

“Have the four of you crewed together long?” Griggs asked, attempting to change the subject.

“Rashnikov and the Captain go way back,” Harris said, “used to work together for Tylani Shipping before the Cap went independent and got his own rig. Rashnikov went with him and I signed on as pilot a few years ago. The grouch over there came on a couple of months back, right after we took on the prison contract.”

“Hefty job, just the four of you delivering supplies all the way out here to a bunch of psychopaths.”

“Money’s good and like you said, when you think about how locked down everything is, the place isn’t all that scary. I mean, except for the iso-units. Those things give me the creeps.”

“Seriously? Those places practically put me to sleep. One inmate, day in day out. When you’re on duty there all you do is watch and make sure they eat and don’t try to bash their brains in. I wouldn’t call them creepy so much as... Dull as dirt.”

“See I used to think that too. But once we started dropping off shipments I overheard a few of your fellow officers talking about something strange in one of the units. Delta Seven?”

“Here we go,” Rashnikov said, rolling her eyes. She leaned forward and reached into her bag. Pulling out a clear bottle filled with a deep Amber-colored liquid, she unscrewed the top and took a hard pull.

“Might as well start drinking now,” she said, offering the bottle to Griggs, “It’ll help you through this madness.”

“You ever worked a shift in the Delta Seven unit?” Harris continued. He gave Griggs a scrutinizing look, searching for a hint of recognition. But the officer simply scowled and shook her head.

“Nope,” she replied, taking the bottle from Rashnikov, “But I’m pretty sure if they were talking about anything strange they meant an inmate. Iso-units aren’t exciting but that doesn’t mean we don’t get weirdos.”

“I’m not talking about an oddball prisoner. I’m talking about something... Abnormal.”

“Murder and rape are pretty abnormal to me Harris.” The man gave an exasperated sigh.

“Just launch into the crazy already,” Kelly said, leaning forward in his chair, “The sooner you’re out with this the sooner it can be over. Or hey, better yet, drop it. I’m sure I speak for the rest of the crew when I say we’re all sick of this... Theory of yours.

“It’s not a theory,” Harris insisted, “Like I said, I heard some officers talking about it and then today-”

“Talking about what?” Griggs interrupted, “I’m beyond lost here.”

“About the monster in the Delta Seven lockup. And I’m not talking about the monsters like the typical inmates. This is worse, a real monster.”

“What, like Dracula?” Griggs cocked an eyebrow incredulously and Kelly and Rashnikov chuckled.

“No,” Harris replied defensively, “Like a genetic freak. A lab-grown thing that’s so dangerous it’s kept in solitary on a penitentiary planet. I mean, scientist back on Earth have made all sorts of impossible

things happen; regrowth of lost limbs, neural transplants and implants... Is it really so hard to believe that along the way they've made at least one big mistake? One they would need to keep secured?"

"Oh right, I totally forgot about the Frankenstein we keep in our iso-unit," Griggs said, voice dripping with sarcasm, "I can't believe I let it slip my mind."

"You wanna make fun, fine. But it's not like you would even know right? You said that you've never taken a shift in Delta seven. You probably don't know about it because it's above your security clearance."

"Or because it doesn't exist. You probably misheard those officers. Or they were screwing with you."

"I don't think so. And even if they were, it wouldn't change the fact that the C.O. On duty at the Delta Seven unit told me all about the thing locked up in there."

"And why would he do that? If something like that *was* housed in an iso-unit, which it isn't, then the officer wouldn't be at liberty to disclose its existence. He would be risking his job, and potentially his own freedom."

"Maybe because he put in a resignation after he found out exactly what he was guarding? When we delivered to Delta Seven he said it was his last shift, and when I asked why he told me all about what he'd been guarding."

"I call bull," Kelly said.

"You weren't there," Harris countered, "You stayed back to jaw with the warden and me, Rashnikov and Torres used the shuttle to take the rest of the cargo to the iso-units. Delta Seven was our last stop."

"So they heard this monster story too then?" Griggs asked skeptically.

"Not a word," Rashnikov said, "Maybe I would have been able to listen better if you'd helped us unload instead of having story time."

"I was going over the invoice with the officer" Harris airily, "... But that's not what's important. Bottom line, I heard what I heard."

"And what was that?"

"Please," Rashnikov groaned, "Don't encourage him."

"I'll tell it," Harris said, ignoring Rashnikov's protest, "But I don't want any interruptions from you naysayers. We clear?"

"As crystal," Griggs said, leaning back in her chair, "I've got nothing but time at this point." Rashnikov rolled her eyes and Kelly shook his head. Torres remained facing the window, but shifted her gaze toward Harris, watching him from the corners of her eyes.

"OK," Harris began, "So about three days ago..."