

A Dusty Future

by: Psy Fi

CONSTELLATION: ISHAGA

REGION: BLACK RISE

SYSTEM: NENNAMAILA

SECURITY STATUS: 0.3

>>Nebuli stretch across the vast expanse of New Eden. A drab desert planet hangs in the heavens; pockmarks litter the dusty terrain. A glimmer of light flickers off a ship orbiting the nearby planet. A Deimos hangs over the skyline, waiting.

Inside the crew impatiently await their next order. Unintentionally each crewmember takes a turn glancing at the cylinder vault in the center of the ship. As if to try to catch a glimpse of their Capsuleer through the reinforced armor plates. 'A. Feenix' is stenciled across the side of the pod bay. Unfortunately for the XO, he must settle for the avatar of a petite red headed woman floating in the left corner of his monitor to dictate their fate.

Monitors surround the interior of the pod bay. A control panel in the corner of the room is the hub between the monitors and the pod itself. The screens displays a ground battle from various angles. Mercenaries in advanced tactical drop suits are retreating into defensive positions. Explosions distort the feed. Lights flash and alarms blare, breaking the silence in the bay.

A badly beaten merc comes into frame. He becomes the main focus filling the monitors. "Unit R5, requesting armor support!" the voice echoes through the capsule bay. "We need those Vayu deployed to zones Sierra and Tango as soon as possible."

"Feenix here, acknowledging request. Vayu's are on stand by."

Within a moment a grenade ignites near the mercenaries. A bright flash whites out the monitors. Half of the blue dots on the map disappear. "Jansen, Swerd...F***! My squad has been wiped out! Feenix, there is no way we can hold this position without that Vayu support. Repeat, we need that armor now!"

"That's a negative R5." the frost in Feenix's voice echos in the merc ears.

"What?!"

"That is a negative. Make me a better offer."

A blast from a forge gun pulverises the merc next to R5. Bodies and drop suit pieces

are flung in all directions. "Feenix Help us!" His voice quivering in panic.

"2 billion isk."

"That's redicu..." another forge blast smashes the terrain next to R5. The sound rumbles through the receiver.

"There is no negotiation. I'm sure Gallente militia will have no problem gaining access to your mainframes after you lose your headquarters." Feenix's hardened voice carries through the cruiser for the whole crew to hear. "Not to mention your name dragged through the mud for all of New Eden to see. Enjoy that clone lieutenant, it will probably be the last body that the Caldari Militia allows you to inhabit." Another explosion momentarily breaks comms; more blue dots vanish from the Neocom.

"I... I... you." R5 can't find words.

"Now, or never."

"Fine, 2 billion isk transferred, F***!"

"Have your squad leaders link me priority targets." she whispers with a smile. Before the last word leaves her lips; three target locations light up on the tactical map. Inside her pod she stretches out her arms, feeling every nerve tingling throughout the hull of the ship. The guns on the belly of the Deimos begin to glow. Beams of light streak from the ship toward the planet's surface. The bolts stream down disappearing through the clouds then impact ground like lightning. The monitors in the pod bay momentarily flash white. Many of the red dots on the tactical map disappear.

"Sierra and Tango are clear! Repeat Sierra and Tango are clear! Squads move up to recover those locations!" the lieutenant barks the order with a glimmer of hope in his voice. Two more targets appear on Feenix's Neocom. Without hesitation she fires at the new targets hurling plasma death from above. Again, the monitors flash white. "Well played Feenix. You brought us home. If you didn't extort us I would thank you."

"No, no, R5. I would insist on thanking you for your... generosity." Feenix cuts communications with the merc.

An audible gasp of relief whispers through the crew. XO Captain Brelan pulls out a comb and brushes the few strands of gray hair he has left. His stocky frame peaks over the rows of command stations. The XO does a double take while checking his scanners. A Stratos suddenly appears on grid. "Ma'am, Stratos decloaking 20k from our position. Seems to be jamming our comms, and is heading at us at full speed!"

"Align to the Enaluri stargate at full speed! We cannot afford to be caught assisting Gal Mil. As far as the factions know we are neutral to the conflict." Feenix insists.

>>The Deimos' engines ignite sending the ship rolling onto its back pulling away from the planet. The Stratos charges its prey getting dangerously close to the Deimos.

"Warp to Enaluri stargate!" An apparent unease seeps out in her command.

"Engines are at 62% We're almost ready."

"Feenix, that Stratios is within 5k..." Brelan reminds her.

A shutter rattles through the hull of the Deimos, and the ship begins to slow.

"Capsuleer Feenix, we are scrambled, and webbed!"

Feenix stares into her monitor in curiosity. "What are you up to little bug?" she whispers to herself. As she thinks the command "Lock target" the Stratios begins to blink on her neocom. A yellow box surrounds the Stratios. "Armor hardeners on, overheat Blasters, and scram him! We don't want any witnesses."

>>The Stratios tries to slingshot past the Deimos, but gets caught in the Deimos' warp scrambler. The Stratios slows and stutters then slinks forward creeping out of range.

"Looks like the little bug doesn't want to talk. Destroy the cruiser, and catch the pod." The Deimos crew springs into action. Antimatter shells rain down on the Stratios' hull. It's shields pop after one volley.

"Stratios has red boxed us and has launched Valkyries!"

Feenix reads the displays inside her capsule, the Stratios armor takes a critical hit and it's armor plummets to 5%. "No matter, it won't last much longer."

>>With some luck the Stratios makes it's way out of range of the Deimos scram, and web range. It picks up speed and gets out of targeting range before re-cloaking.

"We lost scram on the Stratios. It made it out of targeting range." Captain Brelan announces with disappointment.

"It didn't warp off, it cloaked up." Feenix reminds him. "Keep an eye out. It might try to make another pass. Re-align to the Enaluri stargate."

>>The Valkyries race toward the Deimos. The drones shed their outer shell and reveal a pod with anchoring hooks protruding from the base. They smash into the hull of the Deimos and clamp onto the hull. Plasma bursts stream out from the base of the pods puncturing holes in the Deimos.

"Still no sign of them ma'am, the Stratios may have warped off." Captain Brelan states relief. Brelan takes a deep breath and sighs. Before he has a chance to relax the blare of alarms startle him.

[HULL BREACH] appear on his displays. "Feenix, we have a problem... those weren't Valkyries that Stratios launched at us."

“What do you mean Captain?” she inquires.

Brelan glances at the pod bay. “Invasion drones!”

“Warp to the gate immediately captain! We need to get them off of the ship!”

>>With the Stratios gone the Deimos freely glides into warp.

“It’s a long warp ma’am, it’ll be a few minutes before...” Captain Brelan’s words are cut short by machine gun fire outside the bridge doors. “Mercenaries are on board!” Brelan hides behind his control station. Within a moment the doors to the bridge blow open killing two of the crew members closest. Five dust mercenaries stream into the bridge firing upon the crew. Handfuls of the Deimos crew crumble to the ground.

The merc leader points down a corresponding hallway “Reiya, Lopez, phase 1, go!” Two of the soldiers nod then jog down the corridor and out of sight. The merc in charge looks over the remaining crew cowering on the bridge. ‘Sol’ is stitched onto his drop suit. His helmet is heavily bruised and battle scarred. He is built like a greek statue. “Listen up! Your Capsuleer has betrayed the Caldari militia. You may think that she has your best intentions in mind, but let me lay down some truth. She doesn’t give a f*** about you. If the rest of you cooperate you will make it out of here alive. Remember she can resurrected and you cannot.”

Reiya and Lopez enter the engine bay. Lopez deactivates his face plate revealing his stubbled face. He lights a cigarette. Reiya slings her shot gun to her back. She cracks her petite knuckles then sits at the main computer terminal . She gets to work hacking the system while Lopez stands guard. [WARP CORE: STABLE] pans across the monitor.

Reiya whips out a small device from her drop suit and attaches it to the terminal. She types in a few commands and hits enter. The UI flashes and stutters. Lines of code drip down the screen. [WARP CORE: SCRAMBLED] fills the monitor.

>> The Deimos shutters, and comes to a halt mid warp. The cruiser floats aimlessly through space.

Reiya stands to inform Lopez of their success. “Phase one complete.” As she takes a step toward him he falls face first on to the deck revealing a young crew-woman with vibrant jade green eyes. She stands firm over Lopez’s dead body; a bloody knife in hand. Reiya flips her shotgun off her back aiming point blank in the womans face. Jade eyes doesn’t flinch at the sight of the gun. Intentionally staring down the barrel of the shotgun in defiance. *Blam, Blam* The knife tumbles to the ground, her body follows suit.

The remaining mercs surround the pod bay door. Mac traces the door with explosive foam. His heavily armored drop suit having trouble reaching the bottom. Mac grumbles and makes his drop suit conform. He buries a remote detonator into the foam then activates a switch. "Charges are set Sergeant Sol." his gruff tone is apparent.

Reiya returns to her squad with fury in her eyes.

"Lopez?" Jackson's face melts into anger.

She shakes her head 'no'. Jackson punches the door with all his might.

Sol puts a hand on Reiya's shoulder reassuring her "He's probably already been resurrected. Sipping a drink back at station, enjoying the scent of his new clone." Sol looks over his squad, his eyes stop on Jackson. "Keep your heads in the game people." The group perks up at Sol's command. "Mac, lets blow the doors off this rabbit hole!"

"Yes Sir!"

They all take tactical positions around the pod bay door. Mac whistles, and with a click of a button the door bursts off it's hinges smashing to the ground with a loud clang. "Mac, Jackson, I want you to keep watch over the crew. If anyone moves or speaks; kill them." Sol spins around to Reiya "I need you to hack the ship and install the *'prototype'*." Reiya nods in understanding. "Ok lets go!"

Jackson, and Mac take positions outside the pod bay while Sol and Reiya make their way vault.

Sol scans the bay with his rifle before waving Reiya into the room. Reiya hurries to the computer ultimately stumbling on the array of cables connected to the pod. She brushes herself off and makes her way to the control panel. Sol stares at the shinning gold pod mounted in the center of the room. The sergeant cannot help himself. Placing a hand on the cold metal. "Silly girl..."

"What can I do for you Sol." Feenix's voice echoes through the room. Startled, Sol takes a step back from the pod. He looks around the room and notices a camera and speakers in the corner of the bay tracking his movements.

"I was unaware Capsuleers were so paranoid that they'd have cameras in their pod bay."

An avatar of Feenix appears on the monitor causing Reiya to jump. The petite redhead mouths Feenix's words. "I'm sure you don't know much about Capsuleers *'dusty'*." She pauses for a moment to let the insult marinate. "What do you want *squid'?*"

A smile creeps across Sol's face. "Want? I don't *want* to be here Feenix. You're just a paycheck to me. Besides, you brought this upon yourself. Leaving those mercenaries to die, and costing some particularly angry corporations a lot of isk." He presses his cheek against the pod as to embrace it. "Luckily for my financier he was smart enough to hire a contingency plan." Sol's smile widening.

Feenix struggles to find comfort in her claustrophobic confines. " You know as

well as I do that those mercs are in new clones and back on the front lines. All in the time it took you to slaughter my crew. If isk is your only interest then what is your price.”

Sol chuckles, “Caldari militia has offered me far more than you could possibly afford Capsuleer. They must be truly offended by your actions for the amount of isk we are receiving for your corpse.”

“Is my corpse all you want?” Feenix’s laughter fills the room. “Then pod me already.

I could use a fresh Slave set.”

Reiya’s eyes are locked on the control monitors. Her fingers pecking around the keyboard. “C’mon, C’mon, ...yes!” Reiya spins to the sergeant. “Sir, the ‘*prototype*’ is active.” An electrical pulse ripples through the hull. An undiscussed chill passes through the room. “Hailing the Stratios for pick up.” the control panel sounds off.

deet-deet-deet

“Stratios inbound.”

Sol’s smile dissolves. “Of course It’s not that simple you slimy *frog*. There is a catch. The ‘*prototype*’ Reiya activated is a new type of signal distortion device.” He opens his arms wide above his head. “A five thousand kilometer bubble. Within it’s active sphere all neural transfers are scrambled and lost. There is no escape. This time you die for the last time.”

A sharp silence swells throughout the bay until Feenix sighs, “Funny how ironic life can be.” She settles herself and clears her throat. “I have been a Capsuleer since the early days of the clones. Was one of the first to have my conscience transferred. In my ventures I have seen the breath taking peaks and valleys on hundreds of planets and moons. I have travelled to just about every system in New Eden, and drank in the glory of each star.”

Gunfire breaks the conversation. Outside the pod bay door screams can be heard. Mac’s voice carries over the noise. “Don’t f***ing move! Not looking good sergeant!”

Sol’s annoyed demeanor rattles in his empty words. “Take care of it Mac!” More rifle fire and screams fill the ship. Sol reveals an explosive from his drop suit and rigs it to the pod.

“Stratios in range and ready for evac.” Reiya shouts.

“Reiya get clear of the room.” Without missing a beat she makes her way out the door. Sol’s gaze snaps to the camera in the corner of the bay. “This is not a game Feenix. I understand the battlefield better than you ever will. Those are my men and my assets dying down there, but you don’t care. You’re a pathetic aristocrat, lazily pewing your way through space pretending you’re relevant, but only for a limited time. You have two minutes left to live. Goodbye Feenix.” Sol makes his way to the door.

“Sergeant Sol, I would like to finish telling you my story.”

Sol stops in the doorway. "Ok, but I suggest you make it quick."

"My point is that I have seen the ends of the galaxy and what it has to offer. I have lived for hundreds of years exploring all my interests, and somewhere deep inside I'm happy it'll end with someone like you. So thank you Sol."

"What?" confusion contorting Sol's face.

"I am an old soul among the stars, and you are a 'new bro' trying to make a name for yourself. You are right, this is not a game. As soon as you breached my pod bay door I activated my self destruct." The color drains from Sol's face. "We will both die for the last time. The difference between us is I am ready to accept a fate forced upon me. To truly value ones life, one day you must die." A visible horror invades Sol's being. "You never cared about your life until this moment. Embrace this sinking feeling Sol. This is what it feels like to be alive." A countdown clock fills the monitor.

3....

Sol backs away from the glimmering pod that has guaranteed his demise.

2...

The sergeant takes a deep breath, and closes his eyes.

1...

[END]

