

e-500 (Episode minus 500)

Introduction on Xerxes: In a remote galaxy, a town has grown to such proportions that it covers an entire planet and reaches several miles in height. When part of it collapses, a team of archaeologists are sent into the deep to shed some light on its origins as well as its age. Descending through history and legend (and the scenes where they apparently took place), they finally arrive on the planet's surface and discover the spot where the town seems to have been founded several thousand years ago.

Prologue: On Earth, Tim Skolskjaer, a Danish-American astronaut, has been chosen out of a field of 1.5 million to travel, cryogenically frozen, to a planet in another solar system. Several things do not work out as planned, however, and instead of the scheduled twenty years, Tim's capsule, the Solaris, travels for more than two thousand million years – until the computers finally choose a suitable planet and initiate the touchdown. On Earth, meanwhile, humankind, after hundreds of great wars, has finally disappeared.

Chapter 1: Finally thawed, Tim (who has no idea that he is on the wrong planet, or how much time has passed) activates his robot dog Astro and begins to explore his environment. He is cross with the atmosphere analyser for indicating a potentially harmful silicon-argon compound (deemed nonsensical by Tim as argon does not enter into compounds), takes special interest in a moss-like but shape-shifting green layer that seems to be heading for the Solaris, and the 'DEUS' scanner indicates that God has been found. Could the funny green layer by any chance be the Supreme Being?

Chapter 2: Failing to recognise any of the constellations that should be visible in the night sky, Tim begins to realise what has happened while the green layer has begun the climb the Solaris.

Chapter 3: Tim has visions of giant insects and wheels crossing the valley and a thunderstorm destroys the Solaris and handles Tim rather roughly. It also apparently destroys the green layer.

Chapter 4: Tim is attended to and befriended by a greenish extra-terrestrial humanoid.

Chapter 5: When the humanoid witnesses Tim's mourning the badly mauled Astro and his attempt to bury him, he summons an entire retinue of multifarious creatures that patch the robot dog together again, perform music with him and celebrate.

Chapter 6: In this chapter, we are introduced to the race of the Mshm'm'm, who are trying to conquer the entire galaxy; at a conference of their leaders it becomes apparent that the thunderstorm was an attack carried out by them to destroy the green layer (which they call 'styrxis'), which somehow seems to be interfering with their plans. They intend to collect and examine the remains of the Solaris and her crew.

Chapter 7: Tim and his humanoid benefactor search the Solaris's wreckage for usable parts. When they find the steering console more or less in one part and the humanoid touches the controls as if he were intimately acquainted with their handling, Tim, on the strength of his opinion that apart from him there has been only one other person with this knowledge (viz., his friend Ken, left behind at Cape Canaveral two thousand million years ago), begins to call the humanoid 'Ken'.

Chapter 8: Tim teaches the humanoid that his name is Ken and they exchange a few vocabulary lessons, but he cannot entirely convince Ken that they are friends until Astro supplies the needed word. It appears that the planet's inhabitants have implanted a language chip into Astro, and the robot dog becomes their interpreter. Ken leads Tim into the inhabitants' subterranean dwellings, where they are feasted and treated to a theatrical performance that shows the history of the valley as the destruction of a primeval paradisiacal state through a devastating extra-planetary attack followed by several more attacks; in the intervals between these, the green layer (known as 'Komogdon') seems to represent the principle of life attempting to reconquer the valley. The performance concludes with Tim's arrival on the planet and the latest attack.

Chapter 9: Ken informs Tim that other locations on the planet have not been attacked yet, entertains him of the Komogdon's mysterious, wisdom-inducing properties (it seems that it was analysed as both God and a silicon-argon compound by Tim's technology) and the inhabitants' sub-nanotechnology that enables them to produce inorganic food, and introduces him to his light-sabre (powered by mental concentration) and his edible fuel called 'spomon'. They are attacked by four Mshm'm'm scouts, Ken killing two of them, Astro one and Tim knocking the fourth one out. After this episode, the inhabitants (referred to as 'Little Beings' by Ken) offer them subterranean refuge.

Chapter 10: This is a little excursus on a creature named Ytatong on an entirely different planet, who has invented something known as a 'plasmation aura' that surrounds him and vaporises everything it comes into contact with. Ytatong uses his plasmation aura to chastise traffic offenders that cross his way, mostly by moving right through them; since no-one is privy to his secret, an attempt to prosecute him is unsuccessful.

Chapter 11: The Little Beings interrogate the attacker (incarcerated behind a light barrier), but instead of answering any questions, he writhes and finally collapses, cut to pieces by the barrier. All the Little Beings were able to ascertain is his species and his home planet, which they show Tim on a three-dimensional, zoomable map of the galaxy. Ken informs Tim that the Komogdon can transmit information instantaneously, regardless of time and space, and that its contrariety for would-be conquerors consists in precisely this ability to warn of impending conquests. He puts the Mshm'm'm's increasing unsuccessfulness down to the fact that more and more species seem able to make use of the information provided by the Komogdon. The Little Beings provide Tim, as they have Ken, with a camouflaged suite of rooms on the planet surface, equipped with an escape tunnel and a communication screen, to house him and the salvaged wreckage of the Solaris.

Chapter 12: Ken (whose real name, we learn, is Kahiri) introduces Tim to his wife Kostara and his son Potamon, who is twelve years old but infant-sized because he suffers from a mysterious disease that, among many other things, retards his growth. Potamon cannot do much except be one with the universe and utter portentous dicta that Ken writes down in the Book of his People, because Potamon is the reigning Chosen One – somebody too weak to live and too strong to die whose task it is to dictate eternal verities to be written down in the Book until his successor arrives. The Book also says that Ken's people exist to wait for the arrival of someone who will come from space to be the eternal friend of the Chosen One's father, which seems to have just happened. We also learn more about the Komogdon: it enables Potamon to be one with the universe and, in the face of constant attacks, it has morphed into another form that inhabits people's bodies – giving them a tinge of green in the process (Ken, his family and the Little Beings are all greenish).

Chapter 13: This chapter takes us back to Ytatong, the plasmation aura freak of Planet X, who has succeeded in emptying the streets of transport and even pedestrians. Although not proven guilty, he is declared a public enemy, and after several disastrous attempts to arrest him, he retires to the countryside. Somehow the Mshm'm'm find out about his case.

Chapter 14: Learning that Tim and Kostara have had nightmares about attacking serpents, Ken suggests that it may be an emergency call transmitted by the Komogdon. Potamon counsels Tim to learn to understand the Komogdon and become a 'master' – and indeed, after swearing a tongue-twisting oath of secrecy, he is admitted to the innermost chamber that houses the ur-Komogdon and taught the art of understanding it. He comes up with a story about the serpent-like Quorrs and their desire to obliterate the flounder-shaped Quonks on a far-away planet and succeeds in telepathically suggesting to the Quonks a remedy that foils the next Quorr attack.

Chapter 15: The Mshm'm'm capture Ytatong, imprisoning him in a laser cage, and take him to successful coup leader Gnox'x, who dragoons him (laser-based, of course) into submission and orders him to destroy the Komogdon and the other inhabitants of the planet Nemzesval.

Chapter 16: In this chapter we discover that Ken has learnt to speak English and that one of the Little Beings, a Prof. Fsshtprk, has developed a method of storing Komogdon-transmitted information on data carriers and reproduce it like a film. Thanks to this invention, the assembled audience are treated to a 'time film' featuring Tim's arrival in the Solaris which is then wound back to present the past.

Chapter 17: Prof. Fsshtprk has wound back the film until the take-off of the Solaris on Earth, and the audience follow her adventurous journey until her arrival in the target solar system, where the sun, suddenly turned unstable, hurls her out on a new course. Prof. Fsshtprk then shows them the terrestrial Ken's reaction (Ken was Tim's best friend) and fast-forwards through technological advances, war and the subsequent loss of civilisation until the final disappearance of humankind.

Chapter 18: Tim shrewdly conjectures that the Komogdon has taught Ken English, and he learns not only Ken's language but also that of the Little Beings by meditating on them.

Chapter 19: Ytatong arrives on Nemzesval and depopulates Ken's village.

Chapter 20: Ken and Tim fight Ytatong with their light-sabres (light being the only thing that can harm him) and things take an unexpected turn when Tim, assuming that Ytatong has been coerced by the Mshm'm'm, addresses him in his own language and talks him into admitting his antipathy against the Mshm'm'm and Gnox'x. Hoping they will somehow be able to turn him around, they put Ytatong up in Tim's rooms.

Chapter 21: The next day Prof. Fsshtprk shows Ken and Tim the carnage in Ken's village on one of his time films. Ken sinks into lethargy, but Tim injures Ytatong and enables the Little Beings to trap him.

Chapter 22: An attempt to escape having failed, Ytatong is talked into agreeing to help bury Ken's villagers and to use his powers against Gnox'x. Kostara, however, vetoes Ken's going, so Tim, Astro and Ytatong set out without him.

Chapter 23: Failing to discover any body parts in Ken's village, they find a survivor instead – Adda, Kostara's younger sister, who tells them that a creature called Momlotpol buried the

dead. Adda performs a funeral ceremony and the dead speak through her, cursing Ytatong and wishing death upon him. After this, they set out on the return journey.

Chapter 24: The Little Beings persuade Ytatong to act as a diplomatic middle-man between them and the Mshm'm'm and suggest trade, cultural exchange and scientific co-operation. While romance is budding between Tim and Adda.

Chapter 25: Gnox'x informs the council of Mshm'm'm leaders that he is going to negotiate only for show, remaining determined to destroy the Komogdon.

Chapter 26: A very brief chapter in which Tim and Adda get physical and Ytatong assassinates Gnox'x, which brings his own life to an end.

Chapter 27: This is a very meditative chapter in which Tim and Ken brood on the follies of humankind and on religion on Earth and in their present galaxy.

Chapter 28: The moribund Potamon inspires Tim with the idea to take him to the Quonks (our old acquaintances from Chapter 14), who have a remedy for all wounds; the Little Beings construct a new Solaris and three deep-freezes – for Potamon, Tim and Adda.

Chapter 29: In which a huge fare-well celebration takes place, a terrestrial symphony is performed and Tim finds himself persuaded to leave behind a system of writing and give every single Little Being an English name. He also receives a relic that will enable him to contact the Little Beings whenever he desires.

Chapter 30: The last chapter, in which Tim and Ken say good-bye, the new Solaris sets out on her journey and Tim speculates that, since information is never lost, his and Ken's story may one day come to be written down.