

An exclusive look at the first chapter of

ARTEMIS

by

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Chapter One

I bounded over the gray, dusty terrain toward the huge dome of Conrad Bubble. Its airlock, ringed with red lights, stood distressingly far away.

It's hard to run with a hundred kilograms of gear on—even in lunar gravity. But you'd be amazed how fast you can hustle when your life is on the line.

Bob ran beside me. His voice came over the radio: "Let me connect my tanks to your suit!"

"That'll just get you killed too."

"The leak's huge," he huffed. "I can *see* the gas escaping your tanks."

"Thanks for the pep talk."

"I'm the EVA master here," Bob said. "Stop right now and let me cross-connect!"

"Negative." I kept running. "There was a pop right before the leak alarm. Metal fatigue. Got to be the valve assembly. If you cross-connect you'll puncture your line on a jagged edge."

"I'm willing to take that risk!"

"I'm not willing to let you," I said. "Trust me on this, Bob. I know metal."

I switched to long, even hops. It felt like slow motion, but it was the best way to move with all that weight. My helmet's heads-up display said the airlock was fifty-two meters away. I glanced at my arm readouts. My oxygen reserve plummeted while I watched. So I stopped watching.

The long strides paid off. I was really hauling ass now. I even left Bob behind, and he's the most skilled EVA master on the moon. That's the trick: Add more forward momentum every time you touch the ground. But that also means each hop is a tricky affair. If you screw up, you'll face-plant and slide along the ground. EVA suits are tough, but it's best not to grind them against regolith.

"You're going too fast! If you trip you could crack your faceplate!"

"Better than sucking vacuum," I said. "I've got maybe ten seconds."

"I'm way behind you," he said. "Don't wait for me."

I only realized how fast I was going when the triangular plates of Conrad filled my view. They were growing *very* quickly.

"Shit!" No time to slow down. I made one final leap and added a forward roll. I timed it just right—more out of luck than skill—and hit the wall with my feet. Okay, Bob was right. I'd been going way too fast.

I hit the ground, scrambled to my feet, and clawed at the hatch crank.

My ears popped. Alarms blared in my helmet. The tank was on its last legs—it couldn't counteract the leak anymore.

I pushed the hatch open and fell inside. I gasped for breath and my vision blurred. I kicked the hatch closed, reached up to the emergency tank, and yanked out the pin.

The top of the tank flew off and air flooded into the compartment. It came out so fast, half of it liquefied into fog particles from the cooling that comes with rapid expansion. I fell to the ground, barely conscious.

I panted in my suit and suppressed the urge to puke. That was way the hell more exertion than I'm built for. An oxygen-deprivation headache took root. It'd be with me for a few hours, at least. I'd managed to get altitude sickness on the moon.

The hiss died to a trickle, then finished.

Bob finally made it to the hatch. I saw him peek in through the small round window.

"Status?" he radioed.

"Conscious," I wheezed.

"Can you stand? Or should I call for an assist?"

Bob couldn't come in without killing me—I was lying in the airlock with a bad suit. But any of the two thousand people inside the city could open the airlock from the other side and drag me in.

"No need." I got to my hands and knees, then to my feet. I steadied myself against the control panel and initiated the cleanse. High-pressure air jets blasted me from all angles. Gray lunar dust swirled in the airlock and got pulled into filtered vents along the wall.

After the cleanse, the inner hatch door opened automatically.

I stepped into the antechamber, resealed the inner hatch, and plopped down on a bench.

Bob cycled through the airlock the normal way—no dramatic emergency tank (which now had to be replaced, by the way). Just the normal pumps-and-valves method. After his cleanse cycle, he joined me in the antechamber.

I wordlessly helped Bob out of his helmet and gloves. You should never make someone desuit themselves. Sure, it's doable, but it's a pain in the ass. There's a tradition to these things. He returned the favor.

"Well, that sucked," I said as he lifted my helmet off.

"You almost died." He stepped out of his suit. "You should have listened to my instructions."

I wriggled out of my suit and looked at the back. I pointed to a jagged piece of metal that was once a valve. "Blown valve. Just like I said. Metal fatigue."

He peered at the valve and nodded. "Okay. You were right to refuse cross-connection. Well

done. But this still shouldn't have happened. Where the hell did you get that suit?"

"I bought it used."

"Why would you buy a used suit?"

"Because I couldn't afford a new one. I barely had enough money for a used one and you assholes won't let me join the guild until I own a suit."

"You should have saved up for a new one." Bob Lewis is a former US Marine with a no-bullshit attitude. More important, he's the EVA Guild's head trainer. He answers to the guild master, but Bob and Bob alone determines your suitability to become a member. And if you aren't a member, you aren't allowed to do solo EVAs or lead groups of tourists on the surface. That's how guilds work. Dicks.

"So? How'd I do?"

He snorted. "Are you kidding me? You failed the exam, Jazz. You super-duper failed."

"Why?!" I demanded. "I did all the required maneuvers, accomplished all the tasks, and finished the obstacle course in under seven minutes. *And*, when a near-fatal problem occurred, I kept from endangering my partner and got back safely back to town."

He opened a locker and stacked his gloves and helmet inside. "Your suit is your responsibility. It failed. That means *you* failed."

"How can you blame me for that leak?! Everything was fine when we headed out!"

"This is a results-oriented profession. The moon's a mean old bitch. She doesn't care *why* your suit fails. She just kills you when it does. You should have inspected your gear better." He hung the rest of his suit on its custom rack in the locker.

"Come on, Bob!"

"Jazz, you almost died out there. How can I possibly give you a pass?" He closed the locker and started to leave. "You can retake the test in six months."

I blocked his path. "That's so ridiculous! Why do I have to put my life on hold because of some arbitrary guild rule?"

"Pay more attention to equipment inspection." He stepped around me and out of the antechamber. "And pay full price when you get that leak fixed."

I watched him go, then slumped onto the bench.

"Fuck."

I plodded through the maze of aluminum corridors to my home. At least it wasn't a long walk. The whole city is only half a kilometer across.

I live in Artemis, the first (and so far, only) city on the moon. It's made of five huge spheres called "bubbles." They're half underground, so Artemis looks exactly like old sci-fi books said a moon city should look: a bunch of domes. You just can't see the parts that are belowground.

Armstrong Bubble sits in the middle, surrounded by Aldrin, Conrad, Bean, and Shepard. The bubbles each connect to their neighbors via tunnels. I remember making a model of Artemis as an assignment in elementary school. Pretty simple: just some balls and sticks. It took ten minutes.

It's pricey to get here and expensive as hell to live here. But a city can't just be rich tourists and eccentric billionaires. It needs working-class people too. You don't expect J. Worthalot Richbastard III to clean his own toilet, do you?

I'm one of the little people.

I live in Conrad Down 15, a grungy area fifteen floors underground in Conrad Bubble. If my neighborhood were wine, connoisseurs would describe it as "shitty, with overtones of failure and poor life decisions."

I walked down the row of closely spaced square doors until I got to my own. Mine was a "lower" bunk, at least. Easier to get into and out of. I waved my Gizmo across the lock and the door clicked open. I crawled in and closed it behind me.

I lay in the bunk and stared at the ceiling—which was less than a meter from my face.

Technically, it's a "capsule domicile" but everyone calls them coffins. It's just an enclosed bunk with a door I can lock. There's only one use for a coffin: sleep. Well, okay, there's another use (which also involves being horizontal), but you get my point.

I have a bed and a shelf. That's it. There's a communal bathroom down the hall and public showers a few blocks away. My coffin isn't going to be featured in *Better Homes and Moonscapes* anytime soon, but it's all I can afford.

I checked my Gizmo for the time. "Craaaap."

No time to brood. The KSC freighter was landing that afternoon and I'd have work to do.

To be clear: The sun doesn't define "afternoon" for us. We only get a "noon" every twenty-eight Earth days and we can't see it anyway. Each bubble has two six-centimeter-thick hulls with a meter of crushed rock between them. You could shoot a *howitzer* at the city and it still wouldn't leak. Sunlight definitely can't get in.

So what do we use for time of day? Kenya Time. It was afternoon in Nairobi, so it was afternoon in Artemis.

I was sweaty and gross from my near-death EVA. There was no time to shower, but I could change, at least. I lay flat, stripped off my EVA coolant-wear, and pulled on my blue jumpsuit. I fastened the belt then sat up, cross-legged, and put my hair in a ponytail. Then I grabbed my Gizmo and headed out.

We don't have streets in Artemis. We have hallways. It costs a lot of money to make real estate on the moon and they sure as hell aren't going to waste it on roads. You can have an electric cart or scooter if you want, but the hallways are designed for foot traffic. It's only one-sixth Earth's gravity. Walking doesn't take much energy.

The shittier the neighborhood, the narrower the halls. Conrad Down's halls are positively claustrophobic. They're just wide enough for two people to pass each other by turning sideways.

I wound through the corridors toward the center of Down 15. None of the elevators were nearby, so I bounded up the stairs three at a time. Stairwells in the core are just like stairwells on Earth—short little twenty-one-centimeter-high steps. It makes the tourists more comfortable. In areas that don't get tourists, stairs are each a half meter high. That's lunar gravity for you. Anyway, I hopped up the tourist stairs until I reached ground level. Walking up fifteen floors of stairwell probably sounds horrible, but it's not that big a deal here. I wasn't even winded.

Ground level is where all the tunnels connecting to other bubbles come in. Naturally, all the shops, boutiques, and other tourist traps want to be there to take advantage of the foot traffic. In Conrad, that mostly meant restaurants selling Gunk to tourists who can't afford real food.

A small crowd funneled into the Aldrin Connector. It's the only way to get from Conrad to Aldrin (other than going the long way around through Armstrong), so it's a major thoroughfare. I passed by the huge circular plug door on my way in. If the tunnel breached, the escaping air from Conrad would force that door closed. Everyone in Conrad would be saved. If you were in the tunnel at the time . . . well, it sucks to be you.

"Well, if it isn't Jazz Bashara!" said a nearby asshole. He acted like we were friends. We weren't friends.

"Dale," I said. I kept walking.

He hurried to catch up. "Must be a cargo ship coming in. Nothing else gets your lazy ass in uniform."

"Hey, remember that time I gave a shit about what you have to say? Oh wait, my mistake. That never happened."

"I hear you failed the EVA exam today." He tsked in mock disappointment. "Tough break. I passed on my first try, but we can't all be me, can we?"

"Fuck off."

"Yeah, I got to tell you, tourists pay *good* money to go outside. Hell, I'm headed to the Visitor Center right now to give some tours. I'll be raking it in."

“Make sure to hop on the really sharp rocks while you’re out there.”

“Nah,” he said. “People who *passed* the exam know better than to do that.”

“It was just a lark,” I said nonchalantly. “It’s not like EVA work is a real job.”

“Yeah, you’re right. Someday I hope to be a delivery girl like you.”

“Porter,” I grumbled. “The term is ‘porter.’”

His smirked in a very punchable way. Thankfully we’d made it to Aldrin Bubble. I shouldered past him and out of the connector. Aldrin’s plug door stood vigil, just as Conrad’s did. I hurried ahead and took a sharp right just to get out of Dale’s line of sight.

Aldrin is the opposite of Conrad in every respect. Conrad’s full of plumbers, glass blowers, metalworkers, welding shops, repair shops . . . the list goes on. But Aldrin is truly a resort. It has hotels, casinos, whorehouses, theaters, and even an honest-to-God park with real grass. Wealthy tourists from all over Earth come for two-week stays.

I passed through the Arcade. It wasn’t the fastest route to where I was going, but I liked the view.

New York has Fifth Avenue, London has Bond Street, and Artemis has the Arcade. The stores don’t bother to list prices. If you have to ask, you can’t afford it. The Ritz-Carlton Artemis occupies an entire block and extends five floors up and another five down. A single night there costs 12,000 slugs—more than I make in a month as a porter (though I have other sources of income).

Despite the costs of a lunar vacation, demand always exceeds supply. Middle-class Earthers can afford it as a once-in-a-lifetime experience with suitable financing. They stay at crappier hotels in crappier bubbles like Conrad. But wealthy folks make annual trips and stay in nice hotels. And my, oh my, do they shop.

More than anywhere else, Aldrin is where money enters Artemis.

There was nothing in the shopping district I could afford. But someday, I’d have enough to belong there. That was my plan, anyway. I took one more long look, then turned away and headed to the Port of Entry.

Aldrin is the closest bubble to the landing zone. Wouldn’t want rich people dirtying themselves by traveling through impoverished areas, right? Bring them straight into the pretty part.

I strolled through the large archway into the Port. The massive airlock complex is the second-largest chamber in the city. (Only Aldrin Park is larger.) The room buzzed with activity. I slid my way between workers who efficiently glided to and fro. In town, you have to walk slowly or you’ll knock over tourists. But the Port is for professionals only. We all know the Artemis Longstep and can get a good head of steam going.

At the north side of the Port, a few commuters waited near the train airlock. Most were headed to the city reactors and Sanchez Aluminum’s smelter, a kilometer south of town. The smelter uses insane amounts of heat and extremely nasty chemicals, so everyone agrees it should be far away. As for the reactors . . . well . . . they’re nuclear reactors. We like those far away too.

Dale slithered over to the train platform. He’d be going to the Apollo 11 Visitor Center. Tourists love it. The half-hour train ride provides stunning views of the moon’s terrain, and the Visitor Center is a great place to look at the landing site without ever leaving pressure. And for those who do want to venture outside to get a better view, Dale and other EVA masters are ready to give them a tour.

Just in front of the train airlock there was a huge Kenyan flag. Beneath it were the words “You are now boarding Kenya Offshore Platform Artemis. This platform is the property of the Kenya Space Corporation. International maritime laws apply.”

I stared daggers at Dale. He didn’t notice. Damn, I wasted a perfectly good bitchy glare.

I checked the landing zone schedule on my Gizmo. No meatship today (that’s what we call passenger ships). They only come about once a week. The next one wouldn’t be for three days. Thank God. There’s nothing more annoying than trust-fund boys looking for “moon poon.”

I headed to the south side, where the freight airlock stood ready. It could fit ten thousand cubic meters of cargo through in a single cycle, but bringing it in was a slow process. The pod had arrived hours earlier. EVA masters had brought the entire pod into the airlock and gave it the high-pressure air cleanse.

We do everything we can to keep lunar dust from entering the city. Hell, I hadn't even skipped the cleanse after my faulty valve adventure earlier that day. Why go through all that hassle? Because lunar dust is *extremely* bad to breathe. It's made of teeny, tiny rocks, and there's been no weather to smooth them out. Each mote is a spiky, barbed nightmare just waiting to tear up your lungs. You're better off smoking a pack of asbestos cigarettes than breathing that shit.

By the time I got to the freight airlock, the giant inner door stood open and the pod was being unloaded. I slid up to Nakoshi, the head longshoreman. He sat at his inspection table and examined the contents of a shipping box. Satisfied that it contained no contraband, he closed the box and stamped it with the Artemis symbol—a capital *A* with the right side styled to look like a bow and arrow.

“Good morning, Mr. Nakoshi,” I said cheerfully. He and Dad had been buddies since I was a little girl. He was family to me, like a beloved uncle.

“Get in line with the other porters, you little shit.”

Okay, maybe more like a distant cousin.

“Come on, Mr. N,” I wheedled. “I’ve been waiting on this shipment for weeks. We talked about this.”

“Did you transfer payment?”

“Did you stamp the package?”

He maintained eye contact and reached under the table. He pulled out a still-sealed box and slid it toward me.

“I don’t see a stamp,” I said. “Do we have to do things this way every damn time? We used to be so close. What happened?”

“You grew up and became an underhanded pain in the ass.” He set his Gizmo on top of the box. “And you had so much potential. You pissed it away. Three thousand slugs.”

“You mean twenty-five hundred, right? Like we agreed?”

He shook his head. “Three thousand. Rudy’s been sniffing around. More risk means more pay.”

“That seems more like a Nakoshi problem than a Jazz problem,” I said. “We agreed to twenty-five hundred.”

“Hmm,” he said. “Maybe I should give it a detailed inspection then. See if there’s anything in here that shouldn’t be. . . .”

I pursed my lips. This wasn’t the time to make a stand. I brought up my Gizmo’s banking software and initiated the transfer. The Gizmos did whatever magic shit computers do to identify each other and verify.

Nakoshi picked up his Gizmo, checked the confirmation page, and nodded with approval. He stamped the box. “What’s in there, anyway?”

“Porn, mostly. Starring your mom.”

He snorted and continued with his inspections.

And that’s how to smuggle contraband into Artemis. Pretty simple, really. All it takes is a corrupt official you’ve known since you were six years old. *Getting* the contraband to Artemis . . . well, that’s another story. More on that later.

I could have picked up a bunch more packages to deliver around, but this one was special. I walked over to my cart and hopped in the driver’s side. I didn’t strictly need a cart—Artemis wasn’t set up for vehicles—but it got me around faster, and I could deliver more stuff that way. Since I’m paid per delivery it was worth the investment. My cart is a pain in the ass to control, but it’s good at carrying heavy things. So I decided it was male. I named him Trigger.

I paid a monthly fee to store Trigger at the Port. Where else would I keep him? I have less

space at home than a typical Earth prisoner.

I powered Trigger up—there’s no key or anything. Just a button. Why would anyone steal a cart? What would you do with it? Sell it? You’d never get away with it. Artemis is a small town. No one steals shit. Well, okay, there’s some shoplifting. But no one takes carts.

I motored out of the Port.

I wound Trigger through the opulent passageways of Shepard Bubble. It was a far cry from my sleazy neighborhood. The hallways of Shepard feature wood paneling and tasteful, noise-absorption carpeting. Chandeliers hang every twenty meters to provide light. Those, at least, aren’t stupidly expensive. We’ve got plenty of silicon on the moon, so glass is locally made. But still, talk about ostentatious.

If you think *vacationing* on the moon is expensive, you don’t want to know what it costs to live in Shepard Bubble. Aldrin is all overpriced resorts and hotels, but Shepard is where wealthy Artemisians live.

I was headed to the estate of one of the richest richfucks in town: Trond Landvik. He’d made a fortune in the Norwegian telecom industry. His home occupied a big chunk of Shepard’s ground floor—stupidly huge, considering it was just him, his daughter, and a live-in maid. But hey, it was his money. If he wanted to have a big house on the moon, who was I to judge? I just brought him illegal shit as requested.

I parked Trigger next to the estate entrance (one of the entrances, anyway) and rang the buzzer. The door slid open to reveal a bulky Russian woman. Irina had been with the Landviks since the dawn of time.

She stared at me wordlessly. I stared back.

“Delivery,” I finally said. Irina and I had interacted a zillion times in the past, but she made me state my business every time I came to the door.

She snorted, turned, and walked inside. That was my invitation to enter.

I made snide faces at her back while she led me through the mansion’s foyer. She pointed down the hall and walked in the opposite direction without saying a word.

“Always a pleasure, Irina!” I called after her.

Through the archway, I found Trond reclining on a sofa, wearing sweats and a bathrobe. He chatted with an Asian man I’d never seen before.

“Anyway, the moneymaking potential is”—he saw me enter and flashed a wide smile—“Jazz! Always good to see you!”

Trond’s guest had an open box next to him. He smiled politely and fumbled it closed. Of course, that just made me curious when I normally wouldn’t have given a shit.

“Good to see you too,” I said. I dropped the contraband on the couch.

Trond gestured to the guest. “This is Jin Chu from Hong Kong. Jin, this is Jazz Bashara. She’s a local gal. Grew up right here on the moon.”

Jin bowed his head quickly, then spoke with an American accent. “Nice to meet you, Jazz.” It caught me off guard and I guess it showed.

Trond laughed. “Yeah, Jin here is a product of high-class American private schools. Hong Kong, man. It’s a magical place.”

“But not as magical as Artemis!” Jin beamed. “This is my first visit to the moon. I’m like a kid in a candy store! I’ve always been a fan of science fiction. I grew up watching *Star Trek*. Now I get to live it!”

“*Star Trek*?” Trond said. “Seriously? That’s like a hundred years old.”

“Quality is quality,” Jin said. “Age is irrelevant. No one bitches about Shakespeare fans.”

“Fair point. But there aren’t any hot alien babes to seduce here. You can’t *quite* be Captain Kirk.”

“Actually”—Jin Chu held up a finger—“Kirk only had sex with three alien women in the

entire classic series. And that number assumes he slept with Elaan of Troyius, which was implied but never made clear. So it might just be two.”

Trond bowed in supplication. “I will no longer challenge you on anything *Star Trek*-related. Are you going to the Apollo 11 site while you’re here?”

“*Absolutely*,” Jin said. “I hear there are EVA tours. Should I do one, you think?”

I piped in. “Nah. There’s an exclusion perimeter around the whole site. The Viewing Hall in the Visitor Center gets you just as close.”

“Oh, I see. Guess there’s no point, then.”

Suck it, Dale.

“Anyone want tea or coffee?” Trond offered.

“Yeah, please,” Jin said. “Dark coffee if you have it.”

I slumped into a nearby chair. “Black tea for me.”

Trond vaulted over the back of the couch (not as exciting as it sounds—remember the gravity here). He slid to the credenza and picked up a wicker basket. “I just got some high-end Turkish coffee. You’ll love it.” He craned his neck toward me. “Jazz, you might like it too.”

“Coffee’s just a bad kind of tea,” I said. “Black tea is the only hot drink worth having.”

“You Saudis do love your black tea,” Trond said.

Yes, *technically* I’m a citizen of Saudi Arabia. But I haven’t been there since I was six. I picked up a few attitudes and beliefs from Dad, but I wouldn’t fit in anywhere on Earth nowadays. I’m an Artemisian.

Trond got to work on our drinks. “Talk amongst yourselves, it’ll be a minute.” Why not have Irina do it? I don’t know. I don’t know what the hell she was for, honestly.

Jin rested his arm on the Mystery Box. “I hear Artemis is a popular romantic destination. Are there a lot of newlyweds here?”

“Not really,” I said. “They can’t afford it. But we do get older couples trying to spice things up in the bedroom.”

He looked confused.

“Gravity,” I said. “Sex is totally different in one-sixth G. It’s great for couples who’ve been married a long time. They get to rediscover sex together—it’s like new.”

“I never thought of that,” Jin said.

“Lots of prostitutes in Aldrin if you want to find out more.”

“Oh! Uh, no. Not my thing at all.” He hadn’t expected a woman to recommend hookers. Earthers tend to be uptight on that topic, and I’ve never understood why. It’s a service performed for a payment. What’s the big deal?

I shrugged. “If you change your mind, they run about two thousand slugs.”

“I won’t.” He laughed nervously and changed the subject. “So . . . why is Artemisian money called slugs?”

I put my feet up on the coffee table. “It’s short for soft-landed grams. S-L-G. Slug. One slug gets one gram of cargo delivered from Earth to Artemis, courtesy of KSC.”

“It’s technically not a currency,” Trond said from the credenza. “We’re not a country; we can’t have a currency. Slugs are pre-purchased service credit from KSC. You pay dollars, euros, yen, whatever, and in exchange you get a mass allowance for shipment to Artemis. You don’t have to use it all at once, so they keep track of your balance.”

He carried the tray over to the coffee table. “It ended up being a handy unit for trade. So KSC is functioning as a bank. You’d never get away with that on Earth, but this isn’t Earth.”

Jin reached forward to get his coffee. As he did, I got a look at the box. It was white with stark black text that read ZAFO SAMPLE—AUTHORIZED USE ONLY.

“So this couch I’m on is an Earth import, right?” Jin said. “How much did it cost to bring here?”

“That one weighs forty-three kilograms,” Trond said. “So it cost forty-three thousand slugs to have it shipped.”

“What does a typical person make?” asked Jin. “If you don’t mind me asking, that is.”

I grabbed my tea and let the cup’s warmth seep into my hands. “I make twelve thousand a month as a porter. It’s a low-paying job.”

Jin sipped his coffee and made a face. I’ve seen it before. Earthers hate our coffee. Physics dictates that it tastes like shit.

Earth’s air is 20 percent oxygen. The rest is stuff human bodies don’t need like nitrogen and argon. So Artemis’s air is *pure* oxygen at 20 percent Earth’s air pressure. That gives us the right amount of oxygen while minimizing pressure on the hulls. It’s not a new concept—it goes back to the Apollo days. Thing is, the lower the pressure, the lower the boiling point of water. Water boils at 61° C here, so that’s as hot as tea or coffee can be. Apparently it’s disgustingly cold to people who aren’t used to it.

Jin discreetly put the cup back on the table. He wouldn’t be picking it up again.

“What brings you to Artemis?” I asked.

He drummed his fingers on the ZAFO box. “We’ve been working on a business deal for months. We’re finally closing the deal, so I wanted to meet Mr. Landvik in person.”

Trond settled into his couch and picked up the box of contraband. “I told you, call me Trond.”

“Trond it is,” Jin said.

Trond tore the wrapping off the package and pulled out a dark wooden box. He held it up to the light and looked at it from several angles. I’m not much for aesthetics, but even I could tell it was a thing of beauty. Intricate etchings covered every surface and it had a tasteful label written in Spanish.

“What have we here?” Jin asked.

Trond flashed a shit-eating grin and opened the box. Twenty-four cigars, each in its own paper holder, rested inside. “Dominican cigars. People think Cubans are the best, but they’re wrong. It’s all about the Dominicans.”

I smuggled a box of those things in for him every month. Got to love regular customers.

He pointed to the door. “Jazz, would you mind closing that?”

I headed to the doorway. A starkly functional hatch hid behind the finely appointed wall panels. I slid it closed and spun the handle shut. Hatches are pretty common in upscale homes. If the bubble loses pressure, you can seal your house and not die. Some people are paranoid enough to seal their bedrooms at night just in case. Waste of money if you ask me. There’s never been a pressure loss in Artemis’s history.

“I have a special air-filtration system in here,” Trond said. “The smoke never gets out of this room.”

He unwrapped a cigar, bit the end off, and spit it into an ashtray. Then he put the cigar in his mouth and lit it with a gold lighter. He puffed several times and sighed. “Good stuff . . . good stuff.”

He held the box out toward Jin, who politely waved it away. Then he offered it to me.

“Sure,” I grabbed one and slipped it into my breast pocket. “I’ll smoke it after lunch.”

That was a lie. But why would I turn down something like that? I could probably get a hundred slugs for it.

Jin furrowed his brow. “I’m sorry, but . . . cigars are contraband?”

“Ridiculous, really,” said Trond. “I have a sealed room! My smoke doesn’t bother anyone! It’s injustice, I tell you!”

“Oh, you’re so full of shit.” I turned to Jin. “It’s fire. A fire in Artemis would be a nightmare. It’s not like we can go outside. Flammable materials are illegal unless there’s a really good reason for them. The last thing we want is a bunch of idiots wandering around with lighters.”

“Well . . . I guess there’s that.” Trond fiddled with his lighter. I’d smuggled it in for him years ago. Every few months it needed new butane. More money for me.

I took another swig of warm tea and pulled out my Gizmo. “Trond?”

“Right, of course.” He pulled out his own Gizmo and held it next to mine. “Still four thousand

slugs?”

“Mm-hmm. But fair warning: I have to bump it to forty-five hundred next time. Things got more expensive for me recently.”

“Not a problem,” he said. He typed while I waited. After a moment, my screen popped up the transfer verification. I accepted and the transaction was complete.

“All good,” I said. I turned to Jin. “Nice to meet you, Mr. Jin. Have fun while you’re here.”

“Thanks, I will!”

“Have a good one, Jazz.” Trond smiled.

I left the two men behind to do whatever they were up to. I didn’t know what it was, but it sure as hell wasn’t aboveboard. Trond did all sorts of shady shit—that was why I liked him. If he’d brought a guy all the way to the moon, there was something way more interesting going on than “a business deal.”

I rounded the corner and left through the foyer. Irina gave me a nasty look as I departed. I wrinkled my nose at her. She closed the door behind me without saying goodbye.

I was just about to hop into Trigger when my Gizmo beeped. A porter job had just popped up. I had seniority and proximity, so the system offered it to me first.

“PICKUP LOCATION: AG-5250. MASS: ~100kg. DROP-OFF LOCATION: UNSPECIFIED. PAYMENT: 452g”.

Wow. Four hundred fifty-two whole slugs. Roughly a tenth of what I’d just made from a box of cigars.

I accepted. I had to make money somehow.

Dear Kelvin Otieno,

Hi. My name’s Jasmine Bashara. People call me Jazz. I’m nine years old. I live in Artemis.

Ms. Teller’s my teacher. She’s a good teacher even though she took away my Gizmo when I played with it during class. She gave us homework to send email to kids at the KSC complex in Kenya. She assigned me your address. Do you speak English? I can speak Arabic too. What do you speak in Kenya?

I like American TV shows and my favorite food is ginger ice cream. But usually I eat Gunk. I want to get a dog but we can’t afford one. I hear poor people can have dogs on Earth. Is it true? Do you have a dog? If you have a dog please tell me about your dog.

Does Kenya have a king?

My dad’s a welder. What does your dad do?

Dear Jazz Bashara,

Hello. I am Kelvin and I am also nine. I live with my mom and dad. I have three sisters. They’re jerks and the two older ones beat me up. But I’m getting bigger and someday I’ll beat them up. I’m just kidding boys should never hit girls.

Kenyans speak English and Swahili. We do not have a king. We have a president and a National Assembly and a Senate. Grown-ups vote for them and they make the laws.

My family doesn’t have a dog but we have two cats. One of them just comes around to eat, but the other one is very nice and sleeps on the couch all the time.

My dad is a security officer for KSC. He works at Gate 14 and he makes sure only people who are allowed to go in can go in. We live in assigned housing in the complex and my school is in the complex too. Everyone who works for KSC gets free school for their kids. KSC is very generous and we are all grateful.

My mom stays at home. She takes care of all of us kids. She is a good mother.

My favorite food is hot dogs. What's Gunk? I've never heard of that.

I love American TV shows. Especially soap operas. They are very exciting even though my mom doesn't want me watching them. But we have good Internet here so I watch when she's not looking. Please do not tell her. Haha. What does your mom do?

What do you want to be when you grow up? I want to make rockets. Right now I make models of rockets. I just finished a model of a KSC 209-B. It looks very nice in my room. I want to make real rockets someday. The other kids want to be pilots for the rockets but I don't want to do that.

Are you white? I hear everyone in Artemis is white. There are many white people here at the complex. They come from all over the world to work here.

Dear Kelvin,

It's too bad you don't have a dog. I hope you get to make rockets someday. Real ones, not models.

Gunk is food for poor people. It's dried algae and flavor extracts. They grow it here in Artemis in vats because food from Earth is expensive. Gunk is gross. Flavor extracts are supposed to make it taste good but they just make it taste gross in other ways. I have to eat it every day. I hate it.

I'm not white. I'm Arabic. Sort of light brown. Only about half the people here are white. My mom lives on Earth somewhere. She left when I was a baby. I don't remember her.

Soap operas are lame. But it's okay for you to like lame stuff. We can still be friends.

Do you have a yard at your house? Can you go outside anytime you want? I can't go outside until I'm sixteen because those are the rules for EVAs. Someday I'll get my EVA license and go outside as much as I want and no one can tell me no.

Building rockets sounds like a neat job. I hope you get that job.

I don't want a job. When I grow up I want to be rich.