

Random Sci-Fi Vignette

Lus' characters, in space! Some random slice-of-life by Lus Rangifer (aka Eaglehooves)

Tssssssssssssssffff

Hearing the sound of the automatic door, the goat anthro raised a curious eyebrow. Since the next leg of their trip had the *Summersong* in hyperspace for sixteen hours, the captain had dismissed everyone to go do their own thing for a while. After getting a good rest in and still having a ton of time to kill, Gwendolyn had figured she'd go down to the makeshift firing range tucked into a pressurized dead space on the ship's belly, and just spend some time to herself keeping her skills sharp and just... contemplating things.

Setting down the bolt assembly that was in her hoof-hand, she looked up towards the door to see what appeared to be a sheep in a hazmat suit and gas mask standing in it, waiting patiently for her acknowledgement.

"Heya Mary," She said, turning back to look at the disassembled weapon in front of her. "What brings you down here? We're not supposed to be anywhere for quite a while yet."

"Oh, just thought I'd come down and see how you were doing." A synthesized female voice responded, the rubber sheep automaton making her way over to the workbench the goat was seated at. "Just checking in on my crew and all that."

"Don't you have the ship's internal cameras and such for that?" Gwendolyn asked, stifling a chuckle. "What really brings you all the way down here? Aren't you supposed to be flying this thing?"

"The ship doesn't really need me to hold a straight line, so I docked in my bunk and did an extended sleep and recharge cycle, then I tried some new hobby plugins, and... I've still got processing cycles to kill."

The goat chuckled aloud. Mary may have been the most personable (sheepable?) machine she'd ever encountered, but there was still something amusing about the idea of a drone getting bored, and something kinda adorable about the very synthetic way she said it.

Mary's lenses lit up with a happy looking crescent of light at the sound of her friend's laughter, her non-articulated face seemingly expressing enjoyment as if she wanted to chuckle as well, before an over-awareness of the moment caused Gwendolyn to stop. The idea of a bored automaton had been genuinely amusing, but suddenly it felt like a laugh at her expense, and the soft, rounded, diminutive little drone with her caring, helpful personality was just too sweet to laugh at like that.

“So... what are you doing?” The little sheep asked, leaning to the side to attempt to peer around the much larger goat, either oblivious to Gwendolyn’s awkwardness or completely unaffected by it.

“Oh, just cleaning some weapons, checking the sights...” She trailed off, watching as the little sheep surveyed what was laid out on the table, before an idea suddenly hit her. “Do ya wanna try one of them out?”

Mary walked along the table for a moment, seemingly scanning the assortment of weapons before her, before pausing in front of a large submachine gun.

“What’s this one?” She asked, cocking her head to the side in a show of inquisitiveness.

“Ooo... that’s one of my favorites,” Gwendolyn started, excitement rising in her voice as she picked it up from the table. “It’s a reproduction of a vintage, *vintage* human design known as the MP5, but chambered for the fifty cal’ ‘arctic eagle’ round, and fitted with a trigger and trigger guard design that’s more friendly for hoof-hands.”

They both stood frozen in silence for a moment as the drone seemed to think- er... process(?) what was said, before Gwendolyn stepped around the table.

“Here. Let’s see what you think after you get to hold it.” Gently, she raised the drone’s left arm and placed the handguard of the weapon into her glove-like hoof, before placing the stock into the squishy rubber “wool” of her shoulder and placing her right hoof onto the pistol grip for support. “What’cha think?”

“Hm...” The drone trailed off, her hum turning into a little hissing of gasses from her respirator as she shifted her grip slightly, looking down the sights for a moment before lowering the weapon. “The ergonomics are pretty good.”

“You wanna put it through its paces for real now?” Gwendolyn asked, picking up a magazine from the bench.

Mary turned her head to look at her, the light behind her lenses turning to circles, giving her a stunned, wide eyed appearance.

“Like... you mean actually shoot it?” She asked, cocking her head to the side in confusion.

“Yeah, why not?” Gwendolyn responded, shrugging her shoulders. “It’s something different to try, something new.”

“I’m a utility automaton, not a military model. I’m not allowed to engage in violence unless it is defensive in nature, in protection of my ship or of the crew within my care...” Mary replied as

she looked down at the weapon in her hooves, the sky-blue light behind one of her dark, round lenses flattening out and slowly shifting upwards into the appearance of raised eyebrow.

“...although I suppose that restriction does not preclude some recreational target shooting.”

“Heh.” Gwendolyn snorted. “I take that as a yes, then?”

Following the drone to the window of the range proper, Gwendolyn stepped up behind the smaller sheep as she took a firing pose. Hovering over her, she inserted the magazine into the weapon with a click as she started into the instructions.

“Now there’s a handle near your front hand. You’re gonna pull that back and down, then let go of it to chamber a round. It’s spring loaded, so it will snap forward on it’s own, you don’t have to push it. Then there’s a little switch on the handguard near your, uh... if you had thumbs, it’s where your thumb would be. You’re gonna want to click that one notch over for single shot, then take your time and line up the sights, and squeeze the trigger nice and deliberately when you’re ready.” She paused, looking down at the little sheep protectively. “It’s gonna kick, but I’m behind you.”

“Got it,” she squeaked, giving a nod.

What happened next played out faster than Gwendolyn could process and intervene.

Rather than pulling the charging handle back and down as Gwendolyn described, the sheep smacked it with the side of her hoof, knocking it out of the catch and sending it forward, then sweeping her hoof back under the handguard with a single motion. Just as quickly her other hoof mashed the safety selector, flicking it past the pictogram of a single bullet to point at a pictogram of a half dozen bullets, before quickly returning her hoof to the oversized trigger and firmly pulling it all the way back with no hesitation.

Closing her eyes and wincing, Gwendolyn tensed, ready to grab and brace the sheep the moment the recoil knocked her backwards into her chest. Even though she wasn’t watching she could hear the crack of gunfire fill the air, followed by the slamming of the old-school human mechanism reciprocating and the pinging of spent brass, one cycle overlapping with the next in a full-auto cacophony.

What Gwendolyn wasn’t expecting next was the hollow click of the weapon attempting to cycle while empty. Cautiously opening one eye, she watched the little sheep pull the bolt halfway open as she tilted the gun to the side and peered into it, before pulling it all the way back and placing the cocking handle up into the catch. Not waiting for instruction, she pushed the paddle to release the magazine, causing the empty one to fall to the floor with a metallic clattering, then clicked the selector back into the ‘safe’ position with the tip of her hoof and lowered the weapon.

Opening her other eye, Gwendolyn turned her head downrange to look at what kind of chaos had resulted, only for her jaw to drop at what she saw. The silhouette of a person was perforated with more shots than she could quickly count at that distance, but what was notable was the complete *lack* of holes on the poster anywhere outside of the target.

“Your sights are wrong. The windage adjustment screw needs to be rotated 38 degrees in the clockwise direction.” Mary said, putting a step between her and her stunned goat before turning around and placing the weapon into her hooves.

Silently, Gwendolyn stared down at her submachine gun, then back up at the cheery, petite rubber sheep standing before her, then back down at the gun, then back up to watch the sheepdrone cock her head in confusion and display a confused eyebrow raise in her lenses.

“...” Gwendolyn’s mouth hung open, but she couldn’t find any words.

Shrugging and resetting the light in her lenses to her usual happy crescents, Mary bounced her way across the room and back out the door, resuming her duties.

“Thanks for letting me shoot your gun!” Mary chimed, as the door slid closed behind her.

Gwendolyn continued to stand frozen in silence for a while, before slowly turning to face the door that had by then been closed for a good half minute or so.

“...what was *THAT?*”