

Space Highway

The Awakened

A13 ~ Cargo 8. The Space-Highways

A long day at the helm of my Falcom comes to an end...

I am docking at the mixed service station Scorpius-23 in the triple-star system Gliese 667. I am unable to pronounce the name the locals give this system, so I stick with the classification appearing on my board computer.

«Hey! Heh! Kira! 'round 'ere too?»

“Oh! What’s up, Jim?”

«Heh! Turnin’ 'ere for da night...»

“Great, me too.”

«Then meetcha at da Mercury pub, I’ll hit there tonight.»

“Great. Can we eat something there? I’m hungry.”

«Nope. Then meetcha at da Hungry Scorpion nearby. It’s in da trucker’s section, floor thirty-six, in da entertainment zone.»

“Got it. See you there.”

«Yeah, heh! In twenty Imma there. See ya—Ah, yeah! Heh! No need for weapons 'ere, dis place’s civilized.»

“Thanks for the hint, man. See you.”

«Heh! See ya! Out.»

I laugh, he still ends the communication with ‘out’ even if it is not necessary. I understand that controllers finish their call with it, to emphasize that their instructions are definitive, but under us truckers, only a few do it. Well, I still do it, used to our *ancient* traditions of the CB radio.

I wander through the huge mixed station towards the zone Jim mentioned. I’m already getting used to these stations, they are, as the name implies, a mix between a trucking service station and a passenger station. The Intergalactic Railways has a hub here, meaning that all kind of people walks these corridors. Obviously, there are huge differences between both zones or sectors. The passenger zone is well-kept and clean, while the trucker zone is a more crazy place. The entertainment zone is on the borderlands between both sectors and people from both zones converge.

“Ah... there it is... the Hungry Scorpion...”

Quite a creative name, taking into account that we are in the Scorpius constellation...

“Heh!”

Slap!

“Ugh!”

Splat!

“Ouch, heh!”

“Nice to meet you, Jim,” I laugh after our usual rounds of him slapping my back and I elbowing him into his stomach.

“Heh! Likewise! Heheh~”

We end our greeting ritual bumping our fists, and enter the restaurant.

After having ordered, Jim tells about his route...

“Heh... an’ that’s it... How’re copin’ with yer work?”

“Oh... quite nicely. This is my eight cargo now.”

“Already? Heh!”

“Yeah,” I nod. “It’s been a week already...”

“Time flies...” he laughs.

“Yeah,” I nod again. “As each completed route is counted as one cargo... I already reached eight...”

“Not bad, heh.”

“But this route is counted as only one, even if I have several stopovers and get more cargo.”

“Oh! Doin’ a circular route?”

“Yeah, Aia recommended doing one, even if it is quite easy.”

“Yup, ya learn a lot and meetcha lot o’ new people,” he laughs.

“That’s for sure...”

“How’s da experience on da space-highways? We haven’t met for at least a week... heh.”

“Quite well...” I shrug. “I hadn’t had any problems worth mentioning.”

“Heh! That’s da King of da Highways!”

“Jim...” I sigh.

“Heheh~ I know, man, I know,” he laughs. “Ya donna like that nickname. But anyway... tell, pal, tell...”

“Oh, yeah...”

Over our dinner, I tell him the last seven routes.

Of course, I tell him about my first cargo to the Cybernetic Development Transit Station and my encounter with V. He can’t stop laughing while going through my adventure in the Sirius sector.

My second cargo was quieter and a simple trip inside the Sol System, a similar route I did with Aia before the piloting exams. There I’ve met some interesting people from various species but they don’t stand out in my acquaintance list. Others already have that place, like V or Enya...

V does not stop sending me texts asking questions about us mammalians, and in particular about us Humans. Furthermore, she doesn't stop sending me *exciting* nudes. Sadly, I cannot convince her that those pictures do not excite me the slightest, mainly because she tries to emulate poses she sees in porn mags... and fails completely...

Enya... she does not send me nudes, as promised, but her texts are spicy enough to consider them more dangerous than nudes. That, I cannot tell Jim. Even if I, officially, turned her down, she keeps actively flirting with me, luckily not as persistently as before of our talk at the MaryQueens.

The third cargo took me to the planet Amateru orbiting around the star Ain, also known as Epsilon Tauri.

Amateru is a huge farming planet providing food for the whole Taurus constellation. I was truly impressed to find an entire planet wholly dedicated to farming. I brought twelve holds filled with farming equipment from the Cargo Distribution Station of the Sirius Gate Complex, yup, Sirius again...

To my surprise, everyone from that planet knows about the Shinto goddess Amaterasu, a major deity of the Shinto religion I am well acquainted with. My parents educated me on these beliefs. It happened that the name of the planet was suggested by a Japanese observatory in the year 2015. Upon coming in contact with Gaians, the inhabitants of this planet liked Amateru much better than its old one and kept it.

The inhabitants almost revered me when they learned that I am a Japanese from the twenty-first century. They immediately named me a priest, or similar, and gave me quite a headache trying to convince them otherwise. I'm just a trucker, not a symbol of the Japanese Shinto, I know shit about the internal workings of a Shinto. I just visited them with my family...

At least, I had no need to go shopping... They imposed so much fresh food on me, that Aia's fridge and larder were up to the brim with it. She made truly delicious dishes with it, and she even let me help, that was a great progress. Seems the talk I had with her at the museum bore its fruits.

The fourth and fifth haul took me to the Felii imperial or home planet, Fel-tē'sáh, however it's pronounced...

I was excited to visit the place as I already knew some really interesting Felii. Gweraz, Ahnehi and Enya are good examples... Just remembering them I have to sigh... Mainly because of the girls and their *attachment* and interest in me.

Jim has a strange look on his face, while I shake my head trying to purge my mind with the images of both girls, and go on telling him my adventures.

I had enough time to stroll a bit through the Felii-capital, which I'm unable to reproduce, and learned a bit from their culture.

Something catching my eyes was a sign hanging near the door of many places. Unable to read Feliiti, I asked an elder gentleman who spoke fluent English. 'No Felii mestizos allowed'. I was appalled. The gentleman was interested in my outrage and took me to a small street café.

I told him that I am, technically, a mestizo of two ethnic groups. He, in turn, told me that the signs only refer to *mixins* of different species, not different Felii races.

After the initial tension about mestizos, we talked on. He is a history professor at the highest regarded university of the Felii empire.

He told me that those signs are, sadly, not a new trend here, in the capital, but quite old. Even if laws were passed that such racist behavior is banned, segregation against mestizos is still widespread.

I asked him, remembering the visit to the museum with Aia, about what the Felii think about the 'Lif and Lifrasir', the first interspecies couple formed by a Human and another species. His face lit up and he told that, for him, it was the most beautiful thing ever happened regarding with Gaia. That upon the first contact such a couple formed was, according to him, close to a miracle. It is usual that interspecies couples do not sprout until two or three generations had passed.

I questioned him further about that couple, but he only told me that any registers were either deleted or classified, mainly to protect the descendants. He also hints that those files were hidden from some more radical elements who are against interspecies relationships with non-Felii.

But what would happen to visitors which are Felii mestizos, like Enya, I asked him. He warily smiled and his ears folded down, she would be equally denigrated, it doesn't matter if she was born on Gaia. But, he happily told, that there are many other businesses wide open for mestizos, such as the café we were sitting in. He pointed at yet another sign, 'Any species and mestizo welcome'. Slowly yet steadily such signs are springing up in the whole capital, he told.

Jim is outraged by this racism, more after I've mentioned Enya.

I sigh, I am unsure if he is outraged because of the racist behavior in the Felii empire or because I involved Enya. As far as I know, and have experienced, he is surely not a racist. I remember when he said, "It doesn't matter if yer black, white, red, yellow or even green... Yer Kira, that's it. No discussion." But he's going overboard with Enya, he seems obsessed, instead of being in love...

The most interesting thing happening on the next route to Alpha Centauri, was the stopover at the Base Station while returning to Gaia.

There, Gweraz invited me to stay at his place instead of staying in a motel overnight. At first, I was a bit reluctant about it. Not because he's gay, but because I simply don't like to impose my presence in someone's home, like in the case with Aia. He convinced me with a splendid homemade dinner.

Jim laughs and mentions that Gweraz is an impressive cook, to which I fully agree. He also comments that he stayed several times in the guest room at Gweraz's place.

The former Felii prince's home is quite simple, without luxury. I asked him about it and he happily told me that he's happier without all the luxury. He wants a simple life without all the preoccupation of being royalty.

Over the dinner, which was luxurious, he told me about his life.

Gweraz was born into the second royal house of the Felii empire. This means that he would have to prove himself to become a possible candidate for the emperor's throne.

Upon questioning him about how the royal houses of the Felii empire work and how one becomes an emperor, he told me that any prince, or princess, can strive to become the official heir.

For starters, he told, the Felii-empire is a matriarchal empire. The Empress is the matriarch of their society and has several *soulmates* or partners which act as her personal advisors. He would have been a candidate to be an empress-candidate's *soulmate*. He always drew inverted commas into the air while saying *soulmates*. I asked him what he means by those signs. He told me that *soulmates* is the nearest possible translation and means way more in the Felii language. A *soulmate* is essentially a lover with full trust and love, he said. In feliiiti, a *mate* is a *simple* lover with whom you would have a formal relationship, like a partnership in English, it can be asserted through a formal vow, like marriage. But *soulmates* go beyond this notion, he told happily, it is something even more intimate and loving... Seeing that I did not get the full gist of his explanation, he went on with the rest of the explanation.

The royal males have the important role to be the advisors of their female partners, at least in official matters. Inside the home, Gweraz told, true *soulmates* do not follow any gender distinctions and are considered as true equals.

The actual empress, with her *soulmates*' advice, decides between the candidates which have the best qualities. But both, the higher and the lower house of commons can veto the decision if the candidate is considered unfit. Even the separate royal houses can influence in it... but only by expelling a member of the house if they consider him or her unfit to represent the house.

The latter happened to him, he told with a grin. He was disowned by his family and house because he was openly gay since quite young.

I asked him if it didn't hurt. Of course, he said, and more because he was the favorite son of his parents, he told folding his ears down and sighing.

Gweraz was, according to him, a really beloved young prince, mostly by the commoners, with a bright future ahead, even if he wouldn't be able to access the throne in any ways because of his sexual orientation. That he was disowned was, however, not completely a family decision, but pressure from other houses. He told that he found out later, when his parents sent him a letter of apology and offered him to pay his expenses, which he turned down.

He felt free since he was officially expelled from royalty and began to work as a simple server in a bar after hitchhiking out of the Felii empire's dominion.

It was hard to get used to the new life, but worth it, he told smiling. From there on, he laddered up enough to pay a ticket to the Base Station. He originally wanted to visit Gaia because he was fascinated by the Humans, he said. But as happened with many, he ran out of money once he reached this place and began anew, again as a server in a bar.

The same bar he's working in? I asked him. He shook his head, no, it was a smaller one, deep inside the slum. After some years, he told, he had enough money to visit Gaia, but loved the place. Plus, being a dishonored prince, he has no visa to visit Gaia, nor the ability to acquire one, he is, essentially, an illegal immigrant. Here, in the Base Station, he said, his illegal status does not matter, and that a lot of interesting people pass by, such as Jim and myself. With the money he had earned, he bought a premise and founded the Base Camp.

I was dumbfounded, he is the owner of the Base Camp. He nodded happily but asked me not to tell others, Jim already knew. Of course I will honor the promise not to tell anyone else.

But, I asked, if he does not miss anything from his former royal life. Only two things. That his family, now reconciled, is too far away and he cannot visit them easily because he is banned from the imperial planet. The other is that he has not found an instructor who could keep training him in the Fēh'dt'ehk—however it's pronounced—martial arts. It is, he explained, a martial art only taught to royalty of the Felii royal houses.

So, they have an own martial art? They have, he nodded, and not being a royalty anymore, he cannot *ascend* to the master class, which he pursued at the time he was disowned.

He then asked me if I practice any martial arts and told me that he was impressed by my movements during the brawl at the Base Camp when I first met him. Yes, I do.

Under my father and grandfather's influence, I was taught Kendo and sent to a Kendo school in Los Angeles. But I did not like it too much. Upon asked why, I told Gweraz that it is a great martial art, and that I loved its philosophy, but using swords wasn't my style. I just got my 1-dan when I left it for good.

I had a deeper interest in Nippon Kempo as it is, or was—I don't know if it is still taught nowadays—a defensive art using techniques from many other martial arts. The philosophy behind it compelled to my own way of seeing the

world and the combination of the techniques draw my interest. A year before I got cryopreserved, I got my black belt.

About what my father thought about this change... well, he wasn't too happy, honestly... but at least I kept on with a Japanese martial art.

Gweraz suggested that we should, one day, to train together and have a match, to which I agreed.

After the delicious dinner, Gweraz showed me around the Base Station and its nightlife.

He told, after questioning him, that the station is quite old and, despite its looks, quite reliable. Management, however, has been a bit lax in recent years and the slum-zone has begun to overtake part of the truckers-zone.

This station had two main zones at its beginning, he explained, a trucker and a passenger zone. The passenger zone was designed to handle a huge amount of passenger staying for several days. It didn't take long to figure out that practically no passenger would even want to stay overnight and over ninety percent of the hotels had to be closed. The passenger zone was reduced to a third and handles with no problem the huge amount of passengers changing trains, even the few staying overnight.

Decommissioning part of the passenger-zone became a problem as many stranded people began to take shelter there, as it was still directly accessible from the open zone.

Management, he told, moved the trucker-zone up, beneath the passenger-zone and tried to move the stranded people out, but had not the money for it... and most of the former warehouses and unused structures from the former trucking-zone had become a huge slum...

Nowadays, Gweraz told, that the slums of the Base Station are almost as huge as the other two zones, being the cargo facilities zone the biggest one. However, due to the rearrangement of the zones, some of the cargo ports are in the slums.

Remembering my first time on the station with Jim, I asked Gweraz if it was usual that dangerous cargo is docked down there... Yes, it is, he sighted. But, he also added, the cargo might be better protected there as in the official cargo-zone. Most people in the slums respect deeply the truckers and their huge machines, and they would protect them in needs.

I asked him why and he giggled. Most money the poor people make comes from truckers like me, plus many are quite happy there. He believes that if management allowed to build permanent structures down there, a lively space city would grow. Many aren't that poor nowadays in what still is called the slums, but the image the zone gives, marks its classification.

Questioning him if it would be that easy, he nodded and assured it would. Nowadays, the slums have several districts with some elders as their representatives. They even hold meetings to improve the zone, but the management of the station is reluctant. They don't see it as an opportunity, but as a disgrace for the station and would rather expel all from that zone rather than accepting a city.

Why? Just because they don't get it, Gweraz grunted. If a city would grow out of the slums the station would gain a lot. The problem is, that the station's management would not profit too much of it and they don't want to invest in it. I sighted at the bullshit-story as Gweraz did.

Couldn't the people overtake the station and its management? I asked him. That would be great, he nodded, but not easy. Those on the top only have profits in mind and are way too powerful to be overthrown. The usual story...

But, he added, that people here are doing their best with what they have.

That's why he wants to stay here and work in his own establishment? Yes, he laughed, it is the best place for him. He loves the place and its people, even if the management is a bit dumb. He makes, according to him, enough money to pay his employees, the bills, his apartment and to live a good life. He even has enough savings to visit Gaia, he told proudly, but his happiness slumped again when he added the impossibility for him to get a visa.

Back at his home, lying on the bed of the guest room, I was thinking if I could help these people...

Jim nods, he always tries to find a solution for them, but it isn't easy.

My next haul was almost the whole time at the controls of my Falcon.

The *funniest* thing happening was a *roadblock*. Yup! A roadblock in space!

Well, not really a roadblock, but the IPS stopped me on route to search my truck and cargo for a criminal on the loose.

The most impressive thing was the behavior of the agents, they treated me with the utmost respect and asked me for assistance. They even apologized for the time I would lose!

They escorted me to a huge vessel. I was in awe... It was like all the old sci-fi flicks came alive at once!

Once I docked at the huge vessel, I was asked to remain seated in the cabin and open the door to my Falcon.

I did so and a huge Wigmez in uniform entered followed by other two guys.

He asked me if his men could inspect the private hold of my truck where I can store bulky stuff and where the board computer systems are housed. Of course I accepted. After all, I have nothing to hide. And, if I had a dangerous criminal as a stowaway, better they get him before he gets me.

Meanwhile, the Wigmez told me that the cargo holds are being inspected carefully and reassured me that no cargo will be damaged. He also expressed his discomfort to hold me up and for the time I'm losing, and that the IPS is informing the ISTM that they are holding me up. I will not receive a penalty for being late, he guaranteed.

Jim laughs and tells me that it can be usual in several sectors, and that the people from the IPS are all great and care for us truckers.

It happened to him many times. Even that such a stowaway was found in one of his cargo holds! He was lucky enough to get away alive, Jim was hauling explosives at the time.

Anyway, in my case, they found nothing and let me go after a two-hour wait in a cafeteria, with all consumptions included, of the huge vessel from the IPS. A commander came personally and expressed his apologies for holding me up for over two hours.

Unused to such a treatment, I just accepted his apologies and wished him good luck in finding the criminal.

I reached the final port exactly one hour late... But, as promised, no fine, no reprimand, not even a notice... It was okay, they told me there, the IPS and the ISTM informed them... That's progress, friends.

Overall, most routes were quite boring... With autopilot and auto-path always on, I was able to reread the Lord of the Rings and The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, and bought some new digital books online.

I must confess...

This job looked more adventurous than it really is...

I mean, sure, I *pilot* a small spaceship all by myself, but with all the automation its almost like having a desk job... I'm only needed while docking and undocking, entering an atmosphere or lifting off from a planet. The rest... is almost fully automated...

It was more fun in my times, always on your toes, looking out for problems and trouble, watching carefully the traffic and avoiding accidents. Now... follow the instructions of the computer...

I sigh...

At least, the people I meet are interesting and all the *new* alien species! At least that's worth it...

"I don't think so, Kira..."

"What do you mean, Jim?"

"Sure, all da automation makes it look dull, but there' other stuff to look out fo', heh!"

"I know, Jim. It's just... in comparison with my times..."

"Dunno 'ow it was then, Kira. Heh... but yer did some easy trips fo' now. It surely will get better with time."

"I hope so, Jim. I'm used to be more active at the controls. Not just to watch the comp do all the work. I mean, yeah, I could take manual control whole the time, but seems pointless. It's so empty out there, I have to be more on my toes while inside a jump..."

“True... Heh... Ya’ll get it for sure. Yer da Phoenix after all.”

I sigh...

“Yeah...” I say unconvinced.

It’s not that I don’t like my *new* job, but now that I am doing this, it seems less exciting than it was in my old days... But, better than any other office job it surely is.

We finish our dinner with a shot of an unpronounceable liqueur.

“Fuck...” Jim exhales. “Ate too much... heh! Wanna wander ’round a bit first?”

“It’s still early, why not?”

While we wander around the truckers’ zone, Jim tells me about his own life.

He was born in Huston, Texas, into a rancher’s family. His parents have a huge ranch and a large cattle. Seems they are famous for providing *ye olde traditional meat*.

He tells that his family recreate the traditional way of breeding, feeding and tending the cattle. But not only cattle, they have pigs, goats, chicken and everything else a good farm must have.

His parents and five siblings are tending the ranch and all its *inhabitants*. He, however, wasn’t fit for such life, he laughs. He loves the ranch, but his dream always was to pilot a space-truck. His parents even supported his decision and helped him out economically to get the proper schooling for it.

“Heh! Dey thought it would be great to ’ave a trucker to ’aul all da goods dey produce,” he laughs.

Now his parents are proud to have an Ace of Aces in their family.

I ask him when he did become an Ace of Aces.

After some years working for the ISTM, he tells. He had the luck to enter a rookie-program sponsored by the ISTM. He got into the company by blowing away many other contestants, mainly by his recklessness, but also his precision and dedication. He was just twenty-two.

Just five years later, he met the boss outside his Stampede. Jim tells proudly that the old man was looking at his truck when I came by.

“Is this yours, lad?” Mitsubishi-san asked Jim while pointing at the Stampede.

He affirmed with a nod.

“Good!” the boss also nodded and began to walk towards Jim. At his side, the old Mitsubishi simply said to him, “You are my Ace now, the best of the best, an Ace of Aces, Space Cowboy,” and he went away.

Jim tells that he stood there for at least fifteen minutes with his mouth open until a friend came by.

Laughing he says that the guy had to shook him to take him out of trance. Not only did the boss name him an Ace of Aces, but just gave him the nickname he would wear with pride.

Wait a minute... The old Mitsubishi gave him his nickname?

“Yup! An’s ma pride!” he laughs again.

A year later, another rookie-program was run as the company needed more young people.

Only one person stood out, he tells proudly, guess who it was...

“Don’t say, Aia?”

“Yup! Our beauty queen!” he laughs.

She really blew all away, he tells laughing. Not only because of her beauty, but by her handling of a space-truck.

“She was awesome!” he laughs again.

She broke all the records for a rookie and was hired immediately, with no further questions asked.

Aia laddered up at a record-breaking pace and was proclaimed an Ace of Aces after just four years by Mitsubishi-san in person.

The same year, four months later, another girl took part in the rookie-program and stood out.

Mitsubishi-san told Aia and Jim to accompany him and observe the new contestants.

There she was, a Felii mestizo blowing away all the competition, Jim tells with pride. I already get who it was... Enya.

Of course, laughs Jim, Enya. She was so blazingly fast and precise that any of us would have mistaken her for a pro.

The old Mitsubishi even entered the class before the final marks were given. Before all contenders, he hired Enya on the spot and assigned her to be his third Ace of Aces.

She was Jim's love at first sight. But, he sighs, she never took his advances seriously and laughed it off with jokes. Poor Jimmie doesn't get it... and I can't tell him...

The funny thing is, he laughs, the Enya was no rookie by definition. She just never worked directly for the company before. She already had five years of experience in the field. They found out later, he laughs, that she worked freelance for a subcontractor of the ISTM. Instead of trying to enter the usual way, which causes no stir nor recognition, she just jumped in. But the boss already made his decision and there was not moving back. The company had to hire her.

So, she got in by tricking the system? Of course she did!

That's Enya for you... I sigh.

Now I remember...

The night before we, Enya and I, made out, she told me that she was a freelance and that she *smuggled* herself into the ISTM... so that is what she meant with *smuggling herself in*...

Then, she also told me that she did it out of two reasons. The first was that she wanted to enter with a *boom*, a great impact. That's why she worked first freelance to gain experience. The other reason was that, because of her family's background, she would have entered easily, without any tests or exams. She hated that prospect. She wanted to enter out of her own merits, that's why she used another nickname at that time and changed it to SpeedKitty while she participated the rookie-program.

Honestly, Enya already told me her side of the story...

She laughed telling me that the examiners and all the people, in general, freaked out when she outran everyone in a standard truck. But thanks to her stunts and her self-imposed delay, she entered the ISTM being twenty-seven, that was just two years ago.

Taking into account that both Aia and Jim entered the ISTM at the age of twenty-two, she feels a bit out of place...

I reassured her that it is not a problem, I am thirty... and just got in, heck! I'm around a thousand forty-three years old!

Enya just giggled and laughed at my *proclamation* and kept on teasing me about my age for the night... till we made out...

We keep on walking until Jim guides us to the Mercury pub and we enter.

“Wow...”

“Cool, ain't it? Heh!” Jim laughs.

“Yeah...”

The place is huge! Bigger than any other *entertainment joints* I've visited. But the layout is similar to Ahneh's place, several bars on the sides and the floor is filled with strip poles surrounded by barstools. Just a few tables have no *live* shows *on* them.

Jim walks straight to one of a still quite empty table surrounding a strip pole where a cute Reaf girl is performing.

Just as we sit down, another girl, this time a Knoreliaz, comes by and greets us.

“Hi, cuties~ What can I offer you?”

“Two mugs o' beer, beauty, heh!” Jim immediately answers looking at her with a big smile.

“Sure, cuties, I'll be back in a moment,” she happily sings.

I'm baffled, even after having been in other similar joints, this one is simply ginormous...

“Heh! Not bad, right Kira?”

“Huh?”

He points with his thumb at the girl dancing in front of us.

“Oh, yeah...”

“Hi, cuties~” the dancer sings and slowly, yet so seductive, she takes her bra off and a skimpy bikini appears. “Like what you see?” she giggles.

“Oh, yeah...” laughs Jim and taps his thumb on a small screen.

Wow! He just tipped her fifty bucks!

“Oh~ Thank you, cutie~” she signs happily and keeps on dancing.

“Heh! That’s what dey call a *light striptease*,” he says.

“Ligh—”

My question is interrupted by the Knoreliaz serving our beers.

“Hi, cuties, two huge tankards for two strong men.”

“Thank you, beauty,” I say receiving my beer.

“Thanks, gorgeous,” laughs Jim and gives her a huge tip while paying the beers.

“Oh! Thank you! So generous! You are truly a gentleman,” she giggles.

“Ya earned it, heh!” Jim blinks an eye.

Jim... just tipping the girls won’t make them yours.

“Yer saying?” Jim turns to me. “Ah! Heh! Cheers!”

“Cheers!” I laugh.

After hitting down quite a bit, he asks again, “Yer saying?”

“Oh, yeah, what do you mean by *light striptease*?”

“This...” he points again at the girl in front of us. “Dey won’t get completely nude. Jus’ these tiny little pieces o’ cloth hiding da best part...”

“Oh! I get it.”

“Heh! Now enjoy!” he laughs and guzzles down his beer.

“Heheheh~ Not bad, eh?”

“Yeah, quite daring...”

Jim and I laugh. We enjoy jet another beer and the new striptease routine, this time offered by a cute Īiha girl.

While we were enjoying the beers, and the girls, I had enough time to observe a bit the whole place.

This place is filled with space-truckers, rockers, beautiful girls, even couples and *polys*... It isn't a place just for guys. On the other side, behind us, a Reaf guy does a similar routine offered to women and gay men. As Jim told, this is usual in this kind of places. It's funny to think that this kind of entertainment is offered in the same place.

Even so... nowadays is too oversexed... I mean, to what I'm—was used to. Yeah, sure, in my times it was easy to find places in which it was this way too, but nowadays... it's everywhere... Few are prudish enough to hide themselves, most exhibit themselves quite proudly... I thought Aia and Enya were extreme... but, seems usual nowadays. Most women wear near to nothing in their daily life, just what the weather and some rules in certain places dictate. But, interestingly, the rule changes in this kind of places. They show less skin, but their clothes are excitingly suggestive and seductive... *Battle dresses*...

This might be a good place to let off some steam... Aia and Enya's continuous provocations give me a hard time, a really *hard* time...

Jim and I already had several draughts each as we don't have to pilot anyway. We don't stop observing and commenting on the beauties coming and going in front of us while we don't lose sight of the cute dancers.

“Oh~” Interesting...

“Heh? Whatcha see?”

I give him hints with my eyes...

“Heh! Sucha bombshell! Impressive! Oh! There's already one 'ittin' on 'er...” he laughs.

“No surprise,” I laugh too.

“Heh! An’ already brushed off!”

“Yeah,” I laugh, “who knows what he said.”

“Heheh~ Surely somthin’ like *Ya hafta be a dove from another galaxy. I see da Pleiades in yer eyes... or such junk,*” he laughs loudly.

I laugh, “Yeah... Why dove?”

“Pleiades also means a flock o’ doves, in olde greek, heheh~”

“Oh~ how do you know that?”

“Heh~ Tried it once, as a lad. Da girl bursted into laughter an’ sent me packing.”

“No fuck...”

“Heh. Afterwards, I read ’bout in da net...”

We both laugh.

We enjoy the show for over a half an hour. One after another is sent packing by the busty Wigmez. We can’t stop laughing. While I observe her, I notice her gazing over at us every once in a while... Hmm... interesting. My libido has awakened more than ever... Fuck! I’ve got a full hard-on...

“Heheh~ None ’as got an opportunity with ’er,” Jim laughs.

“Oh? You think? She’s horny... Look at her. She’s assessing the available *goods...*”

“Heh. Really?”

“Yeah. But with nonsense flirting you won’t get into her pants. You have to be aggressive...”

“Heh! C’mon! Prove it! Say ya wanna fuck ’her. Heheh~ C’mon, I betcha six-pack she’ll send ya packin’ like da rest,” he laughs.

“Okay,” I grin mischievously and stand up.

He looks at me stunned while I down the rest of my beer.

I go to the bar where said woman sits.

Just in front of me, another guy hits on her. I shrug and simply ask the barmaid for something stronger... Hmm... a Cuba Libre would be nice...

I listen to the guy's corny flirting while I look over at her. She wears a really short dress. Just a bit shorter and she would flash her panties. Her huge tits are barely hidden beneath the sparse and suggestive clothing. Much skin of her upper row of tits is shown thanks to a deep cleavage which even exposes a greater part of the smaller ones of her lower row.

It takes time, too much for my liking, to be served and even more for them to make my long drink.

Another one hits on her just when I receive my drink.

"Hey, gal. How much do charge—"

Bang!

"Ouch!"

I begin to laugh and look at the, at least two meters high, Wigmez.

"Such a fool!" I laugh smirking at her.

She smiles back.

"Would you do better?"

"I don't know," I laugh. "I'm not conceited."

"Oh?"

"But I won't negate that you turn me on and that I'm dying to have a go at it with you," I smirk, then laugh.

She blinks thrice and begins to laugh.

"So direct..." she giggles, "the first one this night."

"Not sure if I should feel honored for it." We both laugh. "Do you let me, at least, invite you to a drink?"

"You're the first one making me laugh," she giggles. "Sure."

The long drink she asked for is finally served and I pay.

“Thank you~” she charms. “Cheers, ah~”

“Oh~ Right, sorry... I’m Kira, Gaian-Human. Space-trucker.”

“Oh~ I’m Xivaz, Wigmez, from Warquiz. Stewardess at the IR. Pleased to meet you.”

“A pleasure to meet you, Xivaz. Cheers.”

“Cheers!”

We both laugh and take a good sip of our drinks.

“Why do you look at me as if you’ve never seen a Wigmez?” she giggles.

“Oh~ Actually, it’s my first time...”

“Huh?”

“At least that close up. I’m an Awakened.”

“Oh? Really? From when?”

“From the twenty-first century GCE...”

“Woow~” she looks at me baffled, then begins to giggle and adjusts her dress in such way that I’m able to discern more of her skin which is truly covered with fine scales.

We keep on talking about nonsense and trivial stuff. About space, species...

While we talk, she plays with her golden tentacle-like hair, it’s not thicker than my pinkie. It grows only backward and floats down behind her pointy ears reaching down to her shoulder.

I keep observing her gestures and movements. They are really nimble, not too sharp nor too fluid, a strange mixture in between...

Little of the second drink remains.

“Want to see more of a Wigmez?” she asks playfully and smirking lustfully.

“I wouldn’t miss it,” I grin equally impishly, “I’d love to discover every nook and cranny...”

She laughs lusciously while moving nearer. I lay my arm around her waist, just above her short tail, and move her gently towards me. She looks into my eyes with her own golden ones, wearing an erotic smile while our lips meet.

What a feeling... The texture of her lips is different from the Humans, and from Enya’s fine ones. It’s like her lips are covered with delicate, fine and soft scales. Our tongues meet. Hers is slightly slippery and impressively nimble, and is slightly pointy. And long... she’s able to wrap her tongue around mine... and suckle on mine sensually. Incredible...

“You’re the first non-Wigmez not freaking out,” she giggles. “You’re a great kisser.”

“Thanks,” I laugh. “Do you have more surprises?” I grin mischievously.

She laughs at my impish gesture.

“Let’s find out?” she asks invitingly.

I just answer with another playful smirk.

She understood, and stands up giggling erotically. I also stand up and wrap my arm around her waist and we wander towards the exit.

I look over my shoulder towards Jim. He’s still there, making out with an Īiha. He sees me, cheers with a drink in hand and laughs loudly...

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Next morning, Jim and I meet again in the cafeteria of the truckers’ motel.

“Oh! How was your ride, cowboy?” I laugh.

“Heh! Smoooooth...” he laughs loudly.

I sit down at his table after our usual greeting ritual and ask the server for a huge cup of coffee.

“Heh! Here...”

“What’s that?” I ask him looking at the datacard he’s handing me.

“A voucher, heh! Fo’ yer six-pack,” he laughs.

“Jim... that’s not—”

“A bet’s a bet, heh! I almost freaked out when ya were making out with ’er,” he grins mischievously.

“But you got also got laid,” I smirk.

“Heh! Learnin’ from da master! Told ’her I wanna fuck ’er. She jus’ laughed and began to slobber ma up!”

“Bastard...” I laugh.

“Heh! An’ ya?”

“Got here at six in the morning...” I shrug.

“Yer da bastar’, heh!” he laughs.

“Yeah... I am...” I laugh, then sigh. “I needed that...”

“Whacha mean?”

“You know... always with Aia around...” I sigh again.

“Oh, yeah... I get it... Not easy, right?”

“No... not easy, pal.”

“Then ya let yer steam off, good for ya. But... will it be a problem?”

“Huh?”

“With Aia, I mean...”

I shudder... and remember... several times the image of Aia came to my mind while sleeping with Xivaz...

I sigh again while the cowboy looks at me questioning.

“Not really... She said I have liberty while she needs her time.”

“Then?”

“I’m not sure, pal. I was so pent up that I didn’t think about it, but right now... I don’t know what to think about Aia.”

“Ya need yer time, Kira. Imma not da best example, heh, but lemme tell ya that if Aia said that, yer free. I mean...” he suddenly sighs. “At least she told ya she likes ya. I... on da other hand...”

“Poor Jimmy,” I smirk impishly, “you’re so free...”

“Heh! Bastar’!” he laughs. “Naw... that’s not da problem. Even I look fo’ love!”

“Perhaps in the wrong direction...” I sigh remembering my conversation with Enya about him.

“Naw... Jus’ need mor’ time!” he laughs. “But yer right! Imma free! No one waitin’ fo’ me!” He suddenly jumps up, “Sorry, pal! Didn’t mean to ’urt ya!”

“Don’t worry, Jim,” I sigh. “It’s okay. I’ll see how it unfolds. Now let’s change subject...”

“Right...”

We get on talking about other stuff until we finish our breakfasts.

Finding each other again in the lobby, we bid our goodbyes, get into our trucks and part in opposite directions. Back onto the space-highways.



To be continued in:

SpaceHighway ~ A14 ~ All Systems Down!

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