Justice Qazi

Prologue - Text Message (received within the last hour)
Age: 42

> TEXT FROM MOTHER: Justice, they say you have to shut down the hydroponic systems there and disable the ship if you can. There are soldiers here, with guns, and they say they will kill me if you do not agree to do this. I may be an old woman, but they do not know I fought in the Army to protect you and your sisters since you were a baby. They do not know that I have prepared for their coming. Go. Do not do what these thugs want. I will not let them scare me. And I have a surprise for them. Do not mourn for me; we will find a way to each other in another life.

End of Prologue

Scene 1 - Justice Finds a Way
Age: 42

You know what hard work is: the difference between life and death. Your mother and your sisters knew this, too. Your father, who is dead, did not. You are alive; you worked very hard to be so. Your mother did the most out of all of you; she is old now, and living in the home you and your sisters' extra work have provided her.

You remember your mother and father arguing when you were young. "It's too hard," he told her, "we may as well stay and hope for the best." Your mother, putting on her uniform, loading her sidearms, replied, "If you are too lazy, if you are too afraid, we will cross the border and the mountains without you and leave you behind! We have children! This famine-stricken land cannot support us!" And when your father said, "If we had fewer children, there would be more food," your mother did no more than shut the door and leave with you and your sisters.

You walked through and over the mountain lands, into valleys that were hardly more than scrublands. Still, things could be made to grow in those valleys, with great, daily effort. You learned how to draw food out of racks and vats, moistened by the connected pipes of liquids from filtered waste and sewage, turned to bits of edibles growing in the sun; this was your first education. From scavenged bits of garbage, and fighting others for the contents of latrines, your family harvested your first garden together, in the tightest of spaces to feed your number - a half-broken, discarded shipping container. When you had pride, your mother stamped it down. "We will all live," she said, "there is nothing too low for us, if it helps us to survive." And slowly, as you all learned that lesson, you lived. As the eldest, they scrambled to find the money and the books needed for school for you. They failed, but you managed to steal a net-sat unit instead, and learned your lessons from searching there.

It was in your middle age, all of you still alive, that your family got its great boon and fortune. A charity had established a technical program, which taught the machines and means for planting and growing. Your net-sat, and a few kilometers of pre-dawn walking, got you in. Meals were provided, which were bounties that could be saved up for your trip back.

You learned quickly - new ways to grow and harvest food, and better techniques to improve what you already knew. With your stolen net-sat, you learned that the founder of the charity, a Very Important Person, would be coming to review its progress. Sneaking your way between the cleaners and the others rearranging the school for viewing, you ran into Rowan, the spouse of **Morgan Lee**, from one of the wealthiest families on the planet. You didn't have long to impress Rowan Lee - school officials trying to curry Rowan's favor wanted to push you out of the way. They were very dismissive of you, a stranger, a foreigner, in tattered and salvaged clothing. Rowan Lee insisted otherwise, and arranged for you to meet after the VIP tour. Rowan was impressed by your ideas and experience, and asked if you would be interested in working with the Cosmic Lee company.

Of course you were. It was a chance to make some real money, to buy real food, and to help your sisters get the education they deserved. Your mother deserved a chance to not have to struggle every day. The tests were surprisingly easy, verifying your abilities as well as your quickness with instructions and manuals.

They were impressed enough to have you travel into space, up to *Alexandria*, in orbit around the Earth. (The money they paid you was more than you'd ever seen in a year, or three.) *Alexandria* was one of the most important projects of the Cosmic Lee company. It even had a complete, fake person who lived in

and ran things from his or her computer in the walls of the ship somewhere. This was a ship of space, one that was intended to go to other stars, to create new Earth ecosystems on other planets in case the tremendous damage to the Earth's ecology could not be repaired. *Alexandria* was even capable of creating other people; a true wonder, undoubtedly blasphemous to many. It is strange that a family as wealthy as the Lees were involved in such a project, where personal gain seemed far from immediate.

The systems were complex, and space was a difficult place. Like many, you had a hard time adjusting to weightlessness. Fortunately, the hydroponics garden, one of the largest open areas on the relatively small ship, was in the rotating part of the ship. That meant that it felt like there was gravity, and things that should be down stayed down.

After two weeks, you had a rough idea how everything worked. The systems were very advanced, and the ***Alexandria*** person could bring up schematics, descriptions, and measurements to answer your questions. The ***Alexandria*** person was very patient, even when you swore in Hindi, cursing the people who created this technological monster that recycled everything it could. There was no margin for error; *Alexandria* was designed to travel for years, for decades, all without adding anything new to the system. It had to recycle everything if the crew was to survive.

That's when the alarms on *Alexandria* blared. You strapped yourself in, as suggested. Before long, the ship was underway, somewhere. There was a long time when it felt like there was an elephant in your lap, if there were any elephants left, and if, somehow, one got into space. The voice of the ***Alexandria*** person warned that they were being chased by nuclear missiles - who would do such a thing to a simple spaceship months away from a real flight? After a while, the pressure eased, and you could remove the straps and move awkwardly about. And there, on the bridge, where the people aboard the *Alexandria* had gathered, perhaps to talk and shout at one another, you saw near death, something which you were very familiar with.

Morgan Lee, you could see, would die from wounds inflicted by unknowns - bullet wounds. And Morgan and Rowan's child, **Aria**, was crying. If they were sending nuclear missiles at Morgan, what were they doing to Rowan? You had just seen the message from your own mother, blurry on the screen because of the elephant's weight. You would think of that, specifically, at a more private time and place.

But here, you could do more than think - and think of what your mother had given you so many times, to keep you alive, to keep something in your belly, to keep you moving, to keep you learning, to keep you through all those impossible times. Think of how young **Aria** - seven? nine? - would need someone who could guide them to adulthood. You had never had children of your own flesh (and likely never would). Perhaps. Perhaps you owed **Morgan** and Rowan that much, even if **Aria** would not accept this quickly - at least until you got back to Earth.

End of Scene 1

Justice Qazi

Scene 2 - Truth, Justice, and the *Alexandrian* Way
Age: 52

Aria has grown up; 18 years alive, and adult. (This is as rich people count these times - you would have been called adult enough at 12 or 13 back in your day, which you can't help thinking about, even after ten years with these different people who did not have to struggle.)

Rowan, a dear sweet child, created by machines from the seeds of unmet parents matched by *Alexandria*, has taken Morgan Lee's space aboard the ship. **Rowan** is quite fond of you, and you of **Rowan**, so much so that you like to dream that you are **Rowan**'s actual parent. **Rowan** is eight; how could so much time have passed since you last saw Earth? **Aria** named **Rowan** after the other parent, Morgan's spouse.

But things end, and you hope to start again, fresh on a new cycle, having gained much karma for your efforts. You, here, on this ship speeding in the vast darkness. Who would have thought? And you have taught everything the rest of the crew aboard the *Alexandria* needs to know about the parts you have worked on and kept up for them. You have spoken of the other parts to ***Alexandria***, who will record the rest, for **Rowan** or whoever is next to take up matters until all of you, and whatever is left of you, yourself, reach wherever you are meant to go to.

So you are dying. What of it? You would die someday, somewhere, nonetheless. And this time and place is not so terrible.

It would be nice for the young people to have a child of their own. Yes, genetic diversity, you can hear ***Alexandria*** say. But it would be nice, wouldn't it? Even if they ultimately use the machines. Couldn't they honor something like that, maybe? When you are dying? A reminder of what people and families are like... Couldn't that be worth preserving, to see? And they will be young and strong and vibrant when they eventually reach a colonizable world, already prepared to raise many children. Maybe for **Rowan** to see? Maybe?

Eh. Maybe you'll let yourself be convinced otherwise; but maybe after you try convincing them so.

End of Scene 2

Tarachand ("Bright Star")

Scene 3 - Second Born Star Child
Age: 8

It's interesting being the only kid on the ship. They tell you they remember when **Aria** was little, and when **Rowan** was little, but they're both big now. **Rowan** was basically your big sibling, teaching you everything about the ship. **Rowan** is the only other person who was born aboard ***Alexandria***, so that makes you even closer.

Aria is like **Rowan**'s big sibling, but started spending more time with **Santos** a couple of years ago, needing help with away missions to get metal for the engine. **Aria** is still nice to **Rowan**, though, and to you. **Santos** is also nice to you, and teaches you about the engines. **Aria** and **Santos** sometimes spend time together with you. They spend a lot of time together.

Sasha and **Aria** went on an away mission to check if a planet was habitable. It never has been so far, but most people aboard *Alexandria* came from one that was, so there must be some out there somewhere. They came back, but **Sasha** wasn't talking, and was being dragged by **Aria**. You followed them to **Dr. Berg**, but **Rowan** is keeping you from getting close to **Sasha**. You see blood, and the doctor looks upset. You hope **Sasha** is okay.

IMPORTANT METANOTE: There are many potential paths and parental/genetic combinations that can lead to Tarachand's birth - too many for us to account for. Play it as you see appropriate, based on what has gone before.

End of Scene 3

Tarachand ("Bright Star")

Scene 4 - What the…?
Age: 18

The crew is much less together than they used to be. **Sasha** and ***Alexandria*** are spending a lot of time in virtual reality together. **Dr. Berg** seems to be keeping themselves busy. **Aria** and **Santos** spend time with each other. They still spend time with you, but not like when you were little. **Rowan** is about the same.

Of course, that's outside your official duties. Everyone on the ship has to know something about everything on the ship. Everyone has to be an expert on something. Your duty is to know and understand how **Santos**' engines work. Well, **Santos** and **Sasha**'s engines. **Santos** is the physicist who figured out how to make *Alexandria* go faster than the speed of light. It makes **Santos** sad sometimes, explaining the physics of the engine. **Santos** says that no one else knows that **Santos**' engine is smarter than Senor Einstein. Senor Einstein is in all the physics books in ***Alexandria's*** library. **Santos** is not, which is wrong.

Sasha built **Santos**' engine, but **Sasha** is strange. It's the alien inside **Sasha** that makes **Sasha** say strange words, in a language no one else knows.

Santos is brilliant, kind, loving, a tough teacher, clearly in love with science and math, proud of the engines, prouder that the engines keep getting better, and proudest of the family that goes with them as they travel to the stars.

Santos got sick recently. It seems harder for **Santos** to do normal things. This isn't a cold or flu, but a weakness that seems to be progressing, and very quickly. You're trying to be as helpful as you can with the engines and whatever else **Santos** might have to do.

Aria seems more upset than **Santos**, though you guess **Santos** doesn't have the energy for that sort of thing. They've known each other and loved each other for longer than you've been alive. You're not as upset as **Aria**, but you want **Santos** to get better. Nothing seems to be helping yet.

No one has ever died while you've been alive. You hope this won't be the first time. Please don't let **Santos** die.

End of Scene 4

Tarachand ("Bright Star")

Scene 5 - The One
Age: 28

You can almost see **Aria** try to hold back eagerness, against the fear of being disappointed yet again.

But **Aria** shouldn't be so worried. This is the best prospect you've ever seen. Even looking at the place, you feel calmer; like it was meant to be - like you could spend the rest of your days here, comfortably.

That's unlikely - there's still a lot of work to do, especially right at the beginning! What crops will grow? What trees to plant?

Maybe you can modify one of the shuttles to help spread Earth seeds across the planet? Is there sentient alien life around? You don't think so; *Alexandria* has not seen any signs of it in all of their scans of the planet.

There are going to be a lot of babies here soon. Will a 28 year age gap between partners be too large? Will you be too old for that? You can see how good it was between **Aria** and **Santos**, and you'd like to have that too.

You're not sure what's going to happen next, but you're sure looking forward to it.

End of Scene 5