

Darkness – Erum, Year 5, NSW

The galaxy, deep dark, but also glowing and beautiful with the light of a million stars. So peaceful, so calm, so gorgeous. Uninterrupted going on for miles and miles. So far away from the earth, from any planet really. It had been like this for years, decades, centuries. Until...

Zooming through the peaceful arc at a million miles per hour, faster than light, faster than anything ever possible, ever *seen*. The contraption responsible for disturbing the quiet peace of this undisturbed universe, was a sleek, metal, hamster-ball like spaceship, with large windows and razor sharp rings of light posing around them. This spaceship was the most advanced of its kind ever built. It would have made billions of dollars selling anywhere, but the creator kept their invention a quiet secret.

My hands clamp firmly on the steering wheel of my very own spaceship, the *Inara*. Around me, I watch as the stars float like twinkling lights, filling the inky black space with tiny dots of light.

Today's the big day, Rose, I remind myself, eagerly. Finally going to complete one hundred laps of the galaxies.

Excitedly, I set the *Inara* on autopilot and bounce up to my bedroom. My bedroom is my quiet space, with walls mostly made up of glass, giving me a complete view of whatever galaxy the *Inara* travelled through. I curl up on my bed, staring in wonder at the stars.

I'm passing my home galaxy now, the Orboin galaxy. I see the planet I grew up on, planet Orbo. It's a big swirling mess of colours, full of happiness and light.

I remember Orbo. Happy memories with my mother, playing with me, chasing me, feeding me. I miss those days. Days of happiness before I left, before I decided that I was never coming back. I keep staring at my home planet wishing I could go back.

But I can't. I know that.

I keep staring, long after the planet had passed. I stare into nothingness. Darkness. As far as the eye can see. Too deathlike for me. I keep staring lost in sad, angry memories. I let them wash over me, like I do every day. I wallow in sadness so powerful it caves my heart. Anger so deep, so strong, so powerful that when I unleash it, I become uncontrollable, unreachable. All of these emotions are locked away. I only let them today. The death day of my mother, Lady Inara.

The tears come as I remember my life. My house, Chateau Shanoi, the most secure facility on Orbo. I remember my mother plaiting my hair. I see her taking me to meet royalty she worked for.

Today, I wonder if there's a way to fix everything wrong. To go back to Orbo.

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"Jeez girl, stop worrying," a sarcastic voice says.

What?! I think as I stumble frantically, looking for something, anything I can use as a weapon. Seriously, of all the places on my ship to ambush me, it had to be in my room? Where I keep, no weapons! The best I can come up with is a shard of glass. Not much, but I'll take it.

When I turn around my jaw drops. In front of me is clearly the most gorgeous girl on Orbo. I've grown up with princesses but those royal girls have nothing on the one in front of me.

"Are you done yet?" the girl says dryly, rolling her turquoise eyes. I shake myself out of my trance, I ask all the questions that I should have before. "Who, what, where, *how?*" I stutter frantically, my shard of glass ready. How did this girl get in here?

We're in the middle of the Orboin GALAXY. And in a super secure spaceship it's not like you someone could just waltz in!!

The girl tosses her black hair and announces "My name is Alina. And *how...*" she caresses a strand of hair and her eyes darken. "*How*, we've been keeping tabs on you for months. We know exactly how to get into the ship, how to get out, and exactly where everything is. We knew you had no weapons in your bedroom. Although the broken glass *is* a nice touch."

Alina smirks. "We know everything about you, your past, your secrets, your worst fears. So, does that answer your question?"

Oh, I think to myself, it more than answers it. Not vague or cryptic at all! Slowly, I lower my weapon.

"What do you mean?" I say.

Alina turns on autopilot as she says "You should have a seat."

I'm too numb to feel her pulling me into the couches. Once I've regained my voice I ask, "Why have you been keeping tabs on me? And who's 'we'?"

"*We* are a protection service your mother worked for and we have reasons to believe that your father is still alive." After everything she said, this shocks me the most. Is my father alive?

I close my eyes and work through all the thoughts fluttering through my head. Fear, anger, all come rushing back with vengeance. I want to blame Alina, say this is all her fault. But deep down, I know that's not true.

But before I work through all this, I hear glass breaking. My eyes fly open as I watch Alina being restrained just before silver cloaked figures seize me. Screams echo through the spaceship but we're in the middle of space. No one's coming to save us. I kick and scream before one of them presses a sweet vial to my lips. The world goes blank.

Slowly, I awaken on the cold metal floor. A figure steps forward and pulls me up by the collar. I grit my teeth and look up, only to find myself face to face with eyes the same cobalt as mine. My father. Shock courses through me. I scream.

“What are you doing, you monster?” I scream, half sobbing. The figure dropped me at my father’s feet.

“Father, why are you kidnapping me?!” My father's blank eyes suddenly become red with fury and his pale skin starts to crack.

“How dare you!” he roars, spit flying. “You’re no daughter of mine!”

I stare at him. The cracked skin, red eyes, millions of people following him. Then I look at the dark helmet he wears. It’s imprinted with the word GENERAL ALLIN on the top. That’s what the head of an army wears. So they can control the robots sent to war. My father has kept his old one and turned all his robot soldiers evil.

The hat is supposed to slowly deteriorate the body of the user if they wear it too long. My father has been suffering its consequences. But that still leaves the question...

“Where are we?” I rasp. My senses are coming back to me, and I see the sheer impossibility of this base. It can’t be floating in the middle of space.

My father, Allin barks out a brittle laugh. “We are in the most secure facility ever built.” His voice lowers to a whisper. “Chateau Shanoi. Only this time, no one’s here.”

I scramble back, fear closing in on my throat. The full reality of my situation grapples me. I stare in shock.

“You killed them,” I whisper. “You killed them all.”

Looking around, I remember all the staff that used to work here. All gone.

“Yes I did. Or rather, I killed their will.” Allin patted his helmet softly. “They are now part of my army. A better life, if you ask me.” His gaze lingered on a select group of people that were distinctly human.

“But why?” I manage to croak out.

Allin’s eyes turn flaming red and he hisses “Because of you! You killed her. You killed Inara.”

My father is still grieving my mother’s death. He still blames me. He staged his own death just to escape me. Allin looks down on me with utter hatred and contempt. Is this the last look I’ll see before I die?

No. No. No. I reach inside me and harness my locked up emotions, they swirl and bounce around, finally locking on the target. Allin. I channel all my emotion, all my *power*, gather momentum and spear into Allin’s head. I watch him convulse on the ground, eyes rolling backwards, his head impaled by a red hot, glowing arrow.

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Little pinpricks of light fly past as I excitedly clamp my hands around the steering wheel of the *Inara*. Finally, I get to complete one hundred laps of the galaxies!

My thoughts wonder to Orbo. I locked the general's hat in Chateau Shanoi. It took a long time but eventually the planet settled into a normal pattern after the end of Allin. Sometimes I feel sad about Allin's death, but did I really have any choice?

I wish my mother was here to comfort me. I'm finally at peace with her death and the stars are shining brighter than ever before.