

Friday

Malohr's voice screeched over the intercom to engineering. "How are our engines keeping up?"

"They're doing all right so far, but we're going to have to drop our speed down sooner or later. The engines can't hold this kind of speed all day."

"Well the Arions are still right behind us. And their ship is five times bigger than ours and anti-matter powered. That means they can keep this speed longer than we can, even though we're outrunning them for now. If you have any ideas I'm open to suggestions."

"We'll keep you posted, but there's not too much we can do."

"I trust you guys, don't let me down. All our... Fuck, they're firing at us! I'll get back to you."

Malohr gazed into the viewscreen, which had been showing the rear view of the ship for some time now, keeping an eye on their Arion pursuers. "Great. They've fired a positron torpedo. How long until impact?" The sparkling white torpedo could travel at speeds greater than either ship, and was slowly gaining on the AVA vessel.

"Five minutes."

"Well you all know I don't want to use our torpedos unless we absolutely have to. It's not like we'll be getting any resupply shipments anytime soon. I'm open to suggestions for the next four minutes."

"Can't we fire the main energy weapons at it?" Fen offered.

"Absolutely not. Energy weapons are completely ineffective at FTL speeds, since they only travel at light speed."

"But we'd be firing backwards."

"It doesn't matter. We'd run into all sorts of quantum mechanical problems and remember that the speed of light is constant for *all* frames of reference. I could explain it to you but we only have five minutes."

"Four minutes."

"Any more suggestions?"

"Can we dodge?" Came another helpful reply.

"Negetive, it's homing and can outmanuever us at FTL."

"Do we still have that broken crotch rocket in repair bay?" Jenya asked.

"Well, yes..."

"I don't have any time to explain then, call up the mess hall and have them bring three rolls of aluminum foil to the repair bay and send as many people as they can with it." Jenya called out as she headed for the elevator. "Just keep moving!" Then the door closed.

"What the... well..." Malohr tapped the intercom and ordered the mess hall to send three rolls of aluminum foil and all their cooks to the repair bay. And hoped Jenya knew what she was doing.

"Three minutes to impact."

"Jenya, how's it going down there?"

"Just two more minutes..."

"You have two and a half."

After another minute, Fen announced two minutes until impact. Then one minute. "Jenya!"

Just as Malohr shouted Jenya's name one more time he saw the positron torpedo suddenly vanish from sight. "What the heck just happened?" Fen asked. "You're going to have to ask Jenya. Jenya, what did you do back there?" he called over the intercom.

But before he could get a reply, the Arion ship suddenly lurched to the side as if it had hit something and slowed down considerably. "Jenya, what the fuck is going on down there?"

"Sorry Malohr, but we didn't have any time to respond. We covered some of the sheet Vendorian steel with the aluminum foil to distract the positron torpedo, and tossed it out the back of the ship. You probably didn't see any explosion because it occurred slower than light, so it dropped out of sight before it was big enough to see. Unfortunately, it also dropped too far back too fast to damage the Arion ship. I anticipated that, so I tossed the broken crotch rocket out the back too. Once it left our dimensional stability field it probably dropped almost instantly out of FTL, so if it hit them it hit pretty fuckin' hard! Did it hit the Arion ship?"

"Excellent work, Jenya! Yes, it did. And it slowed them down quite a bit. The sudden lurch probably damaged their anti-matter pods, I'm guessing they slowed down because they took a few off line to prevent an explosion."

Fen answered, "That's very likely, Malohr. I'm reading a power drop across the entire grid on the Arion ship."

"You bought us some time, Jenya. Get some more aluminum foil and scrap metal down there and be ready for more torpedos if they come by. *

Late morning, about 9:05, in front of the second-largest bank in all of Los Angeles, a small gang of late teenagers to young adults was gathering somewhat ominously. The bank guard was going to have to keep an eye on these guys. They looked like troublemakers. Little did he know just how much trouble they really were.

Sure enough, the small gang walked boldly straight into the bank. Their leader, a large, tough looking hispanic, grabbed the guard by the shirt and lifted him into the air with one hand! "This is a holdup! Nobody hit any fuckin' alarms, nobody move a fuckin' muscle. Guys, get the vault."

At that the rest of the gang walked over to the vault and, with their combined strength, ripped the two-foot steel door right out of the wall! "Holy shit! We did it!" The door hit the floor with a noise loud enough to wake the dead.

The terrified bank guard pulled out his service revolver and fired point blank and the large man holding him in the air. The gang leader was knocked backward, off his feet, and dropped the guard. Several people screamed and hit the floor at the sudden gunshot. Then, to everyone's surprise, he got up!

"Mistake." Was all he said. The guard still had his gun pointed at his assailant, but was too terrified to pull the trigger. He just stood there shaking. The man grabbed the gun with one hand and pulled his hands to the side, offering a clear view of the guard's chest. Then he pulled back his other hand and punched straight through the guard's chest, shattering ribs and killing him instantly. Then he pulled out his hand out, holding the guard's heart. "You know what, I think I'm gonna make this my trademark. You assholes finished with the vault?"

The rest of his gang held up several bags full of money in response. "Then let's go. And someone take that cute little bitch behind the counter while we're at it. I think it's safe to say that little bottle the Arions gave us worked. We're gunna fuckin' own this town in a week."

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Joy was at home, fixing lunch, when she heard her doorbell ring. She was still broken up about Raymond's death, she just couldn't believe it happened. The funeral hadn't even been held yet. And the fact that there was no body to bury had just made it worse.

She answered the door and screamed. By the costume and appearance, it was unmistakably Aurora, the woman who Raymond was trying to get rid of. She knew Aurora was a dangerous and incredibly powerful alien, and she was in part responsible for Raymond's death.

"Wait, I just... oh shoot." Before Aurora could explain anything, Joy had run back into the house and disappeared from sight. "Well that could have gone more smoothly. Joy! Wait, I just need to talk to you!"

Aurora started to scan the house with her Tachyon vision, but she started her sweep from the wrong side. As she looked left, a powerful energy blast came from the right, knocking her down, but otherwise just stinging a little. "Hey!"

"Oh my God, I've never shot anyone before!" And there stood small, delicate Joy, holding an energy rifle that looked large enough to taken down a house!

"Well you did a pretty good job for your first time. Now hold on just a minute. I'm not here to..." Aurora started to get up.

"*Get away from me!!*" Joy screamed, her face distorted in anger, confusion, and tears. "You killed Ray you fucking bitch!" And she fired again, but this time Aurora was ready for her, and sheilded herself with her arms.

"Look, that thing is starting to hurt. Put it down, please, you've got it backwards. I didn't kill Raymond. He almost killed me, I've been in a coma for the past three days, I didn't even know he was dead until yesterday."

"Shut up shut up shut up!" Joy fired again, with similar results as the last time.

"OW! That's it." Twin violet beams lanced out from Aurora's eyes and struck the weapon Joy was holding, heating it almost instantly and forcing Joy to drop it. "Now calm down and listen to me. Raymond was just a little confused, he was half right though. The Arions are a manace to the planet and have to be defeated, but I'm one of the good guys! All right? And I need your help to..."

Just then, a police squad car pulled up in the cul-du-sac. "Oh thank God, the police are here!" Joy ran past Aurora and over to the squad car. "Detective Whitely! Thank God it's you! Look, it's one of those aliens! You've got to help me!"

Detective Whitely put his hand on Joy's shoulder. "Joy, just calm down a minute. We have a lot of explaining to do. Sorry I'm late, Aurora. We had a problem down at the station, it seems someone was trying to hack into our database. We don't know what they were after, but it delayed me for a while."

"Well I could have really used your help here a minute ago. Joy is absolutly refusing to listen to me."

Joy couldn't take it anymore. "Will someone please tell me what's going on?"

Detective Whitely led Joy back into her house. "I'll explain everything. First of all, you have to realize that the Velorians are the good guys, Joy. Raymond couldn't see that, but I'm hoping you can. We need your help. And everyone else who helped Raymond. The Arions are working on some kind of new weapon and we have to find them. We know Raymond had some kind of device he used to find the Aurora several times. Can you get the rest of the group here? We need to talk to everyone."

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Back on the Arion ship, things weren't going well. Half the antimatter pods were off line, their weapons were all but useless at FTL speed, and now, "Captain Thesan, we're losing them. They're pulling too far ahead of us. At this speed we might lose them in a few hours."

Thesan buried his face in his hands. "All right, think, think, think... Where does it look like they're going?"

"They're headed directly for the Lando system. It's a dead system, the star collapsed into a black hole decades ago but aside from that, it's just got a few dead worlds and a small asteroid belt. Unless they're headed for the belt, which I sincerely doubt, there's nothing interesting happening there."

"Wait a minute, if they star collapsed into a black hole, how can anything still be in orbit? Wouldn't it all get sucked in?"

"No sir, a lot of people have that misconception. A black hole only has its extreme gravitational pull when you get very close to it, within the original radius of the star before it collapsed. At greater distances it just acts like the original star did, except it's no longer emitting light of course."

"Oh, well, you learn something new every day."

I'd be surprised if you didn't learn something new every time anyone opened their mouth. Thesan's helmsman was not fond of him, but he was just a Beta, so what could he do?

"What's beyond the Lando system?"

"Mostly open space for a while. I think they may be trying to just flat outrun us. No, wait, they've changed direction, they're headed near the black hole!"

"Follow them."

"Sir, with all due respect..."

"If they can do it, so can we, we're *supremis* after all, we can take a hundred times the G-forces they can. If they're trying to slingshot around the black hole we'll lose them for sure. Follow them."

"Yes, captain."

Meanwhile, Chris was in a detention cell aboard the Arion ship, and his cellmate was just waking up. "Good morning. I'm Chris."

"Mallek." He responded, still grogy.

Chris pointed at himself and said "Chris." again, then pointed at his cellmate.

"I heard you the first time."

"Oh, sorry. When you said 'Mallek' I thought you didn't speak English."

"Mallek is my name. Where are we? Did you bandage me up?"

"We're on an Arion cruiser. I think they bandaged you while you were still out. Looks like they were nice enough to leave your cybernetics on though."

"They probably couldn't figure out how to take them off without killing me." Mallek checked himself over. "They took my ammunition though. Last thing I remember, I was racing an Arion shuttle. It must've landed a good shot on me. I was doing around 200 miles per hour, damn, would've been killed for sure if I didn't have steel plates all over me. Let that be a lesson to you, always wear your helmet. Are we still in Earth orbit?"

"Nope. We left Earth a while ago, heard it over the P.A. system. We're apparently going to try to slingshot around a black hole pretty soon so find something to hold on to." Chris started looking for something himself. He could only find the bed, attached securely to the wall.

"Slingshot around... are we chasing an Altutian or Vendorian ship by any chance?"

"From what I could pick up, we're chasing some kind of ship that was in Earth orbit near us. Don't know what kind though. Why?"

"You're right, we do need to hold onto something."

The Altutian/Vendorian ship passed insanely close to the black hole as the Arions watched through their viewscreen, the massive hole in space artificially visible through advanced Arion scanning systems. As they watched, its speed nearly doubled as it swung tightly around, went behind the hole, and emerged at speeds greater than it had ever traveled before around the other side. A swing that tight wouldn't have been possible for any ship without the black hole to swing around.

"Time to event horizon: 10 seconds."

Thesan was visibly nervous. "Follow their trajectory exactly. We need to come around at the same angle they did."

"Yes Captain. 5 seconds. 4... 3... 2... 1..." Everyone on the ship was pulled hard to port as the starboard side passed far too close for comfort to the black hole. The massive, five mile ship began to swing around the same way the Altutian/Vendorian ship did. "Everything going... Oh fuck!" Klaxons rang all over the ship, all at once, as red lights on every control panel on the bridge began to flash. "We're losing engine power! Structural integrity compromised! FTL capability lost! Life support failing! Captain, we're having problems all over the ship!"

Thesan panicked. He tried to look everywhere at once, take in everything that happened at once, tried to make sense out of what just occurred. He couldn't. He froze. "I... uh..."

"Dammit Thesan!" The helmsman shouted. "Engine room, take everything off line. Shut down all power, even auxiliary. Medical bay, get to the prisoners and make sure they survive the loss of life support. Communications, send a distress call to Aria and find out if there are any other of our ships you can contact. And I want every repair crew working non-stop until we get this ship back in working condition!" Helmsman Krahs clicked off the intercom. He stared angrily at Thesan for a long time.

"I'll... be in my office." Captain Thesan walked slowly off the bridge.

And back by Chris and Mallek, "What the hell was that!?" Chris demanded.

"That was Malohr." Mallek smiled. "We planned for this a while back, just in case we got into a chase with the Arions. The Vendorian ship we were chasing pulled a tight slingshot around the black hole, which means we're probably in the Lando system in case you were wondering, and when the Arion ship which is five times larger tried to follow... heh... it was nearly pulled apart by tidal forces." Chris looked confused. "You see, a black hole's gravity is immense, but it drops off fast. For a ship this size, the gravitational pull on the starboard side was somewhere in the ballpark of the *cube* of the gravitational pull on the port side, so the ship was stretched out. I don't think I need to tell you that that would cause all sorts of problems with the power systems, not to mention the hull damage. We could be stranded for a while." Mallek chuckled to himself. "And my ship got away."

"Wait a minute... are you saying that you're a Vendorian?"

"In the flesh."

"Okay, things are starting to make a little more sense now. Do you know anything about a power crystal?"

"Yeah, we stole one from the Arions, that's when I got captured."

"Well for some reason, the Arions thought that this gem that Aurora had was the crystal you stole... and that's when I got captured."

Their conversation was cut short by a tall female Prime who walked into the room. "Cut the chit-chat you two. We're taking a little walk. Life support is down, so we have to take you to an escape pod before the ship runs out of air." She opened the front of their cell and grabbed them roughly by the arms. "And don't go trying to shoot off the pod, there's nowhere to go. This is a dead system and we'd shoot you down before you got three feet anyway." She roughly escorted the two of them down the hallway. "Personally, I think we should just let you suffocate, but orders are orders."