

Battle of the Abyss Nebula

Captains log, June 7th, 2320,

Jeanette's gotten into trouble again. Despite the lessons in control, she hasn't been able to fully contain the anger within her, and that worries me. Now, I'm being called in for an emergency meeting with her teacher. I hope this isn't too serious.

I walked into Jeanette's classroom. Four people were there, Jeanette, Jeanette's teacher, and a young, teenage couple. The woman was crying. I immediately recognized them. They were the parents of one of Jeanette's classmates, Pam Mason, who was absent. I immediately felt worry. What had happened? They turned upon my entry. Jeanette turned away, hanging her head in shame and keeping her hands hidden.

The teacher "Captain, thank you for seeing us on such short notice."

I sighed. "What did she do?" I asked, looking at Jeanette.

"Well, to be straight, she killed one of her classmates."

I blinked in surprise. Jeanette always had anger issues, but she never tried to kill anyone before. I sat next to her.

"Is this true?"

She held up her hands, which were stained with blood. I closed my eyes.

"What happened?"

The teacher sighed. "Apparently, she had gotten into a fight about a boy in her class. They came to blows, and, well..."

I nodded. "Mr. and Mrs. Mason, I'm sorry. I'll pay for her revival and any emotional damage you've received. Believe me, this will never happen again." I said, darkness in my voice.

They nodded. The teacher picked up a few papers.

"Sir, Jeanette is just too volatile. I don't think it's right we keep her here." He sounded unsure if he should be saying that.

"Don't worry. After tonight, everything will change."

"I hope so, for her sake." 'And mine,' I figured he was thinking.

"Don't worry. Jeanette, follow me." She obeyed, keeping silent as we left the office and walked to my hovercar. The moment we were seated, and we were off, I looked at her. She was dressed in her signature gray shirt and khaki pants with a pair of glasses hanging on the tip of her nose.

"Jeanette, do you realize how much trouble your in?"

She nodded.

I sighed. “Jeanette, killing someone is a punishable offense, one that normally demands prison time for the first offense, and execution the second. Don't you understand?”

She nodded again. I put a hand on my face, keeping my fingers apart so I could see the area before me.

“Jeanette, I can't send you to prison. You're only eight, and you'd never survive there.” She looked at me, hopeful. I frowned. “Instead, I have another plan.”

She frowned. I didn't know if she knew what was in mind. I had been talking with Violet and a neurologist, seeing if it was possible to split the personalities. It was, but there was the possibility that the other personality would surface. It was only a 2% risk, which was acceptable in my opinion. However, Violet was slightly opposed to it, but she would follow my decision.

“What is it?” Jeanette asked.

“You'll see.” I said as I brought the hovercar down in front of my home. We walked in, and Violet hesitated in greeting us, her eyes on the bloody hands of her daughter.

“Violet, could you clean her up?” She nodded and took Jeanette into the bathroom. Diana and Elex both came to greet me, but paused when I knelt down.

“Girls, I need you to do me a favor. Jeanette's in a lot of trouble. When I say so, I need you to hold her down. I don't want you to let her up, until I say so. Understand?” They slowly nodded, unsure if what I was asking was right.

Violet came in and I gave her a look. She swallowed, and moved off. Jeanette followed a moment later, her hands clean, but still slightly red. She started moving to her sisters, but stopped.

“Now!” Diana and Elex jumped, grabbing Jeanette by the arms.

“What the...?” Elex used her leg and knocked Jeanette's legs out and causing her glasses to fall off.. All three girls tumbled to the ground, and Jeanette started to scramble up, but Diana jumped onto her.

“Get off of me.” Elex dropped onto her chest, knocking the wind out of her. Slowly, she started to lift herself and her sisters up, but I knelt down. I placed my right hand over her face, and closed my eyes. Jeanette froze.

I entered another place. It was a large room, filled with hundreds of computers and science things. I saw Jeanette hiding behind one of the massive computers. She realized she could be seen, and bolted, throwing things at me. I jumped into the air, and came down on her. We both hit the ground. She stood, shaking her head, and I grasped her by the front of her shirt. I lifted her up, looking into her eyes. I pushed my fist into her chest, almost like punching, but it went through her clothing and skin. She cried out in pain as I withdrew my hand. In it was a large red-blue ball of energy, her heart, glowing as bright as a star. I looked it over as I dropped her.

She grasped at her chest, confused. I reached into the ball and pulled one of the tendrils of energy. I

pulled it free and she jerked.

“Daddy, what are you doing?” I didn't answer, instead, I set it to the floor. At the point where it touched, a shimmering appeared. I pulled another strand of energy and fed it to the shimmer, which grew and formed a human shape. Jeanette gasped as another strand was fed. Now the shimmering became solid, forming itself into Jeanette's exact features. Another strand formed the skin and clothing.

“Dad, stop.” Another strand, there wasn't much left. She started to move, but found it difficult. I took another strand, and set it on the duplicate's skin. It disappeared, and Jeanette dropped to the floor. Her features changed. Her eyes darkened and her skin became whiter; her finger nails grew longer and sharper; her hair turned white, her teeth yellowed slightly, and her clothing turned a few shades darker. She looked at herself in horror. The Jeanette beside me took on a more human appearance, perfectly white teeth, her hair sank past her shoulders, and her skin took on a more normal, human shade. Her claw slits disappeared, and her eyes brightened.

A final strand, and she blinked. She looked around, confused, then smiled at me.

“Daddy.” came a weak voice. The original Jeanette struggled to stand. I tossed the now bright red ball of energy at her, and it sank into place. She sighed and stood.

“I'm sorry Jeanette,” I said, “But this is how it's gotta be.”

The original Jeanette frowned. “But why? I don't understand.”

“I cant bring myself to kill my daughter. You will live, inside a cage made of mental energy.”

As I spoke, the said cage appeared. It surrounded the original Jeanette, creating a barrier between us. I stepped up to it.

“I'm sorry, Jeanette.”

The cage started to sink into the floor, taking Jeanette with it. She held out her hand, screaming before the floor silenced her.

“DADDY!”

I woke with a start, sweat dripped from my forehead. I was back in the present, having had a bad nightmare, or rather bad memory. Violet moved next to me, disturbed by my sudden movement. She sat up, looking for the pair of glowing orbs she would see if I was 'awake', or rather, out of my hibernation sequence. She found them and asked, “What's wrong.”

“Bad dream.” I said.

She sighed. “That's you fifth one this week. Are you sure your alright?”

“I'm fine.” I got out of bed.

“Alright. Night.”

"Night." I quietly closed our door. Unlike Violet, I could see clearly in the dark. I made my way to Jeanette's door. I quietly opened it and peaked in. She was dead asleep, something I envied. I closed her door and checked on the other girls before sitting in my chair. I sat there for an hour before pulling my communicator from its usual place.

"To the bridge, report."

"Captain?" asked a startled lieutenant, "N-n-nothing to report, sir. All's clear for the next ten light years."

"Good. How's the ball game?"

"Ball game, sir?"

I smiled. It was almost impossible for a human to hear the sound of several dodge balls hitting the walls of the main bridge, but I heard it loud and clear.

"Never mind. Good night."

"Good night, sir." The channel clicked off. I stood and replaced my communicator. I sat for another hour, thinking about nothing in particular, but my thoughts kept going back to the memory. Now that I was older, slightly, was my decision the right one? The event had happened over twelve years ago. Jeanette had just turned 20 last week, as did her sisters.

I moved to my main computer and brought up my log entries. I pressed the 'new' key and stood. The computer beeped and I spoke.

Captain's personal log, August 31st, 2332,

I've been plagued by the memory of Jeanette's split, which took place over 12 years ago. The memory only comes to me when I sleep, and that worries me. Until last week, nothing has come up, but the day she turned 20 was the day it started resurfacing. I've started to wonder if something horrible is going to happen. If something does happen, it will destroy one of three things, me, the Destroyers as a whole, or my darling Jeanette. I'm not worried about myself, and the Destroyers can take on anything without fuss, but Jeanette...

I paused. What could I say. Finally, I started again.

If something happens, I will take care of the problem. If it turns out that Jeanette's second personality, which has surfaced several times in the past, is responsible, I'll be forced to deal with it the problem when it comes to light.

I paused again.

This other personality...is an enigma. A single individual made up of all Jeanette's anger, her hate her lust, and her deceit. It has been bottled up inside her, growing, expanding. Sooner or later, that genie's coming out of the bottle, and when it does, all hells breaking loose.

"End log." I concluded. I signed off and went to bed.

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Two days later

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I sighed and pressed a few keys on my computer. An image of a new weapon came up.

“Laura, what does the power indicators show?”

The AI's hologram appeared. She looked like a young 5-year-old girl with light skin, blond hair, and green eyes. She wore a pale blue dress that seemed to flow in a holographic wind, and she had a pair of blue slip-on shoes.

“Initial tests show promising results. Energy shield penetration is high, with little resistance or damage. Hull damage, on the other hand, is heavy. The prototype punched a hole through a foot of solid Neutronium with no effort, but terminated after 4 thousand kilometers and the device took approximately three minutes to recharge.”

I blinked in surprise. Such a powerful weapon was overshadowed by the Katalist Laser in the Destroyer's sensor dish, but it took almost a day to fire more than one shot. Then again, it could obliterate a planet and cause a star to go nova. This weapon was small enough to fit on a Haze Mark-3, and be powered by its systems with no problem.

“And what are they calling this?”

“The IOYA Cannon. It's an acronym for I Own Your Ass.”

“Fitting. Where's the prototype?”

“On board, sir. Currently, its fitted to the *DSS Bark*, which it used during its initial shakedown.”

I nodded as my door chimed. “Come.”

The doors parted and Jeanette entered. I smiled as she moved to the front of my desk. She smiled at me.

“Afternoon, dad. Hi Laura.”

“Good afternoon, Mrs. Jeanette. Have you tied your hair differently?”

“Ya. I'm letting Elex work with it. She wont admit it, but she loves fashion almost as much as her weapons.”

Laura giggled and her holographic avatar disappeared.

“What's up, Jean?” I asked.

“Well, you know how I've been wanting to work with the secretions the Hunters use?”

“Ya.”

“Well, I've been checking our inventory, and I found we have a Hunter corpse in one of the cargo bays. Would it be alright if I poked around?”

I frowned. “Jeanette, that corpse is over twelve years old, and it hasn't even been kept in stasis. The fact that it hasn't decomposed is a mystery.”

“Ya, but I still want to check.”

I sighed and pulled open a drawer. I pulled a small keycard out and looked it over before handing it to her.

“Alright, but be careful. I don't want you hurting yourself.”

“Yes, dad.” She said before running off. For a moment, she forgot the doors had closed, and she slammed into them. She backed up and straightened her glasses before leaving.

I frowned. “Laura.”

The AI appeared again.

“Sir?”

“Keep an eye on her. I want to know if she gets into any trouble.”

“Yes sir.” And she was gone.

I sat back and pulled up the IOYA Cannon again.

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Jeanette pulled her hovercar into a controlled decent, landing before the large storage bay. She locked her vehicle and moved to the entrance. It was a massive door, about fifteen meters high, twelve meters long, and four meters thick. She swiped the card and the door opened enough for her to enter. After a quick glance around, she located her target. As she approached, a thick odor met her nose. She gagged and held her breath, grasping a respirator from the first aid station. She approached again, and opened the case. One of the creatures, named Hunters from the way they would hunt down their prey, stared up at her. This was, to be specific, a Hunter Grunt, basically a humanoid cannon fodder. The creature was reptilian in nature, had black scales covering every inch of its body, an alligator-like jaw, and had a blank stare from unblinking eyes. Jeanette felt fear, and closed the case, but moved it to an examination station. She reopened the case and pulled the corpse onto the table.

She took several breaths before grabbing the equipment she needed. With a small laser scalpel, she began removing plates, reaching its bare chest, before opening it. Ten minutes passed before she pulled a large organ from the creature. She smiled and set it down, extracting four more before closing it up. From there, she started extracting the liquid from inside the organs. It was a white fluid, with small black specks mixed. It flowed like water, but smelled of motor oil. Jeanette collected all of it, filling a

large jar. From there, she put the corpse back, destroyed the now-empty organs, and left, jar in hand.

She arrived at home, happy that the trip was uneventful. As she entered, she took note of her surroundings. Elex was on the couch, watching TV, her body soaked with sweat from a recent workout. Thorn, her husband, sat beside her, the skin of his left arm missing, revealing a mechanical arm. Diana was napping in their father's easy chair, with her husband, Mark, sculpting a small model of a Haze Mark-3. In the corner, Marcus and Marlene, the only natural born children in the Cantrell family, were playing with some old toys the girls had played with before. Jeanette's husband, Simon, had been sitting next to Elex, holding a small bundle in his hands. but stood upon noticing Jeanette.

“Jean, hi.”

“Hi Simon.” She said as she closed the door. “How are you?”

“Fine.” Simon said, carefully handing the bundle to Elex. “What's that?”

“Well, I've finally gotten some of the Hunter secretions, namely those from a Grunt. He was happy to donate them.” She added at his look.

“Are you sure their safe?”

“Perfectly. Their over twelve years old. Even if I injected myself with some, they wont infect me.” She started for her room, her eyes focused on that.

“Are you sure?”

“Completely. Don't worry.”

“I'm sorry. I'm still not used to you doing all this crazy stuff.”

“Better get used to it then.” Elex called over her shoulder.

“Don't worry, Simon.” Jeanette said, turning to him. “I wont have any problems unless I...”

At that moment, her foot caught on a stool. She screamed and fell, hitting the ground hard. The jar shattered upon impact, as did her glasses.

“Jeanette!” Simon yelled, running to her.

She groaned and sat up, shaking her head to clear it. Simon skidded to a halt as everyone took notice to the scene. Diana woke and she and Mark started for her. Thorn jumped over the couch as Simon knelt down. Jeanette waved off his attempts to help.

“I'm alright, Simon.” She was annoyed at how a small stool had tripped her.

“But the jar...”

“I'm fine. Go get me my spare glasses.”

He nodded and started for her room. Elex appeared, reaching her first and offered a hand. Jeanette took it and was pulled to her feet.

“Are you sure your alright?” Elex asked, holding the bundle lightly.

“Ya, just blind.” Jeanette said.

“We can call dad if you want.” Diana said.

“Nah.” She looked at her shirt, which was stained to the point where it needed to be tossed. “I just need another shirt. Even in death, the Hunters are fucking shit up.”

Everyone laughed as Simon reappeared, a pair of pink glasses in hand. Jeanette took them and put them on with a sigh.

“Well, so much for a cure.” She muttered before taking the bundle from Elex.

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Three months later

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Jeanette hissed in frustration. She'd been bedridden for weeks, a cold presenting itself. She sneezed, the force of which caused some of her stuff to jump. Still, it felt like something inside her was moving. Probably just her body fighting the cold. Violet walked in, a bowl of soup in hand.

“Mom, isn't there a cure for the common cold yet?”

“No, honey. Despite all our medical science, the common cold is still a problem.”

Jeanette sighed.

“I made you some soup.” Violet said, setting the bowl in her daughters lap.

“Thanks mom.” Jeanette started eating.

“Simon asked about you.”

“He did?”

“Ya. He's worried. Problem is, his CO is having him stay on site.”

“Figures. COs never think about anything else.”

Violet nodded. “Elex says the baby needs another vaccination.

Jeanette nodded, then paused.

“Mom, I don't feel good.”

“Well, that comes with a cold.”

“No, its different.”

“Is it the soup?”

“No, I...” She made a sound, then jerked.

The bowl hit the floor as her back arched. Suddenly, a scale pierced the skin on her cheek and she screamed in pain. Violet jumped in surprise. More scales pierced the girls body, covering her body and ripping her clothing. As her clothes fell off in tatters, the uncovered parts of her skin took on a gray complexion, her lips lost their color, and her eyes changed from their normal yellow to a sickly green.

Violet backed away, horrified. Jeanette sat up, looking around, finally settling her eyes on her mother.

“Jeanette?” She asked as Jeanette stood.

Her fist suddenly slammed into the side of Violets head, spinning her mother around in a circle. The older woman collapsed and, through a narrowing, bloody vision, looked up at her daughter. What she saw scared her. The blood covered up the scales, but the evil smile and the deadly eyes were enough to remind her of the eight-year-old who had killed her classmate.

“It's not 'Jeanette' anymore, mother. It's Jeanine now.” She said in a dark voice as she knelt down, her face filling Violets vision. “And I'm here for revenge.”

She stood. “Computer, what ships are awaiting a captain and/or crew to launch?”

The feminine computer voice spoke, oblivious to who it was speaking to. “There are six ships awaiting captains at this time.”

“List them.” Violet blinked, her vision opening up a little. Jeanette was standing over her, ignoring her for the moment.

“The *DSS Mallard*, the *DSS Dread*, the *DSS Bark*, the *DSS Drake*, the *DSS Sanction*, the *DSS Hammond*.”

Jeanette was silent for a moment. “The *DSS Hammond*, information.”

“The *DSS Hammond* is a Haze Mark-3 cruiser. Current crew complement: 350. No captain assigned.”

“Transport me to the bridge on my signal.”

The computer beeped, and Jeanette looked down at her mother.

“Still awake? Your stronger then I thought. Well, I must go. Goodbye, mother.” She lashed out with a foot, knocking Violets head to the side. She was out the moment she was hit.

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“Mom?”

Violet's eyes opened. Elex stood above her, a pack of smelling salts in one hand and a small bundle in the other. She groaned. Everything hurt. Almost immediately, her memory came back.

“Elex, where's Jeanette?”

“Jeanette? Mom, no one was home, just you and a pair of broken...”

“Elex, get your father.” Violet said, noticing Jeanette's broken glasses on the bed. “Something's happened to Jeanette.”

“What? What happened?”

“Just do it!”

“Alright.” Elex shifted the bundle to her other arm and pulled her communicator off her belt. “Elex to the bridge.”

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On the bridge, I was looking at a schematic Simon was showing me.

“This is really good. Have you submitted it yet?”

“Not yet, sir. I plan on doing so tomorrow.”

“Good. I want you to...”

“Elex to the bridge.” Came the voice of my second oldest daughter.

I frowned. “Elex? What's up?”

“Dad, its mom.” The whole bridge crew looked at me.

“What about her? Is something wrong?”

“I found her unconscious in Jeanette's room. Jeanette's not here, and mom is frantic.”

“Put her on please.” I said, looking at Simon. His face betrayed his confusion and worry.

Finally, Violet's voice filled the air. “Tod, Jeanette's gone. She's headed for the *Hammond*.”

“Slow down. What happened.”

“I don't know. All I know is that she started sprouting scales, called herself Jeanine, hit me twice, and left.”

I frowned. That didn't sound like the Jeanette I knew. That sounded like...

“Where is she now.”

“She was asking about the *DSS Hammond*.”

“The *Hammond*?” I pulled up an image of the main hanger on my chair's screen. The *Hammond* hung in place, carbon scoring still on the hull from the battle it had been in. “Are you sure?”

“Positive.”

“Alright. I'll start...” The image suddenly showed the *Hammond* firing upon the docking clamps, blasting them apart. “What the hell?”

I pulled it up on my main screen. The *Hammond*, now free of its birth, started moving to the doors.

“Tractor beams.” I ordered, standing.

Sparkling beams grabbed at the ship, but the beams couldn't grab hold.

I frowned. “Hail them.”

Rob pressed a button. “No response sir.”

“Patch me into the hanger.”

“Your on.”

“General Quarters, all pilots get to your fighters. Repeat, all pilots to your fighters.”

Simon started to move, but I grabbed his arm. “Wait here.”

He nodded. Fighters started to rise. They made a wall, holding position as the *Hammond* approached. For a moment, nothing happened, then pulses of bright red energy was fired at the fighters, blasting them apart. The fighters returned in kind, but they did little to stop the ship. They gave chase as the ship accelerated.

“Keep the door closed. I'll be damned if we're going to let her go.” I told Rob.

“Aye si...” He paused mid-syllable. “Sir, we're receiving a hail from the *Hammond*.”

“Put her on.” I said, sitting in my seat.

A holographic image appeared, fuzzy at first, but as it cleared up, my mouth dropped open. Jeanette, who had been a beautiful when I left home, was now covered in scales, had green eyes, and pale lips. I heard Simon gasp, and I didn't blame him.

“Hello, *Father*.” She said, spitting last word out like a curse.

“Jeanette?”

“My name is Jeanine.” She said, her green eyes flashing red for a moment. Everyone on the bridge pulled up what I was seeing and gasped.

“What the hell are you doing with the *Hammond*?”

“Why father, what ever do you mean?” She asked, pretending to be stupid.

“Jeanette, bring that ship back.”

“I dont think so.”

“I'm ordering you to...”

She pushed forward so her face filled the screen. “I dont take orders from you! You've kept me contained for too long for that!”

Contained? But that meant...

“*Jeanette*?” I asked slowly.

“You do remember. Good. Your not too stupid with age.”

I frowned.

“But...”

“I'm taking my revenge father. Revenge for keeping me in a mental cage while miss goody-two-shoes walks around in my skin. You shouldn't have contained me. In the 12 years I've been in that cage, I've been getting more and more angry. If all I am is what's left from what you took from me, then it'll make a great meal, for revenge is a dish that is best served cold.”

I could see the hatred in her eyes, the anger on her lips. “Bring the *Hammond* back, and we'll discuss this over lunch.”

“Lunch? Do you take me for a fool? All your gonna do is put me back in that cage so *Jeanie* can go back to designing shit and fucking her husband.”

Simon blushed.

“I'm done being locked up. And when I'm ready, I'll kill Jeanette, using my own cage to crush her.”

“NO!” Simon and I shouted simultaneously.

She looked at Simon. “Sorry, Si, but her time is up. In truth, she never should've existed, and you and I, well, we never would've been.” She held up her hand, which had her wedding ring on it. “You know, I want to throw this off, but it looks good there.” She looked back at me. “I'm leaving, and you better not

stop me.”

The image switched off. Simon and I exchanged glances. “She won’t make it out of the hanger.” I assured him.

“Sir, big problem.”

I turned to my screen. The *Hammond* had reached the door. It was solid Neutronium, at least four feet thick. I smiled. She fired a few laser blasts at it, all unsuccessful. Suddenly, a green torpedo fired, arcing under the ship and striking one of the other ships, a Defender. The ship exploded, pieces raining to the floor far below. Another torpedo, and it struck a Haze Mark-3, which, too, became a fireball. A third torpedo, but this one struck the doors. For a moment, nothing happened, then the projectile exploded, blasting the door wide open. Air suddenly started to be sucked into the void as the ship exited the hanger. Fighters followed as a force field snapped in place.

The bridge crew and I were stunned. Nothing could’ve punched through that door. Simon turned to me, but I ignored him. The *Hammond* was getting away.

“Rob, intercept course. Harold, charge weapons, raise shields.”

“Sir, another transmission.”

The screen came on. It was Jeanine again. “Well, father, I must say, your ship looks fine from here. Too bad we’re not gonna see each other again. Thanks for the *Hammond*, dad. Love you.”

The screen went off. I was about to order a laser blast to her engines when the lights went out.

“What the hell happened?”

“She’s planted a virus.” Sanya said, “Everything’s offline. Weapons, Shields, most of our sensors and communications”

“Life Support?”

“Still functioning. I’ll start flushing the main computer.”

“Get it done.” The screen was still on. The *Hammond’s* Warp engines activated, and a Warp Tunnel appeared. They flashed, and the ship was gone. I slammed my fist into my chair’s arm rest, snapping it off. I ignored it.

No one spoke for a minute. Finally, Simon asked, “Sir, would it be alright to go after her in the *Morte Navi*?”

I looked at him for a moment. “Yes. Sanya, let the Hanger know to have the *Morte Navi* ready for launch.”

“Yes sir.”

I took Simon aside. “Alright Simon. Gather the others and meet me in the main conference room.”

“Sir, if I may, what did she mean by locked up.”

I frowned. “I’ll tell you in briefing. Assemble the team.”

“Yes sir.”

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I looked across the back of my ship. Most of the lights were out, but they were snapping on every few seconds. Reflected in the window were my two remaining daughters and all three of my son-in-laws.

“What happened?” I asked.

Simon sighed. “Three months ago, Jeanette fell on a jar she was caring. She had said that it was caring the Hunter secretions she’d taken off a Grunt corpse.”

“She fell on it?”

Simon nodded. I sighed.

“Figures. So this whole time...”

“...She’s been infected? Ya.”

I swore and turned around. “And why wasn’t I informed about this?”

“She didn’t want you to know.”

“Laura!”

The AI’s hologram appeared. “Sir?”

“Why didn’t you inform me about this?”

“Sir, I didn’t know. I had stopped watching her after she arrived at the house.” She looked between me and everyone else. “I didn’t think it was necessary, seeing as she was in a safe environment.”

I growled and sat in my seat. “Well, we’ve been able to track her. She’s headed for the Woren system.”

“The Woren system?” Thorn asked, his eyes looking to the ceiling for a moment. “That system holds a pre-Warp, industrial civilization. It’s off limits to both the Destroyers and the TCF.”

“Maybe she intends to harvest them, like the Hunters normally do.” Diana muttered.

“Stow it.” I ordered. “Simon, why would Jeanette have interest in the Woren system?”

“Jeanette?”

“Yes, Jeanette. Jeanine feeds off her memories and experiences. She'd be using them to her advantage.”

“How do you know that?” Simon asked.

I frowned as Diana and Elex dropped their gaze.

“Because I'm the reason she's this way.”

I stood again and looked out the window.

“When Jean was eight, she killed one of her classmates. She's always been violent, but that was the last straw. That night, I had Diana and Elex hold her while I performed a mental procedure.”

At their silence, I added, “I split my Jeanette into two halves.

I turned around, looking at Simon. “One half was made of pure good. This Jeanette was placed in control of the body. This was the Jeanette you know.

“The other was what was left over, all the hate, anger, and lust of death. I placed a mental cage around this new entity, buried deep in the mind of the other, so deep, that the best she could do is watch as Jeanette grew up, married, and had her first child.”

I turned back to the window. “In helping my daughter, I created a monster.”

Everyone was silent. I closed my eyes.

“I ask again, 'What is Jeanette's interest in Woren.'”

Simon was silent for a moment. “She had last said that Woren's sun was producing an unusual amount of radiation.”

“What kind?”

Simon's eyes went to the ceiling. “I'm not sure. Something interesting though.”

I nodded and tapped the panel in front of my seat. “Bridge. Robert, set a course for Woren, best possible speed.”

I sat again as Rob acknowledged the order. “Now. Your gonna be taking the *Morte Navi*. Find her and bring her back.” I pulled up a hologram of the *Morte Navi*. “Without Jeanette, I cant give you a full torpedo load. Laura, how many torpedoes are in Jeanette's privet workshop?”

The AI was silent a moment. “About fifteen.”

“And how many are on the *Morte Navi*?”

“At last report, there are...”

“The reports are wrong.” Mark interrupted.

“Excuse me?” Laura and I asked simultaneously.

“The report you have was made in the Tevron system, just minutes before an enemy fleet jumped in.”

“Alright, then how many torpedoes are left?”

Mark glanced at Elex. “Only two.”

I was silent a moment. “Let me get this straight; out of 250 torpedoes, you only have 2? And your going up against a ship that, mind you, blew through a solid Neutronium door, with, after adding what we have, only seventeen torpedoes?”

Elex blushed as Mark said, “Well if your daughter wasn't so trigger happy...”

“Enough. Laura, can you automate the process to make more?”

“No sir. All the machines are manual, and they seem to be designed so only Jeanette herself can use them safely.”

I sighed. “You'll have to make do. How long until the *Morte Navi* is ready for launch?”

“About two hours.” Laura said.

“Alright.” I pressed a button and a hologram of the *Destroyer* appeared, along with a glowing orb that was the Woran system. “We're gonna drop you off at Warp. I know its dangerous, but we cant afford to lose any time. As long as you stay in the *Destroyer's* Warp bubble, you should be fine.”

I pressed a few keys, and a holographic *Morte Navi* appeared, leaving the hanger. “After we drop you, you'll activate your Warp Engines and start for Woran. You should get there before Jeanette. If you do, disable the *Hammond* and take it by force. If not, then expect a fight. I have reinforcements on route, but I don't know when they'll get there.”

They nodded.

“Now, who's going to operate the science station?”

Simon sighed. “I will. Between the rest of us, I have more experience with that station.”

“Good. Now, go get her back. Dismissed.” Mark and Thorn stood and left. Simon, Diana, and Elex stayed seated. “Something on your mind?”

“Sir, if I may, why did you leave Jeanine intact? Why not kill her after the split?”

“Could you bring yourself to kill your daughter?”

“No.”

“Then why ask me that?”

“I was just...”

“Just what? Implying that I kill the daughter I had known until the age of eight? Ya, she had a temper, but up until that day, it hadn't been anything but words. When I saw her hands covered in that girls blood, I knew it was time for her to go, but I couldn't kill her outright. So I did the next best thing.”

Simon was silent. Diana and Elex looked at me.

“Dad,” Diana started, “Can we save her?”

I sighed. “The infection requires a month of physical exposure before its beyond removal. If we get to her fast, we can stop it before we do have to kill her.”

Elex's voice cracked. “I'm not sure I can kill my own sister.

“And I don't think I can kill her.” Diana agreed.

“Nether can I.” Simon muttered.

I lowered my head, shaking it. “We don't think we can, but if necessary, we will.”

They nodded, and left. I sat there for another few minutes before heading home.

-

Captains log, December 2nd, 2332,

My worst fears have come true. Jeanette has become one of those creatures. I was not prepared for something like this. I had feared that Jeanine, my original Jeanette, would resurface, but I though I'd be able to control her. Unfortunately, I wasn't prepared for this, and now I have to send my other daughters and their husbands ahead to cut her off. We have to stop her, no matter what her plans are. I'm worried about Simon. How is he really taking this? Will he be able to stop his wife, even if it meant her death? Well, I cant dwell on that. For the time being, Violet and I are going to babysit Amanda, Simon and Jeanette's daughter, until this crisis is over. If only this little one understood that her parents were going to be in the biggest husband-wife fight in history.

-

Mark looked up from his PAMVACC. “Plasma network?”

“Functioning within normal parameters.” Simon said, looking over a holographic image of the *Morte Navi*.

“Quadrillic Meta-life support system?”

“Active.”

“Long Range comm array?”

“Online. Oh, Elex, Deris Chalf beat Tork Bared by 4.235 seconds.”

The girl made a happy sound. “Diana's money is as good as mine.” She said.

“Turn it off. We aren't here for you and your sister bet on Star Surfing champions.”

Elex huffed.

“Now, have they finished loading the torpedoes?”

Elex activated her screens and her chair. Holographic images appeared, seven around the chair and two on the chair itself. She checked one of the screens. “Yes sir. I have four loaded, two in each tube.”

“Good. Minigun?”

Elex checked the reports. “They had to replace barrel four, but they shined up the rest. Its ready to fire at your command.”

“Perfect.” Mark said, rubbing his hands together. “And the Laser Cannons?”

“They were forced to replace the Harus on Cannon 6, and Cannon 8 is halfway through its diagnostic, but they are otherwise ready to fire.”

“Alright. Bridge to engineering.”

A holographic screen appeared. Diana appeared on it. “Engineering.”

“Start the power core, bring all systems to full power.”

“On it.”

She turned around and pressed a few keys. Large, black beams appeared, converging in the center of a large platform. The black hole suddenly appeared, as did the containment fields. The black sphere grew until it reached the barriers, then the green lines leading away from the platform started turning blue. The lights came on to full illumination as Diana turned back.

“All systems coming online now. Except for Cannon 8, I see green across the board.”

“Thanks hon.”

“No problem.” The screen clicked off.

Mark looked around the bridge. The *Morte Navi* was ready to launch. He stood.

“Retract docking clamps, bring engines to one quarter.” He ordered.

Thorn nodded, and a loud clacking sound filled the air. The ship pulled away from its dock before its engines flared and the ship started moving. They approached the door, and Simon pulled up the hole.

“Damn, she did a number.”

The edges were melted and blown apart, something the *Hammond's* torpedoes shouldn't have done. Just beyond the hole was the beautiful colors of Warp Space.

“Simon, what kind of weapon was that?” Elex asked.

Simon put a hand to his chin. “Well, the metal's bent like its a normal Anti-matter explosion, like a Photomon Torpedo, but the edges...”

His voice trailed off.

“Simon?”

He jumped. “Sorry. The edges appear to have been caused by an acid-based weapon, like the torpedoes the Hunters use.”

“So she had a hybrid?” Elex asked.

“Yes, but not a good one. Its barely big enough for the Mark-3. Hunter Torpedoes could've melted through more Neutronium then that.”

“Can we expect more of these weapons?” Mark asked.

“No.” Mark sighed in relief. “We expect worse.”

Mark cringed. “Well, lets go. Full impulse.”

Simon tapped the holographic image, zooming in on the hole. He could see small white EV suites, and another zoom showed the repair crews, each caring a remotely-powered replication device and a Tetra Welder, a device that allowed the Destroyers to bond objects together at the molecular level. It would take them the better part of a day to repair the 361 meter wide, 4 foot deep hole. Simon sighed and clicked off the display. Thorn pulled the ship through the door. Suddenly, the ship accelerated, in the wrong direction. Alarms went off as the ship started to spin.

“Thorn, stabilize...”

“I'm trying!”

He switched to manual and grasped the joystick. He pulled until it almost came off its platting. The ship fought the current, taking most of it on the upper hull. Groans filled the air as the metal was stressed, and a loud thump came from the front of the bridge, which silenced itself a second later. For what seemed like hours, the ship groaned, then Thorn was able to pull the ship into the currents. The ship seemed to sigh as it finally pulled into a better position. Thorn directed the ship behind the *Destroyer*, using it as a shield until the *Morte Navi's* Warp engines activated.

Mark pealed himself off his chair. He helped Simon up as he called, “Damage Report.”

Diana's image came on. Her hair was everywhere, and a bruise was developing on one side of her face.

“Better than the estimates. We have explosive decompression on deck 6, and I've lost some people to the core.”

Mark winced. The Quantum Singularity they used for a power core had claimed a few crewmen stupid enough to not hold on to something, even though they'd been trained since day one to keep a tether to one of the consoles, especially after General Quarters had been called. Some people, however, didn't care, and this was the result.

“How many?”

“Only two.” She sighed. “Mark, I'm getting tired of hiring new people.”

“I know. Hull status?”

Diana consulted her display, which was set in the wall next to the monitor. “Hull stress on Decks 1 through 5. A empty cabin on Deck 6 has decompressed, and our port torpedo launcher has been damaged.”

“Start repairs to the launcher, then focus on the hull.”

Diana nodded and turned to her crew. “Repair teams, let's go!” The screen clicked off.

Elex pulled up the report on the launcher as Thorn activated the engines.

“Matching the *Destroyer's* velocity. Moving into position.” He said.

“Set a course for Woren, maximum Warp.” Mark ordered, “Engage.”

Thorn pushed the acceleration lever to full and the *Morte Navi* shot forward, overtaking the *Destroyer* and passing within inches of her starboard nacelle.

Simon's panel beeped.

“It's the *Destroyer*, Tod wishes us good luck.”

Mark smiled as the *Morte Navi* shot ahead of the massive ship, which disappeared soon after.

-

The Woren system was a small star system, with an asteroid belt and three planets. Only one was habitable, with a population of 4 billion. This system was untouched by humans, at least until its discovery in 2307. It was agreed that, since there was a pre-Warp civilization, that the Destroyers and the TCF wouldn't touch the system. Now, 25 years later, a slit appeared in space. It opened, and a small white ship emerged.

“We are secure from Warp speed.” Thorn announced.

“Sensor scan. Where is she?” Mark asked.

Simon pulsed the system, but the sensors and radar came up blank. “I don't see anything, but I..wait.”

Mark raised an eyebrow and looked at him. “What?”

“I'm detecting an exhaust trail. It leads to the systems asteroid belt, near the star. It has the same energy signature put out by a Haze Mark-3.”

“Transfer that data to the helm. Thorn, as soon as you have the coordinates, lay in a course, full impulse.”

The ship started moving. For five minutes, it circled the star, following the trail until Simon gave a frustrated sigh.

“It's leading off into the system, to the second planet.”

“Are you sure?” Mark asked, folding his arms.

“Positive. Her course is a little erratic, but I can follow it exactly.”

Thorn sighed and started following the next set of way points. After three minutes, Simon frowned.

“Strange, the trail ends here.”

Mark stood. “All stop. Sensor scan?”

“Nothing on standard, switching to Radar...Nothing.”

“Has the trail dispersed at all?” Mark asked, moving to Simon's station.

Thorn noticed something on his panel. “Bridge to Engineering, Diana are you messing with the Warp Drive?”

“No,” Simon said to Mark, ignoring Thorn. “The trail just ends here. There's no radiation, no particle dispersion. She's just gone.”

“No, Thorn.” Diana said, oblivious to Simon and Marks conversation, “The Warp Drive is off line. Nothings in the main chambers.”

Mark took notice to the conversation as Thorn said, “Well, according to my sensors, there's a Warp Field surrounding the ship.

Mark frowned. “What did you say?”

Thorn jumped. “I said, I'm detecting a Warp Field around the ship.”

Mark and Simon exchanged glances.

Immediately, Mark barked off orders. “Elex, raise shields and bring weapons to full power. Thorn, prepare for evasive maneuvers. Simon, I want active Radar pings. Diana, polarize the hull.” He ran to his chair and pressed a button. “General Quarters! All hands, man your battle stations. This is not a drill.”

The lights dimmed and the panels brightened. Simon's panel beeped, as did the comm.

A soft voice filled the room, but it wasn't just the soft voice they knew. There was a dark quality to it, a deadly quality. “I can see you, Simon. Can you see me?”

Everyone froze. They looked at the speaker dome, then at the holographic emitter, which only showed the area around the *Morte Navi*.

“Oh, come now. I know your in there, hiding beneath sixty thousand metric tons of Duanite and Neutronium.”

Simon started tracing the transmission as she continued.

“Not going to speak? Such a shame. You know, Jeanette had many plans for you when the baby was old enough to take care of herself. Sure it would've waited several years, but she already had a plan, one that would allow you to come closer together.”

She paused as Simon got a partial lock on the signal.

“You know what I think? I think that you and I should never have met. I think that we aren't even comparable in the least. You want to know what I think, I think that we never should've *married!*”

A tear left Simon's eyes. He touched the panel and started for Elex's chair. The girl gave him a curious look, and jumped in surprise as he grabbed her shirt. He tossed her out and sat, turning the chair to face aft. With a few keystrokes, he pointed the Laser Cannons between the nacelles.

“Do you hear me, Simon? I said we should never have gotten...”

He fired. A burst of blue energy soared between the nacelles, but stopped short. The space there rippled, and soon, a ship appeared. The crew jumped in surprise. The *Hammond* had positioned itself between the nacelles, so close, it almost touched the dish. Simon was out of the chair in a second.

Jeanette growled. “So you wanna play dirty? Fine.”

Elex had sat as the *Hammond* fired a torpedo. The torpedo flew under the dish, but arched and slammed into the dish.

Diana's voice filled the bridge, “We're hit, acid damage to Deck 2.”

Mark stood as Elex pulsed the Laser Cannons.

“Thorn, on my order, do a millisecond jump to warp.” He ordered.

Another torpedo flew from the ship.

“Now.” The torpedo arched, just as the ship jumped forward. The torpedo, not calculating the ship's departure, phased through the *Hammond's* shields and smashed in to one of the Laser Banks. The *Morte Navi* dropped from its Warp jump and arched around, blasting away with its Lasers.

The *Hammond* looked worse than they'd thought. Her hull was darker, some spots were black, the metal replaced with an organic substance common on Hunter ships. The nacelles, usually glowing blue, had a sick green to them.

She started moving, rolling to dodge a laser bolt. Elex fired a burst of torpedoes, the yellow-orange projectiles impacting the *Hammond's* shields. The minigun spun up and started spraying the *Hammond's* Lasers. Thorn pulled the *Morte Navi* so it went over the *Hammond*, and the gun fire shattered the Harus on the end of the port Laser Bank. The *Hammond* swung around, striking at the engines, but Thorn rolled the ship, and pulses of reddish-green passed harmlessly. Elex fired the aft cannons as Thorn jerked the *Morte Navi* to avoid a torpedo.

“She's absorbing damage like a sponge.” Simon said, “We haven't even made a dent in her shields.”

Diana appeared on one of his screens. “Ya, but she's made plenty in ours. Shields down to 44%.”

Mark growled. “Torpedoes, full spread.”

The rhythmic hiss of four torpedoes leaving the ship reverberated through the hull. The yellow-orange projectiles struck the *Hammond*, but splashed against the shield. Elex hissed and fired the minigun again.

Simon followed the projectiles, then zoomed in on the damaged areas.

“Shit, she's regenerating too fast. Look at this.”

He pulled it up, and the hull, with each armor-piercing bullet, replaced the damaged metal with more of the black substance.

“I've never seen a Hunter ship regenerate that fast.” Thorn commented, before jerking up on the joystick.

Mark frowned. “How is she doing that?”

Elex turned to him. “How does daddy rise after being shot in the head?”

Mark narrowed his eyes, but stayed silent. Another laser bolt struck the *Morte Navi*.

“Aft shields collapsing.” Diana announced over the comm.

“Emergency power to aft emitters.”

“I already pumped everything into them. Warp power, main batteries, *emergency batteries...*” She paused, looking over her board. “We're bled dry, and she knows it.”

Another laser blast, this one causing the ship to jump even more then before.

“She's targeting our weapons.” Elex said as one of her status lights turned yellow.

“Target any projectiles. Thorn, get us out of here.”

“On it.” He pulled the ship into an arc, lining it up so, if the *Hammond* followed, she'd be caught within range of the *Destroyer*. “Engaging Warp Drive.”

BAM! The ship started spinning out of control. Thorn reset his controls and regained his mastery of the ships engines. He frowned. “That wasn't suppose to happen.”

“Your damn right its not!” Diana's face appeared on his display. “We have a hole in the port nacelle casing. Plasma's leaking out and we've lost two coils. We're stuck here.”

Mark hit the arm of his chair. “Cant we even make Warp 1?”

“Nope. Not without this ship flying apart while making circles in Warp Space.”

The amusing scene filled Mark's head, but he immediately quenched it. “Then we need to hold out. Simon, how long before the other ships arrive?”

“Not for another half hour.”

“Can we hold out till then?”

Simon slowly shook his head.

Mark dropped his head. He didn't know what to do. He'd been trained in command and combat, but he never took the final test, the famous no-win scenario, which Tod had programmed himself. Up until now, he'd never faced a no-win scenario, and he didn't know what to expect. Defeat, or victory. It'd always been victory. He raised his head, looking at the crew, who were looking to him for some kind of encouragement.

He huffed. “Well then, lets play dirty. Simon, bring up the *Hammond's* command pefix codes, namely those attached to the shields, weapons, and engines.

“Elex, keep firing the minigun, but on my order, I want a spread of torpedoes on her Warp engines and Sensor Dome.

“Thorn, evasive pattern Delta. When I give the order, go to Attack Pattern Gamma-Seven-Echo.

“Diana, try and get our shields up. I don't care where you get the power. Lets move it people!”

The crew nodded. Moments later, Simon called his readiness.

“Simon,” Mark crossed is fingers. “Do it.”

Simon punched in a code at lightning speed, and the *Hammond's* lights suddenly went out.

“Thorn, Elex, now!”

The *Morte Navi* barred down on the disabled ship, firing lasers and torpedoes. Bolts of blue energy and yellow-orange blobs struck the *Hammond*. The port nacelle exploded, and the Sensor Dome shattered. Sections of the armor disintegrated as the barrage continued. This went on for four seconds, then the power came back. The *Hammond*, still having impulse engines, jumped forward, dodging a pair of torpedoes that would've taken its ability to move at all. The lasers came back a second later, and they fired a pulse of reddish-green energy, which passed between the *Morte Navi's* nacelles and struck the engineering section.

Diana watched in horror as several crewmen were blasted from their stations, at the far wall, and thrown into the containment field of the Quantum Singularity. They froze, then, with a scream, they were sucked into the black abyss. Diana turned away, fear on her face. Her board suddenly turned red and the main computer spoke. “Warning, damage to power core. Containment failure in five minutes.” She jerked around, and saw the blue rippling on the black sphere. With a hiss, she punched in a comm channel. “Bridge, we have a problem; the core's going critical, and I don't know if I can stop it.”

Mark stood, horrified. A holographic image of the *Morte Navi* appeared, showing a bright red engine room. The crew looked at it, forgetting the situation at hand. Mark's fingers touched his chairs panel. “All hands, this is the captain. A core breach is in progress. Get to the life boats. Repeat, all hands, abandon ship.” He released the key and an alarm sounded. “Simon, send out a distress call.”

The teen nodded and touched a button. “This is the *DSS Morte Navi* to any ship in the area. We are suffering a breach to our Quantum Singularity power core and require assistance. If anyone can hear me, please respond.”

He frowned and turned to Mark. “I cant tell if I got through.”

“Doesn't matter.” Mark pressed another key. “Diana, meet me at...”

“Mark, I'm not leaving.”

He blinked in surprise. “Diana, we're abandoning the *Morte Navi*. Get to your escape pod.”

“I said, 'No'. I can stabilize this breach. I've done it before.”

“That was on another ship, Diana, with an Anti-Matter power core. This one's not an old ship, and it sure as hell doesn't have Anti-Matter as its power source.”

“I can do it.”

Mark growled and released the key.

“I'll get her.” Elex said, starting for the door.

“No. She's my responsibility. You, Thorn, and Simon get to our privet bay. Go.” They left, and he started for engineering.

When he entered, the field surrounding the core was starting to falter. Sections of it disappeared, but it was still enough to keep it from expanding. Diana's form was on the upper level, working at a console.

“Diana, come on!”

“I'm not leaving my baby!” She yelled.

“Hon, this baby is going to kill you if we don't go!” He yelled back.

“I can stabilize her. Just give me three minutes.”

“Warning,” The computer said, as if hearing her comment, “Damage to power core. Containment failure in one minute, thirty seconds.”

“Fuck you!” Diana yelled at it.

Mark, having had enough, grabbed a laser pistol from beneath one of the consoles and climbed the ladder. He took aim.

“Diana...”

She looked, and her face sunk. “You'd really shoot me?”

“If it meant getting you out safely, then yes, I would.”

“Mark, you don't understand. This is my first ship, my first baby. Now I'm losing her.”

“Diana, its a ship...”

“It's not JUST a *SHIP*!” She yelled. “It's my whole *LIFE*!”

Mark frowned and pressed the safety switch. “It's set to level 12, kill, which would mean stun to you.”

Diana sulked. “Your not kidding, are you?”

“Nope.”

She turned back to the failing core. “Mark, I've spent my whole life trying to get this ship. Now...” She took a breath, then reached down and pulled off the ship's emblem, a top-down image of the *Morte Navi* with a hooded grim on it. She pocketed it, and turned to him. With tears in her eyes, she walked past him, and jumped off the side to the floor below. He climbed down the ladder and ran to catch up with her.

“They'll build another.” He said as they walked to the front of the ship.

“Will they?”

“Your dad will make sure of it.”

They reached the pod. Simon was standing by the hatch, his arms crossed. He had a sad look in his eyes. They entered and closed the hatch. Elex slammed her fist into a button and the pod shot out of the bay. They looked at the small viewscreen. The *Morte Navi* had suffered serious damage. Sections were ripped out, others were melted. Almost 65% of the ship was damaged, and there was a hole through the entire port nacelle. The *Hammond* hung nearby, ignoring the escape pods. Simon looked at the ship, tears flowing down his face. The *Morte Navi's* engineering section flashed. Suddenly, the ship cracked, and sections of it exploded, others were pulled to the ship. With a flash, the entire ship was engulfed in a massive black sphere, which held its shape for a moment before shrinking into nothingness, leaving tiny fragments that had managed to escape destruction. Diana's face was filled with tears, and she started crying into Mark's arms as the *Hammond* turned to face them. For a brief moment, its weapons charged, but it didn't fire. The weapons cooled and it flew past them.

“Jeanette...” Simon whispered, “...No...”

The comm crackled. “*DSS Morte Navi*, this is the *DSS Kraken*, respond please.”

Mark touched the panel. “Your too late, *Kraken*. This is Mark Cantrell on board Escape Pod *Alpha-1-Niner*.”

“Where's your ship?”

Mark was silent a moment.

“Gone.”

-

Captain Log, supplemental,

Today seems to be getting worse and worse. First, I lose my darling Jeanette, now, I've almost lost my other children and their husbands. I cant believe Jeanette stooped to this level. I taught her better then this, even before the split. Did I do something wrong? Was it something that I did when she was being created, or even after? I don't know, and right now, I'm too pissed off to care. All I know is that Jeanette destroyed the Morte Navi, and now I feel like I caused this. Maybe I did, maybe I didn't. All I know is that Jeanette's going down...

-

I looked at the sad faces before me. I didn't speak. Normally, I'd be berating a captain for losing his ship, but then again, I would always have another completed, unnamed ship waiting. This wasn't the case. The *Morte Navi* was the only Haze Mark-1 *Alpha* in existence. Another would take weeks to build, and there just wasn't time. I looked at all five. Their eyes were sunken, like they hadn't rested in months. Around Diana's neck, cut out and made into a necklace, was the *Morte Navi's* symbol.

“How bad was it?” I asked.

“Very,” Mark muttered, “She caught us completely off guard. We couldn't even ping her on Radar.”

Diana sighed. “I cant believe it. Four year and, poof, she's gone.”

Elex reached across the table and cupped her sister's hand. "Don't worry, sis. We'll get a new one."

"Not for a while." Simon muttered, looking at a holographic image recovered from the *Morte Navi's* gravity-proof black box, which had been ejected when the ship started losing containment.

"Credit for your thoughts?" Elex asked, still comforting her sister.

"Well, our weapons did very little to her shields, but when we dropped them..." He pressed a few buttons and large sections turned red, "...We did a *lot* of damage. What if we take a page from the TCF?"

"Simon?" I asked, "Are you suggesting we use MAGs?"

"No, but that is an idea." He pulled up a weapons list. "Energy weapons did little to her shields, and the minigun didn't do shit to the hull, so here's the plan. We use guns to knock her shields down and energy weapons to blast her hull apart. Now, we just need a ship..."

I stood. "I'll do better." With a single button, five ships appeared. "Let me introduce you to your new ships: the *DSS Mallard*, the *DSS Drake*, the *DSS Sanction*, the *DSS Dread*, and the *DSS Bark*."

They looked them over.

"Each ship is a new Haze Mark-3 *Alpha* Battle Cruiser. Eight universal weapon mounts, a rapid fire Quantumic Torpedo Launcher, 5 meters of armor plating, enhanced power cores, and a rating similar to the Haze Mark-4." I said.

They smiled evilly. These five ships were actually prototypes, and they hadn't even been tested in the field, but tests against the Haze Mark-3 showed promising results. The five reached out and grasped one of the ships each. Mark chose the *Mallard*, Simon took the *Sanction*, Diana had the *Drake*, Elex the *Dread* and Thorn the *Bark*.

I smiled.

"Now, the *Bark* is equipped with a new experimental weapon. Laura, bring up the vids."

On the far monitor, a video played. It showed the *Bark* approaching a captured TCF cruiser. Its Sensor Dome started glowing blue, and a beam of energy suddenly punched through the ship, slicing it in two.

Elex looked at her husband. "Trade you."

"Nah. I'm good."

Diana giggled.

"Now, we've located the *Hammond*. She was able to restore Warp power, but didn't get far. She's in the Tevron system. You have three days. Ready your ships for combat."

"The Tevron system?" Simon asked. "Why there?"

"I don't know." I pulled up a map of the system. "It's got nothing she could use. All she can use is the Abyss Nebula, but that fucks with shields and sensors."

"Maybe that's what she needs." Diana said. "Hide and repair so you can engage at full power later."

"Maybe. You have three days. Go."

They were gone in seconds. I sat back and sighed, my eyes on the *Hammond's* holo-image.

"Jeanette, what have you done?"

I closed my eyes.

...*Father*...

My eyes snapped open.

"Jeanette...?"

-

For the next three days, Diana had every repair crew on board working on the ships.

Mark had requested his mounts to have Type-3 Target Seeking Chainguns, each capable of locking onto the *Hammond*, no matter where she was. He'd also asked for an Archer Missile Launcher, an interesting choice, but still easy to grant.

Elex had asked for a new tractor beam, the Galar, which could hold a ship at a large distance.

Thorn had asked for the Type-2 Long Range Anti-Material Guns, which were like large Sniper Rifles.

Diana had added a Polerex Torpedo Launcher, which had electromagnetic properties.

Simon had opted not to get large weapons. Instead, he grabbed Laser Cannons, added a second Power Core, and added three extra shield generators.

Simon was worrying Diana. Most of the three days was spent in Jeanette's lab, the rest were spent in one of the Training Rooms. He didn't eat. He didn't sleep. He didn't interact with his sister-in-laws. He just kept quiet. He did play with his daughter, but that was it. On the third day, she went to let him know that his ship was ready, but found the door locked. Elex picked the lock and they found him passed out on Jeanette's bed. His lips were red and puffy, and looked like they'd been bleeding at one point. A quick scan revealed nothing, but it still had them worried.

Finally, they were standing before Tod, who looked over the ships.

"Diana, you've out done yourself."

"Thanks dad."

He turned to them. "But are you truly ready to take her on? She's already destroyed the *Morte Navi*, and reports show at least ten others. Are you ready to take on Jeanette's former self?"

"Captain," Simon said, "I've got a plan to stop her. I just need to get on board."

"Very well, Simon, but you better be right. I want my daughter back, and I'll destroy that system if I have to. Do you understand?"

"Yes sir." They said in unison.

"Then your all dismissed. Get going."

They turned and started forward.

"Simon."

The teen stopped and turned to face Tod. Violet had joined him, and in her arms was Amanda, Simon's daughter. She held her arms out to Simon, who pulled her from Violet's grasp. He held her close for a minute, listening to her breathing. He whispered reassuring words to her, and she seemed to listen, a smile growing on her face. As he gave her back to Violet, he whispered, "I love you." As he walked away, she started crying, but he couldn't go back. His eyes locked onto his ship, its gleaming hull glowing bright in the hanger's lighting.

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The ships dropped out of Warp in the Tevron system, a large solar system with three stars and over twelve planets, three asteroid belts, and a massive nebula, named the Abyss for its massive size and ability to cloud sensors and disable shields.

Simon examined the image on his view screen. "Status?"

His helm officer glanced at him. "We're secure from Warp speed."

"Sensors show multiple signals from the Hammond." Simon's science officer said, "I cant pinpoint the actual ship."

"How many signals?"

"Over thirty."

Simon swore. "Has the fleet arrived yet?"

"They are at the other edge of the system. They have orders to search the system."

Simon looked at the holographic image of the system. It was a large system, but for some reason, he felt drawn to the nebula. He closed his eyes.

Jeanette's face flashed before him. ...*Simon...*

He opened his eyes in surprise. His crew were paying attention to their panels. He closed his eyes again.

She appeared again. ...*Simon...help...*

He suddenly felt pain in his head. He opened his eyes.

He wasn't on his bridge anymore. He was somewhere else, somewhere dark. It was filled with computers and wires, and seemed to be made completely out of metal, with no windows. Doors lined the walls, some with descriptions on them, some without.

"Simon," Came a whisper, "In here." One of the doors opened slightly. He immediately ran to it and entered. It was another room of computers, but these had hundreds of memory crystals in them. It looked like an old fashion computer core, but much more advanced.

"Over here." He followed the voice and paused. It led to a large door, which had a label, which said 'locked memories'. He entered and gasped. Jeanette hung in the air, held there by a large machine that produced yellow energy binds that held her up. She still looked like his Jeanette, but her skin looked more human, and her Mark was gone. She slowly opened a pair of sky blue eyes.

"Simon..." She whispered, weakly.

He ran up to her, but stopped half way. Another Jeanette emerged from the shadows. She had pale skin, and bright red eyes. She looked at Simon with interest.

"How did you get in here?"

Simon blinked at the dark voice.

"So this is Simon." The evil Jeanette looked at the good half. "Good looking in person, but its unfortunate that he has to die."

Simon raised his fists. She laughed. "You think I need my fists to hurt you?"

She raised her hand, and a sonic blast flew at him. He jumped, narrowly avoiding it. The blast struck the wall, and Jeanette winced.

"Good. Fast and agile." She held up her hand, and a fireball appeared. "But can you dodge this?"

She threw it. Simon spotted a small hunk of metal nearby. He grabbed it and swung it, smacking the fireball back at Jeanine. She gave a cry of surprise just a moment before the fireball struck her in the face. She screamed as the flesh on her face was burned. Jeanette smiled, but stayed silent. She looked at Simon, then at his feet. He looked down, and noticed a map at his feet. He grabbed it and looked at her.

"Run." She mouthed.

He nodded and took off. Jeanine growled as he slammed the door. She turned to her good self.

“You think this is funny. If he even approaches us, he's as good as dead.”

Jeanette turned to look at her. “You can try.” She said, before looking away.

Simon kept running, stopping at the place he'd started. The door behind him slammed open, bright red eyes in the darkness. He closed his eyes and soon found himself on the bridge of the Sanction.

“Sir, are you alright?” his first officer asked.

“I know where she is. Helm, bring us to full impulse, course 064-mark-005.”

The officer nodded. The Sanction started forward.

“Sir, the *Mallard* is hailing.” The same officer said.

“On screen.”

Mark's image appeared. “Simon, where the hell are you going?”

“I know where she is. Form up on me, Delta Formation.”

Mark blinked. “Simon, I'm fleet leader here. I...”

“Then stay behind. I don't need you to follow.”

Mark was silent for a moment. “Alright Simon. I'll follow. But you better be right.”

His image disappeared.

“The other ships are forming up behind us.” Simon's science officer said.

Simon smiled. “I'm coming, Jeanette,” He whispered. “Just hold out a few minutes longer.”

-

They approached the Nebula, a large, purple cloud of ionized gas that flashed as lightning sparked inside. This lightning would do little damage to ships, but had an ionizing effect on some of the systems.

The fleet of six approached the nebula. Before them, looking like it did three days before, was the *Hammond*. It was, however, dark as night.

“Something's not right.” Simon said, “Scan her.”

The science officer nodded. The *Mallard* flew past, heading directly for the ship.

“Hail them. Mark, what the hell are you doing?”

“My job. Tactical, target engines.”

Simon's science officer gave a cry of warning. “It's a TRAP!”

The *Hammond* suddenly exploded, the shock wave knocking the *Mallard* off its axis. Shrapnel from the ship's hull sliced into the *Mallard*, knocking key systems offline. As the *Mallard* spun, completely out of control, Simon spotted a shimmering just beside her.

“Fuck! Helm, course 315-mark-012, full impulse.”

The officer complied as Simon hit the button on his chair.

“General Quarters! All hands, man your battle stations. Tactical, shields up.”

The *Sanction* flew between the shimmering and the *Mallard*, just as the shimmering took the shape of a Haze Mark-3. It was way different then before. Only 15% of the physical hull remained the normal silver, but the rest is black, oily, and scaly. The weapon ports were green, even the normally-yellow ending of the torpedo launcher was green.

Green laser blasts struck the *Sanction's* shields, but failed to even make a dent. The *Hammond* pulled away as the *Mallard* reactivated her systems. The *Hammond* started firing on the *Drake*, which returned with a spread of torpedoes. The *Bark* came up behind the *Hammond*, striking it with multiple rounds from its guns. As the *Mallard* joined them, the *Sanction* fired a Quantum Torpedo. The blue projectile flew at the *Hammond*, crossing a third of the distance before splitting into five smaller torpedoes. As it neared, almost a kilometer from the hull, it split again, each one splitting into five more, creating a total of 25 torpedoes. They slammed into the *Hammond*, knocking it off its axis and momentarily knocking its shields out. The *Hammond* ignored the *Sanction*, focusing on the *Drake* as the *Dread* blasted it with laser fire. The *Drake* fired back, but started to reverse its shield polarity, or cloaking, to avoid the *Hammond's* sensors. This started to work, but proved too slow. The *Hammond* smashed its shield generator, preventing it from cloaking. A torpedo blasted the engineering section.

Diana growled in anger. She was losing another ship to a core breach, only this time, the core used Anti-Matter, not a Quantum Singularity. The ship was abandoned in seconds, with Diana's escape pod moving as fast as possible. She looked back in time to see a pulse of energy shatter the back of the *Drake's* dish into a million shards of metal. The dish was then engulfed in a fireball as Matter and Anti-Matter collided. Glad to have been off the ship, she sighed in relief, only to cry in horror as the *Hammond* appeared from behind the *Drake's* hulk. A pulse of energy erupted from the Laser Banks, striking one of the other pods. The pod was covered in a star-burst, and when it faded, there was nothing but fragments of metal. Three more pods fell to the infected ship. Finally, she was next. A torpedo was fired, and almost hit her pod, when a ruby-red beam struck it. As the torpedo exploded, the *DSS Mallard* appeared. The *Hammond*, preferring live prey, started to engage it. A hum filled the air, which started to shimmer. Piece by piece, the area around her changed from a cramped escape pod to the roomy transporter room of the *Mallard*. The teen behind the controls smiled and pressed a button.

“Bridge, I have her. She's a little crispy, but she's fine.” Diana thanked the teen and rushed off, reaching the bridge as the *Hammond* started attacking the *Dread*.

Mark turned to her upon her entry. “Diana, thank god. Are you alright?”

Diana felt the burned part of her hair, but nodded. "I'm fine."

Mark's comm officer turned to him. "Sir, Captain Thorn is requesting you bring her closer."

"Do it."

The *Mallard* neared the *Bark*, which charged up the Sensor Dome. As the *Hammond* neared, a beam of pure white energy sliced through space, and sliced into the port nacelle. The beam emerged on the other side before cutting off. The *Hammond* turned on the *Bark*, but moved cautiously, avoiding a line of sight with the Sensor Dome. At that point, the *Dread* caught her in a tractor beam, stopping the ship completely. The *Hammond* started firing at the *Dread*, however, Elex had positioned herself so she wouldn't be targeted by laser fire, and she could easily take down any torpedoes. After trying to hit the *Dread*, and taking a pounding from the other ships, the *Hammond* sent a feedback pulse, which knocked the beam offline, but damaged the *Hammond* in the process. After several minutes of fighting, the five ships wore down the *Hammond*, and like an animal, it crawled its way into the nebula, forcing the other ships to halt their pursuit.

"Damn it!" Simon yelled.

"I'm not going in there." Elex said. "Not without shields and sensors."

"Same here." Mark said.

Simon closed his eyes. A thought hit him.

"Guys, I need your weapons. All of them."

"What?" Thorn asked.

"I'm going in, and I need firepower."

"Simon," Diana said, almost laughing, "Your ship cant hold anymore weapons."

"That's not it, hon." Mark said to her. "Simon, are you out of your mind? She'll make *mincemeat* out of you."

"Not if my plan works. Weapons, Now."

The others hesitated, but they soon relented.

"Alright, Simon." Mark said, "But if you don't signal in one hour, I'm having the *Destroyer* fire its Katalist Laser, and if you and Jeanette aren't out by that point...well, it was nice knowing ya."

One by one, the weapons were ejected off their respective ship's hull. Transporter beams took them, and work crews started making modifications.

"Good luck, Simon." Elex said.

"Thanks, Ellie." He said.

“Simon,” Diana said, “When you find her, smack her for me. That's two she owes me.”

“Dont worry, Diana.”

After farewells and a mess of good lucks, the other ships turned and warped out. The *Sanction* started in, most of its light going out upon entering the purple cloud.

-

Jeanine stared at the many screens that lined the walls of her mind. She'd recently added them, which let her look at the space surrounding her ship in the real world. Voices filled the air, hundreds of them. She could easily pick out any one of them, listen, and interpret the meaning behind it with ease.

“I dont know how you do it.”

Jeanine turned. Her good self stood in the doorway. She was shaking her head as she continued.

“All those voices in your head. You must have terrible headaches.”

Jeanine frowned. “How did you get free?”

“Its my mind, bitch. I just made an off switch.”

Jeanine's frown deepened, but it turned to an evil smirk. “Doesn't matter. I still control your body.”

Jeanette hissed, a sound that didn't fit her human look.

Jeanine turned back to the screens.

“He's coming you know.”

“What?” Jeanine asked, turning from the screen.

“Simon. He's coming for me.”

Jeanine scoffed and turned back to the screens. “He wouldn't dare. He wouldn't risk your life.”

Jeanette laughed. “Like you could do anything.”

Jeanine turned to her. “What's that suppose to mean?”

Jeanette picked up a dusty beaker from one of the tables in the room. She swirled the contents around before setting it down. “The dark cant exist with out the light. By killing me, you kill yourself.”

Jeanine laughed and turned back to the screens. “You expect me to believe that?”

“Search my memories. Look for the name Jake Morse. I performed an experimental that had completely eliminated his dark half.”

“Seriously, your having me look up criminals now?”

“I want you to look at the results.”

Jeanine frowned, but closed her eyes. She started voicing Jeanette's report.

“Experiment 626, final notes. Subject: Jake Morse. Crime: murder in the second degree. Punishment: three life sentences mining raw materials for trading with the TCF.”

She paused. *“I had been successful in eliminating any trace of darkness from Mr. Morse's soul, and I was confident that he could rejoin society and get out of those mines, but there was a complication. After three hours of being darkness free, just seconds after being given his release papers, Mr. Morse collapsed, convulsed, and died within four-point-two seconds. As there were no wounds, and his body is undamaged, I have determined the COD as the result of the lack of darkness in his soul.”*

Jeanine opened her eyes. “So? This just tells me that all good will kill itself.”

“Look at the next one.”

Jeanine sighed, glanced at the screens, and closed her eyes again.

“Experiment 627, final notes. Subject: William Fuller. Crime: murder in the first degree. Punishment: execution by firing squad.”

She paused again. *“Similar to my earlier report, I have been successful in eliminating any trace of goodness from Mr. Fuller's soul. Within thirty-point-four-two seconds, he became more violent and attempted to strangle me. In the process, however, he collapsed, and, like my earlier report, started convulsing, dying within one-point-eight seconds. COD is, essentially, the same. For his execution, I was to be payed by the victim's family, however, my payment was the experiment, and I refused their credits. More on this report later.”*

She blinked, but frowned. “Doesn't mean anything to me.”

“It should.”

“But it doesn't.” She turned back to the screens.

“What are you looking for anyway?”

“Nothing.”

“Worried that Simon would show up?”

Jeanine turned to her, her arm positioned in a fashion that, if Jeanette was closer, she'd start choking her. She checked herself and lowered the arm. “No. I'm waiting for my repairs to be completed.”

She closed her hand. When she opened it, a small image of the *Hammond* appeared. On it were red patches where the recent battle had damaged her severely. The port nacelle was the worst. The hole

wasn't sealing as fast as it should've.

“Right, and I'm sure your never going to see Simon again.”

“Damn right.” Jeanine turned back to the screens. “I hope I never see him again.”

“Really? What about my daughter?”

“A small casualty of war.”

“I know you love her.”

Jeanine turned to Jeanette. “I'm not like you. I don't have a maternal instinct. As far as I'm concerned, I don't have a daughter.”

Jeanette frowned. “You are an evil bitch. I would've though...”

“What? That I would love a child that's not even mine? I never wanted a child in my life.”

“That's not true. Your memories are still here, Jeanine, and I've looked through some of them. You wanted a child, even at eight, and FYI, we share the same body. Amanda's is as much yours as she is mine.”

Jeanine scoffed and turned back to the screens. Jeanette hissed and picked up a beaker. She threw it at Jeanine, where it exploded on the back of her head. The evil girl turned.

“Getting angry? That's not what a person made of pure good does.”

“You forget, I'm not a hundred percent good.”

“Yet you've been saying that this whole time.”

“No I haven't. You cant have the light without the darkness.”

“We'll see.”

Jeanette hissed. “When I'm through with you, I'm putting you back in that cage like the animal you are.”

“I'm the animal? Look at your self. I've seen the memories of the way you and Simon were...”

“Shut up, before I kill you.”

“Ah, and the dark emerges.”

Jeanette closed her eyes, calming down. When she opened them, she noticed movement on one of the screens.

“I wont let you hurt my husband, or my child.” She said, almost a whisper.

"I don't need your permission. I can do what ever I want. I am in *control*! I am the *master*! I am Jeanine, *creature of darkness*, destroyer of *Light*. I am..." She turned to face the screens and froze. "...In trouble." She finished.

The *Sanction* looked different then it had a few minutes ago. The armor seemed thicker and the hull was lined with doors.

Jeanette smiled. "Welcome back, Simon."

Jeanine glanced at her, then at the *Sanction*. With a single tilt of the head, she gave orders to her ship.

-

The *Sanction* pulled lose from the clouds. The *Hammond* was in a clearing, an almost bubble-shaped area where the gasses hadn't gotten to. The *Hammond* turned to face him.

"Polarize the hull, ready weapons." Simon ordered.

The doors on the outside of the ship opened. Guns and other weapons rose out of them, cocking themselves and reading for a fight.

-

Jeanette and Jeanine looked on in surprise as the mass of weapons appeared. Jeanine shook a little, but shook her head.

"He's so stupid. My weapons are *ten times* better then his."

Jeanette smiled. "I dont think so."

-

"Lock weapons. Target engines and weapons."

"Yes sir."

"Hail them."

-

An alarm sounded. Jeanine frowned, but nodded. Simon's image appeared on the main screen.

"Hello, Simon." Jeanine said, crossing her arms.

"Give up, Jeanine. I'm in no mood for games."

"Who said this was a game?"

Simon growled.

“I'm giving you one chance. Surrender now, or I will open fire.”

The girl laughed. “You seriously think I'm gonna surrender? You're even more stupid than I thought.”

Simon frowned, and the transmission ended.

“Now, let's see if his new toys even work.” Jeanine turned to Jeanette. “You know, I think I'll take him alive. I always wanted a man-slave.” She laughed evilly as she turned to the screens again.

Jeanette smiled, not at what Jeanine had said, but because she knew Simon would take her down.

-

The *Sanction* fired first, a burst of Quantumic torpedoes. These had been programmed not to split, and they hit even harder than normal. The *Hammond* returned with a torpedo of her own, but the *Sanction* rolled, and the torpedo missed. The chainguns on the *Sanction* turned and started firing at the *Hammond*, blasting holes in the dark substance. The space between the ships was soon filled with red and green lasers, yellow tracers, and blue and green torpedoes. After a minute of fighting, the *Sanction* unleashed its most powerful weapon. A pure white beam sliced through the *Hammond*, obliterating some of her weapon in one shot.

-

Jeanine froze. That beam was a lot like the one the *Bark* had used, the same one that took out her Warp capacity. Now, she left the loss of one of her Laser Banks and her only torpedo launcher. She hissed and continued firing, though a thought sparked in her mind.

She might actually lose this one.

-

The ships spiraled around each other, and from a distance, it looked like a pair of ballerinas dancing, with weapons fire between them. Fires erupted on both ships, and soon, the pair pulled away, arching back so they would pass within inches of each other. As they approached, the mass of weapons on both ships fired. The *Hammond* received the worst of it, with the hull actually cracking. Atmosphere and bodies flew out of the breach that covered all decks. The crack reached the impulse engines, which started spilling plasma into space. It also reached the engine room, where the crew inside was immediately sucked into space. The ship slowed, stopping completely as the *Sanction* came around.

Simon looked her over. “Hail her.”

-

Jeanine pulled herself up, bits of metal and glass falling off her. She hissed in pain. Her right arm was broken. Not really, but the mental version of it was. She looked at Jeanette, who was struggling to stand as well. A beep came from behind her. She turned as Simon's image appeared on the screen.

“Jeanine, surrender your ship.”

Jeanine giggled. “Really? You think that knocking me around will force me to do anything?”

“Your ship is crippled. You've lost all your weapons, your hull is split from stem to stern, you've lost Warp capacity, and half your crew is dead.” He looked at her in the eyes. “One way or another, your surrendering the Hammond. We can do this peacefully, or I'll beam over a hundred heavily armed soldiers to secure that ship.”

Jeanine laughed. “I'll destroy this ship before I hand it over to you.”

She tilted her head, ordering the crew in engineering to deactivate the power core's containment fields. She frowned. She'd received no response. She pulled up an image of the engine room, and her eyes widened. The back wall was completely split open, and no containment fields had snapped on. The core pulsed, but otherwise did nothing.

She turned toward Simon. “I stand corrected. However, I am not handing this ship to you.”

Jeanette appeared behind her, nursing a leg wound. “Jeanine, give up. You've lost.”

“Never.” She hissed. “I'll kill you before I give up.”

“If I kill her for you, would you give up?”

Both girls turned to the viewscreen. “*What?*”

Simon frowned. “It's obvious that I'm never getting my Jeanette back, so I propose a deal. I destroy her, and you surrender, with me taking you into custody.”

Both girls exchanged surprised glances.

“Simon,” Jeanette asked, “What the *hell* are you talking about?”

“Yes, this I want to hear.”

Simon sighed. “Jeanette, she's got complete control of your body. If I have any chance of taking her alive, I need to destroy the one thing keeping her from surrendering.”

“But, Simon...” Tears appeared in her eyes. “What about...”

“Shut up.” Jeanine said. She turned to Simon. “And how do you propose to eliminate the bitch?”

“I implanted a neural disruptor in my lips. One kiss, and I will completely eliminate any pattern not currently in control.”

Jeanine and Jeanette frowned.

“Your not very good at making things, Simon.” Jeanine said.

“True, but I looked over Jeanette's notes.”

Jeanine closed her eyes for a moment, recalling the notes Jeanette had made. She smiled.

“Then its a deal. I can have you beamed over at any moment.”

“Good.” Simon said. He turned to Jeanette. “I'm sorry, hon.” He said, sadly.

His image winked off and Jeanette collapsed, crying.

“Knock it off you big baby. Look at it this way, you wont have to suffer anymore.” Jeanette looked at her in a rage, but stayed where she was.

-

Simon stood, and straightened his uniform. “Cantrell to transporter room, beam me directly to the *Hammond's* bridge.”

There was an acknowledgment, and a hum filled the air. Simon was engulfed in pure yellow energy. The energy collapsed and they both disappeared. On the *Hammond*, the same energy appeared, but came in reverse. It formed Simon's shape, then disappeared.

The *Hammond's* bridge was like Simons, but here, the main consoles were removed and the viewscreen was black. Some of the shadows moved, and as Simon's eyes adjusted to the dim lighting, he realized they were *Hunter Grunts*, all staring at him. A single machine was in the center of the bridge, where the captain's chair would normally sit, illuminated by a single beam of light. Attached to it was Jeanette.

He gasped. Most of her body was covered in scales, something that the transmission hadn't shown. Her eyes were a bright green, and her skin seemed almost transparent.

“What's wrong, Simon?”

He jerked around. Standing beside one of the Grunts was the other Jeanette he'd seen.

“Does our appearance not appeal to you?” She asked, an arm on the Grunt. She looked up at its face-like snout. “Do you see? He doesn't like me.”

“No games, Jeanine.” He said.

She blew a strand of hair out of her eyes, then walked to him, phasing through the objects in her way.

“Then hurry up. I've been waiting a week for this.”

Simon narrowed his eyes, but walked to Jeanette's body. She made no move to look at him, like she was petrified. Simon took a breath. He leaned in, and placed his lips on hers.

Jeanine smiled for a moment, but then looked at him horrified. “**NO!**” She screamed. Pain coursed through her, and she grasped her head. She started screaming, the sound being echoed by the Grunts, who mimicked her movements. She screamed so loud that the glass on the panels lining the walls

cracked and shattered. A light appeared in her heart, and she suddenly exploded, shards of the hologram disintegrating before they reached the walls. The Grunts just fell flat on their face, dead before they hit the ground.

Simon pulled away from Jeanette, who's features started regaining what color they had before. Her eyes slowly turned back to their normal yellow color before blinking.

She looked at him. "Simon?"

He smiled. "Jeanette. Welcome back."

She started reaching for her head, but her arms were still attached to the machine. Simon started to release her.

-

Captain's log, December 6th, 2332,

It took the Sanction almost a half hour to signal me to hold my fire, and another hour to get the Hammond out of the Abyss. We arrived in system just four hours ago, and Jeanette was immediately admitted to the primary medical center. She's worse then Violet told me, but Elex are confident that they can return her to normal.

-

Over the beeping of equipment, Simon and I looked on as Elex pulled one of the scales off her breast. The skin beneath it was red and rotten-looking, but was starting to heal.

"Will she be alright?" I asked.

Elex sighed as she set the scale down. "She'll be fine. Another few hours of this and she can go home." She grasped another and pulled. The scale hung on for a moment before pulling away, nearly throwing Elex into another bed. She sighed and put it down.

"How bad is it?" Simon asked.

"Not as bad as I thought." She touched Jeanette's skin. She flinched, but sighed. "Most of her internal organs are intact, but her hearts, liver, and uterus were damaged." She placed a hand between her sister's breasts, feeling the heart beat. She smiled. "She's regenerating faster then normal. Her pulse is already up to 77 BPM. By my estimate, she'll be at the normal 154 in a few hours."

I sighed in relief.

"I would, however, recommend against sexual activity."

Simon frowned. "Why?"

"Well, I think its the reason that all Hunter Grunts are male. Her vaginal tract has a mass of teeth-like appendages. According to my scanner, they'll be destroyed by tomorrow, but I wouldn't stick anything in there till then."

Simon paled, and I gave him an amused look. He'd probably been hoping for sex, but now that he'd learned about this...

He licked his lips. "I...ah...um"

"You weren't planning on sex, were you?" Elex asked, looking up at him as she tried to remove another scale.

"N-n-no. I wasn't."

"Good. At present, if those teeth didn't get your dick, then the overly-enhanced musculature would snap it in two, and I'm not patching it up." She pulled the scale free.

"Overly-enhanced musculature?" I asked.

She nodded as she set the scale down. "Her entire muscle structure has been enhanced. She could, quite literally, kick your ass."

I frowned. Jeanette had never been strong enough to take me down, ever.

"Don't worry, by this time tomorrow, she'll be back to her normal self." Elex looked at Simon. "Don't mess around. I mean it about the teeth thing."

Simon nodded.

Jeanette stirred and we all looked at her. Simon leaned over her.

"Jeanette?"

Her eyes opened, but they weren't the usual yellow. They were a bright bloody red.

"You think you've won, Simon?" Came Jeanine's dark voice. "You haven't won. I'm still in here, and when I get out, I will make sure my hands wrap around your *neck*. I will kill you Simon, and your little girl too."

She made a sound, then her back arched for a moment. She collapsed back to the bed, and opened her eyes again. They were now the usual yellow, glowing like a pair of miniature suns.

"Simon?"

"Ya, its me."

SLAP!

Simon staggered back. "What the...?"

She grabbed him. "That was for making me think you were going to kill me."

She pulled him down, bringing his lips to hers. When she let him go, she whispered, “And that was for coming back.”

She released him and he looked at me, dumbstruck. I shrugged as she sat up.

“Man, talk about a headache.” She said, grasping her head.

I smiled. “Elex, get the rest of those,” I gestured to the scales, “And clean her up.”

Elex nodded. “Yes sir. Simon, help me.” They helped Jeanette stand as I walked to the door.

“Dad.” I turned to her.

“Ya?”

“I’m sorry.” She said, almost a whisper.

“We’ll talk about it later, young lady. For now, get cleaned up. I’m debriefing you later.”

She nodded and I left. As I walked into an elevator, a smile met my lips.

Jeanette was home, that’s all that mattered.