

# A Year Among the Stars

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A story told in journal format posting daily for 2020



January 1<sup>st</sup> – August 31<sup>st</sup> , 2020

## **Current Status -**

Entries for January = April have been archived - I have updated this document with the scenes are they are in the posts (there were some updates once I set them up to post)

Deep Space Exploration, hostile environments, unknown civilizations, a team of scientists, a squad of Space Marines, and a convict pilot. What could possibly go wrong?

## **January 1st, 2552 In a heartbeat**

Pilot Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

My name is Kat James, I'm a Pilot on the Vision Project – a deep space exploration mission consisting of one Space Station, the Valhalla, and seven sister ships: Freyja, Norn, Valkyrie's View, the Edda, Twilight of the Gods, Thought, and Memory.

I'm a conscriptee assigned to the Valkyrie's View and I am one of the lucky ones. I know people in my situation say that they're innocent, that the system failed them– that it wasn't their decisions that brought them here– not me.

I know that every decision I made, informed and ill-informed has led me to this ship, this job and my position on board. The judicial board thinks I'm mercurial at best, a high risk. I guess it's fair. I've been convicted of felony kidnapping and murder. I could say I'm innocent, but the law is very clear.

I might have thought I was part of a rescue operation– but it was a kidnapping, which is a felony– especially when the woman we rescued/kidnapped was a computer specialist who happened to be worth a lot of money to certain authorities, so I guess that also means I'm guilty of espionage.

I wasn't even part of the original crew, and I definitely wasn't in on the planning. My brother and his friends had concocted this mission and their pilot was arrested running drugs to one of the penal colonies. They needed a pilot– and that's where I came in. I could blame my brother for that– but again, I knew the kind of things he was into and I should have known he'd lie to me about what was going on. He'd justify it as 'protecting me from the truth' but it really didn't protect me when I was arrested.

I could have gotten them away safely, but by then I knew this wasn't a rescue. My chance to change things came when one of the pursuing officers went into cardiac arrest and his ship's systems took over, landing him on the nearest rock and sending out a distress beacon. I couldn't let the man die- so I landed my craft next to him and rendered aid.

The kidnapping victim and I got off, I believe there was some gun-waving, but in the end, they ran and I rendered aid. I was arrested once the ambulance crew arrived. The rest of the crew were caught a week later. There was a shoot-out and two of the crew died.

The law was very clear – death associated with the commission of a felony is murder, and every guilty party is part of that murder. So... I had a lot of conflicting things going for and against me.

I was part of a kidnapping. I saved the victim, and an officer, someone died... I was part of it.

With the victim's testimony and that of the arresting officer, I was given a choice – Penal colony or space exploration. Guess which I took?

In a heartbeat!

## January 2nd, 2552 Home

Pilot Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

I say, pilot because that is what I am. Unfortunately, because of how I came to the crew of the Valkyrie— my official designation is Convict 237. The ship's mechanical staff call me two-thirty-seven, the guards call me Two-Three-Seven, as if I'm too stupid to deal with three-digit numbers. The scientists consider us test subjects and the Einherjar, or jarheads don't call us— unless we're working with them, and then we don't have names- just the job we're expected to do.

Einherjar, an army of one- the chosen slain, a colorful choice for Confed-Military, and what else are you going to call the soldiers on board a ship that is named after the mythological chooser of the slain?

They have a delightful demeanor, our warrior caste. They are the elite, the few— and they're already dead. Technically we all are. When you get this far out on the frontier, physics takes its toll. We'll never see earth again, except through relayed images from an observatory cluster near the crab nebulae.

They say we're all crew and we're all furthering the cause of exploration, truth, and defense— but there are very definite castes here. The officers call it the chain of command with the Officers, non-comms, enlisted personnel, and support staff. The Einherjar call it rank, which they separate from the ship's command; from the scientist's perspective, it's them the bureaucrats

they need to appease and the ones they can bowl over, and the people who do the labor-intensive things.

In every case, the convicts are at the bottom of the food chain, with the exception of our areas of expertise.

Convict 238, is a musician and tends to keep us entertained. Convict 232 is an expert in explosives, no worries there, right? Convict 223 is a programming genius who needs some moral guidance, or at least some adult supervision. Me, I'm a driver/pilot if it rolls or flies, I can get it from point a to point b. I can also do it, very quickly.

Right now, I'm only allowed to wheel a cart full of cleaning supplies. I guess trust takes time. No one trusts anyone from another branch and well— when it comes to the convicts, we know better than to trust each other.

## January 3rd, 2552 Colorful

Kat again

Each section of the ship is color-coded. If you lose your way, all you have to do is find your line and follow it around the ship back to your area. There are, of course, variations on the color – patterns and shades where things overlap.

Medical, for example, is red. Science is blue. Labs used by medical are red, shaded with little blue crosses. The labs used to study planetary samples are blue with a pattern of alternating orange bio-hazard signs and dark blue death heads.

It should come as no surprise, that orange is reserved for the convict constricttees. And the bio-hazard signs? Yeah, we get to clean up those labs when things are either determined to be 'harmless' or have overrun their Petri dishes and need to be taken out.

The rest of the colors are simple: Ship's crew are gray, military wear black, support wears green, and everybody blends together— with the exception of the convicts.

## January 4th, 2552 Dates

Kat James - Wondering

One of the downsides of having too much time and nowhere to go is the fact that you have too much time to worry. I compensate for this by wondering about random things.

Today I spent a lot of time thinking about dates.

I started wondering why we stick to an archaic set of dates, tied to the rotation of a planet we'll never see again. I think it's just being lazy, personally.

Let's face it, if we change our dating system we have to re-date our entire history. Don't even get me started on pre-history/before common era dates.

There are a lot of reasons not to bother, like the fact that we'd all have to relearn history from the beginning, but think about it: if we re-date everything we could keep the entire fleet busy for a very long time.

Thankfully I found the ship's library and have requested several references to go through while I review the available courses.

I'm stuck here— I might as well make the best of it.

## January 5th, 2552 Identity

Pilot Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

Sometimes I think I put that there just so I can remember who I am.

I am so tired of being called Convict 237. Then again it's better than being called by the charges I was convicted of. The more I learn about my fellow conscriptees, the more I wish I was allowed a private bunk.

I haven't met all the convicts on the ship, just the ten in my group— we're the conscriptees voted least likely to try and blow up the ship. It's an interesting distinction, but at least they are making distinctions and trying to integrate us into the mission.

I can tell them that the hardest ones are going to be 223 and 232.

223... Mathers just needs someone to play angel on his shoulder and shoot the devil as soon as she shows up.

232 Crazy Ivan... our demolitions expert— I don't know how he hid it, but he just wants to see the world burn and I don't want to be there when he tries.

Andi, our musician's great but since she was caught trying to garrote a man with a guitar string— she's not as safe as she first seems.

It's funny. The charges against me are what's protecting me from my fellow untrustworthy trustees. I mean, getaway driver, you usually don't expect much in the line of self-defense, but felony murderer... that gets you a little elbow room.

223's asked for some programming books on the ship's systems, which they were happy to provide.

I requested some classes on mechanics and craft design, and another on cooking. I was permitted access to the cook's training, but the classes on mechanics were denied.

I had almost worked up a full head of righteous indignity when I got my new assignment. Instead of cleaning up the commissary between meals- I'll be working with the ship's mechanic, learning the trade first hand.

## January 6th, 2552 Cross-Training

Wrench Monkey in Training- Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

It seems that my apprenticeship to the chief mechanic had been planned before I was even accepted to the Vision Project.

Chief Charles "Cookie" Pentecost, told me that the justice department had forwarded our psych evals along with recommendations on how to best handle our tendencies to create havoc.

For me they recommended lots of training and learning what makes things tick as well as keeping them ticking. It makes sense- we're going to be some twenty-five thousand light years away from the nearest machine shop, which means we have to be self-sufficient.

My first class in how things work was a discussion on FTL propulsion while tuning an engine. It is also where I learned just how 'one way' this mission really is.

To get to unexplored space in our lifetime, we need to move faster than light. There are a lot of theories behind this but method of choice is wormholes – you create one and follow it through to its end.

Over the past three hundred years, we've gotten better at creating the wormhole. You send out a pilot 'ship' in our case an orb about the size of the moon. you energize the pilot ship to the point that it creates a gravitational well which then pulls your ship along in its slipstream.

The entire fleet of the Vision Project was transported this way, tethered together in a long chain, and slipped along the well created by the pilot ship. The pilot ship itself burned out in the process.

It's a fascinating process and I knew we'd launched probes using the technique. The only downfall is the fact that we have no way of controlling where we're going. We were aimed for Canis Major, but so far, we have no way of knowing where we ended up. I did learn that the last three probes sent out before us didn't even come close. One ended up too close to a double star that tore it apart, The next ended up in the Horsehead Nebula, and the last one crashed into Phobos.

The good news, we made it through and are no longer anywhere near home. The bad news? It's going to take us at least three months to figure out where we are.

On the bright side, we did do our part to help clean-up Earth and the colonies.

Yes, the pilot ship was a giant ball of compacted garbage.

I'm just glad I didn't know this when I agreed to deep space exploration.

## January 7th, 2552 The more you know...

They say the more you know the less you understand. Personally I want to find whoever 'they' are and slap them in the back of the head.

After our morning inspection and commissary duties, we were to report to our assignments for the day. In my case, I got to go to the hangar and learn about capacitors, static discharge and never trust your equipment when Mathers has access to the computers.

I was working my way through an engine's wiring when my datapad started playing Sudoku, with itself. I expected some kind of retribution from the non-specialist conscriptees who were doing laundry, but Mathers has his computer access.

He wasn't doing it to get even— he was just doing it because he could. He did relent before Cookie caught me, but he played it really close.

I got to work on the engine and then I got to clean the hangar from top to bottom. I'm beginning to envy the guys in laundry.

## January 8th, 2552 Exhaustion has its benefits

When you're too tired to rise to the bait one of two things happen – you either end up being the victim or they leave you alone because your lack of reaction kinda takes the fun out of picking on you.

It also helps if they know that you're there because you are a convicted murderer. Thankfully, bunkmates grew tired of baiting me and went back to reading. I stared at the bulkhead until lights out, hoping that my arms would fall off, and then I spent most of the night afraid they would.

You'd think after sweeping and mopping the hangar yesterday, that it would reasonably clean today. It doesn't seem to work that way. No, from the look of things, maintenance is messy work and requires constant clean-up.

I'm beginning to seriously rethink the whole laundry thing.

## January 9th, 2552 9th Day

Pilot Katherine 'Kat' James reporting

Today is our 9th rotation, an official fleet day off, which is to say everyone only works as much as necessary to keep things running smoothly. We get a few extra hours for leisure, and this, our first 9th day, was also the day we got our first readings on the area.

We are nowhere near Canis Major, or Minor for that matter. One of the science team was trying to explain it in an assembly. It seems the theory behind navigating wormholes involves precise calculations involving math that doesn't quite exist yet. If you know the dimensions of the space you're warping, along with the distance you are traveling, you should be able to calculate where you'll end up. The only problem is, it seems when you create a warp, you aren't carefully folding space, you're crumpling it up in a ball and hoping that you aren't working with a mirror image of what you think you know.

His lecture involved a lot more math and theoretical physics that I was ready to deal with, but what it came down to was, "we still need to work on this."  
Now that we know where we're not, we just need to figure out where we are.

## January 10th, 2552 Ship Shape isn't all that shapely

Pilot Katherine 'Kat' James reporting

Now that we are officially in unknown territory we're working our way through systems checks.

I'm learning a lot about swearing, detecting areas of radioactive saturation and stress, what Cookie calls 'an RS and S' check.

My part of the check involved trailing behind senior mechanics with a cart full of measuring equipment, welding torches, patch material, markers and refreshments. I would watch the readouts as they moved along the corridor and let them know when any of the readings changed.

In some cases it was just conduit and plumbing, but each time there was a fluctuation, they would inspect the area, take more measurements and mark things down in their notebooks.

If repairs were needed, they would break out the patch equipment, or the welding equipment and go to work. Then I would hand them the refreshments and they would relax while I cleaned up. Then I'd clean up their refreshments and we would continue down the hall.

It seems that when you travel through warped space, your ship warps as well. Judging by the number of rest stops we took – your ship can warp a lot.

## January 11th, 2552 Evac Drill

A Bunny suited Katherine 'Kat' James reporting

There's nothing like an emergency drill after the fact. The 'Twilight of the Gods' hull ruptured. The emergency call rippled through the fleet. Before the klaxons fell silent, half the crew was gone.

There was a tense silence as the recovery teams were assembled and the ships' emergency teams were dispatched. Being the closest ship, crews from the Valkyrie were the first to arrive.

As a trainee, I wasn't allowed anywhere near the breached ship, but since I was perfectly capable of flying the service vessels, I became an evac driver, ferrying crew and supplies between the two craft. Mechanics and military engineers shored up the bulkheads between the breach and space.

Being neither fleet, nor military I don't have a fancy fitted suit. As such, I was issued an emergency suit, which was more a sealed bag with a visor than a spacesuit. I didn't really need it, but the rules say I have to, so I did.

By the end of the day, we were all exhausted, so someone decided it was the perfect time for an evac drill.

I found it in poor taste, but it was a reminder that life goes on.

## January 12th, 2552 Crew Review

Convict 237 reporting for duty

I'm learning a lot more about the interplay between the Deep Space Exploration Agency, the Confed Military and the Justice department conscription committee, or more to the point, the lack thereof.

It turns out that the majority of the crew was handpicked by the mission commanders. While the crew was carefully selected for skill and group dynamics, and the Einherjar were chosen from the military's top volunteers, the conscriptees were dropped off about twenty minutes before launch.

I guess it was just a matter of time before this all came to a head, and the explosion on the Twilight is looking less and less like an accident. Let's face it when something goes wrong, the first group of suspects are the convicted criminals. It was only a matter of time before a tribunal was held and our cases were reviewed.

Security seemed to take their cues from the captain and of course, in the interest of safety, we were brought in individually, under guard... in chains.

The tribunal put up a good front of fairness, but it was clear that the trustees were always going to be the prime suspects in anything that happened in the fleet.

Even our own Captain tried to impress us with an odd combination of magnanimous godling, but what I got was 'I don't know you, I don't want to know you and I don't want you blowing up my ship.'

I don't want my ship blowing up either- it tends to cut down on the whole 'long life' thing I was hoping for.

I can't really blame him. He's got a lot of lives riding on his decisions but I spent the better part of my day yesterday hauling repair crews and supplies to the Twilight and delivering the injured back to the Valkyrie's View.

I may be a convicted murderer but I'm not into killing people.

As it is, we're all on a much shorter leash until he has had a chance to evaluate us personally.

## January 13th, 2552 The stick

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Convict 237

Well, two months after launch and any progress we'd made as individuals has been forfeit. We're all back to washing dishes, doing laundry, and cleaning areas no one else wants to clean.

Worse, the guards are being particularly focused on keeping us away from anything that could be used against the crew— like silverware, and napkins... they do know we're serving and prepping food, right?

On the bright side, its easier to present a united front when you're stuck together.

The irony is, I'm still too numb from the attack and the aftermath- Threats aren't necessary— I've seen first hand just how delicate the balance is between livable and vacuum.

The next blow came this evening after a hard day's work: Our library access has been revoked and our datapads have been locked in the captain's office until he can review them and us.

The only bright side to this is the fact that I'm not killing myself running the shuttles between the Twilight and the Valkyrie like the rest of the pilots.

## January 14th, 2552 Backfire

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Pilot 237, Reporting

Remember how I mentioned that there were different castes, and they don't talk to each other? It's more that they tend to issue orders to each other and no one is listening.

Case in point, the Military was running the investigation into the explosion and at about 02:00 shipboard, the trail led back to the Twilight and the Einherjar investigating needed a pilot to take them there- right now.

All the qualified ship's personnel had been flying all day and needed downtime before they crashed into one of the ships. That left non-ship's personnel pilots— like getaway drivers with a record.

Fortunately for me— they remembered good old Pilot 237.

The job itself involved a lot of sitting and waiting, and an anxious moment when they ordered me to dust-off. I don't know what they found, but they were subdued on the way back to the Valkyrie.

Their leader, SGT Carlyle told me not to talk about anything I might have seen. Truthfully, I hadn't seen anything and told him as much. He took that as me keeping a secret.

It's nice to have someone trust you.

The findings came out around noon, as we were ramping up for lunch, the explosion was caused by too much pressure in an engine that had warped during our wormhole excursion.

Needless to say, fleet is focused on maintenance and safety before we go any further. On the bright side, 'all hands' means conscriptees as well as crew.

## January 15th, 2552 **Patiently Waiting**

Jr. Wrench Monkey in Training, Kat '237', Reporting

Well, my, we've been busy. I have to remind myself that we are not being slow and inefficient, we're being careful and thorough. I had to remind myself of that again when I was assigned to schlep equipment for another team of senior engineers and go down the same path I'd finished two hours earlier.

I also had to remind myself that as a conscriptee, nobody wanted my opinion on anything and if I wanted to continue to learn my trade, and live in peace— I need to let this go without venting.

'Venting,' another word you do not want to say whilst shipboard. Venting is bad, I get it. Not letting people sleep for more than three hours tends to require more— patience.

## January 16th, 2552 **Next Verse**

Jr. Wrench Monkey in Training, Kat '237', Reporting

Next verse, same as the first. All Day. The only break we got from inspection duty was time spent cleaning up the commissary. On the bright side, I believe every ship's engineer, grease monkey, and backyard mechanic in the fleet has been over our engine at least once.

I did get a little satisfaction when one of the visiting engineers noted a warning and went to mark the area with a can of spray paint, only to find it already painted.

Maybe we should intersperse a little 'fixing what we find' in our search... but what do I know, I'm just a trainee.

## January 17th, 2552 **Repeat Performance**

Jr. Wrench Monkey in Training, Kat '237', Reporting

Today, I learned about welding. Spot welding; Arc Welding, Mig Welding, Tig-Welding, and everybody's favorite when you're not in space Gas Welding, we covered the gambit. Then there was cutting and I think I've pretty much mastered 'toting'. Then there was the ubiquitous sweeping up.

Out of seven ships, eight if you include The Valhalla, only one ship made it through the wormhole without suffering fundamental structural damage. If the Twilight hadn't blown, it would have been one of the other ships, Valkyrie included.

As it was, the Memory was the lucky man out, we moved the injured to the Memory and the rest of the crew were split between the rest of the fleet.

The rest of us spent our day fixing what we found. The Valkyrie made it through with warped engine coil, three deformed bulkheads, and we would have been in for a very big surprise if we'd tried to dock with the Valhalla.

I had enough time to breathe a sigh of relief as we finished our assignments, and then it was back to playing caddy to the unending line of mechanics and engineers who wanted to play through our repairs.

## January 18th, 2552 **Close Call**

Jr. Wrench Monkey in Training, Pilot, beast of burden Katherine 'Kat' James, Reporting

This is going to be short, I'm too tired to last too long writing.

Today was another day of detection and overhauls, and proof that the different ship board units do not talk to each other— at all.

I started off the day as we conscriptees usually do -police up our barracks, report to the commissary, fix breakfast, clean up after breakfast go to our assigned tasks.

I don't know about the others but my tasks included, schlepping for the senior mechanics, getting read-outs and doing guided repairs on non-critical damage, shoring up bulkheads, retesting my work, getting yelled at for not reporting to the hangar and shuttling parts, getting yelled at for not returning to the commissary for lunch prep, getting yelled at for taking a break from repairs— Didn't I know there was a crisis on? Getting yelled at for... you get the idea.

It kept up until I was called into the Admiral's office— can't have a crew-member, especially a convict goldbricking during a crisis.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, he had no less than five reports filed against me, one for each section and one from the guards since they didn't know where I was off to.

We had a long talk, over dinner which he insisted I sit, eat and enjoy before we finished our business. As near as I can tell, it was the only way he could guarantee I got my mandated rest period.

Once we finished, he had his aide write up his findings and my disposition, which he filed a copy of with the Captain of the Valkyrie, Cookie, Colonel Bridges of the Einherjar, Ship's Guard Captain Mateo, as well as my direct supervisors at the Commissary, the flight pool, and Ship's Liaison Officer Daniels so my education didn't suffer.

From now on, all requests for my services and location are being routed through the ship's Liaison officer, who actually met with me and talked to me and asked what I wanted to do.

It's nice to have a buffer.

## January 19th, 2552 **Supply Run**

Jr. Wrench Monkey in Training, Pilot, beast of burden Katherine 'Kat' James, Reporting

I figured I would be doing one or the other of my assigned areas, but instead, somehow Daniels found a way to combine what I've learned. Since the Twilight is not really space worthy, she can sit there but she can't move under her own power, the fleet engineers decided it would be best to take parts from the damaged vessel and use them to fix the others.

Being one of the few pilots who also know how to welt and torch cut (yeah, I've had about 3 days of observation and one or two days of supervised work, but obviously it's enough to scrap a ship. It also meant that the trained mechanics could be spared to shore up the rest of the fleet.

So - I was moving slower than the other pilots and slower than the apprentice level mechanics, but thanks to Cookie's diagrams, I got the parts most needed by the Valkyrie and got them back to the ship.

I missed lunch, but Daniels was there with a bag lunch and orders to fill as much of Cookie's order as possible but don't object if someone else took what he wanted.

I realized that some of the parts weren't things we needed, but rather things we could use to barter for the things we did need.

So much for being an altruistic team— I guess each Captain saw his job as keeping his ship and crew functioning. I guess I can't really blame them.

## January 20th, 2552 Stark, grim— breathtaking

Pilot Mechanic Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

I'm still a wrench monkey in training, but this... this is what I came out here for. Okay, not the grueling hours and the reminder of just how fragile life is, but for the view.

Today was a continuation of yesterday's work, scrapping... er... cleaning away the debris from the Twilight so the mechanics can salvage the ship. (at least the parts that hadn't been liberated by some of the other ships' mechanics.)

I took Big Momma, the Valkyrie's utility flatbed hauler, to the Twilight and started working on the hull. Cookie had given me a diagram of what I was to try and procure. I had a brief session of 'how to work in a vacuum' from him, which involved putting me in a suit, taking me to the Zero G deck and tethering me to the bulkhead.

It was a lot less involved than the training I was given pre-launch, but that was two months ago and was all theoretical. It seems Cookie prefers the 'throw them into the deep end of the pool and see if they live' school of training.

I survived and then I was out with the flatbed. I ferried two other mechanics to different sites and for the most part remained in the ship, until they needed a third set of hands, at which point, I got my first EVA.

I moved Big Momma to one of the Twilight's deck plates and got my first unobstructed view of space. It was... stark, grim, and so heartbreakingly beautiful it hurt.

I could have sat there for hours in awe, but there were pilings to lift and work to be done.

I got back to my barracks exhausted and unable to move, and I can't wait to get out there again.

## January 21st, 2552 Trust

Pilot Mechanic Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

It's been over a week since it was discovered that there had been no sabotage, that no one was to blame for what happened onboard the Twilight of the Gods, but I'm still running into people on my own crew who haven't heard— or have just chosen to ignore the fact that suspicion was just that.

I was bringing Dr. Takahashi, the ship's medical officer, his lunch when three hyenas started circling.

"What are you doing here, Con?" one of the crewmen hissed with a sneer. The sound sent a chill up my spine.

"Who are you trying to kill?" another demanded.

"This area is restricted."

I took a deep breath, knowing that telling him that I had been in that area six days ago checking for leaks wasn't going to help here.

I went for oblivious to the threat. It's worked for me so far.

"I'm bringing Doctor Takahashi his lunch. The commissary sent me when Mrs. Roberts noticed that he hadn't been down since breakfast."

They stared daggers at me and one of them towered over me, trying to intimidate me. The towering over was easy, I'm like 165 cm. Intimidating me— well, yeah, but if I didn't get the Doc's food, I'd have to answer to Mrs. Roberts and she scares me a hell of a lot more than three bored sailors.

"I got my eye on you, con!" He added as they walked by.

Fine- everybody else does, why not you?

You know, I'm supposed to trust these guys with my life, and they can't even keep up to date on the news...

## January 22nd, 2552 Something borrowed

Pilot with a side job, Katherine 'Kat' James reporting

With our extended work hours, and limited rack time, you'd think another assignment would be the straw that broke this camel's back, but— Cookie has given me a new assignment - and my own space in the shop.

My project? Taking piles of scrap, spare parts, and damaged craft and re-purpose them. At first glance, all I saw were torn bulkheads, rejected parts, trashed altimeters and a gutted dart explorer. At second glance, I saw what he saw - enough spare parts to build a cobbled together, multi-purpose vehicle.

It's a great inspiration to learn the craft, especially when I'd be the one flying her, and we've already seen that cookie likes things pass/fail. If I fail - I'll be dead.

Nothing like self-preservation for motivation.

## January 23rd, 2552 Double Life

Pilot, Mechanic's Trainee, all-around good egg, Katherine 'Kat' James reporting

I know I should be tired, I'm working all the time these days, but the jobs are so different, it really doesn't feel like I'm working - it's more like I have a job, a hobby, and a bunch of friends who figure they can hitch a ride any time they need.

Okay, the friends are Einherjar who need to inspect the fleet and they aren't my friends, it's just that I'm a pilot who's not fleet. That means I'm not on rotation and it takes less time to rearrange the schedule of a mechanic's trainee than a fleet pilot.

I'm doing a lot of 'Hey Pilot 237, we have orders for you to take us to Valhalla.'

Oh, the images that brings to mind.

I finished up my apprentice projects, swept the hangar and started going through the pieces laying on the floor in my bay. It's a nice change, and hands-on training has always worked well for me.

Let me tell you, building a ship from the ground up is a far cry from coaxing a few more HPM from an engine.

## January 24th, 2552 AWOL

A prison suited Katherine 'Kat' James reporting

There is another problem to having too many jobs, I can't work on my craft until after the day's assignments are done and the hangar has been swept and mopped.

Then there's a new duty, making sure all the equipment and spare parts are stocked— then, and only then can I start work on my ship. I didn't mind, the ship was something that would be mine when it was done.

The only problem is— I'm still a convict and I was not in my barracks for lights out. The first reminder was when one of the guards grabbed my foot and dragged me out from under the fuselage.

Since they didn't want to wake Daniels— I got to spend the night in the brig. It didn't do much for the way the peanut gallery saw me— they always knew I was a bad seed.

## January 25th, 2552 Bad seed

Katherine 'Kat' James reporting

If I didn't like Daniel's before— I'd adore him now. When the ship's guard brought me before him for breaking curfew, he just looked at them, and then he looked at them some more before shaking his head.

"Gentlemen— we're on a ship, in space, thousands, maybe millions of light-years from home. Where is she going to go?"

"She's a pilot, She could fly..."

"Where?"

"She..."

"She's a mechanic's apprentice, who can fly, drive and operate almost every vehicle in the hangar, besides, if she was going to run— would she have cleaned everything? And then there's that whole "Nowhere to go."

It went on from them with the guard focused on what a bad seed I am, and Daniels pointing out they were overreacting.

I also learned a very important lesson about the chain of command: rank has its privilege, and being on the good side of the person with said rank helps.

## January 26th, 2552 Trouble is its own reward

Katherine 'Kat' James, sometimes pilot, sometimes wrench monkey reporting

Word of my antics reached my three self-appointed watchers. They made no bones about what they were doing, and the fact that they were on to me. It would be nice if they were actually watching what was happening around me, like who dropped the quart of oil on my freshly cleaned floor, and who rubbed grease on the stairs.

No, I just got to do extra cleaning... all day.

I tried to get ahead but my erstwhile work gremlin kept me busy with work until lights out— which I was in time for. When meant that when they decided to grease the area around my

project— there was no one there to help them up when they slipped and hit their head on the fender of my vehicle.

The guards and my watchers were sure it was me— but when he was found— he still had the grease in hand.

It seems that someone out there is looking out for me.

Gotta love instant Karma.

## January 27th, 2552 A tour of the stars

Katherine 'Kat' James, sometimes pilot, sometimes wrench monkey reporting

I can definitely see why they have 9th day. All work tends to be hell for morale. But a little bit of organized tomfoolery can go a long way.

While it was literally a bus man's holiday, everybody cleared for flight was drafted to conduct tours of our area. I didn't mind - I got to see my fill of where we were— It was betaking, but not nearly as beautiful as seeing the Valkyrie's View off my bow.

I think that is what people feel when they're coming home

## January 28th, 2552 Supply run

Katherine 'Kat' James, sometimes pilot, sometimes wrench monkey reporting

I hadn't noticed it before, but after a day of 'fun' everyone seemed friendlier. Even the 'I'm watching you' triplets are smiling while they make my life a living hell.

It wasn't that bad - I ended up being drafted for running supplies between Valhalla and the Valkyrie's View- with a few side trips to The Thought and The Memory - Something involving off the books supplies and 12-year-old scotch for Cookie.

Yep, start any enterprise, any scale even one with the population of a moderate-sized country spread over 8 ships - a black market will thrive. Let's face it, we have enough supplies to last quite a few years - hydroponics on each ship and 2 entire levels dedicated to food production on the Valhalla, people are people, and they're going to want their hooch.

My vices are far simpler - let me see the stars, let me fly. You don't really realize how important those things are until they almost clip your wings.

In other news, my apprentice project is starting to look more like a ship than a pile of bolts... A lopsided cobbled-together ship— but a ship nonetheless.

## January 29th, 2552 A con, an Einherjar and a mechanic walk into a bar

Pilot Mechanic Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

It seems my understanding of rank and divisions within the fleet was an oversimplified version of things.

The Fleet itself follows the old Maritime divisions of rank - from command to support and support includes medical, research, and law enforcement.

The Scientific community has its own hierarchy involving education, experience and seniority and also comes with its own support staff and security.

The military branch follows military rank and chain of command and is responsible for over all security and strategic defense.

The exploration project itself follows a tribunal with three representatives from each branch, which have to agree on how the mission is enacted.

All of this led to a massive staff meeting on the Valhalla - with me ferrying Einherjar representatives, Support Staff and Science officers to and from their respective ships.

Each representative brought their support staff with them, but when the meeting actually started, the staff was all told to go back to their ship or wait in the canteen.

As taxi driver, I took those returning to their ships where they were headed and came back to the canteen to wait for my final charges.

It would have been boring, but I really liked getting to see Cookie in a more relaxed, less responsible position and I got to talk with Sgt "Tower" Carlyle, the platoon leader for the Einherjar stationed on the Valikyrie's view.

He and Cookie decided that questioning me on my training and my history would be a good use of their time. The best reaction had to be Cookie's, "So, you're telling me that you ended up here because you rendered aid to an officer who was trying to capture you, and releasing the kidnapping victim, you were hired to 'rescue?'... that explains a lot."

I wasn't sure if I should be insulted or confused by this.

## January 30th, 2552 HairBrained Schemes, and Lowlife Friends

Pilot Mechanic Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

So - the mechanic who'd been making extra work for me - that was Mac, Darin MacKenzie. Turns out he doesn't like convicts, the idea of convicts being allowed anywhere near civilized people. That goes even stronger for convicted murderers.

He didn't dislike me as a person, but rather what I represented to him - what I represent to me is redemption and a chance to make amends. The way the judicial department sees it - I'm a work

in progress and as far as my kidnapping victim and my arresting officer- I'm a kid who had some unlucky breaks, made some bad decisions, but also made a lot of better decisions— and it keeps me away from my brother and any more of his hair-brained schemes and lowlife friends.

He was back on duty today and I didn't have any extra messes to clean up— the day would have been uneventful if it hadn't been for the 'I've got my eye on you' boys. It seems that they have been emboldened by God only knows what, but they decided to pay me a visit and make sure nothing else untold happened to Mac.

So, once again, I was pulled out from beneath the fuselage of my project craft— which is looking more and more like a fuselage, they were about to start explaining things to me when Mac stepped in.

One minute I'm ready to be intimidated, and the next I have an angry mechanic standing between me and the trio laying down the law.

He waited until they left and then turned to me. I was expecting anything from a reprimand to a beat down, apologies were not something I expected in situations like this.

Turns out my conversation with Cookie, and how I got to be a part of the Justice Department's project had filtered down to him before his release from sick-bay.

We aren't friends— but we aren't enemies either— and he's promised to keep me on the straight and narrow. Then he helped me with the Franken-ship.

## January 31st, 2552 We know the Frikarwe

Pilot Mechanic Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

Today is an official fleet celebration day - we now know where we are in relation to good old Mother Earth: We are in an area designated: galaxy MACS0647-JD - some 13.3 billion light-years from home.

I don't think anyone's really thought about what this means, not in the long term. For the short term, we know where we are and it is space we know, so we didn't tear a hole in space/time - or if we did it's fixed itself. But we are almost as far away as we can be and still be in the same universe.

The truth of the matter is the fact that unless there is a breakthrough in science, we will never see Earth again, and the earth we see is as it was 13.3 billion years ago. Maybe someday, our descendants will meet up with humanity - but any communications we send, all our results are going to remain with us until then.

We are on our own, and they won't see any sign of life on earth for another 13 billion years. That's B, not M.

At least we now know we are the Frikarwe.

## February 1st, 2552 Buckling down

Pilot Mechanic Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

It almost feels like we were all holding our breaths and now that we know where we are, and just how far we are from home, we can get to work.

Until now, we've been maintaining the fleet and discussing the possibilities - now we are explorers and we need to get to work.

First order of business - all personnel who will be involved in gathering samples - scientists, Einherjar and pilots alike are being trained in techniques and procedures for dealing with unknown environments. We need to get samples without contaminating them— and not exposing ourselves to the unknown.

Lives and research depend on us doing our jobs safely and securely.

Simply put - we are studying the unknown and no one wants to be a lab rat - even the lab rats don't want to be lab rats.

That's why they have convict-conscriptees.

## February 2nd, 2552 Redundant Redundancies

Pilot/Mechanic/Lab Rat - Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

It's fun sitting in on lectures about safety and caution when what they want you to do is touch down on alien planets, follow protocols that were designed to control the unknown based on the known. So we're basically gathering samples following protocols for earth-based microbes and known, earth-based elements and we're expecting them to work on places that have never even seen earth - not to mention not leaving any of our nasty ol' earth germs where it might harm the environment or evolve into something that can kill us.

I may have said something to that effect, and the lecturer may have glowered at me - but I only said what was on everyone's mind. We really aren't going to know how well these things work until they are actually put into use.

On the bright side, they did decide to explore one planet at a time until we got a feel for the area, as opposed to the plan of 'pick 8 likely planets and send one ship to investigate each.' I see it as doing my part to try and survive as long as possible.

Reason number 237 why I'm making sure my Franken-ship is well designed and has redundancies on the redundancies - there's too much space out there not to reinforce paranoia.

Mac has volunteered to make sure I don't miss anything, and I'm only mildly paranoid about the offer.

## February 3rd, 2552 New Job, better job

Pilot/Mechanic/Lab Rat - Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

Daniels has decided that I need to focus on one thing right now and that is my project. He seems convinced that we are going to need to be able to scavenge parts, cobble them together and make something we need. It makes sense since we have limited parts and until we can get the base materials, we're stuck with what we've got.

There's a forge and manufacturing equipment on Valhalla, but again, we're dealing with limited supplies.

One thing I should say about having Mac help me— he'll stop me from wasting parts - but he is not above letting me make mistakes so I can learn from them.

It would seem that there are a lot of mistakes that mean taking everything apart again and putting them back together in the right order.

After the 5th time putting together the maneuvering thrusters, he smiled at me and said, "I'll bet that you will never forget the right order."

I wasn't sure if I wanted to throttle him or hug him. He's not treating me like a crook, or a kid - he's treating me like a Junior mechanic with a lot to learn.

## Feb 4th, 2552 Adapt or get left behind

Katherine 'Kat' James, sometimes pilot, sometimes wrench monkey reporting

While I am still working on the Franken-ship, I am also taking science classes on types of rocks and minerals and how they are formed. Or as Tower put it - If a bunch of Einherjar can learn to read the lay of the land, a pilot who can't is only going to be good for supply runs and decorating the landscape.

Actually, what he said was "Con-237, you want to serve slop for the rest of your life— that's fine, but if you want to explore, you need to be able to do more than one job, or on your case more than three jobs..."

It makes sense. If we're going to be investigating local planets and learning what's out there the more you can do on the first landing, the sooner we can figure out what warrants further investigation.

## February 5th, 2552 New Job, better job

Concerned Pilot/Metallurgist/Mechanic/Lab Rat - Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

Today was the first landing on an alien planet, well, almost landing, almost tragedy. Remember how I said that we were making plans based on things we know while poking at the unknown? Yeah that...

Turns out that at least one of the planets the science teams picked out was not friendly to our craft.

Fortunately, the pilot was cautious, preferring to 'dip their toe' in the water prior to landing. I don't know if it was skill or dumb luck - but only one landing gear touched down before everything went haywire.

I ended up watching the footage one frame at a time - but what happened next was a cascade failure that could have stranded the pilot. As it was they ejected the gear and tethered to the Twilight just to make sure that whatever ate through the gear didn't eat through the hull. As it was, the pilot was forced to spacewalk to another craft and be hauled in in an isolation unit.

We might be able to salvage some of the lander, but we're going to keep it tethered for now. Last thing we need are parts that break down as soon as you touch them - and we definitely don't want the deterioration to hit one of the fleet ships.

Whatever we do - it looks like we're about to invent a brand new field of research. It's not the type of thing you want to be at the forefront of - but it's not like we have much of a choice.

## February 6th, 2552 Robot arm

Metallurgy trainee/Lab Rat - Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

It would seem that working in an iso suit is like working in a spacesuit that is far more delicate and unforgiving and you have almost no dexterity whatsoever.

Working in an iso suit over a spacesuit is just plain ridiculous. On the bright side, whatever the reaction was it has stopped and doesn't seem all that interested in organic material, but since the space ship that is keeping us from dying in the vacuum of space is inorganic the end result would be the same.

We need to figure out what caused the reaction and how to prevent it from happening again.

As it is, no one is in any hurry to take the landing gear on board any ship - just in case it starts up again once it has some atmosphere around it.

Today I got to go out and take samples of the landing gear and deliver them to the lab onboard the Twilight of the Gods - hey, if you have a ship eating unknown substance, far better to research it on an already damaged craft than on one of the good ships.

Of course - there's nothing saying that the isolation lab equipment wasn't damaged during our wormhole excursion - let's face it our repairs and reviews were mostly structural - we didn't worry about equipment that wasn't in use yet.

Basically, I got to take the samples, take them to isolation and then have one of the specialists use me as their remote equipment.

That way, if there were any mistakes... well... at least you didn't lose a valued scientist. Just a human guinea pig/robot arm.

I'm on board the Twilight until they're sure whatever it is isn't going to be transferred to the Valkyrie.

## February 7th, 2552 New Protocols

Metallurgy trainee/Lab Rat - Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

Spending the night onboard the Twilight was— surreal. There's only a skeleton crew, and everyone there was either sleeping with a spacesuit in hand, sleeping in an escape pod - or simply not sleeping.

I spent most of the night dozing in front of the isolated sample watching its reaction to atmosphere and the lack thereof as it went through its pre-programmed test. I wrote everything I observed, but I left the conclusions to Raven, the lead metallurgist on the Valkyrie.

When the results were finally disposed of, and I was allowed back on board the Valkyrie's View - I was arrested by the ship's guard for being AWOL— again. This time they knew they were right since I wasn't even onboard the ship.

They did at least wait until I'd been through decontamination and a really nice hot shower. Sleeping in the brig meant I didn't have to worry about being disturbed until word filtered through to Commander Daniels.

When he asked me why I'd waited to notify him, I admitted, "I needed a nap."

By the time I was released, Dr. Raven O'Connell had finished analyzing the results and presenting them, along with a safety protocol for all pilots on exploratory missions to adhere to.

We now have a secondary landing craft - a drone made out of the same material as the landing craft, with one lander designed to test the planetary reactions to every piece of material we use. That craft lands, takes samples and then lifts off and is then intercepted in flight, the results are read off, the samples isolated (after determining that they can be isolated) and then the whole thing is taken back to the Twilight for analysis and review.

If everything checks out - the pilot will then be allowed to land the next day.

## February 8th, 2552 Arcade Games

Flight Simulator Failure/Lab Rat - Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

Today, based on the new protocols, all pilots were called upon to report to the simulator for training. My problem is— the simulator isn't real. In the history of simulators, I have yet to find one that actually handled like a ship - the feel and response time is always off, and it throws me off.

Fortunately, I started flying with a shuttle my brother borrowed from his friend's dad– I did mention that my brother was a bad influence, right?

Then again, if it wasn't for him I don't think I'd ever been allowed to drive, let alone fly. The conversation with the flight officer on the Valkyrie went something like this:

**FO** - Pilot, I've seen you fly. I've seen you land on a deck when the ship was heaving and the pitch and yaw were out of synch. You landed without missing a beat - what's the problem here?

**Me** - Sir, (always remember to be polite) This is not a ship landing on the deck of a carrier. This is an arcade game.

**FO** - You're still a pilot.

**Me** - Yes.

**FO** - Then what's the issue?

**Me** - I'm more hands-on practical effect, with this I might as well be playing pong for all the feedback it gives me.

**FO** - You haven't even tried it.

**Me** - I've tried enough in my day.

**FO** - (you could almost hear his eye-roll) You're what, 25?

**Me** - 27.

He glared at me but he must have seen something in my eyes. He agreed to take me through an unrecorded sim session if I agreed to give it my best. It ended with a wrecked ship and me with the dry heaves. I'm not sure which came first but once the sim stopped things cleared up.

"That's not an issue with the simulator not giving you good feedback," he commented as he helped me to my feet.

I'm not sure what causes it, but the simulator has to not only present the preset program, it has to respond to 'issues' being introduced, not to mention the pilot's reaction time. Something gets lost in translation. The simulator makes me sick - the ship does not.

We came to an understanding - until we had a planet he could certify me on, I was to focus on supply runs, shipbuilding... and training, always training.

## February 9th, 2552 Trio of Terrors

Shuttle pilot/Lab Rat/mechanic in training - Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

You'd think with how busy we are and how much work we have to do in order to survive long enough to do our mission— people would be focused on that. Well, most reasonable, well-balanced people were focused on that.

Unfortunately, there were some people who'd begun to rethink the whole 'let's get stranded a couple of billion light-years away from the earth and try to survive long enough to send the information back.' The fact that the folks back on earth won't know where we are for over 13 billion years did kind of put a damper on the whole thing, but we're here to learn and who knows, we may find a way to get back with the research.

Even more unfortunately several of the conscriptees were grumbling a lot louder than the others. That seemed to be all the trio of 'protectors' needed to try and run roughshod over me.

Fortunately, our work schedule meant that they only had a limited window of when they could 'watch' me. They could watch me in the commissary while I cleaned up in the kitchen, and they could watch me from 21:00-22:00 while I worked on the Franen-ship. But the presence of another mechanic and the fact that he made a big show of setting security on the deck as we left meant that they couldn't do more than loom.

As I headed back to the dorm, Mac stopped me.

"Don't worry about them, kid," he said. "You just keep doin' yer job and keep your nose clean."

I'm not sure what's going to happen, but something in Mac's tone told me that sometimes Karma had help.

## February 10th, 2552 Project Tweaks

Shuttle pilot/Lab Rat/mechanic in training - Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

The Franken-ship is looking more ship, less cobbled-together these days. She's not as sleek as the other exploratory ships, but she wasn't designed to win any beauty contests. She's a multi-purpose vehicle and as such, she's a thing of her own beauty, or is that her builder talking?

It really doesn't matter I guess - what's important is that she handles the work she's given.

With my experiences so far, there are already some mods on the drawing board that, with Cookie's go-ahead, will be added.

First up I want a remote arm for gripping objects in space - this will help with parts retrieval and of course deployment. Next, a detachable isolation kit that can be used to handle samples without having to actually bring them onboard, onboard.

Some of these need to have design help from the science department but Cookie and Mac debated over the drawings before giving me the go-ahead.

So the Franken-ship is going to look like even more of a monstrosity - but it will be more useful. I doubt my design for a sound system is going to be approved, but having a separate compartment that can be isolated from the cockpit should be a no-brainer - I just need to work out some of the specs, and I can't do that alone.

## February 11th, 2552 Failure to maintain

Philosopher/Shuttle pilot/Lab Rat/mechanic in training - Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

The universe is not a forgiving place. Sometimes we forget that— sometimes the reminder is a little hard to take. We really didn't have time to mourn properly when the Twilight ruptured, we were too busy trying to make sure it didn't happen again.

Today - it was just one of those things that happen, a pilot forgot the first rule of the universe— miscalculated the spin on an asteroid and... we lost the pilot and the ship.

I threw myself into my work until Mac pulled me out. He made me talk to him, and I hated him for it— until I realized it was more about him. He'd lost someone he cared about - not from an accident, but from not talking about it. I guess I'm honored that he thinks enough of me that he doesn't want to make the same mistake.

## February 12th, 2552 A moment

Shuttle pilot/Lab Rat/mechanic in training - Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

I nearly hit someone today, which usually a good sign that I need to back off and regroup, only I'm on a ship that's more like a small town. Sure there are people I haven't met and haven't ticked off for being there— but I didn't have it in me to deal with 'I'm watching you' guy and his friends.

Cookie and Mac understood, and oddly Tower and the Einherjar understood. Truth be told I think Mac was expecting it. He and Cookie kept me busy with clean up, and the wreckage was taken to the Twilight.

It's interesting - they took the ship there for forensics not because they were afraid of damage, but because they wanted to keep it so that the pilot's crew would be spared having to see the ship. Only problem is, when you have really good ship-to-ship communications... you see things all too clearly.

I learned an object lesson in coping methods - Cookie inventories, Mac builds... the Einherjar spar... and I need to find something other than being prickly. I'll last longer

## February 13th, 2552 Christening

Shuttle pilot/Lab Rat/mechanic in training - Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

I know Cookie is trying to bring me out of my funk - and I know we need proof that we can adapt vehicles to our new environment but it seems a little crass to launch the Franen-ship, not this close to losing Miranda and the Diva.

I know life goes on but I'm not ready for it.

My craft will never replace the sleek landers, but the tests all say she's space worthy and flight worthy - the tunnels say she'll handle a planetary landing, but she'll fly like a brick under atmosphere. She also won't have FTL - which isn't really a problem since the base ships have it and her job is to fly short-range missions between ships and between planetary objects.

The Franen-Ship got a lot of comments, some hopeful, most skeptical. She is what she is - my apprentice work, and my chance to be a productive member of the crew.

Cookie gave me a can of paint and her numbers. I painted them on with care, trying not to think of all we've lost and focus on moving forward, and then the final piece was her name.

Dancer's ship is the Pavane, Skip's is the Hunter, Jo-Jo's is the Welcome Wagon. My ship is...

The Rummage Sale Gumbo.

## February 14th, 2552 Shakedown cruise

Pilot of the RS Gumbo/Lab Rat/mechanic in training - Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

I have been informed by several people in several departments, that I am not taking myself and/or my position seriously enough.

Several people demanded I rename my ship with something more heroic but— that's just not who I am. It kinda took me by surprise how many people haven't figured out by now that I tend to be a tad irreverent. Don't get me wrong, I love my ship— and I love that I built her but I have no illusion about her - she is a Franken-ship - She's a little bit swap meet ketch and a lot of 'throw everything in the pot and let it simmer'.

Cookie gets it, Mac— Mac just scratched his head and laughed before telling me, he's calling her the Gumbo.

Then the really scary work began. The RS-Gumbo made her maiden flight. Everything checked out and we would have left it at that, but we needed to retrieve some of the folks on Twilight and the other ships were practicing taking off and landing on unpredictable surfaces.

I'm still not cleared for that— but I ended up putting the Gumbo through her paces landing on the Twilight - she was lurching and shuddering. Her gyro and guidance were off and they needed to evacuate everyone but the repair team - So I made about 10 uneventful runs before my luck started to turn.

I made it down, but unless the Twilight starts flying straight and true, I won't be coming back, so The RS Gumbo is tethered down to the deck as the last escape vehicle. Good thing I'm an apprentice mechanic and allowed to work a welding rig, otherwise, I'd have been sitting there with too much time on my hands.

I got back around 2200 that night - tired and ready for bed - only to be intercepted by the Flight Officer.

To be honest, I was expecting an earful about my last landing on the Twilight, but he told me that “Anybody who can land that nightmare of a ship on the Twilight when her pitch and yaw were out of whack— is cleared to land in my book - don’t let me down.”

That was it - he said his piece and walked on - leaving me there elated and more than a bit flabbergasted.

Tomorrow morning, I have to fix the damage that last landing did.

## February 15th, 2552 Wrong Pilot, Right Time

Shuttle pilot/Lab Rat/mechanic in training - Katherine ‘Kat’ James Reporting

Sometimes you get assignments based on the best person for the job - when you can plan things out— that’s what happens when things go according to plan. The universe, it seems, loves a plan, and how little it means to the rest of creation.

That is when the second type of assignments are made, those snap decisions based on who’s available and who has a chance of getting the job done. I usually do not get the first type of assignments - the cushy, pristine flights - I get the ‘We’re all going to die unless someone can get us through ~whatever the situation is~.

These assignments are the ones in my wheelhouse. I’m beginning to think that I am incapable of nice pristine missions, but messy ones?

When a mission is described as being ‘messy’, I’m the first pilot who comes to mind. I don’t know if this is a good thing or a bad thing— but it is happening more now that the Gumbo has proved herself in flight.

Something tells me I will be contemplating this a lot in the future as we begin to explore our area of space.

## February 16th, 2552 Assignment Envy

Shuttle pilot/Lab Rat/Mechanic’s Apprentice - Katherine ‘Kat’ James Reporting

The science boys have mapped out the area and have identified several likely planets to explore - with FTL up and operational, the plan is to leave the Valhalla as our base of operations and then have different ships take different missions - each ship has selected three shuttle pilots as their explorers.

Unfortunately, since I failed the sims, I do not qualify, at least for the first run.

Dancer, Jo-Jo, and SkipTrace are the pilots selected for the Valkyrie's View team.

I wish I were included but— it's still better than being stuck on some rock with no hope of flying. I just need to keep reminding myself of that.

For some reason, the science department has decided that this decision means that they don't need to waste any more effort training anyone other than the trio for sample collection and science.

It means I have more time to work on projects and I am no longer a trainee— I am a mechanic's apprentice, but human nature being what it is - I still envy the others.

I guess that's what the ship's library and advanced classes are for.

## February 17th, 2552 Stir Crazy

Shuttle pilot/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice - Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

It seems that the attitude of the flight deck is following the science department's lead - the only pilots who need to work on landing and dusting off from different surfaces are the pilots selected for the exploration missions, so all other pilots are on standby.

I understand they want Dancer, Jo-Jo, and Skip to have as much experience as possible but I joined this mission to keep from having my wings clipped. Keeping a pilot from flying is another word for slow death. You can put them on other assignments, but in the back of their mind - there's this thing that keeps telling them - "I should be flying."

I feel sorry for some of the pilots— that's all they know. I still have all my other jobs to do. I mean, I still hate not flying, but at least I don't have time to sit and dwell on it.

The other pilots - they can exercise and play with the simulator but— it's not the same.

At least I can work on the Gumbo - but now there's a line of pilots hoping to test fly repaired craft.

## February 18th, 2552 A new Project

Shuttle pilot/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice - Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

It seems that before I can work on adding an arm to the Gumbo, I need to work on the arm on Big Momma. It started malfunctioning during some of the training runs for taking samples. So, I have to repair her, with Mac watching me/training me/working with me/letting me make mistakes in the interest of 'learning'— I think he does it so he can take a smoke break while I clean up my mess.

After spending half the day fixing her and then reinforcing the arm to take more abuse, Cookie deemed me ready to work on the arm of the official landing craft - giving it the same reinforcement I'd given Big Momma - So I worked on the Pavane, with a very anxious Dancer hovering over my shoulder.

At least she didn't try to explain what it needed to be able to do. On the bright side, after all the mistakes and missteps with Big Momma, the Pavane was - easy.

I was still very careful, but I knew the order and I knew when to tighten what.

By the time they let me loose on the Gumbo - I could have done it in my sleep, granted it was late enough I almost did do it in my sleep.

## February 19th, 2552 Troubleshooting

Shuttle pilot/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice - Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

They broke Big Momma again - Different pilots, different pressures, different breakage-- same arm. I looked at it, looked at Mac and shook my head - the chances of two different pilots using the same tools, doing the same job and breaking the same piece of equipment in a different way? That didn't sound right.

So we spent the morning breaking it down.

Okay, we all have a different grip we're comfortable with, we all have different body chemistries that can cause different hormones and chemicals to be released in our sweat - but they're wearing suits, which means that the machine is responding to different movements and grips and exposing the equipment to different stress points.

It meant that the arm was getting different signals whether by grip or by positioning or a combination of the two.

In other words, we going to need to make the controls adjustable, force the pilots to apply the same force at the same angle every time, or we're going to need to get a phone book for some of the shorter pilots.

I spent the afternoon gathering data on the pilot's grips, pressure points, the pressure applied... you get the idea.

We spent most of dinner redesigning the controls, where the goal wasn't to make them better and fine tune them, but to make them give an equal, serviceable response.

The Einherjar found it amusing that our solution was to dumb down the controls.

## February 20th, 2552 Psych Eval

Shuttle pilot/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice - Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

4 months since I was assigned to the Vision Project, 3 Months after leaving Tera-prime and being dumped on the Valkyrie's view, a month after we lose half of a ship's crew and just days after another pilot is killed - they finally think that maybe they should give me a Psych eval.

The Psychologist, counselor... whatever you want to call them, wanted to get to know me and know what makes me tick— how I was coping with the reality of the dangers of my assignment and how it couldn't be reversed — I was stuck in a world where one wrong move— anyone's wrong move could cost me my life.

I'm not sure how their write-up looked when they sent it on to the powers that be - but I was honest.

I pointed out that I chose this life over being stuck on a rock for the rest of my life. I chose this life because life is for living - and it may be dangerous, and it might be short... but at least it's mine and of my choosing.

Hell, if I thought they'd have let me— I'd have volunteered for this job. It is why I don't regret doing what I did. It may have been the wrong decision or a collection of them that brought me here— but I'm here and I'm going to take it as far as I can.

## February 21st, 2552 Cold Reality

Shuttle pilot/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice - Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

We lost another crewman today. One of the conscriptees was found in a restricted area of the ship. Ship's security investigated it - they took a whole 10 minutes out of their day to look into his past and the scene before declaring it an 'unfortunate accident' and leaving it at that.

Thing is, as a mechanic, I've been in that area- it's not the sort of place you just accidentally find yourself in. It took the engineers longer to extricate him than it did for security to file the paperwork. I know the man didn't have a remarkable life - all he has in the fleet is a number and he ended as a three-word epitaph: 'death by misadventure.'

I want my life to mean something, but the cold truth is it's only going to matter if you make it matter.

I am happy to say that the Einherjar took an interest. Not in the man but in where he was found. The man was not supposed to be there— and that could mean something.

I don't know if they'll find anything, or just be happy once they prove that it doesn't mean danger for anyone here— but at least they're looking.

## February 22nd, 2552 Boxing as Therapy

Shuttle pilot/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice - Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

I realize it was probably part of the investigation, but Tower was in the gym when I got there. I haven't really done any training since the last time I needed this particular form of therapy, but he and several of the other Einherjar were there taking turns sparing in the ring.

I had planned on just working with the heavy and speed bags, but before I could say or do anything I found myself gloved up and in the ring.

It was about the third time that Tower reminded me to keep my hands up, that I found myself eating canvas. He's not one for talking, our Sgt Carlyle. His lessons were simple and straightforward - when my guard went too low, he'd tap me in the head protector with increasing force.

I have to admit, you learn faster that way— at least until he knocks you loopy.

After some smelling salts and another round he asked, "Feeling better?"

He wasn't talking about being knocked down, no, this was all about getting back up and getting on with living. I thought about that for a bit before I answered.

"There's no place I'd rather be."

He rewarded me with a smile, a nod, and a cryptic "Thought so."

## February 23rd, 2552 9th Day Races

Shuttle pilot/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice - Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

I have a new side project to work on, one I actually have some experience in. One of the things the fleet planned for us this 9th day was some races. Each ship pulled a pilot from their exploration team to represent their ship. Jo-Jo pulled that honor for the Valkyrie's View.

Everyone was flying stock landers for the first heat, but of course— there were no real rules on the matter, there were just the pilots willing to show off their flying skills and mechanics who wanted to help them... and by help I mean, soup-up the engines and give them some enhancements.

Let's just say, a get-away pilot is some rather helpful experience when it comes to making ships fly faster and handle better at speed. It also meant I could translate pilot speak to mechanic jargon... at least now I understand what those enhancements mean.

We had five hours to enhance the ship and get Jo-Jo on board. It was fun, and almost like flying. Jo-Jo winning was just the icing on the cake.

## February 24th, 2552 Final Exam

Shuttle pilot/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice - Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

Turns out the Gumbo wasn't my Apprentice project - it was more a proof that I could follow directions, figure out what I needed and how to put something together from the ground up. My actual project to be judged by the other mechanics was to take apart a perfectly working ship, have them remove some parts and have me put it back together again and a) identify the missing parts, b) replace them c) make it space worthy.

The actual test was more or less pass-fail. Either I got all the parts where they belonged and the ship flew without killing me or... I failed.

Just when I think they care— I am reminded that the universe is an uncaring place - and you have to rely on yourself.

It seems that all of Mac's 'let her make the mistakes, she'll only make them once' method of teaching works.

I passed. There were a few extra screws and a few odd parts left after piecing her together— but most of those were part of the test. Most - I think it's not proper mechanical work unless you have odds and ends leftover... some unwritten rule.

I just lost a shift in the commissary- giving me two hours of Engineering school in addition to my shop work.

## February 25th, 2552 Flight Team

Shuttle pilot/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice - Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

With the exploration teams focusing on landing and training - the missions are being planned and each pilot is being assigned a dedicated support team - Mechanics, trainers and even a nutritionist. Any time they request a change to their ship, the engineers design it, the mechanics make it happen and I get to make sure it doesn't kill them.

While I'm officially assigned to Dancer's team - I also get to test out Skip and Jo-Jo's craft. Not all mechanics fly and the flight pool prefers to fly repaired ships over experimental.

I don't blame them— but where's the fun in that? I didn't hitch a ride with a deep space exploration team to live a quiet life.

I'm almost living the life of my dreams.

In my dreams, I'm one of the explorers.

## February 26th, 2552 Tow Truck

Barge pilot/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice - Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

With the first landing about to become a reality, I have a new-new job, and the Gumbo just added another purpose to her resume - Tow truck. The RS Gumbo is now the official barge for the Pavane.

While the research team narrows down their selection to the first planet to explore, Dancer has been designated prime for landing, with Jo-Jo lined up as her second. Jo-Jo and to a lesser extent, SkipTrace are still in training, but the spotlight is on Dancer.

It's funny, I'm hauling her ship to the launch windows, but it's all about her and the Pavane, it's like me and the Gumbo are just background noise.

I want to feel bad about it— but I am part of this. I can't believe this is really happening.

## February 27th, 2552 Briefing

Shuttle pilot/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice - Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

You can feel the excitement building. Everyone in the fleet from the conscriptee pushing a broom in maintenance to the lady serving coffee at the briefings, to the staff taking notes, we all feel it— okay, all three of those are me, but I can see it in little things others are doing. We're actually doing this.

In the commissary even my fellow conscriptees are smiling, the meetings are a little more intense and the disagreements are more animated, and one of the biggest changes is the fact that we're all getting assignments.

It isn't just the pilots, and now their support teams. We're working on trajectories, fueling positions, relay teams, supply teams - having ships ready to catch the craft if needed and tow her to dock on the Valkyrie. Dancer is going to have to touch down after the remote test - Deploy FTL back to the designated area near the Twilight, where I'll be waiting to tow her to the landing area. We spend the night there, going over the ship. I'll be on that team while Dancer is taken through medical.

If everything goes according to plan I tow her out in the morning - and she hops back to the View and does the main landing.

It means that I'll see the transmission about half an hour after the actual landing. Part of me wants to feel bad about that, but truth be told— I'm going to be too busy to be feeling anything but the weight of what we're doing.

## February 28th, 2552 Catch and Release

Shuttle pilot/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice - Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

So... the selected pilots they get to do planetary landings and all the extra flight time they can manage so they have as much experience as possible. That means landing on everything in the fleet, including Big Momma, and lots and lots of time in the simulators.

I do not envy them the simulator time the slightest. We have already determined that if it's fake, I end up on the cleaning crew tasked with hosing the simulator down. Besides, with my new role, I have to be sure I'm ready and the RS Gumbo is up to the task of catching and towing a vehicle to the Twilight of the Gods.

Currently, my job is to pick up everything in the area from the Gumbo.

I was given a trash bag from the shop and told to release it, and then clean it up. That was fun for about the first 5 minutes, and then it got interesting as everything spread out and I had to go tracking it down. I almost cried when they suggested I repeat the process.

Cookie, thankfully, recognized the stress in my voice and told Flight ops that that was enough for one day. They started to argue that I needed to be able to pick up everything - in case something happened to the explorer ship and I had to pick up the samples.

Cookie pointed out that they also needed me to be able to pick up the ship, in case nothing happens to the landing craft.

It's good to know that Flight Ops values their pilots almost as much as they value their convicts. I know the mission is what matters, but survival has to be part of that plan, or the overall mission is going to fail due to attrition.

## February 29th, 2552 Heart to Heart

Tow Truck Driver/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice - Katherine 'Kat' James Reporting

It was after my third training run of the day while I was waiting for Flight Ops to decide what monkey wrenches they could throw my way when I caught sight of Dancer. Betty Jean Cartanzki— I kid you not - I'd go by Dancer too if that were my name. Hell, they call me Convict 237 and I answer to that.

Dancer was watching my training runs. It was the first time I actually got to talk to her. She knew that I was on her team and since we'd have direct contact after her first landing and I'd be working on her ship, I guess she wanted to know who she was working with.

She was doing everything a test pilot is trained to do - focus on the mission, focus on the ship - took me a while to realize that she was nervous about the upcoming mission. Truth be told, I'd worry about her if she wasn't at least a little nervous.

I was about to leave her to her thoughts when she asked. "How long have you been flying?"

I laughed. "Whenever I can since I was seven."

That broke the ice. I forgot how it felt to just... hang out with pilots. Yeah, you have a lot of Type A personalities, but you also have people who understand that not flying, is an awful lot like dying.

## March 1st, 2552 Call Sign

Tow Truck Driver/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

Dancer, Jo-Jo, and to a lesser extent Skip decided that I needed a better call sign than 'Convict 237' it didn't roll off the tongue, and it just has too many syllables. I was hoping they'd go with 'Kat' it works better than some of the alternatives.

But of course, Flight Ops had to agree to it, then they had to run it by fleet... I hoped for Kat... I got ConV.

At least they're trying to include me— even if the Admiralty would like to keep me in my place. Then again, we're in deep space in the middle of no-where and my place is expanding.

In other news, Fleet has decided that the lander crew and their support teams are no longer allowed to travel alone - we are to stay in designated groups and under constant guard in case someone decides they need to go put pennies in charging points.

I'm just not sure if they're trying to protect us from some threat in the fleet or from ourselves.

## March 2nd, 2552 Researching the Research

Tow Truck Driver/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

Today was spent shuttling people between ships as we prepare to separate into our mission groups. I guess they're getting all their physical time in while they can. Transmissions are all well and good, but since we haven't figured out how to communicate real-time with at great distances, conference calls are going to be pretty much non-existent.

We do have some experiments they'll be running. Fipps was telling me about one of them. As near as I understand one involves two particles - something about quantum entanglement and

using binary to communicate. But he lost me at state switching and state translation and he simply gave up.

There were discussions about other methods, both of travel and communications, but so much of it is theoretical and I only heard bits and pieces as I shuttled people to and from meetings.

One of the cool things about being a pilot is the fact that your passengers tend to think of the pilot as a part of the ship and not a person with functioning ears.

It has its advantages, or at least it would if I were better versed in theoretical astrophysics.

As it was I had to ask Cookie that if we don't have actual 'Faster Than Light' travel, why do we call the engines that don't quite do the speed of light FTL.

He smiled and shook his head. "Wishful thinking, kid. Wishful thinking."

## March 3rd, 2552 Planning

Tow Truck Driver/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

Okay, I know that the plan is the first casualty of actually trying to execute it. I wonder if that's why execute is the word we use— anyway, today is 9th day, and while we're taking it easy today, we're planning. We're throwing caution to the wind and we're running numbers and analyzing data.

I'm not exactly sure what they're looking for but I know they have four likely planets to explore and the first is going to the Valkyrie's team led by Dancer, but my view of the mission has been from a pilot's standpoint.

Today I got to learn, and see a lot of the other possibilities. If we can establish a base that supplies us with raw materials, or even a haven for us to relax and breath actual air, we will be steps ahead of the game and let's face it— it's always good to have a fallback point where, if everything else fails, you have a place where you can land and start again - or at least, you know— not die in space.

All in all, it was a rather productive day off.

## March 4th, 2552 Wall Flower

Tow Truck Driver/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice/Wall Flower - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

With all the briefings and all the discussions, the fact that I would be staying with the main fleet while the Valkyrie and the Memory headed out, the fact that I'd be watching from the sidelines didn't really hit me until now.

I mean, I knew I was supposed to catch the Pavane and take her to the Twilight after she returned after her first landing, but— I didn't expect to be sitting on the observation deck of a damaged ship, watching my home and mission go sailing off without me.

They are on their way to VV 271.1, and I'm going to have to watch them make history with the rest of the fleet. I'm part of it, I'm part of history but I am so far removed. I came to the dance, but it looks like my job is to clean up after the party.

## March 5th, 2552 Communications Breakdown

Tow Truck Driver/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

Communications started to break down almost immediately - the homing beacon on the Valkyrie went from sounding ever minute to every two until it was almost pointless. If anything happened to the fleet - I'd be traveling so slowly I'd never catch up with the Valkyrie.

So I watched the Valkyrie and the Memory pick up speed and fade away. I know fleet was in contact and can still reach them but the communications are so slow that it's not really practical, they just have to wait with the rest of us.

The actual travel portion of the trip is going to be approximately 6 hours, so they'll only go about 240 AU, then spend the next three days studying VV 271.1 before Pavane is scheduled to land. 240 AU, that's about 2880 light minutes away - which means we won't see them arrive for another day and a half or so.

I kept looking at my watch, trying to figure out where they were, but Fipps just started laughing. He tried to explain time dilation to me, but all that really matters at this point is— the first sign I'll see of a successful mission is the Pavane, reappearing where the Valkyrie was in three days.

## March 6th, 2552 Waiting Game

Tow Truck Driver/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

Day one of waiting. So far, this mission seems to be a study in how long I can hold my breath. We won't know for 2 days if they made it to VV 271.1 and then it will only be one day until the Pavane returns if she makes the landing.

I am not good at waiting. Thankfully Cookie knows this so he put me to work on a mock-up of the Pavane and I spent the day loading and unloading test equipment, first unsuited and then suited. I don't know if the work will help me once Dancer gets back here - but I do know I'm not going to have any trouble falling asleep tonight.

Then again, I'm pretty sure that was Cookie's plan.

## March 7th, 2552 Theoretical Time

Tow Truck Driver/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

If everything is going according to plan, Dancer will have picked out a landing site and will be preparing to deploy the remote landing craft. Knowing the crew, there will be a long debriefing and they'll hold off landing until the conditions are perfect, or Dancer can't take it anymore.

Meanwhile, the fleet is holding its collective breath and the betting pool has given Dancer 21 to 100 against. My money is on Dancer— or it would be if I was allowed to have any.

I spent another day with the mock-up, this time suited and in zero-G. I want to be able to do this blindfolded, but I don't want to say anything around Cookie, because he would arrange a training session with me suited, in zero-G in the dark - and even I think that's a bit much.

## March 8th, 2552 Catch Me if you can

Tow Truck Driver/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

So - we've been able to confirm that the fleet made it to VV 271.1 but of course, what we're seeing is not what they're doing. In fact, I had just finished hauling my gear to the Twilight when the Pavane showed up on our doorstep.

I had enough time to unload before I suited up and headed out— it's a good thing Cookie had me train for this suited because the Pavane had started to vent some of her containment and was starting to spin ever so slightly. As soon as she was in range Dancer shut down the engines and activated her beacon, not that I needed it at that point.

I had visual.

I brought the Gumbo up from underneath, catching her before she started another rotation and Dancer locked onto the grapple.

I hauled her in until the Pavane was properly braced and locked down on the back of the Gumbo and began hauling her to the Twilight.

We kept the chatter to a minimum until we were on the Twilight. I stuck around for Dancer's report before I headed back to the landing bay and got to work on her ship. Aside from the leak, the Pavane was in great shape. I gathered the measuring equipment and turned them over to Fipps and then set to work on the leak - letting Cookie and Mac have a good look at her as I inspected the damage and got their approval on the work to be done.

By evening, the Pavane was primed and ready for her return flight - and I got my first look at the footage of Dancer's landing VV 271.1 is a world of pristine beaches and lagoons as far as the eye can see.

No, I'm not jealous. Not one bit.

Dancer heads back tomorrow for the full landing - We rest while Fipps and the others go over all the reports and verify that we're good to go.

## March 9th, 2552 Catch and Release

Tow Truck Driver/mechanic's apprentice - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

Today was kind of like yesterday, only in reverse. Fipps turned the scientific equipment over to me and I mounted it on the Pavane. After Cookie and Mac reviewed everything remotely, Fipps came back for a final systems check.

Dancer posed for a few pictures and then we were back to work. I towed her and the Pavane off the Twilight, which still has an odd lurch that takes some getting used to— I don't know if it's a good thing or a bad thing that I'm pretty much the expert when it comes to landing on the Twilight.

I towed Dancer out, wished her good hunting— and watched her shift into a trail of light. 5-6 hours of flight time, and she'll be back home - ready to land.

I stayed there for a few minutes, just trying to see where her trail led before heading back to the Twilight. I needed to make sure everything was in order for the next phase and reset my timer. I am, after all, still on the clock.

## March 10th, 2552 Clean-up on Aisle 2

Maintenance Droid - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

Well, Dancer should have been back with the fleet for at least 12 hours now, although I think what we can see is her first foray planet-side doing the touch down - she's still a day away or so from actually landing and deploying the exploration equipment.

After that, it will be another six-hour flight here twenty-four hours of quarantine debriefings and all that fun before she gets to fly back again and return with the results from yesterday's run and the preliminaries from the one she'll be bringing back.

It's hard to feel sorry for her with all that flight time. In the meantime, I get to do some routine maintenance on the Gumbo and the Twilight and keep Fipps company and he goes over his findings.

He really does try to explain these things to me, but if it doesn't fly and doesn't involve electronics or gears— I'm afraid he tends to lose me. The only place where our skills overlap is when it comes to fuel.

Personally, I think he likes trying to find ways to explain it all to me, but to be honest it all boils down to 'Dancer gets to have all the fun.' And even Dancer doesn't get to do it all - by the time she gets back to the Valkyrie from her second quarantine— others will be taking her place. She'll be the first but Jo-Jo and Skip are going to get more time planetside once she's done, which is still a lot more time than me.

## March 11th, 2552 Some Assembly Required

Tow Truck Driver/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

Fipps set the telescope up, but all we saw was yesterday's news. Well, technically it was the day before yesterday's news if what he's telling me is right.

Let's face it, the only part of relativity that I've ever worried about is my rotation and orientation relative to the object I'm landing on are constant and hopefully equal.

Fipps says it's because I'm more interested in the practical aspect while he's more about the theoretical. I say that theory is all well and good— but it doesn't help you land safely then what's the point?

He said that was exactly his point.

He has taken an interest in both flight and my 'issue' with the simulator. He says my brain is interesting, and I know he means it as a compliment but— who wants to be studied - I'd rather a guy find me interesting for me, but— well— classes the way they are on the ship, that's not going to happen.

With extra time on the clock, and all the prep done for the day, I helped out in the lab. I did a lot of hauling and toting— which I'm qualified to do, and a little bit of prep work that I'm okay with supervision and then I got to do some design work where Fipps told me what he needed to change on a piece of equipment to get a better reading and then I came up with ways of adapting the equipment to do what he wanted.

It was kinda fun, in a nerdy kind of way. Hey, you take your fun where you can get it.

## March 12th, 2552 Some pieces not for use with other sets

March 12th, 2552 Some pieces not for use with other sets

Tow Truck Driver/mechanic's apprentice/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

I spent the morning conferencing with Cookie and Mac on the changes I worked out with Fipps. Cookie was the one who found the issue before anyone else. We worked out the changes on individual pieces and didn't take the project as a whole into consideration.

Each individual change was fine on its own and the minor power requirement changes were fine - but if you used all the instruments with all the changes— there was a problem.

So with the four of us worked out how to improve the equipment without breaking anything. In the end, we got something that got us more detail— just not to the degree Fipps wanted.

As Cookie put it - that's for VV Landing 2.0.

The rest of the morning was spent making the changes to the equipment so I could mount them when Dancer returned.

I was so busy I almost missed it when Dancer popped out of sublight/almost Lightspeed. I closed up shop, suited up and brought the Gumbo out to meet her. This time there were no leaks, no awkward listing to the side. We lined up our ships and I caught the Pavane neat as you please.

While Dancer was taken away for debriefing and quarantine, I worked on checking out the Pavane and getting all the readings and biological contaminants contained. Then I pulled the old measuring equipment, sent the results to Fipps in the lab and started mounting the 'new improved' equipment.

Two hours later, Fipps was beside himself with things to study and I found myself in quarantine with Dancer, because emergency iso suits like the ones issued to class C technicians (a nice way of saying convicts) is more fragile than tissue paper.

On the bright side, I got to experience some of the same things I would have if I'd been part of the landing mission. Yay me.

## March 13th, 2552 “Live Feed”

Tow Truck Driver/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

Today was a tad surreal. We were treated to the 'live feed' from Dancer's landing, at least that's what they called it for the non-astrophysicists in the fleet. Everyone was talking about Dancer's Retreat - the new name for VV 271.1 - I have to admit it does have a nice ring to it, and just about anything beats being called a number.

Since I'm not going anywhere, I got to stay in quarantine while Dancer suited up and headed back out. Fipps was champing at the bit, wanting to get to the rest of the data, but until I'm cleared from quarantine all I'm allowed to do is talk, design and stay out of the way while the doctors study my blood and reflexes and generally use me as a voodoo doll.

I swear, it's like secondary contact is the next best thing to getting to study the landing's effect on Dancer.

Tower stopped by to see how I was holding up and to assure me that the betting pool had me as the favorite for walking out of quarantine with a clean bill of health.

I guess if the Einherjar are betting on me, I better be all right.

## March 14th, 2552 Study in red

Tow Truck Driver/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

Today was another day in quarantine - tomorrow if they fail to find anything— I'll be allowed to work on the test equipment I off-loaded. I will process the equipment, get everything secured and strapped down then report back to quarantine for more testing.

If I ever planned on being AWOL— it would be now. I've had enough of tests, and scans and prophylactic treatments, I swear if something happens to me, it will be because they're treating imaginary bugs I might have been exposed to.

## March 15th, 2552 Study in green

Tow Truck Driver/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

New suit, still class C- but at least I'm not being studied. I am, however, being recorded. This is to make sure I don't screw anything up, and if I do— there is an audit trail.

I pulled the sample cartridges from the testing equipment and carefully placed each item in it's own isolate container for Fipps.

Sadly, that was the extent of what I was allowed to do, then it was back into quarantine for more testing. The doctor did at least point out that my suit didn't rupture this time so I didn't have to start all over again. Gallows humor, I guess you take what you can get.

I decided it was better than morbidly pointing out that they were on a doomed ship and if anything went wrong— I was their ticket out of there, well, me and the Gumbo.

I don't think they'd see the humor in that.

## March 16th, 2552 Hurry up and Wait

Tow Truck Driver/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

Today, a squadron from the Valkyrie's View was supposed to return and guide the rest of us in. I'd spent the morning, being poked prodded and tested in the hopes that I'd be allowed to go, but no dice.

Nobody showed up from the Valkyrie or from the Memory. No word, nothing, and of course, any visuals we have are 2 days old.

All I can say is, I don't like waiting, but with the rest of the fleet on edge, nobody cares what the mechanic's apprentice wants to know. I just have to wait along with everyone else.

The doctors didn't so much release me as forget about me. So I suited up and finished up the work Cookie, Mac and I had mapped out.

When the squadron arrives, I want to make sure we're ready. I refuse to say 'If'

## March 17th, 2552 No Answer

Tow Truck Driver/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

There is no movement from Dancer's Retreat. There's no word, no ships and the only thing getting through are rumors. We know that they were active at least as recently as two days ago, but no one has returned and there's a lot of collective breath-holding.

I finished the fixes to the equipment and started working on modifying the Gumbo - it's pretty much the only thing I'm allowed to do.

Tower and Rabbi stopped by. Rabbi is the Einherjar Chaplain. Tower wanted me to go over the troop carrier in case they were called in. Since I didn't have any other duties, I set to work. It kept me busy, which I think was Tower's plan.

He and the chaplain talked a lot with Fipps, but they pretty much left me to do my job. I wrote out a checklist since I hadn't done a troop carrier and the fact that Tower knew something the brass didn't seem to realize: Mechanics are more thorough when their friends' lives are on the line.

He's a smart man. When I finished Tower asked me if I wanted to do a pre-flight test drive on my work. That man knows his way to a girl's heart. I also heard enough comms over the ship's radio to know that if no one comes today— then they will send a squadron from the Edda to find out what's going on.

I tried to get them to let me come - but a) I'm a convict, b) I don't have a ship that can keep up c) I'm not experienced enough to fly there and d) I'm a convict. Well, their way of putting it was a little less friendly. I know they're on edge, but the Valkyrie is the closest thing I've got to family.

No one has heard anything and that is disturbing.

## March 18th, 2552 Nobody knows nothing

Tow Truck Driver/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

Another day and no signs of ships from Dancer's Retreat, and we were forced to watch as a squadron of fighters from the Edda headed out to find out what was going on. Six hours for them, two days for us to see— unless they go, find out what's going on and then head back.

Those were their orders, but you know how these things go - they're going to go over there, and then they're going to need to refuel at which point whatever has been keeping the Valkyrie and the Memory from sending anyone will be affecting the squadron - be it a disease, logistical issues or orders.

Yes, orders could be messing them up, but hopefully someone will be returning— even one ship— to tell us what's going on.

They still haven't returned and it's 23:20 on March 18th. I don't think we're going to hear anything back today. I'm really hoping we hear something.

Fipps spent a lot of time at the telescope, but again all he can really see is small changes. The fleet was still there two days ago. I keep trying to tell myself that no news is good news, or we would have figured something out by now.

But it doesn't really help.

## March 19th, 2552 Something

Tow Truck Driver/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

Half the squadron returned, but they maintained radio silence with the rest of the fleet and made a b-line to the Valhalla. There was a flurry of activity from each of the other ships, with the exception of the Twilight of the Gods, which is pretty much running on a skeleton crew made up of members of every other crew.

It meant that we are still in the dark and it seems the fleet is just as happy to keep it that way. At least we're all in varying degrees of the dark.

They haven't told us anything but Fipps and I were able to watch the ships return, a flurry of ships shuttle people to the Valhalla and back, and still no word.

The only thing I can think it means is that they found something on Dancer's Retreat. Fipps has been going over every bit of data to see if he can find out what would cause this level of—reaction, but even Cooke and Mac aren't saying anything and they've been on the Valhalla since the Valkyrie broke orbit.

The only thing I could get out of them was that the exploration team found something 'interesting.'

Nothing deadly, dangerous or clandestine— just interesting. I hate 'interesting.'

## March 20th, 2552 The Official Word

Tow Truck Driver/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

The official word is that there is nothing wrong at Dancer's Retreat, we're just not allowing anyone to go there— and a lot of telescopes and satellites have been retracted and or recalled. Engineering chiefs from every ship in the fleet have been called to the Valhalla and we're supposed to carry on as if nothing's happened.

They sent for Fipps, but rather than have me take him, a pilot came for him and dropped off two of the Einherjar I've never met, to keep an eye on things

And by eye on things, I mean me. At first, I thought I was being self-conscious, but they were everywhere I went. If I was in the hangar bay, they were outside the door. I took a lunch break, they took a lunch break. I prepped the Gumbo for a supply run, they shut me down.

I had almost convinced myself that it was my imagination until that happened.

I don't think I've done anything untoward, my brother isn't here so I haven't done anything against orders— and I'm not AWOL from anything...

But no, everything is normal... Really

## March 21st, 2552 Mixed Signals

Tow Truck Driver/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

The other half of the squadron returned, still no one from the Valkyrie, but all the support staff has been brought to the Twilight. If I was hoping for an answer, I was wrong, and it was obvious that some people knew more than others. Cookie and Mac knew what was going on, but Cookie's the chief mechanic, so of course, he'd know. Fipps, Tower and the Rabbi were there, but no one was saying anything.

Two mechanics from the Norn started for the Gumbo with wrenches in hand and it took Mac, Cookie, and Tower to keep me from stopping them.

I watched as she tore apart her engine, looked at each other and then just walked away. They left my ship laying there, her engine strewn all over the deck like it was nothing. At least it gave me something to do.

I put the Gumbo back together, muttering about strangers messing with her but the only one listening was Mac. Cookie was conferencing with the other Chief mechanics while Tower and Rabbi kept looking stoic as they watched everyone.

For four hours, nobody was talking to anybody and then, Tower and Rabbi were asked to escort me from the hangar. I don't know what's going on, but I'm getting worried.

Tower kept assuring me that I hadn't done anything, and I wasn't in trouble, but it sure feels like I am.

## March 22nd, 2552 Double Secret Assignment

Tow Truck Driver/Lab Rat/mechanic's apprentice/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting  
They are still being so secretive about everything and the only good thing I can say about it is

the fact that I'm not the only one who's about to burst from all the secrecy. Even Cookie and Mac are having trouble and they're in on the secret whatever it is.

We have been told that a flight from the Valkyrie will be arriving tomorrow or the next day at the latest. That they will have something we've been hoping to find— only its not what they thought it would be and that the science and engineers were going to be very busy for the next few weeks if not months.

That is, once they get here with whatever 'it' is and decide to stop being secretive about it. I wanted to ask why don't we go to Dancer's Retreat if they're having that much trouble pinning it down, but everyone in the know was still giving me the hairy eyeball and I figured it was best not to draw too much attention to myself.

That did garner an appreciative nod from Tower and a pat on the shoulder from Cookie. I'm still being guarded, I'm still being watched but it was something.

## March 23rd, 2552 There's an Acronym for that

Tow Truck Driver/Usual Suspect/mechanic's apprentice/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

Well, the squad did not return with the find, but two pilots did, looking for extra grapples and repairs to their ships where the grapples failed.

I should have been allowed to work on it. I'm qualified to work on it, and if it's being towed... I should be able to tow it- but that would involve bringing another ship there because of course— no FTL, or as I like to call it, 'not quite faster than light but better than ground speed,' but NQFTLBBTGS is never going to catch on.

I ended up coming up with acronyms to keep myself amused. By the end of the day, half the mechanical staff was with me. Some of the better acronyms we came up with included:

NAFLT - Not Actually Faster Than Light

- FTR - Faster than Rumors
- NQC - Not Quite Crawling
- KTITD/KTD - Keep Them in the Dark
- TPBS - Top BS
- NTSH - Nothing to See Here
- REAL - Rumor Enhanced Actionable Logistics

They should know by now not to keep too many smart people bored in one area... and still, I am watched.. Hopefully tomorrow, things will get REAL.

## March 24th, 2552 Almost but not quite under wraps

Tow Truck Driver/Usual Suspect/mechanic's apprentice/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

The top-secret package arrived today - Wrapped in the plastics we were taught to wrap artifacts in, only it was wrapped so tightly, no one could tell what we were looking at, which I think was the idea.

The flight of 15 patrol craft arrived late third shift when most of the folks on board the Twilight were down for their sleep cycle.

I was dozing in the Gumbo when the proximity alarm went off. Most people staying onboard the twilight tend to sleep next to an escape pod. The Gumbo, being my ship is my home away from home and as such is a lot more comfortable and familiar, aside from the two Einherjar crashed out in back.

I had managed to turn the radio on and offer a tow when they called for someone from the Edda to assist with bringing their package in.

"Turn the light off, and go back to sleep," I heard Tower order over the ship's intercom. I wanted to object but it wasn't like it would achieve anything other than irritating me and keeping my watchers from getting the shut-eye they need.

So, more hurry-up and wait and I'll know more in the morning— If they let me.

From the looks of things though, I can deduce one thing - They found a ship.. a ship in unknown space., this is what we were hoping for.

## March 25rd, 2552 Need to Know

Tow Truck Driver/Usual Suspect/mechanic's apprentice/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

I wasn't the only person to recognize the general build of the 'package.' You can wrap it up however you like, but a ship is going to look like a ship under wraps unless you box it first. By the time I decided it was safe to get up, and that my guards had gotten enough sleep, the rumor mill had been working overtime, as had the betting pool.

I put 20 credits on Ship, Alien tech and Top Secret. I won the trifecta— sort of.

It is definitely a ship and the tech is generations more advanced than our tech, Top Secret... yes and no. They assembled the techs they wanted working on it, and again I was singled out as not being part of that team. I was left out again and was starting to wonder why I was still there, until they gave me my own, private walkthrough, once the ship was aboard the Twilight and unwrapped in the hangar bay.

It was the Gumbo... Sort of. I recognized her lines, her markings, the parts where I'd had to get creative with some of my welding to make her work— but her engines were like nothing I had

ever seen. I didn't understand what I was looking at— not exactly, but I recognized the work - it was mine.

Now I understand the hairy eyeballs and watchful eyes. For now, I don't get to analyze the work that was done, just to identify what matches the current Gumbo and the plans I have for her.

## March 26th, 2552 Age vs Beauty

Tow Truck Driver/Gumbo Cook and caretaker/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

I'm not allowed to touch the new ship— they don't even want her in the same compartment as My Gumbo. Aside from yesterday's walkthrough— I haven't gotten to see the ship, I can't put her through her paces and man I want to.

I understand, there is nothing in the rule books for this, nothing to base policy and procedures on. The other techs have taken to calling them Gumbo 1.3 and Gumbo 5.7. I know they're just guessing but if the research team is right, the 5.7 has been on Dancer's Retreat for at least 20 years.

I've read the report and the weathering of the landing gear is consistent with their findings but... A ship can't be two places at the same time, and the 5.7 can't exist before the 1.3 was built.

As it is I'm getting my information second hand and all I can get out of security is some excuse about temporal anomalies. But I can't seem to get them to understand that the anomaly is there whether I work on her or not.

## March 27th, 2552 Busywork

Tow Truck Driver/metallurgist's apprentice/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

Well, since they couldn't have me just sitting around moping, Cookie and Mac worked together to get me some kind of assignment on the project. I understand that the powers-that-be want to make sure I don't break something during the reverse engineering process, but it is my ship.

So - they can't let me out into the wild or I might never work on the changes to the Gumbo that would lead to the ship they found, but they can't let me do the work because— I might change what they found. Which means I'm in limbo. Do they preserve the timeline or let me do my job? I know which I'd vote for, and thankfully this is an engineering problem, not a military one.

At least with an assignment, I'm not dealing with the headache that goes with all the repercussions of what's going on. I'm just going to go with an elaborate hoax and leave it at that.

So, I was assigned to Fipps' metallurgical team. I started taking notes as Fipps filled me in and walked me through the tests to determine wear and tear on the metals, some of which— he's

never seen before. At one point he looked at my notes to review something and I had to translate for him.

“What is that chicken scratch!?” he demanded.

I had to laugh as I looked at my notes. They looked somewhat like a cross between a math equation and a game of Pictionary. “When I was 13 my brother started reading my diary... I fixed that,” I explained.

It had started as a simple letter substitution, simplified versions of letters that pretty much hinted at their origin, but over the years it had grown and changed, shorthand, pictographs, symbols for sounds instead of just letters, then I started adding in letters from different alphabets and even a few signs that represented gestures or ASL.

Since a lot of what we were doing was busywork while we waited for more assignments, I started teaching him the basics. By the end of the day, Tower was playing ‘Learn Kat’s Code’ with us.

## March 28th, 2552 Stress points

Tow Truck Driver/metallurgist’s apprentice/ - Katherine ‘ConV’ James Reporting

Tower and Fipps have been doing their best to keep me occupied and out of the way, but by midday, they’d had to call for re-enforcements. Cookie tried being reasonable and when that didn’t work Mac went straight to the facts.

“Kid,” he began, and I always knew he was trying to lay down some wisdom on me when he started with that. “They aren’t going to let you work on it because the deck is stacked against you. 1) you’re an apprentice, 2) you’re a conscriptee, 3) it’s your ship, and while that would mean to anyone with any sense,” he added gesturing around him to Cookie, Fipps and Tower. “That you are most qualified to work on it— they seem to feel otherwise and when you add it all up, they see you as a problem not a solution, and finally, 5) they’re afraid to risk you based on this development... if anything happens to you... Gumbo 5.7 doesn’t happen.”

So, I can’t be risked working on maintaining the Twilight, I can’t be allowed to work on either of my ships or to do test flights... I let that sink in for a while and finally sighed. “Fine, am I allowed to be acerbic in the corner?”

“Always,” Tower answered.

“Hey, do what you’re good at,” Cookie agreed.

That, at least made me laugh. The good mood lasted until the two mechanics who’d taken my Gumbo apart showed up with a bunch of pictures, wanting to know why I’d used a flatbed fuselage with a Dart/Lander cockpit and balanced it out with a crew transport support.

They did not like it when I answered that those were the parts that were available.

Sometimes you design for effect, sometimes, available parts dictate form.

## March 29th, 2552 Findings

Tow Truck Driver/metallurgist's apprentice/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

So, after all the cloak and dagger work they decided that it was time to hold a briefing and go over their findings, not with the fleet, not just with the mechanics, and God forbid they talk to me— no, they reported their findings to each other.

They filled out paperwork to document that and then they filed it with the brass before they went to brief them on their findings.

Findings I still have not been privy to, other than the fact that they do not approve of my design or lack thereof. What can I saw, form follows function follows parts available.

Tower and Mac got to learn how to swear in my shorthand. There was a lot of that and a lot more after Mac and Tower added their more colorful phrases into the mix.

## March 30th, 2552 Bad endings

Tow Truck Driver/metallurgist's apprentice/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

A lot has changed overnight - another squad from the Valkyrie arrived, Dancer was with the squadron and I knew something was up when her first reaction was to hug me.

The others were slightly more restrained, but they were all finding a reason to touch me— which is really weird since we weren't all that close. I mean we're all pilots and we've trained together, but that makes us kindred spirits, not bosom buddies.

All I can say is - I want to play poker with these guys- I'd make a mint!

Tower met with an Enherjar pilot and got the low down. He wasn't sure how to tell me what they found, but he realized the best way to drive me crazy was to make me play guessing games in the dark.

Then again, telling me that you found my mortal remains next to the remains of the future version of my ship? Well, yeah, that's probably one of the things that you can't really prepare yourself for.

Fipps is performing the autopsy.

Cookie brought the Scotch.

## March 31st, 2552 Limbo

Tow Truck Driver/Schrödinger's Kat/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

This is what hell feels like. The only thing worse than arguing bureaucratic red tape with the brass is arguing scientific paradox theories with a bunch of engineers and scientists, and I've got both.

All I want to do is do my job, but I'm not allowed. The engineers say I can't work on the ship because I might change the time-line, which if you ask me is why the ship was left here in the first place. I can't take any risks because I can't die before I leave the ship on Dancer's Retreat, but if you ask me, and no on is, it's kinda obvious that I won't die before I leave the Gumbo 5.7, because we found the ship.

Fipps tried to explain some theory involving a cat and a box where there's no way of knowing if the cat is dead or alive at any given moment unless you open the box, so until then the cat is both alive and dead. He didn't like my reasoning that maybe it's the other way, that that cat is neither dead nor alive and can function as such.

The end result is the same, but perhaps instead of being both, I'm neither - I'm between here and then and there is a lot of life in between.

If I am dead, then they can stop watching me and I can get on with living my life.

Their final answer is 'you just don't understand,' which roughly translates into 'Sit down, shut up, we'll call when we want you.'

Fine, two can play at that game.

And right on cue, Tower showed up before I could do anything stupid. He suggested I tell it to the heavy bag. As much as I hate to admit it, it was probably the wisest option available.

## April 1st, 2552 April Fools

Tow Truck Driver/Schrödinger's Kat/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

So, without talking to me about it because, I am both dead and alive and nobody thinks my opinion is worth dealing with, the fleet is splitting into two different missions.

The first mission is to continue pressing on with the exploration and second to stay behind and research Dancer's Retreat and my ship.

Fipps had my autopsy and that really feels like the biggest April Fool's joke out there. I mean-how many people can honestly say they've read their own autopsy report?

That was weird enough, but then Fipps wanted to run a complete physical on me so he can compare current not dead/not alive Kat with 30 years older definitely dead Kat. If he weren't so interested in scientific findings, I'd have teased him about buying me a bottle of wine first.

Okay, I admit it, I told him he needed to buy me some wine before he went any further. He blushed, got flustered and then told me he saw me as a sister.

Considering the fact that it was my brother who got me into this mess in the first place— his words did not have a connotation he was looking for.

## April 2nd, 2552 Just Friends

Tow Truck Driver/Schrödinger's Kat/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

I did finally take pity on Fipps, and accepted that in his world we're 'just friends.' I mean, I was trying to be funny and while his reaction was rather comical— ultimately I guess the joke was on me.

Tower told me not to feel bad, that Fipps is much more comfortable with things he can quantify and qualify. I didn't bring up the half-dead cat, or the fact that now I'm wondering if half-dead cats have a half-life.

As it was I had another round of paradoxes and debates where I was the subject of the debate, but not allowed to participate.

Mac brought me some new parts and while I can't work directly on my Gumbo, I can work on the improvements we plan on attaching to her once people calm down. Unfortunately, one of the wonder mechanics caught me with a welding torch in my hands and threw a hissy-fit.

I finally threw down my welding glove at their feet, declaring that if they don't let me work on my ship, then odds are— their ship is going to go away, and all they'll have is the 1.3 and whatever changes I make. It's as plausible as their theories but since it came from me, they again dismissed it. Until I inscribed my feelings on the nose of the Gumbo— and acid on the nose of the 5.7 and brought out the etching.

Of course, I did it the wrong way and now I have to wait three weeks, which was when I scheduled to put the new arm with the additional sensors on the Gumbo. If they vanish from the 5.7, then they'll talk to me.

They think they're giving me three weeks to cool down and forget about it. Don't they know— I have a calendar and a long memory, and compliments of Mac, a pen.

## April 3rd, 2552 Look but don't touch

Tow Truck Driver/Schrödinger's Kat/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

Well, my experiment at least got me a cheap seat in the hangar. I wasn't allowed to touch anything, and they carefully placed me away from power tools and decompression points.

I didn't think pointing out that the entire ship was nothing more than an accident waiting to happen, but hey— it made them feel safe.

While they focused on the tech that none of us understood, I was looking at the story the ship told. There were weapons and battle scarred metal. I can't help but think that that ship was on Dancer's retreat for a reason, and I'm not talking about the fates or destiny.

This has 'planned' written all over it: planned with a side of irony.

## April 5th, 2552 Isolation

Voice of reason/Schrödinger's Kat/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

I really don't know what the brass is thinking. It's bad enough the 5.7 is on the Twilight of the Gods but now all the scientists, technicians and mechanics who are reverse engineering her are now all nicely stationed on the ship of questionable stability.

All it takes is one leak and everything and everyone involved will be lost. I tried to say something but the two techs who'd taken apart my Gumbo pointed out that keeping everyone here means fewer rumors and conspiracy theories to deal with.

They obviously do not know the rumor mill and I'm sorry— what they're doing is only going to generate more conspiracy theories than there already are. In the absence of truth, rumors and theories are all we have.

Add to that a healthy dose of 'We don't know' and what you're really saying is 'we don't want you to know.' That's human nature 101.

Needless to say, I've been once again banned from the hangar bay.

## April 6th, 2552 Inconclusive conclusions

Tow Truck Driver/Schrödinger's Kat/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

There are things that don't add up. I mean more than the obvious Doppelgänger Gumbo with all her, the autopsy report on the older deader me and the fact that it has all my old injuries and a lot more from what looks like a rough future life.

It just doesn't make sense. It also doesn't help that the engineers who've been going over my ships are just too proprietary. Fortunately, they don't understand the notes that were found— ah yes, the notes that seem to be written by me, in my shorthand, only I can't read half of it.

Then again, my shorthand is an organic thing - as I learn things it changes, which means that it is hinting at things that will change, and not necessarily in a good way. I mean, we have the tech, but to send it back, to send me back-- that all speaks of things going sideways at an alarming rate.

## April 7th, 2552 re-alignment

Tow Truck Driver/Schrödinger's Kat/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

With our portion of the fleet realigning their goals I figure it's a good time to realign my own. I need to figure out what this knot in my stomach is and if there's anything I can do about it.

I need to figure out if I just have really, really bad luck or if someone has it in for me.

And finally, I need to know what's going on with my ship. Tower got me a copy of the notes that were found and Fipps got me a copy of my autopsy (try saying that without shivering).

I'm tired of riding the bench and so, I'm doing my own research whenever I can, however I can.

On the bright side, an Einherjar always seems to be around when I bother to look. It's kinda nice as long as I remember they're protecting me, but I know that's only true for as long as I am not a danger to this reality.

From where I stand that means it's all up in the air.

## April 8th, 2552 Under Orders

Tow Truck Driver/Schrödinger's Kat/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

So, now that we're all part of the fleet again we're all under orders to not talk about what we've learned on the Twilight of the Gods.

But if you don't know anything and you're not supposed to talk about what you know... then don't you have to say you know something? Talk about your paradoxes, these are the kind that give me nightmares.

I mean, do any of us really know anything? And then, as I was explaining it, I made a gesture that was familiar. I traced the hand movement as I tried and realize - that was one of the new parts of my shorthand.

So now, instead of using question marks I have a \// I like the question mark more but this is more "I've got nothing" than "I don't know."

It kinda means the same thing but there's a nuance, and that's what this whole thing is about. How do you say nothing without saying something? The only real word for it is "Orders."

That gives me something to think about when it comes to decoding the notes- the context and the nuance of what is said, or not said.

## April 9th, 2552 Cross Currents

Tow Truck Driver/Schrödinger's Kat/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

Remember how I said things weren't making sense— well, today that whole, "let's assign a team to research the phenomena and put them on the least stable ship in the fleet - the one we use when we're afraid something might blow up so we don't kill everyone" attitude is\ really grating on my nerves.

Of course, that may have more to do with the minor incident in environmental control this morning, where we all were breathing toxic some, things like that do tend to make me cranky.

Once we got things sorted and repaired, I had some serious questions on the matter and I really didn't care who I talked to.

It was argued that we were following proper security protocol, I mean, people can't talk if there's no-one to talk to. They were at least sort of listening and they did arrange to send everyone else back— except a skeleton team including me, some of the mechanics, Fipps and Tower.

Oh, and the Gumbos of course needed to stay. - I understand the need to preserve them, I understand the need to be able to compare them and I understand how important they are, but the first thing I'd do is do a full scan of both ships, put them in VR and go from there.

I mentioned that to Tower and he warned me to keep that under my hat. He feels it too. Something is wrong here. I can feel it and it's only getting worse.

## April 10th, 2552 Show don't tell

Tow Truck Driver/Schrödinger's Kat/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

So— it turns out Tower is much better at keeping things under his hat than I am. He's been following the order to 'not speak of this' but I found him passing information between Cookie, Mac, and Fipps.

It was more than a bit frustrating since I was the only one he wasn't coordinating with, then again since I'm the one being watched it makes sense.

When I started to complain about 'things' he just shook his head. "Kat, when are you going to learn - you got a problem, you tell it to the heavy bag."

Tell it to the heavy bag. How many times have I heard that?

Yeah, it took me a while to realize what he was saying— I was too focused on being annoyed to realize that he was telling me a lot more than I need to relieve stress.

So, after shift, I went to the gym and did as suggested. There was a disk in my glove and a recorder in the bag. Looks like I'll be 'telling it to the bag' a lot more.

## April 11th, 2552 The Shape of Things

Hitter of Heavy bags/sometimes Schrödinger's Kat/ part-time Tech – Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

When you're designing a ship, when you're building things, there are some very obvious influences: Purpose, Urgency, Need, and resources these are the physical aspects of design, then there are the more social aspects – under what conditions was the ship designed, was it designed or simply cobbled together.

What I had seen of the design was leaps and bounds beyond what we could do now. The wreckage had been on Dancer's Retreat for over 30 years. My corpse was either very well preserved or hadn't died during the crash.

While I'm thinking about it the 5.7 was in rather good condition for a wreck. I mean aside from the scoring she looked to be in operating condition.

So – If I had been given this puzzle from the beginning and not been on the outside fighting for a chance to work on her...

I started back at the beginning with the procedure I would have followed.

- Make full schematics of both ships
- 3D Scan both ships and make models.
- Backup the scans and models of all the ships, move the ships to someplace safe-separate from the notes/work area ie not on a ship with a tendency to malfunction.

That meant we needed to research two very different angles.

- First: The differences between the ships
- Identify every modification
- Identify the order of modifications
- Identify the purpose of each mod.

Second: Find out why procedures had not been followed.

Of course, the heavy bag never replied, but I got a nod from Tower at dinner.

## April 12th, 2552 Covert backups

Heavy Bag enthusiast/sometimes undead Kat/ part-time Covert-Tech - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

I'm not sure how they got the information but the disk in my boxing gloves had almost everything I'd asked for: Encrypted copies of the scans from both ships, complete with Cookie's notes; breakaway images of the main components; and a built-in cad program that would allow me to use my pad to analyze the data since my shipboard computer use is monitored.

Anything on the pad that didn't involve the ship's computers could only be accessed from the pad, so as long as I stayed off the ship's computers and kept the pad with me the work was relatively safe.

The new order from command was that I was to stay on the twilight, work on section repairs to keep me busy but available should they need to identify something I'd done.

It nicely kept me out of the way in plain sight, but at night— at night I was swimming in new tech. Needless to say- I'm becoming a night-owl.

## April 13th, 2552 Predictive Analysis

Heavy Bag enthusiast/Schrödinger's Kat/ part-time Tech - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

There's a conspiracy going on. I mean one that is counter to our conspiracy. We're conspiring to do good while someone else is conspiring against us.

One of the control panels started indicating a failure so I went to trace it down. It turned out that the actual problem was in the control panel, but while I was tracing it down I overheard someone talking about keeping 'her' busy tracking down non-existent issues that way when the ship blows up— no one will be surprised.

I couldn't tell who they were, but I really did not like what they had planned.

And then there was the other conundrum. Whoever they were, they had security clearance to be where they were - I needed to know who they were. I couldn't just report it - since I could very well be reporting it to the perpetrators...

I had to pray no one in our conspiracy was in on theirs but I didn't have anybody else to warn.

It's times like these, I wish I had stayed with fleet support and was safely folding laundry.

## April 14th, 2552 Accidental Acts of Sabotage

Hitter of Heavy bags/Schrödinger's Clay Pigeon/ part-time Tech - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

When things happen, they happen fast.

When I got out of the shower, Tower was waiting for me. He had me translate my notes since I'd encrypted them and he was only so-so with translating what I wrote.

Since I only knew there were two people and that something bad was going to happen, there wasn't much we could do other than check for damage to the ship and damage points where the hull was weak, or where an accidental vending could cause a failure.

Unfortunately, that was pretty much the entire ship.

Plus, there was no way of telling who was innocent and who was plotting your demise.

I tried to tell myself that I was just being paranoid, but the whole getting caught on the wrong side of a bulkhead when a leak started to rupture the hull did nothing to calm my nerves.

Fortunately on my side of the seal was Cookie and on the far seal, we had Mac and Tower. We got through, but barely and something tells me, it's not over yet.

Fipps is excited since some of my new injuries showed up on my corpse and some didn't. I'm glad he's got something to work on, I just find the whole thing terrifying.

## April 15th, 2552 Conspiracy Theorist's Delight

Hitter of Heavy bags/Schrödinger's Clay Pigeon/ part-time Tech - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

Well, either the conspiracy was more involved than I thought, or people have gone from being not paranoid enough to too paranoid. There are more people in the secure area reserved for convicts and considering my importance and the fact that I was on the receiving end of attempted sabotage, I get an all-expenses paid trip to... paranoia central, you got it, Twilight of the Gods.

Let's keep our mechanic where saboteurs and assassins will have easier access and lock everybody up who couldn't have possibly done it but might be guilty of something else.

Some days it really doesn't pay to get out of bed.

## April 16th, 2552 Out to get me

Hitter of Heavy bags/Schroedinger's Clay Pigeon/ part-time Tech - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

Well, either they're trying to kill me or just gaslight me. Either way will work at this point.

I do a lot of dangerous work these days, hell, living on the Twilight of the Gods is like living on a ghost ship where the ghosts are hospitable to the point they want you to stay, forever.

I heard the saboteurs again. I had just finished clearing some combustibles off of one of the air scrubbers I was sitting there, in a rigging harness to get them when two people walked in and discussed the fact that they were going to have to do something soon.

Something about running out of time and needing to make sure that 'she' was taken care of. Something about her never making it to Baljatun. I'm not sure who 'she' is, but with the number of times I've almost died this week— I'm willing to bet it's me.

And I was sitting, right there, about 200 meters over their heads, not that I had an angle to see them, but all they had to do was look up. That realization nearly did their work for them.

To make things even worse, I couldn't 'tell it to the bag' tonight because there were too many people in the gym. I've written down what I know, using my diary writing - which Mac and Tower know — and put it in Mac's inbox.

I hope it's enough. I'll have to try the bag in the morning.

## April 17th, 2552 Dark

Hitter of Heavy bags/Schrödinger's Clay Pigeon/ part-time Tech - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

We've been duped by someone who not only understands our bureaucracy, they knew how to manipulate it and us, to create the perfect disaster waiting to wipe us all out. The only reason we aren't dead is because they didn't want to tip us off.

If I hadn't seen them my own eyes- I would have told you I'd lost it. If they hadn't been caught on the ship's recorder, the brass would have said I tried to kill us all. As it was, I managed to save the Gumbo and most of the people on board the Twilight.

The future Gumbo and all the official docs on her were lost. The unofficial docs are safely tucked away with a platoon of Enherjar watching over them. We also lost several people who were working on the ship when she blew and the Twilight of the Gods is no more.

Right before the ship went, as we were lifting off, I saw the two mechanics who'd taken my ship down to the bolts take off their skins and dive into space. The ship's sensors showed a ship hovering outside the blast range - just this side of invisible. They swam to it and then vanished in the shockwave that nearly took us all out.

No more Twilight, no more Gumbo 5.7.

From where I'm sitting— I don't think the future is a very good place for us.

## April 18th, 2552 Noodling

Apprentice Mechanic/Survivor of The Second Twilight of the Gods Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

It's been a long time since a 9th day fell on a day where something hadn't gone wrong. That in and of itself was refreshing. My quarters are now more cramped since they've added a few more 'less than trustworthy' individuals to the ranks of the not-so trusted trustees.

I've got three bunkmates instead of one, in addition to my musician/attempted murderer, we have one corpsman who was running a betting pool on when we'd lose the Twilight of the Gods and one man who was running a concession stand with everything from contraband to medical furloughs.

I'm not sure if I'm moving up in the world or down, but I really didn't have time for it. After I went over every system in my Gumbo, I started doing puzzles, like figuring out where I'd gotten the changes to my code. Tower stopped by and between him, me, and Mac it looked like we were playing an odd combination of charades, pictionary, and password with a hint of what's my line.

Still no clue, but it was interesting trying to noodle it out.

## April 19th, 2552 Murphy's Lucky Kat

Survivor of The Second Twilight of the Gods Incident/Schrodinger's Undead Kat Reporting

I'm beginning to think if this Schrodinger guy and Murphy had a child it would be me. I seem to be the unluckiest lucky cat in the universe.

Today started off with salvage operations. A lot of the jump pilots were sent out to gather what parts they could from the Twilight's debris field, a mission tailor-made for me and the Gumbo, but we're back to the brass saying that we're too important to do our jobs.

I was planning on arguing my case before the boss. I had a poignant argument all planned out. I was going to point out that if they didn't allow me to do my job the Gumbo 5.7 would never come into being. I was going to point to the fact that Gumbo evolved so I could do my work and if I'm not doing that, it's not evolving.

I was all set... until one of the recovery craft picked up a piece of metal and blew up. I'm still alive because the brass wouldn't risk me, but someone else is dead. Things only went wrong in the worst possible way for the dead Kat, the alive Kat is still trapped in her box and trying to get out.

This sucks.

## April 20th, 2552 The Guns Come out.

Survivor of The Second Twilight of the Gods Incident/Schrodinger's Undead Kat Reporting

Well, it seems our two mechanics had friends and they've given up the subtle approach. Yesterday it was explosives, before that, having a ship eat itself. Today it was guns.

Okay, it was one gun, but it was pointed at me and, as cliché as it sounds, I saw my entire life flash in front of my eyes. Okay, it was the highlight reel and there wasn't that much of it, but it was my life, my very short life that was about to end.

I'd like to say I was heroic and found some way to fight them off and save the day but no, I tripped backing up and clonked my head on the landing gear of one of our landing probe craft that was in the service bay for maintenance.

I fell hard and landed on one of the lubricant lines. As I was getting back up, I could hear one of my attackers moving into position to get a better shot, while the other warned that someone was coming. A minute later Tower was there, helping me up with no sign of my would-be killers.

They managed to stay off-camera, but only just. Cookie saw the shadow of the gun and would have ordered a guard if Tower hadn't been there. It was probably just as well, the ship's guard are more about protecting the crew from the unwanted element, not protecting the unwanted element from the crew.

## April 21st, 2552 Who's protecting what from whom.

Survivor of The Second Twilight of the Gods Incident/Schrodinger's Undead Kat Reporting

I now have two sets of guards - the first set is making sure I don't touch my own ship. The second set is making sure no one touches me.

It took me the entire day to realize that the biggest problem is the fact that the brass made their decisions based on tainted information - they're doing what the not-us people wanted them to do.

I also realized that no one has asked an even more unsettling question about the non-crew beings- what happened to the people that they replaced? If they're willing to kill to keep this, whatever it is, secret and stop me - odds are they're gone as well and no one is investigating that, or if they are it's above my pay grade.

Since the brass isn't planning on changing their course Cookie came up with a new one for me - Something they haven't thought of - the Gumbo Mark II. Since I can't work on or with the original Gumbo - I'm taking a new set of spare parts and building a new one from the ground up, taking everything I've learned from the original, everything I wished I'd done differently, everything I wanted to do and everything we've learned from the seven and building a better Gumbo.

It's not like we don't have the parts - This one might even have the parts we need for me to make her capable of not-quite faster than light.

## April 22nd, 2552 Laying our guns on the table

Survivor of The Second Twilight of the Gods Incident/Schrodinger's Undead Kat Reporting

The only good thing I can say about today is the fact that, with a reliable witness and video, the brass is now investigating the non-crew. Of course, it took them trying to kill me again, and they would have succeeded if it weren't for Tower and the Rabbi. The two of them have been my constant shadow as I worked on laying out the frame for the Mark II.

They left me alone to do my work but were watching when the two not crew showed up to finish the job. It helped that one of them was the guard who was supposed to be watching me. The guard who had never left the ship.

Aside from not killing me, thanks to two very ticked off Einherjar, it proved that a) there is a very real threat out there and it hasn't gone away and b) the data the brass was going off of was tainted.

Unfortunately, it also means that all the notes that survived the fall of the Twilight aren't worth the plastics they're scribed on. Well, fortunately for us, they weren't the only notes

Sometimes it really pays to have paranoid warrior types on your side.

I'm back to working on the Gumbo and the Mark II, under the watchful eyes of people I trust. People who are also investigating the ship and our not-crew.

Fipps is doing the autopsy and comparing my new scars to those he'd recorded on my now missing corpse. It's really strange working, living like this when you know your atoms are already scattered into the far reaches of space.

## April 23rd, 2552 Scribing.

Survivor of The Second Twilight of the Gods Incident/Schrodinger's Undead Kat Reporting

Today marks the day I would have added the arm to the Gumbo if all these shenanigans hadn't started happening. Now I've got another other job... one that needs to happen like yesterday.

We all knew the arm was on the 7.5 it was in all the notes all the scans that survived, only it wasn't.

That information simply vanished from the sketches and scans we'd taken with us.

So, I am now going through everything, with Fipps and Mac and to a lesser degree Cookie and Tower, to translate, transcribe and understand the ship's systems that generations beyond what we know and understand... and yes, I'm keeping them in a journal that is written in my shorthand.

It also means, that every bit of scheduled maintenance and designs I had for the Gumbo are going on - they're also being added to the Mark II. We're going to be busy for a while.

## April 24th, 2552 Getting Approval

Survivor of The Second Twilight of the Gods Incident/Schrodinger's Undead Kat Reporting

I now have official orders to proceed with working on the Gumbo and I've been granted full access to the official notes on the 5.7. And I'm using them - not the way the brass would think—

our notes are much better and much more thorough and haven't gone through someone's attempts to scrub the information.

But what they tried to - erase, by-pass, redesign— obscure... that's given us a starting point. If that's what they didn't want us to know— that's where we start, not that we aren't working on trying to understand it all, but if you're trying to keep things hidden, that's where you start.

Tower says it only makes sense, and you know for being military— he's not keeping the brass in the loop. When I asked him about it, he smiled, his eyes twinkling— 'Need to know' was all he said.

## April 25th, 2552 Resource Management

Survivor of The Second Twilight of the Gods Incident/Schrodinger's Undead Kat Reporting

Today I learned that I am no longer a convict, a pilot or a mechanic - I am a resource. I knew I was on this mission as an expendable member of the crew that's what joining as a conscriptee meant. Now, however, I am needed as a mechanic and an engineer and while I have to work on the Gumbo, making planned changes and performing planned maintenance there has to be balanced.

The Twilight's fall has given us a glut on parts and materials, but they're just that and I'm trying to apply technology and engineering that doesn't exist and we aren't tooled to work on with materials that have questionable stability.

Fipps is working the metallurgy and making sure that the explosion didn't damage the basic structure of the materials, but he also has his regular job to do researching Dancer's retreat. He's been working on this 'after hours' for weeks now and now he's been given the okay to work on it in the open.

I can tell he's excited but there are only so many hours in the day and we have to work our minds and bodies and let them rest too.

I started thinking about cloning myself and I realized I have the next best thing... 223, Mathers. I need a Kat simulator - A new Kat for Schrödinger to play with.

While Mathers, Thomas, didn't like being taken away from his computer realm, the idea of getting to work on an AI, based on my brain, something he calls Alternative Intelligence was a challenge he couldn't pass up - if this works there were be two of me churning through the data.

## April 26th, 2552 The Ship That Wasn't There.

Survivor of The Second Twilight of the Gods Incident/Schrodinger's Undead Kat Reporting

And just when you think you have a line on everything, someone pulls the rug out from under you. Just one of those things - a pilot landing their craft, only the deck went one way and the pilot— didn't. He didn't read the spin right, he relied on the readings instead of checking his sightlines, he believed the equipment and not his own instincts.

The only bright side in this abysmal lining is the fact that his black box recorded some sort of interference right before he crashed into something that wasn't there.

Yeah, that sounds like our 'friends' that are almost not quite there are still in business. The question is - if they have this technology why aren't they just using it? It's obvious that they are leaps and bounds beyond us— why are they only trying to delete me and my ship?

On the bright side, the Artificial undead Kat doesn't need sleep and can ponder these things late into the night with no side effects. I am not so lucky. I should be sleeping, but instead, I'm going over the ship and looking for signs of tampering.

Mathers is going over the data in the black box - Something tells me our little band of miscreants has grown by one.

## April 27th, 2552 Reflections

Exploration Team /Pilot of Schrödinger's Kat/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

I'm not sure who, or where— but I seem to have someone higher up who's listening and watching out for me. Just like the Gumbo— If I don't progress as we had planned the me that would have built the better Gumbo won't exist. With Jo-Jo gone, they need another pilot for the exploration team and, aside from my inability to land in a simulator, I'm next in line for the team so - I'm back on the roster and scheduled to begin training. I'll be landing on Dancer's retreat and her slightly quirky moon.

The only problem, it makes me more vulnerable, but from the looks of things, Fipps may be on to something. So- my black box has a gray box attached to it. We'll see if we can find a way of tracking these bastards down. And hopefully, after this is over, we'll prove once and for all that Schrodinger was wrong about this Kat. .

## April 28th, 2552 Back to the Basics

Exploration Team /Pilot of Schrödinger's Kat/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

When you can't make sense of things, its usually because they don't make sense, or you're missing something. Sometimes the missing things are small, sometimes it's a world of science and technology that are simply beyond your understanding— but there are usually pieces you can learn and build on to figure them out.

In our case - the ship was left on Dancer's retreat so we could find it, there is no other reason. This would also explain our visitors, but why they didn't just destroy it and leave is beyond me. I mean, I get that they were trying to be subtle, but they've gone beyond that.

Destroying the Twilight of the Gods— that was not subtle. Killing Jo-Jo? I don't know if that was subtle or accidental, but it doesn't really matter. Another crewmate, a fellow pilot, a friend is gone.

... And I'm now back on the flight team...

Tomorrow I begin working on landings and takeoffs from planetary objects that haven't been mapped, do not follow standard rotation and are, general potential death traps, and me, idiot that I am and giddy about it.

Today's heavy bag session actually brought Tower into the gym and instead of the heavy bag we spared. In addition to pointers like 'keep my guard up' Tower told me that Fipps might be onto something, and he'd have more for me then, provided I survived.

And then he faked me out and knocked me to the mat. "I told you— keep your guard up," was his parting shot as he went to the locker room.

Yeah, if my enemies don't kill me, my friends will, is it sad that I love this life?

## April 29th, 2552 Landing on Theoretical Impossibilities

Exploration Team /Pilot of Schrödinger's Kat/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

So, my first official day of working with the Exploration Team and what am I doing? Designing better landing gear for landing on unknown surfaces.

See, this is where simulators fail. You can program the most complex set of landing variables imaginable - but the imagination is limited by our experiences, what we think is possible. There are no protocols for landing on a dust field that is so thick that you can land, but any attempt to take off is going to stir up enough dust to choke your intakes and leave you stranded.

The folks who programmed the simulators to mimic landings on surfaces with their pitch and yaw out of synch, but there is nothing for landing on a surface that is in and out of our reality. Yeah, that's why the moon is so erratic - it's pitching one way while it's Y-axis is going another and the surface is completely in the realm of Schroedinger. It isn't there, but it is there and therefore the ship is there and isn't there.

Talk about a hull breach. Yeah, no thank you— there is no instrument for this kind of work - you have to rely on the feedback from your ship and I need to use that feedback to build a better lander.

Damn good thing I've done some mechanical work.

## April 30th, 2552 Sensitive

Exploration Team /Test Pilot/ Part-time Schrödinger's Kat/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

So after a few training runs on landing on the moon and Dancer's retreat, I ended up working to design a better landing system, well, landing and lift system.

I had a library full of design specs, with everything from hovercraft to anti-grav, and enough experienced mechanics to tap to get what I wanted and I had something the other pilots didn't have. I spoke the language.

I came up with a few designs and then compared what we could build with basic available parts to what we had on the 7.5.

While I was working on giving the ships a more solid grounding - Fipps was working on the more esoteric designs and test equipment. It seems that a lot of the salvaged parts from the Twilight have a residual energy signature. It's mostly background stuff - but that is exactly what our invisible friends are - background interference.

So while I wasn't exactly a clay pigeon, for all intents and purposes I was because we needed to see if Fipps was onto something when it came to tracking our friends. I am happy to say though that when the readings said the ship was level and I knew it wasn't- I trusted my feelings and landed.

I was shaken up but I landed and any landing you can stagger away from without exploding — I'll take. Bonus points for getting Fipps his readings.

## May 1st, 2552 Motion Detected

Exploration Team /Test Pilot/ Part-time Schrödinger's Kat/ - Katherine 'ConV' James Reporting

Last night I had a revelation into the minds of my friends. Fipps likes me because I am a mystery— a riddle to be solved. Tower protects me because I need protecting— except when I'm in flight, then he sees me as in my element and at home— except when someone is trying to kill me by lobbing bits of space debris at me.

And then, helpless to do anything else— he yells orders. Like I don't need someone to tell me that if that giant I beam that came at me from out of nowhere and disappeared as quickly hit me, it would be all over for me. No, I was doing quite enough yelling for the both of us, thank you very much.

While this is not my first rodeo— it is the first one where the risks are more than just "oh look I'm flying an experimental craft."

I get it— I die now, there's no me to bring the future back to us, but it's not going to do that much for my day either.

On the bright side, Fipp's energy detection system picked up a fluctuation right before the I beam appeared and another one right before it vanished. He said to give him a few days and he'd have something for me.

I hope he hurries, I don't think my blood pressure can take much more of this.

## May 2nd, 2552 Ghosting

Test Pilot/ Part-time mechanic - Schrödinger's Kat Reporting

I'm learning more about mechanical engineering and science concepts - it seems to be the only way to survive this mission. It's amazing how inspiring self-preservation can be. Today was a study in another science Icon - Murphy.

Now Murphy and I were rather well acquainted back home, but in addition to 'things going bad at the worst possible time', my corollary was 'in the weirdest way possible.' I am happy to report that that factor is still in play.

Fipps' systems were ready for trial by midday and since we knew the signature we were looking for - we just had to put me out there with some nice juicy concentric circles around me and wait. And wait. And... well, you get the idea.

It wasn't until I was bringing it all home that the sensors went stark raving mad and it didn't take me long to realize that a small bed of debris had popped into existence directly in front of me, and then proceeded to follow me as I tried to get out of its path. It would pop out of existence behind me only to appear where I was headed when it vanished.

The 'weirdest way possible' in this scenario was when I ended up overloading whatever was moving the pieces around and I discovered that it was targeting the detector. I ended up jettisoning the equipment and pushing off in the other direction as I did.

I completing my dive roll in time to see the detector react with the ships being detected. For a moment, there were seven ships on my horizon and no sign of the rest of the fleet, but I got footage of them on the ship's recorder. They were like nothing I'd ever seen.

The ships were skeletal, bare-bones and looked more like Geiger had filled in the details on an Escher design based on something by Picasso with a hint of Mercurio and Davidson. And it did look like it spanned that many centuries. Even the colors surrounding them belonged somewhere else.

I only had a few seconds of visual, before everything shifted back to the familiar. Thankfully I had footage because I don't think anyone believed me when I landed.

## May 3rd, 2552 Denying the undeniable.

Test Pilot/ Part-time mechanic - Schrödinger's Kat Reporting

It wasn't until I'd finished my post-flight physical and a full debriefing before I learned that I was gone for 5 minutes after the explosion - I was there, the explosion hit and five minutes later I appeared about three kilometers out of position.

My footage and the clock on the Gumbo indicated my little interlude lasted three seconds so, faced with the unexplainable, the brass has decided that I must have either messed with the clock, or my ship had a glitch and either way it needed to be reviewed.

It doesn't help that my only explanation was 'it was one of those moments, where you know you weren't supposed to survive, but things went wonky in the best way possible—'

Cookie told me I had better watch it because there are only 5 versions of the Gumbo between me and the ship we found and I've already eaten through at least 4 of my nine-lives.

I know he was kidding, but I really don't want to find out if it's true or not.

## May 4th, 2552 Denying the undeniable.

Test Pilot/ Part-time mechanic - Schrödinger's Kat Reporting

Seeing the enemy ships in action seemed to be just what Fipps needed to work out part of the diagrams we had on the Mark 7.5. He said it was so simple he should have realized it weeks ago. He gave me a general rundown on what he wanted to do, but I don't think it's a great idea.

We're working with technology we don't understand, based on our understanding of how it works and he wants me to try it out without fully understanding what we're doing.

I was hoping the brass would say no on this, but instead, since this is a scientific expedition, and Fipps is a scientist it's not a harebrained scheme. It seems that being stupid with science is better than the mechanical 'let's start with what we know and build from there' approach.

Then again the 'it's science, we don't understand it, but let's see what happens' seems to be our mission statement. Followed by, 'oh, look, there's Kat— let's get her to try it out.'

This is not how to make it to the old spacer's home.

## May 5th, 2552 Random Encounter

Test Pilot/ Part-time mechanic - Schrödinger's Kat Reporting

I have to admit, I felt a lot better having something we could use to detect our visitors, and Fipps was actually able to use my recording and the information he got from his sensors to develop something that would, he hoped, force the enemy to become visible.

I know the brass isn't too crazy about it - but we have to do something, I mean, part of this mission is to see if there are other forms of life out here, and they had all sorts of protocols in place which the aliens managed to slip by and prove that they did not have friendly intentions.

Truth be told, it has made me a little sour on the whole prospect of first contact with anyone else— which of course means that Murphy had to step in and put me, literally on a crash course, with a new life form.

I was practicing landing on Random, one of Dancer's Retreat's moons, when the alarm went off and Fipp's machine went to work. I aborted the landing and ended up hovering over a very concerned looking lizard. It looked like it was trying to run away, but couldn't move.

We sat there for a good minute before I realized the problem - Fipp's machine was working on the lizard, it couldn't slip into that other state. I turned it off and it vanished, only to reappear with another lizard. We studied each other for a few moments before the creatures turned and vanished again.

I landed, did my checks and was about to leave, when they appeared on my ship, running all over it, chittering to themselves. When I came closer, one of them ran up my arm, and down the other jumping back onto the ship before they both vanished.

I made sure they were gone before taking off, and turned the device back on once I'd cleared their space.

And like that, I was excited about the mission again. Psycho killer death beings, no-- happy chittering lizards, bring them on!

## May 6th, 2552 Dancing in the ruins

Test Pilot/ Part-time mechanic - Schrödinger's Kat Reporting

I got a lot of teasing about the lizards, and you can say what you like about that kind of encounter, they were friendly and curious, and as far as I know, they didn't try and kill me. That in itself was a rare treat.

Today it got even better - I was practicing landing On Curios, Dancer's Retreat's other moon when I detected odd terrain. A deeper scan revealed soft dust over carved stairs leading towards the moon's center.

Fipps was practically bouncing off the walls for readings and data and a flight to the moon itself. I don't know about anyone else, but I've seen those movies where you go into the ancient temple and all sorts of bad things happen.

But what do I know, I've attended my own autopsy and survived to tell the story. Who knows what we'll find.

## May 7th, 2552 Randomly Curious

Test Pilot/ Part-time mechanic - Schrödinger's Kat Reporting

For now it looks like our exploration is going to be centered around Curious and Random, they both have better raw materials and Dancer's Retreat looks like it will be much better for Agriculture and R&R. We're supposed to start taking samples and doing survey work while they determine the best way to harvest and process the raw materials.

Once the survey is complete we'll know which moon is a better process for mining operations. So far we've only found the ruins on Curious but we need to know what we're digging into/ digging up before we make any decisions.

We've got most of the ships equipped with the Fipps Device which has cut down on random accidents, it looks like our otherworldly friends are trying to stay off our radar, which only bothers me slightly.

## May 8th, 2552 Curiously Random

Test Pilot/ Part-time mechanic - Schrödinger's Kat Reporting

With 4 probe craft and the Valkyrie's View performing the scans, we got a very good picture of the moons and the surrounding solar system. The atmosphere on Random is almost earth-like, with slightly lower O<sub>2</sub> levels while Curious looks like it would be closer to earth-norm, but is more like how earth would be if it lost half its ozone layer.

We've taken to exploring on foot with Einherjar watching over us— well over the scientists. I'm back to just shuttling people wherever they want to go. Or at least I was until the lizards showed up again.

Suddenly I was the center of attention.

Fipps wanted to catch one and see how they manage to pretty much phase in and out of our reality at will. I had to keep him away from them. They seem to like me and I'm not going to use that against them.

Looks like we'll be focusing on the moons for different reasons.

## May 9th, 2552 Curious and Curiouser

Test Pilot/ Part-time mechanic - Schrödinger's Kat Reporting

It seems the lizards have some friends in high places - Fipps was trying to catch one and as he almost had it, it vanished, reappeared on my shoulder, and chattered at him, almost like it was lecturing him. I chuckled and stroked his chest and suddenly I was phased with him to a parallel world.

I mean, I could see Fipps, and the others and the ships, but I saw a lot more. A lot more. We were surrounded by people who were trying to look like us but the way they moved told me that it wasn't their natural form.

I didn't hear words as much as— see images and sense a deep love for their home and curiosity about us. One of them stepped forward and I felt the urge to run away, but then, it stroked my chest, just like I had with the lizards, and suddenly I felt my senses overload.

I saw concern and sensed confusion as they helped me back into our spectrum, holding their hands out as if to say 'Peace.'

At least that's the feeling I got from them. They didn't mean us harm, but we were strange and simple to them- with all our machines and equipment we needed to see what was around us.

All I can say is, I'm really glad I kept Fipps from dissecting one of my friends.

## May 10th, 2552 A matter of protocol

Test Pilot/ Part-time mechanic - Schrödinger's Kat Reporting

First-contact is a really big thing in the fleet, and only the brass and people cleared for first-contact are supposed to actually, you know, make contact.

That's all well and good, but when the people you're meeting with ignore the diplomats and researchers and go straight to their pilot and treating them like an old friend— that plan kind of goes out the window.

No one is really sure what to do next. I mean, protocols are very specific and we're supposed to learn as much as we can about our hosts without insulting them. But it's more like we've been invited to Christmas dinner, and they've seated us at the little kid's table.

Halfway through the discussion one of the elders tapped me on the shoulder and directed me to the 'big people's' table while they took my seat with the 'children'

I tried to explain that they should have one of the others talk to the elders, but again, one of them reached out and gently stroked my chest as I had the lizard, as if they were saying 'It's all right— we're your friends'

Something tells me it's going to be hard convincing them that that is not our standard greeting.

Murphy, weirdest way... story of my life.

## May 11th, 2552 The Fates

Test Pilot/ Part-time mechanic - Schrödinger's Kat Reporting

Our hosts do not have a name for themselves and while the diplomats were trying to come up with something to call them, they explained that the old one (me) had named them 'The Fates' when they had visited me on Dancer's Retreat (the older, now dead me)

They were confused by the fact that I did not remember them and then said something about us being linear like it was something sad and possibly shameful.

The brass was not happy and they were planning on writing me up for my future actions and breaking protocol and meeting with them before the first encounter team had met with them— until they realized it wasn't the now me, it was the future me, which to The Fates, is all the same me.

It's a little hard to understand, but they're trying to help us— and one of the first things they wanted to do was make sure we knew that we had enemies out there.

The news was about a month late, but it was good to know it wasn't just me.

How do you explain the concept of time to someone who has no need for it? And how do you explain that to someone who does?

## May 12th, 2552 Older and Wiser

Test Pilot/ Part-time mechanic - Schrödinger's Kat Reporting

My discussions with the brass and the scientists are becoming less temporal and more philosophical.

They've tried explaining the equipment to the Fates, who the brass considers not technologically advanced enough to be classified as advanced, but they do agree with me that they are leaps and bounds ahead of us.

One of the Fates, along with one of the lizards have attached themselves to me, both to learn our ways and to try and learn how to communicate. The lizard just likes me.

Because of who and what we are, I've taken to calling him, Aziz. Aziz, in turn, has taken to calling me, the Young One. Still, it's better than 237.

It seems that Aziz is young by The Fate's reckoning. The wider your range— the older you are? It's a little hard to follow, but Aziz always falls back to my relationship with the lizard, as if to say - we're you-- you're the lizard. The Fates are beyond our comprehension, but it seems that the older me has made an impression on them.

They say I still visit them, and Aziz misses me— the older me, because I have great stories to tell, but when he tried to share one with me— I couldn't understand it. It was all images and flashes. I could sense laughter and sadness and a sense of aching aloneness that hurt.

Aziz decided I had had enough and gently patted my chest as if to say— it's okay. It was a slight change, but maybe the older me had at least convinced them that stroking the chest of a mammal is different than stroking the chest of the reptile.

Then again, just to be sure - I asked the lizard. He rubbed his head against my finger and then chittered at me when I didn't stroke his chest. I've taken to calling him Lilbit.

## May 13th, 2552 Do you know the way to Baljatuun?

Test Pilot/ Part-time mechanic/Diplomat, Kat James “The Young One” Reporting

Aziz seems to be learning English a lot faster than I’m learning The Fate’s way of communicating. Words are easier for me to process, the Fates think in references, and scents, and sensations, and sharing the thoughts is too much to get past the sense of hello. For Aziz, our communication is slow and frustrating, of course, their idea of slow, means he was speaking our language by noon and had started on learning Latin to better understand us.

Writing is weird to them, because—well, it’s linear. You start at one point and you tell the story. For the Fates, our writing is archaic. It’s like comparing a series of stick figures to the Sistine Chapel. One conveys simple things the other- moves you on different levels.

I pulled Andi in, figuring that while music is also played in order, it brings other senses into it. I was right - They spoke music.

Aziz spent the afternoon telling us, as much as he could tell us about the Fates - they live in many different places at once, on many different planes. What I saw outside Dancer’s Retreat - that was the plane where they travel. Most of the Fates avoid that area because of Our Enemy. Our Enemy, the Escher/Geirger things want to control the planes and crush any who would travel them (us).

The Fates are not fighters, but some of them are explorers. Most of the Fates prefer to stay near Curious and Random at least when they’re on this plane- it is where the oldest of them begins. And then they mentioned a familiar name - Baljatuun, the one The Enemy didn’t want me to meet.

But of course, as soon as I mentioned that, Aziz had other things to do, and he faded back into his own plane, leaving me with a lot more questions — and a lizard wanting to be scritchd.

## May 14th, 2552 Worlds Collide

Test Pilot/ Part-time mechanic/un-diplomatic Diplomat, Kat James Reporting

Today I met myself, if only for an instant. Aziz was trying to get me to understand their ways - that there is no barrier between worlds or times, that it’s all in my mind.

For the most part, it was mostly me giving myself a headache trying not to think about how The Fates think, but how they relate to the world around them, how they relate to each other. I know that the body I see when I talk to Aziz is not Aziz, but something he created for me to interact with.

I know this— on one level, but it is still easier to talk to the form he’s created and to relate to that. There was one moment where I slipped from our reality into the realm of The Fates.

It was everything I saw when we broke through the phase-shifting engine of the Enemy and then some. In that moment I understood, but I couldn’t hold onto it. It was too big for me to deal

with, but now I understand the Enemy's ships use a mechanical version of the Fates' innate ability to phase in and out of our reality.

I tried explaining it to Fipps, but again, I didn't have the words, but he had the math and the plans from the Mark 7.5 to go over.

I wasn't sure what to think when he picked me up and swung me around in the biggest hug I've ever received— and then he kissed me. That put the entire realm of planes and realities on hold for a good three seconds before he realized what he'd done and backed away.

He was blushing.

Aziz decided to leave us alone with our thoughts- I think they were a little disturbing for him— hell, they were kind of disturbing for me. Up until that point— Fipps was like a brother to me.

Murphy, Weird, Me, it's the only way I know.

## May 15th, 2552 The Application of Theoretical Physics

Test Pilot/ Part-time mechanic/un-diplomatic Diplomat, Kat James Reporting

Fipps is in his element now, he's figured out that the travel between realities is only the tip of the iceberg and it's given him something to work with.

We haven't talked about the kiss - it's like something that happened on a different plane of existence I guess. Nice, but not here.

I've realized that this 'multi-layered' existence isn't just the way they live, or think - it's what they are. Their words, when they use them have multiple levels and for them, I'm not really older or younger me - I'm just me and while I've seen my death - to them I am still alive and well and always will be.

To them, I didn't die, I just changed my state. This revelation led to another migraine when I managed to shift between our reality and theirs and I caught another glimpse of the fleet - past and future - arriving and departing, exploring and blowing up - it was profound, but again, our minds can't handle things being that splintered and the shards had to fit somewhere.

All I know is I woke up on my back, with Aziz patting my chest and Lilbit rubbing his head against my chin. It feels like I'm not getting anywhere, but according to Fipps, I was gone for twenty minutes this time.

It would seem that time as we know it gets left behind-- kind of its own temporal distortion.

## May 16th, 2552 Numbers Game

May 16th, 2552 Numbers Game

Test Pilot/ Part-time mechanic/un-diplomatic Diplomat, Kat James Reporting

It seems that Andi is having an easier time getting along with the Fates than she ever did with people. The fates refuse to call her 238 saying that it is a bad number, in fact, the only number that's worse is 237, me... my old number.

But for Andi, all that matters is the groove.

We talked about it and she told me that there are times when she loses herself in the music. She said time ceases and all that exists is a wave of sound, and she wants to stop and listen, but she knows if she does, she'll lose the music.

And that is exactly what The Fates are like. Andi is their musician, I am their errant child and the fleet brought their lost children to them.

Math may be universal, but music is the universal application of math, physics, and artistry, and Andi speaks their language. It's also given Fipps the missing piece of his calculation - sound.

I just know it sounded amazing and there were parts that no recording device could have captured. Magic. Plain and simple, magic. According to Andi, this is what real music should be. I don't think she could ever go back to playing in a lounge.

## May 17th, 2552 Paint by Numbers.

Test Pilot/ Part-time mechanic/un-diplomatic Diplomat, Kat James Reporting

It seems that the music is key to helping us phase with The Fates. Andi does it naturally, joining her music to theirs forms some sort of bridge. There is no doubt in their minds that I can do it, since 'The Old' does it. There was no doubt in their mind that I will learn, but the time between now and then is frustrating, you can see it in the way Aziz looks at me, as if to say 'You have been doing this for years-- why can't you do it now?'

They did bring some more musicians in to work with The Fates, but the results were mixed. Most of the other musicians wanted to lead or solo-- and according to Andi, it's more of an ensemble than show.

Medical and the Brass stepped in and decided that until they could figure out what made for 'good' shifting and 'bad' shifting, they would limit our lab rats' to Andi and me. I think it's having a profound effect on Andi. I don't think I've ever seen her so at peace.

The fact that she's not on dish duty and her only job is to play music all day isn't hurting in the least.

Aziz has tried to get me to sing with him but what comes out is a little embarrassing. So... now I'm taking singing lessons... from a lizard, yep, Lilbit's crooning is what I need to emulate to make the transition easier.

The only thing is, my throat doesn't do the vibrathey thrumming thing his does.

Aziz seems confident that it will come in time- he has, after all, talked to 'The Old One.'

## May 18th, 2552 Sing along with Aziz

Test Pilot/ Part-time mechanic/un-diplomatic Diplomat, Kat James Reporting

Today, while I was trying to phase with Aziz's assistance, I slipped out of synch with me. Suddenly I was back on the Twilight of the Gods. I was running a routine maintenance check and I was about to call it when I recognized when and where we were.

I thought about the filters behind the panel where I was standing— I thought hard about them until the younger young me went behind the panel to check, and our two visitors decided to discuss how to get rid of me.

A moment later, I was back on board the Valkyrie's View with Aziz. I was so angry that I remained focused and didn't drop to the floor. I just stood there, processing what had happened. I could feel future me and the younger me and I realized— we were all the same, just different points of reference.

I watched as Aziz smiled and nodded as he realized I understood, but I couldn't help but think that The Enemy somehow knew that I was becoming the one they feared.

## May 19th, 2552 Meeting of my minds

Test Pilot/ Part-time mechanic/Young One, Old One, Kat James Reporting

It is one thing to suspect that someone has been pulling your strings, getting you to do things you wouldn't have thought to do on your own, only to find out that you are the person pulling the strings.

Aziz was trying to explain what had happened earlier, and it was like talking to Fipps about Science: I kinda got it, but I got it all wrong— in the right way.

I'm here because I did something stupid, but I followed it up with something honorable— but there was no real reason for me to know first aid. That's what mechs, bots and First Resps were for, right? Why would a reasonably reasonable pilot want to learn first aid other than— it seemed interesting at the time?

It seems that while I am too primitive to talk to my past self, I can inspire her to do things, like learn first aid, like learn about Ethics, to endure PT and psych evals, all so that I could end up here with The Fates and the Valkyrie's View.

I mean, I've heard the adage about life's journey and meeting yourself along the way, but I'm pretty sure they were talking about self discovery not literally meeting yourself, let alone yourself from several different points in time.

Then again, I should learn not to expect normal when it comes to my life— My experience with The Fates are teaching me that.

## May 20th, 2552 Learning from the past

Test Pilot/ Part-time mechanic/un-diplomatic Diplomat, Kat James Reporting

Aziz seems to think that since I have talked with the younger young me, I should be able to talk to the Older me and get her perspective. I can't explain to him how difficult that is. That it's harder because I at least have a point of reference for the younger me - I remember being there, I remember what happened, I remembered who I was, when it happened, but the Older me— that hasn't happened yet.

He says it's the same thing. if I can reach into the past, I can lean into the future and find the Older me. How can I find common ground with a me that hasn't been in my world, how do I relate someone who's been through so much more than I have?

Aziz just shakes his head when I try to explain and then says, you will understand when you are Older.

Does that mean the Older me is waiting for me to come to terms with what is happening?

He didn't say anything, but I know Aziz has decided I've had enough for the day. He patted my chest and said, "Tomorrow."

## May 21st, 2552 Stepping into the Future

Test Pilot/ Part-time mechanic/un-diplomatic Diplomat, Kat James Reporting

Today, I almost met the future me. Aziz was trying different frequencies to see if the pitch would help me travel easier. It did, and it didn't. I've been trying to explain it to Fipps, while he was trying to explain to me about harmonics and resonance but they both might as well been saying 'magic happens here.'

I get that everything vibrates. I get the concept that by changing an object's vibration rate, you can change its state- I can get all that, at least when it comes to things. Things like the ship, things like, well... things. But sentient beings? Not so much.

I had almost given up when I felt myself slipping into another state— this one faster than when I ended up back on the Valkyrie's View. I was only there long enough to see a very worried look on a much older me before everything came crashing in around me.

When I came to, Aziz wasn't patting my chest, he was doing chest compressions.

I spent the rest of the day in the infirmary hooked up to monitoring equipment. When I asked what happened, Aziz explained - you hit 237.

No Duh. It looks like Convict 237/Old Me/Now Me don't go well together. Aziz has said we must not try again, and he was surprised when I agreed.

This time, I was the one rubbing my chest.

## May 22nd, 2552 Another time

Test Pilot/ Part-time mechanic/un-diplomatic Diplomat, Kat James Reporting

Medical still has me taking it easy, and Aziz and the other fates got together while he was waiting for the doctors to clear me. It was weird, he just kind of froze for a moment, before fading from sight.

I smiled at the doctor and shrugged. “You get used to it,” I explained. I think them getting used to us is a lot easier than us getting used to them.

Aziz returned as the Medic was finishing up my paperwork and suggested we go for a walk. I have to admit it was a nice change, although, from the looks of things it is not something Aziz is familiar with.

As we walked I asked questions and Aziz shook his head. “You are infinitely young,” he sighed. “With the curiosity of youth. When you are older - you will settle and contact will be easier.”

“Will it?” I asked.

He shrugged. “It is so for our people... for the most part. Most of us are happy to live as we do - to follow the known patterns and walkways of our lives.”

I didn't want to press, but I did want to know more, especially about Baljatuun, the explorer. At some point in their lives The Fates must have explored, how else would they have gotten here?

According to Aziz, they have always been here— and yet, they do not remember our first passing through here. Just the return of the Old one, and our arrival now.

All I really got out of him was that Baljatuun was a lot like me. That made him sad.

## May 23rd, 2552 Moving on.

Test Pilot/ Part-time mechanic/un-diplomatic Diplomat, Kat James Reporting

The Brass has decided we need to explore more. While Andi and I have been working with The Fates, Fipps has split his time between the ruins and the engine. I'm not sure what he found - but the brass has decided to move on, and continue exploring.

They've invited Aziz to come with us and he's been communing with himself, and the others. I don't think they can compel Lilbit to do anything other than come and go as he pleases. Part of me wishes I could be more like him, but too much of my reality is built on rigid rules that cannot be violated. One of them is the fact that the frequency required for me to move through time warps my brain.

Transcending the planes is easier, but I need help, and that, I think is what The Fates fear. They fear we are too much like The Enemy, that we require machines to do our movement for us and not our souls.

Me, I've never been good at physics, meta or otherwise. All I know is, Aziz has warned me that our way leads to heartbreak and ruin and that the Old one would tell me this— if I could go to her.

Andi has decided to stay as our emissary, and for once the brass agreed. I think if they refused- Andi would simply fade into the planes that we can't see.

I kind of envy her.

## May 24th, 2552 Leaving

Test Pilot/ Part-time mechanic/The Younger One, Kat James Reporting

As we headed out, I couldn't help but feel like we hadn't even come close to finishing what we started, but Fipps assured me that we had learned more than enough for now.

I know it has something to do with the ruins, and Fipps won't say anything one way or the other— which means I'm on the right track, I've been part of this mission long enough to know that much.

He did let me in on the fact that the odd metallurgy they had on the 7.5 matches the scraps we got after the explosion of the Twilight of the Gods. It had somehow been hardened and mutated because of the explosion— and that the explosion was caused by vibrational changes in the metal's structure.

I think, if we aren't careful— we will become The Enemy, and the brass thinks it's not us, but The Fates who change.

As I prepared to leave, Aziz returned. He put his hand to my chest and told me, we would meet again, when I am the Old One, and I return to where we began.

I'm not sure what he meant, but Cookie recommended some scotch as we toasted The Fates and prepared to head out into our future.

## May 25th, 2552 Alert

Test Pilot/ Part-time mechanic/un-diplomatic Diplomat, Kat James Reporting

As we started underway, the proximity alarm went off. The signal forced several ships to appear, but something told me there were more just out of range. At Fipps' command the fleet started echoing a broadcast directed at the others we could see and several of the ships ruptured.

It took less than a minute before all the ships left our plane, but we circled our wagons anyway. We spent most of the day on alert but it seems that whatever Fipps had us broadcast it was enough to make them think twice.

My request to go back and check on The Fates was denied, but in the evening Lilbit appeared, with a note tied to his tail.

It read:

*The Fates were saddened by the loss of life, but grateful you are still alive. Do not look for us - we've gone home. Andi.*

I can't help but feel like a child when I console myself with the thought, 'they started it.'

Thing is— with the way The Fates think - we very well could have started it years from now.

## May 26th, 2552 New and Improved

Test Pilot/ Part-time mechanic, Kat James Reporting

We've regrouped around Dancer's Retreat. Part of me wanted to go back to Curious and Random but that ship has sailed. Part of me thinks that the ruins aren't ruins where they are.

Different planes, different times— different vibrations. I thought about the Fates and suddenly I was standing at the top of a well, looking down into multiple levels of existence and each pool of water reflected another.

I followed the waves as they ebbed and flowed until I found myself facing Andi, and a being I knew was Aziz— Aziz in his true form.

"Now you understand, but it is too late. The damage has been done. The music is a broken cord and you will have to find the long way around."

He didn't speak, but I felt the vibrations and somehow understood. Something tells me that the long way around is what they were hoping to avoid.

"All time, no time, all space, no space," Andi added. I should have known she'd adapt to being one of The Fates. It suits her.

I closed my eyes and in silence, found myself back in my quarters. I'm going to have to work on that— wouldn't do sleep-slip into another plane, or get out of phase with the ship.

## May 27th, 2552 Jump Points

Guinea Pig/ Part-time mechanic/Canary in search of a coal mine, Kat James Reporting

So- it seems the trick to getting me to shift is to get me bored to the point of tears, talking about scientific theory and shipboard politics, throw in some rules and regulations and then when I space out... I really space out.

Seriously - I may not understand physics, but I'm starting to understand what the Fates do - instead of going from point A to point B traveling in space over time, or folding space, where you join A to B, still linear, but you're cutting the distance and time by changing the arrangement of A relative to B, The Fates just... shift. They enter a state where there is no A no B, no distance no time. You just spend a moment in a hall of mirrors being everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Then you find the point where you want to be and when you leave the hall of mirrors, you just shift back to yourself at that point.

Easy for them, but right now the most I can pull off is about 40 feet.

Fipps thinks this is just the first step, but he hasn't seen that hall of mirrors and felt how empty and full it is when you step into it, he's more interested in amplifying the wave, giving me a better range of motion - something to augment the trip for me.

He said that what he wants to do is link me into the ship - so that it's part of me and when I coalesce around a spot (his words) the ship can get me there faster.

He lost me when he started talking about harmonics and frequencies and getting the ship to vibrate at the same speed. I almost started to drift until he started talking about certain harmonics and frequencies disrupting the movement and it would be like hitting a brick wall.

That got my attention. I didn't understand the theory, but I understood what would happen if I hit something that was solid when I was moving that fast.

I managed to not drift for the rest of the day - but I'll be damned if I understood half of what Fipps was saying.

But he does think that being able to identify the frequency and location means we could create jump points for the fleet to follow.

All I know for sure is: we're in danger; the enemy is closer than we think; Fipps is hard to follow when he's excited, and someone is going to get hurt.

## May 28th, 2552 The point of jumps

Guinea Pig/ Part-time mechanic/Canary in search of a coal mine, Kat James Reporting

Day 2, Where Fipps tries to explain his plan to me. This time he brought out some string, a mirror, a replica of the Gumbo, and some netting.

It didn't help, but it felt like we were making progress. I had fun playing with the netting and the replica of the Gumbo but it suddenly made sense when I tried to shift and looked at the way the mirrors were positioned.

I ended up on the floor about 20 feet from where I started, but I think I understand. The netting is space, only it's three or four dimensions rather than two. When you lay it flat you travel one way, but if you phase, you make a pocket in the net, that pocket is the hall of mirrors, Fipps talked about a gravitational well, so I think that adds another dimension to our already crowded hall of mirrors.

Anyway, according to him, that moment in the hall of mirrors where you pick your point, that's where you're making a well that can lead to your target. When it's just you, it doesn't take nearly as much energy as if you had a ship with you. The more mass, the longer the trip takes so - if you want to move a lot of ships, you go for shorter hops, or you go for burning a lot of energy.

It also seems that those pockets end up acting like a spring that can be used to propel people/ships through the pocket to the target area. It sounds very theoretical but as near as I can tell— it's Fipps way of explaining The Fate's way of phasing in and out between planes/realities in terms he understands.

It's all really cool theory and everything but Fipps seems to think I should be shortlisted to the testing team. And I thought he liked me.

## May 29th, 2552 Point and Jump

Guinea Pig/ Part-time mechanic/Canary in search of a coal mine, Kat James Reporting

Day 3 - So, it seems that Fipps was not just talking theory - he was talking a practical marriage between The Fate's way of shifting, mental state changes coupled with frequency variations all mixed into a ship with the ability to change its vibrations and generate that well he needed to create solid jump points.

I looked at it and shook my head in disbelief. It was the Gumbo, only it was the Gumbo after someone had gone crazy attaching sensors to every inch of her hull. My ship, my beautiful ship looked like a freakin' disco ball, and Fipps wanted me to fly around the fleet on a set course of jump points created by me, using the ship.

He didn't want me to do it once or twice, no he wanted me to open twenty jump points and fly the Disco Ball through each of them in order so he could film the experience and he wanted me to open them up while I was still in the well.

I can generate one point 40 feet away, most of the time, and he wanted me to open twenty? I thought he was crazy until I noticed that the mirrors were not positioned equally - they were set to take my one 40 ft jump point and turn it into 20 jump points all around the fleet.

It was all cool, and the trip was amazing until I got back a moment after I'd left. Looks like we need to compensate for time differentials, and I need a really, really stiff drink.

## May 30th, 2552 Jump to the Left

Guinea Pig/ Part-time mechanic/Canary in search of a coal mine, Kat James Reporting

Day 4 As I get over the initial fears, and learn that Fipps had already made several test runs with a remote before my glorious flight in the Gumbo-Mark-Disco, I'm not sure if I feel better or worse. Of course, while I'm debating about this he's setting us up for another run. This one was almost like the last one, but this time there will be a remote trailing me. The idea is, I work out the pattern and jump points, make the jumps, and wait see if the remote can follow me.

I tried to remind him that my previous career was spent trying to keep things from following me, but he's too focused on his studies. He's concerned about the energy expended and whether or not the follow along will slow us down or affect me in any way.

The flight was as uneventful as driving a disco ball through a hall of mirrors at ridiculous speeds piloted by my imagination. And by giving myself a five-count I actually managed not to hit the remote when I reappeared four seconds after I left.

Fipps spent the rest of the day reviewing the footage from the Gumbo and the Gulf Shrimp, his name for the remote, not mine. I got to spend the rest of the day in the lab running on the hamster wheel while medical tried to come up with things to evaluate.

Someone decided it was a good idea to throw in a psych eval to see the effects on my psyche. So... just in case of tons of tension about three minutes of sheer terror isn't enough to mess with me, let's through some Rhoshack paintings in. They kinda looked like The Enemy.

I think the post-flight testing was more tiring than the actual flight, but I did notice that I'm more tired today than I was yesterday, whether it's related or not, I'll leave to the Bio team, I just want some chow and a good night's sleep

## May 31st, 2552 Science

Guinea Pig/ Part-time mechanic/Canary in search of a coal mine, Kat James Reporting

Day 5 I can see why Fipps loves taking things apart and seeing how they work - you learn about what makes them tick and nobody gets hurt, usually. I have to admit, he's good at it. Which only makes me feel marginally better about my part in the process. The part where he puts me in the cockpit and points me in the direction he wants me to go and I let him.

But no matter how you look at it, his way is a hell of a lot safer.

My part involves a healthy dose of adrenaline, some swearing, and a lot of wondering what the hell I was thinking, followed by a lot of being hours of being observed for side effects.

Not that Fipps is the one watching - no, he's physics he's the stuff that crunches, I'm the thing that makes them crunch and then bio studies me to see what happens after my death-defying feats of being pointed at theoretical walls and being told - you can go through that and believe it. enough to do just that.

The problem is, as long as he right- I'll keep doing it, 'cause it's a lot of fun turning the world as we know it on its ear... and when he gets it wrong-- I'll never know.

## June 1st, 2552 SOS

Guinea Pig/ Part-time mechanic/Canary in search of a coal mine, Kat James Reporting

Today's Testing was canceled and we have a new directive: find the rest of the fleet. It started with a 30 day old SOS and got weirder from there. I have a decent understanding of Time/distance communications and I know get the time dilation, but I don't have the math to calculate where the message came from let alone how long it actually took to get to us.

Even knowing where the fleet was supposed to have gone and figuring their speed and heading, and how long their trip would seem to us vs how long they were gone, then there's the method of communications. I'm pretty sure it took all the computing power they had, some really odd maps and I was sure I wouldn't understand anything until I heard it then they broadcast the message to the rest of the fleet.

When they did that, I knew where they were. I can't really explain it— I knew and I knew how to get to them, but getting anyone else there, or getting them back here— that was something I didn't understand and I would need Fipps and all his expertise to pull it off.

Only the brass has laid claim to Fipps and his team. Convicted Felon test pilots need not apply

## June 2nd, 2552, I win? Yay me?

Guinea Pig/ Part-time mechanic/Canary in search of a coal mine, Kat James Reporting

It took several iterations of 'The Gumbo is the only ship equipped for jump point travel' before the brass accepted that the Gumbo was the ship that would have to go and find out what could be done.

It took a lot more to remind them that I'm the only one with any actual experience and that more ships could be built since time didn't really matter. It took them a lot longer to accept that Fipps would have to come with me to explain what we were doing. Once that was dealt with, sending Tower along to keep us safe became just another point for them to plot on their graphs.

The Brass does love their graphs and charts.

I'm beginning to think there was lot more to the SOS than what they broadcast, not that the brass would ever limit the information we receive. That would never happen.

And I wonder why they think I'm dangerous. It's not that I'm a convict, I'm not military - I don't have discipline and I question everything.

## June 3rd, 2552 Might as well

Guinea Pig/ Part-time mechanic/Canary in search of a coal mine, Kat James Reporting

With all the planning and briefings and debriefings the brass scheduled, the actual jumps were rather anti-climactic. We had to take four jumps of twenty, which was new, but in theory, it was the same as doing one run, just doing it multiple times with enough time in between to breathe, reset and prepare to jump.

I had a hard time putting their coordinates into a jumpable order, but Fipps could do the math. So- we did the first series of jumps, I rested while Fipps calculated out where we needed to head next, Tower would watch the monitor for signs of The Enemy and look more than a little green around the gills.

After the second jump, I needed more time to rest, Fipps was starting to look a little green and Tower was ready for our little jaunt to end... and we were only halfway there.

Third jump left us all more than a little loopy and Fipp's calculations, were dead on for the fourth jump— they were dead on in the wrong direction. Instead of arriving a day after they sent the message, we arrived the day before.

Of course, I was in no condition to say anything, Tower threw up exiting the Gumbo and Fipps didn't look like he was going to hold down his lunch— but we got there. Fipps reported in, explained what was going on as they hauled us to medical and began checking us out.

I woke up around dinner time, feeling ravenous and by then Fipps had managed to convince his people that we needed to work something out, and fast.

They tried to get me back in the Gumbo, but I woke up in medical, listening to a heart monitor slowly beep. I figured going back to sleep was a good idea.

## June 4th, 2552 Wishing Well

Rescue Pilot/ Part-time mechanic/Jump Gate operator Kat James Reporting

Our arrival was baffling to the rest of the fleet, especially since we were responding to an SOS that hadn't been sent yet.

While Tower answered a lot of questions about what happened, Fipps worked on making sure that everyone could follow when the time came. My job was to make sure that the Gumbo was ready to pilot the way through. We were going to have to work out the best path to return to the fleet (and not get there before the message was received.)

The plan was to chart a course of jumps based on reversing Fipps' calculations. It was all theoretical and the Fleet Admiralty was not buying it— until The Enemy fleet surrounded us like they had tried with the Valkyrie's View earlier.

A squadron headed out to intercept while the fleet followed me through the first jump point. We made it out before they could do any damage to the big ships, but we lost three fighters who couldn't follow.

We waited tensely scanning the area until there was no chance for them to have followed. Then we prepped for a path home— just as soon as Fipps figures out where we are.

## June 5th, 2552 Side Stepping the Enemy

Rescue Pilot/ Part-time mechanic/Jump Point operator Kat James Reporting

We were on our second set of jumps, and I was in the well about to push on when my detector went off - The Enemy was close by and closing in on us.

Since we couldn't stay in the well without becoming trapped I picked my points and then opened the path. We exited in a different area of space than originally planned and Fipps was ready to have a cow until I pointed the sensor recordings.

"They were in the well. They were trying to find us."

The next jump was uneventful, but they're trying to find us when we slip into well. We set our scanners up and gave the fleet a chance to rest and prepare for another series of jumps.

It seems I got about 200 points for avoiding the enemy, but I lost several thousand for taking us off course and making Fipps do math in the back of the Gumbo.

## June 6th, 2552 Left Handed Spanner

Rescue Pilot/ Part-time mechanic/Jump Gate operator Kat James Reporting

It seems my avoiding discovery has taken us a lot further out of the way than planned. Fipps figures it's going to take us about seven jumps spread out over the next few days if we want to get to the fleet safely without bringing the enemy straight to us.

It's not like they don't know exactly where we are, but... fleet.

One thing we have learned, I can only safely guide a fleet this size, through one set of jumps, maybe two before my reflexes get strained. And the more we jump, the longer I need to rest.

I really hope Dancer and the others are having luck slipping or I'm going to be the Old one in about three weeks.

## June 7th, 2552 Happy Landings

Rescue Pilot/ Part-time mechanic/Jump Gate operator Kat James Reporting

I'm pretty sure I lost a day or three in there, but since we got back to the fleet today, I'll just do my update with today's date.

To be honest I kind of lost track of how many times I was in and out of the well. All I do know is, we're home, with the rest of the fleet. I managed to land the Gumbo on the right ship— I missed my landing bay by two, but I got us down safe and sound.

I remember being called to the bridge, but somewhere between landing bay 13 and the bridge, I kind of fell unconscious. By the time I woke up, they were briefed and my services were needed in the landing bay.

I've been put on retrofit duty.

## June 8th, 2552 Jump Gate Engineer

Rescue Pilot/ Part-time mechanic/Jump Gate operator Kat James Reporting

My new official designation is Jump-Gate Engineer, which is cool, even if it isn't accurate. I know that I'm one of the few pilots who can trigger a well, and use it to go where I want, and I can retrofit with the best of them, but that's all I do.

I don't understand how it works, I didn't design the equipment I'm adding to the darts and the probe ships. But, I'm just connecting wires and making sure the rig doesn't come off during operation.

I'd hate to think about what would happen if a ship was caught in the well when it collapsed. So, yes, I was very thorough about the retrofit.

In the morning, after each ship was fitted, I'd go out with the pilot— first in Gumbo, then in their ship and lead them through the process. They would practice while I fitted the next ship.

Of course, I was only allowed into the well four times after yesterday's performance, but by then Dancer had a decent feeling for it and we had another five pilots learning

Once we had the process down we expanded. Folks fabrication would finish a device, I'd install it, Dancer would do the walkthrough.

Today Valkyrie's View, tomorrow the Fleet.

## June 9th, 2552 What Goes Around

Part-time mechanic/Jump Gate Engineer Kat James Reporting

As the retro fit progressed, I was beginning to feel hopeful that we'd be able to turn things around, and it looked like we might be on the safer side of things when The Enemy fleet shifted into our plane around us.

Three Darts had just gone into the well when they broadcast a message to our entire fleet. They were broadcasting at 236 Mhz, and all the new-would be Jump Gate Pilots who were in the well when it just vanished. I'm hoping they manage to slip somewhere in the hall of mirrors but I'm not holding my breath.

They broadcast, then waited for a response. I don't think they got the fact that it took us 10 minutes to figure out what frequency they were using and then another five to find their transmission

Translating however was not an issue, seeing as how they had taken the time to learn our language.

They demanded that we cease and desist all slip technology and turn over the war criminal. They then transmitted images of me.

Fortunately, the Brass remembered me saving half the fleet so they were at least a little protective.

Negotiations begin in the morning.

## June 10th, 2552 Starting something

Part-time mechanic/Jump Gate Engineer Kat James Reporting

Today has been a case of unraveling a long chain of "We said, they said." For once I was glad I wasn't considered 'first contact' material.

Especially when they accused us of invading their space and trying to assure them that we were not using the limited time slip to counteract their actions.

I would not have been nearly as calm when it came to asking about the destruction of the Twilight of the Gods or the attempts on my life. No, that was a little too personal for me.

According to them, we invaded their space, landed the Twilight of the Gods on top of itself and then blew it, and their diplomatic team up when they tried to signal us.

Again, trying to kill me does send a rather strong signal where I come from and it is rarely diplomatic in nature.

There's an uneasy truce tonight and as such, there is nothing in fabrication and I'm not retrofitting any ships - we're on hold, while we try to find some common ground.

At least their talking now instead of slipping in and out and randomly trying to get rid of me and the Mark 7.5, not that I'd know until they tried— but they'd have to get through an entire ship's complement of Einherjar to do it.

It's good to have friends, but it does make brushing your teeth a little difficult.

## June 11th, 2552 Starting something

Part-time mechanic/Jump Gate Engineer Kat James Reporting

The accusations continue, although it seems that The Enemy have a very different hierarchy than we do.

I'm not sure what it was but during the deliberations and negotiations, three of The Enemy would appear, say their piece, and then step aside for three more who would appear as they left.

It took the brass a while to realize that that was what they were doing, but it all came down to our attack on their ships at the Twilight of the Gods and when their fleet surrounded us and then exploded.

Meanwhile, we're still trying to understand exactly what happened. We broadcast at the same frequency: they used and they're fine, but if we use it, we're bloodthirsty homicidal maniacs...

There's a lot more going on here than a simple misunderstanding.

## June 12th, 2552 Internal issues

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

There are some serious disadvantages to being part of the ship's convict compliment- like the fact that when something happens, you're in the pool of suspects. It doesn't matter if you were on another ship, or doing something else at the time— you're in the pool.

This disadvantage meant that I was pulled into a hearing to have the evidence read against me - that I did willfully and with full knowledge blow up their envoy and the Twilight of the Gods in an effort to hide my activity. I then further broadcast slip-stream event that 'caused their jump gate to collapse thereby destroying one have of their interdiction team.

The advantage of being a jack of all trades meant that when they started talking about me blowing up the Twilight of the Gods, I had gathered debris from the explosion for recycling, I had talked to Fipps about the metallurgic changes based on whatever had caused the accident and, while I couldn't explain pretty much any of it— I could point the investigative team in the right direction.

And, with the help of The Enemy, how mind mending is that?, we determined that no one from the fleet could have caused the accident because we haven't even begun to work with the elements that they have— although Fipps is now excited about the idea researching metals and the effect of the well on their molecular structure.

It seems that not everyone in The Enemy's fleet is on the same page.

I'm just happy that I'm off the hook. I'll worry about the faction that wants me dead, another time.

## June 13th, 2552 Unpleasant Line of Questioning

## Young One/Old One Kats Jameses? Reporting

I think I deserve a day off, for at least a week.

Since I was charged with war crimes and there was nothing that the brass could really do without starting the war we've been accused of starting, in the future, due to my actions in the past... I was called in for questioning.

The Enemy's temporal courts and temporal examinations are nothing like what I experienced with the Fates. When The Fates, talked to Old Me, they soothed me and they coaxed me into a state where I could reach out to my other-selves. That was like slipping into a warm bath.

The Enemy's questioning on the other hand was like being plunged into free-fall and then crashing into the Atlantic Ocean... around, say, Nova Scotia-- in January. It was bracing.

I have no idea what they found, I know the Old One was there, and she was not happy with them and gave them a piece of my mind. They in turn were not happy with what the Old One had to say but they apologized to me and the brass and requested that we reconvene tomorrow.

The Brass wanted me to tell them what I said, but I have no clue. Old me, won't talk to Young me, the funny thing is, I don't take it personally.

Hopefully, we'll find out more tomorrow. Until then I'm going to take a nap.

## June 14th, 2552 Internal issues

### Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

I have no clue what the Old One told The Enemy but things have seriously changed. First, their name actually translates closer to Nemesis than Enemy, and to be honest the two words meant the same thing to me, but I've learned that there are differences - while there is opposition it isn't all bad will and animosity.

We are a challenge to them, just as they challenge us, but we exist in very different reaches of space.

They call themselves the Parataph and it would seem that what they learned from the old one was that things not actually what they seemed. And so we have diplomats salivating over the chance to make a treaty between our two peoples.

Of course, for now, the first rule is - we will travel using one range of frequencies while they use another so we don't have an unfortunate incident where one of us appears on top of the other.

As a gesture of goodwill, they have offered to explain the portions of the technology we're still experimenting with if we teach them the mental aspect of our travel. Another thing the Parataph did-- they found our missing pilots and brought them home.

They've also asked to talk to me again, only this time they wanted to talk to the here and now me. It seems I have, or will have, quite a reputation among their people.

So much better than being a war criminal in a war we didn't even know existed.

## June 15th, 2552 Internal issues

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

Well, it seems that The Fates aren't the only ones who travel up and down their own time-line. Unlike the Fates the Parataph follow things linearly so there is no all at once meeting of the minds - but rather a survey of where each of them are in the timeline in reference to their current position.

It is a little more understandable, but a little more disconcerting because they can see what leads from one self to another.

Today I met one on one with a Parataph named Druckab. It seems that he was/will be one of the ones who tried to kill me and that they failed because he was able to remember me to his future self even though that was in my past.

I'm beginning to realize that I will be so much happier if the only time calculations we have to do involve time dilation and even that gives me a headache. Set a timer, tell me when to expect things to happen- that makes me happy.

Introduce me to my would-be attempted murderer who actually prevents that murder... that's a migraine waiting to happen.

And they think we're confusing with our way of looking at the world.

## June 16th, 2552 Instant Pre-play

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

This is so surreal it isn't funny. The Parataph had put me and Druckab in a room with a panel of experts, theirs and ours. I basically have a lawyer, a diplomat, and a very protective, yet diplomatic Einherjar in the form of Tower working to protect me against their opposite number from the Parataph.

We are working from very different points of view and time references. They say that when we attacked, yes, we attacked them, we started a war that left their fleet decimated. The only

problem is - we weren't at war with them until Druckab and his partner came back in time to kill me and blow up the Twilight of the Gods.

Something they also blamed on us.

According to their records, while we were evacuating the Twilight, one of our ships rematerialized in the middle of the Twilight of the Gods causing a catastrophic tidal wave through the well - and that caused the destruction of their fleet and the Twilight of the Gods.

A ship, they claim, was piloted by me.

But... I was flying away from the Twilight when it blew up. There had already been countless attempts on my life and two of our people had been killed to facilitate my murder/execution/preemptive strike.

Two crewmen who were either innocent of any wrongdoing since there was no war as far as we knew, or guilty of war crimes for destroying the Parataph fleet.

Their reasoning for attacking through time, was that we had left them no other option, the ships that weren't destroyed were dedicated to end this war before it began and as near as I can tell - that action is what started the war.

But, if I died materializing inside the ship - how is the Old One still out there?

And that is where Druckab and I agree, you cannot have a future self after the time of your death, which means— someone has made a mistake.

Unfortunately, that's the only place we do agree. After that, it's like trying to referee two four-year-olds fighting over a bunch of cookies-- Schrödinger's cookies.

## June 17th, 2552 Slipping along a slippery path

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

So, it's a good thing that Parataph do not understand my position here. It's a good thing that I am surrounded by Einherjar since they showed up...

Last night around 02:00 SBT (Ship Board Time) while our fleet and that of the Parataph sat menacing each other, two Parataph decided to slip into my quarters and remove me from the equation, they were followed by a third who was still trying to reason with them as they appeared, in the room - surrounded by Einherjar.

I guess they didn't like the cookies.

One of my would-be executioners was the security man from our negotiations, the other was one of the stenographers. Oddly enough, the Parataph trying to stop them— was Druckab - yeah, the Parataph who tried to kill me on the Twilight of the Gods was actually trying to stop them.

As they came in, everything slowed down, I felt the pit of my stomach fall as I ducked, and pulled the room into the hall of mirrors with me. It turns out that all the equipment on the Gumbo wasn't to help with the jump - it was to keep the pilot from doing what I did.

I didn't just step into the well, I stepped into a well of wells, and as we hung there, we saw the fleet blowing up in mirror after mirror, after mirror - And it wasn't just us or them - it was all of us.

I knew I had tapped into something I shouldn't have been able to, but one moment we were there and the next I was falling. All I could see was destruction until I hit the deck plating and I was back in the bunk room with the Einherjar and three Parataph - and instead of continuing, they all stopped.

Everyone there had seen what I had seen and we knew we were seconds away from mutual destruction. None of us moved, none of us spoke, but we all reacted.

Stand-down orders were broadcast on every channel throughout both fleets. And that moment of stillness held until the vision faded and we were back in our own world.

The question of who started the war became inconsequential in comparison to the war that loomed closer— Druckab promised me he would return, then left, with my would-be assassins in tow.

Tower sat down next to me, the weight of his words was paralyzing. "You just saw a possible future- We just saw..."

I wish I had said something profound or enlightening but all that I could say was, "yeah."

## June 18th, 2552 Slipping along a slippery path

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

Last night was a very long night. The hardest part was getting the brass to listen and not go off half-cocked. Yes, the sanctity of the fleet was violated, yes there was an attempt on my life... they focused so much on what had happened that they missed the part where 'If we do anything stupid - we all die.'

Thankfully Tower got it, and he got Commander Bridges to listen, and more importantly understand. But it still took the three of us all night to get them to understand that what I saw, what we all saw was a warning, not a threat.

By the time they agreed to back off, the Parataph had already retreated a respectful distance and their weapons were no longer trained on our ships.

When I made it back to my quarters, Lil'bit was curled up on my pillow. He gave me a happy little chirp and yawned when he saw me.

I guess that means I've done good.

## June 19th, 2552 Meet the Old One.

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

In light of the new concordance, carefully disguised of sheer terror of doing something wrong, we met onboard the Parataph command ship. Her name translated into something like Star Dragon, or Dragon eater of stars— they're language is a little tricky when it comes to syntax - kind of fitting for a species that bounces around the galaxy.

The top brass, a contingent of Einherjar, Our chief Medical officer, Dr. Takahashi, and me. At least we had established that everyone knew about what we'd seen and we agreed that this moment, which we all knew we were still skirting, couldn't occur.

There was an emptiness that came with those explosions and emptiness that could eat a black hole and no one like that idea.

After a lot of negotiating with our senior officers and Dr. Takahashi, it was decided that one of the Parataph healers... I believe they said healers of spirits would interview me.

The only problem with that was the fact that they agreed— I didn't. Something told me that having someone creep around in my head was a really, really bad idea.

I didn't know how bad until the healer and I met up with the Old One. She was me, but so not me it wasn't even real— and I could suddenly understand why I couldn't connect with her/me - she'd been avoiding me.

One moment I'm fighting having the Parataph healer in my head, the next there were three of us and let's just say that the Old One was not happy. I could feel the well turning and we were slipping closer and closer to that big exploding vision.

Then we were back on board the Parataph ship and the healer was shouting orders. I couldn't hear her voice against the explosions in my head, and when the sound was finally fading, I found myself on the shuttle with Tower piloting— when did he learn to do that?

And my head feeling like I'd just come off a three-day bender. Our people were here, and so was the Parataph healer, watching over me worriedly.

I offered no resistance when they walked me to medical where I fell asleep. When I woke, Takahashi was dozing in the chair next to me, Tower stood at the foot of my bed and Lil'bit was curled up on my pillow, grooming my ear.

I looked at Tower, and all he said was, "We'll talk later."

I probably would have argued, but my head hurt too much and I didn't want to disturb Lil'.

## June 20th, 2552 A New Understanding.

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

Tower and I never had our talk, I ended up hearing about it from the infirmary with Dr. Takahashi monitoring my vitals while Grthara, the Parataph healer soothed my mind and made sure that we were drifting away from the Apocalypse rather than drifting into it.

She wouldn't tell me why the Old One was upset, other than the fact that I should not meet her until I am her— and that me being on a Parataph ship was a very bad idea.

It seems that Old me has a lot of enemies.

The brass worked out an agreement, whereby we only traveled using certain frequencies and only following certain resonances to minimize the chances of our people phasing into one another.

I got to watch that on the ships' comms being stuck in the infirmary with a lizard preening my hair.

According to Grthara, fire and destruction are further away now.

I'm almost afraid to hope.

## June 21st, 2552 Regulator.

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

It feels really strange saying this... working with the Parataph we have found a way to regulate the Fipp's device and limit the frequencies and waves we use to travel. We also worked with them on their equipment to make sure that there would be no accidents in the well.

We would be able to see each other but we will not be able to interact and more importantly we will not accidentally slip into each other. They were congratulating each other when I realized a problem - The Parataph and the fleet use different units of measure. We translated back and forth and the differences were minimal - until you considered how many hops a pilot was taking.

On longer journeys, insignificant became ship shattering significant. I may not know the science behind what we're doing— but I do know the mechanics.

That night, I was given a new call sign... Schrödinger's Kat, S-Kat for short.

## June 22st, 2552 Sometimes it's good to be lucky.

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

On the advice of Grthara and our experiences with one another it was decided, that for now, the best thing we could do was keep our people separated, with the Parataph taking their fleet back home to rebuild and us to explore anything but their territory.

Druckab has been assigned to us as a Liaison Officer. I'm not sure of how I feel about that, but that night I dreamed of Aziz and Andi watching over us, and Andi just shaking her head and telling me 'you were lucky.'

Like I didn't know that before. I mean, I may be slow at times, but when the only fiery explosions nearby are the stars - I'd call it a good day.

## June 23rd, 2552 Guidance.

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

I don't know what Druckab was expecting, but what he got was definitely not it. First, he expected me to be some scientific genius, I'm not. Second, he expected really sophisticated research.

I know - he was on board the Twilight of the Gods, he knew what we had there, but he insists that the ship was an ancient derelict that we used to test things that were too dangerous to risk our better ships.

It was true-ish, but it was a case of recent derelict and our 'better' ships were just less damaged, not more advanced.

Then came the shock of how we actually got here. He looked at the data from our jump, did the math in his head, and then stared at us in disbelief. We were not mad-men poking at things we didn't understand - we were children.

Fipps explained that we were explorers, but I think Druckab thinks that's just another word for immature children. He's probably right.

So instead of a Liaison, he's more of a glorified daycare provider trying to advise us not to put pennies into power points.

## June 24th, 2552 - ReFit and RetroFit

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

Today, I got to be a mechanic. It didn't take Fipps long to figure out what needed to be done with the limiter - he actually had the plans from the scans we'd done of the 7.5 before it, and the Twilight of the Gods were destroyed.

Fipps said it was actually pretty easy once he figured out what he was doing, and then I made the mistake of saying "Hell, man, why don't you just build a 1/24th scale of the Mark 7.5 - we have the 3D modeling.

I lost him for the rest of the day. The Brass, and more than a few Einherjar decided it was best that Druckab get acquainted with our systems and rules— yeah, their technology is leaps and bounds ahead of ours and I don't know if they're afraid he'll figure that out or that we actually have some technology they don't have, like the paper clip.

I don't know, all I know is, I have a ton of ships to fit, retrofit and convert and I won't be flying any time soon.

One of the problems with being multi-faceted, you can't be in two places at once... only I can... just not yet.

## June 25th, 2552 - Big Mouth

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

Me and my big mouth. Fipps decided to take my idea of building a replica of the mark 7.5 and do it on a grand scale. So, instead of a nice quite collection of technical diagrams and a working model we have our very own bay, a staff, including Mac and a full-size mock-up of the 7.5 — including the mechanical parts we have no idea what they do.

All I can say is, if it rips a hole in the hull and transports itself to a tropical island somewhere, I am not cleaning up after it.

Then there's the matter of Druckab, yeah, remember him, the guy who may or may not, will have tried to kill me until he and the witchy woman talked to the Older me? Yeah, he's still on board.

Don't get me wrong, Fipps is an amazing guy, he plays a mean game of backgammon— and he has the common sense of a golden retriever.

Still - It's nice to finally have my hands on a not-quite working version of the 7.5.

## June 26th, 2552 - Material needs

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

Druckab found the hangar today. I could have told the brass he'd find it sooner or later and trying to hide it from him only made him find it that much faster.

He knew immediately that it wouldn't fly and that it was a model, although I'd started building around the model, replacing the parts we knew with what we had, but there were some parts we simply could not figure out what was used because our scans showed the material to be unknown.

In addition to Parataph technology, he said that it also contained Ani technology, and then wouldn't say anything until he discussed the matter with his superiors.

He was impressed with our ability to reverse engineer things, especially those that do not involve complex physics concepts we've only begun to touch on.

The more I learn, the more I see that we are children playing with things we don't understand—but they're just so cool.

## June 27th, 2552 - Reverse engineered or co-designed

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

Today, Druckab promised he would tell us more if we allowed him to look at what we had. I have to admit, it was a little hard trusting him after he tried to kill me, but for him, that hasn't happened yet— if we're lucky, maybe it never will happen.

I don't know, but he went from concern and consternation to outright laughter as he reviewed the 7.5.

"I did not think you all would understand that much of our technology but it would see that you did not reverse engineer the ship," he explained pointing to a small folded ball that was at the center of the ship.

"We haven't figured out what that one is for," Fipps admitted, anxious for an explanation. It turns out that folded ball is Tiri - it is a luck/fertility symbol the Parataph have in all their ships. So— at some point in the future we started working with the Parataph.

All I know is, the fire and destruction never seemed further away. I hope it stays that way.

## June 28th, 2552 - Liaising on a Wednesday afternoon

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

I really don't like the fact that, while the Parataph fleet has moved on, Druckab can communicate with them almost instantaneously and that they can pretty much slip in whenever and wherever they want.

I like it even less when it involves long conversations about me and ends with their Shaman wanting more time with me, and this time she's also asked for time with Lilbit.

I tried to put my foot down, I tried reminding me of what happened the last time Grthara was in my head and just how close the explosions that consumed two fleets had gotten, but of course, no one wants my opinion.— Well, Tower, Cookie, Mac, and to a lesser extent Fipps but My opinion didn't matter.

But this time all she wanted to do was to move me to a different part of the ship and then let Lilbit find me. It started as a minor experiment, she'd move me- Lil'd find me. Then it turned into a game of hide and seek - and from there different crewmembers would try and hide me, but Lilbit would find me until he got tired of the game and started trying to preen Grthara.

I don't know what happened, but I know she wanted to try something else and as she came close, Lilbit took one look at her - I swear I heard him say "No." And vanish.

Sometimes I wish we were just exploring space.

That night, as if I hadn't been through enough, I had one of those otherworldly visits from Aziz and Andi. They didn't say anything, but I understood. I couldn't let any of the Parataph near Lilbit

Later on, when he showed up and chattered away in my ear, he only wanted to scold me and sleep. I tried telling him it wasn't safe, I tried shoing him away, but all he did was give a self-satisfied smile and curl up in my arms.

## June 29th, 2552 - Lost in translation

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

Today Lilbit pretty much Dragged Aziz to see me. It's the first time I could talk to him since we'd parted ways and he was confused when I told him about the Parataph, and the vision of fire.

The thing was, he wasn't surprised by the vision of the fleet blowing up - he was surprised that I'd seen it and it hadn't happened. He smiled saying there was hope for us yet.

I asked him about the Parataph being the enemy and we went a few rounds of trying to explain things until I finally found out that a better translation for the Parataph wasn't 'enemy' but rather "Those Who

Are Not Us". Their word for humans roughly translates as 'The Other Not Us' or "The Other Enemy."

I think something was lost in translation - but the desire to avoid the "Those Who Are Not Us," was very strong and with Druckab as our Liaison, Aziz made himself scarce and told me "Do not call on me again."

I nodded my farewell, but he took my hand and told me, "I am glad you did not follow the path to the fire."

I wonder how much more they know that they won't tell us because they don't want to change the time-line.

## June 30th, 2552 - Sparring

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

Today, instead of studying our technology, Druckab spend the day observing us. He watched our interactions and tried to understand the nuance in having a mechanic/Pilot who's a convicted criminal.

It seems that the Parataph unceremoniously execute their criminals and keep their disruptive tendencies out of the gene pool. I think the Daniels tried to explain the difference and degrees of crime but something was lost in translation and now Druckab seems to think that saving someone's life is illegal.

The interesting thing came when he witnessed Tower and me sparring. After we finished he asked me why I fought Tower and that he was glad we were only fighting to first blood. I tried to explain that we were not fighting, but practicing, but he held his hands out and made a fist, displaying the very ornate, very deadly spikes they had on their hands and arms.

It seems there is no peaceful training exercises for the Parataph. - Their challenges are to the death.

Good to know before I offer to train with him.

## July 1st, 2552 - A blast to the past

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

You know— having people able to slip in and out of spaces is bad enough, but when its you, slipping in from the future, especially after you've told people in no uncertain terms that you're not to do that with me- ever, and then turn around and do it yourself - well, that's cheating.

I was in the hangar working on the 7.5 when the old one pretty much yelled at me that someone was coming to hurt Druckab. And Damn if they didn't - We had just enough time to shout a warning when something big, almost Minotaur-like creature showed up and shoved Tower out of the way, almost goring him in the process. I was able to sound the alarm and hold him off with a blow-torch but— how do you fight something that can slip in and out of a ship at will.

It tried to take the model with it as it vanished but again, the blow-torch worked wonders.

While the medics worked on Druckab and Tower - I started working out why the alarms didn't go off. At least I now know who/what the Ani are - and it seems we're at war.

I reported to Fipps and we're working on something that will keep an area locked down from incoming slips - it looks like something we've needed for a while and it seems that the materials we couldn't identify are key. At least Druckab is now willing to tell us a lot more.

Druckab has given us a map of where we need to go to get the raw ore we'll need to create shielding necessary to keep us from slipping into each other— and to keep anyone from slipping inside our ships.

It's only a month or two too late, but better than never I guess

## July 2nd, 2552 - What have we gotten ourselves into?

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

One of the nice things about having Druckab on our side is the fact that we now know a lot more about the Parataph, the Ani, and how we fit in in this stretch of Space.

The Parataph are not one species, they are many, and within the member species of the Parataph, many, including Druckab's people have clans - The Ani are part of his species, but a very aggressive clan, since we have defended him, the Ani have declared war on us.

But, since Tower risked his life to protect Druckab, he is now considered one of Druckab's clan. I'm more like a second cousin twice removed, since I wasn't injured— but I did hold off the attacking Ani until help could arrive.

It means we're getting a lot more information and that makes the sociologists happy - Tactically speaking we have a lot more problems than we ever dreamed we'd have.

The only really bright side is, we are so far from home that it is highly unlikely that they will be hitting home any time soon.

## July 3rd, 2552 - Tangled web

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

So - it turns out that being second cousin, twice removed to Druckab means that I am protected, by him and his clan. The irony here is the fact that his future self tried to kill me, but that hasn't happened yet, and judging by what has happened it won't happen now— but that's how we got here in the first place.

Time for the Parataph is less like a line and more like a spider's web - sending out tendrils that reach into the past and near future, always feeding back to the center of the circle. I guess if you think about it, it's a little better than the Fate's believe that there is no progression just everything at every moment.

Thinking about it as I write this, I realize that we are all part of the well. The Fates are at the center of the well, all the possibilities laid out before you- all of you are part of the whole. The Parataph are the navigation streams in the well— again, it is all about possibilities, but it following one thread from the center of the well to its final place in the puzzle.

And humans? Frail, sequential, chaotic, and driven to move forward— we're the path out of the well, we are finite time.

Or, I could be in need of more beer.

## July 4th, 2552 - Never study physics from a philosophy professor

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

Today Druckab vanished for half the day- but when he returned, he was a lot more forthcoming. I'm guessing that he spent the morning reporting in to the Parataph command and they'd given him the go-ahead.

It seems that while Allied, not all the Parataph agree with what has happened here, I'm getting the distinct impression that heat I felt from the wave of destruction means nothing to those people in disagreement. In some cases like Ani and Druckab's A'Ni that member species don't always agree with each other, let alone other member races.

He says that his being here has made him a target, but when I asked why he replied, "Because there is much to learn and so much more to teach."

This does not make me feel better but at least when the message reaches me— it's already been translated from Philosophy professor, to theoretical physicist to practical application. I like it better that way - it causes me fewer headaches.

## July 5th, 2552 - Three Strikes and we're out

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

It's amazing how quickly the fleet can make a decision when they're under attack. Three attacks - one by a group claiming to be the true representatives of the Parataph, one surgical strike by the Ani, and one attack by our former friends of the Parataph.

Fortunately, this was a command decision which meant only three commanding officers were needed to make the decision, but seven pilots were needed to scout out a path to somewhere where the Parataph weren't— and all that took was Tower, Tequila and a very drunk Liaison Officer.

Skip found a cluster of planets, Dancer found one that we could at least hide behind before the black hole ripped us apart and I found— nothing. Where I went— there was nothing worth reporting - just fresh wreckage from a recent battle. Definitely not the sort of place we wanted to take the fleet - Salvage, definitely but we have to protect the fleet— that's all there is to it.

So we played follow the leader through the well and ended up in a nice area of unoccupied space. Command had us stay on alert for the rest of the day while the jump pilots were allowed to recalibrate.

By nightfall we were fairly certain we were safe.

Except there was this lizard who curled up in my hair around midnight, scolding me as he puffed my hair to make a pillow for himself.

I'm not sure if Lilbit is getting better at communicating or I'm getting better at understanding him, but he was in a mood.

## July 6th, 2552 - Looking forward

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

While it's nice to leave the crazy party behind us- we know it could catch up with us at any moment, and it's really hard to look forward when you have to keep looking over your shoulder.

Fipps and the rest of the science team are working on two very different problems now - First is making sure that we aren't blindsided when ships with hostile intent show up. We also want to keep people from slipping into our ships at will all the while keeping our ships from slipping into each other.

And then, there is our original mission - exploration and finding planets with useful resources, places with reasons to explore. It's why the brass chose Skip's space since it offered the most possibilities.

Fipps has assured me that they have made the hulls slip-proof and that no one will be bothering us, but the lizard that preens me my ears and uses my hair for his nest says otherwise.

## July 7th, 2552 - No Going Home

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

The problem with jumping, with creating the well and stepping into it - is the fact that it leaves ripples. Ripples that can be followed. It's why we took to jumping short distances and doubling back.

I realized I could shift home with enough stops, but that would lead the Ani and the Parataph Dissidents home— and Earth wouldn't stand a chance. We're going to need to slow down and take a look at the big picture. For better or worse, this is our new home, our new reality and we have to make it on our own.

We need to be able to grow our own food, to mine our own ore and make our own parts, and we need to start that yesterday. At least it gives us what we need to look for in a planetary target - and the first thing is being able to sustain the fleet and that means food.

Fortunately one of the planets in this system looks like it will support agriculture, so the brass decided that was our first point of interest— it will give us time to update ship's systems and make the necessary adjustments Fipps and his friends in the lab came up with.

It's going to take a while, but the good thing about Schroedinger's Kat? She lands on her feet, until she... you know... doesn't.

## July 8th, 2552 - Drunken Liaison

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

It would seem we are a very bad influence on the galaxy at large - and our Parataph Liaison in particular. I think Druckab understood why we had to break contact and the fact that it wasn't really safe for him to report in since he had no idea who he was supposed to be reporting to anymore.

I guess Liaising is hard when there is no one to report to and you realize that you aren't so much a Liaison as a source of information on protocol and Parataph infighting.

Tower took him to the canteen for the time-honored tradition of getting drunk and bonding with your friends - in this case dishing dirt on clan politics, and the comings and goings of our friendly enemies or hostile friends... friends with bad intentions? Friends with Liabilities.

We learned a lot more, at least when Tower was sober enough to report it - it seems that while looking like Escher and Geiger collaborated on a painting Druckab's body has a very high tolerance when it comes to fermented sugars.

By morning he was swearing he'd never do that again, by this evening he was anxious for another go. We've created a monster.

## July 9th, 2552 - Politics and Big Sticks

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

Today we got a lecture on Parataph politics and power struggles - the hung-over edition. The Ani are part of a Separatist movement that wants to break with the Parataph as a whole and the rest of their people on general principles. The in-fighting is bad enough but they stick together because there is another group out that that they cannot face alone - so a disorganized, in-fighting union is still better than standing alone.

We are too young, too dangerous to trust on our own, but we'd end up being the catalyst the Ani need to break away and failing to use us that way, they decided to try and do it another way - if you can't kill us, and you can't force us to leave, you force others to leave us.

IF that doesn't work you kill everyone and slip away while the dust settles.

We really need those scanners and shielding like, yesterday.

## July 10th, 2552 - Fireflies

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

First planet to be explored - Skip's planet of one-thousand fireflies. The feeds looked so pretty and everything looked perfect. Skip's remote landed at twilight and there were fireflies everywhere and what looked like floating lanterns. It was one of the most beautiful scenes I'd ever seen— until the explosions started.

It seems that the fireflies are a little more dangerous out here. Fortunately, they only took out the remote. Skip had been piloting it back to his ship when the fireflies all landed on the remote and well... they lit it up.

No, in case you were wondering - there was not someone out to get us - this was just nature out to get everyone. We're looking for a landing zone without exploding insects and suspicious plants.

## July 11th, 2552 - On the run

Part-time mechanic/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

It only took us three tries to find a landing site without fireflies exploding or otherwise, the second attempt was looking good until we found that something drew the fireflies to the remote - which meant for the third try we had one person fly the remote keeping just ahead of the fireflies while the shuttle landed and took samples.

Skip flew the shuttle down and got the samples he needed while I flew the remote, fighting to keep one step ahead of the fireflies without getting too far ahead of them so they wouldn't double back to the shuttle. For two hours I led them on a merry chase and it wasn't until it was time to come home that I realized that this is what I used to do for a living before I joined the fleet.

I've come an awfully long way to just start doing what I used to do, but for now, I've been ordered to get some rest. After this morning's excitement, I can use it.

## July 12th, 2552 - Sidestep

Decoy Pilot/Pest control Specialist/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

Today, I almost got myself blown up. Twice.

Someone decided that there were a lot of raw resources on the planet of exploding insects and they needed more people collecting more samples - which meant they needed a bigger target for the fireflies to follow.

And someone thought it was worth it to put me in one of the darts and have me run around drawing the explody things towards me. I know the reasoning was I was the one who could slipstream from almost anywhere and I had the most experience sidestepping into the well—what they, and by they I mean I, didn't think of was the fact that maybe—just maybe the psychotic little beasties could sidestep as well.

I was doing a good job keeping them busy—I thought I'd gotten their range and speed until a group tried to head me off. I was too late in seeing them and the only thing I could do was a

hard climb and roll into a well, but when I popped up on the far side of a nearby moon - they were still there.

Fortunately, while they could follow me - the environment was not conducive to exploding, or... you know breathing. Their exoskeletons kept them looking like bugs for about five seconds and then they didn't so much explode as just... splat. But they made a very toxic cloud of acid that almost took me out before I sidestepped a second time back to my point of atmospheric entry.

The brass was very understanding - they sent me back in to do it again, and again.

That night we watched the fireflies from orbit while the lab went through the samples. It's a shame we're a fleet and we all get supplied our basic needs— I should have been getting triple pay.

## July 13th, 2552 - Moonglow

Decoy Pilot/Pest control Specialist/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

So- it would seem that the life cycle of the fireflies is just enough that I can kill off a bunch of them and we have maybe 12 hours to work without the fireflies before they start building up again.

So, this morning was spent being hyper-vigilant followed by about two hours of aerial acrobatics, and random slides into space and then back again. The last run, I misjudged slightly— too many jumps and ended up having to set down on the moon (which means me and my ship were quarantined while they performed scans on her and made sure I hadn't picked up any unwanted passengers.

I did however get some very interesting readings off of the moon itself. According to the folks in astronomy, the moon is actually a piece of debris that fell into planetary orbit and it is full of minerals and elements that have the geologists and metallurgists salivating.

So, while the planet has been classified as interesting, the moon has become a valuable commodity. Go figure.

## July 14th, 2552 - Point of origin

Decoy Pilot/Pest control Specialist/sometimes suspect Kat James Reporting

Today we focused on the moon, so instead of running decoy, I ended up in the Gumbo shuttling samples from probe craft to a temporary pontoon craft that was serving as a base between the moon's surface and the rest of the fleet. While my role was strictly that of the haul and tote variety, the science teams were going to town and running analyses and falling over themselves

for the chance to name the new elements and research not only their properties but how they would react if smelted into new metals.

I believe they figured out which ores would produce the unknown metals in the 7.5.

That should have been more than enough to keep us busy for years, but of course, the different departments had to get into it. Astronomy and physics started working together looking for the origin of the moon, the bio teams were scanning for signs of living matter, while metallurgy and research worked on the possible uses for the new metals.

That would have been interesting on their own, but Fipps had asked them to check out what would happen if you ran a sound wave through them, say something at 237 Hz. I don't know how that worked out - I was loading up with samples when they did.

All I know is, I was told to rest and something about needing it.

## July 15th, 2552 - Exploratory Mission

Scout Pilot/travel agent/Chef Kat James Reporting

One of the skills the Jump pilots have learned is how to prepare meals in your ship. The difference between me and the other pilots is the fact that the Rummage Sale Gumbo is designed to do a lot of different things - She can haul sensor equipment, personnel, supplies, or any combination thereof. She's designed to do pretty much anything you can think of - which meant she was perfect for charting and exploring the belt.

The job in and of itself meant a multi-day assignment with more than one person running the equipment since our metallurgy team has a better idea of what ores and minerals could prove useful,

This meant I took the team to the belt, ran the scans, collected samples, and generally worked my butt off while they treated me like an overpaid taxi driver. Its really strange that we have gotten so used to jumping that going through the well is now considered a simple task— nothing to get excited about.

I still get excited, I hope I never lose that— but the one thing a jump pilot can't afford is to take the well for granted. It's always different and its always treacherous— just waiting for you to slip up, trying to lure you into a mistake.

The scientists wanted me to get samples, but be careful. They warned me that some of the materials they were looking for were radioactive and or volatile and then while I was focusing on getting said items with a remote, one of them yelled "BAM!" right in my ear.

They thought it was so funny - until I pointed out that if anything happened to me, they were stuck here because all the fleet had was where we were heading and they had had me scanning and moving around the belt for hours. They were still jovial about it until someone brought up my record.

They decided that there was more volatile material piloting the Gumbo than there was outside the ship, and for once— I did nothing to set them straight.

The did warm up to me a little come dinner time when they pulled out their field rations and I pulled out the engine-roasted chicken with baked potatoes.

## July 16th, 2552 - First Industrial Enterprise

Scout Pilot/travel agent/Chef Kat James Reporting

One of the advantages of being one of the criminal conscriptees is the fact that no one trusts you so they record everything you do. It means that when you come in from 48 hours of mini jumps and roughing it in a ship with 6 mission specialists and the entire fleet's exploration team constantly looking over their shoulders when they accuse me of threatening them and coercing them— you have proof that lets the brass know that things did not transpire the way they remembered it.

I'd gone from being grumpy to threatening to murder them in their sleep. It also means that said mission specialists were recording being well... special and me dealing with them. Not that any of that really mattered with what they found. We have all the raw materials floating around out there - enough to keep the fleet in new crafts for at least our lifetime— and that's a start.

When we got back to the fleet, they were already making an ore transfer station out of a pontoon lander and several walkways - since most of the work will be done remotely, they just need a place for ships to land and either offload or pick-up, and that kind of enterprise works a lot better without people to mess it up.

I was called on the carpet for using my engine to cook dinner. Cookie and Mac were also there to scold me, but it was more about my technique and lack of the finer techniques of shipboard cooking.

Who knew that the cooling system was good for steaming veggies, and why didn't I think of that?

## July 17th, 2552 - Agricultural Endeavor

Scout/Bug herder/Chef Kat James Reporting

With the scouting done, I was informed that my services on the belt were no longer required— at least not for a few days, so, in the meantime, I'm back in a dart playing dodge bugs with herds of fireflies.

While I played pied piper to the exploding besties the folks from bio and the agriculture department set to work seeing how our standard veggies will grow in Ptera's soil.

I only had to play keep away for four hours— just enough time for them to set up some test patches and plant the seeds, we should know within a few weeks how things will grow.

This could prove interesting, or dangerous— probably both.

## July 18th, 2552 - Jumpgate navigation

Scout Pilot/travel agent/Chef Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

You'd think the command staff would understand the concept of downtime, and maybe they do, but usually under the heading of 'no rest for the wicked.'

While metallurgy and astronomy were focused on the belt, and bio and agriculture were focused on the planet, theoretical physics decided that now was the perfect time to study the well and how the Jumpgate works.

They're trying to take out the human factor so that the navigation is all mechanical the theory being that computers don't suffer fatigue and would, therefore, be able to jump more; faster; better than a human.

The problem is, part of what gets you to the well right now, is the human factor.

Needless to say - we had several discussions before they decided that I was goldbricking and were working on writing me up when we had the first miss-jump and almost lost a pilot, a craft, and a theoretical physicist. They started arguing that I influenced the pilot, but Fipps had the presence of mind to get the pilot into an MRI and what they saw was... more than a little disconcerting.

Skip's brain activity looked more like the gate than a normal brain and after about an hour - it was back to well... Skip's brain. They've agreed to only do one trip per day per pilot, and after each trip, we get an MRI and a lollipop.

## July 19th 2552 - Lunar Base

Scout Pilot/travel agent/Chef Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

Today we started work on a base station on the moon, the idea being that we'd have a place to process ore from the belt and, if it pans out, produce from Ptera without having to keep the fleet near-by.

Ptera might be the closest thing we've found to Earth-norm for growing plants but dodging exploding bugs does not make for easy processing. As it is the ore is more than enough to warrant a base. While Dancer took the scientists planetside, I played chicken with the exploding fireflies.

I had to make sure I avoided the belt, the fleet, and the moon and for the first time, Fipps saw the bugs in action, and instead of continuing his work he was getting readings and trying to work out exactly what was going on.

On my second pass, Fipps was with me monitoring the area and he was fascinated by the fact that the little buggers could actually explode instead of imploding in the vacuum. I also made Bio, Medical and theoretical physics happy since I gave them not one but two people who'd been through four jumps in one day— more to study seems to make them happy.

While my mind was more in tune with the Well, Fipp's mind was on fuel and resources and the theory that the fireflies might prove a good source of fuel.

I tried to point out that it took a lot less 'umph' to blow a ship up than it did to propel it, but Fipps wasn't having any part of it. "In space," he explained. "A little umph goes a long way."

He is getting better at physics for pilots, but I'm more interested in the fact that my MRI turned up the way we've come to expect and his didn't. Then again, he wasn't the one dropping into the well and picking our destination - he was just along for the ride.

It means that maybe we could get a ship to jump further if you had two pilots taking turns. Something to think about.

## July 20th, 2552 - Harvesting fuel

Scout Pilot/travel agent/Chef Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

The seeds that were planted on Ptera have started to sprout, and the seedlings have taken root. In the morning everything was going according to plan. I was leading the bugs away while the science team checked on the plants.

I almost got blown out of the air when I was about to dodge the fireflies and something exploded back the way I'd come - the research plot.

From what I could gather the research team was taking a small portion of the new growth back to the shuttle when the tote with the plant matter fell... and exploded. Thankfully the injuries were minor and the shuttle wasn't damaged, but it looks like farming is a bust.

It's not the bugs, it's not the lanterns- it's something in the planet's soil or atmosphere that makes whatever grew there- explosive.

So, no agriculture for Ptera— but it looks like we may have found a fuel source. We just need to figure out how to safely use it.

## July 21st, 2552 - Building a better base

Scout Pilot/travel agent/Chef Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

With plans of fuel processing in the works, it looks like the lunar - bug-free base, will need a better design, and a lot more safeties built-in.

That means airlocks, separate buildings; shielding, and distance between processing centers since ores need heat to melt and heat and fuel aren't always a good idea. So, today I went from mechanic to builder - learning how to do everything I do in the hangar bays in makeshift assembly areas in low gravity, wearing a spacesuit.

The only thing good about it is the fact that it beats dodging exploding bugs. It's kinda sad when you think about it.

## July 22nd, 2552 - Next Phase

Scout Pilot/travel agent/Chef Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

The plasticrete isn't even settled on the moon base and the brass is already looking ahead - they want to spread out and explore more space. While I understand the desire to keep our ships' stores up and work to keep our ships self-sufficient I can't help but think that the more spread out we are, the easier it's going to be for people to find us.

We still have no way of communicating over long distances and I don't see that changing any time soon, but there are only so many planets that match our criteria for 'viable' planets. We have minerals and if the propulsion teams figure out how to use the produce from Ptera, we're good on fuel, but we still need produce and I have to admit, I could really use a steak about now but I still think we're better off together.

Scouting missions have already started and I'm waiting for mine - Each of the areas they want us to check are three jumps away from the fleet. Three Jumps, three days- We'll see what we can find.

## July 23rd, 2552 - Long Range Expedition

Scout Pilot/travel agent/Chef Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

With the discovery of the well, and the ability to jump long range doesn't have quite the sense of distance it used to have. It's more a case of One jump or two— or seven as the case may be.

For the other pilots it's a case of three jumps, get readings on the planets in the solar system where they end up, see the sights, tuck in somewhere relatively safe for the night, come home.

Since the Gumbo and I are not quite standard, my assignment profile is designed to match. I have a secondary pilot flying with me so we can, in theory, turn our three jumps into seven, keep flying the mission, and cover more ground.

We were given a system that was both larger and further away than the others. They figure that having company would make things better, but when you have a non-traditionally trained convict pilot and a formally, military-trained pilot working as each other's backup, well—

Someone has to determine who's chief, who's in charge, and who's better suited for what. If it had been Dancer, I'd have been fine, we know each other— I got G-man and he liked things neat and orderly and since he outranked me he obviously was running the show and I was his backup pilot and— yeah, you get the idea.

He tried laying down the ground rules. He actually told me that 'on this mission, I am god, and you are along for the ride,' I believe my job as he saw it was to do the menial work and tell him how wonderful he was. I was going to fight him, but I let the ship and the well do my fighting for me. He barely made it out of our third jump and as it was I had to dodge a squadron of Ani and two missiles before we could make it back in and get away from them.

Five jumps later we were back on track and he decided that I might have a clue about what I was talking about. The extra jumps meant a bit of extra rest, and that dinner was a little on the well-done side, but I don't think G-man is going to complain at least until we get home.

## July 24th, 2552 - Scouting

Scout Pilot/travel agent/Chef Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

One of the problems with spending the night in the Gumbo is the fact that you really don't have any privacy, what-so-ever. G-man probably would have been fine if we were in separate ships flying in tandem, but we weren't we were two pilots in one ship - my ship.

We argued about everything, search order, protocols, how long you needed to leave bacon on the manifold if you wanted it crispy vs. extra crispy. We did agree that there were several possible planets and more than a few moons that warranted looking into.

Three jumps a piece to check out the best options and G-man was against me pulling any more jumps than the recommended three. And when I started to argue he held up his hands.

"I'm not declaring superiority here," he told me. "But if we need to make a fast getaway, I want you fresh and able to jump as many times as necessary to get away and that means you rest."

Yeah, he had to go all common sense and sensible on me. As a peace offering, I let him make the coffee.

## July 25th, 2552 - Return flight

Scout Pilot/travel agent/Chef Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

Our return flight was routine which worried me to no end. We took our time checking out the final 3 possible exploration sites, one I felt really good about, but for the life of me I couldn't say why.

G-Man, David Sorensen, thought I was daft going with 'feeling' instead of leaving it to the scientists to figure out where we go from here. Turns out his wife is one of the scientists, also turns out she'd warned him about me and told him that if I got my hooks into him it was over.

Hopefully, respect and not hating each other doesn't count as getting my hooks into him. As it is, we didn't kill each other, weren't attacked and there were no exploding bugs following us around.

He said that was a sign of a good mission, I said it makes my teeth hurt. He said that just meant I had a healthy dose of caution to go with my feelings about places.

Turns out not killing each other and mutual respect were not relationship ending events and Nica, G-man's wife, invited me round to tea. I think David warned her about my coffee, but to be fair, I'm still trying to perfect my engine roasting process.

Now I get to wait while the fleet crunches numbers and the science teams debate about which prospects are best. My money's on Team Gumbo.

## July 26th, 2552 - Dart Express

Scout Pilot/travel agent/Chef Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

From the sound of things, the brass is thinking we should spread out more so that if we're attacked--when we're attacked— we won't all be in one place. While I can agree that small groups might be able to move around unnoticed, I can't help but think that there is strength in numbers.

Druckab isn't really a help since he only hints at issues and dangers when he's drunk and fearing the worst, he refuses to contact his people to find out if the Parataph have fallen into infighting. So he's spending most of his time either alone, contemplating the futility of the universe or alone, with a bottle, which kind of leaves us to our own ends.

Our biggest problem with moving on is communications. We still haven't figured out a way to send a message through regular space or through the well. The science teams were at a standstill until one of the Einherjar, Kyre, threw her hands up in frustration and remarked, "you'd be better off with the pony express."

She was being facetious, but around here— that's where some of our best ideas come from. I mean, if the fleet is in different locations and you don't want everybody to know where everyone is— why not meet somewhere neutral, exchange dispatches, and report back to your team?

We'll have to work out some of the kinks and protocols for not being followed, but it could work.

Sometimes the best solutions aren't more technology, just using what you have.

## July 27th, 2552 - Complications

Scout Pilot/Pony Express Pilot/Target Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

Like everything that looks good on paper, there are certain issues that only show up when you actually try to use the process.

I'm not sure what is happening with the Parataph and if the Ani have separated from them or if they've all gone bust— all I do know is that we did a trial run on the Pony express run. The pilots were Me, G-man, and Dancer. We met up in one part of space exchanged packets, Dancer was carrying Cookie's Pipe, which she gave to G-man, I was carrying the commander's hat which I gave to G-man and G-man was carrying Fipp's Watch which he gave to me.

Then, so we wouldn't interfere with each other's jumps we headed back staggering our jumps - Dancer went first, then G-man and, as I was about to jump, space opened up around me and I was surrounded.

My nearest guess is that since they couldn't trace where the others were heading, they could follow their back trail— to me.

The one good thing about being surrounded as I was was the fact that anyone shooting at me would be endangering his fellows since I was surrounded. The bad thing was— there was nowhere for me to go. And then they started closing in with a cutter.

My choices went from limited to almost none in three seconds and when that happens you either panic or do the unexpected. I opted for the unexpected. I disabled my regulator, shut down my gyro assist and proceeded to spin on my x, y, and z axis, and while spinning uncontrollably opened three gates into the well before falling into a fourth.

One ship managed to stay on my tail, but I was already repeating the process and made three more jumps. At some point, I lost them, but not before the pilot had managed to shoot scoring my top engine and damaging two of my maneuvering thrusters.

The worst part - I was in a Dart. If I had been in the Gumbo, I probably wouldn't have survived the first jump, but, if I had - I'd be able to repair the ship and go home. As it is my tools and equipment are back on the Valkyrie's View.

I reset the regulator and the gyros and headed away from my stream, just in case someone was able to trace my route. I ate a cold dinner and started working on what I could fix from inside the ship, ie not bloody much.

## July 28th, 2552 - In-Flight Repairs

Scout Pilot/Pony Express Pilot/Sometimes Target Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

You can say a lot about the design of the dart - it's fast, maneuverable, and it packs a lot of punch. If you're stuck in space with her maneuvering thrusters shot and only one engine - she's got all the speed and maneuverability of a falling brick, which is really hard to deal with in zero-G.

Yesterday, I spent the time figuring out just how bad things were and working on what could be repaired from the inside. I was able to divert fuel away from the damaged area and shut everything down, which meant for a cold night's sleep but I also know that the only way to fix the outside of the ship is to go outside.

Today started with a cold breakfast of protein pellets, half a glass of water, and a prayer. Then I verified that everything was locked down and my suit was pressurized before I set the system to vent and waited as the systems slowly equalized the pressure outside with the pressure inside.

Outside the damage didn't look too bad— as long as you didn't look too closely. They'd hit me with a rocket of some sort, and while it had damaged the engine - it hadn't exploded, which was either very lucky or very deliberate.

Three hours later - I had two working thrusters and an engine with a combination time bomb and tracking device built-in. It was hard to tell if it was designed to go off if it was removed or to just keep transmitting my location until someone found the signal and traced it back to me.

Since I didn't have anyone to advise me, I left the torpedo where it was and removed the engine and a fuel tank with enough fuel to send it away from me. I spent the next few hours rigging a remote to take the engine far enough away that when I started it the shock wave from any explosions wouldn't do too much damage.

And that was about the time I noticed the alarm on my suit telling me that I'd almost run out of air while focusing on the project.

Since hypoxia leads to bad decision making, I let the engine drift away but didn't do anything else with it until I'd had a chance to rest and rethink what I was doing.

We'll see how things look in the morning.

## July 29th, 2552 - Desperate Maneuvers

Scout Pilot/Pony Express Pilot/Sometimes Target Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

With the engines shut down and life support on minimum, I ended up sleeping in my suit. Things got pretty cold, but that that actually turned out to be a good thing, that and my decision to wait until I'd thought things through with the engine and its hitchhiker.

After setting things up, I took another walk and realized that the torpedo would have activated and pushed on in its original direction before exploding— and my original plan for sending the engine off would have resulted in the rocket taking it back to me, so - I gave it a gentle push at about 45 degrees and down another 30, then waited until it was far enough away from me before firing up the remote and taking it further down and away.

I tried to detach the remote, but as soon as I tried, the torpedo activated, running it out and to the left before exploding.

It was interesting to watch, and I had a newfound appreciation for the deviousness of our enemies, but it didn't have me any closer to getting home.

As it was I let the ship drift into the shadow of a moon and continued to work on the ship. Nobody showed up to claim the ship - ours or theirs. I guess that's a win.

I got the jump-assist back on-line but it's only going to be good for a few jumps, so I'm going to have to time this right— and soon. The run was supposed to last 4 hours, so the ships had only had 1 day's worth of supplies.

I'm not sure what I'm going to do, but things are going to get interesting... and cold.

## July 30th, 2552 - Interesting and cold

Pilotcicle and sometimes Target Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

It took another two walks to get the ship to the point where I had a chance of getting home, and after everything that happened with the torpedo - I took a third just to scour the outside of the ship and make sure there were no active homing beacons attached.

If they were using something passive I was in trouble because all my sensing equipment was attached to the drone. It didn't really matter, I'd hint the point that I either left or died. I was too tired, too cold, to worry about anything else.

I flicked the switch to activate the engines and nothing happened. It took me about two minutes to go from swearing to laughing as I sent power to the warming units. The engine had been cold for almost two and a half days and the system had to be warmed so the fuel could flow to the engine and ignite.

Another two hours and I was ready to try again. This time she restarted and I can't say for sure, but I thought I saw a jump point forming where the engine had exploded.

I don't know, I was out of there and back into the well before anyone could notice - at least that's what I hoped. I took two jumps, moving away from my point of arrival each time, and waiting half an hour to see if anything followed me. Then I took my final jump, not to the fleet but to a point just inside scanner range.

That way if I had been followed, they at least have some warning. I'm not sure what all happened - I know when I woke up I was in medical with an IV and an armed guard, but I was warm and even crackers tasted good.

## July 31st, 2552 - Effect and Cause

Pilot/cicle and sometimes Target Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

It seems that while I was gone for three days, Kat time, as far as the fleet is concerned I was only 4 hours late on my return.

Yeah, showing up 4 hours late, looking like I'd been in a dog fight with a few other ships and then spent three days in space with nothing but a damaged ship and limited repair capabilities didn't quite mesh with what they were expecting. Me being unconscious with a good head start on hypothermia and dehydration really didn't really help.

The first thing I saw when I woke up was Druckab hovering over me saying "You should not have fired on our ships."

I tried to point out the fact that I hadn't but he insisted that the Ani would not have fired unless fired upon. In fact, he continued until it was pointed out to him that while my ship did have weapons— as a convicted felon, none of them were armed.

Fortunately, the cameras and Fipp's watch helped them figure out a lot of what had happened while I continued to sleep it off.

So - as near as I can tell the effect was enacted prior to the cause. I don't know, I'm just going back to bed and letting the brass sort it out. It's not like I could get into more trouble.

## August 1st, 2552 - Full Debrief

Pilot/Witness and sometimes Target Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

I'm thankful that the powers that be gave me some time to recover before debriefing me, although talking to Druckab was interesting at best. He still doesn't quite get the whole unarmed bit when it comes to my status in the fleet. I mean he knew I wasn't exactly expedition material, but he felt that made me an asset.

Now he sees it more as a liability because, in his world, I have ruined the balance of things. I'm not sure but I think in his reality I started the war that led to the ultimate battle between the Parataph and the View Project.

He did find it interesting when I explained that I'm a getaway pilot, not a fighter pilot and that took some more explaining, but it also led to several conclusions on things we need to work on in the fleet.

The civilian pilots need survival training, as taught by the military, the military pilots need to be taught getaway tactics, not to be confused with escape and evade, which is something we all need to work on and expand our options and from what I've seen all the pilots need to learn emergency mechanical repair.

So, we went to discover the universe and the universe taught us that we need a lot more training to get it.

## August 2nd, 2552 - A Policy of Avoidance

Pilot/Witness and sometimes Target Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

Since we will never really convince factions within the Parataph that we did not instigate the events that resulted in the total animation of their peoples. That's the great thing about conspiracies any disproof is just a part of the conspiracy.

It was decided that rather than face a no one scenario the best course of action would be one of avoidance. We will continue to avoid encounters with the member nations of the Parataph while trying to learn more about the world and society we've ended up in the middle of.

Fipps told me he wished I'd kept the tracking device but since that would have led the enemy directly here— I wasn't really sorry I had ditched it.

On the bright side, we proved that the express runs worked and a central location and non-direct flights seemed to be the best option for doing the relay.

Fipps let me keep his watch, saying something about - It's running on Schroedinger's time.

I guess there is no time like the present, whatever that is.

## August 3rd, 2552 - Emergency repairs for Pilots, 101

Pilot/Witness and sometimes Target Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

Medical still doesn't want me doing anything too strenuous, and I can tell they're worried about my well being, but when the well being of the fleet is at stake it's a little hard to sit by and do nothing.

One of them told me, 'The fleet is always at stake, and nothing you or I do is going to change that.'

That may be the case but at least then I'm taking an active role. I guess I'm not the most patient of patients.

Fortunately, Cookie had a job for me that I could do from the relative comfort of my hospital bed. You are looking at the new course designer and subject matter expert for 'Emergency ship repairs for pilots.'

I'm trying to remember as much as I can from what I worked on - but to be honest I was too concerned about making things work and making other things not kill me. I guess that is what the class is actually about is staying alive long enough to get home.

Guess you could call the new training track: Not dying 101. It's one of those Pass/Fail kinds of classes

## August 4th, 2552 - How things work - 101

Pilot/Witness and sometimes Target Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

One of the problems with modular design is the fact that it's designed so that if you have a problem, you pull the unit, put a new one in, and then you can break down the module and effect repairs with little to no ship downtime.

That's great for fleet-based operations, but when you're on your own, unless, of course, you're towing a trailer full of replacement modules it does you no good. But even if you did, there is no safe environment where you can break down the module- you're pretty much SOL on repairs-

That leaves knowing what you can work on and knowing which modules you can survive without and what modules can be used for other things. For example - you can take the power module from the weapon's systems and get 12 hours of life support;

You can limp along with one engine and half your maneuvering thrusters in space, but if you have to land on a planet with an atmosphere? You're going to need the damaged engine in place— and you're going to want as many maneuvering thrusters working as you can get.

There are some things I'm not sure I want to include in the class, just because the brass is already nervous about me being allowed to fly, I don't think they want to know some of the things I've learned in the past 7 months, especially since I'm not allowed to own a weapon or have an armed ship.

Thing is, I know enough about my ship that, if I don't have weapons and I need to defend myself? Let's just say that certain modules make decent limpet mines when properly primed.

It's amazing what you can do with a little bit of imagination, a lot of desperation, and a strong will to survive. Knowing how things work and how you can make them work for you, that's one of first the steps to making the world work for you.

## August 5th, 2552 - Getting out of your craft - 101

Pilot/Witness and sometimes Target Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

Expanding on what we worked on yesterday, I started working with Cookie and Mac to design a class for people who may, or may not know how to turn a wrench. One of the first steps is knowing what you can fix with limited resources and skills.

I knew there was very little I could do about certain things and my only real option with the engine was to ditch it but would I have known that before I got my slot on the View project? Probably not.

So I was figuring, the first thing to teach was how to remove a module and access the serviceable parts. It turns out the correct answer was - item one: how to properly perform a spacewalk.

Baby steps.

## August 6th, 2552 - Survival Training

Pilot/Witness and sometimes Target Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

In light of my three-day/four-hour vacation, the brass, with the military advising them, have decided that all non-military personnel are now required to take a survival training program. They aren't very clear on what 'failure to do so' will entail but everyone, from the guys in laundry to the folks in communications are now required to take the class track based on the situations they might encounter.

I don't know what they think people might encounter, but I'm pretty sure teleporting aliens was not on the list. Not that it's the kind of thing that's on any body's top ten of possibilities but it should be.

What gets to me is the fact that they want people to do this in a lecture format. Now, I'll admit that might work for some people but when you're faced with an alien that looks like someone spiked Picasso's Margarita with a handful of meth laced absinthe with a PCP chaser— and then let him loose with Crayolas.

One look at something like that, and pretty much anything you learned in a book is going straight out the window. Trust me on this, there are some skills that need to be taught hands-on - even if the end result is knowing you should never be trusted around power tools, or sharp objects, or super strong fast-acting adhesives.

These are important things to learn before you need them. As is, first aid and adhesive removal.

And it only took us 8 months to get here.

## August 7th, 2552 - Always carry cache

Pilot/Witness and sometimes Target Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

One of the advantages of having historians in your brain trust is they know a lot of tricks that worked in the past. The interesting thing was— it wasn't our sociologists or our professional historians who came up with the idea; it was Dr. Takahashi that recommended that we create

small stashes of weapons and supplies along the way - these emergency caches mean that we won't have to haul parts around with us - but we will have a place to fall back to where we could get supplies and equipment without endangering the fleet.

He said he was inspired by stories of the Apache, and how they'd done the same thing. It makes sense, especially when you have people who want to kill you with the potential of being anywhere, at any time.

The problem is then a question of keeping the caches supplied and not having them or the path back to the fleet discovered. The more options you have, the more chances you have of something going very, very wrong.

I guess I'm a historian of sorts. Unfortunately, Murphy was my teacher.

## August 8th, 2552 - My Old Nemesis

Pilot/Witness and sometimes Target Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

The military pilots worked out a simulator routine to teach us how to escape and evade— yeah, that went over well. They were pretty much of the opinion that I thought I was better than anyone else since I'd managed to survive an encounter with the Ani, it took all the pilots of the Valkyrie's View to convince them that I did indeed have a problem with the simulators.

And it still took me having to clean the deck plating to convince them it was real.

"Then how did you get to be a pilot?" Kiljoy, one of the fighter jocks asked me.

I laughed, and answered truthfully, "Crime."

That led to an interesting conversation about military escape and evade tactics vs civilian/criminal getaway tactics.

I sense a rematch coming on.

## August 9th, 2552 - Order vs Chaos

Pilot/Witness and sometimes Target Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

In deference to my issues with the simulator - today's educational briefs were done without the simulator. We discussed the difference between standard military escape and evade tactics vs the civilian/criminal getaway. I listened as the fighter pilots discussed how to predict enemy reactions and tactics and how and when to run and when to hide. The advent of The Well meant that there were a lot more places to go and for their portion of the training, we teamed up - one team on escape and evade and the rest trying to find them.

Then it was my turn, well me and Rhys Taylor— a fell convict pilot from the Thought. We started our lecture and then started to laugh as we both realized we were getting along well— as thick

as thieves. While military pilots were trying to get in and out without being seen - most getaway pilots figure that they are coming in with the enemy in hot pursuit - let's face it, while the pilot is waiting for the others to catch up with them - their team is busy drawing attention to them.

Usually, when you start, you are already hot and the authorities are hot on your trail - you learn fast how to avoid patrols, jam signals, duplicate your signature, and high tail it while everyone is still recovering from your distractions. Military involves a lot more stealth and timing - Civilian involves a lot of sleight of hand, misdirection, and trickery.

Their methods were more precise and predictive, ours were more chaotic and unpredictable. By the end of the session, I think both groups had a newfound respect for the other and by dinner time we were coming up with ways of combining our skills. We may not take over the world, but we might be able to save our part of it.

## August 10th, 2552 - Tin Cans and string theory

Pilot/Witness and sometimes Target Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

While the express system of relaying information helps, as we've seen it is not without its issues. First, you have to wait until a set time to update the rest of the fleet. Second - you run the risk of being found, as I can testify. Third - Why can Lil' Bit always find me?

I mean I haven't heard from Andi, or Aziz, or any of the Fates, but I know on more than one occasion I've fallen asleep to Lil' Bit's Crooning. It's almost as if— as if he knows because he's always with me.

If the fates can be believed then the whole idea of entangled particles that Fipps was talking about is the Fates, talking to themselves across space and time. Which means - that if I'm on each of the ships at different times, then I should be able to talk to me across any distance or time...

Something to think about, but to be honest, that makes my head hurt. As it is we're a bunch of kids playing with string and tin cans, running our little pony express because we're imaginative, but we're still kids playing with things we do not understand.

Just ask Druckab - if you can pull him away from the hooch long enough to answer.

## August 11th, 2552 - Rematch

Pilot/Witness and sometimes Target Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

Today worked more on the other side of our **Escape and Evade** training. While one group escaped and evaded the other detected and pursued. It was interesting because the military pilots were used to set protocols and their training said search in one way and of course, the idea of doing the pursuing rather than eluding it was completely foreign to the criminal element and the civilian pilots.

The civilian pilots were of the opinion that you fly - from point A to point B and you only detour to point C if there's a problem at point B. You are also directed to the point when necessary and you fly the registered flight plan. So- there was a lot of learning and unlearning to be done for all of us.

I also learned the difference between a getaway pilot and a smuggler mentality and let's face it none of the flavors of civilian piloting involved 'getting the drop' on someone. Hiding, hightailing, leaving them in your vapor trail yes, following them - only on those very rare occasions where you're being a smart ass— which I never, ever am. Really. You can check my record.

## August 12th, 2552 - Hauling and Toting - 200

Pilot/Mechanic/Jump-Gate Navigator/Grunt Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

While I'm not the only cross-trained pilot, up until today I was the only Pilot/Mechanic/Jump-gate navigator in the fleet. Today we are adding /Grunt to the title.

Oddly enough cross-training with the military involves a lot of the lifting and toting I perfected at the start of this mission, only this time it was done with others, in unison and a cadence. There was a lot of complaining from the civilian pilots, and the scientists - I mean, that's why they brought along the military and the convicts - between those two groups, and research assistants/lab technicians, most of their hauling and toting has been done for them.

Needless to say, there was a lot of grumbling, but I get it - this is a tried and true method of getting everyone on the same page, and when it comes to military work — you need everyone on the same page, I just think we'd get more done if we were— you know— actually training.

But - we're in this for the long haul and I guess haul is the operative word here.

## August 13th, 2552 - Formation flying

Pilot/Mechanic/Jump-Gate Navigator/Grunt Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

While the non-pilot cross-training crew members worked on marching - the pilots worked on formation flying and team tactics. We learned about flying with a wingman and protecting your wingman. That's harder than it sounds especially for non-military types - we're used to watching out for ourselves and especially the criminal element is used to 'everyone for themselves' being a perfectly acceptable team tactic.

It was hard for us to learn new tricks, and let's face it, people with my— area of expertise, tend to have trouble trusting people to watch their back, and it's even harder to allow yourself to get used to having people you trust because you know at some point, they're going to fail you.

It did make for some interesting calls when we decided to do a training mock battle and I got paired with the smuggler - teamwork in smuggling means you have one person draw the

attention of the authorities while the other just waltzes into port and vanishes. They were expecting that tactic, they just didn't expect the distraction to be the actual target.

Again, it comes down to training and teamwork vs chaos and very different teamwork. They've given us our own squadron to train and called it, "The Flying Circus." I'm not sure but I think they meant it as an insult.

We're very proud of our squadron, and her name.

## August 14th, 2552 - The Flying Circus

Pilot/Mechanic/Jump-Gate Navigator/Grunt Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

It would seem that the Flying Circus works better in two teams of three breaking into three teams of two with a pair acting as the net to go where they're needed. I mean, most aerial combat is based on an X-Y-Z axis but with access to the Well, a jump pilot can jump in and out of battle and yes, quite possible into another ship.

Fipps and company have come up with a limiter that keeps people from appearing things in your path or appearing in the middle of a ship but we know it won't be long before the enemy figures out that little trick and comes up with a way to counteract the shielding.

I think we all agree the best way to win a fight is to not be there, but sometimes — you need to fight— unless you're convicted felon, then your turrets are fancy flower holders.

Still, it seems the best way of throwing a spanner into the works is to fight with totally chaotic acrobatics. Plus— it's really, really fun.

## August 15th, 2552 - Transport- Circus Style

Pilot/Mechanic/Jump-Gate Navigator/Grunt Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

We spent the better part of the morning learning fleet maneuvers and escort details. From the beginning, the military decided that the civilian pilots would be best flying the transport vehicles, while they flew escort, but if we've learned one thing - it's always best to know how other people do the job.

While this worked, for the most part, we (the high wire acts of the circus) wanted to see how things would work if we mixed things up.

Standard fleet transport detail - transports fly straight and the escort protects them. Crazy flying monkeys ask 'What if we...'

Yeah, we had a lot of fun - and again, when you can take a transport ship into the well and bring them back out— you can drive people crazy (including your escort) but after a few passes at

half-speed, we tried things at full speed and - let's just say that the stereotype of adrenaline-junkie-pilots is alive and well.

We're going to need to work out the choreographed chaos, but everyone saw the potential. It's not something I'd recommend under normal circumstances, but let's face it when I'm involved normal is pretty much cringing in a corner with its fingers in its ears

August 16th, 2552 - Obstacle course

Pilot/Mechanic/Jump-Gate Navigator/Grunt Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

Today we focused on the obstacle course that the officers set up in the main assembly hall on the Valhalla. The trouble began almost immediately when they realized me and my fellow criminal contingent weren't allowed to carry weapons. There was a very long discussion on the matter and I believe that will be revisited at another time but for now, they've given us radio packs, provisions packs, and dispatch tubes to carry instead of firearms.

We were supposed to crawl with our 'firearm' cradled in our forearms so we could use them at a moment's notice... I understand the reasoning, but what are we going to do? Charge the enemy and give them papercuts?

We drilled with our dispatch tubes until after lunch when we got to run the full obstacle course.

Now the obstacle course involved a lot of climbing and vaulting and crawling over or under things, it also involved a lot of people yelling at you. I don't know about the others - but part of my training as a career criminal was avoiding getting yelled at, avoiding being noticed, and well— getting away from hostile environments.

That means you used the terrain and the equipment to your advantage. I may be small-ish, I may not be armed, but I am a slippery one, and I'd been doing Parkour since before I knew it was parkour - When you're shorter than the guys, you learn to use that to your advantage, that means running starts and bouncing off of things and trying to get as much lift as you can. When your range of available spaces includes a hall of mirrors that can take you 2-8 feet from where you are, well, that tends to make obstacle courses a lot more interesting.

The officers were not pleased with my way of taking the course-- until they realized just how handy those abilities could be. Now, it looks like in addition to emergency repairs, I need to work on a course of going around, over, and through things.

I'm not sure what we're going to do about tomorrow - tomorrow is firearms training and I don't think holding a dispatch tube and saying 'bang' is going to be very productive

## August 17th, 2552 - Firearms Training

Pilot/Mechanic/Jump-Gate Navigator/Grunt Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

Firearms training without a firearm is like... taking a course in cooking without food, or a kitchen for that matter. We got an idea of the principles behind the process and the rules of the range but there was no direct application. Some of the officers were of the opinion that, being convicted felons, we already knew how to operate a firearm.

Know, yes. Have anything close to practice, or, you know, skill? Not so much. I mean, I can't speak for any of the other convicts but I was a getaway pilot. I never fired a gun.

Do I understand the principles? Short answer, yes. I fly. I understand trajectory, thrust, windage these are things I deal with on a completely different level.

So - theoretically I understand what needs to be done, but it's like my cooking - I can do something passable.

I mean, it isn't going to be pretty, but it shouldn't kill you.

## August 18th, 2552 - Ground movement

Pilot/Mechanic/Jump-Gate Navigator/Grunt Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

Building on the work done in the obstacle course, we're now working on unit movement. Useful things like how to cover your teammates with your dispatches while they cross an open area and how to sweep a room as well as how to stay out of the enemy's crosshairs.

It does give us a better understanding of movements and how to work as a team but - let's face it, the military has had years of practice and we're being given the week-long crash course.

I mean, it makes sense, we should know how units move and in an evacuation situation that's going to be very useful, but when you aren't allowed to carry a weapon, how are you supposed to cover anybody?

## August 19th, 2552 - Live Fire Drills

Pilot/Mechanic/Jump-Gate Navigator/Grunt Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

I don't know who's brilliant idea it was to have live-fire drills, but if I find them... I'm going to stick them in a 'scenario' involving bullets, lasers, and no weapons and see how well they do. Duct tape may be involved.

It started with a simple walkthrough of the course and an explanation of what was expected. Then the drill instructor demonstrated how it works. And then it was my turn.

I tried to protest and point out that my firearms had no bullets, but the instructor didn't have time to listen to me and told me that he didn't care. It was up to me to handle the situation and shoved me into the funhouse of horror.

Now, the goal was to get from point A to point B without getting shot, lather rinse and repeat for B-Q.

Once you were clear of a room, the stationary equipment was part of the past, but all the mobile equipment followed you. You could deactivate items by shooting them, but that was not an option.

After I managed to dodge my way through A-B and C, I had the stationary unit in D, two drones and three creepy little ground-based robots on my trail, and a drill instructor yelling at me to use my rifle.

So I did.

I managed to knock one of the drones into the stationary target of D, thereby deactivating both of them. I overturned a desk on two of the ground units and got singed by the third before side-stepping out of its line of fire and right into the flight of the second drone which was intent on strafing me. I threw my pistol at that one and followed that up with a trash can that kept it from flying, but it was working on shooting its way out by the time I got to E.

I'm not sure, but I think I side-stepped F-H, Used a fire extinguisher to distract the obstacles in I, dismantled the stationary shooter in J and used it to take out its compatriot in K. Luckily I am allowed to carry knives and the heat pack from my meal came in handy for giving out a secondary heat signal.

By the time I made it to Q I was actually enjoying myself— until the drill instructor had managed to end his apoplectic fit long enough to pull me out by my hair and start reading me the riot act.

He had just started into how 'if I were in his army...' when Tower and company showed up and while Kyrie started working on the wounds I'd received, Tower managed to remind him that I wasn't in his army, that I wasn't allowed bullets and I shouldn't have had a firearm in the first place and that if he'd bothered to listen, read or otherwise pay attention he wouldn't be risking the lives of pilots to make a point.

It seems Tower and the instructor have a history. In the end, it was decided that I needed time to heal and that wasn't going to happen here. Tomorrow I'm being tapped for an assignment.

## August 20th, 2552 - R&R&R

Pilot/Mechanic/Jump-Gate Navigator/Grunt Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

I have been cleared for light duty after yesterday's adventure, which is actually better than my drill instructor got. Given the choice of running through the course without a gun or taking a demotion and being relegated to a subordinate position, he opted for a tribunal.

I'm not sure if my assignment sprang out of the desire to help him or to protect me, but I've been given dispatches to take to Dancer's Retreat.

My orders were to take the messages to Dancer's Retreat - remain there until I had replies and a full cargo bay - in a 10 section hauler. I'm not sure what they're expecting me to bring back, but I think a tan is going to be on my list.

## August 21st, 2552 - Recover, Regroup, Reload, Repeat.

Goldbricking Pilot/Mechanic/Jump-Gate Navigator/Grunt Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

I was sent here to rest and recoup before heading home, and once the dispatches were given I was told that it would take them a day or two to gather the supplies, duty done— I decided to make the most of my assignment.

They told me to rest and that was exactly what I did. I slept, swam, ate, and sunned myself. I got lost following the beach one way, and then came back the same way. And then I got up and did it all over again.

It's almost enough to forget being shot at by training droids— except of course for the graze wounds and burns, but another cycle of walks, naps, and snacking took care of that.

## August 22nd, 2552 - Recover, Regroup, Reload, Repeat.

Goldbricking Pilot/Mechanic/Jump-Gate Navigator/Grunt Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

Today I ask myself the important question, "is it really goldbricking when you're on assignment?"

There was a problem with one of the couplings on one of the cargo containers so, I'm spending at least another day planet side. I decided to take a little trip out to the moon— all very nice and legal. On the return trip, I picked a nice spot, went back a week, and camped out.

It meant I wasn't staying on campus, which I know has its risks but a week's vacation on the beach is just what the doctor ordered.

A hammock strung between two trees, the surf coming in— the birds. When did Dancer's retreat get birds? It was great until my last night there when I showed up at my fire with a simple message: 'don't flaunt what you can do.'

I didn't say anything else, so I split my last beer with me. I'm not sure if it was better than drinking alone or not. In the morning— It'll be time to tidy up the spot and head back.

## August 23nd, 2552 - Caught Red Handed

Truck Driver/Messenger Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

In the morning I cleaned up my campsite, removed Lil'bit from my hammock and tucked him in my pocket, where he yawned, curled up, and fell back asleep.

Then I headed back out into space and stepped sideways back a week and just far enough away that tracking would have seen me blip out and then blip back in, and made my landing.

I probably would have gotten away with it, if they hadn't done a medical check-up - my leg had a week's worth of healing, and I had a partially healed sunburn. The medics shook their heads and half-heartedly read me the riot act.

Then I was given dispatches for the fleet, research reports, and word on farming. Four hops back and it was almost as if I'd never left.

Lil'bit chirped from my pocket, took one look at deep space, yawned, and blipped away, probably to my little paradise.

I handed off my dispatches and was told to report to medical while they unloaded the haulers. For a fleet our size, it wasn't much in the line of food - but it was fresh and they spread it as far as they could.

If the medics noticed the quick healing or the sunburn, they kept it to themselves.

## August 24th, 2552 - Military Cross Training - Take two.

Pilot/Mechanic/Jump-Gate Navigator/Grunt in training Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

I was once again cleared for training - Which I wouldn't have if I hadn't taken that extra week, but a week of light duty in the fleet will never compare to a week of doing nothing on a tropical paradise. We had a new drill instructor and it seems several of the Einherjar from the Valkyrie's View decided they needed a refresher course.

I know they're watching out for me - but when you have big brothers watching out for you, people tend to find ways around them, or through them.

Fortunately, I'm not a complete pushover and I can give as good as I get— and I'm really good at running away. Today was mostly about tactics and ground warfare but the live-fire exercise and being singled out has given me the inspiration I need to practice side-stepping things.

I still can't go far, but I can do it more often and I am better at planning where I end up— although random still seems the best way to throw people off. Let's face it, its hard to predict someone's moves if they aren't planning things out.

## August 25th, 2552 - Military Cross Training - Tactics

Pilot/Mechanic/Jump-Gate Navigator/Grunt in training Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

Today's lesson in Tactics actually started bringing things together in a way that made sense. Now that I had at least an inkling of how troops moved and the people manning them— I had a better line on what was going on.

It was different looking at troop movements and dealing with enemy positioning, most of my experience was supply line and transport. It was interesting when I realized that the exercise had a mini battleground with game pieces as troops and equipment.

Tower looked at it and showed us where to maneuver our enemies so that we'd have the advantages. Our smuggler was looking at how to get pieces behind the lines while not being noticed and I was figuring out how to get him back out once he was done.

It was all very theoretical until the guy with the pointer showed us how the battle would have gone down with each of our plans.

The military team, of course, did best, the civilians didn't do badly— the criminal element didn't win as much as we played a different game, made things difficult for the enemy, didn't lose anyone and our battle had no solid conclusions.

What can I say, I'm a getaway pilot

## August 26th, 2552 - Military Cross Training - Protocol

Pilot/Mechanic/Jump-Gate Navigator/Grunt in training Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

Today we learned about protocol. Military Protocol to be exact. While they'll never get the spit and polish and snap they're used to from their own people, it is something we need to know so that when things go south we'll know where to expect it to come.

Basically the chain of command says that the highest-ranking person's word is law. If a lower-ranking person countermands an order - they may have a better idea of what's going on and people like me are always going to get in trouble for choosing the wrong orders to follow.

Heck, I could have told them that. It is, after all, how I got here in the first place. But I did learn about how to follow the chain of command and how military protocol works.

That evening we, me and the rest of the convicts, started playing 'how to circumvent the rules and still follow protocol.'

## August 27th, 2552 - Military Crash Course

Pilot/Mechanic/Jump-Gate Navigator/Grunt in training Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

Something has changed in the dynamic we've been dealing with - it seems that the science team managed to talk to the military and it's been decided to tone down some aspects of our

training. It took some time but someone finally pointed out to the brass that 'Crash Courses' are not usually well received by pilots.

I think it took someone saying 'never say crash to a pilot' before they caught on. I mean we understand the need to get us all on the same page, but trying to force-feed us everything we could possibly need to know, as quickly as possible means we're going to end up missing some key ingredients and building blocks. Not that it hasn't been fun— but it's also been intense. And that isn't always the best way to learn things—at least not things you want to stick.

Yes, pain can be a good motivator, but constant pain is not. Survival is a good motivator, but the constant reminder is not- human nature needs to be able to compartmentalize things so they can be dealt with on a regular basis. Living with nothing but a litany of 'This can kill you' "If you don't do something, this will kill you" "this is how people die..." it tends to numb your senses to the point that when something that can kill you pop's up, you don't respond correctly and end up dead.

This is what we, in pilot circles like to call 'bad.' Pilots are usually masters of understatement. It's how they can calmly announce over the ship's intercom that they are crashing into the ocean with no hope of survival and make it sound like you're going to be stepping off the plane at a balmy 20 degrees C with winds out of the south at about 3KPH.

It's a coping mechanism.

## August 28th, 2552 - Set Sail

Pilot/Mechanic/Jump-Gate Navigator/Grunt in training Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

So, while we were cross-training, the fleet was traveling towards one of the places we'd found. It's been dubbed Tequila Sunrise by the military- because from the survey images, and review by the science teams, 95% of the planet is in constant sunrise.

I'm not sure if it has any actual significance but they're curious about it - and it does look habitable. We should be able to get the fleet there in a week— in the meantime an advanced team will be heading there. Since I'm a backup pilot on the mission— I get to go with them this time.

We'll see how things go.

## August 29th, 2552 - Proceeding with Caution

Pilot/Mechanic/Jump-Gate Navigator/Grunt in training Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

The exploration team deployed this morning, with me waiting in the wings just in case I was needed.

Sitting just outside the planet's atmosphere I had a lot of time, and very little to do, other than the usual, keep alert and be ready to run at a moment's notice. I guess my life hasn't changed that much— other than the fact that the view is so much better.

I'm still not entirely trusted, I'm still waiting for things to fall apart— but I am trusted by the people I care about - Cookie, Mac, Tower, Dancer, Skip, G-man and Fipps, so there's that.

I was about to relax when I saw a well open up in the distance. It was a small one, far enough away that the sensors didn't go off. But it was close enough for me to recognize it for what it was.

I radioed the others and we jumped away and went into stealth mode. At least there weren't any exploding bugs.

## August 30th, 2552 - Scouting

Pilot/Mechanic/Jump-Gate Navigator/Grunt in training Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

After a day of waiting and observing we saw no more flashes, no more openings from the well - so the pilots were sent out in teams of two - at least one military pilot in each team. I drew G-man, who isn't nearly as annoying this time, in fact, as we lined up to head out he asked, "So S-Kat, what you got cooking?"

The flight was uneventful and no one saw anything - we had pot roast for dinner.

## August 31st, 2552 - Sunset Explorations

Pilot/Mechanic/Jump-Gate Navigator/Tequila explorer Kat "S-Kat" James Reporting

We kept a perimeter and patrol around the planet while the rest of the exploration team went planet side. If I thought the planet looked gorgeous from space it was even better from within the planet's atmosphere.

It wasn't a steady low light kind of situation like I first imagined, it was just that there was always a sun on the edge of the horizon. And even as one sun set, another rose, but only just before the planet's rotation took it too to sunset. I'm not sure of the physics or astrophysics involved, all I can tell you is to film the sunrise where you are, get about half an hour to an hour's footage, then film the sunset, again for half an hour to an hour, and then play those two tapes on an infinite loop.

Needless to say, those plants requiring shade/little to no sunlight should thrive here, but for plants requiring direct sunlight— there might be a spot on the planet that isn't in twilight, but I haven't seen it from space.

We gathered samples and got readings and then rotated off-planet, pairing up with our military escort to watch the perimeter. G-man complained about the plan since he had to stay on watch while we got to rotate in and out.

I reminded him about the exploding bugs, he said ‘at least you found something interesting...’ I scoffed and answered, “That could kill you...”

He decided that boring was probably the better part of valor— until we had another point from the well open up— this time nothing emerged, at least nothing we could see.

Dinner was grilled cheese.