

A HUNDRED LIFETIMES

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ScreenwritersForHire.Com

Based on the novel, *A Hundred Lifetimes*

by David C.A. Zink

OPENING:

A SIMPLE DISTANCE SHOT OF THE PLANET VENUS WITH WORDING:
"Venus, before the Eco-Apocalypse..."

FADE IN:

EXT. NOKOMIS MOUNTAINS - DAY

Lush and tropical.

Enjoying a picnic is --

-- ZYZZ (10). A young Drelb. All smiles as his MOM AND DAD prepare a beautiful spread of food.

Zyzz picks up a ball and jumps up and down. His Dad knows what that means...

Time to play catch.

Dad jumps up. He and Zyzz toss the ball back and forth.

Mom watches from the blanket.

Dad tosses the ball over Zyzz's head. He runs to fetch it.

Mom and Dad laugh as Zyzz finally arrives at the ball.

He picks it up and tosses it back to his dad.

It's a perfect throw. His Dad catches it. Smiles.

He throws it back to Zyzz. He fails to catch it. As he leans over to pick it up --

-- A loud screech sound pierces the air. Mom stands.

Dad looks to the sky curious as to where the sound came from. Silence.

Mom and Dad look at each other.

Zyzz throws the ball back to his Dad. Dad catches it.

Out of nowhere a MEGARAPTOR [a giant dragonfly] swoops down and grabs Dad off the ground and carries him into the air.

Dad screams in pain as the Megaraptor eats him.

Mom cries out.

Zyzz stares at the sky. Stunned. Too young to process what just happened.

INT. FORESTRY DEPARTMENT UNIVERSITY OF ISHTAR -

HUMAN RESOURCES OFFICE - DAY

ZYZZ (20) sits across from a PERSONNEL INTERVIEWER.

INTERVIEWER

Where would you place yourself in the political spectrum?

ZYZZ

Uhh, I'm not sure what you mean.

INTERVIEWER

How would you describe yourself politically?

ZYZZ

Guess I haven't given it too much thought. I reckon I've been busy enough with more important things to bother much about politics. Sorry.

INTERVIEWER

(Nods and smiles)

That's quite all right. I'd like to hear more about your Venus and Earth History paper.

ZYZZ

Well, it was a study of how the Drelbi and the Thlargi share a common ancestry. Research suggests that the Drelbi evolved from a branch of the Thlargi. Despite some differences in appearance.

INTERVIEWER

Many Drelbi love nature too.

ZYZZ

Yes. We're really not that different. Are we?

INTERVIEWER

Well, the Thlargi are little more... primitive.

ZYZZ

They say that about us.

RECRUITER

I suppose they probably do. But the question is, why didn't they develop?

ZYZZ

They did. Just not in the same way as us.

The Interviewer sits back in his chair.

RECRUITER

You did pretty well on your first round, young man. We think you would make a great asset to our department, Zyzz. We'd like to officially offer you the teaching position.

ZYZZ

Thank you, Ma'am! When do I start?

INT CLASSROOM - DAY ZYZZ IS GIVING A BOTANY LECTURE. SOME FEMALE STUDENTS ARE OGLING HIM & FLIRTING WHILE TAKING NOTES.

NT. ZYZZ'S HOME - STUDY - NIGHT

Zyzz is surrounded by papers. He writes feverishly.

INT. CAMPUS BOOKSTORE - DAY

ZYZZ sits at a table with copies of Carnivorous Plants of Western Ishtar.

ZYZZ signs a copy of his book for A STUDENT that just bought a copy.

ZYZZ

First rule when you're using this book: stay alert! There's some dangerous plants out there.

STUDENT

Thanks, professor!

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

HALF EMPTY.

In the back of the cafeteria at an information table stands -
-

-- ZILLA (20), intelligent and fiery, with a CLASSMATE.

Zyzz sees them and walks over to the table. He stops and picks up some of their literature.

ZYZZ

What's a smart young lady like you doing with these radicals?

He smiles.

ZILLA

Radical problems call for radical solutions, professor. The system is fouling up our planet. From your lectures, it's clear you don't approve of how they're clear-cutting our forests. They're trashing everything! Do you think that's sustainable?

ZYZZ

Of course not. I try to make that clear in my classes. The ecology is being destroyed. Species are being wiped out. Too many are going extinct. Biodiversity's declining in way too many places. Yes. Current practices have to change. But to what? What's your alternative?

ZILLA

Well, for starters, we should demand that for every hectare of land that is clear-cut, one gets replanted.

ZYZZ

Good. Good. But with what? With just a few of the most profitable species?

(MORE)

ZYZZ (CONT'D)

That's a tree farm, not a forest, unstable due to a lack of biodiversity. Come on; You know that.

ZILLA

Yes of course. But even a tree farm would help keep the soil from washing away. And give us time to work on cleaning up the coral reefs. What we really need is, well, how about building a better system? One based on sustainability instead of maximizing profits for the top one percent?

ZYZZ

Sounds nice. But how do you propose we get from here to there?

ZILLA

Tell you what. Here's a copy of our program. It's only seven kecks. Heck, I'll buy it for you.

She drops some change into the donations jar.

ZILLA (CONT'D)

Read it over and let's talk one of these days. Okay? Here, take one of these too. Its our Party paper. We call it the "Wake-Up Call".

She hands him a copy. He accepts it and hands her a ten-keck note.

ZYZZ

Thanks.

He turns to walk away with the literature.

ZILLA

I really mean it sir.

He turns around.

ZYZZ

Sure. Let's do lunch one of these days.

As Zyzz walks away, Zilla's Classmate turns to her --

CLASSMATE : (QUIETLY)
Think we have a convert?

ZILLA
Maybe. That guy can give a lecture
about Plant Ecology that even you
would understand.

ZILLA (CONT'D)
Getting him to join would be a real
coup for the Party.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Zilla walks down the street arm and arm with --

-- SCHNUNG (22). Strong and handsome.

As they walk, their path crosses with --

-- A HOMELESS DRELB (50's).

HOMELESS DRELB
Spare some change?

SCHNUNG
Go get a job, you lazy son of
snarf.

He kicks him in the rear.

Zilla reaches out and helps the Drelb.

SCHNUNG (CONT'D)
What the hell are you doing?

She ignores him. Zilla and the Homeless Drelb make their way
to a food stand.

ZILLA
Want something to eat?

He doesn't answer.

ZILLA (CONT'D)
It's okay. Get whatever you want.

HOMELESS DRELB
(Looks up at the price
board)
I'll have a number three.

ZILLA (TO WAITER AT WINDOW)
 Make that a large order. And give
 me a glass of berry juice.

She reaches into her purse and pays for everything.

SCHNUNG
 Well, aren't we so noble.

Zilla glares at him.

SCHNUNG (CONT'D)
 Why are you wasting your time on
 this loser? The show starts in ten
 minutes.

ZILLA
 The question is, why am I wasting
 time on you?

SCHNUNG
 What's that supposed to mean?

ZILLA
 Good-bye, little boy.

She dismisses him with a wave.

SCHNUNG
 What? That's it?

ZILLA
 Bye-bye, loser.

Schnung storms off. Embarrassed and angry.

HOMELESS DRELB
 I'm so sorry. I didn't mean any
 trouble.

ZILLA
 That's okay. This has been coming
 for a while. So how did you get
 into this situation?

HOMELESS DRELB
 It's a long story, and you don't
 actually know me.

ZILLA
 My name is Zilla.

HOMELESS DRELB
 Call me Amp.

ZILLA

Pleased to meet you.

HOMELESS DRELB

Serzhia, that was my wife. We had a nice little place, and we were pretty happy, all in all. I had a job down at the docks, you know? Loading and unloading ships. Didn't pay much.

HOMELESS DRELB (CONT'D)

We weren't rich, but we had enough. It was great. Best years of our lives.

He sighs.

HOMELESS DRELB (CONT'D)

I was scheduled to retire in another year, when Serzhia got sick. It was cancer. They found it in her colon.

Zilla nods her head, encouraging him to continue.

HOMELESS DRELB (CONT'D)

We had medical insurance through my job. I'd been paying into the plan for years. Never missed a payment.

ZILLA

Yeah?

HOMELESS DRELB

She went in for surgery and started going in for treatments. We were going to beat this thing. Some of the sessions were rough on her. And they weren't cheap.

ZILLA

I've heard that those treatments can get pretty spendy.

HOMELESS DRELB

Next thing we know, the insurance syndicate is saying that Serzhia had filled out her application forms improperly. Left out some information that she had a case of stomach flu way back when she was just a kid.

(MORE)

HOMELESS DRELB (CONT'D)

They find these old records at her clinic, and call it a pre-existing condition. So after paying into the plan for what, 18 years, they drop her.

ZILLA

So you make all your payments. Then the moment you need them --

HOMELESS DRELB

-- They drop us like a hot rock.

ZILLA

They should call them "UNsurance companies".

HOMELESS DRELB

Or maybe "death panels". Well, I hung on at my job. They let me work three years past my scheduled retirement date. Some of the younger guys didn't like that. They wanted to get promoted and there I was, gumming up the works. What choice did we have? But even then, we couldn't afford all the treatments and medications she needed.

His voice trembles. Tears form and roll down his cheeks.

Zilla reaches across the table and holds his hand.

HOMELESS DRELB

WELL, SHE DIED. ALL those medical expenses wiped us out. We had to sell our home. But even with that money...

He gathers himself.

HOMELESS DRELB

... It just went so fast. If the insurance company hadn't dropped her, she might still be alive today. If I could have gotten her all the medicine and therapy she needed. If only...

Zilla pats him on the back. Tears stream down her face.

HOMELESS DRELB (CONT'D)
 Now look what I've gone and done.
 Please don't cry.

ZILLA
 You better eat. Your stuff is
 getting cold.

HOMELESS DRELB
 Thanks for listening. Where's your
 guy? Looks like he got tired of
 waiting.

ZILLA
 He's not really my guy. Just a guy
 I know. Er, somebody that I used to
 know. Not sure why I used to hang
 out with him.

INT. CAFETERIA - MORNING

Zilla is alone at the information table. Zyzzy approaches.

ZYZZY
 I've been going through the
 information you gave me. Very
 interesting.

ZILLA
 You should come to a meeting.

ZYZZY
 Oh yeah?

ZILLA
 Yeah. Why not? You'd have lots to
 contribute.

ZYZZY
 Maybe you and I take a walk
 sometime and you can tell me what
 to expect at one of these meetings.

ZILLA
 That would be nice.

INT. ZYZZY'S OFFICE - LATER

ZYZZY and ANOTHER TEACHER are talking. As ANOTHER TEACHER is
 leaving, she stops, looks back at Zyzzy

OTHER TEACHER

Oh, by the way. You know, a few faculty have lost their jobs for getting personally involved with students.

ZYZZ

Is that right?

OTHER TEACHER

Yes. Be careful, Zyzz. 'Nuff said?

ZYZZ

'Nuff said. Thanks, Zarn.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Zilla and Zyzz walk along the park.

ZILLA

The children of the poor go to school in old buildings badly in need of repair. Public Ed is underfunded in general. They can't pay as much as more affluent schools, so the best teachers tend to follow the money. Hell, even the food served in the working-class school mess-halls is lower quality than the dining facilities in better-off schools.

ZYZZ

But what's the solution? Those schools have more money because people are willing to pay more, no?

ZILLA

It just doesn't seem fair.

ZYZZ

Hell; none of it seems fair. I'm no expert on education policy. Forest Botany is my bailiwick. I mean, look at what's happening with the climate.

ZILLA

Sad.

ZYZZ

There has to be a way out of this. Hell, the science is clear.

(MORE)

ZYZZ (CONT'D)

We can fix this thing. We're not doomed. We've just got to do a better job of getting the truth out there.

ZILLA

How? Except for a few college stations, the media's totally under syndicate control.

(MORE)

ZILLA (CONT'D)

Think they'll broadcast anything that might not be in their interests? Hah! Forget it. They're in denial.

ZYZZ

Okay, they want to maximize profits, right?

ZYZZ (CONT'D)

So eventually, they'll see that it's in their long-term interests to conserve their resources base, no?

ZILLA

I don't know, professor. Most people believe the denials. That's all they've ever heard. They don't know any better. They might be ignorant, but they're not stupid.

ZYZZ

Right. Ignorance is curable, but stupidity is terminal.

ZILLA

And you can't expect the syndicates to change their minds. Their shareholders demand maximum profits. If they don't get it from one company, they'll go somewhere else. It's the system. It's designed to maximize profits, and to hell with anything else. Its not even on their radar screens.

ZYZZ

Well, we gotta try harder then. It's better to try and fail than to fail to try, no?

Zilla can't hide her delight.

ZILLA

We?

She smiles.

ZILLA (CONT'D)

We've been trying. But these
syndicate types are so blinded by
profits that they're crazy. No,
they're the problem.

(MORE)

ZILLA (CONT'D)

It's naive to think they're ever
going to be part of the solution,
professor.

ZYZZ

Nah, they'll wake up. There's gotta
be some people in the syndicate
councils that we can work with.

ZILLA

Oh yeah? Like who?

ZYZZ

Damned if I know.

ZILLA

Forget about those people. They're
hopeless. We need to bypass those
clowns and speak directly to the
people.

ZYZZ

By getting more Wake-Up Calls into
circulation?

ZILLA

How else? Yes, get it into more
people's hands and heads. That,
plus getting more people to public
forums, meetings, distribute more
literature. All that! It's the
people. They're our only hope.
Education. Forget the bosses.

ZYZZ

Okay, okay. Just hold on a sec.
Look at it this way.

(MORE)

ZYZZ (CONT'D)

If something in nature goes haywire, say some species becomes too numerous for its food base to support, well, some predatory species will increase. Reduce the pest population, and restore balance.

ZILLA

Okay?

ZYZZ

Well, biological systems tend to self-correct when things get out of whack.

Zilla eyes him.

ZYZZ (CONT'D)

Well, right?

ZILLA

That's true for natural systems, yes. But not true for un-natural systems.

ZYZZ

Hmmmm.

He raises his eyebrows.

ZILLA

This profit-first system. What's natural about it? It's a disease, professor. A cancer. It's messing things up everywhere you look. Ruining the biosphere. It will eventually kill the host unless it's surgically removed.

ZYZZ

Sure; nothing to it. And how do you suggest we do that? By the way, if you don't mind, just call me Zyzz, okay?

Zilla smiles

ZILLA

Okay, Zyzz. Two things. Sure we could try to find people inside the syndicates. That's where the power is now. Who will listen?

(MORE)

ZILLA (CONT'D)

If you do find somebody that will talk to you seriously, try and make them understand that climate change is real.

ZYZZ

And that we're causing it. You're right: it's definitely not natural. Yes, that's what I've been doing. Or at least, trying to do. And that's what the Ministry of Natural Resources is all about. Educating industry. Showing them how we can stop the most stupid, ruinous practices. Maybe even make a start toward serious restoration.

ZILLA

Which the syndicates usually ignore, right?

ZYZZ

The Ministry is just advisory, no real enforcement authority.

ZILLA

Toothless. They're a joke, Zyzz.

Zyzz sighs.

ZILLA (CONT'D)

We need to educate people. Build a bigger movement. It needs to be so strong and well organized that the syndicates have to pay attention.

ZYZZ

This is huge.

ZILLA

We've got a helluva lot to do, don't we?

AN OLDER WOMAN approaches them.

OLD WOMAN

Got any spare change?

Zyzz digs into his pocket and hands her a few coins.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)

Thank you sir.

ZYZZ

No problem. Take care.

Zilla watches. Beams.

The Old Woman shuffles off.

Zyzz can feel her gaze.

ZYZZ (CONT'D)

What are you grinning at?

ZILLA

I love you, you big lunk.

She smiles. Takes his arm as they continue along.

EXT. ZILLA'S HOME - NIGHT

A beautiful clear night sky.

Zyzz walks her up to her door. They stare deep into each other's eyes.

He pulls her in close. They kiss. Their antenna touch and wind around each other.

ZILLA

Would you like to come in?

ZYZZ

Sure.

INT. ZILLA'S APPARTMENT

They enter and Zilla closes the door behind them.

They kick off their shoes.

ZYZZ

I should take a shower.

ZILLA

You're just fine. Don't worry. Want something to drink?

ZYZZ

Sure, whatever's handy.

Zilla goes to the kitchen, gets some drinks, brings them back, hands one to ZYZZ. They sit and chat a while (what they say isn't important). Romantic music swells.

She takes his hand and leads him to the bedroom.

INT. BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

They can't keep their hands off each other as they fall into the bed.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Zyzz gives a lecture, but he can't help but make "eyes" with Zilla.

She responds with a smile.

INT. ZILLA'S APPARTMENT- EVENING

Zilla prepares dinner.

Zyzz enters. Tracks mud all over the place.

ZILLA

Look at this mess! Could you please take off your boots before you muck up this place?

ZYZZ

Sorry, honey.

He back-pedals and takes off his boots. Sets them aside.

He then grabs a mop and cleans up his mess.

ZILLA

Thanks! Just try and make it a habit to take them off at the door, okay? I'd really appreciate it.

ZYZZ

Sure. Guess it'll save me some work, eh?

As he mops --

ZYZZ (CONT'D)

I was thinking. How would you like to meet my mom?

INT. BUS STOP - DAY

Zilla and Zyzzy board a bus. Once everyone is on, the bus takes off.

INT. BUS - MOMENTS LATER

Zyzzy and Zilla sit next to each other. Hand in hand.

ZYZZY

You nervous?

ZILLA

Of course. This is a big deal.

ZYZZY

You'll be fine. My mom is going to love you.

ZILLA

I hope.

EXT. ZYZZY'S HOME VILLAGE - LATER

A beautiful old-fashioned village complete with a water tower and chain outlet stores.

The bus pulls to a stop. Everyone gets off including Zyzzy and Zilla. Zilla and Zyzzy walk to his house.

EXT. MARG'S HOUSE - LATER

They are greeted by --

-- MARG. Zyzzy's mom.

Sitting outside on a swing, waiting.

ZYZZY

How ya been mom?

He gives her a squeeze. Lifts her off her feet.

MARG

Oh you! Put me down.

She turns to Zilla.

MARG (CONT'D)

Hi, Zilla. You're all he talks about these days.

All three of them embrace in a hug.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Zilla, Zyzz, and Marg walk through the village, and go into a snack bar. They eat snacks and drink fizzes.

Everyone is having a wonderful time.

INT. MARG'S HOUSE - EVENING

Marg and Zilla make dinner. They get along very well and Marg appreciates the extra hands in the kitchen.

Zyzz fixes a cabinet.

LATER

Everyone enjoys a nice meal. There are smiles and laughter.

EXT. MARG'S HOUSE - MORNING

Zilla, Zyzz, and Marg walk to the bus stop, hug, then Zilla and Zyzz get into the bus with a wave.

INT. BUS - LATER

ZYZZ

So how do you like her?

ZILLA

She's sweet. Funny. Great sense of humor.

ZYZZ

Seems like you two hit it off pretty well.

ZILLA

She's very nice. A little old-fashioned and proper, but sweet.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Zyzz grades papers at his desk.

Zilla peeks her head into the room --

ZILLA
Got a minute?

ZYZZ
Sure!

Zilla enters. All smiles.

ZILLA
It's official. I've taken my last
exam. I think I aced it!

Zyzz jumps out of his seat. They hug.

ZYZZ
Fantastic!

Zilla nods

ZYZZ (CONT'D)
This calls for a celebration!

ZILLA
What have you got in mind?

ZYZZ
How about dinner? Something nice.

ZILLA
Are you cooking?

ZYZZ
No way. I was thinking about that
place you like.

ZILLA
Burkens?

He smiles.

She squeals in delight. Hugs him.

INT. BURKENS RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A beautiful upscale restaurant.

UPPER CLASS PATRONS enjoy lavish meals.

Zyzz and Zilla savor a meal at a table by a window.

ZYZZ
Now that you're done with school,
how do you feel?

ZILLA

It's odd. You spend so much time working towards this day, and then all of a sudden it arrives, and you don't know what to do next.

ZYZZ

There's an entire world of possibilities in front of you, my lady.

ZILLA

I feel like things could go in any direction.

ZYZZ

It can. The choice is yours, you know. . .

ZILLA

I know that I want to, you know, do my part to make things better.

ZYZZ

And you will. I know it.

ZILLA

But I'm still not sure where I should focus.

ZILLA (CONT'D)

There's so many things that I'm, well, passionate about.

Zyzz laughs.

ZILLA (CONT'D)

What's so funny?

ZYZZ

You don't have to decide that right now. Give it some time. It'll come to you. But in the meantime...

He gets down on one knee. Pulls something out of the pouch of his shoe...

ZYZZ (CONT'D)

Will you marry me?

Zilla's eyes well up with tears.

ZILLA

Huh? Oh, yes. Yes. Yes.

They kiss.

The restaurant erupts in applause.

INT. PADRE'S OFFICE - DAY

Zilla and Zyzz are seated at a desk. They hold hands.

Across from them sits --

FATHER O'SHOZZ AND his wife SHIZZA.

FATHER O'SHOZZ
First, let me start by
congratulating you on your union.

SHIZZA
Yes. Such a handsome couple.

ZILLA
Thank you. Yeah, we're pretty
happy.

Zyzz and Zilla look at each other and smile.

FATHER O'SHOZZ
And how are plans for the wedding
going?

ZYZZ
Great.

ZILLA
We're a little behind schedule, but
nothing that can't be fixed.

SHIZZA
How so?

ZILLA
Well, somebody was supposed to mail
the invitations yesterday.

ZYZZ
I got tied up with some research.
I'll send them out today.

ZILLA
If he doesn't get distracted in the
lab again!

FATHER O'SHOZZ

If he says he's going to do it,
then you have to believe that he
will.

ZILLA

I know. I just like giving him a
hard time.

ZYZZ

Yeah, she does.

SHIZZA

All marriages are built on trust.
It's important that you trust one
another.

FATHER O'SHOZZ

Marriages erode when that trust is
broken.

SHIZZA

And Zyzz, if she's trusting you to
do a task, you need to make sure
you do it.

ZYZZ

I understand.

FATHER O'SHOZZ

Now. How are the relationships with
the families?

ZILLA

He hasn't met my folks yet.

FATHER O'SHOZZ

Really?

ZILLA

They live kind of far away.

ZYZZ

She's keeping me hidden from them.

SHIZZA

And how does that make you feel
Zyzz?

ZYZZ

It's fine. Guess I'll be meeting
them soon enough.

FATHER O'SHOZZ

Are you sure it's fine?

ZYZZ

Well, I mean, it's up to her. Guess I'll meet her family whenever she's ready for that.

ZILLA

I'm not hiding them from him. There just hasn't been a real opportunity yet. With school and his research.

SHIZZA

Have you met his family?

ZILLA

Yes.

ZYZZ

My mother. My father passed away when I was young.

FATHER O'SHOZZ

You've met his mother. And yet --

ZILLA

-- My father can be, well, difficult.

SHIZZA

How so?

ZILLA

He has his views on things --

ZYZZ

-- Is that why you haven't introduced me? You're afraid I won't get along with him?

ZILLA

No. I don't get along with him.

FATHER O'SHOZZ

So you're avoiding him.

ZILLA

I'm not avoiding him. The opportunity just hasn't presented itself yet.

ZYZZ

Now I AM starting to get nervous
about meeting him.

ZILLA

Don't be. It's not a big deal.

ZYZZ

It sure sounds like a big deal.

SHIZZA

Just introduce them! Whatever
happens, happens.

ZILLA

Thanks for the advice.

FATHER O'SHOZZ

The wedding is right around the
corner. Tell us, what type of
wedding are you having?

ZYZZ

Something small.

FATHER O'SHOZZ

Something intimate. And who wanted
that?

ZILLA

We both did.

ZYZZ

Only our closest friends and
family. Plus, we didn't want to
spend a lot of money.

SHIZZA

That's a good way to start a
marriage. Many couples disagree on
that.

ZILLA

We aren't most couples.

Everyone laughs.

SHIZZA

I can tell.

FATHER O'SHOZZ

Where will it be?

ZILLA

We've booked the campus gardens.

SHIZZA

Those are so lovely at this time of year.

ZILLA

Everything will be in bloom.

SHIZZA

Excellent choice.

FATHER O'SHOZZ

Any questions for us?

ZILLA

I think we're all set.

ZYZZ

I've got a question for you. What's the secret?

SHIZZA

The secret?

ZYZZ

Yeah. To a long and happy marriage.

FATHER O'SHOZZ

Communication.

SHIZZA

If the two of you can communicate, then you'll probably survive anything.

FATHER O'SHOZZ

They say that the first twenty years are the hardest.

ZYZZ

And then it gets easy?

SHIZZA

Well, not really. . .

They all laugh again.

EXT. CAMPUS GARDEN - DAY

It's the day of the marriage ceremony.

FRIENDS AND FAMILY have gathered to watch the ceremony.

The Garden is in full bloom.

Zilla and Zyzz stand in front of Father O'Shozz.

Father O'Shozz clears his throat.

FATHER O'SHOZZ

Are we ready?

ZILLA

Yes!

ZYZZ

We are.

FATHER O'SHOZZ

Sisters and brothers. On this beautiful day, here in this garden, we are gathered to celebrate the commitment of Zilla and Zyzz to share their lives, join their worldly possessions, and become one in the eyes of the Goddess, creator of all that is seen and unseen.

Zilla and Zyzz look into each others eyes and smile.

FATHER O'SHOZZ (CONT'D)

Zilla, do you pledge to dedicate yourself to this Drelb, Zyzz, to honor, respect, and care for him in health and in infirmity, come what may, from this day forward, until you are parted by death?

ZILLA

I do.

FATHER O'SHOZZ

Zilla, do you pledge to raise any children that may result from your union with the love, spirit, knowledge, and teaching of the Goddess and her only begotten daughter Drell?

ZILLA

I do.

Father O'Shozz turns to face Zyzz, and leads him through the same vows.

FATHER O'SHOZZ

By the authority vested in me by the Church and Holy Empire of Drell, our light and savior, I now pronounce you united in Drell. May you two enjoy a happy, loving, friendship and a long and full life together. In the name of the Mother, the Daughter, and the Holy Spirit.

CROWD

Amen.

Zilla and Zyzz kiss, then turn to walk down the aisle between the people standing in front of their folding chairs.

INT. AIRPORT - DAY

Zilla and Zyzz walk through the airport with their luggage.

INT. AIRPLANE - LATER

Zyzz and Zilla sit next to each other on the plane. Ready for takeoff.

EXT. UT ISLANDS - DAY

Zyzz and Zilla head into the water for snorkeling.

EXT. UT ISLANDS - BEACH - EVENING

Zyzz and Zilla hold hands as they walk along the beach.

Zyzz stops and kisses Zilla.

EXT. OLD TOWN DISTRICT - CAFE - DAY

SOMEWHAT BUSY.

Typical sidewalk cafe. Nice tables. Nice view. Decent decor.

Nothing fancy, but not run-down either.

Zilla and Zyzz sit across from Zilla's parents MOTT and GLORT.

There are bowls of soup in front of them.

MOTT

So, what are we doing that's so wrong, Zilla? Damn it, your mother and I have worked hard all our lives unlike some of these... friends of yours.

His antennae lay back combatively flat.

He makes a dismissive, brush-off gesture and his eyes spark as he dabs his chin with a napkin.

MOTT (CONT'D)

I tell you, that land has been good to us. But now? I've just about had it. I'm worn out, girl. Ready to quit. Retire.

(MORE)

MOTT (CONT'D)

We need some security. That land is all we've got. And it's ours to do with whatever the hell we need to.

ZILLA

I just wanted to know what you're planning to do with the farm and our house.

MOTT

I know where you're heading with that. Honey, I've heard all about this global warming stuff. Bunch of alarmist clorm-shit if you ask me.

MOTT (CONT'D)

But even if there is something to it, hell, is that my fault? Don't blame me for it, girl. Besides, do you think the Goddess would just stand by and let us ruin her world?

(turns to Zyzz)

Maybe if you guys spent more time praying, and less time shit-stirring, you'd see that.

ZILLA

Dad, what if the government had right of preferred purchase for farmland?

MOTT

Go on.

ZILLA

Well, instead of selling more farmlands to developers to build more shopping-centers, we could set up big cooperative farms. People could work a whole lot less than they'd have to as individual farmers. They could have time off, take vacations and get away. And we'd be saving the land instead of burying it under concrete. Concrete doesn't clean air, Dad. And it sure as hell doesn't produce food.

MOTT

Sounds good, but --

ZYZZ

-- Can we change the subject?

GLORT

It's been so hot. And they're cutting down so many trees that it's getting hard to find any shade to cool off. I'm so glad that we kept some trees around our place. At least the animals can get a break from the heat. You know, if you ask me, what we really need to do is get rid of these damn developers.

MOTT

You and your eco-agitator friends are a joke, girl. To hell with the government. Politicians bugger up everything they touch. They're in bed with the same damn syndicates you're railing against. Supply and demand, son. That's the answer.

He taps Zyzz on the chest.

MOTT (CONT'D)

That's the only answer. Rising prices will stop this. Sooner or later, it'll make farming worth the bother again. We need to depend on the free market.

ZYZZ

Yeah, maybe. Hey: Zilla's been submitting some application forms for teaching positions.

(MORE)

ZYZZ (CONT'D)
 (turns to Zilla)
 Any responses yet?

EXT. CAFE - LATER

Zyzz, Zilla, Mott, and Glort exchange hugs and pleasantries outside of the cafe.

INT. ZYZZ'S HOME - STUDY - NIGHT

Zilla and Zyzz sit on the couch.

ZILLA
 Sorry about today. Dad likes you, he really does, as long as we can keep away from politics.

Zyzz turns his head and laughs.

ZYZZ
 We? I wasn't having much trouble. It was you that couldn't keep away from politics.

ZILLA
 I know. I just can't help it sometimes.

ZYZZ
 Your dad's okay. He knows you care about things. I think he likes that co-op farm idea. Let him mull that over awhile. Your mom's already on board with you.

ZILLA
 You know they want to do the best thing. But, I mean, what are their real options? If they willed it to me, we could set up a co-op maybe, but the developers are offering them a much better deal than we ever could. And they've worked so hard. They deserve a nice retirement; how else can they get that?

ZYZZ
 You dad's right on one thing. This government is a nest of syndicate roaches.

(MORE)

ZYZZ (CONT'D)

If we could get some progressives like Thromm in there, we might be able to turn this mess around. Most of this current crop of senators isn't worth a damn.

Zilla glances at him. Smiles.

EXT. MUMPHARA RESERVATION OF THE THLARGI PEOPLE - GATE

HOUSE - DAY

A car pulls up to the gate. TENAS looks out the opening of the vehicle.

GRRZZ, The Duty Sergeant approaches.

SERGEANT GRZZ

Purpose of your visit?

TENAS

We'd like to meet with the chief council.

Behind Tenas, Moorv and Zhtipp nod in agreement.

GRZZ

Okay. Let's try this again. Purpose of your visit?

TENAS

We'd like to establish diplomatic relations between the Thlargi and the Back-To-The-Land Movement.

GRZZ

Under whose authority?

TENAS

We have been elected to represent the Back-to-the-Land Movement to establish relations with the people of Mumphara.

GRZZ

Movement, schmoovement. I saw your cluster-fuck out there. You kids having fun partying out there?

None of them respond.

GRZZ (CONT'D)

Well, you are aware that I can't guarantee your safety once you're on the reserve?

TENAS

Yes, ma'am. We're aware of that.

GRZZ

Have you contacted anybody on the reserve yet?

TENAS

No. This will be our first formal contact.

GRZZ

I should just kick your mangy asses out of here.

Tense silence. Then...

GRZZ (CONT'D)

But, I'll let you pass. This might be a little education in protocol for you. Any weapons?

TENAS

No, ma'am.

All of them spread their arms to show there's no concealed weapons.

GRZZ

You may proceed. Just stay on the road.

They proceed through the gate. Once they're out of earshot --

MOORV

Sheesh! Sergeant Hardass, at your service.

The other two laugh.

They arrive at another gate where they come face-to-face with...

ANOTHER GUARD

Purpose of your visit?

TENAS

We request an audience with the chair-woman of Mumphara and her council.

ANOTHER GUARD

And who the hell?... Uhh, do you have an appointment, Miss --

TENAS

My name is Tenas.

ANOTHER GUARD

T-e-n-a-s-s?

TENAS

Just one "s".

ANOTHER GUARD

And your names?

MOORV

Moorv.

ZHTIPP

Zhtipp.

The Guard checks the calender, then picks up a phone. Dials a number.

A few moments later, CORPORAL ZUSKI comes and leads them down a dusty gravel street and into --

INT. MUMPHARA RESERVATION - TOWNSITE - MOMENTS LATER

They walk through the townsite, past mangy, barking, and growling snarfs (like dogs) until they enter --

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER

Corporal Zuski points down the hall --

CORPORAL ZUSKI

Okay, you can go in now. Second door on your right.

INT. HALLWAY

They walk down the hallway and into --

INT. COUNCILOR FRUMM OFFICE

Once they enter they are greeted by --

COUNCILOR MUFF, COUNCILOR SCHMUNN, AND COUNCILOR FRUMM.
(NOTE: THLARGI HAVE BIGGER WINGS THAN DRELBI.)

MUFF

Good afternoon. I'm Councilor Muff, this is Councilor Frumm. This is Councilor Schmun. On behalf of the people of Mumphara, I'd like to welcome you to our home.

MOORV

Thank you.

SCHMUNN

Now, how can we help you?

TENAS

We come in peace.

Moorv and Zhtipp nod in agreement.

MUFF

Please, cut the dramatics. This isn't TV. What can we do for you?

TENAS

We three are here to represent our group at the Encampment. Our group is a detachment of the Back to the Land Movement.

TENAS (CONT'D)

We reject the ways of the Drelbi; and we honor the Thlargi way. We ask that you allow us to move onto Mumphara, so we can better learn your ways.

MUFF

Yeah, we've seen your camp out there. Thank you, but we'll have to decline your offer.

TENAS

We understand. Please understand us. We come to learn from you, not to take from you. We only want to learn from your wisdom. Your ways have proven better than the Drelbi way.

SHMUNN

You wish only to learn from us?

ZHTIPP

Yes, ma'am.

MUFF

Like the missionaries you have sent us?

FRUMM

Your Drelbi missionaries tell us the same thing. And the next thing you know, they're telling us our ways are holding us back. Huh. That their one goddess is better than ours. No thank you.

TENAS

You misunderstand us.

MUFF

Look. We're not here to argue and debate with you.

(MORE)

MUFF (CONT'D)

If you truly want to learn more about our ways, that can easily be arranged. You could have done that without us. Go to our Public Relations Department. The receptionist will be happy to give you information on how to get there.

TENAS

But --

MUFF

-- Listen please. And understand. Our ways are simple. Nothing mysterious. Don't they teach you any of this in your schools? Is it so difficult for you to understand that nature isn't here just to make you rich? Is it so hard to see that all species have a right to exist for their own sake, and that we must learn to live in balance with nature?

MOORV

Yes. We can see that. The Drelbi way is ruining the world.

MUFF

Our struggle to save the forests has been a trail of tears and broken Promises. You Drelbi have destroyed our land and culture, and lock us up on these ghettos with TV's.

TENAS

Our movement rejects the way of the exploiters and spoilers who have hurt you, and misled us. Greed is not good.

SCHMUNN

Yes, yes. Good luck with that. So how many of you are there in your movement? Because it's obvious you don't speak for the majority of your people.

ZHTIPP

We are few, but we are strong in our commitment to breaking with the destructive ways of the Drelbi.

MUFF

Good. That is good. Go back to your friends. After your... camping trip, go back and change your society. Stop the destroyers before it's too late.

TENAS

We've dropped out from all that. Politics is futile. We will change this society by refusing to participate in it. Many Drelbi are starting to realize that the Drelbi way is bankrupt. It's destructive and needs changing.

FRUMM

Slowly nods in agreement.

Now, can we get serious for a moment? And this is important for you to understand. You won't change a damn thing by dropping out. It never has and never will. No. This will take much work. Do you really want to help us... and yourselves?

MOORV

Yes.

Tenas and Zhtipp nod in agreement.

FRUMM

If you expect to harvest your garden, first you need to sow. Then you need to nourish, mulch, compost your plants. You need to pull out all the weeds. Get your fingers dirty.

MUFF

If you seriously want to help, then get involved with changing your practices. That means persistent political activity. And you guys are on the wrong track with your

Uses her fingers to make air quotes.

"Industry is the Problem" stuff. Industry is a tool. The problem is how it's used.

TENAS

Well, we would disagree with that.

MUFF

Now, hold on. Just bear with me on this. Take a hammer, for example.

MUFF (CONT'D)

Now, in the hands of a skilled carpenter that hammer can be used to build a nice house, eh?

TENAS

Okay.

MUFF

Now take that very same hammer. Put it in the hands of a Drelbi-cidal maniac. You could get some very different results, no?

MOORV

Yes, but --

MUFF

-- All I'm saying is this. The tool of industry is too often used to rape our Venus Mother and screw working people. It doesn't have to be that way.

(MORE)

MUFF (CONT'D)

Industry doesn't have to be the enemy of nature. We have shown that we can live in harmony with our Mother. It all depends on who controls the tools and what the priorities are.

SCHMUNN

You may drink from the fountains of nature and come back again and again to satisfy your thirst. But if you destroy the springs, you destroy the streams that they feed. All of us, both Drelbi and Thlargi, live downstream. When we say that if you continue fouling your nest, you will wake up in a bed full of your waste, this isn't just poetry. It's real. Now, go to the PR office and set up a few classes on Thlargian ways. But Promise us that you and your friends will really use this knowledge. Put it to practical use, or you're just wasting your time. Your time and ours. Can you promise us that?

TENAS

Yes. We will.

SCHMUNN

I notice that you're wearing a Thlarg medallion on your necklace, Miss Tenas. Where did you get it?

TENAS

At the Bayview fair.

SCHMUNN

Could I ask what you paid for it?

TENAS

Ten kecks.

The three councilors exchange glances.

FRUMM

We sold them to the trader for two and a half kecks each. Nice markup, eh?

TENAS

Yes, I guess so.

MUFF

Drelbi have been making money from us for a long time.

TENAS

Sorry. What can I say? Maybe we can work out something on this. Maybe set up a Fair Trade arrangement that would bring in more money to the tribe and help the reservation.

MUFF

Yes. We've heard that before too.

Tenas sighs.

MUFF (CONT'D)

You've told us what you want. Now, may I tell you what we want?

TENAS

Yes ma'am.

MUFF

Okay; here's something specific. A law has been proposed by the Conservatives in the World Senate. It will be coming to a vote soon.

TENAS

It can't be much good if it comes from the Mossbacks! What exactly are you referring to, ma'am?

MUFF

The one that would allow Thlargi to sell reserve land to Drelbi. This would be a terrible thing.

SCHMUNN

As you can see, many of us live in poverty. Many of our people would feel compelled to sell their allotment for a short-term financial benefit. But this would end Mumphara and the entire reservation system, with nothing better to replace it. This would kill our communal system and undermine the very basis of our survival and traditional practices.

TENAS

I see.

MUFF

Please. Give me your word that when you get back, you will do all you can to stop this. Talk to Drelbi. Write to them. Organize. This is something you can do.

TENAS

I give you my word, ma'am. I will do all I can.

MOORV

As will I.

ZHTIPP

Count me in!

MUFF

All we Thlargi really want is simple. I mean, what part of "Leave us alone" do you find so difficult to understand? That's what you can do to help us. Just leave us alone. You Drelbi have burnt us so often. All we want now is to be left in peace.

The councilors stand up.

MUFF (CONT'D)

The receptionist will direct you to our Public Relations office. We'll give them the okay to set up a few classes for your group.

TENAS

Thanks.

INT. ZYZZ'S HOME - NURSERY - A YEAR LATER

Zilla is about to give birth, mantid-style. She excretes a white froth onto a branch of their borgel, a miniature tree-shaped device, to lay her eggs in.

She whips it into a foam.

ZYZZ

Can I help?

She groans from the pain of her contractions.

ZYZZ (CONT'D)

Want the window open?

ZILLA

Yes! A little. Now please just go away. Find something to do!

Zyzz walks over to the window. Opens it. Takes a deep breath.

INT. STUDY - LATER

Zyzz listens to the radio.

Zilla's screams can be heard from the other room.

Zyzz turns off the radio. Turns on the TV.

LATER

Zilla stumbles into the room. Exhausted.

Zyzz gets up, goes to her. Hugs her.

ZYZZ

How ya feelin'?

ZILLA

Shot. Totally. Drell, I'm so damn tired. I'm gonna go take a shower.

INT. NURSERY - MORNING (NOTE: DUE TO THE PLANET'S ROTATION, DAYS AND NIGHTS ON VENUS ARE BOTH MONTHS LONG!) Zyzz joins Zilla in the nursery. She has food ready.

They watch as their children hatch.

ZILLA (CONT'D)

Look at these girls. Just look at'em.

ZYZZ

They're so tiny. And so pale.

ZILLA

Yes. Yes. White almost. That's normal. They'll get more color.

Zyzz gives her a hug and kiss on the forehead.

ZYZZ

You are one lovely lady.

INT. AUDITORIUM - EVENING

Moorv watches as a HANDFUL OF PEOPLE enter the auditorium.

He can't hide his disappointment with the numbers.

Amongst those in attendance are Zilla and Zyzz.

Once everyone is seated, Moorv turns on his slide projector.

MOORV

Thank you all for coming. Many wetlands, forests, and other lands have been classified as "non-significant" under the Global Environmental Policy Act. Also known as GEPA. Now, due to the property not meeting criteria such as the presence of potentially important archeological findings or other features, these lands usually receive a "non-significant" designation.

He clicks his remote and the slide show begins.

MOORV (CONT'D)

The absence of such historically important findings has often been enough to allow the land to be developed.

(MORE)

MOORV (CONT'D)

But, if you look at it through the lens of climate change, we can see that much of this land IS truly very significant. Therefore, it may be appropriate to revise the GEPA process of determining significance to include essential environmental services, and require mitigation for significant long term-effects on climate. Now, there are two primary forces that are causing the climate crisis.

He turns and refers to his slides.

MOORV (CONT'D)

The first is increasing levels of greenhouse gas emissions, especially Carbon Dioxide, and the second is the destruction of green, carbon-sequestering ecosystems. Both on land and in the sea.

He turns back to his audience.

MOORV (CONT'D)

Tons of CO2 are being dumped into the air by burning fossil fuels, so reducing these greenhouse gas emissions is an obvious part of any effective strategy. But at the same time, the lungs of our planet, nature's ability to filter out the CO2 is being crippled. Forests, meadows, coral reefs, and other carbon-sequestering ecosystems are under assault. Mining operations are scraping plant life off the land. Forests are being clear-cut. And run-off from erosion of the exposed land is smothering coral reefs.

Moorv walks from behind the podium. Engages with his audience.

MOORV (CONT'D)

So, protecting and enhancing carbon-sequestration is crucial. These are tightly inter-related. Successfully meeting the challenge of climate change will require coordination and progress on both fronts.

(MORE)

MOORV (CONT'D)

Ecosystem services of these threatened lands are significant and valuable. They should not be destroyed via suburban sprawl for short-term economic reasons. These services include but are not limited to: flood control, oxygen production, carbon sequestration, wildlife habitat maintenance, and soil erosion control.

Zyzz and Zilla listen intently.

MOORV (CONT'D)

Now we all depend upon these environmental services, but often act as if they're unlimited.

(MORE)

MOORV (CONT'D)

More accurate valuation of carbon sequestration, oxygen production, and other services as part of the GEPA process will provide us with a much more effective tool in making better decisions about applications to develop land.

Moorv notices a few yawns in the audience.

MOORV (CONT'D)

Are there any questions so far?

There are no questions.

LATER

The lecture is over. As Moorv cleans up his projector, Zyzz and Zilla approach.

ZYZZ

Nice job, my friend.

MOORV (SIGHS)

I don't know. Everyone looked pretty bored to me.

ZILLA

No. It was good, Moorv. This is really important stuff.

MOORV

That's very nice of you to say. But I could tell I was losing some of my audience.

ZYZZ

Maybe it's not you, maybe it was just the time. What if you started earlier next time?

MOORV

That's a great idea, but this was the only time the room was available. Next time I should just wait for a better time slot. This really wasn't publicized well enough.

A beautiful young female named MAJANGA approaches.

MAJANGA

I don't know Moorv, I like what you're saying. These are good ideas but how can we do this?

MOORV

And what's your name?

MAJANGA

Majanga.

MOORV

A pleasure to meet you. These are my friends Zilla and Zyzz.

They all shake hands, smiling.

ZILLA

We were actually just leaving. Great job again Moorv.

ZYZZ

And a pleasure to meet you, Majanga.

Zilla and Zyzz exit.

MOORV

Why didn't you ask that earlier, Majanga? You could've sparked some good discussion!

MAJANGA

Well, I'm kinda shy. . .

MOORV

"What can we do about it?" Great question, Majanga. I wish there were some quick answers. Could I...

(MORE)

MOORV (CONT'D)

uhh, could we meet somewhere and take some time to really get into this?

MAJANGA

That sounds nice.

MOORV

Can I have your phone number?

MAJANGA

Of course.

Writes it down for him.

EXT. RIVERSIDE PARK - SPRING FEST - DAY

Moorv and Majanga see each other across the park. They head towards each other and then hug.

MOORV

Good to see you, Majanga. Thanks for coming out.

MAJANGA

Thanks for the invite.

They walk into the park.

MOORV

Would you believe that I dreamed about you last night?

MAJANGA

Hmmm. Good or bad?

MOORV

Horrible. Just frightful.

He laughs.

MAJANGA

Really?

MOORV

Nah. Actually it was very nice. A little, uh, erotic though.

Majanga laughs.

They make their way to the front of the stage where A BAND PERFORMS.

They dance to the music. And after a while --

They kiss.

INT. CAMPUS STADIUM - DAY

Moorv, Majanga, Zilla, and Zyzz walk through the stadium and look at the various tables.

One particular table grabs Zilla's attention.

ZILLA

Damn. I wish we could afford to
publish slick stuff like this.

Moorv picks up several papers. Thumbs through them.

MOORV

Reading out loud.

"People for Free Choice" Hmmm. "We need market solutions to
the health-care crisis." Oh, yeah, sure. Since when does that
work?

GUY BEHIND LITERATURE TABLE

Shrugs.

Hey: I just work here.

MOORV

Nice-looking poison. Astro-turf.
How much are these guys paying you
to peddle this stuff?

GUY BEHIND LITERATURE TABLE

Huh?

MOORV

Astro-turf. Syndicate propaganda
masquerading as grassroots.

ZILLA

Ah, come on Moorv. Don't give him a
hard time. He's just doing his job.

They sit down just as SENATOR SMADA steps to the podium
microphone.

SMADA

Thank you all for taking time from
your busy schedules to attend this
Town Hall meeting.

(MORE)

SMADA (CONT'D)

I hope that you all take time to
look at the various tables.
Clearly, health-care is very
important to all of us, and there's
different opinions on how to best
go forward on this issue.

(MORE)

SMADA (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Now, I'm sure that you have some questions for me?

Many people raise their hands. A FEMALE is selected.

FEMALE

We are letting the lies of the insurance and pharmaceutical syndicates con us into working against ourselves. Against our own best interests. This is ridiculous. Please everyone, get out there, speak up, write letters. March. Demonstrate. Whatever it takes to get real health care reform.

Some people applaud. Others boo.

The microphone is handed to ANOTHER DRELB.

OTHER DRELB

Our way of life is based on free choice and letting the marketplace work things out. Government bureaucrats have no place in deciding what medical care you should or should not have.

Some applause; some booing. The microphone then gets passed to a FEISTY DRELB.

FEISTY DRELB

Bureaucrats in charge? Yes, I'm afraid so. The real question is, what kind of bureaucrat do you want to be in charge? Will it be a government bureaucrat or syndicate bureaucrat? At least a government bureaucrat isn't aiming to increase her bonus by denying coverage to people when they need medical care. Health insurance companies make more money when they deny coverage. Power over life-and-death decisions is in the hands of the insurance companies.

(MORE)

FEISTY DRELB (CONT'D)

Decisions over your medical care should be between you and your doctor, not with some protection syndicate.

(MORE)

FEISTY DRELB (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Only the government is big enough
and powerful enough to protect us
from syndicate tyranny.

The microphone makes it's way to Zilla.

ZILLA

Here's the blunt truth. The
Syndicate is a powerful tool,
invented and developed to do two
things. Maximize profits. And limit
liability. This makes it a very
dangerous tool. Destructive of
anything that gets in the way of
maximizing profit.

The crowd responds with hisses and shouts of approval.

ZILLA (CONT'D)

The time has come to hang this tool
up in the museum of history. Even
then, we need to warn our children.
Watch out. Keep an eye on this
thing. And don't ever, ever forget,
syndicates can bite.

The crowd applauds.

EXT. MUNCHO STAND - EVENING

Zilla, Zyzz, Moorv, and Majanga have lunch.

MAJANGA

Ishtar Forest Resources isn't re-
planting.

MAJANGA (CONT'D)

They're over-harvesting, way beyond
sustainable levels. Then they move
on to the next clear-cut.
Hillsides, for Drell's sake! Then
the soil washes away. Why are they
doing this? It's stupid. Don't they
know better? It's just not logical.

ZYZZ

IFT land-managers aren't dummies.
Hell, quite a few of 'em have taken
my classes and they've done pretty
well. They're really not bad guys.

(MORE)

ZYZZ (CONT'D)

Then they go out, scalp the hills, and leave them to gully-wash away. Just doesn't make sense. I mean, can't they see that they'd have more trees in a few years if they re-planted?

MOORV

So who ever said the syndicates are logical? There are no villains in this. The System itself is criminal. If you're going to succeed in this system, you have to maximize profit. But the syndicates are so damn focused on short-term profit, that's all they can see. Everything else is way down their priority list. Sustainability? Shit. That's not even on their radar-screens.

MAJANGA

Or is it just Drelbi nature? I mean, its people that run the system, right? And its people who would operate your new system, no?

ZYZZ

We're basically animals. Just dumb animals with a few extra tricks.

ZILLA

Drell! What Drelbi nature is or is not might make an interesting philosophical discussion, but it's beside the point. Totally irrelevant to this. Let's get real. Can we?

ZYZZ

Okay. Go for it.

ZILLA

Come on. Clear cutting? Drelbi nature? Catching so many lobsters and squid that whole species are going extinct? Screwing up the reefs? You think this is Drelbi nature? Or how about dumping food in the ocean while people are starving? Just to keep prices up?

(MORE)

ZILLA (CONT'D)

Do you really think that these are, what? Unfortunate manifestations of Drelbi nature? Come on now.

(MORE)

ZILLA (CONT'D)

That's a pile of junk and you know it. Thlargi and Drelbi lived in more or less harmony with nature for thousands of years.

MOORV

Millions!

ZILLA

Yeah. These aren't illogical results of a sane system. No. These are the logical results of a screwed-up system! Profit is its number one priority. This system was never designed to be sustainable. I mean, what the hell do you expect when nature and labor are treated as commodities for making profits? I mean, putting profit first is guaranteed to mess things up! The surprise would be if this kind of crap didn't happen.

MAJANGA

So the system makes good people do terrible things. What is this? Terminal profitosis?

They all laugh.

ZYZZ

Whatever the hell it is, it's awful. But I've got a question. Economics wasn't my best subject. Never has been. So help me on this.

MOORV

Yeah?

ZYZZ

Okay. Commodity. I've heard the word but...

ZYZZ (CONT'D)

what's the difference between a commodity and a product anyway?

MOORV

A commodity is anything--any product of service that's produced to be sold to make a profit. It's defining purpose is for making a profit. Not for use.

(MORE)

MOORV (CONT'D)

It probably has a use, but the reason it's produced is to make a profit. That's why so many commodities are produced that there's no way they can all be marketed, so they end up getting dumped or warehoused somewhere just to keep their prices up, right?

ZYZZ

Okay. . .

MOORV

Now, labor is people, with needs and rights. But syndicates treat them as commodities too. The syndicates make huge profits by paying workers less than the value they create by their labor.

ZYZZ

Whew, you're losin' me. Wanna back up and run over that again for me?

MOORV

Okay, say you work in a mine, right? Or on a logging crew, an office, or anywhere, as far as that goes. How long do you think you'd have your job if you didn't produce more value for the boss than she paid you in your paycheck?

ZYZZ

Not very long I suppose. If you're in business, you have to make a profit. How else are you going to pay your bills, support your family, meet your payroll, and all that? Business isn't charity, y'know.

MOORV

Exactly. And stockholders want a good return on their investment.

MOORV (CONT'D)

The best possible return, or why would they risk their money investing in your company?

MAJANGA

That's just the way it is.

MOORV

And that's why things are getting so messed up.

MAJANGA

So how do you propose we change things?

ZILLA

Okay: look at it like this. What produces all wealth?

MAJANGA

Labor. Capital. Nature. That's what they taught us in high school. Seems pretty basic.

ZILLA

You're right about nature and labor. Those create wealth. But capital? No, capital is just a catalyst.

ZYZZ

A catalyst?

Zilla nods.

ZILLA

Chlorophyll is a catalyst. It doesn't actually take part in any solar-chemical reaction, but if it ain't there, nothing happens. Its gotta be there, or sunlight, water, and carbon dioxide won't combine. No Chlorophyll, no food. Right?

MOORV

Right. Capital is the catalyst that brings labor and natural resources together to produce wealth.

(MORE)

MOORV (CONT'D)

It enables wealth production in the same way chlorophyll enables photosynthesis and food production.

ZYZZ

So far so good.

MAJANGA

Makes sense.

MOORV

Workers and nature are undervalued, systemically. The game is rigged.

(MORE)

MOORV (CONT'D)

These things don't just happen; the system is based on organized theft of value from the producers. We need to start treating both workers and nature with the respect they deserve. What we need to do is liberate capital, and decide democratically how to use it for real needs. Not just to make the rich even richer.

Majanga and Zyzz slowly nod in agreement.

MAJANGA

Ahh, come on. Who would hire anybody if they couldn't make a profit? Nothing would ever happen. I mean, why would they even bother? So what's the alternative?

ZILLA

If we're going to survive, if our kids are going to have any kind of decent future, we have to stop treating natural resources as just something to use up and make money from. We need to recognize that there's no such thing as infinite anything.

MOORV

And labor should get back all the wealth it creates. All of it, directly and indirectly.

ZYZZ

What do you mean "indirectly"?

ZILLA

Well, some money would have to be invested back into equipment and machinery to keep things going, eh? The main thing is that business should be run democratically, by the people actually doing the work. Cooperatives, not syndicate dictatorships.

ZILLA (CONT'D)

Cooperatives are responsible and responsive to the communities where they operate.

(MORE)

ZILLA (CONT'D)

You can't have a democratic society when a syndicate dictatorship is at the top of it all. It's a sham.

MOORV

And you can't have a democracy where one percent of the population owns more wealth than the bottom ninety-five percent. And when that top one percent makes all the command decisions that affect all our lives.

Majanga and Zyzz nod.

ZILLA

Take medicine for example. Health care resources are public resources, but the syndicate hospitals and insurance rackets are using them to make millions out of people's suffering.

ZYZZ

(sarcastic)

Then let's go out and shoot all the capitalists. Yippee!

MOORV

Now hold on a second good buddy. That's not what I'm saying. Seriously. This is where the anarchists run off the track. Those clowns go and smash some windows and then swagger over it.

(MORE)

MOORV (CONT'D)

Or they kidnap some syndicate officer, maybe even shoot somebody. Then what? The system has plenty of replacements, eager to step in and take over. Terrorist tactics just make the syndicate honchos look like victims and then they get sympathy.

ZILLA

The only way to change this system, or better yet, replace it, is to educate people. Educate, agitate, and organize for peaceful change. The better the organization, the less violence.

ZILLA (CONT'D)

Violence is a symptom of lousy organization. If there's going to be any violence, let the syndicate start it. We want peaceful change.

ZYZZ

That's absurd. I'll fight back.

MOORV

Any violence, even in self defense, coming from our side will get so twisted in the media that it makes us look like the bad guys. It might be too slow for some, but building public opinion for positive change is a much more sure way.

MAJANGA

But how much time do we even have?

ZYZZ

Damn good question. Things are starting to seriously go to hell. Our life-support systems are already breaking down. We need serious action now, or it will be too damn late. It's always been either too soon to worry, or too late to do anything.

INT. CIVIC CENTER - EVENING

VARIOUS POLITICIANS have gathered. Seated in the back are Zyzz and Zilla.

The meeting has gotten extremely tense. A GUY stands.

GUY

You Eco-Socialists are making a big mistake. All you'll do is split the left vote and help the Mossbacks win!

ZILLA

What's the difference? The Liberals support syndicate rule too.

GUY

The LP isn't perfect, but they're a helluva lot better than those damn Mossback conservatives!

A WOMAN stands and makes her way to the door.

WOMAN

None of this matters if this isn't about how to throw them both out. It's all a waste of time.

Zyzz turns to Zilla...

ZYZZ

She's right.

ZILLA

We shouldn't give up.

ZYZZ

Hell, no! I'm just saying, there needs to be a complete shift in the priorities.

ZILLA

I won't disagree with that.

An ANGRY WOMAN stands.

ANGRY WOMAN

If the election doesn't go our way, I say we take this fight right to the syndicate doorsteps!

PASSIVE GUY

If we do that, they'll slaughter us all.

ANGRY WOMAN

Well, we have to do something! If we aren't ready to go all the way, what's the point of all these stupid meetings?

SPEAKER

We have very strong candidates. Wait and see: the system will work.

ANGRY WOMAN

Who're you trying to kid? The damn system has never worked! Not for us working people anyway. If it had, would we even be in this situation? Well, would we?

Zilla turns to Zyzz.

ZILLA

Are you ready to take this fight to the streets?

ZYZZ

You think it'll really come to that?

ANGRY WOMAN

If we lose these elections, who here is ready to finally start getting serious?

There's a chorus of cheers from the CROWD.

MILITANT MAN

We need to arm ourselves. Be ready for a revolution.

ANGRY WOMAN

Finally, somebody with some sense.

PASSIVE GUY

If we start shooting, we'll all be toast within an hour.

ANGRY WOMAN

Then let our deaths be the spark our planet needs.

PASSIVE GUY

Hah! If you get violent and start shooting, it won't be a spark.

(MORE)

PASSIVE GUY (CONT'D)

The syndicates will crack down,
big-time, Then they'll justify it
as self-defense!

MILITANT MAN

Instead of shooting down every
idea, how about you come up with
something?

The entire crowd yells at each other.

INT. ZYZZ'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Zilla and Zyzz eat Crunchies as they watch the debates on
Television.

Two female candidates stand behind podiums. They are --

-- KARZ (for the Eco-Socialist Party) and SCHNUZZ (of the
conservative Mossback Party).

KARZ

(on TV)

The government provides millions of
kecks in subsidies to the fossil
fuel syndicates. That money comes
from the pockets of taxpayers. Why?
These are very profitable
companies. Why not level the
playing field so wind and solar-
energy companies have a fair
chance? Let's put some of that
money to work in building a clean
energy grid. That's how we can wean
ourselves off fossil-fuels.

SCHNUZZ

(on TV)

Utopian dreaming!

The STUDIO AUDIENCE laughs.

SCHNUZZ (CONT'D)

(on TV)

Sorry. But this doesn't pass the
reality test. We just can't do that
yet. If we did, industry would
grind to a halt. Thousands of
people would lose their jobs. Do
you really want that? It's time for
the solar and wind industries to
stand on their own.

(MORE)

SCHNUZZ (CONT'D)

We need to stop subsidizing these failures. Taxpayers can no longer afford it.

ZYZZ

Sure. Take two tax cuts for the oil syndicates and call me in the morning, says Doctor Schnuzz.

KARZ

(on TV)

Cut subsidies for clean energy, while fossil-fuel companies continue feeding at the public trough? They get millions of kecks in tax breaks and lavish subsidies from hard-working taxpayers and you want to stop a modest subsidy for clean energy development? I ask you, do you want to kill thousands of jobs? Good, green jobs. Jobs that will clean up our air and water, and pull our planet back from the brink?

SCHNUZZ

(on TV)

Can I be honest here? The demand for energy is increasing. That is a fact. Fossil fuels are a proven technology, they will continue to be the primary way to meet this demand, at least for several decades.

KARZ

(on TV)

It's obvious that Ms. Schnuzz is reading from the script prepared by her syndicate backers. The fossil-fuel companies don't want to talk about how their pollution is adding to the climate crisis. They don't want us to know! All they can say is that they're working on it. My question to you, Ms. Schnuzz is this: How much more of your pollution do you think our planet can take?

SCHNUZZ

(on TV)

What should be obvious by now is that my friend is spewing radical junk-science again. There you go again. "Oh dear, the sky is falling!"

The audience erupts in laughter.

INT. CIVIC CENTER - NIGHT

Zyzz and Zilla stand amongst MANY OTHER MEMBERS OF THE ESP.

They watch the election results on TV.

Things become extremely festive when the television announces that Thromm (an Eco-Socialist candidate) has won her seat in the Senate.

Everyone goes wild. Hugs are exchanged.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

This region is controlled by the Ishtar Forest Resources.

KOBE AND PORM walk along the logging road, sadly looking over the devastation of a clear-cut.

Suddenly a loaded logging-truck barrels up from behind them. They dive into a ditch just in time to escape getting run over.

Covered in mud, Kobe stands and watches the truck continue on it's way. He makes an obscene gesture towards the truck.

KOBE

You asshole! Think you own the bloody road?!

PORM

Catching his breath.

Well, they do own the frigging road. That's the problem!

They wipe off the muck and continue on their way.

PORM
 Stupid jerks. IFR: Ignorant
 Friggin' Morons!

KOBE
 Moron starts with an "M", not an
 "R", you idiot.

PORM
 So? Make it "Retard" then. Yeah:
 "Ignorant Friggin' Retards!"

Kobe turns and pees on the side of the road.

KOBE
 Somebody's gotta do something about
 these morons. Just look at this
 slag. What a mess!

PORM
 Maybe that somebody should be us...

EXT. ISHTAR FOREST RESOURCES HEADQUARTERS - DAY

BUFO steps out of his vehicle. Because of his obesity, it's a
 struggle. Just as he turns around --

-- Two Masked Guys with guns get out of their car and
 approach him. It's Kobe and Porm.

PORM
 Hold it right there, Bufo. Don't be
 afraid. Do exactly what we say, and
 you won't get hurt. Don't do
 anything stupid.

Points at their car with his gun.

Get in. Now! You're going to come
 stay with us for a little while.

Kobe opens the back door and grabs Bufo by the upper forearm.

BUFO
 Why are you doing this? Do you know
 who I am?

KOBE
 We know exactly who you are.

BUFO
 You'll never get away with this!

Kobe pushes him into the vehicle. He stuffs a rag into Bufo's mouth and wraps a blindfold around his eyes.

KOBE

Lay down and shut the fuck up!

Kobe sits next to Bufo. Presses the gun to his stomach.

Porm hops in on the drivers side.

They both remove their masks and Porm drives off.

INSERT

THE HEADLINES ON THE ISHTAR TIMES READ:

CHIEF EXEC OF ISHTAR FOREST PRODUCTS KIDNAPPED!

INT. PORM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Bufo is tied to a chair.

Porm watches the news.

PORM

We're all over the news.

Kobe enters the room with food for Bufo. He feeds it to him.

KOBE

What are they saying?

PORM

It's not good. The press secretary just said that negotiating with terrorists was not agency policy.

KOBE

What, they're calling us terrorists?

PORM

They also say that we'll be dealt with severely.

KOBE

I'm starting to think this was a dumb idea.

BUFO

Of course it was!

LOUDSPEAKER

(from outside)

Can you hear me in there? You are surrounded. Resistance is futile. Release Mr. Bufo and you will be fairly dealt with.

PORM

This was such a stupid idea.

KOBE

What do we do?

Porm exhales.

BUFO

Let me go, or they'll kill you idiots the moment they kick that door down.

PORM

He's right, man.

Kobe walks over to Bufo.

KOBE

I guess this is it then.

He unties him.

KOBE (CONT'D)

Go on out. Don't worry. Sorry, man.

Bufo gets up. Glares at them. Wicked smile. Walks out and goes to talk with the police.

KOBE (CONT'D)

This could be bad. But we didn't harm him. Not a scratch.

PORM

A few months in jail?

KOBE

Maybe a year? Shit. How the hell do I know?

LOUDSPEAKER

(from outside)

Come out slowly with your hands up!

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

POV

Through a gun sight we see Porm and Kobe exit the building with their hands raised.

A shot is fired. It hits Porm in the thorax. He falls back into a wall.

END POV

Porm is loaded up and placed in an ambulance.

Kobe is shoved into a paddy wagon.

TV Cameras surround Bufo. He looks directly into the camera and takes the moment to assert his power --

BUFO

What you see here is an example of what happens when we let these radicals go around freely. I was their captive for days! This is an outrage! We need to round up all these extremists and put them out of business for good!

INT. ZYZZ'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Zilla paces. Furious.

Zyzz watches, unsure how to talk to his wife.

ZILLA

This is insane. He wasn't even hurt.

ZYZZ

But still. They did kidnap him.

ZILLA

Crap. They didn't hurt him. The syndicate is just going to use this as an excuse to crack down on all of us.

ZYZZ

There's nothing we can do.

ZILLA

I know some people who are organizing a march.

ZYZZ

A march? Now?! Are you crazy?

ZILLA

Are you afraid?

ZYZZ

Things are too intense now. We have our kids to think about. You want to go out and march for what? To free a couple kidnappers?

ZILLA

Do you think the sentence is fair?

ZYZZ

No way. Of course it's not fair.

ZILLA

Then come with me to help organize the march.

ZYZZ

Zilla --

ZILLA

-- It's time to do more than just talk.

ZYZZ

Shouldn't we wait for things to simmer down some?

ZILLA

The war is already raging. This is just the latest battle. We can't just sit here on our fannies. There's people already going out. They're mobilizing.

ZYZZ

There's got to be a better way.

ZILLA

Like what? Another lecture? Pamphlets?

ZYZZ shrugs; looks indecisive.

ZILLA (CONT'D)

It's all we ever do. I'm going. If you just want to stay here and watch it all on TV, go ahead.

ZYZZ

We have a family now...

ZILLA

And it's up to us to make sure they have a decent planet to grow up on. If we don't stop the syndicates now, what's going to be left for the girls?

Zyzz ponders it.

ZILLA (CONT'D)

This is the moment. We have to do something! The sentence they gave them is proof that they are trying to crush all opposition.

ZYZZ

Well, Thromm is in the Senate now -
-

ZILLA

-- And this STILL happened. Look, we tried to handle this the political way. Are we making any real progress? It's time to go on the offensive for a change.

ZYZZ

You really think this is the right thing to do?

ZILLA

I sure do.

ZYZZ

And this is the right time?

ZILLA

If not now, then when, honey? Are you with me?

ZYZZ

Okay. I'm with you.

They hug.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Zilla and Zyzz are amongst OTHER PROTESTORS. They have signs and megaphones.

PROTESTORS
 (chanting)
 Free Kobe! Free Porm!

A DOZEN POLICE arrive carrying tazers and wearing reflective sunglasses, and line up in combat formation.

SERGEANT

This is your final warning. Time to disperse and go home!

PROTESTORS continue chanting, don't leave.

PROTESTORS (CONT'D)
 Free Kobe! Free Porm! Stop Clear-
 cutting now!

SERGEANT

Loudly

Order Arms!

The police squad snaps to attention, brandishing tazers.

SERGEANT

Loudly

Stun level three! Forward march!

POLICE SQUAD advances toward crowd.

PROTESTORS start to panic and disperse. A YOUNG GIRL near Zyzz trips and falls. A policeman kicks her.

POLICEMAN
 C'mon, get the hell up!

ZYZZ

To policeman

Now, just wait a Drell-damned

minute, man!

Policeman tazes Zyzz--a brain-ripping jolt that knocks him off his feet. He blacks out for a few minutes.

Police use water cannons to subdue the crowds.

Sirens wail as Paddy Wagons arrive. Zilla and Zyzz get separated. Zyzz and a handful of PROTESTORS are apprehended.

Zilla watches from across the street as Zyzz and the other protestors are herded into the paddy wagons.

INT. STATION - LATER

Zyzz sits amongst the other protestors. He fills out some paperwork on a clipboard.

When he's done, he walks the clipboard up to the counter.

He gives it and his ID card to the OFFICER BEHIND THE DESK.

After an inspection to make sure everything is filled out correctly...

OFFICER

Okay, you're free to go.

INT. SENATOR THROMM'S OFFICE - DAY

Typical office for a public servant. Nothing fancy.

Practical.

Thromm is on the phone with Moorv.

THROMM

My page attended your talk about climate change last night.

THROMM (CONT'D)

She said it was quite informative.

MOORV

Well, thank you ma'am.

THROMM

You may have heard that Emperor-elect Vrrzzle has declared a State of Emergency and the Prime Minister has called for a special session of the Ishtar Continental Senate.

MOORV

Yes. I've been listening to the radio.

THROMM

That session is scheduled to convene at thirty-seven hours.

(MORE)

THROMM (CONT'D)

I'd like to slot you for expert testimony on how warming seawater is affecting our food resources.

MOORV

Let me check my calendar.

He opens his calendar. Checks the dates.

MOORV (CONT'D)

Dang. I have a meeting then, but it's nothing I can't get out of.

THROMM

You'll have a few minutes. And trust me, there will be plenty of deniers. It's not going to be a very friendly audience. Are you sure you're up to this?

MOORV

I look forward to it, ma'am.

THROMM

Know where the Senate Office building is?

MOORV

Yes, ma'am?

THROMM

Good. Get here no later than 36:15. Present your ID at reception. You won't be able to get in without it. They'll direct you to my office.

MOORV

Sounds good, ma'am. See you then.

INT. SENATE FLOOR - MORNING

The Special Session is intense.

SENATORS AND EXPERTS attempt to make names for themselves.

There is much posturing and wrangling.

Currently on the floor is SENATOR FLOONF.

FLOONF

These mobs are demanding that we adopt some of these half-baked Eco-Socialist notions. To that I say, over my dead body!

Many Senators cheer in support.

FLOONF (CONT'D)

(sneering)

These so-called "ESP Principles" are based on very shaky science, to say the least. If we took this seriously, it wouldn't just be bad for business, it would ruin everything! Unemployment would rise to catastrophic levels. Homelessness and poverty would soon follow. The very foundations of our society would be shaken.

More cheers.

FLOONF (CONT'D)

We've already had a taste of what Eco-Socialism means. Just look at what's happening out on the streets!

RANDOM SENATOR

It tastes rotten!

CHAIRWOMAN KNUX hammers her gavel on her desk.

KNUX

The assembled will come to order!

She waits for the chamber to settle down.

KNUX (CONT'D)

The chair recognizes Senator Schlang, from the riding of Ishtar Central.

Senator Schlang takes the floor.

SCHLANG

Distinguished colleagues, our scientists have clearly shown that the global warming we are seeing is just part of a natural cycle. It isn't caused by Drelbi activities.

(MORE)

SCHLANG (CONT'D)

The science is clear on this:
increased carbon dioxide will
actually benefit plant growth and
agriculture. We should not be
pushed into making any unsound
decisions just because a few
radicals are stirring up mobs!

There is much applause.

Thromm stands amidst the cheers.

KNUX

The chair recognizes Senator Thromm
from the riding of NE Ishtar.

Thromm takes the floor.

THROMM

Madame Chair, most honorable sister
and fellow colleagues. We indeed
face a crisis. The broad consensus
among the scientific community is
that our planet is warming at an
alarming rate, and --

SOMEONE IN THE AUDIENCE

-- Lies!

An eruption of jeers and hisses soon follow.

Knux pounds her gavel to restore order.

KNUX

The assembly will maintain order.

THROMM

Thank you, Madame Chair. The
science is indeed clear. These
rising temperatures are being
caused by industrial activities.
Unprecedented levels of carbon
dioxide are being added to our air
by the over-consumption of oil,
coal, and other fossil fuels. And
this is causing the global climate
to warm, which is known as the
Greenhouse Effect. That is the
broad consensus among the
scientific community. Granted, some
scientists that happen to be on
syndicate payrolls are telling us
that the majority consensus is
false.

Equal parts hisses and cheers can be heard from those in attendance.

THROMM (CONT'D)

Our distinguished colleague, Senator Floonf, is repeating the blatant disinformation put forward by syndicate employees that are calling themselves "scientists". They are saying that higher CO2 levels would actually be a good thing by helping plants to grow. Well, what plants Senator Floonf? The forests are being replaced by strip malls and parking lots. The meadows are being replaced by sprawl. Oceans, and the coral reefs, so important to our food supply, and that so many jobs depend upon, are dying!

She surveys the room. Lets her words sink in.

THROMM (CONT'D)

If we allow things to continue as they are, we will face unprecedented famine. Conditions on this planet will grow too hot to support life as we know it. I propose that we have a summit conference between a select committee from the senate and representatives from the mainstream scientific community and the Eco-Socialists.

THROMM (CONT'D)

We need to take this seriously and come to an understanding.

Things become hostile. Shouts from the chamber.

"Fake Science!" Hisses. Boos.

Thromm waits for everyone to settle down. Once they do...

THROMM (CONT'D)

On one hand, we are dumping carbon dioxide into the air at record levels. That CO2 is reacting with ocean water to form carbonic acid, and that's lowering the pH of the oceans. That is a fact.

(MORE)

THROMM (CONT'D)

And you know what effect that is having on the coral reefs? Those reefs are the incubators for all our important foods. The increasing pH is dissolving the shells of oysters, crabs, and clams. The larvae can't survive long enough to even get started. By clear-cutting forests, scalping meadows, and draining swamps, we are destroying the only way that our planet can cleanse herself. It's like me hitting you, knocking you down, and then kicking you while you're down. If it was a boxing match, I'd be fouled for using dirty tactics. Isn't it about time that we started working with nature instead of against her? Start treating our life-support system sensibly instead of kicking her when she's down?

The gathered crowd hisses and boos her. She stands and takes it. As it subsides...

THROMM (CONT'D)

Do I still have the floor Madame Chair?

KNUX

Yes, yes. You have, uhh... fourteen minutes remaining. Continue if you must.

THROMM

Thank you, Madame Chair. On your schedule, you'll see that the Timekeeper has allotted fifteen minutes to Moorv, an Ecologist with the Ministry of Natural Resources to give expert testimony on this topic. I will cede the rest of my time to him.

As Thromm takes her seat, she beckons Moorv to take the floor.

Moorv takes the floor.

MOORV

Thank you Madam Chair.
Distinguished Senators.

(MORE)

MOORV (CONT'D)

I'm honored to speak with you today about how climate change is affecting our marine food sources. I'll focus on the science, not the politics of the issue.

He fills his water glass. Takes a drink. Clears his throat.

MOORV (CONT'D)

What Senator Thromm says is backed up by most of the scientific community. You see, the root of the problem is simple chemistry.

He places a transparency on the projector. Aims it at a large screen in the front of the room. Turns it on.

MOORV (CONT'D)

As you can see, carbon dioxide, or CO₂, plus water (H₂O) equals H₂CO₃. That's carbonic acid. And when H₂O combines with SO₂--that's sulfur dioxide--in the air, it produces equals sulfuric acid-rain. Now, both CO₂ and SO₂ are produced by burning fossil fuels. Coal, oil, etc. But there's more that you need to be aware of. Rising seawater temperatures are also stressing our most important food resources. The marine food-chains are in trouble. Krill and shrimp, at the base of these food-chains, are dying out.

MOORV (CONT'D)

And, furthermore, these higher temperatures are causing the spread of infections that are deadly to species we depend on for food.

There's a scattering of hisses. But nothing major.

MOORV (CONT'D)

Currently there is a die-off occurring that may be the most extensive marine-disease event ever documented. You may have read about this. If we allow this to continue, jellyfish will be about all that's left in a few years. Probably not among your favorite sea-foods, eh?

He flips to another slide.

MOORV (CONT'D)

Increasingly, mainstream scientists are finding that climate change is causing this problem. A hotter world is causing tropical diseases to increase their ranges, spreading on both land and in the sea. Pathogens thrive and become more virulent at warmer temperatures. Our sea-waters are becoming more acidic. I might add that this warming is also causing the spread of Drelbi diseases historically restricted to the tropics. They're heading our way, esteemed senators. This could easily cause catastrophic epidemics. Want to verify this? Just ask your doctors. They'll probably suggest that you get vaccinated.

Louder hisses. The assembled group does not enjoy being lectured.

MOORV (CONT'D)

These are facts. Clearly, action is needed. But the syndicate pseudo-scientists call it junk science.

Mayhem ensues.

RANDOM SENATOR

Shut up, you lousy radical!

SENATOR

Thlarg scum!

Knux hammers her gavel.

KNUX

Senators, shall we show some respect for our guest? Will that be all, Moorv?

INT. ZYZZ'S HOME - LIVING ROOM

Zilla and Zyzz watch the chaos of the street on the television.

ZILLA

We better get downtown. Try to get some food to the prisoners.

ZYZZ

Haven't you been listening? They probably wouldn't even get it. Damn cops are blocking everything. And they're busting people for that. Sounds like they could use some medical help too.

ZILLA

How can we get some medics in there?

ZYZZ

Those bastards are using zappers and noise machines against unarmed people. Damn bullies. Okay, that does it. I've gotta get down there.

ZILLA

No way. They'd just throw your tush in jail too. Better stay here. Try and calm yourself. There's a peaceful protest next week.

ZYZZ

Do you really believe it'll stay peaceful?

ZILLA

Well, that's our plan.

ZYZZ

The way the syndicates and their goons are acting, there's no bloody way they're going to allow anything to stay peaceful.

ZILLA

We have to at least try, dammit!

EXT.CITY STREET - DAY

A beautiful day.

Zyzz and Zilla march alongside OTHER PROTESTORS.

MILITARY POLICE line both sides of the road.

PROTESTORS

(chanting)

Save our planet! No more clear-cutting!
Save our planet! Stop clear-cutting!

Suddenly a MEMBER OF THE MILITARY POLICE shoves a PROTESTOR.

Protestors and Military Police start to shove each other.

Out of nowhere a make-shift bomb is tossed into a store-window.

It explodes.

Military police begin rounding up and beating the Protestors.

Zyzz grabs Zilla's hand and tries to flee, but the Crowds are overwhelming.

As the Military Police draw near, they dive into a nearby alleyway.

Tear gas floods the streets.

ZYZZ

Let's get the hell outa here!

He grabs her hand. Pulls her down the alley away from the Military Police.

INT. ZYZZ'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The television plays in the background.

ZYZZ

I told you there was no way they were going to let this thing be peaceful.

ZILLA

We had to try something!

ZYZZ

Now the syndicate will claim that we're the violent ones.

ZILLA

Think so?

ZYZZ

Of course. They're going to doctor the footage and use the media to put it out. They'll make us look like a bunch of anarchists.

ZILLA

We had to do something!

ZYZZ

They're going to retaliate. The syndicate isn't just going to let this pass.

ZILLA

Did you hear what they were saying at the protests? They said they're using "enhanced interrogation" on Kobe.

ZYZZ

That's their term for torture.

ZILLA

Those guys were acting on their own. Not even in the ESP as far as I know. Torturing them for what: to get names?

ZYZZ

Who knows what else they're doing?

On television, the News shows multiple buildings on fire.

REPORTER

(on TV)

The terrorists have launched multiple attacks around the city.

ZYZZ

There you go. What I tell you?

ZILLA

It looks like a war zone.

The news cuts to a shot of Senate Chair-woman Knux.

KNUX

(on TV)

For the good of all law-abiding citizens, I am instituting a curfew. Anyone found breaking this curfew will be detained until order is restored.

ZILLA
A curfew? This is crazy.

ZYZZ
Just an excuse to round us all up.

KNUX
(on TV)
We must stop being so nice to those who look to disrupt our way of life. I will move to appoint a special committee to address these concerns.

Zilla shuts off the television.

ZILLA
They can't do that. Can they?

ZYZZ
I'm pretty sure they just did. Look, if they have visuals of us at the protests --

ZILLA
They do. You think they'll come for us?

ZYZZ
It's just a matter of time.

INT. SPACE DEVELOPMENT CONSORTIUM HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Seated in the conference room are SOME ANTI-ESP POLITICIANS AND EXECUTIVES OF THE SPACE DEVELOPMENT CONSORTIUM.

Bufo stands in the front of the room. Paces back and forth as he speaks.

BUFO
If we don't start showing some initiative with these terrorists, they will destroy everything we've built. We need to round up all these radicals. Every last one of them. Then, we can use them as free labor. If they don't want to contribute to the well-being of our society, then it's up to us to help them contribute. Now, I don't need to remind you that I've made many contributions to your campaigns and agendas over the years.

(MORE)

BUFO (CONT'D)

There are many in this room who have directly benefited from my support. I shouldn't have to remind you of the importance of keeping my organization happy. Now, the nice thing about using these ... extremists as free labor, is that if something...unfortunate were to happen to them, say an accident of some sort, I don't think anyone would really care all that much.

Everyone in the room laughs.

INT. ZYZZ'S HOME - LIVING ROOM

There's a knock on the door.

Zyzz answers it and on the other side is --

-- A CLERK FROM THE COURT.

ZYZZ

Yes? How may I help you?

The Clerk holds out an envelope.

Zyzz signs for it and the Clerk walks away. Zyzz closes the door and walks back into the house.

ZILLA

Who was it?

Zyzz opens the envelope and reads the document.

ZYZZ

We've been subpoenaed for our part in the "terrorist acts".

ZILLA

The protests?

ZYZZ

Yes. Of course they're calling them acts of terror against society.

ZILLA

This is ridiculous.

INT. LAWYER'S OFFICE - MORNING

A seedy office in a building that's seen better days.

Seated at the desk is MR. SCHLIVE. Across from him are Zilla and Zyzz.

ZILLA

We've been unjustly arrested. There has to be a way to get this thrown out.

MR. SCHLIVE

I'm not sure it's going to be that easy.

ZYZZ

What do you mean?

MR. SCHLIVE

The government --

ZILLA

-- You mean the syndicates?

MR. SCHLIVE

Regardless. They're cracking down on terrorist activity.

ZILLA

We're not terrorists!

MR. SCHLIVE

We know that. And they know that. But they're going to do everything in their power to prove that you are.

ZYZZ

We haven't committed any crimes. We still have a right to protest, don't we?

MR. SCHLIVE

You haven't been charged with anything serious... Yet.

ZYZZ

No.

ZILLA

Don't we have a right to have an opinion on things?

MR. SCHLIVE

I'm not sure saying that will help you very much.

ZILLA
So what do we do?

MR. SCHLIVE
I've had quite a few clients in the last few days with similar problems. They're going to offer you plea bargain. They'll ask for names.

ZILLA
Names?

MR. SCHLIVE
Yes. If you give them names, they'll offer you a deal of some sort.

ZYZZ
What kind of names?

MR. SCHLIVE
Any that they may find useful.

INT. ZYZZ'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Zyzz reads the newspaper.

Zilla enters the room.

ZILLA
We need to talk.

Zyzz lowers the paper.

ZILLA (CONT'D)
You know we can't name names right?
No matter what.

ZYZZ
I don't see what the big deal is.

ZILLA
We can't betray up our comrades.

ZYZZ
Comrades?

ZILLA
Our friends, and anybody in the Resistance. This is bigger than just you and me, sweetheart.

ZYZZ

C'mon, aren't you being a tad dramatic?

ZILLA

I'm not going to give them any names no matter what they say. And I'll be SO ashamed of you if you do.

ZYZZ

So what if we do give them names? What would they do? Deport them? They should be so lucky.

ZILLA

Lucky?! Lucky to get thrown in jail?! Banished from everything and everyone they know? How the hell is that lucky?

ZYZZ

They'd be saved from a dying planet, wouldn't they? Face it, Zilla, the Syndicates aren't going to change. Quite the opposite. They're doing everything in their power to keep anyone from saving the planet. This whole planet is doomed. And so are we along with it. Its just a matter of time.

ZILLA

Anybody that gets named could be taken in for torture in a death-camp, for Drell's sake. We can't be a party to that. Tell me you won't name names.

Zyzz stares at her.

ZILLA (CONT'D)

Say it, Zyzz.

ZYZZ

I won't name names.

ZILLA

No matter what.

ZYZZ

Come what may.

EXT. ZYZZ'S HOME - DAY

Zilla and Zyzz hear some noise and step outside in time to see their NEIGHBOR get tazed by MILITARY POLICE while trying to protect his child.

The MILITARY POLICE toss the neighbor into a truck.

ZILLA

Where are they taking him?

ZYZZ

Probably to one of the "Family Protection Centers" for "Enhanced Interrogation".

INT. COURT HOUSE - MORNING

The Courtroom is packed.

Zyzz takes the stand.

CLERK

Please state your name, residence, and profession for the court record.

ZYZZ

My name is Zyzz. I live at 237 Ulfrun Street, in Bayview, Ishtar.

CLERK

Could you please spell your name for the court.

ZYZZ

Yes. That's Z-Y-Z-Z.

CLERK

Who else lives in your household?

ZYZZ

I live with my wife, Zilla, and two daughters.

CLERK

Ages of your children?

ZYZZ

Nymphs. Both fourth instar.

CLERK

And your occupation?

ZYZZ

I teach Botany at the Bayview campus, University of Ishtar School of Forestry.

CLERK

Thank you Mr. Zyzz. Your witness Mr. Schlive.

MR. SCHLIVE

Professor Zyzz, how long have you been in your current position?

ZYZZ

I've been teaching at the University for seven years now.

MR. SCHLIVE

And in that time, have you ever been fined, cited, or arrested for any offenses?

ZYZZ

No sir.

MR. SCHLIVE

Now, Mr. Zyzz, as a scientist, and respected authority in your field, would it be accurate to say you have acquired a level of understanding and knowledge of the ecology of Ishtar?

ZYZZ

Yes sir.

MR. SCHLIVE

In your opinion, sir, are current forestry management practices sound and sustainable?

ZYZZ

No sir. I find many of these practices to be very destructive.

NEZA, The prosecuting attorney stands --

NEZA

Your honor. This line of questioning is irrelevant to the question we have before us. I suggest that this court has more important things to attend to than to serve as a propaganda outlet.

MR. SCHLIVE

Your honor. It is in the interest of the court to establish the credentials and motivations of my client.

The JUDGE gives the arguments a moment of thought.

JUDGE

Objection over-ruled. Proceed Mr. SCHLIVE.

MR. SCHLIVE

Mr. Zyzz, how would you characterize the current methods of forest management on Ishtar?

ZYZZ

Sir, current resource management practices employed by the major companies seek to maximize short-term profits with little or no regard for the preservation or conservation of the resource, nor the welfare of society in general and coming generations. These practices are definitely not sustainable.

MR. SCHLIVE

Now, Mr. Zyzz, you've been using the word sustainable. Could you please define this term?

ZYZZ

I would define sustainable as resource use that meets current needs while preserving the resources so that these needs can continue to be met for future generations. Current methods tend to be very wasteful and destructive and fail to meet that definition.

MR. SCHLIVE

Thank you Mr. Zyzz. Your witness, Mr. Neza.

Mr. SCHLIVE returns to his seat.

Mr. Neza approaches the bench.

NEZA

Mr. Zyzz, are you now or have you ever been a member of the Eco-Socialist Party?

ZYZZ

Yes sir. I am proud of that fact. Anybody that has a brain and cares about the state of our world --

The Judge cuts him off with a bang of the gavel.

JUDGE

Yes or no will suffice.

NEZA

Okay. Let's try this once again. Are you currently a member of the Eco-Socialist Party?

ZYZZ

Yes.

NEZA

Thank you. That wasn't too hard now, was it? Now, do you recognize the names Moorv and Schlongg?

Zyzz refuses to answer.

NEZA (CONT'D)

Do you need me to repeat the question?

ZYZZ

No.

NEZA

Then what's your answer?

Zyzz turns to the Judge.

ZYZZ

Sir. With all respect, I refuse to answer that question on the grounds that it might incriminate somebody.

Mr. SCHLIVE gives Zyzz a disapproving glare.

JUDGE

Mr. Zyzz, you have been asked a valid question.

(MORE)

JUDGE (CONT'D)

For the court to render a fair decision, it is in your best interests to answer all questions.

ZYZZ

With all respect your honor, I will not disclose the names of any people who may or may not be members of any organization.

JUDGE

Do either of the two lawyers have any more questions for the witness?

They both shake their heads "No".

JUDGE (CONT'D)

The court finds Mr. Zyzz as a hostile and uncooperative witness.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

The court pronounces him guilty of consorting with, and being a member of, an outlawed and criminal organization. By virtue of the authority invested in this court by the Province of Ishtar and the Holy Empire of Drell, bless her sacred name, this court places him under the authority of the Space Development Consortium for a period of twelve years of indentured servitude.

MR. SCHLIVE

Your honor. Zyzz and his wife have two young children. The defense requests that this family not be separated.

JUDGE

The defense's request is for Joint Domicile?

MR. SCHLIVE

Yes, your honor.

JUDGE

Facing Zyzz.

The intent of the court is that exile with joint domicile is in

harmony with the principles of
 rehabilitative penitence.
 Depending on the verdict of this
 court in the upcoming trial of
 your spouse, the court may find in
 favor of your request.

INT. WAITING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Zilla sits on a bench.

The doors to the court room open and Zyzz is lead out.

ZILLA
 How'd it go?

ZYZZ
 Not bad baby. Stay cool.

THE BAILIFF walks out and beckons for Zilla to enter the
 courtroom.

ZYZZ (CONT'D)
 Good luck.

Zilla enters the courtroom.

LATER

Zyzz waits on the bench.

Suddenly the doors open, and the Bailiff motions for him to
 enter the courtroom.

INT. COURT ROOM

Zyzz stands next to Zilla for sentencing.

JUDGE
 Zilla and Zyzz, it is the decision
 of this court that you are guilty
 of non-violent, political crimes.
 Both of you have relatively clean
 records and will be classified and
 processed as "Category Two
 Offenders".

(MORE)

JUDGE (CONT'D)

It is the judgement of this court
that Joint Domicile is appropriate
in this case.

ZYZZ

Thank you sir.

EXT. ZYZZ'S HOME - DRIVEWAY

A Police Car pulls into the driveway.

Zilla and Zyzz step out of the car. LIEUTENANT HAANIA follows
them into the house.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Haania sits across from Zilla and Zyzz.

HAANIA

Now, it's important that you
understand this clearly. You can
work and go about your usual
everyday activities, go to school,
temple, and medical appointments.
You are allowed to leave this place
only at authorized times for only
pre-approved activities.

ZYZZ

What exactly does that mean?

HAANIA

Okay, let me clarify. Authorized
times basically means daylight
hours. Approved activities include
things like grocery shopping, work,
temple, and the like. Do not. I
repeat. Do not go to any locations
that are not on the list that we'll
be putting together.

EXT. PARK - DAY

It's a beautiful day.

Zilla and Zyzz watch as Moorv and Majanga complete their
marriage ceremony.

As everyone leaves the park, a van marked "Intake Center"
arrives.

MILITARY OFFICIALS hop out of the van and arrest Moorv.

Majanga screams and cries as they shove Moorv into the back of the van, close the doors, and drive away.

INT. CAMPUS - ZYZZ'S OFFICE - DAY

Zyzz packs up all of his belongings. He pulls the awards and certificates down off the wall.

He packs all of his botany books into boxes and tapes them closed.

INT. ZYZZ'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Zilla and Zyzz pack their belongings into boxes.

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

Zilla and Zyzz sit and stare up into the night sky.

ZILLA

How far do you think Earth is from here?

ZYZZ

Well just off-hand, I'd say about 50 million kilometers right about now. It varies. Its a long, long way for sure.

ZILLA

You think it's one of those stars up there?

ZYZZ

Points up
I bet its that bluish one, right there.

ZILLA (CONT'D)

Are you scared?

ZYZZ

Sure. You?

ZILLA

Yeah.

ZYZZ

The way things are going here, this might be the best thing that can happen to us.

ZILLA

I keep telling myself that. But I'm still going to miss Mom and Dad, and all our friends.

ZYZZ

Nods slowly in agreement

Me too, sweetheart.

INT. ZYZZ'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Glort and Mott help Zyzz and Zilla pack up the last of their allowed belongings.

MOTT

You two just couldn't leave well enough alone, could you?

ZILLA

We had to stand up for what we believed in, Dad.

MOTT

Says who?

ZYZZ

We couldn't face our children if we didn't at least try to make this place safer for them.

MOTT

And now you can't even live here anymore.

GLORT

It's all a bit ironic, isn't it?

MOTT

You don't know that this new planet will be any better than this one.

ZILLA

We don't really have a choice in the matter, Dad.

MOTT
And who's fault is that?

ZYZZ
The Syndicate's.

MOTT
Right. Blame the Syndicate because
you two can't function in society.

Shakes his head in disapproval.

GLORT
Do we have to argue now? This might
be the last time we ever see them.
And our grand children.

ZILLA
Thank you mom.

Glort smiles through tears at her daughter, shakes her head,
then they hug.

INT. INTAKE STATION - DAY

Zilla and Zyzz stand in line at the Intake Station.

ARMED GUARDS herd everyone through the appropriate gates.

Zilla and Zyzz have their bags checked by GUARDS.

Zilla keeps their daughters close to her.

INT. SHUTTLE - LATER

Zilla, Zyzz, and their two Daughters board the shuttle.

It's very CROWDED.

INTERCOM
Please prepare for take-off.

EVERYONE ON BOARD straps into their seats.

LATER

A WOMAN walks up to Zyzz and hands him a paper.

WOMAN

Whispering

We are everywhere.

Zyzz takes it and opens it. It's called Reality Check, a Resistance paper.

EXT. THE SHUTTLE GOES UP TO VENUS ORBIT, WHERE IT DOCKS IN THE SHUTTLE-BAY OF THE SPACE-SHIP LENA, IN ORBIT AROUND VENUS.

INT. CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS - DAY

CAPTAIN BANTIA looks over charts and paperwork, pen in hand.

There's a knock at the door.

BANTIA

Cursing to himself.

One damn thing after another,

Can't a guy get anything done

around here?

Then, louder,

Come in.

Zyzz enters.

Bantia leans back in his chair. Studies him.

ZYZZ

Zyzz reporting, sir.

BANTIA

So, Mr. Zyzz. What was it that you needed to talk about so urgently?

ZYZZ

Sir, I've been selected as our group's representative.

BANTIA

Yes?

ZYZZ

According to the Standard Operations Manual, I'm required to establish official contact with the commanding officer.

(MORE)

ZYZZ (CONT'D)

Just thought I'd stop in to
introduce myself sir.

Bantia sighs.

BANTIA

So, how are your people doing on
this trip so far? Everything to
your liking?

ZYZZ

The simulated gravity helps. We're
pretty comfortable, all in all. A
bit cramped. Not much room in the
cabins, but that's to be expected,
I guess.

BANTIA

Have you heard any complaints?

ZYZZ

Not really. Nothing about the ship,
sir. People are missing their
friends and families they had to
leave behind.

(MORE)

ZYZZ (CONT'D)

And there's a generally shitty,
uhh, hostile attitude from the crew
sometimes.

BANTIA

Like what?

ZYZZ

Just the general attitude.

BANTIA

Any disrespect toward you or your
family?

ZYZZ

No sir, not really.

BANTIA

Listen, Zyzz. This is a long trip.
Small, insignificant things that
you'd never notice back home can
get downright irritating after a
while on-board in cramped spaces.

(MORE)

BANTIA (CONT'D)

The crew have all been trained to remain cool and professional at all times, with zero fraternizing with internees. That's just the way it is. That's the way it should be. Now, if you have any specific complaints of departure from these norms, any personnel acting unprofessionally, bring that to our attention through the proper channels. Got that?

ZYZZ

Yes sir.

BANTIA

All I can tell you is to make use of the library and other morale-support activities on board. Warm enough for you guys?

ZYZZ

Well, it's kind of cold on the Lena.

BANTIA

Better get used to that son. Earth's colder than Venus. Food okay?

ZYZZ

Not bad, sir. Kinda repetitious, but not bad. Better than that crap at the Intake Station.

BANTIA

Decent food does help with on-board morale on these runs. You've noticed that the lighting here on the Lena is adjusted to approximate earth days and nights.

ZYZZ

Yes. Seems like as soon as I close my eyes, the damn alarm goes off and it's time to get up again.

BANTIA

Better start getting used to it now. You'll have an easier time once you get to Earth.

Zyzz nods.

BANTIA (CONT'D)

Will that be all then?

ZYZZ

Sir. Most of us on board the Lena are trained professionals. We're chemists. Foresters. Engineers and physicians. I'm a botanist. We're specialists, trained in fields the Consortium needs.

Bantia taps his pen on his desk.

BANTIA

Well, whoopee-ding. So why in the hell are you telling me all this?

ZYZZ

We're not criminals, sir. But that's how we're being treated.

BANTIA

I've been trying to tell you Zyzz. Don't take detached professionalism as an insult. Like I said, that's the way the crew is supposed to conduct themselves. You only have grounds to complain if they depart from those norms.

ZYZZ

And, we're concerned about what the Consortium has in mind for us when we get to Earth. That's the main reason I'm here.

BANTIA

Zyzz, I really don't give a flying fuck what happens to you and your bunch once you leave the Lena. My responsibility is to get your bunch to Earth-orbit intact.

BANTIA (CONT'D)

My duties to you end there. The contract is clear on that.

He holds up a copy of the contract.

BANTIA (CONT'D)

I'm in charge of this ship. That's all.

(MORE)

BANTIA (CONT'D)

What may or may not happen once you arrive on Earth is really no concern of mine. I have no authority on that anyway.

ZYZZ

But --

BANTIA

Have you spoken with Tenodara yet?

ZYZZ

Uh, no?

BANTIA

Do you even know who she is?

ZYZZ

No, sir.

BANTIA

She's the liaison between the Consortium's Earth Affairs Department and the decision-makers on Earth. They're the ones you need to work with, buddy. What happens on Earth is up to them, not me. I'll phone her secretary and recommend that she see you for a brief visit. I said brief. She's busy. And one more thing.

ZYZZ

Sir.

BANTIA

Ask her to have somebody brief you guys on the command structure of this vessel, will you?

ZYZZ

Will do. Thank you sir.

INT. ZILLA AND ZYZZ'S CABIN - LATER

CILNIA AND CALLIBIA sit with Zilla.

CILNIA

What does daddy do?

CALLIBIA

Speaks with a childish lisp,

He's a botanitht. Right mommy?

ZILLA
That's right honey. Now both of
you, say "bot".

CALLIBIA
Bot.

CILNIA
Bot.

ZILLA
Botta.

CILNIA
Botta.

CALLIBIA
Botta.

ZILLA
That's right. Now say botta-nist.

CALLIBIA
Botta-nitht.

CILNIA
Botta-nist.

ZILLA
Well done.

CILNIA
What's a botta-nist, Mommy?

ZILLA
He's kind of a plant doctor.

CALLIBIA
What'th a plant mommy?

ZILLA
Remember back home? All those green
things that were growing
everywhere?

CILNIA
Like trees? Are those plants?

ZILLA

Yes honey. Those are big plants.
But moss and ferns are too, and
grasses. There's all kinds of
plants.

CILNIA

So when a plant get's sick, does
daddy visit them?

ZILLA

Sometimes. Yes.

CALLIBIA

Doeth he have them open their
mouths and thay "Ahhhh"?

ZILLA

Some of the time. But not all of
the time.

They giggle.

CALLIBIA

And what are you mommy?

ZILLA

I'm a mommy. And that's a very
important job.

They both nod.

ZILLA (CONT'D)

And I'm going to be a teacher
someday. Daddy's a teacher too.

INT. SHIP HALLWAY

Zyzz makes his way through the corridors of the ship.

He bumps into Moorv.

MOORV

Hey man, how's it going?

ZYZZ

Just had a meeting with the
Captain.

MOORV

Find out anything important?

ZYZZ

Not much. Just got sent to see somebody else. They got me doing the Bureaucratic Shuffle. How about you?

MOORV

Nope. I'm not even supposed to talk with anybody important directly. That's your job. You'd be getting any important information first, no?

ZYZZ

Nothing yet.

MOORV

No news is good news?

ZYZZ

I guess so. See you later.

MOORV

Don't let them intimidate you. They'll have you dancing like a puppet on a string if you let them.

ZYZZ

We need to stay on good terms with them. As much as that's possible.

MOORV

Just watch it, Zyzz. These bastards are treacherous.

ZYZZ

Something bugging you Moorv?

MOORV

Majanga. I miss her. I mean, how would you feel if they took Zilla away from you? What should I do?

ZYZZ

Have you heard anything from her yet?

MOORV

Oh yeah. Every couple of days. But anything important gets blocked out.

ZYZZ

Both ways?

MOORV

Yeah. They delete any information that might be even remotely sensitive.

ZYZZ

Its gotta be tough, Moorv. But don't blame the crew. Blame the courts. The judges. Blame the whole damn system. But none of this is the crew's doing.

MOORV

Yeah, yeah. They're just following orders. Easy for you to say with Zilla and the kids here with you.

ZYZZ

The communications guys would get into a ton of trouble if they didn't follow their orders.

MOORV

Yeah, yeah.

ZYZZ

When we get to Earth, go to Personnel as soon as you can. Find out what paperwork you need to submit to request that she be sent there. I mean, she's your wife, man. And tell her to do the same thing on her end. See if they censor that.

Moorv nods.

ZYZZ (CONT'D)

How's she doing?

MOORV

She's pretty bummed out.

Starts to cry. Zyzz hugs him.

INT. EARTH AFFAIRS OFFICE - MORNING

Zyzz sits across from TENODARA.

ZYZZ

We were wondering what the Consortium has in mind for us when we reach Earth.

ZYZZ (CONT'D)

How are they going to use us? We're trained specialists, not criminals.

TENODARA

Well, technically, you are criminals. If you weren't guilty of some crime or other, you wouldn't be on this ship.

ZYZZ

But --

She silences him with a wave of her hand.

TENODARA

Now calm down. Of course, we know that you have a cadre of highly trained and dedicated professionals in your group, Mr. Zyzz. The consortium is spending a lot of money to bring you people to Earth. And we are aware that we wouldn't be realizing much gain if we just dumped you of to fend for yourselves. That should be obvious. We'll be giving you all the assistance you need in getting established.

Zyzz nods in agreement.

TENODARA (CONT'D)

I'm going to be working with the Chief Warden of the penal colony, Governor Chaeteesa.

(MORE)

TENODARA (CONT'D)

If I were you, I'd save my breath and talk with her at your first opportunity Earthside.

ZYZZ

I can do that. Can I ask one last question?

TENODARA

Sure; what's that?

ZYZZ

There's a guy in my group. His name is Moorv.

(MORE)

ZYZZ (CONT'D)

His wife is still back home. What does he need to do so they can get stationed together?

Tenodara ruffles through some drawers and pulls out a paper.

TENODARA

He might as well start filling this out now.

She slides the paper to Zyzz.

TENODARA (CONT'D)

He'll have to wait until he knows his duty assignment. So he has a location to enter in that box. It'll save him some time when he gets Earthside.

Zyzz takes the form.

ZYZZ

Thank you. I'll get this to him right away.

INT. ZILLA AND ZYZZ'S CABIN - NIGHT

Zilla and Zyzz play with their children.

INTERCOM

All passengers please report to the cafeteria for an important incoming message from home.

INT. CAFETERIA - MOMENTS LATER

Everybody gathers around the numerous video screens.

The screen reads:

Emergency Management Central Committee

The text vanishes and is soon replaced by: Director Bufo

ZYZZ

Bufo? What?! That, that --

Zilla elbows him to shut up.

Bufo appears on the screen.

BUFO

(on screen)

Good day, my sister and fellow citizens. And it is a good day.

BUFO (CONT'D)

I know you're busy, so I'll cut to the chase, as they say. As you're aware, there have been a few serious disturbances in the past several days at some locations throughout my, uhh... The Empire. This disorder has been instigated and led by criminal and disloyal elements who use discredited, fake science to mislead good, law-abiding people. We could not allow these disruptions to continue. You can rest assured that we are taking stern measures to protect all good citizens of the Empire. We will safeguard the public against this criminal conspiracy. You can be confident that the descent into senseless violence and chaos has been firmly halted. With your help and the guidance of the Goddess of Wisdom and Mercy, those guilty will be found and dealt with appropriately. Martial law will soon be lifted. I thank you for your cooperation. Together, we will put all this behind us and return to normalcy soon.

The screen reads Emergency Management Central Committee, then the transmission ends.

INT. SHUTTLE BAY LATER

Three shuttles are in the shuttle bay, parked and loaded with provisions.

Zilla, Zyzz, and their daughters board a shuttle marked for Beta Colony.

Moorv goes to a different shuttle.

EXT. EARTH

EXT. COLONY - SOMEWHERE IN THE JUNGLES OF NORTHEASTERN SOUTH AMERICA, THE SHUTTLE ARRIVES AT THE COLONY.

The doors open and everyone exits. Including Zyzzy, Zilla, and their children.

Zyzzy takes in his surroundings.

ZYZZY
Well, this is it.

As they take their first steps outside, they feel wobbly.

ZYZZY (CONT'D)
I'm feeling funny. You okay Zilla?

ZILLA
(Off-balance.)
Holy Drell! I'm dizzy as hell.

She grabs his forearm.

ZYZZY
Whew! I know what you mean. The air smells funny here, doesn't it? Kinda sweetish.

A FLIGHT ATTENDANT approaches them.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
You're okay. Just stand where you are a few seconds. Breathe deeply. Try to hiss and stretch. It'll help clear you spiracles. It's normal to feel a little dazed at first. Full Earth gravity does it to me too.

The Flight Attendant leads them toward an entryway that leads them all to --

INT. PROCESSING CENTER - COMMUNAL SHOWER - DAY

All of the passengers go through the communal shower. As they exit, they are routed through a --

INT. CHAMBER

As they go through the chamber, they are treated with a disinfectant mist.

They follow arrows down a corridor to --

INT. ROOM 200

The room has a couple dozen chairs.

Zilla, Zyzzy, and their daughters sit down.

After everyone is seated, SERGEANT BOLBE steps in front of the group.

BOLBE

On behalf of Governor-General Chaeteesa and Chief Warden Mulf, I'd like to welcome you to Earth. Now, as you're probably well aware, the Drelbi colonies on Earth are in a tenuous situation. Earth bases are sited, and our activities are adjusted, to minimize contact with human populations. You'll notice that our buildings are primarily underground. We have one thing going for us. We can see much farther into the long-wave end of the spectrum than humans can. From tests we've conducted, apparently their infra-red vision is limited, so they can't see bugger-all in the dark.

SOMEONE IN THE CROWD

Is all this subterfuge really necessary?

BOLBE

Indeed it is. As you will learn soon enough.

ANOTHER PERSON

How cold does it get here?

BOLBE

Our major bases have been sited in seismically inactive locations where the climate is most like Venus. Outposts tend to be located in less hospitable sites. Subterranean living quarters insulate residents from temperature extremes. You folks will feel right at home here. But there are places on Earth, hell, I'll be honest with you, most of this planet can get so cold, you'd freeze in minutes if you went out unprotected.

(MORE)

BOLBE (CONT'D)

Be glad you're here, where you can breathe easily, without having to wear protective suits.

ANOTHER PERSON

How do the Earth people keep from freezing?

BOLBE

You're Earth people now. As for the humans? Insulation. They wear skins and furs they cut off from other mammals they've killed. Or fabric made from various plant fibers. What's odd about these humans is that many wear this fur or fabric even in warm seasons, or in places where it's never needed at all. Some of those living here in the tropics wear no clothing except for ceremonial occasions.

ANOTHER PERSON

How do they get enough air with so many of the spiracles covered up?

BOLBE

Their respiratory systems are different than ours. They get most of their oxygen through their noses and mouths. Their spiracles are very reduced compared to ours. Pores would be a more accurate term.

ZYZZ

Strange creatures.

BOLBE

That they are. Even with all these problems, Earth is the Consortium's best project. By far. You want cold? Go to Mars. At some time or other, many of you will probably be visiting some of our outposts, it can get cold at some of those too.

CROWD

No thanks!

BOLBE

Instead of importing everything or growing food hydroponically like they do on Mars and Mercury bases - a complicated affair at best, we can just eat off the land here, once you know what's good and what's poison.

BOLBE (CONT'D)

On the other hand, nothing on Mercury or Mars wants to eat us. On Earth, it seems like its one damn thing after another.

Everyone in the crowd looks at each other. Fear and worry on their faces.

BOLBE (CONT'D)

Any more questions?

There are no more questions.

BOLBE (CONT'D)

Okay. That's all for today. At this time you will all proceed to the barracks to your designated rooms and await further instructions. Now, which one of you is Zyzz?

ZYZZ

That would be me.

BOLBE

Okay. The rest of you can go.

Everyone packs up their things to leave --

-- except for Zyzz, who approaches Bolbe.

BOLBE (CONT'D)

I understand you were selected as this group's rep?

ZYZZ

I was.

BOLBE

How's that working so far?

ZYZZ

Pretty good; no problems.

BOLBE

Good: you'll continue with that.
Tomorrow at 8:00 you have an
appointment with Colonel Ameles.
She's the warden's Chief Adjutant
for Personnel. Somebody will be at
your barracks to pick you up at
7:40. Think you can handle that?

ZYZZ

Yes sir.

INT. ZYZZ AND ZILLA'S SUITE - LATER

Zyzz and Zilla unpack bags while their daughters play.

INT. MESS HALL - LATER

The family sits for a nice meal in their new home.

INT. JEEP - MORNING

Zyzz rides on the Jeep, a CORPORAL drives.

EXT. MANUFACTURER - LATER

Zyzz gets out of the Jeep and enters --

INT. MANUFACTURER

As he walks through the facility he can see the assembly
lines where they make --

Zappers. Radios. Spare parts.

DEPORTEES are busy working at the various stations.

Zyzz eventually arrives at --

INT. COLONEL AMELES OFFICE

COLONEL AMELES sits behind her desk. Rugged, rough-looking.
The moment Zyzz enters, she motions for him to sit across
from her.

As Zyzz sits down --

AMELES

So who the hell made you the honcho of this bunch?

ZYZZ

They elected me. I'm just lucky I guess.

AMELES

As this group's rep, you're getting the first interview, so pass this information along to your bunch. We've been through your files and intend to utilize your skills, experience, and training to the max. Each one of you will be scheduled for an interview with me or one of my assistants. They'll all get briefed about their duty assignments. That's about all for that.

ZYZZ

Yes, Ma'am.

AMELES

Relax professor. This should be good news for you.

ZYZZ

Ma'am?

AMELES

You're going to be lead botanist for this post. I have some of your books. Not bad. I'm no botanist, but I can understand them.

ZYZZ

Thanks Ma'am. That a sign of a good field guide.

AMELES

I suppose it is. Your spouse Zilla, she was an education major, correct?

ZYZZ

That's right, Ma'am. General elementary education. She just recently graduated.

AMELES

Well, she'd better be ready for teaching. That's what she's going to be doing here.

Zyzz nods.

AMELES (CONT'D)

She'll get all the details at her interview, but you can tell her that much.

ZYZZ

Okay.

AMELES

So tell me. What do you think of our operation so far?

ZYZZ

From what I've been able to see so far, it's pretty impressive. You're doing a lot here.

AMELES

Now try and do all this while standing on one foot with one hand tied behind your back.

ZYZZ

Ma'am?

With a ruler in hand, she walks over to a map on the wall showing all the Space Consortium's Earth bases.

AMELES

All this subterfuge gets tiresome after a while. So damn tiresome. And it's not cheap. A royal pain in the ass, is what it is.

ZYZZ

Is that right?

AMELES

Damn right it is. If we wanted to, we could just erase these worthless humans and have this place and all these resources to ourselves. Eliminate the lot of them. Just clean up this place. But, oh no. Instead, we have to hide like termites in these damn hidey-holes.

ZYZZ

Whew. Isn't that a little, uhh, extreme?

AMELES

I don't think so. Some of them have already stumbled through our AO-- that's Area of Operations.

Uses ruler to indicate perimeter of AO.

ZYZZ

What happened?

AMELES

Nothing much. Don't get me wrong. Camouflage does help. They apparently didn't notice anything unusual and went on their way. Dumb shits. And size matters.

ZYZZ

Huh?

AMELES

Well, we can come and go pretty well as we please without being detected. If we and our shuttles were any bigger, say, human-sized, we'd have a lot more trouble.

ZYZZ

Yeah. Could we power the perimeter? An invisible fence to zap intruders?

AMELES

Too expensive. And it's too damn wet around here. A perimeter force-field would malfunction in no time. Plus, it would probably just attract more attention.

(MORE)

AMELES (CONT'D)

One of these days we're going to be forced to take some corrective action, mark my words. These humans are spreading like a fungus. Too damn many of them. If they keep it up, they'll ruin this freakin' planet.

ZYZZ

Maybe. How would we do it?

AMELES

Hell. It wouldn't be hard to send a few lethal gifts to their population centers.

She hits her thigh with the ruler.

ZYZZ

Like what? I don't --

AMELES

-- We could engineer strains of bacteria or viruses and start a few good epidemics. They need that to help bring their numbers down anyway. It would be easy to exterminate the whole mess of them.

ZYZZ

Couldn't that backfire and wipe us out as well?

AMELES

Nah. We'd only use human-specific pathogens that wouldn't harm us in the least. Or we could do it the old-fashioned way.

ZYZZ

What would that be?

AMELES

Wage war on them.

ZYZZ

Mega-zappers versus, what, spears and arrows?

AMELES

What we need is a good war. Take the gloves off. Show them who's boss around here. Clean up this place for good.

(MORE)

AMELES (CONT'D)

We could wipe their sorry asses off the face of this planet once and for all, instead of hiding in these damn holes.

Hits herself again in her thigh with ruler.

ZYZZ

It's uhhh, something to think about...

AMELES

Well enough of that for now. Everybody in your group that's been cleared for this duty station has passed their psycho-social profiles with flying colors. And you've all been assigned work that best aligns with your profiles.

ZYZZ

Yes Ma'am.

AMELES

To tell you the truth, some of you did get some rather, uhhhh, shall we say unconventional results in your social and political profiles.

ZYZZ

Oh really?

AMELES

Is that all you have to say?

ZYZZ

I'm listening. Please, go on.

AMELES

A botanist like you is probably going to be a tree-hugger. I can live with that.

ZYZZ

Thanks.

AMELES

Life here is normally pretty simple. We like it that way. You will live comfortably. But you will work. There's a helluva lot of work to do here. We need you, and you need us.

(MORE)

AMELES (CONT'D)

We see ourselves as a family here.
And we have rules that will be
enforced.

ZYZZ

Understood.

AMELES

You will be squad leader on the
Research and Development Team, for
any botany-related field work.

ZYZZ

How many on a squad?

AMELES

Varies. Anywhere from three to a
dozen, depending on the assignment.
You'll be given a field commission;
acting rank of Lieutenant. We'll
start you out with just a few
personnel, see how you manage.

AMELES (CONT'D)

Then maybe give you more. Your
records indicate that you're an
experienced field-work leader.

ZYZZ

What's the mission of the team?

AMELES

Whatever I say it is. Your mission
is to follow orders. You know
something about plants. The
Consortium doesn't like to waste
expertise. There's quite a variety
of plant species on this planet.
Many potential food sources. We've
analyzed a few species already.
You've had some in the mess hall.

ZYZZ

(Nods)

Not bad. No ill effects noticed
yet.

AMELES

Good to hear that. But so far,
we've barely scratched the surface.
That's where you fit in. You're to
build on that.

(MORE)

AMELES (CONT'D)

You will identify and evaluate plants for their fitness for Drelbi consumption.

(MORE)

AMELES (CONT'D)

Nutritional value, toxicity, potential industrial applications. Our labs have state of the art analytical equipment. You'll be seeing that very soon.

ZYZZ

Yeah?

AMELES

We want total bio-chemical analysis. Stems. Leaves. Roots. The whole plant.

ZYZZ

This is huge, how many do you have working on this?

AMELES

There's you and two more in your squad to start with. Plus me. That makes four.

AMELES (CONT'D)

The lab supports you and several other projects. They're stretched pretty thin.

ZYZZ

Sounds like it.

AMELES

The batch of recruits that you'll be leading have already started training. Several will be augmenting our lab staff. Flexibility: that will be a real asset here.

ZYZZ

If you don't mind me saying so, this sounds like a pretty big project.

Ameles nods.

ZYZZ (CONT'D)

From what I've seen of this place so far, the sort of comprehensive inventory you're talking about will be way too big for just three field researchers.

AMELES

There's enough work here for a hundred lifetimes, Lieutenant.

INT. LAB - LATER

ZHAW, dressed in a lab coat, approaches Zilla, Zyzs, and their two daughters.

ZYZZ

Hi! This is my wife Zilla, and this is Callibia and this is Cilnia.

ZHAW

Glad to meet all of you.

She leads them through an entry-way with a small, olive drab sign that read: "Laboratories"

ZHAW (CONT'D)

We have a team of biochemists and physiologists that are developing a nutrition supplement program.

A VOLUNTEER sits amongst the CHEMISTS.

ZHAW (CONT'D)

This volunteer is receiving an implant containing chloroplasts. Now, who can tell me what a chloroplast is?

She smiles at the girls.

CILNIA

Ma'am, a chloroplast is a cell that contains chlorophyll. It's where photosynthesis takes place.

ZHAW

That's right! Looks like we have a budding scientist here. When exposed to sunlight, the chlorophyll tattoo will make sugars that this volunteer's body will use to supplement his nutrition.

(MORE)

ZHAW (CONT'D)

This will enable recipients to stay alive through lean times when they can't get enough to eat. All they'll need is sunshine and air. In places like Mercury, nearly everything, and all the food, has to be imported.

(MORE)

ZHAW (CONT'D)

You can see that this could have significant benefits. Even here on Earth, where food is no problem, this may prove useful. One of the problems with this approach is that too many chloroplasts can cause obesity. We're working out a chloroplast-to-body-weight calculus.

She leads them to another area of the laboratory.

INT. BRIEFING ROOM - MORNING

Zyzz is seated between KLUM and SCHNORR.

In the front of the room stands TECHNICAL SERGEANT GORFF.

GORFF

Before you go outside the perimeter, make sure your canteens are filled. We have a good supply of potable water here at Beta colony, treated to reduce risks of waterborne diseases. Use this.

GORFF (CONT'D)

Do NOT drink the water out there. Might look good, but it's nasty. Full of pathogenic bacteria. Any questions about that?

ZYZZ

I think we've got it, Sarge.

GORFF

Each of you will be issued a beeper. That beeper will be set to go off an hour before sunset. Whatever you're doing, wrap it up and return to base. You'll also be issued back-packs.

(MORE)

GORFF (CONT'D)

Pack plenty of food with you.
Always. If you get stuck out there,
you'll be glad you have it.

ZYZZ

Better to have it and not need it
than to need it and not have it?

GORFF

Yes, sir.

Sgt. Gorff walks over to a table and picks up some berries.

GORFF (CONT'D)

See these?

KLUM

Yes.

GORFF

Look good, don't they?

SCHNORR

(Starts to reach for
some.)

Yeah, they do.

GORFF

They're poison. Eat a few of these
and you're an ex-Drelb. Within
minutes. That's after severe
cramps, pain, and barfing your guts
out. Some birds can eat these with
no apparent harm, but they'll kill
you.

GORFF (CONT'D)

Now, as far as your request for
access to communications with
Venus, yes, we can certainly
schedule times when your people can
come use the commo-services. Those
opportunities are limited, and will
be at our discretion. Be aware that
there can be up to a fifteen-minute
delay when communicating with
Venus. Specialists will help you,
with orders to use the delays to
ensure you don't stray into un-
permitted topics. And there's a
regular mail service. Any
questions?

ZYZZ

(Glances at GORFF and
KLUM, they shake their
heads; no questions.)

I think we're good, Sarge.

EXT. JUNGLE - MORNING

Zyzz, Klum, and Schnorr conduct field research. They use their binoculars to observe mantises.

SCHNORR

We should take one in for examination. I would love to take a look inside that head.

ZYZZ

No way. We don't kill anything unless we can't avoid it. Start something that would be perceived as hostile, there's no telling where the hell it might end up.

SCHNORR

How about stunning one and examining it under anesthesia?

ZYZZ

Maybe. But we wouldn't be able to do it here. Let's bring it in, let the guys in the lab do their thing. Run a total scan while they're at it.

SCHNORR

We could do it now. Knock him out with a zapper and bring him in.

ZYZZ

How are we going to get it to the lab? No, we need to organize this. A stretcher and enough volunteers to carry it. We'll need to prep the scanner first. Schnorr, start putting together a checklist. What tests we should run, what equipment we need. Then, get with the lab and see what they think.

KLUM

Once we zap one of these things and bring it in, they'll only have a limited amount of time to these tests and return the subject back outside the compound. Too much anesthetic could kill one of these things.

ZYZZ

True 'nuff.

A flapping sound is heard. They look up to see a bright yellow and blue toucan land on an avocado tree.

KLUM

Good thing those things aren't carnivorous. Look at the size of that mouth.

A blue and red dragonfly whirred by.

Then another monster - a long black one - glistens in the sunshine as it slithers across their path and slips into some weeds.

Zyzz's breath catches and his heart flutters.

SCHNORR

Damn! Did you see the size of that freakin' worm?

ZYZZ

Did you see the tongue flicking out?

KLUM

Yeah.

SCHNORR

And did you see those eyes?

KLUM

Uh-huh.

ZYZZ

And scales? Do worms have scales?

SCHNORR

Nope.

ZYZZ

Do worms have eyes? Tongues? Backbones?

KLUM

Nope. Must be one of them snakes professor?

ZYZZ

I'm guessing it was. They do look superficially like worms, don't they? They're legless reptiles. We're lucky that thing wasn't hungry. Some of them get to be six feet long.

A dry, rattling noise gets their attention.

They freeze. On high alert.

Out of nowhere, a mantis jumps out from the undergrowth and grabs Klum.

It pierces him with its pincer forearms.

Klum's scream is quickly cut short as the mantis bites his head off.

Zyzz and Schnorr watch in horror as the mantis eats him.

ZYZZ (CONT'D)

Holy shit!

Zyzz and Schnorr quickly open fire on it with their zappers.

Seconds later the mantis is on the ground. Dead, burnt.

SCHNORR

Filthy stupid piece of shit!

He kicks the mantis. Zyzz does the same.

Zyzz takes out his radio --

ZYZZ

(into radio)

Zyzz to Base, Zyzz to Base. Come in Base, over.

BASE

(thru radio)

Base here. Over.

ZYZZ

(into radio)

Yes. We have trouble. A fatality. Bring a stretcher, over.

BASE
 (thru radio)
 What's wrong? What happened? Over.

ZYZZ
 (into radio)
 It's Klum. A mantis killed him. Bit
 his fuckin' head right off. Just
 bring the damn stretcher. Over.

BASE
 (thru radio)
 We've got your coordinates. Be
 there shortly. Hold tight. Over.

INT. ZYZZ AND ZILLA'S SUITE - NIGHT

Zyzz looks at some plant samples with his magnifier.

ZYZZ
 Shit. First day on the job and my
 team has a casualty. What the hell
 have we gotten into?

Zilla enter the room with a letter in her hand.

ZILLA
 We got a letter today from Mom.

ZYZZ
 Did you read it?

ZILLA
 I was waiting for you. Should I
 read it now?

ZYZZ
 Sure.

Zilla opens the letter.

ZILLA
 (reading aloud)
 Dear daughter, son, and dearest
 Callibia and Cilnia. I trust that
 things are going well for you and
 your friends on Earth. As you've
 probably heard, things haven't been
 going so well here. We've been
 having some crazy weather. Would
 you believe hurricanes? We never
 have hurricanes in Brzzt!

(MORE)

ZILLA (CONT'D)

Have you heard about the horrible fires we've been having? One started on a hot afternoon when a rusty old power line snapped, sparking a blaze in the underlying brush. There have been cutbacks in all the local Emergency Service and Public Safety Departments, and that's resulted in crippled response efforts. Volunteers are just no substitute for professional firefighters. Guzz did what he could to help the volunteers, but before they could even pull on their protective gear, the flames were already out of control. In a few hours, a huge dark thundercloud appeared, formed by the vaporized sap of thousands of trees. It towered over the mountains. You should've seen the lightning! Do you remember that fellow that got kidnapped a few months ago? It was in all the papers and on TV. His name was Bufo. He and his family all were killed in a terrible fire. His house, along with most of the other places in his hoity-toity high-security gated community? "Gone in minutes," it says. I have the newspaper right here. Its all so ironic. If I would have been a radical, we might be all been together now on Earth!

ZILLA (CONT'D)

Normally, I'd say that I wish you were here with me, but I can't say that now. Not anymore. It would break your heart to see all the forests and bayous that you love so much go up in smoke. The situation here is grim, my beloved. If things continue as they are, it may well be the end of all of us, and all we have grown to love and take for granted. I have never seen it so incredibly hot. I hope this letter gets to you. With all my love, Mom.

Zilla lowers the letter and starts crying.

Zyzz puts his arm around her to console her .

INT. SCHOOL - MORNING

Zilla enters a full classroom. She takes her place in front of the class and smiles as all her eager students open their books.

INT. AUDITORIUM - A YEAR LATER - NIGHT

Everyone stares at the screens as they suddenly turn on.

There is an audible gasp from everyone that has gathered.

The screens show the devastation and destruction of Venus.

EVERYONE reacts differently. SOME ARE MAD. OTHERS ARE HEARTBROKEN.

Lush forests have been replaced with devastation.

The entire planet looks ravaged, post-apocalyptic.

ANGRY DRELB

What is this? Some kind of sick
joke?

ZILLA

Oh it's real. This is Venus. Or at
least, was.

They continue to watch as different images flash on the screen.

The oceans are gone. Boiled away.

The trees and forests are gone.

ZYZZ

Looks distraught, upset

It happened so damn fast! Its all gone. Crap; is there anything left at all?! Is everything burned into ashes?

AMELES

You know what worries me?

ZYZZ

What?

AMELES

The Mercury and Mars colonies. Ever think of them? All their supplies come... came from Venus. How the fuck are they gonna survive now?

ZYZZ AND ZILLA

Shake their heads.

ZILLA

We produce enough food here for us,
but exporting it to other planets?

AMELES

Mercury personnel will have to
evacuate. Most of 'em will probably
be coming here, some to Mars.
They're growing food there, but
they'll have to make some changes,
big-time.

ZYZZ

Soil's good on Mars. And their
water projects are doin' okay. From
what I've heard, their food-
production is in fairly good shape.

AMELES

Yeah. But Mercury? With Venus going
down the crapper, they're probably
tightening down on food rationing
already.

ZYZZ

How much time would you give them?

AMELES

Huh. Probably no more than a month.

ZYZZ

Earth months?

AMELES

Yeah. Not much time. They'd better
start getting their butts out of
that dump, now.

Zilla and Zyzz nod.

INT. ZYZZ AND ZILLA'S SUITE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Zyzz and Zilla lay in bed.

ZYZZ

I can't help feeling like there was
more I could have done.

ZILLA

Stop feeling sorry for yourself. You did enough to get us deported, didn't you? You got us out of there. We could have been toast. We are alive, dammit! You saved our lives.

ZYZZ

You woke me up Zilla. If it wasn't for you, we'd all have been fried by now.

ZILLA

This is home now. And it's really not that bad a place.

ZYZZ

...If some stupid Earth-mantis doesn't eat you. Hey: we'll probably be getting some new neighbors.

ZILLA

You think so?

ZYZZ

They'll be clearing out the Mercury bases. Most of them will be coming here. Makes more sense then sending them all the way to Mars. I wonder how many.

ZILLA

Try not to let it bother you. And don't let what happened on Venus get you down. We're safe. This is our home now.

FADE OUT.