

Mel Keegan

Callisto Switch



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CALLISTO SWITCH

Mel Keegan

DreamCraft Multimedia, Australia

CALLISTO SWITCH
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CALLISTO SWITCH

Starship Industries Dockyards, Callisto Launch Facility

“Sontag was on *EarthLink*. Did you catch the vid?”

He was right behind me in the crush around the coffee machines. Johnny Dujon, tall and big shouldered, the dark eyes filled with zeal, the red-black lion’s mane of dreadlocks tied back in the trademark pony tail. I was more than surprised to see him. What the hell was he doing in the pilots’ mess at 0300? Come to that, what was he doing on the Callisto docks at all? Civilized people were still asleep. Only drones were up and working in the wee small hours, when Kosmos City, Sky-Harbor and MetroFlight were the playground of machines and hustlers.

“I caught the show.” I turned toward him and saw the light in his eyes this morning. It was the kind of zealot light that gets me anxious, excited. Not a good kind of excited, but churned up in the gut. Worried.

Jarrold Sontag was on *EarthLink* at least twice a week. For years I had thought the man is a pompous cretin, like half the big-shots at UNCO, and this last interview came as no surprise to me. No one in the Jupiter system could have been surprised, and most of us were simply disgusted.

So I had to wonder what could have kindled the weird glow surrounding Johnny that morning. He was always fiery, with his mix of hot French, Spanish and Caribee blood, but there was more, something I neither recognized nor understood, and it bothered me. Also, Big Johnny was on the Starship Industries docks in the early hours of a Thursday morning, when he belonged in a close-to-penthouse apartment under a SkyPark dome over on Europa, and this bothered me even more.

He was watching me like a hawk, waiting for a reaction, and I thought back to Sontag’s segment in the vidNews. For almost a half hour the anchor, Bobbie Oaks, had broadsided the man with the same Precambrian questions. The United Nations Colonial Office logo was bloated in the plasma display behind them, morphing slowly into the usual out-of-scale graphic depiction of the Alpha Centauri system, with the planet a big blue-green, disneyized beachball, and the starship – it

might have been the *Hubble*, it's difficult to tell because the Orion ships are all twin sisters – depicted like a cute cartoon flashlight.

They're not cute. They're the filthiest things in space. But the Orion ships *work*. And because of them there we were, Dujon and me, at the Callisto docks in the Jupiter system, both of us wishing we were almost anyplace else. And I started to sweat when I saw the gleam in his eyes.

I could still hear Oaks's voice in my mind's ear: *So, Mr. Sontag, when will the Hope data be declassified? And then, Yes, sir, everyone is aware that transmissions from 4.4 light years out must be enhanced before low-end civilian users can digest the data. But it's almost nine years since the Kosmos-Textron factory ship aerobraked into orbit around Hope. Folks back home want the data. Educators, technologists, politicians.*

It was always the same antediluvian response from Sontag. Data was being channeled to the public every day, as soon as it was UNCO cleared. Declassified. Enhanced. Whatever. I was already groaning and reaching for the 'off' switch when good old Bobbie O. nailed Sontag, got him good, right between his beady little politician's eyeballs: was Mr. Sontag not aware that UNCO's security division went on full alert thirty-six hours before? And if he was oblivious, he was probably the only person in the solar system who was unaware of the furor.

UNCO Security Services are a private army, and always more or less on alert, but for a day and a half they had been buzzing like a nest of angry hornets. Apparently, the whole 'Net was alive with spooks, government goons. Even I knew a little about this. I log onto the 'Net when I get to work.

Six hours ago, at 21:00 on an endless, boring Wednesday night, the dockyard security system at a facility where I had worked for years needed an eyescan before it would even let me get in through the gate. I wasn't trying to use any special gate, it was just Starship Industries' Callisto launch facility, LockGate 9. God knows, I've used it a thousand times. More.

Then one morning I come to work as usual, and suddenly our own AIS doesn't recognize me. For a moment I thought it was a glitch in the system. Or maybe the machine is smart enough to get as bored as the humans working in these parts, and was trying a leg-pull to liven things up. But these systems are monitored by *other* systems, which are monitored by humans. Glitches don't happen, and AI systems don't play moronic practical jokes.

So without even getting a 'Net-news hookup I knew something, somewhere, had to have gone bad in a big way. And then I saw the

glitter in Dujon's eyes.

Johnny knew. I took a glance up at him, and I was sure he knew exactly what was going on. My gut twisted into a clenched knot. I didn't want the coffee now, though I had a pail-sized mug of double-strong-with-cream in my hands, burning my palms.

"Take a seat, man." I gestured him over to the quiet tables inside the wide obbo-ports, and a large part of me hoped he would take off, go home, let this Thursday morning be normal. But another part of me wanted to know what he knew. I slid in behind the best of the free tables, which had a great view out over the docks. Jupiter was a half-disk, with four of the tiny inner moons scampering across the terminator. I spared the scene a single glance, wriggled my backside to comfort on the squeaking fake-leather seating, and tried to pin him with a glare.

"You want to tell me what goes on, Johnny, or am I funnier when I'm guessing?" He was still with me, though he was not about to sit down.

He shrugged, tossed back the red-black dreadlocks and shoved his hands deep into his pockets. He was wearing plain clothes today because he was not actually working. So, no uniform today; for him it was 'Shanghai chic,' scarlet silks and dust-gold leathers out of the fashion hub of the world. He had the cash for it: John Garret Marshall Dujon had scored a job with top-security-clearance. He was Management now, since his last promotion. The company had made him a shift supervisor. He was a data wrangler for Kosmos-Textron, working thirty hours a week in a SkyCity office eighty k's over Europa, with a view you'd pay money just to look at.

Me? I work for Starship Industries, just another commercial heavy lifter pilot, a 'tractor jockey' doing a job they could train chimps for. I wear Company fatigues, green coveralls and yellow shirt. Makes you look like you work at a carwash. We take what we can get. Johnny Dujon was about as far up the social ladder as you could get without being born with the proverbial titanium spoon in his mouth, but here he was with me, drinking bad coffee he didn't want and looking weird.

I had to wonder what he wanted with me, but then, why shouldn't he come find me? Big John spent a lot of his downtime in a club over on Europa, a den called Dante's. A place where I could find my way blindfold, I've wasted so much of my life there ... and the old saying's right on the mark: all cats are gray in the dark. It doesn't get much darker than Dante's in the early hours of the morning. One night I was pretty wasted, doing some dumb-ass mixture of VR and treats. Bore-

dom makes you do stupid things. I remember falling on my face, almost but not quite passing out; and then a pair of big brown hands caught me, picked me up, put me back on my feet.

I hardly knew Dujon when I saw him that night. How many years had it been since school? Somebody once said, 'It's not the years, it's the mileage.' Back in school Johnny D. and me were close, and neither of us had forgotten. We ran the same hard streets, cussed the same teachers, and ducked the same cops to get into places like Dante's, when we were too young. Anybody can do VR, but not the kind of trip they sell in Dante's.

And now? Socially, the distance between us was abyssal, but still John slid in beside me, dwarfing me physically. I felt the rush of his body heat, smelt the wood-and-ocean scent of his cologne as he leaned closer. His hand cupped around my thigh. "You're flying the high end of the transfer?" He pitched his voice so low, I hardly heard him against the wallpaper static of chatter from the rest of the truckers in the mess.

"It's my shift," I said with a frown, because he knew damned-well whose shift it was, and he was starting to make me nervous. He had the clearance to run the rosters and find out who was flying what, and where, any time. "You know it's my shift, John. Quit it, man, you're spooking me."

He was always the smart one, even when we were kids. He was already smarter than me in the fourth grade, a lifetime ago at Dalhousie Elementary. So, which one of us shot through the corporate technics stream like a missile and was offered the job with Kosmos before his degree had been awarded?

And which of us blew the college thing sky high? I dropped out to go play.

In those days I thought I had better things to do than waste hours with books and let the system turn me into some kind of geek. I knew the nooks and crannies of the city the way the cops only wished they did, because like Big John I was born in them. I could tell the time of the day or night from the flights blasting out of the launch complex; and I knew the best places to dance or do VR or get wasted or laid. I knew most of the hustlers on Havana Street, under the freighter rinks. God knows, I almost became one of them, when I'd run as far as I could, and my luck was stretched thinner than my wallet.

I told myself every day how I'd go back to college, take business studies, maybe even do science, catch up, build myself a proper career. It never happened. Maybe I waited too long to start over. The best I

could ever conjure was a trade school diploma, a commercial-industrial pilot license – and I was riding a twenty-year loan to pay for it, most of which was still outstanding. Why else would I be out in the Jupiter system?

Johnny Dujon was always the shrewd one. I laughed when he stayed in class. He shrugged and let the dreadlocks grow in. I was still laughing while I ran wild with the Havana Street hustlers and he stayed home nights, studying. I stopped laughing when he scored the job with Kosmos-Textron, and suddenly he was flying a Porsche Mako and living in the Kitaro building.

All this was a deluge of stormwater under the bridge, and I forced my mind back to the present. The past was buried by way too many years, and the 'here and now' was about hard work, long hours and short pay.

He didn't speak for so long, I started to sweat. Then he fidgeted and said guardedly, "You be careful, Lee. Can't you drop the shift? Call yourself in sick. Hey, we'll shuttle over to Europa, kill a day in the mall. Go to Dante's tonight, do a little VR, get bombed and sack out someplace. What do you say?"

"Jesus, I can't do that, Johnny! I'm a drone," I reminded him. "Us drones have to work, we need the money ... and if anybody saw me in the mall after I'd called in sick, I could forget coming back to work! It may be crap to you, but I need this job."

His eyes were so dark, just then they looked artificial, glazed. What was he using? Or was it pure zeal? Something he knew. My throat dried again as I watched him push back up to his feet. The fake leather squeaked under him, and then he stood frowning down at me. He fidgeted a moment more, which was so unlike Dujon, I almost took him up on the offer of a day in the mall and a night in the depths of Dante's.

Then he turned half away from me and said, "Yeah, well, you take care, man. Anyway, who's your switch?"

"It ought to be Kai Nielsen. It's been Kai every time, on the last eight or ten transfers. In fact –" I peered at my chrono and swore. "They'll be prepping my tug right now. I gotta go."

He was silent now, and stayed by the table to watch me leave the pilots' mess. I shouldered through the crowd which had gathered around the hot lockers and coffee machines, and as I felt his eyes on my back I muttered murderous curses.

One day those friends of his were going to get him into real trouble. He subscribes to three or four underground 'Netzines that even I know

of, and it's no secret his brother served almost half of a nine year sentence for illegal possession of data. Alex Dujon was never the same when he got out of there.

Four years' hard labor at Iron Monarch, tearing the asteroid apart to feed the mass driver, would change anyone, but no way could I imagine Johnny in there. Alex had survived by the skin of his teeth, because Alex was even bigger than 'Big John,' and as my old man used to say, he was 'made of sterner stuff.' Alex was a ball player, a wannbe-soldierboy with fists like steel, while Johnny was ... Johnny. Four *hours* inside the Iron Monarch labor prison would kill him, let alone four years. I had heard stories of the life in there, and they scared me. Incarceration was the least of it. The work was heavy and hazardous, with a high casualty rate; and when inmates were off-shift, it only got worse. 'Fresh meat' was always eagerly awaited, and no new arrival escaped the auction block.

Alex Dujon had been out for ten months now, and I had heard on the grapevine, he was back on Earth. John never mentioned him, and as I left the truckers' mess I wondered if they kept in touch. Or if Iron Monarch had driven a wedge between them, a breach too wide to ever be healed.

The Company mines the ores there – the ores to build the big ships – and they call imprisonment there 'community service.' It's a nice, tidy term for slave labor, but somebody has to work out there for the good of all Humankind; and I suppose there has to be somewhere to put data-pirates like Alex, presumably also for the good of our species.

Humankind can use all the help we can get, no matter where it comes from. Last I heard, there were eleven billion souls on the Earth, with only one way left to go. *Up*. Some of them have already gone, and when they go, the Callisto launch complex is the place they leave from.

Working at the docks, we watch the big Orion ships come in and we process them through. Kosmos wrangles the data over on Europa, and they like to believe they're right on the pulse of the industry, but we 'drones' over here on Callisto service the ships themselves, we live and work among the Orions. The hulls and hab-modules are still made on Mars, but the engines are made, fueled, tested and fitted, out here in the Jupiter system.

Some of us drones even dreamed of being aboard, quitting this godforsaken place once and for all and looking for someplace better, or at least new. You could get your name on the Colonial Immigration lists for the price of an application fee, a medical and a photo-ID, but

with four billion names already on the list, you knew you would have a long wait to get a ticket out.

The starship docks are spider webs of girders and pylons hanging in Callisto orbit the way gossamer strands hang, impossibly, in the air. A million marker lights glisten like dewdrops, or like colored stars against the backdrop of a night that never ends.

The sun was a too-bright star, setting behind the dusky face of Jupiter as I stopped by the site office to triple-check the 'mission profile.' I spared it a glance before I went over the flight details. Nothing ever changed.

My tug was a big, ugly brute, all engines, with a tiny cab up front, quarantined well away from a new-generation Orion powerplant that's still almost as dirty as the first-generation engines of sixty years ago. The ship makes me think of a brontosaurus – no, a plesiosaur. In its own world it was a perfect creature, semi-intelligent in its own right, monstrously powerful, purpose-designed for the environment where it, and I, worked: the sizzling-hot emptiness between the orbits of the Jovian moons.

My job began at the Starship Industries launch complex, from which the Orion starships depart for the outer planets, then the Oort, and at last the long leg out to the next star system. And my job ended at the Kosmos-Textron yards which orbit Europa, where the crew modules are refitted, repaired, and the engines get routine upgrade.

The big, filthy Orion starships were banned for a century after they were designed, and they were only forced into service at the last moment, as an eleventh-hour dream scheme. Viable technology which was no longer avoidable, though no one could have called it desirable.

There was no change in today's flightplan. The top-end data wranglers like Johnny Dujon might dignify it, calling it the 'mission profile,' which gives the job a smidgen of glamour, but the bottom line is, I'm a switch pilot, like Kai.

The job was simple. I would fire up the tractor, hook up to the cargo sled, shunt it into a Callisto-Europa transfer orbit and monitor the systems to the median point. Halfway down to Europa, Kai and I would rendezvous, and switch tugs. He took the sled in to the Kosmos yard, while I would take my tractor back up to Callisto.

My tug was not certified to navigate European 'airspace' where most of the human population of the Jupiter system still live and work. My tug was all about long-haul, high-power, and she's hot as all hell with those Orion engines which everyone home on the Earth hates with

a passion ... and everyone needs. We're damned if we use them, and damned if we don't. But Kai's tractor was chemical – she burned isotopic Francium, modified from the raw source which is mined out of some asteroid, or hydrogen stripped right out of the atmosphere of Jupiter. In fact, Kai's tractor was a total *wuss*, but it was a *clean* wuss, certified to share space with human beings. Francium fuel, with a half-life of about twenty minutes, would never get you to Hope ... or even shove a starship mass out of the Jupiter gravity well ... but it will shunt a ten-thousand-ton dead weight neatly into the Kosmos marshaling yard at the end of the long down-orbit. The downside is, clean-burn fuel costs way more than the GNP of most countries. My tractor may have been dirty, but she was cheap. So Kosmos split the transfer orbit; we used two switch pilots, and quarantined the so-called 'major risk' Orions away from the habitats, to cut costs. Whatever works.

Ravindra Mendez was on the early shift today. He was a po-faced, big bellied, short-legged fifty-year-old ... in fact, he was a nice guy when you got to know him. His wife worked in some office over on Europa, and they had four kids of various ages and genders in college back on Earth.

The Mendezes were some of the first to get their names on the UNCO immigration list, when early data arrived from the *Jason* probe, which was the first science platform to map Hope. The kids weren't even born when Ravi and Julie registered for travel permits. And they're still waiting, like Johnny Dujon. His parents got him registered early. His name's been on the UNCO register since he was two years old. Where does time go?

A digital image of Hope shimmered on the wall behind Ravi's cluttered desk, between the pneumatic blonde vixens frolicking naked in an improbable ocean of soapsuds, and the two virile young studs in gleaming body oil and too-tight black leather straps. I had seen Ravi's posters too often to even notice them, but the *Jason* image drew my eyes.

Like all such 'radio pictures' it was heavily enhanced. Alpha Centauri A was in the sky behind the New World: a stable yellow star like our own sun, warm and inviting. Hope was blue-green with swirls of clouds in familiar patterns. Like home. According to the *Jason* probe, Hope has an oxygen-nitrogen atmosphere made by a world filled with green plants and oceans of liquid water. Its surface temperatures are only a few percent cooler than Earth's own, its atmosphere just a tad more dense, with a few trace elements which won't bother humans. If you can breathe the air in Athens, Seattle, Perth, you could respire

minestrone. Hope won't be a problem.

The *Jason* data impacted with the Earth like a radio commentary on the second coming, just seventeen years after the new DarkSide lunar space telescope had imaged the planet. I'll never forget the vids, who could? Eleven billion people breathed a communal sigh of relief; five governments released an avalanche of funding; nine Starlifter rockets launched the modules for the Swallow engine, the fifth of the Starship Industries prototype Orions, and it was 24/7 coverage on the tube around the world. *Jason*, the AI brains and heart of the mission, was tugged ponderously out to the Jupiter system by a Phase-4 ion engine sled. Then the Swallows ignited, and she was gone.

The old Swallow engines developed a velocity of half the speed of light. Still, it was a nine year voyage to the planet we had already christened Hope, and due to cost-cutting – funding is difficult; Earth is broke – there was no braking system, and no maneuvering engines. *Jason* was a missile which blasted through the system of our nearest cosmic neighbor in thirty hours, and on its way spat out a swarm of landers and orbiters, the best and brightest robots Kosmos-Textron knew how to build.

It took fifty-six more months for the data to get home. And again, the communal sigh was breathed around the world before the frenzy of activity began. But through all my young years the biggest industrial consortium in history was building a ship called *Hephaestus* – and she was flight-ready when the *Jason* data got home.

The *Hephaestus* was a factory platform with the mass of Ceres, powered by Orions so much more powerful than the Swallow, they cut months off the voyage out. Which was not too shabby, when every wannabe-immigrant was looking down the gun barrel of an eighteen-year round trip.

All this, I remember with yesterday's clarity: the *Hephaestus* launched in a blitz of vidNews trash, and suddenly companies were racing each other to produce the systems, ships, robots, engines, hardware, software, to colonize our new Earth. After centuries of science fiction, it was real. There were already nine billion people in the world in those days, and we all thought our prayers had been answered, as if humanity has been sent a lifeboat.

Still, *Hephaestus* needed twelve years after its arrival at Hope to establish a foothold for Humankind in the new system. It must install the industry base to support a big migrant population.

Where was I while all this rocked the world? I was too busy

running the gauntlet of places like Havana Street, and Kosmos City's infamous Dock Row, and the dim, forbidden recesses of '17 Rink,' the lowest level in MetroFlight. Unlike Dujon, who had seen the way of the future and glimpsed his place in it, I saw nothing for me in the spheres commanded by Starship Industries and Kosmos Textron. By the time I woke up to myself, I was almost right.

Johnny's face preoccupied me as I read through my flight plan, but my thoughts were caught on the reefs and shoals of the past, pulled back the days when the *Hephaestus* put itself into Hope orbit. Over eight years had drifted by since then, and for me they were hard years, times of sacrifice and self-reinvention. If I had been playing and partying too hard to care what was going on before, I found myself working too hard to even notice when the data started to stream in realtime.

Aerials all over the Earth and Moon were aimed like rifle sites, waiting for the first signals to make it home. Right on time, on target, they did, and in minutes about a thousand amateur planetologists were screaming blue murder.

UNCO had encrypted the transmission. Without the decryption algorithm, the signals were 'loaded gibberish' which crashed the smartest AIS on the planet so fast, you had to suspect UNCO had also loaded in a virus. But they would never tell why, nor how.

Four years later, civilians were still waiting for access. The information was supposed to be the property of every human being, but we were getting a trickle-down where we had expected, and thirsted for, a flood. And the fragments of data which were trickling into civilian hands was so edited, it looked patched, artificial, like a hamfisted paste-up.

So Senator Jarrod Sontag appeared on the *EarthLink* show yet again, a pompous windbag, another UNCO cretin who dodged Bobbie Oaks's saw-toothed interrogation with a smile and all the casual aplomb of a presidential candidate.

How many ways can you frame the same question? Hand it to Oaks: she tried. The UNCO man was angry, but keeping a face as calm as a funeral mask as he spoke to the global population and Oaks fired the same old questions at him.

Why in hell was the Hope data still classified?

Bottom line, says Oaks: if the public don't get access soon they'll turn nasty. You take eleven billion people and keep 'em on the mushroom system. Keep 'em in the dark long enough, feed 'em enough bull-shit, and you're going to get trouble.

“Mr. Sontag,” says Oaks, “are you aware that UNCO’s security division went on alert thirty-six hours ago? Have you ever heard the codename *Proteus*?”

He denied everything – he was probably under orders. Oaks could not budge him. After twelve minutes of this balloon juice the camera cut away to the familiar montage of digital animations of Hope, backed by a soundtrack by Beethoven. How many times has everyone seen it?

When the clip was new it was absurdly moving; the hardest cynic among us choked up, myself included. The problem is, if you see anything too often, it looks trite. Last night I had just tuned out, turned off Sontag and went to kit-up for the flight.

This morning I had begun to wonder if I had tuned out a little too soon. “Did you catch *EarthLink* last night?” I asked Ravi as he logged me into the AIS and the system cleared me to fly.

He gave me one of his odd looks, sidelong and vulpine. He was ... skittish, I thought, showing too much white in the eyes. “You’re late, Lee.”

“I got held up.” I waved back toward the mess. There was no need to tell him about Dujon being weird. “You saw Sontag?”

“Same old same old, just more vidcrap,” Ravi growled dismissively, “something about a data smuggler. Another ‘NetNews beat-up.’”

If it was another media beat-up, why was Big John in overdrive? Why wasn’t he at work, at the office over on Europa? Why was he telling a simple switch pilot to watch out for trouble?

Some data smuggler was getting prime-time coverage on *Earthlink*?

A data smuggler like Alex Dujon, who was ten months out of Iron Monarch and more than likely simmering with rage, spoiling for a fight?

My heart was pounding as Ravi waved me off from the site office, and I could barely breathe as I went aboard my tug.

The tractor has no name. She’s known simply as ‘commercial heavy, license number IR6 4BY,’ but I’ve always called her Iris. The cockpit AIS responds to the name, though I don’t recall programming it. The tug couples to the dock by means of a remora – a parasite ring like a jaw in the cockpit shield.

I dove through in freefall, headfirst. As soon as you step off the deck of the Callisto docks, you leave the gravity environment behind. I spun around between the control surfaces, came right-ways up and physically hauled myself into the pilot seat. I buckled down fast into the contoured seat and turned on a little cockpit gravity. I would never

let the company know it, but weightlessness makes me heave. It they knew, my job would be history.

Iris was waiting for me, idling, yellow, green, blue indicators speckling her panels. The lights reported on life support and engine status. Only essential systems were active in-dock. The truth is, Iris could fly the whole mission, and she – it? – knew I was little more than a passenger.

But any AIS can be reprogrammed with an override code. Any ship can be remote operated. Hijacked. The company loses billions of dollars in cargo every year. I heard it was a Canton insurance broker that finally insisted on a human pilot, and got automated flights made illegal. Drones like me are lucky to have these jobs, and the smart ones among us know it.

Such thoughts bedeviled me as I palmed the ID-reader by the pilot seat, and as the ship recognized me she came alive. Through the front viewports I could see the whole dock, the starship yards, the horizon of Callisto with Europa low in the east and the face of Jupiter brooding beyond.

The Orions come home to roost here. The Jupiter system is their eyrie, not Earth, because these ships, these engines, burn too dirty. They are pure power ... power which thrills, frightens, and can easily kill. The crew modules are kept separate from the engine sleds. Any module intended for human habitation is tracted in on a different orbit, from a different dockyard – the science platforms, sample returns, data collects from Saturn, Pluto, the Oort. And the dark beyond.

The engine in dock today was a Phase 9 Orion, one of the newest, with the codename of Swift. This generation of engine offered more thrust, longer burn potential, and it had a plant aboard which manufactured the micro-charges as fast as the engine could detonate them, from a near-pure fissile ore mined out of Amalthea. The Company is steadily gutting the moon. For most of a decade now, Amalthea has trailed a bright streamer of rubble through Jupiter's radiation belts, where the mass drivers pound endlessly like rail guns.

I was waiting for the moment and still jumped as Iris locked onto the engine. Forty electromagnetic seals engaged like hammer-blows through the airframe. I felt it through my own bones two full seconds before the AIS said, "Cargo sled lock-on successful."

I hit a double rank of red switches right over my head. "Initiate radiation shields. Request clearance for main engine ignition sequence."

Any Artificial Intelligence System could perform the ritual, but

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