

Tristan confirmed the medical scanner was intact before turning it on. When sparked didn't erupt, he had Alex sit before him and did multiple passes at different settings, sending the results to his datapad since the ship was without power.

The results told him that whatever had affected his human while outside was no longer affecting him. "How is your implant?" the portable scanner wasn't designed to take something like that into account. "Can it still connect to anything?"

Alex snorted. "Connect to what? It's all dead. Wait." He paused. When he spoke again, he was perplexed. "It's not responding to the check order."

"Was it active when you stepped outside?"

Alex gave him a deserved incredulous look. He never shut it down unless the job required it.

Both their weapons had burned out the moment they used them outside; the electronic components in his Azeru had burned out. He suspected that if he retrieved Alex's weapon, it would be the same.

He handed Alex the scanner, and they switched places. He studied the result on his datapad as they came in and Alex did the scanner Tristan instructed. As best as the scanner told him, both their minds were back to normal.

As a test, he depowered the scanner, then held it past the ship's ripped hull. He waited a few seconds and brought it in. He turned it on and it powered on properly.

Alex grabbed his arm before he extended it outside again. "Is it a good idea to risk the medical scanner?"

"I'd rather risk something I know we won't be able to use after we've left the protection of the ship than anything I might find a use for." As soon as the scanner was beyond the hull, it sparked and ceased functioning. Taking out the components showed the shorted electronics and drained power; like his Azeru.

"What is that telling you?"

Tristan looked outside. "It's the magnetic field. It's strong enough to affect the electronics."

"And us."

Tristan nodded.

"Why isn't it affecting us in here?"

Tristan went over what he knew of ship design, and how it might protect them here. "The hull has a hyper conductive layer to channel electrical discharges created by traveling through space. The sink where discharges are sent while in space was destroyed in the crash, but with the hull partially embedded in the ground, that would serve the same purpose." He hesitated. "I'm unsure if that would be a requirement here. Magnetic fields and how a ship would interact with them like this are not something I researched."

"That doesn't tell me why we aren't affected," Alex stated. "But if the hull is like that, why did everything get scrambled during the approach? I'm guessing it's entering the magnetosphere that caused it."

"Yes. And the systems weren't affected by this directly. Because the conductive layer is designed to sink power excesses, the power generators are on its outside to keep overloads from discharging through unmonitored internal connections. And it isn't affecting us because it's diverting the field around us, I think."

“Then we lost the system because the magnetic field did something that preventing the generators from discharging properly?”

Tristan nodded. “The most likely scenario is that the moment the circuits activated to initiate the discharge, they burned out. Without a safe place to go, the energy coursed through the wiring. The safeguards along those are not designed for that level of energy. Power flickered as those systems engaged to redirect and take out the excess failed and allow too much power, which burned all major systems. Quickly, the power cells were all that was left, along with minimal systems.”

“I’m guessing the cells were destroyed when we crashed?”

Tristan smiled. “I used them to detonate the anti-gravs and alter our entry vector.”

Alex gave him an ‘of course you did,’ look, then shrugged. “Can you get us back to space with what we have left?”

“I’m unsure. The damage is extensive. But it is possible to leave. The manuscript was written by someone who was on this planet, then left. The poles are where the magnetic field will be at its weakest.”

“So we head in that direction to escape this place?”

“It’s also the direction where your cure is.”

“Are you sure?”

“All the information I pulled from it has the mountain being near the pole.”

Alex pointed left and right. “Okay, do you know which one it is?”

They had been over the hemisphere closer to the one he believed was the correct mountain, when the ship failed. They would have been too low by the time he changed their vector to send them over to the other one. Working out where the equator was would simply take time. Then he’d know the direction they needed to travel in.

“I’ll know in a few hours.”

“And do you have a way for us to function out there?”

“The suit’s helmets, with a layer of the shielding, will protect our brains and should allow us to function.”

“You don’t sound entirely confident.”

“I’m extrapolating based on us being safe within the ship. If the magnetic field is strong enough to affect our entire nervous system, it will simply be a case of altering a complete suit. There is enough material within the hull to do that.”

“What do we do for weapons? If nothing technological works out here, I’m left with a handful of polycarbon mono-edge knives.”

“It’s possible to build a blaster that doesn’t use circuits. But by their nature, they are single shot units and there is no guarantee it won’t explode when used.”

“So, my knives and your claws.”

“Two of the native attackers dropped the spiked clubs they attacked us with.”

Alex smiled. “You can have those. What do you need me to do?”

Tristan handed him the tools needed to remove the inner plating, planted a metal rod outside the ship, then set about stripping two helmets while watching its shadow move.

Once he was done with the helmets, he helped Alex, and they then removed wires and components in the way of the conductive layer.

“Is it safe?” Alex ask as Tristan reached for it with cutter.

“Removing a section will lower the protection in this part of the ship, but we should be safe for the length needed to remove more if this isn’t enough to do both helmets.”

He then set about cutting and lining the inside for the helmets. The hyper conductive layer was thin, relative to the material the hull was made of, but not so much as to be easily flexible. He ended up setting two layers to cover the places where it had cracked as he applied force to make it fit the curvature of the helmets.

Alex laughed when Tristan put his own, and stepped outside to test it, but also looked silly wearing one. As with anytime Tristan had to wear a helmet, he disliked the loss of sound details.

The sun was too low by the time they were finished, and the night was dark, with the planet’s sole satellite low on the horizon. Tristan saw enough to navigate if he needed, but Alex was blind.

The native’s eyes hadn’t shown quick reactions when moving from inside to outside the ship, so he counted on them not having low light vision as he did to keep the two of them safe while they slept. But as soon as morning came, they needed to be on the move. He had no doubt the natives would return to take their revenge on the monsters who had fallen from the sky.

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With satchels packed with all the nutrient bars and heals they’d found, Tristan had them set out at ninety degrees from the rising sun. Without a way to confirm which one it was, he called it North.

The temperature climbed steadily over the hours of walking through the plain’s spiky grass. He’d gone back inside to make himself shoes, after his first step on the grass had turned bloody. It bent easily enough, but coming down directly on it made it act like a stiletto.

Tristan stopped Alex from reaching for his helmet. “It needs to stay on.”

“Sorry, can you hear that?”

Tristan listened as best as he could, but he was dealing with two layers of sound insulation. His ears folded back to fit in the helmet, and the helmet itself. “What are you hearing?”

“I’m not sure. It’s faint. But I can’t tell if it’s because of the helmet or it’s far. It’s intermittent, a burst that’s done almost as soon as I realize it’s happened.”

“Can you determine the direction?”

“All around us.”

Tristan searched the distance for any sign of being followed. The most likely cause was one of the local fauna. But the grass barely reached above his ankles at its highest. There might be something lurking in it, and the sound could be how it coordinated with the rest of its pack.

“Stay alert. We might be stalked by a pack of small creatures.”

“How dangerous can they be if they’re small enough to hide in this?”

“Don’t underestimate even something that small. Numbers can overcome strength.”

But while Alex reported hearing the sound throughout the day, nothing bothered them.

Once the sun started below the horizon, they stopped at an outcropping of stone with

little grass around it. They build a shelter against the cooling winds, and snuggled to keep Alex warm since they had nothing to make a fire with.

Tristan had made a sparker from the power cells of tools and wires, but the grass was highly resistant to burning.

As darkness spread, they got their answer for what caused the sound Alex heard. Occasionally, the tip of a blade of grass lit up with the flash of a spark, and knowing what he was listening for, Tristan was able to make it out.

He and Alex took shifts remaining awake, and he heard distant calls of animals. Some came close, but some growling kept them at bay.

They were off with the rising sun the next morning for a nearly identical walk.

It was on the fourth day they had a new encounter. A herd of grass grazers.

“You going to hunt us dinner?” Alex asked with a smirk. The humor sounded forced. The days had been monotonous and even Tristan was getting to hate the weight of the helmet and how it pressed against his ear’s pavilion.

“Not without a way to make a fire,” he replied, going over what he’d need to make the risk worthwhile. “Or a way to test the meat for harmful pathogens, or a way to separate one of them from the herd. Also not without knowing how aggressive they are when provoked, and,” he added. “Not without wearing this thing.”

“I’m contemplating dealing with my mind on the fritz just so I won’t have to deal with the discomfort.”

“I’d rather you don’t,” Tristan said, squeezing his arm. “I like the way your mind works.”

And chuckled. “Much longer of this and it’s not going to be working even with this thing on.”