

BOOK 1 OF TAPESTRY OF FATES

# Spirit's Destiny



**IK DAWSON**

# UNDISCLOSED E-MAILS FROM UDF ARCHIVES

## ALL DATES HAVE BEEN OMITTED

File Edit Create Options Help

SMC  
COMMUNICATIONS

FROM: Mimura Nanahara  
TO: Yuni Nanahara  
CC:  
SUBJECT: I'VE ARRIVED SIS!!!

SENT: [REDACTED]

Dear Yuni,

Well I've finally made it!

All my hard work and training has paid off!

I'm finally a Lieutenant in the Planetary Government's Armed Forces.

Although I'm not allowed to tell you much about where I'm about to be ultimately going, I can tell you we've just docked at the base of Desselles.

This place is breathtaking; the most heavily fortified planet I've ever seen. I've no idea why they require so many warships, but what do I know? :P I've already made two good friends called Dava and Fred so tell the folks not to worry.

Anyway, this is just a quick note to say thank you for all your support and being the best sister I could wish for.

Give my love to mom and dad. I'm told I get leave in a few months so I'll be coming home just in time for Thanksgiving.

Lots of love.

Mimura. x

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SMC  
COMMUNICATIONS

FROM: Mimura Nanahara  
TO: Yuni Nanahara  
CC:  
SUBJECT: HELP YUNI!

SENT: [REDACTED]

Dear Yuni,

I've made a terrible mistake. The Planetary Government is a lie, covering for some bullshit organization called the UDF! Remember all those stories we used to hear about Eclipse when we were little. They're true! Every single one of them! I've been stationed god knows where, surrounded by death and destruction.

I've survived two battles against the program and watched both Dava and Fred get shredded to bloody ribbons beside me. This place is absolute hell. Only twelve of us out of a hundred survived in the second battle and they have the gall to call it a successful victory!

Somehow I've managed to bribe the IT guys to let me send this. I'm not sure how long I'll survive this stupid war. You'd think after five thousand years of it leaving Earth Eclipse would be long dead.

It's up to you to expose the Planetary Government for who they really are. I must go now before I'm caught. I pray I get to see you all again!

Love Mimura. x

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TAPESTRY OF FATES

# SPIRIT'S DESTINY

KEN DAWSON

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*Dedicated to all my family and friends who believed in me  
and this humble tale.*

*I would never have got this far without your unwavering  
faith and support.*

*You'll all be forever in my heart.*

*Ken. x*

*Written for my sister Kelly,  
who helped give a sorceress her strength,  
and a Seraphim his heart.*

*VL*





If only we knew how dangerous our creations  
could become.

## SPIRIT'S DESTINY

# CHAPTER 1

## LEAVING

BOOM!

The small ship shook again intensely, groaning as its aching engines churned through the thick, dusty clouds. Ella sighed and once more tried to read her new book, repeating the same sentence again for the fourth time. Her eyes wandered over the thick black lines relentlessly, but she wasn't concentrating on them.

Weighing squarely on her mind was the fact that tomorrow was one of the biggest days of her life.

BOOM!

Again the ship shook and became silent for a few seconds before the engines spluttered and roared back into full power.

Ella gave up reading, dropped the book and stared out of the dust matted window.

'It's been a month since this shuttle broke,' grumbled the old man opposite her as he reached down to retrieve his worn flat cap, lost during the jolt. 'Makes you wonder if they're ever going to fix the bloody thing.'

Ella turned to him pushing her long red curly hair out of the way of her eyes.

She had a fair complexion, subtle, soft features and a natu-

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rally beautiful smile. Her lips were well defined and thick, slightly pursed as if in a semi-permanent pout. Her eyes were usually in constant motion, flighty and inquisitive, with deep hooded eyelids.

The man pulled his cap down tight. Ella smiled at him before looking back out of the window again.

In the distance the second sun hung like a wavering yellow blob in the deep orange horizon.

Ella was sick of the colour orange; the sky was always many shades of it, giving everything else an equal tangerine hue. Far below, the city of Grewin spread out like a great bustling metropolis, smoke pluming out from the high chimneys and mixing with the gloomy apricot clouds. The thick smoggy fumes had plagued Ella for far too long, but not anymore - tomorrow she was to set off from this horrid planet, Rendor, and leave for Galyria – the fabled institutionalised planet. The picture of her future was so clear in her mind. Four years of studying art and design would gain her the reputation and qualifications to apply for a permit to live on Earth with the remainder of her family.

Earth; how desperately she wished to go there. Her grandparents and a few distant relatives resided there. Even many of her friends had relocated there, having gained enough credits to buy a pass. The beauty of her race's home planet was legendary throughout the galaxy. No colonised planet boasted such beautiful skies, such lush forests, or indeed such perfect water. If only she had studied harder at college here like her

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wiser friends. Living the fast, high life, as well as too much hooch and 'rise' had prevented her from saving up credits like her friends had. Suddenly she had found herself all alone on this God forsaken planet. At least she still had Aunt Iris. She called Iris her 'aunt' but she was really just her mother's best friend. Ella missed her mother and father dearly; being with Aunt Iris made her feel closer to them, as if her company kept the memory of her parents alive.

Gazing into the distance, an artificial lake shimmered in the hazy sunlight. Ella wished so much to feel the water of Earth. Her grandparents had once tried to send her a vial of it but found themselves unauthorized to do so and were stopped by customs. The water on Rendor was terrible; its composition of much more than H<sub>2</sub>O was quite harsh and thick, making it taste almost synthetic. Showering and bathing in it also proved a problem as it never quite run off easily.

Ella stared at the broken cloudy sky; it was hard to imagine a blue clear sky when this smoggy copper fog stared down for over seventeen hours a day. Nights on Rendor only lasted for four hours, which meant sleeping with the curtains open proved difficult.

The shuttle began to descend. Ella's one hour journey home every day seemed to grow shorter as time passed, its familiarity rooted. As the ship landed into the docking bay, Ella placed her book in her bag and pulled her long, heavy brown coat shut, despite the searing heat outside.

Clambering off the rustic shuttle into the down beaten sta-

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tion she took little notice of the people around her, the majority tiredly heading home from another long day of work.

The old man was already shuffling towards the exit. 'Just wait until I see that bloody robot,' he muttered.

The dusty wind blew into Ella's face and she scrunched her face up against it.

The air was warm and humid, as it was all year round, yet Ella pulled her coat tighter and shivered, making her way through the busy space station as quickly as possible. Behind her the old man could be heard arguing with the pilot droid, who showered the elderly gent with vulgar obscenities. Making her way through the hectic port she kept her head down; muggings were becoming more frequent in this part of her hometown - Grewin.

In her eyes, Grewin sucked massive ass; it always looked so depressing and uninviting. Thankfully tomorrow she would be leaving this cesspit for good. The only sad thing about leaving would be saying goodbye to her Aunt Iris, most likely for the last time.

A couple of years ago, Ella fell in with a bad crowd who brought out a side of her she now deeply resented. She spent too much time hanging around the bars, smoking rise and getting plastered off alcohol. Her attitude became so reckless even her Aunt Iris had a tough time keeping the young girl on the straight and narrow.

Finally after one particular exhaustive argument with her Aunt, Ella stormed off from her home with a bag stuffed full

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of clothes. She little expected Aunt Iris to pursue her and literally drag her back home by her hair.

The explosive argument that followed finally brought Ella's new fiery nature under control, and she swore to her Aunt she would change her ways after a lengthy tearful submission.

She soon started hanging around with her better friends again and took up her passion of art once more, entering a college on the outskirts of Grewin.

Her friends, already a full year and a half ahead of her at college, quickly graduated and left Ella all alone.

Two years later brought her to today – her final day, passing with distinction from the college, and high praise from her peers.

She wasn't a bad person, despite occasionally letting her mouth run away from her. Even her tainted past was not a direct reflection of herself. Others had called her thoughtful and respectful, polite and well-mannered. Usually she could be quite passive, but easily roused if she was mistreated or offended. She was especially protective of her Aunt whom she thanked for helping her get back on the right track.

Ella left the spaceport and headed up the steep hill towards her home. Thankfully the part of the city in which she lived was mainly human (or human-friendly) inhabited. Too many illegal races had already settled on Rendor, including Gurans. Gurans were a race of aliens from way out in the Brieers system. Their reputation for their violent and aggressive nature spanned the galaxy almost as much as their race did. Only



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once had she seen one; she was only ten yet the memory would remain with her to this day. She recalled its face, all brown and scaly with menacing red eyes. Its teeth were sharp and protruding, glinting in the pale light. For years after the incident she had nightmares that plagued her sleep.

Suddenly her phone beeped, breaking her thought; it was a text message from Aunt Iris.

**Hgrrp i are you ho..me? tuUu@\$Sto be t\*\*: late. xx**

Ella growled and shook her phone before banging it against a passing wall. Over a week now it had been playing up. She had only owned it for a month and it had cost her all the credits she had to her name. She would have taken it back to the shop that sold it to her if it hadn't burnt down last week. Luck, it would appear, was on her side lately.

A long time ago, so Ella was told at school, technology had evolved to the point where physical phones and computers were rarely needed. People had neurological ports and connections implanted on their actual body. It became standard to have this procedure done as soon as the individual reached their fifth birthday. The implanted devices were astounding. People could access anything on the limitless internet by just thinking about it, making running their day to day lives a simple thought.

However, like any breakthrough, there were some who used it for immoral and criminal means. Hackers were able

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to directly break into people's minds, bringing a whole new meaning to the term 'identity theft'. Not only were personal details free for the taking, but entire memories, deeply hidden secrets, indeed an entire person's life was susceptible to robbery. Having the memories of the greatest moments of your life stolen, and then held to ransom was not uncommon.

Soon, the very notion of neurological implants was frowned upon, and in time, technology took a back step, forcing people to revert back to having mobile phones and computers.

The houses on Ella's road looked down upon her sadly, almost as if they were begging to be taken with her. Their dusty windows concealed great secrets that no sunlight could penetrate. The wind blew clouds of dust into her face and for the seventh time in the past hour Ella started coughing. She muttered a swear word under her breath as she neared the top of the hill. From here she could see the city sprawling before her. The streetlights and various neon signs could be made out in the dark dusty clouds that drove through them. She stared at one of the signs, unable to make it out clearly but she knew it very well. It was for 'The Harmony' - her and her friends' favourite bar whilst she was starting college, and before they all left Rendor. Many times they had spent all night in there, drinking hooch and beer, and drunkenly dancing the night away. How Ella missed them all terribly now, it seemed a lifetime ago since they all went their separate ways, leaving her here alone on this rotten orange dump.

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She smiled knowing she was one step closer to being reunited with them all before pushing open the gate to Aunt Iris' house.

Inside the cosy and well-kept abode Aunt Iris was already busy making dinner. She was always making meals whenever Ella came home. It suddenly dawned on her how she was ever going to cope without her aunt's fabled cooking..

She threw her bag into a corner, which was hastily followed by her shoes and coat. She gave her aunt a hug before slumping into a chair in the kitchen. Ella watched as the woman tottered around; she knew she would miss her so much when she left.

Aunt Iris was around her mid fifties but appeared quite younger. Her hair was a deep brown that she wore in an eternal ponytail. Her clothes were always in pristine condition and always fashionable, despite hardly leaving the house. Ella hoped she would be alright on her own, for she knew Aunt Iris had very few friends, many of them had died in the same disaster as her parents.

'Tea Ella?' spoke her aunt finally.

Ella tiredly raised herself to her feet, knowing that what her aunt really meant was 'Could you make me a cup of tea Ella?'

As Ella filled the kettle with water and set two cups down she turned to her Aunt.

'Well, that's that,' she exclaimed.

'That's what?' replied her aunt, stirring a strange sweet

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smelling broth.

‘College. I’ve returned all my books and equipment. It feels strange that I’ll never take that journey again. I always thought I’d be getting that shuttle until the day I died.’

Aunt Iris smiled at Ella before returning her gaze back towards the broth. Her smile faded.

‘Aunt Iris...?’ spoke Ella.

Aunt Iris said nothing.

‘I will miss you, you know,’ she said softly. ‘You’ve been amazing to me.’

Aunt Iris stopped stirring the soup and turned to Ella, placing her hands on Ella’s shoulders.

‘And I will miss you too my dear.’ She gave Ella a tight warm hug.

‘Now wait here.’

Aunt Iris wandered out of the kitchen and quickly returned with a small camera. She placed it on the side and stood beside Ella. They both smiled sadly as the camera whirred and flashed. Aunt Iris gave the soup a quick stir and then placed the camera on top of a thin small screen. The picture flickered onto the screen displaying the taken picture.

Aunt Iris held another older photograph beside it.

It displayed a young Ella alongside an unchanged Aunt Iris. She barely came up to her waist as opposed to the new photo where Ella towered over her Aunt by nearly six inches.

‘She how much you’ve changed since I took you in?’ laughed Aunt Iris. ‘I’m so proud to see you leaving me as the

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woman you are now.'

Ella smiled. 'Thank you. I wouldn't be who I am without you.'

She gave the woman another hearty hug.

Ella took a deep breath, holding back the tears with relief.

'Now that's over with, where's my tea?' chuckled Aunt Iris.

Ella stared out of her window into the pale orange light. The suns had finally settled and outside the world was all eerie and quiet. A few shuttles passed by as they soared higher and higher, pushing their way out from the planet's atmosphere. Below her the city was at peace for a few sombre hours. Turning, Ella looked around her room. She knew it was the last night she would ever spend here and nostalgia began to hit her. She remembered all the times she had played in this bedroom with her friends, all the sleepovers she had hosted, even her first boyfriend that she had sat here with.

Next to her comfy, tidy bed laid her bags, one carrying her small art case and portfolio. Travelling far across the galaxy was hard enough without taking a ton of luggage. Her travel tickets were beside them and next to these lay her shoes and coat, placed there neatly by Aunt Iris.

Ella tried to recall the time when she first moved here. She was seven and all she could remember was being frightened and alone. She recalled being dragged along by police officers as she called out for her parents who were nowhere to be

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seen.

She shook away the memory and picked up her mobile phone. It bleeped and chirped wildly as it refused to turn off. In anger she hurled it at the wall where it bounced off and bleeped again, unbroken by its thick rubber casing. She picked it up again and put it on her bedside table.

Clambering into bed, her eyes began to get heavier. As they gently closed she felt herself dreaming about what her journey would be like, what Galyria was going to be like, and whom she would meet on her travels.

The night softly fell onto Rendor and Ella slumbered in what was to be her final sleep on her home planet.

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## CHAPTER 2

### THE END?

High above the torrid icy wasteland of the planet of Ionis, Special Agent Tristan Farley's single seater fighter screamed deftly past the UDF warship '*The Faith and Determination*', allowing the depleted guns to dump their heat and recharge.

Narrowly dodging several enemy laser blasts, his fighter turned around for yet another attack run. His target - the tiny messenger satellite, paled in size compared to the enormous warship that relentlessly pursued it. This was no ordinary messenger though; Tristan knew it could carry the co-ordinates to the whereabouts of the four planetary engines of the enemy, and the location of the supercomputer that housed the program of death itself - Eclipse. It had taken Tristan three years to decipher the codes on another satellite, follow various scraps, listen to broken transmissions, and study ancient texts, all of which had led him to this chase. His entire career and dignity rested on capturing this satellite and hopefully begin to put an end the war that had spanned millenniums and killed unthinkable numbers of lives.

The program Eclipse rarely sent information in digital waves through space, mainly because they were so easily intercepted, but also because they frequently became broken and distorted travelling such long distances.

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Instead, satellites were used, often heavily armed and incredibly numerous with millions of decoys being utilised to deceive foes. Tristan wiped the sweat from his brow; the heat inside the fighter was stiflingly hot. The guns recharged themselves and he accelerated once more towards the satellite, preparing another attempt to immobilise it.

Another five fighters flanked him in support.

The round spherical satellite spun furiously now, firing countless laser blasts behind it in a seamlessly random pattern. Up ahead by a few thousand miles was the Eclipse relay station '*Gunga-33*'. If the satellite reached the station, its information would be deployed and rendered impossible to retrieve by the United Defence Force (or the UDF as it had become to be known). Originally called the Earth Defence Force before other races became inevitably entangled in the wars after Eclipse left Earth, the UDF had spread until forty-nine other alien races had united with the humans, despite many blaming the human race for creating such a dangerous program in the first place.

By now the entire fleet of fighter ships aboard '*Gunga-33*' had come to the aid of the satellite and proceeded to ferociously attack the enormous warship '*The Faith and Determination*'. Five thousand men were on board the ship and each one was engaged in frenzied combat procedures.

Tristan and the five other pilots closed in on the satellite.

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The ships they flew were replicas of the legendary Saviour crafts that had won the first stage of the war on Earth. The UDF continued to manufacture the ships not only to remind Eclipse of its defeat, but also in hope to repeat the human's victory.

‘Do not aim for it directly!’ shouted Tristan, the COM<sup>1</sup> device sending out his message to the other ships. ‘We can’t lose that information! Aim for its engines!’

The other Saviour craft dived in and out of the barrage of laser fire that came from all angles at them, lighting up the blackness of space with dazzling luminance. The huge cannons upon *‘The Faith and Determination’* annihilated its way through the bulkheads of the larger enemy ships, leaving them still and silent, like sleeping giants, forever drifting away from their deaths.

The Saviour fighters weaved their way throughout the remaining enemy phalanx that attempted to block their paths. A rogue laser blast caught the ship beside Tristan. It promptly exploded, sending its wreckage shooting past him as he heard the pilot’s last scream echoing through his ears. He ignored the agonizing shrieks and aimed the Saviour’s guns towards the satellite. His narrow eyes focused intently on his target, again shaking the sweat from his head.

He was young, broad, and muscular, with an unfaltering expression of complete determination. His square jaw hung below deep set dark eyes and almost permanently knitted

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brow.

Tristan kept his hair closely shaved for 'there aren't many decent barbers in space', so he told everyone.

Much of his twenty-eight years had been spent upon starships in training as per his parent's wishes. Once again they came into his mind's eye. He pushed them out, determined not to let his pain envenom the mission at hand. Through the frenzied tempest of red and yellow laser fire, Tristan took a deep breath and squeezed the trigger on the ship's controls. The burning laser spewed forth from his ship's guns. Hurtling through space it connected with the satellite's rear engines, which promptly shook and went dead, turning the messenger into a spinning pinball with no destination. Tristan accelerated in front of the satellite and quickly deployed a tractor beam, dragging it behind him. By now the ships of Eclipse were almost completely destroyed by '*The Faith and Determination*', their steel carcasses drifting into the atmosphere of Ionis that ate up their remains. Tristan watched as they started to burn away. Ionis was a horrible planet he often thought. It was typical of Eclipse to choose remote and inhospitable planets to locate its relay stations. He thanked the heavens it wasn't like the star Bulburo-X though. Ten thousand times bigger than the Earth's sun, the star was old and was expected to collapse on itself at any time, leaving it perilously close to going supernova.

Going supernova would cause an explosion greater than two hundred trillion-trillion nuclear warheads, blasting out

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lethal radiation and matter at devastating speeds. It was eight years ago Tristan fought in the battle there that he would rather forget. As he stared into space, unaware of his mission at hand he recalled that failed rescue attempt at Bulburo-X. The UDF's objective that day was to evacuate the nearby planet of Fering. Unfortunately the plan went awry and Eclipse arrived, attacking the UDF relentlessly. The ensuing fight meant that the rescue attempt had to be aborted, leaving eight million human lives to be consumed by the cataclysmic blast as Bulburo-X inevitably subsided upon its own mass and went supernova. Their screams that were quickly silenced changed Tristan forever. No longer was death an issue to him; it simply happened and that was that.

'FARLEY! WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU GOING?' bellowed the commander's voice through the COM. Suddenly Tristan realised he was veering off towards the Eclipse relay station. He pulled his ship around sharply, the satellite safely behind him in the tractor net. He started tapping some buttons on a small control panel.

'I've locked the satellite,' shouted Tristan. 'Get the extractors ready for when I land! We won't have much time.'

'Roger sir,' came a different voice.

By now Tristan was desperately avoiding all the junk and debris that floated around the battlefield. Pieces of metal clunked and deflected off his rapid ship. A larger piece scraped a deep gouge from the right wing. *Just a little further* he thought. The cargo doors on '*The Faith and Determination*'



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groaned open as the remaining UDF craft dove back into the ship. As Tristan's ship landed, dozens of men with computers and wires raced out towards the sleeping satellite. Tristan jumped from the cockpit and sprinted to join them, eager to claim his prize. The battle sirens still echoed above them whilst men frantically darted about, still in the chaotic throws of war. Tristan however, remained still as he eyed the satellite matted with cables. Engineers frantically typed in commands on the adjoining computers, trying to extract the priceless information.

Suddenly the satellite sprang to life and juddered. Lights glowed bright as the satellite bleeped in frenzy, suddenly aware of where it was and what was happening to it.

'Don't let it delete the information!' bellowed one engineer.

'I thought you said you locked it?' shouted one engineer at Tristan.

'I did!' he protested angrily.

The satellite began whirring and an antenna shot out from the top.

'NO!' shouted Tristan. 'It's sending the data! Stop it now!' The engineers started to shout and rushed to plug in more cables, attempting to stop the unthinkable, but it was to no avail.

The satellite stopped dead, its task complete.

'Where did it send the signal?' demanded Tristan.

'It didn't connect to anything,' shrugged one of the engi-

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neers bemused. 'It sent it aimlessly into space.'

'Well something must have picked it up!' Tristan roared, turned and kicked one of the computers, sending it crashing across the landing platform. *What was that information?* He thought. *Why didn't it just delete it or relay it before we captured it? Surely if it sent it blindly it must have been really desperate to pass it on to Eclipse. It must be more important than I thought.*

He sighed and rubbed his face, staring out into the vastness of space, and the remains of the battle.

The engineers watched him silently.

'Find out where it went, before Eclipse does,' he finally spoke. 'We'll hunt down that data to the ends of the universe.'

*<sup>1</sup>Many years ago, communication devices were removed from helmets and mouthpieces – many pilots having complained of their awkwardness. As of such many ships employ highly sensitive microphones within the ships themselves. These could be customised to omit certain voices, or transmit several at once. Headsets and basic microphones are still used but are usually reserved for mobile hand devices or upon larger warships. The basic term for all communication devices was shortened to COM many years ago.*

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## **CHAPTER 3**

# **FIRST STEP INTO OBLIVION**

Large green letters fluttered across the huge departures board. Ella took several steps back to take in the vast information. Her eyes darted over the harshly angled font as she struggled to locate her flight. It was to be the second space trip she had ever taken and hopefully it would be one of the last. Her last experience of interstellar travel was one she'd rather forget. Gravity generators on ships usually kicked in a few minutes after leaving a planet's atmosphere. The momentary floating, weightless sensation would then be cut abruptly short in an almighty gut-wrenching thud.

It was quite nauseating.

The journey was more than ten years ago and Ella prayed the technology had grown a lot smoother since then.

She glanced around Tiercall spaceport. Despite being cleaner than Grewin space station, the atmosphere was just as threatening. Thieves and muggers hid and skulked about in the shadows, looking for the perfect opportunity to strike a wary, unsuspecting traveller. Drunks and beggars lined the disintegrating halls eager for a chance to escape their hellish lives.

Ella pulled her bag tighter towards her and looked back at the departures board.

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Her journey was a three-stop transfer; taking her from Rendor to Pollares, then Pollares to Shoegel, and then from Shoegel through the Deep Rifts to Galyria. All in all it was a four-month journey. Military ships could make the trip in a matter of days whilst commercial trips tiptoed along at a crawl in comparison.<sup>2</sup> Finally Ella saw the departure time for Pollares.

*Delayed by thirty minutes. One hour wait.*

She sighed and looked around for the lounge. Above, voices continuously announced the next departure and arrival, their echoing vocals reverberating off the cold grey walls.

Dead and unkempt plants littered the grimy port – most likely forgotten since they were first potted.

Ella quickly walked towards the dimly lit lounge, all the while hoping that Pollares spaceport was a hell of a lot friendlier.

She thought once more of her Aunt Iris. Their parting this morning had been particularly emotional. Aunt Iris had wanted to come with her to the port but Ella had flatly refused, insisting they say their good-byes at the front door. Whilst almost certainly reducing Ella into tears in a public place, she didn't want her aunt walking through this loathsome spaceport on her own.

Ella smoothly pushed the lounge door open. Being quite big inside, it had masses of fixed plastic chairs covering the stained, carpeted floors. A musty smell hung in the air whilst

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the broken strip lighting above flickered randomly. A couple of young families were sat near the door, their children playfully fighting on the floor, much to the annoyance of their parents. The sight of 'decent' people made Ella feel slightly relieved. Towards the back of the lounge lay several tramps and hobos sleeping on the chairs underneath frayed and tatty blankets. One was snoring loudly.

Choosing a seat close to the families, Ella put her bags next to her, hooking the straps around her arms to prevent a quick snatch.

She pulled her warm coat tighter as she sank deep into the hard chair, letting her long red hair fall over half of her face. Her uncovered eye wandered over to the children playing on the floor. Strange memories floated back into her mind, unearthed by the vaguely familiar surroundings. Her eyelids slowly lowered as she finally resisted the struggle to stay awake.

They slowly closed as Ella drifted away into a time that she had gratefully forgotten.

Ella's tiny hand gripped Aunt Iris' fingers.

Through her tears she tried to recognise where she was. Bright white corridors surrounded her, whilst cries and moans filled the air. A strong bleach like odour burned her nostrils. Strange men in blue uniforms looked down sadly at her, bowing their heads slightly as she passed. She stared down at her favourite red dress; it was burnt and dusty. Her arm had a big



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plaster on it and her cheek was stinging. She tried to remember how she got here.

*The train! I was sleeping on the train! We were going to see Auntie.*

She looked up at Aunt Iris. She appeared upset and tired.

Together they weaved through vast amounts of disheveled and distraught people.

‘Auntie?’ Ella spoke. ‘Where are mamma and poppa?’

Aunt Iris looked down upon Ella through glazed red eyes.

‘They’re gone precious,’ her voice croaked. ‘You’re coming to live with me now.’

Ella was puzzled. ‘But Auntie? Where did they go?’

Aunt Iris stopped. A tear fell down her cheek. She bent down and picked up the small delicate girl before her and held her tight.

‘They’ve gone to live with the angels among the stars baby.’

Even though she was young, Ella knew exactly what she meant.

*Are mamma and poppa really dead?*

She put her arms around Aunt Iris neck and pushed her face into her thick brown hair.

‘Auntie....,’ she spoke softly as she wept into her auntie’s soft embrace.

Ella awoke with a jolt as her phone bleeped. She dug it from her coat pocket and looked at it. Nothing appeared on

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the screen to suggest a call or message. She scowled at it and thrust it back into her pocket. She had hoped that Aunt Iris would have texted her before now. Soon she would be in deep space and the time a message would take to reach her from Rendor could weeks or even months. The families in the lounge had left and Ella once again felt unsafe and alone. She glanced towards the dusty clock that hung on the wall. In five minutes Ella's ship would be leaving. She grabbed her bags and hastily dove out of the door.

Sprinting through the colossus port she caught sight of her ship. Narrowly avoiding knocking over a few people she bounded over an overhead passageway and down some steps towards a bright round yellow ship.

It was huge.

At around nine hundred feet long and four hundred feet tall the ship clashed in contrary to the grimy bay it hung within. Bright lights shone from the highly decorated ship, illuminating all around it. A large name spread across the bulk of the ship - '*The Aurora*', with a crescent moon cut around it; the typical logo of the Crescent Spaceline Company. Aunt Iris had paid for these tickets and Ella smiled tearfully to herself at the thought of her Aunt booking her premier first class tickets. Ella would have settled for a far cheaper flight but even so, the sight of the luxury ship warmed her heart.

Passengers were already queuing in several lines to get into the ship. Ella joined the back of the one stated on her ticket and thoughtfully played with her hair, thankful that she had

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not missed her flight. At the back of the bay something caught her eye. She turned to see a young man in a long black coat watching her from about forty feet away, casually smoking a cigarette. His glare unnerved Ella and she stepped closer into the queue, desperately trying to get into the safety of the ship.

Peering at the man out of the corner of her eye she could see his eyes remained fixed upon her. He had a shaved head and stood just over six feet in height. Ella shivered and turned back towards the ship. Nearly everyone had boarded. Ella handed her ticket to the smiling smartly dressed female attendant.

'Welcome to Crescent Spacelines,' she spoke with a fake grin, almost as if she had repeated the line a million times to the point of despising saying it.

Ella managed a smile and stepped onto the craft.

Inside, the soft cream interior soothed Ella's spirit and the fresh fragranced smell greatly reminded her of home. Momentarily she pondered on what her new home would be like when she reached Galyria, again praying it wasn't a murky dive like the spaceport she was leaving behind.

She looked at her ticket. It read cabin 602. She headed down a few corridors towards the elevator and stepped on alongside a humble looking old woman carrying a small leather bag.

The doors shut.

'Which floor do you need?' enquired Ella.

The old woman slowly looked up at Ella and spoke in a peculiar tinny voice. 'Sixth please love.'

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Ella smiled awkwardly again and pressed the sixth button. The elevator whirred into action and lifted quickly upwards.

The old lady continued to stare at Ella silently. *God, what is with these people? Don't they have any manners?* Ella immediately hoped he hadn't got something stuck to her face whilst she was sleeping in the lounge.

'Would you be so kind as to help me with my bag my love?' the old lady held the small tiny leather bag towards her.

'Err...yea sure of course,' said Ella reluctantly, picking up the incredibly light bag.

Finally the elevator stopped and opened with a loud ping.

Ella looked up in shock to see the man with the long coat from the bay outside stood before her. He stood still and eyed up both Ella and the old woman. Ella froze as the man's gaze penetrated through her.

'Excuse me,' spoke the old lady irritated. 'Could you please move so I can get out?'

The young man looked at her then smiled. 'Of course. Sorry.'

He stepped out of the way to allow the old lady to pass.

Ella shuffled pass him also, her head down.

As she started to walk away she felt two arms grab her and pull her violently back into the lift. She gasped as the young man threw her against the elevator wall. He quickly snatched the old lady's bag from her and threw it through the closing doors; the old lady blissfully unaware Ella had vanished from behind her.

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‘What the hell do you want?’ demanded Ella.

The young man pulled a hefty looking gun from his coat and pointed it straight at her chest.

‘Do not speak...please. They can’t know where you are.’

Ella felt sick. *Who is this bloody maniac?*

‘What is it you want with me? I swear I have nothing of value,’ Ella spoke in terror.

The young man reached behind him and pressed a lift button. ‘I disagree,’ he replied calmly.

Ella felt the lift shunt downwards. The man lowered his gun and seemed to relax.

‘I’m sorry about this Miss Bland. I’m afraid it’s necessary.’

Again he reached into his coat, this time pulling out an official looking badge. Ella peered cautiously at the blue and silver emblem. *United Defense Force*; she had never heard of such an organisation.

‘I am Special Agent Tristan Farley. It is imperative I get you off this ship immediately.’

Ella stepped back against the wall. The elevator continued to lurch downwards. She finally felt herself getting annoyed at the intrusion.

‘I don’t think so! What the hell makes you think I’m going anywhere with you? And how the hell do you know my name?’ The agent put his badge away and looked sternly at Ella.

‘If we don’t leave I promise you will be killed,’ he replied. Ella’s eyes widened, her annoyance suddenly vanishing.

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‘By you?’ her voice became a whisper.  
The elevator grinded to a shuddering halt.  
‘No. By them.’  
‘Them?’

‘Them. Like that old woman that was just in here.’

Ella choked. ‘You are joking aren’t you? That woman could barely walk; she wanted me to carry her bag for God’s sake.’

‘Exactly,’ spoke Tristan with an air of authority. ‘The methods of the Eclipse hu-droids are to gain their target’s trust, appearing harmless before executing them.’

Ella sighed. ‘Oh please! You’re telling me that woman was a droid? Even better, an Eclipse droid?’

Tristan nodded.

Ella stared at him in astonishment. *Eclipse is a stupid myth we used to scare each other with as kids.*

The doors opened again. From the open lift passengers could be seen walking around the lavish corridors. No one seemed to pay attention to the conversation inside the elevator.

‘You still haven’t told me how you know my name,’ Ella spoke at last.

‘The UDF has its resources. Now please, you must come with me.’

Ella pulled her bags tight towards her, preparing to step off the lift.

‘Not a chance mate.’

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Tristan smiled. 'I thought as much.'

He reached back into his pocket and pulled out the gun again, pointing it once more at Ella.

'Now I'm *ordering* you to follow me.'

Ella didn't wish to argue with a gun, whether she thought it could be loaded or not. She promised herself she would run away at the first opportunity. An armed madman couldn't possibly get far on a ship like this; surely there would be guards everywhere.

'Alright, you win,' she said calmly, trying to hide her nerves. They stepped off the lift, Tristan stood behind Ella, concealing the gun that he pressed into her back. He guided her down a few corridors quietly.

'The exit is close to here,' he spoke faintly. 'Just don't say a word and everything will be fine.'

*Like hell it will!* Her thoughts screamed at her.

Ella couldn't believe her luck. Just when she thought she was about to leave this dump, she was about to be kicked straight back onto it. They continued to walk down another corridor, ignoring the other passengers that crossed paths with them.

The ship reminded Ella more of an exclusive hotel than a spaceship. The exquisite interior gave it a warm friendly appearance. Ella found it quite ironic; the place that looked the safest is where she found the most danger. She thought about the old woman, her voice did remind her a little of a robot's. But that was preposterous; a human looking droid was

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unheard of. People didn't like the idea of robots impersonating humans.

Suddenly Ella felt her feet gently lift off the ground before softly landing again.

The sign was clear; they had taken off. She didn't know whether to feel relieved at not having to go back to Rendor or frightened because she was still stuck with this strange gunman.

He halted and looked up as if trying to think what to do next.

'Damn, this is a problem,' he cursed.

Ella glanced to her side, seeing Tristan's distraction in her peripherals.

She saw her chance.

Fuelled by adrenaline, she spun around, pushing him back as hard as she could muster, sending him faltering back against a wall. She then darted away from Tristan, lunging forward down the now empty corridor into a fast sprint, burdened by her heavy bags.

'HEY!' shouted Tristan, diving after her.

'HELP ME! SOMEBODY HELP ME! HE'S GOT A BLOODY GUN!' Ella's raised voice made her panic even more.

She fled around a corner straight into something hard, metallic...and pink! Bouncing backwards, Ella hit the ground hard. She fell into a steady daze. In her muddled vision she struggled to look up at the thing she had just slammed into.



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She could hear Tristan talking calmly again alongside a strange light breathy voice.

‘I’m sorry; it’s her first journey. I think she just panicked,’ spoke Tristan lightheartedly.

Ella’s vision cleared and she finally saw what she ran into. Before her stood a young looking robotic girl. Ella had never seen a droid like this before. The robot girl was completely made of shiny pink metal. Her face shimmered as if made of smooth liquid. Her eyes were totally yellow and without pupils. She wore a pink-purple dress that was tight fitting and seemed to be part of her. Large flat strands of similarly coloured hair curved around her face with unusual large metal decorations on top, surmounted with shiny ribbons flowing down her back.

‘No need to be sorry. Is she ok?’ said the robot girl as she peered down at Ella. She had a threatening beauty about her.

‘Yea I’m sure she’ll be fine. But from the looks of things she may be a little concussed. We must get her sat down somewhere.’

The robot girl looked at Tristan and tilted her head to the side. Ella felt that Tristan seemed to trust this particular robot. ‘I have my own cabin nearby,’ replied the robotic girl. ‘Let’s get her there.’

‘Perfect. That would be great,’ smiled Tristan. ‘Are you able to lift her?’

Without speaking, the robot girl reached down and picked up Ella with incredible strength. Ella felt herself too weak to

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resist. She suddenly realised she was now being carried back down the corridor from which she had just dashed from.

Closing her eyes from her new nightmare her thoughts drifted away as she wished herself to be back with Aunt Iris, safe on Rendor – the planet she now found herself terribly missing.

*<sup>2</sup>Not long after mankind left Earth, scientists soon realised that reaching super speeds through propulsion engines alone was expensive, unreliable, and limited. A scientist called Hans Whittle later patented the Tear Engine. By creating tiny rips or 'tears' into the fabric of space, a ship could ride the created distortions like waves, thrusting it far faster than ever thought possible, with minimal G-forces applied. As the resulting speed was faster than light, navigating alone by sight was impossible. Thus visual decelerators were employed to aid steering, creating a virtual map before the pilot.*

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