

How would you define "an honest living"?

[Rocksea arc] [3] [The fine line] [9620]

Rev 1.0 (Created on September 9, 2019 | Last modified on August 5, 2020)

"Duchess' boobs in visual range," Santino announced through speakers to let us know. I was napping when his voice woke me up. I approached a console in my quarter and popped up a screen to look at the station. I saw a lot of traffic around the station.

"The place sure has changed," I said to myself.

While it wasn't the first time for me to visit this station, I hadn't visited here for at least a decade. My dad took me here once just so that I knew my ways around Rocksea. I never entered the station itself.

In my memories, the station zone used to be virtually empty. As a kid, I recall comparing it to a ghost station or somethin'.

"Has any of you visited here before?" I asked the mates.

Rabinovich and Santino apparetly had. Juno hadn't, which was expected. The station was very male-oriented from what I had heard. Females would have no reason to visit Duchess' boobs in the first place unless, of course, they worked there as hookers.

Initially, I thought all of us were going to enter but it turned out that none of them really wanted to enter.

"Hard to resist fucking beautiful bitches in here," Rabinovich explained, "I'd rather not go in. I will waste money."

Santino's reason was more or less the same as Rabinovich's, and I didn't even bother asking Juno.

Thus, I went in alone once we docked. The docking bay I was in was directly connected to its bar and the first impression of the bar was loud and blissfully colorful. The place, more like a hall, was packed to brim with people dancing their minds away.

Some waitresses were skillfully maneuvering around to serve drinks. Speaking of which, the waitresses were fully naked and fully shaved. Being fully shaved didn't surprise me since shaving is a recommended practice when living in space. Having to deal with hair from our heads is hard enough for air filters.

But it was my first time seeing a girl fully naked which made my heart race and my dick stand up. I started to see the point Rabinovich and Santino was making. If I would drink, I was pretty sure I'd end up waking up on a bed with some random girl next to me.

Clearing my thought, I snapped myself out and swiftly moved onwards. Initially, I was going to float my way in but there was no floating sign all over the place, so I ditched that idea.

"Excuse me. Sorry, excuse me. Passing through. I am sorry. Sorry, Sorry!" Shoving my way in, I moved toward a counter all the way in the back. Shoving my way in wasn't that hard. The real ordeal was the girls, the naked ones. As I moved in, some of girls danced in my proximity, indirectly asking me to join.

"Sorry, girls, no, I am not here for..."

That was when one of the girls attempted to grab my thing. Out of reflex, I jumped

and jumped too high. Before I knew, I hit my head hard on a wall or ceiling and passed out.

I wasn't sure how much time I passed but, when I woke up, I realized I was in a sickbay. There was no one in the sickbay though. But a voice sounded as soon as I raised my upper body.

"Vazken, yeah?" It was a female's voice.

"Yes, I am Vazken. Did I fly into a wall?"

"Sure did. It was lucky that you didn't crack your skull."

"Sorry about that."

"Now, you weren't drunk, meaning you had a business at the station. What is it?"

"I've come to talk to the duke for a job. May I speak to him?"

"He is busy but you may talk to me instead."

"May I ask who you are? You know my name. It's only right that I should know yours."

There was a faint snicker from the speaker. "You've got manners for someone of your age. Very well, I will see you in person."

In probably less than 60 seconds, a woman appeared in the sickbay. She certainly wasn't pretty and, therefore, she couldn't have been one of the waitresses. She did have an okay body though. She had a pony hair style in dark brown and was wearing a dark red cowl shirt and blue jeans.

Approaching me at once, she folded her arms. "My name is Ehka. I am the Duke's wife, so you can talk to me."

I didn't know the Duke was married. But then I didn't know anything about him. I

also did not have a reason not to trust the woman, either, so why not. It wasn't like my purpose was top secret or anything. Therefore, I told her my reason for coming onto the station.

Once she heard my story, she blossomed a short laughter.

"I've seen many reasons for guys to come onto this station. I will say you are the first one with a noble cause," She said, holding her laugh.

"What's 'noble' about that?" I wasn't attacking her or anything. It was a genuine question.

"I meant no offense, really. Your cause is just the most normal I've heard in a very long time. Those who want jobs, they are always desperate and will do anything to get some credit on their hands so that they can satisfy their loan sharks and live another day to drink."

She, then, pulled a chair to her and sat down, crossing her legs.

"Alright, Mr. Vazken, I am interested. What ship ya got?"

"LW class 2."

"I see. Default setup?"

"Yes, it's currently on a rent-to-own program."

"How many payments left?"

"11 out of 120."

Ehka whistled and told me, "I am impressed. Less than a year left on a 10-year program. Never missed a payment?"

"No, and we don't want to miss a payment. That's why we are here."

"How many are there in your group?"

"Four, including me."

"Gender ratio?"

"Three guys and one girl."

"Had sex with the girl?"

I shook my head at once. "None of us has." Quite frankly, Juno would break my arms and legs if I ever attempted to rape her. She's huge and powerful.

She whistled again. "Jesus, you do know what you are doing. I am more than impressed. Normally, I just don't have any incentives to help people out but your case is different. Hard to turn down decent folks trying to make a step forward."

I wasn't entirely sure what she was going on about but I wasn't going to ruin her mood by speaking up further.

"Alright, mister, I do have a job for you. I am already assuming that smuggling and anything illegal is out of the pool."

I nodded at her.

Dangling her index finger slowly toward me, she grinned, "I think I have a perfect job for you."

The job was a hauling job. The cargo was nothing illegal or so I was told. Old lady would be in a convoy escorted by four Badgers. The convoy would depart in four days, meaning we had four days of nothing-to-do. So, we decided to work on our ship. We had been kind of slacking on that part for a while.

Rabinovich came up with a list of things to do on his tablet.

He read out the list on the bridge where we were gathered, "We've got several deep scratches on the hull. Doesn't need to be replaced but need to be filled with the goo. And we might as well check thrusters as well. The console in Vazken's room needs to be looked at. Anything new to add to the list?"

Santino raised his hand and spoke, "Well my shower has been acting as well but I guess that doesn't need to be spoke about?"

“We will replace the whole pipes, so yeah, yours will be covered,” Rabinovich replied with a nod.

Juno added with glee, “Finally, I can take a shower and not worry about something going wrong.”

I replied to her, “A part of the problem is that you take a shower for too long. You take what, 45 minutes for a shower? What do you do in there?”

She replied back fiercely, “It’s none of your bizwax, shut it, Vazken.”

Shrugging, I complied, “Fine, fine. Just pointing out the-”

“I said, Shut it.”

Juno wasn’t exactly a likable girl or even socially active but she was good to work with overall. Other than her shower, she never complained about anything else and would do any mining regardless how risky it was. She had shoulder length hair that was tied into a pony tail and was quite muscular, okay, very muscular. She is more muscular than pretty much any guys. If it wasn’t for her rather large boobs, she could easily be mistaken for a guy because she was a huge woman. I wasn’t sure her exact height but my loose guess was that her height was 190cm and my height was just 175cm. I was fairly certain that she could floor me with one hard punch in my face. It was something I’d never dare trying.

To be quite frankly clear, I never lusted for her. She wasn’t my type to begin with and I wasn’t very sexually active, either, despite of my young tender age of 32. You can’t be sexually active and work in space. Those two just don’t work out in long term. Therefore, I understood exactly why Rabinovich refused to enter Duchess’ boobs. No need to re-awaken your sexual mojo.

For the last four days, we casually worked on our ship repairs and we finally received

the cargo crates by dockyard workers at 0500 on fifth day. There were two 10-ton cubic metre crates which would barely fit into our ore cargo.

We asked whether it was okay for us to check the content of the cargo crates, and they said they had no problem with that as long as we didn't temper, so we checked out what was in there.

The four of us were gathered around a crate. The other was already in.

"What the hell are these?" Juno said. She was completely clueless.

What we were seeing was some sort of frozen organic matters. I had never seen anything like these, either.

"These look like some sort of frozen creatures," Rabinovich remarked.

"I have no idea what these are," Santino added.

We had to bring in a scanner to figure out what they were.

"Fishes, frozen fishes," Juno said after scanning the frozen things.

None of us had seen fishes before obviously. I mean, after all, we were space dwellers. Fish was a very expansive delicacy for planet dwellers.

"So, how much is this one crate?" I wondered out loudly.

And it turned out that each crate was worth around 20 million credit. And I recalled that we'd be in a convoy.

I told my concern to the mates.

"Guys, we will be in a convoy. Our ship alone carries a value of 40m credit. I am guessing the whole convoy will be worth around 100m," I told them with a worried face.

"Probably way more than that," Rabinovich added.

I continued, "I think there is a real chance of us being hit by pirates."

We became quiet for a moment. My point was perfectly valid. The value of our cargo was too huge to simply ignore.

“Do we want to back out of this?” Juno inquired while closing the crate. The crate cover was huge but we were under 0.2g.

I looked at the others; they didn't seem to be too bothered. I wasn't too bothered, either. I simply pointed out the possibility.

“No, we are going,” I replied to Juno to which she gave me a thumb up and locked the crate.

Once we undocked, Ehka guided us to join up with a convoy. There were two Akabasa 1s and four Badgers.

Once a formation was formed, she spoke to us.

“The job's simple in concept. You haul the cargo to New Earth. But I won't lie to you. Your cargo has a lot of value and a chance to encounter pirates is rather high. Now, those four Badgers, they are all crewed by veterans. They know what they are doing. So, follow their instructions and you should be fine. Ehka out.”

The four of us were on the secondary bridge of Old lady. Its primary bridge was a tower that was exposed on the hull. It was great for mining but not so for a job that may see battles.

Juno, Santino, and I took stations and Rabinovich acted as a captain of the ship since he had the most experience. However, as much as we acted the part, our Old lady had no weapons whatsoever. Therefore, us sitting pretty on the bridge had no real meaning behind it other than being in the safest place.

We sat pretty for maybe an hour or so. Eventually though, we all got back to our quarters to kill time.

From the heart of Rocksea to New Earth was about 22 days long journey. The actual distance was a lot shorter but ships could not speed in Rocksea due to abundance of

debris or loose rocks. Well, perhaps cruisers could speed since it'd have the armor as well as shields. However, for any ships with exposed bridges or cockpits, Rocksea was a rather dangerous place to sail in. A loose rock hitting a reinforced glass window of a bridge at a speed of 100,000km/h would well mean instant death. It's take about 19 days to get out of Rocksea and then we could speed to New Earth. Now, our Old lady and the Badgers had shield arrays but the Akabasas didn't. A convoy was as fast as the slowest one.

"Those 19 days is the hard ones," Rabinovich told us when we were on the bridge. "Rocksea is a lawless zone, so pirates could be anywhere. Once we are out of Rocksea, the rest of route should be secure."

It was true that Rocksea was a lawless zone. However, our Old lady had never been pirated upon. That was mostly because pirates didn't tend to hit on miners. I heard that pirates factions agreed not to hit on miners because they were the ones at the bottom of economic pyramid. Pirating miners would bring everything to go up in price or even make lives in Rocksea miserable due to lack of required materials. Life wasn't all that easy in Rocksea to begin with. There was no need to make it harder.

The journey was peaceful for about 10 days. We were, then, in outskirts of Rocksea which was quite a dangerous zone. The heart of Rocksea where Duchess' boobs and Station Oreo were patrolled by such stations and security was kept to a certain degree but there was none of that in the outskirts.

And it was also my first time to venture this far.

We were slacking on our secondary bridge when Santino exclaimed.

"12 ships, Badgers, on a direct course to us, most likely hostiles," He urgently said out loudly.

"Oh, shit," I blurted, "What do we do?"

"We do nothing, for now at least," Rabinovich instructed us to calm down.

A male voice sounded through speakers. His voice was calm.

"This is Badger Alpha. We are detecting hostiles. Old lady, you have shields, so you just keep going. Few shots won't harm you. The Akabasas, you two move into a shadow of a nearby rock. You haven't got shields and a luck shot will take you down."

"How strong is our shields anyway?" I wondered.

"Well, I guess we will find out. Old lady has never been hit on, yet," Santino replied. Meanwhile, Juno was tighening herself onto a chair which we soon followed as well. You wouldn't want to bounce around in space. That could easily kill you.

"We have four. They have twelve. It doesn't look too good," Juno hastily said while controlling her breath.

Rabinovich told us, "We were told they were veterans. Let's see how good they are. If they are taken down, we are surrendering. We agree on that?"

"Yep." We all said at once.

The escort Badgers fired the first by using torpedos which surprised me because I never saw such a thing.

"What the hell is that?" I asked with a surpsied voice.

Rabinovich answered me, "A torpedo, basically a heavy payload missile."

"What is a missile?"

He glanced at me and answered me, "Well, not surprised that you don't know. 99% of people use lasers. It's physically delivering shitload of explosives at a target. Won't do much to a cruiser but deadly to small ships like Badgers."

Just like he said, each torpedo took out a Badger with a large explosion and shockwaves.

"Holy shit, that looks awesome!" I shouted with excitement.

With those four pirate Badgers down, it became four versus eight. And, as soon as dog fights began, it became quiet clear that the escort Badgers were simply far superior in raw skills. Within 60 seconds, two more pirates went down.

And 5 minutes later, a single pirate Badger was fleeing the scene with no loss to the escorts.

"Those do know what they are doing," Rabinovich remarked.

I was in awe. I didn't give much of a chance to the escorts. After all, it was four versus twelve. But they won, easily.

The male voice sounded in our bridge once again.

"This is Badger Alpha here. Hostiles taken care of, you can come out and join us Akabasas."

"Man, that dude is a badass," I remarked in awe.

From that point to the moment we left Rocksea, it was quiet. Once we were out of Rocksea, we could speed all we wanted. At our maximum speed, it was only 3 days to New Earth.

The official name of "New Earth" was Heaven of Order. I had no idea who named the planet such and even why. The name itself didn't make much sense and we simply called it New Earth unofficially. I heard the council is trying on to officially rename it to New Earth at one point.

"Who's going to be seeing New Earth for the first time?" Rabinovich asked us.

I replied, "Me since this is the first time leaving Rocksea."

Juno replied as well, "Same here."

"So, for you two, the planet will be the first colorful one you are going to see, eh."

"Like Earth, right?"

"Yeah, I guess. Never been to Earth but they say they look similar."

The short journey between the end of Rocksea and New Earth was, well, short. We began to see navy ships patrolling soon after we left Rocksea behind and the whole route was very secure. A navy patrol fleet did check up on us but our papers were properly in order, so there was no issue whatsoever.

When we arrived at New Earth at last, a scenery that I had never seen before my life unfolded before my eyes. I saw a planet for the first time and it was a very colorful planet. Additionally, the vicinity of the planet was full of traffic. It looked as if tiny bugs were crawling around the planet.

"There it is, New Earth. Heaven of Order is the official name for now although nobody uses that," Rabinovich explained to us as a holographic screen displayed a planet that was half green and half blue.

Neither Juno nor I displayed much of joy after seeing the planet for the first time. Quite frankly, I couldn't care less how a planet looked.

"What G is that planet?" I asked to which Santino replied, "1G, I believe."

"So, I'd like to be crushed to death if I ever landed on that planet."

Juno replied, "We are used to the 0.4g from Oreo. We wouldn't die, probably, but suffer badly."

"Actually," Rabinovich said, "You might die. There is a huge difference between 0.4

and full 1.0."

The planet had two orbital exchange stations where we docked at and unloaded our cargo crates. We thought our job was done then and expected to be paid. However -

Badger Alpha told us through comm, "Ehka will pay you, meaning you need to go back to Duchess' boobs. Now, since you will be going back, she has an optional job for everyone else."

Apparently, she wanted us to haul some water.

"I can see the point," Rabinovich explained, "Water is dirt cheap here from what I can see."

Water wasn't exactly hard to come by in Rocksea but it wasn't that common, either. I could also see the point of hauling back some water if I was making the trip back anyway.

We asked Badger Alpha whether he was willing to escort us. He replied that he was going back and we were welcome to tag along. However, he made a point that he wouldn't be escorting us exactly.

He explained to us, "My duty ended when we made out of Rocksea. You can tag along and our presence will likely deter pirates but, if they do attack, we are not going to defend you."

I did feel that he was being a dick a little but the ball was in his court. We agreed that it was better than nothing and used our own credit to purchase the goods and headed our way.

The reason we weren't too concerned about security was that water wasn't something that was pirated upon. It was a low value commodity and there was a general rule of not pirating essential commodities among pirates at least in Rocksea. Of course, there was always some who refused to follow such a rule but such were

rare.

Fast forward 22 days, we made it back to Duchess' boobs safely. The Badgers, our Old lady, and the two Akabasas all made it back in one piece. Although I failed to grasp it at that moment, it was a great result for a back-to-back hauling job. Ehka was on comm to greet us soon enough.

"Well, done, flawless I would say. No casualties, goods delivered both ways," She said gleefully.

None of us had anything to say to her though, so we remained quiet.

"Moving on," She said, "Since you've done the optional job, the overall payment accounts to 500,000c. Transferring right now."

We looked at each other with our eyes wide open. It was way, way, more than we expected. Additionally, it was an amount we'd never see via mining.

"Fucking half a mil!" Juno exclaimed joyfully with her fists up in the air.

Santino robbed his face and slapped himself once as if he was making sure he wasn't dreaming.

Rabinovich was more rational and asked if she was giving us extra for being first timers and such.

"Nope, I am in business of making a profit, so I don't give out payments that weren't warranted. I can break down the payment. The original trading run was 300k alone. The optional run was 100k. The extra 100k is a bonus for not having encountered or caused any troubles."

Rabinovich was still skeptical, so Ehka told us the total value of the cargo the convoy carried. It was apparently 80 millions.

In such a scale, our payment of half a mil was really a pocket change.

With smiles on my faces, we travelled back to Station Oreo. We were satisfied and happy. Old lady would have her plumbing replaced and Juno would be able to have her showers. Even after deducting the repair cost, we still had 325k to spare. Once divided, we got approximately 80k per person. In order for me to earn 80k, it'd take ... tens of minining trips.

Little did I know that this credit would eventually break this group apart.

- Fin