

SEEKER

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EXT. DESERT - LANDING SITE - DAY

Rocks and gravel lie scattered over loose ground. A crater in the sand, then a trench dug out by something huge, lead us to:

A SPACECRAFT ESCAPE CAPSULE lying on its side, ragged and blackened from re-entry. Four giant PARACHUTES rest on the ground behind, still partially inflated by the gentle wind.

Its ENTRY HATCH sits askew on top, moving in fits and starts as someone inside attempts to dislodge it. Finally, it skids down the angled surface and lands on the sand.

The craft's pilot reaches up, finding a grip on the hatch's mating surface. The back of his hand is covered in SHORT, SILVERY FUR, with tough, blunt CLAWS on his fingertips.

Struggling, groaning, he hoists himself up and out of the capsule. First his TRIANGULAR EARS, then his DARK-FURRED HEAD, then his gray-and-blue MILITARY UNIFORM SHIRT. Perching on the rim, he maneuvers a bushy gray tail around behind his back.

This is Captain JIRO HANNEMANN, a middle-aged silver fox. With the face of one who's seen too much, he squints as he looks out at the hostile blue sky and rugged mountains in the distance.

(Note: All individuals in this setting are anthropomorphic, i.e. humanlike, caniforms, resembling wolves, foxes, coyotes, wolverines, or some combination of their traits.)

He reaches back into the capsule and hauls up a heavy SURVIVAL PACK. He kicks it away from him, watches it tumble over the edge...then gets out a POLYMER CONCUSSION GRENADE.

He pulls its bright-red pin, holds the grenade over the hatch opening, then drops it into the cabin.

Jiro slides down the capsule's wall and lands on the ground. He grabs his pack, stumbles over the mess of parachute lines, trips, recovers, tries to sprint—

BOOM!

The shockwave blows him off his feet, puffs the parachutes, and throws sand into the air all around him.

Jiro takes a deep breath, then slowly stands up. He looks back at the thin black smoke wafting upward from the wreck, then checks the 5.7MM HANDGUN holstered on his belt.

He lifts his pack, slings it over his shoulders, and trudges off into the sand.

INT. APARTMENT KITCHEN - MORNING (DAYS EARLIER)

Leaning against the sink and countertop, his uniform shirt untucked and unbuttoned, Jiro holds his SMARTPHONE with both hands, tapping out a message.

He looks up and sees his wife, KYLIA, a gray-and-orange cross fox, standing in the doorway.

KYLIA
Something wrong?

JIRO
Yeah.....

KYLIA
Is this about that guy who threatened you?

He turns around and stares out the window, looking at a handful of tall CITY BUILDINGS standing in front of an overcast sky.

JIRO
The guy who threatened me is dead.

KYLIA
What?

She approaches him and puts a hand on his shoulder.

KYLIA
Look, I know you can't tell me what you do. But this doesn't sound like your typical office drama. Jiro...are you in danger?

JIRO
Maybe. It's not the first time I've worked my way out of a jam.

KYLIA
What if you can't? What then?

Jiro can't answer her.

EXT. DESERT - DUNES - DAY

In the middle of nowhere, with the mountains no closer than they were, a partially-assembled EMERGENCY SHELTER sits on the sand, its neon red canopy slanted at a haphazard angle.

Jiro sits in the shade, holding a rugged PROGRAMMABLE RADIO. A cable from it runs out to a JURY-RIGGED ANTENNA DISH made from a foil survival blanket and the extra tent poles.

ATALLA
There's gotta be a way to escape,
right?

JIRO
Not possible.

Jiro looks away...then realizes something. He glances around the room, processing that sudden thought.

INT. SERVICE CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Handgun in hand, Jiro tiptoes under dim red and white lights. He rounds a corner and approaches a LOCKED CLOSET DOOR.

He muffles the lock's beeper with his hand as he punches in a short access code, then opens the door and pushes through into:

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jiro digs through giant LAUNDRY HAMPERS full of uniforms and discarded personal effects.

In one of the bins, he finds a HANDGUN HOLSTER clipped to a belt. He frees it and transfers it to his own waist.

His eye falls on a shirt that stands out from the rest. Unlike all the gray-and-blue uniforms, this one is white, with slate blue shoulders. It's lightly splattered with blood, and embroidered above a chest pocket is the name **HORAK**.

Jiro glares at the shirt for a moment, then shoves his weapon into the holster.

He opens an EQUIPMENT CABINET mounted on the wall, counts off the cables plugged into a NETWORK PATCH PANEL, and yanks a few of them out of their sockets.

INT. HANGAR - NIGHT

Dull red INFRARED FLOODLIGHTS on a security camera go dead.

In near-darkness, Jiro approaches a SPACE FREIGHTER resting on hefty, wheeled landing gear. On the near side of its wide underbody, a BOARDING STAIRCASE sits extended to the floor.

EXT. DESERT - RUGGED LOWLANDS - DAY

The sun hangs low in the sky. Distant, wavering MIRAGES gleam through the shimmering heat.

Jiro drags his feet over uneven, rocky ground, his fur and clothing FILTHY WITH DUST, panting with his long tongue hanging out of his mouth.

He stumbles and staggers, barely able to stay upright. With bloodshot eyes, he surveys the desolate hills before him and the endless expanse of sand behind.

He gets out his handgun. He grabs the slide and pulls it back partway, revealing A ROUND LOADED AND READY IN THE CHAMBER.

A way out of this.

He closes his eyes...

SEQUENCE OF BRIEF SHOTS:

INT. MILITARY INSTALLATION - COMMAND CENTER - DAY

Jiro stands at attention with several FELLOW OFFICERS, shoulder-to-shoulder, frozen in fear, facing a COMMANDER looking back at them. All we see of this figure is the speckled gray fur on the back of his head and ears.

JIRO (V.O.)

If you don't hear from me, I want you to call our son and stay with him.

INT. APARTMENT KITCHEN - MORNING

He waits near the door, fully dressed, holding a MILITARY-ISSUE DUFFEL BAG. Distraught, Kyliia approaches him.

KYLIA

....what about you?

EXT. DESERT

Eyes clamped shut, Jiro swallows hard.

INT./EXT. ESCAPE CAPSULE, SPACE - DAY

He pulls a large, brightly colored RELEASE LEVER.

The capsule ejects from the large freighter's belly, propelled by half a dozen gas thrusters.

JIRO (V.O.)

I'll figure it out.

Strapped into one of four BUCKET SEATS, Jiro peers out a window, observing his Earth-like home planet. Out the other side, the freighter powers up, surrounding its hull in an optically distorted ALCUBIERRE-DRIVE WARP BUBBLE.

JIRO (V.O.)

I'll make it work. I'll come back.

Suddenly, the freighter WARPS AWAY in a flash of light, slamming the capsule away and launching it toward a nearby GOLDEN-BROWN WORLD.

EXT. DESERT

He raises his weapon, clutching it with trembling hands.

INT. APARTMENT KITCHEN

Jiro holds his wife in a tense embrace.

She rests her head against his chest, trying not to cry.

JIRO
I promise.

INT. MILITARY INSTALLATION

Jiro kneels down next to the dead body of the GRAY WOLF who stood beside him. Facedown on the floor, eyes wide open and his head resting in a POOL OF FRESH BLOOD.

KYLIA (V.O.)
This can't be real.

(V.O.) Jiro BREATHES HEAVILY.

The gun FIRES—**BANG!**

EXT. DESERT

An EMPTY SHELL CASING hits the sand next to Jiro's ankle.

He stands his ground, holding his gun forward in front of him, squeezing the weapon's grip for all it's worth.

He lets go of the trigger. CLICK. He opens his eyes.

GROWLING with sudden vigor, Jiro wheels around and opens fire on a nearby BOULDER! Over and over...BANG! BANG! BANG!

MORE BRIEF SHOTS:

EXT. UPPER ATMOSPHERE - DAY

The escape pod SHUDDERS under the force of re-entry, enveloped by a curtain of GLOWING PLASMA.

EXT. DESERT - RUGGED LOWLANDS

BANG! A whole CHUNK OF ROCK explodes off the boulder's face.

EXT. DESERT - LANDING SITE

The capsule's PARACHUTES unfurl—

—and then it SLAMS into the sand—

EXT. DESERT - RUGGED LOWLANDS

BANG! The slide of Jiro's weapon locks back—THE GUN IS EMPTY.

The sound of the final shot reverberates and echoes off the rocks in the distance, dying away into eerie silence.

Then something else: a distant RUMBLE, the brief SCREECH of an aircraft. Jiro's ears perk—he wasn't expecting that.

His strength now completely gone, he drops his handgun, sinks to his knees, and falls forward on his stomach.

INT. APARTMENT KITCHEN - MORNING

Leaning back through the doorway, Jiro looks one last time into the loving, worried eyes of his wife.

INT. MILITARY INSTALLATION - SLEEPING QUARTERS - NIGHT

Jiro sits hunched over on his narrow bunk, looking at the EMPTY RACK across the aisle from him.

All the other bunks are filled with his fellow crew members, deep asleep in the middle of the night.

EXT. DESERT - RUGGED LOWLANDS - NIGHT

A trail of weak, shuffled footprints, broken up by patches of exposed bedrock, lead us to:

Jiro lying flat on his chest, delirious and breathing in rapid, shallow bursts. The sky above him slowly ROTATES, smearing into GLOWING STAR TRAILS.

The distant RUMBLE returns, slowly growing louder and closer. A BRIGHT LIGHT follows the sound, approaching from behind.

Shaking his head, Jiro snaps out of it. He looks up at the stars, once again stationary and normal.

Slowly, weakly, he props himself up on his elbows. He rolls over and sits up, holding his hand in front of his eyes:

He sits illuminated by the powerful WING LIGHTS of a small SPACE PLANE, hovering a short distance away from him.

THE END.