

The Ibn Rushd

by Nate Ayele

Hyacinthe's magnetic boots clicked as he stepped out of the airlock and into the ship. The vessel was abandoned, whatever air they once had was long since vented into the cold vacuum of space, and their power systems were all shut off. It didn't matter much to him though, dead colony ships like this were common on the edges of space, and were often the prey for pirates like him. Hyacinthe flicked on his radio and spoke to the two men following him onto the vessel.

"Harawira, Rowe, report."

"Ship's dead sir," Harawira radioed in, "don't know how else to put it. Atmo's all gone, but the hull's intact. Reactor seems to be out too."

"I think I'm picking up some heat signatures about three levels down though," Rowe added, "Maybe some of the crew could be hanging on?"

Hyacinthe sighed. "Check it out Rowe, and please remember to take hostages this time. Harawira, check their supplies, see how much water and fuel they have left. I'll check the bridge, see what data they've got."

"Yes sir!" both replied.

Hyacinthe launched himself up the small system of ladders that crossed the decks towards the very top, where the bridge was located. When he stopped, the state of the bridge didn't surprise him. The doors were ajar, and the handful of crewmembers inside were strewn across the bridge, bodies floating and half-frozen in the ship's vacuum. Granted it wasn't anything he hadn't seen before, serving almost 20 years as a pirate in the Azure Banner Fleet had long since desensitized him to the sight of suffocated colonists.

He pushed aside one of the bodies floating near the main console and attempted to reactivate it, using whatever storage battery power to resuscitate the bridge's functions and stored data. It was successful, and all at once the displays began to light up across the bridge, showing the name of the ship, the *Ibn Rushd*, alongside the flag of the Pollux Directorate. Hyacinthe tried to access some of the ship's control functions, but was almost immediately interrupted.

“Captain,” Harawira chirped, “there’s a problem down here.”

“What’s wrong?”

“The water tanks appear to be blocked off by some sort of...” Harawira paused for a second. “Well fungal growth seems to be the best way to put it.”

“Is it a leak from their hydroponics?”

“It doesn’t look Terranic to my eyes.”

A sudden and terrified shout came through from Rowe’s end, and Hyacinthe winced.

“What the hell was that?”

“Th-the heat signature, it’s some kind of growth.” Rowe’s voice was shaking with every syllable. “It’s f-fucking MOVING.”

Hyacinthe stood in silent shock for a minute before replying. “Do not I repeat, DO NOT approach this ‘organism’. Stay put and wait for my arrival. Harawira, withdraw and meet at Rowe’s position.”

20 years serving under the Azure Banner, and not once had he ever dealt with anything this severe on a colony ship. Was it a bio-weapon? Some leak from Pollux? Hyacinthe prayed it was just his subordinates’ eyes playing tricks. He busted open one of the terminals and snatched up the main data core, latched it to the hip of his suit, and dropped back down the ladder to Rowe’s position.

Rowe stood outside the doors to a large room complex, and when Hyacinthe turned to see what the pirate was cowering away from, his eyes went wide. The thing was too horrific to call an organism, it was more a mass, a great ruddy, fleshy mass spread out over the walls and floor of the complex. Sticking out of that mass was a plethora of bodies and limbs, all half sunk in the thing, all writhing and kicking and railing against the mass. He could even see heads popping out of it, their faces twisted and contorted into agonizing shapes, their lips moving in vain cries for help.

The sight was petrifying, Hyacinthe stood still alongside Rowe in complete shock and horror. Whatever the *Ibn Rushd* had stumbled upon, it was a greater abomination than anything in mankind’s

long history across the stars.

Harawira radioed in just then, “Approaching your position, do you have any idea what it could be?” His words were enough to snap Hyacinthe out of his paralyzed state, and he responded to the threat in the only way a pirate knew. Explosives.

He threw his whole pack of grenades through the doors, into the complex where the abomination resided, and set off the detonator. The ship rang with the vibration of the explosion, and the mass was blotted out by the small fireball created by its ignition. Immediately Hyacinthe grabbed Rowe and of them towards the ladder system.

“What the hell did you guys just do?” Harawira yelled at him through the radio.

“There’s no time, we’re abandoning this damned ship now while we still ca-” Hyacinthe was cut off by another loud groaning noise that rippled through the ship. He flung himself even faster up, trying to make it out while the *Ibn Rushd* was still intact.

When Hyacinthe made it back to the airlock deck he could feel a constant reverberation through the ship, as if the whole vessel was being shaken like a child’s toy. Turning around he noticed that Rowe was no longer with him, nor had Harawira followed him. In their stead, a swarm of small creatures began pouring out from the lower decks. They looked almost half-way between flowerbuds and spiders, moving like a wave up through the decks and across, towards him. Hyacinthe bolted, launching himself towards the airlock at an inhuman speed, hoping whatever those creatures were they couldn’t catch up to him. Neither of his crewmates were behind him, they were gone, taken by that *thing*. But he couldn’t focus on it, not now, all that mattered was getting away from that mass while he still had the chance.

Hyacinthe burst through the airlock and flew out into the void of space. He fiddled with the controls for his jetpack, trying to stabilize and find his ship. The *Gattamelata* was stationed a distance away from the abandoned colony ship, in an attempt to avoid any traps that might’ve been on it. He made a lock with the ship immediately and radioed in to his subordinates.

“*Gattamelata* do you read, this is Hyacinthe Diarra, over.”

“We read you captain.” his second-in-command, Colonna responded.

“Open the goddamn airlock right now, I repeat, open it right now!” Hyacinthe shouted through the line.

“Copy, opening airlocks.”

On those words Hyacinthe activated his pack and sprang himself at the *Gattamelata*, in a panicked flurry. He hoped that those things couldn’t follow him through the vacuum, that they wouldn’t be able to chase after him and his crew.

He entered the airlock hard, slamming against the inner doors, but he remained upright and stopped himself from drifting out into the abyss. As the outer doors closed behind him, his crew rushed in all at once to assess the situation. They all barked questions at him, about Rowe and Harawira, about the *Ibn Rushd*, about supplies, as well as fretting over the damage to his suit and his own injuries, but Hyacinthe ignored all of them, and gave a single order.

“Fire on that ship.” the words slid out from in between his teeth.

“But sir-” Colonna interjected.

“Fire. On. It.” he repeated.

“Yes sir.”, a junior officer replied, immediately running to the bridge, followed by the remainder of the crew.

Hyacinthe slumped down in the airlock, the adrenaline leaving his body, finally realizing the severe pain of his injuries. His face was likely bruised, his left wrist sprained, one of his ribs broken, and when he looked down to his ankles, he noticed a large bulbous growths emerging from them. His blood went still.