

# Legacies

by Tom Purdom

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Deni Wei-Kolin was asleep in the childcare center at Hammarskjold Station when the fifteen assault vehicles began their kamikaze run into Rinaswandi Base. Rinaswandi was in the asteroid belt, about a third of the way around the sun from the Earth-Moon system, so it would be a good twenty-five minutes before a signal carrying news of the attack reached Hammarskjold and the other man-made satellites that orbited Earth and Luna. The signal would actually reach Hammarskjold a full second later than it reached some of the other habitats, in fact. Hammarskjold was the off-Earth military headquarters of the UN Secretariat and it had been placed in a lunar orbit, for the kind of accidental political reasons that usually decide such matters. Given the positions of the Earth and the Moon at the time the signal started its journey, the message from Rinaswandi actually had to zap past Earth before a big antenna sucked it into Hammarskjold's electronic systems.

Deni's mother, Gunnery Sergeant Wei, got the news a bit earlier than most of the fifteen billion people who currently inhabited the solar system. The military personnel stationed in Rinaswandi Base had been under siege for seventeen days when the attack began. For twelve hours out of every twenty-four, Deni's mother had been plugged into the Rinaswandi defense system, ready to respond the moment the alert signal pinged into her ear and the injector built into her combat suit shot a personalized dose of stimulant/tranquilizer into her thigh.

All around Sergeant Wei people were beginning to stir. There were twenty of them crammed into the command module -- a place that was only supposed to provide working space for six -- and you couldn't shift your weight without disturbing someone. Half of them were merely observers -- support people and administrative wallahs. Gunnery Sergeant Wei could hear little whispers and murmurs as they caught glimpses of the symbols moving across the screens in front of the combat specialists.

The stimulant/tranquilizer started spreading its chemical blessings through Sergeant Wei's nervous system. The long, carefully groomed fingers of her left hand slipped into position just below the key pad she would use to direct the missiles, guns, and electronic devices under her control.

The acting commander of Rinaswandi Base, Logistics Captain Tai, was a slender young man who tended to relate to his subordinates with a lot of handclapping and mock-enthusiastic banter. Even now, when the arrows and icons on his screens represented real vehicles armed with real ammunition, the voice in Sergeant Wei's earphones sounded like it was sending some kind of sports team into a tournament.

"All right, people. As you can see, ladies and gentlemen, they're all bunched up on one side of our happy little home, in Quadrants III and IV. Apparently they're hoping they can overwhelm whatever we've got on that side. Gunner Three -- take the eight targets on the left in your quadrant. Gunner Four -- take everything in your quadrant plus the four on the right in Quadrant Three. Gunner One, Gunner Two -- be prepared to switch your attentions to the other two quadrants. But I would appreciate it -- to say the least -- if you would keep an eye out for anybody trying to slip in on your side while we're looking the other way. Let's not assume they're as dumb as we think they are."

In the childcare center, twenty-five light-minutes away, Sergeant Wei's son was sleeping with his right arm draped across the stuffed animal he had been given when he was two -- a hippopotamus, about half as long as he was tall, that Deni had named Ibar. Two of the children sleeping near him had parents on

Rinaswandi. Six had parents on the four hydrogen-fusion torch ships that had accelerated away from Hammarskjold Station, crammed with troops and equipment, two days after Rinaswandi had come under siege.

Every day all the children in the childcare center stretched out on the big shaggy rug in the playroom and listened to a briefing. Every day, the younger ones focused their best I'm-a-good-student stares on an orbital diagram that showed the current positions of Hammarskjold Station, Rinaswandi, the four torch ships, and a place in the asteroid belt called Akara City. They all knew, as well as their young minds could grasp it, that Akara City had been ruled for five decades by a strong-willed mayor who had turned it into a bustling commercial center in which half a million people took full advantage of the raw materials available in the asteroid belt. The mayor had died, her successor had been caught in a financial scandal, and the turmoil had somehow led to a classic breakdown of social order -- a breakdown that had been manipulated by an obscure married couple who had emigrated to Akara City after they had been chased out of a Zen-Random communal colony. In the last six months, according to the teachers who gave the briefing, Mr. and Mrs. Chen had done some "very bad things." One of the bad things they had done had been killing people -- about three hundred, according to the most believable news reports. They had also engaged in approximately two thousand involuntary personality modifications -- but that was a crime young children sometimes had trouble understanding.

Six weeks ago, a hundred troops could have torched into Rinaswandi Base, picked up the weapons and fighting vehicles stockpiled in its vaults, and deposed Mr. and Mrs. Chen in a few hours. As usual, however, the international politicians had dithered about "sovereignty" and the exact border that defined the line between "internal" and "external" affairs. And while they dithered, Mr. and Mrs. Chen had managed to establish communications with an officer at Rinaswandi who had been greedier than his psychological profiles had indicated. The equipment stockpiled in Rinaswandi had become part of the Chens' arsenal and the personnel stationed in Rinaswandi had crammed themselves into their command module and started watching their screens.

The teachers at the childcare center would never have told their charges the politicians had "dithered," of course. They were officers in the Fourth International Brigade. Proper military people never say bitter things about politicians during official, approved briefings.

Nobody on Hammarskjold told Deni they felt sorry for him, either. That was another thing military people didn't do. If anyone had given Deni a pat and a sympathetic word, however, he would have thanked them very politely and even looked a little thoughtful. For a moment, in fact, he would have thought he really did feel sad.

Deni's mother had been stationed on Rinaswandi for two months before the siege had broken out. For most of the second month, his father, Assault Sergeant Kolin, had been trying to convince him a boy his age shouldn't sleep with a stuffed hippopotamus. It hadn't been as bad as the time his father had made him stop wetting the bed. That time Deni had been forced to endure almost six weeks of hand slappings, sarcastic baby talk, and "confinement to quarters" in a sopping bed.

Deni was seven years old. For four of those years -- over half his lifetime -- one of his parents had been away on some kind of military assignment. When his mother was gone, he lived with an easy-going, enjoy-it-while-you-can father whose basic indolence was punctuated by periods in which Assault Sergeant Kolin became obsessed by the belief his son needed "discipline." When his father was away, Deni's days were dominated by a goal-oriented mother who believed every moment of a child's life should be as productive as she could make it. When they were both home, he frequently found himself pressing against a wall, knees doubled against his chest, while they engaged in "domestic disputes" that sometimes ended in bruised faces and even broken bones.

Deni's day to day life in the childcare center had its flaws. He still had to sit through the daily message Sergeant Wei videoed from Rinaswandi, in spite of the siege. He still had to send his mother a return message in which he assured her he was practicing his flute two hours and fifteen minutes every day -- the minimum a boy as talented as her son should practice, in Sergeant Wei's opinion. He still had to spend three hours a week talking to an officer named Medical Captain Min, who kept pestering him with questions about the way he felt about different things. All in all, however, the last fifteen days of Deni's life

had been a lot pleasanter than most of the other two week periods he could remember. Somewhere in the center of his personality, sleeping with his hippopotamus, there was a little boy who would have been quite happy if neither of his parents ever came home again.

And that, of course, was the problem.

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Medical Captain Dorothy Min was a tall young woman with a round, pleasant face and a manner that correlated with her appearance. Deni Wei-Kolin might have liked her very much, in fact, if she had been a teacher or a childcare specialist. At 23:07 Hammarskjold time -- forty-two minutes after the Rinaswandi defense system had decided it was under attack -- Captain Min was sitting in front of the communications screen in her personal quarters. She was revising a statement in which she requested, for the fourth time, that she be allowed to communicate with Deni's parents. She was staring at a paragraph in which she explained -- once again -- the major reason she wanted to apply a procedure that she and her colleagues usually referred to as an "esem."

*I can only repeat what I've already said before, the paragraph under consideration read. The death of one of Deni's parents -- especially in combat -- could result in permanent, lifelong psychological damage if we do not apply the appropriate preventive measure before that happens. Fantasies about his parents' deaths have become an important component of Deni's emotional structure. The death of one of his parents could trigger guilt reactions no seven-year-old personality can possibly handle. It has now been fourteen days since I originally asked for permission to discuss this matter with Gunnery Sergeant Wei and Assault Sergeant Kolin. If either of his parents is killed in combat before we can provide him with the benefits of at least one session with an ego-strengthening emotional modification procedure, the prognosis for Deni's future emotional development is about as hopeless as it can get.*

Half the space on Captain Min's screen was cluttered with paragraphs and charts she had included in the three memos she had already addressed to the commander of the Akara Assault Force. She should keep her memo short, her contact on the torch ships had told her, but she shouldn't assume General Lundstrom had read her previous communications. This time, her contact had assured her, the message would bypass the general's over-protective staff.

She touched the screen with her finger and drew an X over the now in 'It has now been fourteen days'. The now added a little emphasis, in her opinion, but her contact had made it clear every word counted.

A light glowed over a loudspeaker. "Captain Dorothy Min has a call from Dr. Bedakar Barian," the communications system murmured. "Emergency Priority."

Captain Min tapped the accept button on her keyboard. A plump, bearded face replaced the text on her screen.

"There's a report on Trans-Solar, Dorothy -- an attack on Rinaswandi. Have you seen it yet?"

Captain Min grabbed her stylus and scratched a command on the notebook lying beside her right hand. Dr. Barian's face receded to the upper left quarter of her communications screen. A printed news bulletin started scrolling across the right half.

"I told my system to monitor the Akara crisis and alert me if it picked up any major developments," Dr. Barian said. "Trans-Solar may not be as trustworthy as the stuff you people get through channels, but it looks like it's a lot faster."

Captain Min had been wearing her working uniform while she dictated. Now her hands reached down and automatically tightened the belt on her tunic. One of the purposes of military training, her father had always claimed, was the development of a military alter-ego -- a limited personality that could take control of your responses whenever you were confronted with realities that would have overwhelmed any normal human. The surge of emotion reached a danger point, a circuit kicked in, and the hard, clear responses of the professional officer or NCO replaced the messy turbulence of the human being cringing inside the uniform.

There were no pictures yet. All Trans-Solar had was a few messages from Rinaswandi and a

statement from Mr. and Mrs. Chen claiming that the "center of international militarism" on Rinaswandi had been "effectively terminated."

"That's crazy," Captain Min said. "Even for them it's crazy."

"It's what they've been telling us they were going to do for the last seventeen days."

"It's still crazy. They could have pulled a quarter of our assault force away from the attack on Akara City just by maintaining a low-level threat against Rinaswandi. Now they don't even have the threat."

"Apparently their assessment of the situation doesn't conform to standard military logic."

Dr. Barian lived in Nous Avon, the smallest of the Five Cities that housed most of the human beings who inhabited the space between Earth and Luna. Captain Min had never met him in person but his face had dominated her communication screens -- and her dreams -- from the day he had become her mentor for her training in family therapy. She was especially familiar with the look he got on his face when he was contemplating the follies of people who wore uniforms.

Dr. Barian was, in her opinion, one of the best teachers she had ever worked with. The lectures, reading materials and learning programs he had chosen for her had always been first-rate. His criticisms of her work had almost always made sense. He just happened to believe the human brain turned into sludge the moment you put a blue hat on top of it.

"You'd better call the childcare center," Dr. Barian said. "Right away. Tell them you want Deni kept away from any contact that may give him the news -- video, other children. Make it clear you're the one who's going to tell him -- no one else."

He lowered his head, as if he were examining some notes, then looked up again. "Then I think it's time you and I stopped playing games, young woman. We're both well aware that everything you've been saying in all your memos only proves that Deni should have been put through the complete modification procedure the day his father went riding off to war. You're supposed to be a therapist, Dorothy -- a healer. The people who wrote the laws can't make your decisions for you."

Captain Min stared at him. This was the first time Dr. Barian had made it absolutely clear he thought she should have applied the esem without waiting for the parents' consent. He had been dropping hints every since the Akara crisis had started developing, but he had never put it quite so bluntly.

"We still don't even know Sergeant Wei is dead, Dr. Barian. Don't you think we should verify that before we start asking ourselves if we've got a right to start ignoring the law?"

"From what they're saying, it sounds like most of the control module has been blown up. If she isn't dead, then we've had a scare that should convince you we're risking that child's welfare -- unnecessarily -- every day we sit around trying to avoid the inevitable. There's no way anyone can determine a child has received the benefits of an esem, Dorothy. If you can arrange things so you give him the news in your office, you can apply the procedure in complete privacy -- without the slightest possibility anyone will know you've done it. If his parents give you a nice legal, properly authorized permission statement later on, you can pretend you executed the esem then."

"I'm well aware no one will be able to prove I administered the esem without a legal authorization, Dr. Barian. You've pointed that out to me at least four times in the last two weeks."

"I understand your feelings, Dorothy. You aren't the first therapist who's been put in a position like this. All I can tell you is that if he were my patient I would have resolved the whole issue two weeks ago. The whole idea of requiring parental consent in a situation like this is absurd. Deni's parents are the last people in the universe who could possibly understand why he needs that kind of help."

"Sergeant Wei would have agreed to the esem sooner or later. Every report I've given you for the last ten weeks contains some indication she would have given me her consent sometime in the next few months. We both know her husband would have given in sooner or later just to keep the peace, once she started working on him."

"But she didn't. And now she's never going to."

Captain Min's screen blinked. The face of her commanding officer, Medical Colonel Pao, popped onto the lower left hand corner.

"I have a message for you from General Lundstrom, Dorothy. Can I assume you've already been advised of the news regarding Rinaswandi?"

"I've just been looking at the report on Trans-Solar, sir. My mentor, Dr. Barian, is on the line with me now -- listening in."

"General Lundstrom apparently recorded this message only five minutes after she got the news herself. She wants to know if you still want to discuss the esem procedure with Sergeant Kolin."

Captain Min swallowed. "Does that mean Sergeant Wei is definitely considered a casualty?"

"Are you serious?" Dr. Barian murmured. "I can't believe you could still think anything else, Dorothy."

"I'm afraid that has to be the assumption," Colonel Pao said. "We're still listening for messages from Rinaswandi, but I don't think anybody's very optimistic."

"Can you advise General Lundstrom I said yes, sir? Tell them I'll need about an hour to prepare a statement for Sergeant Kolin. The communications time lag between here and the ships is almost eleven minutes now. There's no way I can engage in a real discussion with him."

"Let me talk to your colonel," Dr. Barian said.

Captain Min stared at him. She started to turn him down and reluctantly decided the combative glint in his eye was a good indication he would respond with an embarrassing flurry of argument. "Dr. Barian would like to discuss something with you, Colonel Pao."

"Can you ask him if it's absolutely necessary?"

Captain Min stopped for a moment and switched to the section of her brain cells that contained her ability to speak in Techno Mandarin. She had been talking to Colonel Pao in Ghurkali -- the official working language of the Fourth International Brigade. Dr. Barian had picked up a good listening knowledge of Ghurkali, but she knew he would be more comfortable speaking one of the three international languages.

"Colonel Pao wants to know if it's absolutely necessary, Dr. Barian."

"At this point I would say it's about as necessary as anything I've ever done."

She raised her eyebrows a fraction of a centimeter, to let Colonel Pao know she was having problems, and the colonel gave her a nod and answered in the language she had chosen. "Go ahead, Dorothy."

She tapped the buttons that would turn the situation into a full conference call and Dr. Barian started talking as soon as Colonel Pao's face appeared on the screen.

"Dr. Min has made three attempts to communicate with Deni Wei-Kolin's parents, Colonel Pao. I assume you've read the reports she's submitted to General Lundstrom."

"I read every word in them before I forwarded them with my approval, Dr. Barian."

"Then I assume you recognize the gravity of the present situation. The ego-strengthening personality modification is the treatment of choice in situations in which a child is being subjected to the strains Deni has been absorbing. It's an absolute necessity when one of the parents who has been responsible for those strains dies prematurely. We are discussing one of the best documented phenomena in the literature. No child Deni's age can deal with the guilt that is going to begin eating at his sense of self-worth the moment he hears his mother is dead. His primary reaction to his mother's death will be the creation of a cluster of unconscious guilt feelings that will distort his entire personality."

Colonel Pao nodded politely. "I'm well aware of that, sir. Captain Min included all that information in her reports."

"Under normal circumstances," Dr. Barian said, "we could continue with the standard procedure Dr. Min has been following. Dr. Min would continue counseling the parents three times a week for another year. Eventually they would acquire some insight into Deni's needs and give her permission to proceed with the modification procedure. Dr. Min asked for permission to continue the counseling sessions when the Akara crisis broke out and it was denied her on the ground that it would subject Deni's parents to too much stress at a time when they might be forced to carry out the more violent aspects of their military duties. She then asked for permission to discuss the situation with them just once, to see if they might agree to the modification as an emergency procedure. We've now spent two weeks waiting for a reply. All our efforts to contact Deni's parents have met with bureaucratic delaying tactics. And now that we're in an emergency situation -- now that the very thing we feared has happened -- your general has finally seen some sense and agreed to let us ask a man who's under extreme stress for permission to do something we should have done days ago."

Colonel Pao frowned. "Are you telling me you don't believe Captain Min should accept General Lundstrom's offer, Dr. Barian?"

"I think it's time someone pointed out that Captain Min hasn't been permitted to talk to Deni's parents. We're going to be talking to Deni's father under the worst possible conditions. If our efforts fail -- the primary reason will be the fact that we've been forced into this position because your general and her staff have spent the last two weeks doing everything they could to evade their responsibilities."

Colonel Pao belonged to a sub-group that the sociologists who studied the military community sometimes referred to as the "military aristocracy." Members of his family had been serving in United Nations military units since the years in which the first international brigades had been formed on Earth. From his earliest days in the army, when he had been a young intern, people had been impressed by the way he always conducted himself with the controlled graciousness of the classic Confucian gentleman.

Two weeks ago, just before the torch ships had left Hammarskjold, Captain Min had spent a few hours with a young surgical captain who had been responsible for loading the hospital equipment. The captain had let his mind wander at a critical moment and the entire loading process had been snarled into a tangle that could have delayed departure by ten hours if Colonel Pao hadn't suddenly started offering courteously phrased "suggestions." The captain was one of the most self-absorbed young men Captain Min had ever known, but even he had been forced to admit that he would have disemboweled a subordinate who had created the kind of mess he had manufactured.

"I realize General Lundstrom may have behaved somewhat cautiously," Colonel Pao said. "I must tell you, however, that I might have tried to postpone a decision on this matter myself, if I were in her position. General Lundstrom is responsible for the lives of four hundred human beings. If Sergeant Kolin does go into combat -- and we've been given every reason to think combat is unavoidable -- the lives of all the people around him could depend on his reactions. General Lundstrom wouldn't have been doing her duty if she hadn't worried about something that could have a significant effect on his emotional state."

"Your bureaucratic maneuvering may have destroyed the future of a defenseless child. If --"

Captain Min's hand leaped to the keyboard. She jabbed at the appropriate buttons and cut the link between Colonel Pao and Dr. Barian.

"Dr. Barian and I will get to work on our statement for Sergeant Kolin right away, sir. Please thank General Lundstrom for me."

"Please give Dr. Barian my regards, Dorothy."

A neutral background color replaced Colonel Pao's face in the lower left quarter of the screen. In the upper left quarter, Dr. Barian was looking at her defiantly.

"We needed to get that on the record," Dr. Barian said. "I made a recording of my side of the conversation, with a record of who else was on the line."

"Colonel Pao is one of the most respected men I've ever known." Captain Min said. "He always treats everybody around him with respect -- and they normally respond by treating him the way he treats them."

"He's a military bureaucrat just like everybody else you're dealing with, young woman. You should have put a statement like that in your files the day he and the rest of your military *colleagues* started giving you the runaround."

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The director of the childcare center looked relieved when he realized he wouldn't have to break the news to Deni himself. Two of his full-time charges had parents on Rinaswandi. Eleven of the kids who had parents on the torch ships were old enough to realize Mr. and Mrs. Chen had just demonstrated their parents really were charging into danger.

"I'm sorry we didn't call you right away," the director said. "I'm afraid we've really been in a turmoil here."

Dorothy nodded. "How long can you keep Deni quarantined?"

"He should be all right until just before breakfast -- until 07:30. We've made it a point not to make any

mention of the news when they first wake up, just in case something like this happened, but there's no way we can keep it quiet once the day kids come in."

"He's going to know there's something odd going on as soon as he sees me showing up that early. I'm not exactly one of his favorite people."

"We'll make a private room available. I'll tell the night counselor you need to take Deni into her room as soon as you get there."

Dr. Barian's precise high-speed Techno Mandarin broke into the conversation. "Dr. Min needs to take her patient directly to her office. This situation has important therapeutic ramifications. She needs to see him in a place where she can spend as much time with him as she needs."

"Have somebody tell Deni I've got some extra questions I need to ask him," Dorothy said. "Don't tell him any more than that -- make it sound like one of those things grownups do and kids have to put up with. Tell him I'm sorry -- tell him I've promised you I'm having strawberry muffins with real butter brought into the office just to make up for it. He claims that's the best thing he and his father eat for breakfast when they're alone together."

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Given the communications lag, there was only one way to handle the situation. An autonomous discussion program had to be transmitted to the torch ship. The program would be outfitted with a general strategy and equipped with critical information and pre-recorded discussions of the treatment. Then they would sit back and watch as their screens told them how Sergeant Kolin had reacted eleven minutes ago.

Dr. Barian had reviewed almost every session Dorothy had spent with Sergeant Kolin. He quibbled with her over some of the numerical estimates she plugged into the program, but no one could argue with her overall evaluation of the sergeant's personality structure.

Deni's father had grown up in an "extended family network" that had been created by a complicated series of divorces and regroupings. He had spent his formative years in a complex web of relationships in which no one and everyone was responsible for the children. His emotional development had been shaped by a situation in which he and nine other children were involved in a ceaseless competition for the love and praise of thirty adults who were heavily involved in their own competitions and interactions. He had never experienced the love of someone who considered him the absolute dead center of the universe. He had covered up his own lack of self-esteem by convincing himself he had enough self-esteem for twenty people. Then he had buried his insecurities a couple of meters deeper by telling himself other people were just as bouncy and assertive as he thought he was. His son, he had told Dorothy on several occasions, was about as stuck on himself as a boy could be. Deni would have been a lot easier to handle, Sergeant Kolin believed, if his mother hadn't succumbed to the delusion she had given birth to a genius.

Sergeant Wei and Sergeant Kolin belonged to the class that created some of the worst problems military family therapists had to live with. They were both people who responded to the enticements of the recruiting commercials precisely because their own childhoods had been developmental disasters. Deni's mother had pushed and punished because she herself had grown up in a family that had lived on the edge of chaos. His father had hammered at him because it was the only way Sergeant Kolin could deny the existence of the hungry boy inside himself.

If someone had put Deni's parents inside an esem treatment chamber at some point in *their* childhoods, their son might not be facing a psychological catastrophe. Essentially, the esem was supposed to endow Deni with a powerful, totally unsmashable feeling that he was a worthwhile person. In families where everything was working the way it was supposed to, the child developed that feeling from parents who communicated -- day after day, year after year -- a normal amount of love and a general sense that the child was valued. Deni would get it in two hours, with the help of half a dozen drugs and an interactive, multi-sensory program. The drugs would throw him into a semi-conscious state, immerse him in an ocean of calm, and dissolve his defenses against persuasion. The program would

monitor all the standard physiological reactions while it bombarded him with feelings, ideas, and experiences that "rectified the deficits in his domestic environment." The intervention was usually applied three times, over the period of a month, but even one application could be helpful.

*"In the midst of winter,"* a twentieth century philosopher named Albert Camus had once said, *"I found that there was in me an invincible summer."* For the rest of his life, no matter how he was treated, Deni would be held erect by the summer the esem would plant in the center of his personality.

So how should they convince an exceptionally un-esem'd adult male that he should let them transform his son into the kind of person he thought he was? Dorothy had originally assumed Deni's mother would be the one who accepted the need for the esem. Once Sergeant Wei had acquired some insight into the realities of her family life, Dorothy had believed, there was a good chance she would buy the esem for the same reasons she bought expensive learning programs and other products that could help her son "achieve his full potential." And once Deni's mother had made up her mind, the relevant analyses all indicated Sergeant Kolin would eventually let her have her way.

Their best hope, in Dorothy's view, was an appeal to some of the most powerful emotions nurtured by the military culture. Normally Sergeant Kolin would have rooted himself behind an armored wall as soon as anyone claimed his son needed special treatment. Now they could get around his defenses by claiming Deni was a combat casualty. The program should play on the idea that Deni had been wounded, Dorothy argued. It should portray the esem as a kind of emotional antibiotic.

Dr. Barian wanted to work with the emotional dynamics that coupled guilt with idealization. The Kolin-Wei marriage, in Dr. Barian's opinion, had been one of the worst mixtures of dependency and hostility he had ever examined. It had been so bad he felt confident they could assume Sergeant Kolin had already started idealizing his wife's memory. Their best approach, therefore, would be an appeal that treated the esem as if it were primarily supposed to help Deni deal with the loss of his mother. Dorothy was correct when she objected that the idealization process usually didn't acquire any real force for several days -- but Dr. Barian wouldn't be surprised, in this case, if it had kicked into action the moment Sergeant Kolin had been advised his wife might be dead.

"We're talking about one of the fundamental correlations in the literature, Dorothy. The worse the relationship, the stronger the tendency to idealize."

Dorothy started to argue with him, then glanced at the clock and compromised. The program would open with the combat casualty approach and follow it with a couple of tentative comments on the special problems of boys who had lost their mothers. If Sergeant Kolin made a response that indicated he was already locked into the idealization process, the program would shift tracks and start developing the idea that the boy needed special help because he had lost the support of a special person.

The really divisive issue was the description of the therapy. Dr. Barian wanted her to prepare a description that talked about the procedure as if they were merely going to bathe Deni in love. They might include a hint that they were trying to replace the love Deni had lost when his mother had died. But there would be no reference whatsoever to the effect on the patient's self-image.

That was a little like describing an antibiotic without mentioning it killed germs, of course. Dr. Barian apparently had his own ideas about the meaning of the term "informed consent." In his case, the important word was obviously "consent."

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Deni would have been surprised to hear it, but he and his parents were only the second family Captain Min had ever worked with. Her original doctorate had been a Ph.D. in educational psychology, not family therapy. The Secretariat had paid for it and she had assumed she would pay off the debt by spending six years in uniform working with military training systems. Instead, the military personnel experts had looked at the data on their screens and discovered the Fourth International Brigade had a pressing need for family therapists. A crash program had been set up and she had spent her first eighteen months as an officer working on a second doctorate -- under the guidance of a civilian mentor who apparently believed there was an inverse relationship between intelligence and the number of years



someone had spent in the military. In her case, in addition, Dr. Barian had seemed to feel her childhood had subtracted an additional twenty points from her IQ.

It was the first time she had encountered someone with Dr. Barian's attitude. She had spent two years in a lunar "socialization academy" when she had been a teenager but 80 percent of the children in her cohort had been the offspring of military people and international bureaucrats. At first she had thought Dr. Barian was trying to probe her responses to the kind of stresses she might receive from her patients. Then she had decided she would just have to ignore his comments on her "contaminated upbringing."

Dr. Barian had hammered at her resolution as if he thought his career depended on it. Much of her training involved long sessions with simulations of patient-therapist relationships. Most of the simulated people who appeared on her screens were trapped in simulated messes that were so foolish -- and believable -- that she frequently found herself wondering how the human race had made it to the twenty-second century. In the critiques that followed the simulations, Dr. Barian loved to remind her that her reactions to her imaginary patients had probably been distorted by the "inadequacies" in her own "formative environment."

"My upbringing was about as good as it could be, Dr. Barian," she had told him once. "I may have more sympathy for the way military people look at things than you do, but it isn't because anybody indoctrinated me. My father may not have been the most loving man who ever lived, but he was so responsible he must have scanned half the research that's been done on military families in the last fifty years. He must have interviewed half a dozen foster care candidates every time he had to leave me alone, just to make sure they really would give me a consistent environment, just like all the literature said they should."

Naturally, Dr. Barian had then started questioning her feelings about her father.

Nineteen years ago, when Dorothy had been six, she had sat on a rug that had looked exactly like the shaggy rug Deni and his schoolmates sat on when they received their daily briefing. In her case, the orbital diagram on the screen had only contained two symbols -- a circle that represented a single torch ship and an oval that represented a Lumina Industries mining asteroid.

The 150 men and women who had taken over the asteroid had belonged to a group that had somehow convinced themselves the city of Rome, on Earth, was the center of all evil and the sole reason mankind could not achieve political perfection. They had killed fifty people in a surprise attack that had put them in control of the torch that was supposed to shove the asteroid and its load of minerals into orbit around the Earth. Then they had set up their defensive weaponry and placed the asteroid on a course that would bring it down somewhere on the southern Italian peninsula. Her father, Pilot Sergeant Min, had made eight ferry trips to the surface of the asteroid, carrying assault troops and heavy weapons.

Her father had been her only parent for most of her childhood, but there had been no danger she would ever succumb to guilt feelings if he had happened to die in combat. After her mother had left them, her father had shouldered full responsibility for her upbringing -- and carried out his parental duties in the same way he had fulfilled every other obligation life had loaded on him.

It hadn't been a natural thing, either. Her father was currently living in retirement in Eratosthenes Crater, on the Moon, and she knew he was perfectly content with a relationship that was limited to bi-weekly phone calls. He was, at heart, the kind of man who was happiest when he was hanging around with other adults like himself. As far as she could tell, he now spent most of his waking hours with a group of cronies whose idea of Heaven was an NCO club that never closed.

The last time she had talked to him, she had been looking for advice on the best way to speed up consideration of her request to speak to Deni's parents. It had been a serious matter, but they had both enjoyed the way he had folded his arms over his chest and pondered the subject with all the exaggerated, slightly elephantine dignity of a senior NCO who had been asked to give a junior officer his best advice.

"Are you asking me, Captain, if I'm still connected with the sergeant's network?"

"I did have something like that in mind, Sergeant."

"As it turns out, I do have a friend who has a certain position on General Lundstrom's staff. I'd rather not mention her name, but I suspect she might be willing to give me some useful advice on the best way to slip your next report past the General's aides. She might even give it a little judicious help if I gave her

some good reasons to do it."

"That would be most helpful, Sergeant."

"Then I shall attend to it with the utmost dispatch, Captain."

Military parents like Deni's father and mother had a well-documented tendency to think of the family as a military unit, with the parents as the officers, and the children, inevitably, as members of the lower ranks. Her father had called her "Lieutenant" from the time she was two years old. For most of her childhood, she had seen herself as a younger person who was being guided and supported by an experienced, gently ironic senior who respected her potential.

\* \* \*

It was 02:04 by the time they got the program ready for transmission. At 02:15 the transmission began to arrive at the ship. At 02:20 Sergeant Kolin sat down in front of a screen and started watching Dorothy's presentation. At 02:31 his face appeared on Dorothy's communication screen and she got her first look at his response to her efforts.

The program opened with a recording in which Dorothy discussed the effects of combat deaths on children. The presentation was calm, statistical, and scrupulously accurate. On the auxiliary screen on her right, she could watch her neat, fully-uniformed image and correlate the statements it was making with the reactions flickering across Sergeant Kolin's face.

"Do you have any questions about anything I've said so far?" the recording asked.

Sergeant Kolin shook his head. He had always kept his guard up during their counseling sessions and he was falling into the same pattern now. Most of her information about his personality came from his responses to inter-active video dramas. The dramas that had worked had usually been designed so they practically forced the subject to make a response.

Dorothy's hands tightened on her desk top. She hated watching herself make presentations. Every flaw in her delivery jumped out at her. She saw her head dip just a fraction of a centimeter -- a brief, tiny lapse in concentration -- and she winced at the way she had telegraphed the fact that she was about to say something significant.

"In this case," the Dorothy on the screen said, "there's the added factor that the parent who's become a casualty is the child's mother. The relationship between a young boy and his mother frequently includes emotional overtones that can't be replaced by any other kind of relationship."

Her image paused for a carefully timed instant -- a break that was supposed to give Sergeant Kolin the chance to start a response. He leaned forward with the beginning of a frown on his face and a subtitle lit up on the auxiliary screen. *Light positive response detected. Continuing probe.*

The program's visual interpretation capabilities were limited to relatively large-scale body movements, but Dorothy had been able to list three actions that should be given extra weight -- and the first item on the list had been that tendency to lean forward. Sometimes, if you waited just a moment longer. Sergeant Kolin would lean a little further and say something that could lead to three minutes of real discussion.

This time he just settled back again. If he had started idealizing his wife's memory, he apparently didn't feel like expressing the feelings the idealization had aroused.

"I'm afraid there's a good possibility he's just angry," Dorothy said. "This isn't the first time I've seen that kind of tight-lipped expression."

"Angry at us?" Dr. Barian said.

"He really hates the whole idea of people examining his feelings. He looks like he's in one of those moods where he'd like to pick up his chair and throw it at the screen."

The program had apparently reached a similar conclusion. Her image had already slipped into a sentence that treated the mother-son relationship as if it was merely a side issue. The sound system let out a blip, to remind Sergeant Kolin he was looking at a recording, and the program switched to her description of the therapy.

Dorothy had drastically revised her standard description. She had included a shot of the treatment chamber, but the shot only showed part of the cover and it only lasted a couple of seconds.

She had done everything she could to make it clear they weren't "rewiring" Deni. "To a large extent," the video Dorothy said. "we're just giving Deni in advance the effects of all the love he's going to be missing during the next few years." She had touched on the danger of guilt feelings, but she had skipped over the relationship between guilt and the anger evoked by demanding parents.

The program reached a check point. "Do you have any comments you would like to make, Sergeant Kolin? Please feel free to speak as freely as you want to. This program can answer almost any question you can ask."

Sergeant Kolin leaped out of his chair. His head disappeared from the screen for a moment. The camera readjusted its field of vision and focused on a face that was contorted with rage.

Deni's father had been trained in the same NCO schools every sergeant in the Fourth International Brigade had attended. Sergeants never bellowed. Their voices dropped to tight, controlled murmurs that made the anger on their faces look a hundred times more intense.

"My son doesn't need people poking into his brain," Sergeant Kolin said. "My son will get all the attention he needs from the person who's supposed to give it to him."

Dorothy's image stared at him while the program raced through alternative responses. The screen dissolved into an abstract pattern that was supposed to be emotionally neutral. An avuncular synthetic voice took over the conversation.

"We're sorry if we've angered you. Sergeant Kolin," the voice said. "We're trying to explain this procedure under difficult circumstances. Captain Min has prepared answers to most of the questions people raise when they're asked to approve this type of emotional intervention."

Dorothy bit her lip. Her right hand hovered over her notebook with the stylus poised to start writing -- as if some part of her nervous system still didn't believe her orders had to cross eleven light minutes before they evoked a response from the program.

She had prepared a statement the program could jump to if Sergeant Kolin expressed his basic hostility to the very idea of psychological "tampering." The program should have switched to the statement, but it had responded to his display of anger instead.

"This isn't working," Dr. Barian murmured.

Sergeant Kolin dropped into his armchair. He rested his hands on his knees and stared at the screen.

"Tell Captain Min to continue," Sergeant Kolin said.

Dorothy's hand started inscribing instructions on her notebook. "He knows he's being recorded," she said. "He knows he has to give us a minimum amount of cooperation. He may be ready to explode but he's still thinking about his career, too."

"So he'll sit there. And listen. And say no."

Her image had returned to the screen. The program had switched to her review of the psychological dangers faced by children who had lost a parent -- a review she had included in the program so it could be used in situations in which they needed to mark time. The program was still reacting to his anger. There was no indication it was going to deal with his feelings about psychological intervention.

She drew a *transmit* symbol at the bottom of her last instruction and her orders began creeping across the Solar System. Eleven minutes ago the program had made a misjudgment. Eleven minutes from now -- twenty-two minutes after the original mistake -- it would receive a message ordering it to deal with Sergeant Kolin's hostility to psychological tampering.

"You've done about as well anyone could have. Dorothy," Dr. Barian said. "I couldn't have done it any better myself. It isn't your fault they made you wait so long you had to work through a program."

"It should have understood," Dorothy said. "It should have switched to the psychological tampering track as soon as he made that remark about people poking holes in his son's brain. It shouldn't have let that slip past it."

"The anger response was too strong. It picked up the anger and it didn't hear the content. You aren't the first person who's seen a program make a mistake she would have avoided."

Sergeant Kolin had sat like that for a big part of half the sessions she'd had with him. His eyes were fixed on the screen. His face looked attentive and interested. And she knew, from experience, that he wasn't hearing one word in three.

"It isn't your fault, Dorothy. You might have had a chance if they'd let you talk to him when the time lag was only a couple of minutes. They fiddled around with your request and now you've got a hopeless situation."

She wrote another set of commands on her notebook and bent over the dense, black-on-yellow format she had chosen the last time she had felt like fooling around with her displays. Somewhere in the mass of information she had collected on Sergeant Kolin there had to be a magic fact that would drill a hole through his resistance.

"Your patient is in exactly the same position as a child who's dying of a disease," Dr. Barian said. "Would you wait for his father's permission -- or some general's permission -- if he needed a new lung or a new spinal cord? Your first responsibility is to that child -- not some set of rules thought up by people who are still living in the Dark Ages."

The last useless paragraphs in Sergeant Kolin's file scrolled across her notebook. She raised her head and discovered Dr. Barian was regarding her with an expression that actually looked understanding.

"There's another consideration you might want to factor into your decision making process," Dr. Barian said. "It may be your friend Colonel Pao is right -- maybe General Lundstrom's staff did do the right thing when they decided her mental state is so delicate they might be endangering four hundred combat troops if they bothered her with a difficult matter like this. It's also true that the military personnel on those ships are all volunteers. They agreed to take the risk they're taking. Deni didn't volunteer for anything."

\* \* \*

She had dispatched her new set of instructions at 02:58. At 03:09 it arrived at the torch ship. At 03:20 she saw the program switch to the path it should have taken in the first place. At 03:40, she ordered it to switch to the termination routine and started waiting for the images that would tell her Sergeant Kolin had refused permission. Dr. Barian started talking the moment she took her eyes off her notebook.

\* \* \*

She picked up Deni at the door of the childcare center, in a cart she had requested from Special Services when it had finally occurred to her they would probably provide her with anything she asked for "under the circumstances." She had even been given a route that had been specially -- and unobtrusively -- cleared of any traffic that might cause her problems. A few of the pedestrians stared when they saw a cart with a child sitting in the passenger seat, but they all looked away as soon as their brains caught up with their reflexes.

Hammarskjold Station was a military base, so its public spaces looked something like the public spaces of a civilian space city and something like the decks of a torch ship. The corridors had been landscaped with trees, fountains, and little gardens, just like the corridors in lunar cities, but it had all been done in the hyper-manicured style that characterized most military attempts at decorating. The doors that lined the walls came in four sizes and three colors. The gardens were spaced every hundred meters and they all contained one tree, a carpet of flowers that was as trim as a major's mustache, and two (2), three (3), or four (4) shrubs selected from a list of twenty (20).

"I thought I wasn't supposed to see you until after lunch," Deni said.

"I had to make some changes in my schedule," Dorothy said, with deliberate vagueness.

"Am I going to have to see you during breakfast from now on?"

"It's just this once."

The big, utilitarian elevator near the childcare center opened as soon as the cart approached it. It went directly to the fourth level without stopping, and she turned left as she cleared the door and started working her way around the curve of the giant wheel that had been her home since the day she had been born.

\* \* \*

The strawberry muffins had big chunks of real strawberries embedded in them. The butter had been synthesized in a Food Services vat, but to everyone who lived off-Earth, it was "the real thing" -- an expensive, luxurious alternative to the cheaper look-alikes. The milk in the big pitcher was flavored with real strawberries, too -- and laced with a carefully measured dose of the tranquilizer that had given her the best results when she had slipped it to him in the past.

"Did I get the muffins the same temperature your father gets them?" Dorothy said.

Deni stopped chewing for a moment and nodded politely. He never talked with his mouth full. His mother had dealt with that issue before he was three.

"Are we talking about my feelings some more?"

"Maybe later. Right now -- why don't we just relax and have breakfast? I'm kind of fond of real butter myself."

"How many can I have?"

"Well, I bought six. And I'll probably only be able to eat two myself. I'd say you can count on eating at least three."

She glanced at the notebook sitting beside her coffee cup. The chair Deni was sitting in looked like a normal dining chair, but it was packed with the same array of non-invasive sensors that had been crammed into the therapeutic chair he normally used. His heartbeat, blood pressure, muscle tension, and movement-count all agreed with the conclusion a reasonably sensitive human being would have drawn from the enthusiasm with which he was biting into his muffin.

\* \* \*

Deni had finished the last bite of his second muffin and given her a quick glance before he reached for the third. The numbers on the notebook were all advancing by the appropriate amount as the tranquilizer took hold.

She stood up and strolled toward her desk with her coffee cup in her hand. "Take your time, Deni. Don't worry about it if you decide you can't finish it."

She called up a status report on her desk screen and stared at the same numbers she had gone over only two hours ago. The drugs she needed for the esem were all sitting in the appropriate places on her shelves. The devices that were supposed to deliver the drugs were all functional. The components that would deliver the appropriate images, sounds, and sensations all presented her with green lights when she asked for an equipment check.

She had thought about putting Deni under and checking the current state of his feelings but she had known it was a stupid idea as soon as it had popped into her head. She knew what his real feelings were. Every test she had run on him in the last three months had confirmed he was still in the grip of the emotions she had observed when she had begun working with him.

She had begun her sessions with Deni with a two hour diagnostic unit in which he had been drugged and semi-conscious. Deni didn't remember any of it, but she had stored every second of the session in her confidential databanks. Any time she wanted to, she could watch Deni's hands curl -- as if he was strangling someone -- as he relived an evening in which his parents might have killed each other if they hadn't both been experts in the art of falling. She knew exactly what he really thought about the time his father had taken his flute away from him for two weeks. She had observed his childish, bitter rage at the cage of work and study his mother had erected around his life.

She scrawled another code number on her notebook and the results of the work she had done last night appeared on her desk screen. She had been ready to crawl into bed as soon as she had made Deni's travel arrangements but Dr. Barian had insisted they should prepare a complete quantified prognosis. They had spent over fifty minutes haggling over a twenty-two item checklist. Dr. Barian had insisted nineteen of her estimates were wildly out of line and tried to replace every one of them with the most pessimistic numbers he could produce.

In the end, it hadn't really mattered which set of numbers you used. The most optimistic prognosis the program could come up with merely offered *some* hope that *someday* the boy *might* voluntarily seek out a therapist. *Someday*, just possibly, he *might* ask for the treatment that would pull him out of the emotional swamp that was going to start sucking at his psyche the moment he learned his mother had died.

*And that's your best prognosis, Captain. Based on numbers most experienced therapists would consider hopelessly optimistic.*

"How are you coming, Deni?"

"I think I'm starting to feel a little burpy, ma'am."

She waved the numbers off the screen and turned around. His glass still held about three fingers of milk.

"I've got a pill I'd like you to take. Can your tummy hold enough milk to help you get a pill down?"

\* \* \*

On the main communications screen, Mr. and Mrs. Chen were holding a press conference. The "reporters" were all "volunteers" from their own Zen-Random congregation, but that was a minor matter. The questions would have been a little different if the Chens had been facing real media types, but the answers would have been the same.

A bona fide journalist, for example, might have asked them how they would answer all the military analysts who thought they had made a tactical mistake when they destroyed Rinaswandi. The phony reporter on the screen had merely asked his leaders if they could tell the people how the attack had improved their military position.

"I think the answer to that is obvious," Mrs. Chen said. "The forces that were guarding Rinaswandi Base can now join the force defending our city. The Secretariat mercenaries will be faced with a force of overwhelming size, with every weapon and vehicle controlled by a volunteer who is prepared to make any sacrifice to preserve the state of moral liberation we have created in our city...."

Every two or three minutes -- for reasons Dorothy couldn't quite grasp -- the Chens let the camera pick up a bald, slump-shouldered man who seemed to shrink against the wall as soon as he realized a lens was pointed his way. If there was one person in this situation who wasn't going to come out of it alive, Dorothy knew, it was Major Jen Raden -- the officer who had betrayed the equipment stashed on Rinaswandi.

Her father was only one-eighth Gurkhali. but no one had ever had to remind him -- or any other member of the Fourth International Brigade -- that he belonged to an institution which could trace its origins to the Fourth Gurkha Rifles, the ancient, battle-scarred infantry regiment the Indian government had donated to the United Nations in the years when the Secretariat had acquired its first permanent forces. I will keep faith, the Gurkha motto had run -- and they had proved it in battle after battle, first in the service of the British Empire, then in the service of the Republic of India, and finally under the flag that was supposed to represent humanity's best response to its own capacity for violence.

A light glowed on Dorothy's communications board. A line of type appeared at the bottom of the screen. *Call from Pilot Sergeant Min. Non-priority.*

On the couch, Deni was still sleeping peacefully. The monitor she had clipped to his wrist was still transmitting readings that indicated he would sleep for the full two hours the deep-sleep pill was supposed to deliver. There were two messages from Dr. Barian in her communications system, but she hadn't looked at either of them.

She tapped the appropriate button on her keyboard. Her father stared at her out of the screen with a blurred, puffy-eyed look that immediately triggered off a memory of beery odors -- a memory that was so strong it was hard to believe the communications system could only transmit sounds and images. She wasn't the only member of her family who had been up most of the night.

"Good morning, daughter. I hope I'm not disturbing anything."

"I was just sitting here watching the news. I've got something I'm supposed to do, but I'm giving myself

a little break."

"I've been thinking about the family you've been concerned about. It seems to me you indicated one of the parents was stationed on Rinaswandi...."

She nodded. "It was the mother. The son's sleeping on the couch in my office."

Her father leaned back and folded his arms across his chest -- but this time neither of them smiled. She had realized, at some point in her teens that it was a body posture that frequently indicated he was trying to keep his reactions under control. He arranged his arms like that, she had decided, so he wouldn't run his hands across his face or do something else that might affect the image a good sergeant tried to maintain.

"I was afraid something like that might have happened. Have they told him yet?"

"I told them I'd do it."

"That's not the easiest job you can volunteer for."

"I still haven't told him. I'm letting him sleep while I think about the best way to approach it."

"I only did that twice all the time I was on active duty. If you don't mind me giving you some advice -- I never talked to anybody who thought they'd found a good way to do it. Whatever you do, you're not going to be happy with it."

"There's some special problems in this case -- some reactions he'll probably have because of the family problems I was trying to deal with."

Sergeant Min frowned. "You were trying to get permission for some special procedure... for something that would help him with the possibility his parents might become casualties...."

"We tried to get permission from his father last night and we couldn't do it. Dr. Barian thinks we failed because they stalled us for so long we had to communicate across a big communications lag. I'm inclined to think we might have failed anyway."

"And what does that mean?"

"It means basically that we end up with a human being who's permanently crippled psychologically. I could show you the numbers and explain them but that's what they all add up to. He'll be just as much of a casualty as anybody who's been physically wounded."

"And nobody ever asked him if he wanted to enlist...."

"That's essentially what Dr. Barian said."

"I'm sorry, Dorothy. It sounds to me like you've done everything anyone could have."

"I'm not blaming myself, papa. I'm just sorry it's happening."

"There isn't anything else you can do? There isn't some possibility he'll get some kind of therapy later? When he's old enough to make his own decision?"

"It's possible, but the odds are against it. We're talking about something that will eventually affect almost every aspect of his personality. When a child has certain kinds of problems with his parents, the death of one of his parents can create unconscious feelings... guilt feelings... that are so powerful they influence everything he does. People tend to protect the personalities they've acquired. Somebody who's rebellious, unruly, and angry usually isn't going to feel he needs a treatment that will give him a different outlook -- even when he isn't satisfied with the kind of life his emotions have led him into."

"Major Raden has a lot to answer for."

"Dr. Barian seems to feel it's mostly General Lundstrom's fault."

"Or some of those babus on her staff."

She shrugged. "They were trying to protect her -- to shield her from distractions."

"She's a general. She's supposed to look after her troops. If she can't put up with a little pestering from a medical captain without going into convulsions, she shouldn't be wearing the pips."

\* \* \*

When Dorothy had been fourteen, one of her best friends had been plagued with a father who had "confined her to quarters" almost every other weekend -- usually for some trivial matter like a dusty piece of furniture or a piece of clothing that didn't look "inspection presentable." Her first boyfriend had been a

wary thirteen year old whose father seemed to watch everything his children did for signs of "weakness."

There were people, in Dorothy's opinion, for whom military life was a kind of moral exo-skeleton. Their upbringing had left them with no useful values or goals. The ideals imposed on them by their military indoctrination were the only guidelines they had.

She had never experienced the kind of problems Deni had lived with, but she had no trouble relating her records of his case to the things she had observed during her own childhood. Press one set of buttons and the data base presented you with a recording of a counseling session in which Sergeant Kolin justified a punishment by arguing that people would behave "like animals" if no one imposed any "discipline" on them. Press another set, and you got to watch Sergeant Wei, in a message she had transmitted from Rinaswandi, telling Deni she hoped he was practicing his flute and spending enough time with his learning programs -- and never once suggesting she loved him or hoped he was having a little fun.

Press a third combination, and the database gave you a look at the hour she had spent with Deni on the day he had received his tenth message from his mother. They had sat on the couch, side by side, and she had spent most of the session stubbornly trying to evoke some kind of comment on his reactions to his mother's exhortations.

"How did you feel about the length of the message?" the Insistent, Patient Therapist had prodded. "Was it too short? Would you like it better if she sent you a longer message every two or three days?"

Deni shrugged. "It was all right."

The Therapist stifled the natural response of a normal adult and produced an attempt at a conciliatory smile. "Try again, Deni. Is there anything else you wish your mother had talked about? Besides school? And music practice? We're not here to play, soldier."

She had been dealing with the great problem that confronted every therapist who tried to get military children to talk about their emotions -- the trait that had been observed by almost every researcher who had ever explored the child-rearing customs of this odd little sub-culture. The one thing that seemed to be true about all military children was their tendency to pick up, almost at birth, the two great commandments of military life: don't complain. don't talk about your feelings. Her solution had been to tell him it was a task -- a duty the officer in command of the situation expected him to fulfill to the best of his ability.

It had helped some, but only some. The resistance she was dealing with couldn't be eliminated by direct orders and nagging persistence. Talk therapy was only a second-best stop-gap -- a procedure that she kept up mostly so she could convince herself she was doing something while she waited for the day his mother finally agreed he needed the only help that could do him any good.

*He won't have the slightest idea you did it, Dr. Barian had said. His father won't know you did it. No one. Somebody may wonder, fifteen years from now, why a kid with his prognosis has turned out so well, but they'll probably assume he just happened to beat the odds. He'll just have the kind of life he should have -- the kind of life you've got.*

\* \* \*

Deni looked up at her from the couch. His right hand made a little twitching movement.

"You fell asleep," Dorothy said. "I thought I'd let you rest."

He frowned. He was old enough to know she gave him medicines that affected his feelings, but she wasn't sure he realized she would do it without telling him first.

His eyes shifted toward the time strip on her desk. "Can I go home now? Are we finished?"

He pulled up his legs and sat up. "They start play time in ten minutes, Captain Min. It isn't my fault I fell asleep."

"Deni --"

"Yes, ma'am?"

"I'd like you to go sit in the chair you usually sit in. I'd like you to do it now, if you don't mind. There's something I have to talk about with you -- something that happened last night."



\* \* \*

The ceremony for the people who had died at Rinaswandi took place in the biggest theater in Hammarskjold, two days after the attack. Deni sat in the front row, with the other children whose parents had been killed. Dorothy could watch him, from her place in the ranks of the medical personnel, and note how he was still maintaining the same poise he had adopted in the cart when she had driven him back to the childcare center.

It was the same ceremony she had attended with her father, nineteen years ago, in memory of the people who had died in the assault on the Lumina mining asteroid. The names of the dead would be read one by one. (Twenty this time, thirty-three then.) A lone trumpeter would play *The Last Post*. The minute of silence -- timed precisely to the second -- would end with the bagpipes roaring into one of the big, whirling, totally affirmative marches the Gurkha regiments had inherited, three hundred years in the past, from the British officers who had introduced them to European military music.

That was how you always did it at a military ceremony. First, you remembered the dead. Then -- the moment over, the tribute paid -- you returned to the clamor and bustle of life. She lived in a world in which people sometimes died, her father had said when he had explained it to her. You never forgot they had died, but you didn't let it keep you from living.

Her father hadn't asked her if she wanted to go to the Lumina ceremony. And she had known, without being told, that it wasn't something they could discuss. There were some things that had to be left unsaid, even with the kind of father she had. She had never told him, for example, about the nights, the whole year after he had returned from the Lumina "incident," when she had stared at the ceiling of her bedroom and tried to ignore the pictures that kept floating into her head.

\* \* \*

She had given Colonel Pao a recommendation for a week of deep-sleep therapy, to be implemented sometime in the next month, and he had indicated he would probably approve it. Colonel Pao didn't think there would be any problems, either, with her recommendation for a long-term follow-up, from now until Deni's legal maturity, that would include any legal procedures that might reduce the damage. If there was one thing everyone in the chain of command understood, it was the plight of a child who had lost a parent in combat.

"... It's the same basic idea you always come back to," she had told Colonel Pao. "The point they always emphasize in all those courses on military ethics they make you take in baby officer's school. My father even explained it to me when I was a child -- when I asked him how he could be sure he was doing the right thing when he helped kill people. If you're a soldier... then for you morality is defined by the law. A soldier is someone who engages in legally authorized acts of violence. If you take away the law, then there's no difference between us and a bunch of thugs. If we can't obey the law, too... at least the important laws...."

Dr. Barian hadn't been particularly impressed with her attempts to explain herself, of course. He had stared at her as if she had just suggested they should deal with the Akara situation by poisoning half the people in the asteroid belt.

"The only difference between an army and a bunch of thugs," Dr. Barian had told her, "is that armies work for governments and thugs don't. You turned your back on a helpless child because you felt you had to stick to the letter of some rule a pack of politicians set up so they could appease a mob of voters who can't tell the difference between an esem and a flogging."

\* \* \*

Behind his desk, to the left, Colonel Pao had set up a serenity corner with a composition composed of green plants and dark, unevenly glazed pottery. He had arranged two chairs so they faced it from slightly

different angles, and he had insisted they should sit in the chairs and drink tea while they talked. On the sound system a wooden flute had been tracing a long meditative line.

"I take it," Colonel Pao had said, "that you feel you might have proceeded with the esem if you had been a civilian."

Dorothy shrugged. "My father always used to claim that a good sergeant took care of the people under him. I have a feeling that if you took it to a vote, half the people on this base might have felt I should have thrown the rules out the airlock and given a casualty whatever he needed."

"And how do you feel about that?"

She shrugged again. "When I think about it that way -- I feel like Dr. Barian's absolutely right and I've acted like a priggish junior officer who thinks rules are more important than human beings."

The left side of the serenity corner was dominated by a thin, long-necked jar that would have thrown the entire composition out of balance if it had been one centimeter taller. She focused her eyes on the line of the neck and tried to concentrate on the way it intersected a thin, leafless branch. Then she lost control and snapped her head toward the trim, carefully positioned figure in the other chair.

"He was sitting right in front of me, sir! I had to look him in the face when I told him his mother was dead. I could be watching what this has done to him for the next ten years if I decide to stay in. If I had my way we'd have a law that let us set up some kind of committee -- without giving the parents an absolute veto -- whenever we got into this kind of emergency. If all the people like Dr. Barian had their way, there wouldn't be any rules at all and we could spend our lives arbitrarily altering people's personalities just because we felt it was good for them. My father, the people on Rinaswandi -- they spent their lives trying to build a wall around chaos. There has to be a law regulating personality modification! Even when it's as benign as this one. Just like there have to be laws that tell you when it's all right to engage in violence."

Colonel Pao folded his arms over his chest. He tipped his head to one side -- as if he were concentrating on the long arc the flute was describing -- and Dorothy settled back in her chair and waited while he collected his thoughts.

He had shifted his thought processes to the formal, somewhat bureaucratic phrases he tended to adopt when he communicated in Techno Mandarin. "It is my personal opinion," he said, "that any responsible observer would have to agree that you did everything anyone could reasonably expect you to do. You took everything into account -- including a point many civilians have trouble understanding. You did everything you could to get a favorable response from Sergeant Kolin. You made a real decision, furthermore, when you arrived at the moment when a decision couldn't be postponed. You didn't just stand there and let the situation drift into a decision by default."

Colonel Pao raised his bowl of tea to his lips. He stared at the center of the serenity composition over the top of the bowl and Dorothy waited again.

"I could tell you that I think you made the right choice and try to ease your feelings by providing you with whatever authority I may possess. I could even tell you that you did the wrong thing and try to give you the comforting illusion someone knows what's right and wrong in these situations. The truth is I can't tell you any more than I've already said. If I understood the principles of ethical philosophy as well as I would like to, I think I would conclude that you applied the Confucian principle of reciprocity, even if I couldn't guarantee you made the most ethical choice. You treated Deni the way you probably would want to be treated yourself. If you or I were in Deni's position ... if someone had to make a decision that might affect us the way this one affects him, then I think we would want it to be someone who's been as thoughtful and conscientious as you've been."

He rested his bowl on the tray beside his chair and switched back to Ghurkali -- the language of her infancy. "Does that help you, Captain? Does it give you any comfort?"

"I think so, sir. Yes, sir."

"The other thing I think I should say is related to something you and I have in common, so perhaps I'm biased. Still, there have been moments -- during the less illustrious interludes in my career -- when it's been the only thought that's kept me functioning."

He reached across the space between the chairs and rested his hand on her shoulder. It would have

been a perfectly unremarkable gesture if anyone else had done it; in his case it was the first time he had touched her since she had been six years old and the duty officer at the post clinic, young Surgical Captain Pao, had held her hand while the first aid equipment had repaired a greenstick fracture in her left arm. Colonel Pao frequently touched patients who needed encouragement or reassurance, but he tended to be physically reserved with everyone else.

"Just remember, Dorothy -- Deni isn't the only person who didn't volunteer."

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