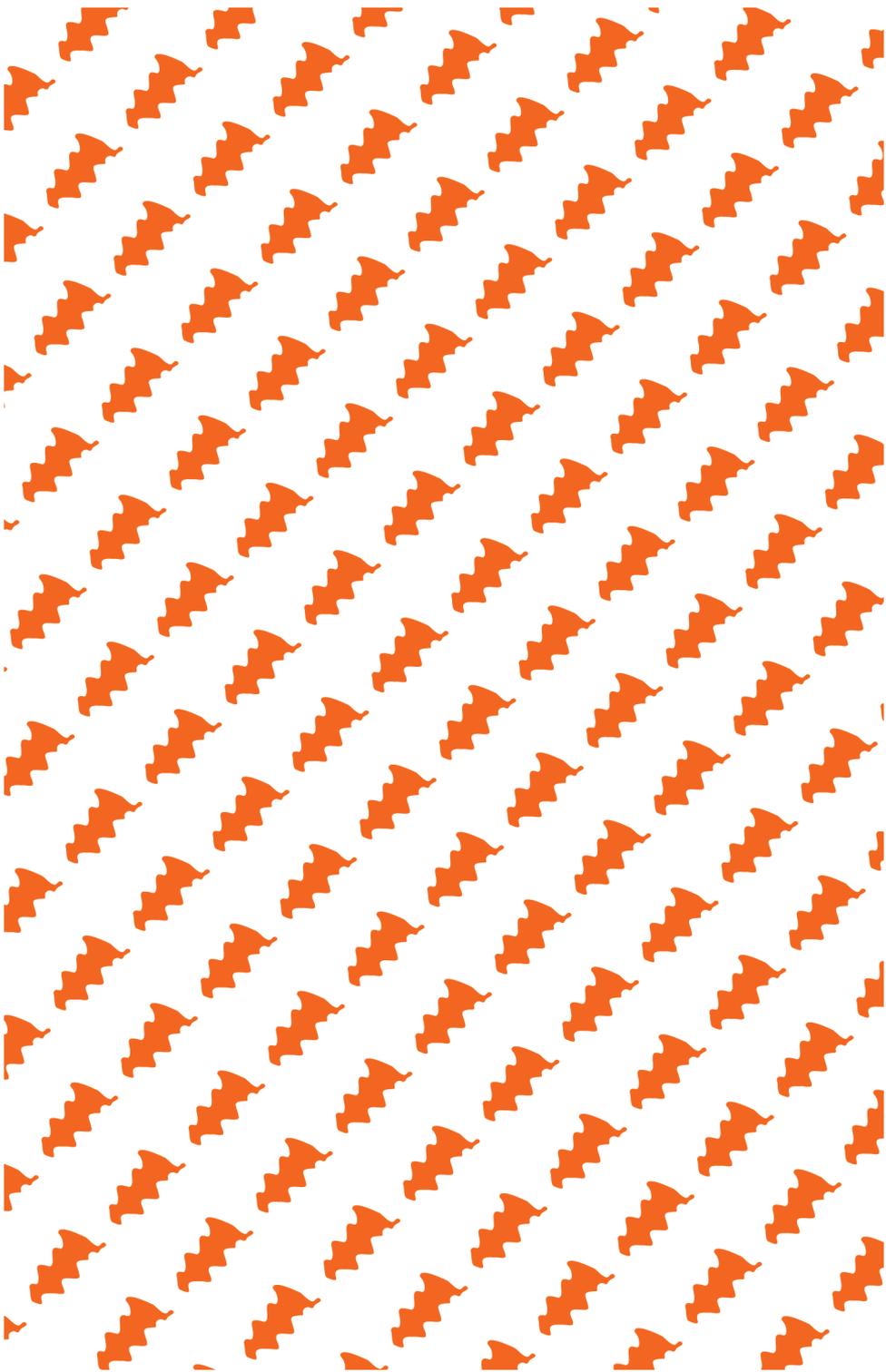


TALES FROM **POLSIX** THE  
SYSTEM

# MISSING PERSONS

ON SISTER ARK

R.C. NECHAMKIN



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***DOGTEETH STUDIO***



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Cover Design by CaaSi  
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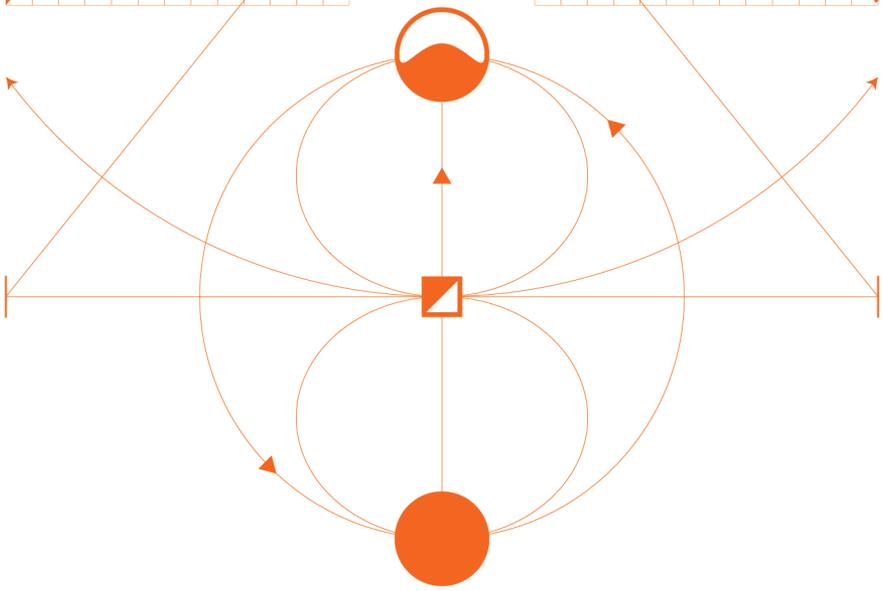
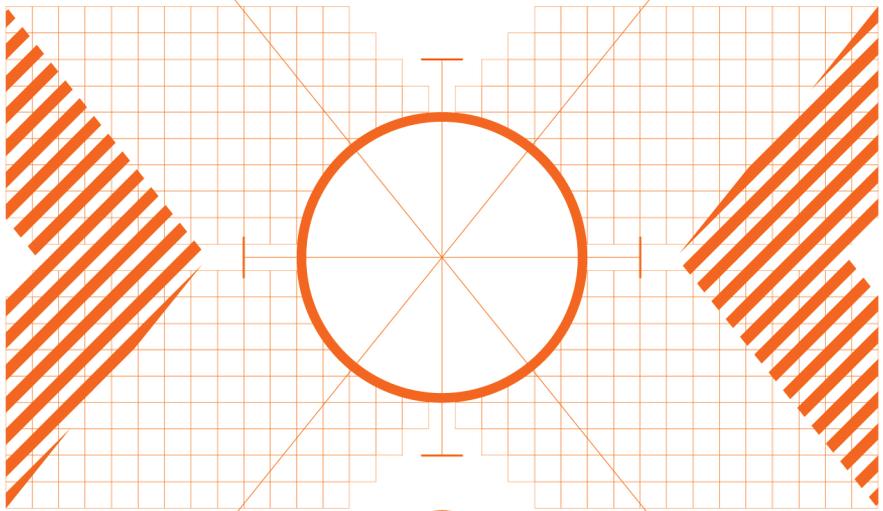
This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, business, events and incidents are the products of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

For the reader.

To those reading this tale, thank you for joining from  
the beginning.



THE  
**POLSIX**  
SYSTEM



Brother Ark



Minerva (Sun)



Juno (Capital)



Oil Cosmotransport (OCT)



Sister Ark

Juventas (Oil Planet)





# MISSING PERSONS

ON SISTER ARK

P1

I have this theory that nobody is actually happy here. Sure, we make do. We get by. We honor our ancestors' way of life by living on this celestial Ark, but at what cost?

Most of the natives on board are wound up so tight, working themselves to death trying to migrate away to a planet. Some of them save more money than they can afford, keeping themselves in poverty. Misery is a way of life for Sister Arkians. So that said, when a client doesn't outright attack me or burst into tears after I've told them what I've discovered, I'm always thrown off guard.

Take this lady stoically sitting across from me in my office for example. When she first came in to hire me to find her daughter, she told me she didn't want to involve the Politia, for she feared a drug habit formed in her daughter. Obviously she and I both knew going into this that drug use in teenagers plateaued at an all-time high decades ago. Hell, she herself probably had "a drug habit form in her" when she was her daughter's age. But you know how a mother worries.

Anyways, now as I'm telling her that I found her daughter in a *hasa* house in the Lower Decks, she almost seems relieved that it's *only hasa*. Kids that age often get involved with things far more nefarious than *hyperaware suspended animation* – although no telling where she finds the money for the Stasiline for habitual use. The mother doesn't seem to even think about that part though. She just sits with a blank look and expresses gratitude.

"Thank you, Mr. Brody," the mother states. "I appreciate your quick and diligent work." She pauses for a moment and then reaches across my desk to gently place her hand on my arm. She gazes into my eyes as if she knows something about me that I don't. "You're a good man, Orion Brody," the mother says. "Don't you forget that."

My gut reaction is to protest, but I don't say anything as the lady stands up and exits my office, closing the door behind her. In my head, I envision her stopping at the front desk of my practice where Clarissa charges her for my service. This poor lady just found out her daughter's stasising away her life, and now we're billing her.

I continue to imagine her as she walks out of the practice into the hallway of the highrise and toward the elevator. Does she lose composure at any point? Curious if I can catch a glimpse of her exiting the building, I peer down out of the window of my office. But she's lost in the foot traffic below.

I worry about the mother more than the daughter. She's lived in the safety of the Upper Promenade Deck her whole life, so I certainly hope she has the wits to not chase after her daughter in the Lower Decks.

My eyes flick from the crowd below to the artificial orange sunset on the fictitious horizon. My office window faces astern, overlooking one of the two beaches on the Main Deck. On each end of the Arks' Main Decks, artificial beaches lead to miles of bodies of water with fake skies projected overhead on the interior of the hull.

From what I can remember Brother Ark resembles Sister Ark identically in their deck layouts.

Every day around this time my pretend oceanic sunset office view is obstructed as the projected sun hides behind a massive, mechanical wave-generator on the far end of the water. The phony fiery circle covers behind the metallic bouncing bulb. The wave-generator — eclipsing the sun — bounces out its last few rolling waves of the evening.

Every day this makes me think about my family's last beach day on Brother Ark when I was a kid.

I'm sure it's because I was a child, but things seemed simpler back then. Back when my father was still around. Before that first Cosmotransport exploded and tensions escalated between The Collective and the seceded Brother Ark, forcing my family to seek refuge on Sister Ark.

I swear people actually seemed happy back home. Here, the closest we get is complacent... or happy *for other people* that are leaving the Ark.

My office door creaks open behind, but I continue staring out the window as a familiar sweet floral scent graces the room.

"I can see you're brooding," Clarissa's sultry voice teases me, "so I'm just going to leave these here." I hear the thud of a stack of files on my desk. "One of those potential clients claims to know you. Says you go way back from your Brother Ark days. I made sure to put that file on top because I don't want you to just choose the first mopey woman you see."

"What'd we charge the mother?" I ask, not acknowledging her comments. Clarissa sighs behind me.

"Our usual price, Orion," she scolds. "We can't give out a discount to every person who doesn't hate you by the end of the case. If *only* we'd sue all of the infidels that attack you like I've suggested, then we could probably just go non-profit."

"No, no," I cut in. Finally turning away from the artificial reds of the sunset, I look into Clarissa's deep blue eyes. "You were right to charge her. Thank you, I'll look over the files before tomorrow." Our eye contact holds for several heartbeats until my bone-conducting radio vibrates against my ear and breaks the spell. "Oh, sorry. I'm getting a call, Clarissa. Have a good night."

She smirks and turns toward the door. My eyes lose focus watching her as she leaves. The buzzing continues on my ear until the door closes and the floral scent slowly dissipates. Yikes. Why am I so awkward with her?

The radio buzzes in a complex pattern indicating the caller's identification: my mother. I — not feeling particularly interested in hearing her brag about my older brother — elect to let the vibration continue until the call attempt ceases.

After the fake sun sets, the hull above the Main Deck slides open to reveal countless stars glistening through the dome glass skylight. When the waves die enough, the calm water connects to the dome at the horizon and reflects the bright stars from below. This creates the illusion that the beach leads directly into space. The rusty wave-generator acts as my brown full moon tonight, like most nights.

Some night cycles I do go home to my duplex I bought with my mother after my dad passed, but that's way down in the Promenade Decks. These days, I prefer to fall asleep in my office in the city. This way I don't bother myself with the commute or any questions from my mother about when I'll "finally have some courage and ask out my assistant."

Tonight though, I know I won't be able to sleep anyways. Something about that *hasa* house from earlier haunts me. And it's not just the stench. All the kids in there looked too young — although most of them were probably older than me. I know personally the new kids though will have regrets when their stasis age inevitably outranks their biological age. That's a weird one to reconcile.

After a few hours of worrying and failing to sleep on my office couch, I decide to distract myself by looking over the client files Clarissa brought in. Moving to my desk, I kick my feet up, lean back, and reach for the manilla folder on top of the stack. Before I open it, Clarissa's floral scent rushes off of the folder, and suddenly I'm distracted by something else. Or rather someone else.

Beyond her stunning appearance and demanding presence, Clarissa's also the best assistant. After every closed case, she'll present a stack of potential client folders that she typed herself and arranged from most urgent to least.

Clarissa somehow keeps better track of everything without the help of a feedback display device than I would with one. I'm not entirely convinced I'm not her assistant.

I catch myself smiling, and I crack open the folder when my smile drops. My focus tunneled in on the poor mother earlier so intently that I didn't even process that Clarissa said somebody "from my Brother Ark years" called. After Dad was killed, my family and I have kept our origins a secret. Outside of Clarissa and my direct family members, there's only one man who even knows I'm from Brother Ark, and I hadn't seen him

in several years.

Yet here in this folder, Gabriel Hunter, Dad's longtime business partner, was seeking my help regarding a... missing person? I didn't even know he had a son.

I read over the file, and it's a pretty standard missing person case from what I can tell.

Here on Sister Ark, most "missing persons" have either gotten involved with drugs and/or *hasa*, escaped to the capital planet, or – to be crass – killed themselves. Mr. Hunter's son is no special case, I'd bet.

Reading through the file more, I note all the important details. Ferdinand Hunter, Mr. Hunter's son, recently eloped with his new wife on the beach facing the bow of the Ark. Apparently he and his new wife bought property in the Subpromenade Decks, but neither have answered when Mr. Hunter's stopped by. The son's not answering his radio either.

My eyes scan page after page. Eventually I stop and withdraw. My head tilts back, my eyes close, and my mind races. Gabriel Hunter, huh? "Mr. Hunter," as I knew him growing up.

See, something interesting about Mr. Hunter is that he actually entered *hyperaware suspended animation* in the pod next to mine when we retreated from Brother Ark. More than that though, Mr. Hunter paid for stasis for my whole family at the time. Me, Mom, Dad, and my brother, Kip, all *hasa'ed* for three years across the Polsix system with Mr. Hunter on the same refugee vessel.

He remained a prominent member of my family's social unit until one day, he and my dad had a massive argument and consequential falling-out. I haven't seen him since the day I caught my dad yelling at him, telling him to leave the housing unit and "never come back." Although I still don't know what the argument itself was about, the fact that Mr. Hunter didn't show up for my dad's funeral a few months after that day is enough for me to hesitate to take this case.

Why should I help this rich man who practically disowned my father? He *did* help our whole family out dozens of years ago. That's worth something, right?

I open my eyes and stare at the ceiling of my office. We need the money. I need the money. Beyond that, I don't think I can stop myself from helping people. I really would go nonprofit, but Clarissa thinks the only way to do that is to sue the cheaters that I beat up out of "self-

defense.” But that just doesn’t feel right to me.

Anyways, I decide to help, of course. Before the artificial sunrise, I try to cram in as much about this case as I can. Ferdinand and his wife met volunteering at a community service event sponsored by a Brother Ark outreach organization. I’ll have to wait to visit the outreach administration office in the Lower Decks which opens in the afternoon. Until then I’ll check out the missing person’s housing unit.

Unfortunately, the client didn’t disclose his son and daughter-in-law’s exact address, but I bet if I tell Mr. Hunter that I’ve accepted his case, he’ll provide the address upfront. You never know with geriatrics though: Mr. Hunter may not be awake until noon or he may already be awake for the day now.

Speaking of geriatrics, right as I’m finishing the last page Clarrisa typed up about the Hunter’s, I receive another call from my mother. I let my radio buzz a few times before letting out a sigh (heftier than I intended), and answering the call.

“Hey, Mom” I say after I press my radio. “Everything okay?” I stand up and immediately look out the window toward the beach.

“Orion, baby!” My mom squeals out of the radio. “You didn’t come home last night! Were you out with Marissa?”

You *do* know how a mother worries, right?

“No, Mom,” I sigh. “I wasn’t out with *Clarissa*. I stayed up at the office like I usually do on weekdays.” Out the window, the overhead hull begins to slide shut to begin the new day cycle.

“Well that’s good too!” Mom replies. “My two hard working boys. Speaking of which,” she says, “Kip finally woke up from his first *hasa* cycle and reached out. After the past few years, he’s about halfway to the capital planet. Are you proud of him or what?”

That’s a loaded question.

“That’s great, Mom,” I snip before changing the topic. “Say, do you remember Mr. Hunter?” Silly question. Of course she remembers Mr. Hunter.

“Of course I remember Mr. Hunter,” my mother says, dropping her chipper tone before building back up to it. “He was a good friend of

your father's for a very long time."

Notice she doesn't mention how their friendship ended?

"Well, he reached out to me to help him find his son, Ferdinand," I explain. "I'm thinking of helping him out, but before I do, I think it's time I know what happened between them."

My mother pauses for a long time – an uncharacteristically long amount of time. Through my window I watch surfers swim out to catch the first waves of the day, and I begin speculating all my theories on Mr. Hunter. Finally, she replies.

"Orion," she starts, "I think if Gabriel Hunter is reaching out to you then maybe it *is* time you know what happened..."

Perfect.

"...But," my mother continues, "Mr. Hunter needs to be the one to tell you. It's not my story to tell, nor my forgiveness to give."

Less perfect. I'm not sure what that even means.

"Okay, Mom," I simply reply. "I'll give him a call. Thank you. Make sure you eat something healthy and organic today, okay? Not just those chocolate protein packs."

"Sure, sure, Orion," she says. "I'll see you tonight? Maybe we can eat some healthy, organic dinner together?"

"Sure, Ma," I strain out, not knowing if it's a lie or not yet. "I'll be home for dinner tonight, provided I make some headway on this case. See ya then."

I tap the radio to hang up, and I get back to work.

Reading over the case file again, I find Mr. Hunter didn't provide a callback frequency, but he did provide an address on the Main Deck. He must still have considerable wealth if he can afford housing up here, which always begs the question: why not leave the Ark for Juno or Juventas even?

My mind reels through all of the reasons a rich man would choose to live on an Ark as I grab my firearm and head out of my office. I stop at Clarissa's desk to scribble a quick note to let her know where I'm going. She knows to try my radio if she needs me, but she rarely does. I exit the practice, head down the hall, and go down the elevator to find Mr. Hunter.

# P2

The address provided in his file leads me to Upper Starboard, a relatively less rich district in the Main Deck. It's a half hour past dawn when I arrive at Mr. Hunter's district on a public zero G shuttle.

Although yes, they're the fastest way to get from one end of the Ark to another, zero G shuttles make me sick: launching you at super speeds from one end to the next in a zero gravity corridor. That type of force creates its own gravity that doesn't ever agree with my stupid stomach.

Anyways, after I vomit myself straight, my trek through Upper Starboard begins. The entire district is really just rows and rows of nearly identical housing units, leaving the numerical grid layout to provide the only means of navigating. The sprawling suburban nightmare almost makes me sick again, but I press on. I walk for about twenty minutes through the streets, breathing the remarkably stale air, when I finally approach Mr. Hunter's housing unit.

Walking up, I notice his nosey neighbor watching my every step. I wave to her, and she ducks out of sight.

Odd. Probably just another miserable Sister Arkian, looking for drama.

Anyways, I continue on and knock on the front door when a housekeeper answers. He welcomes me with a traditional Brother Ark greeting: grasping my right hand with both of his and bowing while bringing my hand to his forehead. The housekeeper brings me inside and tells me to wait in common language as he "awakes" Mr. Hunter. Left on my own in the hosting room, I survey the decor.

Scattered throughout the room are photos of Mr. Hunter, looking around the same age as I remember him. Mr. Hunter's 30-something-year old face gleamed with joy in every photo. In one he held his newborn son. In another he held his toddler son on his shoulders. In another Mr. Hunter's 30-something-year old arms wrapped around his newly college-graduated son's shoulders.

The housekeeper interrupts my snooping by announcing the

arrival of the host. Mr. Hunter walks down the staircase toward the hosting room with a glass of something brown and presumably expensive in his hand. He's no geriatric at all. I swear he looks the same age as he does in the photos.

"Orion Brody!" Mr. Hunter exclaimed, a little too happy to see me. "Aren't you a sight for sore eyes?" He walks into the room and right up to my face. I can still smell the specific stench of Stasiline, a cryogenic necessity, on him. "Well look at you, all grown up," he continues. "I see your boss sent you my cry for help."

"Yes, I've read up on Ferdinand. My condolences," I remark, not bothering to correct him about Clarissa's occupation. "Do you mind if I ask you a few questions regarding his disappearance?"

He gestures to the cushioned seats.

"By all means," he insists as he sits down, "anything I can do to help."

I follow his lead and sit down myself. Pulling out a recording device, I make a gesture to ensure Mr. Hunter doesn't mind. He encourages me as I press the record button for Clarissa to transpose later. (She really is the best).

**Brody:** Mr. Hunter, when did you last see your son?

**Hunter:** Months ago.

**Brody:** And this was at the wedding?

**Hunter:** This was before the *elopement*. Ferdinand was over for dinner one night. He found time in his busy volunteering schedule for me. He didn't even mention Eliza at the time.

**Brody:** And this Eliza, you haven't met her then?

**Hunter:** Correct. Eliza *Hunter*, and I've never met the girl. Breaks my heart.

**Brody:** Had you been in contact with your son since the elopement? Any radio calls or letters even? What makes you think he's missing?

**Hunter:** We used to radio each other every week or so, just to check in. No conversation ever lasted longer than five minutes, but in one of our radio chats, he gave me his current address. A few weeks ago, he told me to visit anytime. Well last week I tried to radio him several times, but it was like his radio didn't even exist. After a few days of trying, I eventually went to check out the address he gave me, but it didn't look like anybody lived there. I've tried their housing unit several times since, and each time, nobody answers.

**Brody:** Interesting. Mr. Hunter, do you know anything about your son using stasis recreationally, maybe using your pod a few times growing up?

**Hunter:** Orion, I don't appreciate what you're implying here. I use *hasa*, yes, but that doesn't make me an inattentive father. I always locked up my pod when Ferdinand was young. If he's gotten into it, it's not because of me. But Ferdinand's a good kid. He wouldn't do anything like that. He cares about this outreach organization and his wife too much for that.

**Brody:** Didn't mean to offend, Mr. Hunter. I'm simply trying to narrow my focus. I'll find your son. I promise.

**Hunter:** Thank you, Orion. If there's anything else I can do to help, please, let me know. Here's my radio frequency if you need me.

**Brody:** Appreciate it, Mr. Hunter. Thank you. I'll see myself out, but before I go... would you mind giving me Ferdinand and Eliza's address as well?

**Brody:** Of course. Here you are. Thank you, again.

\*\*\*

I listen to the recorded interview several times on the way to the newlyweds' housing unit, analyzing intently. While I have no reason to believe he's lying to me, Mr. Hunter hasn't earned my trust in the slightest yet. Admittedly asking him about my father would've provided

a chance for him to earn said trust, but I choked on the question. I can't believe I let my nerves ruin that for me. I'll have to follow up on that tomorrow.

As I ride another zero G shuttle, this time vertically down toward the Promenade Deck, the interview plays on loop on my radio. Just as my focus turns to avoiding more sickness, the shuttle arrives on the deck that houses Ferdinand and Eliza's estate. The shuttle drops me off several miles from their address, so I signal for a personal rover cab.

The cab ride is peaceful enough although the driver won't stop talking about their husband's gambling obsession. Saying he never shows up with any money nor debt after he returns from his gambling trips.

They ramble on as we approach the young Hunters' housing unit. I ask the driver to standby while I inspect the unit. If what Mr. Hunter said is true, this will be quick.

On approach, the exterior reminds me of the housing unit we grew up in back on Brother Ark. The colors don't match, but the general structure appears identical to the one in my memories. Maybe I just have Brother Ark on my mind.

Before I attempt the front door, I sneak around back to look for any windows to look inside before any potential residents realize I'm here. What people do in the sanctity of their own homes defines them. Anyways, I find a window with the privacy curtains fully unveiled to show a completely barren hosting room.

No furniture, no trash, no signs of life in any capacity.

Odd, for sure.

Circling back to the front, I first see if the front door is unlocked. Having made the mistake of breaking-and-entering when I could've just entered, I always check. However, this time, the action bears fruitless.

Thinking of my best ways in, I run through all of the usual spots people hide their house key.

Under the rug? Nope.

Electrical box in back? No key.

I check four more common locations and almost lose faith in myself yet again before autopilot – powered by my childhood memories and intuition – takes over. When I return to the front of the house, my right hand glosses over the bricks close to the door. Suddenly my mind

catches up to my body when I recall where our family used to keep our house key: behind a loose brick.

Surely this vaguely similar house doesn't have the same secrets as my childhood one though.

My intuition proves my logic wrong immediately as I pull out, sure enough, a loose brick. However, my bewilderment meets disappointment immediately when I look inside the secret spot only to see dust and spider webs.

I turn my head back to check on the rover cab driver. They wave to me and point to their wrist, indicating I should probably hurry. I wave back before leaning down to pick up the brick. Losing patience myself, I walk around the side once more and toss the brick through the window.

The moment I enter the housing unit, it instantly occurs to me why I'm thinking about my childhood home. This unit must have used the same common blueprint as the housing unit I grew up in. Suddenly, I'm transported to the night we left when my family and I did our final walk through of the old house. This place is as empty as our's was on that day.

The bedroom doesn't have a bed. The library doesn't have any books. I walk all through the unit looking for any signs of anybody ever staying here to no avail. Maybe the reminiscing distracts me from discovering anything or maybe truly nobody ever lived here.

Then I remember the secret compartment my dad and I would use to give each other messages.

Back in our old house on Brother Ark, in the kitchen, a specific drawer hid a false bottom that my dad and I would lift to leave messages to each other. The messages themselves were never anything noteworthy, but I still remember loving the idea when I was young. While I always assumed my dad built it in, I figure it wouldn't hurt to check Ferdinand's identical drawer for a similar false bottom.

When I walk into the kitchen, staring at the drawer, my mind goes blank. Sweat beads build up on my forehead. My face feels hot as I pull open the drawer to see it looks completely empty. But that's the idea.

I reach in toward the back of the open drawer when my forefinger slips through a small hole. My eyes widen as I curl my finger and lift up.

The kitchen drawer has the false bottom.

The front of the house has the loose brick.

What's going on here? These can't be design features for this model of housing unit, right?

I stop speculating as soon as I see the contents of the secret compartment: a small rectangular device. Not just any device – a device with a feedback display. A computing system with a screen, something outlawed in The Collective long ago.

Inspecting the device all around, I accidentally press a button on the side, igniting the screen which practically illuminates the entire house. Without looking at the feedback display, I press the button again, and the screen dies out.

I'll have to wade through the contents of this device personally back at the office. Clarissa would love to see the display herself, but I don't want to risk her going blind. Being Brother Arkian myself, I should be fine.

Satisfied with this fascinating new piece of evidence, I exit the house and start the journey back to my building on Main Deck, cautious to keep the feedback display device hidden along the way.

On the return, I think about Mr. Hunter and my dad as I knew them back home. Their heads were always buried in their screens unless they were together. When they were together, they only talked in private and laughed often. But around the family, my dad was always serious and working hard, staring at his feedback displays.

He'd occasionally tell me the tale of our "super power." The legends go that during the Odyssey Era, a virus broke out on Sister Ark causing the entire populus to all go blind. While they overcame the challenge through medical advancements, the citizens' new eyes weren't up to par. They retrofitted their entire Ark's technological systems to avoid blue-light or any artificial light deemed dangerous, including screens. Or so the tale goes.

I'll never forget the day when my dad told me his justification for working so hard, using our super power as leverage.

He said, "Son, the citizens of Brother Ark have the gift of sight. We must use it to help the rest of The Collective as much as possible since they do not share our abilities."

This was of course when Brother Ark still considered themselves

a part of The Collective. Before my dad lost faith in the unity of the Polsix system.

Before Mr. Hunter and my dad fell out.

Long before a random Sister Arkian shot my dad and left him for dead solely because he was from Brother Ark.

# P3

When I arrive back at my private practice, Clarissa is out for lunch. On the same note I left for her this morning, she wrote back:

*“Be back soon with lunch for BOTH OF US. Do NOT eat another chocolate protein pack.”*

I smirk, continue into my office, and immediately pull out the device I found at Ferdinand’s kitchen drawer. Shading the windows, I begin inspecting. Although I’ve seen my dad and his friends use a similar device countless times, I admittedly have never actually used one myself. I start by pressing the button on the side.

The light immediately consumes the office. Radiating from the device, Brother Arkian text reads out “SWIPE UP,” so I swipe upwards on the feedback display. And my heart sinks.

The device now illuminates an image of Mr. Hunter and my dad with text saying “MISSION BRIEFING.” Under the image, smaller text reveals details regarding Ferdinand’s involvement with the Brother Ark outreach. I swipe up again and more text shows up at the bottom.

## MISSION BRIEFING:

1. FERDINAND HUNTER, GABRIEL HUNTER
2. Classified Intel for HUNTER EYES ONLY (CBI (**OFF BOOKS**))
3. Infiltration and Retaliation
  - a. F. HUNTER to infiltrate the **terrorist group** disguised as the outreach organization known as **Brothers of Odyssey**
  - b. Retaliation for the **assassination of Dr. Emmett Brody** deemed necessary. Discover possible weak spots and members of leadership.
  - c. Mission contingencies...

I drop the device. The politia told me my father died in a senseless act of violence. What the hell is this about an *assassination*?

Gabriel Hunter. I need to call *Mr. Hunter* immediately.

My hand flies toward my radio on the side of my face in front of my ear. I rapidly tap in the sequence to call the frequency *Mr. Hunter* provided. After pressing the binary language frantically on the radio, I wait for an answer. Eventually, his housekeeper picks up.

“Hello! You’ve reached Gabriel Hunter’s radio, he’s currently indisposed. May I take a message?” She chimes out.

“This is Orion. Wake his ass up, and get to my practice. I have urgent news.” I reply, unsuccessfully trying to hide my anger. I *really* should’ve asked him about my dad.

After ending the call, I pick up the device to see it didn’t survive the fall. The glass on the display is shattered, and the metallic casing puffs out like a bloated pig. Cursing myself for dropping the device in the first place, I pace around the room. Did the device hold any more secrets?

The sound of my footsteps against the carpet keeps a muted tempo. My train of thought swerves and turns on the beat as I speculate and reach for answers.

Gabriel Hunter sent his son. On a supposed CBI mission. To retaliate against a charity organization. One which he believes is responsible for the death – no, *assassination* – of my dad.

I loved my dad, but as far as I know he was not an important figure in either Ark’s community. Not enough to use the word “assassinate.” Why would a Brother Ark group even allegedly do such a thing? His *murder* was a hate crime. A senseless, idiotic attack just for being from his home Ark.

But if that is true, why is The Collective’s Bureau for Intelligence interested in the circumstances of my father’s death?

On that note, is Gabriel actually a member of the CBI? Is Ferdinand? Was my dad?

My dancing train of thought derails when I hear the front door of the practice open. My heart sinks, but I’m ready to confront this lying son of a bitch.

With purpose, I burst through the door. Clarissa who had just entered the practice yelps and drops her bags of takeout.

“Orion!” she yells, “now why the hell would you do that?”

She leans down to collect the bags. Luckily they landed upright, so at least nothing spilled.

"I'm sorry," I blush, "I thought you were somebody else."

I pull an ultra-collapsible chair from a cabinet drawer and flick it open to sit at Clarissa's desk with her. As she starts to unbag and plate our lunch, I explain the recent developments and our impending guest.

Comforting, savory aromas fill the room as I show her the (now broken) device I found. More importantly, I tell her about the information on the device. Gabriel Hunter is a CBI agent. My dad was, according to Hunter's device, *assassinated* by this terrorist group disguised as a charity organization. Ferdinand Hunter was recruited by his father to go undercover at the organization. And so on.

After I explain everything I know, Clarissa raises her fork, points it at me, and – with a full mouth – says "you keep saying 'supposedly' and 'allegedly' like you're some kind of lawyer. How much of this do you even believe?"

I shrug as I take my first bite of some kind of noodle dish. The salty, warm first bite sends me spiraling back to my childhood. This must be from that new Brother Ark cuisine joint.

"Well, all I'm saying," Clarissa continues after taking another bite, "how do we know Mr. Hunter isn't just a conspiracy nut who roped his son into spying on an ordinary outreach organization? What if Ferdinand actually found love and just couldn't tell his kooky dad?"

Great questions.

Beginning to speculate all the possibilities, I ready another bite on my fork when a knock on the front door interrupts our meal. Proceeding the knock, the visitor walks right in.

"Oh, terribly sorry," Gabriel Hunter says upon entering the practice. "I didn't mean to interrupt anything. I was told to come right away."

I put my fork down and wipe my face.

"No trouble at all. I'm glad you're here," I reply and gesture toward my office. "Please, come in. Sit." Gabriel Hunter walks in, and I follow him, closing the door as I do.

Once Gabriel's sitting down across from the desk, I ready my recording device for the interview. I then slam the broken screened device

in front of him.

“Is there anything you’d like to tell me?” I grill him. “Maybe something you left out?” My heart races. I’m not great at confrontations, but I’m good at acting like I’m great at confrontations.

Gabriel looks at the device. He looks up at me as I stand next to him.

“Where was it? Who broke it?” Gabriel calmly asks.

“The device was under a false bottom in your son’s kitchen drawer,” I respond. “And I broke it out of shock from the contents on the device. Now you answer my question.”

“Huh,” Gabriel chuckles out, “the kid’s using our old tricks. Well, my boy,” he continues, “if you read the mission briefing, you already know,” Gabriel says as he breaks eye contact and looks straight ahead. “Your father was an essential Case Officer working for the CBI, and my handler. This Brother Ark group found out and didn’t like that your father was a Collective-apologist, so they had him killed.”

I can’t process what I’m hearing. Too many secrets unturned at once, and now I don’t know what to believe. Maybe I’m in shock. Maybe denial.

“Keep talking. I want to hear the full story,” I manage to blurt out as I walk to the window. Looking out at the horizon – and away from Gabriel – I try to focus. “What happened between you two? And why bring your son into this all these years later?” I ask, confused as ever.

“Well, your father and I were given the opportunity to retire here on Sister Ark, and we took it, knowing the work’s never finished,” he tells me. “When I approached him about entering the espionage game again, I mentioned we needed some young agents to go undercover.”

“And you suggested me and my brother,” I whisper. Their falling out starts to make more sense.

“And I suggest you and your brother,” Gabriel Hunter explains, “which of course, your father hates. To the point of him banishing me from contacting your entire family ever again.” His voice breaks. “I loved your father. I loved your whole family, and now that I know, after all these years, who’s responsible for his death... Well, don’t you want some type of closure?”

My mind races, failing to land on a single coherent thought. Suddenly I’m startled by Clarissa as she knocks on the door.

Cracking open the door, she says “I’m sorry to interrupt, but you have another visitor. It seems urgent.”

I turn to face the door, and as I do, I hear the glass of the window behind me shatter. By the time I even process I heard a gunshot, I hear another.

Something zips by my head and into Gabriel. Clarissa screams. She exits the doorway and the office door slams open further. Gabriel’s nosey neighbor from before slams through the door with a handgun ready.

“Shots fired! Shots fired! Everybody down!” the neighbor screams as she rushes to take cover behind my desk.

I stand motionless as if in *hasa*. I watch the neighbor pull Gabriel out of his seat and onto the ground next to her. Eventually I turn toward the window and examine the shot’s origin.

In the farthest distance possible on the Ark, a quick reflective light shines from on top of the rusty wave-generator. I blink and almost miss the assailant’s leap from the brown spherical machinery, disappearing into the water below.

“Call the politia! Call a doctor!” I hear the neighbor cry. Still in silent shock, I turn back just in time to see her jab a needle into Gabriel who’s blood spread on my office floor. “Call the politia!” she cries again as she feels for a pulse.

The next few moments blur together. Clarissa rushes me out of the office and down to the building lobby. Within an instance, politia and Arkian Medical Officers (or AMOs) arrive and rush upstairs. While the politia presumably get a statement from the neighbor, the AMOs drag Mr. Hunter out of the building on a gurney with all sorts of medical tubes and wires.

Clarissa encourages me to follow them onto their emergency rover, so I can ride with them to the Arkian Medical Facility. We sit in the rover and wait for a brief moment until the neighbor joins us.

## P4

The next thing I know, I'm sitting in the AMF cafe with a cup of coffee, across from Gabriel Hunter's neighbor who potentially saved his life. I take a long gulp of the shitty, lukewarm coffee. The caffeine laboriously helps me collect my composure. Setting the mug down, I look at the neighbor with about a million different questions competing to leave my mouth. Before I can speak though, she goes first.

"So prior to getting into this," the neighbor says with the full context lost on me, "let me properly introduce myself. My name is Special Agent Carla Roscoe. I work for the CBI." She pulls out a badge and an ID that confirms it and then snaps them back into her pockets. "Now, straight to business: tell me everything Gabriel Hunter told you," she demands. "What is his involvement with the Brother Ark group?"

I look her in the eyes. Something's not right. I mean, in addition to all of the other *not-right*.

"Shouldn't you know?" I reply. "Considering Gabriel's one of your's?"

Agent Roscoe pauses. Her eyebrows scrunch and her lips purse.

"Agent Hunter was fired from the CBI a long time ago. He aggressively pursued a Brother Ark refugee camp that he accused of bombing that OCT from a while back," Agent Roscoe states with calm confidence. "In the midst of this case, your father was arbitrarily gunned down, and Hunter went off the rails. Then when our intel came in that the accused organization was clean, he refused to believe it. Hunter – unable to be reasoned with – went on a one-man raid. After he critically injured the innocent owner of the camp, Mr. Yondrias, and his poor young daughter, Lizzy, the CBI cut ties with ex-Agent Hunter entirely."

Agent Roscoe pulls out a cigarette and lights it without hesitation. The smell of tobacco and mint fill the cafe. In between draws and sips of her coffee, she continues explaining Gabriel Hunter's paranoid delusions and extreme actions.

"He'd been quietly in-and-out of *hasa* since, but when Hunter recently reached out to hire you to find his son, it raised red flags for our

guys," she says. Taking another drag before continuing, she then speaks with the utmost authority, "You have to tell me everything ex-Agent Hunter said to you."

I take her story in. Sitting in silence for a moment, I chug my coffee further until I can feel it in my teeth. Caffeine jitters shoot up and down my body while my brain works in overtime to process every bit of information revealed to me today. I don't know whose story to trust.

As much as I want to believe my dad was assassinated for his apparently important work, I struggle to picture it. The thought of my dad dying for something, and not for nothing, gives me a vague profound feeling that a senseless death simply couldn't. However, believing that would mean trusting Gabriel Hunter, a *hyperawareness* junkie who betrayed the trust of an entire branch of the government, not to mention my dad himself.

On the flip side, the CBI is notorious for its secrets. My dad evidently kept secrets from his children his entire life. Perhaps if I didn't break the device, I'd have more to go off of. Maybe Clarissa could repair it if—

*Shit.* The device. My idiot self left it in the office amidst the commotion. Could Agent Roscoe have taken it? If the CBI analyzes the data, they'd know what's really going on. But would they even share the truth with me?

Sweat forms on my warm face while I internally scream. This was all avoidable. I should've just gone back to Gabriel Hunter's house to interrogate him again. I shouldn't have dropped the device that could've potentially revealed everything.

I'm a moron.

Maybe I would've found Ferdinand by now if I weren't such a mess up.

Agent Roscoe stares at me as I hyperfixate on all of the mistakes I made in the past day like some shitty montage. Her impatience starts to show as my mind finally mourns the last moments in my office with Gabriel.

I can't help but feel partially responsible since Mr. Hunter was shot in my office. The shooter used my window and my interrogation as an opportunity to take him out.

But *wait*. Why? Who was the shooter?

Sick of all of the puzzles and games, I give a quick summary of the case so far to Agent Roscoe. I run through the important information without mentioning the device, optimistic that the CBI doesn't already have it. Eventually I get to the part of the story where Gabriel's shot.

"And that's where you came in," I explain, wrapping up the recap of events. "Speaking of which, do we have any info on the shooter?"

Using the lit end of her previous one, Agent Roscoe lights another cigarette. It's her turn to process information, but she continues smoking with a blank expression, unfazed. After exhaling a smoke puff that dances in the space above our table, she replies.

"We're looking into it," the Agent responds. She makes no attempt at eye contact as she says "ex-Agent Hunter made a lot of enemies over the years all across the Polsix system. It could've been anybody really."

She still doesn't trust me.

I still don't trust her.

We sit in tense, awkward silence until I finally ask how Ferdinand fits into all of this.

"Well we figured he found love," Agent Roscoe comments, "I'm assuming he'll visit his father once he hears what's happened."

From there, I excuse myself. My new top priority is finding an exit and the fastest way to the administration office for the outreach program. The only way to know for sure what to believe is to discover the truth myself. I've made mistakes during this case, but I was hired to find Ferdinand. And that's exactly what I intend to do.

Remembering the admin office's address from Gabriel's file, I sprint to the nearest vertical zero-G lift. Unfortunately the fastest way to the Starboard Lower Decks is by two different zero-G lifts. Fortunately, I'm too determined to let some nausea and light vomiting slow me down.

It's a fast journey into the neglected underbelly of the Ark where the facility is located. The dirty Lower Decks don't see the same attention (or maintenance) that the Upper and Mid Decks do. The second zero-G shuttle drops me off at a grimey, long-stretching corridor. Every few meters, labeled dark hallways branch off in opposite directions leading to who knows what. Turning down my destination's hallway, I slowly creep into the darkness.

I walk past several doors with all types of labels. The eeriness

of the Lower Decks fuels all types of conspiracies, but understandably so. For all the doubt I have in Gabriel's story, in this moment, my gut tells me to remain vigilant in this environment. For the first time since I holstered it this morning, I think about my firearm.

Eventually I find the door that says "Brothers of Odyssey Outreach Admin." I knock on the door.

After a little while, the door is answered by some kid, a teenager. He greets me in a formal Brother Arkian fashion and welcomes me into the admin building. Upon entering, I see the front room, a small office, represents the entirety of the "building." The admin teenager sits behind the desk in the office, and asks how he can help.

With some urgency – and without all of the details – I explain to the teenager the situation. How Ferdinand's dad is in surgery right now as we speak, and that I'm looking to deliver the news to Ferdinand. I ask the administrator if he knows where I can find him.

With a forced smile, the teenager quickly explains that he needs to make a radio call. He excuses himself and rushes out of the room through the front door, and I trust my gut feeling more.

As soon as the teenager leaves the office, I stand up to start snooping. Looking around the office, nothing incriminating comes up. In fact, nothing comes up at all. Throughout my search in the office, I don't find a single document, file, or photo. There aren't even any knick-knacks on the desk.

What kind of teenager doesn't have knick-knacks?

Suddenly my radio vibrates.

"Clarissa?" I immediately answer. "Where are you? Are you okay?"

"Yes, yes. I'm fine," she replies softly. "I'm probably blind in one eye, but that can wait. Listen, I fixed the device with the feedback display. Are you still at the medical facility?"

"You did *what*?" I retort, flabbergasted, before I piece together her first comment with her second, and I plead "please, tell me you didn't look at the screen."

"Just with my left eye," she nonchalantly replies. "It's a one-off trick, but it got us the information we needed. Orion, where are you?"

Damn it, Clarissa. Too good for your own good.

“I’m at the Brothers of Odyssey Outreach Admin office,” I reply. “I’m still trying to find Ferdinand.” I place my hands on my hips as I scan the office. “Hey, I think you might have been right,” I tell her, “maybe this is just an outreach program and Eliza and Ferdinand are just in love.”

“No!” Clarissa shouts, startling me. “That’s why I called. The mission briefing also contained mission *updates* from Ferdinand himself.” Panic rises in her voice. “Orion,” she cries, “Eliza is a past victim of Gabriel! The outreach program is a front for some type of institutionalization scheme. Elizabeth Yondrias is recruiting young Arkians and radicalizing them against The Collective. I think she kidnapped Ferdinand to draw out Gabriel.

“You need to get out of that office, Orion,” Clarissa continues. “Now.”

Instead, I run to the front door, and lock it from the inside.

“Clarissa,” I say, “I can’t do that until I find what I’m looking for.”

“Which is *what* exactly?”

“I don’t know. But I’ll know it when I see it.”

I hang up.

As soon as I hang up, the teenage administrator returns. He wiggles the locked door handle in denial and starts calling out to me, using my name which I never gave.

I continue scanning the room, looking for something – anything – that could help me find Ferdinand. Maybe the teenager would lead me to Eliza.

*Boom! Boom! Boom!*

The entire room shakes as something more aggressive than knuckles slams against the office door.

“Orion Brody!” somebody else snarls from the other side, “You are trespassing. If you don’t open the door, we will take extreme measures.”

Although I draw my gun, I ignore the continued slams against the door to mind my investigation. Scanning the room top to bottom, I make my way to the end of the office and notice scrapes against the hard floor in front of the far wall. With my free hand, I knock against the back wall and the sound reverberates through the hollow other side. And there it is; I found what I didn’t know I was seeking.

I set my gun down on the desk behind me and examine the wall for where it might open. Meanwhile the slams on the door grow more and more violent, increasing my sense of urgency. The metallic door's integrity holds, but the lock or hinges will break eventually. They may kill me the way they tried to kill Gabriel unless I find a way through this wall.

Desperate, I pick up the desk chair and throw it toward the closed hidden entryway. The wall rejects the chair, bouncing it back toward me. After catching the chair, I arrange it in my hand to start mimicking the invaders outside the office.

The chair thuds against the wall as I ram it repetitively. Battering over and over, about twice the pace as the actual battering ram against the office door. After a while, the chair legs start to degrade and crumble against the wall.

*Shit.* Now what?

The door starts to rattle in its frame, more and more with each *boom*.

I grab my gun and shoot multiple shots at the back wall of the office. No ricochets, so I assume the bullets fly straight through. After emptying a full clip, I reload my gun, and examine the bullet holes.

Although the battering chair wasn't successful, the back wall seems thin based on the holes. I have to try again with something else.

I look around the office for anything sturdy enough to ram against the wall, and suddenly I'm out of time. The door flies off of its frame, making a dramatic loud noise against the floor.

Two men enter the office, one with a shotgun, one with the battering ram.

"Orion Brody," the man with the shotgun scolds, "you are trespassing on Brother Ark territory." He raises the gun toward me and states "put the weapon down and we can resolve this peacefully."

"Where's Ferdinand Hunter?" I reply, gun still in hand.

The two men share a quick glance before the one holding the battering ram says "There's nobody by that name in the volunteer registry. But if you come with us, maybe we can help you find him."

My grip tightens as I stare at the men for what feels like for an eternity. While the men glare back at me, my face flushes, and my heart pounds. Looking down the barrel of the shotgun aimed at my chest, I

calculate every option.

The tension brings time to a crawling halt, and few moments last a lifetime. My entire day leading up to now displays in my head like it's on a vivid Brother Ark screen.

Then I drop to the ground.

The man with the shotgun blasts a spreadfire above my head.

Meanwhile I take my shot.

It's a hit.

Right in his shoulder.

He falls to the ground.

Immediately, I jump back to my feet and take a shot at the man with the battering ram, but he's already ducked down and reaching for his companion's weapon. The paper-thin wall behind me, now presenting a gaping hole from the shotgun's spreadfire, provides my exit.

With all my might, I leap toward the hole in the wall shoulder first to break through. As I pass through the barrier, the sound of shotgun fire follows. After landing on the ground, somehow unscathed, I immediately smell a familiar stench.

Stasiline. The reeking component that makes *hyperaware suspended animation* possible.

I look up and see a dim, brown warehouse with rows and rows of stasis pods. I'm in a *hasa* house.

Rolling over on my back, I look toward the hole leading to the administration office. The second man takes a step through, and I shoot him in the leg. He yells and drops to the ground, releasing the shotgun on the way down.

As I stand up, commotion materializes. *Hasa* attendants round the corners of various stasis pods. A dozen attendants, one for each dozen pods, stand defenseless before me. I raise my gun toward the closest one.

"Where is Ferdinand Hunter?" I spit out.

The scared attendant silently nods his head in a general direction. "Show me."

He then ushers me in the direction he nodded, trudging with my gun at his back. Every pod I inspect along the way contains a subject my age or younger. Many have Brother Arkian symbols tattooed or even branded. Eventually, the attendant stops and points.

He points directly at a pod that contains a face I only recognize

from pictures. But a face I recognize all the same.

Ferdinand Hunter. There he is. In stasis right in front of me.

Smiling, I turn to the attendant and send him away.

He runs away, and I focus back on the *hasa* pod to wake Ferdinand up when the sound of a high-caliber gunshot explodes through air.

*Crack!*

I look around, confused. My scan brings me back to the attendant who helped me. He's now longer running. He's face down on the ground several yards away.

A woman turns the corner and walks toward me, obstructing my view of the attendant. I squint to see her in the dim lighting only to notice she carries the high-caliber gun in her hands. By the time I recognize she's aiming the gun in my direction, it's too late.

*Crack!*

Another shot rings out.

She lowers her weapon and continues to advance toward me when I feel my shirt dampen around my stomach. I inspect the wet spot with my free hand.

I'm bleeding.

Only then does the pain hit, and I collapse to my knees, trying to hold myself up with Ferdinand's pod. The woman draws closer, and I don't have the strength to raise my weapon.

"Eliza!" I cry out. "You don't have to do this. Please, don't do this."

She silently aims her weapon at me again as she approaches when I notice she's crying.

"Lizzy," I whisper. "Please."

Her voice breaks as she snaps "This is for Brother Ark. For my father."

*Crack!*

I open my eyes and Elizabeth Yondrias looks confused. Her weapon drops to the ground and she follows.

Standing behind her, Clarissa in an eyepatch points a firearm in our direction. Smoke still floats from the end of the gun that shakes rapidly in her hand. She drops the weapon and rushes toward me.

"Orion!" Clarissa shouts. "Don't you ever hang up on me again. I could've help—"

“Shit,” she blurts out, interrupting herself, “you’ve been shot!”

“Oh, that’s what that is,” I respond, unintentionally sounding sarcastic. “Ya know, you’re somehow even more beautiful with an eyepatch.”

She reaches down to help me. Applying pressure on the gunshot wound with one hand, she radios for an emergency response team with the other.

The sight of her face goes blurry while I babble on about the Hunters, the Yondrias, and my dad.

“I know, Orion,” she says. “We’re going to get you and Ferdinand out of here. Don’t worry.”

The emerging sirens from the politia and AMOs blare as Clarissa continues to comfort me.



A few day cycles later.

The hull above the Main Deck slides shut and receives a projection of a dawn sky. Fictitious clouds pretend to reflect a golden pink back to the fake sun. Watching the display from my office, I breathe in a new day when my radio buzzes in an unexpected pattern.

“Kip?” my groggy voice croaks.

“Orion?” my brother replies in a mocking tone. “What’s up, man? Heard you saved the day and got shot. And Mr. Hunter’s dead? You gotta tell me everything.”

I chuckle and then cringe. It hurts to laugh.

A somber wave washes over me as I tell Kip the recap of that day including all of the conspiracies surrounding Mr. Hunter’s life that led to his death. Surprisingly, Kip digests the news of our father being a CBI agent with ease.

Eventually I tell the whole tale to my brother that led to the *hasa* house.

“So yeah, more like Clarissa saved me and Ferdinand after I got shot,” I finish my story. “Hey, speaking of *hasa*, I thought you were supposed to be in stasis yourself right now,” I comment, sounding ungrateful for the radio call.

“Well,” he says after a pause, “I told them to wake me up for today well in advance. You know why, right?”

I start to think about all the significant dates in our lives. Today isn’t anybody’s special birthday. Is it some anniversary of when we left our home Ark?

Not any anniversary of when our dad died, I know that.

“Today, my brother,” Kip states, “thanks to *hasa*, you are officially *my* older brother. The eldest Brody. As such, you should know our family history,” he continues jokes dryly, “our family secrets.”

Kip goes on to tell me that he’s actually known about our dad’s occupation. In fact, he knew more details about his job and even Mr.

Hunter's conspiracies than me. At the end of his monologue he reveals one more truth, something he – much to my outrage – withheld from me since he left: Kip's reason for leaving.

"Orion, I'm joining the Collective's Bureau of Intelligence," Kip says. "I'm going to be a part of a negotiation committee arranged by Corrie Daniels, the young Speaker from the Promenade Decks. She wants to arrange a peace conference between Brother Ark and The Collective. Maybe we'll even go home someday."

All I hear is Kip's joining the CBI. My older brother—no, younger brother—will be a CBI agent.

I bite my tongue, withdrawing my own opinion, and simply congratulate him. Who knows, maybe I'll learn to trust the Bureau with Kip on the inside.

My brother and I speak on the radio for another hour. After hanging up, I think how my father would be proud of him for joining a greater cause. Then I surprise myself by thinking about how my father would be proud of me too.

My eyes swell.

My mind wanders, but I snap back when I hear a gentle knock on my office door.

"Hey, Orion," Clarissa says upon entering. "I know you said to hold off on new cases while we transferred ownership of the practice to me, so I at least typed up what was on your recording device for now. You've listened to this, right? Because *wow*."

I look up and stare into her beaming blue eye, missing the one hidden by the eye patch.

"I've listened to it, but I'll still read over what you typed. Thank you," I reply. "Hey, Clarissa?" I ask.

"Yes?"

"Would you like to go on a date with me? I'd love to visit that Brother Ark restaurant we got takeout from the other day," I say as I feel my face heat up.

Clarissa stares at me and smirks.

"I'd love to," she replies. "But that'd be tricky since your mother made those lunches. Maybe we should just go visit her."

I chuckle which hurts, but I don't mind.

"That'd probably make us all happy, honestly," I comment, and

we exit the office together.

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(Labeled: From The Transcript of Orion's in-office  
Confrontation with Mr. Hunter)

**Brody:** "Keep talking. I want to hear the full story. What happened between you two? And why bring your son into this all these years later?"

**Hunter:** "Well, your father and I were given the opportunity to retire here on Sister Ark, and we took it, knowing the work's never finished. When I approached him about entering the espionage game again, I mentioned we needed some young agents to go undercover. And I suggest you and your brother, which of course, your father hates. To the point of him banishing me from contacting your entire family ever again. \*voice break\* loved your father. I loved your whole family, and now that I know, after all these years, who's responsible for his death... Well, don't you want some type of closure?"

\*Knocks on the door\*

**Clarrisa:** "I'm sorry to interrupt, but you have another visitor. It seems urgent."

\*Silenced bullet shoots through the office window\*

**Agent Roscoe:** "Shots fired! Shots fired! Everybody down!"

\*Commotion\*

**Agent Roscoe:** "Call the politia! Call a doctor! Call the politia!"

\*Brody leaves the office, and AMOs drag Hunter out of the office.\*

**Agent Roscoe:** \*on the radio\* "It's me...Yessir, we'll have the AMOs drag it out... Don't have to worry about Brody, I'll feed him some cover story... Yessir. And by the way, sir, excellent shot."



*EXCERPT FROM R.C. NECHAMKIN'S*

TALES FROM **POL**SIX<sup>THE</sup>  
SYSTEM

**OCT**  
**MELTDOWN**

# OCT MELTDOWN

The power chamber sat ominously in silence. The massive stadium-sized room traditionally occupied only by two levels of a total of eight nuclear reactors hosted an unexpected, ninth object. The massive, egg-shaped intruder rested against one of the reactors on the bottom level. The silence in the chamber broke when the airlock to the zero gravity lift antechamber hissed open and revealed the Captain standing tall with rifle in hand, next to Fitz slouching in his wheelchair.

Footsteps and squeaky wheels echoed as they approached the power control console. The Captain slung his rifle over his shoulder and pressed multiple buttons in a specific order and then waited for diagnostics. He touched the grain-sized radio he still wore before turning to Fitz.

“Somebody sabotaged the power from the console itself,” the Captain said. “The impact of this egg-ship-thing had no effect on the power supply.” The Captain looked back at the console and pressed a couple more buttons. “I think I can fix it. I’m not Parlor, but since I still went through the same engineering programs, I may have a shot at restoring the power yet.”

Somebody sabotaged the power. Those words swirled around in Fitz’s already dizzy head. Is Brother Ark behind this after all? Fitz

## OCT MELTDOWN

wheeled over to the large egg. He toured around the base of the ship and eventually found an entry point. A huge section of the egg-shaped ship opened up like just another door on the OCT.

Fitz shielded his eyes from the bright glare of the lights inside the egg-ship reflecting off the pristine white interior. His eyes adjusted and focused on the enormous, open kennel in the middle of the ship. He progressed into the egg to investigate further.

Lights far brighter than anything Fitz had seen in the past seven years forced him to squint as he peered around the inside of the egg-ship. He first inspected the kennel. A standard animal containment contraption, he gathered, though he'd never seen one this big before. He backed up and rotated around the kennel.

"Oh, shit." Fitz muttered when he found on the other end of the kennel, eight unoccupied, human-sized suspended animation pods, all linked into an intricate navigational display on a display screen that burned at Fitz's eyes.

There's no way Brother Ark did this. The navigational chart is all wrong. According to the blinding display readout, this egg came from beyond the furthest reaches of the Polsix system. Surely Brother Ark would've literally taken a different approach.

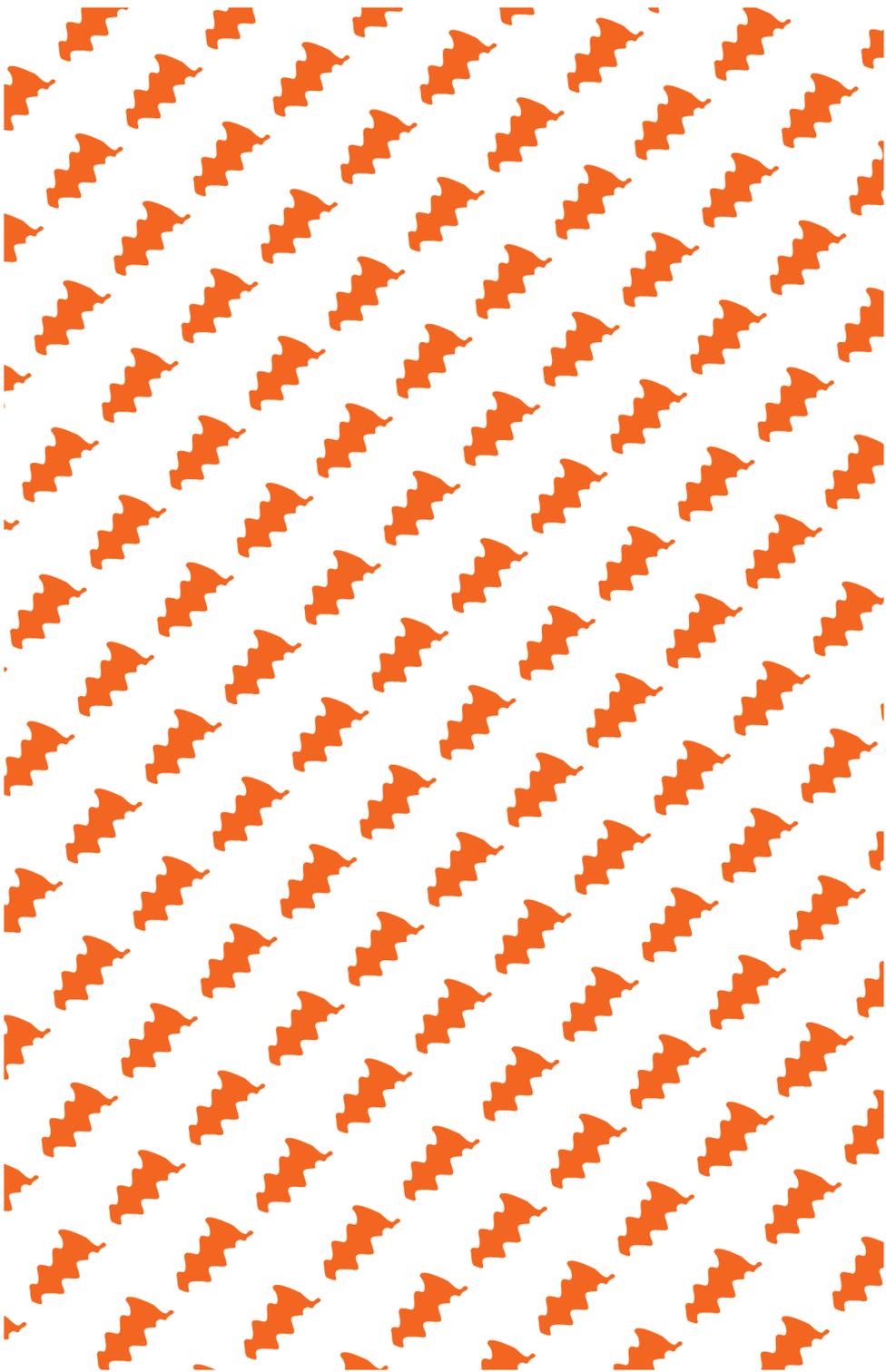
Fitz examined the pods closer. Standard stasis pods—just like the elites use on the capital planet—as far as he could tell until he noticed the interface on the other end of the row of pods. A foreign text inscribed on the buttons vaguely reminded Fitz of something he'd seen in his studies. Abruptly, deep-rooted knowledge came to the surface. This was an archaic language used on the Sibling Arks in the early Odyssey Era.

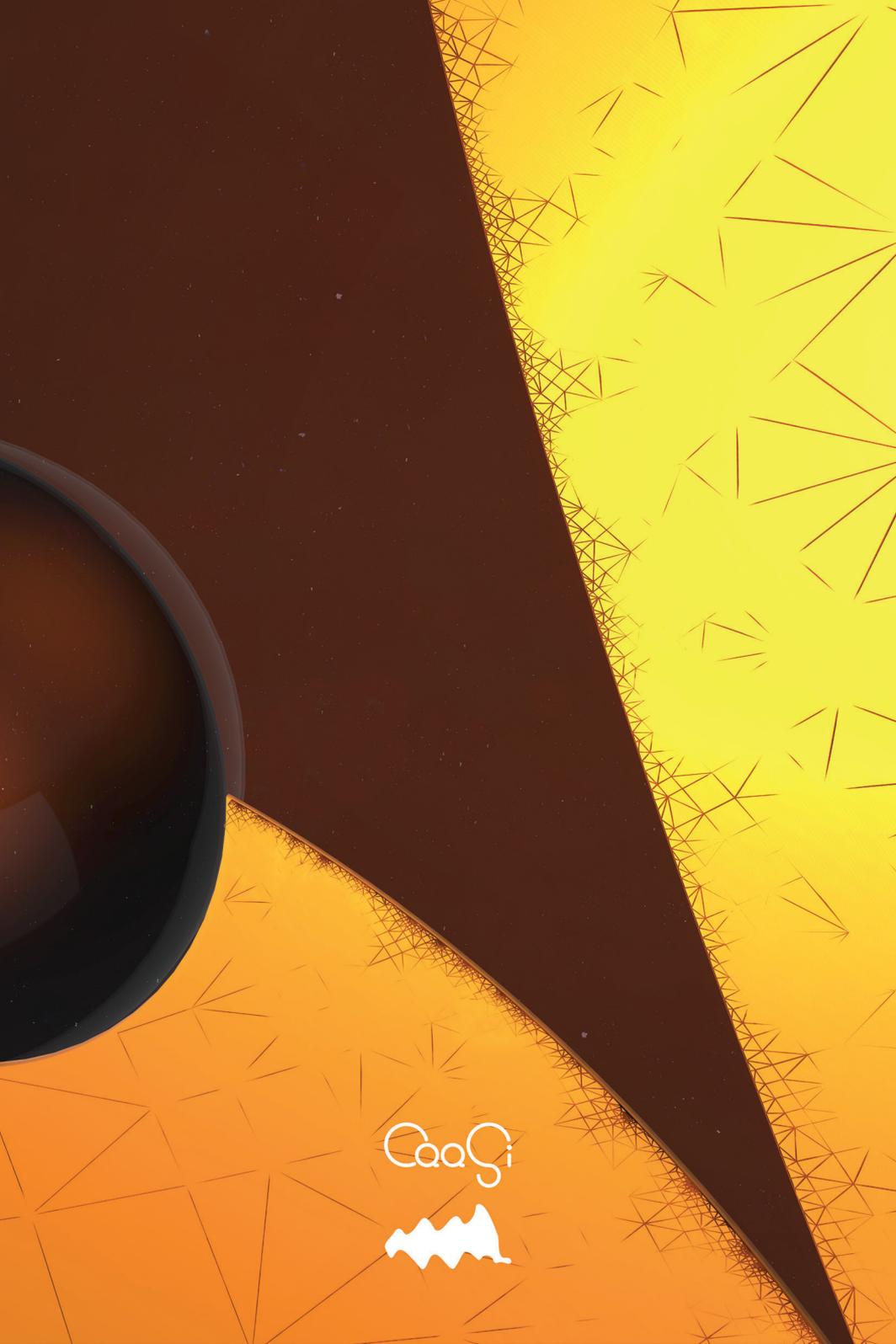
"Warren!" The Captain called out to Fitz from outside the egg-ship. "We have a problem."

## **R.C.NECHAMKIN**

is a part-time fiction writer (currently) living in McKinney, TX with his adoring wife and dog. He's loved creating fantastic stories since he was young, and he now plans to break into the publishing world with 'The Polsix System'-a universe he's crafted over the course of several years.

In his spare time, he works full-time at a corporate coffee chain where he toils away, making people's day a little less annoying. In his other spare time, he reads and writes.





CaaGi

