

World:

A hundred or so years in the future, humanity has comfortably expanded through the inner system (Mercury through Mars), and has a wilder presence as far out as Saturn. There are spaceports on Luna, and colonies on Mercury and Venus.

Mars is well on its way to being fully terraformed. Its atmosphere has been successfully thickened enough for tolerable living conditions, and a handful of sizable cities have sprung up, along with myriad smaller mining and production outposts.

There are a couple of scrappy civilian “colonies” (more like bases) on some of the larger asteroids beyond Mars, but for the most part, the Asteroid Belt is populated by hardy contractors and corporate lieutenants looking to make their fortune. There are hundreds of mining crews, and thousands of survey craft, outposts, transports, freighters, and defense craft. It’s more organized than the California Gold Rush, but not by much.

At some point in the last hundred years, the superpowers of Earth have collapsed under their own weight, and split into smaller nations. Of all nations, new and old, the Netherlands rose to power, and by combination of strong leadership, sound policy, and generous terms have folded numerous nations into their empire. Much of the inner system colonies were founded and run by the Netherlands, though its monarchs have learned enough from history to let the Orange Flag fly while not interfering too much with the day-to-day operation.

A few decades before our story starts, the asteroids of the Belt and Jupiter’s lagrange regions were mostly abandoned by the inner system governments (I haven’t really sorted out “why”, and it remains to be seen whether I’ll bother). Corporations run the mining logistics and police each other.

Setting:

The MRS (Mineral Retrieval Ship) *Hyacinth* is the setting of this story. It’s a fairly typical mining ship, though it’s been showing its age for a few years. Conlin and Famke “Blue” Hynes were able to lease it from Halaesus Mining Co when they first ventured into the asteroids.

The *Hyacinth* itself is above 400,000 tons (a bit larger than an aircraft carrier), and capable of extracting and hauling a great deal of semi-refined ore. It resembles a gigantic hammer, with the ‘handle’ turned toward the surface of whatever asteroid it is working on. A thick tether runs from the bottom this handle to the surface.

Ordinarily the ship runs with a crew of 50 or so people, but for this secret mission, it is running on a skeleton crew of 6. This is possible mainly because the mission is a simple deep-scan operation that would ordinarily be performed by a dedicated (much smaller) vessel.

The basic operation of an MRS is to send crew members to drill to and plant explosives in deposits of ore, blasting the material into small chunks. A massive net (extended from the ship’s ‘handle’) funnels the rock into the ship, where it is sorted and blasted in levels called “smithies,” which can be detached once at capacity to serve as ore containers for transport.

CHARACTERS:**Argus:**

Argus is a contract miner currently employed aboard the MRS *Hyacinth*, a ship owned by Halaesus Mining Company.

He is in his thirties, and has a great deal of experience in space, having worked on several vessels and mined dozens of asteroids. He is a bit of a prankster, and--despite his experience--is still thrilled to be working on a spaceship. He respects the fact that space wants to kill him, but he has a great deal of awe for it.

Not an introspective person, Argus isn't either arrogant or self-conscious: he is more aware of the people and things around him than he is of himself most of the time.

Argus prefers when the people around him are on good terms, and feels really uncomfortable with interpersonal conflict. An exception to this, however, is if someone questions his experience: Argus will make his experience known, even if it requires someone else be taken down a peg.

Blue:

Blue, highly-talented, started mining asteroids just a few years ago with her brother, and has recently taken command of her own ship, leased from Halaesus Mining Company. She is back on the *Hyacinth* (the ship she started on) to help with this desperate mission.

She is a very animated, talkative person--more so when she gets nervous. She decides in very short order whether she likes someone, and it can take a long time for a person to get past this first impression if it is negative.

Despite her tendency to talk through stress, she handles herself well under it, and ultimately has excellent leadership skills. People tend to listen to her when she starts giving commands, regardless of her actual authority.

She cares deeply for those people she likes, and can't stand Corporate for their carelessness to the people who work for them. She's only still working for them because it's a job, and she has zero respect for them.

Con:

Con is a leader mainly because he cares so deeply for people, and they trust him implicitly as a result. He's alright under stress (he does live in space, after all) but can get overwhelmed. He works best when the people under him are highly competent and able to work together, where he can serve as an organizer versus a straight-up commander.

He's smart, but not brilliant. Capable, but not extremely so. He leads by example, though, and this allows him to remain a captain in the midst of many others who are more inclined to actively command.

Also important: he's Blue's older brother, and Finch's husband (they were married by another captain 3 months after meeting).

Dreadnought:

Dreadnought is an independent young guy who likes the danger of being the first to discover and survey asteroids. Despite his cavalier attitude to regulations, Dreadnought is a very capable surveyor with excellent instincts. He's pretty much fearless. He's accepted his danger in space, and is pretty comfortable with the knowledge he might die: that said, he would very much prefer to be living comfortably in the inner solar system--adventures lose their lustre with bad pay. He

became a surveyor because it has the highest potential payoff, if also a great deal of risk. His frustration with his job has grown as Corporate has been taking advantage of their regional monopoly and skipping on the bonus payments for rich asteroids, AKA “goldierocks”. He’s fed up, and he wants out. This mission is his chance to achieve that.

Ember:

Ember is a small part. Just a few lines. But she’s a great friend to the people on the *Hyacinth*, and a former captain of Argus and Grimm.

Finch:

Finch is an excellent mechanical and geological engineer, having served aboard the *Hyacinth* for the last half-year or so (incidentally, she joined the crew sometime after Blue had left for her own ship). She is on this mission because she loves Con, and not for much else. She’s willing to take the risk of punishment from corporate, but not as inclined to risk her life for Ember (whom she only met once). This mission isn’t supposed to be a great threat, after all. Just a routine deep scan job.

She is confident, with a go-get-em, gung-ho attitude, and is often relied on by the people around her for her encouragement. She has a fondness for terrible puns.

Grimm:

Grimm is Argus’ best friend, and his polar opposite in many ways. He is introspective, sarcastic, occasionally morose and difficult, and doesn’t shy from personal conflict: in fact he seems to enjoy starting it. One thing he certainly has in common with Argus, however, is a prankster attitude: the two of them have gotten in trouble with more than one captain. So while they are valued members of every mission team they’ve been a part of, few captains have been sorry to see them leave for another job.

Grimm and Argus started working for Conlin Hynes a while back, and have stuck with him for longer than any other captain, mainly because he doesn’t mind working with them, mainly because he’s so trusting they feel too bad to pull pranks on him.

Grimm, specifically, jokes almost as much as Argus, but with a more cutting and sardonic wit. Usually, his jokes are at the expense of the moment as well, coming at the worst times for levity. This results in some conflict which, again, he seems to enjoy.

One habit he’s not a huge fan of in himself is his inability to break bad news well: he just tells things like they are, and not in a good way. Not for nothing is he nicknamed “Grimm”

Station:

Station (or more correctly, the corporate shill who’s currently dispatching ships), is a company man, and an officious prick. End of story.

Temple:

Eric Temple is damn good at what he does. He captains a dedicated "defense" vessel of Lykaon Minerals Corporation, a major rival company to Halaesus Mining Company

There has been tension rising between Halaesus and Lykaon for years, since the official military forces of the inner solar system withdrew from the asteroids to deal with their own problems.

Eric Temple is essentially a privateer enforcer of Lykaon's interests, and he is paid well for keeping the company's territory free of independent mining crews. He has never had more than a tense standoff with a ship from Halaesus Co yet, so having a "legitimate" reason to hold one hostage is pretty exciting for him and his crew.

Halaesus Co is larger than Lykaon, and have taken a few choice asteroids from them under heavy guard. Temple is keen to have leverage over Halaesus this time, and the undefended *Corvus* presented a perfect opportunity.

So, Temple is excited about this, and happy to be a thorn under Halaesus' fingernails. He is confident, competent, and a little smug. He has every good card in his hand, and he doesn't care if his opponents know it.