

There's a certain predictability in the whirr of a plane's engine I've come to appreciate. For one thing, when it is unpredictable it is not a sound one usually has time to come to terms with the quality of, however fine or poor, because you will have plummeted to your death too quickly to have an opinion. Now, appreciation and like are not the synonyms people make them out to be. I appreciate the consistent whirr of the plane's engines as I sit strapped two feet from them with the perpetually open cargo bay reminding me that the earth is not a safe haven if you fall into it. That doesn't mean I like the sound drilling its way into my skull, and I like it even less alone.

I can't say that I held any surprise when Iasha, my supposed comrade in arms and in a significantly more complicated affair; she never found herself able to pull away from the cloying grip of her invariably boring, but admittedly safe past (no, current and future as well) life and join me in my atheist pilgrimage and gamble to fly to the floating concrete paradises of debauchery, lust and opportunity, that made up the Neutral Zone.

Arconia and Rigel, the two great powers of this world had, in an unexpected show of conscience, had chosen to end the war that had been raging between them for the past 300 years. More accurately Rigel chose an incomplete surrender. I say incomplete as their web of spies that made up the innermost workings of the Rigellian government, could never truly be swept away.

Iasha had no great push to leave the supposedly quiet borders of Arconia and with such massive forces at play. They endeavored to sever the string of intimacy connecting us and set me on an orbit without a sun. I, like any careening piece of space junk in the aftermath of a supernova, couldn't help but oblige. Maybe this chaotic drive slamming around my body, the need to climb to a new life and the simultaneous gravity of simply wanting to lie down and let myself decay is what compelled the Rigellian sitting across from me to watch me.

He was admittedly most surreptitious, clearly an expert at these sorts of things. I expect that the only reason why an amateur like me would notice was because he was as unmoored as I was. His frame was reptilian, that was expected, but he was faded, that was not. I couldn't place where weapons lay hidden on his body, but it was no uncertain fact that they were there. His intricate lace-covered robe showed the affects of wealth, but the slightly fraying seams hinted at poverty and the fact that his frame seemed to have hollowed since its purchase was disconcerting. He was also sitting in the cheapest seats, or maybe someone brave and foolish enough to display their wealth in their clothes was comfortable winning fights to keep such finery on their body. Or maybe, petty thieves knew better than to risk fighting a Rigellian, even if they'd lost the war.

He smiled, and in a truly unfortunate turn of events, it was at me. I hastily looked away, an amateurish move, but I was just that. How could he blame me for being true to my nature? Now, he did not hide his interest in me; he seemed to relish my acquiescence. I turned my focus to his pointed amethyst painted nails coiling and unfurling around the large intricately embroidered satchel that sat on his crossed legs. I could feel him accessing me and I knew that all those Arconian soldiers who'd ended up imprisoned behind Rigellian lines had told me the truth— those fascists did not know empathy and nor would they endeavor to make its acquaintance.

The plane clunked down with a jolt onto the gray concrete of the Neutral Zone. Which seemed to shock both the Rigelliean and myself. I naturally took a sort of vindictive pleasure in our shared brief disconcertion.

Within moments, a brusque Neutral Zone attendant was ushering us out the cargo bay and I raced after her. Mostly because if I had not, I most likely would have remained on the vast tarmac for the rest of my natural existence, or until I was squashed by some flying vehicle.

There is something to be said about the transience of spaceports. Their utilitarian architecture reminds you that they are simply a vessel to hold the masses. The disgusting customs checks, where you feel you have to manually lower your blood pressure as some soulless lifeform scans you; and you feel inexplicably guilty even if you haven't forged some part of your documents. In my defense, I've forgotten which parts of mine are fake, which says something about the skill of my forgeries and something else about my memory. No one wants to stay there and few do.

When I got out I felt thoroughly vanquished, the already dwindling spirit of adventure reduced to a faint simmer in my veins. But then, the cosmic horror of the Neutral Zone dawned upon me. I was floating. Well, the ground I was standing on was floating and I could feel it. Not so much as a sensation, but as a concept working its way into my nerves. If the anti-gravity set up failed I could plummet into the light cerulean seas below me. There was sky above and below me and I thought I could come here and find some mooring?

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