

Chapter One

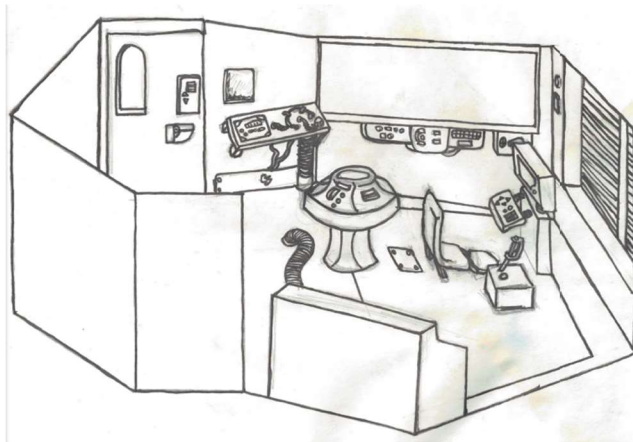
The Beginning of the Beginning

The soft hum of the electricity as it buzzed through the conduits above filled the quiet hallway as the man walked toward a dim light. His name was Tyroe Ticcousium and he was headed for his daily shift.

He was tired. Always tired. He hasn't slept well since he volunteered for this job thirteen years ago. He remembers being young, thinking his whole life was ahead of him, and that taking this assignment would open all the doors for him. When he was young, he wanted adventure and excitement. Now as he begins to feel the ennui into the third decade of his life, he regrets his decision to commit himself to this assignment.

Adventure has been replaced by repetition, excitement by monotony. He has seven more years. Four more drops, and what feels like an infinite sea to journey through. Then and only then can he return to the life that he foolishly placed on hold under the guise of patriotism and exploration.

As he entered through the bulkhead of the cold octagonal room, he almost trips over a pool of strewn wires left in a pile on the floor. He knew one day he would have to pick them up, but they had been left there for months from a prior electrical patch job that never rated high enough priority to be properly repaired.



The room was not very large. Just barely big enough to fit the three chairs and their consoles within. The slight slope of the walls made him feel even more cramped, and the knowledge that this room was nestled within the center of a massively hunk of metal travelling across a vast unforgiving space, did nothing to quell the anxiety he faced every day of his life. Exse Dionusius was already seated at his console, plugging data in about their recent potential drop site. Exse was always to work early, and usually willing to take over command of the vessel to help ease tensions. It had come in handy when Tyroe needed to get away from Davea. He hated Davea. When they first started working together, it seemed like it was a manageable arrangement. Then the arguing started. Part cabin fever, part stir crazy, he just couldn't take Davea as quickly as one year into the assignment. Maybe it was the close quarter work space. Maybe it was simply because both of them were strongly opinionated, but if you asked Davea he would simply, and politically say they were just not compatible as co-workers.

Tyroe often wondered how Exse was able to put up with both Davea and himself, but kept that question to himself. After thirteen years, he felt Exse was the closest person to a brother he had ever had. Or maybe it was just how much he hated Davea that made his relationship with Exse so much more precious to him.

"So any winners for this drop?" Tyroe said cutting through the silence and hum of the equipment.

"Uh," slightly started Exse responded, "Sorry Tyroe, no luck. It's not conducive for a drop."

"Come on Exse, just four more drops and we get to go home. Isn't there one place in this hell hole that is sustainable?"

"No, I mean. We could but then what kind of chance would the biome have for survival? I'm willing to do double time as long as the science and subjects are safe."

Silence fills the room as Exse returns to his inputting. Without looking away from his console, he continued, "So, have you seen Davea yet today." A smirk dancing ever so slightly across Exse's mouth. "No, why... oh fuck, I forgot." Tyroe responded. His shift today was a solo run for 10 straight hours with Davea joining him to relieve Exse an hour into his shift.

"Hey....," Tyroe started to say with a softened cadence to his voice.

"No."

"Come on, I can't today."

"Look, I get it, but I'm pulling off a double right now. I'm seventeen hours in right now, and I feel like collapsing."

"What if I lower the resistance, then you couldn't collapse if you try!"

"Why can't you just blow off steam with the rest of the crews?"

"Because, since we were in a potential drop condition the crews have been in quarantine for the last week to prevent contamination odds. Right now it's just you two and the four remaining biome captains."

"Look any other day I'd take you up on it, but today I can't. Just clench your jaw, and plan bare the nine hours. Hell, practice working on that personality of yours."

"Funny."

Tyroe sat at his console, and began plotting the course for the next potential drop location, as the silence took over the room once more, save for the slight occasional harsh click of an errant keys on the consoles.

An hour and a half later the silence was once shattered. The clunky step pattern echoed down the hall as a figure made its way toward them. Tyroe let out an exasperated sigh. "Really, already," followed

shortly from Exse as he glanced over to Tyroe. Then Davea entered the room. A disheveled and unkempt man, lazy and sloppy with his posture.

"Hey Tyroe and Exse, sorry I'm late. Couldn't seem to get out of the bunk, especially knowing I'd have to see Tyroe stupid disapproval for the next 9 hours."

Exse let out a soft chuckle as Tyroe's eyes narrowed toward Davae. "Feeling's mutual," Davea retorted.

"Don't worry Davea, I needed to stay a little longer to prepare the module data, so that we can send a message to Federal command," Exse said interrupting the two's squabble.

"Letting them know we are dropping here?"

"No, unfortunately, letting them know that we checked out this area, and are moving on to a new quadrant."

"Don't let me stop you then..." Davea says, as he sits down on his console.

A couple minutes the buzzing is interrupted by the creaking and moaning of the vessel and then a release, as the module is fired out of the ship. "It'll take about a week for it to get within range of any civilization to broadcast it back to a Federal outpost, but we should be able to make way for the next quadrant," said Davea and as quickly as he finished, the module begins to beep as it travels slowly across the room's main status screen.

Beep.

"So where we headed then?"

Beep.

"Tyroe has plotted our course already."

Beep.

"Oh great, Tyroe is the one who picked this winning quadrant without a viable drop location."

Beep.

"Hey get off my back Davea, all I have to go with is vacant, and environmentally approved locations. Then Exse does his scans."

Beep.

"Come on guys, can't we make it through one week without..."

"Exse does his job Tyroe, I'm just asking you to do your job!" Davae said while standing up out of his chair.

"Guys..."

"Davae why don't you learn how to show up for a shift on time, and then you can try to tell me what my job is!" Tyroe snaps as he hops to his feet.

"GUYS!"

"What Exse!" Tyroe snapped.

"Where did my module go?"

"It should have been on our scans until it left the system right," Tyroe responded still on edge.

"That's weird, it's last read out was a hull breach and then silence," Exse said burying his face in close to his readouts.

BEEP.

"Is it back?" Tyroe stated slightly confused.

BEEEEEP.

"Davae run to secure the biomes!" Exse shouts, "We have an unidentified vessel approaching."



Davae barks back, "This god damn sector shouldn't have been inhabited," as he runs down the corridor, his loud footsteps echoing as he flees.

"Tyroe, get on communications, try a broad spectrum broadcast, using a multi-lingual range"

"Okay, what are we sending?"

"Startwith please don't kill us, then what every you feel is appropriate..."

"This can't be right."

"Tell me about it."

"No, we can't broadcast."

"What? Somethings jamming our system?"

"I don't know... oh shit."

Exse slams his hand down on the grey large button next to a stick microphone jutting out of his console. Exse's hand trembles on the button as he waits for the light to go green.

As Davae pulls down a large geared handle, which causes a series of clanks as processes begin to shift in the corridor walls. A static begins to hum in the speaker box above his head.

"Everybody. We have a situation. Everyone brace for impact!"

Davae begins to head for the wall communications panel, with the interest of reaching out to Exse, but before he can reach it, the ship rears. As the sound of rupturing metal, and twisted steel. After the initial breaches the ship still trembles as the vessel groans as the vacuum of space pulls upon the hull of the ship. Davae struggles to his feet, as he pulls open the communication panel cover, holding his hand down on the feed activator.

"What the hell was that?" Davae said as soon as the light on the panel goes green.

"The unidentified vessel has opened fire upon us. Biome four has has severe breaches, and all readings list total loss of containment."

"God, Exse... a thousand lives all lost?"

"Focus on what we can for now Davae, the lives of the people still in danger. Do we have breach within the ship at dock points?"

"No, the containment process for contamination block seems to be holding in light of the breach." Davae says as the ship continues to groan from pressure and vacuum of space.

"Check biome integrity, and keep ready for further instructions."

The main chamber is riddled with red blinking lights, as sirens screech. Exse scrambles, his fingers dancing upon his console, as Tyroe stands in front of the main status screen. Tyroe bites his finger ever so slightly as he quickly is running numbers in his head. He mutters to himself, "Think... think think..." Exse knocks a stack of documents off of his console, "We are screwed. We are a seed ship. No weapons, no shielding, not even a strong hull."

"...Wait. They are jamming us, check the read outs. Do you think it's a focused wave?"

"We've got nothing picking up or broadcasting out on the hull of the vessel, I couldn't tell you," Exse said with a confused look, "We are lucky our outdated sonar system is getting even basic readings."

"Hear me out, they are coming in on this vector," Tyroe says indicating on the main status screen, "If they are using a directional array to jam our system, then if reorient our vessel, we could place into the angle the underside of our ship."

"And why?"

"The underside has the reflective heat plating, we might be able to bounce their signal back at them, just enough to get a window."

"There are way to many maybe in that plan. What if it's not laser based. What does it do to help us not die?!"

"Look, if it doesn't do anything we still are dead."

Exse starts furiously entering data on his terminal, as the vessel shakes slightly as the vehicles stabilization rockets ignite rotating them. "There, I don't exactly know why we..." BEEEEEEEEEP, "Oh god." Exse presses down on the communications system, "Brace for impact!"

Multiple spike projectiles race toward the biome vessel from the dark shadows of the quadrant. Of the seven missiles, six miss, but the last clips the primary engine thruster.

"What was that you two!" screeched from the radio on the console.

"Before you answer that," Tyroe said, preventing Exse's hand from connecting with the actuator, "we need to launch a biome."

"Are you crazy? They'll be torn to shreds!"

"Not if they're launch pattern uses our vessel as a shield."

"Then we'll be dead."

"Exse, we were never going to make it out of this situation, but if we ARE jamming their readings, they might not even realize we launched the biome. If I'm right, at least one biome and a thousand of the people on this ship would survive."

"One biome, on a planet that couldn't support life, and with the Federals not knowing that they are even here? That's death even if whoever is attacking us, doesn't finish the job."

“It’s a chance, and it’s more than we have.”

“WHAT IS GOING ON! ANSWER ME,” Davae sqwacks through the radio.

“Davae, prepare Captain Dobsiun, and inform him that he will have to drop biome three immediately, using the main vessel to cover it’s trajectory.” Exse said with a soft quiver.

“Whoa, why does Captain Dobsiun get to abandon ship? We should get us into the command deck of the biome, and leave the quarantined biomes behind.

“Davae, just get it done. We don’t have a lot of time here!” chimed in Tyroe.

“I’ll start feeding trajectory telemetry to the biome, you keep your eyes on the placement, of the unknown vessel. Make sure that we are hopefully blocking their readings Tyroe.”

As biome three starts to hum to life, the detach coupler begins to cycle, and disengage from the seed ship. “Very good Captain Dobsiun, make sure to follow the path, tell the Federal that we did our best,” Exse said with a melancholy tone.

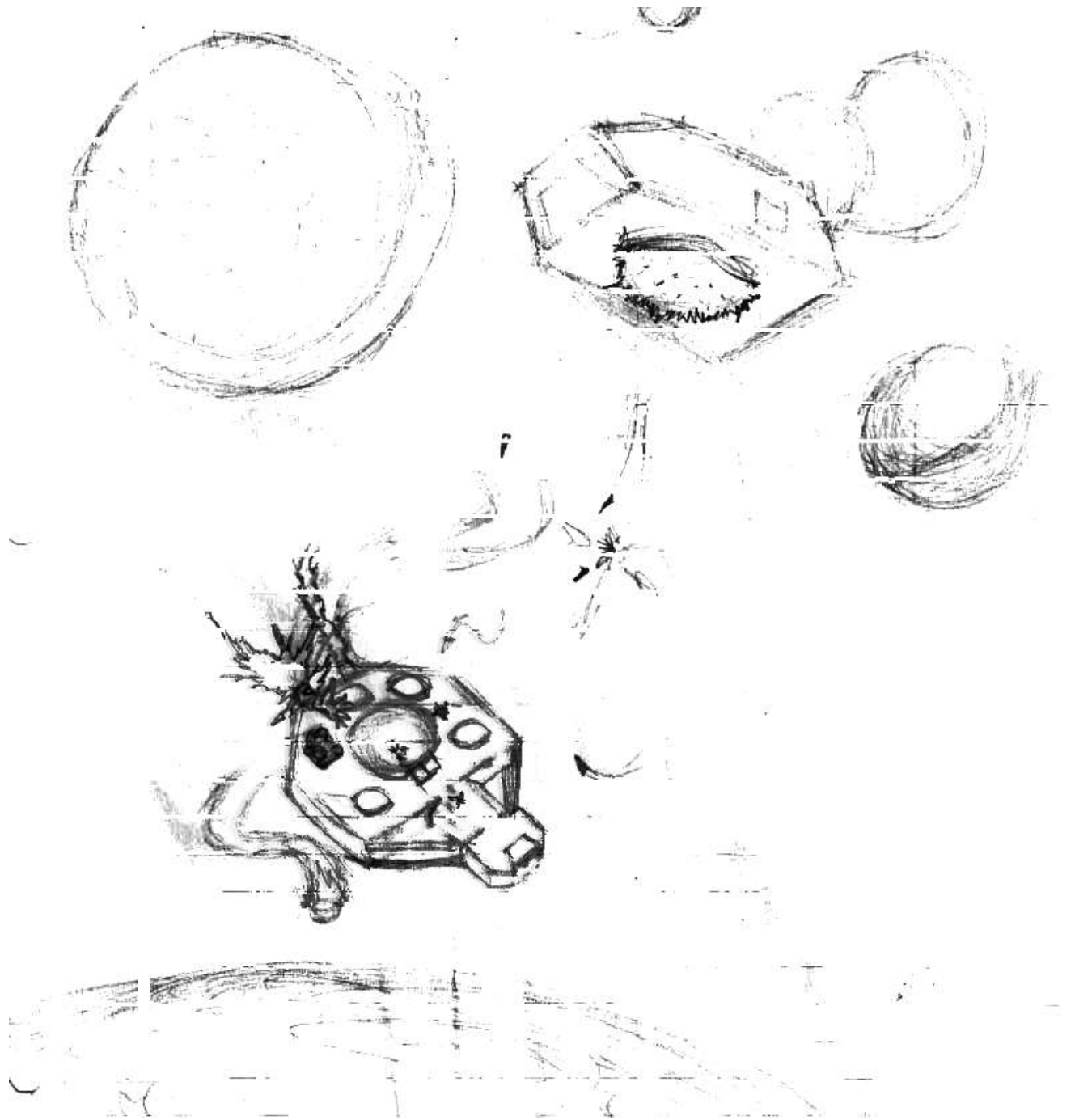
After the biome fully disconnects with the ship, leaving only the communications line wire before it breaks on it’s own due to distance, Exse tries once more to reach the command deck of the biome, “Did you copy Captain Dobsiun?”

A look cuts across Tyroe’s face, as realization cuts through the terror of his impending doom, “Oh no...” Tyroe runs down the corridor toward the biome dispatch deck.

“I’m sorry Exse, I couldn’t,” the familiar voice of Davae cuts through the speaker, “I won’t die here...” as static hits the line indicating the snap of the direct communication line from the biome, indicating that it had broke free of the radius of the seed ship.

Tyroe arrived at the sealed bulkhead that would have lead to the command deck of Biome three, to find a body lying face down in a pool of blood. He rolls it over to see the face of Captain Dobsiun bashed in, fragments of bone stabbing out off the hamburger mash of tissue and blood. A stained wrench to the right of the scene.

Before Tyroe can yell out in frustration, a wave projectiles rip through the ship. The vacuum begins to tear through all the bulkheads and in the wave of debris and wreckage, the biome slips through the atmosphere of the nearby planet.



Davae clutches his head as he sits at the main console of the biome's command deck. The biome initiates its landing sequence, doing its best to prevent damage to itself in the planets severe gravitational pull.

His communications line was blinking, as the people within the biome were trying to reach out to find out what was happening.

