

POSTCARDS FROM ANOTHER WORLD

COMPUTER

Message playback. Received at 8:28 on colony date 25907.

There's a beep, and some static, as the recording is played.

Lyra's voice is old and sharp.

LYRA

Hi, Privik. It's just me, checking in. I wanted to let you know that we arrived at Lunaseti Colony. Neeva is settled in her bunk at this stopover station. She's doing... let's just say, she managed the trip okay. I know you'll be worried about her. I'm still getting my bearings. It's been too long since I was here. I just... anyway. I'm probably not making much sense. Freightlag has never been this bad before. But I just wanted you to know that Neeva's fine. As fine as she's going to be. I'm sure she'll be in touch when she's ready. Speak soon. Lyra, out.

There's another beep and the recording ends.

COMPUTER

End of message. Save. Delete. Archi— message deleted. Next message. Received at 15:82 on colony date 25908.

This next recording has much less static.

LYRA

Well, it took two shuttles and three transports, but we finally made it. We're in our decontamination pods, camped at the edge of Lunaseti Base. Has Neeva been in touch yet? I'm sure she will when she's up to it. She's been such a help. I don't know what I'd have done without her. The colony seems so much bigger since I was last here. I can't believe it's been almost twenty years. So much has changed. I hardly recognise it. But even though everything's different, it still reminds me of Rohan. I always promised I'd bring the boys here. That I'd show them...

Lyra is fighting back tears.

LYRA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Privik. I just. I can't believe they're both gone. I know you'll be hurting too. But... I'm sorry.

The beep brings the recording to an end.

COMPUTER

End of message. Save. Del— message deleted. Next message. Received at 19:46 on colony date 25910.

LYRA

So we're still in decontamination. I've been messaging different ones to try and get us integrated into the new colony, and I thought of you, Privik. Do you remember that time when the boys were Rapphar hunting for the first time without Rohan, and they came back with a Bunthar as if it was the single greatest accomplishment the colony on Epsilon had ever seen? And it turned out to be a Bunthar from your farm? They'd got lost and hadn't thought to check their scanners. Your face. It was such a picture.

(Chuckles)

I think that's when Japhek first caught Neeva's eye. She's doing well. I'm keeping an open link with her while we're in separate pods. By this time tomorrow, we'll be entering the city. How's the farm doing? And how's everyone on Epsilon? Did Persis make it back? I guess she must have done to fill you in on Neeva.

(Pause, changes to a more serious tone)

I had no idea that Neeva was going to do what she did, Privik. You have to believe me. Persis and Neeva insisted on taking me to the freighter port. I tried to get them to turn around. I begged them to. I thought they'd just come along to see me off. When it was time for Persis to head back, she tried to get Neeva to go with her. But Neeva wouldn't leave. I ordered her to go back, but she refused. She said that she'd loved Japhek too much to let me leave on my own. That we were bound together so wherever I went, she would be there. But I swear, I had no intention of bringing her with me. I had—

Bleep.

COMPUTER

Are you sure you wish to skip message?

(Pause)

Message deleted. Next message. Received at 32:57 on colony date 25915.

LYRA

We're out of decontamination. Finally. I have a distant relative — one of Rohan's great great something or other — who is looking to get some work for us. Nobody here knew about the accident. News hasn't travelled from Epsilon yet. I've had to tell them about Rohan, and the boys. How's the inquest coming on? Have you heard from Neeva yet? I keep asking her to send you a message. I'll have another word about it. It was so senseless, Privik. So... unnecessary. I feel empty. No. That's not right. I feel... you know those baits Japhek and Jokra used to keep for the Rapphars? You remember how bitter the smell of them was? How it would make your eyes water and the back of your throat sting. I feel like one of those is lodged in my heart. Like my whole body is just... bitter. Like I'm rotting from the inside out.

And Neeva is... she's a comfort. But nothing can replace the loss of a child. Nothing.

(Pause)

I'm sorry. I just realised this is what you must be feeling with Neeva gone. I'll ask her to message you in the morning. She's meeting with this relative of mine to go through a skills test. The colony's...

(Sigh)

At least there's no drought like the last time. Nothing to force us to move out. You know... sometimes I wish we'd never come to Epsilon. Rohan might still be here. Losing him to the Rapphar a couple of years ago was hard enough. But losing our boys. Japhek and Jokra... Still. If we'd never come to Epsilon, I'd never have met Neeva. You should see the way she

looks at Lunaseti. It's so different to what she's used to. Anyway. I'll sign off for now. I'll tell her to call you. I promise. Lyra, out.

Bleep.

COMPUTER

End of message. Save. Delete. Archive. Mark as unviewed. Repeat.

(Pause)

Message saved. Next message. Received at 21:90 on colony date 25918.

Neeva's voice is youthful, warm, and innocent, like the sunrise on a spring day.

NEEVA

Hi, Dad. Lyra's been asking me to message you. I've been meaning to. I just... couldn't bring myself to try to explain. I guess by now you've realised I'm not coming back. And I guess you want to know why. But I... I can't put it into words yet.

(Hurries as if she's said something wrong)

I want you to know that it wasn't you, okay? You didn't do anything wrong. You were always there for me. Always. And I'm so grateful to you. Please don't think this is your fault.

(Slower)

It's nobody's fault. Is it? Anyway. I should stop yapping at you and let you get on.

LYRA

(From the background)

Neeva! Can you help me with this?

NEEVA

Lyra's calling. She needs me. I guess that's it. She needs me, Dad. I'll call again, alright.

LYRA

Neeva...?

NEEVA

Gotta go.

Bleep.

COMPUTER

End of message. Save. Delete. Archive. Mark as unviewed. Repeat.

(Pause)

Save. Delete. Archive. Mark as unviewed. Repeat.

(Pause)

Message archived. Next message. Received at 19:10 on colony date 25920.

NEEVA

Hi, Dad. Me again. So, I've been thinking about that last message, and I was talking to Lyra, and she says I owe you an explanation. That you'll be grieving me being here the same way we're grieving Jokra and Japh...

(Coughs, as if she's finding it hard to say)

Japhek.

(Sobs)

I'm sorry. That's the first time I've said his name since the accident. Pause message.

A different kind of blip is heard, to symbolise the recording is paused before Neeva continues.

NEEVA

(Composed)

So, I figured it was about time to tell you why I'm here and not with you on the Bunthar farm.

(Draws a deep breath)

After the funeral, I tried to go back to normal. I really did. You were such a big help. And Lyra always tried to shoo me and Persis away. Every time we went to see her, she'd tell us to move on with our lives. She used to say that there was a whole future waiting for us, and all she had left to give us was the ramblings of a bitter old colonist who'd rolled the dice and lost. But I still went to see her. We all did. Every day. I guess that's what I loved most about Epsilon. We were a colony. A family. All of us. I mean, it was bad when she lost Rohan to that Raptar. I don't know how it had got through the shields and into the camp. But this time, it was much worse. For all of us. It was even worse than when Mum...

(Pauses)

Okay. If I'm gonna do this, I need a drink.

(Pours a drink and liquid fills a glass)

Do you remember our wedding day? Me and Japhek's? Of course you do. I mean, it's not like you'd forget it, right? The farm looked amazing that night, with Bunthar chirruping until dawn. And then after the funeral, after we'd buried the bodies just on the edge of camp, I came back to the farm, and all I could see was his face. His smile. He was everywhere, right in front of me, all the way to the horizon. But he was gone. I don't know why the shields failed. I don't know why Jokra and Japhek had to be the ones to go outside the dome and fix it. But it was like living with a shadow that no amount of light could shift.

(Swigs drink)

Can you understand that, Dad? What it was like for us? I'm sure Persis is the same. Well, I suppose you know all about it, with Mum and everything. That's why you got the farm, isn't it? Why you settled down on Epsilon? Because that's the last place you saw Mum. I bet you're looking round the Bunthar farm and seeing me there too, even though I've gone. I couldn't do it. And it might have been selfish to leave, but... I just couldn't. I can't do what you did, Dad. I couldn't stay living in a moment while the world passed me by. I had to keep moving. Or else I'd be living in a shadow forever.

(Swigs drink)

Japhek used to talk about this place. About Lunaseti. He came to Epsilon when him and Jokra were just boys. All those stories he told me about this place, he made it sound so wonderful. I knew coming here would help. And it will. I'm sure it will. And it'll do the same for Lyra. She's strong, but not strong enough to do this by herself. She needed me, and she always will. Can you forgive me, Dad? Can you forgive me for leaving without saying goodbye?

(Swigs last bit of drink)

I hope you can. I know that running away isn't the same as moving on. But neither is standing still. It's the inquest tomorrow. If they... if they find out what was behind the shields failing, will you let me know?

(Pauses and draws breath, as if she's pulling herself together)

Alright. I've blabbered on long enough. There's so much that's happened here and I can't even get my head around it. I'll fill you in later. Speak soon. Neeva, out.

Bleep.

COMPUTER

End of message. Save. Del— message saved. Next message. Received at 2:48 on colony date 25922.

LYRA

(Annoyed)

Privik, I just found out. I can't believe the results. The incompetent fools. How can they not know? How can all of the scientific minds on Epsilon with all of that technology not be able to retrace a few circuits and find the cause of the malfunction? I'm livid about the whole thing. The inquest was supposed to put this to bed. But instead, it just feels like they're stabbing a wound before it's had a chance to begin healing. It's Neeva I feel for. I think she was hoping this might bring some closure. I'll give her a hug from you. Anyway, however bad it is here, I can't imagine what it must be like on Epsilon. I'm so sorry. I hope you're doing okay. Lyra, out.

Bleep.

COMPUTER

End of— message deleted. Next message. Received at 6:20 on colony date 25922.

NEEVA

Hey, Dad. I just wanted to check in. We heard the news. Lyra's here. I just...

LYRA

It's okay, Neeva.

NEEVA

I don't know what to do. I just wanted you to know that I love you.

(Cries)

LYRA

It's okay, sweetheart. You should take the day off. Zabo will understand.

NEEVA

(Still upset, but determined)

I can't take the day off. What else are you going to do for food? You know our supplies are short, and if I don't pick up the slack, then who knows what kind of work Zabo will throw my way in the future?

LYRA

I've seen the way that Zabo looks at you, and I don't think we'll have to worry about food for a while.

NEEVA

Lyra. He's like... twice my age. And Head of Lunaseti's Grain Production. I know I've been collecting debris from his machinery and bringing it back here. But even this amount of scrap won't keep us going for long.

LYRA

Neeva, I don't know where your strength comes from, but Zabo is the one who got us these lodgings. You know he'll always be loyal to Rohan's family.

NEEVA

But that's the point, isn't it? I'm *not* Rohan's family. This isn't like Epsilon. It's so much bigger here. And I'm not one of them. I was born off-world, and I'll always be an off-worlder to them. If I can't prove that I'm making my own way here, then what will people think of you? I don't want you to become an outcast just because I'm not pulling my weight.

LYRA

You're always thinking of me, aren't you?

NEEVA

I owe it to Japhek.

LYRA

Japhek's... He's gone, my dear. You have a life for yourself. You're not responsible for me. If I knew my journey home would cause you this much work, I'd have stayed on Epsilon. I came back here because I didn't want to be a burden.

NEEVA

You're not a burden, Lyra.

LYRA

I'm a grumpy old Bunthar, and you know it.

NEEVA

Did you hear that, Dad? All that effort you put into farming Bunthar, and you could have just put a muzzle on Lyra all this time.

LYRA

(Laughing)

Privik, your daughter is a lifesaver.

NEEVA

Dad. I'm sorry, but I've got to go.

LYRA

I'll make sure she doesn't work too hard.

Bleep.

COMPUTER

End of message. Save. Delete. Archive. Mark as unviewed. Repeat.

(Pause)

Repeating message.

NEEVA

Hey, Dad. I just wanted to check in. We heard the news. Lyra's here. I just...

LYRA

It's okay, Neeva.

NEEVA

I don't know what to do. I just wanted you to know that I love you.

(Cries)

A different kind of bloop.

COMPUTER

Paused. Rewind. Play.

NEEVA

I just wanted you to know that I love you.

Bloop.

COMPUTER

Paused. Message archived. Next message. Received at 39:03 on colony date 25930.

Zabo has a kindly, mature voice.

ZABO

Greetings, Privik. My name is Zabo. You don't know me, but I've been told that I have you to thank for Neeva's work ethic. She began helping with the machinery at our grain stores, siphoning off spare bits of scrap. With you being a colonist, you'll know the value of recyclable materials. Scrap metal is more precious than my great-grandmother's pearls. I've been letting Neeva take a share of what she's collected for us, considering she's streamlined most of our machines and ripped out the excess.

(Lowers his voice out of respect)

I've been made aware that Neeva travelled on the freight with Lyra, using the last of the funds she acquired from her late husband's... erm... what would you call it? Estate? I don't want to be tactless and suggest you couldn't afford a freight pass, but Bunthar farming has never made anyone rich in all the history of the worlds. So... I have a proposal for you.

(Excitable but professional)

Seeing as though your daughter is such a hard worker — a skill she could only have acquired from a devoted father — then I believe you also deserve a share in the scrap Neeva's been siphoning for us. Lunaseti prices might not be as high as Epsilon, but I intend to set something aside for you from the surplus. It won't be much, but it might mean that you can find a little time to take a break from farming and send a message to Neeva. I know she'd like to hear from you, and she deserves a reward for all she's done. At least, that's what I've gathered from our conversations. Not that we've been conversing. Well, it's not like we haven't talked. It's just that when we talk, it's...

(Awkward)

What I mean to say is that your daughter has the finest reputation of anyone on Lunaseti Base. And I know you'd be proud of what she's doing here. As proud as the rest of us. Zabo, out.

Bleep.

COMPUTER

End of— message saved. Next message. Received at 18:95 on colony date 25932.

NEEVA

(Excited)

Hey, Dad. It was great to get your message. I can't tell you how nice it felt to see your face. I'll try to answer all your questions, but if I forget, just nudge me in your next vidshare, okay?

Right. First up, the colony here is treating me very well. Everyone is nice to me. I think it's because they feel sorry for me. And I've got Lyra to thank for that. Either people have heard about our situation because of her, or they're so sick of her moaning that they think I'm a saint for putting up with her!

(Laughs)

If she were a Bunthar, you'd have sold her for meat weeks ago! Anyway. The colony is beautiful. It's so much more spectacular than Japhek could have ever described it. There are three moons, all shining with different colours because of the ores on them, or something like that. So at night, when they pass across each other, you get these kinds of rainbows that glitter across everything. Zabo showed me the best place to watch them from, on the top of this ridge.

(A fondness creeps into her voice)

Zabo has been really good to us lately. He makes sure our food stores are topped up every day. And my scrap collection is growing. But more than that, he's just so easy to talk to. Zabo remembers Japhek when he was just a kid, and hearing new stories about him... well, it helps. Zabo helps.

(Embarrassed)

But he's much older than me, if that's what you're thinking. So you don't need to worry, Dad. Besides, he wouldn't be interested in a farm girl like me, anyway. Onto your next question.

Lyra is doing fine. She thinks I should be moving on, and I think I'm starting to agree with her. The city is so big, it's always moving. And it's easier to move on with things here than it would've been back on Epsilon. Speaking of, thank you so much for showing me the sunset.

Nothing beats an Epsilon sun show. Not even the moons of Lunaseti.

(Churlish)

Oh, and tell Persis that she can absolutely *not* have my old record collection. She's still got her handout from what happened to Jokra, which should be more than enough to cover the

cost of a few records. Besides, I might want you to play me some of them in one of your vidshares to remind me of home.

(Uncertain)

Erm... did I forget anything?... I don't think so. But I'll listen back and reply just in case.
Hang on.

One of the same kinds of blips from earlier is heard to pause the recording, before Neeva continues.

NEEVA (CONT'D)

(Playful)

Oh yeah! How could I forget! Yes, I do want you to pass on a message to the Bunthar. You can tell them that if they don't get fat before market season, there'll be trouble.

(Laughs)

Okay, I think that's everything. Bye for now. Love you. Bye.

Bleep.

COMPUTER

End of message. Save. Delete. Arch— message archived. Next message. Received at 12:14 on colony date 25957.

NEEVA

(Worried)

Sorry it's been a while, Dad. Lyra heard that a Rapthar got through the shield again. Is everyone okay?

ZABO

Rapthar? Is that one of those creatures you told me about?

NEEVA

Mmhmmm. Oh, this is Zabo, by the way. Zabo, Dad. Dad, Zabo.

ZABO

It's an honour to make your acquaintance.

NEEVA

You don't have to be all formal or anything.

ZABO

But I want to make a good impression.

NEEVA

Why?

LYRA

Oh, pack it in, Neeva. Good manners never hurt anyone, did they?

NEEVA

They could do a lot of damage on Epsilon come rain season.

ZABO

I take it there's a story behind that?

NEEVA

Let's just say that holding a door open for someone might have resulted in a certain person getting so wet, they caught a fever and couldn't get out of bed for a week.

LYRA

(Laughs)

I remember that. Japhek was so mad at you.

ZABO

(Concerned)

Were you really ill for a whole week?

NEEVA

I'll fill you in later. Anyway, can I finish my message now? Sorry, Dad. It's easy to get distracted with these two in the same room
You know what it's like minding the children.

LYRA

We're not children, are we Zabo?

ZABO

I'll fart on anyone who says so.

LYRA

Precisely my point.

NEEVA

(Sighs)

I just wanted to introduce Zabo to you, so you can put a face to the name. And to check you were alright after the Rapphar thing. Talk soon, okay? Love you.

Bleep.

COMPUTER

End of message. Save. Delete. Archive. Mark as unviewed. Repeat.

(Brief pause)

Message saved. Next message. Received at 91:30 on colony date 25960.

NEEVA

(Crying)

I'm so sorry. It's been a whole year today since... And I know it's stupid that I still feel like this, but I just wanted to talk to someone. You know? And I can't talk to Lyra because she

refuses to believe it's been a year. And I can't talk to Zabo because I don't want to make a fool of myself in front of him. And you're not here. But that's not fair, is it? I'm the one who left. I... I can't do this. It isn't fair to you. Forget I sent anything. Delete this message, will you, Dad? Will you? I don't want you to think of me like this.

Bleep.

COMPUTER

End of message. Save. Delete. Archive. Mark as unviewed. Repeat.

(Pause)

Save. Del— message deleted. Next message. Received at 18:35 on colony date 25973.

ZABO

(Respectful)

Privik, thank you for your message. I'm glad the scrap payment reached you. Sending payments off-world is always a risk. I absolutely insist on you keeping it. The idea of returning it is out of the question. But there's another matter I want to discuss with you. I wish I could come to Epsilon and ask you in person, but I can't leave the grain stores. So this device will have to do.

(Nervous)

I've never considered myself the marrying type. I was always happy in my own company, obsessed with work. But lately, that's not been the case. I'm only happy when a certain person is working. And I think you can guess who that is. I'm planning on asking her tomorrow. Will you be available for us to message if she accepts? If I have your blessing, that is? I don't want to presume anything. Let me know. Zabo, out.

Bleep.

COMPUTER

End of message. Save. Delete. Ar— message saved. Next message. Received at 20:09 on colony date 25974.

NEEVA

(Excited)

Dad! You won't believe it, but Zabo... he... we... I can't believe it!

ZABO

She said yes.

NEEVA

Lyra's spreading the news all over the colony. She's gone from being the most depressed person here, to the happiest I've ever seen her. It's ridiculous.

ZABO

She's just happy for you. You know she thinks of you as a daughter, right?

NEEVA

She's old enough. *You're* practically old enough to be my Dad. Are you sure people won't be freaked out by this? By... us?

ZABO

Let them think what they like. We're joined now. That's all that matters.

NEEVA

I love you, old man.

(Kissing noises, which intensify)

Come on. Let's...

Bloop.

COMPUTER

Skip message. Message deleted. Next message. Received at 11:04 on colony date 26305.

NEEVA

(Tired, and a little uncertain)

Hey, Dad. Do you remember when I was little and that old lady kept calling round, after Mum died? And I asked if you were going to marry her? You remember what you said?

(Pause)

You said that you could never marry another person. That Mum wouldn't let you, whether she was here or not. I just... Am I doing the right thing?

(Quicker)

Don't get me wrong, Zabo is beyond anything I could've imagined. But... I know you haven't left Epsilon because of Mum. Because that's where you loved her last. And here I am, on

Lunaseti, living a totally different life to the one I had with Japhek. But Dad, I just...

Memories aren't supposed to be a prison, are they? I can't keep living in the past. Life moves. And I've got to move with it. I feel like I'm cheating on Japhek's memory every time I'm with Zabo, and I know that's ridiculous. But... it would just make a difference if *you* told me it was okay. It *is* okay isn't it? I know that when I think about my other life, the one on Epsilon, it's like everything I remember is just... I don't know... it's like my memories are postcards from another world. I can't keep living in them. I'm moving on, Dad. And that's a good thing, right?

Bleep.

COMPUTER

End of messa— message archived. Next message. Received at 35:15 on colony date 26339.

NEEVA

(Excited)

You're not gonna believe this, but... it happened. We got the approval to expand our family unit. And I'm... well, look at this bump! It's amazing. I mean, I've been sick so much. But that's normal, right?

(Sad)

I just wish you were here. There have been so many days where I've wished you were here.

I mean, I'm glad I came. Don't get me wrong. I have Zabo. And Lyra would never have survived the trip without me. But leaving you behind was... I just miss you so much. I wish the freighter costs weren't so high. I wish we weren't so distant. I wish... I wish I didn't feel like this. I should be happy, right? I should be overjoyed. But I just feel so guilty. It should've been me and Japhek having a child, and you'd have been there. It should've been... But I'm happy. I know I'm happy. I'd just be happier if you were here.

(Serious)

I know the second inquest is coming up soon, but... I don't care about the results. I buried Japhek on Epsilon. Digging that up will do nothing for us now.

(Happy)

I'm gonna be a Mum, Dad! Me! Anyway, I'll keep you posted on due dates and everything. Love you so much. Neeva, out.

Bleep.

COMPUTER

End of message. Save. Delete. Arch— message archived. Final message. Received at 86:32 on colony date 26450.

NEEVA

I got your last message, Dad. Are you serious? This isn't some kind of a joke? I had no idea that Zabo was sending you a percentage of the scrap. Or that it was anywhere near enough to buy you a freight ticket. Are you seriously in decontamination right now? Yes, of course I'll send you copies of the broadcasts from Lunaseti to Epsilon addressed to you. I know how long the days can be when you're waiting to cross into the colony. I guess by the time you get this message, we might even have seen one another. I can't believe it. Privik the Bunthar farmer on Lunaseti. Did you bring the Bunthar? Are they as fat as me? Did you spot me from orbit? I bet you did. I'm practically the size of a moon.

(Laughs, then pauses)

Dad. I know I ran away. I know I let you down. But thank you for always being there. Thank you for trusting me to take the steps I needed to. I know it's been hard. But now, there's a place for you in our colony. Zabo's already made the arrangements. And Lyra can't wait to see you. Thank you, Dad. Thank you for letting me find my path. I'm so proud of you for leaving the farm. For leaving it behind. Can't wait to see you.

(Blows a kiss)

Neeva, out.

Bleep.

COMPUTER

Message saved. End of messages. Please prepare for the final stage of decontamination.

Air whooshes in a burst. Followed by a chime.

COMPUTER

Welcome to Lunaseti Base.

A cityscape can be heard of ambient traffic and voices.

From out of these, Neeva's voice steadily gets louder.

NEEVA

Dad! Dad! Over here! Dad!

PRIVIK

Neeva!

NEEVA

Dad!

PRIVIK

Don't let go. Not just yet.

(Pause)

It was worth crossing worlds just for this.

(Pause)

I'm not holding too tight, am I?

NEEVA

Not at all. Come on, let's take you home.

END.