

# [Rocksea arc] [6] [Old friends] [9624]

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Two years had gone by. And, for the two years, I had been working pretty much non-stop at the Duchess' boobs. I actually didn't mean to work this hard but I sort of got into a rhythm that kept me going at a good pace.

Needlessly to say, I quickly became Ehka's favorite employee.

I enjoyed my Badger very much. It was my home as well as my workplace. I modded the hell out of the ship to be a nimble fighter. Ever since the battle with the Old lady, I hadn't had any actual combat experience but I felt pretty confident in an actual combat.

It was just an ordinary day for me as I patrolled around the Duchess' boobs. I spotted a shuttle that was bumping into a wall right next to a docking bay door frame repeatedly. I immediately knew it was being piloted by a drunkard. It was a common occurrence.

I approached the shuttle at once and opened a public channel.

"Sir, please stop your engine," I told him.

I didn't expect him to stop, and he didn't. The shuttle simply kept on bumping an innocent wall.

"Sir, I repeat, please stop your engine. I will tug your shuttle into a docking bay."

Again, no response. It was entirely possible that he was already dozing off.

There wasn't exactly a standard protocol in these situations. I mean the station

wasn't exactly a high standard workplace. But a common practice in these situation where a drunkard was bumping into an innocent wall was just tug the shuttle anyway and force it into a docking bay.

Since my badger would have more thruster powers, it was possible.

Just to be sure though, I contacted him one more time through a public channel.

"Sir, I am tugging your shuttle. Say something if you wish to refuse."

Again, no response, and I waited few good minutes.

"Alright, let's do this," I said to myself as I touched a series of holographic buttons floating on a console. I was turning off assisted piloting so that my badger could approach the shuttle without it having a mind of its own and move away. It was a safety feature. Once that was done, I carefully approached the shuttle and attempted to push it sideways so that it will eventually go into a docking bay. It wasn't even that far off, a few meters at the most.

However, at one point, the pilot from the shuttle shouted through a public channel.

"The fuck you are doing?!"

I responded promptly. "Woke at last, eh? I am trying to get you into the docking bay."

"Mind your fucking biz. I know what I am doing!"

Having said so, he powered up his engine. Mind you that the shuttle was bumping into a wall. By suddenly powering up its main engine, it crashed into a wall, shattering its cockpit window. A pop of air bursted out along with the pilot. His body accelerated into a wall head first, and his skull shattered instantly, leaving a floating corpse floating. The dude wasn't even wearing a seat belt of any kind.

"Oh My God," I uttered.

"Not your fault," was Ehka's conclusion as soon as I reported in. "I saw the incident video. You followed the protocols. The pilot was stupid. Natural selection," She concluded.

I knew that. I knew I didn't do anything wrong but I felt really down.

As if she read my mind, she suggested an idea.

"Why don't you take a break? You've been working here for some years non-stop.

You do deserve a holiday of some sort."

I hesitated because I still needed to earn money.

"It will be a paid vacation. Just take some days off, like few tens of days."

Sighing deeply, I figured why not.

It had been years since I visited Oero station. I missed its 0.4 gravity. I figured I'd spend some time there. It was only a few days of travel in addition.

"Hasn't changed a bit," I said to myself as I looked at Oero station. It had been only two years. Of course, nothing changed. I bet a small station like Oero wouldn't change even after a hundred years.

I was visiting for no reason. Therefore, my initial request for a docking request was denied.

I contested the decision over a comm. "Seriously?"

"Sorry, sir. Unless someone inside can vouch for you, we cannot let you dock. I am sorry. It is our policy."

I wasn't sure Yating was on the station, but she was the only one I could think of.

"Is there Yating on the station? I know her personally."

The guy over the comm sounded surprised. "Yating? Hold on."

After some seconds later.

"Your docking request has been granted."

So, she was indeed on the station, possibly with Santino as well. Could Juno still be on the station also? This could get a bit awkward.

As soon as I landed my badger and exited the ship, I spoke out loudly.

"Computer, locate Yating."

A moment later, a small light ball that was a size of a fist appeared in front of me and it began to move at a walking pace. I simply followed it.

Where it ended up was the docking office. It was where I used to meet her when receiving payment for ore.

She was in front of a desk, looking down on a holographic data sheet. As soon as she noticed my presence, she stood up and approached me with a beaming smile.

"Hello, Vazken."

There was another person, a guy, in the office. He glanced at me once and returned to whatever he was doing. It could be the guy from the comm earlier.

"Yating, I didn't expect you to be here." I meant that.

"Yet you still named me as your guarantor," She replied with a grin.

I scratched my head. "Well, it was a bit of a gamble. I didn't know anyone else. I assume Santino is here as well?"

Her face darkened a bit. "We broke up," She said with a bitter grin.

"Oh, I am sorry. I see. That's why you are back."

"Pretty much." She changed the subject afterwards. "I was told that you are visiting here for no reason. Is that true?"

I explained my situation earnestly to her. I was never going to lie to her. She was my

crewmate once.

"Oh, I see. I am sorry about that." She sounded genuinely worried about me. "I see. Well, in that case, stay on the station as long as you'd like."

Then she turned her attention to the guy in the office. "Marcello, add his name to the approved visitor list."

"You got it," He replied at once.

"I will also have a guest quarter assigned to you."

"No, no, you don't need to do that. I will stay in my ship."

"You sure?"

"Yeah. I will stay here for some days at the most. I just wanted the sweet 0.4 gravity."

The guy, Marcello, chuckled in response.

She beamed a bright smile at me. "Enjoy your stay then. Since you are on an approved visitor list, you should have more access than regular visitors."

"Thanks."

I really wondered whether Juno was still on station but honestly did not want to run into her. I asked the station computer whether a person named Juno was present on the station.

"Positive," It replied.

"Bugger," I said to myself. I really did not want to bump into her. The chance of actually dumping into her was really low though. The cafeteria would be the most dangerous place.

For no apparent reason, just for kicks I suppose, I asked the computer another question.

"Santino and Rabinovich."

"Negative on Santino. Positive on Rabinovich."

I froze up as soon as I heard that. Rabinovich is here? And Juno? With Yating, pretty

much the whole group was present on the station. This was gettin' weird.

Initially, I thought about just leaving the station. But then I realized I didn't do anything bad to warrant avoiding them. The group being disbanded wasn't my fault, at least not entirely. If anything, it was Rabinovich who hammered the final nail on the coffin.

With that line of thought, I decided to stay around for a bit longer.

For the next few days, all I did was play games in my badger and work out a bit to maintain my muscles. The 0.4 gravity made working out far more natural. I ate dummy food meanwhile.

Dummy food was basically a tasteless substance, which was basically fiber, to give our internal intestine something to work with so that it doesn't die. Several nutrition pills a day was enough for a grown adult.

Even so, you can't beat eating a real meal, like trans fat, salt, and all that jazz.

Therefore, I eventually paid a visit to the cafeteria.

It was quite crowded when I arrived. I had never seen the cafeteria on Oero this crowded. A mining frigate must have docked recently or something. I saw over ten people present, and there was a small line up for food.

When I saw the guy in front me getting his tray of food, he turned around and -

"Vazken?" He said to me, sounding surprised.

I wasn't exactly paying attention and when I did -

"Rabinovich?"

"Hey, dude! It's been a while!" He raised his voice with excitement. "Come, get your tray and sit at my table."

I wasn't exactly keen but did just that.

My tray of food was boiled rice with roasted pieces of spam and two sunny side up eggs. It was nothing fancy but trust me. This combination was fucking good.

When I sat down at his table with it, he greeted me again with glee.

"So, dude, what have you been up to? Good to see you really." He asked me as he took his first bite at his food which was several loaves of bread along with a gravy.

I told him earnestly what I had been up to. I had nothing to hide really.

"Kinda saw that coming. That woman, Ehka, valued you high."

"Really? Didn't notice."

"You are a good worker. I am sorry that I broke up the party." He sounded genuinely apologetic. "I have a problem with alcohol and women."

Well, that much was clear.

He explained that, after the group was disbanded, he ended up spending most of his money in booze and hookers. Thankfully, he was able to get a hold of himself and moved to Oero before it was too late.

"I am a solo miner now," He added, "Boring as fuck, but it gets me fed."

I carefully said to him, "I believe Juno is here as well. Have you ran into her?"

He chuckled. "I have, dude. It was awkward since I was the one who made the ultimate decision of letting her go."

"How is she?"

"She is a solo miner like myself. We didn't talk much. The air was just too awkward.

She may open up to you though."

I didn't want to talk to her though.

"I think she may have hots for ya."

I almost choked on food. Coughing hard, I blurted at him. "What the fuck was that

for?"

He snickered. "Not kidding. It's just a vibe I got from her. She did ask me about you and only you. Asked about no one else."

I never saw her that way though. I mean, she's a huge woman, much bigger than myself. To be honest, Yating was more of my type than Juno.

"Anyway, really good to see you," He said with a playful grin on his face.

I couldn't deny that it was good to talk to an old friend. "... Yeah."

It certainly lifted some weights in my mind that the group members were doing alright. I didn't know where and what Santino was doing but I was sure he was doing alright on his own.

It was ninth day when I left the station Oero. It was time to get back working. The station was starting to feel like a real home to me. My friends were there as well as memories, good and bad.

Perhaps more importantly, I was able to leave the incident at the Duchess' boobs behind me. I was over it.

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