The Queen and The King of the **SpaceHighways**

B08 ~ Press Conference

The colossal press hall is up to the brim with people awaiting the latest ISTM announcement. This is not a simple press room, but a whole auditorium!

Astonished, Aia and I look at one of the monitors covering the five-thousand seats. There are even people standing! The first rows are packed with journalists.

Are we really going to do this?

I look at Aia's smiling face. Yes, we're going to do it.

"Nervous?" she asks me.

"Yeah," I confess.

"Me too," she confirms, giggling shyly. "But-"

"We have to do it," I interrupt her and sigh. "It's the best way to get peace."

"Yeah..." Aia sighs too. "Let's make it fun, at least, shall we?"

"Right," I chuckle.

As planned, Mitsubishi-san and Yuuki take the stage first. The noisy hall goes silent. The old man wanders calmly towards the podium, while Yuuki stands to his right.

"Dear friends," the boss addresses the audience, "thank you for coming on such a short notice. We, the ISTM and I, have a fabulous announcement to make today. Even I got moved by the news..." The crowd starts to whisper among themselves. "However..." The crowd goes silent again as Mitsubishi-san goes on, "I will not be the one who will make the announcement, but two of our Aces of Aces! Please, welcome The Queen and the Phoenix!"

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A roaring applause fills the vast hall as we step onto the stage.

Aia smiles radiantly and waves at the cheering crowd, while I simply lift my left hand and try to smile despite my nervousness. Her metallic blue cocktail dress glitters from the many camera flashes flooding us.

We sit on our designated chairs while the old Mitsubishi and Yuuki take theirs behind a long desk.

The camera flashes blind me, and the noise is deafening until the boss lifts his hand.

"Please, when you want," Mitsubishi-san asks us to speak.

I look at Aia, she nods and smiles.

Okay.... I take a deep breath.

"Thank you for coming," I start. "Thank you, Mitsubishi-san, for having us.

"The announcement we want to share with you today, concerns Aia—The Oueen—and me..."

"Yes," Aia goes on while she takes my trembling hand lying on the table, "today, we are making it official, we are dating."

The hall erupts in cheers, and we're blinded, once again, with flashes. The deafening cheers die down as the boss lifts his hand again.

"Last Saturday, Kira proposed to me, and I obviously accepted," Aia declares joyfully and shows the crowd her engagement ring.

More cheers deafen our ears until they are silenced by Mitsubishi-san.

"And Aia proposed to me shortly afterward," I add, showing the crowd my engagement ring.

Aia smiles at me lovely, and we kiss in front of the audience. The noise level from the crowd just went overboard. Aia's 'I love you' whisper is almost drowned under the cheers.

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"Congratulations, Aia-chan, Kira-kun," Yuuki says after the noise has finally calmed down, "Could you, please, tell us a bit about your relationship, to answer most possible questions?"

"Sure," Aia giggles. "As most of you know, Kira awakened on January the seventh of this year. I met him that day. We became friends in no-time, and our love flourished."

"We shared an apartment while I got used to nowadays' way of life," I say, taking over. "During our time sharing home, we got to learn a lot about each other. We started to discuss our feelings after a time, but couldn't go further..."

"Mainly, because that horrible event Kira was involved in..." Aia continues, "Crushmont..." she sighs.

"Yeah..." I confirm.

"From there on, we struggled about our relationship..." Aia sighs again. "We knew what we wanted, but were still very much affected by *that*. However, we were able to break that spell on Saturday night.

"Kira organized a beautiful dinner at the Dutchess, but he didn't have to, our feelings flourished the moment he came home from a long haul. There was no need for words, our bodies and emotions expressed 'emselves by 'em alone," she ends giggling.

"True..." I laugh, "however, that dinner was the real starting point for our new life together, as a couple."

"Yeah," Aia giggles again. "It truly was..."

As the crowd cheers again, we look over at Yuuki. She takes her cue, stands up, and moves towards the podium.

Meanwhile, Mitsubishi-san addresses the audience, "I know the presentation has been short, but I doubt that more has to be said," he laughs. "I believe, it is time to answer questions from the eager journalists."

The whole hall roars in laughter until Yuuki silences them from the podium.

"I will handle the turns. As many journalist want to ask questions, keep in mind that a maximum of two directly related questions shall be asked. And to the tabloid reporters, please, refrain from asking too personal questions. A reminder

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to add, The Queen and the Phoenix have full right to not answer a question they feel too personal.

"If your publication wants to have a full interview, please, contact the ISTM's press department. We will study the interview questions and schedule a private interview with The Queen and the Phoenix if they agree with the topic to discuss. Please, refrain from asking for a direct interview on the spot." Wow! Now I get why she is in charge of the ISTM's public relations, she knows the journalist well. "First... sir Lengreth from Gaia News, please..."

The named Human stands up and addresses us.

"First, congratulations!" he joyfully exclaims. After we thank him, he goes on, "You have just said that you proposed to each other in the famous Dutchess restaurant. Could each of you tell us about the moment?"

"Oh, sure..." Aia giggles. "I actually proposed after Kira, already on our way back home. I was so moved by his proposal, that I actually forgot mine," she laughs. "His was simply beautiful, just like in the movies..." She sighs happily. "It was the perfect place, with beautiful roses, a small string orchestra, incredible food, and..." Aia halts her words in suspension. "At the most romantic moment, just as the fireworks went off, he kneeled before me... asking me *the* question!"

"Truly a memorable moment," the journalist interjects. "And you accepted, as we know now."

"Oh, yeah! I shouted the 'Yes, I do,' and anyone in the restaurant heard it," Aia confirms with a short buster of laughter. Everyone laughs with her.

"I was so moved when Aia also proposed to me, I almost forgot that I did the same thing just a mere thirty minutes prior," I say and laugh.

"Phoenix, how did you get the idea of proposing in the Dutchess? I mean, it's difficult to get a table, and there are many other cheaper alternatives..." another journalist asks me.

"Actually, the only thing planned was the dinner," I answer.

"Kira promised me a dinner after a month-long haul, before he went," Aia interjects and giggles.

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"Exactly," I confirm. "During that haul, I planned to propose. But I didn't know a good place. I got the recommendation for the Dutchess from Yuuki..." I point at her with open palm. "And SpeedKitty helped me to hatch the plan... Thanks, Enya!" I shout. "It worked!" I add, laughing.

"You're welcome!" Enya shouts from far away, and everyone bursts into laughter.

"Unbeknownst to me," I go on after the laughter died down, "Yuuki reserved for us Mitsubishi-san's table at the Dutchess under my name... So, huge thanks to both of them." I bow to them.

"You are welcome, Kira-kun. It was worth it," the old man laughs.

"It was beautiful," Aia giggles. "From the limousine to the proposal, it has been the best night of my life."

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"Congratulations, again," says another journalist. "Queen, you mentioned you also proposed to the Phoenix, this means, you also had a plan... I am right?"

"Oh, yes..." Aia giggles. "I made many plans during that month alone... I got me a new cocktail dress, just for the occasion. I also got the engagement ring. But most of my plans just burst the moment Kira entered our apartment... I was so happy he came back," she giggles, "that I completely forgot 'em... My emotions went mayhem the moment I saw him...

"I actually had planned to propose to him on that promised dinner. He was just faster than me," she giggles again. "I was taken by surprise... Actually, I hoped for it... At least, I anticipated it thanks to the ambiance. It was the perfect setting. Just as I took the decision to propose, Kira stood up to kneel before me..." Aia says, drying a tear of happiness. "I was so happy, that I forgot my own proposal..."

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"Sorry for asking such a strange question, sir," the journalist apologizes. "I presupposed that it was not usual for women to propose to men in your times before your cryopreservation..."

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[&]quot;Would you have accepted The Queen's proposal, Phoenix?"

[&]quot;Of course," I confirm.

"No offense taken," I say. "You're right, it wasn't the usual thing. However, I live in this era now, and I think I have learned to adapt," I laugh. "In Aia's case, no doubt, I would have reacted the same as she did. I actually did, just a bit later..."

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"I hope my question isn't offensive..." Everyone laughs at the tabloid reporter's introduction. "But you know what our readers wanna know... Have you done it?"

"Is that a question or an affirmation?" Aia asks, wearing a suggestive smirk.

The whole hall explodes in laughter again.

"Write whatever you want, as usual," I add, laughing.

"Then..." the reporter laughs, "do you have plans for children?"

"Oh, yes..." Aia confirms. "It's still early, but already discussed it."

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"Do you already have a date for your wedding? What kind of wedding?" asks a Reaf.

"Still too early to worry about that," I laugh.

"Yeah, we're engaged for barley five days now... We hadn't had time to discuss it yet..." Aia confirms.

"But rest assured, we'll tell you the day after," I add, laughing.

"Or after the honeymoon," Aia says, giggling.

Yet again, the crowd laughs with us.

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"You've confirmed that you have been dating for the last five days. That means, that most recent reports about your relationship are true..." another reporter starts her question.

"Or rather utterly false," Aia interjects with a burst of laughter.

"You have quite the imagination," I add, also laughing.

"True..." the reporter sighs, "would you give us a small insight about your last few days?"

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"So you can crosscheck your hits and misses?" I laugh.

"Not much to tell," Aia says and giggles. "We're taking this week—Actually, we got the week off. By the way, thank you for the nice proposal honeymoon vacations, Mitsubishi-san," she tells the old man.

"You are welcome, Aia-chan, Kira-kun. I am just hoping I will get an invitation to your wedding," he laughs joyfully.

"You will be the first one to get one," I confirm, laughing.

"That would be nice," he laughs again.

"Ah, yeah... So... Over the last few days, since we're dating, we went to my parent's home. Kira wanted to meet 'em. We also went to a nice beach on Venus and had, overall, a nice time together," Aia informs.

"Meaning, we have been molested by reporters in New Angeles, on Mars, and on Venus... that's already three planets," I add and laugh.

"Yup, from our night out till today... We would really appreciate your peers could leave us alone for a while." Aia giggles and adds, suggestively, "We need a lot of time alone now..."

As the whole hall erupts into another laughter, Aia looks at me with a seductive smirk. She is clearly enjoying teasing the press. I smirk back and slightly strengthen my grip on her hand in mine.

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"Congratulations, Queen, Phoenix," a young Felii woman congratulates us, again. "I am Nehriah, from Interspecies. You are now, without the slightest doubt, the most famous interspecies couple. Have you had some inconveniences due to your different species?"

"Oh..." I'm actually surprised by her question. *Interspecies*, intriguing name for a magazine.

"Yeah..." Aia sighs. "I had some strange encounters because of my species alone. However, since we're dating, we already had two altercations because of some anti-IE people..."

"Yes..." I also confirm. "One happened on the seaside avenues of NA, the other on Mars..."

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"The first one was horrible... An old woman almost went berserk just because we were kissing..." Aia relates.

"Actually, it was just a peck..." I add. "That woman started insulting us vocally in front of everyone, on a terrace café."

"Fortunately, all patrons defended us and forced her to leave," Aia says, wearing a broad smile.

"For the rest, we had either great feedback or went unnoticed," I comment.

"True..." Aia confirms. "We've met some really nice people."

"That's wonderful," Nehriah says, smiling broadly. "I know how it feels. I am in an interspecies relationship too... I'd really wish to have a conversation with you—Ah! Sorry! Sorry!" she exclaims. "I shouldn't ask for an interview now..." she says downcast and blushing while some other reporters laugh around her.

"Aia, dear?" I whisper while muting my mic.

"Yeah, darling?" she whispers back.

"Should we grant her that interview? I have the feeling that we should..."

"Me too..." she whispers as we both nod. Aia gesticulates at Yuuki while Nehriah recomposes herself. "We want that interview with Nehriah."

"Understood," Yuuki confirms. "I'll ask her backstage after the conference."

"Thanks, Yuuki-san," I tell her.

"Doitashimashite1 Aia-chan, Kira-san," Yuuki says, slightly bowing to us.

"I'm so sorry, again..." Nehriah finally says. "What message would you love to send to other interspecies couples and polys?"

"Don't let others tell you what to do," Aia says with a bright smile.

"Nor whom you should or shouldn't love," I add.

"Nobody can tell you what species you can or can't date."

"Nor what gender or sexual orientation your partners should have."

"You alone, you and your partners can decide that."

」どういたしまして: Japanese: "You are welcome."

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"In love, there is no place for racism, speciesism, LGBTQ-phobia, nor any other phobia. Love traverses genders, species, sexual orientations, anything. Whatever and whoever you are, you are valid and deserve to love and to be loved," I blurt out while Aia caresses my hand in hers. "Want to marry? Do it. Do you love someone who has no place in your family? Your family has no right to hold you back. Want to have children? Have them as long as you know you can support them and give them a wonderful life. Are you LGBTQ? Ignore the haters and embrace the community and its allies. Do you love someone from another species? Embrace them. I support you." Aia squeezes my hand firmly, smiles warmly, and nods. "We support you," I conclude.

My short soliloquy ends with a roaring applause from the crowd.

Nehriah dries a tear and says, "Thank you, for your wonderful words."

"What are your future plans now? Short and long term?" asks another journalist.

"Short term... enjoy our new relationship," Aia says, giggling.

"In the long term... the same," I add, laughing.

"Exactly," Aia giggles. "We haven't planned anything. For now, we will do everything as before..."

"Just together," I end her sentence.

"Yup!" Aia laughs.

"You expressed wanting to have children... Being an interspecies couple, is your compatibility confirmed? Sorry to ask a possibly depressing question..." a further journalist asks and apologizes.

"Well... We don't know yet..." Aia sighs. "We'll see an interspecies specialist over the next days. We wanna know if it's possible for us to have children."

"Yeah," I confirm. "We want to know our possibilities as soon as possible, to be prepared."

"Yes... I don't wanna learn that we can't, the moment we decide to have a kid..." Aia sighs again.

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"Our feelings for each other won't change. Whatever the results of that test," I assert.

"Exactly," Aia confirms. "But we wanna know. If we can't, there will always be a way. I'm adopted. My wonderful parents found me and adopted me. They are my real parents, and I love 'em."

"This is another message we want to convey," I say, caressing Aia's hand with my thumb. "Don't let the fact that you can't have children because of your partner's species ruin your feelings. Don't lose your hopes. There's always a way. Adoption is one of many possibilities. Unable to have children does not render your love invalid."

"Exactly," Aia confirms with a radiant smile. "I, we already know that our feelings won't be affected. It will, of course, affect our immediate happiness, but not our long term happiness.

"So, please, don't feel *broken* if you are not compatible with your partners, you aren't. You are still valid and loved."

"Thank you..." the journalist says, drying a tear and blowing his nose.

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"Regarding family," another reporter begins, "you've mentioned that the Phoenix already met your parents, Queen... Are you willing to share any comments about their reactions?"

"They love him and accept him. We both are always welcome in their home," Aia says, wearing a bright smile. "That's all I'll share."

"Thank you. I understand. Phoenix, would your parents have accepted the Queen as—?

"I don't know," I interrupt the journalist. "We will never know. But I know that my love for her will always be above my parents."

"My apologies..." the journalist ends apologizing after my harsh tone in my voice.

I loved my parents very much, even if they were, sometimes, quite strict in their belief. They always preferred me to have a Japanese girlfriend over any other. I really don't want to speculate how they would have received Aia. Surely, an 'another non-Japanese girlfriend?' stare... Shit...

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"How do you see your work from now on? Forming a family in such a difficult and dangerous job environment could be a challenge..." a further reporter asks.

"Isn't being a parent a challenge anyway?" I ask him back and laugh.

"Yeah..." Aia giggles. "That's too early to think about right now. We don't see it a problem, and we know we'll manage. I'm absolutely sure that Kira will be a wonderful father..."

"And Aia, a wonderful mother," I add while hugging her waist.

"Oh, you~" Aia charms. "That's something we'll see when the time comes."

"Meanwhile, we'll keep on with our job as good as we can. I don't see that our relationship will affect our performance," I explain.

"Yeah," Aia nods, "we shared an apartment for a while now, and we haven't found it a problem."

"However, that is not the same..." the journalist interjects.

"Sure it is," Aia laughs. "Or are you saying that certain new activities between us two might affect our job's performance?"

"It will," I laugh loudly. "At least, we'll be motivated to finish fast and early to reach home as soon as possible."

"Oh, yeah!" Aia also laughs. "That's for sure."

As the crowd's laughter dies down, another reporter asks his question, this time, to Mitsubishi-san.

"Sir Mitsubishi, what are your views about having a couple in your Aces team?"

"I am absolutely thrilled," the old man says, beaming in happiness. "As you know, the ISTM does not limit nor imposes anything on their workers outside their job's responsibilities. The ISTM is an all-inclusive enterprise. Everyone is welcome as long as they share our ethics. No one is judged, disrespected, or discriminated against for their gender, sexual orientation, relationships, and beliefs.

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"Interfering into personal matters such as relationships between our workers would only increase discontent and productivity would falter. We don't care about our relationships are in as long as it does not interfere with their job. In such cases, we discuss it with affected people and search for adequate options and solutions.

"And in the case of Aces, they are Aces because of their higher productivity than the top median anyway. As you might know, Aces might lose their status if their productivity falls below a threshold.

"In Aia-chan and Kira-kun's cases, they are, together with Enya-chan and Jim-kun, way over any productivity threshold. Even despite Kira-kun's hospitalization some months ago, he still is way above the top threshold set for Aces."

"However," the journalist says after Mitsubishi-san's brief pause, "such relationships imply time off such as maternity and paternity leaves, honeymoons, anniversaries, and such... I'm sorry to put this on the table, but really might affect the company's profits.

"That's easy, youngster," the old man replies. "If I, or the ISTM, would meddle with or even forbid such relationships, their productivity would suffer, eventually leading to them leaving the company. That would be a bigger loss, way bigger, than every *lost* day for your mentioned reasons.

"More so, if they are high-profile employees, such as any of the Aces, and, especially, if they are Aces of Aces.

"From a business perspective, the ISTM cannot risk losing any of its high-profile truckers. That would hurt us not only economically, but also in confidence. Truckers are a tight-knit community. If one high-profile trucker leaves a company for whatever reason, many others will doubt the company, and more so if it is about such a trivial reason. This could mean a massive exodus of highly qualified personnel.

"And personally, I cannot stay in the way of a happy couple. I'd rather gift them some free time as long as they keep fulfilling their contract and established quota.

"In Aia-chan and Kira-kun's case, it is obvious. Both of them are exceeding their quotas vastly. If they are able to fulfill a six-week job in less than five, I gladly reward them an extra free week. Which is the case.

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"I am absolutely sure that both of them will still keep their excellent quotas. I am confident to even claim that they will further exceed their quotas from now on. A happy worker excels in their job.

"Frankly, I am glad that you mentioned this issue. Now it is public. The ISTM will never meddle with any relationship of any of its employees. We do not care, as long as productivity is kept inside the established thresholds."

The humongous hall erupts into a standing ovation from our co-workers.

We already knew that the ISTM does not discourage relationships between its employees. It was already known to us. In fact, there are many relationships inside the huge company. The ISTM is simply too big to meddle with its employees' happiness.

That Enya doesn't want to sleep with other ISTM employees is her own decision and, actually, a quite rare one. Okay... I am the exception she would make...

I sigh thinking of Enya, about what might happen from now on.

Aia notices and whispers, muting our mics, "Don't worry darling, everything will work out."

"Yeah..." I sigh again. Did she really just read my mind, or am I a bit paranoid about it?

"Sir Mitsubishi," another journalist addresses the boss, "the ISTM is renown for their policies of openness about LGBTQIA-plus people and inclusion of different species. You employ any species and any open-minded person. Can we take that you, from now on, also support publicly interspecies couples and polys?"

"Of course," the old man says and nods. "In fact, I am organizing a new foundation for that purpose. You might know it, as I am working on it for several months now. The organization is called the Interspecies Foundation Mitsubishi, or IFM for short. This foundation's objective is to normalize the perception of interspecies relationships. Of course, its core values include any sexual orientation, gender combination, and species.

"The foundation's objectives include education, defense, legal counseling, medical counseling, and many other ways of assistance for interspecies couples and polys.

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"Despite not yet formalized, the foundation is already working together with several specialized publications, specialists, clinics, and governments. If everything goes as planned, the IFM will go public in about a month.

"That leaves me to..." Mitsubishi-san interrupts himself and looks over at us. "Aia-chan, Kira-kun, we still need honorary members and representatives... Would you accept to become part, even if just as honorary members, of the future IFM?"

Wow...

Aia and I, we look at each other. First, dumbfounded. Then, we smile and nod.

"It would be an honor," Aia says. The boss' face visibly illuminates.

"We would love to be part of the IFM and help spread mutual interspecies understanding," I add.

"We will be an example that we are two people in love, not just two species," Aia confirms as I nod.

"That is wonderful," Mitsubishi-san says with the brightest smile I have seen yet. "Hereby, I name you two the first honorary members of the IFM," he declares with pride.

Another standing ovation follows and many more questions...

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"Queen, Phoenix, can you, please, confirm the burning question-"

"Yes friend," Aia interrupts him irritated, "we did it. Yes, we had sex, we fucked. Non-stop. Yes, it was my first time. Yes, Kira is awesome. Yes, we experiment. Yes, we have fun. Yes, we're wild. Yes, we're tender. Yes! We! Fuck! Now stop asking stupid questions you already know the answer!"

Once again, the whole hall erupts into laughter and a standing ovation.

Meanwhile, Aia blushes and playfully sticks her tongue out. "Sorry, Kira," she whispers.

"It's okay, Aia," I whisper back and pull her towards me.

Our lips meet, and we start to make out in front of everyone. The roaring hall just stepped a notch up and became a living pandemonium...

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"Okay, with this, the official press conference is finished," Yuuki declares. "Remember, any publication wanting a private interview with The Queen and the Phoenix, has to send a proposal of the topics to discuss to the ISTM's press department. We will screen the interviews before contacting the couple. They will have the saying if they are interested or not."

I grab the mic and shout into it, "Buz! Prepare your place! You have the guest list! Let's party!"

Another shout comes back, "On it!" And more cheers follow. We see many truckers leave hastily following the hefty bartender.

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Backstage, we find a nervous Nehirah.

"For real?" she stutters. "I thought, I blew it..."

"No, no..." Aia calms the Felii.

"Quite the contrary," I say.

"We're really interested in an interview with you," Aia confirms.

"Wow! Cool!" The Felii jumps up full of energy and happiness. "Ah... Sorry... I'm in this job for some years now, but I'm still getting nervous in front of important people like you..." she confesses.

"Don't be," I say. "We're not important. We're just two people in love."

"Exactly," Aia confirms. "We want that interview with you because your questions came from your heart. These were your questions, not some prepared standard questions like those from the tabloids. I hate 'em."

"And I am curious about your magazine's name. I haven't heard about nor read it before," I confess, "but your questions gave me a hint..."

"Oh, I actually read it," Aia declares. "It's what you surely are guessing, love. It's about interspecies relationships tips, healthcare, interviews, and a lot more..."

"Then, confirmed, I'm in for anything supporting interspecies relationships," I assess.

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"Kira~" Aia muses and hugs me. "Yeah... We will."

"You'll have to show me one of those magazines," I tell her playfully.

"Yup! Now..." we turn to Nehriah, "what day and time would be good for you? Tomorrow we can't because we'll visit the maternity clinic for our compatibility tests."

"I wouldn't want to interrupt your engagement honeymoon..." Nehriah says. "But... the next issue will be published on Sunday."

"When do you need the interview transcribed and edited?" I ask her.

"On Friday night, New Angeles time... at the latest..." the journalist says.

"Okay, my suggestion, why don't we have lunch on Friday? You could bring your partner, or partners, and we'll have a double date. What do you think?"

"That's a wonderful idea," Aia confirms happily.

"Wonderful," Nehriah also confirms. "My boyfriend is an absolute fan of yours. He surely will make time for it. We also live in New Angeles. Would the SkyPod restaurant be fine? I'll reserve a table in one of the private boots they have. Around one pm?"

"Great," Aia confirms again, and I nod. "We'll be there."

"Perfect! I'll reserve under my name, so nobody could infer your presence," Nehriah happily informs.

Filled with excitement, the Felii leaves the backstage, and we decide that it is time to leave for the MaryQueens.

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To be continued in:

SpaceHighway: The Queen and the King ~ B09 ~ Party!

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Especially to

all the Aces of the ISTM

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