

ARC OF THE PHOENIX

by

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inspired by characters created by Dan O'Bannon and John Carpenter
and lyrics by Bill Taylor

SCREEN FLASHES RED:

ATTENTION! ATTENTION! ATTENTION!

Then, COMPUTER READOUT types:

INCOMING TRANSMISSION

COMMANDING OFFICER EYES ONLY:

United Planets Space Corps council report.

Funding for Colonization Clean Sweep: EXPIRED.

Search for sentient non-terrestrial life: INCONCLUSIVE.

Effective immediately, all Atomic Destruction Craft and Explorer-class scout ships: TERMINATED.

Sorry to break this to you, guys.

Please keep this frequency clear to advise your own revised mission parameters.

Sincerely, General R.T. Parsley UPSC Explorer Mission Command.

TRANSMISSION ENDS.

EXT. SPACE

A squat United Planets ATOMIC DESTRUCTION CRAFT floats above a swollen RED SUN. READOUT TYPES OVER:

UPSC *Dark Star*, ADC 2239-5531

Crew: 5

Location: Veil Nebula, NGC 6960.

Mission time: 4 years, 6 months, 3 days,
12 hours, 23 mins, 5 seconds.

A filtered RADIO VOICE -- PINBACK -- is heard as mission time ticks down.

PINBACK

Lieutenant Doolittle? Lieutenant?

We have a problem with Bomb

Number-- Augh!

The radio abruptly cuts off. Silence, then FEEDBACK and blowing into mic.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Lieutenant? I'm getting some
really funny readings down here.

(MORE)

PINBACK (CONT'D)
 I think Bomb Number 20 might be
 about to--

The Dark Star silently EXPLODES. Fire and debris blossom, once, twice, three times WHITING OUT THE SCREEN. Twisted, twirling objects fly out into space. One twisted, twirling object is a space-suited MAN.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
 Aaaaaaugh!

The man tumbles, flailing, collides with a spinning girder.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
 Ooof!

He grabs hold, catches his breath and depolarizes his faceplate. He is 30, moon-faced, paunchy, bearded; name tag: PINBACK, V.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
 What do you know? I made it.

Pinback notices debris float past: a toilet tank, a copy of Playboy, a scorched teddy bear with one eye missing. Pinback reaches for the bear, but only succeeds in batting it into a fast spin. A GLOW OF COLORED LIGHTS makes him look round.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
 Hey...

A LUMINESCENT GAS CLOUD is visible through the debris, growing bigger, pulsating.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
 I'm saved! Over here! Yoo hoo!

A final bright EXPLOSION.

Pinback loses his grip, shoots off again with a hundred times more speed and dwindles until he disappears, a speck among the stars.

TACTICAL DISPLAY

The image DIGITIZES to a COMPUTER SIMULATION, with Pinback depicted as a BLIP, tracing an arc across the stars.

The display ZOOMS BACK from the CYGNUS CONSTELLATION, through giant nebulae and galaxies, plotting Pinback's trajectory, which becomes less and less significant.

ON-SCREEN DATA counts down magnitudes of space: 1,400 light years... 1,500... 1,600....

In parallel, a second set of DATA shows MISSION TIME: 15 years... 20... 25... 30... and upward.

A TRACKING BEACON

Rotates, scanning the constant howl and crackle of DEEP SPACE STATIC. The beacon is part of a porcupine array of antennae floating above a moon. STATIC abates, tunes in, and gives way to a faint but constant BEEP.

Other larger antenna turn to face the same direction and the BEEPING noise grows stronger to a SLOW HEARTBEAT.

Far out in space, a tiny speck approaches. Floating closer, it is visible as FROZEN PINBACK.

GENERAL PARSLEY (V.O.)
How long has it been, gentlemen?
From their last reported call-in
to where we picked him up on the
outer spiral arm: that's sixty
years, at least. How long do you
think a man could survive on his
e.v.a.-pack alone? Anybody? Doctor
Boron?

INT. MEDLAB - VIDEO DISPLAY

Numbers and medical charts scroll past, then Pinback slides into view, nude, hair and beard grown enormous, eyes closed, mouth hanging open. A thin robot arm taps his cheek. Pinback snaps awake, screen displays jump to life. He cannot move his facial muscles, but his eyeballs dart about in fright.

DOCTOR BORON (V.O.)
That's difficult to answer,
General Parsley. A man in this
condition, with little or no motor
function and limited brain-wave
activity -- I'd have given him,
oh, twenty weeks.

The robot arm holds open one of Pinback's eyelids. Another reaches in with a needle and drops water in the eye. Robot arms continue probing and prodding, Pinback reacting all the time like a frightened laboratory animal.

GENERAL PARSLEY (V.O.)
Yet none of us can explain what
kept him alive?

DOCTOR BORON (V.O.)
At this point, no.
(MORE)

DOCTOR BORON (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Sergeant Pinback is either an
extraordinary man, or
extraordinarily lucky.

DOCTOR HAYDEN (V.O.)
There's nothing extraordinary
about his intellect. He's nearly
fifty points below the standard
U.P. rating. Even by the standards
of sixty years ago, that would
have put him cleaning toilets.

DOCTOR BORON (V.O.)
Don't be so quick to judge him,
Doctor Hayden. Sergeant Pinback's
record is exemplary. The stellar
detonation atomic destruction
craft embodied the pioneer spirit.

DOCTOR HAYDEN (V.O.)
Bombing 'unstable' stars? What
kind of mission is that? And
whoever heard of this 'Dark Star'?

DOCTOR BORON (V.O.)
I stand by my report. Neural decay
is to be expected after protracted
deep space exposure. Give him time
to recoup. Besides, he could be
useful to the program.

Electrodes are applied to Pinback's face. A hypodermic follows.
His muscles twitch and spasm. He begins to gibber. More robot
arms hold him down.

GENERAL PARSLEY (V.O.)
Are we agreed, gentlemen, that he
is no threat to himself or to the
Corps?

DOCTOR HAYDEN (V.O.)
He's no use to us.

GENERAL PARSLEY (V.O.)
Doctor Boron?

DOCTOR BORON (V.O.)
Sergeant Pinback is no threat.
Keep him supervised. Send him
home.

DOCTOR HAYDEN (V.O.)
Just get him out of here.

Pinback breaks free for an instant. Robot arms restrain him, but he grabs a microphone and SCREAMS.

EXT. PLANET EARTH

Ringed by an equatorial space station. Space traffic flits about.

INT. EARTH STATION - DAY

A light above an airlock PINGS. The door opens.

Around the airlock, REPORTERS jostle behind a barrier with bright lights and cameras.

Flanked by a buzz-cut UPSC ESCORT, Pinback steps out of the airlock in full Space Corps uniform, a medal on his chest, his hair and beard now trimmed. Lights blaze in his face. Cries of 'There he is!' And 'Sergeant Pinback!' Pinback stares back at the reporters, bewildered, as he is led past. He gives them a little wave. The reporters go wild.

EXT. MAIN STREET, BENSON, ARIZONA - DAY

A huge banner 'Welcome home, Sergeant Pinback' spans the street.

Ticker tape is everywhere, crowds line the streets, cheering and waving flags. A marching band with teenage majorettes adorned with UPSC livery parades past, preceding an old-fashioned open top limo.

Pinback is propped up between his escorts, now growing more adept at smiling and waving, although still bewildered.

PINBACK

Like this?

ESCORT

Doing good, sir.

Pinback waves more enthusiastically and throws a kiss into the crowd. A female bystander swoons.

EXT. DUPLEX - DAY

In a residential street, banners and balloons festoon a single-story home with a chain-link fence and a grubby lawn. Cheers from onlookers as Pinback's limo arrives.

MARTHA and EVAN - a homey couple in their 40s - emerge from the duplex with a gaggle of small children and other family members.

The U.P. escort opens the limo door. Pinback steps out, and is confronted by a sea of faces staring at him, waiting for him to make the next move. One catches his eye, a sexy 23 year old girl with a shock of glorious red hair.

This is MIRANDA, and there is little doubt about what she would like to do to the prodigal space traveler.

Pinback raises his hand, in uncertain greeting. Martha runs forward and throws her arms around him, blurting tears. Evan shakes Pinback's hand and then joins in the hug. Crowd all cheer.

INT. DUPLEX, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Faces of grubby children peer in the windows, trying to catch a glimpse at the scene inside.

Martha leads Pinback into a gloomy living room crammed with family members. Pinback continues grinning and nodding at everyone, giving little waves. Miranda squeezes past and gives Pinback a sly smile.

MIRANDA

Very pleased to meet you.

MARTHA

(a mile a minute)

Of course, you won't remember
Miranda, your second cousin once
removed. Her husband, my son
Grady, was in space, you know, God
rest his soul. He's dead now.
Miranda here, she baked you this
darlin' cake.

MIRANDA

Hope you have a sweet tooth.

Pinback sees a cake decorated with an icing sugar spaceman
astride a pink rocket. Somewhere a DOG starts to bark.

EVAN

We have a surprise for you now,
Virgil. Brace yourself, okay?

Children are pulled aside to reveal VIRGIL JR. -- a frightening
fossil of an old man, somewhere in his 90s, seated in a
wheelchair, a cane across his lap.

Pinback starts to smile until he notices the old man is decked out in an old Space Corp uniform, his chest full of medals.

MARTHA

Virgil, meet your brother, my
granddaddy, Virgil Junior.

A hush falls on the room, although the BARKING DOG continues. The old man fixes Pinback with a steely glare and whirs forward, squinting critically.

VIRGIL JR.

(yells)

Will someone silence that dog?

The unseen dog is silenced. Pinback tries to speak but, instead, emits a croak that turns into a coughing fit.

MARTHA

Oh, my! Miranda darling, go get a
glass of water, toot sweet!

MIRANDA

Yes, mama.

VIRGIL JR.

This here ain't Virgil!

The old man stabs Pinback with his cane then hits him across the knees. Pinback shrieks, fending off the blows.

PINBACK

Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow!

Shock and bafflement all around. Evan pries the cane from his grandfather-in-law. The U.P. escort looks in through the screen door.

EVAN

Pappy, please. This here is your
brother. It's an Einstein time
dilation. He's been lost in space
for years. He's a hero now.

VIRGIL JR.

I'm tellin' you, it ain't him!

The MAD DOG from outside bounds into the room.

VIRGIL JR. (CONT'D)

Sic him, Gus!

'Gus' goes for Pinback's legs. Pinback jumps up onto the table, which upends and catapults the cake into the air --

SLOW-MO

-- As sugar spaceman and pink rocket sail across the room.

FAMILY

-- Scream and dive for cover.

MARTHA

-- Pulls the dog away from Pinback, and then looks up to see
VIRGIL JR.

-- Receives the cake, full face.

EXT. TRAILER PARK - DAY

The Space Corps limo pulls away from a mobile home, viewed by a small gathering of other trailer residents.

INSIDE THE LIMO

The escort removes his sunglasses, touches his ear and speaks into a tiny microphone:

ESCORT

Ithaca Base, the Virgil has
landed.

INT. MOBILE HOME - DAY

Martha and Evan, now in a change of clothes, show Pinback his new home and marvel at the surroundings.

EVAN

Gotta hand it to 'em. The Corps
looks after its own.

Pinback remains standing as Evan tests a low-slung couch, still factory-plastic-wrapped, then moves to the kitchen where a fruit basket sits, with a bottle of fancy wine and Space Corps flags. Evan opens the refrigerator, finds it filled with food, and is more impressed by a large stock of beer. He helps himself and passes one to Pinback. Martha frowns, disapproving.

MARTHA

We'll leave you to settle, Virgil
honey. Why don't you call, after
you freshen up? You know how to
work it, sugar?

She points to a large dormant TV screen recessed in the ceiling. Pinback gawks up but sees no obvious controls.

EVAN

Come on by for dinner. We'll do ribs. Miranda will be there. You met Miranda, right? She'll set your feet back on the ground, Virge, know what I mean.

MARTHA

Evan!
(then, to Pinback)
Will you call us, hon?

PINBACK

I will. Thank you.

Evan pops the seal on the beer in Pinback's hand. Martha drags her husband out, scolding him before they are out of earshot.

MARTHA

What kind of talk is that about your own daughter-in-law?

EVAN

Gimme a break. After eighty years, a guy's gotta clean his pipes.

Pinback stares at his beer, closes the door, sits on the couch, which crinkles nosily under him.

He notices a small computer pad 'Tee Vee Gyde' on the coffee table. Pinback sets his beer down, picks up the pad. It is not a book, has no buttons or controls.

PINBACK

How do you turn it on?

On Pinback's 'on' SOUNDS OF EXPLOSIONS AND MACHINE GUN FIRE. Pinback cowers, then sees the ceiling screen playing an OLD WAR MOVIE. Pinback examines the remote again, yells into it like a walkie-talkie.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Change it!

The screen above changes to a ROAR AND FLASH OF TEETH as a lion floors an African gazelle in a nature documentary.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Change it!

BASEBALL. Pinback lays back with his beer.

EXT. TRAILER PARK - NIGHT

Pinback's new home flickers from within with TV light.

INT. MOBILE HOME - NIGHT

The ceiling screen plays ABBOTT AND COSTELLO. Pinback is still prone on the couch, his beer propped on his stomach, his head thrown back, eyes closed, mouth open. He SNORES.

Abbott and Costello RECEDE INTO THE CEILING, STARS APPEAR BEHIND THEM, MOVING OUT OF THE SCREEN TOWARDS--

Pinback, on the couch. He opens his eyes.

THE STARS EMANATING FROM THE CEILING accelerate, surrounding Pinback.

PINBACK

Cool.

Pinback gently waves his hands before his face, like a kid in a 3D movie, until he notices a red glow above him. The view through space approaches a RED SUN.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Oh, no, man...

Pinback fumbles for the remote.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Change it! Change it!

Closer, above the sun, a SHIP: the Dark Star.

TALBY (V.O.)

What's the problem, Pinback?

INT. DARK STAR, OBSERVATION DOME

Inside a plexi bubble under stars on the dorsal fin of the Dark Star, Pinback is lying as he was on his couch in Arizona, facing TALBY -- bearded, 28, skinny, in Dark Star fatigues -- seated opposite in the observation chair.

TALBY

I said, what's the problem?

PINBACK

Talby?

TALBY

No-one ever comes up here to see me unless they have a problem. Not even you, Pinback, and you're the sanest of them all.

Pinback sits up. He still has his beer and remote.

PINBACK

I am?

TALBY

I like you, Pinback. You're different. The others, they were always jerks, but no-one's been the same since Commander Powell died.

Pinback tries to stand and, BONG, hits his head on the transparent dome. He rubs his head.

PINBACK

Where am I? How did I get here?

TALBY

It's the Phoenix Asteroids. She'll take you there.

PINBACK

Huh?

Suddenly, panic and klaxons --

INT. DARK STAR, CORRIDOR

-- And Pinback finds himself below decks, dressed in his space suit, amid flashing lights and jets of steam. BOILER - a portly, longhaired crewman, 34, with a walrus mustache and a Hawaiian shirt - runs up, distraught.

BOILER

Where the hell you been, Pinback?

PINBACK

I don't know.

BOILER

You're not going out there, are you?

PINBACK

What?

(MORE)

PINBACK (CONT'D)

No, I was watching baseball, and then-- I mean, this all happened years ago, Bomb Number 20--

BOILER

Don't do it! You'll kill us all!

EXT. SPACE

The Dark Star EXPLODES.

INT. MOBILE HOME - CONTINUOUS

Pinback jolts awake, tumbles off the couch and hits his head on the coffee table. A shrill WARBLING SOUND begins. Pinback blocks his ears. He looks up at the ceiling.

Back-lit against stars, the silhouette of a DARK-HAIRED GIRL is staring down at him.

Pinback is transfixed, then closes his eyes. The WARBLING SOUND continues, TV SOUNDS gradually resume. Pinback looks up again.

Abbott and Costello have returned, with a graphic that flashes red in the corner of the screen in time with the WARBLING: 'You have a call.' Pinback stands, wet from spilt beer. He discovers the remote flashing a graphic of a telephone. He speaks into it, experimentally.

PINBACK

Hello?

MARTHA (O.S.)

Up here, Virgil!

Pinback looks up at the ceiling, where Martha has replaced the TV broadcast.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Look at you. Your head, it's bleeding.

PINBACK

Oh, I guess I fell asleep. Look, Martha, I'm not up to ribs tonight.

MARTHA

Want me to come over? I'm supposed to keep an eye on you, you know.

PINBACK
You are? No, that's okay.

MARTHA
Breakfast then? Tomorrow: eight
o'clock?

PINBACK
Breakfast will be fine. Bye bye.

Pinback fumbles the controller, trying to hang up, then whips
around in fright, as

-- Above him, the TV AUDIENCE LAUGHS.

EXT. TELESCOPE ARRAY - NIGHT

A giant radio telescope beneath the stars is overgrown with
vegetation. Another dish beside it has fallen off and become
home for a community of cats.

INT. DINGY CORRIDOR - NIGHT

FEET march along concrete, stop at a door: 'General R.T.
Parsley.' KNOCK KNOCK.

INT. CLAUSTROPHOBIC OFFICE - NIGHT

GENERAL PARSLEY - bullish, ruddy, 50s - looks up from his copy
of Field and Stream as HADLEY - a youthful aide - enters and
presents a computer printout.

HADLEY
They confirmed.

Parsley grabs his coat. Hadley helps him with it. They gather
up other documents on the General's desk.

GENERAL PARSLEY
Give me the short version.

HADLEY
VLAs in Tsiolkovsky crater,
Jo'burg and Mileura all
corroborate a 94-percent
probability NTI. A definite
unknown. Out of the Veil Nebula.

GENERAL PARSLEY
The pink one?

HADLEY

Yes, sir. Very pretty. Right out on the rim. Local traffic are scanning to see if we have anyone out there. General, does this mean we'll be going back to Langley?

GENERAL PARSLEY

Hadley, my boy, if this all goes to plan, the President herself will be inviting us to tea.

EXT. SPACE

The lumbering space tug 'Wanderer' slowly blots out stars as it chugs through space.

The sound of a subspace frequency CRACKLES WITH STATIC, then tunes in to the same TV SHOW that Pinback was watching.

INT. WANDERER

CLOSE ON A COMPUTER MONITOR

ABBOTT AND COSTELLO clown around on a viewscreen beside a pair of sneakered feet. The unseen viewer (SPRINGER) takes a swig from a bottle of Jack Daniels. An intercom BEEP interrupts. Both voices are female.

SPRINGER (O.S.)

What?

REISS (O.S.)

Incoming. Channel Five.

SPRINGER (O.S.)

I'm busy.

REISS (O.S.)

It's the Corps.

SPRINGER (O.S.)

Shit. What have we done now?

EXT. DUPLEX - DAY

Miranda walks up to Martha and Evan's house, carrying a bag of groceries. The children are playing spacemen on the lawn.

INT. DUPLEX, KITCHEN - DAY

Miranda boots the kitchen screen door and peers in.

MIRANDA
Someone gonna let me in?

Martha and Evan are seated eating breakfast, Evan dressed in his Buy Big manager's uniform. Martha lets Miranda in and signals her to shush.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)
What's with the long faces?

Evan jerks a thumb toward the living room.

EVAN
Buck Rogers crash landed last night.

MARTHA
Virgil's having problems. We had to rescue him. He's talking with his counselor. They told us not to leave him alone.

MIRANDA
They did?

Martha takes the groceries from Miranda, who goes to the kitchen serving hatch and peeps through.

INT. DUPLEX, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Blinds have been drawn, a sofa bed extended. Pinback is seated, hunched, before the wall-sized family TV. He is dressed in sweats and an oversize plaid shirt, his forehead bandaged, and he is wringing a paper napkin to a pulp, addressing a CompuCounselor™ HOLOGRAM onscreen.

PINBACK
I've always had a problem getting through to people, you know? Four years on the ship, that's like 20 here on Earth. You try to share a little joke, friendly conversation, you know? No-one would even....

The hologram image is frozen.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
Hello?

HOLOGRAM

Please continue, Virgil.

PINBACK

I can't. That's just it. I can't go on like this. I've been having dreams. I think I'm losing my mind.

The hologram gives a sympathetic frown, then JUDDERS and PIXILATES a little. A WHIRRING from a vidphone on an end- table by the sofa, and a long strip of paper begins printing.

HOLOGRAM

These should stop your dreams. Take three in addition to your usual medication and we will speak again next week.

PINBACK

But, I'm not on any medication.

HOLOGRAM

You're not?

PINBACK

Just one beer.

The hologram JUDDERS and PIXILATES again.

HOLOGRAM

Virgil: alienation, dislocation, dreams, these are common side effects when home is no longer home. You need kindness, you need warmth. You need 30 milligrams of chlorpromazine hydrochloride three times a day.

The printer finishes printing. Pinback tears off the strip, very glum.

HOLOGRAM (CONT'D)

(sympathetic)

What is it, Virgil?

PINBACK

I just want to know... why me?

HOLOGRAM

Why you, alone, survived?

Pinback nods, starts to sob.

PINBACK

There was an accident on the ship,
Lieutenant Doolittle... he tried
to save us. Bomb Number 20 would
not respond. I tried to... warn
him.

HOLOGRAM

Virgil, nothing can bring them
back. Take your medication and
accept the kindness of your
family, okay?

Pinback nods, wipes his eyes. The hologram grins.

HOLOGRAM (CONT'D)

And don't be a stranger!

EXT. DUPLEX, KITCHEN - DAY

Evan and Martha have joined Miranda to eavesdrop at the serving
hatch. They hurry back to their breakfasts, but Miranda remains
standing as Pinback enters with his prescription. He brightens,
seeing Miranda.

PINBACK

Oh, hi.

MARTHA

Virgil, won't you have some
breakfast with us now?

PINBACK

No, I really got to be going. Real
sorry about last night.

MIRANDA

What happened to your head?

PINBACK

Oh, just bad dreams. Guess I'm
still a little loopy. Ha ha. Is
there a drug store near here?

EVAN

I'll drop you.

MARTHA

Why don't you walk him, Miranda?

Miranda smiles. Pinback looks uneasy.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
It's only a few blocks, if you cut
through the park. Go see what's
become of your home town!

Miranda steals a piece of toast, feeds it to Pinback, links her
arm in his and drags him out. Evan laughs.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Pinback walks, eating toast, studying the trees. Miranda
watches him closely.

MIRANDA
My husband was in space.

PINBACK
Mhm, Grady, right?

MIRANDA
Yeah, he was up on the Ring, in
construction. They say he floated
off one day an' died like a
shootin' star. You know the Ring?
You come through it on your way
down.

PINBACK
Oh, that. Yes, it's huge. Amazing.
I'm sorry that he died.

MIRANDA
I never been off-world. Grady
always said he'd take me. Closest
I got was livin' out at Ascension
Station, then little Grady Junior
came along, and Clovis and
Monique....

Miranda squeezes his arm.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)
You ever do it weightless? I hear
it's wild.

PINBACK
Do it?

MIRANDA
You know. Sex.

PINBACK
Look, Melinda...

Miranda stops him with a smile.

MIRANDA
'Miranda' -- it means 'worthy to
be admired.'

PINBACK
Miranda. This is difficult for me.

MIRANDA
Don't you like girls?

PINBACK
Oh, sure I do. Everyone's been
great. I just don't feel... that I
fit in.

MIRANDA
Let me help you, Virgil.

Miranda kisses him and pushes him into undergrowth surrounding
a statue of an Indian Chief.

IN THE BUSHES

Miranda pins Pinback up against a boulder, kissing and
nibbling, raking at his shirt.

PINBACK
Miranda, please, there's been a
big mistake.

MIRANDA
I don't care, you're gorgeous!

She slinks down out of view. The sound of a small ZZZIP.
Pinback gasps, looks down, then buckles at the knees.

BACK ON THE PATH

a jogger passes by and sees the bushes shaking.

IN THE BUSHES

Pinback is on his back, Miranda astride him in a frenzy. Behind
her, the statue of the Indian Chief DISSOLVES AWAY and A VORTEX
OF STARS APPEARS IN THE SKY.

PINBACK
No...

MIRANDA
Yes! You -- fit -- perfect!

The stars behind Miranda rush forward, then EXPLODE. Pinback chokes back a cry. The DARK-HAIRED GIRL has appeared, staring down, her hair blowing in a corona.

DARK-HAIRED GIRL
Tell me, Virgil, how does it feel
to be home?

Pinback SCREAMS.

INT. MOBILE HOME - DAY

The ceiling screen has been covered with a sheet. Martha brings hot soup to Pinback in his bed. Miranda is applying a compress to his head.

Pinback tries the soup and sees a gang of children watching from the doorway. Evan shoos them out of his way as he enters, carrying an old portable TV.

EVAN
Quite a mileage on her, but she's
a push button beauty. See if you
can resist throwing a chair
through this one, eh, Virge? Just
here okay?

Pinback sits bolt upright in alarm as Evan plants the TV by his bed.

MARTHA
It's not going to hurt you, hon.

EVAN
Jeez, what did you do to him,
Miranda?

MARTHA
Evan, don't start.

EVAN
Me start?

A little boy runs in and aims a toy ray gun at Pinback.

CLOVIS
Space alien broke his tee vee
with a ray gun.

Miranda disarms the child.

MARTHA

I think it's time Virgil had a
little alone time, from all of us.
Miranda?

Miranda exits with Clovis and pokes her tongue out at Evan.
Martha swats Evan on the butt, dismissing him, too, then
switches on the TV: a DAYTIME SOAP OPERA.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Oh, it's 'The Family,' my
favorite. Did you have them in
space? It's interactive. When
they look at you, you answer.

PINBACK

No, I... oh, gosh.
(becoming emotional)
I don't know why I'm here.

Martha shushes him.

MARTHA

Honey, don't fret. The nice man
from the Corps said he'd stop by
later. Just remember we love you,
okay? Whoever you are. Get well.

Martha kisses him and then exits and shuts the door behind her.
The door BEEPS, followed by a CLICK. Pinback jumps up, tries
the door, then windows. Locked. Outside, a CAR starts up and
drives away.

PINBACK

No! Wait! Come back!

Pinback paces, notices the TV: members of 'The Family' are
frozen, staring at him, a graphic flashing: 'WHAT DO YOU THINK,
VIRGIL?' Pinback turns off the TV.

INT. WANDERER, CORRIDOR

CLOSE ON

COMBAT BOOTS, a pair of ROBOT FEET and SNEAKERS march along a
metal grid floor. These people mean business.

The mysterious trio stops at a door which POPS open revealing
BLINDING COLORED LIGHTS. Pinback emerges from the light,
dressed in ducky pajamas, and salutes.

INT. MOBILE HOME - DAY

Pinback wakes, perspiring and saluting. He is wearing the same pajamas from his dream, sitting up in bed, RAIN falling outside. He sees Miranda seated nearby, knitting. The smallest of her children is by her feet with a robot toy. The TV is playing a NEWS REPORT about local celebrity astronaut Virgil Pinback, now convalescing.

MIRANDA
Feeling better?

PINBACK
No. What day is it?

MIRANDA
Wednesday, no, it's Thursday.
Martha slipped a mickey in your
soup. Lord knows it worked. You've
been out for hours. I have your
medication.

PINBACK
Oh. Thank you.

Pinback sees a medicine bottle on his bedside. He picks it up, opens it, shakes out a caplet as fat as a cockroach, regards it as if it might be one.

Miranda stands and pours a glass of water. She sits on Pinback's bed, strokes back his hair.

MIRANDA
You were talking in your sleep.

PINBACK
What was I saying?

MIRANDA
Muhmm mummma mummmbla Dably penis.

PINBACK
Talby Phoenix?

MIRANDA
Virgil, I don't know. Are you
gonna drink this or am I gonna
have to stick it where the sun
don't shine?

Pinback beckons Miranda close.

PINBACK
Did Martha say anything to you?

MIRANDA
About what?

PINBACK
I'm not... who you think I am. Not
that guy on the TV news.

MIRANDA
Virgil, we love you for who you
are, not what you are.

PINBACK
No, listen: there was a mixup on
the Dark Star. I was out in space,
but I'm not... him. You and I,
we're not related.

MIRANDA
It's okay, Virgil. Second cousins
is not blood relations. There's
nothin' weird in that.

Pinback grabs Miranda's arm, becoming slightly manic.

PINBACK
I'm not Virgil!

MIRANDA
You're scaring me.

PINBACK
Help me, Miranda. I've got to get
back out there. Back to space. Can
you help me, please?

Miranda looks afraid. Pinback releases her, distressed. He
tries to touch her but she pulls away and hides her face.

MIRANDA
I'm sorry, I can't do this.

Miranda starts to cry. The UPSC escort lays a reassuring hand
on her shoulder, startling Pinback.

ESCORT
Move aside, please, ma'am.

PINBACK
Who let you in here?

MIRANDA
I'm so sorry, Virgil. I guess this
is goodbye.

Miranda dabs her eyes, picks up her child and leaves in floods of tears. Pinback glimpses Evan and Martha waiting outside with umbrellas. A second UPSC escort closes the door. The first escort produces a high-tech-looking hypodermic. Right on cue, LIGHTNING FLASHES.

ESCORT

Sir, please pull down your pants.

PINBACK

What the hell is that? You get away from me. Miranda! Martha! Help!

Escort #1 nods to his partner, who swiftly overpowers Pinback, flipping him face down on the bed, muffling his screams, and pulling down Pinback's pajama pants.

ESCORT

Should've listened to the lady, sir.

Escort #1 administers the hypodermic to Pinback's buttocks. As Pinback's struggle subsides and a silly grin spreads over his face, the TV NEWS ANCHOR continues:

TV NEWS

Sergeant Pinback, who is scheduled to be decorated as Major next week at the White House, is enjoying long overdue r&r, in the bosom of his family in Benson, Arizona.

ON TV: Parade footage, stock shots of the town:

TV NEWS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Local spokesmen report that golf and water sports number among the spaceman's agenda. Insiders meanwhile indicate that love may be in the air, before the Major's next mission.

ON TV: Back to the studio:

TV NEWS (CONT'D)

But don't be too concerned, ladies: Space Corps sources just recently confirmed details of a new Explorer mission, the first in over thirty years. Details remain classified. More at eleven.

INT. BACTA TANK - UNDERWATER

Pinback's body plunges into soupy liquid. Bubbles cascade around his pale body, which is naked but for a pair of billowing shorts and a tangle of electrodes wired to his skin. He twitches, snorts big bubbles.

INT. ASYLUM, CELL - DAY

Blinds snap back to emit morning light, revealing Pinback in a nightshirt, curled in a fetal position on a cot.

NURSE (O.S.)
Good morning, Virgil. Time for
your walk.

EXT. ASYLUM - DAY

A glorious day, green lawns, flowers, trees in blossom.

The NURSE, a metallic android, pushes Pinback in a chair. Pinback is wearing sunglasses and hospital pajamas. Other inmates are seated or wandering about. Pinback's nurse stops before a group playing ball, supervised by ANDROID ORDERLIES.

NURSE
Would you like to play?

PINBACK
I want to see a doctor.

INT. ASYLUM, ACTIVITY ROOM - DAY

Still in his wheelchair and wearing sunglasses, Pinback wheels himself around an antiseptic white room, keeping his distance from other inmates. He skirts a game of ping pong, stops before a tough-looking android orderly seated by a metal door.

PINBACK
I want to see a doctor.

No reaction. Pinback steers himself away, views the faces of the other inmates. An OLD MAN in baggy pajamas goes up to the orderly and repeats, "I want to see a doctor. I want to see a doctor."

Pinback moves off into a corner. A man playing a STRINGLESS GUITAR nods a greeting and then hands Pinback a harmonica.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
I just want to see a doctor.

Stringless strums the air, SINGS: "I just want to see a doctor." Other inmates clap along and sing. Some begin to dance. The android orderly gets to its feet but cannot stop the uprising. Pinback joins in with the clapping.

INT. ASYLUM, CELL

Two android orderlies throw Pinback into his cell. The nurse enters with a hypodermic.

PINBACK

No!

Pinback SCREAMS as the orderlies hold him down. The nurse jabs him in the buttocks, they all exit, then the door slams to BLACK.

DARKNESS

is pierced by a narrow beam of light that reveals Pinback's bloodshot eyes.

Three figures stand looking over him in silhouette.

Pinback flails feebly and hunkers up against a wall. He squints against the light as he hears them confer. Humans. One raises his voice:

DOCTOR BORON

Sergeant Pinback?

Pinback opens his mouth, cannot speak.

DOCTOR HAYDEN

He's too far gone, we've lost him.

PINBACK

No!

(coughs)

That's me! I'm Pinback! Who are you? Am I dreaming?

The silhouettes confer again, nodding, shaking of heads. They step aside to emit two orderlies with glowing eyes. Androids. Pinback WAILS, scuttles away.

A hypodermic is pressed into Pinback's arm. He falls limp again, losing focus as GENERAL PARSLEY LEANS IN OVER HIM AND SMILES.

GENERAL PARSLEY

Welcome back, son.

EXT. SPACE

The Wanderer drifts against a belt of asteroids, moored to a MINING PLATFORM, Orcon Waystation 59.

INT. WANDERER, AIRLOCK

An airlock opens, revealing Pinback in immaculate UPSC fatigues, a kit bag at his feet, a folio under his arm.

A well-worn NAVBOT-class automaton - man-sized, nuts and bolts design, resembling a motorcycle cylinder on legs - steps forward to greet him. Navbot CLICKS and WHIRS. Pinback displays his Space Corps i.d.

NAVBOT
Welcome aboard, Major Pinback, V.
I am Navbot. Please follow me.

INT. WANDERER, CORRIDOR

Navbot leads Pinback down a long, low corridor, carrying Pinback's kit bag and SINGING, in mechanical staccato:

NAVBOT
*Oh, I'm the type of guy who will
never settle down....*

Navbot's SINGING continues over a MONTAGE:

INT. WANDERER, NAVIGATION ROOM

The door opens and Pinback steps in, and stops in shock.

NAVBOT (V.O.)
*Where pretty girls are well, you
know that I will be around. I kiss
them and I love them 'cause, to
me, they're all the same...*

The Dark-Haired Girl, EDIE SPRINGER - trim, 33, completely uncompromising - is seated at a command post with the remains of a half-eaten meal before her. Her co-pilot, ESTHER REISS - butch, African American, 42 - sits across from her, smoking a cigar. Nobody moves or speaks as Navbot enters and dumps Pinback's kit bag with a loud CLANG.

Navbot's SINGING continues.

EXT. SPACE

The Wanderer leaves its payload moored to the mining platform and maneuvers into space.

NAVBOT (V.O.)
*I hug them and I squeeze them,
 they don't even know my name...*

Navbot's SINGING continues:

INT. WANDERER, COMPUTER SCREEN

A large lighted screen displays biometrics of a youthful, smiling Pinback and other members of the *Dark Star* crew:

Communications officer: PINBACK, V.
 Navigator: BOILER, T.
 Science officer: TALBY, R.
 Chief engineer: DOOLITTLE, S.
 Mission commander: POWELL, G.

NAVBOT (V.O.)
*Call me the wanderer. Yes, the
 wanderer....*

Navbot's SINGING continues:

INT. WANDERER, COMPUTER SCREEN

Yellow arrow on vector 'Y' slowly closes in on point 'Z'. Red arrow 'X' blips closer.

NAVBOT (V.O.)
I roam around, around, around...

INT. WANDERER, CORRIDOR

Pinback bounds out of his cabin in shorts, a 'Team Player' T-shirt and a headband. He flexes, bends, runs on the spot.

EXT. SPACE

The point of GLOWING GREEN is now much closer now, traveling at a parallel distance to the *Wanderer*.

INT. WANDERER, CORRIDOR

Navbot leaps out with a MECHANICAL SCREECH, eyes blazing. He lands on top of Pinback and pins him to the floor.

PINBACK

Argh! Get off me! Get off!

INT. WANDERER, FLIGHT DECK

Reiss' viewscreen clears to show a GHOSTLY IMAGE OF A BEARDED MAN'S FACE. The ghostly face winks.

REISS

What in hell is going on here?

EXT. SPACE

GREEN GLOWING ENERGY swarms across the Wanderer's hull, PLASMA TENDRILS snake around, forming a giant claw of energy that connects the ship with a colossal egg-shaped ALIEN SPACECRAFT.

INT. WANDERER, FLIGHT DECK

In red emergency lighting, Pinback enters the flight deck with Navbot tagging behind, Reiss holding them at gunpoint. All stop as they see Springer seated at her command post, looking very conflicted.

PINBACK

What is going on here?

The Little Girl is seated at the navigator's station, peering at the blinking lights and readouts.

SPRINGER

Behind you.

Reiss and Pinback turn to see the Bearded Man step out of shadows behind them in the navigation room. Pinback, startled, gives a little YELL. Navbot regards the apparition more thoughtfully, and WHIRS. Reiss shoves Pinback forward, points him to his secondary command chair.

PINBACK

Is someone going to explain to me who these people are?

REISS

None of your business. Navbot, get in here.

Reiss takes her own seat, giving the Little Girl a wide berth. Navbot steps up to the navigator's station, the Little Girl joins Springer at the viewscreen, which displays a hull-camera view of the alien ship. More METALLIC NOISES from the hull.

SPRINGER
Systems failures across the board.
I think we're being probed.

PINBACK
Probed by what? Oh my....

Pinback and Reiss see their own viewscreen images of the alien ship.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
How big is that thing?

SPRINGER
Big enough to swallow us.

The Bearded Man steps up behind Pinback to view the image on screen and casually lays a hand on the back of Pinback's chair. Pinback stares closely at the hand, which appears to be large and hairy, and perfectly real.

Navbot CLICKS erratically.

REISS
Oh, shit.

PINBACK
(alarmed)
What?

Reiss stares, helpless, as her helm controls move by themselves. Navbot WHIRS and BEEPS, as if in conversation with an unknown entity.

SPRINGER
Me and my big mouth.

EXT. SPACE

The Wanderer slowly spins, turning about-face, and then fires its thrusters briefly.

A HOLE opens in the underside of the alien ship. The energy field creates a tunnel leading toward it. PLASMA TENDRILS nudge the Wanderer toward the orifice.

INT. WANDERER, FLIGHT DECK

Navbot WHIRS and BEEPs, operating controls.

REISS
Navbot, over-ride.

Navbot continues WHIRRING.

REISS (CONT'D)
Navbot, over-ride!

SPRINGER
Esther, let's assume we're guests
here.

The Bearded Man makes eye contact with Pinback, benign.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, DOCKING BAY

The Wanderer floats up through an entry tube resembling an alimentary canal and comes to rest in a gloomy chamber. The tunnel irises shut behind the ship, closing out the stars.

INT. WANDERER, FLIGHT DECK

Reiss folds her arms, sulking. Springer clicks her fingers in Navbot's direction, causing the robot to look round.

SPRINGER
How about some light out there?

EXT. ALIEN SHIP, DOCKING BAY

Wanderer's SEARCHLIGHTS illuminate a JETTY leading to an oval arch.

BACK TO SCENE

Pinback joins Springer at her viewscreen. The Bearded Man and the Little Girl also press in close to see.

PINBACK
(lowering his voice)
Clearly an alien spacecraft of
advanced design. I suggest we
remain calm and make no
threatening moves.

Springer ignores Pinback's analysis, and turns to the apparitions crowding her controls.

SPRINGER

Do you mind?

The Bearded Man backs off, pulls the Little Girl away.

REISS

Something's happening out there.
An atmosphere is forming. We got
nitrogen, oxygen, hydrogen, trace
elements of argon and other crap.
Localized around the ship and that
structure up ahead. It's
breathable.

Navbot WHIRS and CHIRPS.

SPRINGER

Let's go take a look.

PINBACK

Do you really think we should? I
mean, maybe we should sit here and
just wait to see what happens?

INT. ALIEN SHIP, DOCKING BAY

A RAMP opens in the Wanderer's underside and comes to rest,
against the jetty. An inner airlock door opens, and light
streams out of the Wanderer. WHIRRING and CLANKING, then Navbot
appears.

He descends the ramp, stops on the jetty and stands motionless,
staring ahead.

Springer follows, with Reiss and Pinback close behind. All wear
goldfish-bowl breathing helmets that FILTER their voices.

PINBACK

I still think it would be prudent
to bide our time and wait on the
ship. We don't want anybody to
misinterpret our actions.

SPRINGER

You really want to stay with them?

Springer jerks up her thumb back overhead. Above them, peering
out through an observation window, the Bearded Man and Little
Girl have their faces pressed up against the glass.

PINBACK

I'm beginning to wonder if you ladies appreciate what I might be able to contribute to this mission.

Springer and Reiss join Navbot on the jetty. Navbot waits until Pinback catches up. As soon as he steps off the Wanderer ramp, the ramp retracts and Pinback teeters on the jetty edge. Springer grabs his arms, pulls him to safety.

The Wanderer airlock SLAMS SHUT, the ship pitches violently, UPENDING. The faces of the Bearded Man and Little Girl are briefly seen, peering out of the observation window, despairing, then the Wanderer ZOOMS UPWARDS, the chamber ceiling rapidly DISTENDING INTO BLACK. With a flash of jets, the Wanderer is gone.

REISS

Oh, great! That's just great!
Major, you owe us one ship.

Springer stands, numb, peering up into the black void.

PINBACK

You'll be fully compensated.

REISS

Yeah, posthumously, no doubt.

Navbot walks toward the oval archway. Springer glares at Pinback, then follows the robot.

PINBACK

Maybe they'll return our ship once they've checked us out? For all they know, we could be hostile.

REISS

They'd be right.

Reiss goes after Springer. Pinback tries to put a hand to his head in desperation, but bangs his knuckles on his breathing helmet.

PINBACK

Ow! I don't see why we have to wear these things, if the air in here is breathable. Hey, at least we don't have those creepy ghosts following us around, whatever they were.

HIGH ANGLE

They proceed along the jetty like ants, voices ECHOING. Particles of GREEN ENERGY flit back and forth in the massive architecture, unnoticed above them.

REISS
Pinback, will you ever shut up?

PINBACK
Someone needs to be the voice of reason. We could be dealing with an intelligence far beyond our own.

REISS
No shit, Sherlock.

THE OVAL ARCHWAY

leads to a sealed oval door three times Navbot's height. Again, the robot waits motionless for the others to catch up, then the door opens, revealing a TALL, THIN CYLINDRICAL ROOM with no other doors or windows. Navbot enters.

PINBACK
Elevator!

SPRINGER
Be my guest, Major.

PINBACK
Ladies first.

Reiss shoves Pinback in. The cylindrical room appears stable. Navbot WHIRS and CLICKS. Springer and Reiss step in. The door closes.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, ELEVATOR

A soft HUM, no sense of motion, no controls. The three humans stand in silence, glancing up at the ceiling way above their head.

Pinback reaches for the clasp around his helmet, closes his eyes, unfastens the seal. HISS. Reiss and Springer stare, a little shocked. Pinback takes a breath, opens his eyes, and grins. He removes his helmet. Navbot WHIRS. A slight jolt and the door re-opens.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, VESTIBULE

The elevator opens onto a tall, narrow vestibule that appears to curve off to infinity, like a nightmare from Dr. Suess.

Navbot leads the way.

Pinback tucks his helmet under his arm and follows. Reiss and Springer exchange glances, remove their helmets and walk out beneath the high ceiling. Hundreds of other elevator doors line the walls.

REISS

Homey.

Navbot steps onto a central section of the floor that is a moving walkway. Pinback hops on, nearly losing his balance.

PINBACK

This way, I guess?

The others run to catch up and also hop on, to be transported down the corridor

REISS

You realize this whole place could be some kind of automated life-form harvesting system.

PINBACK

Do you have some other plan of action in mind?

REISS

Maybe I do.

Reiss reaches inside her jacket, as if for a weapon.

PINBACK

You didn't bring a g- g- g-?

SPRINGER

Pinback, shut up.

Navbot CLICKS and WHIRS, looks back at the humans.

PINBACK

I didn't say any word.

The moving walkway branches off toward a doorway that opens like a ghost train ride.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, HIGH BRIDGE

The moving walkway carries them out above a dizzying drop crisscrossed with other walkways, all empty.

Pinback peers down, and then up. The view above is much the same.

At the end of the bridge, they reach a giant set of double doors and the walkway stops. Navbot turns to face them, WHIRS and CLICKS.

NAVBOT

Wait here.

They stand, nervously, looking about them.

REISS

What are we waiting for?

PINBACK

I think we should do as we are told.

(to Springer)

Don't you?

Springer waves her fingers in front of Navbot's face. No reaction. She walks past the robot to the double doors. There are no handles. She presses the door surface and, with a silent breath of air, the double doors swing open.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, CONTROL ROOM

Springer, Pinback and Reiss enter. Navbot follows and remains by the double doors, which close silently behind them.

Curving surfaces everywhere. Sterility and grace. A large, kidney-shaped shuttered window dominates the room, beside a nook of THRUMMING readouts. A transparent STAR MAP divides this area from the rest, behind which is seated the ALIEN PILOT.

The humans are transfixed by their first sight of the alien being.

The thin, bipedal alien does not appear to notice them, working at its controls. It is unclothed, sexless, flat-footed and vaguely blue with an elongated Giacometti-like physique. It is too far off to tell, but there is something wrong about its head.

Springer eyes the star map, which shows a display similar to Pinback's trajectory of 'X' with two glowing blips converging at a projected interception point. Pinback sees it, too.

PINBACK

Hey, he's got one like us!

The alien turns to regard them, revealing piercing yellow eyes in a flattened HAMMERHEAD.

Reiss backs up, unnerved. Springer stands her ground. Even Pinback is silent.

The alien rises from its chair, walks over and halts a few yards away. It has no ears or nose, its mouth a tiny lipless slit halfway down its throat. It is 12 feet tall.

SPRINGER
Your move, Major.

PINBACK
Oh, uh, yeah.

Pinback hesitates, then steps forward and extends a hand.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
Major Pinback, planet Earth. How are you?

The alien regards Pinback's outstretched hand critically, then repeats the gesture. It has six elegant fingers. Pinback enthusiastically grabs the alien's hand, to shake, but the alien pulls away, alarmed.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
Oops. Easy, there, big fellah.
(to Springer)
Guess that didn't go so well.

SPRINGER
The map.

PINBACK
The what? Oh, yeah.

Pinback grins at the alien, points at the star map, makes an inquisitive gesture. The alien frowns. Pinback points at himself and then the alien, and then indicates two points moving through space and colliding, with a KABOOM noise. The alien appears confused.

REISS
He's a complete idiot.

The alien turns its attention toward Reiss, looks her up and down, then makes eye contact with Springer.

PINBACK
They brought me here to you. Well, not to you. We weren't expecting this. I think we've both been traveling in the same-- nuuuh.

The alien turns sharply toward Pinback and pokes its finger at him. Pinback's body goes rigid. The alien walks quickly away, peeved, returning to its map.

SPRINGER
 (lowering her voice)
 Pinback...? Pinback, speak to me!

Pinback is glassy-eyed, his tongue protruding slightly from his mouth.

REISS
 Personally, I think it's a big improvement.

SPRINGER
 Snap out of it, Pinback!

REISS
 Let's get out of here, Edie. We've got to find our ship.

PINBACK
 Nuuuuuuuuuhhhh.

Springer slaps Pinback's face. Pinback blinks and regains composure, then has a delayed reaction to the pain.

REISS
 Dammit, Edie.

PINBACK
 I can hear them.

SPRINGER
 What?

PINBACK
 I don't know how, but I can understand them. What they're saying. I can...
 (touches his head)
 ...hear them in here.

SPRINGER
 'Them'?

Navbot WHIRS, having walked up close. The alien looks back at them again with suspicion. Navbot CLICKS and WHIRS.

REISS
 What are they saying?

PINBACK
 Big blue, he's the pilot, he wants to invite us to dinner. No... he wants us to be dinner. I'm not sure.

REISS
You'd better work on your alien
e.s.p. a little harder, Major.

Reiss puts a hand on the gun inside her jacket. Springer glares at her to keep it hidden.

SPRINGER
Pinback, don't blow this.

PINBACK
But you're not going to--?

REISS
If Bluey won't give us our ship
back, we are taking his.

PINBACK
But we don't know the first thing
about what makes this thing fly!

REISS
How hard can it be with our
autopilot wired into the ship?

Navbot stops WHIRRING. They look around to see the alien still staring at them. It waves a hand at the window.

Shutters fall away from the window to reveal a mind-bending view of REDSPACE: a hurtling cone of ruby light, coagulated to white at its vanishing point, spilling stars that slip past the ship.

PINBACK
I'd say pretty hard.

REISS
Screw this.

Reiss pulls out her plasma gun, aims it at the pilot.

PINBACK
No!

REISS
Okay, buddy, fair's fair. You
gonna give us back our ship, or
what?

The alien waves its hand again. Simultaneously, the gun flies out of Reiss's hand and Navbot grabs her arms. Another flick of the alien's wrist and Reiss SCREAMS, clutching her wrist, and falls to her knees in pain.

PINBACK
Please, don't hurt her!

The alien narrows its eyes at Pinback, and points its finger again. Reiss collapses in the background. Pinback walks up to the alien and kneels, holding out his space helmet as if it were an offering.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
Dinner sounds great.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, LOWER LEVEL

Another endless, curving corridor, this time streaked with filth. Heavy metal doors are interspersed with thick, translucent windows, MOVING SHADOWS within, and a constant murmur of ALIEN ROARS and HOWLS. One window contains three human shapes, one with his face shielded up against the glass.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, CELL

Pinback tries to peer out the grimy window. He uses his sleeve to wipe clean a space, regrets it. Springer paces, Reiss seated on a scattering of straw, looking groggy.

SPRINGER
Any theories, Major?

A muffled, blood-curdling HOWL goes up from a neighboring cell.

PINBACK
It's a biological survey ship. The alien is a zoo-keeper.

SPRINGER
I meant escape plan.

PINBACK
I'm going to reason with it, one highly evolved life-form to another.

Reiss gives a sarcastic laugh.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
My instinct is he's not interested in us. It's object 'X' he wants. A specimen.

REISS
This could just as easily be a prison ship.
(MORE)

REISS (CONT'D)
'X' could be a penal colony. A
slave market. A slaughter house.

SPRINGER
Well, I'm open to suggestions. Any
more e.s.p.?

Pinback frowns, then shakes his head. Springer continues
pacing. Pinback goes to lean against the glass, changes his
mind and leans against a wall, hands in his pockets. He takes
out his harmonica. Springer halts, Reiss glances up; stern
looks from both. Pinback puts the harmonica away.

CLANK then CLICK from the door. A circular peephole irises open
and a glowing eye peers through.

NAVBOT
Pin Back?

PINBACK
(overjoyed)
Navbot! Buddy!

NAVBOT
You are to come with me, please.
The others must stay. I am armed.

Further CLANKS and CLICKS. Pinback looks to Springer.

PINBACK
I'll get us out of here, I swear.

SPRINGER
That's very reassuring.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, LOWER LEVEL

Navbot SLAMS shut the cell door and turns a huge key in its
lock. Pinback waits nearby, a chain around his neck and feet.
Navbot leads him off, wielding an ALIEN CATTLE PROD. HOWLS from
other cells as they walk by. Something VERY FIERCE throws
itself at one murky window.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, CONTROL ROOM

The double doors swing open. Navbot herds Pinback in, unfastens
the neck chain once the doors have closed, and leaves him
standing.

An elegant DINING TABLE has been set up by the main window
before the view of REDSPACE. The alien pilot, already seated,
beckons Pinback over.

PINBACK

I wish I'd know it was formal. I
would've dressed. Ha ha ha!

Pinback trips over his chains and stumbles as he starts to cross the room. The alien watches, unblinking. Pinback laughs again, then notices the star map. the alien graphics show object 'X' much closer now.

Pinback shuffles over to the table. The pilot beckons him to sit. Pinback complies. Navbot steps up with a bulging sack of liquid slung over one shoulder. The robot extends a pouring nozzle to a large goblet on the table in front of Pinback.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Ah, oh, well. Sure, yes, thank
you.

Navbot fills Pinback's goblet with dark wine, and then attends to the pilot. The alien raises its goblet in a toast. Pinback responds in kind. The pilot waits for him to drink. Pinback smiles, nervous, takes a small sip. His smile broadens.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

It's good!

The pilot waits. Pinback takes another mouthful, sees the alien still watching, drinks his whole glass. The pilot does the same. Pinback laughs too loud, relieved. Navbot refills his goblet.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

What a strange and wonderful part
of the galaxy this is, eh?

Navbot refills the alien's goblet, deposits the wine sack on a nearby frame and heads for a serving trolley containing ominous domed trays.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

I mean, at least for us. Us
humans.

The alien drinks. Navbot returns with a tray, unveils the appetizer: something that could be deviled toads. Navbot serves up two small, limp amphibians each. The pilot waits for Pinback to eat.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

We don't get out much, you know.
Not this far anyway. Ha. Ah, do
you...?

Pinback mimes using a knife and fork. The pilot takes a slimy morsel in its fingers, lifts it to its mouth and sucks it down like an oyster. Pinback stares, dismayed. The pilot licks its lips with a snake-like tongue, revealing tiny needle teeth.

Pinback takes one portion in his fingers, breaks off a leg and nibbles. His eyebrows go up. He finishes the leg, more eagerly starts another.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
 (with his mouth full)
 Still I expect you know all about
 us from Navbot, here, right? We're
 just another race to you. Boy, if
 the guys back on the Dark Star
 could see me now!

The alien reacts to the words 'Dark Star'. Pinback is oblivious, enjoying his meal.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
 Mmm-hmm! You would not believe how
 good this is. I've been on
 recycled god-knows-what since I
 came offworld. And let me tell
 you, that is one part of human
 culture you do not want to--

A bubbling, musical SOUND stops Pinback's prattle. He looks up from his food.

The alien pilot is CHUCKLING.

Pinback smiles, uneasy.

The pilot's shoulders shake in merriment. The creature raises its glass and drinks another toast. Pinback nods enthusiastically and then does the same.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, CELL

The peephole GRINDS open. Reiss and Springer look up. Navbot's eye peers in at them, then the peephole shuts. A second later, a slot near the base of the door snaps open and a tray slides through containing two chunks of raw, unidentifiable meat.

Reiss and Springer exchange looks.

Navbot pokes through two bowls of water. Springer dives at the slot and grabs Navbot's hand. Navbot SCREAMS (O.S.) and then his hand detaches. Springer tumbles back with the hand. The slot snaps shut.

REISS
Damn robot!

Navbot's hand flips the bird at Reiss and springs to the floor.

SPRINGER
Grab it!

They jump at the robot hand, but it scuttles away like a lunatic crab and hides in the straw bedding.

Reiss leaps up and down, stomping at the straw, until she makes contact. Navbot SCREECHES (O.S.). The robot hand grabs Reiss's foot. Springer pries it off. The two of them hold it flat.

REISS
Be my guest.

Springer grabs a digit and bends it back. Navbot WAILS (O.S.). Springer snaps off the digit. Navbot SCREAMS. She takes the finger to the door and knocks. The peephole opens. Springer pops the finger through.

SPRINGER
You want the rest?

Another forlorn robot WAIL (O.S.).

SPRINGER (CONT'D)
Sorry, Navbot, didn't catch that.
You know I have three more fingers
here. What do you say?

More robot WAILING (O.S.), then Navbot's eye appears at the porthole.

NAVBOT
Ma- ma- ma-

SPRINGER
For that, you get the finger.

Springer rips off another digit. Navbot SCREAMS. She pops it through.

SPRINGER (CONT'D)
Never flip off your commander,
okay?

NAVBOT
Y- y- y- yes, Captain.

SPRINGER
This is tough love, Navbot. It's
good to have you back.

NAVBOT
Good to be back.

SPRINGER
We'll see about that, huh?

Springer waves the remains of the robot's hand in front of the porthole. Navbot WHINES.

SPRINGER (CONT'D)
Open.

Navbot CLICKS, WHIRS, SPUTTERS, falls silent. CLANKS and CLICKS and then the cell door POPS open. Navbot steps in, hands its alien cattle prod to Springer and extends the stump of its truncated wrist.

NAVBOT
A little warmth -- and human kindness.

Springer regards Navbot curiously.

SPRINGER
Where is Pinback?

NAVBOT
Dining, ma'am. Level 116.

REISS
He's dining? That does it.

REISS (CONT'D)
Edie, I don't know what strange attraction you have for our friend the Major, but I am finding it increasingly difficult to believe anything he tells us. He's demented. We've got to forget him and go find our ship -- wherever that is.

NAVBOT
Level 137.

REISS
Thank you, Navbot. Welcome back aboard.

NAVBOT
Thank you, Esther.

Springer fastens Navbot's hand back into place and reattaches its fingers.

SPRINGER
You better be right.

REISS
Why would I not be? He's a sweet
and harmless guy, and a total
loser.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, CONTROL ROOM

Pinback is inebriated, attempting to fill his own goblet with wine and spilling most of it.

PINBACK
So I says to them: I'm not who you
sink I am. I did. I told them.

The alien, completely sober, its hands folded on the table, regards Pinback with curiosity.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
But they couldn't find Sergeant
Pinback. He died. So there I was,
in his uniform, they froze me and
stuck me in the ship! You can't
believe how freaked out I was when
I woke up four light years later.

Pinback hiccups.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
Oh me, oh my. In venus veritas!

Pinback gets the Latin wrong, attempts a toast and slips off his chair. The alien shakes its head in disbelief, picks up a small silver servant bell, rings it, and looks around for help. No Navbot.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
S'okay, nothing broke. 'pologies.

Pinback regains his chair and smirks.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
I know. I'm a little drunk. But
now you know my secret. I'm not
Sergeant-- oops, excuse me, Major
Pinback. I'm really Bill Fruge.

The alien regards Pinback intently.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
 Bill Fruge, Fuel Maintenance
 Technician, from Saint Louis,
 Missouri. No one really cares. All
 they wanted was a hero. And that
 hero was me!

Pinback loses his chipper mood as he sees the alien
 scrutinizing him. Suddenly, a PIERCING TONE penetrates
 Pinback's head, he clasps his head and falls backward again.

Pinback crashes to the floor and curls in a fetal ball until
 the PIERCING TONE DESISTS. He looks up and sees

The alien towering over him.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
 Why did you do that? I was only
 making conversation.

The alien's lips do not move, but ITS LILTING, MUSICAL VOICE IS
 CLEARLY HEARD IN ENGLISH:

ALIEN
 Why you?

PINBACK
 Why me? Why me what? Hey, how
 come I can hear you?

The alien gestures with its hand and an unseen force HOISTS
 PINBACK TO HIS FEET AND THRUSTS HIM BEFORE THE STAR MAP. The
 alien map shows object 'X' much closer.

ALIEN
 Why has it brought you here?

PINBACK
 Why has what brought me here? You
 mean that thing out there?

Still hanging by his armpits, Pinback cranes his neck to see
 the alien very close, its yellow eyes burning with irritation.
 The alien thrusts a finger at object 'X' and then points out
 the window at the view of REDSPACE.

ALIEN
 It seeks Pinback.

PINBACK
 It does?

The alien mutters a single, untranslatable expletive and turns
 away from Pinback. It rings its dainty silver bell again, then
 tosses the bell aside in irritation.

Pinback drops to the floor, lands heavily on his knees and tries to recover, still groggy from the wine.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
Can I get a glass of water?

ALIEN
Look at me.

PINBACK
I will, if you don't stand by that window, it makes me nauseous--

The alien gestures at Pinback again. Pinback flips onto his back, spread-eagle on the floor. The alien stands over him, viewing him with contempt.

ALIEN
Why does it seek Pinback? You are... a barbarian.

PINBACK
I thought I was your guest?

Frustrated, the alien shakes its head.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, VESTIBULE

Navbot leads Reiss and Springer along a section of long curving corridor flanked by giant STATUES OF ALIEN CREATURES. One particularly DEMONIC BIRD has a double phallus.

They give the statue a wide berth and take an adjoining corridor.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, LABORATORY

Pinback hangs in mid-air, half-unconscious, suspended by his wrists and neck, at the center of a dim-lit room of metal and glass. The STRANGE HUM of unseen alien devices is everywhere, instruments hanging from the ceiling, focusing on Pinback in a beam of light.

Pinback squints, tries to see.

The alien stands beyond the rim of light, a filter mask over its mouth.

PINBACK
Let's talk. Seriously.

The alien attends to instruments resembling dental tools.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
You're right. I must look like a
barbarian to you. I know about
that thing out there. I knew that
it was calling me. Instinctively.
Okay?

The alien moves closer to the light, which reflects brightly
off a long gleaming tool.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
I'm telling you the truth! I'll
tell you anything you want to
know! You don't need to do that!
Please!

The alien tool begins to BUZZ and VIBRATE.

Pinback SCREAMS and SOLARIZES.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, DRY-DOCK

Navbot pushes open a heavy door. Reiss and Springer step
through to stop at a gantry railing.

Before them, in a giant zero-gravity well, the Wanderer hangs,
stripped to its support struts. Other ships of untold origin
float in pools of light beyond, in various states of disarray,
attended by tiny FLITS OF LIGHT like worker bees.

Springer bows her head, defeated.

REISS
I'll rig something. I can do this.

SPRINGER
Knock yourself out. Navbot help
us.

Springer looks around. Navbot is nowhere to be seen, the door
standing open, the vague sound of NAVBOT SINGING 'WANDERER'
emanating from the corridor behind it.

SPRINGER (CONT'D)
I'll be back.

Springer runs out. Reiss stands before an alien control panel.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, LABORATORY

Pinback hangs, frozen in mid-scream, wreathed in CRACKLING
GREEN ENERGY BOLTS.

INT. DARK STAR, CORRIDOR

Pinback, in his space suit, wrestles with Boiler.

BOILER

Don't do it, Pinback! You'll kill
us all!

PINBACK

Let me go, you big ape! I have to
get out there! Commander Powell
was wrong! Phenomenology won't
stop the bomb exploding!
Doolittle, help!

INT. ALIEN SHIP, LABORATORY

Pinback SIZZLES, in a different frozen scream.

INT. DARK STAR, CORRIDOR

Pinback breaks free from Boiler and punches at a comlink beside
an airlock door.

PINBACK

Lieutenant, Doolittle? Lieutenant?
I think we have a problem with
Bomb Number-- Augh!

Boiler tackles Pinback, knocking him off his feet.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, LABORATORY

Pinback frozen in another scream.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, DRY-DOCK

Pinback's manic expression appears on AN ALIEN VIEWSCREEN on
the dry-dock console that Reiss is operating. She stops what
she is doing, tries to tune the picture clearer, suddenly gets
a BLAST OFF SOUND WITH PINBACK SCREAMING, which she quickly
mutes, as she realizes what she has found.

REISS

Oh -- my -- God.

Reiss goes to call for Springer, but thinks better of it. She
cautiously turns up the sound:

PINBACK (O.S.)
(filtered)
--some really funny readings down
here, and I think the Bomb Number
20 might be about to-- No, wait.
It didn't happen like this. It was
not my fault. I did not blow up
the ship! Lieutenant Doolittle?
Talby?

INT. ALIEN SHIP, VESTIBULE

Navbot teeters along, SINGING drunkenly to himself, taking in the sculpture exhibition. Springer catches up with the robot, who regards her with a series of WHIRS and CLICKS and pats her on the head.

NAVBOT
He really likes you.

SPRINGER
What?

Navbot WHIRS again and tunes into the same audio that Reiss was listening to:

NAVBOT/PINBACK
(filtered)
I'm not even Pinback, but I truly
thought I'd come here just to be
with her...

INT. ALIEN SHIP, DRY-DOCK

NAVBOT/PINBACK
(filtered)
But maybe I was wrong. Maybe I am
here for another reason, a higher
purpose. To face this thing...

INT. ALIEN SHIP, LABORATORY

PINBACK
I have to face it, if I ever want
to understand... why we must be...
so lonely.

Pinback breaks down into tears, blubbing like a baby. The alien looks on.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, DRY-DOCK

REISS
What a jerk.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, VESTIBULE

Navbot dabs at imaginary tears, pantomime-fashion, as he continues to broadcast Pinback's emotional meltdown.

SPRINGER
Snap out of it, Navbot.

The robot snaps out of it.

SPRINGER (CONT'D)
You're still connected to Pinback?

NAVBOT
Intermittently, ma'am.

SPRINGER
Why did you walk off and leave us
back there?

Navbot WHIRS, gestures like a waiter.

NAVBOT
Time for dessert?

SPRINGER
Navbot, concentrate. Can Major
Pinback get us off this ship?

Navbot WHIRS.

NAVBOT
Yes.

SPRINGER
How?

NAVBOT
Estimated impact with object 'X'
in T-minus 16 minutes.

SPRINGER
What?!

NAVBOT
Estim--

SPRINGER

I heard you the first time. We're going to hit that thing? Even at light speed, we were weeks away!

NAVBOT

Redspace quantum shift operative.
Estimated impact: T-minus 15 minutes, 47 seconds.

Springer grabs Navbot by an arm and runs with him, heading back the way they came.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, DRY-DOCK

Springer, out of breath, bursts back onto the gantry where Reiss is still viewing the alien control panel. Springer sees the VIEWSCREEN IMAGE OF PINBACK, steps up close to surveys the alien console. It is alive with blinking lights and confusing readouts. One SCREEN GRAPHIC displays the trajectories of the ship and object 'X' about to connect.

Navbot peers in from the corridor.

NAVBOT

Estimated impact in T-minus 13 minutes.

EXT. SPACE

The alien ship GLOWS GREEN, hurtling through REDSPACE, the vanishing point ahead now coalesced into an INTENSELY BRIGHT POINT OF WHITE AND RAINBOW-COLORED LIGHTS.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, CONTROL ROOM

Pinback, still groggy from debriefing, is wheeled out into full view of REDSPACE. Pinback opens his eyes and focuses, then SCREAMS.

Pinback is on an upright gurney, directly in front of the main window, where the dining table has now vanished and the window completely fills his field of view.

PINBACK

Why are you doing this to me?

The alien, busy with its controls, throws a switch. A DEEP HUM resonates through the ship as if the universe was unwinding.

Pinback MOANS, but then sees REDSPACE drop away to NORMAL SPACE before him. The view ahead still travels at great speed, approaching an INTENSELY BRIGHT, FLUCTUATING STAR.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, VESTIBULE

Springer and Reiss hurry along, Springer carrying her weapon, Navbot doing his best to keep up, Reiss attempting a cross-examination while running.

REISS
What I don't get -- if we see
ghosts -- from our past -- and
he's not Pinback -- what's this
thing -- that we're about to hit?
-- It must be something -- big for
him. Oh, crap.

Springer arms her cattle prod.

SPRINGER
Keep running.

Just ahead, the Bearded Man and Little Girl are wandering, hand-in-hand, staring all about them. Springer, Reiss and, eventually, Navbot run past. The Bearded Man and Little Girl start to follow.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, HIGH BRIDGE

Springer, Reiss and Navbot run across the bridge toward the alien control room.

As they reach the double doors, an ALIEN KLAXON begins: obviously not good news. Springer, peeved, thrusts her weight against the doors and they obediently swing open.

INT. ALIEN SHIP, CONTROL ROOM

Springer steps into the room, FLASHING KALEIDOSCOPIC LIGHTS strobing all around, the KLAXON continues.

The alien is standing in the center of the room, lit up by the light show emanating from the window, streaming around Pinback on the gurney.

PINBACK

is squinting, staring into the lights, aghast.

PINBACK'S P.O.V.

the window is filled with a NEBULA OF GLOWING CRYSTALS AND INCANDESCENT GAS, blotting out the stars: object 'X'.

EXT. SPACE

The CRYSTALS are huge, rotating, planet-sized, multicolored. Immense ELECTRIC ARCS dance from rock to rock like synaptic activity in a giant brain.

BACK TO SCENE

Springer walks into the room, still holding her cattle prod, and stops a short distance from Pinback. The alien pilot turns to regard her.

SPRINGER

Let him go.

The KLAXON changes frequency, becoming more insistent, attracting the alien's attention back to its controls. Springer looks back to the crystals and then at

THE ALIEN STAR MAP

The two converging symbols have met, one intensely bright, the other starting to disintegrate.

A SHUDDER shakes the ship. Window shutters slowly close, shutting out the crystals. Springer tries to free Pinback from the gurney. Navbot steps in and uses a BLASTING TOOL attachment on his arm to remove the shackles.

REISS

You're full of surprises, aren't you, Navbot?

Reiss pats Navbot appreciatively on the shoulder.

PINBACK

Wha-- wuh-- Doolittle?

The alien can make no sense of its controls, which are blinking and wailing, sits in its command chair and fastens itself in. A transparent OVOID begins to close around the control nook, sealing the alien inside.

Another TREMOR shakes the ship.

REISS

We're screwed.

SPRINGER

No. Rise and shine, Pinback!

Springer smacks Pinback in the face. He revives and smiles drunkenly at Springer. With Reiss and Navbot's help, Springer hauls him from the gurney and they help him stand. In the doorway, the Bearded Man and Little Girl are now looking in.

THE ALIEN PILOT

sees the new intruders through its ovoid shield, which muffles klaxon and engine noise. Springer yells irately at the alien, MUTED.

BACK TO SCENE

SPRINGER (CONT'D)
 --asshole alien! He's the reason
 we're here! He can save us! Let us
 in!

The alien, safe inside its bubble, activates a control. The control room doors SLAM shut. A second door SHOOTs DOWN, sealing the room, TREMORS increasing all the time.

REISS
 Forget it, Edie.

SPRINGER
 No! Goddamn it, Pinback!

The alien presses another control and GREEN CRACKLING ENERGY shimmers across the surface of the control room ovoid, sealing it off like a smaller version of the main ship.

Springer grabs Pinback by the scruff of his neck and shakes him.

SPRINGER (CONT'D)
 Do something, you worm!

A HUGE TREMOR shakes the ship.

The window shutters CRACK, BLINDING ENERGY knives into the room and atmosphere is sucked out.

SLOW-MO/ZERO-G

-- Reiss is blown backward.

-- Springer slams into a bulkhead.

-- Navbot grips a railing with one arm, grabs Pinback in his other.

Shutters splinter. Light streams through. The control room is torn apart as cracks expand, causing the alien escape pod to jettison prematurely and crash into the room.

SPRINGER

hangs on for dear life.

THE ESCAPE POD

smashes into the shutters, lodges momentarily and then is sucked out with a large chunk of hull.

REISS

is also sucked out.

NAVBOT

loses his grip, hits the ceiling, taking Pinback with him, grabs a ceiling fixture.

SPRINGER

goes flying, too.

PINBACK

sees Springer fly out toward the crystals, tumbling end over end. He smiles, lets go of Navbot. Navbot grabs him by the collar. Pinback chokes. The ceiling fixture gives way and they both fly out.

EXT. SPACE

The alien ship rotates majestically on its axis as the crystals suck energy from its hull. The ship CRACKS like an egg and EXPLODES. The nebula reacts ecstatically, multicolored synaptic lightning dancing feverishly between the glowing rocks.

THE ALIEN ESCAPE POD

bounces like a pinball between the lightning bolts.

SPRINGER, REISS, NAVBOT AND PINBACK

cartwheel through the flashing void, flailing, mute.

PINBACK

opens his eyes to see

ALIEN ZOO CREATURES

flapping, twirling, spinning by.

PINBACK

amazed, serene, smiles, inverts, then mutely SCREAMS.

A HUGE CRYSTAL

barrels toward him.

PINBACK

curls into a ball.

THE HUGE CRYSTAL

rolls by, extremely close, then deflects to reveal a SMALL BLUE MUD-BALL PLANET rapidly approaching on the same trajectory.

PINBACK

looks up, then hides his head again. Navbot hurtles past and starts to FLARE against the mud-ball planet's upper atmosphere.

FORKED LIGHTNING

hits Springer and Reiss, altering the vector of their fall.

PINBACK

falls, a fetal ball. A CORONA BLOSSOMS around him, but his skin and clothing do not burn.

EXT. MUD-BALL PLANET - DAY

High in the sky, lights flash above a curving blue terrain, TWO FIREBALLS descending, leaving trails of vapor. A short way behind them, ANOTHER TWO FIREBALLS IGNITE and descend on a more distant trajectory.

WIDE VIEW

The terrain is a featureless sun-baked plain of cracked blue mud, the horizon visibly curved the planet is so small.

PAF! PAF!

Two fireballs hit foreground and throw up dust.

CLOSER,

smoke rises from two deep black holes in the mud. Not a sound, then another FIREBALL IMPACT shakes the ground close by. More IMPACTS further off. It is raining fireballs.

PINBACK

climbs out of one of the larger craters, totally unscathed. He stands on the brim, hands on hips, and views the scenery.

IN ANOTHER CRATER,

the ALIEN ESCAPE POD is smoking but intact, its surface now opaque. A bedraggled ZOO CREATURE hobbles past.

PINBACK

watches the zoo creature go about its business, then goes to investigate a closer smoldering crater. He scales the closer crater's brim, peers in.

IN THE CRATER

Navbot is face-down, half-buried and extremely charred.

Pinback clambers in beside the robot, digs earth away with his hands and finds the dirt is hot. He touches Navbot, scalds his hand.

PINBACK

Yeeow!

Navbot jolts to life and sits up, spraying dirt, caked in blue mud. One eye is unlit.

Pinback looks around, finds a small blue rock, goes to pick it up and winces. He sees a gruesome burn blistering his palm. Pinback uses his other hand to pick up the rock, holds the rock to the side of Navbot's head and gives it a hard GONG. Navbot's dead eye lights, he CLICKS and WHIRS.

NAVBOT

Thank you. Do you need assistance?

Pinback looks at his injured palm. The burn has miraculously healed, the skin rejuvenating.

PINBACK

I guess not.

PINBACK AND NAVBOT

climb out of the crater and stand. The alien has emerged from its escape pod, dazed and shaken. Navbot WHIRS.

NAVBOT

Pin Back. How are we alive?

PINBACK

I don't know. But the first thing
I want to do is to find the girls.

(MORE)

PINBACK (CONT'D)
Commander Reiss and Captain
Springer.

Pinback walks away from the alien pod.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
This way.

WIDE VIEW

Navbot follows Pinback away from the three craters.

EXT. MUD-BALL PLANET - CONTINUOUS

Pinback muses as they trek.

PINBACK
I know this place....

Pinback glances up at the sky of flashing lights, sees Navbot dawdling, pauses for him to catch up.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
You remember when I first came on
board your ship?

NAVBOT
Distinctly, sir.

PINBACK
I had this same feeling. Except it
seems much clearer now. I know
that I'm not crazy. Everything
that's happened has happened to
bring me here.

Pinback looks to the sky again.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
I just can't figure gosh darn why.

They continue walking, Pinback staring up. Just in front of them, the ground HEAVES, SWELLS and solidifies into a six-foot-tall blue MENHIR. Navbot sees it, halts, WHIRS, CLICKS.

NAVBOT
Sir....

Pinback walks right into it. He rebounds and holds his nose in pain, then regards the strange protuberance now jutting from the ground. Navbot stands, WHIRRING and CLICKING in confusion. Pinback views the standing stone with suspicion and walks around it.

PINBACK
Keep walking.

Navbot sidesteps the menhir and follows Pinback, who quickens the pace. Pinback glances back.

The menhir stands monolithic, then SHRINKS INTO THE GROUND.

Pinback halts abruptly. Navbot stops short.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
Did you see that?

Navbot glances back. They continue on and Pinback slams straight into the identical menhir now risen up before him.

NAVBOT
Sir....

PINBACK
Damn stupid place to put a rock.

Pinback sidesteps and walks on, pursued by Navbot across the featureless terrain.

The menhir stands alone as Pinback and Navbot depart, and then GLIDES FORWARD, following at a distance with the cracked- earth planet surface flowing over it. Navbot glances back.

NAVBOT
Sir....

PINBACK
(sharply)
What?

NAVBOT
The rock is following us.

Pinback halts, Navbot halts. The menhir halts. The human and the robot regard the completely stationary rock.

Pinback shakes his head, and marches on, resolute. The menhir follows. Navbot WHIRS and hurries after Pinback. Pinback continues walking, then suddenly springs and spins around in a martial-arts-style move. The menhir comes to a standstill the exact same moment.

PINBACK
Aha!

Navbot WHIRS and looks back and forth, confused, between Pinback and the rock.

NAVBOT

Sir?

PINBACK

Navbot, don't -- you -- move.

Pinback turns slowly and walks on a few more paces. Navbot regards the menhir and then BEEPS, alarmed, as the monolith GLIDES FORWARD and INCREASES IN SIZE.

Pinback repeats his karate spin and is terrified to see the menhir racing at him. Pinback cowers, the giant rock shadow hangs over him, THE SIZE OF A HOUSE. The sound of a MAN'S LAUGHTER makes Pinback look up.

The GIANT MENHIR towers over him, LAUGHING.

Navbot skirts the rock, catches up with Pinback, helps him to his feet.

The menhir recovers from its laughing fit.

MENHIR

I'm just messing with you,
Pinback.

PINBACK

Do I know you?

MENHIR

Let's just say, I'm not the guy
you used to know.

(laughs)

Come onnn, I thought you'd nearly
figured it all out. You must be
even dumber than you look.

PINBACK

I'm not going to stand here--

The menhir SHRINKS and blobs into the shape of a BLUE CLAY EASY CHAIR. Pinback frowns.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

I'm not going to stand here and be
patronized by a rock. Navbot,
let's go.

Pinback and Navbot walk away. The chair rolls forward and rises up into an amorphous MASS that flows along beside them.

MENHIR

Sorry.

PINBACK
Pardon me?

MENHIR
I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings.

Pinback takes an abrupt turn, Navbot tags along. The BLUE MASS HALTS.

MENHIR (CONT'D)
You're heading in the wrong
direction.

Pinback changes direction again.

MENHIR (CONT'D)
She's cute, you know.

Pinback stops and faces the blue mass. The object sculpts itself into human form -- short, bearded, thin, a Golem in Dark Star fatigues -- a BLUE CLAY TALBY.

Pinback is stunned and disturbed to see the image of his former ship mate. He squints and steps toward him.

Blue Clay Talby smiles and fakes a karate move.

TALBY
Pretty nifty with the martial arts
back there. They put you in
training before they sent you out
to find me?

PINBACK
(incredulous)
Talby?

TALBY
Good to see you, bud.

PINBACK
How did--? What did--? Is that
really you in there?

Blue Clay Talby looks down at himself, then COLORIZES into human flesh and clothes. He gestures at the sky.

TALBY
It's the Phoenix Asteroids. Aren't
they beautiful?

Pinback GASPS and suddenly turns weak at the knees. The BLUE CLAY CHAIR and a matching OTTOMAN pop up out of the ground behind him.

Pinback sits and stares at Talby in a mixture of shock and dawning recognition. Navbot regards the ottoman and sits.

PINBACK

It is you! It really is.... And somehow...

TALBY

Somehow you knew it all along?

PINBACK

Right!

Pinback is overjoyed, almost near tears. He jumps up and steps close, staring at Talby's clothes, his face, his beard. Talby smiles and holds out his hands for Pinback to touch.

TALBY

We're all here, Pinback. Me, Boiler, Doolittle, Commander Powell.

PINBACK

(excitedly)

Commander Powell?! But... how?

TALBY

After the ship blew up, the Phoenix Asteroids came right through our debris field. I don't even remember how I got out there--

PINBACK

I blasted you out of the airlock by mistake!

TALBY

You did? Well, thanks. Because I was out there with Doolittle--

PINBACK

He was trying to fix the bomb!

TALBY

Yeah, and then the Phoenix Asteroids came right through the debris field and they picked me up.

PINBACK

You've been out here all this time?

TALBY
 Circled the universe. That got
 pretty lonesome, so I put the old
 crew together. You like?

Pinback stares around him.

PINBACK
 You built this?

TALBY
 We all did....
 (lowers his voice and leans
 close)
 It's the landscape of your dreams.

A BREEZE blows out of nowhere and a SEMI-NAKED GIRL grows up
 out of the ground like a Botticelli angel. Pinback is agog as
 the girl takes form, wreathed in flowing hair and a wispy veil,
 bearing a striking resemblance to Springer.

PINBACK
 Heyyyyy....

The Semi-Naked Girl drifts close to Pinback, takes him by the
 chin and kisses him softly on the mouth. Pinback starts to
 enjoy it, but then pulls away. The Semi-Naked Girl looks sad as
 she SPLATS INTO A POOL OF BLUE CLAY. LAUGHTER nearby.

DOOLITTLE and BOILER have appeared, enjoying the joke and
 looking exactly as they did on board the Dark Star.

TALBY
 Guys, cut it out!

PINBACK
 Very funny. I see nothing's
 changed.

DOOLITTLE
 Aw, come on, Pinback, don't be so
 up tight.

BOILER
 Yeah, live a little, dope!

Navbot WHIRS, perplexed, as Boiler and Doolittle start to poke
 and prod the robot, goading it. Pinback frowns at Talby.

PINBACK
 Is this why you dragged me here?

TALBY
 Dude, I saved your life!

PINBACK

Did it ever occur to you I might
not need saving?

TALBY

What kind of attitude is that?
You're a hero now. You even got a
girl.

PINBACK

I'm perfectly capable-- Oh, I
don't even know why I am having
this conversation. You guys
treated me like an old washrag!
Why would I want to be part of
your weird planet? All I want is
to find my friends!

NAVBOT

Major Pinback, sir.

BOILER

Oooh, Major Pinback?

DOOLITTLE

More like Major Pain In The Ass!

Pinback, fuming, turns to Navbot and then follows the robot's
gaze down to his feet.

Pulsing, blue-veined ROOTS have grown up out of the ground and
embedded themselves in Pinback's boots.

Pinback SHRIEKS and kicks free.

The roots SHRINK BACK into the mud.

PINBACK

What in heck's name was that?

TALBY

If you're going to stay, you'll
have to be absorbed.

PINBACK

That's disgusting.

TALBY

It's painless.

PINBACK

I can't believe this. Lieutenant
Doolittle, I used to look up to
you, but now....

(MORE)

PINBACK (CONT'D)
You guys are a disgrace! Come on,
Navbot. We're going home.

Navbot stands and follows Pinback away from Talby and the others.

Talby glowers, the sky behind him FLASHING VIOLENTLY.

DOOLITTLE
Bummer.

BOILER
No kidding -- Aww, mannnn!

Boiler is annoyed as his moustache GROWS LONG VINES. Doolittle is likewise irritated as his own fingers SPROUT LEAVES. Talby's hair CURLS INTO VEGETATION, like a demonic Arcimboldo vegetable man painting.

EXT. RAINFOREST - CONTINUOUS

PLANTS GROW UP ALL AROUND, shooting up from the planet surface, snaking out and blanketing the ground.

TREES block Pinback's path and close in overhead, blotting out the sky. Pinback looks back to see

IN A CLEARING

Talby, Doolittle and Boiler now stand as HUMAN PLANTS.

TALBY
This is home, Pinback.

PINBACK
Not if I can help it.

Pinback thrashes off into the undergrowth. Navbot follows.

DOOLITTLE
Talby, what's with the foliage?

BOILER
Yeah, man. Not cool.

TALBY
Oh, be quiet.

Vegetation CLOSES IN around the Dark Star crew.

INT. RAINFOREST - DAY

Dark, primeval, alien. HOOTS and SCREECHES all about.

Pinback and Navbot struggle through the choking brush. A thick branch THWACKS Pinback in the face, and knocks him on his butt in a muddy puddle. A flurry of ALIEN BIRDS take flight above. Navbot helps Pinback regain his feet.

PINBACK

I'm fine.

Pinback removes his sodden crew jacket and hangs it on a tree. A long, feral GROWL makes them both spin around in opposite directions. Pinback sees nothing, shadows in the trees, then more BIRDS.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Everything is fine.

Navbot WHIRS, nervous, eyes glowing bright in jungle. Pinback pats the robot's shoulder and they continue.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Let's both keep calm about this.
If this place is made up of stuff
from my brain, we've got nothing
to be afraid of.

Navbot WHIRS.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Wait, that did not come out right.
Whatever. We've got to focus on
finding Captain Springer and
Commander Reiss, then we're--

A DEEP SEISMIC RUMBLE shakes the forest.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Then we're out of here. Okay?

Navbot WHIRS repeatedly.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

Stay focused, Navbot.

Pinback picks up the pace and they are soon blazing a trail. Then stop.

Pinback's sodden crew jacket is hanging on a tree: they are back where Pinback fell in the puddle. Another RUMBLE, followed by the same feral GROWL, closer now.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
 Nothing to be afraid of. We'll
 just try a different--

Movement in the trees makes Pinback stop. He signals Navbot to be silent and then hears a GURGLING GROWL. He looks up.

An ORANGE BALL WITH CLAWED FEET -- the FARK from Pinback's Dark Star mission report -- is perched in a tree, GURGLING and quivering in a threatening fashion. It gives a shudder and then spits out a small object.

The object lands at Pinback's feet. He picks it up and sees it is a small rubber CHEW TOY. He gives it a squeeze and it SQUEAKS. More GURGLINGS make Pinback look up into the trees.

NAVBOT
 Sir: Farks.

The trees are FULL OF FARKS, all excited to see Pinback. The aliens go silent and then all TAP THEIR FEET IN UNISON. Pinback very carefully sets down the chew toy, and whispers to Navbot.

PINBACK
 Yes, Navbot. I know what they are.
 They're harmless. Just very
 playful. When I give the word....
 Run!

Pinback flees. Navbot is left standing, WHIRRING, and then follows.

Up in the trees, farks leap from their branches.

Pinback and Navbot hurtle through the forest. Pinback looks back.

Hordes of farks are bouncing after them, bounding through the trees.

Navbot lags behind. One fark latches onto the robot's head. Navbot is blinded as the alien's claws clamp around his eyes and he crashes into a tree. Pinback runs up, waving a large branch, and starts batting at the fark. Other farks keep coming from all directions. Pinback whacks at them with the tree branch, but they are overwhelmed. Suddenly, farks start to pop and deflate in midair. Pinback looks around.

The ALIEN PILOT is standing pointing a WEAPON, taking potshots at the alien air bags.

Farks pop and shoot around, deflating with farting noises. Others scatter, leaving Navbot unharmed but very confused.

NAVBOT
Major Pinback? Sir?

The alien pilot lowers its gun. Pinback sees Reiss nearby, gagged and bound with vines, tied to a tether. She is filthy, cut and bruised, and glares at Pinback fiercely.

PINBACK
It's okay, Navbot. Let me do the talking.

The alien points its weapon to stop Pinback advancing.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
There's no need to be hostile. Did you find Captain Springer?

More grunts and protests from Reiss. She indicates 'back there' by gesturing with her head. Navbot steps out of the bushes, WHIRS, and then translates.

NAVBOT
Major Pinback, Commander Springer... she's been captured, sir.

THE ALIEN PILOT

leads the way, like a hunter, through the trees, Reiss ungagged but still on a tether, and Pinback following with Navbot.

REISS
After all the trees appeared, there was this huge rumble and a big ugly bird swooped out of the sky and took her to its cave. I saw it happen.

PINBACK
It's my fault.

REISS
What?

PINBACK
The rumble, this planet, all of this--
(gestures around them)
--it's built out of my brain. It's complicated. The guys from my old spaceship, they're alive here, in the Phoenix Asteroids.

The alien glances back at Pinback.

REISS
Phoenix asteroids, huh? Does any
of this make sense to you, Navbot?

NAVBOT
Yes, Ma'am. Major Pinback is going
to take us home.

EXT. RAINFOREST PERIMETER - DAY

They halt at the perimeter of a clearing where trees give way to a grassy rise beneath a rocky incline. They pause behind a rock. The alien unclips a telescopic sight from its weapon and offers it to Pinback. Pinback peers through the scope.

REISS
How about you untie me now, huh?

PINBACK'S P.O.V.

The ELECTRONIC SIGHT reveals a large, dark CAVE at the foot of a craggy blue-mud MOUNTAIN, at the top of which, wreathed in clouds, is a ruined TEMPLE. Lighting flickers in the sky, followed by a ominous RUMBLE.

PINBACK
What is that?

REISS
That was not up there last time we
were here.

A prehistoric SCREECH (O.S.) makes Reiss look skyward in fear. Pinback gawks up. The alien clips the sight back onto its weapon and stares at Pinback expectantly. Navbot WHIRS, translates.

NAVBOT
Captain Springer is up there, sir,
in the temple.

PINBACK
That's what I thought. Navbot,
wait for my signal.

Pinback hurries forward.

REISS
Pinback, no, you idiot!

The alien aims its weapon skyward.

PINBACK

scampers out from the forest and rapidly scales the incline toward the cave.

THE ALIEN PILOT

scans the sky with its weapon.

PINBACK

continues his ascent and reaches the cave.

INT. CAVE - DAY

Pinback stands silhouetted, peering into darkness. Total darkness inside the cave, then he makes out a small figure: the Little Girl from the ship. He turns and waves back to the others.

EXT. RAINFOREST PERIMETER - DAY

Navbot stands and follows Pinback. Reiss can almost not bare to look. The alien continues scanning the sky.

REISS

There is no way you are getting me
to go anywhere near there.

PAPA (O.S.)

Essie, baby, you comin' home?

The alien and Reiss both turn to see the Bearded Man from the Wanderer -- Reiss' PAPA -- standing behind them.

REISS

Papa, leave us alone. We're busy.

PAPA

You want me to help?

REISS

How can you help me? You've been
dead for years. Leave me alone!

The Bearded Man gestures at the vines binding Reiss' wrists, which fall off.

PAPA

Anything is possible, baby.

INT. CAVE - DAY

Pinback takes a few steps into the cave and sniffs, smelling an offensive odor. Navbot appears behind him and turns on a chest lamp built into his torso. The lamplight frightens the LITTLE GIRL and makes her run away, deeper into the darkness. Navbot WHIRS, ECHOING.

NAVBOT
Captain Springer's child.

Pinback shushes the robot, then looks round, in surprise.

PINBACK
(whispering)
You mean that's her kid?

NAVBOT
Yes, sir. Her dead child.

PINBACK
(whispering)
That is interesting. I'm sorry to hear it. Follow me. Try not to make a sound.

Pinback and Navbot venture deeper in, Pinback holding his hand over his nose. Navbot's lamp scans the floor as they round a bend. Pinback makes him halt. The lamp has illuminated the Little Girl, who is crouched in a corner, looking terrified, hiding beside a small rock.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
Hi.

Pinback smiles. The child does not. Pinback takes a step toward the Little Girl. The Girl bares her teeth, emits an ALIEN GROWLS then runs off again into the darkness. Pinback halts. He looks around and notices the ground is littered with guano and remnants of giant feathers.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
What do you think, Navbot? Do you think we're really going to meet some big giant monster bird, or is this all part of my imagination?

Navbot WHIRS.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
Don't answer that.

NAVBOT
Sir: up ahead.

Navbot casts his light forward to reveal a small stream in a channel carved into the floor. Very faint, the sound of RUNNING WATER. Pinback signals Navbot to take the lead and follows, close.

Navbot's lamp reveals a twisted Escher staircase carved into the rock. The stream running alongside the stairs, UP to where it cascades into a POOL OF WATER IN THE CEILING.

Pinback picks up a small rock, tosses it toward the pool. It falls UP and splashes, reflecting light around the walls. Pinback steps forward to have a closer look, teeters, and then falls UP himself.

INT. UNDERWATER

Pinback plunges, flailing, into an inverted cascade of bubbles. The ANGLE INVERTS, up becoming down. Pinback swims toward an ethereal light ahead.

INT. GLEAMING POOL ROOM

Pinback surfaces, gasping, treading water. He has emerged into an ornate, white-tiled bathing pool resembling a Turkish bath. Fountains, pristine architecture, windows onto clouds. Pinback splashes toward poolside, beaches himself on steps and lays there coughing.

SITAR MUSIC makes Pinback stop spluttering (an eerie instrumental refrain of 'Benson Arizona'). He climbs to his feet and sees Doolittle and Boiler, dressed in glowing white versions of their Dark Star uniforms, both playing sitars and both apparently as high as kites. Neither notice Pinback. He does not disturb them, sees a fancy Oriental screen nearby. The faint sound of a BASEBALL GAME (O.S.). Pinback walks over, peers round.

Talby is reclining on a couch with Springer, both in glowing white attire, Springer's very short and low-cut. She is curled up, eating popcorn, glassy-eyed, watching TV.

ON SCREEN: the 1955 WORLD SERIES CHAMPIONSHIP: Brooklyn Dodgers versus the New York Yankees, Yogi Berra on the last innings.

PINBACK

This is not my idea of Heaven.

TALBY

(his eyes on the game)

It's not?

PINBACK
Commander Powell liked the
Dodgers. I was always a Yankees
fan.

SITAR MUSIC stops (O.S.) and Yogi Berra FREEZES IN MID-PLAY.

TALBY
Have you spoken to Commander
Powell lately?

PINBACK
Of course not. He's been dead for
80 years.

TALBY
You want to?

PINBACK
No!

TALBY
He loved you like a son.

PINBACK
Talby, my own father did not love
me like a son. That's not why I'm
here. You know that.

TALBY
I'm sure he'd like to see you.

PINBACK
Talby, whatever you have done to
Commander Powell, I don't want to
know, okay? It took me long
enough to get over him blowing up
right next to me. I was not happy
about keeping him alive in our
deep freeze for a year.

Talby clicks his fingers. Springer puts down her popcorn, opens
a fancy lacquered cabinet and takes out a small, rectangular
box. She presents the box to Pinback. Pinback stares into
Springer's eyes, snaps his fingers. No sign of recognition.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
What have you done to her?

TALBY
Anything I like.
(off Pinback's reaction)
Relax, I didn't touch her. Open
the box. It's a gift, from me to
you.

Pinback takes the box and opens it. COMMANDER POWELL is inside, miniaturized and alive, encased in frozen crystal.

POWELL
(ghostly, filtered)
Pinback? Is that you?

Pinback snaps shut the box. A TREMOR shakes the room.

The pool RIPPLES AND BUBBLES.

Doolittle and Boiler exchange worried looks and put down their sitars.

PINBACK
Talby, I am not impressed. How can
you be happy here?

Doolittle and Boiler appear from behind the screen.

DOOLITTLE
Pinback -- I should've guessed.

BOILER
It's good to see you, man! The
team is all together!

Boiler goes to punch Pinback on the arm. Pinback pulls away.

PINBACK
No!

He brandishes the miniaturized space-traveler-in-a-box at Talby.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
Commander Powell was a great man!
You've turned him into a Popsicle!

The water in the pool CONTINUES TO BOIL.

TALBY
Pinback, we love you, man. Come
back to us, please. You can have
the girl.

Pinback grabs Springer, holding her close, backing away from his Dark Star crew mates.

PINBACK
I am going to take this young
woman, and am going to leave here
with her and my friends.
(MORE)

PINBACK (CONT'D)

And, let me make this clear, I do
not want to be party of this
crazy, sick charade!

THE POOL ERUPTS

and a GIANT, UGLY PREHISTORIC ALIEN FLYING CREATURE rears from
the water with a hellish SHRIEK.

BOILER

Holey moley.

DOOLITTLE

Awesome.

TALBY

No!

Talby leaps from his couch, trying to grab Springer from
Pinback.

The FLYING CREATURE SHRIEKS again and snaps at Doolittle and
Boiler, who stumble back, blocking Talby's path as Pinback runs
with Springer, dragging her toward the pool.

TALBY (CONT'D)

Out of my way!

The GIANT BIRD rears up before Pinback and Springer, spreading
its wings.

Springer appears to regain her senses, staring at the bird in
terror, just as Pinback propels her forward with him into the
water.

Talby cowers behind Doolittle and Boiler as the bird snaps at
them.

DOOLITTLE

Heavy duty, man.

BOILER

That Pinback always was a great
big turkey.

TALBY

Nice birdy. Pretty bird.

INT. UNDERWATER

Pinback swims into the depths with Springer.

Behind them, the GIANT BIRD dives after them, beak thrust forward, bubble streaming, eyes burning, searching for them.

Pinback swims faster toward an opening ahead. The opening is blocked by a grating with a sign: 'No Way Out, No Way, Man.' Pinback rips off the grating, and enters

AN UNDERWATER PIPE

Pinback and Springer are sucked into a tube by the underwater current. Behind them, the GIANT BIRD'S BEAK crashes into the opening of the pipe, unable to fit through.

EXT. WATERFALL - DAY

Water spews from the mouth of a giant stone effigy of Pinback carved into a blue-rock cliff face. Two tiny figures burst out of the waterfall and plummet --

SIX HUNDRED FEET BELOW

-- into a plunge pool in a lake at the foothills of the mountain.

EXT. PLUNGE POOL - DAY

The cascade thunders down.

UNDERWATER

Pinback and Springer plunge into the foam, Springer starts to sink, unconscious. Pinback grabs her and kicks toward the surface.

Pinback surfaces with Springer, gasping, and swims toward the shore. A FLASH OF LIGHT and DEEP BOOM. Pinback glances up as

THE MOUNTAINTOP

EXPLODES with another BOOM and flames jet out from Talby's temple, which crumbles.

EXT. LAKESIDE - DAY

Reiss and Navbot help Pinback drag Springer from the water. They lay her on dry ground and Pinback looks down at her body, preparing for CPR.

PINBACK

I got this.

Reiss shoves Pinback aside and covers Springer with her jacket. Springer COUGHS, regaining consciousness.

SPRINGER
Jesus, what a dream.

Springer sees Pinback staring down.

PINBACK
It's not a dream. It's a rescue.

THE GIANT BIRD

appears like a phoenix from the flames of the ruined temple, Talby astride a saddle on the creature's back. He reigns it forward, off the mountaintop.

EXT. RAINFOREST - DAY

Pinback runs with Springer, Navbot and Reiss, dodging debris falling from the trees.

THE GIANT BIRD

carries Talby down, swooping over trees.

EXT. CLEARING

Pinback, Springer, Navbot and Reiss run out of the trees into a denuded patch where all forest life has given way to a hummock of blue-cracked mud.

An immense egg-shaped ALIEN spaceship, a blue-clay version of the alien's former ship, is sitting on its end, rising high above the tree-line, its based supported by blue roots. The ship appears to have grown out of the ground. A ramp stands open in the spaceship belly, a glowing light within.

PINBACK
How--?

REISS
He grew it.

The alien pilot steps out of its new space craft and beckons to them. They hurry over, run up onto the ramp.

Another TREMOR makes Pinback look round. He is the last to board.

Trees SHRIVEL to reveal the MOUNTAIN NOW DECAPITATED and in flames, the planet dying around it.

TALBY

Stop!

ALL TREMORS CEASE.

A sudden, eerie silence, with only the sound of CRACKLING FLAMES. Talby trots out of the decimated forest. He stops in the clearing, dressed in his original Dark Star fatigues.

TALBY (CONT'D)

Pinback, I... I just had to say...
(emotionally)
It doesn't have to be like this.

Pinback views his old ship-mate, and SIGHS.

TALBY (CONT'D)

You're right. I hate it here.
(steps forward)
Take me with you, Virgil.

PINBACK

My name's not Virgil.

TALBY

It's not?

PINBACK

I'm Bill Fruge.

Talby looks confused.

TALBY

Well, Bill, I appreciate you leveling with me. And I'm sorry that I stole your girl. I'll level with you, too. It's boring living like a god. All I wanted was some conversation.

PINBACK

What about Doolittle and Boiler?

TALBY

They're imbeciles. They love it here. Come on, what do you say... take me with you?

PINBACK

I don't know, Talby.

Springer grabs Pinback from behind, pulls him on board and the ramps SLAMS SHUT.

TALBY
Pin-baaaaaaaaaack!

The MOUNTAIN ERUPTS behind Talby. The sky DARKENS, and TREMORS RETURN with increased ferocity, FIERY HAIL and WIND.

ROOTS SNAKE UP TALBY'S LEGS, encasing half his body.

Talby's face TURNS BLUE, his eyes BURN ORANGE, agonized and pleading:

TALBY (CONT'D)
Don't leave me!

INT. MUD-SHIP, AIRLOCK

Pinback pulls away from Springer, the sound of ENGINES powering up around them.

PINBACK
I wish you hadn't done that.

SPRINGER
There was no way he was going to let you go.

PINBACK
(peevd)
I guess we'll never know that now, will we?

Exasperated, Springer walks away. Pinback goes after her, following her through a blue-vine corridor.

SPRINGER
Keep away from me.

PINBACK
Is that all the thanks I get?

SPRINGER
Thanks? You want me to thank you for dragging us all this way and losing me my ship? Some hero you turned out to be -- Bill.

Pinback grabs her by the arm, stopping her, mid-rant. She pulls away and SLAPS HIM.

Then she grabs him back and kisses him very hard on the mouth. Pinback's knees buckle. She shoves him away. Pinback goes to speak. She silences him with a warning finger, then storms off, wiping away tears. Pinback slumps onto the deck, decimated.

EXT. MUD-BALL PLANET

The alien mud-ship rises, crackling with blue-white energy, leaving the erupting planet below. Reiss's Papa, the Bearded Man, appears from the tree to wave goodbye.

Talby SCREAMS again:

TALBY
It's so lonely out here!

INT. MUD-SHIP, CONTROL ROOM

The alien pilot operates its controls among vines and creepers. Reiss and Navbot are strapped into seats behind the alien, terrified as the SHIP JUDDERS and SHAKES around them. Springer fastens herself into a seat behind them. SUDDEN SILENCE as they break free of the planet's atmosphere. No one says a word.

EXT. SPACE

The mud-ship powers away from the Phoenix Asteroids, the crystals FLASHING WILDLY all round, then the astral phenomena EXPLODES in a chain reaction erupting from its core.

One vicious ELECTRIC ARC hits the departing mud-ship.

INT. MUD-SHIP, CONTROL ROOM

The ship is ROCKED VIOLENTLY. The pilot rips away some creepers from a large RED GLOWING BUTTON and punches it.

EXT. SPACE

The mud-ship shoots off into REDSPACE, evading the DETONATION as the Phoenix Asteroids rip themselves apart in a final cosmic cataclysm.

WIDE VIEW

The crystals expand to form a NEBULA.

WIDER VIEW

Viewed from afar, the nebula is a SMUDGE OF LIGHT.

EVEN WIDER VIEW

The smudge of light GLIMMERS for a second against a hundred billion other points of light.

EXT. REDSPACE

The mud-ship travels along.

INT. MUD-SHIP, CONTROL ROOM

The alien pilot is slumped with relief at his controls. Pinback appears behind Springer and crawls into his chair. He smiles. She glares at him, lowering her voice.

SPRINGER
This alien.

PINBACK
Possibly the first truly sentient
life we've ever--

SPRINGER
(cutting him off)
I want your word.

PINBACK
Anything.

SPRINGER
I want a ship. No alien
interference. Just get us back, I
don't care what it takes. After
that, I never want to hear from
you or the Corps again.

PINBACK
I was going suggest...

Reiss turns and frowns at him.

PINBACK (CONT'D)
Maybe he could drop us off.

SPRINGER
Sounds good to me.

EXT. SPACE

A bright FLASH then WARP OF RED and the mud-ship drops into
normal space.

A porthole IRISES OPEN in the side of the ship and a tiny
vessel pops out --

THE WANDERER

-- rebuilt, and draped in moss and vegetation. The mud-ship nudges away and then WARPS TO RED and zips away.

INT. WANDERER, FLIGHT DECK

Springer, Reiss and Navbot take their seats, which are covered in moss and vines, going through per-flight checks. Pinback occupies the spare seat by the door, looking glum.

PINBACK (V.O.)
My mission may have seemed like a
total failure. But I knew
otherwise...

INT. MUD-SHIP, CONTROL ROOM

CLOSE ON

a small piece of card bearing a crude, hand-drawn map of the terrestrial solar system, with an arrow pointing to the third planet indicating 'Earth.'

The alien pilot flips the card, revealing it to be Major Virgil Pinback's Space Corps business card. The alien narrows its eyes and the CARD INCINERATES. The alien YELPS as it burns its fingers.

PINBACK (V.O.)
I knew that, some day, truly
evolved beings would be back to
see us. I made sure of that.

INT. SPACE CORPS OFFICE

Pinback faces a Space Corps officer identified by his nameplate as MAJOR DICK, seated at a panel with DOCTORS, AIDES and GENERALS, including General Parsley and other earlier proponents of Pinback's case.

MAJOR DICK
You gave this alien our
coordinates?

PINBACK
Just Earth. And our home system.
You know, the Sun, Mars and
planets.

One of the generals GROANS. Pinback looks up and down the panel for a friendly face, finds none.

MAJOR DICK

Thank you, Major Pinback. You may step down.

GENERAL PARSLEY

Major Dick, I don't see why we should jump to conclusions about the intentions of these clearly superior, highly evolved new beings.

MAJOR DICK

Thank you, General Parsley. We are all familiar with your views on this subject. Major Pinback, I repeat, you may step down.

PINBACK

Actually, I wasn't finished.

MAJOR DICK

Really.

PINBACK

If it's okay?

MAJOR DICK

Be my guest.

PINBACK

Thanks. I know how all this is going to look to the funding board. You took a chance to send me out, and what do I bring back? A lot of cockamamie stories. Nothing really you can use. Like the Dark Star, and all them other missions.

MAJOR DICK

We appreciate your concern.

PINBACK

Wait, there's more.

Major Dick shifts uncomfortably. Pinback unzips his jacket, fishes around inside and takes out a bundled rag.

PINBACK (CONT'D)

I hid this until now because I wanted you to be the first to see it, Major Dick.

Pinback unwraps Talby's crystal containing Commander Powell.

POWELL

Hello? Hello? Where am I?

Aides and Generals crane forward, amazed. Pinback stands and grins at General Parsley, then places Commander Powell on the table in front of Major Dick.

POWELL (CONT'D)

Pinback? Are we home yet?

EXT. EARTH STATION

The giant space station rings the globe, spanning left and right, viewed through the window of--

INT. PRESENTATION HALL

Pinback steps up to a podium, framed against the window overlooking Earth. He is dressed in full Space Corps Major's garb, his first medal on his chest. General Parsley takes another, even larger, medal and pins it beside the first. Pinback salutes and shakes the General's hand.

Flashbulbs FLASH. Pinback grins. Crowd APPLAUD.

RECEPTION, LATER

General Parsley embraces Pinback, tears in his eyes.

PINBACK

Will Commander Powell be restored to normal size one day?

GENERAL PARSLEY

No, son, he'll be small the rest of his life. But he's a very happy little man, as am I. You did us proud! We'll just have to figure out a way to get you integrated back into the program. You're our new hero now.

PINBACK

Thank you, General. Have you seen Captain Springer? You know, the girl I came with?

GENERAL PARSLEY

Her? I think they left already.

PINBACK

What?

GENERAL PARSLEY
You might just catch them, if you
ask my aide--

Pinback runs out, leaving the General standing.

EXT. EARTH STATION, GANTRY

The Wanderer, now cleaned of vines and extra-terrestrial
planetary growth, drifts in dry dock.

Pinback runs up to where Springer is reviewing inventory with
Reiss and Navbot. Navbot WHIRS and CHIRPS, seeing Pinback.
Reiss appears less enthused.

PINBACK
She's looking great. The ship.

REISS
She'll run.

PINBACK
You missed the ceremony.

SPRINGER
No, we didn't.

An awkward pause.

PINBACK
It's good to see you, Navbot. Glad
to be home?

Navbot WHIRS, CLICKS. Reiss takes the robot by an arm and leads
him on board before he can start to speak.

REISS
(to Springer)
See you on board.

SPRINGER
Nearly done here.

Reiss and Navbot disappear inside.

PINBACK
You got your money?

SPRINGER
Paid in full.

PINBACK
Oh, well. Good. I just wanted to
say--

MESSENGER
Major Pinback! Major Pinback!

A young MESSENGER runs up, out of breath.

MESSENGER (CONT'D)
Urgent orders, sir. General
Parsley must see you immediately.

PINBACK
What's so urgent?

MESSENGER
Sir, I think it's a new mission,
but that's not for me to say.

Springer pats Pinback on the arm.

SPRINGER
Count me out.

She walks up the landing ramp. As soon as Pinback realizes she has gone, a nearby EXHAUST vents steam onto the gantry. He yells up into the ship.

PINBACK
Edie!

Even if she heard him, Springer does not stop. The ramp RETRACTS, the Wanderer disengages and then ZIPS AWAY.

As Pinback stares, forlorn, the ship's departure causes a ZERO GRAVITY pocket. The Messenger grabs a handrail, stopping himself from drifting away. Pinback dislodges from the gantry and FLOATS OFF into space.

MESSENGER
Major Pinback, sir! The General is
waiting!

Pinback looks drifts further away over the giant blue GLOBE OF THE EARTH.

PINBACK
What's your name, son?

MESSENGER
Private Hurl, sir. Private Charles
Hurl. My buddies call me 'Chuck.'

PINBACK
Chuck Hurl. I like it.

MESSENGER
Don't move, sir, I'll go get help.

PINBACK

Relax, Chuck. I've got this under control.

MESSENGER

Sir?

PINBACK

You go tell the General, I think I've figured out a way.

Pinback does a little pirouette, floating off towards the Earth, then strikes a pose like Superman, gives a little wave and sails off into the sunrise.

And over the END TITLES, 'Benson Arizona,' plays:

A million suns shine down,/ But I see only one./ Tryin' to think I'm over you,/ I find I've just begun./ The years move faster than the days,/ There's no warmth in the light./ How I miss those desert skies,/ Your cold touch in the night.

Benson, Arizona,/ The warm wind through your hair./ My body flies the galaxy,/ My heart longs to be there./ Benson, Arizona,/ The same stars in the sky./ But they seemed so much kinder/ When we watched them, you and I.

FADE OUT.