

Bounty Hunter

The Kitchen Episode (Where Reyanna's writing career began)

This story came about with an idea to get the children involved more in reading and writing. It's un-edited and in it's original format. Each participating discussion board member created a character and posted a paragraph (or more) to the storyline. The result is what you'll read below. Will it become a best seller?

Starring

(In order of appearance)

Daniel	-----	"Damon Morlan"
David	-----	"Jason Rider"
Michelle	-----	"Jayce Williams"
Reyanna	-----	"Solace Black"
Stephanie	-----	"Kidd Majere"

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Damon Morlan sat back in the seat of his ship and sighed. *Bloody bountyhead*, he thought angrily, *he keeps dodging around on me, jumping from planet to planet. He's a slippery one, but I'll get him sooner or later.* The burly bounty hunter flexed his black-leather-gloved right hand as he set the controls to autopilot and climbed out of the pilot seat. His ship, the *Ace Jammer*, was pretty big as private ships go. It had a galley, fully equipped sleeping quarters, and a hanger bay made for one to two smaller ships. In there rested his smaller fighter ship, the *Ace of Spades*. That little ship had saved his butt on numerous occasions, not to mention allowed him to catch bountyheads when they would have escaped if he'd used the *Jammer*.

He pushed off the pilot's chair and floated across the main room on the ship. Zero gravity wasn't his favorite part of the job by far, but it was something you had to get used to if you were going to work in space. His bare left hand caught the door to the kitchen section of the galley and he pulled himself in.

He snagged a cold beverage from the refrigeration unit and popped a straw into it. Drinking the usual way was nearly impossible in zero g, and straws were just more sensible, anyway. He took a long draw from the drink as he floated back out of the kitchen. His sidearm a large-caliber pistol, clanked against the side of the ship as he came to rest next to his large stereo system. What kind of ship was complete without a kickin' sound system? He hit a button and heavy metal music poured from the speakers; he took another long draw from his drink and sighed, this time one of happiness.

On the planet Venus, within site of planet Earth, Damon found his mark. He ended up sitting in a bar on Venus, listening to a smooth jazz group jam out. He ordered a glass of gin and downed it in one shot. A bit of alcohol never hurt before heading to take a bountyhead anyway. His cold green eyes swept the bar, looking for anyone that fit the description of his mark. His long black hair fell just far enough down his face to hide his eyes; a good bounty hunter had to be able to watch people without them knowing.

Jayce "The Ace" Williams sat back in her chair and downed her whiskey thinking of the past and how peaceful it was, *you need to get over the past* she told herself *what good is it dwelling over the past? Besides you need to set your mind on your next target.* She looked up to see her warrant on the rather small TV at the counter. Then got up, glanced at the whispering drunkies, rolled her eyes and went out of the bar. As she reached her airship *Lighthawk* she opened the door, got in, and set a course for earth *time to visit an old friend* she said.

Despite the power failure a back up generator was maintaining the stations critical systems with relative easy. Jason Rider continued soldering the main board circuits on the FGEN3500. The smell and smoke, unbearable for most people, drifted up across his face and into the ventilator above the workbench. *"I need more light"*; he mumbled to himself, *"I can't see crap. I've got to get my eyes adjusted again!"* Determined to finish the circuit before going to bed, Jason reached over and grabbed a powerful magnifying glass with a built in quasar lamp, eyeballed the diode lead, lightly touched the solder, and with a tiny puff of smoke he exclaimed, *"ah, perfect as usual."*

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He'd been working on the main generator computer for the last six hours. Ever since an ion storm passed across his hidden laboratory on an asteroid he affectionately call *The Rock*. He found his unique hideout by accident after narrowly escaping capture when a weapon deal went sour. If his ship, *Predator One*, hadn't sustained damage in the escape, he would have flown right passed the asteroid. But with a damaged jump coil, he had to come up with another plan. Pure genius is how his friend as well as his enemies describes what happened next. With nothing more then a holographic generator and a long-range probe, Jason projected an image of ship going to warp. At the same instance his pursuers took out after the probe, he engaged his shelf built cloaking device and glided into what is his hideout today. The mineral content of the asteroid has hidden his presence ever since.

Jason slid the last of the repaired circuit boards into the generator computer. As if given a resuscitating shock, the station came to life. A quick check of the systems reviled all areas functioning normal. "*What a day*", he thought as he glanced at the clock; "*I must finish my plans for the ion shield. I don't need another day like today.*" He looked around at the mess in front of him, yawned and decided to clean up in the morning.

Now that the generator was repaired he could focus on his rendezvous with Zenbawa, his new contact for a possible weapons deal. Even though Zenbawa came highly recommended, in this line of business there's one simple rule, "don't trust anyone."

Jayce awoke with a start as she fell out of her bed, *what the? Bountyhunters* She screamed as she tried to find the control room. Her left wing was hit and almost completely destroyed; *Even the Lighthawk will break under this pressure!* She said as she tried to get her missiles up and working. *I gotta get the he... OUCH!* She yelled as she was thrown across the room. She ran back to the computer and fired the missiles, but her missiles missed... *Crap! The cheap ones always miss! Fine! I didn't want to use this but I have no choice!* She screamed. And the Lighthawks top opened to reveal a HUGE gattling gun, she fired it, laughing as she did, and you saw nothing but bits and pieces. *Ha, They deserved it.* She thought to herself. *Anyway, where am I?* She said. *hmmm, still a good 4 hours before landing, oh well,*

Her sword slid a little off her shoulder as she tried to clean up the room. Almost everything was either on the floor or broken. The wing was repaired though she doubts it would make it past the Earth. she also needed to buy more bullets for the gattling gun. She'd been cleaning for the past 2 hours, Her eyes were itching, and she was aching all over, *two more hours.* She sighed and sat down. She looked out the window and slowly her eyes began to close.

On the planet venus, Solace Black walked into the Starlight Bar, with a gun strapped to her side, it was a nice touch to add to her leather shorts and knee high black boots. "Gimme a light beer", she said to the bartender, as she slid into the stool seat at the counter, looking around cautiously. "You bet" he replied, smirking. Solace sighed, running her fingers through

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her shoulder length black hair, *How boring, I haven't killed anything for weeks. This planet stinks.* "Here ya go," said the bartender, sliding her drink across the table. "Thanks," she said, rolling her eyes. "PFFFT!!!" "I SAID LIGHT BEER!!!" Solace yelled, throwing it back at him. "OUCH! Sorry...geez," said the bartender.

The Bar doors swung open, a tall man with long black hair entered. Solace looked at him suspiciously. *He has that look* she thought. Solace touched the butt of her gun, ready to pull it out if necessary.

"Here." The bartender attempted a second try with the beer, interrupting Solace's thoughts. He backed away as she unappreciatively took it out of his hands. He just stood there. "What? Do you expect me to thank you or something?" She yelled. The bartender put his hands up as if to surrender and smirking, he walked away from her. *Idiot* Solace rolled her ice blue eyes again and turned them back to the suspicious character she was watching before her interruption.

Damon sat back on his bar stool and threw a glance at the striking young woman who sat a distance down the bar from him. *Hmmm... She's GOT to be Solace Black. Although, I DID think SHE was a HE...* He smirked to himself. *She'll fetch me a pretty price... and she's not bad to look at, either!* He slid his empty glass towards the bartender and slid a couple of oolongs to the man behind the counter. "Thanks for the drink," he tossed over his shoulder as he exited the bar. He made sure to get close to Black as he went by her; he locked eyes with her for just a moment, then was gone. *I'll tackle her when she heads back to her ship, he thought, and then I'll collect the 1,000,000 oolong reward!*

He made his way silently back to the *Jammer*, content to watch and wait for Black to make a mistake. That night, he sent a message to one of his bounty hunting allies about another, smaller bountyhead named Jayce Williams; smaller, yet significant in her own right. His partner's voice was excited, and kept getting interrupted by explosions. *"Don't worry, Morlan! I'm on it! I've got her in my..."* Then static.

Damon cursed and threw down his radio and swore loudly. "Great! One of my partners just got waxed by... by a CHILD! Williams should have been NO PROBLEM, but NOOOO, I get stuck with DIM-WITS and HALF-BAKED MORONS for PARTNERS, and... Aw, screw it!" He rose and drew his pistol, twirling it on his forefinger out of anxious habit. *Great, all this work setting up this double job, and Williams gets away.* He sighed and holstered the weapon. Honestly, he was getting tired of this crap.

Later that night, he ghosted towards the hanger where Black's ship rested. He checked the large dagger that hung behind his back horizontally at waist level; it was secured firmly, ready to use at his beck and call. He checked the clip in his pistol; the .44 caliber bullets shone in the dull yellow light of the Venusian moon. *She won't go down easily, he thought with a smile, and that's what's going to make this all the more satisfying.*

He snuck into the hanger, quiet as the shadows surrounding him. The ship resting in the huge, empty building was impressive and beautiful, if not as beautiful as it's pilot. He shook his head to disperse those kinds of thoughts. *Crapes, man, get a HOLD of yourself! This is a STAKEOUT, not a romance tour!* He ran close to the

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ship, hoping to find a ramp release lever, only to have searchlights from the ship flip on, blinding him. "Crap!" he hollered, running for cover as several weapons popped out of the hull of Black's ship and began spraying bullets everywhere. "Of COURSE.. this day couldn't get ANY better, COULD it?!"

Back at the Starlight Bar, Solace, still sitting on her stool, was trying to decide if she wanted to make a move or not. The guy had taken a seat at the bar a couple of stools down from her. He kept looking at her.

What's his problem? If he's what I think he is...huh? The man got up and started out the back door. He passed her and when he did they gave each other a cold stare.

Those green eyes of his give me the creeps!

After that moment that seemed to go in slow motion, the man exited out the door.

Solace looked at her watch and spoke into it, it was actually a transmitter, connecting her with her pilot she had hired for her grappler ship, the Battoussai (*The manslayer*), "Be on the lookout, a suspicious guy just walked out of here through the back way, he gave me the creeps. Watch for him, see what he does," she said to her partner, Kidd Majere. They had met a few years ago when Solace needed a pilot for *Battoussai*, but they had grown close into good friends and had been through a lot together, Kidd was like a sister to Solace and she was the only person she trusted. "Dang, I was hoping to finish the grappler arms, but whatever," Kidd replied.

Kidd sighed. *Why me? I really wanted to get these arms fixed. I don't like flyin' around without them. Ok, suspicious guy, that really narrows it down.* Kidd looked around, and then went into the ship to wait for the guy to show up. She was really starting to get bored and was about to ask Solace what the heck she was talking about when she saw a guy sneaking into the hanger she and *Battoussai* were sitting in. "Well, well, I've been waiting for YOU Mr. SG." Kidd silently said to herself. Kidd spoke into her transmitter "Solace, he's in here. Shall I welcome him with open arms?" she asked sarcastically. "Yeah, go ahead, get started. I'm on my way out, watch for me and then we'll make our escape." Solace answered "10-4," Kidd replied, "Ok Mr. SG, get ready to dance." Kidd pressed one single button and out came her favorite weapons, pushing another one, she released their firepower. "HAHAHAHAHAHAHA!" Kidd laughed maniacally. Using the big guns always got her a little excited. Kidd looked over her shoulder and saw Solace coming into the hanger. "Darn, the fun's about over." She said.

Solace entered the hanger; gun in hand, ready to shoot anything that moved, she didn't see the guy anywhere. *Humph, must have run for cover.* She lightly laughed, *can't blame him though.* She saw the ramp to *Battoussai* open, *Good Kidd. You never let me down.* She was just about to enter the ship when a bullet just barely missed her, she ran into the ship and using the side as cover, turned around and leaned out the entranceway to see if it was him. It was. Not that it surprised her, he didn't look like the kind that would give up easy. But neither was she. "What do you want?" She yelled.

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Sweet Jesus! What was that? Rider was in the head taking a leak when all hell broke loose. Zipping up his pants and running as fast as he could toward the main viewer, he trip over his own feet landing head first into power control console. *Son-of-B#\$@*!* Raising his bruised head, Rider stared in amazement as the hanger lit up like the forth of July! He had been sitting in *Predator One* for the last two hours waiting for his meeting with "Zenbawa". It was standard practice to arrive well ahead of the scheduled rendezvous and watch for a setup. As Rider surveyed the situation he wondered if this had anything to do with his meeting. He saw someone dash into the shadows on the far side of the hanger, of course that person was on the other end of an awesome firefight and not likely to survive. *Man what an armament setup on that ship.* He said to himself. *Looks like two Vulcan dual pulse multi-barrel fast-fire cannons combined with single large proton bulkhead buster. Whoever's behind that trigger sure knows what they're doing.*

The fireworks ended soon after they started. Through the smoke filled hanger Rider could see several shipping containers ripped to shreds by the cannon fire. Sparks flickered on the west side of the hanger where a round had cut through a power conduit. No one was in sight as the fire suppression system began extinguishing several small fires throughout the hanger. Then from the left side of the viewer Rider caught sight of a man, no a girl, casually walking toward the ship that moments before unleashed it's awesome firepower. *She looks familiar* he muttered to himself.

*I think I sold her those Vulcan cannons! Hum... who is she? d**n memory!* As the woman entered her ship a shot rang out startling Rider back to reality. *d**n there's still someone alive over there.* Rider jumped into the left seat, selected emergency launch on the computer command console, press confirm and counted the seconds to takeoff. He wasn't waiting around for the investigation. Even though technically he hadn't broken any law, well at least not today, he didn't need anyone snooping around his ship... especially the cargo hold.

Ignition a computer generated voice announced. Rider cleared the hanger doors and headed away from Venus in the most inconspicuous manner as possible. His meeting with "Zenbawa" will have to wait for another time. As his radar scanned for any signs of approaching ships he still couldn't put a name to the face in the hanger.

"Dang, I'm gonna have nightmares over this one." Kidd said to herself as she watched Solace jump into the ship and peer outside with her gun aimed at whatever was out there. *Come on Solace, we should have taken off by now, whoever he is just let him go.* "Huh what's that?" Kidd asked herself as she turned her attention to a sudden flare up of light. A ship a few spaces over had just all of a sudden come to life. "Well, he looks like HE'S in a hurry. Wait, I've seen that ship before, but where?"

As she was trying to remember where she had seen that beautifully crafted ship, a nearby explosion from some stray sparks reminded her that she needed to focus on getting Solace all the way into the ship so that they could get out of this place. She started flipping switches in prep for take-off. "Come on Solace! We haven't got all night! We gotta get outta here!" Kidd yelled. No answer. She heard a loud noise; almost an explosion and then that ship a few spaces over sped out of that hanger like there was no tomorrow. "Yup, DEFINATELY in a hurry." She muttered.

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Damon swore loudly as the twin Vulcan guns on Solace's ship began ripping the holy heck out of the entire hanger. *Judas Priest! What the bloody heck am I supposed to do against THAT?* He thought, trying to figure out a weak point in this ship's defenses. Unfortunately for Damon, whoever had done the security system for this bountyhead's ship had done a good job, TOO good of a job for Damon's taste. He clutched the grip of his .44 and prayed for a chance, just ONE chance to disarm this beast.

And, amazingly, it came! The guns stopped, and he heard boots clicking on the hangar floor. A stealthy peek from his hiding spot showed Solace Black striding confidently across the deck towards her ship. The 1,000,000-oolong bountyhead stopped on the ramp of her ship and demanded to know what he wanted. He smirked into the darkness and leaped up. "I'm here for YOU, that's what I'm here for!" he shouted, taking careful aim with his pistol. Three quick shots rang out in the relative silence of the hangar; one went into each section of the twin Vulcans, rendering it temporarily inoperable, at least. The third went for Solace; she had, unfortunately, began moving when the first shots were fired, and the third shot went wide. Damon swore again and charged her ship.

As he closed with the ramp, however, it slid up and merged seamlessly with the ship's hull. *D-n it!* he thought, *NOW what?!* There was only one thing to do, now. Swearing, he holstered his gun and sprinted out of the hangar, heading for his own ship.

Less than ten minutes later, he zipped out of the large hangar bay of the *Jammer* in his tiny fighter ship, hell-bent on getting Solace THIS time. He brought the *Ace of Spades* in along the side of Solace's hangar; his sights dancing across the thick wall. *Well, time to open this tin can!* His finger tightened on the twin triggers of the *Spades*; the twin gattling cannons on the short, stubby wings opened up with massive force, ripping chunks out of the wall in Damon's attempt to get to Solace. It didn't take long for the wall to crumble; Damon danced his little fighter out away from the hole, just to make sure he didn't end up looking like a piece of swiss cheese, and waited for Black to make the next move. *C'mon, you crazy woman, he thought with a smirk, let's make this a date.*

By the time she landed it was early in the morning, The Lighthawk was carefully hidden in a useful little cave just outside the town. You'd think that the mechanic she had on the phone would at least show up on time. *"I'm paying him enough"* She thought out loud.

Just outside she heard a engine turning off. *"Finally."* She sighed, looking to see if it's him. *"You the one that called me right? Let me take a look at that wing."* he said, climbing up the ladder. He didn't even bother to look at her, *"ya have a loose wire on the left side and your..."* *"I don't care about that! I just need to know how long and how much it will take to fix it."* Well it all comes down to 100,000 oolongs and about 2 days to ix. *"WHAT!!100,000 OOLONGS? 2 DAYS?* She screamed. *"And just where the heck am I gonna get that kind of time and money?* Jayce sighed. *"Look, I'll give you 50,000 oolongs and 10 hours to fix it."* well I don't think... Jayce Glared at him. *"errr 50,000? Sounds like a fair price, and 10 hours is okay"* He said, looking at her blade on her shoulder

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and dagger at her side. *"But I'll need the money now,"* He laughed. *"you know, In today's world."* Jayce rolled her eyes, and sighed. *"fine"* and paid him the 50,000 oolongs. *It better be ready when I get back, if it's not, well lets just say I wouldn't want to be you.* "And walked off

She walked into the candlestar casino right in the lower parts of town, the truth was that Jayce had 200,000 oolongs in her bag not counting the 50,000 oolongs she gave to the old mechanic, but hey, why pay all that money when you can get a discount by threatening someone? *"I don't think anyone knows I'm a wanted criminal..."* Jayce thought to herself. Resisting the urge to shoot a game of poker, she instead went to the only door there was besides the entrance, where her "old friend" was hiding his fat little face. She kicked open the door and pistols came right in front of her face, *"Charlie, how nice to see you again..."* pushing the pistols out of her face. *"What are you doing here?"* Charlie said, looking very scared at the sight of her. *"well now that's not a very nice welcome."* she said, lighting up a cigarette. *"Well, why have you come here THIS time? More money I guess?"* Jayce rolled her eyes, and sighed, *"no, I came here because I thought you would know where a guy named Jason rider is, you know, since you have "contacts" as you put it."* Charlie was sweating up a storm, *"your right, his name is Jason Rider nick named J.R, he..."* but Jayce interrupted him. *"I know his name, but I need to know WHERE he is!"* She said, slamming her fist on the table, Charlie jumped. *"Nobody knows, like you, he travel in a spaceship and he only seldom comes down to the earth."* *"Hmmm, You wouldn't be lying to me now would you?"* She eyed him suspiciously. *"N...no!"* He whispered. *"GREAT! I ALMOST GET KILLED COMING TO SEE YOU AND YOU HAVE NOTHING? GEEZ... YOU'RE A *REAL* HELP."* she yelled. *"Humph, fine, we'll meet again Charlie, just wait,"* and headed toward the door, *"oh, and if I find out you're lying, you will surely die, remember that.."* and walked out. She was making her way back to the ship. well how the heck am I gonna find him? She asked herself. And that mechanic better be finished.

Solace slowly opened her eyes; they had been sailing in space for a couple of hours now. Not entirely sure where they were going. Kidd had set the autopilot and was snoring in the seat beside her. Solace smiled and then yawned as she got up and headed toward the refrigeration unit. She took out a bottle of water and turned to her computer. *That guy was pretty persistent. He'll be back for sure.* " Time to get in touch with an old ally." She mumbled as she typed her message:

Jayce-- How have you been? Listen, I need a favor. A guy, a bounty hunter more specifically, has just blasted the hell out of my weapons. You know anybody? I need more ammo and some repairs done. Where can I meet you?

--Solace-----

She leaned back on the couch she was sitting on. "Whatchya doin'?" Kidd asked. She had woken up and wandered into the "living room". "Jayce? You mean Williams?" Kidd asked looking at the computer screen. "Yup" Solace answered sending the message. "That serious? This guy must have you worried." Kidd said. "Irritated is

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more like it." Solace replied. "Who does he think he is? Sneaking up on me like that. What a coward." She said. Kidd snickered and changing the subject asked, "So where exactly are we going?" "We'll know for sure when Jayce responds, but for now let's head to Jupiter. We'll hide out there for a while." Solace said. "Ok, I'll go set *Battoussai's course* to Jupiter. It'll take about three days to get there." Kidd said. "Right and when we get there, we'll have to hit the bank." Solace said, with a grin. "Right on. But when that time comes, I get the big gun right?" Kidd asked, grinning back. "Sure." Solace replied. Kidd laughed as she went to the control panel.

Kidd set the course for Jupiter and set the autopilot again. She went back to the "living room" and set up the game system. "All work and no play makes Kidd...well, boring." She said as she grabbed the controller. "Solace! Come help me kick the crap out of these dudes." Kidd yelled. "Don't you have anything better to do than play video games all the time? Solace asked, taking a controller. "Nope." Kidd replied. "Besides, we need to enjoy it while we can, for all you know, we could be dead next week." She said. Solace pounded her head "What exactly are you implying?! You think this guy will win?!" Solace yelled. "Can we lose some of the violence?" Kidd asked rubbing her head. "This guy won't win, his bounty hunting days are just about over." Solace said ignoring Kidd's request. Kidd rolled her eyes.

Jayce returned to her ship, and was fixing her sound system when 2 messages came, one was from Earth. She entered her 9 digits and up came a message from Charlie, "*huh, so I guess he found Rider.*" And got up from her chair to take a closer look. It read:

Williams, meet Rider on the planet Jupiter in the city of Moore at the Valencia INN. Date set for the 25th, -Charlie--.

"Hmmm, a week from now, I think I can make it, she read the other message, it was from Solace Black, asking if she knew a good weapons dealer. *Ha! Just in time!* She finished writing the message to Solace and had to check it to see if it sounds right.

Solace, I'm fine, Listen, I've set up an appointment with a weapons dealer named Jason Rider, it's for the 25th on the planet Jupiter in the city of Moore at the Valencia INN, send back a message and I'll wait for you. P.S don't pick on Kidd so much...-----Williams-----

It's good enough, and sent the message. She went back to her sound system and finally finished installing her new speakers. She turned up the volume to full blast and put in her favorite CD, the speakers blasted out heavy metal. *Well they work!* She screamed over all the noise, and quickly turned them down. She went to the control room and set a course for Jupiter. *Hmm it'll take 5 days, I just hope I don't get any interference* she thought to her self.

She'd spent the last couple of days in her training chamber working on her swordsmanship, she sighed. *I need a new weapon all right.* "She took out her sword which was engulfed in flames, though it didn't burn her. "*Humph, this sword has all kinds of nicks and dents, it had come in handy the past couple of years with the*

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bountyhunters and all, but she wanted something more sharper, longer, and powerful. She then took a look at her pistol, hidden under her shirt, it had some scratches but it was almost brand new, *"but I'll need more bullets for it..."* she thought out loud. She finally came out of the chamber and went to get something to drink, she took out a glass and poured some whiskey into it. she went into the "living room", sat on the couch, and picked up a picture. *"It's been a really rough couple of years since you've been gone."* She thought. The picture showed her self and a man with real puffy hair. She set the picture down finished her whiskey, and went back to her training.

Rider opened one eye and tilted his head to the left as he glanced at the clock on his bedside table. The communication center was emitting a soft but continuous beep indicating an incoming message. *Who's the hell's calling me at this time of the night, don't they know I need my beauty sleep!* He continued to lay in bed hoping the beeping would go away, but it just seemed to get louder and louder. *I'm coming I'm coming... this better be important!* Swinging both legs out of bed his feet touch the cold floor sending a chill straight through his body instantly crushing any chance of getting back to sleep. Of course he couldn't go to the communication console now because the cold chill made him have to pee. *Why is that?* he thought to himself as he staggered over to the toilet.

Seated at the communication console, Rider push the flashing amber light and displayed the two messages. The first message was from Jayce William's accepting his terms for the rendezvous on Jupiter at the Valencia Inn. There was a side note concerning a second person that would also be with Williams and that this individual was in need of additional items. Rider considered for a moment rather to cancel, but decided it would be ok, as long as he got there early and scope the place out. He could always bug out if things didn't look kosher. Besides, Charlie wouldn't think of setting him up with someone who wasn't on the level. He sent a confirmation message to Williams and clicked on the next message.

The second was from Morlan's, a notorious bounty hunter from earth, *well all be... bounty hunter Damon Morlan must be on the hunt again. Apparently he's after someone who's not afraid to put up a fight. "Needs ammunition and upgrade." Well that's not a problem.* Morlan and Rider have known each other for quite some time.

Even though Morlan is considered on the side of the law, he and Rider have an understanding. Rider supplies Morlan with the items necessary to do his job and Morlan forgets where and who he got them from. The fact that Rider gives Morlan a very generous discount on all his transactions doesn't hurt their relationship either. *There's no since making two trips,* Rider thought to himself, *I'll meet him on Jupiter as well.* Rider replied to Morlan with instructions to meet him at the Valencia Inn on the 25th.

Rider compiled a list of everything his two, no make that three, customers needed, plus threw in some extra special items just in case one of them wanted to spend big oolongs. Using the Mark IV pallet mule, Rider and his warehouse robot, "RALPH" (Remote Action Lifting and Pushing Humanite) started loading Predator One. As Rider and RALPH pushed the last of the pallets in to the cargo hold, the computer beeped indicating the ships weight was at maximum capacity. *That's all she'll hold RALPH, we don't want to overload her and break her back.* Rider looked at his robot

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as if to expect a response then laughed *ha... what's wrong "tin man" ain't you got no heart?* Rider place RALPH back into his charging port secured the warehouse and head to the galley for something to eat. After eating dinner he headed for the sonic shower then to bed for a good night sleep, first stopping by the communication console and muting the message alarm. *Don't want that little bugger waking me up tonight, I'm going to have to get an early start tomorrow if want to get to Jupiter before everyone else...*

Rider was snoring like the wind blowing through the caverns on Uranus when his bedside alarm went off. *Time to make the oologs*, he said to himself. Grabbing the bag with his personal items he went into the command center, checked for new messages, set the station in self-security mode and headed for the hanger where Predator One was waiting to launch.

"HAHAHA!! DIE!!!!" Kidd yelled while wildly pushing the buttons on the game system's controller.

"Yeah, yeah whatever." Solace said with less enthusiasm. "I'd rather be doing the real thing."

"Of course you would, you're rather violent you know? You should calm down. You'll have a heart attack before you're 30." Kidd responded.

Solace's computer beeped. It indicated an incoming message. "I wonder if that's Jayce." Solace said getting up. "So soon?" Kidd asked. "Sure why not?" She replied reading the message. "It says, she already has plans to meet with someone! Lucky us. Ok, write this down Kidd." Solace said. Kidd threw the winning punch on her game. She got up to get a writing tablet as the letters 'K.O.' flashed on the screen. "Ok, ready to write." she said to Solace while holding up a pen. "Ok, it says here to meet her on the 25th of this month on the Planet Jupiter, wow even luckier, city of Moore at the Valencia INN." Solace finished. "Val-en-cia INN." Kidd mumbled as she wrote.

"What time?" "Doesn't say, I'll ask her in a minute when I reply to her message." Solace answered.

Solace started typing:

Jayce--

Thanks for the quick response. Jason Rider huh? Sounds familiar. Ok, I can get there by the 25th, no problem. What time did you want to meet? I'll have some 'business' to do before we get to the inn. Later. --Solace

Solace hit the send button. "I'm gonna go take a shower." She told Kidd walking towards the bathroom.

Kidd waved her hand at her. She had started back on her game and was trying to concentrate on it.

Solace turned the handles in the shower and let the water run for a few minutes. When she stepped in the water was nice and hot. She let it stream down her face and relax her tired muscles. It felt good. *I'd still like to know who that bounty hunter was.* She thought.

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Damon rolled over in bed, nightmares running rampant in his mind. It was the same one he'd had countless times before; the dream that drove him on his hunts, his endless journeys across the stars. His former wife-to-be, a beautiful brunette woman with eyes that could melt the hardest of hearts, and *had* melted Damons, was a major part of it...

He knocked down the door of the office, pistol held out in front of him at the ready. This was the place HE was hiding, and the place he was holding his love. His sword felt heavy against his shoulder; his trusted blade would put an end to this nightmare, and NOW. Damon, clad all in black, dashed up the hallway; a man popped out of a door on the right and Damon filled him full of holes. Down the hall he went, down to the office on the end; his foot rose and broke the door open. There, behind the desk, behind his love, stood the man he was after. "Let her go!" Damon yelled, dropping his gun and drawing his long, curved blade. The man pushed her out of the way and lunged at Damon; the black-clad swordsman thrust the tip of his blade at the man's chest. Quick as lightning, something bad happened. The man brought Damon's love back in front of him; the black haired man's eyes widened as the point of his sword pierced her chest, spewing blood everywhere. Damon felt his heart slowly break as she died in his arms, and watched as the man who was responsible for it all escaped with a nerve-grating laugh...

Damon shot up in his bed, sweat drenching his brow. His chest heaved with heavy breath as the dream faded; his hand swiped across his forehead and he sighed in aggravation. *All right, this CAN'T keep up. If it does, I'll NEVER get enough sleep to keep my edge!* He swung his legs over the side of his bunk and pushed off the bed; he floated across the sleeping quarters and into the galley. That day... that was the day he'd become a bounty hunter. He HAD to find the man who had killed his beloved, and he had YET to find him. He threw a glance to the front view screen and nodded in satisfaction. He'd received the message from Rider less than twelve hours ago and had set course for Jupiter immediately. It wouldn't be more than three more days before he arrived and met Rider for reloads and upgrades. He was quite excited to see what kind of selection the weapons dealer would provide this time.

He sighed and floated towards a certain compartment in his ship, one that he had not opened since he'd locked it years ago. He sighed and gazed at the keypad covered in dust. *I'll probably need this for this mission*, he told himself, but despite the logic in it, he could still barely bring himself to punch in the numbers. The door hissed open and Damon's green eyes gazed inside; in there lay his old partner, the blade that had saved his life a dozen times and the blade that had killed his love...

... the blade called the *Masamune*. The blade he loved and hated at the same time. The blade he knew he'd need for this job.

Three days later:

"Hahahaha!" Kidd laughed her maniacal laugh as she and Solace burst out of the 'Universal Bank 101,' alarms blaring. Solace had two bags full of bologns in her left hand and a pistol in her right. Kidd was carrying three bags in her left hand, 'The Big Gun' in her right, and had also managed to fit two bags in her shirt. As they ran out of the bank, Kidd yelled "Hey you! Stop!" and she pointed 'The big gun' at a terrified stranger who held his arms up, wallet in hand. "Give me these." Kidd said,

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and she grabbed his sunglasses off his face and kept on running. Solace smirked at the stranger who looked confused.

They headed towards *Battoussai*, Kidd still laughing.

"Run now laugh later!" Solace yelled to Kidd.

They got to their ship a few seconds later. Solace opened the hatch and let Kidd slide in, while she turned around and took a few shots at the police who had just started arriving. She jumped in and yelled at Kidd, "Get us out of here!" Kidd hit a few buttons and they took off towards the Valencia Inn.

"Whoa, this is fancy." Kidd said peering around the Inn behind her newly acquired sunglasses. "Jayce has good tastes!" Kidd set down their bags, and waited for Solace to request a room. "We didn't get the chance to make any reservations, do you happen to have any rooms available?" Solace asked, winking at the desk clerk and shoving a small bag of oolongs in his direction. "Well sure!!!" He said gratefully stuffing the bag in his pocket. "Do you need one bed or two?" "Two, you idiot." Solace replied. "Uh, right, here ya go...room 143," He said handing her two key cards. "One for each of you." He said.

"No? Really?" Kidd said sarcastically while picking their bags back up. Her and Solace started up the stairs to their room. "I need to see if Jayce sent a message telling us what exact time she wanted to meet us. For all we know she's already here." Solace said.

Jayce wiped the sweat out of her face as she fell for the 4th time since she went back training. "You've got to concentrate!" she yelled out loud, *how else are you going to avoid those bounthunters?* She was going to get something to drink when she saw she had a message, it was from Solace again, "Hmmm, *she wants to know what time...I think it would be better if we did this at night. That way no one would recognize us. It read:*

Good, I'll meet you outside the Valencia INN at 10:00 PM, I don't want anyone to see us ,-----Williams-----.

She sent the message. Jayce sighed, "I guess I should write down the things that I'll need, and went to get a piece of paper, she ran to her room and got a pen and paper and started writing down her weapons, when she noticed some movement from the hallway. Hand on her dagger, she started to make her way down the hall very slowly, pulling the dagger out of it's sheath, she was at the corner of the hallway, she turned and held up her dagger ready to strike, "AHHH!! They both screamed and Jayce dropped her dagger, Jayce made a grab for her gun but then looked down to see a little girl. She was crying, her hair was dirty, her clothes were a mess, she must have snuck on her ship when she was on Earth, and Jayce hadn't seen her since she was training day and night. Jayce picked up the dagger and sheathed it, "just what do you think you're doing on MY ship?" She yelled, making the little girl wince." I...I uh...."she stuttered. "aw, great, Jayce said to herself, what am I gonna do....she asked herself while passing around the room. Her bright blue eyes were watching her. "Okay, you can stay until I get back to Earth, but that's all! She looked up at Jayce and smiled, uh, do you have a name or something?" she asked. "Yah, Celeste. "Celeste? What kind of name is that? Jayce sighed. "Okay, listen, I have to do.... something on Jupiter, so when we get there I want you to just stay INSIDE the

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ship got it?" she shook her head. "Why me?" she thought to herself. "I'll get to Jupiter in 2 hours, she said, slowly closing her eyes, "ah hum, where am I supposed to sleep?" She asked. Jayce opened one eye, there's another room next to mine. she yawned.

2 hours later:

"Finally," Jayce stepped out of the ship, right outside the town of Moore. "Now remember what I said, don't go anywhere. I don't need another death to be blamed on me." she said under her breath as she set off toward the Valencia INN. Making sure she had the list, she wondered if Solace was here yet. She looked off to the bank and found police swarming all over it, she fell into the shadows "yah, she's here all right." she laughed to herself. "ah, the Valencia INN, best in town," and made her way up the steps. She reached the counter. "I have a reservation for Riddel," she said, hoping there was someone here named Riddel. "ah yes miss Riddel, you have room 140, have a nice stay!" he said, giving her the key, "yah, Aisil!" She said in the same enthusiastic voice. she went up the stairs to her room and onto the bed. "now all I gotta do is wait for Rider and Solace."

It was nearly 10:00 pm; Rider was sitting in Predator One staring at the computer screen. He'd been monitored all arriving and departing ships via his modified scanner looking for the identification numbers of his customers. In the last eight hours two of them had arrived and the third had yet to respond to his calls. He had arrived at Valencia Inn's hanger 12 hours ago and positioned Predator One in a parking stall close to the exit that offered the greatest vantage point and provided a quick escapes if thing didn't go as planned. When his customers were ready to deal, they were instructed to call him on his private frequency and then meet him at his ship after he replied.

The waiting is the toughest part of this fricken job, he thought to himself, but the reward is what makes it all worthwhile. By meeting three customers in the same place this could stand to be the best financial deal Rider had made to date. His plan was to meet with Jayce and Solace first, complete the sale, then call in Morlan. The fact Morlan was a bounty hunter and the other two where outlaws, made him a little nervous to say the least. Ah, quit your worrying Rider, you've schedule the rendezvous two hours apart. Besides what are the odds Morlans knows these two anyway. Rider put those thoughts out of his head and focused on getting ready for his meeting.

Normally Rider doesn't wear a weapon, but because of the nature of his job and sometimes persnickety customers, he strapped a rather large pistol to his hip. It was an older model, but one of his favorites. Accurate as hell and designed to kill, it provided the necessary insurance if a customer got the urge to change the deal. Despite his reputation as just a nerd, Rider was quite a marksman. Walking into the cargo hold he inspected the hardware, reviewing the list for both Jayce and Solace, he found everything to be in order and ready to deliver. He was checking on Morlans order when he heard a beep from the communication console. Making his way back to the flight deck Rider pushed the amber light on the console. It was Jayce, she had transmitted the correct authentication code and was ready to meet and finish the deal. Rider responded with "Shangri-La" letting her know it was him and to meet

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at his ship in ten minutes.

Grabbing his hat Rider headed for the exit, pressed the open switch and watched as the door opened and the ramp quickly extended to the floor. Making his way down the ramp, he headed for the rear of the ship where he'd wait in the shadows for Jayce and Solace. As Rider walk away, the noise of the closing door masked a faint beeping sound coming from the communication console inside his ship. Unknown to Rider, Morlan had experienced communicator problems and was just now able to send a messages announcing he was arriving earlier than expected and would be there in approximately 30 minute!

Damon banged his fist on the top of his communications unit, not a hard blow in frustration but a soft thud of resignation. *Geez, why can't I get ANY good equipment?* he thought with a sigh. He'd been trying to send Rider a message to tell him that the *Jammer* had made better time that Damon considered it would; he'd be arriving in roughly 30 minutes. He hoped it wouldn't be too much of an inconvenience, but he doubted Rider would complain too much. With the amount of cash Damon was about to pour into his bank account, Rider had BETTER not complain TOO much.

After several tries, he finally got the message sent, but Rider didn't respond. *Hum*, he thought, worry furrowing his brow; *he must have been on the toilet or something. No biggie.* The bounty hunter shrugged and went back to his pilot chair; the large ship was just now entering Jupiter airspace and he needed to concentrate. These traffic people on Jupiter always seemed to be touchier that everyone else...

Less than an hour later Damon checked the slip of paper with the address of the Valencia INN. He nodded and nudged the door open. Inside was a rather... FAIRY-ish looking man behind the front desk. Damon approached and leaned against the counter. "I need a room," he said, slipping the man a small bag full of oolongs, "and I don't want to be remembered. Ya get me?" The man took the oolongs and gave the dark haired bounty hunter a wink.

"You got it," was all he said as he slid the key to Damon. Morlan gave him a disgusted glance and swept off to the stairs. His boots felt VERY heavy as he clomped up the stairs and down the hall; it felt like his muscles weren't re-acclimated to gravity just yet. He sighed as he found his room. *142... huh... let's hope it's my lucky number.* He HAD to get re-accustomed to gravity, or his fighting skill would mean JACK.

The lock on the door was a bit tough to get open, but otherwise the room was impressive for the money he'd paid. He tossed his duffle bag onto the bed; it clanked with weaponry. He opened it up and drew out his sword; the *Masamune's* sheath shone in the low light of the room. The guns that followed the sword out were fine makes from all sides of the caliber spectrum; everywhere from a .223 automatic pistol to a 50-caliber revolver. He was determined NOT to be caught off guard.

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Ten minutes later Damon's heavy hand knocked on the hangar door Rider had specified; two knocks, one, then two. The *Masamune* felt heavy against his shoulder; he hoped that wasn't a bad sign.

Solace was sitting on her bed in her and Kidd's room. The room was pretty nice. They each had king size beds, the bathroom was huge with plenty of accessories. They had a picture window that looked down on the city. Solace's computer sat in front of her. She was checking to see if Jayce had written her back. She had. Jayce said to meet her outside her room, number 140 at 9:50pm in order to meet Rider at 10:00. Solace looked at her clock on her bed stand, it was 9:17. *Almost time. Good I hate waiting.* Solace walked towards the bathroom where Kidd was. She knocked on the door and said, "Kidd, we have to meet Jayce in a half an hour so hurry up."

Man, I was trying to relax Kidd thought. She was in the bathtub, enjoying the quiet. "Ok! I'll be out in a minute." She yelled to Solace. She ducked beneath the water to rinse all the soap off and then she stepped out of the tub and dried herself off. She slipped on her jeans and a white tank top. She put her hair up in a ponytail and slid a knife in her right boot that she had put on. She strapped a gun to her side and pulled her shirt bottom down over it. "Alright, I'm ready to go." She said as she stepped out of the bathroom.

Solace, after telling Kidd to hurry up had started gathering her things. She had her usual leather shorts and knee-high boots on. Her boots actually served as another weapon. They had a short, but very sharp blade on the tip that would slow anyone down with a swift kick. Her pistol was strapped to her side. Her long sleeved shirt concealed a knife that would eject into her hand on command. It seemed like a lot but in this business you had to be prepared for anyone and anything. Kidd had just stepped out of the bathroom. She was ready to go. Solace looked at the clock again. It was 9:48pm. "Ready?" She asked Kidd. "Yup. let's get this done, you got the money to pay Rider?" Kidd asked. "Yeah." Solace answered holding up a bag of oolongs.

Solace and Kidd stood outside Jayce's door. "Room 140. This is it." Solace said knocking on the door. Jayce opened the door. "Hey Jayce. Ready when you are." Solace said.

Jayce stepped out of the bathroom; She had just taken a shower and was drying her hair. She looked at the clock, *9:45, I guess I should gather up my things.* She said, throwing her towel in the hamper. She had on her usual blue kimono that was cut into a shirt, her flare hip hugger jeans with holes everywhere, her sword on her shoulder, and her black pearl necklace. She strapped her pistol to her hip, and her dagger was strapped to her side, in this kind of world, you can never be to sure. She grabbed her list and heaved her bag of weapons onto her shoulder. *It's 9:50.* she thought and was just about to go out when somebody knocked on the door. It was Solace and Kidd, "Long time no see," She grinned." We are to meet Rider at his ship called *Predator One*, Lets go."

They were making there way to Rider's hanger, Solace in front, Jayce following, and

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Kidd in back. They made their way down the steps of the Valencia and into the outer skirts of town to a cave much like the one Jayce used to hide the *Lighthawk*, they came upon a ship and Jayce could see the words Predator One on the side. They reached the hanger and knocked 3 times like Rider had requested. The ship's hanger opened up by itself and they all stepped inside. The ship wasn't very clean inside, there were empty bottles of beer cans and old chip bags on the floor. Jayce looked up to see a short-haired, brown eyed man with a smug look on his face, "You must be Jason Rider," Jayce said, holding out her hand.

It had all happened so fast...

Damon waited a few moments and, when no one opened the door, he pushed it open himself. The hangar was dark inside; the only light spilled out of Rider's ship, *Predator One*. Several people were looking in one of the holds on *Predator*; Damon was instantly a bit more wary. Most of Rider's clients worked on the opposite side of the law than he; sometimes these meetings led to cash for Damon. The tall bounty hunter's boots made very little noise as he crossed the large open space of the hangar, which seemed to be mostly comprised of a cave with a big door. Damon approached the lighted area and stepped into it with a smile.

"What, starting the meeting without..." He trailed off as he saw who else shared the beam of light. Solace Black, her accomplice Kidd, and Jayce Williams stood with Rider as they looked at new weapons for a small ship.

Instinct took over. Damon's hands shot to his leg holsters, pulling a silenced 9mm from each one; two long barrels, one for Solace and one for Williams. Sweat beaded on the black haired man's brow as his green eyes shot from one woman to the other. "All right... well... I certainly didn't expect this kind of surprise." His eyes went to Rider.

"Dang, Rider, I'm gonna have to TIP you, man! Thanks to you, I've just scored about fifteen times what I was about to pay you. Since you DID help, I'll spot you-" He was cut off as Solace's hand connected with his left wrist, knocking his gun out of his hand. He turned his right gun towards her, and her other hand knocked THAT gun out of his hand. Damon snarled as he brought his foot up and kicked her in the gut; he dove and grabbed both guns.

Within seconds, he was up onto his feet and running for the far side of the hangar. He threw his back against the wall and opened fire, his twin pistols thumping out rounds at Solace, Kidd, and Williams, who had holed up behind different places in the cave.

Damon dove behind a large crate and kicked both clips out of the guns; he skillfully reloaded them and waited for the next gambit. *This is ONE situation that NO ONE is going to get out of easily; he thought with a wry smile!*

Bullets flew threw air as Jayce kicked a table over and hurled herself behind it. She winced as she fired her .22 caliber pistol, she looked over to see that her shoulder had been hit and was bleeding. *I've got to get out of here...* she thought to herself.

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She looked at Solace who was reloading her gun, *but I can't leave Solace and Kidd.* Jayce then started reloading her gun. She fired at the man who Solace said was a bountyhunter, he was blocking the exit. The *Lighthawk* was not close by, it was clear on the other side of town. More gunfire told her that Kidd had started in on the gunfight. *This Table's not gonna hold on anymore,* she thought. She looked to the right and smiled, "Solace, we're getting out of here!", and threw her dagger toward a window, and shattered it. She reloaded her gunshot some rounds, and jumped out of the window. She heard a terrible crunch as she hit the ground, but didn't stop to see what it was she just kept running. She didn't hear any more gunfire, of course she was running like heck so her ears were kind of blocking out sounds. She could feel extreme, piercing pain coming from her shoulder, she stopped running and tried to catch her breath, she was sure that he couldn't catch up with her, not with Solace still there, or at least she thought Solace was still there. She took a look at her arm, which was bleeding freely, "It's not that bad, but I need to get that bullet out", and proceeded to her ship.

She reached the hanger, opened it up and climbed inside. Celeste met her at the door, "Jayce!" are you okay?" I'm fine, strap yourself in, were going to Earth," she said, she was setting the computer for Earth and at the same time wrapping her arm in a ripped towel. They took off, Jayce went over to the 'Kitchen' and grabbed a sharp knife, and pulled the bullet out of the wound. She gritted her teeth and started rewrapping her arm, she floated over to a chair, sat down, and pulled her laptop over to her. She was looking up new weapons dealer since Rider was either dead or alive and if he was alive she could never see him again, not soon, anyway. *I think I'll send Solace a message to see if she's okay* and started writing it:

Solace, are you and Kidd okay? Listen,I'll talk to you later,-----Williams-----

She looked over to see that Celeste was sleeping, *I guess I should too* and laid down but didn't go to sleep, she was recapping over what happened today." I hope Solace and Kidd made it out of there." and closed her eyes.

Solace, Kidd and Jayce had been in Rider's ship looking at all the awesome and unusual weapons he had acquired and were discussing prices when the door flew open. In walked Damon Morlan.

"Rider, you bastard! You set us up!" Solace yelled. Damon had pointed two long barrels at Jayce and Solace and started talking to Rider. Solace saw her chance, ran and grabbed his left wrist and said, "You can't kill me! I'm not worth anything dead!" and she knocked the gun out of his left hand and went for the other he had turned towards her. Damon kicked her in the gut, knocking the air out of her lungs. After a second she ran behind a counter and pulled her gun out of it's holster and started firing at Morlan. She looked over Kidd who was happily setting loose some firepower of her own. Then she turned her eyes to her partner. Jayce had thrown a dagger at the window and was running towards it. Blood dripped down her arm as she crawled out the window. She couldn't see Rider anywhere. *This is getting us nowhere and costing us ammo* She thought. *It's basically the same scenario. I have to think of something or this guy is going to make my life a living hell.* Solace pointed her gun towards the ceiling of Rider's ship and shot three times to get Damon's attention.

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"Morlan! This is getting us nowhere. Whaddya say, you forget about the bounty on my head if I help you catch an even bigger bounty?" Solace yelled in his direction.

Kidd suddenly held her fire and asked "What? Solace, have you gone mad?"

Solace sat quietly behind the counter and awaited Damon's reply.

The \$hit was hitting the fan and Rider was caught in the middle! He'd always planned these weapon deals so well, never had anything happen like what was going on now. *Leave it to the bounty hunter to show up early and screw up my plans.* There was nothing Rider could do but dive for cover after Solace knocked loose Damon's guns. He hit the deck and crawled behind a pallet of weapons as bullets zinged all over the ship. He could see Solace and Kidd, they had taken cover just inside the cargo hold and both were shooting at Damon on the other side of the hanger, he didn't know where Jayce was but heard her yelling to Solace.

Rider held his .44 auto mag pistol at the ready. He'd have to do some fast-talking to whoever survived this mess and the .44 would ensure he'd have a chance. Solace already thought he had set her up, and Kidd didn't need a reason to kill anybody so his best chance was to hope Damon caught or killed both. *Solace I can reason with, but that Kidd is another story,* Rider thought to himself. *I have a clear shot at Kidd now and maybe I could hit Solace on the second shot or at least divert her and allow Damon to get in a shot. Given Solace reputation with a gun, I'd have a better chance moving to the flight deck and getting the hell out of here. Either way I'm labeled as a traitor and no one will deal with me again. There has to be a way we can all get out of here alive.* Rider decided against shooting Kidd or Solace and was trying to figure a solution when Solace shot three rounds into the ceiling of the cargo bay.

Solace was calling to Damon in apparent attempt to come to some kind of compromise to the current situation. She was unaware what happened when she shot Predator One. The first and second shot lodged harmlessly into the bulkhead but the third hit a coolant line for the main engine reactor. Coolant dripped onto the cargo floor, neither Rider nor Solace noticed the puddle of coolant growing larger.

Solace had inadvertently started a countdown when she shot the coolant line as without proper cooling the reactor will overheat and explode. The ships computer was monitored the reactor temperature and in approximately 20 minutes would trigger an alarm. Either the reactor gets shutdown or the whole hanger as well as the Valencia Inn will disappear of the face of Jupiter.

Damon slammed another clip into each of his guns and the chambers clicked shut.

He heard glass breaking and someone shouting to Solace. *It was probably Williams, she never was one for a fight,* he thought with a wry grin. He was about ready to open fire again when Solace's voice rang out in the hangar.

"Morlan! This is getting us nowhere. Whaddya say, you forget about the bounty on my head if I help you catch an even bigger bounty?"

Damon laughed aloud.

"A bigger bounty than YOU, Solace? Is that even possible? You know there's 12

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million on your head right now, and it goes up with every month you're free! So the longer you run, the harder I'm gonna chase!" Damon holstered his twin-silenced pistols. "It would be to your advantage to just give up now, Ms. Solace. It would save us ALL a great deal of trouble..." he pulled out his .50 caliber revolver and pulled the hammer back, "...if you would just put down your guns and come out with your hands up, 'K?'"

All he heard from Solace was laughter. He sighed. *This is getting nowhere fast.* His right hand went to the sword on his shoulder; it itched to be drawn, but he knew it would be pointless right now. Shaking his head, he called out to Solace.

"All right, Black, here's the deal. Come out from there on the count of three. We'll both put our guns away and meet in the middle to discuss this. That way, you have the advantage of having your *partner* cover you from her hiding spot." After a few tense moments, he heard Solace agree. He took a deep breath and began to count.

"One." *You know this is the first time in your career that you'll have negotiated with a target,* a tiny voice in his head told him. *It'll ruin your reputation as a bounty hunter.*

"Two." *Shut up!* he told the voice. *I only needed the reward money from Solace to continue my search for the man who killed my fiancé. Maybe she can lead me two him.*

"Three." He stood slowly, letting the hammer of the gun down carefully. Solace stood from the opposite end of the hangar. Damon held his gun up and slowly placed it on the ground; he then repeated the process with his twin-silenced guns, his .38 revolver from his ankle holster, the .223 from his shoulder holster, and the throwing knife from his back. His sword he left; he had to have SOME kind of protection. Solace hesitated for a moment, then followed suit. Damon held his hands up and walked to the center of the cavern and met with Solace.

She was just as striking now as she had been the first time he'd seen her. He felt a smile begin to creep onto his face but he quickly killed it. *No time to show emotion, old boy.* He brought his hands to his side and gave the bountyhead- no, the woman a nod. "It's good to finally meet you face to face." He sighed again. "Now, what can you offer me, Black?"

Oh my gawd, Solace you idiot! Not only have you offered to talk civilized with our number one enemy, YOU ALSO SHOT THE COOLENT LINE! Kidd thought while she waited for Damon and Solace to come to an agreement. Kidd was taking cover behind a table that she had thrown on its side, spilling Rider's weapons all over the floor. *Too bad they aren't loaded* She thought looking at all the beautiful weaponry lying beside her. "Well I better tell them or this will take all night... Hey, cool!" She said as she stuffed a dagger, she just caught sight of, in her bra. It had a cover on the blade so it didn't do any poking.

All Solace heard was Damon laugh and then he said "A bigger bounty than YOU, Solace? Is that even possible? You know there's 12 million on your head right now, and it goes up with every month you're free! So the longer you run, the harder I'm

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gonna chase!" *Great. I have to do some more convincing-* She was thinking when she was interrupted by Damon's voice again: "...if you would just put down your guns and come out with your hands up, 'K?" Solace laughed. *Yeah, like I'm gonna give up that easy* She thought. Solace's laughter must have convinced him, because he was negotiating a cease-fire on the count of three so they could talk.

"Three." The sound of Damon's voice was loud and clear as Solace slowly stood up, throwing her pistol to the side and releasing her concealed knife into the wall. Rider's ship was looking horrible. It was definitely going to need some repairs. *If he tries anything, all I have to do is kick him and it'll slow him down* She thought remembering the short blades in the tip of her boots. They met halfway and were now face to face. *Well, he's cuter than the last bounty hunter* She thought. "It's good to finally meet you face to face." He sighed again. "Now, what can you offer me, Black?" Damon asked.

"Uh, hey you two?" Kidd's voice rang out from the table she was behind. "What?" Solace and Damon yelled together. "Oh, nothing really, I was just hoping you two could finish this happy little conversation in order to LIVE! In about 20 minutes we're all gonna be toast. Burnt toast. You, SOLACE, have hit the coolant line to Rider's main engine reactor. That means big trouble. And we've wasted about a minute by me explaining things and WE ARE NOW DOWN TO 19!" Kidd exclaimed. "Just thought you'd like to know. Hey has anyone seen Rider anyway?" She finished up.

Solace looked at Damon. "Two words. Twenty-five million." She said. "We can finish this conversation after we've gotten outta here. "Deal?" She held out her right hand towards him.

Damon could barely contain himself when Solace mentioned something about 25 million. *Holy...! That much for a bountyhead and I haven't heard about it?* He shook himself back to reality as she extended her hand towards him. He looked at it for a moment, his instincts and logics warring inside of him. *You know the bounty hunters are most likely going to be after your head now?* the voice told him.

I know, I know! But at this point, I don't have much choice. If I say no, she could kill me as soon as look at me. And, he smiled, for 25 million and a shot at my fiancé's killer I'd sell my own brother. His grin widened as he took Solace's hand and gave it a firm shake. She had quite a grip for a woman, and coming from Damon that was quite a compliment.

"Well, since it seems that Rider's ship is going downhill from this point on, what say we get out of here?" Damon whistled and called out to the weapons dealer. "RIDER! Get your @ss out here! You ride with me!" He gave Solace a nod. "Let's meet up in orbit. I've gotta get Rider's ship above the city or something to make sure nobody's hurt by the explosion; and believe me, there's gonna be one!"

Ten minutes later, with only nine minutes to go on before the Predator One destructed, Damon latched tow cables onto the gunrunner's ship and hauled it from it's resting place. Gritting his teeth, the bounty hunter shoved the throttle forward

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and the massive *Jammer* and pulled it up above the planet.

With only a minute to spare, Damon whirled the *Jammer* around and launched *Predator one* into orbit, where it exploded with massive force. He grinned over at his slightly unwilling passenger and laughed. "Aw, c'mon, don't feel so badly! It was "just" a ship; hey, at least YOU weren't on it!"

The black-clad bounty hunter flicked on his comm unit and made an all-bands call for Solace; she had BETTER not have skipped out on him!

I can't believe... what the... how in the hell... who shoots inside... when will she ever learn... Rider was beside himself mumbling what sounded like obscenities. He had just watched his ship *Predator One* explode in the atmosphere of Jupiter. Damon attempt to ease Rider's anger wasn't working. *That was my only means of income on that ship and trigger-happy Solace Black has managed to put me damn near in the poor house with one shot. That bitch owes me a ship!* Rider was pacing back and forth across the flight deck of the *Jammer* in an oblivious rage. *Damon!* Rider suddenly shouted. *Whatever you need to take down this crazy space witch I'm here for you. Just say the word and I'll get it for you!*

The light from Rider's ship exploding flashed in Solace's eyes as she peered out a window of *Battoussai*. Minutes before, Solace had grabbed Kidd by the arm and ran like a bat out of hell towards *Battoussai* in order to save their lives. Damon had agreed to Solace's offer for the unknown bountyhead and told her to escape in her ship but that "She had better not try to run." The thought had crossed Solace's mind to just flee the scene and hide out for a while but *we might as well get this over with. It's gonna come to this someday* she reasoned with herself. Kidd was in the pilot's seat waiting for instructions from either Solace or Damon. She twisted her new dagger in her hands and thought *what a turn of events*. Kidd looked over at Solace. "I kind of feel bad for Rider, ya know losing his ship and everything." She said. "I mean he was helping us". "You call setting a trap by inviting that scumbag bountyhunter to 'collect' us, helping?" Solace responded. Kidd shrugged. Solace sighed, "It was a nice ship though."

A call was coming through on *Battoussai's* communication unit. It was Damon, calling for Solace and Kidd. Solace responded to his call and let him know what frequency she was on. Then she asked him, "Where do you want us to meet you? Back on Jupiter or what?" "Maybe we could try E-arth? I hear it's really nice this time of year." Kidd interrupted. "I've never been there myself tho."

It took a few minutes for Damon to respond and while they were waiting, Kidd said to Solace "Here's something to think about, Damon took Rider on his ship with him. What are we gonna say to him? 'Oh hey there Rider, sorry about your ship' and then he could pummel us? What would you do if *Battoussai* exploded?" "I'm not sure about anything. Everything's so foggy right now. I guess we just do what we do best and play it by ear. Morlan won't let Rider kill us." Solace said. "At least not for a while." she sighed. Damon's voice finally broke through again. *This is it, the end of my life, as I know it, being near a bounty hunter and not being able to kill him. I*

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haven't done that since the last time I saw my father.

It was 6:00 in the morning when Jayce stumbled out of bed, "It will leave a scar," she mumbled, looking at the mess that was her arm. "That bloody bounty hunter....he was good, real good." she said, then, remembering Solace, she checked her computer to see if she had written back. She sighed, there was no message. "I'm getting too worried about this", She laughed. "What are you doing up?" A voice from the hallway yawned. "I should be asking you the same question, go back to bed Celeste." She didn't move. "What are you doing?" She asked, "I'm checking to see if they're any spaceships in our area", and there were 2, according to the computer", well, well, I guess Solace really did make it out of there! "She laughed, looking through the window and seeing the words *Battoussai* written on the side of a ship. "Who?" Celeste asked, climbing on top of the 'couch' to see. Jayce sighed, "Just an old friend" she said and ran to the control room and got her headset and tried to find the frequency that Solace was on. "Does she have a bounty on her head too?" Celeste said, looking up at Jayce. "Yah, bigger then mine, ha!" Jayce yelled, she had found the frequency. She heard Solaces' words: "Where do you want us to meet you? Back on Jupiter or what?" Jayce looked up in confusion. *Who is she talking to?* Jayce thought. She then heard another voice: "Maybe we could try E-arth? I hear it's really nice this time of year. I've never been there myself tho. "There was silence. *It can't be that one bounty hunter.... could it?* She thought to herself, "hummm isn't what you're doing called eavesdropping?" Celeste said out loud. "Be quiet! I just want to know who's' she's talking to!!! "She heard a voice, that same voice of the man who shot her. Jayce felt pure hatred surging threw her veins. "He'll pay..."She said under her breath. Celeste looked at her in confusion.

Damon sighed with relief as Solace picked up on the other end of the line. "Well, it's good to know that you didn't just jet when you could have," he remarked, throwing Rider a questioning look. *He'd help me get her, no matter what? Man, he's REALLY bent out of shape about that spaceship...* Shaking his head, Damon continued.

"Listen, Jupiter isn't safe for us any more. Earth is a relatively left-alone planet, a good place to hide if you can make it through the asteroid field around it. That's the hard part, y'know, but I think we could do it. You guys just follow me; if any of the authorities stop us, I'll just tell 'em that I've captured you and that I'm taking you to Earth. All right? Good. Follow me." He tossed the receiver across the galley where it landed lightly next to the pilot's chair.

Morlan turned to Rider, who STILL looked pissed. He cleared his throat uncomfortably, and began a conversation. "Say, Rider, I was wondering if you could help me with something..." The former arms dealer gave him a look that was slightly less than venomous, but only slightly. "Just follow me; I think I've got something that'll keep your mind off of your ship."

Rider followed Damon into the hangar bay of the *Jammer* where *Spades* sat. As Damon thought would happen, Rider's eyes lit up, and the bounty hunter grinned.

"Not bad, eh? I got her from the former Mars Security Force; they were upgrading to newer models and I got one at a discount." He floated to her and patted the mini gun on the left wing. "Of course, I upgraded it myself. Enhanced armor, upgraded weapons targeting computers and the like, and some "special" weapons, mostly

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provided by you." Damon smiled and waved around the hangar. "Anything here is at your disposal. If you'll help me keep my ships in good working order, I'll help you get another ship as soon as we can, all right?"

"Ahh! I HATE this!" Solace screamed. "Being babysat by a dumb@\$\$ bounty hunter!" She slammed her fist into the communication unit. She had just finished talking to Damon and the way he was talking, it was like she had given up and become his prisoner. "Hey, hey now, don't take it out on the beautiful ship." Kidd said to her, giving *Battoussai* a love pat. "Ugh, I know, I know, I'm sorry. It's just that, that guy gets me so mad!" Solace said through gritted teeth. "Well, set a course for Earth or E-ath as you called it. That's where Damon said we're going. He said to follow him. Oh, umm, can you handle the asteroid field?" Solace asked. "Sure! No prob." Kidd answered. "Great." Solace sighed. "I'm gonna go lay down for a while." *Geez, she looks stressed* Kidd thought as she set *Battoussai's* course for Earth.

"Whoo hooo! Born to be wild baby!" Kidd laughed as *Battoussai* bumped and shook in the asteroid field. It was a few hours later and the turbulence in the field was almost unimaginable. Solace was sound asleep, and drooling, but not for long. An extra bumpy bounce knocked her out of bed and onto the floor. "Ahhhh!" She screamed as her bum hit the hard floor. "That hurt." She said trying to stand up and also rubbing her backside. She stumbled and twisted her ankle as she made her way to the cockpit where Kidd was. *Probably having the bloody time of her life* Solace thought. "I thought you said you could handle the field?" She asked Kidd as she walked into the room. Solace fell, literally, into the passenger's seat. "I'm *handling* it just fine." Kidd answered. "Are you questioning my pilot abilities?" She asked Solace. "No, no, not at all." Solace replied. She sighed "What a disappointment this has turned out to be."
"What's a disappointment?" Kidd asked. "The whole situation, Rider setting us up, if that's what he did. Morlan being able to control us like puppets. And now, you're driving like a crazy person and I can't get any sleep!" Solace whined. "Well, I'm so sorry, why don't you call up somebody else to do the piloting? Or maybe you'd like to try?" Kidd asked gesturing towards the control panel.
"Shut up. I get it." Solace said rubbing her injured ankle.
Things had calmed down a bit as they flew through the field. Damon was ahead of them and it looked as though his ship had a smoother flow about it. "Great, we get to stare at his @\$\$ the whole trip." Solace sighed getting up. "I'm gonna check the mail." She told Kidd.

"I got a message from Jayce. I guess she's alive after all. She sure high-tailed it outta there don't you think?" She asked Kidd. "Yeah, she sure did. I guess you can find who you're true friends are when you're in a situation of life or death huh?" Kidd answered. "Well, I guess I should tell her we're ok. Kind of anyway." Solace said as she began typing:

Jayce, how'd you escape? Anyway, we're ok, sort of. I had to make a deal with Damon, Cyan Bloodbane's bounty for me. I get him to Cyan, and I get to keep my head. That simple. I gotta tell him the details later. Well, now that you know we're ok. I'm gonna jet. See ya.

-----Solace-----

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Solace looked out the window. She could see Earth. It would be only a little while longer before they landed.

She heard Kidd contacted Damon again: "Ok, buddy boy, we'll be there in about 45 minutes, what's the plan from there?" Kidd asked him. *The plan? Oh my gawd, we have PLANS with a bounty hunter. I think I'm gonna die.* Solace thought. "Oooh!!!!!" She growled as she stuffed her face in a pillow and waited to hear Damon's response.

Damon flicked the clear lid that covered the switch that activated his ship's hidden missile launchers up; he probably didn't NEED that firepower, but when you were flying a ship as big as the *Jammer*, it was a good idea to have a few aces up your proverbial sleeves, as it were. Granted, he was flying a huge ship in front of a ship that was no slouch in the size department and was about to try and make a discreet entrance to a planet through an asteroid field, and using missiles probably wasn't the best way to remain low profile, but at this point, he didn't really care. He pushed the button.

Outside his ship, two false covers slid away on the hull revealing twin missile launchers, each of which poured out a dozen-missile salvo into the floating field of rock. Two -dozen rapid concussions rippled through the ship as the high explosive projectiles vaporized a dozen small asteroids and one huge one, sending shards of razor-sharp rock spewing everywhere. Damon felt four huge shudders jolt through his ship; his eyes widened, wondering what happened before he remembered where Rider was. The bounty hunter had given Rider free reign of the quad artillery cannons on top of the *Jammer*, actually against his better judgment. Rider seemed pretty burned about the whole ship thing, and Damon had told him straight about the rules.

"Listen to me, Rider!" Damon half-yelled as the former weapons dealer headed for the turret. "I want Solace to be unharmed, you hear? Do NOT fire on her." Rider looked just shy of caring. "If you do, I swear I will come up there and slit your miserable little throat myself!" Rider still looked like he didn't give a rat's @ss, and Damon sighed. "Look, if this whole deal goes down without a hitch, I'll spot you some of the reward to get you back on your feet. If it doesn't go down smooth..." the bounty hunter shrugged. "If it doesn't, I'll give you Solace, free of charge. You can do what you want with her if that happen I don't care. Deal?" Rider thought for a moment, then nodded with a small smile as he headed up towards the turret.

At the very least, I've still got a kill switch here in on the panel. Damon picked up the comm unit as Kidd's voice came over the line and laughed. "Plan? What plan, I'm making this up as I go, aren't you? Luckily for you guys, I've actually GOT a plan at this point. When the moon broke up, a big ol' chunk of it landed in North America and made a nice little hiding spot for a ship as big as mine, and yours for that matter. Just follow me again, and you'll be fine." Damon replaced the receiver on the radio and put his hand back on the yolk. Hopefully that crater was still open to him.

Less than an hour later, Damon settled the *Jammer* softly onto the silt floor of a huge cave, big enough to hold both his ship and Solace's. He sighed as he powered

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down the engines. *Well, might as well check the bounty hunter channels.* After all, if he was going to be working against his former comrades, he might as well be informed. He flicked on the television; "Big Shot" was on, after all...

His fingers found the keyboard of his computer terminal and began flying over them, clicking away as he found and surfed the network of the bounty hunter links. His fingers clicked and clicked and... froze. His eyes widened in disbelief. "No... it can't be them..." He clicked a few keys and a report came onto his screen. According to this information, the crew of the Cowboy Bebop, one of the most talked-about bounty hunter group in the business. According to this, they were on their way to Earth right now. "Great... just BLOODY great! Now I've got Bebop moving in on my-" then the television cut in on his thoughts with some VERY familiar names.

"That's right, amigos! Today's Big Score is none other than our old friend, Solace Black!"

"Black again? That makes it four months in a row! But I thought she got taken down by that hot shot bounty hunter Damon Morlan?"

"No way, senorita! As it turns out, Morlan joined up with her!!!"

"No!"

"YES! And now, if you catch Black, Kidd, AND Morlan, you get a whoppin' 35 MILLION OOLONG!!!" The words "Double Score" appeared on the screen; Damon felt his jaw go slack. They were lumping HIM in with these... these BOUNTYHEADS? "Well, at least no one knows where-" Suddenly it hit him.

Bebop was headed here, to Earth, and the bounty on Solace and her companions had just doubled. *Oh gawd... NO!!!* The crews of Cowboy Bebop weren't known for their kindness; Spike and Jet alone were bad enough, but with Faye Valentine along side them? Valentine made Solace look like a flower girl, and a nice one at that! And rumor had it that they had an ace hacker along for the ride, Radical Edward if the info was correct.

Damon kicked his computer desk as he stood and stormed out of the ship and down the ramp to where Solace and Kidd stood. "Great, just BLOODY FLIPPIN' GREAT!" he screamed at them. "Ever since I took this... this DEAL, they've put out a bounty on ME, as well!!! And now we've got the Cowboy Bebop and it's crew on our trail, they're headed here NOW!!!!!!!!!" He kicked a big rock and sighed. "Listen, unless you want to be here when the Bebop gets here, I suggest you tell me who we're after and where we can find him."

Solace and Kidd stood at the base of the ramp leading out of the ship. Damon was yelling at them and when he was finished, Solace and Damon heard a light giggling that slowly grew louder until, "HAHAHAHAHAHA!" Kidd was barely able to contain herself. "Well Solace, this couldn't have worked out better if we had planned it all this way" Kidd said still laughing. Damon raised his fist and Kidd tried to stop laughing. She was still giggling under her breath though. Solace smiled a rather sly smile. "Yup this has worked out pretty decently after all." She winked at Damon.

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"The Bebop crew is headed this way huh? Well, I wouldn't worry about them, I don't think "Daddy" would turn in his own daughter, no matter how much I piss him off." Solace finished. Damon stood there in disbelief. After a few moments of silence Kidd finally spoke up and said "Ok, figure it out Damon," She pointed towards Solace, "Solace *Black*, Daddy equals Jet *Black* and yeah. Well, you're a smart boy, you'll figure it out right?" Kidd asked Damon, who was still speechless.

Damon had finally returned to his senses when Solace started telling him about the 25 million oolongs.

"His name is Cyan Bloodbane, he's a killer. The mayor of my hometown on Mars, Raytown, is offering the reward to capture the guy who killed his family, his wife and his little girl. He offered me the reward at first; said I was really good with a gun. But I declined because I didn't want to become someone like you. Now, I don't have a choice, both of our reputations have gone down the crapper." Solace said folding her arms. "Mayor Hoffman and his family used to be pretty close to my family years ago. He might even up the price" Solace said. "Or ya know, we could turn ourselves in and collect the 35million! How's that sound?" Kidd asked. Solace punched her on the arm and told her to be quiet. "Ok, ok, geez, I can't even make a joke to lighten you people up..." Kidd grumbled while rubbing her bruised arm. "So do you want to get going or do you want to hang out here for a while?" Solace asked Damon.

"What the heck is Solace DOING? "Jayce yelled, slamming her fist on the table." I mean, she's following a bounty hunter!" Celeste stared. "YOU are too, you know..." "Oh, be quiet!" She said. Jayce was in the cockpit and trying to maneuver her way across the asteroid belt, while at the same time wondering why Solace would do such a thing. "Hey Jayce, your computers beeping, I think you have a message, yah it's from that Solace girl." Well I can't exactly look at it right now, read it to me..." Celeste started reading it to her. "Cyan bloodbane's bounty...." "But Jayce stopped her there," Cyan Bloodbane...." She asked. "That's what it says." Celeste replied. and kept on reading, *they're chasing after him....* Jayce thought to herself. "Hey! are you listening?" Celeste yelled, snapping Jayce back to her senses. "What?" Celeste sighed. "Never mind...." "Okay we're out of the asteroid belt, and I can see Solace's ship is not to far ahead, we should be there in about an hour or two.

2 hours later:

It was a silent trip down to earth; Celeste wasn't looking at Jayce as they landed. "I need to see where Solace and that bountyhunter went to, so I'll be coming down with you," Jayce said, and grabbed her pistol, and sword. They made their way out onto the deck of the ship, "I forgot to ask, where do you live?" Jayce asked. "An orphanage...." She said silently. "Oh, well, where is it?" Up through here, I can get to it myself," and Celeste walked off, leaving Jayce behind. She shook her head. "Glad that's over..." She said in an awkward voice, and proceeded to look for Solace. She had to keep her distance from most places since she had robbed banks in this region before. *Come to think of it, I am running low on cash...she thought to herself. I think I'll stop at the bank before I leave this place...*

Jayce had been walking for a while and had still hadn't found Solace or Damon."

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That's it...I need a drink." She said and headed to the nearest bar. She ordered a beer and sat down. *Gawd! Earth's going to the dogs*, she thought as she looked around the bar. There were people here that looked even worse than her or Solace. She looked up at the small TV by the counter, which was tuned to big shot ""That's right, amigos! Today's Big Score is none other than our old friend, Solace Black! "Jayce sat fixed on the screen with her beer in her hand. "Black again? That makes it four months in a row! But I thought she got taken down by that hot shot bounty hunter Damon Morlan?"

"No way, senorita! As it turns out, Morlan joined up with her!!! "Jayce choked on her beer when she heard the news. "No!" "YES! And now, if you catch Black, Kidd, AND Morlan, you get a whopping..."the bartender turned off the TV "HEY! I WAS WATCHING THAT! "Jayce screamed. "sorry, sorry....."he said and turned it back on.....OOLONG!!!" "great now I missed it....." she grumbled, she was unaware that everyone was watching her". You a bounty hunter or something?" the bartender asked. "yah, ME a bounty hunter." She said, rolling her eyes. She got up out of her stool and started to walk off. "Hey! You forgot to pay!" She glared at him, and tossed him the remaining oolongs she had in her pocket. She stood outside of the bar; trying to think of some other places to look for the two. *They aren't gonna go too far into town, since they got a bounty on their heads*. She looked up at the sky, "uh?" she looked up to see a ship sailing over the town, the words *bebop* was written on the side. "BEBOP?" she yelled and started running toward the ship. *They can't be after Solace and Morlan, not when Jet's on board, so why are they here?* She stopped and tried to catch her breath. *They're not after me, are they?*

Damon felt his jaw drop open as Solace revealed something completely new about herself. *Jet Black... is her DAD?* Was all he could think? Something in the back of his mind smacked him around for not seeing the connection EARLIER (after all, how many Blacks were there in the universe?) but he quickly shook it off. "Great, that takes care of YOUR hide," he growled, "But I'm sure they would have no qualms about taking ME in. After all, even if I managed to get my good name back, they'd be down a rival, wouldn't they? So I IMAGINE that my unexpected or untimely capture slash demise would NOT cause them to lose any SLEEP!"

"At any rate," he continued, "I'd rather not hang around here for too long; a lot of bad things can happen to ya here on Earth. Every day they have meteorites falling through the atmosphere, and NOTHING on the surface can save ya from *those*.

Trust me, I've seen what they can do." The black-clad bounty hunter sighed and sat down, then stood back up and began pacing as he mulled the information over in his head. "Cyan Bloodbane, huh... I've never heard of him... and with a bounty THAT big, I'd sure have heard about it on the channels." He looked to Solace; she, as usual, betrayed nothing. He raised an eyebrow. "Unless this Mayor Hoffman didn't post the bounty on regular channels? With something so personal, he'd probably keep it to himself until he found someone who could do it RIGHT, and do it HIS WAY, too, no less. It's not common, but that sort of thing HAS happened before..."

His eyes became cold as they locked with Solace's. "We're gonna do this, but before we do... Tell me one thing..." He forced down the lump in his throat; just thinking about her made his heart hurt. "Has this... Bloodbane... killed on any other planets? I mean, like... Earth? Or Venus? Or one of the Asteroid Colonies?" He swallowed

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again. "Or... Ganymede?" His fiancé had died on Ganymede. If this Bloodbane character had killed more than just those two on Mars...

Solace let out a deep sigh *all men are babies* she thought. "Don't worry about them." She said referring to the Bebop gang "They won't turn you in because they know that if they do, you'll give away MY position and I'll be caught. Am I right?" Damon shrugged. "Well anyway, I don't know if Bloodbane killed anyone else." Solace said. She could tell by the way Damon had been talking and avoiding her eyes, that he had lost someone close to him. She figured he was asking her if Cyan may have been the one who took, whoever he was thinking about, away from him. There was an uncomfortable and kinda creepy silence in the air until Kidd broke it. "HEY! Anyone hungry?" Solace and Damon looked at her. "Let's take a break from all this crazy shi* and get something good to eat for once and then we can decide where we're going later...Damon's treat." Damon made kind of a growling noise. "Uh, please? We kinda don't have any money right now." Kidd grinned. "Ah, heh..." Kidd backed up a little bit and turned on her heel and moved over toward Solace.

An hour later they were sitting in a little restaurant, Kidd munching away happily at some steak looking thing. "Inlly, om EAT!" Kidd said with her mouth full. "What?" Solace asked. Kidd gulped down her food and said "Finally some MEAT!" She said. "Well, I'm sorry for making you eat crap!" Solace said. Kidd shrugged. Solace looked toward Damon, "so do you want to go and talk to Hoffman or what? I haven't talked to him in a while so hey, we may be able to make more money!" Solace said trying to brighten him up. "You're not still worried about the Bebop gang are you? Even after everything I said?"

A noise, the sound of a spaceship approaching had just interrupted their meal and conversation. "I wonder who that is..." Kidd said trying to see out the window.

Damon reluctantly tossed the oolongs for their meal to the waitress as Kidd vied for a peek of the ship and it's contents. "Ah, c'mon, Kidd. It's probably just a shipment of the mystery meat you were so eagerly gobbling up," he teased, a wry grin touching his face. "Believe me, you wouldn't eat that stuff if you knew where it came from." Damon didn't know himself, but hey, she didn't know that. Sighing, Damon decided to try for a stiff drink and excused himself from the table. *Great, I didn't even EAT anything and I've got indigestion*, he thought sourly as he slid into one of the stools at the counter and asked for the most alcoholic beverage they could whip up.

His head fell into his hands. *God, HOW did I get talked INTO this?* He massaged his temples with his thumbs. *Just calm down, Morlan... Everything we'll work out. All you have to do is find this Bloodbane character and turn him in for the reward. Then you can clear everything up with the authorities; tell them that you only joined up with Black to get to Bloodbane and that it was all a ruse. Yeah; that'll work! And if the results are as good as they seem to be, they'll HAVE to believe me!* He felt a small smile on his lips again; it was the first real smile he'd felt in at LEAST the past 48 hours. A nudge at his elbow pulled him out of his quiet introspective; a drink that looked like muddy water and smelled like a bad Mexican restaurant rested there. His grin broadened; now that he'd gotten a reign on the depressing thoughts that had

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been plaguing him, he felt almost jovial. Perhaps he'd go tease Kidd some more; she was awfully fun to mess with.

As he stood with the drink in hand, however, the opening of the door made him pause. In walked a man in a worn blue suit with a thin red tie and hair that looked like a poor attempt at an afro; his shoes were scuffed, his shirt was unkempt, and the outline of a gun under his suit coat was enough to tell Damon that he was another bounty hunter. BUT, he wasn't just ANY bounty hunter; it was Spike Spiegel, one of the most feared bounty hunters amongst the outlaws. He was feared not for his skill with weapons (although he WAS quite talented in that department) nor for his skill as a pilot (which were also considerable); he was feared because any bounty head that he didn't catch ended up dead. His partner and Solace's father, Jet Black, wasn't with him, luckily; or unluckily, as it would be. If Jet had been there, Solace would have at least been overlooked, and Damon as well if Solace would put in a good word for him (*Yeah, right*, he thought). Faye Valentine, however, WAS feared for a good reason; she, unlike Spike, was feared because she was wicked good with guns and could split you in half with a pistol at 300 yards.

The door was a good distance away from the group of fugitives, giving Damon just enough time to get back to the table. He downed the nasty, *NASTY* drink in one long gulp, but it didn't even phase him. If they made a scene now, they'd probably all die. "Look, Spike Spiegel and Faye Valentine just walked in that door. Your daddy's not with them, which means that we-" the look Solace gave him said that it didn't matter, so he coughed. "-I'm in trouble. I'm gonna try to make it out; you'd be wise to do the same." Sighing, he turned his back on the table and made long, easy strides for the bathroom. With luck, he'd make it just far enough to-

"You! In the black! STOP!" Faye's sharp voice rang out in the small diner. Damon swore under his breath but kept walking slowly. Maybe they'd think he was deaf or something...? Despite his calm thoughts, his feet didn't care; they began running, as fast as they possibly could, towards the gentlemen's restroom. Gunshots rang out, bullets whizzed through the air, and pieces of plaster and building materials scattered everywhere as Faye's shots went wide of Damon. The black-clad bounty hunter dashed into the washroom and frantically searched for a way out of this mess. There was a window in the room; with a crash, he flew out into the street.

Heaving himself to his feet, he made tracks down the street as fast as his long legs would carry him, all the while trying to get the glass shards out of his hair.

Bullets zinged their way down the street, and Damon knew he was in DEEP sh*t.

Once they get their teeth into you, they never let go, he thought, KNOWING it would only be a matter of time, now. But he sure as HELL wasn't giving up THAT easy! Down an alley here, over a wall there, and somewhere drawing his sidearm in the process, Damon made his way towards the edge of town and the relative safety of his ship. He threw his back against a building, his chest heaving. *All right... this is it. No more running!* He prepared to take out Faye, leaped out...! And found that no one was chasing him anymore. He blinked in surprise a couple of times before falling to the ground with exhaustion. "All right... what happened... to them... I wonder?" he pondered aloud.

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Kidd had been gobbling up more of the meat that Damon said was "Mystery Meat" when he announced that Spike and Faye had walked into the restaurant. She was unimpressed and was determined to finish the meal as to say to Damon that she didn't give a damn what the stuff was, it was good and that's all that mattered. "And why do I care if Faye and Spike are he- HEY! Where are you going?" Kidd asked Damon as he ever so gracefully made his way to the bathroom marked 'Gents,' in order to escape a visual from either Spike or Faye. But he was too late. Faye called out to him and like an idiot he started running after what seemed like a delayed reaction because he HAD started to slow down. *The idiot just doesn't get it, if he would have stayed here I probably could have talked them out of taking him, Damn you Faye,* Solace thought as she was sitting at the table. It was a rather comical scene from Solace's view. He had told her that it would be wise to escape. *Why? Sure, Faye and Spike aren't anywhere NEAR my buddies but they know what would happen if they turned me in. They haven't even seen us yet but still, I guess we should TRY and slip out of here...*

"Come on Kidd, we gotta go get Damon's sorry @\$@ out of the trouble he's gotten himself into now." Solace said getting up.

"Why? I mean, what do we owe him? We can just as easily slip out of here and head to OUR ship and ditch his @\$@." Kidd replied.

"Just come on. He paid for our meal...and...uh....JUST MOVE!" Solace said.

"Boy, you're getting soft, and all over some GUY..." Kidd mumbled so that Solace wouldn't hear.

Solace knew how she sounded. Kidd thought she was losing her nerve. But for some reason, when Damon was asking about Bloodbane and she saw that look in his eyes, she just felt like she needed to help him. Like she owed him that much after all the trouble she had gotten him into. He had been a very respected bounty hunter until she had messed it all up, now he was running from people he shouldn't be. People like him...She shook her head and stopped thinking about it.

They were just about to the door when they heard, "Well, well, look what the cat dragged in."

It was Faye, she had just stepped back through the entrance. Apparently she had given up her chase on Damon. "You know, I would be a rich woman if it weren't for the fact that you're Jet's daughter."

"Yeah, I'll bet it just kills you that you can't do anything about me." Solace responded coldly.

"Not like I asked for my father's protection, I could kick your @\$@ any day of the week."

"Is that a fact? Would you like to try?" Faye asked.

"Well, WHAT do we have hear?" Spike had just walked up and interrupted their stare-down. "Solace, it's been a while, too bad Jet isn't with us, it would have been nice to have a little family reunion."

"Yeah, I'll bet it would have been great fun, where is 'Daddy' anyway?" Solace asked.

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"He's taking care of some business..." Spike answered. Something about the tone of his voice made Solace suspicious. But she didn't ask any questions; she wanted to get outta here. Spike and Faye were incredibly annoying separate, but together they were unbearable to be around longer than a few seconds. She just nodded.

"Well, we were just on our way out so I guess we'll see you losers, I mean, guys later." Solace said while trying to slide past Faye and out the door.

"Hang on!" Faye said. "Going to rescue your new boyfriend?"

"NO! I would hardly call him a friend, much less a BOYFRIEND. We just need to take care of something that has NOTHING TO DO WITH YOU! NOW GET THE HELL OFF MY BACK! Come on Kidd." Solace started stomping off in the direction of *Battousai*. Kidd silently followed her.

"It was GREAT seeing you Solace!" Spike sarcastically called out to her.

Solace didn't look back, just lifted up one finger in his direction as a sign of her affection.

Jayce had decided to follow rather than introduce herself yet again to the angry and tired looking bounty hunters. She took a quick peek and saw that Jet was not with them; they led her to what looked to be one of the crappiest restaurants in the universe. *This is so stupid, hiding from them* she thought as both Spike and Faye entered the poorly constructed building. *They probably already know I'm here.* but she remained at the window where she took a quick look inside, the first thing she saw was Solace and Kidd sitting in the near by table on the left, . She couldn't see where Morlan was but that was probably because Spike and Faye were blocking her view. "You! In the black! STOP!" she heard Faye scream. *That's Morlan alright...* Jayce thought, remembering Morlan's looks as though he was in front of her. She was brought back to her senses when bullets flew through the air and she saw in amazement as Morlan came bursting out of the window to her left, not paying any attention that a wanted bounty-head kneeling beside him, nor anybody else for that matter. The bullets subsided and she heard people coming closer to the door. But they stopped right as they reached the exit. She could hardly hear the conversation that was going on inside but caught small sentences. "Yeah, I'll bet it just kills you that you can't do anything about me." She heard a voice say. "Not like I asked for my father's protection, I could kick your @\$\$ any day of the week." Jayce knew Solace had not liked Faye, Spike either, as she mentioned one of her 'visits' with her." Going to rescue your new boyfriend? "Jayce knew she had stuck gold with that remark, and sure enough, she heard Solace's voice explode within the building. "NO! I would hardly call him a friend, much less a BOYFRIEND. We just need to take care of something that has NOTHING TO DO WITH YOU! NOW GET THE HELL OFF MY BACK! Come on Kidd." Jayce heard enough, she hurriedly walked away just as Solace and Kidd leaving the poor excuse for a restaurant, she assumed they, like Faye had said, were gonna go looking for Morlan. She saw Spike and Faye exit the building and headed in the same direction as Solace and Kidd had left in." Wait a minute." she said, stopping in her tracks. She had knew Spike before she took up what he called. ' a life of crime'. And if they're looking for Morlan, and not Solace,"

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Then this is the best way to exact my revenge!" she laughed. She heard sirens going off and people screaming, "It's her! It's Jayce Williams!" Jayce sighed, "Aw, crap."

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