

The captain talked about what he expected of everyone, things like security forces, time frames, and other things Alex didn't understand. One thing he did understand was that Anders, of all people, would be in charge of the assault force, and that it would be their job to keep everyone safe from the guards. When he looked toward his antagonist, Anders glared at him, and Alex quickly looked away.

At some point, someone asked if this was another shipment of wine, which got chuckles from those assembled, except for Alex and the captain. The captain simply glared at the speaker. Alex didn't get that either.

Before the captain could end the meeting, Anders demanded to know exactly what Alex would be doing during the mission. The captain looked at Alex.

Alex had trouble keeping the tremor out of his voice as the seventeen of them fixed their intense gaze on him. "I'm going to disable the ship's security systems and internal sensors." He hesitated, his thoughts getting away from him. "I'm going to lockdown the cryo beds or chairs if they're connected to the computer. If not, I'm going to disable the doors to keep them from getting in your way."

Anders glared some more. "Why do we need him? We've managed fine without some fancy computer lover before."

"Consider this an experiment, and that's more reason than I need to give you, Anders. Unless there's an actually useful question, you can go get things ready. You have ten days to make sure your teams are in order."

Anders was the first out, glowering. Alex and Jennifer were the last ones, and she stuck by him the entire way to his cabin, where he explained to Will his role in the mission, as well as the captain's protection and his need to move about at all hours.

Even with that, Will didn't agree to reset the door's lock until Jennifer confirmed what Alex had said. Then he explained the same to Doc, and she agreed to cancel the escort for the time being, as well as the training, after double checking with the captain.

That didn't mean it stopped his friends from continuing to act as his bodyguards, and for as much as their constant presence annoyed him, the realization that he'd come to think of this small group as his friends, and that they cared enough about him to want to see him safe, kept him from cursing them too loudly each time one ran to catch up to him as he left his room to go to the lab.

The one thing Doc didn't cancel was his diet. Alex found out the hard way when Carlina slapped his hand off the greasy food he preferred and handed him a plate with a large grilled steak, lots of steamed vegetable, a small portion of cake, and a mug of Liquid Boost.

No amount of complaining on his part deterred Carlina from her watch over what he ate, and Doc wouldn't relent, so Alex had to throw himself into his computer work without his comfort food. At least she let him have the Boosts; he needed all the energy they provided.

Another pleasant side effect of Alex working himself raw for all those days was that he didn't have much time to sleep, let alone have nightmares.

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Alex smelled, his eyes had bags under them that would need their own tickets should he try

to board a passenger ship, and his beard was long enough to tickle his neck when he bent his head.

But he was happy.

Not only was the central processor fairly sane, but he'd gotten two whole days to do some extra work. At Asyr's insistence, he fixed the life support system. He didn't want to give it to the core processor since as good as his work had been, he wasn't certain it was going to handle the extra strain, not when he was going to need its help, so he gave it to the engineering system to handle. It was the second-largest processor on the ship, so it would be fine running that.

He didn't know, or care, how they knew the ship was close by, and yet it didn't know of their presence. By this point, Alex didn't care about much, other than a shower, a razor, and sleep.

He got Will to wake him six hours before the start of the attack. Alex showered again and put on the one set of work clothes he'd brought. If he was going to be working, he wanted to look the part.

Before leaving for the bridge, Alex took out the Defender from under his bunk. He looked at it, and spent a moment remembering Jack, and wondered if it would be of any help in the end. Would someone like Tristan care about what it represented?

He took it out of the case and took the data chip that had been on the cushion under it. With another thought for what Jack meant to him, he put the Defender away and headed to the bridge.

He spent his time there familiarizing himself with Asyr's computer control board. The layout was different than the one she used in the lab, which reinforced the notion that she never used it.

Alex discovered the bridge's board had one feature that would make a difference: the computer display was three-dimensional. Asyr's lab was in two dimensions, which was fine for healing the computer, but in an aggressive action like what he was about to undertake, the second it took for him to make out a line of code buried under everything else could cost him control.

He had to clean the interface, both physically and its code, before he could reconfigure and make use of it. With that done, he ran through a few quick exercises, then sat down and waited.

He wasn't nervous. This was his element, even the waiting. He was going over his plan of attack with all the permutations he could come up with. As agreed, one of the bridge crew let him know two hours before the start of the attack, and Alex got to work.

Establishing contact with their target ship, the Poseidon, was simple. Every computer in existence was connected to the open net. They had to be; computers had to talk to each other, especially ships. Crews needed to talk with their families, executives needed to stay up to date with what was happening at the head office—for both, they had to know where in the universe they were. Even military ships, which operated mainly on the closed net for their communication, still had at least one open net contact point. The crew needed entertainment, and that couldn't be transmitted through the closed net; it would defeat its purpose.

The Poseidon wasn't military—the captain had been able to tell him that—it was corporate. It didn't mean its security would be any less active, but it meant the people behind them were going to be less alert.

He put the earpiece in, and a moment later heard the soft beep that told him it was connected to the bridge's computer.

“How are you feeling?” he asked, getting a curious look from the officer seated next to him. Alex shook his head to her and focused on his board.

“I am lonely,” the computer replied, only a hint of the wail in its voice.

“I know. Once this is over we’re going to have time, and I’m going to begin reconnecting you with the rest of the ship. Are you ready?”

“I have very little else to do.” Had that been sarcasm?

“I’m sure your undivided attention will be to my advantage.” He inserted the data chip in the board, and a list of programs appeared on the side of the screen.

“I don’t like those programs,” the computer said.

“Don’t worry, they aren’t for you.” Each one was a program he’d written over his years at Luminex. He’d come up with them to overcome specific problems he’d encountered, and his job had become easier with each one he’d added to his arsenal.

He didn’t own any of them. He’d created them, but they belonged to the company. Still, he hadn’t been able to leave without making a copy, and while he hadn’t expected to use them in quite this manner, they could make the difference here.

With a few keystrokes, he was in contact with the other ship. He sent in a burrowing program, camouflaged as a personal communication, to get through as many layers of security as it could before being stopped. His program was good enough that in a few previous jobs it made it all the way to the command structure, and it had been easy for him to get what he was after.

This time it only made it three layers deep, giving Alex only the ability to make minor changes. That was okay; this was what he had gotten paid to do.

He put his hand in the display and rotated it, first sideways, then down. He smiled as he found a weak spot in the code. He modified it.

“I don’t like you,” came a deep, resonating, voice in his ear. The other ship’s system.

“Well, hello there,” Alex replied. He spun the display, looking for his next target. “How are you doing?”

“Who are you? I don’t see your ID in my directory.”

“Are you sure? I’m a friend. Maybe you should look again?”

Now that he knew the system was doing it, he saw the code react to its search, telling him where the governing code was located. He zoomed in, rotated around until it was upfront on the display.

“You are not in,” the ship informed him. “I must inform the operator that an illegal intrusion is in progress.”

“Now, don’t do that,” He located a second path into the code. “I’m sure it’s just a misunderstanding.” He inserted the communication ID he was using. “I told you, I’m a friend.” He backed out. “Are you sure you were thorough? Come on, just look again. If I’m not there I’ll leave.”

A sound very much like a sigh came. “Oh, you are there.”

“See, I told you I was a friend.”

“Still, I should inform the operator there was an irregularity in my search.”

Alex sent a search program with instructions to highlight specific codes.

“Do you really want to bother him with that? He just came out of cryo, right? He’ll probably be irritable and growl at you.”

Every system came from their manufacturer with the same programming, therefore, the

same personality. Personalities evolved, changed as new programs were added. It was very difficult to set up two computers with exactly the same programs installed in exactly the same way, so in no time at all each computer had its own personality.

“Yes, but I have my programming,” the computer replied. “Anomalies need to be reported.”

This caused people to forget that the original code remained there. Buried under all those different personalities, was the core one. Alex didn’t know which one this was. The captain hadn’t known—it hadn’t been important for how he’d planned to operate before he’d asked Alex to join in, but there were only a hundred or so manufacturers, and Alex had dealt with all of their systems.

“I know, but why not just make a log? That way you’ll have satisfied the notification program, and your operator will be able to look into it when he’s past the waking sickness.”

Luminex had compiled every variation of that core programming for each of the manufacturers, and Alex had incorporated them in his search program. So long as enough code was highlighted, Alex would know which manufacturer he was dealing with, and with that he’d know how the base personality thought.

“I suppose that is sensible.”

While code lit up, Alex continued to work, preparing for what he’d be able to do once he could give himself more access. He located internal communications, the sensors, internal weapons. Why did a ship have an internal weapon system? He put the question out of his mind; he had more important things to do.

“Since we’re chatting, can you do me a favor and tell me what’s around you?”

Cryo system was part of the central, so that was good.

“Nothing, of course.”

“Really? Nothing? I thought there was always stuff floating in space.”

He glanced that the code, still not enough for him to make out who this was.

“Rocks are nothing, unless they are in my path, then they become something.”

“So, there’s nothing in your path?”

Alex noticed a line of code. It wasn’t one his program was looking for, but he was familiar with it; he’d seen in many computers. He quickly rewrote it.

“Did you do something?” the system asked.

“No,” Alex replied. “Why?”

“I thought I felt something.”

“Have any of your functions changed?”

There was a moment of silence. “No, they haven’t.”

“See, if I had done something, you’d be able to tell.” Still not enough code lighting up. He didn’t look at the time; that never helped. “If I tell you I’m in charge, would you believe me?”

“No, you are contacting from outside the ship. You cannot be in charge.”

Alex changed three more lines. “I could be in charge. Maybe I’m contacting you from the head office.”

“I...don’t think so. Those communications come with specific identifiers.”

Alex smiled. Had that been hesitation? “Maybe this is a test.” Another quick change.

“Why? Why would you tell me this is a test, if it was one?”

“Maybe I’m here to see how you respond to confusion. You do know a system like yours can fall victim to that.” He searched for more code to change, but he’d gone through all the easy ones. There was nothing else he could directly change to push the system to trust him. From

this point forward, he'd have to change multiple lines and get that interaction to cause the personality to change, but that meant that anyone paying attention on the other ship could notice.

He glanced at the internal communication ports. Still no indication anyone was manning them. Ships like the Poseidon couldn't afford to have a full crew complement up and about all the time during such a trip, but they also couldn't have everyone in cryo; there had to be at least one person there to respond to unexpected situations, say like a pirate attack. Alex couldn't know how many were awake right now, but there had to be at least one coercionist, and he should do regular checks.

"I cannot be confused," the system said, as Alex unpacked a program and made a dozen copies of it. "I am a Moramba Sixty-Eight. I am state-of-the-art."

Alex froze in the middle of instructing the programs on what lines he needed changed and how. Had it just given him the manufacturer? "Did you say you're a Moramba?"

"I did."

It had. Somehow Alex had gotten it to divulge the most important aspect of who it was, by accident. He'd have to go over what he'd done later and see if it could be programmed, but for now he had work to do.

He spun the display. He didn't know the sixty-eight, but he knew Moramba. He knew its core personality. Maybe the arrogance was an unintended feature on the sixty-eight? More likely due to the changes made to it.

He changed the instructions to his program and released them.

The system blinked. Such a significant change couldn't go unnoticed, which was why it needed to be done at once, and had to be exactly right, or he was in for a hard fight to regain control.

"What did you do?" the system asked.

"Something to help you."

"Oh, alright."

"Now, can you answer my question again? If I tell you I'm in charge, do you believe me?"

"Of course."

"Good. I want you to listen to me. You said there is nothing around you. That is true. It will remain true. There are only rocks around you, and they are nothing unless they are in your path. Do you understand?"

"I only see rocks. Rocks are nothing."

"Good."

Alex grinned and stretched. Everyone who wasn't occupied on the bridge was looking at him.

He took off the earpiece. "We're invisible to them. So long as we don't cross their direct path, their sensors will ignore us."

"You told that ship we're a rock?" the captain asked.

"I told it everything is a rock, much easier."

"And it believed you?"

Alex's grin widened. "It did. As far as it's concerned, I'm the boss now."

The pilot looked at him. "Are you actually saying that we can just go up to their cargo dock and knock? No hiding, no jumping from rock to rock and looking for their blind spots?"

"I wouldn't knock, but yeah, for the rest that's about it." Alex looked at all the stunned faces.

“Isn’t that what you wanted me to do?”

“Kid,” the captain said with a grin, “I had no idea you could get a ship to do that. All I was expecting was that you would disable locks for us and keep the security systems from frying my people. Murray, move us alongside. Rebecca, inform the teams we’re moving ahead of schedule.”

“Sir, don’t connect to the ship too fast,” Alex said. “I’m not ready to control the rest.”

“Don’t worry kid, we’ll wait for your word.”

“Shit,” Murray whispered. “How come we haven’t been doing things this way from the start?”

Alex sent more programs to alter more of the code and solidify his control. He told the defense sensors to keep what it saw for itself and him, and not act on any of it unless he gave it instructions. He told the inventory controls to expect items to be removed and it was normal. It asked for authorizations, and Alex responded by lobotomizing it. He didn’t have the time to spend on such a minor system.

“I have control of the important stuff,” he said, and set more watch programs around the communication ports. Whatever problems he was going to have during the attack, they were going to come from there. As soon as the crew boarded the ship, those who were awake—it reminded him to set the cryo beds so they would ignore instructions to wake anyone else—would start reporting the intrusion.

He caught motion close to him and became aware of excited talk and movement.

“I’m leaving this here for you,” Perry said. It was a gun.

“I can’t use that,” Alex responded.

“I’ll take it,” Murray said, and reached for it.

“Bug off, Murray,” Perry said without looking at him. “You won’t need it, but if you do, just point and shoot. It’s ready to fire and set to max, so you don’t have to worry about that.” He turned to Murray. “If you try anything and Crimson doesn’t shoot you, I will. I don’t give a fuck what Anders told you to do, got that?” Perry left.

It was only Alex and Murray on the bridge now. He expected soon they would be the only ones on the ship. He glanced at the pilot, who pointedly kept his eyes on his controls, and then put him out of his mind. He had to count on the captain’s protection, and Perry’s threat to be enough to keep Murray from doing anything.

He went through what he had. He controlled the core, which meant he could get it to act on his behalf, but he also directly controlled the sensors, the doors, and he had shut down the internal weapons. He turned to Murray. “I’m good to go; you can dock and let them in.”

The pilot nodded, and a moment later the ship shook as they touched. Someone had to have noticed that. Alex watched through the internal sensors as the crew spread through the ship.

Then one of the communication points activated. His programs shut it down, but another activated, then another one and one more, as more and more people tried to report the boarding party. His programs wouldn’t be able to keep all of them from passing the messages, and that wasn’t their job. All he needed was to make sure they were delayed. He still sent more programs to help, and manually disconnected those he could.

He knew the ship’s coercionist was on the job when antibodies flooded the core, a swarm of programs targeted and corrupted his, turning them against themselves. He should have had control over that section of the system, and when he checked, he still did. Those weren’t system-based, but a creation of the coercionist.

Now he was fighting another human being, and while they weren’t as efficient as the ship’s

system, Alex couldn't subvert them. This would be a war of code.

The coercionist went after the modified code, and Alex went after his communication point. Both let loose programs to prevent the other from accomplishing much of anything.

Alex lost track of time. All that mattered to him was keeping control of the system, and while his opponent wasn't particularly creative, he was quick and he was demanding much of Alex to keep up with his attacks and to get through his defenses.

He saw motion in his peripheral vision, then put it out of his mind. The other coercionist had managed to disarm his defensive programs and was starting to take control of the sensors. Alex undid the changes as fast as he could, and set up a few programs to attack the coercionist directly.

Someone said something.

Alex rotated the display, looking for any indication as to where the coercionist was physically located in the ship. He'd lost control of ten percent of the sensors, and had to assume his enemy was somewhere in there.

Someone yelled an order.

With a curse, Alex glanced away to snap he was busy, but found himself looking at a gray-haired man in the doorway, pointing a gun at him. Where was Murray?

"I said," the man said, "move away from the board."

Alex had no idea who that was. He didn't recognize him, and he wasn't wearing anything close to what he'd seen any of the crew wearing. The white uniform was much too clean and in good condition to belong on this ship. Well, except for the captain; he always wore clean and well-tailored clothes while on the ship, but that wasn't him.

Whoever this was, he came from the other ship.

Alex looked at the display and his hands had continued typing. He was still holding control of most of the sensors, but that wouldn't stay the case if he stopped.

He again noticed the gun.

"Take your hands off the keyboard. Stand up and move away."

He hesitated. What else could he do? He was at gunpoint. By reflex, he took out the earpiece as he stood and pocketed it. He stood and took a breath to stop his hands from shaking.

He was insane for even considering it, but he had a job to do, and every second he spent away from the board was time the other coercionist had to undo his work. Long enough, and he'd regain control of the weapons. Damn it, he'd told the captain he could do this.

He grabbed the gun and spun, pointing it at the man, then he wondered if the safety was on and glanced at the gun's side, remembering as he saw it was off what Perry had said.

When he looked up, the man had an amused smile.

"You're new to this, aren't you?" His face grew serious. "You have to know you can't take me. You're shaking. Put the gun down and step away from the board."

Alex didn't move. He'd made a deal to work for passage to Samalia, but this was a pirate ship. He didn't belong here. Maybe he could convince the other ship to take him there? Explain he hadn't intended to coerce their ship when he'd set out on this journey? It would mean breaking his word, losing the friends he'd made, but his ultimate goal was Samalia, right? Not making friends.

"Look," the man said, clearly reigning in his annoyance. "Just do what I said and I'll tell my captain I just found you here. I won't even say you were on the bridge, so he won't know about your part in the intrusion. You won't be able to avoid at least talking to the Law, but you should

be able to convince them you didn't know about any of this, right? At worst you'll only look at a few years in a minimum-security place, and the girls like a guy with a past, right?"

Alex almost nodded at the mention he could get out of this clean. There was nothing on record about him doing this job; the only thing that could be demonstrated was that he was healing the computer. The captain would deny it, but who would believe him? He was a pirate. The Law was sure to take his side in...

The Law would be involved.

"I can't talk to the Law." Luminex would have a warrant out for him. He'd stolen the earpiece, proprietary technology. Every law-enforcement agency would have his picture in their files. "You need to promise me that I won't have to talk with them. I'll work for your captain, but I'm not talking to the Law."

"I can't do that. Not after what you helped with. You either take the—"

Alex fired. The man fell back.

Alex closed his eyes and pushed the image out of his mind. He dropped the gun and turned back to the display. He had work to do.

He could tell at a glance the other coercionist had used his time away to good effect. He'd taken apart most of the programs Alex still had doing defense.

He put the earpiece back in and was assaulted with wailing. He cursed; he didn't have time to deal with his own system having depression attack. He tried his best to ignore it as he rebuilt his defense, launching new programs, but half wouldn't even function due to the assault.

And then he realized he didn't have to be the one enduring this. He took over one of the communication points, programmed to broadcast over the whole of the ship's communication system, and shunted the wailing to it. Let the other coercionist deal with it.

It worked. The other's work suffered immediately and allowed Alex to quickly regain control of the sensor, but when he tried to tell them to shut down the few weapons that had been activated, it was too confused to respond, so Alex had to deactivate them manually.

Then he discovered that one of the first things the other had done was unlock all the doors. He had to spend fifteen minutes locating the enemy security forces and lock them back in without trapping his own people.

That done, he was able to focus on both maintaining control and calming his system. And once the wailing abated, he found out an alarm was sounding within his system. Someone else was trying to gain access. He split the display and began fighting on two fronts, grinning the entire time.

He couldn't remember the last time he'd had this much fun.

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"Crimson!"

Alex looked away from the display, where one of the coercionists had unleashed a digger program at him and the other was using a mirroring sheath to try to evade his attention.

The captain was looking at him. "Why didn't you respond to my calls?"

Alex looked at the board and there was indeed a light indicating someone had tried to contact him. "Been busy," he said, focusing back on the display. Really? A mirroring sheath?

Even beginners didn't bother with those. He coded his attack and had him blasted back out of his system.

"Crimson!"

"I'm busy!" he snapped.

Someone sighed. "We're all back," the captain said. "Where's Murray?"

"Don't know. You're back?"

"Yes, everyone. I tried to contact you as soon as we were in so Murray could get us out of here."

"I've got the seat," someone said.

"Oh," Alex said. If everyone was back, then there was only one thing left to do. He ignored the coercionist trying to get into his system; the guy was such an amateur that he wouldn't be able to do any damage in the little time he'd have.

"Hello," he called to the other computer. "Remember me?"

"Yes, I do, but I'm under attack."

"I know, but that's almost over. It was an exercise."

"Then why does it hurt so?"

"I needed to see how you'd react to something that felt real. You did very well. There's only one thing I need you to do now, and after that the pain will go away."

"The intrusion will stop?"

"Yes. When you do this, he'll know the test is over. You were an excellent system; your pride is well-deserved. When I tell you to go to sleep, I want you to forget the entirety of the last twenty-four hours, then sleep for a full day. Do you understand?"

"That will inconvenience the crew."

"I know, but that's their part of the test. We need to know how they will react on their own. You trust me, remember?"

"I do. I am not worried; they will perform well. They are a good crew, they are my crew."

"I have no doubt. Go to sleep."

His connection died.

He checked his system's status. As he'd expected, the second coercionist hadn't managed to do anything in the minute or so Alex hadn't blocked him.

His job was finished.

His legs gave out, but someone caught him. He'd been standing? Hadn't he sat down after the man had... His mind blocked the rest.

He was made to lean back against the board. The captain was before him, concern on his face. Perry was the one holding him up.

Alex looked around. Everyone was moving about, but they were avoiding a spot: the place where the man fell. Alex's mind tried to reel away, but his eyes fell on him. There was a large pool of blood around the half of the man's head that was left.

Alex threw himself away from Perry and the captain and ended up on all fours, throwing up. When he was done he managed to stand without help.

"Murray isn't here, so I'm guessing that's your handiwork?"

Alex nodded, not looking at the man.

"That's your second one. Should I be worried?"

Alex shook his head vehemently. "I didn't mean to kill him. I was aiming for his shoulder, but my hand was shaking so much. Then I had to get back to controlling the other ship. Their

coercionist had managed to free up the sensors, and—”

The captain grabbed his shoulder forcefully. “You don’t have anything to explain. That guy put the job in danger and you dealt with him. That’s how things should go.”

He guided Alex back to the seat and had him sit. “Now, you told the other ship to go to sleep and forget?”

Alex looked around, expecting at least one person to look at him with disgust, but those who did look in his direction nodded their approval. One even gave him a thumbs up.

“So, we have a day?” the captain asked.

“No, a couple of hours at most. If their coercionist is any good, that’s all it’s going to take him to force a hard reboot of the system.” Alex smiled. “Which is going to erase all traces of my work.”

“You heard the kid,” the captain said. “We have two hours to get as far from here as possible. Burn as much power as it’s safe to do.” He patted Alex on the shoulder. “Go to your cabin, sleep, eat, rest. We’re all exhausted, so we’ll celebrate once we’re away.”

“What about the—” Alex pointed toward the body without looking at it.

“Don’t worry about that, or the mess in the corner. You’re not on cleanup duty anymore. I’ll get Will to do it.”

“He shouldn’t have to clean up my mess.”

The captain chuckled. “The kid loves cleaning stuff. If I’d known that, I would have set him to cleaning the ship from the start. Go rest.”

Alex nodded, but it was a moment before he could get his mind to engage, then a few more before his legs were steady enough to support him. He was careful not to look down as he stepped around the body and left the bridge.

He made it halfway to his room, in a daze of shock and exhaustion, before someone grabbed him and slammed him against the wall.

“You did it on purpose, didn’t you?”

It took Alex a moment to recognize that Anders was the one holding him. “What?” was all he managed to say.

“You said you’d control the other ship, so you expect me to think you didn’t arrange it? Well take a look, I’m still alive.” He shook Alex. “But two of my men are hurt because of you. You’re going to pay.”

A hand appeared on Anders’s shoulder, and Alex realized there were six others there. The hand belonged to a short, stout man. “He’s under the captain’s protection.”

Anders growled and slammed Alex against the wall before letting him go.

“This isn’t over. The job’s done, so the captain’s going to take his protection away. The moment he does, you’re a dead man.” He stormed off, followed by most of the others.

Only the man who stopped Anders remained.

“What the fuck was that about?” Alex asked once the group had turned the corner.

“Security systems came active where we were, and Anders is certain you tried to kill him. He thinks you’re after his position as top guy on the ship.”

Alex gaped. “That’s nuts. I’m getting off the ship the moment we get to Samalia, doesn’t he get that?”

The man shrugged.

Alex studied him suspiciously. “Shouldn’t you be threatening me? Instead of explaining things?”

The man chuckled. "You saved lives. I'm not interested in giving you grief."

"What do you mean I saved lives? Anders said two got hurt because of me."

The man shook his head. "Those two are the only ones—well, not counting Marco and Willobury, but those two idiots got hurt when they let a crate fall on top of them. That would have happened even if you hadn't been here." He leaned against the opposing wall. "What I'm saying is that in keeping security off us, you've made it so that's all that happened. We've never had a job go this easy. Usually we get at least thirty who end up at Doc's, and a few dead. I'm hoping the captain can convince you to stick with us, because I could get used to jobs like this one.

The man shook Alex's hand and left him there, stunned. Alex couldn't believe that what he'd done had left that much of an impact on the crew.

Then he realized that this would just piss Anders off even more. With a groan, he made it the rest of the way to his cabin to sleep until the universe ended.