

"I don't like it. What if they do something? If they give away our position?" Femir was fidgety, staring at the screen. Displayed on it, some distance away from their ship, a perfectly smooth dull gray sphere sat fixed in space.

"Nobody's ever heard of an Observer ship doing anything to interfere with, well, anything, ever. And how the hell will it give us away? They're invisible to everything but the visible spectrum. *We're* more likely to be spotted than they are."

"Just because nobody's ever heard of it doesn't mean it hasn't happened. Ships go missing all the time. Observers make me uneasy."

"Well, keep it to yourself. Your clicking is getting irritat—aw, shit."

"What?"

"Ragnar ship just hopped in. A few light-seconds off."

"Have they seen us?"

"Damned if I know. And I'm not about to do any scans."

The two sat in a tense silence for several minutes.

"Looks like they're moving off."

"No hops?"

"No, they're not in Absolute Rest."

"Where the hell could they be going? They're nothing around here but dust."

"I don't know, and I don't care."

"You're not the least bit curious?"

"Nope. And—oh, look. Th Observer ship is moving off."

"Where to?"

"Following the Ragnar."

"Maybe we should tail them, too."

"Didn't you want to get away from that ship?"

"Yes, but there must be *something* that way. And the Ragnar aren't known for their cleverness or intellect, so I doubt it's a trap."

"Yes, but they are known for having *huge fucking guns*."

After a moment, Femir replied, but not the the current conversation. He was staring at the Observer ship.

"How do they even move without any sort of reaction mass or energy expenditure?"

"How do they do anything? No one has any idea."

"The humans think they warp space."

"The humans think a lot of things."

"You know, we've got plenty of time before the rendezvous. We could at least follow them for a few light-seconds."

"And give ourselves away? We can't move like that ship, you know. We have to blast heated matter out of our rear."

"Damn physics."

Femir sat in silence for a moment.

"I hate waiting."

"Deal with it. It's part of the job."

"This job sucks."

"This job *pays*."

"Yeah, but what's in that container that could be so valuable? It's not even that big. Just a few meters square."

"It's not our job to be curious."

"You have no imagination."

"I know when my imagination could get me killed. Quantum Impulse is a pretty powerful

corporation, even outside Jupiter Republic space.”

“And what would an engine and energy company want with whatever this is? It's way too small to be either a drive core or an energy source. We could scan it...”

“Again, I know when my curiosity may get me killed. They should be here any moment now—and there they are. Ship just hopped in a few hundred kilometers from here, and it's syncing to our reference.”

The console flashed. Femir answered it.

“*Inncit* here.”

“*In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud, It perched for vespers nine.*”

Femir was the one who understood English phonetics, and he repeated the answering phrase which he had memorized without understanding its meaning:

“*Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white, Glimmered the white Moon-shine.*”

“Good to see you, *Inncit*.” The voice came across in universal now. “I hope you have a package for me?”

“We'll dump it from the hold as soon as we've verified the funds.” Off-speaker, he muttered to his partner “*They* scanned it.”

“They should be there now. Pleasure doing business with you.”

“It's *their* package.” Came the retort. “The money's there.”

Femir opened the hold doors. The low-pressure atmosphere of the hold jettisoned out the cargo, which was promptly caught and held motionless.

“I wish we knew how they do that.” Femir said as the container was slowly reeled in to the other ship.

“Join the damn republic, then. Maybe you'll get a job that has clearance. In the meantime, I'm getting us the hell out of here.”

The *Inncit* sped past the opposing ship, and, after an instant, vanished from that region of space in a single flash of light.