

Lyra Colony
Eorilia's Moon
Lyra-3K-a System

VeZ awoke, despite her best efforts, to the abrupt and repeated nudging at her ribs.

"Hmmpghgr," the Mirialan groaned.

"VeZ, wake up already." The voice was female. Vaguely familiar. Her mother? No, no. Couldn't be.

"I told you not to trust a spicehead," the voice continued. "We might as well call the whole thing off."

"Come on, baby," a male answered. "This is our one chance to get off this rock. She's just not a morning person." He sounded... vague. Everything was vague. Spice? Yeah, that sounded about right.

"Catch!" The woman's voice was immediately followed by a small ocean of cold water raining down on VeZ's head.

"Kriffin' choobie fraknozzle," the Mirialan squeaked, shrinking back from the deluge.

"See? She's more articulate already," the male said with a chuckle. "You've got two hours. Go grab some caf or something."

"Put a shirt on first," the woman chimed in, tossing VeZ's synthleather jacket at her.

VeZ sat up, trying to rub the water and yesterday's mascara out of her eyes and succeeding mostly in smearing it all over her face. Eventually she managed to get her clothes back on.

The Mirialan was unceremoniously escorted to the door, and recoiled at the bright afternoon light. The man gave her an odd look. "Two hours, ok? Don't be late."

"Yeah, sure," VeZ answered with an awkward thumbs up. "You know me."

The Human just nodded at her, and then uncomfortably turned and walked off towards the main street. VeZ turned and staggered in the opposite direction. Once she'd made it past three of the boxy prefab dwellings, she turned down an alley, threw up, and collapsed onto a pile of bagged refuse.

"Duke," she mumbled, pawing at her myriad pockets until she finally found a comlink. "Duuuke," she whined.

A mechanical gibbering answered her, the comforting voice of one of her repurposed imperial murder machines.

"Duke, mommy needs a pickup."

The voice gibbered back. It was a little hard to understand the old probe droid when she was lucid. In her current state, Vez didn't even bother trying. "I don't know where I am. Use the tracker, you lazy bastard."

The droid shot back with something curt, which she didn't need an interpreter to parse for her.

Vez leaned back into the garbage heap, hand over her eyes to keep the nauseating sunlight at bay. *I am trash*, she thought. *And I'm gonna die with the other trash*. She took a moment to savor the self pity before the realization that she was probably working kicked in. The preceding night was a blur. She could barely remember her name, had no idea what planet she was on, and hadn't even caught the other woman's species before her boyfriend/husband/brother/whatever had hauled her out into the frakking daylight.

Waking up naked and hungover in a stranger's house was not a new experience for her, but for all her practice she had never figured out how to pull it off in a way that wasn't miserable and disorienting.

Inevitably, her inability to piece together any useful details about her situation gave way to a healthy amount of self-loathing that lasted until the comforting—yet also nauseating—pulsing noise of the probe droid's repulsor motor roused her.

"Duke, I'm over here," Vez called out, though the actual sound was less a call than a croak.

The Duke looked down on his master with his massive visual sensor, a bulge about the size of Vez's head that she would have called black if the probot's chassis weren't an even darker shade. "Frimmin on the frim fram," it scolded. "Frimmin on the fram."

"Yes, I'm garbage. Shut up and help me home."

The probot did the probot equivalent of a shrug before reaching out with one of its pincer arms and hauling its disheveled mistress to her feet. Somewhere in the process it managed to float to the ground, deciding that skittering along the pavement on its pincers would be preferable to floating. Vez kept both hands on the droid's oval head and tried to stay upright as it half-guided, half-dragged her in the direction of the spaceport.

The walk of shame ended in front of the sexiest vessel in the known galaxy, the *Waterbug*. Sleek, deadly, and dressed in black, the Aggressor was a perfect reflection of her owner. At least that's what Vez liked to think in the times when Vez was capable of thinking. The Duke escorted her aboard and straight to the fresher.

VeZ flailed absently at the shower controls with one arm while she tried to focus on the medicine cabinet in the cramped room. She managed to find the yellow vial she was looking for and grabbed it and a toothbrush.

Clothes off, chems in, she thought, shrugging off her jacket. *That's how they do it on Zeltros*. The vial's contents, a precalculated dose of Muon Gold, was the most important fourth of her go-to cure for hangovers of indeterminate origin. The hot shower, mint toothpaste to chase the taste of vomit away, and an oversized cup of caf all had their roles to play, but Muon Gold never let a girl down in a moment of personal crisis.

The spice tasted like nothing, which was arguably one of its charms. The Mirialan rubbed the glittering powder against her gums as she stepped into the shower, letting the electric tingle of exploding neurons rouse her from the deep funk she had drank, smoked, and/or snorted herself into the night before.

As the hot water cascaded over her, the previous night's events started to come rushing back as the Muon Gold sent her brain into overdrive.

Things had started, as usual, with ill-conceived cantina karaoke. The Human male was Zacrya. He worked some dead-end security job for the colony administrators. Cute, but not bright. Just how she liked them.

The woman, his girlfriend, was one of those who looked Human but was probably some dumb obscure species that would take offense at that. Kiffar? No, those have tattoos. Epicanthix? Eh, it didn't matter. Her name was... Jazaali. She was the demanding type you saw a lot in hick resource extraction colonies like this. Desperate to get offworld, but completely unable to fathom the concept that she could do it herself instead of pushing her man to do it for her.

Zac was guarding some big archaeological site at the edge of town. Normally, the authorities had it locked down, but things were down to a skeleton crew because some idiots had started a war with some other idiots over something stupid.

Muon Gold was a hell of a spice, but even its magic couldn't make VeZ keep track of galactic politics.

She was going to help Zac steal something from the site. VeZ couldn't remember what, or why the Lyran couple thought she was suited for the job, but she'd figure that out later.

The Duke arrived right on cue as she stepped out of the shower, shoving his way as far into the fresher as he could manage without being able to fit through the bulkhead. One skeletal arm reached out to her, steaming caf at the ready.

"Thanks, bud. Get the starter kit?"

The droid sputtered an affirmative and floated back out to fetch some light munitions.

For her part, Vez gathered the day's pharmaceuticals. Another dose or two of Muon Gold for the road, some Millaflower to take the edge off if she overdid it on the Gold, some Booster Blue in case she overdid it on *that*, and some Glitterstim because Glitterstim is awesome.

With all of that safely stowed in her purse, Vez spent the next hour on hair and makeup before getting into battle dress. All black, as usual, with the comfy synthleather jacket with all its pins and patches and hidden pockets, and big stompy rocket boots just in case. Today felt like a sensible pants day.

"Alright, Duke," the Mirialan said as she strolled into the passenger compartment and started rifling through the hodgepodge of ordinance the droid had gathered. "Any idea where I'm going?"

The probot's answer sounded suspiciously like flatulence.

"Yeah, fine. I'll wear an open comm next time." Vez fidgeted with a pack of cigarras, black nails rapping against the black package. "Maybe check the Holonet for some archaeological site? This feels like a one-dig sort of town."

A few seconds later, the probot started chattering.

"Yeah, whatever. Forward it to my datapad and lead away."

The Duke emitted some sort of metallic hiss as it gestured with another arm to a two liter bag of water with a long suction tube coiled up at one end.

"Yes, I'll hydrate," the Mirialan sighed, rolling her eyes. She grabbed the waterskin and stuffed it in her bag. "Now shut up and lead on."

The pair meandered through the streets of Lyra Colony, the Duke leading the way while Vez kept her nose buried in her datapad. *What the hell is an Ordu Aspectu?* she wondered. *Sounds expensive.*

The natives were staring, of course, though as usual they were so fixated on the probot that they hardly noticed the normally-conspicuous Mirialan following it. That was one of the Duke's many charms.

Lyra Colony was not an especially large settlement, and with the Duke setting a brisk pace they hit the edge of the jungle in about fifteen minutes. As soon as the probot was satisfied that they weren't being followed or watched, it led them in an arc around the edge of town toward the dig site. Vez tried to keep up, muttering various obscenities every time she nearly tripped over a root or rock.

The archaeological site was hard to miss. The entire complex was surrounded by a three-meter tall fence, topped with barbed wire and some sort of ultrasonic projects to gently encourage wildlife to avoid the area. The Duke picked up a few humanoids on its scanners and continued on, floating menacing as only a Viper can.

As they drew closer to the gate, Vez was able to see the two guards. One of them was probably Zac. The other was some overweight guy with a beard that probably always looked three days old. He fit into his uniform, at least, though a few buttons were struggling valiantly to keep it that way.

Vez remembered bits and pieces of the preceding night; judging from how exhausted Zac looked, the bits she didn't remember had not been spent peacefully asleep.

"What the..." the larger man grunted, head spinning around to try to locate the weird pulsing noise. His eyes widened at the sight of the probot floating towards them.

Zac was not happy. "Vez, where the hell have you been? You were supposed to be here an hour ago!"

"Hey," the Mirialan answered. She gestured to her makeup and attire. "This doesn't just happen."

"Oh, *this* is the hotshot you were telling me about?" The Other Guy gave her a quick look over.

"What, did you pick her up on a street corner?"

Vez snorted. "You two losers couldn't afford it. We doing this or what?"

The two guards looked at each other for a moment. Zac broke the silence. "We were *supposed* to sneak you in right after shift change so you could do your thing before the patrol started snooping around."

"Which thing was that again? Last night's kind of a blur."

"Ashla and karking Bogan," the Other Guy muttered. "I should have known better than to go along with this stupid scheme."