

Weapon

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A work of fiction, meant for adults. Read something else if you are not an adult, or are offended by stories with sexual content. Then again, if all you're looking for is in-out, in-out, in-out, you should probably read something else. I welcome constructive comments. Enjoy.

A second-class transit station orbiting a second-class world, busy with commerce but not too busy, a place people traveled *through* but never *to*. A place to be avoided if you could, but not unpleasant if you passed through quickly enough.

People and cargo passed through, transitory and unremarkable, moving through corridors and structures equally transitory and unremarkable, one of those places that seemed to be under continual renovation, never quite finished, never quite polished. A place to be departed and forgotten as quickly as possible.

People passed through, moving purposefully down corridors, always *through*, never *to*.

Except.

Lost in the noise, the commerce, the hustle and bustle, a few ships traveled *to*.

Like the location, these ships seemed unremarkable, ordinary. Transiting passengers and crew, if they stopped to look out a portal and saw one of these ships, wouldn't give them a second glance.

Unless they knew about these ships, in which case they knew better than to look at them at all. Especially if four such ships were in the same place at the same time -- you didn't want to know.

And from those four ships, six seemingly unremarkable passengers disembarked.

Everyone moving through the station moved with purpose. Still, these visitors moved with *more* purpose, and others instinctively made way for them.

The six moved indirectly through passageways, down corridors, and finally through an unmarked door to a small conference room, a room secured by far more than its obscurity.

The Group of Six assembled once more. The four women and two men nodded formally to each other as each sat at their traditional place.

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“Let’s get on with it,” one of the men said gruffly.

The last woman to arrive produced a holomessage cylinder from a pocket in her robe and slid the recording into the viewer.

A small image of a man appeared in three dimensions in front of them. The figure bowed, and began to speak.

“Hmmm, you want to know about the Weapon, don’t you? It’s the least important part of what I have to tell. And what do I have to tell? I have an interesting story, my Lords and Ladies. We made a Jump. We met the Other. My Lady vanquished the Other, for all of time. The Terror which lurked beneath Space is no more. So you see, the Weapon doesn’t really matter.”

“You’re not satisfied, I can tell. Oh, it’s a fearsome Weapon -- I’ve felt it. And while you are still my Lords, you are no longer my Masters. She is my Master, and will be forevermore, such is the nature of the Weapon.”

“It’s a Weapon that can’t be built, or bought. It’s not made of matter. Nothing can stand before it, yet it is so delicate -- it can be destroyed. Oh, it’s an old Weapon, very, very old. I don’t know why you’d be interested.”

“Ah, but before I speak of the play, I should describe the set, and the players, no?”

“I’ll start with myself. I have been your humble servant for some time, observing, reporting, doing you bidding, going here and there, your eyes and ears, occasionally your hands. It was your bidding that I follow her, my Lady and my Captain, and report. She knew this from the beginning, but accepted me for what I was. And I will be forever thankful, for she also saw and accepted me for what I could become.”

The figure paused and smiled.

One of the women snarled at the figure projected before her, “You are a loon.”

The recorded figure smiled and bowed to her with a flourish.

“And while I may be a loon, I have been *your* loon, my Lords and Ladies, faithful in my service and in my reports.”

One of the men chuckled and muttered, “How does he do that?”

The figure tilted its head, as if listening. “How indeed?” it said with a smile. “There are many Mysteries in the Void....”

The figure moved to sitting cross-legged in the old style called Lotus.

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“It was your bidding, my Lords and Ladies, that I follow her, so it is with her that we should begin. You know her story, or you *think* you do. Lady Catherine, Leader of the Great House of the Southern Cross, deciding to take an Adventure, and accompany her niece to the newly opened world of New Haven, and return. She left as Lady Catherine of the Great House of the Southern Cross, and returned Catherine *in* the Southern Cross. She brought the Great Ship White House back from New Haven in one Jump. She departed a Great Leader, and returned the first of the Great Captains.”

The figure shook his head slowly, a sardonic smile on his face. “Oh, there are many mysteries in the Void, but that is *not* one of them. That was *not* happenstance, but that is a tale for another day.”

One of the women frowned. She touched the jeweled emblem on her chest and said, “The transition of Lady Catherine from Leader to Captain was *not* an accident. Find out what really happened.”

The figure grasped his right foot with his left hand and deftly placed his foot behind his head. “It is the tradition of our Guild that when a Captain takes a Ship, she recruits her own crew. It was no surprise that she chose her aide and consort of many decades, David of the Southern Cross, as her First Officer. The chemistry between Captain and First Officer is paramount to the operation of a Great Ship. The rest of the crew is easy to pick. Through, ah, *happenstance*, I became part of her crew.”

The figure placed his hands together in front of his chest, and with his foot still behind his head, bowed. He sat up, removed the foot from behind his head, placing the other foot there.

“Catherine and David were wed, and had a daughter. If there is to be one greater than my Lady Catherine, it will be her daughter, Celeste. For she was born of, and to the stars.”

“Let me speak of her Ship. When the time came for Our Lady to Captain her own Ship, much discussion followed. What would she choose? What befitted her skills, her abilities? With those backing her, what would she choose? What would she build, she who had already built entire worlds? The Great Ship Versailles? The Great Ship Taj Mahal? The Great Ship Phobos? Surely, the greatest Captain deserved the greatest Ship.”

“Oh no, that is not her way. Look at the holos of her attending important functions. How is she dressed? How does she speak? ‘We have no need of lavish ornamentation,’ she says. She lets her deeds speak for her.”

“And so she chose the Great Ship Fallingwater. Oh, it fits her so well -- the openness, the informality, the natural textures. It is a Great Ship. Yes, many ships are larger -- the Great Ship White House, for example. But none have gone so far.”

“Now I ask you, my Lords, *how* do the Great Ships whisper beneath the stars? Ahh, you don’t know; you can’t know -- you haven’t done it. Oh, you can talk to scientists, and repeat what they say about the Source powering drive fields which are modulated by the polycrystals of

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the Rim and the Officers' flight crowns, folded adaptive Minkowski spaces -- but while that's correct, it's also completely irrelevant."

The figure in front of them frowned and moved to sitting in full Lotus once more.

"Ahh, let's try a different approach. How do you do this?"

The figure in front of them extended and flexed the index finger of its right hand repeatedly.

"How do you do this? If you talk to physicians, they'll tell you about tendons and muscles, and maybe nerve impulses, and perhaps calcium and potassium -- correct and irrelevant!"

One of the women around the table muttered, "Get to the point, fool."

The figure in the recording looked out at them intensely, still flexing the finger maddeningly.

"I may be a fool, but the way we do this is the same way we whisper beneath the stars! They are the same! You don't need doctors, or scientists, or engineers. You don't need people like Cargill, Shinozuka, or de Severac. You need mystics -- like me, or Crowley!"

One of the women keyed her communicator and muttered, "Find me this mystic called Crowley."

The figure continued.

"For moving a finger, and moving a Ship between the stars are both the same -- they are acts of Will! Without Will, the finger does not move, the Ship does not move. It is Will which moves the finger, and it is Will which moves the Ship!"

"A Jump is a supreme act of Will. The Captain chooses how to end the Jump. We've known that there are 'good' and 'bad' places to end Jumps, and the 'bad' places are to be avoided, for they are associated with the Other."

"And when the ship Jumps, where does it go? Hmmm? We say 'whisper beneath the stars,' but where is that? We know mathematically the ship moves out of our 'normal' space, and into a different one. Then it unfolds to 'normal' space at a different location, far, far away."

"Now we are getting to the matter of the Other. That is a phrase strange-curious though, as the Other has nothing to do with matter. We know, from the remains of ships such as the New Caledonia, and the exploration craft Gimlet, that the crew were touched by something, by the Other. Oh, yes -- I've seen the Gimlet, and what remains of her brave crew. But we don't need to worry about that, because our Captain, my Lady, ended the threat for all time."

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“But, I hear you ask, what are they? Where do they live? How? Are they friend, or foe? Is there profit to be made? Do they prefer their tea hot or cold? Do you find that last question irrelevant? They all are irrelevant!”

“Where is the Ship when it is neither in normal space nor Jumping? Where are you when you are neither asleep nor awake? There is another place, one oh so hard to recognize, and even more difficult to explore. But our Captain found it. And, she hovered in it. For this is the place in which the Other lives -- the universe between wake and sleep, between our space and Jump space.”

“Did the Other attack? Did they attack us? Did they attack the New Caledonia, the Gimlet, the Wouff Hong? Oh, people have died, and worse. But I don’t think they attacked.”

“Imagine a young child seeing a soap bubble for the first time. The child is drawn by curiosity, and reaches out, reaches in a spirit of innocence and exploration. But oh! One touch and the bubble is no more!”

“So it is with the Other. They are so curious! And as our ships transition from one space to another, we pass, so briefly, through their space. We are such a curiosity to them, appearing so briefly and suddenly -- and they reach out, and touch ... our souls.”

The figure was filled with sadness. “Oh, my Lords and Ladies, they did not know what their touch did. They were driven by curiosity, a curiosity which increased as it became apparent we were avoiding them.” The figure wept for a moment, then wiped his eyes and continued.

“But that leads us to the next part of our tale. Our Captain had taken us on another Jump. It was for her a moderate Jump, but it was a Jump which will become part of history. For on that Jump, she discovered the Other.”

“As she was taking us back to normal space, she sensed ... something. Not the smoothness of ‘safe’ space, or the rough curdle of ‘bad’ space, but something ... interesting. She found the space of the Other, and she hovered our ship there.”

“She sensed them. And oh, they sensed us. Imagine a playground full of curious, active children -- suddenly bubbles appear all around them! What delight!”

“I was on the bridge, and experienced it. The Other touched Brennan, our engineer and a friend. We on the bridge felt his bubble burst. We knew. But our Captain was also curious, trying to contact them, even as the Weapon started to form.”

“They touched Carmichael, cargo master and my lover. I cried out in anguish as we felt her bubble burst -- I felt the sticky sweetness that was her soul spill into the Void. Our Captain kept trying. Through my tears I could see the gleam of the Weapon.”

“Then, they reached for others on the ship, including her child, and her husband!”

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“In an instant, she raised and wielded the Weapon, overloading the Source powering our Ship. We all felt it, and fell in awe before her power and glory. Did you miss that, my Lords and Ladies? In that instant, she drew more energy from the Source than has ever been recorded in the history of the Great Ships.”

“In that instant, the Other felt her Weapon as well. They fell back. They approached again, and she raised the Weapon again. And in that instant, the two made contact.”

“She did it, my Lords and Ladies. Lady Catherine made contact with the Other. She learned that they were merely curious. They learned that their touch causes us great harm, oh, harm which cannot be undone. This saddened them greatly, and they promised it would never happen again. We felt their remorse. We filled space with our tears.”

“She forgave them, such is her greatness, and raising her Weapon once more, took us back to normal space.

“We tumbled into normal space, in shock, in awe. We helped the doctor care for the broken husks which had held Brennan and Carmichael. We felt the Weapon again as her cries of anguish shook her ship, mourning the loss of friends, of crew.”

“And what is this Weapon? My Lords and Ladies, it is brighter and more powerful than the largest supernova. Yet it is as delicate as a whisper blossom, which can be destroyed by a breath.”

“What is this Weapon? It is Love -- Love under Will. She would do anything to protect her family, and her crew. We were protected by her love; her love defeated the Other. Oh yes, there was the power of the Source, and the polycrystals in her crown and in the ship’s Rim, but all aboard felt her love. Love under Will is the greatest power in the Void.”

The figure paused and sighed, wiping away tears.

“Rubbish,” one of the men sitting at the table muttered.

The figure raised its head, smiling. It stood and bowed.

“And that is the end of my report, and the end of all my reports, my Lords and Ladies. I told you I was on the bridge. I was on the bridge, wearing a flight crown, at her bidding. I have felt her love. I have also felt the fabric of spacetime, and changed it by my own Will. By my Will, I have whispered our Ship beneath the stars, crossing the Void.”

The figure sighed. “I begged her to let me stay with her, serve her, for the rest of my days. But she put my name in for membership in the Guild, and I have been accepted. While I will never approach her greatness, I know that I will Captain a Ship, whispering beneath the stars, crossing the Void, the Void that she has made safer for us all, made safer through the awesome power that is Love under Will.”

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The figure bowed one last time, and the recording winked off.

FIN
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