

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-