

STAR BREAKER
Chapter 1 Excerpt
Technical Script

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CHAPTER 1-1

"Mystery Theme" continues to play. Drone of wind, rain, and rolling thunder can be heard in the background with poignant claps of thunder in appropriate places.

NARRATOR
Chapter I: Starport

Actioni contrarium semper et æqualem
esse reactionem: sive corporum duorum
actiones in se mutuo semper esse
æquales et in partes contrarias dirigi.

Isaac Newton, 1643 - 1727 A.D.

(Record Intact)

507 A.E. March 12, 20:25:33 Local

Approximately 7 years later

JP "Sol" Starwind

New Earth Imperial Order, Delan [dey-lan] III, 15.63 KM outside Red Heaven

SOL NARRATOR
Wistful; contemplative
My quadlev comes to a stop as I reach
the cliff's edge

Quadlev coming to a stop

sounds of walking on gravel

and I get off, walking a dozen steps further. I look down and out on Red Heaven, through the light, steady rain. From this height, I can see the city, nestled between the mountains near and the sea beyond. The whole of Red Heaven shines—as the name might suggest—with a variety of red lights, sleek buildings reaching up from the ground like—I don't know, some kind of organic crystals, maybe? —rising beyond the lesser developed and less important clusters around them.

As I survey the city, my NVD superimposes little details here and there.

NVD beeps and various subtle tech sounds as he surveys the city

A helical building is the planetary headquarters of Dowin Engines. The center, prominent, and tallest quartet of multi-colored buildings called "Elemental" is actually a single casino and hotel. There's a highlighted region which my neural designates as a commercial sub district. And there's another cluster: transitory residential apartments that-.

tech sounds stop

"Mystery Theme" cuts

DANTHER
Subtle air of superiority
Alright, you have my curiosity.

SOL NARRATOR
Danther is off quadlev too now and next to me, sound of his voice interrupting the thrum of pattering rain.

DANTHER
Why are we standing out here in the cold?

SOL NARRATOR
Amused
I look at him.

SOL
chuckles

"Out in the cold?" That PES not keeping the little prince warm enough?

DANTHER
Annoyed
It's an expression.

SOL
More amused
"Out in the cold."

DANTHER
More annoyed
Oh, fuck off.

SOL NARRATOR
Enjoying himself
laughs

He rolls his eyes, reaches over and shoves me,

Sound of shoving

but grins despite himself.

SOL
Soberly; almost bored
Soberly, though, you get a message or something?

Why'd you stop?

SOL NARRATOR
Wistful, but not as much as before
I look out on the sea beyond Red Heaven, trying to guess which of the hundred or so building-sized pods will unfurl; I could check the data—the same data I checked to get the launch time in the first place—but I want this part to surprise me. It begins and I point. Lights on one of the platforms flash, forming a chasing pattern as the building begins to shift.

DANTHER
Mildly exasperated
Oh, come on, Sol, you're going to see like a hundred of these over the next couple months.

SOL
Earnest
Yeah, but this is the *first*,

SOL NARRATOR
I wave my hand, impatient.

SOL
A little exited; attempting to persuade
Red Heaven residents might get to see
this a couple times a week—maybe even a
day, who the hell knows—but the dinky
little port in Fong wasn't anything
special and I want to appreciate this
first liftoff.

SOL NARRATOR
I spare a moment to look over to
Danther.

SOL
Still selling, but more confident
Besides, Red Heaven is known for these—
it's tourist-y and all that—and this is
a spectacular view.

SOL NARRATOR
Subtle air of knowing
He sighs, the sound obviously louder
than natural.

In awe
I look back to the sea. From here the
dock looks like a flower, two layers of
six petal-like arms opening with a
living sort of grace. Lights float up
from the opening flower like something
faeryish-faerious? Faeryic? Whatever—
something or another from the Fantaziya
sims—and the ship begins its ascent,
floating up into the sky like it's
going up some invisible elevator.

DANTHER
Mildly interested now
Can you believe ships used to use
thrust to get out of the atmosphere?

SOL
curious
What?

SOL NARRATOR

I look at him, tearing my attention
away from the ship.

SOL

Clarifying

Like jet cross engines?

SOL NARRATOR

He grins, looking out at the ascending
vessel.

DANTHER

sagely

Sort of.

SOL NARRATOR

I look back out too, the ship more up
than away now.

SOL

How so?

DANTHER

*Still sagely, but somewhat overcome with
enthusiasm*

Jet cross bikes use anti-grav windows
to stay up and fuel-based thrust for
their velocity.

SOL NARRATOR

Amused, despite himself

He pauses, affording the listener—me—a
couple moments to prepare for the
brilliance of whatever he intends to
say.

DANTHER

Enthusiastic with the smallest hint of pomp
The early spacecraft combatted gravity
directly with thrust; it meant the
longer it took, the more energy was
required. As you know, modern starship
engines are completely internal now—no
emissions—and a planet's gravity can be
entirely negated by...."

Fade out Danther's words

SOL NARRATOR

A little bored

He continues on, but I filter the sound
of his voice, having my sub-neural
follow his words in case I need a
summary.

Shift toward excitement

The ship, but a glowing dot now, seems
to join the stars—still a bit brighter
in the twilight than the real ones, but
small and twinkling. I'm just glad the
captain left it visible rather than
enabling any stealth...

Shift toward confusion

uh generators? Is stealth gener-no, no
stealth systems.

Back to wistful

The whole thing is just so... I don't
know—magical?

The flower-shaped hanger continues
furling back up, having begun the
process after the departing ship was a
couple kilometers up or so. I imagine
on a busier world another ship would
replace it immediately, space at a
premium near the more populated core of
civilization. For now, the port just
closes, lights dying away. At least
here, with the lazier schedule, that'll
probably favor the maintenance crews,
giving plenty of time for anything that
needs to be done.

Shifting away from wistful

My sub-neural indicates Danther's
speech pattern is tending toward a
final point of some sort and several
key details of what he said pop up on
my feed.

knowing

Another lecture, essentially.

The man sure does like his engines.

*Danther's dialogue fades back
in*

...anyway, that's just the way it works.
No sense in trying to get around it.

SOL
Deadpan; vaguely
Fair enough

Perhaps when we get our hands on a
ship, you can show me.

SOL NARRATOR
Preemptive
I can sense him opening his mouth.

SOL
Three parts amusement, one part annoyance
—no, I don't want to do it in a sim.

SOL NARRATOR
I glance over, seeing him shake his
head.

SOL
Matter of fact
It just isn't the same, man.

DANTHER
Giving up
sigh

I'm just never going to understand that
about you.

SOL
Changing the subject
Yeah, well, ready to head in?

SOL NARRATOR
He just looks over at me, expression of
annoyed boredom in his eyes.

SOL
Amused
Alright then

Chuckles

SOL NARRATOR

Still amused

*Quadlev acceleration sounds
and wind rises*

I push off over the edge of the cliff,
my quadlev picking up speed for a
couple seconds and offering several
trajectories.

Whip-whip of passing trees

I decide to take the more scenic route,
locking in a winding path that weaves
through a dense forest of evergreen
trees.

I expect Danther is well enough sick of
all the nature we had to "endure" on
our trek from Fong, but for my part, I
kind of wish the journey wasn't over;
sure, I can see all that in a sim-
Danther reminded me of that enough
times already—but it just isn't the
same. Beyond that, I think it might be
a fair degree easier to hide in the
wilds.

Nevertheless, hiding won't solve any of
our problems.

The trees flash by in a dark undulation
between deep, verdant green and empty
blackness, nearest ones passing in a
whip-whip-whip of sound.

*Louder sound of trees for a
couple seconds to emphasise*

In a forest this thick, not even the
light of Red Heaven makes it to me
until I reach a clearing, which I do
sometime later.

*Quadlev deceleration sounds
and wind dies off*

Mounting excitement
Red Heaven is still kilometers to the
west and an idea occurs to me.

SOL
Excited
Danther, wanna race?

DANTHER
*Immediate, almost cutting him off;
disinterested*
No

SOL
Confused
What? Why?

DANTHER
Weary, but simple
You're too much of a risk taker

I'd never win.

SOL
*Renewed hope/enthusiasm; through laughter at
the end*
I—come on, Danther, that's such a
bullshit excuse!

laughing

SAGELY
More amused
Ah, but it *is* a valid one, is it not?

SOL NARRATOR
Amused
I roll my eyes.

SOL
Self-satisfied
Whatever. I'll just race myself.

DANTHER
Worried
I don't think that is such a good idea

Fade out his words

SOL NARRATOR

Wildly excited

I cut the channel and push the quadlev
to its max acceleration.

*Quadlev acceleration sounds
and wind rises*

Having my suit pop my helmet, I cry
aloud, laughing and yelling.

*Wind increases and sounds of
excited yelling through
laughter*

This is what a quadlev's for!

Tree dodging sounds

I dip a branch and dodge around the
occasional tree, feeling the pull up
and down as I crest hills and sweep
through valleys. The wind catches my
hair and tears stream across my face.
The rush is fantastic-like it must feel
for the pro lev-cross racers.

*Peak of excitement
This is awesome!*

*Excitement fades
But then... it ends.*

Travel sounds stop

I grow still a ways beyond the grand
outer walls of Red Heaven, not willing
to do anything remotely threatening too
near the city's outer batteries.
Twenty meters high and a hundred thick,
it's hard to make out the curve of the
barrier encircling Red Heaven. I send
a quick query on my feed; almost five
million people live here.

*Introspective
Time to add two more ...for a while,
anyway.*

DANTHER OVER COMM.

*Radio-like filter, but more
futuristic*

Entrance is about three more kilos to
the south

HUD beep

SOL NARRATOR
Mildly impressed.
He kept up after all.

SOL
Mildly impressed still
Sounds good

SOL NARRATOR
We assume a closer formation as we make
the final stretch, the cargo spheres
that had been trailing us tightening
ranks as well. The last several
minutes go by in silence, I getting all
my information in order—I assume
Danther does the same.

*Hanger opening sound; rain
and environmental sounds
filtered with a "heard from
the inside" effect*

The hanger opens and we enter, a
uniformed greeter waving us in and
pointing toward processing rooms; poor
guy looks dead on his feet.

*Environmental sounds all but
dead now*

We separate and enter our own isolated
areas; once my cargo spheres assume a
tight enough train for the door to
close, it does and the room begins its
scans.

*Various sounds of scanning
and such; sound suite*

The white walls and bright lights look
non-threatening and sterile, but behind

the façade is enough weaponry and counter contagion equipment to... well, I don't much like thinking about it.

As I wait, my handler program begins interacting with that of customs, exchanging all the relevant information. I let the process fall to the sub-neural, the whole affair quite dull.

Sol footsteps; confident

Fade into interior soundscape; think airport or mall

A while later, I'm released from holding. I get off my quadlev and enter the main waiting terminal as my belongings are subjected to further scans.

Danther footsteps; more artless

Danther exits a couple minutes later, annoyed.

DANTHER
Irritated
Why do you always get out first?

SOL
Amused
I don't audit everything. You hungry?

DANTHER
Exhausted; over dramatic, but not consciously
Starving. Let's go find the food fabricators.

Sound of them both walking

*Highlights here an there of
other mall-like sounds*

SOL NARRATOR

We walk a ways, passing several kiosks
and stores, eventually coming to a food
court.

SOL

Excited

Hey! Look!

DANTHER

Skeptical

What is it?

SOL NARRATOR

Undaunted

I don't know. Let's check it out.

*Sound transitions to cooking
suite*

SOL NARRATOR

We approach the strange restaurant,
immediately bombarded with appetizing
smells and sights, a man in a strange
uniform preparing food for a group of
people. "Welcome! Welcome!" he says,
laying strange looking meat on some
kind of hot surface.

*Sounds get louder as they
approach*

COOK

Enthusiastic

Are you gentlemen hungry?

SOL NARRATOR

Matching enthusiasm

Famished!

Mildly amazed

Are you... cooking?

SOL NARRATOR

Mildly amazed still

I've seen the occasional person cook
here and there—usually for some special
occasion—but never someone doing it for
a group of strangers at a restaurant.

COOK

Appreciative

That I am. If you two like, sit down
and pull up a menu.

SOL NARRATOR

Danther, evidently reading said menu,
looks skeptical.

DANTHER

Pessimistically

The selection is so... limited.

COOK

Still enthusiastic, patient

When something is prepared, there are
always limits.

SOL NARRATOR

Danther shutters.

DANTHER

Aghast

Shit, this is expensive!

SOL

Dismissive

What do you expect, Danther?

The guy's making it by hand.

DANTHER

Argumentative; irritated

Yeah, but I could get any of this for a
quarter of the price in less than a
minute, Sol!

COOK

Enthusiastic; Trying to be helpful
With purely fabricated food, you merely
wait on your stomach's insisting to
overcome your laziness,

SOL NARRATOR

Amused; through laughter
I laugh, finding the words strangely
accurate. Danther, for his part, just
snorts.

COOK

Enthusiastic; Trying to be helpful
There is something beautifully human
about the wait-enduring the discomfort
of hunger for the way a preparing meal
entices the nostrils with-.

DANTHER

Condescending

Alright, Gustavo,

SOL NARRATOR

Irritated

Danther interrupts and I lazily turn my
head to stare at him; sometimes he's
such an ass.

DANTHER

Condescending and pompous

What are you selling.

COOK

Trying not to get annoyed

In a hurry, are we?

SOL

Taking the cook's side

I'm in. How long does it take?

DANTHER

Annoyed, dismissive

Oh, come on, Sol. This is just tourist
bait.

SOL

Dismissive, but coolly so

Ah, shut it. Have a seat and enjoy the presentation.

SOL NARRATOR

Implements tinkling

I gesture to the cook, who now makes a show of juggling shrimp with implements I've never seen before—flat handled spoon-like things, but too big and with no bowl.

SOL

Persuasive; placating

We're here until our stuff is processed—what's the harm?

DANTHER

Ignoring him

"Teriyaki?"

SOL NARRATOR

Danther leans in toward a holographic cut of meat, eyes enhancing.

DANTHER

Dismissive again

Sounds made up

SOL NARRATOR

Dismissive

I roll my eyes.

SOL

Dismissive

Just look it up, Danther.

SOL NARRATOR

I run a search. The entry pops into my interface window almost immediately.

SOL

Dismissive

It's old Earth cuisine—completely val.

COOK

Enthusiastic again
Sounds a lot better than "Flavor
Pattern 034-B7," eh?

SOL NARRATOR

Danther ignores us.

DANTHER

Scheming

So... what is it? —the meat?

COOK

With pride

A blend between the patterns of Old
Earth beef and dark turkey

Has a good mix of—

DANTHER

Aggressively dismissive

Completely Earth-spec my ass! Since
when do bovines breed with poultry?

SOL NARRATOR

The vendor shakes his head, looking at
me.

SOL

Ignoring Danther

Everything smells great.

I'll take some Teriyaki... uh, turkey-
steak, some of that fried rice, a
couple of those roll things, and uh,
uh... what do you do drink wise?

COOK

Also ignoring Danther; with a hint of regret
Drinks are all standard fabrication,
I'm afraid, he says with a hint of
regret.

On a brighter note, laughing
We're in the process of aging some
alcoholic selections at the moment but
I'm afraid it will be a couple years

before that's ready; believe it or not,
that's how long it used to take.
Anyway, there's not much point in not
fabricating any standard drinks—nothing
to be gained.

SOL

Into the moment

In that case, I'll just take some water
and CS 30-A2.

COOK

Appreciatively

Vanilla root beer, eh?

SOL NARRATOR

I nod.

COOK

"Good stuff."

SOL NARRATOR

I glance over to Danther, who still has
a look of hesitation in his stance.

SOL

Annoyed, but amused

Damn it, Danther, just order!

SOL NARRATOR

Giving up

Fine! Fine.

SOL NARRATOR

He sits.

DANTHER

Fight gone

I'll have what he's having.

CHAPTER 1-2

"Luna's Theme" plays, leading up to the end of the introduction.

NARRATOR
Chapter I: Part 2

507 A.E. MARCH 12, 20:46:32 LOCAL

LUNA VERILEY

New Earth Imperial Order, Delan Iii,
Red Heaven, Dowin Engineering Planetary
Headquarters

"*Luna's Theme*" begins fading

LUNA NARRATOR
Dern June appears in my office.

DERN
With the air of an assistant
Ms. Veriley

LUNA
Professional, but slightly playful
One second please, Mr. June.

*Sounds like Sol's HUD, but
more professional*

LUNA NARRATOR
I bookmark my thought and let my vis
windows go transparent. I gesture to a
chair.

LUNA
Please.

Sound of sitting

You have something to report, I expect?

DERN
Through a chuckle
Yes

Always with your little games at
humanizing me.

Clears throat

LUNA NARRATOR
He grins.

DERN
Very mildly amused
Two flagged individuals have entered
the city.

LUNA
Curious
Who?

LUNA NARRATOR
I am well able to get the information
myself, but enjoy the discourse.

LUNA
Officials? Criminals?

LUNA NARRATOR
He grins again.

DERN
Amusement growing
Personal interest.

LUNA NARRATOR
I raise an eyebrow.

LUNA
Who flagged them?

DERN
Why, you did.

LUNA
I...?

LUNA NARRATOR
Dern chuckles and takes a sip from a
teacup that materializes in his hand as
I forgo further conversation. The
video feed appears along with the two
profiles.

DERN

Airily

It has certainly been a while, has it not?

LUNA NARRATOR

Absentmindedly

Almost a decade.

LUNA NARRATOR

Drawn in

I lean back in my chair, staring. It's amazing, but they're just like I would imagine—memories all grown up.

Sol walks, slouched forward, hands in his pockets, brown hair just as disheveled as always; I switch the feed and see those dark bored eyes.... I grin, bored or alight with excitement, his mind is only rarely anywhere else.

Danther, short and striding to keep up with Sol, still retains his customary air of bemused irritation. That frown has always made him look petulant, but I know that's just how he looks when he's thinking.

The sight makes me feel young again.

LUNA

Almost to herself

What could they be doing here, I wonder?

DERN

Perhaps they seek you?

LUNA

If that were the case, I suspect they would have contacted me first.

DERN

Then they do not know you are here?

LUNA
Absentmindedly
Not inconceivable, as far as
coincidences go.

LUNA NARRATOR
He says something, but I only just
realize.

LUNA
Pardon, what?

DERN
Through a chuckle
I shall put the rest of the day's
schedule on hold.

CHAPTER 1-3

City nightlife soundscape plays: music, mumbled conversation, stabs of laughter, advertisement-sounding voices, etc. plays, rising until the end of the introduction.

NARRATOR
Chapter I: Part 3

507 A.E. MARCH 12, 21:11:34 LOCAL

Danther Minth

New Earth Imperial Order, Delan III,
Red Heaven, Downtown

Quadlev sounds throughout

DANTHER NARRATOR

Mildly critical

Sol takes a bite of the turkey steak as the quadlevs take us to the commercial district. It's night by now, but in a city like this that hardly matters; sleep schedules as screwed up as ours are, it'll be hours until I'm tired enough for bed, so it makes sense to check out the ship listings. Who knows, maybe we'll get lucky and not need to get an apartment at all.

Yeah. That'll happen.

I look over at Sol, unable to keep myself from grinning. —that stupid look of enjoyment on his face.

My grin sours.

He could be doing anything right now. He was always the most popular, the most athletic—the coolest.

Seven years—seven years he's run with me... he's kept me safe.

I shake my head.

Sometimes I wish I had the courage to leave. —to just disappear one night and let my friend get on with his life—start a real career—find a woman—start a family.

His life would be so much easier—better—without me.

SOL

Damn.

Sound of swallowing and a whistle of appreciation

This is amazing.

DANTHER

Weary correction

He said the point of take away was eating it later.

SOL

Complaining playfully
I'm still hungry!

DANTHER

Playfully critical

You're always hungry.

DANTHER NARRATOR

I shake my head.

DANTHER

You need to have your metabolism adjusted.

DANTHER NARRATOR

He grins, mouth full.

SOL

Through a full mouth

Ven I uldn't be able te eat es much!

DANTHER NARRATOR

I look over to him as he takes another bite.

DANTHER

Earnestly; a trifle annoyed
I could have talked him down, you know.

SOL

Through laughter
If that's what you think was going to
happen, you—

DANTHER

Mounting annoyance

Oh, fuck off, Sol. If you think we are
gunna to get a ship with what's in the
account: one, you'll have to be a whole
hell of a lot less naive and two, learn
how to negotiate.

DANTHER NARRATOR

He glares at me.

SOL

Patronizing

Ah yes, negotiating, the art of
verbally tweaking someone to the point
where they no longer want to do
business.

DANTHER NARRATOR

I punch his shoulder.

SOL

Annoyed

Hey, man!

DANTHER

Sobering a little

I'm serious.

We're not going to get shit without a
miracle.

DANTHER NARRATOR

Sol Laughs

He takes another bite.

SOL

Dismissive

You're such a pessimist.

DANTHER
Annoyance bubbling
And you need to learn to be more
frugal.

SOL
Ignoring him
Damn...

DANTHER NARRATOR
I look over to see him biting his lip.

DANTHER
Puzzled
What?

DANTHER NARRATOR
He tilts his wooden bowl, showing the
empty bottom. I roll my eyes, handing
him mine.

DANTHER
Resigned
Here.

SOL
Excited
Soberly?

DANTHER
Resigned still
Yeah. Seeing you eat makes me lose my
appetite anyway.

DANTHER NARRATOR
I shake my head and he grins.

DANTHER
You're like a goddan slop warthen.

DANTHER NARRATOR
We walk for a while, Sol devouring my
leftovers before fabricating a cup of
iced lemonade for dessert. I swear,
sometimes I can nearly picture the
credits disappearing into that stomach
of his; then again, we could both save
credits by dieting, I expect, but I

think I'd rather not live off of PureCal for the sake of financial stability.

Quadlevs power down.

Commercial soundscape goes low, replaced by a store's smooth canned "generic and unoffensive" music, as a door opens and closes, Danther and Sol's footsteps going in.

Eventually we make it to a commercial district, entering Inmar and Falden, a promising second hand ship dealer. The place is deserted, as expected, most potential customers using neural to do business. Even so, everything seems to be trending toward companies having some human-driven means to interact with potential customers; I think I read somewhere that studies indicated making things more personal helps business or something to that effect.

I peruse the listings while Sol talks to the guy at the front. It doesn't look promising, everything either way outside our price range or too small for anything other than travel. Perhaps if we were desperate-more desperate-one of them might work, but really only as a means to get off the planet and make enough to get a bigger ship.

SOL
Danther.

What do you think?

DANTHER NARRATOR
I look at the listing, appraising it.

DANTHER
In disbelief
Are you fucking kidding me?

DANTHER NARRATOR
I stare at the older representative.

DANTHER
Disbelieving still
Sixty million for that?

DANTHER NARRATOR
He stares at me, patronizing.

TARNER
Unamused
Sixty-one million, five.

SOL
Crestfallen
There's nothing cheaper?

TARNER
A little more patient
Nothing meeting your specifications and
operational, no.

sigh

Like I said, we primarily deal with
retired F-Class ships of a military
lean and all our ships are on the
listings. Ours and every other
reputable shipyard's listings are all
posted, per regulation.

DANTHER NARRATOR
A look of concern takes his face.

TARNER
If I might be frank, you two are going
to waste a lot of credits traveling
around looking for something that isn't
there—that is, if you don't intent to
enjoy the journey.

DANTHER NARRATOR
Patience exhausted
I roll my eyes.

DANTHER
Well thanks for—

SOL

Earnest

I'm decent with a fabricator

Are there any repairable-?

TARNER

Sympathetic; a bit pained

Honestly, we're in the business of retrofitting. If there's any worthwhile wrecks within two gates, we're probably already processing it for resale.

JIN

Excited; conspiratorial

Ai, tell them about The Walnut.

DANTHER NARRATOR

Another person says from a back room, the man leaning back in his chair, legs propped up.

Our salesman rolls his eyes.

TARNER

I'm not-.

SOL

Excited

What walnut?

DANTHER NARRATOR

Our salesman shakes his head, sighing.

TARNER

They're yours, Jin.

JIN

Showboat-like; a man with a rare spot of fun in a boring job

Why thank you, Tarner.

DANTHER NARRATOR

He gets up and approaches with a caviler energy, as the other leaves.

DANTHER

Suspicious

So, what's this "Walnut?"

DANTHER NARRATOR

Also suspicious

I get the feeling it's a load of
garble, but Sol seems excited enough.
Who knows.

JIN

Excitement revving

So The Walnut—or at least that's what
we've been calling it—is a ship that's
been with the city—the planet—for as
long as anyone can remember. It comes
and goes now and then, but mostly it
just stays in its dock and does
nothing.

SOL

Excited too

Is it for sale?

JIN

Conspiratorial

No.

DANTHER NARRATOR

He grins and my annoyance flickers.

DANTHER

Annoyed.

Then wha—?

JIN

If you can figure out how to get rid of
her, she's free.

SOL

Excited and in awe

Free?

DANTHER

Through a sigh.

What's the catch?

DANTHER NARRATOR

Weary of something he recognizes as a scam
I rub my temples. Whenever something
like this presents itself to Sol, he
just can't let it go. It's like he
thinks fate is conspiring to fix all
his problems if he believes hard
enough; all the times we've got screwed
and he still hasn't figured out that
people lie.

JIN

Defensive, but understanding and not
offended

Like I said, she's been at the docks
for as long as anyone can remember.
Over the years, people have tried to
get rid of her, but she just comes and
goes as she pleases.

SOL

Confused, but trusting
Without a crew?

JIN

Amused

Near as we can tell.

DANTHER NARRATOR

His grin widens like this is some sort
of amusing game.

JIN

Every so often she'll leave for a while
and then come back.

DANTHER

Looking to break the spell
Why not revoke the ship's access to
port?

JIN

Earnest and through laughter
They've tried!

She just gets back into the system and
returns the registry. One time another
vessel took her dock while she was away

and, upon return, she just moved the other ship-hacked into the piloting system or something like that and just moved it.

DANTHER NARRATOR

Irritated

I roll my eyes. I've had about enough—

SOL

What about defabricating the dock itself?

JIN

Knowingly

Tried that too. She just took another.

laugh

And get this: some nobin tries to pull a fast one—defabricate for credits things he knew the ship would just fabricate again, right? But the ship hacks the guy's bank account and 'as him pay for it all. The idiot then tries to report it—the wank!

SOL

Interested

Have they tried firing on her?

JIN

Excited

Yup and get this.

DANTHER NARRATOR

He stares at Sol, look significant.

JIN

Whenever the city's—hell, even the orbital defense network's—weapons lock on her, they just... won't... fire. No worrying about shields, no warp defense, nothing.

SOL

In awe

Where is she?

DANTHER NARRATOR

Jin walks out from behind the desk and opens a group holo window, everything between here and the "Walnut" going transparent as he magnifies.

Various effects relating to settings, zooming, and such.

DANTHER

Kinda...

DANTHER NARRATOR

Thoughtful

I begin, trying to find the right word.

DANTHER

Archaic looking, isn't it?

JIN

Old Tor thinks it's an Earth ship.

SOL

Overwhelmed with awe

No! Really?

JIN

Less than convinced

He compared it with the old structures on New Jerusalem. Said there was some resemblance.

SOL

Buying into it

Yeah, I think I see it!

DANTHER NARRATOR

Sol turns to me.

SOL

Excited

This might be just what we've been looking for!

DANTHER

Unamused

That ship's a unicorn, Sol.

SOL
Dismissive
Danther, you're such a pessimist.

DANTHER NARRATOR
Deliberate
I turn to Jin.

DANTHER
Deliberate still
How long have people been trying to get
access to this ship?

TARNER
Bored
Since this planet was discovered, near
as we can tell—around a hundred years
or so.

SOL
Undaunted
Well I'm going to give it a shot!
What's the worst that could happen?

TARNER
Warning; disinterest gone
You could offend her.

SOL
Enthusiasm transitioning into confusion
I... —what?

JIN
Amused
Oh, here we go.

TARNER
These boys ought to know,

DANTHER NARRATOR
Jin rolls his eyes and Tarner glares at
him.

TARNER
Anyway, there have been a couple of
times people inquired after that ship
and didn't live long after.

SOL
Concerned
What? Why?

TARNER
Not sure. We think one tried to break in-.

JIN
—that's the one that got the gantry blown up and—

TARNER
Hey, you had your turn. You gunna let me talk?

DANTHER NARRATOR
Tarner levels a stare. Jin holds up his hands, conceding.

DANTHER
Impatient
I'm sorry, did you say "blown up?"

TARNER
Matter of fact
Took him out and a group of mercenaries he hired to breach the hull about a decade ago. And there were others too.

DANTHER
Concerned
Such as?

DANTHER NARRATOR
Optimistic
If nothing else, I hope the stories will dissuade Sol.

TARNER
She took out a small cruiser that tried to destroy her—a couple others who looked into the whole 'free ship' idea showed up in the morgue, too.

JIN
Playacting
Some disappeared.

DANTHER NARRATOR

Jin raises his hands, wagging his fingers. Tarner rolls his eyes.

TARNER

If you want to check out "The Walnut," you're welcome to do so—hell, used to be a pretty big tourist destination, that ship's gantry, up until all the commotion. I just want you to be forewarned. Common courtesy, right?

DANTHER

Past interested

Well thanks.

DANTHER NARATOR

My mind is already onto the next goal.

DANTHER

Come on, Sol.

SOL

A little crestfallen

Alright. Thanks for your time, gentlemen.

TARNER

Your welcome, and if you change your mind about a ship, feel free to check Inmar and Falden's listings or set up an automated notification with your specs.

DANTHER NARRATOR

We say our goodbyes and begin away.

*Store soundscape fades;
automatic doors sliding;
commercial soundscape
resumes; quadlevs startup*

After a block or so, we enter a more casual commercial area. More food stalls—all glitz fabricator clusters with flashy holographics and

*Momentary focus on the sound
he describes*

annoying A.I. sales personas that will conversationally latch onto anyone getting too close—interspersed with stores and displays. Several sim cafés draw crowds, some new program in the Violet Star series out today, as I recall—borderline softcore porn pseudoscience drivel, in my opinion. There are also a couple specialty shops, but most of the timeshare parcels of commercial real estate are in the process of transitioning over to the night businesses.

It's nothing I haven't seen in every other city, save a little more budget and slightly newer specs.

Losing myself in a muse, I wonder if perhaps there are some private listings with a ship worth buying. That, or it finally might be time to take another go at trying to convince Sol to consider a lease or a sponsor. —that, or just trying to build our own ship like I did with the quadlevs... I have been toying with the specs for months, and....

DANTHER

*Coming out of being lost in thought
Sol, I—?*

SOL

Simultaneously

I think—.

DANTHER NARRATOR

We both look at each other.

DANTHER

Knowing

Go ahead.

SOL
Coolly challenging
No, you.

DANTHER
Not budging
Nah, let's hear it.

SOL
Accepting obstinately
I think I'm gunna go check out that ship.

DANTHER
sighs

SOL
Surprised
What?

DANTHER NARRATOR
Incredulous
He's surprised-surprised. How the hell can he be surprised?

DANTHER
Mildly condescending
That story about the ship's a load of shit, Sol. —something they tell tourists to have a laugh.

SOL
Unconvinced
Nah, come on!

DANTHER
Warning playfully
They'll be watching you walk up to that thing, laughing their asses off as the owner's security escorts you away.

SOL
Challengingly
And risk their jobs on a bad review for Inmar and Falden? You think that's worth a joke on a couple strangers? Besides.

DANTHER NARRATOR

He looks off to what I presume is
information on a personal holo screen.

SOL

Confident

I just searched all the review sites
and there is nothing about the thing
being a joke—hell, there's a ton about
the ship itself—theories and such.

DANTHER

Under his breath

And yet when it comes to trusting
information about ship listings...

SOL

Genuine

What?

DANTHER

Through a sigh

Nothing.

DANTHER NARRATOR

Exhausted

Truth be told, I'm just about to where
I can take of this newest empty hope.

DANTHER

Resignedly

If you want, go check the thing out.
I'll head off and get us a room for the
night.

SOL

Happy

Uh, yeah.

DANTHER NARRATOR

He grins.

SOL

Comm. me.

DANTHER

Yeah, sure.

Soundscapes fade.