

Sparks Fly

ACT I SCENE 1: Lunar Colony, the community room. It's school time for the elementary-aged kids and they're gathered on a rug while an older woman, MEI LING LOWENSTEIN sits in front of them in a high tech wheel chair. Their TEACHER, hovers nearby.

The back wall of the stage is the view outside the habitat dome, the typical moonscape we've seen in sci-fi shows forever, except that there are other domes dotting the horizon.

TEACHER: Everyone, we have a special visitor today. She's one of the founding members of our community. Say hello to Ms. Lowenstein.

MEI LING: Please, don't use titles here. You know that, Charlie. (to the children). My name is Mei Ling. And I was born on Earth, in a place called San Francisco, but my parents were born in a city called Hong Kong.

GIRL 1: Isn't that an island?

MEI LING: It is! But do you know what? In many ways, our colony is also like an island. We are an island surrounded by space, and Hong Kong is an island surrounded by water.

BOY 1: Is it true that the oceans on Earth used to be clean enough to swim in?

MEI LING: Oh, yes! When I was very little my parents used to take me to the beach in the summer and I would let the ocean chase my toes, and then I would chase the edge of the waves right back into the ocean. (she pauses, caught in a memory for a moment) But I didn't come here today to talk to you about the ocean.

KIDS: (cued by TEACHER) Why did you come?

MEI LING: I came to talk to you about the Lunar New Year.

KIDS: (cued by TEACHER) What's that?

MEI LING: Well, just like we have the anniversary of our colony every year, and just like we celebrate the new calendar year every December 31st and January 1st, some cultures on Earth also celebrate the new year based on a lunar calendar. Now, many cultures use calendars based on the cycles of the moon – the Jewish calendar is lunar, and so is the Hindu calendar. But Asian lunar calendars are all very similar so most of us celebrate the new year at about the same time, and on Earth, that time is this week.

GIRL 2: Is it like regular New Year, with lots of grown-ups wearing sparkly clothes and drinking a lot and dancing funny?

MEI LING: Well, some people do dress up, but lunar new year is really more like a giant family reunion. People return to their family homes from all over the world, and they eat favorite foods, and there are parades and special celebrations with lanterns and red envelopes full of money are passed around.

BOY 2: We don't use money here.

MEI LING: No, we don't.

GIRL 1: I heard my daddy talking about red backpacks last night, but that usually means there's a problem. The red backpacks are for going outside the dome.

BOY 1: No one goes outside the dome.

GIRL 1: Sometimes they do, like to fix stuff.

BOY 3: I heard that our parents go outside the dome to save us from Space Dragons. They fly down to the surface of the moon from outside the Asteroid Belt and wait until after Earthrise to attack!

GIRL 3: That's not funny!

BOY 3: It's not supposed to be. (makes his hands into claws) RAWR I'm a Space Dragon!

TEACHER: (clapping hands for attention) Children...!

MEI LING: Actually, dragons are a part of lunar new year. But in our culture the dragons symbolize nobility, strength, and good fortune, and when we do the dragon dance, we are driving away evil spirits.

GIRL 3: Like our parents chasing away the monsters?

MEI LING: (comforting) Yes. Like your parents, chasing away the monsters. (she pauses, waits then continues) Now, I am here representing the colony elders with a special invitation for all of you children, and your teacher, and your families, as well.

GIRL 1: An invitation?

MEI LING: Yes. You see, we cannot go home for lunar new year, because going back to Earth isn't practical. And part of forming our community here means making our own traditions. So Kevin Fong and Pasha Zhang and I have decided to create a celebration here and we want you all to come. It will be tomorrow night, and you will meet in the main courtyard. Do you want to come?

KIDS: (shouting) YES!

MEI LING: Alright, I have to go now, but I will see everyone tomorrow night.

TEACHER: Everyone, say thank you to Mei Ling for visiting us.

KIDS: Thank you, Mei Ling.

(As the lights fade to black, Mei Ling wheels herself out (her chair is electric) and th kids begin to chatter amongst themselves.)

ACT II SCENE 1: The Courtyard. It's a round room under the dome, lunarscape outside, tables with different foods lining the outer edges, benches and potted plants making an indoor greenspace in the center.

The kids and their parents are there, as well as TEACHER and MEI LING, with the two men she mentioned PASHA ZHANG and KEVIN FONG.

MEI LING: Kelly, I'm so glad you came. Have you ever had a steamed dumpling before? Come try this. It's stuffed with shredded cabbage and carrots.

GIRL 1: Mom? Can I?

MOM 1: Of course, sweetie, it's a party.

DAD 3: Raj, I promise you, there are no man-eating dragons on the moon. Or anywhere else. I do not know where you get these absurd ideas. Perhaps you should consider writing scary novels for a living

BOY 3: I think you're holding out on me, Dad. I mean, really, why else would you have to have protective gear?

GIRL 3: I'm telling you, Matthew you *cannot* see fireworks from space.

BOY 2: But I heard Kevin and Pasha talking about sparks and a safe perimeter, Allison, I swear!

GIRL 3: I don't know what you heard, but I'm pretty sure it wasn't fireworks.

(KEVIN and PASHA wheel MEI LING into the center of the space)

KEVIN: Everyone, your attention, please.

PASHA: Focus, please!

(The milling crowd stills)

PASHA: Thank you all for coming tonight. I know we're a small community so we probably don't need to introduce ourselves, but we're recording this for the Archives so humor us. Hi, I'm Pasha Zhang, community affairs director, Luna Colony.

KEVIN: I'm Kevin Fong, Mayor of Lunar Colony.

MEI LING: And I'm Mei Ling Lowenstein, former Admiral in charge of the Moonbase Delta before we transferred to civilian hands. I'm also the oldest citizen, and longest continual inhabitant. I wasn't born here, like some of you (she gestures to the children) but I will die here, in my chosen home.

And that's why we're here tonight. On Earth, many cultures are celebrating the lunar new year, a time of family and homecoming. Kevin and Pasha and I decided we should also celebrate our own 'lunar new year,' by giving our colony a better name than 'Lunar Colony' and so, we have chosen to adopt the name Tianlong – the Celestial dragon of Chinese mythology – and have a proper name at last.

(There are gasps and applause.)

PASHA: As your children learned in school the other day, the dragons of lunar new year come to protect their communities, and to bless them. Their fire and smoke purge the world of evil spirits.

KEVIN: We can't hold a parade, and we can't set off fireworks, and since we don't use hard currency, we won't be handing out red envelopes, but you were all asked to bring your red emergency EVA packs with you tonight for a special surprise... if you can all put them on... parents, help your kids first, and then get into yours... we'll then attach everyone to a safety link, and cap off our evening.

BOY 3: I told you there were red backpacks! I told you!

DAD 3: Rajesh! Come here and step into this suit immediately or you will not come.

(Boy 3 immediately behaves.)

(Everyone gets into EVA suits)

Blackout

SCENE 2: The Same dome, sort of. It's been empty except for a tall thick wall of stone in the center of the room. The entire cast is pressed around the outer walls of the room in EVA suits. Conveniently, their names are on them.

Because everyone is in space suits, all dialogue has a filtered quality.

KEVIN: True facts about your mayor. When I was a boy, I dreamed of being a knight in shining armor, and I even went to a renaissance faire summer camp and learned to work a forge. I wasn't very good at it, but one of the smithies taught me something amazing.

PASHA (teasing) How to talk too much? (he's carrying a large, steaming bucket which he carefully sets down. The gravity in this dome is less than in the habitat.)

KEVIN: Yep. I aced that lesson. (laughter). No, actually, he taught me that if you throw hot, liquid metal at cold stone, you can make fireworks without having... you know... fireworks.

PASHA: Gentle friends, please keep your hands and feet inside the ride at all times. Do not try this at home. Rajesh, I'm especially talking to you.

BOY 3: Dad, did you tell him my name.

DAD 3: Raj, Pasha and Kevin know *everyone*. Be quiet, son. Watch.

(Kevin takes a large metal ladle-type thing and stirs it around the bucket then dips up some of the molten metal and flings it at the stone wall. Sparks fly, everyone gasps. This repeats until the lights fadeout.)

ACT III SCENE 1: A newsdesk. A single newscaster is speaking. There's a video display behind him that changes to the recording of the scenes we just saw.

ANCHOR: Tonight, around the globe, and indeed, beyond the atmosphere, people of many cultures gathered to celebrate the Lunar New Year. In New York, San Francisco, Hong Kong, and Beijing, there were the requisite parades, of course, but one celebration was truly special.

In a place without its own atmosphere, a group of people, many of whom are *of* Earth but not *from* it gathered not only to honor this holiday, but also to give their community a permanent, personal name.

From tonight on, Lunar Colony shall be known as Tianlong, in honor of the Chinese Celestial Dragon.

Please join me in wishing our very distant brothers and sisters 恭喜发财.

Blackout.

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