

Jenkins sipped his coffee and recoiled when the hot liquid burned the roof of his mouth. During this reflex an unseen drop of the liquid spilled down onto the dashboard of the Resource Extraction-72 tugship and quickly slipped underneath one of the lit buttons which then cordially extinguished its light.

“Stupid bloody ship.” Jenkins mumbled quietly to himself as he tongued his burn. He unbuckled the three separate seat belts that kept him secured during even the most intense maneuvers this little tug spaceship was capable of. He got up to get himself a glass of ice water. He worked his way out of the tiny cockpit and ducked his head as he made his way through the hall. The ship rocked back and forth unsteadily. Jenkins looked around sheepishly before he slapped his forehead and ran back to the cockpit. He sat back down for just a moment this time making sure he enabled the autopilot correctly by pulling down on a lever. He got up and went back to the kitchen. In his haste he had forgotten his barely sipped coffee on the dash and had at the same time only engaged the autopilot lever to the eighty percent position.

The ice cold drink soothed his sore burn. Jenkins closed his eyes and swished the water back and forth dreaming about just what he was going to do back on Earth first. He had it all planned out. First he would drop off the asteroid of pure tungsten in High Earth Orbit. Then burn the fuel reserve speeding back to the landing site. Go through quarantine and fly back home in hopefully less than 5 hours when the real fun would begin. His eyes lit up as he continued thinking through his wonderful plan.

Meanwhile the tug ship was heading straight for earth. A little message popped up on the dash recommending that the pilot begin the turning maneuver for HEO in 15 seconds for maximum fuel efficiency. The autopilot system, only engaged at 80%, would not and did not make any course correction decisions.

Jenkins was entirely unaware of just how close to the end of his journey he really was. He accidentally overestimated the mass of the asteroid days previous. Some part of his mind seeing nothing but a big fat bonus when the erroneous scans dictated a higher than expected mass. Not bothering to double check Jenkins quickly drew up a flight plan using the incorrect mass and came out with a level of thrust that now put him two hours ahead of schedule.

Feeling relieved Jenkins put away the glass, clipping it to the spaceship kitchen cabinets. He yawned and stretched out his arms before deciding he would take one last look at the flight plan before enjoying a quick pre landing snack.

Jenkins sat down at his seat not bothering to strap in as he reckoned he would only be a minute. He took the ship off autopilot and checked the ship speed. He did a double take and went completely pale when he read the ship speed again. Due to the inexplicable turning off of a certain “Dynamic flight plan” button the ship’s autopilot had been gradually increasing ship speed. The autopilot had ignored the flight plan Jenkins had created and instead optimizing the

ship for simple A to B travel at the highest possible speed with current fuel. The result was that the ship was now travelling at triple safe speeds.

Jenkins took a deep breath and quickly diagnosed the problem and reenabled the dynamic flight plan. He watched the ship speed indicator closely. His quick found success faded from his face as the ship did not slow down. "What?" he asked himself, his voice unnaturally high. He activated the live view display. Replacing graphs and ship information on the ship viewport a video capture feed from outside the ship took its place.

Jenkins nearly fainted as the image of Earth was larger than the entire viewport. He realized he was only a few dozen kilometers away from the Earth's atmosphere. Already the ship was under Earth's gravitational pull. After a moment of utter disbelief and a panic soul deep Jenkins pulled up on the controls, hoping to skim by the planet and return to his course back home. As soon as he initiated the maneuver the pull of artificial gravity on the ship changed. Heighten by the increased speed Jenkins was torn from his seat, unbuckled straps bounced around. He slammed into the ceiling, activating several engine subsystems and thrust regulators with his head and upper back. The now cold coffee that had been sitting on the dash immediately splashed over a large part of the console. Buttons turned off and on seeming at random.

Jenkins was quickly brought back to the ground by some obscure combination in the ships newly activated controls. Unluckily for Jenkins, having turned forward slightly due to hitting his head on the ceiling, was now falling with his stomach and ribs directly over the ships stick controls. He landed without a cry, not due to some strength in Jenkins character but due to a complete lack of air in his lungs. He could hardly process his difficulty in taking a breathe before the ship began spinning out of control.

Above all the panic and fear coursing through Jenkins veins he heard a truly horrendous and gut wrenching sound. The sound that every asteroid mining pilot dreads above all else. The sound hammered into everyone's heads during safety training. The metallic grinding noise only found during a critical failure of the tug lines.

Sweat was tossed in all directions as Jenkins was pressed against the dash, held there by the horrible centrifugal force as the ship continued to spin. Jenkins cried out as the grinding sound was joined by loud pings signifying the snapping of the support lines. Jenkins pushed with all his strength and once in reach kicked at the steering stick. At once the ships motion snapped back to normal quickly followed by an overwhelming crescendo of snaps and pops and finally a moan of pure agony either from the failing tug lines or the ship's pilot.

Jenkins fell back in the chair and watched as the asteroid quickly flew passed the spaceship looming large and terrible on the display. For one terrifying moment the Earth disappeared behind the shadow of the asteroid. Then quickly the asteroid grew smaller. The space ship quickly followed behind, slowed only by the contradictory signals sent to the engines.

Jenkins did nothing to stop the spaceship, realizing that such a last minute attempt was futile. He had gone limp in the seat. He looked down at the Earth with dead eyes, barely keeping them focused as the surface ruptured into a macificent explosion. He was yet again lifted out of the seat as the turbulence of entering the atmosphere rocked the ship. Jenkins didn't fight and was knocked around the cabin, barely feeling anything as the ship descended and met its cargo on the surface below.