

1

Slowly, Piotr raised his eyebrows over the edge of the console. The disembodied face was still there, floating placidly beyond the borders of the main screen.

"Name's Atlas," it stated, boisterously. Piro received the impression of a hand extended in friendship. "How are you called?"

"Captain. Né Piotr. Pleased to make your acquaintance."

"Hm. I think I'll call you Piro."

"That's... not my name." Eyelids suddenly drawn tight.

"There's been an update. It is now."

Piotr's hand traveled, instinctively, to his holster. Thumbed his login. Authentication error.

"Anyway, where's the shitter?"

Piotr relaxed his grip on the pistol. The deity had indeed proven friendly. Just wanted to unload. He updated his address book, pushed the backup to remote storage. "Computer. Guide our guest to the head."

After flashing a loading screen for some seconds, the RAGNAROK complied with the order. In the absence of a confirming bleep, Piotr once again reclined in his seat. He stared at his leaf. Occasionally, he enjoyed a sip of his tea.

Ship's guests.

2

As the RAGNAROK came to terms with its new course, Divorcée Canyon gradually shifted into view. A self-propelled Möbius strip modeled on the American southwest, the station's absurdly detailed period furnishings commanded grudging respect even from those who found themselves unable to stomach its symbolic payload.

"Uncanny valley," remarked the floating head.

"Not even wrong," replied Piro.

Product placement confirmed docking speed at regular intervals. Government boobs. Deep throat checking. Mold removal. This last advertisement coaxed a chuckle from Atlas. "If only," he sighed, sadly, and rested his chin on the floor.

On the ground, Piro stumbled briefly. Noticing the difference in gravity, he adjusted his Reeboks and paid closer attention to his footing.

Atlas inspected several divorcées en route to the public facilities. As he removed the panties from the final specimen, he shook his head in appreciation of local craftsmanship. "Superb elastic modulus," he observed as he continued to work his fingers in and out of the moist folds beneath her clitoris. "Responsive, too."

Piro hit up the vending machines. "The ship is eating," he snapped into his commlink. "Roger that," confirmed Atlas.

Slake Bottom was fifteen years gone and still there was nothing Piro could do to rectify the situation. Unacceptable. Inevitable. He inserted the seventy dollars change.