



WHO

WERE

THEY

SCREENPLAY BY RUDI O'MEARA

OMNILINGUAL

BASED ON THE SHORT STORY
BY H. BEAM PIPER

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Written by

Rudi O'Meara

Based on the Short Story by H. Beam Piper

EXT. AMAZON RAIN FOREST - DAY

Amid a deafening DOWNPOUR, two RAIN-SOAKED FIGURES streak through a stretch of dense jungle as poison darts WHISTLE and THUD all around them.

SUPER: LANDÍVAR, BOLIVIA - 2013

The man in the lead, TONY LATTIMER (20s, unshaven, roguish, a digger not a thinker), skids to a stop at the edge of a steep cliff, looking lost.

The woman behind him, MARTHA DANE (20s, sharp features, fierce eyes), charges up next to him, gasping for air.

MARTHA

What are you doing?!

TONY

What does it look like?!

Tony turns, sprints away. Martha leaps off after him.

MARTHA

But... but this isn't archeology!

Tony wheels back around, yanks Martha to cover behind a tree trunk as a HAIL of darts rains down.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

This is theft!

In one hand, Martha clutches some sort of golden figurine. It's heavy and it glints in the light.

TONY

Darling...

Tony looks up, yanks down a dangling vine.

TONY (CONT'D)

...archeology is theft.

Before Martha can get a word in edge-wise, Tony spins her around, wraps the vine around her waist, cinches it tight.

TONY (CONT'D)

Didn't Dad teach you anything?

More darts. More rain.

MARTHA

I said--

Tony plants a sloppy kiss on her lips, cutting her off.

Martha rears back, HOWLING:

MARTHA (CONT'D)
STOP calling him that!

Grinning ear-to-ear, Tony snatches away the bust and then abruptly shoves Martha backward off the cliff!

She falls away, tethered.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
(airborne)
You son of a--

The vine GROANS loudly as she swings across the canyon.

TONY
What? So, I can't talk about your
father and *that's* the way you talk
about my mom?

Martha draws a knife from a sheath on her thigh and slashes at the vine. It cuts cleanly.

And as she gracefully falls to safety on the other side of the canyon, more darts STREAK past Tony.

He barely notices, brimming with pride. And love.

TONY (CONT'D)
God, I wish he was here to see you
now!

Martha SHRIEKS from the other side:

MARTHA
I trusted you!

He tosses the bust into a satchel slung over his shoulder, blows her a kiss, and then takes off running.

TONY
Sorry, babe.

HARD CUT TO:

EXT. DIG SITE, INDUS VALLEY - DAY

From the swirling downpour to the sweltering, cloudless sky of current-day northern Pakistan.

SUPER: PUNJAB, PAKISTAN - TEN YEARS LATER

Wearing a sweat-stained white linen blouse and dirt-covered khakis, Martha strides from an olive drab canvas tent.

MARTHA

No, no, no. I don't have time for this... ridiculousness.

A haggard looking man in an ill-fitting (though still miraculously pressed) suit follows her out of the tent.

This is SELIM VON OHLMHORST (60s, dapper but weathered and worn, an academic elder statesman).

SELIM

Please, Martha. Be reasonable.

Martha wheels around. Selim nearly runs right into her.

SELIM (CONT'D)

Well, you know what I mean.

She narrows her eyes. Her chin is only inches from his. He's sweating. She's not.

SELIM (CONT'D)

They only want to talk to you. To us. Briefly.

Martha abruptly thrusts a hand into Selim's jacket, yanks out a silver cigarette case.

MARTHA

Why him?

She flicks the case open, pulls out a pastel colored Turkish cigarette, lifts it to her lips.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Why Tony? That... liar.

Selim fishes around in his pants pocket for his lighter, finds it, flicks it open.

SELIM

Because. He's an expert.

Selim lights his lighter. Martha leans close to the flame.

MARTHA

At demolition.
(inhaling)
Double-dealing.
(exhaling)
Desecration.

His face shrouded in smoke, Selim closes his lighter.

SELIM

Whatever you two were into back in
the day, trust me, I very much do
not want to know.

Martha spins on her heels and tromps roughly away, toward a silver Quonset hut.

MARTHA

Five minutes, tops.

Selim nods, trailing after her.

SELIM

I am certain that's all they'll
require... to convince you.

INT. QUONSET HUT - DAY

A stern looking military man, COLONEL PENROSE (50s, grizzled and chiseled), stands with his back to a billowing, old-school portable movie screen.

His face is illuminated by the image projected onto the screen. Evidently, it's a topographic map of a vast crater.

COLONEL PENROSE

What I'm about to tell you - what
I'm about to reveal - cannot, I
repeat *must not*, leave this room.

Still smoking, Martha grimaces.

MARTHA

(scornfully)

Please.

Penrose looks to Selim. Selim lifts his hands. *It's fine.*

Penrose swivels his head toward a silhouetted figure behind Martha. This is CAPTAIN FIELD (mid-20s, tight-lipped, shady, accustomed to secrecy).

Field steps out of the shadows. He's clad in a uniform that in no way matches Penrose's. His arm patch reads: Aerodyne.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

What's Aerodyne?

COLONEL PENROSE

Captain Field, Doctor Dane.

MARTHA

I said--

COLONEL PENROSE

Aerodyne. CSA Contractors.

Not even bothering to chime in, Field presses a button on the remote in his hand and the map ANIMATES.

CAPTAIN FIELD

(all-business)

Syrtis Major. The dark spot on the planet Mars.

On-screen, the view is one seen from inside some sort of landing vehicle getting closer and closer to a rendering of the red planet's surface.

COLONEL PENROSE

Back in 2020, we set a lander down there. Perseverance. The one with the drone. Not far from where the Chinese landed Tianwen-1 in '21.

Two blips illuminate inside the crater. Call-outs indicate the locations of both landers by name.

COLONEL PENROSE (CONT'D)

Thankfully, the Chinese are on-board with us on this one. Keeping a tight lid on things for a change.

A third BLIP flashes - followed by a thin, bright white arc indicating its likely trajectory.

COLONEL PENROSE (CONT'D)

But now, we have a problem.

Captain Field steps closer to the screen.

CAPTAIN FIELD

We have six weeks, give or take, until Roscosmos lands their first solo vehicle on the planet's surface.

(pointing)

Likely here. Although we don't actually know for certain now that they're no longer working in partnership with ESA.

COLONEL PENROSE

(for clarification)

The European Space Agency.

Already bored, Martha crosses her arms, looks to Selim.

MARTHA

Can we just, like, get to the point
already?

Penrose and Field swap a quick, furtive glance. *Really, this is our go-to?*

CAPTAIN FIELD

(to Colonel Penrose)

For the record, Aerodyne is 100%
against this.

Penrose ignores this.

COLONEL PENROSE

Ruins.

Martha looks back to him.

MARTHA

What?

Field clicks a button on the remote, and what appears to be a precise, urban grid renders quickly across the crater.

COLONEL PENROSE (CONT'D)

We've found ruins.

Penrose slowly strides out of the light, allowing the grid to transform into a holographic rendering of a vast cityscape not unlike Paris or New York as seen from above.

COLONEL PENROSE (CONT'D)

Of an enormous, sophisticated,
roughly 50,000 year-old city. A
port. A trading center. An oasis.

On-screen, we're suddenly flying through mile after mile of gleaming, streamlined skyscrapers. Almost Art Deco.

CAPTAIN FIELD

Apparently built by a highly
advanced, nearly humanoid
civilization of unimagined
technical sophistication.

Selim looks to Martha. *See, I told you.*

COLONEL PENROSE

With a written language not
dissimilar - at least graphically -
to Sumerian, Babylonian, and
Assyrian cuneiform.

The screen fills with shapely, elegant assemblies of long
dashes and slashes. Calligraphic.

CAPTAIN FIELD

No pictographs. Although there are,
we think, other forms of visual
representation likely to be
discovered on-site.

MARTHA

(distantly)

On-site?

COLONEL PENROSE

On the planet. By you, Doctor Von
Ohlmhorst here, and our crew of
subject matter experts.

(beat)

Ideally before the Russians touch
down and the news leaks. And all
hell breaks loose.

CAPTAIN FIELD

Before the rest of Planet Earth
realizes that - at least for a
brief while as our species was just
beginning to evolve - we were, most
definitely, not alone.

SILENCE. Just the faint BUZZ of the projector.

COLONEL PENROSE

We need you to help us decipher
their language.

CAPTAIN FIELD

Much in the same way Rawlinson
translated Akkadian in the 1850s.

COLONEL PENROSE

And help us build a deeper
understanding of their culture...

CAPTAIN FIELD

...their abilities...

COLONEL PENROSE

...their ways, their history...

CAPTAIN FIELD

...so that we can offer the world a clearer picture of who they actually were...

COLONEL PENROSE

...before, you know, the proverbial cat's out the bag.

The rendering on-screen zooms back out to a high aerial view of the crater and Roscosmos' likely landing zone.

After a second, Martha pushes off the counter she's leaning against, strides toward the screen.

MARTHA

Why doesn't the world know about this already? Why is this a secret?

COLONEL PENROSE

Space Force, Aerodyne, and CSA want it that way. For now.

CAPTAIN FIELD

If news circulated before we had any actual insight - any clear understanding of what their culture consisted of, who they were - think of the ramifications.

COLONEL PENROSE

From just a religious perspective alone--

MARTHA

(cutting him off)

What happened to them?

Martha's eyes are riveted to the screen. She lifts a hand out, letting it bathe in the light of the projector.

CAPTAIN FIELD

Prevailing theory is that they faced a crisis not unlike our own. Overpopulation. Diminished crop yields. Unpredictable catastrophic storms. Drought on a massive scale.

The footage before Martha transitions to a series of visualizations of a complex network of viaducts and canals woven amongst the skyscrapers.

COLONEL PENROSE

They seem to have attempted to adapt. To harness and optimize their resources. Wind. Water. And yes, even electricity.

On-screen, we zoom back out to a simulation of what appears to be a rapidly diminishing global atmosphere.

CAPTAIN FIELD

But from what we can glean, they engineered some sort of... *organism* designed to reverse the effects of their version of so-called climate change.

In time-lapse, the planet is quickly rendered the cloudless, barren wasteland we know it as now.

COLONEL PENROSE

But something went wrong. We don't know what precisely. But instead of protecting what little atmosphere they had left, it gobbled up the whole damn thing.

CAPTAIN FIELD

And their once great society collapsed under its own weight.

The screen goes dark. Martha turns back toward Selim.

MARTHA

How many characters?

SELIM

Unknown. Likely hundreds.

MARTHA

Morphology? Syntax?

SELIM

Indecipherable. As of yet.

She wheels around toward Penrose and Field.

MARTHA

You want me...

COLONEL PENROSE

...and Dr. Von Ohlmhorst and Mr. Lattimer and the rest of the team we've assembled...

CAPTAIN FIELD

...most of whom are already on-planet mapping, surveying--

MARTHA

...to attempt to translate, disambiguate, and document a wholly unknown, alien language with no common currency with any existent human language written or spoken in six weeks?!

COLONEL PENROSE

Well, three if you subtract time for expedited transit from Terra via Luna to The Cyrano.

CAPTAIN FIELD

(by way of explanation)

A top-secret Aerodyne orbiter stationed five thousand miles off-planet.

Martha looks like she's about to explode.

CAPTAIN FIELD (CONT'D)

In suspended animation, of course.

Selim CHUCKLES at the pure insanity of at all. *At his age?*

COLONEL PENROSE

Now, we know that you and Mr. Lattimer have had your fair share of... *differences*.

I/E. CARGO PLANE - DAY [FLASHBACK]

Amid the ROAR of props and the wind GUSTING in through an open hatch, Tony and Martha argue - both dressed for a jump.

MARTHA

(loud)

How am I not supposed to be hurt?!

TONY

It was just a fling!

MARTHA

But Amelia?! That... bimbo?!

TONY

Bimbo?! She just won the Chalmers-Jervise--

In a fit of rage, Martha shoves Tony out of the plane at altitude. *Wait, did he even have a parachute?*

END FLASHBACK.

INT. BAVARIAN SALT MINE - DAY [FLASHBACK]

Standing inside a dimly-lit cavern piled high with Nazi plunder, Martha lifts a Luger and aims it at Tony.

TONY
(eyes wide)
Wait a minute, you divorced me!

MARTHA
And I'll do it again. Watch me!

TONY
But... I love you.

Martha loudly COCKS the pistol.

TONY (CONT'D)
I'll always--

Martha closes one eye, takes aim.

MARTHA
What he saw in you will always elude me.

TONY
Who?

MARTHA
DAD!

Tony draws a breath to speak.

But instead, Martha pulls the trigger. BANG!

Wait, it was loaded?!

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. MANHATTAN CITY STREET - DAY [FLASHBACK]

Dressed as if for a fund-raising meeting (or a lecture) Martha rushes down a crowded city sidewalk.

Out of nowhere, a PROCESS SERVER cuts her off extending a sheaf of papers. *Oh, here we go...*

PROCESS SERVER
 (calmly)
 Doctor Martha Dane?

MARTHA
 (warily)
 Yes?

PROCESS SERVER
 You've been served.

MARTHA
 Again?!

END FLASHBACK.

INT. AIRPORT TERMINAL - DUSK [FLASHBACK]

Hefting a dirty canvas satchel over one shoulder, Tony strides through a sleek modern airport shedding dig dust.

Another PROCESS SERVER veers toward him. *This again?*

TONY
 (resignedly)
 Yeah, yeah. I know.

PROCESS SERVER #2
 You've been--

He forcefully yanks a similar-looking sheaf of papers out of the process server's hands.

TONY
 Can't get rid of me that easy!

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. DIG SITE, HARAPPA, INDUS VALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Martha and Selim tromp swiftly away from the Quonset hut followed by Penrose and Field.

MARTHA
 It'll never work!

Dusty DIG WORKERS pass the other direction carrying mesh-trays brimming with excavated pottery shards and bones.

COLONEL PENROSE
 Of course you'll have unlimited access to all the computing power you could possibly need.

MARTHA

What good's that gonna do?

She veers toward a waiting Jeep.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Knowing Greek, Champollion learned to read Egyptian. By knowing Egyptian, Hittite was learned. And that was with the Rosetta Stone! No such continuity exists here. We don't have our Rosetta Stone!

She stops dead and spins back around.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

(to Selim)

What're you trying to do, ruin both our reputations?

SELIM

(out of breath)

Grotfend. He only had the word for 'king' when he started trying to read Cuneiform.

Field looks like he as no idea what they're talking about.

MARTHA

(still to Selim)

But everyone already knew the names of all the Persian kings! It's not the same!

Selim nods, conceding the point.

SELIM

Tony.

(beat, breathless)

He's already there. Already busy stealing all the... limelight. Digging up sculptures. Statues. No bones though, for some reason. Carting them up like they're his own personal treasure trove.

Martha's face hardens. *Of course he is.*

SELIM (CONT'D)

Thinks relics are more important than truth. Meaning.

Penrose slides deftly between them.

COLONEL PENROSE
 Now, Miss Dane, if you think it
 can't be done, I'll take that under
 advisement and politely move on.

He lifts a hand to her shoulder. She looks like she's about
 to punch him in the face.

COLONEL PENROSE (CONT'D)
 But as my old C.O. used to say...
 (slyly)
 ...any officer who's afraid to risk
 his reputation seldom makes one for
 himself to risk.

Beat.

CAPTAIN FIELD
 Transport to the Cape is wheels-up
 from Shamshi at 08:00.

Penrose taps her shoulder lightly.

COLONEL PENROSE
 We sure would just be pleased as
 punch if you were on it.

She lets her eyes fall back to Selim. His eyes twinkle back
 full of mischief, like a man glad to be back in the game.

EXT. SHAMSHI AIRBASE - NIGHT

Dressed exactly as she was earlier, Martha leaps from the
 back of a PAK Army transport truck followed by Selim.

Both heft heavy-looking duffel bags.

MARTHA
 How I let you talk me into this
 B.S. is entirely beyond me.

SELIM
 Me?! I couldn't talk you into a
 thing even if *both* our lives
 depended on it.

MARTHA
 What's that supposed to mean?

In the distance, we see a waiting C-17 Globemaster. Its rear
 gangway is down. Oddly, the plane has no insignia - no
 markings. Secretive.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
 (pointing)
 And what's the deal with that
 thing, huh?

SELIM
 Aerodyne. Top Secret, apparently.

He reaches a hand gently forward, catches her elbow.

SELIM (CONT'D)
 Listen, however this goes, and I
 have a feeling it could go sideways
 six ways to Sunday at the drop of a
 hat, know this...

She turns back to him, seeming perplexed by his seriousness.
 And his mixed metaphors.

SELIM (CONT'D)
 ...for my money, you're the *only*
 person who can do this.

She frowns, having already convinced herself it's hopeless.

SELIM (CONT'D)
 Your father--

She pulls sway from him, continuing on toward the plane as a
 YOUNG WOMAN emerges from the top of the rear gangway.

MARTHA
 (over her shoulder)
 I know, I know! If only he could
 see me now.

Martha lifts a hand to block the floodlights and get a good
 look at the woman up ahead.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
 (to herself)
 You'd think it wouldn't take
 traveling sixty-four trillion miles
 to earn that man's approval from
 the grave.

The approaching woman, DR. SACHIKO OZAWA (20s, fresh-faced,
 high-strung, eager), slows, extending a delicate, finely
 manicured hand.

SACHIKO
 Doctor Dane.

Martha squints her way, always on-guard.

SACHIKO (CONT'D)
Such an honor and a privilege to
finally meet you in-person.

Martha takes her hand. *Finally, a little respect.*

SACHIKO (CONT'D)
Your work expanding our
understanding of Linear B was a
game changer. You're the reason I
got my PhD.

Martha's grin fades. *Jesus, she's just a kid.*

SELIM
Sachiko, Martha. Martha, Sachiko.

Martha lets Sachiko's hand drop.

SELIM (CONT'D)
Ozawa.
(by way of explanation)
Minato-san's star pupil at Osaka
University.

Martha nods, finally clocking the name.

MARTHA
Ah, I read all about your discovery
in the Cave of Horrors. First Dead
Sea Scroll sections found in over
60 years. Nice.

Under the flood lights, we can almost see Sachiko blushing. Martha pushes past her, toward the gangway to the plane as its engines loudly SPIN UP.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
How's they talk you into this...
fool's errand?

Sachiko and Selim share a quick look.

INT. TRANSPORT PLANE - NIGHT

Wheels-up and now somewhere over the Mediterranean, Sachiko sits strapped into a jump seat next to Selim. She clutches an open dossier on her lap.

It's full of dogeared official-looking documentation, maps, grainy photographs, and scans.

Two seats down, Selim holds a glowing tablet. Seemingly checking his email.

SACHIKO

(loud over the engines)

From what I've been able to take in so far, most of what they've found vis-a-vis text fragments are all on some sort of polymer.

Looking like she's jonesing for a cigarette and tumbling swiftly into an uncharacteristic bout of claustrophobia, Martha paces the cavern-like hull of the plane.

SACHIKO (CONT'D)

Like a crazily durable silicone with no moisture content.

Martha mimes. *Yeah, yeah, yeah. Speed it up.*

MARTHA

No water, no desiccation. Got it.

Sachiko changes tact, remembering who she's talking to.

SACHIKO

My immediate inclination is to think that the long verticals...

She holds up a scan of what appears to be a torn translucent sheet covered in long and short dashes.

Martha drifts toward her, studying it. Next to Sachiko, Selim continues quietly scrolling.

SACHIKO (CONT'D)

...might be vowels. There are only ten of them. That I've seen so far.

Martha nods, takes the scan out of Sachiko's hand.

MARTHA

And the short horizontals, consonants?

Sachiko nods.

SACHIKO

Twenty of them. Or so. And, uh, maybe the over- and underlining could be something akin to... capitalization?

Martha nods. *Hmm, maybe.*

SACHIKO (CONT'D)

Now, it's not really my field. But maybe it's something kind of like German. Where word units are, like, pasted together to form new words.

Martha flips the image over in her hand, studying it.

MARTHA

(to herself)

And maybe sounds like -NG, -CH, and -SH could be single characters?

Sachiko nods admiringly back.

SACHIKO

Quite possibly.

For a second, it looks like Martha is about to crumple the scan and toss it to the floor. Instead, she thrusts it over toward Selim.

MARTHA

Great. So if we're lucky, we'll figure out how to pronounce a few syllables!

He doesn't look up.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

But there's no way we'll ever know what we're actually saying!

He finally, coolly, clicks his tablet off.

SELIM

Surely, meaning isn't something that evaporates with time.

Both Martha and Sachiko stare at him quizzically.

SELIM (CONT'D)

All we have to do is find, say, a children's primer - a school book, a picture book. Lion, lion. Ball, ball. Clock, clock.

He stretches, YAWNING loudly.

SELIM (CONT'D)

Where the pictures explain the captions instead of the other way around.

Both women know he's right. *But, still. How the hell...*

Selim unbuckles his shoulder straps and stretches out sideways to catch some shuteye.

SELIM (CONT'D)
I'm sure Tony's well on his way to
finding us precisely what we need.

Martha shoves the scan back at Sachiko.

SELIM (CONT'D)
Better get some sleep.
(nestling in)
I hear suspended animation really
does a number on you.

Martha and Sachiko share a quick look. Martha breaks eye contact first, looks around feeling caged.

MARTHA
(distantly)
Your, uh, work piecing together
those fragments from Hahal Hever...

Sachiko sits forward, palms on the dossier on her lap.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
...solid.

Martha strides away toward another long empty row of austere metal jump seats tucked up into the fuselage.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Dad always said there was more to
be found in Wadi Sdeir.

Martha throws herself down onto the row and stretches out, using her duffel as a pillow.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
(trailing off)
If he'd only had the... time.

Sachiko nods somberly, lowers her gaze back toward the hulking dossier on her lap.

EXT. WADI SDEIR, ISRAEL - DAY [FLASHBACK]

The blazing hot sun hovers over the high limestone cliffs lining Wadi Sdeir in the Judean desert.

SUPER: WADI SDEIR, ISRAEL, 2010

Standing at the edge of the cliff, wrapped in nylon harnesses, climbing rope, and a belaying brake is a much younger looking - nearly teenage - Martha.

As she leans against the rope, letting bits out steadily (presumably to another climber) we can make out another man sitting on the clifftop behind her.

He's wearing a weathered felt hat, aviators, and a rumpled oxford shirt with the sleeves rolled as high as they can go.

The man, Martha's father, DR. OLIVER DANE (40s, imperious but kindly) meticulously brushes dust away from what appears to be some sort of amphorae.

OLIVER
So? He is like a son... to me.

Young Martha grimaces, sweating.

OLIVER (CONT'D)
And was to your mother as well. God rest her soul.

Young Martha lets go of the rope and we hear, above the SQUEAL of her belay brake, a young man SCREAM:

YOUNG TONY (O.S.)
(from below)
Hey, hey, hey!

Young Martha hits the brakes. Oliver doesn't even look up from the amphorae.

OLIVER
(distractedly)
At least *someone* doesn't panic at the slightest hint of danger.

YOUNG TONY (O.S.)
(still down below)
I think I... I can almost... yes. I can reach it!

Oliver looks up.

OLIVER
Initiative! It means doing the right thing *without* being told.

Young Martha lets the rope go slack again. WHIZZZZZZZZ!

Oliver goes back to brushing away dust.

OLIVER (CONT'D)
Victor Hugo.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. TRANSPORT PLANE - DAWN

With the first hints of sunrise coloring the sky outside, Martha rolls over in her seat. Both Selim and Sachiko are fast asleep.

Over the DRONE of the engines, Martha stares at the ceiling.

INT. TRANSPORT PLANE - MARTHA'S POV

Over the aluminum ribs of the airframe, we suddenly see an undulating pattern of long and short lines.

They match the characters from Sachiko's dossier. Just a seemingly random set of glowing dots and dashes squirming and dancing before our eyes.

At first they seem random. Chaotic. Mindbogglingly disordered. But then, slowly, the characters begin to form patterns. Shapes. Combinations.

Words. Phrases. Sentences.

Then, DARKNESS. Nothing but inky black and the dull ROAR of the plane's engines.

HARD CUT TO:

INT. THE CYRANO, CRYO BAY - CONTINUOUS

SILENCE.

Then, GASPING followed by the WHIRRING and PINGING of digital alarms and alerts.

Abruptly, Martha's pale and gaunt face rockets into the frame. She's WHEEZING and GULPING down air.

Thin translucent sensors dot her temples and forehead.

SELIM
(comfortingly)
Now, now. Easy. Easy.

From out of the blurry white background, Selim's welcome and familiar face nears.

He gently lifts a hand to Martha's shoulder (which is now clad in some sort of high-tech fabric, not dirt-crusteD, rumbled linen).

MARTHA
(hoarse)
Where...

SELIM
It's best not to speak for the first few minutes. Your vocal chords--

Martha's face says it all. *Nobody tells me I can't speak.*

MARTHA
Where are we?

Selim lifts his hand and gestures grandly to the still mostly out-of-focus cocoon of white surrounding them.

SELIM
(regally)
The Cyrano. In orbit.

Three other VAGUE FIGURES cluster in the background.

One of them takes a few steps forward. It's Sachiko. She looks completely at ease in her Space Force jumpsuit.

SELIM (CONT'D)
Our shuttle to the surface will be here in 30. So, freshen up. Have a cocktail. Relax.

He steps away into the blur.

SELIM (CONT'D)
The synthetic martinis are actually quite... convincing.

INT. THE CYRANO, BRIEFING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A dimly-lit high-tech briefing room.

At the center of the circular space is a sleek glass orb out of which BEAMS an extremely realistic-looking hologram of the planet's surface.

Colonel Pensrose strides through the shaft of light.

COLONEL PENROSE
As you already likely know...

Beyond him, we can make out Selim, Martha, and Sachiko seated at streamlined desks.

COLONEL PENROSE (CONT'D)
 ...the Martian atmosphere is thin.
 Its volume is roughly only about 1%
 of Earth's.

Captain Field, now wearing a bright orange jumpsuit (the base layer to his spacesuit), steps into frame.

CAPTAIN FIELD
 In other words, there's
 approximately 99% less air.

COLONEL PENROSE
 And the atmospheric pressure is so
 low that...

CAPTAIN FIELD
 ...without your suit--

A 3D rendering of a standard-issue Space Force suit bounces up into the air and spins slowly.

MARTHA
 (interrupting)
 Cut your suit and you're dust. We
 get it.

COLONEL PENROSE
 You'll suffocate *and* your blood
 will boil.

CAPTAIN FIELD
 (to Martha)
 A sensation I have a feeling you're
 already quite accustomed to.

The hologram switches to helmet-cam footage of a handful of EXPLORERS in space suits approaching what appears to be a sleek skyscraper jutting up through the swirling sand.

At regular intervals, large stretches of pockmarked glassy, window-like voids reflect the harsh rays of the sun.

COLONEL PENROSE
 Which is why you'll be accompanied
 at all times by Dr. Lattimer.

MARTHA
 Doctor?!

COLONEL PENROSE
And his team.

MARTHA
(to herself)
He wouldn't have gotten through
high school without Dad's help.

The hologram flips to a closer shot of the building as seen from below. It's majestic. Spectacular.

CAPTAIN FIELD
From early samplings, we've
determined that most of the
structures are composed of roughly
the same material.

The explorer recording the helmet cam footage before us reaches out, runs a gauntleted hand up and down against the structure's metallic surface.

COLONEL PENROSE
Some sort of beryllio-silver alloy.
Extremely strong.

The hologram cuts to a wide view from a further vantage point. In the foreground, we can make out two arms holding what appears to be some sort of weapon. A cannon?

KA-BOOOM! The cannon fires, sending a single huge projectile swiftly toward the same structure. It barely pierces the building's skin.

CAPTAIN FIELD
Which is why, at first...

The hologram before us transitions to a low angle on another structure covered in what looks, again, like glass.

COLONEL PENROSE
...we focused on the windows.

A swift BARRAGE of shells from a similar looking gun all ricochet wildly off the massive, dust-covered panes.

COLONEL PENROSE (CONT'D)
We still don't know what they're
made of exactly, but we can
presume--

Martha leans forward, pointing.

MARTHA
(interrupting him)
Pause. Zoom in.

Miraculously, the FLICKERING hologram does. And we suddenly see a gigantic wind-blown statue of what appears to be a nearly humanoid figure. A man by the looks of it.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
What is that?!

Penrose and Field share a quick look.

CAPTAIN FIELD
Ah, yes.

Penrose reaches a hand into the hologram, erasing everything in the background. All we see is the man.

He looks like something you'd see comfortably at home on the façade of the Chrysler building. Stylized and regal.

COLONEL PENROSE
As I think I mentioned, Tony and his crew haven't found so much as a femur. Not a finger. No bones at all. No skulls. Not one. But...

He gently rotates his hand and the sculpture follows.

COLONEL PENROSE (CONT'D)
...from the busts, frescoes, and sculptures we've found, the general consensus is that they likely had vocal organs nearly identical to our own. If that helps.

You can see both Martha and Sachiko take this in like it's a bombshell. A game-changer.

Penrose waves his hand through the hologram and it cuts to a view of the same CREW carting away a trove of statues and frescoe fragments in hulking Aerodyne-branded vehicles.

Selim, his eyes agog, absentmindedly raises his hand like a young school boy.

SELIM
Where are you archiving everything you're finding?

CAPTAIN FIELD

In a series of secure containment vehicles, each with their own propulsion system.

The hologram transitions to a view from high above Syrtis Major. From the crater, a fleet of hulking collection craft ROCKET up into orbit on their own power.

COLONEL PENROSE

Once Schiaparelli orbits back in, everything collected will be crated up and sent back to a Biosafety Level 4 containment facility being built as we speak at the Utah Test and Training Range.

(beat)

To prevent backward contamination.

Martha, Selim, and Sachiko stare at him blankly.

COLONEL PENROSE (CONT'D)

Obviously, organic life did exist here. On Mars. Which means we're going to have to be *exceedingly* careful that whatever wiped out their atmosphere doesn't do the same thing to ours when we bring everything back home.

Field steps up and SNAPS his fingers. And the hologram goes ominously dark.

CAPTAIN FIELD

Suit up. Your shuttle's primed and ready to take you to the surface.

INT. THE CYRANO, LANDER BAY - CONTINUOUS

All suited-up and looking nervous as hell, Martha, Selim, and Sachiko sit strapped into streamlined jump seats.

The interior of Martha's helmet visor fogs ever so slightly with each heavy exhale. She's visibly anxious. A first.

Selim, on the other hand, looks almost giddy.

Penrose and Field are up ahead, at the helm.

CAPTAIN FIELD

Lander Two to Ground.

Over the comms another VOICE chimes in:

GROUND CONTROL (V.O.)
Lander this is Ground. You are
clear for approach.

CAPTAIN FIELD
Roger that.

Field swivels his head back toward his anxious passengers.

CAPTAIN FIELD
Alright everybody. This part's the
fun part!

Martha and Sachiko grip their armrests as the bay doors up
ahead silently part.

SACHIKO
(over the comms)
So, is it true?

Martha looks to Sachiko. *Are you talking to me?*

SACHIKO (CONT'D)
About you and Dr. Lattimer.

Selim grins, knowing the question would come eventually.

MARTHA
(by rote)
Married twice. Divorced twice.

In silence, the lander levitates slowly up and out the open
doors and into the darkness.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Threw him out of a plane at twenty
thousand feet. Shot him at close
range with Hitler's Luger. Had him
extradited from London to Cairo to
stand trial as a grave robber. Sued
him twice for libel.

Beat.

SACHIKO
No, I meant--

MARTHA
Wait. Three times! Once on behalf
of my father. God bless his soul.

SELIM

Best man - best excavator, best
archeologist - I've ever had the
pleasure of calling a friend.

SACHIKO

(slightly embarrassed)
I meant about Wadi Sdeir.

MARTHA

(ignoring her)
Oh, and, he was wearing a
parachute. I checked.

Suddenly, every window surrounding them is filled with the
spectacle of the red planet's horizon bumping up against the
jet black, starry sky.

It's mind-meltingly beautiful. Even Martha can't stifle a
GASP at the surreal panorama unfurling before them.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Oh my god. It's...

SELIM

(reverently)
...majestic.

COLONEL PENROSE

(from up front)
Alright everybody, hold on tight.

The ship does a slow roll, descending swiftly.

As Martha gazes out at the vast canyons and windswept
scarlet mountains getting closer and closer, something about
her face shifts.

In a way, this is nowhere she should ever be. But it's
likely the one place her father would've wanted her to be
right here, right now.

A brave new world.

INT. LANDING BAY - CONTINUOUS

With the lander silently JETTING steam behind them inside a
hulking temporary structure lined with silver foil, Martha,
Selim, and Sachiko stride slowly behind Penrose and Field.

There's gravity. But not much. Only Penrose seems completely
at home. An old hand at this apparently.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, a familiar VOICE over the comms:

TONY (O.S.)
Well, if it ain't the prodigal wife
returned!

Martha freezes at the sight of Tony sauntering cockily
across the landing bay next to a heavily made-up YOUNG WOMAN
in a matching dusty spacesuit.

MARTHA
Who's this? Your latest jail-bait
conquest?

His face brightens. Twenty-four carat smile.

TONY
You know I only like women...

MARTHA
Oh, do you?

TONY
...who work at Hooters.

MARTHA
That sounds about right.

TONY
Or have PhDs from Harvard *and* Yale.

Rusty at jousting with Tony, Martha just blinks.

TONY (CONT'D)
Martha, Gloria. Gloria, my ex.
(beat)
PhD Harvard, Archeology. PhD Yale,
Philology.

The young woman, GLORIA STANDISH (late 20s, a petite blonde
with a coy southern accent and way too much makeup), steps
up and reaches out a gauntlet.

GLORIA
Gloria Standish. Fox News.

MARTHA
Great.

Martha takes her hand with both hands, shaking it way too
vigorously. Penrose and Field continue past them, toward a
closed metal hatch.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Of course you are.

Over Gloria's shoulder we can barely make out a second man filming them. This is Gloria's unnamed CAMERAMAN.

GLORIA

We're covering the whole mission
soup-to-nuts for broadcast as soon
as DOD clears it!

MARTHA

(up toward Penrose)

DOD? I thought this was a purely
academic mission. Not some
militaristic land grab.

Penrose simply waves her off, typing in the code for the hatch. It opens without so much as a sound.

Tony pushes past Martha toward Selim, arms wide.

TONY

Von Ohlmhorst! You sly old fox.

The two men embrace as comfortably as two men in thick, reticulated orange spacesuits can.

TONY (CONT'D)

You're lookin' great!

SELIM

Don't feel a day over sixty-four.

TONY

That's flipping space, dude! Does
wonders for the constitution.

(slapping his shoulders)

I'm so glad - SO glad - you're
here. All of you.

His eyes drift toward Sachiko, who already seems entirely ensnared by his charms.

TONY (CONT'D)

(not subtitled)

*Kure Mitsu-san, o ai dekite
kōeidesu.*

She bows ever so slightly.

TONY (CONT'D)

(back to English)

Your work piecing together the
scrolls and determining that they
were most certainly written in the
first century BC...

He lets go of Selim and sweeps up her hand. For a second it looks almost as if he's about to kiss it.

Martha rolls her eyes and continues toward Penrose and the now wide open hatch.

TONY (CONT'D)
...breathtaking.

He spins on his heels, pushes past Gloria toward Martha.

TONY (CONT'D)
(to Sachiko)
I know that spot like the back of my hand. A certain somebody *almost* let me fall to my death there all the way back in 2010!
(toward Martha)
God, we were so young! Just kids!

Sachiko stands frozen in-place.

SACHIKO
(to Selim)
Is it always like this?

Up ahead, we can barely make out the cameraman trying to introduce himself. Martha shoves him out of the way.

SELIM
(calmly)
Pretty much.

Selim takes a tentative step forward, still barely believing his eyes.

SELIM (CONT'D)
Pretty much.

INT. SYRTIS STATION, AIRLOCK - CONTINUOUS

With the rest of the crew following Martha and Tony into the airlock, Penrose lifts a hand toward a thin glass control panel and quickly types in a code.

COLONEL PENROSE
Alright. Dane, Ohlmhorst, Ozawa.

The hatch slides SILENTLY closed behind them as the airlock pressurizes. GUSTS of fog-like decontaminate jet through the airlock at waist level, drifting up.

COLONEL PENROSE (CONT'D)
 Field will escort you to your
 quarters. Make yourselves
 comfortable. Freshen up. Have a
 bite. Get some rest.

A second hatch opens ahead of him, revealing a long
 corrugated steel chamber full of deconstructed spacesuits
 waiting to be donned.

MARTHA
 Screw that. I didn't just fly
 sixty-three million miles to take a
 nap! I'm going out!

Sachiko and Selim would clearly rather get their bearings
 first. But Tony pushes past Penrose, gesturing for Martha to
 follow him away.

TONY
 (to Penrose)
 Told you so.

Tony bends toward another set of hatches leading toward a
 tall geodesic glass dome jutting out into the barren
 landscape just outside.

TONY (CONT'D)
 (toward Martha)
 C'mon. This'll blow your mind!

Tony enters a code on the panel and the first hatch opens.
 Looking back briefly, Martha steps off after him.

MARTHA
 (to Sachiko and Selim)
 Sure you don't wanna...

Sachiko nods 'no'.

SACHIKO
 I have plenty to do sifting through
 the fragments they've already
 unearthed. Or, well...

Selim waves Martha off.

SELIM
 Just play nice. Okay?

Over the comms we hear Martha SIGH as she steps in and Tony
 closes the hatch behind her.

INT. SYRTIS STATION, EXTERIOR PASSAGE - CONTINUOUS

Together, Martha and Tony walk slowly through a long transparent passage.

Over the comms, we hear Penrose's VOICE:

COLONEL PENROSE (V.O.)
Alright now, this way to the lab.

In the distance, we can barely make out the jagged cityscape we've only up to now seen rendered digital snippets of. It's astoundingly beautiful.

An elegant ruin blanketed in sand.

Tony hits a button on the keypad on his wrist and the comms go silent. Penrose's voice disappears.

TONY
(singing off-key)
*I think we're alone now.
There doesn't seem to be
anyone around.*

He looks back to ensure that the hatch behind them is sealed and the light above it is green.

Martha stutter-steps past him, eyes on the buildings beyond.

TONY (CONT'D)
(still half singing)
*The beating of our hearts
is the only sound.*

He reaches past Martha toward another key panel. She doesn't even bother watching him enter the code to open the last hatch to the glassed-in dome.

TONY (CONT'D)
We need to talk.

The hatch ahead opens swiftly. And suddenly we can hear the WIND WHIPPING just outside - pelting the glass geodesic dome in the distance.

Martha pauses, suddenly realizing that what she thought was a closed off volume is actually just a glass canopy. Looking down, she notices red dust swirling all around her feet.

TONY (CONT'D)
Something... odd is going on here.

Ignoring him (as usual) she takes her first step forward onto Martian soil.

TONY (CONT'D)
Like, really strange.

She turns and takes a few more steps toward the edge of the canopy, in awe.

MARTHA
Well, you're here for starters.

He closes the hatch behind them and follows Martha out to the edge of the glass canopy.

TONY
No, I'm serious.

Together, they step out toward the waiting city.

TONY (CONT'D)
Everything I find, everything we dig up, they immediately cart off to who knows where.

Still barely listening, Martha bounds toward what appears to be a tall, oddly-shaped tower. Sand PELTS her visor.

MARTHA
That's so you. Immediately claiming ownership of everything you dig out of the dust.

TONY
No, it's not like that.

Martha picks up the pace like a hound on the hunt.

MARTHA
Even Dad said that was your worst trait. Always a whore for the headlines. The spotlight.
(beat)
The glory.

EXT. QIN MAUSOLEUM, CHINA - DAY [FLASHBACK]

From the surface of Mars to the remains of the recently unearthed tomb of the first Qin Emperor back on Earth.

Striding swiftly through a seemingly infinite array of life-sized terracotta soldiers, Martha's father shouts over his shoulder to his daughter:

OLIVER
Divorced? Why, for God's sake?!

Looking only slightly younger, Martha struggles to keep up with her dad. Clearly, she's accustomed to talking directly to the back of his head.

MARTHA
Because, Dad. He *cheated* on me!

Oliver stops dead.

OLIVER
I'm sorry, dear.

Martha skids to a stop, looking surprisingly chided. Oliver spins back around, picks up the pace.

OLIVER (CONT'D)
But what did you expect? He's a charmer. A rogue.

Martha, her hackles up, lunges off after him as he zigzags through the soldiers. Oddly, Martha and her father seem to be the only archeologists on-site.

MARTHA
Then why'd you push me so hard to marry him in the first place?!

Oliver slows at what appears to be a shallow moat at the edge of the endless rows of stone soldiers.

OLIVER
Because.

Oliver stares somberly down into the moat.

OLIVER (CONT'D)
He was the son I never had.

Martha looks like she's about to scream.

OLIVER (CONT'D)
Plus, you're brilliant. And you never let anyone forget it. Ever.
(beat, seriously)
After your mother died, I just... I didn't know how to talk to you anymore, how to engage you.

MARTHA
What?! Why?

OLIVER
 Because you were so... angry.
 Volatile. I couldn't--

He cuts himself off, pointing down toward the moat.

OLIVER (CONT'D)
 See, there? That line? Liquid
 mercury. Rivers of it. To keep out
 the looters.

MARTHA
Dad!

OLIVER
 Sometimes it just felt like Tony
 was the only person who could
 bridge that gulf. Cross that line.

He turns slowly back around to face her.

OLIVER (CONT'D)
 The mercurial river between us.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. SYRTIS MAJOR, CRATER - CONTINUOUS

The view before us is of a vast, purple-tinged copper sky
 filled with low swirling clouds of glimmering red dust.

As Martha and Tony stagger through the dust toward a cluster
 of crumbling, once-majestic structures, all we hear is sand
 BLASTING their visors.

Tiny lights bracketing their helmets cast faint blue/white
 beams through the billowing dust.

MARTHA
 It's really... *real*.

Martha slows, flabbergasted and unable to hide it.

TONY
 Yep.

Up ahead, we can make out that a huge, jagged hole has been
 smashed out of the side of one of the structures.

MARTHA
 (trying to sound stern)
 This your handiwork?

TONY

Listen--

MARTHA

Never did know how to handle a site properly. Among other things.

She veers toward the gaping hole in the wall ahead. It's nearly a story tall and sand swirls in and out of it in crimson eddies.

Tony slows, pressing a button on his wrist to turn up the lights bracketing his visor. Their beams can barely cut through the sand in the air.

TONY

Stop.

She reluctantly does. He reaches out and takes her wrist, almost like he's about to fall to one knee and propose (again). Instead, he turns her lights up as well.

TONY (CONT'D)

I can't tell if this is a dig or a demolition.

MARTHA

What?

TONY

That's why I wanted you here, to help me get to the bottom of it.

MARTHA

I've followed you to the bottom of way too many things.

She pulls away from him.

TONY

Listen--

He offers her his hand. She declines.

MARTHA

No you listen. This is my dig now.

He SIGHS loudly, follows her in.

INT. ALIEN STRUCTURE - CONTINUOUS

Once inside, the scale of the space is mystifyingly vast.

Even in the faint light from their helmets we can make out that there are no noticeable interior walls.

MARTHA

Holy...

TONY

Yeah. Whoever they were, they sure could build.

In the distance, we can make out massive bridge-like decks connecting the structure to other far-off towers.

TONY (CONT'D)

We figure this was some sort of transport hub.

He points to a sand-covered pile of metallic objects.

TONY (CONT'D)

Yeah. Flying flipping cars. Wait 'til Musk finds out.

Tony pauses, points to a spidery pattern of dark lines covering sections of wall and floor like a decorative mural.

TONY (CONT'D)

Electricity. For mag/lev. Or at least that what the eggheads think. Everything we've found so far suggests that they were extremely advanced. And highly, well, I guess the only word that really works is 'digital'. Things that seem in every way like screens are all over the place. But there's no way to tell what they might've been used for. Or what they would've shown or said.

Together they walk slowly through the vaulted space.

TONY (CONT'D)

Basically, it's the same as what the future versions of you and me'll find when they try and put together the pieces our dead civilization. Computers, tablets, phones, TVs - they'll be as inert as a block of stone. Dead silica.

He pauses, bends to pick up a tattered bit of nearly translucent paper-like detritus.

TONY (CONT'D)
And, bingo. Just like that...

Tony lifts the bit of trash, flashing it her way. On it we see a set of now familiar long horizontal and short vertical dashes and lines.

TONY (CONT'D)
...print isn't dead after all.

He carefully tucks the scrap of silicone into a pocket on his thigh.

MARTHA
Penrose said you haven't found any remains.

TONY
None. Super weird. Either they were insanely tidy with their dead. Or pretty much everybody everywhere got the hell outta Dodge on the double. Or both.

He gestures for her to follow him toward a huge sand-blasted pane of what again looks like glass.

TONY (CONT'D)
Pretty much every structure we've been able to break open seems to have been cannibalized up to the end. Things reused. Re-purposed. Looted. Wrecked. Guttled. For centuries, as the city died. Like Minturnae. The opposite of Pompei.

He points out the 'window' toward another tall conical structure in the distance.

TONY (CONT'D)
I call that one the salt shaker.

It does indeed resemble a giant salt shaker.

TONY (CONT'D)
We're hoping it might've been occupied up to the end.

MARTHA
Well, c'mon. Let's--

He grabs her by both shoulders, one eye checking the keypad on his wrist to make sure they're still muted.

TONY

Just, listen. I think there's a reason all of this... the whole mission, everything... is so hush-hush.

MARTHA

Oh, yeah. What about Ms. Fox News?

He ignores this, leans his helmet closer to hers.

For the first time in a long time, there's nothing between them but two sheer thicknesses of glass.

And, of course, a pressure void that would boil blood.

TONY

(hushed)

That's Space Force. NASA. They document everything. And Penrose. He's on the up-and-up. I think. But Field... Aerodyne. They're not on the same page.

Martha pushes him roughly away.

MARTHA

In case you've forgotten, we're on the clock here.

TONY

That's what I mean! I think Aerodyne wants to sweep this all under the rug - under the sand - before the Russians show up.

MARTHA

Please.

TONY

To colonize the joint. Stake their claim. Keep the Russians out. Restart the dynamo. Rebuild the atmosphere. And turn this rock into Earth 2.0. Or, well, USA 2.0.

She turns and heads back toward the hole to the outside.

MARTHA

You really have lost your mind. Fourth time's the charm.

TONY (CONT'D)
All I'm saying is, you don't see a
lot of teepees flapping in the wind
around Omaha. Now do you?

Irritated, she spins back around.

MARTHA
I don't need your--

RIP! The shoulder of her suit snags the jagged edge of the
metal wall.

Suddenly, GUSTS of oxygen start jetting out of her suit.

TONY
No, no, no!

Martha frantically wheels around trying to figure out what
the hell's happening. Tony surges toward her.

ALARM (V.O.)
Exterior membrane compromised.
Oxygen levels falling. Seek
immediate shelter. Repeat...

MARTHA
My... My--

Tony grabs her arm, spins her around, throws a single
gauntlet over the tear.

BURSTS of oxygen spit through his splayed fingers.

TONY
Dammit!

ALARM (V.O.)
Oxygen levels critical. Seek
immediate shelter.

TONY
Here!

He lifts her hand to the tear.

TONY (CONT'D)
Help me! Cover it! Hurry!

She does. He stabs his free hand into one pocket, yanks out
a small hand-held device.

ALARM (V.O.)
Oxygen level 2%. Suit failure
imminent.

MARTHA
DO something!

TONY
I AM!

He rams the device, hard, onto her shoulder.

She stutters sideways, eyes wide. He follows, keeping in firm contact as the device cauterizes the gash shut.

After a second:

ALARM (V.O.)
Membrane sealed. Suit failure
averted.

Tony and Martha lock eyes. Tony lifts the device. Cocky.

ALARM (CONT'D)
Oxygen level 1%. Seek immediate
shelter. Repeat. Seek--

Tony stabs at the panel on his wrist, silencing the alarm.

TONY
You're welcome.

He pockets the device, pushes past her.

Martha stands stunned mute on the surface of Mars, her heart beating a million miles a minute.

INT. SYRTIS STATION, LAB - NIGHT

Having returned to the station, Martha (still white as a sheet) walks into a hushed, dimly lit research lab.

Sachiko and Selim sit hunched over high-tech light boxes at a long metal table covered in meticulously cleaned scraps of silicone covered in characters.

Both are wielding tweezers and wearing binocular loupes.

SACHIKO
(without looking up)
Is it cocktail hour yet?

Moving gracefully, Sachiko carefully lifts a fragment with her tweezers and sets it back down before misting it with some sort of fixative.

SELIM
(also not looking up)
Don't remind me.

Selim sets down his tweezers, lifts the loup from his eyes, leans back in his chair, cups his palms over his eyes.

SELIM (CONT'D)
What'd you see out there?

Tony enters the room behind Martha.

MARTHA
Wouldn't believe me if I told you.

SELIM
Try me.

Martha's eyes are still on Sachiko. Every movement of hers is precise, as if being performed to unheard music practiced a million times. A symphony.

MARTHA
A transit hub of some sort. Huge.
With, like, electrified magnetic
levitation tracks.

SELIM
So I've heard.

SACHIKO
Electricity? Just... crazy.

Still putting together fragile puzzle pieces, Sachiko is careful not to disturb what's before her with her breath.

TONY
Found you one more.

Tony lifts the scrap he found earlier and gently slides it onto the table in front of Sachiko.

TONY (CONT'D)
Sorry.

She finally sits back and lifts her loup, too. Her eyes are weary but full of energy.

SACHIKO
No, I love doing this. Monk's work.

She looks back at her seemingly minimal progress.

SACHIKO (CONT'D)
If only it would mean something
after I did it.

Martha takes a seat at the table, swiping her hand across a clear section of tabletop. A digital interface instantly illuminates, screen, keyboard and all.

MARTHA
(sounding stoic)
I'm working on it.

SELIM
Tony's just gotta find us our
Rosetta Stone!

Tony steps away from the table, heads toward a nearby hatch. He's more at home in the field than in the lab. Again, a digger, not a thinker.

TONY
Don't get your hopes up.

He types in a code and the room depressurizes slightly. The silver foil roof flexes almost imperceptibly.

TONY (CONT'D)
A whole race, a whole species, dies
while the first Cro-Magnon cave
artists were painting pictures of
buffalo in France.

He steps beyond the hatch, into the passage.

TONY (CONT'D)
If there's a way to bridge a gap of
fifty thousand years and sixty plus
million miles...

He pauses, wagging his head toward Martha.

TONY (CONT'D)
...Miss Hardass Home Wrecker over
there'll probably find it.
(beat)
If we're lucky.

As he departs, Martha buries herself in a tidal wave of type scanning, swiping, zooming, and jotting down notes.

MARTHA
 (distracted)
 Home Wrecker? You cheated on me.

TONY (O.S.)
 After you flipping shot me!

Martha looks up, making eye contact with Sachiko.

MARTHA
 Never trust a man who doesn't
 swear.

INT. SYRTIS STATION, CREW MESS - MORNING

Seated amongst a host of CLEAN-CUT AERODYNE GRUNTS all wolfing down nutrition pellets like they're Lucky Charms, Selim and Sachiko nurse steaming mugs of coffee.

They both look wrecked. Bookworms down the rabbit hole.

SELIM
 I'm too old for this.

Sachiko nods wordlessly, seeming discouraged.

Suddenly, Martha BLASTS into the room.

MARTHA
 (shouting)
Mastharnorvod! Tadavas! Sornhulva!

Only Selim and Sachiko stare at her blankly. Everyone else continues eating.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
 (rapid-fire)
 One of your pages! It's, like, a
 magazine. I think. A newspaper!

Martha throws herself loudly into a seat at the head of the table. None of the grunts even bother to look up.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
 All three, or variations of each word, were on each scrap. Each page. *Masthar* seems to be a common word. So is *norvod*. So is *nor*. But *-vod* is, I think, a suffix of some sort. And *davas* is a word too. *Ta* is a common prefix. *Sorn* and *hulva* are words, too! I mean, possibly.

A flickering sense of recognition is kindling in Selim's eyes. Sachiko still seems entirely perplexed.

SACHIKO

But, how... What does it mean?

MARTHA

I don't know!

Sachiko's shoulders sag.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

And who knows if I'm pronouncing them correctly.

(beat)

But it might be, like, a masthead? Of a journal. Like, I dunno. The Quarterly Archeology Review. Or...

SELIM

(returning to his coffee)

Sexy Stories.

MARTHA

Yes! Yes! I mean... maybe?

(beat, excitedly)

A smaller line under the title...

She pulls a thin tablet from her pocket, zooms in on a tiny set of seemingly meaningless lines and dashes.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

That could be, like, the issue number. And date! See!

She zooms in further.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

I think these are letters and these are numbers. A decimal system not unlike our own. If I'm reading this correctly, 745. Then the word *doma*. Which must be one of the Martian months? The word shows up all over the place!

She slams the tablet down on the table.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Issue 745. *Doma!* Of the The Sexy Stories Quarterly Review of Archeology!

One of the grunts at the far end of the table lifts his head. It's actually Captain Field.

CAPTAIN FIELD
That seems like a little bit of a stretch, don't you think?

All three of their heads swivel his direction.

CAPTAIN FIELD (CONT'D)
I mean, what'd the AI engine say?

MARTHA
AI? Eff you. That B.S. is just for pattern matching. There's no pattern to match here!

Martha looks like she's about to Frisbee her tablet straight at his face when, suddenly, Tony breezes into the room.

TONY
(blithely)
What'd I miss?

EXT. SYRTIS STATION, EXTERIOR PASSAGE - CONTINUOUS

Back outside, just beyond the clear glass geodesic dome, Tony and Martha lead Sachiko and Selim toward the Martian cityscape on the horizon.

SACHIKO
(no subtitles)
Totemo utsukushīdesu.

TONY
Yes. Yes it is.

In the distance, a fleet of TRANSPORT VEHICLES full of grunts rumble past a handful of SUITED SOLDIERS towing what appears to be another giant cannon of some sort.

Behind Sachiko and Selim, Standish and her cameraman follow along. He's filming. She's narrating:

GLORIA
And as we approach what some have begun calling the salt shaker...

Tony and Martha share a quick look.

MARTHA
Hooters, huh? Not Cracker Barrel?

GLORIA

...partially because of its conical roof which might actually be some sort of wind turbine, or so the thinking goes.

TONY

Just press zero seven to mute her.

In synch, all four of them immediately do.

With the cameraman bounding around her, trying to get a wide shot, we can see Gloria's mouth still moving.

MARTHA

Thank you.

Tony grins. The structures loom above them, much as they did when we first saw them.

TONY

I think that's the first time you've actually said thank you to me in...

He slings a heavy solenoid jackhammer over his shoulder, gripping it like Rambo as he veers left.

TONY (CONT'D)

...over ten years.

MARTHA

(eyes on the structure)

Did I say thank you? I meant--

He mimes punching in the code to tune her out, too.

TONY

You three head straight on. I'm gonna go check out a weak spot while they get set up.

He points toward the troops prepping the cannon.

SELIM

(winded)

Such a pity.

Martha and Sachiko continue toward the building with Selim BREATHING HEAVILY over the comms.

MARTHA

They're ruining everything.

SELIM

And I'm realizing I'm more at home
in a civilization that rode in
chariots and fought with swords...

He pauses to catch his breath.

SELIM (CONT'D)

...and was just learning how to
work iron. The Hittites.

(beat)

Mars is for... young people!

He shakes his head weakly at the troops with the cannon.

SELIM (CONT'D)

And brutes.

Sachiko slows.

SACHIKO

(in absolute awe)

It's all really... real.

MARTHA

Yep. Sure is.

In the distance, Tony's jackhammer starts BANGING away.

INT. LECTURE HALL - DAY [FLASHBACK]

Almost in time with the BANGING of Tony's jackhammer, a
slightly older-looking Oliver BANGS out a pair of giant foam
erasers at the foot of a long blackboard.

He's dressed in a chalk-dusted tweed jacket and an un-ironed
white oxford. The archetypal absentminded professor.

All the seats in the hall appear to be empty.

OLIVER

(seemingly to no one)

The Runamo Runes. As far back as
the 12th century, Scandinavian
scholars believed the markings were
runic inscriptions carved by
Vikings into the rock. Then, in the
18th century, Finnur Magnússon - an
Icelandic archeologist who many
considered the leading European
expert on Old Norse - convinced the
Royal Danish Academy to fund an
expedition to study the runes.

Oliver sets the erasers down and turns back to the seemingly empty lecture hall, bathed in a cloud of white dust.

OLIVER (CONT'D)

Afterward, he made the boldest of proclamations - that he had deciphered the runes! He claimed they were a poem, praising King Harald Wartooth for his bravery at the Battle of Bråvalla.

He rubs his hands together as if to warm them. White dust falls from both.

The camera PULLS BACK to reveal a single student seated a few rows back, alone in the vast hall.

YOUNG TONY

(finishing the story)

Problem was, when Jöns Jacob Berzelius...

OLIVER

(proudly joining in)

...a Swedish chemist...

YOUNG TONY

...decided to inspect the inscription for himself...

OLIVER

(grinning ear-to-ear)

...he arrived at a shocking conclusion...

Young Tony sits forward in his seat, gazing down at his future father-in-law adoringly.

YOUNG TONY

...that all the carvings were not runes at all.

Oliver takes off his glasses, rubbing them clean with a kerchief from his jacket pocket.

OLIVER

They were just natural cracks and fissures in the rock. Random. The work of erosion. Nature.

He pops his glasses back on. Young Tony stands, pulls a book bag up over his shoulder.

OLIVER (CONT'D)
Poor Magnússon. His reputation
never quite recovered.

Young Tony rumbles down the stairs toward him.

OLIVER (CONT'D)
And the lesson is?

YOUNG TONY
(quoting him back)
Where instinct fails, intellect
thrives.

Oliver smiles broadly.

OLIVER
Yes, my boy. Yes.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. CONICAL STRUCTURE, SIXTH FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Stepping tentatively in through the massive breach Tony has jackhammered into the glittering metal wall, Selim follows Martha into the darkness.

TONY
Intellect before instinct.

Behind them, Sachiko plugs a thick cable into some sort of nuclear battery.

At once, dirty gray smoke and orange dust give way to the GLOW emanating from a large portable lantern connected to a charger at Tony's feet.

He picks it up, surveys the space.

Then, a second louder EXPLOSION echoes in the distance. The walls shudder but stand.

A second transport vehicle RUMBLES up next to the hole in the wall. Out of it bounds Penrose.

He's shouldering a similar machine-gun like jackhammer.

COLONEL PENROSE
Ropes. Crampons. Axes.

He throws Selim a heavy coil of rope. He catches it awkwardly, like someone who hasn't been in the field in far, far too long.

He tosses Martha an ax. She catches it deftly. A pro.

COLONEL PENROSE (CONT'D)

Just in case.

Tony clicks on another portable lantern. The windows behind him, grimed and crusted with fifty millennia of dust, filter in a dim twilight.

Martha snaps on her lantern and the lights lining her visor and stares up at the ceiling.

It's an enormous room. Empty and bare. Dust lies thick on the floor, reddening the once white walls.

MARTHA

An office of some sort?

TONY

Who knows. Most of these places have been stripped to the sixth or seventh floor.

SELIM

(looking around in awe)

Seventh floor?

COLONEL PENROSE

The sand outside is seven to eight stories deep. Ten in places.

Another figure steps in, carrying his own lantern and ax.

CAPTAIN FIELD

Could do for barracks once Schiaparelli arrives?

COLONEL PENROSE

Perhaps.

Penrose rubs one hand over the spidery pattern on the wall.

COLONEL PENROSE (CONT'D)

Almost exactly how Nikola Tesla transmitted power wirelessly on Pikes Peak in the 1890s.

Deeper into the space, Selim pauses as a pair of double doors. They appear to be sliding doors. Not hinged. He tries them both. They won't budge.

TONY

Here.

Tony fits a spear point into his jackhammer.

TONY (CONT'D)

Some of these things are so jammed,
it's like the molecules have bonded
together over time. Fused.

Bracing the hammer on his hip, he pulls the trigger.

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

In the distance, we can make out Gloria Standish pointing to her cameraman to get the shot.

Above the door are a series of characters. Martha studies them carefully over the CLAMOR. So does Sachiko.

SACHIKO

(sounding it out)

Dar-fhul-va.

MARTHA

Whatever the heck that means.

Tony gets the doors open just wide enough to pass through.

Selim, too, notices the word/number combo over the door.

SELIM

Strange, I feel oddly at home here.

He spins around, bathed in a cloud of gray and red dust.

SELIM (CONT'D)

Maybe this was some sort of...
classroom? A university? Perhaps
that word was the subject taught?
Or the department?

TONY

A twenty-five story university? A
building this big could hold, what,
thirty thousand people! I mean...

Mostly moved by a desire to spite Tony, Martha pushes past him, into the next room.

MARTHA

Why not? This city was huge, back
in its prime.

Tony caves.

TONY
(to Selim)
Fine. I'm going down. Even though
chances are slim of finding
anything on this floor or below.

SELIM
Go ahead. I'll stick with Martha.
And remember, everything we pull
out of here needs to be logged,
tagged, and--

TONY
Yeah, yeah.

Martha ducks her head back in.

MARTHA
I found some stairs. I'm going up.

SACHIKO
Me too.

COLONEL PENROSE
Great. I'll come with you both. See
if Field can use this as a barracks
later.
(beat, to Field)
You keep eyes on Ms. Fox News over
there.

CAPTAIN FIELD
Will do.

COLONEL PENROSE
And see to it they don't get lost.
Again.

Penrose follows Sachiko through the double doors, off after
Martha.

We stick with them.

INT. CONICAL STRUCTURE, PASSAGE - CONTINUOUS

With Martha in the lead, Sachiko and Penrose emerge into
what appears to be a huge, vaulted passageway thick
underfoot with dust.

More open rooms adjoin the hall - most open, all looking as
if they've been stripped of every stick of furniture and
looted over hundreds or thousands of years.

Tall glass-like screens stand at what would, if they were classrooms or lecture halls, be the front - the stage.

Martha points ahead toward two wide sculptural mechanized sets of stairs. Unbelievably, they almost identically resemble futuristic escalators.

MARTHA

See. That's how they'd handle the students. Between classes.

Together, they walk gingerly up the stilled, dust-covered stairs and come to a stop at a great central hall.

INT. CONICAL STRUCTURE, CENTRAL HALL - CONTINUOUS

All three of them emerge into a huge space with more escalators and what appear to be pod-like elevators.

But it's the walls, and the paintings on them, that bring them up short and staring.

Martha immediately BLURTS out:

MARTHA

Jiminy Christmas!

The camera WHEELS around to reveal a series of golden letterforms above each of the four walls.

SACHIKO

There it is, again. That word!

Spanning the space, clouded with dirt but still fully intact and vivid, is a vast HISTORICAL PANORAMA.

Starting with a group of skin-clad figures squatting around a fire, it moves clockwise to hunters with bows and spears, carrying a carcass of an animal slightly like a pig.

Then, nomads riding long-legged, graceful mounts resembling hornless deer.

Then, peasants sowing and reaping. Mud-walled hut villages. Cities. Processions of priests and warriors. Battles with swords and bows. Then, cannons and muskets.

Galleys. Ships with sails.

Then, ships with no visible means of propulsion. Then, what appear to be aircraft.

PENROSE

Field? Come in, over. You're gonna
wanna--

He cuts himself off, staring at the mural.

Throughout, changing costumes and weapons and styles of
architecture. A richly fertile landscape, gradually merging
into barren deserts and bushlands.

The time of the great planet-wide drought. The canal
builders, seemingly men with machines nearly identical to
steam-shovels and derricks digging and quarrying.

More cities. More seaports on the shrinking oceans,
dwindling and half-deserted.

Then, an abandoned city with four tiny figures standing next
to something resembling a rocket in the middle of an
abandoned, weed-choked plaza - dwarfed by buildings.

In the distant sky above the deserted cityscape is a tiny
blue marble of a planet seemingly flickering like a beacon
of hope in the blackness. *Earth?*

MARTHA

(breathlessly)

Darfhulva... history?

INT. CONICAL STRUCTURE, CENTRAL HALL - LATER

Now gathered in the center of the hall gaping at the mural,
Selim, Penrose, Field, and even Gloria marvel.

PENROSE

God. They look just like us! I
mean, that's... that's *our* story.

MARTHA

Yeah, I don't--

SELIM

Oh, my goodness! It's the entire
history of the race! Each period.
Each style of architecture. Each
era, all laid out right before our
eyes. The whole bloody thing!

MARTHA

I guess we can assume it's
accurate. I mean, it's the history
department after all.

(beat, proudly)

The *Darfhulva* Department!

Selim spins to face her.

SELIM

Yes, dear! *Darfhulva!* History! And
your magazine... *Sornhulva!*
(beat)
Martha!

The two of them lock eyes. For a second, we can see her icy shell begin to melt ever so much.

SELIM (CONT'D)

You have... a word!

Beyond her, Tony seems to be stifling his excitement, trying to shovel it into a furnace of reason.

TONY

Alone, I suppose, *hulva* could mean something like science. Or study?

She turns toward him. It's almost as if they'd only just met for the first time moments ago. Zero grievances. No history.

MARTHA

The equivalent of our 'ology. Our past, our old times, our struggles, our chronicles... studied!

Sachiko chimes in:

SACHIKO

That's three words, Martha! Three words!

Tony turns back to the mural. Captain Field, seeming dubious, pipes up:

CAPTAIN FIELD

Let's not get ahead of ourselves.
I'll admit, it's some... words.
Let's run it through the AI engine,
see if the logic holds up.

Gloria's cameraman pushes roughly past Penrose. Gloria, sniffing out a scoop, follows - gesturing like a game show host at the dust covered murals above.

GLORIA

(stage voice)

This, my friends, is the biggest
discovery to-date!
(MORE)

GLORIA (CONT'D)

The entire history of Mars - stone age to the end times - all laid out for all eyes to see eons and eons ago on all four walls.

She sweeps a hand regally through the air and then curtly gestures 'CUT' with the same hand toward her cameraman - who automatically drops the camera, steps back, and resets.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Switch to a wide shot. A long pan from beginning to end.

CAMERAMAN

With you?

GLORIA

Without me. Just the, uh, thing-y.

She turns back toward Tony.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

(smooth as silk)

Say, I might wanna have you do a take of the, uh, voice-over. I mean, if that's not too much to ask.

Martha GROANS audibly over the comms.

MARTHA

Who wants to go further up?

INT. CONICAL STRUCTURE, SEVENTH FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Moving swiftly but cautiously, Martha leads Tony and the rest of the crew up the next flight of stairs toward another tall pair of corroded metallic doors.

The cameraman trails them, filming everything.

TONY

(gesturing)

Penrose, you hit that side. I'll take this side.

COLONEL PENROSE

Oh, so now you're giving the orders too, huh?

MARTHA

Enough already.

Martha turns and grabs Field's jackhammer.

CAPTAIN FIELD

Be my guest.

With their backs to each other, Tony and Martha wordlessly commence jackhammering the jammed doors apart.

SELIM

Cooperation. Wonders never cease.

Sachiko smiles. *They do make quite a team...*

BANG!

The door Martha's working on GRINDS open. Tony spins around and, in synch, they both lay into the door together until it slides open just enough to pass through.

Lifting his lantern, Penrose peers through the gap.

COLONEL PENROSE

Oh, dear.

Martha shoves the jackhammer, its bit glowing red, back into Field's arms.

MARTHA

What is it?

Penrose takes a tentative step inside.

COLONEL PENROSE (O.S)

You're about to have your work cut out for you, Dr. Dane.

Followed by Field, Martha and Tony work their way inside.

INT. CONICAL STRUCTURE, LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

Lit only by the glow of their lanterns and a trickle of sunlight from the grime-covered windows high above, Martha and Tony enter what appears to be a vast library.

Tall, dust-covered metal shelves stretch far off into the distance. In nearly every way, it resembles an archetypical human collection of ancient reference materials.

MARTHA

Oh, my...

Tony lifts a gloved finger to the glass dome of his visor like a mock librarian.

TONY

Shhhh.

In silence, the rest of the crew tumbles into the space, again in spellbound awe. Of course, Standish immediately starts NARRATING:

GLORIA

And here we've found what appears to be some sort of--

Tony reaches down and MUTES her again. Thankfully.

Martha pauses, reaching up and pulling down a thick, slightly translucent volume.

Cracking it gently open, she gingerly flips through page after page of now increasingly familiar dashes and lines.

Sachiko peers over her shoulder.

MARTHA

It's a goldmine.

SACHIKO

And everything... intact.

Selim leans in, barely able to breathe.

SELIM

It's like the Library of Alexandria!

Tony pulls his own tome off a shelf.

TONY

Only no Caesar to burn it to the--

In the distance, Field tosses what looks like a small metal ball to the floor. BANG!

The sound startles everyone but Penrose. And, suddenly, a bright green beam of light scans the room, floor-to-ceiling.

MARTHA

Shut that thing off!

CAPTAIN FIELD

What?! Why?

TONY

We don't know what could damage this material!

Tony SMASHES the orb with one boot and the light goes dark.

TONY (CONT'D)
Jesus, man. Think!

Martha slowly closes her volume, sliding it back up onto the dusty shelf.

MARTHA
Typical military. Survey, exploit,
trash... move on.

CAPTAIN FIELD
If you'd rather we bring on another
team of cryptologists, by all
means--

Tony steps between them, protectively.

TONY
Listen, on-site, Doctor Dane gives
the orders. Not you. Not Penrose.
Not your Aerodyne stooges. Hear me?

Martha seems almost more stunned by her ex calling her the boss than by him calling the Aerodyne grunts stooges.

CAPTAIN FIELD
Duly noted.
(ironically)
'Doctor' Lattimer.

After a second:

MARTHA
Selim, you and Sachiko inventory
what you can. I doubt we'll find
many picture books. But anything
with images and captions just might
do the trick.

Selim nods. Sachiko, trance-like, steps further into the vast hall of thousands and thousands of intact volumes.

SACHIKO
(not subtitled)
Nantekotta, sore wa kyodaida...
(back to English)
There must be half a million
volumes here!

Martha nods.

MARTHA

Field.

CAPTAIN FIELD

(mock servile)

Yes, ma'am?

MARTHA

You stick with these two. And try to be useful.

(beat)

Penrose, you come with us.

Gloria urgently mouths something wordlessly. Tony, having forgotten, UN-MUTES her:

GLORIA

(stammering)

...where, where, where are you going?!

MARTHA

Up!

Gloria looks to her cameraman. He, still having said almost nothing, just shrugs. *Whatever, dude.*

And, together, Tony and Martha lead Penrose, Gloria, and the cameraman back out of the library toward the central hall.

INT. CONICAL STRUCTURE, CENTRAL HALL - CONTINUOUS

Trudging through sand toward the stilled metal escalators to the next floor up, Martha catches Tony's eye.

Without saying a thing, she looks to the keypad on his wrist. With Penrose about ten or so feet behind him lifting his lantern to the walls, Tony nods.

He reads her mind like an old hand and MUTES everyone but the two of them.

MARTHA

(hushed)

Aerodyne, what is it?

Tony glances back at Penrose as if to catch any glimmer of recognition. They're in the clear.

TONY

I don't--

He wags his head slightly to one side. Through the towering pane of glass to their right, we can see the lights of a squadron of AIRBORNE VEHICLES cutting through the dust.

TONY (CONT'D)

They're packing up everything I find and carting it off to god knows where.

Breathing heavily, the two of them continue up the sand-choked stairs.

TONY (CONT'D)

Talking about trying to get as close to the core of the planet as they can. I think to set off some sort of shaped nuclear charge before the Russians--

Tony trips and nearly falls to the ground. It's the first time we've seen him be anything but sure-footed. Martha reflexively grabs his arm, steadying him.

The two lock eyes for a split second.

TONY (CONT'D)

You think I'm crazy, don't you.

She lets go of his arm like it's hot metal.

MARTHA

Yes.

He simply stares back.

TONY

It's been so long.

MARTHA

Shaped nukes to do what?

TONY

I'm sorry?

MARTHA

Shaped charges to do what?

TONY

Restart the dynamo.

Nearing the top of the escalator, Martha lets her eyes drift from him to the walls of the next floor up.

TONY (CONT'D)
 Rebuild the planet's magnetic
 field, engineer a new atmosphere.

He pauses briefly, eyes also ahead.

TONY (CONT'D)
 (in awe)
 Terraform the planet so that we
 have a place to crash when
 everything back home goes--

Turning, he rapidly UN-MUTES everyone.

GLORIA
 (from behind them)
 Oh my freaking gawd!

The camera WHEELS AROUND to reveal --

INT. CONICAL STRUCTURE, NINTH FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Spread out before us is another massive mural.

COLONEL PENROSE
 There it is again! That word. From
 the magazine.

Indeed, painted again in gold letters at the top of each
 wall is the word: *SORNHULVA*.

Judging by the subject matter (a comprehensive chronological
 history of scientific invention, exploration, and discovery)
 we can glean what Tony immediately deduces:

TONY
 Science. *Sonrhulva* means science!

COLONEL PENROSE
 (pointing)
 Or chemistry or physics!

TONY
 (into his radio)
 Sachiko? Selim? Better get up here,
 ASAP! Over.

In the GLOWING of their hand-held lanterns, we can see a
 series of heroically-scaled Martians so human in appearance
 they seem almost familiar.

Not foreign or alien in the slightest.

SELIM (V.O.)
(over the comms)
What is it? Over.

Each figure is holding some sort of object - a book, a test tube, a vial, sophisticated-looking scientific apparatuses.

And behind them all are scenes of laboratories and factories, flame and smoke, lightning flashes.

MARTHA
(into her radio)
Trust me, you're gonna wanna see this, over.

CAPTAIN FIELD (V.O.)
(over the comms)
Copy that.

Tony points toward one wall.

TONY
(hushed and reverent)
Just... wow.

Martha nods, eyes wide.

TONY (CONT'D)
Must be the inventor of the spectroscope!

She lifts her lantern, stepping closer.

MARTHA
Right. The rainbow!

Indeed, there is a faint but colorful rainbow just beyond the scientist's shoulder.

TONY
And her?

He gestures toward a statuesque woman in a blue smock, lifting a beaker-like glass container.

MARTHA
Organic chemistry?

TONY
With the diagrams...

MARTHA
...long-chain molecules!

In the distance, the cameraman is standing before what appears to be a gigantic, heavily barricaded steel door.

TONY
Chemistry and physics as one
subject. One idea.

CAMERAMAN
Uh, guys?

Everyone ignores him.

In the distance, we can see Selim, Sachiko, and Field sprinting swiftly into the space.

MARTHA
Incredible.

Selim skids to a stop, marveling.

SELIM
(winded)
Oh... my...

SACHIKO
(spinning around)
...godness!

Far off, the cameraman pipes up again:

CAMERAMAN
Hello?

SELIM
I just can't...

CAMERAMAN
Maybe this is a--

Finally, Gloria turns around, irritated, just in time to see her shooter set his camera down and reach to remove some sort of device from the barricaded doors.

And, with a loud CLICK, two huge cylindrical beams pendulum down from the ceiling INSTANTLY PULVERIZING THE CAMERAMAN'S HELMET WITH DEAFENING CLANG!

Sachiko SCREAMS!

Tony and Martha freeze as the cameraman's headless body immediately incinerates itself inside his useless spacesuit.

CAPTAIN FIELD
Nobody move!

GLORIA
Oh, my god. Oh. My. GAWD!

She instinctively takes a half step backward.

MARTHA
Don't--

CLICK. WHOOSH!

THE FLOOR OPENS UP BENEATH HER - SENDING HER TUMBLING
DOWNWARD INTO AN IMPROVISED PIT TRAP!

THUD!

Her body is impaled by a grid of sharpened metal rods. She doesn't even scream. All we hear is the MECHANICAL GUSTS of oxygen escaping her pierced suit.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Goddamn it!

Tony lifts an arm protectively back toward Martha.

TONY
Booby traps.

COLONEL PENROSE
WHAT?!

MARTHA
Don't! MOVE!

TONY
(quizzically)
Interesting.

Tony's eyes wash over the towering barricade, studying it.

CAPTAIN FIELD
Everybody, stand down!

SELIM
Stand down?!

Martha's eyes fall to the false floor above the pit trap.

MARTHA
Just like the tomb...

TONY
...of Amenhotep III.

MARTHA
False walls. False floors.

CAPTAIN FIELD
I said... stand DOWN!

All eyes whip from Field to Penrose.

MARTHA
Who's in charge here, huh?

CAPTAIN FIELD
Back to base, now. And that's an order!

Tony steps between them.

TONY
Hey. Hey!

Field straight-arms Tony.

CAPTAIN FIELD
Two people just died because of you and your reckless--

TONY
Reckless?!

MARTHA
We *have* to get behind that door!

CAPTAIN FIELD
You need to STAND DOWN! Return to base. My men can handle it from here!

MARTHA
(toward Penrose)
Who are his men anyway?

Penrose is still (stunningly) mute.

TONY
(toward Field)
What's your mission? What's Aerodyne's *doing* here?!

Field flashes Penrose a look.

CAPTAIN FIELD
Told you this was a mistake.

MARTHA
 (still toward Penrose)
 What's their mission?!

COLONEL PENROSE
 (quietly)
 That, I'm afraid, is classified.

The word hangs there for a beat.

COLONEL PENROSE (CONT'D)
 You heard him. Back to base. We'll
 send a crew to scan the space. See
 what's beyond the door.
 (striding off)
 No one else dies. Not on my watch.

INT. SYRTIS STATION, LAB - LATER

Surrounded by heaping piles of books gathered from the library, Martha, Tony, Sachiko, and Selim sit slumped around the long table in their now sweat-stained jumpsuits.

SACHIKO
 I've never seen... I've never seen
 anyone die before. And we didn't
 even know his name.

Martha clearly wants to change the subject.

MARTHA
 Something's *definitely* wrong here.

Looking wrecked and in far beyond his depth, Selim MUTTERS:

SELIM
 I can't believe they're just...

SACHIKO
 ...gone.

SELIM
 Maybe we shouldn't be here. Don't
 belong here. Shouldn't--

Martha picks up one of the books on the table, leafing carefully through it. After a second:

MARTHA
 Are they all like this?

Selim and Sachiko look to her blankly. Tony looks away.

SELIM
Stop. This is *not* the time.

SACHIKO
Two people. Two humans just--

Martha roughly tosses the book back on top of the stack, still vehemently refusing to feel.

MARTHA
Yeah, maybe it is useless.

Everyone else looks for a second like they're trying to drum up some sort counter-argument. None comes.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Field and his goons are just gonna bulldoze the lot of it anyway. Shovel it under the sand before the Astroturf shows up.

Sachiko looks up.

SACHIKO
What?!

MARTHA
Mister two-timer here...

TONY
It was one time!

MARTHA
(ignoring him)
...says the Aerodyne foot soldiers are planning to nuke the core.

Selim narrows his eyes.

SELIM
Nuke?!

MARTHA
So that it re-liquifies like ours at home. Sloshes around again.

Sachiko looks up. A glimmer of grave realization.

SACHIKO
(distantly)
Restoring the magnetosphere. Making it possible to rebuild and retain a breathable atmosphere. But that's...

MARTHA
Insanity? Uh-huh.

SELIM
Why? Why bring us here then? Why go
through all the... trouble?

MARTHA
Hell if I know.

Martha stands.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
We gotta get behind that door.

Tony nods. *That's my girl.*

Selim and Sachiko stare back. Sure, they're archeologists,
but this? Selim finally says it:

SELIM
This is beyond my pay grade.

INT. SYRTIS STATION, LAB - MOMENTS LATER

Moving fast (clearly surreptitiously) Tony, Martha, Sachiko,
and Selim shove equipment into pressurized shoulder bags.

TONY
Scanners?

Martha nods. And Tony dumps a handful of black orbs like the
one he smashed earlier into his bag.

TONY (CONT'D)
(pointing)
What about that thing?

Martha's eyes dart to the thin glass tablet-like device
sitting amongst the stacks of silicone volumes.

SELIM
(hushed)
Why are we hurrying?

Martha grabs the tablet.

TONY
If we find anything, we sick the AI
engine on it.

Martha looks like she's going to crack the tablet in half.

SACHIKO
What *is* the rush?!

TONY
(meaning the tablet)
You said it yourself. Pattern
matching.

Martha reluctantly shoves the tablet into her bag.

TONY (CONT'D)
Just like Dad. Such a Luddite.

MARTHA
I told you...

BANG!

The normally unflappable Sachiko slams both fragile-looking palms down onto the cold steel table.

All eyes fall to her.

SACHIKO
Why are we rushing?!

MARTHA
(after a second)
Because.

She looks to Tony.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Tony's right. This isn't a dig.
It's a demolition.

She throws the strap of her bag over one shoulder.

SELIM
That doesn't make any sense!

MARTHA
Aerodyne.

She looks to the door.

Behind her, out one long, pill-shaped portal, we can make out another fleet of dragonfly-like Aerodyne AIRSHIPS flying low over the sand.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
We gotta find some way to get what
we've found home.

Martha shoves off, headed for the exit.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
 Away from Field and his jarheads.
 Before they sweep everything under
 the rug.

SACHIKO
 I still don't--

Tony turns to follow Martha out.

TONY
 C'mon! We're explorers. Let's
 flipping explore.

With Tony hot on her heels, Martha blasts her way through the lab and out into the hall toward the airlock.

INT. TOMB COMPLEX, EGYPT - DAY [FLASHBACK]

Somewhere deep below the Valley of the Golden Mummies in the Bahariya Oasis, teenaged Tony and Martha follow Oliver through a series of smoke-smudged caverns, holding lanterns.

OLIVER
 All from the Roman period. Thus the
 Ptolemaic coins, jewelry, and
 bracelets.

TEENAGED TONY
That's what I'm talkin' about!

Teenaged Martha GROANS audibly.

OLIVER
 Yes, but the most important things
 are the sticks...

Oliver veers toward a hand-carved space in which we can barely make out a resting golden sarcophagus.

TEENAGED MARTHA
 ...made of reeds...

Oliver nods, slowing.

TEENAGED MARTHA (CONT'D)
 ...placed on both sides of the body
 to wrap them in linen...

OLIVER
 (eyes on the sarcophagus)
 ...making the mummy very stable.
 More stable than those of the
 Pharaonic period.

Tony bends to brush away a thick layer of dust covering engraved hieroglyphs on the chest of the golden sarcophagus.

TEENAGED MARTHA
 The hearts of the deceased were
 placed on a scale opposite the
 feather of the goddess of truth.

Gold glitters in Tony's eyes. The smoldering fires of greed.

TEENAGED TONY
 All this stuff's gotta be worth--

Martha turns toward her father, cutting Tony off:

TEENAGED MARTHA
 If the scales balanced, Horus would
 take the deceased to meet the god
 Osiris.

Oliver nods, seeming to stifle his pride at having raised a daughter of such ferocious intellect.

OLIVER
 Don't forget Isis, dear.

Tony stands, all the gold reflecting in his eyes.

TEENAGED TONY
 (teasingly)
 Yeah, don't forget Isis.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. CONICAL STRUCTURE, SIXTH FLOOR - LATER

Moving silently and fast, Martha, Tony, Selim, and Sachiko sprint up the stilled escalator from the seventh floor.

Tony and Martha are both hefting huge, machine-gun like jackhammers again.

INT. SYRTIS STATION, LAB - CONTINUOUS

Perhaps sensing something is amiss, Colonel Penrose pushes his way through the hatch to the lab.

The room depressurizes and then re-pressurizes again, sending the mylar roof fluttering.

His eyes wash over the mountains of accumulated books waiting to be translated.

COLONEL PENROSE
Not a good idea, Miss Dane...

INT. CONICAL STRUCTURE, SEVENTH FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Tony, Martha, Sachiko, and Selim sprint through the central hall adorned with the historical murals.

INT. SYRTIS STATION, COMMAND CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Penrose thunders into a command center filled with AERODYNE CONTRACTORS glued to myriad screens FLICKERING grid coordinates and sophisticated diagrams.

On a large central display, we see a live view from The Cyrano. In the near distance, a second orbiter - The Schiaparelli - approaches slowly.

Penrose makes a beeline for Field.

COLONEL PENROSE
They're gone.

Field rips off his headset, eyes still glued to the screen at the head of the room.

CAPTAIN FIELD
Who?

COLONEL PENROSE
Dane. Lattimer. The whole team.

Field turns back to the screen.

CAPTAIN FIELD
Of course they are.

COLONEL PENROSE
NASA won't stand for this.

CAPTAIN FIELD
Yes they will. And you damn well know it. This is Aerodyne's mission now. Your people have failed.

COLONEL PENROSE
Aren't you even the least bit curious?!

CAPTAIN FIELD
 (scoffing)
 About what?

COLONEL PENROSE
All of it. What it all means!

On the screen up ahead, we see a second view of the planet's surface. Landers filled with Tony's plundered relics launch one after the other, headed for Schiaparelli.

CAPTAIN FIELD
 Nope.
 (beat)
 Survival.

Clearly there's a power imbalance between the two of them not previously suggested by their ranks.

CAPTAIN FIELD (CONT'D)
 That's the mission now.

Field slaps his headset back on.

CAPTAIN FIELD (CONT'D)
 Don't make me lock you up for
 insubordination.

Penrose, his face flush, turns to leave.

INT. CONICAL STRUCTURE, EIGHTH FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Together, the team runs past the open door to the vast library. Both Sachiko and Selim look at it longingly, like that's where they'd both rather hole up interminably.

INT. SYRTIS STATION, AIRLOCK - CONTINUOUS

Alone in the airlock, Penrose scrambles to surreptitiously don a waiting spacesuit. A man on a mission.

INT. CONICAL STRUCTURE, NINTH FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Finally reaching the top of the escalator leading to the science wing, Tony skids to a stop. Martha does too.

Sachiko crests the stairs behind them, followed by Selim - who is completely out of breath. Sucking down air.

Tony immediately swings his shoulder bag around to the front, unzips it, reaches inside.

MARTHA
 Wait. Let's think about this.

She eyes the barricaded door in the distance.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Whoever built this did it to keep
people out. Like the Egyptians.

TONY
And the Mayans. And Qin Shi Huang.

SACHIKO
Cinnabar. Mercury. Poison.

SELIM
(gasping)
Don't forget the crossbows and the
stone blocks. At Khufu. Giza.

Martha leans cautiously forward, eyes into the open pit
where Gloria's desiccated body still rests impaled.

MARTHA
Alright.

Martha looks away, steeling up. Blocking it out.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Looters?

Tony takes a half step forward, one hand still in his bag.

TONY
Somebody had to try to protect
their legacy.

Martha nods solemnly.

MARTHA
Their history.

Martha points toward Tony's bag.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Worth a shot.

TONY
Okay.

Tony pulls one of the orbs out of his bag, clicks a button
on the top, rolls it out across the floor just next to the
edge of the pit trap.

After a breathless second, it comes to a stop, automatically
rights itself, cracks further open, and casts a blinding
beam of GREEN LIGHT across the entire space.

All four of them lift their gauntlets to block the light.

MARTHA

You and your gadgets.

A wavering, pixel-perfect rendering of the space instantly appears projected over every surface, every stone.

TONY

Yep.

Ahead of them, the building has been x-rayed. Scanned.

A whole host of other PIT TRAPS of various sizes and shapes dot the floor in random intervals leading toward the barricaded door.

SELIM

Scheiße.

Between the pit traps are a series of illuminated blocks set into in the floor. They glow bright green.

SACHIKO

Pressure plates?

Martha nods solemnly. Tony looks to the cameraman's body.

TONY

Man, kid. Dumb freaking luck.

Martha scours the floor beneath them for a rock, a shard of stone, anything heavy to throw.

But, before she can find anything, Tony rips another scanner out of his bag and tosses it toward one of the green plates.

It lands with a THUD. And two bursts of tiny METALLIC PROJECTILES shoot from gaps in both far walls.

Tony nods confidently. *Yeah, thought so. Just like...*

BANG!

A huge slab of stone falls from ceiling and SMASHES the sensor to bits.

MARTHA

Great. Anything *else* you'd like to destroy?!

Tony zips his bag shut.

TONY

Nope.

MARTHA

Okay. Just head for what's his name. Follow his footprints.

SACHIKO

Show some respect.

MARTHA

Avoid anything green.

SACHIKO

(quoting)

Always handle the remains of the dead with the utmost care.

(beat)

Taylor-Jones.

Tony takes a gingerly step forward like someone venturing out across an icy pond.

TONY

Archeology isn't a science. It's a vendetta.

(taking another step)

Sir Mortimer Wheeler.

Martha slowly steps precisely into Tony's footprints, following him closely.

MARTHA

Nice and easy. Nice and--

Suddenly, the faintly illuminated plate under Tony's left foot FLICKERS and then CLICKS loudly.

From deep inside the walls to their far left and right we hear a RASPING METALLIC GROAN!

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Go, go, GO!

Suddenly, a hail of large, jagged DISC-LIKE SILVER BLADES shoot out from both walls!

TONY

Run!

Tony sprints dead out, doing his best to avoid every bit of laser-generated green dotting the floor.

Martha, her right hand gripping the back of Tony's life support pack ducks and dodges until:

BANG!

One of the blades CLIPS Tony's shoulder, sending him tumbling into the air!

MARTHA

TONY!

Tony hits the ground hard, chest first, and tumbles across the floor before:

CLICK!

Another huge pit trap opens up just behind him.

Martha leaps forward, slides below the WHIRLING silver blades toward Tony as he slips backward into the pit trying to get a grip.

ALARM (V.O.)
 (from Tony's suit)
 Exterior membrane compromised.
 Oxygen leak detected.

Martha grabs one of his gauntlets. Then the other.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Gotcha!

ALARM (V.O.)
 Seek immediate shelter. Repeat...

Then:

CLICK!

The floor beneath Martha gives way as well.

TONY

No, no!

Tony tightens his grip.

Together, they dangle precariously while the silver blades continue to WHIR and SWOOSH above them.

ALARM (V.O.)
 Exterior membrane compromised.

TONY
 (straining)
 Good thing you put on a few pounds.

ALARM (V.O.)
 Oxygen leak detected.

MARTHA
 Not. NOW!

She cranes her head to her right, scraping the glass of her visor across the stone floor.

Tony looks too. He's pulling her slowly in with him.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
 On three.

TONY
 No!

The spinning silver blades above them fly back toward their respective walls. Waiting to be tripped again.

Tony shimmies desperately side-to-side, trying to get a foothold. But there's nothing but air below him.

ALARM (V.O.)
 Seek immediate shelter. Repeat...

TONY
 I can't get a grip.

MARTHA
 (also straining)
 That's so you!

ALARM (V.O.)
 Seek immediate shelter.

TONY
 I'm pulling you down!

Martha grips him hard, won't let go.

MARTHA
 Wouldn't. Be. The. First. Time!

TONY
 Stop!

MARTHA
 No!

ALARM (V.O.)
Critical.

TONY
Let me GO!

MARTHA
You'd like that, wouldn't you?

ALARM (V.O.)
Critical.

MARTHA
On three!
(beat)
One.

Tony SCREAMS:

TONY
WAIT!

MARTHA
Two.

TONY
I said...

MARTHA
THREE!

Summoning every ounce of her strength, Martha rolls over onto her side and DRAGS Tony up and out of his pit.

In the distance Selim and Sachiko watch breathlessly.

TONY
Oh my GOD!

ALARM (V.O.)
Critical.

Martha SHOVES a hand into a pocket on Tony's leg, pulls out the puck-like device from earlier, and SLAMS it against the gash in his suit.

It LIGHTS UP and WHIRS, cauterizing the gash.

ALARM (CONT'D)
Membrane sealed. Suit failure repaired.

Martha collapses back to the floor, gasping for breath and staring at the ceiling. Tony reaches out and takes her hand.

After a second:

MARTHA
 (mockingly)
 Let me go...
 (beat)
 You're hilarious.

TONY
 Worked every other time!

Martha sits up, looks around, still holding Tony's hand.

MARTHA
 (to Selim and Sachiko)
 So, that. Don't do that!

Tony sits up, too. A broad adrenaline-fueled grin is plastered across his face. He points with his free hand.

TONY
 Aside from that, it's a breeze!

Martha tosses him back his repair kit. He lets go of her hand to catch it.

MARTHA
 C'mon.

INT. CONICAL STRUCTURE, NINTH FLOOR - MOMENTS LATER

With Selim and Sachiko stepping slowly across the floor behind them, Tony and Martha continue across the space.

MARTHA
 (a breathless whisper)
 Why's that thing not showing
 anything beyond the door?

TONY
 (also whispering)
 I dunno.

Tony's foot comes dangerously close to the edge of another one of the glowing green plates.

MARTHA
 Careful!

TONY
 (ignoring her)
 Maybe the material's impenetrable
 to radar?

Martha takes the next step wider, avoiding Tony's footprint by centimeters.

MARTHA
Radiation-absorbent?

She reaches forward, grabbing Tony by one shoulder.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Wait.

The tile ahead of Tony seems to glow green slightly. Martha bends to one knee, lowers her face to the floor.

She reaches through Tony's legs, wipes a hand across the floor. The sand scatters, revealing a fine gauzy mesh stretched from tile to tile.

Martha pinches up one end of the fabric. It instantly melts away in her gauntlet.

AND A FEROCIOUS GUST OF TINY METALLIC PARTICLES rushes out of the void!

Martha, still on her knees looks up. Tony's visor is coated in fine silver dust. Beyond it, his face is full of fear.

TONY
What is it?! What--

MARTHA
Shhh!

Selim and Sachiko freeze.

Martha quickly thrusts a hand back into her bag, pulls out the thin glass tablet.

She waves the tablet through the air. Text instantly appears on the screen.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Chromium?!

She tilts the tablet up toward Tony. His fear swells.

TONY
But that's...

MARTHA (CONT'D)
A deadly toxin, yeah. On Earth.

TONY
Am I--

MARTHA

No, no.

She taps the back of his oxygen generator.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

You're fine. It's just...

SELIM

What's happening?!

MARTHA

Strange.

She pockets the tablet, stands, looks to the walls full of heroically rendered scientists.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

But I guess elements are elements.

SACHIKO

What are you talking about?!

BANG!

Another MASSIVE STONE BLOCK falls from the ceiling and SLAMS down onto the floor between Martha and Selim!

Sand goes flying.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

RUN!

Together, Tony and Martha sprint for the barricaded door as more stone blocks THUNDER down from the ceiling behind them.

Ducking and dodging the falling blocks, Selim and Sachiko zigzag their way across the space doing everything they can to keep pace and stay alive.

Bits of glowing green lines and pixels FLICKER and WASH across their spacesuits as they run.

And, as the last block falls with an EAR-SPLITTING SMASH, all four of them skid to a stop at the foot of the barricaded door, eyes wide.

Red dust fills the air.

SELIM

(gasping)

Never! Again!

Tony, his hands on his knees, panting, still can't wipe the grin off his face (even though his helmet is covered in deadly poison).

TONY
Dad always did wanna dig more at
Huang's tomb!

Martha's eyes wash over the door.

TONY (CONT'D)
He woulda gone bananas for this!
Flipping bananas!

Tony cranes his head toward the door. It must be a good 30 feet tall, heaped with tangled bits of crudely welded scrap and scavenged hardware.

MARTHA
(to Tony)
Don't touch anything.

Tony nods, points.

TONY
Look!

Just above Tony's head, a series of slender dashes have been etched into the surface of a long metallic cylinder.

Above and below the cylinder, more dashes. Some of them match the ones on the cylinder's face. Some don't.

They're out of sequence. Jumbled. Seemingly random.

Martha, her mind racing, scours every marking. *Letters?*

MARTHA
Wait.

TONY
What?!

MARTHA
That couldn't...

Now Sachiko sees it too.

SACHIKO
But, that's--

Martha wheels around, careful not to move her feet.

MARTHA
Exactly!

TONY
What IS it?!

Martha turns back to the door, also pointing.

MARTHA
There. There. There. And there!

Tony and Selim squint, trying to make out what the hell she's talking about.

SACHIKO
This *is* the Science department,
after all!

SELIM
What?

Martha points to some of the matching clusters of markings.

MARTHA
A-a. T-t.

Sachiko picks it up from there.

SACHIKO
G-g. C-c!

MARTHA
The four bases! Adenine, thymine,
cytosine, and guanine. The four
nucleotides that make up DNA!
(beat)
Just, like, scrambled.

TONY
ATGC?
(beat)
But, that's *human* DNA!

MARTHA
You saw those murals. They look
just like us! Maybe a little
taller. A little handsomer. But,
shit, dude. Almost identical!

Tony draws a breath. It's hard to object.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
 That was chromium! Exactly the same
 molecular composition, the same
 poison, as it is on Earth!

Her eyes drift to the metal cylinder.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
 It's the stupidest science nerd
 combo lock in the known universe!

Finally, Selim gets it:

SELIM
 Of course!

MARTHA
 Just rotate the thing until the
 letters match!

TONY
 I don't... It doesn't make any--

MARTHA
 See!

She leaps ahead of Tony.

He throws his arms around her protectively. And she reaches
 up to rotate the cylinder counterclockwise.

KA-CHINK!

A loud series of CLICKS and THUDS follow from deep within
 the door. It's like a centuries old vault coming to life.

Tony winces, fearing a trap.

But then, miraculously, the door begins to GRIND loudly open
 with a heavy, ominous WHOOSH!

MARTHA (CONT'D)
 HA!

Tony lets go of her.

And Martha wheels back around. She and Selim lock eyes.

SELIM
 Marvelous, dear. Just--

Suddenly, the ground beneath Selim and Sachiko SHUDDERS
 briefly AND THEN SPLITS IN TWO!

Sachiko stumbles forward, toward Tony. He strains to snatch one of her arms and pull her closer.

MARTHA

SELIM!

Martha lunges toward Selim. But it's too late.

In a cloud of dust, the stone floor beneath him FALLS AWAY!

Selim's eyes meet our for the briefest of seconds before he tumbles wordlessly away into the void.

His sadness at not being able to see the expedition all the way through to the end burns right through us.

SACHIKO

NO!

INT. CONICAL STRUCTURE, NARROW PASSAGEWAY - CONTINUOUS

In a blistering rage, Martha and Tony blast their way down a narrow passageway lined with long-abandoned detritus SHOUTING at each other at the top of their lungs:

TONY

He was my friend too!

MARTHA

No he wasn't. He thought you were a disgrace! A liar. A grave robber!

Sachiko, looking utterly crushed, trudges along behind them in a daze with her eyes downcast to the floor.

TONY

You arrogant--

Martha veers away from him down the hall.

TONY (CONT'D)

Who held your father's head, Dad's head, as he laid there dying? Huh? Me! That's who!

(beat)

And why?

Martha doesn't even bother responding, picking up the pace.

TONY (CONT'D)

Because you were too goddamn busy! Couldn't tear yourself away from your dusty little crypts in god knows where.

MARTHA
 (under her breath)
 Harappa.

TONY
 Harappa! To come home and show your
 respect to the one man on Earth who
 loved you more than me!

Martha stops dead.

TONY (CONT'D)
 There. I said it. I love you. I've
 always loved you. My life went to
 hell when you left. Both times!

Still behind them, Sachiko slows.

TONY (CONT'D)
 Second time was way worse.

INT. CONICAL STRUCTURE, NINTH FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Carrying a large gun-like jackhammer that matches Tony and Martha's, Colonel Penrose noiselessly weaves his way through the wrecked space.

With the rest of the pressure plates still illuminated by the scanning orb, he leaps from footprint to footprint across the floor.

INT. CONICAL STRUCTURE, NARROW PASSAGEWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Tony reaches out and takes Martha's helmet in his hands.

TONY (CONT'D)
 I wanted you to come here. I asked
 Selim to talk you into it, to make
 it all happen. Not only because I
 knew that only you could pull this
 off - you, no one else - but
 because I needed you to know.
 You're the only person who's ever
 understood me. The *real* me.

She finally lets herself look him in the eyes again.

TONY (CONT'D)
 I'm... nothing without you.

We can see Martha's wheels spinning. She's searching for a searing response. No words come.

TONY (CONT'D)
 Selim was my friend. A great
 friend. A great mind. A great man.

He lets go of Martha's helmet and turns back toward Sachiko.

TONY (CONT'D)
 But now it's on us - all three of
 us - to blow this thing wide open
 for the whole world...

Something in the distance catches his eye and he pauses.

TONY (CONT'D)
 (distracted)
 ...to see.

Suddenly, Penrose steps out of the shadows behind Sachiko.

COLONEL PENROSE
 Couldn't agree more.

Moving quickly and confidently, Penrose steps up and thrusts
 a hand into Tony's shoulder bag.

COLONEL PENROSE (CONT'D)
 Much to my chagrin.

He pulls out one of the remaining orbs, clicks it against
 his hip, tosses it to the ground.

COLONEL PENROSE (CONT'D)
 And the detriment of my pension.

The orb sweeps the narrow corridor with a BLINDING beam of
 light - revealing, up ahead, a pair of double doors leading
 to what appears to be a large ovoid room.

Seeing it, Sachiko's chin drops.

In the center of the room stands a long, egg-shaped table
AND WHAT APPEAR TO BE NEARLY TWENTY HUMANOID SKELETONS
SEATED IN VARIOUS STATES OF DECREPITUDE.

After a second:

COLONEL PENROSE (CONT'D)
 I think we just found our bones.

INT. CONICAL STRUCTURE, OVOID ROOM - CONTINUOUS

From inside the ovoid room, we hear the BANGING of all three
 jackhammers as the metallic doors to the room shudder and
 slide slowly open, inches at a time.

TONY (O.C.)
 (loud, from outside)
 There! There! That's enough!

All three jackhammers GRIND and HISS as Tony sticks his helmeted head through the gap.

The stunned look on his face says it all:

TONY (CONT'D)
 You're not gonna believe this!

He pushes his way through the gap and in, followed by Martha, Sachiko, and Penrose.

MARTHA
 (in awe)
 Unbelievable.

The space resembles a meeting room of sorts. At the center of the long table, sits a circular black stone disk.

In each chair slump partial skeletons in various states of decay. And before each, twenty clear goblets.

Whatever was in them is long gone. *Poison?*

Everything else in the space is a complicated clutter of hastily gathered lab equipment: books, vats of unknown material, scavenged essentials.

Spanning a large thigh-high built-in metal cabinet that runs the length of the room are a series of closed clear glass boxes in a metal grid.

There must be hundreds of them. Thousands. Tony picks one up carefully. In it, tiny granules shift like sand.

TONY (CONT'D)
 Wait. Seeds?

MARTHA
 They must have been the last. The final survivors. Trying to--

Something catches her eye on the wall behind Tony.

Across the room, Penrose picks up what appears to be a molecular model almost exactly like the ones that kids use in science class back on Earth.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
 (pointing)
 Is that...

Tony nearly drops the glass box, wheeling around.

On the wall is etched a pattern of concentric circles. Both Martha and Tony recognize them immediately.

Tony turns back toward Martha, eyes wide.

TONY
Atomic structure!

At the far end of the table, Sachiko pauses.

SACHIKO
Martha...

Martha is busy tracing the diagram on the wall with her eyes. Deciphering it.

MARTHA
Uranium! That's a uranium atom!

SACHIKO (CONT'D)
(louder)
Martha?

Martha swivels her head toward Sachiko.

On the curved wall behind Sachiko is etched a complicated grid full of of what appear to be numbers and words. Something about it, too, seems instantly familiar.

Martha drops the jackhammer she's still holding down on the table. Bones go flying.

Not saying a word, her eyes locked on the chart, she staggers toward Sachiko.

MARTHA
But, that's... *impossible*.

Tony and Penrose share a quick look.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
(counting, to herself)
Ninety-two. Ninety-two boxes! They probably started with uranium because it's the largest of the natural atoms!

A faint glimmer of recognition flashes across Tony's face.

TONY
They probably hadn't created any of the transuranics yet!

SACHIKO
Ninety-two boxes.

TONY
Ninety-two elements!

MARTHA
(rapid-fire)
Hydrogen, *Sarfaldsorn*. Helium,
Tirfaldsorn. What's number three?!

COLONEL PENROSE
Lithium?

MARTHA
Lithium! *Sarfalddavas!* *Sorn* must
mean matter. Or substance! But,
davas... davas?!

TONY
And those? Those squiggles? Those
are numbers! The atomic weight of
each element?!

For a long, breathless second, all four of them stand
staring at the wall before them, slack-jawed.

MARTHA
The periodic table of elements.

TONY
Our... your...
(beat)
The Rosetta Stone!

MARTHA
(quietly)
Our Rosetta Stone.

SACHIKO
Nanite kotoda.

Martha whips out her tablet, quickly snapping scans of the
grid and every character in it.

MARTHA
Now we have our...

Finally catching on, Penrose steps nearer.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
(snapping away)
...pattern to match! The key. The
key to it all!

COLONEL PENROSE

The atomic weights aren't run out
past the decimal point. Hydrogen's
one plus, if that double hook
thing's a plus.

TONY

A hook! To hang things together!

COLONEL PENROSE

And lithium's what? Seven? That's
not right. It's six point nine
four... or is that thing a minus?

SACHIKO

A knife. To cut something off!

TONY

Of course. Beryllium. Nine and two
hooks. 9.02!

COLONEL PENROSE

Oh my god. You're reading that!
We're reading that!

He slams his hands down on the table.

COLONEL PENROSE (CONT'D)

We're reading Martian!

With the THUD of his hands, the circular stone disk at the
center of the table spins a few degrees clockwise.

AND A CRUDE LOOKING HOLOGRAM FLICKERS TO LIFE ABOVE IT!

The disk slows and the hologram disappears.

Everyone freezes like they've just seen a ghost.

Martha sets her tablet down on the table.

On its screen, we can see a RIVER OF CODE flying by. The AI
engine finally translating. Pattern matching.

MARTHA

(to Penrose)

Do that again.

Penrose lifts both palms as if to pound the table again.

TONY

No, no. Like this...

Tony reaches out and gives the disk a spin. From below it, we can barely make out a CRACKLING BLUE GLOW - almost like static electricity under a heavy blanket.

The HOLOGRAM suddenly appears again.

It's of a single, very human-looking FIGURE. He stands before what appears to be some sort of celestial map.

On the map we can make out a rendering of the planet Mars before the image FLICKERS and goes dim.

Tony reaches back out, giving the disk a heavier spin. And, astoundingly, the figure SPEAKS!

His voice is rich and full. The language, now increasingly familiar, suddenly more sophisticated. Almost lyrical.

TONY (CONT'D)

Are you... are you getting any of this?

MARTHA

No, but keep going. It must be...

She bends to peer below the disc. Faint blue SPARKS.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

...generating its own power. Like, static electricity?

SACHIKO

Like a music box!

Tony keeps spinning it. The light of the hologram washes across all of their faces.

Behind the hooded figure, another planet appears. It's ours. Earth. An ocean of life in the bleak darkness of space.

The hooded figure continues SPEAKING.

COLONEL PENROSE

What is he saying?!

TONY

But that's... Earth?

Martha nods gravely.

Behind her, the clear glass tablet suddenly PINGS.

She wheels around, lifts it up.

MARTHA

Shit.

TONY

What?

MARTHA

We've got it. We've got it all!

SACHIKO

Everything?!

Martha rapidly nods.

MARTHA

Three weeks?! Try two days! Screw you, Aerodyne!

She points to the disk.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Back it up.

Tony does. And the hologram reverses.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

There. Stop.

She lifts the tablet into the air, presses a button, and nods to Tony. And he gives the disk another spin.

And as the hooded figure speaks again, the tablet translates in a MECHANICAL MONOTONE:

TABLET/HOLOGRAM (V.O.)

...and once we realized the gravity of our mistake, that reversing the course of the damage we had done to our planet, the same planet we fled to from Gliese 667Cc so many centuries before, was futile...

(beat)

...it was too late.

In the hologram, the rendering of Earth appears again, slowly nearing. A cluster of blue and green floating pixels.

TABLET/HOLOGRAM (CONT'D)

It was chaos. Man against man. A mad rush to presumed safety as the storms approached. Crops died. The atmosphere slowly disappearing day by day. So we did what we did, what we had learned to do.

(MORE)

TABLET/HOLOGRAM (CONT'D)

After ignoring our past failures,
ignoring our history and the truth
before our very eyes, we fled. To
start over. To begin again. To
conquer a new world with the
promise of someday returning.

The voice and the hologram start SLOWING DOWN like a record
on a player running out of steam.

TABLET/HOLOGRAM (CONT'D)

(creeping to a halt)

A few survivors remained,
attempting to preserve what
knowledge we had gathered. But
holding out hope against hope
eventually proved too heavy a
burden to--

This last word drags on eerily until the hologram FLICKERS
and disappears again entirely.

Martha looks to Tony. Tony looks to Sachiko.

MARTHA

They aren't just like us.

She slams the tablet back into her bag.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

They are us.

Martha turns to grab Sachiko and drag her roughly back
toward Penrose and the exit.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

They didn't engineer some sort of
organism that ate their atmosphere.
They killed it themselves!

(gravely)

Humanity! We're the weed! The
pestilence! The invasive species!

Penrose's face falls.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Moving from planet to planet
leaving nothing but destruction in
our wake! And now we're about to do
it all over again. Here!

COLONEL PENROSE
 (somberly)
 Aerodyne.

Tony, looking torn, steps backward away from the table.

TONY
 They're only here to stake the
 claim before before the Russians.

Penrose nods again, gravely.

COLONEL PENROSE
 According to DNI, NOAA, ESA, Earth
 has already crossed the threshold.
 The tipping point. 1.5° Celsius.
 Pretty soon, the Greenland ice
 sheet will collapse. Same with the
 Western Antarctic. The boreal
 permafrost. Great barrier reef.
 Almost all the major glaciers.
 (beat)
 Only the elite will survive. The
 one percenters. Here. On Mars.

Martha and Sachiko freeze, looking shaken.

COLONEL PENROSE (CONT'D)
 I'm old enough to remember when
 NASA was for all mankind. Now, it's
 every man for himself.

Beat.

MARTHA
 The Schiaparelli. Can you fly it?

COLONEL PENROSE
 What? No.
 (beat)
 It flies itself.

MARTHA
 How many cryo pods are there?

COLONEL PENROSE
 I don't know. Hundreds. Enough to
 carry all of Aerodyne's troops.

Martha turns again to go.

MARTHA

We gotta get off this rock! Get this... get everything Tony's found, all of it, home!

Tony nods, storms past Penrose.

TONY

The world has to learn from this, from them. Before it's too late!

EXT. CONICAL STRUCTURE, BREACH - DAY

Tony, Martha, Sachiko, and Penrose stand clustered just outside the conical structure.

Behind them is the hole Tony blasted just the day before.

COLONEL PENROSE

There's an Aerodyne transport about two clicks that way.

MARTHA

(to Tony)

How's your oxygen?

He looks at his wrist.

TONY

Twenty percent.

MARTHA

(to Penrose)

Is that enough?

COLONEL PENROSE

(ignoring the question)

There goes my pension *and* my commission.

MARTHA

Is that enough?!

COLONEL PENROSE

I don't know!

He pulls a pair of digital field glasses out of his bag, peering back across the crater toward one of the last remaining freight transports.

COLONEL PENROSE (CONT'D)

If we can get to that transport, I think I can trigger a launch.

(MORE)

COLONEL PENROSE (CONT'D)
 But it's only meant for freight,
 not human passengers. So, we'll
 need every bit of life support we
 can muster 'til we get to
 Schiaparelli.

MARTHA
 And then what?

Penrose SIGHS deeply.

COLONEL PENROSE
 Commandeer the vessel. Turn it
 around. Head for home.

SACHIKO
 Can they stop you?

COLONEL PENROSE
 Yes, no? I don't know! It's a
 dereliction of duty. Mutinous.

MARTHA
 I thought they were contractors!

COLONEL PENROSE
 Yeah, well. Money makes power.
 Power makes law.

TONY
 Bullshit.

MARTHA
 What he said. Let's go!

EXT. SYRTIS MAJOR, CRATER - CONTINUOUS

Moving in a tight pack, Tony, Martha, and Sachiko sprint
 across the windswept plain behind Penrose.

As they pass a gathering army of AERODYNE WORKERS ferrying a
 raft of equipment - diggers, surveyors, drones - all we hear
 is the sound of them BREATHING.

MARTHA
 (winded, to Tony)
 You were right.

She points toward a far off, gigantic looking BORING MACHINE
 with a massive titanium corkscrew at its head trundling
 slowly across the surface.

COLONEL PENROSE
 Claim they're looking for water but
 they're really digging as close to
 the core as they can.

(beat)

Seventy-five megatons. Bigger than
 AN602, The Tzar Bomb.

On the run, Tony nods Martha's way.

TONY

Told ya'!

EXT. SYRTIS MAJOR, ROVER - CONTINUOUS

Darting from boulder-to-boulder trying to stay low and out
 of sight, Penrose leads the way toward a waiting, open-
 topped rover.

COLONEL PENROSE
 (to Martha and Tony)
 You two, take the far side.
 (to Sachiko)
 You follow me.

Sachiko nods, and the four of them split up.

Penrose is the first to the rover. He throws himself behind
 the wheel, rapidly swiping at a screen on the dash while
 Sachiko pulls herself into the seat behind him.

Martha leaps into the seat next to Penrose, just as an ALARM
 sounds on her suit:

ALARM (V.O.)
 Warning. Oxygen reserves at 15%.
 Please return to base immediately.
 Repeat. Oxygen reserves--

Penrose reaches across and stabs at the keypad on her wrist,
 silencing the alarm.

COLONEL PENROSE
 This is gonna be close.

Tony jumps in, and the rover jolts to life.

I/E. ROVER/MARTIAN SURFACE - CONTINUOUS

The rover speeds silently across the surface.

COLONEL PENROSE

Once we're in, try and wedge
yourself between things - anything
to keep you from floating once we
hit Zero-G. And whatever you do,
try to keep your heart rate down.
Conserve oxygen.

He swings the rover hard right, kicking up sand and rocks.

COLONEL PENROSE (CONT'D)

So, no more arguing, huh?

In the distance, we can see the freight transport.

INT. SYRTIS STATION, COMMAND CENTER - ON FIELD

Standing before what appears to be a live feed from within
the rover, Captain Field rips off his headphones again.

CAPTAIN FIELD

(to the screen)

What on God's green Earth do you
think you're doing?

(beat, turning)

Disable access to that transport!

EXT. SYRTIS MAJOR, FREIGHT TRANSPORT - CONTINUOUS

Penrose SKIDS the rover to a stop at the foot of the freight
transport. Now that they're next to it, we realize the thing
is massive. Enormous.

COLONEL PENROSE

Quick as a bunny now.

Penrose LEAPS out and runs through the sand toward a large
hatch at the foot of the freighter.

Tony, Martha, and Sachiko run his way as he pulls open a
panel next to the hatch and begins punching in a code.

INT. SYRTIS STATION, COMMAND CENTER - ON FIELD

Clutching his headphones, Field stares up at the screen as
the panel Penrose is typing his code into flashes GREEN.

CAPTAIN FIELD

I said, disable access to that
transport!

An Aerodyne FLIGHT TECH behind him, his hands a flurry
across a virtual keyboard, SHOUTS back:

FLIGHT TECH
Sir, I... I can't sir!

Field wheels around angrily.

FLIGHT TECH (CONT'D)
He, uh, he outranks you. I'm afraid
I can't disable his credentials.

INT. FREIGHT TRANSPORT - CONTINUOUS

The hatch open, Penrose shoves Tony inside the transport which is packed to the gills with assembled treasures.

Huge gleaming metallic sculptures of regal looking men and women are nestled cheek-to-jowl with all manner of salvaged artifacts and relics, most tied down or strapped.

Tony seems immediately at home. Reunited with his spoils. Martha pushes past him, reaching back to grab his hand.

MARTHA
C'mon, grave robber. Help me find a
place to--

The ALARMS on Tony and Sachiko's suits cut her off:

ALARM (V.O.)
Warning. Oxygen levels critically
low. Return to base immediately.
Repeat--

Martha stabs at the panel on Tony's arm.

The alarms goes silent. And, together they burrow their way between two huge, very art deco princely figures.

Warrior kings.

MARTHA
Did you really mean what you said
back there?

Tony, straining to find a way to brace himself, HISSES back:

TONY
What?!

Martha slides into a narrow gap right across from him. They almost look like two passengers in cramped bunks inside a retro first-class rail car.

MARTHA
About you. About us.

He looks across to her, red text flashing across the glass of his visor, blocking his view.

TONY

Yes.

COLONEL PENROSE (V.O.)

(over the comms)

Alright everybody. Hold on tight!

TONY

Every word.

KA-BOOM!

The booster engines at the foot of the transport loudly ignite. The whole craft SHUDDERS violently.

Still staring at each other through their blinking visors, Tony and Martha brace, not losing eye-contact.

And then: a DEAFENING ROAR as the craft rockets skyward.

With everything around them JOSTLING and JANGLING loudly, Tony and Martha do their best to stay locked in-place until, suddenly, the craft hits Zero-G.

And everything around them starts floating. Weightless, Tony and Martha drift slowly toward each other surrounded by a floating mass of antiquity.

Over the comms we hear one of their suit alarms BLEATING:

ALARM (V.O.)

Warning. Oxygen levels critical.

Seek alternative life support.

Warning. Oxygen levels critical.

Seek alternative--

BANG!

The craft hits orbit, sending the drifting contents of the frigate ricocheting wildly.

Her arms floating at her side, Martha drifts toward the ceiling. Her eyes roll backward. She's passing out. Losing consciousness. Going under.

But the expression on her face is nothing but calm. Placid. Like a woman exactly in her element. Home at last.

CUT TO BLACK.

SILENCE over nothing but darkness. Then --

CUT TO:

INT. PENTAGON - DAY

From darkness, light.

A blinding beam filled with fine particles that dance and twinkle. Like stars. Like the firmament. Like heaven.

Then, a VOICE:

COLONEL PENROSE (V.O.)
As you can see here, their entire physiognomy as captured in nearly every relic, every sculpture, every visual representation we uncovered...

A hand crosses the beam of light. And we suddenly realize we're staring down the barrel of a projector inside a darkened conference room.

Penrose is at the head of the room, pointing to the screen. His other arm is in a splint.

COLONEL PENROSE (CONT'D)
...or rather that Doctors Dane, Lattimer, Ozawa, and Von Ohlmhorst - god rest his soul - uncovered...

Beyond Penrose, a handful of STONE-FACED MEN sit in the shadows. Some are in uniform, some aren't.

COLONEL PENROSE (CONT'D)
...resembled humans in every possible way, from the likely structure of their vocal cords, to their exceedingly sophisticated understanding of architecture, history, science, literature--

A twang-y MAN'S VOICE cuts him off:

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
(southern accent)
So, you're tellin' me the little green men weren't little and green after all.

Penrose nods.

MAN'S VOICE (CONT'D)
But they were... *men*?!

COLONEL PENROSE
And women. Yes, sir. Human, sir.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Who fled their supposed home
planet...

COLONEL PENROSE
Technically, our home planet. Sir.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
(incredulous)
...fifty thousand years ago after
having moved to Mars from some puny
exoplanet outside our solar system?

COLONEL PENROSE
Yes sir. Gliese 667Cc. I, uh, I
don't recall what they actually
called it. That's the, uh...
translation.

Penrose's eyes finally drift across the conference room
toward three more seated figures.

COLONEL PENROSE (CONT'D)
Surely there's something vital to
be gained from studying the demise
of their society. Their culture.

The figures in the distance finally come into focus.

It's Tony, Martha, and Sachiko - all alive and well but
clearly not thrilled with being grilled by these rubes.

COLONEL PENROSE (CONT'D)
So that we can avoid repeating the
same mistakes ourselves.

Martha loudly pushes her chair back from the table. SCREECH!

MARTHA
Where the hell did you take our
stuff?!

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Your stuff?

We still can't see where the twang-y VOICE is coming from.

TONY
Everything we discovered, it
deserves to be analyzed. Studied.
Properly. By experts.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Oh, it will be, boy. It will be.

SACHIKO
By who?

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
I'm sorry, doll. What'd you say?

Penrose tries in vain to defuse the room.

Martha stands.

MARTHA
She said, where's our stuff!

A ROTUND MAN in an expensive-looking pinstriped suit leans forward out of the darkness.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Why, at a Biosafety Level 4
containment facility at the Utah
Test and Training Range.
(beat)
To prevent backward contamination.

He's either the President or an Aerodyne stooge. Or both.
It's hard to tell.

ROTUND MAN
Lord knows we don't want whatever
gobbled their atmosphere to do the
same thing here.

MARTHA
That's not what happened! They
ruined their own planet. Just like
we're doing now. Here and there!

Having heard enough, Tony stands too. For the first time, he
and Martha form a wholly inseparable, indomitable duo.

Precisely the pair her father had always hoped they'd be.

TONY
We need to stop the destruction,
break the cycle! Not beat a hasty
retreat. Learn!

ROTUND MAN
Now, now--

MARTHA

No. You don't understand! Human beings, we're the ones wrecking planet after planet one after the other because we're too self-absorbed to care!

Martha looks to Tony. He nods back. *You got this.*

MARTHA (CONT'D)

We can't just keep burning everything to the ground as we go! We need to see eye-to-eye. Think! Understand. Recognize the truth.

She looks to Tony.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Learn from our mistakes. Both of us. All of us. Everywhere.

ROTUND MAN

If you'll excuse me--

Tony finally breaks eye-contact with Martha again.

TONY

Aeordyne! They're not contractors, they're profiteers. Raking in the cash while they pull the wool over everyone's eyes!

SACHIKO

The world needs to know what came before. Who we really are!

The rotund man SNICKERS mockingly.

TONY

We need to study what we brought back!

ROTUND MAN

Oh, it's bein' studied, son! Don't get your knickers in a twist.

Finally, Sachiko stands too. Full of uncharacteristic rage.

SACHIKO

(louder)

By WHO?!

The rotund man slips back into the shadows, grinning like that cat that ate the golden goose.

ROTUND MAN
Experts, doll. The best.

Martha grabs Tony by the arm.

MARTHA
That's it! I'm out!

They both RUSH for the door with Sachiko hot on their heels. Penrose lifts both hands, trying to smooth things over.

COLONEL PENROSE
Now, now, Doctor Dane. Please, be reasonab--

BANG!

The door slams shut.

EXT. PENTAGON, STAIRS - DAY

Back out in the daylight Martha, Tony, and Sachiko rumble down the stairs in a fury.

TONY
Experts, my ass!

MARTHA
The best? We're the best!

TONY
There's gotta be--

Martha stops in her tracks. Sachiko, demoralized but already scheming, presses past her.

Martha grabs Tony, spins him around.

TONY
I...

She throws her arms around his neck, pulls him close, and lands a humdinger of a kiss right on his lips.

It goes on and on and on.

At the foot of the stairs, Sachiko slows.

SACHIKO
Is it always like this?

Martha lets go of Tony and he stumbles backward. His mouth is a pink lipsticked slash.

MARTHA
Pretty much, kid.

Tony wipes the lipstick away with the back of one hand, takes Martha's hand firmly with the other.

TONY
Pretty flipping much.

Martha looks around wildly.

MARTHA
Where do you think they keep the
Justice of the Peace in this stupid
swamp anyway?

Tony grins ear-to-ear. Never letting go.

TONY
I hear Utah's quite the
destination.
(beat)
For a third honeymoon.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SECURE CONTAINMENT FACILITY, UTAH - DAY

A giant, bright white containment facility somewhere in the desert surrounding the Utah Test and Training Range.

The futuristic space is packed to the rafters with Martian STATUES, BUSTS, URNS, BOOKS, MURALS, and PAINTINGS - all arrayed in neat rows, tagged like inventory. Plunder.

THE END CREDITS ROLL AS WE SEE --

A single SCIENTIST in an Aerodyne-branded bright orange clean suit rolls a huge red stone bust of an athletic young woman with an aquiline nose across the floor.

Pausing, he shimmies the stone bust free from his dolly, bends down, scans a small tag attached to the bust with a tablet, grabs the dolly, turns to go.

And as he leaves the frame, we back away too. The space is unbelievably massive. Multiple football fields long.

Above, a series of thick-walled glass structures hang from hydraulics over the excavated treasures like high-tech cloches. Like massive rectilinear bell jars.

For a brief moment it seems as if everything Tony, Martha, Sachiko, and Selim risked (and lost) their lives to bring home is going to rest here eternally. Gathering dust.

But then, one of the glass structures slowly lowers from the roof above the section the Aerodyne scientist just left.

Once it hits the floor, it seals with a loud WHOOSH!

Then, inside it, lights FLASH RED twice and a loud alarm BUZZES before the entire glass volume is filled with SWIRLING RIVERS OF BRIGHT BLUE FLAMES!

This is not a warehouse. It's an incinerator. A blinding bit-by-bit inferno obliterating everything in sight, one zone at a time.

Slowly. Hopefully, slowly.

CUT TO BLACK.

CONTINUE END CREDITS --

To "Cities in Dust" by Siouxsie and the Banshees.

THE END