

FOUR HEARTS PARALLEL

Episode #101

"Pilot"

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PART ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. - ZURDIC - AZURA ACADEMY - TRAINING GROUNDS - DAY

Several dozen single-pilot airships gleam from their starting points on a runway. An observation deck flanks them to the rear, the silhouette of a flight academy soaring above the arena.

Thirteenth from the end of the first row, SHANA VALNERR grips her cockpit controls, bracing herself for the starting signal.

Sweat drips from under her cap as she squeezes her eyes shut.

FLASHBACK - SHANA'S CHILDHOOD HOME - DAY

Shana's mother MIRIA lies ill in bed. A YOUNG SHANA approaches.

YOUNG SHANA
How are you feeling, Mama?

MIRIA
A little better, I think. Having the window open helps some - there's a lovely breeze today. Don't you think the sky looks pretty, Shana?

YOUNG SHANA
The sky? It's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen!

She spins in a circle, teeters to a stop, then bounces back to sit at her mother's bedside.

YOUNG SHANA (CONT'D)
After you, of course, Mama.

Miria laughs faintly and strokes Shana's hair.

MIRIA
If I'm not careful, my baby bird will fly off to who knows where! Guess I'd better hold on extra tight!

She squeezes her in a hug.

(CONTINUED)

YOUNG SHANA
Hold extra tight and don't let go!
When you're better, we'll fly
together, all the way past the
clouds! Okay, Mama?

Miria smiles sadly.

MIRIA
Yes, I'd like that very much.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. - ZURDIC - AZURA ACADEMY - TRAINING GROUNDS - DAY

A loudspeaker crackles and screeches. Shana gulps.

COMMANDER TANITH (O.S.)
Welcome to the third quarter
practical examinations! At this
time, your Orbital should be in
position and ready for takeoff. As
a precaution, all phasers have been
locked to their lowest frequency
for the duration of the melee. Your
score shall be calculated based on
your tactical application, display
of aerial maneuvers, and total
sustained damage. ...Pilots ready?
On my mark!

Shana white-knuckles her control sticks.

TANITH (O.S.)
Three!

MEMORY FLASH - the silhouettes of a trio of youngsters
holding hands against a summer sky filled with fireflies.

TANITH (O.S.)
Two!

MEMORY FLASH - A young girl, LIA, visiting Miria looks out
the bedroom window in terror; a shadow passes over the city.

TANITH (O.S.)
One!

MEMORY FLASH - A bomb drops from a strike fighter emblazoned
with a crest containing the name "Izaria."

(CONTINUED)

TANITH (O.S.)
Start!

Shana explodes off the runway with precision focus, whirling and weaving between her competitors.

From the observation deck, a young man in a cadet blue uniform, LAVI, follows her movements tensely.

Another candidate attempts to attack from Shana's blind spot; Shana executes an ambitious feint.

Lavi relaxes his grip on the railing before him.

Farther down, the panel of judges sits at a long table, engrossed in the action.

A mustached MAN in a lab coat removes his glasses with interest, zeroing in on Shana's performance.

EXT. - AZURA ACADEMY - TRAINING GROUNDS - DAY (LATER)

Back on the airstrip, the candidates line up beside their vehicles for inspection.

As the panel of judges moves from each applicant to the next, his or her final marks are displayed on a massive scoreboard mounted over the observation deck. So far, no one has passed.

Shana salutes as the panel approaches, COMMANDER TANITH among them.

COMMANDER TANITH
At ease, Ms. Valnerr.

Shana relaxes somewhat.

The panel begins their inspection, scribbling on clipboards.

The mustached man exchanges glances with Tanith, who nods.

TANITH
Ms. Valnerr, this is Dr. Marcoh,
director of aeronautics for the
Bureau of Defense.

DR. MARCOH
Ms. Valnerr, watching you fly is
almost as much a pleasure as
meeting you in person. You're quite
the impressive young lady.

(CONTINUED)

SHANA

Thank you, sir.

DR. MARCOH

Commander Tanith has informed me
that you've applied to join the
Infinauts, correct?

Shana nods.

And aside from your obvious
academic achievements, what makes
you think you're the woman for the
job?

SHANA

Well, it's my dream, sir. Ever
since I was a little girl I wanted
to fly past the clouds. Flying with
the highest in the league seemed
like the best way to get me there.
Besides, who doesn't want to fly
first class?

DR. MARCOH

First class, eh? What if I told you
I could do you one better?

SHANA

How do you mean?

DR. MARCOH

In the last year, my team has been
developing a new Orbital model
called a Bladewing. It links
directly into the central nervous
system, minimizing reaction time to
virtually zero, and allowing for
execution of unique tactical
maneuvers on the fly, if you'll
pardon the pun.

Shana smiles thinly.

DR. MARCOH (CONT'D)

Even better, it automatically
stores newly created moves in its
database for future use.
Theoretically speaking, if you can
think it, it can do it, and do it
again. In other words, it relies on
intelligence, real skill. Today,
you have demonstrated both. On
behalf of the Bureau, I'd like to

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DR. MARCOH (CONT'D) (cont'd)
offer you a position on our staff
as a test pilot.

SHANA

What about my original application?

TANITH

Your ranking based on today's graduation test will remain separate from any other post you choose to accept independently. The Academy recommended you for this project after extensive reviews of your academic and practical achievements. Therefore, we support your participation in both capacities. Should you do so, you will be excused from duty as needed.

SHANA

And who else is a part of this project?

TANITH

Several of our senior officers, as well as a few younger fliers like yourself. You may remember Anton Corvi, he was in his last year when you joined the Academy.

SHANA

Oh, my, um, friend Lavi was in the class below him, so I've met him before, yes.

Tanith stiffens slightly at the mention of the name.

Shana shoots her a look, but Dr. Marcoh holds out a sheaf of papers secured to his clipboard.

DR. MARCOH

Why don't you have a look at the contract? You don't have to decide right away. I must return to the lab tonight, but our operations themselves don't resume for two more weeks. You should note however that whether or not you decide to join us, we would appreciate your discretion regarding the project.

Shana flips through the contract.

(CONTINUED)

I will say though, it would be a shame not to have you on our team. It's people like you that have the power to put an end to the fighting in the Izarian Province.

Shana's head shoots up, her eyes fierce.

SHANA

Do you plan to use the Bladewings to defeat the rebels then?

DR. MARCOH

Well yes, the sooner they're fully functional, the better -

SHANA

Count me in.

DR. MARCOH

I'm sorry?

SHANA

I'm saying that I accept your offer, Dr. Marcoh. Thank you very much for the opportunity. I promise I won't let you down.

She signs the contract.

DR. MARCOH

T-Thank you, Ms. Valnerr. We appreciate your enthusiasm.

He holds out his hand and they shake.

DR. MARCOH

You know what, I'm not really supposed to allow it, but how would you like to take her out for a trial run? Get a taste for all you have to look forward to?

SHANA

You brought one with you?

DR. MARCOH

Yes, of course. Had to get approval from your Academy board of safety now didn't I?

He smiles and winks at Tanith.

DR. MARCOH
If you're not busy just now, why
don't we have ourselves a look-see?
I'm told they stored her in a more
private hangar on the back lot, you
know the one?

Shana grins, nodding.

DR. MARCOH
Wonderful! After you then, Ms.
Valnerr!

INT. - PRIVATE HANGAR - DAY

A streamlined, silver airship gleams from its space in the hangar.

Shana stands to the side with Tanith as Dr. Marcoh readies the cockpit, her eyes hungrily following the contours of the exterior.

SHANA
(under her breath) Sexy.

DR. MARCOH
All right, she's ready for ya!

TANITH
And you're sure it's safe?

DR. MARCOH
It passed inspection at the lab
last week and here this morning, so
I can confidently say, "Yes,
ma'am," to that! We'll be on the
headsets with her the whole time.
But just to be sure, you can send a
couple spotters out with her if you
want.

SHANA
Don't bother, it'll just take more
time getting them prepped and down
here. Besides, can't be any more
dangerous than the practicals I
just took, right?

TANITH
With the way you flew, I suppose
not. All right, no spotters, but
that means no stunts either!

(CONTINUED)

SHANA
Roger that. Thank you, ma'am.

DR. MARCOH
Wonderful! Okay, Ms. Valnerr, let's
get you in the air!

Shana gets into the cockpit.

A headset labeled "Nervegear" descends over her eyes.

The backrest of the seat is molded to imitate the human spine, nodes running up into the neck.

Built into the heads of the armrests are touchscreens linking to the main display panel, semi-transparent against the windshield.

The dashboard contains several other displays, including digital pressurization controls, an airspeed indicator, a machmeter, a medical monitor, and a tactical database.

DR. MARCOH
It's voice activated. Just state
your name and it'll do the rest.

SHANA
Shana Valnerr.

BLADEWING NAV
Valnerr, Shana. Welcome to
Bladewing model I315NASB. I am
Tsadde. Should you encounter any
problems or desire more information
about any aspect of the operating
system, please address me for
assistance. When you are ready for
takeoff, assume your position on
the gravigate.

Shana lines herself up over the gravigate in the hangar floor.

The motion-activated hatch opens, but the Bladewing remains in place, held up by gravity fields integrated into the gate perimeter.

SHANA
Release gravity fields.

TSADDE
Gravity fields disarming in 3, 2,
1:

Shana allows the Bladewing barely a moment of descent before she zooms off.

She performs some basic maneuvers to Dr. Marcoh's shouts of, "Wonderful, wonderful!" from the hangar. She allows herself a whoop of joy, elated by the rush of executing moves simply by thinking them.

SHANA

Oh, I could get used to this! Let's see how fast you can go, baby girl.

She tries to accelerate.

TSADDE

You have reached the maximum airspeed permitted for this trial.
Time remaining: six minutes, thirty-four seconds.

SHANA

No stunts, now no speed? So not sexy. Guess I'll have to get Lavi to make up for your poor performance later, huh? Azura knows he's good for all three.

TANITH (O.S.)

(miffed) That's it, Valnerr,
test run's over!

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. - REALM OF ARACELIS - WOODLAND - DAY

A druid apprentice, LAVI, sits at the center of a small clearing. His legs are loosely crossed in some form of meditation or prayer, his palms pressed together, middle fingers interlocked.

After several moments, he relaxes, falling back to lie spreadeagled on the forest floor.

A BLACK JAGUAR CUB pads around his head, nuzzling him gently.

Lavi reaches up under her belly and lets his fingers graze her side. She purrs.

A distant flute sounds, and he rises, watching the cub frolic to the melody.

(CONTINUED)

He retrieves and dons his thigh pouch, tightening the straps around his hip and leg. He removes a scroll from it and draws a symbol in charcoal at the center of the canvas.

He straightens and calls to his familiar.

LAVI 2
Shana, it's time!

The cub yaps, and trots to his side, instantly sober.

Lavi fingers her ears affectionately for a moment.

LAVI 2
Ready?

She bows her head, a low rumble issuing from her throat.

The two brace themselves in unison.

Lavi raises two fingers nearly level with his face. He closes his eyes, focusing, and begins to chant.

LAVI 2
Lei twa un'laerium tor umbratiem
marrakesh du nethil'bra fo letico!

WHOOSH - Writhe dark matter explodes from the scroll.

Pulled together by the incantation, Lavi and Shana transform into a great, inky bird.

The surface of its feathers ripples, and we see that each is composed of ancient runes crawling and connecting to one another.

BLAST - The ink-beast takes to the skies, soaring over the forest and past a village nestled in a valley towards the mountain range beyond. It lands at what appears to be a

SHRINE ENTRANCE

The flutist stands atop a ledge lined with stone steps leading into the shrine, ushering the villagers inside.

Lavi releases the spell and he and Shana join the procession as a second player harmonizes with the first.

INT. - ARACELIS - SHRINE - DAY

The muted sound of hand drums, low humming and chanting overlap with the flutes.

Rows of villagers sit cross-legged before a great altar, clasping hands and swaying as they sing.

Lavi takes his place among the druid apprentices, and adds his voice to the choir.

Shana morphs into a songbird and trills along with the others.

A girl in a white kaftan dress and veil kneels in prayer before stone carvings of gods and goddesses. Beside her rests an ornate crescent-shaped bell.

She turns to face the villagers and raises her arms.

The singing intensifies gloriously; her hands form fists and it ceases.

Though she is but a young girl, she addresses the villagers as would an elder.

HIGH PRIESTESS ITHYLIA

O my children, my Azure Eye has shown me the passing of the Ilmari bloodline. The Day of Naming has come at last!

The hall fills with cheers. Lavi and his brethren remain still.

ITHYLIA

Will the apprentices please rise.

Lavi and his companions stand, their familiars alongside them.

ITHYLIA

On this day, four of our brothers and sisters will join the ranks of our prophets. They will enter the Azure, and protect our realm with their Sight. As architects and arbiters of the Beyond, their familiars shall manifest into their final forms to help guide their Sight as they delve into the Unwritten.

She retrieves the summoning bell and raises it high.

(CONTINUED)

A hush falls over the crowd.

ITHYLIA

I will now call upon the spirits of the Azure to bear witness to the ceremony. Spirits of the Azure, I welcome thee!

She rings the bell.

The congregation bows their heads until the final echo fades from the hall.

ITHYLIA

When I call your name, approach the stand and remove your clothing for the Cleansing. Once the spirits have blessed you, you will enter the Azure.

Lavi D'elrion!

Lavi joins the priestess at the altar as the drums and chanting resume.

He strips to his waist, then kneels before the statues.

The priestess dips her hands into a basin of clear, dimly glowing liquid.

Cupping them high, she faces Lavi. The water seeps between her palms.

INT. - AZURA ACADEMY - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Lavi raises his face into the water streaming from the showerhead. He finishes up and twists the tap, exiting the shower stall.

As he towels off, we hear snatches of other boys' conversations.

BOY 1

Did you see the practicals this morning? I heard they only passed one candidate, can you believe it?

BOY 2

With those Izarian Alliance bastards threatening insurrection, I'm surprised they passed anyone this time around. My folks voided

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

BOY 2 (cont'd)
my application, said it was safer
to stay in school. Probably worried
I'd get assigned somewhere
dangerous.

BOY 3
It's that Valnerr girl they passed,
right?

BOY 1
Yeah, Little Miss Perfect, that's
what I heard.

BOY 2
Hey, she's not all bad. Great
grades, great ass -

Lavi slams his locker shut with a resounding clang and a glare.

The boys disperse. Lavi heaves a sigh.

INT. - AZURA ACADEMY ATRIUM

Lavi, now dressed in his own clothes, ambles down a set of curved marble stairs.

He reaches the bottom and gazes fondly up at an enormous golden statue of a arced wing that follows the curve of the staircase.

Frantic footsteps echo from above.

SHANA 1
Lavi, Lavi, wait up! I did it! I
did it, come see!

She hurries down the last of the stairs, and waves a leather badge holder triumphantly in his face, giddy with excitement.

I passed! I'm officially an
Infinaut! Can you believe it?

LAVI 1
You bet I can! I was watching from
the observation deck - you were
phenomenal!

He throws out his arms and they hug, laughing.

LAVI 1
Congratulations! I knew you could do it!

SHANA 1
I trained with the best, after all.

LAVI 1
Well...

He rocks back on his heels, thumbs hooked in his suspenders.

Shana tucks the badge into her bag where a brand new uniform is snugly folded. She wipes at her cheek.

SHANA 1
Your hair's damp. Did you take your Orbital out for another run?

LAVI 1
No, I was stuck in the lift doing maintenance. Don't tell anyone, but I snuck her into the private hangar on the back lot. Now that they've issued those warnings to prevent any more sabotage attempts, I figure I can't be too careful. Not to mention that I want her in top shape for next week's assignment.

SHANA 1
I can't believe they're sending you all the way to the fourth tier and you're only second rank. ...Are you worried?

LAVI 1
Because of the uprisings? A little. But we'll be with Commander Tanith, so I'm sure it'll be fine. Besides, I don't do much anyway.

SHANA 1
Just stand there and look pretty?

Lavi grins and gives a sportive shrug.

LAVI 1
If that's what Tanith asks of me.

SHANA 1
Does she?

LAVI 1
Shana.

SHANA 1
Well, does she?

Lavi doesn't answer. Shana shoulders her bag with a huff, and shoves past him.

LAVI 1
Hey wait, where are you off to?

INT. - ACADEMY LIBRARY - DAY

Shana strides past rows of bookshelves, her jaw set, eyes locked on a lamplit table near the Psychology section.

Lavi jogs up behind her; she refuses to look at him.

He tries to catch her arm, but she shakes him off.

SHANA 1
I told you to quit following me.

LAVI 1
Look, Shana, I'm sorry. What do you want me to say? She's my superior - I didn't want anyone to get hurt -

SHANA 1
A little too late for that, don't you think?

LAVI 1
Don't be such a child! I'm two years your senior, and I've been looking after you for nearly as long. You owe me some respect.

Shana rounds on him. Lavi puts his hands up defensively.

SHANA 1
Why, does it make you feel small, like less of a man if I don't? I'm sure Tanith can take care enough of that for the both of us -

The library-goers shoot them disapproving glares at her shrill tones.

LAVI 1
Would you keep your voice down?
Listen to me, it's not what you
think, okay? She was the only one
making advances. I told her that it
wasn't right, that I wasn't
interested. That I already had -
someone else.

SHANA 1
What makes you think you "have" me?

LAVI 1
I, well - because you have me,
don't you?

Shana's expression softens. She smiles, rolls her eyes, and stretches up to kiss Lavi's cheek.

He takes her hand, playing with her fingers.

LAVI 1
Happy now?

SHANA 1
You could do with a shave.

LAVI 1
I thought you liked a bit of
scruff! Oh fine, if I clean it up
some, then will you be happy?

SHANA 1
Not quite.

LAVI 1
Why? What are we even doing here
anyway?

SHANA 1
Research.

She retrieves several books from the surrounding shelves.

Lavi glances at the spines of the two peeking out from under Shana's arm: "Astral Projection and Bilocation: Mysteries of the Occult" and "Lore Galore: Dreamwalkers and Dopplegangers." Both volumes are dusty and hastily earmarked.

LAVI 1
You're really not supposed to do
that to the corners, you know.
Public property and everything.

SHANA 1

In case you haven't noticed, I'm a bit too preoccupied to worry about that right now. The Devil's in the details my ass.

LAVI 1

More likely it's in Ms. Girard.

He nods towards the head librarian's desk, his eyes flicking over to a severe-looking woman lighting the last of the lamps.

LAVI 1

If she catches you, you can bet she'll be after more than just your ass, which, I might add, I won't be covering if she fines you.

SHANA 1

Yeah, like I said, don't have time to care about that right now.

LAVI 1

What are you talking about? The practicals are over, you've got nothing going on.

SHANA 1

Oh, I have plenty going on, believe me. No, really...I'm going to tell you something, and I need you to believe me, all right? Don't laugh.

Lavi looks at her, bewildered.

I've been having these dreams. No, not the nightmares, they're different. Well, sort of. You're still there. Sort of.

LAVI 1

So you've been dreaming about me, huh? No wonder you got upset about Tanith -

She reaches under his jacket and snaps a suspender strap.

LAVI 1 (CONT'D)

OW! Shana, what the hell - I- I mean, hello, Ms. Girard.

MS. GIRARD

This is a library, not a loony bin.
Either escort yourselves to a
check-out clerk or out the door.
Your pick.

Subdued, Shana and Lavi shuffle off to the front desk. Shana dumps the books in front of the clerk and heaves a sigh.

LAVI 1

You've had a long day. Why don't we
take the tramway home instead
tonight?

Shana nods.

INT. - METROPOLIS OF AZURA - CABLE CAR - NIGHT

The tram glides over the city towards the lower town.

Shana leans against the window, watching the buildings drift past. She stares wistfully at several adjacent districts in varying stages of restoration.

Lavi slides his arm around her shoulders and gently pulls her away. His hand on her head, she buries her face in his sleeve.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. - ARACELIS - LAVI'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

SHANA, in human form, enters the cottage, flitting about to light candles.

Under her robes, deep blue tattoos run up her bare skin, the prong-edged willowy patterns connoting a kind of fierce grace.

She rushes out to retrieve a wan-looking Lavi.

His arm around her neck, Shana helps him inside and onto the bed.

He rubs his eyes with a groan.

LAVI 2

I don't know how Ithyilia does that
all day. She didn't tell any of us
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LAVI 2 (cont'd)
how exhausting that was going to
be.

Shana wets and wrings out a cloth at the washbasin.

SHANA 2
The first time usually is.
Sustaining astral projection for
that long takes some getting used
to.

She returns to the bed, leaning down to dab his face.

SHANA 2
You'll feel better after you take
some rest.

LAVI 2
You must be tired too. Tethering me
to the physical plane for so long
can't be easy.

SHANA 2
An anchor may rust, but it does not
weary. So the navigator needn't
worry.

LAVI 2
You are my friend. Of course I'm
going to worry.

He takes the cloth from her, and holds her hands.

LAVI 2
I never got the chance to fully
admire you in this form. You're
beautiful, Shana.

SHANA 2
My true form is far more impressive
I think. But since it would be
illogical to assume it on this
plane, I am able to take this shape
because of your strength.

LAVI 2
I'm not so sure. It would seem
there may be another reason.

SHANA 2
Oh?

LAVI 2

When I enter the Azure, I see a land of smoke and steam and beige and bronze. There is a girl who looks like you. She lives with a boy who looks like me. She flies in a great gray beast that sits like a stone until her touch makes it sputter to life. She must be very strong to work magic without a spell...

Shana's expression grows serious.

LAVI 2

But then there are other times where she is not so strong. She thinks of her mother often. She does her best to hide it, but I can tell it saddens her. She cries herself to sleep...and yet, it is curious.

SHANA 2

What is?

LAVI 2

When she sleeps, she lives through your eyes and dreams our reality. It is a magic greater than I have ever known...

A look of quiet comprehension sweeps across Shana's face.

SHANA 2

It would seem that we have resonated with two others who share our souls.

LAVI 2

Our souls?

SHANA 2

People are made out of stars, yes? Then it is not outside the realm of possibility for more than one person's soul to share the same star. And if the Azure serves as the gateway to billions of other universes, it would make sense for the course of at least one of those realities to run alongside our own.

(CONTINUED)

LAVI 2

So when I entered the Azure, our
souls were naturally drawn
together?

SHANA 2

Four hearts parallel, converging
among the stars.

LAVI 2

But what of the girl, the other
Shana? Her world does not contain
magic, at least not our kind. How
can she see us in her dreams?

SHANA 2

I suppose if the will of one's
heart is strong enough, anything is
possible...

INT. - AZURA LOWER TOWN - LAVI'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Lavi portions out a freshly-cooked meal onto two plates.

LAVI 1

Chow's on!

He gets no reply.

LAVI 1

What, you got your nose buried so
far in those books you can't smell
this deliciousness? I made your
favorite! C'mon, let's celebrate!
...Shana?

He hops upstairs and into

SHANA'S ROOM

Star charts and diagrams detailing the designs of vintage
and modern airship models plaster the walls. A large poster
labeled "Nephthys Command" hangs over the bed. Evening light
streams through the open window. Underneath it, the library
books lie strewn about the floor. Shana sleeps in the middle
of the mess.

Lavi surveys her with a sigh, but can't help smiling.

LAVI 1

I should be annoyed with you for
flaking out on me, but you're so
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LAVI 1 (cont'd)
damn cute now I'm just annoyed with
myself. At least you're sleeping
soundly for once.

He picks her up and tucks her in bed, then tiptoes out the door.

Shana dreams on.

EXT. - ARACELIS - ILMARI VILLAGE - NIGHT

Fire surges across the entire valley.

Lavi, hood pulled up against the smoke, fights against
CROWDS OF FLEEING VILLAGERS.

LAVI 2
Has anyone seen my sister?

He stops an OLDER PROPHET, whose robes are singed.

LAVI 2
Please, do you know where the
priestess is? Is she safe?

The old man whimpers, gesturing to the foothills past the village.

Jostled by the man tripping past him, Lavi pales as the shrine begins to crumble.

LAVI 2
Shana, to me!

Shana, back in jaguar form, bounds to his side. Lavi vaults onto her back and forms a hand-sign, channeling his magic.

He urges her on, and she is suddenly able to take impossible leaps across the valley and up into the shrine.

INT. - SHRINE - CENTRAL CHAMBER

A faintly glowing pool overflows across the once-beautiful chamber, waterfalls seeping sideways, supporting pillars cracked and caving.

LAVI 2
Ithylia! Ithylia? Can you hear me?

Shana shifts back into her human form, and the two split up.

Lavi struggles around the debris, sloshing through knee-deep water still on the rise.

He makes it to the back of the shrine to find Ithyria kneeling before the altar, clutching her bell.

LAVI 2

Ithyria! We have to go, the temple is collapsing!

ITHYLIA remains motionless. Lavi moves to carry her out.

SHANA 2 (O.S.)

Lavi, no! Don't touch her!

Lavi whips around. His hood falls.

LAVI 2

I'm not letting her die, not like this!

He reaches for her shoulder, but is blasted backwards by some invisible force.

Ithyria turns to face him. Her eyes burn white. When she speaks, her voice is warped, mingled with a dark power that is not her own.

ITHYLIA

Such a silly sister you have here, probing into the deep reaches of the Azure without permission. Woke me from my cursed slumber with the sweet sound of her summoning bell.

She flings the bell with superhuman strength and it shatters against one of the statue faces.

ITHYLIA

A silly sister, yes, but certainly much nicer than my own, wouldn't you say, Shana?

SHANA 2

No, it can't be!

ITHYLIA

It would seem the seal you placed on me was not as strong as you believed. Broken by so small and sweet a thing. Ten thousand years is a long time, but it is no eternity. But perhaps I should have
(MORE)

ITHYLIA (cont'd)
liked to remain asleep, having
awoken to such a cruel reality. To
curse your kin twice over is an
unforgivable betrayal. You leave me
no choice but to erase such a false
existence.

Ithylia raises a hand towards Shana, closing it into a fist.

Shana gasps, choking, then is lifted off her feet and
slammed into a pillar.

LAVI 2
Shana!!

INT. - LAVI'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Shana jolts awake, screaming and clutching at her throat.

Tangled in the sheets, she thrashes wildly and slips off the bed.

She flinches as the door bangs open.

Lavi rushes in, missing a few layers but still clothed.

LAVI 1
(to himself) Damn it, the
nightmares again? (to Shana)
Shana?

SHANA 1
No, you have to get out!

Halfway to her side, Lavi hesitates, uncertain, then closes the distance between them to Shana's continued shrieking.

He drops to his knees, tentatively pulling her hands away from her neck as he tries to calm her.

LAVI 1
Shana, they can't hear you, they're dead. It's just a dream, you're all right.

SHANA 1
No, no, no, they can't be dead. I have to help them, I have to save them!

Lavi looks pained. He closes his eyes.

FLASHBACK - BOMBING AFTERMATH

Shana and Lavi stand aghast in an Academy classroom, smoke and flame reflected off the windows covering the left side of the building. Some are cracked or shattered from the explosion.

Smoke leaks into the room as alarms blare from the hall. Over them, an announcement:

COMMANDER TANITH

This is not a drill, I repeat, this is not a drill. Students and faculty shall remain in their classrooms until further notice. The city is under attack.

SHANA 1

(murmuring) Mom -

She looks over at Lavi, his face screwed up and wet with tears.

And Lia...

The doors at each end of the room lock automatically. Shana sprints to the back and fumbles with the handle. Lavi wrestles with her, trying to pull her back.

SHANA 1

Let go! I have to help them, I have to save them!

LAVI 1

You can't. You know you can't. It's too late - they were dead before we could even realize it. If you go out there now, you'll die too.

SHANA 1

I don't care! It's my mother, your sister - we can't lose them!

LAVI 1

We already have. That's why you have to stay. Because I can't lose you too. I need you, Shana.

PRESENT DAY - SHANA'S BEDROOM

Teary-eyed, Lavi surveys Shana, still shuddering and sobbing.

(CONTINUED)

LAVI 1
It's okay, it's not your fault.
It's not your fault.

Lavi leans to take her face in his hands, but she recoils against the bed, breathing hard. She gasps for air.

LAVI 1
Breathe, Shana, breathe. There's no explosion, you can breathe. We're home, we're here, together. You said as long as we're together, we'd be all right, remember?

Shana freezes.

FLASHBACK - BOMBING AFTERMATH

Shana sinks to the floor with Lavi. They huddle together.

SHANA 1
I need you too. I know I act like I don't need people holding my hand, but...

She takes his, tentative but then tightly.

SHANA 1
Growing up as kids, I always felt like when we were together, there was nothing we couldn't do, that no matter what happened, everything would be okay in the end.

LAVI 1
And now?

SHANA 1
"Together" might mean something different, but everything else is the same. As long as we're together, I know we'll be all right.

PRESENT DAY - SHANA'S BEDROOM

Shana seems to surrender.

Lavi cups her cheeks in his hands. He brushes away her tears and the hair in her eyes.

A new wave of tears replaces the first and she buries her face in his shoulder. He rubs her back.

LAVI 1
Shh, shh, you're all right, I'm
here.

SHANA 1
But you're there too! You and Lia
and the other -

LAVI 1
Shana.

Shana attempts to compose herself.

SHANA 1
It wasn't just a dream.

LAVI 1
I know how much you miss them. I do
too, I think about them every day.
But you've got to let this go. The
nightmares have to stop.

SHANA 1
You don't understand, I can't stop
it. Doesn't matter what I do.

LAVI 1
You couldn't have stopped it.
There's no need to feel guilty -

SHANA 1
That's not what I'm talking about!
I tried to tell you before -

LAVI 1
But the nightmares -

SHANA 1
Aren't just nightmares anymore.
They're real, the dreams are *real*.

Lavi stares at her.

END OF ACT THREE & PART ONE

PART TWO

ACT ONE

INT. - LAVI'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT (LATER)

The pair sit quietly on Shana's bed.

LAVI 1

And this has been going on for weeks?

SHANA 1

Yeah. Sometimes I'd wake up and it would feel almost like I was on the wrong side. That's how I knew I think, that it was all really happening.

LAVI 1

How can you be completely sure though?

SHANA 1

For the last time, I'm not making this up! There's no way I could invent whole histories in my head - in my sleep! The people, their culture, their *magic*, it's all real!

LAVI 1

But I thought you said the village and the temple were destroyed?

SHANA 1

Yes, but they could have made it out somehow, couldn't they? Magic, remember?

LAVI 1

...But if they didn't, doesn't that mean the dreams will end?

SHANA 1

No, they have to have survived. I need them to be alive.

LAVI 1

They probably don't even know *you're* alive! Why is this so important to you?

SHANA 1

Because! ...Because if they're alive in that world, then maybe there's a chance - maybe there's a
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SHANA 1 (cont'd)
chance that my mother is too. I
know it wouldn't be the same, but
if I could just see her again -

LAVI 1
Don't talk like that.

SHANA 1
Why not?

LAVI 1
Because it's not healthy! You're
scaring me a little, okay? You know
the Academy could revoke your
license if they found out about all
of this?

SHANA 1
What, because they'll think I'm
crazy? I've always been crazy! I'm
the one no one wants to pair off
with for simulations or scrimmages!
But you know what else? Over forty
people applied to take the
practical today, and I'm the only
one they passed! Maybe a little
crazy is what they were looking
for, huh?

LAVI 1
Or maybe they just think you're
expendable.

SHANA 1
Excuse me?!

LAVI 1
Listen to me, Shana! The Izarian
Alliance could declare war on us
any day now, and you know what'll
happen then? They'll reassign
everyone of age to the Nephtys
Fleet to defend the border and
we'll all get ourselves blown up!
Is that what you want?

SHANA 1
No, Lavi, I -

LAVI 1
Well it damn well shouldn't be! And
it's not what your mother would
(MORE)

LAVI 1 (cont'd)
want either! I promised her Shana,
I promised I would protect you! But
if I die like her and Ithylia and
the rest of the victims, I won't be
able to keep that promise. If war
breaks out, I -

He breaks off, pulling Shana close.

He presses his lips to her forehead, hard and half-desperate
as the swallow he takes to steel himself.

LAVI 1
If war breaks out, I have half a
mind to run away. And I know it's
cliche, but you've always been my
better half, so...would you come
with me? I don't even know if I
could do it without you in the
first place. ...But I wouldn't make
you go if you wanted to stay and
fight. You're a fighter, I know.
That's why they passed you, because
who better to have as a fighter
pilot than someone who's had air
supremacy over her skies for nearly
all her life?

Shana smiles into Lavi's shirt, and hugs him back.

SHANA 1
I thought you were a pilot, not a
poet.

Lavi hums a laugh as they break apart.

LAVI 1
So you're all right now?

SHANA 1
Yes, but...will you stay? Please?

A rare moment of vulnerability. Lavi smiles.

LAVI 1
You want me to bring you up some
dinner? You never ate.

SHANA 1
Yeah, I'd like that, thanks.

EXT. - ZEPHYRION RIM - TESTING FACILITY ROOFTOP - NIGHT

The stormy desert sky is obstructed by an expanse of shining whiteness; the titan-spirit OROS, winged with a halo-like ring around its disembodied orb of a head rises before a tall building. The roof is smeared with twisting trails of blood.

Dr. Marcoh kneels at the ledge, blood-spattered, arms outstretched imploringly. At his feet, lines upon lines of naked corpses.

OROS
This sacrifice is insufficient.

DR. MARCOH
Please! You promised! I prayed just like you asked -

OROS
Yet you've failed to meet the conditions of our bargain.

DR. MARCOH
I - I can bring you more sacrifices, I swear. We're collecting more test subjects as we speak, we just need time!

OROS
You dare name patience as the price for my power, when it is not mine to pay?

DR. MARCOH
W-We want the same thing, the strength to exterminate those who have betrayed us! We had an understanding!

OROS
I understand that you promised me 10,000 souls in exchange for a portion of my power. This sacrifice is insufficient.

DR. MARCOH
Please, d-don't kill me! No one wins that way!

OROS
Just as sacrifice is not inextricably linked to failure,
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

OROS (cont'd)
loss of life does not equal loss *in* life. We are dealing with sacrifice, not wins or losses. You fear the potential of demise so greatly, you would arm yourself needlessly against an annihilation impossible for your kind. It is no wonder there are those who wish for your death as much as you resist it. And they may well be the ones to see it done, as the nature of our contract prevents me from doing so.

DR. MARCOH
You are merciful indeed.

OROS
I am not merciful, you are simply mundane. Your war means nothing to me compared to the treachery of my kin. 10,000 souls and we will both have what we seek. For now, I shall accept this initial offering.

A piercing hum that fluctuates in pitch almost like a song fills the air, and the bodies float upwards.

As they rise, we see that the flesh on their backs has melted off, their spinal columns ravaged or partially torn out.

At last level with the titan's head, an orifice materializes to consume them.

The rain runs red.

Lightning flashes, and Oros vanishes.

Miles away, a rebel airship squadron comes to halt, the engines' screaming lost to the storm.

REBEL 1
What the hell was that?!

REBEL 2
You telling me you ain't seen no lightning strike before?

REBEL 1
No, before it hit, t-there was this thing, this monster! I couldda
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

REBEL 1 (cont'd)
swore I saw it. We should fall
back.

REBEL 2
Well, we're gonna hafta in the
meantime. That storm up ahead's
impassible. Might put us back a few
hours, but we've come this far,
can't turn back now. If we're
lucky, the Rim'll be ours come sun
up.

INT. - METROPOLIS OF AZURA - LAVI'S HOUSE - DAY

It is barely first light, but the city is very much awake.
Inside the house, Shana wakes abruptly to the discordant
sound of warning bells.

She scrambles over Lavi, out of bed, and to the still-open
window, holding her ears.

Panic races through the streets and across her face.

SHANA 1
Lavi! Lavi, get up, we're under
attack!

She runs out of the room, returning with Lavi's uniform.

She unfolds her own, holding it out in front of her to block
the fast-rising sun. Her expression hardens.

LAVI 1
So this is it then? You really want
to do this?

Shana nods.

LAVI 1 (CONT'D)
I know you want closure, but this
isn't the only way to get it.

SHANA 1
Running away won't help though. I'm
not doing this just for my mom, I'm
doing it for you too, for Zurdic.
We took an oath, now it's time to
live up to it.

(CONTINUED)

LAVI 1

I know. But you'd better swear me something too. The only way you really live up to that oath is by living. You live, you hear me?

SHANA 1

Loud and clear, Lavi.

She kisses him, and they finish dressing in frantic silence, hustling downstairs.

Lavi grabs a bread bun for each of them, Shana grabs his hand, and they sprint out the door towards the Academy.

EXT. - AZURA ACADEMY - FLIGHT DECK - DAY

Veterans and recent graduates alike stand at attention in block formation, awaiting briefing and assignment.

Commander Tanith paces before them as she begins a speech, severity in every syllable.

COMMANDER TANITH

My fellow Infinauts, the Izarian Alliance rebels have taken the Zephyrion Rim. I regret to inform you that as of 0400 hours this morning, the Sky Colonies of Zurdic are at war.

Grim silence follows. The commander looks to the other officers standing behind her. They move forward to assume leadership of the various blocks.

TANITH

You will be grouped into units comprised of multiple rankings to ensure skill diversification. Select members from S-Class, R-Class, and C-Classes will fill the open positions of Nephthys Fleet KIAs. First-year graduates and rookies are hereby ordered to remain stationed at the Academy until further notice.

Tanith gives the command for dismissal, but Shana remains where she stands, immobilized by shock and fury.

She watches Lavi's block march off towards the separate hangar housing the Nephthys ships.

Her hands ball into fists.

SHANA 1
Commander Tanith! Commander!

She jogs up alongside her.

You can't do this to us, we've worked so hard to get here! We don't deserved to be sidelined!

TANITH

You are by no means "sidelined." We need troops stationed here to defend our capital. The Academy puts the city at risk as a symbol of government sympathy. Should the rebels return, we must not allow a repeat of their initial invasion.

SHANA 1
Waiting around for a possible attack doesn't get me anywhere - I want to fight! I'm just as qualified as any of the second rank pilots, and you know it!

Farther down the block, Lavi breaks ranks and sneaks to the end of his row. Distracted, the commander does not see.

TANITH

Ms. Valnerr, no one denies your skills are exceptional. However, it would seem you are an exception I can't afford to make. I'm sorry, that's my final word. Now, do your duty and let me do mine.

Shana drops back, crestfallen.

Lavi touches her arm discreetly as he passes her.

She calls after him, but he does not turn back.

INT. - LAVI'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Shana flings herself onto the bed.

She crumples her assignment slip and chucks it across the room, then flops onto her stomach to scream into her pillow.

Flushed and scowling, she rolls over and studies her Nephthys poster for the umpteenth time.

SHANA 1
(rubbing her arm) I didn't even get to say goodbye.

She holds the place where Lavi's hand had been, right over a small pocket on her jacket sleeve. There is something inside.

She frowns, and fishes it out. In her hand hang the keys to the private hangar and Lavi's Orbital.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. - PRIVATE HANGAR - NIGHT

Shana slips into the now unguarded hangar. She passes several other airships in a beeline towards the back.

Out of the corner of her eye, she catches Lavi's Orbital stationed inconspicuously behind some larger models, and smiles.

She spots the Bladewing on the other side of the hangar, its shape unmistakable even under its protective canvas.

She hesitates, looking from one to the other. She pockets Lavi's keys and walks past it.

She yanks the tarp off the Bladewing, lingering to admire the design, then situates herself

INSIDE

She presses her hand against the scanner, and the various dashboard screens light up.

Shana steers herself into the gravigate. The hatch opens.

SHANA 1
Release gravity fields.

TSADDE
Gravity fields disarming in 3, 2,
1:

Clear of the gate, Shana shoots off into the night.

EXT. - ARACELIS - ILMARI VILLAGE OUTSKIRTS - NIGHT

Lavi carries an unconscious Ithyilia on his back, the blazing remains of his village radiating around him as he plunges into the thickening underbrush leading into the forest.

A bulge in his pouch pocket wiggles, and a quoll slips out onto the ground.

LAVI 2
Shana, what's wrong?

Shana morphs back into human form.

She tries to stand, but falls back, her breathing labored.

Lavi stoops beside her, placing a hand on her back.

LAVI 2
I'll be all right on my own for a while longer. Please, you need to rest.

He pats the pouch, but Shana shakes her head.

SHANA 2
No, I must return to the Azure. I must warn my kind of Oros' return.

LAVI 2
You're not fully recovered. Surely you can -

SHANA 2
It cannot wait. They are my family. I need to ensure their safety. I have never seen Oros so powerful. I suspect he will only desire more if he wishes to succeed with his plans.

Lavi grips Ithyilia tighter, and nods.

LAVI 2
He spoke of "twice-cursed kin" and a "false existence." What did he mean?

SHANA 2
Many, many years ago, when your people discovered the Azure, my kind was unsure how to act. It was the first time we had come into
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SHANA 2 (cont'd)
contact with creatures from the physical plane. Oros felt we should remain true to our duties as guardians and keep the Azure pure, undisturbed by outside forces. I and many others disagreed. Your people were benevolent, and we saw no reason to try to put up walls in a boundless dimension. Oros considered this a betrayal of our creed, and began killing those he contracted with, trying to thwart what he saw as treason. We had no choice but to seal him away. ...It would seem his slumber has granted him fresh eyes. Now at least he sees who the traitors truly are. If my suspicions are correct, I believe he means to cleanse the universe of all that has corrupted his harmony.

LAVI 2
He would kill his own kind in the name of peace?

SHANA 2
Mine and yours, yes. Which is why we must stop him before he obtains the power to do so.

Lavi helps her stand.

SHANA 2
I will return to your side as quickly as I can. Until then, be safe.

She touches his arm briefly, then holds out her own.

SHANA 2
Prepare yourself.

Lavi backs away a few paces.

Shane raises her face towards the stars, both arms outstretched.

Light shines out her eyes, nose, and mouth until her body becomes completely suffused in the glow.

A final flare bursts, and a white streak shoots up into the starry sky.

As though he had the wind knocked out of him, Lavi staggers down on one knee.

LAVI 2
I'd almost forgotten what that feels like.

He rises again, and turns back to survey the charred ruins of his village.

LAVI 2
May this be the only time I have to say it: Goodbye.

He looks to the sky, then at Ithylia, then resumes his trek into the forest.

INT. - ZURDIC - BLADEWING COCKPIT - DAY

Shana soars over a strait towards the desert province of Izaria, the floating capital city far behind her.

Above and below her, the Free Cities drift equidistant through the sky.

Much higher in the distance, Shana spots a larger landmass. The central display identifies it as the "Fourth Tier."

SHANA 1
That's where Lavi should be right now, not at the Rim.

She glances at the mini-map in the corner of the screen.

SHANA 1
I'll never catch up to him at this rate. Tsadde, trial run's over. Can we do anything about the stupid safety mode?

TSADDE
Safety Mode: Disengaged.

SHANA 1
Yes, finally! Now we can really get going!

SKY PIRATE (O.S.)
You're not going anywhere!

Shana looks out the window. A dozen airships, mismatched in model and mechanics materialize out of thin air.

SHANA 1
(to herself) Damn pirates and their cloaking devices! (Over the radio) Back off, boys, this sky ain't big enough for the both of us!

SKY PIRATE
Not til you surrender that there ship!

SHANA 1
Not gonna happen!

She accelerates, but the bandits follow.

SHANA 1
Tsadde, run tactical and mechanical analyses.

TSADDE
Dual analyses in progress. (Beat.) Structural weak spots identified.
Now targeting.

Shana attacks the two nearest ships head on, looping away to take out the third as the other two suffer critical damage.

One loses a wing and spirals into a fourth flier.

Shana rockets straight up, using the cloud coverage to her advantage.

TSADDE
Analysis complete. Now adapting cloaking mechanization. Progress: forty-eight percent.

Shana flies into the clouds, the two remaining bandits on her tail.

Seventy-three percent.

The bandits fire at her.

Shana rolls, surround-shields deflecting the charges.
Ninety-six percent.

The bandits aim to ram her from both sides. She shoots upwards, popping out over the cloud.

Seconds later, the pirates emerge as well, but the Bladewing has vanished.

Shana disables the radio, cackling.

SHANA 1
See ya, suckers!

She tears off, losing the pirates in less than a minute.

The now tranquil scene quiets her. She looks down at the clouds below her and smiles.

SHANA 1
And just like that, here we are,
Mom. All the way past the clouds.

EXT. - ARACELIS - FOREST - DAY

Lavi looks up at the clouds, his neck stiff, eyes bloodshot and shadowed. He carries Ithylia in his arms.

She stirs, and he moves quickly to set her down in the shade.

LAVI 2
Ithylia, thank the spirits you're all right. I was starting to think I'd lost you.

ITHYLIA
Where are we? What happened?

LAVI 2
The village - got destroyed. I was taking you to the neighboring town.

ITHYLIA
The village...it's my fault!

LAVI 2
It's not, you didn't know! You were only doing your duty as priestess.

ITHYLIA
But the prophets, our people -

LAVI 2
Many of them survived. They've probably already made it into town.

ITHYLIA
We shouldn't go there. They'll hate me for what I've done.

LAVI 2

They could never hate you. You are our priestess, the most beloved member of our tribe, the reason we have been able to continue our ancestors' legacy.

ITHYLIA

But I've ruined it! I've ruined it forever!

She struggles to stand; Lavi helps hold her upright.

LAVI 2

As long as you're alive, nothing is truly lost. You are our light, our hope. With that, we can rebuild. It will take time, but we will. It is good you were chosen so young.

ITHYLIA

Perhaps if I was older, I would not have wandered off and gotten everyone into trouble.

LAVI 2

It is an error our people understand well. It is in our nature to wonder. Sometimes wonderings lead to wanderings. It is how we discovered the Azure in the first place.

ITHYLIA

It is not the same. It does not excuse my actions.

LAVI 2

Do not punish yourself with the past. We must carry on if we are to reach the village and find the others. Holding onto such pain will only slow you down. Let go. It will be all right.

ITHYLIA

Where's Shana? We must warn the guardians, though I fear I'm too weak to enter the Azure myself. Perhaps she can contact them in my place.

LAVI 2

That's what she's doing right now.
Although, I'm getting worried.
Night has come and gone, and she
hasn't yet returned...

Ithylia closes her eyes for a moment.

ITHYLIA

I can sense her presence, but it is
faint. She is on Aracelis, but
likely too weak to assume her
physical form.

LAVI 2

Her spirit's trapped? She must have
misjudged my location when she
descended. Can you tell which
direction she is?

Ithylia points to the right.

LAVI 2

That's the way to the village.
Perhaps she's found the others. If
we hurry, we can make it through
the forest by nightfall.

ITHYLIA

Let's go.

EXT. - ARACELIS - FOREST - DAY (LATER)

The trees are becoming sparser. Fading daylight illuminates
the path. Lavi helps Ithylia walk.

ITHYLIA

I'm all right now, Lavi. I can walk
by myself.

LAVI 2

We could have gone faster if you'd
just let me carry you.

ITHYLIA

It wouldn't have been fair after
you carried me all night! You're as
exhausted as I am, probably more so
without Shana at your side.

(CONTINUED)

SHANA 2 (O.S.)
I'm not sure I can lend you much
strength like this.

LAVI 2
Shana!

Slightly ahead of them, Shana leans against a tree for support, favoring one leg.

The siblings rush to her side.

ITHYLIA
Your leg!

LAVI 2
It looks broken.

SHANA 2
I've never landed so poorly in my life. Maybe I could use some flying lessons from my other half.

LAVI 2
At least your sense of humor's still intact.

He pulls her arm around his shoulder.

Shana hops off the tree.

SHANA 2
It was hard enough to develop in the first place, I am not like to lose it so easily.

She smiles at Ithylia, who takes her other hand.

LAVI 2
Stubbornness too, I see.

The three resume walking along the path.

Shana looks straight ahead, unamused.

SHANA 2
Sober yourself, Lavi. We need to enter the Azure. We must contact Shana.

LAVI 2
Contact her? But we're not meant to-

SHANA 2

The other guardians have given me special permission. They believe it may be the only way to stop Oros.

LAVI 2

What do you mean?

SHANA 2

We are no longer the only ones with a connection to her world. Oros is there as well.

Ithylia looks up at Shana, terrified.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. - BLADEWING COCKPIT - DAY

The desert draws near.

A burning sensation hits Shana's back and head. She grimaces.

SHANA 1

Is that supposed to happen?

The pain returns, stronger than before.

TSADDE

Medical assistance recommended.
Vitals unstable.

SHANA 1

Okay, no, no, definitely not. (With a grunt) What the heck is going on?!

She loses altitude as the pain intensifies.

TSADDE

Warning: severe inflammation detected. Recommended course of action: disembark.

SHANA 1

With nowhere to land, right.

...Maybe there's emergency protocol information somewhere else in the database. Tsadde, display all former pilot logs.

(CONTINUED)

Hundreds of records pop up on screen, all ending in termination of the test pilots.

Shana stares in disbelief.

A blinking red light at the corner of one window draws her attention. It contains a video file.

A young man, ANTON, records himself from inside a Bladewing. Shana recognizes him.

SHANA 1

Anton?

ANTON

If you're watching this, I'm dead. We're all dead. And you'll be next if you don't find a way to stop them.

SHANA 1

Them? Who's them?

ANTON

They're lying to us. Suppressing the rebellion is just a front. They want to use the Bladewings to conquer the colonies. Marcoh's convinced that they're all plotting against the government, developing weapons to destroy the capital. So he created the Bladewings, invincible airships able to take out any threat. Only he couldn't get them working properly. Not enough power. ...It took months, but I got close to him, got access to off limits areas, hacked into their security systems - and found this.

He fiddles with the Bladewing controls and pulls up other video files.

One shows the bombing of an Izarian town, dated over a year ago.

Horrified, Shana watches fleeing townspeople become kidnapped under the guise of evacuation.

Another shows the victims undergo invasive operations, chips implanted into their brains, electronic ports drilled into their spines.

(CONTINUED)

A third depicts numerous subjects perishing during flight tests.

The final footage shows Marcoh sacrificing the bodies to Oros.

SHANA 1
(whispering) ...We're on the wrong side.

The pain returns, and Shana spasms.

She struggles to keep the Bladewing in the sky.

The screens flash red, warning alarms issuing from the pressurization display and medical monitor.

Shana's vitals fluctuate wildly; the ship plummets.

EXT. - ARACELIS - FOREST - DAY

Lavi and Shana sit facing one another, holding hands. Shana watches Lavi intently, whose eyes are closed.

LAVI 2
We have to do it now. I'm sorry, there's no time. Can you manage?

SHANA 2
It will weaken me, but yes. I must.

She squeezes his hands, and closes her eyes as well.

As Lavi chants, Shana's tattoos spring to life, slithering outward from her body and onto the ground, encircling them like a seal. Light radiates from Shana's eyes.

INT. - BLADEWING - DAY

Shana sags in her seat. Light flares behind her lids, and her eyes fly open.

She grabs the controls and steadies the Bladewing enough to prevent it from crashing.

INT. - THE AZURE - DAY

The prophet and his familiar remain in position, their bodies suspended by rippling blue mist that extends endlessly in all directions.

Shana jolts; the light leaves her eyes and she blinks rapidly in confusion.

SHANA 1

Lavi?

LAVI 2

Hello, Shana.

SHANA 1

What's going on? What is this place?

LAVI 2

This is the Azure.

SHANA 1

Then you're -

LAVI 2

Not the Lavi you know.

SHANA 1

Oh, but I do know you! Or at least it feels like I do - I've been dreaming about you for weeks.

LAVI 2

I know.

SHANA 1

You know?

LAVI 2

I've been watching over you, yes. It's my job, as a prophet to my people.

Shana nods.

SHANA 1

You jump between dimensions to create a record of other realities, right?

(CONTINUED)

LAVI 2

Yes, for as long as anyone can remember, such has been the way of the Ilmari. We have always observed...but never before have we interfered.

SHANA 1

So this, you and I talking, isn't meant to happen.

LAVI 2

No, never. It risks drastic shifts in both our realities.

SHANA 1

(upset) Then why?

LAVI 2

Why are you crying?

SHANA 1

I thought...ever since I realized what my dreams meant, I wanted - I'd hoped that I could find my mother in your world, the woman who looks like her, I mean.

LAVI 2

A shared soul does not equal a shared mind. I may look identical to the Lavi on your world, yet you do not love me as you love him. We are our own selves, just as you and Shana are. So too it is for your mother. Finding the woman who shares her soul, if she is to be found at all, will not bring you the peace you seek.

SHANA 1

You and Lavi are more alike than you think. He said the same, in different words.

LAVI 2

Please don't misunderstand. I do not speak in reproach. Shana - my Shana - believes it is only through the strength of that wish, the strength of your love, that your soul was able to cross over into Aracelis. Everyone has dreams; it

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LAVI 2 (cont'd)
is only the strongest that come
true.

SHANA 1
But I'm not strong. Headstrong
maybe, but not truly strong. As a
child, I would look up at the sky
and see freedom. During my
training, with all the doctors or
dimwits standing in the doorway, it
was the only place that really felt
like home. But now -

LAVI 2
The sky, it reminds you of your
mother, does it not? Beautiful and
gentle, with arms wide open, always
there when you look up, always so
full of light and that quiet kind
of wisdom from seeing many moons.

SHANA 1
Yes, it does. Or it did. But now
it's just another cage. It's
ironic. The truth should have set
me free, but here I am, feeling
more trapped than ever.

LAVI 2
(Beat.) Look down.

The mist parts underneath them to reveal the open sky.

Far to the east stands the capital. To the west, the
Zephryion Rim, and beyond it, the desert province of Izaria.

Below, the Bladewing, a choppily drifting dot.

LAVI 2
Before you is everything you love,
your sky, your country, your Lavi.
You are not trapped. You do not
have wings, and yet you fly. You do
not know all that exists beyond the
blue, yet still you brave these
skies. You are free because you
love. That is true strength.

SHANA 1
I'm not strong enough to pilot the
Bladewing, for whatever reason they
thought I might be. I'm down there,
dying for all I know!

LAVI 2

You are strong enough to not, and that is what truly matters. And you are not dying. Shana has seen to that.

SHANA 1

She saved me?

LAVI 2

Yes, but she cannot maintain the substitution for much longer. The, ah, family feud has weakened her severely.

SHANA 1

That spirit that possessed Ithylia you mean?

LAVI 2

Yes, her brother Oros.

SHANA 1

He is here on Zurdic, conspiring with the military. Some sort of power exchange.

LAVI 2

All for the sake of revenge.

SHANA 1

A feeling I am all too familiar with.

LAVI 2

You asked me why we would take such risks to save you. That is why. Because you understand. You alone understand the plight of all our people. And that gives you the power to set things right.

Blood trickles from Lavi's nose. He wipes it away.

LAVI 2

Shana has reached her limit. You must go now.

SHANA 1

But how will I contact you again?

LAVI 2

Your connection to Shana remains intact. Should you need to, call to her in a dream. She will hear you. And remember, we are watching over you. ...It's good you know how to fly.

SHANA 1

What? Why?

Shana sinks suddenly as the mists dissolve.

She tips toward the sky, and falls, flailing and screaming. A shining light streaks past her in ascent.

All at once, she is back in the Bladewing cockpit.

The pain returns, but not as badly as before. She is able to reassume full control.

The Nephthys fleet is in sight, and farther beyond it, the Rim.

She takes off again, full speed ahead.

INT. - NEPHTHYS FLAGSHIP - CENTRAL COMMAND - NIGHT

PRIVATE

Commander Tanith, we've picked up something on the radar. An unidentified aircraft of some sort.

Tanith watches the monitor as the Bladewing dodges unsteadily in and out of the patrol units' paths.

TANITH

Good thing invisibility shields can't hide heat signatures.

PRIVATE

What should we do, ma'am? It would appear either the ship or the operator has sustained some damage. Looks like she won't be in the air much longer.

TANITH

Let her dock. I will deal with the intruder myself. Do not sound the alarm. No need in distracting the troops from our mission.

INT. - NEPHTHYS FLAGSHIP - MEDICAL BAY - NIGHT

Shana staggers into the empty medical bay.

She rifles through various drawers until she finds a syringe and a vial of diamorphine.

With shaking fingers, she sterilizes the needle, then plunges it into her thigh.

Trembling, she turns back towards the door.

Before she can reach it, it opens.

Commander Tanith stands before her.

COMMANDER TANITH

Shana Valnerr. You're supposed to be back at the Academy.

SHANA 1

I was going to come find you, I swear, I just needed something for the pain first -

TANITH

For the pain, you say? Here, let me help you with that.

She backhands her across the face.

Shana stumbles backwards into a counter, and sinks down the front, clutching her cheek in shock.

TANITH

You just had to play the hero, didn't you? Disobeying orders and stealing a state-of-the-art airship. And for what? To avenge mommy dearest?

Shana aims a punch at her throat, but Tanith catches and secures a handcuff to her wrist.

She drags her over to a gurney and cuffs her to the rail.

SHANA 1

You knew?! All this time you knew!

TANITH

Of course we knew! And the rebels did too! Why else do you think they tried to bomb the capital?

(CONTINUED)

SHANA 1

The rebellion was justified! You murdered their people! Of course they sought revenge! And I - I was going to kill them too.

TANITH

But wasn't that the point? Didn't you also want revenge? How are you going to get it if you can't kill the people who took your mother away from you?

SHANA 1

It wasn't them! It was you! It was you all along! I looked up to you, I trusted you!

TANITH

And this is why power is such a beautiful thing. It ensures faith. No wonder everyone wants to play god.

SHANA 1

Is that what this is then? You and Marcoh and everyone else trying to outstrip humanity and fly with the angels?

TANITH

You should understand that desire, Miss "First Class." You're almost a seraph yourself.

SHANA 1

Those machines, they're wrong. That kind of power, it's not meant to be! Look at what they've done, it's terrible -

TANITH

Terrible yes, but beautiful. Like the might of angels. Warriors of the heavens, but made to serve man. It is truly a glorious design. No, you don't think so? Shall we get another opinion? How about I ask Lavi what he thinks after I've fucked him so hard he can't remember your name?

Shana screams at her, thrashing against the handcuffs. Tanith laughs.

TANITH

If I was in a better mood, maybe
I'd let you watch. But special
people like you don't have time for
that sort of thing, now do they?
They're too busy *dying!*

She stabs a needle into Shana's neck. Shana begins convulsing.

TANITH

Oh, don't look so sad. This is
better than revenge - it's reunion!
You should be thanking me, really.
Maybe it's not first class, but
you're gonna be up on high, so who
cares? How fitting, Little Miss
Perfect, a true angel after all.

She stands to leave, and chuckles the syringe.
I'd love to stay, but I feel like
this is one of those moments that's
just too perfect to even watch.

The room dissolves into blackness.

We hear the pitiful sounds of Shana choking, gasping.
Underneath, a slowing heartbeat. Silence.

A woman in white swims into view. She is beautiful, smiling.

SHANA 1

Mom?

FADE OUT.