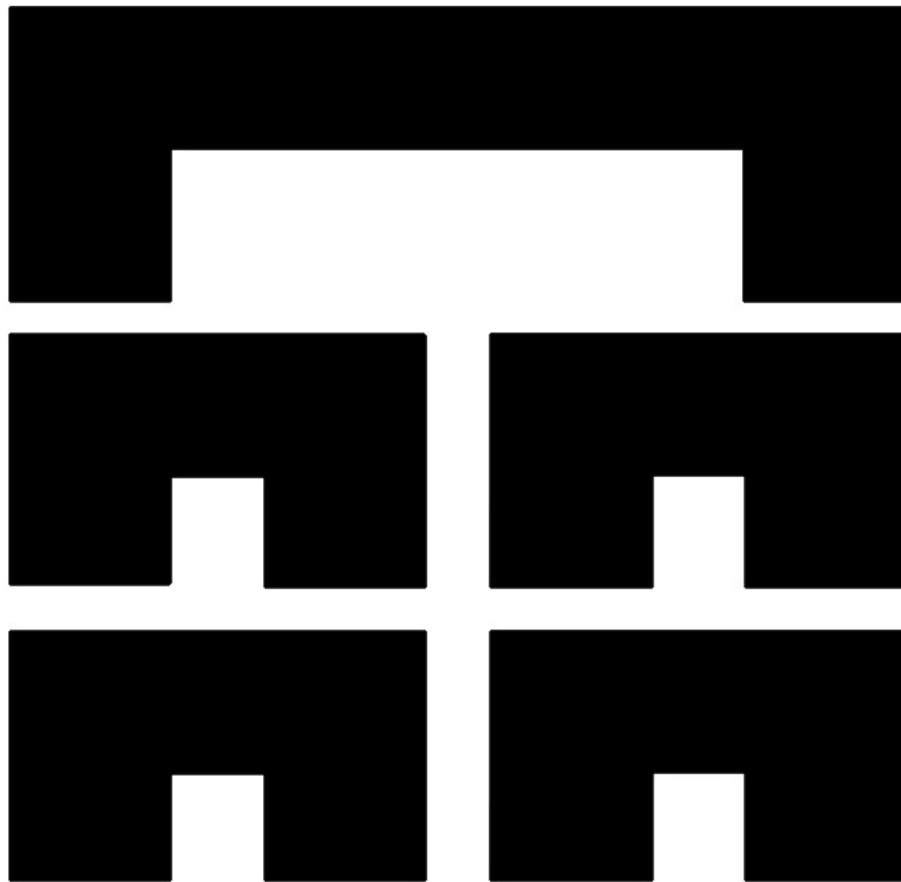


TALES FROM THE WARS™ UNIVERSE

WARSONG



The Great Technician Kaguya



By James Wylder



February, 2385

"If you go to any areas not listed on your itinerary, you will immediately be taken down by snipers."

Well, always nice to have a friendly greeting. Au Kaguya just smiled and nodded.

"You should be honored to meet our employer," the armed man said.

"I am, of course." Not that she knew who she was meeting in the slightest. The job listing had simply listed requirements, a salary, and a cypher. She'd solved it, sent her resume in, and had promptly gotten a request for an interview. She wouldn't have even gone if her mother hadn't badgered her about it. Yes mom, I'm still at home. No mom, I haven't found a job. Yes mom, I should have gone for a Masters degree you're right.

Now that she put some thought into it, the options seemed pretty limited: Secret Operations for CiSyn on Earth, or the Government of Mars. Or Gongen. Whatever they were calling it now.

Or, the Yakuza. She wasn't sure how she'd feel about serving the Ebon Gate.

She sighed, and man looked her up and down as the train car jostled. She could tell he was disappointed in her level of dress. What had he expected; that she'd come wrapped in a yukata, hair and makeup done up like it was New Years? She was here to interview for a job, so a yellow turtleneck and slacks would do just fine. The man kept blathering about all the security measures that would kill her if she slipped up on protocol, so she moved her eye to activate the visualizer in her glasses, and scrolled through social media till they go too far into the facility for the signal to carry. After that, there was another hour, giant doors slamming behind their railcar. The place was intentionally disorienting, but she could feel artificial gravity under her feet, something that took either a lot of experience or a lot of research to notice. That wouldn't be necessary on a normal train, it meant the thing had a functional grav drive in it, that could propel it at speeds fast enough for space travel. And it confirmed one of Kaguya's suspicions: this train was going straight down, deep below the surface of Mars. That she felt like she was going horizontal was an illusion.

This was the kind of place that liked its smoke and mirrors. Duly noted.

Finally, right before the nearly empty train pulled into its stop, noise canceling headphones were placed over her ears, and black hood was pulled over her head. She could feel a person's hand guiding her, not the man in the train with her, these fingers felt different, and she held tight, getting jerked along till she felt the hand pull away and the hood whipped off of her face, the headphone pulled off from the back.

Kaguya was standing in the center of a series of gray monoliths, a blue light shining from a panel on the face of each one. Other than that, they were smooth and featureless.

"Princes Kaguya, so the fable goes, came from the moon. As I understand it, that is true of you as well, Ao Kaguya."

A light came down on her from the ceiling, illuminating her like an actor.

"That is true, sir or madame...or...am I speaking with Shocho?"

The lights flashed.

"That is correct."

She bowed deeply, "It is an honor."

"That is correct."

She'd expected something odd, but not for Shocho. She didn't entirely trust it, the most powerful Artificial Intelligence ever constructed. Connected to every aspect of life on Mars. She let out a deep breath.

"Recite your story to me, Kaguya. Of your name."

"I'm sure you know it, Shocho-san."

"Correct. But I wish to hear your telling of it."

She coughed, "Yes, alright then, uh, the tale of Technician Kaguya..."

* * *

Earth, the Exclusion Zone, 2381

"Please make sure your partner's hazmat suit is secured tightly, ZIR Tours is not responsible for death, cancer, or any other ailment related to improper suit usage," the tour guide said over the intercom, then more quietly, "...or anything else really."

Kaguya hadn't wanted to come, but her mother had insisted, so here she was risking her own wellbeing in order to walk through a carefully prepared part of Tokyo that the CGC allowed tours through. Her partner, a man who she'd already forgotten the name of, checked her suit, and she returned the favor. Everything seemed to be in order, and as the whole armored bus finished signaling they were ready, they were let out of the airlock two by two.

They were on a sun-faded street, a canyon of disheveled sky scrapers crawling at the base with abandoned cars. They walked along a carefully cordoned path, and she looked into the wheeled vehicles windows they passed. Cups sat abandoned in their holders, their liquids long abandoned. A child's doll lay on it's side, plastic eyes staring eternally into the seat back. It almost seemed too on the nose: she got it, this was a tragedy unlike any other, the individual human cost had been immense. Now let her go back to the hotel and read before bed already. She'd probably be enjoying this more if her body had reacted better to the training and medicine to prepare her for Earth's higher gravity--she had felt exhausted the whole trip, a never-ending headache betraying even her ability to sleep.

"...When the nuclear disaster that devastated Asia in 2071 hit Tokyo, residents were hit by the radiation without warning. Of course, this was only one of a number of tragic events involving nuclear energy in the history of the island of Japan..."

She could see a pair of sneakers in the window of a shop, they were totally white from the long sun exposure, but the more shaded picture behind them showed they'd once been blue. The history intrigued her less than these individual stories, the lives of the people who had walked these streets. Had someone stood here, admiring these shoes just as she was?

"...Many of you are descended from the evacuees who moved from Tokyo to Mars--"

"Gongen!" someone in the back yelled.

"...Mars," the tour guide gritted her teeth, Kaguya knew she'd never be allowed to say the G-Word on a CGC sanctioned tour. "I myself am descended from a Tokyo resident who chose to stay here on Earth, moving to San Paulo. But we're all united in our common ancestry, and our mutal ties to this land." The tour guide finished her prepared speech with a certain tiredness that expressed a deep wish that no one would try to fight her on things she'd lose her job if she disagreed with."

The man in the back began to speak again, but Kaguya turned and shook her head no. He stopped. Pursing his lips with a bow of his head.

The relieved tour guide continued their journey, and it struck Kaguya for the first time that this wasn't her home. Her body barely was able to function here in Tokyo, but more than that, she didn't feel the connection her mother had hoped she would. She felt bad for her ancestors who had died here, but the ones who lived had brought her to red-soil beyond these skies. With every step, she felt more and more hollow. Earth had emptied from her, and all she wanted to do was go home. To where her family was.

Where she belonged.

* * *

2385

"You may not come from the moon, but you come from the stars Kaguya. You have been looking up wherever you are, and have never found your place."

She stuck her hands in her pockets, "And you believe you can give me that place?"

"I believe that you will find that place yourself when given the chance."

A short pillar rose from the floor, and with a small frown of confusion, Kaguya stepped up to it. The only thing on it was a nametag.

"Lead Technician Ao Kaguya"

She picked it up, "That's a very interesting job title, Grandfather."

"Your name is a legend, but the times that will come soon will birth new legends, frightful and wondrous, and as they come to pass I will need hands. Hands that are familiar with some of everything, hands that will be loyal and can help create a glorious future for Gongen."

She ran her finger across the embossed nametag, "...I think this could be my destiny to be here, in this room."

"Then you accept?"

"If you answer one question. The way you're talking, I always heard Shocho talked in a very forthright and analytical manner. So why do you talk to me of legends with glossy words?"

There was a pause, the red light flashed. "Because my child, I have lived a long time. And I have many ways of speaking. I simply chose the manner that would be most effective towards bringing you to my cause."

She smiled.

"But you had already concluded this."

"I had."

"This simply re-enforces your suitability for the job."

She picked up the nametag, and pinned it on, "Alright then, Grandfather Shocho, when shall we start?"

The light flashed again, as though it were an excited child, "Well then, Moon Princess, let us see if you live up to your name. I will be sending you to Deimos."

She raised an eyebrow, "There's nothing on Deimos."

A hologram appeared, and as she investigated it, her eyebrow only raised further. "I see you've been busy."

"The work, Technician Kaguya, has only just begun. Things are merely under construction."

She nodded, she'd remember that phrase. "Fly me to the moon."

From the Publisher's Desk:

Are you ready for the Battle of Phobos? Now that we've seen the history of the elusive Au Kaguya who has popped up throughout our preview stories, the culmination of her secret work with Shocho will be revealed in WARSONG: Codettas! It comes out August 29th, 2023, and you're in for a real treat.

Everything has been building up to this. The Battle of Phobos series culminates as the battle begins, and we'll find out how things pan out...

[You can preorder the book here:](#)

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-James Wylder

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