

# Space Highway

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## The Awakened

### A03 ~ Flatmates

Monday! Today I'll get my ID-chip.

Full of energy, I leap up. A shattering sound of porcelain against the floor makes me look around...

“Don't startle me like that! Or I won't make you coffees in the mornings anymore!” Aia shouts and crouches down to pick the pieces of two mugs up.

“I'm sorry! Let me help you...”

I approach her, and, crouching down, I notice her blue panties peeking out between her bathrobe.

“It's okay, already cleaned.”

“Ugh... okay...”

I stand up just in time, before she notices me peeking...

After breakfast, we go to the lab complex.

Ralph's cheerfulness lasts until Aia shows him the digital documents with Mitsubishi-san's signature. He reads through them with an earnest face. Reaching the last document Aia handed him, it seems as if his ocular implants would fall out... He looks at us baffled...

“That’s right. Ralph. Kira has an assigned job, and I leave the lab-job. Now, if you are so kind, please sign Kira’s authorization and my resignation,” Aia says grinning.

With visible mixed feelings, Ralph signs the documents with his fingerprint.

After saying goodbye, we go one floor down. In one *office*, which looks more like a lab to me, a surgeon implants a nano-chip into my left wrist, it doesn’t even hurt, and loads it with my data.

“Do you have a cash card you wish to transfer?” he asks, and I hand him the pot-data-card I got from the ISTM’s simulator. “Wow!” He almost jumps up. “Recently awakened and already rich! One moment, please... Okay, done. Now you have your cash transferred to your subcutaneous chip. I recommend you to open a bank account. If you lose your left arm, you’ll also lose this money.”

I blink thrice.

“Ehh~ Thanks... I haven’t planned to get rid of it on the long run...”

“Very well. Last question, your address? It’s for social security, tax office, and company.”

Doubtfully, I look at Aia. I don’t have a place...

“Ah~ Yeah... We live together, you can copy the address from my chip,” she says. “And, by the way, copy the key to the apartment as well.”

“Okay. In that case, sign here...”

The surgeon hands her a small tablet-like gadget, and she signs the authorization with her fingerprint.

“Aia, are you sure?” I ask her baffled.

“*Hm.*” She nods. “You don’t have a place anyway, nor the money for the rent. And it doesn’t bother me having you in for a while.” The surgeon looks at us puzzled. “This money,” she says pointing at my recently implanted ID-chip, “is for your Falcon, isn’t it?”

“Uhh~ Yeah... But—”

“No buts. For now, you stay at my place.”

I sigh in defeat. “If you insist...”

But, honestly, right now I am relieved that I don't have to look for a place to stay. And once I get my truck, I'll simply live in it, no big deal.

Quite happy with my conclusion, I add, "Thanks, Aia."

"*Fufu~*" she giggles and hums happily in affirmation, "*Hm~*"

We flit out of the lab-complex on her bike. What the hell is this woman thinking?

We have lunch at a restaurant with an impressive view. All New Angeles lies at our feet, no wonder it's called *Sky Pod*. And the food is quite delicious.

"So this is the New American food... tastes great!"

"I'm glad you like it." She smiles. "Your dish is a specialty of this restaurant, its ingredients come from various galaxies. Nowadays, most Gaian ingredients are only used in the Old-Style dishes."

We finish the lunch with a dessert from a galaxy far, far away, its name seems unpronounceable... I only know it's absolutely delicious...

"What's the plan now? I mean all the stuff I have to prepare for..."

"Hmm~ We should buy the piloting theory book you have to study. We know that the practical part won't be an issue for you. Later on, we'll visit Kim and Kite, to see how they're doing on your Falcon, but it will surely take them some days more... Especially, if you want to add some of your stuff from the twenty-first century."

"Yeah, you're right. I still have to go to the museum to get them."

"What do you want to get?" Aia asks intrigued.

"You'll see, antiquities," I laugh.

Aia pouts briefly, but her smile comes back while she keeps on eating her delicious dessert.

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In the afternoon, we buy a DigiBook for me in a small *bookstore*. It's a gadget to read digital books and is foldable from a standard paper-sheet size to a credit-card size, a credit card from my times...

Aia shows me how to buy and download the digital piloting theory book from the device. Impressive... I've seen eBook-readers before, but this...

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Later on, we confirm that Kim and Kite will need several days more to finish my truck. That's okay. I like their progress... it begins to have the feel of being my Falcon.

Kite chats with me about the colors she's planning to use on the graffiti and asks for my approval.

"Okay, just perfect. Great work, girls," I laugh.

Aia and I leave pleased with the results.

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«Do you like a coffee?» asks Aia through the comm-system of the helmets.

«Yeah, where are we going? To the MaryQueens?»

«No... let's go to a quieter place. They won't leave us in peace, at least not until you're settled in. We're going to a cafeteria nearby.»

Aia hits the gas, and we dart away towards our destination.

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"It's not a big deal, perhaps a bit snobby, but they prepare an exquisite coffee. Let's go."

We get inside. Well, the interior design isn't really my taste... It reminds me of some of the *classic* cafés from the twenty-first century. And it's true, about being snobby, only humans wearing formal attire are in here... Most of them turn their heads as we walk towards the barista behind the counter, their faces show absolute disdain at our presence.

“Just ignore them, they think they are the best, in who-knows-what,” tell Aia ignoring them. Reaching the counter, Aia greets the barista, “How do you do John? Is business good?”

“Hello, Aia. It truly is,” the barista greets back. “Who is the lad accompanying you? Your boyfriend?”

“No, no... He’s my flatmate and coworker, Kira.”

“Pleased to meet you, sir.” He nods and smiles.

“Likewise,” I greet him.

“Please prepare two cups of your best coffee, John,” Aia says with a cute smile on her lips.

“Right away, please take a seat,” he confirms with a nod.

“Thank you,” Aia giggles.

This barista has an incredible resemblance with John Lennon in his later years. Could he be a descendant? We take a seat on the barstools at the counter.

John prepares our coffees with utmost care. First, he selects the grains by hand, then he crushes them in a grinder and fills the powder into a curiously designed glass coffee-brewer. He switches a burner underneath the brewer on, and the coffee slowly begins to boil. After some time, the fresh coffee dribbles through glass-tubes into our two cups.

“I hope you enjoy it,” he says serving us the two delicate porcelain cups.

We thank, and I take a sip from the hot steamy brew...

“*Oishiii!*” I cry out. “It’s absolutely delicious. The best coffee I’ve had in centuries! The best, without a doubt...”

“I am flattered by your liking, sir.” John bows pleased.

“Truly, Kira...” giggles Aia. “You can’t take the expression *in centuries* light anymore. It’s literal... more than a thousand years...”

Our laughs resound inside the coffee-shop, and the rest of the clients look at us annoyed.

“What do you mean?” asks John intrigued.

Aia tells him briefly my story.

Finally, he also laughs.

“In that case, I am delighted you had your best coffee in a thousand years here...” he adds.

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After a pleasant chat with John and enjoying his delicious coffee, we flit towards Aia’s apartment. There, we get some backpacks and sacks, and *fly* to the museum in her *car*.

“What do we do? Go directly to the director?” asks Aia stepping into the vast building.

“No, Aia. If possible, I’d like to wander through the museum a bit. Even if it seems boring, I’d love to have a brief overview of what I’ve missed...”

“Okay, I’ll guide you,” she smiles.

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Three hours pass swiftly by while I’m getting an update... Too much to see... I’ll need more time to absorb that much information. We only are able to watch a highly condensed history animation and snippets of info... A thousand years is a lot of time. At least, I get an idea... Two world wars, if I understood it right, alien contact, the expansion into space... too much happened... I have to come here again, with way more time to spare...

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“Come in, come in...” The museum’s director receives us happily. “Welcome, miss Asdiekx, mister Matsumoto. I suppose you came to retrieve the objects you mentioned the other day?”

“Yes...” I nod.

“Okay, I will accompany you.”

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We reach the place where my old Falcon rests. It’s still beautiful. I climb up and open the door to the cab... Hmm... the lock was forced... I hope there is still some of my stuff inside...

I look down and see Aia and director observing my actions with great interest.

“Come on, climb up. I’ll show you how this baby from the twentieth century works,” I tell them.

Aia and the director’s faces glow and climb onto the passenger seats.

“Ah~ so many memories...” I sigh.

Aia looks around with curiosity.

“How do these machines work? I’ve only seen them in old movies...” she says intrigued.

“Actually, it’s quite simple, Aia. Look...” Both pay attention with great interest as I explain to them how it is, or was, to drive an eight-wheeler. “... quite simple, isn't it?”

Aia hums impressed, “*Hm~* Yeah, it seems quite easy. Even so, there’s a lot I miss on the dashboard...”

“Yeah... We hadn’t had all the advanced technology as you have nowadays. That’s why I still prefer to do certain things the old-fashioned way...” I laugh.

“And what do you want to take out of here? I can’t find value nor make sense of most of the things in here...” says Aia looking around.

“Yeah, I bet,” I chuckle. “Most in here are mostly objects with sentimental value. I’ll take my *vintage* toolbox with me, it saved my Falcon and me several times. And my CD and MP3 player, and all my original discs...”

Aia’s eyes widen. “You mean those archaic music playback systems? But we have way better systems nowadays...”

“I believe you, Aia. But these discs did cost me big bucks. Besides, it’s my favorite music,” I laugh.

In a few minutes, I disconnect the stereo with the help of my old-fashioned *vintage* tools. Many eyes observe me handling the tools with great interest. I hand each of the *antique* gadgets to Aia who scrutinizes them and stores them with the utmost care in a big backpack. The same with the CDs carefully stored beneath the passenger seats.

At Aia’s smile, I take the pillow still resting on the bunk behind the seats.

“Uh~ I just love this pillow...”

“*Fufu*~ I feel you,” she giggles.

She takes it and puts it into a big sack.

With some difficulties, I’m able to reach several books hidden under the mattress.

Both, the director and Aia scrutinize them.

“Woow!” he exclaims. “The Lord of the Rings, the original five volumes of The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, Snow Crash, Neuromancer... Such a treasure!”

I reach several paperback editions hidden in small compartments beneath the bunk. Again, the director freaks out...

“Woow! A collection of Philip K. Dick, the full set of Gibson... The collection of tales by Clarke... The complete works by Sagan... They are incunables! In such good conditions! Not in my wildest dreams, I would have imagined that such treasures would be hidden in this truck!”

Aia is also astonished.

“Kira... Such a collection of sci-fi fiction of your times...” she says marveled.

“Yeah,” I laugh. “I’m a sci-fi fan since I can remember. There was way more in here... It seems that what was on sight disappeared, including my movie collection, my DVD-player and TV set...”

“No way...”

“Yeah...” I look around then smile at Aia. “I still have my favorite books... Heh... Even my clothes have vanished...”

The museum director takes pictures of the books with an ultra-thin camera, it has to be camera... After each picture, he hands the book to Aia who puts them carefully in the second backpack. It seems he regrets now his hastily given permission.

“Let’s see if it’s still here... ah... yeah...”

I take a revolver out from under the seat, my good old S&W M29. Aia and the director look at the weapon with big eyes as I swing its cylinder out and check that, truly, it is still loaded.



“Is this a functional M29? Of the .44 magnum caliber?” the director asks stunned.

I can only smile and nod at the director’s amazement.

“Yeah. It saved my ass several times...” I confirm.

“Amazing...” he gasps.

I look again at the gun.

“Oh! Now that I think of, is it still possible to get ammunition for this gun?” I ask the director.

He thinks briefly. “Perhaps in weapon specialized antique shops... but almost impossible to find...”

I almost shout ‘fuck’ in the director’s face, trying to soften my language, an unnatural “Darn...” comes out, oh fuck! I go on, “Well, there should be one or two boxes hidden somewhere...”

And truly, I find two boxes, filled with a hundred bullets each, well hidden beneath the seats and the bunk. Both’s eyes open even more if possible...

Aia asks me carefully, “Did you always carry this?”

“Yeah, of course. I don’t know how’s nowadays... But in my times, I always had to carry a gun, at least in the truck. Many times, I’ve crossed not too friendly neighborhoods...”

She sighs, “It’s not for carrying a gun... honestly... But nowadays we carry stunguns in case of an emergency... Not firearms...”

“Oh!” Now I understand her wavering. “Don’t worry Aia. I’ve never killed anyone, only injured one or two. And for your peace of mind, I unload it,” I smile. Unloading the handgun I go on, “I’ll get a stungun as soon as possible.”

Aia sighs in visible relief and shows a beautiful smile.

“Anything else?” she asks looking at the two full backpacks and the sack.

“Hmm~”

I look around.

“Oh! Yes! Of course!” I take a small photo album out from behind the seats.  
“Aia, I introduce you to my parents...”

“Wooow...” Aia’s eyes sparkle. “Developed photos! Your mother, how beautiful...  
Is this you?”

“Yeah, when I was ten...”

“How cute!”

“Ah~ Better I show them on another occasion...”

Many eyes keep observing our actions...

She seems to get the picture and giggles, “*Fufu*~ Yeah...”

We step out of my old eight-wheeler.

“Okay, done. I hope Kim and Kite are able to install my music player in my new Falcon,” I laugh, then I say to the director, “Sir, once I get a replica of these gadgets, I’ll bring them and install them back into the old Falcon.”

“It is not urgent. It was a pleasure to climb into this truck, receive a masterclass in controls of an old truck, and come across such precious literary pieces.” The director seems torn between the things I take with me and the happiness of what I’ve taught him...

We have to make our way out through the crowd gathered while we were inside the truck. All my stuff salvaged from my old Falcon is well protected inside the two backpacks Aia borrowed.

After a long day, we reach Aia’s apartment.

“Try your chip out. Simply hover your hand over the reader...”

“Okay...”

I follow her instructions on the door’s panel. The door opens, just as it did with Aia’s chip.

“Welcome to my sweet home... or should I say *our* sweet home.” Aia smiles satisfied.

“Aia, thanks, but I don’t feel completely at ease with this...”

“Why?” She looks at me astonished. “You don’t like to share the apartment with me?”

I sigh. “No, that’s not it... You have just one bedroom...”

“Ah! That... You aren’t thinking something pervert, aren't you?” She smirks mischievously.

“Ugh~” I swallow empty, shit... “No... that’s not it... I mean intimacy...”

“So it is about that...” She smirks.

“Of each other...”

“Ah~ okay... Well, I trust you. So, don’t do anything strange, okay?” she giggles.

I sigh... I am grateful for her trust, but I am a guy... It’s difficult to suppress my instincts... Living under the same roof, with only one bedroom... without a *defined* relationship... with a woman as impressive as her... this will be fucking difficult...

I place my books and the other stuff we got from the old Falcon on a shelf Aia designated for me in the living room. Meanwhile, a rich, delicious smell fills the room. Aia is preparing dinner.

Finished the impressive and delicious meal, I take a shower. This time I won’t make a fool out of myself, now I know how this touch-panel stuff works. After the shower, I put the bathrobe on Aia lent me. A pale blue one, of course.

As I open the bathroom door to ask Aia where I should leave the used towel, she hurries into the bathroom with a big hamper, takes the towel, and shoves me out of the bathroom.

“Make yourself comfortable, I’ll put your clothes in the washer...” she says closing the door.

I’m not able to say anything... What should I do? I don’t have more clothes. I’ve got to buy new ones, urgently...

I get a beer from the fridge and sit in front of the *television*-wall. Sluggish, I zap through the zillion channels until I find a documentary channel. This seems

interesting, a film about outer space and modern space travel... Wow! There are enormous ships, just as in the sci-fi flicks of my times...

“I see you’ve made yourself comfortable. What’s on? Oh, a documentary about space travel, is it interesting?”

“Ye—yeah...”

Aia approaches wearing the same kind of bathrobe in the same color as mine and sits at my side... Her fragrance fills the living room.

Finished the documentary, from which I only understood about a third, she changes to another channel. It seems that the comedy club is still popular. We laugh for a good while, even if I don’t get all the hints and puns.

Laughing a lot and wearing simple bathrobes have some disadvantages... some might say advantages... They loosen slowly and allow to get a glimpse of... a generous, deep cleavage opens up from Aia’s bathrobe while in mine a tent forms...

In a hurry, I stand up and go to the bathroom to hide my rising boner. Aia still laughs while she follows me with her eyes. Why does she laugh? Is it the TV or about me? Is she trying to seduce me, or is it just coincidence? *I trust you*, she said... That’s why it’s a problem to live together in this way. I’m a guy, and a reaction like this is normal, but... I sigh deeply and try to relax...

Having fixed my *problem* and my bathrobe, I leave the bathroom and go towards the fridge.

“Want another beer?” I ask Aia who is still sitting on the couch.

She hums happily in affirmation, “*Hm*, I’d love one.”

Reaching the sofa, I find that Aia hasn’t fixed her bathrobe yet and still shows off her deep cleavage... didn’t she realize it? Ugh~ For some reason I feel somewhat insecure around her...

I reach her the can.

“Thanks,” she smiles charmingly.

“Uh~ Aia...”

“Yeah?”

“I can almost see your tits... it would be better you'd cover up...” I say a bit concerned while taking a brief glimpse of her exposed flesh.

She looks down, “Oh!” then smirks. “Does it bother you?”

Oh, fuck!

“Ugh~ No... that's not it... it's... a bit distracting... and makes me feel uncomfortable...”

“Yet I have lovely tits...” she giggles coyly...

This woman...

I sigh trying not to ogle at her.

“Uh~ yeah, No doubt. But given the situation we're in, it's distracting, at least for me...”

“Ah!” She looks at me as I open my can. “That's why you dashed off to the bathroom? *Fufu~*” she giggles. I look down at the floor as I sit again on the couch. “Don't worry Kira. I don't mind you seeing 'em...”

I turn my head sharply towards her in surprise, “Eh?”

“I'm way too used to wear about nothing at home, it just feels unnatural to wear street-clothes at home...”

Overwhelmed, I look at her.

“Ugh~ It's not about your comfort, Aia, but about me. You're sharing your apartment with a guy you've just met. You don't know how I'd react... You're telling me that you trust me, but I don't know how to answer you to *that*... You said you don't want any kind of relationships, and less something intimate, sexual...”

“Yeah, that's right.” She nods.

I sigh again. “I don't want to hurt you in any way, but if you show yourself off that way... you're arousing and tempting me... I'm a guy, and I'm not sure how much I'm able to resist...”

She giggles timidly, “*Fufu*~ Thanks for your sincerity. But this is my home, and I won’t change my habits. It’s true, I trust you, and I know you won’t do anything strange,” she smiles heartily.

Fuck! How can I remain steadfast in this situation?

I sigh deeply, “Fuuh~ Okay... you win, but promise me two things...”

“Yes?”

“First, if I go over the top, slap me hard, even beat me up.”

“Okay,” she giggles.

“Secondly, please don’t wander around too lightly dressed nor naked while I’m around...”

“Okay...” She nods. “I’ll try not to forget it. By the way...”

“What?”

“The same applies to you.”

“Of course.”

“And... I don’t care if your body, or at least part of it, react to me. You don’t have to hide it like you did moments ago... *Fufu*~” she giggles.

“Oh—Okay...”

After an awkward while, Aia goes into her bedroom, and I prepare myself to go to sleep.

I lie down on the sofa-bed. This is madness... How can I share the flat with such a crazy woman? I feel uncomfortable thinking about what could happen. I’ve only known her for some days... and I already like her... in fact, I think I’m falling for her. Me, falling in love? With an alien?

I shake my head. I don’t want to hurt her, I’ve broken too many hearts in my past... and less after all she has done for me... But if she keeps on tempting we this way, I need to find another place to stay. She doesn’t want a relationship, she doesn’t want sex... but she wants to walk around in the raw while I’m around... I don’t understand her. Is she testing me? So tired...

Ⓝ

“*Uuaabb~*” I yawn and stretch my arms. “I’ve slept great!”

“Good morning, Kira. I’m already preparing breakfast.”

“Thanks, Ai—aaaah!” Hastily, I cover my head under the sheets.

“What’s the matter, Kira? Are you alright?”

“What the hell are you doing topless?” I shout from under the bedsheets.

I hear her voice coming nearer, “Oh, this? It’s very hot, and it’s a beautiful day. It’s about what we said yesterday? Don’t worry, I’m wearing panties...” she giggles. “C’mon, breakfast is ready!” She pulls the sheets off, and I appear barely covered by the bathrobe... “Come to the table, it’s getting cold...”

I adjust and tie up the bathrobe, and sit in front of Aia at the table. I center my attention and eyes on the plate as I eat. I think Aia is saying something, but I’m not able to pay attention to her words...

“Kira! Please look at me when I’m talking to you...”

I jolt at her sudden stern voice.

“Ugh... Ye—yeah...”

As I look up from the plate, my eyes wander over the tits of my host, they’re just perfect! The perfect shape, they even seem to defy gravity... The same blueish color as the rest of her skin, quite big areolae, and cute nipples, both in a darker blue, almost light purplish... I force myself until my eyes find her beautiful blue ones.

“That’s more like it,” she giggles. “I was saying that we should go shopping, you’ve got only one change of clothes... I absolutely don’t mind you wearing only a bathrobe here at home, but you need more street-clothes. That way I’ll also buy something new for me,” she beams.

“Yeah... okay... perfect...”

My smile must look forced, the distraction is... simply perfect...

Aia finally disappears into her bedroom. Sighing, I put my clean clothes on. This woman will drive me crazy!

Truly, today's quite hot. I'll leave my jacket here. Wait... January, and hot?

"I'm ready~" sings Aia.

I turn around with a smile. Instantly, I freeze...

"But what kind of clothes are these?" I freak out.

"Oh~ This? It's hip," she giggles spinning around.

"Re—Really?"

She nods happily. "Yeah, c'mon..."

She takes my hand. Ignoring the fact that she, again, simply takes my hand, I ponder about these clothes... are they truly fashionable?

Reaching the streets, I'm flabbergasted... truly, many women wear something the like... a see-through dress which reveals a bikini of the same color beneath it. Aia's is, of course, blue. I can't believe it...

"This dress is *in* on hot days as this one. It's fresh, and you don't go around in a bikini," she giggles.

Help! How can the guys remain firm at this sight?

Happily, she hooks into my arm, ignoring my personal space again, and guides me towards a nearby shopping mall. She doesn't let me look around, nor look at the strange creatures I see from time to time. I'm already somewhat familiar with the catlike Felii thanks to Enya, but I see more strange aliens, and I'm genuinely interested in meeting one of them... But it seems that Aia has her goal in mind and ignores the surroundings, even my attempts to look around... Oh... Could it be because of her own origin? Being unique must have taken a toll on her. Does she ignore the ogling and observing people around her and centers her attention on her goal? It truly seems so...



We reach the clothing department of a humongous mall.

“We’ll find only snobbish things here, I don’t see you wearing such stuff. But it’s great for socks and underpants... What do you think of these?” Aia giggles.

“Ugh~ Aia these are transparent briefs... I won’t wear such thing...”

“*Fufu*~ A shame, they’re sexy... Well, there are others, opaque ones...” she giggles.

After buying several pairs of underwear, we leave the mall.

“Better we go to a retro-store,” says Aia. “Surely you’ll find there something more of your style. By the way, what do think of ’em?”

“Of what?”

I look at her unsure what she means.

“C’mon, Kira,” she giggles. “You’ve been ogling at ’em throughout the whole morning...” She cups her tits and lifts them.

“Ugh~ Aia... Where did that come from?”

“C’mon, tell me...” She smirks teasingly.

“Ah~ They’re perfect... gorgeous...” I stutter overwhelmed by her sudden provocation.

“*Fufu*~ Thanks,” she giggles. “That’s all I wanted to know. C’mon, let’s go...”

Dumbfounded, I look at her and follow the strange alien in silence.

After a good while walking —I kept silence the whole time pondering about her behavior and ignoring the colorful passers-by— we reach a store of only two stories high. An enormous old-fashioned neon sign indicates that we arrived at the *Retro Store*. Just beneath, the slogan figures *Find anything from the past*.

We enter. The first thing greeting us is a huge *Maneki-neko*, one of those luck-bringing Japanese cats with a shaking paw. Cute.

Once inside, Aia asks for the clothing section. The store is up to the brim of junk, seemingly working junk... from old turntables to iPads, from an old-fashioned hand-driven washing machine to hoverboards —real hoverboards! Like in the movies!— and anything in between... at ludicrous price tags!

“Aia?”

“Hm?”

“Isn’t it too expensive to buy clothes here?”

“Possibly... But I don’t see you wearing any other kind of clothes... Being the Phoenix, you have to keep your style and appearance. Don’t you think?”

“Ugh~ You’re right, but...”

“No buts, besides, the clothes are cheaper. C’mon...”

We climb to the first floor. It is full of clothes, more or less organized... by kind of fabric.

I scan the signs. “Let’s see... first, some jeans...”

Aia finds easily the shelves overflowed with jeans. At least they are organized by size. I get some and try them on in the fitting-room. Perfect, at least I have three pairs more.

“I’ve found the t-shirts...” Aia says and takes, again, my hand and rushes me towards said clothing section.

Too many of them... With greater difficulties, I find some to my liking.

“Perfect, now, another leather jacket would be great... let’s see, where is the leather section?”

“There!”

Yet again, Aia drags me through the aisles.

“Uh~ Kira?”

“Yeah, Aia?”

“Did you really wear this kind of clothes in your times?”

“Eeehh~?”

She holds a leather harness in her hands and looks at it intrigued...

“Uh~ No, Aia. At least not on the streets.”

She looks at me even more intrigued.

“Why not? It’s sexy.”

I sigh. “Because it’s a fetish attire for SM-games.”

“Ah! This was used to fuck?”

I can’t avoid smiling at Aia’s innocence.

“Yeah... Well, at least by people who enjoy this kind of sex...”

She seems to ponder and smirks.

“Hmm~ Would you put it on?”

“Eeehh? No! I’m not into that!”

She giggles, “*Fufu*~ It would make a great pajama. You’ll have to tell me quite more about the perversions of your times...” she grins mischievously.

I sigh, “Fuuh~ Okay, okay... but first I have to find a leather jacket...”

We find more of those strange attires than jackets in the leather section. But finally, I find one which fits me perfectly.

After another long while, I find a pair of fitting boots which are to my liking.

I keep looking around the store if there is anything I can use or, at least, would be interesting to have. Oh! A shaving set... yeah, I need that! And a nice *old-fashioned, vintage* manual toothbrush too, nice.

As I reach the checkout counter, I find Aia paying for something. She hastily puts a small bag away into her handbag as she sees me.

“What did you buy?” I ask her.

She simply tilts her head and blinks an eye. “It~ is~ a~ se~cret~” she sings happily. Oh dear...

While the elder cashier scans the price tags, she smiles at us.

“You make a lovely couple. She bought something cute for you...”

I blink and almost rashly negate, “Eh? No, no... We’re not a couple, just flatmates...”

“Really? Then you miss something out...” the nice cashier sighs, then shows me the full amount.

Fuck! That's expensive!

Just as I hesitate, Aia elbows me softly.

"Ugh~ Okay, okay..." I look at the brightly smiling Aia.

I hover my left hand over the chip-reader, and I authorize the payment of my new *retro* clothes, my *new* shaving set, and the *manual* toothbrush with my fingerprint.

We step out of the store. Aia is in an excellent mood.

The same moment the cashier holds me back, lays her hand on my shoulder, and smiles.

"Here, take. A gift. Don't dare to lose her, she's your soulmate, I'm sure," she hands me a small bag with a small box in it.

"Ah~" I blink moved. "Tha—thank you. Have a nice day..."

The woman waves goodbye happily. What the hell? She's making things even more complicated... I shove the small bag into one of the big ones without taking a look at what's in it.

"Perfect. Now you have good clothes. Now, other important things... You need a bank account and a terminal."

"Terminal?"

Aia nods and hums in affirmation, "*Hm~* This is mine..."

She shows a translucent gadget which reminds me of a twenty-first-century smartphone.

"Is this a cell?"

She tilts her head. "If you mean a cell phone, it's similar..."

"Oh~" I surely look hesitant.

"Don't worry, I'll explain it later on," she says smiling.

We reach a bank, it doesn't seem to have changed much in here...

“I’ve got my account here, in this bank. So it’s easier to make a new one in your name. Plus, as I recommend you, we both get a slight bonus on the interests,” Aia says.

“Wo—wow... Okay.”

Finally, after a whole hour, I’ve got a new bank account and have transferred most of my money from my chip into it.

We leave the bank...

I sigh and grumble, “Fuuh- This hasn’t changed in over a thousand years... just as torturous...”

Aia giggles at my side, “*Fufu*- Well, now that you have your account, let’s get you a terminal.”

Aia guides me... well, rather than guiding me, she’s dragging me, to an electronics mall... A huge mall just for electronics... Wow! These gadgets are really tiny...

“Kira!”

For what the hell is that thing for?

“Kira!”

“Eh?”

“C'mon...” she takes me by my wrist and drags me into one of the shops.

A sales agent approaches us... Wow... He seems—*is* an alien... His skin is whiter than any Caucasian human... Almost pale... His short hair is almost white with shadows of light cinnamon. His movements are incredibly fluid... as if he doesn’t have joints nor bones... Mesmerized, I inspect the alien man.

“Kira...” Aia calls me while I inspect the confused sales agent...

“Ah... Sorry!” I almost shout.

She giggles, “*Fufu*~ Kira... Ah, yeah... You’ve never met a Reaf, didn’t you?”

Ashamed, I nod and bow to him in apology.

“Uh~ My apologies... It is the first time I have met someone of your species...”

“Oh?” The sales agent blinks his eyes, it seems as if he has upper and lower eyelids... He carefully asks, “Are you, perhaps, an Awakened?”

Aia jumps in, “Yeah, he is a recently Awakened.”

He then opens his eyes wide, and a big smile appears on his jellylike face.

“Oh, in that case, it is understandable. I also would be intrigued... Ah, how can I help you?”

“Ah, yeah...” Aia giggles. “We need a personal terminal for him.”

“Great, this way, please... What kind and with what features?”

“Something like this one,” she shows him her gadget. “It has to be a sturdy one which endures the harsh work of a space-trucker. It needs to have multiple contact function. At least two, one private and one business contact...”

The alien man nods in his fluid, almost jellylike, movements.

“Understood. With such needs, we can rule out many models. Let’s see... trucker, you said?”

“Yeah, for the ISTM.”

“Okay. Then it needs to have data sync with the company and the strongest encryption.”

“Exactly.”

Silently, I follow the dialogue between the two... I’m already lost... I hope this gadget isn’t too tricky to handle... I’ve never owned a smartphone...

“Very well. These are the best nine models for your needs...”

“Great. Kira, which one do you prefer?” asks Aia.

I look over the nine gadgets lying on the counter...

“Uh~ I don’t know... I’ve got no idea about this stuff...” I say wavering.

Aia giggles, “*Fufu*~ Don’t worry. I’ll teach you how to use it.”

I sigh, what a pinch...

“Uh~ What are the differences?” I ask the salesman.

“Basically, only a few details... The system is the same,” the good alien man calmly and professionally explains. “Some have a better camera... like these three have one of the best quality, at a yottapixel—”

“Yotta?” I interrupt him.

“Indeed.” He calmly nods. “A septillion pixels. In space, you will be able to capture a perfect picture of most of the stars in view and to be able to zoom in at almost a few parsecs... and with the aperture of  $f/0.01$  and multiprocessing IPU and image stabilizer you can get the best and sharpest pictures of any celestial body...”

“I don’t get an iota...” I say overrun by technical terms.

Aia simply giggles at my side...

“These terminals have a greater storage capacity... These are faster...” he goes on explaining in detail the differences with utmost patience and calmness.

I still don’t get most of what he’s saying... Simply too much information and too many super-prefixes, yotta-prefixes, hyper-prefixes, pre-prefixes, and whatever-prefixes...

“Ugh~ So many things to take into account...” I look over the gadgets, pick up each of them and hold them for a while to see how they sit in my hands... “This one...” I finally choose solely based on how it feels and looks.

“Perfect, this is an excellent terminal. Then we come to the contract. Which company do you prefer?”

“Ugh~” Not again...

“UniComm,” Aia luckily comes to my rescue.

“Perfect. You are surely aware that it is the most expensive provider.”

“Yeah.” Aia nods. “But also the one with the best network coverage around the known universe.”

“Quite true. I see you are aware...”

“Yeah, we have to be able to be localized in any place.”

“Perfect. In this case, sir, please hover your chip over this reader.” I do as he asks and he goes on, “Perfect, mister Matsumoto. Can you please confirm that this is your bank account?”

My recently opened account appears on a small screen.

“Yes, that’s the one...”

“Very well, this is the monthly deducted amount. Please confirm with your fingerprint.”

Fuck! That’s hefty!

Aia pokes me gently.

“Don’t worry, the ISTM takes over most of your monthly fee. It will be transferred to them once your contract becomes effective,” she explains.

“Thank goodness...” I sigh.

“Don’t worry, I know all this is new for you,” she giggles.

I *sign* with my fingerprint.

Once the phone-contract, or whatever it is, is accepted, the sales agent goes on, “Perfect. Now let’s configure your personal settings. Once configured, this terminal only works with your fingerprints, voice, and face, but it can be set to accept another person.”

“Eh~ In this case... Aia should have access too, in case I get lost using it.”

“Okay, fine by me,” she giggles.

The terminal guides me through several steps I have to complete... It asks for the fingerprints of each of my ten fingers, to read aloud two long sentences, and lastly, I have to move my head around facing the selfie camera. After I finished, Aia has to do the same.

The calm alien male helps me through the complete setup.



“Let’s see... Good. Now your personal contact is generated. Your company will create your business contact.”

Finally!

“Great,” I exclaim and ask, “What’s my new number then?”

The sales agent looks at me doubtfully.

“Number?” He asks baffled.

Aia giggles and laughs. “Oh, Kira... We don’t use numbers anymore. We swap contacts.”

“Swap?” I ask.

“*Hm~*” She nods. “Well, officially, it’s called *exchange* contacts.”

“Really? How?”

“Yeah, I’ll show you later on.”

“Your contact is also stored in your chip, together with your personal data,” the Reaf explains. “All your data is continuously synced between your ID-chip and your terminal.”

“Wow...”

“Okay, that would be all. I really hope you will enjoy your new terminal...” The salesman smiles.

“Thank you...”

Wow... I take the gadget and inspect it in more detail. It’s uber-slim... less than a twentieth of an inch—ugh~ metric system... about half a centimeter, I guess... Its whole surface is something between four and five inches in diagonal... ugh~ ten to twelve centimeters, or so. With the exception of two small black strips, one at its lower and one at its upper part, it is almost translucent. Only the time and date is displayed. It’s funny to see the time going by while it seems to float over the floor at its back...

“Let’s eat something, and I’ll teach you how to use it,” Aia offers.

“Yeah, good idea,” I sigh.

Aia giggles again, “*Fufu*~ You don’t seem so much at ease with your terminal as sitting at the controls of my Thunderbird.”

“Uh~ This is different...”

“*Fufu*~ Don’t worry, you’ll get it in no time.”

We sit down on a terrace with great views over one of the city’s parks. Aia orders some beers and several servings to share.

“The best thing here is, that you can order these small plates. This way we can eat bit by bit as I teach you,” Aia explains smiling.

“Perfect.”

Aia takes her terminal out.

“Great. Let’s swap our contacts first. Put yours in contact interchange mode. Here...” She shows the steps to take, quite simple. “Good. Now just gently shake your terminal with me.”

We shake our terminals...

*Ta-daa...* »Do you want to add Aia Asdiekx to your personal contacts?« the gadget asks and Aia’s beautiful smile appears on the screen.

“Great,” Aia giggles. “Now tap or say *yes*, and my contact will be stored in your terminal.”

“Oh~ That simple?”

“Uh-huh...”

I look at the terminal, *yes* is highlighted with a green button and *no* with a red one, I say, “Yes,” and Aia’s smiling face flies into a kind of folder.

“Now your contacts are in here...” She points at the classic agenda-icon. “Just tap it or say *Open Contacts*. Try it...”

“Oh~ Open Contacts.”

The folder opens and shows all my contacts. Aia is alone in here...

“If you want, you can flag my contact as a favorite. That way I appear first and will come through even if you have your terminal in *Do not disturb* mode. Also, you can call me just by swiping three fingers in diagonal, in this motion...”

“Oh, cool.”

“Of course you can just say *Call* and the name of the person you want to call. You just need to have your terminal in your hand.”

“Wow...” I’m impressed... “How comes that it doesn’t react to your voice?”

“Ah, that’s because you’re holding it. As long as your fingers touch it or the camera detects your face, only your voice-commands are admitted.”

“Wo—wow...”

“Now try calling me...” she giggles and smiles.

I look at the *terminal*, and say, “Call Aia...”

»Calling Aia Asdiekx, private contact.«

Aia’s terminal begins to ring, a beautiful melody sounds, and she answers, «Hello Kira,» she giggles.

I laugh, “Hahaha~ Funny to talk through cell having you in front of me...”

«*Fufufu*~ *Hm*. Hang up, it’s the red button...»

I hang up. “Impressive... I didn’t hear you double... only through the cell phone...”

“Yeah. They’re very advanced, but it isn’t a mobile nor a cell... it’s called a terminal...”

“Oh, yeah... I’ll have to get used to it...”

“*Fufu*~ Don’t worry, you’ll get used to it.”

“Hmm~ What else do I have to know? It doesn't seem too complicated...”

“*Fufu*~ Yeah, let’s see...”

Aia goes on explaining more basic stuff about using this gadget...

“I’ll explain the rest as it comes, when you need it,” she giggles.

“Great... And what’s all about this double contact in a terminal?”

“Ah, yeah... Tomorrow we’ll visit the ISTM. There, they will give you your business contact. It’s automatic. From then on, if you call a business contact registered at the ISTM, the call goes through your business contact and is billed to the ISTM.”

“Wow! And if I call you?”

“Oh~ By default it goes through the business contact, but here... you can force the use of your private contact. Even easier, just say *Call Aia, private*. And, it can be programmed by time and location, we’ll see it when you’ve got your business contact.”

“Oh? So I can put it in business mode if I am in my truck or at the Alpha?”

“*Hm*, exactly. We will see...”

“That’s useful...” but seems complicated...

“Yeah,” she giggles.

For now, I’ll stick to the voice command...

.

We finish with the plates, and Aia shows me around the park. After a while, we sit on a bench, and she insists on having a look at the piloting theory book.

The afternoon flies by as she explains many aspects of the space piloting theory...

.

When the sun is setting, Aia decides that it’s time to go. I follow her silently as I look at my new terminal. Aia's happy face appears again on the screen... an image of her bare tits flashes through my mind... and immediately links the image to the SM attires from the retro-store and what the old lady said...

“—eers? Kira! I’m here! Let’s get some beers, are you up for it?” Aia brings me back to reality...

“Uh... Yeah, great, let’s go...”

We wander towards the MetalHeaven and enter the pub, it's still quite empty. Not many patrons are here at this hour. We sit at a nice table and order some beers.

After a while chatting about the piloting theory, Aia asks with a hint of curiosity, "By the way, what did the cashier from the Retro Store give you this morning?"

"Oh~ Now that you mention it, no idea..."

"C'mon, open it..."

"Sure..."

I search through the various bags I carried around the whole day.

"Ah~ There it is..." I take the small bag out. "Let's see... a pack of... condoms?"

"What?" Aia blinks thrice.

We both look at the colorful package. Bright fluorescent letters describe its content, *Retro Condoms*. We begin to giggle, and burst into laughter...

Still gasping for air and giggling, Aia takes the small box and reads, "The retro-condoms are manufactured with the same process used in the twentieth century. It will give you completely new pleasures in your sexual relations."

We keep on laughing.

"Kira, surely they won't be completely new to you..." Aia has quite a challenge to breath in her laughter.

Suddenly, she stops dead and blushes deeply. Ups... I am sure I know what she is thinking... The only thing I can do right now is gulping down my beer.

We keep on drinking in silence, only the music of the pub doesn't stop... »... *gonna give you my love, baby...*« Fuck... just the right fucking song...

Aia takes the condom pack, looks at me, smirks, whispers into my ear, "I'll keep it for now..." and kisses me on my left cheek.

Bewildered, I'm only able to smile as she sits back again.

"Another round of beers here!" she shouts.

“Coming!”

Another night in which I carry the beautiful bluish alien, plus many bags, on my back.

We reach *our* apartment, the door opens with its characteristic buzzing sound after I hovered my wrist over the front of the panel. And, just as I did some nights ago, I carry Aia to her room, lay her down on her bed, undress her till her underwear and cover her with a blanket.

I sit at her side on the bed while I admire her beautiful face. The living room’s light floods her bedroom. Her silky hair glitters in a great spectrum of bluish hues.

She sighs briefly and seems to smile, it seems she has sweet dreams... Her fine lavender lips slightly curl up before relaxing again.

She is so vulnerable... But, at the same time, she seems strong, really strong... Such a strange combination. What has she been through? A unique alien. A lovely yet strong alien. A mesmerizing alien. Carefree but vulnerable. I have the urge to know more about her... She begins to curl up in the bed, her face towards myself...

A true beauty... Mesmerized, I look at the sleeping beauty. I...

I sigh deeply, stand up, and go to the living room. What a disaster... I don’t understand this woman... She has me mesmerized... enchanted... And I don’t dare to go against her... Is it because she is an alien? Has it to do with me being in a completely unknown place? Because of the cryopreservation? The way she treats me? She treats me more like a colleague... but not... My head spins, the booze doesn’t help clearing up my mind... At this pace, either I fuck her or I’ll go crazy... I slap my face... I need a shower!

As I leave, finally a bit relaxed, the bathroom, I hear Aia’s regular deep breath. There she is, sleeping peacefully. I pick the bags up from the floor, place them on a chair, prepare the sofa-bed, and lie down. Each day is crazy, getting crazier and crazier...

What should I do? Honestly, I am torn... I want to be with her. But...

While I revolve and ponder, I slowly feel sleepy...

.

Dreams are tormenting me. Aia continually appears, the terminals, the piloting theory, the stuff from the retro-store, the gizmos we saw there, the SM attires, the retro-condoms, her lingerie, her tits... all mix together and become a chaos... Get me out of here!



To be continued in:

SpaceHighway: The Awakened ~ A04 ~ Space Cowboy Jim

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**Especially to**

**all the Aces of the ISTM**

- Al

**and all the Instructors**

- Ana del Hierro
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TL;DR:

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