

A N I M U S

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FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE

Typical view of space from space: a spiral galaxy can be seen in the distance, as can a gaseous nebula; individual stars polka dot the heavens.

This serenity is interrupted by a ship - the Asteria - cruising INTO FRAME. It's size and form indicate it is a CTV - a convict transport vessel.

INT. ASTERIA BRIDGE - NIGHT

The bridge of the spaceship, equipped for three, has a lone occupant, who sits upright in the navigator's chair, head leaning forward, chin to chest, seemingly unconscious.

The panel in front of him suddenly lights up. The video screen flashes the words "Incoming Message."

The "navigator" opens his eyes, tilts his head up slightly. Facial tics and eye movement indicate he is "processing".

He lifts his arms, places his hands on the panel, and presses a series of buttons. Once he stops...

COMPUTER VOICE (V.O.)

"Change of course confirmed.
Coordinates for new destination
accepted."

The navigator returns his arms to his side, tilts his head back down, and shuts his eyes.

EXT. SPACE

The ship, viewed from behind, gradually veers to the left
OUT OF FRAME.

INT. ASTERIA MEDICAL CENTER

Five upright chambers can be seen, each filled with a clear, viscous fluid. Above each is a screen monitoring the vitals of the beings inside.

As one screen brightens and begins to emit a beeping sound, the fluid begins draining from the chamber below. Seconds later, the clear, thick, glass-looking cover slides away.

The being inside clad only in boxer shorts - DARIUS PRATT, an African-American man, muscular build, late 30s - suddenly opens his eyes.

He immediately shrinks to the floor, coughing, on all fours, then regurgitates that same viscous fluid onto the floor in front of him.

After looking around, squinting, and getting his bearings, he drags himself over to a computer screen.

He logs in and, after a series of keyboard strokes, brings up a screen with information on the ship's location.

He stares at the screen, shaking his head in disbelief.

PRATT

What the...

ASTERIA BRIDGE - NIGHT

The doors to the bridge slide open. A still scantily-clad Pratt hustles in, striding toward the navigator's chair.

PRATT

AIB, what the hell is goin' on?

AIB (Artificial Intelligence Being) sits in the navigator's chair, head down, oblivious to Pratt.

Pratt realizes AIB is in "sleep" mode and gets behind him. He places a hand behind each of AIB's ears and presses both buttons he feels simultaneously.

AIB opens his eyes, sits straight up, and turns his head.

AIB

Hello, Captain. I hope your emergence from stasis was not...

Pratt cuts AIB off in mid sentence.

PRATT

Let's dispense with the pleasantries, shall we, AIB. Why are we off-course?

AIB

I received a message with instructions and coordinates for a new destination.

PRATT

And why wasn't I notified immediately?

AIB

The message also contained an order requiring that all human crew members remain in stasis.

Pratt is obviously taken aback by this and, mouth agape, is momentarily speechless. He comes out of his stupor, stares at the video screen, and then addresses AIB.

PRATT

How long ago did we receive that message?

AIB brings up new information on-screen.

AIB

239 hours, six minutes

Pratt does the mental math.

PRATT

Two hundred...that's nearly ten days. We've been on this course for ten days!

AIB

Ten Earth days, Captain, yes.

PRATT

(exasperated)

So...what is this new destination?

EXT. SPACE

Vista of space from the ship's POV. ZOOM IN on a distant object. A small ship comes into view. All is dark, save for one tiny, blinking light.

INT. ALIEN SHIP

BEGIN MONTAGE

- BRIDGE: There are no beings of any kind present. All is dark but for a solitary blinking light on a control panel.

- CARGO BAY: A single, isolated pod, attached to the floor: Its cover is opaque, obscuring whatever is inside.

END MONTAGE.

INT. ASTERIA MEDICAL CENTER - NIGHT

Three of the other four chambers are draining and, once the glass doors slide away, one by one, the occupants come to, falling to the floor, hacking and vomiting.

The fourth chamber remains intact. Through the semi-transparent fluid and glass, a large, grizzled Caucasian man can faintly be seen.

CLOSE-UP of the tattoo on his neck, which resembles a bar code.

EXT. SURFACE OF PLANET EREBUS - DAY

The surface of Erebus: rugged hills; rocky, sandy ground. No vegetation. High winds kick up considerable dust.

Through the dust storm, a lone, dome-shaped building can be seen, but barely.

INT. DOME-SHAPED BUILDING

Two facility officers are present. One - OWEN GATES, mousy Caucasian, early 20s - is wearing a headset and answers back to whomever he is speaking to.

GATES

Yes, sir. I understand, sir. Yes, I'll be sure to do that. Good-bye.

Gates removes his headset and addresses the other officer - Commander FAITH RENTERIA, butch, Hispanic, 40ish - who looks to be his superior.

RENERIA

Well?

GATES

The premier sends his regards.

RENERIA

Wonderful. And what of Cranston? When should we expect him?

GATES

Umm...it appears the Asteria was diverted from its course to investigate an unusual distress call in Quadrant 12.

RENERIA

Meaning?

GATES

Meaning his arrival here will be... delayed.

RENERIA

(exasperated)

Unacceptable! The ererbite ore doesn't mine itself you know! Is he not aware of how desperate we are for more inmates?

Renteria stares angrily at Gates, expecting an answer.

GATES

(beat)

Sorry...I thought that was rhetorical. I don't know.

Renteria pauses, then smirks at Gates.

RENERIA

Ever use a pick axe, Gates?

Gates' eyes get big and his bottom lip begins to quiver.

GATES

No, ma'am.

Renteria leans over the desk and is nose-to-nose with Gates.

RENTERIA

You best find me more fellas who
can swing one or you'll be gettin'
some on-the-job training!

GATES

(timidly)

Yes ma'am!

INT. ASTERIA DINING ROOM - DAY

The human crew of the Asteria is gathered around a table,
enjoying their first meal since coming out of stasis.

Engineer ANGELICA SOTO - Latina, 30ish, temperamental -
addresses the group.

SOTO

All I gotta say is we better be
gettin' some serious overtime for
this bullshit.

First mate and combat specialist LI JIANG - Oriental, 30ish,
slender and attractive - responds.

JIANG

Soto, how about stuff some food in
your mouth so I don't have to hear
what comes out of it.

Soto stands quickly, knocking her chair to the floor. As she
begins to make her way around the table, Pratt stops her.

PRATT

Simmer down, Soto. Nobody here is
happy about takin' the scenic route
to Erebus, least of all the
marshall.

Pratt glances at Marshall TUALA MAAMU - 40ish, Samoan - who
nods and responds.

MAAMU

The sooner Cranston is on that god-
forsaken world breakin' rocks, the
better. The man is just plain
scary.

The ever cocky Soto sits down in a huff.

SOTO

Ya, will he don't scare me none.

MAAMU

He should. You better pray we deliver him safely. He's gotta thing for Latinas...Soto.

SOTO

O-o-o-o...I'm so worried...

Soto stares at the Marshall's nameplate, trying to figure out how to say his last name.

SOTO

...ma...may...mahmu. What the hell kinda name is that?

Always the smart aleck, Jiang interrupts.

JIANG

Maamu...It is Samoan for "shut up or get your ass kicked."

Soto and Jiang both stand and eye each other. Again, Pratt intercedes.

PRATT

(sternly)

Could we all please be a little less confrontational? We have a job to do here!

Just then, the comm buzzes and AIB's voice is heard.

AIB (V.O.)

Captain, your presence is required on the bridge.

Pratt addresses the group again.

PRATT

Speaking of which, I need to be elsewhere. Since you two can't seem to play nicely, Jiang, you're with me. Marshall, check on our prisoner. Your talk's got me...feeling a mite uneasy about him.

MAAMU

Will do, Captain.

Maamu gets up from the table and exits the room. Soto sits at the table, continuing to eat.

PRATT

Soto. Cargo bay when you're done here. I gotta hunch that...

Soto continues to eat and does not acknowledge Pratt.

PRATT

Soto!

Soto finishes swallowing but does not look up.

SOTO

I heard ya...

PRATT

And how am I supposed to know that when you don't acknowledge me?

Soto looks up at Pratt, stone-faced.

SOTO

'Cuz I'm sittin' right here. How could I not hear ya?

PRATT

Soto...I swear...next port, I'm trading you for an android if you don't lose the attitude.

Pratt nods at Jiang and the two exit the room. Soto slyly eyes their departure. As she prepares to take her last bite, she begins to cough. She puts her hand over her mouth. Once the coughing jag subsides, she removes her hand and discovers blood in it. Her normally cocky expression is replaced by one of grave concern as her head dips.

INT. ASTERIA BRIDGE

The bridge door slides open. Pratt and Jiang enter.

PRATT

AIB, I'd ask for good news, but I don't even know what that would be.

AIB

I requested your presence because the source of the distress signal is close enough to put on-screen.

PRATT

Well, by all means, let's take a gander at it.

AIB does so. The screen shows an object too small to make out so another push of a button magnifies the image.

PRATT

So...it's a ship. Any idea what class...either of you?

Pratt glances at Jiang, who studies the screen intently. AIB accesses his database.

JIANG

Looks like a CT-12.

Pratt eyes Jiang impatiently.

PRATT
Care to elaborate?

AIB
Captain, a CT-12 is a Consortium transport vessel, strictly for small amounts of passengers or cargo - limited range. It has no business being this deep in space.

PRATT
Weapons?

AIB
None, captain.

PRATT
Are we in range to hail it?

AIB
Already done, sir. No reply.

Pratt pauses to think over his options.

PRATT
AIB, what exactly have we been ordered to do?

AIB
Discover the source of the signal. Investigate. Retrieve any useful data.

PRATT
Does that mean boarding the ship?

AIB
Most likely, Captain, if we are to obtain anything of value.

Pratt droops his head and sighs, then addresses AIB.

PRATT
Get us close as you can. Dock if possible. If not, we'll need to know how to get in.

AIB
Understood, Captain.

Pratt turns to Jiang, serious, but with a slight grin.

PRATT
Suit up. Time to play astronaut.

ASTERIA MEDICAL CENTER - DAY

Maamu enters sick bay. He sits down in front of the prisoner's chamber, staring at Cranston. He pulls out his pistol, checking the chamber to make sure it's loaded. He points it at Cranston and pretends to fire.

MAAMU

Bullet in the brain. That's what you deserve.

Maamu gets up and walks toward Cranston, sizing him up.

MAAMU

But then you'd be dead...and I wouldn't get my money.

A slight, brief buzz can be heard. Maamu takes a device from his pants pocket and presses a button. A screen lights up. It reads "10,000 credits. Deposit confirmed." Maamu smiles, then eyes Cranston.

MAAMU

Well, Cranston, looks like the plan is a go after all. Guess you'll be gettin' out o' that chamber sooner rather than later.

INT. ALIEN SHIP - CARGO CHAMBER

The pod sits on the floor of the previously seen alien ship cargo chamber, undisturbed. A few items not affixed to the floor or wall float aimlessly.

Noise can be heard coming from a large hatch. A circular wheel turns. After one complete revolution, it stops. The hatch slowly opens inward. Pratt and Jiang, in suits, slowly make their way into the chamber, their magnetic boots impeding their gait.

After a few steps, they stop and scan their surroundings.

PRATT

AIB...can you hear me? You gettin' all this?

INT. ASTERIA BRIDGE

AIB sits in his chair, staring at a screen which is capturing the video signal sent by a camera in Pratt's helmet.

AIB

Yes on both counts, captain.

INT. ALIEN SHIP - CARGO CHAMBER

Pratt and Jiang continue to eye their environment.

PRATT
Any idea what we should be looking
for, AIB?

AIB's voice is heard in the speaker inside Pratt's helmet.

AIB (V.O.)
I do not, captain. However, I
suggest you examine the pod up
ahead on the floor.

PRATT
Will do.

Pratt motions to Jiang and the two plod over to the pod. As they lean over it, Pratt notices a window which is obscured by dust and condensation. He wipes it clear, revealing what appears to be the face of a young human female!

Pratt and Jiang are both surprised and recoil.

PRATT
Damn! There's a little girl inside!

INT. ASTERIA BRIDGE

A light on the control panel illuminates but AIB does not notice, as he continues to monitor the events on the alien vessel on-screen via Pratt's helmet camera.

AIB
It would appear so, captain. Is she
alive?

INT. ALIEN SHIP - CARGO CHAMBER

Pratt and Jiang stare at the pod window, hoping to glimpse any indication that the being inside is alive.

PRATT
Unknown.
(beat)
AIB...would bringing the pod back
to the ship fall under the heading
"retrieve useful data"?

AIB (V.O.)
I believe so, Captain.

Pratt and Jiang more closely examine the pod and the pedestal it rests on. They discover a control panel. One tiny light blinks to the same beat as the distress beacon.

PRATT
This unit must have its own power
source...

JIANG

And yet still be interconnected to
the ship's computer.

Pratt punches a button, which lights up a small screen. The
vital signs of the being inside are displayed.

PRATT

She's alive, alright. Now what?

AIB (V.O.)

I suggest Jiang get to the ship's
main computer and plug into it.
That should allow me to download
the ship's log. Perhaps that way,
we can discover what happened.

PRATT

Good plan. I'll get the pod
disconnected from its base and into
the air lock.

INT. ASTERIA BRIDGE

AIB turns his gaze from the screen to the panel and notices
a sector lit up that shouldn't be.

AIB

Captain, I do not wish to alarm
you, but it appears the chamber
encasing our prisoner has been
activated.

INT. ALIEN SHIP - CARGO CHAMBER

Pratt, obviously upset, stops what he's doing and responds.

PRATT

What? Find the Marshall! Soto - get
to sick bay, on the double!

INT. ASTERIA CARGO BAY

Soto has been monitoring the events from a screen on the
wall next to the air lock door and been listening via a
headset.

SOTO

Right away, Captain.

Soto turns around and comes face to face with Maamu and
Cranston. The former has his weapon pointed at her face.

SOTO

Shit. Captain...we have a little
...problem.

Cranston yanks the headset off of Soto and puts it on.

CRANSTON
Correction. Captain, you have a big
problem.

INT. ALIEN SHIP - CARGO CHAMBER

Pratt stands dumbfounded for a moment.

PRATT
Cranston?

INTERCUT BETWEEN PRATT AND CRANSTON.

CRANSTON
Well, since my voice is the only
one you wouldn't recognize,
brilliant deduction.

PRATT
What do you want?

CRANSTON
Your vessel, of course. And with
you on the other ship, I couldn't
think of a better time to steal it.

Pratt pauses momentarily, then his eyes brighten.

PRATT
AIB - Protocol Alpha Charlie Zebra
zero zero one!

CRANSTON
(confused)
What the hell was that all about?

PRATT
I just placed our android pilot in
sleep mode. The ship's controls can
only be operated by him. You're not
going anywhere.

Cranston peers at Maamu and Soto, then, with a smirk,
returns his attention to Pratt.

CRANSTON
On the contrary, Pratt, you will
give me the code to wake up your
pilot, or the Marshall here will
splatter your engineer's brains all
over this bay.

Maamu draws his gaze away from Soto and onto Cranston, just
for a moment, surprised by what he has been hearing.

MAAMU
Cranston! This is not the plan!

CRANSTON

I just changed the plan. Shut up
and keep your weapon on the bitch.

PRATT

You won't get away with this.

CRANSTON

Of course I will. Who's gonna stop
me?

A brief scuffle is heard and then a thud. Cranston is still
facing the video screen but his eyes get big.

PRATT

My engineer, who by now, will have
disarmed Maamu and should be
pointing his weapon at you.

INT. ASTERIA CARGO BAY

Cranston turns from the monitor to see Maamu on the floor
unconscious and Soto pointing his weapon at Cranston. His
mouth agape, a look of panic sweeps over his face.

Soto fires the weapon, sending a surge of energy that knocks
out Cranston. Soto stands over him triumphantly.

SOTO

Scary? You ain't shit.

INT./EXT. THE PLANET EOS - REGIME HQ - DAY

A man in uniform, highly decorated, makes his way down a
hall in what seems to be a government building. He enters a
comm room and heads straight for a young man sitting at a
computer terminal with a headset.

OFFICIAL

Perkins, any word from the Asteria?

THAD PERKINS, mid 20s, answers back respectfully.

PERKINS

None, sir. That said, as deep in
space as they are, any message they
send will take days to reach us.

OFFICIAL

Understood, Perkins. Continue
monitoring.

PERKINS

Yes, sir.

(beat)

Sir, if I may be so bold, why
divert a CTV to such a task,
especially one housing such a
dangerous prisoner?

The official smiles and shakes his head.

OFFICIAL

Way above your pay grade, son. Just do your job.

INT. ASTERIA HOLDING CELL

The holding cell is walled on three sides, with a protective force field as the fourth wall, allowing Cranston and Maamu to be seen, laying on the floor, hands cuffed behind them, still unconscious.

INT. ASTERIA MEDICAL CENTER

Pratt, Soto, and Jiang are gathered around the pod. Jiang studies it, attempting to find a way to open it without damaging its contents. Soto breaks the awkward silence.

SOTO

Alpha Charlie Zebra? You just pull that outta your butt?

PRATT

Don't be ridiculous. I had a suit on.

Jiang looks up from her work.

JIANG

Captain, no such protocol exists.

PRATT

You and I know that. Cranston didn't. Hey, it worked...

SOTO

(cocky)

It worked 'cuz I put a beat down on Cranston and the marshall.

As Jiang returns to her work, Pratt nods reluctantly.

PRATT

Soto, I'll concede you're a mite handy to have around...at times.

SOTO

(grins devilishly)

Still wanna trade me for an android?

Pratt eyes Soto and grunts, shaking his head. Just then, Jiang speaks up excitedly.

JIANG

Captain, I believe I've figured out how to open the pod without harming the girl.

PRATT

Well, then don't keep us in
suspenders any longer.

Jiang nods and pushes a series of buttons on the pod control panel. The pod lid opens up slowly, hinged at one end, until it is perpendicular to the rest of the pod. Vapor spills out of the pod, briefly forming a cloud that then dissipates.

As the three gaze down at the girl, she suddenly opens her eyes, causing them to recoil. She then sits up straight and begins to look around, analyzing her surroundings.

Soto and Jiang are unsure of what to do. Pratt carefully approaches the girl and squats down to be at her eye level.

PRATT

Little girl. My name is Darius
Pratt...what is your name?

The girl finally stops panning the room and turns her still expressionless gaze toward Pratt.

PRATT

Can you hear me? Do you understand
what I am saying?

The girl slowly nods and reaches out her hand toward Soto, who has been cautiously inching toward her. Thinking she needs help getting up, Soto takes her hand in hers.

Immediately, a look of surprise and terror grips Soto. She seems frozen in place. After a few seconds, the girl lets go of Soto's hand. Soto's knees buckle and she struggles to maintain her balance. Pratt and Jiang rush to her aid.

PRATT

Soto...you ok?

SOTO

Holy crap! I heard her voice in my
head!

PRATT

Ok...and that voice told you what,
exactly?

Soto takes a moment to regain her composure.

SOTO

That she wants...needs to go home.

Pratt and Jiang look solicitously at Soto and then the girl, who gazes back at them with an anxious, hollow expression.