS

What?

LANCE

Your coyote pirates sullied my whole species!

RELLS

Wait, what do you mean--

Lance storms off. Rells stares after him.

**EXT. LILAGOS LANDING SITE - NIGHT**

Rells runs after Lance, stopping at the edge of the Colossus' exit ramp. She looks down at the grass, nervous.

RELLS

Wait!

Lance's ear twitches toward her, and he glances back, hurt. He keeps walking.

Rells takes a deep breath and runs out onto the ground, getting weaker the farther away she is.

She makes it 500 feet from the Colossus before a glowing hard-light tether surfaces around her heart and yanks her back.

RELLS (CONT'D)

Lance!

She fights the tether.

RELLS (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry! I never meant to...

Lance looks sadly back at her and whistles, summoning his ship.

**EXT. SPACE - GATE STATION**

As he returns home, he passes Cossea's Gate Station. It appears weathered and unstable.

He stares off into the field of stars, reminiscing:

LANCE (V.O.)  
What made you take up painting?

KALI (V.O.)  
I like to meet people, even if they never know me.

LANCE (V.O.)  
(joking)  
So you're shy!

Their laughter fades. Lance sniffs and blinks back tears, wrenching his attention away from the void.

LANCE  
Maybe then you'd still be alive.

**EXT. LANCE'S HOUSE**

Lance sits on the balcony of the restaurant, barely touching his ramen.

To his surprise, Captain Whitehaus knocks on the door two stories below.

He sees Lance.

WHITEHAUS  
Lance.

LANCE  
...You're not with patrol officers.

WHITEHAUS  
I understand you got into some trouble.

**EXT. COSSEA WATERFRONT - NIGHT**

An upscale wharf that dumps its river into the slums. They walk along the tasteful brickwork.

WHITEHAUS

I know she wouldn't have dumped this on you if, well... there was any other way to get through to me.

Lance finally looks at him.

LANCE

You *know* her?

WHITEHAUS

She rescued you, right? From that massacre.

Lance nods, looking at his feet.

LANCE

How would you know?

WHITEHAUS (CONT'D)

Son, what she tasked you with... she also tasked me, only I didn't listen to her.

Lance finally listens.

LANCE

What do you mean?

WHITEHAUS

She told you there was only one successful timeline, right?

He chuckles sadly.

WHITEHAUS

Twenty years ago, there were two.

PAST

**EXT. COSSEA - PRE-DESTRUCTION**

CAP: The Truth: 20 years ago.

The scene from the beginning, but what really happened:

**EXT. SPACE**

The Starhounds follow the hostile Precursor Vessel on its path of destruction. The Vessel turns to face them.

COMMANDER

Why are you killing what you have made?!

There is no response. The standoff lasts only a moment.

The ensuing laser blast leaves only a debris field behind.. and a lone fighter craft on the far edge.

Inside is Cadet Whitehaus, 20s, terrified. He spurs his battered craft behind a chunk of the Command Ship as the Precursor Vessel slowly searches the scene for any survivors-- and comes very close to finding him. Then it does.

Just as the Precursor Vessel is gearing up to fire on him, a similar laser blast cuts through the ship, cleaving it in two. Whitehaus braces as the broken halves pass within inches of his ship.

Then the shadow of a massive vessel falls over him. Whitehaus tries to start his ship. It's fried.

A bright light floods the area around him as his ship is pulled into the docking bay of the..

Colossus.

A female human silhouette waits by the landing pad.

FADE TO:

**EXT. COSSEA WATERFRONT - NIGHT**

LANCE

She saved you?

WHITEHAUS

I was never a hero, kid. It was more lucrative for top brass to vilify all Precursors than to admit some were good.

He looks off into the water, reminiscing. Lance stares at him, genuinely surprised.

PAST

**EXT. COLOSSUS BRIDGE - PAST**

Colossus hidden behind a moon. Whitehaus and Rells embrace in silhouette.

WHITEHAUS

So we visited in secret.

Then, Whitehaus and Rells picnicking aboard the Colossus in different environments. Rells never strays far from the ship. As time passes, Whitehaus looks older and more decorated. Rells looks the same as when she first met him.

WHITEHAUS (CONT'D)

All was well for some years. I earned my medals. We visited all the places in our galaxy. Then something changed.

Rells hesitantly approaches Whitehaus.

WHITEHAUS (CONT'D)

The Gates began to suffer instability.

#### **EXT. SPACE - GATE STATION**

A sleep-deprived attendant routes commercial traffic through the massive Gate.

RELLS (V.O.)

The Gates' stars need a steady stream of Voidspace to power them. It rewinds time to keep their stars in check. In essence, an antimatter battery.

The attendant notices the Gate beginning to glitch. The shimmering veil erratically red-and blue-shifts, pulling in his nearby coffee thermos.

RELLS (V.O.) (CONT'D)

These antimatter batteries have to be changed out every few decades or they'll release their stars.

The battery level indicator's cables loop through the scavenger-damaged, exposed plating of the Gate. Solar radiation and electromagnetic waves disrupt the sensor, causing the indicator to fluctuate rather than flatline.

The confused attendant verifies the battery levels with the chart in the station, looking confused.

The cables connecting the backup antimatter battery to the main battery are frayed. An overloaded freighter scrapes the backup battery as it passes, damaging it.

RELLS (V.O.) (CONT'D)

When that happens, their white dwarf stars pull in the densest energy around them in an attempt to keep from collapsing and going supernova...

The Gate swallows the attendant whole.

An entire tanker star liner, halfway through the Gate, disappears into its maw. The star within the Gate explodes outward in a burst of white light, then goes supernova in a scorching wave that burns up the entire solar system.

RELLS (V.O.) (CONT'D)

A series of minor errors culminating in disaster. In other words, a catastrophic "normal accident". Trapping everything around it in a bubble of Voidspace... and then a life-ending supernova.

#### **EXT. GATE NEXUS**

The superhighway of civilian and commercial Gates.

Instead of being fixed, its corresponding Gate is turned off.

Timelapse of decades. More and more are turned off or rerouted.

WHITEHAUS

She told me what could eventually happen. Not all of the Gate stations are well-funded or maintained. If the Gates got hungry enough, they'd eat a star.

#### **EXT. SPACE - GATE STATION**

Whitehaus is turned away by the guards. He notices management bribing an inspector.

WHITEHAUS

We didn't have enough white holes to patch them all up. But I craved the chance to earn the title "hero."

#### **INT. OFFICE - NIGHT**

Whitehaus drafts messages to the Transit Authority.

WHITEHAUS  
I poked and prodded until they  
threatened me.

He reads a response:

WE HAVE INVESTIGATED THE SITUATION. DO NOT CONTINUE.

Outside his window, he notices one of the Transit Authority's drones watching him. Its sinister green scan-lines sweep over the room as he ducks below the window.

**INT. COLOSSUS**

Rells and Whitehaus stand apart. Whitehaus goes to embrace her and Rells pulls away from him.

WHITEHAUS  
I was too concerned about my reputation  
to do what I should.

BACK TO

**EXT. COSSEA WATERFRONT - NIGHT**

Tears slip down Whitehaus' cheeks. Lance stares at him, stunned.

WHITEHAUS  
And now I've let you down too, Lance.  
You were never meant to shoulder my  
burden.

He tries to compose himself.

WHITEHAUS (CONT'D)  
She resorted to SH washouts to try to  
stop the madness. Go to her, Lance. I'll  
do everything to ensure they do not  
capture you.

Lance realizes they've stopped in a shadowed area of the wharf.

LANCE  
You're not coming?

WHITEHAUS  
They watch me. Go through the slums and  
summon your craft. They don't have as  
many eyes there. Go!

Lance vaults over the railing and lands on a roof, hoofing it down the vertical houses.

WHITEHAUS (CONT'D)  
Tell her I'm sorry.

**INT. COLOSSUS BRIDGE**

Lance enters the Bridge of the Colossus. A BEEP draws his eye to the Iteration counter on the side monitor:

993,901,021.

He stares in horror.

For once, his presence surprises Rells. His gasp pulls her attention away from the monitor tracking the Transit Authority's search drones.

He sees her in person for the first time. She is not a lioness—the snout beneath her helmet is that of a cat.

LANCE  
You knew about the back door to the Gates. You designed them, didn't you?

RELLS  
Yes. They utilize the same technology as the Alcubierre drives in your starship, but for a different purpose. But I always thought they would improve upon my design.

She looks longingly at the ground.

RELLS (CONT'D)  
And now we have so little time before the primary worlds are lost.

Lance steps forward.

LANCE  
Primary... worlds? You mean Starhounds headquarters in Cossea?

RELLS  
Cossea, Kepler, Lilagos. The first ones seeded by my people.

Lance stares out the window at Kepler, far away.

LANCE  
Because you've used up all the time jumps on my stupid mistakes.

RELLS

We... I... I have made plenty myself. We only have three days before the Twin Sun Gate destabilizes and destroys this system.

LANCE

Wait... your people? What do you mean?

Rells takes off the helmet and reveals herself to be a Precursor, 30s. Her features are between human and feline. Savannah cat features adorn her body and a mixture of feathers and fur poke out of her shirt.

She can't quite pass for a cat Descendant, though. Her legs are noticeably human, and her fingers have black nails, not claws. Her hair is more akin to human hair than fur.

LANCE

So your projection wasn't... you?

RELLS

Correct.

She looks askance.

RELLS

Ever since my brother attacked the Descen-your race, Precursors are "attack on sight" in this galaxy. Which is why I enlisted your help.

LANCE

Your brother? Wait, I saw the Precursor attack on video. About Captain Whitehaus.

She perks up at the mentioned name. Lance thinks.

LANCE

Did he... earn any of his medals?

Rells smiles sadly.

RELLS

It was much like our encounter.

LANCE

And Kali?

RELLS

I tried to save him. I used fifty thousand iterations.

Her voice cracks.

RELLS  
I couldn't.

Lance looks uncomfortable. He notices the ramen fabricator.

LANCE  
Are all Precursors this mischievous?

Rells' smile falters.

RELLS  
Some were. Some are. Some are less  
amused by the Descendants.

LANCE  
Descendants?

RELLS  
You. Everyone you've known. The Animai,  
they were once called. We created them  
both in our image and that of creatures  
deemed beneath us.

LANCE  
Wait, you mean—

Rells picks off a molting feather from under her shirt. She discards it.

RELLS  
Snouts are not a Precursor trait, nor is  
fur, scales, feathers... you understand.  
We found that the differences in anatomy  
made these... hybrids... more suitable for  
certain tasks.

Lance blinks, getting angry.

LANCE  
...You mean the tasks you didn't want to  
do.

RELLS  
My people are lazy and inefficient. We  
discovered traits within other beings  
which predisposed them toward hard  
labor, unlike us.

LANCE  
So we were slaves?

Rells adjusts her shirt. Lance watches in horror as a cat's tail slips out of her cloak and moves.

RELLS

The first generations desired to please us. The later ones did not. I did not partake in such designs, personally. As you can plainly see.

Annoyed, she adjusts the cloak to cover the tail.

LANCE

...Wait, but how are you a Precursor if-

RELLS

-If I look *somewhat* like a Descendant? Simple. I did this to myself.

LANCE

Why? Where are the others?

RELLS

They squabble amongst themselves in another galaxy, though several have made their home here.

He notices she didn't answer his first question.

LANCE

What's with you and the Captain?

For the first time, Rells appears caught off guard. She quickly recovers with a smile.

RELLS

We've been at odds before.

LANCE

I think you're blushing.

RELLS

You're imagining it through the fur.

He smirks, then sighs. She looks at him.

LANCE

I...I've got to know. Is Kali really dead?

RELLS

Yes and no. I attempted to pull him out of the supernova's path.

(MORE)

RELLS (CONT'D)

But I was late on my final attempt. He's in a state of flux. Like this object.

She shows him an holographic recreation of a quantum object.

RELLS (CONT'D)

When it is observed, it remains present. But as we look away, it changes state. This is the nature of things trapped in Voidspace.

She directs him to look away, at her finger, then back to the object, which has moved. It exhibits the same red- and blue-shifting as Kali.

LANCE

Can he be saved?

Rells shakes her head.

RELLS (CONT'D)

There is no known way to reverse such a process.

She smiles, sadly.

RELLS

It is similar to the mechanism which keeps me tethered to this ship. Your friend is trapped, much like I am.

LANCE

Quantum... mechanics?

He stammers.

LANCE

I know we survived going into a black hole... but my head hurts.

RELLS

We do not yet understand its full workings either, but the technology has made us functionally immortal. As long as this Vessel remains, so shall my life extend. Thus my reluctance to leave.

Lance stares out at Lilagos.

RELLS (CONT'D)

There are enough energy stores in the Colossus to last a millennia, and yet I've run through 98% of it in a tenth of that time. The rate of solar conversion is not sufficient. There is but a week left of energy under ideal conditions.

LANCE

You're going to die?

RELLS

Yes.

LANCE

I know we don't have much time, but... How about one brief detour?

**EXT. HIDDEN WOODLAND CAMPSITE - NIGHT**

A Lilagos forest large and tall enough to hide the Precursor Vessel within its thicket. Lance and Rells sit on overturned logs and roast marshmallows over a fire.

LANCE

Isn't this a bit "primitive" for you?

Rells laughs.

RELLS

On the contrary. I've always wanted to try this, but I spent my life on a star-cruiser, so...

LANCE

You never saw grass? Trees? Birds?

RELLS

Holograms, simulations, games... never the real thing.

LANCE

That's sad.

Rells pulls her knees to her chest.

RELLS

Yes, I suppose it is. I don't know how far I can travel from the Vessel before the immortality severs. So I just... didn't.

LANCE  
I get being afraid.

Rells looks at him.

LANCE  
That's why I looked to study Captain Whitehaus. I thought if I could face down a Precursor Vessel like him, well... I'd be stronger, braver. But even that was a lie.

RELLS  
Maybe we're all afraid?

Lance laughs. There's a moment of silence.

LANCE  
You can't bring back the dead, can you?

Rells stares up at the stars.

RELLS  
There are many I would.

LANCE  
So even the Precursors don't know everything? But you hooked your bodies up to the tech anyway?

RELLS  
As stated previously, we are a reckless species.

LANCE  
Speaking of, what's the deal with the tail and the feathers?

RELLS  
After I rescued Captain Whitehaus, we... we saw each other for a while.

Lance feigns surprise.

RELLS  
I tried to use my colleagues' genetic research to make myself look more like a Descendant, and...

She plucks off a feather and sighs.

RELLS  
I messed it up. He's rightfully furious... I haven't seen him since.

LANCE

Wait, you *ghosted* him because you were embarrassed?

Rells looks askance.

Loud crickets draw their attention to the bushes.

RELLS

I never imagined nature could be so... noisy.

Lance laughs.

LANCE

I saw your food stores. You've really been eating out of your ship this entire time?

Rells looks at him, surprised.

RELLS

I'd kill for fresh noodles after a lifetime of carbon-fabricated instant ramen.

Lance smiles. He takes something out of his pocket and hands her a song-stone necklace. She holds it, uncertain.

RELLS (CONT'D)

What is this?

LANCE

A song-stone. In Lower Cossea, specifically *dhole* culture, we give these to those we consider friends. When you whistle, they'll respond in kind. So that you can always find your way home.

He looks down, sad.

LANCE (CONT'D)

I gave one to Kali, just before...

He gets choked up and doesn't continue. Rells stares at the stone, looking guilty.

RELLS

You... want to give one... to me?

Lance looks at the Colossus.

LANCE (CONT'D)  
Up there all alone, you don't have  
anyone looking out for you.

Rells puts it around her neck, looking touched.

RELLS  
Thank you.

The stone does not pulse.

**EXT. SPACE**

The Colossus emerges from Lilagos' atmosphere, alerting the SH.

**INT. COLOSSUS BRIDGE**

Rells looks at her posters and smiles, sadly. She turns to Lance.

RELLS  
Ready, *Icarus*?

Lance rolls his eyes and taps her piloting console.

LANCE  
Let's hope I don't live up to that  
namesake.

**EXT. SPACE - GATE NEXUS**

Rells sees Cossea's Gate Nexus, reads its energy level, and sets her jaw. She steers the Colossus toward it. SH patrols pursue them.

The Command Ship corners the Colossus.

**INT. COMMAND SHIP BRIDGE**

ADMIRAL  
This is a warning. I will not repeat  
myself.

**INT. COLOSSUS BRIDGE**

Resigned, Rells stares at her cloak. She grits her teeth and looks through the VR camera array simulacrum of a windshield.

RELLS  
Nor will I. Step aside, Admiral.

**EXT. SPACE**

Between the two ships, Starhounds and Precursor. Admiral and Rells stand off, neither moving.

ADMIRAL  
You once protected us. Now you too would  
destroy us?

**INT. COLOSSUS BRIDGE**

RELLS  
No. This Gate must be fixed, or else  
Cossea, Kepler, Lilagos—everything that  
matters to us *both* will die!

ADMIRAL  
That's the Transit Authority's  
prerogative. Why would we trust a  
Precursor?

Rells becomes frustrated.

RELLS  
Bah, this is why I couldn't tell you—

She sighs.

RELLS  
...You don't have to trust me.

Her expression hardens.

RELLS  
You cannot *stop* me.

Lance looks at the Gate, determined.

LANCE  
I know we've used up our time travel  
jumps. If we save the galaxy... There is  
something else that I request.

RELLS  
I am in no position to promise anything,  
but I will do what is within my power.

Lance holds his hand out. Rells places a battery in it. He  
marches toward the docking bay.

RELLS (CONT'D)

(low)

Come back. Please.

**EXT. COSSEA GATE NEXUS**

Lance's craft zooms toward the fluctuating Gate. He weaves around and between the SH as they pursue him.

Red drones attack, but the SH keep them at bay--barely.

He changes out the battery--and Greyskin fires on him. Lance dodges. The blasts hit the battery and explode it, sending Lance's craft spinning.

**INT. COLOSSUS BRIDGE**

Rells stiffens, then furiously types on the keyboard. Her holographic monitors locate the twinned stars of the system.

RELLS

We might have to stabilize the gravity  
of the other sun, but...

**EXT. COSSEA GATE NEXUS**

Lance wrestles his ship out of its tumble. He reorients himself. Rells appears on his comms.

RELLS

We have one last chance. We can feed the  
Gate one of the twinned stars. I can  
remotely boost your tether--but I cannot  
guarantee your survival.

Lance stares at the Gate for a long moment.

LANCE

I know. Let's do it.

Kerfur guides Lance.

**EXT. COSSEA TWINNED STARS**

Lance's ship begins to heat up as he flies closer to the stars. He's struggling to keep from passing out. He whistles, and gets a response from Kali's song-stone.

Kali's ghost ship comes beside his and hooks onto his wing as he did Kali's, pulling him in tether range of the twinned stars.

LANCE

...Kali...?

Kali disconnects his ship and cockily signals him before peeling off to harass the SH Command Ship, slipping in and out of reality as the older pilots chase him.

Lance steels himself, throws his ship into neutral, and whips the back end around to face the stars.

LANCE (CONT'D)

Gotta do this... quick...

The SH follow and watch him carefully.

Rells activates his tether. He waits for her to supercharge his boost before hitting the throttle. Rells diverts the lights and A/C inside the Colossus and watches the energy of her ship deplete.

Sweating as his craft begins to suffer heat damage, Lance aims for the collapsing Gate. The Admiral glares at Lance through the hologram.

ADMIRAL

Shoot him down, Captain! That's an order!

Whitehaus jams the signal.

WHITEHAUS

Do not engage! DO NOT ENGAGE!

The SH cadets wait, uncertain. The Raven boosts forward, but Greyskin blocks her.

GREYSKIN

No, let him finish his mission.

Whitehaus watches Lance drag the star behind his craft.

WHITEHAUS

Darn it, Sirrel... I hope you know what you're doing.

Rells sends the Pirates and drones ahead of Lance to clear the pathway to the Gate of twisted debris. The Colossus' energy reserve ticks down through the <0.10% range.

RELLS

You are our legacy!

Lance slingshots the star into the Gate, halting the supernova. The Gate stabilizes and overcharges, sending out a massive wave of solar radiation.

The SH retreat as their ships turn off. Rells uses the final .01% of energy, boosting the Colossus to catch the resulting massive shockwave instead of Lance's ship.

The blow cripples the Colossus and throws it far sideways, where the gravity of Lilagos pulls it down toward the planet.

**INT. COLOSSUS BRIDGE**

Rells collapses as the shockwave hits. The heartbeat slows.

The heartbeat stops as the electronics completely shut down.

RELLS

...Thank you.

**EXT. LILAGOS**

The Colossus throws up massive waves of earth as it crashes. Fires from its fried electronics quickly spread through the trees.

**EXT. GATE NEXUS**

Everything stills. Lance slows down his ship, staring at the stabilized Gate.

He catches a glimpse of Kali's ship flying toward the firestorm on Lilagos and follows him.

**EXT. LILAGOS - CRASH SITE**

Singed but desperate, Lance lands his ship near the crash site and begins searching for Rells. He finds large pieces of the bridge and digs through them.

He comes up empty and panics.

Then he pulls out his necklace, grasping it. He takes a deep breath, then whistles.

A low, clear note whistles back from Rells' song-stone. He keeps whistling and listening for the response until he finds her.

Lance rescues Rells from the wreckage of the Colossus. He checks her pulse. She's not breathing. He administers CPR.

LANCE

Come on! Come on, I can't lose you too!

She COUGHS and GASPS to life, clutching the rib he broke. He laughs off his fear.

LANCE  
Hey, sleepyhead. How do you feel?

He helps her up and catches her when she crumples to the ground. Her leg is broken.

RELLS  
Everything hurts. But it "hurts good."  
An old saying.

Lance laughs.

LANCE  
Well, your pulse is strong and you don't look suddenly old. I think you're going to be okay.

He looks back upwards at the distant Gate and the jet trails of the SH as they regroup.

LANCE (CONT'D)  
Thanks.

Rells smiles, then puts a hand on her chest, feeling her heartbeat in abject wonder.

RELLS  
I haven't felt it in so long... Is this what it feels like to... be alive?

LANCE  
Well, now that you're not tethered to your ship... would you like to go get something to eat?

#### **EXT. COSSEA - EVENING**

Lance guides Rells (with a cobbled-together motorized leg brace) to his parents' restaurant. Rells looks both nervous and dazed by all the sights and smells.

#### **INT. LANCE'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

Lance's Mom eagerly welcomes her. The kids all crowd around, curious, and rope Rells into playing with them. Lance's Dad eyes her with suspicion. He takes Lance aside.

DAD  
 (low)  
 Okay, Lance—what species *is she*?

LANCE  
 (low)  
 She's—

Rells butts in.

RELLS  
 Precursor, actually.

The parents look stunned.

RELLS  
 (nervous)  
 I never planned on being famous...

LANCE  
 (quickly)  
 She's not the one that split the planet  
 in two.

RELLS  
 That would have been my idiot brother.

They all look at her. Lance's Mom tries to defuse the situation by laughing.

MOM  
 Well, welcome to our home! It's not  
 much, but it's our lot.

Rells looks guilty. Lance's Mom hands Rells a forkful of ramen, and she perks up.

RELLS  
 This is *fantastic*!

**INT. LANCE'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

Lance and Rells help out at the restaurant. As Lance heads back to the kitchen, his Mom pulls him aside.

MOM  
 She's a keeper, hon. A little light on  
 hair, but she remembers orders like a  
 machine! And she's so sweet.

Lance blushes and hides a smile.

**EXT. LANCE'S HOUSE - ROOF - NIGHT**

Lance and Rells sit up on the roof, looking at the stars over the slumbering city. They're both as nervous as high schoolers attempting a date.

RELLS

Is... is this a simple excursion, or more?

LANCE

I don't know. Is it?

He laughs.

RELLS

I mean... My years outnumber yours by a factor of-

LANCE

You *look* my age. Biologically, you might even *be*. Does it matter? We're already crossing a species gap.

Rells smiles a little.

RELLS

I guess not. It's been so long since I've... even just held hands.

Lance holds out his. She takes it.

LANCE

You and Whitehaus didn't-?

RELLS

I... I was infatuated, but no. Neither of us was ready, and a good relationship can't be built on a rescue.

LANCE

How do you feel now? I mean, you did rescue me.

RELLS

You rescued me, too. I'd say we're even.

Rells smiles.

RELLS

Being here now, with you...  
(MORE)

RELLS (CONT'D)  
it feels like I don't have to change  
myself to belong.

LANCE  
My mom likes you. You'll grow on my dad.

RELLS  
I hope that's an expression.

She smiles and waits for Lance's reaction. He laughs.

RELLS  
Your family is wonderful.

Lance smiles.

LANCE  
They didn't annoy you?

Rells giggles.

RELLS  
Not at all.

**EXT. COSSEA WATERFRONT - NIGHT**

Rells sneaks up behind Captain Whitehaus and surprises him with  
a bouquet of flowers.

He stares at it for a moment, then they embrace.

**EXT. KEPLER 51B - OVERHANG BALCONY - NIGHT**

Rells, alongside a sheepish Admiral, fixes up the atmospheric  
generators.

Shifting, Kali watches them with a smile.

**EXT. KEPLER 51B - OVERHANG BALCONY - DAWN**

It's overcast. Rells and Lance hold hands, watching the clouds.  
Captain Whitehaus and the Admiral stand together off to the  
side.

The lone sun breaks through the clouds at horizon level.

LANCE  
We did it, Kali. Wish you could see  
this.

Far above him on the balcony, the shifting ghost of Kali smirks down at them, then at the sun.

**INT. LILAGOS MOON - RUINS**

The DOOR ticks into place and rumbles OPEN.

A massive Precursor vessel HALF, reconfigured into a Tripod-like monstrosity, climbs out of the darkness. Its red eye pierces the darkness.

FADE OUT.