



JOVIAN UPRISING
2315

BY MICHEL POULIN

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SCIENCE-FICTION NOVEL

BY MICHEL POULIN

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WARNING TO READERS

THIS NOVEL CONTAINS DESCRIPTIONS OF SCENES OF VIOLENCE, SEXUALITY AND CRUDE LANGUAGE AND IS NOT MEANT FOR YOUNG CHILDREN. THIS IS ALSO A WORK OF PURE FICTION AND ANY APPARENT SIMILARITIES WITH PERSONS OR EVENTS OF THE PRESENT ARE FORTUITOUS.

FOREWORD

THE AUTHOR, WHEN WRITING THIS NOVEL IN 2011, USED THE KNOWN INFORMATION AVAILABLE THEN ON THE MAKEUP OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM. HOWEVER, THE RAPID RATE OF ASTRONOMICAL DISCOVERIES MAY MAKE SOME DATA ON PLANETS, MOONS AND ASTEROIDS AS USED IN THIS NOVEL LOOK OUTDATED. FOR THIS, THE AUTHOR ASKS FOR THE INDULGENCE OF THE READERS.

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CHAPTER 1 – INHERITANCE

09:18 (Universal time)

Thursday, February 4, 2315

Notary's office, city of Callisto Prime

Callisto (8th moon of Jupiter)

Jupiter System



“...I hereby bequeath total and complete ownership of my ship, the MSS KOSTROMA, to my beloved niece, Tina Forster. This includes all the unattached spare modules, ground support equipment and stocks of spare parts, fuel and other supplies held in my name in the hangars and warehouses of the Jovian Shipping Lines at the Callisto Prime spaceport, plus the bank account linked to the MSS KOSTROMA.”

The tall, brown-haired young woman sitting in one of the chairs set facing the notary's desk opened her mouth under the combined shock and surprise of hearing this part of her uncle's last will. The MSS KOSTROMA, a multipurpose interplanetary cargo ship in which she held the positions of first pilot and temporary captain, was a behemoth with a mass when empty of 2,560,000 metric tons and an overall length of 1,260 meters. Even after nearly 26 years of plying the commercial space lanes, it was still worth over five billion credits! Then, the full realization of the demands and responsibilities this unexpected gift meant dawned on Tina. Even though interplanetary space travel was now routine, space commerce was still a risky, fiercely cut-throat business. Many negligent or incompetent ship owners had ended up bankrupt, buried under debts from bad contracts or catastrophic breakdowns resulting from negligent maintenance. One could not as well lay still and wait for contracts to show up, on pain of seeing the better deals snatched away by more savvy entrepreneurs. Even though she knew and understood well the rules of that game, Tina knew as well that she was no business shark or shipping magnate. Fortunately, she had as part of her crew someone who could take good care of the financial aspect of this gift from Uncle Bill.

The few other witnesses invited to the reading of Bill Forster's last will, distant relatives and friends mostly, ended up on their part with minor but still valuable parts of

his estate. Bill Forster had been a widowed man and had few relatives left alive, with Tina being the closest in the remaining family tree. Tina herself had lost her parents and two siblings in a tragic space accident that had also cost the lives of 64 other people seven years ago, when the ship transporting them had been hit by a stray piece of space debris near Jupiter. As glamorous as life in space could appear, it was still way more dangerous than living on the old Earth, as polluted and depleted as it was now. Spacers, as they were called by Terrans, realized that but most would not even dream of returning to live permanently on Earth. The cradle of Humanity was in the year 2315 an overcrowded place, with its 8.2 billion inhabitants living on a world whose natural resources had been severely depleted, or even exhausted in certain cases. Herculean efforts had been made to clean up the worst of the pollution from centuries of neglect and abuse, but much of the past beauty of Earth was now gone forever.

The notary, his reading of the last will completed, then distributed the deeds, electronic checks and property titles that had constituted the estate of Bill Forster, making the recipients sign for them before shaking hands with them. On her part, Tina left the office with the ownership papers of the KOSTROMA and its various ground equipment and stores, plus the bank account linked to the KOSTROMA's space operations. That account by itself was worth 48.3 million credits. However, Tina knew that this seemingly huge sum would be needed as a financial buffer to pay the ship's operational expenses, like the personnel payroll and the fuel bills, until profits from future or ongoing contracts could refill that bank account. It would definitely not be smart to burn that money in a wild spending spree. At the age of 28, Tina was a responsible woman, made even more so by her thirteen years spent as a crewmember of the KOSTROMA.

Leaving the ten-storey building in which the notary's office was, Tina glanced up at the curved ceiling of the giant air and water-tight tube containing this section of the buried city of Callisto Prime. The tube itself had a diameter of 120 meters and was connected to a series of similar tubes forming a kilometer-long residential and commercial district, with its avenue lined on both sides with prefabricated buildings and parks. The ceiling was covered by a huge plasma screen that now showed a clear blue sky, with a few dispersed white clouds. That would progressively change to a star-filled night sky in the evening, to give the impression to the citizens of Callisto Prime that they

were living on some Earth city. That, and the Earth-like gravity provided by artificial gravity matting installed throughout the city, helped the inhabitants to feel at home on what was in reality an alien world, half water ice and half rock, with a tenuous, unbreathable atmosphere. Those who wanted to observe the real landscape of Callisto, with the huge orb of Jupiter in the black sky of space, had to go up from the city complex, situated forty meters under the ice crust of the moon's surface, to one of the observation domes emerging from the ice. Callisto Prime, with a population approaching two million people, was made up of hundreds of sections of tubes interconnected together and buried under the ice to provide protection against space radiations and meteorites. In this, Callisto Prime was very similar to the other cities of the Outer Solar System.

Jumping on the rolling sidewalk running the length of the avenue, Tina then jumped again, this time on the parallel high-speed sidewalk, and let herself be transported by the mobile rubberized carpet. If she wanted to go the other way, she would only need to get off the high-speed strip, step on a second low-speed sidewalk, then on a fixed walkway, before stepping again on the rolling sidewalks, which formed a long closed oval along the avenue. The whole system, using electric motors, was both pollution and noise-free, while permitting people to go around at speeds of up to ten kilometers per hour. For the handicapped without the minimal balance needed to use the rolling sidewalks, they could use small electric karts along the fixed walkway, which was also used by small delivery vehicles. After a fifteen minute trip, Tina arrived at her destination, a bank that held the account she had just inherited. There, armed with the papers received from the notary, she formally put the ownership of the account under her name.

To get to her next destination, the offices of the Jovian Space Administration, or JSA in short, Tina took the electric subway line running the length of the central spine tubes of the city, arriving in six minutes at the Callisto Prime Spaceport. The sprawling complex, situated for safety reasons four kilometers outside of the city limits, was also mostly under the surface ice of the moon, except for a dozen landing platforms on elevators that stuck out of the ice. Taking a deep breath before entering to control her growing excitement, Tina walked in the reception hall of the JSA and made her way to the third floor offices of the Space Registrar. The clerk that greeted her there with a big

smile was a young and handsome man of Asian descent, prompting Tina to smile warmly in return.

“Good day, mister! I am here to register the change of ownership of a ship, the MSS KOSTROMA.”

“Certainly, miss.” Said the clerk while typing quickly in his computer the name of the ship, calling up on his screen the ship’s file. “It is presently listed as being owned by a Bill Forster. Do you have documents to prove the change of ownership, miss?”

“I certainly do, mister. My uncle, Bill Forster, recently died and he bequeathed me his ship and associated equipment and supplies in his last will. Here are the documents given to me by the notary.”

The young clerk took the documents handed over by Tina and examined them carefully, then made a number of computer searches to confirm their authenticity. While doing so he smiled apologetically to Tina.

“You will excuse me if I run a number of checks, miss: your new ship is a multi megaton-class cargo ship at full load and represents quite a large value. I will also have to have my supervisor verify himself your papers. There aren’t very many megaton-class cargo ships in the Jovian lists. In fact, there are only six such ships in the Jovian lists. Your KOSTROMA is the third biggest of the lot, miss. If we look at the whole Solar System, there is a total of just 22 megaton-class ships still in operation. Your ship is sixth in order of mass at full displacement in the Solar System. You have the right to be proud, miss.”

“The sixth biggest? I thought that it was only the seventh one.”

“They recently retired the old SIRIUS, miss. Apart of being over ninety years old, its technology was outdated and made it commercially inefficient on the interplanetary lanes.”

“The sixth biggest ship in the Solar System. Hot damn!” Exclaimed Tina, not a little proud. “Thanks for that info, mister.”

“You’re welcomed, miss.” Replied the smiling clerk, liking this very pretty client. “My own checks are completed. I will now transfer the dossier to my supervisor, who will do the final checks and approval.”

That took another nine minutes, at the end of which the clerk’s supervisor came to the reception counter to shake hands with Tina and congratulate her on her new ownership. He then promised her that all the customs and space authorities in the

Jovian System would be informed within the hour. Feeling like a queen, Tina left the JSA offices and then wondered what she would do next. Feeling her stomach grumble, she checked her wristwatch and saw that it was nearly noon, Universal Time. Seeing a good restaurant nearby, she decided to celebrate her newfound fortune with a good meal and a bottle of wine. She certainly had the financial means for that now!

The restaurant was actually a five-star establishment that catered to the rich, most notably to big industrial or shipping magnates and to high-level politicians and functionaries. The working-class jumpsuit of Tina got her a snobbish up and down look from the maitre d' but she still managed to get a small table in a far corner of the dining room. Mentally sending the maitre d' to a choice location, Tina took hold of the wine list first and nearly choked with indignation on seeing the prices. Even though she was now technically rich, she had always been rather frugal in her personal needs and tastes, like many of the spacers who lived often in minimalist conditions aboard their ships, which were effectively their home for them and their families. Most of the wine bottles in the list she was reviewing cost nearly as much as what a ship technician earned in a week! Being well aware of the costs for shipping cargo across the Solar System, Tina still found the prices outrageous, until she thought about the state of the food industry, and of the general economy, on Earth. With much of its resources depleted and burdened with 8.2 billion inhabitants, the planet barely managed to feed its masses with its own food products and had in turn to import from space many of the raw materials its industries needed to manufacture goods. Plastics, hydrocarbons and chemicals were in particularly short supply on Earth, with the planet's oil reserves having dried out in the 22nd Century. Pollution and rising sea levels due to climate warming had in turn cut on the amount of arable land available for agriculture. With every possible arable surface now exploited, the production of such luxuries as wine and alcohol had been limited by the planetary authorities, for good reasons. This had caused the prices for those products to jump to the stratosphere. Grape production in hydroponic gardens had helped provide a source of relatively cheap wine, but at the cost of quality. The truly good wines, those who would not be spat out by expert wine tasters of the 20th Century, were still being produced in places like Europe, South Africa and South America, but in limited quantities. Ironically, that put them out of reach of the pockets of most of the citizens of Earth, leaving only the few rich ones to enjoy them.

Watched by an impassive waiter, who had noticed her shocked expression on seeing the prices, Tina finally chose a bottle of French red Bordeaux that cost the niggardly sum of 640 credits, or five days-worth of her past salary as a ship pilot. Next, she explored the menu, with its prices that would have made the wine list proud, and ordered a Kobe steak imported from Japan, followed by a platter of varied pieces of French cheese. When she was finally served, the meal proved a memorable experience to Tina. Standard ship food was healthy, balanced...and rather bland. Most spices were very expensive, while the meat and fish produced in space farms somewhat lacked the full taste of the original product. Chewing pieces of Kobe steak washed down with red Bordeaux wine made Tina close her eyes with delight. The platter of cheese, accompanied by the rest of her wine bottle, was nearly as good. She finally ended her meal with a shot of French cognac. With the maitre d' looking like he expected to have to get her arrested for grand theft, Tina asked for the bill. She actually managed to keep a straight face on reading the bill, which amounted to a whopping 2,185 credits. Making a show of patting her various pockets under the severe eyes of the maitre d', Tina finally took out her new personalized debit card, the one linked to her ship's account, and presented it to the maitre d'. The latter then paled on examining it: it had the black and silver color of the type of debit card good for withdrawals of more than one million credits at a time. Turning red with embarrassment, he ran the card in his electronic reader, offering the unit to Tina so she could add a tip and sign on it with her thumbprint. After a short hesitation, Tina decided not to be mean and left a 400 credits tip, getting the maitre d' to bow to her while proffering his thanks. Tina finally got up from her table and left the restaurant, feeling like a million credits. Once outside, she could not help break out laughing.

15:49 (Universal Time)

Bridge of the MSS KOSTROMA

Docking Station number Four

Orbital terminal of the Callisto Prime Spaceport

Patricia O'Neil, the sensors and communications technician on duty on the bridge of the KOSTROMA, raised her head long enough to speak to Frida Skarsgard, the second pilot of the ship.

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