

With a steadily increasing vibration, the *Sentinel* shuddered, but then all vibration abruptly ceased as the ship unexpectedly dropped out of hyperspace.

There was a loud bang from the engine room and the acrid smell of something burning, then another alarm sounded.

“Fire!” I yelled out as smoke rapidly billowed out of the engine room before being cut off as a bulkhead slammed closed.

Beside the closed bulkhead, an indicator lit up illuminating a sign: ‘CAUTION – FIRE SUPPRESSION UNDER WAY!’

“Problem?” Dave asked with a smirk.

“Nothing major – I hope...” I replied with a grimace as Kate appeared.

“The fire is out, mistress. The primary power coupling for the secondary blade of the primary hyperspace generator has burnt out,” Kate explained. “It will need to be replaced...”

“No shit, super-brain!” I retorted, then I looked at Dave. “Well it can’t get any worse...”

All the lights went out as the main power failed completely and we were all plunged into darkness.

“... Kriff!”

“But then again...” Dave quipped.

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Mindy was *not* happy!

In fact, I was keeping well out of her way as she swore violently at what passed for the *Sentinel*’s vital components. She wore a face mask to help her breath as the thick black, choking smoke was still clogging the engine room – there was no functioning air conditioning to suck the smoke away! I was wearing a breathing mask too and it was very uncomfortable.

“Hey, asshole – keep that light steady!”

I kept the light steady as I watched her small hands deftly manoeuvre tools and electronic parts smoothly and efficiently.

“Got it!”

There was a satisfying clunk and all the lights snapped on. Mindy smiled and climbed out of the innards of her ship. I turned off the work-light.

“Temperamental bitch!” Mindy growled as she patted her ship.

As if in response, we were instantly plunged back into total darkness.

“I think you may have missed something...” Kate offered unhelpfully, his eyes glowing in the darkness.

There was a dull ‘thunk’ as something metallic hit something else metallic.

“That hurt on so many levels...” Kate commented.

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Two hours later, all power was restored.

The smoke was gone and the hyperspace generator was functional – at ninety-two percent; I would need to find some hard cash and buy some much-needed parts which were *not* going to be cheap! I felt rather embarrassed when I found Dave smirking in the Lounge.

“Sorry about that – she can be a problem at times. She needs a damn good overhaul...” I paused as Dave reached out and rubbed some oil off my bare shoulder.

My skin tingled as he touched it – what was wrong with me?

“I’m a mess!” I responded.

Any further, possibly interesting, thoughts were cut off as another alarm sounded.

“Aw come on!” I screamed as I ran for the Cockpit.

Two resounding crashes shook the *Sentinel*...

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“Somebody is shooting at us!”

“I had kinda noticed, Dave, but thanks for updating me!” I growled back as I slid into my seat.

We had dropped out of hyperspace in a bad neighbourhood – part of the Inner Rim. We still had a long way to go to Tatooine and now we were being attacked. I looked out of the Cockpit to try and see what had attacked us.

The ship was not large, slightly smaller than our own and, I assumed, lightly armed by the fact that the blasts were not penetrating our armour. They were not a major threat, but the *Sentinel* had enough problems without further damage.

“Kate – power up the upper and lower laser cannons and slave them to Cockpit targeting...”

The front of the cockpit was made up of five windows, the centre of which was circular. Around the top half of this circular window were four equal sized windows forming a 180-degree spread. Within a minute, a green targeting overlay appeared on the upper pair of the four windows.

“Cool!” Dave commented.

“I can fire either or both of the two quad laser cannons mounted on the top and bottom of the ship, from here. That other ship is small and under normal circumstances a YT-2400 could be easy prey – only the *Sentinel* is, as I said before – not stock!”

“So that idiot out there, has no idea what he has just taken on?”

“Exactly!”

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Mindy pulled the ship into a tight turn and accelerated hard to cut off the attacker.

I noticed that she flew the ship amazingly fluidly with Kate looking after everything except for the actual flying and shooting. Kate’s involvement was obviously a huge help to Mindy as the ship was fought.

She was an amazing pilot – but so was the guy flying the other ship! Both vessels twisted and weaved as they tried to avoid incoming fire and also to get into a good position to engage the other. I had a distinct feeling that the other pilot had now figured out that this particular YT-2400 was *not* going to be easy pickings! After some fast manoeuvring, we were in position and I saw the target in the heads-up-display surrounded by a set of four red flashing arrows. Then I was stunned as multiple red laser bolts erupted from above and beneath the *Sentinel*, over to our left.

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The *Sentinel* was certainly well armed! Several of the laser bolts struck home causing small explosions on the hull and the other ship to buck and shake.

“Yeah!” Mindy yelled out as she spun the ship around for another pass at the G9 light freighter.

The gun at the end of the strut, which extended out from the starboard side of the freighter, turned to follow us, emitting green bursts in our direction – until Mindy blew it off! I whooped with joy, which Mindy blushed at, but she smiled through it nonetheless. The enemy craft was not twisting and turning so much, not now it was trailing wreckage behind it at least.

“Should we let him go?” I said pointedly.

“Kriff no!” Mindy replied, sending another burst into the main body of the other vessel.

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I grinned broadly as the other vessel came apart.

I loved my life!

“Kate – safe the guns and get us back into hyperspace...”

“So, who was he?” Dave asked.

“Don’t know – don’t care – he attacked *me!*”

“You are one cold bitch!”

“Yes, I am!”

“I’m starting to like you, Mindy...”

“You ain’t seen nothing yet, Dave...”

As we finished speaking, the *Sentinel* accelerated forwards, past the smouldering wreckage of the freighter and onwards into the blue shroud of hyperspace.

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An hour later, I was kicking Mindy in her left side.

It was retaliation for a sharp kick in my own side – which hurt! Our sparring had moved on from exploratory and it was now decidedly invasive... I also learnt that Mindy was *not* a good loser – when she found herself losing, she doubled her efforts and the girl had a lot of stamina for somebody so young.

“You should learn when to quit,” I commented between breaths.

“Don’t know the meaning of the word...” Mindy spat out, just as breathless as I was.

“Could be useful in a tough situation,” I replied.

“Tell me about it...”

Mindy tried to spin-kick me, but she was exhausted – what with all the day’s activity – so she crashed into me and we both went down, rolling into a heap with her on top of me. I found myself gazing into her mesmerizingly beautiful green eyes. Mindy seemed to be doing the same; gazing into my own eyes, but then her face suddenly went pink and she jumped to her feet.

“Sorry about that...” she stammered as she stood above me.

“I’m not complaining,” I replied with a grin.

Mindy went a deeper shade of pink and then glared at me for a moment before reaching down to pull me to my feet.

“I know somebody who sounds just like you...” she commented without any further elaboration.

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Damn!

That felt... good...

I made an excuse about checking the Cockpit and Dave went to bed – we were both shattered after the day’s events. I decided that I needed some time to myself – to calm down! I had some thinking to do. I knew next to nothing about Dave, but something inside me said that I could trust him – and that I *should* trust him.

Kate had run some checks on Dave, which were inconclusive. For now, I would trust him – I had to... I needed too; I was fed up with being alone. Kate did not count – he was a damn droid; I wanted a partner – and *not* a sidekick either...

What was I thinking? I had only known him a little over a day and...

Why was I drawn to Dave? There was a bond there, but I had no idea what – I was a firm believer in fate, so maybe it would all come clear... over time.

I was still thinking about Dave when I lay down on my bunk and I considered going to talk with him, but sleep overtook me.

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There was no sign of Mindy when I awoke, so I went and showered.

As I walked past the Lounge, I noticed that the door to Mindy’s cabin was open and light was flooding out. I took a couple more paces and turned to say...

Mindy was standing with her back to me, putting her hair up in a pony-tail – nothing strange about that you might say, only she had no top on! I caught a glance in the mirror of Mindy’s bare chest and I began to turn away.

“Am I that bad?” Mindy laughed.

I turned away completely and after a moment I felt a hand on my back. I turned to see Mindy, this time with a top on – a dark purple top with long sleeves.

“Sorry if I startled you...” I began. “You look beautiful...”

“Don’t be,” Mindy said cheerfully, her face going pink. “I’m not used to having others onboard, so I forgot...”

“No harm done,” I replied with a smirk.

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After breakfast, Mindy took me through the *Sentinel’s* controls in the Cockpit. I was familiar with certain aspects of flying and I had flown, once or twice, but nothing as large as the *Sentinel*. Mindy was a very good teacher and was patient with me when I made mistakes – although Kate was not and he often made disparaging remarks about my skills!

We dropped out of hyperspace to allow the damaged hyperspace generator time to cool down. Mindy gave me instructions to fly the *Sentinel* towards a small moon where we would be harder to detect – we had no desire to be attacked again.

However, we found somebody already there.

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It was another Corellian Engineering Corporation freighter, which while more than a bit battered, was otherwise very familiar.

I grinned, reached for a headset and hit a button on the console. I threw another headset at Dave before I spoke.

“What the hell is *that* rust-bucket doing here?” I called.

“What’s up, Hit-Girl – you lost?” The cheery voice called back with a friendly chuckle.

“Well, I don’t want directions from a chauvinistic pig like you!”

“You love me really...”

I cut the communication and chuckled.

“Is that guy safe?” Dave queried.

“Well, there’s safe and then there’s safe...”

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Once the two ships were docked – we were latched onto the other vessel’s port Docking Ring – I made preparations to greet the crew of the other ship.

“He called you ‘Hit-Girl’?”

“Yeah – about that... You’ve probably worked out that I’m not just Melieme Rhohal...”

“Who?”

“Melieme Rhohal – me...”

“But I thought you were ‘Mindy’?”

“Yeah, well I never liked Melieme, so I went with my middle name: Mindy, when I was about four... Anyway – that guy knows me as the bounty-hunter, Hit-Girl. He probably also knows my real name –

he's not stupid, but we give nothing away for free in my line of business – nor his, either, for that matter. I wouldn't recommend letting him know your real name, so..."

Dave looked at me expectantly – I was thinking hard and fast.

"Well, you can kick ass and you do it really well... That kick damn well hurt – so let's call you: Kick-Ass!"

"Kick-Ass!" Dave did *not* sound impressed.

"Yeah – we'll go with that..."

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I walked out of the Cockpit, followed by the unconvinced Dave. After ducking into my cabin for a moment, Dave gave me a raised eyebrow as I strapped on my blaster and belt.

"Better to be safe than sorry – I would very much like to live to see fourteen!"

Our progress was blocked part-way around the Doughnut when Kate stepped into view. He was holding a pistol belt together with a Model 57 blaster pistol.

"I think Master Kick-Ass should be suitably attired, Mistress Hit-Girl!"

Sometimes, Kate had some good ideas... We continued around to the Airlock and the Docking Ring. Once I had checked that the Airlock was correctly pressurised, I pressed the button to open the inner doors. I walked through to the outer doors of the Docking Ring where the indicator showed a positive pressure on the other side.

I took a deep breath and with my right hand on my blaster, I stabbed the 'open' button for the airlock.