

It wasn't the sounding of the proximity alarm that awoke the bomber pilot aboard the starfighter Lenny. Nor was it the burning sensation slowly creeping up his lower back from being strapped to his chair for longer than he could remember.

No... what finally woke Volox-V11 was the shaking of his two dashboard bound figurines, an annoying cacophony of rustic squeaks and twangs as the bobblehead cat and dog shook back and forth erratically. The black grinning cat seemed to bounce in rhythm to the alarm reverberating off the ship's canopy, while the spotted dog bounced to its own tune, creating a symphony of vexing chaos.

He groaned while stretching out his limber arms to shut off the alarm, his mind unable to grasp in the moment that he should be awake and terrified. His consciousness formed a much nicer delusion of sitting asleep on his couch at home, but it lasted only a split second before his eyes snapped open bringing him back to sentience. Hot, crippling pain from a dozen different points on his body almost caused him to blackout again, but he gritted his teeth and tried to breathe as searing light flashed from above. Ragged breathes didn't ease the pain, but he was finally able to open and focus his eyes. His attention was fully captured by the proximity alarm that had been screaming into his ears since regaining consciousness.

He glanced at the numbers appearing both below and above the spherical see-through readout... pausing to reread a specific count that caught his attention. He stared at it as the ship shuddered and bounced his chin off his chest, snapping his jaw shut.

'This can't be right,' Volox pondered to himself. 'If this was true that would mea...'
The shaking of the ship suddenly grew more urgent in his ears at the realization of his current predicament crashed down upon him finally. Recent memories flooded into his subconscious like a tidal wave, crashing down on his psyche. A panic unlike anything previously experienced in his life knocked the breath out of him again, and the pain of his pierced and burned flesh returned tenfold.

Fighting back tears of panic, he looked over his shoulder, trying to see the helmet of the pilot who was supposed to be steering their brand new BEEMO type ship. All his searching eyes was able to discover was empty space and a jagged red splatter mark across the top of the seat's grey paneled headrest. The light flowing in from the Pilot's canopy showed that half the instruments were dead and dark, and sparks were shooting

out from the navigation panel, causing a slight metallic burning smell to strike Volox's nostrils like a five-pound weight.

Swiftly turning his attention back to his own instruments, a shadow passing over caused him to pause. He quickly looked out the top window, seeing nothing but a blue-tinged green sky. He realized this was rather odd, as the last thing he remembered was being out in the forest colored nebula above the planet designated H-166, codename Little Garden.

Another shadow passed over, and Volox froze again. The pain from his wounds was causing him no end to the turmoil of his thoughts, and he was having difficulty focusing his eyes. He knew that shadow passing overhead was a big deal, and he knew the alarm that had been blaring since he awoke was important too. There was something blocking him from being able to remember what was wrong.

A large bang from the port side wing shook the entirety of the ship. The shuddering caused his wounds to start screaming at him again, but he couldn't hear them, for he had finally put together all the clues and realized... he was skimming over the planet's surface! The sky, those shadows that kept passing overhead, the alarm on the ship's panels, whatever the ship had just struck... all were telling him the danger he was in, but he had been too disoriented to figure it out himself.

Volox quickly tapped the only working panel by his right hand. His eyes searched the numbers that appeared in the air in front of him, his eyes darting around the displayed information. His eyes focused on a secondary number function that shouldn't be anywhere close to what it showed.

The sudden realization struck him like a laser blast to the chest. His eyes remained fixated on the elevation readout as his hands began to fly around the cockpit, pressing buttons at what would have seemed random to anyone not versed as a bomber in the 433rd Spaceforce battalion. He tore his eyes away from the readout long enough to look back up and out the window... just as the ship passed below a large, grey cylindrical tube, stretching across the sky. The shadow lingered longer than the last couple had, a testament to the size of the strange object stretching to great heights in the heavens above him.

He was in an Alliance bomber, a craft not designed for low level flying and indeed, was too heavy to escape most gravitational fields found on inhabited planets. All

the information from basic training seemed to flow to the forefront of his thoughts as his pulse quickened again, causing fresh pain in his various cuts and punctures. His attention however, was too focused on attempting to take control of the craft to feel his myriad of wounds.

He pressed button after button, trying to wrestle control of the ship from the 'Unoccupied Auto Piloting System Arcs'. A neat little gadget designed to fly a ship back to the fleet in case both pilot and bomber were rendered unconscious or killed in action. A creation that was refusing to believe that a pilot was still alive after controls had not been activated after the prescribed time limit.

Smashing switches with his fingers, he punched at the UAPSA module with the bottom of his fist, bringing it down with his full force, swearing for the machine to let go of the ship. A final smash with his fist, in which he shattered two buttons and possibly his pinky; the power light blinked off of the module. The long nose of the ship began to tilt towards the planet's surface, disorienting Volox as the world tilted and he felt himself falling backwards in his chair. The sudden change in direction caused him to glance upwards through the canopy. He was slightly surprised to see the horizon line reversed from its normal orientation -sky towards his feet- before his few thousand hours of flight training snapped him back to reality.

He glanced upwards again as he took control of the flight stick, shocked to see what appeared to be the side of a sheer cliff almost right outside. The ship was turning downwards right into a large trench cut deep into the earth! Volox quickly grasped the controls, not knowing how much time he had left until he struck something immovable and left pieces of himself all over the planet.

Volox worked quickly, pulling up on the stick and shifting the front mounted-thrusters to give him extra lift. Setting thrusters to maximum, he attempted to edge away from the cliffs on both sides of the bomber. The ship, designated 'Lenny', shifted slightly upwards and away from a side of the cliff while small pebbles and small pieces of earth pelted the outer hull, shaken loose by the passing of the wildly out of control starship.

As the ship nose began to slowly inch it's way upwards, an out-cropping of gray whatever made up the ground on this planet, struck an outlying portion of the port-side wing, crushing and tearing it off entirely. The ship dropped a few hundred sickening feet

before the anti-gravity thrusters finally slowed the descent. Slowed, but didn't stop it. Volox checked his altitude, alarmed to see the number dropping quickly as the ship continued its fall to the planet. He continued to fight for more control, panicking as certain systems refused to respond while others seemed to have already given up and were merely waiting for the inevitable. Even as he pounded buttons and switched switches within the bomber, he knew his efforts would merely afford him a slim chance at survival... a small hope that the ship wouldn't disintegrate the moment it touched the surface of this unknown world.

Still surrounded on both sides by seemingly impossibly large sheer cliff walls, the ship drifted lower, the lower section beginning to shake as the wash from the ship's engines began to scar and scatter debris along the surface. The scarring quickly became great gouges in the planet as the engines strained to stop the ship from impacting. The vibrating became more intense, and Volox wondered if the engines themselves would tear the ship apart before he touched down.

He didn't worry for long, as the underside of the ship finally connected with the planet's surface. Right before impact, Volox switched on an emergency impact program, immobilizing his head and neck while adding an extra strap to both his torso and legs. The activated program was designed to give a fraction of a chance to survive in the event of ship to ship collisions and even though he had never heard of someone using it to survive a collision with a planet, he knew his options were vastly limited in the moment.

The impact of the lower level of the ship caused Volox to feel immediately crushed into his seat, exploding the oxygen from his lungs. He tried to gulp for air in the next moment, but the anti-gravity engine was torn from the ship and the resulting impact of the entire ship into the surface caused him to blackout as it slammed down into the planet.

Volox blinked. His right eye was open, but he couldn't focus it... resulting in him only seeing amobious shapes and colors. Light mingled and retreated against the dark, and in the turn the dark would turn and devour the shifting lights. He tried to shake his head, but was still immobilized against his chair. He tried to open his left eye, but his eyelids felt stuck together by something gooey. 'Blood' he thought to himself. He was

surprised to find himself alive, seeing as how there were only a handful of recorded instances of bombers surviving impact with a planet's surface. The ship was too heavy and dense to be graceful when crashing, and very few survived any kind of impact.

His body hurt everywhere. From the joints in his feet feeling stretched and crushed at the same time... to his neck which felt swollen and achy even while being unable to move it. He felt pressure on his back, which he interpreted to mean he was lying on it.

Volox slowly raised his arms, each muscle straining from exhaustion, superficial cuts and deep bruises slowly blooming on the skin. Both of his flight sleeves were missing, torn off just above the elbow during the ship's impact with the ground. It was odd his arms were still attached without his sleeves, or at least he thought they were still.

He could only see what vaguely looked like the outline of his hand as he held it up against the sky. The realization that it was the sky rocked him a little more than he was prepared for. It made him ache down to his very bones... like the core of his being was cracked in all the places that caused him pain.

Struggling against his shoulder bonds, Volox attempted to hit his helmet's quick release with his fingers. It was below his ear, snugly placed into the helmet. He was having a bit of trouble working his gloves, but he finally managed to get a finger into the pull hatch and yanked the bar outwards. His chin strap immediately loosened, and Volox hunched downwards trying to pull his head out from the still strapped down helmet. He placed both hands under the neck of his helmet and pushed his body downwards into the seat. He felt the bruises in his side bite into him as he twisted and tried to free himself further.

With a groan and a few choice words for the predicament he found himself in, Volox's head barely cleared the bottom of his helmet as he groaned and unfolded himself from his crunched position. As he rested next to his still strapped down helmet, he breathed deeply, thankful that his first crash had been on a life sustaining planet. Star fights over worlds that had no resources (or life, depending on which side of the war you agreed with) were rare, but in war even the rarest things seemed to happen with great certainty when it stretches throughout a dozen star systems.

His open eye was finally beginning to focus and things became sharper in his vision as he turned to look at his appendages. The outline of his hand against the sky was clear, though his head was ringing as he tried to focus on the back of his torn glove, his fingers outstretched and slightly curled against the light green sky.

His gaze strayed to the jagged metal and dangling wires a few feet away from his outstretched hand. The light pouring in from the jagged tears in the ship reflected off dust still stirred up by the ships presense.

Volox let out a deep breath and glanced up at the strap keeping his helmet in place. As breathable as the air seemed, he would feel better with his helmets ventilators cycling the air through its filters. Taking the loose end of the strap that trapped his helmet against the destroyed ship, he followed it up with his fingers, feeling for another release hook. Though as easy as a push of a button normally, the entire array of instruments strewn in pieces before him... all of them were dark. No gently shining backup lights shown to pierce the dark interior, only what shined in from the great gashes strewn through the front end of the ship.

He finally found the release on the other side of the helmet his head was resting on, and though painful to stretch his limbs even a little, he managed to hook his finger into the release and pull. The mechanism was stuck and caused him to exclaim in shock as pain raced up his arm after the attempt. Knowing that if wasn't able to free his helmet this was going to be much, much more difficult endeavor, Volox gathered himself and tried again, a little slower, expecting to feel the same resistance. The latch lifted free easily, and the strap loosened enough for him to pull the helmet out from underneath it.

Breathing a sigh mixed with relief and apprehension -relief at it being free, apprehension at having to cram his head back into something he just suffered to get out of- he turned the helmet around to view any damage. The Anti-Bright-Light (ABL) shader that was set into the top of the helmet appeared to have only suffered some minor scuffs and a small tear on the bottom of it. Unfortunately, he could only see the ABL because a large portion of the forehead of his helmet was missing. His clear visor had been ripped from the helmet at some point, and a panel covering one of his ears had been almost entirely ripped out.

Volox exhaled in exasperation, a move followed by a sharp intake of breath as all the hurt from his cuts and bruises reawakened just as his natural adrenaline high

started to dissipate. A one-two punch that forced Volox to bring his helmet to his chest as a wave of agony seemed to break over his entire body. Riding it out, his eyes and teeth shut tightly to fight the pain. He slowly opened his good eye as he set his helmet aside, and worked at freeing his chest. Finally, now able to partly see the straps they were quickly removed and Volox moved into a sitting position on the side of his chair.

Wincing as he sat, he surveyed the cockpit around him. Panels hung by their wires everywhere he looked, a few sparked with the last remnants of power quickly flowing out of the gravity-core.