

# Diving Into The Wreck

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We approach the wreck in stealth mode: lights and communications array off, sensors on alert for any other working ship in the vicinity. I'm the only one in the cockpit of the *Nobody's Business*. I'm the only one with the exact coordinates.

The rest of the team sits in the lounge, their gear in cargo. I personally searched each one of them before sticking them to their chairs. No one, but no one, knows where the wreck is except me. That was our agreement.

They hold to it or else.

We're six days from Longbow Station, but it took us ten to get here. Misdirection again, although I'd only planned on two days working my way through an asteroid belt around Beta Six. I ended up taking three, trying to get rid of a bottom-feeder that tracked us, hoping to learn where we're diving.

Hoping for loot.

I'm not hoping for loot. I doubt there's something space-valuable on a wreck as old as this one looks. But there's history value, and curiosity value, and just plain old we-done-it value. I picked my team with that in mind.

The team: six of us, all deep-space experienced. I've worked with two before—"Turtle and Squishy, both skinny space-raised women who have a sense of history that most out here lack. We used to do a lot of women-only dives together, back in the beginning, back when we believed that sisterhood was important. We got over that pretty fast.

Karl comes with more recommendations than God; I wouldn't've let him aboard with those rankings except that we needed him—"not just for the varied dives he's gone on, but also for his survival skills. He's saved at least two diving-gone-wrong trips that I know of.

The last two—"JypÃ© and Junior—are a father-and-son team that seem more like halves of the same whole. I've never wreck dived with them, though I took them out twice before telling them about this trip. They move in synch, think in synch, and have more money than the rest of us combined.

Yep, they're recreationists, but recreationists with a handle: their hobby is history, their desires—"at least according to all I could find on them—"to recover knowledge of the human past, not to get rich off of it.

It's me that's out to make money, but I do it my way, and only enough to survive to the next deep space trip. I don't thrive out here, but I'm addicted to it.

The process gets its name from the dangers: in olden days, wreck diving was called space diving to differentiate it from the planet-side practice of diving into the oceans.

We don't face water here—"we don't have its weight or its unusual properties, particularly at huge depths. We have other elements to concern us: No gravity, no oxygen, extreme cold.

And greed.

My biggest problem is that I'm land-born, something I don't confess to often. I spent the first forty years of my life trying to forget that my feet were once stuck to a planet's surface by real gravity. I even came to space late: fifteen years old, already land-locked. My first instructors told me I'd never unlearn the thinking real atmosphere ingrains into the body.

They were mostly right; land pollutes me, takes out an edge that the space-raised come to naturally. I gotta consciously choose to go into the deep and dark; the space-raised glide in like it's mother's milk. But if I compare myself to the land-locked, I'm a spacer of the first order, someone who understands vacuum like most understand air.

Old timers, all space-raised, tell me my interest in the past comes from being land-locked. Spacers move on, forget what's behind them. The land-born always search for ties, thinking they'll understand better what's before them if they understand what's behind them.

I don't think it's that simple. I've met history-oriented spacers, just like I've met land-born who're always looking forward.

It's what you do with the knowledge you collect that matters and me, I'm always spinning mine into gold.

So, the wreck.

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I came on it nearly a year before, traveling back from a bust I'd got suckered into with the promise of glory. I was manually guiding my single-ship, doing a little mapping to pick up some extra money. They say there aren't any undiscovered places anymore in this part of our galaxy, just forgotten ones, and I think that's true.

An eyeblink is all I'd've needed to miss the wreck. I caught the faint energy signal on a sensor I kept tuned to deep space around me. The sensor blipped once and was gone, that fast. But I had been around enough to know that something was there. The energy signal was too far out, too faint to be anything but lost.

As fast as I could, I dropped out of FTL, cutting my sublight speed to nothing in the drop. It still took me two jumps and a half day of searching before I found the blip again and matched its speed and direction.

I had been right. It was a ship. A black lump against the blackness of space.

My single-ship is modifiedâ€”I don't have automatic anything's in it, which can make it dangerous (the reason single-ships are completely automatic is so that the sole inhabitant is protected), but which also makes it completely mine. I've modified engines and the computers and the communications equipment, so that nothing happens without my permission.

The ship isn't even linked to me, although it is set to monitor my heart rate, my respiration rate, and my eyes. Should my heart slow, my breathing even, or my eyes close for longer than a minute, the automatic controls take over the entire ship. Unconsciousness isn't as much of a danger as it would be if the ship were 100 percent manual, but consciousness isn't a danger either. No one can monitor my thoughts or my movements simply by tapping the ship's computer.

Which turned out to be a blessing because now there are no records of what I had found in the ship's functions. Only that I had stopped.

My internal computer attached to the eyelink told me what my brain had already figured out. The wreck had been abandoned long ago. The faint energy signal was no more than a still-running current inside the

wreck.

My internal computer hypothesized that the wreck was Old Earth make, five thousand years old, maybe older. But I was convinced that estimation was wrong.

In no way could Earthers have made it this far from their own system in a ship like that. Even if the ship had managed to survive all this time floating like a derelict, even if there had been a reason for it to be here, the fact remained: no Earthers had been anywhere near this region five thousand years ago.

So I ignored the computerized hypothesis, and moved my single-ship as close as I could get it to the wreck without compromising safety measures.

Pitted and space-scored, the wreck had some kind of corrosion on the outside and occasional holes in the hull. The thing clearly was old. And it had been floating for a very long time. Nothing lived in it, and nothing seemed to function in it either besides that one faint energy signature, which was another sign of age.

Any other spacer would've scanned the thing, but other spacers didn't have my priorities. I was happy my equipment wasn't storing information. I needed to keep this wreck and its whereabouts my secret, at least until I could explore it.

I made careful private notes to myself as to location and speed of the wreck, then went home, thinking of nothing but what I had found the entire trip.

In the silence of my free-floating apartment, eighteen stories up on the scattered space-station wheel that orbited Hector One Prime, I compared my eyeball scan to my extensive back-up files.

And got a jolt: the ship was not only Old Earth based, its type had a name:

It was a Dignity Vessel, designed as a stealth warship.

But no Dignity Vessel had made it out of the fifty light year radius of Earth—they weren't designed to travel huge distances, at least by current standards, and they weren't manufactured outside of Earth's solar system. Even drifting at the speed it was moving, it couldn't have made it to its location in five thousand years, or even fifty thousand.

A Dignity Vessel.

Impossible, right?

And yet...

There it was. Drifting. Filled with mystery.

Filled with time.

Waiting for someone like me to figure it out.

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The team hates my secrecy, but they understand it. They know one person's space debris is another's treasure. And they know treasures vanish in deep space. The wrong word to the wrong person and my little discovery would disappear as if it hadn't existed at all.

Which was why I did the second and third scans myself, all on the way to other missions, all without a word to a soul. Granted, I was taking a chance that someone would notice my drops out of FTL and

wonder what I was doing, but I doubted even I was being watched that closely.

When I put this team together, I told them only I had a mystery vessel, one that would tax their knowledge, their beliefs, and their wreck-recovery skills.

Not a soul knows it's a Dignity Vessel. I don't want to prejudice them, don't want to force them along one line of thinking.

Don't want to be wrong.

The whats, hows and whys I'll worry about later. The ship's here.

That's the only fact I need.

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After I was sure I had lost every chance of being tracked, I let the *Business* slide into a position out of normal scanner and visual range. I matched the speed of the wreck. If my ship's energy signals were caught on someone else's scans, they automatically wouldn't pick up the faint energy signal of the wreck. I had a half dozen cover stories ready, depending on who might spot us. I hoped no one did.

But taking this precaution meant we needed transport to and from the wreck. That was the only drawback of this kind of secrecy.

First mission out, I'm ferry captain—a role I hate, but one I have to play. We're using the skip instead of the *Business*. The skip is designed for short trips, no more than four bodies on board at one time.

This trip, there's only three of us—me, Turtle, and Karl. Usually we team-dive wrecks, but this deep and so early, I need two different kinds of players. Turtle can dive anything, and Karl can kill anything. I can fly anything.

We're set.

I'm flying the skip with the portals unshielded. It looks like we're inside a piece of black glass moving through open space. Turtle paces most of the way, walking back to front to back again, peering through the portals, hoping to be the first to see the wreck.

Karl monitors the instruments as if he's flying the thing instead of me. If I hadn't worked with him before, I'd be freaked. I'm not; I know he's watching for unusuals, whatever comes our way.

The wreck looms ahead of us—a megaship, from the days when size equaled power. Still, it seems small in the vastness, barely a blip on the front of my sensors.

Turtle bounces in. She's fighting the grav that I left on for me—that landlocked thing again—and she's so nervous, someone who doesn't know her would think she's on something. She's too thin, like most divers, but muscular. Strong. I like that. Almost as much as I like her brain.

"What the hell is it?" she asks. "Old Empire?"

"Older." Karl is bent at the waist, looking courtly as he studies the instruments. He prefers readouts to eyeballing things; he trusts equipment more than he trusts himself.

"There can't be anything older out here," Turtle says.

"Can't is relative," Karl says.

I let them tough it out. I'm not telling them what I know. The skip slows, shuts down, and bobs with its own momentum. I'm easing in, leaving no trail.

"It's gonna take more than six of us to dive that puppy," Turtle says. "Either that, or we'll spend the rest of our lives here."

"As old as that thing is," Karl says, "it's probably been plundered and replundered."

"We're not here for the loot." I speak softly, reminding them it's an historical mission.

Karl turns his angular face toward me. In the dim light of the instrument panel, his gray eyes look silver, his skin unnaturally pale. "You know what this is?"

I don't answer. I'm not going to lie about something as important as this, so I can't make a denial. But I'm not going to confirm either. Confirming will only lead to more questions, which is something I don't want just yet. I need them to make their own minds up about this find.

"Huge, old." Turtle shakes her head. "Dangerous. You know what's inside?"

"Nothing, for all I know."

"Didn't check it out first?"

Some dive team leaders head into a wreck the moment they find one. Anyone working salvage knows it's not worth your time to come back to a place that's been plundered before.

"No." I pick a spot not far from the main doors, and set the skip to hold position with the monster wreck. With no trail, I hope no one's gonna notice the tiny energy emanation the skip gives off.

"Too dangerous?" Turtle asks. "That why you didn't go in?"

"I have no idea," I say.

"There's a reason you brought us here." She sounds annoyed. "You gonna share it?"

I shake my head. "Not yet. I just want to see what you find."

She glares, but the look has no teeth. She knows my methods and even approves of them sometimes. And she should know that I'm not good enough to dive alone.

She peels off her clothes—no modesty in this woman—and slides on her suit. The suit adheres to her like it's a part of her. She wraps five extra breathers around her hips—just-in-case emergency stuff, barely enough to get her out if her suit's internal oxygen system fails. Her suit is minimal—it has no back-up for environmental protection. If her primary and secondary units fail, she's a little block of ice in a matter of seconds.

She likes the risk; Karl doesn't. His suit is bulkier, not as form-fitting, but it has external environmental back-ups. He's had environmental failures and barely survived them. I've heard that lecture half a dozen times. So has Turtle, even though she always ignores it.

He doesn't go starkers under the suit either, leaving some clothes in case he has to peel quickly. Different divers, different situations. He only carries two extra breathers, both so small that they fit on his hips without expanding his width. He uses the extra loops for weapons, mostly lasers, although he's got a knife stashed somewhere in all that preparedness.

The knife has saved his life twice that I know of—once against a claim-jumper, and once as a pick that opened a hole big enough to squeeze his arm through.

They don't put on the headpieces until I give them the plan. One hour only: twenty minutes to get in, twenty minutes to explore, twenty minutes to return. Work the buddy system. We just want an idea of what's in there.

One hour gives them enough time on their breathers for some margin of error. One hour also prevents them from getting too involved in the dive and forgetting the time. They have to stay on schedule.

They get the drill. They've done it before, with me anyway. I have no idea how other team leaders run their ships. I have strict rules about everything, and expect my teams to follow.

Headpieces on—Turtle's is as thin as her face, tight enough to make her look like some kind of cybernetic human. Karl goes for the full protection—seven layers, each with a different function; double night vision, extra cameras on all sides; computerized monitors layered throughout the external cover. He gives me the handheld, which records everything he sees. It's not as good as the camera eyevue they'll bring back, but at least it'll let me know my team is still alive.

Not that I can do anything if they're in trouble. My job is to stay in the skip. Theirs is to come back to it in one piece.

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They move through the airlock—Turtle bouncing around like she always does, Karl moving with caution—and then wait the required two minutes. The suits adjust, then Turtle presses the hatch, and Karl sends the lead to the other ship.

We don't tether, exactly, but we run a line from one point of entry to the other. It's cautionary. A lot of divers get wreck blindness—hit the wrong button, expose themselves to too much light, look directly into a laser, or the suit malfunctions in ways I don't even want to discuss—and they need the tactical hold to get back to safety.

I don't deal with wreck blindness either, but Squishy does. She knows eyes, and can replace a lens in less than fifteen minutes. She's saved more than one of my crew in the intervening years. And after overseeing the first repair—the one in which she got her nickname, I don't watch.

Turtle heads out first, followed by Karl. They look fragile out there, small shapes against the blackness. They follow the guideline, one hand resting lightly on it as they propel themselves toward the wreck.

This is the easy part: should they let go or miss by a few meters, they use tiny air chips in the hands and feet of their suits to push them in the right direction. The suits have even more chips than that. Should the diver get too far away from the wreck, they can use little propellants installed throughout their suits.

I haven't lost a diver going or coming from a wreck.

It's inside that matters.

My hands are slick with sweat. I nearly drop the handheld. It's not providing much at the moment—just the echo of Karl's breathing, punctuated by an occasional "fuck" as he bumps something or moves slightly off-line.

I don't look at the images he's sending back either. I know what they are—the gloved hand on the lead, the vastness beyond, the bits of the wreck in the distance.

Instead, I walk back to the cockpit, sink into my chair, and turn all monitors on full. I have cameras on both of them and readouts running on another monitor watching their heart and breathing patterns. I plug the handheld into one small screen, but don't watch it until Karl approaches the wreck.

The main door is scored and dented. Actual rivets still remain on one side. I haven't worked a ship old enough for rivets; I've only seen them in museums and histories. I stare at the bad image Karl's sending back, entranced. How have those tiny metal pieces remained after centuries? For the first time, I wish I'm out there myself. I want to run the thin edge of my glove against the metal surface.

Karl does just that, but he doesn't seem interested in the rivets. His fingers search for a door release, something that will open the thing easily.

After centuries, I doubt there is any easy here. Finally, Turtle pings him.

"Got something over here," she says.

She's on the far side of the wreck from me, working a section I hadn't examined that closely in my three trips out. Karl keeps his hands on the wreck itself, sidewalking toward her.

My breath catches. This is the part I hate: the beginning of the actual dive, the place where the trouble starts.

Most wrecks are filled with space, inside and out, but a few still maintain their original environments, and then it gets really dicey—extreme heat or a gaseous atmosphere that interacts badly with the suits.

Sometimes the hazards are even simpler: a jagged metal edge that punctures even the strongest suits; a tiny corridor that seems big enough until it narrows, trapping the diver inside.

Every wreck has its surprises, and surprise is the thing that leads to the most damage—a diver shoving backward to avoid a floating object, a diver slamming his head into a wall jarring the suit's delicate internal mechanisms, and a host of other problems, all of them documented by survivors, and none of them the same.

The handheld shows a rip in the exterior of the wreck, not like any other caused by debris. Turtle puts a fist in the center, then activates her knuckle lights. From my vantage, the hole looks large enough for two humans to go through side-by-side.

"Send a probe before you even think of going in there," I say into her headset.

"Think it's deep enough?" Turtle asks, her voice tinny as it comes through the speakers.

"Let's try the door first," Karl says. "I don't want surprises if we can at all avoid them."

Good man. His small form appears like a spider attached to the ship's side. He returns to the exit hatch, still scanning it.

I look at the timer, running at the bottom of my main screen.

17:32

Not a lot of time to get in.

I know Karl's headpiece has a digital readout at the base. He's conscious of the time, too, and as cautious about that as he is about following procedure.

Turtle scuttles across the ship's side to reach him, slips a hand under a metal awning, and grunts.

"How come I didn't see that?" Karl asks.

"Looking in the wrong place," she says. "This is real old. I'll wager the metal's so brittle we could punch through the thing."

"We're not here to destroy it." There's disapproval in Karl's voice.

"I *know*."

19:01. I'll come on the line and demand they return if they go much over twenty minutes.

Turtle grabs something that I can't see, braces her feet on the side of the ship, and tugs. I wince. If she loses her grip, she propels, spinning, far and fast into space.

"Crap," she says. "Stuck."

"I could've told you that. These things are designed to remain closed."

"We have to go in the hole."

"Not without a probe," Karl says.

"We're running out of time."

21:22

They are out of time.

I'm about to come on and remind them, when Karl says, "We have a choice. We either try to blast this door open or we probe that hole."

Turtle doesn't answer him. She tugs. Her frame looks small on my main screen, all bunched up as she uses her muscles to pry open something that may have been closed for centuries.

On the handheld screen, enlarged versions of her hands disappear under that awning, but the exquisite detail of her suit shows the ripple of her flesh as she struggles.

"Let go, Turtle," Karl says.

"I don't want to damage it," Turtle says. "God knows what's just inside there."

"Let go."

She does. The hands reappear, one still braced on the ship's side.

"We're probing," he says. "Then we're leaving."

"Who put you in charge?" she grumbles, but she follows him to that hidden side of the ship. I see only their limbs as they move along the exterior—the human limbs against the pits and the dents and the small holes punched by space debris. Shards of protruding metal near rounded gashes beside pristine swatches that still shine in the thin light from Turtle's headgear.

I want to be with them, clinging to the wreck, looking at each mark, trying to figure out when it came, how it happened, what it means.



But all I can do is watch.

The probe makes it through sixteen meters of stuff before it doesn't move any farther. Karl tries to tug it out, but the probe is stuck, just like my team would've been if they'd gone in without it.

They return, forty-two minutes into the mission, feeling defeated.

I'm elated. They've gotten farther than I ever expected.

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We take the probe readouts back to the *Business*, over the protests of the team. They want to recharge and clean out the breathers and dive again, but I won't let them. That's another rule I have to remind them of—"only one dive per twenty-four hour period. There are too many unknowns in our work; it's essential that we have time to rest.

All of us get too enthusiastic about our dives—we take chances we shouldn't. Sleep, relaxation, downtime all prevent the kind of haste that gets divers killed.

Once we're in the *Business*, I download the probe readouts, along with the readings from the suits, the gloves, and the handheld. Everyone gathers in the lounge. I have three-D holotech in there, which'll allow us all to get a sense of the wreck.

As I'm sorting through the material, thinking of how to present it (Handheld first? Overview? A short lecture?), the entire group arrives. Turtle's taken a shower. Her hair's wet, and she looks tired. She'd sworn to me she hadn't been stressed out there, but her eyes tell me otherwise. She's exhausted.

Squishy follows, looking somber. Jyp and Junior are already there, in the best seats. They've been watching me set up. Only Karl is late. When he arrives—also looking tired—Squishy stops him at the door.

"Turtle says it's old."

Turtle shoots Squishy an angry look.

"She won't say anything else." Squishy glances at me as if it's my fault. Only I didn't swear the first team to secrecy about the run. That was their choice.

"It's old," Karl says, and squeezes by her.

"She's says it's weird-old."

Karl looks at me now. His angular face seems even bonier. He seems to be asking me silently if he can talk.

I continue setting up.

Karl sighs, then says, "I've never seen anything like it."

No one else asks a question. They wait for me. I start with the images the skip's computer downloaded, then add the handheld material. I've finally decided to save the suit readouts for last. I might be the only one who cares about the metal composition, the exterior hull temperature, and the number of rivets lining the hatch.

The group watches in silence as the wreck appears, watches intently as the skip's images show a tiny Turtle and Karl slide across the guideline.

The group listens to the arguments, and JypÃ© nods when Karl makes his unilateral decision to use the probe. The nod reassures me. JypÃ© is as practical as I'd hoped he'd be.

I move to the probe footage next. I haven't previewed it. We've all seen probe footage before, so we ignore the grainy picture, the thin light, and the darkness beyond.

The probe doesn't examine so much as explore: its job is to go as far inside as possible, to see if that hole provides an easy entrance into the wreck.

It looks so easy for ten metersâ€”nothing along the edges, just light and darkness and weird particles getting disturbed by our movements.

Then the hole narrows and we can see the walls as large shapes all around the probe. The hole narrows more, and the walls become visible in the lightâ€”a shinier metal, one less damaged by space debris. The particles thin out too.

Finally a wall looms ahead. The hole continues, so small that it seems like the probe can continue. The probe actually sends a laser pulse, and gets back a measurement: the hole is six centimeters in diameter, more than enough for the equipment to go through.

But when the probe reaches that narrow point, it slams into a barrier. The barrier isn't visible. The probe runs several more readouts, all of them denying that the barrier is there.

Then there's a registered tug on the line: Karl trying to get the probe out. Several more tugs later, Karl and Turtle decide the probe's stuck. They take even more readouts, and then shut it down, planning to use it later.

The readouts tell us nothing except that the hole continues, six centimeters in diameter, for another two meters.

"What the hell do you think that is?" Junior asks. His voice hasn't finished its change yet, even though both JypÃ© and Junior swear he's over eighteen.

"Could be some kind of forcefield," Squishy says.

"In a vessel that old?" Turtle asks. "Not likely."

"How old is that?" Squishy's entire body is tense. It's clear now that she and Turtle have been fighting.

"How old is that, boss?" Turtle asks me.

They all look at me. They know I have an idea. They know age is one of the reasons they're here.

I shrug. "That's one of the things we're going to confirm."

"Confirm." Karl catches the word. "Confirm what? What do you know that we don't?"

"Let's run the readouts before I answer that," I say.

"No." Squishy crosses her arms. "Tell us."

Turtle gets up. She pushes two icons on the console beside me, and the suits'™ technical readouts come up. She flashes forward, through numbers and diagrams and chemical symbols to the conclusions.

"Over five thousand years old." Turtle doesn't look at Squishy. "That's what the boss isn't telling

us. This wreck is human-made, and it's been here longer than humans have been in this section of space."

Karl stares at it.

Squishy shakes her head. "Not possible. Nothing human made would've survived to make it this far out. Too many gravity wells, too much debris."

"Five thousand years," JypÃ© says.

I let them talk. In their voices, in their argument, I hear the same argument that went through my head when I got my first readouts about the wreck.

It's Junior that stops the discussion. In his half-tenor, half-baritone way, he says, "C'mon, gang, think a little. That's why the boss brought us out here. To confirm her suspicions."

"Or not," I say.

Everyone looks at me as if they've just remembered I'm there.

"Wouldn't it be better if we knew your suspicions?" Squishy asks.

Karl is watching me, eyes slitted. It's as if he's seeing me for the first time.

"No, it wouldn't be better," I speak softly. I make sure to have eye contact with each of them before I continue. "I don't want you to use my scholarship" or lack thereof" as the basis for your assumptions."

"So should we discuss this with each other?" Squishy's using that snide tone with me now. I don't know what has her so upset, but I'm going to have to find out. If she doesn't calm, she's not going near the wreck.

"Sure," I say.

"All right," She leans back, staring at the readouts still floating before us. "If this thing is five thousand years old, human made, and somehow it came to this spot at this time, then it can't have a forcefield."

"Or fake readouts like the probe found," JypÃ© says.

"Hell," Turtle says. "It shouldn't be here at all. Space debris should've pulverized it. That's too much time. Too much distance."

"So what's it doing here?" Karl asked.

I shrug for the third and last time. "Let's see if we can find out."

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They don't rest. They're as obsessed with the readouts as I've been. They study time and distance and drift, forgetting the weirdness inside the hole. I'm the one who focuses on that.

I don't learn much. We need more information" we revisit the probe twice while looking for another way into the ship" and even then, we don't get a lot of new information.

Either the barrier is new technology or it is very old technology, technology that has been lost. So much technology has been lost in the thousands of years since this ship was built.

It seems like humans constantly have to reinvent everything.

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Six dives later and we still haven't found a way inside the ship. Six dives, and no new information. Six dives, and my biggest problem is Squishy.

She has become angrier and angrier as the dives continue. I've brought her along on the seventh dive to man the skip with me, so that we can talk.

Junior and JypÃ© are the divers. They're exploring what I consider to be the top of the ship, even though I'm only guessing. They're going over the surface centimeter by centimeter, exploring each part of it, looking for a weakness that we can exploit.

I monitor their equipment using the skip's computer, and I monitor them with my eyes, watching the tiny figures move along the narrow blackness of the skip itself.

Squishy stands beside me, at military attention, her hands folded behind her back.

She knows she's been brought for conversation only; she's punishing me by refusing to speak until I broach the subject first.

Finally, when J&J are past the dangerous links between two sections of the ship, I mimic Squishy's postureâ€”hands behind my back, shoulders straight, legs slightly spread.

"What's making you so angry?" I ask.

She stares at the team on top of the wreck. Her face is a smooth reproach to my lack of attention; the monitor on board the skip should always pay attention to the divers.

I taught her that. I believe that. Yet here I am, reproaching another person while the divers work the wreck.

"Squishy?" I ask.

She isn't answering me. Just watching, with that implacable expression.

"You've had as many dives as everyone else," I say. "I've never questioned your work, yet your mood has been foul, and it seems to be directed at me. Do we have an issue I don't know about?"

Finally she turns, and the move is as military as the stance was. Her eyes narrow.

"You could've told us this was a Dignity Vessel," she says.

My breath catches. She agrees with my research. I don't understand why that makes her angry.

"I could've," I say. "But I feel better that you came to your own conclusion."

"I've known it since the first dive," she says. "I wanted you to tell them. You didn't. They're still wasting time trying to figure out what they have here."

"What they have here is an anomaly," I say, "something that makes no sense and can't be here."

"Something dangerous." She crosses her arms. "Dignity Vessels were used in wartime."

"I know the legends." I glance at the wreck, then at the handheld readout. J&J are working something

that might be a hatch.

"A lot of wartimes," she says, "over many centuries, from what historians have found out."

"But never out here," I say.

And she concedes. "Never out here."

"So what are you so concerned about?"

"By not telling us what it is, we can't prepare," she says. "What if there're weapons or explosives or something else?"

"Like that barrier?" I ask.

Her lips thin.

"We've worked unknown wrecks before, you and me, together."

She shrugs. "But they're of a type. We know the history, we know the vessels, we know the capabilities. We don't know this at all. No one really knows what these ancient ships were capable of. It's something that shouldn't be here."

"A mystery," I say.

"A dangerous one."

"Hey!" Junior's voice is tinny and small. "We got it open! We're going in."

Squishy and I turn toward the sound. I can't see either man on the wreck itself. The handheld's imagery is shaky.

I press the comm, hoping they can still hear me. "Probe first. Remember that barrier."

But they don't answer, and I know why not. I wouldn't either in their situation. They're pretending they don't hear. They want to be the first inside, the first to learn the secrets of the wreck.

The handheld moves inside the darkness. I see four tiny lights "Jyp's glove lights" and I see the same particles I saw before, on the first images from the earliest probe.

Then the handheld goes dark. We were going to have to adjust it to transmit through the metal of the wreck.

"I don't like this," Squishy says.

I've never liked any time I was out of sight and communication with the team.

We stare at the wreck as if it can give us answers. It's big and dark, a blob against our screen. Squishy actually goes to the portals and looks, as if she can see more through them than she can through the miracle of science.

But she doesn't. And the handheld doesn't wink on.

On my screen, the counter ticks away the minutes.

Our argument isn't forgotten, but it's on hold as the first members of our little unit vanish inside.

After thirty-five minutesâ€”fifteen of them inside (JypÃ© has rigorously stuck to the schedule on each of his dives, something which has impressed me)â€”I start to get nervous.

I hate the last five minutes of waiting. I hate it even more when the waiting goes on too long, when someone doesn't follow the time-table I've devised.

Squishy, who's never been in the skip with me, is pacing. She doesn't say any moreâ€”not about danger, not about the way I'm running this little trip, not about the wreck itself.

I watch her as she moves, all grace and form, just like she's always been. She's never been on a real mystery run. She's done dangerous onesâ€”maybe two hundred deep space dives into wrecks that a lot of divers, even the most greedy, would never touch.

But she's always known what she's diving into, and why it's where it is.

Not only are we uncertain as to whether or not this is an authentic Dignity Vessel (and really, how can it be?), we also don't know why it's here, how it came here, or what its cargo was. We have no idea what its mission was eitherâ€”if, indeed, it had a mission at all.

37:49

Squishy's stopped pacing. She looks out the portals again, as if the view has changed. It hasn't.

"You're afraid, aren't you?" I ask. "That's the bottom line, isn't it? This is the first time in years that you've been afraid."

She stops, stares at me as if I'm a creature she's never seen before, and then frowns.

"Aren't you?" she asks.

I shake my head.

The handheld springs to life, images bouncy and grainy on the corner of my screen. My stomach unclenches. I've been breathing shallowly and not even realizing it.

Maybe I am afraid, just a little.

But not of the wreck. The wreck is a curiosity, a project, a conundrum no one else has faced before.

I'm afraid of deep space itself, of the vastness of it. It's inexplicable to me, filled with not just one mystery, but millions, and all of them waiting to be solved.

A crackle, then a voiceâ€”JypÃ©'s.

"We got a lot of shit." He sounds gleeful. He sounds almost giddy with relief.

Squishy lets out the breath she's obviously been holding.

"We're coming in," Junior says.

It's 40:29.

\* \* \* \*

The wreck's a Dignity Vessel, all right. It's got a DV number etched inside the hatch, just like the materials say it should. We mark the number down to research later.

Instead, we're gathered in the lounge, watching the images J&J have brought back.

They have the best equipment. Their suits don't just have sensors and readouts, but they have chips that store a lot of imagery woven into the suits'™ surfaces. Most suits can't handle the extra weight, light as it is, or the protections to ensure that the chips don't get damaged by the environmental changes'™ the costs are too high, and if the prices stay in line, then either the suits'™ human protections are compromised, or the imagery is.

Two suits, two vids, so much information.

The computer cobbles it together into two different information streams'™ one from Jyp'™'s suit's perspective, the other from Junior's. The computer cleans and enhances the images, clarifies edges if it can read them and leaves them fuzzy if it can't.

Not much is fuzzy here. Most of it is firm, black-and-white only because of the purity of the glovelights and the darkness that surrounds them.

Here's what we see:

From Junior's point of view, Jyp'™ going into the hatch. The edge is up, rounded, like it's been opened a thousand times a day instead of once in thousands of years. Then the image switches to Jyp'™'s legcams and at that moment, I stop keeping track of which images belong to which diver.

The hatch itself is round, and so is the tunnel it leads down. Metal rungs are built into the wall. I've seen these before: they're an ancient form of ladder, ineffective and dangerous. Jyp'™ clings to one rung, then turns and pushes off gently, drifting slowly deep into a darkness that seems profound.

Numbers are etched on the walls, all of them following the letters DV, done in ancient script. The numbers are repeated over and over again'™ the same ones'™ and it's Karl who figures out why: each piece of the vessel has the numbers etched into it, in case the vessel was destroyed. Its parts could always be identified then.

Other scratches marked the metal, but we can't read them in the darkness. Some of them aren't that visible, even in the glovelights. It takes Jyp'™ a while to remember he has lights on the soles of his feet as well'™ a sign, to me, of his inexperience.

Ten meters down, another hatch. It opens easily, and ten meters beneath it is another.

That one reveals a nest of corridors leading in a dozen different directions. A beep resounds in the silence and we all glance at our watches before we realize it's on the recording.

The reminder that half the dive time is up.

Junior argues that a few more meters won't hurt. Maybe see if there are items off those corridors, something they can remove, take back to the *Business* and examine.

But Jyp'™ keeps to the schedule. He merely shakes his head, and his son listens.

Together they ascend, floating easily along the tunnel as they entered it, leaving the interior hatches open, and only closing the exterior one, as we'd all learned in dive training.

The imagery ends, and the screen fills with numbers, facts, figures and readouts which I momentarily ignore. The people in the room are more important. We can sift through the numbers later.

There's energy hereâ€”a palpable excitementâ€”dampened only by Squishy's fear. She stands with her arms wrapped around herself, as far from Turtle as she can get.

"A Dignity Vessel," Karl says, his cheeks flushed. "Who'd've thought?"

"You knew," Turtle says to me.

I shrug. "I hoped."

"It's impossible," JypÃ© says, "and yet I was inside it."

"That's the neat part," Junior says. "It's impossible and it's here."

Squishy is the only one who doesn't speak. She stares at the readouts as if she can see more in them than I ever will.

"We have so much work to do," says Karl. "I think we should go back home, research as much as we can, and then come back to the wreck."

"And let others dive her?" Turtle says. "People are going to ghost us, track our research, look at what we're doing. They'll find the wreck and claim it as their own."

"You can't claim this deep," Junior says, then looks at me. "Can you?"

"Sure you can," I say. "But a claim's an announcement that the wreck's here. Something like this, we'll get jumpers for sure."

"Karl's right," Squishy's voice is the only one not tinged with excitement. "We should go back."

"What's wrong with you?" Turtle says. "You used to love wreck diving."

"Have you read about early period stealth technology?" Squishy asks. "Do you have any idea what damage it can do?"

Everyone is looking at her now. She still has her back to us, her arms wrapped around herself so tightly her shirt pulls. The screen's readout lights her face, but all we can see are parts of it, illuminating her hair like an inverse nimbus.

"Why would you have studied stealth tech?" Karl asks.

"She was military," Turtle says. "Long, long ago, before she realized she hates rules. Where'd you think she learned field medicine?"

"Still," Karl says, "I was military too"

Which explained a lot.

"and no one ever taught me about stealth tech. It's the stuff of legends and kidsâ€™ tales."

"It was banned," Squishy's voice is soft, but has power. "It was banned five hundred years ago, and every few generations, we try to revive it or modify it or improve it. Doesn't work."

"What doesn't work?" Junior asks.

The tension is rising. I can't let it get too far out of control, but I want to hear what Squishy has to say.



"The tech shadows the ships, makes them impossible to see, even with the naked eye," Squishy says.

"Bullshit," Turtle says. "Stealth just masks instruments, makes it impossible to read the ships on equipment. That's all."

Squishy turns, lets her arms drop. "You know all about this now? Did you spend three years studying stealth? Did you spend two years of post-doc trying to recreate it?"

Turtle is staring at her like she's never seen her before. "Of course not."

"You have?" Karl asks.

Squishy nods. "Why do you think I find things? Why do you think I *like* finding things that are lost?"

Junior shakes his head. "I'm not following the connection either."

"Why?" Jyp asks. "Apparently he's not following it as well."

"Because," Squishy says, "I've accidentally lost so many things."

"Things?" Karl's voice is low. His face seems pale in the lounge's dim lighting.

"Ships, people, materiel. You name it, I lost it trying to make it invisible to sensors. Trying to recreate the tech you just found on that ship."

My breath catches. "How do you know it's there?"

"We've been looking at it from the beginning," Squishy says. "That damn probe is stuck like half my experiments got stuck, between one dimension and another. There's only one way in and no way out. And the last thing you want—the very last thing—is for one of us to get stuck like that."

"I don't believe it," Turtle says with such force that I know she and Squishy have been having this argument from the moment we first saw the wreck.

"Believe it," Squishy says that to me, not Turtle. "Believe it with all that you are. Get us out of here, and if you're truly humane, blow that wreck up, so no one else can find it."

"Blow it up?" Junior whispers.

The action is so opposite anything I know that I feel a surge of anger. We don't blow up the past. We may search it, loot it, and try to understand it, but we don't destroy it.

"Get rid of it," Squishy's eyes are filled with tears. She's looking at me, speaking only to me. "Boss, please. It's the only sane thing to do."

\* \* \* \*

Sane or not, I'm torn.

If Squishy's right, then I have a dual dilemma: the technology is lost, new research on it banned, even though the military keeps conducting research anyway—trying, if I'm understanding Squishy right, to rediscover something we knew thousands of years before.

Which makes this wreck so very valuable that I could more than retire with the money we'd get for selling it. I would—we would—be rich for the rest of our very long lives.

Is the tech dangerous because the experiments to rediscover it are dangerous? Or is it dangerous because there's something inherent about it that makes it unfeasible now and forever?

Karl is right: to do this properly, we have to go back and research Dignity Vessels, stealth tech, and the last few thousand years.

But Turtle's also right: we'll take a huge chance of losing the wreck if we do that. We'll be like countless other divers who sit around bars throughout this sector and bemoan the treasures they lost because they didn't guard them well enough.

We can't leave. We can't even let Squishy leave. We have to stay until we make a decision.

Until I make a decision.

On my own.

\* \* \* \*

First, I look up Squishy's records. Not her dive histories, not her arrest records, not her disease manifoldsâ€”the stuff any dive captain would examineâ€”but her personal history, who she is, what she's done, who she's become.

I haven't done that on any of my crew before. I've always thought it an invasion of privacy. All we need to know, I'd say to other dive captains, is whether they can handle the equipment, whether they'll steal from their team members, and if their health is good enough to handle the rigors.

And I believed it until now, until I found myself digging through layers of personal history that are threaded into the databases filling the *Business's* onboard computer.

Fortunately for me and my nervous stomach, the more sensitive databases are linked only to meâ€”no one else even knows they exist (although anyone with brains would guess that they do)â€”and even if someone finds the databases, no one can access them without my codes, my retinal scan, and, in many cases, a sample of my DNA.

Still, I'm skittish as I work thisâ€”sound off, screen on dim. I'm in the cockpit, which is my domain, and I have the doors to the main cabin locked. I feel like everyone on the *Business* knows I'm betraying Squishy. And I feel like they all hate me for it.

Squishy's real name is Rosealma Quintinia. She was born forty years ago in a multinational cargo vessel called *The Bounty*. Her parents insisted she spend half her day in artificial gravity so she wouldn't develop spacer's limbsâ€”truncated, fragileâ€”and she didn't. But she gained a grace that enabled her to go from zero-G to Earth Normal and back again without much transition at all, a skill few ever gain.

Her family wanted her to cargo, maybe even pirate, but she rebelled. She had a scientific mind, and without asking anyone's permission, took the boardsâ€”scoring a perfect 100, something no cargo monkey had ever done before.

A hundred schools all over the known systems wanted her. They offered her room, board, and tuition, but only one offered her all expenses paid both coming and going from the school, covering the only cost that really mattered to a spacer's kidâ€”the cost of travel.

She went, of course, and vanished into the system, only to emerge twelve years laterâ€”too thin, too poor, and too bitter to ever be considered a success. She signed on with a cargo vessel as a medic, and soon became one of its best and most fearless divers.

She met Turtle in a bar, and they became lovers. Turtle showed her that private divers make more money, and brought her to me.

And that was when our partnership began.

I sigh, rub my eyes with my thumb and forefinger, and lean my head against the screen.

Much as I regret it, it's time for questions now.

\* \* \* \*

Of course, she's waiting for me.

She's brought down the privacy wall in the room she initially shared with Turtle, making their rift permanent. Her bed is covered with folded clothes. Her personal trunk is open at the foot. She's already packed her nightclothes and underwear inside.

"You're leaving?" I ask.

"I can't stay. I don't believe in the mission. You've preached forever the importance of unity, and I believe you, Boss. I'm going to jeopardize everything."

"You're acting like I've already made a decision about the future of this mission."

"Haven't you?" She sits on the edge of the bed, hands folded primly in her lap, her back straight. Her bearing is military—something I've always seen, but never really noticed until now.

"Tell me about stealth tech," I say.

She raises her chin slightly. "It's classified."

"That's fucking obvious."

She glances at me, clearly startled. "You tried to research it?"

I nod. I tried to research it when I was researching Dignity Vessels. I tried again from the *Business*. I couldn't find much, but I didn't have to tell her that.

That was fucking obvious too.

"You've broken rules before," I say. "You can break them again."

She looks away, staring at that opaque privacy wall—so representative of what she'd become. The solid backbone of my crew suddenly doesn't support any of us anymore. She's opaque and difficult, setting up a divider between herself and the rest of us.

"I swore an oath."

"Well, let me help you break it," I snap. "If I try to enter that barrier, what'll happen to me?"

"Don't," she whispers the word. "Just leave, Boss."

"Convince me."

"If I tell you, you gotta swear you'll say nothing about this."

"I swear." I'm not sure I believe me. My voice is shaky, my tone something that sounds strange to

even me.

But the oathâ€™”however weak it isâ€™”is what Squishy wants.

Squishy takes a deep breath, but she doesn't change her posture. In fact, she speaks directly to the wall, not turning toward me at all.

"I became a medic after my time in Stealth,â€™ she says. â€™I decided I had to save lives after taking so many of them. It was the only way to balance the score...."

\* \* \* \*

Experts believe stealth tech was deliberately lost. Too dangerous, too risky. The original stealth scientists all died under mysterious circumstances, all much too young and without recording any part of their most important discoveries.

Through the ages, their names were even lost, only to be rediscovered by a major researcher, visiting Old Earth in the latter part of the past century.

Squishy tells me all this in a flat voice. She sounds like she's reciting a lecture from very long ago. Still, I listen, word for word, not asking any questions, afraid to break her train of thought.

Afraid she'll never return to any of it.

Earth-owned Dignity Vessels had all been stripped centuries before, used as cargo ships, used as junk. An attempt to reassemble one about five hundred years ago failed because the Dignity Vesselsâ€™™ main components and guidance systems were never, ever found, either in junk or in blueprint form.

A few documents, smuggled to the colonies on Earth's Moon, suggested that stealth tech was based on interdimensional scienceâ€™”that the ships didn't vanish off radar because of a â€™cloakâ€™ but because they traveled, briefly, into another worldâ€™”a parallel universe that's similar to our own.

I recognized the theoryâ€™”it's the one on which time travel is based, even though we've never discovered time travel, at least not in any useful way, and researchers all over the universe discourage experimentation in it. They prefer the other theory of time travel, the one that says time is not linear, that we only perceive it as linear, and to actually time travel would be to alter the human brain.

But what Squishy is telling me is that it's possible to time travel, it's possible to open small windows in other dimensions, and bend them to our will.

Only, she says, those windows don't bend as nicely as we like, and for every successful trip, there are two that don't function as well.

I ask for explanation, but she shakes her head.

"You can get stuck,â€™ she says, â€™like that probe. Forever and ever."

"You think this is what the Dignity Vessels did?"

She shakes her head. â€™I think their stealth tech is based on some form of this multi-dimensional travel, but not in any way we've been able to reproduce."

"And this ship we have here? Why are you so afraid of it?â€™ I ask.

"Because you're right.â€™ She finally looks at me. There are shadows under her eyes. Her face is skeletal, the lower lip trembling. â€™The ship shouldn't be here. No Dignity Vessel ever left the sector of

space around Earth. They weren't designed to travel vast distances, let alone halfway across our known universe."

I nod. She's not telling me anything I don't already know. "So?"

"So," she says. "Dozens and dozens of those ships never returned to port."

"Shot down, destroyed. They were battleships, after all."

"Shot down, destroyed, or lost," she says. "I vote for lost. Or used for something, some mission now lost in time."

I shrug. "So?"

"So you wondered why no one's seen this before, why no one's found it, why the ship itself has drifted so very far from home."

I nod.

"Maybe it didn't drift."

"You think it was purposely sent here?"

She shakes her head. "What if it stealthed on a mission to the outer regions of Old Earth's area of space?"

My stomach clenches.

"What if," she says, "the crew tried to destealth" and ended up here?"

"Five thousand years ago?"

She shakes her head. "A few generations ago. Maybe more, maybe less. But not very long. And you were just the lucky one who found it."

\* \* \* \*

I spend the entire night listening to her theories.

I hear about the experiments, the forty-five deaths, the losses she suffered in a program that started the research from scratch.

After she left R&D and went into medicine, she used her high security clearance to explore older files. She found pockets of research dating back nearly five centuries, the pertinent stuff gutted, all but the assumptions gone.

Stealth tech. Lost, just like I assumed. And no one'd been able to recreate it.

I listen and evaluate, and realize, somewhere in the dead of night, that I'm not a scientist.

But I am a pragmatist, and I know, from my own research, that Dignity Vessels, with their stealth tech, existed for more than two hundred years. Certainly not something that would have happened had the stealth technology been as flawed as Squishy said.

So many variables, so much for me to weigh.

And beneath it all, a greed pulses, one that "until tonight" I thought I didn't have.

For the last five centuries, our military has researched stealth tech and failed.

Failed.

I might have all the answers only a short distance away, in a wreck no one else has noticed, a wreck that isâ€”for the moment anywayâ€”completely my own.

\* \* \* \*

I leave Squishy to sleep. I tell her to clear her bed, that she has to remain with the group, no matter what I decide.

She nods as if she's expecting that, and maybe she is. She grabs her nightclothes as I let myself out of the room, and into the much cooler, more dimly lit corridor.

As I walk to my own quarters, JypÃ© finds me.

"She tell you anything worthwhile?â€” His eyes are a little too bright. Is greed eating at him like it's eating at me? I'm almost afraid to ask.

"No,â€” I say. â€”She didn't. The work she did doesn't seem all that relevant to me."

I'm lying. I really do want to sleep on this. I make better decisions when I'm rested.

"There isn't much history on the Dignity Vesselsâ€”at least that's specific,â€” he says. â€”And your database has nothing on this one, no serial number listing, nothing. I wish you'd let us link up with an outside system."

"You want someone else to know where we are and what we're doing?â€” I ask.

He grins. â€”It'd be easier."

"And dumber."

He nods. I take a step forward and he catches my arm.

"I did check one other thing,â€” he says.

I am tired. I want sleep more than I can say. â€”What?"

"I learned long ago that if you can't find something in history, you look in legends. There's truths there. You just have to dig more for them."

I wait. The sparkle in his eyes grows.

"There's an old spacer's story that has gotten repeated through various cultures for centuries as governments have come and gone. A spacer's story about a fleet of Dignity Vessels."

"What?â€” I asked. â€”Of course there was a fleet of them. Hundreds, if the old records are right."

He waves me off. â€”More than that. Some say the fleet's a thousand strong, some say it's a hundred strong. Some don't give a number. But all the legends talk about the vessels being on a mission to save the worlds beyond the stars, and how the ships moved from port to port, with parts cobbled together so that they could move beyond their design structures."

I'm awake again, just like he knew I would be. â€”There are a lot of these stories?"

"And they follow a trajectoryâ€”one that would work if you were, say, leading a fleet of ships out of your area of space."

"We're far away from the Old Earth area of space. We're so far away, humans from that period couldn't even imagine getting to where we are now."

"So we say. But think how many years this would take, how much work it would take."

"Dignity Vessels didn't have FTL,â€” I say.

"Maybe not at first.â€” He's fairly bouncing from his discovery. I'm feeling a little more hopeful as well.â€”But in that cobbling, what if someone gave them FTL?"

"Gave them,â€” I muse. No one in the worlds I know gives anyone anything.

"Or sold it to them. Can you imagine? One legend calls them a fleet of ships for hire, out to save worlds they've never seen."

"Sounds like a complete myth."

"Yeah,â€” he says, â€œit's only a legend. But I think sometimes these legends become a little more concrete."

"Why?"

"We have an actual Dignity Vessel out there, that got here somehow."

"Did you see evidence of cobbling?â€” I ask.

"How would I know?â€” he asks. â€œHave you checked the readouts? Do they give different dates for different parts of the ship?"

I hadn't looked at the dating. I had no idea if it was different. But I don't say that.

"Download the exact specs for a Dignity Vessel,â€” I say. â€œThe materials, where everything should be, all of that."

"Didn't you do that before you came here?â€” he asks.

"Yes, but not in the detail of the ship's composition. Most people rebuild ships exactly as they were before they got damaged, so the shape would remain the same. Only the components would differ. I meant to check our readouts against what I'd brought, but I haven't yet. I've been diverted by the stealth tech thing, and now I'm going to get a little sleep. So you do it."

He grins. â€œAye, aye, Captain."

"Boss,â€” I mutter as I stagger down the corridor to my bed. â€œI can't tell you how much I prefer boss."

\* \* \* \*

I sleep, but not long. My brain's too busy. I'm sure those specs are different, which confirms nothing. It just means that someone repaired the vessel at one point or another. But what if the materials are the kind that weren't available in the area of space around Earth when Dignity Vessels were built? That disproves Squishy's worry about the tech of that thing.

I'm at my hardwired terminal when Squishy comes to my door. I've gone through five or six layers of security to get to some very old data, data that isn't accessible from any other part of my ship's networked computer system.

Squishy waits. I'm hoping she'll leave, but of course she doesn't. After a few minutes, she coughs.

I sigh audibly. "We talked last night."

"I have one more thing to ask."

She stepped inside, unbidden, and closed the door. My quarters felt claustrophobic with another person inside them. I'd always been alone here—always—even when I had a liaison with one of the crew. I'd go to his quarters, never bring him into my own.

The habits of privacy are long engrained, and the habits of secrecy even longer. It's how I've protected my turf for so many years, and how I've managed to first-dive so many wrecks.

I dim the screen and turn to her. "Ask."

Her eyes are haunted. She looks like she's gotten even less sleep than I have.

"I'm going to try one last time," she says. "Please blow the wreck up. Make it go away. Don't let anyone else inside. Forget it was here."

I fold my hands on my lap. Yesterday I hadn't had an answer for that request. Today I do. I'd thought about it off and on all night, just like I'd thought about the differing stories I'd heard from her and from Jyp, and how, I realized fifteen minutes before my alarm, neither of them had to be true.

"Please," she says.

"I'm not a scientist," I say, which should warn her right off, but of course it doesn't. Her gaze doesn't change. Nothing about her posture changes. "I've been thinking about this. If this stealth tech is as powerful as you claim, then we might be making things even worse. What if the explosion triggers the tech? What if we blow a hole between dimensions? Or maybe destroy something else, something we can't see?"

Her cheeks flush slightly.

"Or maybe the explosion'll double-back on us. I recall something about Dignity Vessels being unfightable, that anything that hit them rebounded to the other ship. What if that's part of the stealth tech?"

"It was a feature of the shields," she says with a bit of sarcasm. "They were unknown in that era."

"Still," I say. "You understand stealth tech more than I do, but you don't really *understand* it or you'd be able to replicate it, right?"

"I think there's a flaw in that argument."

"But you don't really grasp it, right? So you don't know if blowing up the wreck will create a situation here, something worse than anything we've seen."

"I'm willing to risk it." Her voice is flat. So are her eyes. It's as if she's a person I don't know, a person I've never met before. And something in those eyes, something cold and terrified, tells me that if I met her this morning, I wouldn't want to know her.



"I like risks," I say. "I just don't like that one. It seems to me that the odds are against us."

"You and me, maybe," she says. "But there's a lot more to us™ than just this little band of people. You let that wreck remain and you bring something dangerous back into our lives, our culture."

"I could leave it for someone else," I say. "But I really don't want to."

"You think I'm making this up. You think I'm worrying over nothing." She sounds bitter.

"No," I say. "But you already told me that the military is trying to recreate this thing, over and over again. You tell me that people die doing it. My research tells me these ships worked for hundreds of years, and I think maybe your methodology was flawed. Maybe getting the real stealth tech into the hands of people who can do something with it will *save* lives."

She stares at me, and I recognize the expression. It must have been the one I'd had when I looked at her just a few moments ago.

I'd always known that greed and morals and beliefs destroyed friendships. I also knew they influenced more dives than I cared to think about.

But I'd always tried to keep them out of my ship and out of my dives. That's why I pick my crews so carefully; why I call the ship *Nobody's Business*.

Somehow, I never expected Squishy to start the conflict.

Somehow, I never expected the conflict to be with me.

"No matter what I say, you're going to dive that wreck, aren't you?" she asks.

I nod.

Her sigh is as audible as mine was, and just as staged. She wants me to understand that her disapproval is deep, that she will hold me accountable if all the terrible things she imagines somehow come to pass.

We stare at each other in silence. It feels like we're having some kind of argument, an argument without words. I'm loath to break eye contact.

Finally, she's the one who looks away.

"You want me to stay," she says. "Fine. I'll stay. But I have some conditions of my own."

I expected that. In fact, I'd expected that earlier, when she'd first come to my quarters, not this prolonged discussion about destroying the wreck.

"Name them."

"I'm done diving," she says. "I'm not going near that thing, not even to save lives."

"All right."

"But I'll man the skip, if you let me bring some of my medical supplies."

So far, I see no problems. "All right."

"And if something goes wrong—and it will—I reserve the right to give my notes, both audio and digital, to any necessary authorities. I reserve the right to tell them what we found and how I warned you. I

reserve the right to tell them that you're the one responsible for everything that happens."

"I *am* the one responsible," I say. "But the entire group has signed off on the hazards of wreck diving. Death is one of the risks."

A lopsided smile fills her face, but doesn't reach her eyes. The smile itself seems like sarcasm.

"Yeah," she says as if she's never heard me make that speech before. "I suppose it is."

\* \* \* \*

I tell the others that Squishy has some concerns about the stealth tech and wants to operate as our medic instead of as a main diver. No one questions that. Such things happen on long dives—someone gets squeamish about the wreck; or terrified of the dark; or nearly dies and decides to give up wreck-diving then and there.

We're a superstitious bunch when it gets down to it. We put on our gear in the same order each and every time; we all have one piece of equipment we shouldn't but we feel we need just to survive; and we like to think there's something watching over us, even if it's just a pile of luck and an ancient diving belt.

The upside of Squishy's decision is that I get to dive the wreck. I have a good pilot, although not a great one, manning the skip, and I know that she'll make sensible decisions. She'll never impulsively come in to save a team member. She's said so, and I know she means it.

The downside is that she's a better diver than I am. She'd find things I never would; she'd see things I'll never see; she'd avoid things I don't even know are dangerous.

Which is why, on my first dive to that wreck, I set myself up with Turtle, the most experienced member of the dive team after Squishy.

The skip ride over is tense: those two have gone beyond not talking into painful and outspoken silence. I spend most of my time going over and over my equipment looking for flaws. Much as I want to dive this wreck—and I have since the first moment I saw her—I'm scared of the deep and the dark and the unknown. Those first few instants of weightlessness always catch me by surprise, always remind me that what I do is somehow unnatural.

Still, we get to our normal spot, I suit up, and somehow I make it through those first few minutes, zip along the tether with Turtle just a few meters ahead of me, and make my way to the hatch.

Turtle's gonna take care of the recording and the tracking for this trip. She knows the wreck is new to me. She's been inside once now, and so has Karl. Junior and Jyp had the dive before this one.

I've assigned three corridors: one to Karl, one to J&J, and one to Turtle. Once we discover what's at the end of those babies, we'll take a few more. I'm floating; I'll take the corridor of the person I dive with.

Descending into the hatch is trickier than it looks on the recordings. The edges are sharper; I have to be careful about where I put my hands.

Gravity isn't there to pull at me. I can hear my own breathing, harsh and insistent, and I wonder if I shouldn't have taken Squishy's advice: a ten/ten/ten split on my first dive instead of a twenty/twenty/twenty. It takes less time to reach the wreck now; we get inside in nine minutes flat. I would've had time to do a bit of acclimatizing and to have a productive dive the next time.

But I hadn't been thinking that clearly, obviously. I'd been more interested in our corridor, hoping it led to the control room, whatever that was.

Squishy had been thinking, though. Before I left, she tanked me up with one more emergency bottle. She remembered how on my first dives after a long lay-off, I used too much oxygen.

She remembered that I sometimes panic.

I'm not panicked now, just excited. I have all my exterior suit lights on, trying to catch the various nooks and crannies of the hatch tube that leads into the ship.

Turtle's not far behind. Because I'm lit up like a tourist station, she's not using her boot lights. She's letting me set the pace, and I'm probably setting it a little too fast.

We reach the corridors in at 11:59. Turtle shows me our corridor at 12:03. We take off down the notched hallway at 12:06, and I'm giddy as a child on her first space walk.

Giddy we have to watch. Giddy can be the first sign of oxygen deprivation, followed by a healthy disregard for safety.

But I don't mention this giddy. I've had it since Squishy bowed off the teams, and the giddy's grown worse as my dive day got closer. I'm a little concernedâ€”extreme emotion adds to the heavy breathingâ€”but I'm going to trust my suit. I'm hoping it'll tell me if the oxygen's too low, the pressure's off, or the environmental controls are about to fail.

The corridor is human-sized and built for full gravity. Apparently no one thought of adding rungs along the side or the ceiling in case the environmental controls fail.

To me, that shows an astonishing trust in technology, one I've always read about but have never seen. No ship designed in the last three hundred years lacks clingholds. No ship lacks emergency oxygen supplies spaced every ten meters or so. No ship lacks communications equipment near each door.

The past feels even farther away than I thought it would. I thought once I stepped inside the wreckâ€”even though I couldn't smell the environment or hear what's going on around meâ€”I'd get a sense of what it would be like to spend part of my career in this place.

But I have no sense. I'm in a dark, dreary hallway that lacks the emergency supplies I'm used to. Turtle's moving slower than my giddy self wants, although my cautious, experienced boss self knows that slow is best.

She's finding handholds, and signaling me for them, like we're climbing the outside of an alien vessel. We're working on an ancient systemâ€”the lead person touches a place, deems it safe, uses it to push off, and the rest of the team follows.

There aren't as many doors as I would have expected. A corridor, it seems to me, needs doors funneling off it, with the occasional side corridor bisecting it.

But there are no bisections, and every time I think we're in a tunnel not a corridor, a door does appear. The doors are regulation height, even now, but recessed farther than I'm used to.

Turtle tries each door. They're all jammed or locked. At the moment, we're just trying to map the wreck. We'll pry open the difficult places once the map is finished.

But I'd love to go inside one of those closed off spaces, probably as much as she would.

Finally, she makes a small scratch on the side of the wall, and nods at me.

The giddy fades. We're done. We go back nowâ€”my ruleâ€”and if you get back early so be it. I check my readout: 29:01. We have ten minutes to make it back to the hatch.

I almost argue for a few more minutes, even though I know better. Sure, it didn't take us as long to get here as it had in the past, but that doesn't mean the return trip is going to be easy. I've lost four divers over the years because they made the mistake I wanted to make now.

I let Turtle pass me. She goes back, using the same push-off points as before. As she does that, I realize she's marked them somehow, probably with something her suit can pick up. My equipment's not that sophisticated, but I'm glad hers is. We need that kind of expertise inside this wreck. It might take us weeks just to map the space, and we can expect each other to remember each and every safe touch spot because of it.

When we get back to the skip and I drop my helmet, Squishy glares at me.

"You had the gids,â€” she says.

"Normal excitement,â€” I say.

She shakes her head. â€œI see this coming back the next time, and you're grounded."

I nod, but know she can't ground me without my permission. It's my ship, my wreck, my job. I'll do what I want.

I take off the suit, indulge in some relaxation while Squishy pilots. We didn't get much, Turtle and I, just a few more meters of corridor mapped, but it feels like we'd discovered a whole new world.

Maybe that is the gids, I don't know. But I don't think so. I think it's just the reaction of an addict who returns to her addictionâ€”an elation so great that she needs to do something with it besides acknowledge it.

And this wreck. This wreck has so many possibilities.

Only I can't discuss them on the skip, not with Squishy at the helm and Turtle across from me. Squishy hates this project, and Turtle's starting to. Her enthusiasm is waning, and I don't know if it's because of her personal war with Squishy or because Squishy has convinced her the wreck is even more dangerous than usual.

I stare out a portal, watching the wreck grow tinier and tinier in the distance. It's ironic. Even though I'm surrounded by tension, I finally feel content.

\* \* \* \*

Half a dozen more dives, maybe sixty more meters, mostly corridor. One potential storage compartment, which we'd initially hoped was a stateroom or quarters, and a mechanic's corridor, filled with equipment we haven't even begun to catalogue.

I spend my off-hours analyzing the materials. So far, nothing conclusive. Lots of evidence of cobbling, but that's pretty common for any shipâ€”with FTL or notâ€”that's made it on a long journey.

What there's no evidence of are bodies. We haven't found a one, and that's even more unusual. Sometimes there're skeletons floatingâ€”or pieces of them at leastâ€”and sometimes we get the full-blown corpse, suited and intact. A handful aren't suited. Those are the worst. They always make me grateful we can't smell the ship around us.

The lack of bodies is beginning to creep out Karl. He's even talked to me in private about skipping the next few dives.

I'm not sure what's best. If he skips them, the attitudes might become engrained, and he might not dive again. If he goes, the fears might grow worse and paralyze him in the worst possible place.

I move him to the end of the rotation, and warn Squishy she might have to suit up after all.

She just looks at me and grins. "Too many of the team quit on you, you'll just have to go home."

"I'll dive it myself, and you all can wait," I say, but it's bravado and we both know it.

That wreck isn't going to defeat me, not with the perfect treasure hidden in its bulk.

That's what's fueling my greed. The perfect treasure: *my* perfect treasure. Something that answers previously unasked historical questions; previously unknown historical questions; something that will reveal facts about our history, our humanity, that no one has suspected before; and something that, even though it does all that, is worth a small "physical" fortune.

I love the history part. I get paid a lot of money to ferry people to other wrecks, teach them to dive old historical sites. Then I save up my funds and do this: find new sites that no one else knows about, and mine them for history.

I never expected to mine them for real gold as well.

I shake every time I think about it, and before each dive, I do feel the gids. Only now I report them to Squishy. I tell her that I'm a tad too excited, and she offers me a tranq that I always refuse. Never go into the unknown with senses dulled, that's my motto, even though I know countless people who do it.

We're on a long diving mission, longer than some of these folks have ever been on, and we're not even halfway through. We'll have gids and jitters and too many superstitions. We'll have fears and near-emergencies, and God forbid, real emergencies as well.

We'll get through it, and we'll have our prize, and no one, not any one person, will be able to take that away from us.

\* \* \* \*

It turned this afternoon.

I'm captaining the skip. Squishy's back at the *Business*, taking a boss-ordered rest. I'm tired of her complaints and her constant negative attitude. At first, I thought she'd turn Turtle, but Turtle finally got pissed, and decided she'd enjoy this run.

I caught Squishy ragging on J&J, my strong links, asking them if they really want to be mining a death ship. They didn't listen to her, not really "although JypÃ© argued with her just a little" but that kind of talk can depress an entire mission, sabotage it in subtle little ways, ways that I don't even want to contemplate.

So I'm manning the skip alone, while J&J are running their dive, and I'm listening to the commentary, not looking at the grainy nearly worthless images from the handheld. Mostly I'm thinking about Squishy and how to send her back without sending information too and I can't come to any conclusions at all when I hear:

"...yeah, it opens." Junior.

"Wow." JypÃ© says.

"Jackpot, eh?" Junior again.

And then a long silence. Much too long for my tastes, not because I'm afraid for J&J, but because a long silence doesn't tell me one goddamn thing.

I punch up the digital readout, see we're at 25:33 plenty of time. They got to the new section faster than they ever have before.

The silence runs from 25:33 to 28:46, and I'm about to chew my fist off, wondering what they're doing. The handheld shows me grainy walls and more grainy walls. Or maybe it's just grainy nothing. I can't tell.

For the first time in weeks, I want someone else in the skip with me just so that I can talk to somebody.

"Almost time," JypÃ© says.

"Dad, you gotta see this." Junior has a touch of breathlessness in his voice. Excitement "at least that's what I'm hoping.

And then there's more silence ... thirty-five seconds of it, followed by a loud and emphatic "Fuck!"

I can't tell if that's an angry fuck, a scared fuck, or an awed fuck. I can't tell much about it at all.

Now I'm literally chewing on my thumbnail, something I haven't done in years, and I'm watching the digital, which has crept past thirty-one minutes.

"Move your arm," JypÃ© says, and I know then that wasn't a good fuck at all.

Something happened.

Something bad.

"Just a little to the left," JypÃ© says again, his voice oddly calm. I'm wondering why Junior isn't answering him, hoping that the only reason is he's in a section where the communications relay isn't reaching the skip.

Because I can think of a thousand other reasons, none of them good, that Junior's communication equipment isn't working.

"We're five minutes past departure," JypÃ© says, and in that, I'm hearing the beginning of panic.

More silence.

I'm actually holding my breath. I look out a portal, see nothing except the wreck, looking like it always does. The handheld has been showing the same grainy image for a while now.

37:24

If they're not careful, they'll run out of air. Or worse.

I try to remember how much extra they took. I didn't really watch them suit up this time. I've seen their ritual so many times that I'm not sure what I think I saw is what I actually saw. I'm not sure what they have with them, and what they don't.

"Great," JypÃ© says, and I finally recognize his tone. It's controlled parental panic. Sound calm so that the kid doesn't know the situation is bad. "Keep going."

I'm holding my breath, even though I don't have to. I'm holding my breath and looking back and forth between the portal and the handheld image. All I see is the damn wreck and that same grainy image.

"We got it," JypÃ© says. "Now careful. Careful" son of a bitch! Move, move, move" ah, hell."

I stare at the wreck, even though I can't see inside it. My own breath sounds as ragged as it did inside the wreck. I glance at the digital:

44:11

They'll never get out in time. They'll never make it, and I can't go in for them. I'm not even sure where they are.

"C'mon," JypÃ© is whispering now. "C'mon son, just one more, c'mon, help me, c'mon."

The "help me" wasn't a request to a hearing person. It was a comment. And I suddenly know.

Junior's trapped. He's unconscious. His suit might even be ripped. It's over for Junior.

JypÃ© has to know it on some deep level.

Only he also has to know it on the surface, in order to get out.

I reach for my own communicator before I realize there's no talking to them inside the wreck. We'd already established that the skip doesn't have the power to send, for reasons I don't entirely understand. We've tried boosting power through the skip's diagnostic, and even with the *Business's* diagnostic, and we don't get anything.

I judged we didn't need it, because what can someone inside the skip do besides encourage?

"C'mon, son," JypÃ© grunts. I don't like that sound.

The silence that follows lasts thirty seconds, but it seems like forever. I move away from the portal, stare at the digital, and watch the numbers change. They seem to change in slow-motion:

45:24 to

...25 to

...2 ... 6...

to

...2 ... 7...

until I can't even see them change any more.

Another grunt, and then a sob, half-muffled, and another, followed by

"Is there any way to send for help? Boss?"

I snap to when I hear my name. It's JypÃ© and I can't answer him.

I can't answer him, dammit.

I can call for help, and I do. Squishy tells me that the best thing I can do is get the survivorâ€”her word, not mine, even though I know it's obvious tooâ€”back to the *Business* as quickly as possible.

"No sense passing midway, is there?" she asks, and I suppose she's right.

But I'm cursing herâ€”after I get off the lineâ€”for not being here, for failing us, even though there's not much she can do, even if she's here, in the skip. We don't have a lot of equipment, medical equipment, back at the *Business*, and we have even less here, not that it mattered, because most of the things that happen are survivable if you make it back to the skip.

Still, I suit up. I promise myself I'm not going to the wreck, I'm not going to help with Junior, but I can get JypÃ© along the guideline if he needs me too.

"Boss. Call for help. We need Squishy and some divers and oh, shit, I don't know."

His voice sounds too breathy. I glance at the digital.

56:24

Where has the time gone? I thought he was moving quicker than that. I thought I was too.

But it takes me a while to suit up, and I talked to Squishy, and everything is fucked up.

What'll they say when we get back? The mission's already filled with superstitions and fears of weird technology that none of us really understand.

And only me and JypÃ© are obsessed with this thing.

Me and JypÃ©.

Probably just me now.

"I left him some oxygen. I dunno if it's enough..."

So breathy. Has JypÃ© left all his extra? What's happening to Junior? If he's unconscious, he won't use as much, and if his suit is fucked, then he won't need any.

"Coming through the hatch..."

I see JypÃ©, a tiny shape on top of the wreck. And he's moving slowly, much too slowly for a man trying to save his own life.

My rules are clear: let him make his own way back.

But I've never been able to watch someone else die.

I send to the *Business*: â€œJypÃ©'s out. I'm heading down the line."

I don't use the word help on purpose, but anyone listening knows what I'm doing. They'll probably never listen to me again, but what the hell.

I don't want to lose two on my watch.

\* \* \* \*



When I reach him six minutes later, he's pulling himself along the guideline, hand over hand, so slowly that he barely seems human. A red light flashes at the base of his helmet—the out of oxygen light, dammit. He did use all of his extra for his son.

I grab one small container, hook it to the side of his suit, press the button only halfway, knowing too much is as bad as too little.

His look isn't grateful: it's startled. He's so far gone, he hasn't even realized that I'm here.

I brought a grapppler as well, a technology I always said was more dangerous than helpful, and here's the first test of my theory. I wrap Jyp against me, tell him to relax, I got him, and we'll be just fine.

He doesn't. Even though I pry him from the line, his hands still move, one over the other, trying to pull himself forward.

Instead, I yank us toward the skip, moving as fast as I've ever moved. I'm burning oxygen at three times my usual rate according to my suit and I don't really care. I want him inside, I want him safe, I want him *alive*, goddammit.

I pull open the door to the skip. I unhook him in the airlock, and he falls to the floor like an empty suit. I make sure the back door is sealed, open the main door, and drag Jyp inside.

His skin is a grayish blue. Capillaries have burst in his eyes. I wonder what else has burst, what else has gone wrong.

There's blood around his mouth.

I yank off the helmet, his suit protesting my every move.

"I gotta tell you," he says. "I gotta tell you."

I nod. I'm doing triage, just like I've been taught, just like I've done half a dozen times before.

"Set up something," he says. "Record."

So I do, mostly to shut him up. I don't want him wasting more energy. I'm wasting enough for both of us, trying to save him, and cursing Squishy for not getting here, cursing everyone for leaving me on the skip, alone, with a man who can't live, and somehow has to.

"He's in the cockpit," Jyp says.

I nod. He's talking about Junior, but I really don't want to hear it. Junior is the least of my worries.

"Wedged under some cabinet. Looks like a battlefield in there."

That catches me. Battlefield how? Because there are bodies? Or because it's a mess?

I don't ask. I want him to wait, to save his strength, to *survive*.

"You gotta get him out. He's only got an hour's worth, maybe less. Get him out."

Wedged beneath something, stuck against a wall, trapped in the belly of the wreck. Yeah, like I'll get him out. Like it's worth it.

All those sharp edges.

If his suit's not punctured now, it would be by the time I'm done getting the stuff off him. Things have to be piled pretty high to get them stuck in zero-G.

I'll wager the *Business* that Junior's not stuck, not in the literal, gravitational sense. His suit's hung up on an edge. He's losingâ€”he's lostâ€”environment and oxygen, and he's probably been dead longer than his father's been on the skip.

"Get him out." Jyp's voice is so hoarse it sounds like a whisper.

I look at his face. More blood.

"I'll get him," I say.

Jyp smiles. Or tries to. And then he closes his eyes, and I fight the urge to slam my fist against his chest. He's dead and I know it, but some small part of me won't believe it until Squishy declares him.

"I'll get him," I say again, and this time, it's not a lie.

\* \* \* \*

Squishy declared him the moment she arrived on the skip. Not that it was hard. He'd already sunken in on himself, and the bloodâ€”it wasn't something I wanted to think about.

She flew us back. Turtle was in the other skip, and she never came in, just flew back on her own.

I stayed on the floor, expecting Jyp to rise up and curse me for not going back to the wreck, for not trying, even though we all knewâ€”even though he probably had knownâ€”that Junior was dead.

When we got back to the *Business*, Squishy took his body to her little medical suite. She's going to make sure he died from suit failure or lack of oxygen or something that keeps the regulators away from us.

Who knows what the hell he actually died of. Panic? Fear? Stupidity?â€”or maybe that's what I'm doomed for. Hell, I let a man dive with his son, even though I'd ordered all of my teams to abandon a downed man.

Who can abandon his own kid anyway?

And who listens to me?

Not even me.

My quarters seem too small, the *Business* seems too big, and I don't want to go anywhere because everyone'll look at me, with an I-told-you-so followed by a let's-hang-it-up.

And I don't really blame them. Death's the hardest part. It's what we flirt with in deep-dives.

We claim that flirting is partly love.

I close my eyes and lean back on my bunk but all I see are digital readouts. Seconds moving so slowly they seem like days. The spaces between time. If only we can capture thatâ€”the space between moments.

If only.

I shake my head, wondering how I can pretend I have no regrets.

\* \* \* \*

When I come out of my quarters, Turtle and Karl are already watching the vids from JypÃ©'s suit. They're sitting in the lounge, their faces serious.

As I step inside, Turtle says, "They found the heart."

It takes me a minute to understand her, then I remember what JypÃ© said. They were in the cockpit, the heart, the place we might find the stealth tech.

He was stuck there. Like the probe?

I shudder in spite of myself.

"Is the event on the vid?" I ask.

"Haven't got that far." Turtle shuts off the screens. "Squishy's gone."

"Gone?" I shake my head just a little. Words aren't processing well. I'm having a reaction. I recognize it: I've had it before when I've lost crew.

"She took the second skip, and left. We didn't even notice until I went to find her." Turtle sighs. "She's gone."

"JypÃ© too?" I ask.

She nods.

I close my eyes. The mission ends, then. Squishy'll go to the authorities and report us. She's gonna tell them about the wreck and the accident and Junior's death. She's gonna show them JypÃ©, whom I haven't reported yet because I didn't want anyone to find our position, and the authorities'll come here whatever authorities have jurisdiction over this area and confiscate the wreck.

At best, we'll get a slap, and I'll have a citation on my record.

At worst, I'll maybe we'll face charges for some form of reckless homicide.

"We can leave," Karl says.

I nod. "She'll report the *Business*. They'll know who to look for."

"If you sell the ship?"

"And what?" I ask. "Not buy another? That'll keep us ahead of them for a while, but not long enough. And when we get caught, we get nailed for the full count, whatever it is, because we acted guilty and ran."

"So, maybe she won't say anything," Karl says, but he doesn't sound hopeful.

"If she was gonna do that, she woulda left JypÃ©," I say.

Turtle closes her eyes, rests her head on the seat back. "I don't know her any more."

"I think maybe we never did," I say.

"I didn't think she got scared," Turtle says. "I yelled at her." "I told her to get over it, that diving's the thing. And she said it's not the thing. Surviving's the thing. She never used to be like that."

I think of the woman sitting on her bunk, staring at her opaque wallâ€”a wall you think you can see through, but you really can'tâ€”and wonder. Maybe she always used to be like that. Maybe surviving was always her thing. Maybe diving was how she proved she was alive, until the past caught up with her all over again.

The stealth tech.

She thinks it killed Junior.

I nod toward the screen. â€œLet's see it,â€• I say to Karl.

He gives me a tight glance, almostâ€”but not quiteâ€”expressionless. He's trying to rein himself in, but his fears are getting the best of him.

I'm amazed mine haven't got the best of me.

He starts it up. The voices of men so recently dead, just passing informationâ€”"Push off here.â€•  
â€œWatch the edge there.â€”make Turtle open her eyes.

I lean against the wall, arms crossed. The conversation is familiar to me. I heard it just a few hours ago, and I'd been too preoccupied to give it much attention, thinking of my own problems, thinking of the future of this mission, which I thought was going to go on for months.

Amazing how much your perspective changes in the space of a few minutes.

The corridors look the same. It takes a lot so that I don't zoneâ€”I've been in that wreck, I've watched similar vids, and in those I haven't learned much. But I resist the urge to tell Karl to speed it upâ€”there can be something, some wrong movement, or piece of the wreck that gloms onto one of my guysâ€”my former guysâ€”before they even get to the heart.

But I don't see anything like that, and since Turtle and Karl are quiet, I assume they don't see anything like that either.

Then J&J find the holy grail. They say something, real casualâ€”which I'd missed the first timeâ€”a simple  
â€œshit, manâ€• in a tone of such awe that if I'd been paying attention, I would've known.

I bite back the emotion. If I took responsibility for each lost life, I'd never dive again. Of course, I might not after this anywayâ€”one of the many options the authorities have is to take my pilot's license away.

The vids don't show the cockpit ahead. They show the same old grainy walls, the same old dark and shadowed corridor. It's not until JypÃ© turns his suit vid toward the front that the pit's even visible, and then it's a black mass filled with lighter squares, covering the screen.

"What the hell's that?â€• Karl asks. I'm not even sure he knows he's spoken.

Turtle leans forward and shakes her head. â€œNever seen anything like it."

Me either. As JypÃ© gets closer, the images become clearer. It looks like every piece of furniture in the place has become dislodged, and has shifted to one part of the cockpit.

Were the designers so confident of their artificial gravity that they didn't bolt down the permanent pieces? Could any ship's designers be that stupid?

JypÃ©'s vid doesn't show me the floor, so I can't see if these pieces have been ripped free. If they have, then that place is a minefield for a diver, more sharp edges than smooth ones.

My arms tighten in their cross, my fingers forming fists. I feel a tension I don't wantâ€”as if I can save both men by speaking out now.

"You got this before Squishy took off, right?" I ask Turtle.

She understands what I'm asking. She gives me a disapproving sideways look. "I took the vids before she even had the suit off."

Technically, that's what I want to hear, and yet it's not what I want to hear. I want something to be tampered with, something to be slightly off, because then, maybe then, JypÃ© would still be alive.

"Look," Karl says, nodding toward the screen.

I have to force myself to see it. The eyes don't want to focus. I know what happens nextâ€”or at least, how it ends up. I don't need the visual confirmation.

Yet I do. The vid can save us, if the authorities come back. Turtle, Karl, even Squishy can testify to my rules. And my rules state that an obviously dangerous site should be avoided. Probes get to map places like this first.

Only I know J&J didn't send in a probe. They might not have because we lost the other so easily, but most likely, it was that greed, the same one which has been affecting me. The tantalizing idea that somehow, this wreck, with its ancient secrets, is the dive of a lifetimeâ€”the discovery of a lifetime.

And the hell of it is, beneath the fear and the panic and the angerâ€”more at myself than at Squishy for breaking our pactâ€”that greed remains.

I'm thinking, if we can just get the stealth tech before the authorities arrive, it'll all be worth it. We'll have a chip, something to bargain with.

Something to sell to save our own skins.

Junior goes in. His father doesn't tell him not to. Junior's blurry on the vidâ€”a human form in an environmental suit, darker than the pile of things in the center of the room, but grayer than the black around them.

And it's Junior who says, "It's open," and Junior who mutters "Wow" and Junior who says, "Jackpot, huh?" when I thought all of that had been a dialogue between them.

He points at a hole in the pile, then heads toward it, but his father moves forward quickly, grabbing his arm. They don't talkâ€”apparently that was the way they worked, such an understanding they didn't need to say much, which makes my heart twistâ€”and together they head around the pile.

The cockpit shifts. It has large screens that appear to be unretractable. They're off, big blank canvases against dark walls. No windows in the cockpit at all, which is another one of those technologically arrogant thingsâ€”what happens if the screen technology fails?

The pile is truly in the middle of the room, a big lump of things. Why JypÃ© called it a battlefield, I don't know. Because of the pile? Because everything is ripped up and moved around?

My arms get even tighter, my fists clenched so hard my knuckles hurt.

On the vid, Junior breaks away from his father, and moves toward the front (if you can call it that) of the pile. He's looking at what the pile's attached to.

He mimes removing pieces, and the cameras shake. Apparently JypÃ© is shaking his head.

Yet Junior reaches in there anyway. He examines each piece before he touches it, then pushes at it, which seems to move the entire pile. He moves in closer, the pile beside him, something I can't see on his other side. He's floating, head first, exactly like we're not supposed to go into one of these spacesâ€”he'd have trouble backing out if there's a problemâ€”

And of course there is.

Was.

"Ah, hell,â€” I whisper.

Karl nods. Turtle puts her head in her hands.

On screen nothing moves.

Nothing at all.

Seconds go by, maybe a minuteâ€”I forgot to look at the digital readout from earlier, so I don't exactly knowâ€”and then, finally, JypÃ© moves forward.

He reaches Junior's side, but doesn't touch him. Instead the cameras peer in, so I'm thinking maybe JypÃ© does too.

And then the monologue begins.

I've only heard it once, but I have it memorized.

*Almost time.*

*Dad, you've gotta see this.*

JypÃ©'s suit shows us somethingâ€”a wave? A blackness? A table?â€”something barely visible just beyond Junior. Junior reaches for it, and thenâ€”

*Fuck!*

The word sounds distorted here. I don't remember it being distorted, but I do remember being unable to understand the emotion behind it. Was that from the distortion? Or my lack of attention?

JypÃ© has forgotten to use his cameras. He's moved so close to the objects in the pile that all we can see now are rounded corners and broken metal (apparently these did break off then) and sharp, sharp edges.

*Move your arm.*

But I see no corresponding movement. The visuals remain the same, just like they did when I was watching from the skip.

*Just a little to the left.*

And then:

*We're five minutes past departure.*

That was panic. I had missed it the first time, but the panic began right there. Right at that moment.

Karl covers his mouth.

On screen, JypÃ© turns slightly. His hands grasp boots and I'm assuming he's tugging.

*Great.* But I see nothing to feel great about. Nothing has moved. *Keep going.*

Going where? Nothing is changing. JypÃ© can see that, can't he?

The hands seem to tighten their grip on the boots, or maybe I'm imagining that because that's what my hands would do.

*We got it.*

Is that a slight movement? I step away from the wall, move closer to the vid, as if I can actually help.

*Now careful.*

This is almost worse because I know what's coming, I know Junior doesn't get out, JypÃ© doesn't survive. I knowâ€”

*Carefulâ€”son of a bitch!*

The hands slid off the boot, only to grasp back on. And there's desperation in that movement, and lack of caution, no checking for edges nearby, no standard rescue procedures.

*Move, move, moveâ€”ah, hell.*

This time, the hands stay. And tugâ€”clearly tugâ€”sliding off.

*C'mon.*

Sliding again.

*C'mon son,*

And again.

*just one more,*

And again.

*c'mon, help me, c'mon.*

Until, finally, in despair, the hands fall off. The feet are motionless, and, to my untrained eye, appear to be in the same position they were in before.

Now JypÃ©'s breathing dominates the soundâ€”which I don't remember at allâ€”maybe that kind of hiss doesn't make it through our patchwork systemâ€”and then the vid whirls. He's reaching, grabbing, trying to pull things off the pile, and there's no pulling, everything goes back like it's magnetized.

He staggers backwardâ€”all except his hand, which seems attachedâ€”sharp edges? No, his suit wasn't compromisedâ€”and then, at the last moment, eases away.

Away, backing away, the visuals are still of those boots sticking out of that pile, and I squint, and I

wonderâ€™am I seeing other boots? Ones that are less familiar?â€™ and finally he's bumping against walls, losing track of himself.

He turns, moves away, coming for help even though he has to know I won't help (although I did) and panickedâ€™so clearly panicked. He gets to the end of the corridor, and I wave my hand.

"Turn it off.â€™ I know how this plays out. I don't need any more.

None of us do. Besides, I'm the only one watching. Turtle still has her face in her hands, and Karl's eyes are squinched shut, as if he can keep out the horrible experience just by blocking the images.

I grab the controls and shut the damn thing off myself.

Then I slide onto the floor and bow my head. Squishy was right, dammit. She was so right. This ship has stealth tech. It's the only thing still working, that one faint energy signature that attracted me in the first place, and it has killed Junior.

And JypÃ©.

And if I'd gone in, it would've killed me.

No wonder she left. No wonder she ran. This is some kind of flashback for her, something she feels we can never ever win.

And I'm beginning to think she's right, when a thought flits across my brain.

I frown, flick the screen back on, and search for JypÃ©'s map. He had the system on automatic, so the map goes clear to the cockpit.

I superimpose that map on the exterior, accounting for movement, accounting for changeâ€™

And there it is, clear as anything.

The probe, our stuck probe, is pressing against whatever's near Junior's faceplate.

I'm worried about what'll happen if the stealth tech is open to space, and it always has beenâ€™at least since I stumbled on the wreck.

Open to space and open for the taking.

Karl's watching me. â€™What're you gonna do?"

Only that doesn't sound like his voice. It's the greed. It's the greed talking, that emotion I so blithely assumed I didn't have.

Everyone can be snared, just in different ways.

"I don't know what to do,â€™ I say. â€™I have no idea at all."

\* \* \* \*

I go back to my room, sit on the bed, stare at the portal which, mercifully, doesn't show the distant wreck.

I'm out of ideas, out of energy, and out of time.

Squishy and the cavalry'll be here soon, to take the wreck from me, confiscate it, and send it into



governmental oblivion.

And then my career is over. No more dives, no more space travel.

No more nothing.

I think I doze once because suddenly I'm staring at Junior's face inside his helmet. His eyes move, ever so slowly, and I realizeâ€”in the space of a heartbeatâ€”that he's alive in there: his body's in our dimension, his head on the way to another.

And I know, as plainly as I know that he's alive, that he'll suffer a long and hideous death if I don't help him, so I grab one of the sharp edgesâ€”with my bare hands (such an obvious dream)â€”and slice the side of his suit.

Saving him.

Damning him.

Condemning him to an even uglier slow death than the one he would otherwise experience.

I jerk awake, nearly hitting my head on the wall. My breath is coming in short gasps. What if the dream is true? What if he is still alive? No one understands interdimensional travel, so he could be, but even if he is, I can do nothing.

Absolutely nothing, without condemning myself.

If I go in and try to free him, I will get caught as surely as he is. So will anyone else.

I close my eyes, but don't lean back to my pillow. I don't want to fall asleep again. I don't want to dream again, not with these thoughts on my mind. The nightmares I'd have, all because stealth tech exists, are terrifying, worse than any I'd had as a childâ€”

And then my breath catches. I open my eyes, rub the sleep from them, think:

This is a Dignity Vessel. Dignity Vessels have stealth tech, unless they've been stripped of them. Squishy described stealth tech to meâ€”and this vessel, this *wreck* has an original version.

Stealth tech has value.

*Real* value, unlike any wreck I've found before.

I can stake a claim. The time to worry about pirates and privacy is long gone, now.

I get out of bed, pace around the small room. Staking a claim is so foreign to wreck-divers. We keep our favorite wrecks hidden, our best dives secret from pirates and wreck divers and the government.

But I'm not going to dive this wreck. I'm not going in againâ€”none of my people areâ€”and so it doesn't matter that the entire universe knows what I have here.

Except that other divers will come, gold-diggers will try to rob me of my claimâ€”and I can collect fees from anyone willing to mine this, anyone willing to risk losing their life in a long and hideous way.

Or I can salvage the wreck and sell it. The government buys salvage.

If I file a claim, I'm not vulnerable to citations, not even to reckless homicide charges, because everyone

knows that mining exacts a price. It doesn't matter what kind of claim you mine, you could still lose some, or all, of your crew.

But best of all, if I stake a claim on that wreck, I can quarantine it—and prosecute anyone who violates the quarantine. I can stop people from getting near the stealth tech if I so choose.

Or I can demand that whoever tries to retrieve it, retrieve Junior's body.

His face rises, unbidden, not the boy I'd known, but the boy I'd dreamed of, half-alive, waiting to die.

I know there are horrible deaths in space. I know that wreck-divers suffer some of the worst.

I carry these images with me, and now, it seems, I'll carry Junior's.

Is that why Jyp made me promise to go in? Had he had the same vision of his son?

I sit down at the network, and call up the claim form. It's so simple. The key is giving up accurate coordinates. The system'll do a quick double-check to see if anyone else has filed a claim, and if so, an automatic arbitrator will ask if I care to withdraw. If I do not, then the entire thing will go to the nearest court.

My hands itch. This is so contrary to my training.

I start to file—and then stop.

I close my eyes—and he's there again, barely moving, but alive.

If I do this, Junior will haunt me until the end of my life. If I do this, I'll always wonder.

Wreck-divers take silly, unnecessary risks, by definition.

The only thing that's stopping me from taking this one is Squishy and her urge for caution.

Wreck-divers flirt with death.

I stand. It's time for a rendezvous.

\* \* \* \*

Turtle won't go in. She's stressed, terrified, and blinded by Squishy's betrayal. She'd be useless on a dive anyway, not clear-headed enough, and probably too reckless.

Karl has no qualms. His fears have left. When I propose a dive to see what happened in there, he actually grins at me.

"Thought you weren't gonna come around," he says.

But I have.

Turtle mans the skip. Karl and I have gone in. We've decided on 30/40/30, because we're going to investigate that cockpit. Karl theorizes that there's some kind of off switch for the stealth tech, and of course he's right. But the wreck has no real power, and since the designers had too much faith in their technology to build redundant safety systems, I'm assuming they had too much faith to design an off switch for their most dangerous technology, a dead-man's switch that'll allow the stealth tech to go off even if the wreck has no power.

I mention that to Karl and he gives me a startled look.

"You ever wonder what's keeping the stealth tech on then?" he asks.

I've wondered, but I have no answer. Maybe when Squishy comes back with the government ships, maybe then I'll ask her. What my non-scientific mind is wondering is this: Can the stealth tech operate from both dimensions? Is something on the other side powering it?

Is part of the wreck "that hole we found in the hull on the first day, maybe" still in that other dimension?

Karl and I suit up, take extra oxygen, and double-check our suits'™ environmental controls. I'm not giddy this trip "I'm not sure I'll be giddy again" but I'm not scared, either.

Just coldly determined.

I promised Jyp's © I was going back for Junior, and now I am.

No matter what the risk.

The trip across is simple, quick, and familiar. Going down the entrance no longer seems like an adventure. We hit the corridors with fifteen minutes to spare.

Jyp's ©'s map is accurate to the millimeter. His push-off points are marked on the map and with some corresponding glove grip. We make record time as we head toward that cockpit.

Record time, though, is still slow. I find myself wishing for all my senses: sound, smell, taste. I want to know if the effects of the stealth tech have made it out here, if something is off in the air "a bit of a burnt smell, something foreign that raises the small hairs on the back of my neck. I want to know if Junior is already decomposing, if he's part of a group (the crew?) pushed up against the stealth tech, never to go free again.

But the wreck doesn't cough up those kind of details. This corridor looks the same as the other corridor I pulled my way through.

Karl moves as quickly as I do, although his suit lights are on so full that looking at him almost blinds me. That's what I did to Turtle on our trip, and it's a sign of nervousness.

It doesn't surprise me that Karl, who claimed not to be afraid, is nervous. He's the one who had doubts about this trip once he'd been inside the wreck. He's the one I thought wouldn't make it through all of his scheduled dives.

The cockpit looms in front of us, the doors stuck open. It does look like a battlefield from this vantage: the broken furniture, the destruction all cobbled together on one side of the room, like a barricade.

The odd part about it is, though, that the barricade runs from floor to ceiling, and unlike most things in zero-G, seem stuck in place.

Neither Karl nor I give the barricade much time. We've vowed to explore the rest of the cockpit first, looking for the elusive dead-man switch. We have to be careful; the sharp edges are everywhere.

Before we left, we used the visuals from Jyp's ©'s suit, and his half-finished map, to assign each other areas of the cockpit to explore. I'm going deep, mostly because this is my idea, and deep "we both feel" is the most dangerous place. It's closest to the probe, closest to that corner of the cockpit where

Junior still hangs, horizontal, his boots kicking out into the open.

I go in the center, heading toward the back, not using handholds. I've pushed off the wall, so I have some momentum, a technique that isn't really my strong suit. But I volunteered for this, knowing the edges in the front would slow me down, knowing that the walls would raise my fears to an almost incalculable height.

Instead, I float over the middle of the room, see the uprooted metal of chairs and the ripped shreds of consoles. There are actual wires protruding from the middle of that mess, wires and stripped bolts—something I haven't seen in space before, only in old colonies—and my stomach churns as I move forward.

The back wall is dark, with its distended screen. The cockpit feels like a cave instead of the hub of the Dignity Vessel. I wonder how so many people could have trusted their lives to this place.

Just before I reach the wall, I spin so that I hit it with the soles of my boots. The soles have the toughest material on my suit. The wall is mostly smooth, but there are a few edges here, too—more stripped bolts, a few twisted metal pieces that I have no idea what they once were part of.

This entire place feels useless and dead.

It takes all of my strength not to look at the barricade, not to search for the bottoms of Junior's boots, not to go there first. But I force myself to shine a spot on the wall before me, then on the floor, and the ceiling, looking for something—anything—that might control part of this vessel.

But whatever had, whatever machinery there'd been, whatever computerized equipment, is either gone or part of that barricade. My work in the back is over quickly, although I take an extra few minutes to record it all, just in case the camera sees something I don't.

It takes Karl a bit longer. He has to pick his way through a tiny debris field. He's closer to a possible site: there's still a console or two stuck to his near wall. He examines them, runs his suit-cam over them as well, but shakes his head.

Even before he tells me he's found nothing, I know.

I know.

I join him at a two-pronged handhold, where his wall and mine meet. The handhold was actually designed for this space, the first such design I've seen on the entire Dignity Vessel.

Maybe the engineers felt that only the cockpit crew had to survive uninjured should the artificial gravity go off. More likely, the lack of grab bars was simply an oversight in the other areas, or a cost-saving measure.

"You see a way into that barricade?" Karl asks.

"We're not going in," I say. "We're going to satisfy my curiosity first."

He knows about the dream; I told him when we were suiting up. I have no idea if Turtle heard—if she did, then she knows too. I don't know how she feels about the superstitious part of this mission, but I know that Karl understands.

"I think we should work off a tether," he says. "We can hook up to this handhold. That way, if one of us gets stuck—"

I shake my head. There are clearly other bodies in that barricade, and I would wager that some of them have tethers and bits of equipment attached.

If the stealth tech is as powerful as I think it is, then these people had no safeguard against it. A handhold won't defend us either, even though, I believe, the stealth tech is running at a small percentage of capacity.

"I'm going first," I say. "You wait. If I pull in, you go back. You and Turtle get out."

We've discussed this drill. They don't like it. They believe leaving me behind will give them two ghosts instead of one.

Maybe so, but at least they'll still be alive to experience those ghosts.

I push off the handhold, softer this time than I did from the corridor, and let the drift take me to the barricade. I turn the front suit-cams on high. I also use zoom on all but a few of them. I want to see as much as I can through that barricade.

My suit lights are also on full. I must look like a child's floaty toy heading in for a landing.

I stop near the spot where Junior went in. His boots are there, floating, like expected. I back as far away from him as I can, hoping to catch a reflection in his visor, but I get nothing.

I have to move to the initial spot, that hole in the barricade that Junior initially wanted to go through.

I'm more afraid of that than I am of the rest of the wreck, but I do it. I grasp a spot marked on Jyp's map, and pull myself toward that hole.

Then I train the zoom inside, but I don't need it.

I see the side of Junior's face, illuminated by my lights. The helmet is what tells me that it's him. I recognize the modern design, the little logos he glued to its side.

His helmet has bumped against the only intact console in the entire place. His face is pointed downward, the helmet on clear. And through it, I see something I don't expect: the opposite of my fears.

He isn't alive. He hasn't been alive in a long, long time.

As I said, no one understands interdimensional travel, but we suspect it manipulates time. And what I see in front of me makes me realize my hypothesis is wrong:

Time sped up for him. Sped to such a rate that he isn't even recognizable. He's been mummified for so long that the skin looks petrified, and I bet, if we were to somehow free him and take him back to the *Business*, that none of our normal medical tools could cut through the surface of his face.

There are no currents and eddies here, nothing to pull me forward. Still, I scurry back to what I consider a safe spot, not wanting to experience the same fate as the youngest member of our team.

"What is it?" Karl asks me.

"He's gone," I say. "No sense cutting him loose."

Even though cutting isn't the right term. We'd have to free him from that stealth tech, and I'm not getting near it. No matter how rich it could make me, no matter how many questions it answers, I no longer want anything to do with it.

I'm doneâ€”with this dive, this wreckâ€”and with my brief encounter with greed.

\* \* \* \*

We do have answers, though, and visuals to present to the government ships when they arrive. There are ten of themâ€”a convoyâ€”unwilling to trust something as precious as stealth tech to a single ship.

Squishy didn't come back with them. I don't know why I thought she would. She dropped off JypÃ©, reported us and the wreck, and vanished into Longbow Station, not even willing to collect a finder's fee that the government gives whenever it locates unusual technologies.

Squishy's gone, and I doubt she'll ever come back.

Turtle's not speaking to me now, except to say that she's relieved we're not being charged with anything. Our vids showed the government we cared enough to go back for our team member, and also that we had no idea about the stealth tech until we saw it function.

We hadn't gone into the site to raid it, just to explore itâ€”as the earlier vids showed. Which confirmed my claimâ€”I'm a wreck-diver, not a pirate, not a scavengerâ€”and that allowed me to pick up the reward that Squishy abandoned.

I'd've left it too, except that I needed to fund the expedition, and I'm not going to be able to do it the way I'd initially plannedâ€”by taking tourists to the Dignity Vessel so far from home.

The wreck got moved to some storehouse or warehouse or waystation where the government claims it's safe. Turtle thinks we should've blown it up; Karl's just glad it's out of our way.

Me, I just wish I had more answers to all the puzzles.

That vessel'd been in service a while, that much was clear from how it had been refitted. When someone activated the stealth, something went wrong. I doubt even the government scientists will find out exactly what's in that mess.

Then there's the question of how it got to the place I found it. There's no way to tell if it traveled in stealth mode over those thousands of years, although that doesn't explain how the ship avoided gravity wells and other perils that lie in wait in a cold and difficult universe. Or maybe it had been installed with an updated FTL. Again, I doubt I will ever know.

As for the crewâ€”I have no idea, except that I suspect the cockpit crew died right off. We could see them in that pile of debris. But the restâ€”there were no bodies scattered throughout the ship, and there could've been, given that the vessel is still intact after all this time.

I'm wondering if they were running tests with minimal crew or if the real crew looked at that carnage in the cockpit and decided, like we did, that it wasn't worth the risk to go in.

I never looked for escape pods, but such things existed on Dignity Vessels. Maybe the rest of the crew bailed, got rescued, and blended into cultures somewhere far from home.

Maybe that's where JypÃ©'s legends come from.

Or so I like to believe.

Longbow Station has never seemed so much like home. It'll be nice to shed the silent Turtle, and Karl, who claims his diving days are behind him.

Mine are too, only in not quite the same way. The *Business* and I'll still ferry tourists to various wrecks, promising scary dives and providing none.

But I've had enough of undiscovered wrecks and danger for no real reason. Curiosity sent me all over this part of space, looking for hidden pockets, places where no one has been in a long time.

Now that I've found the ultimate hidden pocketâ€”and I've seen what it can doâ€”I'm not looking any more. I'm hanging up my suit and reclaiming my land legs.

Less danger there, on land, in normal gravity. Not that I'm afraid of wrecks now. I'm not, no more than the average spacer.

I'm more afraid of that feeling, the greed, which came on me hard and fast, and made me tone-deaf to my best diver's concerns, my old friend's fears, and my own giddy response to the deep.

I'm getting out before I turn pirate or scavenger, before my greedâ€”which I thought I didn't haveâ€”draws me as inexorably as the stealth tech drew Junior, pulling me in and holding me in place, before I even realize I'm in trouble.

Before I even know how impossible it'll be to escape.

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