

Yippark rifled through his case of cassette tapes, taking only moments to read the poorly written title on each one before moving to the next. “No, no... no. Oh? There we go,” he said, satisfied. Pulling out a worn cassette tape, the paper label upon it worn from being inserted into a player over and over again over the years, he flipped it over his fingers then fit it snugly into his cassette player that hung off his side. Once he got snug in the pilot’s seat, he turned the cassette player on and relaxed, hands behind the back of his helm as he stared at the twinkling void of space from the safety of his ship. Though the helm he wore looked to be made of opaque refracted glass in the front that hid his face entirely from view, he still enjoyed the vastness before him, serpentine tail wagging from between the hole in his seat.

This moment of peace was swiftly interrupted however, as his music was paused and the antenna attached to his helmet picked up a signal from one of his allies, Legion’s Workshop.

“Yippark, are you available?” a voice on the other end crackly asked. It was Tachy, he’d recognize it any day.

“It’s my day off, not supposed to be testing new mech models for you,” he replied.

“I don’t exactly need you for any of that, silly, but... bzzt... pirate’s stole blueprints for our latest mech, the Neverender and you’re the closest to them... bzzt.”

“Let me guess, you need me to get them back?”

“Yep! I’ll send you the coordinates... bzzt... catch them if you can. I will let them know they have a buyer through our unofficial channels.” Yippark’s tail stopped wagging as he stood up on his feline-like legs.

“I’ll take care of it,” he replied.

“Good, let me know when... bzzt... got it. Thanks! Signing out.”

“I never do get a break, but that seems to be the case for most kobolds doesn’t it?”

Yippark sighed. Already dressed for the job in his dark green recon gear, the steel plates on the thighs and upper arms lit up with motes of blue light. “Not too far away thankfully,” he acknowledged as he read the coordinates from the comfort of the interior of his helm. “Should be about an hour trip, another hour to clean up and get the cargo, and then another hour to get to safety. Three hours? Plenty of time to relax while I guess.”

Yippark patted his holster to ensure his firearm was at ready, but found it missing. He looked around and saw it laying idly next to the ship’s control panel. “One day I’m going to forget to bring that thing with me and someone is going to steal it,” he said with a shake of his head. “Not like many lancers use revolvers like these anymore, high-caliber and able to take anyone out if they’re out of their mech. When you’re fighting in mechs, not much help after all, but perfect for stuff like this,” Yippark shrugged. “Anyway.” He holstered the firearm and then turned to the control panel of his ship.

“Yugoloth, fly to these coordinates, do not engage artillery until we leave,” he commanded.

“Affirmative,” Yugoloth replied in a masculine voice.

“Get in, get out,” he told himself. “Pretend you’re here to buy and no one has to get hurt... though,” he felt the holstered firearm at his side. “Not that I’d mind that if it comes to that.”

“Coordinates locked, prepared to depart. Would you like to leave?” Yugoloth asked.

“Hit it,” Yippark said. Yugoloth then whirred to life as it creaked with age and blasted off towards its destination.

The trip there was a simple affair. Thirty minutes and it was done. The Yugoloth controlled ship floated near the pirate’s battle vessel and from his seat, Yippark could see markings on it depicting a skull with a spear through it painted in red. A warning to all about what awaited any who opposed the pirates. Yippark snickered, a warning for those who weren’t prepared at least. He checked to make sure his revolver was prepared, hidden away in a compartment in his suit, then turned on the comms unit.

“You the buyer we after?” a voice cackled from the comms unit.

“That’s me,” Yippark responded.

“Good, come aboard, you’ll be checked before purchase,” the voice told him.

“Will do,” Yippark said and turned off the comms unit. “Yugaloth board the ship,” Yippark commanded.

“As you wish,” it said. During this, the boarding bay of the pirate’s ship began to open for entry and with a swift flight, Yippark was aboard. “Oxygen levels stabilized in the outdoor environment, you are safe to leave,” Yugaloth told Yippark and opened up its own doors. The boarding bay was filled with smaller raiding ships useful for attacking other vessels, though there were surprisingly no mechs to be seen anywhere near. Typically, Yippark would expect at least one shoddy mech to deal with one guarding a merchant ship, but perhaps these pirates weren’t as interested in that side of piracy. It did make Yippark wonder how they managed to steal blueprints, but criminals can be crafty, so he didn’t think of it much further, not that he could with a small legion of them coming in to greet him.

The man at the head, a robust fellow with a bushy beard who towered over the comparatively short kobold. “My friend! You come here to buy? We got exactly what you need if you have the money,” the man greeted with arms wide as a keyring jingled at his waist. The rest of his rough and tumble entourage stood menacingly behind him for a moment, then began milling about the boarding bay, though a lengthy one stayed behind.

“Yeah, I’m here to buy the Neverender blueprints,” Yippark said. “Got plenty of cash to cover it.” The lengthy pirate patted Yippark’s body and then pushed him over to a metal table nearby filled with clutter from empty cans to miscellaneous tools, then walked away. A part of Yippark wanted to shoot him then and there for the disrespect, but he needed to get his hands on the blueprints first before moving to anything drastic. As the bushy beard pirate sat down, he wiped all the trash and junk off the table to the ground with a clang then, inviting Yippark to join him as his face turned dour.

“So, what makes you think I won’t kill ya after taking your money?” he asked.

“Uhhhh, because that’s bad for business?” Yippark responded with a head tilt.

The pirate then began simply laughing until he nearly fell over. Yippark wasn’t sure what was so funny, so sat there with a blank expression beneath his concealing helm.

“You’re a serious one, I’ll give you that. But you’re right there, name’s Captain Dreadhold, I welcome you to my ship and I’m glad to do business with you. No matter how...” the Captain inspected Yippark closely, “anonymous you are. I’ve done business with worse though.”

Yippark laughed in his mind. The Captain will likely be singing a different tune soon enough.

“So, about the nature of payment. I expect two hundred Manna in my account, then you can see the blueprints.”

“Where are the blueprints?”

“Files are all on a dataslate in my office kept in a blast-locked safe up there,” he pointed to a windowed balcony above them. “Stole ‘em off those Legion’s Workshop idiots fair and square during an infiltration from one of our contacts, want ‘em sold and we don’t need ‘em, so have the whole thing,” the Captain explained.

“I think I will,” Yippark responded as his revolver flung out of his suit into his hand and put a shot right through Captain Dreadhold’s skull. He fell back with a thump to the ground, blood pooling from out his skull, and all eyes turned towards Yippark. “Let’s dance,” Yippark said as he rolled over and grabbed the keyring off the Captain’s belt.

“That thing killed the captain!” the lengthy pirate yelled. “Deadlock the doors and make sure he don’t get out of ‘ere alive, boys!” He then pulled out his own firearm and took a shot at Yippark, partially damaging the paneling on the helm. “This next one won’t miss,” he told him.

“Then you won’t make it,” Yippark replied with a shot to his chest. At this point, others had begun grabbing their weapons and shooting or approaching the kobold hastily to avenge their captain. Yippark looked towards the circular entrance further into the compound. Still open. That’s all he needed. Taking a few shots at the pirates while running over to the door, he felled a few then got through and shut the door. Behind it was another scrawny pirate who seemed to be moving towards the boarding bay. He put up his hands in fisticuffs and dashed towards Yippark defensively. Each shot from Yippark’s revolver missed as the pirate dodged out of the way, then he needed to reload, but there wasn’t time. The pirate made a punch and Yippark slid out of the way just in time and tripped him up as he swept under his legs. The pirate hit his head off the door and got up in a daze, but by the time he was ready to return the favor, he already had a hole through his head. Banging came from the other side of the door as people tried to break in, throwing out threats if Yippark didn’t let them in.

“Not getting through that, for now at least,” Yippark commented. “Need to get to that office now.”

Yippark ran through winding hallways, going further up in the ship’s labyrinthian layout. Thankfully, it seemed most of the pirates had made their way to the boarding bay, but that’d make getting out all the harder. However, soon enough, he made it to the office. It was as much

of a mess as the captain was, but behind the disaster zone was a large locked safe right on top of his desk. As Yippark traversed the trash that covered the ground, he noticed the safe had a series of three locks and an eye scanner. “Well that’s a small problem…” he paused for a moment and looked over to the balcony with a thought in his mind. Swiftly, he unlocked the three locks he could with the keychain he stole from the captain, then he lifted the safe up with all the might he could muster. “Hopefully this doesn’t break anything!” he yelled as he whirled around and tossed it through the glass, jumping after it.

“What was that?!” one of the pirates yelled as Yippark fell through the air. Once they saw the kobold falling, they readied their aim to fire, but with three carefully placed shots, he took out several pirates and hit the ground with a clang, the safe hitting it with a crunch. Yippark then looked around for the captain, a few pirates flanking the body, with the safe not too far away. He ran for his life towards the corpse, taking one pirate out with a shot to the chest, then pulling out a knife from his side and stopping the other from taking a shot. The gun the pirate held went flying, then a knife went in his chest and Yippark grabbed the bulky body of the captain, dragging it to the safe as he used the body as a shield. Once he finally made it over, fending off pirates who got too close with his knife, he placed the body’s eye on the scanner while hiding behind it and the safe’s door blew open. With dataslate in view, Yippark nabbed it and made a break for his ship while reloading. The pirate’s made potshots at him as he retreated, Yippark returning fire and felling a few before he got away, but right as he boarded his ship, he took a shot right through his arm.

“Got ‘em boys!” a pirate with a sniper rifle yelled from the balcony. In Yippark’s arm, electricity buzzed and circuits bzzted. “Wait, why ain’t he dead?!” the pirate exclaimed. It didn’t matter, Yippark was already aboard his ship and out of there, with nothing but a need for a few repairs.

“I got the dataslate, Tachy,” Yippark said on comms as his ship reached a safe destination.

“I’ve heard! The pirates are raving about it on unofficial channels,” he replied over comms. “It seems you got hurt though, going to need to fix you up. Luckily you’re not too far off from a dropoff point. Stop by and we’ll get you fixed up and can get the dataslate from you. Does that sound good?” Tachy asked.

“I’d like to get some music for a job well done first, if that’s alright with the folks at Legion’s Workshop?” he asked.

“Yippark! You’re hurt, I don’t want you getting hurt even more.”

“I’ll survive, be there in an hour.”

“Just be safe alright?” Tachy told him.

“Couldn’t imagine myself any other way,” then Yippark switched off comms.

As the ship approached a merchant vessel, he boarded and made his way towards the music shop aboard. The store had a nostalgic sting to it, the smell of ages old tape hanging in the air, while records hung on the way. Yippark browsed through the old cassette tapes for something

to suit this recent adventure. As he flicked through each tape, he found one that seemed to have been listened to time after time, titled *Bang Bang*. If anyone could see him that day, they'd tell you Yippark had lighter steps and a bit more energy despite everything. It was time for something new after all he'd been through.