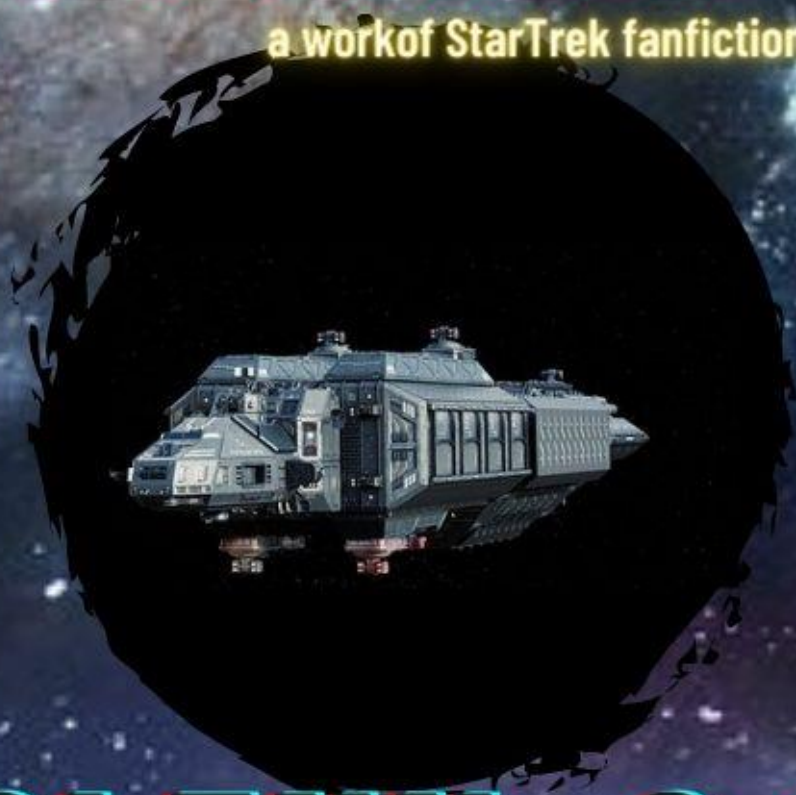


# ZOOMERS & BOOMERS

a work of StarTrek fanfiction



# GLENN G G MAITLAND

## Zoomer & Boomers

Copyright© 2023 Glenn G G Maitland

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the author, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other non-commercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests contact the author at the email address below.

The materials presented here are in no way meant to infringe the copyrights regarding Star Trek in any of its incarnations or the intellectual property of CBS, Paramount or Simon & Schuster. This is a work of fan fiction and no profit whatsoever is being derived from the materials presented. Star Trek and its associated marks are trademark CBS Studios Inc. & Paramount Pictures Corp.

Any references to historical events, real people, or real places are used fictitiously. Original names, characters and places are products of the author's imagination.

Cover image: *Gunnlaugur*/Public Domain Image Pixabay Licence Free Commercial Images  
Published: 7 September 2017

Book and Cover Design: © Glenn G G Maitland

All Plates and Images come from the Pixabay Licence Free archive of Commercial Images. These images are free to use, considered to be Public Domain and require no citation per Pixabay. Each Image has been presented with accreditation to Pixabay and its individual date of publication.

For Permissions or to contact the author email: [convergenceauthor@outlook.com](mailto:convergenceauthor@outlook.com)

## Author's Note:

**Zoomers & Boomers** is the fifth book in the **Convergence** series. The tale is presented as a short novella detailing some of the smaller adventures occurring during the broader events detailed in the longer stories so far presented. **Zoomers & Boomers** can be enjoyed as a stand-alone adventure. Taken as part of the series, it will expand the breadth of the **Convergence** tale related so far and illuminate some of the consequences of earlier events and events yet to come.

A debt of gratitude is owed to Trekkie Fan Fiction and Mr. Sean O'Keefe for his kind support and outstanding assistance with helping to bring these stories to life.

## Books In This Series:

Book 1: **Sheaffe**

Book 2: **Aftermath**

Both Books 1 & 2 comprise **Convergence**

<https://trekkiefanfiction.com/stories/convergence/>

Book 3: **Dirge for A Winter's Solstice**

<https://trekkiefanfiction.com/stories/dirge-for-a-winters-solstice/>

Book 4: **Cor Coroli – Book One**

<https://trekkiefanfiction.com/stories/cor-coroli-book-one/>

Book 5: **Zoomers & Boomers**

[trekkiefanfiction.com/stories/zoomers-boomers/](https://trekkiefanfiction.com/stories/zoomers-boomers/)

Coming Soon: **Cor Coroli -Book Two**

# Contents

Author's Note:.....	3
Books In This Series:.....	4
ZOOMERS & BOOMERS.....	7
HAWK.....	10
GUNNLAUGUR.....	15
KAMAK.....	20
LOTHRA MINOR.....	26
TROUBLE AGAIN.....	31
SCRAPPERS.....	39



**ZOOMERS  
&  
BOOMERS**

# ZOOMERS & BOOMERS

Light-pod racing originated on K'el. Commonly referred to as Lothra V, K'el exists in an unaligned system bordering the trade corridor between Ivor Prime and Altair VI, in the Typhon Sector. The K'eltrecs started racing shortly after having discovered faster-than-light space travel more than three centuries ago. The sport was popular among the upper classes of K'eltrec society and quickly became the system's most prevalent sport. K'eltrec colonies and allied systems soon joined a growing league of racers. By the time Lothra V joined the Federation Trade Alliance, a century of racing culture had taken root.

For a time, light-pod racing expanded out to worlds as far-flung as Trill and even Earth itself. Young men and women tempted by the romance, danger, and adventure of the sport flocked to satellite League offices to register themselves as pilots and hope for an opportunity to try out for some of the League's established teams. Aspiring engineers too felt the pull towards designing and building light-pod racers.

The sport revolved around simple, light-weight pods mated to rudimentary warp-drive systems strictly regulated not to generate fields capable of producing speeds greater than Warp 1.48. The pods themselves could be no longer bow-to-stern than five meters and no wider abeam than three meters. Fixed reactors were forbidden. Pods relied upon small reaction chambers where carefully regulated dilithium pellets were used to regulate matter/anti-matter events. Each pellet was expected to last no more than one hundred light years of travel before burning-out and breaking down. Most pods utilized a single nacelle to generate their warp fields.

These warp-capable pods then raced along straightaways (which could measure between one and six light-years long) at warp, then decelerating to navigate various turns and obstacles using only momentum and limited thrusters before lining-up for the next warp speed straightaway once again.

A light-pod course was a total of twenty lightyears long. To complete a race a pod had to complete five laps for a total of one hundred lightyears travelled.

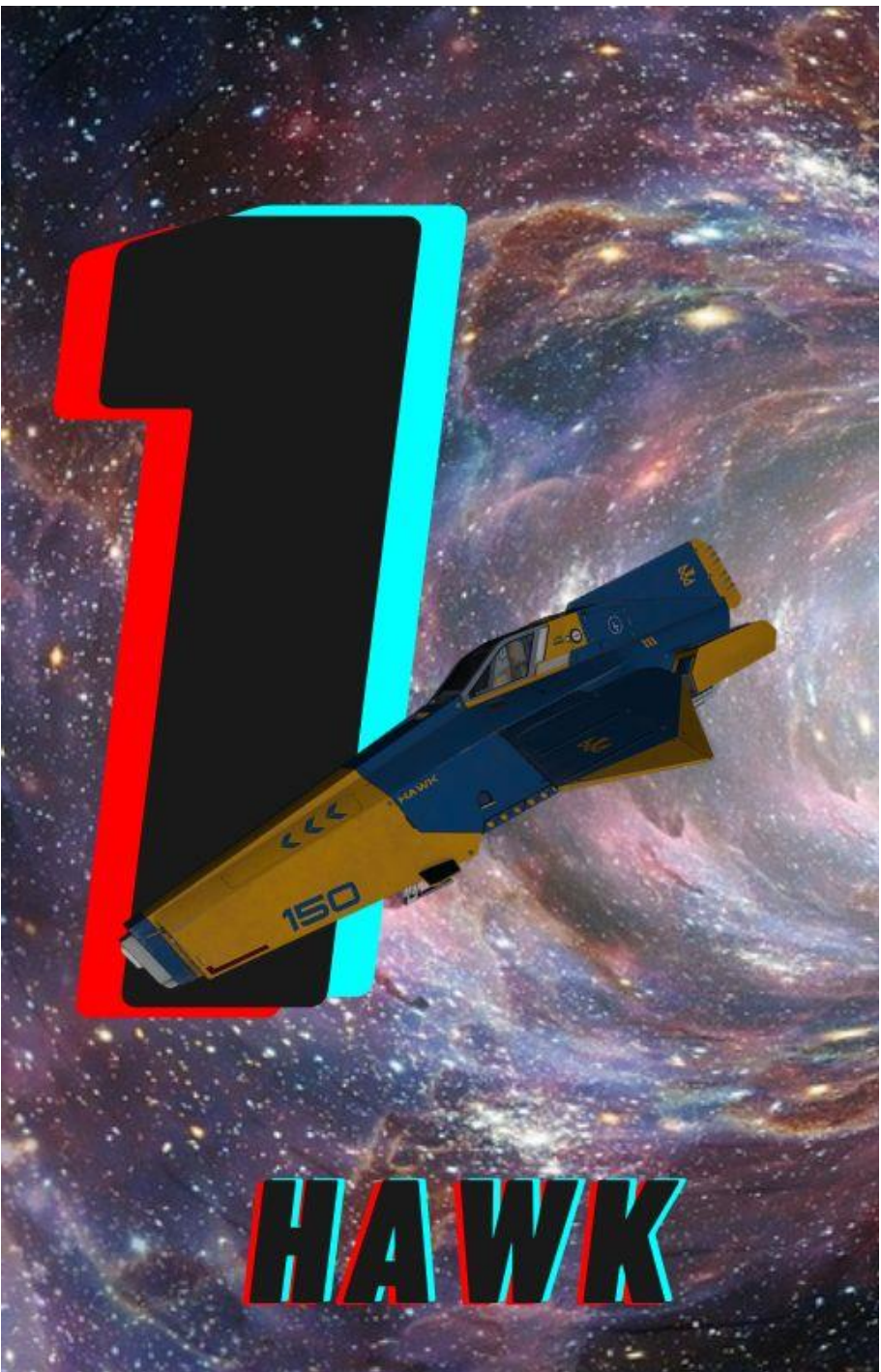
At its height the Light-pod Racing League (LRL) boasted no less than thirty sanctioned courses spread across twelve sectors and twenty-four systems. Established teams competed with upstart independent engineers and daring pilots across two Quadrants for the thrilling entertainment of billions—all in pursuit of the Lothra Cosmic Championship.

Then the Klingon War broke out.

Dozens of LRL transmission satellites and marked courses were destroyed. Pilots were called up for service and engineers summoned to drydocks and shipyards where their skills were desperately needed to help repair Starships and support craft for Starfleet, Vulcan, Andoria and any other Federation world capable of contributing to the war effort. The fighting spilt over into the unaligned systems as well – trade routes, shipyards, storage, and logistic facilities were attacked indiscriminately by rampaging Klingons.

It took almost a decade for the LRL to organize a full season of light-pod racing after the war. Only the outer-most systems (largely unscathed by the war) bordering the far fringes of Federation territory were interested in participating. Aside from the challenging course marked in the vast nothingness between Teneb and Ivor Prime, none of the courses within Federation space had survived. From a high of twenty-four systems participating in the races before the Klingon War, the LRL had been reduced to its core five courses in the Lothra System and the Teneb course.

Many Federation worlds outlawed light-pod racing in the decades following the war, deeming the sport to be a wanton waste of materials and far too dangerous an activity for their citizenry to engage in. What was left of the LRL was the five major teams which had first established the sport before Lothra V was even aware of the Federation, along with a fluctuating number of smaller independent teams. The league was open to anyone capable of earning a spot, provided they met the leagues' strict standards for qualification. Only in the Typhon Sector, at Teneb, was light-pod racing still sanctioned within Federation borders.



*Figure 1: Hawk. Published 28 Aug. 2020 Pixabay Licence Free*

# HAWK

Riadir tensed his grip on his pod's accelerator and concentrated on his breathing. He'd entered the second straightaway too close to Chutz – the Nausicaan pilot currently leading this LRL Season. Chutz and his brother, Steick, had dominated the last two seasons and were looking to win the Championship for a third straight cycle. Riadir drew air in through his nose as calmly as he could – Chutz had hammered him in the stomach the previous evening when Riadir had managed to win a game of dom-jot, and it still hurt to breathe.

Nausicaans were notorious for their aggressiveness as a species and the reckless abandon with which Chutz piloted his dark green and silver pod, the *Shayug Turdz*, made clear the level of disdain he held for his fellow racers. The fact Chutz had goaded Riadir into making a ten thousand credit wager on *Hawk* finishing fourth or better at Lothra Minor, also likely factored into his vicious racing. Winded and bent, Riadir had let his temper get the best of him and let the five hundred Chutz had lost on dom-jot get rolled over to a ten thousand credit bet on the race.

Riadir's own pod, the *Hawk*, had been performing well. The accomplished Trill pilot had no delusions of winning today's race, but he felt confident of a strong showing. Coming out of the second turn leading into Lothra Minor's five-lightyear-long grand straightaway, Riadir found himself nearly colliding with Chutz's fast-moving pod. Chutz had intentionally dropped out of warp to cut across *Hawk's* bow and force the Trill to burn up his limited thruster fuel to avoid a collision.

The tactic worked. The heavier, twin bladed *Shayug Turdz* passed over *Hawk*—to avoid a collision Riadir Preed overcorrected his course with three long and costly thruster burns. *Hawk* tumbled for nearly four seconds before Preed could pull his bow back into alignment with the course markers.

"That's going to cost you. Fzzzt."

Riadir cursed the disinterested voice in his headset. LRL regulations required every racer to have a dedicated moderator to monitor and advise each pilot on course developments, safety concerns, and status updates. Riadir's regular moderator, Marteinn, had gone to the Sol System seven weeks earlier to make final arrangements with an interested sponsor for their little team. Marteinn had failed to return though, and Preed had needed to hire a stand-in.

"You're in the warning track... Fzzzt."

Light-pods had next to no onboard sensors or navigation equipment. They relied on course markers to guide their pilots safely through interstellar space at speed, trusting that the designated course had been swept clear of

obstacles and dangerous debris. A pod falling out of the marked course could be lost forever.

Riadir grunted as a wave of nausea hit him and cold sweat pooled between his shoulder blades. Savagely he pushed down hard with his left foot to fire the port/aft thruster, then drew back his right foot to fire the starboard/bow thruster. *Hawk* warbled and kicked her nose up. If a pod left the marked course, it entered a warning track—an area surrounding the course which could be occupied no longer than ninety seconds before a pod was considered off-course and disqualified from the race. As *Hawk's* nose aligned with a distant course marker Preed desperately toggled primary thrust control to his accelerator and grunted hard as he pushed the lever forward in a controlled motion until it was a quarter of the way along in its narrow slot.

The small ion pad mounted to *Hawk's* stern flared blue and then white. The blue and yellow pod jumped out of the warning track and back up onto the course just in time to be buffeted by the displacement field generated by the *Shayug Turdz* as the unrelenting Nausicaan jumped to warp.

Once the turbulence of the displacement field had passed, Riadir toggled the thrust control off and engaged his own warp drive by slamming the accelerator lever all-the way forward. As a grain of anti-matter was released into the reaction chamber to mix with the deuterium, Preed could feel the slim nacelle beneath his seat begin to hum. The starfield beyond *Hawk's* small rectangular window blurred and streaked away as the pod jumped to Warp 1.33.

“There is no way you can finish this thing now. It is only Lap Three and you’ve just burnt up your entire reserve... looks like three, or four turns worth of thruster fuel. Fzzzt.”

Preed kept his right hand on the *Hawk's* tiller as the sleek blue and yellow pod flitted along the straightaway at warp speed. He allowed his legs to relax momentarily and kept focussed on his breathing. His sides ached and his stomach rolled.

Though *Hawk* was pressurized, there were no on-board life-support systems. Riadir, like the other six teen pilots in today’s contest, relied entirely upon his EV suit and helmet to survive in the freezing vacuum of space. The cramped cockpit didn’t allow for a lot of room, so light-pod pilots strictly rationed the size and capacity of their support packs. Panic meant the rapid consumption of oxygen. The rapid consumption of oxygen meant a quickly depleted support pack—which ultimately meant death. Riadir concentrated on his breathing and tried to block out the pain and rage.

“I didn’t hire you to cheer me on to defeat,” Riadir coolly hushed into his helmet’s transmitter.

“No, you barely afforded to hire me at all. Look—section three, part A of the code states: *No racer shall knowingly proceed...zzzt...*”

“...knowingly proceed to compete in a sanctioned event if their pod is unable to—yeah, yeah, yeah... Which is it? Three or four turns worth of fuel?”

“What?” Silas, a fat Altairian, dropped his eyes from his monitor and stared at the transmitter/receiver built into his multi-purpose pit-unit.

Riadir drew a shallow breath and held it for a beat. The only onboard sensor he had to rely on was the small screen dedicated to alerting him to the location of the course markers. All other gauges and instruments, aside from a countdown clock, were monitored by the pit.

“How much fuel did I waste because of that Nausicaan bastard!? What do I have left?”

There was open static on Preed’s headset. The glow from the countdown clock illuminated Riadir’s dark blue gloved hand steadying the *Hawk*’s tiller control. By the time the counter reached zero, Preed would have to disengage the overworked warp engine and either lean into turn eight with half-thrust, or track for the off-course collection area and withdraw.

“Three turns you mad Trill! No reserve fuel at all. You’re in the danger zone. Want me to signal for a pull? Fzzzt.”

“Stepping softly in a danger zone...story of my life.”

“I’ll call for a pull. You can pay me when you get towed back to the Station. Fzzzt.” Silas lifted the guard plate on the pit computer’s yellow remit button.

“Don’t you call for anything! I can manage the next two laps on this turn at half-thrust and make up at least two more turns on number three using just momentum.”

“Like blazes you can! Fzzzt.” Silas looked from the yellow button which would signal *Hawk*’s withdrawal from the race to the status screen. It was as clear as the Lothra Sun that the Trill had nothing left, the race was over.

Preed lifted his left hand off the accelerator lever and squinted to read the oxygen level left in his support pack. Unable to raise the gauge above chest level, he had to squint hard to make out that he had gone through just under half of his air supply. The curvature of his helmet’s visor distorted his view terribly, but he was sure he could see his O2 level was still in the green.

“If you want to be paid at all... you’ll keep off the cursed pull-channel. I can do this. Just keep me away from Chutz and let me know if anything else goes wrong.” Riadir returned his hand to the accelerator and felt the vibration of *Hawk*’s rebuilt engine rattle up his arm.

“You expect me to just hand you a weapon and watch you kill yourself? Fzzzt.”

“No weapon in my hand.”

“You’re insane! That blue pod of yours is going to rocket you right to death! Fzzzt.” Silas breathed heavily and began to sweat. He needed the fifteen thousand credits if he was going to make it to the Neb-bid Race for the quarter finals. There was no response from the Trill... “Fine, but if you miss one turn, I’m having you pulled. There’s no way I’m risking my certification for a pretty Trill with a death wish! Fzzzt.”

Preed looked at his countdown and began calculating when he’d need to disengage the warp drive and head into turn eight. He needed to finish the race. “Silas?”

“What? Fzzzt.”

“You think I’m pretty?”

The Altarian ran a stubby-fingered fat hand down his face and stifled the urge to rain curses down on the fair-haired Trill. He sat back in his worn seat and roughly flipped the guard back over the remit button.

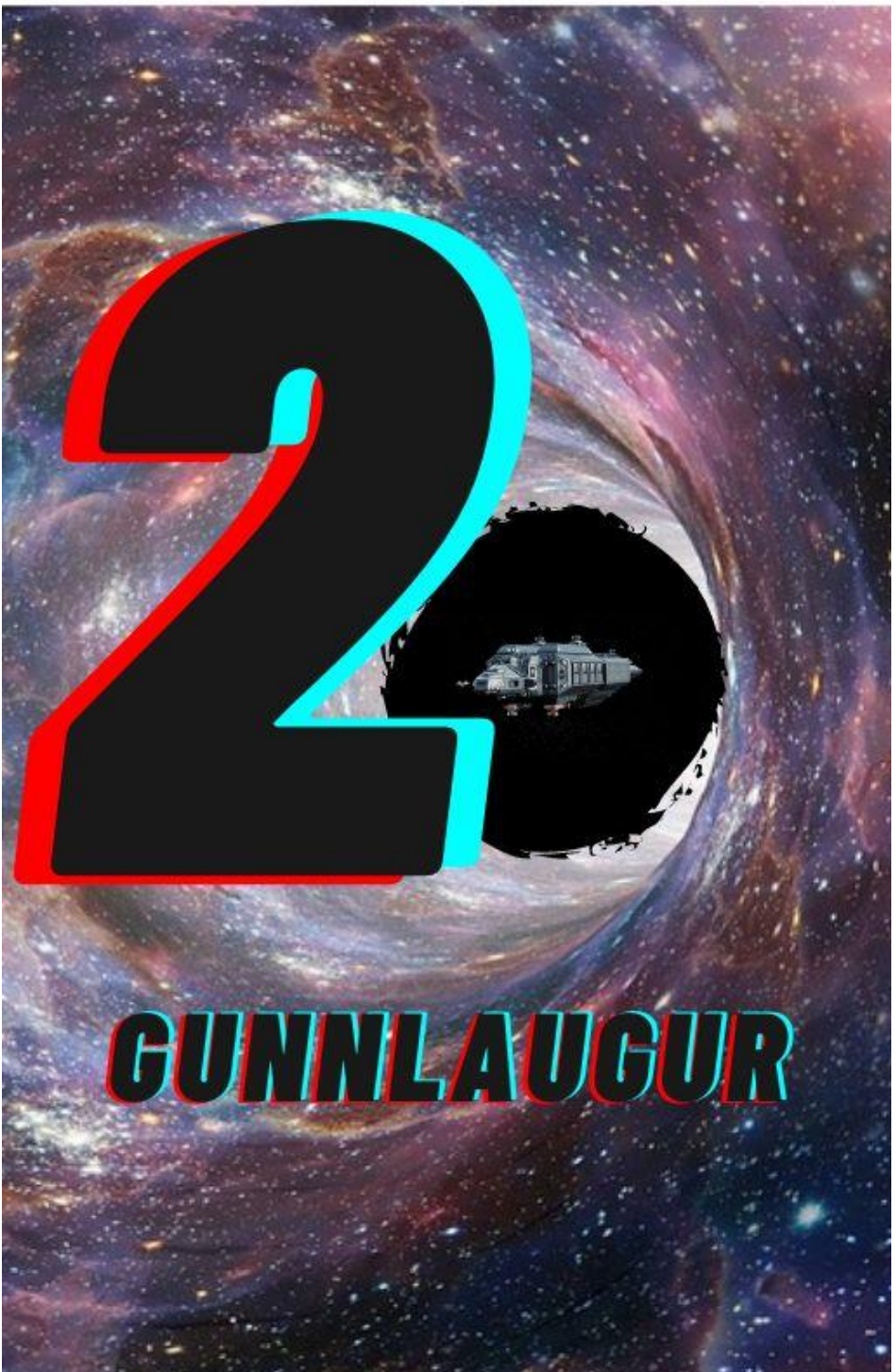


Figure 2: Gunnlaugur. Published 7 Sept. 2017 Pixabay Licence Free

# GUNNLAUGUR

>Helo 4, indications negative: Frequency Hq77.D003.

“Damned thing, are you positive?” Marteinn spun away from the forward viewport and pulled his slotted command chair towards the *Gunnlaugur’s* primary computer interface.

Reluctantly, Marteinn had permitted the old human he and Riadir had met while attending Teneb Luna for the first race of the Season, to install an interactive A.I. aboard the *Gunnlaugur*. The converted Alvanian freighter served Marteinn and Riadir Preed as a mobile hangar/pit and monitor station for Team Preed’s light-pod, *Hawk*.

Marteinn and Riadir had won the Cosmic Championship just three Seasons earlier and had been poised to join K’eltian Committed – the largest and most favoured LRL team. A losing Season followed though and quickly killed any interest from K’eltian Committed. This was followed by an *incomplete* follow-on Season and the pair were left with few prospects and a light-pod in bad need of refurbishment or replacement. The last of their shared funds had been spent on second-hand warp coils and a new reaction chamber for *Hawk* heading into this Season. *Gunnlaugur*, *Hawk’s* support ship and the pair’s de facto living quarters, had similarly fallen into disrepair.

\*\*\*

Limping into Teneb Luna for the second race of the Season, neither Riadir nor Marteinn wanted to admit that even with the refreshed coils and new chamber, *Hawk* wasn’t likely to make it to the end of the Season. *Gunnlaugur’s* mechanical stores were depleted, and the old freighter was showing signs of reactor failure as well. Riadir Preed, the dashing fair-haired Trill who’d managed to set the entire LRL on its side just two Seasons earlier, was now largely discounted as one of hundreds of flash-in-the-pan independents; quick to triumph but doomed to fade quickly.

Four days before the Teneb race Riadir brought an old human he’d met at the LRL satellite office aboard the *Gunnlaugur* to meet Marteinn and see *Hawk* for himself.

The human introduced himself as Dannar Mann, a design engineer from one of the smaller outfits in the Sol System. He’d made the voyage to Teneb specifically to see the only race to be held that season within Federation boundaries and possibly recruit a light-pod pilot. Being a Tiburonian, Marteinn was naturally skeptical of strangers and refused at first

to let this “Mann” anywhere near *Hawk*. While Preed was somewhat embarrassed by Marteinn’s refusal, the human took it all in stride.

“I completely understand your reluctance, Mr. Marteinn. I understand light-pod racing is as competitive on the course as it is in the pits. Your desire to protect Mr. Preed’s pod is... admirable, frankly. I won’t take any more of your time. I’m sure one of the other teams here would be interested in my firm’s investment.” Dannar kept his voice low and even.

“Mann” had been in hundreds of negotiations with Starfleet Admirals over the decades—a greasy light-pod mechanic on the fringes of civilization posed no challenge in Dannar’s mind. He nodded towards the middle-aged Tiburonian and managed to keep from smiling at the sight of the man’s ridiculously long and wide earlobes before turning to face the younger Trill pilot he was truly interested in.

“Well, I thank you none-the-less Mr. Preed. All the best.” Mann, as he had called himself, then took three confident steps back towards the airlock as the young Trill spoke in rabid hushed tones to his pit boss, Mr. Marteinn.

“Wait! Uh, Mr. Mann... what, what do you mean by *investment*?”

Dannar abruptly stopped and smiled. He’d taken a risk coming all the way out to Teneb in the hopes of finding a willing and qualified test pilot. After having a few drinks with young Mr. Preed, he was sure he’d found his man. Dannar turned back from the airlock and spread his arms wide to show the Tiburonian that he was open and true. A smile was fixed on his face.

“My firm is developing a new engine design and we require a competent test pilot to put it through its paces, as it were.”

Marteinn regarded the tall human with the salt and pepper hair. The man didn’t look like an engineer. He wore a dark green suit with pale embellishments across the shoulders and at the elbows, along with a matching pair of luxurious looking boots. If Riadir had introduced the old human as the Federation President, Marteinn wouldn’t have doubted it. Marteinn pulled absently on his left earlobe and ushered Mr. Mann into *Gunnlaugur’s* living module adjacent to the cargo bay where *Hawk* was kept...

“So, for Riadir’s services as a test pilot, you’re going to pay us one hundred and fifty thousand credits?” Marteinn had listened carefully to every word the human had to say, and still didn’t quite understand what it was the old man was proposing.

“That’s correct. Upon satisfactory completion of the test phase of our Virgo project, I will transfer the credits to you both. Mr. Preed was very clear that you are both equal partners in any endeavour undertaken.”

Marteinn sat back from the bare metal table he and Riadir usually took their meals at and stroked his left earlobe again.

“Oh! Mr. Mann, tell him about the *assistance*. About what you’re prepared to do for us ahead of the race, go on...”

Marteinn turned to face Preed who was wearing one of the old flight suits from the previous Season. The younger man looked tired. His fair sand coloured hair was dishevelled and greasy, but his blue eyes still sparkled with a youthful lustre Marteinn himself doubted he’d ever possessed. Marteinn tried to discern if Riadir was drunk, but quickly returned his gaze to the old human as Mr. Mann began explaining how he was willing to overhaul their pod ahead of the race and update any support systems as needed—as a gesture of good will.

Three days later and to Marteinn’s amazement, *Hawk* was running as soundly as she ever had—perhaps even better. For all his finery and genteel manners and appearance, Mann proved to be a remarkably gifted engineer. With the pod squared away and only hours until the start of the Teneb Race, Mann turned his attention the *Gunnlaugur* and convinced both Preed and Marteinn to allow him to completely replace the ship’s antiquated CPU with a solid-state A.I. unit he claimed was standard on all his firm’s shuttles and maintenance craft.

By race time, Marteinn found himself monitoring *Hawk* from a slick, new, voice activated A.I. terminal which Mr. Mann affectionately referred to as “*Brain*”. Brain was tied into every operation aboard the *Gunnlaugur* including the module dedicated to monitoring and interfacing with *Hawk*. With Mr. Mann at his side for the entire race, Marteinn guided Riadir to a remarkable third place finish.

After the race, as Preed celebrated with the other pilots—including a violently intoxicated Nausicaan; Marteinn sat down with Dannar Mann and read over a contract the human had drawn up. At the midway point in the Season, when teams would have nearly two and half months to refit and refurbish their pods as they prepared to head towards the Championship Series of races, *Gunnlaugur* would ferry some cargo from a depot in the Typhon Sector to a facility near Tellar. There Marteinn would receive parts and supplies for Team Preed to finish out the Season. Once finished with the LRL Season, Marteinn and Riadir would then rendezvous with Mann at a confidential location to get to work on Virgo.

\*\*\*

“Brain...” Marteinn waited half a second for the A.I. to chirp its cheery acknowledgement. “Scan Helo 4 again for anything on Frequency Hq77.D003.”

*>Helo 4, indications negative.*

“Where the Areinnye is he?”

*>Query: Where the -translated from the Romulan- Hell, is who?*

Marteinn sat dumbfounded for a moment. Brain was cutting-edge A.I., even so Marteinn had been completely taken off-guard a few times since its installation by the interplay Mann’s computer was capable of. Brain chirped again when no response was offered.

“Uh, Riadir... he was supposed to wait for... for us at Helo 4.”

Another chirp.

*>Signal positive Hawk 424, relayed from point 997.34.B2, original carrier frequency: Hq77.D003.*

“Where!?”

*>In transit, spatial grid 323.87. Closed course, Lothra Minor.*

“FVADT!”

Brain chirped and was about to query Marteinn when the Tiburonian propelled himself back to the navigational control panel and brought *Gunnlaugur* hard about to head towards Lothra Minor and the race both he and Preed had agreed they could afford to miss.

“Why the Areinnye didn’t you tell me that the first time I asked!?”

*>Initial query was directed to Helo 4. Specific query inputs will result in specific outputs. Is there a problem?*

“It’s just this *brain*, designed by Mann, got me in trouble again.”

Marteinn hissed more to himself than to the A.I.

*>Warning: current fuel reserves are at critical levels. Complete transit to Lothra Minor is not certain.*

“In trouble again.”

*>fzzt-fzzt?*



Figure 3: Kamak. Published 11 Sept. 2017 Pixabay Licence Free

# KAMAK

The footage played through on a loop, over, and over again. A grainy, green flickering image of the lifeless hulk they'd happened upon while picking their way through unclaimed space just beyond the shipping lanes outside of Altair IV. The monotone video was captured by the only two functional probes they had aboard. A dark shape in the vacuum at first. A line of bright, white static. A shudder, then a white flash as the probe's spotlights came online. The probes were rudimentary—meant to assist with orbital loading and unloading of the freighter's long tail of trailing cargo container pods. Then, bathed in light, the hazy, green saucer of a Starfleet vessel came into clear view.

Gixr kept his thoracic arm extended out towards the navigational controls where he deftly had his three hand toes resting on the freighter's helm as he watched the footage on a small secondary viewscreen. He worked the playback controls with his right hand and kept his left hand firmly on his station's warp regulator. As an Edosian, Gixr was uniquely adept at multitasking—a fact which had made him an asset to the Kanean Logistical Consortium.

The Edosian had been distracted since the *Kamak* had come across the drifting wreck weeks earlier while en route to deliver her consignment of frozen altaberries to the waiting Andorian wholesalers on Ivor Prime and Makka, the *Kamak's* commander, was growing concerned...

“Gixr, time to the border?”

Makka had been watching the younger man for nearly an hour from his own station at the rear of the *Kamak's* cramped command deck. It was his job to monitor the five cargo containers they were hauling as well as the freighter's old reactor and single massive nacelle.

“Huh?” Gixr heard Makka, but he'd been too focused on the fuzzy green image of the Starfleet vessel to catch what his older Kanean captain had asked.

“Gixr, turn that off, would you?!”

Gixr blinked his bright yellow eyes twice and shook his head as if being shaken out of a dream. “Sorry, Makka... what did you need?”

Gixr quickly flicked the secondary viewscreen off with his right central hand toe and shifted his attention forward to survey his primary instruments. They were on course for the border crossing at Melnos IV, by way of Ivor II—where Makka had made his usual, unscheduled pickup.

“Time to border, Gixr?”

“Holding at Warp 3... we'll be passing the Federation border markers in eighteen hours.” Gixr kept his central hand on the helm.

Makka glanced down at his engineering console. The reactor was holding at seventy-five percent of maximum output, which was as hard as they dared to push *Kamak's* old dilithium plant. She was built for hauling massive loads over long distances—not for speed. Makka then consulted his own star charts to verify Gixr's calculations. They'd have no issue crossing the border out of Federation space provided they managed to do so before their freight permit expired. The young Edosian pilot was running down a checklist at the head of the small cabin, but Makka wasn't interested. Their unscheduled stop for illegal Klingon Warnog had taken nearly twelve hours longer than it should have and Makka reasoned that they'd be lucky to pass Federation markers with but three hours to spare.

"You know Makka, we could probably make enough to buy our own fleet of freighters on what we'd get for the scrap tritanium alone..." Gixr corrected the *Kamak's* course slightly and trimmed their warp field to coax a little more speed out of the old freighter.

"I told you to forget it. That derelict is of no interest to us." Makka noted the slight increase in speed and began recalculating their ETA.

"You know, my uncle Arex was in the Starfleet." Gixr fought the urge to replay the probe footage of the drifting starship they'd come across on the start of this latest run into Federation territory.

"Yes, yes... you've told me that a few times. Captain of the *SS Surprise*, best friends with a Vulcan, a regular hero..." Makka sighed and switched off his terminal. They were going to cut it close and there wasn't anything more either one of them could do.

"He was a Lieutenant, Makka. A Lieutenant aboard the *USS Enterprise*; it was the Starfleet's flagship, you know."

"Fine, that and fifty credits might get you a hot supper the next time you're at Ivor Prime..."

"What I mean is, I understand what a salvage like that one could be worth to the right people. Could we maybe take it to Appa and see..."

"Gixr, I'm not going to tell you this again. We're boomers, not scrappers. Appa runs nine freighters and makes his living moving goods, not by scavenging other people's garbage." Makka spun in his seat to face the young male.

Gixr turned back to face his superior. Appa, a born Kalean and Makka's cousin by marriage, was the wealthiest being Gixr had ever met. He was a savvy businessman and had managed to turn his father's small freight business into a profitable enterprise within a matter of decades. The *Kamak* belonged to Appa—just as Makka and Gixr himself belonged to Appa. Both men had signed long-term contracts with the Kalean Logistical Consortium, which effectively meant that for the duration of their employment they were

as much chattel to Appa and his small Board of Directors as the *Kamak*, the *Lillva*, their crews or any of the other long-haul freighters Appa owned. Nothing happened aboard a Consortium freighter without Appa's approval... most of the time.

Being "family" with Appa had somewhat emboldened Makka over the years. While the run between Altair and Ivor Prime was hardly the most desirable route the Consortium covered, it did provide the wily Makka with a money-making opportunity no other freighter commander would dare to even consider.

Years earlier, when Makka had first taken command, he'd discovered a cache of Klingon Warnog stored on an unassuming asteroid orbiting Ivor II. The Warnog was leftover from the war nearly a century earlier and though unappreciated within Federation boundaries, it was outlawed in the Alvan and Klean systems and thus, incredibly valuable.

*Kamak* was rigged with five full-sized cargo pods for their present run. She could haul up to a dozen such pods, but to save expenses on fuel the Consortium only ever used what was required for any given job. Makka had transported a gross of altaberries and yeast to a long-standing Andorian client who specialized in vinting and wholesaling spirits—a lucrative endeavour to be sure. Once relieved of their cargo, Makka then had Gixr navigate an out-of-the-way return course byway of Ivor II where the fifth and final cargo pod at the far aft of *Kamak's* dull purple train of empty containers, was filled with five dozen barrels of the valuable and very illegal Warnog.

The cache of Klingon spirits was now nearly depleted. Makka figured he'd be out of the Warnog business in another one, or two runs. He'd managed to make a small fortune smuggling over the years and was already a rich man. At first, he'd had to work around a full complement of six men aboard the *Hammox*, Appa's oldest and smallest freighter—the ship Appa had inherited from his father to continue in the family's haulage business. Only once in those first few years did anyone think to question Makka about the curious return trips past Ivor II and that poor slug had promptly found himself reassigned to the Consortium's Dewar run, the coldest and most remote route Appa had contracted for. Being Appa's cousin was a good thing indeed.

*Kamak* was acquired from the Alvanians a few years ago and when Makka realized that the young, three armed Edosian pilot who'd come to work for Appa could easily do the work of two men, he began lobbying his cousin for command of the larger, newer freighter. Soon Makka was running with a crew of just four. The Andorians were proving to be good customers and rarely did Makka find himself shipping out with fewer than five full-sized cargo pods for any given run. All the while he made a fortune selling illicit

Warnog. There were times he had to bribe the odd Alvanian Customs Inspector, or pay off the old prospector who technically owned the asteroid near Ivor II where the barrels had first been discovered, but Makka could afford such expenses.

It was coming to an end though. The last dozen runs to Ivor Prime had been scantily manned. Makka had convinced Appa to let he and Gixr manage the *Kamak* alone—the expense saved on a full crew meant more profit for the Consortium and by cutting their compliment in half, the Consortium could save additionally on supplies and fuel. Gixr was aware of what Makka was up to and had been promised a small percentage of the profit in exchange for his silence and hard work. Together the two were able to smuggle huge shipments back across the border without fear of the crew realizing what they were up to.

Neither the Consortium's Board, nor Appa himself were aware of Makka's years-long endeavour. The *Kamak*'s navigational computer had been reprogrammed to omit the details of the freighter's unique return trajectories from Federation Space and Makka had long-standing arrangements to have the freighter's fuel stores replenished at the service yard of Lothra Minor. Every three cycles Makka had to settle his fueling debt at Lothra out of his Warnog profits, but again, it was simply the cost of doing business.

Once they were safely out of Federation space it would be another twelve hours of low-warp travel before they arrived for refueling. Makka was due to settle his debt—a case of latinum had been prepared and stowed in his sleeping berth for just this reason. He figured the profit taken from the present shipment would just about cover the outstanding fuel bill, but that was to be expected given how busy he and Gixr had been of late. One more grand run and he'd be able to buy out his contract with Appa, purchase his own ship and find a sandy beach to retire as a wealthy ex-smuggler under the moons of Gemulon V.

Makka pulled himself up from his station and stretched out his back. He was nearly fifty cycles old and the thick muscles which had twisted and bulged beneath his pale purple skin had started to turn to fat. Kaleans had an average life-expectancy of ninety cycles; being middle-aged had given Makka perspective.

"We shouldn't have even stopped when we came across that wreck, Gixr. It's got nothing for us but trouble and questions we don't need."

Gixr watched as the older man he'd come to think of as a mentor stretched his two odd arms above his head and then scratched at his torso. To an Edosian, the symmetry of bipeds was disconcerting. With only two arms and two legs they just looked... odd. Still, as Gixr had learned long

ago, most of the higher lifeforms in the known universe were simple bipeds and when he decided to leave Edos as an adolescent he'd learned to accept their grotesqueness.

"We found it out-bound though. Like I said, even if Appa doesn't want to deal with the Starfleet, I know we can get a fortune for its salvage value." Gixr brought his left and right hands together as if pleading with Makka to reconsider, while his thoracic arm reached up to allow him to rub his broad orange chin as was his want to do when agitated or excited.

"Appa won't deal with the Federation's Starfleet at all, you know that. As for finding a scrapper interested in breaking down a giant hulk like that—out here? Please. Besides, it'd likely take every freighter we have working together just to tractor that thing to a friendly port!" Makka could see the younger man was still fixated on the issue.

"Well, the yards at Altair II..."

"Are months away from where we found that thing. There's no money in it, kid. I used to be a scrapper, remember? Besides, neither of us need Appa or his accountants getting too interested in what we've been up to out here, it just raises too many questions."

Gixr sighed.

Makka regretted calling Gixr "kid". The younger man didn't like it and while they were more partner's-in-crime than actual friends, Makka was fond on the young pilot. "Here listen, we know from the trajectory that ship was on that it likely came out of the Kea System... I mean there's nothing else out there..."

"I know, I know..."

"That's Rommy territory Gixr. I'd rather go up against the entire Albanian Customs Force and Appa himself, than get mixed up in anything to do with Rommies. You can't tell me it didn't cross your mind that the Romulans might have had something to do with a dead Starfleet ship drifting in the darkness."

Gixr just starred at Makka with his small yellow eyes. He let all three of his arms fall and go limp. It was as if the old smuggler who'd promised to make him rich, had just let all the air out of his lungs.

"Sorry, Gixr. I'd put my life jeopardy in the service of my friends, but we're more than that. We're business partners, and our business isn't done yet. Now, see us to the border and then on to Lothra Minor—there's an LRL race scheduled it'll be just the thing to cheer you up."

Makka smiled and left the command deck to find his cabin. Gixr sat stoically in his seat for a few moments before double-checking their course and returning to the probe footage. Uncle Arex and his adventure stories flooded Gixr's head and fired his imagination.



Figure 4: Lothra Minor. Published 13 May 2020 Pixabay Licence Free

# LOTHRA MINOR

“*Kamak*, Port Control, disengage your primary drive and proceed to outer marker Z3 on thrusters only. Copy?”

Gixr kept his thoracic hand on the helm as he methodically cut power to the freighter’s fusion drive with the hand toes on his left hand. His bright yellow eyes remained fixed on the navigational trajectory emitted from Lothra Minor’s designated marker. The *Kamak* was already lined up for the approach to the Starport; momentum would carry the long freighter steadily closer. With his middle right hand toe, Gixr triggered the transmit function on *Kamak*’s communication panel.

“Confirm, Lothra Minor. Fusion drive offline... proceeding to marker Z3.”

Makka wasn’t on the small command deck. After they cleared Federation space without issue he’d retired to his cabin and remained out-of-sight the entire way to the Starport. Gixr was more than capable of bringing the *Kamak* into port on his own. He’d managed the task dozens of times and the fact that Makka wasn’t sitting behind him didn’t trouble the Edosian in the least.

Beyond the spread of monitors and the primary triangular viewing screen, was a one-meter-square observation port set into the bulkhead beyond Gixr’s station. The small port (more an affectation to relieve claustrophobia by providing a window out into space than a practical tool for visual acquisition) slowly filled with the bright yellow and green lights of the Lothra Minor complex. Gixr kept his grip on the freighter’s helm and thruster controls, but looked past his logistical plot screen to watch the Starport grow closer and closer with his own eyes.

“*Kamak*, Port Control, you are now within our screen boundaries, drop all deflector shields and prepare to be taken under tow.”

Gixr complied.

As the *Kamak* drifted closer to the long, silver buoy floating in the foreground ahead of the looming Spaceport, the command deck was awash in a blue/green wave of colour. The Z3 marker locked onto the approaching freighter with a powerful tractor beam and slowly pulled the long vessel to a stop a scant ten meters from its own silver hull. Once the rudimentary laser sensors confirmed zero momentum, Z3 then deployed a standard mooring umbilical which lined up with *Kamak*’s forward airlock.

“*Kamak*, Port Control, you are moored and stable. Standby for further instructions.”

“Confirm, Lothra Minor. *Kamak*, standing by.” Gixr powered down the engines and locked *Kamak* into her mooring profile. Behind him the hatch opened, and Makka made his way onto the command deck.

“Where in the mother have they stuck us?!” Makka slowly lowered himself into his own seat but didn’t bother trying to use any of his controls. In mooring profile, *Kamak* was essentially blind.

“We’re at an outer marker, Makka. The Port Authority say the inner fueling ring is jammed with LRL support vessels.” Gixr double-checked that he’d locked everything down before turning in his seat to face Makka.

“Hmmm...we’ve never been this far out.”

“Makka?” Gixr noticed that the older man wasn’t really addressing him per se. He was gazing out the viewport, turning something over in his mind.

“Wh...? Nothing, Gixr. Nothing. We’re lucky you bought us some extra time on the way here, this might take a while.”

Makka insisted that Gixr should disembark along the umbilical to the marker’s dedicated transport chamber. *Kamak*, like many freighters, didn’t have a personal transporter system. One of them had to remain aboard to arrange refuelling, and perhaps more importantly, to settle the outstanding debt with the Lothra Port Authority. They’d managed to arrive before the LRL event had concluded and Makka wanted his younger crewmate to see at least some of the race.

\*\*\*

Silas focused on his breathing and tried to look relaxed as the LRL Course marshal slowly paced along the observation deck overlooking the team moderators. Preed had just skirted his way around the second chicane of the final lap. *Hawk* had veered perilously close to the warning track again. By LRL rules, if the crazy Trill spilt out of the marked lane one more time, he’d forfeit the race. It wasn’t that Preed might lose that had Silas sweating profusely as the marshal approached; the fact that Silas was knowingly allowing Preed to continue with no thrusters was grounds for immediate disqualification and disbarment from the League for life.

The race at Lothra Minor was not a qualifier for this Season’s finals. Every season the LRL included four races out of the standard twelve events which did not add to a team’s total point standing for the championship. Teams could use the events to tune their pods, work in new pilots, or take a bye. Riadir Preed was supposed to have skipped Lothra Minor. Though the race held no points for Preed, it was one of four events where teams could legally place wagers with one another and the LRL then took fifty percent of

those funds and split them between the top four finishing teams. Preed had nearly run out of funds and Marteinn had disappeared with any hope of maintaining *Hawk* through the remainder of the Season.

“Watch it! You’re cresting the warning track again. Fzzzt.” Silas hissed into the transmitter tied to the Comms unit in Riadir’s flight helmet. He shifted his girth violently and made a show of readjusting himself as the marshal passed by behind him—to obscure the readouts his station was registering for *Hawk*.

“Ugggh!... Thanks Silas, I’m aware!” Riadir strained against the tiller of his pod as his sides and abdomen seared with pain.

Riadir’s voice came through Silas’s headset in a strained groan. There was enough fuel left in the pod’s belly for one more turn... after that, the Trill would be out of luck. The marshal continued along the deck and was now standing behind Steick’s station. The tall Nausicaan roared instructions into his own transmitter and then barked laughter as his brother, piloting the *Shayug Turdz*, rocketed across the finish line to victory.

Silas tried to calm himself, but the readings coming from *Hawk* were concerning. So far, Preed had managed to keep on track using momentum and skill, but the stress he was subjecting his small pod to was warping the spaceframe. The fuel situation was something Silas felt he might be able to talk his way out of, but the Master Alarm had signaled two turns earlier as *Hawk* slowly began twisting and pulling herself apart. Silas knew there was no way to excuse disconnecting the audibles and willfully ignoring it. He was grateful for the Nausicaan’s expected victory at that moment as the marshal moved to attend Steick’s station to review the recorded data and confirm the win.

Steick roared in triumph and bounded up and away from his terminal. The other moderators cowed themselves and remained focused on their own instruments. The race was won, but it wasn’t over. The marshal signaled a clean victory and Steick rushed out towards the concourse where his brother would be arriving shortly to claim victory and collect debts.

\*\*\*

Gixr materialized on an elevated pad overlooking the main concourse of the Spaceport and stepped cautiously into the loud din and bright lights of Lothra Minor Station. Several people were clambering around the row of betting windows at the base of a giant view screen. Two more travellers materialized behind Gixr as he blinked his small yellow eyes in rapid succession to try and adjust to the bright lights of the bustling surroundings he found himself in.

“Z3?”

Gixr blinked and turned away from his view of the concourse to come face-to-face with a tall, green uniformed soldier wearing a yellow helmet with a red visor. “Uh... marker Z3?”

“Correct. You transported in from Z23?”

The soldier’s voice was tinny and almost robotic sounding. Gixr couldn’t tell what species the man belonged to, only that he was a biped, like most. “I’m the helmsman for the *Kamak*... the freighter at Z3?”

“Six Two Three. Assayer’s Office. There’s a matter of an outstanding fuelling account.”

Gixr cocked his head slightly and tried to understand why the Assayer’s Office would be interested in fuel accounts...

“There’s been some changes since the last time you passed through. You are to remit the outstanding amount to me immediately. Then you will accompany me to the Administrator’s tower.” The tall man let his left hand come to rest on the hilt of a shiny black disruptor discreetly holstered in the left thigh of his green coveralls.

“I... there’s been some misunderstanding... I’m just the helmsman. Makka deals with the Depot Chief...”

“The Depot Chief has been relieved of duties. You will remit the outstanding balance now, or your freighter and any cargo will be seized.”

A roar went up from the collection of gamblers and race fans gathered below. Two enormous Nausicaans were pushing their way through the crowd and climbing the metal ramp towards the large communal transporter pad. One of the Nausicaans was wearing a silver EV suit and carrying a helmet. As Gixr fumbled for words he realized the two approaching strangers must be actual light-pod racers.

“I... Makka has a case latinum aboard the *Kamak* to pay for the fuel. I’m just the helmsman...” All three of his arms were held outstretched in a pleading gesture.

The Nausicaans pushed past the young Edosian and the green uniformed soldier without slowing. They laughed and roared and carried on in a menacing fashion, pausing only momentarily to input their desired co-ordinates before transporting away.



Figure 5: Trouble Again. Published 20 Oct. 2019 Pixabay Licence Free

# TROUBLE AGAIN

As Gixr was being led away by the green uniformed soldier to further discuss the outstanding balance owed by the *Kamak*, Silas was shuttering his pit monitors. The Trill had just washed across the finish line and had secured fifth place. *Hawk* had used less than a quarter burn of reverse thrust to buffer her exit from warp speed to sublight and her fuel was exhausted. Most pit moderators remained linked to their light-pod pilots until the course tugs took them in tow, but Silas had no intention of remaining on Lothra Minor any longer than he needed to.

The Nausicaan brothers, Chutz and Steick had claimed victory. The team from Aldeb III managed to edge out the independents from Dessica II, and the Kalea L'PRO team had captured fourth place.

As Silas locked his terminal down and disconnected from the race grid, he let a shuddering sigh of relief escape his chest. The marshals were obligated to inspect and quantify the data recorded on the top three finishers' pit computers before certifying the results of any race. They had the option of doing so with the fourth-place winner in what were commonly referred to as '*Money Races*' as well. With a fifth place showing the chances of anyone discovering Silas's wilful disregard of LRL rules as concerned the race-worthiness of the light-pod he was moderating were slim.

Silas hustled from the pits to the secondary docking array where the tugs were towing the light-pods following the race. As the hulking Altairian pushed through the throng of dock workers and crews, he spotted *Hawk* being lowered to the deck from the receiving pad above the pressurized hangar. The little light-pod was battered and bent. The trailing edge of her single nacelle, once neatly hidden beneath the decorative cowling of her chassis, was clearly visible and her port stabilizing fin was bent up and away from the pod's frame.

Before the landing platform supporting *Hawk* had made it to the hangar level her canopy was violently pushed up and forward. There was no pit crew waiting for the battered blue and yellow racer. Only Silas, the hired moderator, stood witness to Riadir Preed's rage as he struggled to free himself from *Hawk's* harness. The pod continued to sink lower and lower towards the hangar floor. Preed jumped clear of the bent and battered racer and nearly fell off the landing platform. Silas could see how angry the Trill was.

At the far end of the hangar the *Shayug Turdz* was being carefully loaded into a custom transport module by the professional engineers employed by K'eltian Committed; the premiere Race Team of the LRL. Chutz

and Steick were nowhere to be seen. Silas watched in envy as the uniformed, trim, and professional crew babied the Nausicaan light-pod into its waiting module as though it were made of pure latinum. More than anything Silas had wanted to be a light-pod racer... and if not a pilot, then at least a moderator for a great team. All he'd managed to achieve was a reputation as a reliable fill-in moderator among the independent teams.

“Damn!”

Silas returned his attention to the *Hawk* and managed to just avoid Preed's EV helmet as it crashed onto the deck only a few centimeters ahead of him. “Hey! Watch where you're throwing things Preed!” Silas yelled as *Hawk* finally came to a rest on its deck-level berth.

Riadir glared at the fat Altairian for a second, then towards the shattered visor on his best EV helmet. He swallowed a scream and ran his blue gloved hands through his sandy hair in wild frustration.

Silas watched the younger man tremble and shake for a moment before reaching into the front pouch of his dirty yellow coveralls to retrieve the pad with his contract details.

“Fifth! Fifth, Silas! Do you know what that means!?”

Preed glared across the hangar deck taking in the sight of the other pilots and their crews going about the usual post race drudgery. He lingered for a moment on the bright orange and pink K'eltian Committed branded modules and crewmen attending to Chutz's *Shayug Turdz* and let a wave of jealousy, envy, and frustration wash over him.

“It means you're not dead and somehow, I still have my license. Now, if you don't mind.” Silas extended his thick left arm and thrust the pad towards the seething Trill.

“Blood suckers!!”

“Hey! We're professionals, Preed. Be professional.” Silas spotted two LRL marshals making their rounds two berths over. The LRL was strict when it came to contracts and wagering between licensed racers and crews. If the Trill wanted to make things difficult, he could find himself slapped with a hefty suspension.

Riadir took the pad from the Altairian he'd hired to moderate for him and keyed the sequence required to release the agreed upon fifteen thousand credits for Silas's services. He handed the pad back with a trembling hand and watched as Silas quietly turned to walk out of the hangar and go and prepare for the next race at Neb-bid.

“Fifth, Silas... all I needed was to finish fourth. I had it... I swear, I did.”

Silas stopped and turned back towards the exhausted looking Trill in the grimy EV suit. *Hawk* was now sitting eye-level and looked even more

beat up than she had descending on the platform. There was nobody around to help Preed. The Trill looked like a man who had nothing. Because of him, Silas very nearly lost everything...

"I wouldn't care, but it's a dangerous affair...getting mixed up with you, that is."

"Being on my team?" Riadir suddenly felt deflated. The anger was gone, all that remained was a sense of being drained.

"If that's what you call it, Preed. Don't, don't call on me again." Silas turned away and continued back towards the main concourse, pad in hand.

As the fat Altairian made his way out of the secondary docking array, he noticed an older Tiburonian shuffling his way onto the hangar floor. The man was bald (most Tiburonians were) and wore a thick pair of coveralls in the same white and blue pattern as Preed's dirty EV flight suit. Silas paused a moment to watch the older man pass. He couldn't help from grinning at the sight of the Tiburonian's ridiculously large earlobes flopping about wildly as he hurried towards the hangar.

Silas took one more look at the pad in his hand and confirmed that fifteen thousand credits had been deposited to his account. Then he replaced the pad to his yellow coveralls and made for his transport. He'd return in an hour to collect his pit equipment when the activity had died down.

Marteinn stood just inside the bulkhead of the secondary hangar deck and scanned the thinning collection of crewmen, pilots and techs. He quickly picked out what was left of *Hawk* and the blue and white suited figure standing dejectedly in front of her.

"RIADIR! What the Areinnye?! What the Areinnye!"

Preed looked up and clearly saw Marteinn across the hangar. He didn't have the emotional energy to get angry, or demand to know where Marteinn had been the last two weeks. He didn't know how he was going to explain how he'd just emptied their account to pay for racing in a losing bid to make some money and show up Chutz...

From behind Marteinn appeared two green uniformed soldiers and a short Dewan transgendered LRL Official named Cr'ach. Preed knew exactly what Cr'ach was here for and from the quick look Marteinn shot towards the Dewan and his escorts, Riadir was sure his partner had deduced quickly what was going on. Cr'ach was the LRL's Gaming and Collections Commissioner. It was Cr'ach's job to see that all wagers were honoured, and all debts were paid. Cr'ach, the two soldiers and Marteinn all made their way towards Preed.

"Marteinn, I'm sorry... 'cause I'm in trouble again."

“In trouble again.”

“Pardon?”

“Trouble again. Mr. Gixr. At least your vessel the *Kamak* is in trouble, in trouble, in trouble...” H’ey-dir shook his heads back and forth slowly in a sad, almost hypnotic way. He spoke softly from both mouths. His right head was the dominant one and had the most to say, but his left head quietly repeated those sentiments he felt needed to be emphasised. In this case his left mouth just quietly repeated ‘in trouble, in trouble, in trouble’ repeatedly.

Gixr watched as this strange biped with two heads loomed over him from behind a white polished desk in Lothra Minor’s Administrator’s office. The tall, green uniformed soldier who’d accosted him at the transporter platform had delivered him to this *Mr. H’ey-dir* after Gixr had failed to remit the outstanding fuel debt for the *Kamak*. H’ey-dir was now the acting Depot Chief for the Starport and the Chief of the Lothra Minor’s Security Force.

“I don’t understand what you mean, sirs...?”

H’ey-dir stopped shaking his heads and took a seat across from the young Edosian. The dark green eyes of his left face narrowed, his left mouth drew itself into a tight line under his purple nose; while the nearly grey, blue eyes of his right face widened, and his right mouth set itself into a bemused grin. The young male before him claimed to be a simple helmsman for a logistics company, nothing more. H’ey-dir prided himself on his ability to read people. Looking with his discerning set of empathetic grey/blue eyes, he could see that the young Edosian was a simple work-a-day lad; however, looking with his cold detail-oriented set of dark green eyes, he could see that young Mr. Gixr was also something of pirate, or a...

From a large silver transmitter/receiver mounted to the corner of H’ey-dir’s desk came a low buzz. H’ey-dir raised his right hand and signalled for Gixr to remain silent. With his left hand he reached towards the silver box and removed a small black handset, which he held to his left head’s, left ear.

“H’ey-dir, yes? ...Is that confirmed?... The search?... How many?... No. Standard protocols... Correct...” H’ey-dir’s left head was quiet and focussed on the call, his left set of eyes were focused on the receiver in his left hand.

“Mr. Gixr, your vessel has made a regular habit of stopping here to refuel on what I must presume to be your return trips to... to...?” H’ey-dir’s right head was focused squarely at Gixr, who sat somewhat dumbfounded across from the two-headed Depot Chief.

“Uhm... to the Kanean Logistical Consortium, Kalea III?”

“Yes, Kalea III.”

“Have it put in stasis and transported to the Examiner’s office. Anything on the Security Net?... Check the redundant feeds then...” H’ey-dir’s left head continued with its conversation seemingly oblivious to the conversation his right head was having with Gixr.

“This Consortium you work for, it’s a large outfit?”

Gixr pulled his attention away from the left head and the odd, one-sided and somewhat hushed conversation it was having over the curious black communications device and tried to focus on the light grey/blue eyes of the right head. “Um, yes... I think it’s the largest freight company on all of Kalea III.”

“I see. If that’s the case, may I ask why your vessel routinely stops here to top up its deuterium supply and on at least one occasion... two cycles ago that is, replenish a portion of your dilithium?”

“Thank you Six Two Three, once that’s secured, I’d like you to join us.” H’ey-dir replaced the black handset into the silver box on his desk with his left hand and his left head returned its dark green-eyed gaze to Gixr.

“Uh... Makka, my boss, he likes to top up the reserves for the return.” Gixr tried to keep focused on the right head, which had asked him about the fuel, but he felt self-conscious under the withering gaze of the left head, now no longer engaged in a separate conversation.

“Well, Makka doesn’t exactly ‘top up’ anything, does he?” The right head asked in response.

“Can you confirm that this Makka was aboard your vessel at Marker Z3 when you transported to the Starport?” The left head enquired in a cold matter of fact tone.

“I... I mean, I’m just the helmsman. Makka is the boss, what he does is his... he’s, yes, he’s aboard *Kamak* now.”

H’ey-dir drew a long slow breath in through his left nose simultaneously exhaled a short sharp blast of air through the nostrils on the nose of his right face. “Makka had an arrangement with the former Depot Chief here, which I know you are aware of. He replenished only a portion of fuel to your vessel and paid for this expense himself, usually in latinum.”

Gixr blinked his small yellow eyes, searching for something to say.

“Within the hour you will be asked to identify a body we just discovered aboard your freighter. This Makka appears to have been the victim of foul play,” said H’ey-dir’s left head.

Gixr went cold.

H’ey-dir could see the news of the boy’s commander’s death had genuinely shaken him. He allowed the expression on his right face to soften, as if to signal some sympathy for young being; however, his left head pressed the matter home.

“We also discovered a surprising large load of vintage Klingon Warnog in the last cargo pod of your vessel. This Warnog does not appear on any of your manifests.”

“Makka’s dead?” Gixr’s own head was spinning.

“It appears as though he was attacked with a serrated blade sometime within the last hour. I’m sorry, there was nothing Six Two Three, or his men could do,” said H’ey-dir’s right head.

“Usually, I’m kept busy with pirates and smugglers running Romulan Ale into the Federation. You and this Makka were smuggling Warnog out of Federation space and selling it on the black market here though, weren’t you?” asked H’ey-dir’s left head.

Gixr began to cry... he had no words. He nodded his head slowly, and this sign of admission seemed to brighten the scowl on the Acting Depot Chief’s left face.

“Owing to the volume of traffic we’ve been dealing with around this Race; our security sensor network didn’t pick up anything at the outer markers. I am having Six Two Three review our redundant feeds though, in hopes of discovering what might have transpired in the short time since you left your vessel,” said the right head.

“In the meantime, the freighter known as *Kamak* and all sundries and cargo discovered onboard will be impounded until such time as the outstanding balance on your fuel bill has been paid in full,” said the left head.

“No... no, Makka had the money ready. Latinum, a whole case of it.” Gixr looked from one head to the other as tears continued to roll down his long face.

“There was no latinum found aboard. Six Two Three is extremely thorough in these matters. Until such time as the outstanding debt is paid, the freighter is ours,” said the left head coldly.

“Perhaps it would be helpful if you contacted your Consortium to work this out to a mutually agreeable end?” asked H’ey-dir’s right head.

“No... no...” Gixr couldn’t begin to imagine how he’d explain any of this to Appa.

“Regardless, once our investigation into the presumed homicide is concluded, we will be contacting this Kanean Consortium ourselves,” barked the left head.

“For now, Mr. Gixr, you’re free to go about your business. I am sorry for your loss...” said H’ey-dir’s right head as his grey/blue eyes took in the miserable young Edosian.

“...you will of course remain at the Starport until our investigation concludes. You understand what I’m saying to you?” continued the left head coldly.

Gixr wiped away his tears with his thoracic hand and tried to look into both pairs of eyes at the same time. "Yes, I understand."

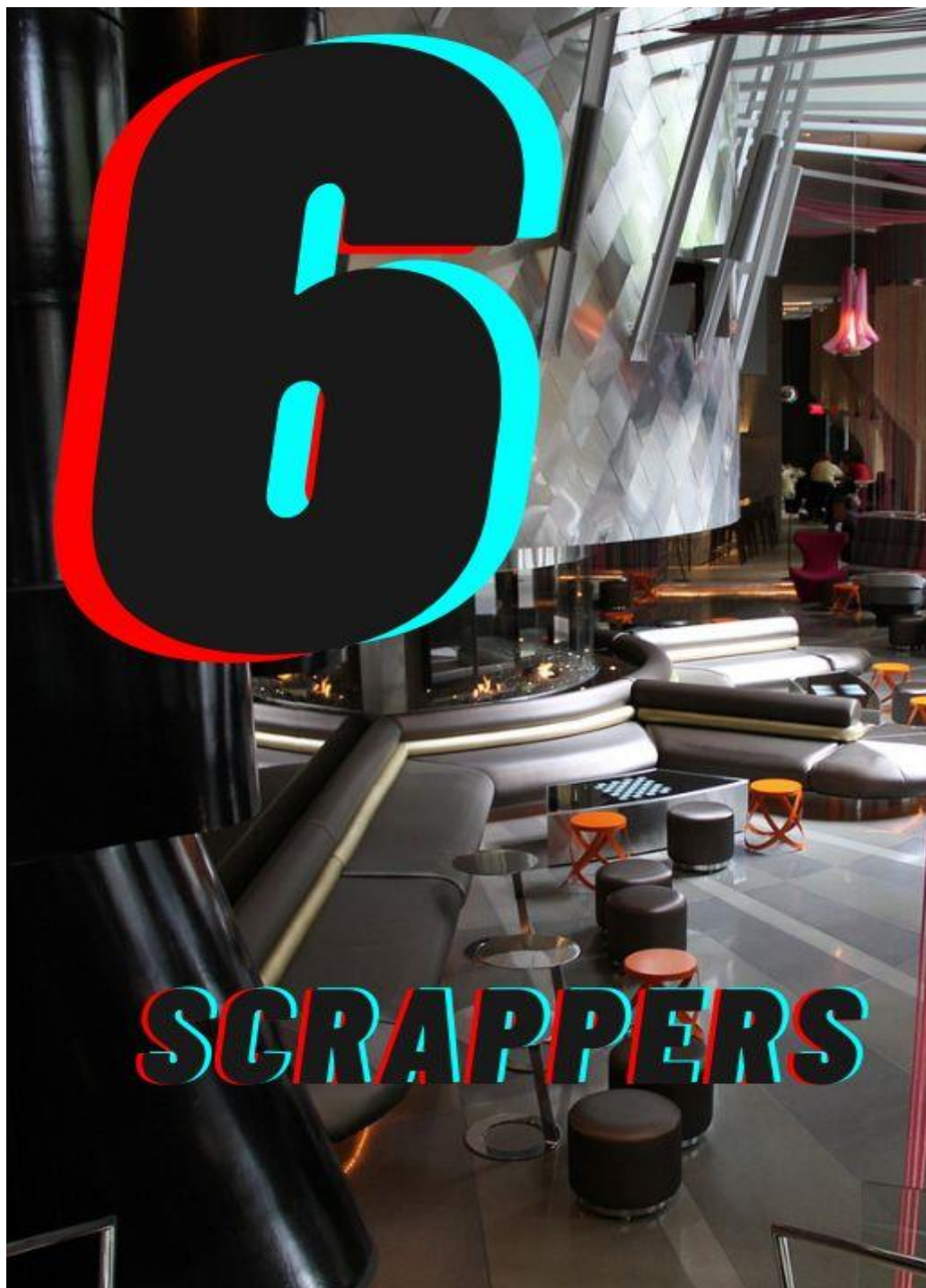


Figure 6: Scrappers. Published 30 Nov. 2014 Pixabay Licence Free

# SCRAPPERS

Riadir took a long pull from his mug and held the Alvanian rum in his mouth for a moment before swallowing the sickly-sweet liquor. Beside him Marteinn stroked his left earlobe thoughtfully as he studied the scant information on a worn padd he'd brought from the *Gunnlaugur*.

The lounge on the lower level beneath the main concourse was a favourite for the deckhands and workers on Lotha Minor. It was less expensive and but just as grand as the twin-leveled gambling house and bar frequented by run-of-the-mill spectators and tourists. Many of the pit crews and racers found it more inviting as well as it offered a somewhat private escape to unwind after a race, out of the eye of fans and media.

"This is it then? Six hundred credits? That's all we have left?"

Riadir slowly placed his mug back on the small table he shared with Marteinn and drew a breath. How had everything gone so wrong? he wondered.

"Technically... we're in the hole for ninety-four hundred credits, plus what we owe for these drinks," Riadir purred in a rum heavy voice.

Marteinn placed the padd down and took hold of his own glass of Romulan Ale. Cr'ach had made it clear that Chutz and Steick were expecting to be paid their share of the ten thousand credits Preed had apparently wagered on the outcome of today's race. Team Preed had until the next event at Neb-bid to transfer the funds, or default and face indefinite suspension, or possible expulsion from the LRL.

Cr'ach had gone on to say how refreshing it was that the Nausicaan brothers had opted to follow LRL guidelines regarding outstanding wagers, as opposed their normal tact of assault and intimidation. While Steick had apparently been the voice of 'reason' in the matter of the outstanding debt, seemingly owing to some urgent appointment the brothers had to keep, collateral was required. Over Marteinn's pained protests, Cr'ach and the green goons had impounded the battered and twisted *Hawk* in lieu of payment.

"So... this is it then." Marteinn raised his glass and downed his blue ale in a single gulp.

"Looks like. Where were you, Marteinn? You were supposed to be back weeks ago..." Riadir kept his hands on the table and tried to control the roiling emotions churning inside him.

"Where was I? I was making a cursed cargo run to Tellar for that bogus old fraud, that's where I was. What I want to know is what the Areinnye were you thinking? We didn't need to be in this race. We surely didn't need to make side-bets with murderous Nausicaans," Marteinn hissed this through

his teeth, not wanting to make a scene in the crowded lounge. At the table next to them sat a pathetic-looking Edosian nursing a glass of expensive Altair water.

“You were only supposed to be gone five weeks at most. I didn’t hear from you. We were running low on everything, so I figured I’d enter Lothra Minor and make a few credits while I waited for you, or some word of you...”

“I delivered the cargo as we agreed, but there was no sign of Mann. I even went to the Sol System proper to look for him and there was nothing. No support. No supplies. Nothing of what he promised.”

“So, this is my fault?” Preed tensed his arms but kept his hands firmly on the table.

“You’re the one who blasted our life savings out the airlock!”

The steady din of the lounge dropped off for a second and the collection of drinkers, grifters, race fans and off-duty workers all turned to see if violence was about to erupt.

“There’s a lot of green meanies about. I don’t have any desire to spend the night in a holding cell, Marteinn,” growled Riadir.

“Well... neither do I. So where does this leave us, then?”

\*\*\*

Gixr ordered a glass of Altair water from the barman in the glitzy lounge one level below the main concourse. The older man gave him an odd look, but served him, nonetheless. There wasn’t a lot of call for Altair water on the working levels of Lothra Minor.

By the time Mr. H’ey-dir had finished interrogating him, and the green soldier had returned to have him identify the corpse discovered aboard the *Kamak*, the LRL race was long over. Gixr hadn’t even cared about the race really. Makka had been the one to make a big deal over it. Now Makka was dead. *Kamak* was impounded, and Gixr quite literally had nowhere to go.

Surprisingly, it had been the tall, uniformed soldier, Six Two Three who’d advised Gixr to stick to the lower levels to find food and shelter while he awaited the outcome of Mr. H’ey-dir’s investigation. Six Two Three warned the young Edosian that while Lothra Minor looked inviting, it was essentially a floating tourist trap in space geared towards the singular purpose of fleecing as much latinum and as many credits as possible from those who passed through. As Gixr had no income, no vessel, and no way to leave the Starport for the foreseeable future, Six Two Three advised that he should eat where the workers ate and seek accommodation among them, as opposed to overpaying for hotel accommodations on the main concourse.

He'd learned from Six Two Three that Mr. H'ey-dir was now in charge of the Starport while the former Depot Chief and his staff, including a division of H'ey-dir's own Security Deputies were under investigation for a variety of smuggling, fraud and theft charges. The soldiers usually used by the Assayer's Office to inspect and police mining operations, freighters and prospectors in the sector were serving as a temporary police force in Lothra Minor.

Gixr had thanked the soldier for his advice and for finding it in him to have some empathy. He dutifully followed an off-going shift of baggage handlers down to the lower level beneath the grand concourse and promptly found a quiet table within a crowded, but welcoming lounge.

Most of the people in the lounge were work-a-day labourers serving various needs throughout the Starport. A few of them were crews from the various light-pod race teams which were still packing up and getting ready to move on to the next event in their Season. Gixr quietly watched all of them and wished for all the stars that he might trade places with any one of them.

Money, thanks to Makka, was not a problem for Gixr. He had amassed a small personal fortune in his time running Warnog aboard the *Kamak*. After paying for his second round of Altair water he consulted his personal pad and confirmed that he had just over twenty-five thousand credits available in his account and a remaining fifty-five thousand in reserve. He certainly had more than enough to book passage anywhere in the system, but then what?

He had no home to speak of. After leaving Edos he'd ruined any familial relations he might otherwise have relied upon with his mother's family. His father was long dead and his uncle, Arex, the male who'd fired his imagination as child with stories of the *USS Enterprise* and Dr. Spock and Mr. McCoy and all the other colourful heroes—lived in retirement somewhere in the Sol System.

Even if he had somewhere to go, it wouldn't matter anyway. Mr. H'ey-dir had made it clear he couldn't leave until they were done with him... and even if and when that happened, Appa would be looking for him.

The thought of Appa worried Gixr most of all. Appa would want to know why the *Kamak* was impounded far away from where she ought to be. No doubt he would be told all about the Warnog and the smuggling. With Makka dead and gone, Gixr would be the only one left to answer for any of it.

"You're the one who blasted our life savings out the airlock!"

Gixr looked-up from his drink with a start and quickly turned his attention to the two bipeds at the table next to him.

“I don’t have any desire to spend the night in a holding cell, Marteinn,” growled the younger man, who appeared to be a Trill given the dark brown spots running down the sides of his face to disappear down the collar of his dirty white-and-blue shirt.

“Well... neither do I. So where does this leave us, then?” replied the young man’s drinking companion. He was a man with a bald head and enormous earlobes. He was older, and in a way reminded Gixr of Makka.

“Can I help you, friend?” asked the younger man when he noticed Gixr’s fixed gaze.

“Ah, my apologies. I didn’t mean to...”

“It’s all right, friend. I was being a Romulan’s ass and got too damned loud. Please, let me buy you a drink as an apology,” said the older man.

Gixr blinked rapidly and forced a sheepish smile towards the older bald man he’d just been thinking looked particularly humorous owing to his exaggerated earlobes.

“Fpppht! Why not? It’s not like another few rounds are going to bankrupt us anymore. Come take a seat,” Riadir exhaled and let the hostile edge in his voice die, then beckoned the orange Edosian over to the table he and Marteinn had been brooding over.

“Thank-you... I’m Gixr.” The two men sat silently as Gixr rose from his small table in the corner and gracefully sidled up to the offered stool on his three legs and took a seat.

“I’m Marteinn, and this young racer, this is Riadir Preed.”

“I thank you again. You’re... you’re a Trill, is that right?”

Riadir finished the last of his rum and motioned for the bartender. “I am indeed and yes; the spots go all the way down.”

“Sorry, I’m confused. You are a Trill, but you are also a light-pod racer?”

“Ha! Yeah, well... I didn’t say I was a popular Trill.”

Marteinn looked from Gixr to Riadir with a questioning look.

“He’s under the impression that Trills don’t race light-pods, Marteinn... or pilot small vessels, or test shuttles, or have any fun at the stick at all.”

Riadir could see his friend didn’t understand. He explained that the Government of Trill had unanimously forbidden citizens of joinable age to participate in any activity involving competitive flying in 2286. Following a shuttle accident which nearly killed a prominent symbiont by the name of Dax, the Symbiosis Commission had pressed the Government to prohibit all joined and prospective Trill hosts from engaging in such senseless endeavours.

As the barman approached, Marteinn shook his head at the story Riadir was telling and looked over at their new friend... "You're Edosian, right?"

Gixr nodded.

"What're you drinking?" Marteinn pointed to Riadir's empty mug and his own empty glass.

"Oh, Altair water."

"I'm sorry...?"

"Altair water."

"Can you, I mean do Edosians not, y'know... drink?" Marteinn looked from Gixr to Riadir (who was clearly growing intoxicated) back to Gixr again.

"Well, of course."

"Good. Two Romulan Ales and a rum for the dissident here."

The trio drank for remainder of night. At first Marteinn and Riadir talked about winning their one and only Cosmic Championship just a few cycles ago. Gixr shared his own tales of being a boomer with the Consortium. For a time, it was good for all of them to pretend that their present circumstances weren't dire and pressing, but soon truth won out over fiction and past glories were tarnished by the touch of current circumstances.

Riadir and Marteinn were professional light-pod racers with no pod to race, no funds to draw from, and an old Alvanian freighter with no deuterium to fire her engines. While Gixr was a boomer with no ship, no captain, or home; very soon to be a marked man. What funds he did have were enough to pay for a temporary escape, but the inevitability of capture was a foregone conclusion.

"I'm sorry to hear about your troubles, Gixr. You seem like a good kid," Marteinn said this half into the glass of Ale he was pouring down his throat as Riadir finished yet another mug of rum.

"No, no... I'm sorry this human, Dannar, lulled you both into your present situation. You are honest men and deserve better." Gixr collected the two empty glasses and Riadir's mug and held them high for the barman to see they needed another round.

"If... if only we could get one real chance. You know? Just one real sponsor and I know we could win the big one again. This time it'd be different," lamented Riadir.

"How do you mean?" asked Gixr.

"Well, if Marteinn and I could get a real investment, one that actually came through... we could be a real light-pod team. A fresh pod, new equipment. No more patching things together last minute, or shady dealings for quick funds. Unstoppable, Gixr. Unstoppable."

“Bah! Who are we kidding Preed?! It’s back to the Altair Scrapppers for both of us!” Marteinn’s head drooped towards the bar and the tips of his earlobes nearly went into the drinks.

“Wait, Altair? You know of the Altair II Scrap Yards?” Gixr’s eyelids had been growing heavy too as he drank glass after glass of Romulan Ale, but suddenly he felt bright and hopeful.

Preed moved his mug clear of Marteinn’s right earlobe and looked over at their new friend with a quizzical expression. “Marteinn here, used to be commander of an Altairian Tractor Scow. I was a trainee pilot with the salvage division he was responsible for... It’s how we met.”

Gixr drew all three of his long arms together and clasped his hand toes into a massive ball at his chest, a smile lit his long face. “Do you still have contacts with the scrapppers?”

“Uh, my... my son took over for me when I left to join the circus with Preed, why do you ask?” Marteinn was very drunk, but the sight of the young Edosian suddenly so happy buoyed him up and helped him stave off the desire to simply pass out at the table.

“A ship! Not just a ship, but a starship! Immense, worth a fortune and I know where it is! We could salvage it, use the proceeds to settle the debt on *Kamak* and restore Appa’s faith!”

Riadir and Marteinn just sat dumbfounded, grinning madly at their young friend’s newfound joy.

“Don’t you see? If we can get Appa onside, he’d be your sponsor! Between his support and whatever your end of the salvage would be... we’d all be in the clear and living free!”

\*\*\*

Still inebriated, the three new friends arranged to have the *Gunnlaugur’s* fuel cells filled using funds Gixr transferred into Marteinn’s personal account. The old freighter was ready for departure by the time the fancy restaurants on the main concourse were preparing to serve breakfast. A quick diagnostic from Brain confirmed the old freighter had a full fuel reserve and could make warp five to Altair IV on the fringes of the Kea System in a little over six weeks.

Hiding within a trunk carried between Riadir Preed and Marteinn, Gixr was moved from the Starport to the main transporter pad without being spotted by Mr. H’ey-dir or any of the green-uniformed soldiers prowling about Lothra Minor. Marteinn had taken pains to be sure Gixr was confident he wanted to commit to the plan the three had agreed upon over drinks in the wee hours of the night. The young man remained committed.

“If you do this kid, you’ll be a fugitive.”

“If I don’t, I’ll be a dead man.”

With no fanfare and with barely anyone other than a half-asleep approach control operator even noticing, the *Gunnlaugur* pulled away from Lothra Minor at less than half impulse. The old freighter navigated past an ancient asteroid belt, then jumped to warp in search of the derelict *USS Sheaffe*.

*“If everything seems under control, you’re just not going fast enough.”*

- Mario  
Andretti

*“Admire a small ship, but put your freight in a large one; for the larger the load, the greater will be the profit upon profit.”*

- Hesiod



**ZOOMERS  
&  
BOOMERS**