

# The Conscripted Queens of Space

## Chapter 1

A long time from now in a region of space not unlike ours...

A red ship tore through the vastness of space. A large battleship, which had been given a coat of custom red paint. The name "AES X177 Da Vinci" was molded into its hull in several places, but the "AES X177" was painted over in red, with "Countessa" written over top. Several skull and crossbones were manually painted on the ship's sides. This pirate ship was known throughout the galaxy to merchants, smugglers, and travelers as a serious threat. The exact name was irrelevant; this was the ship of the two women who would call themselves the "Space Pirate Queens".

The ship's bridge only contained two people, one short of the ship's full "crew". Sitting at the helm was one of the women bold enough to call themselves the Space Pirate Queens, Tilannah Onikyu. She was born as a clone and lab experiment in an Alliance science facility, as a genetically modified child genius. Her number in the lab was #029, which was why she took the name Onikyu. #029 used to be written on her left bicep, until she cut that arm off and had it replaced with cybernetics. Compared with the little girl who escaped the science lab, the woman in the captain's chair was smarter, more versatile, more pragmatic, more callous, and more self-centered. Ever since stealing the AES X177 Da Vinci, she's been known as one of the most dangerous women in the galaxy. She had lavender hair, dark skin, and orange eyes which contained a fire telling you to not take her lightly. While sitting in the captain chair, a nautical coat was draped across her shoulders.

Sitting in the navigation position was a young boy, looking to be in his early teens. He was pale with brown hair, and couldn't look less like Tilannah. Despite this, he adopted her last name, and the two treated each other as siblings. This boy, whom Tilannah named Leonardo, was a biological component of the Da Vinci. That is to say, he was also a science experiment, but designed to control two of the Da Vinci's most cutting-edge systems. When the pirate stole the ship, she stole the boy as well. As both artificial humans built to serve the military, the two feel a certain kinship. If you ever tried to say this scrawny kid WASN'T a member of the "Space Pirate Queens", you were going to get a metal fist in the face.

A console beeped. It was an incoming communication. Tilannah pretended not to hear it. It rang again.

"Sis, it's Captain Mathers of the Malcontent. You should really pick up..."

"Ugh, fucking Alliance. What a pain. Fine, patch him in."

For the time being, Captain Mathers was the Countessa Da Vinci's 'Handler'. Realistically he wasn't any more fond of the arrangement than Tilannah was. Whenever the Alliance had a task they needed performed "off the record", they would call upon the Queens' CO, who would

then have the awful job of convincing the Queens to do it. This was their fourth commanding officer, and Tilannah was starting to like this guy. It wasn't that there was anything particularly nice about him; he was an ordinary Alliance starship captain. But every time the Queens got wild, out of control, and needed to have their actions covered up, they were given a new CO, in the hopes that they'd work together better. The first time was completely on purpose, as a show of defiance to the Alliance. At this point, though, she was getting tired of the *process*. If the Queens were going to be forced to work for the Alliance for some time, she'd rather not have to get used to a new CO every month. Thankfully, though, things were going well.

A middle-aged man with a thick mustache was displayed on screen.

"Captain Mathers. To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"Ms. Onikyu. I'm just calling for a standard check-in."

"Oh, a check-in? Well, things are going fine. I suppose my bed could use new pillows..."

"Quit toying around. You were supposed to give a status report an hour ago. I... I'm not angry, I'm just taking the liberty of asking you for a report instead of waiting for you to give me one."

That was fair, she thought. Honestly neither of them liked working with each other, but they were under orders from their superiors to "play nice". Tilannah knew that Mathers was just trying to do his job, but she just hated that his job needed to be done. She hadn't felt so baby-sat since the testing facility.

"Right, yes. My mission took twenty-eight more minutes than I expected, but I was successful. I infiltrated a Guild secret science facility, retrieved their sample of Starzorite-268, and even downloaded schematics for the Guild's new model of cruiser."

"... Do you mean to tell me you spent 28 minutes going outside the mission parameters?"

She responded quickly, sharply, firmly.

"No. Your intel on the security measures of the facility was incomplete. It took most of those extra 28 minutes for me to get in undetected and get out undetected." Her mood lightened. "Picking up these schematics took me less than 30 seconds. Their sensor arrays were advanced, but hacking through their security was child's play."

The captain looked relieved.

"Oh, well, I suppose that is all quite acceptable. Kudos on the good work, Onikyu. Now, what about the Gargantan..."

"Ah, well, since I was delayed in my infiltration, I'm delayed in picking her up. But we're on our way to Celeron-3 now. I'll give you a new update after we've had a debriefing."

"Very good. Well, I don't want to count my chickens, but I look forward to us continuing to work in the future."

"I do as well. Onikyu, out."

She pressed a button on her chair to cut the feed.

The young boy spoke up.

"I wish he hadn't said that..."

Leonardo had been looking at the long-range scanners. He didn't like the energy readings he was seeing, but he wasn't 100% certain...

"Why, what is it. What did she do..."

“Sis, we gotta stop giving your girlfriend missions that require her to be covert...”

The Countessa Da Vinci entered the star system around Celeron-3.

Celeron-3 was a planet whose civilization was still undergoing its infancy. Using the Olde Terran rating system, it was in the “Medieval Phase”. This meant that the sentient creatures of this world had developed castles, feudalism, and weapons of wood and steel. The Urzo-Duang Treaty stated clearly that no space-faring organization would in any way interact with civilizations yet to be able to leave their own star system under their own power (with the exception of a set of extenuating circumstances, all detailed in the treaty). This treaty was signed by all the members of the Pan-Galactic Strategic Alliance, the Arlington Empire, Mercantile Guild, and Association of Free Planets; the current major galactic powers. Therefore, none of these civilizations had any official business interacting with Celeron-3. Any unaligned force which would dare set foot on or otherwise involve themselves with such a planet would be branded an outlaw. However, that meant that if you already were an outlaw, nothing REALLY was stopping you from going to Celeron-3. If you were, say, a known outlaw secretly working at the behest of a galactic super power...

Out of all the kingdoms on Celeron-3, the Kingdom of Rinkah was the most influential and powerful. Within the Kingdom of Rinkah, the Rinkah Royal Castle was the largest and most important physical structure. So, it was not a stretch to say that Rinkah Royal Castle was the grandest and most important physical structure of all Celeron-3. Well, this structure... was currently being used by a giant as her personal throne. She was easily 30 times the size of the average citizen of the planet. The royal square, from which the king used to address his troops or hold tournaments, was currently being occupied by her gigantic ass. The large and central tower of the building was supporting the woman’s back, and slowly failing. Bits of the outside crumbled as her back occasionally rubbed against it. If you had asked her, she would probably complain that the building didn’t go high enough; she had no neck support. Her legs dangled over the castle walls, and her knees bent, landing her feet in the market outside the castle’s walls. Troops had long given up trying to launch their best rocks, flaming rocks, and arrows into this giant’s skin; barely a scratch had been made. Instead, the citizens of the castle and surrounding city had accepted that this was their new ruler. Atop the giant’s head, a gigantic version of the King’s crown sat, though because it was not designed with her two head horns in mind, it was placed over one of them. On her right shoulder stood an ordinary woman, who wore a tattered dress and less impressive crown. She was a Celeronian; you could tell by the lizard-like tail poking out of her dress. She sung gracefully, to the enjoyment of the giantess. In their right hand, Rinkah Royal Castle’s new ruler held a golden staff, adorned with gemstones, a magnified version of the one previously used by the king. In her left hand, she held a gigantic crystal goblet, in which there was wine. She swirled around this giant glass, with the liquid of ten swimming pools. She took a drink of this wine, and enjoyed the tiny girl’s music.

“Ah, it just doesn’t get any better than this...” she bellowed.

In her ear, she heard a beep. She rolled her eyes. A message came through, and she had no way of stopping it.

“A little self-indulgent, don’t you think?”

Far, far above the Rinkah Royal Castle, up in space, a the Countessa Da Vinci was in orbit. Even from a window, they could easily see the giant woman down below.

The giant turned her head to her personal singer, and spoke in a gentle tone.

“Shh, shh, shh. Hush, your majesty.”

The singer stopped, and the giant turned her head back to where it was.

“Sorry, honey, what was that? I didn’t quite hear you.” said the giant, to no-one who was present.

Tilannah, on the bridge, responded.

“You heard me. I said you’re being self-indulgent. Just lounging around like that. Bet you didn’t even get your fucking job done.”

“Hey, I did! The Starzorite-268 is right here.” said the giant, holding up the staff. “You know me. I’m business first, then pleasure.”

“Bitch, I know you aren’t. From personal experience.” responded Tilannah.

“Whatever, hon. I did it properly this time. So now I’m just, you know, relaxing. Besides, I had nothing to do until you got back.”

“You know I’m only late because I had to do my job by the book. Anyway, I’m here, you’ve got the goods, so we’re leaving.”

The star-ship descended towards the planet. The giant could see it, and rolled her eyes.

“Uuuughh. This is so lame. I was just taking a well-deserved break...”

As the ship descended, a cone of light was emitted from its underside. Slowly, the giant was being pulled up off the ground.

“This is some goddamn horseshit!!!” said the giantess as the light absorbed her and her little friend into the ship.

A few minutes later, the ship had been brought back into orbit, with Leonardo at the helm. Tilannah had marched all the way across the length of the ship to the cargo bay. The bay door slowly rose, giving her time to put her hands on her hips in disappointment.

In the cargo bay was the giantess from before, except reduced down to a normal size. She was still taller than her companion, the singer in the ruined dress. The two were sitting on the floor, kissing. It wasn’t long and passionate kissing, but instead cute, short little pecks of kisses. Occasionally they would kiss each other on the cheek. The larger woman held the staff, now normal sized, in one hand, and the goblet in the other, her arms stretched apart. The woman with the tail had her hands on the tall woman’s shoulder and waist.

Tilannah stood watching this, hands still on her hips, for thirty seconds before clearing her throat. The tall woman turned to look, and the shorter one’s lips landed on her ear. Surprised, she also turned to look.

“Greyza. What are you doing.” said Tilannah, flatly and unimpressed.

“Just, you know, smooching royalty.” she said with a shrug.

“I’m sorry, what I meant to ask is why the hell did you bring a princess back with you.”

“Ah, you know, I’ve actually been thinking about that. Technically, as she’s the only living member of the royal family, she’s the queen.”

The woman who was apparently now a queen just watched all of this, confused.

“Just... Get up. We should store that Starzorite.”

“Ugh, fine. But I’m bringing her, too.” she said, using the staff to push herself up.

The princess stood up as well. Greyza handed over her goblet, wine still in it, to the queen. "Here, your majesty, you can finish this. Mama's gotta go back to work."

Greyza and Tilannah walked side by side through their ship. They knew its corridors well enough to make the journey blindfolded. The young queen timidly followed.

"Anyway, what's this about me not doing my job properly, Tilannah? I did my job by the book, and finished way before you did." said Greyza.

"Because you solved your problem by enlarging again, rather than what we planned," she responded. The two talked like an old married couple.

"Oh no. No no no. I stuck to the plan."

"Oh yeah? Go over it for me."

"Okay, first, I seduced the princess. There's no doubt about that" said Greyza, pointing behind her.

"Alright fine, so you know how to get your way into a girl's pants. We knew this. Then what."

"Then, of course, I cozied up to her family, the king and queen."

"Alright"

"Then, her family showed me where the scepter was. I got my hands on the goods."

"So far so good."

"Then, in order to secure the scepter, I killed her parents."

"Mm---" Tilannah was about to object, so Greyza quickly spoke over her.

"Then, I had to escape the guards, obviously."

"Yeah bu--"

"Except, they had me and cutie over there cornered."

"Why wa---"

"So, just so I could retrieve the goods, I had to enlarge."

"Sure, bu---"

"And I figured, because of the new job, we had plenty of time to regain fuel."

"Hn, bu---"

"So why not enlarge the maximum amount?"

"No, yo---"

"And anyway, YOU weren't there in time to pick me up! I paged you on time! Check the records!"

Tilannah didn't have a response for that one.

"Even when I was big, pri-- Queen Grace Rinkah the... sixteenth?" Greyza turned to look at the young woman following them.

"Seventeenth", the girl meekly responded.

"Queen Grace Rinkah the Seventeenth was still head over heels for me, so we put on a play for the citizens and acted like her singing was soothing the savage beast. And it worked, because they brought me some wine."

Nobody was looking at her, but Queen Grace Rinkah the Seventeenth nodded, confirming that's what indeed happened.

Tilannah finally had room to get a word in edgewise. At this point, though, they had reached the vault. Tilannah pressed a few buttons on a command console, and a cylinder of lockers rotated, and a locker opened to reveal a stone of similar type to the centerpiece of the

royal staff. Greyza walked over to the locker, and brought the two stones in contact with each other.

"Mine's bigger" Greyza commented in a petty boast.

"Ugh. Whatever. It doesn't matter." Tilannah said with crossed arms.

Greyza put the staff into the locker and closed the door. Tilannah hit some more buttons and the cylinder moved again.

"Okay, so you know you fucked up at least seven times there, right?"

"Seven? That's hardly fair."

The three began walking again.

"Okay so first. No need to be killing her parents."

"We used to do that all the time! Plus, she doesn't seem to mind."

"They were terrible parents."

Tilannah turned and gave a sharp, angry glare.

"Shut the fuck up, your majesty."

"Yes'm" the queen said meekly.

"Greyza, just because we killed people all the time doesn't mean we can keep killing them at the same rate. Our employers, are gonna crack down on us at some point."

"The Alliance are not our employers, they're our slave drivers."

"We work for them. That's the point. So that brings me to your second fuckup... the fact that you killed her parents means that you alerted their guards, which means they're going to remember you. The Alliance doesn't want people to know we're doing their dirty jobs, and to that end we've got to keep a low profile."

"I don't think it's fair that that's two different points against me. That's a cause and effect."

"Fine. Actual second. Why the fuck did you bring the princes with you when you were escaping the guards?"

"... I don't know. It felt right? I didn't want to leave her? Okay, fine, two points against me."

"Third. On the subject of not drawing attention to yourself, enlarging just to defeat a few guards wearing sticks and unrefined alloys? Amateur move. Also, back to drawing attention to yourself."

"Okay but that was the only way to get that fine little thing out of danger. So, cause and effect. Two against me."

"Fourth." she said assertively, "Just because we have a set schedule doesn't mean you can go wasting the energy I give you. I shouldn't even LET you fill up to maximum before you go on a solo mission."

"I don't think that's fair, but whatever."

"Fifth, it sounds like you had no reason to go up all the way."

"You know, by the logic you laid down just there, that one's your fault."

At this point, the three reached the ship's bridge. Leonardo was still at astrometrics. However, he knew not to say anything when the two of them were arguing.

"Sixth, why the FUCK is she still here?"

Tilannah pivoted to point at Queen Grace Rinkah the Seventeenth. In response, the young queen made an "eep" and defensively balled up. Greyza put herself between Tilannah and Grace.

"She's here because she loves me. She's my new girlfriend."

Tilannah rolled her eyes.

"Listen, babe, honey, darling... We know how this is going to work. You're going to try to be with both her and me, but in a few months I'm going to get jealous and throw your new girlfriend out of the airlock into cold space."

"It *has* happened a lot..." Greyza muttered.

Grace couldn't help but feel scared.

"I said it before. We've got to stop killing random people. Especially people in authority. I'm putting her into an escape pod and sending her back to the planet. Leonardo, can you turn us back around? Greyza took something by accident."

The boy grumbled and changed the ship's course.

"Yes Ma'am..."

"Alright, Greyza. Say your goodbyes."

With alarming swiftness, Greyza scooped up the queen into a princess carry, and gave her a kiss on the lips. Tilannah rolled her eyes and walked over to a seat by Leonardo. She pressed a button, and a wall of the bridge opened up to reveal the entry to a cramped, spherical room with a chair.

"Hey baby. Lovely. You've gotta be brave, alright? Your people just lost their ruler. And, you know, I might've killed a few hundred more of them. They're gonna need you to be a leader."

Greyza was saying this between kisses. Along with the quick kisses from before, they had some longer ones. After telling her to be a leader, Greyza gave the queen a long, long kiss, with open mouth

"Listen, babe, I'm never going to forget you. Maybe in a few years I'll come back."

"I would like that very much. I will be sure to give you a royal welcome. I'll even cater to your friends."

"Ehhh, we'll see." Greyza set the queen back down. "Oh hey. I think you're going to need this." She took the royal crown off her head, and handed it to Grace.

Queen Grace had a cute idea. She took her smaller, princess's crown off the top of her head. She wouldn't be needing it anymore.

"Trade you?"

Greyza nodded, and the two exchanged crowns.

Grace turned towards the pod, and Greyza gave her one last grab on the ass for good measure. Grace was surprised, but still liked it. As the pod closed, the queen waved goodbye.

It took a few more minutes for the ship to reach a spot close enough to launch the escape pod.

"Those things aren't free, you know." commented Leonard.

"Meh. We'll charge the Alliance." said Tilannah.

After launching the escape pod, Leonardo changed the flight path to put them back on course.

"Oh, hey, Leonardo... I kinda... maybe... used all 250 zettaquads you gave me."

Leonardo immediately looked exhausted.

"ALL of it?" he shouted incredulously at Greyza.

"Sorry Leo" she said, embarrassed.

“Ugh! I was going to ask how your mission was, but now I don’t care! I’m going to go recharge the ship’s batteries. Maybe once I’ve finished with that, I’ll be in a better mood...”

He got up, and walked out of the bridge, grumbling.

Tilannah got up, and sauntered over to Greyza.

“Why do you do this to me, love? You know I’m the jealous type.”

The two kissed, then hugged, then looked directly at each other with their hands on each others elbows.

“You agreed that we should have an open relationship, you know...”

“Yeah, I know I said that, but you’re just so much better at picking them up than me.”

“You’re darn tootin’. I’ve got the brawn and the beauty in this relationship”

“You’re lucky I’ve got more than enough brains.”

“I *am* lucky.”

The two smiled at each other and chuckled. Greyza went in for a long and passionate kiss. After they finished, they hugged and rested their chins on each others’ collarbones.

“We may not be the Space Pirate Queens anymore, but...” said Tilannah.

The two said this together:

“You’ll always be *my* Queen.”



## Chapter 2

As a ship docked into a space station, a man watched with a certain sense of misery. He was a young-looking man in a captain's uniform, sipping some coffee. His name was Ryuichi VanWinkle, sometimes known as "The Sleeping Dragon". The ship that he was watching was the ANS-1069 Majesico. It was known as the ship of fools; the dumping ground of the Alliance space forces. And he was going to be its latest captain. There were only two words to describe his mood: Misery and Tiredness. He sipped some coffee.

A few specific files were brought to his attention. Despite his bad reputation, Ryuichi still had some friends in the Alliance. Most captains brought onto the Majesico were only given a briefing of the ship's crew when they met the First Officer. That was how little respect the top brass had for the Majesico.

The first file he looked over was the First Officer herself, Lieutenant Commander Cynthia Xueng. She apparently had the nickname "The Most Unkillable Woman In Space". Supposedly it used to be something about being the "Second Luckiest" but there were a few incidents that had made it clear that this title was more appropriate. That is to say, Ms. Xueng was one of those individuals blessed with an inordinate amount of luck. In her file, captains are warned not to make bets with her or even flip coins. However, in many instances, she was the lone survivor of certain attacks. At the infamous massacre at Sune Station, she barely escaped with her life. Xueng was, in all other ways, an exemplary officer. Ryuichi had heard stories about every member of the Majesico being a troublesome character for the Alliance. But Xueng's record was, aside from these instances of survivor-ship, pretty clean. He didn't have the time to read the entire file, but was up to date on her time since serving the Majesico.

Ryuichi VanWinkle had been given three other individuals' files, along with some 'handling orders'. Tradition was that such orders would be given to the Captain via his First Officer, but since he had the files he might as well look. One of the ship's engineers was the military scientist Doctor Lloyd Torovsky. Torovsky was previously in charge of an initiative to create humanoid weapons for the Alliance. He was trying to create piloted giant robots. Because he was a genius, the Alliance allowed him to keep to this ridiculous work, and they would have their other scientists copy the usable parts of his research. The latest anti-ship cannons, for example, were made by Torovsky. The arrangement went fine until the space colony he was on was attacked, killing his family. After that point, all of Torovsky's colleagues said he was slowly going insane, and focused all of his work on a single bipedal robot, called the Falchion. He was given to the Majesico and eventually became their chief engineer. Captains are to give a monthly update on his mental status, and the latest weapons on the Falchion.

One ensign on board the ship was named Gentarou Ishimura VII. Roughly a century ago, Gentarou's home planet, Hibiki-5, was officially accepted into the Alliance. However, some number of years before that, a set of extra-dimensional beings called the Neediar-arika attacked Hibiki-5 and were fought off by a massive entity called Roxinger. To all methods of measurement, when not in use, Roxinger was a stone statue that could not be harmed. When a member of the Ishimura family calls for it, it absorbs them as a pilot, and awakens. Gentarou Ishimura VII is the current pilot of Roxinger, and assigned to the Majesico after being unruly in following Alliance orders. The Alliance has given up on telling Gentarou what to do, but wants

to know more about Roxinger. Captains are to ask Dr. Torovsky for a report on changes to Roxinger every 3 months or 5 sorties, whichever comes first.

The final file was for the ship's doctor, Lillian Eisen. Lillian was a brilliant doctor and cyberneticist who implanted her brain into a fully cybernetic body when it turned out she had an incurable form of cancer. As a result, she looks functionally identical to an android, but considerably more human in demeanor. While her bedside manner has stayed decent, she tends to suggest procedures that are more drastic and painful than are strictly necessary, in the interest of greater long-term quality of life. She's also registered as the ship's counselor, but nobody takes her up on that. A replacement is recommended. Considering the large percentage of Dr. Eisen's body that is robotic, there is a concern that her electronics may evolve into a maverick AI. Captain's notes are that if any signs of this occur, Alliance high command is to be contacted immediately and steps should be taken to isolate her from the ship's electronics.

This had been what he had been expecting. A mad scientist. A teenager with an ancient superweapon. A mad doctor who was a potential Killer AI threat. These all seemed like the sort of people that would end up on the most infamous Alliance ship. Ryuichi had heard rumors about this ship more than enough times when in the captain's lounge at starbases. Whenever a captain had a few bad missions, others would joke that they were on their way to the Majesico. And now, finally, it was his turn...

The ship had docked. Some of the crew rushed out of the Majesico immediately, to enjoy a small bit of leave time on the space station. He had been watching from a distance, because he hoped that some change would happen at the last minute. He knew he wasn't the "Luckiest man in space" or anywhere close to it, but he could still hope. He finished off his coffee and threw away his disposable cup. It was time. He adjusted his hat, adjusted his collar, and began walking to the Majesico.

Captain Ryuichi VanWinkle walked past a few crewmen as he made his way across the walkway from the station to his ship. Most of them were smart enough to stop and salute him, but not all. One girl posed with him for a selfie. He tried hard to keep his eyes open. At the top of the walkway stood a tall woman. She looked stern and all business, but she was trying very hard to put on a smile for her new captain. He started to yawn, but quickly turned it into an "aaah" while waving. He didn't want to be rude, and had to settle for unprofessional instead.

"Hello! Am I correct to assume that you are Commander Xeung?"

"Yes, sir, I am. How did you know, captain?"

"Only one officer on a ship that would ever wait for a new captain to arrive like this."

"Ah, I suppose that's right. Well, welcome to the ANS-1069 Majesico."

He took the last step from the walkway onto the ship, and saluted. Xeung saluted back.

"Captain Ryuichi VanWinkle, reporting."

"Captain on board the ship."

Cynthia Xeung proceeded to take the new captain on a tour of the ship. Everything was mostly the same as any Tenkawa-class battleship, so he knew roughly what to expect. Tenkawa-class ships were rare by today's standards, but there were still a few more in use. Ryuichi knew the layout from when he served in one as an ensign. Nothing on the ship was terribly unexpected. Perhaps there were a bit too many blaster marks and other bits of damage in the hall-

ways? Older ships tended to have these, from raids, but this one was pretty heavily damaged. The captain moved to check an oddly concentrated structure of shots.

"Ah, that..." Cynthia said with disappointment. "That was from when the crew tried to play a game of 'shoot the apple off of an ensign's head'..."

"... Isn't security supposed to stop those things from happening?"

"At the time, Mr. Jam--- The other First Officer was sanctioning the event."

"Other first officer?"

"I will explain that later."

"Okay..." Ryuichi yawned, turned, and pointed at some other black spots on the hallway. "How many of these black smudges are from 'friendly' discharges, overall?"

"About three quarters." Cynthia said, sadly.

The walk continued. Nothing out of the ordinary was said, until they reached the hangar.

"And this is Dr. Torovsky's project, the Falchion. It is up to you to agree how much to indulge his funding and energy demands."

"I see. Well, it looks impressive, even if it is impractical... Speaking of impractical, where's the other one? Rock Singer?"

"Roxinger. Roxinger 7. And, you must not be up to date. The Roxinger 7 is too large to fit in our hangar and leave enough room for repairs to be done on our fighters. As such, it is in flight mode on top of the ship. Dr. Torovsky was kind enough to fashion a set of bindings to hold it in place during Hyperfold."

"Huh. I guess that was that weird rock atop the ship. That's a shame. Always wanted to see an ancient super weapon up close."

Ryuichi yawned. The fact that he yawned so much made it hard for Cynthia to tell if he was being serious or not. The tour continued.

The tour concluded in the captain's ready room, found next to the bridge. The central object of the room was a semicircle table centered around a large chair. There was enough room between the right side of the table and the wall for the captain to pass through. On the other side of that, there was a computer terminal for the captain's use. Five chairs were on the other side of the table. Cynthia stood before the chair she intended to sit in, the center of those opposite the captain. Ryuichi was momentarily distracted by a beverage dispenser in the wall of the room, by the entrance. He punched in an order for black coffee with a little bit of sugar. He could tell, without looking, that his first officer was still standing, so he gave a wave of his hand.

"Sit down, sit down. I'll be right over."

She continued to stand. The wall dispensed his coffee, which he blew on before drinking. He walked over to the captain's side of the table. Cynthia was about to sit down, expecting that Ryuichi would also sit down. However, she quickly noticed, he wasn't.

"Sit, sit. I insist."

He let out an even bigger yawn and then sipped some coffee.

"Sir...? We can do this at another time, if you like..."

She didn't really want to do that, but she was used to operating the ship in absence of a captain.

"First of all, sit. Don't make me order it."

She was shocked, but complied.

"Listen. If we're going to work together, I need you to understand something. I don't know what it says in my file and I don't care. I'm not a narcoleptic."

She nodded, but she also knew that's exactly what his file said; that he was a serious narcoleptic. Though, that didn't make sense when you lined that up with his achievements and service record.

"I suffer from Kogoro Syndrome. I know, it's ironic, considering that my last name is VanWinkle. It appears to come from my mother's side, so I'm the first VanWinkle to have it."

"Ah, sorry, I'm not familiar."

"Of course my file doesn't have it. Great... Okay, listen, I encourage you to look this up later, and for now just trust me, alright?"

She nodded. He continued.

"I appear tired and low energy all the time. No matter how much sleep I get. I'm not tired, I'm not sleeping. I'm fully aware. I'm standing right now because when I sit down, people think I'm asleep. And I don't blame them. It looks like I'm asleep. It takes a goddamn red alert for me to even seem attentive."

One couldn't blame her for being doubtful. She was absolutely going to look this up later. But, now things that she had read were starting to make sense...

"How long have you had this for?"

"My entire adult life."

"Sir, with respect, how did you even make it to captain?"

"Diligence, I guess? Also, as bad as my condition is, the other side of it is that people are reassured by how I respond to a crisis."

"That makes sense."

"Anyway, we're here so that you can tell me about the crew. Let's start with the bridge"

"Yes, sir. Have you heard of any members of our motley crew?"

"No, but you said you'd tell me about a different first officer?"

"Right. For a while we had two First Officers. When I was assigned to this ship, it already had a first officer. I kept my rank, but I was told to be a pilot, even though this ship already had a pilot. More about our pilot later."

"Hell of a demotion..."

"No, no, the captain at the time.... Well, I shouldn't speak ill of the dead. The captain made ensign Jameson the second in command."

"Wait, wait..." He was trying to remember something he heard in the Captains' Lounge "Jameson... As in... related to fleet admiral Jameson?"

She nodded, and continued.

"The great grandson of the fleet admiral. The ensign's father, the admiral's grandson, has basically demanded his presence on an Alliance navy ship. ... If I may speak personally?"

He nodded and she continued.

"I'm pretty sure that it's just that his mother wants him out of the house and this was the only way to keep him out."

"That sounds about standard for the Majesico"

"Oh, there's three other ensigns that I think are in the same boat."

"Ugh. Back to being the first officer"

“Until that captain died, he was first officer. The next captain had us both be first officer. When she realized that I was doing all the work, she demoted Jameson back to ensign. Our comms officer died around that time, so she let him try being on comms. That kid actually always wanted to be a radio DJ, so this works out for everyone.”

“Still, fucking nepotism...”

She shrugged. “Can’t be helped. Still, this works out well.”

“Okay, next, pilot”

“Ensign John Doe. The most forgettable man in the universe.”

“What. Is he some sort of human experiment? Is that even his real name?”

“No, I looked into it. His parents named him that. He was sent here because he had a poor attendance record. If I had not been actually assigned to pilot, I might have never noticed him either. You can notice him when he’s on video, and I have to check the records if I want to be sure he was at his post.”

“That... that is unfortunate.”

“Yeah. Just, just pretend he’s there even if you can’t see him.”

“Okay. Now, at radar, there were a bunch of cutesy items there.”

“Oh, that would be Lieutenant Autumn Melody.”

“That’s a strange name...”

“Changing your name isn’t illegal, you know.”

“Yeah, I don’t have a problem with it, I’ve just never heard of someone with such a name.”

“Anyway, Lt. Melody is our radar operator and is really good at it. Did you notice how ‘valley girl/gyaru’ came back into fashion with high school girls recently? Apparently she fell hard into it. Tans, bleaches her hair, always taking selfies. The works. She leaves personal items on her console, but her performance is so good that I don’t feel comfortable telling her to stop.”

The truth was that Cynthia liked cute stuff too. She leaned more towards a traditional pink style, but she had quite a few things like that in her quarters. She enjoyed looking at Autumn’s collection, so she let it slide. Autumn WAS good at her job despite her quirks, and the Majesico was where people like that tended to be sent.

“I see. I’ll trust your judgment on the matter until I come to my own decision. For now, who’s on Tactical?”

“Lieutenant Junior Grade Meryl Derringer. Good at her job but obsessed with firearms. 20<sup>th</sup> century firearms specifically. If you want to know what gunpowder smells like, it smells like Meryl.”

“Ah. The usual.”

Cynthia nodded. Ryuichi was getting the idea of what kind of people formed this crew.

“Next is Security, then.” he said.

“Freidmann Zhang, Lieutenant Junior Grade. He is... actually from the future.”

There was silence.

“Captain, I’m sorry, but as I just met you it’s really hard to tell if you’re silent out of shock or if you’re silent because you fell asleep.”

“That’s fair. No, what do you mean future”

“Have you heard of the USF-044 Trancewalker?”

“... How have YOU heard of it.”

“Right, right, I know. On the books that’s classified, right? Captains Only information?”

"Yeah. That's right."

"Do you remember how there was one living survivor on that ship from the future?"

"Yes. I heard he was taken into a lab to be tested."

"He was. But now he's here. It turns out he doesn't actually know that much about the future. Not too much that's relevant. Would you be able to tell someone from 1000 years ago how the ship's transport tubes work?"

"Not easily, no."

"Anyway, he's very good at fighting, from a combination of physical enhancement, better senses, and knowledge of martial arts. So, he's our chief of security. Does 80% of the job by himself. By the way, we're under orders to kill him if he gets captured by an enemy faction. He knows."

"That's unfortunate. Anyway, there's one more"

"Well, there's about 290 more people on the ship..."

"No, no, there's one more member of the bridge crew."

"... sir?"

"The model officer. 'The most unkillable woman in space'"

She rolled her eyes. He meant her.

"You're too good to be here."

"That isn't true..."

She averted her gaze.

"Anybody, myself included, has a good reason to be here. I've heard about your 'Superpower', and how you used to be 'the second luckiest human in space', purportedly."

Something about that gave her a cause to chuckle, but she stifled it.

He continued, "As captain, I've received some of the old captains' logs for this ship and looked them over. You're a superb officer. I don't understand what you've done to end up here. Nothing that you've done since getting here seems to indicate that you deserve to be here."

"... So what, though."

That was not the reaction he was expecting. It shocked him enough that she could tell, despite how tired he still looked.

"Sir, I'm not a soldier for the glory. If this is my post, then this is my post. If the things I've done up until now dictate that I have to serve the Majesico, then I am fine with it."

She suddenly stood up.

"Sir, I have other matters to attend to. If that will be all..."

Ryuichi still wasn't sure quite sure how, but it seemed clear to him that he had pushed a button. He hadn't wanted to get off on the wrong foot with his second-in-command, but since he had, he wanted to keep the damage to a minimum.

"Yes, that will be all."

She saluted and left. He sat down, and revisited his words in his mind...

## Chapter 3

The ship left dock and the captain formally introduced himself over the comms. The *Ma-jesico* departed for the far edge of Alliance territory, where it would patrol the boondocks of space. This was an ideal job for a crew you didn't want to be anything near anything that resembled action. The crew had received this assignment multiple times, and knew it would lead to nothing happening. As far as Captain VanWinkle was concerned, this was perfect for getting to know the crew, and perhaps for demonstrating that he wasn't a narcoleptic. The crew instead got the impression that he just didn't sleep much, as it seemed he was always walking around the ship with a cup of coffee and a tired expression. For two days, the captain and first officer talked the minimum amount to each other. The XO did diligently submit daily reports, however.

At the beginning of the third day, Cynthia requested to talk to the captain in the ready room at the start of his shift. They entered, and the captain stood by his chair.

"Permission to sit, captain?"

"Yes, Ms. Xeung. Go ahead. Would you mind if I stood up?"

"Not at all."

By now, Cynthia had seen how the captain looked completely asleep when he sat in the captain's chair. It was far more unnerving for her to talk to him while he sat than when he stood.

She saluted before sitting down.

"I would like to formally apologize for my behavior over the last two days. It was not befitting of a first officer."

"I accept, under the following condition. You allow me to apologize for attempting to pry too much into your personal details."

"I accept."

"Then, I accept. Please, from now on, do not hesitate to tell me when I am out of line."

The tension in the room dissipated.

"As long as you don't ask about my past, there shouldn't be any problems."

"Can I ask about your super luck?"

"Minimally."

"Is it that you just won't die? What can you tell me?"

"They call me what they call me because my luck will save me from death, but not others. For example..." she hesitated. "If, say, hypothetically, pirates threw me and another crewman out of an airlock, I would hypothetically be saved by falling into the open cargo bay of a nearby stealth ship, and the crewman would not. Hypothetically."

Ryuichi would be lying if he said he wasn't bothered by how specific an example that was, but he just nodded so she would continue.

"It's functionally impossible to use my good fortune to benefit others. Our previous captain... died while we were on a mission together. I can't even win a die roll on someone else's behalf."

"Ah, is this related to the fact that you barely survived the Sune Massacre?"

“... That is when my nickname changed, but I would prefer you not ask me anything else about that.”

The captain did know, from looking a little at her service record in the past two days, that she rarely took time off, unless it was mandated by her captain. However, after Sune, she took extended time off. When she returned to duty, within six months she was sent to the Majesico.

“Okay. I have no more questions then.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Though, I did want to ask some questions about other members of the crew...”

Two weeks passed. The Majesico verified star charts and cleaned up space garbage. There was one encounter with pirates, who gave up as soon as the mechs and jets were sortied. It was so boring that nobody on the crew could blame the captain for having his eyes closed and head down while at the command seat. He hadn't been able to convince anyone that it was neither sleep deprivation nor narcolepsy.

Ensign Jameson got a message on screen, and looked around. He leaned over towards Lieutenant Melody, and whispered.

“I got a message for the captain, but I think he's asleep...”

Ryuichi could hear Jameson perfectly.

“I'm not asleep. What is it.”

The ensign turned to face the captain.

“Sorry sir! You have a level 1 encrypted message from command, sir!”

With a big yawn, the captain stood up.

“Transfer it to my ready room.”

“Yes, captain.”

Ryuichi sauntered over to his ready room, and got a cup of coffee from the wall. At this point he had programmed it to give him the coffee he wanted with a single button press. He walked over to his chair, sat, and turned to his terminal. After he input his personal decryption ID, he opened the message. It was audio only.

“Captain. This message is to inform you that you have been put in charge of Project Q. This is a Code 0 project, and you must disavow any knowledge of it when asked by anyone who is not above you in the Alliance chain of command. In order to maintain the secrecy of this project, you are receiving minimal detail in this message. In three days time, a shuttle will arrive with further materials you will need for this project. Furthermore, your assets will arrive at that time as well. You will receive further orders after you have made contact with the assets. Perform a gogamma-eleventeen scrub of this message after receiving it. Repeat, perform a gamma-eleven scrub of this message.”

Ryuichi had no idea what any of this meant, but he was sure it wasn't anything good.

Within the following days, Captain VanWinkle would spend many hours pacing around his ready room. He didn't like this situation. He had scrubbed the message after every word of it was drilled into his brain. There was so little information to go off of. What did “gogamma-eleventeen” mean? And, a Code 0 project? He had never heard of such a thing. Well, considering the nature of it, it made sense. Alliance project codes were given importance numerically; a Code 5 was something tiny, like keeping tabs on Roxinger, and the USF-044 Trancewalker was to



be treated with the secrecy of Code 2. Perhaps it was due to his reputation, but he had only performed a couple of Code 1 tasks in his career. Most of those consisted of traveling through neutral space in order to deliver supplies to moon bases which didn't officially exist. Was he getting the beyond-secret project because it went to the Majesico and he just happened to be the captain? Or was he sent to the Majesico specifically in order to carry out a Code 0? In a typical Code 1 scenario, you and your XO were the only ones who knew. Project Q could not be discussed with Cynthia. It didn't really matter because he still had no idea what Project Q consisted of, but he wanted to share the agony of waiting. He legitimately wished that they hadn't told him anything, if they were going to give him so little. He wished they had waited until they delivered the shuttle to inform him of the project.

It was the third day. He was in his ready room again. There was a beeping noise to tell him that someone wanted to talk to him.

"Captain?"

It was the ship's doctor, Dr. Lillian Eisen. He had met her in the weeks before, but wasn't exactly fond of her. She had a tendency of suggesting drastic procedures to solve simple problems, and telling you harsh truths you didn't want to hear. He came to realize that the reason she made a good counselor was because people tended to talk themselves out of their issues rather than having to talk to her. Ryuichi had actually seen crew members outside her door, working through their problems together while having anxiety about which one would see Dr. Eisen first. He had already issued a request for a new counselor. He was even trying to see if any ensigns were qualified.

"Yes, Dr. Eisen?"

"Permission to enter your ready room?"

"Granted" He didn't want to, but she probably had good reason.

She entered. She had a cybernetic body that had been built to look like a woman half her age. Her skin looked just metal enough that you knew that she wasn't normal. Her blonde hair was tied up in a bun, and she wore glasses even though it was clear that a cyborg should have no need for them. She wore an Alliance medical uniform that was two sizes too small, to accentuate her figure, with a physician's lab coat over top.

"Captain. You're worrying the crew. Everyone can see that you're anxious, DESPITE your Kogoro Syndrome. As ship's counselor, I would be absent in my duty if I did not get to the bottom of this."

"It's fine. I'm fine. Don't worry about it."

"You could tell me anything, you know. Doctor-patient confidentiality applies here."

"I know, I know, but... I ca--- No, it's fine."

She looked unimpressed. Within a few seconds, she had a bright idea, and a grin that was perhaps wicked.

"You know, I've been thinking... Perhaps this is a glandular problem. Nobody really knows what causes Kogoro Syndrome. You could take a daily medication, or perhaps better yet, an implant that regulates your adrenaline levels. The procedure wouldn't hurt... much..."

Ryuichi was frightened enough to appear to have the energy of a normal human being. "No, no, I'm fine, see?"

An alert sounded. Ryuichi was strangely relieved. He left his ready room, into the bridge, as ensign Jameson's smooth voice filled the hallways of the ship.

“Unknown ship in pursuit of an Alliance shuttle to our port bow. Active fire.”

“All hands, battle stations” barked Ryuichi as he stood in front of his chair.

Dr. Eisen followed the captain into the bridge, and found a wall with nothing on it to lean by. She wasn’t letting the captain get off the hook that easily.

“Waitwaitwaitwait, it’s an Arlington Empire ship? Out here? For real?” said Lt. Melody

“Jameson, have you tried hailing either ship?” said the captain.

“It’s no good, sir. The pursuing ship is generating some kind of radio jammer.”

“Damn. Derringer?”

“Yeeesssssss?” said their gun nut on tactical, expectantly.

“Fire in the direction of the Empire ship, but don’t hit it. We want them to know we’re here.”

“Awww... yes sir”

“Wait, I’ve seen this before...” said Lt. Melody “A red ship... is it... Omigosh! It’s totes the Countessa Da Vinci!”

“The what?”

“It’s the Space Pirate Queens!”

“RED ALERT!” yelled the captain. The name of their ship was often misquoted and so not well known, but every captain knew about the Space Pirate Queens.

The klaxxon sounded.

“Derringer, Shields up! Jameson, tell the hangar to sortie.”

“How many, sir?”

“ALL OF THEM”

“Red Wing, Blue Wing, White Wing, Falchion, prepare to launch.”

In Jameson’s station, two dozen or so voices shouted “Roger”

“Gentarou Ishimura. Current position?”

“The Seventh.”

“Gen, seriously. What door are you nearest.”

“Deck 7, port side, third airlock”

“Sir, permission to open the deck 7 port side third airlock?”

Captain VanWinkle pinched the bridge of his nose. He’d seen this happen before, but it still felt incredibly unnatural. At least he understood why command wanted him to keep tabs on Roxinger; it tended to defy physics.

“Release the bindings on Roxinger, then granted.”

“Already done. Opening airlock...”

On deck 7, a teenager in a leather jacket took a deep breath. Then, the door before him opened, and he was sucked into space. The door shut. Through means that nobody was able to fully explain, the boy shouted, the noise somehow reverberating despite the emptiness of space.

“ROXINGER! LET’S ROCK AND ROLL!”

The stone object attached to the hull of the ship had already started moving into position when the airlock opened. It emitted a light, which shone on the teenager before absorbing him into itself. The stone object twisted around, forming clearly defined arms and legs. Once its head was revealed, the stone titan took a pose, and its body changed color.

“Roxinger 7! Hasss... arrived!”

Somehow this sound was coming out of the giant robot, and was being transmitted through the void of space. At the same time, the crew of the Majesico heard these words in the teen’s voice, over the comms.

Back on the bridge, Captain VanWinkle shook his head. He was never going to get used to this. At about this time, Commander Xeung made it to the bridge. Roxinger’s presence didn’t phase her.

“Sit Rep, captain.” she said with a salute

“Alliance shuttle being pursued by the legendary space pirates. Neither can respond to hails”

Xeung nodded. She was actually quite impressed to finally see the captain in “crisis mode”.

“Something doesn’t vibe...” said Lt. Melody “The pirate ship doesn’t appear to be gaining. They’re not even trying to hit it. Also, the shuttle is doing something funky with its headlights...”

“On Screen” said Ryuichi and Cynthia at the same time. Cynthia looked apologetic.

The screen showed the shuttle, the pursuing red ship, and also the two robots and 13 fighter jets from the Majesico. As Melody said, the two headlamps on the shuttle were flickering in an odd pattern. Their comms officer seemed to understand it.

“Sir, it’s binomial morse.” said Jameson. “They’re asking to dock in a cargo bay.”

“Open up cargo bay 2 and tell them they can dock.”

“Yes, sir”

“Red Wing, provide cover for the shuttle as it makes its way into cargo bay 2. Roxinger, shield that ship with your body if you have to.”

“Roxinger 7!”

Ryuichi tried to ignore this, and continued.

“Blue Wing, White Wing, Try to disable the ship. Falchion, aim for their guns but also go for general disabling.”

“Sir?” spoke Derringer from tactical.

The captain looked to Xeung, to say it was her call.

“Light ‘em up.”

“Yesssssssss” hissed Derringer.

The Majesico opened fire on the Countessa Da Vinci. The pirate ship had shields up before the Alliance ship shot the first volley. The fighter jets and the smaller humanoid robot got into close range while the shield energy was concentrated at the pirates’ front. In an unexpected move, the spaceship sprouted four mechanical arms, which it used to swat at the fighters and try to grab the humanoid. The ship changed course and headed towards the Majesico, opening fire. The fighters and stone titan continued to guard the shuttle as it approached the battleship from the side.

“Sir, they’re on a collision course!”

“Shit! Do we have the shuttle yet?”

“No, sir, it’s closing in.”

“Roxinger 7! Give that shuttle a push!”

“Okay!”

What they did not know, what they could not know, was that two individuals had already entered the ship, moments after the cargo bay doors opened. The two had visual stealth and thermal cloaking, so it was unreasonable for anyone to have expected this. They made their way to the bridge...

“It’s totes speeding up! It’s on a collision course!”

“Sir, cargo bay 2 confirms the shuttle.”

“Okay, hard starboard! Close the shuttle bay! Then, speed up. Maximum thrust.”

“Roger!”

“So not vibe! It’s speeding up again! Is this ship for real?”

“Roxinger 7, Falchion! Get out in front of it and push! All wings, target their starboard thruster!”

“Yes Ma’am!” shouted five voices.

Captain VanWinkle nodded. Commander Xeung was more familiar with the capabilities of their troops. It was a good call.

It would be a good call if they weren’t against the Countessa Da Vinci.

The pirate ship grabbed the Falchion with one arm, and swatted Roxinger out of the way with two more. As the fighters moved around to the back of the ship, its guns were already in position. They shot in front of the fighters. The pilots got the distinct feeling they were being toyed with. The engine roared as they let out one final burst of speed.

“Sir, it’s no good! They’re gonna hit us!”

“Brace for impact!”

“All hands, brace for impact” reverberated ensign Jameson’s voice through the comms.

## Chapter 4

The ship hit and the lights failed. No, that wasn't right. It was off by a fraction of a second, but the lights went off and THEN the ship hit. The crew was disoriented enough by the lights turning off completely that few people noticed the weakness of the impact. The pirate ship had cut its engines before making contact. This was, after all, just a show.

The real show, however, was on the bridge. The lights and viewscreen were off, and aside from monitors and consoles, the bridge was completely dark. Suddenly, there was a light show originating from a ball a few feet above head level, in front of the viewscreen. In darkness, there was a voice.

"The legendary outlaws, known throughout the galaxy!"

"The women with the highest bounties in the known universe!"

"We've plundered countless ships, relieving them of their goods!"

"We've captured countless hearts, and left them wanting more!"

A spotlight turned on, revealing one of them.

"The deadliest mind in the galaxy, Tilannah Onikyu!"

She struck a 'thinking' sort of pose. Another spotlight turned on.

"The last of the giant conquerors, Greyza Garganta!"

She struck a muscular, flexing pose.

A fourth device generated a fixed-pose hologram of Leonardo. Tilannah tried to throw her voice, but it was still obvious she was doing it.

"And Leonardo!"

She returned to her normal voice as she spoke in unison with Greyza.

"You have been graced by the presence of... the Space Pirate Queens!"

The lights came back on. All members of the bridge crew were shocked silent, except for Lt. Melody, who was already snapping pics. Dr. Eisen, still on the bridge, gave light applause.

After a few moments of posing, the Queens started to hold their mouths shut to stop from giggling. Their cheeks puffed and bodies trembled, until they completely broke their composure and started laughing.

"Aaaah! The looks on their faces!"

"And you, Greyza! You got all the lines right, this time! That was great!"

"Whoo, you were right, sweetie, this WAS worth it..."

The crew of the Majesico were clearly not so amused.

"All hands..." Cmd. Xeung rose a hand to start giving orders. Tilannah interrupted here.

"Hold on, that was all a joke! Just, a fancy introduction. We look forward to working with you."

Everyone on the bridge looked perplexed, except for Capt VanWinkle, who was still stunned.

"Surely they told you about us. We're Project Q."

"For *cute*!" Greyza added. Tilannah didn't find it helpful.

The captain put his fingers on his temples, closed his eyes, and rubbed.

"All hands, stand down."

"... sir?" said Xeung.

"Cancel the red alert. I don't have all the details, but they're not hostile."

Tilannah walked around and picked up her disco ball, two spotlights, and holo transmitter while the crew tried to put themselves at ease. Greyza posed with Lt. Melody for some selfies.

“Recall the ships” said Xeung.

“Yes Ma’am”

“Oh, right, before I forget...” Tilannah suddenly pulled out a large gun she had been hiding in the disco ball, aimed it directly at Xeung, and fired before anyone could react. However, nothing happened.

“What the hell!!!” shouted Xeung, uncharacteristically.

Tilannah looked satisfied, and put the gun away. She walked closer, which made the commander walk back a step in surprise.

“I guess it’s true. You really are the most unkillable woman in space. I knew you were here, so I made this gun with five failsafe mechanisms. In other words, if the first firing mechanism somehow jammed, there would be a second. If the second jammed, there would be a third. And so on. But they all failed on me. Impressive.”

“Ms. Space pirate, please refrain from trying to kill my first officer.” said the captain. “Or, for that matter, any other member of my crew.”

“Mmmm...” she said, looking up at Xeung, inspecting her face. “She’s fascinating... I don’t think I will try to harm her again. Can’t make any promises about the rest of your crew.”

Greyza noticed the way that her friend was looking at their new XO, and raised an eyebrow.

“Yoouuuu!!!!” A new face had come to the bridge. It was an officer of the Alliance, sweating, holding a briefcase. He had ran all the way from cargo bay 2.

“Oh, hey Steve. You knew we weren’t actually trying to shoot you, right?” said Tilannah.

“S-Still! You, you, you can’t just...”

“Chill out. We just wanted to have some fun before our next assignment. Spice it up while introducing ourselves to the new guy. Not that they seem to appreciate it...”

“But, you... you can’t do that! Of all the...”

“What are you gonna do, blow our heads up?” said Greyza.

He rolled his eyes.

“Captain, we need to talk. Alone.”

“S-sure. I’m going to my ready room. Xeung, you have the bridge.”

“Yes, sir. What should we do with these two, the brig?”

“No, no, they need to be in here, too. Come on” said ‘Steve’

“Sure, sure...” said Tilannah.

The captain lead the way to his ready room, and the new officer and Greyza followed. Tilannah looked around, and felt vexed by how poorly her little show had gone over. Greyza came back, pat her on the shoulder in understanding, then pushed her in the direction of the captain’s room.

Tilannah sat herself first, at the central seat opposite the table. The officer was a little bothered by this, and took the seat to her left. The captain made it to his side of the table. Greyza sat in the chair to Tilannah’s right, but moved it over so their hips were in contact.

“Do you mind if I...” Captain VanWinkle stood by his chair. He had just gotten out of a crisis, so he still had a bit more energy than usual, but he still was starting to look tired.

“No, no, you should sit. Don’t worry about it, I know about your condition.”

The captain looked relieved and sat down. He already looked like he was drifting off.

“Uhhh... is he...?”

“Greyza, we talked about this. He’s got Kogoro Syndrome, which means he only looks asleep.”

“Right, right right.”

“I’m Commander Stevenson, and I am handing these two off to you. From today onwards, you’re going to be their commanding officer.”

“Ah... So this is Project Q...”

“C-Captain! You’re not supposed to use the codename so flippantly”

The captain merely raised an arm, and pointed at Tilannah.

“I told them” Tilannah said with a shrug.

“Y-you told the whole bridge crew?”

“Bridge crew? Hahaha. Oh right, that’s why I never told you about this plan, because you would’ve been a fucking buzzkill. No, after we got into the ship through their open cargo bay, I hacked the comms and gave our intro to the entire ship.”

“Believe it or not, captain, this is our first time doing this. You should be grateful, that my wonderful girlfriend went to so much effort for your crew.”

“Th--- The whole ship?” He cleared his throat and regained his composure “In any event, they’re your problem now. I’ll begin from the top. A few months ago, the Alliance captured these two. Surgery was performed, and now they both have miniaturized bombs implanted in their skulls. They now work for the Alliance, under penalty of death. They’ve completed a number of missions that the top brass want done under the radar. Bases in the neutral zones, pre-warp civilizations, assassinations... you get the idea.”

“The problem is,” Tilannah interjected “They only have the one card to play against us. So we’ll do what they want, but if they have complaints about how it’s done, tough shit. They can make us make the omelet, but they can’t control how many eggs we break”

“So, when one of us messes up, they can’t REALLY do anything about it, other than hope that a new captain can somehow keep us under control.”

Tilannah was going to make a comment about how every mess up so far was in fact caused by Greyza, but then she thought better of it.

“So you’re going to give me some kind of button for their bombs, in that case there?”

“Button? Nooo... The case contains a quantum-entangled decoder, for your missions.”

Ryuichi gave the slightest nod. He had heard of the tech before. If one had two particles in a state of quantum entanglement with each other, one could encode a message that could only be read using the paired device. They weren’t commonly used because of technical limitations.

“As for the bomb activation, we’re giving you and your first officer each a dead man switch.”

Ryuichi’s eyes widened. It was clear he was awake, now. A dead man switch was something they installed next to your heart, which would trigger if it was removed or if you died. It was, perhaps a little drastic.

“Only that? There’s no way to activate it without me dying?”

“I was told to tell you. ‘The password is what you were told to scrub. The first time.’ I hadn’t received your initial message, so I don’t know what that means, but I trust you understand.”

Ryuichi thought for a moment. It must have been “gogamma-eleventeen”. Clever way to transmit it without his assets hearing. He nodded in understanding.

“Originally I was going to do this to your first officer later, but I suppose since Ms. Onikyu has done away with all sense of secrecy, you should call her in.”

“Sure.” He doubletapped his communicator badge. “Xeung to my office, please.”

While they waited, commander Stevenson put his briefcase on the desk, and opened it. Encased in protective foam molding, the case held a large electronic device, a small electronic device, and two syringes.

Commander Xeung entered. Greyza watched intently, which made Xeung feel a little put off.

“Captain?”

“Have a seat, Xeung.”

The only two empty seats were next to Stevenson and next to Greyza. Greyza patted the chair next to her, while looking at Xeung. Tilannah tried to smile, charmingly. As Xeung walked to and sat down in the chair next to Stevenson, Greyza gave a pout. Tilannah frowned.

“If you could roll up your sleeve, I’ve got something critical for your new mission,” said Stevenson, while readying a syringe.

Xeung looked to VanWinkle, who could only nod. She rolled her sleeve back to her elbow, in compliance. Some scar tissue might have been visible above the elbow, so she used a hand to cover it up.

“This will only hurt for a moment...”

Stevenson looked for a good vein, then put in the needle of the syringe. Xeung bit her lip. After emptying the contents into her arm, he removed the syringe, and put it back in the case. He removed the second syringe from the case, and turned to VanWinkle. The captain already had his own sleeve pulled back, and now put his arm onto the table. Stevenson stuck the needle into the captain’s arm, and again emptied. He put back the syringe and took out the smaller of the case’s two electronic devices.

“The nanomachines should be assembling next to your hearts as we speak... The commander’s is online... And now the captain’s. Now I just need to make sure the devices are in sync... Good. And now mine is off. Alright.”

Stevenson put the small device back in the case, and removed the larger one, which he then pushed across the table to VanWinkle. He closed the case.

“Well, now they’re your problem.”

Tilannah raised an eyebrow.

“Oho? Yours is off now? Then I suppose... There’s nothing stopping me from killing you”

Stevenson’s eyes widened. He clearly hadn’t thought through the consequences of this action.

“I’m kidding, I’m kidding. I just wanted to see the look on your face. Now, get the fuck out of here, Steve, before I change my mind.”

He stood up, and saluted the captain.

“Permission to leave, sir?”

The captain waved a hand.

“Granted. Goodbye, Stevenson.”

“Good luck, sir.”



He took his briefcase and ran.

Silence set in for a moment.

"... Captain, what exactly is---"

"You get to be our new baby sitters, Commander Cynthia Xeung." said Tilannah.

"Baby sitters for the queens of space! You should be honored!" said Greyza.

Cynthia looked to the captain, who only gave a nod. After seeing his XO's discomfort, he elaborated.

"These two have been forced to work for the Alliance. It seems they've tired out several other captains, and now it's our turn. They're going to report to me, and I'm going to hand down 'dark' missions from high command. If either you or I die, they both die. I also have a word that will kill them, I suppose to be used if they kill too many of our officers."

"Understood."

"Oho, you're taking this rather well, Cyn." said Tilannah.

A moment of quiet. Cynthia would never speak up for herself, but Ryuichi decided to.

"Please refrain from calling my senior officer 'Cyn'. It's Commander Xeung to you."

Tilannah grinded her teeth a little, but bared it.

"Guessing I can't call you Ryu, then?"

"I would rather you would not."

For whatever reason, Tilannah decided that this was her moment to snap.

"Listen up, Ryu, I'm gonna call you two whatever the fuck I like. You see this bad bitch here?"

She motioned to Greyza, who smiled with a faked sense of congeniality.

"She's a Garganta, which means she can store up to 250 zettaquads of energy in this lovely body of hers. That's enough to let your ship go at Hyperfold factor 15 for a *month*. And she's got all that in her right now. Which means, if you blow her up, you blow up this ship, my ship, everything. Not even the most unkillable woman in space can escape from that."

She paused, if anyone wanted to give her back talk. She was hoping for it. After a few moments, she continued.

"Now, I was thinking of leaving her on your ship, to keep you in line, but honestly I'm worried she'd fuck the shit out of half of your bridge crew. Plus, she's easy on the eyes, so I kinda want her on board my ship. Since I can't keep the threat of my giant bomb of a girlfriend on top of you forever, I'm going to give you this: We're much, MUCH more valuable to your military than you are. If we die and it turns out you did it for some completely flippant reason like 'boo hoo the genius pirate queen said mean things to me', you're going to be spending the rest of your career scrubbing toilets in star bases in the middle of nowhere. Both of you."

Greyza had actually been concerned for quite a while.

"Darling, I think you're being a little cranky. We should just go back to the ship, and come back when we're all a lot more calm, huh?"

"Nonono, I haven't finished telling these two off yet. And ano---"

Greyza gripped Tilannah's right arm. Tightly. She was reminding her who was the brawn in this relationship. You could see in Tilannah's face that it hurt, but she didn't say anything.

"Fine! I'm going back to the Countessa Da Vinci. Hail me if you have any official business."

She got up and left the room. Greyza got up at the same time, but had an apologetic face on.

“Sorry about her... We’re honestly looking forward to working with you in the future. Bye captain, bye commander.”

Greyza caught up with Tilannah in the hallways of the Majesico. Tilannah was clearly still angry. Greyza grabbed her hand, and she reluctantly accepted. She couldn’t be mad at Greyza, so this cheered her up a little bit.

“Honey, what’s wrong? I thought we wanted to make a good impression with this crew...”

Said crew members who were walking about the hallway ducked into other passages or rooms to stay out of sight. Tilannah was going to ignore them either way.

“I was! I was... But... No, I can’t do it. I wanted to make some friends, since we’re stuck in this situation, but... We’re just assets to them. And when we fuck up, which we inevitably will, we’re just going to get sent to another ship. It’s far better to have them not care about us. And for us to not care about them.”

“We poured over their files and everything...”

“I know... I was actually looking forward to seeing Meryl’s gun collection. But, no, I opened this black hole. There’s no going back.”

“I don’t think we’re over the event horizon yet, baby...”

“Sweetie, please...”

“Let’s just get back and take a rest, huh?”

“Sure...”

They reached cargo bay 2, the exterior door of which was now closed. Tilannah found a console by the door, and using the electronic components of her left arm, hacked it effortlessly. A barrier formed to protect the ship from direct exposure to space, and the door opened. Tilannah pressed a button on her collar, which formed a bubble around her head. All other exposed bits of skin were covered as well. The two held each other closely and crossed the barrier out of the ship. In the void of space, Greyza could not only breath but propel and steer herself, by releasing a few kiloquads of energy out of her storage of 250 zettaquads. They returned to their ship.

After the pirates left the captain’s office, Cynthia and Ryuichi both gave a relieved exhale.

“Well. This has been a day. What’s the damage report?”

“Very minimal. No fighters took any shots. Roxinger 7 took minor damage which we... expect will magically repair? The Falchion took so little damage that we may not want to bother with replacement parts yet. The pirate ship braked before impact, so damage to our hull should be fixed within a day.”

“Ah, good, it WAS just a show...”

“Captain, you said to stand down when they mentioned Project Q... How much did you know about today’s events?”

“Very very little. I’ve known for three days that SOMETHING was going to be thrown on our lap, but it was a Code 0 so I couldn’t divulge even that much to you.”

“A Code 0...?”

"Yeah, I've never heard of one before, either. But, hey, cat's completely out of the bag. Well, I suppose we should limit the media that Lt. Melody transmits."

"Don't worry about it. Part of the terms of her continued use of social media is that I review and edit all posts she makes before they are transmitted."

"Okay. Anyway, all I was told was that today, I would be receiving material and assets for Project Q, to await further instructions, and to erase that message. By the way, I'm pretty sure the code to trigger the bombs is 'gamma' but with a 'go' in front of it, followed by 'eleven' with a 'teen' after it."

"Eleventeen and gogamma. Roger. Well, this at least explains why you were pacing..."

"I wanted to tell you, but..."

"No. I appreciate that you're concerned, but orders are orders."

She hesitated. He could tell she wanted to say something, so he waited.

"You do not need to get angry on my behalf. It isn't a problem if they want to call me Cyn."

"They're now the crew of my ship, and I can't have them harassing senior officers."

"That's true, but..."

"Sorry, commander, no buts. If you formally give them permission, then fine. But I have no intention of letting those space pirates bully any member of my crew."

"I'm not sure you're going to have a choice with them, sir... But anyway, thank you."

"Heh... Anyway, if we're both in here for too long, the crew is going to worry. Go out there and reassure them. I'm going to see if this machine has any marching orders for me, and then I'll be right out."

"Roger"

She stood up, saluted, and left.

After a few minutes of getting used to the thing, he was able to check for messages on it. Coordinates were given for a point in space not far from their current heading. And that was it. He walked out, back to the bridge.

"Adjust heading, bearing theta 10.7, phi 1.8. Three quarters thrust. Transmit our new heading and speed to the space pirates."

"Roger"

"Once they've acknowledged that, open a channel from me to the crew."

"Yes, sir. They've confirmed. Channel is now open."

"Greetings, Majesico. This is Captain VanWinkle. The 'Space Pirate Queens' are currently acting in coordination with the Pan-Galactic Strategic Alliance. As we are the closest ship, they will be accompanying us. That is all."