

ABSTRACT

The Phoenix: An Original Teleplay

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Television is a unique form of storytelling that keeps the audience tuning back in week after week to watch a story unfold. TV series tell their stories over long spans of time, layering multiple story arcs to form complex narratives. This allows for extended world building and character development. Drawing on my studies of creative writing and obtaining inspiration from some of my favorite television series, I have written a teleplay for the pilot of an original TV series, *The Phoenix*, as well as outlining the parameters of the rest of the series in an accompanying show bible. My teleplay combines elements of Space Operas, such as *Star Trek* and *Firefly*, with the issues addressed by Teen Dramas, such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Teen Wolf*. *The Phoenix* tells the story of a group of teenagers who are on the run from an imperialistic interplanetary government aboard a stolen cargo ship. In their search for freedom they journey to far-off planets, discovering new worlds and alien societies along the way.

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THE PHOENIX: AN ORIGINAL TELEPLAY

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

My Teleplay

My thesis is a teleplay for the pilot of an hour-long science-fiction drama, *The Phoenix*. The series centers around a group of teenagers who are on the run from the imperialistic Irisi government. From different backgrounds, two groups of teenagers meet each other and clash during the pilot, as they have different purposes behind running from the government. However, they are united by the need to escape the Irisi government; it is this need that forces them together.

My script is a pilot, so my main goal in writing it is to set of the world of the series while intriguing the audience enough to want to come back for episode two. Although each TV episode is a small part of a larger story, each episode must also tell a story in its own right. For my pilot, this narrative includes an A-story and a B-story.

The A-story is about a group of teenagers who clash while trying boarding a cargo ship, the *Phoenix*, in order to escape from the Irisi government. Over the course of the episode they come together, united in their goal of escaping the Irisi government, who wants to capture them.

The B-story of the episode is about the Irisi government at first trying to figure out who they are and then, by the end of the episode, setting out in an attempt to capture them. I see this dual-story form continuing for the rest of the series, with the teenagers constantly on the run from someone, although their chasers may change over the course of the series.

The pilot contains both an encapsulated episodic story and a continuing narrative. The encapsulated story of the script is that the teenagers, on the run, realize they need to refuel in order to get from the star system they are in to a new star system. If they do not stop to refuel, they will lose power in the middle of systems and either die as a result or be sitting ducks, waiting for the Irisi government to find and capture them. The teenagers decide to stop on a fringe planet.

Fringe planets are diverse places. They are often wondrous, and sometimes they are terrifying. However, they are usually barren planets that have barely succeeded in being terraformed. The planets are usually barely inhabitable, which provides dangers and obstacles to the main characters as they try to navigate these planets.

Fringe planets are home to drifters, which is a general term for different groups of people and aliens who don't live on traditional planets that have governing bodies. Often criminals who have been exiled from their planets or other offbeat people and alien groups, the drifters are a terrifying counterculture who will reoccur throughout the series, as many episodes will feature various fringe planets. However, as the series develops, it will show that this is a gross generalization of multiple people groups. Not all drifters are criminals; they have not all been rejected from governed planets. Instead, there are multiple groups of traveler cultures that formed their societies based on traveling through the stars to different planets. While drifters will often be antagonists in the series, some drifters will aid the teenagers in their journey, becoming recurring friends to the crew.

Although the specific planet that the teenagers stop on will not be featured in most of the series, other planets and groups of drifters will be featured in the continuing

narrative that is shown in the pilot, which is that of a group of teenagers on the run, divided both in their backgrounds and in their intended destinations and goals.

The Phoenix will be a character-driven drama. My vision for the series is that it will be heavily serialized, with a narrative that runs along the series as a whole. Although most episodes will feature a new location, usually new planets, there will be seasonal arcs linking the episodes together, with the characters having seasonal goals for new destinations.

Because my teleplay is a pilot for a character-driven drama, I have worked to establish well-defined characters with their own personalities. The main crew of the *Phoenix* who are shown in the pilot can be divided into two groups. There are the Barzhakian teenagers and the Irisi teenagers.

The Barzhakian teenagers, who commandeer the ship and set out on the goal of getting back to their planet, were abducted by the Irisi government when their home planet was invaded and colonized. On Iris, they were experimented on and genetically engineered to have different qualities, which the Irisi government thought would make them a formidable group. While Freya was engineered to be more intelligent, rendering her a genius, Jason was made to be a charismatic leader. Seth was engineered to be stronger and faster, making him a virtually indestructible warrior, and Artemis was made to be essentially emotionless and remorseless, capable of killing people without batting an eye.

The Irisi teenagers have not been engineered in any way, but they still have their own personalities. Camilla, the main protagonist, is the daughter of one of the government's doctors who have been working on the Barzhakian teenagers. She's deeply

curious, which led to her trying to figure out who her father is. She snooped in her mother's room, finding out the true nature of her mother's job. She also discovered old love letters between her mother and the emperor of Asteria, who was at the time only a prince. This led to months of further spying, trying to figure out exactly why Iris would be performing such experiments on people. Camilla's best friend, Ryder, is an orphan who doesn't really have anything going for him on Iris. He has no family and no friends other than Camilla. When the opportunity to leave presented itself in the form of sneaking on a ship to Asteria, he jumped at the chance. Lastly, there's Navid, a teenager who is seen working at the shipping yard at the beginning of the pilot. Navid is sarcastic, cracking jokes at all times, but especially when he's scared. He lacks ambition and plans; he ends up on the *Phoenix* purely by chance, desperately not wanting to be there at first. However, he will quickly fall in love with the adventure of being aboard the ship, moving from angry captive to useful member of the crew.

The Phoenix will combine elements of science-fiction, particularly the space opera sub-genre, with action-adventure and teen drama. The series is a space opera that shows a group of people traveling through space. It will depict various diverse planets, people groups, and alien societies. At times these planets will inspire awe and wonder; at others, fear and dread.

In creating the series, especially the characters, I was inspired by Teen Drama series and Young Adult novels. It is important that the main characters of my series are teenagers. They're a group of young adults who were yanked away from their childhood and thrust into a scary world where they have to run for their lives and struggle to decide the right course of action. In many ways, they are in way over their heads. However, in

other ways, this is an advantage for them. The ages of the main characters will cause them to be underestimated by their enemies, and over the course of the series they will prove time and time again that they're not just kids; they're warriors.

TV Format

I chose to make my story a teleplay, rather than a novel or screenplay, for the extended world-building and character development that is called for in a television series. I also love the idea of telling multiple stories within a new world. As explained by John August and Craig Mazin in episode 218 of "Scriptnotes," a podcast where the writers discuss screenwriting and things relevant to screenwriters, feature films are about the life-changing events that happen to characters, whereas television is about the everyday lives of characters (August and Mazin). The interesting components that drive the story in a television series are the characters and the world they inhabit, whereas movies are more driven by the story and plot (August and Mazin). This seemed ideal to me in my goal to create a new work of science fiction.

The Phoenix is a science fiction story that centers around space travel and different adventures that occur during such travel. It takes place hundreds of years into the future on different planets. I decided to make the story a television series because the long, serialized format of television allows both me as a writer and the audience as viewers to spend more time in this fictional reality, exploring the different planets and societies that exist in the world. It also allows for extended character development as the story follows the main characters navigating the world of the story.

Television is about depicting and discovering a world and the characters that inhabit that world. This is a large task, and because of that television structure requires a

linking of different kinds of story arcs. For any given episode, a writer must write the specific episode while taking into consideration how it works to advance the seasonal arc, the overarching series narrative, and each individual character's character arc.

In his essay "Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television," Jason Mittell discusses the styles of storytelling in American television, arguing that television series have both wider possibilities and wider challenges for creativity when compared to movies, including "extended character depth, ongoing plotting, and episodic variations" (Mittell 31). These challenges and possibilities lie in the complex layering of narratives that is required to create a TV series.

Episode Structure

Television series are large stories which are told in smaller stories: episodes. Each episode is a small chunk of the larger story; however, each episode also tells its own story. In his handbook on TV Writing, *Writing to Television*, Martie Cook says about episodes that "structure is one of the most important elements of [a] script" (Cook 54). However, television structure is quite different from the structure seen in novels or even in films.

Television episodes are told in acts; these acts are separated by act breaks, which are presented in the form of commercial breaks. Act breaks are not always as intuitive as one might think. TV series do not follow the three-act structure of movies. Rather, they follow whichever structure a network wants. If a network wants there to be two commercial breaks, then a show will follow a three-act structure. If the network wants four breaks, there will be a five-act structure. It all comes down to what the network thinks will be best for bringing in revenue. Unlike with other narrative forms, there is no

set formula that will always hold true in television. TV writers must be flexible to adapt good story structures around the act breaks desired by a network.

Hour-long dramas have traditionally followed four-act structure, though in recent years some shows have begun following five- or six-act structure instead (Cook 130). For my script, I have decided to follow a more modern five-act structure with an added teaser at the beginning to preclude an opening sequence.

Types of dramas

There are different types of TV series. Since the inception of television, it has been divided into mainly two camps: the serialized series and the episodic series (Mittell 32). A serialized series is one that tells a story over the course of many episodes; these series are often character-driven, with viewers tuning in to each episode to see what will happen to the characters (Cook 134-142). These are the series where viewers need to tune into each episode in order to understand what is going on. An episodic series, such as a sitcom or a procedural drama, is more plot-driven, with viewers tuning in to each episode to see the either funny or exciting plot that will happen (Cook 123-133). These tend to be the kinds of shows viewers can watch out of order. historically, television has favored episodic series, since “traditional industry logic dictated that audiences lacked the weekly consistency to allow for serialized narratives, and the pressures of syndication favored interchangeable episodes of conventional sitcoms and procedural dramas” (Mittell 31). Episodic series do well in syndication since viewers can watch episodes at random.

In his essay on narrative complexity, Jason Mittell explains that there is a shift in television that allows for more complex narratives, which is “not necessarily a complete merger of episodic and serial forms but a shifting balance” (Mittell 32). Although this

form contains episodic storylines, it rejects the episodic need for plot closure at the end of each episode, with ongoing stories stretching throughout the series (Mittell 32). Some series “oscillate between long-term arc storytelling and stand-alone episodes” (Mittell 33). They succeed at this technique through a careful balance between episode arcs and seasonal arcs.

Seasonal Arcs

This narrative complexity can be seen in the way seasonal structure that is used in many science fiction/fantasy series, such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel*, and *X-Files*. In these series, each season has a story arc while also featuring several stand-alone episodes that tell encapsulated “‘monster-of-the-week’ stories” (Mittell 33). For these series, the season’s premiere and perhaps a couple more of the first episodes, will establish the seasonal arc, which is about that season’s villain (Mittell 33). The season will then feature a few stand-alone episodes that may move the seasonal story along a bit but not a lot; these episodes may . If there is a midseason finale, as there often is in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the seasonal arc will be moved forward more in the midseason finale and midseason premiere before going back to stand-alone episodes. The last couple of episodes of the season will close the seasonal arc, bringing it to a conclusion (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*).

This is the format I see *The Phoenix* following. For instance, for season one, the first couple of episodes will establish the seasonal arc: get to Barzhakan while escaping the Irisi government. However, throughout the season there will be stand-alone episodes mixed in that feature individual planets and obstacles on those planets. The stand-alone

episodes will work to show the world of the series, introducing the audience to different planets and alien species.

Character Arcs

The characters in a television series must change and develop over the course of the series. Within a television series each character has their own character arc. This arc is the development of a single character over the course of the series. Characters in television must be as complex as the show's plot. They should have backstories that get revealed over the course of the series. It is not enough to simply advance the plot forward throughout the series; the characters are what drives the plot forward, and as such they must develop along with the story (Cook 223-232).

As pointed out in "Re(de)fining Narrative Elements: Examining Television Narrative Structure," the characters are the thing that draws many viewers to television series, with some TV series focusing less on plot and more on character (Porter et al 1). There are even episodes of some series where the story's only focus is the development of a particular character (Porter et al 2). It is this "emphasis on character that is the defining quality of television narratives" (Porter et al 2). The characters are seen as the most important component to TV series. This is especially the case in serialized character-driven dramas.

This does not mean that a writer can completely disregard the importance of plot. In television, as in movies and novels, it is important for writers to create an interesting and dramatic story for the characters to enact within the series; however, the driving force behind the story is the characters (Cook 134). Television prioritizes characters. It is important for viewers to want to come back and watch the actions and experiences of

these characters week after week, and in order for that to happen, the audience has to care about them. A TV series “without interesting, well-defined characters...won’t work because the audience won’t care (Cook 223). While an interesting story with an action-packed plot but flat characters could conceivably capture an audience’s attention for a couple of hours, plot alone is not enough to captivate an audience enough to come back every week to tune into the story. For that to happen, the audience must be captivated by the characters.

In writing my script, I worked to make the characters unique while also adding a sense of mystery to their backgrounds. My goal was to give just enough information to the interest the audience into wanting to know more while leaving room for future reveals as to the characters’ pasts and further development. Although this is not all revealed in the pilot, I have planned out character backgrounds and personality traits that influenced the way they were written in the pilot.

Genre

Although studying TV structure and the unique qualities of television writing was a big part of the research behind constructing my teleplay, that was not the only component. I also considered issues specific to individual genres, such as themes that often occur in the genres from which I drew inspiration.

Genre plays a big part in how a writer constructs a TV series. An audience member expects different things when they tune in to watch series in different genres. A show’s typical values and stakes will vary from genre to genre, as will the show’s general style and tone. I took this into account while creating and writing *The Phoenix*.

My teleplay belongs to multiple genres. While it is primarily a science fiction space opera, it is also partially a teen drama, particularly in the style of young adult fiction. When writing my teleplay, I drew on inspiration from the TV series, movies, and novels that I love in these genres.

Science Fiction

Science fiction is a genre that concerns itself with imaginative new worlds and content. As Gerald Gaylord explains, science fiction is a literature about progress (Gaylord 21). Moreover, science fiction does not just concern itself with progress; since its beginning, science fiction has used fictional narratives to provide critiques of modern thought (Gaylord 22). Science fiction is not just about reiterating modern values; the genre often challenges modernity and proposes new, progressive values. As such, science fiction tends to favor liberal ideals and political philosophies (Gaylord 21-22). Science fiction often creates new worlds and realities. In the creation of these new spheres, science fiction “renders temporal relations uncertain and makes the familiar appear strange, and its fantasies of the future provide a critical view of the present” (Wolmark 8). The genre offers new and alternative ways of imagining the cultural and social realms that exist today (Wolmark 10). Science fiction uses new worlds as a way of analyzing the values of the world we inhabit; it uses fiction to shed light on reality.

Because of the ways in which science fiction analyzes and critiques the modern world, the genre often overlaps with other critical genres and themes such as postcolonialism. Gerald Gaylord argues that postcolonialism and science fiction often go hand-in-hand due to their shared concerns, including “issues of travel, migration, alterity, other cultures, colonization, empire, power and alternatives to imperialism” (Gaylord

22). Postcolonial fiction is often about a period after the demise of colonialism; however, it often also suggest an ongoing survival of colonialism, critiquing that heritage (Gaylard 23). Postcolonial fiction asserts premises and values that challenge the colonial narrative. Science fiction often uses its unique components, such as futuristic settings and new societies to do the same.

This link between post postcolonialism and science fiction influenced me as I was creating my TV series. I chose to make the imperialist Irisi government the primary antagonist of the series for this reason. As a writer I am interested in creating worlds that are new and exciting; however, I would still like there to be a certain degree of realism in my writing. This is why I chose not to write a world that has completely escaped colonialism. Instead of creating a universe that is free of such tendencies, with different planets coexisting peacefully, I drew on inspiration from both history and modern times.

The Irisi government is analogous to any other imperialist country. Iris has invaded planets, such as Barzhakan, in order to take advantage of those planets' resources. The planet's government wants to expand its sphere of influence as far as possible. I have tried to portray this as a villainous quality by making a group of Barzhakian prisoners of war who have been tortured during their time on Iris.

The Barzhakian teenagers were ripped away from their home planet when they were just kids. They were held captive on Iris and experimented on. The Irisi government attempted to brainwash them into advancing Iris's own agenda. Over the course of the first season, the extent of the brutalities carried out on the teenagers will be revealed. This will be revealed through flashbacks as the teenagers advance in their goal to reach Barzhakan. As the character progress in their journey, the viewers will see more of their

backstory, providing an understanding for the reason why the teenagers desperately want to get back to their home planet.

Their hopes will be shattered in the finale of season one when they finally reach their home planet; it is at this point that the brutality of the Irisi government will be shown in greater detail. The Irisi government has turned their home planet into a mining colony, using the Barzhakian natives as enslaved manual labor while the Irisi forces enjoy high standards of living as the overlords who rule the planet.

Iris does not just conquer far-away planets such as Barzhakan. Another one of Iris's imperialistic plans is revealed in the pilot. This plan is the driving force that sends the show's main protagonist, Camilla, and her best friend, Ryder, onto the *Phoenix*. Iris has plans to invade Asteria, a planet in their own star system. Iris's government has goals to be the ruling body over their entire star system, even if this means breaking alliances.

This goal was a main reasoning behind Iris's invasion of Barzhakan, as they plan to use the resources mined on the planet to fuel their war against Asteria. This is the driving force behind Iris's actions in not only season one but also the following seasons, particularly season two. Season one will end with the main characters discovering what has happened to Barzhakan. Season two will focus on the crew discovering Iris's reasoning behind creating a colony on Barzhakan, as well as finally committing to a journey to warn Asteria about Iris's plans to declare war on the planet. Over the course of the series, the *Phoenix*'s crew will commit to bringing down Iris, as the planet repeatedly invades other planets, using those planets to advance their own agenda.

Iris's greed in taking over other planets was inspired by postcolonialism. The planet's colonial tendencies are seen as a villainous. In writing *The Phoenix*, I have tried

to be critical of the planet's colonialism by depicting the protagonists as people who are against Iris's invasions of other planets and even having some of the protagonists be victims of one of the planet's invasions.

Space Opera

Within science fiction there are multiple subgenres, such as futuristic dystopian, steampunk, and space opera, just to name a few. My teleplay fits into the space opera subgenre of science fiction. Aspects of this genre and multiple series that belong to it influenced me as I was writing my teleplay.

The term space opera originated as a derogatory term; in the 1950s the term was used to refer to poorly written, ridiculous pieces of science fiction; it was not originally seen as its own subgenre (Hartwell and Cramer 9). In fact, space opera did not originally refer to only science fiction that took place in space, instead referring to any piece of science fiction, not matter the location, that was seen as bad literature, in comparison to other works of science fiction. The term space opera was created in relation to the soap opera genre as a way to refer to science-fiction that was "hackwork" (Hartwell and Cramer 10).

Space opera continued to be used as a negative term for multiple decades. However, over the course of time space opera came to be a term for a specific subgenre incorporating bodies of science fiction that deal with common themes and motifs (Hartwell and Cramer 10). By the 1980s the term was no longer used pejoratively, coming to be a way to refer to some of the bestselling works of science fiction on the market (Hartwell and Cramer 17).

Space opera as it is known today is a genre that incorporates aspects of both science fiction and westerns. Space opera fiction is set in a futuristic space setting and often centers around adventurers, particularly criminals or vigilantes on the run, similar to what one would expect to see in a western (Hartwell and Cramer 10).

Space operas are marked by a sense of adventure and discovery; they are often overdramatic with an air of romanticism towards space and all of the possibilities that exist in such an unknown frontier. In creating *The Phoenix* I was inspired by space opera television series such as *Star Trek* and *Firefly*.

Star Trek tells the story of the crew of the USS *Enterprise*, whose mission is “to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before” (*Star Trek*). The series follows the crew as they travel through the vast wonder of space, journeying to new planets and discovering new alien societies.

This inspired me in creating *The Phoenix* because I want there the *Phoenix*'s crew to also discover new worlds as they travel through space. Although this is not their mission in being aboard the ship, I want the crew to land on new planets and see how diverse the planets and different alien species and societies are. They will be driven to these planets by the urgent need to outrun Iris, often having to stop on these planets as a way of evading Iris's forces. In seeing these planets and societies and learning about all that Iris and other planetary forces have subjected the Drifters to, the crew will realize just how much the universe needs Iris to be taken down so they can't terrorize any other planets.

Firefly tells the story of the characters who are aboard *Serenity*, a spaceship shaped like a firefly. The series makes use of the western aspects of space opera, depicting planets that are desert-like and desolate, much like the American frontier that is often portrayed in westerns. The series focuses on the Alliance, the governing body for the central planets and the fringe society that lives on the outer planets (*Firefly*).

This influenced my creation of the universe for *The Phoenix*. Similarly to *Firefly*, I also created fringe societies, the Drifters, that live at the edges of star systems. However, while *Firefly* focuses on what seems like one star system, with only one main governing body, *The Phoenix* will feature multiple governing bodies. For instance, both Iris and Asteria are major governing bodies in the series, and while there are alliances and unions that keep different governing bodies living in peace most of the time, this peace will be shattered early on in the series as a result of Iris's imperialism.

I drew on inspiration from *Star Trek* and *Firefly*, but I decided to focus *The Phoenix* on teenagers, rather than adults, because I saw a chance to bridge a gap between teen drama and space opera science fiction. To my knowledge, there has not been a live action space opera television series that centers around teenagers. In my search for one, I found multiple works of anime (Japanese animated series) but none that weren't animated. I was surprised to find so many anime series with this premise. What this tells me is that while a space opera series about teenagers has not been done yet for live action television, putting teenagers into a space opera setting isn't too ridiculous to work.

Teen Drama

In addition to being a space opera, *The Phoenix* is also a teen drama. As such, I drew on inspiration from not only science fiction shows but also from teen drama series.

Teen drama refers to TV series that are aimed at the teenage demographic and center around teenagers and their lives. In creating *The Phoenix*, I was particularly inspired by teen drama series that also had elements of science fiction and fantasy, such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Teen Wolf*, and *The 100*.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer tells the story of Buffy Summers, a teenage girl who is the chosen one: the vampire slayer. She is the one person in the whole world given the power to defeat vampires and other forces of darkness. The series tells the Buffy's story, as well as the stories of those around her. The series shows Buffy and her friends battling demons and saving the world over and over again. They do this in spite of the fact that they are only teenagers. In fact, the main characters point out multiple times throughout the series that they are too young to have so much resting on their shoulders. There are several points in the series where Buffy hesitates or flat out refuses to do her duty as the slayer because she is a teenager who just wants to do normal teenage things like date boys and go to prom. Throughout the series, Buffy struggles to balance having a normal teenage life with fulfilling her duties as the slayer (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*).

In writing *The Phoenix* I am interested in telling a similar story about teenagers who have a large amount of responsibility. Lives depend on them; entire planets could get destroyed or at the very least conquered if they do not do their best to bring down Iris. The crew will not always be brave heroes who valiantly walk into battle knowing they could die. Sometimes they will break down, particularly the Barzhakian teenagers who did not ask for any of this. They were ripped away from their homes; all they want is to be able to have normal lives. Unfortunately, that just is not possible for them. In engineering them to have the strengths they do, Iris created the very people who are

capable of helping people on the fringe planets to resist Iris's rule and eventually even defeat the Irisi forces.

I was also inspired by *Teen Wolf*, a series that tells the story of Scott McCall, a teenage boy who is bit by a werewolf and must deal with the aftermath of the event. A recurring theme in the series, particularly in the first couple of seasons, is that Scott must now fight against his werewolf nature, choosing to become a hero instead of the monster he thinks being a werewolf will make him (*Teen Wolf*).

Scott McCall's journey from average teenage boy to werewolf hero influenced my character arcs for the Barzhakian teenagers. The Barzhakian teenagers also have to fight their nature. Similar to Scott McCall, this nature is not something that they were born with but, rather, something that was done to them. This is particularly true in the cases of Artemis and Seth who were engineered to be an unsympathetic killer and a fierce fighter, respectively. It is difficult for them to put these tendencies aside and choose to be heroes that don't just kill first and ask questions later.

Another teen drama that has influenced my writing is *The 100*, which tells the story of one hundred juvenile prisoners who are sent back to earth roughly a hundred years after nuclear warfare made the earth uninhabitable. The teenagers are sent back to see if the earth is safe to return to, and they quickly find that they are not alone on the planet, with other humans having survived the nuclear destruction and made civilizations on earth. The teenagers find themselves at war with these Grounders; over the course of the series the teenagers turn into both soldiers and diplomats (*The 100*).

As I was creating *The Phoenix* I wondered if perhaps it was too farfetched to write about teenagers setting out to bring down a major planetary power. Similar to the

teenagers in *The 100*, the teenagers in *The Phoenix* must become both soldiers and diplomats; they must become leaders. The main characters in my teleplay are setting out on a major journey through space, and they are doing it on their own. It is most certainly not a probable scenario. However, teenagers taking down an entire government is a common theme in young adult fiction, another genre from which I drew inspiration.

Young Adult fiction

In recent years, there has been a growing trend in children's publishing: young adult dystopian series (Basu et al 1). These series describe futuristic worlds that are a great deal worse than the current world we live in (Basu et al 2). These novels often use the severe strife and turmoil of these societies as "a catalyst for achieving adulthood" (Basu et al 7). The societies of these novels take away the adolescents' innocence, forcing maturity upon them (Basu et al 7). These young adult dystopian novels depict coming of age stories that are horrific and often leave the main characters traumatized and even dead.

As I was writing my teleplay I was inspired by this trend in young adult fiction and the novels belonging to this dystopian subgenre. In particular, I was inspired by Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*, which tells the story of Katniss Everdeen, a teenager who lives in the dystopian society of Panem, where every year each of the country's twelve districts sends two teenagers to battle it out until there's only one teenager left alive in *The Hunger Games* (*The Hunger Games*). Over the course of the series, Katniss becomes the leader of the rebellion against Panem's capital, eventually bringing down the current government and making it possible for a future representative form of government to be established in its place (*Mockingjay*).

This inspired me in writing *The Phoenix* because the main characters of my series also desire to tear down a cruel government. Like Katniss and the other children in *The Hunger Games*, the Barzhakian teenagers have been dehumanized by a governmental body. While the teenagers in the Hunger Games were pitted against each other and turned into a sick form of entertainment, the Barzhakian teenagers were experimented on in an attempt to turn them on their own people. Iris's ultimate goal in their genetic experiments is to engineer warriors who will fight for the government. As is often seen in young adult dystopian fiction, *The Phoenix* will be about teenagers who lead a rebellion against the imperialistic Irisi government. The Barzhakian teenagers will be vital to this, and the great irony of the story will be that in engineering the teenagers the way they did, Iris created the very warriors who are able to end Iris's cruel reign.

Conclusion

Television is my favorite form of storytelling. I love the way television tells stories that are drawn out, bringing viewers back to the same world week after week for years. In my experience, this form of storytelling allows viewers to really fall in love with the story and grow attached to the characters. I am a fan of both science fiction and teen dramas, and I would like to see more TV series that combine the two genres. One of my questions when writing *The Phoenix* was whether or not a space opera TV series with teenage protagonists could work. I wrote *The Phoenix* as an answer to this question.

CHAPTER TWO

The Phoenix Series Bible

The Premise

The Phoenix is an hour-long science fiction drama that centers around a group of teenagers aboard a stolen cargo ship, *The Phoenix*. The teenagers all have different reasons for being on the ship, but they are mostly united in a common goal: outrun the Irisi government, which has sent forces out into space to capture them.

Theme

The series will explore what it's like to search for a place where one belongs. The teenagers are all searching for that in a way. Soon before the start of the pilot, the main protagonist, Camilla Jackson, has discovered that she is actually the daughter of the emperor of another planet, Asteria. She wants to get to his planet in time to warn him that Iris is going to declare war on them. Four of the teenagers are escaped captives who were stolen from their home planet and were experimented on by the Irisi government. All those teenagers want is to return home. However, they will later find that home is no longer what they remember it to be.

Setting

The series takes place in the future, once humans have colonized space. In addition to featuring the Phoenix space ship in nearly every episode as the crew travels from planet to planet, the series will take place on various planets, with most episodes

featuring a new planet. However, there will be several planets that are either featured or referenced frequently throughout the show.

Iris

The pilot will open on Iris, which is the largest planet in the Hephaestic star system. The planet is named Iris due to the fact that from space, it looks like an eye since the land is composed of a big round island, surrounded by smaller islands. The planet is home to the Irisi Republic, a governing body that is imperialistic, with multiple colonized planets under its rule, including half of the planets in the Hephaestic star system. Throughout the course of the series, the Irisi government seeks to expand its sphere of influence. The Irisi government is the main antagonist throughout the series due to its cruel tendency of destroying and conquering other planets with little care for the planets' inhabitants.

Asteria

At the start of the series, Asteria is an ally of Iris. Asteria is the second-largest planet in the Hephaestic star system, and several planets lie between it and Iris. Astoria is the head of the Asterian empire, which is comprised of Asteria and four other planets in the star system. Despite being the head of an empire, Asteria is not as imperialistic as Iris. The four planets that are under the control of Asteria are much smaller and remain in Asteria mostly for the protection. Iris attacks these smaller planets first.

Barzhakan

Barzhakan is a small planet in the Baldurian star system; it is a rocky, mountainous planet with several volcanoes, located away from the Barzhaki civilization,

that shoot out plasma. This plasma is the ideal fuel used by the latest models of starships. For this reason, it was attacked eight years ago by Iris. Irisi forces sent armies to take over the planet. Although remembered by the crew of *The Phoenix* as a wonderful, peaceful civilization that thrived on farming, that is not the state the planet is in today. Most of the Barzhakians have been killed or exiled, with the few who stayed behind working in the plasma rigs for the ruling Irisi government. The Barzhakians on their native planet are poor, relegated to the lower classes of society, while the Irisi government enjoys the wealth from the plasma drilling. The other Baldurian planets welcomed the exiled Barzhakians, but they have not helped to get rid of the Irisi forces due to the Irisi government's notoriously ruthless military regime. As such, most of the Barzhakian citizens live as refugees on other planets in their star system.

Fringe Planets

Most of the series will take place on various fringe planets, which are planets at the edges of star systems. *The Phoenix's* crew will travel between these planets because they are the ones that aren't ruled by governing forces. Most of the fringe planets are naturally uninhabitable but have been terraformed by the Drifters. The fringe planets are diverse places that can sometimes be wonderful and magnificent but are at other times terrifying and treacherous. They're home to multiple societies of Drifters whose diverse cultures play a part in the variety of the planets.

The Phoenix

The crew will spend much of their time aboard the Phoenix as they travel from planet to planet. The Phoenix is the heart of the series, with every episode featuring it.

The Phoenix is a cargo ship, used to ship mail between planets. The Phoenix is part of the latest line of cargo ships with capabilities for interstellar shipments. Although it is a drone that doesn't need a pilot for shipments within a star system, the ship needs a pilot for interstellar travel since the space between stars is so unpredictable. As such, there is a bathroom and a couple of rooms in the ship, although these haven't been used yet. The crew creates makeshift beds and sleeping quarters in the mean time. They buy bedding early on in the series. Because of the compact nature of the ship and the lack of multiple rooms, the crew members all share rooms with each other, turning the cargo hold into a room as well.

Character Biographies

The Phoenix Crew

Camilla Jackson. Camilla is a fifteen year old from Iris. She is the daughter of Amelia Jackson, an Irisi doctor who was working on the genetic experimentations. Camilla is naturally curious and also very brave. Throughout her childhood she wondered who her father was, but it was never a big deal to her. That ended when she overheard her mother talking about her job on the phone. During the phone conversation, the Emperor of Asteria was mentioned, and her mother talked about him like she knew him well. This piqued Camilla's curiosity, and before she knew it, she had spiraled down a rabbit hole where she discovered the true extent Iris's terror and her mother's participation in it. Camilla found love letters from her mother to the Emperor from just before she was born. Camilla concocted a plan to get the information to her father and warn him about Iris's plans against his planet.

Over the course of the series, Camilla will struggle to deal with the fact that the loving mother who raised her is the same woman who tortured teenagers to turn them into soldiers. She will also be conflicted between helping the Barzhakian teenagers and seeing them as enemies, since they have derailed her plans to get to Asteria and save her father's empire. Camilla is loyal to Ryder, her best friend, and over the course of the series she will grow loyal to every other crew member of the Phoenix.

Ryder Harrington. Ryder is a fifteen year old from Iris. He has been Camilla's best friends since they started school when they were five. Ryder is an orphan who doesn't have any idea who his parents were. He's lived in Mr. Barinov's orphanage (a rather small place, with only 10-15 kids at any given time) for as long as he can remember. Mr. Barinov is an emotionally abusive alcoholic who doesn't care for Ryder. There are only a couple of other orphans who have been at Mr Barinov's for as long as Ryder has, and he's always been somewhat of an outsider in the place. For this reason, Camilla is the closest thing Ryder has to family.

Ryder is a kind, compassionate person. He's loyal to Camilla until the end, which is why he follows her onto the Phoenix. He is not romantically attracted to Camilla. He sees her as a sister, although other characters sometimes assume he's in love with her. He quickly grows to care about the rest of the crew, and once that happens there's no questioning that he's loyal to all of them, having a hard time choosing sides. For this reason, he will often be the person who encourages the others to work with each other, working as the peacekeeper on the ship.

Jason Santiago. Jason is a seventeen year old from Barzhakan. On Barzhakan, he was the son of farmers. Jason was stolen from Barzhakan when he was eleven years old. He had three younger siblings. He doesn't know what happened to them, which is a fact that haunts him throughout his journey to Barzhakan. He was lanky and awkward before being taken from his planet, but on Iris they turned him into a charismatic leader. His purpose according to the Irisi doctors was to be able to lead his command unit to victory. On Iris, Jason watched his Barzhakian people die at the hands of scientists experimenting on him. His crew was the latest experimental group. He struggles with the question of why they were the ones to get away when so many failed and died before them. He's determined to get back to Barzhakan since so many of his people didn't even get the chance to try to escape.

Some of the Barzhakians that were experimented on by the Irisi government were his friends. His best friend died in the experiments. One person who he hadn't known before was Artemis Moon, who he became quite close to over the course of his time on the planet since they were put in the same experimental group. Slowly, he watched the life and personality be sucked out of her, something that has left him extremely protective of her.

Jason is loyal to his crew and to all Barzhakians in general. He feels a duty to his people to help free them from Irisi control and to make sure that the cruelties that were performed on him and his friends are never repeated on anyone else.

Artemis Moon. Artemis is an eighteen year old from Barzhakan. Although she doesn't remember, Artemis was the daughter of wealthy merchants on her home planet. She had two sisters, and she loved them dearly. When she landed on Iris, Artemis still

retained some of the hope and positivity she'd had growing up. Over the course of Iris's experiments, all that was ripped away from her. They slowly removed capabilities of empathy and compassion. They also erased her memories of her home planet, leaving her a shell of herself. The Irsi doctors did this in order to make Artemis a fierce killer. She's able to murder without remorse, something that will make several appearances over the course of the series. While Seth is able to lead and make the smart decisions, Artemis is able to make the choices no one else wants to make.

The Irsi forces were mid-experiment when the teenagers escaped, so she and her crew all maintain small traces of their old personalities. This is most obvious in Artemis, as her changes were the most drastic. For Artemis, the biggest sign that the experiments were not completed is that she cares so much about her inability to correctly feel emotions. It's something that haunts her throughout the series, making her particularly resentful of Iris. Although she doesn't actually remember any of her home planet, she has nightmares about the place regularly, though she doesn't know whether these are memories or just products of her imagination.

At the beginning of the series, Artemis is only loyal to herself. However, she wants to be more than that. She wants to care about the others, but she can't seem to get herself to make the selfless decisions. Over the course of the show, this will change as she struggles to overcome what Iris did to her. Although she will never get back to the kind, compassionate person she once was, she will eventually come to terms with the new flaws of her personality, working everyday to overcome them.

Freya Burns. Freya is a sixteen year old from Barzhakan. On her home planet, Freya was the daughter of scientists who worked with the planet's farmers to increase

sustainability for the planet's population. She was always intelligent, something that Iris used to their advantage as they made her into a super-genius. Freya has always had anxiety problems, something that was exacerbated by the Irisi experiments. Although they were working to fix these problems, the Barzhakian teenagers escaped before the issue could be fully remedied. These issues will make regular appearances over the course of the series as Freya struggles to control her anxiety.

Freya is particularly close to Artemis, who she knew back on Barzhakan. The fact that Artemis doesn't remember their friendship is a point of pain for Freya. Freya wants her friend back, but she knows that this probably isn't possible. However, that doesn't stop her, and over the course of the series, Freya will use her remarkable intelligence to search for a way to bring the old Artemis back to the surface.

Seth Acker. Seth is an eighteen year old from Barzhakan. He was the son of teachers on his home planet. Seth was engineered to be a fierce fighter, and as such he's bulky and looks intimidating. He's good at fighting and even killing when need be. However, he was not made to lack empathy the way Artemis was. As such, when he kills a person for the first time early in the first season, something that happens out of a necessity to protect his friends, he wrestles with his guilt. The guilt of his actions slowly tear him apart, but his instincts are so strong that when he gets into a fight, he just loses control and becomes a fierce machine.

Over the course of the series, Seth will struggle to overcome his fighting instincts and will learn to be able to walk away from fights and not be so aggressive all the time. However, he will continue to be a source of strength in the group, able to help his friends whenever they need his muscle.

Navid Gilani. Navid is a seventeen year old from Iris. Navid is from a large middle-class family He works at the shipping yard as a night job to help build a life for himself after school. Navid has never inspired to much, happy with a future working in the shipping yard. This is something that has always made him feel like somewhat of a disappointment to his parents. His parents, like Seth's parents, are teachers, which is a point of bonding for the two boys. Navid is on the Phoenix merely by circumstance of being at the wrong place at the wrong time. The crew kidnaps him partially for his knowledge of the cargo ships, but mostly they just do it so he can't rat them out.

At the beginning, Navid resents them for taking him. However, he's a laid-back guy, and after a while he begins to love the adventure of it all. Navid is sarcastic, often serving as the comedic relief of the show. He has a way of looking at everything with humor. However, before he got on the ship, he often struggled with the idea that he was a disappointment to his intelligent parents. Once on the ship, this still bothers him; he wonders if he's just going along with the crew as a way to run away from his planets. He worries about the pain he's caused his parents. This causes him to eventually try to send a message to his parents to tell them he's okay; however, this is intercepted by the Irisi forces, giving them a lead on the location of the teenagers.

Hetara Deleuze. Hetara is a sixteen year old Drifter. She shows up at the end of the pilot, having snuck onto the ship while the teenagers were on Asphodelus. Hetara was abducted as a child and raised by a "companion" (prostitution) company with the intent that she would eventually become one. She has been trained for this future her entire life. However, Hetara was not content with this future for herself. When she saw the teenagers

wandering around Asphodel City, she decided to stow herself away on their ship and join them on their adventures.

Hetara is sweet and innocent in a way that seems contradictory to the way she was raised. However, that nature is exactly why she decided to leave that life behind. The crew will spend the second episode debating whether or not to let her stay with them, eventually deciding that she could be of use to them since she knows about Drifter culture. She often helps the crew to interact with different Drifter communities, something that keeps them out of trouble a lot—that is, when they decide to listen to her.

Irisi Forces

Police Sergeant Leo Richards. Leo Richards is a part of Iris's forces to catch the teenagers. He believes in his planet, but he is blind to a lot of the injustices carried out by Iris's government. Although he starts out firmly set out to capture the teenagers, over the course of the series he will realize all of the horrific things Iris has done and plant himself on the side of the resistance, helping the teenagers to fight against Iris's rule. This will pit him against some of the people he originally aligned with, in particular Admiral Caine.

Admiral Jenson Caine. Jenson Caine is a military admiral who is firmly on the side of Iris. He knows all the things that Iris has done, but he believes that it was all for the best. He supports the Grand Mayor and his visions for Iris. Over time he will grow more determined to stop them, and he will grow even more firm in his beliefs as he is forced to stop on multiple fringe planets during his search for the teenagers. He sees the fringe planets as the ultimate form of chaos; he believes that they need larger governmental bodies such as Iris to rule them and give them order.

Grand Mayor Alexander James. Alexander James is the leader of Iris. He is the one who sends his forces out to capture the teenagers; he's also the person who allows experiments such as those carried out on the Barzhakian teenagers to occur. The Grand Mayor has a vision of a united star system under Irisi rule, believing that this will lead to peace in the system. In his heart, he believes that he is just doing what is best for his planet. Mayor James wants to create a legacy as the Grand Mayor who ushers in a golden age for Iris. He sees the teenagers as a huge threat to this future and will stop at nothing to capture them.

Amelia Jackson. Amelia Jackson is Camilla's mother. When Amelia Jackson was younger, she worked as a doctor on Asteria. While there, she had a relationship with the then-Prince of Asteria who has since become the Emperor. When she realized she was pregnant she left and went back to her home planet of Iris. She did not want the Prince to be forced to marry her, or for people to think she was trying to trap him in a relationship.

Although not seen much at the beginning of the series, her role in experimenting on the Barzhakian teenagers causes trouble for Camilla when the teenagers find out. Amelia is a doctor, and although she participated in the experiments, she worked hard to lessen their pain. In her mind, she thought that this was enough to ease her conscience. Over the course of the series, she will confront the role that she played in causing the pain of so many people and aliens, eventually taking a stance against Iris and their ways.

Series Style

The Phoenix will be an hour-long drama. Specifically, it is a space opera combined with a teen drama. The series will feature seasonal arcs, as well as stand-alone

planet-of-the-week episodes. There will be many shots of space as the crew flies past wondrous space oddities such as nebulae and weird-looking planets. The coloring of the show will vary depending on the location. While the show will generally be brightly lit when they're on the Phoenix, this will change when they're on planets, using different types of coloring to match the different planets that the crew lands on.

Season One

Season one will follow the crew on their way to Barzhakan. It will feature stops on various planets along the way, with individual episodes focusing more on those planets and the shenanigans the crew gets into on them. The mid-season finale will feature the Irisi forces closing in on them, ending with the crew about to be captured. The second half of the season will resume with the teenagers narrowly getting away and resuming their journey to Barzhakan. The first season will end with the crew landing on Barzhakan only to find that it is a shell of what the Barzhakian teenagers remember it to be. It is overrun by Irisi forces, with the native Barzhakians forced into slave labor under them.

Future Storylines

Season two will take place in the Baldurian system as the Barzhakian crew members search for their loved ones among the various planets. It will also feature Camilla trying to formulate a plan to get back to her own star system so that she can warn Asteria. This will cause tension between her and Ryder, who believe they should stay to help the Barzhakians.

Over the course of the series, the crew will struggle to decide what the right course of action is to take down Iris. There will be a slow shift that takes the teenagers from escaped fugitives who are running away from Iris to rebels who are in the frontline trying to take Iris down.

Note on Pagination

For the next section, my thesis will follow traditional teleplay formatting and pagination.

Regular formatting will resume for the bibliography.

THE PHOENIX

"Pilot"

Written by
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FIRST DRAFT

11 10, 2015

TEASER

FADE IN:

INT. IRIS GOVERNMENT HOSPITAL BASEMENT - NIGHT

The basement is dimly lit with grey walls. It's too empty, giving the room an eerie feel.

AMELIA JACKSON (40, dressed in a lab coat; tired) strolls through the basement, clearly at ease in the place.

She reaches a door marked "AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY," waving the pass on her lanyard in front of the sensor to the right. The door slides open, and Amelia walks through.

INT. IRIS GOVERNMENT HOSPITAL RESTRICTED AREA - CONTINUOUS

The corridor is brightly lit, a drastic contrast to the previous room. The entire hallway is bright white with a few silver accents on the doors. Exactly what one would expect in an evil laboratory.

Amelia walks past a door with a small window. Through the window we see a REPTILIAN HUMANOID ALIEN. The alien HISSES at Amelia as she walks by. She pays it no attention as she continues walking past.

She walks past windowed door, this one showing a YOUNG BOY (6 years old), crouched in a corner of the room, head tucked into his knees. The child WAILS, whether in pain or sadness is unclear. Amelia again ignores the door.

The next window shows an ANGRY WOMAN (30, she appears human except for her bright blue skin). As Amelia walks past, the woman BANGS TWICE on the window.

Amelia turns and locks eyes with the woman.

ANGRY WOMAN
(muffled)
I hope they kill you!

Amelia is unaffected by the woman's words. She turns back to face the front and continues walking.

She turns a corner, stopping cold when she sees that in this hallway there are four open doors.

Amelia reaches her wrist up, tapping on her watch a few times as she dials her supervisor.

AMELIA

Why are containment cells in the B-Wing open?

She waits for a moment, staring at her watch. No response comes, so she brings her wrist up again. She taps on her watch again in the same pattern, frantic this time.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

Hello?

A WEAK YELL comes from down the hall, sounding like a cry for help.

Amelia walks forward, hesitant now. She gets to the first door, hiding behind the wall before she glances in.

Empty.

She walks across the hall to the second door, not being sneaky this time.

Also empty.

She walks to the third door, stopping when she sees what's inside.

NURSE JACKIE MUNIZ (30) is on the floor, slumped against the wall. Tears fall out of her eyes as she clutches at her ribs, where her shirt is soaked in blood.

JACKIE

They escaped.

FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE - NIGHT

We see the planet IRIS, bright against the darkness of space, with a purple atmosphere and multiple moons. There's a large circular island in the middle, with little islands around it, making the planet resemble an eye.

We move towards the brightest light on the planet, stemming from a city right in the center.

EXT. DOWNTOWN IRIS CITY- CONTINUOUS

The city is vast and sprawling, life bustling throughout the town despite the late hour.

We find a young CAMILLA JACKSON (15, curious and adventurous), clad in a dark coat a large hood and a handkerchief tied around the bottom half of her face, being chased by THREE ARMED POLICE.

They wind through a gleaming downtown full of glass towers that stretch up as far as the eye can see.

They take a turn and are thrust into an area with dark, gritty brick buildings. Slums. Camilla seems at ease here, making sharp turns the guards don't see coming.

She gets further ahead and turns into an alley, quickly opening a nondescript door and ducking into it while they run past.

INT. RESTAURANT STORAGE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Camilla looks down at her watch and catches her breath. She looks up, taking in her surroundings as she SIGHS in relief.

EXT. LARGE STREET - NIGHT

Camilla walks down a large street, still in the gritty slums. It's quieter here than it was in the downtown area we first found her, not many people out on the street.

Camilla's coat is now in her hand, her handkerchief in her pocket, and she looks down, trying her best to blend in and not be noticed.

She stares up at one of the many brick buildings, not particularly different from any of the others and turns down the side alley.

She comes up to a fire escape and jumps up to pull it down. She begins to climb it.

EXT. FIRE ESCAPE - NIGHT

Camilla leans over the side of the fire escape, smiling as she glances down at the ground far below.

She turns toward the window and taps on the glass.

A beat, and the window opens to reveal RYDER HARRINGTON (15, sweet, boyish), who looks around outside before quickly ushering Camilla into his room.

INT. RYDER'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The room is small and messy, not much more than a bed and a dresser with clothes strewn around.

Ryder and Camilla stare at each other, Ryder looking almost giddy to see her.

RYDER

You're late.

CAMILLA

What can I say? I got a little held up.

Ryder sizes her up, eyebrows raised.

RYDER

Anyone follow you?

CAMILLA

Coppers. Lost them over on forty-fifth street. Shouldn't be a problem.

Camilla peeks out the window, looking around outside before shutting the curtains. She strides over and plops herself down on the bed.

RYDER

Did you get everything taken care of?

CAMILLA

(sarcastic)

No, I was chased all the way across the city because I failed to pull through. What do you think?

She pulls her coat up, reaching into the interior pocket. She pulls out a large envelope.

RYDER

(hopeful)

I think that we're going to be on the first shipment out of here tomorrow morning?

CAMILLA

Yep. We'll be out of the star system before anyone even notices we're missing.

RYDER

Good. Mr. Barinov is passed out on the couch. Really don't want to talk to him one last time before I split.

CAMILLA

Well you're in luck then. We leave in four hours.

INT. MAYOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The three cops from before sit in front GRAND MAYOR ALEXANDER JAMES (60, stern and angry). To their side stands POLICE SERGEANT LEO RICHARDS (40, large and intimidating).

MAYOR JAMES

You lost her?! Well go find her!

SERGEANT RICHARDS

My men tried, sir. From what the tell me, the girl was too fast.

MAYOR JAMES

A girl? What else can you tell me about her?

POLICE OFFICER # 1

She was small. Clever. Hard to tell how old, since her face was covered, but I'd guess she was a teenager, maybe early twenties at most.

The officer looks at the other two, who nod in agreement.

POLICE OFFICER # 2

She ran directly for downtown, went into a bad neighborhood real quick. She seemed to know the area well.

MAYOR JAMES

So what you're telling me, is a young impoverished girl managed to steal those documents? That's what you're saying. Tell me again, Richards, why do I trust you and your men with my security?

Sergeant Richards looks down, clearly not knowing what to say.

MAYOR JAMES (CONT'D)

Check every security camera between this building and wherever you lost that girl. I want to know who she is. I want her found, and I want her -

He's cut off by a SHRILL RINGING coming from Sergeant Richard's watch.

Sergeant Richards clicks a button on his watch, bringing it up to his ear.

SERGEANT RICHARDS

What is it?

The sergeant's eyes widen as he takes in what the other person is saying.

SERGEANT RICHARDS (CONT'D)

Okay, I'll be right there.

Sergeant Richards hangs up the call and looks up to the mayor.

SERGEANT RICHARDS (CONT'D)

Mr. Mayor, I am so sorry, but there's been an emergency down at the hospital. It's probably best you come down and see for yourself.

The men all stand up and follow Sergeant Richards out of the room.

INT. RYDER'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ryder sits down next to Camilla on the bed and puts an arm around her.

RYDER

I gotta be honest, I'm a little surprised you actually pulled it off.

CAMILLA

I said I would, didn't I? But don't get too excited. We're not even close to done. We won't be until these documents are in my father's hands. He'll know what to do then.

RYDER

You excited to see your dad?

CAMILLA

Of course. And excited to never see this place again.

RYDER

Yeah. That's probably the best part of all this. So run this by me one more time. What's the plan?

EXT. SHIPPING YARD - DAWN

Camilla and Ryder creep through the dark shipping yard, on the lookout for people; the two are carrying two large backpacks on their backs.

CAMILLA (O.S.)

We'll go to the shipping yard at dawn. I ordered to have a large crate shipped to Asteria. It should be waiting on the platform to be loaded onto the cargo drone.

They come up to a large box, which sits in a row behind two other boxes. Camilla walks forward and opens it while Ryder stares up at it hesitantly.

RYDER (O.S.)

We're going to spend the entire ride to Asteria locked in a crate? Sounds safe. And comfortable.

CAMILLA (O.S.)

It's got some holes for us to breathe and an opening on the inside. We'll be able to get out once we're on board.

RYDER (O.S.)

If you say so.

INT. SHIPPING CRATE - DAWN

Camilla and Ryden step into the crate, and Camilla closes the door behind them. It's dark for a moment, then we adjust to the light seeping in from the small holes around the edges.

CAMILLA (O.S.)

We'll need to be quiet. No one can know that we're in there. It shouldn't be long before we're loaded onto the ship. After that, all we have to do is sit back and wait until we get to Asteria. Should be smooth sailing.

The two settle into the box, leaning their head back as they wait.

EXT. SHIPPING YARD - CONTINUOUS

THE PHOENIX, one of many cargo drones, this one small in comparison to some of the others that are parked in the yard, glides down onto the landing strip.

NAVID GILANI (17, tired and lazy), a young shipping yard worker, paces next to three small crates, talking into his headset.

In his hands is a small tablet; he pauses his pacing and punches directions into it, causing the back hatch of the ship to slowly open downwards.

Navid once again begins pacing. He presses a few more buttons on his tablet, and a small crane rolls up.

NAVID

I'm coming off the longest shift of my life, I swear. One more craft to go, and there are only a few shipments on it. I don't even understand why they think they need me here.

(MORE)

NAVID (CONT'D)
These machines practically do
everything for themselves. I'm just
here to press a few buttons.

The crane stops next to the first of the crates, picking it
up rolling it towards the Phoenix.

NAVID (CONT'D)
Don't worry, I'll be there. I just
need a few hours of Z's and a few
caffeine tabs and I'll be good to
go. Just one last ship to oversee
and I'll be off. Okay, we'll talk
later.

Navid clicks a button on his wrist, ending the call. He
stands awkwardly, looking on as the crane grabs the second
box.

INT. SHIPPING CRATE - CONTINUOUS

Camilla and Ryder stare at each other as we hear Navid's
MUFFLED HUMMING.

Ryder makes an exasperated face at Navid's antics, and
Camilla chokes back a LAUGH.

The crate around them begins to shake, and their amusement
cuts off as they nervously grab at the floor of the crate.

EXT. SHIPPING YARD - CONTINUOUS

Navid HUMS as the crane lifts the last crate off the ground
and carries it over to the Phoenix.

It's halfway to the ship when there's a flurry of movement
nearby, alerting Navid.

NAVID
Hello?

The yard is silent except for the whirring of the crane
moving the crate. A beat passes, and Navid relaxes.

A shadow moves in the distance. Navid tenses again, squinting
as he tries to see what the movement is.

NAVID (CONT'D)
Jessie, is that you?

The shadow freezes, seeming to blend in with the background.

There's another flurry of movement, off to Navid's other side. He turns around in a panic.

NAVID (CONT'D)

Come on, dude. This isn't funny.

Navid turns around, looking for whoever or whatever is out there. Terrified, he reaches down to his wrist and begins to dial something into his watch.

He's only dialed two buttons when someone comes up behind him. A hand CLAMPS DOWN on his wrist, and another locks around Navid's other arm.

The hands belong to SETH ACKER (17, muscular and scary), who looks almost giddy at having stopped the other boy before he could call for help.

SETH

Sorry, bud. Can't let you do that.

Navid's eyes widen in fear as Seth grins down at him.

A trio walks out of the shadows. They are JASON SANTIAGO (18, cocky and charismatic), ARTEMIS MOON (18, fierce and intimidating), and FREYA BURNS (16, quirky and intelligent).

JASON

Oh, come on now, Seth. Don't give the boy a heart attack.

The trio stops right in front of the two.

SETH

He was about to call for help.

Jason considers this and looks at Artemis, nodding towards Navid. Artemis steps forward and takes the watch off, throwing it on the ground and stepping on it.

NAVID

What do you guys want?

The group ignores him, and Artemis reaches down and yanks the tablet out of his hand. She inspects it and is about to drop it when Freya reaches out to grab it from her.

FREYA

Don't do that.

Freya turns the tablet on and quickly begins tapping away at it.

FREYA (CONT'D)

Just what I thought. This is our ticket out of here.

ARTEMIS

How so?

FREYA

It's the control unit for the drones.

JASON

Okay, onto the ship. Fast.

SETH

What should I do with this one?

Seth looks down at Navid, shaking the boy a bit for emphasis. Navid glares at him.

JASON

He's coming with us. We might need him.

NAVID

What? No! Trust me, you don't need me. Just leave me behind. I won't tell anyone you were here.

The two boys ignore him, Seth turning to Jason.

SETH

You serious?

JASON

He knows more about these ships than any of us.

Freya looks up from where she's still tapping at the tablet.

FREYA

Not for long.

JASON

Still. It might be good to have someone who's actually from this star system with us.

Although the others don't seem to agree with him, they don't argue. Seth pushes Navid forward, and the group walks onto the ship.

Freya presses a button on the tablet, and the door closes behind them.

There's a beat of silence, the shipping yard now empty,
before the sound of THE PHOENIX'S ENGINES STARTING UP begins
to HUM.

The Phoenix slowly lifts off the ground, hovering in the air
for a moment before it SHOOTS OUT into the sky, leaving the
empty shipping yard behind.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

INT. IRIS GOVERNMENT HOSPITAL RESTRICTED AREA - DAWN

The three police officers enter the ER, followed by Mayor James and Sergeant Richards. They walk through the destroyed hallway, surveying the area.

They are greeted at the door by OFFICER LUCINDA MARTIN (early 30s).

OFFICER MARTIN

Fourteen wounded, three in critical condition. One victim isn't expected to last the night.

SERGEANT RICHARDS

Any suspects?

OFFICER MARTIN

More than just suspects, sir. We've got their faces on camera. Doesn't seem they cared too much for anonymity.

She pulls out a tablet with pictures of the suspects on it. They are the four teenagers from earlier.

OFFICER MARTIN (CONT'D)

The four fugitives were patients in the experimental wing.

MAYOR JAMES

The one we're funding?

OFFICER MARTIN

Yes, sir.

SERGEANT RICHARDS

Wait, they were *patients*?

MAYOR JAMES

Is there any way the incident here and the one at the capitol are related?

OFFICER MARTIN

Highly unlikely, sir. The two incidents occurred simultaneously, and from what we've gathered here, the patients have had no contact with any civilians. Officially, they've never even been on Iris.

The mayor nods and turns to Sergeant Richards, a serious look on his face.

MAYOR JAMES

Divide your force. Some need to be looking for these fugitives. The rest need to figure out the identity of the girl who broke into the capitol. Iris won't be safe until we find these criminals.

SERGEANT RICHARDS

Yes, sir. Of course.

INT. CRATE - NIGHT

In the crate, we see Camilla and Ryder sitting back, oblivious to what has happened.

NAVID

(muffled)

Please let me go!

Camilla JOLTS UP, sharing a bewildered look with Ryder.

SETH

(muffled)

Stop whining.

Camilla tries to peek out of one of the holes in the box, catching only the blurry silhouettes of the group.

She motions for Ryder to look, and he complies. He sees the movement through the holes, but it's impossible to make anything out.

They share a look, Camilla moving to open the crate. Ryder CLAMPS a hand down on Camilla's wrist, shaking his head. She doesn't listen, pushing the crate open.

INT. PHOENIX CARGO HOLD - CONTINUOUS

The group stands around, Navid still being restrained by Seth. They look at Freya as she works on the tablet.

FREYA

There should be a manual override option in the control center, as well as a way to disable the GPS tracker on the ship, though that part should be trickier to hack.

She walks away, towards a door at the front of the room, when there's a CRASH from behind the group as Camilla and Ryder stumble out of the crate.

CAMILLA

Who are you people?

The group all stare at the two in shock, Artemis staring at Camilla in particular, as if trying to figure out who she is.

It's Navid who breaks out of his stupor first.

NAVID

Seriously? There are more of you?

JASON

No. They're not with us.

They all stare at each other in confusion.

FREYA

I don't have time for this.

With that, she's off, ignoring everyone as she walks through the door. Artemis looks at Ryder and Camilla suspiciously before turning to follow Freya.

INT. PHOENIX COMMAND CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Freya storms in and strides up to the control panel, pressing at the main screen at lightning speed. Artemis stares on in confusion.

FREYA

Here we go. Okay, I've got the code for the manual override, but first we need to disable the GPS tracker so the command center can't see where we are.

ARTEMIS

How'd you get the code?

FREYA

Please. What do you think I was doing while Seth and Jason were arguing about the boy? According to the schematics, the tracker should be located somewhere on the left of the panel. If I'm careful I should be able to jam it so that we still have a map of where we are, but Iris won't be able to read our location.

ARTEMIS

So what does it look like?

FREYA

It should be a little antenna, just like...ooh, that.

She reaches out towards a small antenna in the corner that's moving around.

FREYA (CONT'D)

Neat. Okay, now disabling it can't be too hard...

INT. PHOENIX CARGO HOLD - CONTINUOUS

The two groups are at a stand still, sizing each other up.

CAMILLA

What do you want?

NAVID

Good question. I'd like to know that too!

Seth TIGHTENS his grip on Navid, causing Navid to GASP in discomfort. Seth lets him go, pushing him forward a little. Navid quickly steps away, taking a position between the two groups.

JASON

I asked you first. Who the heck are you? Why are you here?

CAMILLA

Why should I tell you?

SETH

Well, for one, you're outnumbered, and you're both so small I could snap you in half.

(MORE)

SETH (CONT'D)

Plus, we're armed. You're not. I'd say that makes us the ones in charge.

Jason amusedly glances between Camilla and Seth.

JASON

Now, now, Seth. No need to resort to threats. I'm sure there's enough room on this ship for all of us.

He turns back to Camilla.

JASON (CONT'D)

However, Seth is right. We do have the upperhand. So I'll ask you one more time. Who are you? What are you running away from?

CAMILLA

I'm not running away from anything.

Ryder steps forward.

RYDER

My name's Ryder. This is Camilla. We have important information regarding secrets being kept by the Republic. We're on our way to Asteria to warn Emperor Lyon.

Seth SCOFFS.

SETH

What makes you think the emperor of Asteria would listen to a couple of teenage runaways?

CAMILLA

He'll want to listen to me. He doesn't know it yet, but I'm his daughter.

INT. PHOENIX COMMAND CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Freya presses a button on the control center.

FREYA

And that should just about do it. Iris shouldn't be able to track our movement anymore. Now, I'll just...

Freya moves over to another part of the control panel.

FREYA (CONT'D)

Go get Jason for me before I
override the course we're on.

Artemis nods and walks out of the room.

INT. PHOENIX CARGO HOLD - CONTINUOUS

Jason, Seth, and Navid stare at Camilla with new regard.

RYDER

There. Now you know our story. So
answer the question: what do you
want?

JASON

We want what everyone wants:
freedom.

NAVID

Really? Freedom's what you're
after? Real ironic that you decided
to hold me captive, then.

SETH

There's a price for everything.
Forgive us if we're willing to
exchange your freedom for ours.

NAVID

Definitely not forgiven.

JASON

Look...

He trails off, apparently realizing he doesn't know the boy's
name.

NAVID

Navid.

JASON

Right. Navid. This situation is
only temporary. We'll let you go as
soon as we get to our destination.

Artemis walks through the door, but the group pays her no
attention.

NAVID

Oh, right. You'll let me free, on another planet on the complete other side of the star system. No big deal.

CAMILLA

What do you want in Asteria, anyway?

JASON

Asteria? We don't want anything there. We just want to get home.

CAMILLA

Well, this ship is on its way to Asteria.

ARTEMIS

Not for long. Freya's about to override the ship's autopilot. She wants you in there, Jason.

CAMILLA

What!?

Artemis and Jason ignore her and walk through the door.

She stares after them for a moment, outraged. She and Ryder rush to follow them, trailed by Navid and Seth.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

Freya works at the control panel, glancing back when the door opens.

FREYA

Good, you're here. Should I go ahead and change our course?

Jason nods, but Camilla steps forward, pissed.

CAMILLA

No way! This ship needs to go to Asteria.

FREYA

No offense, but I don't take orders from you. Jason?

JASON

Do it. Send us home.

CAMILLA

What? No! You need to drop us off
in Asteria. Please. Trust me when I
say we need to get there.

Jason looks like he's considering it, but Seth steps up,
enraged.

SETH

Dude, no. It's way too risky. We'll
be setting ourselves up to get
caught. We need out of this star
system - and away from all these
sadistic psychopaths - as soon as
possible.

ARTEMIS

He's right, Jay.
(to Camilla and Ryder)
We can't risk dropping you off. You
need to come with us.

JASON

Go ahead, Freya.

Freya pushes a few keys on the control panel, and a
notification FLASHES on the screen, prompting Freya for an
authorization code.

COMPUTER

Manual Override Request. Please
enter your authorization code.

Freya quickly types a code in.

COMPUTER (CONT'D)

Manual Override Request Granted.

FREYA

(to herself)
Now, just need to set new
coordinates for the autopilot, and
it should be smooth sailing.

Navid stares on, eyebrows drawn close in confusion. He looks
up to where Jason's standing.

NAVID

Where exactly are you taking us?
Where's home?

JASON

Barzhakan.

NAVID

Barzhakan? There's like five star systems between here and there.

SETH

Yeah, it's a long trip. Trust me, we remember from the first time. Don't freak out about it.

Seth disregards Navid like he's just being overdramatic, but Navid shakes his head in frustration.

NAVID

There's not enough fuel to get us there.

Freya looks up from the control panel, alert.

FREYA

What are you talking about? This ship's tank has room for ten plasma fuel cans. That's more than enough fuel capacity to get us there.

NAVID

Yeah, it has the capacity, but it's running pretty low from the day's shipments. It was set to refuel in Asteria.

FREYA

That doesn't make sense. This was the first shipment out today. It was supposed to refuel last night.

NAVID

Technically, yeah. But for all intents and purposes, this was the last shipment out from last night. It hit a bit of a delay with a debris shower.

Freya starts typing into the control panel, trying to prove him wrong. When the information pops up, she slumps over, defeated.

FREYA

He's right.

Navid holds his hand out to catch everyone's attention.

NAVID

You're going to need to stop
somewhere in the system to refuel,
or the ship's gonna run out of
power somewhere between this star
system and the next.

The teenagers all star at Navid, dread on their faces.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

INT. SERGEANT'S OFFICE - DAY

Sergeant Richards sits at his desk, typing at his computer, looking like he hasn't slept at all. The tablet on his desk lets out a LOUD RING.

Sergeant Richards leans forward and answers it.

SERGEANT RICHARDS

Sergeant Leo Richards
speaking...wait, what...Can you get
me the security tape? Yes, ma'am.
We'll look into it. Can you come
into the station so we can take
your statement? And please bring
the footage. Thank you ma'am. See
you soon.

Sergeant Richards presses a button, transferring over to another call.

SERGEANT RICHARDS (CONT'D)

Hello, this is Sergeant Richards.
Hold on with the search for the
four fugitives, I think I have a
lead. Things just got a bit more
complicated.

He clicks to end the call and leans back, letting out a DEEP SIGH.

INT. PHOENIX COMMAND CENTER - NIGHT

Only moments have passed since we last saw the group, and everyone stares at Navid in shock.

JASON

Your government could be close
behind us. We don't have time to
stop for fuel.

NAVID

We're gonna have to make time.
Either we stop, or we'll be
stranded in between star systems,
wasting away at our power until
eventually the ship dies, and we go
out along with it.

CAMILLA

Well that settles it. We'll stop in Asteria. You can let me, Ryder, and Navid go, and you guys can continue on home. We'll forget this ever happened.

SETH

No way. What if someone noticed the ship was tampered with? We'll be in custody the second we land.

CAMILLA

Well what are your other options? This is the only that makes sense.

JASON

She's right. Asteria's already expecting us. We try to land on another planet, they'll see us as a threat, blow us out of the sky.

ARTEMIS

We can't go to Asteria. They'll send us back. Asteria's allied with Iris.

RYDER

(under his breath)
Not for long.

Camilla shoots him a warning look, though it seems the others didn't hear his comment, with the exception of Jason.

ARTEMIS

We'll be flying right back into their hands. I'd rather die.

SETH

Good plan, Artie. I vote for death too.

Artemis storms over to Seth, pushing him against the wall.

ARTEMIS

Call me Artie one more time. I dare you.

FREYA

There's another option.

Everyone looks at Freya, waiting for her to elaborate. Artemis lets go of Seth.

FREYA (CONT'D)

We could land on a fringe planet.

They all look at her like the idea is ridiculous.

SETH

Very funny.

She ignores him, staring into the direction of the control panel, her face scrunched up as she thinks.

FREYA

I'm serious. They don't usually have the same security as the inner planets; they might not even notice us coming in. We just need to try to land near a big city; they should have fuel there.

JASON

Freya, that's too risky.

FREYA

It's the smartest option.

ARTEMIS

Of course it's the smartest option, you came up with it. Doesn't mean it won't get us killed.

FREYA

I trust you and Seth will be able to keep us safe.

JASON

Let's do it.

(to Freya)

Program in the coordinates for whichever planet you think is our best bet.

Camilla steps forward.

CAMILLA

What?! No. No way. We can't go to the fringe planets. It's suicide.

Jason stares at her for a moment before he shakes his head and pulls her aside.

JASON

Look, I'm sorry you got caught up in this, but trust me when I say that it's important for us to get as far away from Iris as we can, as quickly as possible.

CAMILLA

I believe you, but Ryder and I need to get this information to Asteria. People could die if we don't.

Jason looks at her, guilty, but he says nothing as he walks back to the group.

INT. SERGEANT'S OFFICE - DAY

The sergeant is still at his desk, a call open on his watch.

SERGEANT RICHARDS

Yes Grand Mayor, I've seen stills of the footage myself. It's definitely the Barzhakian fugitives, and they've taken a young man captive with them.

(a beat)

A seventeen year old shipping yard worker, Navid Gilani.

(a beat)

No, sir. The boy does not seem significant. Wrong place, wrong time, it would appear.

(a beat)

Of course, Mr. Mayor. I'll send the message out. We'll have the entire star system looking for them and the stolen ship.

The Sergeant's door is THROWN OPEN, and one of the police officers from earlier rushes in.

POLICE OFFICER # 3

We've identified the girl from earlier. A street camera caught her coming out of the alley where we lost her just minutes later. I ran facial recognition.

He places a tablet down on Sergeant Richard's desk. On the screen is a photo of Camilla, what looks like a school ID picture.

POLICE OFFICER # 3 (CONT'D)
Her name is Camilla Jackson.
Fifteen years old. She's the
daughter of Dr. Amelia Jackson.

SERGEANT RICHARDS
You're positive she's the thief?

POLICE OFFICER # 3
Yes, sir.

SERGEANT RICHARDS
What the hell would an Irisi
schoolgirl want with the secrets in
those files?

POLICE OFFICER # 3
That's what's interesting, sir.
Amelia Jackson is one of the
doctors who was working on the four
Barzhakian captives.

SERGEANT RICHARDS
You think Ms. Jackson has something
to do with this?

POLICE OFFICER # 3
I think it's worth looking into,
sir.

The sergeant nods and stands up.

SERGEANT RICHARDS
You're coming with me.

INT. PHOENIX COMMAND CENTER - NIGHT

The group is sitting around the control panel.

CAMILLA
This is a terrible idea. We can
still turn around and land on
Asteria.

ARTEMIS
Not happening.

CAMILLA
I don't understand the big deal.
It's safer than landing on a fringe
planet. How are we even supposed to
pay for the fuel out there?

Already annoyed, Artemis snaps, turning on Camilla.

ARTEMIS

Look, I don't care that you want to get to Asteria. It's not happening. I am getting the hell out of this star system, it doesn't matter who I have to take down to do it. You have no clue what happened to us on that planet you call home. Asteria would send us back to Iris, and I can't let that happen. So sit back, and shut up, or I'll make sure we leave you behind on whatever fringe planet we land on. Let the drifters do whatever they'd like with you.

Everyone is silent. After a beat, Ryder leans forward.

RYDER

They wouldn't, though. The Asterians. They wouldn't send you back to Iris, not once they know what we know.

CAMILLA

Ryder!

Camilla's tone is clear; Ryder has said too much.

It's too late. Everyone's interest has been caught.

JASON

What exactly do you know?

Camilla and Ryder share a look, Camilla subtly shaking her head. Ryder looks down, considering, before looking at Camilla, an apology on his face.

Ryder turns to Jason. Camilla reaches to grab his arm, a last warning.

RYDER

Iris is planning on invading Asteria, as well as the rest of the planets in the star system. The Republic is preparing to declare war.

Artemis SCOFFS.

ARTEMIS

Figures. First they invade another system, steal kids from our homes, and perform experiments on us. Then they turn on their own allies. That's one gem of a planet you've got there.

Understanding dawns on Camilla's face.

CAMILLA

You're the soldiers. The ones they've been engineering.

ARTEMIS

You mean the ones they've been violating. And we're not you guys' soldiers.

FREYA

We're just kids. We want to go home.

ARTEMIS

And we'll do whatever it takes to get there.

INT. CAMILLA'S FRONT HALLWAY - DAY

Sergeant Richards and the third police officer stand in the apartment hallway. Sergeant Richards knocks on the door.

A beat, and then the door opens to reveal an exhausted Amelia Jackson.

AMELIA

Yes, officers?

The officers stare at her, eyebrows furrowed as her smile fades into confusion.

INT. CAMILLA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

The sergeant and the officer sit down on the couch, while Amelia takes a seat on the love seat.

AMELIA

Is this about what happened at the hospital? Because I already talked to an officer about that.

(MORE)

AMELIA (CONT'D)

Of course, I'll help out however I can, but I really didn't see anything prior to finding Jackie on the floor. I was on break at the time.

SERGEANT RICHARDS

Ma'am, this isn't about the hospital. We're here to talk to you about your daughter, Camilla.

AMELIA

Camilla? What about her?

SERGEANT RICHARDS

Do you know where your daughter is right now, ma'am?

AMELIA

She should be at school right now.

SERGEANT RICHARDS

Ms. Jackson, your daughter didn't show up for school this morning. Last night, Camilla broke into the grand mayor's office and stole classified documents. She evaded our police officers and is now missing.

AMELIA

Camilla? That's not possible. Camilla would never...

The officers share a look before Sergeant Richards leans forward and goes on.

SERGEANT RICHARDS

Ma'am, that's not all. Due to your position dealing with the Barzhakian fugitives, added to the coinciding timing of the two incidents, we have reason to suspect that Camilla was working with the fugitives against the republic.

Amelia shakes her head.

AMELIA

That's not possible.

SERGEANT RICHARDS

We understand this may be surprising, but we have security footage of your daughter running away from police.

POLICE OFFICER # 3

We just want to get to the bottom of the situation and find out where your daughter is.

INT. PHOENIX COMMAND CENTER - NIGHT

The teenagers sit around the control panel, Freya in the center.

A dark, rocky planet begins to come into view in front of them.

FREYA

Only half an hour before we land on Asphodelus.

NAVID

Asphodelus? We're landing on Asphodelus? It's like you want us to get killed.

FREYA

Asphodel City is the largest drifter colony in this star system. It's our best bet for refueling.

NAVID

Well our best bet is populated by criminals and lunatics.

SETH

You scared?

NAVID

Course I'm scared. You'd have to be stupid not to be.

SETH

You calling me stupid?

NAVID

More like delusional. And in denial, if you've really convinced yourself you're not scared.

SETH

Fear is for the weak.

NAVID

Fear is for the smart. You know,
the ones with survival skills.

Jason leans into Camilla while the others continue ARGUING in the background. Artemis eavesdrops on their conversation.

JASON

So how'd you know about us?

CAMILLA

What?

JASON

You weren't surprised when Artemis mentioned the experiments. You already knew about them. How'd you know? About us, about Iris declaring war.

CAMILLA

My mom, she...works for the government. I overheard her on the phone, sounded suspicious, so I looked into it, got Ryder to help. Figured out what was going on.

JASON

And then you jumped on a cargo drone to Asteria to warn everyone.

CAMILLA

Well, there were a few more steps involved, but yeah. That about sums it up.

Jason LAUGHS and shakes his head.

JASON

That's brave. Most people wouldn't--

Camilla ignores him and goes on. She raises her voice so everyone can hear.

CAMILLA

Seriously, though. How are we going to afford a full tank of fuel for the ship?

SETH

We're going to a planet of criminals. Why don't we just steal some?

RYDER

Like you said, they're all criminals. You really think stealing from them will be that easy?

SETH

I'm sure we could manage.

RYDER

Yeah, manage to get ourselves killed. You must not want to get back to Barzhakan that badly.

Seth leans forward, intimidation clear on his mind.

SETH

Don't talk like you know me.

Once again, Carmilla ignores everyone.

CAMILLA

I've got some money, but it definitely isn't enough. Wasn't planning on the ship taking a detour.

Navid, who has been listening in, scoffs.

NAVID

Some detour.

Jason considers what Camilla has said.

JASON

Hey, Navid, you got any clue what's being held in the cargo on this thing?

NAVID

I just load the stuff.

Jason looks at Camilla and grins.

JASON

Let's go check it out.

The two get up and walk out.

INT. PHOENIX CARGO HOLD - NIGHT

Jason and Camilla walk into the cargo hold. Jason looks around before walking over to a wall, where there are various tools, grabbing something that looks similar to a crow bar.

He strides up to a random crate, forcing it open. Inside are smaller boxes.

JASON

Looks like civilian mail.

Camilla catches on and smiles.

CAMILLA

Civilian mail between Iris and Asteria?

JASON

I'd be willing to bet there's something pretty valuable somewhere in here. Start opening boxes, and I'll see what's in the other crates.

Camilla sits down, working to open the first box, while Jason walks over to another crate.

INT. PHOENIX COMMAND CENTER - NIGHT

Artemis and Freya stand at the front of the room. Freya pilots the ship while Artemis sits back and watches.

Camilla and Jason walk in, smiling.

RYDER

Right on time. We're nearly there.

The two take their seats.

ARTEMIS

Find anything valuable?

JASON

Oh yeah. Should be more than enough to barter for some fuel.

Freya presses a button on the panel.

FREYA

Prepare for landing.

Everyone moves to buckle themselves into their seats as the Phoenix speeds up, entering into the Asphodelian atmosphere.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

EXT. ASPHODELUS FIELD - DAY

The terrain is black and rocky. No life grows out of the ground.

Although it is day, the sky is dark, save for a small point of light above them. The biggest source of light comes from the horizon, Asphodel City in the near distance.

The Phoenix comes speeding down from the sky, slowing as it gets closer to the ground. It hovers for a moment, the bottom opening up, legs growing out of it. It lands with a soft THUD.

The back hatch opens, the door slowly descending down to the ground. The crew stands in the doorway, surveying the landscape.

NAVID

Seriously? We're seriously getting out here?

The rest of the crew SIGHS and rolls their eyes at him.

NAVID (CONT'D)

I'm just saying, how is this place even habitable?

FREYA

It barely is, and it wasn't originally. The drifters had to terraform the planet. The farther you get from Asphodel City, the less survivable it gets. Rumor has it that the other side of the planet is completely uninhabitable. The atmosphere becomes toxic.

NAVID

We landed on a planet that's half toxic?

(to everyone else)

Why are we listening to her?

Freya steps in front of the rest of the group, tablet in hand.

FREYA

Because your people engineered me to be a genius. Now let's get going, we'll want to be out of here before night fall.

She walks off the ship, stepping onto the rocky ground. The others follow, Navid the last to move as he glances up at the dark sky in confusion. What's the difference?

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

The room is cold and harshly sterile-looking, completely white and silver.

Sergeant Richards and Amelia Jackson sit on opposite sides of a small silver table.

SERGEANT RICHARDS

Are you sure you never talked about your work to Camilla? Maybe mentioned your patients, something that would make her want to reach out and help them?

AMELIA

I've already told you, Camilla knows nothing about my job. She can't possibly be working with the Barzhakians.

SERGEANT RICHARDS

Ma'am, with all due respect, we're not inclined to believe you. You're working in a highly classified government program, and then your patients and your daughter commit simultaneous crimes, evading police and escaping the planet. It's awfully suspicious.

AMELIA

You think I had something to do with the crimes?

Sergeant Richards opens his mouth to say something but the door to the room opens, one of the cops from earlier stepping in. He walks in and hands the officer a tablet with a video paused on it.

EXT. ASPHODEL CITY ROAD- DAY

A CROWD OF PEOPLE AND ALIENS OF VARIOUS SPECIES mill about the busy street, the crew cutting their way between them.

The crowd is full of people dressed in dark clothing, most are rather dirty. Many have tattoos and piercings. Most have hostile looks on their faces.

There are aliens of all kinds; some look like humans, just with added features like extra eyes or limbs. Others don't look human at all. Lizard creatures. Bug-like humanoids.

The teenagers walk through, trying to look as confident as possible. They fail miserably.

The four Barzhakians flank the outside of the group, forcing the Irisi teenagers between them.

SETH

Try to run, and you're dead.

The Irisi teenagers nod, eyes wide.

FREYA

Heads down, try not to make eye contact.

Freya looks down at her tablet, eyebrows furrowed in confusion. She taps at something on the screen and grins.

FREYA (CONT'D)

They have the network here. That's a pleasant surprise. According to this, there should be a market a few blocks down. We can trade for a few cans of fuel there. I think about five will be enough to get us home.

Navid nods his agreement. Freya smiles at him, and Navid glances down at her tablet.

NAVID

You might want to put that away. Wouldn't want my most prized possession to get stolen by a drifter.

Freya nods and pockets the tablet into her bag.

SETH

Your most prized possession is a standard-issue tablet?

NAVID

Yeah, I've got like a millenia-worth of music and movies on that thing.

ARTEMIS

Whatever. Irisi entertainment is crap.

NAVID

It's not all Irisi. I've got things from all of the English-speaking galaxies. Even got a few Barzhakian classics on there.

SETH

No way.

NAVID

I'll show you as soon as we get back on the ship. Provided we get back alive.

CAMILLA

Getting back alive would be nice.

JASON

Can we stop talking about this and focus on the task? We need to get the fuel and get out of here.

The lightheartedness dies out in an instant, and they all focus on making their way through the crowd.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

Amelia sits alone in the interrogation room. The door opens, and Sergeant Richards walks in, followed by Police Officer # 1.

Sergeant Richards stares at Amelia, a serious look on his face as the video on his tablet comes to an end.

He gestures for Amelia to stand up and she complies, though her face is panicked.

AMELIA

But, there must be some kind of mistake. I had nothing to do with what happened last night!

Sergeant Richards urges the police officer forward, and the officer reaches down to handcuff Amelia, leading her towards the door.

SERGEANT RICHARDS

Ms. Jackson, we currently have forces throughout the star system looking for your daughter and the other teenagers. Once we find them, we can get to the bottom of what really happened, and if it's true that you're innocent, clear your name.

He stares at Amelia menacingly, as if he doesn't actually expect her name to be cleared.

EXT. ASPHODEL MARKET - DAY

The group stands at a stand, where a DRIFTER MERCHANT (mid-40s, only a little sleezy-looking) stands behind a table that's covered in plasma fuel cans.

JASON

How do I know this fuel is good quality?

DRIFTER MERCHANT

Go ahead and inspect it yourself.

Jason looks down at the table, pretending he knows what he's looking at.

Navid SCOFFS and pushes him aside, picking up one of the cans. He inspects it in his hand, turning it around and testing out the weight.

NAVID

Well, it's not the highest quality stuff, but it'll do the job just fine.

Jason nods, reaching into his messenger bag to pull out four tablets.

JASON

Four tablets for six cans.

DRIFTER MERCHANT

Tablets? Those are barely worth two cans. Fuel is getting expensive.

JASON

Take another look. This is the newest model. They aren't set to release in the inner planets for weeks, and you know that means it'll be months before they make it out here. Six cans.

DRIFTER MERCHANT

Four cans. One can for each tablet, seeing as there's no way you came about these things legally.

JASON

Very well then.

He reaches into his bag and pulls out another two tablets with a cheeky grin towards the Merchant.

JASON (CONT'D)

We'll be taking six cans.

He nods at the table, and Seth, Artemis, and Freya all reach out to place cans into their bags.

JASON (CONT'D)

Pleasure doing business with you.

They turn and walk away from the merchant, who grins down at the tablets.

NAVID

You know you got screwed in that deal, right?

JASON

Eh, whatever. Not like we had to work hard to get those tablets. And there are plenty more where those came from. Let's go trade for some food and other necessities before we leave.

EXT. ASPHODEL CITY ROAD - NIGHT

The group is happy, walking down the street with their bags stuffed with new things, some of them even holding new bags.

A YOUNG DRIFTER COUPLE bumps into the group, halting them in the tracks. The drifters say nothing as they move to walk past them, but then they stop, recognition dawning on the first one's face.

DRIFTER # 1

Hey, I know you guys. You're all over all the news feeds. You're the seven criminals they're looking for.

DRIFTER # 2

Oh, yeah! You kids are worth a lot of money.

The group freezes, scared shock on their face.

JASON

Run!

The teenagers listen, running in the opposite direction, weaving their way through the crowd.

Seth, who was closest to the drifters, gets yanked back by his backpack.

The other teenagers run through the crowd, putting as much distance between them and the drifters as they can. They leave Seth behind.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

EXT. ASPHODEL CITY ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

The group of teenagers, minus Seth, turns down a dark alleyway.

They run for their lives. They're alone, having evaded those following them. As they're running, Freya stops.

Jason stops next, turning back to her.

JASON

Frey, what are you doing?

FREYA

We left Seth back there.

ARTEMIS

He'll catch up. We need to get back to the ship.

FREYA

We can't just leave him.

ARTEMIS

Why not? It's the smartest option. Isn't that supposed to be important to you?

FREYA

Maybe. But it's also the selfish option.

NAVID

Look, not to rush you guys, but you need to decide. We're doing no good just standing here.

JASON

Freya's right. We have to go back for him.

ARTEMIS

Seth can take care of himself.

FREYA

Well I'm going back for him. With or without you.

ARTEMIS

That's stupid. You're useless in a fight.

JASON

Yeah, but I'm not. And I'm going with her. Are you guys coming with us? Or sticking with the heartless one.

He turns to the Irisi teens, dismissing Artemis.

Artemis flinches, but it goes unnoticed by everyone except Freya, who stares at her friend with desperation.

Ryder and Camilla share a guilty look.

CAMILLA

I think we should go back to the ship.

Jason SCOFFS and shakes his head like he can't believe what he's hearing.

JASON

Just like an Irisi. You know, your people did that to her. What the hell is your excuse?

He turns around and walks back toward the direction they came from. Freya stays back for a moment, staring at Artemis.

EXT. ASPHODEL CITY ROAD - NIGHT

The drifter clutches Seth by his backpack. Seth shrugs it off and grabs at it. He YANKS it out of the drifter's hand, SWINGS it back and SLAMS it down into the drifter's face.

He looks at the other drifter and down at his backpack, making a split decision. He backs away and then HURLS the backpack at the second drifter before scrambling away, hurrying after the others.

EXT. ASPHODEL CITY ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

The group stares at each other, Freya and Jason on one side, the rest on the other side. Freya is close to tears as she stares at Artemis.

FREYA

You don't have to be like this. You can be more than what they made you.

Freya turns to follow Jason, but Jason stops abruptly as he nearly collides with:

Seth, as he comes running down the alleyway. He stops to catch his breath, looking up at the group.

SETH

I lost two of the fuel cans.

Everyone turns to gape at him.

Freya runs into Seth's arms, hugging him tight. A moment passes, and she leans back and slaps his arm.

FREYA

Who cares about the fuel cans? We thought they had you.

SETH

Aw, come on. Have a little faith in me. A couple of drifters are nothing.

Seth walks forward, and the other teens fall into step behind him.

Artemis walks up next to Seth and slaps on the head, harder than Freya had.

ARTEMIS

Keep up next time.

Seth LAUGHS, unaware of the tension between the teens.

SETH

Let's get out of here before someone else recognizes us.

The group walks away together down the alleyway.

INT. MAYOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Mayor James sits at his desk, wrist pressed up to his ear as he talks into his watch. The door opens, and Sergeant Richards rushes in.

The mayor leans in towards his watch.

MAYOR JAMES

I'll have to call you back.

He hangs up and stares expectantly at Sergeant Richards.

SERGEANT RICHARDS

We got a tip about the teenage fugitives. They were spotted on Asphodelus about an hour ago.

MAYOR JAMES

If it was an hour ago, why are we just hearing about this now?

SERGEANT RICHARDS

You know drifters, sir. They want to make sure they've got the best deal before they give up any information.

MAYOR JAMES

Sergeant, how would you feel about being part of a search team to bring the teenagers back?

SERGEANT RICHARDS

Me? Sir, I mean no disrespect, but why would you choose me? Why not someone else? Someone with a higher ranking?

MAYOR JAMES

You've been on this case from the get-go. You can follow through with it. The safety of our planet depends on you.

SERGEANT RICHARDS

Of course, sir. I will do anything I can to serve the Republic.

MAYOR JAMES

Good. I'll put you on a team under Admiral Caine. I want you two to find those teenagers and bring them back here. They need to answer to what they have done.

EXT. ASPHODELUS FIELD - NIGHT

The group trudges towards the Phoenix, their breaths labored.

CAMILLA

What do you think the odds are that the drifters told Iris we're here?

NAVID

I'd say about ninety-five percent. Maybe more.

RYDER

Depends on how much Iris was willing to pay for the info.

NAVID

Did you see those people? They'd probably take anything.

SETH

Well it doesn't matter. We'll be off the planet soon enough. There's no way Iris will catch up to us.

JASON

Yeah, and even if they do catch us, we can take them. There's no way they're taking me back to that planet.

NAVID

You sound awfully sure of yourself.

JASON

It's part of my charm.

They reach the Phoenix, and Freya pulls out her tablet. She hit a button, and the Phoenix opens. The teenagers walk onto the ship.

EXT. SPACE - NIGHT

An IRISI WAR SHIP sails through space.

The ship is large, at least five times the size of the Phoenix. It's got compartments on the sides for missiles to shoot out of.

INT. IRISI WAR SHIP - CONTINUOUS

Sergeant Richards stands at the front of the ship next to PILOT MARIAH WALTERS (40, analytical with a determined look on her face) and ADMIRAL JENSON CAINE (60, brutal, with a perpetual glare on his face).

ADMIRAL CAINE

How long?

PILOT WALTERS

Thirty-seven minutes until landing.

SERGEANT RICHARDS

Do you think they'll still be on
the planet?

ADMIRAL CAINE

Doubtful, Sergeant. But we may be
able to find a lead on where
they're going.

The Admiral turns away from Sergeant Richards, who opens his mouth as if to say something. He closes it and turns forward, a pensive look on his face.

INT. PHOENIX COMMAND CENTER - NIGHT

Freya pilots the ship while the other teenagers sit around the room.

FREYA

We have officially left the
Asphodelian Atmosphere.

JASON

Cheers to that.

SETH

Is it a problem that I lost the
fuel cans? Sorry about that, guys.

JASON

No one gives a crap about the fuel,
dude. We're just glad you're alive.

FREYA

We have enough to get to the
Ragnari star system, but we'll have
to stop on one of their planets for
more fuel.

NAVID

Great. You can drop me off there.
I'll hitch it back to Iris.

JASON

You're so eager to get home, why
didn't you stay behind back there?
(MORE)

JASON (CONT'D)
Let the drifters collect some of
their reward?

Navid says nothing.

JASON (CONT'D)
That's what I thought.

ARTEMIS
Besides, you heard what the
drifters said. They're looking for
seven criminals. Not six and a
prisoner. You're as guilty as us in
their minds. They'll lock you up
the second they find you.

NAVID
Not once I explained what really
happened.

ARTEMIS
You sure about that? In my
experience, Iris is more the
imprison and torture now, ask
questions later type.

CAMILLA
She's right.

Everyone turns to Camilla.

CAMILLA (CONT'D)
We're enemies to them now. All of
us. And you know what they do to
their enemies. If we're caught,
we're dead. Worse maybe.

ARTEMIS
Maybe you'll get lucky and they'll
turn you into shiny new toys like
they did to us.

SETH
Well we don't have to worry about
Iris anymore. Soon we'll be out of
their star system.

JASON
Can we try to not stop on any
drifter planets this time? If I
never see a drifter again, it'll
still be too soon.

Everyone LAUGHS, but something at the back of the room catches Ryder's eye. He turns, and his jaw drops open.

RYDER

Uh, you guys?

NAVID

Oh, so you mean I was right to be scared of them? Is that what you're saying?

RYDER

Guys!

Everyone turns to him. When he says nothing, they turn towards what he's staring at.

At the back of the room stands HETARA DELEUZE (16, pure and innocent looking underneath the layer of dirt that coats her), a young drifter. She looks at the group with wide eyes.

HETARA

Hello.

Everyone stares at her in silence. Camilla opens her mouth as if to say something but closes it. Hetara smiles at them.

FADE OUT.

END OF PILOT

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