

Lacuna Blue

By Mantrid Brizon

Chapter Ten: Change Of Pace

“Bannockburn hailing Charlie-Tango-One-One-Niner. Requesting permission to dock.” Kira Nazarova says over the radio.

“Charlie-Tango-One-One-Niner, you are cleared for landing. Welcome, Bannockburn. We’ve been expecting you.” The base’s dispatcher replies.

“Alright, Mr. Hirota. Set her down!” George cheerfully orders.

“Yes, sir!” Ein grins.

Flying low over the terraformed moon of Callisto, the Bannockburn approaches the Con-Tali base where they are destined to deliver supplies. After the Oberon incident, George and his crew returned to the Sol Rogue’s then-current headquarters where they hired replacements for Fiona, Whitley and Gretsche, who wanted to leave the crew. At that time, George also replaced the deceased Marcus. May took over for Fiona, already a competent navigator and very dedicated to her work, as well as George.

In her stead, Kira, the daughter of Kazimir, became the ship's new dispatcher, with her father's blessing. Replacing Gretsche as the electrical and computer technician, George hired a human Sijian woman named Colette Evans. The 24-year-old, green eyed, pale skinned red-head, stands a solid 5 feet and 9 inches tall, with an athletic build; Colette is as competent with a blaster as she is with a soldering gun or a holographic touch-screen, skills very important in their line of work, which helped her find a place aboard his ship.

Replacing Whitley as the science officer and trained doctor is a Soyuzian woman, a Voeldahn from an area that was once a country called India, Rakshasa Anand-Basu. Though a trained doctor and chemist, her position with the Sol Rogues was less than ethical, often being employed for the sole purpose of enhanced interrogation and discrete operations. Also a competent fighter with both blasters and knives, Rakshasa was hired by George as backup more than anything else, but her medical skills are certainly not forgotten.

The dainty 29-year-old woman's slender frame conceals her combat prowess and lethal knowledge of anatomy, just as her tall rabbitesque ears conceal her humble height of 5 feet and 2 inches. With her cobalt blue eyes, a thick coat of all black fur, a little fluffy tail and wavy, shoulder length, dyed blue hair, Rakshasa is easily the least threatening in appearance to all of the crew at first glance. Like Colette, Rakshasa is loyal to George's payment above all else and both women have pledged unshakable loyalty to him, so long as the credits are paid.

Still needing both an engineer and a custodian, George filled Marcus' position by hiring Garin Dara. A Voeldahn male and a Soyuzian from an area not far from Rakshasa's home town, Garin came highly accredited for his skills with a wrench and knowledge of ship mechanics. With a distinctly mouse-like appearance and standing only 5 feet and 3 inches tall, he is the shortest male and second shortest of the crew, after Rakshasa. He has slate gray fur, green eyes and shaggy black hair, with a long and whip-like tail that's as furless as his hands and feet.

Garin, however, is as well known for his competency with a wrench as his psychopathic, sadistic and human-hating ways. To the Sol Rogue's surprise, Garin sought out George, knowing full-well that he is a human. However, also knowing that George supplied the weapons for the Earth-Dem Massacre, which killed slightly more humans than Voeldahn, he nearly begged to be a part of his crew. The fact that George pays each crewmember 10% of the cargo value, a sum far exceeding any other captain, legal or otherwise, certainly helps ease the sting of taking orders from Garin's least favorite race.

With his hardened and somewhat bloodthirsty replacements on board, George paid Fiona, Whitley and Gretsche their fair share before leaving them on Mars, at a city of their choosing. Now with roughly half of his original crew gone, George returned to smuggling. Using his ship, he runs drugs, weapons, industrial materials, food and whatever else the criminal factions of Sol demand, for a price. Captaining them as a benevolent dictator, he never

asks the opinions of his crew, save for May, and often only in the privacy of their bedroom.

Setting down the ship on the moon's surface, Ein deactivates the engines. The crew collectively rise from their seats and prepare for the meet, while Ein and Kira work on their consoles. Ein readies the ship for takeoff while Kira prepares a daily log, which George will fill out later, at his discretion. Unneeded during the face-to-face exchange, and also forbidden by George from accompanying them, at the request of her father, she sits in the bridge with Ein as the others leave to make the trade.

Kira watches, her head turned slightly to the side and her icy blue eyes staring at May and George. Her lips curl at the corners of her snout as George gives May's butt a little smack as they pass through the bulkhead, into the hallway and toward the armory. She turns her chair to face the doorway for a moment, watching the bulkhead slide closed.

"Mmm-mm... The things I'd do to you..." She murmurs.

"Er... What?" Ein looks over his shoulder.

He turns his chair around when he sees that Kira is facing away from him and staring at the closed door, raising a brow in confusion.

"Hello? ... Kira!"

"Huh?" She turns to him.

“... What was that?” He asks.

“What was what?”

“Whatever you just said.” He replies.

“Oh, just thinking aloud.” She says, returning to her work.

“Oh... About who?”

“George.” She casually answers.

“Oh! ... So, you like humans?”

“I like everyone, but especially women.” Kira smirks.

“Do you like May too?” His lips twist into a subdued grin.

“Hell yeah, I do! Have you seen her?!”

“Yes. Yes, I have.” He nods.

“That girl is gorgeous and George... I’d obey *every one* of his orders.” She winks.

“You know that May would turn you into a rug if you ever touched him.” Ein remarks.

“Maybe they’d like a third someday? You can’t blame a girl for hoping.”

“Anyone else that you’re interested in? I’ve heard rumors of a single pilot on board, and he’s very open minded to deviance.” He chuckles.

“No thanks. I float on the lesbian side of bi most of the time; George is an exception... A very exceptional exception...” She sighs as she daydreams.

“Damn.” Ein snaps his fingers.

“But now that you mention it, Rocky and Cole would be pretty tempting if they weren’t so scary.”

“Scary? Cole is a human ginger, a clown without the face paint, and Rocky’s the size of a housecat, with a volume to match.”

“You just don’t see it.” She says as she shakes her head.

“I guess not.”

“I grew up with a father who’s knee deep in stuff like this. Some people will do anything for credits, and it’s just business to them. If it were part of their job description or he gave the order, Rocky and Cole would drop their panties and bend over the table for George without question. Any position for as long as he wanted, and he wouldn’t even have to pull out; they’d let him do it all without saying a word.”

“Oh my...” Ein pulls at the collar of his shirt with an index finger.

“And if he told them to cut off someone’s head right after, they’d rush off and do it with their panties still on the floor.”

“Well that got dark...” He murmurs.

“The most dangerous person is the one who sees everything in credits. I’m just a degenerate scumbag like the rest of you, but even I have a line I won’t cross. Those two? ... I don’t know if they even have one.”

“Glad to see we still have a voice of reason on board, if a really perverse one.” Ein remarks, turning back to his console.

“Aww.” She coos.

Riding the cargo lift to the ground, Rakshasa and Colette stand on either side of George and May. The women clutch matching VT-3 rifles, as does Donovan, while Prat holds his signature, dual JV-5 submachine guns. May holds an XR-20 blaster while George keeps his holstered. Instead, he gently holds her upper arm, his own being draped over her shoulders like a cloak. Garin stands inside of the cargo hold, watching and waiting. Stepping off of the platform, the crew approach a group of Con-Tali soldiers, at least 20 in total.

“Hello there!” The Con-Tali captain calls out.

“Ready to do this?” George asks.

“Down to business... I like that!”

“As always.” George grins.

“I see you’ve got my crates of brand new, military grade weapons!” The captain says as he steps up to the human.

“And I see that you’re not holding a credit chit or reader...”

“Yeah, about that...”

“Here we go! The first C.O.D. we take in a long time and there’s a problem. The price is the price and it’s not negotiable.” George says sternly.

“Oh, we’re not negotiating that. We were actually hoping that you would help us out with something. A very important mission that will pay exceptionally well.”

“What kind of mission?” George asks apprehensively.

“Just a little run to Hyprion.”

“Hyp... That’s near Saturn!” George growls.

“I know, I know, but just hear me out! We have a cache of crates fresh from Earth. One of our ships was going to make the run, but it had mechanical issues and stopped here; we don’t want to risk losing the cargo. It would be worth a small fortune if you would finish the run for us.” The captain explains.

“I get paid small fortunes all of the time.” George smirks.

“Alright, a moderate fortune then!”

George sighs and hangs his head, gripping his brow with a hand and rubbing his temples.

“Let’s take a look at this cargo...” He relents.

Leading George toward a pair of odd looking olive drab crates with large canisters attached to one side, his crew follow loyally behind. Raising a hand George stops all of them in their tracks. He follows the terrorist captain past his soldiers as more crates, possibly hundreds, come into view. His arm remains draped over May, whom he always keeps close. Following the Con-Tali captain, they listen as the terrorist rambles on.

“Normally, we don’t deal in this kind of cargo, but we have a base on Hyperion that mines water for another base that we have on Titan. We have to keep our Titan facility hidden, for obvious reasons, so it’s in the desert; we don’t have access to the lakes and whatnot. Some beautiful lakes on Titan, too. Inland seas really! Anyway, the base is run by a fairly small crew. It’s not even a base per se but sort of a modified-“

“Does this story have a point?” May rudely interrupts, quickly growing impatient.

“Right, well, we decided to supplement our workforce, and the few agents still on board also need entertainment. Luckily, we found a solution.”

Approaching the leftmost crate, the Con-Tali captain leans forward and flips a clear plastic cover that protects a shiny green button. Pressing the button, the automated lid of the crate lifts a few centimeters and slides open, making a subtle swooshing noise. A plume of smoke, possibly steam, emerges from the crate as florescent light sticks imbedded in interior side panels begin to glow. May gasps in surprise, covering her snout with both hands.

“What the fuck?!” George exclaims.

“Yeah...” The captain grins.

Lying in the crate is a Voeldahn woman, completely naked and strapped to a removable gurney. With the synthetic bindings pulled tightly over her ankles, thighs, wrists, upper arms, waist, and two going across her chest,

above and below her breasts, she would be unable to move, if she were awake. Tubes run from the tank attached to the side and into an I.V. stuck into her left arm, as well as a feeding tube in her left side. An airtight oxygen mask covers her short snout as a machine within the crate regulates her breathing.

The brown fur of the feline Voeldahn is matted from sweat, a result of the airtight compartment not allowing the expulsion of the life support system's residual heat. A musty smell floods their nostrils, causing May to briefly turn away. At first, she appears to have succumbed, but a facial twitch confirms that she is still alive.

"I'm going to assume that she's not your usual call-girl." George comments.

"Nah. Just a slave we bought from a contact on Earth." The captain answers.

"I didn't know slavery was still a thing." May remarks.

"Of course! It's the second oldest profession. She'll be practicing the first." The captain grins.

"... Lovely." George murmurs.

"There aren't many of these though. What we really need are workers. There's a man in the other one, but I don't know how good his equipment is; I'd hate to upstage you in front of your girl." The captain teases.

He pats George's chest with the back of his hand, hoping for an amused response. George turns to the captain, glaring at him.

"Ha! He'd probably have to be a horse Voeldahn." May laughs.

"Oh, damn." The captain's brow raises in surprise.

"Alright, knock it off." George growls.

"Sorry, little bear. Just coming to your rescue." May coos.

"So... For a moderate fortune, will you do it?"

"... How moderate is 'moderate'?"

"On top of your previously agreed upon pay of 2,500,000 for the weapons, we'll add another 10,000,000."

"Well now!" George can't help but grin. "How many crates do you have?"

"All that you see, which is exactly 200."

The crew stand by and wait, watching as the Con-Tali captain seals the crate and shakes George's hand. Charging a credit chit and handing it to him, the captain motions to his men and brings them in while George and May return to the crew. Climbing back aboard the cargo lift, they help the terrorists unload their weapons while power loaders bring over and stack the olive drab crates, identical to the two that the captain displayed. After several hours of work, the cargo lift is loaded with all 200 crates, each containing a sedated slave.

The crew ride the lift back up into the cargo hold. Garin calls over the ship's intercom, warning Ein who begins preparing the ship for takeoff. As he presses the buttons that prime the engines, George suddenly calls over the intercom and asks both he and Kira to join them in the cargo hold. Kira flies out of her seat, beating Ein to the hold by a solid minute. As he enters, he finds Kira sitting on the floor only a few feet from George. She is unable to sit atop the cargo as she often does; the crates are designed to latch together and the stack is far too high, easily 8 feet tall.

Using their own power lifter, Garin pulls a single crate at random, bringing it down from the top and setting it on the floor for George to display to the crew. Gathering around the crate, George clears his throat.

"Alright, now before you say anything, I didn't pack these crates and they aren't labeled." He cryptically warns.

Several of them raise their brows, wondering why that even matters. Flipping the protective cover and pressing the green button, the crate door lifts slightly and slides open, as the other did before. The smoke clears and the lights flicker and glow brighter, revealing the strapped in, naked body of a Voeldahn female. With rabbit-like features and sweaty, matted black fur, she sleeps with her wavy black hair running down to her shoulder.

"Woah..." Ein remarks.

“Ooh! She’s pretty!” Kira comments.

“Hell yeah, she is!” Prat exclaims as he leans closer.

Rakshasa leans over and carefully examines the woman’s body, bearing a striking resemblance to the slave within. Save for Rakshasa’s dyed blue hair, the two golden earrings in her lower left ear and her golden belly button ring, she could be the sleeping woman’s twin.

“Hey Rocky. Is this a friend of yours?” Prat teases.

“No.” She answers in a dry monotone.

“So, what’s the pay?” Colette calmly asks.

“I imagine it’s substantial. A woman this beautiful would sell for a high price.” Rakshasa comments.

“Aren’t we full of ourselves.” Garin remarks.

“Merely stating a fact.” She grins.

“They’re not all women. I’m told that most of them are men to be used as workers.” George explains.

“Yeah, I’ll bet.” Prat snickers.

Before George can continue, Donovan steps back, slowly shaking his head.

“What’s wrong?” George asks.

“I don’t know how I feel about this...”

“Oh great, we got another Marcus.” Prat grumbles.

“Shut your fucking mouth, Prat, and watch how you speak about him!” George growls.

Prat leans back, holding up his hands in surrender.

“How did she even wind up in there? She doesn’t look like a junky or a criminal.” Donovan asks.

“I don’t know and I don’t care. We’re doing a job and it pays an ass-load.” George replies.

“That’s a valid point. What if she’s missed?” Kira adds.

“We’re headed to Hyperion.” George laughs. “No one will ever look there, and if she’s found and saved, she won’t remember us. We didn’t kidnap her, drug her and stick her in a crate. We just moved it.”

“I can live with that.” May chirps.

“So can I.” Kira nods.

“Would you be okay with this if she were a human?” Donovan presses.

“Uh, yeah!” George smirks.

“You’re awesome.” Garin remarks to George.

“You know that race doesn’t mean anything to me, man. This is just a job.”

Donovan sighs, running his hands over his dread-locked hair as he pulls the strands back. With his face still looking into the opened crate, he turns his eyes toward his captain.

“Oh, man... I will never forgive your ass for this shit. This is some fucked up, repugnant shit.” Donovan replies.

“What about now?” George asks.

He holds up a portable credit chit reader and primes a chit for the payment, giving the dark-skinned human 1,250,000 credits.

“Forgive and forget, right?! That’s what I always say!” Donovan chirps, taking the chit.

“Mhm...” Prat grins.

George silently laughs at Donovan’s sudden shift in demeanor before taking out more credit chits. He pays the rest of his crew, who promptly forget about the woman in the box, all except for Prat. He leans in, placing his snout near the human’s ear.

“Hey, do you think they’ll miss just one crate?” He whispers.

“Oh yeah. I’d miss that crate a whole lot.” George quietly replies.

“Damn...” Prat sighs.

“Maybe some other time, buddy.”