

GREETINGS FROM HUPZOOTNIK

Episode 1: "The First Day"

FADE IN:

EXT. DEEP SPACE. NIGHT. (OPTICAL)

The planet Earth against a richly multicoloured starscape, or so it appears. (Note: this will be the opening visual sequence for every episode; only the voiceover will change.)

SKRAELINCX

(V.O., sepulchral)

Earth...has been conquered.

Start a slow PULL BACK.

SKRAELINCX

(V.O., continuing)

The mighty vessels of the Combine descended from space without warning, sweeping all before them. The planet's air defences were annihilated by Combine fighter-scouts. Resistance on the ground was quashed by Combine shock troops. The planet's resources were harvested by Combine...harvesters.

Keep PULLING BACK. More stars, maybe a hint of curvature at the edges, some blurring in the foreground that might be words.

SKRAELINCX

(V.O., continuing)

Now Earth is a frontier colony with a new name, a lone outpost in a war between the great galactic powers, a world whose native population seethes with revolt, ruled over by a governor chosen from those races of the Combine closest in physiology to the planet's norms.

PULL BACK further. The words become GREETINGS FROM HUPZOOTNIK, engraved on the surface of a SNOW GLOBE full of stars and planets, and as we PULL BACK still further the title comes with us and we see the snow globe is sitting on the cluttered desk of a harassed alien official, SKRAELINCX. He is Ushaki, mostly humanoid, with just enough difference to set him apart. Around him various humans and aliens are shouting, gesturing, thumping his desk and generally carrying on, and now we start to hear them faintly as the GOVERNOR puts his head in his hands and we realise we are hearing his thoughts:

SKRAELINCX

(V.O., continuing, with just a shade of whininess now)

And frankly, I'm wondering what the Driffleblig I did to deserve it.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACEPORT. DAY.

CAPTION: THREE WEEKS EARLIER

The spaceport is big, like an airport but with concave circular landing pads instead of runways. Across the top of the terminal building, which is Ushaki in design (slightly rather than outrageously alien) a big sign proclaims WELCOME TO HUPZOOTNIK. The last word is scrawled out with black spray paint and the word EARTH substituted next to it.

Ships of various kinds in the background, a suggestion of people movement behind the windows, as a huge USHAKI STARLINER comes in to land.

CUT TO:

INT. FIRST CLASS LOUNGE. DAY.

The interior of the starliner is in the same style as the architecture. In one of the VIP seats, a row of Ushaki drinks miniatures on the table in front of him, sprawls SKRAELINCX (the GOVERNOR from the teaser), dishevelled and unkempt, and asleep. Carry-on luggage strewn hither and

yon, open briefcase spilling papers, all with that ever so slightly not of this world look.

A FLIGHT ATTENDANT, also Ushaki, enters deferentially and approaches him.

ATTENDANT

Governor Skraelincx? Your Excellency?

(as SKRAELINCX stirs)

We have landed, sir.

SKRAELINCX

(hungover drone)

Then why is the ship still being bombarded by asteroids?

ATTENDANT

(smiling)

That would be your head, sir. The ship is safe and sound on the landing pad.

(greatly daring)

And may I--may I wish you every good fortune in your new posting, Governor. You'll find Hupzootnik a very pleasant planet. Much like home, apart from the natives of course.

SKRAELINCX blinks at her in bleary surprise.

SKRAELINCX

Thank you. Um--would you happen to know where I--

ATTENDANT

The Colonial Administration Building is just across the main vehicleway. The native settlement nearby is called Bry-stoll.

(back to her script)

Thank you for flying with us, sir, and we hope to see you soon.

SKRAELINCX

(rousing himself)

So do I. Keep my seat for me. I may
not be long.

And as the ATTENDANT hides a smile and leaves, he begins to
gather his things.

CUT TO:

EXT. COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION BUILDING. DAY.

It is indeed just across the road from the spaceport, the
road in question being the Bristol ring road. Big and
impressive, Ushaki in design. Futuristic and not-so-
futuristic cars zoom along the road, both ways.

SKRAELINCX crosses the road by a footbridge and climbs the
steps of the building.

CUT TO:

INT. SOUVENIR SHOP. DAY.

The souvenir shop takes up a chunk of the ground floor of
the Colonial Administration Building. Racks of shelves hold
plush models of Earth animals, lots of snow globes like the
one in scene 1, and other weirder items. A machine near the
counter dispenses tea, coffee and various alien drinks
including oushma. Behind the counter is THULLING, an alien
of a different species, vaguely tentacular-looking,
pottering about. A few customers are desultorily browsing,
but not many; it's early in the day. Among them is PREMDA,
a youngish Ushaki female, dressed for work and waiting for
something.

The something proves to be SKRAELINCX, pushing through the
outer doors and hurrying past the shop, hung over and
running late. PREMDA hastily leaves the shop, moves to
intercept him and escorts him back in.

PREMDA

(already in full flow)

...and the oushma is not of the
finest pressing but it's all right
if you are not too picky. Allow me

(MORE)

PREMDA (CONT'D)

to apologise once again for the lack of official welcome, but the political situation--

SKRAELINCX

(cutting her off)

Yes, yes, thank you, I'm sorry, but who exactly are you? And quietly, please.

PREMDA

My apologies, Governor Skraelincx of the pouchline of Bzud. I present my credentials.

(producing a data chip from her pocket)

I am Premda, of the pouchline of Tlig. Your assistant.

SKRAELINCX

(absently, taking the chip)

Delighted to meet you, Miss Premda--(realisation) Tlig?

PREMDA nods. Under the following they move towards the drinks machine, and PREMDA orders and pays for a cup of oushma.

SKRAELINCX

Isn't there an ancient bloodfeud between your pouchline and mine?

PREMDA

(calmly)

Indeed, Excellency. But you need not be concerned. I am a professional diplomatic operative and my priorities are quite in order.

SKRAELINCX

I'm delighted to hear it.

PREMDA

(as before)

As long as you hold this office I shall serve you to the best of my ability. Right up to the moment when I plunge my honour blade into your stinking guts, rip your vile body from end to end, grind your entrails into toxic slime and rain them down upon the foul warrens of your treacherous, detestable pouchline. (Offering the cup) Oushma?

SKRAELINCX

(taking it, faintly)

You're something of a traditionalist, Miss Premda.

PREMDA

In some respects, yes.

SKRAELINCX

Well, there is a lot to be said for tradition. Personally I carry no honour blade, I regard blood feuds as outmoded mumbo-jumbo, and if I find any cause to suspect you of trying to carry this one out, you will be on your way home to Ushakni before you have any idea what is happening. Do you chime?

PREMDA

(inclining her head)

In perfect tone, Excellency. Now if I may conduct you to your office...

She gestures for SKRAELINCX to precede her. He demurs and does likewise. Eventually they leave the shop side by side, casting wary glances at each other.

DENZIL, an elderly human in overalls with a broom, approaches THULLING behind the counter.

DENZIL

So that's the new bod, eh?

THULLING

Yes indeed, just in from the
spaceport all fresh and fragrant.

DENZIL

I give him six months.

THULLING

Five and a fortnight.

They shake forelimbs on the bet.

CUT TO:

INT. GOVERNOR'S OFFICE. DAY.

We've seen this in the teaser. Big desk in the middle, with built-in computer console, currently clear. Glass-fronted bookshelves and bar behind it, currently neat and tidy with Ushak-style books of law arranged in order. Various chairs for visitors around the walls, a low table in one corner for plotting around, glass doors (with blinds) to the outer office where some of the staff can be seen working at computers, and another door which leads to the private apartments. One wall is fully glazed and slides open, giving on a balcony for official appearances.

SKRAELINCX and PREMDA enter through the glass doors.

PREMDA

...and this is your office, where you will meet with visiting dignitaries and representatives of the native communities, as required.

SKRAELINCX

Is that strictly necessary?

PREMDA

It is generally--

The glass doors burst open to admit Colonel ARDBITTON, a grizzled human male, American, in camo gear, forage cap and combat boots. He is followed by KRIVIT, a young Ushak male with a flustered air.

ARDBITTON

Where is he?

PREMDA

(completing her sentence)
 --unavoidable. (To ARDBITTON)
 Colonel Ardbitton. Where is who?

ARDBITTON

The new Grand Exalted Poobah.

KRIVIT

I'm sorry, Miss Premda, I couldn't
 stop him--

SKRAELINCX

If that is your term for a Colonial
 Governor, Colonel, then I am he.

ARDBITTON looks him up and down scornfully.

ARDBITTON

That, sir, is my term for a damned
 upstart alien bureaucrat.

PREMDA

Colonel Ardbitton is the leader of
 the official native resistance.

ARDBITTON

That is correct, mister, and I am
 here to serve notice on you--

PREMDA

He does this every time--

KRIVIT

I did try to make him wait--

ARDBITTON

No longer will humanity lie mute
 beneath the yoke of alien
 oppression. You may think you've
 beaten us--

PREMDA

We do, actually.

ARDBITTON

(crescendo)

I say you may think you've beaten us, but it is in moments such as these that we find us the strength to do what must be done. Mankind will rise again, Mister Governor, rise again from the ashes and turn on you.

He begins pacing restlessly, in an irregular orbit which will eventually take him out on to the balcony.

ARDBITTON

Not the privileged few, sir. Not the intellectuals and the dreamers, but ordinary decent men and women, taking up arms to defend their home and their liberty. And when they do--

At this point he passes out on to the balcony, and though he carries on orating without a pause, his words are now gibberish, distorted and unintelligible.

SKRAELINCX

(helpless)

What is happening right now, please?

ARDBITTON is still pacing the balcony and shouting, obviously describing in graphic detail what will happen to the invaders, blissfully unaware that not a word is getting through.

KRIVIT

Our Universal Telepathic Translator is adversely affected by the atmospheric density of this planet.

PREMDA

The fact was not taken into account when the building was constructed, Excellency.

KRIVIT

On good days its cone of effectiveness encompasses the building.

PREMDA

Otherwise, as you perceive, not quite.

ARDBITTON

(coming back in)

--with blunt teaspoons. What do you think about that?

SKRAELINCX

I am most impressed.

ARDBITTON

You should be. You may think this little planet's a pushover, just because you've got vastly superior numbers and advanced technology--

SKRAELINCX

(to PREMDA)

Never crossed my mind.

ARDBITTON

--but we got a little something called the human spirit, buddy, and you won't find that so easy to crush.

PREMDA

Colonel, don't you have somewhere to be?

KRIVIT

That's right, the Welfare Allowance counter will be open now.

ARDBITTON

I only take that money to further the cause. (He walks to the glass door and turns dramatically) The day of the humans will dawn!

And he sweeps out.

SKRAELINCX

Is he at all an actual threat?

PREMDA

He has a dozen followers. They meet every fortnight, chant slogans and practice with pieces of wood.

KRIVIT

You should not underplay the importance of his group, Miss Premda.

SKRAELINCX

(to PREMDA, of KRIVIT)

And who is this now?

PREMDA

(dismissively)

Krivit, pouchline of Gchee.

KRIVIT

(proudly)

Senior researcher, diplomatic staff.

(back to the point)

Colonel Ardbitton is a seasoned warrior, a battle-hardened veteran--

PREMDA

The man was a motivational speaker.

SKRAELINCX

A what?

PREMDA

He travelled from place to place telling people they should feel better.

SKRAELINCX

And that worked?

KRIVIT

He became very rich doing it. Till we arrived.

SKRAELINCX

That explains the animosity.

SH'K-S'HK-KREE, a somewhat birdlike alien, is tapping quietly but obsessively on the glass door. She has been tapping for the last few seconds and is obviously set to do it all day.

SKRAELINCX

(off this)

A question, Miss Premda. If you are not in the outer office, can anyone simply walk in off the street, or--

PREMDA

(nettled)

Nester Sh'k-s'hk-kree is your first scheduled appointment, Excellency. Of course your junior staff screen all visitors to the building.

SKRAELINCX

I'm relieved to hear it.

(deep breath)

All right, let's get started.

PREMDA opens the door for SH'K-S'HK-KREE, and KRIVIT slips out, followed closely by PREMDA, as SH'K-S'HK-KREE stalks in and perches on one of the visitor's chairs. SKRAELINCX takes his seat behind the desk.

SKRAELINCX

(making an egg shape in the air with his hands)

Nester. Sound shells to your offspring.

SH'K-S'HK-KREE

(patting the air)

Soft feathers to your nest, Excellency.

SKRAELINCX

How may I help you?

SH'K-S'HK-KREE

Poverty. Hardship. Deprivation.

SKRAELINCX

I'm sorry to hear that.

SH'K-S'HK-KREE
Barrenness. Bitterness. Cold. Hope.

SKRAELINCX
Hope?

SH'K-S'HK-KREE
This planet. Bigness. Abundance.
(She gets up and moves to a
different chair)
Infestation. Mammal. Clearance.
Resettlement. (deep breath) Great
joy.

SKRAELINCX
So your government requests that we
exterminate the humans and hand
this planet over to you.

SH'K-S'HK-KREE
Rationality. Uselessness. Expense.
Assistance. Mutual benefit.

SKRAELINCX
Nester, I regret that your people
are suffering, but we hold this
planet in trust for the entire
Combine. We cannot yield it up to a
single member race without a
decision of the full Conclave to
ratify our actions. (gently) Do you
really think you can get one?

SH'K-S'HK-KREE
Grudging acceptance.
Disappointment. Resolve.

She hops off the chair and spreads her arms in a formal
gesture.

SH'K-S'HK-KREE
Favourable winds to your flight,
Excellency.

SKRAELINCX
(standing up and cupping his
hands in front of him)

Rich lands to your wintering,
Nester.

SH'K-S'HK-KREE leaves the office, and SKRAELINCX breathes out, sits down and relaxes as PREMDA comes back in with a handful of files.

SKRAELINCX

Thanks be to Bzud that was one of the cultures I worked up during the flight.

PREMDA

How many did you manage?

SKRAELINCX

Twenty-two.

PREMDA

(putting the files on the desk)

Only another four hundred and forty-nine to go then. Shall I order you some reference materials from the library?

SKRAELINCX

That would be most helpful. (As PREMDA makes to leave) Only about forty at a time, please. Who's next?

PREMDA smiles and exits as SKRAELINCX picks up a file and begins reading.

CUT TO:

EXT. ARDBITTON'S BUNKER. DAY.

A Nissen hut, with a couple of jeeps parked outside, latrines, piles of tyres and so on. All very spartan, military and outpostish. It's only when we pull back that we see that the hut is in the grounds of a beautiful estate, with a big Georgian house at the centre.

CUT TO:

INT. ARDBITTON'S BUNKER. DAY.

Basically the inside of a Nissen hut. Shelves line the walls, and two rows of trestle tables with chairs seat about twenty or thirty. Table at one end, map on the wall behind it. CINDY ARDBITTON, the Colonel's daughter, young and pretty in a kind of Ushak-ish way (there's a reason for this), in camo gear (with name tag "ARDBITTON") which on her somehow looks good, is sorting cans and boxes of food on shelves.

ROCHELLE McCATES, her fellow "soldier," similarly dressed (with name tag) and carrying two bags full of more cans and boxes, bangs the door open, strides in and bangs it shut. CINDY jumps to attention and salutes, then relaxes.

CINDY

Rochelle. Any luck?

ROCHELLE

Too easy.

She bangs her bags down on the nearest table.

ROCHELLE

You'd think there weren't any shortages at all.

CINDY

They say there aren't.

ROCHELLE

Propaganda, your dad says. He says the shortages are going to bite down any day now.

CINDY

And yet we claim enough food for nineteen families, we have enough stockpiled to feed the whole street for years, and nobody is going short. Doesn't that strike you as odd?

ROCHELLE

It's all just appearance. Lulling us into a false sense of security before they start up the work camps.

CINDY

It's been five years. That's a fairly long lull.

She starts unpacking the bags, but ROCHELLE has become interested.

ROCHELLE

Cindy? Are you having doubts?

CINDY

(hastily)

No, no no.

ROCHELLE

Because if you are, you should really talk to your dad--

CINDY

Yes, of course, because that's something that happens so seldom.

ROCHELLE

I'm sure he could explain whatever's bothering you.

CINDY

It's just--

(gathering her resolution)

It's just that nothing's happened the way he said it would. I mean, okay, they levelled London and a few other places right at the start, but apart from that there's been no fighting, no destruction, no suffering, and most things are actually working better than they used to--

ROCHELLE

(coldly)

Are you saying you want this? You enjoy being a conquered people?

CINDY

No!

ROCHELLE

Are you happy under alien rule?

CINDY

No!

ROCHELLE

Are you a traitor to the cause?

CINDY

(losing it)

What cause? There is no cause!
There's just my dad and his mates,
striding around barking orders and
living the Steven Spielberg dream,
and--

(the emotional floor gives
way under her)

--and some of us...would like to
wake up sometimes.

ROCHELLE

Cindy--

But at this point ARDBITTON opens the door and strides in,
and both ROCHELLE and CINDY snap to attention and salute.

ARDBITTON

At ease.

They relax.

ARDBITTON

Supply situation?

ROCHELLE

Sir, good, sir!

ARDBITTON

All right. Make the most of it.
Those shortages are going to bite
down any day now.

CINDY rolls her eyes at ROCHELLE, as ARDBITTON rubs his
hands in glee at the hardship he foresees.

CUT TO:

INT. GOVERNOR'S OFFICE. DAY.

Some time later. SKRAELINCX is sitting, watching intently, while an ALIEN DIPLOMAT who converses entirely in gesture reaches the climax of what has been a long and impassioned speech. PREMDA hovers by the door, yet more files in her arms.

SKRAELINCX

(rousing himself)

Yes, well, thank you, Honourable (three quick gestures), it's an interesting proposal and I will give it due consideration.

The ALIEN DIPLOMAT gestures briefly.

SKRAELINCX

About three months. If you haven't heard by then. by all means give us a call. Drop us a line.

ALIEN DIPLOMAT gestures.

SKRAELINCX

Or indeed that. Thank you.

With gestures of mutual respect, SKRAELINCX and the ALIEN DIPLOMAT part formally. PREMDA holds the door open for the visitor, then closes it and comes forward.

SKRAELINCX

Did you get that? He wants to flatten the surface of the planet, polish it and use it as a screen to project commercials on to. At least I think they're commercials. They might be religious ceremonies.

PREMDA

With his people there is not much difference.

She lays out the files on his desk in order.

SKRAELINCX

Are these people all mad? Those creatures who wanted to suck out the molten core of the place, install photonic drives and pilot the hollow shell around the galaxy--would that even work?

He scans the files, rearranges them in a different order, under the next speech.

PREMDA

It has not worked the last six times they have tried it. Their enthusiasm seems unabated.

(beat)

Excellency, the Combine is very large, and it has been a very long time since we conquered a new planet. There was talk of organising a proper waiting list for allocations, but the discussions were abandoned in the recent administrative reshuffle. Essentially, Earth is the last ceremonial arch in the district on Yearturn's Eve, and everyone wants it.

SKRAELINCX

So my job is basically to say no in five hundred different languages?

As PREMDA impatiently rearranges the files once again--

PREMDA

That is a major part of your duties, yes. Also not to offend the representatives of any petitioning planet, either by appearing to favour any other, or by appearing to suggest that they themselves have requested special favour. Though of course they each want it, and will be offended if they do not get it.

SKRAELINCX

(picking up the files again)
Is it too late to resign?

PREMDA

Much.

SKRAELINCX

What about actually running this--
(breaks off)
--and what the driffleblig kind of
name is Hupzootnik anyway? It's not
Ushaki, it's not--

PREMDA

It is not anything. Every member
world of the Combine submitted a
letter from its alphabet, and the
first ten drawn at random--

SKRAELINCX

That is ridiculous!!!

And he throws the files into the air.

A short silence, as papers tumble down.

PREMDA

Yes. It is. It is insulting, and
demeaning, and it shows the extent
to which the Combine has
deteriorated over the past few
centuries. Our Ruling Council is
dominated by commercial interests
and small-minded bureaucrats. Our
space fleet is a shadow of its
former might, our economy locked
into an endless spiral of inflation
and depression, our peoples
moribund and decadent...

(beat)

But it is the Combine, and it is
our duty to serve it, and that is
the reason why I do not kill you
for the wrong done to my pouchline
by the marauders of Bzud. So I
suggest that you will best serve

(MORE)

PREMDA (CONT'D)

your own interests by retaining
your position.

She bends to retrieve the papers.

PREMDA

Would you give me a hand please.

SKRAELINCX registers the chaos with surprise--he had not
noticed--and starts picking up sheets and folders.

KRIVIT puts his head round the glass door.

KRIVIT

The ambassador from--

SKRAELINCX & PREMDA

(together)

Not yet!!

KRIVIT

I'll ask it to wait.

He ducks out again.

PREMDA

As for running the planet, there is
nothing to it. Resources are
abundant, apart of course from the
fossil fuels, and the natives are
perfectly capable of providing for
their own needs since we got rid of
their corrupt and venal
governments.

SKRAELINCX

Ah yes.

(quoting)

"The two great afflictions of
emergent planets; fossil fuels and
professional politicians."

SKRAELINCX & PREMDA

(unison)

"Both abundant; both tempting; both
toxic."

They have retrieved all the papers now, and get back on their feet.

PREMDA

You are familiar with Lembral's work?

SKRAELINCX

I wrote my exitium paper on his *Principles of Xenoeconomics*. So. Nothing for me to do but fend off all the other races who want the planet or its people, till... (when?)

PREMDA

Until further notice, Excellency.
(recollecting herself; that sounded too much like an order)
At least, so I gather.

KRIVIT puts his head around the door again.

KRIVIT

The ambass--

SKRAELINCX

Yes, all right, Mr Krivit, I will see him at once.

KRIVIT

(quickly)

And--I wondered if I might take the afternoon off, Miss Premda. I feel a little unwell.

PREMDA

Of course, Krivit. See you tomorrow.

KRIVIT ducks out again. PREMDA too goes to the door.

PREMDA

Do not misunderstand, Governor. Our shared admiration for the work of

(MORE)

PREMDA (CONT'D)

Lembral means nothing. I shall still murder you at the first opportunity.

SKRAELINCX

I would expect nothing less.

As PREMDA leaves--

CUT TO:

EXT. COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION BUILDING. DAY.

Establishing shot.

CUT TO:

EXT. ADMIN BUILDING SIDE DOOR. DAY.

An unfrequented corner of the building, with a fire exit. KRIVIT opens the door cautiously and puts his head out. He is wearing Earth-style clothes and a cap, and looking furtive.

KRIVIT

(quietly)

Cindy?

CINDY

(off shot)

Krivit?

CINDY hurries up, and they share a brief embrace.

KRIVIT

How do I look?

CINDY

Fantastic. He'll never suspect a thing.

KRIVIT

Are you sure you want to go through with this?

CINDY

It's important you understand, Krivit, you and the Governor and everybody. My dad--he isn't a bad man. It's really all just a game to him.

KRIVIT

If he finds out...it will be the end of us.

CINDY

I know.

They kiss, lingeringly.

CINDY

But it has to be worth the risk, doesn't it? To make a real difference...to bring our two peoples closer together.

KRIVIT

I don't know. I don't even know what we're doing, Cindy. We're completely incompatible, genetically speaking--

CINDY

(laughing)

Whoa, tiger!

KRIVIT

Well, we have to think about these things.

CINDY

We really don't. Krivit, we're early days. We're still working on "I like you, you like me, let's spend some time together and compare iPods." Species doesn't matter at that stage.

KRIVIT

I'm sorry. I'm just not used to these feelings. My chime is out of tune.

CINDY

It sounds fine to me.

Another hug and kiss.

CINDY

Anyway, if we want to make this meeting we better hustle.

KRIVIT

You're sure I won't be detected?

CINDY

Not by Dad. He hardly even looks at me. I'll tell him you're my friend Kevin from college. You'll be fine.

KRIVIT looks doubtful, but allows CINDY to lead him away.

CUT TO:

INT. OUTER OFFICE. DAY.

Some time later. PREMDA is sitting at her desk, talking into what looks like a phone. Through the glass door SKRAELINCX can be seen sitting at his desk, while another ALIEN DIPLOMAT paces back and forth. As the scene progresses the argument becomes more animated.

PREMDA

...some cause for concern. As you know, I am not impartial in this, but even allowing for my negative bias, he seems to lack...fibre.

HEADQUARTERS

(V.O., distort)

You are not required to eat him, Agent Premda.

PREMDA

No, that is a pleasure I am deferring till later.

(grimaces at the thought;
it's a metaphor)

I am, however, worried that this new Governor might prove too...pliant in dealing with other races. We Ushaki did not become the dominant life form of the Combine by giving in to the demands of lesser beings.

HEADQUARTERS

(V.O., distort)

If my knowledge of history serves me, we did it by lying, cheating, thieving and finally by employing overwhelming military superiority. I am sure you, like me, would not wish a return to those days.

PREMDA

No indeed. (back to the point) I think we should keep a closer eye on Mister Skraelincx.

HEADQUARTERS

(V.O., distort)

Very well. Our top surveillance agent will be with you directly.

ARGORIEN

(V.O., up close)

Hello.

His voice is dark and sexy and above all unexpected.

PREMDA

(startled)

Hello?

ARGORIEN

(V.O.)

Don't be alarmed. I'm the communicator in your hand.

PREMDA

(understanding)

You are a Brelenki. A Changer.

ARGORIEN

(V.O.)

Indeed. You wish someone watched?

PREMDA

Yes, were you not listening?

ARGORIEN

(V.O.)

Simulating the function of a communicator pre-empts most higher brain functions. I cannot eavesdrop. Who, may I ask--?

PREMDA

The new Governor. There are concerns about his suitability for the post.

ARGORIEN

(V.O.)

Say no more. Simply direct me to his quarters and leave the rest to me. You shall have weekly regular reports, and should anything strike me as requiring precipitate action I will exercise discretion.

PREMDA

You will inform me before taking any action, Agent...

ARGORIEN

(V.O.)

Argorien daNesk. Combine Intelligence Forces, Changer Division.

PREMDA

Very well.

(A thought occurs to her)

I suppose that was Headquarters I was talking to? And not you doing a funny voice?

HEADQUARTERS

(V.O., distort)

Of course. How could you think such a thing?

PREMDA

(dry)

I have a nasty mind.

The phone suddenly leaps out of her hand and MORPHS into a tall, handsome male, Ushaki in appearance, formally dressed, standing a little too close to PREMDA.

ARGORIEN

Is this better?

PREMDA

That would depend.

And ARGORIEN looks down to find PREMDA's honour blade just pricking the fabric of his shirt. He laughs a little.

ARGORIEN

Good reflexes, Agent Premda. The Service has taught you well.

PREMDA

I am a daughter of Tlig. My pouchline has a proud tradition.

ARGORIEN

(moving away)

Well honoured, I would say.

(bowing with a flourish)

Where is my quarry?

At which point there is a thunderous EXPLOSION from SKRAELINCX's office, and both look in that direction.

SKRAELINCX emerges, a little scorched and dazed, in a cloud of smoke and dust.

SKRAELINCX

The delegate is not entirely happy with the terms, Miss Premda.

PREMDA

I will consult the advisors and explore alternatives, Excellency.

She looks around for ARGORIEN but he is gone. In his place a magnificent potted plant stands beside her desk.

PREMDA
 (to the plant)
 That would be him.

She straightens up, ignoring bemused looks from her co-workers, and becomes very engrossed in her files.

CUT TO:

INT. ARDBITTON'S BUNKER. DAY.

As before. ARDBITTON is haranguing a group of about two dozen people, including CINDY, ROCHELLE, and (in disguise) KRIVIT, all sitting round trestle tables. He may have been a good motivational speaker, but on this subject he has long worn out his audience's patience.

ARDBITTON
 Now I know it's been a long haul, and morale has suffered along the way, but this is no time to be disheartened. My friends, we are on the very brink of success. If we keep up our efforts, we can wear down the enemy's resources, just as a constant drip wears away a stone.

CINDY
 You've been saying that for the past five years, Dad.

ARDBITTON
 (snap)
 Colonel.

CINDY
 Colonel Dad. You've been promising us that shortages of food and fuel would create public disaffection and bring people to the cause. Well, there haven't been any shortages. Not once. The aliens have made things work, Dad--

(MORE)

CINDY (CONT'D)

Colonel--better than we ever did on our own.

ARDBITTON

It won't last. There will be shortages. This is just the honeymoon period.

CINDY

What's gonna change it, Dad? Us claiming food supplies for people who don't exist? That is what we're doing, isn't it? All this food, sitting here going to waste so that innocent people will go hungry.

ARDBITTON

That is a recognised technique for undermining the--

CINDY

Petty pilfering and fraud? Not much of the glorious military tradition there, huh, Dad?

ARDBITTON

Stand down, soldier.

ROCHELLE

Sir, I hate to say it but she might have a point, Colonel, sir.

ARDBITTON

(tragically)

Et tu, McCates?

ROCHELLE

This strategy isn't working. Maybe it's time to consider a different strategy.

ARDBITTON

I'm sorry, did somebody declare a democracy while I wasn't looking?

(sudden thunder)

Orders are orders, Corporal, and ours come from higher than you can possibly imagine. You think we're alone? You think we're a joke? Well, congratulations. That's exactly what our alien friends are intended to think.

He patrols his space, while this sinks in.

ARDBITTON

(continuing)

There is a plan. There is an overall strategy, of which this is just a tiny part. And there is a resistance movement, a genuine resistance movement, and it will bring this alien tyranny crashing down in ruins and open the way for a grand rebirth of human freedom and independence!

Under the applause--

KRIVIT

(sotto, to CINDY)

He wants things the way they were?

CINDY

(sotto)

He wants people to be free.

KRIVIT

(sotto)

Aren't they?

ARDBITTON

(in his stride)

Now I know you'll want proof. Hell, why should you believe me? I'm only your commanding officer. So I've put in a request, and if it's granted, you'll be getting a visit from a three-star general in the Army of the Resistance. Maybe you'll believe him.

More applause.

KRIVIT

(sotto)

I should inform Miss Premda of
this--

CINDY

(sotto)

No!! Krivit, you promised.

KRIVIT

But if the resistance is real--

CINDY

It can't be. He's not a real
soldier. It'll just be one of his
friends in a costume. Krivit, no.
Please.

She looks at him with big eyes, and he yields.

KRIVIT

All right, Cindy. If you say so.

But his eyes are troubled as he watches ARDBITTON basking
in the adulation.

CUT TO:

INT. GOVERNOR'S PRIVATE QUARTERS. DAY.

It's evening, and the lights are off. This is the main
room, with a curtained sleeping area, a walk-in wardrobe,
an en suite bathroom, a bar, and a media centre taking up
most of one wall. SKRAELINCX's non-carry-on luggage is
standing in the middle of the floor, festooned with labels
and looking sad. There is also a familiar-looking potted
plant.

SKRAELINCX opens the door, letting in light from the
office, and fumbles for the light switch. Light floods the
room and SKRAELINCX winces; he's dead on his feet.

SKRAELINCX

(mumbles indecipherably)

He wambles across the room, missing the pile of luggage apparently by pure luck, and gravitates towards the curtained area, tugging at his jacket.

A moment's pause--

SKRAELINCX

GYAAAAAAIIIIII!!!

And SKRAELINCX backs frantically out of the sleeping area and across the room straight into the pile of luggage, sending himself and it flying, as KYLIE, human, young and wrapped in a quilt, comes through the curtain after him. (Note: her speech mode is the result of her trying to speak Ushaki rather than relying on the translator. Her accent is local.)

SKRAELINCX

Who the driffleblig are you?

KYLIE

I Kylie. I bedwarmer belong Governor.

SKRAELINCX

You...what?

KYLIE

Old man Governor he likee make...
(she gestures suggestively)
...with Hupzootnik girl, long time.

SKRAELINCX

What?? That is disgusting! And can you please speak your own language, the universal translator is working perfectly and you are just making its job more difficult.

KYLIE

The old guy didn't think I was disgusting. And I'm trying to learn your stupid language, thank you so very much.

SKRAELINCX

(struggling to his feet)

I don't think you are disgusting.
But that...no. You must get dressed
and go, quickly.

KYLIE

Why? Your wife on the way, is she?

SKRAELINCX

(thrown)

What? Er, no, I'm not bonded. This
just...this is not...

KYLIE

And where am I supposed to go then?

SKRAELINCX

Have you not got a home in Gristol?

KYLIE

Bristol. No, I ain't. The old
Governor, he let me stay here.

She crosses to the bar and pours herself a drink, perfectly
nonchalant in her quilt. SKRAELINCX is trying to look
everywhere but at her.

SKRAELINCX

I can't believe this. Unnatural
sexual practices...

KYLIE

I beg your pardon. Nothing
unnatural about it. Everything went
exactly where it belonged.

SKRAELINCX

Our...equipment is not like yours,
miss. Any resemblance is purely
coincidental. The actual biological
function...

(he can't cope any longer)

Can you please...do you actually
own clothes?

KYLIE

Bloody cheek! Course I do.

SKRAELINCX

Then please put some on.

Someone knocks on the door.

SKRAELINCX

(desperately)

In the bathroom.

KYLIE

God, this is charming.

She goes into the wardrobe, grabs some items of clothing and slams the bathroom door as the knocking is renewed. SKRAELINCX lunges for the office door and opens it, to reveal PREMDA, immaculate as ever, and a burly GUARD behind her.

PREMDA

Governor? Are you all right?

SKRAELINCX

All right? Why would I not be?

PREMDA

Mr Vramencx here reported a disturbance. Screaming--

SKRAELINCX

May I talk to you in private?

PREMDA

Thank you, Mr Vramencx.

The GUARD goes, and PREMDA closes the door.

SKRAELINCX

How much did you know about--

(lowering his voice)

the former Governor's domestic arrangements?

PREMDA

Domestic--? I'm afraid I don't understand--

KYLIE emerges from the bathroom, dressed in a PVC maid's uniform, fishnets and stilettos. She stops dead at the

sight of PREMDA.

KYLIE

Oh, hi Prem.

PREMDA

Good evening, Kylie.

SKRAELINCX

You know each other?

PREMDA

Why should we not? You will be retaining Kylie's services, I trust.

SKRAELINCX just gapes.

KYLIE

We were just negotiating the new salary, weren't we, Guv?

SKRAELINCX

Salary?

PREMDA

I'm sure a reasonable increase will be possible. Excellency?

SKRAELINCX

You mean...this is officially approved?

PREMDA

Of course. It is one of the fundamental duties appertaining to the post.

SKRAELINCX

It is??

KYLIE

I think the Governor might have misunderstood the nature of my duties. I did rather startle him.

PREMDA

Kylie is your cultural liaison.

SKRAELINCX

My...

Behind PREMDA, KYLIE gives him a broad wink.

PREMDA

The former Governor took a lively interest in the folklore and traditions of the indigenous peoples, and he engaged Kylie here as a local expert.

SKRAELINCX

(numbly)

Of course he did.

PREMDA

That costume, for instance, is traditionally worn during the celebration of... (she's forgotten)

KYLIE

Saint Fifi's Day.

PREMDA

Yes, of course.

SKRAELINCX

Cultural liaison, indigenous traditions.

PREMDA

I hope, Excellency, you will see fit to continue this good practice.

SKRAELINCX

Well--

KYLIE

I'm sure you would come to find my services...indispensable.

SKRAELINCX

(to KYLIE)

Indeed.

(to PREMDA)

Well, I will consider it. Just at the moment, though, what I would like to do is go to sleep. So if you and the young lady will excuse me...

PREMDA

Yes, Governor.

KYLIE

Of course, Governor. (Gallantly)
I'm sure I'll make it into town and find somewhere to sleep...a doorway, a park bench...

SKRAELINCX

(through his teeth)

Miss Premda, please arrange suitable quarters for Miss Kylie. In fact, you might assign her a permanent billet.

PREMDA

Certainly, Governor. Will you come with me, Kylie?

KYLIE

(enjoying herself immensely)
Delighted, Miss Premda.

SKRAELINCX

One moment, Miss Premda--
(makes "go on" gesture at KYLIE)
if I could have a word.

KYLIE pouts, but goes.

PREMDA

What is it, Governor?

SKRAELINCX

(exploding)

Cultural liaison my spinal nodes!
That woman is no more a folklore expert than I am!

PREMDA

What do you mean?

SKRAELINCX

She was his--the old Governor's...

(can hardly say it)

pouch-that-walks.

PREMDA's eyes go wide and she claps both hands over her mouth to muffle an involuntary half-laugh, half-scream.

SKRAELINCX

I don't even know the details, I don't want to know, but I went to my bedroom and there she was.

PREMDA

I don't believe it...the old cragsquatter! Under everyone's noses--

(recollecting herself)

I mean, of course, how terrible. Quite immoral and utterly inappropriate...

(corpsing again)

And perfectly typical of him. I had no idea, Governor. What you must have thought--

SKRAELINCX

I'm going to have to let her go, of course.

PREMDA

(recovering her poise)

Ah...unfortunately, Governor, it's not quite that simple. The appointment of a cultural liaison was a significant event in your predecessor's career. It earned him a citation from the Department of Colonial Affairs. If you were to reverse that decision, important people would want to know why.

SKRAELINCX

And if I told them...

PREMDA

Your predecessor comes of a very influential pouchline. You might as well push your career into the Silent Pools.

SKRAELINCX

I can't harmonise this. I set off from Ushakni three days ago, I haven't slept in far too long, I started work straight off the ship, all I wanted was one peaceful night's sleep--

PREMDA

I'll make sure she's moved into separate quarters right away, Governor.

SKRAELINCX

(giving it up)

Thank you, Miss Premda.

PREMDA

And I'll organise a schedule for her. Actual cultural liaison work, or something that we can pass off. Trust me, Excellency, by the time I'm finished she will want nothing more at the end of the day than her own bed to fall into.

SKRAELINCX

I chime perfectly with that.

PREMDA

Forgive me, Excellency. Good night.

She bows and leaves.

SKRAELINCX

(to the room in general)

Is that it? Any more surprises?

We focus on the potted plant, which does nothing.

SKRAELINCX

Good. In that case, I am going to
bed.

As he heads for the curtained alcove, remembers something,
pivots on one foot and goes into the bathroom--

ARGORIEN
(the potted plant, V.O.)
Phew!

CUT TO:

EXT. COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION BUILDING. NIGHT.

Establishing shot.

CUT TO:

EXT. ADMIN BUILDING SIDE DOOR. NIGHT.

KRIVIT and CINDY, hand in hand in the glow of the lamp
above the door.

CINDY
Oh, Krivit...

KRIVIT
Oh, Cindy.

CINDY
I've never met a guy like you
before.

KRIVIT
How many Ushaki have you met?

CINDY
(laughing)
One.

KRIVIT
That might account for it.

They hug.

CINDY
You promise you won't say anything?

KRIVIT

(torn)

I have promised.

(pause)

But if the resistance is a real threat, if innocent people's lives will be in danger...I love you, Cindy, but I have a duty to my people as well. Please do not force me to choose.

CINDY

(conceding)

If the resistance is a real threat...I can't believe it, but if it is...then we'll talk. I don't want you to get hurt, Krivit--I don't want anyone to get hurt--but...he's my dad. You know?

KRIVIT

Well, not really. I was hatched from a pouch and raised with all the other children of my pouchline. But I will take your word for it.

As footsteps approach--

CINDY

I must go. Goodnight, my darling.

KRIVIT

Goodnight.

CINDY disappears into the shadows, as a GUARD (could be the same one we saw before) rounds the corner. KRIVIT gives him a guilty wave, darts inside and shuts the door.

The GUARD waits for him to be gone, then takes out a communicator (of a different kind from any we've seen previously, opens it up and speaks into it.

GUARD

Aeolus-14 Umbra. Aeolus-14 Umbra. This is Agent 68. The new Governor is no threat to you. Everything

(MORE)

guard (CONT'D)
will go according to plan.
Hupzootnik...will be yours.

And as he in turn strolls away he reveals DENZIL in the background, leaning on his broom, watching.

FADE OUT.