

Kwali Bunker's UNITED SOLAR SYSTEM:

SmS Politics

VOL. 1

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CHAPTER O

Hereditary Lies

November 2287

Earth-Mars Interplanetary Highway, Outer Space, USS

Rosetta drifted in the kind of silence that settled after long missions and longer months. Earth glowed ahead—blue, steady, familiar, and somehow foreign now.

Inside, the squad sprawled in their seats like people who had earned the right to be exhausted—boots propped, harnesses loose, heads leaned back. Nobody in crisis. Nobody asleep. Just breathing.

Banian flew one-handed, tapping switches with casual precision. Future slumped opposite him, half-watching clouds roll across the planet.

Wakati broke the quiet first.

"So... when we land, what's everybody doing?"

Voice low, tired. "Y'all heading straight to the Submerged Sector base, or...?"

Banian let out a noise halfway between a laugh and disbelief.

He hit autopilot, swivelled in his seat, and stared dead at Wakati.

"You really think I'm going to base?"

He clicked his tongue.

"Come on, bro. I'm getting the top floor suite of the nicest hotel in Atlantis."

He pointed at Sam.

"You staying with me, right?"

Sam smiled.

"Nope. Me and the girls been planning already."

"Yeah, we're renting a subVilla," Tatum said, stretching her legs.

"Three days. Nothing major."

"More like a soft girls' trip," Sequoia added.

"We'll only be forty-five minutes from the city once training starts," Katherine said quietly.

Ni'kio rolled his shoulders.

"I'm staying with someone. Haven't seen her since January."

Future cracked a knuckle.

"You already know I'm going to your house," he said, eyes still on the window.

"Auntie promised me Blueberry Lagoon Pie the next time I step foot in Atlantis."

Nth lifted his head.

"Blueberry Lagoon?"

A faint interested hum.

"That sounds good. I thought we were going straight to base."

Arora didn't look up.

"My mother wants me to stay with her at our compound until deployment."

Meed finally spoke, still typing.

"I'm heading to base. STEM wing opens early. And I don't exactly have hotel or subVilla money."

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Wakati tore open a bag of chips with one hand.

"Well, perfect. You can stay with me and Future, then. And if y'all want, everyone can come by before heading wherever."

He shrugged, took a chip.

"Atlantis is closest to the base. We got space. I can get my mom and grandma to cook something real. And if you still got energy, I can show you the downtown pod—like Banian did for us in Elon."

Banian smirked.

"You're welcome, by the way."

A ripple of soft replies filled the cabin.

"Yeah."

"Sure."

"That's fine."

Sam lifted her hand. "We're not staying though."

"Neither am I," Arora added quietly.

Banian shrugged. "I might."

"I am," Zechtor said.

Wakati brightened slightly. "Sweet. I can't wait to show y'all the city. Ima call my boy Malik—he knows all the club owners."

The next two hours blurred—talk, music, laughter.

The kind of loose, drifting chaos that follows too many days of discipline.

Then Rosetta jolted.

The entire squad lurched awake—Wakati wiping drool from his cheek, Banian stumbling back into the pilot's chair.

"Oh shit—we're here," Banian muttered, grabbing the controls.

They hit Earth's upper atmosphere.

The windows went white from friction heat.

Then blue as clouds ripped past.

Then—

deep, endless ocean-dark.

Rosetta plunged beneath the surface with a muted concussion—less of a crash, more like falling into a dream.

Pressure cinched around the hull.

Cabin lights dimmed to deep-sea blue.

And beyond the glass—

the world transformed.

Atlantis revealed itself slowly, like the ocean unveiling a secret.

Columns of illuminated force-tunnels spiraled through the deep, branching like neural pathways.

Residential domes clung to the trench walls—membrane shells shimmering pale gold.

Transit pods glided through water lanes with manta-ray grace.

Schools of engineered silverfish streaked neon arcs through gentle currents.

Commerce districts pulsed along the seabed—bright veins of light connecting labs, markets, academies.

The heart of the city glowed brighter than the surface ever had.

Even the squad fell silent.

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Banian disabled autopilot and guided Rosetta toward a membrane tunnel.

The translucent barrier parted, sliding around them, expelling water before sealing shut.

Inside, Rosetta shifted to hover mode as Banian merged into the underwater highway.

The deeper they descended, the warmer the lights became—dimmer, homelike.

Wakati leaned forward, eyes wide with something between nostalgia and awe.

"This is the Ridge District... two minutes to my place."

They slid into the residential zone—lantern-blue walkways, garden domes swaying with slow-moving kelp vines, small hovercars lined neatly in front of quiet airlocks.

Banian slowed as Wakati leaned over his shoulder.

"Next right. Last house at the end of the cul-de-sac."

Then Wakati's brows pinched.

"... Why are there so many cars on our street?"

Rosetta hovered in front of his home and settled.

Banian cut the engine.

"Damn, man—your neighborhood stays busy."

Wakati shook his head.

"It's... never like this."

They stepped out onto the walkway—cool, brine-scented air brushing past their faces.

Wakati led them to the front door.

Future sniffed once.

"...something smells good."

Nth nodded.

"Serious good."

Wakati pressed the chime.

A second passed.

Another.

A third.

Then the door swept open.

"SURPRISE! WELCOME HOME!"

The sound burst from the dome like a shockwave.

His mother, Diety.

Aunt Venus—Future's mom.

Their grandmother.

Uncle Alejandro.

Little cousins and his sister weaving between legs.

Malik—taller, sharper, flashing that same reckless grin.

Old neighbors.

Family friends.

And Kaitlyn.

She had opened the door.

For him.

"Wakati!"

She dashed forward—arms wrapping around his neck, kissing him before he could breathe.

Warm.

Long.

Familiar.

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"I missed you so much," she said into his shoulder.

"...I missed you too," he muttered, eyes already drifting past her—toward Arora.

Kaitlyn pulled back, confused.

"What's wrong? Did something—?"

The room stilled.

Arora stood closest, expression unreadable.

Neutral—until it broke.

Not loud.

Not dramatic.

Just a tightening of her jaw, a shift in her eyes—hurt, then rejection, then nothing.

She walked out.

No words.

No hesitation.

Tatum recoiled like she'd been slapped.

"Really, Zuri..."

She grabbed Sequoia's wrist. "Come on."

Sam and Katherine followed quickly.

Behind him, Banian whispered, "Ooooh..."

Future smacked his arm.

"Dude."

Nth covered his mouth.

Ni'kio snorted once before catching himself.

Meed lowered his gaze, as if offering a moment of respectful silence for Wakati's impending doom.

From outside the dome—

"Banian! We need to go!" Sequoia's voice echoed.

Banian straightened.

"You good, bro?"

"NOW, Banian!" Sam called.

Wakati raised a hand without looking back.

"Go. Drop them off. Just... come back after."

Banian paused.

"You sure?"

"Yeah. Go."

Banian stepped toward the exit.

"I'm coming, I'm coming—y'all keep yelling at me like that and I—"

"Shut up, Banían," Sam snapped.

The airlock sealed behind them.

Inside, the music rose again—soft bass, warm laughter, clinking glasses—but the warmth felt strained at the edges, soaked in subtle tension.

Malik hovered near the counter, confused.

Kaitlyn stood stiff beside Wakati, hurt radiating off her in wave

Diety watched her son with the kind of disappointment that didn't need words.

Wakati forced a breath, forced a smile, forced himself to move deeper into the room.

But the echo of Arora walking out stayed with him.

CHAPTER 1

Six Months Under

May 2288

USSMA's SsS Delta Base, North Western Submerged Sector, Earth

Base Delta thrummed with the low, constant pulse of the ocean pressing against its walls—steel groaning like an animal in its sleep.

Fluorescent strips washed the hallway in thin, cold light as Wakati's boots clicked through shallow puddles on the metal floor. He wiped the last crumbs of coffee bread from the corner of his mouth with the back of his glove.

Six months in the Submerged Sector, and the place finally felt... familiar.

Not comfortable.

Just understood.

The Blinkers were gone—contained, dismantled, scattered across classified vaults. Now it was trench work and fault lines. Tectonic shifts. Rogue salvage crews. Pirate gangs. Feral abyssal fauna. Smugglers and trafficking syndicates.

Sometimes the threats were human.

Sometimes they weren't.

Sometimes it was just the ocean trying to crush everything mankind built.

Today looked like one of those days.

"Morning, Zuri," Meed called from diagnostics, elbow-deep in a sensor module. "You read the bulletin?"

Wakati yawned and nodded.

"Volcanic pressure spike along the Mariana shelf trench. Magmatic uplift, vent destabilizing. Basically, we're underwater firefighters-slash-demolition again."

Banian tossed a stick of stim-gum into his mouth as he passed.

"At least nobody's trying to shoot at us this time."

Meed zipped his med-kit.

"Yet."

Their MAVs stood in a line—retooled for heat, pressure, and violent currents. Reinforced joints. Thermal shielding. Thruster arrays humming softly in standby. Under the bay's filtered luminescence, they looked like coiled predators waiting for the hatch to open.

Wakati ran a hand along the cool plating of his suit.

"Weird kind of peace," he muttered. "No cults. No freak shows. Just tectonic time bombs."

Nth didn't look up from the gear bench.

"Don't jinx it."

Overhead, the PA crackled. Captain Mynus Banneker's voice rolled through the bay—cool, clipped, and already irritated.

"Alpha Unit, report to Node Fourteen. Pressure-core breach at geothermal vent two-two-three Zulu. Mission is recon, stabilization, and controlled venting. No hostiles expected—carry full kit. Launch at oh-nine-hundred. Try not to get cooked."

Banian raised a brow.

"Another day in paradise."

Wakati's grin was thin.

"Let's go keep the ocean from boiling everyone alive."

They suited up.

May 2289

USS Western Trenchline, SsS Delta Sector, Earth

The launch bay shuddered under their feet—deep, resonant, old—as if the ocean were clearing its throat.

Sealed in their MAVs, Alpha Squad boarded the subVan. The vehicle dropped through the lock with a hiss of pressure valves and slid into black water.

Outside, the trench yawned beneath them—wide, fractured, glowing faintly with tectonic heat. A slow pulse of red vented from the rock like the planet exhaling through its teeth.

"Pressure's already spiking," Meed said over comms. "You see that steam pocket?"

"Northwest shelf," Nth replied from the driver's rig. "It's about to blow."

Banian angled the subVan toward a jagged outcrop, currents swirling around their hull.

Captain Mynus Banneker's voice cut through the channel—sharp, surgical: "Armanis. Zuri. Dive."

The two Askari moved without hesitation.

Wakati stepped out of the subVan and dropped into the trenchline, heel servos feathering against the current. His SmS cybernetic harpoon rode along his hip—scarred, tuned, trusted.

"Two primary vents on my side," he said, as his thermal overlay flooded his visor. "I'll neutralize these. Banian, get the other pair."

"Copy," Banian said, peeling off toward a spire of rock.

A plume of volcanic gas burped past his helmet, shimmering in the floodlights. Banian rolled through it, letting it slip beneath his MAV's arm.

A plume of volcanic gas burped past him. He spun cleanly, letting it slip under his MAV's arm.

"Wooo! These new thrusters are insane," he said. "Remind me to kiss you two for making this for me."

"Please don't," Wakati and Meed muttered in unison.

Nth fired a coolant rod from the subVan into a steaming vent below. "One seal down," he said.

The trench trembled.

Wakati steadied himself, fingers flexing against the grip of his harpoon. "You feel that?"

Microbubbles shimmered around them like static in the water.

"Backline's collapsing," Meed warned, eyes on his tablet feed.

Wakati's HUD flared red.

"Second vent destabilizing—ten meters up on the coral shelf."

He fired his harpoon, anchoring to the shelf, and dropped a pair of neutralization bombs into the ruptures. The detonations puffed dull clouds into the water—contained, controlled.

Banian finished his vents in seconds, kicking up sediment as he banked away.

"Zuri, status?" he called.

"Last cavity," Wakati said, maneuvering into position. "Dropping coolant now—"

The vent beneath him didn't rupture.

It inverted.

"Gravity well propagating beneath you, Zuri," Meed snapped. "That isn't a normal collapse."

An entire pocket of mantle rock shifted pressure, turning the space under him into a sucking throat.

The pull hit like a truck.

Wakati's MAV lurched violently, propulsion screaming against the drag.

"Whoa—whoa— I'm getting pulled!" he shouted.

He grappled the trench wall, harpoon cable snapping taut as he dug his boot blades into the rock. The gravity shear ripped them free like they were made of cardboard.

His stomach dropped. The HUD screamed proximity warnings.

In seconds, Banian crossed three kilometers of ocean that would only register in his brain later.

He fired his harpoon—the tether wrapping around Wakati's torso just as Zuri's MAV began to slide toward the center of the planet.

The pull didn't care.

It yanked both of them downward.

"Redirect power, Banian!" Wakati yelled, teeth grinding as his joints started to pop.

"What?"

"Put everything into your thrusters!" Meed cut in. "Now!"

Banian rerouted power, thrusters flaring hot. The two of them stopped dropping—but they didn't climb either. They hung in place, caught between the well and Banian's engines.

"Equilibrium," Meed said. "You're holding. Barely."

Nth reacted instantly, piloting the subVan above them, fighting the current and gravity shear.

Banian locked one arm around Wakati's harness.

"Zuri—don't move."

"No shit!" Wakati snapped, boots scraping uselessly against the rock face.

Banian gritted his teeth, reached for his second harpoon, and fired upward.

The shot slammed into the subVan's undercarriage. Magnetic talons clamped down with a hard *thunk* that vibrated through everyone's bones.

"Nth—pull! Pull, now!" Banian barked.

Nth pushed the engines to max.

The subVan strained, metal whining, water roaring around its frame.

The gravity well fought them—dragging, pulling, hungry.

Banian's arms burned. Wakati's MAV jerked in his grip, starting to slip.

"No, you don't," Banian growled, locking both arms around him.

The subVan's engines roared louder.

Inches turned into half-meters. Half-meters turned into meters.

Little by little, the two Askari were dragged out of the vent's maw—away from the crushing dark—until they slammed hard against the van's hull.

Wakati popped his final coolant bomb into the cavity and launched a gravity-equilibrium charge right behind it.

The vent shuddered.

The pull softened.

Pressure equalized with a low, rolling boom that faded into the trench.

Silence rushed in behind it.

The PA crackled in their helmets—Mynus Banneker again, voice steady, like he hadn't almost watched two of his squad vanish into the mantle.

"Alpha Unit, fault readings leveling. Good work. Pull out clean. Don't rupture anything on your way back."

Harpoons retracted. The squad climbed back into the subVan, water streaming off their armor.

Inside, Wakati tore his helmet off and exhaled hard.

Banian slapped the back of his suit.

"That's five times now."

"Oh, we're keeping count?" Wakati managed a tired smirk.
"I've saved your ass seven times. Score's still in my favor."

"And technically," Meed added, buckling in, "we built the powerful new thrusters that saved both of you. So that's like 7.5 to 4.5 in Zuri's favor, if we're being exact."

"Fuck you guys," Banian muttered.

The cabin filled with relieved laughter—thin, shaky, but real.

The ocean rumbled below them, deep and distant, as the subVan glided back toward Base Delta.

Contact USS at kwalibunker.com/uss to request the full chapter.