

13

naykid in a tin box

LCTN: CALAR-3 (Pleiades cluster)  
CORD: M45-B002 (133pc from SOL)  
DATE: 2309ce-JANUARY-1-FRIDAY  
TIME: 07:05zulu (local 16:45mst)

Brown dwarfs, like Calar-3, actually glow with a deep red hue. In the infrared spectrum they can be somewhat dazzling, spectacular even, but with the naked eye they pretty much vanish at an AU or two.

The Iron Maiden has been waiting for over an hour before the tell-tail soap-bubble of a MDDSH field slips in and bursts at just twelve kilometers away. From this emerges a huge tractor ship with just under a hundred freight boxes in tow. Looped in a figure-8 to fit within the drive envelope, it immediately starts to unravel into a string of cars just over 10 clicks in length.

Maiden Control wastes no time, ["Blackjack, One-One-Zero-Eight, this is Sierra Alpha, Three-Six. Do you read?"] After a ten second pause, ["Repeat, Blackjack, One-One-Zero-Eight, this is Sierra Alpha, Thirty-Six. Do you read?"]

["Loud an' clear, Three-Six. I understand you've got me a load of containers?"]

["Roger that. Our eleven freight boxes will be ready in about thirty minutes. You need any help getting situated?"]

["Negative, Three-Six. It's gonna take me at least two hours to get unraveled here, and another half a day to splice your load in. Just dump 'em overboard an' I'll get after it. Ya'll don' have to hang out for this."]

["That's okay, Blackjack. We'll hang with ya."]

Suddenly, on the port side of the Iron Maiden, light floods the area between the top and bottom flight decks, and this shows a buzz of activity as their shipping containers start to rise up on elevators from below. Twenty meters wide, thirty high, and a hundred meters

long, two of them can squeeze on each lift.

01010000-01110010-00110000-01101110

In the main hold, under the primary flight deck of the Maiden, the last of the eleven containers is about to be sealed. Scott and Angie are standing in front of one with an open access hatch. He's in casual BDU, and she is in her JACC fighting suit.

He gives her a kiss and with concern, "You cool?"

"I'm cool." Angie gives him a quick peck and smiles big, "Trust me, I'll be okay!"

As Angie turns for the hatch, Scott pats her butt, "Watch your ass. I want it back in once piece!"

In spite of all the armor the JACC is flexible, but few women can make a sexy gesture seem...sexy. Angie managed to wiggle her butt back at him. She throws him a kiss and slips into the hatch.

Scott turns to Jacob and Bill who just entered the elevator shaft, "Billy, I know she's a big girl, but—"

Bill puts his suited hand out to stop him right there, "I'll keep an eye out on 'er for ya. Just promise me that ya'll come bail our butts out if our situation gets out of hand. Okie dokie?"

Scott smiles as he pats Jacob on the back, "The shit-hottest of them all is scheduled to fly your CAP. How's that Cowboy?"

"That's what I'm afraid of. We're all gonna hang it out on this one, but when Ol' Carion is flyin' CAP, you know it can get ugly."

Bill steps into the hatch, but before he closes it he huffs, "Ya know, a hundred and fifty young-uns slitherin' around naykid in a tin box like a bunch of sardines sounds like my idea for a good weekend. I don't know how I'll hold up after three months."

Which is true.

Between the supplies, recyclers, munitions, JACCs, drones and two wolverine tanks, the only luxuries they can afford in the container are 8 heads, 4 shower stalls, 4 exercise stations, and 2 towels each. It's so tight that after showering all are required to oil up so as to minimize scraping injuries as they move about—all the while bumping and pushing up against each other. It leaves little to the imagination on what's going to be going on during their off time when not running simulations, or when suited up while the container is being hosted in transit.

The hatch closes with a hiss, and while Jacob and Scott step

out of the shaft, heading towards a waiting drop ship, Scott asks, "Eugene, tell me, how do you do it?"

Confused, Jacob looks at Scott, "Do what?"

"You always end up in the thick of it. After all these years, no one can figure out how you manage to do that. You get a premonition or what? Trust me, it ain't in your planning. You always position yourself in the oddest of places, but that is exactly where they show up every time. How?"

Jacob never really thought about it, "So, would you believe that I consult the stars? You can get a lot of good shit out of your astrological forecast, did you know that?"

Scott rolls his eyes so Jacob continues, "Tea leaves! You know I drink the shit outta that all the time. Why do you think I always use loose leaf?"

Scott shakes his head so Jacob takes another stab at it, "Okay, I'll level with ya, it's the light bulb. I saw it go off one time. I shit thee not! One night I happened to be looking in a mirror an' *bam!* There's this heavenly aura, and angels be singing, and..."

Scott is giving him a deadpan look, so Jacob shrugs, "I don't know, it's just a hunch. I get a feeling."

"More than a feeling." Scott points a finger at him.

Jacob shrugs, "What the fuck do I know? I take a stab at shit and it works. So, that works for me!"

As Jacob turns and steps up on the ramp of the Razorback, Scott shakes his head in reflection, "You know, you're crazy for doing this with Ramirez, mon."

Jacob turns back, "Doing what?"

"Let's see, two weeks with a woman who wants nothing more than to snatch your nuts and wear them as earrings. Now *that's* hanging it out!"

"We're gettin' along, Scott."

"Ya, right. Like fire and ice on a good day."

The ramp starts to close, so Jacob steps backwards into the hold all the while saying, "You got it all wrong, Scott. Too many men desire women who are timid little monkeys with willing genitals. Not me, no sirree! All the women in my life have been exoskeleton hard, psychopaths. The kind of babe that devours the male of their species like a mantis after copulation, but I continue to persevere and you want to know why? Because they have yet to figure out that..."

The ramp snaps shut, and without a break in rhythm Jacob comes through the tacnet to finish, <"They're supposed to bite our heads off first!">

Amused, Scott shakes his head as he turns away from the Razorback, all the while muttering to himself, "And won't we be a couple of dumb fucks when they do."

The Razor rolls slowly back over Scott towards an open lift. If he were to reach up he could touch the underside of it which would feel like textured glass beads. As it clears he notices the lift holding the container with Angie onboard is already on its way up.

With that, a thought crosses Scott's mind, "I'm in love...with a woman! How the hell did that happen?"

He has been intimate with women before, and it was great and all, but with omni-men there are no strings attached. Now that he's hooked on Angie he does not miss his old life one bit.

And that seems to bug him.

At least while she is on this mission he could play the field just for giggles, and with a few hours to blow he thinks, *why not?*

He paths a channel to an old friend who answers the call abruptly, ["Wakow! I hear you've been pussy-footin' around with Simmons. What's up with that?"]

Scott laughs, "Gilroy, how's my Batty-Bwoy?"

["Cock goes here! What's keepin' ya?"]

00000000 | 01