

Communicate –A Thursday Prompt

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Day 1:

Space is big. Rocks are small. Ships are small. That all being so, this cats small Singleship navigating in big space just got buggered by a small rock. Now space is also unfriendly. So when bad things happen out here, they usually happen energetically, and they happen permanently. Space and Fate sometimes team up to be cruel.

Vex makes a living as a freelance rockjack, prospecting and collecting high value rare earth rich asteroids in and about the main belt. She is the full owner of the singleship 'Neodymium:HAG', a 2 person (usually one) mining vessel that can latch onto asteroids up to one half klick in length, assay the ore value, and then using its large hypermotor nudge it into an industrial parking orbit for sale to the refining market.

Rare earth asteroids are as rare as the rare earths they contain, making them very lucrative. The big mining operations don't bother with them because for them the volume of targets makes them unviable financially to go after, but for small scale freelancers they are the honey pot, a handful of good rocks and they have a long comfortable retirement after a year or two in space. The downside of course without the massive support structure of a big mining operation, the likelihood of living long enough to get that handful of rocks is a crap shoot. Vex rolled snake eyes this time.

Vex was homing in on a good candidate asteroid and was initiating the grappling process when the alarms started sounding. There was no perception of an impact, or explosion, no pressure drop or power failure. But the christmas tree of indicator lights on the panel made Vex's fur poof out in dread that she was a dead cat. Systems offline and irreparable: Hyperdrive, Hyperwave radio, Lightspeed radio.

A singleship typically has a 20day supply of air and food, Vex was 10 days into the assay of this rock. The flight plan has the HAG scheduled to be back at the station in 10 days, and traffic control won't go looking for lone freelancers till they are 3 to 5 days late. With no communication she can't call for help. With the hyper motor gone the thrusters alone will get the HAG back into the traffic lanes in about 2 months. If the rock had holed the crew compartment she would have been dead in moments, now she has 10 days, perhaps 11 to think about dying of CO2 poisoning and suffocation.

Day2:

Vex took off her EVA helmet and stuck it on the rack. Smoothing her ruffled fur she sat heavily into the control couch to assess her options. The rock had put a clean hole right through the hypershuttle nexus. Nothing but 3 weeks in drydock would fix it. By a terrible stroke of bad luck the impact deflected the rock by just enough to totally destroy the hyperwave resonator, which by a brilliant layout design was right next to the traditional light speed radio amplifier which was taken out when the resonator exploded from the impact. The emergency transponder worked, but its range was only about 5000 clicks, and the HAG is about a month or two from being in range of anyone who could hear it. Vex licked her nose and set about vectoring to the station.

Her tail twitched, her fur still rippling in agitation and panic trying to envelope her mind. Vex closed her eyes, and began a zen meditation to regain her calm. Death is absolute certainty with panic, she can't get off her nut just yet.

The drilling laser! Vex's eyes snapped open. She could feed the transponder signal into the laser's pulse modulator, and the laser has more than enough power to reach the station. But gods! She would need to modify the beam director controls to achieve sub micro-radian pointing accuracy, AND someone would have to be looking for an out of band lasercom signal from an atypical lasercom line of sight! Shit! A nothing chance to get out of this jam, but it's that, or go take a walk outside without the EVA suit and be done with it. Vex began working.

Day7:

The drilling laser is online and tracking on the station to within 500 nanoradians. The downside is now Vex has nothing else to do but wait for the air to run out.

Day 8:

The CO2 scrubber warning light came on. Air is still good but it's a friendly warning that you better be under 2 days from making port. It happens to be the law to declare a flight plan with your return a minimum 3 days under your air endurance capacity. Freelancers however ignore that law, as the ship doesn't make money sitting in port, so they stay out right to the physical limit and accept the risk.

Day 11:

CO2 reading at 4.5%. If it stays at that level Vex has about 8 hours of consciousness left. However at the rate it was rising, she had about 4 hours before succumbing to respiratory acidosis. No sign her call for help was heard, this was it. Thoughts of her life passed through her mind, remembering her folks back home as a kitten in Montana. They were so proud when she passed her captain's exam and got her certification. They had helped with the down payment for the HAG. The Hag got paid for with the first rock she brought in, and had 2 more sizable rocks

since then. This was going to be the retirement rock if the assay panned out. She would sell the HAG and get a gig starting a courier business from lunar station to TerraFirma station, perhaps get a teaching position at the astrogation college. What really started bothering her is that cute tomcat she met at the 'Delta Vee Bar & Grill'. He was some shy tabby with a really cute pink nose, he could barely look her in the eye or say more the a few words at a time. He was a new engineer or something working for one of the big operators. She can't even remember his name. She wished she could remember his name.

Day11+ 3 hours:

Vex was slipping in an out of consciousness now, convulsions haven't started yet, but it can't be long now. Can't see very well now, were those running lights flashing off in the distance? Naw, just too tired, so tired....Blackness.

They were running lights that were in the distance. DMS fire and rescue grappled with the HAG and pulled a pale and matted Vex out and got her into the autodoc. Turns out a few days previously a certain engineering tomcat with a pink nose back at the station was practicing his hobby of searching for gamma ray burst events using the stations university sponsored telescope array. He happened to have been searching in that sector when the search software found the emergency beacon waveform on top the spectral band of a drilling laser. His name was Jax.