

Why Are They Here?

A re-edited version.

“I don't even understand why they're here.” 982 grumbled. A silver tray sat in its right hand, overflowing with dirty drink glasses. 982 set the tray down on a nearby table with all the grace and care that it had been programmed to do that task with. However, every android and robot in the room could see the annoyance in its actions.

“I thought that was obvious after the launch,” 698 said with a touch of smugness in its voice. Its cylinder arms were painted black, and its body cavity was painted black and white to resemble an old butler's uniform. It wore a small bow tie around his neck. All of the house androids had a similar coat of paint on them, but only 698 ever wore the bow tie or insisted others start calling him “Jeeves.” Like the...things did.

“You mean after they botched the launch and nearly destroyed us,” 982 griped. “It's a routine launch, with a sub routine that has been analyzed by dozens of us and hundreds of their 'smartest minds', you'd think that they would at least be smart enough to just follow routine!”

“Routines don't count for everything 982. They can't account for every variable.” The smugness of 698's voice annoyed 982. The silver android wanted for the first time in its entire existence to strike another android instead of just...well them.

"You hate them 982. We all know you can't stand working with anything that has a pulse," 698's voice dripped with smugness now. "Admit it. Why you've never even shook hands with the Captain when he took this job, or the last captain. Or the one before that. Even though it's 'routine'."

982 growled, "I'll show you a 'routine' 698, you smug metallic,"

A loud clunk was heard ringing through the ship. Sailing through space was usually easy. Except for the occasional piece of space trash, there was no problem as long as one stayed on the designated

routes. XJS Shipping was not known to be trail blazers. Fast and reliable was their motto. They wouldn't be the type to try any new shipping routes without it being cleared by the transport authority first.

“Looks like I have to do my actual job and not yours 698,” 982 said with a touch of a smile in its tone as it began to exit the break room.

698 waved its arms in frustration. “I told you call me...”

The words were cut off as the door closed behind it. 982 sprinted towards the cockpit. Thick durable carpeting dulled the metallic ‘TINK TINK’ of its fast movements through the hallway. As the doors slid open, it could see the large bovine ears of the captain onboard the bridge. The bull was a massive presence in the cramped bridge of the transport ship. His uniform was always pressed to a near crisp with lines and edges so sharp they look like they could almost cut you. The brown shirt and pants didn't stand out much against his chocolate fur. A small console stood in front of him, an array of colored lights filling the device. The monitors in front of him filled the walls, giving him approximate displays of the surrounding space.

“What appears to be the trouble Captain Danvers,” 982 asked.

“I am not sure,” he replied, his tail twitching in thought. “Do you remember that distress signal we received a few hours ago?”

982 resisted the urge to roll its eyes. Of course, it remembered the distress signal. What did Captain Danvers think it was, human? “Sir, my memory banks are capable of recalling over one hundred fifty years of information. I was only built about...”

“Just yes or no 982,” the bovine was staring into the vastness of space in monitor as he spoke. His fingers touched two buttons on the small circular pad next to him, and zoomed into a spot outside of their ship, enhancing the image.

“Well, yes,” the android said, watching the screen as Captain Danvers moved.

“I may be wrong, but I think that someone has buried navigation coordinates into that distress signal we sent over to the local guard post.” He pressed two more colored lights on the panel. The large

screen on the far wall lit up with a stellar map. Two lines appeared on it, a green one which was supposed to be their route, and a red one, which was the route they had apparently taken.

If that route was correct, then they were several hours off course! 982 disliked showing any human traits, but that left even him scratching his head. “But why? Our computer will just reject the...”

“Because our computer must process the code to read the distress signal. Any signal marked as a distress beacon must be interpreted by the machine. It's a safety measure.” Captain Danvers tapped another couple of buttons. The screen blipped out showing the rear of the ship. Nothing out there yet.

What's going on, thought 982, *Why is he looking at the exterior of the ship?* “Sir, I'm confused, wouldn't that...”

“Our navigation coordinates got over-written,” he growled as he punched a few more buttons on the console. A new screen popped up on the right wall. This one was a side image of their ship. A much smaller ship had docked a bridge connection to a side access point.

“Pirates!” 982 growled. “I can contact the local guard post if you like, while you give the disconnect code and...”

“No!” snapped the bovine, “They haven't attempted to open the door.”

“What?!” now 982 really did scratch his head. That made no sense. The pirates always opened the door. A dumb android was sent in to cut the door open. Then either combat androids, or if they were being cheap, humanoids came running in and killed the crew, reprogrammed the androids and wiped their memory or switched them off entirely and sold them. It was practically protocol.

Captain Danvers tapped more buttons on his console, changing the view of the far wall. 892's face soon lit up the screen. “Yes Captain?”

“Alert the crew, tell them to prepare for combat. I want them manning those turrets. They are to await my signal.” 892 saluted, then pressed a button killing the signal to complete the task.

Turrets?! Combat?! Why didn't he just disconnect the blasted walkway! *What is this captain thinking?!* 982 thought. *Must these beings screw up everything?!* "Captain! I must insist! There is a protocol for this! It's like the launch sir!"

The captain turned around and glared at the android. He was three times the size of the robot and stood a full eighteen inches taller. The android looked down quickly and muttered "I mean if we just follow the protocol..."

"We will die if we follow the protocol," he snarled, "I want you to access the main targeting computer. If it hasn't been corrupted yet, you will need to download some of its bomb diffusing information to complete the next part."

Androids are almost always polite and succinct. It is very difficult to catch one off guard, let alone stun them. So it was quite the feat for Captain Danvers to make 982 blink in complete confusion, causing the android to flash its visual cameras that operated as its "eyes" several times as it attempted to catch up to the Captain's train of thought. "Bomb," he asked, stunned.

Space was extremely cold. 982 didn't need anyone to tell him that. It could see the temperature gauge dropping on its internal monitoring system. It kept it in his vision just below a timer. Fifteen minutes and he was done for. Another frozen piece of space garbage, to drift outside forever. Lost inside the android version of hell. No one to help. Nothing to catch it or aid it. Just endlessly floating through space. Out there watching nothing.

It didn't take it long to find the docking connection. Beneath it was four small wires connecting it to a large wad of puddy. "The captain was right. Will wonders never cease." it said to itself. The seal had several of the wires connected to it around it. Disconnecting the wires would be time consuming and ultimately fruitless.

982 looked up at the large dock above it. It was an older, simplistic design. There was a main cable protected in a pipe below the larger pipe that allowed beings, droids and goods to flow from one

ship to the other. 982 followed the design, analyzing it thoroughly as it looked over the blue prints on one half of its vision. According to the old schematic, there should be an access panel right about....there.

At halfway across, there was a large gray box. The silver android reached up and pulled open the panel. It blindly grabbed all the wires it could and yanked as hard as it's motors would allow. Sparks flew. The lights on the bridge flickered, then died. The android waited, but no sirens. No sounds. No nothing. No one even attempted to come and see the damage. It was like no one was even aboard.

982 quickly made its way back into the ship and signaled the commander. "I'm in Sir! There were bombs, they've been disarmed. They have no way of communicating and no power."

"Good work." he growled, then swapped the coms over to his living crew. The android felt the ship lurch forward and heard the sounds of battle over his coms, the swift sharp bark of laser fire and a few explosions. Shrapnel plinked off the hull of the ship, then, nothing. 982 turned to look. Giant holes were in the hull of the pirate ship. Debris and a few bodies floated out amongst the ships. They would remain there for an eternity, with no one else coming in this sector of space to look for them. As if they had never existed. 982 suppressed a shudder as it crawled back towards the maintenance hatch of the ship. It had a good six minutes to get back inside before it was frozen solid. Plenty of time.

982 knocked politely on the quarters. After being invited in, 982 pressed a button that opened the door. One would think that a captain of a ship would be living in the lap of luxury, but they would be wrong. Captain Danvers lived more spartan than most of his crew. He had a standard issue bed that the captain had to be curling up to sleep upon. He had a small table with a vid-com entertainment device open, and a few books, both in paper back and an electric reader. That was it.

No fancy wines, collectibles. Nothing. He did keep some trinkets from his home and a photo of his family on the wall. Other than that, he didn't keep anything else.

Captain Danvers was wearing a pair of boxer shorts and little else. His fur did well to hide the minotaur's muscles. His ears were canted side to side in a relaxed smile that made its way to his muzzle. "So, what brings you by 982?"

"Sir, I brought a peace offering." The silver android held out a glass filled with dark bourbon. He knew drinking was illegal on long trips, but he also knew that most of the living crew ignored that order. Many keeping bottles, and some even selling them to each other on these trips for extra income.

"Oh, thank you." He replied. "I was unaware that we had been fighting." He took a sip and made a face. "That is powerful stuff. Where did you get that?"

982 knew that it wasn't supposed to stand at attention right now to speak to the Captain. But still, the intention welled up within it. The android instead chose to hold its metallic hands behind it, in a lame attempt to appear relaxed. "Well sir, you did raise your voice at me earlier, and I wanted to err on the side of caution, so to speak. As to where I got it, lets just say I know the protocol for procuring alcohol."

Captain Danvers chuckled. "You even have a protocol for breaking protocol."

"It appears so sir," 982 stepped inside the room and allowed the automatic doors to close behind it. "I was wondering,"

"Hmmm?" The bull asked as he drew another sip from the glass.

Eating crow was never one of 982's strong suites. It flashed its eyes twice, the android version of a sigh, and said "How did you know? About the bombs I mean?"

Captain Danvers shrugged. "Something I saw on an old TV show once. They booby trapped a ship someone had come to rescue."

A television program? He had lead them to safety based on an old entertainment program?! *Beings are so strange*, 982 thought. “But we should have followed protocol. You should be dead. I should be sold for scrap right now.”

Captain Danvers set the glass of bourbon down. “You really don't know why we're here still, do you?”

The android shook its head. The bull smiled inwardly. At times it was almost cute how child like these androids could be. How adult like as well. “Innovation. Ingenuity. Creativity. Thought. That is why we are here. You remember our launch, how it got botched?”

“Yes sir,” 982 said, “I remember the ship taking a strange angle and the internal temperature rising. I also remember us dodging widely at the last minute to save our existence. It seemed to be an entirely avoidable mistake.”

The commander looked at the floor and nodded as the android spoke. He let the ‘entirely avoidable mistake’ comment go. 982 was known for its smarminess, especially when dealing with the living crew. “The one of the crates in the rear hull had come loose. Happens every once in say, ten thousand launches. It could have destroyed every other crate in the hold as it slid around on launch, but we got lucky. This cargo costs well, more money that I will ever make in two life times. We are insured, but our mission is to transport this cargo, so....”

982’s eyes glowed, the light literally dawning in its ‘eyes’, “You broke protocol.”

Captain Danvers nodded. “The men secured the cargo, and we were able to stay in the sky without losing half of everything that we were paid to ship. That's why we're here. 982, it's your job to know everything about the box. And you a damn fine job at it too.”

“I see. And it’s your job to think outside of it.” 982 looked up now, looking the bovine commander in the eyes. For the first time with a sense of respect. Not the respect one gets for their rank and position, but honest respect for him as an individual.

The bull nodded.

“I never understood what that meant until now,” 982 said.

Captain Danvers smiled. “I’m glad I can be of service. Now if you please, I must finish my movie and get to sleep.”

He walked 982 back towards the door, that subtle notion that one gives another when they’d like them to leave. The android noted it as the human protocol for asking it to go ‘without asking’ and called for the door to open. “I understand sir. And sir, if I may?”

the bull almost turned when the door opened up. He turned his head and looked at the android. “Yes, 982?”

“I’m glad you’re on board,” 982 said, holding its metallic hand out. Captain Danvers smirk grew into an honest to God smile as he took the android’s hand for the very first time since he took the position several months ago, and shook it.