

Philip K. Dick's
THE VARIABLE MAN

Based on the PKD story "The Variable Man",
public domain, copyright- and license-free

claytonemery@comcast.net
603 380-4849

WGA registration I250498

FADE IN

EXT. KANSAS ARMY BASE

Year is 1914. A dusty Army base.

Soldiers drill and march. Trucks rush. Civilians unload supplies from wagons.

TOM COLE drives his "I Fix Anything" cart and horse. It's full of tools and material and projects.

Tom Cole is middle-aged, raw-boned and scruffy. He wears overalls with tools in all the pockets.

TITLE OVER

THE VARIABLE MAN

Cole delivers resoled boots to a soldier.

Hands a repaired typewriter to a female clerk. She smiles, but he's shy.

Oddly, no one notices a "time bubble" that bumbles around the base like a dog.

Almost alive, the bubble spies on blueprints, drilling soldiers, officers discussing strategy.

Suddenly the bubble starts to vibrate, jump around, swell.

Cole's cart is crossing the parade ground when --

-- The bubble veers over Cole, cart, and horse and partly over some soldiers. Men YELL.

Then it vanishes.

What's left is a big scoop out of the earth and parts of dead soldiers.

INT. NYC WAR ROOM

Year is 2128. A military war room surrounded by huge screens.

Military officers, scientists, and politicians watch a war rage above the planet Centaurus.

Everyone has a color-coded tracker in their wrist.

On every wall hangs the Counter like a scoreboard. The current display is "Earth: 18. Centaurus: 24."

ON SCREEN

>> Earth space ships zoom and shoot and bomb.

>> Centaur "two-headed" spaceships fight back.

>> A tag in the corner says, "View: K-247".

>> Armored human soldiers drive through a weird city. Centaur-like aliens defend.

>> Battle is fierce and without mercy. Wounded men and ships are killed. Cities are obliterated.

>> EXPLOSIONS blow both armies to shreds. The battle winds down.

PRESIDENT waves her hand.

President of the Council (of Earth) is a middle-aged woman with a poker face because she can trust no one.

PRESIDENT

Shut it off.

GENERAL RIMER pushes a button.

General Rimer, head of Security, is male, hard-jawed and cool. Never sure what's he thinking.

Security forces wear black or dark blue.

Screens flash: "SCENARIO K-247 TERMINATED"

The screens reset to show Centaurus at peace. A tag says, "View: Real Time".

Counter jiggles, sets at "Earth: 17, Centaurus: 21"

WAR ROOM TECHS

(groan, sigh)

CPT ANDOR is Rimer's aide. Young and ambitious, always watching his boss -- for devotion or a weakness?

CPT ANDOR

The production and technology lags are closing.

PRESIDENT

Waiting and waiting...

CPT ANDOR
We've had a straight gain for the
last quarter.

RIMER
We sank by six at one point.

PRESIDENT
We can't commit the fleet without a
two-point advantage.

RIMER
Unless we declare an emergency.

PRESIDENT
60 years' worth of "emergency".
Raise the war production quotient by
3% and run the numbers.

War Room Techs look uneasy.

WAR ROOM TECH 1
Madame President, that would mean --
(checks screen)
Food reductions of 50 grams across
62% of the population. Starvation
casualties, riots --

PRESIDENT
It's just a projection, people, an
imaginary number. Run it.

RIMER
Fact, figures, food supplies. What
we need is a weapon.

People fall to work, not happy.

Gobs of data readjust.

From displays, it's obvious every person, factory, farm and
resource on Earth is factored into war production.

Mars and Asteroids are included.

Counter flickers to "Recalibrating".

PRESIDENT
(to Rimer, low)
Tighten the screws on fringe efforts.
Cut where you can.

RIMER
I know just the place.

INT. NYC TIME BUBBLE BAY

The bay is a like a small dry dock. One end has big doors.
A tier runs around the bay.

Down in the bay, a hologram shows how the time bubble bumbles
around the 1914 Army base.

Cole, cart, and horse are seen in BG.

Soldiers and civilians of the Research & Design Department
wear tan uniforms.

MAJOR SHERIKOV is in charge.

Sherikov is female, 45, Russian, a dreamer, happy in her
work.

Sherikov goes from screen to screen looking at the newly
acquired data, pleased.

SHERIKOV

Look here. These men suffer from
bad teeth, yet are knowingly inducted.
Their army must have instituted a
dental program --

BUBBLE TECH 1

Major, alert from Security. General
Rimer.

Sherikov frowns but takes the call.

A hologram of Rimer pops up.

RIMER

(hologram)

Major Sherikov. Recall the time
bubble immediately.

SHERIKOV

Sir. It's regulated to return
automatically.

RIMER

Bring it back manually.

SHERIKOV

It's risky. If we abort the mission,
we could cause a ripple --

RIMER

The President is ready to declare
an emergency. All equipment and
power will be dedicated to
mobilization.

SHERIKOV

General, need I remind you knowledge
is the ultimate weapon --

RIMER

Not any more. Shut it down.

Rimer's hologram winks out.

BUBBLE TECH 1 and others are stunned. Sherikov is near tears.

BUBBLE TECH 1

Major?

SHERIKOV

I'll do it.

Sherikov touches a screen. It lights up with warnings.

Screen: "ABORT MISSION? Authorization needed."

Sherikov touches her wrist tracker to the screen. Pushes
the button.

Down in the bay, the bubble suddenly vibrates, jumps, shivers.

Then the hologram is replaced by the real bubble, which winks
out.

Leaving a patch of earth, parts of dead soldiers, and Cole
and his cart and horse.

Cole is stunned. So are Sherikov and the Bubble Techs.

SHERIKOV

Bozhe moi!

Stunned, Cole sees "foreign" soldiers, then parts of dead
soldiers around his cart.

COLE

(yells)

A Bubble Tech HITS a red button.

The bay doors SLAM open to reveal a long rising corridor.

COLE
(to horse)
Hyaah!

Cole slaps the reins. The horse and cart bolt into the corridor.

SHERIKOV
What the hell --

BUBBLE TECH 1
It's a primitive! We'll be infected --

BUBBLE TECH 2
I alerted Security. They'll --

SHERIKOV
Idiot! Never alert Security without
my permission --

The bay doors slam shut.

BUBBLE TECH 1
What now?

SHERIKOV
We blame it on the emergency.

INT. NYC CORRIDOR

Cole drives the panicked horse past a cross-corridor toward closed (outside) doors.

They're bound to crash.

COLE
Whoa! Whoa!

Two Security troops run, raise rifles.

But a camera analyzes Cole and the horse.

Blips "Anomaly".

Just in time, the doors SLAM open.

Cole aims for them.

Security troops FIRE.

A purple ray shears off the corner of Cole's wagon.

Another ray VAPORIZES a rein before his hand.

Cole ducks, losing control.

Two outer doors form an airlock. The horse plunges through.

EXT. NYC RUINS -- DAY

New York City was slagged in a war years ago and the surface abandoned. Now it's ruins overgrown by brush.

Cole's horse and cart burst outside. Doors SLAM shut behind.

The horse plunges headlong until a fallen tree blocks the path.

COLE
Whoa! Whoa, girl!

The cart SLEWS sideways and BANGS the tree. Cole goes flying.

It's quiet. Shaken, Cole mechanically checks the cart, sets things aright.

He examines the scorched corner of his cart, vaporized.

Fixes the severed rein.

Dazed, he draws a canvas water bucket and pours himself and the horse a drink from a canteen.

The overgrown ruins are oddly peaceful. BIRDS SING.

There are no people.

A cool pool of water beckons. Cole fills his canteen.

RUSTLE. A deer watches him. Then flits away.

Wolves creep out, look at Cole curiously, then slip away.

A ruined building says "NEW YORK" across its face.

COLE
(to horse)
Not what you see in picture postcards.
You got any ideas, Beulah?

Horse tosses its head.

Past the fallen tree, the cracked road makes a tunnel through greenery.

Cole looks back at the complex doors still shut.

COLE
That's horse sense.

SOON

Cole unhitches the horse, rigs a chain to pull aside the fallen tree.

Hitches the horse. They continue.

Deer skip ahead.

COLE
The one time I leave my rifle behind
the door.

They disappear under overhanging trees.

INT. NYC WAR ROOM

Screens show shifting numbers, figures for war production.

Techies crunch numbers.

The Counter reads "Recalibrating".

General Rimer frowns at screens, busy, busy.

Major Sherikov follows him.

SHERIKOV
I told you the time bubble program
was useful. Look what we brought
back.

RIMER
A primitive.

SHERIKOV
And a horse. Think what we can learn.

RIMER
Horses don't win wars.

SHERIKOV
Tell that to the Cossacks.

Rimer ignores her.

Production numbers freeze on the screens.

Techs pick up their heads.

The Counter flickers, then displays, "Earth 23, Centaur 19."

WAR ROOM TECHS
(cheer)

RIMER
Quiet! We've got the facts. Make
the 3% reductions permanent. Start
the L-Series scenarios. We can
finally end this damned war.

SHERIKOV
General, I must protest. The time
bubble program --

RIMER
Is finished. Find that primitive
and have him expunged, then reassign
your staff. We've got a war to win.

Steaming, Sherikov salutes and exits.

EXT. WASTELANDS

The overgrown city gives way to a field of blasted slag.

Cole hesitates, snaps the reins.

The horse steps on glass-like slag and slips. Balks.

COLE
Hold on, Beulah. Don't get antsy.

Cole picks up a chip of slag-glass.

He stares around in wonder, then back at the overgrown city,
realizing war ravaged the city.

COLE
The hand of Man can make the wrath
of God look downright puny.

Cole wraps rags around Beulah's feet so she doesn't slip.

He leads her by the bridle, slipping himself.

MILES ON

Beulah nickers. Cole looks up.

Slag peters out to soil and weeds. Then green fields.

COLE
The promised land.

He unwraps the rags and climbs on the wagon.
They push on, fearful and hopeful.

EXT. NEW YORK COUNTRYSIDE

A farming village surrounded by crops.
Houses are small green domes.
Some have gardens with vegetables and flowers.
A few larger domes are kitchens and bathrooms.
But the village reeks of a refugee camp.
Fields run for miles.
Giant robot farm machines spray and harvest.
People wear simple baggy clothes and sandals.
Some women in their gardens go topless.
As Cole rolls in, a security camera on a pole tracks him,
eerie.

SHOT: Security camera sees the cart, but Cole and horse are
"invisible".

Still dazed, Cole stops. Dismounts.

Approaches a topless VILLAGE WOMAN in her garden. Tries not
to gawk.

COLE
Uh, ma'am. I'm a handyman. I can
fix anything --

VILLAGE WOMAN
I'm in my house.

Clearly she's not. Unless her yard is "in her house".

COLE
Yes, ma'am, if you say so. I can
mend --

VILLAGE WOMAN

(huffs)

Wait.

She goes into her egg-house and comes out with a top on.

Deliberately steps over some invisible line.

Children gather around the horse, fearful and fascinated.

VILLAGE WOMAN

Who are you?

COLE

Tom Cole. I'm -- Where am I?

VILLAGE WOMAN

Where should you be?

(nods at horse)

What is that? A reindeer?

COLE

It's a horse. Ma'am, as I tried to say, I can fix anything.

VILLAGE WOMAN

No, you can't.

COLE

I can. Typewriters, boots, even a lamp. Or, can I buy some food?

VILLAGE WOMAN

Why would you buy food?

She points vaguely at a larger dome, a cafeteria.

COLE

Can I just -- Where am I?

VILLAGE OFFICIAL

Hey, you!

VILLAGE OFFICIAL is a fat self-important guy with a tacky sash as badge of office.

He staggers to see the horse.

VILLAGE OFFICIAL

Is that a horse?

COLE

Beulah.

VILLAGE OFFICIAL
A beulah. Damn.

COLE
Where in nine hells am I?

VILLAGE OFFICIAL
Are you lost?

COLE
I'm looking for work. I can fix --

VILLAGE OFFICIAL
Apply to the Placement Department of
the Federal Activities Control Board.
They allot occupational therapy.

A VILLAGE MAN runs up.

He waves a vidsender.

VILLAGE MAN
Get away! He's the anomaly Security's
hunting!

He points at the sky.

Black silent wingless planes soar, then stoop and dive.

VILLAGE MAN
Run!

People scatter.

Cole grabs the reins. He's all alone.

COLE
Aeroplanes! God almighty, aeroplanes!

The first plane flicks on a purple targeting ray.

Cole's seen that before.

The beam marks the cart.

Cole tries to pull the reins, but the horse backs.

COLE
Damnation, Beulah! This is no time --

More rays target the cart.

BOMBS WHISTLE.

Cole runs for his life.

The first bomb BLASTS cart and horse.

Cole is KNOCKED flying and singed by the blast.

He scrambles for cover, dodging among the houses.

More BOMBS fall in precision around the cart.

Some egg-houses are incinerated.

A man runs from one, SCREAMING, burning, then is VAPORIZED as more bombs carpet the village.

Villagers SCREAM.

Reaching the end of the village, Cole TUMBLES in an irrigation ditch.

He flings himself into the water.

Flames WHOOP as the village is destroyed.

INT. NYC WAR ROOM

Techs crunch numbers continually as the war effort proceeds.

Officers and staffers plot.

A new scenario plays out on the screens.

Earth forces are winning.

General Rimer walks around, silently driving people on.

Cpt Andor comes with a vidsender.

CPT ANDOR

That primitive was expunged, sir.

Rimer looks at the vidsender.

Screen: It shows the bombing approach from the cockpit. Oddly, the reins end in mid-air. (Without a wrist tracker, Cole is invisible to sensors.) Then the first bomb hits the cart.

Rimer frowns, runs the image again.

RIMER

What's wrong with this readout?

CPT ANDOR
Some glitch, sir. It was a fast
approach.

WAR ROOM TECHS
(murmur, hopeful)

WAR ROOM TECH 1
The first scenario is winding down,
General.

Screens read: "L-003 Complete", then "Victory".

The Counter sets at "Earth 23, Centaurus 19."

RIMER
It's holding. Excellent.

CPT ANDOR
(watching vidsender)
As long as they're aren't any
glitches...

EXT. WOODS -- MORNING

A rocky ridge of woods between farmlands.

Using sticks and a knife, Cole roasts potatoes and odd "corn"
over a tiny fire, eats apple-sized strawberries.

He has a discarded bottle for water.

He's scratched and filthy, but not uncomfortable.

He hears KID'S VOICES not far off.

Cole rises, peeks.

Kids play on rocks at the end of the ridge.

One big kid, GAGE, keeps trying to grab a vidsender from a
smaller child, KARR.

It hits the rocks and BREAKS.

Karr CRIES.

Cole returns to his meal, finishes, extinguishes the fire,
and moves.

KARR
(cries)

Against his better judgment, Cole swings that way.
Kids see him in weird clothes and go quiet.

COLE
Morning. What happened?

KARR
Gage broke my vidsender!

GAGE
It's his own fault. He wouldn't
hand it over.

KARR
It's not yours!

GAGE
Shut up.

COLE
Let me see it.

KARR
Why?

COLE
Might be I can fix it.

GAGE
Where'd you get those funny clothes?

Cole points a thumb vaguely over his shoulder.

COLE
I need pockets.

GAGE
Fixing things is your therapy?

COLE
My what? Oh, like in a booby hatch.
Yeah, I fix all kinds of things.

GAGE
Liar. When things break you just
throw them in recycling.

COLE
Not me. I fix 'cycles too. What is
this thing?

KARR
Hey, how'd you do that?

Using a small screwdriver, Cole snaps the thing open.
Takes out a loupe and screws it into his eye.

GAGE
It's a vidsender, dummy.

KARR
It's a good one. I can talk to White Ridge.

COLE
Like a telephone crossed with a crystal radio? Only with moving pictures thrown in?

KARR
I guess.

GAGE
What are you going to do?

COLE
I'm going to fix this here "sender".
You're gonna fetch me an armful of food from the -- cafeteria.

KARR
Dispensary?

COLE
Bingo. Ham or bacon, wheatcakes, eggs any way, and a gallon of coffee to start. All wrapped up in a big old bandanna.

Kids shrug at the strange words, but two run off.

COLE
Don't tell anyone I'm here, and watch out for black aeroplanes!

Cole works. Kids go back to playing, but check in.

LATER

Cole eats as he works. Some food is unfamiliar but, hey.

He hands Karr the vidsender.

Gestures, "Hands off" to Gage.

KARR
It works! Hey, what's this?

Kids crowd.

Screen: Centaurs in a newscast. An alien language comes from the speaker.

GAGE
Those are centaurs. The enemy.

KARR
What are they saying?

GAGE
It's not translating.

KARR
Wait'll I show my mom!

Cole folds up a metallic cloth with the the food.

COLE
Thanks for the grub.

Kids watch him go, puzzled.

Then Karr runs off.

Cole heads back up the ridge into forest.

INT. NYC WAR ROOM

Screens show war preparations boom along.

Counter still reads, "Earth 23, Centaurus 19".

Rimer marches back and forth, satisfied with progress.

A screen flickers. Numbers begin to run crazily.

The Counter flashes random combinations: "Earth 4, Centaurus 24. Earth 38, Centaurus 16. Earth 48, Centaurus 86..."

WAR ROOM TECHS
(mutter)

RIMER
What is it?

WAR ROOM TECH 1
I don't know, General. Something just --

WAR ROOM TECH 2
Look!

The Counter flickers to "Recalibrating", then "Calculating".

WAR ROOM TECH 1
"Calculating?"

RIMER
What's wrong with that?

WAR ROOM TECH 2
Nothing? Except I've never seen it
before.

WAR ROOM TECH 1
Found it!

Techs gather around his screen.

WAR ROOM TECH 1
A broadcast just went out from Sector
256. Non-linear. Non-regulation.

RIMER
Which means?

WAR ROOM TECH 2
A signal off the grid, sir. Except
that's impossible.

RIMER
Spy technology.

WAR ROOM TECH 2
No.. And the signal went to --
Centaurus?

WAR ROOM TECH 1
An unknown variable...

RIMER
An anomaly.

WAR ROOM TECH 1
An anomaly can be ignored. A variable
must be considered but can't be
evaluated --

Counter keeps flickering, "Calculating".

RIMER
I don't care. Your "variable" just
stalled the war effort! Find it!

INT. PRESIDENT'S OFFICE

President's Office oddly has a window overlooking the ruins of NYC.

One whole wall is a star system display.

The President frowns as many vidsenders chirp bad news.

Major Sherikov enters in her best uniform.

SHERIKOV

Major Anna Dostoevsky Sherikov, Madame President.

PRESIDENT

Major, as head of the Research Department, are you up to date on the latest crisis?

SHERIKOV

Yes, Ma'am. Some variable bollixed the Counter. Our best techs are tracing it.

PRESIDENT

I don't really care about the Counter. It's just a number.

SHERIKOV

Ma'am?

PRESIDENT

I know Security and the military live and die by the Counter odds, but they forget it's a gestalt.

SHERIKOV

I am glad you grasp that, Ma'am.

PRESIDENT

The figures for Centaurus are a flat-out guess based on reports from spies. God knows what garbage they feed us.

SHERIKOV

(chuckles)

It's people who make a war.

PRESIDENT

People could make a peace, too, I suppose, though likely not in our lifetimes.

(MORE)

PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

(beat)

But Rimer is forcing my hand. We
need to dust off Plan B.

SHERIKOV

Plan B being...

PRESIDENT

Icarus.

SHERIKOV

Oh.

PRESIDENT

"The last bomb we'll ever need." Or
so I was briefed on my first day.
Where is the Icarus project, Major?

SHERIKOV

Where it's sat for the last six years,
Ma'am. We revisit it once in a while,
but it's unsolvable.

PRESIDENT

Could you try? For the sake of the
Earth?

SHERIKOV

As you wish.

PRESIDENT

I'd hoped for more, Major.

SHERIKOV

Ma'am?

PRESIDENT

I expect a military officer to say,
"Yes, Ma'am" and sally forth. I
expect Research and Design to advise.
Even contradict.

SHERIKOV

That I can do.

Sherikov walks to a wall display.

One dot is Earth with a war fleet hovering.

Another dot is Centaurus, also with a war fleet.

Sherikov shrinks the display.

Earth and Centaurus become pinpoints in a dirty "Iron Cloud": the Centauran Empire.

Earth and many other planets are trapped within the Iron Cloud.

SHERIKOV

As you say, Ma'am, the military can be short-sighted. Defeating Centaurus is not Earth's goal. Breaking free of their stranglehold is the goal.

PRESIDENT

Their empire is burnt out. It's not fair they hem us in.

Sherikov pinches Centaurus out of existence.

The Iron Cloud suddenly has a "tunnel" to free space.

With a nudge, she sends Earth's fleet down the tunnel to freedom.

She resets the screen, with Earth trapped in the dirty Cloud.

SHERIKOV

Icarus could blow a hole in the Iron Cloud, but anything that would lift the Centaurs' boot off our necks would be a blessing. Maybe without killing billions of aliens who could be allies under better circumstances.

PRESIDENT

What do you suggest?

SHERIKOV

If I had a solution, I'd be sitting in your chair.

PRESIDENT

Sometimes I just wonder if we've wandered too far down the wrong road.

SHERIKOV

With the entire indus-sphere of Earth cranked to war production...

PRESIDENT

War is all you get.

SHERIKOV

"If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail."

PRESIDENT

I'm not smart enough to sit in this chair either. All we have for a hammer is Icarus. So please, reopen the project.

SHERIKOV

Yes, Ma'am.

EXT. WOODS

The woods end at fields.

Cole must cross a field and road to reach the next woods.

He watches the giant harvest robots, then sets out.

An air-car floats down the road.

SEAL drives. Karr rides.

Seal is a female scientist, young, in simple baggy clothes. Karr's mom.

Cole dithers whether to duck back or keep going.

KARR

Hey, friend!

Cole waits.

Seal holds up the repaired sender.

SEAL

Comrade. Did you fix this?

COLE

Yes, Ma'am.

SEAL

How?

COLE

It was dropped and some parts came loose. I reconnected them. Would'a done better with a soldering iron --

SEAL

I don't understand. Where are you from?

COLE

Far away.

SEAL
How did you end up here?

COLE
Got snatched up by a tornado, near
as I can tell. Like Dorothy.

SEAL
(nodding at bare wrist)
You have no integrator?

COLE
Nope.

SEAL
I'm a scientist for the Resource
Allocation Module. Your ability to
repair artifacts is rare. Would you
care to come home so we can discuss?

COLE
The last town I visited didn't fare
too well.

No reaction.

Cole gets in the air-car.

It zips along the road, often cutting across country.

COLE
I thought those aeroplanes were a
kick in the head.

EXT. SECOND VILLAGE

Another village, larger. Green egg-houses and bigger domes
ramble amid rocks and woods. All arable land is cultivated.

Seal stops the air-car near a larger dome.

SEAL
This is where I work.

KARR
C'mon!

Cole follows inside.

Notes the door fits badly.

INT. WORKSHOP DOME

The dome interior almost looks like a workshop, except with many piles of broken parts and few tools. All is dusty.

Seal, Cole, and Karr enter.

Cole doesn't know what's what.

COLE

How --

Seal directs him to a half-shell scanner.

She picks up a scooped plastic part that's cracked.

SEAL

Here. When something is broken, we subject it to scan.

Seal places the odd part in the scanner.

Lights scan the part, then display a readout.

Readout: "Tractor fender, part B-569K. Fracture. Assessment: Replace. Yes/No."

COLE

Then what?

SEAL

That's my job. I'm a scientist. I assess whether the part warrants replacing or not.

COLE

Don't you try to fix it first?

SEAL

No...

COLE

Then it's gotta be replaced?

SEAL

Maybe. I balance productive work against societal needs. My recommendation would be submitted to the village council. If it warrants replacement, we order a new one or have the generator make one.

COLE
Generator. That word I recognize.

SEAL
(laughs)
If the part is small enough, the
generator fabricates one. Otherwise
it's shipped in.

She steps to a dusty machine like a big microwave.

COLE
OK, "generator" is another word I
don't know.

Seal tilts the scanner.

Beams wash over Cole.

SEAL
It could generate you real clothes,
if you like.

COLE
Can I have pockets? Lots of them?

SEAL
(laughs)
I'm sure there's some schema. It's
nice to meet another scientist.

Seal punches buttons on the scanner, then the generator.

COLE
I can't claim to be a scientist,
Ma'am. Never even graduated. I'm
just a handyman. But that scoop-
piece. It's a tractor fender, right?
You could just fix it.

SEAL
(working)
That's what Karr tried to tell you.
Nobody fixes things.

COLE
Anyone can. If they have tools.
Some baling wire or clamps and sheet
metal screws or...

Cole prowls the room.

There are fancy gadgets, most disused, but no identifiable
tools.

Diagrams, schematics, bulletins, lists are posted on walls.
Cole points to a bulletin with "October 6, 2125".

COLE
Is this the real date?

Seal watches the generator work (making his clothes).

SEAL
No, that edict is three years old.
It's 2128.

Seal pulls baggy coveralls with many pockets and plastic boots out of the generator.

COLE
That explains a few things...

EXT. URAL MOUNTAINS

Farm lands run almost to the mountains. Giant robot machines tend crops with a few human supervisors.

Beyond the mountains rise wild forests that run forever.

A tan wingless plane zips down to a mountain.

A hole dilates in the mountainside and the plane flies in.

INT. URAL WAR ROOM

An underground complex similar to the NYC Complex, but with a friendlier, more relaxed atmosphere. This is Research.

Technicians wear tan, the Research color.

The plane hovers and lands.

Two officers wait to greet it.

Major Sherikov exits the plane carrying a small briefcase.

Officers immediately yak at her.

RESEARCH OFFICER 1
Good afternoon, Major. We reassigned three technicians as you requested. Checked the hatches and cycled the air.

RESEARCH OFFICER 2
Sampled the background radiation.
Diverted energy resources from the
fuels program to the labs --

SHERIKOV
Did you notify Internal Affairs?

RESEARCH OFFICER 1
Uh, yes. They've scheduled a review.

RESEARCH OFFICER 2
And General Rimer insists on seeing
you the moment you land.

SHERIKOV
Pizdets! That khuy! How did --
Fine, pipe him into the bay.

Sherikov marches on.

INT. ICARUS BAY

A long bay like a tunnel houses "Icarus".

But the project was abandoned six years ago, so the bay has
a dusty air.

On the wall, from happier days, is painted a classic Icarus
flying toward the sun on wings of wax and feathers.

By contrast, Icarus is a ugly stubby rocket on a rail runway.
Painted gray primer with no adornment.

Three technicians go over control boards.

Robot janitors mop the floor.

Two techs clean a small hatch in the rocket's midsection.

One long table has a soccer-ball sized lump covered by a
sheet.

Major Sherikov enters.

Everyone salutes, but she waves them back to work.

SHERIKOV
As you were. General Rimer will
inspect us momentarily, so pretend
to know what you're doing.

Sherikov takes a look around, props the laptop on a console, touches her wrist tracker.

SHERIKOV
Major Anna Dostoevsky Sherikov, Head
of Research, available.

With a SHIMMER, General Rimer appears as a hologram.

He can walk and talk as if present.

SHERIKOV
I apologize for the state of our
facilities, General. I've only just
returned to the Ural Complex.

RIMER
(hologram)
I'm informed by our Madame President
you are authorized to reopen Icarus.

SHERIKOV
Those are my orders.

RIMER
As I understand, Icarus was shut
down six years ago because it failed.

SHERIKOV
To be precise, General, Icarus proved
a success in early tests, but its
inventor was killed in a later
experiment.

RIMER
Failure is failure.

SHERIKOV
An explosion is an explosion. Icarus
has potential as the "last bomb we'll
ever need".

RIMER
(considers)
Explain.

SHERIKOV
If you are in the War Room, you can
pull up the Icarus scenarios --

RIMER
Please. Now.

Sherikov punches her computer.

Calls up a hologram model hanging in the air.

SHERIKOV
(steamed)
Very well. Earth, as you know, is
hemmed by the Centauran Empire.

Model: Earth and her solar system are suspended in the dirty
Iron Cloud.

SHERIKOV
The empire has a dozen other races
in thrall, and stifles exploration.

Model: Within the Iron Cloud are more blue planets.

RIMER
Potential allies.

SHERIKOV
The Iron Cloud is rotten, corroded,
but strong enough to snuff any
ventures.

RIMER
(snorts)

Model: A ship zips away from Earth, is swarmed and zapped by
Centaur two-headed ships.

Model: Another ship zips away from a blue alien planet and
is forced back to land.

SHERIKOV
For one hundred years, Earth's goal
has been to break out of the Centauran
Empire. Our last attempt was 24
years ago.

Model: A fleet leaves Earth, meets Centaur's fleet, and is
pushed back to Earth.

SHERIKOV
Centaurus is 4.6 light years out.
Since our ships cannot breach the
light barrier, that's a lag of 4.6
years just to attack --

RIMER
I know all this, Major.

Model: An Earth fleet launches, accelerates, then bogs down,
making only tiny progress.

SHERIKOV

Then you know an object that approaches light speed loses length but gain mass.

RIMER

All I remember is, we can't reach light speed because we can't reach it.

SHERIKOV

True. To breach light speed, an object would need no length but infinite mass. No one can imagine such an object.

RIMER

Metaphysics --

SHERIKOV

Ten years ago, a man not only imagined it, he achieved it.

RIMER

Go on.

SHERIKOV

Aso Hiroki invented instant communications across vast reaches with a "tangle link". No one was even sure how it worked, including the inventor, but it did. We can keep tabs on the Centaurs.

Model: Pictures and words zip back and forth between Centaurus and Earth.

SHERIKOV

But a radio signal is not a 246-ton battleship.

(beat)

Eight years ago, Hiroki invented, by pure accident, the time bubble. But it can only transmit information. Moving matter is erratic at best.

Model: A tiny time bubble spits into being, bumbles across Earth's surface, swells, pops.

SHERIKOV

What we needed was a Great Leap Forward. And we got one.

Model: Aso Hiroki appears, a middle-aged scientist. Like a giant, he lays the Icarus rocket on the bay rails.

He plugs a "glass marble" into its mid-section.

Playfully he touches Icarus off like a firecracker.

Icarus launches.

Icarus overtakes the bogged Earth fleet.

Hiroki taps the glass marble.

Icarus spurts forward, shrinks in length, and -- disappears.

Even Rimer is impressed.

RIMER

Huh. It enters sub-space?

SHERIKOV

Yes, no, maybe. Having no length,
it ceases to occupy known space.
Yet it exists.

RIMER

You're talking nonsense.

Model: A ghostly Icarus zooms toward Centaurus.

SHERIKOV

It exists. And flies toward its
goal at 50 times the speed of light.
Undetectable. Unstoppable.

RIMER

If the technology gets us to Centaur
double-quick, why don't we use it?

SHERIKOV

Why do pilots say taking off and
flying is heaven but landing is hell?

Model: Ghostly Icarus approaches Centaurus.

Hiroki makes a cut-off gesture.

The glass marble turret winks off.

Icarus becomes solid --

-- And EXPLODES.

It also BLOWS chunks off Centaurus, destroying the planet.

RIMER

Icarus is packed with explosives?

SHERIKOV

No. It's just a rocket. It explodes
because two objects cannot occupy
the same space at the same time.

Model: Close up, ghostly Icarus zooms toward Centaurus. But
stray atoms float inside the ghost-image.

When the glass marble winks out, two atoms collide. BOOM.

SHERIKOV

Even "empty space" contains stray
atoms of hydrogen, and you only need
one. And one atom fissioning is a
nuclear explosion.

RIMER

I see why the President calls it the
last bomb we'll ever need. It always
explodes?

SHERIKOV

Always. Even Hiroki could not correct
that last flaw.

Model: Hiroki and others in an observation spaceship wait
for an Icarus rocket to arrive.

It does, too close, EXPLODES, and SCORCHES them in a fireball.

RIMER

Still, an immense and undetectable
bomb --

SHERIKOV

Traveling 50 times the speed of light
has a bomb window of a nanosecond.

Model: Three tries.

>> One: Ghostly Icarus overshoots Centaurus, rematerializes,
and EXPLODES too far away.

>> Two: Icarus EXPLODES too short a second time.

>> Three: Icarus EXPLODES close to the Earth fleet and
obliterates it.

Sherikov turns off the display.

RIMER

One last thing to fix, then.

Sherikov walks to the long table.

Pulls off the dust cover.

The cover actually hovers on a force field.

She taps her wrist tracker.

Force field winks off.

The rocket's "turret" looks like a glass soccer ball.

Wires and circuits hang out, unfinished.

SHERIKOV

Unfinished. And the one man who
could fix it --

RIMER

Is dead.

Disgusted, Rimer's hologram VANISHES.

Sherikov is stuck: Now what?

EXT. SECOND VILLAGE

Cole fixes the door to the workshop dome.

People tending gardens watch Cole in fascination.

Kids in BG play on a new seesaw.

Seal has a small shoulder bag.

Cole looks rested with a neat haircut and new baggy overalls.
He's made a tool belt, pack frame, and tools with the
generator.

On his wrist he wears a (fake) tracker.

He tests the door.

It works fine.

SEAL

The way you fix things, like something
out of a fairy tale.

COLE

Just common sense and elbow grease.

An air-car floats up.

A man and woman collect an oven-like box Cole fixed.

Grateful, they load it and take off.

KARR
Any more toys?

COLE
Oh, let me see.

Cole pulls out puddle-jumpers whittled of wood. Spins one like a helicopter.

Children run off delighted. Adults follow for fun.

Seal and Cole are alone.

SEAL
Karr is thrilled --

Cole looks up.

A black wingless plane soars overhead.

He ducks inside the workshop.

The plane moves on and he comes back out.

SEAL
Why do you fear the flyers?

COLE
Don't like a sword hanging over my head while I eat dinner. The fellas in the black planes run the whole shooting match, huh?

SEAL
If you mean Security, yes. They keep us safe and help us meet quotas. We're lucky. We're not a labor camp.

COLE
So everyone in the world sticks close to home and grows apples and assembles bombs?

SEAL
It's just the way things are.

COLE
Who's Karr's father, if you don't mind me asking?

SEAL
(dunno)

Seal pulls the repaired vidsender from her bag.

SEAL

I must report to headquarters. They
insist on seeing Karr's sender.

COLE

Another good deed gone wrong. I
better head for the hills.

She points to his fake wrist tracker.

SEAL

That copy will not fool the sensors.

COLE

If it fools people, it's good enough.

SEAL

Karr will miss you.

COLE

I'll miss him. You, too, Seal.

Awkwardly, he kisses her hand.

She's puzzled but pleased.

Cole shoulders his pack frame and walks toward the woods.

Seal walks back to her home.

With a WHISPER, a flyer settles.

Cpt Andor, Security Squad Leader, and three Security troopers
get out.

Seal is frightened but stays calm.

All stare at the kids' seesaw.

CPT ANDOR

Seal 6589? You have an illegal
vidsender.

Seal hands over the vidsender.

Cpt Andor checks the number against a hand-screen.

SEAL

It's not illegal. It was broken and
fixed.

CPT ANDOR

Tampered. Who fixed it?

SEAL
Uh, someone came by and just fixed
it.

CPT ANDOR
His ID?

SEAL
It didn't seem important.

CPT ANDOR
Where did he go?

Seal waves vaguely down the road: not the way Cole went.
Cpt Andor glares, wondering whether to take her in.
She sweats.
He decides not. Instead points to the seesaw.

CPT ANDOR
Destroy it.

Kids flee as Troopers WRECK the seesaw.
Troopers board their flyer and fly off.
Seal and the kids watch them go.

KARR
Mother, why --

SEAL
Hush, hush.

INT. ICARUS BAY

Sherikov and Technicians run test scenarios on Icarus, trying
different ideas.

Every simulation ends in an explosion.

A black-suited Security Trooper enters without announcement.

Everyone stares.

SHERIKOV
What is it?

Security Trooper walks to Sherikov without a word, hands
over the vidsender, exits.

They're puzzled. A simple vidsender?

They turn it on.

CLOSE ON: Vidsender shows broadcasts on Centaurus.

RESEARCH TECH 1
Is that Centaurus?

RESEARCH TECH 2
That's impossible.

SHERIKOV
We hear that word a lot lately.
(beat)
Patch me through to General Rimer.

With a SHIMMER, Cpt Andor appears as a hologram.

CPT ANDOR
(hologram)
General Rimer is busy. What do you want?

SHERIKOV
This is the vidsender that reaches Centaurus. Where did you get it?

In BG, Research Techs open the vidsender, excited about the repairs.

CPT ANDOR
Someone in Sector 256 repaired it.

SHERIKOV
256. Not the primitive who was swept up in the time bubble?

CPT ANDOR
Not possible.

But Cpt Andor worries.

SHERIKOV
You realize this "I Fix Anything" man came from a time of great innovation. Edison, the Wright Brothers, Curie, Burbank, Pasteur.

CPT ANDOR
Major --

SHERIKOV
Back when people had intuition, something we've lost.

CPT ANDOR
I mean not possible because he was
expunged.

SHERIKOV
How long has the Counter been stalled?

CPT ANDOR
63 hours.

SHERIKOV
Shortly after the variable man arrived
and the horse lost a shoe.

CPT ANDOR
Eh?

SHERIKOV
"For want of a nail the shoe was
lost?"

CPT ANDOR
What is Research's obsession with
horses? Analyze that vidsender and
file a report. To me.

Andor's hologram VANISHES.

INT. NYT WAR ROOM

Techs work.

Rimer is not present.

Cpt Andor grabs Security Squad Leader, head of his personal
goons.

CPT ANDOR
Get your squad together. On the
quiet.

INT. ICARUS BAY

Hurrying, Sherikov stabs buttons on the console.

CPT LLONGO comes on screen.

Cpt Llongo is competent and quiet, good at keeping secrets.
He heads Sherikov's personal goons, a circumspect squad of
Research Troopers.

SHERIKOV
(to Cpt Llongo on
screen)
Captain, scramble your squad and tap
all our spies. There's a lone
primitive hiding from Security
somewhere west of 256. I want him
first and I don't care who gets in
the way.

CPT LLONGO
Right away, Major.
(winks out)

Research Techs worry.

RESEARCH TECH 1
Major, Security wants that variable
dead.

SHERIKOV
One reason we want him alive.

RESEARCH TECH 2
He's dangerous. Like a wild animal.

SHERIKOV
(looking at turret)
And that's the other reason.

EXT. SECOND VILLAGE

Seal tends her garden.

Looks around often, worried.

Flinches as a tan (Research) plane soars and lands.

Tan Research Troopers spill out and surround her.

They're a mix of Light and Heavy Armor troops.

Cpt Llongo has removed his helmet and carries no weapon.

CPT LLONGO
Seal 6589? We're looking for the
man who repaired that vidsender.
(she's terrified)
Please. We're not Security. We
want to help him.

SEAL
Cole.

CPT LLONGO

Eh?

SEAL

His name is Tom Cole.

EXT. FOREST HILLS

Steep hills and trees. No farms or fields in sight.

Cole has a small camp.

He cooks a rabbit.

He's not particularly worried, just unsure what to do next.

Crows in trees CAW at him, then SQUAWK and flap off.

Cole listens.

Hears BRANCHES BREAK.

He grabs the pack frame and moves uphill into brush quietly.

Slipping along a game trail, he freezes.

A Security plane landed in BG.

Security Troopers get out and move toward Cole's camp.

They're a mix of Light and Heavy Armor Security Troopers,
all black, led by Security Squad Leader.

Cole turns.

Not far off is another plane and more Security Troops.

Obviously they surround his camp.

He hunkers down.

SECURITY SQUAD LEADER signals to close in.

Radios other squads.

They pass Cole, hidden.

He debates moving on, but stays put to watch.

SECURITY SQUAD LEADER
(murmurs inside helmet)

Security Trooper 1 pans a hand-scanner.

Taps his wrist, indicates "No signal".

They move in.

Troopers meet at the camp.

Feel the fire, look around, then at Security Trooper 2.

Security Trooper 2 drops a tripod and plunks on a laptop with a radar dish.

Hiding, Cole knows he should go, but is intrigued by the gadget.

Security Trooper 2 pushes a button.

A sensor grid like visible radar spills out from the laptop for 20 feet around.

The campfire glows green, obviously from heat. Troopers light up green.

Security Trooper 2 pushes a button to remove Troopers and the campfire from the scan. They wink out.

A Trooper points to a green glowing rabbit that hops off.

Cole catches on -- "Oh, Shit!" -- and scurries uphill.

Security Trooper 2 pushes a button.

The green grid floods the landscape.

Cole, scampering like a squirrel, lights up.

Troopers whirl and BLAST at him.

Ray-gun beams ZIP by.

Cole DIVES over the top of the hill.

He TUMBLES down a rough slope.

He's more concerned about hanging onto tools than protecting himself.

Heavy-armor Troopers BOUND up the slope like kangaroos.

Tumbling, Cole watches two BOUND overhead. Very bad.

But they bound too far and have to backtrack.

Reaching a stream, Cole DASHES downstream.

Ray-beams SCORCH around him.

Cole goes to dodge behind a tree.

A Heavy Trooper FIRES a big gun. The tree EXPLODES.

KNOCKED flying, half-blinded, Cole SCRAMBLES upslope into dense brush.

More beams BLAST the brush.

Cole is almost scorched.

Suddenly he's surrounded by three (disguised) black Troopers.

They aim guns.

Cole closes his eyes.

Hears a single RAY-GUN BLAST, then MANY BLASTS.

Cole peeks. What the hell?

Oncoming Security Troopers are burned and blasted to shreds. Flesh burns in scorched shells.

(The ambushers are Cpt Llongo's Research Troopers disguised holographically in black. Cpt Llongo, also disguised in black, wears a bulky backpack.)

Security Troopers rush this way, confused by the ambush, but knowing to grab Cole.

COLE

Who are --

Disguised Research Troopers clamp onto his arms and legs.

Blue beams from their armor FLASH, intersect and lock on, welding the four Troopers into a single unit.

Cpt Llongo drags off his own backpack, props it, and fiddles with settings. Note the pack straps stay on his shoulders.

COLE

My tools!

Cpt Llongo nods.

A Research Trooper picks up Cole's pack.

Black Security Troopers are almost here.

CPT LLONGO

Ready.

Cpt Llongo pushes a button.

The backpack sends out a red sensor grid that floods the countryside.

Security Troopers are rocked as RAUCOUS NOISE BLARES in their helmets.

They writhe.

Security Squad Leader rips off his helmet to save his ears.

At the same time, the backpack gushes smoke.

Cpt Llongo slaps a glove on a Research Trooper. It sticks like a magnet.

CPT LLONGO

Go!

Locked together with blue "glue", the squad takes off like a hovercraft, low to the ground.

They carry Cole at the center.

Cpt Llongo hangs on like a limpet.

LEFT BEHIND

Headachey Security Troopers reach Cpt Llongo's backpack, still sending the red-grid scrambler signals and billowing smoke.

One Trooper KICKS it in disgust.

Helmetless Security Squad Leader has a thought and yells.

SECURITY SQUAD LEADER

Clear out! Scramble!

He DIVES flat.

Sailing away, Cpt Llongo opens a panel on a pack strap and pushes a button.

BACK IN CAMP

The backpack EXPLODES in a fireball, incinerating most Security Troopers.

Security Squad Leader is scorched but survives.

NOT FAR OFF

Cpt Llongo's squad floats down in a clearing.

Cpt Llongo taps a signal in his helmet.

A cloaking device shuts off to reveal the tan Research flyer.

The squad "unsnaps" the blue beams.

They also "wash off" the black hologram to reveal their tan uniforms.

They hustle Cole inside and join him.

INT. RESEARCH FLYER

The interior is like a shuttlecraft, mostly bay and a single seat in the nose for the pilot.

Cole sits.

Troopers keep their helmets on and weapons ready, as if the ship might be shot down.

Cpt Llongo flips open his helmet and jacks into a shielded comm link.

COLE

Who in the Sam Hill are you fellas?

CPT LLONGO

Friends.

The door SHUTS.

EXT. FOREST HILLS

The ship's cloaking device shimmers, rendering the ship invisible.

Silently it floats across the ground, its image rippling.

Then it quits the woods for farmland, drops the invisibility, and SOARS into the sky.

LEFT BEHIND IN FOREST

Security Squad Leader reaches the spot where the tracks end.

No clue where they went.

Helmetless, he uses a backup radio to report.

Some other troops show up, some hurt.

SECURITY SQUAD LEADER
Black Crow 9 here. Patch me through
to Captain Andor.

INT. NYC WAR ROOM

The facility bustles as war preparations continue.

Cpt Andor takes the (secret) call on a computer.

INTERCUT between Cpt Andor and Security Squad Leader.

CPT ANDOR
Andor.

SECURITY SQUAD LEADER
Sir, the extraction failed. Somebody
beat us to it. Not sure who.

CPT ANDOR
They got Cole? Where did they go?

SECURITY SQUAD LEADER
Can't say, sir. Their tracks just
stop. But they must be around here
somewhere. I'm down to four
functionals. It'll take a while to
quarter these hills.

CPT ANDOR
No idea who did this?

SECURITY SQUAD LEADER
No, sir. Only that their tech was
something new.

CPT ANDOR
"New."

SECURITY TROOPER 1
We need reinforcements. If you could
send --

CPT ANDOR
No, stand down, soldier. I'm
springing Plan B.

A rising WHISTLE sounds overhead.

SECURITY SQUAD LEADER
I wasn't briefed on any Plan B, sir.
(looks up)
Aw, no!

Bombers soar overhead, swoop, and UNLEASH HELL that boils the mountain.

INT. RESEARCH FLYER

The pilot flies high.

Cpt Llongo listens to his link intently, then jacks in a link.

CPT LLONGO
We're clear.

Troopers open helmets, laugh with relief, drink water.

COLE
I reckon you-all must be friends,
'cause them other fellas were fixing
to kill me.

Cpt Llongo hands Cole a vidsender.

A star winks red.

CPT LLONGO
You don't know the half. That dot
was your camp.

COLE
Was?

CPT LLONGO
Keep watching.

On the vidsender, a bomb hits the camp and evaporates half the forest.

More bombs rain.

Cpt Llongo touches the screen, shrinking the view.

The entire range of hills is bombed out of existence.

COLE
All that to kill me?

CPT LLONGO
Would you believe you're the most
dangerous man alive?

COLE
Never. Lord, that's -- Wait. Where
are we going?

CPT LLONGO
Different hills.

EXT. URAL MOUNTAINS -- NIGHT

Establishing shot as the Research flyer arrives and enters the mountain.

INT. URALS, COLE'S BEDROOM

A small guest room like a mountain hotel.

Cole lies in a nice single bed.

Wakes slowly (he was drugged).

His left wrist has a tracker implant.

He prods it. It's part of him.

Carefully he tries the door knob. Jumps at a DOOR CHIME.

DOOR CHIME
Please wait for escort.

A closet holds more baggy coveralls with pockets and his pack of tools.

For a moment he's sad, thinking about Seal.

He transfers tools to new coveralls.

Dressed, he tries the door again.

COLE
Uh, I'm ready.

DOOR CHIME
Your escort will arrive shortly.

Cole waits.

Door OPENS.

BETA smiles.

Beta is an officer's aide. She wears a simple tan uniform and carries a tablet.

BETA
Comrade Cole. Ready to face the
world?

COLE
Ready for something. Where am I?

BETA
At a research facility in the Ural
Mountains.

COLE
In -- Arizona?

BETA
Russia.

CORRIDOR

Beta leads him down the corridor.

COLE
You folks are Reds?

BETA
(laughs)

INT. ICARUS BAY

Technicians hang around Icarus pretending to work because
the project is stalled.

Sherikov shakes her head over computer screens.

Beta escorts in Cole.

Everyone stares.

Cole wanders up to the rocket.

SHERIKOV
Know what it is?

COLE
A rocket. Saw one in a picture show,
flew to the Moon.

Cole ponders the big painting of Icarus.

Sherikov hands him the repaired vidsender.

SHERIKOV
Did you repair this?

COLE

Did you rescue me?

SHERIKOV

I have many questions and not much time.

COLE

I got all the time in the world.

SHERIKOV

Believe me, you don't. We did save your life.

COLE

From them fellas in black. Aren't you all on the same side?

SHERIKOV

Not always.

COLE

Army-Navy kind of grudge?

SHERIKOV

Look. If you're not the man we need, I'll toss you to the wolves.

COLE

Got it.

SHERIKOV

Did you repair that vidsender?

COLE

Yes, ma'am.

SHERIKOV

How?

COLE

(demonstrating)

Popped it open. Plugged in this jigger here. The corner of this plate was broken, so I moved this wire to this doohickey --

SHERIKOV

Enough. You tell the truth.

Sherikov leads Cole to the table and the turret.

SHERIKOV

Can you fix this? And don't drop it.

Cole examines it.

COLE
What is it?

SHERIKOV
It's a brain for that rocket.

Cole looks up at the big painting of Icarus.

COLE
You going to fly it to the sun?

SHERIKOV
No, we're going to fly it into the
enemy's planet.

Despite himself, Cole is intrigued.

He studies the turret.

COLE
Lot of wires.

Sherikov points to a headset with tiny claw manipulators.

SHERIKOV
Some microscopic. You need a
magnifier to manipulate them.

Setting down the turret, Cole goes to the rocket to examine
the hole it plugs into.

COLE
So it's a war, huh? Against them
horsemen.

SHERIKOV
More or less. The real reason we
fight the Centaurs is to break out
past their planet. To be free.

COLE
Uh, huh. Back home we got a war
brewing in Europe that's all about
freedom, or something. If I fix
this gizmo, what happens to me?

SHERIKOV
I'll direct the time bubble to send
you home.

COLE
And if I don't fix it?

SHERIKOV
I'll turn you over to Security.
(mimics him)
"Them fellas in black."

COLE
If it works, a lot of them horse-
people will die?

SHERIKOV
They keep us trapped here, Cole.
They are evil.

COLE
Uh huh. You ever met any of 'em?

SHERIKOV
Yes.
(Cole is surprised)
Would you like to?

INT. URAL CORRIDOR - DAY

This corridor is wider, for air-cars.

Sherikov and Cole sit in the back of an air-car while a DRIVER pilots.

COLE
We still inside the mountains?

Sherikov nods. Cole is amazed.

INT. CENTAUR PRISONER BAY - DAY

Another huge bay converted as a POW holding cell.

The floor of the bay is an exercise yard for CENTAURS. There are individual cells built into the walls. A balcony runs all around the room.

CENTAUR POWS mill on the bay floor.

The alien Centaurs are huge, like nine feet tall. They have a camel-like hump on their backs, which is where they get their two-headed spaceship designs.

They're ugly and angry. Male and female.

They wear simple white smocks as prison garb. Even then, they've finger-painted ketchup and mustard on the smocks in arcane designs, like heraldic symbols or rank marks.

They mill on the bay floor. Carefully, because their hooves skid on the slick surface.

Up on the balcony, Cole stares, fascinated.

SHERIKOV

A scout ship crashed. We rescued a few POWs.

COLE

And you keep 'em here. Same as me.
(pause)
They speak English?

Down in the bay, a FEMALE CENTAUR notices Cole and Sherikov. She nods at ARKANY, a Centaur captain.

Arkany is noble and grim, even in his white smock with smeary symbols.

Arkany prances below Cole and Sherikov. His hooves skid slightly on the slick floor.

CENTAUR ARKANY

Major, we demand you release us. We will not be held captive by inferiors.

Sherikov says nothing. Cole leans on the rail.

COLE

Name's Cole. I'm not from around here. You folks is better than humans?

Arkany looks at Sherikov, who nods: Go ahead, talk to him.

CENTAUR ARKANY

We are. Our race is ancient. We have conquered much of the galaxy. We entered space as your people quit the trees. I should not even address you, you - bug.

COLE

And you keep Earth people penned up on this planet?

CENTAUR ARKANY

We do. They are contained, like other inferiors.

COLE

Huh. At the moment, though, the
horseshoe is on the other foot.

(Arkany: Huh?)

You're the ones contained.

CENTAUR ARKANY

Come down here and say that, so I
may crush you like a bug under my
"horseshoes".

Cole turns and leaves the balcony. Sherikov follows.

SHERIKOV

Cole! You can't fight that monster!

INT. CENTAUR PRISONER BAY ENTRY - DAY

At floor level, the entry to the bay is a wide glass door.
Research Guards hold rifles, but are wary.

Cole approaches the glass door.

Arkany stands on the other side, waiting.

From this view, Cole has to crane his neck. The Centaurs
are huge. Other Centaurs crowd behind to see.

Still, their hooves skid on the floor.

Sherikov gingerly joins Cole.

COLE

I just wanted a closer look.

(to Arkany)

I can see you'd whip me, Cap'n. So
let's say you won.

Arkany SNORTS, turns and walks off --

-- Then spins and charges the glass doors.

Cole and Sherikov and Guards jump back as Arkany charges --

-- But Arkany's charge is spoiled as he skids and sprawls.
He SMASHES into the glass doors, which fracture but don't
break.

Arkany is jolted by SIZZLING electric shocks.

Other Centaurs haul him back from the CRACKLING doors.

Cole thinks a moment, turns to go.

SHERIKOV
Satisfied? You've seen the enemy.

COLE
I've seen their enemy too.

INT. ICARUS BAY - DAY

Cole and Sherikov enter.

SHERIKOV
You've seen how and why Earth is
"contained". We don't like it. We
want to be free.

Cole just gives her a look. Then he signals a Tech over.

COLE
Let's see your crystal ball.

Research Tech 1 comes forward to demonstrate the magnifier.

OFF TO ONE SIDE

Sherikov watches a while, maybe satisfied.

SHERIKOV
(to Beta)
Give him anything he wants. But
watch him.

Sherikov exits.

Beta approaches Cole.

BETA
Cole, is there anything you need?

COLE
Gallon of coffee.

Puzzled, Beta looks up the word on her handscreen.

BETA
It's a -- bean?

COLE
And some green paint. Sticky green
paint. Lots.

INT. ICARUS OBSERVATION ROOM

Sherikov uses a one-way mirror to watch the Icarus bay.

Cole has taken charge.

There are more tables, more tools, more technicians.

Above the table floats a huge hologram of the turret.

Cole has already learned how to turn the hologram.

Technicians point things out, but Cole corrects them. "No, this goes here."

Sherikov taps her computer with her wrist tracker.

SHERIKOV

Major Anna Dostoevsky Sherikov.

(computer verifies ID)

Madame President.

PRESIDENT

(on vidsender)

Major, any developments on Icarus?

SHERIKOV

A major breakthrough. The schedule is back on track and may even be accelerated.

PRESIDENT

Wonderful. Let's keep that information confidential.

SHERIKOV

Assuredly.

Sherikov hangs up.

She watches Cole a while, still not satisfied.

INT. NYC COMPLEX

Technicians work.

Rimer flips through reports.

Counter still reads, "Calculating".

Cpt Andor approaches.

CPT ANDOR
General, one of our spies reports
Icarus will soon be ready.

RIMER
Sherikov swore it couldn't be fixed.

CPT ANDOR
If our spies know, the Centaurs know.

Rimer thinks.

Andor sweats.

RIMER
The variable. How is he still alive,
Captain?

CPT ANDOR
We suspect Research intervened.

RIMER
Fine. We can change the rules too.

Rimer punches buttons on his private computer.

Cpt Andor watches, worried.

Close on screen: A symbol of a knife appears. It demands
"Verify". More taps. "Verified." Then, "Initiated."

WAR ROOM TECHS
(murmur, then clap
and cheer)

The Counter flips to "Earth 22, Centaurus 19."

CPT ANDOR
General, submitting false data to
the grid is treason.

RIMER
So is thwarting me. You see the
Counter. Send the order. Full
mobilization.

INT. ICARUS BAY

The bay is crowded with more tables. Even piles of material
on the floor.

Technicians work on several man-sized models of gadgets.

(The extra activity is a smoke-screen so Cole can work on illicit projects to escape.)

Cole directs operations.

He works on various projects and the turret itself.

Beta watches him work.

BETA

What are these other models?

COLE

The turret's too delicate to fool with, and we've only got the one. So I'm dinking with mockups.

Beta is not convinced.

BETA

Major Sherikov's bark is worse than her bite. She is fond of you.

COLE

Like I was fond of my horse.

BETA

She thinks you show great promise for a primitive.

COLE

I aim to not disappoint her --

Suddenly a tiny "soap bubble" (time bubble) grows on the work table.

It swells, bumbles along, engulfs a tool --

-- And WINKS out.

COLE

Was that a --

BETA

Time bubble. I wonder who plays a joke.

COLE

Are they made here? Show me.

BETA

I'm not sure Major Sherikov would approve.

COLE
The time bubble begat Icarus, says
in the notes.

Beta nods.

They go.

INT. URAL TIME BUBBLE BAY

Similar to the NYC Complex bay, but disused.

BUBBLE TECH 3 repairs a gutted console.

Cole and Beta enter.

COLE
Hey, there. Did you send a time
bubble to our neck of the woods?

BUBBLE TECH 3
Pardon me?

BETA
Have you activated a time bubble,
Comrade?

BUBBLE TECH 3
(shakes head)

COLE
Show me how they work?

Beta nods.

Bubble Tech 3 starts up a machine.

BUBBLE TECH 3
The principle's complicated, but the
operation's fairly simple. A time
tube forces a plasma bubble --

COLE
Just show me.

BUBBLE TECH 3
Uh, we need authorization to
experiment outside the complex or
current time frame.

BETA
I'll authorize it.

COLE
Focus on the Icarus bay.

BUBBLE TECH 3
How long an interval?

COLE
Just about... 15 minutes.

Out over the bay, a machine like a giant eyedropper warms up.

Bubble Tech 3 maneuvers controls.

The machine SPITS a droplet toward the bay.

It VANISHES.

They watch a screen.

Screen: Watching from inside the "soap bubble", colors appear. Then a face. Cole's.

Obviously this is the time bubble that appeared on his tabletop 15 minutes ago.

Screen: The bubble bumbles along the tabletop, growing. Engulfs a tool.

COLE
That'll do. Bring it back.

BUBBLE TECH 3
Watch down in the bay.

Bubble Tech 3 shuts off the machine.

The bubble appears in the bay, then winks out.

The tool is left on the floor of the bay.

Cole walks down, picks it up, walks back.

COLE
Slicker'n eel snot. The bubble can expand big enough to snatch up a horse and cart?

BUBBLE TECH 3
I heard the story. Yes.

COLE
But it starts out as a teeny bubble no bigger'n a chigger?

BUBBLE TECH 3

It has to be. It takes a tremendous amount of energy just to send that.

COLE

You did this a lot? You time-digging folks?

BUBBLE TECH 3

Until the termination for the war effort.

COLE

What else have you snatched?

Bubble Tech 3 opens a cabinet.

Takes out a part of a Roman gladiator's sword and glove (sheared off). Part of a colonial rifle, an Aztec war club.

COLE

That explains a few more things.

INT. ICARUS BAY

Cole returns to work.

There's been a delivery. A barrel. Beta checks her manifest.

BETA

Your green paint.

Cole cracks the top. He dabs some paint on a scrap tile, dries it with a heat gun. Feels it. Slightly tacky.

Beta trails.

BETA

What is the paint for, if I may ask?
You can't paint Icarus green.

Cole fetches a big spray gun, fits it to the barrel, mounts it on a hover-trolley.

COLE

How do we hop one of them flying cars?

INT. CENTAUR PRISONER BAY ENTRY - DAY

Cole and Beta arrive at the POW glass doors. They're repaired.

BETA
Did Major Sherikov authorize
interaction with the prisoners?

COLE
She didn't not authorize it.
(to Guards)
Can you shoo them horse-folk back
into their cells?

Research Guards confer, an Officer nods.

A SIGNAL and flashing lights send the Centaurs back to their cells. As they enter, bars of light form cell bars.

A Guard opens the door. Cole drags in his hover-trolley and paint sprayer.

INT. CENTAUR PRISONER BAY - DAY

The bay is empty. The Centaurs watch from their cells.

Everyone watches curiously as Cole feels the slick floor.

Then he fires up the spray gun and proceeds to paint the floor green. Methodically he sprays back and forth, covering the entire floor. The paint is irregular, but good enough.

Cole is amazed. The paint dries instantly.

Finished, he exits the bay.

INT. CENTAUR PRISONER BAY ENTRY - DAY

Racking the spray gun, Cole signals to the Guards: Let 'em out.

Another SIGNAL and flashlight lights release the Centaurs.

Gingerly they prance out onto the green paint - and don't skid.

The Female Centaur catches on. She leaps, kicks, pirouettes, sure-footed.

Soon the Centaurs are horsing around, racing, skipping, joyful.

The Female Centaur signals to Arkany.

Arkany marches to the glass doors. He throws a strange salute to Cole. Cole imitates it, turns to go.

BETA
Why do that for an enemy?

COLE
You mean, fellow prisoners.

INT. ICARUS BAY - AFTERNOON

Beta lingers, bored at the end of the day, as Cole fits something to his wrist, tests it out.

Something in his manner suggests urgency.

BETA
What is that?

COLE
Grounding strap. Don't want a spark of static electricity to fry the turret.

BETA
It's amazing how you've caught on.

COLE
I'm a regular Tom Swift.

BETA
It must have been very strange, your time.

COLE
Some days more'n most. We had the same problems you do. Had coffee. But your dentists that rebuilt my teeth, they're a caution.

Cole works.

A BELL sounds.

Technicians quit for the day and move out.

One tech approaches the door, but a BUZZER sounds.

He/she pats his pocket, finds a wrench, returns it, exits.

Cole keeps working.

Beta yawns.

Cole fakes a yawn.

COLE
Guess I'll turn in. Got a full day
tomorrow.

BETA
Good night, Comrade Cole.

COLE
Hasta luego.

Beta exits.

Cole is alone.

He pulls gadgets and a stuffed pack from under a table.

He moves the "grounding strap" to cover his tracker, turns a
button.

Crosses his fingers.

He approaches the door.

No buzzer.

Marches through.

INT. URAL CORRIDORS

Cole moves easily through the complex.

Sensors can't "see" him.

He fiddles doors with another gadget so they open silently.

He ascends ladders, landings, more ladders.

Reaches an outside door.

The gadget opens it.

Fresh air blows in his face.

He grins and steps outside.

EXT. URAL MOUNTAINS -- EVENING

Ural Mt Complex is largely underground, so wilderness is close.

Cole climbs a ridge through trees and reaches the top.

A thousand miles of wilderness stretch away.

Grinning, Cole skips down the mountain into trees.

DAYS LATER, ONE MORNING

Cole comes out of trees into a meadow. He has a light beard, looks happy.

Cole tries to orient to the sun, shrugs.

Any direction is fine.

He walks.

He hears WOLVES SNARL. A WOMAN YELLS.

Cole veers that way.

A travois is tipped over, one runner broken.

A frightened reindeer is tangled in traces.

Wolves circle and SNARL.

ONYA, a Mari woman, holds a baby.

Onya is a Mari, a mountain tribe like Laplanders. Young and Slavic.

Cole quickly uses a big handmade knife to chop a forked sapling.

Creeping close, he shucks his pack.

Holding the forked stick like a spear, he CHARGES.

COLE
Hyaah! Git, git, you! Hya!

Cole rushes the wolves, surprising them.

One turns and Cole JABS it hard.

Wolf LUNGES.

Cole RAMS the fork against its leg, tripping it.
He WHACKS another one, a third.
Flustered, the wolves retreat out of range.
Onya watches, fascinated.
Cole RUNS to the travois.
With the knife cuts the reindeer loose.
SPANKS it.

COLE

Git, hoss!

The reindeer runs off.
Wolves chase it.
Cole catches his breath.
Onya is puzzled but thrilled.

COLE

Sorry to sacrifice your -- is that a
reindeer? But I figured us people
should stick together.

She doesn't understand, but smiles.

ONYA

(Russian)

You are a very handy man.

COLE

Sorry.

Cole rights the travois.

Cuts loose the broken runner and replaces it with the sapling,
lashing it tight.

COLE

That ought'a do her. No charge.

Onya sets the baby in the travois, drapes the breast strap
over her chest to pull it.

ONYA

(Russian)

Come with me? My people are just
beyond.

COLE

Me?

Cole reaches gently for her hand, checks her wrists.

She has no tracker.

COLE

Like me. Or how I used to be. I'd
be pleased for hospitality, Ma'am.

ONYA

On-ya.

COLE

Tom.

Cole makes sure his own tracker-mask is working.

They move off.

EXT. MARI CAMP

Cole is taken in by the Mari tribe. Fits in easily.

MONTAGE

>> Makes wooden toys for the children.

>> Helps spear fish in a river.

>> Jokes with the men leering at women.

>> Picks up some of the language.

>> Stays close to Mari.

>> She steers him to other women: free love.

>> Cole fiddles with the tracker embedded in his wrist, but
can't turn it off, so puts back the tracker-mask.

>> The Mari are nomads. Cole travels with them.

>> They sing as they trek. Cole joins in.

>> Sits by the fire in an evening, content, looking at stars.

>> Shakes his head at a strange life.

>> Watches the skies for planes.

>> Laughs rather than explain why.

INT. MARI HUT -- NIGHT

A small skin tent on a wicker frame, cozy.

Cole sleeps with Onya and her baby in skins and blankets.

Many WHISPERS are approaching planes.

Lights from above suddenly wash over the camp.

Sounds of SCORCHING brings SCREAMS.

Cole SCRAMBLES out of bed, RUSHES outside.

EXT. MARI CAMP -- NIGHT

Mari RUN from BURNING tents in terror.

Running people are BURNED DOWN by ray-beams.

Research Troopers stalk in slowly.

Rifles envelope Mari people in a red glow.

Readouts identify their genetic makeup.

Troopers KILL anyone who registers as Mari.

Cole is horrified.

Onya STUMBLES out with her baby.

Cole shoves her back inside.

Unsure what to do, he grabs a hunting spear.

A Research Trooper swings his rifle.

Cole is bathed in red glow.

Readout says "TARGET ACQUIRED".

Furious, Cole WHACKS the Trooper and only BREAKS the spear.

A sizzling red ray TASES him.

He falls, TWITCHES.

Research Trooper signals on his radio.

Attacks cease.

Surviving Mari FLEE.

A Trooper kicks up the fire.

Smoke rises.

Onya comes out of the tent.

Cole JERKS uncontrollably.

A Research Trooper flips his helmet.

It's Cpt Llongo.

COLE
(spasming)
You -- you --

CPT LLONGO
You.

COLE
How -- How -- I masked -- the tracker --

Cpt Llongo nods at smoke spiraling up.

Signals his men.

Troopers bundle Cole into a plane.

It rises.

Cole tries to wave goodbye to Mari but can't.

CPT LLONGO
You're not done till Icarus is fixed.
Lives depend on it.

Cole sees bodies litter the ground below.

Closes his eyes.

INT. ICARUS BAY

The tables are mostly bare.

The big fake models are gone.

Tools and supplies are laid in neat trays and numbered.

Technicians work.

Guards watch.

Cole, shaved and in the baggy coveralls, works.
His wrist tracker has an annoying permanent glow.
Beta enters, peeved.

BETA
Major Sherikov orders I keep a closer
watch on you.

Cole waggles his glowing wrist tracker.

COLE
A magic lantern done stole your job.
What happens if I skip out the door
this time?

BETA
Your wrist stays here.

COLE
Huh. Sorry I had to razzle-dazzle
you.

BETA
That's war.

COLE
And all you folks know is war.

BETA
And all you will know is work.

He waggles his tracker.

COLE
Can you escort me somewhere?

BETA
I can. The trip must be work-related.

Cole picks up the sprayer, a can of red paint, and a sack.

COLE
Write down, "Peace treaty
negotiations."

He and Beta exit.

BETA
Major Sherikov may not like it.

COLE
All the better.

INT. CENTAUR PRISONER BAY ENTRY - DAY

The Centaur POWs mill on their new green floor, but the thrill has worn off and they're bored again.

Cole signals to the Guards: Open the door. An Officer nods: Why not?

BETA

You want them in your cells.

COLE

No I don't.

INT. CENTAUR PRISONER BAY ENTRY - DAY

Centaurs are amazed as Cole walks in with his spray gun. He passes several.

COLE

Morning.

Cole walks to one end of the bay, opens the sack, takes out a light projector. Sets it on the ground, turns it on.

A light projects a square on the end wall the size of a soccer goal.

Cole carefully spray-paints the goal.

He walks past puzzled Centaurs to the opposite end, paints another goal.

He goes to the middle of the bay, adjusts the projector to draw a stripe across the middle like a 50-yard line.

He paints the line red.

Cole reaches in the sack and pulls out a soccer ball. Drops it.

Clumsily he dribbles the ball downfield past the Centaurs to the goal, then kicks it -- BAP!

The Centaurs still don't get it.

Cole returns to the midline. Centers the ball. And KICKS it right into Arkany's face!

Arkany, enraged, ROARS and charges Cole!

CENTAUR ARKANY
(roars outrage)

FEMALE CENTAUR
Arkany!

SMASH CUT TO

Arkany CRASHES into another Centaur. Scrambles to get the ball, kicks it, gallops.

Arkany and his team now have red-painted stripes on their smocks.

Arkany's team dribbles, kicks, dodges, and scores a goal! Centaurs ROAR in delight.

Cole watches from the sidelines. Satisfied, he picks up his tools.

CENTAUR ARKANY (O.S.)
Cole!

Cole turns. The Centaurs form two lines and trot toward him, menacing.

But every Centaur sheers off and gives him the curious salute.

Cole stands with his hand on his heart, like a kid saluting the flag.

The Centaurs resume their game. Cole exits.

INT. CENTAUR PRISONER BAY ENTRY - DAY

Cole joins Beta. They go.

COLE
Some fierce, huh?

INT. ICARUS BAY - DAY

MONTAGE

>> Cole works, very industrious.

>> Pores over schematics.

>> Studies the hologram model.

>> Sweats over the turret through the magnifier.

>> Scribbles notes.

>> Directs the Techs to run simulations on the model.

>> Combs the results, works more.

INT. ICARUS OBSERVATION ROOM

Sherikov and Beta watch Cole work.

SHERIKOV
For real this time?

BETA
(nods)

SHERIKOV
How does he do it? He knows nothing,
but he can fix anything.

BETA
He's an artist.

INT. ICARUS BAY

Cole works.

Sherikov enters.

Beta checks her tablet.

SHERIKOV
Cole. How much longer?

Cole finishes something, sits back, tired.

COLE
Just about got 'er. Should be ready
for a live trial in...

He shrugs.

SHERIKOV
I could use a more precise answer.

BETA
(looking at tablet)
Major? General Rimer wishes to see
you.

SHERIKOV
Project him here.

BETA
In person, Major. He's flying in.

SHERIKOV
Here? To the Urals?

BUZZERS got off.

Lights flash.

Sherikov nods at Beta: "Hide Cole!"

Sherikov exits.

Beta grabs Cole's arm.

COLE
Rimer is --

BETA
"That fella in black." Quickly.

But Cole pulls free and returns to the turret.

BETA
Comrade, you must hide.

COLE
Ten minutes. Scout's honor.

Beta signals Guards: "Stick with him."

She exits.

EXT. URAL MOUNTAINS

A small fleet of black Security flyers WHIZ in, then hover.

One Security flyer dives into the mountain.

INT. URAL FLYER BAY

Rimer, Cpt Andor, and Security Troopers debark.

Security Troopers surround the ship, rifles at Port Arms.

Cpt Llongo greets Rimer.

But frowns at the show of strength.

Research Techs come forward to service the flyer.

Security Troopers block them.

Cpt Llongo waves them out.

Rimer waits while Cpt Andor whispers to Security Sgt: "Keep everyone away and be ready to take off on a second's notice."

Rimer marches with Cpt Andor and six Troopers.

CPT LLONGO
General Rimer, what a surprise.
Welcome to --

RIMER
Major Sherikov.

CPT LLONGO
Certainly, sir. She'll meet you in
the War Room. Would you care for
refreshments --

RIMER
Now.

Cpt Llongo bites his tongue and they exit.

INT. URAL CORRIDOR

Rimer marches fast with his escort.

Cpt Llongo marches alongside.

INT. URAL WAR ROOM

This War Room is a smaller copy of the NYC Complex War Room.
Colors are softer.

Research Techs work.

Cpt Llongo escorts in Rimer's party.

CPT LLONGO
If you'll excuse me, I'll find Major
Sherikov.

Cpt Llongo exits.

INT. URAL SECOND CORRIDOR

Major Sherikov half-runs.

Research Officers keep up.

SHERIKOV
Call a Blue Alert. Everyone to their
stations. Secure for attack.

RESEARCH OFFICER 1
Attack?

SHERIKOV
Call up Llongo's squad. And make
sure that yakupov Cole is squirreled
away --

Beta runs up.

BETA
A Blue Alert?

SHERIKOV
Where is Cole?

BETA
He swears ten minutes is all he needs.

SHERIKOV
Good God, he's more dangerous than
Icarus -- Calm.

Cpt Llongo trots up with his Research Troopers.

SHERIKOV
I'll conduct them to the Interrogation
Room. I'll no doubt take some heat.

CPT LLONGO
Good luck.

SHERIKOV
Calm.

Stopping before a door, Sherikov straightens her uniform.

Takes a breath, enters.

INT. URAL WAR ROOM

Research Techs work, wary of Security Troopers with rifles.

Rimer waits.

Sherikov enters, faking calm.

SHERIKOV

General Rimer, what a surprise.
Welcome to our --

RIMER

Major Sherikov, I have received a
number of contradictory reports --

SHERIKOV

General, we put forth the President's
wishes for the war effort --

RIMER

And how is it the Icarus project --

SHERIKOV

General, I apologize for interrupting,
but for security's sake...

She gestures at Research Techs listening in.

Points to a side room with a big glass window.

Rimer nods.

They enter the glassed-in room.

INT. URAL INTERROGATION ROOM

A room off the War Room. A glass window looks onto the War
Room.

Oddly, the only furniture is a steel table and steel chairs.

Propaganda posters are posted on walls.

Rimer, Cpt Andor, and four Security Troopers enter with
Sherikov.

She stands by the table.

Four Security Troopers flank her.

SHERIKOV
Now, General, what is this --

RIMER
Cpt Andor, place Major Sherikov under
arrest.

Cpt Andor comes forward.

Sherikov backs up.

Security Troopers step with her, not touching.

SHERIKOV
I don't understand.

RIMER
You're under arrest for the duration
of the war. From now on Security
will oversee Research. Pending your
court martial --

Sherikov backs to the far wall.

She's hemmed in by Cpt Andor and Troopers.

SHERIKOV
Please, General. I'm entitled to an
explanation.

RIMER
Even Centauran spies know what you've
done.
(to Cpt Andor)
Send troops to the Icarus bay. They
may have to shoot their way in. The
variable man should be there.

CPT ANDOR
General!

Sherikov SPINS and JUMPS through the (holographic) wall,
vanishing.

Cpt Andor JUMPS --

-- And SLAMS into the (now solid) wall.

A Security Trooper RATTLES the door handle.

Locked.

RIMER
Down!

CPT ANDOR
Shoot out the window! Bomb it --

FLAMES ERUPT from the ceiling, engulfing the room. WHOOSH!

Rimer DIVES under the steel table.

Cpt Andor snatches a rifle and SHOOTs out the window. CRASH!

Burning, Cpt Andor HUSTLES Rimer out the window.

Cpt Andor FLOPS atop him, rolls to put out fire.

Burning Security Troopers SCREAM.

INT. URAL WAR ROOM

Research Techs and two Security Troopers gawk.

Singed but alive, General Rimer stays down.

RIMER
Kill them!

Security Troopers RAY-GUN BLAST the Research Techs. Kill them all.

Cpt Llongo's Research Troopers burst in.

A fierce claustrophobic FIREFIGHT ensues.

Cpt Andor is SHOT, falls.

More Security Troopers RUSH in.

CPT LLONGO
Fall back!

Research Troopers pull the same trick, diving through a "solid" wall.

Security Troopers SLAM the wall, unable to follow.

Shooting stops.

Cpt Andor is dead.

RIMER
Find Cole and kill everyone else!

INT. URAL CORRIDOR

Sherikov exits through a "solid" wall into the corridor.

Research Officers and Techs DASH this way and that.

Sherikov snags one.

SHERIKOV

Send the order to evacuate the
complex. Drop everything and run.

RESEARCH OFFICER 1

What about --

SHERIKOV

Send it!

Sherikov RUNS down the corridor.

INT. ICARUS BAY

ALARMS BLARE, lights blink.

Cole makes a final adjustment to the turret.

Research Techs fret over tablets.

A Research Trooper listens to a helmet radio.

RESEARCH TECH 1

Sir, we just received orders to
evacuate.

COLE

Then you'd best skedaddle.

RESEARCH TECH 1

Comrade, we must --

COLE

Right behind you. Git, hoss!

Everyone RUNS out.

Cole is alone.

Cole installs the turret in Icarus and LOCKS the hatch.

Grabbing a paint sprayer, he tests by SPRAYING green paint
on the wall.

It works.

Quickly he SPRAYS a word (not seen by audience, it's "FIXED!") on the side of Icarus. Drops the sprayer.

Goes to a hidden cabinet and pulls out field clothes and a pack.

Saluting Icarus, he RUNS out.

INT. URAL CORRIDOR

Rimer and Security Troopers march through corridors.

Troopers SHOOT any Research staff they see.

One Trooper gets in incoming signal, points around the corner, goes ahead.

Security reinforcements arrive, led by SECURITY SGT.

SECURITY SGT
General, we've cleared an exit route.

RIMER
I'm not leaving. We must eliminate
Cole. Pull up his image. Distribute
it.

Security Sgt taps a tablet.

Cole's image springs in mid-air.

Another tap, and it appears on the face plates of every Security Trooper.

Each Trooper taps their rifle to calibrate "Shoot on sight".

RIMER
Cole is to our primary target, but
we must confirm the kill. Everyone
else is a traitor. Sweep the complex.
Find that man.

Security Sgt taps coordinates.

Maps appear on Trooper faceplates.

The company splits into squads and trots off.

Soon RAY-GUN BLASTS and SCREAMS are heard.

Rimer marches for the exit with his bodyguards.

INT. URAL LADDER SHAFT

Cole climbs a ladder to an access hatch, but --

-- Is surprised when it's sealed shut.

He starts to descend the ladder, but --

-- Freezes at CLATTERING and RUNNING sounds.

Below, two Research Techs run past.

Cole swings into a niche.

Below, Security Troopers trot after the Techs.

RAY-GUN BLASTS, SCREAMS.

In the niche, Cole pulls out a tablet.

It's his own, jury-rigged with extra wires and welds.

He pulls up a map of the complex, orients.

Goes to a maintenance hatch.

Plugs prongs into the lock, taps the tablet, opens the door.

Goes through.

INT. URAL MAINTENANCE ROOM

A typical maintenance room full of cleaning equipment.

Cole climbs in, crosses the room, cracks the door.

Out in the corridor, Security Troopers trot past.

Cole consults his jury-rigged tablet and map.

He fiddles, pushes a button.

Screen: Red dots appear, moving fast. Security Troopers are everywhere.

Cole looks around.

Sees a robot, gets an idea.

Dismantles the robot's chest section, yanks and reattaches the battery, jury-rigs a chest plate with straps.

Fiddling, he generates a shimmery force field.
Checking his tablet map, he sees red dots to the left.
Crossing his fingers, he goes out.

INT. URAL CORRIDOR

Security Troopers at an intersection listen to new orders over radio.

Cole steps into plain view.

Trooper faceplates light up with Cole's image: "Target!"

Troopers FIRE a blistering volley at Cole.

The force field around Cole BUCKLES, WOBBLES.

He's rocked, but stays on his feet.

Cole RUNS at the SHOOTING Troopers, BOWLS them aside and runs on.

They SHOOT at his back but the rays BOUNCE off.

Cursing, Troopers RUN after him.

Cole dives through a door --

-- JAMS prongs from his tablet into a socket, which SLAMS the door.

Troopers can't follow.

SECURITY TROOPER 2 radios.

SECURITY TROOPER 2
Dispatch. We sighted the target and
fired, but he's wearing a force field.
He got away, west of my coordinates.

EXT. URAL FLYER BAY

SECURITY AIDE frets, is relieved when Rimer arrives.

SECURITY AIDE
Sir, glad you're safe.

Rimer, with bodyguards, enters the shuttle.

RIMER
Lift off. Fall back.

The shuttle rises and SOARS.

EXT. URAL MOUNTAINS

Many more heavy flyers have arrived, all black.

INT. SECURITY FLYER

Rimer checks status.

Security Aide receives a report.

SECURITY AIDE
General? Troopers sighted Cole but
he's protected by some force field.

RIMER
A human being can't sustain a force --
Oh, yes.

SECURITY AIDE
They lost him. What are your orders,
sir?

RIMER
Level the mountain. Let's see Cole
endure a rain of hellfire that'll
make this region uninhabitable for
the next hundred years. Give the
order.

SECURITY AIDE
(into headset)
All forces, by orders of General
Rimer, go to Whiteout. I repeat:
Whiteout.
(to Rimer)
We better fall back, sir. Well back.

Rimer nods.

The fleet splits as Rimer's shuttle backs up.

INT. ICARUS BAY

Sherikov, mussed and flushed, stumbles in.

Stops, gawks at the rocket.

Sees the spray-painted word on the side (the audience still doesn't see, but it's "FIXED!").

Sherikov smiles.

She RUNS to the hatch, opens it.

Sees the turret "brain" winking merrily.

RUNS to the console.

Taps her wrist tracker.

Inserts it, taps a signal, begins a 30-second countdown.

COUNTDOWN: 30, 29, 28, 27...

Icarus WHINES, comes up to speed, begins to SMOKE.

Sherikov RUNS to a door, jumps through, and DOGS it shut.

Just as the first wave of bombers hit.

Distant EXPLOSIONS, earth RUMBLING.

Sherikov RUNS.

EXT. URAL MOUNTAINS -- DAY

It's a pleasant day outside.

BIRDS SING.

Cole comes out a concealed hatch. His force field is off.

He smiles to see the day.

A RUSH of approaching flyers makes him duck.

Three Security flyers ZOOM close overhead.

Spot him.

Bank toward him.

Cole SNAPS on the force field.

It JIGGLES, SHIMMIES, which is worrisome.

He runs downhill.

Running makes the force field SPUTTER from a loose connection.
He SLAPS at it, it works.
Keeps running.
Flyers line up to strafe.
A pulsar beam GOUGES the ground.
The beam WASHES over Cole's force field, staggering him.
The force field SPUTTERS worse.
Cole runs on.
Far behind, SMOKE jets from the mountainside.
Three flyers bank away.
A RUMBLE sounds (hatch opening), then a WHOOSH!
Cole turns.
A hatch BLOWS free.
Icarus ROARS into the sky.
CLOSE ON: Now the audience sees the spray-painted word.
"FIXED!" shines like a banner.
Cole smiles.
Then panics as three flyers SWOOP again.
Cole RUNS.
The first flyer's BEAM knocks him TUMBLING.
He SCRAMBLES up.
The force field SPUTTERS badly.
The second flyer BEAM KNOCKS him flat.
The force field SPUTTERS --
-- And QUITs.
Cole looks up at Icarus vanishes into sub-space.
The third flyer fires a BEAM that ENGULFS him in flame.
BURNING, TUMBLING, SCREAMING, Cole DIES.

EXT. URAL MOUNTAINS

Security fleet pounds hell on the mountains.

INT. SECURITY FLYER

ONE MINUTE EARLIER

The shuttle bobs in the air from the concussion of distant bombing.

Rimer handles three tablets at once coordinating the attack.

RIMER
(gives orders)
Close in! Red wing, flank the doors!
Blue wing... Etc.

Security Aide studies his tablet.

Suddenly Icarus ROARS into the sky.

RIMER
What in God's name is that?

Icarus SOARS, faster and faster, then WINKS away.

SECURITY AIDE
Icarus.
(listens)
Sir, they killed Cole.

Rimer digests that, unsure what anything means.

INT. URAL WAR ROOM

The War Room is a wreck.

Consoles are shot up. Blood is spattered everywhere.

A few terrified Techs hide.

Sherikov stumbles in.

SHERIKOV
A console. A working console. Which
one?

RESEARCH TECH 1

Major, they're killing anyone who
moves --

RESEARCH TECH 2

Saturation bombing is breaking down --

SHERIKOV

Get me a working console or I'll
shoot you myself!

Research Techs scramble.

Identify a working console.

Sherikov wipes blood off the screen.

SHERIKOV

This is Major Anna Dostoevsky
Sherikov, 101 priority. Patch me
through to General Rimer.

SECURITY AIDE

Major Sherikov? Where --

Picture wobbles as Rimer grabs the tablet.

INTERCUT between Rimer and Sherikov.

RIMER

You're as hard to kill as a mountain
goat.

SHERIKOV

General, please hear me. I surrender
my command and all my forces to you.
Spare my people. I take full
responsibility --

RIMER

You most certainly do. And you know
the fate of traitors.

SHERIKOV

I beg you, call off the attack,
General. Icarus has launched. The
new day you spoke of has arrived.
When Icarus arrives simultaneous
with Centaurus, the planet will crack
like an egg or evaporate into gasses.
This means an end to war, General.
After 100 years.

RIMER

Too bad you won't march in the victory parade.

In BG, Research Techs have some screens operational.

One screen shows Cole's scorched body.

SHERIKOV

Sir, please call off this attack.
All our efforts must be directed to
the final push against Centaurus.

RIMER

For once you're right, Major.
(to Aide)
Call off the attack.

SHERIKOV

Thank you, General. *Bud' Zdorov.*
Please ask your Troopers to withdraw.
I'll surrender myself and Cole --

RIMER

Cole is dead.

SHERIKOV

What?

Research Techs point to the screen.

Screen: Cole is crisped but moving feebly.

Sherikov slumps and CRIES.

Rimer is triumphant.

RIMER

Victory will mean adjustments in the
highest echelons. Earth will enter
a new phase --

Computers CHIME.

All tablets and screens show the President's face.

PRESIDENT

(frowning, on screen)

Major Sherikov, I have a report that
Icarus has launched. You might have
informed me.

SHERIKOV

Madame President, my apologies.
(MORE)

SHERIKOV (CONT'D)
Circumstances -- Yes, we have been
derelict. But Icarus means victory --

PRESIDENT
For whom, Major?

SHERIKOV
What?

RIMER
What's that?

On screen, the President moves aside to show a big Counter.
Counter reads, "Earth 1, Centaurus 99."

RIMER
99 to 1 odds. How is that possible?

SHERIKOV
The Counter is only calibrated for
two digits... Huh. The real odds
may be incalculable.

RIMER
You're not helping your cause.

SHERIKOV
They can only hang me once.

PRESIDENT
Once Icarus launched, it sent a
continuous signal until it
disappeared. The Counter corrected
itself to this. What will surely be
the greatest defeat in Earth's
history.

Stunned silence.

RIMER
Cole!

SHERIKOV
But what did he do?

PRESIDENT
Who can say?

RIMER
Someone's made a mistake. Someone
must be found and punished.

PRESIDENT

I agree.

President winks out.

Sherikov and Rimer are left gawking.

Sherikov looks at the screen where Cole is dead, and just shakes her head.

TITLE OVER

4 Years, 4 Months, 16 Days Later...

INT. NYC WAR ROOM

The War Room bustles.

Rimer watches.

Rimer has aged in just four years. He's gaunt from worry.

Counter still reads: "Earth 1, Centaurus 99".

Techs bustle.

A screen announces, "Scenario M-985 commencing".

ON SCREEN

>> Planet Centaurus looks serene.

>> A close-up shows Centaurs going about business, some military.

>> Earth's fleet coasts in from the edge of space.

>> Centaurus launches two-headed ships to defend.

>> An inset shows Icarus as a ghost coincident with the planet.

>> A countdown reads, "Icarus departing sub-space."

>> Icarus turns solid.

>> The planet quakes.

>> Then a mammoth explosion blows huge chunks into space.

>> Centaurs die by the millions.

>> Earth's fleet hovers as the planet crumbles.

>> A few Centaur two-headed ships attack, but are blasted.
>> Earth troops drop onto Centaur outposts to take possession.
>> A trooper plants an Earth flag.
>> "Scenario successful."
>> A VICTORY SONG rings out.

PRESIDENT (O.S.)
Shut it off.

SONG cuts off.

The screen reads, "Scenario M-985 canceled".
Every screen flickers to a blank blue or similar.
President marches in with her blue bodyguard.
Rimer is almost beyond caring.

PRESIDENT
Still comforting yourself with fairy
tales, General?

RIMER
(exhausted)
The scenario succeeds every time,
Madame President.

PRESIDENT
Show the fleet.

One screen shows Earth's fleet approaching Centaurus with a
countdown: "Fleet firing range: 121 minutes".

PRESIDENT
Theirs?

A screen shows the Centaur fleet, thousands of two-headed
ships, ringing the planet. Inset: "View: Real Time".

RIMER
Planet-side?

A screen shows street-level Centaurus. Centaurs go about
their business. No panic. Inset: "View: Real Time."

PRESIDENT
The scenarios only work if Icarus
arrives to save the day. But Icarus
was lost, General.

RIMER

It could still arrive. We don't
know --

PRESIDENT

It's time you grasped reality. Our
fleet will get slaughtered.

President points to the Counter. "Earth 1, Centaurus 99."

RIMER

No one heeds the Counter, Madame
President.

PRESIDENT

How convenient.

President nods to bodyguards.

Two guards bring in a prisoner --

-- Sherikov, in prison coveralls and manacles.

After four years in a slave labor camp, Sherikov is old.
Hair gray, face lined. She's missing tips of fingers.

RIMER

What is that traitor doing here?

PRESIDENT

(scoffs)

We'll all be traitors in two hours.

Still, President and Rimer are shocked by her appearance.

By contrast, Sherikov is beyond worry, so smiles.

SHERIKOV

Madame President. General Rimer.
Anna Dostoevsky Sherikov, Major,
retired.

(laughs)

PRESIDENT

What happened to your hand?

Sherikov waggles a hand with missing fingers.

SHERIKOV

Frostbite.

PRESIDENT

Why weren't they regrown?

SHERIKOV

Resources are not wasted on political prisoners in the current emergency.

(nods at screens)

We're at war, you know. Still 1 to 99?

PRESIDENT

The Counter never budged since Icarus launched four years ago.

SHERIKOV

The system is broken and can't be fixed.

RIMER

I ask again, why is this traitor here?

PRESIDENT

Because I have questions and need straight answers if we're to salvage anything from this disaster.

(deep breath)

Major Sherikov --

SHERIKOV

"Comrade."

PRESIDENT

Icarus has yet to make an appearance. Our fleet is outnumbered. Is there any way to recall it --

SHERIKOV

None. Traveling above light speed renders an object untraceable and unstoppable. I explained this.

PRESIDENT

Do we have reason to believe Icarus will arrive?

SHERIKOV

Perhaps. We know Icarus communicated with our fleet shortly before vanishing. It could arrive any time. Or never.

PRESIDENT

Not very precise.

WAR ROOM TECH 1

Signal coming in. It's -- Icarus!

Screen: Smack between the two fleets --

Screen: Icarus suddenly materializes.

Screen: The spray paint is scorched and faded, but clearly reads, "FIXED!"

PRESIDENT

What?

RIMER

No!

SHERIKOV

(laughs)

Whoo-hoo!

Screen: Icarus, mission complete, shuts off and floats in space.

RIMER

Why didn't it shatter the planet?

WAR ROOM TECH 1

Fleet Admiral requests orders.

PRESIDENT

I don't know --

RIMER

Order an attack. Immediately. Order
they attack, Madame President!

PRESIDENT

We --

SHERIKOV

Call off the attack, Madame President.
We've won.

Everyone stares.

SHERIKOV

There's no need to fight ever again.

Everyone is confused except Sherikov.

Screen: A few Centaur ships peel off and SHOOT at Earth ships.

Screen: A few Earth ships engage in a FIGHT.

Screen: More ships warm up guns and SHOOT.

SHERIKOV
Centaurus lost. Earth won. Call
off the fight.

Screen: The battle hots up.

PRESIDENT
Signal them to stand down. Withdraw.
Back -- Cease fire!

WAR ROOM TECHS
(babble orders)

Screen: The firefight threatens to escalate.

Screen: Then a green signal pulses from lead ships.

Screen: Smaller ships are shut down remotely. They drift.

Screen: The same happens to Centaur ships. The fight is
done.

RIMER
(shaken)
How long do you expect this cease-
fire to hold?

PRESIDENT
If we're lucky, a hundred years.

Everyone turns to Sherikov.

She can't gesture with bound hands.

Holds out her manacles.

President nods.

A Trooper takes off the manacles.

SHERIKOV
We should break out champagne for
Earth's greatest victory.

PRESIDENT
Can we hold the celebrating until we
understand what happened?

SHERIKOV
Hiroki never intended to create a
bomb. He intended to perfect faster-
than-light travel. But he died
experimenting. Cole analyzed the
turret, read Hiroki's schematics,
and fixed the problem.

PRESIDENT
Same as that vidsender.

RIMER
But the flight took four years.
That's useless --

SHERIKOV
Space is time. It could have bridged
the gap in four days or forty years.

PRESIDENT
Icarus popped out beside Centaurus
safe and sound...

SHERIKOV
It could have jumped over Centaurus
to the next star system. Or the
next.

RIMER
You mean...

SHERIKOV
Cole's fix leaves Centaurus in the
dust. The whole universe, all of
God's creation, is ours to explore.

PRESIDENT
Worlds without end.

RIMER
No more war.

PRESIDENT
We can divert all resources and
production to space travel.

RIMER
That's why you claimed victory.

SHERIKOV
I did. We do. Congratulations.

Suddenly a War Room Tech gets it.

WAR ROOM TECHS
We won! We won! We won!

Techs cheer, yell, sing, shout, cry, hug.

Rimer is thunderstruck.

PRESIDENT
(gently)
General.

RIMER
I understand.

Rimer exits, a broken man.

PRESIDENT
But -- Did Cole foresee all this?

SHERIKOV
Ask him.

INT. ICARUS BAY

The bay is now a lab with tools and gadgets.

Techs bustle on a hundred projects.

Cole works at a table.

Half his skin is a clear plastic shield that shows muscles and veins. He wears long sleeves and a cap to cover up.

Sherikov enters, fresh and crisp in a new uniform.

Cole gallantly stands.

COLE
Major Sherikov.

SHERIKOV
(chuckles)
Colonel Sherikov.

COLE
I hear the war is over.

SHERIKOV
Did you hear one man single-handedly
saved the human race?

COLE
(suddenly embarrassed)
Don't roll out a parade.

SHERIKOV
What reward can Earth present our
benefactor, Cole?

COLE

Tom. My Christian name is Tom.

SHERIKOV

Tom. How is it you never married?
A gallant man who stands when a woman
enters the room?

COLE

No luck with the ladies.
(beat)
You can't send me back to my own
time.

SHERIKOV

(shakes head)

COLE

Can't be fixed.

SHERIKOV

I'm sorry I lied.

COLE

That's war. Them horse-folk?

SHERIKOV

Repatriated.

Cole goes to a locker and pulls out a huge pack.

SHERIKOV

Tom. Not again.

COLE

One more tweak.

SHERIKOV

Your wrist implant?

COLE

Jumped that stump first week back.

Cole picks up a gadget, touches it to his wrist implant.

The implant goes dead.

SHERIKOV

Tom, please.

Cole picks up a force field harness, improved.

COLE

Thanks for the hospitality.

Cole turns on the harness --
 -- And becomes invisible, intangible.
 Sherikov gropes the air.
 Nothing.

SHERIKOV

Tom!

The door mysteriously opens and closes.
 Sherikov runs out.

INT. URAL CORRIDOR

Sherikov runs into the corridor.
 No sign of Cole.

SHERIKOV

Tom?

INT. URAL WAR ROOM

The place is quiet in off hours.
 Techs play a game.
 Sherikov hurries in.
 Punches buttons.
 Techs come to watch.
 Screens light up with outside views.
 Screen: Outside it's evening.
 Sherikov scans, scans, scans --
 Screen: Cole winks into existence on one screen, having turned off his harness. He discards it, shoulders the pack, hikes.
 A Tech pulls up a file of Cole.
 The wrist implant box is empty.

RESEARCH TECH 1

His implant is -- turned off?

Sherikov turns off the outside screens.

Screens: All go blank.

Sherikov turns to the file of Cole.

Enters a code.

Screen: Cole's face is marked "Deceased."

SHERIKOV
Stupai s bogom, Tom Cole.

EXT. URAL MOUNTAINS -- DUSK

Forested hills as night falls.

Tom Cole, happy, reaches a ridge.

Looks around.

In the far distance is a tiny column of smoke.

Smiling, he tramps that way.

FADE OUT