TWO WORLDS

Episode 1 – "CLASSIFICATION"

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TEASER

INT. GEOLOGY LAB — COLORADO SCHOOL OF MINES — NIGHT

A university geology lab, cramped and institutional. Rock samples in labeled trays. A polarizing microscope. Thin-section slides racked on the counter. Printed spectral charts pinned to corkboard. The hum of a fume hood left running.

SUPER: GOLDEN, COLORADO — 2041

MARK DOWELL (29, lean, quiet, the kind of face that listens more than it speaks) sits alone at a workstation. He's running spectral decomposition on basalt samples — thesis work, tedious, the deep hours of mineral-by-mineral cataloging that separates working geologists from people who like the idea of geology.

His coffee went cold two hours ago. The campus beyond the lab windows is dark.

His laptop CHIMES. A push notification. He glances at it with the fractional attention of a man deep in a data table.

Then he stops.

CLOSE ON THE SCREEN: "Europa Clipper — Mass Spectrometry: Enceladus Plume Ejecta — EMBARGOED DATA — PUBLIC RELEASE"

Mark opens the file. His eyes move across the data. We don't need to read it — we read him. His posture changes. His breathing changes.

CLOSE ON HIS HANDS. They are shaking.

He pulls up spectral profiles. Runs them against a terrestrial protein database. The comparison fills the screen — two columns of data, one labeled TERRESTRIAL STANDARD, the other ENCELADUS EJECTA. The structures are similar in logic, alien in detail.

Mark sits back. Stares at the screen.

He checks the verification memo. Three independent laboratories confirmed. No contamination pathway. The final line:

CLOSE ON TEXT: "These results are consistent with the presence of complex organic biosynthesis in the subsurface oceans of the Saturnian system."

Mark stares at the word "consistent." The most understated word in the history of science.

He scrolls further. Past the amino acid chains, past the chirality data. He finds the secondary analysis tables. Dissolved rare-earth concentrations. Cerium. Neodymium. Lanthanum. Three orders of magnitude above terrestrial seawater.

His expression changes. Not wonder now. Something else. The first shadow of what this will become.

He picks up his phone. Scrolls to a contact: LENA VASIK. His thumb hovers over the call button.

He puts the phone down.

He looks at the screen. The amino acid data on one side. The mineral concentrations on the other. Two readings of the same discovery. One is a miracle. The other is a balance sheet.

Mark sits in the blue light of his laptop and reads the data again, all of it, from the beginning, because he is a geologist and geologists don't trust the first reading of anything.

The second reading confirms the first.

> SMASH CUT TO:

MAIN TITLES

ACT ONE

EXT. COLORADO SCHOOL OF MINES CAMPUS — DAY

The campus in motion. Students crossing the quad, backpacks heavy, the Rockies visible in the distance. It's an ordinary Tuesday, except the dining hall is twice as loud as normal and three professors have canceled afternoon classes.

SUPER: THE NEXT DAY

INT. GEOLOGY LAB — CONTINUOUS

Mark hasn't moved. He's been here all night, running his own analysis — not of the amino acids but of the dissolved mineral data. Reserve estimates. Concentration profiles. The numbers on his screen are absurd.

A KNOCK. LENA VASIK (30, pale eyes that can be warm or calculating, coat over her arm, laptop bag on her shoulder) stands in the doorway. She came straight from the economics building.

LENA
You've seen it.

MARK
Everyone's seen it.

She drops into the chair beside his desk.

LENA
The amino acids are incredible. This changes everything.

MARK
Which part?

She looks at him. A beat. She's calculating.

LENA
All of it.

Mark turns his laptop to face her. Not the amino acid data — the mineral concentration tables.

MARK

I ran the reserve estimates.

Lena leans in. She reads for perhaps ten seconds. Her expression doesn't change, but her breathing does — a single, sharp intake, controlled, released.

LENA
That's Europa?

MARK
Extrapolated from Enceladus concentrations, adjusted for Europa's estimated ocean volume and hydrothermal flux. Conservative.

Lena opens her own laptop. She begins building a spreadsheet. Her hands move across the keyboard — fast, precise. She pulls commodity prices, shipping costs, capital expenditure estimates, transit time projections.

TIME CUT — twenty minutes of work compressed into seconds. She doesn't speak once.

She sits back. Looks at the number on her screen.

LENA
That's the break-even point. For a single extraction mission.

Mark looks at the number. It's large but not impossible.

MARK
Lena.

She looks up.

MARK (CONT'D)
There's something alive down there.

A long beat. Lena holds his gaze. We watch the calculation happen — not coldly, not cruelly, but with the relentless efficiency of a mind that weights outcomes.

LENA
I know. That makes it more complicated, not less.

They sit. The afternoon light comes through the windows. The campus hums outside.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING ROOFTOP — NIGHT

Denver skyline. The three of them — Mark, Lena, and JAMES OKORO (31, tall, broad, dark-skinned, with a stillness about him that people mistake for impassivity — it is discipline). James is in his ROTC uniform, pressed ACUs and polished boots.

Mark has beer. Lena has her laptop. James has himself, which is always enough.

MARK
To the amino acids.

LENA
To the amino acids.

JAMES
To whatever comes next.

They drink. Jupiter is visible to the southeast — a steady bright point, not twinkling, the way planets don't.

JAMES (CONT'D)
I got my orders today.

Mark and Lena look at him.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Interplanetary Security Division. The new KAIC joint force. I ship to Johnson Space Center in June.

LENA
(hand on his arm)
James. That's incredible.

JAMES
It's what I wanted.

Mark studies his friend. He knows the story — James's father, Captain Samuel Okoro, career Army, killed in a training accident at Fort Carson when James was twelve.

The Army investigated. Found the cause. Implemented new protocols. The system worked, at the cost of one man's life. James absorbed this lesson the way children absorb the lessons that shape them: not through understanding but through faith.

MARK
KAIC. The consortium.

JAMES
Kepler-Aldrin Interplanetary Consortium. Joint authority under the DSRC. NASA, ESA, plus three resource partners. We'll provide security for surface operations.

MARK
Surface operations where?

JAMES
Mars first. Then wherever the program goes.

(looks at the sky)
The Europa data changes the timeline. They were planning Mars-only for the first decade. Now they'll push for Europa within five years.

A beat. Mark drinks his beer and says nothing.

LENA
Mark. You should apply.

MARK
To KAIC?

LENA
As geological survey specialist. They'll need geologists for Mars. You're top of the class.

She's right. He is.

MARK
I'll think about it.

LENA
Don't think. Apply.

(her eyes are bright)
The three of us. Together. This is what we've been working toward.

Mark looks at James, who looks back with steady eyes. James doesn't recruit. He doesn't push. He simply exists in a state of readiness that makes readiness seem like the natural condition of being alive.

JAMES
(quietly)
Together.

Mark raises his bottle to his lips. Looks at Jupiter over the skyline. Somewhere beneath the ice of one of its moons, in an ocean of black water, something is folding amino acids into shapes that have never existed on Earth.

MARK
Okay. Together.

They drink. The Denver skyline glitters. Three friends on a rooftop, toasting the future. They have no idea what they're toasting.

INT. KAIC HEADQUARTERS — GENEVA — DAY

Glass and steel. Views of the Alps through floor-to-ceiling windows. This is money — institutional, multinational, unassailable. A building designed to make decisions feel inevitable.

SUPER: KAIC HEADQUARTERS — GENEVA, SWITZERLAND — SIX MONTHS LATER

Lena walks through the fourteenth floor. She is the youngest person here by a decade. She does not care. She has a desk, a security badge, and access to data sets the public won't see for years.

She sits in her cubicle. Opens a document on her screen.

CLOSE ON TEXT: "DEEP SPACE RESOURCES COMPACT — ARTICLE 7: HABITABILITY CLASSIFICATION"

She reads. We hear her voice in VOICEOVER — not narration, but the text itself, as she absorbs it:

LENA (V.O.)
Category A: Sentient life. Exploitation prohibited. First-contact protocols apply. Category B: Non-sentient life. Exploitation permitted with environmental monitoring. Category C: Abiotic environment. Unrestricted extraction.

She scrolls to Section 2. The definition of sentience: "the demonstrated capacity for self-awareness, symbolic communication, and intentional behavior as assessed by a qualified scientific panel."

Lena sits back. She sees the architecture immediately — the assessment is delegated to a panel appointed by the exploiting entity. The people who decide whether something is sentient are the people who profit if it isn't.

This is not a flaw. It is a feature.

INT. KAIC HEADQUARTERS — LENA'S CUBICLE — DAY

DR. ELIAS BRANDT (late 50s, silver-haired, practiced warmth, coffee cup that says GENEVA SCIENCE WEEK 2037) leans against her partition.

BRANDT
Ms. Vasik. I've read your thesis on resource-depletion cascades. Your instability threshold prediction was within two percent of the actual market disruption in 2038.

LENA
I was lucky with the timing.

BRANDT

You were not lucky. You were right. That's better.

(beat)
I understand you know geology.

LENA
I minored in geological engineering.

BRANDT
Then you may be interested in the Mars survey data.

He sets a tablet on her desk. She picks it up. Radar returns showing subsurface structures — regular, branching, geometrically precise.

LENA
What am I looking at?

BRANDT
That's what we need to determine. The structures could be mineral crystallization along fracture planes. Geological. Or they could be biological.

LENA
Biological?

BRANDT
The Enceladus data changed the landscape. There's political pressure to find biology everywhere we look. My job is to ensure our assessments are scientifically rigorous. Regardless of pressure. In either direction.

Lena understands. In either direction. Pressure to find biology. Pressure not to. Brandt is positioning himself as the neutral arbiter. The reasonable man.

LENA
What do you need from me?

BRANDT

Resource impact assessment. If the structures are biological — what's the extraction cost of reclassifying the site? If geological — what's the extraction value? Both sides. Clean, defensible numbers.

LENA
I'll have the analysis by Friday.

BRANDT
I knew you would.

(picking up his coffee)
One more thing. I'll need a geologist on the ground when the survey team deploys. Someone who can identify the structures firsthand. Provide expert testimony to the classification committee.

He pauses. He's read her file. He knows about Mark.

BRANDT (CONT'D)
You mentioned you know a geologist.

LENA
Mark Dowell. We were at Mines together. He's the best structural geologist I know.

BRANDT
Better than you?

LENA
I'm an economist who took geology classes. Mark is a geologist. There's a difference.

Brandt nods. Leaves. Lena sits with the tablet. The radar image of branching subsurface structures fills the screen.

She thinks about Article 7. Classification committees. Hellas Basin's rare-earth deposits. A town in West Virginia where her parents still live in a house worth

less than the mortgage.

She picks up her phone. Calls Mark.

INT. MARK'S APARTMENT — GOLDEN, COLORADO — NIGHT

Mark's phone RINGS. He answers.

MARK
Hey.

LENA (O.S.)
(filtered)
I have something for you. KAIC geological survey lead, Mars surface operation. Hellas Basin. First major deployment.

MARK
(fourteen seconds of silence pass in three)
Yes.

LENA (O.S.)
You don't want to think about it?

MARK
I just did. Yes.

He hangs up. Looks out his window at the night sky. Somewhere up there, Mars is waiting.

He doesn't think carefully about what he's agreeing to. This is the kind of thing he'll examine later, in the small hours, in a pressurized habitat on a dead planet, wondering how much of what followed can be traced back to this phone call.

ACT TWO

EXT. KECK ORBITAL FACILITY — SPACE

The ISV PROMETHEUS against the black of space — 180 meters of engineered purpose. A central truss, a rotating habitat ring amidships, a cluster of four VASIMR-X engines at the

stern. Earth fills the background, blue and white and impossibly fragile.

SUPER: ISV PROMETHEUS — MARS TRANSIT — DAY 1 OF 47

The engines ignite. A pale blue-white plume extends hundreds of meters behind the ship, ionized argon streaming into the void.

INT. ISV PROMETHEUS — OBSERVATION DECK — DAY

A room the size of a small gymnasium. Synthetic sapphire viewports two meters across. Mark stands at the glass, watching Earth shrink.

It dwindles from a disk to a marble to a bright point. Then it's just another star among stars, distinguished only by being slightly bluer than its neighbors.

Mark presses his hand against the viewport. The glass is cold.

INT. ISV PROMETHEUS — GEOLOGY LAB — DAY

A windowless compartment on the inner wall of the habitat ring. Mark studies Martian regolith data on a workstation. Calibrates field instruments. The work of preparation.

He pulls up the restricted subsurface radar data on a separate terminal. The branching structures fill the screen — filaments, nodes, the pattern of a nervous system rendered in geology.

The data is compartmentalized. He can view it but not share it outside the geological survey team. This bothers him. Not the restriction itself — he understands operational security. The implication. If the structures were purely geological, there would be no reason to restrict the data. The restriction means KAIC considers them potentially biological. Which means the classification process has already begun, before anyone has seen the formations firsthand.

Mark files this thought under the category of things he notices and doesn't act on. It is a large and growing category.

INT. ISV PROMETHEUS — COMMISSARY — NIGHT

The social center of the ship. Long tables. A viewport overlooking the engine plume. 247 people in a steel tube for seven weeks need a place to gather.

Mark and James eat dinner. The routine is established — every evening, the way they've always shared meals, old rhythms in a new setting.

JAMES
You've been reading the Mars survey data.

Not a question.

MARK
It's my job.

JAMES
The restricted data.

MARK
How do you know about the restricted data?

JAMES
I'm ISD. Everything classified crosses my desk.

MARK
You have access to the geological survey files?

JAMES
I have access to the classification applied to the geological survey files. Restricted. Compartmented. Need-to-know.

(eating reconstituted vegetables)

That's a lot of security for rock formations.

MARK
It is.

JAMES
What did you see?

Mark hesitates. Not because he doesn't trust James. He hesitates because saying it out loud makes it real.

MARK
Subsurface structures. Branching networks. Crystalline composition. Geometrically regular. Extending for hundreds of kilometers through the regolith.

JAMES
And?

MARK
They don't look like any known mineral crystallization pattern. The branching ratios are wrong. The regularity is wrong. The depth distribution is wrong.

JAMES
What do they look like?

A long beat. The commissary hums around them. 247 people eating dinner, none of them thinking about what's beneath the surface of where they're going.

MARK
They look like a nervous system.

James sets down his fork.

JAMES
You're going to be careful with that assessment.

MARK

I'm going to be accurate.

JAMES
Being accurate and being careful are not the same thing.

MARK
No. They're not.

They hold each other's gaze. Two friends who understand each other perfectly and are beginning to understand that understanding will not be enough.

INT. ISV PROMETHEUS — MARK'S QUARTERS — NIGHT

SUPER: DAY 43

Mark composes a message to Lena. On the screen:

"I think the structures are alive."

He sends it. Stares at the cursor.

Hours pass. The response arrives:

"We'll determine that on the ground. Follow the assessment protocol."

Mark reads it twice. Not "that's incredible" or "what makes you think so." Determination. Protocol. The machine is already running.

INT. ISV PROMETHEUS — OBSERVATION DECK — DAY

SUPER: DAY 47

Mars fills the viewport. Red and rust and ochre, the thin atmosphere a pale smear at the limb, the polar cap a white thumbprint.

Mark stands at the glass. James appears beside him. They stand together, looking at the planet.

MARK

You ever think about what your dad would say? About all this?

JAMES
(long pause)
He'd say follow orders. Do your job. Trust the process.

MARK
You believe that?

JAMES
I believe the process exists for a reason.

MARK
What if the reason is wrong?

James doesn't answer. They watch Mars grow in the viewport. Below the surface, something is waiting.

ACT THREE

EXT. HELLAS BASIN — MARS SURFACE — DAY

The lowest point on Mars. A vast impact crater, 2,300 kilometers across. The sky is butterscotch — suspended iron-oxide dust that colors everything. The sun is small and sharp, a white coin in the amber sky.

SUPER: HELLAS BASIN, MARS — SOL 3

Habitat modules — inflatable cylinders arranged in a cross, connected by pressurized tunnels. Solar panels. The squat cylinder of a nuclear RTG. Three drill rigs deployed, their derricks raised against the Martian sky.

Mark walks across the basin floor in a pressure suit that weighs 15 kilograms in Martian gravity and feels like wearing a refrigerator. He carries a geological survey kit: ground-penetrating radar, seismic impulse generator, portable core drill, sample bag.

He's alone. The habitat is a cluster of shapes behind him. The drill rigs are silent — waiting for his survey. Ahead,

nothing but flat rust-colored ground extending to a horizon that curves slightly wrong for an Earth-trained eye.

EXT. SURVEY POINT ALPHA — MARS SURFACE — CONTINUOUS

2.3 kilometers from the habitat. Mark deploys the ground-penetrating radar — a sled with an antenna array that he drags along a transect line.

Data streams to his helmet's heads-up display. Horizontal bands of regolith. Ice lenses. Bedrock contacts. And deeper, at the edge of the radar's resolution —

The structures.

Clearer from the surface than from orbit. Individual filaments resolved: thin lines of high-reflectivity material, one to two millimeters in diameter, branching and rebranching in a fractal pattern that extends downward beyond the radar's 100-meter depth limit. The filaments connect at nodes — denser areas where multiple branches converge — evenly spaced, roughly every thirty meters.

Mark stops walking.

HIS POV — the HUD overlay: below his feet, in every direction, a network of filaments connected by nodes, branching and rebranching, filling the subsurface like a three-dimensional web.

He's seen this pattern before. Every geologist has. Drainage network. Root system. Vascular system. Neural network. Any system optimized for distributing resources or information across a volume.

He sets up the seismic impulse generator. Triggers a series of calibrated impacts — small thumps, precise and measured.

The return data shows the filaments RESPONDING. Not just reflecting the seismic energy — responding to it. Electrochemical activity in the nearest filaments spikes within seconds, then propagates outward through the

network. Three meters per second.

Mark checks his instruments. Recalibrates. Triggers another impulse. Same response.

He kneels — carefully, in the pressure suit. Deploys the portable core drill. Positions it where the GPR shows a filament cluster near the surface.

The drill bites into Martian soil.

EXT. SURVEY POINT ALPHA — MARS SURFACE — LATER

The core comes up in sections. At 2.4 meters depth — contact.

Mark extracts the core section. Holds it in gloved hands. The regolith is reddish-brown, compacted, typical. Running through it, visible to the naked eye: a thin line of crystalline material. Translucent. Slight amber tint. Glinting in the Martian sunlight.

He breaks the core carefully along the filament. Extracts a section roughly 10 centimeters long.

CLOSE ON THE FILAMENT through the hand lens: a silicon-carbide lattice, hexagonally ordered, with geometric precision no geological process could produce. Crystal faces smooth, regular, oriented along a growth axis.

And it is active.

Mark's instruments confirm: a faint electrical current flows through the filament's core channel. Not static charge. Not piezoelectric response. A sustained, modulated current, varying in frequency and amplitude, propagating along the filament toward the nearest node.

Mark sits on the Martian surface, holding a piece of living crystal in his hands.

The sun is low. The butterscotch sky has deepened toward the horizon. His suit's environmental system hums.

He sits there for a long time. Below him, the network pulses.

He runs the analysis again. And again. And again. Four readings. All four confirm.

He keys his suit radio.

MARK
Habitat, this is Dowell at Survey Point Alpha.

RADIO (O.S.)
Go ahead, Dowell.

MARK
I need to speak with Dr. Brandt. Priority channel.

RADIO (O.S.)
Nature of the communication?

Mark looks at the core sample. The filament glints. The current flows.

MARK
Classification relevant. The subsurface structures are biological.

Static on the radio. A long pause.

RADIO (O.S.)
...Copy. Routing to Dr. Brandt. Stand by.

Mark stands on Mars, holding the core sample, waiting. The network pulses beneath his feet. It has been pulsing for ten thousand years. It does not know what is about to happen.

Neither does he.

INT. ISV PROMETHEUS — CONFERENCE ROOM — DAY

SUPER: SOL 15

The ship's conference room. Austere. A long table. A wall screen showing data displays. The hum of recycled air.

Five people sit at the table. One stands.

DR. ELIAS BRANDT, chair. KAIC Chief Science Officer.

DR. KIRA OSEI (40s, tall, precise, skeptical by default) — xenobiologist. The only person in the room whose career is built on being right rather than being convenient.

DR. PAVEL MOROZOV (50s, careful, KAIC-contracted planetary geologist) — Mark's nominal supervisor.

COMMANDER SARAH CHEN (40s, crisp, DSRC legal advisor) — the person who translates scientific assessment into legal classification.

COLONEL THOMAS WEBB (50s, military bearing, ISD liaison) — not James. Senior. Experienced. Present to represent the security implications.

Mark stands at the front. Core samples laid on the table. GPR data on the wall screen. Video of filament activity.

He presents the way a geologist presents: methodically, evidentiary, each data point building on the last.

MARK
The filaments are silicon-carbide crystal, hexagonally ordered, one to two millimeters in diameter. They branch in fractal patterns and connect at nodes approximately every thirty meters. The network extends beyond our survey area in every direction.

He advances the display. Signal propagation data.

MARK (CONT'D)
They conduct modulated electrical signals. Not static. Not piezoelectric. Sustained, variable currents that propagate directionally through the network at approximately

three meters per second.

He advances again. Video of the seismic response.

MARK (CONT'D)
They respond to external stimuli. Seismic impulse generates electrochemical activity within seconds. The response propagates through the network. It is coordinated.

He pauses. Lays his hands on the table.

MARK (CONT'D)
The structures are biological. The evidence is unambiguous.

Silence. The committee absorbs.

OSEI
I concur. The electrochemical activity, the growth patterns, the signal propagation — these are characteristics of a living system. What Dr. Dowell has described is consistent with a chemolithotrophic biofilm of extraordinary complexity and scale.

MOROZOV
"Consistent with" is not "is." The structures could be an abiotic autocatalytic network. Silicon-carbide crystallization driven by electrochemical energy from subsurface mineral oxidation. We see analogous self-organizing patterns in terrestrial geochemistry.

OSEI
Not at this scale. Not with this level of signal modulation. The frequency-amplitude patterns are too complex for autocatalysis. They carry

information.

MOROZOV
Define "information" in this context.

OSEI
Modulated electrical signals with non-random structure, propagating directionally through a network with processing nodes. That is the operational definition of neural signaling.

MOROZOV
In terrestrial neuroscience. We are not on Earth.

The debate continues. Mark sits down. He watches the committee's dynamics — five people in a room, each calculating a different variable.

Brandt chairs with careful neutrality. Asks clarifying questions. Gives each speaker time. Steers the discussion toward a conclusion without appearing to steer.

TIME CUT — two hours have passed.

CHEN
For the committee's consideration. The DSRC Article 7 classification depends on the distinction between sentient and non-sentient life. If these structures are biological — and I note this remains under debate — the relevant question is not whether they are alive but whether they are sentient.

BRANDT
The distinction is crucial. Category B permits extraction with monitoring. Category A prohibits extraction within five hundred kilometers of habitation.

CHEN

And the extraction site is directly above the largest concentration of subsurface structures. A Category A classification would require relocating the entire operation.

The room absorbs this. Mark watches the committee members calculate. Morozov — a scientist, but a contractor whose next engagement depends on the project continuing. Chen — a lawyer who understands her assessment will be the document that permits or prohibits a trillion-dollar operation. Webb — military, thinking in mission parameters.

Osei — who is also a KAIC contractor but whose reputation is built on being right.

BRANDT

We don't have sufficient evidence for a sentience determination. What we have is evidence of complex biological activity. I propose we classify as Category B: non-sentient life, extraction permitted with environmental monitoring.

OSEI

I disagree. The signal complexity is consistent with neural processing. If these structures constitute a distributed nervous system, they may be sentient by any reasonable definition. We should classify Category A, pending further study.

MOROZOV

Pending further study could take years.

OSEI

Then we take years before we destroy the network.

Silence. Five seconds. Brandt lets it hold.

BRANDT
Dr. Dowell. Your assessment of the structures' sentience?

Everyone looks at Mark. Five pairs of eyes, each calculating a different variable.

MARK
(pause)
I can confirm the structures are biological. The evidence is unambiguous.

BRANDT
And their sentience?

CLOSE ON MARK. This is the moment. The question that will determine everything that follows.

He opens his mouth. Closes it. Opens it again.

The honest answer is "I don't know." The network shows signal complexity consistent with neural processing. But complexity alone doesn't prove sentience. There's no framework for assessing a non-terrestrial distributed network. Osei is right about that.

But Osei is also right that the signals carry information.

He thinks about Lena, who would say: follow the protocol. He thinks about James, who would say: trust the process. He thinks about the filament pulsing in his hands on the Martian surface.

MARK
I can confirm the structures are biological. I cannot confirm sentience with the data currently available. The signal complexity is suggestive but not conclusive.

Osei looks at him. Something in her expression — disappointment, or understanding, or both.

BRANDT

Thank you, Dr. Dowell.

The vote is 4-1.

Brandt. Morozov. Chen. Webb. In favor.

Osei. Dissenting.

BRANDT (CONT'D)
The committee classifies the subsurface structures as: crystalline bioformations, non-sentient, Category B. Extraction operations in Hellas Basin are approved to proceed with environmental monitoring.

He says it calmly. Professionally. The way you sign a document that will authorize the destruction of something that took ten thousand years to grow.

INT. ISV PROMETHEUS — CORRIDOR — CONTINUOUS

Mark walks out of the conference room. He moves down the corridor with the careful steps of a man holding something inside him that he cannot yet name.

Dr. Osei falls in beside him.

OSEI
You know they're alive.

MARK
I said they're alive.

OSEI
You know they're more than alive.

Mark stops. Faces her.

MARK
I know what the data shows. The data shows biological activity. The data does not conclusively show sentience.

OSEI

The data shows a distributed network conducting modulated electrical signals through a crystalline lattice spanning hundreds of kilometers, responding to external stimuli with coordinated defensive behavior. On Earth, we would call that a nervous system.

MARK
We're not on Earth.

OSEI
(quietly)
That's what Morozov said. I expected better from you.

She walks away. Mark stands in the corridor. The ship hums around him.

INT. ISV PROMETHEUS — OBSERVATION DECK — NIGHT

Mark alone. Mars below him. The Hellas Basin is visible as a vast dark oval on the southern hemisphere.

He presses his hand against the viewport. The glass is cold.

Below the surface, the network pulses. The classification has changed nothing in the regolith. The signals continue at the same frequency, the same amplitude, the same complexity. The committee has voted, and the network has not noticed.

Mark composes a message to Lena on his tablet:

"The committee classified B. Extraction approved. Osei dissented. I think she's right."

He sends it.

Fourteen minutes later, the response:

"Noted. The assessment protocol worked correctly. Let's talk about the monitoring framework."

Mark reads the message. Reads it again.

He closes his eyes.

INT. ISV PROMETHEUS — LENA'S VIDEO FEED — NIGHT

INTERCUT — LENA IN HER GENEVA OFFICE, ALONE. SHE READS MARK'S MESSAGE ON HER SCREEN. THE WORDS "I THINK SHE'S RIGHT" GLOW ON THE DISPLAY.

She sits very still. Then she opens a new document and begins writing the monitoring framework. The machine is running. She is operating the machine.

Through the window behind her, the Alps are dark against the sky.

TAG

EXT. SURVEY POINT ALPHA — MARS SURFACE — SUNSET

The Martian sunset. The sun, small and white, sinks toward the horizon. The sky shifts from butterscotch to salmon to a deep, bruised violet. The thin atmosphere scatters light in ways that make the familiar strange.

Mark walks back to Survey Point Alpha. Alone. Off-shift. No authorization for this EVA — he logged it as equipment retrieval.

He kneels on the rust-colored ground. Places a sensor against the regolith. Closes his eyes behind the helmet visor.

The sensor feeds audio to his earpiece. It's a crude translation — electrical signals converted to sound, the way a stethoscope translates the body's internal noise. What he hears is not music and not speech and not silence. It is a rhythm. A pattern. Something happening in the crystal lattice below him that has been happening for ten thousand years and will continue happening until someone stops it.

Which someone will.

The extraction rigs will power up tomorrow. The drills will punch into the regolith. The filaments will be severed, the nodes destroyed, the network fragmented. The classification has been made. The process has spoken.

Mark kneels on Mars and listens.

CLOSE ON HIS FACE through the helmet visor. The expression of a man who has found something extraordinary and already knows what the world will do with it.

He opens his eyes. Reaches into his sample bag. Pulls out the core section from Survey Point Alpha — the one with the filament. He holds it up to the setting sun. The crystal catches the light. The amber tint glows warm in the Martian sunset.

The filament pulses. A faint, steady current, carrying a signal to a node that no longer has a complete network to receive it.

Mark holds a piece of living crystal on the surface of Mars, and he knows. He knows what it is. He knows what it means. He knows what will happen next.

And he knows — with the certainty of a man who studies the deep time of planets and understands that ten thousand years is nothing, is an eyeblink, is the time it takes a canyon to deepen by a centimeter — that what is about to be lost cannot be replaced.

He holds the crystal. The sun sets. The sky goes dark. Stars appear — sharp and bright in the thin atmosphere, more stars than any Earth sky has shown in a century.

Jupiter rises in the east. A steady point of light. Not twinkling. Somewhere beneath the ice of one of its moons, in an ocean he will one day see, something else is waiting.

Mark lowers the crystal. Stands. His breath fogs the helmet visor.

He doesn't move. He stands on Mars, between the stars and the living ground, and the network pulses beneath his feet, and the future is already written in the classification document drying in the conference room above him, and he cannot change it.

Not yet.

He turns and walks back toward the habitat. The lights are on. The drill rigs stand against the darkening sky, waiting for morning.

> FADE TO BLACK.

> END OF EPISODE

EPISODE 1 — "CLASSIFICATION"

Runtime estimate: ~58 minutes

Next episode: "PERIMETER" — The drills hit the lithotroph network. The network fights back. James faces the first impossible order.

TWO WORLDS is based on the novel "A Conquest of Two Worlds" by Jeremy Salsburg.

Inspired by Edmond Hamilton's "A Conquest of Two Worlds" (Wonder Stories, February 1932).

END OF EPISODE 1

Runtime estimate: ~58 minutes