

AZIMUTH

Written by

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EXT. UPPER ATMOSPHERE (ALTITUDE: 55,000 FT) - DAY

The atmospheric glow of the Earth's curvature is seen against the backdrop of space.

A singed troop transport, with glowing undercarriage, hurls its way toward a cluster of freighter ships at 35,000 feet.

Retrorockets fire, slowing its descent---the undercarriage returning to the normal color of carbon-carbon from the orange heat of hell.

Compared to the air-anchored freighters, the transport designated STT-317 looks like a dreadnought-class warship.

INT. BRIDGE, FREIGHTER

The crew is on edge.

The captain arrives on the bridge, still putting on his gear.

A DECKBOY defuses the tension...

DECKBOY
What the hell is that?

EXT. FREIGHTER

The transport maneuvers its way over the open cargo area of the 400,000 long-ton freighter.

The firing of retrorockets blows some of the grain-like cargo overboard, and pushes down on the freighter, making it list momentarily.

It bobs back up until the small undulations dampen to zero.

The transport, now hovering effortlessly over the cargo hold, maintains its fixed position.

A side hatch bursts open, a few soldiers pour out, rappelling into the grain.

One of the soldiers already planted in the grain, makes a swirling motion with his arm---directed at the bridge.

Inside the bridge's windows, the freighter crew members look stultified.

INT. BRIDGE, FREIGHTER - MORNING

More crew members have gathered on the bridge, peering out the windows at the invasion below.

A NAVIGATOR craning his neck over map panels....

NAVIGATOR

What's he saying?

CAPTAIN

Not sure. Open exohatch three.

INT. BELOW DECK, FREIGHTER

No sooner is the hatch opened by one of the crew members, in bursts one of the armed soldiers.

He pulls open a velcro flap on his arm---revealing a strange symbol---as unnerving as a biohazard symbol.

The crew members respond almost reverentially, backing away.

INT. MESS HALL, FREIGHTER - LATER

Crew members, including the captain, are eating at a table.

Suspiciously they glance over at one of the tables farther away---where a dozen soldiers are eating, segregated.

One of the soldiers, AVEN, likely the leader, gets up and walks over to the Captain's table.

Aven is a clean-cut, no-nonsense space marine---the kind of guy who could kill an ordinary citizen with an absent-minded movement of his hand.

AVEN

We're trying to get back surface.

CAPTAIN

We're longhaul. Try the SX23.

He points out the large window at the freighter moving alongside.

EXT. FREIGHTER - LATER

The soldiers make their way across a makeshift bridge to the other freighter, the SX-19A23.

Between the freighters: a 7 mile abyss terminating on the earth's surface---a scenic death clocking in right under 50 seconds.

One of the soldiers slips---Aven behind him catches his arm, steadies him, repositions him.

The soldier looks back---thankfulness betrayed only by the fear in his eyes.

EXT. SHORTHAUL FREIGHTER - LATER

The soldiers look on from the main deck railings as the longhaul freighter LY-71M17 pulls away from under the floating transport.

The transport starts falling toward earth.

A soldier presses a button on a handheld device, and the soldiers peer over the side of the freighter to see the transport explode into a fireball 3000 feet below.

EXT. SHORTHAUL FREIGHTER - LATER

The freighter is approaching a docking station, which looks like a donut-shaped rig anchored to a long, swooping cable that disappears into the atmosphere below.

The freighter slowly approaches, docking with the station.

Aven looks up at the bridge, and gives a look of acknowledgement to the pilot.

The soldiers file off onto...

EXT. EXTERNAL DECK, DONUT (ALTITUDE: 40,000 FT)

...and look over the railing.

Undistracted, Aven continues walking.

They follow him and enter...

INT. DONUT TERMINAL AREA

...populated with all kinds of travelers, mostly working-class haulers.

They get strange looks, as if they were from another planet.

Aven motions for the others to follow him.

They file into another section beyond the terminal area.

A halfcylinder---a pod that looks like a cylinder cut in half along the long axis---descends into the cable-like structure of the donut platform.

Another halfcylinder is approaching on the other side.

Aven turns to the middle-aged OPERATOR...

AVEN

We're taking the next one.

OPERATOR

Yes, sir.

The operator tries to strike up a friendly conversation...

OPERATOR (CONT'D)

Which outpost are you guys from?

Aven ignores him.

The soldiers await the arrival of the halfcylinder.

It docks: sounds of hydraulics and bolt-actions.

A couple of mechanics exit, followed by some civilians.

The operator presses a few buttons on his console, causing the halfcylinder to turn 180 degrees.

A civilian who has been waiting tries to board.

Aven yanks his arms, spinning him around.

AVEN

Next one.

Aven nods to the soldiers, and they get in.

Aven rips open his shoulder patch to the operator before stepping in.

The Operator is nonplussed---hits a button on his console.

The hatch closes and the halfcylinder slides down the tunnel of the structure like a bullet into a chamber.

INT. HALFCYLINDER

Daylight filters into the interior as the solid metallic structure of the tunnel gives way to truss-like lattice work.

The soldiers stare out the windows, as if seeing the earth's atmosphere for the first time.

EXT. HALFCYLINDER - LATER

The pod continues to move down the pipe at very high speeds.

It slowly approaches a thin layer of wispy clouds...then passes it.

The earth's surface comes into sharper focus, including the terminus.

INT. TERMINUS - LATER

Aven and his men file out into the densely populated main terminal hall---large enough to moor three enormous zeppelins.

Again the strange looks from travelers.

A child is pulled back by a parent.

INT. TERMINUS - LATER

Except for Aven, the other men have changed into civilian garb.

They stand in a small circle, shake hands, and each goes his separate way.

Aven heads toward the train terminal section.

Vendors are offering all kinds of things for sale.

He walks past them.

A sign reads, "NEUPARIS".

He boards that train---another metal box.

EXT. TERMINUS - LATER

The train shoots out of the terminus on one of the many diverging tracks with trains arriving or departing.

EXT. TRAIN - LATER

The train speeds across the slagpile landscape---a wasteland not unlike the burnt hills surrounding the gas station in Fitzgerald's Gatsby.

EXT. NEUPARIS - LATER

The train approaches the Neuparis terminus.

INT. NEUPARIS TRAIN STATION

Aven disembarks the train along with other passengers.

The crowd spills into a large plaza.

Overhead, the gigantic antique iron-and-glass dome looks like a relic from a previous millenium.

Male street vendors are all vying for attention, offering all kinds of things: flowers, food, mostly women.

This is an unclean world, the underbelly of society: a sewer with its people the raw sewage.

Aven looks disoriented---as if it all looks new to him.

EXT. NEUPARIS - LATER

Aven walks through dirty, littered streets---seems to know where he is going.

He turns onto a particularly murky street lined with food vendors.

Approaching one...

AVEN

How much for the Gal-bi, Fishcake?

The Korean vendor, a sweaty fat man wearing a wife-beater t-shirt, with his tweenie concu-gyne lurking in the shadows, gets up from his chair.

He speaks with a heavy Korean accent...

VENDOR

It depends.

AVEN

On what?

VENDOR

It depends on what Sung-Kyen is offering.

He points at another stand.

VENDOR (CONT'D)

We're having a price war.

As if that's supposed to impress, his mouth snaps into a toothy, shit-eating grin.

Aven looks at the digital read-out: the price keeps fluctuating between 179 and 341.

AVEN

I'll take it at 179.

VENDOR

Sorry. Don't work that way.

AVEN

I'll take my business elsewhere.

Aven turns to leave.

The Vendor tries to entice him...

VENDOR
Why not try your luck?

Almost smiling, incredulous...

AVEN
Go ahead.

The Vendor places the Gal-bi on a scale.

The digital readout lands on 179.

VENDOR
Oh, you so lucky.

AVEN
No, I'd say you were lucky.

The concu-gyne flashes a timid smile.

The Vendor packs it up.

VENDOR
6-4-4.

Aven hands him some cash. The Vendor is surprised by the currency.

VENDOR (CONT'D)
Which regiment are you?

Aven rips open his shoulder patch.

The Vendor is shocked.

AVEN
Like I said. You were the lucky one.

Aven winks at the concu-gyne.

She bows.

VENDOR
No charge.

The Vendor reaches over to hand back the money.

AVEN
Keep it. Buy the girl a ring.

Aven continues walking through the bazaar in a familiar way.

He turns a corner, looking at some knockout European BOMBSHELL walking through the bazaar.

He flashes a smile.

She returns it.

He bumps into a building.

The Bombshell laughs in that cute no-I'm-not-too-hot-to-fuck-you kind of way.

He stands there looking at a wall slightly recessed from the street.

BOMBSHELL
You gotta watch where you're going.

AVEN
Couldn't help it.

BOMBSHELL
What's with the costume?

Aven smiles.

AVEN
I've had better days.

BOMBSHELL
You should look me up.

She tries to hand him a card.

Aven points at the ring on his finger.

She insists.

He pockets it.

AVEN
You from here?

BOMBSHELL
Sure. Does it matter?

AVEN
Where's the Drake?

BOMBSHELL
Sure. I get you. This is it.

AVEN
Drake?

BOMBSHELL

Was the Drake.

AVEN

What?

BOMBSHELL

Drake was built-over a decade ago.
Why?

AVEN

I used to live on Drake.

BOMBSHELL

Well, you shoulda visited more often.

AVEN

Was in the Corridor.

BOMBSHELL

Are you putting me on?

AVEN

Don't have the time.

BOMBSHELL

Is this some kind of scheme for me
to take you in?

AVEN

Sorry to dash your fantasy, honey,
but I've got a daughter your age.

With derision belying her disappointment...

BOMBSHELL

A family man.

She walks off.

Aven stands there motionless...left by himself.

INT. POLICE DEPARTMENT - LATER

Aven stands in front of a cheese grater window.

Behind it, a POLICE OFFICER operates a computer screen,
points.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL AREA - DUSK

A canal banked by overgrown walkpaths runs between two rows
of residential houses.

Aven approaches one backyard, its brick wall overgrown with vines.

A warm glow radiates from inside the house.

A woman in her 70s and a woman in her middle 40s are in the yard.

Aven ducks behind the wall, slides down, shocked.

He peeks through the vines, moving.

Sliding back down behind the vines, he activates a communication device, dials.

AVEN
Vargas?

VARGAS (O.S.)
You make it home yet?

AVEN
You?

VARGAS (O.S.)
No.

AVEN
There won't be one to return to.

VARGAS (O.S.)
What are you talking about?

AVEN
They fucked us.

He shuts off the device.

A moment later...

the device rings...

and rings.