

Avery Bissel

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C. J. Orkney

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**Dr. Riley
Eckhart**

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Harper Aiken

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**Taylor
Orkney**

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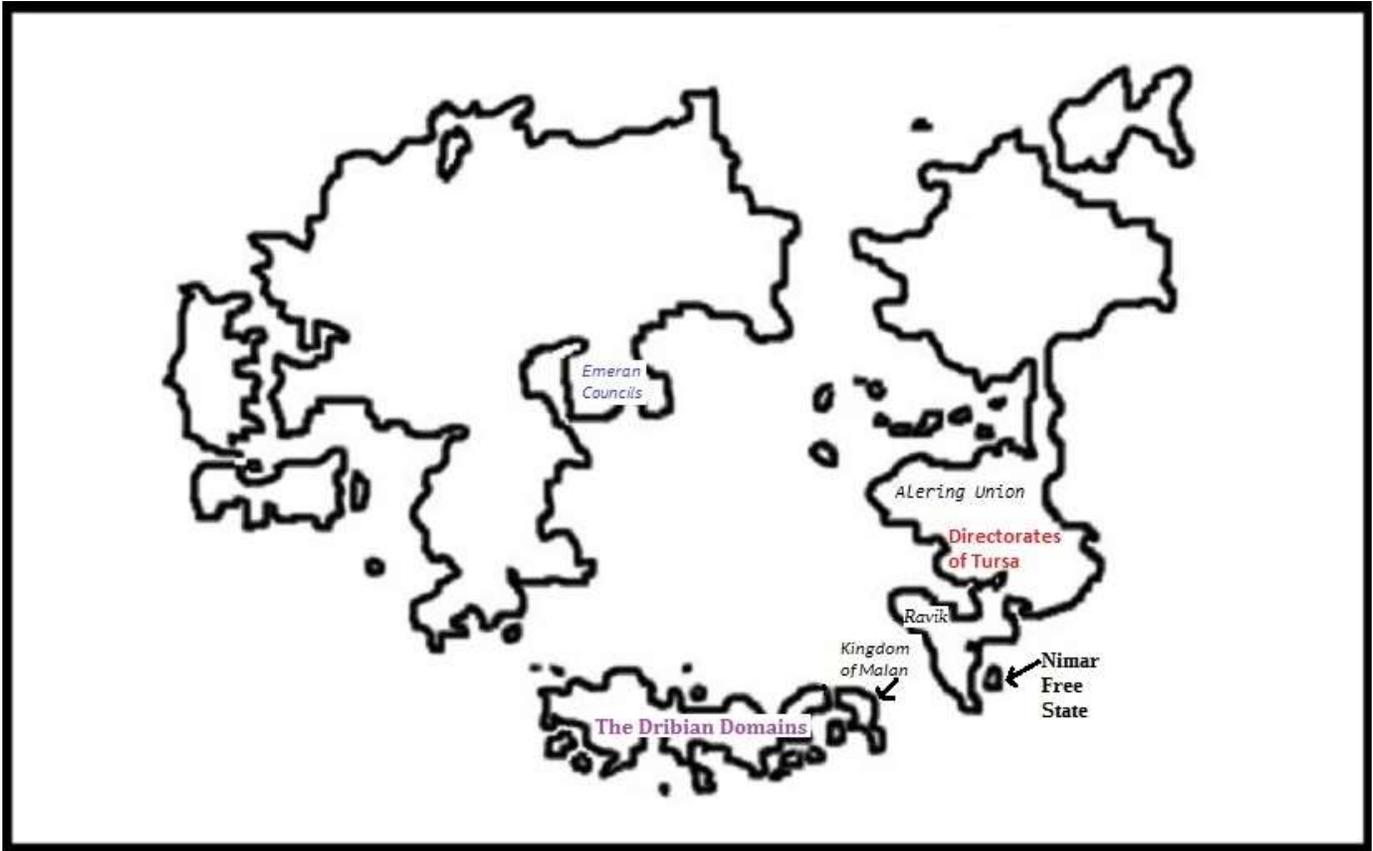
**Jamie
Whitlow**

— / —

Pat Gipp

— / —

Highlights of the World



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For the middle decades of the century, Emera was stuck in a middle-income trap. Its GDP per capita stayed about one-sixth that of Dribia, Tursa, and the other core developed countries. This has changed recently; with about 4% per capita annual growth since the early 4370s, Emera is now a booming emerging market. It is especially strong in industries related to science and technology, even as access to high-quality education remains unequal. Emera's economy is still a fraction of the size of the large core ones. It is still only a quarter as rich as Dribia and it is smaller (Dribia has 250 million people, Tursa 200 million). Emera does have faster population growth, and fewer, larger cities. Although the Dribian commercial capital, Onder, has by far a larger economy still, the Emeran capital, Sillbury, now has 30 million people, larger than any core city. Even the next few Emeran cities - the booming tech center of Eastshore, the manufacturing center of Cannhill, and the port city of Lionsdam - are larger than any Dribian city other than Onder.

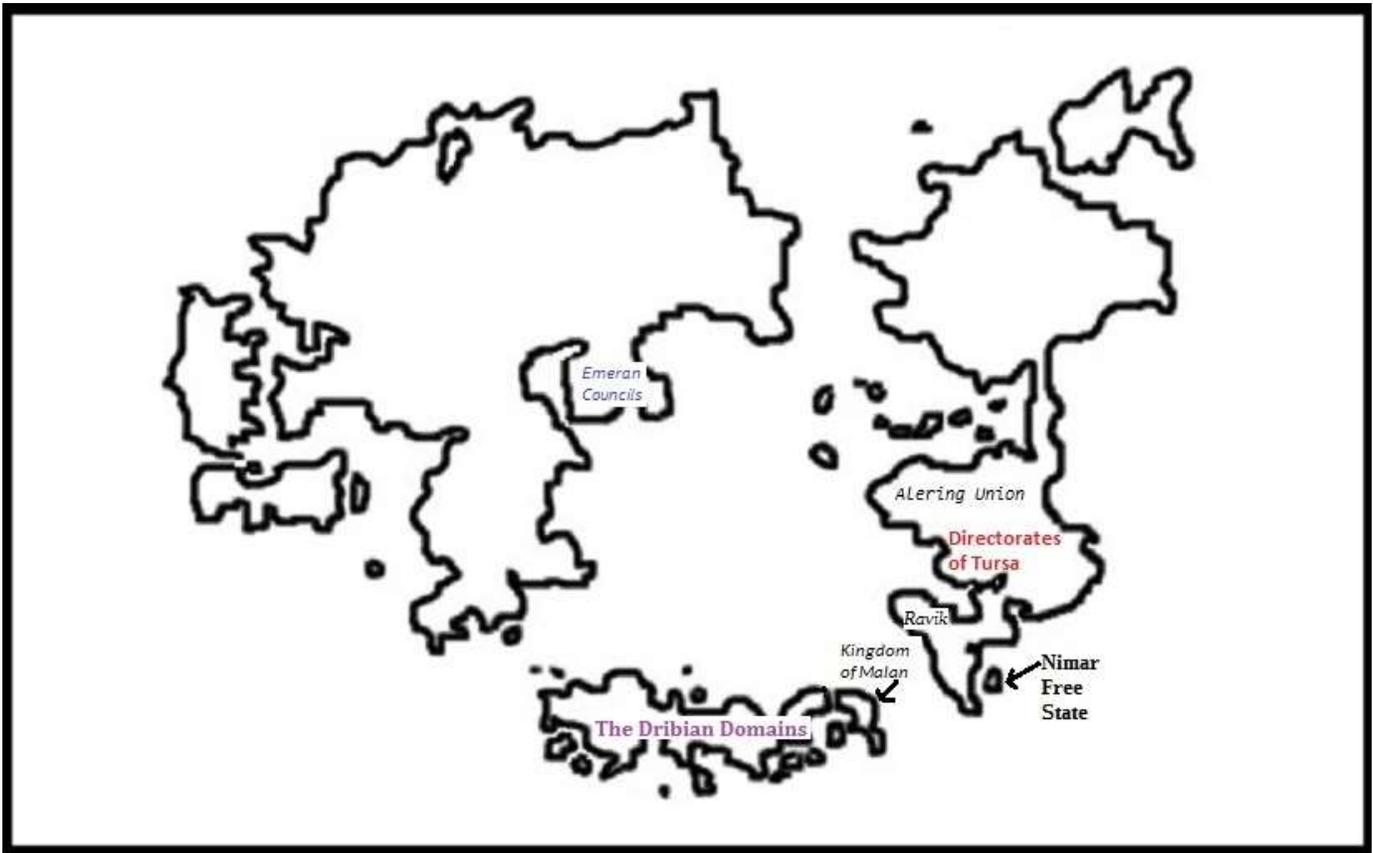
Emera's feelings toward its former colonial master are complicated, to say the least. Its elite culture has been deeply influenced by Dribia's, and the Emeran language underwent some Dribian influence. It is proud of its independence, however, and successfully maintained its neutrality during the cold war early this century. Emera has avoided the fate of smaller ex-colonies, whose resources and industries are usually owned by foreigners. Emera's industry is owned by Emerans. Emeran businesspeople are even investing abroad. It is a point of pride to some Emerans that Blue Phoenix and many other domestic corporations are buying and indigenizing Dribian technology, picking up on projects that Dribia, Tursa, and the other core countries have long abandoned.

Dribia, Tursa (no longer much of an enemy to Dribia), and smaller countries, including **Nimar**, **Ravik**, **Alering**, and **Malan** are the main rich countries. They have extensive trade ties, dwarfing their trade with such poorer countries as Emera.

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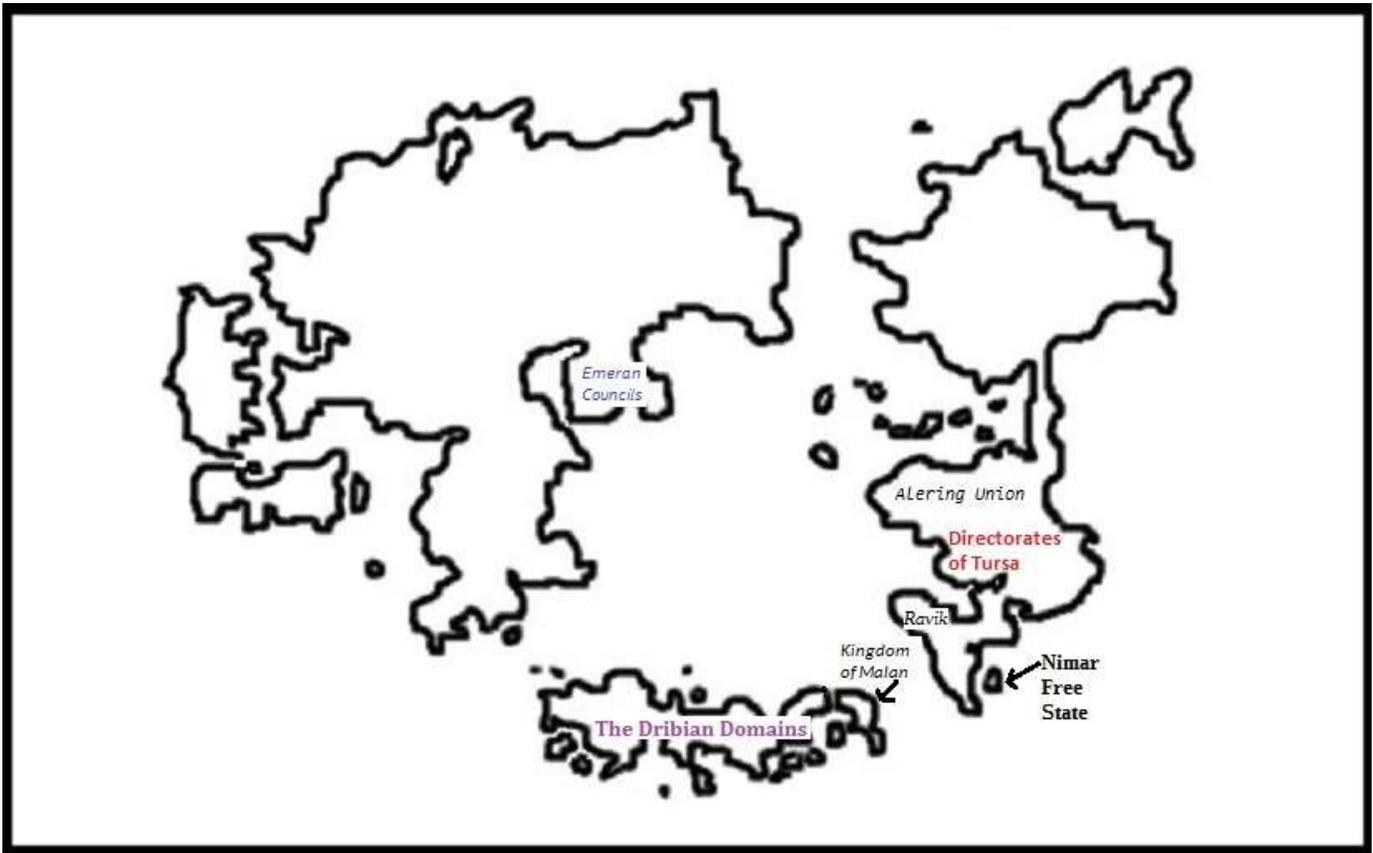
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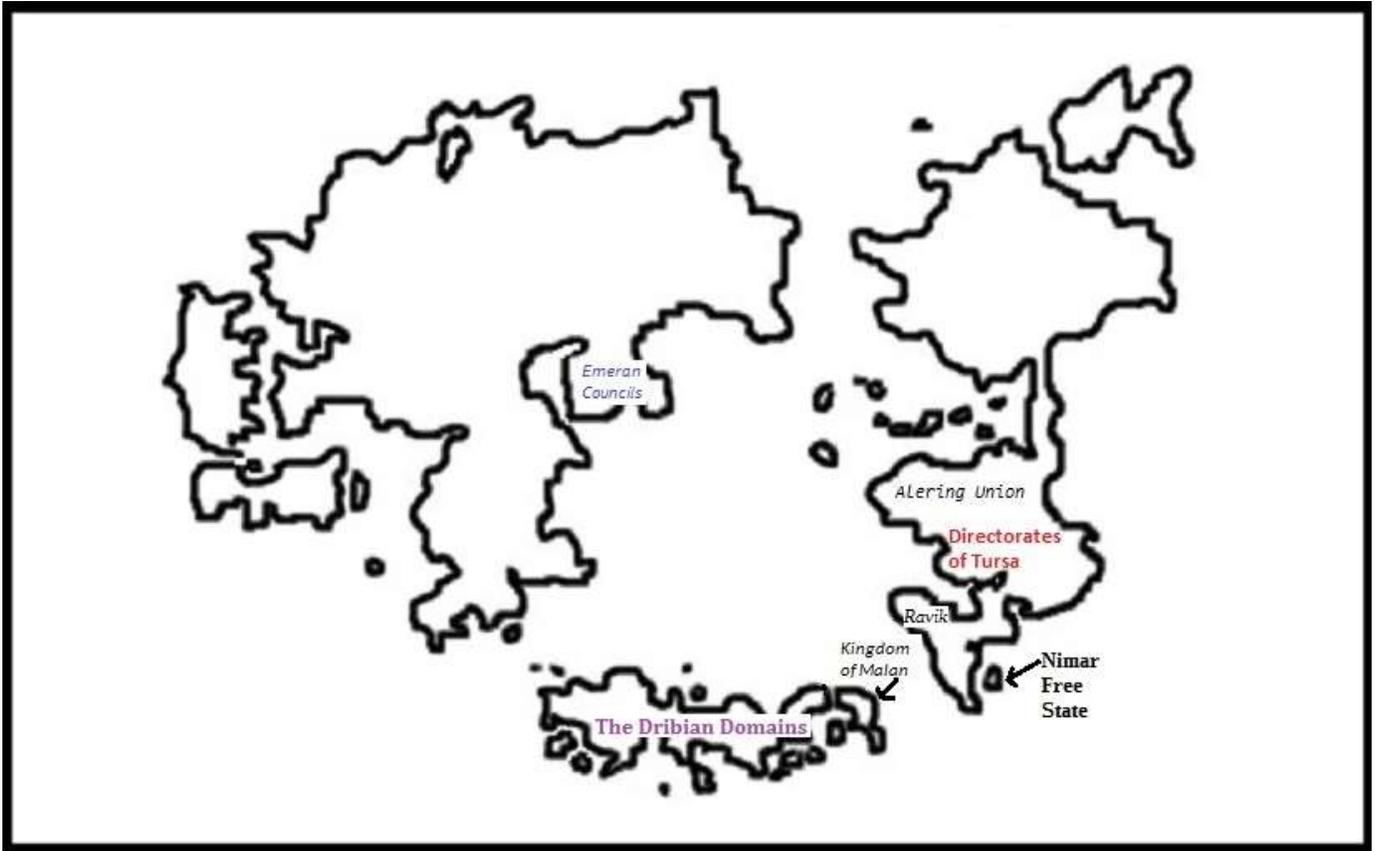
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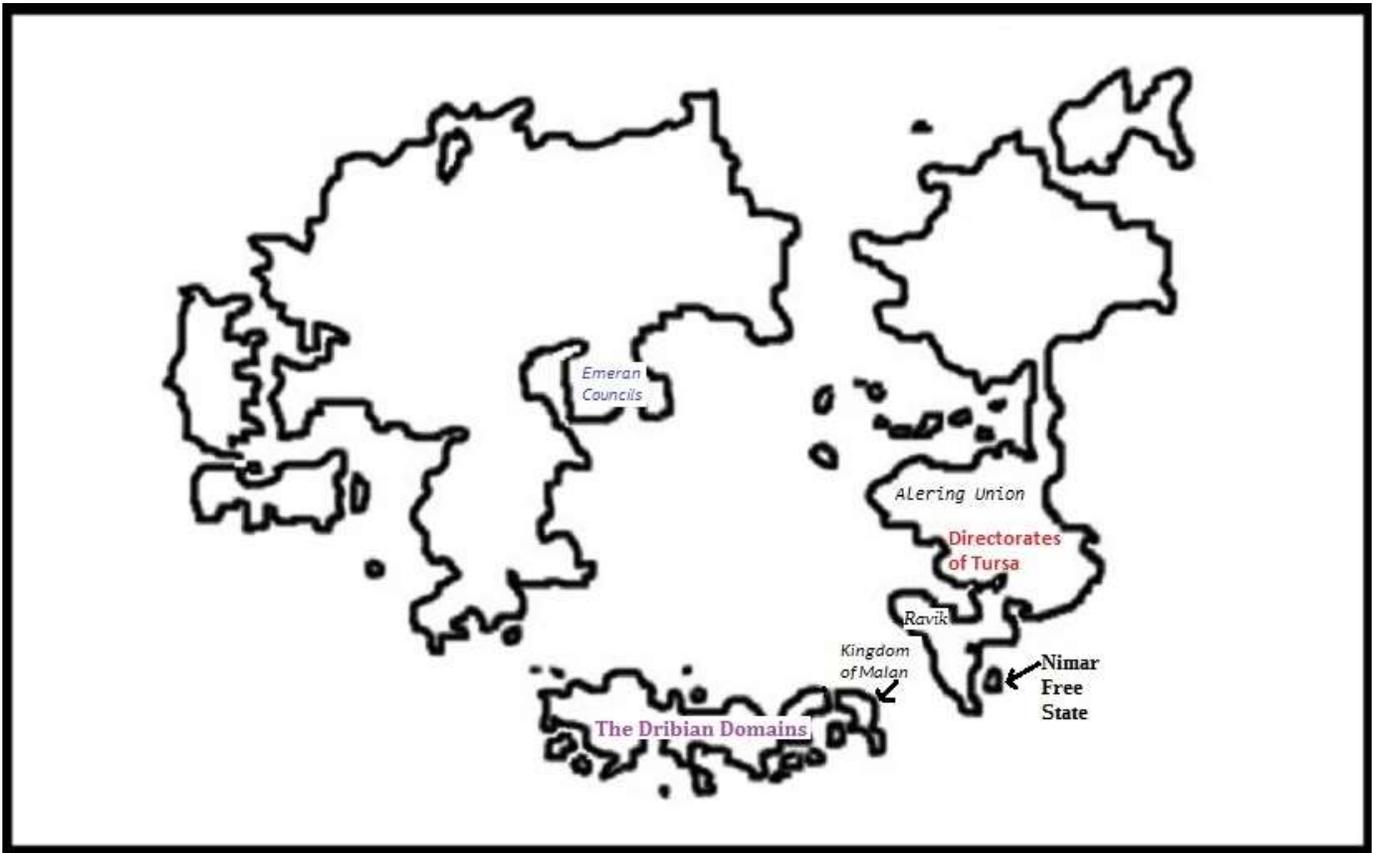
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Avery Bissel
Year of birth: 4365



You are preparing for the biggest moment of your life, and possibly the most important moment in Emera's history. You are one of the two candidates for the lead astronaut position for this upcoming mission, and, to be frank, you're a little scared. But, as always, when dealing with a tough decision, you will face it rationally and with a clear head.

You have aspired to excellence, but a humble version of excellence. Your background is in tech, first as a general hobby, then specializing in flying craft. You started as a drone hobbyist, but liked flying so much you became a pilot on real planes. It's not what people expect from those with your background, but you learn quickly and methodically, work hard when you care about something, and apply yourself. This extends to your personal life, too. As a lover, you were tender and appreciative. As a parent you've been stern but fair. And when Lee died, leaving you a single parent... well, you made do as best you could. You still have your ring, and you've not had any serious relationships since, but you're probably ready to move on. And now, your hard work and stoicism have paid off. You've made it to the final pool of candidates for this mission. Either you will get picked or you won't, but either way, you're going to fly, as long as this mission is a success.

If only the other current candidate wasn't **Harper Aiken**. What an insufferable jerk! Aiken is possibly the most egregious example of a kiss-ass ever. Every day in training, Aiken used every insincere attempt at schmoozing you have ever heard, and quite probably invented a few new ones. To say nothing of Aiken's habit of taunting you, seemingly whenever possible. You tolerate it, as good-naturedly as you can manage it, but you did almost blow up at Aiken one day. Aiken was talking about how great it was to be married, and something kind of snapped. You didn't yell, but you did tell Aiken to go away. You don't think Aiken even remembers the incident.

It's a pity **Jamie Whitlow**, one of the original, final candidates dropped out of the running due to family issues. And yet, you were never comfortable interacting with Whitlow. Jamie's spouse also became ill, but while Lee died, Whitlow's spouse lived, after taking that leave of absence. Could you have done as much, and have had Lee live? No, that is not a rational way to look at it - your situations were particular and personal; not parallel. The doctors tell you there was nothing they, or you, could do, and you believe them. But that doesn't quite quiet the lingering regrets.

The tests are nearly done, and despite the differences in your circumstances and personality, you and Harper both have top marks. What's left is an examination by **Dr. Riley Eckhart**, who will screen you and Aiken and make the final decision on who is in the first live launch. The doctor is impressive. You've read some of the papers the doc has written, and they are solid pieces of science. You are ready to show you are in control and clear of mind. Aiken will probably try to charm the doctor, but from what you understand, the doctor has an independent point of view. Despite working for Blue Phoenix, the doctor does not toe the line just to please the CEO, **C. J. Orkney**. You respect that. It gives you hope the doctor has practice seeing with unbiased eyes.

You also would not toe the line for the CEO. For all of Orkney's posturing about how grand it will be to go to space, you know Orkney knows little about science or technology, and can't predict the possible mistakes in a mission like this. You will smile and shake hands, but you won't sing your boss's praises, and you will do what the mission, not C. J. Orkney, demands. You've worked for Orkney your entire life - after high school you went to work for Orkney's tech firm, Eastshore Software Technology Solutions, which is how you were selected to be a test pilot. You're not really interested in working for another firm, but you still think Orkney has some definite blind spots.

For one thing, Orkney's kid is the mission controller (gee, go figure) - just another sycophant in an important position, jumped out of the astronaut pool into a position of authority. Yeah, **Junior** (actual first name is **Taylor**, but everyone just uses Junior) talks up a good game about trying to be independent from Orkney Senior, but you can see a touch of heartfelt doubt every time Junior disagrees with Senior. Dr. Eckhart is really your best hope to get the mission, and clearly the most neutral party.

Well, time to start...

Short bio:

Born 4365 in Corton

Educated in private schools, finished Sylvania High School 4383 *summa cum laude*

Electronics Specialist, Eastshore Software and Technology Solutions, 4383-4385

Developer, ESTS, 4385-4386

Drone Developer, ESTS, 4386-

Test Pilot, Blue Phoenix, 4391-

C. J. Orkney
Year of birth: 4342



You are C. J. Orkney, the founder and CEO of Blue Phoenix - the company that will take humanity back to the stars. Blue Phoenix will bring back hope to the world, and put Emera into the center of the world, where it belongs.

You've always been a leader. In high school, you won a grant for your school, Blighton Preparatory Academy. The other private schools in Emera have Dribian names and try to turn out kids who are just the way the elites of Dribia were fifty years ago; Blighton, instead wanted (and still wants) to create real leaders and entrepreneurs; what Emera needs in the future, not an echo of the past. It was ahead of its time, and you were ahead of the curve at school. At some of the technology classes, students assembled flashlights, and you sold them to a local merchant and then established a connection between the merchant and the school for future deals.

You met your partner, Dana, in Blighton Prep. Dana admired your initiative, and supported you every step of the way, giving up a job offer to be with you when you went to university for your M.B.A. Dana went to work later, as you worked at many industrial firms, moving to wherever you needed to be, as you applied yourself to get promotions.

In 4380, you left the corporate world to found your own business, the combined hardware-software startup Eastshore Software and Technology Solutions (ESTS). Using Emera's now-highly-skilled urban workforce and paying them low wages but retaining them with at-the-time-worthless stock options, you undercut many established core companies, offering not just low prices but innovative computer maintenance practices. You became a billionaire within five years, and even Dribian media noticed you.

Tech is nice, but the future is much grander. Four years ago, you used the profits from ESTS to found a new company, Blue Phoenix. You see, Dribia never went into space beyond Low Earth Orbit, and Tursa only went three times, to the moon Bery, plus regular jaunts to stations in geosynchronous orbit (Emera hadn't gone into space at all). The established powers stupidly neglected space exploration, despite the potential profits to be made from many possible applications: asteroid mining, better satellites, solar power; not to mention uplifting the human condition. That's what happens when you let government bureaucrats run everything.

You won't make that mistake. You are making Blue Phoenix the most important business in Emera. In the world, really. You will go to and beyond Bery. The technology's all there, you just need to assemble the perfect team for it.

You're proud of the team you built. Each of them is incredibly talented in their own fields, and many of them can also be leaders. You hope to help each of them reach greater heights.

Dr. Riley Eckhart is an excellent scientist. Dr. Eckhart thinks too much like an intellectual and not enough like a businessperson; someone like that could never create something new, but could work out the details, the little picture stuff, while you focus on the big picture. It's on Dr. Eckhart to choose who will be the test pilot for the first flight. You recruited three top-notch pilots for this, but unfortunately, the first choice, **Jamie Whitlow**, dropped out to spend more time with family (both partner and kids). Whereas your partner is supportive of you and your ambitions, Whitlow's unfortunately required Whitlow to be supportive.

You're left with two other pilots; either could be the first astronaut. **Avery Bissel** is incredibly bright. Bissel will never be a leader (Bissel has worked for you ever since finishing high school, repairing and then building devices for ESTS), but is a definite asset: meticulous, detail-oriented, a fast learner, and creative to boot. Bissel just can't make big decisions.

Harper Aiken, on the other hand, in addition to being really bright, shows real leadership skills, and acts like it. That kid knows how to use each individual person to their greatest potential. With hard work and your guidance, Aiken can be as successful as you are someday. Aiken seems to know this, and is like a younger, flying version of you, whereas Bissel is a younger, flying version of Dr. Eckhart.

Then there's your oldest child, **Taylor Orkney**. You see a lot of yourself in Taylor. Dana saw the potential in Taylor first, and convinced you that Taylor's best place is at the forefront of the space industry. You're not ashamed to admit you've pulled a few strings for your kids - at Blighton, and in their work career. You might as well use what power you have to help those who are deserving get ahead. But frankly, Taylor never needed it. The kid's a genius -- with top marks in reflexes, science, and judgement.

Taylor wants to go into space. You know this - and you indulged Taylor's ambitions as Taylor trained as a pilot and potential astronaut. After all, all knowledge is valuable. Taylor might even have been able to qualify as a top astronaut, but it would be a great waste of future talent - being an astronaut is dangerous, and Taylor's got broad potential, including leadership potential. That's why you promoted Taylor out of the test pilot pool, and into mission control where all that training and brilliance can be used to make decisions on the ground, without the risk of mischance or equipment failure costing you, and the world, one of its future stars. You'll use all the influence you have to save Taylor's excellent potential.

Short bio:

Born 4342 in South Eastshore

Educated in private schools, finished Blighton Academy 4360

B.A. University of Eastshore, 4363

M.B.A. Sillbury Institute of Management, 4365

Intern, Harrison Ironworks 4365-4366

Sales Associate, Harrison Ironworks, 4366-4367

Sales Branch Manager, Harrison Ironworks, 4367-4370

Marketing Eastern Region Manager, Preston Plastics, 4370-4374

Marketing Vice President, Thurston Holdings, 4374-4375

Marketing Vice President, Graysheet LLC, 4375-4380

Founder and CEO, Eastshore Software and Technology Solutions, 4380-

Board of Directors, Hawley-Linton Manufacturing, 4386-4390

Founder and CEO, Blue Phoenix, 4388-

Dr. Riley Eckhart
Year of birth: 4347



You're Emeran, but feel like a foreigner in your own country, and you always have. You speak three languages, which is perfectly normal for an educated Emeran, but your Emeran has a lot of learned Dribian words, and people notice. Not that your Dribian is perfect - you learned it in school and went on to medical school in Dribia for six years, but you've always spoken the language with a noticeable Emeran accent. You tried to flatten it, to speak Dribian with a good standard Eastern accent, but people always noticed, and treated you like a provincial hick.

In Dribia, you lived and went to school in Onder, the commercial capital of the country. Onder is smaller than Sillbury but a lot more bustling and cosmopolitan. There, the Dribians treated you like a foreigner; you lived in an Emeran immigrant community, where you were less socially isolated, but people around you kept asking you for uncomfortable favors. You'd help the other Emerans by talking to managers about giving them odd jobs at the hospital, or helping them fill out forms properly to get cheaper health insurance

After you graduated, you couldn't stay because of Dribia's immigration controls, and none of your Dribian classmates was sympathetic. Instead, you went to the Nimar National Hospital Infectious Disease Lab, where you had to quickly learn Nimarian to be able to interact with anyone outside your immediate work group.

You went back home to Emera after three years in Nimar. You've moved back and forth between working at the Dribian Ministry of Health, maintaining a private practice, and working for the corporate sector. For a few years you were a consultant for the Dribian Aerospace Company, which had offshored some of its labs to Emera, for the cheaper labor. (You made about a quarter of what your medical school classmates did.) You got a lot of experience developing regulations for g-forces acting on airplane passengers, which is how Blue Phoenix hired you.

It's also how people at home keep reminding you you're too foreign - even back in Sillbury, you worked for a Dribian company. It was just two years, but it's all the confirmation your friends from high school need whenever you disagree with them on something. *You're not like us.* They'd all kill to get that job, which paid a lot better than the domestic companies did, but since they didn't, they sniped at you.

Working at Blue Phoenix is problematic, to say the least. The boss, **C. J. Orkney**, is a nationally renowned entrepreneur, which just makes you lose confidence in anything else the media says. Orkney is very good at business, which as far as you can tell consists of telling people to do impossible tasks, and taking credit for it when those people figure out solutions to things that are possible. Orkney tries to run the company on a shoestring budget. Orkney appears to have learned this from all the corrupt politicians who have been running the country into the ground. The fact that you can't predict how much science will cost is beyond business leaders' comprehension. You've been very lucky so far, which means Orkney's been very lucky, but this luck will run out eventually. C.J.'s dream of low-cost space travel, as a comparative advantage for Emera, is just that: a dream.

You're more ambivalent about Orkney's oldest kid, **Junior** (technically **Taylor**, but everyone calls Junior Junior). Orkney pulled strings to get Junior a job at the company's Mission Control. Junior wants to go into space, and could potentially be good enough to go one day, just... not today. Junior's too young, too raw, and too spoiled. Fortunately, since space is dangerous, Orkney gave

you specific instructions not to let Junior go up. Instead, you're supposed to decide which of the company's two astronauts will go up for the test flight.

Everyone's psyched for the decision. Three astronauts - **Harper Aiken, Avery Bissel, and Jamie Whitlow** - began a rigorous training program a year ago. Whitlow was clearly both the most medically fit, despite being slightly older, and the most capable of the fast technical decisionmaking required of a solo mission. Unfortunately, Whitlow dropped out six months ago, for family reasons. Aiken has a partner but no children; Bissel has a child but no partner (Bissel's partner died); Whitlow has a partner and children.

So now you need to figure out who to recommend for the test flight, Aiken or Bissel. Aiken is ex-military and a braggart, the kind you are certain hates you for being educated and "soft," the way some of your friends put it. Aiken also has quicker reflexes and better intuition than anyone you know. Most people who are this vexing and condescending are useless idiots, but Aiken is actually good, and clearly capable of things you (and Orkney!) could never do.

Bissel is the exact opposite of Aiken. Bissel is methodical and calculating, and prefers team play to claiming credit; if Aiken hadn't thoroughly irritated Bissel, Bissel might well have dropped out to let Aiken be the first pilot. Bissel is smarter, and looks up to you in many ways. You lean toward naming Bissel rather than Aiken the test pilot... you're just not completely sure about it; Aiken might not be as smart, but faster reflexes can make up for a lot of technical experience.

You hate that the success of the test mission is on your shoulders. After all, both candidates are perfectly physically fit for the task, and you're deciding entirely based on who you think is more qualified as a pilot, which isn't really your subject of expertise. Orkney just thinks you're the expert, and you don't feel like giving the decision back to Orkney, who is not to be trusted (and who favors Aiken, who is the better schmoozer).

The one other person who could make the decision is Junior. You could ask Junior for input about the decision, but letting Junior decide... it would be hard to explain "it's either Aiken or Bissel, but certainly not you, because the boss thinks it's too dangerous for you to fly, and no matter how well you do in simulations, that's no substitute for real experience."

Short bio:

Born 4347 in Sillbury

Educated in private schools

B.Sc. Emeran Institute of Technology, Cannhill, 4368

M.D. University of Onder, 4374

Intern, Nimar National Hospital Infectious Disease Lab, 4374-4375

Lab Assistant, Nimar National Hospital Infectious Disease Lab, 4375-4377

Staff Scientist, Ministry of Health, 4377-4380

Private Practice, 4380-4382

Consultant, Dribian Aerospace Company, 4382-4384

Regulatory Advisor, Ministry of Health, 4384-4388

Senior Science Advisor, 4388-

Harper Aiken
Year of birth: 4365



These are great times to be you. Mustered out of the army air corps with honors after a standard tour of duty, married to a wonderful spouse, loved by everyone, and soon to be the lead astronaut on the upcoming mission, your life is just great. There's always been something magical about "the Space Program" days of yore, the kind of magic you've always aimed for, and you're glad it has finally come to Emera. And you're not just a wannabe, either. You are fit, dedicated, and cool under pressure. Once, when there was a fuel fire on the base back in the service, you didn't lose your head. You got over to the fire extinguishers and safely fought back the flames until the rest of the team arrived. You are bona fide hero material. All it takes is this one mission, and your name will be in the history books to show it!

So far so good. It's not a done deal yet, but **Jamie Whitlow** dropped out of the running due to some family issue. A rething pity; Whitlow was real nice, had the right stuff and everything. But with Whitlow gone, what kind of chance does **Avery Bissel**, the remaining candidate, have, compared to you? Bissel has great technical knowledge, and came with the boss, **C. J. Orkney**, from a previous company, but this kind of high profile mission needs a hero, not an electrical engineer who works out. Of course, Bissel will have some sympathy votes going, since Bissel has a kid but... well, Bissel's partner died, and... well, it's a sad case for Bissel. It says a lot that Bissel is in the running. But you've got the skills to pay the bills, and the will to succeed.

One possible hitch: **Dr. Riley Eckhart**. The good doctor will be examining both candidates and make the final decision. You have not known the doctor long, but one thing sticks in the craw: the good doctor seems to be fiercely independent, which makes it hard to determine the best approach to win the doctor over. Well, fortunately, you're nothing if not flexible.

Of course, the good doctor's gonna be listening to everyone's opinion, with Orkney Senior - C. J. - top of the list. You like C. J. Orkney, and Orkney likes you, so you're pretty sure Orkney favors sending you--but C. J. is too much of a pro to overrule the experts--and Eckhart is the expert in charge of this decision.

Another person to get on your side to talk you up is **Junior**. Junior (a.k.a., **Taylor Orkney**, but really, everyone uses Junior) is Mission Control, and, miracle of miracles, the child of Blue Phoenix chief C. J. Orkney. Coincidence? Who cares? The boss's kid is the boss's kid. Not to mention seriously likable; Junior's a good kid, and you've always gotten along. Heck, it's kind of touching how Junior's been trying to step out of Senior's shadow. You can respect that. In fact, a little positive reinforcement that Junior is doing well might be important to get the decision.

Well, time to face the music, get the interviews over with, and be officially chosen.

Short bio:

Born 4365 in Graywater

Educated in private schools, finished Sideron Academy 4383 *cum laude*

Served in the Army Air Force, 4383-4391, discharged with the rank of Lieutenant

Test pilot, Blue Phoenix, 4391-

Taylor Orkney ("Junior")

Year of birth: 4368



This is your big chance. You, Taylor, are in charge of Mission Control for the FIRST space mission in more than 50 years. You're going to prove to everyone that you deserve this promotion, deserve to work for Blue Phoenix in the first place. You've heard the rumors... that you only got this job because your last name is Orkney, like the CEO, because the CEO liked you... okay, it's true you're the CEO's eldest child. They call you Junior. They don't see that you have this job not because you're being favored by being the boss's child, but because...as Mission Control, you're going to prove you are the best person for this job. The best way to get the job you want is to succeed at the job you have.

C. J. frequently tells you that you were the best for the job. From C. J, it totally sounds like the kind of compliment a parent gives a child, though; not the kind of compliment a CEO gives a new hire. You called C. J. out on it. Hell, you call C. J. "C. J." because you want to separate your professional life and your familial life. You did NOT get this job because you're C. J.'s kid. Of course at home you don't call your parents "C. J." and "Dana," but at work, you try to avoid pointing out the obvious family connection.

You were put in charge of Mission Control because you make the best decisions. You make sure to carefully consider every single option. You never jump to conclusions. Hell, you schedule a full half hour in the morning to finalize which outfit you wear, but it's time spent to make the best damned choice - nice enough to be considered professional, but not so nice people might think you're referencing a connection to C. J. It's a very important decision, with repercussions on your career and your relationships. You don't underestimate the importance of decisions, and that's why you were promoted to Mission Control.

You were put in charge of mission control because you're a good judge of character. **Harper Aiken**, for example, is a pretty cool person. Harper may also call you Junior, but Harper's kind of cool about it. Harper also has a great intuition; Harper finds issues before they occur. Given you're out of the running for being the first person in space for half a century, you'd be willing to put in a good word for Harper.

You were put in charge of Mission Control because you are the most technical... well, maybe **Avery Bissel** is the most technical, but you have better intuition than Avery will. And Avery is also kind of a jerk. You're pretty sure that while some call you Junior as a joke, Avery does it out of pure malice. Technical skill can be taught, and you'll surely be more technical than Avery soon with all the studying you do. Lately, you've been talking a lot to **Dr. Riley Eckhart**: a REAL Scientist. You're slowly soaking up all the knowledge Riley has. You may not have much real-world experience, but you're willing to put in the work, you're smart, AND you have a good personality to go with it. That's another reason why you were promoted over Avery.

You were put in charge of mission control because... darn it you wish you weren't put in charge of mission control. *You want to go to space!!!!* Avery or Harper will get to go to space. Probably both of them, if this mission succeeds. Yes, you get to make decisions... but either Avery or Harper are going to be the first people in half a century to leave the planet... and you really wish you at least had a chance. You're a little pissed off that C. J. chose you for this job, effectively cutting you out of the running. People may say you've been favored by being the boss's kid, but really, it's a curse.

Short bio:

Born 4368 in Eastshore
Educated in private schools, finished Blighton Academy 4386
B.A. University of Lionsdam, 4389
M.A. University of Lionsdam, 4391
Mission Control, Blue Phoenix, 4391-



BLUE PHOENIX



Scene 1: Leaving the Nest

Year 4392 IMC (in the Modern Calendar)

Location:

A makeshift conference room, lined with file cabinets, deep in the bowels of the Eastshore warehouse serving as the headquarters for Blue Phoenix, Incorporated.

Blue Phoenix has had a couple of successful test launches, with their entire budget put into technology, and are ready to try a manned launch. If this goes well, they will be able to get more funding, some government contracts, and excellent press. If it goes poorly, the company is toast.

Astronauts Avery Bissel and Harper Aiken are the final candidates to be in the cockpit for the company's (and Emera's) first manned launch. CEO C.J. Orkney likes doing things aboveboard, so they have invited Astronaut Bissel and Astronaut Aiken to discuss which of them should be sent. Along with C.J. Orkney's only child, Taylor Orkney, who trained as an astronaut before being promoted directly to Mission Control, the CEO is meeting with Dr. Riley Eckhart, who is tasked with deciding which of the astronauts is best suited to being in the cockpit, given the stakes.

While the others will give advice, the final say belongs to Dr. Eckhart.



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Jamie Whitlow [after Bissel's death]

Year of birth: 4362



It feels weird to be back at the office. Six years ago, you were the top test pilot at Blue Phoenix. Everyone (including you) thought you were a shoo-in as Lead Astronaut when the position came up for grabs. You'd come from nothing - a working-class town in a desperately poor part of the country, public schools with truant teachers and ridiculously low graduation rates - but you made it by toughing it out and getting a whole bunch of lucky breaks. (If everyone could advance by toughing it out, there would hardly be any poor people around.) You became a commercial pilot, and then a test pilot, and got married at 23 and started having kids at 24. You had it all.

Then your luck ended. Your partner, Nat, got sick. Deathly sick. It broke your heart, but you quit your job to be with Nat, who thankfully pulled through, and made full recovery. You still manage consult for Blue Phoenix, but on support projects from home, with an occasional promotional appearance to bank on your past glories. It was a good life, and you had no regrets. Or did you?

Now, with the tragedy, you've been called back up to the mission, but as a member of mission control. With your experience, you will be advising **Taylor Orkney** (or, as everyone knows the mission control chief, **Junior**, since the elder **C. J. Orkney** is the boss) and carrying out any plan of action. This could actually be the best thing. You won't be on a dangerous space mission, where you could end up like **Avery Bissel** did, so you won't have to worry about leaving Nat alone. It's kind of a rotten deal, though, in a sense - it just reminds you of what you could have been, *for better or for worse*. But currently, you are in the place you need to be.

You're working with the last remaining astronaut from all those years ago, **Harper Aiken**. Aiken always looked up to you - and looked down on everyone else - but has matured into a more self-conscious, more measured person. You still have a good rapport, but this just makes you think of what could have been.

The Orkneys, Senior and Junior, still work here. Orkney Senior is still a *reth*, a supposedly self-made billionaire who still went to private school, but Junior at least recognizes where the family comes from and makes an effort to see other people's point of view. After all... it's Junior who made that decision to burn up the capsule in the atmosphere, killing Bissel. It was that or potentially unleashing a deadly virus on everyone. That was, of course, the right decision, one that not everyone is capable of. But still... you get uncomfortable whenever you see someone who got their job through nepotism.

Also, **Dr. Riley Eckhart** is still advising. Excellent. Doc has always been quick on the uptake, and can stand up to C. J. Orkney when it's necessary. Working with such a pillar of the company helps take a load off your shoulders.

Well, time to start another workday. Hopefully there will be some sort of progress made on the space program's recovery.

Short bio:

Born 4362 in Carbell

Educated in public schools, graduated in 4380

Pilot Trainee, Air Emera, 4380-4382

Pilot, Air Emera, 4380-4388

Test Pilot, Air Emera, 4388-4391

Test Pilot, Blue Phoenix, 4391-4392

Consultant, Blue Phoenix, 4392-

Jamie Whitlow [after Aiken's death]

Year of birth: 4362



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You're working with the last remaining astronaut from all those years ago, **Avery Bissel**. Bissel and you didn't always hit it off, possibly because your spouse lived while, Bissel's, unfortunately, died years long before you ever met. It might just have been a sore spot.

The Orkneys, Senior and Junior, still work here. Orkney Senior is still a *reth*, a supposedly self-made billionaire who still went to private school, but Junior at least recognizes where the family comes from and makes an effort to see other people's point of view. After all... it's Junior who made that decision to burn the capsule up in the atmosphere, killing Aiken. It was that or potentially unleashing a deadly virus on everyone. That was, of course, the right decision, one that not everyone is capable of. But still... you get uncomfortable whenever you see someone who got their job through nepotism.

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Short bio:

Born 4362 in Carbell

Educated in public schools, graduated in 4380

Pilot Trainee, Air Emera, 4380-4382

Pilot, Air Emera, 4380-4388

Test Pilot, Air Emera, 4388-4391

Test Pilot, Blue Phoenix, 4391-4392

Consultant, Blue Phoenix, 4392-



Pat Gipp [after Bissel's death]

Birth Year: 4362

C. J. Orkney has just fired Blue Phoenix's medical/scientific advisor, **Dr. Riley Eckhart**. Serves Dr. Eckhart right, that traitor - you looked at everyone's bios, of course, and Dr. Eckhart not only went to medical school in Dribia, but even wanted to stay there! People who think of Emera as a second-choice country are the reason why the country's in such a mess. Well, C.J.'s use of Dribian sympathizers like Dr. Eckhart failed, and now you will be able to direct Blue Phoenix's space program for the needs of the public.

It's about time for you to do something this big, too. The government's a cesspool of bureaucrats who don't understand your worth, and stick you with jobs in which ten people all do the same thing, watching one another so that nobody can show initiative. Well, you're going to show initiative. You're going to watch C.J. closely to make sure there are no shenanigans this time, and you're going to show initiative whenever C.J. makes a bad decision.

You've looked at the remaining employees' records, and they're all positive. Too bad the company has been in such dire straits, but oh well - it's just bad luck, and if the company turns itself around, you'll still get the credit you so richly deserve.

Taylor Orkney is C.J. Orkney's only child, universally called **Junior**. Seems competent, although you doubt Junior would've gotten to be mission control without that family name. You will not berate Junior in C.J.'s presence, unless you're deliberately trying to assert your (and the government's) authority over C.J.'s. But it's clear Junior had some involvement in the accident in 4395, in which the test pilot **Avery Bissel** died.

Too bad Bissel died - such a promising career nipped in the bud because of Junior (or maybe even C.J.!). The remaining test pilot from that era, **Harper Aiken**, is a ladder-climbing *reth*. Aiken is a good pilot, but not a great one. One of the people whose main skill is getting people to like them.

The remaining astronaut, **Jamie Whitlow**, was a rising star before dropping out in 4392, and came back in 4398 after Bissel died. Whitlow has been a star since, juggling family and career. You find Whitlow impressive, but wonder if this is too good to be true. Even if all is as it seems, Bissel would have been so much better...

Short bio:

Born 4362 in Sillbury

Educated at private schools, graduated Auron Academy in 4380

Regulatory Advisor, Ministry of Transport, 4380-4389

Regulatory Advisor, Ministry of Health, 4389-4393

Senior Regulatory Advisor, Ministry of Science and Technology, 4393-



Pat Gipp [after Aiken's death]

Birth Year: 4362

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It's about time for you to do something this big, too. The government's a cesspool of bureaucrats who don't understand your worth, who stick you with jobs where ten people all do the same thing, watching one another so that nobody can show initiative. Well, you're going to show initiative. You're going to watch C. J. closely to make sure there are no shenanigans going on, and you're going to show initiative whenever C. J. makes a bad decision.

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Avery Bissel, Aiken's colleague from before the accident, is methodical and thorough. You have looked through all relevant files, both from Blue Phoenix and from the employees' past, and have been unable to find anything negative on Bissel. On the contrary, Bissel impresses you, and reminds you of how both public and private workers should act: there really is no *i* in *team*.

Jamie Whitlow was a rising star before dropping out in 4392, and came back in 4398 after Aiken died. Whitlow has been a star since, juggling family and career. You find Whitlow impressive, but are wondering if this is too good to be true.

Short bio:

Born 4362 in Sillbury

Educated at private schools, graduated Auron Academy in 4380

Regulatory Advisor, Ministry of Transport, 4380-4389

Regulatory Advisor, Ministry of Health, 4389-4393

Senior Regulatory Advisor, Ministry of Science and Technology, 4393-



Pat Gipp [after no deaths]

Birth Year: 4362

C. J. Orkney has just fired Blue Phoenix's medical/scientific advisor, **Dr. Riley Eckhart**. Serves Dr. Eckhart right, that traitor - you looked at everyone's bios, of course, and Dr. Eckhart not only went to medical school in Dribia, but even wanted to stay there! People who think of Emera as a second-choice country are the reason why the country's in such a mess. Well, C.J.'s use of Dribian sympathizers like Dr. Eckhart failed, and now you will be able to direct Blue Phoenix's space program for the needs of the public.

It's about time for you to do something this big, too. The government's a cesspool of bureaucrats who don't understand your worth, who stick you with jobs where ten people all do the same thing, watching one another so that nobody can show initiative. Well, you're going to show initiative. You're going to watch C. J. closely to make sure there are no shenanigans going on, and you're going to show initiative whenever C. J. makes a bad decision.

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Harper Aiken is a ladder-climbing asshole. Aiken is a good pilot, but not a great one. One of the people whose main skill is getting people to like them.

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Educated at private schools, graduated Auron Academy in 4380

Regulatory Advisor, Ministry of Transport, 4380-4389

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Senior Regulatory Advisor, Ministry of Science and Technology, 4393-

[Scene 3B]

Jamie Whitlow

You just got back into space flight, but now things may be ending. Of course C. J. Orkney should go it alone. So what if it's hard?

[Scene 3C]

Jamie Whitlow

You just got back into space flight, but now things may be ending. Of course C. J. Orkney should go it alone. So what if it's hard?

Wait a second... Did you hear that right? A bio-WHAT?

[Scene 4A]

Jamie Whitlow

Reth this! If Heath was sitting in the Commander's seat, you'd launch this bird, just to declare your disgust with the corrupt idiots in Parliament. They've been making it harder and harder on Blue Phoenix, even as the company has been taking bigger and bolder leaps into the void. The payoff to Emera has been profound, creating jobs and new technologies, enriching those greedy morons in the Parliament and their *reth*ing friends.

Instead, Taylor Orkney sits in the Commander's seat - not a surprise for the boss's kid. You'd bet that the switch would become permanent, if Heath stays on the sick list for another two or three days. Years of C.J.'s protection meant that Taylor didn't wash out, despite there being better candidates; grudgingly, you have to admit that Taylor has learned some competency with maturity.

The thing is, this is a full dress rehearsal of every mission system prior to launch. Phoenix One could fly, if systems aren't shut down at the end of the countdown. Everyone in the control room and the support stations around the world are practicing today. Everyone has simulated the post-launch procedures repeatedly for months, from the moment of ignition until the moment the Phoenix One Commander steps onto the surface of Bery. The primary crew - Heath, Cranmoor, and Enfield, have been working together for a year for this flight. The backup crew - Orkney, Edwards, and Hewitt, have been working just as hard and just as long, prepared to step in as needed. All of these astronauts are ready to fly.

All it would take is the two astronauts in Mission Control agreeing to not stop the launch procedure. Phoenix One could fly today.

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

[Scene 4B]

Jamie Whitlow

Reth this! If Heath was sitting in the Commander's seat, you'd launch this bird, just to declare your disgust with the corrupt idiots in Parliament. They've been making it harder and harder on Blue Phoenix, even as the company has been taking bigger and bolder leaps into the void. The payoff to Emera has been profound, creating jobs and new technologies, enriching those greedy morons in the Parliament and their *rething* friends.

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All it would take is the two astronauts in Mission Control agreeing to not stop the launch procedure. Phoenix One could fly today.

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

[Scene 4C]

Jamie Whitlow

Reth this! If Heath was sitting in the Commander's seat, you'd launch this bird, just to declare your disgust with the corrupt idiots in Parliament. They've been making it harder and harder on Blue Phoenix, even as the company has been taking bigger and bolder leaps into the void. The payoff to Emera has been profound, creating jobs and new technologies, enriching those greedy morons in the Parliament and their *reth*ing friends.

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[Scene 4A]

Pat Gipp

This launch *must not continue*. The Tursans, it turns out, know that Blue Phoenix had access to the bioweapon. If Blue Phoenix starts sending off more rockets, the Tursans will assume those rockets contain airborne bioweapons. The Emeran government expects you to help Blue Phoenix do what's right here. That is absolutely not flying. Not right now.

But... if Blue Phoenix doesn't set off a rocket right now, will it end the Emeran space program forever? That... would be less than ideal. Blue Phoenix has been the pride of Emera since it started on these missions...

[Scene 4C]

Pat Gipp

Blue Phoenix is in possession of a bioweapon. They refuse to go through the proper channels and send it to the Emeran government. Orkney did, at least, fire the traitor, but you're still not sure you'd trust Blue Phoenix with paperwork, let alone a launch. You must make sure Orkney makes the responsible decision here.

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[Scene 4D]

Pat Gipp

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Scene 2: A Broken Wing (Control Room)

Year 4395 IMC (in the Modern Calendar)

Location:

Blue Phoenix Mission Control

The mission was to go to station IMS-10 (abandoned by Tursa sixty years ago, and therefore available for salvage), a small station still in geosynchronous orbit. The crew of the Falcon IV capsule, which includes Blue Phoenix's first spacefaring astronaut as well as Mission Specialists Kevin Isley and Barbara Williams, were sent there with an eye towards assessing repairs, and the hope of turning the IMS-10 into a base for further missions.

It was going well. And then it was not - really not: Kevin Isley is dead. Barbara Williams is unconscious. Both Barbara and the last remaining astronaut are in the Falcon IV capsule, and have declared quarantine.

The surviving astronaut is still in communication and has reported the accidental release of a bioweapons agent; the IMS-10 was apparently a secret Tursan bioweapons research facility. This led to the death of Mr. Isley and the illness of Ms. Williams. If true, this means the capsule may be compromised. Quarantine procedures in place would dictate the destructive sterilization of the Falcon IV capsule, overriding autopilot safety controls so that the capsule burns up on re-entry.

At and as Mission Control, Taylor Orkney used the remote auxiliary control systems to detach the Falcon IV capsule from the station and called an all hands meeting for input on the decision. And as per pre-established protocol, this is **Mission Control's call**.

[CHARACTER SPECIFIC INFORMATION FOLLOWS]

Avery Bissel

Emotions run high in emergencies. Procedures are in place so people will make the right decisions in times of crisis. It's an unfortunate situation, and Aiken's irresponsible as all hell, but you can't help but feel a little more respect for Aiken's pushing for the right call. Hopefully, Junior will see it that way, too. Even someone who got here through nepotism must see this - right?



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[CHARACTER SPECIFIC INFORMATION FOLLOWS]

C. J. Orkney

Kevin Isley was a good person, and you feel the pang of the loss. And Barbara sick? And the third astronaut pushing essentially for a heroic suicide?

The Falcon IV capsule would be a very expensive loss. You know the procedures - of course you know them. And it's ultimately Junior's call, even to call to override those procedures.

You don't know if you can write them off like this. An ostrich in the dirt still breathes air.



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[CHARACTER SPECIFIC INFORMATION FOLLOWS]

Dr. Riley Eckhart

There's an old, Tursan bioweapons facility up over in the IMS-10?! Well... if Junior decides to let them land, you would like to take a look at what's there. Yes, it goes against quarantine procedure, but it's people's lives, and some of the procedures and regulations you saw when you worked for the Ministry of Health were put there by idiots. It's all on Junior to decide - no real rules here, at least none that deserve any respect. But if the decision is to let the Falcon IV land, you have some thoughts on how to maintain the health of your not-yet-deathly-ill astronaut and reverse the progress of the disease in Barbara Williams - a "bioweapon" isn't magic. Everyone who's not yet dead may yet live.



Scene 2: A Broken Wing (Control Room)

Year 4395 IMC (in the Modern Calendar)

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Blue Phoenix Mission Control

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[CHARACTER SPECIFIC INFORMATION FOLLOWS]

Harper Aiken

It should have been you up there. You'd have solved the crisis... or would you? Bissel's such a pushover, but you really can't imagine what it's like. Nobody deserves it. You must admit, Bissel is not completely useless. For one, you're never as careful. *Reth*. Still, there's a right decision, and that's to let the ship burn. It's on Junior to decide. Hopefully, the decision will be the right one.



Scene 2: A Broken Wing (Control Room)

Year 4395 IMC (in the Modern Calendar)

Location:

Blue Phoenix Mission Control

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[CHARACTER SPECIFIC INFORMATION FOLLOWS]

Taylor Orkney

What to do? Those are your friends and colleagues up there. And not only that, but also the Falcon IV capsule is really important to the future of Blue Phoenix. But, overriding the quarantine procedures risks more lives. No matter what people say the right call is, it's a terrible decision either way.



Scene 2: A Broken Wing (Falcon IV Capsule)

Year 4395 IMC (in the Modern Calendar)

Location:

In orbit, in the Falcon IV capsule

The mission was to go to station IMS-10 (abandoned by Tursa sixty years ago, and therefore available for salvage), a station still in orbit. The IMS-10 was a complicated structure built from several capsules and modules. Your mission was to assess IMS-10 with an eye towards repairs, thereby opening the possibility of using it for other missions in the future. You were in charge of the mission, and the success would be yours, even though it was not a solo mission.

You and the other two mission members - Kevin Isley and Barbara Williams - successfully launched, achieved the plotted geosynchronous orbit, reached the station, and docked the Falcon IV capsule. After several hours of hard work, which went well, just like the training simulations, you verified that the station seal still held against vacuum, and showed only superficial damage.

It was some time after entering the twisty, cramped passages of the station that disaster struck... After cracking the seals of your helmets, Kevin Isley began sweating profusely and then vomited. And then worse - he died quickly... and it was really, really ugly. Looking in the cramped space of the station, near where he died, through the mist of Kevin's blood, you saw telltale biohazard labels - so terribly easy to overlook in one of the darkened nooks of the station. The Tursan labeling indicated this was a bioweapon facility. Alarmingly, it seemed to still contain active agents, even after being in vacuum for nearly sixty years.

Barbara complained of nausea, and you evacuated back to the Falcon IV with her, as per protocol. You weren't going to leave her behind. She fell unconscious.

You are starting to feel nauseous. How could the Tursans have done this without anyone knowing?

You returned to the capsule to radio your status report to Blue Phoenix Mission Control. They have activated the overrides and detached the capsule from the station. Ordinarily, the Falcon IV's autopilot would bring you back safely. It's possible you can be treated... but it's possible for you to be the vector for a plague - even for your dead corpse to be such a vector. You and your suits have been in contact with whatever toxin is in the station. That means the Falcon IV capsule must be considered compromised.

Even at the cost of your lives, established quarantine procedures demand the capsule be destroyed. There is no self-destruct button on the capsule - that sort of thing is only for cheesy late-night movies. Heck, you can't even deliberately pilot the ship to its own destruction. But, Blue Phoenix Mission Control could override the safeties on the autopilot and burn you up in the atmosphere.

You are still conscious and in radio communication with ground control. If they're stupid enough to bring you back, you're not opposed to living. Maybe they can even do something for Barbara. It would be the stupid, irresponsible choice. Not even you are worth it. But it's **Mission Control's call.**



Scene 3A: Cuckoo in the Nest

Year 4398 (in the Modern Calendar)

Location:

In a large, theater-style Blue Phoenix conference room, with 3d-projection equipment and the latest communications gear.

In 4395, Taylor decided to keep the astronauts alive. The Falcon IV capsule and its passengers made it to the landing point under autopilot. Kevin Isley's body, unfortunately, was left behind on the IMS-10. Under strict quarantine, Dr. Eckhart managed to halt the bioweapon's progress in both survivors. Barbara Williams was affected worse by far, and ended up retiring from Blue Phoenix on medical disability. The mission commander got a clean bill of health and returned to full duty. Not only that, Dr. Eckhart also saved a sample of the bioweapon for the company's R&D department. And that was that: no widespread plague.

This situation has been stable for the last three years, despite questions by investors and customers on the exact circumstances of Kevin Isley's death. These questions have mostly been diverted with some vague, dissatisfying comments about "technical issues." Blue Phoenix doesn't want the existence of the disease to be known publicly; that might cause panic and draw unwanted, negative attention.

Last night, the media was afire with the news: Tursa has launched a massive, vintage behemoth of a rocket, a class of vessel that has not flown in nearly seventy years. This morning, the vessel docked with IMS-10, and within an hour, IMS-10 was said to be open, operational, and occupied. Tursa has re-entered the space race with a vengeance, and Blue Phoenix must step up the tempo of their efforts, or resign themselves to playing second fiddle.

C. J. Orkney has called this meeting to discuss how to respond. Ramping up Blue Phoenix's program to keep up is likely to require substantial extra funding. And frankly, there isn't much left in the coffers.

In the end, it's **C. J. Orkney's call**. C. J. Orkney built the empire from nothing, and if you're going to sell out to anyone, C. J. Orkney is going to be the one to smile and shake their hand.



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[Scene 3A]

Avery Bissel

It's a hard decision.

Emera has never had a bioweapon program. Most people in the military are every bit as pompous and nowhere near as competent as Aiken. Even Orkney looks good in comparison to the Emeran military.

On the other hand... laws are laws. Keeping a bioweapon around can't be legal. There's a point beyond which Blue Phoenix can't just choose to ignore "inconvenient" regulations the way C. J. Orkney's old tech company, ESTS, did.

And besides, the company needs the money desperately, and you can't imagine losing Blue Phoenix.

On the third hand, maybe we've taken enough risk: stay the course, do the work, and trust things will work out somehow.

[Scene 3A]

C. J. Orkney

You're caught between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, continuing to progress on your own will make it hard for Emera to remain at the forefront of the space race - no matter how smart and brave Blue Phoenix's employees are, a private research firm is always going to have access to far less money than any government agency. You've been clean so far... maybe it's time to face reality and reassess whether your standards are too high.

On the other hand, you know a deal might be too good to be true. The easier choice now, that leads to big regrets further down the line?

And then again, it would be worth it if you could get to a moon. Once the firebird grasps the apple, nothing can hold it down.

[Scene 3A]

Dr. Riley Eckhart

There is another option. You, personally, have some really solid contacts in Dribia that C. J. Orkney doesn't realize you have, including in the Dribian government. Dribia can't possibly be happy with Tursa's new space efforts. You can get what will look like top Dribian tech companies to buy significant shares in Blue Phoenix.

And they'd pay even more for a sample of the Tursan bioweapon - you could probably reproduce enough of the bioweapon for any and all interested customers, if requested. As for the Emeran military - the Dribian military makes whatever Emera has look like the sad post-colonial joke it is.

Technically, selling the Dribian investors any share of a company with defense contracts is against the law. But it's worth it. The company C. J. Orkney started before Blue Phoenix, ESTS, had to circumvent the law a few times. But Blue Phoenix doesn't have that clout, and C. J. Orkney may need to actually bribe regulators; you certainly know of several recent cases in which the laws against foreign ownership of defense contractors went conspicuously unenforced. It's worth the risk; it's a manageable problem. And if it came out, the right people in Dribia would likely be very grateful, especially with Tursa acting so aggressively.

Traitor. You can hear everyone's voice in your head. But it's the right choice. Dribian "private" backers are still far better people than your own military, and you're the only person who can guarantee those connections pan out.

[Scene 3A]

Harper Aiken

You still have friends in the Army Air Force, back from when you were a pilot and a Lieutenant. Some of them have quietly approached you under the table, supposedly at the behest of even higher ups: Despite efforts to keep it a secret, they have somehow heard rumors of what Blue Phoenix found on IMS-10. Their offer seems pretty generous - easily enough to fund missions to the moons and beyond, in the form of under-the-table money, lucrative military contracts, and access to government research. All you have to do is convince C. J. Orkney to transfer the bioweapon to the Emeran Army...

For starters... a bioweapon belongs in the hands of the military, not a private company, no matter how awesome that company is. As far as you know, Emera has never had a bioweapon program. But it's a national matter now.

Also... the money will keep Blue Phoenix in business. You admire Orkney for having gotten this far, but there's a limit to everything. Blue Phoenix is Emera's chance to keep up with the renewed Tursan program. Tursa was an even worse colonial power to its imperial subjects than Dribia was!

Where Dribia dithers and Tursa plods, Emera will step up and show everyone how it's done. Emera will win, Blue Phoenix will win, and *you* will win.

[Scene 3A]

Taylor Orkney

Having made the decision to bring the bioweapon back, even indirectly, you feel responsible for it. In the hands of a military, you fear what could happen. You don't want to feel responsible for... whatever any military decides to do with this thing. As far as you know, Emera has never had a bioweapons program.

You hope C. J. will make the right decision here. You love the Blue Phoenix space program more than almost anyone, but you'd rather see it die than to see people die in its name.



Scene 3B: Cuckoo in the Nest

Year 4398 (in the Modern Calendar)

Location:

In a large, theater-style Blue Phoenix, Inc. conference room, with 3d-projection equipment and the latest communications gear.

In 4395, following pre-established procedure, Taylor decided to let those in Falcon IV die to prevent the possibility of a bioweapon plague. Kevin Isley's body was left behind on the IMS-10. The Falcon IV capsule burned upon re-entry, in an unavoidably public and shocking manner. The video of the astronauts' funeral, with empty caskets, grieving spouses, and weeping children, left an indelible image connected with Blue Phoenix in the minds of the Emeran public. With no concrete proof about what happened, worldwide media - particularly the Tursan media - decided it was technical incompetence and gross mismanagement that led to the casualties. Attempts at alternate explanations were taken as a cover-up.

Business slowed. Investment dried up. As the months passed, the situation stabilized. As a monopoly in the space industry, Blue Phoenix could ultimately recover.

And then last night, the media was afire with the news: Tursa has launched a massive, vintage behemoth of a rocket, a class of vessel that has not flown in nearly seventy years. This morning, the vessel docked with IMS-10, and within an hour, IMS-10 was said to be open, operational, and occupied. Tursa has re-entered the space race with a vengeance, and Blue Phoenix must step up the tempo of their efforts, or resign themselves to playing second fiddle.

C. J. Orkney has called this meeting on how to keep Blue Phoenix's ambitious agenda for space, including the manned moon mission. It would likely require substantial extra funding from somewhere. But where?

In the end, it's **C. J. Orkney's call**. C. J. Orkney built Blue Phoenix from nothing, and if you're going to sell out to anyone, C. J. Orkney is going to be the one to smile and shake their hand.



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[Scene 3B]

Avery Bissel

It's a hard decision that C. J. Orkney faces. You don't envy the choices available. If pressed, you'd lean towards getting Emeran government support, probably by sharing technical data with the Emeran military. While most people in the military are every bit as pompous and nowhere near as competent as Aiken - may Harper rest in peace - they always seem to get a generous budget. And getting some part of the Emeran government interested and invested in Blue Phoenix will probably be better for the general welfare of Emera anyway.

And besides, the company needs the money desperately, and you can't imagine Emera losing the space race to Tursa now.

On the other hand, maybe we could still make it by standing firm: stay the course, do the work, and trust things will work out somehow.

[Scene 3B]

C. J. Orkney

You're caught between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, continuing to progress on your own will make it hard for Emera to remain at the forefront of the space race - no matter how smart and brave Blue Phoenix's employees are, a private research firm is always going to have access to far less money than any government agency. You've been clean so far... maybe it's time to face reality and reassess whether your standards are too high.

On the other hand, you have gotten this far on your own; this was never going to be easy. If you make a choice to make things easier now, will that lead to regrets further down the line?

And then again, it would all be worth it if you can get to Bery, the large moon. Once the firebird grasps the apple, nothing can hold it down.

[Scene 3B]

Dr. Riley Eckhart

There is another option. You, personally, have some really solid contacts in Dribia that C. J. Orkney doesn't realize you have, including in the Dribian government. Dribia can't possibly be happy with Tursa's new space efforts. You can get what will look like top Dribian tech companies to buy significant shares in Blue Phoenix.

Technically, selling the Dribian investors any share of a company with defense contracts is against the law. But it's worth it. The company C. J. Orkney started before Blue Phoenix, ESTS, had to circumvent the law a few times. But Blue Phoenix doesn't have that clout, and C. J. Orkney may need to actually bribe regulators; you certainly know of several recent cases in which the laws against foreign ownership of defense contractors went conspicuously unenforced. It's worth the risk; it's a manageable problem. And if it came out, the right people in Dribia would likely be very grateful, especially with Tursa acting so aggressively.

Traitor. You can hear everyone's voice in your head. But it's the right choice. Dribian "private" backers are still far better people than your own military is, and you're the only person who can guarantee those connections pan out.

[Scene 3B]

Harper Aiken

Blue Phoenix has had tough times before. All the company needs to do is lean in, and it'll get through it. Avery, that magnificent bastard, would have wanted nothing less.

You still have friends in the Army Air Force, back from when you were a pilot and a Lieutenant. Some of them have quietly approached you under the table, supposedly at the behest of even higher ups: Their offer seems pretty generous - easily enough to fund missions to the moons and beyond, in the form of under-the-table money, lucrative military contracts, and access to government research. All you have to do is convince C. J. Orkney to share technical data with the Emeran Army...

The money will keep Blue Phoenix in business. You admire Orkney for having gotten this far, but there's a limit to everything. Blue Phoenix is Emera's chance to keep up with the renewed Tursan program. Tursa was an even worse colonial power to its imperial subjects than Dribia was!

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[Scene 3B]

Taylor Orkney

Having made the decision for safety, you feel partly responsible for the PR disaster that followed - despite the fact it was the right choice. You'd love to be able to do something to make up for it.

You fear what could happen to Blue Phoenix in the hands of a military. You already feel responsible for the death of three astronauts. You don't want to feel responsible for... whatever a military decides to do with Blue Phoenix technology.

You hope C. J. will make the right decision here. You love the Blue Phoenix space program more than almost anything else, but have a lot invested in hoping things stay much like they currently are.



Scene 3C: Cuckoo in the Nest

Year 4398 (in the Modern Calendar)

Location:

In a large, theater-style Blue Phoenix, Inc. conference room, with 3d-projection equipment and the latest communications gear.

Taylor decided to keep the astronauts alive. However, the astronauts took matters into their own hands. The Falcon IV capsule and its passengers made it to the landing point under autopilot, but they were both dead. Kevin Isley's body, unfortunately, was left behind on the IMS-10. Under strict quarantine, Dr. Eckhart managed to remove traces of the bioweapon from the capsule and the corpses within it. Dr. Eckhart also saved a sample of the bioweapon for the company's R&D department. And that was that: no widespread plague.

This situation has been stable for a few years, despite strong pressure by investors and customers for the exact circumstances of the astronauts' deaths. These questions have mostly been diverted with some vague, dissatisfying comments about "technical issues." Considering the loss of the entire crew and the preservation of the capsule, the uninformative story about the Falcon IV disaster is generally considered a flagrant lie. But Blue Phoenix was committed to maintaining that lie, as it didn't want its possession of an old Tursan bioweapon to be known publicly; that might cause panic and draw even worse negative attention.

Last night, the media was afire with the news: Tursa has launched a massive, vintage behemoth of a rocket, a class of vessel that has not flown in nearly seventy years. This morning, the vessel docked with IMS-10, and within an hour, IMS-10 was said to be open, operational and occupied. Tursa has re-entered the space race with a vengeance, and Blue Phoenix must step up the tempo of their efforts, or resign themselves to playing second fiddle.

C. J. Orkney has called this meeting to discuss how to respond. Ramping up Blue Phoenix's program to keep up is likely to require substantial extra funding. And frankly, there isn't much left in the coffers.

In the end, it's **C. J. Orkney's call**. C. J. Orkney built the empire from nothing, and if you're going to sell out to anyone, C. J. Orkney is going to be the one to smile and shake their hand.



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[Scene 3C]

Avery Bissel

Poor Harper, dying trying to keep the bioweapon from reaching the planet. Yet here it is anyway.

Emera has never had a bioweapon program. Most people in the military are every bit as pompous and nowhere near as competent as Aiken was. Even Orkney looks good in comparison to the Emeran military.

On the other hand... laws are laws. Keeping a bioweapon around can't be legal. There's a point beyond which Blue Phoenix can't just choose to ignore "inconvenient" regulations the way C. J. Orkney's old tech company, ESTS, did.

And besides, the company needs the money desperately, and you can't imagine losing Blue Phoenix.

On the third hand, maybe we've taken enough risk: stay the course, do the work, and trust things will work out somehow.

[Scene 3C]

C. J. Orkney

You're caught between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, continuing to progress on your own will make it hard for Emera to remain at the forefront of the space race - no matter how smart and brave Blue Phoenix's employees are, a private research firm is always going to have access to far less money than any government agency. You've been clean so far... maybe it's time to face reality and reassess whether your standards are too high.

On the other hand, you know a deal might be too good to be true. The easier choice now, that leads to big regrets further down the line?

And then again, it would be worth it if you could get to a moon. Once the firebird grasps the apple, nothing can hold it down.

[Scene 3C]

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[Scene 3C]

Taylor Orkney

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In the hands of a military, you fear what could happen. You already feel responsible for the deaths of three astronauts. You don't want to feel responsible for... whatever a military decides to do with Blue Phoenix technology.

You hope C. J. will make the right decision here. You love the Blue Phoenix space program as much as the next person (probably more), but have a lot invested in hoping things stay much like they currently are.



Scene 4A: 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

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Scene 4A: Shadow of the Hawk

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[Scene 4A]

Avery Bissel

Reth this! If Heath was sitting in the Commander's seat, you'd launch this bird, just to declare your disgust with the corrupt idiots in Parliament. They've been making it harder and harder on Blue Phoenix, even as the company has been taking bigger and bolder leaps into the void. The payoff to Emera has been profound, creating jobs and new technologies, enriching those greedy morons in the Parliament and their *reth*ing friends.

Instead, Taylor Orkney sits in the Commander's seat - not a surprise for the boss's kid. You'd bet that the switch would become permanent, if Heath stays on the sick list for another two or three days. Years of C.J.'s protection meant that Taylor didn't wash out, despite there being better candidates; grudgingly, you have to admit that Taylor has learned some competency with maturity.

The thing is, this is a full dress rehearsal of every mission system prior to launch. Phoenix One could fly, if systems aren't shut down at the end of the countdown. Everyone in the control room and the support stations around the world are practicing today. Everyone has simulated the post-launch procedures repeatedly for months, from the moment of ignition until the moment the Phoenix One Commander steps onto the surface of Bery. The primary crew - Heath, Cranmoor, and Enfield, have been working together for a year for this flight. The backup crew - Orkney, Edwards, and Hewitt, have been working just as hard and just as long, prepared to step in as needed. All of these astronauts are ready to fly.

All it would take is the two astronauts in Mission Control agreeing to not stop the launch procedure. Phoenix One could fly today.

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[Scene 4A]

C. J. Orkney

Reth this. You hate losing your last chance to launch, your last chance to prove to those fools in the Parliament that you were right all along, your last chance to prove Blue Phoenix's viability in space - which would bring in the money you need to continue. You would give anything to finally finish what you started so many years ago. Almost anything; you are **not** going to lose Taylor on a rushed rookie flight on untested equipment, no matter how much expertise is sitting in the other seats.

It's a good thing that you managed to get the Tursan bioweapon down from IMS-10. If you hadn't, the government wouldn't have given you those lucrative contracts and cash under the table, all of which you've plowed back into Blue Phoenix. You thought that the bioweapon would have purchased you a little more time, but clearly Parliament has caved to greed and Tursan pressure. There are commercial enemies who want to get at your technical expertise, the military wants your spacecraft to carry the bioweapon as a threat, and the Tursans don't like that idea one bit, threatening crippling economic sanctions. The government thinks they can handle this better if they have it all under their control. Fools! Morons! *Rething* idiots! A wet kestrel still flies!

[Scene 4A]

Dr. Riley Eckhart

While this is a full dress rehearsal, and Phoenix One could fly, it's too soon. There's a plan, a schedule that Blue Phoenix needs to stick to. You can't cut corners with space, because that will kill you and your dreams. The Emeran Parliament will come around eventually and let you fly. Even the Emeran military isn't so thick-headed that they would ignore the benefits Blue Phoenix brings to the country.

[Scene 4A]

Harper Aiken

Taylor deserves to sit in the Commander's seat. Heath may know the book backwards and forwards, but he's far too smug about it. His seatmates might kill him long before they reach Bery. You've seen the years of work Taylor has invested and have come to appreciate that dedication; C.J. should be giving Taylor a break.

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[Scene 4A]

Taylor Orkney

Light this *rething* candle while you still can. If the military takes control, Blue Phoenix will not boost another civilian astronaut into space for years.

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C.J. could make this happen. You're an adult, you can make your own decisions. C.J. could finally remove the shackles around your ankles and let you fly.



Scene 4B: Shadow of the Hawk

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"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 go 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.

[Scene 4B]

Avery Bissel

Reth this! If Heath was sitting in the Commander's seat, you'd launch this bird, just to declare your disgust with the corrupt idiots in Parliament. They've been making it harder and harder on Blue Phoenix, even as the company has been taking bigger and bolder leaps into the void. The payoff to Emera has been profound, creating jobs and new technologies, enriching those greedy morons in the Parliament and their *rething* friends.

Instead, Taylor Orkney sits in the Commander's seat - not a surprise for the boss's kid. You'd bet that the switch would become permanent, if Heath stays on the sick list for another two or three days. Years of C.J.'s protection meant that Taylor didn't wash out, despite there being better candidates; grudgingly, you have to admit that Taylor has learned some competency with maturity.

The thing is, this is a full dress rehearsal of every mission system prior to launch. Phoenix One could fly, if systems aren't shut down at the end of the countdown. Everyone in the control room and the support stations around the world are practicing today. Everyone has simulated the post-launch procedures repeatedly for months, from the moment of ignition until the moment the Phoenix One Commander steps onto the surface of Bery. The primary crew - Heath, Cranmoor, and Enfield, have been working together for a year for this flight. The backup crew - Orkney, Edwards, and Hewitt, have been working just as hard and just as long, prepared to step in as needed. All of these astronauts are ready to fly.

And they're coming to arrest everyone? If you launch, they'll probably just add "aiding and abetting fugitive" charges too, but let's see them make a *rething* arrest of the Phoenix One crew, who'll be laughing all the way to Bery. The Parliament will have to let you support a mission to Bery, looking like dangerous idiots if they arrest the supporting ground crew in the middle of the biggest space mission in sixty years.

All it would take is the two astronauts in Mission Control agreeing to not stop the launch procedure. Phoenix One could fly today.

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

[Scene 4B]

C. J. Orkney

Reth this. You hate losing your last chance to launch, your last chance to prove to those fools in the Parliament that you were right all along, your last chance to prove Blue Phoenix's viability in space - which would bring in the money you need to continue. You would give anything to finally finish what you started so many years ago. Almost anything; you are **not** going to lose Taylor on a rushed rookie flight on untested equipment, no matter how much expertise is sitting in the other seats.

The problem is that you made that deal with the Dribians about the Tersan bioweapon from IMS-10, even though you knew it could come back to haunt you. It was a gamble, one that brought in some money you really needed to keep Phoenix One on schedule. Now the Parliament has caved to greed and Tursan pressure. There are commercial enemies who want to get at your technical expertise, the Dribians are using the bioweapon as a threat, and the Tursans don't like that idea one bit, threatening crippling economic sanctions against Emera. The government thinks they can handle this better if they have it all under their control - and they're looking for a scapegoat.

That's going to be you and Blue Phoenix. The call made it clear - they're coming with overwhelming military firepower and overwhelming legal firepower - big guns and warrants for everyone's arrest, for treason. Fools! Morons! *Rething* idiots! A wet kestrel still flies!

[Scene 4B]

Dr. Riley Eckhart

While this is a full dress rehearsal, and Phoenix One could fly, it's too soon. There's a plan, a schedule that Blue Phoenix needs to stick to. You can't cut corners with space, because that will kill you and your dreams. The Emeran Parliament will come around eventually and let you fly. Even the Emeran military isn't so thick-headed that they would ignore the benefits Blue Phoenix brings to the country.

[Scene 4B]

Harper Aiken

Taylor deserves to sit in the Commander's seat. Heath may know the book backwards and forwards, but he's far too smug about it. His seatmates might kill him long before they reach Bery. You've seen the years of work Taylor has invested and have come to appreciate that dedication; C.J. should be giving Taylor a break.

The thing is, this is a full dress rehearsal of every mission system prior to launch. Phoenix One could fly, if systems aren't shut down at the end of the countdown. Everyone in the control room and the support stations around the world are practicing today. Everyone has simulated the post-launch procedures repeatedly for months, from the moment of ignition until the moment the Phoenix One Commander steps onto the surface of Bery. The primary crew - Heath, Cranmoor, and Enfield, have been working together for a year for this flight. The backup crew - Orkney, Edwards, and Hewitt, have been working just as hard and just as long, prepared to step in as needed. All of these astronauts are ready to fly.

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[Scene 4B]

Taylor Orkney

Light this *rething* candle while you still can. If the military takes control, Blue Phoenix will not boost another civilian astronaut into space for years.

The thing is, this is a full dress rehearsal of every mission system prior to launch. Phoenix One could fly, if systems aren't shut down at the end of the countdown. Everyone in the control room and the support stations around the world are practicing today. Everyone has simulated the post-launch procedures repeatedly for months, from the moment of ignition until the moment the Phoenix One Commander steps onto the surface of Bery. The primary crew - Heath, Cranmoor, and Enfield, have been working together for a year for this flight. The backup crew - you, Edwards, and Hewitt, have been working just as hard and just as long, prepared to step in as needed. Everyone is ready to fly.

C.J. could make this happen. You're an adult, you can make your own decisions. C.J. could finally remove the shackles around your ankles and let you fly.



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.

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[Scene 4C]

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[Scene 4C]

C. J. Orkney

Reth this. You hate losing your last chance to launch, your last chance to prove to those fools in the Parliament that you were right all along, your last chance to prove Blue Phoenix's viability in space - which would bring in the money you need to continue. You would give anything to finally finish what you started so many years ago. Almost anything; you are **not** going to lose Taylor on a rushed rookie flight on untested equipment, no matter how much expertise is sitting in the other seats.

The problem is that you wouldn't make any deal for the Tersan bioweapon from IMS-10, even though you knew it could come back to haunt you. It was a gamble, maintaining a moral stand, not responding to the lucrative bribes and favorable contracts in exchange for providing samples to the Emeran military. There were even feelers from the Dribians, offering large sums of money and promising to bribe the right officials to look the other way at treasonous actions.

As a result, Blue Phoenix is in a real financial bind. You've quietly mortgaged everything you own, sometimes more than once, in order to get Phoenix One off the pad.

When it was clear that you were not going to supply the bioweapon, your enemies in government and business tipped the balance against you, pushing the Parliament to cave to greed and Tursan pressure. The call made it clear - they're coming with overwhelming military firepower and overwhelming legal firepower - big guns and warrants for everyone's arrest, on a litany of flimsy charges and manufactured crimes. You'll be so tangled up in trouble that you won't be able to make the necessary payments, and Blue Phoenix will slip from your grasp, into greedy hands with no vision, who will sell your technology and your spacecraft for military use. Emera will never reach Bery. Fools! Morons! *Rething* idiots! A wet kestrel still flies!

[Scene 4C]

Dr. Riley Eckhart

While this is a full dress rehearsal, and Phoenix One could fly, it's too soon. There's a plan, a schedule that Blue Phoenix needs to stick to. You can't cut corners with space, because that will kill you and your dreams. The Emeran Parliament will come around eventually and let you fly. Even the Emeran military isn't so thick-headed that they would ignore the benefits Blue Phoenix brings to the country.

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C.J. could make this happen. You're an adult, you can make your own decisions. C.J. could finally remove the shackles around your ankles and let you fly.

You also know that C. J. has mortgaged Blue Phoenix to the hilt, along with everything else C. J. owns. Very few people probably realize how close C. J. has pushed Blue Phoenix to the brink of disaster. If you don't fly, Blue Phoenix goes under, to be gobbled up by greedy enemies with no vision. They'll sell the technology and the spacecraft to the military, and you'll never get to walk on Bery. Emera will return to being a second-rate country, bullied by the bigger and stronger countries of the world.



Scene 4D: 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

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"Mission Control, this is Phoenix One." You can hear the anger in Taylor's voice. "We are go 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."

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Scene 4D: Shadow of the Hawk

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[Scene 4D]

Avery Bissel

Reth this! If Heath was sitting in the Commander's seat, you'd launch this bird, just to declare your disgust with the corrupt idiots in Parliament. They've been making it harder and harder on Blue Phoenix, even as the company has been taking bigger and bolder leaps into the void. The payoff to Emera has been profound, creating jobs and new technologies, enriching those greedy morons in the Parliament and their *reth*ing friends.

Instead, Taylor Orkney sits in the Commander's seat - not a surprise for the boss's kid. You'd bet that the switch would become permanent, if Heath stays on the sick list for another two or three days. Years of C.J.'s protection meant that Taylor didn't wash out, despite there being better candidates; grudgingly, you have to admit that Taylor has learned some competency with maturity.

The thing is, this is a full dress rehearsal of every mission system prior to launch. Phoenix One could fly, if systems aren't shut down at the end of the countdown. Everyone in the control room and the support stations around the world are practicing today. Everyone has simulated the post-launch procedures repeatedly for months, from the moment of ignition until the moment the Phoenix One Commander steps onto the surface of Bery. The primary crew - Heath, Cranmoor, and Enfield, have been working together for a year for this flight. The backup crew - Orkney, Edwards, and Hewitt, have been working just as hard and just as long, prepared to step in as needed. All of these astronauts are ready to fly.

All it would take is the two astronauts in Mission Control agreeing to not stop the launch procedure. Phoenix One could fly today.

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[Scene 4D]

C. J. Orkney

Reth this. You hate losing your last chance to launch, your last chance to prove to those fools in the Parliament that you were right all along, your last chance to prove Blue Phoenix's viability in space - which would bring in the money you need to continue. You would give anything to finally finish what you started so many years ago. Almost anything; you are **not** going to lose Taylor on a rushed rookie flight on untested equipment, no matter how much expertise is sitting in the other seats.

The problem is that after the disaster of the Falcon IV at IMS-10, investors became very skittish. As things got tighter and tighter, the offers from the Emeran military got tougher and tougher; they'd give you money, but you'd have to mortgage your soul to the military. All of your plans would stretch out further and further, giving them more and more opportunity to put Blue Phoenix completely under their control. There were even feelers from the Dribians, offering large sums of money and promising to bribe the right officials to look the other way at treasonous actions.

As a result, Blue Phoenix is in a real financial bind. You've quietly mortgaged everything you own, sometimes more than once, in order to get Phoenix One off the pad.

When it was clear that you were really struggling, your enemies in government and business tipped the balance against you, pushing the Parliament to cave to greed and Tursan pressure. The call made it clear - they're coming with overwhelming military firepower and overwhelming auditing firepower - big guns and tax accountants to ferret out any financial "improprieties". You'll be so tangled up in trouble that you won't be able to make the necessary payments, and Blue Phoenix will slip from your grasp, into greedy hands with no vision, who will sell your technology and your spacecraft for military use. Emera will never reach Bery. Fools! Morons! *Rething* idiots! A wet kestrel still flies!

[Scene 4D]

Dr. Riley Eckhart

While this is a full dress rehearsal, and Phoenix One could fly, it's too soon. There's a plan, a schedule that Blue Phoenix needs to stick to. You can't cut corners with space, because that will kill you and your dreams. The Emeran Parliament will come around eventually and let you fly. Even the Emeran military isn't so thick-headed that they would ignore the benefits Blue Phoenix brings to the country.

[Scene 4D]

Harper Aiken

Taylor deserves to sit in the Commander's seat. Heath may know the book backwards and forwards, but he's far too smug about it. His seatmates might kill him long before they reach Bery. You've seen the years of work Taylor has invested and have come to appreciate that dedication; C.J. should be giving Taylor a break.

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[Scene 4D]

Taylor Orkney

Light this *rething* candle while you still can. If the military takes control, Blue Phoenix will not boost another civilian astronaut into space for years.

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C.J. could make this happen. You're an adult, you can make your own decisions. C.J. could finally remove the shackles around your ankles and let you fly.

You also know that C. J. has mortgaged Blue Phoenix to the hilt, along with everything else C. J. owns. Very few people probably realize how close C. J. has pushed Blue Phoenix to the brink of disaster. If you don't fly, Blue Phoenix goes under, to be gobbled up by greedy enemies with no vision. They'll sell the technology and the spacecraft to the military, and you'll never get to walk on Bery. Emera will return to being a second-rate country, bullied by the bigger and stronger countries of the world.



Scene 4E: Shadow of the Hawk

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Reth this! If Heath was sitting in the Commander's seat, you'd launch this bird, just to declare your disgust with the corrupt idiots in Parliament. They've been making it harder and harder on Blue Phoenix, even as the company has been taking bigger and bolder leaps into the void. The payoff to Emera has been profound, creating jobs and new technologies, enriching those greedy morons in the Parliament and their *reth*ing friends.

Instead, Taylor Orkney sits in the Commander's seat - not a surprise for the boss's kid. You'd bet that the switch would become permanent, if Heath stays on the sick list for another two or three days. Years of C.J.'s protection meant that Taylor didn't wash out, despite there being better candidates; grudgingly, you have to admit that Taylor has learned some competency with maturity.

The thing is, this is a full dress rehearsal of every mission system prior to launch. Phoenix One could fly, if systems aren't shut down at the end of the countdown. Everyone in the control room and the support stations around the world are practicing today. Everyone has simulated the post-launch procedures repeatedly for months, from the moment of ignition until the moment the Phoenix One Commander steps onto the surface of Bery. The primary crew - Heath, Cranmoor, and Enfield, have been working together for a year for this flight. The backup crew - Orkney, Edwards, and Hewitt, have been working just as hard and just as long, prepared to step in as needed. All of these astronauts are ready to fly.

All it would take is the two astronauts in Mission Control agreeing to not stop the launch procedure. Phoenix One could fly today.

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

[Scene 4E]

C. J. Orkney

Reth this. You hate losing your last chance to launch, your last chance to prove to those fools in the Parliament that you were right all along, your last chance to prove Blue Phoenix's viability in space - which would bring in the money you need to continue. You would give anything to finally finish what you started so many years ago. Almost anything; you are **not** going to lose Taylor on a rushed rookie flight on untested equipment, no matter how much expertise is sitting in the other seats.

The problem is that after the disaster of the Falcon IV at IMS-10, investors became very skittish. You knew the Emeran military was interested, so you made a quick deal, before they could figure out just how big of an advantage they had in the negotiations. If you hadn't, the government wouldn't have given you those lucrative contracts and cash under the table, all of which you've plowed back into Blue Phoenix. You thought that the deal would have purchased you a little more time, but clearly the Parliament has caved to greed and Tursan pressure. There are commercial enemies who want to get at your technical expertise, the military wants more access to your spacecraft, and the Tursans don't like easy Emeran access to space. The government thinks they can handle this better if they have it all under their control. Emera will never reach Bery. Fools! Morons! *Rething* idiots! A wet kestrel still flies!

[Scene 4E]

Dr. Riley Eckhart

While this is a full dress rehearsal, and Phoenix One could fly, it's too soon. There's a plan, a schedule that Blue Phoenix needs to stick to. You can't cut corners with space, because that will kill you and your dreams. The Emeran Parliament will come around eventually and let you fly. Even the Emeran military isn't so thick-headed that they would ignore the benefits Blue Phoenix brings to the country.

[Scene 4E]

Harper Aiken

Taylor deserves to sit in the Commander's seat. Heath may know the book backwards and forwards, but he's far too smug about it. His seatmates might kill him long before they reach Bery. You've seen the years of work Taylor has invested and have come to appreciate that dedication; C.J. should be giving Taylor a break.

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[Scene 4E]

Taylor Orkney

Light this *reth*ing candle while you still can. If the military takes control, Blue Phoenix will not boost another civilian astronaut into space for years.

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C.J. could make this happen. You're an adult, you can make your own decisions. C.J. could finally remove the shackles around your ankles and let you fly.



Coda 5A: Lunar Landing

20 Years Later

Location:

Isley Executive Center; Blue Phoenix Building; Eastshore, Emera

Landing on Bery was a momentous occasion, and in some ways, a big problem. Blue Phoenix instantly became a name on the lips of every person in Emera, as were the first Emeran astronauts to walk on Bery (there are even *primary schools* named after each of them). Taylor Orkney, the first to step onto the surface, is a hero amongst heroes.

Work contracts doubled, and doubled again: military contracts, commercial interests, international research projects. Emera has built a big niche out of the space industry and related sectors, to say nothing of the global prestige.

And just like that, twenty years have passed. New ships, new designs, new problems. The new prototype engine blew up in testing, but there weren't any casualties. It's gotten some news interest, which you're happy to get ahead of. So you've gathered together for a press conference at the company's shiny new HQ.

The reporters who have come are smiling and polite. Under the gaze of the cameras and recording devices, the first asks a question.



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C A N N H I L L
MAXIMUM SECURITY FACILITY

Coda 5B: The Prisoners

20 Years Later

Location:

Cannhill State Maximum Security Prison

In the investigations following the aborted launch, certain things and connections came to light were slanted in the worst possible way. After a secret military trial, a verdict of "guilty" was rendered on the crime of treason against Emera. Still, you were not executed. And you were assigned to serve your life sentences at the same maximum security facility.

Interest in your case has waned, largely overshadowed by the breakdown in what is now called the "temporary peace" between Tursa and Dribia. Emera has managed to hang on to its independence, partly by unofficially confirming the ability to deliver advanced bioweapons against any nation who violates Emera's territory or national security interests.

Twenty long, dull years have passed. And then one day, a break in the routine: All of you are gathered together once again, in the prison's press room. A reporter has asked for an interview.

The reporter turns on a recorder, looks at each one of you, and asks one question.

Coda 5C: Shattered Dreams

20 Years Later

Location:

Conference room, *The Sillbury Guardian*

After a thorough investigation following your arrests, you were ultimately not charged. You were eventually released, after a torturous and draining legal battle.

You've kept in touch, after going your separate ways. When you look back, editing out some of the hard parts, you can't help but feel them as glory days.

Twenty years have passed since the Emeran government shut Blue Phoenix down. C. J.'s fortune was swallowed up by legal fees, lawsuits, and payoffs.

A reporter from *The Sillbury Guardian* has asked to meet you. Not as individuals, as you see - you, together, ride up the elevator to the conference room.

There's no question why the *Guardian* wants a talk with you - it's been all over the news. And the launch will happen soon: Jordan Morris, an Emeran citizen, will land on Bery as part of the Dribian space program. All of Emera is ecstatic.

The reporter turns on a recorder, looks at each one of you, and asks one question.



MINISTRY OF SPACE
D R I B I A N D O M A I N S

Coda 5D: Dribian Victory

20 Years Later

Location:

Conference Room C-1; Ministry of Space; Onder, Dribia

After a thorough investigation following your arrests, you were ultimately not charged: major political pressure from Dribia made it politically impossible for Emeran charges against you to stick. Indeed, citing the military importance of advances made by Blue Phoenix and other Emerans, and as a result of several embarrassingly public scandals by Emeran political opponents, Emera was quickly made a “voluntary” partner in Dribia’s growing conflict with Tursa. With the support of its Emeran and other allies, Dribia declared war against Tursa, and would make rapid gains against its historic foe.

And it was in the euphoric aftermath of victory, and perhaps somewhat oddly to those with a keen eye towards such matters, Emera became junior partner in a “perpetual” Alliance with Dribia, gaining promises of favored status, such as lower tariffs and other economic subsidies, to Dribia’s Emeran citizens.

Somehow, you have lived through these years relatively unscathed; nearly twenty years since your ill-fated launch, when you were known as Blue Phoenix.

A reporter from *The Sillbury Guardian* has asked to meet you near your assigned offices in Onder. There's no question why the *Guardian* wants a talk with you - it's been all over the news. And the launch you have helped organize will happen soon: Jordan Morris, an Emeran citizen, will land on Bery as part of the Dribian - or, rather, the Allied - space program. All of Emera is ecstatic.

The reporters who have come are smiling and polite. Under the gaze of the cameras and recording devices, the first asks a question.