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BIG CAT

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Tara's eyes nearly popped out of her head. It was one thing to be in space, but actually to walk on the Moon? And to rescue someone! Wow!

"What happened to Ortez?" she asked.

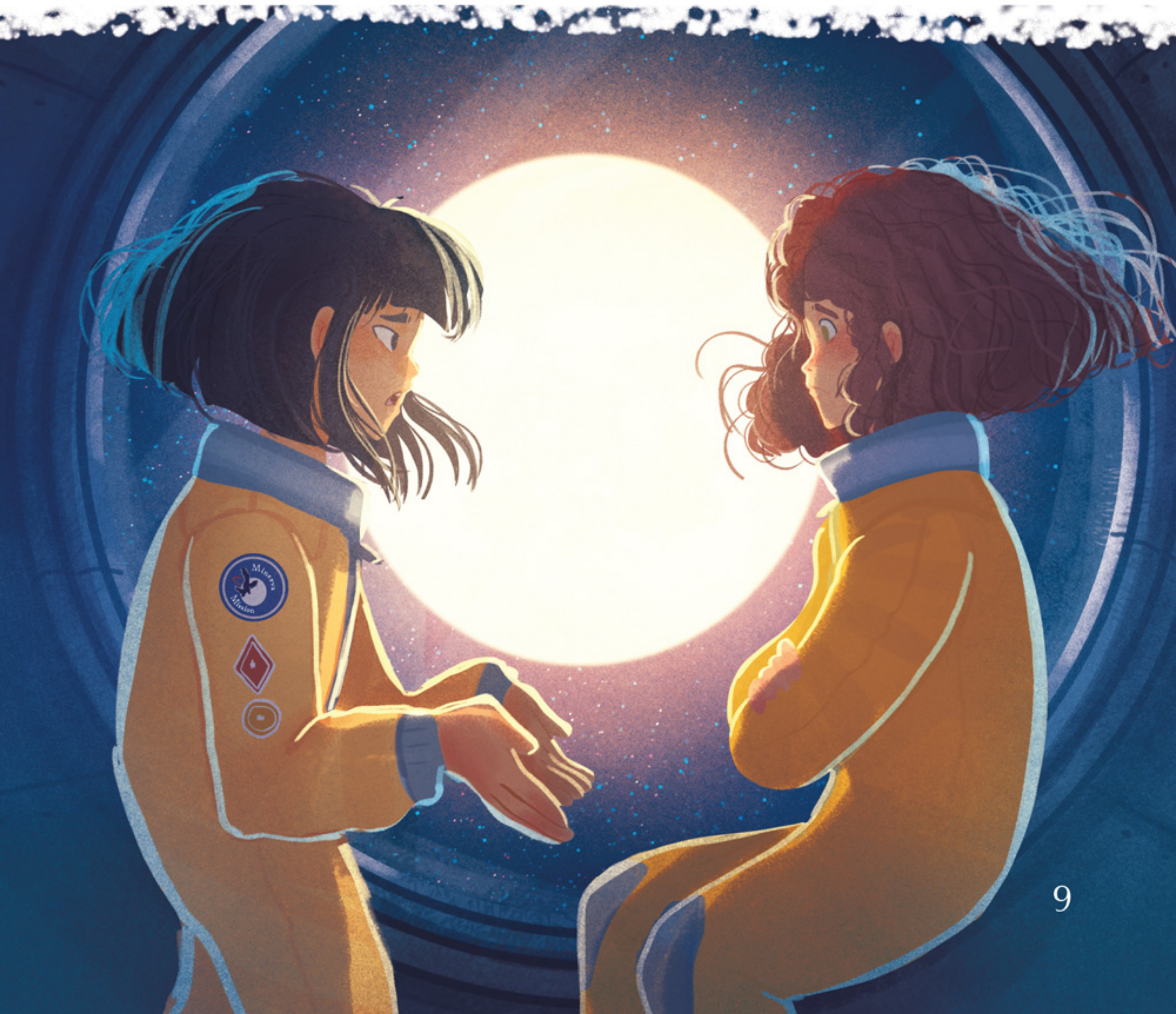
"He was just on a normal mission. He's done loads of them. He took one of Minerva's three lunar landers down to the Moon's surface yesterday – the Luna-1. He was collecting rock samples. He tests them to see if they have special properties that are different from the rocks on Earth. If they are strong enough, we could use them to build a settlement on the Moon."

Tara's head was reeling. She couldn't take it all in.

Ayesha continued: "Houses, roads, tunnels … who knows what might be possible."

Tara faltered. "B-but Ortez? Is he OK?"

"We don't know …" Ayesha replied gravely. "Ortez was analysing some of his samples when something bad happened."





Ayesha went on: "A meteorite storm struck, and it was much bigger than we were expecting!" Her eyes widened. "Terrifying – hundreds of rocks, pelting the surface of the Moon. Some of them bigger than footballs! Big enough to make new craters –"

"And Ortez?" asked Tara.

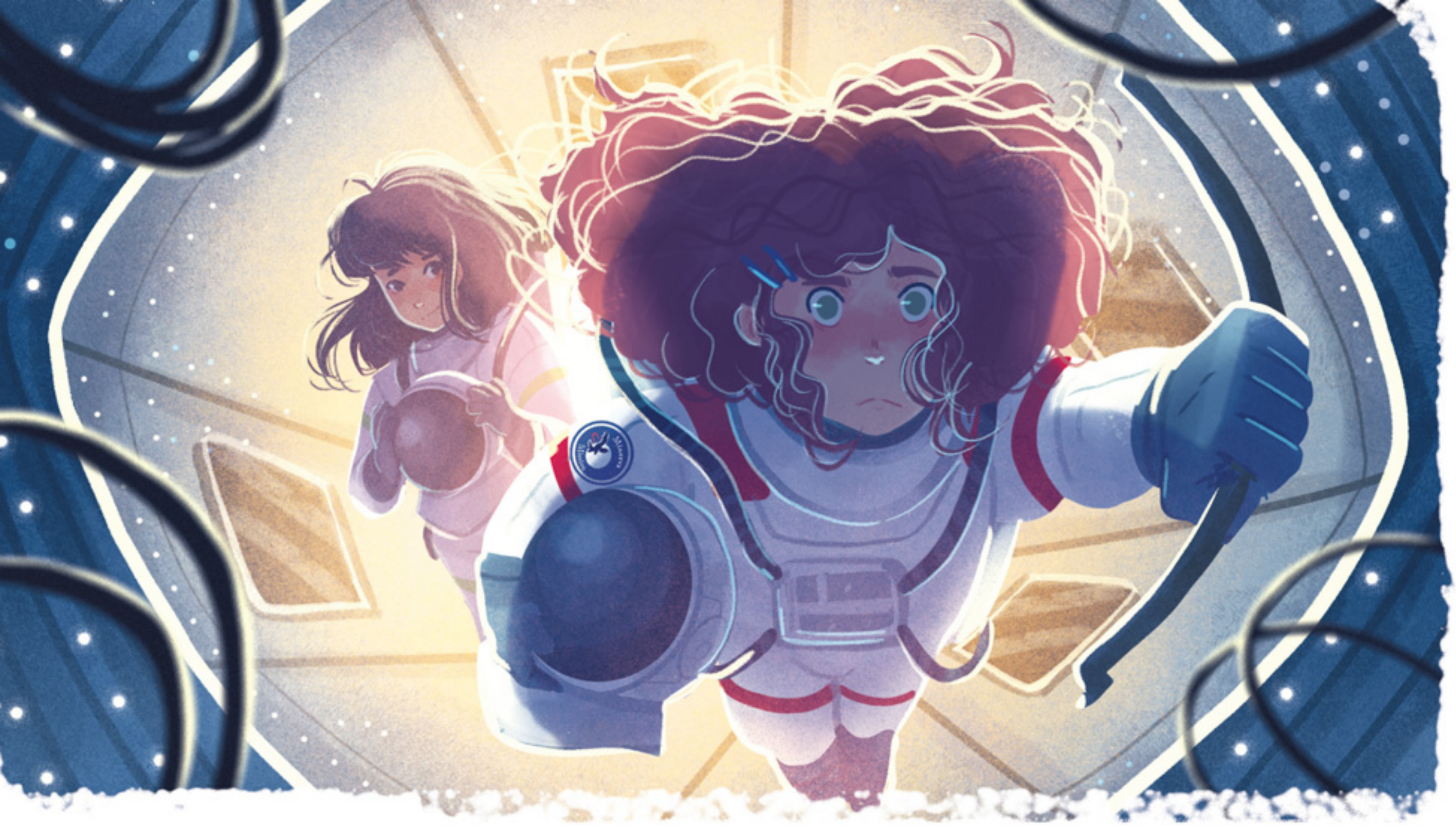
"Luckily, he wasn't outside when the storm struck. He was in the Luna-1. But that *did* get hit. He says it's badly damaged and he can't take off to return to the Minerva. So we need to get him back before the next storm hits. There's another one expected in the next few hours, but it's tricky to be sure when it will arrive."

Ayesha pointed at two bulky white spacesuits.

"Put on one of these. We'll take the second lunar lander, the Luna-2, and we'll head down on our next orbit around the Moon."

Ayesha typed numbers into the onboard computer. She was working out the exact moment the Luna-2 needed to separate from the Command Ship Minerva-7. Then the Moon's gravity would take the lunar lander gracefully down to where Ortez was stuck.





Chapter 3

Tara and Ayesha pulled through the airlock into the Luna-2. It was smaller than Tara was expecting. The control panel looked complicated – four small screens and lots of dials, buttons and switches. They were in zero-gravity and the walls were covered with metal cases that clipped into place to stop them moving about during the flight.

The rest of the inside looked very basic – lots of pipes and wires, and three seats. Tara sat down on one of them.

"Strap yourself in," said Ayesha, looking at one of the screens. "The blasters will separate us from the command ship in ten seconds. Ten … nine … eight … seven…"