(The stage is dark but for a simulated ticker display at the top of the stage—much like the one at Times Square in New York City. It lists headlines that remind us of those reporting on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Iraq War, or any nation where civil strife is present—news of deaths, bombings, etc. A large flat screen on the back wall suddenly turns on. The face of a priest appears)

FATHER
In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. And he split this ball of earth in half and called it home, and set one side in darkness and one side all in light. And nothing living could thrive at either end. But in His mercy, God created where the light met the dark a land that blended both, and this creation He called Twilight. And life began to flourish there, and prosper.

(The screen blips as if a channel has been changed. A TEACHER stands in front of a blackboard. There is a sphere drawn on the board, divided in half. One side is labeled DARK and the other side labeled LIGHT. There is a squared-off area in the center labeled TWILIGHT)

TEACHER
And thus, approximately 240 PreSpin, the Nardic race emerges here—

(She points to the twilight area with her chalk) in what is now Fortula. At first a relatively peaceful group, the Nardic used the stability of the planet’s core to their advantage, developing in a relatively short amount of time a habitually sound environment that required almost no effort to maintain. With little else to do, our ancestors spent this happy and prosperous time reproducing. That’s enough snickering. It’s not funny. Overpopulation became a major problem. And we know what happened next.

(The screen blips again. Back to the Priest)

FATHER
They grew lazy, and evil in their ways. And God realized that life without struggle would not endure.
(The screen blips. The Teacher)

TEACHER
They established in the farthest reaches of the dark a colony and sent their undesirables to die there—their thieves and their infirm—but the population continued to grow. So they loosened the definitions of crime and crippled, but still they couldn’t banish them fast enough. The weight of all those bodies in that small space shifted the balance at the core and the formerly static planet began to spin.

(The screen blips. The Priest)

FATHER
And as it turned, what was once dark became light and what was once light became dark. Chaos and fear descended on the land. And this was the first day.

(His face dissolves to darkness as the screen goes out. The ticker tape continues. On stage, a government office. Lots of chrome and glass. High ceilings. Brilliant fluorescent light. No windows. SENATOR CORT sits behind a large desk. There is a knock at the door. A young man enters)

MITCH
Captain Marcus to see you, sir.

SENATOR CORT
I’m in a meeting at the moment, Mitchell.

MITCH
(looking confused)
I’ve already said you’re free, sir.

SENATOR CORT
Then go back out to him, please, and tell him you’ve made a grave mistake.

MITCH
Yes sir.

(CAPTAIN MARCUS walks through the door)

MARCUS
Senator Cort, it’s good of you to see me.
SENATOR CORT
My pleasure, Captain, my pleasure.

(They shake hands. MITCH sneaks out of the room. He almost succeeds in closing the door all the way when SENATOR CORT calls for him)

SENATOR CORT
Mitchell.

MITCH
(opening the door again)
Yes sir?

SENATOR CORT
We’ll talk later.

MITCH
Yes sir.

(He closes the door. MARCUS and the SENATOR drop hands. They stare at one another for a moment)

MARCUS
I came to see if it was true.

SENATOR
It is.

MARCUS
Yes. I can tell by the look on your face. You have no idea what you’ve done.

SENATOR
I have succeeded.

MARCUS
Sending Quinton to the Depth is not succeeding.

SENATOR
He is a convicted undesirable, the last I checked. A thief.

MARCUS
A petty thief.
SENATOR
A calculating one.

MARCUS
Call the transport back.

SENATOR
And do what with him, hmm? Send him to the Calaphon colony as the constitution decrees? Where he has waiting for him, willing and able, enough disgruntled souls to cause an uprising? This man knows the Constitution better than any, and it was not luck on our part or a mistake on his that he was caught stealing fruit cakes from a treat cart. The same man who we’ve suspected for years of single-handedly dismantling the gateway system finally apprehended over a confection? It’s laughable. He knew what crime would get him where, and he knew where he wanted to go. Punishment, as I’m sure you agree Captain, is not about appeasing the perpetrator.

MARCUS
The people know nothing of suspicions. They see only this small crime, and the severest of consequences meted out. The people think you’ve crossed a line.

SENATOR
What people? The Nightborns? They are not my people.

MARCUS
They live under your rule.

SENATOR
And they should be grateful! Things have been much worse for them.

MARCUS
Things could be much better!

SENATOR
Once again, the impasse. And it only took—
(looking at his timepiece)

(He walks back to his desk)

SENATOR
I trust you’ll show yourself out.
(MARCUS looks around)

MARCUS
You had the windows boarded.

SENATOR
(gesturing around him)
Even in the darkness, there is light.

(Pause. The Senator goes back to signing papers. MARCUS watches him)

MARCUS
Your son has been honored, did you know?

SENATOR
In what?

MARCUS
He takes the place of Travis.

SENATOR
(looking up, concerned)
My son?

MARCUS
That’s a fine reaction! You could fill this office with boys who dream of commanding the mighty Torches, protectors of the Bright.

SENATOR
My son is not marked—I would know it.

MARCUS
When was the last time you looked into his eyes? When was the last time you looked towards him at all?

(CORT does not respond)

MARCUS
Quinton kept the Nightborn tribes in line. In the Depth he is as good as dead, and with him gone, no one will rein them in. They are hungry for retribution. Their people are hungry. Given who you are, your son’s a certain target. Can you see now what you’ve done?
(Pause)

MARCUS
Call the transport back.

SENATOR
It’s not possible.

MARCUS
I can not accept that!

SENATOR
I can not accept your tone of voice! I can not accept the way you’ve stalked into my office uninvited and tried to loosen my resolve by bringing up my son.

(A knock at the door)

SENATOR
(barking)
What is it?

(MITCH enters cautiously)

MITCH
She’s arrived, sir.

SENATOR
Did she come willingly?

MITCH
Restained.

MARCUS
The mother?

MITCH
Yes sir.

SENATOR
Mitchell.

MITCH
(wincing)
Yes sir?
SENATOR
Have you just now accepted a position as Captain Marcus’s agendant?

MITCH
No sir.

SENATOR
You are still my agendant then?

MITCH
Yes sir.

SENATOR
Then mine are the only questions you need concern yourself with. Is that clear?

MITCH
Yes sir.

SENATOR
I will be in.

(MITCH nods and exits quickly)

SENATOR
If you’ll excuse me, Captain, I have guests.

MARCUS
They led her shackled through the streets? That woman?

SENATOR
What drama, Marcus! Perhaps you need to rethink your profession. I hear the Chronicle is looking for a gossip columnist.

MARCUS
My position suits me. And as your Captain of the Law, I advise you, Senator, to pack the guards. Word of Quinton’s banishment will spread like wildfire through Section 3.

(MARCUS turns his back and strides towards the door)

SENATOR
You forget yourself!
MARCUS

(whirling around)
Would I could forget myself, and the things that I have done.

(They glare at one another, no longer simply two professional men on opposing sides of an issue)

SENATOR
Trigarin is a scholar, not a brute.

MARCUS
It’s been my experience we scholars make the best brutes.

(Without breaking eye contact, MARCUS bows at the waist)

MARCUS
Peace be with you.

(He rises and exits. CORT is left alone)