

Interplanetary

"Emergency in sector three. Emergency in sector three. Emergency in sector three."

The alarm clock rung in my ear. I turned it off and slowly got up, looking at myself in the mirror. Today was the day we'd dock on the Interplanetary Space Station - IPSS for short. It was a big day for us Martians - it'd be the first time we Mars-born humans docked. Maybe then we'd be valued.

The whole story is that our forefathers were Earth's "scum". Mostly prisoners and criminals, with some homeless thrown in for good measure. After about 100 years of civil chaos within our Martian "cities" - a bunch of pre-planned buildings just dropped onto the surface - we finally came to our senses and started acting as a proper society. Of course, Earth didn't recognize us as such, so we were mostly expected to just stay to ourselves. Man is a peculiar creature however and our greediness got the better of us. Without help from Earth we developed our own spacecraft and now - well, here we are. MarsStar M46, the ship under my command, docking at the IPSS today.

I put on my uniform and headed out to the main deck. I'd thought of stopping by the chow hall to get something to eat but I had a strange feeling in my stomach, so I decided to skip breakfast.

"Sitrep.", I called out upon entering the navigation room.

"Sir! Vessel is on schedule for docking at fourteen hundred Earth today.", a tall man with a grey-green uniform turned around. My number two, known only as Stern. An old Academy nickname.

"Good, good. Anything on comms?"

"Negative, sir."

I looked out the holoscreens. Picturesque, the starry view was. Overhead was a segment of a reddish circle - the curvature of my planet. The screens displayed all the information necessary for our navigators on a pale green HUD, not dissimilar to an aircraft's. Our trajectory was mapped in the middle, with the predicted course for docking in glowing red for contrast. The map moved slightly

around the ship indicator to update for our new position.

"Emergency in sector three. Meltdown imminent. Emergency in sector three. Meltdown imminent.", the robotic voice repeated in a casual tone, as if announcing the weather. I tuned it out as I ran towards the lifeboats.

"Copy that. Rerouting to dock four, over and out.", I spoke into the microphone. The IPSS had just sent us the docks' area schematics and given us clearance for docking. I stepped back and enjoyed the view of Man's greatest accomplishment. The floating hunk of metal in front of the holoscreens shone brightly, reflecting sunlight even though it was painted black. Earth's flag was clearly visible on the station's hull. As the navigators adjusted the ship's speed and angle relative to the station, I turned around to Stern.

"Ready for embark?"

"My speech has been ready since the first week at the Academy."

I smiled. "Let's make history."

We walked in a silence as deep as space itself. Metal creaks sounded through the ship as we docked, and the station's power hum joined our ship's engines'. The doors to the station slid open. The air was heavier than usual. Maybe their air composition was slightly different from ours.

"Welcome to the IPSS."

A woman in a grey uniform greeted us.

"It's a great honor." I shook her hand. A glint in her eye. She led us through the station. Stern and I looked at each other a few times inbetween. This was a great moment for Mars, and

we definitely felt it. Then, we felt it.

The station shook beneath us.

Surprise isn't enough to describe what we felt. My vitals charts would later report a surge of adrenaline just before the "incident", as they called it, along with increased heart rate and blood pressure. Sirens started blaring as soldiers ran around the station. The woman in grey disappeared and Stern and I were left to ourselves. We ran back to where we'd come from - or did we take a right here? A large holoscreen in front of us, and an Earth vessel launching missiles in our direction. Stern and I looked at each other before following the emergency exit path.

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Martians would never be the same as Earthians.