

A Family Argument

You see a vision of Commander Wheeler-Nicholson, but she looks much younger. She is talking with someone: he looks kind of like here. A brother? A cousin? Parent or child?

The words are garbled so that you can't make out what they're saying. As the conversation goes on, the two get more angry and more animated. Eventually, the two are yelling at each other. Now the words become a little more clear:

"What the military has been doing to those soldiers is immoral, and you know it" he says.

"Joining the military while they continue these programs is condoning their immoral acts."

"Defending our way of life is worth some sacrifices." The not-yet-commander yells back. "And you can't stop me joining the military." She storms out of the room slamming the door behind her.

Nearby, a small child watches with worry in his eyes.

Disappointing Pareidolia

You get a vision of several workmen in space suits, carting a box through an airlock chamber. As the door finally closes behind them, each begins removing their helmets and life support gear.

A figure approaches: it is Dr. Tenagon. She impatiently waits for the workmen to finish removing their suits, then rushes them into opening the crate. There is a whoosh of gasses as the pressure inside and outside the box equalize. Tengaon reaches through the fog in the box to grab out a stone that looks vaguely like a squashed human face.

"This is no good" she says. "Just a natural sandstone deposit. There's no sign that tools were involved in making this, just natural geologic forces."

The workmen look at one another, unclear on what this means.

"No aliens here" she says, looking disappointed. "Same as every other planet."

Welcome to Proxima

You receive a vision. In it, Hester Zao is dressed in a nice suit. She walks through the lobby of a towering office complex. Inside, she scans a handheld device for directions to an office. The directions seem to take her further and further into the bowels of the earth rather than up towards the fancy offices on higher floors.

Zao arrives at a doorway, which seems to be her destination. She looks up, and is dismayed at what she finds. She knocks on the door and then enters.

Inside, an ancient man sits in a messy office. He looks up at her. "Ah, you must be my replacement, uh..." he shuffles the papers and eventually finds one he's looking for. "Hester Zao?" Zao nods.

"Well," he says, "it's all yours. All you gotta do is sit here and listen for signals every couple days. And send reports on back to Earth, of course."

"I'm confused" Zao says. "I thought this was a management job, with growth potential."

The old man laughs. "Growth potential? There's no way anyone is getting out of here. It's the deepest pit in Gaumata Conglomerated. No manager back on Earth will ever see what you're doing here, not when they got eager business school graduates back there around Sol." The man keeps chuckling

under his breath as he gathers his hat and coat and leaves Zao alone.

Once he's gone, Zaolooks dismayed. "Where do I go from here?" she asks herself. **A Flash of Light**

You get a vision: A blinding flash of light is slowly clearing. Jacobson is looking over at someone dressed in a military uniform, who has collapsed on a counter. "Rayburn?" Jacobson says. "Rayburn, are you okay? Manassah, say something."

Rayburn's eyes slowly open, but there is no comprehension inside. He looks around at Jacobson and the laboratory, but does not seem to recognize anything. He screams, and hoots, and leaps up from his chair. As Jacobson watches in shock, Rayburn leaps onto the counter and backs into a corner, terrified of his surroundings.

"Listen, Manassah." Jacobson says in a soothing voice. "It's okay. Whatever happened has passed, and you seem to be fine now."

Rayburn's foot lashes out, clocking Jacobson upside the head. As Jacobson falls, Rayburn leaps over him and sprints to the door, yelling something without words.

Jacobson slowly climbs off the floor, and activates his communicator. "Get me Dr. Crozier, and have Lieutenant Ramos get his security people down here. Something has happened to Officer Rayburn." Then Jacobson leans gingerly against the table to wait, cradling his injured jaw in a hand.

An Alien City

As in a dream, you see a city built by no human hand. Your vision floats through strange buildings made of unfamiliar materials, created in forms unknown to earthly architecture.

The city is filled with wonders, and you see much of alien civilization as you float through the city, though none of the aliens acknowledge your presence. The aliens themselves are hard to visualize: as the vision happens you can see their form clearly, but when it ends you instantly forget what the alien's physical form looks like.

Nonetheless, you see many alien people on your survey of their city. In none of the cases are you able to identify what the aliens are doing. Is it some sort of dance? a game? A religious ceremony? A mating ritual? Without context, it is impossible to say.

As you drift through a small chamber, you see aliens working on a strange device: it looks like the alien artifact in the lab. One has picked up a small crystal, and holds it to the device. As the device begins to glow, the alien looks directly at you and says "Irvine, it is time for you to wake up." And you do, and the vision ends.

Addiction

You receive a vision. In your vision you see someone furiously typing away at a computer terminal. You see that it is Dr. Kashtaritu-Kennedy, and she is writing some sort of scientific paper.

The pace of her typing slows. "No," she says "The effects are wearing off too rapidly. My prognosis indicated a heightened state for at least another hour. I need that boost to be able to finish this work." She shakes her head. "I can already feel my brain getting sluggish."

She stands from her chair, and goes over to a counter. There on the counter is a pill bottle. You can see the label: Cozonol, which you know to be an addictive intelligence enhancing drug.

The doctor shakes the pill bottle, but no pills rattle around inside. "Fuck" she says to herself. "Another bottle gone means I'll be out in no time. I need more, dammit, before the withdrawal symptoms kick in." she stops for a moment, pondering where she can get more of the drug.

Just then, a flashing message appears on the computer screen. Dr. Kashtaritu-Kennedy goes over to see what it says. A scientific research station has stopped responding, and they want to send a survey team to see what happened. They want her as part of the team. The doctor is uninterested in the message, until she notices a brief mention that the research station had been doing neurological

experiments. "Perhaps..." she thinks out loud, "...would they perhaps be using Cozonol in their research? I wonder..."

The Escape Attempt

You receive a vision. A pair of armed military guards are knocking on a door in the station living quarters. After a moment, the door slides open, and a drunken man eyes the pair.

"Evening, Israel, Rosabel," the drunk man slurs. "How can I help the two of you?"

The male officer speaks. "The captain has issued a warrant for the arrest of Hong Jacobson, and for him to be returned to Proxima for immediate court martial."

"Court Martial?" Jacobson says. "Can you court martial someone not in the military to begin with?" As he speaks, the female officer raises a pair of handcuffs to place them on Jacobson.

"Now, Rosabel," Jacobson pleads, "there ain't no need for those. I'll go along peacably." Rosabel looks over at her partner, who shakes his head.

"Come on, Israel. He can't go far on the station anyway." Israel finally shrugs in agreement.

As the trio leaves the living quarters, Jacobson continues to act friendly to the guards. His conversation is entertaining, and by the time they are passing the labs, the guards are laughing at his jokes. As they do so, Jacobson snatches a laser pistol from Israel's holster, and ducks into the lab.

"Shit" says Israel. Rosabel fires a few shots, but the doorway blocks her fire. As Israel radios for backup, Rosabel approaches the doorway. She pushes the doorway open, only to see a wave of blinding light engulf Jacobson.

Pulling Strings

As in a vision, you see Rachel Gaumata hugging and kissing a uniformed man. "Oh, Warrant Officer Rayburn," she says, with mock formality. "How will I wait for you to return, when I know your duty may take you to the rebellion around Saturn? Or the riots on Luna? A boy could get himself hurt out there."

Rayburn withdraws at the question. "Look," he says, "we talked about this. I know you worry about me, but you have to let me earn my way through the ranks. I want to know I deserve it, you know? So no getting your dad to pull strings on my behalf, okay?" Rachel frowns at this, but nods in agreement.

Seeing that she agrees, Rayburn kisses her once more, then releases their embrace. "Alright, I love you, but I need to get going. They expect me back at the base." Rachel bids him goodbye and he exits the room.

Once the door shuts, Rachel counts under her breath to one hundred. Then she turns on the videophone, and calls someone. When the other side answers, you can only hear one side of the conversation. "Aunt Magdalene? Does

Gaumata Dynamics have any research stations far from anywhere dangerous? No, Mars had that plague a little while ago. How about somewhere past Proxima? Alpha Centauri A would be perfect. What do they study... no I realize it's classified. But do you know who's in charge? Could you contact General Gushtap about a favor? For me? I am so worried about my boyfriend Manassah..."

Planetary Romance

As in a vision, you see Rachel Gaumata looking out a spaceship window, at the planet Saturn. Someone enters the chamber, and she turns to see it is Manassah Rayburn. She smiles at him.

"You wanted to see me, Miss Gaumata?" he asks.

"Rachel's fine, Officer Rayburn."

Rayburn relaxes slightly. "Then you can call me Manassah. But maybe not in front of my superiors, you know?"

Rachel smiles at him again. "Let me ask you something. What are the military's rule on... " she searches for a word. Rayburn waits expectantly for completion of the sentence. "Fraternization?" she finally says, as though she is uncertain if that is the right word.

"Well, uh, that would depend on whom I am, uh, fraternizing with," Rayburn replies.

"How about, just by way of example, me?" Rachel asks, though it becomes clear that she is not just a random example in the question.

Rayburn thinks for a moment. "I'd have to check the military code to be sure, but I don't see how it'd be a problem. You aren't a superior officer, and you aren't really a military contractor exactly. You're just a civilian, in the eyes of military justice."

This is the answer Rachel had been hoping for. "Then let me ask you another question. 'Would you like to join me or dinner?'"

Rayburn seems slightly surprised, but eagerly

agrees.

First Contact

You receive a vision, in which an armed female military police officer is edging toward a doorway. "Shit, what was that?" she yells, louder than she intends.

"I don't know," says her partner, a male officer apparently lacking a weapon. "But we need to get Jacobson." He gestures for her to enter the room.

The female officer yells "Jacobson, we're coming into the lab. Give yourself up." When there is no answer, she moves over into the doorway, to see what is happening in the lab beyond. In the lab, a man stands with a strange expression on his face near a strange mechanical device. He does not appear to recognize the female officer, and his only notable reaction is a look of curiosity at everything.

The woman speaks to him firmly. "Give yourself up, and we'll overlook your escape attempt." Jacobson looks at her, as if surprised that sounds can come from her mouth. He tries once to speak, but only an awkward gurgle comes out of his mouth.

He tries again, and this time an incomprehensible language spills forth. The female officer calls out to the hall. "Hey, Israel, I think he did to himself whatever he did to Rayburn." She approaches, cautiously, with a pair of handcuffs. When she goes to put them on his hands, though, Jacobson freaks out, and kicks her back. She falls backward, and hits her head against a sharp bit of

lab equipment. Once on the ground, her neck is clearly at an unhealthy angle, and her body completely motionless, dead.

Manassah's Mysterious Illness

As in a vision, you see someone sleeping uncomfortably, strapped down in a hospital bed. It might be the beast man found downstairs, though he looks cleaner and in better physical condition.

Standing over him is a middle aged woman in a lab coat. She speaks into a digital transcription device. "Subject is Warrant Officer Manassah Rayburn. He was brought into the medical bay after some sort of lab accident. The captain says they've got some MPs looking into it. I guess it involved the alien device, so we really have no idea what might be going on with him..."

The sleeping man groans in his sleep. The doctor pauses in her speech, until his sleep seems to quiet again. "Anyway, the subject is quite violent, and seems to have no memory of anyone or anything. He would not respond to anyone trying to calm him down." He grunts once more in his sleep. She pauses again, waiting for him to calm.

"We have him heavily sedated," her report continues. "But it took a lot just to get him to sleep." As she speaks, the transcription device slips from her hand and falls to the floor. "Darnit." She says.

As the doctor stoops to recover the device, the sleeping man's eyes flutter open. And his limbs strain against his restraints. The doctor's head snaps up, to see his arm break free. As the doctor tries to stand from her crouch, the man sits up in bed and

begins ripping the rest of his bonds loose. The doctor tries to flee, but he leaps amazingly fast from his bed, and attacks her.

Space Time Anomaly

In a vision, you see a small group of armed soldiers, clustered around a doorway. "Do we need to give him another warning?" a soldier asks. The leader shrugs.

"It didn't work before, but you know, it can't hurt. Protocol, right?" he says. The questioning soldier nods.

"Hong Jacobson," he yells. "You are once more requested to give yourself up into custody. You are to be returned to Sol for immediate court martial." The soldiers wait for a tense moment, as no answer comes.

"Right, in you go," says the commander. Soldiers kick in the door, and rush in to tactical positions.

Inside this very chamber, a human body lies dead on the floor. A strange swirling force floats above the fusion reactor. "What the hell..." a soldier wonders aloud, before catching himself.

The commander looks bemused. "What has happened to Jacobson? What is this?"

The glowing field of energy passes a tendril over the commander. When it withdraws, he seems confused. "But, but you killed Hong!" he yells. "Soldiers, kill it if you can."

The soldiers seem relieved to have a clear order to follow. Guns blaze, but they just pass through the field. It expands to cover all the soldiers.

As it passes over them, they begin aging rapidly. After a few seconds, each is very ancient, and they begin dying of old age. The commander panics, and tries to run, but an arm of the energy field catches him. He disappears, and then the arm swings back, making every soldier's body disappear with it.

Paradise

Your mission here is finished, so you and your crewmates leave to go back to Proxima. Back in civilization, you are celebrated as heroes, and the secrets you found here make you famous throughout human occupied space.

Using your fame and success, you are quickly able to climb upwards through your chosen career, and find at the top of the ladder fortune, true love and an altogether satisfying life.

Then, as your life goes on, you begin to experience doubts. Everything you always wanted is there for you to take, no effort required. It is as if your life has become too perfect: things seem too simple, too easy, and too nice. Even more than that, though is that everything seems too short; like you're only watching the highlights of your life rather than living every day of your life.

Finally, you come to a realization: your life is an illusion, and has been for the decades you have been gone from this research station. For many years, the suspicion grows within your mind, but you are unwilling to acknowledge it. Finally, you become certain that it is the only explanation, and you voice your doubts, vocally, by abandoning your life and returning here.

And you reenter this very chamber, and see the space-time anomaly is still there. And it says to you:

"Good work. I expected it to take you longer to figure it out." And then the vision ends.