

SHADOW 19

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June 30 draft (rough)

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FADE IN:

EXT. SATURN ORBIT - FAR FUTURE

Saturn swims against the stars, its rings slicing the night. DIONE, a pale moon, looms in the foreground.

SUPER: DIONE, MOON OF SATURN

A battleship crosses the moon's disk. On its hull: the name HIGHLINE - and the symbol of a red hawk.

INT. BATTLESHIP HIGHLINE (IN FLIGHT)

CAPTAIN CONRAD VANCE of the Offworld Marine Corps prepares for combat. He is a rugged man of 40, calm and focused. In his massive ARMORED SPACE SUIT he looks superhuman: a half-ton war machine. His rifle is big as a cannon.

Technicians swarm around him, checking systems.

Nearby, more technicians tend to ELEVEN OTHER MARINES: elite soldiers in their late 20s and early 30s.

Vance is first on his feet. He steps free of his prep station and walks the line, inspecting his men.

Motors hum as he walks. His footfalls shake the deck.

One of Vance's men catches his eye - MOX, a seasoned soldier.

MOX

What do you think, Cap?

Vance shrugs - a massive movement of armored shoulders.

VANCE

The ammo load is armor-piercing, so whatever we're fighting, it's big.

VOICE (O.S.)

That's right.

Silence in the room. The Marines turn to the man who stands on a raised deck above them: their commander, COLONEL COBURN.

Coburn wears an ordinary uniform and a headset. He frowns in concentration, listening and talking at once.

COBURN

The Hegemony has heavy tanks
advancing on the Dione Colony.

VANCE

The Colony has anti-ship guns. How did they land tanks?

COBURN

They dropped 'em weeks ago on the far side of the moon. They crawled all the way around, right under the radar.

MOX

What crawled all the way around?

COBURN

Four D-Class tanks. And a mystery target. Something bigger.

VANCE

Bigger than a D-Class?

COBURN

Something new. Target's designated "Colossus". We've got destroyers inbound, but they're six hours away. Right now you're all we have.

The Marines become grim. This is a desperate action.

COBURN (CONT'D)

Six thousand people live and work in the Dalton Mining Colony. Maybe they'll be rotting in prison ships tonight. Maybe they'll be free. You decide it now. Lock in.

The Marines step into metal drop capsules. The capsules close and sink into their launch tubes.

EXT. DIONE

The DIONE COLONY, an industrial city, sits rooted to the rock. The red hawk symbol is painted on its walls.

Around the city, the mines lie silent: digging machines abandoned in their trenches.

MISSILES swarm over the horizon toward the colony. The colony's GUNS blast some from the sky. Other missiles detonate against the city walls.

A digging machine EXPLODES in a weird airless fireball.

Smoke clears. Across the valley, four D-CLASS TANKS climb over the ridgeline. They are three stories high, painted with the blue interlocking circles of the Hegemony.

The colony goes turtle: withdrawing its towers, it closes up and hunkers down against the rock.

EXT. BATTLESHIP HIGHLINE (IN ORBIT)

The Battleship's guns begin to fire in a cycle of terrible violence: pounding at their targets on the moon below.

Twelve DROP-CAPSULES launch. Rocket toward the surface of Dione.

EXT. DIONE - DALTON COLONY BATTLEFIELD

The battleship's bombardment hammers the tanks. Near-misses and hits. Their armor is damaged but withstands the assault.

The tanks launch flares and interceptor missiles.

A drop-capsule rockets down and shatters, revealing Vance in full armor. He vaults from the impact crater - as a missile explodes where he just landed.

Other drop capsules hurtle down, OTHER MARINES emerge. They take cover in rocky terrain chaotic with explosions.

ATHENA'S VOICE

All troops down safe.

VANCE

Marines! Give me a battle line,
twenty meter spacing. Athena.
Tactical.

The electronic voice of his armor's battle computer answers him - feminine, calming.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Tactical.

Vance's visor lights up, painting the terrain around him with data: enemies, friendlies, ranges and velocities.

Each Marine is tagged in Vance's display with his name and status. Vance watches his men move into a battle line.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Four D-Class tanks incoming. Target
"Colossus" out of range.

The four tanks loom closer. Behind them, Vance's visor display indicates the Colossus, hidden behind the ridge.

VANCE

Advance on me. Fire as you go.

Vance moves toward the D-Class Tank at a run through the broken terrain. The other Marines join in seconds later, their rifles blazing.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Incoming fire.

From the tanks, energy beams flash toward the Marines. Vance cartwheels off the ground, JUMP-JETS flaring from his boots. He arcs through space, firing all the while.

Behind him Marines take evasive action on their jets.

VANCE

We're not breaching the armor.
Let's get close and do some
demolition.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Fatality. Sergeant Holder.

Vance charges a tank. Enemy fire rakes the ground around him.

INT. BATTLESHIP HIGHLINE - COMMAND COCKPIT (IN ORBIT)

Onscreen, Colonel Coburn watches the battle unfold below.

A fatality marker throbs where Sergeant Holder fell. The eleven remaining Marines charge toward the enemy.

EXT. DIONE - BATTLEFIELD

Vance reaches a tank: gets in under its guns and keeps going, right between its gnashing treads and under its armored body.

From a pod on his thigh he pulls a series of powerful mines. Plants them on the belly of the tank.

VANCE

Athena. Detonate on my mark.

On the underside of the tank, belly hatches open. ARMED TROOPERS drop out. Their gunfire ricochets off his armor.

Vance hurls a mine into an open hatch. Fires his jump-jets. Cannonballs through the troopers into the clear.

VANCE

Now!

Behind him the tank EXPLODES spectacularly.

Vance scans the battlefield - two of the D-Class Tanks burn furiously. Marines concentrate fire on the other two.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Fatality. Lieutenant Carver.

Vance looks up, and gapes in awe. The COLOSSUS climbs over the ridge: a tank twice as big as the D-Class machines. A fortress on the move.

VANCE

I see the Colossus. It's a monster.

COBURN (V.O.)

We are hitting it now.

A barrage of shells from the orbiting Battleship. Explosions march across the lunar surface and pound the Colossus.

When the smoke clears, the Colossus is battered but intact: still coming.

Its mammoth guns rise to point toward the stars.

VANCE

Heads up, Command! Colossus is returning fire...

A thunderous concussion shakes the ground. Flames leap as the Tank's heavy guns all fire at once.

EXT. BATTLESHIP HIGHLINE (IN ORBIT)

Gunfire from the Colossus far below tears into the Battleship, triggering a chain of EXPLOSIONS.

INT. BATTLESHIP HIGHLINE - COMMAND COCKPIT

Colonel Coburn, shaken badly, watches damage reports stream in from the Battleship's burning sections.

COBURN

Marines. We are hit. Highline is disengaging.

EXT. BATTLESHIP HIGHLINE (IN ORBIT)

The Battleship veers away from Dione.

EXT. DIONE - DALTON COLONY BATTLEFIELD

All four of the D-Class Tanks are burning hulks. Marines emerge from the smoking wreckage to advance on the Colossus.

Vance watches in horror as the mighty guns of the Colossus lower to engage in the surface battle.

VANCE

Rapid advance! Move! Move!

The battle line breaks into a run: the Marines sprint toward the Colossus, rifles flashing...

The HEAVY GUNS of the Colossus open fire. The Marines take evasive action - but one by one soldiers are BLASTED into oblivion.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Fatality. Sergeant Markhart.
Fatality. Sergeant Chan. Casualty.
Lieutenant Drake.

Vance roars in rage.

VANCE

Cover! Take cover!

The Marines dive for shelter as the guns shake the earth.

VANCE

(under his breath)
Too many. Too many.

He stares at the Colossus, scanning the giant war machine with telescopic vision.

His gaze settles on the anti-personnel gun turrets that protrude like steel barrels from the tank's hull.

VANCE

McGrath! Get to Drake. Run a med-check. Everybody else, fire from cover on my order. Target the sensors. Eyes and ears. I want that monster blind. Ready...
(gathers himself, poised to sprint)
Fire!

Vance explodes from cover, racing toward the Colossus. Around him, the Marines blast away at the Colossus's sensors with precision rifle fire.

Vance is half running and half flying, his jump-jets blazing. The Colossus pounds the battlefield with haphazard firepower, but Vance weaves and leaps and the gunfire doesn't touch him.

He gets in past the guns. Leaps onto the Colossus. Clings magnetically beside a gun turret.

A plasma torch extends from his forearm. He aims at the seam where the turret meets the hull and lights up.

Blinding light from the contact point. His visor darkens. White-hot liquid metal gouts down the side of the tank.

He plants his feet, wraps his arms around the gun and heaves.

The motors of his battle-suit WHINE.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Warning. Critical strain.

VANCE
(through clenched teeth)
Override!

With a SCREECH, the entire turret tears out of the tank. A GUNNER spins to the rock below. A BLAST of escaping air.

Vance swings into the hole.

INT. COLOSSUS

Vance bulls down a passageway. He barely fits. The shoulders of his armored suit scrape the walls.

His visor's heads-up display streams with data as ATHENA maps the inside of the tank.

VANCE
Hold your fire. I'm inside the
Colossus.

MARINE (V.O.)
Inside?!

A TANK CREWMAN rakes Vance with bullets that bounce off his armor. Vance blows him away with a single shot.

Vance reaches a ladder-well leading upward. He starts up - and his shoulders CLANG against the well rim. He doesn't fit.

Vance heaves. The ladder rungs bend under his hands. With a shriek of metal, the walls of the ladder-well give way.

COLOSSUS - BRIDGE

The COMMAND CREW does damage control: drivers wrestle with controls...gunnery officers search for targets. They wear light vacuum suits.

Behind them, the ladder-well emerges from the deck plates.

A ROAR. The bridge is shaken by an unseen force.

Vance BLASTS out of the ladder-well on his jets, SMASHES into the ceiling. Lands on his feet in a shower of scrap metal.

The deck crew spins in alarm. Two crewmen pull pistols and fire. Bullets ricochet wildly.

Vance's rifle comes up.

EXT. COLOSSAL TANK

An explosion blows out the Colossus's command bridge. Jets of flame billow into space.

The Colossus goes dark. Churns to a stop. A hailstorm of shrapnel pelts the battlefield.

Vance lands on his feet in the dust - armor dark with soot.

INT. BATTLESHIP HIGHLINE (ON DIONE)

The Marines gather again in their ready room. They are transformed: armor pitted and blackened, faces smeared with sweat and blood. Only seven men remain.

Technicians lift their helmets off, open up their armor. Two men are wounded: medics rush to help them.

The Marines gather around Vance, slap his shoulders in grim celebration: they are mindful of their losses.

MARINE #1

This was all you, Cap.

VANCE

This was the fighting two-ten, best platoon in the Corps.

MARINE #2

But the big kill was yours.

VANCE

The kill belongs to the men we
lost. When we get inside the
Colony, we drink to them.

COBURN (O.S.)

We won't be seeing the inside of
Dione Colony.

The men turn. Coburn stands above them on his command deck.

COBURN

We lift as soon as our casualties
are aboard.

The Marines murmur in protest.

VANCE

Back to Mars already?

COBURN

Earth. Special orders.

Sudden silence.

MARINE #3

What's it about, sir?

COBURN

I don't know. Captain Vance has
been called home. We're just along
for the ride.

The men's eyes turn to Vance in surprise.

COBURN

(to all the men)

I wish I could grant you some shore
leave. You've earned it. But I have
orders.

(points at Vance)

You. In my stateroom.

INT. BATTLESHIP HIGHLINE (IN FLIGHT) - COBURN'S STATEROOM

A luxurious cabin by spacefaring standards but still cramped.
Colonel Coburn sits reading an electronic slate.

The engines rumble. Saturn's rings slide past the porthole.

Vance enters in regular uniform, hair damp. He looks wary.

COBURN

Vance, you've done more combat tours than any man in the division. I've done all I can to keep you where you want to be. But it looks like I'm losing you.

(reads slate)

"Transport Captain Conrad Vance to Earth ASAP. Run silent. Avoid hazard of combat. Vance to report on arrival to the State Science Agency for special duty."

Vance looks stunned. This makes no sense to him.

VANCE

The SSA?

COBURN

What it says. A battleship diverted to take one man home!

VANCE

What does the Science Agency want with a Marine? Do they run combat ops?

COBURN

Who knows what they do? But the Secretary of Defense signed the order himself. It's for real.

VANCE

I'm a soldier, not a lab rat. I'd like to protest the order.

COBURN

Not under radio silence. Two weeks to Earth. Nothing to do 'til then but rest up. Your orders.

(he hands Vance the slate)

Maybe it's time you got out of the field. You ought to have my job by now. Hell, you ought to be senior to me. How long can you keep refusing promotions?

VANCE

I don't know. I'll stay in armor as long as they let me.

(he laughs)

Maybe that's what the Science guys want. To have my head examined.

INT. BATTLESHIP HIGHLINE - BARRACKS - NIGHT

Vance and the other Marines lie in their bunks watching video on electronic slates as light as magazines. One soldier dozes off in front of a news broadcast:

NEWS ANNOUNCER #1

The Allied States and the Hegemony broke off arms-control talks after weeks of deadlock. Stockpiles of fusion and gravity weapons continue to grow.

Another soldier munches bright blue chips from a bag and watches a different channel:

NEWS ANNOUNCER #2

Prices rose again as the population outgrew the food supply for the sixth year running...

And a third soldier watches a video letter from home.

MARINE'S WIFE

...somebody tapped into the Baxters' water pipes! At these prices I guess you can't be surprised. But imagine, stealing water!

Vance watches a broadcast with particular interest:

NEWS ANNOUNCER #3

...more than half of the federal budget is now classified. Despite popular outcry against this secret spending, the so-called "black funds" continue to grow.

Five bunks are empty. Folded flags commemorate the dead.

EXT. BATTLESHIP HIGHLINE (IN FLIGHT) - EARTH APPROACH

The scarred Battleship passes an Allied States defensive space station: a huge manned satellite bristling with guns.

The satellite SCANS the Battleship with a laser beam as it passes.

Earth shines below, half in light and half in shadow. On the planet's night side, cities shine in the darkness: far larger than today's cities, and connected by arteries of light.

The Battleship descends toward the eastern seaboard of North America - where dawn is fast approaching.

EXT. NEW WASHINGTON SPACEPORT (EARTH)- MORNING

A vast landing ground surrounds the spaceport terminal. Military spacecraft lie at harbor. The distant towers of New Washington shine in the sunrise.

The Battleship Highline settles into a landing bay. A gangway tube extends from the spaceport to the battleship.

INT. GANGWAY

Vance debarks alone, in dress uniform: his chest crowded with medals. Walks the long transparent tube toward the terminal.

His men watch him go, dressed in common fatigues.

SPACEPORT TERMINAL

Vance emerges from the gangway into a busy concourse.

An officer in a military uniform stands waiting: JOHN RANDALL, 50, a good-natured bear of a man with a barrel chest and a crew cut.

OFFICER

Captain Vance.

(they exchange salutes,
shake hands)

Major John Randall. Department of
Defense. Welcome home.

SPACEPORT CONCOURSE

Vance and Randall walk together.

RANDALL

It's an honor to meet you, Captain.
I know what you did on Dione.

He shakes his head, speechless. Vance nods his thanks.

RANDALL

I'm here to make the handoff to
your new command.

VANCE

Who's my C.O. now?

Randall's forehead wrinkles in perplexity.

RANDALL

The lawyers are looking at that.
The whole arrangement's unusual.
Technically, it looks like your
C.O. is Jarod Marbeck. Director of
the State Science Agency.

VANCE

(amazed)

The Director of the SSA. And what
does he want with me?

RANDALL

(shrugging)

Secretary of Defense signed your
orders. He didn't tell me why.

VANCE

Speak of the devil.

He nods over Randall's shoulder at...

A PUBLIC MEDIA TERMINAL

The news. A pretty ANCHORWOMAN speaks. In an inset image, the
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE gives a press conference.

ANCHORWOMAN (ONSCREEN)

Secretary of Defense Gideon Dain
today announced the end of
hostilities over the Dalton Colony
on Dione.

The image cuts to the press conference. DEFENSE SECRETARY
GIDEON DAIN speaks: a chiseled man with salt-and-pepper hair
and the brick-solid build of a career soldier.

SECRETARY DAIN (ONSCREEN)

Today the Hegemony surrendered its
claim to our mining colonies on
Dione, after last month's defensive
action by the Offworld Marines.

Vance grins in satisfaction.

SECRETARY DAIN (ONSCREEN)

The action was exemplary. Our
losses, acceptable...

Vance's smile fades.

SECRETARY DAIN (ONSCREEN)
 ...and the Dalton Colonists remain
 free people.

The news cuts to a piece on overpopulation.

RANDALL
 Nobody minds losing some soldiers,
 as long we win. I was in the
 Offworld Corps myself. Seventeenth
 Division, Mercury terminator.
 (Randall hikes up his
 trouser leg. His right
 leg is a high-tech
 prosthetic.)
 Then I tangled with a neutron gun
 and landed me a desk job.

Vance gives the artificial leg an expert glance.

VANCE
 That's a good leg. I have friends
 with that leg.

SECURITY BARRIERS

Vance and Randall exit the spaceport's secure zone through a
 humming gauntlet of sensors and scanning beams.

Beyond the barriers, a SCIENTIST waits: Vance's age,
 athletically built. He wears a long black coat, styled like a
 lab coat, and a black skullcap. His face shows no feeling.

RANDALL
 You must be...

SCIENTIST
 Rune Banneker, Scientist.

VANCE
 (extending a hand)
 Captain Conrad Vance.

BANNEKER
 (ignoring the hand)
 Yes. Come with me.

Banneker turns to leave. Randall scowls in indignation.

RANDALL
 That's a war hero you're talking
 to. You take care of our man.

Banneker replies with a supercilious smile.

BANNEKER

He's our man now.

The Scientist strides off. Vance shoots a troubled look at Randall, and hurries after the Scientist.

INT. LIMOUSINE (IN FLIGHT) - DAY

Vance and Banneker soar into New Washington. They are alone: the limousine pilots itself.

New Washington is shining and beautiful: an architectural homage to the 20th-Century American city.

Everywhere, signs of militarization: Soldiers on street corners. Propaganda posters. On billboards, military style is evident in civilian fashions. The red hawk banner of the Allied States flies from every building.

VANCE

I haven't been here in years. It's beautiful.

BANNEKER

City population is forty-six million. Growth rate is five percent plus a year. It's unsustainable.

Vance stares at Banneker in distaste.

VANCE

I've been off-world for two years. It's beautiful.

The limousine settles in front of an imposing classical skyscraper: The headquarters of the State Science Agency.

INT. STATE SCIENCE AGENCY - DAY

The cavernous lobby bustles with people. They wear stylized lab coats in white, gray, or black. The youngest wear white coats, the oldest black.

Heavily armed Agency Guards stand post at every door.

Banneker strides through the vast front doors, Vance in tow.

BANNEKER

Welcome to the State Science Agency.

Vance looks like he's just stepped through the looking glass.

Banneker heads for a distant bank of elevators. As they approach, he stares at an elevator: it opens.

ELEVATOR

The doors close. Vance and Banneker are alone.

Banneker gazes intently at the elevator's control panel. Lights flash to life, and the elevator descends.

The floor indicator reaches the lowest basement level - but the elevator KEEPS SINKING.

VANCE

We're still descending.

BANNEKER

Yes.

Vance stares. Banneker ignores him. The elevator plummets deep underground.

After an endless time the elevator sighs to a halt. The doors don't open. Banneker hands Vance an electronic slate.

BANNEKER

Before entering this facility, you must sign this writ of secrecy.

Frowning, Vance scrolls through the dense legalese.

VANCE

"Penalties for violation of secrecy may include revocation of citizenship, imprisonment, or execution." Execution?

BANNEKER

You can easily avoid the penalties by obeying the writ.

The men stare at each other. Finally Vance presses his thumbprint in the signature box. Banneker takes the slate.

The elevator doors open.

INT. UNDERGROUND COMPLEX

Vance and Banneker emerge into a bright vestibule. A cannon on the ceiling rotates and aims its muzzle at Vance.

Vance takes an experimental sidestep; the cannon ignores Banneker and tracks Vance like a hunting dog.

BANNEKER
Security's tight down here.

UNDERGROUND CORRIDOR

Banneker and Vance walk abreast at a brisk clip.

BANNEKER
Why do you think we selected you,
out of a hundred thousand Marines?

A Scientist in a grey coat walks by, shepherding a mysterious mechanism on a motorized cart. Vance watches it pass.

VANCE
Selected me for what?

BANNEKER
We'll get to that. Why you?

VANCE
I've seen more action than most.

BANNEKER
You've survived more missions than
any trooper in the Offworld Corps.

They pass another security cannon. Vance watches the weapon unhappily as it tracks him.

VANCE
I've been lucky.

BANNEKER
You have the fastest reflexes in
the Corps, and the lowest resting
pulse rate. Your eyesight and
hearing are in the first
percentile. You're an amazing
specimen. But that's all trivia.
The point is, you're the man who
comes home.

VANCE
So far.

GRAND CONCOURSE

A huge subterranean space, gleaming and supermodern. Walkways above walkways, all bustling with movement as Scientists hurry to and fro.

In the center of the Concourse stands a great GLOBE OF EARTH: it shows the world divided into two super-nations that cover

every speck of land on the planet - the Allied States marked in red, the Hegemony in blue.

Beside the globe stands JAROD MARBECK, 65, DIRECTOR OF THE STATE SCIENCE AGENCY. Magisterial and severe in an ornate black coat and cap.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

Welcome, Captain. I'm Jarod Marbeck, Director of the State Science Agency.

(he smiles)

You're wondering why you're here.

VANCE

Yeah.

Marbeck points at the globe turning slowly above them.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

We've lived in a state of cold war for more than a century. All our lives. Do you know how many times we've come close to total war?

VANCE

No.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

Six. Six times we've armed our doomsday weapons and teetered on the brink of extinction. Imagine that!

Marbeck shakes his head with the air of a man personally offended.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

We Scientists work to protect humanity. From disease. Famine. Cosmic accidents of every kind. This Agency has quietly rescued humanity more times than I can count. And for what? So our idiot politicians and military barbarians can march us right back to the abyss! The world's in danger. Our only home.

VANCE

We have colonies on the outer planets.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

Little steel bubbles filled with air! If Earth is lost, they'll

(MORE)

DIRECTOR MARBECK (cont'd)
 perish in a year or two. No, I saw
 the truth long ago. There's only
 one way to safeguard our future.

VANCE
 What's that?

DIRECTOR MARBECK
 We need another world.

GOVERNING COUNCIL CHAMBER

Marbeck and Banneker lead Vance into an immaculate white conference room.

Around the table: SCIENTIST WALTER LARSON, 60, slender and folksy; SCIENTIST MARTIN CAUL, 70, a bearded man with fierce eyes; and SCIENTIST CORDELIA RHAY, 65, keen and severe.

All the Scientists wear black coats and skullcaps. Behind each Scientist stands a gray-coated Apprentice.

Vance's eyes are drawn to Martin Caul's Apprentice: ADA KILDARE, 30, a beauty whose hair falls to her shoulders. She watches Vance with open curiosity.

Marbeck and Banneker sit, leaving a chair at the foot of the table. After an awkward moment Vance takes the empty chair.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
 Colleagues, this is Captain Conrad
 Vance of the Offworld Marine Corps.

The Scientists inspect him. Vance looks back, his eyes lingering boldly on Ada. Flustered, she looks away.

Marbeck points at Vance.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
 I was your age when I became
 Director. You see, I was a prodigy
 too: but where you excel at
 killing, I had other talents. I
 enlarged the Astronomy division and
 began a search of the heavens. And
 in just five years I found what I
 was looking for.

He raises his hand, and a STAR swells into existence in the air above the conference table - which is also a holograph generator. Vance is startled, which amuses the Scientists.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
 Erix. Similar in size and orbit to
 our own world, with a single large
 (MORE)

DIRECTOR MARBECK (cont'd)
moon. A new hope for humanity, just
twenty light-years away.

IN HOLOGRAM: Planets spring into being around the star. The
fourth planet, ERIX, grows to fill the space over the table:
an angry red planet with a pale yellow moon.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
I assembled the best scientific
minds in the Agency. And they
designed and built the most
extraordinary spacecraft ever made.

IN HOLOGRAM: The scene shifts. A spaceport orbits Jupiter.
Cradled in its scaffold is a saucer-shaped spacecraft.

As the view shifts, the ship's immensity becomes apparent.
Construction ships swarm over it like ants.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
Prometheus!

VANCE
(awed)
Nothing's that big.

The elderly Scientist Larson grins.

LARSON
Prometheus is. Half a kilometer
across, with a mass of seventy
million tons. And history's biggest
gravity drive running through its
core. It's a magnificent monster.

Marbeck indulges Larson with a smile of real affection.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
And the greatest secret ever kept.

VANCE
How many people aboard?

DIRECTOR MARBECK
None. The Prometheus has no
passenger compartments, no cockpit.
It's a super-intelligent machine
designed to transform Erix into a
new Earth.

VANCE
A terraforming ship.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
Yes! The Prometheus Project. This
is Scientist Walter Larson, Chief
(MORE)

DIRECTOR MARBECK (cont'd)
Engineer. He designed Prometheus
forty years ago.

Vance looks at Larson in surprise. Marbeck gestures at the
other Scientists around the table.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
Scientist Cordelia Rhay, Chief
Physicist. Scientist Martin Caul,
Chief Planetologist. You've met
Scientist Banneker, Project
Coordinator. I lead the project.
And our work has begun in earnest.
After a thirty year voyage,
Prometheus has arrived.

IN HOLOGRAM: Prometheus orbits Erix. It releases a shower of
probes that fall onto the planet: a swarm of satellites that
swing into crisscrossing orbits.

Prometheus lands and DIVIDES elaborately. Six sections crawl
away on giant treads, each a titanic machine in its own
right. The core remains, a spire reaching into the sky.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
The ship's core forms the
Prometheus Ground Station, here.
Six crawlers spread over the
surface, sowing the seeds of new
life. And now to the point. One of
these crawlers has broken down.
(he points)
Crawler Three. Its communications
array has failed. Without satellite
data it can no longer chart its
course. It will not move or launch
the rockets it carries.

VANCE
How can you know this? It's
impossible to know what's happening
twenty light-years away. Any
message would take twenty years to
get here.

RHAY
That's true - in the physics you
were taught. But there have been
some unannounced breakthroughs in
the field. The Prometheus is
connected to Earth by a device
called a Lang Transporter. It
allows objects to "travel"
instantaneously from one point to
another. The Prometheus has been
(MORE)

RHAY (cont'd)
sending us progress reports roughly
once a week.

VANCE
You have a teleportation machine.

RHAY
A Lang Transporter. Yes.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
A transporter, Captain Vance, that
works in both directions. A device
large enough to transport a man.

Vance digests this information. The Scientists watch him.

VANCE
You want me to go to Erix.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
Yes.

VANCE
You want me to repair Crawler
Three.

Marbeck smiles like a teacher pleased with a clever student.

CORRIDOR

Marbeck leads Vance and the other Scientist along at a brisk clip. Security cannons continue to pick Vance out of the crowd and track him as he passes.

Vance, shell-shocked by all he's learned, is trying to get his head around it.

VANCE
I thought I was pretty well-
informed. You know, I read the
news.

Marbeck chuckles.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
The events that truly shape the
world rarely make the news.
Especially in this day and age.

PROMETHEUS PROJECT - TRANSPORT FACILITY

A cavern of staggering dimensions, its floor lost in shadow far below. A futuristic reactor looms in the darkness. At the center of its coils: a chamber not much bigger than a coffin.

A catwalk stretches across empty space to the chamber.
Marbeck leads Vance out onto the bridge. His voice echoes.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

The Lang Transporter. The only
device of its kind. Humanity's
greatest invention, if humanity
only knew it. That doorway there,
that chamber...a gateway to another
world. You will be the first to
pass through, Captain. The first.

PROMETHEUS PROJECT - STAGING ROOM

A huge industrial space connected to the Transport Facility.

Heavy machines hulk in the corners. Massive cranes hang
overhead. The floor is a mosaic of conveyor belts and moving
platforms.

Banneker leads Vance in.

BANNEKER

We have everything you should need.
If we don't have it, we can
probably get it. If we can't get it
we'll make it for you.

Banneker points to a door at the top of a metal staircase.

BANNEKER

Your quarters. Close to the work.

A klaxon sounds: a massive locker descends into the Staging
Room on an elevator. The crate is marked with Marine insignia
and Vance's name.

Banneker gazes at a heavy crane: it leaps into motion. Lifts
the locker from the elevator. Sets it down and withdraws.

VANCE

You keep doing that.

BANNEKER

Doing what?

VANCE

Controlling machines with your
eyes. Elevators, doors, the crane.
How's it work?

BANNEKER

In the Agency, rank has its
privileges.

He removes his cap. He is bald: a sleek metal crown clings to his scalp. Its terminals pass through the skin into his head.

VANCE

Ouch.

BANNEKER

When there are secrets to be kept,
machines make the best servants. We
don't need many human helpers here.

Vance keys his ID code into the massive locker. Thumbs the print reader. The case opens.

Inside: Vance's armor - and an arsenal of weapons and tools.

Banneker peers into the locker. Inspects a rack of something like wet-suits. He fingers one curiously. It's marked with Vance's name and Captain's rank insignia.

BANNEKER

What is this?

VANCE

Skinsuit. You wear it under the armor. Soaks up sweat, keeps your skin clean, heals wounds. It even scratches where you itch. Best of all, on a long mission it catheterizes you.

BANNEKER

Ouch.

VANCE

Yeah. You tend to have a love-hate relationship with your skinsuit.

MINUTES LATER

Vance, wearing a skinsuit, stands in front of his armor.

VANCE

Athena, wake up.

Athena's electronic voice speaks from the battle suit.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Captain Vance.

VANCE

Open.

The battle-suit SPLITS OPEN like some strange mollusk - the helmet swings back, the body opens wide.

Vance slips easily into the armor, and it closes around him. He stands up wearing half a ton of metal.

VANCE
Offworld Marine, ready for duty.

BANNEKER
Very impressive. Come and see the repair job. We have a mock-up.

VANCE
Hang on.

Vance reaches into the locker and clamps a bulky apparatus onto his left forearm. He points it at Banneker.

Its muzzle belches a blur of motion that makes Banneker flinch violently - but it's only a rapid rotation of tools: socket-wrench, chisel, hammer, pincers.

VANCE
(grinning)
Field engineer's toolkit. Can't hurt you.

Behind Vance, unknown to him, the Staging Room machines turn on him: the heavy crane hangs overhead, its quivering jaws ready to crush him. A pit opens at his heels. Security cannons awaken and take aim.

Banneker relaxes, and the machines withdraw silently into the shadows.

TRAINING FACILITY

Vance, in full armor, enters on Banneker's heels. Apprentices gape at the giant in their midst.

A house-sized machine dominates the room. It's shaped like a beetle's head: two eye-like domes, a shell of armor plate.

One armored dome is torn raggedly open.

BANNEKER
This is a replica of Crawler Three's comm array. We reproduced the damage from diagnostics.

Vance takes in the complex machine. Shoots Banneker a look.

VANCE

Look, why am I here? You've got to have hundreds of engineers who could do this.

BANNEKER

The Offworld Marine battle suit is the toughest spacesuit there is. And it takes months of training to wear it. A skilled Marine was our best option.

Vance walks up the module's hull and inspects the damage. He casually peels back the thick metal and peers inside. Banneker's eyes widen at this feat of strength.

VANCE

What did this?

BANNEKER

Unknown. Probably collision damage. Erix isn't flat.

VANCE

It's not pretty. But it looks like the only real damage is this cable. It's an easy fix.

BANNEKER

(skeptically)

There are components you have to move. Systems to shut down and restart in a certain order.

VANCE

Easy. Good.

INT. PROMETHEUS PROJECT - ENGINEERING CENTER - DAY

Scientist Larson's kingdom, a gallery of technical diagrams and intricate mechanisms.

Larson, Banneker, and Vance survey a huge scale model of Prometheus and its Crawlers.

They cluster around the model of Crawler Three.

SCIENTIST LARSON

Now when you complete this repair, watch out. Crawler Three's going to start talking to Prometheus, and in less than a second they'll exchange more information than a human brain handles in a lifetime. Crawler

(MORE)

SCIENTIST LARSON (cont'd)

Three's going to find out it's late starting the Ocean Program. And right that second it'll launch its rockets, bound for the seas of Erix.

Larson frowns. Four hatch-covers flip open on top of the model of Crawler Three. Four model rockets emerge. Larson lifts one with obvious pleasure.

LARSON

Big rockets. It'll get hot for you. Around two thousand degrees Kelvin.

VANCE

For how long?

SCIENTIST LARSON

Ten seconds or so. Only a second or two of peak heat.

VANCE

All right. I can ride that out.

SCIENTIST LARSON

(grins)
That's a damned fancy suit.

VANCE

(returning the smile)
Yes, sir. What do these rockets do?

SCIENTIST LARSON

The oceans are the foundation of the biosphere. The rockets are loaded with bacteria designed to change...

BANNEKER

Captain Vance may have top-secret military clearance, but he has no clearance here. Tell him only what he needs to know.

Vance and Banneker lock eyes. They're not going to get along.

STAGING ROOM

The Staging Room is deserted. Vance and Banneker enter.

VANCE

So what now?

BANNEKER

Now nothing.

(off Vance's bewilderment)

It's eight-o'clock. The end of our day. We'll resume at eight tomorrow morning. Take some time to study the project. You have the files.

Banneker turns to go.

VANCE

What about food? I'm starving.

BANNEKER

Talk to the terminal in your room. Food will come in the autovalet.

Banneker disappears down the corridor.

VANCE

(shouting after him)

The auto-what?

VANCE'S QUARTERS

A simple room with a desk, a holography table, and an industrial metal bed. A door opens onto a compact bathroom.

A panel in the wall stands open: the AUTOVALET, a delivery system. A dinner tray, demolished, sits on the desk.

At the holograph table, Vance flips through data: maps of Erix...diagrams of Prometheus...diagrams of Crawler Three.

Under the table, his knee jumps with nervous tension.

CORRIDOR

Deserted. Vance strolls restlessly, hands in his pockets. The security cannons track him as he passes.

VESTIBULE

Vance palms the elevator switch: ACCESS DENIED.

TRANSPORTER FACILITY

Vance stands outside the door. Stares into the transporter cavern. Electricity flickers over the vast machinery.

In his face in this solitary moment, we see something extraordinary: fear.

INT. PROMETHEUS PROJECT - PLANETOLOGY CENTER - DAY

Ada Kildare greets Vance and Banneker at the entrance.

ADA
(with a winning smile)
Captain Vance. Welcome to the
Planetology Division. I'm Ada
Kildare.

VANCE
Scientist Kildare...

ADA
Ada.

VANCE
Ada. Pleasure to meet you.

She leads them through a tantalizing laboratory. Apprentices work at display screens filled with weather systems, satellite maps, complex data displays.

ADA
This is where we study Erix.
Geology, chemistry, biology,
everything.

She hustles them through the lab too fast to allow Vance a good look around.

VANCE
(under his breath)
Biology?

MARTIN CAUL'S OFFICE

The den of a university professor: actual books on shelves, a holography table, huge display screens for data.

Scientist Caul and Ada sit with Vance and Banneker. Caul scowls at Vance and strokes his beard.

CAUL
You'll have to tell me how I can
help you, son. I'm no military man.

Vance looks impatient.

VANCE

I have to travel a hundred kilometers across an alien planet, and back. I have no recon. What's the ground made of? Does it rain? What's the rain made of? What about background radiation? Electrical storms. Volcanoes. Earthquakes...

CAUL

All right, all right. Ada will get you an environmental survey...
(he glances at Ada inquiringly)

ADA

Tomorrow, first thing.

VANCE

And you said biology. There's life on Erix?

CAUL

Of course. We couldn't terraform without biomass to work on.

VANCE

Well, what are we talking about? Algae? Bugs? Little green men?

CAUL

No, no, nothing like that. No intelligent life.

VANCE

You know that?

CAUL

Certainly. There's no technology. No agriculture, no artificial structures, no roads. No controlled use of fire. No sign of social organization. We've been thorough.

VANCE

All right. So what is there?

CAUL

Abundant plant and animal life. I can't be very detailed.

VANCE

Listen. I'm combat-certified in low gravity, heavy gravity, and zero gravity. I can operate in vacuum,
(MORE)

VANCE (cont'd)
 atmosphere, or underwater. But
 there's no training program for
 "aliens." I need information.

Caul glances nervously at Banneker.

CAUL
 Please understand. Prometheus is a
 planetary terraforming system. I
 can tell you whether Erix's carbon
 cycle is positive or negative for
 the week. I can give you the
 chemical composition of any part of
 the planet to ten decimal places. I
 can give you details - but not the
 ones you want. You want to know if
 life on Erix could be dangerous to
 you. And we simply have no idea.

TRAINING FACILITY

Vance, in armor, practices the repair. Larson and a crew of APPRENTICES look on. Vance's right hand is tucked behind his back; he works with his left.

Vance finishes the repair, lifts his hand with a flourish. Diagnostic lights flash to life.

APPRENTICE #1
 System operational.

APPRENTICE #2
 Three minutes forty-eight seconds.
 With one hand.

Apprentices restore the mock-up to its damaged state for the next practice run.

LARSON
 And no technical diagrams. Next
 you'll be doing it blindfolded.

Vance looks at Larson mischievously. The mock-up is ready.

VANCE
 Athena. Blackout.

Vance's visor goes opaque. He gropes over the repair.

INT. VANCE'S QUARTERS - DAY

Vance lets Ada in. She moves into the room, a little shy, looking around. Vance, suddenly self-conscious, gives the

place a quick scan, but there's nothing to tidy up: the room is immaculate.

She peeks into his tiny bedroom: Vance's personal effects are stashed meticulously; his bedsheets are taut as a drumhead.

ADA

You really know how to make a bed.

VANCE

Boot camp dies hard.

Ada activates Vance's holograph table.

ADA

I brought you some more detailed maps and environmental data.

A map of Erix rises from the table. Vance looks it over.

ADA

I've made notes where I could. Hazardous terrain, rainfall and wind conditions... Everything I could think of.

Vance toggles the map through different overlays: temperature data, precipitation, geology...he stops at a display he doesn't understand.

VANCE

What's this?

ADA

(hesitantly)

Biological material. Vegetation.

VANCE

Just my luck. Looks like Prometheus landed in a hot spot.

ADA

It wasn't chance. We chose a landing site rich in organic material. A jungle, really.

VANCE

Great.

VANCE'S QUARTERS - LATER

Alone, Vance studies the map. He's been at it for a while. He pulls a REMOTE from his pocket and speaks into it.

VANCE
Athena. Wake up.

STAGING ROOM

The chest panel of Vance's armor lights up.

VANCE'S QUARTERS

Athena's voice emanates from the remote.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Captain.

Vance plugs the remote into his holography table. Athena's Greek-helmet icon appears in the corner of his display.

VANCE
Tactical Model One. This is the
planet Erix.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Model One.

With a stylus, Vance touches a symbol on the map.

VANCE
This is Prometheus Ground Station.
Call it longitude zero.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Longitude zero.

Vance's stylus floats over the map: across ridges and valleys, canyons and rivers. A long way. Touches again.

VANCE
This is Crawler Three.

INT. PROMETHEUS PROJECT - GOVERNING COUNCIL CHAMBER - DAY

Vance stands in front of Director Marbeck and the Scientists of the Governing Council, who sit around the table.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
After only two weeks, you say
you're ready.

Vance plugs his REMOTE into the Council table.

VANCE
Athena. Tactical model 5B.

The map of Erix rises out of the table.

VANCE

Display primary route. Secondary route. Tertiary route. Display hazards.

Athena paints information across the map. A dense path of data connects the Ground Station to Crawler Three.

CAUL

(intrigued)

You've altered that map.

VANCE

This is a Theater-Wide Tactical Model. It's what the Corps uses. Athena has the whole region in memory.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

And the repair?

LARSON

He can do it blind. I watched him.

VANCE

More prep is just over-training. I'm good to go.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

(to Scientist Rhay)

The Transporter's ready?

(off Rhay's nod)

Very well. In the morning, Captain, you will go.

INT. VANCE'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

Vance does push-ups, ticking them off like a metronome.

He rises, breathing hard. The map of his mission glows on his holography table: he circles the table, studying the map, focused and deadly serious.

INT. PROMETHEUS PROJECT - STAGING ROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

Vance, in full armor, is checked over by a team of Apprentices. Baneker looks on.

Vance's breathing is slow and steady, his eyes far away.

At the last moment the Apprentices replace his "VANCE" ID plates with plates reading "VANCE 1." Vance takes no notice.

TRANSPORT FACILITY

Vance enters, hulking in his armor.

Ada stands beside the door. Vance musters a smile.

VANCE
Wish me luck.

ADA
Good luck, Conrad.

Vance crosses the catwalk to the transport chamber. The Scientists watch from the Control Room window.

All eyes on Vance. Tension palpable in the room.

The transport chamber opens, spilling light into the cavern.

RHAY (O.S.)
Are you ready, Captain?

Vance gives the thumbs-up.

DIRECTOR MARBECK (O.S.)
Enter the chamber.

TRANSPORT CHAMBER

Vance steps inside. The door closes. He stands cramped in the small, bright chamber. Breathing faster now.

RHAY (O.S.)
Charging.

The vast dynamos of the Lang Transporter RUMBLE to life.

VANCE
Athena. Transit to Erix. Stand by.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Standing by.

The sound of the dynamos rises to a HOWL.

EXT. NEW WASHINGTON - SUNRISE

New Washington stands pale against the dawn. A rolling BROWNOUT darkens the city's lights.

INT. PROMETHEUS PROJECT - TRANSPORTER CONTROL ROOM

The Scientists watch as electrical arcs spatter across the Transporter. The noise is incredible.

Ada joins the other Scientists in the control room. They watch in fascination.

TRANSPORT CHAMBER

Vance closes his eyes against the light and noise. Sweat runs down his cheek.

The dynamos reach a SCREAMING PITCH and hang there.

RHAY (V.O.)

Full charge. On your signal.

VANCE

Hit it.

BOOM. Blinding light.

Pure energy hammers through the transport chamber: for a split second Vance is a human lightning rod, a negative image, his mouth wide in an inaudible scream.

Silence.

Vance stands trembling, wisps of smoke rising from his armor. He takes a shuddering breath. Opens his eyes.

The chamber door grinds open - not the slim door he expected, but a massive slab of armor plate.

He looks out at...

THE PLANET ERIX

Smoky clouds race across a blood-red sky. Lightning flashes, and where it strikes a ribbon of fire twists and fades.

The landscape is a jungle out of a child's nightmare. Everything is moving. There's no clear division between plant and animal. It howls and rages and feeds on itself.

Vance stares, transfixed with horror.

VANCE

My God.

EXT. PROMETHEUS GROUND STATION

Prometheus towers out of the jungle, its vast ribs curving into the sky like the bones of a giant.

The ship's descent has blasted a clearing in the jungle. The tracks of the huge Crawlers lead away in all directions, highways of crushed vegetation and ruin.

Vance steps out. The ground crunches under his boots.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Satellite system online.

VANCE
Athena. Show me Crawler Three.

A blue marker on his visor display points down the path to his left. Crawler Three is out of sight over the horizon. A readout gives the distance: 124 KILOMETERS.

Vance moves out into the clearing. VINES wriggle toward him across the ground. Vance, wide-eyed, skips back from them.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Multiple targets incoming.

PREDATORS burst from the jungle and head for Vance - big and terrifyingly fast. Gleaming tusks jut from their shoulders.

Vance pulls his rifle - but the weapon is tangled in vines.

He pulls it free - too late. They're on him. Tusks punch through his armor. Horrific wounds.

His rifle fires convulsively.

He dies.

The gunfire shocks the jungle into motion. Winged things explode into flight, trees claw at the air. A vision of Hell.

INT. PROMETHEUS PROJECT - TRANSPORT FACILITY (EARTH)

The transport chamber's door opens. Vance steps out onto the catwalk. He's untouched, his armor unmarked.

A few thin wisps of smoke rise from his shoulders. He doesn't look like a man who's just seen his own death.

In the Control Room the Scientists stand watching.

VANCE
I'm still here.

DIRECTOR MARBECK (O.S.)
Technical difficulties, Captain.

RHAY (O.S.)
We're, ah, running tests.

Vance looks up at the Control Room. The Scientists look down at him...all but Ada Kildare, who turns and vanishes.

VANCE
Technical difficulties. But this is safe.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
Perfectly safe in theory. It takes a week to recharge the transporter. One week. Until then - continue training.

TRAINING FACILITY

Vance, in armor, stands in front of the repair mock-up. Plainly sick of doing this. He sighs heavily.

He gestures, and the toolkit extrudes from his armored gauntlet. He starts the repair.

INT. VANCE'S QUARTERS - DAY (A WEEK LATER)

Vance sits wearily at his small holography table. His tactical map of Erix glows in the darkened room. A KNOCK.

VANCE
Come in.

Banneker steps in, all business.

BANNEKER
The transporter's ready. You go in the morning. Eight-o'clock.

PROMETHEUS PROJECT - TRANSPORT FACILITY - MORNING

Vance, in armor, steps into the chamber for the second time. His ID tags read VANCE 2. The door closes behind him.

TRANSPORT CHAMBER

Vance stands cramped in the tiny chamber.

RHAY (V.O.)
Stand by...on your signal.

Again the dynamos howl in leashed fury.

VANCE
Go.

A BOOM and a blinding FLASH.

Energy slams through him - and then Vance stands shuddering in the transport chamber.

The door opens. Vance steps out into the...

TRANSPORT FACILITY

Vance looks up at the Control Room window where the Scientists stand.

VANCE
What now?

DIRECTOR MARBECK (V.O.)
Patience, we're almost there. One more week. We'll try again.

INT. PROMETHEUS PROJECT - STAGING ROOM - NIGHT

Vance, wearing a headset, tinkers with his armor.

VANCE
(into headset)
Sensor diagnostic. Execute.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Diagnostic running.

(O.S.) AGITATED VOICES in the distance.

Vance looks up. In the corridor outside, Scientist Banneker and Ada Kildare are arguing. Vance lifts a headphone away from his ear, listens. The thick window muffles their voices.

VANCE
Cancel diagnostic. Tactical sound.
Isolate voices.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Tactical sound.

An oceanic roar resolves into speech.

ADA (V.O.)
Well, how can he do better if you
don't tell him what's happening?

BANNEKER (V.O.)
We're obliged to protect certain
secrets.

ADA (V.O.)
You make no sense. You're hiding
the problem you want him to solve.

They move away down the hall, and the conversation is lost.
Vance pulls his headset off, pondering.

INT. PROMETHEUS PROJECT - VANCE'S MISSION ROOM - NIGHT

Vance lies on his bed, the room lit by the shifting light of
a holograph: bloody Erix orbiting its pale sun.

INT. PROMETHEUS PROJECT - TRANSPORT FACILITY - MORNING

Vance, in full armor, steps once more into the

TRANSPORT CHAMBER

The door closes over him as the dynamos howl. The tags on his
armor read VANCE 3.

BOOM. Lightning strikes inside the chamber.

EXT. ERIX - PROMETHEUS GROUND STATION - DAY

Electricity crackles over the immense terraforming ship.

The transporter door opens. Vance emerges, trailing wisps of
smoke. Gapes again at the alien wilderness.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Captain. Marines down.

VANCE
(in disbelief)
What?

Two CASUALTY MARKERS hover in his visor display. He inspects the fallen shapes with telescopic vision. Sees the shattered armor, reads the ID tags: VANCE 1, VANCE 2.

VANCE

You bastards. What have you done?

ATHENA'S VOICE

Satellite system online.

Vance scans the jungle. Nothing to see. He notices a fallen RIFLE beside one of the fallen Marines. Sprints for it.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Incoming. Multiple targets.

Vance gets the rifle. Three PREDATORS are closing on him.

He BLASTS them, a rifle in each hand.

The gunfire tears into the predators. They stagger, raging against their injuries, and go down.

Vance relaxes - and his visor LIGHTS UP with warning markers.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Incoming. Incoming. Incoming.

PREDATORS erupt from the jungle. The leaders pounce and Vance jumps away on jets, rifles blazing mid-air.

He lands running. They stay with him, flanking him.

Vance leaps over a SABER TREE and the tree snatches him out of the air, piercing his armor with curved blades. He dies.

INT. TRANSPORT FACILITY (EARTH) - MORNING

The transport chamber door slides open. Vance, unhurt, steps out into the laboratory, visibly angry.

From the Control Room the Scientists look down at him.

DIRECTOR MARBECK (V.O.)

Apologies, Captain. It looks like we're not quite there yet.

Vance stares suspiciously. He zooms in telescopically on the Director's face. Marbeck is smiling.

VANCE

Athena. Open up.

His armor releases him.

DIRECTOR MARBECK (O.S.)
Captain?

CONTROL ROOM ACCESS CORRIDOR

Vance emerges from the elevator in his black skinsuit. He's got something hidden in his hand.

Banneker stands at the Control Room door. Vance brushes past him and palms the door switch. Nothing happens.

Banneker slides between Vance and the door.

BANNEKER
The Control Room is a restricted...

Vance applies an armlock. Plants Banneker's hand on the door switch. The door slides open.

CONTROL ROOM

Director Marbeck stands waiting. Around him, technicians sit at elaborate consoles.

Vance enters. Banneker follows, rubbing his twisted arm.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
Captain.

Vance takes in the monitors and controls. He scans the faces of the technicians.

VANCE
You're not disappointed.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
What?

VANCE
You're not disappointed.
(points at the techs)
They're not trying to figure out
what's wrong. They're just sitting
there. Job's done.

He holds up an ID tag from his armor. It reads VANCE 3.

VANCE
Vance Three. What does that mean?
What is that machine doing to me?

DIRECTOR MARBECK

(to Banneker)

Here's what comes of recruiting the headstrong problem-solver.

(to Vance)

Captain, you won't get what you want by making demands of me in front of my staff. Your concern is noted. Banneker, if you will.

Banneker reaches for Vance's arm as if to escort him out. Vance stops him cold with an admonishing finger.

VANCE

Not on your best day.

He flings the ID plate at Marbeck's feet.

VANCE

Do you know what battle readiness is, Director? It's the vital thing that bleeds away when you keep soldiers in the trenches too long. When you tell them every day that battle is coming, and it never comes. I'm in the dark here. I don't know what we're doing. And at this rate, when something finally happens, I won't be ready.

Marbeck struggles visibly with his temper, and wins. He takes a deep breath.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

You're right. The Lang Transporter hasn't failed. It works perfectly.

VANCE

And what does it do?

DIRECTOR MARBECK

You said it yourself. Faster-than-light travel is not possible. The Transporter works by another principle.

RHAY

Conrad, the Lang Transporter has two chambers. One here, and one on Prometheus. The system exploits quantum superposition to create virtual particles in...

Vance tries to follow this. Shakes his head in frustration.

VANCE

Just give me the bottom line.

RHAY

Sorry. The Lang Transporter doesn't "transport" things. It duplicates them. It samples whatever's in one chamber and creates a perfect copy in the other chamber. We've created copies of you on Erix three times.

A moment of silence rolls by. Vance stares at the Scientists.

VANCE

Copies of me. On Erix.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

The Transporter allows you to stand on Earth and cast your shadow on another world. The men we sent to Erix were you, in a sense, with your abilities, your memories, your intentions...but you remain.

VANCE

And you didn't feel the need to tell me this. What are you doing? Building an army over there?

He stares out at the Transporter brooding in its cavern.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

There's no army. Your first two duplicates, your shadows on Erix, died within minutes. Your third shadow is most likely dying as we speak.

Vance - a man who has never been wounded - is stunned. He glances at the VANCE 3 nameplate on the floor.

VANCE

I died.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

Your shadows died.

Vance looks at Marbeck, grappling with the unbelievable.

VANCE

Show me.

INT. GOVERNING COUNCIL CHAMBER - LATER

The Scientists stand around the holography table: Director Marbeck and Scientists Banneker, Caul, Rhay and Larson.

Vance, back in regular uniform, faces them across the table.

IN HOLOGRAPH: Grainy satellite video of the Prometheus Ground Station.

DIRECTOR MARBECK (O.S.)
Prometheus, seen from orbit.

Vance points at the landscape surrounding Prometheus.

VANCE
What's all this movement?

CAUL
The jungle.

IN HOLOGRAPH: Electrical energy erupts from the Station.

RHAY (O.S.)
That energy discharge is the
creation of a large mass.

The image zooms in. A blurry figure emerges from the Station.

DIRECTOR MARBECK (O.S.)
That's you. Or rather, the first
copy of you. Call him Shadow One.

SHAPES burst from the jungle and overwhelm Shadow One.

VANCE
What's that? What are those?

A data marker pops up, recording the death.

CAUL
Aliens.

ADA
Native predators.

Vance shakes his head in disbelief.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
Death at one minute eighteen
seconds.

Director Marbeck cues the next holographic recording.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

Second arrival, one week later.
Your second duplicate, Shadow Two,
exits the station. Gunfire. Death
at two minutes fifty-one seconds.

CAUL

Same type of predator.

ADA

Maybe territorial.

Vance watches, frozen with amazement and rage.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

Third arrival, just hours ago.
Shadow Three.

VANCE

He picked up a second weapon.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

Extended gunfire here.

Vance stares, completely absorbed.

VANCE

Two kills. Three.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

Apparently. Shadow Three flees. He
is pursued. Death at four minutes
twenty seconds.

BANNEKER

Twenty meters off the ground. Looks
like he got stuck in a tree.

Vance scans the faces around the table, settles on Ada.

VANCE

Is this real? Is that me?

ADA

It's real. Believe it.

Vance stares at the flickering images. When he looks up
there's fire in his eye.

VANCE

You knew this was happening. And
you sent me - copies of me - into
that hell with the same equipment
and the same plan, every time. What
did you expect the third time?

BANNEKER

You can't plot a curve with one or two data points...

VANCE

Look. I'm no scientist. I don't have your expertise. But this isn't science. It's combat. And that's what I do.

(to Marbeck)

Do you want this done? Do you want to save your terraforming program?

DIRECTOR MARBECK

You know I do. It must be done.

VANCE

Your "Shadow Three" took some of those monsters down with a light rifle. Whatever they are, they die. Let me pick the weapons and plan the op. I'll do this thing.

Marbeck looks at Vance as if seeing him for the first time.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

You believe it can be done?

VANCE

I'll get it done. On these conditions: You give me the data I need. I don't care how you do the paperwork. Just answer my questions.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

Agreed.

VANCE

(pointing at Banneker)

And I don't need a handler. Get him off my back.

Scientist Banneker's outraged glance finds no audience.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

Scientist Banneker will assist you - as you see fit.

INT. PLANETOLOGY CENTER - MARTIN CAUL'S OFFICE

Vance sits with Scientist Caul and Ada around Caul's holography table.

CAUL

Congratulations. You're the first non-Scientist ever to hold a level-one SSA security clearance.

VANCE

So are you done lying to me?

His eyes fall on Ada. Caul notices.

CAUL

Don't blame Ada. At this level of security, a slip of the tongue can be high treason. She could forfeit her career, her freedom... even her life.

ADA

The writ of secrecy you signed is no joke.

CAUL

And now you're in even deeper. Level-one secrets are practically radioactive.

VANCE

Are you trying to scare me?

ADA

He's trying to keep you safe.

VANCE

(surrendering)

I get it. So talk to me about aliens.

CAUL

When we sent Prometheus to Erix, we expected to find life. The planet's chemistry implied life. But how much? What kind?

He gestures, and a globe of Erix rises from the holography table. It's an infrared display: the seas are cool in shades of blue: the continents hot with life.

CAUL

No one was prepared for the data we got back. Erix has twice the biomass of Earth. More life than Earth has ever carried.

ADA
Great for terraforming. Lots of
biomass to work with.

VANCE
And what lives there?

CAUL
We don't know much. Between the
jungle canopy and heavy cloud
cover...we get glimpses. We've
catalogued hundreds of organisms
from rabbit-sized creatures to
things bigger than anything on
Earth.

VANCE
Dinosaur-sized.

ADA
Well, technically, bigger than
dinosaurs.

Vance stares.

ADA
(encouragingly)
They might be plant-eaters.

CAUL
You should expect great diversity.
It's a wilderness.

VANCE
Well, a Marine who's done more than
a hundred combat ops walked into
that wilderness wearing one of the
finest weapons systems ever built,
and was torn to pieces in minutes.
Three tries, and every time he died
in minutes. I have to know how
that's possible.

CAUL
(to Ada)
Show him the simulator.

BIOSIMULATOR FACILITY

Ada and Vance stand in front of a large holographic tank.

Strange shapes writhe in the hologram: unborn monsters
mutating in the womb. Vance stares, aghast.

VANCE
What am I looking at?

ADA
We have DNA sequences from samples
taken all over Erix.

VANCE
DNA? Like us?

ADA
Yes and no. They have three base
pairs instead of two - and not the
same ones. What you see is our
computers trying to imagine the
organism this DNA sequence might
create. It's a very hard problem.

Vance stares at the shifting shapes. They gleam with metallic
spines, scales, blades. Unfinished demons.

VANCE
You think you've got problems.

ADA
Erix is richer in heavy elements
than Earth. Tungsten, chromium,
titanium. Living things on Erix
incorporate those metals.

VANCE
They're made of titanium?

ADA
Partly. Some of them. Erix also has
twice the background radiation of
Earth. That means a higher mutation
rate: faster evolution. So the
natural arms race that produces
tiger claws and turtle shells and
porcupine quills on Earth...

VANCE
Produces military hardware on Erix.

ADA
It's a safe bet.

CORRIDOR

Vance catches up to Banneker in a hallway. He talks rapid-
fire as they stride along.

VANCE

I want new armor. Ten-gauge plate
on a heavy-planet chassis.

BANNEKER

All right.

VANCE

One Kehlor R-10 Railgun. Ten
thousand armor-piercing rounds. One
hundred Mark-Six field grenades.
Extended flamethrower tank. Got
that?

Banneker doesn't bat an eye.

BANNEKER

I have it. You can carry all this?

VANCE

I'll find a way.

INT. PHYSICS CENTER - SCIENTIST RHAY'S OFFICE

The walls are display screens densely covered with equations
and complex diagrams.

Vance faces Scientist Cordelia Rhay across her desk.

VANCE

How do I know these copies of me
are capable? Maybe my Shadows fail
because something's wrong with
them.

RHAY

You don't understand. What the
Transporter sends is you. The
process is perfect. The man on Erix
is as much you as you are. What you
know, he knows. What you can do, he
can do. Don't ask me what your
Shadows are capable of: you're the
only one who knows.

INT. PROMETHEUS PROJECT - STAGING ROOM - DAYS LATER

A new, more massive suit of armor stands in its rack. Vance
welds extra ammo pods to the armor.

Nearby, Apprentices unpack enough ammunition for a regiment.

EXT. PROMETHEUS GROUND STATION (ERIX)

A fantastic electrical display erupts from the Station, lightning stabbing into the clouds from the giant machine.

SHADOW FOUR steps out in heavy armor, railgun in one hand, missile launcher in the other.

He stares in grim determination at the jungle reflected in his visor. The badge on his helmet reads VANCE 4.

INT. PROMETHEUS PROJECT - STAGING ROOM - DAY (EARTH)

Vance stands at the wall. His armor's first three ID plates are bolted up there: VANCE 1, VANCE 2, VANCE 3.

He bolts a new plate up at the bottom of the column: VANCE 4.

INT. ENGINEERING CENTER

Larson and Vance examine Larson's scale model of Prometheus. Larson looks up from their work with a sudden boyish smile.

LARSON

Think. You're the first man ever to leave the solar system. The first man to stand under an alien sun. It's historical. Do you feel it?

VANCE

That's a grand way to put it. But yeah, I feel it.

LARSON

I felt it. Building Prometheus. With Scientist Rhay, and Scientist Caul, and Director Marbeck. Far from home. Jupiter hanging over us.

VANCE

How many people built Prometheus?

LARSON

Three thousand. And thousands of machines.

VANCE

With that many people, how'd you keep it secret?

The old Scientist's good humor fades away.

LARSON

When Director Marbeck wants
silence, he get silence.

INT. PROMETHEUS PROJECT - VANCE'S MISSION ROOM - DAY

Ada peers into the map table. Vance leans over her shoulder.
He stands close; they've grown comfortable with one another.

IN HOLOGRAM: a satellite map of Erix. Shadow Four's fatality
marker blinks, a lonely star in the alien wilderness.

VANCE

Shadow Four did five-point-three
kilometers before he died. Shadow
Five carried more missiles.

IN HOLOGRAM: Shadow Five emerges from Prometheus and blazes
into the jungle.

VANCE

He goes through his missiles in two
hours. At two point five hours, he
visits the body of Shadow Four.

ADA

Why? Something there can kill him.

VANCE

Yeah. Must have been something he
wanted badly.

He watches her with a half-smile: testing her.

ADA

Ammunition.

VANCE

Right. At five hours he stops
shooting. I think his rifle failed.
It'd be red-hot by then. After the
rifle quits he doesn't last thirty
seconds. He did seven kilometers.

The image freezes.

ADA

That's progress. But it's a hundred
kilometers to Crawler Three.

VANCE

(nodding)

I don't think we're going to get
(MORE)

VANCE (cont'd)
through the jungle. But you said
there's less life in the highlands.

Vance taps his remote.

IN HOLOGRAM: A new trail paints itself across the landscape:
scaling the cliffs to the highlands, traveling many
kilometers, and descending again near Crawler Three.

VANCE
It's a hell of a climb, and it's a
longer trip. But I think Shadow Six
should take the high road. I know
I've been demanding data on the
jungle. But now I need everything
you can give me on the highlands.

ADA
I have it ready. But I want to show
you something first. Come with me.

SERVICE CORRIDOR

Ada leads Vance down an unfamiliar industrial passage. She
can't quite suppress a smile. Vance is perplexed.

Ada palms a door open, revealing a freight elevator. He
follows her in.

FREIGHT ELEVATOR

The doors close. Vance looks up. The elevator is an open
platform: the concrete shaft seems to go up forever.

Ada palms the switch. Nothing happens. Ada scowls.

Then the elevator ROCKETS upward. The walls hurtle past. They
grab for the railings. Ada grins from ear to ear.

EXT. SSA HEADQUARTERS - ROOF - DAY

A trap door in the roof slides open. The elevator rises into
view and locks into place. Vance is astonished.

They step onto the roof.

The sun drenches New Washington in golden light. Traffic
sparkles. Buildings shine. Clouds scud overhead.

ADA
I heard you asked to go outside.

VANCE

The Director said no. Security risk. The elevators refuse me.

ADA

I thought maybe Security wouldn't consider the roof "outside."

Vance stands at the edge of the roof, drinking in the view. He can't stop smiling.

VANCE

I've been off-planet so long. It's been killing me to be back home, but trapped underground. Thank you.

ADA

I wish I'd thought of it sooner.

She stands close. Vance touches the shoulder of her coat.

VANCE

White coats, gray coats, black coats. What do they call you gray-coated Scientists?

ADA

White coats are for Novices. Gray for Apprentices, black for Masters.

VANCE

So you're an Apprentice.

ADA

I've been offered the mastery, more than once. That's an honor at my age. But I haven't accepted.

VANCE

Why?

ADA

There are things that go with mastery I'm not comfortable with.

VANCE

The hardware under the hats.

ADA

You know about that?

VANCE

Banneker showed me his.

ADA

It's called the cybernetic crown.
Banneker was the youngest Scientist
ever to receive it. He's proud.

She pauses, looking out over the city.

ADA

After your coronation, you absorb
information faster than before. You
calculate faster. You have total
recall. And you can control the
Agency's devices. Masters do
science at a higher level.

Vance nods in understanding - he relates to this idea.

VANCE

In my armor I see farther, move
faster. I can almost fly.

ADA

But you can take the armor off.
With the crown there's no going
back. You're different forever. And
it's classified technology: after
your coronation the Agency owns a
part of you. They always know where
you are, and you're no longer free
to leave. The job's forever.

Vance scowls in distaste at that idea.

VANCE

I've only been here a couple of
months and I've had enough.

ADA

And sometimes the crown changes
people. Maybe one Scientist in
ten...they stop socializing. Lose
their taste for ordinary pleasures.

VANCE

Which pleasures?

ADA

Take your pick. The crown touches
everything.

She parts her hair with her fingers, touching one point after
another.

ADA

Two terminals in the frontal lobe.
Two in the parietal, two in the
temporal, one in the occipital.

Her fingers form a cage around the top of her head. Vance slides his fingers into her hair. Pulls her hands away.

VANCE

I like you better this way.

She closes her eyes for a moment. Takes a deep breath.

ADA

Charging into battle?

VANCE

(letting go)
Sorry, I...

She kisses him. He pulls her in, pressing her body against him. After a long moment she breaks for air, grinning.

ADA

Wow.

VANCE

I've been in space a long time.

He starts to unbutton her gray coat. She lets him.

EXT. HIGHLAND PLAIN - DAY (ERIX)

A dry flatland studded with rocks and low, twisted trees.

SHADOW SEVEN flees across the plain, firing on the run. The shadows of winged creatures spiral around him on the ground.

A WINGED RAPTOR smashes him to the ground, its talons piercing his armor. He dies. Other raptors land. They squabble over the body.

Time accelerates. The sun hurtles across the sky.

The raptors fly off, revealing broken armor, a ravaged body.

Night and day flicker past. Alien vermin swarm over the corpse. The armor corrodes and collapses on itself. The face withers to a bare skull.

Seven days pass. Time slows. Resumes its normal pace.

An armored boot plants itself before Shadow Seven's unseeing eyes. SHADOW EIGHT stares down at the body.

After a moment Shadow Eight stoops. Takes the dead man's gun.

INT. GOVERNING COUNCIL CHAMBER - DAY

Vance and Ada sit at the large holography table, reviewing the progress of Shadow Nine. It's late, and they are weary - their heads propped on their hands.

IN HOLOGRAPH: Shadow Nine struggles through the jungle - a tiny, indistinct figure.

Swarming shapes pursue him. Flashes of light as he fires his rifle, his grenade launcher, his jump jets.

He stops moving. A fatality marker pops up on the display.

Scientist Caul appears behind them. Looks gravely at Vance.

CAUL

How many times can you watch this?

Vance glances up at the old Scientist and nods. Restarts the recording. The flickering light plays across his face.

VANCE

That's my twin down there. My brother. He's dying.

CAUL

That's what I mean. Can't be good for you.

VANCE

Every choice he makes is a message. Every mistake. His death is a lesson. All I can do to honor his sacrifice is learn from it.

CAUL

I guess I haven't given much thought to what your duplicates go through.

Vance nods, his eyes far away.

VANCE

When I have a Shadow fighting on Erix, I'm so aware of it I can almost feel it happening.

Ada has been tapping at an electronic slate. She looks up.

ADA

I've been working the other side of the problem. Understanding what the monsters are thinking. I have the computer sort the aliens into types using size and behavior. Then I do game-theory analysis on their movements.

She taps her slate. Diagrams fill the display: circling patterns, swarming movements - annotated in symbolic logic.

Scientist Caul's eyes light up.

CAUL

Semantic analysis of group dynamics! You may have invented a new sub-discipline. I want to try it myself.

VANCE

(bewildered)

Try what exactly?

ADA

I'm watching the predators think. Species A defend their territory but won't leave it. Species B won't attack you if you hold still. Species C will follow you in ones and twos, but only attack in groups. There are rules.

VANCE

Now that's military intelligence. Can you show me on a map?

PLANETOLOGY CENTER - SCIENTIST CAUL'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Scientist Caul sits at his desktop terminal. In holograph before him, small shapes move over the surface of Erix.

The computer traces their complex paths. Equations appear in the air as the computer responds to Caul's thoughts.

Scientist Caul leans forward intently, the light playing on his face.

STAGING ROOM

The industrial space is dim and deserted. The window of Vance's quarters glows at the top of its staircase.

Ada steals through the Staging Room and up the stairs. Slips into Vance's room.

VANCE'S QUARTERS

Vance and Ada lie naked and entangled on Vance's narrow cot. Ada pores over Vance's muscles with her hands.

ADA

All these scars.

VANCE

Every trooper takes his hits. A few get through the armor.

ADA

You're lucky to be alive.

VANCE

It's not just luck.

ADA

So proud. The ladies must love you. Are there ladies, in space?

VANCE

The Corps is fifteen percent women. But they're not like you.

ADA

(laughing)

I would hope not! You're not what I'm used to either.

VANCE

You sure this won't make trouble for you? People must know you come here.

ADA

We have to report personal relationships inside the Agency. But you're not a Scientist.

(grins)

You're a Captain in the Offworld Marines.

VANCE

And you like that.

ADA

I like that.

EXT. JUNGLE - DUSK (ERIX)

SHADOW THIRTEEN races through the undergrowth, a gun in each hand. Whistling SPINES like arrows tear through the jungle around him, skipping off tree-trunks.

He emerges into a clearing...and stops short. SCORPIONS wait for him there: monstrosities whose tails hurl deadly spines.

Pursuing Scorpions burst from the jungle behind him. Caught in the middle, he leaps to the top of a round rock.

Scorpions swarm out of the jungle, surrounding him. He pivots in place, guns raised. Hope drains from his face.

He starts shooting. A storm of spines flies in answer.

INT. VANCE'S QUARTERS - MORNING (EARTH)

Vance slams awake, bathed in sweat, panting.

The clock says 5:30 AM.

Ada lies beside him, her skin shining in the half-light.

INT. DIRECTOR MARBECK'S OFFICE - DAY

Marbeck sits at his grand desk. In front of him, Scientist Caul paces restlessly on the fine carpet.

CAUL

Jarod. It's over.

Caul sounds almost threatening, but Marbeck responds with good-natured disbelief.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

Martin. This kind of sentimentality is beneath you.

CAUL

How can you hear what I've found and still go through with this?

DIRECTOR MARBECK

How can you ask? Erix is the greatest gift ever given to the human race. It's my life's work.

CAUL

You and your legacy. The world won't stand for it, once they know.

Marbeck comes to his feet, all silky menace.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
Who's going to tell them, Martin?
You?

The question affects Caul like a loaded gun. He freezes.

CAUL
I should never have joined you in
this. It was a devil's bargain.

The door behind him opens. Guards enter the room.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
Call it what you will. It was a
bargain.

INT. PROMETHEUS PROJECT - VANCE'S QUARTERS - DAY (EARTH)

Vance sits at his holography table. Shadow Thirteen's fatality marker winks on the map.

Director Marbeck appears behind Vance.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
Thirteen attempts, Captain.
Thirteen weeks lost. Thirteen
disruptions of the city's power.
More conspicuous requisitions for
weaponry.

Indignant, Vance pivots in his chair to face Marbeck.

VANCE
What do you want from me? I'm
moving mountains here! Nobody's
ever done anything like this.
(he points at the map)
I'm getting there. That's progress!

DIRECTOR MARBECK
You belong to my project now. If
you ever want to get back to your
life, back to your platoon...
(almost snarling)
...then don't give me progress,
Captain. Succeed.

STAGING ROOM

Brooding and stressed, Vance surveys his arsenal: racks of guns, piles of munitions. Baneker stands behind him.

BANNEKER

I know. You want something better.

Vance shakes his head helplessly.

VANCE

There is nothing better. These are the best...

(his eyes go wide)

I'm so stupid!

BANNEKER

That's what I keep telling you.

VANCE

I thought I was using the best weapons and armor available. But I'm not. I'm using the best stuff available *in the field*.

BANNEKER

As opposed to...?

VANCE

The Arsenal in Nevada has experimental weapons. They make field-issue gear look like toys. They're too expensive to put in harm's way...

Banneker gets it and comes around at once.

BANNEKER

But you can use them without risk. What do you need?

VANCE

A flight to Nevada. And when I get there - anything I ask for.

INT. BALLISTIC SHUTTLE (IN FLIGHT)

Vance looks out the window of a supersonic plane.

America rolls by far below. The curvature of the Earth is visible. Behind him, the sun rises. Above, he can see stars.

A fully armed SSA guard sits beside Vance. Banneker sits across from him beside a second guard.

EXT. NEVADA ARSENAL - FRONT GATES

A military troop carrier barrels down a desert road.

Vance sits up front with the driver; Banneker and the guards hunker uncomfortably in the back.

Vance and his escort arrive at a remote desert facility: The Nevada Arsenal of the Department of Defense.

INT. NEVADA ARSENAL - LOBBY

ISABEL GARVEY, 50, stands waiting. She's a lean, rangy woman in plain service uniform, sleeves rolled up.

Vance, Banneker, and their guards enter. Banneker approaches Garvey officiously.

BANNEKER

Rune Banneker, Scientist...

Garvey brushes past Banneker to Vance.

GARVEY

Captain Vance? Colonel Isabel Garvey. Chief Weapons Master.

She sticks out a hand. Vance shakes it, grins at her grip.

VANCE

Ma'am.

GARVEY

This way.

Vance and Garvey stride briskly away, forcing Banneker and his guards to hurry after them.

GARVEY

Your combat reports are required reading here. We redesigned the G-4 rocket launcher based on your feedback.

VANCE

The new G-4 is outstanding. Smooth. Fast on the reload.

SECURITY CHECKPOINT

Plexiglass barriers, armed sentries, automatic guns.

Vance and the Garvey sweep through the checkpoint unchallenged. The sentries block Banneker and his guards.

GARVEY

(to Vance)

You're the only one cleared for the
Armory. You need these guys?

Vance grins at Banneker on the far side of the barricade.

VANCE

No.

Banneker glares as Vance and the Lieutenant stride away.

ARMORY

Garvey and Vance stride along a corridor, trailed by two
subordinate officers who tag along at Garvey's beck and call.

VANCE

I need the best armor you have. And
weapons.

GARVEY

Do you understand how valuable
these prototypes are?

VANCE

They'll be safe. Barely handled.

GARVEY

You need 'em ready to use, but
you're not going to use them.

VANCE

I know that sounds strange.

GARVEY

Sounds like you took a few hits to
the helmet.

ARMORY

Garvey leads Vance past a fantastic gallery of armor
prototypes: slim black stealth suits; five-ton demolition
suits; suits with massive specialized weapons.

They pass a rack of massive axes and machetes too heavy to
lift without armor.

They stop beside a gorgeous silver armor with fluid lines.
Vance takes to it immediately.

GARVEY

Here's the crown jewel. Diamond fiber plate. Hardest thing going. And lighter, so we can bulk up the chassis, the power plant, the motors. Stronger and faster than current models.

VANCE

This is what I need.

Vance is already headed for the exit. Garvey follows, protesting.

GARVEY

I knew you'd say that. It's the only suit of its kind.

VANCE

I'll take good care of it.

They pass the rack of massive machetes. Vance points.

VANCE

And get me one of those.

WEAPONS LAB

Garvey shows Vance a rack of identical supermodern rifles. They are bulky and ponderous: designed for powered armor.

GARVEY

The Milburn M20 railgun. Next generation rifle.

Vance heaves a railgun out of the rack. With a speed that belies the weapons weight, he checks the safety; cracks the magazine open, checks the load, closes it; cocks the weapon loudly, chambering a round.

Nearby technicians look up as the weapon goes live.

Vance hauls the rifle to his shoulder - arms trembling under the burden. He flicks the gunsight on. The scope paints light across his eyes.

Vance shuts the rifle down and drops it into the rack.

VANCE

Nice. But it's just a bigger, better machine gun. I want the experimental stuff. I want an energy weapon.

GARVEY

A handheld energy weapon? There's
no such thing.

Vance looks her steadily in the eye.

VANCE

You know what I'm here for.

Garvey stares back at him, her defiance crumbling. She sighs.

DARK OPS LAB

A WEAPONS DESIGNER looks up from his workbench: a gaunt man
of 50 in high-tech goggles that magnify his eyes.

Garvey and Vance stand in front of him.

WEAPONS DESIGNER

Borrow the Valkyrie!?
(he peers at Vance)
You're Conrad Vance.

VANCE

Yeah.

WEAPONS DESIGNER

You're a one-man destruction test.
You've abused or broken every
weapon in the arsenal.

VANCE

(grinning)
Not the Valkyrie.

WEAPONS LOCKER

The Valkyrie hangs behind shatterproof glass: a sleek energy
rifle. It's polished to perfection, but toolmarks and welds
betray its handmade origin.

The Weapons Designer hands the Valkyrie to Vance.

GARVEY

Valkyrie Laser Rifle. It'll punch a
hole through twenty centimeters of
carbon steel. Ten thousand
discharges on a single power cell.

Vance smiles, hefting the weapon. He thumbs it on: the
Valkyrie activates with a deep throb of power.

VANCE
Tough enough for field use?

WEAPONS DESIGNER
I made it myself. But it's a test
unit! You can't just...

Garvey waves him quiet.

GARVEY
He can.

Vance points into the weapons case: another weapon hangs
beneath the Valkyrie.

VANCE
What's that?

WEAPONS DESIGNER
(reluctantly)
Antimatter grenade launcher.

Vance flashes Garvey a big smile. She sighs again.

INT. PROMETHEUS PROJECT - CAUL'S OFFICE (NEW WASHINGTON)

Scientist Ada Kildare arrives at Scientist Caul's office, and
is shocked to find the door flanked by SSA guards.

She enters to find Scientist Caul and Director Marbeck
waiting for her.

Marbeck has a cold and malevolent air. Scientist Caul looks
both furious and frightened; his hands are fists.

Ada picks up the vibe in the room. Looks warily from Marbeck
to Caul.

ADA
You called for me?

Marbeck looks promptly at Caul.

CAUL
Ada. I'll no longer be with the
Project, as of today.

His voice is taut, emotionally loaded.

ADA
(dismayed)
Why?

CAUL

I can no longer perform my function here. I'm sorry, I'd explain if I could. But you can see my situation. The Director's chosen you to succeed me.

(with a significant look)

I told him you're smart enough to do the job, and wise enough to do your duty.

Ada frowns at Caul, sensing deeper meaning in the words but unable to grasp it.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

(to Caul)

That's all.

CAUL

(to Marbeck)

Go to hell.

Caul turns and leaves the office. The SSA guards outside the door fall into step and escort him away.

Ada turns to Marbeck in consternation.

ADA

What's happening?

DIRECTOR MARBECK

You're now the Chief of Planetology. You have more than enough to think about.

Ada begins to reply hotly, but bites her tongue; there's more going on than she understands.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

I've read your reports. You've been working long hours.

ADA

(warily)

With so much data coming through...

DIRECTOR MARBECK

For the past seven weeks, you've also been spending your nights with our hired barbarian. I suppose I shouldn't be shocked. Young, fit specimens in close quarters...it's biologically predictable.

Ada stares, shocked at this invasion.

ADA
It's not forbidden.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
It's not wise. We Scientists must guard our objectivity.

ADA
Objectivity? Conrad's a colleague, not an experiment.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
Twice you've refused the crown. You could have been the youngest ever. Younger than Banneker. Now that your responsibilities have grown, it's time you became a Master.

ADA
It's my choice. You can't force it on me.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
At times in the past, times of crisis, Scientists have been compelled to take the crown.

ADA
(horrified)
What are you saying?

DIRECTOR MARBECK
We do great things here. Don't complicate the work.

INT. NEVADA ARSENAL - CORRIDOR - DAY (NEVADA)

Garvey leads Vance back toward the lobby of the Arsenal.

A YOUNG FUNCTIONARY catches up to them at a run. Whispers urgently in Garvey's ear. Garvey's eyes widen in astonishment.

GARVEY
Follow me.

She hustles Vance back the way they came, away from Banneker. Banneker watches them retreat in renewed frustration.

Garvey rounds a corner and stops at a pair of double doors.

GARVEY
Stand up straight and watch your manners.

MEETING ROOM

Three dignitaries sit behind a long table: a distinguished MAN IN A SUIT flanked by two GENERALS, a man and a woman. The generals' chests are buried in decorations.

Vance follows Garvey in and snaps to attention, eyes wide with surprise.

He stares at the man in the suit: Defense Secretary Gideon Dain, seen earlier on a news broadcast in the Spaceport.

SECRETARY DAIN

Captain Vance. I'm Gideon Dain,
Secretary of Defense.

VANCE

Yes, sir. I know, sir.

The young functionary scurries to Vance's side with a chair. Vance sits. The functionary presses a cup of coffee into his hand. Vance relaxes a bit.

SECRETARY DAIN

Your flight's in less than an hour.
I'll keep this brief.

Vance sips coffee. Nods.

VANCE

Yes, sir.

SECRETARY DAIN

The Department of Defense relies on the State Science Agency for key technologies. When they requested a Marine for special duty, I couldn't easily say no. I'm beginning to regret that decision. I want to know what this project's about.

VANCE

I signed a writ of secrecy, sir. I can't say much.

SECRETARY DAIN

Ever since you arrived, there have been weekly power fluctuation in New Washington. Whenever they occur, we detect an energy pulse with the profile of no known device. But there is a theoretical device that would create that kind of energy pulse. It's called a Lang

(MORE)

SECRETARY DAIN (cont'd)

Transporter. No working model has ever been built, or so we thought. Have you ever heard the term "Lang Transporter," Captain?

VANCE

Yes.

The generals exchange meaningful looks. SECRETARY DAIN leans forward intently.

SECRETARY DAIN

Where are they sending you with all those guns?

VANCE

You're telling me the government doesn't know what Marbeck's doing?

There's a strained silence. The generals watch Vance gravely.

SECRETARY DAIN

That's what I'm telling you.

VANCE

I can't tell you where they send me. But I'll tell you this: you've never been there.

INT. PROMETHEUS PROJECT - VESTIBULE - NIGHT (NEW WASHINGTON)

Vance emerges from the elevators in his dress uniform. The security cannon takes aim at him.

VANCE'S QUARTERS

Vance hangs up his uniform. Steps to his comm terminal. Punches Ada's name. The response flashes: UNAVAILABLE.

VANCE'S QUARTERS - HOURS LATER

Vance lies in bed, staring at the door. No one comes. Rising, he dials Ada again: UNAVAILABLE.

Sighing, he rolls back into bed.

INT. PROMETHEUS PROJECT - TRANSPORTER FACILITY - DAY

Vance approaches the transport chamber in his gleaming new armor and weaponry: laser rifle, grenade launcher, giant machete.

This is his first attempt at Erix in his experimental gear. His ID tag reads VANCE 14.

In the Control Room, the Scientists look on - Ada among them.

Vance vanishes into the transport chamber. The transporter howls as it charges. A BLINDING FLASH.

Vance emerges, a veil of smoke rising from his armor. He stalks away without so much as a glance at the Control Room.

VANCE

Now we'll see.

STAGING ROOM

Vance tinkers his new battle suit, still in the skinsuit he wears beneath his armor.

VANCE

(into headset)

Athena. Sensor check.

ATHENA answers in Ada's voice. The sound is more resonant in the new armor.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Sensor check running. Stand by.

ADA (O.S.)

She's a beauty.

Vance turns: Ada stands behind him.

VANCE

(quietly)

You're not taking my calls.

ADA

Things have changed. Martin Caul left the Project while you were gone. I'm replacing him. Suddenly I'm under a magnifying glass.

VANCE

Why?

ADA

I don't really understand what's happening. Martin was forced out. He's in some kind of trouble.

O.S. Voices in the corridor.

Banneker enters, talking to a couple of Apprentices. Seeing Vance and Ada talking, he stares in their direction.

Ada shies away from Vance.

ADA
I need some distance for a while.

VANCE
I have to talk to you.

But Ada's already drifting away, brow furrowed with anxiety.

ADA
I can't. I'm sorry.

Vance watches her go.

DIRECTOR MARBECK'S OFFICE - DAY

An immense, aristocratic room. Director Marbeck sits behind his massive desk, staring into a data terminal.

Vance enters unannounced. He has a serious air.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
Captain! An unexpected pleasure.

Vance ignores the false pleasantry. Pulls up a chair and sits. A moment passes before he speaks.

VANCE
Back when I was still new to the Corps, my platoon was called up for a secret op. We did a night drop with two other platoons on a Hegemony base on Venus. My platoon secured the perimeter. Second platoon cut the comm lines and jammed radio. The third platoon went inside. We heard a lot of shooting. When we dusted off, the third platoon looked shaky. They said they'd just killed a bunch of civilians. Combat report said we hit a hard target, but it wasn't true. It was a research station. I don't know why we hit it.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
(impatiently)
What lesson am I supposed to...

VANCE

A few weeks later it all blew up. There was a top-secret shitstorm. Our base commander resigned. They broke up my platoon and sent us to other units. They broke up the second platoon the same way. But the third platoon, the guys who did the shooting, they went up on charges. War crimes. That was ten years ago and they're still locked up. And you know, it nothing but luck that it wasn't my platoon pulling the trigger.

Marbeck can see where this is going, and he doesn't like it.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

Your point, please.

VANCE

We're killing off a whole planet here. And nobody has any idea. Seems like the kind of thing Congress would want to know about.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

(contemptuously)

Congress? They bicker and compromise until even the best idea is watered down to nothing. A visionary is a man, not a mob. This Agency is the greatest center of learning on Earth. If I'm not fit to make this decision, who is?

VANCE

I just want to know this job isn't going to come back to haunt me.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

Captain, I've spent billions of dollars and decades of my life on this work. It's bigger than you. Be a soldier. Finish the job, and you'll be back in ranks in no time.

INT. PROMETHEUS PROJECT - CORRIDOR - DAY

Vance strides up to Scientist Larson at an intersection. The old man grins and shakes Vance's hand vigorously.

LARSON

Wonderful result, Conrad. Let's go
and see.

GOVERNING COUNCIL CHAMBER

Vance and the Scientists of the Governing Council surround
the holography table.

Ada joins them. Vance catches her eye, but she looks away.

IN HOLOGRAM: The familiar blip of a Shadow emerges from the
Prometheus Ground Station on Erix.

VANCE

Shadow Fourteen.

As the dim shape heads into the jungle, weapons fire flashes
around him - much brighter than before. The laser rifle
etches lines of light across the landscape.

A tremendous white flash. A plume of smoke.

BANNEKER

What's that?

VANCE

Antimatter grenade.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

Remarkable.

Shadow Fourteen crosses Erix in a blaze of violence. He
passes the death site of Shadow Thirteen and keeps going.

The light flickers out far past any previous Shadow.

VANCE

Nine days. Seventy-six kilometers.
Shadow Fourteen stayed alive almost
twice as long as any other Shadow.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

Much more like it, Captain.
(turning cold)
Now finish it.

INT. VANCE'S QUARTERS - DAY

Vance sits at his holography table. A battle on Erix plays
itself out in front of him like a fireworks display.

A fatality marker pops up: SHADOW 15.

INT. PLANETOLOGY CENTER - ADA KILDARE'S OFFICE - DAY

Ada sits in what was Scientist Caul's office - now hers.

She is looking at Scientist Caul's work: his equations, his diagrams...trying to understand. Lacking a cybernetic crown, she must use a stylus and keyboard where Caul could use his mind alone.

She browses a menu titled "SEMANTIC STUDIES." Selects a file.

An error message comes back: FILE DELETED.

She tries the next file, and the next. The result is always the same: FILE DELETED.

Ada paces around her office, scowling in troubled thought.

INT. STAGING ROOM - DUSK

Vance bolts a new ID plate to the Staging Room wall. It reads SHADOW 16. He steps back, looks at the array of names. Sixteen dead men.

A movement catches his eye. He turns his head to find Ada watching him from the corridor, ghostly in her gray coat.

When he catches her eye, she hurries away.

VANCE'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

Vance sits at his holography table. The map of Erix lies before him. He traces the paths of his Shadows...past the fatality markers of Shadows 16...17...18.

Shadow 18 died just half a kilometer from Crawler Three.

Vance stares thoughtfully at the map. Taps it with his stylus, zooming out. The outlines of continents and finally the curvature of the planet become visible.

He rotates the planet, studying it: rust-colored land, dark rivers draining into darker seas...pale deserts, mountain ranges, polar icecaps. All wreathed in smoky clouds.

The doorbell chimes. Vance switches the map back to his tactical view. Opens the door to find Ada.

ADA

What if you get the repair done and
go back to the Marines?

VANCE

Then I'll be where I belong.
 (gently)
 But I'll miss you.

ADA

I've been a coward. Marbeck told me
 to stay away from you, and I did.

She steps into the room, and into his arms. Their kiss gains momentum fast.

He presses her back onto the holography table, laying her body across the crags and valleys of Erix. The landscape crackles and sparks beneath her as he opens her gray coat.

VANCE'S QUARTERS - BEDROOM

Vance and Ada lie entangled, sweat shining on their skin. Ada pillows her head on Vance's shoulder.

ADA

I think when you leave, I'm leaving
 too.

VANCE

Really?

ADA

I'd have to apply to leave the
 project. But I think they'd have to
 let me out.

Vance twists around to look her in the eye.

VANCE

Where would you go?

ADA

I don't know.
 (shyly)
 Where will you be?

Vance grins at her.

VANCE

(teasing)
 Mars, probably.
 (her face falls, and he
 nuzzles her)
 But I'm overdue for some shore
 leave. Maybe I'll hang around Earth
 for a while.

She smiles in the dark.

ADA
Maybe you should.

STAGING ROOM - NIGHT

Vance pulls Ada down the stairs from his quarters. They've thrown clothes on but they're still mussed from bed. Vance looks mischievous; Ada wears a mystified smile.

ADA
Where are we going?

Vance leads Ada to his empty armor. He holds his armor's remote control up to her mouth.

VANCE
Say hello to Athena.

ADA
(into remote)
Hello, Athena.
(to Vance)
What's the idea?

VANCE
I've been having Athena listen to you whenever you're around.

ADA
Why?

VANCE
(takes the remote)
Athena. System check.

Athena speaks - and her voice sounds just like Ada now, with an electronic burr.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Power at one hundred percent.
Sensor array online and nominal. No weapons rigged...

ADA
(in wonder)
She sounds like me!

VANCE
Next time I go to Erix, I take you with me.

INT. PROMETHEUS PROJECT - STAGING ROOM - MORNING

Vance suits up for a transition to Erix.

He wears the gleaming prototype weaponry. The badges on his helmet and shoulders read VANCE 19.

TRANSPORT FACILITY

Vance crosses the catwalk to the transport chamber. From the Control Room, Director Marbeck watches him.

MARBECK
(over loudspeakers)
Captain. Perhaps you'll succeed
this time.

VANCE
Or die trying.

TRANSPORT CHAMBER

The chamber door closes, sealing Vance inside. Dynamos throb and howl.

A BOOM. Lightning strikes inside the tiny chamber.

The chamber door opens, revealing:

THE JUNGLE OF ERIX

Reflected in Shadow Nineteen's visor. His eyes widen in horror and astonishment.

SHADOW NINETEEN
(in disbelief)
Erix. I'm Shadow Nineteen.

INT. PROMETHEUS PROJECT - STAGING ROOM (EARTH)

Vance climbs out of his armor. Ada stands by him.

ADA
How long will it be, do you think?

VANCE
Shadow Eighteen lasted eleven days.

INT. TRANSPORT CHAMBER (ERIX)

Shadow Nineteen stands in the open chamber, staring out at Erix. Like a sleepwalker he presses the door switch.

The chamber closes. Seals him once more in a bright cocoon, too small to move in. He closes his eyes. Swallows hard.

Reaches for the door switch. Hesitates. Lets his hand fall.

He leans his head on the door.

SHADOW NINETEEN
I don't want to die.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Captain?

It's Ada's voice. He's still for a long moment, his eyes squeezed shut.

SHADOW NINETEEN
Nineteen. I'm Shadow Nineteen. Come on, Conrad. Be a Marine.

He stands straight. Squares his shoulders. Opens the door.

EXT. PROMETHEUS GROUND STATION - MORNING

The battles of eighteen Shadows have transformed the terrain: A cratered field strewn with broken armor and alien bones.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Satellite network acquired.

On his visor, Athena marks the broken shapes of previous Shadows half-buried in the earth.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Marines down.

SHADOW NINETEEN
I know, I know.

The tracks beaten into the jungle by the Crawlers are narrower than before - overgrown.

Shadow Nineteen steps out of the chamber. All around Prometheus, predators forage among the bones.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Multiple targets incoming.

Shadow Nineteen explodes into movement, running for high ground. Predators give chase.

He strafes them with his laser rifle: CRACKLING BEAMS of white light. Predators fall dead. Trees topple in the jungle. It's a hell of a gun.

EXT. WOODS (ERIX) - DAY

Shadow Nineteen is on the run, hounded by SPIDERS that slash at him with curved blades.

His armor shows damage: shallow notches and cuts. He's exhausted, panting, drenched in sweat.

He turns and faces the spiders. Raises his grenade launcher.

BOOM. BOOM. The antimatter explosions are blinding.

Two blasts tear holes in the jungle, annihilating spiders. But more keep coming...their numbers are incredible.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Targets inside minimum range.

SHADOW NINETEEN
God damn.

He strafes the nearest spiders with his rifle and runs.

He splashes into a STREAM: the SPIDERS REAR BACK, HISSING, and will not enter the liquid.

Shadow Nineteen looks down. The stream is full of TRANSLUCENT WORMS, big as rattlesnakes. They suck at his armor.

He lifts a worm in his hand, experimentally. It bites harmlessly at his armor. After a moment he drops it.

Spiders leap over his head to the opposite bank. They slash at him from both banks, nearly reaching him.

He SUBMERGES HIMSELF in the stream. Under the surface, he watches the spiders search for him and straggle away.

Shadow Nineteen's breathing slows. He settles into a more comfortable position on the stream bottom. The eerie worms slide silently past, ignoring him.

SHADOW NINETEEN
Athena. Mission time.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Six hours, forty-nine minutes.

SHADOW NINETEEN

I'm going to rest. Keep watch. If I sleep, wake me in ninety minutes.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Ninety minutes.

Shadow Nineteen closes his eyes.

INT. PROMETHEUS PROJECT - VANCE'S QUARTERS (EARTH) - NIGHT

Vance, sleeping in his narrow bed, wakes beside Ada. She caresses him, her bare arm gleaming in the half-light.

ADA

Can't stop thinking.

VANCE

About what?

ADA

The project. I'm a biologist, and somehow I ended up killing things for a living.

VANCE

Don't torture yourself about it. They launched Prometheus before you were born.

A faraway look comes into Ada's eyes. Her voice takes on an electronic tone.

ADA

Hazardous contact.

VANCE

What?

When she speaks again, her voice is clearly Athena's.

ADA

Critical strain on suit.

Ada slides her arms around him. Her legs lock around his thigh. Her expression is inhuman, intense. She kisses him violently - it's the act of a predator.

EXT. STREAM (ERIX) - DAY

Shadow Nineteen slams awake in the alien waters.

A SPINED SERPENT coils around him in a grotesque parody of Ada's embrace. It bites at his visor, etching the glass.

Shadow Nineteen, freeing his machete, hacks through the serpent's coils. Worms swarm over the serpent's corpse.

Shadow Nineteen struggles out of the stream.

CLIFFS - DUSK

Shadow Nineteen reaches the base of the cliffs. The body of SHADOW TEN lies on the rocks, broken by a devastating fall.

He stands staring at the shattered body, haunted.

Shakes it off. Looks up at the towering wall, a thousand meters of sheer rock.

CLIFF FACE - DUSK

He ascends in a series of climbs and rocket-assisted jumps.

A STORM begins: fierce wind and a viscous black rain. He climbs on as darkness falls.

Exhausted, he comes to a ledge in the cliff face where previous Shadows have burned their signatures into the rock: SHADOW 7...SHADOW 11...SHADOW 15.

EXT. CLIFF FACE - MORNING

Shadow Nineteen wakes on the ledge. His eyes open on the awesome sight of the churning jungle far below.

He's about to resume climbing when he turns back, burns his name on the stone: SHADOW 19.

EXT. CLIFFTOP - DAY

Shadow Nineteen climbs into view, panting, to find a...

HIGHLAND PLAIN

Covered with pale green waving grasses: serene and beautiful. Winged creatures wheel gracefully overhead.

He pauses there and catches his breath: a moment of peace.

Then he takes a step forward - and the GRASS itself clutches at him, scratching his armor. He leaps back, tearing himself loose. He spots a MESSAGE burned into the rocks:

GRASS KILLS. BURN IT.

SHADOW 8

Shadow Nineteen turns his flamethrower on the grass. It withdraws into the ground, baring a circle of earth that expands across the plain like ripples in a pond, revealing:

A litter of alien bones and a SUIT OF RAVAGED ARMOR whose ID plates read VANCE 6.

Suddenly the grass sprouts anew. Doubling its height. Tripling it. The long blades beat at Shadow Nineteen. He flees along the cliffs.

ROCKY WASTE - NIGHT

A wasteland of cracked clay studded with stone outcrops. Lightning flickers overhead.

Shadow Nineteen crosses the waste at a run, his armor's floodlights feeble in the vast darkness. He carries his rifle and grenade launcher. Breathing hard. Dripping sweat.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Bogeys incoming, five o'clock.

Shadow Nineteen spins, fires a grenade high. It EXPLODES, a white sunburst. Winged creatures fall away in flames.

For a moment the wasteland is illuminated. Strange shapes moving closer through the darkness.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Seven grenades remaining.

Shadow Nineteen runs on. Passing a rock formation, he slides into a long, skidding stop. Turns his light on the rock.

A message is burned above a crevice: SHELTER.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Bogeys incoming, eight o'clock. Ten o'clock. Four o'clock...

Shadow Nineteen scrambles for the crevice.

CAVE UNDER THE ROCK

Shadow Nineteen squirms inside: a tight fit.

Turning to survey the tiny cave, Shadow Nineteen gasps in shock: a DEAD MARINE sits in his floodlight beams. The ID tags on the battered armor read VANCE 9.

Shadow Nine's eyes stare through a broken visor. Vermin scuttle inside his helmet. Dried blood paints the cave floor.

O.S. A SCRABBLING NOISE.

Something outside tries to get in. Scimitar CLAWS probe the cave entrance and withdraw.

Shadow Nineteen sits, keeping his rifle on the cave mouth and eyeing Shadow Nine. The corpse stares back.

SHADOW NINETEEN
What are you looking at?

INT. PROMETHEUS PROJECT - GOVERNING COUNCIL CHAMBER - DAY
(EARTH)

Vance, sitting alone in the Council Chamber, studies a map of Erix in the big hologram table. Scientist Larson joins him. Peers at the map: Shadow Eighteen's death marker flashes.

LARSON
Eighteen got close. Nineteen's there now?

VANCE
Almost a week.

LARSON
Long time to spend fighting.

VANCE
Men have fought longer...but not like this.

Larson looks conflicted. Finally he speaks.

LARSON
You asked me once how we kept Prometheus a secret.

VANCE
(suddenly alert)
That's right.

LARSON

When Prometheus was complete, the Design Committee came back to Earth on a shuttle. The construction crew followed on a transport ship.

Vance picks up on Larson's grim tone.

VANCE

What happened?

LARSON

We lost contact with the transport. It missed turnaround and shot past Earth. Fell into the sun with three thousand souls.

VANCE

My God.

(he stares at Larson)

You think that was no accident.

LARSON

It kept our secret very well.

Vance takes that in grimly.

VANCE

Why are you telling me this now?

LARSON

You're close to succeeding. When you do, you'll no longer be useful. You'll be in danger. I'm worried about Ada, too. She's repeating Martin's research. If she finds what he found, she could be removed as well.

Vance is starting to take this seriously.

VANCE

"Removed?"

LARSON

Martin was officially "reassigned." But he's no longer listed in the SSA directory, and his phone number doesn't work. Most likely he's in a cell somewhere. He may be dead.

(off Vance's stare)

Do you understand now where you are? What kind of place?

VANCE

What did Martin Caul find?

LARSON

He didn't tell me. And now I can't ask him.

CAVE UNDER THE ROCK - HOURS LATER

Still leaning against the cave wall, Shadow Nineteen sleeps. He's turned his armor's floodlights off: only dim instrument lights illuminate his face.

A SCRAPE of metal. Movement in the darkness. An armored hand slides up Shadow Nineteen's chest.

He wakes with a start.

SHADOW NINE leans over him, dead eyes leering, mouth agape: clutching at his armor. Their faces are inches apart. Shadow Nineteen is paralyzed by terror.

The dead man breathes raggedly. Wheezing, gripped by a hideous need to communicate. He speaks in a ruined voice.

SHADOW NINE

This world will kill you, and you will kill the world.

SHADOW NINETEEN

(a desperate whisper)

I'm not going to die here.

SHADOW NINE

You are a circle of death.

CAVE UNDER THE ROCK

Shadow Nineteen wakes with a shout. His armor's floodlights snap on. His rifle whips up, aims at Shadow Nine. Shaking.

Shadow Nine slumps against the wall, lifeless and inert.

SHADOW NINETEEN

Athena. Has that guy moved?

ATHENA'S VOICE

No, Captain. That guy is dead.

EXT. HIGHLAND WOODS - DAY (DAYS LATER)

Shadow Nineteen stalks at high alert through the undergrowth. He is gaunt, weary, whiskered. His armor carries new scars.

His battle-suit motors grind and whine.

SHADOW NINETEEN
Athena. Mission time.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Six days, fifteen hours.

SHADOW NINETEEN
Stimulant.

ATHENA'S VOICE
You have exceeded recommended dosages...

SHADOW NINETEEN
Override.

There's a HISS. His pupils dilate sharply. He takes a ragged breath and stands up straighter.

HIGHLAND MAZE

The red sun beats down on a valley of fissured stone.

The report of Shadow Nineteen's rifle echoes distantly. Far off a flock of WINGED RAPTORS bursts into the air, screaming.

A sudden EXPLOSION as an antimatter grenade detonates in the distance. Stones wheel airborne through the smoke. Another BLAST. And ANOTHER.

Shadow Nineteen, barely seen, works his way through the rocky maze, his movement betrayed by a trail of smoke and ruin.

An explosion resounds. The echoes reverberate and fade, and silence falls on the valley.

ROCKY HOLLOW

Shadow Nineteen, moving stealthily, rounds a rock outcrop and disturbs a giant WORM feeding on its kill.

An armored Worm, with no eyes and a complex mouth full of blades. Its blind head whips around, questing. Shadow Nineteen freezes.

The Worm doesn't budge. A long moment passes. Shadow Nineteen takes a slow step toward the shelter of the rock outcrop. The Worm slithers toward him - frighteningly fast.

SHADOW NINETEEN

Oh, hell.

He raises the grenade launcher.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Too close.

Shadow Nineteen fires PAST the Worm. The grenade arcs over its head and DESTROYS its kill in a grotesque explosion.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Grenades depleted.

The blast batters the Worm, but it gathers itself at once. Sniffs at the ruin of its dinner. Charges Shadow Nineteen.

Shadow Nineteen drops the empty grenade launcher and shoulders his rifle: Fires.

Hits the Worm twice, inflicting terrible wounds, but it doesn't slow down.

Its jaws close on the rifle: the rifle CRACKS loudly. Spews white plasma. The Worm, scorched, leaps back SCREAMING: a hideous, unearthly sound.

Shadow Nineteen hastily flings the rifle away. It spins through the air and EXPLODES in a sunburst of white light.

Shadow Nineteen turns to face the Worm, drawing his machete - too late. The Worm SLAMS into him. They tumble over the ground, grappling. The machete goes flying.

With his armored hands, Shadow Nineteen strains to prevent the Worm's mandibles from closing on him.

Pinned under the Worm, Shadow Nineteen plants his feet against its body and fires his JUMP JETS. Flames ROAR from his boots. The Worm recoils, shrieking.

Shadow Nineteen rolls to his feet.

Unarmed, howling in rage, he meets the Worm head-on and deals BLOW after BLOW with his armored fists until black blood coats his gauntlets and the Worm lies slain.

EXT. CLIFFTOP

Shadow Nineteen stands combing through data, scanning maps.

SHADOW NINETEEN

Athena. Show me the bodies of other Shadows. I need a weapon.

In Shadow Nineteen's visor, glowing markers spring up across the landscape, each marking the death-site of a Shadow.

SHADOW NINETEEN

Who's closest?

ATHENA'S VOICE

Shadow Thirteen.

A single death marker shines in the highlands. Beside it, a distance indicator reads 3.6 KILOMETERS.

SHADOW THIRTEEN'S LAST STAND

Shadow Nineteen sneaks up on the site.

He holds his machete in one hand. His flamethrower nozzle juts from his other wrist - his only remaining weapons.

SHADOW NINETEEN

Athena. Stimulant.

A HISS. He shudders and steps out into the open.

In a clearing, SHADOW THIRTEEN lies slumped against a stone. His body bristles with spines sunk deep in his armor.

Around him lie hundreds of alien corpses: spiny Scorpions dead and broken. They crunch under Shadow Nineteen's feet.

Shadow Thirteen's armor and rifle are covered with strange crystals. Shielding his head, Shadow Nineteen test-fires the corroded weapon. It EXPLODES in his hand.

Shadow Nineteen screams in frustration.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Damage to right glove. Repairing.

EXT. WITHERED PLAIN - DUSK

Shadow Nineteen, crossing hard dried clay and sparse plant life, warily approaches a huddled shape. His visor display labels the shape: SHADOW 15.

As he gets closer, Shadow Nineteen discerns a fantastic sight: a MENAGERIE OF ALIEN CREATURES sitting around a hidden light. Most appear dead. A few breathe but do not move.

Still closer. He sees an ARMORED MARINE squatting among the beasts: SHADOW FIFTEEN. A rifle discarded at his feet.

Thin NEEDLE TENDRILS have emerged from the ground at Shadow Fifteen's feet, crept up his legs, and found entrance through his armor's chestplate. A skull stares out of the helmet.

All the creatures are snared and pierced by these tendrils.

Shadow Nineteen shields his eyes from the light. He gropes toward the fallen rifle.

Getting close, he glances up at the dead marine - and sees LIGHT reflected in the dead man's visor.

Entranced by the reflection, he lowers his hand. A BRIGHTER light tugs at the corner of his eye, and he looks at the true source. A BEAUTIFUL GLOWING ORB atop a vegetable stalk.

Shadow Nineteen approaches it. Steps into the ring of creatures, staring, hypnotized.

He drops into a crouch, just like Shadow Fifteen. Fine needle-tips grow from the soil around his boots.

EXT. WITHERED PLAIN - NIGHT

Shadow Nineteen hasn't moved.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Captain. You're dehydrated.

His drinking tube nudges his lips inside his helmet. Shadow Nineteen doesn't drink. Water drips down his chin.

ATHENA
You are suffering muscle cramps,
Captain. Injecting muscle relaxant.

A hiss. His lips move, faintly, but he doesn't speak.

He stares into the light.

Fine tendrils wind around Shadow Nineteen's legs and quest upward. Their needle-tips search for weak points.

Across from Shadow Nineteen, an alien corpse collapses, gutted by vampiric tendrils.

And over the alien corpse...

...an impossible APPARITION stands:

A black-cloaked figure - as if the Angel of Death itself has come to watch Shadow Nineteen die.

EXT. SSA HEADQUARTERS - ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Ada and Vance stand huddled against the wind in the corner of the roof. They wear overcoats: winter has come to New Washington.

ADA
Three thousand dead!

VANCE
That's what Larson said. The whole construction crew.

Ada's outrage hardens into determination.

ADA
I'm going to find out what Martin discovered.

VANCE
I don't think that's smart.

ADA
It doesn't matter. I need to know.

EXT. WITHERED PLAIN - DAY (ERIX)

Shadow Nineteen crouches in the ring of aliens. His lips are cracked, his eyes bloodshot. He breathes in shallow gasps.

There is no sign of the mysterious cloaked figure who stood watching before.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Captain. You must wake up. Captain.
Captain Vance. Injecting stimulant.

A HISS. Shadow Nineteen's pupils dilate. His breath catches, but resumes its shallow rhythm.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Captain...You must...

Athena trails off - as if even she is surrendering hope.

The tendrils entangling Shadow Nineteen grope at the chestplate of his armor.

Suddenly SHADOW FIFTEEN collapses: the tendrils have stripped his skeleton and gutted his armor. He falls apart with a horrible CLATTER of metal and bone.

Shadow Nineteen's eyes flicker to the fallen figure. He reads his own name on the armor. A precious moment of lucidity.

SHADOW NINETEEN
(huskily)
Athena. Blackout.

His visor goes OPAQUE. Shadow Nineteen falls to the ground. Slowly tears free of the tendrils, his limbs in agony.

SHADOW NINETEEN
Athena, you see the light?

ATHENA
Yes, Captain.

SHADOW NINETEEN
Don't let me see that light. Tell
me when I'm facing away.

He turns on hands and knees.

ATHENA
The light is behind you now.

Shadow Nineteen crawls a few feet, attempts to get to his feet. He's too weak.

SHADOW NINETEEN
Help me stand up.

His armor's motors whine. Mechanically, like a puppet, Shadow Nineteen stands.

SHADOW NINETEEN
Let's walk.

Shadow Nineteen trudges away, his steps stiff and robotic.

ROCK OUTCROP

Shadow Nineteen sits shaking in the shelter of stones.

SHADOW NINETEEN
Food. Water.

An arm inside his helmet presses a food pellet to his lips. He eats it. His water tube extends, and he drinks.

SHADOW NINETEEN
Stimulant.

ATHENA'S VOICE
It's dangerous to...

SHADOW NINETEEN
Override. Stimulant.

HISS. Shadow Nineteen gulps air. His teeth chatter.

SHADOW NINETEEN
Show me the next Shadow's location.
I need a weapon.

A pointer appears on his visor display: the distance indicator reads 14.1 KILOMETERS.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Shadow Fourteen.

HIGHLAND JUNGLE

Shadow Nineteen, still shaky, prowls into a stand of trees. He carries his machete and flamethrower at the ready - the only weapons he has left.

SHADOW NINETEEN
Stimulant.

ATHENA'S VOICE
You have no more combat stimulant.

He almost bursts into tears.

An ALIEN WOLF lunges from the woods in front of him. Shadow Nineteen chases it off with a billow of flame.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Flamethrower fuel low.

More wolves approach behind him. Shadow Nineteen throws fire their way. They keep their distance.

Shadow Nineteen fights a retreating action through the woods, keeping the pursuing wolf-pack at bay with his flamethrower.

He backs into a...

CLEARING

The wolf-pack stops in its tracks, wailing and keening.

Shadow Nineteen turns. A giant THORN TREE towers here, its bladed branches filled with skewered creatures. Among these monsters, crucified on thorns, hangs an ARMORED MARINE.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Shadow Fourteen.

SHADOW FOURTEEN'S rifle is still in his hand.

Shadow Nineteen steps warily forward. Branches slash at him. He fends them off with the machete and steps back, panting.

He aims his flamethrower and tries to burn the tree. Fire licks weakly from the nozzle and flickers out.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Flamethrower fuel depleted.

The wolf-pack mills at the edge of the clearing, watching.

Shadow Nineteen tries to reach Shadow Fourteen by hacking and slashing with the machete. The branches are too many and too strong. He retreats, his armor gashed and sparking.

No gun. No flamethrower. He needs a weapon.

SHADOW NINETEEN

Athena. What's the power reading on Shadow Fourteen's armor?

ATHENA'S VOICE

Power at eighty-seven percent.

SHADOW NINETEEN

What's my power cell reading?

ATHENA'S VOICE

Eighty-nine percent.

SHADOW NINETEEN

If I pull my power cell, how long will my backup power last?

ATHENA'S VOICE

Thirty seconds.

He stares at Shadow Fourteen's body, gauging distances.

SHADOW NINETEEN

When I pull my power cell, give me a countdown to power out.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Warning: when backup power...

SHADOW NINETEEN

No warnings. Just count down.

He pulls the power cell from its slot in his chest. Red warning lights flash on.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Thirty seconds of power remaining.

Shadow Nineteen squeezes the power cell in his hands until it CRACKS. White light shines from the fissure. He hurls the leaking cell into the heart of the tree.

SHADOW NINETEEN

Come on...

The cell EXPLODES. The tree, engulfed in flame, flails and screams. Shadow Nineteen shrinks away from the deadly limbs.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Twenty seconds remaining.

The tree's thrashing weakens. Shadow Nineteen wades into the branches, hacking with the machete.

The dying tree rakes at his armor. Shadow Nineteen grabs Shadow Fourteen's ankle. Drags the body down.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Ten seconds remaining.

Shadow Nineteen pulls the dead man's POWER CELL - as a BRANCH lifts him off his feet. The power cell falls to the ground.

He fights desperately, chopping with his massive machete.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Five seconds.

Shadow Nineteen hacks through the branch. FALLS heavily to the ground. He searches frantically for the power cell.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Four...three...

He sees it! Lunges though the burning branches.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Two...one...

His hand closes around the power cell - just as his power dies. He crashes to the ground, his armor suddenly a crushing iron maiden he cannot lift.

The outside world is muffled, his breathing loud in his own ears. His breath fogs his visor. Shadow Nineteen roars in frustration inside his helmet.

The WOLF-PACK pushes into the branches.

Screaming with effort, Shadow Nineteen rolls onto his back.

An ALIEN WOLF sniffs at his helmet, drooling onto the glass.

Shadow Nineteen's right arm fights the weight of his armor. Pushes the power cell toward the slot in his chestplate.

The wolf gnaws at Shadow Nineteen's armored throat.

Involuntarily, Shadow Nineteen turns his face away from the horrible jaws. A stunning sight greets him:

...the APPARITION has returned.

The CLOAKED FIGURE stands outside the tree, watching him. And this time Shadow Nineteen sees it.

For a split second he stares in astonishment. Then he closes his eyes. Clenches his teeth in concentration:

The power cell skids toward the slot...misses...hangs...and SLIDES HOME.

His armor HUMS BACK TO LIFE. He reaches up. Takes the wolf's head in his hands and twists. There's a horrible CRACK, and it falls limp.

Shadow Nineteen seizes Shadow Fourteen's rifle and rakes the wolf-pack with energy bolts. They scatter into the jungle.

He looks around. No sign of the cloaked figure he glimpsed during his struggle.

Quickly he scavenges Shadow Fourteen's jump-jet fuel...ammunition...food pellets...water and oxygen tanks.

EXT. LUMINOUS GROVE - NIGHT

Shadow Nineteen enters an orchard of GLOWING TREES. Insects flutter around them, feeding and hunting one another.

The scene is beautiful and calm. Shadow Nineteen looks around cautiously, his rifle sweeping with his eyes.

Nothing dangerous appears.

He sits against a rock in the middle of the clearing, watching the dancing lights.

INT. PROMETHEUS PROJECT - ARCHIVE - NIGHT (EARTH)

Ada leads Vance through a dimly lit storage facility. They pass a tall rack of massive glassy discs.

They speak in undertones.

VANCE

What are these?

ADA

Prometheus uses the Transporter to send copies of its memory home. That's how we get data from Erix. We're looking for smaller ones... here.

A second rack of glassy discs seems to extend for miles.

ADA

Backups of the core computer.

She drifts down the rack, scanning serial numbers. Stops.

ADA

This is the one. I thought it might not be here.

FOOTSTEPS down the aisle.

Vance pulls Ada around the corner, behind a rack of shelves. They hold their breaths. An ARCHIVIST passes, yawning.

When he's gone they emerge again. Ada takes the data disc off the shelf.

ADA

The files Martin worked on in his last days here were all deleted. But the files should still be here on the backups. It's holographic storage - impossible to edit.

VANCE

So how do we read it without setting off any alarms?

ADA

We need a mainframe that's not connected to the network. And I know where to find one.

EXT. LUMINOUS GROVE - MORNING (ERIX)

Leaning against the rock, Shadow Nineteen wakes. The insects are gone. The trees have withdrawn their luminous fronds.

He rises and stretches, showing some of his former vigor. Burns a message on the rock he slept against: SAFE.

CLIFFS

Shadow Nineteen reaches the clifftop: a sweeping vista of the jungle below. For the first time he sees CRAWLER THREE.

His visor magnifies the image: a metal monstrosity squatting in the jungle. Winged creatures circle it like crows. His visor gives the distance: 18.1 KILOMETERS.

CLIFF FACE

Shadow Nineteen climbs down. Losing his grip, he slides down a sheer face. Fires his jets. Lands safely on a lower ledge.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Jump jet fuel low.

LOWLAND JUNGLE

Shadow Nineteen runs through the wilderness, rifle raised. A TENTACLE reaches down from the jungle canopy. He SEVERs it with a blast of gunfire and runs on.

A massive ANIMAL rears up in his path. He guns it down without waiting to see its intentions. Runs on.

THE GREEN ROAD

Lungs heaving, Shadow Nineteen stumbles out of the jungle into the wide track left by Crawler Three.

In the beaten track, GREEN EARTH-LIFE GROWS, a mossy highway through the alien forest. Nothing moves on the green road. He follows the trail toward the Crawler in peace.

He passes alien creatures dead at the green road's edge, their skins overgrown with green patches like a plague.

THE GREEN ROAD - HILLTOP

Cresting a rise, Shadow Nineteen sees CRAWLER THREE, two kilometers away. The giant machine is frozen in its tracks, halfway up a hill.

SHADOW NINETEEN
Athena. Display last locations of
Shadows Seventeen and Eighteen.

His visor displays two MARKERS on the road in front of him.

SHADOW NINETEEN
(musing)
Something between here and there.

GREEN ROAD - SITE OF SHADOW SEVENTEEN'S DEATH

Shadow Nineteen, at high alert, approaches the spot where Shadow Seventeen's death marker hovers in his visor display. There's nothing to see on the ground.

SHADOW NINETEEN
Seventeen died here. Athena, scan
for hardware.

ATHENA'S VOICE
No hardware detected.

Shadow Nineteen looks around, bewildered.

SHADOW NINETEEN
Where'd he go?

GREEN ROAD - SITE OF SHADOW EIGHTEEN'S DEATH

Following the green road, Shadow Nineteen makes an astonishing discovery:

A line of poles marches across the landscape. Mounted atop the poles are the skulls of various bizarre creatures. The skulls are inscribed with symbols and alien characters.

Where the green road crosses this border, several poles lie crushed and flattened in Crawler Three's tracks.

Shadow Nineteen inspects one of the skulls, but can make no sense of the writing there. His eyes are wide with astonishment and confusion.

Breathing hard, he walks across the border.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Marines down.

A marker appears on his visor display. Shadow Nineteen approaches a dark shape on the ground.

Side by side, SHADOW SEVENTEEN and SHADOW EIGHTEEN lie dead in the green muck. Arms and legs outstretched. Their weapons lie beside them, broken to pieces.

The dead men's armor is riddled with neat TRIANGULAR PUNCTURES. Bare skulls inside the helmets.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Target, twelve-o'clock.

He looks up. A BLACK-CLOAKED FIGURE stands in the green road. Barring his way. Shadow Nineteen freezes in terror. It's an impossible sight.

SHADOW NINETEEN
(with superstitious dread)
Who's there?

The Cloaked Figure cocks its head at him. With its foot - hidden under its cloak - it draws a LINE across the ground.

SHADOW NINETEEN
What are you?

It SPEAKS. A guttural clatter of sound.

Shadow Nineteen stares. At the line in the earth. At the figure. He POINTS down the green road toward Crawler Three.

SHADOW NINETEEN
I'm going to the Crawler. I'm going
past you.

The Cloaked Figure trembles. Speaks again: inhuman sounds. It redraws its line in the earth, cutting a deeper furrow.

Shadow Nineteen taps his own chest and points down the road.

And the cloaked figure OPENS ITS WINGS: revealing a PREYING-MANTIS shape with sickled limbs. It's an alien being, not a supernatural one.

Its slim body is armored in metallic scales. Its claws are adorned with ornaments of twisted wire, glinting with jewels.

Its large eyes are strangely beautiful: iridescent like opal, colors playing across them.

The Mantis raises its arms and beats the air - as if to say, *stay back*.

With a gasp, Shadow Nineteen raises his gun, his hands shaking.

The Mantis takes flight, too fast to hit.

It lands beside the road. Furls its wings. Once more takes on the appearance of a cloaked figure: a cosmic coincidence.

It CHITTERS. From its cowl a TRIANGULAR TUSK juts and withdraws.

Shadow Nineteen glances at the triangular punctures in the armor of Shadow Seventeen and Shadow Eighteen.

He RUNS toward Crawler Three. The Mantis pursues him.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Incoming, six-o'clock.

Shadow Nineteen spins and fires. The Mantis veers away.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Incoming.

Shadow Nineteen bounds off the ground on his jump jets. The Mantis barely misses him. He fires mid-air. It spirals around him, impossible to hit.

He lands and runs on.

He reaches Crawler Three. ROCKETS up the side of the Crawler.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Incoming, five-o'clock.

He twists in the air, firing.

And his jets SPUTTER OUT.

Straining for the top of the Crawler, Shadow Nineteen falls short. Clings with one hand to the Crawler's side.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Jet fuel depleted.

He slaps his rifle into its clamps. With both hands, he climbs desperately.

The Mantis is shouting at him - strange syllables carried on the wind.

ATOP THE CRAWLER

Shadow Nineteen reaches the top. Scrambles onto the deck.

The top of the Crawler is covered with alien writing: unreadable pictograms scratched into the armor plate.

Shadow Nineteen has no time to take this

ATHENA'S VOICE

Incoming.

Shadow Nineteen spins to face the Mantis. Too late. He draws his machete -

- but the Mantis SLAMS INTO HIM like a living missile, and the machete clatters away.

They struggle.

The Mantis locks its barbed legs around him. THRUSTS its tusk through his helmet into his neck.

Shadow Nineteen SCREAMS. Pushes at the thin powerful body.

Slowly he forces the tusk out of his neck. Blood spatters his visor from the inside.

Unable to free himself from the Mantis's serrated arms, Shadow Nineteen locks his arms around the creature's thin powerful body - and SQUEEZES with all his might.

His armor's motor's WHINE. There is a ghastly CRACK, and the Mantis falls dead.

Shadow Nineteen struggles to his knees, choking on blood.

He swings his helmet back in the toxic atmosphere. Slaps a field bandage on his neck. Applies an emergency patch to his helmet. He puts his helmet back on.

SHADOW NINETEEN

Purge.

Jets of white gas HISS from the suit. Wind whips his hair inside the helmet. Shadow Nineteen inhales greedily.

For the first time he sees the writing on the Crawler. He stares with bloodshot eyes and can't make sense of it.

The beetle-like communications module looms above him.

Instead of the ragged tear from the mock-up on Earth, the armored dome carries a row of triangular punctures, surrounded by hex signs and inscriptions. The Mantis's work.

He pulls back the punctured dome to reveal the familiar repair job.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Multiple targets incoming.

He turns.

Winged MANTISES are circling: ragged black phantoms against the fiery sky.

Three of them land atop the Crawler. They shout at him in their strange tongue: jarring sounds.

Shadow Nineteen snatches up his fallen machete. Brandishes the blade.

SHADOW NINETEEN
(hoarsely)
Get away from me!

His amplified voice thunders. The aliens stand their ground. They flicker closer.

Shadow Nineteen sees the Mantises are standing atop the hatch-covers of the Crawler's MISSILE WELLS.

He gestures: his toolkit extends from his armor. Turning his back on the Angels, he begins the repair.

SHADOW NINETEEN
Athena. Running range to nearest target.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Four meters.

Shadow Nineteen works feverishly. Panting. His hands shake.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Three meters.

He clenches his hands, shakes them loose. Keeps working.

ATHENA'S VOICE
Two meters. One meter. Contact.

He pulls his machete and slashes behind him. Mantises burst away from him like a flock of crows - and dive back, claws raking at him.

With one hand he hacks and slashes at the aliens, keeping them at bay. With the other he works at the repair.

Sparks fly from his battered armor. His blade, streaked with black blood, never stops slashing.

He COMPLETES THE REPAIR.

Crawler Three RUMBLES INTO MOTION, resuming its slow crawl up the hill. Trees sway and topple under its treads.

The Mantises SCREAM in protest.

The hatch-covers of the missile wells SLAM open. FOUR GIANT ROCKETS LAUNCH, immersing the Crawler in fire.

The Mantises shrivel and burn. Shadow Nineteen curls into a ball, his armor bathed in flame. When the fire passes, Shadow Nineteen remains, smoking but safe in his blackened armor.

He rises shakily. Watches the rockets arc away across the sky in four different directions.

A pall of smoke hangs over the hill.

INT. PROMETHEUS PROJECT - STORAGE FACILITY - DAY (EARTH)

A dark cavernous space filled with mothballed equipment.

Ada pulls a dust-cover off a massive computer. Vance stands beside her, a coiled power cord slung over his shoulder.

ADA

This is the old bio-simulator. Too valuable to throw away, too classified to let anyone use it. There's power over there.

Vance plugs the machine in. Ada inserts the disc, taps at the terminal. In a moment the display fills with light.

Ada navigates a dense directory: thousands of files.

ADA

In his last days here, Martin did almost all of his work in this program. "Semantic Survey 3.1".

She touches controls.

IN HOLOGRAM: The globe of Erix appears. The view shifts from one spot on the planet to another. Sparks of light swarm over the surface in rapidly changing patterns.

Graphs and data readouts surround the planet.

VANCE

What is it?

ADA

(fascinated)

It's a program based on the work I did for you. But much more sophisticated. See, if you watch animals move around long enough, you can figure out how much information they're exchanging. You watch fish swim in a school, they do a small amount of coordination. You watch a beehive, and you can tell the bees have a crude language. Then you watch people move around a city, and over time their movement implies complex language. Higher intelligence.

Ada sorts through species rapidly. Each one has a different fingerprint on the planet's surface - different readings on the semantic indexes: all low numbers.

Suddenly the numbers jump, high up the scale. The new movement pattern on Erix is stunning: a complex web of light embracing the whole planet. Ada gasps in amazement.

ADA

This is what Martin Caul found.
Species 8429.

VANCE

They talk?

ADA

This is high-order language. This is a civilization.

EXT. JUNGLE - ATOP CRAWLER THREE - DAY (ERIX)

Crests the hilltop, tree-trunks snapping like cannon shots. The smoke clears. Trees fall away.

Atop the Crawler, Shadow Nineteen looks down in shock at...

A MANTIS CITY

Under the jungle canopy, twisted TOWERS of dark plaster rise out of the ground like smokestacks. Irregular windows glow with a pale red light.

TUNNELS snake between the towers: a maze on the forest floor.
An organic city. A hive.

Mantises look out from the towers. Hooded figures row on row.

They wheel and soar over the city: darting into tunnels,
erupting from the towers' mouths.

The Crawler churns down the hill toward the city. Huge trees
topple under its treads.

Branches scrape at Shadow Nineteen as the Crawler descends
among the towering trees. Alien inscriptions cover the
mammoth trunks.

A BARRICADE surrounds the Mantis city - a spiky thicket of
alien teeth and bones.

The Crawler GRINDS OVER THE BARRICADE.

A great lamentation rises from the city: A cacophony of
shrieks and beating wings.

Mantises swarm from the city and fling themselves at Crawler
Three.

By the hundreds they STRAIN to hold the Crawler back with the
strength of their bodies - and the Crawler drives them back
and crushes them under its treads.

Shadow Nineteen looks down in horror.

SHADOW NINETEEN

What am I doing?

(shouting)

Athena! Guidance control. Stop the
Crawler! Stop it now!

He looks up. The rockets' contrails arch away across the sky:
the rockets hurtling toward the horizon.

Shadow Nineteen scrambles to the top of the comm module. He
lifts his rifle and sights on a rocket.

SHADOW NINETEEN'S POV: A targeting reticle appears over the
rocket in his visor display. Range, velocity, windage.

He FIRES. And AGAIN. And AGAIN.

A moment passes. The rocket EXPLODES in a distant fireball.

He sights on another rocket and fires three rounds. It
DETONATES: the fireball hangs in the sky.

He aims at a third rocket...too late. The remaining two rockets have vanished over the horizon.

SHADOW NINETEEN

Damn it!

With a vast SIGH of machinery, the Crawler stops. Silence falls on the forest.

A ROAR OF WINGS. Mantises rise from the city like a cyclone. They fill the branches - thousands of watching figures.

A Mantis shouts from within the city. The haunting cry echoes eerily among the silent towers. Another voice joins the outcry, and another.

Soon a thousand voices are raised in tumult. A riot of sound.

SHADOW NINETEEN

(shaken)

Athena. Show me navigation. We're turning this thing around.

PROMETHEUS GROUND STATION

Prometheus's antennas pivot to receive a message.

A BOOM like a thunderclap inside the giant ship. Lightning stabs upward into the turbulent clouds.

INT. PROMETHEUS PROJECT - CONTROL ROOM - DAY (EARTH)

Monitors light up. Electricity dances over the Transporter.

Scientist Banneker looks up from his instruments.

BANNEKER

Transmission!

He strides to the terminal, scans the data.

BANNEKER

The repair's complete! Crawler Three is running. Launch is success...

(horror replaces the elation in his face)

Oh, no. No!

CORRIDOR

Vance and Ada hurry along, talking in whispers, agitated.

ADA

This is first contact. We've found an alien civilization - and we're slaughtering them. We're poisoning their world. If we don't stop this, we're going to regret it forever.

VANCE

All right.

ADA

What do we do?

VANCE

We'll go for my armor. Once I'm wearing it, nobody can stop me. And then I'll get us out of here.

As they approach the Staging Room, Vance quickens his steps.

ADA

We can't let this happen. I have to let someone...

STAGING ROOM

Full of guards.

ADA

...know.

The guards' pistols come up. Vance and Ada freeze.

Across the Staging Room, Vance's armor locker sinks out of sight on an elevator. He watches it go in dismay.

The guards part to let Director Marbeck and Banneker through. Marbeck's face is a mask of rage.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

Shadow Nineteen has repaired
Crawler Three.

VANCE

So what's with all...

DIRECTOR MARBECK

He sabotaged the mission. Half the
rockets destroyed!

VANCE

He did?

DIRECTOR MARBECK
Don't play the innocent with me.
You did this. This monstrous thing.
(to Banneker)
Lock him up.

The guards seize Vance and drag him out under Banneker's gloating eyes.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
(to Ada)
And you. Did you help to plan this?

ADA
(bitterly)
I wish I had. Where's Martin Caul?

DIRECTOR MARBECK
His heart failed him. But your heart mustn't fail. The ocean program has lost two rockets. I need your expertise to compensate for the damage. The terraforming effort depends on it.

ADA
The terraforming effort has to stop. You know what Martin found.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
It's time you took the crown, Ada. It may help you see things clearly.

ADA
No.

Director Marbeck beckons to his guards.

INT. STORAGE CELL

Guards shove Vance into an empty steel-walled room. Turning back, Vance confronts Banneker in the doorway.

BANNEKER
I hope you enjoyed your conspiracy. It'll be the end of you. And Ada will face her own consequences.

VANCE
What consequences?

Banneker removes his cap. His cybernetic crown gleams.

BANNEKER

As we speak, she's becoming one of us at last.

VANCE

The hell she is.

Banneker smiles. The door begins to close.

Like lightning, Vance reaches out, grabs Banneker's coat. Yanks the Scientist into the sliding door's path. The door bounces open again.

Vance charges out. Hammers Banneker into the wall. Banneker drops, limp.

Three guards in the hallway draw their pistols hastily.

Vance is a demon among them. A quick flurry of blows and close-quarters gunfire.

INT. MEDICAL COMPLEX

A sterile facility: white enamel and cold steel.

Ada lies strapped into a terrifying apparatus: a CORONATION MACHINE. She wears a flimsy hospital gown. Her head is secured in a metal clamp. Above her hangs the cybernetic crown she will soon wear forever.

She twists at her restraints in vain. An old PHYSICIAN in a scarlet coat begins to shave her head.

ADA

Please don't do this. Please don't do this.

The Physician winces but stays the course. Ada's beautiful locks drop to the floor.

PHYSICIAN

Shhh.

A sudden COMMOTION.

An Agency Guard staggers into the room, slams into the wall and collapses. Vance charges in.

He rushes to Ada. Shoving the Physician aside, he works at the straps that hold her down.

VANCE

Ada. I'm here. It's all right.

ADA

Conrad! Oh, hurry. Look out!

The old Physician presses an instrument to Vance's neck. It HISSES. Vance jumps as if bitten.

PHYSICIAN

You'll be no more trouble.

Vance knocks the Physician out with one punch. But already he looks woozy.

Vance's legs buckle. He drops to his knees, fumbling at Ada's restraints. His face is inches from hers.

ADA

Stay awake. Conrad. Please...

VANCE

Ada...

He collapses.

EXT. PROMETHEUS GROUND STATION - DAWN (ERIX)

Prometheus towers over the jungle. A deep rumble. Foliage crashes down. Crawler Three rolls into the clearing.

It churns to a stop beside its mother ship.

ATOP THE CRAWLER

Armor plates have been warped into a crude bunker. The welded metal tears open. Shadow Nineteen climbs out.

EXT. PROMETHEUS GROUND STATION - TRANSPORTER

The transporter's massive door rumbles open to reveal the small bright chamber. Shadow Nineteen steps in.

SHADOW NINETEEN

Athena. Overlay tech specs.

In his visor's heads-up display, a wireframe circuit diagram is superimposed on the chamber walls.

He opens a panel, revealing complex controls.

INT. PROMETHEUS PROJECT - TRANSPORT FACILITY - DAY (EARTH)

Scientist Banneker talks to grey-coated technicians in the vast transporter cavern.

Suddenly, electricity CRACKLES over the transporter. Klaxons howl. The technicians flee. Banneker stands his ground.

A resounding BOOM.

The transport chamber opens. Shadow Nineteen steps out. His rifle rests in its clamps on his thigh.

BANNEKER

Vance!

Shadow Nineteen opens his visor, breathes clean air. He approaches Banneker across the catwalk.

SHADOW NINETEEN

I had to come back.

Banneker concentrates. The catwalk withdraws, separating Shadow Nineteen and Banneker from the Transporter. The heavy steel doors of the Transport Facility slam shut.

SHADOW NINETEEN

Listen to me.

Banneker sweeps the room with furious eyes. In unison, four security cannons aim at Shadow Nineteen.

SHADOW NINETEEN

(shouting)

Wait!

The cannons FIRE.

Bullets tear at him, throwing showers of sparks from his armor, leaving gouges in the metal. His visor slams shut.

Staggering under the onslaught, he pulls his rifle and fires, destroying one cannon. Another.

Banneker flees. The Staging Room door opens for him.

Shadow Nineteen pounds after him.

STAGING ROOM

Banneker glances at the Staging Room door. It slams shut.

Shadow Nineteen slides into the closing door. The steel slab pins him against the frame. On the far side, the security cannons rake at his armor, throwing sparks.

He strains. The door grinds back. He slides through.

Banneker gestures. Two security cannons drop from the Staging Room ceiling. Shadow Nineteen blasts them into shrapnel.

Banneker is caught in the open, at gunpoint. He freezes.

SHADOW NINETEEN

There are cities on Erix. It's inhabited.

Banneker rolls his eyes in contempt.

BANNEKER

Not for long.

SHADOW NINETEEN

(astounded)

You knew!

BANNEKER

You idiot.

A FLOOR HATCH opens beside Shadow Nineteen. The floor beneath him slam into motion - it's a conveyor belt - and flings him into the pit.

As Shadow Nineteen climbs out, the hatch cover closes on him, clamping him in place.

Banneker gloats nearby - until Shadow Nineteen's rifle swings that way.

A PLATFORM rises between them: Shadow Nineteen's rifle fire tears into the platform as Banneker ducks for cover.

Shadow Nineteen wrenches himself free of the floor hatch. Racing around the platform, he draws a bead on Banneker...

But the Staging Room CRANE swoops out of the shadows. Seizes him in its claw, pinning his gun arm to his side.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Critical strains on suit.

Unable to break free, Shadow Nineteen sees heavy bolts on the hinge of the claw. With his free arm he extrudes his toolkit.

Banneker grins wickedly. The heavy crane smashes Shadow Nineteen against the wall. Shadow Nineteen works desperately.

A bolt spins out of the crane's hinge. One finger of the claw falls off, freeing Shadow Nineteen's gun hand. He shoots into the crane's hydraulics, and the metal arm goes limp.

Freed, Shadow Nineteen lands on his feet.

A FREIGHT PLATFORM tips, burying him in massive metal crates.

Banneker smiles in triumph...but Shadow Nineteen rises from the wreckage, a crate held overhead. He HURLS the crate at Banneker with a roar of animal rage.

The crate crushes Banneker against the wall.

The room falls silent.

Shadow Nineteen rolls the heavy crate away from Banneker's body. Banneker, broken and dying, gasps for air.

BANNEKER

(a whisper)

You're not even supposed to exist.

Banneker's breath stops. His eyes stare at nothing.

SHADOW NINETEEN

But I do.

He turns, makes his way painfully across the room. His armor's motors whine as he moves.

SHADOW NINETEEN

Athena. Mayday beacon.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Mayday beacon on.

A red light begins to flash on his armor's chestplate.

CORRIDOR

Scientist Larson looks up in alarm as red emergency lights begin to flash all along the hallway.

The security cannon at the corner EXPLODES. Larson cringes.

Shadow Nineteen steps out of the smoke in his battered armor. He recognizes Larson and his rage subsides.

LARSON

Conrad! How did you...

He sees the haggard face behind the visor. Whiskered, spattered with dried blood. He understands.

LARSON

(in wonder)

You were on Erix. What did you see?
No, there's no time. You have to
run. They'll kill you.

SHADOW NINETEEN

They're trying.

LARSON

They've locked you up, here. They
mean to make you disappear. And
there's something else.

SHADOW NINETEEN

What else?

LARSON

Ada.

MEDICAL COMPLEX - HOSPITAL ROOM

Ada lies in bed, in a hospital gown. Her head is shaven. A
cybernetic crown gleams against her scalp. Beside the bed
hang a Master's black coat and cap. She stares at the coat.

SCREAMS outside the door. Running feet.

The door jumps in its frame. Ada shrinks back in her bed. A
powerful force tears the door open.

Shadow Nineteen enters, a metal giant. She rushes to him.

ADA

Conrad!

She sees the dried blood on his face, the beard. Stops short.

ADA

You're the Shadow. You're Nineteen.

He stares at her bald head: the crown embedded in the flesh.

SHADOW NINETEEN

What have they done to you?

She makes a futile attempt to cover her head with her hands.

ADA

Why did you come back?

SHADOW NINETEEN

To set things right. Ada.

(he steps closer)

(MORE)

SHADOW NINETEEN (cont'd)

I never dreamed they'd do this. Are you all right?

Tears shine in her eyes.

ADA

It doesn't matter, does it? What's done is done.

Shadow Nineteen's face is wracked with guilt. He looks anxiously out into the deserted medical facility.

SHADOW NINETEEN

We can't stay here. I've been welding doors shut, but the guards will come soon. I'm going to break myself out. The real me. Can you hide until I...

Ada sheds her hospital gown. Puts on the black coat.

ADA

I'm going with you.

SHADOW NINETEEN

It won't be safe.

ADA

I know where he is. And I can help you now.

She places the black skullcap over her crown.

CORRIDOR

Shadow Nineteen advances down a corridor, rifle raised.

One by one, security cannons take aim at them - and one by one, Shadow Nineteen blows them to shrapnel.

They reach an intersection. BULLETS whine off of Shadow Nineteen's armor: Guards approach down the crossing corridor. Shadow Nineteen fires back, his rifle barking.

Ada GESTURES: Doors SLAM SHUT between them and the guards.

SHADOW NINETEEN

How long can you keep that up before they revoke your privileges?

ADA

They already have. I'm using Director Marbeck's ID.

SHADOW NINETEEN
(grinning)
Nice.

STORAGE ROOM

Red alarm lights throb. Vance paces in his bare metal cell.
O.S. GUNFIRE outside the door. Heavy footfalls approach.
The door slides open. Ada enters.

VANCE
Ada!

They embrace fiercely. Troubled, Vance reaches for her black skullcap. She shrinks away.

ADA
Don't. Please. Listen. There's
someone outside the door. He's
going to help us.

CORRIDOR

Shadow Nineteen stands watch in the corridor. A guard lies unconscious at his feet.

Ada emerges from the cell. Vance follows warily.

Vance and Shadow Nineteen stand face to face, staring at each other: Vance in perfect health, lightly dressed - Shadow Nineteen haggard and wounded, in armor. Vance is speechless.

SHADOW NINETEEN
Hello, Vance.

VANCE
(cautiously)
Hello, Vance. What's happening?

SHADOW NINETEEN
I'm getting the two of you out.

VANCE
And you?

SHADOW NINETEEN
Don't worry about me. I'm not even
supposed to exist.

Ada looks sharply away down the hallway.

ADA
Someone's opening the doors I
locked. I'm sorry. I'm new at this.

SHADOW NINETEEN
Let's head for the roof. Can you
get us to your freight elevator?

ADA
I think so.

Vance crouches and takes fallen guard's pistol.

VANCE
Let's go.

SERVICE CORRIDOR

A deserted hallway. The freight elevator door is closed.

Shadow Nineteen, Ada, and Vance arrive at the elevator door. Turning, Ada concentrates and closes a corridor door behind them.

Ada palms the elevator switch. The floor indicator shows the elevator descending from the roof. They wait.

VANCE
What happened on Erix?

SHADOW NINETEEN
I saw the Angel of Death.

Vance and Ada stare at Shadow Nineteen, mystified.

SHADOW NINETEEN
We fought. And I killed it. But it
was just...a creature. A living
thing. And then I found a city. A
city of these things.

ADA
You saw them!

SHADOW NINETEEN
They're terrifying. But they're
...people. I thought Erix was Hell.
But it's just somebody else's
world.

Ada looks at corridor door in fright.

ADA

Someone's opening the door. I can't hold it.

Shadow Nineteen takes aim at the door. They watch the elevator's floor indicator nervously.

Suddenly a SIREN sounds. A heavy steel SECURITY GATE begins to close in front of the elevator, sealing it off.

Shadow Nineteen throws himself at the descending gate and heaves. The gate stops in his tracks, its motors whining.

Very rapidly: the corridor door slides open. SSA GUARDS wait on the other side.

Vance pulls Ada behind him. His pistol snaps up: he fires several rounds. Two guards fall. Others return fire.

A BULLET slams into Vance's ribs. He SCREAMS.

Shadow Nineteen, still holding off the security gate, twists in place and FIRES his laser rifle. It tears a glowing furrow in the wall. The guards fall back, shouting.

The elevator opens. Vance struggles in, leaning on Ada.

Shadow Nineteen dives into the elevator. The security gate SLAMS down. The elevator doors close.

ELEVATOR SHAFT

Concrete walls rush past as the freight elevator rises. Sound echoes in the confined space. Vance sinks to the deck.

VANCE

I'm hit.

Shadow Nineteen rolls Vance over. The wound is severe, a bloody puncture between the left ribs. Shadow Nineteen presses a battlefield dressing over the injury.

VANCE

It's bad.

SHADOW NINETEEN

Yeah.

Vance fumbles blindly for Ada. She takes his hand.

ADA

Hang on, Conrad. We'll get help.

She weeps. Vance is fading fast. A shudder racks his body, and a look of amazement crosses his face.

VANCE

I'm not going to make it.

Shadow Nineteen leans close.

SHADOW NINETEEN

You keep breathing. I've seen you
dead too many times.

Vance looks at Shadow Nineteen. His lips barely move.

VANCE

It's only fair. I'm the only one
who never paid a price.
(weaker still)
It's all yours now.

The life drains out of him.

SHADOW NINETEEN

(urgently)
Athena. Medical.

ATHENA'S VOICE

Medical.

He places two fingertips on Vance's chest. A muddy MURMUR.

He tears open the shirt. Lays his gloves on Vance's ribs.

SHADOW NINETEEN

Clear!

Ada jerks her hands back. A THUMP as voltage pours through Vance's body. He arches and lies still.

EXT. SSA HEADQUARTERS - ROOF - DAY

A glorious SUNSET drenches the city in light.

The freight elevator rises into view and locks into place. Shadow Nineteen kneels over Vance. Ada beside him.

Vance isn't breathing. Shadow Nineteen stands. He seems stunned - he can't take his eyes off his own dead body.

ADA

What are you doing?

SHADOW NINETEEN
 (hollowly)
 He's gone.

Ada cries, clutches at Vance. Shadow Nineteen stirs. Gently pulls her away.

SHADOW NINETEEN
 Ada. He's gone. We have to move.

She looks at him, paralyzed. She's just watched her lover die, but here he stands in front of her.

DIRECTOR MARBECK (O.S.)
 Captain Vance.

They turn. Director Marbeck stares down at Vance's body.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
 You make this difficult. You dirty
 my hands.

Shadow Nineteen aims his rifle at Marbeck.

SHADOW NINETEEN
 You shouldn't have come alone.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
 I don't need help to deal with you.

He waves contemptuously at Shadow Nineteen. Shadow Nineteen's armor POWERS DOWN. He collapses like a marionette with cut strings. He sprawls on his back, unable to move.

SHADOW NINETEEN
 Athena. Athena!

DIRECTOR MARBECK
 I had your armor modified, Captain.
 A precaution. I reserve myself
 certain privileges. I'll tolerate
 no more...

ADA
 Damn you!

She launches herself at Marbeck in a two-handed shove that sends him staggering. She follows, poised to shove him again.

Enraged, he grapples with her. Flings her to the pavement. She strikes her head cries out.

Marbeck turns back to Shadow Nineteen - but his armor lies open and empty. Shadow Nineteen steps free in his skinsuit.

SHADOW NINETEEN

Enough.

He HAMMERS Marbeck across the face with his massive rifle. Marbeck staggers and cries out.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

Guards! Guards!

Shadow Nineteen backs Marbeck up against a pillar. His arms tremble under the weight of a rifle meant for powered armor.

GUARDS swarm onto the rooftop.

Ada darts to Shadow Nineteen's side. Marbeck glares at gunpoint, his mouth bleeding freely.

The guards surround them in a thicket of pistols.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

If you shoot me, they'll kill you.
Lay down the gun and live.

SHADOW NINETEEN

You won't let us live. We know what
you've done.

Marbeck glances at Shadow Nineteen's trembling arms.

DIRECTOR MARBECK

How long can you bear that weight?

O.S. A RUMBLE.

SHADOW NINETEEN

(grinning in triumph)
Long enough.

A shadow falls over them all.

MARINE (O.S.)

Stand down!

A MARINE AIRSHIP hovers over the rooftop.

Six ARMORED MARINES leap from the airship on jump-jets. They encircle Marbeck and his guards, rifles raised.

The SSA Guards, so menacing a moment ago, suddenly look like children. They drop their weapons.

Exhausted, Shadow Nineteen lays his massive rifle down.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
 You're trespassing! This is a
 secure facility! You have no right!

The Marines' PLATOON LEADER steps forward. He scans the rooftop: takes in Vance's body; the battered armor lying open; Shadow Nineteen in his military skinsuit.

PLATOON LEADER
 There's a Marine distress beacon
 coming from this rooftop, sir. I'm
 required to respond.
 (to Shadow Nineteen)
 Do you need assistance, sir?

SHADOW NINETEEN
 Yes. Captain Conrad Vance, Third
 Offworld Division. I need evac
 right now. Me, this woman, and...
 (he hesitates, looking at
 Vance lying dead)
 ...that Marine.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
 These people are in my custody!

SHADOW NINETEEN
 (to Marbeck)
 Not any more.
 (to the Platoon Leader)
 Call the police. Get them here. And
 call the office of the Secretary of
 Defense. Tell them Conrad Vance has
 a story to tell.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
 No!

SHADOW NINETEEN
 Let's get airborne. Too many
 surprises here.

The Marines collect Vance's body, the crippled armor. Shadow Nineteen pulls Ada toward the airship.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
 (to Ada, desperately)
 Scientist. You are not released!

Ada shoots him a cold look. Moves closer to Shadow Nineteen. Marbeck is unravelling, almost snarling.

DIRECTOR MARBECK
 Captain! Remember your writ of
 secrecy!

SHADOW NINETEEN
You killed the man who signed it.

INT. MARINE AIRSHIP (IN FLIGHT) - DUSK

Shadow Nineteen and Ada sit huddled against a bulkhead. Armored Marines sit around them.

Outside, the skyscrapers of New Washington slide by.

Shadow Nineteen and Ada cling to each other, their eyes haunted.

He lifts a finger. Traces the line of her crown.

ADA
I know I'm not what I used to be.

He pulls her closer.

SHADOW NINETEEN
Neither am I.

ADA
Don't think about it now. For now
let's just be. You're Conrad Vance.
You came home.

He stares across a vast distance. Shakes his head.

SHADOW NINETEEN
I'm still there.

Ada looks at him, questioning.

SHADOW NINETEEN
You can't come home. You can only
send your shadow home.

EXT. PROMETHEUS GROUND STATION (ERIX) - SUNSET

The lurid sky bathes Prometheus in red light.

The door opens. An armored Marine, his armor blackened by fire, looks out in despair at the jungles of Erix.

The ID plate on his armor reads VANCE 19.

Predators slink from the undergrowth at the sound of the door, watching him, circling.

FADE OUT.