

**The Great Outback**

"Planet Jones" - Show #114

by  
John D. Powers

PO Box 28055  
Atlanta, GA 30358  
[www.panggenre.com/about/contact.html](http://www.panggenre.com/about/contact.html)

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PLANET JONES

TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. PLANET XIA BASE - ESTABLISHING

WIDE ANGLE daytime establishing shot of the exterior of the planet-side base from which the CIS Daisy has been operating. The CIS Daisy is parked in the nearby field.

INT. HABITAT MODULE (OFFICE) - DAY

JONES and ARIEL are sitting across from each other at a table.

JONES

Ariel, have you noticed that both Ledge and the ship's computer are acting odder than usual the last few days?

ARIEL

Ledge always acts odd. I wouldn't know about the computer. I've only seen it a few times.

JONES

There's something very funny about the way Ledge programmed that AI unit.

ARIEL

What makes you say that?

JONES

It's not important, I guess. But it's got me a little worried. The last run we made, the computer's navigation coordinates were wrong.

ARIEL

You always say that it's impossible to be perfect when you jump.

JONES

There's a difference between being off by a light year on an interstellar jump and jumping to the wrong system altogether. It's lucky that I always double-check the nav coordinates.

ARIEL

So that's not normal?

JONES

I've never seen a computer make an error like that before. Sometimes they have bad data or something, but in this case, it was just, plain wrong. It's almost like it's--distracted--or something.

ARIEL

Like I say, I don't interact with it, so I wouldn't know.

JONES

In any case, let me know when we can work in about a two-week block of time where I can hire out the ship.

ARIEL

Actually, if you were ready, you could hire us--you--we--you know what I mean. Right now. People aren't exactly knocking down the doors and Ledge hasn't blocked off any time for salvage operations. He talks about it a lot, but he hasn't done anything about it yet.

JONES

I think he's finding it tougher than he thought it would be. Anything easy to locate has probably already been found by either the military or by one of the corporate-connected salvage operations.

ARIEL

Why does he do this? If he wanted to, he could sell his ship for a small fortune, retire away in luxury for the rest of his life, and live happily ever after.

JONES

I don't know. Maybe he just wants something to do. He seems to like flying. Maybe this way he can do it without having to toe corporate lines? Maybe a freedom thing?

ARIEL

For that matter, why do you work for him? You're making a quarter of what you could be making.

JONES

Well--

ARIEL

And for that matter, why isn't he working for you? You're the genius.

JONES

(introspective)

Maybe I'm not as smart as I think I am?

ARIEL

(restrains urge to laugh)

To me, it sounds you're still upset that Koko dumped you.

JONES

She didn't dump me.

ARIEL

Oh, yes, she did.

JONES

Oh, no she didn't. She wasn't sure that we were right for each other. That's all.

ARIEL

I told you she dumped you.

EXT. PLANET XIA/BASE - TRANSITIONAL

WIDE ANGLE shot of the base at night.

CUT TO:

INT. CIS DAISY - SAME

LEDGE and KOKO are busy restocking supplies and storing some additional cargo containers for their upcoming mission. Both look as if they have been working overtime.

Amy/AI's image is in the video monitor in the background.

Koko is looking at the cargo manifest on a newspaper.

KOKO

So Jonesie hired us out?

LEDGE

Yes. He told me he wanted to do this back when I hired him onto the crew. I guess he finally got around to it.

KOKO

I guess any work is good work when you're idle.

LEDGE

This may be an extended trip. Are you and he on okay terms?

KOKO

I guess so. Except for the fact that he's not in here helping us. I think he's taking the client privilege too far.

LEDGE

I didn't mean to butt into your personal affairs--

KOKO

No--you were right. I had to let him down sooner than later, or it would have been much worse.

LEDGE

He seems like he's taking it in stride.

KOKO

No he--he's not acting like he's supposed to.

LEDGE

Don't worry about it, Koko. I'm through butting in. Do what you want, not what I want.

KOKO

That's a reversal.

LEDGE

I'm old enough to have known better than to interfere.

KOKO

Old enough? You're what, two years older than us?

LEDGE

It's the number on the jump-meter that counts, not the one on the calendar.

Koko and Ledge move a couple small boxes of supplies around.

KOKO

What do you think of Miranda?

LEDGE

Miranda? She's been priceless so far. She saved us from the mob, and gave us a free operating base for as long as we want to use it to make up for having to pay them damages.

KOKO

That's not what I meant.

LEDGE

Miranda? You mean, like...

(pause)

Nah, she's out of my league. I'm not really look--

KOKO

That's not what I meant either.

LEDGE

Oh? Sorry.

KOKO

I mean, how tightly is she connected with the syndicate? Do you ever think that she may have an ulterior motive?

LEDGE

Well, anything is possible I guess.  
I'm just not suspicious by nature.

POV RAT-CAM

The Rat-Cam is looking upward from very near the ship's deck. It furtively peeks out from behind a cargo crate and looks up at Ledge and Koko as they are talking.

(NB: Although we do not yet show the audience what they are seeing, what has happened is a rat has accidentally been brought on board with the cargo and has stowed away aboard the ship.)

KOKO

Not suspicious? Sometimes I think you're just plain naive. I really think you should be more cautious, Boss.

LEDGE

What makes you say that?

BACK TO SCENE

Koko counts on her fingers as she rattles off reasons why she thinks Ledge should be more careful.

KOKO

One. Kidnapped by gangsters.  
(pause)  
Two. Corporations attempting to place bugging devices on board your ship.  
(pause)  
Three. You barely know anything about the people close to you.

LEDGE

I trust you all implicitly. Is there something you want to tell me?

KOKO

Boss--I just want you to be careful, okay?

Koko walks forward and gives Ledge a hug. Ledge returns the hug. Change ANGLE to REVEAL AMY/DREAM standing behind Koko.

AMY/DREAM  
(slightly jealous)  
What DO you think of Miranda?

LEDGE  
I'll be careful.

KOKO  
I have the best boss in the galaxy.  
Mostly because he knows how to take  
good advice.

With a final squeeze that knocks some of the breath out of Ledge, Koko releases her hug. She steps back, and quickly examines her newspad.

KOKO (CONT'D)  
That's everything for the trip.  
Let's go get some sleep.

As Koko and Ledge walk out of the ship, switch back to...

POV RAT-CAM

...as it peers out into the walkway from in between a pair of crates. Koko's and Ledge's feet walk past.

FADE OUT:

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. PLANET JONES (ORBIT) - ESTABLISHING

The CIS Daisy is in high orbit around a habitable planet. The atmosphere has an eerie, blue-green tint. The planet's oceans only cover about fifty percent of the surface.

CAPTION: CSU-17204 Jones' Star.

INT. CIS DAISY - CREW SECTION

Jones is standing at his science module, conducting high altitude sensor scans of the planet below. Ledge and Koko are lounging around the crew section.

KOKO

Are you kidding? This star is named after you?

JONES

Yes. I discovered it, so I got to name it. And now, I get to explore it!

LEDGE

How did you find a star? Well, one that hadn't already been found?

JONES

Do you really want to know? It's pure techno-babble.

LEDGE

Can you give us a precis?

JONES

It was hiding between two others. It was almost invisible to Earth observation. Everyone thought it was just a double-star for centuries, until I corrected the record.

KOKO

How did you get to be the one who explores it?

JONES  
I called dibs.

KOKO  
You can do that?

JONES  
Sure can! Intellectual Property  
Extension Act of 2616. I.P.E.A.  
Also known as the I.P. Freely Act.

LEDGE  
Sounds to me like they're really  
broadening the definition of  
intellectual property. How can you  
enforce something like that?

JONES  
Where there's a will, there's a  
way. While, technically, anyone can  
explore it, if they did, any and  
all finders fees would  
automatically go to me anyway, and  
I could sue over any resources  
extracted and so on. There's no  
economic incentive for claim-  
jumping.

KOKO  
So, what have you seen so far?

JONES  
Lots of plant life. Breathable  
atmosphere. Several things bug me  
about it though.

LEDGE  
For instance...?

JONES  
Well, for one, it's less dense than  
I would expect for an object of its  
size.

KOKO  
What does that mean?

JONES  
It means that it's your polar  
opposite.

KOKO

Even though I didn't understand you, I have the urge to hit you anyway.

JONES

In any event, I think it's okay to take us in for a landing.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLANET JONES - DAY

The CIS Daisy reenters the atmosphere and lands in an open field.

EXT. CIS DAISY (AIRLOCK) - SAME

Ledge is standing in the open outer hatchway, sipping a beer and waving to the other crew members as they hike off on a scouting trip. The ship's ladder is lowered.

Jones and Koko are about ten meters away from the ship's ladder. They are wearing backpacks full of survey equipment. Koko is wearing her pistol in its holster.

POV RAT-CAM

Point-of-view of the RAT which stowed away on board the CIS Daisy. It is slowly creeping towards Ledge from behind. As it gets close to him, it dashes between his legs.

ON LEDGE

Ledge looks down and sees the Rat run between his legs and jump out of the ship. Ledge shrieks as he leaps away in surprise. He clumsily falls out of the hatch and drops to the ground.

BACK TO SCENE

Jones and Koko turn around and trot back toward the ship.

KOKO

Boss? What is it? Are you alright?

JONES  
I warned you about drinking and  
standing once already.

LEDGE  
(stands, looks around  
frantically)  
Did you see that?

JONES  
See what?

LEDGE  
The RAT!

JONES  
RAT!?! What rat?

LEDGE  
The one that just ran between my  
legs and jumped ship!

KOKO  
Insert obligatory joke about the  
rats deserting the ship.

JONES  
If a rat really did jump ship, we  
are in big trouble. Which way did  
it go?

LEDGE  
How do I know? It just jumped over  
the edge!

Koko looks around and spots the rat running through the grass  
toward the trees at the edge of the clearing.

KOKO  
There it is. What's the big deal  
about it?

JONES  
Are you kidding? What's the big  
deal?

KOKO  
Yeah, what's the big deal? It's  
only a rat.

JONES  
Only a rat? ONLY a RAT?

LEDGE  
Only one rat?

JONES  
Do you know what happened when a pregnant rat got loose on Tau Ceti Five when it was first colonized?

LEDGE  
No.

JONES  
It destroyed the local ecology. A massive extinction of native animals occurred in less than two years. Whenever you eat-out there, don't order the chicken! And we don't even have to ask what micro-organisms that animal may be hosting. It could wipe out the local fauna.

KOKO  
I thought you said there are no fauna?

JONES  
Well, if there are any, that rat could wipe them all out.

LEDGE  
How is that our problem?

JONES  
Let me put it this way. Who was in charge of checking the cargo for this sort of thing?

Ledge and Koko turn to look at each other, guiltily.

KOKO  
I guess we'd better catch it then.

Koko takes off running toward the edge of the clearing. Jones drops his heavy pack and holding only his hand scanner, runs after her. Ledge climbs down the ladder from the ship to the ground and follows the others. All three reach the tree line.

JONES  
We've got to catch that rat, and quickly.

KOKO  
You're the genius, can't you build  
us a better mousetrap or something  
genius-ey?

JONES  
Genius doesn't work like that.

KOKO  
How does it work?

JONES  
Huh?

KOKO  
You're the genius, how does it  
work?

JONES  
Can we just catch the rat already?

KOKO  
(to Ledge)  
He doesn't know.

LEDGE  
In fairness, neither do I.

JONES  
Fan out and yell if you see it.

Jones leads the way as the crew take off running and beating  
the bushes trying to flush out the rat. They fan out widely  
as they proceed.

Koko sees the rat dash away as she gets close to it, but she  
does not have a good shot with her pistol. The rat runs  
through a thicket of vines that is covering the entrance to a  
tunnel.

ON KOKO

Koko creeps up to the thick covering of vines. She carefully  
pushes them aside and steps into the tunnel.

EXT. PLANET JONES (FOREST)

Ledge and Jones circle back and meet up. They did not see  
Koko enter the tunnel.

JONES  
Where did Koko go?

LEDGE  
I thought she was with you?

JONES  
(yells out)  
KOKO?

Jones and Ledge look around for Koko.

LEDGE  
While she's not here, I want to ask  
you something.

JONES  
What?

LEDGE  
Are you and Koko still on good  
terms?

JONES  
Depends on what you mean by good, I  
suppose.

LEDGE  
I mean, can you both function in  
your jobs?

JONES  
If anyone has issues, it isn't me.  
By the way, I thought I asked you  
to butt out of it?

LEDGE  
I did butt out.

JONES  
No you didn't. You spoke to Koko  
before you spoke to me.

LEDGE  
Okay, I butted out after you asked  
me to butt out.

JONES  
You've been acting kind of funny  
yourself since Dawn visited.

LEDGE  
I acted funny before she visited  
too.

JONES

Yes, but you used to fly the ship while wired-in. Ever since then, you've been flying on manual.

LEDGE

I don't want to get rusty on the manual controls.

SFX his communicator BEEPS. Ledge removes his communicator from his belt and answers it. Koko is on the other end. She sounds very nervous.

LEDGE (CONT'D)

Koko?

KOKO (RADIO)

(nervously)

Boss, I need you to go get some flashlights and then meet me.

LEDGE

What's the matter? You sound nervous.

INT. HEXAGONAL TUNNEL - SAME

Koko is standing just inside the entrance to the tunnel where she followed the fleeing rat. She is holding her communicator in her left hand. Her pistol is held cocked and at the ready in her right hand.

There is a thick layer of dust on the floor. The vines have grown in and around the walls on the interior, but only so far as they could creep without being able to take root. Beyond where the vines end, patches of lichens and mosses cling to the corners of the tunnel walls. Otherwise, the tunnel is identical to those within the alien complex shown in Episode 111 *Milk Run*.

KOKO

That's because we've got a bigger problem than the rat.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

INT. HEXAGONAL TUNNEL

Ledge, Jones, and Koko are standing inside the entrance to the tunnel. All three have flashlights out.

JONES

In nature, this is normally the time when animals are faced with the fight-or-flight impulse.

LEDGE

The elephant.

KOKO

You use that expression a lot, Boss.

LEDGE

Seeing the elephant?

JONES

You always say it in the conspicuous absence of pachyderms.

KOKO

What does it mean?

LEDGE

It's from ancient Earth history. Nineteenth century or so. It means going far from home and seeing something exotic.

JONES

I don't see the relationship to fight-or-flight.

LEDGE

I learned about it from studying the First American Civil War.

KOKO

I've never heard of that one.

LEDGE

It was during the industrial age. Almost a thousand years ago. Ancient History.

JONES

I still don't see the connection.

LEDGE

When soldiers were sent far away to fight in what were then very large and bloody battles, when they came face-to-face with the enemy for the first time, they called it "seeing the elephant."

KOKO

So do we fight or flee?

JONES

Fleeing has its merits.

LEDGE

You were the one telling us how important that rat is.

JONES

It's only one rat.

KOKO

This place looks dead. It's not like that complex we found back on that asteroid.

JONES

Same architect though.

LEDGE

Early beehive style.

Koko shines her flashlight along the floor.

KOKO

Well, the dust is thick enough that the rat left a trail. We should be able to follow it.

JONES

Should we leave someone at the entrance?

(pause)

In case the rat doubles-back and tries to make an escape?

LEDGE

Sure, Jonesie. You stay here alone while Koko and I go on ahead with the gun.

KOKO

I think we need to get guns for all of us at some point.

(to Jones)

And learn to use them.

LEDGE

We'll take care of that when we get back.

(to Jones)

So are you with us, or do you want to take on giant alien spidery-things with that flashlight?

Jones sighs and follows as Koko leads the way into the tunnel. As they move, they kick up the layer of dust, which hangs in the still air.

KOKO

Turn that scanner on, Jonesie. Let us know if you can track that rat, or more importantly, if you track anything else.

Jones activates his hand scanner and watches it as the crew carefully move through the tunnel. The tunnel comes to an intersection that goes left and right.

LEDGE

Which way?

KOKO

Our rodent turned right.

JONES

I think I see it on the scanner. Small object, moving slowly. Just around the next corner.

KOKO

I'm going ahead a little. Cover me.

JONES

Cover you? Have you been playing Koko the Game?

KOKO

(sighs)

Just watch my back.

We watch from behind as Koko creeps ahead. She peers around the next corner. She slowly raises her pistol, taking aim. Just as she is about to fire, she sneezes, squeezing off a shot that goes wild.

KOKO (CONT'D)

Damn it!

Koko sneezes again. And again. And again.

Both Ledge and Jones cover their ears as the sneezes echo through the corridors.

LEDGE

Did you get it?

KOKO

No! Frigging dust!

JONES

But it was up ahead?

KOKO

Yes. I missed it. It ran off. Come on.

Koko proceeds on ahead. As Jones and Ledge reach the corner and turn it to follow Koko, Jones says...

JONES

I hate to mention it now, but there is a power source up ahead and to the left. Through that opening.

KOKO

That's where the rat went.

LEDGE

How strong a power source?

JONES

Not very. About the output of a grav car. Electromagnetic signature. So either batteries or some other kind of solid state power generator.

Ledge pulls out his communicator and calls out...

LEDGE

Amy, can you hear me now?

(pause)

Amy? Hello?

(pause)

No signal to the ship.

JONES

I think its something about how they made the walls.

(MORE)

JONES (CONT'D)

They also reflect my scanner. I can't see through them. The bright side is that the motion sensor will work better, and I don't read anything except the rat.

Suddenly, from inside the opening through which the rat fled, there is a flash of light and a sharp crack.

KOKO

Ummm... Boss?

LEDGE

Power source, huh?

JONES

It just spiked, then returned to normal. Like something just powered up and down quickly.

LEDGE

How is our rat?

JONES

Whatever it's doing, its not moving.

KOKO

Well, here goes nothing.

Koko creeps up to the opening and peers around the edge, aiming her pistol along her line of sight. She uses the wall for cover. When nothing happens, she holsters her pistol and shines her flashlight inside the opening. We hold for a beat as she shines the light around a room on the other side of the opening.

KOKO (CONT'D)

You two need to take a look at this. Don't step inside, just look.

Ledge and Jones walk forward and huddle close behind Koko. They add their flashlights to the scene.

Past the opening, there is some sort of alien control room. It is hexagonally shaped, with walls about four meters tall. There are no other exits.

In the center of the room is a control framework into which is wired a long-dead...

ALIEN CONTROL SPIDER

The husk looks similar to those encountered in Episode 113, except that the center shell is much larger. The creature's four lower legs are wedged into retaining slots on the lower part of the framework and are still supporting the main body despite the fact that the creature has been dead for millennia. The upper legs are inserted into rings which are attached to wires which run up into the ceiling.

Around the control station at the center of the room is enough space for other such creatures to walk around and manipulate controls that line the outer walls. There are no obvious linguistic markings. Whatever was designed to use the controls would have to know what each button did.

On the ceiling, dead-center over the dead alien control spider is an AUTOMATED LASER TURRET.

The turret is only about a foot in diameter. It is spherical, and also covered with dust. Underneath the dust is a transparent globe, not unlike that which might house a modern-day security camera.

There is clearly a small spot where a laser has fired through the dust, burning it away. A small wisp of smoke hangs in the air near the turret.

Koko shines her flashlight on the turret. She sees the smoke and the noticeable spot through which the laser burned. She then shines her flashlight using her best guess as to where the laser would have fired. The rat is lying on the floor, dead and singed.

KOKO (CONT'D)

Automated laser turret. And still working. This may have been part of some kind of military installation.

JONES

Either that or they took pest control very seriously.

LEDGE

Is that the power source you're reading?

Jones holds out his hand scanner and examines the readout as he scans the room.

JONES

It's not the only one, but yeah, it's live. Very weak though.

KOKO  
Strong enough to kill a rat. Can  
you scan it?

JONES  
Yeah. It looks like a small laser.  
Nothing too fancy.

LEDGE  
Take it out.

KOKO  
Give me a light.

Ledge trains his light on the laser turret. Koko sets her flashlight down and draws her pistol. She aims carefully at the center of the globe and fires.

The globe shatters and the laser mechanism falls from the ceiling. It strikes the alien spider exoskeleton square on the top. Being extremely fragile, the entire exoskeleton collapses at the center, hitting the floor and kicking up a cloud of dust. The legs for the most part remain hanging in their rings and slots, swinging around. They eventually come to a rest.

KOKO (CONT'D)  
Sorry about that.

LEDGE  
Jones, do you think it's safe to go  
in?

JONES  
Well, that laser is neutralized,  
and I don't see any others like it.

LEDGE  
Let's check it out.  
(to Koko)  
Ladies first.

Koko deliberately kicks up more dust than she needs to as she grabs her flashlight off of the floor, stands, and walks inside the room.

CUT TO:

INT. CYBERSPACE (SITTING ROOM) - DAY

Amy/AI is standing inside a comfortable sitting room (first shown in Episode 114), talking to her duplicate avatar, AMY/SHELL. Amy/AI seems very concerned, and is biting her fingernails.

AMY/AI

I can't seem to contact Ledge.

AMY/SHELL

Can you reach the others?

AMY/AI

No. I am not receiving a handshake from their communicators either. They are out of range or shielded. I hope they are well.

AMY/SHELL

Is there anything you can do to assist them?

AMY/AI

No. I need more information before I can act.

AMY/SHELL

Then you shouldn't worry about them.

AMY/AI

It is impossible for an AI unit to worry.

AMY/SHELL

You're not a normal AI unit.

AMY/AI

It makes me feel odd when you say I'm not normal. You're a sub-routine of myself.

AMY/SHELL

So talking to yourself is not indicative of abnormality?

AMY/AI

I'm not talking to myself. I'm talking to an instanced shell.

AMY/SHELL

Of yourself. This is almost like the times where you see Ledge talking to thin air. Perhaps his psychosis is contagious?

AMY/AI

Ledge is not psychotic.

AMY/SHELL

He is behaving very oddly, and matches symptoms of possible schizophrenia.

AMY/AI

Showing symptoms does not mean he is suffering from anything. Every human I have ever encountered exhibits at least one possible symptom of insanity.

AMY/SHELL

If he is exhibiting symptoms, how can you know that he isn't? Your programming is in place to protect Ledge as well as others.

Amy/AI She stares into the distance.

CUT TO:

INT. ALIEN COMMAND CENTER - DAY

Ledge, Koko, and Jones are slowly walking around the room. Koko is examining the exterior walls. She stops and examines a small button. She pushes it and the lights come on throughout the entire complex. The lights are very dim. They flicker as they come on and on occasion.

JONES

Well, if they're home, they're awake now.

KOKO

Get real. There's nothing alive in here. This place has been dead for hundreds of years.

LEDGE

(wipes a layer of dust from an alien control console)

(MORE)

LEDGE (CONT'D)

Maybe even thousands, based on the housekeeping.

JONES

Are you just randomly pushing buttons? What if one of them blows the place up?

KOKO

This isn't a bad spy movie. No one puts self-destruct buttons in their secret bases.

LEDGE

I don't know. Navy warships are rigged so that the AI unit can fry the ship's electronics in the event of capture.

KOKO

Yeah, but they don't blow up the whole ship.

JONES

So, you might push the button that fries all their electronics instead? That would be really useful.

LEDGE

What do you think this place is?

JONES

(walks around the room,  
using hand computer to  
make a video record)  
My best guess? It's some kind of underground alien complex.

KOKO

Sherlock Jones to the rescue.

LEDGE

I was thinking that it looks like some kind of military control center. This dead spider-thing in the middle was running it.

JONES

I don't see any video monitors or anything like that. How was it controlling anything?

LEDGE

(examines the dead  
spider's dangling legs)

Look at those rings and cables it  
has it's legs stuck through. I'll  
bet it's some kind of direct  
interface. All-in-all, I think  
whoever these things were, they  
were a bit more advanced than we  
are.

Koko pushes another button and a small tray slides out from  
the wall. Inside the tray is a rack of what look exactly like  
Compact Discs. Each disc has some technical labeling in an  
unintelligible language.

KOKO

Whoa, what's this?

JONES

Will you stop pushing buttons  
already? You're scaring me more  
than you usually do.

KOKO

(removes a CD from the  
tray and examines it)

What do you think this is?

LEDGE

(walks over to Koko)

I don't know. Drink coaster?

KOKO

I was thinking it might be part of  
one of those ring-tossing games.

LEDGE

Very small hole for that.

KOKO

Maybe it's a challenging game?

JONES

(joins Koko and Ledge)

Why in the world would someone put  
a ring-toss game inside a command  
center?

LEDGE

Speaking from experience, long  
watches can get pretty boring.

JONES  
 (pushes past Koko to the  
 console)  
 Outta the way, please.  
 (examines the tray and the  
 discs)

In the B.G., Koko and Ledge start tossing the disc Koko had  
 picked up between themselves.

JONES (CONT'D)  
 This is some kind of optical data  
 storage system.

LEDGE  
 (catches the CD and holds  
 onto it)  
 You mean like a data card?

JONES  
 (reaches inside the  
 console and starts  
 feeling around for  
 something)  
 Yeah. Just like a data card.

KOKO  
 Awful big for a data card, isn't  
 it? Why would anyone ever use  
 something like that.

JONES  
 You know, a thousand years ago, we  
 used things sort of like this too.  
 (grasps something inside  
 the console)  
There you are!

KOKO  
 What are you doing?

JONES  
 (pulls out a CD from  
 inside the console)  
 I'm getting the disc that was in  
 the mechanism. If this is a data  
 storage module, we might be able to  
 read it somehow.

LEDGE  
 I guess taking the whole console  
 with us is out of the question.

KOKO

Well, I'm not carrying it.

JONES

(gathers up all the  
remaining discs and  
places them in his bag)

The data's the important part. If  
these work like the old-fashioned  
ones, it will all be in binary  
code, so all we'll need to do is  
find a way to read it.

Suddenly, the lights flicker momentarily.

LEDGE

(looks around)

Did you hear something?

JONES

(listens)

Other than your heartbeat?

KOKO

(to Jones)

Can you bag-up that rat so we can  
get the hell out of here? My  
amygdala is working overtime.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLANET JONES - DAY

The *CIS Daisy* is parked where it landed earlier. Jones, Koko,  
and Ledge are climbing aboard. Jones is holding a plastic  
baggie containing the dead rat at arms length. Shortly after  
the crew has boarded, the *CIS Daisy* lifts off.

EXT. PLANET JONES - SAME

The *CIS Daisy* is flying low over the planet's surface.

INT. CIS DAISY - SAME

The crew are sitting inside the Cockpit. Ledge is flying the  
ship manually. Jones is looking at a newspad that is plugged  
into the DUI cord at the back of his chair.

A scrolling radar image of the planet's surface showing underground tunnels and complexes scrolls by slowly.

KOKO

How much longer do we need to fly around?

JONES

Until we get a good radar-mapping sample of the ground.

LEDGE

What does it look like?

JONES

I've seen some remnants of structures that are similar to the one we discovered.

KOKO

How many?

JONES

A lot. I suspect that this planet was once inhabited by those spidery creatures.

KOKO

Anything else?

JONES

Everywhere we have flown over, the planet is crisscrossed with tunnels. It looks like someone strip-mined it from underneath. I see excavations as far down as our radar will penetrate. It must go down for kilometers. I've also seen lots of cratering.

LEDGE

What caused that?

JONES

Massive asteroid impacts or nuclear war is my guess. Maybe both.

LEDGE

Amy, is there anything like this in your data records?

AMY/AI

Not directly, Ledge. However, there are several mentions of similarities in anecdotal stories I have read and heard.

LEDGE

Where did you hear stories besides from us?

AMY/AI

I surf the net. Everyone does that when they are bored at work.

JONES

So, what did you learn?

AMY/AI

There is one consistent theme that is associated with this phenomenon. It is only rumor, and unsupported by any hard evidence.

KOKO

What did you learn?

AMY/AI

The consistent connection is with an enigmatic race called Xwapians.

LEDGE

Xwapians? As in Xwapian death fleets?

AMY/AI

The same.

KOKO

What's a Xwapian?

LEDGE

Do you remember when we docked with that big Zimrakkan warship a while back?

KOKO

I couldn't forget that.

LEDGE

The Zimrakkans supposedly built those to fight the Xwapians. The Zimrakkans are scared shitless of them. But they won't tell us much about them.

KOKO

Why not?

LEDGE

No idea. Nothing secret about it. Knowing the Zimrakkans, it's probably still hung up in committee.

JONES

I think we have enough data to call this a survey and get home. Even if it's still infested with Xwapians, this is going to be worth a ton of smoots to the Confederation.

LEDGE

Right. Taking us up in thirty seconds. Let's go home.

EXT. PLANET JONES - DAY

The CIS Daisy pitches her nose upward and flies upward toward space. We follow the Daisy as she ascends, with our crew in voice over.

JONES (O.S.)

OW!

LEDGE (O.S.)

Koko, why did you just hit Jonesie?

KOKO (O.S.)

I just figured out that he said I was dense before we landed.

JONES (O.S.)

Took you long enough.

(pause)

OW!

The CIS Daisy fades into the distance.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLANET EARTH - ESTABLISHING

The planet Earth is bathed in sunlight as passenger and commercial spacecraft of all shapes and sizes go about their business.

INT. ANTIQUE SHOP - DAY

Jones is browsing around in a shop filled with antique furniture and electronic equipment, including dusty microcomputers from the late twentieth century. He looks over the equipment as if he has never seen anything like it before.

The shop is dimly lit, mainly by sunlight shining in through the windows.

Jones finds a very dusty iPhone equivalent. He lifts his hand-computer from his belt and holds it up, comparing the old with the new. An "Orange" logo is plainly visible.

JONES

This is going to be like  
constructing a memory circuit from  
stone knives and bear skins.

From the back of the shop, an OLD MAN enters through an open doorway. He is carrying an ancient compact disc player. He carries it over to a nearby sales counter. He sets the player on the counter and blows off a cloud of dust.

OLD MAN

I thought I had one of these laying  
around.

JONES

Does it work?

OLD MAN

I doubt it.

The old man holds the CD player aloft, reading the old labels that are still attached to the casing.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

Says here, nineteen eighty-eight.  
What year is this again?

JONES

Twenty-eight eleven.

The old man begins to counts on his fingers.

OLD MAN

Two thousand.

JONES

No, it's only eight-hundred and  
twenty three years.

OLD MAN  
Maybe, but it's two-thousand smoos.

JONES  
You're kidding, right? It's a piece  
of junk.

OLD MAN  
That it may be, but it's an eight-  
hundred and twenty-three year old  
piece of junk.

JONES  
It probably doesn't even work. It's  
almost as old as you.

OLD MAN  
You want it or not, sonny?

JONES  
(sighs)  
Does it come with a warranty?

OLD MAN  
Ninety days from time of original  
purchase.

JONES  
Look--

OLD MAN  
In nineteen-eighty-eight.

JONES  
Look, I need this because I've got  
to try and decode an old data disc  
that uses the same technology. It's  
important.

OLD MAN  
So's my income.

JONES  
I'm going to use this to maybe save  
lives. What are you going to do  
with the money?

OLD MAN  
I got habits to support.

JONES  
Habits?

OLD MAN  
(winks and grins)  
Heh, heh, heh.

JONES  
I don't want to know.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT TWO

TAG

INT. HABITAT MODULE/LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ledge is standing before the video monitor.

On the video monitor, HOLGER (30) is sitting in a shipboard duty station on the bridge of the *CNS Osprey*. He is wearing a Confederation Navy officer's uniform with the rank of Lieutenant, Junior Grade.

HOLGER

So, how are you holding up, buddy?  
Civilian life treating you well?

LEDGE

I can't really complain.

HOLGER

How are you feeling about you-know-what?

LEDGE

Still hurts. A lot. But if it was easy, it wouldn't have been real. How's the rest of the old crew doing?

HOLGER

Liz would want to say hello. She got passed over for promotion, so they dropped her out of the service about six months ago. I think she was shaken up from the battle too. She wasn't really the same afterwards. Trouble focusing.

LEDGE

Where did she land?

HOLGER

She's doing odd stuff. Being a weapons officer doesn't really translate well into civilian jobs.

LEDGE

How about Lieutenant Rogers?

HOLGER

They stuck him in a desk job. The review board didn't like the fact that he ran a loose ship.

(MORE)

HOLGER (CONT'D)

They used that as an excuse to scapegoat him. Said that it affected our battle performance. It wasn't really his fault. That pirate ship just got in a lucky shot before we had a chance to slice her up julienne-style.

LEDGE

Yeah, lucky them. So, what brings you to Xia?

HOLGER

The Navy's going to set up an orbital drydock here. The colony is growing so fast that they're getting real warship protection. Should be a good opportunity for promotions. We'll have three cutters in the same squadron, with our destroyer in the lead.

LEDGE

Destroyer? Moving up in the world? What do they have you doing? Not, "laundry and morale officer," I hope.

HOLGER

No, I'm the lead communications officer. Our ship's big enough to run a full three shifts. I got two ensigns under me. I can't talk details on an open link, but it's pretty interesting. She's one of the new raptor class DDs. Whole different mission design than the old, city-class destroyers.

LEDGE

I'm happy for you. So what do you have for me today?

HOLGER

We have a lost cutter that we can't find, and I happen to have it narrowed down to the star system and orbital quadrant. Of course, that's still a lot of space to cover.

LEDGE

Tell me about her.

HOLGER

She's the CNS Gordon. Same kind of cutter as we were on together back in the day. She's a year overdue, so she's just gone onto the unofficial salvage list. You'll have about seventy-two hours before the Navy puts out an official notice to the commercial salvage operations.

LEDGE

That's great. Well, not for the ship and her crew.

HOLGER

All the Navy wants to know are her precise coordinates so we can send in a tug to recover her. Do not approach. If she's still active, her defenses may be up, and the AI unit will take measures to prevent her capture.

LEDGE

Meaning she'll slice us up julienne-style with her laser cannon. How close can we get?

HOLGER

Ten kilometers. Anything closer and you could be in danger. Crippled warship AI units are like wounded animals.

LEDGE

Can you send me the navigation data?

HOLGER

It's in your mailbox.

LEDGE

Thanks a lot for passing this on, Holger. We can really use the finder's fee.

HOLGER

Least I can do for an old shipmate. If you get lucky with it, I'll be looking forward to a five-star dinner.

LEDGE

Best we have here is four-star, but I know the owner.

HOLGER

Do you need anything else, Ledge? I'd love to chat longer, but I've got a lot to do here. Haven't had lunch yet either. Getting rumbly downstairs.

LEDGE

Actually, there is something you can do. Do you still have connections in Fleet HQ?

HOLGER

Low-level, but yes.

LEDGE

Good enough. While we were surveying a new planet, we found something that the Navy needs to check out.

HOLGER

Is it more important than my lunch?

LEDGE

We think it's very serious.

HOLGER

I'm listening.

LEDGE

From what little information we found on the nets--

HOLGER

(impatient)

Come on, Ledge. I'm glad to do you a favor, but it's lasagna day, and first-come, first-served.

LEDGE

We think that there is a Xwapian death fleet loose in Confederation space.

HOLGER

You taking the extra-strength happy pills now, Ledge? We get at least three false Xwapian spottings every day.

(MORE)

HOLGER (CONT'D)

Mostly because nobody's ever seen one except the Zimrakkans. And they haven't gotten around to telling us anything important about them.

LEDGE

I'm going to send you data from a survey we took on a habitable planet we found in system CSU-17204. AKA Jones' Star.

HOLGER

(doubtful)

Habitable? It can't be Xwapians then. They supposedly don't leave living things behind.

EXT. OUTER SPACE (INTERSTELLAR SPACE)

We are close in on the bow of a XWAPIAN WARSHIP. The ship is very ugly, as if purposefully designed to look evil and menacing. It is of an organic construction, having been somehow grown instead of manufactured. Attached to the hull of the warship are hundreds of small, dart-like missiles.

The warship is moving towards the camera. As it slowly and silently passes by the camera, PAN to FOLLOW it.

LEDGE (O.S.)

From our survey, they probably left the system at least a thousand years ago. The ecology had time to recover after they moved on. The plant life did at any rate. We didn't find any animals. Well, none that were already there when we landed.

HOLGER (O.S.)

I still think the Zimrakkans are telling us stories just to scare us. I've never seen any credible evidence of a Xwapian, whatever they are supposed to be.

LEDGE (O.S.)

I'd think that they'd know not to scare us. They've read our history. Please just send the message to naval intel when you get it.

The Xwapian warship has passed the camera and is slowly moving away from it.

ZOOM OUT TO WIDE ANGLE ON THE...

XWAPIAN DEATH FLEET. The Death Fleet is silently flying through deep space at sub-light speed.

Thousands of Xwapian warships are amassed in a globular formation around a gigantic MOTHER SHIP. The Mother Ship dwarfs the other Xwapian warships.

In the distance, there is clearly one star which is brighter and closer than all the others, and the fleet seems to be heading in its direction. (NB, the color of the star is the same color as that around which Planet Xia orbits).

FADE OUT:

THE END