

was a tiny ship, about like a water globus next to the nationships of the Mars-Luna-Terra trade route. It was crammed full of sensor equipment and the quep drive, the hold for the ProbeLinks at the one end and the bridge at the other. The only other space allowed for the two occupants was their pods—individual chambers capable of self-sealing, that Kena and Mari slept in.

Mari navigated through the tight passageways down to the magnetic resonance sensor, tapping several keys on its internal screen to begin running diagnostics, peering through the tiny viewport to see the sensor arm as the rocky “It’s all greens down here,” she commed to Kena.

“Check the quep,” Kena tersely responded. “I’m getting some strange feedback from it.

Mari turned and pulled her body two paces down the hallway and dialed into the drive’s computer.

“Kena, it’s—”

A screeching whine rose inside the quep chamber, one that threaded between Mari’s joints and into her skull and deep into her teeth.

No puedo ser bueno, as Mamanita would say.

Critical failure in the Quantum-Electro-Physics Drive Compartment, belatedly informed the ship.

A rattling joined the whine, and the ship began to jounce and jump, like the rocks Nico and she skipped together that last week before—

Commented [EA1]: The quep drive could really use a better introduction and explanation, since it is so key to the story. It would be helpful to be able to understand that “QUEP” is the acronym for Quantum-Electro-Physics Drive, and that this is the drive that enables the ship to transport at faster-than-light speed, much earlier in the story, possibly as soon as the first paragraph.

Commented [EA2]: The ProbeLinks are part of the technology allowing the faster-than-light travel, correct? This would also be helpful to be understood earlier in the story.

Commented [EA2R2]: The reader does not need to be able to understand all the nuances of what the ProbeLinks (and the QUEP drive) do, or how they work. But they need to know enough, preferably through Mari’s and Kena’s actions and words, to know these basic facts.

Commented [EA3]: Since the ship’s construction and the location of the various features is an important story element, it would be worth your time and effort to orient your reader to those features with just a few more details. Ground your readers to the environment through Mari’s senses.

Commented [EA3R2]: Also, gravity? No gravity?

Commented [EA4]: Is this an unfinished thought here? I’m not sure what this is meant to say.

Commented [EA5]: You have limited dialogue between Kena and Mari. As such, leverage those interactions to their greatest potential to help characterize each woman. Both women could be more clearly and consistently characterized. Think about who you really want each person to be, and have them respond to the other in characteristic, not bland, ways. Is Mari carelessly sloppy and lazy, or is she just depressed and out of it? Is Kena snippy and crabby with the world, or is she just quiet and cares a lot about her work? I find it a little hard to tell at the moment.

Commented [EA6]: Adding in a descriptor of the mechanics of how she maneuvers in the ship would improve the characterization of the ship, here and at the point of “navigated” a few lines above. The ship is a character in this story too! The ship dies saving Mari! Help your reader get attached to the ship so they feel the full impact of the loss and tragedy of losing it later.

Commented [EA7]: Giving just a couple more words as a hint that something isn’t right would help build suspense.

Critical failure in the thrusters compartment, informed the computer calmly.

Diablo.

Critical failure in the genera—

And suddenly everything was silent, too silent, and still, too still.

Mari lurched toward the ladder to the bridge, tapping at her helmet-comm, trying to raise Kena. But it was silent, and it was dead.

Kena's feet came out of the bridge, and there was a moment where their mirrored faceplates seemed transparent as they shared a last look, a knowing look. Then they lowered into their pods, their last hope, and sealed the heavy metal lids, the lids that were only meant to be closed when the pods became coffins, over themselves.

In those last few seconds, or long hours, or whatever they were, Mari felt herself opening that box, that Pod inside herself that she kept the lid on, and she could not keep it closed any longer. OR maybe she was now inside it, with the memories she kept inside it.

Marianela Garcia Ricardo, Mama had said, porque? Why do you want to go?

Mari had said nothing, just stood there and looked at Mamanita. Her own dear Mama, no matter how much she loved her, would never understand. Her life was too perfect, too happy.

Commented [EA8]: I know this isn't the main conflict in your story, but you have a lot of untapped potential in this space. Suspense occurs when a character is so close to something happening...you can build significantly more suspense with just a few more steps of troubleshooting that almost works...but then things get worse, or even that the troubleshooting attempts make the situation worse.

Commented [EA9]: Is there a change in gravity due to the generator shutting off suddenly?

Commented [EA10]: I don't find this to be clear. How are these pods their last hope but the lids are only meant to be closed when the pods become coffins? I would like to see more detail throughout the narrative to clarify this. I surmise that these are escape pods that, since space is so tight on the Scout, conveniently double as sleeping/storage areas?

Commented [EA11]: This idea of time being a slippery thing that Mari can't keep tabs on has become a theme in this story. If you wish it to be a theme in the story, you can strengthen it substantially, simply by describing those moments of temporal drifting in more detail. Make your reader pause just like Mari does.

Commented [EA12]: This! This is great. I love the representation of Mari's past pain being like the escape pod she is forced to "bury" herself in. The many points of comparison are perfect. However, it isn't obvious until this point that she is in a lot of emotional pain. A little more characterization as noted in other comments would clarify that—make it clear from her actions and responses that she is depressed or missing a part of herself in some way.

Commented [EA13]: I personally don't generally prefer a lot of internal flashback monologue. However, I feel this fits your story's needs, and it fits the circumstance that Mari finds herself in. If I was locked in silence in a claustrophobic coffin waiting to probably die, I would probably start running through some painful memories too.

Just give it time, Mari, she had said, meaning well. Give it time, and **that young man will fade,** and another young man will come in and steal your heart and will make you happy.

Commented [EA14]: Good job seeding in details of backstory instead of info-dumping.

Papa had shrugged. If she wants to take care of us in our aging years, **with all the promised familial benefits,** then let her. And that was all he said.

Commented [EA15]: I find these details confusing instead of adding to the story. I'd love to see the detail somewhere before this point (or even at this point would work too) connecting that the ScoutRunners are generally viewed as suicide mission runners on a martyr mission for the advancement of mankind, and their families get most of the benefits.

Abuela had patted her cheek sorrowfully. Child, she had said, there are easier ways to get rich.

Manolo had grinned—the wretch!—and turned to Abuela. And when **she disappears and is never heard from again,** I will get all the money! He had narrowly missed Mari's swat, ducking out of the room.

Commented [EA16]: Maybe replace this with "my sister" to clarify that Manolo is Mari's brother—or clarify in another way.

Only Tia Veronica. The one who didn't fit, the one who sat quietly in the corner, watching the gossips gabbling, wrapping her silence about herself like a solemn shawl.

Tia Veronica had, at the last moment before she left the farewell fiesta, taken Mari's hands in hers. Looked in her eyes, and spoken softly, so softly that Mari had had to bend down to hear.

Marianela—she had said, and just the way she looked at Mari brought the hated tears pricking to her eyes—Marianela, the reason for **the emptiness you feel**

Commented [EA17]: This is a linchpin of the story—but it hasn't really come out until now. I'd like to see this as more evident in Mari's actions, her thoughts, her dialogue, her *being*, before this point. You are capable of driving a much greater emotional payoff with this story, but in order for that to happen, the reader has to understand the emotional stakes earlier.

And Mari felt her world erupt in heat and flame and even the Pod and pressure suit she'd wrapped around herself couldn't entirely keep it all from coming to pieces.

Marianela Garcia Ricardo awoke, groggy, screaming, from a dream of being buried alive.

Her pressure suit sighed and she gulped, swallowing her screams down in the close dark of

Write

the pod. She palmed the interior release, panic threatening in images of being buried under twenty feet of lava, or worse, solid rock. At least with the lava she would die quicker.

But by some miracle the pod's release functioned correctly, and with a heave, Mari found herself in the middle of a barren wasteland.

Esther

Commented [EA18]: Didn't she already have some idea of the planetary body they were closest to, from the preliminary scans? And there wasn't lava? This reference to lava doesn't seem to fit. I recommend pressing into Mari's claustrophobia in a different way.

Commented [EA19]: This is a pivotal point in your story. Sit in it for a moment. Build some tension and suspense. In a sense, this is Mari's rebirth, her second chance, and it doesn't make sense that it would be fast and painless. Whether her emotional rebirth follows the same trajectory as her physical as a parallel, or a different trajectory as a contrast, remains to be seen at this point in the story...but this hovering between dead and alive emotionally, as a parallel to being in the Pod, is where Mari has lived for some years now. Don't skip over this point lightly.

Commented [EA20]: "barren wasteland" is a bit of an overused trope. At least consider the thought exercise of what other landscapes Mari could be stranded on, and what might fit your story's themes.