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The first time you lay eyes on the Nefer Key it's like you're an American G.I. in 1946 occupied Japan—they all look exactly alike.

For the first few months here on Imi you'd swear they were cookie-cutter fembot gingerbread babes, insomuch as you really can't tell the differences between them. After eighteen months the opposite holds true and the calliope of nuanced dissimilarities in their faces and figures stand out and none of them look the same ever again.

As a whole the female Nefer Key have this neotenous, almost *kawaii* vibe to them, where even those who are many thousands of Earth years old still have the cut, build and beauty of a nineteen year old prima ballerina from the Bolshoi. That is unless you glance at their tongues, which is jet black through their first five or so thousand years transitioning to dark gray by six. The long and short of it is they are all gorgeous and in freakishly great shape for life.

Here at Port Royal, hovering motionlessly over the water by the docks, is the first morning shuttle from Sashi that is disgorging three-thousand Nefer Key ladies into the city. A fair majority head on out to the central city temples to get their freak on early, but a growing number take their time by hitting up on the retail shops and coffee bars before they trek out to the burbs to hook up with their regular human guy, or gal for that matter.

Charles is sitting here by the ramp of the saucer with his ex, Rachel, along with Jason, Lilith, Aat and three of their three-star army commanders, Belle, Alexi and Zora. Aat now has the four-star bars that were her husbands and Lilith wears the five-star clusters plopped on her by Charles. Long ago he and Maat have both been elevated to Tribunes by the Nefer Key, and before the end of business day today,

overhead on Sashi, Lilith will be joining them.

Funny thing is, she is the only one here who doesn't know.

With Charles watching the Nefer Key women debark, and as the others small-talk over the new infantry railgun they're developing, Yvette slips onto the bench seat and bumps into Charles, all-the-while holding her hand out—admiring her ring, "Oh, my god! It came!"

With a snort, Charles adds, "Good thing, I guess?"

"Ebay, ya know I love Ebay." She holds the ring out for the others to see. Gawd, how I love Ebay!"

With the girls drooling over it, a gold sprite with emerald eyes, kneeling two-centimeters tall on the band, while balancing two huge strawberries made of red coral, Jason shakes his head and says, "That...is the ugliest thing I have ever seen!"

Yvette waggles the ring in Jason's face, "You're just jealous that you didn't get the jump on this for Lilith!"

Jason looks over at Lilith, who innocently shrugs at him, so he turns back to Yvette, asking, "That's a one of a kind, right?"

Yvette blinks, then, "Waddya think? Of course!"

Jason smirks, "Good to know I'm off the hook."

Shaking her head, Lilith rolls her eyes, "Ass."

Jason smiles at Lilith, gives her a warm little kiss, then turns to back Yvette, "Want me to fetch ya a coffee?"

Yvette's eyes go wide, "Yea, sure! Lots of crème and sugar!" Jason gives Lilith another little peck, hops up, and as he steps away Yvette calls out to him, "Thank you, hon!"

Zora leans in towards Alexi and Belle, and quietly whispers, "After all this time, he's still whipped!"

While Lilith grimaces at that, biting her tongue, Charles and Rachel both chuckle, and with Jason out of earshot, Yvette looks to Lilith and, "Now that I got you cornered, how do I convince you that what you want to do is the dippiest-of-shit options?"

Lilith scowls at her, "Need I remind you that, as the Princeps Censor of the Council, you already gave this mission your blessing."

"All I have is the power of *no*, but I can option it any time."

Rachel points out, "*Intercessio* is the greatest power of all."

Yvette glances at Rachel, who now looks maybe twenty-two, "Claudia concurs wholeheartedly." She again stares at Lilith and says, "This mission you cooked up rocks, but why not send Zach first?"

Rachel adds, "Zach just got back from one and Jay has been training his ass off for this, purdy much ten straight solars now."

Charles notes that, "He wants this mission bad."

Yvette nods, "Yea, I know, but twenty Earth years is a real long haul for him to be gone, don'cha think guys?"

Lilith sighs, "He's been away before."

Yvette comes clean with, "You're my great-granddaughter, okay? This is not what I want for you."

"Well, Luc did promise that this would be his last if he did it."

Yvette laughs out-loud, "I was hoping you'd forget that!"

Aat throws out, "Evie, you don't got shit for leverage."

Lilith nods, "And I am holding grandfather to it." She then reminds Yvette that, "Look, we've been entrusted to do a job and, for good or bad, like it or not, we're obligated to do our job."

Yvette shrugs, "But, you are not a brainless trust, get me? What is talking for you now are those stars on your shoulders. What I wanna know is, as a woman, what is it you want?"

Lilith leans in, "For this to be his last mission...forever."

Charles quietly says to Yvette, "I told you to let it go, hon."

"That ya did!" Yvette laughs and, "You're right again, Chuck!" She sits back with a huff, "Okay, Lilly-Doll, you got what you want! I'm not gonna pull a last minute fast-one on ya. Jason goes but, be honest with me...you really don't want 'im to go, do ya?"

Lilith mimics surfer Jay with, "Like über cowabunga d'uh!" She thumbs towards Charles, "But we're thinkin' that first in gives Goofy Foot a better chance to get out before things blow the fuck up."

Charles notes, "An' their shit is gonna blow the fuck up."

Yvette nods big, "I hope he has an uneventful trip."

Rachel interjects, "That's the joy in planning and projecting risk, you really don't know squat until after the fact."

"I'll give you this, hubby, you've been right about everything."

Charles shrugs, "Always about the things, but not the when."

Rachel again adds, "His educated guesses is not crystal ball omniscience. Might as well be, though."

"Being right all the time sucks. This time I wish I was wrong."

Lilith nods, "My fingers are crossed."

Everyone sitting here has executive seats for this shuttle, making them last on but first off, and with thousands of Nefer Key ladies now starting to board the ship, moving up the ramp, Lilith asks Yvette, "Not to change the subject, but any word on the vote?"

Yvette smiles, "Ya'll here will be the first to hear when I hear!"

Rachel speaks up, "This is my last day as a Novitiate so, Yvette, no matter how the vote turns out I want to thank you for the opportunity. This has been a kick-an-a-half."

Yvette thinks and nods in agreement, "As long as we have had you humans here, not one has been invited to become a Censor. Point is, the members of the Council cooked it up and summoned you on their own. I did not have a hand in their effort."

"But you could've vetoed it. Why didn't you?"

"Honestly?" With Rachel nodding yes, Yvette struggles to get this out, "I learned from my son and realized it was time."

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*Iret Nwt*, that being the Eye of Nut, is the Nefer Key city permanently overhead to the human city of, *Ipet Hah*. The planets of Dolphin Reel, Sashi and Imi, are tidally locked so both cities constantly face one another, and where *Ipet Hah* consists of many mixed building styles spanning millennia, *Iret Nwt* is something altogether different.

Jason Kay once described *Iret Nwt* as the love child popped out by Net Basha and Disney's Tomorrowland, that is if Tomorrowland bent Net Basha over and fucked her silly during an Iron Butterfly concert—specifically on the second set featuring In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida while on psilocybin. Point is, the eclectic quirkiness, textures, colors and the gravity defying architecture of *Iret Nwt* is both impossibly surreal and shockingly beautiful.

The oldest building here, smack-dab in the middle of the city and surrounded by a perfectly coiffed garden-park that is two-leagues wide, is the Procuratio. Nobody could understand Jason when he came back from Earth and started calling it Space Mountain, of all things, but this iteration of Space Mountain is sixty stories tall.

That said, it's the shortest building in *Iret Nwt*.

The shuttle from Imi drifts over the lake beside the Procuratio and, coming to a hover at a causeway that terminates along the edge of the lake, it drops it's ramp perfectly level with the deck.

Charles, Yvette and the rest step out from the bottom of the saucer and are met by a rifle company of Praesidio troops. The guards

are in camo-gray BDUs, which is in sharp contrast to Lilith and her generals who are wearing khaki green day-uniforms, yet the one common item between them is their garrison caps.

The command squad faces Charles and Yvette. The captain of the guard places a gold laurel wreath on Yvette's head, an indicator of her lofty station, but for Charles the corporal of the squad is carrying his fasces made of a halberd pole-arm bound with rods.

The captain and the Praesidio's Sergeant Major, who also functions as the Council's Sergeant at Arms, turn and lead Charles and Yvette to the Procuratio, with the corporal trailing Charles at his five o'clock between them. Jason, Lilith and Rachel fall in, with the three generals and the rifle company bringing up the rear.

As they pass the half way point to Space Mountain the passengers start to pour out from the saucer onto the causeway.

Inside the building it is hollow, just like the old Luxor hotel in Las Vegas, with offices and flats going all the way up to the top. At the bottom of it is an open amphitheatre that serves as the Chamber of Censors. Three quarters of it is seating for the Council of Censors themselves, with the last quarter functioning as a peanut gallery for anyone who comes under summons, or simply stops by just to watch. As the only seat of government for the Nefer Key, it serves as the judicial counterpoint to their one dictatorial Consul.

And that just so happens to be, Luc.

As they step onto the floor of the open chamber, they are met by Luc and Maat, who is standing beside Maat's fasces mounted to a stand. As the command squad helps Yvette undress and don an ivory white kaftan wrap, Charles' fasces is inserted in a stand near Maat.

Now dressed, Yvette steps up on a shallow dais and drinks in the eleven-hundred and ninety-nine Censors standing in honor of her. The Censors here are all in black kaftan's with ivory embroidery along their necks and sleeves. Nefer Key women wear a galaxy of different styles of clothing, much of it sheer and revealing, and these kaftan's may cover most of their bodies but, since all of the Censors are from breeding stock, the kaftan wraps actually accentuate their centerfold quality curvature rather well.

With the senior Censors at the top row and the rookies on the bottom row near the dais, closest to Yvette, to the left of Yvette's seat is the only empty seat in the chamber.

All of the Censors sit except for one at the very top row, who puts her hands out and announces, "*Nostrum suffragium quod sic.*"

As Yvette slowly turns back around, Jason leans in towards

Rachel and quietly says, "I think you're in with the moomoo crew!"

Lilith heard that and starts to snicker, while Rachel snarls under her breath, "Moomoo? Fuck you!"

Gesturing to the open seat, Yvette says to Rachel, "It's time for you to take your seat in the choir, Censor Rachel." With the entire chamber applauding, Yvette then motions for the Captain of the guard to help Rachel change her wraps while she announces, "Before we head out to the banquet, in honor of our new Censor, we have one little itty bitty item we'd like to squeeze in today."

Luc speaks up, "Madame Princeps." And with Yvette pointing towards the ground, visually correcting him, Luc cringes slightly and, "Mother, did you discuss the mission on the way here?"

"Not the item I had in mind..." Yvette laughs, and with the Sergeant at Arms and Captain now helping Rachel don the black wrap of a Censor, and the command squad slipping in behind Lilith, with her new fasces in hand, Yvette goes, "But, to answer your question, yes, the missions to the Annex and the Co-op will go as planned."

Luc rears back, pleasantly surprised, "Oh, okay! Cool."

Lilith is still oblivious to the command squad standing behind her when Yvette says, "General Lilith, we rarely see you here."

Lilith shrugs, "Busy? Not to be an ass but, I am kinda busy?"

"We've noticed. You have done a wonderful job creating our Nefer Key army, but we think it's time to lighten your load...Tribune."

Confused, Lilith wonders, "Hu?"

Next to Lilith, her newly bound fasces is dropped into a stand with a hollow thud.