

Terra-Reforming

By: RaddaRaem

“So what kinda spiel did you dole out this time around?” Stifling a yawn, the ferret let his gaze dip back and forth between the touch monitor at his waist and the camera feed hovering just above eye level. Yellow pings rippled out along the coarse but interactive sheet of plastic that his knees knocked against. They lapped against the tiny green block signifying their ship.

Heavy footsteps thumped loudly against the narrow steel walkway that ran the length of their spaceworthy vessel’s spine. Arms pressed closely to her sides the lioness grunted at the claustrophobic quarters. “Took the ol’ volcano insurance approach.” She flared her nostrils at the snort she received in response. “You laugh but that assbackwards approach has snagged us more jobs ‘din any other,” the feline pointedly remarked.

Turning his attention back to his artificial eyes on the outside the ferret lazily maneuvered out of the path of orphaned asteroids. Static coursed through the camera display as it rapidly switched feeds to the starboard side and visually confirmed the barrage of ice and rocks harmlessly passing by. He sighed when she took to reciting what had sealed the latest deal.

“Orbital defense? Doomsday deterrence? Nah nah nah let me set it straight with ya. We here at PlanetPutty are all about prevention.” Toothy grin spread wide upon her cheeks, the lioness took to wagging her thick and meaty index fingers before her. Casually conducting the imagined crowd she took to guiding them into place. “Now, it’s not mah place to perpetuate rumors but... we’ve all heard about the piss-poor jobs certain unnamed mining companies have conducted as of late. Their planet cracking operations leaving solar systems strewn with refuse and potentially catastrophic messes left behind for their celestial neighbors to contend with.” She narrowed her eyes in smug satisfaction. Already, she could see her anticipated audience nodding reluctantly in acknowledgement. “Ruptured gas giants spewin’ clouds of metallic hydrogen and neon that waft along on solar winds. Shattered planets of ice, moon sized fragments lazily orbitin’ around an exhausted core, at risk for slingshottin’ their forgotten fragments out of their very solar systems and towards unsuspectin’ population centers.”

Rolling his eyes, the ferret focused on his duties. He tapped at the rectangular icon scooching forward on his navigation panel. Green ripples surged out from it as the probes that circled their ship gradually increased the radius of their orbit and took to actively scanning their immediate environment. Bright red blips pocked the tiptop of the screen. A minefield of debris, loosely held together by a mixture of static electricity, magnetism, and gravity lay dead ahead. He flipped through his camera feeds to confirm a visual.

“Now don’t get me wrong,” the lioness brushed her knuckles against her generous chest as she subtly pruned back the sense of urgency in her spiel. “The chances of any of dat happening are fairly slim. I mean. It’s been nearin’ a century now since your neck of the neighborhood was ripped open. You know what they say though. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Or, well, kilotons of it in your case. Given that the HyperCorp, the name escapes me, that pillaged those hunks of rock has long since folded there’s no one on the hook to clean up the mess they made.” She arched her brows. This

was about the time when her audience sighed bitterly. Hell, her favorite lil' catsnake already was. The amount of effort that would be required to find the parties responsible, much less coerce them into righting their wrongs, would be herculean.

"Are you quite done yet?" A resigned groan sputtered out between his lips when he received his answer.

The job was anything but glamorous. After all, their work presided solely of cleaning other people's fuckups. "We here at PlanetPutty, for a reasonable cost, will fix that right up for you. We dun care who picked apart what planet. Just dat we're the ones to put it back together." Following that came to the idle chatter and haggling. Which wasn't really haggling so much as providing a quote and walking out the instant anything besides the number she provided was offered.

They always tended to ping back a day or two later in a much more cooperative mode.

"So long as you're enjoying yourself," Kayden replied. Lips curled up into a lopsided grin he exhaled through his teeth. "I can just as easily have us gifted these jobs. No questions, no theatrics."

A low rumble rose up from the lioness' throat. "That's scummy and you know it. Wouldn't you rather wanna be known through word of mouth?"

The ferret quietly drew in the stale air that had been filtered thousands of times over through the ship's ventilation. He dismissively tossed an arm out to his side and gestured to the electrical tape and plastic rings that struggled to keep their vessel's insides from regurgitating out onto the flight deck. Interior paneling was more of a 'nice to have' than a necessity. Black wiring, fiber cables, and a handful of diodes hummed and buzzed at Kayden's head and sides. "Can't say I'm terribly interested how we make a name for ourselves. Just that we do so." His ears flicked against a bundle of cables that sagged low. "Sooner we move our way on up from this ion powered coffin the better."

"Hmmmph." She rubbed her broad shoulders back and forth against the cramped hallway's quarters. Strands of her fur caught between the metal plates and painfully tugged themselves free from her mountainous biceps. "Jus' sayin. Better that than someone sussin' out that we're quietly and consistently tasked with cleaning up after a certain set of powerful people. That's not the kinda leverage I want someone havin' over us." Arms crossed about her chest, Illia pulled her lips down into a frown. Eyes half lidded, she spoke. "You know I dun like these 'friends' of yours in high places, Kay."

He tilted his head back and clamped his teeth together. "We've kept our hands clean enough picking up the pieces left behind by no name nobodies. Nothing sketchy about righting the wrongs of the long dead and long forgotten." Kayden furrowed his brows when he felt her worried gaze bore into the back of his head. "Look. It's not like we're encouraging bad habits here. These mining hypercorps have been trashing planets and uninhabited solar systems for centuries. Us going around and cleaning up their messes for them isn't going to change that."

"If not that then it feels like we're enablin' them," Illia huffed back. "It's an awfully convenient business model is all I'm sayin'. Them makin' messes, purposefully or not, and the two us jus waitin' to swoop in and undo the damage done."

"We're opportunists. Not colluders," Kayden quietly decreed.

Illia shook her head side to side. This was about as far as he ever let her push it. "I jus worry, is all."

"I know you do," the ferret groaned guiltily. "...We're a legitimate enterprise now. You can concede that much, right?"

"Only after I picked up the slack where your conscience left off," the lioness teasingly rumbled. She tried to bring her hands up behind her head in a gloating fashion but ended up rumbling grumpily when her bloated arms caught against her sides.

"Illia, if I can't even stretch out in here what made you think you could?" Eyes focused straight ahead, fluorescent flickers of blues, greens, and reds illuminating his face, a satisfied grin creased the ferret's lips.

Inhaling and exhaling in a controlled and steady manner, Illia slowly brought her arms back down to her sides. "Jus' preppin' that's all. With another couple gigs under our belts we might finally be able to afford something better than this metal coffin." The lioness simply stood in place and relaxed her muscles. Her blooming biceps pressed against the cramped confines of the hallway. Hills of muscle and fur compressed against steel plates and the warm plastic veins that tingled and coursed with electricity all throughout the alleged Kitty Coffin.

Kayden puffed out a cheek. His padded finger plopped against the ship's icon once more and the drones returned to nest along the Kitty Coffin's lead lined, if not blocky, exterior. "Would be nice to get something with windows..." the lanky ferret acknowledged. Monitors displaying the health of himself, Illia, and the very ship lined where he would have hoped to see windows. Behind them lay the backside of the radiation proof plating that clung to every crook and crevice of their ship.

"See! You want it jus' as much as I do." Clad in a tanktop that left precious little desired, Illia padded up behind her pilot and wrapped her arms around his chair. Her soft thick triceps pressed against his chest while her scruffy chin scratched against his noggin.

The ferret was nothing if grateful for the fluorescent and buzzing waves of red that slowly swallowed up the panel before him. Did a fine job masking his welling blush. "Shouldn't you be prepping to go planetside?" Kayden's head bobbed side to side as his loomy lioness scratched at his skull.

Illia let loose a bass and bellowing purr as the Kayden clenched his bony fingers around her own swollen digits. "Nah nah nah, see, I've been keeping track," she teased. She tapped a clawed finger against the side of her head. In response, one of the monitors overhead flickered. The display changed to show the recent history of who had PlannetPuttied and when.

"Even so... that's not how we do things," Kayden smirked when he felt his lioness' growl reverberating in his chest. "Each job has a dedicated-"

"Dedicated pilot and dedicated PlanetPuttier. I know." She resentfully tightened her embrace.

Sinking deep into the frame of his chair, stuffing and cracked leather slowly engulfing his limbs, Kayden refused to budge. A disappointed sigh signaled his victory.

"Fine," Illia grumped. "What's tha ETA?" Leaning forward against the back of the pilot's seat, the base of it groaned as the bolts and rivets locking it in place tugged up.

“Half-an-hour give or take. Should be plenty enough time to do triple checks on the diagnostics,” the ferret replied. His head tilting forward as Illia came to rest upon it, Kayden’s lithe fuzzy fingers tabbed between windows on the navigation panel. The touchscreen halved the real estate afforded to the spatial map and brought up walls of text alongside it. He hurriedly tapped at the documents as they loaded on screen. “That should be all of them.”

The lioness’ ears flicked as a chirp rang out in her ear and three new messages appeared in the HUD of her vision. She blinked once. Her pupils glowed green as she projected the contents of Kayden’s parcels onto the world around her and methodically scanned over the checklists. Illia blinked twice to disengage the AR projection. “Looks good tuh me.” Her lips tilted into a lopsided scowl. “PlanetPuttyin’ is on you next time. Promise?”

Kay brought his hand back and gently papped at her cheeks. “Promise.”

Illia’s eyes regained their natural amber hue as she leaned forward and nibbled at his stout ears. “See ya on the flip side.” Disengaging her hug, she slowly lumbered towards her destination.

Her back to flight deck, if you could even call it that, the lioness shuffled her way towards the back of the ship. She passed a handful of sliding doors along the way, her broad bulk accidentally activating each and every one. There was the bathroom; boring but functional.

BWIP

That’d be the kitchen. Errr... well. Replicator. It was a hole in the wall that spat food out at them. Did what it needed to. Which right now consisted of conjuring up a protein shake for the road. Another chirp sounded out from within Illia’s ear as she mentally synced up with the Kitty Coffin’s onboard computer. Hand held out before her, she caught the frothy brew that generated near instantaneously. She resisted the urge to imbibe it and carefully kept on a shuffling.

An errant bump of her booty revealed her and Kay’s shared bedroom. Two mattresses piled on top of each other upon the ground with a lioness shaped indent punching firmly into the memory foam of both. All accentuated by piles of clothes shoved into the corner of the room. Heeee. She practically was Kay’s mattress at this point.

With a tunk she squeezed free from the cramped corridor. Illia errantly sipped at her shake, kilocalories of protein and a serving of nanite slush flowing down into her gullet. She growled as her footsteps thumped ever louder, the nanites actively massaging and enlarging her muscles via the food fuel at their disposal, while the lioness patrolled what was the roomiest part of the ship. Blinking once, eyes going green as she did so, Illia brought up her first checklist.

She turned her attention towards one of six nondescript spheres, that just barely dwarfed her in size, littered about the landing bay. Shutters and yellow strobe lights lined the wall behind her. “No obvious damage...” the lioness mumbled as she placed a hand upon it and slowly circled round. In her eyes the sphere took on a green hue and a large transparent checkmark hovered above it. This repeated itself until each and every one was glistened with three golden checkmarks hovering above them.

“First check’s all clear, Kay,” Illia spoke aloud as she held a hand up to her ear.

“Copy that,” the ferret’s voice, laced with static, vibrated through her eardrums. “Let me know once you’ve completed a check on the gravity tethers and I’ll open the shutters.” No sooner had they come did the cracks and snaps humming in her ear cease.

Bobbing her head left and right, Illia skulked about the bay. She devoured her shake, edible plastic cup and all, and enjoyed a noticeable lack of fur covered by her tanktop in response. The lioness scratched at her sculpted abdominals while she poked and prodded about. Impatiently, she awaited her corneal implants to reset the active checklist and move onto the next one.

“There we go!” she rumbled in delight as the green highlights vanished from pods. A large blue holographic palm appeared upon the curved metal surface of the nearest one. Broad kitty palm pressed against it, electric whirrs sounded out as it waited for her to stand clear. Heavy thumping paws plunked backwards against the cold steel floor to a safe distance.

TUNK

Metal crashed against metal raucously as the pod popped open. Shoulders bunched up, Illia forced her way inside and plunked her titantic toosh down within its warm, wooly, and uniformly eggshell interior. Plump paws pressed against the curved walls before her and knees pressed against her chest, the lioness hummed and huffed while she slowly synced with its systems. A single chirp sounded out when she did and dozens of lines of data made themselves manifest before her eyes.

“Oxygen levels... good. Water... good. Nothin’ found by the antivirus. Thrusters are fine.” A translucent panel, visible only to her augmented reality equipped eyes, appeared before her palm. It was circular in shape, five glowing white points dotted upon its surface. She tapped at one.

VIRRRRRRRRRRR

A beam of purple extended out from her pod to the one selected. The metallic spheres slowly pulled together. “Gravity tether connection between Alpha and Epsilon checks out,” Illia casually noted aloud as her AR checklist updated in response. “Alpha and Sigma are fine. Same with Alpha and Beta.” Beeps, whirrs, virrs, and boops echoed within the landing bay as she methodically checked, double checked, and triple checked the connections between the pods and her own supplies.

“Kay, gravity tethers check out.” She grunted when her bloated knees pressed firmly against her generous chest as the pod door locked shut. Her vision faltered for a second as her checklist vanished. In its stead the levels of air, water, and energy that remained along with status of the other pods came to occupy her vision. Illia blinked in irritation to minimize them and relegate everything, save her oxygen and fuel stores, to the periphery of her eyeballs.

Blaring sirens reverberated through the landing bay as the strobe lights kicked alive and drowned the steel plated room in a yellow glow. The cacophonous symphony was accompanied by a deafening crash when a wall of metal slammed down to separate the remainder of the ship from what was soon to be the cold vacuum of space.

“Opening shutter doors,” the ferret calmly droned into her ears.

Eyes half lidded, Illia's ears flicked about in anticipation. There it was. The roaring whistle of decompression. She tensed up slightly as her body violently rocked back and forth within the plush lined pod. It, and the others, jettisoned out into the empty embrace of space.

Rolling her shoulders, Illia leaned side to side against her cramped quarters while her plump toes impatiently took to twiddling. These AR implants were positively ancient. It took seconds, entire seconds, to load up new interfaces sometimes. Absolutely pitiful. "Finally!" she rolled her head back and groaned as the final checklist came online.

"Let me know when you're ready to be towed," Kayden's voice crackled in her ears. Back on the flight deck the ferret lazily guided the Kitty Coffin back towards Illia. The blue glow of the ion engines ebbed as he banked the rectangular death trap to the left and casually circled around her.

One by one, Illia engaged the gravity tethers until all five connections were active at once. She slowly adjusted the alignment of the beams, pushing and pulling at the pods until they had arranged themselves into a five pointed star with her at the center. The bulky lioness, squeezed tight within her pod's puffy embrace, repeatedly killed and reconnected the links between the metal spheres. "Lemme at it, Kay."

Hovering the Kitty Coffin above the connected series of pods, Kayden flicked on the ship's tractor beam. Waves of light, stardust rippling along them, pulsed out from beneath the spaceworthy vessel. It bathed the half dozen metallic spheres beneath in a pale blue glow. "We'll be hitting the debris field in... three minutes give or take." Lurching forward, the ferret guided his ship towards the ruined remnants of the rocky terrestrial planet floating out amongst the abyss.

Illia urfed as her body continued to bloat courtesy of her prior meal. "Mighta overdone it on the kilocalorie count..." the lioness huffed as her thunderous thighs clapped against each other while her billowing biceps pressed firmly against her ribs. "Let's make this a quickie, Kay," Illia grumbled in response to the ever crampening confines of her workspace. Her expression flattened at the crackled snickering that rang out in her ears. "I dun have to wait for you to escape the pull of the gravity tethers once I get started yunno," she flatly responded.

"And we're here." Off went the tractor beam as Kayden pulled a sharp turn and hurriedly distanced himself from the flotilla of pods sailing steadily forward.

"Thought as much," the lioness snarked. Inertia hurtling her onward, she quietly waited out her partner's departure. "You clear?"

There was pause on the ferret's end of the comm link. "...Now I am. You're good, Illia." Turning his attention to his visual feeds Kayden toggled between the cameras. There it was. A flash of purple. He zoomed in on stern side view.

A field of purple, a veritable well of artificial gravity, made itself manifest around each of the individual pods. Dust and pebble sized fragments lazily found themselves pulled into the orbit of those spheres and caked against the outer boundaries of the fields themselves. With a gentle touch, Illia extending and retracting the push and pull of the pods from their piloted center stage, those planetary pieces were coaxed into coating the links between the individual pools of gravity. As the mass of the

Pods increased so too did their gravitational pull. Rocks. Boulders. Larger and larger pieces of the planet deferred to the pull of the pods and slowly embedded themselves into the star shaped mass.

Eyes darting back and forth between the Kitty Coffin's eyes and the navigation panel, Kayden dedicated more and more screen space to ogling the handiwork of his coworker. The pointed tips of the star elongated. Pulses of purple punched through the tons of rock coalescing around each and every pod as mountainous slabs of stone collided into shifting mass. The star's pointed tips grew soft as they thickened. Its shape gradually giving way to something more familiar. More intimate.

A humanoid conglomeration of stone and stardust loomed large before the plundered planet as it drew ever more mass into itself. Its nubby hands sprouted fingers. Defined spires that twiddled against the purple palms that held them. Titanic twiddling toes took shape upon those equally nubby legs. Mountain ranges crashing and smashing against each other while the gravity wells parted at the heels.

Kayden smiled shyly and scratched at his warming cheeks. That chest grew ever more curvaceous. Generous. As continental shelves were amassed into it only the faintest sparks of light could be seen in what would serve as its tummy. Somewhere inside there Illia was crafting herself this new and star struck form. Then last, but not least, was the brains behind it. Rounded outcroppings, ears no doubt, came to be on that amorphous head as the lioness used the pool of gravity nestled inside it to reshape it to her vision. That long muzzle. Those sunken cheeks. All that remained was to... oop she was already on it. Gaping chasms had been hollowed out for the eyes.

Purple fog lights glared out from them and served as stark visual indicators of the kitty colossus' line of sight. "Annnnd dun!" With a blink Illia launched two probes from the northernmost pod. The tiny machines swam furiously against the waves of gravity that lapped against them until they came to rest among those empty eye sockets. Whirring to life they initiated their camera feed.

The lioness' vision went black. Waves of white and static coursed along her dampened vision as her visual implants synced up with the probes. A blink or two later and her sight had been restored. Down she stared at her latest job. She brought a hand up before her face and gently waved it side to side. A string of code scrolled across her field of view as the probes and her implants quickly rectified some lag.

"Pretty as a picture," Illia marveled aloud at her now rocky skin. Her planetary avatar's form flapped its lips. Given the lack of air, and lungs, all that could be heard were the vibrations and thooms of mountainous lips crashing against one another. Letting her arms drape down to her sides she flexed her massive fingertips. Palms pulsed outward she mentally engaged the thrusters on the pods nested within her paws and hands. Pillars of fire shot from the looming lioness' limbs while she slowly took to circling the planet.

Turning her head this way and that, those fog lights that were her eyes cutting through the dark swatches of space, Illia reached out at whatever pieces of planet were highlighted within her vision. A colossal and country sized hand reached out at a moon sized fragment. Fingers clutching tightly at it, clouds of dust belching up into what would have been its atmosphere if it had one, the lioness brought it crashing down into the planet from which it originated. Ripples of energy coursed through the shattered

sphere as it angrily hummed. With her free hand Illia collected what had been displaced into the gravitation pull of her palm and just as effortlessly embedded it back into where it belonged.

“Enjoyin’ the show?” the lioness quietly mouthed to her ogling observer some many miles away.

“Do you have to ask?” Kayden answered her question with a question. He felt his chest grow light as his heart fluttered at the giggle he received in response. Even if it was routine it had an inextinguishable charm to it. Watching his colossal gal pal, in between fits and spurts of static, circle a patchwork planet. Casually smashing it back together and leaving miles wide indentations and craters on its surface. It was definitely much more satisfying to take it in than to participate in it. ...Probably why Illia had all but guilted him into taking on the PlanetPutty mantle for the next job.

Every piece of debris that registered in Illia’s visual feeds registered less than a mile in diameter following repeated meteoric slams. “That’s the worst of it,” she sighed in relief from within her command pod nestled deep within the looming lion avatar’s chest. Reaching her hand out to the stars she scraped her fingers at the endless expanse. Her palm pulsed purple as what refuse remained was pulled into it. Errant slaps and pats of the planet put those remaining pieces and parts back where they belonged. This repeated itself following a couple more orbits of the planet.

Sighing in relief, Illia allowed herself to fall to its surface. Her apocalyptic ass touched down violently upon its reshaped surface and sent catastrophic shockwaves rippling across the lifeless plains of stone. “Whenever you’re ready, Kay.” One by one she disengaged the gravity wells surrounding each pod. The rocky avatar’s eyes went dark as its limbs atrophied. Billions upon trillions of tons of stone shed itself from her form and collapsed onto the planet’s surface. Amongst the rising plumes of dust Illia’s starbound form withered away entirely until only the skeletal flotilla of pods remained.

Patting at his chest, Kayden steadied his flustered nerves. The cloud of debris surrounding their latest job was done. No exposed fissures. No window into the core itself. It was a planet. Rough. Manhandled. Ugly to behold. But it was a proper planet once more. “Another fine job, hun. I’ll pick you up planetside shortly.”