

Desolate

by

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"DESOLATE"

FADE IN:

INT. STARSHIP ENGINE ROOM - SPACE

The dim atmosphere of the engine room hangs in the air, and the inscrutable machines that dominate it WHIR and CHUNK repeatedly, the unmistakable sound of faulty machinery. Lying between two of them, hair matted in a small pool of blood, is ALEX BROUSSARD, a motionless and battered man in his 30s wearing an engineering jumpsuit.

His eyes open, and as he recognizes the sounds, he sits up slowly, wincing as he places a hand on the wound on his head. Alex looks around, and he spots a body nearby beside a toolbox. As he approaches, the body's serious leg injury becomes more obvious, as does his name tag.

INSERT - THE OLDER MAN'S NAME TAG

"Leon Barris, Engineering Supervisor"

LEON, who appears to have been in his 60s with cropped gray hair, does not move, and when Alex kneels beside him and sees the massive pool of blood, it is clear that he has bled out.

Alex slumps back when he sees his efforts are in vain, still in a daze. After a few long moments, he notices something crumpled supervisor's hand. Fumbling, he unfolds it.

INSERT - LEON'S PHOTO

A smiling WOMAN in her 60s stands beside Leon, surrounded by his family, made up of multiple adults and tiny grandchildren, all beaming at the camera. Leon looks almost tearful with joy.

Alex stares at the photo for a while, looking from each smiling face to the next with a frown. Eventually, he sets the photo down by the body, withdrawing with his eyes closed.

The CHUNK of the machinery continues despite his brief moment of introspection. Finally, visibly pushing through the pain, he goes to inspect the nearest machine. He punches vague commands into a cracked computer interface.

INSERT - COMPUTER SCREEN

Alex types his name into a login window to access a complicated engineering overview. The user interface blinks

red, and displays enough system and hardware error messages to fill the screen. The first one listed is labelled critical, flashing and BEEPING incessantly. Alex smashes the enter key, and the screen displays the oxygen level: 1.7% remaining.

FLASHBACK - INT. UNIVERSITY TEST FACILITY - DAY

INSERT - TIMER

The electronic display of the oxygen levels turns into the display of a timer counting down, and the beeping of the screen turns into the BEEPING of its countdown, which, after a few moments, goes off.

The room is long, clean, and very austere, with dozens of students sitting at desks with stacks of paper. Shutters on the windows slide open, revealing natural daylight. Dominating the main wall is a starry blue lion emblem with "Starlight University" in huge letters underneath it.

A PROFESSOR walks between the rows of desks, collecting the tests and giving each young adult student a resolute nod. MOS students themselves visibly relax in relief and congratulate each other, including a younger, college-aged Alex, laughing and clapping a hand on the back of the classmate beside him, another STUDENT with longer, lighter hair and a smug look on his face as he flashes Alex a thumbs-up.

FLASHBACK - EXT. REPAIR GARAGE - DAY

The sun is slowly setting behind a small, dingy repair garage. It is a far cry from the test facility, grimy despite the obviously futuristic cars parked outside. An older ENGINEER in a jumpsuit waves her hand towards something in the depths of the open garage, and out rolls a cart being pushed by a hunched figure, also in a jumpsuit.

INSERT - TOOL CART

Hanging from a SQUEAKING metal cart are racks of technologically advanced tools that vaguely resemble wrenches and screwdrivers.

The figure looks up, revealing himself to be Alex, not much older than college-aged but looking tired, with a scraggly beard on his face. He appears exhausted as he pushes the cart up to a sleek, beautiful red car with its hood popped up. Alex picks up a tool and walks around toward the engine, but can't stop and help and gawk at the interior, looking luxurious and expensive. Something catches his eye, and he

leans in toward the windshield.

INSERT - CAR DASHBOARD

A Starlight University ornament hangs from the mirror, with the word "ALUMNI" unmistakable underneath it.

Alex steps back, looking stricken. But he merely lets out a resigned sigh, and moves under the hood of the car, burying himself in his work as the engineer looks on, arms crossed, as the sun sets.

BACK TO PRESENT DAY

INT. STARSHIP ENGINE ROOM - SPACE

The older Alex is no longer staring at the oxygen display. He looks resigned, much like his young counterpart, but doesn't bury his face in work. Instead, he is slumped against one of the huge engines, and seems to have thrown a rough blanket over the body of Leon. The beeping is present, but muted. Alex is sadly gazing out a window into the void of space, while a photo is limp in his hand.

INSERT - ALEX'S PHOTO

Compared to Leon's, Alex's family photo is tiny, with the words "ALEX, REBECCA, AND LANCE" scribbled on it. It's him, his wife, REBECCA, a young blonde woman in her 30s holding a small, energetic toddler in her arms, LANCE. Both wife and child are beaming at the camera. Alex is smiling as well, but it is visibly forced, one arm draped carelessly around his family. The difference in his and Leon's statures is obvious. Alex glances down at the photo, his thumb moving to cover his face briefly, then moving away.

He looks back up to the window. Alex's face is impassive for a few moments, but slowly his expression turns grim, his jaw setting. Grimness turns to determination as he looks down at the photo again, as slowly the BEEPING grows louder. Finally, he pushes himself to his feet, and collects the toolbox from beside Leon.

FLASHBACK - EXT. CHEAP CAFE

Younger Alex doesn't look quite so disheveled, but is still in his jumpsuit and visibly tired as he sits alone at a table under an umbrella outside of a cafe. An ice cold soda and a sleek tablet sit in front of him as he gazes toward the street, watching the cars roll by with envy. The red car he'd worked on before passes by, and Alex glares at the driver,

the student who had previously been celebrating with him at the university. But his visible anger halts when the car passes a young woman walking on the street, a younger, and much busier-looking Rebecca with briefcase in hand, and Alex's gaze lightens noticeably as she catches his eye, flashing an obvious smile.

BACK TO PRESENT DAY

INT. STARSHIP ENGINE ROOM - SPACE

INSERT - COMPUTER SCREEN

The BEEPING has slowed, but the oxygen level now displays as 0.9%.

Present day Alex is on his back under one of the engines, tools scattered around him, working furiously. He scrabbles for a tool blindly, too focused on his work to look away, and snatches a wrench from beside the photo he's pinned to the toolbox.

QUICK FLASHES - ALEX'S LIFE AND PRESENT

-- Young Alex and Rebecca sit across from each other on a date, both looking shy. MOS she finally says something, and he merely nods along.

-- Older Alex twists a bolt with a wrench, and it hisses loudly.

-- Young Alex and Rebecca wed, holding hands and kissing as a crowd claps. They turn toward the crowd, and he looks pleased, but not much more.

-- Older Alex gently applies some sort of bonding paste to seal a hole in the engine, and the crack seals.

-- Young Alex rifles through bills at a kitchen table, more tired than ever, as a visibly pregnant Rebecca returns from work, setting her briefcase down as Alex attempts to hide the bills.

-- Older Alex is no longer under the engine, instead attempting to re-wire a panel in the wall that lights up and hums agreeably as he flips a switch.

-- Young Alex is indistinguishable from present day Alex now, and he kisses his wife and son goodbye as he walks up the ramp of a starship in his present day jumpsuit. He puts on a brave face for them, but as he turns to board, it vanishes

instantly.

BACK TO PRESENT DAY

Alex looks over his repairs quickly, revealing the incredibly extensive work he's done on the engines. He nods vaguely, and returns to the computer.

INSERT - COMPUTER SCREEN

The beeping is sporadic, and oxygen levels are at 0.2%. Alex returns to the error screen, and presses a button. One by one, they vanish, and he inhales sharply, looking more alive and desperate than we've ever seen him. Finally, only one message remains: "system changes have been made. Manual reboot required."

Alex turns to the side, to eye a huge switch with black and yellow hazard stripes surrounding it on the wall. He turns slightly further, past the window, to the body of Leon, and then, finally, he holds up his family photo once more, laying a kiss on it before folding it into his hand.

Alex stumbles slightly as he walks towards the switch, and the lights dim, but his determination is obvious. He walks past every patch and repair he's made, but can't bear to look at them this time, eyes closed, opening only once he's to the switch. He wraps one hand around the handle, and hesitates for a moment, before grabbing it with his other hand, too, the picture of his family sticking out between the fingers, as he pulls the switch down.

FADE OUT.

THE END