

It was dark, I could feel myself enclosed on all sides in sticky wet mucus and veined flesh. But I didn't feel scared or alarmed, rather I felt calmed by the encasing pressure, safe and secure. I moved myself deeper into the flesh pocket as I felt the gentle massage of my host's pulse. But then I was thrown out of my serenity by a loud siren interspersed with Cole's frightened screeching.

"Everyone to the bridge, we've been hit by laser fire, I repeat we are under attack!" I could feel Aniya jump off her bunk and propel herself down the hallway with me still inside her pouch. It must have looked odd to anyone watching, a fat half-naked wolf taur with a second tail sticking out from under her groin, which was covered by a pair of taur-sized panties you perverts.

"What is going on?" It felt strange to hear Aniya's voice echo through her body like that, the extra pair of lungs in her lower body allow her quite the reverb.

"About a minute ago something fried one of our aft sensor pods. There wasn't any indication of a radiation storm and I picked up a heat signature 200 kilometers in that direction. So I took us behind the nearest asteroid." Cole's voice carried none of his usual jocularly, he was truly scared. "Where's Argen, ze is better at reading these sensors."

At that moment I felt a hand grab my tail. "Found zir," came Denal's voice as he yanked me out of the pouch. I burst out in a cloud of mucus and reached around to grab him for pulling me out of my hiding place, making sure to coat his fur in a nice layer of pouch slime. He cringed at the feeling and let me float there next to Aniya's backside. "Makers, for an asexual being you have some odd kinks Silver."

"Later." I did not feel inclined to explain, for at least the tenth time, that I did not consider my fondness for the interior of my crewmate to be sexual. Though to be honest I sometimes wondered if my adrenals did provide enough hormones for a proper sex drive and my brain had redirected it somewhere away from my lack of traditional reproductive organs. Anyways I wiped my hands off on Denal's coveralls and jumped over to a tablet to call up the sensor logs. Sure enough, they showed a heat signature following us since we left the asteroid where we had picked up the gold chunk. Unfortunately it didn't tell me much, it seemed we hadn't bothered much with active radar on that side of the ship, and now we were completely blind in that area thanks to our pursuer's precision shot. "Worthless, we need a better view of them to even know what we're up against. Can you try sending a drone out to the edge of the rock we're hiding behind?"

"Yeah, yeah, sure I'll launch one." Denal tried to avoid putting himself in contact with the slime I'd left on him as he went over to his console. We had half a dozen survey drones that Denal would frequently send out on arcs around asteroids we thought looked promising. They'd circle the rock a couple times, playing their radar over it and taking snapshots of the surface in multiple wavelengths, and transmit it back to our ship, saving a lot of time on prospecting for ores. He shot one out to swing around the asteroid we were currently using for cover and programmed it to scan outwards rather than at the asteroid. Meanwhile me and Aniya called up manual controls for our primary collision avoidance coilguns, hitting a stray rock with a fast-moving iron slug tended to get it out of the way a lot faster than melting it with a beam of concentrated light, and anyways lasers were a bit out of our price range.

The drone reached the far side of the asteroid and transmitted back a view of the region of space beyond. Radar imaging finally brought me a view of what I had been looking for in the first place, a small (relatively speaking, we were about twice as large thanks to the need for mining equipment and landers) cargo ship covered with laser turrets and a pair of long tubes that I had no reference for. It didn't seem to be moving as we scanned it. "It's like it's just waiting to see what we do."

Aniya had the first suggestion, "Maybe they're moving when we're not watching. Why don't we send the drone back out to see if they've come any closer." Denal punched in the commands and the drone flew back out to take a second look. It hadn't moved, however there was now another, smaller and much faster object moving out towards us.

"Incoming missile!" Cole screeched as the object swung around the asteroid heading straight for us. Panicked I switched the auto-tracking on my turret back on just as Aniya did the same. Registering the small, fast incoming object as a collision threat the automated systems sent streams of darts at the missile. Mere seconds from impact one of the darts ruptured the missile's fuel tanks and triggered an explosion that took out the explosive weapon entirely and sent shrapnel flying everywhere, thankfully not fast enough to do much damage to our ship.

I didn't understand how they had been able to lock onto us from the far side of an asteroid but before I could think of something another missile came in from the opposite side of the previous one. Aniya just barely managed to shoot that one down as well. Noticing the drone following the missile it came to me. "Denal, shut down the transmission to that drone! They're tracking it!"

The panda switched off the transmitter, then as an afterthought shut down all of our transmitters just to be safe. Now we could see nothing of the attacking ship, until either us or the pirates moved to our side of the asteroid we were blind.

"Now what?" Denal asked, evidently a bit scared now that we had just barely escaped death twice. I thought it was obvious, we wait for the pirates to get bored and leave. Unfortunately that wasn't the case, after half an hour of sitting there the enemy ship came up around the asteroid and began to approach us. As it drew nearer I saw docking arms unfold from the underside of the miniature freighter.

I panicked again, hastily aiming the gauss turret I was controlling at the pirate vessel I blasted away with a stream of iron. I saw a docking claw tear itself off and fly out into space, a laser turret shattered into a million shards of glass, then there was a puff of gas out of one of the holes I made in the main hull of the ship. But it still kept coming at us. "Move, move, move!"

Cole swung our ship away from the asteroid, the pirate ship continued on in the same direction it had been following the whole time. Of course, there being no friction in space you needed to fire retro-rockets in order to slow down before you hit anything, which didn't bode well for the crew of that ship. Either their control systems were damaged, or, as suggested by the gas vent I'd opened up, they were dead.

"I'm not picking up any signals from them." Cole stated as he moved the ship in for a closer look. I called up a spectroscopic analysis of the cloud streaming out of the ship, approximately 80% nitrogen and 20% oxygen, with traces of carbon dioxide and other trace gases. Plus ice crystals of a red fluid that appeared to contain a significant concentration of iron.

I dropped the tablet in shock, not quite the effect it has in gravity as it just hung there suspended in mid-air. "I killed somebody," I exclaimed in horror, "it's blood, I didn't just rupture their crew compartment, I shot someone and made them bleed out."

Cole pulled up some schematics of the enemy ship based on what we could see of it. "One person space truck, designed for short hops from one asteroid to another. Pilot sits in a polarized plexiglass bubble. You got lucky."

"Lucky?" Denal exclaimed, "do you know what the Cerean directorate does to anyone who kills someone?"

"Seizure of all assets and fifty years hard labor?" Aniya suggested, everyone who lived full or part time on Ceres knew the basic penalties for criminal acts. "But ze was acting in self-defense, they launched missiles at us."

"They don't care, there's nothing in the laws to make exceptions and the computerized judging systems follow the laws to the letter." This information about the consequences of my rash actions sent my adrenal glands into another overdrive, but since there was no one to fight this time I instead prepared for flight, right into Aniya's pouch, shoving her into the nearest wall. "That's not going to help, she's just as guilty as you are as far as the judges are concerned, for that matter we all are."

"Crap," I murmured from inside the wolftaur's nice and safe belly as I pulled my tail in behind me. With such severe penalties I wondered why that guy in the other ship had even bothered to attack us if he knew what was in store for him. "Any idea what drove that guy to try and kill us?"

Cole ruffled his feathers in a way that might have been a shrug. "I heard talk of some extremists who wanted us to break off trade with earth, they apparently nuked some freighter docks on the east side a while back. Trying to annihilate anything that was of more value to earth than to the Belt."

"I've seen nuclear detonations before," Aniya's voice reverberated down to her pouch. "They were a lot larger than the explosions those missiles produced when we destroyed them." If anyone could have seen them at the moment I might have rolled my eyes.

"Nukes don't have nuclear reactions when they're ripped apart by high speed projectiles." I told her in a rather matter of fact way. For some reason when I said that her pulse dropped slightly. "However, if they were carrying fissile material it would have set off a radiation alarm."

"But chemical explosives have barely any effect in space, they might open the hull or disable the engines but the gold in our hold would be recoverable. And that's worthless except for exportation, so wouldn't they want to destroy it?"

Denal snorted loudly enough for me to hear it. "Then maybe he was just a plain old pirate. They do say that banditry or violent theft is the second oldest profession after all."

"And what, dare I ask, would the oldest profession be?" Aniya asked him in response. He said nothing, or at least nothing that I could hear, but I had a decent idea of what he had in mind.

"So what are we going to do about the draconian Cerean law enforcement that would have us all back in chains?" I asked my co workers and friends with whom I had apparently committed the worst criminal offense out of necessity for our lives.

"Nothing." Cole suggested. "We make no mention of this incident and pretend we obtained this haul with no unusual troubles. Odds are he wasn't from Ceres, probably one of the smaller and more lawless asteroids, there's no way he could get away with fencing pirated goods back home."

"I could probably cover up the laser damage." Denal threw in his own contribution. "Those sensor pods are modular anyways, I could simply remove the remainder of the attachment and recycle it. Then weld over the hull scars to make it look like micrometeor pitting."

"Well, I guess that's it then. We're safe." Yet strangely, despite my words, I did not feel any more assured. I curled up tighter in a rather appropriately named fetal position.