

*Listen, my child, to this tale from the dark
Of a girl like you who burns like the sun.
Her story will ignite from you a spark
That compares to absolutely no one.
From pauper to princess to pirate
To beloved criminal of her home,
She was chosen and blessed by the Great Cat
And earned fear and respect wherever she roamed.
Perfection, however, is never constant
Within anyone born in mortals ways,
And though she tried to do what she can't,
Her love for herself is worthy of praise.
This is a tale that has traveled as far
As the girl forged in the heart of a star.*

CHAPTER 1

Clayton Jiggins was out of place in Rigel. His home in the slums of Meissa was a blessing compared to the rotting hovels and polluted streets he was entering. As difficult as the trip had been, he was grateful for the abrasive captain who brought him to this place. They arrived in the early morning while the city slept in to recover from the rambunctious festivities that were the nightly norm. Whoever was still awake in the town would leave him alone as long as the captain was by his side.

“Welcome ta hell, Mister Jiggins.” Clayton turned to the owner of the booming, low class voice. Captain Marshall Brownsea was a seasoned man who had fed all of his vices well in his lifetime. Such a man should be relatively happy, but the captain was as hardened as everyone else Clayton had met since he left Meissa. His curly, salt-and-pepper hair crawled down the side of his face and grew long on his jaw. His round cheeks and nose were red from years of consumption.

“Oh, it doesn’t look... that bad.”

Captain Brownsea barked a hearty but cynical laugh. “Dicky bird of advice; drop all manners ye were taught. Out here, they mean nothin’.”

The crew of *The Damned Sword* pulled the ship into the harbor and tended to her cargo while Captain Brownsea de-boarded with Clayton, leading him through the town. Clayton did his best to stick close to the captain’s side as the town slowly woke up. The men and women who had spent the night at the numerous brothels were waking up early and sneaking out as quietly as possible, either to avoid paying for the services that were provided to them or to get home before their spouses awoke. The most unfortunate citizens were fighting each other for the busiest side streets that would yield the greatest income from their begging and groveling habits. Everyone in between was still sleeping.

“So... where do we start?” Clayton looked around the city that seemed to be coming apart at the seams. It was vast, clustered, and poorly laid out. She could be anywhere.

“Taverns and inns.”

Clayton was confused. “Why? It sounds like she would more likely be in...”

“A whore house?” Captain Brownsea laughed as Clayton’s cheeks went red at the crude term. “What makes ye think a dangerous man like the Blue Lion would allow his bit o’ crumpet ta work in a place where any old bastard can put his hands on her?”

The Blue Lion was an assassin who started taking lives a year earlier. He had gained the name for the cloak that seemed to be his trademark. It was said to be made of cobalt velvet with the constellation of Leo the Lion stitched into the back with white thread. A few witnesses had seen a figure in this cloak fleeing crime scenes just before the victims were found. While the man who sent them didn't know the precise location of the Blue Lion, he was fairly positive there was a woman in Rigel that the Blue Lion was "deeply invested in": a young woman with coppery hair, grey eyes, and a scar on her left cheek. If they found her, there was a chance she could lead them to the Blue Lion, and Clayton could finally get the help he desperately needed.

It became quickly clear that Captain Brownsea had spent plenty of time in Rigel; he called the owner of every single tavern and inn by name, and they all welcomed him with a grin and a full tankard of ale on the house. Even if the owner had never seen a woman who fit the description, the captain would drink each tankard dry before leaving to look somewhere else. By about the eighth tavern, Captain Brownsea was stumbling around uselessly, so Clayton boldly decided to go looking by himself while the captain passed out in an alleyway.

The Wandering Royal Inn was identified by the rotting, wooden sign depicting a crowned prince with a travel pack slung over his shoulder as he strutted away from a large castle. The inside looked like it had been a fine, comfortable establishment before it was overrun with vermin, along with rats and cockroaches. Now the place looked like it had been the setting of a million drunken fights and indecent acts. The owner looked like she had been there when the inn was first built and had watched its fall from grace. She was twenty years younger than she looked, and hadn't had a single good night's sleep in those added twenty-years. "Excuse me? Madame?"

"Oi! I ain't no 'Madame'! This look like a brothel to ya?!"

"No?"

"Damn right! Now, what do ya want?"

"I'm looking for someone. A woman with reddish hair, grey eyes, scar on her cheek? Have you seen her?"

"What's it ta ya?" The tavern owner held out her hand, making sure Clayton knew exactly what she wanted. Hesitantly, he put his light purse into her hand. Recognizing the lack of weight, the woman examined the contents. "Three stinkin' white dwarves?! Get outta here!" She threw the Starz and the purse back at Clayton, sending his money

scattering to the ground. He dropped to his knees, desperate to grab the money before it was lost forever.

The woman's yelling started to stir several patrons who had passed out at the tables. "Shut the hell up, Millie!"

"That's Mildred ta ya, ya bastard! And if ya don't clean up yar language, ya'll not be welcome in this shithole anymore!"

Mildred forgot about Clayton almost instantly. It gave him the opportunity to peek at the beat up guest book. All the names of the current residents seemed pretty straightforward, except for one who had not signed the book and was paying three times the normal rent. According to the record book, Mildred had put this mysterious person up in room seven. Looking back over his shoulder, Clayton saw that Mildred was still shouting at the drunkards around her; he was fairly certain that she was about to start smashing things over their heads. Still, her anger was a boon to him as he sneaked up the stairs.

Initially, Clayton had gone down the correct corridor, but he couldn't find room number seven, so he doubled back. It wasn't until he inspected the other rooms around him that he realized there was a room seven, but someone had scratched through the painted-on number, rendering it illegible. Clayton tapped his knuckles against the warped, rotting door, avoiding splinters. He tried to be loud enough to only wake the tenant he hoped was still inside. When no answer came, he knocked a little harder, hoping she was not as hungover as her neighbors. Holding his breath, Clayton wrapped his huge hand around the rusted doorknob. He was lucky none of the rooms in the tavern had working locks.

Despite the late morning light, the room was dim due to a thick piece of fabric thrown over the only window. There was enough light to allow Clayton to make out how humble the room was: a rickety table-and-chair set and a half stuffed old mattress on the floor were the only things in the room. Clayton could tell someone was lying on the bed, back towards him, but he couldn't make out any details.

Clayton timidly stepped into the room and quietly closed the door behind him. He cleared his throat to get the tenant's attention. There was no sound or movement; the body didn't stir. "Excuse me?" The only sound was the floor creaking beneath his weight as he tiptoed across the room to the mattress. "Miss?" Clayton was worried that whoever was in this room wasn't even with him in the realm of the living anymore; he

couldn't hear any breathing aside from his own, and the body was steady as a meteorite. He reached out to touch the person's shoulder to see if the body was cold.

Clayton touched the warmth of life before his world was flipped around. By the time he got his head straight again, he was on his back, and there was a weight on his hips and shoulders. Through the dim light, he could see whoever had been lying in the bed was now on top of him, pinning him by the shoulders. The body was small for the strength it displayed.

"Who the hell are you?" The voice was tense and raw, but female. She sounded just as cynical as the people around her, and yet she also sounded too young to be so cynical. Clayton tried to push her off of him, all the while ordering her to do so. He was cut off when cold steel pressed into his neck. Clayton had never known someone paranoid enough to sleep with a knife under their pillow, so he was as fascinated as he was nervous. "Kid, I had a late night, you are waking me up way too damn early, and honestly, I don't trust you as far as I could throw you. Unless you fancy a trip through the Black Hole, I suggest you do not piss me off any more than you already have." The woman paused in the middle of her threat to give Clayton the opportunity to choose death over life, which he didn't take. "Now, I'll ask again; Who the hell are you?"

"Clayton. Clayton Jiggins." Clayton hated how tremulous his voice sounded, and took a deep breath to try to compose himself.

"Never heard of you." Clayton couldn't tell where this woman had come from; her speech wasn't broken, suggesting this was her first language, but she didn't sound like anyone he had heard in all of the Hunter Galaxy. She didn't have the posh dialect of Nobles – not that he expected her to – but she also didn't sound like the low-class people surrounding her.

"I... never expected you to."

"What's your business?"

"I, uh... I'm looking for... the Blue Lion?" There was a strained silence before the woman growled out an extremely irritated sigh. Keeping the knife to Clayton's throat, the woman reached up to rip the make-shift curtain off the window. The morning light boomed into the room, illuminating everything. Clayton simply had to blink for his eyes to adjust to the change while the woman on top of him snapped her eyes closed and groaned in pain. While she rubbed her eyes, her short, frizzy red hair fell over her face. It was in desperate need of a wash and a brush. When she finally pulled her hand away from her face and cracked her eyes open to glare at him, Clayton saw her steely

eyes raging like a thunderstorm that could destroy the entire town. The ferocity in those eyes was heightened by the thin, pale scar that followed the curve of her left cheek from the hinge of her jaw until it stopped about half an inch from the corner of her mouth.

Clayton didn't have any time to take in the fact that he had found the person he had been looking for before the woman got right up in his face, snarling as her hair tickled his nose. "For the last goddamn time, I don't know who or where the Blue Lion is. Now, get the hell out and tell your people to leave me alone!" With that, she rolled off of Clayton, gripping him by his coat collar and using the momentum of her roll to throw him off of the bed.

While Clayton was trying to gather his bearings, the woman collapsed onto the bed and pulled the single moth-eaten blanket over her head. "Miss, please. I am in desperate need of help, and the Blue Lion—" Clayton was cut off when something flashed by his face and went into the wall behind him. The woman had thrown her knife right at him. As much as the act made Clayton want to flee, it also convinced him she had the information he was looking for. "I'm willing to pay for what you know." Clayton scrambled to get his beaten-up pouch that had just been rejected by the owner of the tavern.

Growling in irritation, the woman shot up and threw more daggers at Clayton, but this time from her eyes. "I can't give you what I don't have! Now get out of—"

"It's the prince!" Silence hung over the room as the woman looked at Clayton, waiting for him to explain. "... I need the Blue Lion to kill the prince. Please, if you know something that can help me, I will do... anything."

For a long time, the woman just kept staring at Clayton. He couldn't tell what she was thinking, which made him slightly uncomfortable. As she got up, she mumbled "Goddammit," under her breath. She strode to a lonely bucket in the moldiest corner of the room.

The woman was only wearing a blue corset, a chemise, and cut off bloomers. Clayton averted his eyes. "So, you do know the Blue Lion?" Clayton heard splashing water, followed by a high-pitched exhale. It made Clayton look at the woman to see what she had done, but he looked away again when he saw she had just thrown cold water over her head.

The woman sighed again. "Normally, I'd be kicking you right out of here, but you happen to have just said the only thing that could save you from an ass whooping."

“So you’ll help me?” Clayton couldn’t control the hopefulness in his voice. He reached for his pouch again and dumped the three Starz into his hand, clenching them in his palm.

“You’re not the only one who has the prince on their shit list.” Clayton heard shuffling, and some clapping of wood knocking against wood.

“Thank you!” He looked at the woman just in time to see her shimmy into her pants. Clayton was impressed with how quickly she dressed, especially considering how complicated and fierce her clothes looked. He rushed towards her, offering the Starz in his hand.

She jerked the zipper up on her fur-lined, leather vest. “Save your money kid.”

“But—”

“Sh!” Out of nowhere, the woman threw herself against the inside wall right behind the door. She pressed herself as flat against the wall as she could, glaring at the door as if she was silently daring it to open.

“What is —”

“Sh!” She glared at Clayton like he was a complete idiot. She turned her gaze back to the door and Clayton indulged the woman. They both listened as carefully as they possibly could, but Clayton didn’t know what the woman was worried about; he couldn’t hear anything aside from some heavy footfalls.

Out of nowhere, the door to the room was kicked in, making Clayton jump. Captain Brownsea pushed his way into the room, looking much more in control of his senses than he had when Clayton had left him. His saber was drawn, and he looked like a giant, feral dog searching frantically for the pray he had been hunting. “Where is she?!”

“Captain!—”

The woman jumped from her hiding place, brandishing the knife she had used to threaten Clayton. She gripped it backwards in her hand and leaped onto the captain, slamming the hilt of the dagger right into his temple. The impact dazed the captain, but not enough to subdue him. When the woman attacked the captain a second time, he swung his saber wildly, striking a small but lucky blow against her bare arm.

“Captain, please!” Both the captain and the woman ignored Clayton as he backed into a corner, avoiding the captain’s flailing saber. He had no idea what was going on, and no idea how to stop it.

The captain managed to block the woman's next two attacks with ease before throwing her to the ground. He also managed to cut her thigh when she retreated to her table. She wanted to replace her knife with a better weapon to even the fight.

"Stop it! Stop it now! Both of you!" Clayton, unsure as he was about everything, was getting angry. He was yelling loud enough to wake the whole tavern.

Instead of listening to Clayton, the woman grabbed a saber of her own. She whipped around to attack the captain and struck him twice. They weren't serious wounds, but the angered captain yelled, "Ye little bitch!"

The captain flailed wildly and inflicted a serious blow on the woman's side, slicing into her vest. Blood spilled out of the wound, slowly staining the fur and leather. She held her wound and glared at the captain.

Clayton slid along the wall as the fight resumed until he had reached the door. He stepped outside and shouted, "Help! Help! Someone help!" The only response was all the remaining drunks downstairs yelling in unison, "Shut the hell up!"

The captain and the woman traded blows and no one came up to the room to stop them. With his pleas ignored, Clayton became desperate—he chanced a dash through the room, narrowly dodging the combatants' flailing swords. He went to the woman's pile of remaining weapons and grabbed a two-foot long lead pipe before whipping around to face the fighters. The captain was the closest and had his back to him. Clayton swung the pipe at the captain, who proved to be more agile and perceptive than Clayton had originally given him credit for; he dodged Clayton's attacks with surprising ease. However, while the captain was focused on Clayton, the woman seized the opportunity. The captain didn't dodge her attack.

His rage soaring, Captain Brownsea attacked both of them and managed to find purchase against the woman. His wild attack against Clayton missed and Clayton managed to strike a blow to the captain's cheek, leaving him dazed and short one tooth.

Shocked by the consequences of his actions, Clayton stood momentarily motionless. The woman hit the captain in the temple, but the blow didn't take the captain down; it just left him practically defenseless. The woman's final kick to the head rendered the captain completely unconscious.

Clayton was still stunned when the woman stomped up, grabbed him by his shirt collar, and slammed him against the wall. "And to think I believed you."

"What?"

“Fool me once, asshole,” Keeping one hand at his neck, the woman raised her saber up until the tip was pointed right at his gut. “and you won’t live to fool me twice.”

“No, please! I swear I didn’t know the captain was going to attack you! I have no idea what’s going on! Please!”

Before either one of them could make another move, musket shots exploded from outside, followed by an authoritative, male voice shouting, “This is Royal Hunter Navy! Everyone exit the premises now!”

Clayton and the woman looked at one another before the woman spoke the one word that came into both of their minds. “Shit.”

Clayton grabbed the woman’s wrist and slipped between her saber and the wall. He made for the door, dragging her behind him. “We have to g–” He was cut off when the woman’s foot slammed right into his gut, pushing all the air right out of him. Another kick came to the back of his knee, knocking him down to the ground.

While he was on his hands and knees trying to catch his breath, the woman pulled away from him. “I’m not going anywhere with you.” She went in the other direction, grabbing the remaining weapons from her table, including the lead pipe Clayton had dropped. Once all her weapons were on her person, she grabbed a cloak that was dull on the outside. On the inside, Clayton saw blue velvet and the sign of Leo embroidered in white thread. “Give my regards to August.” With that, she leaped out the window.

Clayton heard shouting and shooting immediately after the woman disappeared. He ignored the pain in his stomach and bounded to the window. The moment he stuck his head out, musket balls drove him back inside. He leaned against the wall, catching his breath. The Navy was the last thing he wanted to deal with, but if he didn’t get out there, he would lose his only chance to save his family. Drawing a deep breath, he crawled through the window.

He was surprised when he didn’t hear anymore musket fire. What he heard instead was a cacophonous chorus of tortured screams, coughing, and crying. He looked to see six men in Navy uniforms sprawled out all over the cobblestone streets. Some of them were clutching at their eyes. Others were grabbing at their necks or chests as they vomited blood. Everyone left was unconscious or nearly so. All of the sailors looked like their skins were shriveling up and burning off of their bodies. Clayton couldn’t imagine what could possibly inflict such instantaneous damage, but he assumed it had something to do with the pale pink dust settling around the soldiers. He didn’t spend too much time on the subject, however, since he had something bigger to worry about.

Clayton was nowhere near as agile as the Blue Lion, whose hooded figure was bounding across the rooftops with incredible ease. Clayton moved carefully to the Inn's rooftop, and the moment he got there, he stepped on a molding section of the thatch. The roof broke beneath his weight and he fell through to his waist. The top half of his body was still out in the open while his legs were flailing around inside the room.

The situation grew worse when someone grabbed Clayton's legs. He didn't know who was trying to grab him, but he knew it wasn't an ally. Clayton struggled to break free of his attacker who tried to pull him into the room. Both endeavors failed until Clayton fell through the roof, crashing onto his attacker.

The boy suffered less damage as his attacker cushioned his fall; he got his bearings long before the other man. The moment Clayton saw the uniform of a Navy Captain, he jumped up and made for the door.

The window may have been faster, but going the long way through the tavern was far safer. While all the tenants downstairs woke up during the commotion, most were too hung over to even move, let alone challenge Clayton. He accidentally hit a few of them as he rushed through the Inn; he didn't look back and no one tried to stop him. Not even Mildred seemed to care about the Navy shooting at her establishment.

The thing that kept Clayton running was the Navy Captain right on his tail. Once he was out on the streets, he darted into the nearest alleyway and hunkered down, hoping the Navy Captain would assume he ran down one of the main streets. Instead, the captain ran around to his men sprawled on the ground, still screaming in pain and coughing up blood. Clayton took advantage of the opportunity to sneak through the streets in the direction he saw the woman running towards before she disappeared from his sight.

When he was far enough away to be temporarily safe, Clayton searched as thoroughly as he could. It became difficult with the rest of the town awake and Captain Brownsea absent. Moreover, Clayton had no idea where to look for the woman. Just as Clayton was giving up and admitting disappointing defeat, he noticed medium-sized, elongated blood drops spotting the streets. He remembered the wound the captain had opened up on the woman's side, and that she fled with only her hand to slow the bleeding. As subtly as he could, Clayton followed the blood drops to the rocky shore of Rigel. He struggled to cross the difficult terrain, but he endured until he came to what he assumed was the woman's destination.

The cave was small; it would've been easily overlooked from a distance. That might be why the woman went there; she could easily hide whatever she was keeping there under a muddy sheet. As telling as the setting was, the Blue Lion was nowhere to be found, and that was the only thing that mattered to Clayton.

He froze when something sharp and cold pressed into his back. "Boy, you have got the biggest death wish I've ever seen." The woman was still fuming, though Clayton could've guessed that without hearing her.

Not knowing what else to do, he raised his empty hands up by his head. "I swear to you, I had no idea the captain was going to attack you. If I did, I would've come alone."

"Why should I believe you?"

"I suppose my word of honor isn't going to work?"

The woman scoffed. "Don't be cheeky. Honor doesn't mean a damn thing out here or in Meissa... It is Meissa, isn't it?"

"Uh, yes. You have a good ear, Miss."

"You still haven't answered my question: Why should I believe you?"

"You know what I asked for—don't you want to know why?"

"I don't give much of a shit. If August sent you like I know he did, he gave you that line to get my attention."

If Clayton was going to convince this woman he meant her no harm, he would have to take a risk. He slowly turned around until he could look the woman in the eye. That's where he tried to look anyway since he wasn't comfortable looking down the blade of her knife or below the her neck since she had stripped to just her chemise on top.

"You're correct that Captain Grant did send me, but not because I work for him. He sent me to you because he said he couldn't help me himself." The woman furrowed her eyebrows, but didn't act. "Prince Barnaby Oldfield is responsible for the death of my father, and I wish to see him brought to the justice no one will ever believe he deserves."

Clayton's statement made the woman's face soften, but her expression was still unreadable. She locked eyes with him and never looked away. It was like she was trying to read his mind. After a long and silent stare down, the woman lowered her dagger and slipped it into the holster on her belt before walking over to a rock where her cloak, vest, corset and clean bandages were. She took the corset and fastened it in the front, though the loose laces kept the garment from doing it's intended job.

"Do you need any—"

"No." The answer was assertive and harsh, but she proved she didn't need any help; she managed to tighten and tie her own corset, though she winced as it tightened around her now-bandaged wound. Once she tied off the laces, the woman got her vest back on, slightly groaning when she stretched.

"Miss, may I ask your name?"

She looked at him like he had just asked the worst possible question. "Whatever for?"

"Well, I can't call you Miss Blue Lion now can I?" He tried to laugh at his statement, thinking maybe it would soften her. She never even cracked a smile.

"Catherine."

"Oh. Catherine?"

"Just Catherine."

"Right. Catherine." Clayton stuck his hand out. After a moment of the woman refusing, he pulled back. "So when do we leave?"

Catherine gave Clayton another unreadable, unnerving look. "We are not leaving at all. I am leaving immediately."

Clayton panicked. "But I must come with you!"

Catherine gave a cynical look. "Oh, your life absolutely depends on me babysitting you? You really shouldn't have placed your bets on that, kid."

Clayton took a deep breath, trying to be patient. "I wasn't planning on going with you, but considering my ride back to Meissa is currently incapacitated and most likely not on my side anymore, you're my only option."

Without even looking at him, Catherine shrugged. "Sounds like you're up the Shitty Way without a lifeline." The response briefly made Clayton consider leaving her and looking for help elsewhere so he that didn't have to deal with the woman's belittling attitude. The only thing that stopped him was his instincts reminding him he was in a dangerous part of the Galaxy with only two people who understood the place.

"If I can present a good reason why, will you let me?" There was no way Clayton could challenge this woman physically, as she had proven earlier. The only chance he had was to appeal to her logic and convince her he would be more of an asset than a burden.

Giving an annoyed but defeated sigh, Catherine lazily turned around to look at the boy. "You have one chance and ten seconds. Go."

"I'm a person who isn't wanted or hunted by everyone in the Galaxy. I can quietly get us into every place we need to go without trouble."

"August has spies and people working for him everywhere. You can't guarantee that none of them witnessed that debacle."

"Which is why we leave this here." Clayton pulled out a very beat up star chart of the Dragon Galaxy. "If this is left here, they might believe that's where we're headed."

"No way August would believe that I'm headed there."

"Do you have a better idea?" Her silence said that she didn't. "Besides, I may not be Captain Grant's spy now, but if you leave me here, I may have to consider it to save myself."

"You're seriously trying to threaten an assassin?"

"It's a chance you're forcing me to take." Clayton pushed his hand out. "So do we have an arrangement?"

Catherine flashed her eyes between Clayton's face and his extended hand. With a heavy sigh, she mumbled under her breath, "It doesn't look like I have much of a choice." With great ferocity and strength, Catherine gripped his forearm. "You just got yourself a ride back to Meissa, kid."

Clayton held his sigh of relief until the Catherine had released his arm. She threw the muddy sheet off of the mass it was covering. Clayton's jaw practically unhinged when he saw a SkyCraft StarGlyder—a machine that Clayton had heard much about but had never seen with his own eyes. He presumed that such machines were widely considered luxuries, meant only for the upper-class.

"Close your mouth kid; if you suck in any more dust, a planet will start forming in your lungs." As Clayton awkwardly took Catherine's advice, she leaped onto the StarGlyder, opening a small compartment at the front of the SkyCraft. She shoved her wrapped up cloak in and took out two sets of goggles; one set seemed brand new with acid green lenses while the other set with plain, clear lenses had been heavily used. Catherine tossed the scarred goggles to Clayton, saying, "They might be a little tight, but they'll be better than having an eyeful of stardust. You got any way to tie your hair back?"

"Oh, uh, no. No, I don't." A length of leather landed in his hands on top of the goggles.

"See what you can do with that. A long head of hair full of stardust is about as bad as an eyeful." Without another word, Catherine set up two lifelines with lengths of

strong rope and carabiners. In the meantime, Clayton set to his work, hastily tying his long, curly hair back, and loosening the goggles as much as he could before slipping them on.

Once the lifelines had been secured to the StarGlyder, Catherine tossed one of the carabiners to Clayton, who fumbled and nearly dropped it. "Find somewhere sturdy to hook yourself up." Clayton was about to ask if she had any suggestions but decided to figure it out for himself when she hook herself up by the utility belt.

Once Clayton's lifeline was hastily and clumsily hooked to his worn belt, Catherine took her place in front of the two-handed helm. She looked back and jested, "What're you waiting for, kid? An invitation?" Clayton was unsure of himself as the SkyCraft looked far less sturdy than the two ships he had sailed on in the last three days. He tried to tip-toe his way on, but Catherine lost her patience. She grabbed him by his coat, and yanked him on board, making the SkyCraft sway.

Catherine didn't even wait for Clayton to get straight and comfortable in his seat behind her before pushing a heavy iron key into the machine. With a single turn, the machine revved to life beneath them. Catherine pulled the goggles over her eyes. "Hang on tight." With that, she pulled the lever connected to the helm's right handle and shot out of the cave. Clayton cried out as he wrapped his arms around Catherine's waist, closing his eyes. The new partners sped away from Rigel in the direction of Meissa.