



Fault- A Thursday Prompt

By S.W.Ohm

Vex was sitting in the Commanders seat of her recently acquired Blue Bessy, an in-system freighter. Bessy was hauling a full load from Nadir Station to Terra Lagrange 1 Station.

Nadir is where the interstellar heavies come and go, then their massive cargos get carried piecemeal by the system haulers to the various stations within the system and from there the ‘trucks’ take them dirt side.

“Shit!” exclaimed Vex as her alert panel was registering a fault. Warm hold, Bay 5, O2 detect. And; Warm Hold, Bay 5, CO2 detect.

“What’s up, babe?” asked Jax, as his feline form stepped into the bridge with a beverage bulb in each hand giving one to his mate.

Her tail brushed against his thigh in thanks for the drink, “Got a fault alarm in bay 5, warm. Looks like another damn rat chewed through the seals in a transportainer.”

The Bessy had two cargo holds, a cold hold that is mostly exposed to space with bays along a framework superstructure, used for containers that are tagged for ship to ship transfer. The warm hold is for ship to station dock transfers and for perishable cargos. The Warm hold is kept at one quarter atmosphere pressure of dry nitrogen gas as a fire suppressant and for cleanliness. Sometimes vermin get bottled up in the transportainers dirt side and go along for the ride, and if they survive they get bored and chew through the linings. Sloppy work by the dock crew who loaded the container, and will have to be reported. Right now though the regs say an oxygen leak in the hold is a safety hazard and has to be logged and secured before the Bessy will be allowed to dock.

“Right, I’ll go warm up the suits” Said Jax.

“Thanks, Bunny.” Vex said as she padded his side with her tail again. Jax smiled at the use of her nickname for him, which according to Vex, was not because he looked like a rabbit, but because of her opinion of his, well, what he sits on. His ears always redden when she uses the name in public.” I’ll be along in a minute.”

The hold is called ‘warm’ only because it’s not quite as cold as deep space, but not a whole lot warmer, kept at a regulation -55C. To enter the hold required an E-suit, but the ones used on ship, for reasons of economy, are not rated for space use, just enough to keep you from suffocating and, mostly, freezing to death while in the hold. Suited up, the pair made their chilly way over to bay 5. they noticed right away there was an icy patch along one of the forward seams. Typing the emergency access code the seal was released and logged. Vex then cycled the lock and opened the access door. The pair was immediately blasted with a wave of condensation fog.

“The hell?” Exclaimed Vex.

“That’s not supposed to happen!” said Jax as he wiped the ice now trying to form on his face plate.

“No shit, it’s not!” said Vex. Transportainers (except for environmentally regulated ones) were specified to have no more than one half atmosphere of standard air, at no more than 1% relative humidity. This container had at least three quarters an atmosphere and it was humid! The shipper bill is recorded as inspected to be complying with the standard! What bullshit was this? The shipper also claimed it contained medical goods from Proxima. Jax shined a light into the darkness, and the beam stopped on a form at the back amidst a pile of blankets and packing insulation. Stepping closer they saw what it was.

“Fuck me!” swore Jax. They were looking at a lifeless body in an E-bubble and emergency survival kit. The bubble was half deflated, and in this pressure that means whoever was inside it, if not already dead, soon would be. It looked that there was an issue with the survival kit not long before the fault alarms had sounded, depending on how long the faulty seal lasted he could have been unconscious for ten or twenty minutes.

“Holy shit, he’s a Quemrann!” said Vex.

“I’ve got vitals, we need to de ass this guy to the ‘doc right now!” said Jax. The pair, as quickly as they could, hauled up the limp form and carried him out of the hold. The Bessy was an in-system freighter, and so it really didn’t have much in the way of amenities, and the auto doc was little more than a fancy first aid station capable of only minor injuries and conditions. If their new friend here had any internal injuries or brain damage, they would likely be permanent, if not fatal. What desperate mess was this alien in to risk such suicidal stunt?

The Quemrann were a race of lizard-like marsupial-like aliens, fairly recently encountered by the Terrans, but known to several of the other space faring races, they are never seen in Terran systems except for high level diplomats. As they were hooking him up to the ‘doc they did notice he was a he, as he had a pouch. Male Quemranni had the lactating mammary glands that fed the tiny infants for 4 months sheltered in their pouch after the female gives birth.

He had an angular anthropomorphic scaly lizard like head, arms, hands and feet, and an alligator like tail, but the rest of his body was covered in a very soft felt, greenish tan in color with particular variations normally, however he was quite pale from hypoxia and hypothermia. Quemrann Estus was a world somewhat higher in gravity than Earth, about 1.2g surface gravity, and so her critters tended to be stocky and short, and quite strong in earth standard gravity.

“Look at this, V” said Jax, “he’s got a tat on his right forearm.”

“Bugger!” Vex exclaimed in shock. The tat was the shape of an inverted L rotated 45 degrees with an arc under the short arm and a circle above the apex. “The Cartel!”

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