

Gravity reasserted itself the wrong way, and Alex fell among the debris littering the ceiling. It only took the time to get to his feet to understand gravity was fine; it was the ship that was upside down.

Still, considering how they'd been heading to the surface without a working ship, it said much that there was a ship there at all for Alex to exit cryo into. His breath caught when he noticed the pilot's chair wasn't there anymore, and immediately forced himself to calm. If the cryo had been active, it wouldn't have been ripped out. The field extended into the floor specifically to ensure someone wouldn't be flung out, for the field to then fail when they were floating in space.

Alex didn't understand the details of how field systems worked, just that they did. Even once a ship fully ran out of power, there was a cell within the reinforced casing that protected the generator that kept it going for a while.

Since Tristan wasn't in the pilot's seat, it meant he'd gone and done something to ensure they woke up with space to breathe. He made his way out of the cockpit, climbing over the top of the door, and carefully lowered himself among the nearly six inches of supplies mixed in with stone and soil. It seemed the latches on the cabinet hadn't been designed to resist the impact that broke a ship open; daylight at the back attested to that part.

He located Tristan partially seated in the cryo chair against the wall opposite the ship's power cell. There was no question Tristan had managed something at the last moment, thrown himself in the chair and activated it as soon as all of him was within the field.

Without a working ship, Alex had no idea how to turn it off. It would be running off its own cell, but were they standardized? Would this one last longer? If so, how much? If he had any idea where the cell was, he could disconnect it, but that was the work Tristan did.

Since he had to wait, Alex used the time to go through the spilled supplies for anything useful. He found the Heals, Human and Samalian version, since those were the first thing they added after acquiring Hart's ship. With the ship dead, most of the emergency tools were of limited use, since there would be no way to recharge them, but Alex found older models; probably things Hart kept around because they were old, that came with panels that could be connected to them.

Tristan would know what they were for and how useful they might be.

Portable lights were immediately useful, and usable. Every well-equipped ship had some that had their own supplies. They had the same problem as the tools, but lights didn't need as much power, so would last much longer.

He was setting up the second to light the cabin when something crashed, and Samalian cursing sounded.

"When did you start cursing in Samalian?" Alex asked.

Tristan pushed himself to his feet and wiped the blood from his muzzle.

"Sealants in the pile by the cockpit's door."

"How long have you been out of cryo?"

Alex turned the light on. "A few minutes. How long do you think it's been since the crash happened?"

Tristan sniffed the air. "A few days at most. The smells are mainly freshly upturned

earth and vegetation.”

“How long until you can get us back into space?”

“I won’t know until I’ve gone over the damage the crash caused and work out why the system failed.”

“Any chance it was some safeguard Hart had in place in case the ship was stolen?”

Tristan didn’t immediately answer. “Unlikely. This triggered once we hit the planet’s atmosphere. It would have happened the first time we did that.”

“So, you missed a critical system about to fail when you went over the ship?”

Tristan gave him an incredulous look.

“The only other option I can think of is that there was some ship with magical cloaking technology that shut us out of the sky as we were on approach.”

“I don’t know why this happened, but there were no components about to fail. Carter Hart took great care of our ship.”

“Nutrient bars are over there. I’m guessing we have enough for a few months.”

“Weapons?”

“I can’t open the door to our room.”

Tristan force it open, then climbed through.

Alex put the things they couldn’t use back in the cabinets that were angled to hold them.

“Here.” Tristan said, holding Alex’s harness. He handed him his holster after, then exited the room already wearing his gun harness.

“Do you think—”

Something protested the forces applied to it.

Alex has his gun in hand, pointed at the back. He thought he made out voices, but couldn’t tell what they were saying.

Tristan motioned for him to advance, while taking position on the opposite side of the cabin, a few steps behind him. Before they took two steps, the groan of reinforced ship hull came again, and more light entered the back of the ship.

Alex was still wondering what was strong enough to pry open ship plating when someone stepped into the ship.

Alex raised his gun, but kept himself from firing at the human shape, thought these were emergency workers here to look for survivors, but then something registered as wrong, beyond the fact the clothing was rough fabric or the bald head was covered in some dark muck that had dried and cracked.

It was the eyes, a little too small, too far apart. The muscles that seem to stretch the visible skin thin, the too large hands.

It got over the surprise before Alex and let out a guttural bellow before moving forward, then staggering back as Alex and Tristan fired at it. More voices came outside. Alex hurried after the intruder. He didn’t want to have to deal with their numbers in the confines of the ship.

Seven at a glance, two helping the injured one away from the imminent confrontation. The ground was mostly clear soil with the remnant of a few overturned trees. Alex stepped outside, gun pointed at the five holding clubs with bone like spikes embedded into them.

One of them rushed, club high, and Alex fired.

The gun sparked, the power indicator went from green to off, then Alex dodged. He slashed up, and the thing roared in pain as the knife bit into its flesh. The shove nearly threw Alex off his feet, leaving the knife into the thing's sternum where it had gotten stuck.

Tristan cursed, gun pointed at them and pressing the trigger, but his also wasn't firing. Alex rushed another, knife in both hands, but as he put a foot down, the world shifted thirty degrees. He had trouble finding his footing and barely raised his arm to block the strike, then, through the pain, he planted the knife in the thing's chest. It took him along as it fell back, but he had a second knife into it before they hit the ground. Then he rolled off it and trying to figure out what was happening to him.

Even if he could feel the ground under him, so he knew how gravity was, to moment he raised his head, it was like he was overshooting the sitting position, and had to lie back down.

He rolled out of the way, of the foot coming down, caught sight of Tristan, claws into one of them, and seemingly using them to keep standing, then he was on his back and kicked at his attacked's knee, ignoring the fact he felt like he was upside down.

The bone broke, and it bellowed. Alex grabbed a knife and sat to strike it, but the world pulled at him and he missed it. Instead of taking advantage of his trouble, the creatures fled, taking their injured with them.

Alex carefully went on all four, then tried to stand, but this wasn't gravity having shifted. It kept changing, making it impossible to remain standing.

"Tristan?" he called, having gotten himself back to all fours. "What's going on?"

"I don't know." He was on one knee. "Can you get inside the ship? The medical scanner should tell us what they did."

Alex set his gaze on the open part of the ship and inch his way to it, having to pick himself up multiple time as he overcompensated for the gravity shift and ended up on his side.

Once inside, he kept crawling as gravity settled back down the way it should be. Tristan let himself fall next to him.

"Is it settling down for you, too?" Alex asked.

Tristan interrupted his nod, his nose pad going dry. When his breathing settled, he took his gun out of his holster and looked it over, ears back in anger. He pried the side open with a claw and pulled a small board from.

"Burned," he muttered, then looked outside.

"Mine overloaded too, I think. I dropped it out there. Any idea how come they both failed?"

"I'm going to have to run tests." Tristan used the wall to get to his feet, stepped away and awaited. He didn't fall, then offered Alex his hand. "But first, let get you scanned so we can work out what happened to us."