

Darksun

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pages

Renegade Aris pulled her carryall from her shoulder and set it down on the floor at her feet. Around her, the corridors and vast halls were lined with rows of tiny lights that shone faintly with an eerie glow, giving her little enough to see by. Ahead of her, the huge mural window of the building's lobby overlooked the Great Scarp Canyon, darkened like the rest of her surroundings. Darkened in mourning, she supposed. In her memories, the bright floodlights still lit the canyon blindingly, as Christoph Aris had always insisted. Only her memories and the faintest of orange glows told her what lay beyond the reinforced glass of the window.

Rhea City seemed deserted. The hours of darksun that had descended on Saturn's largest moon long before she landed seemed to fit the mood of the city. The long journey back to her homeworld had long since inured her to the pain of facing her parents' deaths in person. She was relieved just to be off the cramped liner; home had never felt so good.

Aris flung her arms into the air, laughing aloud mirthlessly. She ran wildly midst the darkness, knowing the conservative Titan administrators would not have even moved the lobby's furniture--not in six years, not in sixty, if they could get away with it. She didn't want to think about the swell of pain and grief that even the darkened surroundings spawned in her soul.

Behind her, a voice shouted gruffly. "Lights!"

Light flooded the great hall. Aris immediately ceased her dancing and her shouting, squinting her eyes against the sudden brightness.

"What's going on here?"

Aris shouted in a voice as loud as his, "Dim, please!"

The lights dimmed to a level more tolerable to her slowly adjusting eyesight. She beheld the ancient watchman who had always been such a trouble to her as a child. He had been on Titan even longer than her

parents, and she had always believed that he had held some ill-will toward the later comers, but she knew that to be just baseless paranoia.

"Who are you?" he questioned through the dimness. A grizzled hand strayed warily near the stunclub at his belt.

She laughed at his failing memory, jumping up on the back of the couch nearest her. "It's me! I'm back, you old sheep! The prodigal Renegade has returned!"

The old man groaned in recognition. "'Tis a pox on all of Titan!"

She grinned at his archaic turn of phrase, leaping down off the couch. "I'm back for good. There's no more getting rid of me. You'd have to kill me first." She didn't even bother to wait for his expectedly sarcastic remark. Aris ran passed him and snatched up her carryall before tearing off down the corridor in search of her old apartments.

Behind her, a dim glow through the obscuring clouds of Titan's atmosphere signalled the coming of newsun, the reemergence of the nearest star from behind Saturn's eclipsing bulk. Slowly, the city began to stir.

Aris strolled lazily around the now sprawling city of Rhea. Sprawling by Titan standards, she supposed. Rhea was little more than a network of buildings linked and crosslinked by a huge web of enclosed catwalks and turborails. The domed cities of the inner solar system might never get this far out, but it was just as well. Titans took too much pride in not being too much like their less well-travelled brethren.

Despite the lobby's furniture, much had changed in the time she'd been gone, though the changes were more subtle than she might have expected. The efficiency of the fusion engines that propelled humans between worlds had improved dramatically, making it cheap enough for colonists to begin considering the Uranian system as a new homeworld. Old technologies had

sent her to Mars for her education. The new technology had not been able to return her to Titan in time to to save her parents. She had come home to a world that was, for her, empty; returning only long after the last of her family had vanished.