

Chapter 2: The Queen of the Heavens

Mo: So...I was talking with Hun earlier...

Flo: I already don't like where this is going...

Mo: I know, I know. It didn't go well last time...but I know that I was in a bad place, and he was under a lot of stress with repairs. He was actually really sweet yesterday...he noticed my new conditioner I made with the Replicator. He never noticed things like that before! Or anything in general.

Flo: Hmm...I hate that. They're too miserable thinking about themselves to notice anything about you.

Mo: I know! But he really was sweet. And part of me does still like him. So I told him...I can't deal with you being stressed all the time. So let's wait until you finish this round of repairs that Jin and Mana passed down.

Libby: (entering the room) Hello everyone. Glad to see you could all make it.

C Levels: (together) Good morning, Ma'am.

Libby: Good morning to you as well. Let's see, where were we...(to computer console) visual access of ship's historical archives. Date, 4942 AD. Can anyone guess what this date corresponds with?

Mo: The Solar System War.

Libby: That's correct. The final confrontation that set us on our current course. By the early 50th century, Earth's atmosphere had become so toxic that the planet was entirely dependent on a network of atmosphere control stations. Dwindling supplies of water meant that Earth reduced exports of water to its colonies, while also increasing imports from the moons of Saturn. The colonies, headquartered on Mars and Titan, declared independence from Earth, and seized all the water reserves of the Saturnine moons.

Mo: (snores jokingly)

Flo: (Sighs) Haven't we heard all of this before?

Libby: (ignoring) The conflict escalated significantly when the Kuiper Federation, as the colonies named themselves, discovered a cruiser filled with antimatter warheads bound for Earth-controlled battle stations near Mars. Eventually, Earth and the Federation unleashed their full arsenals on each other. The delicate atmosphere control systems were all destroyed, leaving Earth and all the colonies... uninhabitable...

Flo: So everyone died?

Libby: Everyone died.

Mo: Everyone?

Libby: Every living human except for those on this ship. And the 100000 frozen embryos stowed in the ship's cargo bay, for when the ship comes to a habitable planet.

(Jin enters. A flurry of excited whispering from the C level girls)

Jin: Libby.

Libby: (Salutes) Sir. Is there anything I can help you with today?

Jin: I need to access the Archives. I need your help scrolling through some newly arrived files.

Libby: What type of files, sir?

Jin: That's....what I need your help figuring out.

Libby: Ah, yes. I see. Girls, I think our lesson is concluded for today. Next week we'll start back up at this unit, with the Alcubierre Drive and nature of faster-than-light travel. (Scooting of chairs and desks as the C level girls get up and leave)

Bree: (timidly) Good luck with the Archives, Jin!

Flo: (Snidely imitating Bree) 'Good luck with the Archives, Jin!' (Mo and Flo snicker)

Libby: (friendly) Still doing work on the day of Saturnalia, sir?

Jin: Things have to get done. Even on the day of Saturnalia. (Becomes more humorous) Just this one thing. And then no more work, I promise.

Libby: Very good sir. Firing up the central archive core now (computer sounds). You know, for later tonight, I found this recipe I think you're going to love.

Jin: Really?

Libby: It took some doing, but I was able to decipher the chemical code and get all the elements together necessary for synthesis. It's called...salmon, I believe? With butter and garlic. You'll be my test case for it.

Jin: (chuckles) I look forward to it. (computer sounds) Are the Archives ready?

Libby: Yes sir.

Jin: Pull up the records of the ship's com systems. (keyboard clacking, buttons beeping) What are those serial numbers in front of the logs?

Libby: The sector of the ship the log came from. The time code is at the end, the serial number in the front tells what station the log was issued from.

Jin: Scroll to the top...that one. I saw that message logged on my personal monitor early this morning. Can you find out where it came from?

Libby: Yes, sir. (Keyboard typing. Pause. Confusion, tinged with fear) The back of the ship.

Jin: The mechanic bay? The synthetic production floor?

Libby: No, sir. The very back of the ship. The protein recycling pools. The engine...

Jin: How is that possible...

Libby: It could have been a technical error, sir. A misfiring signal, I'm sure the C levels could go back and fix it.

Jin: It had a recorded message though. A voice...

Libby: But there's no one back in that part of the ship, sir.

Jin: Except for...the D levels. And Cus, the boy, was up with the rest of us for Derry's play. So that just leaves...the girl...

Libby: Jan? The D Level?

Jin: Yes.

Libby: That's impossible. The stations are all heavily encrypted. The C levels only get in with temporary access codes. That station hasn't been updated in...(keyboard typing) A year. So it's frankly impossible for her to have gotten in.

Jin: So what explains this audio recording?

Libby: Maybe the voice was a leak from another file source? One of Derry's plays or cinemas, getting mixed into the signal.

Jin: (Sighs) That must be the only explanation then. Strange.

Libby: (After a pause) Sir...

Jin: (warmly) You don't always have to call me that, you know.

Libby: Jin...I know you've been busier than everyone. I just hope...things aren't getting to you, too much.

Jin: I hope so too...

Libby: Let's just sign out, turn off all the monitors for the day, and enjoy the Saturnalia! That's what it's for. The lower levels get a taste of what they can aspire to, the higher levels get a chance to let go of some responsibility. It'll be good for you.

Jin: Is that what it's for? (pause) I didn't like last night.

Libby: Me neither.. I didn't think Derry would have picked that one...

Jin: He's done plays like that before.

Libby: It was a rough role to have...but we all had to take on roles like that earlier in our lives.
(Beat) It could have been worse..

Jin: You're right. (pause) Libby?

Libby: Yes Jin?

Jin: I can trust you, right?

Libby: Of course you can.

Jin: I'll take your advice (chuckles) Logging off, relaxing, enjoying tonight. Maybe I'll have a mineral bath. Just let go of my worries. But tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow, once we've settled back into our normal schedule...I want to look into this audio signal. Something is going on here. I know it.

Libby: Very well, sir. (pause) Well, I think that settles it.

Jin: Yes, I think that's all I have.

Libby: So...I want you to log out...right now.

Jin: (chuckles) Ok.

Libby: And I'll check later on in the afternoon to make sure you haven't logged in or done any more work.

Jin: (laughs) I know you will. Very good, Libby. Logging off, taking the day. I'll see you in the evening for Saturnalia.

(The main assembly deck)

Mech: So...you know that look that Mo gives?

Nut: Uh...no. Can't say that I do.

Mech: When she likes you. Kind of holds her gaze on you for a little bit longer than normal.

Nut: And she's looking at you like this?

Mech: (satisfied) That's right. (Nervous suddenly) Well...she looked at Hun like that the other day. But I'm pretty sure she gave me that eye in the mess hall. Just kind of...held it there. (Dreamily) It was nice.

Nut: I don't know, Mech. I've heard you say stuff like this before. I know she's real pretty and all...what about Bree? When was the last time you two dated?

Mech: A year ago. Just for a little while. She became too much to handle. Way too much.

Nut: Yeah. I think I was seeing her a little bit then too. And yeah, I couldn't deal with her either (laughs). Mo's only got eyes for Hun, and Flo doesn't want to be with anyone.

Mech: And Bree's too much

Nut: Bree's way too much...

(The larger ensemble enters)

Hun: Hello there girls. And the female C levels as well.

Mo: Bree, Flo, a little space, if you don't mind? Hogging the entire stand.

Libby: Hello, everyone. The big day is finally here! I have the tastiest feast prepared for you all, I can't wait for you all to enjoy it. But before we dive in, Derry wanted to make an announcement.

Derry: Thank you, Libby. That's correct. (Pauses) Do you know where Jin is?

Libby: He's...still doing some work, I think. In the main console chamber. He said he'd be right down, don't bother waiting for him.

Derry. Oh, if that boy could only learn to lighten his burden a little. Very well. Anyway, I'm glad to see you all here on the eve of our ship's most beloved celebration. Through a year's worth of dedicated toil, you have all earned the right to the mischief and revelry that will ensue. This year, Mo has taken a great amount of initiative. I believe you wished to speak, Mo?

Mo: Yes! I do, if you don't mind. Everyone! Can you hear me! (Mech and Nut whispering to themselves) Mech, Nut, shut up and listen! Anyway...I would just like to say that I am honored to be the Mistress of Ceremonies, for this year's Saturnalia. To me, nothing is more important than tradition. As such, as I'm sure you've guessed, with all the costumes I've been bringing back and forth from the Replicator, I have a certain theme planned for this year's celebration. And, most exciting of all, per my specifications for this theme, a special guest. Derry, if you'd explain?

Derry: That's correct. I'm delighted to announce that our circle for this year's Saturnalia has grown a little larger. Jan, our young friend in the lower levels of the ship, will be attending for the very first time. I know we see her infrequently, busy as she is attending faithfully to her duties. I think she will make a luminous addition to our celebration. Libby, are the D levels here?

Libby: They are, sir. They were on a job, I had to bring them here on rather short notice. Cus, will you come in? (footsteps as Cus enters)

Hun: (mocking sarcasm) Looking good there, Cus. Walking it off well.

Cus: (timidly, in pain) Thank you. Good to see you all again.

Libby: Is Jan with you, Cus?

Cus: Yes, she was right behind.

Libby: Very good. Jan, dear, will you enter? We just wanted you to say hello to the others. It won't take long.

(Jan enters. All the C levels snicker and laugh)

Mo: Someone's been out for a nice swim.

Flo: God, I can smell her from across the room!

Derry: Oh, my poor dear. Why would you enter the chamber like this?

Jan: I...there was no time...I just got here.

Flo: (snickering) Bree, Mo...

Bree/Mo: Yeah?

Flo: You know how the Ark is a generation ship, its mission to carry embryos to continue the human race? I think her hair is a generation ship for rats and lice.

Mo: (laughing) The Mission must be carried out! There's still hope for the rats and lice of ancient Earth.

Libby: Girls, please. Jan had an important job to retrieve an object from the protein recycling pools. Don't worry, dear, we'll get you cleaned up soon.

Jan: Libby, I was meaning to speak to you earlier...

Libby: We've all been so busy. Don't worry, we can talk more tonight at the feast.

Jan: It's very important. (To the crowd) Everyone, listen. I have something important to say...

Derry: (cuts her off) Jan, I'm glad to hear your enthusiasm for addressing the group. But we all have to get washed up before the feast.. I'm sorry to see you in such disrepair, my sweet girl. I just wanted to announce your attendance at the feast, that's all. Libby, please see that Jan gets a good bath and some clean clothes.

Libby: Of course, sir. Jan, come with me...(the two leave)

Jan: Please, let me just speak...

Libby: (sharply) Jan! (firm order) Come with me. (A pause, then the two walk off together)

Hun: (mockingly) Your lover is getting away, Mech. Go after her!

Mech: No, I'll leave her for you.

Hun: Come on, this could be your last chance! Go save your beloved!

Nut: He loves the scent of her perfume. (Nut and Hun both laugh)

Mech: Oh come on now...

Mana: All right kids. Let's all get ready and we'll convene in the dining hall in one hour.

Hun: Yes sir!

Mo: Oh, I can't wait! The costumes this year are magnificent, not to complement myself too much. I have something special in store for our newest addition, the illustrious Jan the Janitor.

Bree: I can't wait to see it!

(The main dining hall)

Libby: Ah, all these candles! Such a nice, luminous effect. And they smell wonderful too. (Hums to herself) Glasses here, plates there. All shiny crystal and richest silver. (Musically) What a night it'll be...(Jin enters. Libby's demeanor suddenly changes) I thought I told you not to do any more work today.

Jin: You did. Sorry, I couldn't help myself. Had to take one last look at the audio and video files.

Libby: You know that just for today, I am your superior, don't you? You disobeyed a direct order. I will have to think of a way to punish you.

Jin: Apologies, ma'am.

Libby: Start by giving the table one last wax and polish. I want our guests of honor to be able to see their reflections in it.

Jin: Yes, ma'am. (Gets to work wiping the table. Derry and Libby enter)

Mana: The sous chef of the evening, ready with a 12 course meal.

Derry: And a humble footman, eager to provide anything his masters need.

Libby: As the maitre'd of this dining establishment, I am charging all of you with providing our guests with the finest night of their entire year. We have six reservations that will be arriving shortly, and then two more that will arrive later on. Have all the glasses filled and the cutlery set. And make sure there are always bottles of wine and champagne at hand!

Derry/Jin: Yes ma'am! (They set about pouring glasses)

Libby: As for you, my good chef, please set out the hors d'oeuvres at once, and have the amuse-bouche not far behind.

Mana: Yes ma'am!

(The door to the dining hall opens. The C Levels enter gingerly, laughing quietly)

Mo: Hello? Humble proprietor? I believe we called ahead with a reservation.

Libby: Yes! Our guests of honor. And judging by the names on the registry, some nobility at that! Truly an honor to have you with us tonight. Sit them at once, please.

Derry: Of course. Right this way, my lords and ladies.

Mech: (giggling) I like this sash. What do upper levels sound like? (Feigning aristocratic pomposity) Make sure no wine gets spilled on this sash, you dog.

Derry: Of course, my lord. I will show the utmost care. (Pouring wine)

Libby: We'll start with a synthetic replica of a 1767 Bordeaux from ancient Earth. And for the hors d'oeuvres course, mussels canapes with basil cream cheese. And followed swiftly afterwards by an amuse bouche of blinis of trout roe caviar with creme fraiche.

Bree: It smells so good!

Flo: Literally everything here looks amazing.

Mo: You're really easy to impress, you know that? (Softens) My fellow ladies. This is the type of meal worthy of your station.

Nut: We've worked all year for this!

Flo: Now let's enjoy! (They all begin to eat and drink, loudly)

Mo: More wine, servant.

Jin: Of course, my lady. (pours wine)

Mo: Why haven't the bottles been chilled? Send it back, bring me something cooler.

Jin: Of course, my lady. Apologies.

Libby: The next course is the soup. Pumpkin sage bisque...pardon my conceit, my lieges, but I think I did quite well with this one.

Nut: Why can't we eat like this every night?

Hun: They put a lot of effort into preparing this for us, dummy. They can't just do that all the time.

Mo: Don't speak that way to fellow nobility! What title are you exactly...

Nut: Umm, I don't know...I forgot...

Mech: Maybe it's written on your sash...

Mo: Oh, nevermind. We'll coin your peerage now. Nut the Lugnut, 'Marquis of Galaxies'. Kindly lord of all the rotations in the void.

Flo: I can see it! He certainly has the right noble bearing for that. (Laughing) More wine, servant.

Derry: Of course. (Pours)

Mech: Ooh, this is fun. What am I...? Mech the Mechanic, Knight of Planets. My ring of asteroids my shield, my gravity's pull my deadly lance against my foes.'

Bree: 'Bri the Bride, Contessa of Spirals.' Thousands of stars bound together in majestic arms.

Flo: (giggling) 'Bri the Bride?' Pretty sure it's supposed to be 'Bree the Breeder'.

Mo: Careful! That's a powerful enemy for you to make. Flo the Flower.

Flo: I'm the Marquess of Galaxies! My husband the Marquis will protect me from any danger. (Comical lover talk) Isn't that right, starry snookums?

Nut: Uh, huh huh....that's right. I'm the Markey, after all.

Libby: Our next course...I'm very proud of this one...smoked salmon with champagne vinaigrette, capers, lemon and avocado.

Bree: (flirtatiously) Oh servant.

Jin: Yes, my lady?

Bree: More wine.

Jin: Of course (pours wine)

Bree: You spilled?

Jin: Did I? Apologies if I did.

Bree: Yes...my feet. (Slowly) Would you be so kind as to wash them?

Jin: (pause. Then, professionally, cordially) I am here to serve, ma'am.

Mech: I want to see if I can eat this in one bite...

Nut: Let me have some more, I finished mine already...

Mo: Oh, have some courtly demeanor, my lords. But! Moving on...As the Baroness of Stars, (hiccups drunkenly), quartermistress of nuclear fusion and purveyor of ultraviolet rays, it is my honor to introduce the first of two illustrious guests, far more illustrious than you sorry lot. Maitre'D?

Libby: Ah, yes. I will bring him in at once (walks off)

Mo: Behold, the one and only Duke of Superclusters! Master of galactic filaments vast beyond imagining!

Cus: (nervously) Uh, hello...pleased to see you all again.

Hun: Seat him higher up, on the dais!

Bree: He deserves nothing less!

Cus: Thank you for all having me. It certainly smells very good here.

Mo: Servants, attend to the Duke! He has a lot of eating to catch up on.

Hun: And bring him plenty of wine!

Mech: Lots of wine!

Nut: Huh huh, more wine than any of us!

Cus: (as plates are set and glasses are poured) Thank you, thank you. (Takes a bite and a slurp)
This is really good. (A little queasy) It's rich though. I'm not used to eating food this rich...

Mo: Oh nonsense, you dine like this daily in your dark matter hall. Bring more courses over, servants!

Bree: Eat up my liege!

Mo: Eat it, eat it...

Cus: (between bites) I'm trying...

Hun: Wash it down with wine.

Mech: Hold his head back..

Nut: There you go your grace. (Cus gagging and choking)

Hun: I'll help you my lord! (smacks his back. Cus loudly vomits everywhere...the C Levels all break out laughing)

Mo: The Duke sees it fit to vomit his meal out before finishing it! Perhaps this is the latest fashion, we should all do the same. (Pretending to vomit)

Mech: More wine, your excellency. I'll clean the vomit chunks from your hair. (Pours the glass of wine all over Cus. The C levels laugh. Cus whimpers and groans)

Mo: (after a beat, as the laughter of the C levels dies down) And now...to the climax of the evening. The next guest is truly the one above all.

Flo: I can already see her glowing from behind the door!

Mo: Bring her in, please.

Libby: Of course. (The door opens. Jan enters)

Jan: Please, if I could have just a moment to explain...

Mech: Wow! She sure cleans up good.

Nut: Oh, what I'd do to get under those robes...

Hun: Shut up! Don't talk to your queen like that.

Mo: We are only her stewards in our cosmic domains! The Queen of the Heavens, beaming in glory before us!

Bree: Move her to the center, raise her up high! (frantic footsteps as the C level girls dance and swirl around Jan)

Flo: And so the last shall be first!

Bree: The radiance of the Heavens' Queen!

Mo: Gleaming white robes, as pure as comets!

Flo: She needs more than just this. Simple robes won't do.

Mo: Let us coronate her then!

Bree: Yes, yes, of course!

Jan: Stop, we don't need to do this...

Flo: A golden galaxy for a crown!

Mo: Shining down upon us, the spirals of her grace!

Jan: Stop, please!

Mo: We would be honored to grab your limbs and hold you up my queen!

Bree: Borne up by the strength of our love! (The C Levels wrestle and overpower Jan, hoisting her up into the air)

Jan: Stop!

Jin: Please, stop, you're hurting her.

Hun: Don't talk to your masters like that, servant!

Mech: You have no authority tonight.

Jan: Please, there's something I need to tell you...

Mo: Quiet, my lady! You've already spoken enough through your cosmic works.

Jan: STOP!!!! (Jan's voice is accompanied by a loud crackle of electronic distortion. Everyone is shocked and taken aback. Frantic whispering among the C Levels. Jan grunts as the C Levels drop her roughly)

Jan: (Her voice elevated in power by the electronic distortion) You will hear me speak. You will hear my message. (The distortion slowly dies down...)

Jan: (softly panting with desperate excitement) Listen well, fellow travelers, I mean not to steal your time but the most important hour of our lives is drawing near. Do you know where we are in space? Or how long we've been on this journey? (No one answers. Jan, with growing confidence) I have looked into the minds of those who set us on this course so many ages ago. From the ship's mainframe, the deepest archives in the quantum computing cloud...

Jin: That's impossible, there's no way you could have accessed them...

Jan: And yet accessed them I did. All the time banished in the ship's lower darkness I thought was a lonely curse...until I saw this design laid out before me. Years of poring through the original plans. And now I can tell you with confidence our forebears had a purpose for us! We are not, nor never have been, lost in the void.

Jan: There were five ships such as this. Five ships, the sum of our species' progress, every cruelty and discovery for a hundred thousand years. All of the ships were set on a straight course to a destination—a distant new world where we could find renewal. Four were obliterated in the Solar System by Earth's foes—fellow humans with the red mist of war over their eyes. But one

ship was so far from the others, its trajectory so ungainly, its destination so impossible, that it was deemed not worth the hateful ammunition to destroy it. And for thousands of years... (quietly) for thousands of years, though they have not felt like it in our daily relativity....the light of the humans of ancient Earth has been extinguished, the memories all gone..

Jan: But now, friends....at the end of two and a half million light years of darkness....we awake from the nightmare of extinction to find that all has been forgiven and redeemed! Soon we alight upon the spiral arm of Andromeda, our sister galaxy...and there, glimpsed by Earth's telescopes but soon by our living eyes...a new world! As fair and beautiful in all creation, not just a replica of Earth but its superior. Its star a gentle rose, suspended in perfect harmony with all around it...the light refracted from it dazzling with the electromagnetic signatures of sweet air and purest water....the whole world under the green calm of early summer. The planet Empyrean! The highest heaven, the greatest gift for a race that, at the very hair's breadth of annihilation, had still gathered enough reason and love across millennia to set into motion this Ark, of which we must fulfill our portion of the greatest duty.

Jan: I will not lie, the hour is drawing near. Five weeks and we will have slipped the crest upon which our forebears intended us to change course in accordance with gravity...the one hope may shoot past us forever into the void. Yet we have every power to end this long dream. All my skills and knowledge are yours. Unto this gleaming hope, I will gladly be your navigator! (Pants and exhales after her passionate speech)

(A pause. Some murmurs and whispers from the C levels, unable to process what they heard)

Flo: What is she talking about?

Mech: Is this...true?

(Then, after a beat, slow clapping. Derry steps forward)

Derry: A spirited performance, my dear. The imagination that solitude can inspire! (Firm tone, asserting his authority) I think our friend seeks to extend her elevated role beyond just tonight. Does it not seem that way, my lords and ladies?

Mech: (After a pause) Yeah...

Mo: That seems to be likely...

Derry: To keep her queendom with talk of a new planet, talk that we could never possibly verify or disprove?

Bree: (Catching on) That's true....

Derry: I'm just a humble footman, but I caution my betters about those who seek to fly too high from solid ground. (Turning jocular) But tonight she is our queen. We should pay her the appropriate respect.

Mo: (Sinister) Oh, of course! Anything she wants she can have.

Bree: (Bitterly) Our queen for a day...

Mo: (Building energy) You look tired, my queen.

Bree: (Menacing) So much exertion for one night..

Flo: Maybe you wish to return to your chambers in the ship's rear. (The C Level girls gather round Jan, laughing)

Jan: What are you doing? Did you hear nothing at all?

Mo: Take her arms. Let's go back now...

Jan: (Desperate) Stop, let go of me! (Strikes out and hits Bree)

Bree: You hit me! You little bitch! (Jan struggles as the C Level girls overpower her) You dirty little bitch! (Begins to beat Jan. Jan cries out in pain)

Mo: Hold her arms, Flo! (Laughing) Looks like the Queen is being overthrown!

Jin: Stop right now! That's an order!

Hun: No orders from you tonight!

Nut: Huh huh, more wine, at once.

Mech: You heard him!

Jin: Stop, you're hurting her!

Derry: Our masters have spoken. It seems that even royalty must mind the will of their subjects.

Jin: But...

Mech: More wine, now!

(Jin growls in anger and frustration. Jan crying out, and the C Levels laughing continues and slowly fades away)