Collision

The captain had stared outside for a while. The binoculars hovered in front of his eyes and were inches away from the cockpit's main window. He called his first mate.

"Derek, come up here." His eyes never strayed from the binoculars as he waved his hand forward. Derek stepped forward, next to him, and stood at attention. Although he already knew what he was going to say, he still acted like he didn't.

"Sir?"

The captain finally took the binoculars from his sight although his eyes remained glued to the window. "What do you think of this dust?"

The crew noticed it about three days ago. It was on the side of our airship, a fair distance so they thought nothing of it. But it stayed for longer than they thought. When the ship should have left it behind about two days ago, it seemed to follow them. And not only follow, but extended itself when the ship started to get ahead of it. Not to mention it was rare for a mass of dust like that this far in deep space. Eventually the captain had started watching it. About two hours earlier. Derek was worried about the dust before he examined it. But he lifted the binoculars to his eyes as the captain wanted. Beyond the pane of glass, the impenetrable mass of gray loomed like one of the massive war ships that patrolled outside the boundary of controlled space. It showed no sign of moving or dissipating as far as Derek could see. He handed the binoculars back.

"Well, it doesn't look good." The captain put it back to his eyes.

"Hmph, that's a given." The only time he moved was to breathe.

"What do you think then?" The edge of the captain's mouth twitched.

"I believe it's bad news."
"As far as...?"

"Navigation, communication, a number of things really."

"You're worried it'll swallow us up, and we'll lose our course." Derek gazed towards the wall of gray.

"I don't see it moving away soon. And what happens when our course goes straight through it?"

The ship, The Korstarr, was an old one. And if the navigation system went out? Running out of fuel a couple miles in the sky wasn't the best thing to put on a headstone. If they even gave him one.

"Do you want me to do something before that happens?"

"Yes..." He lowered the binoculars once more. "I want you to go to communications and give them a message. The captain wants all of the ship’s main directors to be on alert. This dust poses a few problems."

"I'll get right on that, sir." Derek turned for the door. His captain’s hand on his shoulder stopped him almost immediately. His attention was back to the windows.

"And Derek, make sure that the directors are the only ones told. We don't want a panic." Derek nodded. "Yes sir."

The captain said nothing further so Derek took his leave.

He walked past the desk that overlooked the windows and up to the door. He tugged the metal lever down and pushed the heavy door out. He wondered if he would still look for a lever if the ship was ever upgraded to one where the door would open by itself. He walked hastily down the stairs and to the elevator at the end of the hallway. He pressed the appropriate button to get to the balcony overlooking the tram station for the control center of the ship. When its door opened he stepped out into the open space of the nexus for the control center.

Since the ship was a big one, it had its own mini train system. This was one of the stops and a few tannish colored trams were waiting on the rails. His path took him left and he gazed out on the station. It was the usual crowd, a couple people waited around. Derek thought that they were probably waiting for some other people. They didn't really have any
reason to hang around. The security probably wouldn't take kindly to loiterers anyway. He reached the end of the balcony. The communications room was a short trip down a ladder into the next room. It was cramped like most maintenance areas on this ship were. The comms room was a rather large room, but it was cramped with towering computers.

The space was narrow and the sound was overwhelming. A loud droning came from the back of the room. A blend of whirring computers and messages being printed out, then fed to different parts of the ship. The director of communications was a tall man, who milled about the computers and weaved between employees working over the papers spilling from the machines. Derek stepped up to the man and saluted him.

"Director Barrs. I have a message from the captain." The director returned the salute.

"And so what does our illustrious captain want from a lowly communications employee?"

Derek's usual frown deepened a bit. "He wants a message sent out to all the directors. Which includes you."

The director waved him over. "Well, come on then." The pair went to one of the smaller rooms that was situated in the back. Another worker was hunched over a terminal, obscuring most of it. Director Barrs slapped his back and simultaneously yelled "Hey, Daniel, how are you!?" His voice carried well over the relative silence in the room and Daniel jumped in his seat.

Daniel held a hand over his heart. "I hate it when you do that." He was still muttering into his computer screen as Barrs laughed heartily.

"Ohh, God, it never gets old," he said after a few more chuckles. "It's way too easy to scare you."

Derek decided it was time to interrupt. "If we're all done here, then we can stop stalling and send the message now." His voice carried with it anger and irritation.

The director addressed him. "Jeez, you need to lighten up, you know that? Do you not do anything fun up on the bridge?"

"We don't have time for 'fun' when we're trying to run a ship."

The director shrugged. "To each his own I guess."
Daniel turned to the pair. "So where is this message going exactly?"

Glad to be getting to where he needed to be, Derek gave him the information. "It'll go to all the directors of the ship’s departments. Though you can leave Director Barrs off the list seeing as he's right here."

"All right..." Daniel pulled up a program on the computer in front of him. "Directors... Group message... And we're ready. Just tell me what to say." The cursor blinked in the space of the new message.

"The captain requests that the directors be advised that the situation with the fog may get serious, but they shouldn't put any alarms out. We just need them to be prepared."

Daniel had typed all the way through his talking and had finished the message a little after he stopped.

"Send it."

The man pressed a button on the terminal and sat back. "Done like dinner." He smiled.

Derek turned to the director. "I assume you got all of that."

The director raised his hands. "I've got it. Fog is serious, but it isn't."

Derek turned through the door and walked to the main room again. He was getting tired of how the director wasn't taking things more seriously. As he was considering calling him out on it, a small tremor shook the room causing the employees to look up from their screens.

"And is that something serious?" Barrs' tone was almost mocking. Derek eyed the walls of the room as if the cause of the shake would spell itself out on the metal and pipes.

"I'm sure it's just the engines. You would do well to remember what the captain says if it does get serious."

"No one approaches this more seriously than I do sir."

Derek stopped in an aisle of computers. "Make sure it stays that way." The director saluted him in what could have been interpreted as mockery. Derek left him behind, eager to report back to the captain. He was just before the door when a second, more violent shake rocked the ship.
Derek felt his teeth knock together.
The director was behind him. "That isn't good, is it?"
Derek narrowed his eyes. "No it isn't."

A third tremor. Greater than the last two combined. Derek was knocked to the side of the corridor and hit the wall hard. Barrs didn't fare much better, being knocked to the floor. An explosion was heard further down the length of the ship. The room behind them erupted into a frenzy. The workers filed out of a door on the side of the room, probably to an emergency exit.

Derek regained his balance just in time. The door in front of him started to automatically lock down. A red emergency door began descending. He crawled under the slowly closing door.

The director had got a hold of himself as well.

"Derek, wait! We need to get out of here!" Derek was a few rungs up when the director grabbed his pant leg.

"Stop! Now!" Derek kicked at him, barely missing him. "I need to get back to the captain! We need to get this thing under control!"

Barrs pulled Derek off the ladder and grabbed the arms at his side. "We need to think! Do you really believe that having more people running around the command center will help?"

Derek jerked his arms away from Barrs' grip. "All right... all right I see your point..."

"Now, let's come up with a plan." Derek breathed slowly, trying to calm himself down.

"So think, what would the captain want you to do?" Barrs asked.

"He would want us to get out of here while he tries to get the situation under control." Derek said.

Barrs nodded. "Okay so let's get going. We can wait for him to fix everything and then all come back and get this mess." Derek nodded and motioned for Barrs to go first. He started up the ladder and Derek followed him. Barrs gave him his hand and pulled Derek through the top of the ladder. Derek's eyes widened, and he felt his stomach drop. There
was a giant hole in the room blocking off the route to the cockpit. The elevator door opened and closed randomly. An ominous glow of fire emanated from the bottom of the shaft. Barrs noticed him looking in shock at the path to the captain.

"Hey…hey!" Derek turned to Barrs as he yelled to him. "They'll find another way out, okay?"

"Yeah, the captain can make it through, can't he?" Derek asked.

"He always does." Barrs directed him down the stairs to the trams.

As soon as they got to the floor that held the rails, a large door opened near the trams. They both turned, startled. They weren't exactly sure what would emerge. It was all too possible that bandits might have taken advantage of the fog and boarded their ship. They only relaxed when they saw a team of three security officers. The man in the front had his gun raised to the pair’s level and the two in the back were ready if trouble broke out.

"Identify yourselves!" Barrs took a step forward.

"Calm down, would you? We've got the regulation uniform on, so I don't think we're that much of a threat to you." The man finally lowered he gun

"Well we can never be too sure." Derek stepped forward.

"So where are you heading to?" Derek asked

"We need to get to the lifeboats. That's what the protocol for something like this is." Derek eyed the railway. It seemed like whatever had shot through the ship had damaged the railway.

"Are you sure that the trams are still functional?" Derek voiced his concern.

"If they're not, then we can get them going," one of the security officers assured him.

"Do you mind if we tag along then? We're all looking to get out of here." Barrs said.

"That's our job. Get people out of here." The officer waved them over as he walked to the railway. They all examined it, save for the two other officers who stood on guard against any threat that might appear. The tram didn't look too damaged, but it tilted dangerously to the side. Derek wondered if it was safe to ride on. They crouched down by the officer looking at the side of the closed door.

"Any idea what caused the alert?" Barrs asked.
"Well," the guard adjusted himself, "last thing we heard was something like a derelict ship came out of that dust that followed us around forever."

"A ship then..."

"Hmm." The guard hummed his agreement, still working on the door. "It all seems suspicious that a ship just happened to come out of nowhere and slam into us."

"So you think it was an attack on us then?"

"Could be." The door slid open.

Everyone stepped in, and the officer pushed one of the myriad of buttons on the panel. The tram surged to life and launched down the line. The space was titling on the rails, but the officer sat back in a chair despite that.

"Nothing to do now but sit and wait." Though he said that, everyone else remained standing. Then, there was a loud bang and a jolt through the tram. The top right cable had finally snapped under the pressure and tilted so that its right side was now the floor. Derek held on to one of the bars on the ceiling next to a luggage rack. Barrs wasn't so lucky. He had smacked his head against the window of the tram, the thin material barely a second away from shattering completely. Derek reached out a hand to him.

"Director! Barrs, take my hand!" He was sluggish to react. He picked his head up from the window, which was shattered and bloodstained from the impact. Derek assumed he had gotten a concussion. He sat up on the glass and was inches away from his hand. The window shattered. Barrs was thrown from the tram and so was a security guard unlucky enough to have lost his grip on the inside of it. Derek still held his hand out, shocked.

Barrs was gone. No doubt he was killed by hitting the floor of the tunnel at the speeds they were going. A minute of silence passed. Derek was crying. He knew the director well. They had signed on to the ship at the same time. And he was his friend, though he didn't really like how he always messed around instead of taking a more serious approach to running an important part of a ship. The tram reached its destination. Albeit sideways. The officer and his remaining guard helped Derek out of the tram car. The other guard jumped first; the tram was stuck behind the platform so it was a bit of a drop down.

Just then, it occurred to Derek that he never asked for their names. So he asked them.
"Hey, I never got your names..." Derek was clearly in shock, partly from the traumatic event that had just taken place and the stress of all of the past few hours. He guessed his mind was trying to take its thoughts somewhere else and that was how it decided to do it. The other officer spoke first.

"My name is James," he called out from below the tram.

"And mine is Gerard." Derek nodded, just staring forward.

"Thank you for helping us." Gerard helped Derek down to the platform under the train.

They crossed the room to the departure area. A flurry of activity dominated the room. A couple ships were docked on the platform, and the crew scrambled to get people onto the ships. Gerard ran up and conversed with a man loudly yelling orders. He had told them he wanted the three of them to get in one of the many lifeboats and pilot it to a larger ship waiting outside to take them to safety. Derek was rushed across the room and into one of them.

They buckled into the cramped space, and James took control, piloting it smoothly out of its bay. As it jettisoned from the main ship, Derek looked out one of the small windows and saw the damage that apparently was caused by the abandoned ship hitting theirs. It was a short trip to the makeshift rescue barge waiting some distance away from the ship. They docked with it, and the doors had opened. All sorts of refugees from the ship were there. Some were employees standing around and talking to fellow crew members, and some were simply passengers who were traveling on the ship. The guards had taken him up to the cabin to see if they could reach the captain. About six men stood in the cockpit and looked over read outs coming from computers set up in the room. They informed him that they hadn't been able to reach the captain and that they feared the worst. The radio came to life, a man in a smaller ship making rounds in and out of the docking bay, saying that there were still hundreds missing and that none of the directors had been found. Derek sat down in one of the chairs in the back of the room and told them not to worry about searching for Director Barrs.

The ship that had ripped through their vessel, the Andromeda’s Reach, had gone
missing in deep space about 200 years ago. The reason the ship didn't transmit any warning was that the Andromeda was an experimental ship contracted by the government and built by a private research company. After losing track of the ship, it wasn't just a simple short scan for it in space. The best they could have done was look out the window and see if someone was lucky enough to spot it. Derek didn't know what to make of this. In his mind he debated whether it could have just been pure coincidence that the ship came from nowhere and tore through his. From what he had heard, the ship wasn't damaged at all from the impact. It was however, split in half from a prior collision. The ship was built to withstand direct hits from asteroids. Something massive with enough force to destroy billions that the government pooled into the project ripped it in half. A black hole Derek supposed. There was a large volume of chatter as people waited to be evacuated to someplace more comfortable than small rescue ships. Most of it was where the survivors would go. Would the ship be repaired soon? A myriad of questions abounded. Derek overheard a group talking about the Andromeda. He slowly gravitated towards their conversation so as not to intrude.

"-any weapons on the ship?"

"I'm sure they'll find some. You don't go out into deep space to the threat of God knows what and not arm yourself to the teeth."

"So it was split up by an attack on them?" There were three men in a circle discussing the situation.

"Right, maybe to get at something inside." One of the men sitting there had remained quiet until then, when he spoke up.

"Listen to this." The other two men looked at him. "I came up with an idea; what if someone blew the ship up for weapons?"

"Well that's what I just said, but if you blow it up, you're bound to blow at least half of the guns into space," one of the men interjected.

"That's not what I meant." He took a breath and leaned in close dropping his voice lower. "What if someone used the ship itself as a weapon?"

"That is the stupidest thing I've ever heard. How would you use the whole
ship as a weapon?”

“Think about it. An undetectable bullet that can survive most of what space could throw at it and cause a large amount of damage.”

“Well then, how would you aim something that large?”

“Use a tracking computer. Our ship was going in a straight line, all they had to was the math.”

Derek spoke up then. “So you’re saying terrorists did this?” The men’s eyes moved to him.

“Not unheard of. Miners break apart asteroids like that sometimes. Hit one with another.” They continued to bicker amongst themselves. Derek looked back out the windows. The ship’s fires were mostly put out. Derek used his newfound information from the men to calculate the chances of this being an accident. And the odds scared him.