

The soft, induced crushing noise rang through Midnight's mind as her vision shifted, drones returning to the Redeemer as it transited the wormhole. The drones spread out as she settled her ship on the other side. Visually nothing, DScan clear. She shot a message of thanks to the scout that was cloaked nearby. The red and black of her Crimson Harvest livery shimmered briefly into existence as she aligned out. The scout was already off ahead of her when she broke cloak and hit the long warp across system to the home hole.

At the scout's request she flicked off a casual link to the ship's details; *SWS Trapdoor Spider*. The camera drones settled as she reached full warp speed. She thought she would stretch out if she could control her body, deciding to do the next best thing she checked the ship's logs.

The maiden voyage had been uneventful so far, the logs showed the usual calibration details, some complaint from engineering about charge accumulation in the drive coils. Her focus however was grabbed by a single message from a shield maintenance engineer.

"Beautiful, isn't it?"

Aura usually filtered these messages out she thought.

"What is?" she replied, confused.

"Space, the view. Mainly thought of that solar transit," the reply was slow, hand typed.

"What solar transit?"

The engineer sent a picture back, taken from a starboard window, out over the mega pulse turrets. Beyond them a moon crossed the bright blue star, vaguely she recalled seeing it on the way out.

"Beautiful, right? Worth waking up for."

"First crew?"

"Does it show?"

"Just a little."

"Move!" the scout shouted at her in corp comms. She flicked away the image, focusing on her camera drones, she scanned. She'd been sitting exposed on the WH, tackle and two carriers were on short as she jumped out. Cloaked align took her off the WH on the other side even as her corpmates formed up. She made excuses in the corporate and fleet channels and wished them luck as her battleship is pulled into dock at their Fortizar.

The Citadel's machinery extracted her pod and dropped her in her quarters. Fatigued and a little shaken she wandered through to settle. A new mail chime disturbed her as she cast her clothes aside to address her tiredness: Junior Engineer Yasmin Grenberg.

"I'm so sorry, I won't do it again."

Midnight sighed as she considered it, tapping out several messages, deciding for a moment not to reply at all and idly scrolling back to the picture she was sent. With a soft smile she threw it up on her huge main screen, rarely graced by more than PI, and tapped out a reply.

"Save it for when we're docked."

"Home cyno's up!" the call came through on comms and soon the cloak rolled off the *Spider*. The jump bridge went up and Midnight sent her fleet home. The remains of the ratting carriers packing their cargoholds.

The bridge cycled down and she jumped herself back, landing to the deafening sound of their stealth bombers pouring back into the home system. The other black ops ships already jumping back and she noted as it crit, only she remained on the outside. She said a little thanks to DuckShard for his maths and took herself home collapsing the connection behind her.

She saw the new grid as the bombers warped themselves home in a ragged line, she vaguely chastised them in corp chat but the fleet was breaking up. Throwing the star to one of their newer FCs she took her Redeemer back to dock and dropped comms, heading into her quarters.

Unclipping the top of her jacket she fell into the embrace of her sofa and started on her after action report; the CEO was always fond of some good self-congratulation. Her writer's block halfway through the first paragraph was alleviated by a message chime.

"Are you busy?" it asked.

"Not really," she replied, any excuse for a distraction. A moment later she received a video call. Initially she frowned at the strange noise, the calls a rarity in the capsuleer community. Realising what it was she stroked her hands over her heavily tattooed face and tried to tidy her hair a little, realising she'd not washed all the pod goo out as she sighed and picked up.

Yasmin popped up on the screen smiling, at least she guessed this was her. Midnight's first impression of the engineer was a mixed one. She appeared a little mucky still, after the *Spider's* recent deployment. But beneath it her face was cute, if scared, much the structure she'd aimed for when reshaping her own. A quick glance to her mirror reassured her, but they might have passed for sisters. Her gaze returned to the overall clad crew member and focused on her eyes, studying them before she waved causing Midnight to jump.

"Midnight?" Yasmin said softly, right hand waving to get her attention, though two fingers of it were absent. "You don't do this often do you?"

"Not ever," she said shaking her head, "Does it show?"

"Just a little," Yasmin said with a smirk, "You're gawking at me, Midnight." Midnight blushed, shaking her head to clear it, returning her gaze to Yasmin and licking her lips without noticing.

"I'm sorry," she said seeing the engineer blush, "I don't normally do... well, people."

"Not that you don't want to it seems," Yasmin said, chuckling before realising her meaning had been utterly missed by a sheepish-looking capsuleer. Studying her screen she watched Midnight's eyes wander over her obliviously. "You really aren't used to being seen are you?"

"Not at all," Midnight said, eyes snapping to Yasmin's lips, "Nor having so many surfaces I don't control."

"Surfaces?"

"Aspects of me that can be outwardly observed."

"So like you licking your lips at the sight of me? You aren't used to having lips and exposing your... hunger like that." Yasmin asked, prompting Midnight to blush. "Or cheeks to blush. I wonder if you lick your lips when you see a ship you want to kill?"

"I don't think so," Midnight said, "I wouldn't know, I can't feel my body like that."

"Shame," Yasmin muttered, "So, do you just never go out and talk to people?"

"We can't."

“Not even with each other?” Yasmin asked and Midnight shook her head. “Maybe I should ring you more then, get you used to being seen, you’re certainly worth seeing.” Midnight smiled and blushed in turn eventually beaming and almost bouncing in her chair as Yasmin smiled and shook her head. “Whatever will we do with you?”

The shimmer of the cloaked Redeemer shattered the straight lines of the mining lasers as Midnight watched them. Two Rorquals burned in the middle of the belt as her Black Ops gang lurked to protect them. On the fleet’s comms channel the Apostle pilot on standby bitched about the T3 that had escaped earlier in the day. She tuned them out quite quickly, ensuring their alerts were set up correctly, waiting for a new sig spawn.

She ran through the logs, it had been a few weeks since the *Spider* had been out and she was berating herself for the low crystal count. Not serious, it would need to be addressed soon though. A message chime went off and as she checked the name her pod told her it had injected drugs to stabilize her heart rate. An overreaction perhaps, but how would her systems tell butterflies from a heart attack when she truly felt neither?

“Would now be a good time?” Yasmin asked.

“Certainly nothing happening for now.”

“Sure?”

“They will scream loudly if I’m needed, their oversized ventures are blinged.”

“Won’t be the only ones screaming, those Rorquals have six thousand men on each.”

“They’re safe enough, that’s why we’re here. Should have no expensive lossmails today,” Midnight sent, idly scrolling back to a previous Rorqual loss of their corp, wincing at the ex-corpmates hubris and poor fitting. “Won’t be repeating Carefin’s silly mistakes.” This message was met with a silence that stretched on until Midnight tried to break it. “No issues with the shields?”

“None, you think we’ll be needing the Rorqual reps?” Yasmin’s reply finally came.

“Good option to have, how’s the view?”

“Distorted, as ever, but I got some nice shots earlier,” this came faster now Yasmin was properly interested. “Even got some of your Oracle fleet from the other day.” An album of images came with this message and she flicked through them happily. Soon she found one from the Fortizar of her Oracle fleet returning, complete with the scar across the armour of her starboard bow, a salvo of Null that had been lucky.

She scaled and cropped it around her own ship before sending it back.

“Think I could get a print of this?” she asked with it.

“For your quarters? Not sure I would know how to have it done out here but I could look into it. Haven’t done prints since signing up.”

“Did you used to before?”

“Used to do it for a living back on Octanneve II, before I had to move.”

“Do you miss it? Seems like a talent.”

“Less and less by the day. It is, but these crews pay better,” Yasmin’s message left Midnight at a loss for a while, she was even grateful when a new sig popped up.

Yasmin sat on the observation deck, her old tripod set up beside her ran a motion capture and in her lap she sketched the *Trapdoor Spider*, emerging from the system's yellow sun, as the corp's endless traffic of ships drifted by. She tapped away messages on a side pane to Midnight. Debating the killing of carriers, she wished they wouldn't stand off like this, as much as she knew Midnight was out of touch she enjoyed her far more when the subject was their connection.

She flicked back to the image that started it all, a beautiful shot of the swarms of escape pods leaving a dying carrier even as others burned on the field behind. She'd put a print copy of it in the canvas order Midnight had had her put in. It would go on her wall once she had one. One of the other crew caught sight of the image as he walked past and paused wandering over.

"Was that from the recent deployment?" he asked.

"Yeah, taken from the *Spider*," she told him.

"It's incredible," he said softly, "Is that why you're out here then, to take pictures?"

"I'm an engineer on the *Spider* actually," she said shaking her head.

"Ah, exciting, I'm a comms officer for the *Overcompensating*, she's a Victory Edition Rattlesnake though so it's barely a job," he said with a quiet laugh admiring the image, "Surely crew work can't pay better than that would proper?"

"It does if I die, and that was the plan."

"Oh," he said, seeming shocked.

"Well, at times it was, at others it was perspective. There used to be a bridge, over a bay. It was said people would jump off trying to kill themselves, but they'd live, and they'd realise by the time they hit the water that their problems weren't so bad after all and they could fix their lives."

"That's what your contract is you reckon, your version of jumping?"

"Exactly."

"So, when it's over you know how to fix what went wrong?" he asked a little nervously.

"Oh not at all, but I've realised, I don't care, and I don't want this to be over," she said with a smile as he made excuses and moved along his way, leaving her to send more sweet nothings to Midnight.

Yasmin was dressed casually as the call opened up, holding a small device and sprawled out on her new sofa. Midnight sat on her own sofa, still wet with pod fluid from a T3C deployment.

"You called, little engineer?" Midnight said with a smile, her gaze more steady on the engineer's eyes now, a mix of practise and having studied the rest of her in depth.

"I did, I wanted to show you my new place," Yasmin said with a wide smile, "You overpaid me terribly for sorting prints."

"I'm paying the supplier to sterilize them anyway, might as well pass it on to my favourite engineer," she said finding the closest thing she had to casual clothes. Yasmin watched her move to do so intently, taking her chance to study the sockets than ran down Midnight's spine. "I have it after all."

"Which reminds me," Yasmin said as she watched the capsuleer dress, "You need more than two sets of clothes. We should buy you some new ones."

"So I'm overpaying you, but you're encouraging me to spend so much more on something only you will ever see?" Midnight turned and smiled as she tidied her Yoiul festival shirt.

"I never said not to over pay me, and because you like making me happy?" Yasmin said with a mischievous smile, hopping up and wandering through her new quarters. "Found a place over the docking bays, I'm only a few levels above the observation deck I used to spend all my free time on." She turned the device to show the busy space outside her window, capitals sliding past each other so close as a sites fleet was forming. "You've made me a very happy engineer."

Midnight watched the view through the window with an odd fascination, it was the closest she'd come to naturally seeing the ships in space.

"I'm glad," said Midnight, "it's an incredible sight."

"They really are, aren't they? Well, you might not think so."

"I was actually thinking of you happy, so no, the ships are pretty much just another day."

"You know you gave me enough to live happily on for the rest of my natural life, right? Once my contract is up."

"Did I really give you that much?" Midnight asked in shock.

"You did, looks like you'll keep your favourite engineer happy for a while."

The *Trapdoor Spider* drifted slowly around the wormhole; their bait was dangling itself a few connections down the chain and a small flotilla of cloaked ships lurked nearby to close the trap when the moment came. FCing duties had been given to a new prospect tonight, with Midnight there in case things went wrong. Bite potential came over comms and inwardly she sighed, hoping they weren't wasting more time on this chain.

"View is really good of the sun from this wormhole," chimed in Yasmin's private channel.

"It's a rather odd spawn, so far above the orbital plane."

"I think I nearly saw a sunspot," Yasmin said, "You know if you brought her round a bit across that Apoc on the hole it would be beautiful."

Midnight chuckled and adjusted her course across the wormhole to try and hit the sweetspot Yasmin asked for, finally sending her message off, "It better be beautiful."

"What?" came the reply from fleet.

"It's a Proteus, 'course it isn't."

"Damn it Midnight."

"Attention, pay some."

"Sorry guys wrong comms," she rushed off and more came in.

"You talking to your crew again?"

"What better be beautiful?"

"It's not one Proteus, I see a full fleet."

"Bloody pervert."

"Is this why you bring that to everything?"

"Hey, they're still human."

"Not really."

"Only human."

"Oh shut up!" she called out, "She's human. So am I, vaguely, and I love her. So I moved my ship a few km because of it, big deal."

"Oooooo."

"Told you she loves that ship."

"Midnight, you sent that one to both channels again," Yasmin replied, "But, it is mutual."

"It is?" she asked the engineer.

"Definitely," Yasmin sent.

"You think that's bad you should see ZeeZoo and his Thorax."

"Check, check!" Their bait called as he jumped through, "Proteus coming through."

"Decloak, decloak, bubble up, get the 'ceptors on grid," the new FC called, setting off a deep rumble as the fleet decloaked. He'd jumped the gun, but she saw tackle landing anyway and set about bringing her own firepower to bear. Brick tanked, the damage seemed to fall off against its shields. And then the wormhole crushed. The FC screamed to scramble FAXes as the hostile fleet decloaked around them.

Midnight tried to orientate herself enough to step up as the other Black Ops began to fall, their limited logi struggling with a full on fleet engagement.

"Drop bubbles! Kill theirs!" she finally called, "Primary on the Phobos, secondary will be the Devoter, anyone who can, haze the 'dictors. Soon as you can warp off do it, reship will be brawling Vindicators. Phobos down, Devoter primary!"

"FAX undocking."

"Warp in is the wormhole," she said and cursed on comms. "Will need a new target caller soon I'm going down, overheat on the Devoter." She watched her armour race against that of the Devoter, knowing her crew should be ready to eject with her soon and wanting to cry as she started bleeding structure first.

The other FC was calling targets again as her vision settled, drifting from the remains of the *Spider*. The first Vindicators landed on grid and the Devoter fell to their initial volleys. She watched the *Spider's* escape pods warp away and felt a surge of relief so strong her pod warned her of her falling heart rate. A scram from a Proteus soon fixed that however as sitting on the field her pod was swiftly torn apart.

Yasmin sat on the observation deck, with her contract up she had been taking to her quarters, but today pushed herself out into the station. She was speed sketching the Ark that drifted out beneath her when the message came through.

"Look out from the undock, something worth waking up for?"

She'd never seen the livery in space but she knew it well as a Crimson Harvest Redeemer drifted in from out of the sun.

"Definitely," she sent with a smile.