

Djankrat stepped out of the lift and the hatch swung closed behind it. Asnemwoi floor plans were very simple. The levels were all but empty, without corridors or even many walls. There were a lot of cubes however, within which all the work or habitation would happen, and in a few places there would be a column in which cables or tubes would run between floors, but that was all. This way it was easy to get from one department to another and there were fewer resources wasted on construction. It also left room for the landing legs to retract into, as well as other things. On the other hand this empty expanse meant that Djankrat's walk was met with a barrage of echoing footsteps, the sounds reverberating off what few surfaces there were to ring over themselves, creating a constant drone of hoof beats. It'd chosen the landing leg that would bring it closest to the main stasis chamber, but there was still a fair distance to go; it was a big frigate.

Djankrat couldn't help but think that without that snack of a peccary it might not have made it this far, for even with the fresh meat sitting comfortably in its stomach it was low on energy. Thankfully the trek was practically over, the cube that held its captain in suspended animation being but a brisk walk away. Weary from its long expedition for the menial task of recon, Djankrat stumbled at the finishing line, throwing out a limp hand against the cube wall. It was too exhausted to care about the dreadful sound of its claws scraping down the metal panels. What strength it had left had to be reserved for awakening their leader. Before it slipped into unconsciousness, Djankrat pulled itself up and threw itself against the door, pushing it open. What lay beyond was an orchard of glowing lavender cylinders suspended in the air by thick cables from the floor and ceiling. Within the cylinders, behind the rising columns of bubbles, were Asnemwoi officers hooked up to life support apparatus. Djankrat staggered along the rows, gazing in at their contents until it at last found the captain's. One more flurry of fingers on a keypad released the Asnemwoi from its long lasting slumber and Djankrat was done...or so it thought.

Kraotjaaq stepped down from the stasis tube once it had been drained of fluid and hinged open. The Predator-state captain of these Asnemwois looked down with its burning eyes at the limp Djankrat, broke off one of the needles from the stasis tube and jammed it through the scout's armoured neck. Immediately the drug coursed through Djankrat's system, meaning it was up and alert within seconds, much to its dismay.

"What is your current name?" Kraotjaaq barked at the underling in the Predator-tongue.

First allowing the buzz to leave its head, the younger Asnemwoi finally answered in the same language, "Djankrat, sir."

"Hmm... You are the scout, are you not?"

"Ye..." Djankrat began.

"There is no need to tell, I can see that you are. What did you do during the Great Conflict?"

“I..”

“You were one of the cowards, were you not?” Kraotjaaq carried on, not listening to what Djankrat had to say. “That will be why you are of such a low rank. I am not a fan of your kind. Your lot hid from the line of duty while real soldiers like myself fought for the honour of our species. No wonder you are of an indivine occupation. Even I, while on the Crusade fleet, had a place by the Eldest’s side. That is because I know how to serve my people, unlike you. Well, am I right?”

“Of course you are, sir,” Djankrat mumbled, hanging its head in shame.

“There was never a doubt about it.”

The pathetic excuse for an Asnemwoi dealt with, Kraotjaaq moved on, examining its suspended crewmembers. They appeared lifeless in their fluid-filled tubes, but of course the reality was the complete opposite. With its officers at hand, Kraotjaaq would be able to get this ship up and running in no time, then with the scout’s intel they could find whatever Entity activity had brought them here and finally go home. The scout’s intel...The captain could only hope that that fool had managed to find *something* out.

“Well, you might have a chance to redeem yourself,” it called to the juiced-up worker. “Tell me what you have learnt of the situation outside the Owubeh. What was detected that awoke you from your slumber first?”

Djankrat looked up at its captain, bleary eyed and with a throbbing head, “Um...There is only one Entity on the ground so far as I could tell, however three of the Brethren Lords are also working separate from it. The Entity in turn would appear to have brought some natives of this planet back from the future, quite why I do not know. I admit that in the moment I did not focus on any of them enough specifically to gauge any more about their natures than that. I was also unable to discern what their reason for being here is, but I believe it is not with the consent of the Parliament, for a new class of Entity vessel has just now entered the atmosphere to immobilise their fellow on the ground along with its company. It is currently departing from the planet...”

Djankrat would have continued, telling Kraotjaaq about the peculiar location the Entities in the ship had chosen to fire upon, but the captain’s face had suddenly stiffened, an expression of hatred having instantly formed upon hearing these words.

“There is no time to awake the others,” Kraotjaaq growled under its breath, the anger evident in its voice. “How long ago did the ship depart?”

“I...I do not know exactly...It has been a little while...”

“Then we are wasting our moments. We should power up this frigate and head after them. I have seen too many of our people die at the Entities’ hands to let even one escape when I had the chance to avenge our fallen. You would not know what I mean because you hid from the war, unlike me. I fought on the front lines. I am a true war hero.”

Djankrat tried to hide its sigh, “Yes sir, you have mentioned it already.”

“And I shall mention it again! My heroism shall not be forgotten while I still live and breathe! No Entity shall go unpunished! The Owubeh will not be swayed from its mission!”

Feeling it'd made its point, Kraotjaaq stormed from the stasis chamber. Djankrat shambled after the captain, seeing it bounding away through the open space towards the front of the ship. Though Kraotjaaq was older, at this point it was far fitter, its leaps metres longer than the scout's could be. So great were its bounds that it reached the control centre before Djankrat had even travelled a fraction of the distance.

Kraotjaaq brought online the various systems in the control centre simply by entering the enormous room. The glaring white spotlights that hung all across the crossed girders rising up before it flared on one at a time, each with a metallic thud overlaid with a faint hum, the moment it crossed the threshold. All of the floors in the Owubeh led here, connected by walkways which converged on the main control centre, passing through the grid of girders. On the raised circular platform where these walkways met the officers would sit and pilot the craft. Kraotjaaq strode up the ramp to the ring of computers. Agitation fuelling its actions, the Asnemwoi activated the primary systems with its claws, working its way to the captain's chair. As navigation and weapons control came online, the huge hollow hemispheres on the sides of the ship lit up, holographic webs shining out of the curved surface before turning into collages of live displays. Above Kraotjaaq's horned head were to-scale representations of Earth and the surrounding landscape, the relative location of the Entity ship in comparison to itself, nearby life signs, internal power distribution levels and the oscillations of the signal being received from the Crusade fleet.

Taking its place in the captain's chair for the first time since they'd separated from the main armada and it'd gone into stasis, Kraotjaaq maximised the reading of the Entity vessel so it filled its fiery vision. Its target locked in its sights, Kraotjaaq redirected the controls that would have otherwise been seen to by other officers at the surrounding computers to a pad at its side. Delaying no further, the impassioned captain charged up the CORET cannons, letting loose all the firepower at its disposal with a slam of its fist. As it watched the digital representations of the torpedoes speeding away in the direction of the Entity ship, which was already some distance beyond the moon, Kraotjaaq gave an almighty laugh, crying out with triumph, baring its many teeth. But all too quickly the exultation turned to horror, for almost as soon as the torpedoes had gone a few times their own length from their cannons they had stopped, hanging in mid-air according to the sensors.