

SYNOPSIS – THE WANDERER

by Anthony Hernandez

David Johnson and his younger sister, Eva, scrape out a life on post-Destruction Earth after their father's transgression earns them exile from Mars. They survive in Omapeka by maintaining hydrators that wring water from toxic air and farming caustic soil. David dreams of growing real food, marrying his sweetheart Lynn, and restoring Earth. That dream collapses when a starving neighbor steals his experimental strawberry crop with violent consequences.

Their aunt, Gertrude Kellem—mayor of the Chryse Planitia Pleasure Colony—bombards David with computers, educational content, and eventually a spaceship with an invitation to return to Mars. Impatient, David launches early using a solar slingshot. Something impacts the ship at perihelion. All seems lost.

David and Eva awaken fully healed aboard the alien frigate *Quirl*, crewed by both humans and aliens, including Mygareans reminiscent of Earth's "gray alien" myths. *Quirl* belongs to the Second Federation of Worlds, a multispecies alliance where only humans and Mygareans lack local evolutionary roots. Legend speaks of "Wanderers" who left a home world called Raia and would one day return to "Those Left Behind."

The siblings appear before the High Commission and Fleet Supreme Command on the capital planet Sarcha. Officials offer citizenship and resettlement. Eva embraces this new life. David demands Fleet training so he can return to Earth and rebuild what was lost.

The sentient robot Quardir tutors David through relentless physical, technical, and psychological training. David joins the Fleet as an ensign and trains at Basic Flight School on Tawantin. He excels but remains second to Arlo Ravenger, a gifted pilot descended from survivors of the First Federation's war with the expansionist Dimenoans. Their friendship grows. Both earn slots at the elite Tactical Fighter Operations Center (TFOC) on Vegax.

On Vegax, David falls for fellow pilot Alyya Puquoo, who is determined to win the Honor Graduate title at any cost. Arlo dies in a routine training mission under questionable circumstances, and David begins to suspect Alyya's ambition crossed a line. He perseveres despite his grief and graduates at the top of his class.

David serves as Tactical Officer aboard the cruiser *Munvya* and then as Executive Officer aboard the caravel *Xrych*. Back on Tawantin, he tests the new Fang fighter. Alyya—now an instructor—argues that fighters win dogfights, not pilots. David defeats her in a lopsided duel. She is demoted and seems to vanish. He is promoted to Air Wing Leader aboard the heavy cruiser *Defender* under Commander Tamor.

Pirates overrun a Federation garrison on a distant world. David leads a precision Fang strike. The operation proves the fighter's worth but shows him the true meaning of military service. Chastened, he returns to Sarcha for extended leave and reconnects with Maradei Busumanii, a scholar and museum curator he met before deployment. Their relationship deepens. She helps him reframe the prophecy not as legend, but as something personal and relevant.

Meanwhile, Eva builds a life of her own. She joins the Sarcha Planetary Guard as a medic and falls in love with fellow Guardsman Zyra Xurlio.

David returns to duty and receives command of the supercruiser *Dawnstar*—the ship from his childhood dreams. He reflects on his recurring nightmares and the Second Federation's expectations. Like it or not, he is becoming a symbol.

Physicist Professor Bzzdukuzz offers data that might lead back to Earth. David, just back from saving Truvip IV from a rogue meteoroid, accepts the offer despite uncertainty about whether it's destiny or manipulation.

The Wanderer ends with David falling asleep in Maradei's arms, dreaming of a green Earth and resolving to keep his promises to those he left behind.