

an epic young-adult science fiction adventure ...

NEBADOR

screenplay treatment
by J. Z. Colby

**A young ship captain from the stars
seeks his first crew on a medieval planet.
He has no idea how many rules he must break to succeed.**

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TREATMENT

The Nebador universe is a fusion of Science Fiction and Religion, without the hubris of human exceptionalism that usually permeates both. The Gods are in charge of the universe, but most of today's religions would have trouble recognizing them.

In that universe, mortals who live on planets have not, and cannot, discover the secrets of interstellar travel. Just as science knows today, "warp drive" would require energies too vast for mere mortals to ever handle. Our solar system is our playpen.

But there is a place in the stars for a few sapient mortals of skill and good character. The Gods maintain a small civilization on gleaming "star stations" to help with tasks most easily done with hands, claws, flippers, and the brains behind them.

ILIKA, early twenties, has just spent his youth working on Nebador starships in every capacity. Now he has his first command, a small "deep-space response ship" designed for long missions without re-supply. The Manessa Kwi needs a crew of 6 and can hold a dozen mission specialists or passengers. For training purposes, Ilika must find his own crew on a human planet at the medieval stage, and learn everything he can in the process.

The movie opens as Ilika lands and hides his ship in a swamp, taking only a small shoulder bag and his plain bracelet of many powers. Because of his origin, he will naturally remain a bit aloof, more narrator than hero, leaving most moments in the limelight for the younger characters.

In ACT 1, Ilika must quickly learn the local customs, with guards everywhere and slavery ready to receive the clumsy. He is befriended by DOKO the innkeeper and his family, but is also targeted by the city's powerful and ambitious HIGH PRIEST. Ilika attempts to stay one step ahead of trouble while looking for his crew, and TORI the baker, privy to all gossip, helps him discover the only place in the kingdom where spirited young people can be found.

After painfully making a deal with the SLAVE MASTER, Ilika tests his candidates and selects one innkeeper's daughter and 9 slaves, knowing he only needs 5 crew members. Doko's daughter SATA, the youngest at 10, has a strong work ethic and is good with numbers and words. Impish KODI, 12, soon violates the group's trust and returns to slavery. Small MATI, 13, has a bad knee and walks with a crutch, but is even-tempered and intelligent. Slender, freckled RINI, 13, has a mystical quality, and eventually becomes bonded to Mati. NETI, 14, is as pretty as a slave in rags can be, and is promised to handsome MIKO, 15, who craves to lead but lacks the wisdom. Large but gentle BORO, 14, easily understands the physical sciences, and soon grows fond of Sata. Squirrely and outspoken BUNA, 14, has potential but many personal demons to overcome. Sociable KIBI, 16, quickly bonds with Ilika and becomes the trusted second leader of the group. TOLI, 19, is nerdy and insecure, but shows signs of growing up, and accepts a relationship with Neti after Miko's death.

Ilika tries to educate his students within the medieval walled city, but the high priest has other plans, and soon attempts to have them all arrested. Ilika of Nebador, however, has done his homework and manages to turn the accusation around. The high priest can hardly get away fast enough, but goes directly to the king for an indefensible warrant.

In ACT 2, with the help of DOTI the witch/healer, Ilika and his 9 remaining students follow dark, dangerous ways to slip out of the walled city unseen. Boro finds his leadership skills, Buna is sorely tested by a terrifying underwater passage, and Mati must learn to ride a stubborn donkey so she won't be a constant burden.

Farmer KENI and his wife can sense the travelers' innocence. Shepherdess NONI and her animals offer an earthy life, and Buna decides to stay. Sata is challenged to find her smile and not blame natural events on evil spirits. THIEVES, who surround the group with clubs and knives, discover they are way out of their league. PRIESTS and SOLDIERS continue to pursue the travelers at every turn.

Rini becomes Mati's hero when confronted by a huge timber wolf in the ancient forest. Even the donkey must find its courage, and a curious fox's life is about to be changed. Kibi, holding the power of life and death, chooses to feed the starving wolf instead of harming it.

Lumber Town seems to offer safety and rest, until a forest fire sweeps through. Both Kibi and Boro must follow a mysterious voice and glowing orb to escape the inferno. The orb leads the group to MISA, 7, and the fox is led by a smaller orb to several orphaned fox cubs.

After re-supply at a farm, where Boro gently refuses (to Sata's delight) an offer from a pretty girl, the travelers trudge up the steep trail into the mountains. The GIRLS and WOMEN of a mysterious monastery rescue the travelers from a freak snowstorm, and after peering deeply into their souls, allow them to witness their sacred Aurora Ritual. Armed priests are hot on the group's trail, but are easily led astray by the women.

On the way down the mountains, Miko exhibits his usual over-confidence, misjudges a leap between boulders, and falls to his death. Neti grieves as they bury their friend, then continue the journey. She ceases lessons, and soon attaches herself to Toli.

After scouting Cattle Town and its slave market, the students propose to borrow Ilika's powerful bracelet to free the slaves. They receive a lecture about interfering with a culture, and a glimpse of the ethics of Nebador.

After final exams, the group comes full-circle to the swamp where Ilika's ship is hidden. Toli is disappointed that he is not selected, but Neti takes his hand, and with young Misa, they are an instant family. Ilika gives them gold coins to help them get started, and the 3 people and one donkey disappear down the trail.

In ACT 3, each of Ilika's 5 chosen crew members sees something different as the ship rises and shakes off the mud. After washing it in a lake, they are soon inside, wide-eyed. Everything is cozy and livable by human beings or similar creatures, with pleasant color harmonies and artistic curving lines, but nothing is culturally-specific, tacky, flimsy, or faddish. Although everything is clean, robust, and in perfect working order, it also has the feeling of great age and long use. It is truly a ship created and maintained by the Gods and those who work directly for the Gods.

A priest wanders by, glances in, and Ilika sees a training opportunity. For the next 5 days, he gives each new crew member basic instruction at their ship positions, while the rest (except handicapped Mati) walk into the city to buy supplies. Kibi becomes the steward, Boro the engineer, Rini the "watch," Sata the navigator, and to her amazement, Mati takes the pilot's seat.

Those going into town soon learn what the high priest is up to. The trails become guarded, and the shoppers must use their bracelets to get back safely. On the last trip, the way is an armed encampment, with the priests preparing to burn the "evil demon" in the hills. Ilika knows the ship is in no

danger, but with flames leaping up all around, he prepares a demonstration so his crew members can slip inside. Tents, torches, wood, ashes, and priests are sent flying away from the little ship in all directions.

Although the characters deal with mortal dangers all the time (e.g., Miko's fatal leap), the lack of real, deadly jeopardy in the Act 3 climax is symbolically essential to the overall Nebador story. This separates it from countless plots in which avoiding death is the only concern. The sense that the entire process is part of something vastly greater, even though we don't yet know much about it, will pique the interest of anyone with a deep curiosity for *what's out there*, and at least a latent religious/spiritual side.

In the CLOSING MONTAGE, the ship clumsily takes to the air. The crew sees the frustrated people of the medieval city breaking down the gates of the religious order. The ship visits several other points of interest in the kingdom (ocean, hot springs, Port Town, mountain monastery), and finally settles into the sand dunes of the deep desert to begin serious training in:

NEBADOR 2: Deep-Space Response Ship

The new crew members of the little starship are challenged on the ground, in the air and water, and in space, before facing the ultimate mortal test.

The nature of the Nebador universe is not fully revealed to the new crew members, or the audience, until the third film:

NEBADOR 3: Star Station

**The star civilization of Nebador is revealed:
few of its citizens are human,
and any misunderstanding could get the new crew
assigned to projects that will forever change the universe.**

With minimal necessary violence, these movies could be rated G or PG, depending on how realistically slavery is handled, and how much intimacy is shown in the relationships that develop.

This cinematic trilogy is based on the first 6 books of the Nebador series. Beyond that, NEBADOR Book Seven: The Local Universe and NEBADOR Book Eight: Witness would make good single movies, and NEBADOR Book Nine: A Cry for Help would easily yield a 2-part movie or a 3-5 hour mini-series.

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