

# Loli Power

By Tsukiko

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It was a traffic nightmare.

Koji Jones thought it would only be fair to put some gas in Debbie's tank, because he had driven quite a lot of it out. Or at least he believed he had. But the only station he had seen for two miles was there on the right, just before the intersection, and exit on either road trying to get back to Debbie's would be a left-hand turn through solid unyielding traffic. There were frequent jams on State Street because of the mall and college students wanting to get out and party, but it was rarely this bad. What was that all about? Was there a festival he hadn't heard about? Small college towns like Athens weren't supposed to be like this.

Nevertheless, he pulled in, waited only a few minutes before getting access to a pump, and filled the tank.

"Good grief," he muttered as he slammed the door and considered his options. His best bet looked to be to turn right onto the cross street and follow it until he could find a place to turn around. He didn't know that part of town and hoped it wouldn't take that long. It was already dark, and he wasn't wanting to spend the entire night trying to get back.

But it seemed like he belonged in the night.

And then, as he pulled out, he saw her standing there. That strange little girl he had seen three times already that day, in three different parts of town. At least he thought she was a little girl; there was something about her that didn't add up. It wasn't the purple hair, because you could see purple hair any time you wanted just by swinging by the university, but it was unusual on a sixth grader. *If* she was a sixth grader. She had big, beautiful blue eyes, a slender sprite-like form, and wore a short but elegant dress in layers of pink, blue, and white, rainbow leg warmers up to her knees, and pink sneakers. And so cute it almost hurt. Every time, she had looked at him as if she knew him.

Weird. He hunched his shoulders and shuddered as he drove past and out into the nightmare.

Traffic was backed up for two blocks trying to get through that light, and after that, a string of headlights that seemed to reach to infinity. It was two miles before he found any place to the left he could pull into, turn around, and thrust himself back into the maelstrom. He wouldn't be back at Debbie's until tomorrow.

Half an hour later, his phone rang. He knew who it was; that ring tone belonged exclusively to Debbie Paskiewicz.

He spoke first. "Debbie? You wouldn't believe the traffic out here. I've never seen anything like it in Athens. It's more like Tokyo. I'll be back as soon as I can."

Debbie was his only contact with the world, it seemed. He'd be lost there without her.

"Hurry if you can." He could sense the worry in her voice. "There's been a car parked across the street with two men watching the house since just before sunset. I have no idea who they might be, and I'm kind of worried because I'm here by myself."

"Cops?" he speculated. "What would they want?"

"Who knows? They're not local cops. FBI or something."

He sighed. "I'll be there as soon as I can."

"Try to hurry."

He hung up, frowned, and sighed again. "I wish I could fly."

#

Debbie Paskiewicz jumped in surprise when a knock pounded at the door. It wasn't Koji's knock, and he didn't bother with one if he knew her parents weren't home. A peek through the peephole confirmed her fears: two men in black suits, with black hair. Even their eyes looked black. She swallowed, made sure the safety chain was secure, and pulled open the door the two inches it would allow. Both were presenting IDs that looked very federal to her.

"Debra Paskiewicz?"

"Yes?"

"Reality agents Springer and Haxby. Can we find Koji Jones here?"

"He doesn't live here. He's my boyfriend. Is he in some kind of trouble?"

"No, ma'am. We are not in any type of law enforcement. The only penalties we are concerned about are the ones that apply to us if we screw up."

"Then what's this about?"

Springer replied, "That, ma'am would take a bit of explaining, and some suspension of disbelief. May we come in?"

Debbie thought about it in obvious doubt for several seconds before she finally released the chain and admitted them. They had black shoes, too, and immediately took seats on the couch by the front window. She chose the chair farthest away from them still in the same room.

"So you said 'reality agents'? Not 'realty agents'?"

"Yes," said Haxby. "It is our assignment to detect, analyze, and if feasible assist in closing reality breaches."

Her doubt increased. "What's a reality breach?"

"It is when elements of one reality become interlinked with elements of another. Such as if Dorothy, Toto, the Scarecrow, Tin Man and Cowardly lion were suddenly prancing down your street. The real deal, not someone dressed up in costume."

She snorted. "That's impossible!"

"Impossible, yes," said Springer. "But it happens more often than you think. The sort of thing you expect from tampering with realities. It usually happens when someone, or a group of people, obsess over a movie or book. Usually a movie. We've had several *Star Wars* incidents. I've met Luke Skywalker and Haxby here has met Darth Vader. *Harry Potter* is another. We've both met Hermione Granger twice each — different versions of her, of course. The most helpful was Mr. Spock, who had already deduced the existence of reality breaches and understood the urgency in getting them closed. It was he who tracked us down in that case."

"Are you serious?"

"Quite serious," said Haxby. "Are you particularly obsessed with anything like that? *Star Wars*? *Harry Potter*?"

She shook her head. "Not really. I'm doing pre-med at the university. It's not like I have a lot of time for that. I do watch a lot of anime, I guess, but I'm not obsessed like a lot of other people. I don't think I qualify as a real otaku."

"There have been some anime incidents," said Springer. "*Bleach* comes to mind. And *Fairy Tail*."

"I was once stuck in *Pokemon* for three days," said Haxby. "Talk about a nightmare!"

"I've never seen anything like that," Debbie objected.

"If you had, you probably didn't recognize it" said Springer. "If you saw Dorothy and her friends out front of your house, you probably wouldn't think it odd because your own reality stream is different. It can be very difficult to detect a breach. It modifies both the current reality and the history that goes with it in such a way that people don't realize anything has changed. Even people familiar with reality breaches may not even know which reality they belong in."

"When I met Darth Vader," Haxby added, "Earth was under the control of the Empire, which had a planetary governor set up in Amsterdam. People were routinely buying vegetables from all around a fictional galaxy without ever suspecting anything was amiss. Of course, when we get the breaches sealed, matters go back to almost normal. I say 'almost' because there are often points that the reality streams cannot resolve to their original state."

"Well, if they're that hard to detect, what makes you think there is one?"

"The United Earth Reality Monitoring Administration has had well over a century to refine their technique. We can measure a subtle curvature in the reality metric here, but we have been unable to pinpoint the location of the breach. We have our tools. Allow me to show you."

Springer pulled a zippered case from an inside pocket. From it, he withdrew something flat, square, and red. He touched a point at his right temple that opened a slot in the side of his head. He slid the object in, and his eye turned into a glowing red orb that looked like it belonged to Terminator. Debbie shrieked involuntarily. He immediately removed the filter.

"Sorry to have startled you, ma'am. Leave it on faith that we can detect breaches, and usually deal with them. Heaven forbid there should be two breaches at the same time. That would probably contort existence to the point that the human mind would be incapable of ever comprehending it."

"So you still haven't said what this has to do with Koji."

"We believe Koji might be a focal point somehow."

"Koji?" She was aghast. "Except for flying, Koji's about as boring as you can get. He...."

She was interrupted by the welcome opening of the door and Koji's bursting through it. After a moment of mutual embrace, she nodded toward the men in black.

"Is that them?"

"Yes."

Naturally, Springer and Haxby had to explain themselves all over again, and, naturally, Koji had trouble believing it all, though he was more receptive to it than Debbie had been. The agents went on to attempt to explain exactly why it was they suspected Koji of being a focal point, but as it involved the confluence of two realities, it quickly became too confusing for either of the young people to follow.

"Have you noticed anything unusual lately?" Springer finally asked. "Anything that doesn't seem right?"

"I thought you said people wouldn't know if anything changed?"

"That's generally true," Springer agreed. "But that doesn't prevent the appearance of oddities that may lend clues to what has happened."

Koji shrugged. "Not really." Then his eyes lit up. "Wait! I have been seeing this strange girl all around town."

"What does she look like?"

"Purple hair, big eyes. Looks about 12 years old, maybe. Some kind of fancy dress, blue, white, and pink. Pink

sneakers. Oh, and these rainbow leggings.”

“Big adorable eyes?” asked Springer.

“Yeah.”

“A loli,” he said as Haxby nodded. “Several reality breaches have been provoked by fans’ infatuation with lolis. “I was personally involved in one involving Fate Testarosa, but I know of some involving others. Shana, Kanade Tachibana, Illyasviel von Einzbern. Did you see this girl’s panties?”

“What?” Koji could feel himself blushing. “No. Of course not!”

Springer frowned. “That’s unfortunate. You can often tell a lot about a loli by her panties. Is she one you are familiar with from an anime, perhaps? One you particularly like?”

“No. I’ve never seen her before. I don’t really watch that much anime.”

“What in particular struck you as odd about her?”

“Well, that she kept showing up. I mean in four different places across town. How can that be just a coincidence? Then, too, she looked at me every time as if she knew me. That was pretty creepy.”

“Definitely a red flag,” Haxby said. “Suppose she really does know you?”

“Well, I don’t know who she is!”

The two reality agents conferred in low tones for several minutes as Koji watched the clock edge toward eleven. Finally, they turned back. It was Springer who spoke.

“I would advise you to keep an eye open for her, and if you see her again, make contact with her. You can simply ask who she is for starters. Anything you find out, report back to us.” They started passing out cards. “If she is an anomaly from another reality, and if you are a focal point, your making contact should provide us with some information.”

He shrugged. “OK, I guess. I don’t see how that could hurt.”

“You fly for the United Earth Space Defense, don’t you?” Haxby asked suddenly.

“Huh? Yeah. But I haven’t been called up since I met Debbie.”

“Have you encountered anything odd in space?”

Koji shook his head. “Not really. Just the usual Wogon attack globes. But they’re not difficult. They’re all automated and not very smart. The problem is there are so many of them at times.”

“Do you still have access to your psi fighter?”

“Of course. It’s out in Debbie’s grandpa’s old barn.”

“I suggest you take it up. There is evidence that the breach might be in space, or at least in the upper atmosphere. If you can get close to it, and if you are a focal point, we might get some information that way as well.”

“No!” Debbie objected. “I don’t want him falling through it and ending up in Oz that way.”

“A breach isn’t like that,” Springer explained. “It’s not a portal that you can go through from one reality to another, though it’s possible. It’s more like a boil in your armpit. The closer you get to it, the more strained things get.”

“OK, I guess,” Koji shrugged. “It’s not like you have to buy gasoline for psi fighters.”

“And I suggest you do it soon.”

Springer and Haxby didn’t have much after that, just a few details to wrap up, and they took their leave. But as Koji stepped out onto the porch to watch them go, someone unexpected caught his eye. The purple-haired loli on a child’s bicycle watching from the sidewalk across the street.

“That’s her!” he pointed. “The mystery girl!”

The agents saw her almost as fast.

“Definitely a loli!” Haxby erupted.

The agents sprinted in her direction, but the girl was faster. She sped off on her bike, down the road, up the path through the Andersen’s yard, and toward the woods. Koji would have bet real money that the men would never catch her.

#

Koji shoved one of the massive barn doors aside, then the other, as Debbie watched. The rollers were old and rusted, barely serviceable, so it was no easy task. But there inside, a dark form looming in the larger darkness, was his psi fighter, perhaps a younger brother to the Star Wars X-wings, its nose a bit shorter and stubbier.

“I’ll give it a spin first and make sure all the systems still meet specs,” he said.

He found the pull switch that lowered the access ladder, and as soon as he reached the top, he twisted the control that would open it up. The cowl slid back and swung up toward the back, then the top quarter of the nose slid forward and swung up in a matching gesture. He took his first look inside. It was a cockpit, all right, but it seemed different than he remembered it. Had it been so long? It was especially the seat that seemed odd. It was made sort of like a recliner, but not quite. There was a foam wedge between the legs that forced them apart a little. The part his lower legs rested on, dropping off a little, had foam-padded platforms above them that looked like they were designed as extensions to the

upper legs. He could make out a couple of hand grips down by his feet, and some controls he couldn't possibly reach without worming his way out and climbing in backwards. More padded supports that didn't make any sense.

He squirmed his way into place. The rest of the seat was no less weird. There were two padded depressions on either side that looked like his arms should go into, assuming he had two pairs of them. But it was the outer grove that lined up with the control sticks. There were safety harness straps, of course, but there were extra ones that couldn't attach to body parts, and one that seemed to go over his thighs but wouldn't adjust down short enough to secure him. A rest that cradled his head. There were controls to either side, but a lot of the console was at the rear of the nose piece cover, and would be out of his reach until he closed it.

He should know how to fly this, so instead of thinking about it, he just did what seemed to come automatically. He pulled back the yellow handle and the top of the nose dropped and slid back into place, presenting him with the rest of the controls, but there was still a gap beneath it, wasting a lot of space that could have been part of the console. The canopy dropped, slid forward, and locked. He rotated the two keys on either side that would guarantee it couldn't come open in flight. That little craft had to operate in space.

He automatically activated the power systems and the console came to life, most it to the sides. A small screen in the middle showed bare metal. It seemed that screen should be important, but he couldn't remember why. The power meter was deep in the dark red, at three percent. Three percent? It should run around 100% of nominal without doing anything in particular.

The lifters didn't use jets, but the pressors that pushed the ship from the ground also acted on the air, and so generated a torrent of wind like an industrial fan. Debbie, her hair and clothes whipping around, stepped behind the protection of the walls as Koji carefully guided the craft outside the shelter of the barn. He waved in passing, and gunned the main drive, but the ship hardly moved.

Power three percent of nominal.

It felt like he was trying to pilot a two-day-old child's helium balloon that was near the end of its life. He didn't soar upward; he drifted. The engines didn't roar; they whimpered. The systems didn't sizzle; they fizzled.

"What the hell is wrong with this crate?"

He tried to reason it out, but he was a pilot, not an engineer. He knew there were batteries, kept charged by some power source he didn't understand. He knew there were electrophasic weapons and shields. He knew there were computers and backup computers, and multimodal scanners. But he didn't know how any of it actually worked. That wasn't his job.

He needed an engineer!

For more than an hour, he tried to put the ship through its paces over town, but it was useless. The only way he could coax it over 30mph was to put it into a steep dive, and that was dangerous because he didn't have the power to effectively pull out of one. His legs kept slipping out sideways from their supports, and that didn't seem right, either. Frustrated and discouraged, he turned back toward the old barn. What good was a psi fighter that would take hours to reach space?

Maybe he should call Springer or Haxby about this. The strange behavior of his craft might be a clue to the reality breach they believed existed.

On lifters, he backed it into the barn as it had been, and settled it to the ground. But before he shut down the power, the communicator crackled.

"You'll never do it on your own," came a girl's voice.

Huh? What? Stunned, he slapped the headset into place. "Who is this?" The image that came to mind was the strange purple-haired girl who had been stalking him.

"Soon, I hope," the voice returned. "Make it real, Koji."

And that was that.

What the hell?

#

Springer hung up the phone with a puzzled expression just as Haxby returned with a sheaf of papers.

"You look thoughtful," Haxby said.

"Yeah." Springer nodded. "Just got a call from Koji Jones. I guess he took his psi fighter up last night and came back and slept most of the day away."

"I'd say! It's almost six."

"He said the fighter almost didn't work. Only three percent nominal power, and that it wasn't even worth trying to get into space. He wondered if that might mean something, and so do I. Then as he was putting it away, he got a short message over the communicator that might have been from our mystery loli. 'You'll never do it on your own'. 'Soon, I hope.' 'Make it real, Koji'."

"'Make it real'? A reference to a reality breach?"

"Maybe. Still trying to make sense of that. And although he didn't mention anything about, it seems odd that he went back to the Paskiewicz house and slept for 16 hours straight. It's almost like whatever drained energy from his fighter drained it from him, too."

“That girl?”

“Possibly. Did you find out anything useful about her?”

Haxby sighed. “Not useful enough. The anime group has a whole database of anime characters, and they filtered out a few dozen with purplish hair, bluish eyes, or something similar. There are two that seem pretty close to me, but neither one is quite close enough. Ironically, though, they’re both from weird anime that make you question reality.”

He pulled up a chair and started spreading out color print-outs.

“My favorite is Rika Furude from *When they Cry*. Notice she has the right overall look about her, the right apparent age, dressed very similarly except she doesn’t have pink sneakers and her skirt’s plain, boring gray. Notice these two long locks of hair. They call that a hime cut, and that matches. But her hair is too blue and her eyes too purple. The ones that really match in terms of overall super-cuteness are Neptune and another girl, Plutia — that seems to be her equivalent in a parallel reality of all things — from *Hyperdimension Neptunia*, with their ornate dresses and all and those leggings. Very close on the hair color, but not the style.”

“The lighting wasn’t too good when we saw her,” Springer pointed out. “We could have some of the details wrong.”

“I know. That’s why I didn’t reject any of them completely. Some of these ... look. Yuri Nakamura from *Angel Beats*, Shiro, from *No Game No Life*, Terminus Est from *Seirei Tsukai no Blade Dance*. A bunch more, but they all have something that doesn’t match: hair or eye color, hair style, clothing, too old, too young, whatever, but you’re welcome to look through the rest.”

“I probably will.”

“I spent some time with their composite artist — who has a nifty anime character program, by the way —and they came up with this.”

He sorted through the stack and pulled out another image. Springer nodded.

“I’d say that’s her. We can pass this out to our other field agents to keep an eye open for her, but who the hell is she?”

“I have no idea,” Haxby went on, “and neither do the anime guys. But I’ll tell you this. While I was talking with the anime group about these different girls, we came up with something. Something we missed, and it’s big.”

“You going to tell me?”

“There’s something special about this case, and it leads to the possibility that the anime she’s from no longer exists in this reality stream.”

Springer nodded thoughtfully. “I suppose that’s possible, but what’s so special about this case?”

“In every other case of a reality breach being triggered by obsession, it’s a real person pursuing a fictional character. In this case, we seem to be looking for a fictional character in pursuit of a real person.”

Springer gaped. “My God! You’re right! How can that even be possible?”

#

Debbie hadn’t come home yet — she had a late cellular biology class. Koji had spent a lot of the time pacing, trying to figure things out, wishing he’d had the courage to pursue sex with her, and uncertain if his virginity would be a hindrance or an asset in that department. He had gone out to check his flyer twice more, and both times the power meter came up at three percent nominal. Useless. Shortly past 10:00 PM, he couldn’t sleep and so went out for a third attempt.

He lowered the access ladder, but before he could climb it, a diminutive form separated from the shadows.

“You need me,” she said.

He turned, and there she was. The girl. The loli. The one who acted as if she knew him and so eerily cute it could bring a man to tears. The one who looked like a kid at first glance, but looked differently once you took the time to study her eyes.

He remembered the instructions Springer and Haxby had given him. “Who are you?”

A look of pain and sadness flashed across her face. “I’m Kazumi. Ishimura Kazumi. Your engineering loli.”

Time froze for a moment.

“My what?”

“Your engineering loli. Why do you think you’ve had so much trouble getting power out of our fighter?”

“Our fighter?”

“Yes, our fighter. I’ll show you. Get in.”

Torn between his fascination with her and the urge to call Springer and Haxby right then and there, he chose the former and climbed into the cockpit. By the time she had reached the top of the ladder, she was barefoot and bare-legged. She stuffed her shoes, socks, and leg warmers into a storage compartment behind his head. He hadn’t even remembered it was there.

She actually climbed in on top of him, straddling his belly, facing away from him. She lay down forward, fitting her head into some of those padded brackets toward his feet and deftly squeezing her lower legs into that slot between his sides and his arms. OK, that explained some of the weird things about that cockpit; it was designed for two. But two in such an intimate configuration? Hell! He was staring right at her butt in his lap — though, mercifully, her dress covered it — and

the flesh of his arms was pressing against the flesh of her legs. There was no way to rearrange himself to avoid that contact. What the hell? Was this designed to turn him on?

She was riding him as she would a racing motorcycle.

She had worked her upper body into a harness. "You have to lock in my knee supports and my waist strap."

Oh, God! The knee supports were easy to find and engage, and her waist strap well within reach, but messing around over top of her butt from that position seemed way, way too personal. As he tightened his harness again, he felt a sudden flow of moisture in his left nostril, and checked it with his fingertips. Blood.

"If you get a nosebleed like you did the first several times," Kazumi said, "since you seem to have forgotten everything, there will be tissues in reach once the cowling drops."

How had she known?

Nosebleed, hell! Her butt might be hidden beneath her skit, but the best of her inner thighs were all around him, and he felt himself on the verge of getting an erection. Since her pubic bone was physically pressing against his manhood, it would be impossible for her to miss it.

"Is this juicing you up any?" She asked with a mischievous tweak to her voice.

There was no point in lying. She probably knew, anyway. "Well, yeah, actually."

But was she even of age for him to be responding like that?

"How old are you, anyway?" he asked, nervously.

"God, Koji! You're scaring me! I wish you could at least remember something. I'm 17!"

"Well, it's because you look 12. Or 11. Or maybe even 10."

"Well, duh! Of course I do! I'm your loli! You can't get effective loli power from a girl who doesn't look like one."

She worked her controls to lower the nose cover and the cowling. With them in place, that center screen now showed her painfully cute face, but nothing subdued the proximity of her butt. Another mischievous design feature?

He grabbed a tissue from the overhead dispenser and wadded it up his nostril.

Kazumi groaned. Bio-filters are on line and we have a solid connection to the power couplers, but power is at 67% nominal. That's no good. We should be getting at least 100% right now. We can escalate propinquity, of course, but that would leave less of a margin for battle. There's something holding us back. Any idea what it is?

"I don't even know what's going on!"

"A reality breach."

"I knew that much. At least that's what Springer and Haxby told me."

"Springer and Haxby. They're really good, but not much help this time. They're just about the best reality agents we have, which is probably why they got stuck on this side of the breach with you. Let me run a full diagnostic on the power systems."

"Does that take long?"

"Not long at all." She sighed. "Everything checks. It has to be with us. OK. Let's just take her up and see how she handles with both of us."

This was an entirely different experience from the first time. The ship accelerated smoothly, easily hitting two and a half g's in linear acceleration. But he learned quickly that although Kazumi's restraints held her in place they didn't keep her from sliding an inch or two forward and back over his loins. Nor did they prevent her body from pressing down even harder during atmospheric banks. Did they design that cockpit just to tease a man?

*Don't think about it! Don't think about it! Don't think about it!* But telling himself not to think about it, he only made himself think about it.

He hit Mach 1. Mach 2. And he steered for the heavens. Half an hour later, the indicators showed they had reached the boundary of space.

"I'm showing Wogon attack globes," Kazumi said.

"Then why hasn't the UESD called me up?" he wondered.

"Probably because it's the UESD in the wrong reality."

"Well, are we going in?"

"We can't," she replied. "And do any good, that is. Not enough of a power margin for the main guns. We can have engines, shields, or guns, any two, but not all three."

"So what do we do?"

"Any idea what's holding us back?" she asked.

"No! I don't know anything."

"Then we'll have to escalate propinquity. I hate to have to, because we normally run about 108% as we are right now. We need to go ecchi on this."

“And how do we do that?”

“It’s really sad you don’t remember *that!* You have to take small steps. Start by lifting my dress. So you can see my panties.”

“What?”

“Come on, Koji! This is important! It’s not a good time for amnesia. I remember when you really enjoyed that part. OK, I know it’s not really amnesia, but it looks like it to me. Go ahead. Hurry.”

He took a deep breath, lifted the back of her dress up over her back, and immediately reached for another tissue. He would need it. The details of her anatomy might be covered, but not very effectively concealed. Not only was her feminine form clear from inner thigh to inner thigh, but her panties were pink. Hell! Did she know he had a thing for pink panties? If they had flown like this in some other reality, she probably did.

*Don’t think about it! Don’t think about it! Don’t think about it!*

“We have 97%,” she announced victoriously. “We can work with that. Take us up, fly boy. Let’s get those globes!”

He knew how to fly a psi fighter. He knew how to fight with it and destroy Wogon attack globes. That he was experienced at flying a craft that he could couldn’t possibly fly without an engineering loli he had never heard of should be enough proof that something was amiss with reality as he knew it. That was just too inconsistent not to mean something was weird.

“One o’clock high!” Kazumi shouted.

“I see it.”

He used that psi fighter skill to bank softly to the right, a little up. He fired two satisfying electrophasic bolts. The first disabled the sphere; the second obliterated it.

“That’s my Koji,” she said. “Almost straight down.”

“I see that one, too.”

He rolled the ship to the left and dove steeply, pressing her loli body forcefully into his. Damn! Two more bolts and another Wogon globe destroyed.

“We’ve lost power again,” Kazumi warned.

He saw the problem right away. “Your dress slipped back down. Must have been from that last maneuver.”

“Damn! I should have thought of that; it’s happened before. Should have taken it off before I got in. You’ll have to cut the bottom part off. Shame. I love this dress.”

“Cut it off!” His heart skipped a beat. As if their arrangement weren’t indecent enough! “With what?”

“Your emergency strap cutter, silly.”

“Oh, yeah.”

He remembered precisely where to find the cutter, low to the right. Getting it was no challenge at all, but cutting her dress was a hair-raiser. He could feel his breathing accelerate, helpless to prevent it, with his hands just centimeters away from.... He didn’t to think about that. The worst part was working the cutter between them where there was no room to get at the front of it, and tried to focus on pigs to keep his attention away from other things. At last he and was able to pull the fabric away from around her like a severed pink and blue rose and stuff it into a cranny.

“We’re at 105%, slowly dropping back down. That’s about 22 kilo-lols.”

Kilo-lols?” he asked. “What are kilo-lols?”

He could hear her sigh even without the microphone. “A kilo-lol is 1,000 lols, silly. Units of loli power. You can’t have forgotten everything. We peaked at 121% while you were working.” There was a hint of mischievousness in her voice.

“Well, we’re OK on power, aren’t we?” he asked.

“Acceptable. But with my panties showing, we should be at 135 or 140. And that difference can be a big one. Something’s still holding us back, and it has to be you, since you’re the one that’s different. Any idea what it could be?”

“Me! I don’t even understand what this whole loli power thing is about!”

“What? You, a healthy young man, can’t figure that out?”

“Well, maybe I could, but.... Do all you lolis look like kids?”

“All the best ones. There are teams with semi-lolis, girls with loli faces but big boobs. They work sort of OK with the right pilot, but you get the best results with a real loli and a lolicon pilot.”

“Lolicon! Are you calling me a child...?”

“No! Of course not! That just means you like lolis. Get a grip! Does my looking like a kid make you nervous?”

“Yes, I guess.”

“That’s loli power! I am your only loli, right? You don’t have another loli stashed away somewhere, do you?”

“No! There’s only Debbie, and she’s not a loli.”

"Well...." She choked on her words. "That's it, isn't it? You care for her, don't you? That's what's holding us back! Your feelings for her. They're getting in the way of you responding to me."

"Even if that's true, what can I do about it?"

"I don't know. Never had to worry about that with you before. But we'll have to do the best we can with what we have. Nine o'clock minus 20."

They took out two more Wogon globes. Koji kept his eyes on the instruments largely to keep them off Kazumi's panties, even if they did boost their power, and the readouts were making more and more sense to him. Especially the reality curvature gauge, which kept creeping upward, from green to yellow, to orange.

Kazumi saw it, too. "God! Look at that curvature! We have to be close to the breach."

"I've been monitoring it," Koji said after he had consulted his own readouts. "But it's too great to get a good gradient."

"Good! You're remembering. It's our proximity to the breach; it's changing the reality flow."

"Yeah, I guess. But it can still take us forever to find the center of the breach without more power."

"Power? Coming right up," she said.

And she started to rub her loins in circles against his.

"What are you doing?" he exclaimed.

"Don't get so flustered. There was already some swelling down there, even before you cut my dress. It's my job to notice things like that. I am an engineering loli, after all."

He grabbed another tissue. "Shit." But he couldn't think about pigs anymore.

"We're at 140%," she said. "I've got a bearing. What are you reading?"

"Uh.... Uh.... Uh...."

"Never mind if you can't talk. Two o'clock, down 30."

He could still steer, sort of.

And as curvature increased further, he could actually feel the shift in reality. After all, he'd been on 37 missions with Ishimura Kazumi.

"We were good, weren't we?" he said, finally acclimating himself to all that was happening.

"Good? Hell, Koji, we *are* the best. Present tense."

"OK," he said. "I think we're close."

"Got it. Plus 10 by minus two. But I can't get any kind of reading on range."

"I'm reading something odd," he said after a few more seconds. "Something big. Not a globe."

"I'm reading it, too. Too big for a fighter, even a cruiser. It's got to be.... Shit! It's a full-fledged battle station! Has to be! And it looks like that's the source of the breach. You don't suppose they've learned to generate breaches on demand, do you? That's a horrifying thought!"

"We'd better call for reinforcements," Koji said, trying to remember how.

"We can't," Kazumi replied. "We're on the wrong side of the breach. There aren't any reinforcements here. Our UESD and the one here aren't the same, remember?"

"Well, we can't fight a battle station ourselves," he said.

"Not at this power level," she agreed. "Have you got Debbie out of your system yet?"

"Who? The name sounds familiar, but I can't place anyone."

"Good. That's progress, because we're close to the breach. We are reading about 15% higher now, but it's still not enough."

"Do we run?"

"Better not. You probably haven't noticed, but certain aspects of the reality stream are resolving to their natural courses because we're close to the breach. If we go back, since you seem to be a focal point, we might provoke some changes that we don't want. We might make things worse."

Koji was feeling his pulse pick up, and it was not just from his constant view between her legs. Damn! This was worse than battling traffic: just as frustrating and with a greater chance of getting killed. "What are you saying? We can't fight and we can't run. What does that leave? A suicide mission?"

She chuckled. "It wouldn't be our first. But I said we couldn't fight at this power level. I guess we'll have to notch it up from ecchi to hentai. Cut off my panties."

"Nandayo!?"

He grabbed two more tissues.



Debbie answered the knock at the door with a puzzled brow wanting no distractions from getting into bed after her night class. Who could it be at that hour? She found two men in black standing there.

"Yes?"

"Is Koji here?"

Her brow wrinkled more. "Who are you guys? And who's Koji? I've never heard of him."

One rolled his eyes in despair and glanced at his companion. "A slide. I really hate slides."

"They're not all bad," said the other. "A slide of this nature, that we remember her but she doesn't remember us or Koji, means a lot of reality curvature, and that means the breach has to be close. It could be moving, or possibly even closing."

"Or, it could be opening wider. Either way, we probably won't find Koji here now. We can only hope he runs into that loli again and gives us a call."

"Or, if Koji really is the focal point, it could mean that he's close to the breach." The one on the left turned back to the still confused Debbie. "Sorry to have bothered you, ma'am."

They turned to go, but she had a sudden thought. "Wait! You wouldn't be Springer and Haxby would you?"

The men stopped and turned in sudden interest.

"I'm Springer. This is Haxby. Do you remember us now?"

"No, never saw you before. But I found this strange note on the table addressed to Springer and Haxby. I don't have any idea how it got there."

In seconds, she handed it to Springer, and he read aloud, "'Have come to get him. Stay close. Ishimura Kazumi'."

"Ishimura Kazumi!"

The two men gawked at each other and said hasty good-byes before racing to their car.

Debbie muttered, "What the hell?"

#

Koji had given up trying to stop his nosebleeds with wads of tissue up his nostrils, and instead had constructed a bib of several layers tucked into his collar. That, too, failed, and he gave up on the matter altogether having already decided his shirt was no longer salvageable. They had never gone this far before, raising propinquity to the hentai level. They were reading stable at 330%, almost 70 kilo-lols. That allowed enough power to the shields to keep them from being blasted into vapor by the battle station's superior weapons, but not enough to make a dent in its defenses, and certainly not enough to close the breach. They would need a dozen other teams like theirs, and there were none in that reality.

"We're just going to keep this up until we make a mistake and they get us," he grumbled.

"Koji, old buddy, you and I do not make mistakes. That's why we're the best."

"But do you see what we have here? Look at those readouts. Not just a breach into another reality, but breaches into two. I've never seen anything like that before. It has to be stopped. I don't even know if the reality theorists know what to do with something like that."

"No one has ever seen anything like this before," she replied. "So we'll have to try something that has never been tried before. At least not for loli power in a battle scenario."

"Any ideas?"

"We have no choice," she said with grit in her voice, rubbing her loins against his again. "We need to try peak propinquity."

"And just what is that?" He was feeling himself sweat. "What else can we do?"

When she told him, he sprayed blood all over the cockpit.

#

The next two and a half hours lasted 11 minutes, during which time they shot down two living face cards and a Model T Ford. It was lost somewhere between Amber and Chaos, where the looking glass led, if one had the talent for it. Stitches. They had used the solution to find the solution before they had it....

*Narrator's note:*

*In short, it took every last iota of combined skill, every last milli-lol of loli power they could generate, and nearly continuous, intense concentration for Koji and Kazumi to deal with what was to prove to be a multiply breached confluence of three realities. It was to take every year of Springer and Haxby's combined experience and the reality theorists' last I.Q. point of intelligence to make any sense of it afterward. With this in mind, it is pointless to try to explain the interleaved web of events and nonsense to anyone outside the circle of experts, and to succeed with any ex-realis observer would raise to 92% the chance of provoking a new reality breach between this reality and that of you, the reader. Therefore, we will terminate the battle narrative here.*

#

Debbie Paskiewicz finished the last episode of *Loli Power* and sighed deeply, trying to gather her wits.

Wow!

She couldn't decide if that "loli power" thing was an attempt to deconstruct the lolicon meme or validate it, but she was sure it was a metaphorical nod to the real-world power of lolis to attract male viewers, to energize the market. The anime certainly was neither parody nor satire. She rather liked lolis herself, but because they were invariably cute, not because they were hot. And this one, Kazumi, was about as loli as they got, up there on the cute scale with Neptune and Plutia, with Yoshino, with Asterotte Ygvar. Regardless, the loli power angle made a memorable impression. Kilo-lols! She would probably dream of that anime for the rest of her life.

And as for the reality breaches, well, there had been alternate realities ever since there had been anime, but some of the subtleties stunned her: how the breach looked different from each side, how people near to the breaches — like Springer and Haxby — could possibly not know which side they belonged on, how realities healed themselves when the breach closed and how they sometimes didn't heal evenly, how the Wogons had pulled the secret of deliberately constructing reality breaches from another reality by an author named Roger Zelazny, one called *The Chronicles of Amber*. It all still left her mind reeling.

One of those realities, the one in which Koji and Kazumi had been stranded for two and a half episodes, seemed a lot like hers, even down to those episodes taking place in a Midwest American college town called Athens. And those reality agents with the eye filters that plugged into the side of their heads ... they were creepy. Someone had put a lot of thought — or a crazy, opium-induced dream — into that script. She would have to watch it two or three more times before she understood everything.

As she popped the DVD back into its box, she smiled. Although it hadn't actually shown anything — it was rated PG in the US, after all — and hadn't explicitly stated as much, they had made it clear enough what Kazumi had meant by "peak propinquity" in order to close the final breach and return the reality shifting spell to where it belonged. She could just imagine Koji's nosebleeds over *that*! She'd have to do some research and see if there was even a name for such a sexual position. She chuckled. With the restricted movement in a psi fighter, especially confined in those safety harnesses, even a veteran nose-bleeder like Koji would be able to last two and a half hours. She'd have to try that one herself if she ever found a real boyfriend.

It had implied at the end of the final episode that their escalation to peak propinquity would lead to their finally becoming lovers. That would weaken the loli effect between them and end their status as the best psi fighter team in the UESD, but it wouldn't really matter. They had already brought down the Wogons. On the other hand, what would they do about season two?

She slid the volume back onto her shelf and paused. Watch it again? Why not? She pulled out the first volume and looked at the artwork of purple-haired Kazumi Ishimura and black-haired Koji Jones on the cover. She loved his initial bashfulness and trepidation in response to her brash lack of modesty with him. It had been a nosebleed festival through half the episodes. Kazumi was a freaking lucky girl, but it was into Koji's haunting eyes that Debbie kept staring.

Strange. She couldn't shake the notion that somehow, somewhere, in some reality, she had actually known him.