

Before you read this, I want you to know that my stories are divided into arcs. The arcs all occur in the same universe I've set. I've created extensive amount of lore files in order to create the world for the characters to live in.

My story titles are divided into 4 sections.

[Arc name] [Chapter] [Story title] [Year it started]

Repairman arc is an exception where it has no story title and chapters in this arc is standalone and has nothing to do with each other. The year part is sometimes very important because the year is what determines which news topic characters may converse about.

## [Repairman arc] [2] [9603]

Rev 1.1

“You are kidding, right?”

I told him bluntly.

Unfortunately, he was not; he stared at me silently and rather intensively.

“Listen, this is my job to oversee this and, I repeat, we may need the plates.”

He placed his hand on his waist and sighed. “Tell me something I don't know. All I am asking is just take few less.”

“What if the captain happens to check up my worklog? I don't want to get into a trouble.”

He let out a short laugh. “As if he has ever done that.”

True, our captain never checked on worklogs of his crew. Still what if it was my time to go? What if he decided to check up on me? Anything could happen. And the crates were smelling really bad.

“What the hell are in those crates behind you anyway? Those smell.”

“Those are frozen fishes,” He said out loud with pride in his voice which I couldn’t really understand why. Speaking proudly in front of half-dozen smelling frozen fish crates; yeah, what a sight to remember.

Apparently, half-frozen since they’ve been out in this docking bay for few hours now.

*For the love of fucking God –*

I was one of repair crewmen aboard this cruiser-class patrol vessel bound to Saturn. We were docked at Uranus outpost for resupply. We took turns on overseeing resupplying and it was my turn this time to oversee what went into our cargo bay.

Above conversation occurred when I was trying to get three hundred crates of tritanium plates. A crew approached me and asked if I could reduce the number of the tritanium plate crates. I recognized his face although I could not recall his unit number.

“Frozen fishes?!” I uttered with amusement. “Are you seriously telling me to overlook our own safety for some damn half-frozen, smelling mind you, fishes?!”

“Look, we haven’t seen a battle for weeks. Pirates seems to be on holiday, so why not us also? I am sick of taking the energy pills and take the dummy food. I want some delicacy.”

“Tell the captain then and get his permission!”

“I already did on behalf of the crew.”

Of course, I never heard anything about that. Apparently, I am not a part of “the crew”. Well, duh, fine, I am a repairman. I am not a fully licensed and trained space personnel like him. I absolutely have no complaint whatsoever for not being treated as a crewman. I don’t care.

“So, He refused, I reckon?”

“Well, he said ‘later’ but we’ve decided that now is better than ‘later’.”

By rules, we were supposed to have enough raw materials to repair a whole deck if necessary, and the plate crates took the most volume out of any materials. Funnily enough, the plate

crates had an expiry date and our plate crates ran out of that date a season ago. It was time to replenish the stock we had. They had an expiry date in case the crates were stolen or pirated. No legit business would take an expired crate of tritanium alloy.

“I am not listening to you anymore, dude,” I told him firmly. “I don’t care if those fish crates go bad. It’s not my business.”

“You have to help me out. It’s already been paid for.”

“Not my fault though, is it?”

I realized I started to sound like an ass, but so did he. He started this, not me.

He shook his head and ran off somewhere with haste. I had to sigh as well. What the hell was he thinking? I knew that it was not over, so I was hesitant in taking the tritanium crates in.

A cruiser class vessel has crewmen of up to one hundred. The patrol cruiser I was assigned to had eighty six crewmen, me included. Seven members were repairmen, me included again.

As a repair crew, my primary task was to repair whatever damage the ship received or earned. By “earned”, I mean accidents caused by human errors. My secondary task would be to keep the ship in a good condition, regular maintenance so to speak.

This was my third cruiser I was assigned to during 8 years of my career. I started out from United Sol academy on Moon and was immediately assigned to a frigate upon graduation. It wasn’t a good experience to be a repairman of a frigate. The ship was too small and had little room for anything other than bare essentials. Thankfully, I had to endure that horrible experience for only three seasons before I was transferred to my first cruiser. Life was simply a ton better in a cruiser. I was allowed to bring in my own stuff even.

I saw him coming back with another fellow whose face I recognized clearer than him. It was the first mate of the ship. His rank would be right below the captain.

‘What’s going on?’

If the first mate was involved, I don’t see why the captain shouldn’t be involved and just give out his permission to take it the reeking fishes.

‘Damn, I shouldn’t have mentioned the fishes. The smell is getting worse.’

“Hello, 79,” The first mate hailed me. 79 was my unit number in the vessel; I was a 79<sup>th</sup> crewman. The captain, interestingly, had a unit number of 52, and the first mate had a unit number of 1. What all those meant was that the first mate had been with the ship far longer than the captain. Though the crew would never call the captain “Unit 52”.

“Hello, sir. Would you please tell me what is going on?”

“34 told me what happened. And I do understand your concern, but I want you to take in those crates.”

“I will be happy to obey your order, sir, as long as you sign my worklog.”

I would be free of any responsibility from this little incident then.

The first mate scratched his head and told me, “Here is the thing; I am asking you for a personal favor.”

‘For a guy I’ve known for a little less than a year? I think not. I am risking my career here.’

But he did have powers to make my life miserable during my stay in the ship.

“Sir, with all due respect, this risks my career with United Sol. You can ask as much as you want but my answer is no unless you sign my worklog.”

They whispered for a moment before the first mate spoke to me reluctantly.

“Care for a story?”

I gestured negatively. “No, sir. This is just too suspicious for my guts. I am out of here and the tritanium crates are going in.”

Before I turned around and head back to the ship, I had to inform the first mate something.

As much as I hated ruining someone’s mood further when it was down, I had to say it because whatever “plan” they had might be ruined if I kept my mouth shut.

“First mate.”

He looked back at me, seeming slightly frustrated and bothered. “Yes?”

“You do know that the cargo bay is not a refrigerator, don’t you?”

He seemed confused and asked me, “What do you mean?”

“There are fishes in the crates, right?”

“Yes, so?”

“Aren’t fishes like meats? Granted I’ve never seen a fish in my life, but aren’t those to be treated like meats? Keep it frozen for long voyage?”

He seemed to have gotten my point. “Yeah, don’t worry. The crates are self-contained freezer.”

*I think not, dude.*

“Mate, those crates reek which means they are not self-contained freezer units.”

I was surprised he never noticed the smell.

His facial expression changed from frustrated to ..., let’s say, worse. He turned to a crate and took his gloves off in rush, touching the crate with bare hand.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck!” He uttered.

Even if he did manage to get them aboard the ship, they would need to find a place to store them frozen, and the cargo bay wasn’t designed for that. It was possible to modify the cargo but then everyone, including the captain, would find out.

The only other way was to use the freezer in the cafeteria where some solid foods and alcohol were stored. However, crew would notice him moving a dozen of smelling crates across the ship.

I suppose he could acquire new self-contained freezer crates and relocate the fishes. Nevertheless, I took my hands off the matter.

Natural fishes were found from only two planets. One was Earth and the other was Heaven of Order. On Earth, commercial fishing was forbidden. Only high ranking members of the Bau might have a license for casual fishing.

On Heaven of Order, commercial fishing was very limited since the planet lacked any sea and only had few large lakes.

There were commercial fish breeding facilities throughout the clusters but their supply was nowhere close to meet the demand. In other words, fishes were very expensive delicacy.

And I counted about a dozen crates over there by the first mate. That was some serious money poured into this scandal. Whatever it was for, I didn't care. I wanted nothing of it.

When I finally got back to my quarter which wasn't too far away from the main reactor room, I received a call to report in to the reactor ship in few hours. Since it wasn't an emergency call and I was allowed "few hours", I decided to slack a bit before reporting in. When I did eventually report in, I was asked to perform a regular maintenance which I duly complied.

As usual, I walked around the active reactor and dragged out its maintenance console. As soon as I turned it on and entered my password, I smelled something... very unpleasant. At the same time, I vividly recognized the disgusting smell.

*'Oh, for the fucking mother of-'*

I saw those cursed crates in a dark corner. There were six of them. I got pissed. I really got pissed.

*What in the world are those here?!*

As soon as I had that line of thought, I kind of figured out why. The first mate obviously did not want to let his captain know and wanted to store the crates somewhere cool or cooler. Why he did not change the crates to self-contained freezer was beyond me.

The reactor room was one of the coolest parts of a cruiser or any other spaceship for that matter. The temperature wasn't subzero but it was cooler than any other part of the ship. Docking bay was slightly cooler but then there would be constant traffic. Obviously, he chose to store six crates here.

"I wonder where the other crates are?"

Leaving the console behind, I approached the crates at once. The smell got progressively worse. I started to wonder if the first mate knew what he was doing. If fishes were anything like red meats, he should not store them here, either. The only place would be a freezer. The only freezer we had aboard was the freezer at cafeteria which probably didn't have enough room left to store a dozen of crates. But I've never seen how big the freezer was, so I basically had no idea. What I did know was that the first mate was screwing up whatever he was doing.

I stared at them for a moment, trying to think what to do with them. In the end, I chose not to do anything. I returned to the console and did my job there and left the reactor room as soon as possible. I felt like the smell got to me and had to take a long hot shower.

Two days passed without any noticeable incident. It was two days of break for me as well. No task came in and I simply enjoyed playing games for two straight days. Eventually, I was called to report in.

And when I entered the reactor room, the smell was there. This time, the smell was everywhere. The stink knocked my nose hard as soon as I entered. Engineers in the room were gathered, discussing something.

I cleared my throat as I proceeded into the room.

“What’s this smell?” I asked innocently. “This place stinks.”

One of the engineers turned his head to look at me. He said, “We are trying to figure it out. The smell has been present for few days, but it was weak and we didn’t pay too much attention. But today it’s gotten a turn for worse.”

Meaning the fishes are probably rotting by now.

“Have you searched the room?”

Although it was called a “room”, it should have been described as a deck. The place was pretty huge and multi-story. Some parts of the room were restricted to enter as well.

“We did a brief search. Nothing came up,” He told me.

“Checked the vents?” I spoke as if I didn’t know what was going on.

“Sure did. Nada. I informed the captain about this.”

Uh oh, that cannot be good for the first mate.

“What is going on here?!”

Speak of the devil, the first mate entered the engine room and immediately covered his nose.

“What the fuck is this odor about?!”

“First mate, welcome,” An engineer told him. “It’s why we called the captain. We need to figure this out and need access to restricted areas.”

The first mate was right behind me and I whispered to him, "Your damn fishes are rotting."

He was startled by my words but kept his calm. "Alright, men. I will search the restricted areas. Unit 79, come with me."

What the?

Pointing at myself, I exclaimed. "Me? Why me?"

"This is an order!"

Crap.

He probably knew where the crates were. They weren't obviously in a corner behind the reactor because, if it was so, the engineers would have already located them. He took me down two levels to the A.C.M. core. A.C.M. deck was the most secured area of a ship and only the captain, chief engineer, or maybe the first mate would have access to.

A.C.M. was a part of the reactor and it was responsible for generating all powers and maintaining shields. A.C.M. resembled a giant egg-like device with lots of wires connected to it. Since it generated powers through forcefully ionizing matters and eventually breaking matters into atoms and molecules, any matter was possible to be used. For space ships, human wastes were mostly used. It was a win-win solution for space ships. Urine was not used and was recycled for ships with intention of long voyage. But for patrol ships and the like which did not venture further from supply stations used urine as fuel in addition to human wastes and garbage.

Having thought that... I just thought of a perfect excuse for the smell. If the first mate claims that A.C.M. fuel door was not secured, meaning open, it could explain the odor. However, failing to secure A.C.M. fuel door would be a severe breach of conduct because A.C.M. can basically break down any matters including the ship itself given enough time. Thankfully, I was never in charge of A.C.M. due to being a freshman repairman.

"Hey! Give me a hand here!"

Jetting out of my thought, I saw the first mate trying to lift a crate by himself. There were the crates in a corner on A.C.M. deck.

"Are you kidding me here?! Two of us cannot lift that thing!"

Indeed, one of those crates would be tons.

“Just get here! Give me a hand!”

Sighing, I assisted him to lift a crate. It was surreally light considering how big it was. And it must have been full of fishes. The only explanation would be that the crate was not made of iron.

{Refer to Gravity in Lore}

Which was against the rules because the last thing they want would be heavy crates floating and bumping into each other in cargo bay.

Good thing that this ship did not enter a battle. If it did, I am sure the crates would have been destroyed by heavy collisions and its contents would have spilled out.

“Oh, alright. Put it down a sec. Take your clothes off!”

“What?!”

“Put the crate down and take your clothes off! We need to get to the fuel door on top.”

This fucking idiot was getting me into all sorts of troubles. The navy uniform had a certain amount of iron threads which created a sense of gravity inside of space ships by magnetic field. By taking the uniform off, I would be under zero gravity.

Having no choice, I took the navy uniform off and so did the first mate.

“You owe me big time, first mate.”

He didn't answer and I continued to strip anyway.

“Where are the other crates? I saw a dozen and I see only six here.”

After both of us took our uniform off, the first mate reached A.C.M. fuel door on top and disconnected a fuel tube, therefore opening it. He got down and lifted a crate with me.

“I managed to get one crate into the cafeteria freezer.”

“Okay, where are the five?”

“It's on hull.”

I didn't get what he meant.

“What do you mean?”

“It's on hull. Outside.”

How did he manage that? Alarms would have gone off. But since it was the first mate, I am sure he had his ways.

“You could have put all of them on hull then. These six crates are ruined. A lot of credit.”

“Just get moving.”

One crate by one, we managed to throw them into the fuel tank. There would be nothing left in few days. I was afraid that the crates would be too big to be thrown through the fuel door but it was just wide enough. The crates made unpleasant sound as they crashed into human wastes inside.

I wondered how the first mate will report this matter to the captain as well as to the engineers above. If he did use insecure fuel door as an excuse, whoever was the last one to do maintenance of A.C.M. would be reported and probably be court martialed. It would basically mean one’s career would be completely destroyed.

All just to cover up the fishes.

I put my uniform back on while the first mate secured fuel door and attached fuel tube back on. He talked to me while putting his uniform back on.

“Alright, the fuel tube and door were insecure. That will be our story.”

I crossed my arms. I was ready to argue.

“You will be ruining one engineer’s career, maybe even his life.”

“Better than getting my record dirty.”

If I was in his shoes, I would probably have done the same. But I would have never gotten into such a smelly situation in the first place. I could stand against him and let the truth out but I was uncertain if I was ready to accept circumstances after that. I would probably defeat the first mate in the dispute with such clear evidences but what after that? I would have to leave the ship afterwards and I didn’t know what kind of connections the first mate had in the navy.

Therefore, I decided to play safe and just get along with whatever story he came up with.

“Fine, I guess there is no other way,” I responded reluctantly.

“You should. Just nod along when we go up there. I will do the talking.”

When we went up, pretty much all available engineers were called upon, even the chief engineer was present.

“First mate,” The chief engineer glanced at me before speaking to him. “What was the cause?”

“Fuel tube was slightly loose and the fuel door was not properly shut. You can guess the rest.”

The chief engineer was obviously not convinced.

“We do this everyday, mate. We would not make such typical mistakes.”

“Mistakes can and do happen,” The first mate pressed on.

“True, but insecure A.C.M. fuel tube and fuel door are not something we’d let happen. We bring three engineers down there at once to ensure that such a mistake does not happen.”

“But it happened,” The first mate looked right into eyes of the chief engineer. They both glared at each other for a moment before the chief engineer looked at me.

“You, unit 72, yes?”

“Actually, 79, sir.”

“Aren’t you a repair crew?”

“Yes, sir.”

The chief engineer looked back at the first mate. “He is not classified to enter the deck. Why did you bring him?”

“He was closest to me when I entered the room, so naturally I brought him with me.”

The first mate’s statement was backed by other engineers who were present at that time.

“So, 79, is the first mate speaking truth?”

Oh, boy. What does he expect me to say?

I was on a crossroad. It was a stinky crossroad that I never asked for.

“Yes, sir. The fuel tube must have been only slightly loose. Over hours, it must have gotten very loose. We had to clean up some mess.”

I didn't like the first mate but the chief engineer never paid any attention to me, either. In the end, I decided to stick with the first mate.

The chief engineer sighed deeply after listening to me. "Who were the ones that did the maintenance last time on A.C.M.?"

An engineer spoke up, "77, 80, 81, sir."

Oh, wow. They were all pretty much new ones, meaning a mistake could certainly have happened given their lesser experience. The chief engineer should have included at least one senior engineer.

The first mate looked somewhat relived as well. He probably figured I might not go with his idea. I sure hell did not want to go with his idea, either. But, in the end, I did. I simply chose what looked like an easy way out.

This event made me to decide that I would put in a transfer request. Who knew what might happen in the future? I wasn't certainly going to rely on my life on someone like the first mate.

The three engineers were charged and later court martialed. They were shipped out of the ship shortly later.

My transfer request was granted at the same time as well and I was to step down when the cruiser made next supply stop at a station. Because of my impending transfer, I wasn't given any tasks to do, or maybe because the chief engineer didn't trust me anymore. Either way, I was mostly freely.

A few days prior the cruiser would dock at a supply station near Saturn, I paid a visit to the cafeteria. It was my first visit to the cafeteria actually. I favored taking dummy food and taking energy pills.

And I saw the damn stuff.

The fishes.

Dishes involving fishes were everywhere. The crewmen were certainly enjoying their newfound delicacy. It may taste nice, true, but I wasn't going to try it out. Lives of three guys were ruined because of those and I just couldn't get the stink out of my head. I turned right back and went back to my quarter.

The damn smelly fishes ruined three lives.

- Fin