

# Space Highway

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## The Awakened

### A04 ~ Space Cowboy Jim

My head hurts, I slept terribly. Yesterday's memories kept floating around in my mind. Aia, her tits, the retro-condoms, the SM attires...

I sit up, yawn again, and stretch my arms till my shoulders creak.

The moment I open my eyes, I find Aia's beautiful smile.

"Good morning, Kira."

"Good morning, Aia..."

At least she wears a bra and low panties... Thank goodness...

I hold back a sigh of relief while she hands me a mug of coffee.

"Thanks, Aia."

"You're welcome."

She sits down at my side on the couch with a smile.

While she sips on her coffee, she looks at me.

"I was thinking... we should go to the Alpha to get your business contact and see if someone has a job who could take you with 'em..."

"Oh! Great idea." I nod. "So I can observe them piloting and learn from them." And I can relax a bit away from her and occupy my mind with something else...

"Yeah. I still have no job scheduled," she sighs. "Meaning, I can't take you with me even if I'd love to."

This smile... so tempting...

I focus my attention on the coffee and swallow the images of Aia's tits flashing through my mind.

"I want to see you as soon as possible at the controls of your Falcon. So study hard, okay?"

I swallow empty, that smile...

"Yeah, thanks, Aia. Ugh~"

"*Hm?* Why do look at me this way?" she asks, tilting her head.

It seems that her panties just cover her pubic hair, if she doesn't shave... My blood begins to gather in my nether parts...

"Oh~ Nothing... nothing..." I shake my head. "Well... It's just I don't know how to repay you for all you're doing for me..."

"*Fufu~*" she giggles. "Don't worry. As long as you keep your promise."

"Ah~"

"And thanks, again, for yesternight. You're truly a gentleman," she giggles and blushes slightly in her violetish hues.

"Ah~ Ugh~ Yeah. Don't worry..." I force a smile.

She doesn't know how I was before, during the twentieth and twenty-first century... If she'd know, she surely wouldn't let me stay here... Even though I made the decision to change it... I'm not sure to be able to change at her side...

"C'mon, let's have breakfast in the MaryQueens..."

"Great."

While I stand up, Aia gazes at me intently.

"Ugh~ What's the matter, Aia?"

"*Uh~un~*" She gently shakes her head with a smile. "Nothing... *Fufu~* I just thought that I'm fortunate to have you as my flatmate," she giggles.

"..."

Such a beautiful smile... I'm lost for words...

“Welcome! Good morning, Queen, Phoenix!” Buz greets us ecstatic and with a broad smile.

“Hehehe~ Good mornin’ double Aces...”

“*Fufu*~ Good morning, Buz, Jim.”

“Good morning...”

“What would you like?”

“Two of Sue’s special breakfasts.”

“On the way Aia! Good morning!”

“Hi, Sue.”

I almost got lost in all the *good-mornings* and greetings... I blink overwhelmed. Oh! Aia already ordered us some breakfast...

Aia sits at Jim’s side.

“Jimmy, do you have something scheduled for today?” she asks the happy cowboy.

“Heh... Sure. Why? Wanna swap with me? Heheh~” he grins.

“No, no, Jim...” Aia giggles. “But Kira wants to go with someone on a haul...”

“Ooh~” Jim’s face brightens. “Wanna come with me, Phoenix? Would be an ’onor. Heheh~”

“Yeah. Of course.” I nod. “I hope I’m able to learn a lot from you, Jim.”

He begins to laugh happily.

“Heheheh~ Da great Phoenix, learnin’ from me... Such an ’onor!”

I have to laugh at the way he puts me on a pedestal.

“Yeah... Ah, by the way, Jim, call me Kira, I prefer it.”

“Heh! ’Course, Kira. We leave in an hour an’ a half.”

Aia nods happily at our conversation and adds, “Perfect. Then we have time to go by the office to get Kira’s ISTM business contact.”

“Oh? Already got a terminal?” Buz laughs.

“Yeah.” I nod. “We bought it yesterday...”

I take it out, and show it to him.

“Cool! Wanna swap contacts?”

“Sure, Buz. Oh~ And the business contact?”

“You can update your shared contact with your business ID, just select the contact you want to share it with,” Aia explains.

“Oh, yeah? And he gets it?”

“Yeah. Your contact data will also be updated...”

“Quite convenient...”

Buz brings his terminal out and we carry out the ritual of swapping our contacts.

I begin to laugh...

“Why are you laughing, Kira?” asks Aia blinking.

“Ah~ I just thought it’s similar to the rock-paper-scissors game.”

“True...” giggles Aia, “never thought of that...”

“Heh! Can I have yers too, Kira?” Jim asks.

“Sure, Jim.”

“Heh! Rock-paper-scissors! Take ma contact! Heheheh~”

We all explode in laughter at Jim’s gestures.

“That’s a good one, Jim,” Aia laughs.

Our laughter dies down as Sue brings us our breakfasts.

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Eating breakfast, I flip through the contacts in my new smartph—err... terminal.

Aia smiles.

“Now you’ve got already three contacts, Kira.”

“Yeah,” I laugh. “Two guys and a beautiful girl...”

She blushes at my comment.

Jim slaps my back.

“Heheheh~ Ya’ll get used to dat... We normally have way more guys in our contacts than girls...”

“Jimmie... Don’t chicks dig you?” I smirk.

“Heh! I’d wish! Heheh~ An’ ya Kira? Ya got only one.”

“Yeah, man...” I laugh. “But what a beauty. Anyway, I’ve got this terminal just yesterday...”

Aia blushes and smiles sheepishly, while Jim laughs.

“Heh...” He grins. “Don’ say ya had more girls in yer terminal?”

“On my cell from the twenty-first century, I’ve had the double of girls than guys in my contacts...” I smirk mischievously.

Aia and Jim’s faces show surprise and disbelief..

“Are ya fuckin’ serious?” shouts Jim jumping up.

“Jimmie...” I grin, “an Ace needs to have many contacts.”

“Kira...”

“Yes, Aia?”

“Did you really had that many girls in your contacts?”

Ups...

“Ah, yeah... My past...”

She blushes and looks hesitantly around.

“Oh~ Ah~ Tell me another time, okay? Let’s hurry. You still need the ISTM business contact.”

“Yeah, you’re right...”

Lucky me, she saved me from explaining my womanizer past...

After breakfast, we three go to the offices. In a short time, I receive my business contact, and Aia shows me how to configure my cell—I mean my terminal, to work with both contacts.

Jim informs the dispatcher that I will come with him so that it figures in the register and the manifest.

Once done, we go towards the cargo-bay area.

“Kira, I present ya ma Stampede... One of da most powerful trucks in da galaxy. Heheheh~”

Jim points at one of the space-trucks through the huge windows. It’s completely red, except for the cabin area, which is dark yellow...

“Oh~ Impressive. It really fits you, The Stampede...” I laugh.

“Yeah...” Aia giggles. “I’ve told you, Jim is specialized in hazmat cargo. You can learn a lot from him. Ah~ Learn only from his piloting skills...”

“Heh!” Jim laughs. “Whadda mean, Aia beauty Queen?”

“*Fufu*~ Precisely that. That he doesn’t copy your personality,” she giggles.

“Heh! Whadda wrong with it?”

“*Fufu*~ Nothing. But I prefer him being the Phoenix, not a Space Cowboy Two.”

We three laugh...

“Don’t worry, Aia,” I laugh. “I’ll try and not learn such things from him.”

“Yeah,” she giggles. “I believe you. I really prefer you the way you are now...”

Jim smirks mischievously at Aia’s blushing cheeks.

“C’mon, Kira!”

*Splat!* He smacks my back hard.

“Heh! Time to go. Wanna be back for dinner.”

Recovered my breath, I elbow him into his side...

“Ugh!”

“Perfect, partner, let’s go.”

“Heheheh~ We’ll get along fuckin’ well, partner. Hehehe~”

We laugh...

“Good luck guys,” Aia giggles. “Ah~ Kira, call me when you’re back. I’ll pick you up.”

“Yeah, thanks, Aia.”

“Have a safe journey,” she smiles.

“Heh. This canna be better... Accompanied by a legend an’ a beautiful girl seein’ us off... Heheheh.”

I laugh, then look at the bluish alien.

“*Matane*, Aia,” I tell her.

“Huh? What?”

“Ah, sorry, it’s Japanese, meaning *see you later*.”

“Oh~ Yeah... see you later...” she giggles.

Jim guides me through the airlocks.

“Heh. From now on, there’s no gravity. Hold on to da rails...”

“Oh! Fuck!” I begin to laugh...

“Heh...” Jim smirks, “seems microgravity donna affect ya...”

“I love it!” I giggle like a child.

I push myself from one of the rails towards another one at the ceiling. “*Banzai!*”

“Heheheh! Look at ya havin’ fun with this... Heh! Is it really yer first time in microgravity?”

I do a backflip, hook my foot on the ceiling rail and look down.

“Yeah...” I laugh. “Okay! Playtime’s over... back to work...”

I push myself towards the truck’s doors. Shit... this made my head spin...

“Heheh~ No doubt yer da Phoenix... Work first... Heheh. By da way...” Jim points to his left...

I see Aia and some others roaring in laughter... The airlock is see-through... They’ve seen it all...

“Heheheh~ Now dey have somethin’ to tell.”

“Fuck... C’mon, let’s go...”

“Heheh~ ’kay...”

We float through the airlocks and reach Jim’s truck.

If we omit the chaotic inside looks of his ride, it’s quite similar to Aia’s Thunderbird and my future Falcon.

“Da copilot seat’s all yers... Heheh~ There’s a compartment for yer backpack...”

“Thanks.”

I hold on the rails and handles spread out throughout the truck, follow Jim, and stow my backpack.

With some fuss, I fasten the seatbelts.

“Heheheh~ Not as easy as with gravity, eh?”

“Hell yeah... But a good training,” I grin.

“Heheh~ ’course. Let’s go through our route. First, we’ll go to Ganymede, da largest moon of Jupiter, dere we’ll load a good cargo o’ *Radio-Act IV*, a highly volatile fuel. Heh! We hafta transport it to da planet Wintermute in Alpha Centauri. Heheh~” Jim laughs.

“Alpha Centauri? The nearest star after the Sun?” I ask flabbergasted.

“Heh! Dat’s right... Da nearest star system with planets...” he grins as I blink.

“Won’t it take a lot of time?”

“Heheheh~ Not much, ya’ll see...”

Uh... If I remember the science classes from high school correctly... that would be about four lightyears... If we travel at the speed of light... that’s four years... no... eight... there and back... Didn’t he say we’ll be back for dinner?

“Let’s rock!” Jim shouts euphorically, takes a gadget which looks like a radio-mic from my times, and speaks into it, “Charlie. Space Cowboy speaking, Stampede ready to blast off..”

«Roger, Jim. You have vector five at your disposal. Break a leg...»

“Thanks, mate. Heheh~” Jim laughs.

Jim moves his rig carefully forward between several trucks until reaching the open space. There, he projects a map of the solar system on the windshield.

“We’re here. Heh! First, we hafta get dere...” he points at Jupiter. “Now we take da Gaia-Jupiter Jump, an’ later on, da brand-new Jupiter-Centauri Jump...”

“Jump?” I ask intrigued.

“Heh... yeah...” He grins. “Jumps are a kind o’ interspace highways. Officially, dey’re called Space Gates, but we call ’em Star Jumps, Star Gates or simply Jumps...”

“Wow! Really? Like those in the sci-fi flicks and stories of my times?”

He grins at my exaltation.

“Heheh~ Yeah, da like... Dey’re tollways. I don’ know how dey really work, heh... But dey speed ya up extremely... Ya’ll see... Heheheh~”

“Wow... intriguing...”

While Jim explains more details about the cargo settings and procedures, we reach a complex of huge structures. They look like humongous rings floating in space. Each of the rings emits a strange silvery light. A huge amount of space vehicles enters and exits those rings...

“This’ da GGC, da Gaia Gate Complex. Heh. Now da system detects our intentions...”

Truly, a loudspeaker comes alive, and a metallic sounding voice greets, »Welcome to the Space Gates Cooperative. Please input your destination.«

Jim takes the mic. “Destination, Jupiter.”

»Destination, Jupiter, Sol System. Vehicle type, truck. Designation, Stampede. License plate, GS0-STA-SC. Cargo, none. Company, ISTM. Correct?«

“Correct.”

»Fee charged. Proceed to gate A5, alpha-five.«

Astonished, I follow the interaction between Jim and the synthetic voice.

He looks at me with a grin on his face.

“Heheh~ Da system charges da ISTM directly. Now we can enter da gate...”

Just before entering the gate A5, the system calls in again, »Permission to enter granted. You may proceed. Have a safe journey.«

“Heheh~ Thanks,” Jim laughs.

We enter the gate, and I am blinded for a moment... I blink, to my amazement, we are on a kind of lane... It looks just like a colossal tunnel with eight wide lanes, the width of a space-truck...

Jim laughs heartily.

“Welcome to da space-highways!”

“Wow! Oh~ We’re able to overtake others?” I’m baffled.

“Heh.” Jim grins. “Dat’s right. If ya got a rig fast enough, ya can overtake anyone.”

“Oh~ We keep the relative speeds?”

“Exactly. Heheh~ Just as we’re in open space. Will take us two hours...”

“Only?”

“Heheh~ Yup. An’ about da speed... Heh! Ma Stampede is designed an’ tuned for hazmat cargo an’ dangerous routes.”

“In what way?”

“Heh, greater armor an’ shielding. Dat’s why it’s quite slower than da Queen’s Thunderbird and SpeedKitty’s Cheetah...”

“SpeedKitty?”

“Heh, Enya...”

“Ah~ The feline girl?”

“Heheh~ Isn’t she a cutie?”

“Oh, yeah...” I laugh.

“Heh! I’d love to do her... Heheheh~”

I laugh again, “Oh!” and smirk.

Jim looks at me a bit annoyed.

“What? Is it strange for me to have interests in Enya?”

“Oh, no, no... Absolutely not, she is a beauty... I just remembered a trucker called Kitty from my times...”

“Oooh~ c’mon man, tell more... heheh~”

“Yeah. She was a beautiful girl, a bit chubby and quite curvy. Her name was Kathy, well, her real name was Catarina... But as she was a bit feline, we called her Kitty.”

“Heheh~ Was she a feline in da bed too?”

“Oh, yeah, of course... the best...”

“Phew~ Kira... did ya fuck her?”

“Many times...” I grin.

“Heh! Ya bastar’... Fuck me... Hope I can do Enya sometime...”

“Try it,” I laugh.

“Heh! Easier said as done! She don’ wanna have one-nighters nor casual screws... Heh~ What I’m babbling? She’s not interested, so she says...” he sighs.

“You have my sympathies, pal,” I exhale.

“Heheh~ Yeah... Seems I’m not her type...”

Jim changes lane to pass another slower truck with four container holds. His happy face seems changed... I don't think he means it. He isn't interested in just a

fuck, but is in love, unrequited love... He shakes his head and begins to laugh. Yup, I'm right. I've seen many like him...

“Heh.” He smirks. “By da way, how are things with da Queen? Ya share an apartment with her, doncha?”

I sigh deeply. “Don’t remind me... I don’t understand her...”

“Heh... In what way?”

“That remains under us...”

“course, yer secrets are safe with me, pal...”

“Yeah... She doesn’t want to have anything with me and says that she completely trusts me, that I won’t do anything to her...”

“Wow, such trust...”

“Yeah. But then the chick goes and wanders topless around the house...”

“Really?” Jim shouts. “How are dey? Ah, sorry...”

I laugh. “They’re perfect, pal... Just impressive... They seem to defy gravity...”

“Damn, pal... Lucky dog...”

“Lucky? She doesn’t want a thing with me...”

“Fuck... that’s hell... Now I feel pity for ya...”

“Yeah... Not only that, she insists in me living there, with her...”

“Damn shit... I don’ know what to say... On da one hand, seems like yer in a paradise. On da other, in da very same fuckin’ hell...”

“Hell yeah... Ah~” I stretch my arms. “Sharing this with you feels great, pal!”

“Heheh~ Always here when ya need me.”

“Thanks, friend.”

“Heh! Friend...”

“Sure, pal.”

“Heheh~ Such an ’onor,” he laughs happily.

I sigh. "By the way... What legends had been made up about me?"

"Heh... couldn't tell all of 'em... too many..."

"No fuck? Damn..."

"Heh, don' believe 'em... Each more unreal than da other... In one, ya breach through a forest on fire with yer Falcon. In another, ya cross a lava-river. In yet another, ya dodge a fuckin' asteroid deluge, or ya come walkin' coolly out o' a huge explosion. Others say dat ya fought against a hundred men armed to da teeth an' knocked 'em down jus' by fists..."

"Fuck me..." I sigh.

"Dey call ya da Phoenix, da immortal. Heh! Ya canna die 'cause ya'll be reborn from yer ashes like a real phoenix..."

I burst into laughter, "Unbelievable..."

Jim laughs, "Heh... But da latter became true..."

"Yeah..." I laugh again. "But I wasn't reborn from the ashes... I was frozen like a cod..."

"Heheheh~ But yer reborn..." he laughs.

"True, that doesn't change..." I have to laugh too...

"Then, whadda real legend?"

"Oh, yeah... It's true that I did cross a forest fire with a load of nitroglycerin..."

"No fuck..."

"Yeah. It's not as melodramatic as told... I was called the Phoenix when I was seen coming out of the flames driving my Falcon..."

"Heheheh~ No wonder! Whadda nitro for?"

"To blast an experimental oil well on fire or the like..."

"Fuck me... Now I understand da legends... Ya saved some truckers an' firemen, dontcha?"

"Yeah."

"Heh! Great, that's it... Sparks for legends... Heh..."

“Yeah...”

“Heheh~ Ya really did somethin’ impressive. How old were ya then?”

“Yeah... I’ve just turned eighteen...”

“No fuck?”

“No fuck.”

“Yer amazing... truly...”

I laugh, “Don’t get overboard...”

“Heheheh~” Jim again passes another truck. “Ah, Kira...”

“Yeah?”

“Can ya bring me a pouch o’ coke? Heh. Dere’ some in da fridge.”

“Sure... Uh~ Pouch?”

“Heh! Yeah, sorry. Dey look like small bags. Take one if ya like.”

“Okay, thanks.”

I free myself from the seat-belts and push me through the cabin into the kitchen area. This living area would surely be a greater mess if stuff hadn’t to be tied and fixed down for the sake of weightlessness...

I find the fridge. It’s filled with beer cans and small bags. I take a closer look at the bags, more beer, and some cokes. I grab two *pouches* of coke. They look similar to those drinking-pouches for astronauts I’ve seen at the Science Center I visited once during a school trip...

Back in the cab, I throw Jim one of the pouches. “Catch!”

He catches it on the fly. “Thanks.”

I observe him turning the cap and pulling out a short drinking straw, and, finally, popping the cap off.

I imitate him while he exhales. “Ahh~ Dat hits da spot... Shame’s not a draft...”

“Yeah...” I laugh. “But I doubt they would let you drive...”

“Heh! An’ less with hazmat cargo... If dey catch ya... bye-bye license...”

“I believe you,” I sigh. “And smoking?”

“Heh... If ya don’ wanna spend a fortune, don’ even think ’bout it...”

“Because of the air and the ventilation?”

“Yeah... Da air filters... If ya smoke, ya hafta change ’em every week or two instead o’ once every six months... Heheh~”

Still laughing, he takes a pack out of his vest and makes a gesture to take a cigarette...

“C’mon... Heheh~ Ya donna smoke?”

“Well, yeah...”

“Heh! Hesitatin’ after I said dat? Ya’ll see after receivin’ yer first salary. Heheh~ Bein’ one of da Aces ya’ll get a generous bonus, heh! Ya can afford it.” He smiles broadly.

“Thanks, Jim,” I laugh.

I light the fag with the lighter Jim handed me after hitting his own.

“Aaah~” I exhale the first draw with satisfaction.

Jim laughs, “Heheh~ Just be careful with da ashes... At yer right, ya have a zero-gravity ashtray. Heh. Hold da fag always over it when not puffing. It sucks most of da smoke an’ da ashes down into a residual container.”

“Convenient.”

“Heheh~ Ask Kim’n’Kite to install some...”

“Yeah, I will...”

We both inhale deeply...

Time flies while Jim explains stuff about the ventilation system, the oxygen generator, and the air purifier and filtering system until, »*Ding!* Please, be sure to take control.«

“Heh... We’re reachin’ da exit gate.”

“Already? Are we in Jupiter already?” I ask flabbergasted.

“Heh! Sure pal,” he grins.

“Fuck me... that’s fast!”

“Heh. This job’s quite simple, heheh~ We only have a short part o’ direct nav,” Jim laughs.

“Direct nav?” I ask intrigued.

“Heh... Direct navigation, in open space... Da only place we really hafta be on our toes, heheh~”

We exit the gate. There’s not much traffic according to the AR, mostly space-trucks.

“Heh... Jupiter an’ its moons are mostly gas an’ chemical compound mines. Heheh~ Ganymede’s a refinery moon, where most o’ da mined gasses an’ compounds are refined an’ processed. Hehe~”

I look at the scenery astonished.

“Wow... The cargo is an already processed compound?”

“Heh, yeah...”

“Didn’t you mention something about fuel?”

“Heh.” He nods. “*Radio-Act IV*. More explosive than nitroglycerine. Heheheh~”

“No shit, and what’s for? Something so unstable...”

“Heh... To feed terraformers.”

“Terraformers?”

“Yeah, heh! A humongous complex o’ machines an’ ships which transform da atmosphere o’ an inert planet to make it habitable.”

“Oh? Like Mars? Aia mentioned it is inhabitable.”

“True, heh... Donna ask me how this stuff works, no idea. I only know dat da *Radio-Act IV*’s used to bombard da planet with complex chemical compounds.”

“Huh?”

“Better ask when we arrive dere, heheh~” he laughs.

“Yeah, I will...”

Jim points at one of the moons, “Heh... dat’s Ganymedes.”

Just behind the moon, Jupiter’s Great Red Spot can be seen... Overwhelmed by the view, I remember my smar-terminal, take it out and search for the camera app. There it is... I focus on Jupiter... *click*. The terminal shows the picture I took, impressive... Jupiter...

“Hehehe~ Doin’ sightseein’?” Jim laughs heartily.

“Of course, man! It’s the first time I’m outside the inner border. I’ve never seen Jupiter that near, and less live.”

“Hehehe~ True. Then...” He turns off half of the AR system displayed on the windshield. “In fifteen minutes, we arrive in Ganymedes, heh.”

“Thanks, pal...” I nod at him.

I keep on taking pictures of Jupiter and the moons without the intrusive AR as we close in towards the moon.

“Kira, shut yer cam off...”

“Huh?”

“We’re enterin’ a restricted area.”

“Oh~ Okay.”

I close the cam app. Jim’s always cheerful face has turned completely serious.

Looking forward with a stern face, he says, “They’re able to detect any activated cam. Da only allowed ones are da truck’s system cams.”

“Really?”

“This area’s a Confidentiality-C zone. Dere’ only two higher ones... *A*’s purely military, *B*’s majority military, an’ *C*’s half military, half civil...”

“Wow...”

“The ISTM’s da only certified transporter in da Sol System for such transports. Ya hafta be one of da Aces to do da higher two categories...”

“Meaning, we can do transports for the army?”

“Yeah, pal. Heh! But ya won’t like it... They’re fuckin’ assholes with ya... Dey search yer stuff an’ frisk ya from tip to toe... SpeedKitty an’ da Queen absolutely refuse those shipments.”

“Fuck me... I completely understand them.”

“Heh! Me too. I only did one job for ’em... I don’ recommend ya accept any, heh...”

“Are they voluntary?”

“Yeah... Luckily, heh!”

“And what happens with the cargo?”

“Dey themselves hafta do da job. But it’s more expensive than hiring us...”

“I get it... Doesn’t it get the ISTM into problems?”

“Nope...” Jim grins. “Heh! Da old man covers his back well. He’d announce officially, dat no jobs are accepted where any o’ da truckers have deir physical integrity violated by da contracting party, heh! Hehe~”

“He’s got balls...”

“Hehehe~ Truly... In essence, he threatened da army without namin’ ’em...”

“Fuck me...”

“Heh... We’re arriving...”

«Cargo port Gamī to Stampede, do you read?»

“Loud and clear, Space Cowboy speaking.”

«Perfect. Someone else than the pilot is detected. Name passengers and function.»

“I’m accompanied by da Phoenix, an ISTM colleague. Ma copilot.”

«Roger. Proceed to sector five. Disembark through airlock two.»

“Roger an’ out...”

“Are they cold...”

“Heh... yeah... Oh, yeah, an advice, don’ let ’em provoke ya... Da lower ranked army guys love to fuck around with us truckers.”

“Really?”

“Heh! Dey canna swallow dat truckers like us get more credit than ’em in da exploration o’ da universe...”

“Assholes...”

“Heh! Yeah... but if ya canna keep cool, dey can arrest you...”

“Such cocksuckers...”

“Heh! That’s why I’m saying donna let ’em trigger ya... Calm yer fists...”

“Understood.”

I observe Jim’s inputs as he docks at the airlock.

“Heh. Now I tell da system to get into hitchin’ mode. Now da cargo guys can attach da container holds to da truck.”

“Okay, I got it.”

“Perfect, hehehe~” He frees himself from the belts and stands up. “Right, let’s meet da one in charge. Ah, yeah, heh! We’re at ’bout half Gaia’s gravity, careful with Jumps, don’ hit yer head, hehe~”

I have to laugh at his gestures. “Would be a first.”

“Hehehe~”

We exit the Stampede through the airlock and wait at another closed door.

“Heh... Dere dey come... da grunts...”

Truly, two human soldiers arrive and manipulate a control panel, the door opens.

“C’mon! Space-scum! To da cargo office.”

“Heheh~ Okay, da scum follows da trash~”

“What?”

“Oh~ Hehe~ Nothin’, nothin’ pal...”

Didn't he just say we shouldn't get worked up by them?

"More respect! It's thanks to us you've got a job! Asshole!"

"Hehe~ Thanks, Sarlacc..."

"What? How'd ya call me?"

I begin to laugh.

"And what do you laugh for?"

"Nothing..." I grin. "I just thought it should be an honor to be called like a creature from Star Wars."

"What the fuck's that?"

"You know, those movies from the twentieth century..." I laugh.

"What the fuck yer babbling about?"

"Oh?" I smirk. "I thought that soldiers are more learned nowadays..."

"What?" the soldier screams angrily.

"Hehehe~ Yer mistaken, Phoenix, this creature exists."

"For real?"

"Heh! Not sure if it's da same..."

"Stop fucking around now! Let's go!" the other soldier bellows.

"Okay, okay..."

Jim blinks an eye. Huh? Did I react as he wanted to?

We arrive at an office.

An older Human wearing an army uniform looks up as we step in.

"Oh! Jimmie!" he exclaims letting a tablet-like gadget slam onto the desk in front of him.

"Heh! Nik! Ya here?"

This Nik stands up and hugs Jim heartily and slaps his back.

“Hahaha~ Ya see,” he steps back, “jus’ before retirement dey dropped me in dis fuckin’ shit-hole.”

“Heh, seems quiet...”

“I’d wish, lad... Da grunts here’ all complete assholes... Dey only send da losers an’ babblers here...” The two soldiers who escorted us here hold their visible anger back. “Dey’ve neva seen a battle in life an’ believe dey’re some fuckin’ savior-heroes of humanity...”

“Hehehe~ Seems yer pissed off...” Jim laughs.

“Bet I am!”

“Oh... Got another star?”

“Hah! Dose motherfuckers promoted me to commanda an’ sent ma ass into dis shit-hole. Not only dat, to take charge of da cargo port... Fuckin’ assholes!”

“Hehehe~ Yer too good for ’em...”

“Dream fuckin’ on... By da way, who’s dis swarthy Asian?” Nik looks at me.

“Heh! Sorry... I’ll introduce ya...” Jim steps back and places his hand on my shoulder. “Nik, this’ da recently awakened Phoenix, from da twenty-first century. Phoenix, this’ Commander Nik, ma uncle...”

Wow! Now I understand their similarities in speech and gestures...

“Nice to meet you, Nik.” I offer my hand to the flabbergasted commander.

He looks at Jim, then at me, and back at Jim.

“Really? Jim? *Da* Phoenix?”

“Heh, I’d never lie to ya, uncle Nik, hehehe~”

Nik blinks several times... Suddenly, he takes my hand with both his hands.

“Such an ’onor! Da legendary Phoenix! Oh~ Thought yer brawnier...”

“Not many hit the mark on my looks,” I laugh.

“Really nice to meetcha. Yesternight I heard rumors ’bout yer ’wakening... Dinna believe it, thought dey’re cadets’ yackety-yak...”

“Hehehe~ He’s da real one, an’ drew with da Queen in da sim...”

“No fuck... With dat beauty?”

“Heh! What’s more, she brought him...”

“Fuck me...”

“Da old Mitsubishi hired him without blinkin’... Hehehe~”

“No fuck, anyone would... Ah~ C’mon, take a seat...” The commander offers us two chairs, and we sit down.

“Here, take some, boys...”

“Heh, uncle... Canna drink, hafta haul a cargo of Radio...”

“Oh~ Yeah, bummer... Well, I hit one. Here, Phoenix, take, ya donna pilot, right? Hahaha~”

I take the shot of whiskey.

“Of course,” I laugh. “By the way, call me Kira. Cheers.”

“Haha~ Cheers, Kira...”

I gulp it down. Wow! That’s some strong whiskey!

Jim grins at my side as I exclaim, “Tastes great! Which brand is it?”

“Hehehe~ Ya won’t get it elsewhere, Kira,” Jim laughs.

“Huh?”

I look at Nik, he laughs too, “Hahaha~ Make it maself!”

“Fuck me... It’s fucking great...”

“Thanks, lad,” he laughs again.

“Hehehe~ Sorry, uncle... But we should do da fuckin’ paperwork... Heh! Dey await us in Wintermute...”

“Oh fuck... True...”

“We’ll come someday on visit to have some drinks,” I laugh.

“Hahaha~ I’ll ’wait it eagerly.”

“Hehe~ Sure, uncle. An’ if ya come by Gaia, as well....”

“Hahaha~ Sure. But I wanna stay in yer sty...”

“Heh... what’s so bad about it?”

“It lacks a female’s touch, Jimmie. Hahaha~”

“Don’ remind me o’ dat, uncle...” Jim grimaces.

“Hahaha~”

I take mental notes while Nik and Jim go through the digital *paperwork* with yet another tablet, a DigiWaybill, also called DW. It details the cargo, origin, destination, and the data of the truck and the trucker, the whole manifest. The DW from the truck connects with the one of the dispatcher or recipient wirelessly. Both confirm the data with their fingerprints.

“Heh, perfect. Now let’s check it visually. Ma Stampede’s system already confirmed six hazmat tank holds.”

“Haha~ Yer a professional, Jimmie.”

“Heh! Da Phoenix is with me to learn da differences from his times an’ get a good update, hehehe~”

“Hahaha~ Kira, donna take him too seriously, but I can guarantee, he’s da best in hazmat cargo.”

“Thanks, Nik,” I laugh. “I’ll make sure to learn the most possible.”

“Hahaha~”

Jim is satisfied with the cargo. Both sign again their DWs.

“Heh, thanks, uncle... But we hafta leave...”

“Hahaha~ Don’ worry, lad. Ya already brightened up ma week,” Nik laughs, then looks at the two soldiers. “Ah, privates...”

“Sir!”

“Don’ eva pester dese two again... Dis goes for all of ya... If I get wind of it...” Nik holds his finger to his neck and draws it slowly from one side to the other. Both soldiers visibly swallow empty. It seems they fear him as much as they hate him...

Nik turns to us and slaps our backs.

“Save travels, lads, hahaha~ Have fun!”

“Heh! Thanks, uncle Nik. See ya...”

“Thanks, Nik. I hope we’ll get a better time to talk.”

“Hahaha, sure lad...”

Half an hour later, we enter the Jupiter-Alpha Centauri Jump. Jim went through the same procedure as at the GGC.

Once inside the Jump, I ask, “By the way, what happens if you try to enter a Jump ignoring the procedure and don’t pay?”

“Heh... won’t recommend it... Da gate closes an’ ya would end in da same space, hehehe~ with a nice welcomin’ committee... hehe~”

“Wow! The gates can be closed that fast?”

“Heh! But afterwards, it takes several hours to open ’em again, it only affects da entry gate. Those inside can still exit it.”

I blink, is this even possible?

“Fuck me...” I sigh. “Meaning, that if you got an asshole just in front of you, you have to wait?”

“Heh, yeah... but he, he’ll be in for it... He hasta pay for da restart o’ da gate an’ da compensation for da affected. Hehehe~”

“I doubt you’ll get the money, surely a fortune.”

“Hehehe~ Yup... It has been more than five years since da last incident, at least in da Sol System.”

“I bet no one has the guts to do it.”

“Heh~ Da last one still pays... an’ will pay till his last days... hehehe~”

“Fuck... Taking note... Does the same happen if you get the wrong gate?”

“Heh, yeah. If ya ignore da warnings an’ go on anyways. If ya don’ change yer vector or stop in less than three minutes, da system activates.”

“Damn... And if it is because of a breakdown?”

“Good question... Heh! Happened to a buddy o’ mine ’bout half a year ago... He sent an SOS in time an’ contacted da SGC. Dey kept da gates open an’ sent an emergency craft in. Dey took him out at da next gate an’ could patch his rig together. Heh, obviously, he hadn’t had to pay a nickel. Hehehe~”

“Thank goodness... It happened to me once... My Falcon was at a workshop for servicing, and I had a rush job, I was lent another truck... a pile of shit... I lost the brakes just in front of a fucking cop roadblock for another stupid dude... I couldn’t break, and those assholes weren’t tuned into the truckers’ frequency. I wrecked two cop cars. When I was able to stop the truck, they fell on me and arrested me like a criminal...”

“No fuck... dumbasses...”

“I was in the slammer for some days until they got it sorted out...”

“For real? Fuck me... Did dey repay ya in any way?”

“Yeah... they paid me a taxi...”

“No fuck... Heh! Nothing else?”

“Nothing else...”

We keep chatting about safety at the controls until, “Oh, shit... I should be studying the piloting theory...”

I take my DigiBook out of my jacket’s pocket and unfold it.

“Heh, ya’ve got da DigiBook Micro... Hehe~ Ya should buy da Encyclopedia Galactica, hehe~ Should help ya out with yer doubts ’bout nowadays...”

I begin to laugh, “Encyclopedia Galactica?”

“Heh... Whatcha funny ’bout it?”

“Ah... It just reminded me of the stories of the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy.”

“Heh... a book?”

“Yeah. Five books... I recommend it, it’s worth the read. It’s from Douglas Adams, a twentieth-century author. An Encyclopedia Galactica appears there too, but is not as renown as the Guide...”

“Hehehe~ If ya say so, I’ll hafta read it.”

“Yeah, the Guide is something like a collaborative and interactive encyclopedia with tips on how to survive in the universe. Its best advice is *Don’t Panic*,” I laugh.

“Hehehe~ Really da best advice.”

“Yeah, I stick with it to the letter.”

“Hehehe~”

“By the way, are there still hitchhikers nowadays?”

“Hehe~ Da like... Dey pester ya at some stations, mainly truck stops an’ in highway diners.”

“Oh~ Of course... they can’t hitch a ride in space.”

“Hehe~ They’d love to... Why?”

“Oh~ It’s just because I’d gave many a lift in my times.”

“Heh~ Surely some cute chicks too... Hehehe~”

I have to laugh at his smirk, “Yeah, there were some...”

“Hehe... Including some o’ those who offer themselves for a ride?”

“Yeah,” I smirk at Jim’s grin.

He laughs, “Heh! I only gave a ride to one o’ those... She was a fuckin’ horrible stone in bed... I didn’t take any more o’ them...”

“Bad luck, pal...”

“Heh, you had better luck? Tell, pal, tell... Hehehe~”

I laugh at his comical face.

“Yeah... the Linda Lisa... we called her so because she was from a Latino background... She traveled around the country by hitchhiking, she always carried an F4R-sign around.”

“Don’ fuck! Fuck for Ride?”

“Yeah,” I laugh. She became quite famous among us truckers. I gave her more than one rides...”

“Heh! In both meanings!”

“Yeah...”

We both laugh.

“Was she hot?” he asks intrigued.

“Yeah, quite... She was quite wild... a nympho...”

“Fuck me... Why do those things don’ happen to me? Heh!”

“You stopped giving rides after the first disappointment... Of course there were some not so good as her, but nevertheless, I gave them a ride...”

“Heh... true...”

“Besides, I gave most hitchhikers a lift just to have some company, as most hauls were quite boring...”

“Heh, true... Well, I take some too, at least if they’re not F4R...”

“Open more your door, perhaps you get lucky,” I laugh.

“Hehehe~ Yer right...”

“Ah~ Back to the encyclopedia, do we have connection in here? To buy and download it...”

“Heh. Sure, da SGC offers free connection to *Unet* in its Jumps, hehehe~”

“Unet?”

“Heh, da Universal Network, I know, sounds strange. Issa calque from its original name in *Īihah*... It’s jus’ like GlobalNet on Gaia...”

“Wow! An interplanetary internet?”

“Heh... Internet?”

“Oh, it isn’t called that way anymore... Uh~ what’s *Īihah*?”

“Heh... right... *Īihah* is da native language o’ da *Īiha* people.”

“*Īiha*?”

“Heh... yeah... Seems ya haven't met any yet...” I negate, he seems to ponder a minute. “Hmm... let's see... Remember those classic images o' da small, gray, big-headed aliens from da movies?”

“Yeah... don't say...”

“Not exactly, heh!” he laughs. “They're about da same height as us, even da head has a similar proportion like ours, but is more oval. Their skin's silvery, not really gray. Heh... I'm bad at describing people... hehehe~ you'd better look it up in da encyclopedia...”

“Right...” I launch the bookstore app. “Let's see... Reference... Oh~ It's on the top... And quite cheap...”

“Heh. Being da best-sold reference book, it hasn't to be expensive. But ya hafta buy it anew each year, or it won't be updated anymore. Hehe~”

“Oh, then I'm buying a subscription?”

“Yup, da like, hehe~”

“Okay, nice. Buy... Language... Fuck me...”

“Heh, if ya wanna Universal Standard English, select universal languages first.”

“Oh! Right, found it. I'm able to change the language?”

“Yup. If ya wanna all of them, dey won't fit on yer DigiBook, heh! Ya hafta download 'em first... hehe~”

“I believe you... Only in English for now...” The download begins, it's huge! “By the way, what language do we use outside the Ear-Gaia?”

“Hehehe~ Easy... English...”

“No fuck?”

“Heh~ In most places we frequent, the Cargo Stations, English is one o' da official languages. An' in many other places dey speak English too...”

“Really? No fuck?”

“No fuck, hehehe~ Heh, best ya check it in da EG. Anyways, nowadays there' only six major languages on Gaia.”

“Fuck me...”

“Heh, Universal English on da whole planet. In South America, Modern Spanish. In Europe, for da exception of Britain, it’s Modern German. In Africa an’ da Orient, dey speak Arabere. An’ in Asia, dey speak Chinese an’ Japanese... hehehe~”

“Fuck me... things got easier in the past millennium.”

“Heh! At this rate, Gaia could be adopting Universal English as its sole official language...”

“Fuck me...”

“Heh, donna know da details... but most o’ those languages are not da same as in yer times. Seems dat Modern German isn’t really German anymore, nor is Chinese... Arabere is, as far as I know, heh, a fusion o’ many languages with Arabic. It’s said dat only English an’ Japanese hasn’t changed much. Heh! Proof’s dat ya understand me... hehehe~”

“That’s true, lucky me...” I laugh. “But, honestly, it took me quite a time to get your accent... The way you pronounce is quite... strange for me...”

“Heh, really?”

“Yeah,” I nod, “not only you, all of them... It took me more than an hour to get somewhat used to Aia’s accent...”

“Heh... yeah... Yers’ also quite strange, hehehe~” Jim laughs. “Don’ worry, it’s easy to get, ya speak like in da old movies... hehehe~”

“Fuck, now it looks like I’m an old fuck...”

“Heh, ye are... over a millennium old...”

I burst into laughter, “Yeah... right...”

“Fuck!”

Jim hits the breaks, or whatever you call it now... A kind of sportster, similar to Aia’s Ferrari, changed lane at a lower speed... The AR splashes red caution warnings all over the windscreen... Granted, it was over a mile—er... kilometer ahead... but at these unbelievable speeds, it’s as if it were some feet—fuck! Some scores of centimeters? Huh?

Jim takes the mic completely pissed off, “Asshole! Don’ eva pull in front o’ a truck, are ya trying to kill all o’ us?”

«Oh~ So scary...»

“Heh... Ya haven’t seen da signs o’ ma cargo... Got more than a hundred-seventy kilotons of Radio-act IV in ma back, hehehe~”

«And what the fuck?»

“Hehehe~ One scratch an’ this Jump’s a livin’ hell in seconds, hehehe~ C’mon... move!”

«Fuck you! Don’t come near!»

The sportster accelerates but Jim is still on his tails, well... a kilometer or so... Finally, he desists and changes lanes. Jim overtakes him in seconds...

“Hehehe~ Asshole...”

I laugh, “I’d loved to see his face.”

“Hehe~ yeah... But’s true, if this blows up... this’d be da very same hell...”

“Fuh~ Would it affect the gates?”

“Heh! Sure. An’ a wide range... This’ jus’ like a tunnel... Da Stampede might survive... But da Jump’d collapse without any possibility to reopen it...”

“Fuck me... This means, even if we’d survive...”

“Heh, we’d float in da limbo for eternity... hehehe~”

“Not really encouraging...”

“Heh, ya say it, pal.”

After I floated back for more Cokes, I sit down and go on with my theory book. I’d loved to read some of the new EG, but knowing myself, I would lose track of time and never pick up this book... I pick up from the part where I left it with Aia.

Oh... “By the way, Jim... Are there speed limits?”

“Heh. As in max speed allowed by law or vehicle?”

“Oh~ By law...”

“Hehehe~ In space, none. In a Jump, heh, dey can put some limits, but mostly in special circumstances. Heh, like a special transport occupyin’ more than one lane, or an accident happened... Normally, dere’ no limits, hehe~”

“Oh~ Neat... It’s just because it isn’t mentioned in here... Just the speed limits on planets and their inner borders. Specifying ground and airspeeds...”

“Heh, really? Well, dere’s no reason to limit speed in open space... hehehe~”

“Yeah, true,” I laugh.

“By the way, hehe~ What’s yer new Falcon’s top speed?”

“Uh~ Kim and Kite said something about five-hundred *Ps*...”

“No fuck! A true falcon! Heh!”

“Uh, what’s that *P*?”

“Heh, Paulet. It’s da speed measurement in space.”

“Wow... Let’s see... *Paulet*... The EG says that the speed’s name was put in honor for Pedro Paulet. A Peruvian scientist and engineer, he’s considered the father of the liquid-fuel rocket engine...”

“Heh! I didn’t know dat... hehe~”

“Yeah... It says that even Wernher von Braun considered him as one of the fathers of aeronautics...”

“Fuck me, heh! Always learning somethin’ new. Da powa o’ a good encyclopedia, hehe~”

I laugh, “Yeah. There is a table with comparisons to other speeds... but I can’t make any sense of it...”

“Heh... I believe ya... Let’s see... Ma Stampede has a top speed o’ three-hundred eighty paulets. Da fastest sportster on sale reaches ’bout three-hundred paulets... hehe~”

“No fuck! My truck will be faster than a sportster?”

“Hehehe~ Donna be surprised... A truck’s way bigger an’ can thus carry bigger an’ more powerful powerplants, an’ way more fuel... hehe~”

“Oh~ yeah... Now I get it... of course... in space, there is no friction...”

“Hehe~ Seems yer gettin’ it...”

“Is there a difference in fuel too?”

“Heh, ’course... Trucks use da same fuel as da big crafts, da *Tsien*.”

“Wow! Then we have miniature spacecrafts?”

“Hehehe~ Technically, yeah. Smaller vehicles, like sportsters or vans an’ MUVs, use another fuel, da *Korolev* or simply *Koro*... heh...”

“Oh~ That explains the fuel pumps at the CreativeTruck... I only saw T, K, and M on them...”

“Hehehe~ Dat’s right... da *M*’s for *Microplas*. Used for non-space vehicles, heh, like bikes an’ other near-ground vehicles, hehe~ It’s really cheap, quite powerful an’ biodegradable, it donna fuck up da environment.”

“Interesting...”

“Heh, oh, yeah... Right now, da fastest private vehicle in da Sol system’s Enya’s Cheetah, hehehe~”

“No fuck?”

“Heh, yeah... Only experimental an’ governmental vehicles are faster, like special security vehicles, da latter jus’ barely, hehehe~ She holds da record o’ five-hundred twenty-three paulets. Aia’s Thunderbird reaches five-hundred nineteen... hehe~ Da second fastest...”

“Fuck me... How much will mine reach?”

“Hehehe~ I’d love to see a race between da Queen, SpeedKitty an’ da Phoenix... dat’d be da bomb, hehehe~”

“Yeah,” I laugh, “truly...”

I sigh, Jim looks at me.

“What?”

I shake my head, “Naw... I’m just overwhelmed by all this new stuff.. We’re technically traveling at speeds faster than light...”

“Yup,” he laughs, “several times.”

“Even outside of these Jumps?”

“Yup. Our powerplants are special FTL-plants. Don’ ask...” he grimaces, “no idea how dey work. An’ da Jumps... no idea either. I jus’ use ’em. If it helps me to get ma work done in time, I’m happy, heheh~”

I laugh at his gestures.

.

I go back to the theory... So many changes...

.

“By the way, Jim...”

“Yeah?”

“The old Mitsubishi-san said something about the Aces of Aces... What did he mean by that?”

He laughs heartily, “That’s an invention o’ him. Da ISTM had da term Ace for their four best truckers forever. But each branch o’ da ISTM has a set of Aces.”

“Branch?”

“Yeah, each sector has a branch or subsidiary o’ the ISTM.”

“Sector?”

“Heh!” He grins at my one-word questions. “Yeah, depending on da size o’ da solar system, it’s per system, if not, a greater sector is established. For example, Central ISTM’s sector is da Gaian Sector, meaning, da Sol System and almost da whole Orion-Cygnus arm.”

“Central ISTM?”

“Heh, yeah. Da Alpha station is da HQ o’ da Central ISTM, da core o’ da whole ISTM. Each branch is mostly independent, but hasta follow da Central’s rules.”

“And Mitsubishi-san?”

“Heh! He’s da boss o’ all. But manages mostly da Central.”

“Then, the Aces?”

“Yeah, heh, each branch has its Aces, even da Central.”

“Oh, then we are the Aces of Central?”

“Nope!” he laughs heartily.

“Huh? Then?” I ask blinking.

“According to da old Mitsubishi, we’re better than Aces.” He grins.

“Better?”

“Yeah,” he smirks. “Aces of Aces...” he says proudly as he takes his pack of fags out of his vest pocket and offers me one. After taking a deep puff, he smirks again. “Da old Mitsubishi felt dat da use of Ace had become too mainstream, heh, as most branches designate da Aces jus’ ’cause of simple performance statistics. Too mechanized, heheh~ He coined da Aces of Aces to go back to its roots.”

I blink. “He assigns Aces by hand?”

“Yeah, heh! We’re his personal Aces.”

“No fuck...”

“Heheh~ But he never misses. If ya get his blessing, yer sure he considers ya da best of da best.”

“I don’t think I’m—”

“Yer da best. No doubt. Heh!” he interrupts me.

“But—”

“Jus’ yer name, Phoenix. That’s all he needed, heheh~”

“I’m hired just for my name? Am I a publishing stunt?”

“No, no!” he almost Jumps up. “Da old Mitsubishi don’ ever do such stuff. Heh~ He’s sure dat ya will outperform most truckers.”

“How? I’ve just awoken... and—”

“He’s got dat gut feelin’...” he interrupts me yet again. “Happened with Aia, with Enya, an’ maself, heh. Once he met each o’ us, he simply looked at us, nodded

an' jus' said, 'Yer my Ace now, da best of da best, an Ace o' Aces...' an' turned 'round."

"No fuck..."

"Yeah," he nods, "dat's da way I became an Ace o' Aces. Aia an' Enya got it in a similar way... I still considered maself a rookie..."

I sigh deeply, "Then he expects that I outperform my old self?"

"Yeah, heh... Being an Ace of Aces has a lot o' pressure... But also a lot o' privileges."

I just hope I can live up to his expectations. I already feel the pressure...

After a good while reading on the piloting theory, Jim offers me another fag.

"We're 'bout to reach da exit gate... hehe~"

"No fuck... at Alpha Centauri?"

"Heh, jus' for lunch. Hehe~ We'll take a rest an' eat somethin' at da Base Station."

"Wait... Isn't Alpha Centauri a star? How near is the gate to it?"

"Heh, Alpha Centauri's a binary system, heh, it has two stars. Da Centauri Gate Complex's quite far from da stars, at da best location... Don' worry 'bout it..." I sigh, and he goes on, "By da way, do ya've got a weapon?"

"Yeah, why?"

"Then take it with ya, heh. This place isn't always friendly, hehe~"

"Oh~ Okay..."

I leave my fag on the space-ashtray, float back, and look for my backpack.

"Fuck! That's an M29? Genuine?"

"Uh, yeah... an S&W M29..."

"Badass... Heh! But don' dare to fire it inside a craft or a station, da bullets may damage da fuselage or worse..."

“Hmm~ Right... I haven't thought of that... I should buy something more civilized...” I laugh.

“Hehehe~ Later on, we get ya one. For now use yers, at least it scares da shit out o’ anyone...”

“Yeah, true...” I laugh.

“Heh... Can I see it close up later on?” he asks intrigued.

“Sure...” I nod as I load the revolver...

“Fuck me...” I’m flabbergasted as we exit the gate...

The AR is littered with IDs, thousands of space vehicles cross a vast sector. Over twenty of those huge gates are bustling with activity.

“Welcome to da Alpha Centauri Gate Hub,” Jim laughs.

“Gate Hub?”

“Heh, issan important hub. Ya can transfer to almost any other hub or nearby system through here.”

“So a kind of crossroad?”

“Yup! Heh~ Let’s get out o’ here... Da gate system indicates an exit vector, we’ve got to follow it.”

“Understood, like those of flight control.”

“Yup, heh! Da truck’s system told it dat we wanna take another gate, thus shows us da way out o’ da complex.”

“Wow! Cool.”

Overwhelmed by the view, I look around...



To be continued in:

SpaceHighway: The Awakened ~ A05 - Base Station and Terraformers

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