

“Where did you get that?” Geo turned around to see his sister staring at him angrily.

“What do you care? I’m not a child anymore, Rose.” Geo held out the item from his back, its presence revealed.

“I thought they outlawed all Navigators within our border.” Rose said, confidently.

“They did, but I still got one, didn’t I?” Geo held out the small electrical device for Rose to examine.

“Don’t tell me you were at that black auction again.”

“It’s for the last time, I swear.”

“They could have followed you here Geo. They could have had an inside man at the auction! What are you going to do if-“

“They won’t. I hid my identity.”

“That doesn’t mean they still can’t track this thing.”

“I’ll be gone soon anyway” Geo took the Navigator and looked away, toward the window. He stared out at the metal buildings piercing the gray sky. Their world was dull, and still imprisoned since they’ve been alive. The war has not been too kind to their home. The stars were concealed by the city lights, as they always were, as they always will be.

“How are you gonna get out? Even if you found a ship, they will stop anything trying to leave atmosphere. And what’s mom gonna think?” Rose started to seem worried. She was stressed enough as it was.

“I must get out. Something out there is calling me. I need to see the stars, Rose. And sadly, mom is not going to stop me.” Geo looked back at Rose, with slight tears in his eyes.

“I could take that Nav from you right now and you’d never be able get out of this system. Why shouldn’t I? Give me one good reason.” Geo could see the red in his sisters’ eyes and face.

“Because I have no meaning here! Joining the explorer’s guild is the only thing I’ve ever wanted. You know this. I have never been happy since dad was lost.”

“Don’t speak about dad right now! Do you not think that we’ve all suffered? That doesn’t give me the excuse to leave everything behind!” Rose shouted.

“Then come with me.” Geo now felt guilty.

“You idiot. My life is here, with mom. Why would I leave her? And for what? What is there to find?” Rose’s anger turned to sadness.

“I’m sorry.” Geo turned away from his sister and walked to his room. He glanced at dad’s old office as he walked past.

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“But I don’t have the money for it.” Geo only had so much money left after his auction visits.

“Look son, if you don’t get the augmentation, you simply won’t live long enough to reach uncharted space. You would never be able to come back.” The guild officer stared lightly at the boy, obviously being used to telling people that they are going to die.

“I’m still going. With the augmentation or not.” Geo said confidently.

The officer was surprised. “You said your name was Geo Redstar? I think I used to know your father. He was a great help to the guild back in the day.” The officer looked down at his desk.

“It’s a shame we lost him.” Geo said. They both stayed silent for a few seconds.

“Too bad our guild chose a side in this war. Otherwise, we wouldn’t be hiding down here in this dirty hole.” The officer looked up and had a brighter expression on his face. “You know what? Just for you, I’m gonna reduce the price. We probably won’t get any more explorers out there with all the prohibitions. Give me what you have, and I’ll implant it.” The officer smiled at Geo and waited for a reply.

“I don’t know what to say.” Geo handed him all the units he had left. The officer looked pleasant, as he had expected much less.

“Okay Mr. Redstar, sit down and relax.”

“Will it hurt?” Geo said, a little anxiously.

“Just a little. Drink this. You’ll be asleep for a few hours.” The officer handed him a cup with some black fluid in it.

“Wait. How long will I live exactly?” Geo started having second thoughts.

“It increases your average lifespan by about five-fold. It is impossible to reach uncharted space without it. Time moves much, much faster for you while in a warp drive. It’s basically time travel but legitimate. I thought you would have learned this by now.” Geo thought about his remaining family. Will he ever see his mother again? His sister?

Geo shuddered at the thought. “I’m ready.” He said, secretly unsure. He drank from the cup, and all went black.

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As Geo exited the secret guild hideout, he heard a static noise to his left while in the alleyway. He abruptly turned, expecting a possible mugging. All he saw were a few large trashcans scattered across the ground. The electrical noise still blared, so Geo took a closer look. He flipped over the trash and uncovered something similar to a corpse.

“Shit!” Geo had found a somewhat destroyed, augmented individual. The body had one real arm, one long metal claw, robotic circuits in its chest. Geo almost leaped back when he looked up at the head. It had no face, not even a metal one. It appeared to have been pried off, and recently. Geo had thought that the war brought much unwanted political violence. Then, the head sprang to life.

“387 years, 3 days, 7 hours, 42 minutes, 3.. 4.. 5 seconds.” The augmented started blaring out random computer gibberish. Its voice was almost fully autonomized, its lungs giving out. Geo put the body upright.

“One day, I will be home, one day, I will be home, one day...” It seems his augment had been somewhat damaged when it got attacked. Geo didn’t know what to do to help.

“Hey, guy... Are you okay? Can you hear me?” Geo tried speaking to the augmented. The body seemed to turn and face Geo and went silent.

“Rosalith, is that you? I can hear you. Take me back home, back home.” The body reached out, its arm touching the nothingness. Geo guessed it couldn’t smell the garbage that surrounded them.

“Take me... Take me...” The body fell on its side and the life seemed to have left its body. Geo just stared down at what was left of his augmented friend. Geo thought of Rosalith, the name he called out for. Geo was reminded of his own family. He looked at the corpse and saw almost a reflection. Could I really end up like this? He grasped the metal claw, and laid him carefully along the street, so that someone could find him.

“The universe we live in...” Geo thought to himself. He jumbled away from the scene, a single tear falling and landing on a puddle. He imagined himself sitting in the garbage, calling out to Rose... No. Geo knew he was better than that. That wouldn’t happen to him. He would make it home in the end, at the very least. He began walking back to his residence. The city, as bright as always, kept shining. The fallen augmented was later found and put to rest, its pieces most likely resold, as does everything on this planet. Rosalith will never find her brother. And even if she had, she wouldn’t have even recognized him.

Later, Geo had found himself in a dirty shipyard, talking to a dirty, illegal contraband runner. The individual was a Snidarian, an uncommon species on this planet. The guild officer had given Geo a plan for how he could get into orbit. This was Geo's only possible chance of obtaining his freedom, and of course, it would come at a cost.

"I'm still gonna need that ship." Geo Redstar spoke.

"Bata-Skrata!" The Snidarian did not seem amused at the offer. Its long fleshy ears perked up and its large eyes squinted. Geo had his translator active, and it rephrased what the intelligent species had said.

"I am not amused at this offer." The translator device rang as it concluded its sentence.

"The guild officer told me that you owed my father a huge favor that has since remained unspent. I come to you in kindness and humbly accept your ship as payment." Geo tried to act as confident as he could.

"Grotto-fotor des halata. Mee karotto!" The Snidarian did not seem like coming to terms anytime soon, which is what the guild officer told Geo would happen.

"Your father is gone. I do not owe anything." The translator device rang once again. The guild officer also told Geo something secret about the individual, to help with the negotiation.

"Your name is Leao Vordata. I have heard that you may have some contraband on that ship. I could report you right now and claim about half a million units, or you could lend it to me. The choice is yours." Geo tried as hard as he could to not falter. He was small, but ambitious.

"Aah! Grotobo!" Leao's eyes widened and he stumbled back about a step. He quickly glanced at his ship and back down at Geo.

“Unknown slang detected.” The translator device buzzed. Geo could have only guessed what the translator had tried to decode.

“Hakula diopa? Marat po coveno?” The Snidarian started to look anxious, but still had not given up just yet.

“You would turn on your own guild? Help the damned covenant?” The translator beeped. They seemed to shrug and look at the dirt. He then shook his head slightly and did some sort of foreign hand gesture.

“If you do this for me, you can keep all the contraband, I promise. You can afford to lose a ship at the cost of that luggage. It’s probably worth more than the ship itself. Besides, no one can even leave the planet anyway.” This was Geos final attempt. If this did not work, he would need to do something illegal. He didn’t seem to worry, as that was what his original plan consisted of anyway. The Snidarian sighed and used his keys to open the ship. He started unpacking the luggage in multiple trips as Geo sat in the dirt and waited. He tossed the kid the keys, seemed to do a nod of respect, and turned away. Geo looked up to the sun and knew he was one step closer.

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Geo appreciated and entered his newly stolen ship. The air pressure valves spurred and smelled of something unnatural as the door unsealed itself. As he entered, a new aroma identified itself, the smell of spoiled milk and cheese. It seems the contraband smuggler did not care for his ship in the slightest.

“Thank god.” Geo was fortunately not greeted with an odor in the captain’s seat. The smuggler must have had some pride in keeping the cockpit clean. Geo sealed the door behind him and sat down at the extensive control pad. There were at least 30 buttons, levers, and switches. Geo was used to most of it, considering he has read many piloting manuals over his lifetime. He also remembers the few times his father took him on his ship, he didn’t get to fly, of course, but he learned a few things.

“I almost can’t believe this thing can actually take me into uncharted space.” Geo said to himself. Most ships these days were standard for space exploration. All you really had to do was maintain and refuel the ship, and it could go on for years without a problem. Unless of course you crash it, run out of fuel, get raided by pirates, get caught by patrols, or get it stolen from you. Geo wasn’t gonna worry about any of that, though. Geo jumped out of the sealed door and landed on the dirt of the sloppily made landing bay. It was dark outside now, and he knew it was raining by the scent of petrichor and mud. He stared at the singular moon in the sky, for at this time of decade the second moon was not visible. He remembered as a kid when there were two moons. He tried to remember as much as he could about his childhood while his father was still home. He looked out and wondered if he was looking at him right now, and if he was somehow looking back.

“I will find you. I will try.” Geo turned his back to the moon and went back home.

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Geo woke up well rested, and nervous. Today was the day of the primary eclipse. A primary eclipse is when a bright star is eclipsed by a dimmer star in a binary star system. On these days, the frequencies of technologies are messed up, and it’s bright in the atmosphere. Geo’s home planet is in orbit around this binary system, which is rare for a habitable planet. Geo knew today was his only chance to escape. He would use today to his advantage, possibly flying under the radars of the carrier ships that surround the planet. They would hopefully be watching the eclipse, and not Geo’s ship. He finished all his preparations and was ready to take off. But he had one thing he had to do. He pulled out the note that he would be leaving for his family. He knew he wouldn’t have the courage to talk to his mother, to tell her that he might never see her again. He couldn’t do it. Geo sneakily went back into his house, and no one appeared to be home. He snuck the note on mothers bedstand and turned to leave when he saw Rose standing there, arms crossed.

“What is that?” She asked him, loudly.

“I’m leaving today. I can’t talk to mom.”

“Were you even going to talk to me?” Rose started getting emotional.

“It’s hard. Everything is in the note.”

“So that’s it? Are we ever going to see you again?”

“Maybe. Maybe not. It’s what I have to do. I’m glad you’re staying with mom.”

“I don’t even have a choice anymore Geo. You’re giving up on us.” They both started to cry.

“I’m gonna miss you guys.” They embraced each other, one last time.

“Mom is going to cry for weeks.” Rose told him.

“I’ll try to come back. To see you both again.”

“You better.”

“It’s gonna be awhile.” Geo left his sister after a final farewell and headed toward his ship. The primary eclipse started, and preparations were set. Geo began his calibrations, made sure everything was ready. He flipped about 20 switches, hoping each one was correct. Geo looked up at the piercing, lone sun in the sky. He pulled a final lever and took off toward the stars.

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Geo grabbed his face with his metal augmented hands. His mind throbbed. He awoke to an alert going off in the ship. Today was Freedom Day, the day he escaped his home planet. Geo’s heart ticked. For his family, it was about 30 years ago. But for Geo, it was 300.