

Eternity Project | Book 1
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Chapter 1

Recommended reading song - Fire and Honor Remix by Audiomachine

I sip from my mug. If they don't show up soon, I'm going to have to order another one. I catch myself strumming my fingers against the table. I've been here half an hour, and impatient fidgeting is a dead give away that I'm waiting for someone. I take another drink.

I remove my cAs from my pocket and double check that I have the right bar and time. Yes, that's all correct, and they know they're meeting with Skylar Driven. Virus! Maybe they thought Skylar was a man. Should have sent a picture, or at least what I would be wearing. I slide the cAs back in my pocket. It doesn't matter; I know what Doctor Lee looks like, and he's not here.

The dim lights and loud music of the bar fill my senses. More tables dot the room with some bigger booths along the wall. I check each patron again; a woman flirting with the bar keeper, who's cleaning a glass. A family with a youngster in a booth. A handful of couples. A gang of three giggling. I take another drink of my soda, trying not to look bored. I shiver; I choose to sit by the front door, and even though it's locked, the cold still finds its way through the hinges and rubber seals. It was the only spot where I could watch the garage entrance. This time of the month, it's the only entrance the bar uses.

The door to the garage opens. The newcomers aren't Doctor Lee. The hair on my arm stands up. It's five Government Officials. I should have insisted on a different bar. I look away, staring at my drink. The men greet the barkeep by name, then remove their heavy coats and squeeze into the corner booth. The barkeep brings them mugs with something steaming. Their laughter makes it through the music and rattles my ear.

If my contacts even show up, I'll have some words for them.

We need a doctor. Badly. Last week, a miner fell, breaking his ribs and puncturing his lung. He didn't make it. We have two expecting mothers. One of them is due in a month. I lean back, arms cross. It's a friendly bar; the Govs are probably just on break. Besides, I know how to handle them if trouble comes up.

20 minutes tick by, and I decide to wait another five, then another five after that. I order another soda, this time a hot one. Somewhere in there, a half drunk flirts with me. I glance at the Govs; I don't want to draw their attention. I tell him I'll meet up with him later. He believes me and wonders back to the bar to drink more.

The garage door opens again, and this time two men enter. I don't know the first, but the second is Doctor Lee. Both men look lunar, but I know that Doctor Lee is earth-born. He's been on the moon long enough for the dry air and lack of sunlight to have taken its toll. He looks tired, drained. He has nothing but his medical bag slung over his shoulder and a backpack. At least he travels light.

Both men sit down, and the second man, a 20-somethings with shaky blond hair, orders a drink.

"You're late," I say more sharply than I meant to.

The man shrugs and leans backwards, tipping his chair back.

"Had some trouble, sorry." He puts his hands behind his head.

"Any we should know about?" I say.

“Na, I handled it,” he grins. When his beer arrives, he drinks half of it before setting it down on the table with a thud.

“Watch it!” I say. “Do you want them to look at us?”

“Them?”

He didn’t notice the squad of Govs having a good time in their booth? I nod slightly toward group. He starts, almost falling over in his chair. I roll my eyes before I can stop myself. How has this idiot not gotten himself caught or killed?

“We should go,” Lee moves to stand, but I catch his arm.

“We’re just friends meeting for lunch. Play the part,” I says. “We can’t draw attention to ourselves by leaving right after we enter. It’s a friendly bar. Govs are welcome here.”

“So how long are we staying?” the blonde mans say. I really should learn his name so I know what not to name my future children.

“20 minutes, or after they leave,” I say.

The man swears.

“It isn’t like they’re timing us. We’re just background to them.”

“We play it calm, okay?” I say. “We should talk. Pass the time. Look like we’re ‘old friends.’”

I put my hand on Lee’s arm and smile. “So what brought you to the moon?”

“Work,” Lee says. “There’s always work for a doctor.”

“How long have you been working?”

“Few years. Mining operations. Off books.”

A thought strikes me. “We can’t really pay you. Kashmen told you, right?”

“I know. I’m looking for a way back to earth. That should be payment enough.”

The man chugs the rest of his beer, then sets it down, this time softer.

“I’m out of here.”

“You have to wait,” I say. “You show up with Lee, then leave by yourself. Anyone with eyes can see we’ve doing an exchange, and not a legal one.”

“I’m sure you’ll figure it out, coward.”

The words bite hard. I clench my cup.

“If a coward takes cares of broken families and finds them a new home, then yes. We are cowards. We appreciate your sect drawing attention of the government away from.”

“Appreciate it?” he leans in. “You all are too scared to do what’s needed to free this nation of this God-forsaken government. They kill people, Skylar, and you just run away?”

A lump grows in my throat, but I choke it back, and it is replaced by a hot flame in my chest. “I know what the United World Government does.”

Virus! Why is he getting to me? I exhale through my nose, trying to bring me into the now.

“We don’t kill Govs,” I say. “Not anymore.”

“I’m sure you’re proud of that too.”

“Always,” I smile. “Besides, I hear you haven’t killed any Govs either. It’s been 18 months since your last strike? Troubles with recruitment numbers,I imagine.”

“The moon is meant to be a refuge from the United World Government. That’s why it was colonized 300 years ago. Then the government decided to take over, and now they own the place, and you’re just going to watch?”

“So, the lunar founding fathers ran away from a corrupt government to a new free home? Sounds familiar.”

He scoffs, drains his drink, and lets it thump on the table.

“Well, enjoy your new doctor, coward.”

“Enjoy the new lunar Admiral.” I say. “I heard his acceptance speech.”

He glares at me, then leaves, slamming the door behind him. I quince. We might as well be holding a neon sign that says look at me. I exhale and glance at Lee.

I suddenly realize that I can't hear the Govs joyous conversation. I glance at them, and I make eye contact with one of them. His eyes dart away. One of them pulls out their cAs. Looking something, or more likely, looking up someone. If they look me up, they'll find a missing child with no adult criminal activity. They look up Dr. Lee, then we have a problem.

I shove back my seat and go to the bar. “Can I have three shots vodka, and a bottle of dry whiskey.”

The barkeep draws his eyebrows together. “A dry whiskey?”

Virus, these people don't even know what a dry whiskey is!

“Forget the whiskey, just the shots. Make it quick.”

I'd probably get them fast if I flirted, but I'm not in the mood. I look back at Lee; he looks relaxed, bored even. Either he doesn't know that we're in trouble, or he knows how to keep his cool. I hope it's the latter, but if he's from earth, he's probably clueless.

I carry the three shots back to our table and push one over to him. Some of the liquid sloshes over.

“Drink it,” I say.

“I'm good,” he says.

“You ever been in a bar fight?” I say.

He shakes his head.

“It will dull the pain somewhat.”

“I said I'm good.”

Over his shoulder, I see the group Govs rise. Two are new transfers from earth; one looks like he's lunar-born. I don't have time. Virus! I like it better when my cargo doesn't need a briefing.

“When things break out, go out the front door. It will lock behind you. Crawl under the highway, and wait in the alley for me.”

“What if you don't make it?”

I don't answer. He has no way to contact our base, and I don't have time to slide him a earpiece or explain how to contact Jeremy through our secret network.

Two Govs come to our table, the earth transfer, Officer Shaw, and the lunar-born, Officer Vance. Knowing their names is sometimes helpful. Ideally, I'd learn their first name, but it's not printed on their uniforms.

“Ma'am,” officer Vance says to me, but then turns to Doctor Lee. “Do you have your identification?”

Lee's been made.

I throw my shot of vodka into Officer Vance's face. He jerks back, the alcohol burning his eyes. I follow by breaking my mug on Officer Shaw's head. Some shattered glass flies back and cuts my wrist.

“Go!” I yell at Lee when he doesn't move. Idiot!

I may have more Govs to deal with. Shaw is still on the floor, holding his bloody hair. Vance is hissing curse words.

I bolt for the front door. A chair falls over, and the thudding of boots tells me I'm being followed.

"Wait!" Vance shouts. "Stand down!"

I burst through the doors. I'm hit with the biting midnight air. The cold steals my breath as it slams my body. I'm also smacked with the sounds of the busy street and the smell of burnt fuel. At the moment, there are no trains coming toward us, so I ram Lee and shove him onto the road, which is about a meter down. He drops out of view. I turn, drawing my pistol, and sliding to the side of the building. The sidewalks are empty this time of the month, so I don't have to worry about civilians. The cold freezes my lungs from the inside and the gaseous air from the ships chokes me.

Before the doors have closed behind me, one of the earth-transfers charges out. He takes a step back when the cold hits him; it probably never gotten this cold on earth. He gasps. I point the gun at him, but it takes him a few seconds to of scanning his surroundings for him to see me. The doors close, locking him out of the bar.

He stands unmoving. His gun is drawn, but it's pointed straight up. I could shoot him before he could even could get me in his sights. Only military is allowed firearms; he wasn't prepared to come face-to-face with a barrel. Rookie mistake. Then again, that's why over half of new transfers don't make it one year. I glance at this name tag: Seymour.

"Drop it, Seymour," I say.

He bends over to put the gun on the ground.

"Don't move, just drop it!"

He lets the gun fall and it bounces off the concrete a few times before it finally comes to a stop. Virus. I'd hope it might bounce off the sidewalk and into the street, where Lee is. He glances at the door, but it doesn't open. His squad mates are smart enough not to follow him. They're probably calling in backup. If they're brave, they'll go out another exit and try to flank me. Either way, time isn't on my side.

He looks back at me. He's probably never had to stare at the black hole of a barrel, wondering if it's the last thing he'll see. If I pull the trigger, would he even know it? Will he hear the gunshot, see the flare of the bullet before he dies, or will he just be dead? His body is shaking, and his breath comes in uneven gasps. Weather it's from fear or the cold, I'm not sure. His green eyes are wide with a mix of terror and yet trying to be brave. He remind me of Jeremy.