

Encounter
Science Fiction Short Stories & Novella
Book Sample



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Enemy Self

—Intergalactic Trading Ship Bountiful—

*Captain: **Lu Kimberling***

*Hired Protection—Androids: **Justine Santana** and **Max Wheeler***

Justine's Private Internal Record

Ship's Lounge, Captain Kimberling steps in.

"Hey, you two, one last stop at Ingilium, and you can look for other work. I'm going to take a breather on Helm. The Bhuaci are harmless, so I won't be needing your services for a while."

Oh, joy! Wheeler is going to give his opinion. Like the captain cares....

"Are you certain that's wise, sir? The Bhuaci may be harmless, but they are frequently attacked. The Telathot incursion nearly decimated—"

Brilliant. Get the highest paying ship's captain irritated while light years from the next hope of employment.

"Don't lecture me, Wheeler. I've stopped there often enough and found myself a secure place. Cresta's and Ingots could invade till the sun explodes, and they wouldn't nudge me a millimeter."

Know the meaning of the word vaporized? If Wheeler were human, he'd be bright red right now.

"As you say, sir."

"Sure, compliance always makes up for being a total idiot—"

"Listen, I'm going to sleep. The crew just changed shifts and we're in dead space, so it should be nice an' boring for a while."

"As you say, sir."

"By the time I need you again, Wheeler, learn a few new expressions, would you?"

"As you—"

“Ah, shut up.”

Poor Captain Kimberling. He hasn't got one itsy, bitsy clue...

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One hour later...

*Wheeler may be huge, but he's as bulky as an Ingot and lumbers like a Cresta. His brown, steady eyes peer straight through the lounge bay window displaying our bright, red spectrum universe as it swirls amid black space. I'd like to paint that view. Someday.*

*What does Wheeler think about in that tectonic brain of his? Here goes nothing... I'll be subtle. Promise.*

“You do that on purpose, don't you?”

“What?”

“Egg him on.”

“Egg. Him. On. What is that supposed to mean? No, don't tell me. Another one of your human colloquialisms? You need to decide what you are, Cyborg.”

“Like you?”

“I have an identity. I know my role and I—”

“Play the fool.”

“Who's the fool? You're the one pretending to be human. ‘Look at me, I have a moral code...’ You were lucky to come out in one piece on Terra Seventeen.”

“I am human. At least...genetically.”

*His grip is stronger than I anticipated. Good to know....*

“Shall I rip your arm off and show you the technology that holds you together?”

*Twist, turn and elbow to the mid-section. Leg sweep under the knees. Pinch Wheeler by the soft spot at the base of his neck...*

“Let me remind you that when they put me together, they included the DNA of a brilliant human mind. Not a Cresta—”

“I’m not Cresta!”

“Ingoti then.”

“Damn you!”

*Pity on the fool. Oops, didn’t mean to shove that hard.*

“That almost sounded human.”

“DNA means nothing!”

*There he goes again. He really ought to turn beet red just to clarify himself.*

“So, you’re human too? Genetically speaking?”

“I’m a cyborg. Humanity never claimed me. I never claimed them.”

“But your cyborg family welcomed you with open arms, right?”

“Go to Bothmal!”

“Please—watch your language.”

“Like anything could offend you.”

“I have sensibilities.”

“Just no sense. Being human—genetically speaking—won’t protect you. Only a cyborg—”

“You won’t live forever.”

“Near enough. Better than anyone else.”

“Uanyi and Ingots live for millenniums. Luxonians too. Are they happy?”

“Hades! Who’s looking for happiness? I want to survive for as long as possible.”

“Someday...you’ll die.”

“Not if I can keep getting parts. Besides, who really cares?”

“That’s the question, isn’t it? You’ve never given anyone a reason to care—”

*Uh, oh... blinking, blaring sirens! As usual, humans typically overstate the obvious. Here comes the captain, charging ahead like a Cresta at a science convention.*

“Hey, you two, looks like we’ve got unexpected visitors. Power up!”

*Sigh. Wheeler’s got bloodlust in his eyes again.*

“Ready, Human?”

“As much as you, Cyborg.”

“Don’t look so grim. We’ll come out of this alive. Probably. It’s a living.”

*I wonder...*

“Or a really long death sentence.”

### ***I Never Had a Son***

—Planet Lux—

A courtyard dominated by a two-story fountain and decorated with generous fauna wafting in a gentle breeze as cloud sprays reflect every color in the spectrum.

Cerulean stands before the fountain, silent and alone.

*I miss Viridian. Or rather, I miss what I hoped we’d have together—my son, following in my footsteps or perhaps forging a new path together.*

*Must all such dreams die? Surely not...*

*Anne had a second chance with her daughter, and Peter has grown closer to his son. Not all families are doomed to a hideous fate. But me? My father has been long gone, and I’ll never have another son.*

“Cerulean?”

“Yes, Judge Sterling. What can I do for you, sir?”

*Surprise.... He's in his human form, with his matching white suit and beard...looking as dashing as any aging Luxonian with delusions of—*

“Supreme Judge. Formality, I know, but we must keep up appearances.”

“Yes, Supreme Judge. Sterling.”

“Odd. When you say it— Never mind. I've come to inform you that a council has been appointed to discuss the Human Question...again.”

“Sir?”

“Don't think I haven't noticed your efforts on their behalf.”

“I believe I told you my concerns up front.”

“Yes, and I was listening. You look doubtful.”

“You never appeared interested.”

“Humanity has proven useful. I'm not ignorant of their worth. I simply needed to understand how involved the Cresta was going to be.”

“Now that Ingots, the Uanyi, and Bhuacs have staked their claims—is it involved enough?”

“Stop scowling, Cerulean. If you'd appear like a proper Luxonian, I'd feel more comfortable.”

“But I wouldn't.”

“So I've noticed. In any case, I have a friend...shall we say a benign enemy who—”

“You mean the reporter—Lang?”

“You know her?”

“She's notorious.”

“Yes, well, we have an understanding. She lies to me... I lie to her... And we understand each other perfectly.”

“What lies has she been telling you now?”

“She was kind enough to inform me that Crestas have outlawed all crossbreed experimentation, that the Ingots have no interest in Newearth, that the Uanyi plan on relocating on the dark side of the Divide, and that the Bhuacs are quite happy being decimated.”

“With enemies like her, who needs friends?”

“My thoughts exactly.”

“So— What’s the next step?”

“We must regain our position on Newearth, but that means we need an alliance everyone can agree with.”

“An impossible challenge.”

“It’s *your* challenge, Cerulean. Come up with a plan, think of a way to present it to the Supreme Council so that they see how it benefits Luxonian society, in fact, make it seem like their idea. Then return to Newearth and make it happen.”

*I can feel sweat trickling down my back. What I wouldn’t do for an ice-cold—anything.* “I can’t do this alone.”

“You won’t. Roux will accompany you to Newearth. You’ll make friends—”

*Uh, oh, that one-of-a-kind, tormented stare....*

“You always do. Find allies; convince them that it is in their best interest if we all work together.

“It will be.”

“See? You’ve convinced me already.”

*Odd. I never noticed that his smile has a certain charm.* “When is the council meeting?”

“Tomorrow, early. Come ready for battle. Act like it’s the end of life as we know it—”

“I’ve already used that argument. It only works once.”

“True.”

*By the Divide, he's pacing the walkway, stroking his beard like a human patriarch of old.*

"Lang advised me that since Newearth is so *poor* in natural resources, there isn't a merchant within a million light years who'd be interested in it."

"Merchants? They're as dangerous as politicians."

"Don't be ridiculous. Merchants are thieves and liars, but they have honest souls. They know perfectly well that war shrinks the profit margin. The Luxonian Council—"

"Supreme Luxonian Council."

"Yes, of course, they want happy merchants because happy merchants protect our assets."

"I see."

*Strange that I never noticed this side of Sterling before. How could I have missed it?*

"Thank you, sir. I was nearly out of options."

"I know. I do have eyes...never mind. I must attend to other Supreme Judge business."

"Of course."

"Cerulean?"

*Deep breath. He's staring again.* "Yes?"

"I never had a son."

*Forget ice-cold; my mouth just went as dry as the dark side of the Divide.*  
"If you had, he'd probably have been just like you."

Exactly. But you—you're nothing like me.

"Sir?"

"I never wanted a son, Cerulean.... See you in the council chamber."

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As a teacher with a degree in Elementary Education, who has taught in big cities and small towns, Ann Frailey homeschooled all of her children. She manages her rural homestead with her kids and their numerous critters. She writes books and a Friday blog alternating between short stories and her *My Road Goes Ever On* series.

Her nonfiction work focuses on the intersection of motherhood, widowhood, practicing gratitude, and rediscovering joy.

Her fiction novels expand from the OldEarth world to the Newearth universe—where deception rules but truth prevails.

She earned a Masters of Fine Arts Degree in Creative Writing for Entertainment from Full Sail University.

In her spare time, she serves as an election judge, a literacy tutor, and as secretary/treasurer of her small town's cemetery.

She is currently finishing a new science fiction novel in the Newearth world and a historical fiction & science fiction blend in her OldEarth series. To check out her stories, novels, inspirational books, and her film and TV scripts, visit <https://akfrailey.com/>



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