

Achmed of Alphard and the Aliens

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After picking his way through the Wedding Rings, Achmed of Alphard set his ship down on Henry VIII. It was a cold, dark, forbidding world, with a temperature of minus 93 degrees Celsius, a gravity about half of Galactic Standard, and an atmosphere of pure ammonia.

He'd picked up a neutrino reading where there shouldn't have been any, and had homed in on it. Sure enough, the aliens had set up a repair and refueling station there among the huge outcroppings of rock and ice.

Achmed checked his weaponry, made sure his burner and his screecher were fully powered, and stuck a trio of energy grenades in his belt. He set his ship down twelve miles away from the station. His oxygen cannisters could keep him supplied with air for almost ten hours; given the light gravity, it shouldn't take him more than a couple of hours to reach the station. He'd eliminate any guards with his laser rifle -- no sense using the screecher and letting them know the enemy was nearby -- and then he'd take out the station with the grenades. Then he'd return to his ship. Even with a couple of unforeseen obstacles, he should have a good five hours of oxygen to spare.

Before he donned his protective spacesuit and left the ship, he raised the Cyborg de Milo on his subspace radio.

"Where are you?" she asked.

"I'm on Henry VIII."

"What the hell is there?"

He told her.

"Good," she said. "Just sit tight until I'm through here, and I'll be out there to wipe them out."

"I'm going to do it myself," said Achmed.

"Don't be a fool," she said. "You're no commando. Leave this work to the people who are fit for it."

"How do you know you're fit for something until you try it?" he retorted.

"Have you ever killed anyone?"

"Ask me in ten hours."

"I haven't got time to say it politely. You're no Catastrophe Baker. Just sit tight until I can get there."

"I appreciate your concern, Venus," replied Achmed, "but I can't let other people fight my battles for me."

"Who says it's your battle?" she demanded.

"You did, back at the Outpost."

"I didn't mean you."

"I aim to do my part," said Achmed. "Don't worry. I'll be careful. I'll sneak up on them and be gone

before they even know I was there."

"They already know you're there. You can't land a ship ten miles away without their knowing it."

"Twelve miles," he corrected her.

"Ten, twelve, it makes no difference," said the Cyborg de Milo. "They'll know if you land anywhere in the same hemisphere."

"I'm not afraid."

"Your courage does you no credit," she insisted. "It's born of ignorance. Leave the killing to the killers."

"I plan to make you proud of me," he said, breaking the connection.

He checked his weaponry one last time, climbed into his suit, and opened the hatch.

He never saw the pulse blast from the alien weapon that shattered both his helmet and his head before he could even step out of the ship.