



Scene 4C: Shadow of the Hawk

Year 4403 IMC (in the Modern Calendar)

Location:

Taylor Orkney: In the commander's seat of Phoenix One, on the pad

Everyone else: Blue Phoenix Mission Control

C. J. Orkney decided to keep the bioweapon and tough things out. This made the push for Bery a lot harder. Still, it was a comfort to know the bioweapon was there as insurance, available for sale if things really did get unbearably difficult. Progress came slowly, but slow and steady work got results; the date for a possible moon launch approached.

This is supposed to be a full dress rehearsal for a flight to Bery, the large moon, but the whole thing seems jinxed. First, each new drop of the software has been late and buggy. This is the only time the team has been able to get through the checklists, with surprising efficiency; maybe this update is finally going to work. Second, Commander Heath is running a significant fever, and is now in isolation. These dress rehearsals are too expensive to postpone, which is why Taylor Orkney, the backup Commander, is sitting in the center seat. Finally, there've been a lot of rumblings in the Emeran Parliament against the Blue Phoenix efforts; some contracts have been cancelled or postponed, and there's talk of "stronger measures", whatever that might be.

Everyone is sitting in the normal, planned hold at T-15:00, running through a set of diagnostics verifying the software, when C.J.'s cell rings.

"*Reth!* Who do they think they are?" C.J. rarely swears, but is clearly angrier than anyone in Mission Control has seen in a very long time. After ninety long seconds, C.J. slams the phone onto the control desk, grabs the Mission Control mic, and starts to vent.

"Our beloved government has decided, in their infinite *rething* wisdom, to shut our launch down. I've been informed that they've mobilized half the armor in the area; they're going to have *rething* armored personnel carriers here in around twenty minutes. We've been ordered, *rething ordered*, to shut all operations down and turn over everything to the military. They're also planning to arrest everyone, despite the efforts of the best paid lawyers in Emera."

There are stunned looks for a brief moment, but everything continues flashing on the control panels, demanding attention.

"Mission Control, this is Phoenix One." You can hear the anger in Taylor's voice. "We are going to continue the rehearsal. We've put too much into this to stop now. *Reth* it to the stars, let's just light this candle and let them know what we think."

"Roger that," echo Cranmoor and Enfield, the other crew members of Phoenix One.

"No! *Reth* that," C. J. shouts, "it's not safe; shut it down." This is Blue Phoenix's last chance to launch -- but unless C. J. rethinks things, it looks like it's going to slip through all of your fingers.

This is the CEO's **decision** to make.

GM NOTE: If the two astronauts in Mission Control agree, they can override a decision by C.J. stopping the launch.