

ATLAS' CARD

Written by

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INT. ASPACESHIP

JOSEPH is sitting on a chair, staring blankly at the wall.  
BRYAN enters.

BRYAN

Up early?

Bryan goes to the kitchen table and pours two cups of coffee.

JOSEPH

Can't sleep.

Bryan pulls up a chair, sits next to Joseph. He offers Joseph a cup of coffee.

BRYAN

Drink something warm. It's coffee, so you won't sleep, but at least you'll feel better.

Joseph, after a pause, takes the cup. A pause, and then they drink.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

Got this from Titan. Feels good, doesn't it?

JOSEPH

It's hot.

BRYAN

But good, right?

A pause.

JOSEPH

Yeah.

BRYAN

Your body gets used to the cold on these ships. You're freezing, but you don't know it. Warming up's important. Drink more.

Bryan takes another sip, but Joseph doesn't move. Bryan notices Joseph's silence, but doesn't say anything.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

So they say we'll take about a hundred grand for this mission. The planet we erased was pretty big so they'd bump the pay up a little.

A pause.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

You know, that could buy us quite a bit. Coffee included. Good ,eh?

JOSEPH

Yeaha.

A pause. Bryan sighs deeply.

BRYAN

And... figured since we'd have quite a bit left over... That we could get one of the newer models. The smaller ones. Harder to hit.

Suddenly, from the comms, a fearful voice speaks up:  
ERIC.

ERIC

Hello? Can you hear me?

Joseph and Bryan look at each other.

Joseph moves to a nearby window, looks outside.

JOSEPH

He's in the blind spot, can't see him.

BRYAN

Then ask him.

Joseph cautiously walks over to a control panel, presses a button on it.

JOSEPH

(to comms)

State identification parameters.

BRYAN

(whispering to Joseph)

Or you will be fired upon.

Joseph sighs. Then, guiltily:

JOSEPH

(to comms)

Or you will be fired upon.

ERIC's voice emanates from the control panel. It's fuzzy, full of static and panic.

Note: Until noted, Eric is not seen on stage and speaks from the control panel.

ERIC

My name is Eric Lester. My ship is running low on fuel, and I request permission to either board your ship or to obtain fuel so that I may return home.

BRYAN

(to Joseph, dictating)

What's your home planet?

Joseph's taken aback.

JOSEPH

(to Bryan)

Why?

BRYAN

We just erased a world from existence. Survivors may be angry. Ask him.

Joseph sighs.

JOSEPH

(to comms)

Where's home?

A pause.

ERIC

Why do you need to know?

JOSEPH

(to comms)

To know how much fuel you need.

A pause. Eric sighs.

ERIC

Ganymede. I come from Ganymede.

Bryan grabs Joseph's arm, makes a throat-slashing gesture. Joseph returns to the comms, quickly says:

JOSEPH

(to comms)

Eric, listen to me - there isn't a Ganymede anymore, I need to talk to my -

Bryan slams a button on the comms, shutting it off. He grabs Joseph by the shirt and pulls him away.

BRYAN

What the *hell* do you think you're doing?

JOSEPH

Are we really going to let him float out in space, alone? He'll die.

BRYAN

You know what he can't do if he's dead? Blow us out of the sky. He's piloting a damn interceptor -

JOSEPH

How do you know?

BRYAN

Like there's much inter-space traffic this far out.

JOSEPH

But we don't know -

BRYAN

He's the *enemy*, and that's all we need to know.

JOSEPH

I can't do this. I'm out.

Joseph pushes Bryan away, releasing his grasp. He paces around, thinking. Bryan walks over to the comms.

BRYAN

(to Joseph)

You want out? Let me do the talking.

Bryan presses a button on the comms, opening it back up.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

(to comms)

Eric, this is the captain of the ship speaking. I'm sorry, but we're not in a capacity to assist you at this moment.

ERIC

No, no, forget the fuel. What do you mean, there isn't a Ganymede any more?

Bryan looks to Joseph. Joseph sighs and walks to the comms.

JOSEPH

(to comms)

The whole planet's been bombarded. It's gone.

ERIC

*Gone?* That's not right. I'm still getting communications -

JOSEPH

(to comms)

Leftover communications. They're just now getting to you.

Beat.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

(to comms)

I'm sorry.

Beat.

ERIC

Who did it?

JOSEPH

(to comms)

We -

Suddenly, Bryan reaches over and shuts off the comms.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

What? What now?

BRYAN

"Who did it?" What did that sound like? Dejected? Angry?

JOSEPH

He sounded normal. Who do you think he is?

BRYAN

(thinking to himself)

If he wants revenge, he's going to be irrational, want to take it out on the closest target, no matter the risks. If we tell him we did it, he's going to have to turn on his engines to maneuver to a good firing position.

JOSEPH

If he wanted to take us out of the sky, he'd have done so a long time ago. What are you doing?!

Bryan goes to another control panel and starts pressing buttons on it.

BRYAN

Tell him. Tell him our name. He'll turn on the engines, the turrets will find his signature and shoot him down. We'll have the upper hand. Okay, turrets should be up.

Bryan looks to Joseph.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

What are you waiting for?

Joseph doesn't move.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

Damn it.

((to comms))

Eric, the TS Bentley did it. We're the Bentley. We destroyed Ganymede.

Bryan listens for a reply. None comes. He presses buttons on the comms.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

Is this working?

Bryan runs to a control panel, presses buttons on it, looks at interfaces.



BRYAN (CONT'D)

I'm not seeing anything - did he fly up already? Where is he? What's happening?

Bryan turns to Joseph, angry. He rushes to him.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

What did you do?!

Joseph remains silent.

Bryan HITS Joseph. No response.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

What the FUCK did you do?!

Bryan rushes back to the comms.

He presses a button.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

(to comms)

Come out, damn it! Fly! Fly, you fucker, *fly*! Come on! Shoot us! *SHOOT US!* We're the ones that killed your people, so now kill us! Those are the rules! Follow the rules! Kill us! *COME ON!*

Bryan finally stops. He's exhausted. He collapses to the ground.

Joseph walks over to Bryan and looks at him in pity.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

Fuck, I'm freezing - get me another shirt.

JOSEPH

How did it happen?

BRYAN

Did you hear me -

Joseph produces a GUN. He aims it at Bryan. Bryan raises his arms.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

You're kidding.

JOSEPH

No. I'm asking. How did it happen?

Bryan starts to laugh dryly.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

I see the flashes every time I close my eyes. The arcs of light coming down from our ship and floating ever so slowly towards the face of our target. And I feel like a god, but I shouldn't. It's like - it's like that game, where you try to guess the card on the top of your head, and everyone knows it but you. But I think I've figured it out now. I've got Atlas's card. The weight of the world on my shoulders.

Joseph sighs.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

There has to be a point, where it just clicks, and you accept that this is your world now. So that's what I'm asking you. How did it happen? When along the line does it transform from a job to a universe? When can I be surrounded by so much hate that I embody hate itself? When does it stop? How did it happen?

ERIC

I- I'm sorry.

Suddenly, a BANG from outside. The entire ship shakes.

Joseph rushes over to the comms, talks to Eric.

He ditches the gun nearby, on a clear surface.

JOSEPH

(to comms)

Eric, Eric is that you?

Bryan stands up.

BRYAN

Because the world is hateful, and bad, and cold.

Another BANG.

The interior of the ship is bathed in red as alarms start going off.

From the windows, flashes of light as the turrets open fire.

Bryan starts moving towards the gun.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

Because we make decisions, but the consequences lie outside, beyond a barrier of steel, where we no longer have to face them.

JOSEPH

(to Bryan)

Turn the turrets off! They're tearing him up!

(to comms)

Eric! Eric, the turrets are going after your heat signature! You have to stop moving!

Another bang. A hiss, as the interior starts to depressurize.

ERIC

(to comms)

My fucking family is dead! My people are dead because of you!

Bryan reaches the gun.

JOSEPH

(to Bryan, not looking at him)

You happy now?! He's not in an interceptor - he's in a damn *tanker*! The turrets aren't doing shit! Captain -

Joseph spins around to see Bryan standing near him.

They are an equal distance from the gun.

Slowly, calmly, Bryan extends an arm, reaching for the gun.

Joseph doesn't move.

Bryan grabs the gun. Points it at Joseph.

Another BANG. The windows begin to crack. Air hisses out.

Bryan, still pointing the gun at Joseph, moves to the control panel, and presses a button.

The alarms cease. But the turrets continue firing.

BRYAN

As far as humanity has come, the name of the game is the same as it's ever been. Survival. Not of the fittest, not of the strongest, wittiest - survival of the last one standing. It's not who deserves to survive. It's who *wants* to.

Bryan walks towards Joseph.

JOSEPH

You killed him. He's a civilian. You killed him.

BRYAN

We couldn't kill him if we tried. No. We're entombing him. In the vastness of space, in his own ship, eliminating all his chances for survival.

The lights from the control panels go off.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

There's not a lot to a ship. First, the electricity. Engines go silent, radiation shielding, off.

The rumbling of the engines slows down.

Outside, the turrets stop firing.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

Then, the oxygen. No power means no scrubbing. There's a bit of delay, but it comes. It always comes.

The humming of the air conditioning stops.

Bryan sits down. Joseph joins him.

Bryan breathes - fog comes out from his mouth.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

Power doesn't want to exist. Oxygen goes out of any surface it can find. But people? Life? It clings, holds on - no matter the cost.

Bryan holds the gun out, handle first, to Joseph.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

You're an engineer. His ship's battered, but holding together. You take it.

JOSEPH

No matter the cost.

BRYAN

He may have been a tanker a few minutes before, but right now he's ramming into our ship. Cutting our lives short..

Bryan takes Joseph's hand, places it around the gun.

BRYAN (CONT'D)

Eliminate the resistance. Go to your enemy, wherever, whoever he may be, and kill him. Remember where you came from. Do what you signed up to do. *Survive*.

JOSEPH

Yes, sir.

A GUNSHOT.

Bryan looks to his stomach, where a pool of red expands.

He looks up to Joseph, betrayed.

Then slumps down, dead.

Joseph shakily stands up. He's shivering, weak.

He moves to the window, sits down next to it.

Slowly, debris falling off of it, two halves of Eric's tanker float by, detached. It's destroyed.

Joseph breathes out, one last time.

Then, he remains still.

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