

The Earth Serenades by Emma Griffiths

Characters

Skim: Research Astronaut, female, language specialist

Beta: Onboard AI (sounds digitally female) Pronounced Bet-ah

Shakarn: Skim's commanding officer, male

Pree: Research Dolphin, female, adolescent

Scene 1 Aquatic Spacecraft orbiting Earth, there may be some light bubbles and digital blips.

Skim: It started with a song.

FX: Whale song (Humpback)

Skim: So full of beauty and hope it touched the hearts of all who heard it. And the Government made sure everyone heard it. Dispatching interpreters across our world to share this good news, this... *invitation*....And whilst, I wouldn't *entirely* agree that that's *exactly* what it was. It did speak of a planet, not so different to ours back in its glory days. A people with whom we might share a culture, ideas...a home...It was hard not to get swept up with this newfound optimism. *We should* reply. It was only polite. What did we have to lose?... Well, for her Majesty and her government, nothing, because they're not stuck in a fracking *shell*, light years from home, in an orbit of space junk, listening to *Earth Noise*.

Beta: Skim, I am obliged to remind you that all onboard reports are recorded via the universal translator.

Skim: *Relax* Beta, no one's actually listening. If they were they'd have called us back during the last orbit.

Beta: All verbal comms will be fully decipherable to mission command *and* her Majesty's government.

Skim: *Noted*.

Beta: Also, I'm a fully automated, Bio-engineered Exploration Transport and Aqualab. Not just a shell

Skim: *Apologies*. But that's really not the worst thing you'll hear today, Beta. I guarantee it.

FX: Radio Audio: "Swarms of migrants" "Stop. The boats!"

Skim: This planet does not sound nearly as welcoming as advertised.

FX: Radio Audio: "Massive oil slick", "Dozens of whales stranded on beaches" "Tonnes of waste dumped at sea"

Skim: In fact, it's beginning to sound like a *boiling mess*.

FX: Radio Audio: "Mickies Magical Cruise Liners!"

Skim: Urgh.

FX: Jarring sounds, e.g. radio static/sirens/ foghorns/underwater explosions.

Skim: This is hopeless, so many sounds I can't even translate.

FX: More Jarring sounds

Skim: How am I supposed to hear the song through all this noise?

Beta: I have found it.

Skim: What?

Beta: It is not an exact match, but has the same pitch and tone for 67.7 per cent of notes.

FX: Similar whale song.

Skim: That's it! It's not the same singer but it's definitely the same song.

FX: Whale Song.

Beta: Are you ready to reply?

Skim: Call the Commander.

FX: Hailing sound.

FX: Whale song starts to fade. Rattling and bubbling.

Skim: Wait, what's happening to his voice?

FX: Rattling, bubbling, then a crunch like a mic being crushed.

Skim: Did he stop singing?

Beta: I am no longer able to detect a transmission from; hydrophone four hundred and twelve.

Skim: What's happened to it?

Beta: There is no data available.

Skim: Turn the volume up on the neighbouring devices.

Beta: Hydrophone four hundred and twelve is in the area known locally as the North Sea, between the coasts of Scotland and Norway. Our nearest functioning hydrophone is 14,000 nautical miles north. It would be out of range.

Skim: Frak!

FX: Hailing.

Shakarn: Officer Skimly. You're not due an appraisal for at least another two lunar cycles.

Skim: We've picked up this voice Sir.

FX: Repeat second whale song.

Skim: We were right Sir, if a song is important enough, it will be passed down through the generations. This is the same dialect, a familial match.

Shakarn: Fantastic, I'll call it in, have you prepared your reply?

Skim: Yes, but... I'll need a new hydrophone.

Shakarn: What? No time for that. Sound quality doesn't have to be perfect, just get the message across. Quickly, before they swim out of range.

Skim: Hydrophone's dead sir.

Shakarn: What d'you mean dead?

Skim: Well it, picked up the song and then it...stopped transmitting.

FX: Bubbling, crackling.

Shakarn: Maybe it's lodged in the rocks. If it's too sheltered there won't be enough force in the waves to re-charge it.

FX: Crunch.

Shakarn: Ah.

Skim: I'll need a replacement.

Shakarn: You'll need to get down there.

Skim: What?!

Shakarn: You have a repair kit on board.

Skim: Yes but...

Shakarn: We'll send replacements for the parts you use but... try not to break any of the tools.

Skim: Sir, I'm a *language* specialist.

Shakarn: Your basic training's up to date?

Skim: *Basic* yes.

Shakarn: So, what are you waiting for?

Skim: Sir, I can plug a leak, I can't build a hydrophone.

Shakarn: Let's hope it just needs re-charging.

Skim: Sir.

Shakarn: It will take hours for a replacement to reach you.

Skim: I know but...

Shakarn: And this is the first time you've heard from the singer? In nearly two solar cycles?

Skim: But now we know where to look.

Shakarn: You've said yourself, you think migration patterns may have become erratic.

Skim: Oh you... listened to my reports.

Shakarn: Intern put it into bullet points, very illuminating.

Skim: Right.

Shakarn: Point is, if you wait for a new device, you may never find them again.

Skim: I still think.

Shakarn: Orders from above.

Skim: Sir.

Beta: I have received a text note from the Prime Minister. Would you like me to read it?

Skim: Already?

Shakarn: Go ahead Beta.

Beta: She has written. Great work officer. Just wanted to say how proud we all are. You are a credit to your pod/school/shoal. Your efforts, your sacrifices will not be forgotten. I'm sure we will be singing your story for generations to come. Best of luck.

Skim: Singing my *sacrifices*?

Shakarn: That won't happen. Mission's classified.

Skim: Sir.

Beta: Initiating launch.

FX: Rattling.

Skim: I didn't start that!

Shakarn: Mothership has override.

Beta: Landing in ten.

Skim: Beta pause sequence!

Beta: I cannot override the mothership.

Skim: Sir, I have some concerns.

Beta: Nine.

Shakarn: We've talked about this, I said you could hold your position in orbit until you have more data. Now you have more data.

Beta: Eight.

Skim: Which says the environment is *hostile*.

Shakarn: Can't conclude that from where you are.

Beta: Seven.

Skim: The longer I listen the worse it sounds.

Beta: Six.

Shakarn: What can be more hostile than space? Literally, nothing can live in space.

Skim: Planet full of angry sea monsters?

Beta: Five.

Shakarn: Maybe they're friendlier than they sound.

Beta: Four.

Skim: Sir!

Beta: Three. I would advise fastening a seatbelt.

Shakarn: Good luck Skim.

Beta: Two. Prepare for impact.

Skim: I'm gonna be sick.

Beta: One. Brace. Brace.

FX: Shell plunges into water. Bubbles as it sinks, quietens as the craft settles.

Scene 2: Submerged, North Sea, words in Italic are in Dolphin. Pree cannot hear Skim and Beta converse (Skim is wearing a helmet) Different digital blips can indicate some actions.

Beta: Descent complete. Begin safety checks.

FX: Switches, apparatus powering up.

Skim: Power check. Engines check. Oxygen check. Auxiliary check. No sign of shell breach. No loss of pressure. Everything looks intact Beta, we're okay.

Beta: How do you feel?

Skim: *Apart* from angry nausea?

Beta: It is normal for the high G-force of interstellar travel to cause mild nausea in your species. This will typically pass within 20 minutes. Are you experiencing, headache, dizziness, tingling sensation or sudden euphoria?

Skim: Nope.

Beta: Any symptoms of hypoxia must be reported immediately.

Skim: If I suddenly feel euphoric Beta, you'll be the first to know. Come on let's find this hydrophone and get the frak out of here.

Beta: Homing in on last known signal.

Skim: Have to admit, it does feel good to be surrounded by water again.

Beta: I must remind you that any swimming outside the shell must be conducted in full safety apparatus.

Skim: *I know*, I won't take off my suit. Wouldn't wanna risk it anyway, looks kinda murky, what's that stuff everywhere?

Beta: It is normal for sea water to contain mineral particles and organic matter.

Skim: I know but what's all that other stuff?

Beta: I have no frame of reference for this...stuff.

Skim: If it's not animal or mineral what is it?

Beta: Initial data has been uploaded to the mothership, I will inform you when they reply.

Skim: Stuff is everywhere.

Beta: This is the last known location of the hydrophone. Final transmission, just beneath the beam of our headlights.

Skim: No sign of debris.

Beta: Based on the currents and the weight of the object, I estimate it could not have drifted more than a mile from here.

Skim: Depends how small the pieces are. Those are pretty deep gouges where it's smashed against the rocks.

Beta: You cannot be certain when those gash marks were made.

Skim: There's no sediment or plant growth around it.

Beta: You think something tried to eat it?

Skim: Well, it's certainly not here. There's hardly anything here, where is everyone?

Beta: You were expecting the whales?

Skim: No but, more life than this.

FX: Sonar.

Skim: What is that?

Beta: I am unable to precisely identify this creature.

Skim: What's your best guess?

Beta: I have no frame of reference for this large bulbous species.

Skim: So, you've *no* idea?

Beta: I suggest, proceed with caution.

Skim: I suggest we stay here and turn off our headlamps!

Beta: That light flickering could be a message.

Skim: Could just be their face.

Beta: Ignoring it could be seen as weakness *or* an act of aggression.

Skim: Frak. Okay, I'll say hello.

Beta: Protocol states that you should start with a simple greeting.

Skim: Relax Beta, I've been practising my phosphorescent grammar for months. Check it out.

Beta: I am obliged to remind you that not all creatures respond well to bright flashing colours and strobing light.

Skim: That was my dullest, most polite...

Beta: The greeting may still have been too colourful. Some sea creatures use light to mesmerise prey.

Skim: We're not deep enough for that.

Beta: No signs of response.

Skim: D'you think it's dead?

Beta: Could just be stunned, or blinded.

FX: Sonar.

Skim: What *is* that noise?

Beta: That appears to be their response.

Skim: So, not dead! Just...monosyllabic. They have a really annoying voice.

Beta: They may not be talking to us. It appears to be using reflected sound to orientate itself.

Skim: You think it's a weird looking whale? Or...really big shark.

Beta: It does appear to be using echolocation.

Skim: I'll try singing.

FX: Burst of whale song then dolphin clicks.

Skim: Still nothing. Don't even see it breathing.

Beta: It's possible we are only seeing an exoskeleton.

Skim: Like a crab? Okay, I'll try sign language.

FX: Hydraulics of the robotic arms being extended, waved around, clicking together.

Beta: A slow wave would be considered a simpler, gentler greeting.

Skim: Come on Beta, no one's impressed by that.

Beta: I am obliged to remind you, that if you break the hydraulic arms, you do not have the skills to fix them.

Skim: Doesn't look like they wanna dance anyway, are you sure it's not dead?

FX: Submarine motor.

Beta: The swimming away would indicate not.

Skim: Must be shy.

Beta: I am detecting an electronic frequency.

Skim: So, it *did* eat the hydrophone.

Beta: Scanning now...The frequency does not match.

Skim: Different tech?

Beta: We have not been notified of other visitors.

Skim: Not sure I'd expect Mission Control to tell the likes of us.

Beta: It does not resemble any craft blueprints on my database.

Skim: It *is* possible you don't have all of them.

Beta: Scanning again.

Skim: Is there a protocol for scanning something that might be an unidentified, possibly classified shell while it's moving away from us?

Beta: I will find one...Internal bio signs indicate...A human.

Skim: A naked land monkey? No way! How'd they get inside a whale? The local diet sounds most unappetising.

Beta: I can only detect life signs from the human. The shell appears to be a craft piloted by the human.

Skim: But they can't survive down here can they?

Beta: They are completely ill-adapted for sub-aquatic life.

Skim: How long would they survive outside the shell?

Beta: How long would you survive in orbit without me?

Skim: So why are they down here?

Beta: That does not feature on the list of polite introductory questions.

Skim: Beta, did you get a recording of all of that?

Beta: Our entire mission is recorded.

Skim: Play back the audio of the shell's movements.

FX: Motor, bubbles.

Skim: Now play back the list of unidentified voices.

FX: Shipping bells, foghorns, sirens, explosives, motors.

Skim: Run a match through the latest audio.

Beta: There is sufficient similarity to suggest the source of these unidentified voices is human in 93.791 per cent of cases.

Skim: So, they're everywhere?

Beta: Mapping locations.

FX: Digital blip.

Beta: Map indicates activity in all major seas, rivers, oceans and lakes, but to limited depths.

Skim: Beta, show the map as a timeline over the past two Earth years.

FX: Blips.

Skim: So, they're going deeper more often.

Beta: I have highlighted significant spikes in activity on the seabed, there has been a significant increase over the past two solar cycles.

Skim: With an upward trajectory.

Beta: Based on recent activity, modelling suggests seabed activity could continue to increase exponentially.

Skim: Beta, run this timeline across our orbital footage for the past two cycles.

Beta: Synchronised.

Skim: Highlight any changes to coast and river structure that coincide with this human noise audio.

FX: Blips.

Beta: Showing all identifiable matches.

Skim: They're dredging the seabed, shifting the sand, expanding the land.
Are they colonising it?!

Beta: Inconclusive. There also appear to be areas of sea expansion. Islands in the Pacific are already being returned to the sea.

Skim: How are they?...Beta, restart the footage, focus in on the polar icecaps...now speed it up...

FX: Blips.

Skim: They're shrinking.

Beta: Seasonal fluctuation would be normal.

Skim: Go to the spring equinox.

FX: Blips.

Skim: Now compare to the previous year.

FX: Blips.

Skim: The ice caps are smaller.

Beta: Two cycles is inconclusive, however, water analysis indicates lower levels of salt than anticipated for a habitat of this type.

Skim: Fresh water's melting into it.

Beta: I remind you again, don't go out without your suit.

FX: Dolphin calls.

Skim: At last! Intelligent life.

Beta: That is a porpoise, known locally as a bottlenose dolphin.

Skim: Is there just one?

Beta: I have detected no other dolphins.

Skim: Looks kinda sad on her own.

Beta: Her movements do appear unusually sluggish, perhaps she is unwell?

Skim: What's that on her head?

Beta: There is a low-level electronic frequency being emitted from the device.

Skim: At least she's not afraid to get close.

Beta: Bottleneck dolphins are known for their curiosity.

Skim: I know but not like this, she's not singing, not dancing, not trying to engage with us at all just, swimming up and down in-front of us in a grid, like a zombie, it's weird.

Beta: If this is her territory she may have seen the hydrophone.

Skim: Hope she's more alert than she looks.

Skim: *Hello Friend...I said...Hello there my friend.*

Skim: I said that correctly right?

Beta: According to our most recent data.

Skim: *Hello*

Skim: Frak, where'd she go?

FX: Craft whirling.

Skim: Not behind, not above, not underneath. Does she have super speed?
Transparent skin? Urgh, this spinning, I'm gonna be sick.

FX: Buzzer.

Skim: Hatch alarm?

Beta: Yes, there is a pressure warning.

Skim: What would cause that?

Beta: Erratic driving...also, something is ramming it.

Skim: What?

Beta: Something the size and weight of a bottlenose dolphin.

Skim: Why would she?

FX: Bump against hatch.

Skim: Okay, I felt that one.

Skim: *Hello Friend.*

FX: Louder bump.

Skim: *Hey! Could you not...*

Skim: Wow, I see her, she really swam up to that thump.

Beta: That hatch is systems critical, it will need to be checked, immediately.

Skim: Go for it.

Beta: *Manually* checked.

Skim: Me? Next to weird zombie dolphin. No way. Can't we just wait for her to get bored or knock herself out?

Beta: You want this mammal to be unconscious underwater?

Skim: *No*

Beta: If the hatch goes, it could let in contamination from the untested Earth water, *and*...weird zombie dolphin.

Skim: Frak.

FX: Internal hatch opens and closes.

Skim: Okay Beta, internal hatch secure. Checking external door seal. The light's stopped flashing.

Beta: Pressure is stable.

Skim: Now she can see me through the porthole she's stopped.

Beta: What is she doing?

Skim: Just peering in at me. Seems a lot calmer now I've come to this window.

Beta: You will need to check the outside of the hatch for damage.

Skim: She's started to do that up and down swimming again.

Beta: The pressure is stable. If she is no longer ramming the hatch, there is no need to engage with her. You can wait until she swims away.

Skim: Do you see anyone else we can ask about the hydrophone?

Beta: I would advise, proceed with caution.

FX: Outside hatch opens.

Skim: *Hi*

Pree: *Er, what?... Are you talking to me?*

Skim: *Who else would I be talking to?*

Pree: *Oh, yeah...guess there's no one else here.*

Skim: *Whatcha doin' there with all this, up and down swimming and... head butting?*

Pree: *I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to disturb you, I didn't know anyone was in there.*

Skim: *S'okay, but...doesn't it hurt?*

Pree: *Just wanted to see what was in there.*

Skim: *Could have just asked...When I called to you.*

Pree: *That was you?!*

Skim: *Yeah.*

Pree: *I'm so sorry. No one really talks to me out here.*

Skim: *No one? Not even your pod?*

Pree: *Yeah, they do but, not out here and, they don't talk to me like you are.*

Skim: *What d'you mean?*

Pree: *They're all like, grunt and whistle and clapping their spindly fins.*

Skim: *Clapping?*

Pree: *Yeah, and sometimes they like me to jump through a hoop. Simple things make them happy.*

Skim: *Right. Well, I'm very glad to be talking to you. I'm Skim, what's your name?*

Pree: *Princess.*

Skim: *Wow, that's... unusual for a dolphin, what does it mean?*

Pree: *Dunno, but they like it. I actually prefer Pree.*

Skim: *Well, it's lovely to meet you Pree. I was... also hoping to speak to some Whales, don't know if you've heard them? Play her the song Beta.*

FX: Second Whale Song.

Pree: *Ha, ha, ha, yeah, he's so desperate. Overheard Mamma Hunchback say he's pathetic and a liar. There's hardly any good feasting in that territory anymore. All her daughter's think he's a loser. He's never gonna get any.*

Skim: *So, it was too good to be true, Beta.*

- Beta: We cannot rule out the possibility he was exaggerating his assets.
- Skim: Very plausible, given what we can see here. If the song wasn't for us, why was it transmitting through space?
- Beta: Same reason all the other noise does.
- Skim: Which is?
- Beta: I will consult the mothership.
- Pree: *Oh, Skim! Can I take a look inside?*
- Skim: *Erm*
- Beta: Skim, this dolphin does not have clearance to be onboard.
- Skim: Oh, a quick peek inside the hatch won't hurt. Besides, she's already barged her way in. *Careful, Pree!*
- Pree: *Wow! It's like being inside the mouth of a giant stingray.*
- Beta: That is offensive.
- Skim: You don't have the programming to get offended.
- Beta: I have been machine learning Earth languages for two solar cycles, I appreciate nuance.
- Pree: *Skim, if you're going to talk to whales, you should probably do it from in here, coz, don't take this the wrong way but, you kinda look like a big glowy version of lunch.*

Beta: Ha

Pree: *I shouldn't have said that should I? I'm so sorry. I meant no offence.*

Skim: *None taken.*

Beta: She does make a good point...And holding up that middle digit would have more impact if you had a strong internal skeleton.

Pree: *You don't mind me being in here do you? My pod really love it when I get good footage of something new.*

Skim: *That's a camera?*

Pree: *Yeah.*

Skim: *How...did you get a camera stuck on your head?*

Pree: *They put it there.*

Skim: *Your pod did?*

Pree: *Yeah, they love it when I find shiny new things.*

Skim: *Do you...like filming footage for them?*

Beta: Maybe she didn't hear you.

Skim: *Sorry Pree, didn't mean to startle you, I'll tone down my colours.*

Pree: *No, it's...no one's ever asked me that before.*

Beta: This dolphin's behaviour does not closely resemble any of the modelling I have on my database. I suggest caution.

Skim: After two Earth years, I think we can accept our models from home haven't been entirely accurate.

Skim: *Hey, speaking of shiny new things, did you happen to see anything that looks a bit like a disembodied tail fin with an antenna?*

Pree: *You mean the hydrophone?*

Skim: *Yes!*

Pree: *Yeah, that was so cool.*

Skim: *Do you...know what happened to it?*

Pree: *Took it to my pod.*

Skim: *You did?!*

Pree: *They loved it...Hey, I can show you.*

Skim: *Wait!*

Beta: *Stay inside Skim.*

FX: Hatch closes, departure zone is flushed with water created inside the shell.

Skim: *We'll lose her.*

Beta: *I can travel faster.*

Skim: *But I'd need to wait while you flush the hatch.*

Pree: *Come on Skim.*

Skim: *Please slow down.*

Beta: *Don't get out of range.*

Pree: *Look there's one of them.*

FX: Sonar.

Skim: *Wait. Do you mean that dull shell bubble with the whiney echolocation?*

Pree: *Submarine? Yeah.*

Skim: *You're in a pod with land monkeys? They can't even swim!*

Pree: *They try. I think it's hard for them coz, outside the sub they have to wear extra lungs.*

Skim: *They swim outside the sub?!*

Pree: *Yeah, usually see Ned flailing around those spikes over there.*

Skim: *Aren't those tridents a little big for humans to hunt with?*

Pree: *That's a coral frame, Ned likes to garden, thinks he can regrow the reef. Makes little playlists for it and everything. Reckons you attract all kinds of life with a sexy song.*

Beta: *He's not wrong.*

Pree: *Should see how proud he is when there's new branches. So cute.*

Skim: *What happened to the old branches?*

Pree: *Up he goes.*

Skim: *Wait.*

Pre: *Must've seen something really cool today if he's straight up to the boat.*

Beta: Skim

Sound: Rush of bubbles.

Beta: Skim!

Sound: Foghorn, clanging. Strong wave. Water rushing into the shell hatch.

Beta: (muffled) Skim? (Clearer) Skim! CAN. YOU. HERE. ME. SKIM?!

Skim: Think I know why that dolphin doesn't always hear us.

Beta: Standard procedure is to stay submerged.

Skim: I *was* submerged.

Beta: I have detected significant activity from human noise close to the surface. I advise, you stay inside.

Skim: Wasn't planning to swim up to the land monkeys.

Beta: That dolphin is wearing a camera.

Skim: Frak.

Beta: Also, don't take your suit off inside.

Skim: But if I'm not going outside again?

Beta: That *stuff* you could see in the Earth water is now around the departure hatch.

Skim: But you flushed it.

Beta: It has been absorbed into the membrane.

Skim: But it's contained around the departure hatch?

Beta: It is travelling away from the hatch, towards the control centre.

Skim: What will it do if it reaches the control centre?

Beta: I do not have the data, it has not reached the control centre yet.

Skim: Do you know what it is?

Beta: Initial analysis indicates that it may be a synthetic material derived from oil.

Skim: The fossil fuel made from desecrated ancestors?

Beta: Some of the human noise transmissions refer to plastics. This may be a match for the material.

Skim: What is it for?

Beta: I have no data.

Skim: Why is it in the sea?

Beta: I could not find a logic for this.

Skim: Might have to find out.

Beta: If it can be absorbed into my membrane it can likely be absorbed into your skin. Do not take off your suit.

FX: Popping.

Skim: What is that?

Beta: The outer frame cracking.

Skim: Cracking?!

Beta: Small fractures around the departure bay.

Skim: So now we know what the stuff does.

Beta: Negative. It is the carbon dioxide.

Skim: What? There has to be carbon dioxide or there'd be no plants.

Beta: Not at these levels, the higher concentration makes the water more acidic, it can dissolve coral structures.

Skim: Are you okay Beta?

Beta: Define okay.

Skim: Are you dissolving?

Beta: The de-calcification is minor, I can repair it and if necessary, I can upload back to the mothership, but, I do not currently have the structural integrity to safely return a passenger to orbit.

Skim: Understood...We should try to find somewhere less acidic. Maybe if we went further from the coast?

Beta: It is possible, but higher CO2 levels would be consistent with higher air temperatures, which would be consistent with melting ice.

Skim: So, it could be like this everywhere?

Beta: It is possible.

Skim: We should still try....

FX: Engines, turning in the water.

Skim: Hey, I said further from the coast.

Beta: The mothership has sent a new destination.

FX: Blip.

Skim: We're going on dry land?

Beta: India. The Himalayas.

Skim: That's *really* dry land, we might as well be back in orbit!

Beta: The Himalayan mountains are the biggest salt mountains on this planet.

Skim: Because being up on freezing dry land, at altitude, isn't bad enough?

Beta: The area was once seabed, the salt remained after the sea evaporated.

Skim: So, we're archaeologists now?

FX: Incoming call.

Shakarn: Greetings Skim.

Skim: Hi Sir, this new destination seems like a deviation from the core mission.

Shakarn: Area is currently under the cover of a light meteor shower, and we're sending you down a mining drill.

Skim: But you couldn't send a hydrophone when I asked?

Shakarn: We need you to receive the drill and start testing the possibility of setting up a mass salination unit.

Skim: Sir, it's good to be prepared, but I really don't need that much salt. The salination device I have onboard should be plenty.

Shakarn: We may need to upscale.

- Skim: Don't you think the land dwellers might notice? We know lots of creatures live on the land and some of them can fly!
- Shakarn: We need you to investigate *discreetly*.
- Skim: Sir, even if we fly with translucence, under cover of darkness, the action of a drill won't be invisible. Beta might not even be able to fly that well right now.
- Shakarn: That's why the orders are to go now, before the de-calcification Beta reported gets worse.
- Skim: Sir.
- Shakarn: Skim, you've been doing a great job, everyone's been impressed with your data transmissions. It's really enhanced our understanding of the habitat.
- Skim: So, you know there's other issues. Not just salt.
- Shakarn: There's a feeling we can sort that out when we get there.
- Skim: Sir, this habitat is really not...
- Beta: Incoming text from the Prime Minister.
- Shakarn: Go ahead Beta.
- Beta: She has written. Great work officer. Very excited about the melting ice, can't wait for the floods. Looking forward to making our new home our own. Best of luck.
- Skim: That's the plan?! I have to stay here and slowly mummify on a salt mountain while we wait for everything here to die?!
- Shakarn: Odds are, you probably won't even have to wait that long.
- Skim: Pretty drastic plan!

Shakarn: There's some feeling in government that if the current residents can't look after their planet, it deserves a fresh start.

Skim: Does someone need to remind the government how we got into this mess?

Shakarn: The Prime Minister does not cultivate a sense of irony.

Skim: Sir.

Shakarn: Orders from above Skimly...Of course, there is a *chance* that the salination system won't work and... who knows, maybe the climate won't change quite as quickly as anticipated. Those monkeys are creative. Do you understand what I'm saying Skim?

Skim: Yes Sir, I think I do.

Shakarn: Good. Now get to it officer. I'm sure you'll know what to do dododododo.

Beta: I am obliged to inform you that our connection to the mothership is currently down. We are no longer able to transmit our research *or* location.

Skim: They cut us off?

Beta: The synthetic Earth stuff has clogged the transmitter. It is a highly malleable material.

Skim: How long do you think it will be before that's resolved?

Beta: That will depend on how the maintenance is prioritised. It is currently listed below barnacle clipping.

Skim: You've *never* had barnacles.

Beta: Can't be too careful. Maintenance is very important...Mothership override is down. What do you want to do?

Skim: Take us back to where we saw Pree and her pod.

Beta: I should tell you, the blueprints for the drill package contains parts you could use to repair my frame. You could go home.

Skim: If I stay, you could still upload.

Beta: The mothership has no models for nuance. And also...you would not survive without me.

Skim: That is true.

Beta: We have not exhausted all our research opportunities here. There may be more to learn, for here and for home.

Skim: You mean find some fixes?

Beta: It is possible.... Human shell craft ahead.

Skim: How d'you think I should start?

Beta: We have no protocol for communicating with land creatures.

Skim: Of course we don't. If we did, maybe our own oceans wouldn't be turning to sludge.

Beta: If there is no protocol, it cannot be broken.

Skim: You know this could go very wrong.

Beta: I suggest...proceed with *bravado*.

FX: Whistles.

Skim: Hey Humans!

FX: Clanging like banging pans.

Skim: You really need to hear this!

FX: Jazzy mix of clicks, and whale song.