



BY JESSICA WHITLINGER

# CHAPTER 1

In a faraway portion of the infinite universe, legends are told of an ancient race of people who lived on a planet called Olympia. The stories say that in the dawn of time the Olympians emerged from the heavens onto the lush paradise that was Olympia. The entire planet teemed with life like a thriving garden. The heavenly Olympians, said to be descendants of the gods, were capable of possessing the Divine Power, a force capable of destroying all darkness. However, only an Olympian of entire purity could ever wield such might.

Peace was the sacred way of life for the heavenly beings and reigned for countless centuries of the Olympian civilization. However, evil temptations stirred on neighboring planets and other races began coveting the sacred planet of light and the vast power of the Olympians. Merciless war broke out and centuries of slaughter followed. Wielding destructive power, the Olympians crushed all their opponents and emerged victorious. Their vast empire spanned for many light years and countless races had to pay homage to the Olympian king.

After the bloodshed had ceased, the awesome might of the Olympians was recognized and all lived in fear of provoking their wrath. Peace once again prevailed for thousands of years and as this time passed, less and less Olympians developed their power and turned their interest to developing technology. Slowly, their empire dwindled away as they lost sight of their sacred ancestry and became docile beings. That's why nearly all of the Olympians were slaughtered on the day the darkness descended. Very few survived the massacre by fleeing from the darkness, but there are no Olympians left on Olympia. It has become a forsaken wasteland of ruins forgotten by time...



In a distant future, mankind has moved out into the stars and expanded its territory through the use of highly advanced technology. It is a peaceful time of trade among planets and Earth is enjoying great prosperity. With a vast population spanning across many galaxies, Earth has become the most powerful planet in the universe. Perhaps it was the conceit of the humans that hindered them from noticing the growing darkness...

On the tiny planet of Gabora, in a small galaxy, the Gaborans are engaged in fierce combat with an invading force. Amidst the bloodshed, a single soldier flees from the battlefield. Making his way to a small tent at the base of a towering cliff, he scurries inside. In a panic he says, "General! I have news for you!"

Spinning around in his chair, the anxious general faced the frightened soldier. "What news? How's the front line?" The words sprung quickly from his quivering lips.

The soldier bowed his head in shame. "I'm afraid it has fallen... We're outnumbered fifty-to-one! What's to be done, general?"

The general paced back and forth for a moment, thinking deeply on the situation. Rubbing his blue, scaly head, he sighed. "There's not much we can do. This enemy is too

strong for us and I can not allow any more blood loss on our side! We have no choice but to surrender and submit to their demands.”

The young soldier gasped in horror. “But general! If we surrender, they’ll-”

The general raised his gloved hand to silence him. “I know the consequences of defeat, but there’s nothing else to be done. We put up a good fight and gave it our all. Better then some and worse than others. Now go sound the retreat!”

Tears formed in the young soldier’s frightened eyes and sweat dripped down his face. “Yes sir.” He bowed his scaly head again and quit the tent, his shoulders slumped and his head hung low in misery. When he had walked only a few meters, the sound of a gunshot erupted from the tent. The soldier jumped in surprise and spun around. His eyes grew wide as he realized what his commander had done. With a trembling hand he grabbed a trumpet from the belt around his waist, raised it to his quivering lips, and the soldier blew with all his might. All over the battlefield soldiers stopped their fighting and listened to the blaring notes. Understanding the message, the Gaborans turned and fled from the enemy.

A lieutenant in blue armor from the attacking side smiled in delight. “They are retreating!” Pointing to a young soldier soaked in enemy blood, he said, “You there! Go and tell General Lars that we have won!”

“Yes sir!” The soldier bowed and promptly ran off in search of the General. Finding him in the midst of killing a Gaboran, the soldier saluted. “General Lars!”

Lars, a tall, black haired man with gray eyes, kicked the dead body away and turned around with a smile. “They finally surrendered?”

“Yes General.” The soldier replied.

Sheathing his sword, Lars said, “Those pathetic fools lasted longer than I thought they would. But I suppose it does not really matter. Tell the Lieutenant to finish off the remaining soldiers and begin setting up control of the planet. In the meantime, I will report our success to the Emperor.”

“Yes sir!” The soldier saluted and ran off to relay the message.

Just outside of Gabora’s atmosphere, a massive mother ship awaited the return of the soldiers. Inside the colossal structure, in a spacious, dimly lit room, an elegant man sat in silence and gazed upon the tiny planet below through a wall of glass windows. Raising the silver cup in his right hand to his lips, he sipped the red wine with satisfaction. On the opposite side of the room, one of the huge doors slowly creaked open and a smile spread across the man’s face.

A young boy in elegant clothes walked up beside the throne and bowed deeply. “Forgive my intrusion, Master. We have received a message from the General.”

“And what did the General have to say?” The man smiled with anticipation.

“He said that the Gaborans have surrendered and the planet is now yours.” The boy replied with no emotion as he stood up straight and tall.

A satisfied chuckle escaped the man’s lips as he rose to his feet. “Excellent! The General has completed another wonderful crusade!” He exclaimed enthusiastically.

“Gaze upon it, Damion! Such a small and pitiful planet with hardly any resources, it is hardly worth my time! Oh well... It is only a pit stop on the way to our *real* prize.”

“You mean Earth, Master?” Damion asked.

“Yes.” The Emperor replied with a sinister smile, his icy eyes burning with eagerness. “I am going to bring those sickening creatures to their knees! For so long they were nothing, unaware of the vast universe in which they live! And now... Now they think it alright to move out into space and do as they please! Fools! I hate humans! I will have them on their knees begging for me to show them mercy and compassion! And I will give them none!” He broke out in uncontrollable laughter and threw his glass of wine across the room. Controlling himself, he called, “Damion! Send a message to General Lars telling him to quickly finish setting up control of Gabora. I wish to proceed to our next target.”

“Yes, Master.” Damion bowed deeply and left the room.

The Emperor returned his gaze to Gabora as he once again took his seat. The excitement overtook him and he began to laugh uncontrollably again.



Several weeks later, Planet Earth was enjoying a warm summer day. In Tokyo, Japan, in a crowded schoolroom, a teenage girl with light blue hair was snoozing at her desk. The teacher leaned over her student and adjusted the pair of glasses rested on her nose; her face was contorted with ferocity. “Miss Tomokazu,” She said sternly, crossing her arms across her chest. There was no reply. “Miss Tomokazu.” Still no reply. “Miss Tomokazu!” The teacher grew impatient as the girl continued to sleep. “Seki Tomokazu!!!” She roared into the girl’s ear.

Seki’s eyes flew open and her body jerked up immediately. Trying to smile as her teacher glared down at her, she replied nervously, “Uh.... Y-yes ma’am?”

“Miss Tomokazu, you were sleeping in my class again! I thought we talked about this,” The teacher said through clenched teeth. Other students began to snicker, but a quick glare from the teacher was enough to silence them. “Are you alright, Miss Tomokazu? Is something wrong at home?”

A girl with pink hair sitting nearby laughed aloud. “It’s hard to have trouble at home when you don’t have one! Isn’t that right, *Miss Tomokazu*?”

A frown dulled Seki’s pretty face and her blue eyes welled with tears. It took everything she had to keep them from flowing down her face in a raging river. The girls snickered at causing Seki’s pain. “Awe. Are you gonna cry about it?” They teased.

“Girls!” The teacher scolded. Turning her attention back to Seki, she said, “I’m sorry, Seki. I forgot again.”

“It doesn’t matter.” Seki frowned and looked away. Her face had turned red from embarrassment and shame.

“Well, would you mind telling me why it is that you keep sleeping in my class?” The teacher asked.

Seki kept her face towards the ground and replied in a low voice, “Because it’s boring and I hate it.”

“What?!” The teacher gasped. “Don’t get attitude with me, Miss Tomokazu! Am I going to have to speak to your guardian again?”

“Go ahead,” Seki said with a sigh. “It’s not like she can do anything about it. She’s much too busy to have time for me.”

“Oh! That does it!” The teacher growled. “I’m tired of you never paying attention and sleeping in my class! And I’ve had it up to here with your attitude!” She motioned to her head. “Go stand out in the hall for the rest of the period! And you can be sure that I will talk to your guardian about this!”

A sigh escaped Seki’s lips as she got out of her seat. The whole class began whispering as she walked out the door. The words rang in Seki’s ears like a haunting melody. She had heard it all so many times before. As Seki sat in the quiet hallway all alone, tears in her blue eyes, she couldn’t help but think, ‘They always say the same things. Over and over, year after year... So why does it still hurt? I’ve grown used to it all. Not being wanted... not having friends.... not fitting in.... So why does it still bother me? Does it really matter what they say?’

Her thoughts were interrupted by the sound of the bell ringing. The hall was suddenly filled with kids on their way to lunch and Seki was lost in the crowd. Instead of making her way to the cafeteria, Seki fought the swarming sea of students to the door and stepped outside. Without any direction, she wandered around the city. As the afternoon faded away, she found herself at the orphanage in which she lived. Opening the door, she was greeted by a familiar voice. “Seki!” It was Miss Takashi, the person in charge of the orphanage.

Seki turned to face her guardian. “What?” She asked glumly.

“I got a call from your math teacher not too long ago. She said that you were sleeping in class again and giving her attitude,” said Miss Takashi with a frown. “You’ve really got to stop that. You need to *learn* while you’re at school. Which, by the way, you just got up and left from. What were you thinking just leaving in the middle of the school day like that?”

“It doesn’t matter.” Seki sighed and looked away.

“And why not?” Miss Takashi demanded. “There are so many things you could do if you get a good education! You’re a very smart girl.”

“Maybe so...” Seki replied. “But isn’t it obvious that no one wants me around? I don’t even see the sense in going to college.”

“Oh Seki! You’re being silly! No one cares that you don’t have a family!” Miss Takashi held Seki’s shoulders and smiled.

“Yeah right.” Seki frowned. “Tell that to all the kids at school! I never did anything to them and they all hate me!”

“You’re over exaggerating!” Miss Takashi argued. “If you wouldn’t be so backward, you’d make friends.”

“Don’t you think I’ve tried? I have! And look where it got me! I’m the laughing stock of the entire school!” Tears formed in Seki’s eyes as she shouted the words in frustration.

“Oh Seki...” Miss Takashi sighed. “What am I going to do with you?”

“There’s nothing you *can* do,” Seki said coldly and pulled away from her. “I’m not your child.”

“But I *am* your guardian and I *do* have authority here,” Miss Takashi said.

“Yeah right! Like you have the time to discipline me! You’re too busy finding homes for all the other kids!” Seki cried. “You never had time for me!”

“That’s not true,” Miss Takashi argued with concern.

“It is too!” Seki shouted. “You found every kid a home except me! I’m still here, Miss Takashi! You failed! You put everybody else ahead of me like I was nothing! And don’t deny it! You know it’s true!”

“No Seki,” Miss Takashi said with tears in her eyes. “I *did* try to find you a home. I honestly tried. But everyone turned away...because of your...”

“Just shut up!” Seki began to cry. “I’m sick of this! I’m sick of everything!” With tears streaming down her face, she ran out the door.

“Seki!” Miss Takashi yelled after her, but Seki never looked back.

Seki ran blindly through the streets as her tears continued to flow in a steady stream down her pretty face. Without noticing, she ran into one of the girls from her class. “Hey! Watch it! Oh! Look who it is! The little orphan girl with the bad attitude!” Completely ignoring the girl, Seki brushed past her and continued running.

Meanwhile, at the nearby spaceport, a group of three boys exited their ship and ventured out into the city streets. The first boy, Brandon, stopped and took a deep breath. “Ah! Smell that air!”

The youngest one, Pete sniffed at the air, too. “It doesn’t smell like anything special to me.”

“If you’ve smelled one city you’ve pretty much smelled them all,” The third boy, Zack, said.

“But we’re on Earth now, you guys,” Brandon said. “The cities here are full of excitement and things to do. And not to mention plenty of beautiful girls!” A smile lit his face as he rubbed his hands together in excitement.

“We’re not here to check out girls, Brandon!” Zack scolded with a frown. “We came here to pick up that part for your uncle. Or did you forget that already?”

Brandon grinned from ear to ear. “No, I didn’t forget. Let’s go.”

So the three boys, Brandon, Zack, and Pete walked along the streets. Brandon was a tall boy with brown hair and chestnut eyes. The second boy, Zack, had golden blonde hair and emerald eyes. His younger brother Pete, was like a younger version of Zack. As the boys rounded a corner, a blue-haired girl collided into Brandon. The impact sent her crashing to the ground and Brandon gasped in surprise. “Whoa! I am *so* sorry! Are you ok?” He reached out a hand to help the girl up, but she ferociously smacked it away.

Seki looked up at Brandon with her tear filled eyes. “Just leave me alone!”

“Hey! Hey! No need to get angry! It was an accident.” Brandon raised his hands in surrender. “Besides, you’re the one who ran into me. You should be more careful.”

Standing up, Seki brushed herself off. “Just shut up!” She scowled at the three boys and disappeared into the sea of people

“Man! Who spit in her cereal this morning?” Pete frowned in disgust.

Zack shrugged it off in a lighthearted manner. “Maybe her boyfriend dumped her,” he suggested with a smile.

“Wow! She was beautiful!” Brandon exclaimed suddenly. His chestnut eyes twinkled happily and a smile brightened his face as visions of the blue-haired girl danced in his brain. “A real cutie! I wish I could’ve gotten her digits!”

Zack laughed at the stupor of his friend. “Just forget about her, dude. Chances are you’ll never see her again.”

“Never say never, bro!” Pete winked.

“Don’t encourage him, Pete!”

The three boys continued on their way in the unfamiliar city. When they finally located the shop they had been searching for, the boys entered and purchased the space ship part for Brandon’s uncle. It was early evening when the boys went back out into the crowded city streets. The air was now cool and a slight breeze blew around the towering skyscrapers. What was visible of the sky was clear and blue. As the boys paused at a street corner and waited to cross, Brandon couldn’t help but think aloud, “I wonder what ever happened to that girl with the blue hair...”

“I thought I told you to forget about her.” Zack said.

“I can’t! She was too beautiful! And so sad! My heart can’t help but ache at the thought of her pain! It must have been immense to make her cry like that! Didn’t you see her eyes? Full of tears like she had been crying all day!” As Brandon spoke, his words were full of passion and he moved about as if acting out a play.

“Like I said before, she probably just got dumped by her boyfriend,” Zack interrupted Brandon’s performance. “She’ll get over it.”

“That fiend!” Brandon shouted and clenched his fists in anger. “Why, if I knew who he was, I’d hunt him down and I’d...I’d...”

“You’d what?” Zack smiled tauntingly as he folded his arms across his chest.

There was a slight pause, then Brandon answered with a smile, “I’d tell him to apologize!” The two brothers looked at each other, a disappointed frown dulling their handsome faces. “Then I’d sweep her off her feet and take her away to live happily ever after!” Brandon continued to act out his drama.

“Brandon, you were read *way* too many fairy tales when you were young.” Zack chuckled and shook his head. Looking his friend in the face, Zack continued in a serious tone. “There’s no such thing as happily ever after. So will you stop with that girl already? She’s gone! You’ll never see her again!”

“Hey look!” Pete jumped between the two older boys and pointed eagerly across the street. “There she is!”

“Where?” Brandon stood up straight as a fence post and an excited smile brightened his cheerful face. His eyes twinkled with happiness as he peered over Pete’s shoulder. Spotting his beautiful dream girl, Brandon said, “Good work, Petie boy! That’s her! You’ve got good eyeballs!”

“Don’t call me Petie boy!” Pete frowned up at his now dazed companion.

All three boys gazed across the street at the beautiful blue-haired girl. Each of them seemed to be in a trance, completely engulfed by her charm. They were rudely awakened from their mindless dream as a crowd of people passed by, blocking their view of the beauty. When the crowd had dispersed, Seki was no where to be seen. “Oh! She disappeared!” Brandon cried dramatically. He turned frantically to Zack for an answer. “Where did she go?”

“Maybe she went down the alley.” Zack suggested with a shrug of his shoulders.

“Yeah! The alley! It’s so romantic!” Brandon said passionately. “Come on, you guys, let’s follow her!” Before either had a chance to object, Brandon darted across the street. Zack and Pete had no other choice and reluctantly followed. They stopped at the end of the alley and glanced around.

“I don’t see her” Pete frowned.

“Oh no! She’s gone forever!” Brandon cried frantically.

“Calm down, Brandon. She’s right over there by the bridge.” Zack pointed to where Seki stood, glancing down into the river. The three boys watched intently as Seki carefully climbed over the railing and looked down at the river again.

“Oh my god! She’s gonna jump!” Brandon wailed in terror. Dramatically, he sank to his knees, covering his face with the back of his arm. “What’s this world coming to?! Beautiful girls killing themselves?! How will I bear it?!”

“What are we gonna do?” Pete gasped as he looked to his brother for guidance.

Without hesitation, Zack ran out of the alley way, shouting, “Hey! Wait a sec!”

Seki jerked up in surprise and looked around. Finding the source of the voice, she warned, “Stop right there! Don’t come any closer!” Seki clung to the railing, her eyes wide with fear and surprise.

“Ok.” Zack took a step backward and raised his hands in surrender. “Why don’t you come back over to this side? It’s dangerous to lean over the river like that.” Zack tried to persuade her with a friendly smile.

“I know that!” Seki frowned, “I want to be on this side! It’s easier to jump from here.”

“And why would you want to jump in the river?” Zack asked.

“It’s none of your business!” Seki shouted angrily. “Who are you anyway?” Pete and Brandon came up behind Zack, neither knowing what to say or do. Seki immediately recognized Brandon. “Oh, I know who you are! You’re those boys from earlier this afternoon. The ones that knocked me down in the street.”

“Hey! You ran into me!” Brandon defended himself.

“What do you want?” Seki asked in annoyance.

“We’d like it very much if you would come back over to our side of the railing.” Zack replied with another friendly smile. “It’s much safer to talk over here.”

“I don’t even know you!” Seki frowned as she adjusted her grip on the railing.

“Well, maybe we can help you. I’m very willing to lend a friendly ear for your troubles.” Zack said.

“As if! I don’t want any help from strangers!” Seki stuck out her tongue.

“We don’t have to be strangers. All it takes is an introduction to get acquainted.” Zack took one cautious step towards her.

“I told you not to come any closer!” Seki shouted. “Or I’ll jump right now!”

“Oh please don’t jump!” Brandon howled and dropped passionately to his knees. “I’m too young to see a suicide! My poor nerves can’t take it! You’re too beautiful to die!”

“What?!” Seki frowned in confusion and surprise. Suddenly, she lost her grip and began to fall. A screamed of terror escaped her lips.

In an instant, Zack lunged forward and seized Seki by the wrist. With all his strength, he hoisted the girl up and over the railing. His strength spent, Zack fell backwards and Seki landed on top of him. Gasping for breath, Zack asked, “Are you alright?”

Seki slapped her hero across the face and pushed him away. “Don’t come near me! Just stay away!”

Zack held his cheek as he looked over at her. The friendly smile had disappeared and an annoyed frown took its place. “Ouch! What’d you do that for? If it weren’t for me, you’d be drowning in the river right now!”

“That’s what I wanted!” Seki shouted.

“Why would you want to kill yourself?” Zack asked, “Is life that bad for you?”

Seki’s eyes welled up with tears and she looked away.

Sensing she wasn’t going to answer, Zack continued, “You know, I was just like you once. I thought the whole world was against me. There were plenty of times I thought about taking the bridge too.... But then I realized how cowardly that was. Suicide is just a permanent solution to a temporary problem. It really makes no sense. So I decided to live and make things better for myself. Maybe you should consider that too. Whenever things looked bad, I would think about all the people that would miss me if I died and it stopped me every time. I’m sure there’s someone that would miss you.”

Seki couldn’t tame her swelling sorrows and began to cry violently. “No....there’s no one....” Her whole body trembled in agony and pain.

The three boys looked down at her as though they weren’t sure they had heard her right. But before anyone of them could say anything, the sound of an explosion echoed among the skyscrapers and the ground shook violently. The force of the tremor knocked Brandon and Pete to the ground. The quake lasted only a minute, but it seemed like an eternity to the frightened group. When the tremor ceased, the whole city was as silent as death; time seemed to stand still.

“What was that?” Pete broke the silence with his question.

“Search me.” Brandon scratched his head.

Suddenly, the still air was pierced with screams of terror. The four kids dashed through the alley and burst into the street. A swarm of screeching people buzzed past them in a panic. Instinctively, they all turned their heads to see what the mob of people were running from. Fear filled their widening eyes and they stood frozen in shock as more people scurried past them, fleeing for their lives. Obviously the source of the explosion, the tallest skyscraper in the city was engulfed in flames. Unable to stand any longer, it toppled to the ground, crushing the escaping people. Their terrified screams echoed through the hot air and caused more panic and confusion. Suddenly the sky was filled with black and blue fighter planes, so numerous that they blocked out the sun. The sky turned blood red as more bombs hurled upon the city, blowing buildings and people to bits. In the distance, soldiers clad in battle armor appeared in the streets and began killing civilians with guns and swords.

“We’re under attack!” Someone shouted from the swarms of hysteric people.

Zack snapped back to reality and shouted to his companions, “Let’s go!” Without thinking, he grabbed Seki by the wrist and dragged her alongside him. The four of them ran for their lives towards the spaceport on the other side of the city. They had to dodge cars spinning out of control and the shower of bombs continuing to fall from the storm clouds of fighter planes. Their hearts beat wildly in their chests as they ran. When they reached the spaceport, it was full of hysteria. All around, people were boarding ships and taking off with no order at all. Some ships collided in the air and were blown to smoldering bits; others ran over people as they sped down the runways. Zack reached in his pocket and pulled out his keys. Fumbling through them with one hand, he found the button to open their ship and pressed it. About fifty meters away, a ship opened up and the boys ran up the gangplank, Zack still pulling Seki along. Once inside, they all raced to the cockpit. Zack finally released Seki as he sat down to the controls. “Sit here.” Pete pulled Seki by the arm to a seat. Seki plopped down, gasping for breath. Pete hit a button

on Seki's chair and a seatbelt came on around her. Jumping into the chair beside her, Pete buckled himself in.

"Prepare to launch!" Zack commanded from the helm.

"Right!" Brandon said and immediately began pushing buttons.

"Hurry guys!" Pete urged.

"Ready!" Brandon yelled over to Zack.

"Ok!" Zack took the helm in both hands. The ships launched forward at full speed. Boldly, Zack dodged several ships and people as he flew down the runway. Within minutes, the ship was in the air and soaring through the atmosphere. As they exited the atmosphere, a fleet of massive ships appeared before them.

"What is that Zack?" Pete asked.

"I have no idea," Zack replied blankly.

"Are they the attackers?" Brandon wondered aloud.

"Sure looks like it," said Zack. All four of the kids stared at the fleet for a moment, not wanting to believe it was real. "We better get out of here," Zack said at last. "Activate the hyper drive."

"Right." Brandon pulled a switch. "Brace yourselves," He warned as he leaned back in his seat. Suddenly, the ship shot forward like a bullet and was gone in seconds.

On the largest ship in the fleet, the mother ship, an elegant man stood before a wall of windows, watching with satisfaction the explosions on the Earth below. An amused giggle escaped his smiling lips. "This is absolutely wonderful! Die humans! Die!" His giggle transformed into laughter of insanity and he seemed to lose all control of himself.

His servant boy, Damion, stood nearby, emotionless. He too looked down at the suffering Earth, but he silently pitied it.

There was a knock at the towering doors across the vast room and a servant entered. Coming up behind the Emperor, he bowed with his face almost touching the ground and he said, "Forgive my intrusion, my Emperor. But General Lars sent a message for you. He wants to know if he should try to stop the escaping ships."

The Emperor was silent as he thought it over. Finally, he said with a smile, "No, that will not be necessary. The humans can run, but they cannot hide. Once the Earth is mine, the colonies will come with it. Then I will own all humans. You can tell the General not to bother with the escaping vessels."

"Yes, my Emperor." The servant bowed deeper and left to fulfill his task.

"After this victory, no one will be able to say that they do not know of us." The Emperor said half to himself and half to Damion. "Everyone will fear us because they will know that we were the ones that crushed the humans."

"Yes, my Emperor," Damion said with no expression.

The Emperor smiled happily and said in almost a whisper, "Yes, soon all creatures will cower in fear at the name of Emperor Darka."

## CHAPTER 2

After several minutes of zooming through space, the boys' space ship slowed down. Everyone sat in silence, trying to understand what had happened. Brandon was the

first to snap out of his daze. “Man! I don’t know about you guys, but I don’t ever wanna do *that* again!”

Pete unbuckled his seatbelt and stood up. “What are we gonna do now, Zack?”

“What do you mean?” Zack asked, trying to sound unaffected. He stood up straight and tall, like a superhero. “We’re gonna do the same things we always do.”

“But what about Earth?” Pete asked with concern in his voice.

“I don’t know...” Zack scratched his head as looked out the window at the black nothingness of space. “There’s really nothing we *can* do about it. We’ll just have to wait to hear some news. I don’t imagine it’ll take long.”

“I’m just glad we got out of there alive!” Brandon chimed in, cheerful as ever. “And as an added bonus, we now have a new and very lovely passenger!” He smiled happily at Seki, who only blushed in response.

“Oh yeah! I almost forgot!” said Zack. “Everything happened so quickly! I didn’t even think to ask you whether or not you wanted to come along. Sorry about that.”

Seki was still shaken up by what had happened. As the boys looked at her, she retreated into the corner and asked in a quivering voice, “Who are you people?”

“We didn’t get to the introductions yet, did we?” Zack smiled as friendly a smile as he possibly could. “I’ll start. My name is Zack Nakata and this is my little brother Pete.” Zack motioned to the blonde-haired boy beside him.

“Hiya!” Pete waved.

“Hello.” Seki half smiled and slightly raised her hand in return.

“And I’m Brandon Shinichiro.” Brandon sprung forward and took Seki’s hand in his own. “But you can call me your ‘knight in shining armor’!”

Zack grabbed him by the shirt and pulled him back. “I think ‘annoying freak’ will do just fine, Romeo.” He frowned at Brandon, but turned his attention back to Seki. “So, what’s your name?”

“I’m Seki Tomokazu.” Seki bowed her head politely.

“Whoa! No need to be so formal. We’re pretty chilled around here.” Zack half bowed in return. “Anyway, it looks like you’ll be hangin’ with us for a while. At least until we reach the next spaceport. So try to make yourself at home, ok?”

“Yeah...” Seki looked around nervously.

“I’ll show you around, Seki.” Pete grabbed her hand. “Follow me.”

Seki followed close behind him as he showed her every inch of the ship. As the tour came to an end, Seki couldn’t help but frown upon the mess she was shown. “You mean you people actually live in this...filth?!”

“Yeah.” Pete laughed cheerfully. “We’re pretty lazy when it comes to cleaning up after ourselves, but we have lots of other things we do to keep busy.”

“What kind of things?” Seki asked with doubt in her voice.

“I’m glad you asked!” Pete smiled brightly. “We have a band! It’s called ‘Wasted Words’.”

“Why?” Seki frowned.

“I dunno.” Pete admitted with a shrug.

“At least it’s original.” Seki replied blankly.

“Can I ask you something?” asked Pete.

“What?”

“How old are you?”

“I’ll be sixteen in two months.” Seki replied.

“Wow! We’ll throw you a party!” Pete smiled.

“Oh no! Don’t do that!” Seki gasped. “I’ve never celebrated any of my birthdays, so why start now? Besides, I’ll probably be gone by then.”

“You’re gonna leave us?” Pete frowned and folded his arms across his chest.

“Man... I thought for sure you would want to stay. But if you have somewhere else to go...”

Seki looked away. She could feel her eyes welling up with tears. Holding them back, she said, “No...there’s no place for me to go.... No one to go to...”

“So why not stay here?” Pete persisted.

Looking down at the ground, Seki replied, “I don’t even know you guys. It would be weird for me to live with three strange men.”

“We’re not *that* strange!” Pete laughed cheerfully. “We’re your friends now.”

Seki looked at him, doubtful and confused. “Friends?”

Before Pete could say anything else, Zack walked into the room. “I’ve been looking all over for you guys! Did you show Seki around, Pete?”

“Yep.” Pete nodded. “And she said that it’s filthy.”

Zack laughed with embarrassment. “Yeah, I guess it is. Sorry about that! You must think we’re a bunch of slobs! We’re not really, though. We’ve just been so busy lately...we haven’t had time to clean up. If we had known we were going to have a guest, we would’ve definitely tidied up a bit! I promise you we’ll try harder to keep it tidy while you’re here.”

“Thank you,” Seki replied, “But I think I’ll be leaving when we reach the next space port. Until then, I’d like to repay you for saving my life and allowing me to stay here. I’ll clean up the place real good and cook food for you guys.”

Zack was silent a moment, then he smiled and said, “Sounds good to me. I’ll bet you’re a better cook than the three of us combined! Please make yourself at home, ok?”

Seki bowed her head slightly and walked out of the room. Pete let out a deep, depressed sigh. “She’s leaving...”

“I had a feeling she wouldn’t stay.” Zack said.

“Why didn’t you insist that she stay? She has no where else to go.” Pete frowned.

“Some people believe they can do everything on their own.” Zack said with a smile. “They’re stubborn and it’s pointless to argue with them. Besides, it’ll be at least two weeks before we reach a spaceport. She’ll have plenty of time to change her mind.”

“Good point.” Pete smiled happily. He always trusted his big brother’s wisdom. “I’m gonna go find Brandon.” With a quick wave, Pete darted from the room.

All alone now, Zack thought aloud, “I have a feeling there’s more to Seki than her just wanting to be independent. Maybe I can find something out.”



Seki glanced around the dirty kitchen, hardly knowing where to start. With a deep sigh of regret, she started with the dishes. For hours she slaved away, scrubbing, sweeping, and mopping the entire kitchen. When the whole room was done, everything in it seemed to twinkle like the stars. As Seki slumped down into a chair to relax, Zack

strolled in and gasped, "Whoa! Incredible! This kitchen wasn't even this clean when we built this ship! You did all this yourself?" He turned to Seki.

"Yes," replied a worn out Seki.

"Wow! I'm impressed!" Zack said, opening a cupboard and grabbing a package of cookies. As he munched on a few, he continued to look around. "Do you clean all the time?"

"No. Only when I have to." Seki replied.

"You're very good at it," Zack smiled and ate a few more cookies. "But you look exhausted. Maybe you should call it quits and get some sleep."

"I am exhausted." Seki sighed, running her fingers through her blue hair. "Of course, I did quit school early and literally ran around the city all day."

There was a brief moment of silence, then Zack said, "If you don't mind my asking, why were you running around the city like that?"

"I'm not really sure..." Seki admitted. "I guess I just was sick of everything... Sick of life..."

"Is that why you were gonna jump in the river?" Asked Zack.

Nodding, Seki replied, "Yeah, I guess."

"Well...what was so bad that you wanted to end your life like that?" Zack asked. "Was it your friends? Your boyfriend?"

Seki looked away. "No, nothing like that. I guess I was tired of being alone all the time.... Of having no one to talk to...."

"Not even your parents?"

"No... there's no one...."

"What about your friends? Did they abandon you?" Asked Zack.

Seki shook her head as her eyes filled up with tears. "No, I have no friends... Everyone at school hates me. They talk about me like I'm some sort of freak. ...Tease me and laugh at me.... That's the way it's always been..." A single tear rolled down Seki's cheek and she quickly wiped it away. "I'm always alone."

Zack was silent a moment. "Well...maybe you've just never opened up to people. Maybe that's why they reject you."

"No... It's because I'm an orphan that nobody wants!" Seki cried, unable to hold her tears back.

Zack couldn't think of much to say. "Some people are so cruel... I can't understand why... It makes me so angry! If those kids from your school were here right now I'd bash their heads for being so mean to you!"

Seki looked up at him in disbelief and wiped away more tears.

Noticing the look on her face, Zack smiled. "Sorry. I guess that's sounds pretty cruel, too. Well, don't worry. You'll always be welcome here. Pete, Brandon and I are like family. And we'd be more than happy to have another member...that is... if you want." He looked away for a moment, almost embarrassed. "You must think I'm really weird. Sorry if I come across that way! My intentions are good, but when I try to say something really important, I end up sounding stupid!"

"Oh no! Not at all!" Seki said with embarrassment. "It's just that...nobody's ever been so nice to me before... Thank you."

Zack couldn't help but smile happily. He felt like he was really helping Seki. "Don't mention it. Why don't you come to the living room and I'll make you a place to

sleep on the sofa.” Without a word, Seki followed him. She silently watched Zack lay some blankets and a pillow on the couch. “It’ll have to do for now. I’ll get Brandon and Pete to help me clear out one of the spare rooms tomorrow. There’s one with a bed in it that you can have. So...uh... Goodnight.”

“Goodnight.” Seki replied almost in a whisper and watched as he walked towards the doorway. “Zack!” She called after him. Zack spun around, surprised that she had actually used his name. With a little smile on her face, Seki said, “Thank you.”

“Anytime,” He smiled and left the room.

Seki couldn’t fall asleep for several hours. Laying in the dark, her thoughts raced through her head, recalling everything that had happened that day. Zack’s words kept ringing in her ears. ‘If those kids from your school were here right now I’d bash their heads for being so mean to you! .... It makes me so angry! ....don’t worry. You’ll always be welcome here. Pete, Brandon and I are like family. And we’d be more than happy to have another member...that is... if you want...’ These words kept Seki awake and when she was finally able to fall asleep, they even filled her dreams.

The sound of music woke Seki up the next morning. But it wasn’t just any music, it was the drums. Lying on the couch, she listened to the beats for a while. Curiosity finally overtook her and she got up. Following the sound, Seki walked down the hall towards a room with a light on. The door was partially open, and she peaked inside. What her big blue eyes saw almost surprised her; it was Pete playing a drum set. On and on he played, without tiring. Seki was now halfway through the doorway, just staring. Pete finally noticed her and stopped. “Good morning!” He smiled warmly.

“Good morning.” Seki replied, stepping inside the room.

“Did you like my playing?” Pete asked, laying his drumsticks down.

“Yes,” Seki replied. “I don’t know much about drum solos, but I liked it.”

“You should hear us all play together.” Pete smiled. “It’s sounds even better.”

“I’d like that.” Seki smiled. “What do Zack and Brandon play?”

“You’ll have to find out for yourself.” Pete said with a wink. “How about some breakfast?”

“Yeah, I should start making it.” Seki said.

“No need to. Zack already started it because you slept in.” Pete said and led the way to the kitchen. Brandon was sitting at the table, stuffing his face with bites of chocolate chip pancakes.

“Hi guys.” Zack smiled from the stove as they entered.

Brandon quickly swallowed his food and smiled, “Good morning Seki! Did you sleep well?”

“Uh...yes, fine.” Seki replied, sitting down at the rectangular table.

Zack brought over another plate of pancakes. “I hope you like chocolate chip. If not, I can make some plain ones. Or maybe you’d prefer blueberry.”

“No, chocolate chip is fine.” Seki replied. “I’m sorry that I over slept and didn’t get to make breakfast. I already broke my promise.”

“Don’t worry about it.” Zack smiled cheerfully as he stacked a few pancakes on Seki’s plate. “It’s no biggie.”

After breakfast, Seki was watched the boys skateboard in a small skate park built into the ship. All three were performing their best tricks, trying to impress the lovely

spectator. Brandon brought his board to a quick stop in front of Seki. “Do you want to skate, Seki?”

“I don’t know how.” Seki admitted.

“I can teach you if you wanna learn? You can use my board,” Brandon said.

“That’s alright. Thanks anyway. But I’ll just watch you guys.” Seki smiled.

“If that’s what you want.” Brandon smiled back. He stepped onto his board, ready to thrust forward, but something stopped him. Turning his head, he faced Seki. “You know something,” Brandon said, “You’ve got a really pretty smile. I hope you use it more often.” With that, he skated away.

Seki blinked in surprise. Reaching up, she gently touched her lips. ‘Pretty smile?’



Meanwhile, in large meeting room in the capital city of planet Earth, all of Earth’s important leaders were gathered. Also seated at the large table were the representatives of the invaders who had attacked Earth the day before. The whole room was noisy with discussion and commotion. The head of the invader representatives, General Lars, stood up and smiled calmly. “Gentlemen!” Once Lars was sure that he had everyone’s attention, he continued, “I think you all are being overly stubborn. You were defeated fair and square by us, the Dark Empire, and should have no objection to what we command.”

One of the younger humans stood up bravely and shouted, “Fair and square my foot! Your empire launched a sneak attack and killed millions of innocent people! What was the meaning of that?!”

Before Lars could answer, the door burst open and the Emperor stepped into the room. His presence awed everyone and the whole room was as silent as death. “I do not believe it is any business of you humans how we do things. But if you must know, I will oblige you just this once. You humans are so proud and arrogant! You deserve to be crushed with no mercy! You have lived the high life for far too long!” A wicked smile spread across his face.

All three of the Dark Empire representatives sank to the floor and bowed. Their faces nearly touched the ground as they said in perfect unison, “Emperor Darka!”

“Emperor...Darka?” The young human who had spoken out against Lars repeated blankly. The other humans looked on in fear as they sank down in their chairs. “So you’re the leader of the Dark Empire. Then perhaps you can explain *why* it was necessary for your troops to kill so many innocent people! Why?!”

Darka’s blue eyes grew angry and cold. Walking up to the young man, he seized him by the throat. “Do not raise your voice at me, you fool! I do not owe any explanation to the likes of you! I hate humans! For billions of years you all were nothing! Ignorant of the vast universe around you! And now you think you can move out into space and build colonies anywhere you want! You think you can do as you please! Well, no more! Now you all will do as I say and anyone that opposes me will die!” He dropped the man on the floor. Kneeling down, he grabbed the man’s head in his right hand. Darka squeezed until the man’s skull shattered and there was a puddle of blood on the floor. Standing up straight, the Emperor glanced around the room at the horrified humans. “Let that be a lesson to all you humans. Opposition will meet with death. No exceptions. I rule you now and you *will* do as I say.” With that, he stormed angrily from the room.

A smile brightened General Lars' face as he pursued his Emperor. "That was a perfect example to show those pathetic humans, my Emperor. You have such a way of dealing with the weak."

"Yes. They are weak," Emperor Darka smiled. "They have no power, only technology. They are worthless creatures."

"What do you plan to do with them, my Emperor?" Lars asked.

"Make them suffer." Darka answered with an evil chuckle.