

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Generations: Part 1

Blake Jackson · Monday, July 12th, 2021

The dimensional engine swirled and pulsed in front of Jedrian, its multicolored clouds reminded him of a living and breathing nebula. His hand reached out almost of its own volition, stretching towards the galaxies that danced before him. Resting against the soft membrane separating him and the engine, he could hear the song of the universe echo inside him like a heartbeat. *Thump. Thump.*

“Jed, get the hell away from there!”

He snapped out of it, and pulled his hand away as his supervisor approached. Kyl was a harsh supervisor, not one to take bullshit from any of their underlings.

“Sorry, Kyl. I don’t know wh—”

“I don’t care. Just get back to work and don’t look directly at the engines,” they sighed heavily as they turned away. “They teach you that shit in basic training, imbecile.” Jed only smiled. Kyl had been almost like a parent to him these last couple years. They had seen his talent and hired him on as the ship’s youngest engineer.

The engine room around Jedrian was massive, at least twice as big as a standard Lenore-class cruiser. The cylindrical engines stretched upward, disappearing into the darkness above. Pocked throughout were membranous windows where engineers could peer into the colliding dark matter within: the dimensional rifts that powered the *Generations* fleet.

The shimmering rainbow meant everything was good. Part of Jed’s job was to watch for fluctuations or variations, not that any had ever happened. There hadn’t been any issues since the fleet left Earth six years ago, and Jed wouldn’t know what to do if there was one. There was still almost seven hundred years ahead on their journey to humanity’s new home: Eden. He shuddered to think what would happen if a disaster struck while they were alone in the dark of space, too far out for anyone to rescue them.

Jed took the long way home. He liked to do that every now and then. It was a reminder that there was more to the ship than the dingy corridors that wove through the outermost edges, with only four feet of metal between them and the endless void outside.

As he entered the airlock, an automated voice gently reminded him to take deep breaths in order to

keep calm and to not stare upward for too long until he was acclimated. Jed ignored the voice entirely as he stepped through into the open air of the Center.

Green hills covered in grass and trees rolled away from him and sloped gently down towards Delhian, the closest city. The soiled earth curved and warped around the edges of the ship, folding overhead into a perfect circle. Jed looked up, and he could see the larger city of Nezan glinting in the far distance. Loose clouds drifted through the center of the massive space, diffusing the sunlight refracted from the massive solar mirrors at either end of the *Wayfarer's* cylindrical interior. A marvel of human ingenuity and engineering. A generation ship that could carry millions of people for centuries on their journey to Eden, and there were three other just like it, only a few hundred miles to either side.

Looking at the interior of the Center still made Jedrian's brain ache slightly, but it was better than the claustrophobic corridors that wound their way underneath. Being able to pay for a home surrounded by free oxygen and not recycled air was expensive and neither Jed's engineering career or Kino's art were able to support living in one of the Center cities.

Seventy percent of the *Wayfarer's* residents lived in the Web, a maze of endless corridors that snaked under the majesty of the Center. If the privileged saw them as vermin scurrying to make ends meet, then that's what they would be. Ignore the rats in the walls for too long, they emerge into the light, too many of them to stop.

Jed walked the edge of Riada Lake, watching the ducks paddle lazily in the easy current. He grabbed a flat rock, and threw it across the lake, smiling as the spin gravity caused the stone to dip and sail through the air until it landed in the part of the lake that curved into his horizon. This ship never ceased to amaze him.

A light chime sounded in the warm summery air. *Sunset*, Jed thought.

The sunlight began to dim as the solar mirrors rotated almost fully closed. The reds and pinks of an Earth sunset didn't exist here. Just a soft darkening until the city lights blinked on, and the ambient glow of "moonlight" spread across the Center. In twelve hours, the solar mirrors would fully open again and a new day cycle would begin. The people of the Center couldn't bear to let go of their lives on Earth, and so they did their best to imitate it.

Jed didn't think about Earth too much. Doing so meant remembering all the people he left behind six years ago. His father begging him to stay. His older sister stubbornly refusing to get onto that "deathtrap of a ship." Jed had been fourteen, and he didn't want his life to be mired in the dirt and ash that was Earth's definite future. So he left.

Jedrian knew his pain was not unique. Everyone on the *Wayfarer* had left people behind. Knowing he was not alone didn't make it any easier.

If he ignored it, he wouldn't have to think how Earth's "death date" was approaching in less than a year. How all the scientists and experts had given the planet he was born and raised on until next year before the oceans completely swallowed continents and the "bad weather" that had been getting worse and worse, would have become so bad that Earth would be inhospitable to humans.

He wouldn't have to think about how his father, his sister, would choke on the ash thrown into the atmosphere from volcanoes erupting, how they would scramble to survive the mass flooding, how

they probably would be dead within the next two years.

No, he didn't have to think about that at all.

Kino looked up from his work as Jedrian wearily walked through the door. He grinned ear to ear, and his wide smile almost made the whole shitty day worth it.

"Welcome back."

Jed made an incoherent grunt.

"Bad day?"

He flopped onto the couch across from Kino. "I got caught staring at the engines again."

"It's not your fault it's supposedly the most beautiful thing humanity has ever created," he lifted his brush back to the canvas. "I would love to see it."

Jed angled, trying to peek, but Kino turned the canvas away, smiling. Jed rolled his eyes and sprawled back on the couch. "Maybe I'll take you there one day."

"Then we'll both get arrested and spaced to keep the Big Secret. You know you're still under a confidentiality agreement, right?"

Jed blew a raspberry. "Whatever. They must know they can't keep this a secret forever. I mean how much longer will people buy that a ship this size is powered by fusion? I mean *really*."

Kino swept a broad stroke across his painting. "It's not up to us. Let's just focus on the little things, the things we can control." He was only a year and a half older, but Jed felt that he had more wisdom and kindness than anyone he had ever met. Kino scrutinized the canvas for a moment, then nodded. "Done."

Jed's breath caught as Kino turned the painting towards him.

It was a watercolored portrait of *him*. Jedrian. Looking upwards at the expanse of stars surrounding him. The colors of his skin blurring and blending with the sea of stars behind him, while he stared out from the painting with a look of knowing confidence.

"Kino...it's...*perfect*."

He pulled Kino into a tight hug, feeling like he would lose hold of this amazing man if he eased up even for a second. Jed pulled away, staring into Kino's brown eyes as he blushed.

Kino kissed Jed passionately, then whispered into his ear. "That's how I see you. My man of the stars. My beautiful, perfect man."

The two men began to wordlessly undress, unable to take their eyes off of each other. Jed pulled Kino to the couch, tracing his finger up his stomach, brushing over the faint scars from his top surgery, then wrapped his fingers in his wild hair and pulled him closer. "Marry me, Kino."

Kino laughed. "What?"

Jed couldn't stop grinning. "I know it's only been nine months, but I can't think of another person I'd want to spend the rest of my life with. I'm yours."

"You're mine, hmm...I like the sound of that."

"Is that a yes?"

"Of course it's a yes, you idiot!" Kin's laughter was like the twinkling of bells. Jed had never heard anything more beautiful.

The two men fell into each other, bodies merging, two souls becoming one.

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