

CHAPTER 0: Serenity

A light jolt of electricity interrupted his dreamless sleep, sending a tingling sensation down his spine. He felt as if he was floating in an endless void, unable to feel where his body ended and the surrounding fluid began. Pervasive darkness engulfed him on all sides, and for a brief moment he was overcome with sheer terror.

The confusion quickly faded as he realized where he was, and the fear was replaced by contentment. His lips curled into a smirk as he silently shamed himself for his brief moment of weakness. That was the most satisfying nap he had ever experienced, and sadly, it was over. The overhead doors to his capsule parted and a beam of light sliced through the darkness, blinding him.

"Good morning," a cheerful voice rang out. It was unfamiliar, and its high pitched tenor was a tad annoying. Before he could muster a reply, a pair of slender arms reached down and began gently unhooking things from his body.

"The cryogenics took a toll on your body, but we'll get some warm food in you and you'll feel good as new!" Her overly happy voice made him cringe.

"So we arrived?" he groggily asked.

"Why else would I be waking you up?" She laughed.

She was a smart-ass too — well that was just perfect. He would rather just go back to sleep.

"You must be Adam. I'm the nurse for this department, Aria. You are the last one to wake up. How do you feel?"

"I feel a lot better now, but I am still a bit dizzy," Adam replied with a hoarse voice.

Aria pressed a button and the liquid began to drain from the chamber. The air felt frigid to his skin, and he longed for the pleasant warmth of the receding cryogenic fluid. Just five more minutes...

"Okay you can hop on out of the chamber unless you need some help," she teased.

Adam rolled his eyes. "I'm fine. I feel better already." Adam grasped the sides of the chamber and hauled himself upright. He gingerly stepped over the threshold and his foot made contact with a cold metal floor. The artificial gravity was set to a comfortable 0.8G, so his motions were fairly effortless. Once he was fully out, he raised his dripping head and saw the owner of the irritating voice for the first time.

A middle aged woman sat in a small metal seat beside the capsule. Her straight red hair was clean, and it draped below her shoulders. She wore the standard black navy uniform with ice blue trim, but there was a red cross emblem on her breast. Her eyes were a shade of light grey with tinges of amber and lime green. Only genetic engineering could produce an eye like that. She typed something into the terminal to her left.

"Do you feel any nausea or pain?" she asked.

"Nothing worth noting."

"If there is anything at all I need you to tell me, we can't have you suffering from cryo-sickness!" she exclaimed.

Nagging already?

"No, I'm fine," Adam replied with a firm voice.

He really did feel fine, not counting his growing agitation.

Behind him, he heard another calm feminine voice. "Now that we are done here, I should head to my landing capsule to prepare for launch." The statement contained little emotion.

Adam rotated to face the unknown voice. She was a shorter girl, who looked to be in her twenties. Of course, she could have been 100 years old for all he knew, as humans no longer aged. Her silver hair was long and wavy, and her eyes were a faded purple that gleamed unnaturally in the reflection of the overhead lights. Her face bore a stark expression that sort-of creeped him out. She wore the same

uniform as Aria, but she lacked the cross emblem. Instead there was an emblem he did not recognize — a falcon. Resting on top of her head was a black sailor cap.

“Sure Ella. I don’t have anything else for you to do. I’ll see you when you land,” Aria replied.

“Affirmative. I wish you good luck,” Ella responded evenly. She turned to leave. Her eyes glanced at Adam momentarily, but she seemed uninterested. He might as well have been invisible. Whatever, it’s not like he had any intention of getting to know someone with such a boring personality. Though, it would be better than trying to converse with the headache inducing harpy behind him.

Adam watched her walk away for a moment. Her motions were graceful, and her posture was perfect — almost too perfect. He tore his gaze away and turned back to Aria.

“That’s Ella. She was helping me out here. She’s really multitalented!” Aria smiled as she watched Ella leave.

Adam just stood there awkwardly, cryogenic fluid dripping from his cryo-suit.

"The locker room is that way, so you can shower and get your things there." She exuded a degree of enthusiasm that had to be completely artificial.

"I'll be sure to do that. Thank you," he replied with a forced smile. He turned and made his way to the showers.

The shower was long, and he had turned the heat up to an almost unsafe level. When he finally emerged, his face was flushed red. He strode to the locker and swung open the metal door. The only items inside were a skin tight space suit and a helmet, designed to protect him against the vacuum of space. There was no need for any personal belongings where he was going. Everything would be provided for him, including his home. The colonies would be built using the surrounding land, as the pioneers did on Earth almost one thousand years ago.

After putting on the suit, Adam rapped his knuckles against the interior hull and gave a look of satisfaction.

This bucket of bolts actually made it.

The Andromeda was the flagship of the United Earth Navy. It was intended to be the ark of humanity, containing 56,242 souls — all of whom were either distinguished military personnel or talented civilian volunteers. These people were intended to form the backbone of the first human colonies in the Trinity star system.

Adam finally returned to the cryogenics room. To his relief, it was empty. Aria must have had some work to do. He had purposefully taken as long as possible to prepare, and it seemed that his effort was rewarded. He stood for a moment with closed eyes, enjoying the silence.

He hoped that the stories about Aldrin were accurate — that it was beautiful earth-like planet with a complex ecosystem and semi-intelligent wildlife.

Breaking out of his calm reverie, he strode down the long hallway lined with empty cryogenic tanks. All was quiet save for a few humming machines and the tap of his boots against the metal floor. He finally reached the exit and the door slid open.

Adam let out a deep sigh. Aria was standing serenely, gazing through a large, wall sized window. No — it couldn't have been a window, the ship didn't have any. It was a monitor. Easily 30 meters long, it expanded along the length of the hallway. She had already changed into her space suit, and clasped her helmet in her hands.

Maybe she didn't notice him. He could probably sneak back and find another exit.

"It's incredible isn't it? That is our new home," she said contently as she stared at the monitor.

He followed her gaze, but didn't reply. No...he couldn't reply, astounded at the scene before him.

After an extended pause, he finally breathed. The monitor showed a small blue orb: the planet Aldrin. Its azure oceans and lush green terrain reminded Adam of a better Earth. Billowing white clouds covered a significant portion of the surface,

and through the gaps he could make out sprawling ice capped mountain ranges and colorful valleys. Winding rivers cut through the terrain like veins carrying the life-blood of the planet. The sunlight reflected off the surface, soaking it with a striking yellow hue.

Aldrin stood out in detail on the pale blue background of the looming gas giant Hyperion, which filled a large portion of the monitor — as it should; the giant was nearly 5 times more massive than Jupiter. On the left portion of the screen, half of the fleet could be seen floating in silence, their cold tritanium ships motionless except for blinking lights.

To break the silence, Adam spoke. "When do we launch?" Oh great, he asked a question. Now he was going to have to listen to her blabber. Why didn't he just keep his mouth shut?

She turned to look at him, but it was obvious her mind was focused elsewhere. He really shouldn't have said anything — he probably ruined the moment.

Aria put on her most cheerful face. "Very soon. The military is already launching hardware and supplies, we should be outbound within a few hours. When we get to the surface we'll make our way to the Anderson colony to begin setting up. We'll meet up with the other colonists and form camps until we are able to construct more permanent habitats."

A look of realization appeared on her face "That means we are going to be living in close proximity! We could take turns preparing meals! I wonder what the local food tastes like —"

Adam felt the heat rising inside of him. He had no patience for her meaningless drivel. She was just so annoying. He wished she would just seal her flapping lips and let him survey Aldrin in peace.

"— I have always wanted to sample the various fruits and berries, they say that they have a sweetness that is unparalleled! Oh, and the bread is supposedly made from some weird flour compound derived from —"

She wasn't even looking at him anymore, as if she was talking just to hear herself talk. He made a mental note to ditch her as soon as he feasibly could. He could probably pretend he needed to piss and then just sprint to the other side of the ship.

“— there's lots of really great fish to try as well. Apparently they are a bit salty but when prepared right you can't really tell! That reminds me of that one time when my brother left the salmon in the oven and almost burned the house down —“

He briefly considered what would happen if he knocked her unconscious, not that he would ever do such a thing. But... hypothetically...if he did it right he could just pretend that she got light headed and passed out. She would just wake up in the infirmary later without a clue as to what had happened. Though, if he fucked it up he would be imprisoned. The risk outweighed the reward.

“— I'm glad they brought sweet potato seeds from earth. Sweet potatoes are so easy to cook and I bet they would go great in combination with some of the local vegetables —“

Was she still going? Adam had stopped paying attention. She had her hand to her chin, a look of concentration on her face as she went on and on and...

“— I have never been much of a chef. I wonder if Ella knows how to cook? I bet she would be happy to teach me a few tricks. Though I never seem to be able to return the favor for anything she —“

“Aria do you ever shut up?” Adam asked with an inquisitive tone, masking his hidden frustration.

Arias mouth slammed shut and her eyes widened.

“I asked a simple question, and I expected a simple response. I don't have the patience to listen to you drone on.” Adam had let his anger get the better of him. He partially hoped that he didn't hurt her feelings too much, but he also partially hoped that he did.

Arias expression went flat. She glared directly at Adam, a gleam in her eyes that radiated murderous intent. Uh oh, she was pissed. He mentally prepared himself for a verbal attack.

They stared at each other in silence for a moment. Adam was the first to break eye contact, electing to stare at Aldrin rather than engage in any more pointless conflict with that woman.

Aria turned back to the monitor. “Very well. You obviously aren’t looking for friends, so I would be happy to oblige,” she spoke with a hint of concealed wrath dripping from her pointed words.

What a bitch! She was the one who wouldn’t shut the fuck up and let him think. He briefly considered a retort, but determined that it would be unwise. Instead he clenched his fists and acted uninterested.

They stood in silence for a full minute as Adam cooled his head. He would have left, but that would mean she had won. Besides, he wanted to gaze at Aldrin for just a bit longer.

Small dots could be seen dropping from the other ships. They reflected the light like hundreds of tiny mirrors, lightly blinking as they drifted towards Aldrin. They were probably personnel carriers.

Aria was the first one to break the silence. Her voice didn’t contain a single scrap of the joy it did before. “We’ll be launching in a few hours. We should go ahead and make our way to—” She choked off her statement mid-sentence.

A massive dark object appeared from nowhere; filling the left side of the monitor.

And then the care bears came out of no-where and killed everyone with their rainbow laser cannons the end.