

*Four hours later on the M'lok Brigade Flagship*

Leviticus Babel walks up to a sealed cargo hold door. The two armed guards standing outside salutes and then one announces the pirate leader to the intercom. Moments later the door opens and he walks into the inky blackness inside the cargo module, stopping just as he crosses the threshold. The door closes behind him and he waits for his eyes to adjust to the lighting conditions.

He makes his way through a maze of crates and racks of equipment, eventually emerging into a open area where a small mound of tubes, wiring, and fiber optic cables encase a reclined chair. In the chair a dark skinned, male rests, his face totally concealed behind a facemask wired into the equipment, the other tubes and wires connected to various portions of the mesh suit covering his body.

"I don't have time to come running every time you squawk, Alpha; especially during those times when we are both on the same ship. You could have told me whatever it is over the intercom," Leviticus says with aggravation in his voice.

The male voice that replies comes from the surrounding blackness, "True, but given the nature of what I am about to tell you, you would have come here anyway, so I saved you the time and aggravation."

"Ok. What have you learned?" Leviticus replies.

A large display comes to life and Leviticus turns to face it, taking a seat on a nearby stool. It shows a schematic of the station the flagship is currently docked to. Many of the systems are yellow or red.

"Your engineering staff, with the help of the one called Demos, is well on its way to bringing the station back to operational status," the voice says.

"I needed to come here for that!" the pirate leader interrupts.

"No, but while the engineering teams restore the facility, I have been picking through the remains of the central processing core. Perhaps what Demos was really doing here would be of interest to you?" the voice says slyly.

"Go ahead," is all that Leviticus says.

The display flickers as it jumps from image to image. "He reconstructed the primary computer core using standard parts, but in order to recover some of the data, he has been using his ship's computer," Alpha says.

"Oh really," Leviticus replies.

"Yes and I have been able to piggyback onto his channel. Not only to keep an eye on his work, but to also explore some of his ship's computer; a very tricky and very challenging task to do unnoticed, I might add," the voice chuckles.

"Only if you learned something of interest, so far all I've heard is some bravado, and not good bravado at that," the pirate leader says flatly.

Alpha clears his throat before continuing, "He's looking for information on what we did with the AI they let us use and modify. Fortunately for us, I did that on this ship in an isolated system. There's nothing for him to find over there."

"Ok. That's good. The Staffbearer was a bit peeved when he found out about our modifications to their computer program," Leviticus replies.

"It was more than that I assure you, but in any case, the gem of information I recovered came from Demos' computer. As it turns out, he has been keeping tabs on our friend for some time. She set up a front for herself in the Bozeman star system, as a high priced hooker none the less. Demos has incomplete records at best, but enough to go on," Alpha says, "I didn't think one of them could pull that kind of deception off, but she did."

"She's different from them somehow, could she be there now?" Leviticus asks.

"I don't see why not. No one is supposed to know that she is there," Alpha replies.

Leviticus Babel walks up to the screen and brings up a display. Entering a series of communications codes, the ship opens a channel to a nearby ship. A minute later, a rough looking, large, muscular, well armed man answers the call. "Yeah boss," he says.

"William, despite your ... over enthusiastic ... activities in Bancredo Bay, I'm giving you another opportunity to shine," Leviticus begins, "I need you to ... find ... someone for me. I'm sending you the details now."

Leviticus pulls a keyboard over and begins entering commands. He gestures to Alpha and the lights on the equipment around him begin to flicker. Moments later, the man on the screen reads instructions on a nearby screen. His eyes go wide and then he turns back to the communications screen. He gives the pirate leader a lopsided grin and says, "Gonna be tough, she won't come along without a fight, especially with that ship of hers."

"Then think of some way to neutralize her advantages," the pirate leader says, "Use that noggin of your for something other than butting heads in bars and crushing containers. And take the *Freebird* and *Malaise* with you."

"Aye sir," William responds and the screen goes blank.