

THE TOWER

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SYNOPSIS

Two aliens, under orders by their government, wander the universe looking for planets inhabited by intelligent life and then judge whether or not the planet deserves to live or die. If it is determined they deserve to die, their job is then to destroy the planet with their devastating technology. One day, these two aliens come across Earth and mete out the justice they feel is deserved.

THE SETTING

Futuristic looking. It is an alien space ship. There are two smaller work stations downstage and a larger one upstage. This larger one has three circular lights on the front. The backdrop is a large circular window. Outside, the Earth can be seen amongst the blackness of space and specks of stars. All of the set, the inside of the spaceship, is a stark and brilliant white.

THE CHARACTERS

Alien 1- Young, brash, self-righteous, takes pride in his job. He strongly believes his job is moral and is for the greater good.

Alien 2- Older, erudite, dispassionate about his job. Leans more towards believing his job is morally wrong. He wants to protect the people he is sent to destroy.

NOTE

The three lights on the larger work station represent each person's vote on the fate of the planet. The center light is the Tower's vote, the light towards stage left is Alien 1's vote, and the light towards stage right is Alien 2's vote. Green means destroy, red means do not destroy, and yellow means pending vote.

(Aliens 1 and 2 are at the work stations downstage, 1 stage right, 2 stage left. The three lights on the larger workstation are yellow. A beeping sound is heard and paper feeds out of both work stations.)

ALIEN 1

Preliminary results are in.

ALIEN 2

Let's see it then. *(They begin flipping through the paper. They look surprised.)* This is amazing.

ALIEN 1

More like disturbing. We've got 73 units of conflict, negative 58 units of harmony-

ALIEN 2

58 disharmony, 65 units unhappiness, 39 units of hunger, 71 units of environmental degradation...it goes on like this for a while.

ALIEN 1

Any redeeming qualities? Is there anything that can possibly save them? What's their science like? Their culture? Their history?

ALIEN 2

(Flips through more pages.) Their science is flawed and very far behind. Most of it seems to be done in the interests of acquiring currency anyways. Their culture is rife with trivial things. Not much of it seems intent on forwarding important thought. Their history...they fancy themselves survivors, but haven't gone through anything beyond 15 units of cataclysm.

ALIEN 1

I say we don't even ask the Tower. Just wipe them and be done with it.

ALIEN 2

It does say they will meet their natural destruction within 40 units...

ALIEN 1

Good, they wouldn't have had much time to live anyway.

ALIEN 2

We still need the machine's input. It's part of procedure.

ALIEN 1

Oh fine. But I don't see what difference it will do. My vote's already in for cleansing. You?
(He presses a button on the large workstation and the light on stage left turns green.)

ALIEN 2

I...I don't know yet. Let's wait for the machine.

ALIEN 1

Alright whatever you want. *(He goes to the large workstation upstage and feeds the paper into the machine. The light in the center begins alternately flashing red, yellow, and green.)* It should take a few units.

ALIEN 2

(Looking out the window at Earth.) What do you think they're thinking right now?

ALIEN 1

I'm not sure. What does it matter anyways?

ALIEN 2

Well aren't you ever just curious?

ALIEN 1

No. No I'm not. "All Adjudicators must remain emotionally distant from their subjects."

ALIEN 2

Adjudication Tenement Four, I believe.

ALIEN 1

Six, actually. They've changed it since you were last in the field.

ALIEN 2

Really? Now that's just confusing. Things used to be so much simpler.

ALIEN 1

Are you complaining?

ALIEN 2

No no just...have you ever thought about them? We've cleansed dozens of worlds by now and have you ever just thought maybe, maybe one of them had a single seed of goodness in them?

ALIEN 1

(Getting riled up.) It doesn't matter. We're doing our job. We're protecting our world from potential threats. We save countless lives by ending the lives of these barbarians. What if any one of them developed space travel? It wouldn't be long before our worlds would be at war. The lives of our people would be at stake. What would we say to a soldier on the front lines or a civilian victimized by war when we tell them we had the ability to stop their suffering, but didn't because we cared more about people on an alien world than we did about our own?

ALIEN 2

You know you remind me of myself when I was your age-

ALIEN 1

And I'll tell you something else. If our places were switched, they would be doing the exact same thing to us. We are absolutely justified in what we do.

ALIEN 2

You remind me of myself when I was your age. Eager, self-righteous, unshakable morals. I graduated from the Academy with high honors too, you know. I looked for every chance to spit out the training I was fed, just like you just did.

ALIEN 1

But then what? You got old?

ALIEN 2

No, nothing so dramatic. But you still haven't answered my question. Do you ever think about the people you doom?

ALIEN 1

No. I absolutely do not, nor do I ever intend to.

ALIEN 2

You should. Right now, I imagine there's someone on the surface there about to marry the woman of their dreams. Or a student about to give the most important presentation of his life. Or a family celebrating their daughter's third birthday.

ALIEN 1

What? Why? Why would you do that to yourself?

ALIEN 2

To see how much I'm still alive.

ALIEN 1

(Pause) Well now that I've answered your question, answer mine.

ALIEN 2

What's that?

ALIEN 1

I'm curious. What happened to the fine young Adjudicator you said you used to be? Can I look at you and see a future me?

ALIEN 2

I doubt you'll be so unfortunate, my friend. I'll answer your question, but first-

ALIEN 1

You want me to think up little stories for the people down there.

ALIEN 2

If you would so amuse us.

ALIEN 1

You're not going to let this go are you?

ALIEN 2

Given the proper persuasion, I might, but even then, I'd be at it again on the next world we visit.

ALIEN 1

It'd be breaking protocol. You're lucky I won't report you for what you've said when we get back to HQ.

ALIEN 2

Well I trust you. And besides, HQ is millions of units away. They won't know a thing.

ALIEN 1

(Lowering voice) But I heard these Tower ships have things on them that record our voices.

ALIEN 2

Well if those unfounded rumors are true, then we're both in deep water already. I don't think the Head Adjudicator will appreciate what you've said about his daughter.

ALIEN 1

Alright alright alright ok I'll play your silly game.

ALIEN 2

That's the spirit.

ALIEN 1

So imagining a life...

ALIEN 2

Yes just imagine what some people down there would do in their everyday life.

ALIEN 1

Well, I would imagine there are several people currently in the act of killing and warring over petty reasons. I see people breaking the laws and engaging in immoral activities. I see people destroying their world and destroying each other. I see greedy people not sharing their meaningless wealth with the beggars they walk past every day. Basically, I see a world that has only made it this far on luck. I see a world that is unworthy of living any longer than it already has. I see my duty written clearly in the blood of these people.

ALIEN 2

I didn't ask you to look at the world.

ALIEN 1

What?

ALIEN 2

You're looking at the world as a whole. What about the soldier, killing for what he believes is right? Isn't that what we're technically doing too? The soldier has a story. And what about that man stealing and breaking the laws? Born into poverty maybe? Left with no choice? Each individual has a story. Each individual has a reason, a story behind behaving in a way we believe is immoral. I'm asking you to look deeper to see if there's a chance that what we find immoral might seem perfectly just in a close up point of view.

ALIEN 1

(There is a longer pause.) What's your story, old man?

ALIEN 2

Do you know how things were run back in the day?

ALIEN 1

Yeah each planet would be allowed to have a representative to make a case for their survival. The trial would last for a week. But that method was made obsolete with the creation of the Tower. *(He pats the larger workstation whose center light is still flashing between red, yellow, and green.)* Everything can be done faster and more accurately now.

ALIEN 2

I was in one of the final planetary representative cases. We transported the selected subject aboard. She was really surprised at first, but I-

ALIEN 1

You fell in love with her.

ALIEN 2

So impatient...

ALIEN 1

I'm right, though.

ALIEN 2

Am I really that easily read?

ALIEN 1

You just strike me as the romantic type.

ALIEN 2

You're a sharp one. You make a good Adjudicator.

ALIEN 1

Thank you. So you fell in love.

ALIEN 2

I was convinced her planet should live. The other Adjudicators, all they saw was a world ravaged by war. But she showed me how even through all the disharmony, good things were happening. People were showing compassion. Small, but powerful acts of kindness in the places nobody ever wants to look. See, the other Adjudicators, they failed to see the single most important thing a person judging the fate of an entire planet needs to see. It's something even this machine doesn't calculate. *(He gestures at the workstation, still alternating its center light.)*

ALIEN 1

What's that?

ALIEN 2

The potential to change. *(Another pause.)* You know what the hardest part was?

ALIEN 1

I couldn't imagine...

ALIEN 2

After the week was up, the representative was supposed to go back to the planet, not to take part in any of the Adjudicator's decisions. I convinced my colleagues to let her wait in the shuttle. After the almost unanimous vote for cleansing, I went back to her and I...I lied to her. I told her she was going to live. The last I saw her, she was glowing with happiness. She had received validation of the intrinsic fairness of the universe. She gave me a kiss and a promise we would see each other again. And then she was gone. *(Long pause. Suddenly, the machine beeps and the center light stabilizes at yellow.)*

ALIEN 1

The Tower's ready to give its vote.

ALIEN 2

Can't do it anymore...

ALIEN 1

Look, I'm very sorry, but we have a job to do. You've convinced me, yes. I'll think more carefully before casting my vote from now on. But I made a pledge to cleanse the universe of immorality. This has to be done. It's my job. *(He goes around to the larger workstation and is about to press a button to reveal the Tower's vote.)*

ALIEN 2

Wait! *(Alien 1 stops. Alien 2 walks to his workstation.)* Computer. Hold vote for current world. Open new case. Analyze world, subject: Tower ship 135. *(The three lights turn yellow.)*

ALIEN 1

What are you doing?!

ALIEN 2

You know very well. You're smart enough.

ALIEN 1

You can't do this! How...no stop it! Stop it right now! Computer-

ALIEN 2

What's the matter? Afraid you're going to be judged of being immoral? Aren't you doing the right thing? *(Alien 1 freezes, unsure of what to do. Alien 2's workstation beeps and a paper slides out. Without pausing to look at it, Alien 2 goes to feed it into the Tower.)*

ALIEN 1

That was fast...

ALIEN 2

It's a two person world. *(He feeds the paper in. The center light begins fluctuating again. Alien 2 presses the button for his vote. The light towards stage left turns green.)*

ALIEN 1

Wait hold on you can't just...the Tower isn't meant to do something like this. It wasn't designed to-

ALIEN 2

Don't lecture me, boy! I helped build the damn thing!

ALIEN 1

You? But...

ALIEN 2

Why do you think that case was one of the last ones that had a representative?

ALIEN 1

You're the one who created the Tower...

ALIEN 2

I thought it would help. All it's done is make things worse. Machines can't do this job any better than we can. (*Alien 1 crouches then sits on the ground next to his station.*) You were so convinced you were doing the right thing. You have the authority to stop the judgment. You can still stop it if you want.

ALIEN 1

I'm not going to. (*He stands back up again.*) I'm doing the right thing and you are going to prove it to both of us. This means nothing. When the Tower is done playing this stupid game, it's going to vote for the cleansing of this world-

ALIEN 2

You don't know that. They might have been deemed worthy to live.

ALIEN 1

They are going to be destroyed! And then we are going straight back to Headquarters and you will be tried and convicted for treason against the state.

ALIEN 2

If the Tower judges us innocent of crimes of morality, I will gladly return with you to face penance at the hands of the court.

ALIEN 1

Fine. (*The Tower's central light stabilizes at yellow.*)

ALIEN 2

Still feeling confident? *(Both aliens walk behind the Tower's larger workstation.)*

ALIEN 1

Absolutely. You?

ALIEN 2

I'm never confident when it comes to matters of morality.

ALIEN 1

I guess that's the one thing that makes us different. *(He hits the button. The center light turns green. Neither alien says anything for a long pause. Then Alien 1 leans against the workstation, closes his eyes, and shakes his head. Alien 2 puts his hand on his shoulder.)*

ALIEN 2

You haven't cast your vote yet.

ALIEN 1

I was just doing my job...

ALIEN 2

You are doing your job.

ALIEN 1

(Looking up slowly.) I am...I am doing my job.

ALIEN 2

We are doing our job.

ALIEN 1

We are doing our job. *(Starting to smile, he grasps Alien 2 by the shoulders and laughs lightly.)*
We're doing our job.

(Alien 2 smiles. Alien 1 turns to the workstation to cast his vote. He presses the button. All stage lights cut out. The only lights that remain are three green circular lights on the Tower and the Earth being illuminated through the window, as though casting a vote of its own.)

CURTAIN