

Ship 775

Dilong-paradoxus

September 2022

Chapter 1

Sleep

1.1 Part 1

1.1.1 Intro

How do I sleep at night, you ask? I don't.

Not well, anyway. It's not a worry thing. Even before the war I was like this. I just get in my bed, pull the covers up, nothing happens. Fuck-all.

So how, you're thinking now (I can see it), did an insomniac end up as crew on a nuclear-armed battlecruiser, at the front line of lunar combat? Well, I have a few ideas. But first I'm gonna tell you about the one place where I *do* get some sleep.

1.1.2 The Battle

Despite my state of extreme sleep deprivation I'm the first one out of bed when the scramble alarm goes off. Enemy ships detected on a trajectory crossing the SDIZ surface. Gotta hydrate. Floor rumbling as the pumps pre-spin. I zip up my flight suit, cool as a cucumber. My crewmate hops through the hatch before me. He's a little antsy. His first time, you know how they are. I put my helmet on. Down the hatch. In the seat. Crew element 3, ready for liquid fill.

Filling the pod takes just over a minute. My eyelids are getting heavy, but I glance over at my crewmate. He's hyperventilating as the liquid gets to chest level. I tap him on his shoulder to get his attention, then take a big breath of the pod fluid. I've been in enough of these things to know it's better if you get it over with quick, and it's easier for everyone if he's not coughing for the next ten minutes. He calms down enough to get a good lungful, then we're all the way under. Breathe in, breathe out.

Once liquid fill is complete we get rammed into ship 775, along with our buddies in the two pods above. Ka-chunk, ka-chunk, ka-chunk. Once the blast covers close we've only got the

internal lighting, no (tiny) windows anymore. A stream of GO signals runs past on the monitor, but who really reads those, anyway? Then, above, more heavy clunking, getting progressively softer as it recedes into the distance. My path is now clear, but I think I saw my crewmate flinch a bit. Ugh.

But wait, there's more! Just after we get the "all reactors at launch power" indication, the computer voice tells us we have a 37 second phasing hold. Okay, could be worse, but I can tell even the ship is ready to get this show on the road by the way it hums.

T-0. FUCKIN' GO.

I weigh a ton and half. Literally. The ship is screaming up the tunnel to the surface on a paper-thin cushion of electrified plasma, a railgun to the stars. Or I assume it is, anyway. I'm already drifting off. The last thing I remember is my crewmate screaming as the Gs pile up. By the time we clear the blast doors on the surface and shed the launch sleds I've already drifted off to a blissful rest. Sweet dreams, me.

1.1.3 Light

Gently, I drift back into wakefulness. A shaft of sunlight helpfully illuminates the clock. Woah, ten hours! Damn, that feels good. Kinda weird we haven't RTB'd but who cares?

Wait, I think. Sunlight? I lean forward in my seat, and yep, I can see the sun. That's, uh, not normal for being buried inside a starship. I look closer at the main display. In giant letters, it says:

EMERGENCY BEACON ACTIVE, PLEASE WAIT FOR RESCUE

I look over at my crewmate. He's not screaming anymore, which makes sense because of the two shrapnel holes on either side of the pod, conveniently intersecting his torso. The environmental control is doing a good job sucking the blood away from where I'm breathing, for now.

fuck. **FUCK!**

1.2 Part 2

1.2.1 Lost

So no shit, there I am. Aerated crewmate (well, I guess he's hydrated, but that doesn't have the same ring), no ship, stuck in a capsule breathing recycled liquid. Oh, and I'm perfectly lucid thanks to my first full night of sleep in a few months. Great.

Okay, I know what you're thinking. Time to panic, right? We'll get there, don't worry, but first I gotta check on some stuff. First, helmet off and a quick once-over to make sure I don't have any new holes. Check. Second, make sure the holes in the capsule walls self sealed and aren't leaking. Check, for now. Third, check the capsule diagnostics to find out if the stuff I can't see is also working. Check please, I'd like to leave the restaurant now. Capsule says me and my crewmate have a week and a half at the current rate of consumption and I don't think he minds if I take a bit of his share. I pop open a hatch and shove a couple of the nutrient cubes stored there into my mouth before moving on.

Now, where am I going with this? Oh yeah, gotta find out where I'm going. I move back over to my seat and bring up the navigation panel. Okay cool, zoom out button's broken. Wait, no, shit, am I really that far out? How the hell fast is this thing going? (If you're wondering, now is the part where I panic)

I swim over to the window, try to look out, get blinded by the sun, and then remember it's too tiny to see towards earth anyway. I grab the controls and give the thrusters a couple puffs to orient the window towards home. Should be right there. I almost turn to go back and nudge the thrusters again, but then I see it: a very small planet, very far away. I move to the side to get a better angle through the window, and yep, there's the moon too! Fuck! Stupid tiny-ass far planet! Useless tiny people! AAAAAAA! Fuck. Kicking the side of the capsule does not help, but it is satisfying.

So thanks for sticking around, but the next week and a half is gonna be a bit of a bummer. They are *not* coming to get me on this trajectory. Guess I'll have plenty of time to review the tapes on how it all went so wrong.

But what the hell is that annoying beeping I hear now?

1.3 Part 3

1.3.1 Detected

Lost in space. Dead guy in the right seat. Can't even contemplate my mortality in peace with that annoying noise. Can it get worse?

OBJECT DETECTED INCOMING. IFF NO ACK, PRESUMED HOSTILE. PREPARE FOR EVASIVE ACTION.

Yes, yes it can! I thank the robot voice (sarcastically, of course) as I strap back into my chair. Would be nice to have the rest of the ship right now, but I guess I'm stuck with the shitty capsule docking cams. I strap on my helmet to take a look and can immediately see the hot end of a big ship executing a braking burn. They're lasing me, of course. After a minute the engines cut out and the radiation monitor in my goggles falls back down a bit. I see the thruster gases lit by sunlight as the ship slowly spins around.

INCOMING MESSAGE RECEIVED AND RELAYED TO BATTLEGROUP COMMAND

Okay cool, probably wasn't important anyway.

INCOMING MESSAGE RECEIVED AND RELAYED TO BATTLEGROUP COMMAND

You have got to be shitting me.

INCOMING MESSAGE RECEIVED AND RELAYED TO BATTLEGROUP COMMAND

Don't they think it might be useful for me to know what's going on if I'm the one out here in deep space getting pinged by a hostile ship? No? Awesome. But then I hear a buzzing noise, like they're trying to drill through the hull. The window dims and I see sparks flying past as the light outside flickers. They're trying to drill through the hull! Wait, am I hearing voices?

...pArE To e BoArDeD. oo nOt Be LaRmEd bY mErGeNcY CoMmUnIcAtIoN mEaSuRes...

That ship has fuckin' sailed, dude.

...IsAbLe CoUnTeRmeAsUrEs iMmEdIaTeLy AnD pRePaRe oo Be OaRdEd. HaNkYoO.

No problemo, I say to myself as I navigate the menus and switch off the flares, auto-evade, and other stuff that's supposed to keep me alive when facing a situation like this. The ship gets bigger and bigger in the cameras, until it finally eclipses the sun. It's more heavily armed than a barrel of octopi, and I can see several of the primary laser turrets are focused on my capsule. The capsule is telling me I'm all but being x-rayed by the ship's sensors. An arm reaches out from the belly of the ship to grab the capsule and berths it to a conveniently capsule-shaped hollow in the cargo bay. Huh.

The hatch lights turn green. Not having received any further instruction, I move to the hatch and yank the lever. I can tell the ship has started burning for wherever the hell it's going by how much of a pain in the ass it is to push the hatch all the way open even with the spring assist. As much as I'd like to say I spring into action, I probably look more like a semiaquatic mammal hauling itself onto some rock as I exit the capsule and cough up as much pod-water onto the grated floor as I can manage.

Just as I'm spitting out the last of the capsule fluid in my lungs, the airlock door swings open. Standing behind it are two people in uniforms. The closest one, a guy, is pointing a gun at my center of mass. He's backed up by a mountain of a woman, who looks like she could hold her own in a sumo match. The guy says "my bad," in a Russian accent as he pulls the trigger, looking almost apologetic.

I'm too busy convulsing from the taser round to be thankful it wasn't a real bullet, but I take pride in the fact I manage to wheeze out an "ASS...HOLE" between breaths as they drag me into the ship.