

Lacuna Blue

By Mantrid Brizon

Chapter Eight: Oberon

George storms out of Oberon's conference hall, a room built near the end of the staff quarters. His meeting with the Sectan's a bust, he grumbles in frustration. Without James' tact, George was left to fend for himself in a meeting with roguish businessmen eager to haggle. Compounded with the enhanced stress of his brother's sudden abandonment, however valid the reasons might be, he was unable to think rationally when the proposed deal was picked apart by the already reclusive and anti-social group.

Though George knows that the failed deal is nearly entirely his fault, he can't help but harbor a modicum of resentment towards his brother. To make matters worse, it didn't take long for the already rough and tumble workers constructing the station to balk at the changes that James had made. Unwilling to be micromanaged as though they were employed by a megacorporation, they ceased working and organized a protest, something that George was made aware of during the meeting with the Sectans.

Stomping through the halls like a bull about to charge, George is confronted by several Sol Rogues hired as security officers. The rag-tag street soldiers look rather frightened of the seething human as he passes them by without uttering a word. From his looks alone George has garnered a reputation as a fearsome and imposing leader, his stature not taken into account; heart is more important than physical size. May races down the hall beside Fiona, who search frantically for their captain and the owner of Oberon.

“Little bear!” May shouts.

He grins at the sound of her voice and a pet name that she had given him weeks earlier. Turning to face her, his anger evaporates at the sight of his pigtailed lover and one of his closest and most trusted friends. Upon closer inspection of their faces, however, he becomes very worried. The security staff stop and watch as the two Voeldahn women dart up to the human man.

“What’s wrong? Are you two alright?!” He fretfully asks, looking between them.

May shakes her head, her pigtails swaying. The girls gasp for breath, exhausted from an extensive run through the sprawling space station.

**“It’s the workers. Their protest is getting really big.”
Fiona begins.**

“We might have serious trouble.” May adds.

George feels the anger returning. Looking past his female companions, he holds up a hand and waves at the security officers, motioning for them to come closer. They race to join their paying boss, as any good goon would.

“What’s up, boss?” One officer asks.

“Call for backup to...” He pauses and turns to the girls.

“The docks.” Fiona says.

“Right, call for backup to the docks and come with me. We’re going to take care of this once and for all.” George orders.

“Yes, sir!” The officers chirp in unison.

Heading for the docks at a casual and methodical pace, they pick up more security and arm themselves along the way, taking both non-lethal and lethal weapons. After a considerable walk across the space station, they enter the Oberon docks and are shocked by what they see. Nearly the entire construction crew stands within the docks, shouting at the security officers who try to keep them back. Bolstered by the sight of the rest of their comrades, half of whom were walking with George and the girls, they push back against the crowd.

George and his men race ahead while May and Fiona keep some distance. While Fiona is otherwise frightened, May prepares herself for action and draws her blaster, readying for a fight.

“What the hell is going on here?!” George growls.

“We’re tired of being told what to do like we’re slaves!” A worker cries out.

The others shout in agreement, a cacophony of noise splitting George’s skull apart.

“You aren’t slaves! You’re getting paid, and the food and board is free!” George explains.

“But now we have managers and deadlines!” Another worker chirps.

“This is the reason I left the corporate rat-race on Earth and Mars.” Another retorts.

“We’re fucking crooks, you dumb fucks! This is just how work gets done on time so that we can get back to selling drugs and guns!” George screams.

“Well we don’t like the changes!” A worker cries out.

The ear-splitting noise of the echoing voices in the large docking bay causes George to cover his ears and wince in pain. His patience at its end, a fuse inside him blows. Turning his gaze to the crowd, he stares with cold, emotionless eyes. Drawing his Anelace XR-9 blaster,

George aims at a man who seems to be inciting the mob and flips off the safety switch. The security officers follow his lead, readying their weapons.

“Get back to work...” He calmly orders.

“Fuck you!” The older Voeldahn worker snarls.

“Wrong answer.”

Without saying another word, he fires a round into the man’s forehead, executing him in front of the entire mob. Shocked into silence, the crowd backs away. The security officers wait for a signal from their leader or the crowd; whoever acts first decides the course of action. A man in the mob bears his teeth and balls a fist.

“You mother fucker!” He screams, lunging at George.

George and May both fire upon the man, killing him instantly. As he falls to the ground, May puts a round into the back of his head to make sure that he is dead. Fiona is surprised by how quickly May will resort to violence, even for her lover, George. Never a witness to such graphic violence, the young Voeldahn woman turns and wretches, vomiting and stumbling away.

“Disperse and return to your work or this will get a lot worse!” George rather calmly exclaims.

With armed security pointing weapons at them, and two of their leaders' dead, the mob backs down and disperses. Returning to their ship, George leads Fiona with a hand gently resting on her back. She turns to her captain, a friend of several years who has been nothing but kind and understanding to her. They've shared pet names and insults, but she never witnessed him callously murder a person. For the first time in years, she second guesses her place aboard the Bannockburn.

Safely aboard the ship, the crew designate a patrol and leave the shields activated throughout the night, just as a precaution. The mob never returns or retaliates, however. George and May return to their room for the night, leaving the crew to their own devices. As they enter the cabin, George removes his black long coat, blaster, gear belt, and boots. Lying atop the bed, he stares at the ceiling as May strips down.

"Are you going to say anything?" George finally asks as May crawls up to him.

"No." She softly answers, lying beside him.

"Why not?" He asks, resting an arm around her.

"Because..." She says, giving him a tender kiss. "You did what you had to do, little bear."

"You don't think I'm a monster?" He asks with glossy eyes.

"Of course not! I love you! You're my little bear!" She grins.

“You’re something special, cupcake.” He replies, giving her a passionate kiss.

“Look who’s talking.” She coos before kissing him back.

Fiona sits alone in the lounge, looking through the windows and watching the docks. She expects trouble every time the security officers pass by her view down below, thinking that someone will pop out and start a firefight right then and there. She jumps at the subtle swoosh of the sliding door, turning her head quickly to see Whitley standing in the doorway.

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to scare you.” He begins.

“It’s alright.” She says, turning back to the window.

“I heard about what happened.”

“Yeah?” She sighs.

“Yeah... Did you want to talk about it?” He asks, sitting beside her.

“Normally, this would be the part where I thank George for being such a good guy and then ramble on...” She murmurs.

“I know I’m probably not your favorite guy around, but at least I’m here if you need me.” He adds.

“You know, I never disliked you. We all just like to pick on you because it’s easy.” She begins.

“I kind of figured, but it feels good to hear that.” He replies.

“George killed that guy, and when the other one lost control, he killed him too. They both did... I knew May had some issues, but damn... She’ll shoot someone faster than Prat!” Fiona turns to him.

“Maybe she was worried about her lover?” Whitley rationalizes.

“No. She double tapped his head, just because.”

Fiona turns her head back to the window and looks down at the security below.

“If this is what it’s like to be deep in the game, then I don’t think I’m cut out for it.”

“What will you do for money?” He asks.

“I’ve been saving since I started working here. Nearly half of everything went into an account, and the rest I took care of. I have enough to live for a few years while my record clears up and I can go back to a legit shipping company.” She replies.

“Do what you’ve got to do, Fiona.”

“Thanks, Whitley...” She says with a faint smile.

“Anytime.” He says as he stands. “And Fiona?”

“Yeah?” She turns to him.

“If you’re getting out, I want to leave too.”

“Okay.” She nods.

After a restless night, Fiona walks the halls of Oberon with Donovan. Donovan, who actually has experience with security in a past criminal career, is on his way to coach a group of less experienced security officers in preparation for another uprising. On the way, he is escorting Fiona to the traffic control tower where she is going to upload a recently updated star chart to Oberon's main computer. As the pair turn a corner to continue to the tower, they stop in their tracks at the sight of nearly a dozen workers.

Some armed and all very angry looking, they glare at Fiona specifically. Her mind races as the unwashed Voeldahn men scan her with their eyes. Fear of rape and physical torture wash over her and she can feel her chest tightening. Donovan rests a hand near his holstered blaster, not yet touching the cold metal.

"You better move, or I'll make you." The dark-skinned human calmly demands in a bellowing voice.

"Step aside and hand her over." A worker demands.

"And why would I do that?" Donovan chuckles.

"She was there when Rictus and Leon were killed!"

"What?! That wasn't me!" Fiona pleads.

Donovan holds up a hand to silence her, knowing that her denial, however true it is, will only make them angrier.

"We heard it was you! You shot Leon in the head twice!" A man shouts, clearly mistaking her for May.

“So, a dozen of you are going to take it out on a woman? ... Real manly!” Donovan jeers.

“Get out of the way before we hurt you.” Another worker demands.

“I’d love to see you try.” Donovan grins.

“Fine. Have it your way!”

The men rush Donovan at once as Fiona jumps back. Before she can turn around, her human companion quick draws his blaster and fires three rounds, striking three of the men in the chest or stomach. Jumping backwards, he rolls in reverse. He appears to have practiced these moves countless times before. His dreadlocks swing outward from the momentum as he lands on a knee, a foot firmly planted on the ground. He fires as quickly as he can at the men who disperse without ever once touching him.

Fiona stares in horror as Donovan approaches the bodies of seven of the workers, four dead and three wounded. Without hesitation or remorse, he aims and fires into the skulls of each wounded man, killing them. Fiona realizes right then and there that she can’t live this life. Turning to her, Donovan holsters his blaster and uses his V.I. bracelet to contact George before rushing a distraught and tearful Fiona back to the Bannockburn.

“Try to kill *my* crew?! *And* target a *woman*?!” George growls, pacing before them in the cargo hold.

“It’s getting worse, man.” Donovan says.

“We just need to find the ones responsible and string them up! Cut off the head and kill the snake!” Prat exclaims.

“Oh, shut up!” Fiona cries.

“Are you alright?” George asks in a soft voice, kneeling before the sitting Fiona.

“No.” She sniffles. “I can’t do this. This is horrible.”

“Hey, you’re safe now.” George says, trying to embrace her.

“No! You don’t get it! Fuck this criminal shit!” She growls as tears run around her snout and down her cheeks.

“You want to quit?” George asks in genuine surprise.

“Yes. When we leave for a run, I’m getting out while I still can.”

“What a skag. A little blood and she bitches out.” Prat mutters.

“Shut up, Prat!” Whitley barks, stepping forward. “We both want out.” He adds.

“We three.” Gretsche suddenly speaks, also stepping forward. “I didn’t sign up to see my boyfriend die and his best friend become a murdering psychopath.”

George is taken back by their request and sincerity. He never expected this from his original crew, who were with him since the Bannockburn was brand new. His heart stings but looking at the teary Fiona, the stern Whitley and heartbroken Gretsche, he feels guilty for bringing this upon them.

“Alright...” He softly answers as he nods his head. “Mars or Earth. Take your pick where you want to go. I’ll even give you a bonus; severance pay.”

“Thank you.” Fiona says, wrapping her arms tightly around George and embracing her friend. “You’re still a good man... I hope you stop before that changes.” She whispers into his ear.

As they release each other, George returns to May’s side. He begins to plan out their exit strategy, offering to take them as close to their family’s homes as they wish but is suddenly interrupted by the chiming of his V.I. bracelet.

“What is it?!” He asks the caller.

“Boss! Trouble! The workers are coming to the dock in force!” A man replies.

“Damn... Gather all security officers and anyone not with the rebels and retreat to the docks.” George orders.

“Yes, sir!”

George doesn’t hesitate, taking Fiona, Gretsch, and anyone unwilling to get their hands dirty from the cargo hold. With weapons from the Bannockburn’s armory in hand, nearly the entire crew ride the lift down to the ground floor. There they are met by a growing force of security officers, all armed with lethal weapons and wearing basic armor and helmets. Only a handful of workers have refused, most being professionals with something besides their lives to

lose. George is quick to organize an evacuation, using the remaining shuttle craft and his own ship for their escape.

With armed security watching the shuttle craft, they launch and head for the airlock, which wouldn't fit them and the Bannockburn at the same time. As they wait for the airlock to release the shuttles and then pressurize, large doors to the warehouse open and a huge mob of armed workers emerge. Without uttering a word, the workers charge the security officers in a wild frenzy. Slashing, stabbing, bashing, scratching and some even shooting, the docks are awash with blood, sweat and fur.

Donovan, George, May and Ein take careful shots, while Prat uses two JV-5 submachine guns and fires wildly at large groups of workers. Kira stands near the cargo hold, pacing anxiously with Gretsche, Whitley and Fiona standing around.

"I feel like I should do something!" Kira exclaims.

"This isn't our fight." Whitley explains.

"We don't want any part of this." Gretsche adds.

"So, you're going to let your friends die?! What the fuck is wrong with you?!" Kira growls.

Fiona rests her face in her hands, her clawed fingers running through her hair. As much as she is afraid of George, May and some of the others, Kira speaks the truth. If

George didn't survive and she somehow did, she doubts that she could ever live with herself.

"If you won't help, I'll do something by myself!" Kira snarls.

"I'll help..." Fiona mutters.

"Fiona, don't." Gretsche shakes her head.

"He's my best friend. He used to be yours. I have to do this, for him and me." Fiona replies.

Taking Kira by the hand, the dainty Fiona leads her to the bridge while Gretsche and Whitley remain behind in the hallway. Entering the bridge, they activate the security consoles. Bringing up the emergency controls, Fiona coaches Kira on how to use the console and activate the turret controls, each of them sharing half of the ship's weapons. As the fighting down below intensifies, George and Donovan look up as concealed doors that look like ordinary hull panels begin to shift.

To their delight the Bannockburn's plasma cannons emerge from the compartments and charge up. Seeing the weapons of a star ship activating, the mob begins to panic. Even the weapons used by a ship like the Bannockburn would obliterate swaths of workers with a single shot. Fiona and Kira don't even have to fire the cannons to see the results of their actions. The remaining security officers collect the wounded and make a hasty retreat for the cargo lift, which takes all of the survivors into the Bannockburn with one trip.

Racing into the bridge, George rushes up to Fiona and gives her a tight hug, quickly joined by May, Donovan and several others.

"You saved our lives. I owe you." George says to her.

"If it wasn't for Kira, none of us would have done anything. She talked me into it." Fiona somewhat shamefully admits.

"Whatever. You still acted, and I'm proud of you, babe."

"Don't call me that, sugar." Fiona quips.

"Alright, doll." George smirks.

Turning to Kira, he walks up to her and seems to stare her down. After a short pause, he grabs her and gives her a tight embrace.

"As far as I'm concerned, you're one of us and if Kazimir is fine with it, you can fly with me anytime you want." He says to her.

"Furless!" Fiona interrupts the moment.

"What now?" George gives a frustrated sigh.

"They're coming back!" Ein exclaims.

"Prepare for launch!" George orders.

The crew take their places and work without being told. Using the master codes that George possesses, Gretsch uses her knowledge to hack the Oberon and access the airlock doors remotely. Fiona plots a course for Earth to drop the wounded Sol Rogues on a planet-side base. Ein prepares the ship and charges the shields while Prat and Donovan man the cannons. To their horror, the workers have modified an industrial riveter, turning it into an impromptu rail gun that might actually penetrate the shield.

Ein lifts off and turns the Bannockburn around. The workers aim their makeshift weapon at the ship as they prepare to flee, charging it and loading a large bolt.

“This is taking too long. They’re going to hit us if we don’t get out of here.” George thinks aloud.

“Want me to shoot them down?” Prat giddily asks.

“... No.” George begins.

“What?” Prat turns to him.

“Shoot the outer airlock doors.”

Prat and Donovan both grin, turning their weapons to the doors. As Ein moves the ship into position, they fire several rounds. The superheated plasma punches through the doors after a few direct hits, opening the docking bay to the vacuum of space. Men race for the interior of Oberon as the emergency airlock doors begin to close. Several of the men scream in terror as they fail to grab hold of anything

and are sucked right past the ship and through the large hole to die in the cold of space without a suit.

Gretsch and Whitley cannot believe their eyes as men suffer a horrendous end when George purposefully attacks the integrity of his own space station. Fiona is torn by the act, grateful to have her life spared and to have saved George but pities the dying men. Shooting the doors repeatedly, the outer airlock is eventually obliterated and the Bannockburn flies through the hole. At least a dozen workers were pulled past the ship and into the void, while the others remain in lockdown, unable to escape and with limited supplies in the warehouse.

“What about all of the men left behind?” Kira asks, a hint of concern in her voice.

“Fuck them.” May growls.

“They deserve what they get.” George adds.

“Okay! I was just curious.” Kira smiles, clearly not all too concerned with their lives after all.

On George’s order, Prat takes aim with a plasma cannon, firing a round at the antenna array, thereby preventing the Oberon from ever calling for help or communicating with outside vessels. Though the Sol Rogues have agreed to supply the base, he is certain that the other rogues have already reported the incident to their superiors who are far more petty than George could ever be; they’ll never help the men trapped on the station. Gretsch and

Whitley glance to each other as they sit at their consoles, eager to be rid of this chapter in their lives.

Though Fiona feels the same, her conscience is clear. She repaid the friendship and compassion of her captain by sparing his life, now she can walk away without any guilt. Kira watches Oberon as the Bannockburn circles around and heads for Earth, wondering how long it will be before anyone else discovers them. Looking to George and May, she remembers what attracted her to the ship and her crew in the first place, quickly forgetting the worker's plight.