

H₂LiftShips – Vol 1 – Beyond Luna

Sample Chapter

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The ship was making its final approach toward port after what felt like an extraordinary excessive journey.

Tang looked up and did a quick calculation on when landfall would be. He thought: *I'm sure there is time for one more hand before getting back to work.* Tang slowly checked the dealer and ran his gaze across the table. To his left, Jorge scowled; he had, at best, a queens-high pair, Ginny had her hat pulled low over her eyes as the single, white ostrich feather wrapped lightly around the brim waved gently in the air.

Surprisingly, she was sending a message, but not the one she wanted; there was a clear sign of a bluff.

The edge of the Moon appeared in the starboard porthole; its white light eerily bathing the table, highlighting Tang's hairy red arms. The ship creaked from the stretch of the lines as they pulled tightly on the sail for the final approach. The sound echoed through the common area, telling all on board it was time to go back to work.

A grey shape appeared in Tang's peripheral vision as the ship, swayed, tilted hard and came about, the light from the porthole now brightly shimmering from the blue, white, and gold of the Earth passing below.

The ship's common area was lightly decorated as befits an H₂LiftShip, where weight is more important than beauty. The standard plastic walls were overlaid with bamboo paneling, the floor with lightly stained redwood and the ceiling untouched with exposed pipes over the dark plastic. Portholes encircled the area, but were seldom used since dark space and unblinking stars are boring, at best.

Photos; Earth, Luna, Asteroid scenes and a few modern paintings randomly placed around the room, helped break up the simple color scheme. A small galley was set into the stern, and tables and chairs placed along the floor. Magno-plastic crisscrossed the floor and walls and was embedded into the tables to ensure everything stayed in place at ZeroG.

Grey shape moved from Tang's peripheral and resolved into his crewmate, Jack, who growled as he flew through the ZeroG cabin. He headed straight at Tang's head, snout first, sharp teeth, mouth open, his blue and brown eyes glaring straight ahead.

Tang ducked, and Jack, now a snarling grey furball with legs, twisted and bounced off the bulkhead, shattered Jorge's image, hit the table, sending the magnetic chips and cards into the cabin. He spun around, all four legs pawing the air as he floated away, looking like nothing more than a weak fish swimming through the ether.

Jack exclaimed, "Capt'n says time prepare descent...NOW!"

"Hey! You son of a female dog! I was winning" Shot back Tang.

Jack snarled, "Capt'n says NOW!"

Stop try be Human!

Go Work Now!

You big red ape, not a Gam' r."

Tang thought to himself,

They should never have given dogs the ability to talk.

Now, these dumb-as-asteroid-dust canines think they control us primates with their teethier-than-thou attitude.

Leave it to human scientists to meddle where they should leave well enough alone.

Gathering himself up, Tang spoke aloud, "Who needs to listen to a mutt anyhow!"

It's not as if Jack could pull rank; they were both just deckhands on the same ship.

Tang calmed down, reminding Jack he had more important things to do,

"Well, as soon as we dock at the Niland port, I'll grab the shuttle and head out to Vegas for some real money, and you'll be stuck wandering around the desert."

Ah, Las Vegas, uniquely non-discriminatory to age, sexual orientation, genetic variability, or original species; they are happy to serve any human, simian or canine who has money to lose. Never forget, when they say "Guaranteed 97% Winning!" it means you get a 3% loss on every Ξ Standard spent, year after year. Good odds, but only for the house. Of course, Tang, like most others, misread the formula and thinks it means 3% of the clients will win, and he, of course, would be one of those.

Tang reached up with his great red hairy arm and pulled the lever to turn off the Ginny and Jorge holograms and started stowing the cards and chips.

Jack, having failed the sneak attack, tried one more time to taunt his shipmate, "K, Sure, win against shiny lights, not same as Reals. If you had shirt, would lose it."

Well, Jack had a point, but only about the shirt. His bright red fur didn't need additional fashion statements, it was always correct for any occasion. Tang always wore overalls with a hammer, a screwdriver, and an adjustable spanner in his pockets.