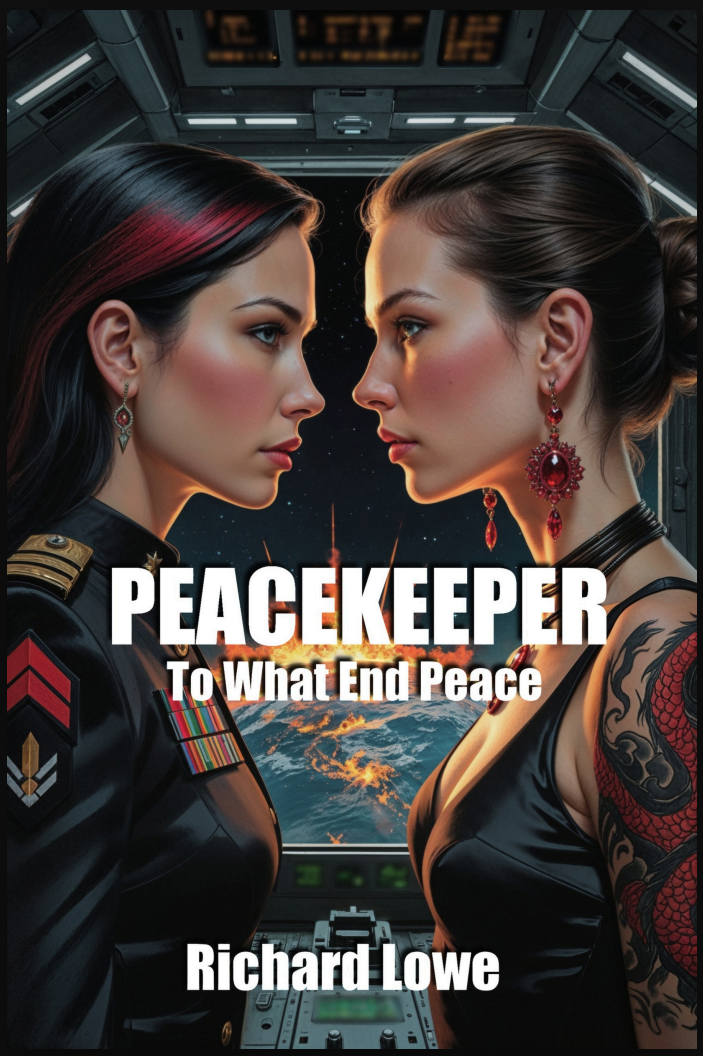
A FREE COMPANION TO PEACEKEEPER: TO WHAT END PEACE

The Anchor Burn

Four years before the Peacekeeper comes, a girl rides up to the rock her father is steering into the sky, and counts the hatches.



RICHARD LOWE

The Anchor Burn

The humidity sensor in Dome Six had been lying for a week, and Amara had spent the morning proving it. She hung off the catwalk with one knee hooked over the rail, twelve meters above the tomato rows. The misters had come on while she worked, and her shirt stuck to her back in a cold sheet.

"It says sixty-one percent," she called down. "It's ninety if it's anything. The vines are dripping."

Below her, Keno did not answer, because Keno had his mouth full. She could see the top of his head between the plants and a little pile of green stems at his feet. He was ten, and he had been told nine times this summer that the tomatoes in Six belonged to the cooperative.

"I can count the stems from up here."

"They fell off," Keno said.

She worked the old sensor out of its socket with her thumbnail. The housing was furred white with mineral scale, because whoever installed it had put it downwind of a mister nozzle and the nozzle had been spraying straight into it since the rains. She would write that up for the cooperative, and nobody would read it.

The handset on her belt buzzed against her hip. She let it buzz while she seated the new sensor and watched the readout climb past eighty, past eighty-five, and settle at ninety-one. Then she answered.

"Are you still in Six?" her mother said.

"I fixed the sensor. Keno's eating the tomatoes."

"Leave him. Come home and pack a bag. Your father got you a pass."

Amara tightened her grip on the rail. "A pass for what?"

"For up." Her mother's voice had gone flat, the way it went when she was pleased and didn't want to show it, or when she was frightened, and Amara had never learned to tell the two apart over a handset. "There's a crew shuttle at dawn from the Ndovu field. He wants you to see it before you go off to the university. Two nights. Bring a sweater, he says. He says it's cold."

Keno had heard. He came up the catwalk ladder faster than she had ever seen him do anything, tomato juice on his chin.

"Me too."

"You're ten," Amara said.

"Papa said when I'm bigger."

"You're not bigger." She wiped his chin with her sleeve, which was wet anyway. "I'll tell him you ate the cooperative's tomatoes. He'll be proud."

Keno kicked the rail, and the whole catwalk rang under them. She climbed down after him and went out through the dome lock into the afternoon. The heat outside hit her like the door of an oven, and she looked up out of habit.

You could not see Anchor Two in daylight. At night it crossed the sky from west to east, a hard white point that did not twinkle, and every night for the last eleven months her mother had gone out on the step to watch it go over. Her father had been on it since the rains.

* * *

The crew shuttle smelled of sweat and sealant and somebody's fried fish. Amara had the window seat because the rigger who should have had it took one look at her and moved. She did not know if that was manners or because she was the guidance chief's daughter.

Twenty riggers and welders filled the rest of the bench seats, most of them asleep before the shuttle cleared the field, heads tipped back, mouths open. The two across from her were not asleep. They were arguing in low voices about a number.

“Forty a shift,” one said. “Forty bolts a shift, an' now they want sixty.”

“Since when?”

“Since the Secretary's office sent the new board. Simon wants Two on station by the end o' the month.”

“End o' the month is nine days early.”

“Aye. Ye tell him.”

The pilot, a heavy man named Danjuma, came on the speaker to say they would be weightless in four minutes and that anybody who threw up on his deck would clean it with their own shirt. Nobody laughed. They had heard it before.

Weightlessness came as a long drop that did not end. Amara's stomach climbed up under her ribs and stayed there, and the strap across her lap became the only thing in the world that knew which way was down. She held the armrest and looked out the window, because her father had told her years ago that the window helped.

It did not help. Selob III turned under the shuttle with the whole southern continent in morning light, brown at the edges and green in the river country. The island chains strung out east across the ocean like beads off a broken necklace.

She had seen pictures. Everybody had seen pictures, and none of them had been this large.

It took four hours to reach the rock. She slept for two of them with her cheek against the cold glass, and when she woke the rigger beside her was pointing.

Kijani filled the forward port. From the ground it had been a white point, and up close it was a lump of dark nickel iron a kilometer across, pitted and scorched. A crater had been blasted so deep into its middle that she could see scaffolding down inside it like the ribs of a split melon.

Floodlights hung off the crater rim on long arms. Around the rock's waist ran a belt of guidance thrusters, squat cylinders bolted straight into the iron, and two of them were firing in short blue pulses.

“Holding attitude,” the rigger said. “They do that all day. Ye feel it through the floor.”

“How do you sleep?”

“Ye stop noticing.”

* * *

Her father met her in the dock in a padded suit with the arms tied around his waist. He had lost weight. The beard he had taken up with him had gone gray at the chin, and he had shaved his head because, he told her later, hair floated into everything and the air filters hated it.

He did not say anything at first. He pulled himself along the grab rail, took hold of her shoulders and held her out at arm's length to look at her, the two of them turning slowly in the air while riggers went past them on both sides. Then he hugged her so hard her ribs creaked.

He smelled of machine oil and of the ginger candy he had chewed every day since he quit smoking, which had been the year Keno was born.

“Ye got tall,” he said.

“I've been this tall for two years.”

“Then I wasn't looking.” He let go and wiped his eyes with his wrist, quick, as if there were grit in them. “They feed ye on the shuttle?”

“Somebody had fish.”

“That's Oyelaran. He'll be eating it at his own funeral.” He hooked a tether onto her belt with fingers that knew the clip without looking. “Come. I'll show ye my rock.”

The inside of Kijani was a warren of tunnels bored through solid iron and sprayed white so the lights would carry. Cables ran along every wall in bundles as thick as her thigh. There was no up or down; there were handholds, and tethers, and a dropped bolt drifting off down a corridor until somebody caught it.

Her father moved through it the way he moved through the house at night, a hand out to touch the wall at each turn he already knew was there. He had been a mining engineer at Kelvin Base for twenty years before the board brought him up here. He had told her once that rock was rock, whether you were digging into it or steering it.

He showed her the cable spool first, because he knew she would want to see it. It sat at the bottom of the crater in a cradle of girders, a drum two hundred meters across wound with the elevator ribbon. The ribbon was dark gray and thin as paper, and when he shone a hand lamp on the edge of the drum the light went into it and did not come out.

“Thirty thousand kilometers o' that, an' more,” he said. “When she's on station we drop the end down t' the field at Ndovu an' they catch it. Then cargo goes up an' down on climbers. Grain up, machines down. Cheaper than a shuttle by a thousand times.”

“What's it made of?”

He did not answer right away. He played the light along the drum.

“Good material,” he said.

“Papa.”

“Ye'll learn the chemistry at the university, an' then ye can come tell me.” He switched the lamp off. “Come on. Cargo bays.”

The cargo bays were where she began to count.

They were real bays; she would give him that. There were three of them, hollowed out of the iron near the rock's equator, each big enough to hold a shuttle, with square doors on the outer wall and loading rails running off into the dark.

Between the bays ran a long tunnel, and he took her through it quickly. The wall on the outer side was set with round hatches. They were a meter and a half across and spaced three meters apart, each with its own sealed collar and its own bundle of cable feeding into it, and she counted fourteen before the tunnel turned.

In the turn, a dozen long shapes lay strapped to racks under gray tarps. The tarps were cinched tight at both ends.

Cargo doors were square. Every cargo door she had ever seen was square, because cargo came in crates and crates were square, and she had spent a whole summer in Dome Two loading them.

She grabbed a handhold. The tether went taut between them and swung him half around.

“Those aren't for grain,” she said.

Her father looked at the hatches and then at her. He had a way of looking at a broken pump before he touched it, his head on one side, and he gave her the same look now.

“No,” he said.

“How many?”

“On this rock? Ye counted fourteen.” He pulled himself back along the tether until he was beside her. “There's more. Amara, ye know what they are.”

“I know what they look like.”

“Then ye know.” He said it gently, and the gentleness made it worse.

A welder came around the turn pushing a torch cart, and they both flattened against the wall to let him by. The welder nodded to her father and did not look at the racks. Nobody up here looked at the racks, she would learn, the way nobody at home talked about the Imperial inspection that was coming due, the one every child on Selob III learned about in school as a date instead of a thing that would happen.

“Mama knows,” she said, when the cart had gone.

“Yer mother knows I'm building a transport hub.” He touched the tarp nearest him and smoothed a fold with his palm. “An' she knows me. So aye. She knows.”

“Keno thinks you're building a road to the sky.”

“I am.” He pushed off from the wall. “Come see the room. Ye'll like the room.”

* * *

The command room sat deep under the crater floor, behind two pressure doors and thirty meters of iron. It was the only place on the rock with furniture. The consoles were in, curving in a horseshoe around a raised platform, but most of the screens were still dark behind protective film, and loose cable floated in loops waiting to be tied down.

On the platform stood one chair. It was bolted down and wrapped in clear plastic, with the factory tag still hanging off one arm.

“That's mine,” her father said. “When they let me sit in it.”

“When will they let you?”

“When she's done.” He did not go up to it. He looked at it from the floor with one hand on a console, the way she had seen him look at the new pump house in Dome Four the day it first ran. “Ifeoma says she'll fight me fer it. She'll lose.”

Amara drifted over the cables to the platform and put her hand on the plastic. It crackled. Under it the chair was dark green, the color of the dome vines in the last week before harvest.

“Kijani,” she said.

“Yer grandmother's word. Green.” He was smiling. “The board gave the anchors numbers. I said if I'm going t' live on a rock, the rock gets a proper name. Nobody fought me. Nobody up here cares what it's called.”

“Papa, why is there a command room on a transport hub?”

The smile went, though not all the way.

He pointed her at the edge of the platform and pulled himself down beside her, so their shoulders touched. For a while he looked at the dark screens.

“The space elevator isn't just infrastructure, Amara,” he said. “It's our lifeline. Without it, we're trapped on the surface while they rain fire from above.”

“Who?”

He turned his head and looked at her, and she felt her face go hot.

“I know who,” she said. “I meant you can't. Papa, they have ships the size of cities. We learned it in school. One ship. One of them could...”

“Aye. One o' them could.” He nodded. “That's why the rock is a kilometer of iron. That's why the room is down here.”

“That's not an answer.”

“No,” he agreed, and did not give her another one.

The comm panel on the nearest console chimed. Her father reached over without letting go of the platform and thumbed it, and a woman's voice came out, dry and hoarse.

“Obi. Ye seen the board?”

“I've been showing my daughter the chair.”

“She can see the chair tomorrow. Come up t' guidance. Simon's office moved the burn.”

* * *

Ifeoma Bello was sixty and built like a fuel tank, and she chewed ginger root the way Amara's father chewed ginger candy, so the guidance room smelled of it. She shook Amara's hand with a grip like a vise and then forgot her completely.

The new schedule glowed on the wall screen. Amara read it over her father's shoulder. Final positioning burn, Anchor Two, had moved forward nine days, to the evening after tomorrow, ground time.

“Thruster four,” her father said.

“I know.”

“Four's feed valve stutters on a cold start. I want a hot test on the stand, with nobody near it, before we light the whole belt.”

“Ye've said. I've said. I sent it up.” Ifeoma spat a wad of ginger fiber into a bag clipped at her waist. “Kwame's on the line. Ye tell him.”

Her father put on the headset. Amara could hear only his half, so she watched his hands instead of his face. His face stayed calm, and his hands took hold of the edge of the console and let go, took hold and let go.

“Four days,” he said. “Kwame, I'm asking fer four days... Aye, I know what the Gov'nr wants. I know what the Secretary wants. I'm telling ye what the rock wants... No. No, I don't think it'll fail. I think it might. There's a difference, an' the difference is four days.”

A long time passed. Ifeoma chewed and watched the screen. Out in the corridor somebody was laughing, and the sound came in thin through the hatch.

“Then I'll be on the rim,” her father said at last. “At four. With a manual cutoff in my hand... I know I'm the guidance chief. That's why it's me.” He listened. “Aye. Aye. Ye too.”

He took off the headset, hung it on its hook and kept his palm flat on the console for a moment.

“He's frightened,” he said to Ifeoma. “I can hear it. Somebody's frightening him from above.”

“Somebody's frightening everybody from above,” Ifeoma said. “That's the whole job.” She looked at Amara as if she had remembered her. “Ye hungry, girl? Yer father forgets people eat.”

* * *

They ate in his quarters, which were a sleeping bag clipped to the wall, a locker, and a porthole cut through four meters of iron to a disc of glass no bigger than a plate. The food came in pouches. He warmed two of them on a heater plate and gave her the one marked plantain, and it tasted like cardboard soaked in oil, and she ate all of it.

“I asked fer plantain,” he said. “Six months I asked. That's what they sent.”

“It's terrible.”

“It's terrible,” he agreed, and looked pleased.

The rock had turned while they ate, and Selob III filled the glass. The dawn line was crossing the northern continent, a curve of gold sliding over the grasslands, and under it she could pick out the gray smudge of the capital and the long bright thread of the river.

Somewhere south of that, too small to see, were the domes. Her mother would be asleep. Keno would be asleep with the window open, because he always slept with it open, and his blanket would be on the floor.

“When I was a boy,” her father said, “younger than Keno, my father took me into the city fer the market. There was a crowd in the square. We couldn't get through.”

She waited. He had never told her this.

“An Imperial officer was reading charges. Sedition. There was a man kneeling in front of him, maybe twenty years old.” He said the next part carefully, like setting down a full cup. “Jabari Mbaku. The Gov'nr's brother. He wasn't Gov'nr then, the brother that lived. Nobody was anything then.”

“What happened?”

“What ye think happened.” He turned the empty pouch over in his hands. “I don't remember the end of it. I remember he looked up. There was a camera on a pole, an' he looked straight up into it, an' my father put his hand over my eyes, but I'd already seen. He wasn't scared, that man. He was looking at the camera like he wanted somebody t' see his face.”

The thruster belt fired above them, a long pulse she felt through the wall at her back. She had stopped noticing it hours ago. The rigger had been right.

“So that's why,” she said.

“That's one why.” He crumpled the pouch. “There's a lot o' them. Ye've got cousins in Dome Nine who never saw a real doctor, because the Empire decides what medicine a colony's allowed t' have. Ye've got five hundred million people on that ball, an' every one o' them knows the date the ships are due back, the way ye know yer own birthday.” He laughed, short. “So we built a transport hub.”

“With fourteen hatches.”

“With more than fourteen hatches.”

She pulled her knees up to her chest. The cold of the iron came through the wall, through the borrowed sweater, into her shoulder blades.

“I'm going to study atmospheric engineering,” she said.

“I know. Yer mother sent me the letter.”

“Weather. Rain. Making it rain on the dry side of the southern continent so they can farm there. I've wanted to since I was Keno's age. Since the drought.”

“I remember the drought.”

“I don't want this.” It came out harder than she meant. “Papa, I don't want any of this. I don't want hatches. I want the domes. I want to make the dry side green.”

He was quiet for a while. Then he reached over and set his big hand on top of her head the way he used to when she was small, and left it there, heavy and warm.

“Good,” he said. “Somebody should make it rain.”

She had been ready for an argument. She did not know what to do with that, so she leaned against him, and he let her. They watched the gold line cross the continent until the rock turned and the porthole filled with stars.

* * *

She woke in the night with the sleeping bag zipped to her chin and her father gone. A hand lamp floated near the hatch on its tether, turning slowly. Through the wall she could hear voices in the corridor, his and Ifeoma's, low and fast.

She unzipped the bag and pulled herself to the hatch. They were at the junction ten meters down, both in suits, helmets clipped at their hips, a tablet between them.

"It's the seat," her father was saying. "It's the valve seat. I can see it on the trace. It opens late an' then it opens all at once."

"So we swap the valve."

"There's no valve. The spare's on the ground. It's on the ground because somebody decided the spare could come up on the next lift, an' the next lift is after the burn." He rubbed his scalp with the heel of his hand. "So I sit on four with the cutoff. If it opens late, I kill it, an' the other eleven carry her."

"Eleven can carry her?"

"Eleven can carry her crooked. We trim it after." He glanced up and saw Amara at the hatch. His face changed, smoothing over like water after a stone. "Go back t' sleep, girl. It's three in the morning."

"There's no morning up here."

"There's a morning wherever I say there is," he said. "Go on."

She went. She lay in the bag with her eyes open and listened to them for a long time, until the voices moved off down the corridor and there was nothing but the tick of the iron cooling as the rock turned out of the sun.

* * *

The rule was no visitors on the rock during a positioning burn. Her father had known the rule when he got her the pass, and he had planned two easy nights before the burn, and the board had taken one of them away. The shuttle down left at the start of the next shift, a full day before the burn.

He walked her to the dock in his suit, helmet under his arm, because he was going out to the rim to start the checks on four as soon as she left. Ifeoma came too. She gave Amara a twist of paper with three pieces of ginger root in it and told her to chew one if the drop made her sick.

"It won't help," Ifeoma said. "But ye'll have a job fer yer mouth besides throwing up."

They stopped at the lock. Danjuma was already aboard, shouting at somebody about a strap.

"Tell yer mother I'm eating," her father said.

"You're not."

"Tell her anyway." He unclipped her tether and coiled it around his hand. "Tell Keno I'll bring him up when he's bigger."

"He'll hold you to it."

"Aye. Good."

She waited for him to hug her, and he didn't yet. He was looking past her at the dock wall, at the white paint over the iron, at the cables running off into the dark.

"Someday," he said, "somebody's going t' have t' defend what we built here."

He said it to the wall, not to her. He said it the way he said the weather was turning, or that the pump in Four needed a new seal.

"Not me," she said.

He looked at her then. She thought he would argue, and he didn't. He pulled her in with the helmet knocking against her back and held her and smelled of oil and ginger, and then he let go.

She went through the lock. When she looked back through the port he had already turned away, pulling himself hand over hand down the tunnel toward the rim stair, the helmet swinging from his wrist.

* * *

The burn was set for the hour after sunset at the domes. Her father had called her mother and told her he would be watching from the rim, and that from the ground it would look like a star getting brighter. Her mother made an event of it, the way she made an event of everything she was afraid of.

She brought out the folding chairs and a jug of cold tea and the good cups. She made Keno put on shoes. They sat on the flat roof of the pump house behind Dome Six, where the land fell away east and there was nothing between them and the sky but heat shimmer and the black line of the windbreak trees.

The domes glowed behind them, green and wet. Insects ticked in the grass. Somebody on the next farm was playing a radio too loud, an old song about a river, and nobody went over to tell them to turn it down.

Keno found it first. He found everything in the sky first; he had their father's eyes.

“There. There, there.”

Anchor Two came up over the trees as it had every night for eleven months, a white point sliding east. Amara sat forward. The tea in her cup had gone warm in her hand.

At the hour, the point brightened.

It swelled slowly, from a star to a brighter star to a small hard sun that threw the faint shadow of her hand across her knee. Keno whooped and stood up on his chair. Her mother told him to sit down, sit down, and didn't make him.

Then the light flickered on one side.

Afterward Amara thought that if she had not been looking for it she would have missed it. The bright point stuttered and flared hot on its left edge for a second, two seconds, and the whole point slid in the sky by the width of a fingernail. Then it steadied and went on burning, straight and even, and climbed toward the top of the sky.

“Did you see that?” Keno said.

“See what?” said her mother.

“It jumped. It wiggled.”

“It's a long way off,” her mother said. “Everything wiggles a long way off.” She held her cup in both hands, and Amara watched her mother's thumbs press against the china until the nails went white.

The burn lasted forty minutes. When it ended the point faded back to a star, and for the first time in eleven months it did not move east. It hung over the windbreak, fixed, while the real stars turned slowly past it.

“It stopped,” Keno said. “It's on station. Papa did it.”

Nobody answered him. The handset on the table between the chairs did not ring. They sat on the roof until the insects quit and the dew came down, and the radio on the next farm went off, and still it did not ring.

Finally her mother picked it up and turned it over in her hands and set it down again.

It rang a little before dawn.

* * *

Kwame Asante came to the house nine days later. He was a thin man with a sweat-dark collar who held a datapad against his chest as if somebody might take it off him. He said he was the Governor's logistics coordinator, that the Governor sent his sorrow personally, and that he would have come himself.

Her mother let him in. She gave him tea in one of the good cups, and he drank half of it and held the rest.

“A guidance thruster misfired during a routine positioning burn,” he said. He had said it before; Amara could tell. It came out smooth, a sentence with its corners sanded down. “On a transport hub under construction. The unit tore loose from its mount, an' the rock shifted against it. Your husband was on the rim beside it. He would not have known.”

He would not have known. Amara turned the phrase over. A thruster had torn loose and a kilometer of iron had moved, and her father had been between them with a cutoff switch in his glove, and somebody in an office had decided that a man crushed like that would not have known.

She thought of his hands on the edge of the console, taking hold and letting go.

Kwame set a bag on the table. It held a pair of boots, spare clothes, a tin of ginger candy with three pieces left in it, and his work tablet. Amara picked up the tablet and woke it.

The memory had been wiped back to the factory screen.

“There's a form,” Kwame said to her mother. “Fer the family. Ye understand the hub is... sensitive. Commercial reasons. The Secretary asks that the family speak o' the accident as what it was. A construction accident.”

“It was a construction accident,” her mother said.

“Aye, ma'am.”

Her mother signed. She signed the way she paid the cooperative dues, without reading, a quick hard scrawl. Then she got up and went into the kitchen and ran the tap, and kept it running, and did not come back.

Keno stood in the doorway of the back room. Amara caught his eye and shook her head, and he went back in, and the door stayed open a crack.

“He asked you for four days,” Amara said.

Kwame looked up. He had not expected her to speak. She watched him decide whether to lie and decide not to, and she hated him a little less for it and a little more at the same time.

“Aye,” he said. “He did.”

“Thruster four. He said the valve seat opened late. He wanted to test it. He wanted the spare.”

“I know what he wanted. I was on the line.” He put the cup down at last. His hand shook, and he hid it in his lap. “I'm the one told him no.”

“Why?”

“Because I was told no.” He looked at the window, at the dome glow, at the pale day sky where Kijani hung fixed now and invisible. “An' the man who told me was told no. I don't know how high it goes, girl. I don't think anybody does. We're all frightened o' the same date.”

“He's dead because you were frightened.”

“Aye,” Kwame said. “Some o' it's that.” He stood and picked up the datapad and held it against his chest again. “Two made station. She's holding. If that's anything t' ye.”

“It's not anything.”

He nodded as if he had expected that. At the door he stopped with his hand on the frame.

“He used t' call me every week about the plantain,” he said. “Six months. I kept ordering the wrong kind.”

Then he went out into the heat. She heard his car whine off down the dome road, and in the kitchen her mother's tap ran on.

* * *

That night Keno came and lay across the end of her bed with his feet against the wall, the way he hadn't since he was six.

“What was Papa building?” he said. “Really.”

The window was open. If she lifted her head off the pillow she could see it over the windbreak, the one star that did not move.

“A dock,” Amara said. “For the cargo ships. The ones that bring seed.”

“That's all?”

“That's all. Grain up, machines down. Cheaper than a shuttle by a thousand times.”

He was quiet. He picked at a loose thread on the blanket.

“I'm going to go up,” he said. “When I'm bigger.”

“Go to sleep, Keno.”

He went to sleep eventually, crosswise on her feet. She lay awake with him heavy across her feet and did not look at the window.

* * *

In the autumn she went to the university in the capital and enrolled in atmospheric engineering. Her room on the fourth floor of the residence hall faced east. On clear nights she could see all three anchors from her desk, low over the city, three white points spaced across the sky that held still while everything else turned.

She was bad at statistics. She was good at fluid dynamics. In the second month her atmospheric chemistry professor, an old woman who had worked the drought, kept her after class to tell her she had the best feel for cloud seeding models of anyone in the year.

Amara walked back to the residence hall in the rain with her face hot. She thought about the dry side of the southern continent going green, and she did not think about anything else the whole way.

She kept his tin of ginger candy on her desk and did not eat the last three pieces. Ifeoma's twist of paper sat beside it, the ginger root dried hard as wood.

Some nights she turned off the desk lamp and sat in the dark and picked out the middle anchor from the other two. There was nothing to see. It was a point of light thirty thousand kilometers up, a kilometer of iron with a room at the bottom of it, and in the room a green chair in plastic that nobody had sat in.

Then she turned the lamp back on and opened her books, because she had chosen rain, and the exam was in the morning.

The World of Peacekeeper: To What End Peace

Who's Who

The people of the novel as you first meet them. Nothing here gives away how anything ends.

NAME	WHO THEY ARE
Admiral Jessica Lang	Commander of the Peacekeeper battleship Astoria and her fleet. Two hundred millennia of service, five thousand rebuilt bodies, and a recurring dream of a lake of blood.
Brain	The mind linked to Jessica through a deep implant. He speaks inside her thoughts, and she has never known a day without him.
Ship	Astoria's own intelligence, protective of her crew and of Jessica.
Erika	A twenty-two-year-old dancer at the Humdinger Bar on Similus IV, with dragons tattooed across her skin that move when she does. She asks Jessica to take her along.
Sophie	The austere shuttle pilot who brings Erika aboard. About two thousand years old, universal time.
Governor N'Kosi Mbaku	Planetary Governor of Selob III for thirty years. A family man with a daughter, Zola, and two young grandsons, and a secret he will not explain.
Molly	The tall, red-haired engineer who builds the Governor's shield towers and has no use for warnings.
Captain Adam Davidson	Commander of the heavy cruiser McMurphy, four thousand years in command.
Captain Dwayne Mason	Commander of the heavy cruiser Darius.
Captain Diego Rodriguez	Commander of the heavy cruiser Claudius and its twenty thousand crew.
Commander Brennan	McMurphy's first officer, who takes four midshipmen down to the Celestial Veil for an education.
Mendoza, Sato, Fischer, Al-Sayeed	Miguel, Akemi, Chloe and Tariq: four ship-born midshipmen on their first deployment, crew of the cutter Peregrine.
Commander Yara Osei	Runs the refueling fleet from the tanker Meridian. Fuel, not glory.
Lila Johannsen	A farm-world organizer from Tessaly, one of two thousand women of the Colonial Partnership Program, with her friends Mira, Elena and Cassandra.
Lieutenant Helena Ross	Officer in charge of the Partnership intake, uneasy with the paperwork's language.

Captain Xander Graves	A genetically modified Marine officer, asleep in cryo until the Admiral needs him.
Glenda and Gloria	A scout beacon and her backup mind, named by Jessica a hundred thousand years ago.
Amara N'Kosi	A young woman of Selob III, daughter of a mining engineer.

In this story only: Obi N'Kosi, Amara's father, guidance chief on Anchor Two; Keno, her younger brother; Ifeoma Bello, his deputy; Kwame Asante, the Governor's logistics coordinator, who also appears in the novel; Danjuma, a shuttle pilot.

Timeline

From the Empire's long past to the fleet's arrival at Selob III, where the novel's trouble starts.

WHEN	WHAT HAPPENS
Long ago	The Second Expansion collapses. Fifty thousand years of chaos follow, the Dissolution Wars, until the Empire of Earth restores order.
800,000 years	Roughly how long the Empire has ruled. Twenty thousand colonies now answer to Earth.
200,000 years ago	Jessica Lang's service begins, with Brain in her head from the start.
100,000 years ago	Jessica names the scout beacon Astoria-4S Glenda, and her backup Gloria.
A century before the novel	The Peacekeeper Goliath surveys Selob III: an ordinary agricultural colony with basic orbital traffic control.
Decades before	Jabari Mbaku, the future Governor's brother, is executed in the city square for sedition.
Thirty years before	N'Kosi Mbaku becomes Governor at forty-two. The building begins.
About four years before	Anchor Two, the rock called Kijani, makes station over Selob III. *The Anchor Burn* takes place here.
About three years before	Molly demonstrates the shield in the wilderness, a thousand kilometers from the nearest city.
Before Similus IV	Operation Scourge: Governor Joffrey's world is sterilized in a seventy-two-hour campaign.
Similus IV	Jessica's last night at the Humdinger Bar. Erika comes aboard. The midshipmen visit the Celestial Veil. Two thousand Partnership women enter cryo.
The crossing	4.7 light-years at ninety-seven percent of light speed: fourteen months ship time, nearly five years for the worlds behind.
Arrival	The 8,301st scheduled inspection of Sector 471 reaches Selob III, the Empire's 16,547th terraformed world. The Governor asks for a tour of Astoria.

Places

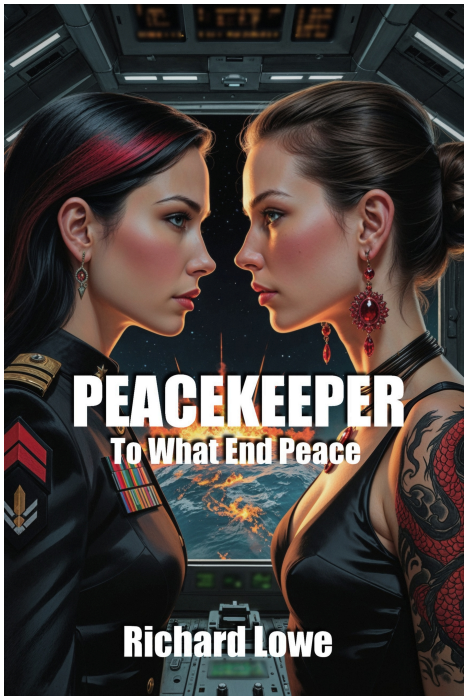
- **Selob III.** A terraformed world of five hundred million people: two major continents, blue oceans, island chains, grasslands, agricultural domes and a capital of spires.
- **The anchors.** Three asteroids about a kilometer across, reshaped with explosives and set in geosynchronous orbit to hold the planet's space elevators. The colony calls them transport hubs.
- **Kijani.** Anchor Two. The name means green.
- **Kelvin, Dash and the triple moons.** Other bodies of the Selob system. Kelvin Base is a mining operation.
- **The gas giant.** The only double-ringed gas giant in the Empire, where the fleet goes to refuel.
- **The solar ring.** A structure a hundred kilometers across in close orbit around Selob's star. Nobody aboard Astoria can say what it is for.
- **Similus IV.** Twenty-two million people on one oval continent. Home of the Humdinger Bar and the Celestial Veil.
- **Astoria.** One hundred fifty million tons, nearly twenty kilometers long, three parallel hull sections, about four hundred thousand people aboard.
- **McMurphy, Darius, Claudius.** The fleet's heavy cruisers, forty-seven million tons each.

Glossary

- **Peacekeeper.** An Imperial battleship and its fleet: three heavy cruisers, six destroyers, a dozen four-crew cutters, over a thousand robot fighters, shuttles and the tankers that gather fuel.
- **Admiral.** The created commander of a Peacekeeper, linked to its Brain and its Ship. Admirals are rebuilt rather than retired.
- **Reconstruction.** The cycle, about every forty years, in which an Admiral's body is taken apart and rebuilt while she stays awake.
- **Universal time.** Time on the worlds left behind, as against ship time aboard a fleet near light speed.
- **Groundworms.** Fleet slang for people who live on planets.
- **Colonial Partnership Program.** The program that brings colonial women aboard to marry into ship-born crews and add genetic diversity.
- **Spy-eyes.** Insect-sized surveillance machines.
- **Marines.** Genetically modified soldiers, loyal to the Admiral, kept in cryo until needed.
- **War declared.** The formal order that removes every restriction on Imperial force.
- **Imperial Conduct Regulation 4.** A rule whose breach can carry a death sentence.
- **Guidance thruster.** In the story, one of the engines bolted into an anchor rock to steer it onto station.

Read the Novel

Four years after the burn, the Empire's inspection fleet reaches Selob III, and the hatches on Kijani are no longer a secret anybody can keep. Peacekeeper: To What End Peace tells what happens when Admiral Jessica Lang, two hundred millennia in service, a dancer whose tattoos move, and a colony that has spent thirty years getting ready finally meet.



Peacekeeper: To What End Peace
Peacekeeper, Book One

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