

COMMANDER AUSTRALIA

Written by

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INT. JAKE'S BEDROOM - ADELAIDE - NIGHT

TITLE CARD: ADELAIDE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA - SUMMER 1972

JAKE HOLDEN (21), lanky, brown-haired, sits cross-legged on the floor surrounded by university forms and a crumpled astronomy syllabus.

Against a stack of books rests a small, faded photo: six-year-old Jake grinning beside his mother, MARGARET HOLDEN, a telescope between them.

LINDA KINNEAR (20), freckled and barefoot in a wrinkled cotton dress, lies sprawled across the bed, thumbing through an astronomy textbook. A Polaroid camera rests nearby.

LINDA

The light from Andromeda takes two  
and a half million years to reach  
us.

She glances at Jake, eyes bright with wonder.

LINDA (CONT'D)

So, when we look at the stars,  
we're seeing the past. Long before  
humans ever existed.

Jake smiles.

JAKE

Exactly. Astronomy messes with your  
sense of time. What looks like  
now... happened ages ago.

LINDA

You made the right decision. Your  
mum would be pleased.

Jake's gaze flicks to the faded photo. He nods.

JAKE

Yeah. She always encouraged me.  
Even when I wanted to sing in the  
school play.

LINDA

But... you can't sing.

Jake shrugs.

JAKE

Minor detail.

They laugh. Linda flips the textbook shut.

LINDA  
My mum thought I'd be a ballerina.

JAKE  
Really? What happened?

LINDA  
I tripped over my clumsy feet and  
broke my arm.

A beat. Their eyes meet - comfortable, familiar.

JAKE  
You'll be a great teacher.

Linda runs her hand over the textbook.

LINDA  
I hope so. I want to teach them  
about stars. Animals. Big things.

JAKE  
(teasing)  
I'd probably have paid more  
attention if you were my teacher.

She laughs, grabs the camera, snaps a photo. The camera whirs. She waves the picture dry, scribbles something on the border, then hands the photo to Jake.

INSERT - POLAROID PHOTO

Jake, mid-thought, caught in the glow of the ceiling light. Written beneath in Linda's handwriting: "The astronaut at work - 1972."

Jake smiles, studying the photo.

He places the polaroid beside the faded photo of him and his mother.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
Come on. Let's check out those  
stars.

EXT. JAKE'S FRONT YARD - ADELAIDE - NIGHT

A warm, moonless night. A telescope stands like a sentinel, aimed at the stars.

The lawn - crisp from summer heat and weeks without rain - stretches to a waist-high iron fence, where a few stubborn rose bushes cling to their last blooms in the dry evening air.

Jake and Linda lie on a blanket nearby, a cooler between them filled with melting ice and beer cans.

LINDA  
(teasing)  
Still reckon you'll spot little  
green men before me?

Jake cracks a beer, hands it to her.

JAKE  
Nah, they'll look like meat pies.

Linda laughs.

LINDA  
In flying sauce bottles, of course.

Jake snorts beer, wiping his chin.

JAKE  
Bloody oath. Hot and fresh from  
Venus.

Headlights sweep across them as a sleek Ford Fairlane rolls into the driveway.

Jake tenses. Linda sits up, brushing grass from her dress.

FRED HOLDEN (56), three-piece suit, navy tie, polished shoes, Deputy Leader of the Liberal and Country League (LCL) steps out of the Fairlane, carrying a manila folder.

Fred approaches, casting a long shadow over the telescope.

LINDA  
(wary, polite)  
Good evening, Mr Holden.

Fred eyes the telescope with barely disguised contempt, then brushes an imaginary speck of dust from his jacket.

FRED  
Still wasting time on this star-  
gazing rubbish?

Jake glances at Linda, then back to his father.

JAKE  
Uni starts soon, Dad.

FRED  
Good. The News wants to run a story  
- my son following in my footsteps.

He nudges the telescope slightly with his polished shoe, as if it offends him.

Jake stands.

JAKE  
I switched degrees.

FRED  
You what?

JAKE  
I switched to a Bachelor of  
Science, specialising in Astronomy.

Fred's mouth flattens. His voice stays calm, but his eyes harden.

FRED  
Without my permission?

JAKE  
It's my life.

FRED  
That I'm paying for!

Fred straightens his already-perfect tie, a habitual gesture.

FRED (CONT'D)  
I have an election to win. You're  
my son. Like it or not, the media  
is interested in you. It's bad  
enough that you live with that  
hippie protester. He reflects  
poorly on both of us.

Jake opens his mouth to defend Danny.

FRED (CONT'D)  
Well. That settles it. The funding  
stops, as of now.

JAKE  
What do you mean?

Linda stands next to Jake, reaches for his hand.

FRED  
No more money. University, rent,  
food. You're on your own.

JAKE  
You're serious?

FRED  
This is your future, Jake. You  
study Political Science. Or you  
work in my office. I'll pay for  
either.

Fred nods toward Linda.

FRED (CONT'D)  
She wants what's best for you,  
right?

Jake slips an arm around Linda.

LINDA  
I want Jake to be happy.

FRED  
Happiness won't pay the mortgage  
or, in your case, Jake, the rent.

Fred offers Jake the manila folder. Jake hesitates.

JAKE  
What's this?

FRED  
New rental agreement. Think  
carefully about the financial  
implications.

Jake reluctantly takes the folder

Fred adjusts his gold cufflinks with practiced precision.

FRED (CONT'D)  
I have a fundraiser downtown. I'll  
call back later for the signed  
copy.

Fred strides off toward his car. He doesn't look back. Jake  
stares at the folder, as if it might bite.

INT. JAKE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A cramped space with mismatched furniture. An astronomy textbook lies on the coffee table next to protest flyers and clipboards.

A Greenpeace poster adorns one wall alongside a "BAN NUCLEAR TESTING" banner. Rolled protest signs lean against the corner.

Jake slumps on the couch, the manila folder open in his lap, papers scattered around him. Linda sits beside him, her hand on his knee.

DANNY JOHNSON (21) enters from the kitchen, carrying three beers. He wears a protest T-shirt that reads: "No Nukes."

DANNY

I brought reinforcements.

He hands one to Jake, then one to Linda, before cracking his own and sitting. He notices the folder.

DANNY (CONT'D)

So... how bad is it?

Jake holds up a document.

JAKE

Rent's going up fifty percent. And that's if I even get to stay.

LINDA

Fifty percent?

JAKE

Cut off my funding. Jack up my rent. Dad's playing hardball.

DANNY

He really sees you in a suit, doesn't he?

JAKE

He sees me in his office. At his desk. Saying all the things he says, just with a younger face.

DANNY

That's not you, mate.

JAKE

Doesn't matter. He's got me boxed in. No money, no loan, no options.

LINDA  
Can't you borrow the money?

JAKE  
Tried.  
(imitating a banker)  
"No income? No chance. But hey,  
your dad's rich. Why don't you ask  
him?"

He tosses the rental agreement onto the table.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
It's a trap. One way out - his way.

DANNY  
Wish I could help.

LINDA  
I could ask my parents-

JAKE  
No!

A beat. Jake rubs his face.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
Sorry. I just... I can't owe them  
too.

He takes her hand and holds it.

LINDA  
It's not about owing. They care  
about you.

Jake looks down at their hands, quiet for a moment.

JAKE  
Maybe I should just sign the damn  
papers. Work in his office. Wear  
the tie. Smile for the camera.

LINDA  
Jake-

JAKE  
Maybe once he wins the election,  
he'll ease off. Let me study part-  
time. Save face for both of us.

Jake stares at the table. No one speaks. The silence stretches.

Danny takes a long sip of beer, watching Jake without pushing.

The only sound is the distant hum of traffic. Jake lifts his beer, forcing a smile.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Politics goes down easier when  
you're half-cut.

DANNY

I'll drink to that.

They clink bottles. Linda watches Jake, her concern rising as she sees him start to fold under the pressure.

INT. JAKE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Empty beer bottles clutter the coffee table. The rental agreement lies among them, stained with condensation rings, one corner curling upward.

Jake sprawls on the couch, shirt half-open, flushed and clearly drunk. Linda perches on the armrest beside him, glancing at her watch.

LINDA

I've got to go.

Jake sits up, trying to rally. He sways slightly as he reaches for his shoes.

JAKE

I'll drive you.

She looks at the bottles, hesitates.

LINDA

It's okay. I'll walk.

Jake shakes his head, slurring slightly but trying to sound protective.

JAKE

Not safe. Don't want anything  
happening to you.

He lurches upright, patting his pockets for the keys.

LINDA

Jake... I don't think you should  
drive.

EXT. JAKE'S HOUSE - CARPORT - CONTINUOUS

Under the carport sits an aging Datsun - a hint of rust, dulled paint, and a faded "No Nukes" sticker on the bumper.

Jake leans against the car, grinning.

JAKE  
Your starship awaits.

Linda gently stops him, holding his hands at his sides.

LINDA  
You know I'm happy, right? Whether it's uni or work or... whatever.

Jake nods slowly, eyes heavy.

JAKE  
Yeah, I know.

He kisses her nose - sweet and clumsy.

LINDA  
I just want to be with you.

A quiet beat.

JAKE  
Maybe you should move in. Then I wouldn't have to drive you home.

Linda beams - surprised, thrilled.

LINDA  
Are you serious?

Jake smiles, but it's tired. The beer's catching up.

JAKE  
Yeah. Course I am.

LINDA  
What about Danny?

Jake shrugs.

JAKE  
He already lives here.

Linda smiles, then hesitates.

LINDA

I mean... I could help with rent.  
It'd make things easier.

(beat)

But maybe we should talk more -  
when you're not half-pissed.

Jake leans back against the Datsun, grin fading slightly as the beer settles in his system.

JAKE

Yeah. Sure. Tomorrow.

Headlights sweep across the yard. A sleek sedan pulls up, government plates glint faintly under the porch light.

Jake squints at the car, momentarily sobered, but says nothing.

He turns to the Datsun, tries to open the door, fumbles with the handle, slightly off-balance.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Come on, then. Let's get you home  
safe.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

A burst of headlights. Screeching tyres. A sickening crunch - metal into metal. Glass shatters across the asphalt.

A muffled scream - then nothing. Steam hisses from the crumpled hood.

A bloodied hand hangs from the shattered window of the Datsun.

The "No Nukes" sticker, half-peeled, flutters in the breeze.

Somewhere down the street, a dog starts barking. Then silence.

No one comes.

INT. ROYAL ADELAIDE HOSPITAL - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Fluorescent lights strobe overhead.

Jake lies on a gurney - bloodied, barely conscious, an oxygen mask misting with each breath.

Blurred figures shout orders.

The world slips in and out of focus.

INT. ROYAL ADELAIDE HOSPITAL - WARD - LATER

Jake lies motionless. A bandage wraps tight around his head. An IV drips beside him. The heart monitor beeps steadily.

His eyelids twitch. He stirs - barely.

INT. ROYAL ADELAIDE HOSPITAL - MORGUE - MORNING

Linda lies on a metal slab, pale and still. A sheet pulled to her chin. A toe tag: KINNEAR, L.

Beside her on a small metal table: personal effects. Among them - her Polaroid camera.

The door creaks.

Jake shuffles in - hospital gown loose, IV tape dangling. He looks like a ghost.

He sees her, freezes.

His gaze drifts to the camera. He reaches for it, fingers trembling, then sinks to his knees beside her. He clutches both her hand and the camera.

JAKE  
(hoarse, broken)  
No. No, no, Linda...

He presses his forehead to hers. Silent sobs rack his body.

TITLE CARD: THREE MONTHS LATER

INT. JAKE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DREAM

Jake and Linda sit inside the parked Datsun, overlooking the twinkling lights of Adelaide.

LINDA  
Tell me the Southern Cross story  
again.

JAKE  
Aboriginal people saw it as the  
footprint of a wedge-tailed eagle.  
Settlers used it to navigate. Same  
stars - different stories.

She leans into him, resting her head on his shoulder.

LINDA  
What's our story, Jake?

A flicker of headlights.

LINDA (CONT'D)  
(sharper now)  
Jake? Jake!

- Tyres screech.
- Glass shatters.
- Metal screams.
- A flash of Linda's bloodied face. Black.

INT. JAKE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - END DREAM

Jake jolts upright, drenched in sweat, gasping like he's surfaced from underwater.

He scans the room: torn posters, unwashed clothes, a telescope gathering dust. Only one thing gleams - his mother's photo, wiped clean.

MONTAGE OF JAKE'S RECOVERY

INT. JAKE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jake slumps on the couch in rumpled clothes, staring blankly at daytime TV. Empty beer bottles crowd the coffee table.

Danny enters, sees the mess, starts collecting bottles without comment. Jake doesn't acknowledge him.

INT. JAKE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY (LATER)

Fred stands holding a pressed suit, shirt and tie. Jake shuffles in wearing pyjama bottoms and a stained singlet.

FRED  
The Rotary lunch is in an hour.

Jake reluctantly takes the clothes, begins changing like a robot.

Fred discretely clears more empty bottles from around the room.

EXT. HOTEL FUNCTION ROOM - DAY (LATER)

Jake, now suited and groomed, stands beside Fred shaking hands with DONORS. His smile is hollow, practiced.

In the background, CATERING STAFF clear empty beer bottles from abandoned tables.

INT. JAKE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Jake sits alone at the kitchen table, a handwritten note in front of him:

"Jake - Your Gran called. Misses you. Would love to see you. - Danny"

Jake stares at the note for a long moment, then sets his beer bottle down next to several empties. He slowly starts collecting them himself.

INT. JAKE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT (LATER)

Jake sits at the table in dress shirt and trousers, jacket and tie draped over a chair. He reads a newspaper with the headline: "NASA WARNING: ASTEROID HEADED FOR FLINDERS RANGES."

He pushes aside his coffee mug and really looks at the headline for the first time.

END MONTAGE

INT. FRED'S CAMPAIGN OFFICE - DAY

Fred sits behind a desk covered with election materials, cradling a phone between his ear and shoulder while signing documents with his free hand.

Campaign posters line the walls. A newspaper with the headline "NASA WARNING: ASTEROID HEADED FOR FLINDERS RANGES" pokes out of his wastepaper bin.

FRED  
(into phone)  
Yes, but I want final approval.

He glances up as Jake enters, looking clean and purposeful for the first time in months. He gestures for Jake to sit down. Jake remains standing.

FRED (CONT'D)  
(into phone)  
Tomorrow. Good.

Jake notices the discarded newspaper. Fred hangs up the phone.

JAKE  
I'm going to Pirie.

FRED  
We have the Business Council dinner Thursday. Channel 7 wants to interview--

JAKE  
(interrupting)  
I won't be available.

Fred leans back in his chair, studying Jake's face.

FRED  
Actually, that works out. I've got a development project in Pirie. Economic revitalization.

JAKE  
I'm visiting Gran and observing the meteor.

FRED  
Jake, focus on what matters

Jake turns to leave.

FRED (CONT'D)  
The election's in three weeks. Then we'll talk about your future.

Jake stops at the door.

JAKE  
I'll be back Friday. Then we can talk about the election.

He exits.

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

Danny stands on the footpath, watching as Jake loads his telescope onto the rear seat, nestling it against a frayed wool blanket.

DANNY  
Got snacks. Got fuel. Got  
existential dread. You're all set.

Jake manages a smile as he closes the back door.

JAKE  
Thanks for the car.

DANNY  
Thanks for not turning into your  
old man.

They clasp hands. No big speech. Just weight. Jake slides into the driver's seat.

DANNY (CONT'D)  
Tell the meteor I said g'day.

Jake glances at Danny, then up at the sky. The sun hangs low, painting the horizon in a hazy gold. He starts the engine and pulls away.

Danny stands watching as the taillights disappear into the night.

EXT. PORT WAKEFIELD HIGHWAY - DUSK

Danny's battered Volkswagen rolls north, tyres humming against the open highway.

To the west, the sun melts into the horizon, spilling deep amber and crimson across the sky.

To the east, Lake Bumbunga gleams like a shattered mirror, its salt flats fading into shadowed infinity as night begins its slow descent.

INT. VOLKSWAGEN - CONTINUOUS

Jake grips the wheel, eyes on the road. In the back seat: his telescope, a camping bag, canvas water bag dripping condensation.

On the passenger seat: the newspaper with the asteroid headline. Its corners flutter in the breeze from the half-open window.

For the first time in months, Jake looks almost peaceful, but tension lingers in his jaw, in the way he grips the wheel.

A road sign flashes past: PORT PIRIE 60 MILES.

INT. GRAN'S KITCHEN - PT PIRIE - NIGHT

A country kitchen with well-worn charm. Copper pots hang from a rack. Family photos line the windowsill next to a softly playing radio. A warm overhead light illuminates the wooden table.

ALISON HOLDEN (75), sharp-eyed and warm, sits at the kitchen table with items carefully spread out in front of her:

- Local newspaper with headline: "PORT PIRIE URANIUM LEGACY: FRESH CALLS FOR NUCLEAR REVIVAL"

- A black-and-white photo of her husband STANLEY HOLDEN (50) wearing a Navy uniform and standing in front of a low concrete bunker with faded military markings and warning signs: the Port Pirie ordnance depot.

- A few official naval documents with faded letterheads. A magnifying glass rests nearby.

She studies the newspaper article, cross-referencing it with one of Stanley's documents. Her finger traces a location on a hand-drawn map.

She takes a manila envelope from a kitchen drawer. "JAKE" written on it in her careful handwriting.

She tidies the newspaper with its prominent headline, Stanley's facility photo, and the naval letterheads into a neat pile, then slides them into the manila envelope.

Alison seals the envelope and places it on the side counter. She checks the clock on the wall, then moves to the stove to begin preparing dinner.

EXT. GRAN'S HOUSE - PT PIRIE - NIGHT

A white 1920s stone villa glows in the warm porch light. Its verandah, edged with intricate iron lacework, casts delicate shadows against the walls, a quiet testament to craftsmanship of another era.

Danny's Volkswagen turns into the concrete driveway and rattles to a stop.

Jake climbs out. His boots hit the ground just as the screen door creaks open.

Alison stands in the doorway in a flour-dusted, flower-print apron. Her silver hair glints in the light.

She opens her arms.

ALISON

About time you visited your gran.

Jake doesn't hesitate. He crosses the distance in three long strides and hugs her tight.

INT. GRAN'S KITCHEN - PT PIRIE - NIGHT

The same kitchen, now with a pot of tea brewing and a roast dinner steaming on the table. Jake and Alison sit across from each other.

The manila envelope marked "JAKE" sits on the side counter, within Alison's reach but out of Jake's direct line of sight.

His telescope case leans against the wall near the back door.

Jake eats with real hunger. Alison watches with quiet pleasure.

ALISON

First proper meal in a while?

JAKE

Been living on whatever's quick.

ALISON

And beer, I imagine.

Jake smiles, caught out. He gestures to the plate.

JAKE

This is perfect, Gran. Thanks.

Alison refills his plate without asking. A comfortable silence settles between them.

ALISON

The telescope made the journey, I see.

Jake follows her gaze to the telescope case leaning against the wall.

JAKE

Yeah. First time I've taken it out in months.

ALISON

Your mother loved the stars too. Used to drag your father out to watch meteor showers.

Jake's fork pauses mid-air.

JAKE

I can't believe he went.

ALISON

Oh, he did, but you could tell he hated it.

Alison chuckles.

ALISON (CONT'D)

Your grandfather used to say that Fred didn't have the patience. But you - Stanley would set up his old Navy telescope and call you his "little commander." Said you had the makings of an explorer.

Jake smiles, shakes his head.

JAKE

I was so stupidly proud when he called me "little commander".

His smile fades. He stabs a roast potato. Alison seems to read his mind.

ALISON

Your dad... his career's become everything since your mum died.

She reaches across the table, rests a hand on his.

ALISON (CONT'D)

But you're not him, Jake. You never could be, even if you tried.

JAKE

Tell him that.

ALISON

Oh, I have. He's never been much of a listener.

She pours Jake a cup of tea.

ALISON (CONT'D)

It's so good to see you.

JAKE

I'm sorry, Gran.

She pats his hand gently.

ALISON

You've been through hell. But it's okay to laugh, to live, to find joy again. It doesn't mean forgetting. It means honouring her by living the way she'd want for you.

JAKE

She wanted me to be happy.

Alison slaps the table - not hard, but firm.

ALISON

Well, there you go. Be happy. Honour her.

She stands, moving to the counter. With her back to Jake, she picks up the envelope marked "JAKE" and quietly slides it into a drawer.

She returns to the table.

ALISON (CONT'D)

Bill Miller lives out at Warnertown with his daughter Sharon. Nice people. They're expecting you.

EXT. MILLER FARMHOUSE - WARNERTOWN - DAY

Danny's Volkswagen pulls up in a cloud of dust. Jake steps out, shielding his eyes against the afternoon sun.

Ahead, a classic sandstone farmhouse bakes in the heat - iron roof, wraparound verandah, gum trees and saltbushes dotting the dry yard.

SHARON MILLER (10), all energy and curiosity, bolts out from behind the house, pigtails bouncing.

SHARON  
Are you the star man?

Jake smiles.

JAKE  
That's me.

SHARON  
Dad said you were coming! Do you  
know all the stars? Have you ever  
seen a comet? Or a UFO?

BILL MILLER (40s), weathered and tall, emerges from a  
galvanised shed, wiping his hands on a rag. He extends a  
calloused hand to Jake.

BILL  
Long time, Jake. Think you were  
about yay high last time I saw you.

He holds his hand at chest height.

SHARON  
(interrupting)  
That's my height. See.

She stretches tall beside her dad, measuring herself. Bill  
ruffles her hair.

JAKE  
Wow! You're tall.

Sharon grins like she's just won something.

BILL  
You know the meteor might be closer  
to Melrose.

Jake glances toward the Flinders Ranges, a quiet smile  
forming. This is where he's meant to be.

JAKE  
Doesn't really matter. Feels good  
to be out here.

Bill studies Jake's face.

BILL  
Alison said you've had a rough  
patch.

JAKE  
Yeah. You could say that.

BILL

Well, you're welcome here as long  
as you need.

Sharon tugs on Jake's sleeve.

SHARON

Can we set up the telescope now?  
Please?

JAKE

We need to find the perfect spot.

They head toward the back paddock. Sharon chatters away  
beside him like they've always been friends.