

MIGHTY NOSTROMO

By
Michel Poulin



MIGHTY NOSTROMO

SCIENCE-FICTION NOVEL

BY MICHEL POULIN

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WARNING TO POTENTIAL READERS

THIS FICTION NOVEL CONTAINS GRAPHIC DESCRIPTIONS OF WAR AND VIOLENCE, AS WELL AS COARSE LANGUAGE AND CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECTS THAT ARE UNSUITABLE FOR CHILDREN.

ABOUT THIS NOVEL

This novel is a sequel to WAR AMONG THE STARS and is the fifth novel of my KOSTROMA Series. It continues the adventures in Space of Tina Forster and of her mighty giant cargo ship, the A.M.S. KOSTROMA,

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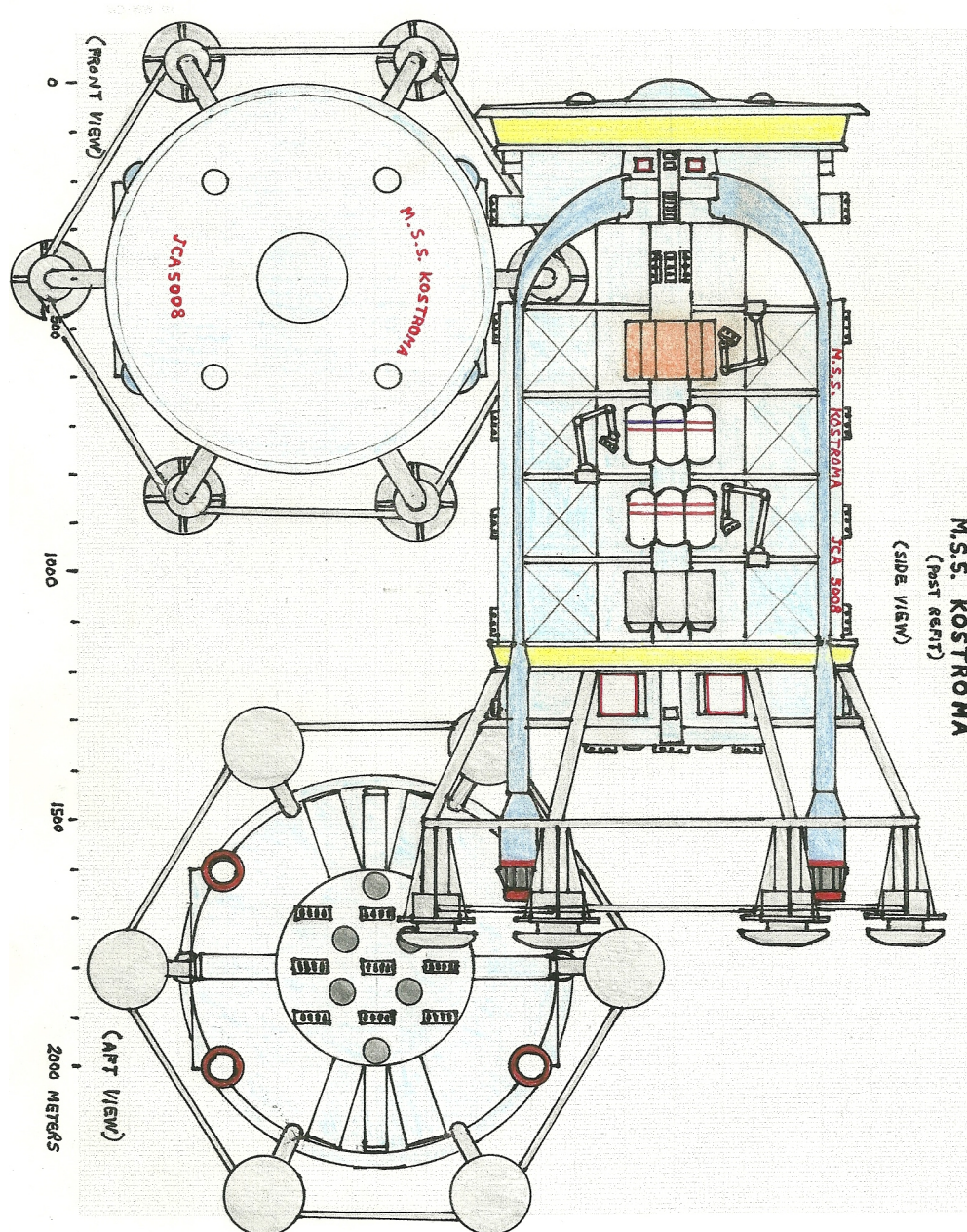
A MARS ODYSSEY

NAUCA – DAUGHTER OF THE STEPPES

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CHAPTER 1 – THE KOSTROMA



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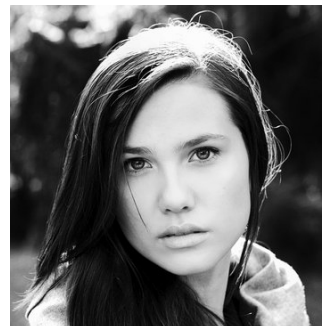
Tuesday, May 20, 2324 C.E.

Bridge of the Armed Merchant Ship KOSTROMA

On approach to the Las Americas orbital space station

Low Earth orbit, Solar System

Tina Forster, sitting in her command chair on the bridge of her ship, the armed merchant ship A.M.S. KOSTROMA, contemplated for a moment the image of the Las Americas orbital space station, visible ahead on the inner surface of the giant holographic projection sphere surrounding the bridge's concentric platforms. She then pressed the 'talk' button of her headset's microphone and spoke in a calm but firm voice.



"Las Americas Traffic Control, this is the A.M.S. KOSTROMA, requesting permission to dock at your cargo terminal." **Tina Forster**

The response from the traffic controller on the orbital space station followed a mere second later.

"KOSTROMA, you have permission to dock at our cargo terminal. Docking Station Bravo has been reserved for your arrival. Please engage your automated approach system and deploy your mooring clamps and we will guide your ship through the docking sequence."

"Thank you, Las Americas Control! Engaging our automated approach system and deploying our mooring clamps now."

Looking at her pilot, Frida Skarsgard, Tina nodded her head once to signify to her to follow the directives of the orbital station, to which the 36-year-old redhead replied with a nod of her own before punching a number of buttons on her work station.

"Automated approach system switched on and tuned to the Las Americas Control datalink. Mooring clamps deploying."

Looking down at one of the small display screens attached to the armrests of her command chair, Tina eyed the digital representation of her ship shown on it and saw that the massive telescopic arms supporting the equally massive mooring clamps of her cargo ship were effectively coming out of their wells and were also pivoting in order to fit in the mooring receptacles of the cargo terminal. With an overall length of close to 1,800 meters and a maximum loaded mass of 25 million metric tons, the KOSTROMA could only dock at space terminals reserved for super-heavy ships. As the sixth largest spaceship existing in the Solar System, the KOSTROMA certainly deserved the qualification of super-heavy ship. It also fully deserved the nickname of 'Mighty KOSTROMA' widely used to describe it. On top of being able to carry a stunning total of over twenty million metric tons of cargo, the KOSTROMA also happened to possess a very powerful armament, which it had used numerous times in actual space combat

during the past nine years. Its first combat had happened in 2315, when it had protected the planets and moons of the Spacers League against the tyrannical rule of the now-defunct Earth Federation, while its last combat had happened three years ago, against the Drazts of the Ross 128 System. With a peace treaty having been signed between the Spacers League and the Drazts, the KOSTROMA had then been free to return to its original purpose, which was the long-distance space hauling of heavy or outsized cargo.

While Tina had full confidence in the competence and skills of her pilot and of her other bridge crewmembers, Tina stayed in her command chair during the whole docking maneuver, watching carefully how it went. One false maneuver or an excessive approach speed could make her giant ship cause some serious damage to the Las Americas cargo terminal, something that had to be prevented at all cost, as the Las Americas orbital station was one of only four orbital stations around Earth capable of receiving super-heavy ships like the KOSTROMA. After some 23 minutes of careful maneuvering and slow approach, the ship's mooring clamps finally engaged and locked themselves to the cargo terminal's mooring receptacles, prompting a call from the cargo terminal traffic controller.

"KOSTROMA, this is the cargo terminal control: your mooring clamps show 'green' across the board. You may now start transferring your cargo pods to the terminal."

"Thank you, Terminal Control! We will start by transferring the eight extra-large bulk liquid tanks we filled with methane and acetylene in Hibernia, in the Trappist-1 System."

"Acknowledged, KOSTROMA! What is the actual tonnage of liquid hydrocarbons presently contained into those tanks?"

"Our bulk liquid tanks contain 1.01 million tons of methane and 1.2 million metric tons of acetylene."

"That should make the local representative of the Dows Chemicals Corporation happy and content...at least for a while." replied the traffic controller in a facetious tone that made Tina chuckle.

"Well, if he bought a gas-guzzler, that's his problem, not mine. Be advised that we are also going to unload a total of forty bulk ore silos containing a total of eleven million tons of chromium, vanadium and molybdenum processed metal pellets, loaded aboard while we were in the Klondike asteroid belt of Trappist-1."

"That should keep our terminal workers and robots busy for the rest of the day, KOSTROMA. Do you need to disembark passengers at this stage?"

"Not today, Terminal Control. We will wait until our cargo unloading is completed and the loading of our new cargo modules is done before moving to the passenger terminal tomorrow morning, where we are due to receive paying passengers heading to the Alpha Centauri System."

"Understood, KOSTROMA. Have a nice day! Cargo Terminal Control, out!"

Satisfied, Tina finally got up from her command chair and started walking towards the elevator banks serving the bridge complex, all the while giving instructions to her bridge crew.

"Dana, you have the bridge! I am now going to fly out in my yacht to the Avalon Space Yards, to go have a chat there with Mister Shomberg. From there, I will go down on Earth to do some early shopping for my future ship."

"Got it!" replied Dana 'DD' Durning, the navigator and unofficial first officer of the KOSTROMA. Knowing that her ship was in competent hands, Tina went into a waiting lift cabin and touched a tactile display screen to command the cabin to go down to Level 16, eight decks down from the bridge complex. The vertical trip took only seconds and she soon stepped out of the cabin and onto the Human Services Deck, which centralized the various crew services available on the ship, including the school departments and the kindergarten center. Walking across the central rotunda surrounding the central core column containing the lift shafts linking the various decks of the ship, Tina went to the kindergarten center, entering the parents' reception lounge and smiling to the young female receptionist.

"Hi, Helena! I'm here to pick up my little Misha. Sorry if I am a bit early."

"That's alright, Tina." Replied the receptionist, who called her by her first name, like most people aboard the KOSTROMA. "You may go get your sweet little boy at the center's playground."

"Thank you!"

Taking the long hallway linking the various sections and rooms of the kindergarten center, Tina went to the large playground, a 120 square meter room with foam mattresses covering the floor and containing a number of play modules designed

for toddlers. Tina felt a wave of joy rise in her when her son Misha, now four and a half years old, ran to her the moment he saw her.

"Mommy! Mommy!"

Catching her running son in her arms and then raising him up, Tina kissed him twice on his cheeks before smiling to him.

"So, how was your day up to now, Misha?"

"We had fun and I played a lot with my friends, Mommy. Are you here to pick me up?"

"Yes! I am a bit early today but I had to go visit someone in a space station, then go down to Earth and I thought that you would like to come with me."

"YES! I want to go with you, Mommy." replied at once her son in an enthusiastic tone of voice.

"Then, let's go pick up your backpack first, then we will go down to the hangar deck, where we will take my yacht for our trip."

Going first to the classroom used by her son's group, Tina recuperated the small child's backpack containing a set of spare clothes and shoes, then went back to the reception desk of the kindergarten center, where she called her husband, Michel Koniev, on her wrist communicator. Michel, who worked at the ship's security section, answered her in seconds.

"Hello, Tina! What's up?"

"Hi, Michel! I just picked up Misha at the kindergarten center and was going to bring him with me on a short business trip to the Avalon Space Yards, then down on Earth, where I intend to pay a visit to a tree nursery center near Vancouver. Would you be available to come with us?"

"Uh, just let me check with Ahmed on that. I won't be long."

As Michel paused the link for a moment to go speak with Ahmed Jibril, the head of security for the KOSTROMA, Tina waited patiently while playing with her son. Michel was back on line after less than a minute, sounding happy.

"Ahmed gave me the rest of the day off, Tina. Where do we meet?"

"At the Hangar Deck: I intend to use our personal yacht for our trip."

"Good! I will be there in a few minutes."

"The same here. See you at the Hangar Deck!" replied Tina before closing the link and smiling to little Misha.

"Come, Misha! We are going to take a space ride with Dad."

"YAY!" shouted the boy while jumping up and down on his small legs.

Leaving the kindergarten center and going to the central elevators' column, Tina and her son took a cabin ride down to the Hangar Deck, on Level 7. As they were exiting the lift cabin, Tina smiled on seeing her very handsome husband come out of another lift cabin next to hers.

"Aah, perfect timing, Michel! Let's go to our yacht."



Crossing the rotunda surrounding the core spine column, the small **Michel Koniev** family then walked through a large and high-ceiling space used for the movement of craft and large equipment before entering the Crafts Hangar Number Four, where Tina's yacht was parked. Tina was fond of her FRIENDSHIP, which she had bought second-hand in Vancouver a few years ago, despite it being a rather dated craft design. While not the most modern model available on the market, it still had very decent capabilities and had also been refitted by her with a Koomak Drive, giving it an interstellar capability. It was also a comfortable small ship and was easy to operate, being able to be programmed to fly itself from takeoff to landing. It also had a sentimental value for Tina, having been the craft she had used two years ago to go on a diplomatic mission to Ross 128 and conduct peace talks with the Drazts. The FRIENDSHIP had then sustained some serious damage when the Drazts had mounted a treacherous attack against the KOSTROMA but she later had decided to have it repaired and upgraded instead of simply scrapping it. Now, it was about as good as anything else available and it was just the right size for Tina's personal use, with seating and accommodations for up to six persons. Another reason for Tina to use it today was that there were sets of spare clothing and personal hygiene kits inside for her, Michel and Misha, thus saving her the need to go up to her family suite in order to pack bags for their trip.

Going to her yacht, parked beside a much larger cargo shuttle, Tina activated the left side ('port' side in naval parlance) access door, also called an 'airstair', making it pivot down and present its integrated stairs to her, Michel and Misha. Climbing quickly aboard, Tina then went straight to the small cockpit of the yacht, where she started activating the various systems of the FRIENDSHIP while Michel sat down and strapped in Misha in one of the four padded passenger seats located just behind the two crew

seats. The three of them were strapped in by the time that she contacted the hangar control station.

"KOSTROMA Traffic Control, this is the FRIENDSHIP, in Hangar Number Four. I request cycling through our southern airlock for departure."

"FRIENDSHIP, you are authorized to enter the southern airlock now."

"Thank you, Control!"

Grabbing the flight control stick of her seat, Tina made her rise yacht gently and silently from the hangar deck, using the gravity sails of her small craft to make it move inside the KOSTROMA. Gravity sails had been invented a good century ago but were still a very efficient propulsion mode, especially for small craft meant for short trips in space or inside a planet's atmosphere. As its name entailed, flat surfaces acting like the sails of an ancient sailing ship produced thrust at right angle to them when hit by gravity waves. The system was totally silent, didn't produce any heat and took little space inside a ship, being often integrated into main partition walls. Multiple layers of gravity sails and their gravity wave generators could also be superimposed to multiply the force transferred to the ship or craft. The only thing needed to make it work was electricity. Even the huge KOSTROMA used gravity sails integrated into its hull sides and partitions when maneuvering close to a space station or when landing on a planet or moon. The KOSTROMA could also make a short trip strictly on gravity sails, doing so with accelerations that could attain 2 Gs, a performance which many lesser ships could only envy. Hovering just above the deck and slowly going forward, Tina's yacht soon entered the airlock connected to its hangar and landed on its rotating platform pad as the inner door of the airlock closed behind it. The air inside the airlock was then pumped out before the outer door opened, showing the vacuum of space beyond a short but wide tunnel.

"KOSTROMA Control, from FRIENDSHIP: I am now going to fly out to head to the Avalon Space Yards."

"Understood, FRIENDSHIP. Have a good trip!"

"Thank you, KOSTROMA." replied Tina, who believe in the virtues of politeness. Like every time she flew a craft or spaceship, Tina felt happiness while flying her yacht out of the KOSTROMA. She truly had been born to fly and had been the main pilot of the KOSTROMA before she had inherited it after the death of her uncle, who had been the owner of the giant cargo ship. Consulting her space chart display, she then veered

her yacht towards the orbit used by the Avalon Space Yards, her first destination, and engaged her autopilot before twisting her head to look at her son.

"Our first trip won't be long, Misha: we are going to visit a space shipyard where I need to discuss with the head designer. Then, we will go down to Earth to go see trees."

"But we have many trees already on our ship, Mommy."

"True, but I want new trees for a future ship I am having built. I will explain that more to you once down in Vancouver."

"We are going to have another ship, Mommy? But I like our KOSTROMA."

"I love it too, Misha. Don't worry: I have no plans to get rid of it. I just want to add another ship to my business. However, that new ship won't be ready for another eight or ten years anyway, so you will have plenty of time to grow up on the KOSTROMA. I am going to select and buy more trees today so that they have time to grow a bit before they are transplanted in my future ship. Most fruit trees need to grow for many years before they can start producing fruits and I want the fruit trees in my future ship to start producing by the time that ship is launched into service."

"How will you call that ship, Mommy?" asked the four-year-old boy after a moment of reflection. Tina smiled to herself then, imagining her new ship traveling through space.

"It will be called the NOSTROMO and it will be even bigger than our KOSTROMA, Misha."

The rest of the short trip, which took no more than twenty minutes, was spent mostly in silence, as Tina and Michel let Misha admire the view of Earth from orbit through the cockpit's windows. Then, a mass appeared ahead of the yacht, growing as the FRIENDSHIP approached it. Soon, it revealed itself to be an orbital installation of colossal dimensions.

"The Avalon Space Yards!" announced Tina for the benefit of her son. "The place where the KOSTROMA was built and where my NOSTROMO will also be born in a few years. We are going to visit its owner and chief designer, Mister Gustav Shomberg."

"Mister Shomberg built this station? It is huge!"

"It is effectively huge, Misha, but Gustav Shomberg didn't build it: he bought it after the original owner went bankrupt because of his poor managerial skills. Apparently,

the man was a better engineer than he was as a businessman. Mister Shomberg is a true genius, but he also is a very decent and principled man. He risked his life and everything else to help me to fight the tyranny of the Earth Federation in 2315, when he secretly added weapons to my KOSTROMA.”

Little Misha listened to her in silence while staring at the ever-growing orbital installation. Soon, the yacht approached a wide opening on the surface of what now looked like a vertical wall of steel that made the craft appear like a small insect. Letting the automated approach controls of the station guide her yacht in, Tina watched on as they cycled through an airlock, then entered a cavernous garage in which dozens of other craft and minor ships were already moored at individual docking ports. The tractor beams equipping the garage then pulled the yacht towards a free docking port, where it docked smoothly after another minute, with mooring clamps taking hold of the FRIENDSHIP, which was still essentially floating in the internal space of the garage reserved for short term visitors. Tina knew that more long-term visitors would instead be accommodated inside individual ship hangars in another section of the space yard.

Powering down her yacht, Tina let Michel undo Misha's harness before taking her son's hand and guide him out of the craft and into a reception airlock, then into a small locker room cum reception lobby. There, they were met by a young and very beautiful Asian woman who had apparently been waiting for them and who presented herself to Tina.

“Welcome aboard the Avalon Space Yards, Commodore Forster. I am Miri Jintsu, one of the personal assistants of Mister Shomberg. When our local space traffic control section alerted Mister Shomberg about your approach, he sent me to welcome you and bring your family to him. I have a cart waiting just outside this compartment. If you will please follow me.”

“Mister Shomberg was too kind.” replied Tina, who then followed the woman out of the lobby, still holding Misha's hand. The small family sat inside a waiting electric cart parked in a large hallway, next to the door of the lobby, while Miri Jintsu sat at the controls. The cart quickly started rolling down the apparently interminable hallway, the length of which prompted a question from little Misha.

“Gee! How long is this hallway? I can't see its end.”

“This hallway is 11.5 kilometer-long and runs from one end of the space yards to the other, forming one of its main circulation arteries. Since the Avalon Space Yards

specializes in the building, refit and repair of large spaceships, it necessarily occupies a large volume of enclosed space, which is mainly taken by big, pressurized construction and repair docks.”

“And how many of those construction and repair docks do you have, Miss Jintsu?” asked Michel Koniev from his rear seat.

“We have four construction docks for super-heavy ships, all able to accommodate ships as big or bigger than your KOSTROMA, plus another ten construction docks for heavy ships and twenty smaller docks for medium and small ships. We also have an internal construction hall complex able to produce small craft in series quantities.”

“That’s quite impressive, miss. And how busy are the Avalon Space Yards presently?”

“Quite busy, sir. In fact, we are approaching our maximum production capacity right now. Business is really good, thanks to the present space colonization boom.”

Tina couldn’t help exchange a worried look with her husband on hearing that, something the personal aide apparently noticed.

“Mister Shomberg told me to reassure you about the construction work on your ship, Commodore Foster: while we are quite busy with other construction projects, that has not impinged on the construction of your NOSTROMO. Mister Shomberg will expand on that further once we will be at his office.”

Half reassured by that, Tina refrained from asking more questions afterwards and stayed quiet as they rolled along the long hallway.

After another two minutes and over one kilometer of rolling, the cart turned into a secondary hallway, then slowed down and stopped, parking next to other carts near a double door entrance. That entrance was in fact a full-fledged personnel airlock which was probably meant to act as a second level of security against accidents that could cause leaks and explosive decompressions, a major worry for any ship or space installation. Cycling through the entrance airlock, the small group then walked across a posh lounge and followed for about forty meters a wide corridor lined with administrative offices with transparent partitions. Jintsu finally stopped at a door along an opaque section of wall and touched with one hand the access pad next to the sliding door, making it open. Tina, Michel and Misha followed her inside a sort of anteroom where a young secretary got up from behind her desk when they entered and bowed to them.

"Commodore Forster, Mister Shomberg is waiting for you in his office. You may enter it right away."

"Thank you, miss!"

Flanked by her husband and son, Tina went to an old-style door made of polished wood and knocked on it, waiting for a muffled 'come in' before opening it and entering a large office. That office, while comfortably furnished, also had a happy chaos look to it, with piles of papers and documents stacked on and around a large work desk and a shelving unit and with models of spaceships suspended from the ceiling or sitting on shelves. A big man in his fifties then came to her, his right hand extended for a shake and a big smile on his face. He was of pure Nordic blood, with blond hair, blue eyes and fairly pale skin color.

"Tina, it is truly nice to see you again. And you brought with you your cute son." Shomberg shook Tina's hand, then Michel's hand before bending down to brush Misha's hair.

"You are growing up quite fast, Misha. You should be able to attract plenty of girls in a few more years."

While Misha reddened a bit in embarrassment at those words, Michel and Tina grinned in response, with Michel replying to the designer.

"Please don't encourage him on that, Gustav: one kid is already a lot to watch."

"Well, at least you have a boy." Replied Shomberg. "A girl would mean a lot more watching, if you see what I mean."

"Oh, I do see, Gustav." said Tina before switching to a more serious subject. "We came to take news about my NOSTROMO and to discuss a few points about its construction."

"Then, let's go sit in those sofas in that corner. Would you like some drinks? Coffee, tea, juices, milk or water?"

"I wouldn't say no to a cup of strong coffee." answered Tina, imitated by Michel. Nodding his head, Shomberg excused himself for a moment and went to speak briefly with his secretary before returning to the corner where the small family was now sitting, sitting in an easy chair facing their sofa.

"So, what would you like to know, Tina?"

"First off, how is the construction of my NOSTROMO going? I heard that your space yards are quite busy these days."

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