

SpaceHighway

The Awakened

A23 ~ Return to the Space-Highways

“Kira~ Wake up~”

“Huh?”

I blink and force my sleepy eyes open. The first thing my eyes focus on is Aia’s bare tits. Now I’m fully awake.

“C’mon, breakfast is ready. We’ll be leaving for the Orion sector in an hour and a half.”

“Orion? Leaving?” I yawn.

“Yup, got a haul there, and you’re coming with me. Time to return to the space-highways.”

“Oh, okay... I’ve never been there...” I stretch my sore arms.

Even my new bionic arm feels sore from sleeping...

I stand up with the help of the crutch. Even if I am able to walk quite well already, I don’t want to overload my new bionic leg.

“How’s your leg?” asks Aia with a charming smile.

“Quite well, it seems...”

“Great!” She jumps up, making her perfect tits bounce. “We’ve got a lot of time to recover.”

“True...” I sigh while I sit at the richly prepared table. “And you were on leave for the whole time...”

“Yeah~” she giggles, also sitting down.

“Yum~ I really missed your breakfasts.”

“Thank you~” she sings happily.

I really missed this... A perfect breakfast with perfect views... My beautiful friend and homie baring her tits. Back to the celestial views, and Aia’s temptations.

Now that we have quite clear what our future will be, a strange tension is floating around us two. Aia confessed that she truly loves me and that she is almost ready for a relationship. And I also feel the moment is near, but neither of us knows the exact moment, it has to be special.

Plus, there is Enya. Yesterday I texted her to tell her that I'm out of the hospital. She promptly suggested to meet and sent me quite exquisite nudes... Of course, I accepted her *subtle* invitation, promising her that we will meet the moment I will be able to pilot again.

We step into the Thunderbird after having greeted Kim and Kite, and had a brief chat with them. The girls assured me that my Falcon is more than ready for action.

Aia pulls her truck carefully out of the CreativeTruck’s garage. Destination: Los Llanos, South American Union. There we have to fetch ten holds of construction material. Our destination is the new Ostis gate’s construction area. Ostis is a colossal mining planet for madranite with a significant growth in the Orion sector. The planet orbits around the star Rigel.

The holds are being attached at Gaia’s distribution center of the Space Gate Cooperative.

I help Aia as much as I can while I try not to overload my new bionic limbs. While Aia finishes signing off the cargo manifest, I already climb her Thunderbird taking my time.

Sitting in the copilot seat, I begin the pre-liftoff checklist needed for a takeoff from a ground port. Taking into account the special takeoff strip and the cargo’s weight and length, I instruct the comp to calculate the ideal power settings.

“All’s set...” Aia says entering the cabin. “Oh? Already finishing the checklist? Cool!” She gives me a peck on the left cheek. “Thanks, Kira.”

Jolting briefly from her unexpected kiss, I just hum in affirmation and go on configuring the board computer for takeoff from Gaia.

“Ready, Aia. I’ll call port control.”

“Perfect~” she sings happily while sitting into the pilot seat. “Thanks, Kira~”

I call port control, which gives us the green light to take off.

“All systems are green, Aia. We’re ready to take off. Takeoff ramp alpha zero-one,” I inform her.

“Thanks~” she giggles.

While Aia taxis to the designated ramp, I keep calculating vectors.

“After takeoff, set course on vector zeta thirty-three, then route G-56.19 to the GGC.”

“Cool to have such a great and experienced copilot,” giggles Aia.

“It’s also an experience to be a copilot,” I laugh.

“True,” she giggles again while binding her hair into a long ponytail.

“Takeoff power setting: twenty-three percent,” I instruct Aia as we reach the takeoff strip. “Max speed is set to Mach three point two.”

“Perfect, thanks.”

“We’re ready to take off.” I check the written instruction from port control. “And we have green light. Blast off!” I laugh.

“On it,” laughs Aia.

With the help of these specially designed takeoff ramps, we’re able to take off from Gaia with full cargo by sheer power alone. Without cargo, we are able to take off vertically from anywhere, but the cargo holds have not enough self-lifting power for a one-Gg environment.

Aia accelerates to the speed I have calculated just before the V1-zone, the area of no return right before reaching the ramp.

“All green,” I call out, and Aia keeps steady on her ground-vector.

With the help of the ramp, we reach outer space in less than five minutes, where Aia is able to accelerate to one-hundred Paulets, which is the max speed imposed inside Gaia's inner border.

I sigh deeply and relaxed as I feel the weightlessness finally returning to my body.

"Feels good going back to space..."

"Yeah," giggles Aia. "Very true... You won't notice what you've missed until you're back."

"True, Aia, true..." I sigh again while I light a fag and throw her my pack over.

She takes a cigarette and lights it too. While exhaling the smoke, she throws me the pack back. I cannot avoid noticing Aia's tits to regain their weightlessness forms, pushing up slightly her bodysuit. She seems to notice my ogling, her seductive smirk tells it all.

"Thanks..."

"Welcome..."

Without a hitch, we reach the Gaian Gate Complex.

When asked, Aia gives the system our destination route, "Betelgeuse, Orion." The automated system checks the destination, collects the fee, and instructs the gate number to enter.

Inside the jump, Aia sighs...

"So much traffic to the Betelgeuse Space Gate Complex... I can't rely on the autopilot, it would delay us too much..." she grumbles.

"Yeah... Seems so..." I sigh. "I've read that the whole Orion sector is in the midst of a construction boom..."

"True..." she sighs too. "Anyways, this jump has several exits. Surely traffic will be halved halfway through."

"Hope so..." I nod. "If you're getting tired, tell me, and I take over."

"Thanks~" she giggles. "It will take us about half a day to reach Betelgeuse. From there, to Rigel and Ostis without jumps, around a day..."

“Meaning, three days...” I calculate.

“Yup,” Aia giggles.

“Oh!” I exhale the smoke from my lungs and drop the stub into the ashtray.

“You’ve got only one bed...”

“Ugh~ Shit... true... and a small one on top of that...” She looks at me blushing.

“You take the bed, I’ll figure out something.”

“No, Aia. You take the bed, you have to pilot. You have to rest properly.”

“We’ll see when’s time to sleep...” she says blushing even deeper.

I don't think her main concerns are the bed itself, nor its size. We have slept many times together, even in small beds, like those of the hospital. It must be because of the uncertainties still floating around... I cannot guess any other possibility...

She takes a deep breath.

“Ah—anyways... I... want to sleep with you—ugh, together—I mean, in the same bed... cuddling. I miss it...” She blushes even deeper.

“No worries then,” I laugh playing it off and trying to calm her.

“Ye—yeah~” she giggles.

Aia keeps in the fast lane the whole time. Surely most space novices are surprised by the huge truck and cargo passing them.

“Fuuuuck!” Aia suddenly screams while the AR flares red warnings all over the windscreen. She reduces her Thunderbird’s speed to almost the half in less than two seconds. Without the seatbelts, I would have crashed into the dashboard in front of me... even in Zero-G...

“Fucking asshole!” she screams into the comm-micro. “Let me through!”

«Crazy bitch! Trying to pass me and my Z-600?» a male voice shouts back.

“Shut up! Motherfucker!” Aia swears. “Let me pass! Fly, you fool! Out of my way!”

«What? How?»

“Move! Make space for my Thunderbird!”

Aia pushes her truck up to a hundred meters from the sportster in front of us.

«Crazy bitch! Don't come nearer!» he shouts in terror.

I laugh while he changes lane hurriedly.

“Your fucking steam engine is lightyears away from my Thunderbird!” Aia shouts again and pushes her baby to the max.

We pass the sportster and his idiot owner in a few seconds with the whole cargo.

«What the fuck?» he shouts. «My Z—»

Grinning, I take the mic.

“Sorry, kid. The Queen's in a hurry. Next time you see the Thunderbird, the Falcon, or the Cheetah, I suggest you'll move out of vector. They're way faster than your expensive toy.”

Aia explodes into laughter, and I follow suit.

“By the way,” I ask Aia, “I wanted to ask you before... How did you get all the free time to be with me during my hospitalization?”

“Oh~” She blushes and looks at me sheepishly. “I cheated... Well, Mitsubishi-san and Yuuki are aware of it... I asked for a work leave due to a family member's serious illness.”

“Really?”

“Yeah~” She blushes even deeper. “You're my best friend, my homie, the one I've told most about myself. You're the person I most l—love, besides my parents, for me—” she halts her words, unable to go on.

“I—” I'm unable to say a word... “Thanks...” is the only thing I can say. I know now how much she cares for me, but to ask for an official work leave... that's too much. Not even Enya got through this. But in Enya's case, I can't blame her, she wants to keep our relationship hidden, at least the explicit one.

The longish and awkward silence is broken thanks to an incoming call through the Thunderbird's comm-system.

«Hey, hey~ Thunderbird~ Cheetah here~ Do you read?»

“Hi Enya, I read you. How are you?” Aia answers.

«Quite well,» Enya giggles. «I see you’re back on the space-highways.»

“Yeah. Are you inside the Gaia-Orion jump too?”

«Yup! I just saw your Thunderbird on the AR. Going back to Gaia.»

“Ouch, sorry... I haven’t spotted you...”

«Don’t worry,» Enya giggles. «By the way... how’s Kira? He texted me yesterday that he finally was able to leave...»

“Quite well, Enya,” I say laughing. “Thanks for asking.”

«Hi, hi, Kira~» she sings. «Also on the Thunderbird? Then you’re really well,» she giggles.

“Yeah, he’s almost ready,” adds Aia. “Today, he’s coming with me.”

«Oh, Aia, girlfriend...» Enya giggles. «You worry too much about him. He’s the Phoenix, the immortal...»

Enya... I sigh to myself. You were as distressed as Aia, and you couldn’t leave me alone either...

Aia giggles.

“Perhaps... but till he hasn’t fully recovered, I won’t leave him on the roads alone...”

This time, Enya giggles.

«You’re more like his girlfriend rather a homie.»

“What are you saying? It’s normal that I’m worried about him. I really lo—” she halts her words abruptly blushing deeply.

«Got it, got it, missis private nurse,» giggles Enya.

“Enya...”

«Ups~ Gotta end this call. I’m about to leave the jump. Have a good haul. And... good luck, you two~» she sings.

“Ugh~ Yeah... Good haul, what you have left... Bye, Enya...” Aia is flustering

“Bye, Enya. We’ll meet the next days in the MaryQueens with a draft,” I tell her.

«Yup, I’m already longing for it,» she giggles. «Bye~bye~»

Enya cuts the comm.

Aia giggles to hide her embarrassment.

“She’s as crazy as always...” she says.

Her face is still flushed while concentrating on the *road* ahead. I have to say something to break this awkward spell...

“Want a coke?” I ask Aia. “I’m thirsty.”

“Oh, yeah, thanks,” Aia says with a shy smile.

I unbuckle the seatbelts, float back to the living-area of her truck, and open the fridge. It’s filled with cokes, beers, and some insta-food packs. I fetch two cokes. Obviously, Aia can’t drink booze while piloting.

“Here...” I throw Aia a pouch of coke.

“Thanks, Kira~” she happily says catching the pouch. “Oh, you could have a beer if you want to.”

“Ah, yeah... But I might take controls. I thought it would be better to have the same as you.”

“Ah~ Nice~” she says sweetly. “Cheers~”

“Cheers,” I laugh.

The route goes on with some mellow small talk.

After some hours, traffic has reduced substantially. Aia changes lane and activates the autopilot.

“Ugh~ I need to move a bit...”

She frees herself from the seatbelts and stretches once she’s floating in the cabin.

“I can take over, if you want,” I offer.

“Don’t worry. Let’s see what we’ve got in the fridge...” She floats into the living area. “Oh, fuck...” I hear her swear from the kitchen. “I only have insta-food left... I forgot to buy...”

“If we got enough time, we could buy something in the Betelgeuse Gate sector,” I suggest.

“Good idea, Kira!” she shouts from the back. “There’s a huge station nearby, the Yamato. I’m told that it has a huge market of fresh goods. We’ll have to settle with some canned *sadwiches* for now...”

“Sad sandwiches?” I ask back laughing.

“Yeah...” she giggles tossing a can over.

“Truly a sad sandwich...” I sigh opening the can. She giggles while I take a bite. “Ugh~ I prefer yours...”

“*Fufu*~ Thanks Kira,” she giggles blushing slightly. “I forgot to—”

“Don’t worry, Aia. You had enough to do. It still nourishes, right?”

“Well, yeah,” she giggles.

The exit-gate alarm sounds. Finally...

“Wow...”

The view took my breath away. Thousands of light and heavy space vehicles rush around in hundreds of precisely designated vectors. It's bigger than any other Gate Complex I've visited.

“Oh? Never been to Betelgeuse?” asks Aia.

“No...”

“It’s an important Gate Complex with many spaceports,” she explains.

“Wow... Do you know where this Yamato station is?”

“Nope, no idea...” She sticks her tongue out. “Let’s try this...” She takes the mic and selects the trucker’s public channel. “Hi~ The Queen on board the Thunderbird here~ Can anyone tell me how to reach the Yamato?”

Fuck me... Only she can be so reckless to ask for directions on the trucker's channel in the midst of a Gate Complex.

«Oh, hey! The Queen! Welcome back to the space-highways! I'm Crunchy, on board my Eternal Love. You'll find the Yamato easily. Follow route Beta-66 towards Betelgeuse V. You'll reach her in ten, fifteen minutes.»

“Thanks, Crunchy! Next time we meet, a draft is on me.”

«Will be an honor! I'll verse a poem for the occasion! Good haul!»

“*Fufu*~ Thank you~ You too~”

She grins and looks at me.

«Low Bow on the SexMachine speaking. A pleasure, Queen. Already got the vectors?»

“Yup, thanks~”

«Great... By the way, if you want to buy fresh stuff, I'll recommend you the local market. You'll find the best goods from this galaxy there.»

“Thanks, Low Bow. A beer on me when we'll meet in person.”

«Oh, yeah! Won't miss it. Good haul!»

“Thank you~ You too.”

«Hey, hey, hey... Long live da Queen! Heheh~» a familiar voice blares through the speaker.

“Hey Cowboy, how're you?” I ask.

«Heh! And da King! Long live both! Heheh~ Already outta here? How's yer rehab?»

“Going well. They kicked me out yesterday. And now I'm here, with Aia. Just tagging along,” I laugh.

“Yup, so he'll get used to space again,” giggles Aia.

«Heh! As if necessary... Heheh~ Yeah, where ya going?»

“Rigel.”

«When dere, ya hafta taste da local beer, it's breathtakin'.»

“Cool, we’ll try it,” giggles Aia.

«Ah... Could ya bring ma some cans? Donna have no haul dere for da next few months...»

“*Fufu*~ If we’ve got enough time, we’ll do so.”

«Thanks, guys. Good haul.»

“Thank you~ You too.”

“Bye Jim, see ya.”

More and more chime in... It takes us longer to talk with everyone than reaching the place, that’s for sure... I would have asked the board computer...

Aia is in an excellent mood.

“See? It was easy to get the coordinates and the vector.”

“You’re too much, Aia... Yeah, it was easy, but you created a real commotion...”

“True,” she giggles. “Well, now everyone knows for sure I’m back on track.”

“Yeah...” I sigh. “Now that I think of... all truckers calling in were guys. Are there no girls around?”

“Need another one?” she giggles. “I’m here...” she ends pouting.

“Sorry... I meant statistically. It’s true that more guys are working as truckers, but—”

“Surely they are in other places. The universe is huge,” she giggles again, then smirks looking at me sideways.

Crunchy was right. After just ten minutes, a massive object is highlighted on the AR.

Its AR outlines look like... “an old Japanese warship...” I laugh. “It looks just like a warship sent to outer space in an anime I watched as a kid...”

“Oh, you...” Aia giggles. “You and your yesteryear’s animes.” She laughs. “Let’s go...” She calls to port. “Yamato control, the Queen speaking from the Thunderbird. We want a dock for a truck with ten holds.”

«Welcome to the Yamato, Queen. It is an honor to receive you. You have airlock Zeta-74 at your full disposition. Please, send your manifest and confirm passengers, if any.»

“Thank you~ Sending manifest. I’m accompanied by the Phoenix, trucker from the ISTM.”

«Roger. Received the manifest and—Wait... The Queen *and* the Phoenix? Both?» the female voice freaks out.

“Yup,” giggles Aia. “Both of us.”

«Wow! Wow, wow, wow... Two legends in one truck...» The controller goes completely fangirl... «Ah... Sorry...» Her voice changes back to her former professionalism. «You’ve got the dock for five hours, is it enough?»

“Sure,” giggles Aia. “We’ll just have a break, and buy some fresh supplies.”

«Perfect. I wish you a pleasant stay on the Yamato.»

“Thank you~”

Aia and I look at each other and burst into laughter.

“I’d love to have been able to see her face...” I laugh.

“Truly...” laughs Aia.

“Ah... By the way, how’s it that almost all controllers and many truckers do not use the video stream-feature during calls?”

“Oh~” Aia blinks. “Right... Controllers don’t do it because of the possible delays. More if they are good looking, too much flirting. And most truckers don’t do it because they think it’s distracting.”

“Got it, makes sense.” I nod. “Ah, Zeta-74... there it is...” I point at the highlighted dock. “At your left, six degrees. Down twenty.”

“Thank you, mister copilot~” Aia sings happily and proceeds with the docking maneuver.

The airlock opens, and we are welcomed by a huge, well-built female Wigmez in uniform.

Upon reaching her, she bows slightly to us.

“Good evening, Queen, Phoenix. I am Xiberz, in charge of your security.”

“Oh?” Aia looks at me, then at Xiberz. “Is this place dangerous?” she asks.

“Not really.” The Wigmez shakes her head. “The IPS and the management of the Yamato want you to be safe.”

“Then... You’ll be our bodyguard?” asks Aia.

“Indeed.” The hefty golden alien nods. “After the events in Crushmont, we all are on the alert. Besides, it is still rumored that the attack might have been against the Phoenix himself.”

We are left speechless. Yeah, such stupid rumors were going around, that all the mess happened because of me... which is nonsense.

I look up, she’s about two meters twenty tall, her face shows confidence, calmness, and professionalism.

“Then, thank you very much for your hard work.” I smile.

“Yeah, thank you, Xiberz,” adds Aia. “Uh~ Yeah, could you guide us to the market? We want to buy some fresh supplies.”

The huge golden woman nods with a polite smile.

“Of course, ma’am, sir. This way, please...”

The Yamato is chaotic. The zone we are walking through looks like a ginormous bazaar with many small stalls and some shops. Every possible exotic color and smell surrounds us. Very few Humans are around, most are aliens from species known to me.

“Ah~ Keep at my side, Kira,” Aia says and hooks into my arm.

“Huh?” I look at her dumbfounded. She always hooked into my arm when walking around. Why is it different this time?

“We’re in an alien area. You’re standing out too much. Better you keep near me.”

“Why?” I ask her confused.

“Ah~ It—well...” Aia blushes deeply.

Xiberz smiles.

“Above all, so that no alien girl pesters you. If you are a bit intimate with another alien girl, they will leave you in pace.”

“Wow...” I look at the hefty, golden woman speechless.

Aia does not simply hold on me, she pushes her body against mine, her right tit presses against my new bionic arm.

“Many poor families live here,” explains our bodyguard. “Many girls try to seduce a wealthy man and make him take them with him, including the whole family, obviously. They also target truckers, known to have enough money to do so. It also goes for guys seducing visitors. Actually, they try to seduce men or women alike. Most don’t care about sexual orientation, some even force themselves into one they are not, just to be able to leave... This happens in many stations near Space Gate Complexes, but here it is a bit extreme.

“They are not doing anything wrong, law-wise. Neither do they force you nor use intimidation. They use their looks and bodies to get what they want. Again, that applies to both guys and girls.

“But... being you with the Queen, you don’t have to worry. Her figure surpasses any of them.”

Aia blushes slightly at Xiberz’ words while she holds on me tightly. Even so, I notice a gentle smile on Aia’s lips, it seems that she is enjoying it...

Many eyes follow us steadily. Most of them belong to really cute and beautiful girls, and some guys, hiding themselves partially. Their gestures and faces of disappointment confirm Xiberz’ words and Aia’s action.

“More women than men are working as bodyguards here precisely because of that,” Xiberz goes on with her explanation. “Important men always have one of us guiding them through the station. And,” she sighs, “most prominent people visiting us are still males...”

“Shit...” I sigh. “That must be really harsh on you, and give you many problems...”

The Wigmez opens her eyes wide.

“You’re right...” She nods slowly.

“Surely those you have to protect from the pestering girls harass you instead.”

“Sir Phoenix...” our bodyguard sighs. “You’re right again... We have many issues with our clients, too many undesired sexual advances.”

“That’s why you’re showing your wedding band off?” I ask her.

“Oh... Ugh~” Xiberz squirms for a second. “Seems that you have a keen eye...”

“Yeah~ That’s Kira for you,” giggles Aia. “Besides being observant, he says what he thinks.”

“That is a virtue...” the hefty alien says looking at me.

“But brings me many problems,” I laugh. “By the way, call me Kira, it’s my real name.”

“*Hm~* And me, Aia,” confirms the bluish alien holding on me tightly.

“Thanks.” Xiberz smiles broadly. “It feels great to have such nice clients.”

“*Hm~* This smile suits you better,” Aia giggles.

Aia stops abruptly in front of a big clothing stall. A heap of beautiful dresses is on display.

She hooks out of my arm and begins to look through those designed for Humans or similar characterized species.

With a smile, I follow her. Right... Perhaps I find something I could gift her.

While I also look through the many beautiful dresses, Xiberz seems to enjoy our enthusiastic interest.

“Oh...”

“Found something, Kira?” asks Aia stepping closer. I simply show her the dress I’ve found. Her eyes sparkle. “It’s beautiful!”

The piece I have in my hand is a one-shoulder tight-fitted cocktail dress. It’s color, metallic blue, of course.

“Yeah.” I nod. “Seems your size.”

“It is...” she confirms looking at the tag. “And really sexy.”

“Would you put it on?” I ask her.

“Of course.”

“Perfect.” I smile and hand the dress to the merchant. “It will be this dress.”

“Excellent choice, sir,” she says while I pay.

“Here, Aia.” I hand her the bag with the dress. “For your care. I mean—Not only for that—Ah...”

“Thank you, Kira!” she shouts and hugs me tightly.

The longish hug ends with a short-lived peck

.

We reach the market. It has the same feel as those crazy Asian markets I have visited as a teen. Hundreds of stalls and one huge chaos.

“What do you want to buy?” asks Xiberz.

“Oh, food actually. Preferably fresh local products,” says Aia, and I confirm nodding.

“Great,” laughs Xiberz. “In that case, I know the best place to buy fresh local food. I can even guarantee their freshness. It’s my favorite one. It’s owned by two of my best friends, great guys.”

“*Hm~* Just perfect,” giggles Aia.

The stall is quite big, compared to the others. Its front counter and back shelves are filled with unrecognizable, at least for me, fruits and vegetables. A big display fridge is filled with exotic looking meat.

Aia’s sparkling eyes say it all, she knows the displayed food well.

Behind the counter stand two guys, an Īiha and a Reaf.

“Hi guys,” Xiberz greets them. “I bring you some customers.”

“Oh, hi Xiberz,” the Reaf greets our bodyguard.

“Welcome, dear customers,” the Īiha greets us. “We guarantee the freshness of our products. They have arrived this morning from Zoovroozlechester. The fruits

and the vegetables are from my sister's farm and the meat from my pal's parents' farm."

"Oh~ Kira, look~" Aia looks around with enthusiasm. "There's such a huge variety. I can't decide..."

"Don't worry, Aia. Take your time. I'm afraid, I can't help you to choose, I don't know these products..." I shrug.

"True..." she giggles. "It's your first time here, in the Orion sector."

Aia begins to chat with the guys, and in no time, they start to exchange recipes.

I wait patiently at Xiberz' side while having a smoke after she confirmed that smoking is allowed in this place.

"Who knows what she'll buy," I sigh. "Surely a lot..."

"Excuse me if I ask an improper question," the golden alien at my side says, "are you a couple?"

"Ugh~ No... We're homies and coworkers..." I say sighing.

"Really?" Xiberz questions me. "But you'd make a wonderful couple..."

"I know..." I sigh again. "She does too, I know it, we both know it... But she needs more time."

"Ouch... seems complicated. But let me give you a piece of advice. Even if she needs more time, you have to be clear about your feelings and your expectations. Don't take it for granted that she knows it. I almost lost the love of my life for waiting too long... twice..." she says with a tender smile while playing with her wedding band. I can figure three names engraved in the carefully crafted ring.

"I'll keep it in mind. Thanks, Xiberz," I sigh.

"I'm not as observant as you," she giggles, "but I have a good eye to spot couples."

"May happen," I laugh. "You see perfectly well what's around you, but not what you have at your side, right?"

"Exactly." She smiles again, then sighs lovely. "I almost ignored both the boys I really loved presupposing that they knew what I felt, and still feel, for them. I believed that they were only teasing me. I never thought that they were testing

the waters...” she sighs. “And I ignored them... It was only by sheer chance that we came clear. At a party... Both were frustrated by my lack of response. I walked in on them making out together...”

“No way, Xiberz...”

“It was the turning point,” she giggles. “I stormed away, crying. I was really drunk. You won’t see me crying that easily. I ran into an empty room and sat down crying. Both came running after me. There, we cleared everything up. And began to make out, the three of us. Next day, we began to date. And now, I’m happily married to them,” she concludes with a radiant smile.

“Beautiful story, Xiberz. Congratulations on having such a beautiful family.”

“Thanks, Kira.” She smiles.

“Ah~ Kira~” Aia calls me. “What do you think of buying this?”

“Huh? What’s that?” I ask unsure.

“It’s Kef’ter, a meat from our planet,” the Reaf says. “I think, it is similar to your chicken.”

“Yes,” the Īiha adds, “it tastes best grilled with some veggies. Your girl has everything—”

“Ah... we’re not dating...” I interrupt him.

“Ugh~ Sorry...” He drops his head.

“Excuse my boyfriend, I honestly thought so too,” excuses the Reaf.

“Don’t worry.” I shrug. “But you are, right?” I ask them.

“Ugh~” The Īiha slumps down.

“Oops... I spilled the beans...” The Reaf also drops his head.

“Don’t worry, guys,” I say. “I don’t know why you hide it. But that won’t make us not to buy here.”

“Really?” both cry out and jump up.

“Thank goodness...” sighs the Īiha.

“Huh?” I look at Aia’s dumbfounded face then back at them.

“Yeah...” The Reaf nods. “Some customers don’t like to buy from interspecies’ couples, and less if they’re gay...”

“Such a nonsense! Why? You’re assisting us perfectly, and your ware is obviously of the finest quality.” I ramble on angrily, “Your love, relationship, and your sexual orientation have nothing to do with it. Intolerance has no place in love.”

The couple looks at me relived and sigh while Aia smiles broadly. She hugs me.

“Kira’s right. As he said, you assist us fabulously. Your mutual feelings have nothing in common with your business. I, too, am in love with an alie—” she halts her words blushing deeply and looks sideways at me wearing a cute, shy smile. “I mean... there’s nothing wrong with interspecies’ relationships. Your sexual orientation isn’t wrong either, my best friends are a lesbian couple.”

I lay my hand on her shoulder.

“Truly. They are fabulous girls and do a wonderful job. They have a huge space trucking workshop. I’d never leave my truck in others’ hands except for them.”

Both guys dry some happy tears.

“Thanks...”

“Thank you very much, really,” sobs happily the ĩiha. “It’s for a while since we heard such IE and queer defense.”

“Truly...” The Reaf smiles broadly. “Ah~ Have some Xie’leks, they are similar to your apples. A gift...”

Aia and I look at them a bit surprised.

“And, yeah, you’re right...” tells us the ĩiha. “Even if we live in a completely tolerant society, it’s not the same when we sell here. Many different creeds, views, and religions come together here. We’re always exposed to bigots.”

“Yeah,” sighs the Reaf. “That’s why we hide our relationship...”

“That’s bullshit...” I sigh. “Look, guys, if I were you, I would get the biggest rainbow flag, or whatever you use nowadays as the symbol of homosexuality, you can find, and hang it up in the back of your stall, so everyone can see it. Whoever wants to buy, will buy. Those who won’t, fuck them! Never suppress your feelings just because there are some backward bigots and assholes.”

Aia beams in happiness at my side and hugs my hip tighter.

“Kira’s right, guys,” she adds. “I’m sure you’ll sell even more, and better, when you show who you really are.”

“That’s my point.” I nod hugging her back.

“Wow...” The Reaf blinks. “What do you think, dear? Should we try it?” he asks his boyfriend.

“Sure, what could we lose?” he asks back.

“Then, let’s do it!”

Both cheer while Aia and I hug each other’s hip.

“Thanks, friends... Ah! By the way, we’ve never introduced us properly. I am Graendak, a Reaf.”

“And I am İlagüe, an İiha.”

“Pleased to meet you, I am Aia, known as the Queen.”

Both drop their chins.

“And I am Kira, known as the Phoenix, nice to meet you.”

Their jaws seem to dislocate...

“Wooooow!”

“No way! I can’t believe it! Really?”

Xiberz simply nods with a bright smile.

“We’ll take your suggestion to heart. I’ll get a flag at once!” İlagüe laughs wholeheartedly.

“And hang it in the back of the stall, right there!” Graendak adds euphorically.

“That’s the way,” I laugh. “I am sure you’ll sell more. And if not, call me and demand a compensation for your losses,” I add laughing.

“Oh, you~ Kira~” Aia giggles charmingly.

We pay for the goods, swap our contacts, and go our way after an emotional goodbye.

“You’re really impressive...” laughs Xiberz. “I invite you to a beer. I know the best pub for that.”

“No need,” protests Aia.

“I insist,” laughs Xiberz again. “You blew my mind, really. No wonder you’re well known for your deeds. You follow your hearts and know what to say. You are not the typical famous and rich just showing off their supposed superiority. Graendak and İlagüe are my best friends. And you just encouraged them to come out publicly, and gave them a huge boost of confidence. You’re just great! Ah, this way...”

Smiling, we follow our bodyguard.

We reach a small pub. It has only four tables but has a really long bar counter. We sit at the bar as no tables are free. With excessive care, I sit on the barstool, I don’t want to strain my new leg.

Of course, Aia noticed and is helping me with a caring smile after leaving the grocery bags on the counter.

“Ah, thanks, Aia.”

“You’re welcome~”

Following Xiberz’ recommendation, we order a local beer each and some small plates with local tidbits.

“Hmm... Tastes great,” I say nodding after the first sip of the beer.

“Truly,” giggles Aia. “I’ll have only one. I still have to pilot.”

“Don’t worry, it’s really low on alcohol,” tells us the bartender.

A terminal rings...

“Oh, it’s mine,” our golden bodyguard says. “Ah, I’ve got to get this call. Be right back.”

She leaves the noisy place.

Just some minutes later...

“Oh... What’s sucha beauty doin’ ’ere alone?” A fat Human guy with several visible half-bionic implants in his skull and arms nears Aia. She ignores him in disgust. “Hey... Cutie... Lemme invite ya somethin’. I’ll keep ya good company.”

“No, thanks,” Aia brushes him off coldly.

But he doesn’t seem to take a *no* as an answer... Now he even steps between us two.

“C’mon, baby...”

I lay my hand on his shoulder.

“The girl said *no*. Plus, I already keep her company,” I tell him sharply.

“Eh? Ya? Ya three-legged cripple?” he laughs.

Even his laughter is disgusting...

He suddenly turns towards me and shoves me off the barstool. I lose my balance, and I fall to the ground...

“Kira!”

Fuck! On top of that, I tumbled over my fucking crutch...

“Pathetic!” the fat guy laughs.

“You’re lucky I’m crippled, if not, you’d be already dead,” I grunt in anger.

“Oh? An’ wotcha donin’? Hittin’ ma with yer crutch?” he keeps on laughing.

Aia seems to stand up to intervene, but just then... *Crash!* He breaks a bottle. She froze...

The moment the fat guy jumps over me, she jumps from the barstool. As she reaches him, he’s already in range of my forming fist. My left fist moves, all alone as if guided, and drives into the fat chin. I feel as if I’m watching it in slow motion...

Crock!

The fat guy flies upwards.

Crack!

His head crashes through the drop-in ceiling, and he gets stuck.

Aia reaches me in haste while the fat guy still hangs from the ceiling.

I look at her flabbergasted, completely blown away from what just happened, while she dries a tear. Xiberz also runs towards us while the rest of the patrons are either hiding or running away.

“What ha—” I only manage to say while Aia and Xiberz help me up.

They sit me on one of the freed benches.

A long moan and a crashing sound make us look back. The fat guy just crash-landed.

Still bewildered, I look at Aia. She returns a gentle, caring smile.

“Shh~ It’s okay, take a deep breath, try to calm down,” she says. “It was because of your bionic arm. You just forgot to reduce its strength. You hit him with your full power, around fifty times stronger...”

“Wow... If you got a bionic arm, no wonder... plus, this place is low-grav.” Xiberz seems to be calm. She takes her micro-radio and talks into it, “Xiberz here. Send a cleaning squad down to my coordinates. A harasser just received a master’s beating.”

“*Fufu*~ Aren’t you going overboard?” giggles Aia.

“Absolutely not,” laughs Xiberz. “Ah, barman, could you bring him a juice, or anything calming?”

“At once, ma’am.”

Aia takes my bionic hand into hers.

“Don’t worry, Kira. Take a good, deep breath. See? You’re still the same. Do you feel my touch?”

“Ye—yeah...” I’m still looking at her staggered.

I’m utterly shocked by the shown strength, the sheer power. I can’t believe I really did that...

“Thanks, Kira, for defending me...” Aia whispers into my ear.

I notice a wet string flowing down my cheek. My arms twitch, I feel something soft, tender pressing against my body... Right... Aia is hugging me... I return the hug.

“See?” Aia whispers tenderly. “You’re still caring and gentle. You haven’t become a brute.” She makes some space between us while she smiles lovely, yet her tears still flow. I lift my left, artificial, hand and hold her beneath her cheek while my thumb dries her tears. She takes my hand and snuggles her cheek into my palm. “You’re still the same, just stronger. You’ve lost your cool in front of this lunatic. I can’t blame you, he could have killed you. I wouldn’t have reached you in time.” She moves my hand and kisses it gently.

The barman offers me a kind of juice with a calm smile. Aia takes the glass and brings it to my lips.

“Here, this will do you good.”

I take several sips of the life-giving juice, and I feel my senses coming back. Aia puts the glass back on the table. I move to hug her. My arms surround her, she reciprocates gently.

“Thanks, Aia...” I sigh deeply.

“No worries, Kira,” she whispers relived.

Some long minutes and some fags later, it seems I have overcome my breakdown. Finally calm, I empty the glass of juice. The fat guy isn’t there anymore, he must have been taken away.

I sigh deeply.

“I didn’t expect such force...” I say pensively.

“You lost, for a moment, your perception of strength. You hit him with all your might,” Aia giggles.

“Ugh... And him?” I ask preoccupied.

“He’ll survive,” Xiberz tells calmly. “He surely won’t persistently pester girls anymore,” she laughs.

“Thanks,” I sigh. “I got scared by this strength...” I confess making a fist and opening it repeatedly.

“I know,” Aia says calmly with a gentle smile. “Are you okay now?”

“Yeah, thanks to you.”

“I did what I had to do,” she says with a beautiful smile. “I was more worried about what could have happened to you.”

I sigh deeply and straighten my back.

“Fuck... Now I realize the mess I’ve made...” I say shocked as I look around.

“Don’t worry,” the barman says with his calm smile. “My insurance covers it. Plus, you got rid of this nauseating jerk pestering my patrons. I had to call the law enforcement several times, but he came back once freed.”

.

Xiberz pays, and we leave the pub. I notice something strange in my bionic leg and begin to limp. Aia notices immediately and tries to help me still carrying most of the bags, she didn’t let me carry them...

“Are you alright?” she asks worried. “Did you hurt yourself?”

“I don’t know, Aia. Perhaps when I fell, or the thrust of the punch...”

“Might be. Your body is still in shock. It will go away in time. I’ll have a look on my Thunderbird, you surely need a rub-treatment for bionic limbs,” she adds with a smile. “I’m sure no stitches have opened.”

“Do you prefer to visit the hospital?” Xiberz asks also worried.

“Don’t worry, Xiberz,” Aia shakes her head. “I’m a doctor in Human medicine.”

“Wow... I couldn’t have guessed that...” Xiberz looks at her surprised.

“I don’t make it public anyways,” giggles Aia.

.

We reach the airlock to the Thunderbird and say our goodbyes to our nice bodyguard after swapping our contacts with her.

Aia insists that I should lie down on her bed. She floats into the cabin and activates the artificial gravity after having stored the fresh food.

Shortly after having undocked from the Yamato and being back on route, Aia comes back.

“Okay, the autopilot is on. Now, sit up and take your pants off, I need to have a look at your leg,” she instructs.

I do as she said, and she begins to carefully inspect the place where the bionic leg is attached to my body. No stitches can be seen, not the slightest difference between my biological part and the bionic one of my leg can be distinguished. I am sure, only she and a few other doctors might even know where to look.

“Lift your leg a bit more, please,” she instructs again. “I’ll apply pressure on different spots, please tell me if you notice something strange.”

“Yeah...”

Using her thumbs, she applies pressure on different spots. Some on the biological part, some on the bionic part.

“Nothing strange,” I sigh relieved. “I feel your pressure evenly.”

“Perfect,” she smiles brightly. “Then it’s nothing grave. You’ll have to lie down a bit and relax. I’ll help you relax your bionic muscles. But first, let’s have a bite.”

She stands up, grabs some of the strange fruits she bought from the larder, and throws me one. Ah, these are the ones the guys gifted us...

I try it.

“Yum~ It tastes like an apple, but its texture resembles a mango...” I marvel.

“Yup,” Aia giggles. “They’re tasty.”

“What were these called?”

“Xie’leks.”

“I won’t even try to pronounce it,” I laugh.

“Oh, you~” Aia giggles. “Okay, now, lie down. I’ll relax your bionic muscles with a special massage. You only suffered an adaption stress.”

She sits on the bed and begins to massage my left arm from the shoulder downwards. It truly is relaxing... Reaching the fingers, she rubs each of them carefully, then her relaxing caresses work upwards again.

Aia hums a beautiful song while she clearly puts all her efforts into the massage. She wears a gentle, loving smile without losing her concentration.

I sigh deeply and relaxed while she goes on with both the massage and the melody.

“Now your leg,” she sighs in relief.

She makes me lean against the bed’s wall towards the bathroom while she sits right in front of me with her legs spread.

While leaning forward to reach my thigh, she offers me an exciting view, her cleavage. While the massage is relaxing, the show she offers is noticeable, mainly in my boxers...

She works her fingers downwards, towards herself. Moving herself into a more comfortable position, I see how the fabric of her bodysuit is diving into her nether flesh... Shit... The response, in my boxers, to such a visual stimulant is immediate. Either she does not care or does not notice. She keeps on massaging my bionic calf muscle smiling and humming a different, sexier song.

“Phew! Sooo hot!” Aia suddenly exclaims and sits up again.

She pulls her bodysuit’s zipper down till her belly button, pulls her arms out of the sleeves, and lets the upper part fall. Her beautiful bare tits just gave my libido another push...

“Ugh... Aia?”

“*Hm?*”

“You don’t wear a bra?” I ask trying to look at her face.

“Nope, not with the bodysuit, neither panties...” she giggles and smirks.

“Too much information...” I sigh.

“I see...” she giggles lusciously, then she goes back to the massage.

Fuck... There she goes again, driving me crazy...

But strangely, I am feeling dizzy... Albeit being aroused, fatigue is overcoming me...



To be continued in:

SpaceHighway: The Awakened ~ A24 ~ The Ostis Incident

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TL;DR:

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