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A hatch opened on the back and a man walked out waving his arms attempting to get the smoke out of his face. A breeze picked up, blowing most of the smoke away from wreckage. The man surveyed the damage on the ship and sighed, seeing that, with some repair, the ship could still fly. He walked to the hatch and called into the ship, "So the engines took damage. The communication and sensors relays are completely gone."

"I'll set up camp. Can you go explore and see if we can scrounge some of the materials we need to repair the ship, Micecon?"

"Sure thing, Scaria." replied Micecon.

Walking over the crater that was caused by the crash, Minecon saw the land sprawling before him.

"This is a lot of land to cover to find some metal," micecon thought.

Micecon double tapped his wrist and a computer interface appeared on his arm. A progress bar appeared on the display as the scanner activated.

Scowling at the results, Micecon told Scaria over his radio, "We're in luck. There is some material that we need that can fix either the engine or sensors, but not both. What do you think we should do? Should we take a risk and fly without sensors or should we fix the sensors and wait a very long time for help to arrive?"

"Well, the maps still work, so we would at least know we are heading in the right direction," Scaria replied.

"How much fuel do we have left? Is it enough to jump to the nearest inhabited sector?" asked Micecon.

"Barely enough, but it's possible." said Scaria.

"Then we'll fix the engines. I'll finish getting the material." stated Micecon. Micecon headed out of the crater in the direction the sensors had detected the needed materials. After a few hours of gather materials Micecon returned extremely excited calling out to Scaria who was on the outside of the ship

fixing the engines, “Hey Scaria, I found something odd while I was getting the materials.”

Micecon held up a multicolored and glowing cube.

Scalia not looking asked jokingly, “Did you at least get the materials before you got distracted?”

“Yes, of course I did. I’ll put the materials into the mechbox. Let’s hope there’s enough to make the part we need. I’ll put the cube in the material scanner to help figure out what it is,” replied Micecon, rolling his eyes.

“The mechbox should make those parts pretty quick. So I should be done soon.” Scaria said.

Some time passed and Micecon was working on other repairs when Scaria exclaimed over the radio, “It’s all done now, let’s get the hell out of here.”

“Alright, I’ll finish up here then head to the cockpit.” replied Micecon.

Micecon sat in the pilot seat and flipped some switches, which made the ship roar to life.

“Come on baby, hold together,” Micecon whispered.

“Micecon, the engines will be able to do three jumps max.” Scaria stated over the radio.

“Well, that’s good. It’ll take use two jumps to get us in a habited sector,” Micecon replied sarcastically. He pushed a lever forward and, with a burst of speed, the ship entered slip space.

When the ship appeared next, it was in a new sector of space. At the center of the sector was a small blue star glowing at its center. Looking at the readings on the dashboard, Micecon saw that the engines needed to time to cool. Something flashed in the view port, catching his eye. He saw another large ship that also had serious damage.

Micecon called over the radio to Scaria, “We have another ship that seems to have it’s communication working, but their engines are destroyed . We need to get in contact with them. What can we afford to lose so we can get communications working?”

“Well, we could boost the signal we’re using right now, but I’ll have to take parts from the energy collectors and what was left of the communication

relay.” she replied.

“Okay, do it. I bet, if we can connect the two ships, we could help each other get back to civilization.” remarked Micecon.

“Done. Give it a try.” Scaria told Micecon.

“This is Starfly. Is there anyone there?” called Micecon over the communication link, hoping to reach the other ship.

“Hello, Starfly. This is the cargo ship, Siren. We see you don’t have a communication or sensor relay, and recently had repairs. We were hit by a solar storm, which took out shields and damaged our slip space drive and engines. Our engineer was injured during a fire. Can you assist us?” replied Siren’s captain.

“Absolutely, we can help out. I see that Siren has a ship to ship connection rig. Are you able to use that with your engineer hurt? We could connect and act as one fully functional ship. We could use some of your power to boost engine power, while you can communicate to other ships when we reach our destination.” asked Micecon.

“Yeah, I can use the rig but, I’ve never heard of a ship to ship connection remaining during a jump.” said the concerned captain.

“I’m sure that my engineers can reenforce the connection so we can stay connected. Also, the ships create a warp sphere around them. That’s why we need to expand the power, allowing us to increase the size of sphere. The larger sphere would allow us to travel through slip space as a single unit,” replied Micecon confidently.

“Let’s try it. We can give you some of the money we make after we sell our goods. It’s the least we could do, ” the captain replied graciously.

“My engineer and I can help make repairs to reduce your costs. Instead of paying us, why don’t we make a [trade](#)? If you are carrying droids, could we [trade](#) our help for a droid? “ asked Micecon.

“We are carrying a shipment of droids, and we can give you one. Are you sure you don’t want the money?” replied the captain.

“Well, we can work out the final details if we make the jump,” laughed Micecon.

The two ships flashed into existence. The ships had made it to the space port Xentri, the massive space station. It held more than 2 million inhabitants and was one of the larger hubs to buy and sell goods.

Releasing the breath he held during the jump, Micecon smiled. Using the communication link Micecon exclaimed, “We have reach our destination! Congrats on making the first successful combined jump ever! Can you guys call for some assistance to get us into the port? I never did ask, what is your name?”

“It’s Cerilia. I’ll call in for some help in the port, and thank you.” replied the Siren’s Captain.

After being assisted to the port, the Siren’s crew went to the marketplace to sell their droids and assorted goods. Miececon and Scaria stayed with the Siren to oversee repairs. When the repairs were complete, they started talking to the locals, catching up on what they had missed during their journey.

During one conversation, they learned that the pirates they had run into were part of a larger coordinated attack to steal medical supplies and raw materials that were heading to the Xentri. The reduction in the needed supplies and the fact that this was a bold attack left people in fear. The ensuing panic from the attacks caused a scramble to get the scarce items before they were gone. The panic caused a brutal raise in prices and left the station with a massive shortages of many key items. The usually busy marketplace was barely running since many ships had been caught in the pirate attacks. The people they spoke to were grateful for the supplies that the two ships brought them. The conversation left Micecon and Scaria with more questions then answers. The only thing they were sure of was that the money they were going to get by selling their cargo would more than cover the trouble it had put them through.

Meanwhile, The Siren’s crew brought their engineer to the infirmary, while the Cerilia headed to the marketplace.

The fear in the marketplace was palpable as Cerilia walked to the Siren’s designated selling area. The pirate attacks, which caused the shortage, had such a huge impact on the marketplace. Cerilia looked around the marketplace and the prices she saw made her shake her head in disgust. The

shortage had disappeared since fifty ships made it to the station, but the high prices remained.

Cerilia knew that the station usually had around two hundred ships daily, so there was still a shortage in some of the products because of the lost shipments, but the supply of many products were at normal amounts. As Cerilia walked through the marketplace, she heard rumors that the [Trade Commission](#) was going to interfere and set a price ceiling to force the prices lower sense the shortage was mostly gone.

Cerilia was setting up her area when an announcement came over the sound System, “The marketplace will be closing early and a price ceiling will be enacted when we reopen tomorrow and will remain until further notice. All dealers must reduce their prices to either match or be lower than the new price ceiling. Any violators will lose their [trade](#) certificates, and will be fined.”

Cerilia rolled her eyes and thought, “It was only a matter of time until they did something. I hope that Micecon and Scaria heard that broadcast and would be set up before closing.”

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Cerilia rolled her eyes and thought, "It was only a matter of time until they did something. I hope that Micecon and Scaria heard that broadcast and would be set up before closing."

Hearing the broadcast Micecon and Scaria jumped into action realizing they needed to hurry to sell their goods. They ran into marketplace and quickly found people to purchase their goods. After settling on a price they sold and traded their goods. They cleaned up their station and headed to the Starfly. Micecon and Scaria stood in front of Starfly, discussing where to go next. “I think we were lucky that we made a little profit this time even though we sold our goods at a reduced price. The demand for the StarMetrix metal was so high. I also realized that when you decided to sell them at a sale price, you knew we would make back more than enough money for the trouble we went through transporting the goods,” said Scaria.

“That was the plan all along,” Micecon said, winking at Scaria, “StarMetrix metal has always been profitable, but this time was more so.”

“Since this time was such a close call with the pirates, I kind of want to do an exploration job instead of transporting goods, especially if we keep running into pirates. With our luck, even doing an exploration job we will probably still run into pirates,” Scaria said, rolling her eyes.

“I like the sound of exploring new areas, so let's do it! We can check the job board and see what we can find. We are lucky that we aren't affiliated with any of the corporations because freelancing gives us so much more flexibility to choose what job we want,” Micecon said excitedly. They turned to head to the job board, and ran into Cerilia.

“Hey guys, I heard your ship was getting fueled up and you're going to be leaving tonight. I wanted to say thank you again and repay you for your help. Before you say anything, here is your new crew member, QE-AI001. We work for the QTech [cooperation](#) and we were sent to sell goods and find a beta tester for this new line of droid. So here she is.” Cerilia said moving aside revealing a blue and orange droid.

Scaria eyes widened, “Is that the Quantum Entangled series? Thank you, it's just what we need! Isn't that right Micecon?”

“Yes, and thank you, Cerilia. Good luck on your next job,” said a grateful Micecon.

Cerilia started to head toward her ship, while Micecon and Scaria headed to the job board.

Scaria and Micecon stood in front of a hologram projection on the job

board.

“Wow there are a ton of research and exploration jobs. There are even some corporate funded ones,” Scaria remarked.

“Well, it seems that we can make a decent amount. Hey, it looks like the sector where we crashed is a location they want to explore,” Micecon said, “The droid we got from Cerilia could definitely help with this job. Its a good thing we didn’t need to pay for AI001 because I’m pretty sure we wouldn’t have been able to afford her. Our budget as free lancers wouldn’t allow us to get such a luxury. “

“The new sensors and AI core is supposed to be the best. AI001 can even help with navigation and maintenance,” gushed Scaria.

“Okay, so back to the jobs. I think we should take explore the sector where we crashed. It also pays really well, which should help us maintain the budget we have been so lucky to have thus far. How’s that job sound?” asked Micecon.

“Well, if you put it that way, sure that sector was a good place that was far away from pirates.” replied Scaria.

“Okay, lets see if that sector has any other jobs, just in case. We were lucky to be able to afford our repairs and still have a tiny profit. That profit we made, which will now be used to upgrade our ship after resupplying it,” said Micecon.

After the supplies and the final upgrades were complete, the Starfly headed out of station and with a flash entered slip space.

As the ship flew through slip space Micecon asked Scaria over the radio, “How’s Q doing with the jobs you assigned him?”

“He doing great!” replied Scaria excitedly, “She is doing such a good job we won’t even have to hire more crew members. She can talk to the ship to help me fix the problems faster. This will help us make more money per job!”

“Don’t get to ahead of yourself. We still have to see how these exploration jobs go. Who knows we may even do some commissions for corporations and system governments,” replied Micecon.

“And you said don’t get ahead of yourself, you should listen to yourself,”

Scaria replied jokingly, “Hey, do you think we should get another QE droid?”

“They cost way too much and right now one droid is highly **efficient** and effective at the jobs we tell her to do. Maybe if we upgrade the ship and expand our operation,” replied Micecon laughing, “And besides, if we just added another robot what the heck would it do anyways, would it be worth the extra cost or a waste of circuits?” asked Micecon.

“It would be worth it, if the ship was twice the size and had twice the cargo and jobs,” scoffed Scaria, “Speaking of doing a job, the material scanner has been scanning that silly glowing cube you found and hasn’t found anything, but we need it to do the job so.”

“Oh, wow I totally forget that was in there. huh, who knows this cube has to be rare enough to make the scanner I made come up with nothing! I’ll go check it out,” Micecon said excited for something to do.

“Okay, Micecon good luck with that,” Scaria replied, rolling her eyes and unrolling her game pad.

“I’ll just take a little break and see if I can get to level ten,” Scaria thought. After about five minutes of playing her mobile game in the common room, QE walked in.

“What are you doing? ” asked QE

“Its a mobile game. I play them to pass the time and sense most are free,” replied Scaria, still looking at the screen.

Some time passed in silence, but then QE said, ” Research complete. A mobile game is a small game meant for the devices humans use daily and carry with them, correct?” asked QE.

“Well yeah, The amount of games on the store is incredible,” replied Scaria. “With research I just did, the **market** has been flooded with so many developers and game that most prices are either free or are a tiny fraction of a credit to purchase a game. Why would they keep flooding the **market** place with games? It’ll just make them less and less profit.” asked QE.

“Well, the games don’t just make money through selling the app. They have add ons you can pay to unlock more content. As for the free ones, most have ads to help the developers make money,” explained Scaria, “Why are you so

interested in gaming, QE?”

“I am just making conversation so that I can make my algorithms more accurate. This interaction has increased my ability to communicate effectively by fifteen percent,” replied QE.

“Well I’m glad that I could help you. We should be at our destination shortly hopefully it’s an uneventful trip,” Scaria laughed.

The Starfly flashed into orbit around a red and blue gas giant.

“Woah, that shouldn’t have happened. The only reason why the ship would pull us out of slip space is if it detected a lot of ships near our destination,” Micecon thought as he ran to the cockpit. Upon sitting in his seat he looked at the sensors display.

“Oh crap, really, “ he whispered.

“Micecon what the heck is going on,” Scaria asked over the radio.

“Have QE turn on and handle the advance sensor relay and turn on the stealth equipment,” replied Micecon.

“Oh crap, pirates out here, really? QE, go to the sensors. I have to handle the mess of Micecon’s stealth tech.” Micecon overheard Scaria on the radio. looking at the sensors Micecon saw a hundred ships in formation sending neither convoy nor military signals. Suddenly, a display flicked on and Micecon smiled knowing QE just turned on the Advanced sensors. The new sensors he made and bought would allow him to intercept ship to ship communications and eavesdrop on normal conversions on the targeted ship. He pressed a few keys and heard a males voice say, “The sensors picked up something, but its gone now.”

“Well tell me if it pops up again. We can’t let anyone see the coming events,” replied firm female voice.

“Yes ma’am when should the Starcorp reps be here,”

“They should be here shortly, and stay focused on your sensors,” commanded the female voice.

Micecon’s eye widened and he frantically hit the radio switch, “Scaria, make sure the stealth equipment doesn’t crash. There are some pirates waiting for the Starcorp reps to arrive.”

“Oh come on, why would the biggest name in tech and the only cooperation to supply rare metals and computer components meet way out here?” asked Scaria.

“I don’t know, but we will wait out here and observe and record this. We may find out how Starcorp can maintain a monopoly and stop other corporations from competing against them.” replied Micecon. With a squeak, Micecon sat up and looked at the display that showed a new incoming ship.

“Okay, now it gets interesting,” Micecon thought. He targeted the ship with the sensors and heard, “Let’s hope that the pirates stick to their promise of retrieving that infinity cube. We need the control of these sectors’ resources and that cube is the way of getting it. I can’t believe that some corporations have the gall to compete against us,” said a pompous voice.

“Well sir, the R&D lab didn’t even think that deconstructing and can double the output without extra material. It’s revolutionary and a physics wonder,” replied another voice.

“Well, the pirates better have that cube. If it delivers we will make even more profit and be able to start pushing the other corporations out of the market.” scuffed the pompous voice.

Micecon rolled his eyes, then frozen looked at the glowing cube on the dashboard. He hit the radio button, “Scaria the cube can double anything that is somehow put in to it! I think it might even be able to do more than that!” “So that’s what they are looking for, and the point of the attacks?” asked Scaria.

“Um, well, apparently the Star corporations are actually pulling the strings and that other corporations have been competing against them in this section of the galaxy,” said Micecon excitedly.

“Being able to double output could allow them to increase speed of production or even use it to make their products even better,” Scaria said, equally excited.

“The Star corporation has always been on top, making a ton of money, then

more corporations come into the [market](#), pushing their profits down, which then pushes them to try and innovate. Only to lose to whoever created the cube, but why hire pirates to get the cube?” Scalia thought.

“Hey Scaria come to the bridge and listen with me,” Micecon radioed.

“Sure, anything new, ” Scaria asked.

“Well no but,” Micecon trailed off as the sensors squawked meaning a new ship had appeared.

“Well what,” Scaria asked as she sat down in the copilot seat .

“A new ship just arrived and the pirates and Star corporation are freaking out. Put the head phones on to listen with me, ” replied Micecon.

“hailing all pirate and Star corporation representatives, we are representatives from Quintillion and the Xenoterf corporations. We do not want trouble, but want to make an alliance and work to push the less worthy corporations out of business.”

“What’s stopping us from whipping you all out,” replied the Star corp reps.

“Well sense we recored your previous conversation, which is pretty incriminating. We sent a copy to our headquarters to be sent to the [trade](#) commission if we don’t make it back” calmly replied the representatives.

“Fine we are listening.” reluctantly replied the Star corp rep.

“We simply work together in the sectors that we don’t have complete control over, meanwhile we individually do as we wish in the sectors we control. We will fund the pirates as well to harass those that dare face us. Does that seem fine,” asked the Xenoterf rep asked.

“This seems like a profitable endeavor for us,” agreed the Star reps and the pirate leader.

“Well as a show of good faith, we should say that there seems to be a ship that is eavesdropping on our conversation. We only just detected them from the lack of anything in a spot near the gas giant,” said the Quintillion representative adding, “ We have also jammed any communication that they could send out so we should deal with them. ”

“Oh shit, this is bad. Scaria,” Micecon barely got out

“Already ahead of ya,” replied Scaria running to the engine room.

“QE we need to get the heck out of here. Find the nearest sector with military ships and find the fastest way there. ” yelled Micecon over the radio.

The pirates were coming in a massive swarm firing electric magnetic pulse missiles trying to take out the Starfly engines. Smiling Micecon thought, "That trick only works once and I have way more tricks up my sleeve this time."

"Should we use it yet, and I can hear the missile alarm over radio will our shields hold," asked Scaria.

"yes they will hold and I'll stop missiles with the system we bought. We need them to be in the same gravitational field before we can use my new invention." replied Micecon flipping some switches, which caused a massive pulse blowing up the incoming missiles.

The swarm of pirates drew closer and the amount fire the Starfly was taking was getting critical, Micecon looked for the leader ship and saw that it was holding back protecting the corporation ships.

"Scaria do it! we will get most of the ships, and what will be left if the corporations and the pirate leader," yelled Micecon as he moved the Starfly in position near the gas giant.

"Got it heres hoping your invention works," replied Scaria hitting a few buttons which made the engines roar.

With a burst speed the Starfly took off invisible again heading towards the outskirts of the sector. They left behind a hologram of the ship that acted as if it had been hit drawing the pirates closer.

"Ok now we got you," Micecon shouted as he hit a few keys. The result was spectacular explosions as almost all of the pirate ships got sucked into one another and exploded from impact. Those ships that avoided the trap lost power and were quickly dragged down towards the gas giant's surface.

"My gravitational field manipulator worked! they didn't know what hit them. Now we can get the heck out of here," whooped Micecon. with a flash the Starfly headed to nearest military post.