

"Are you even listening?" the frustrated voice asked.

"Oh, sorry, I zoned out", a woman's voice answered.

"Yeah, you keep doing that", the frustrated man retorted, displeased by the answer, "along with everybody else on the crew as of late."

"I know we're due earthbound soon but that's no excuse to start slipping up on the job, alright? Somebody could get hurt", he continued.

"You're right, John. Thank you for the reminder", the woman said as she sharply cleaned up her posture. "Now, what was it you'd have me do?"

"Just need you to keep an eye on the gauge and let me know if I'm doing something wrong here", John answered, while already having turned back towards the intricate machinery within the open wall panel and working the parts with the two slim tools he was holding.

"You're still in the green", the woman said after moving her focus to the gauge, whose electronic display was blinking at a steady pace with a green-colored bar filling up its indicated bounds about three-quarters of the way.

"They're really cutting it close this time. Ship's barely holding it together. Let's hope we make it", John said.

"Tell me about it. The lab is almost unusable at this point. My guys are spending more time repairing than actually conducting research", the woman said, shaking her head in disapproval. "I guess this is what we get when the decision-makers are so far removed from the actual process."

"As long as I get back home in one piece, I'm happy enough", John said.

"Don't forget the rest of us", Erin peeped.

"Of course not, I will always be there to save anyone of my crew", John said with a fake heroic voice.

"But yeah", John continued more seriously, "this stuff is why I'm going to start working on going indie first thing earthside. I want to at least feel in control while I'm up here, to know exactly what to expect."

"You know, John, I've given that some thought", the woman jumped in as the opportunity had presented itself, "as cozy as corp gigs can be, it's nothing compared to working for ourselves, right? I'm in."

"But I have a feeling it won't alleviate this whole 'ship's breaking down while we're still in it' problem", she added jokingly.

"Glad to hear it, Erin", John nodded, relieved. "We would have been severely lacking in the brain department without you."

"And you know what they say: 'it's better to die for yourself than to live for another'", he continued.

"Literally no one says that", Erin laughed.

"Well I just did", John chirped.

"Alright, alright, but let's get earthside intact first. Gauge's starting to dip", Erin said as she glanced back at the display.

“Oh shit”, John mumbled as he adjusted his tools. “Grab those pincers and hold them up slightly so they don’t droop and cut off the supply”, he followed up and Erin swiftly did as instructed.

“Almost done here”, John broke the multiple minute-long silence as the two of them had fallen into deep concentration after the gauge had gone into the orange and the urgency of the repair had risen significantly. “Thanks for the help by the way. I know it’s not your post or duty”, he continued as he started to pack up tools that were no longer necessary.

“An acute lack of oxygen would definitely affect my actual duties though, so I don’t mind helping-”, Erin started, waving her hand.

A warning signal suddenly started broadcasting through the ship’s overhead speaker system. “Fuck! Let’s move”, John asserted as he sprung onto his feet and started running down the corridor with Erin right behind him.

“The source looks to be one of the entry bays. Auto-locks are in place looks like”, Erin panted as she tried to catch her breath while relaying to John what she was seeing in the ship’s interior map display.

“Must be a perforation, we need to go and fix it. Are any of the suit chambers safe?” John spat out, breathing heavily while looking around for possible doorways.

“Looks like A3 is closest out of the still-functioning ones. Let’s go”, Erin answered and the two of them quickly spun around and started sprinting towards the chamber.

“This is my usual so all my tools are here; you on support, alright?” John asserted as he darted into the chamber as soon as the pressure doors opened, started to suit up, pointing Erin to the one she should use as the warning signal started to intensify, indicating the situation in the entry bay getting worse.

“Ready?” Erin asked with her hand on the lever to open the exit hatch.

“Ready”, John said after grabbing his toolkit and walking over to hold on to a handle in preparation for the depressurization.

“Holy shit”, Erin gasped through the radio relay in both of their suits as the two of them maneuvered over the bend towards where the entry bay could be found and saw the gash in the ship hull, with equipment, ship parts and crew members scattered around the empty space in a rough line leading from the tear.

“This is bad”, John said quietly, “but don’t lose focus and always make sure you’re attached to the safety.”

“Support kit has a longer tether, use it to grab some of those plating pieces so I can start to patch up the tear. The bay has been depressurized already so I can just seal it up. There’s no helping those out in the cold so the priority right now is to fix the tear so it doesn’t widen”, he continued while pulling himself towards the tear by grabbing on to the safety line that runs lengthwise across the ship on the outside of the hull.

“On it”, Erin said and attached her tether to the safety, took aim and jumped off of the hull, grabbing a piece of outside plating before reeling herself back in and handing it over to John, who then takes out his welder and starts to patch up the tear.

“Tear must have torn wider by debris getting shot out from depressurization and some of the crew must have rushed in initially while it was still small in hopes of repairing it but got sucked out along with everything else that wasn’t welded on”, John explained absent-mindedly while focusing on welding on the plating parts brought over by Erin.

“Oh god...” Erin muttered as she misjudged one jump and bumped into the floating body of one of her fellow crew members before suppressing all thoughts and focusing fully on her current task, not wanting the tear to spread to other, still pressurized compartments of the ship.

“You’re doing well, Erin, just keep looking at the plating pieces and me, nothing else”, John tried to reassure Erin while trying to keep his welding in pace with how fast the plating pieces kept coming.

“Fuck, my tether!” Erin shouted as she jumped off once more, failing to notice the support kit’s tether was worn out and had snapped just as her feet left the hull.

“I’ve got y-“ John started, reaching out to grab the end of the tether as it flung off along with Erin, his suit gloves failing to grip it as it slipped through his fingers. He jumped off of the hull to try and grab it but Erin’s momentum had been so strong that the end of her tether was just out of reach, and John’s short tether yanked him back before he could close in on the distance with his own momentum.

“Shit...” John exhaled.

“John? John, please! Help me help me help me!” Erin kept shouting over the radio as she kept floating off farther and farther from the ship.

“There’s... There’s nothing, Erin. It’s fucked”, John said apologetically. “Corp skimmed on the safety equipment, there’s no jets or any other maneuverability gear. I’m sorry.”

“...” the radio buzzed as if to begin broadcasting, but nothing but static could be heard. It went on for a few moments before cutting out completely, leaving John to finish patching up the tear in silence before returning back onto the ship.