

Gennaji opened his eyes again and locked them onto Karel's. He would protect this crew. Unlike someone else in the past.

"Let's get some nukes ready," he said bluntly. "And helmets ready. Just in case."

The helmsman nodded curtly, and he unstrapped his flight harness. Gennaji's eyes met Orynko. She bit her lip, then turned back to her nav console. *Hamno*, he thought. Maybe he should have just let her sleep in that one time. Last thing they needed was an emotional crew member.

He motioned to Karel, and they made their way to the hatch. As they exited the command center, Gennaji could already feel the Sagittarius turn. The navigator had done as he asked.

In the corridor, Gennaji felt his weight increase and stretched a hand out to steady himself. The acceleration had increased the g-force slightly. They had better prepare the ballbuster before they reached high orbit. The weapon parts were heavy enough as it is, even for two people in fairly decent shape.

He massaged his shoulder again. Back in the day, he wouldn't have had a problem with heavy weapons. Of course, Sergey hadn't bothered with ship weapons. The old man always said they took up too much valuable space, that it was better to board and battle hand to hand. Most of the older hunter captains agreed.

The newer hunters didn't.

After taking command of the Sagittarius, the first thing Gennaji had done was to remodel the cargo hold to accommodate defenses. It cost a pretty bitcoin but saved their butts once or twice.

*If she had done that*, Gennaji thought, *Lena might still be alive*. His face hardened as they reached the entrance to the cargo hold. Andrzej was in the middle of the hold, straining to push the rocket launcher to the access port. Gennaji motioned for Karel to help him, then touched a panel next to the cargo hold door. The panel slid up. So did the next three, revealing a storage compartment with suits and helmets.

He retrieved four of each. Then, after a moment's hesitation, he touched the next closed panel. The weapons locker. He withdrew three pistols. Two cartridges each. Hollow point. Strictly speaking not allowed according to international space

mining treaties. He hadn't permitted his crew to use them when they boarded the Artemis. In his eagerness to confront Riss, he had foolishly thought that including Karel and Andrzej would force her to give up at least part of her claim.

He hadn't counted on the Loonie and his cybervision.

Gennaji gritted his teeth and pocketed the cartridges.

*Not this time.*

Closing the lockers, he turned his attention to the computer console on the opposite wall. He checked it. The railgun needed another hour and a half to fully charge. Barely in time.

He looked up. Karel and Andrzej were still struggling with the bulky launcher.

Gennaji half-walked, half-bounced across the hold. As he reached them, the Sagittarius shuddered briefly. They all stopped and waited. Gennaji felt his legs strain under the sudden weight. The gravity had increased again.

Orynko's voice reached them over the ship-wide.

"Captain, we're in high Saturn orbit. Behind Enceladus."

"The opponent?"

"They've altered course to match."

"Hold position until I say otherwise."

"Aye, sir."

Gennaji took out two pistols and handed them to Karel and Andrzej.

"Just in case," he said. They nodded. Likely, there was no "in case."

Together the three pushed the launcher platform across the metal floor. Despite the rollers, it was much heavier than he remembered. But it couldn't be helped. They needed something to disrupt and confuse their opponents' sensors, even if the damned thing was near impossible to accurately target anything smaller than a space station.

As long as they could get it hooked up in time. Maybe even a neighborhood buckshot would work. The question was whether to hide behind Enceladus and take them on one at a time, or come over the top and try to get both in a radiation shot.

Either way, he favored their chances. Whoever it was out there, they wouldn't risk damaging his ship. Not if they wanted whatever rocks they thought he had. Which he hadn't.

They kept pushing.

After twenty long minutes, they managed to slot the

platform in place at the access port, which would now serve as a launch port. They remained silent as they continued to work. No need for chitchat. Save some energy and oxygen for the fight.

Karel fiddled with the port connection while Andrzej anchored the platform both physically with chains and magnetically with clamps. The rocket launch would likely alter their position, so Gennaji busied himself with preparing possible railgun targets. The Artemis was a new ship with a thick hull and strong shielding that made the railgun ineffective, but the other hunter ships were vulnerable. The Pleiades, too, if it came down to it.

He hoped he wouldn't need to go to that extreme.

It had been some time since he fought ship to ship. And that was in the Happy Hunting Grounds, not halfway to the Oort. But Bardish had taught him well. Despite his aversion to big weapons, Bardish had a patient, tactical knowledge that left a strong impression.

A smile came unbidden as he thought of the old man.

The first ten years he spent on the Sagittarius were the best of his life. Bardish, already famous as the discoverer of ditrium, hailed as the savior of the Lunar terraforming project. Gennaji, just another flyboy in the Ukrainian Union airforce. Bored by endless training exercises that seemed to serve little purpose other than antagonize their neighbors. Spending most of his free time drinking like a fish and chasing tail.

When the Union military cut their fliers due to budget constraints, he latched onto the first job available: piloting supply runs to the new Lunar Base. Luckily for him, the Sagittarius was docking the first time he made a run, or he might still be wasting his life hauling bean curd and anti-radiation skin replenishing cream.

Spend weeks, even months at a time in the outer solar system searching for dirty rocks? Risk his life for faceless corporations that couldn't care less if a hunter crew lost a member of two? Endure endless tubes of tasteless powder-based food rations and sleep every night trussed up like a slab of meat in a butcher's window?

As long as he was helping a fellow Ukrainian, as long as he was getting paid and having the time of his life, he'd had done it forever.

Until Clarissa took the Captain away from him.

He was next in line to inherit the ship. He was sure of that. Who else was qualified? Who else had been in the crew so long, besides Ildico? And she was a geist, at that time.

His lip curled at the thought. A geist, becoming a Hunter captain. Of course, he respected her skills as an engineer. And she certainly had the experience of the Hunt, often the first to identify which rocks had the best ore.

But in charge? Of him?

And Clarissa...

Thinking back, he knew even at the time that they should have left well enough alone. The refuge ship explosion. The debris field. Retrieving a radiated escape pod.

To be sure, the metal fetched a fine price, once they had decontaminated most of it. They could have had an even higher profit margin, had Sergey agreed to dump the escape pod and cleared more room for other, more valuable ship parts.

But he wouldn't hear of it.

*"This child needs a home," Bardish said. "We keep the pod."*

*"But Sergey," Lena protested. "She can always stay in my bunk. There's room. She's so small."*

*"No!" Sergey barked. "This is where she stays. For now."*

Gennaji's right eyelid twitched at the memory.

"For now" didn't last long. Just long enough for Sergey to adopt the girl. The pod metal turned out to be worthless, selling for next to nothing. They could have made much more from engine parts. Hull pieces. Even fuel tanks with holes that could easily be patched.

At first, the crew tolerated the girl. Sergey doted on her. He struggled to speak Russian with her, though. At least until her English was good enough.

*Good enough, Gennaji thought, to wheedle her way into the hearts of nearly everyone she came in contact with. Including Lena.*

But not him. He knew what she was doing. He knew she had planned everything. No parents, sure. There were loads of kids who lost their folks. He, himself, never learned what happened to most of his family. Even years after the East Asian Wars ended, when the dust cleared and the burnt farms and hollowed out cities began to rebuild.

She would never know his pain.

And then...

*"Captain, they're almost in range!"*

Orynko's voice. He snapped his head up and looked over at the rocket launcher. Karel was bent over the console. Andrzej appeared to have just finished clamping the rocket in place.

"Captain, almost ready," Karel called over to him.

Gennaji glanced down at the railgun settings. The moment of truth.

"Karel. Andy."

He paused. "Prepare to fire."

## 6 The Artemis

*"O God of the Trident, to whom rule over the restless waves,  
closest to earth, fell by lot, give your aid I beg, and grant a place to  
one whom a father's angry drowns, or allow her to be that place  
herself!"*

*The Metamorphosis, VIII*

*"...Love you. End transmission."*

RISS EXTENDED A HAND TO TOUCH THE COMPUTER PANEL, then leaned back in her sleeping cabin chair. Another vid message finished. The ping would probably take several days to reach Weng on Luna. She sighed. She hoped she hadn't looked as tired as she felt.

Flying over to the centaur had made her more anxious than she cared to admit to the Artemis crew. Her first capture of a potentially extra-solar object, one that might have originated from the Kuiper Belt. The whole way over she kept thinking of Sergey and the ditrium rock he caught. The one that made the Moon terraforming possible. The one that made him famous.

She desperately wanted the rock to be different. Needed it to be different.

She looked to her right. Barren, boring desktop space. Compared to her crew's quarters, hers was spartan. Where they had objects that reminded them of home — photos of family, books given by relatives and friends, even freeze-dried flowers — she had practically nothing.

No family. Save Sergey. But he disliked photos, especially of himself.

So instead of a photo, she had a doll, a *motanka*. Given to

her on her sixth birthday, to protect her. Sergey promised to find her parents. Or at least find out what happened to her parents. She couldn't remember if she'd had dolls when her parents were still...when she was living Earthside.

At any rate, they never found out what had happened. She barely had memories of them, let alone whatever dolls they may have given her.

She stretched out a hand and picked up the doll. Slender blond tresses, tied at the end with red ribbons. A black dress and white shirt decorated with bands of bright orange and light blue. Crown of yellow flowers.

A cross for a face.

Somehow, she couldn't picture a German father giving her the same doll. Her Russian mother might have given her a...what was it called? A *babushka*. No, a *matryoshka*. Wooden nesting dolls. Different colours, too. Probably.

What kind of people were they, she wondered. She remembered waking up in the lifepod, in the Sagittarius's cargo hold. Frightened by the large bearded man with the sad eyes who looked like her father but didn't sound like him.

The woman next to him who looked nothing like her mother but would later treat her like one.

Lena...

Riss sighed and put the doll back, gently, on the desk. She kicked off her magboots, lay back on her bed.

"Artemis."

The desk chimed.

"Play Beethoven."

"Specify."

"*Für Elise*. Medium volume, slower tempo version. In the style of Rachmaninoff."

The well-known melody did not really soothe her. But it did remind her of Sergey. And she never could decide between German and Russian composers.

Her body began to float above her bunk. It was dangerous to sleep without being strapped in, but it felt relaxing, for the moment. She lay on her back, in the air, looking at her hands. Stretching them in front of her, slowly. Henna-brown hair drifted. Ought to get a cut, she thought absently. The music swelled, repeated the main refrain.

"Artemis. Stop. Play Holst. *The Planets*, regular volume."

"Specify movement."

"Start with the second, then skip to the sixth."

*No Mars or Jupiter*, she thought. Even though most of her life, she'd been in the Happy Hunting Grounds. A lifestyle inherited from her foster father Sergey. Chasing rocks around the inner solar system, an independent operator living on the fringes of civilized space. Part of the fun of the job was that each rock was different, but really they were all the same. All variations on a theme.

*Like the doll*, she thought, with a smirk. *Maybe*.

She thought back to her last conversation with Weng, before the Artemis left for the TNO.

"The Luna Council doesn't want original and beautiful works of architecture," Weng told her, as they walked along the Lunar Sea, arm in arm. "They want inhabitable cities. Ugly, soulless blocks of metal and concrete, as fast as they can be 3D printed."

She hadn't responded. Just stared into the cold night sky. Why argue when the stars were so beautiful?

*Maybe the Council was wrong*, she thought now. Maybe simply living and working wasn't enough. Even for adventurous types like Sergey.

No, Riss decided. Maybe she was wrong, too. Maybe she wasn't an adventurous space captain, after all. Maybe she was just a scavenger, catching ice and throwing it at Ceres, like all the other scavengers with their junky ships.

"The magician" began. She closed her eyes and allowed herself to float higher. Spread her arms out. Tilting back and forth ever so slightly. The hum of the engines below the crew bunk area reverberated.

She was so sure that this rock would be different. No doubt that had added to her getting seriously annoyed at Gennaji. At least twenty-five Earth years older than her, but he acted like sixty. And getting worse with age.

But she felt time slipping away, as well. She had wanted some time on the rock. Alone. To really get to know this one, see if it had something to tell her. To see if she had chosen the right kind of life.

Just another ice rock. Nothing different. No ditrium, no special metals. More ice.

At least the landing and recovery operations went smoothly. At least she got some sense of satisfaction out of a job well done. With a competent crew.



Well, competent, if a little dysfunctional. Sanvi's skill as a pilot was still developing, but her martial arts talents were always beneficial. The incident in the hold a recent example. The woman occasionally bothered her, challenging her decisions. Questioning her past.

Lena. Sanvi was too much like Lena. Different ethnicity, same personality.

Was that it?

*Poor Lena, I'm sorry. I...*

Riss opened her eyes. She was looking down at her bunk, her back pressed against the ceiling of her quarters. Reaching back with a hand, she gave a little nudge and began to float downward.

Coming out past Neptune to chase a TNO always bore some risks. She supposed she should be happy they had scored anything at all. A pretty amazing catch, all things considered.

Millions of miles from civilization with an ordinary ice rock in the hold to keep them company. She sighed.

"Artemis, stop music."

Back on the bunk, face down, she stretched out a hand and retrieved her boots. While the crew was in rest and relaxation mode, she might as well check their reserves. It'd be a while before they reached Zedra.

She wondered how the rest were coping.



*"Munbu ngwekumbofambawo"*

*[It is important that at times a person goes on a journey.]*

*Manyika proverb*

BRADY COOPER WAS TYPING.

It was more difficult than he thought it would be. One hand strapped into the pad case, the other single-finger typing on the pad surface, all the while trying not to float away from the bunk.

Floating made him queasy. He would never forget the embarrassment he felt just before his first launch. The "training" he received in the weightless chamber prior to joining the Lunar geological survey team simply didn't

prepare him for living on Luna.

He lasted all of ten minutes before getting sick. All over himself, his teammates, the arrival seats in the spaceport lounge.

And it didn't get any better from that point.

Somebody should have told me that terraforming didn't change the gravity! he complained to his supervisor at the time. Didn't Lunar Base have grav generators, anyway?

But that was just an excuse. Of course, he should have known. He'd forgotten. In his haste and anxiety to prove himself. The youngest geologist ever allowed to join an extra-Earth survey team, just recently out of grad school. And from Africa, no less!

No, not from Africa, he argued. American. I'm American. That was just my mother.

They always shrugged. You UA people all look alike, some told him.

Asians. He just didn't understand them. But he knew Chinese scientists. Japanese. Indian. Malaysian. He needed to prove to them, prove that he was just as good as they were.

When the call came for a geist to join an asteroid hunting crew, he leapt at the chance. Without thinking, as usual. But he knew he could do it.

He hadn't figured on the gravity being more or less the same. Or the equipment more complicated. Or the people more...complicated.

The recalcitrant pad was proving adept at avoiding his fingertips. Irritated, Cooper tried to sit upright. Instead, he managed to propel himself tumbling head over foot toward the closed entrance door.

Letting out a tiny yelp, he cradled the pad to his chest to protect it. His feet banged against the door, arresting his forward momentum and pushing him back towards the bunk. Calming himself down, Cooper reached down with his free hand and grabbed a boot. After a few awkward attempts, he managed to yank the boot on one-handed. The boot touched the floor, securing him in place.

He laughed. It must look ridiculous. Him anchored in place, waving his arms and left leg around like a sea anemone.

He took his hand out of the pad case and pulled the other boot on. Sitting down on the bunk, without doing a somersault this time, Cooper thought back to his near-fatal

mistake. His first Hunt.

What a scene he must have made, that time.

He'd been so anxious about actually stepping foot on an asteroid that he had forgotten to set his boots. One step on the asteroid was all it had taken to push him off of the surface and onto a slowly arching path out into space.

Fortunately, Riss had seen him starting to float away and performed a daring rescue worthy of the popular NetStream vid "Real Space: Rock Hunters." She turned off her own boots, grabbed the cable from the ship's winch and launched herself as hard as she could at Cooper. A few bounding leaps onto the roof of the ship later, she crashed into him and wrapped the cable around his waist.

He was only free floating for twenty seconds. But that was enough time for him to ponder having to make the choice: either slowly suffocate as his air ran out, or open his exosuit for a quick, frozen death.

Sitting on his bunk, magboots now firmly attached, Cooper could now look back and wonder.

Why hadn't he learned his lesson the first time?

He shook his head.

A better question was why he felt so drawn to seek an outer belt hunting expedition.

Chalk it up to the exuberance of youth, he heard a former teacher's voice say.

He smirked at the memory. Mistakes, one after the other, in his doctoral studies at Boulder. Geochemistry had never been his strong point; somehow, he persevered. Even got three papers published before graduating. His professors' lectures set his imagination on fire. To see asteroids and comets up close! To visit the Zedra methane stations of Titan and see the ice plumes of Europa!

But far from the colonized part of the solar system, constantly traveling back and forth between the LaGrange points of Jupiter and Saturn, the Greeks and the Trojans, he was afraid.

All of the time.

Afraid. He had no idea the psychological rigours of deep space travel would affect him so intensely. The isolation. The emptiness. No up or down, left or right. No centre.

None of his astrogeology studies had prepared him for this.

He held his head in his hands and stared at the floor.

Why had he and his mother left Tanzania?

As a high school student in Colorado, he had never fully understood the reason.

"It was time to leave Dar es Salaam behind," she told him. "The republic is no more. The Commonwealth will not save us. Our future is with our brethren. In the UA."

He originally thought they were searching for his father. British, he had been told. A white man from a distinguished background. Maybe even a politician. But they only stayed in Brighton for a few days. Then Chicago. Then Colorado.

His mother had never spoken of his father's whereabouts, or why he had left. Cooper had no distinct memories of his father. Only that the man had not talked to him much, or even visited the house often.

In fact, the geologist realized he didn't even know if his parents were married or not. He supposed now it didn't matter. It was not something his mother wished to discuss.

"Study science," she insisted, whenever he asked. "Listen to the rocks. Learn their story. Their past is your past."

He did as she said. He studied. He got into his dream school. He learned. He struggled.

When he was chosen for the Mars terraforming project, his classmates told him how lucky he was. How jealous they were of his success.

But he hadn't felt successful, somehow. Always needing to prove himself. Like he was being constantly tested, watched. Judged.

Mistakes. His work was nothing more than a giant bundle of mistakes.

Instinctively, he stood and clasped his hands. The short daily prayer, the prayer affirming the power of the divinity and its grace. In what direction Qiblah lay, he had little idea.

*"...There is none other God but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting."*

He sat down again. There was no way to wash his hands in space. Sponging just wasn't the same. Directions were meaningless. He had even skipped the long prayers for days at a time. Saying the medium prayer three times a day had proven difficult. When was sunrise? Sunset? Where could he find enough space for supplication?

He was glad nobody had yet asked him to use a gun. Violence ought to be avoided; the teachings forbade the

faithful from carrying weapons or even using coarse language to criticize another. He came close to doing so, in the cargo hold, when the white Hunter captain insulted him. Almost lost his temper.

White. Was that because he was white? What about his own captain?

Cooper shook his head again and closed his eyes, praying silently for the strength to remain faithful. His mother had lapsed. She was now covenant-less. Would he join her?

Only his isolation prevented the Elders from knowing his crisis of faith. He dared not contact his family. Even speaking with the covenant-less was grounds for being ostracized likewise.

Yet the isolation that saved him also condemned him. Who could he talk to?

Riss?

No, she was his captain. She had enough burdens to handle, let alone bear his. He was resolved to follow her command. She had more than earned it.

Enoch?

He hadn't yet figured out the navigator. He didn't seem Hawai'ian, although he claimed to be a descendant of ancient Pacific Island sailors. And his name, Enoch, was Biblical, yet the man had no interest or knowledge whatsoever of even his own faith. Cooper didn't know what to make of him.

Sanvi?

Hm. She bothered him. In many ways. But spiritually, perhaps.

No. Not yet. He was unsure of himself, of his devotion. His own strength. He needed to be sure they could rely on him, before he could come to rely on them.

He hoped he'd done the right thing by adding the ice to their water supply.

The pad bumped him in the back.

He turned around and plucked it out of the air, where it had floated aimlessly during his self-recriminating daydream.

He sighed and swiped it on again. Maybe another vid binge would take his mind off things for a couple of hours. Good thing the Artemis library had several thousand hours' worth of pirated Net Stream vids.



*"Though one may conquer a thousand times a thousand men in battle, yet he indeed is the noblest victor who conquers himself."*

*Dhammapada 8: 103*

HATARAKI.

*Mugen. Mutoto. Muryō. Mushi. Mushū.*

*That which is without beginning and without end, without limit and without volume, that which cannot be seen, touched, heard, smelled, or tasted, but whose presence can be sensed and felt in every tree and every rock, every stream and every hill. Everyone and everything. Everywhere.*

*We are all part of it, as it is what gives us life. We are all connected. We are all aspects of the Hataraki of the universe, the universe aware of itself and yet unaware of itself.*

*Namu dāma.*

Legs crossed, right foot resting gently upside on her left knee, Sanvi Janes clasped her hands in front of her *tanden*, just below her diaphragm, and let out a slow, deep breath. Counting ten seconds, she paused, waited three more seconds, then slowly, deeply, breathed in for seven seconds. Hold. Three seconds. Exhale. Pause. Inhale. Hold. Repeat without thinking. Empty the mind. Clear the machine.

Sanvi had practiced *mushin*, mind no mind meditation, for most of her adult life. Her parents had initially disapproved.

Her father, a devout Lutheran, claimed it was simply her rejection of religion. Her mother, nominally Hindu but essentially non-practicing, said it represented an ancient, foolish attempt to recreate superstitious rites of the best-forgotten past. The then-college student Sanvi had mocked them both as sticks in the mud. What did they know about the Path and the Way? What did they know about the true nature of things? After her younger brother Aaron had died — asphyxiation, of a faulty airsuit during the move to the Lunar Base — they had no right to force her to trust their archaic belief systems. Martial arts and meditation had given her something her parents never could: a centred self. She started training as a hobby, then for health, but eventually it became her life.

Inhale. Hold. Exhale. Pause. Repeat.

"What's the point of meditation?" her father had asked,

sarcastically. "Does God talk to you directly?"

"There is no God," Sanvi insisted stubbornly. "There is no Heaven. No Hell. There just is."

"You think you're so much smarter now," his response. "So much smarter than your poor old parents, clinging to their old-fashioned beliefs in something better than ourselves, something higher."

No, it wasn't like that. It was not a rejection of an ideal. It was a vision.

"I don't understand," her mother said, bemoaning her daughter's martial arts practices. "You say you seek deeper understanding, yet this comes with all the kicking and punching and throwing of other people. You come home with ugly purple bruises all over. Is this Enlightenment?"

Sanvi shook her head, trying to clear the images, the words, the emotions. Peaceful mind, empty the thoughts, don't even think of thinking.

*Inhale. Hold. Exhale. Pause. Repeat.*

Another image floated out from her memories. The first time she witnessed the paired forms practice, the first time she observed the group meditation at a college training hall.

She remembered how violent, how quick, yet how graceful and fluid the motions looked. The poise and mutual respect, the utter confidence the sparring partners showed. Tension as the two faced each other, the split-second silence of staring, as if they could read each other's souls. The shuffling of the cotton uniforms and bare-foot gliding steps. The snap of the leg, arm block and countermove. The takedown throw and roll of the thrown, bouncing effortlessly back on their feet and facing off again.

She wanted that poise. Needed that grace.

"It is not a block," her *shidō-shi* told her much later. "It is a reception. Receive the blow. Accept it. Use it. Transform it into a self-expression."

After years of practice, first as a student, then even as a lower ranking teacher, she still didn't fully understand. The forms, the breathing, the mind over substance, the teachings.

Complete understanding remained as elusive as ever, just beyond her grasp.

Silently, feeling her *tanden* expand and contract as she slipped further into no-mind, she heard the words:

*Rightness of thought.*

*Rightness of speech.*

*Rightness of deed.*

*Rightness of mind.*

*Rightness of understanding...*

Her face flushed, her body trembling with adrenaline, Sanvi stood in the middle of the concrete floor, facing off against her opponent, a fellow *kenshi* from her biochemical engineering lab. Seconds into the session, Sanvi knew she could best the man. She was faster, her techniques were sharper.

A half-second pause, and the two moved. She saw the foot, then the hand, but she had underestimated the angle of the incoming fist. It glanced off her faceguard as she twisted her torso to avoid the blow. In fury at herself, she seized the leg and threw. Not waiting for him to regain his footing, she advanced, intending to pommel him from behind. He fell, rolled, crouched and instinctively raised a hand to ward off the next incoming blow. Sanvi came back to herself before she finished the strike and heard her voice.

"Sorry, sorry! Are you alright?"

No damage had been done. Lucky. Her face flushed again, with embarrassment. As the higher-ranking spar partner, she should have been able to better control her anger.

Shido-shi chastised her.

"*Heijō-shin*, Sanvi. Control your thoughts. Calm your mind. Accept. Do not think of consequence."

She struggled with the peaceful mind. A daily struggle. Especially on board the *Artemis*.

Her thoughts wandered to the cargo hold. Focused on the takedown, the confrontation with Gennaji.

She hadn't known how Riss would react. Only that she should protect her captain. Her friend.

There was no real need to slam the man down so hard. But she couldn't help it. She had seen his contempt, his arrogance, his lack of respect for her captain. More than anything, she had wanted to show that she, herself, Sanvi, was a worthy opponent. Not someone to be ignored.

She almost lost control. *Heijō-shin*.

*Breathe. Inhale. Hold.*

She remembered the first time she met Riss. On *Ceres*, during her stint with the asteroid ore processing plant. The job was boring. Uneventful. Filled with safety checks, routine



maintenance, shipping schedules and monthly quotas and computer log entries.

Nothing interesting for an ore transport flight deck trainee.

Asteroid hunting seemed exciting. Enticing. Much more challenging and eventful. And Riss was the first female captain that Sanvi had ever met. So sure of herself, cocky and independent. Even after she had learned about the accident with Lena, Sanvi knew that Riss was someone who could teach her how to become equally as independent and indomitable in spirit.

*I fall down seven times, I get up eight.*

But asteroid hunting turned out just as tedious. Flight paths and records. Restrictions on catches and retrievals. Standard pings and telemetry procedures. Seemingly endless stretches of empty space with nothing to do.

And hardly any space and time for practice. Unless the cargo hold was empty. Which it never was.

Practice. She had meant to go back to her computer programming lessons, the way she had Earthside. Before the move to Luna.

Before...

No.

Sanvi opened her eyes. Her breath was in disarray, out of rhythm. She pounded the side of a fist against the wall and heard a muffled complaint from the other side. Enoch.

*Screw him*, she thought.

Aaron. I still haven't forgiven them. Or forgotten you.

The tears came again, as usual, unbidden and sudden.

She wiped them away with the heel of her hand and hit the wall again.

*Heijō-shin*. Why was this always so hard?



*"And were it possible that man could outnumber the particles of the earth, yea, millions of earths like this, it would not be a beginning to the number of thy creations..."*

Moses 7:30

KAPOW! ANOTHER GERMAN PLANE ON FIRE, spiraling down from the sky, destroyed by a hail of bullets from his trusty

Hellcat.

"Farck you, Focke-Wulf!" Enoch chortled. His gloved hands danced in the air, fingertips wiggling as his 3D-goggled head bobbed back and forth.

He had no idea how long he'd been flying. *What an addictive game!* he couldn't help thinking, as he shot down a Zero.

It made no sense, of course, but the game scenario creator allowed him to populate the battle with planes from any country, any time. He could have included a Sopwith Camel from the first world war, or a Mars Warplane from the shortly lived Mars Colonies War if he felt like it.

But his favorite were World War II planes. Especially the Zero. How many times had he imagined himself saving the Pearl City from the Japanese invaders? Enoch, the hero, the half-Jewish, half-Irish Hawai'ian...

A stray memory entered his head as his Camel swooped over Diamond Head, strafing the dastardly Zero trying to attack hapless Waikiki swimmers as they sunned on Kahanamoku beach. He tried to push the thought away. Once, twice, his fingers twitched, sending burst after burst of virtual machine gun fire into the Zero's side. The enemy shuddered, smoke spurting from its canopy, and began its descent into the pounding surf.

He pulled back on the throttle and veered right, soaring over Nu'uaniu Pali, aloft on the wind that warriors of old would challenge. Jumping contests of bravery, daring the wind to push them back over the cliff, or failing in the eyes of the gods and falling to their deaths on the rocks below.

He let go of the controls. The plane sailed straight through the valley.

The hill of Kaipu-o-Lono on one side, Napili on the other.

Enoch's grandfather often told him the stories of the *piko* stones, Hapu'u and Kalae-hau-ola, twin goddesses guarding and protecting the children whose parents made the appropriate sacrifice and performed the ritual of blessing.

"The stones are gone now," Grandfather told him, when Enoch was a boy. "Destroyed by the *haule* who took our kingdom away from us. But the stones will return in time. And their spirits still guard us, even now."

But Enoch was not pure Hawai'ian. He was not even *hapa haule*. Not for the last time, he wished that his father had not been Irish-Hawai'ian, his mother not Jewish.

"La'azazél!," he shouted, tearing the headset off and flinging it at the floor of his sleeping cabin. He yanked the controller glove off and clenched it in one fist. But he stopped himself, released the glove. It hung mid-air, fingers gently bobbing up and down like the disembodied hands in the *Evil Dead* movies.

He sat up in the bunk.

Who the farck ever heard of an Irish-Jewish Hawai'ian?

From the Moon, no less.

A sudden banging noise came from the other side of the wall. Sanvi.

"Knock it off, Karate Kid!" Enoch shouted, knowing full well she wouldn't hear him clearly. Who cared. She hit the wall about once every two days. What the h was her problem, anyway?

He massaged the back of his neck, resisting the urge to stand up and stretch. Being born off-Earth had its advantages. Enoch's height gave him the reach others lacked, but it sucked to be in a cramped cabin on a ship built for four Earthers.

Loonie. Yeah, he was a Hawaiian Loonie. Who had never been to Hawaii, and never would. Not without a special pressure suit, complete with robotic supports so that he could walk in normal Earth-g. And who needed electronic implants to see, because the Moon's low gravity had permanently effed up the fluid inside his eyeballs. Native-born Loonies didn't have grav generator privileges. Get in line, local boy.

At least he could zoom-in. Only a couple hundred meters, but definitely a targeting advantage.

He folded his hands behind his head and stared at the ceiling. The vidgame headset floated upward opposite his bunk, gently rebounding against the door.

Another loud noise from the wall. Sanvi must have hit it twice.

Enoch shrugged. He thought she was cute, on first joining the Artemis crew. Fantastic fighter. With his Loonie-bones he stood no chance against her in a scrape. But the mysticism she got so hung up on was a major turnoff.

"Aren't you interested in Kabbalah?" she asked him once, in the mess room. "You know, being Jewish and all?"

"I'm Hawai'ian, not Jewish," he replied.

"But it's fascinating!" she persisted. "Elements are similar to Zen..."