

# Bounty Hunter

## Segment 3

### 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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Jayce Stared into Dantes golden eyes. Presumed dead 3 years ago. Dante Blackblade, 18, was standing right in front of her. "WHADDYA MEAN WHAT AM I DOING HERE?!!!" she exploded. "WHAT'RE YOU DOING HERE?!! YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE DEAD!!!" Lou was staring back and forth from Dante to Jayce. "What, old girlfriend?" He asked. "NO WAY!!!" he yelled. "SHE," he pointed at Jayce. "STOLE MY SHIP!!! THEN SHE BLEW IT UP!!!"

"I DIDN'T!!!! FAYE VALENTINE OF THE BEBOP GANG DID!!!" She looked at him in disgust, sure she didn't expect this to be a happy reunion but she didn't think he'd still be mad at her for what she over 3 years ago. "I DON--" He began but was cut off by Lou. "Umm, I think we should be trying to find a way to get off this planet before the cops find our ship." He looked up at Dante who nodded. Jayce realized this and started walking out of the ship. "where are you going? You owe me a ship!!!" Jayce turned around, closed her eyes and said calmly "My 'new' ship's engine has been destroyed thanks to all this sand, so I'm walking toward the nearest town and getting a drink...If you want to apologize to me then you may come along." and with that said. She turned on her heel and was out the door. It was a couple of minutes before she saw Dante and Lou lagging behind.

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They had been wandering in the desert for what seemed like hours and was dying of thirst. Dante and Lou were still following her mumbling to each other in very low voices, but apparently thinking she had some idea of where she was going. She looked out into the 'endless desert' and saw something that surprised her. A man with blonde spiked hair and a red coat was running toward her...

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Damon blinked at Solace as she and Kidd went off on him simultaneously. The bounty hunter jabbed an accusing finger at Solace. "As I recall, *SOLACE*, you ran away once all ready, and I caught you again, remember? I don't think it would matter TOO much if you stole my own ship. I'd just get another one and blow you out of the cosmos." He moved the finger to Kidd. "YOU had just better keep your crazy mouth shut. I like you, Kidd, but you're obnoxious sometimes." And then he pointed his gun at the head of the boy who lay on the floor. "AND I'm only going to say this once." He shifted his aim and shot between the kid's legs. "GET THE HELL OFF MY SHIP."

It didn't take the kid long to get out; he knew that Damon's threat would quickly evolve into an action if he didn't oblige. He stumbled out into the burning sun, followed by three of Damon's bullets in the sand behind him, just to keep him moving. The black clad and very pissed off bounty hunter holstered his .50 caliber revolver and pulled out one of his twin silenced 9 mm pistols. A smile crept across his dirty and sweaty face as he began his next threat, "I could easily kill you and bury you out here in the sand..." but then he recognized the boy. He was a tad bit older and he looked slightly different, like he'd had something done to his face, but his eyes gave him away. He'd only seen one picture, but that had been enough. His smile broadened. "...but it would be much more appealing to hand you over to Mars authorities and collect the reward."

He saw the shock on everyone's faces, and he swept *Masamune* in a cutting motion to keep everyone silent. "Quiet. No one needs this money more than me... well, US." Solace and Kidd seemed taken aback by his referral to them as part of his team, but he plowed on. "And since my hopeful target has yet to show up, I-" An

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explosion from the direction of town neatly busted up his conversation.

In one swift motion, Damon sheathed both *Masamune* and his pistol. "Well, it seems that you're safe for now," he said to the boy on the ground. He tossed a smile to his partners. "Well? Come on! Vash the Stampede waits!"

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Solace Black and Kidd Majere watched as Vahn was practically thrown out of Damon Morlan's ship. Solace was still mad at him, but dam\* that Morlan guy was being a jerk.

*I can't let him just throw Vahn out* She thought to herself. Then she came up with a plan as Damon was threatening to turn Vahn in. Standing behind Damon, she motioned to Vahn from Damon's side. She mouthed the words *Battousai* to him.

Vahn saw her motioning but he shrugged and shook his head.

*Great, the idiot doesn't understand me.*

She motioned to Kidd instead. Kidd understood and nodded her head.

That's when they heard the explosion and Damon said something about catching Vash The Stampede. Before she answered him, Solace turned to Damon, and practically screeched in his ear,

"You're such a jerk! Why'd ya have to throw him out?" She put on a sobbing show and started forcefully crying.

*Hmm, I think I'm getting good at this*

"Well, at least let me tell him goodbye! I gotta give the guy a hug!" Kidd added, whining as she ran outside the ship and over to Vahn.

Solace, meanwhile, distracted Damon by yelling at him some more.

"We aren't going to help you with Vash until you can guarantee you'll leave him alone!" She stood, clenching her fists.

Kidd wandered over to Vahn thinking of how she was going to do this, *Alright I've only got one shot at this, I hope the moron understands.* She thought to herself as she ran to Vahn.

"What's going on Kidd?" Vahn asked as she hugged him.

"Shh! Listen. Go to Sentinel Three, speak to a guy named Fred Luo, mention Damon and get our ship back, the *Battousai* come and find us ok?" Kidd whispered to him.

He nodded and took off running.

"Oh! I'm gonna miss him! The poor guy. He doesn't stand a chance without us!" Kidd sobbed as she walked back to the ship. Solace continued her sobbing fest as Kidd stuck her tongue out at Damon while she walked by him. The two girls hugged each other and wailed a few moments longer. Then Solace, wiping her eyes, spoke to

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Damon,

"Well? Do you promise?" She asked him.

He stayed silent. Finally, after a few minutes, she half growled and half yelled, "Hurry up and say, 'yes', so we can go get that Vash guy!!"

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Damon blinked at Solace, not quite believing what she was saying. Let this guy go? His bounty may not be quite as much as Vash's, but if rumor was correct, this Vash guy was supposed to be nigh uncatchable. If they held on to Bloodbane and failed to get Vash, they'd still have about... \$25 mil to split? And if they got Vash AND kept Cyan, or whatever his name really was, they'd have... well, a SH!TLOAD of money!!! The bounty hunter glanced from Kidd to Solace, Solace to Kidd and back again. He flexed his sword hand out of nervous habit. This was a decent chunk of money they were asking him to throw away... but he couldn't even HOPE of capturing Vash the Stampede without Solace's help, at least; Kidd would probably just try to shoot him or something. Which was only PART of the plan, not the WHOLE plan. On the other hand, if he did this by himself, he could have the entire bounty to himself, and this planet's double-dollars translated VERY favorably to the outside universe's oolongs... The \$\$60 billion was about 900 BILLION oolongs, which was, needless to say, a HEFTY sum! But if he didn't have Solace's help, he may miss out entirely... PLUS he didn't exactly want her out of his sight if he could help it... PLUS he'd miss her if she went...

He heaved a sigh. "Yes. YES, I'll leave him alone... bloody hell..." Solace gave a nod of satisfaction and Damon knew he'd been duped somehow...

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Damon, Solace, and Kidd crouched down behind a group of water barrels in the small town where Vash was having a gunfight with a band of bounty hunters from this world. From the sound of it, Vash was winning by a GREAT margin. Damon had discarded his black trench coat for the moment, and without it you could see just how many guns he had strapped to himself; his twin silenced 9mms at his hips, his twin Uzi's in shoulder holsters, his big .50 caliber revolver lower on his right thigh and his .223 pistol on his left. The *Masamune*'s hilt stuck over his right shoulder, and two throwing knives nestled at the small of his back. Was it any wonder why Damon Morlan thought he was invincible?

Damon was currently drawing a plan in the sand. "All right. Solace, I'm going to draw him up the main street HERE." He drew a path up the rough sketch of the town. "I'll need you and Kidd to give me support. Leave the rest to me." Kidd was fairly bouncing on her heels, and Damon gave her a sharp look. "Listen close, Kidd. We don't want him DEAD, we just need him to be caught off-guard. Just shoot near is feet or something, but DON'T SHOOT HIM." Solace gave him a look, and Damon rolled his eyes. "OK, OK, don't shoot him BADLY." Kidd grinned, and Damon knew that asking THAT much was pushing it.

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"Who the...?" Jayce stared out the distance as the man in the red coat was weaving in and out of city ruins, the sound of gunfire hit her ears and she immediately picked up her .22, "what's going on Jayce?" Dante asked, he also upholstered his hand made pistols, while Lou hid behind Dante. *How pathetic.* Without thinking, Jayce started running towards the gun fight. "What are you doing?!" Dante yelled after her. "Simple," Jayce laughed, "I'm bored."

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Dante wasn't far behind Jayce as they hurried over to 'have some fun' with the man in the red coat.

"What happened to Lou?" She asked as Dante finally caught up with her. "He's not one for fights." he simply replied, apparently he was still mad for the blowing up HIS ship thing. As they reached the scene, Jayce and Dante hid behind the corner of an old bar to get a better look at everything. "Come back here VASH!" she heard the assumed bounty hunters call him. "Vash huh?" She said. "what do you think Dante, should we take his side, he seems far outnumbered." She was correct, there had to be at least 30 or more chasing after him. She looked over at Vash who was hiding behind a barrel a couple of feet away. "Do what you want, I'm just gonna be shooting at anything that moves." and with that said he made his way through the shots and started firing at....well anything that moved. *Never thought he'd be the one to hold a long grudge...well I'm gonna help him*

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Kidd and Solace stayed crouched behind the water barrels. They were waiting for some sort of signal from Damon before they made their move. He was supposed to lure Vash up the street and they were supposed to cover him from behind and corner him.

"Ooh! This is gonna be great!" Kidd said excitedly rocking back and forth on her heels. It was quite obvious she wouldn't hold out much longer. She was on the verge of exploding from excitement.

"I've been waiting a long time to get in on some major action! The biggest bounty head anyone's ever heard of and WE'RE IN on it! Can you believe it, Solace?"

"I know what you mean, but you have to calm down, ok?" Solace said, half grinning at her.

Kidd nodded and tried to think of something else. "Man, that Damon sure has a lot of weapons." She said remembering all that he had strapped to his body.

"Yeah he did, but you're not really one to talk, ya know?" Solace said grinning at her again and nodding to everything she had strapped to herself; She had a pistol in her right hand, a hand claw also strapped to her right hand that she had mysteriously acquired only hours before, another set of pistols at her sides, a boot knife, a dagger in her belt, and strapped to her back was a large green bag that contained God knows what.

Kidd shrugged, "Maybe."

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A few minutes later:

"I'm getting tired of waiting!" Kidd practically yelled.

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"Shh! You'll blow our cover!" Solace whispered.

"Well, what IS the signal anyway?" Kidd asked.

"I don't know, he just said that we would know when we saw it." Solace answered.

"AHAHAHAHA!"

Solace and Kidd looked at each other

"What the hell was that?" Solace asked peeking around the corner.

Damon was running toward them with a man in a red coat running behind. The man was the one laughing maniacally.

"Run Away!" Damon yelled at them as he ran by.

"I guess that was the signal." Solace said in disbelief.

"Well then, I ain't waitin' any longer!" Kidd yelled running after them, Solace not far behind. Kidd wasn't going to wait for anything, she started releasing her "awesome" fire power right away, but this guy named, Vash, kept dodging her bullets. It didn't look like he was even TRYING to dodge them, it just happened. Solace joined in and started shooting at the man's feet.

"Oooh, we're good, aren't we?" Kidd said in an almost demonic voice.

"You only THINK you're good my friend", She said, unzipping the pack on her back and pulling out an old AK-47 sub machine gun (Did I get that right? :P),

"Well, LETS SEE YA DODGE THIS!" She shot all around his feet and a little higher hoping to hit a leg, bringing up a whole bunch of dust in the process. Solace stayed behind her, where it was safe. "WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!" Solace yelled. No good. Kidd was so crazy right now that she wouldn't be able to hear much of anything.

"MUWHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!" She laughed.

The blasting lasted a few minutes then she stopped, grinning from ear to ear. "That'll teach ya-huh? WHAT?!?!" Kidd yelled as she saw that not one bullet hit it's mark.

Vash was STILL running after Damon, he didn't even seem to notice her. Solace had run ahead when the shooting stopped, she was catching up to them too. Kidd growled, and aimed the gun again,

"STUPID...BOUNCY...RUBBER MAN! HOLD STILL!!!! Watch out SOLACE!" She started to shoot again when a young girl ran past her, shooting her own gun, and seeming to enjoy it.

Kidd took a quick look to see who dared run ahead of her when she was in the middle of working. "Oh, hey Jayce!"

She ran up to her, "What are you doing here?"

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Damon Morlan, the baddest bounty hunter in the universe, had never had to run from a bounty head before. He'd always had the upper hand, always had SOME contingency plan that allowed him to CONSTANTLY be the hunter, not the hunted.

In THIS situation, however, his "hunter" status had been quite rudely taken from him and replaced by a horribly written "hunted" sign.

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His black combat boots crunched roughly on the gravel as he sprinted down the street, he threw a hasty "Run away!" to Solace and Kidd as their cover flew by.

Damon knew that Vash wasn't far behind him as his two partners opened fire, and he also KNEW that not a single bullet would hit it's mark. This guy had something... WEIRD... about him. No matter how much ammo was spouted at this blond nut ball, he NEVER took so much as a SCRATCH from Damon, and he doubted even KIDD could do the job.

Luckily, he had a plan... sort of. He rounded a bend and, twisting himself sideways as he leaped into the air, hurtled himself over some rain barrels. In mid-air, he drew his twin Uzis and aimed behind him, which was soon in front of him as he flew backwards over his barrier. The twin guns blasted lead behind him just as Vash rounded the corner. Of course, none of the bullets hit, but it did throw the blond gunman off just enough so that Damon could put into motion the last part of his plan.

Around another corner Damon flew, hearing Solace and Kidd doing their job from down the alley. Quick as a cat, he pressed himself up against the wall, out of sight from anywhere except from directly across from him. Equally fast, he drew his .223, which was at the moment loaded with several dozen high-potency tranquilizer darts. He flipped the toggle switch to fully automatic and waited.

It didn't take long; Vash flew around the corner, blasting back down the alley at his two associates. Lightning would have envied Damon's speed as he drew a bead on Vash's chest and let it rip. Seven darts imbedded themselves in his chest as he flew by, several more making nice wall decorations as Damon missed the last dozen or so shots. But seven darts was enough.

Vash slowed down as he exited the alley, and as he pointed his huge revolver at Damon, his aim wavered for a moment... then it wavered more... and then he was toppling over, completely unconscious. Damon stood over him and laughed. "HA! Even the best must go down like the rest!" And he laughed.

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Solace was running toward Damon and Vash. She couldn't let them out of her sights. If she did, who knows what would happen. She hated to leave Kidd unsupervised with the loaded weapons, but she would just have to trust her to use her best judgment with them this time...God help them.

Even though it seemed hopeless, she still shot at Vash's feet, maybe she could at least slow him down so Damon could make his move. This Vash guy was like a pinball machine. He kept bouncing and dodging from one side of the street to the other.

*What is with this guy? Is he made of rubber AND has eyes in the back of his head?* She saw, ahead of Vash, Damon round a corner, and then Vash do the same a few seconds later. She sped up, reloading her weapon as she did so, then she went around the same corner, gun out in front of her, expecting to have to use it. She dropped it to her side as she saw what had happened. Vash the Stampede was lying on the floor of the alley with seven darts in his chest. Damon was standing over him with a look of pride on his face. Solace rolled her eyes as she placed her gun in it's holster.

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"Seven? Really? Do you think you needed that many?" She asked sarcastically, then shrugging said, "Now what?"

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NO WAY.....*Was that Damon I just saw?* Jayce thought, she looked over toward where Vash was and followed him, reloading her gun as she did. She turned the corner and bullets came flying at her, *What the....?* she said and was forced to weave to the right past Damon and Vash. She leaned against a wall to catch her breath when she heard her name, "Oh, hey Jayce!" She looked over to see Kidd, AK-47 in hand. *Well if she's here....then Damon MUST be here.* "What are you doing here?" Kidd asked. "Well it's kind of a long story..." she laughed. She heard more shots fire and looked over Kidd's shoulder and saw Solace race over to there, gun beside her. Jayce and Kidd looked at each, nodded and ran over to join Solace. "HEY!" she heard Dante yell. "So, your not dead.." She said in a kind of bored voice. "Wow, you sound happy."

"Yeah, well."

"Anyway, who was that?" He said, pointing at Kidd.

"oh, just an old friend....why?"

"Just wondering...."

Jayce shrugged "Well if that's all you wanted then I'm going! gawd! Drag me all the way over here just to..." She continued rambling, but couldn't help thinking he wasn't telling her something.

She rounded the corner to where Kidd and Solace was standing and couldn't believe what she saw; Damon Morlan doing a.....weird pose over a passed out Vash, Solace and Kidd were both standing there with weird grins on their faces. *What's so funny?* She thought. *and why does everybody want to kill this guy?? Anyway on to more pressing matters* "Damon...." she said as she unsheathed her sword. "THIS time

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Damon holstered his .223 and chuckled. "Well, the only thing left to do is haul him in to the authorities and collect the reward!" He struck a triumphant pose. "HA!

Even the most feared bountyhead in the universe falls to Damon Morlan!" He heard a throat clear, then sheepishly added, "And, uhm, his two partners... yeah..." He coughed, then addressed Solace again. "And YES, seven darts in his chest WERE necessary. Did you see him MOVE?! It was like... like he was some kind of bio-android or something. Luckily, those darts worked on him; otherwise, we'd have had one EXTREMELY pissed off gunman on our hands."

"You mean he wasn't pissed off all ready?" Solace asked.

Damon grinned sheepishly again. "Well... not pissed off exactly... He was just chasing me because... well..." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a slightly smashed pastry. "I stole his last donut."

Suddenly, a familiar voice spoke to him. "Damon.... THIS time, we finish it!" He heard the tell-tale sound of steel being drawn across leather as he turned to face his challenger. His sheepish grin slid down into a calm smile as he said, "Well well, Jayce Williams, I do declare. You chased me all the way to this backwater planet, did you?" He waved to Vash. "As you can see, Solace, Kidd and I have just brought down a sizeable bountyhead, so I really have no need of the price on YOUR head.

But, seeing as we were interrupted in our previous battle..." He reached over his left shoulder and drew the *Masamune* from it's sheath. "...it would only be proper

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that we finish it."

He took the .223 pistol out of its holster, flicked it back to single shot, and tossed it to Solace. "If Vash starts to move again, pop about three more of those in him.

Don't get me wrong, he SHOULDN'T move; just one of those darts is enough to put a normal man out for at least three hours, but as we've all seen, Vash the Stampede is NOT a normal man." With his left hand, he began dumping all non-bladed weapons from his person; his Uzis, his revolver, and his 9mm silenced pistols all went into the dirt. The only weapons he kept on him were his sword and the two throwing knives at the small of his back.

The black clad man brought his blade up into a guard position, hilt towards Jayce, the blade resting on his shoulder almost as if he were holding a baseball bat. He let his muscles relax as he faced the young woman; he knew that if he allowed his muscles to tense up, he wouldn't have the speed it would take to beat Jayce Williams.

*She trained under Sid Vicious, he reminded himself. No matter how you look at it and no matter how you approach it, this is gonna be just as tough as it was last time.* Granted, last time he'd known NOTHING about her, and this time he'd at least seen her fight; but if Vicious trained her, she knew that HE knew he'd seen her fight, and she'd be planning a completely different tactic. Or maybe she just wanted him to think that? Was she going to use the same technique in hopes of throwing him off? Would she come in high for his head, or low for his legs?

He gave himself a mental shake, stopped thinking and let instinct take over. His black combat boots crunched as he leaped forward, bringing the huge, curved *Masamune* down in an overhead swing. Jayce's own blade leaped up and met his, the two opposing magical blades sparking and spitting at the contact. Damon grinned at his young opponent. *My, my... this IS going to be quite the workout.*

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Solace Black stood over a limp Vash the Stampede, ready to shoot him with another dart or two, as Damon had instructed, should he stir even the slightest, while she waited for Jayce and Damon to "settle the score."

She kept a good watch on him for a few minutes but she soon got bored. She looked over to Kidd, who had shown up with Jayce only minutes before, and then looked from Damon, to Jayce, and then to Vash. He still wasn't moving...

Kidd was watching the two enemies clash swords with a drooling envy. She had never been in a real swordfight before, but she would have loved to be in on the action. To Kidd, anything that she could use that was sharp, or exploded in one way or another, was her friend.

Solace noticed her drooling over the fight, *...I better distract her...*

"Come on, Kidd." She said standing up, Damon's .223 still in hand, "Let's cheer for our friend..."

Kidd jumped up, "Ok!"

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Solace took a deep breath, *I can't believe I'm going to do this.* She let the air escape her lungs and yelled in a sing song voice,  
"Rah! Rah! Sis coom bah! Jayce can do it! Yee haw!"  
At the same time, Kidd cheered,

"Damon! Damon! He's our man! If he can't do it, noone can!"  
The two girls stopped cheering as they heard each others very different cheers.

"Damon?" Solace asked.

"Oh, we're cheering for Jayce?" Kidd asked innocently.

"Well, I assumed. She's our friend, isn't she?" Solace asked her.

"Hmm, yes, but Damon is our partner." Kidd said.

"Good point." Solace replied.

"So, now what?" Kidd asked.

Solace shrugged, "I guess we have no other choice..."

"Go! Go! Whoever wins, we don't care, just let it end!" Solace yelled.

"Yeah! Cuz I'm hungry!" Kidd added.

"That didn't rhyme." Solace pointed out.

"Oh...Oops."

"Oh let's just forget it!" Solace said. She started to turn back to her "guard duty," when she and Kidd heard,

"Mmm. This donut is good...yum."

Vash had rolled over on his side and was talking.

"Aaah!" Solace and Kidd screamed. Startled, Solace pulled the trigger and shot him once more, this time in his left side.

"...Ouch..." Vash mumbled as he rolled back over.

"It's ok," Kidd said, "I think he was just talking in his sleep."

Solace looked at the gun, then to Vash, and back to the gun.

"Oops. He should be alright...right?"

-----  
*Okay Jayce, stay alert. This guy has the Masamune and what's worse is he mastered it. Anyone with that kind of power has to be dangerous.* She had also threw her .22 to the ground and looked into his eyes, hoping to read his moves. She had unsheathed her sword and held the hilt towards her right ear so the tip was facing

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outward. Damon attacked her with full force, blades locking together and spitting. She pulled back and got ready for a frontal assault when he came flying from above. She jumped back, and ran toward him blade in front. He turned around to block. Sweat rolled down her face as she faced him again, she was about to go for his knees when she heard something that sent a chill down her spine; "Rah! Rah! Sis coom bah! Jayce can do it! Yee haw!" "Damon! Damon! He's our man! If he can't do it, noone can!"

*OH MY GAWD!!!* Jayce thought but didn't dare look over to the obviously bored Solace and Kidd. Damon too, stopped but didn't do anything he just had a 'look' on his face before returning to the fight. She ran to Damon and faked a low swing and went for his chest, in which he jumped backwards and ran at her at full speed. *DANGIT! WHY CAN'T I HIT HIM!!! THIS IS REALLY TICKING ME OFF!!!!!!* she yelled in frustration as she thrust him back, she saw him smile and that ticked her off even more, *Okay, don't panic, stay focused...* she kept telling herself, but what could she do? She felt her energy slipping but her anger burned even more.

This time she attacked with a swing which he blocked but her black boot met his face making him stumble backwards. *YES! Finally a hit...well is it a hit? I don't think that qualifies...crap....* she could tell that made him mad as his hits were more powerful than the last, had he been holding back the whole time?

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Damon felt his stomach turn as Solace and Kidd did a bit of a cheer; they must be ungodly bored right now, but right now, the bounty hunter couldn't care less.

Jayce's skills had improved greatly, even since the last time they'd dueled, but so had Damon's. Practicing in your ship every night had its advantages, but it also put him in confidence that he couldn't be beaten; a dangerous attitude, especially when fighting someone as skilled (and crazy!) as Jayce Williams.

She brought her blade in a long wide sweep which Damon easily blocked; what he didn't anticipate was her boot in his face. He staggered backwards, feeling his rage growing as his face stung in a pattern of her boot treads; he quickly suppressed it.

He knew that the *Masamune* would take whatever negative emotions or any energy you fed into it and intensify it a hundredfold. However, it also had some other interesting traits.

Damon brought his blade up into another guard position, the blade held at an angle out towards his opponent. He grinned and closed his eyes, focusing his *chi* into the *Masamune*. The blade absorbed his life force hungrily, and for a moment Damon felt like he would collapse. His life force was completely drained, and for half a second, Damon Morlan was dead. Suddenly, the *Masamune* exploded in a halo of bluish-white fire. The life energy that the sword poured back into Damon kicked his body into overdrive, but it also kicked him back a few feet. His boots crunched the dirt of the street as he struggled to remain on his feet as the *Masamune* burned brightly.

He stood still for a few seconds, clutching his chest. Then his head rose slowly, inch by inch, till his eyes locked with Jayce's. His blue eyes were bright platinum, drained of all color and life. Damon Morlan had suddenly ceased to be, at least for the moment; for the moment, the spirit of the *Masamune* sword inhabited his body.

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A soulless smile curved his lips as he advanced, smooth as silk and silent as death. The burning blue-white blade splashed stark shadows across his opponent, the two observers, and the unconscious Vash. He closed back to combat distance with Jayce. "This is the true power of the *Masamune*, Jayce Williams," he said in a voice like a cold winter wind. "Few have seen this power unleashed, and fewer still have lived to tell of it. I highly doubt you will be one to survive." And he attacked.

The *chi*-wreathed blade danced in as though it were alive and not Damon's body; it struck high, low, from one side then the other with such speed that no one short of Sid Vicious himself could have survived. Well, Vicious or one trained by him. Jayce was good, VERY good, but the spirit of the sword wasn't about to give up.

From somewhere deep inside his own mind, Damon Morlan watched the fight with growing concern. The *Masamune* would most likely not stop till one of the two combatants was dead, and although Damon wanted to DEFEAT Jayce, he certainly didn't want to KILL her. *Oh this is not good*, he thought wryly. He should have just let well enough alone...

-----  
Jayce looked at Damon in shock, his expressionless smile made her hair stand on end; He attacked with such power that she was using all of her strength just fending him off. *hehehehe ,perhaps I shouldn't kicked him.* she thought. Jayce took the opportunity while he made an aerial attack to duck, turn on her heel and made a thrusting motion toward Morlan. But the next thing she felt was a stinging pain in her back followed by a bone chilling laughter that came from Morlan's mouth. She gasped for air and turned to face Damon and the bloody *Masamune*, the *Masamune* was now glowing a blood red light,  
*Fine, I guess I have no choice, I have to use it.*

-----  
Quickly drawing her sword into the attack position, she began focusing her *Chi* into a mist around her body; she then placed the tip of the *Excalibur* on the rough, sandy ground. then, tip set firmly on the ground she swung it out in front of her; The aura immediately exploded onto the sword surrounding it with flames as if she lit a match. *Okay, I still haven't mastered this trick, so I have to do it fast.* She stared at Damon who still had that insane smile as before. He came and swung upward at her; she found a blind spot and decided to take it. "Pay attention Morlan!" She laughed. "This is one of the secrets of Sid Vicious!!" And with that said she released the flame around Morlan, making him disappear in a wave of flames. She then charged into the fire, sword first; using precise speed and agility she could move past the fire easily. She stopped at the center of the blaze and found that no one was there. "What the..?! How could he?!" he came from behind her and she was forced to weave to the left and into her own trap. *Dangit! This is the last of my energy!* The flames had stopped and she was on her knees, panting and still feeling the aching pain of her cut, while Damon stood over her and put the *Masamune* to her neck.

-----  
Kidd and Solace stood on the sidelines, "Man, look at that power..." Kidd commented, watching Damon as he viciously attacked Jayce.  
"Yeah, I know...I never realized..." Solace's words faded out and she kept the rest to herself;

*That kind of power...He could really do some damage. Maybe Kidd and I never had a*

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*chance to begin with...*

Of course she wouldn't tell Kidd that. Kidd would only try to prove her wrong and deliberately pick a fight with Damon.

"Whoa, Solace. Maybe we should do something..." Kidd said.

Solace had been looking down, as she silently spoke to herself, but looked up at the fight once again after Kidd spoke. Damon was out of control. Jayce was doing her best to defend herself but Damon looked maniacal. Solace didn't think anybody could win against him right now. She watched a few minutes longer as Jayce unleashed an awesome ring of fire, but was caught in it herself when she underestimated Damon's moves. Damon now had her on the ground, sword at her throat.

"Solace?!" Kidd yelled.

"I'm goin'!" Solace replied taking action; she aimed the tranq gun with its last remaining dart and shot Damon right in the back. "That's enough!" She yelled as the dart hit him between the shoulder blades. The sword he was holding went back to its original state and Damon hit the ground at Jayce's feet.

Solace and Kidd ran over to Jayce and helped her stand. "Come on Jayce, we have to take care of that wound of yours." Solace said, putting her arm around Jayce's waist to help her walk. Jayce nodded, but was obviously too exhausted to say anything. "What about them?" Kidd asked, nodding to Damon and Vash. "Keep an eye on both of them, after I get Jayce to the ship, I'll be back to help you." Solace answered.

"Ok. Don't be long. We don't have any more darts." Kidd reminded her. Solace nodded as she half-carried Jayce to Damon's ship.

-----  
"Geez, ya stupid idiot." Kidd mumbled to Damon, or more to herself since he was unconscious. She was dragging him over to where Vash was so it would be easier to keep an eye on both of them. "You had to go all psychos didn't you? Jerk!"  
-----

When Solace reached the *Jammer*, Jayce was completely passed out from exhaustion and maybe even a little blood loss. She set her down on one of the cots in the ship and dressed her wound, making sure to wrap it tightly. *Good thing that guy keeps plenty of med supplies...* she thought as she covered Jayce with a blanket. *Damon...What the hell happened to you...?*

She went back outside and headed to where Kidd was "babysitting" the two men. The sun was setting; meaning Vash the Stampede had been out for a quite a few hours and would more than likely be waking up soon. Damon, even though he was only hit with one dart, would probably be out for a little while longer at least.

"How are we doing, Kidd?" Solace called to her as she reached them. Kidd was sitting at the men's feet, which were now lined up side by side, she looked very

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bored.

"They both snore." She said miserably.

Solace sighed, "Ok, which one do you want?"

"Hmm, Damon looks lighter..." Kidd answered.

"Fine! Whatever, let's just get this over with." Solace said, taking hold of Vash by the wrists and dragging him in the direction of the *Jammer*

Kidd followed Solace's lead and took Damon by his wrists and also dragged him.

"He'll probably be pissed since we're getting his clothes all dirty." Kidd said.

"Who cares, after what he just did..." Solace replied.

Some local citizens were staring at the two girls as they drug the two men along the dirt road. They gave questioning glances.

"Mind your own business unless you want to be next." Solace snapped at them. "I'm not in the mood for any of you people, so just back off."

The people looked offended, but Solace didn't care.

"Yeah, she means it too," Kidd added. Then, so Solace wouldn't hear her, she mouthed the word, "Crazy" and made gestures towards Solace with her head since her hands weren't free. Luckily Solace didn't see.

-----

*"Holy crap..." The words seemed to float in oblivion, just like him. He knew he'd spoken them, but he didn't know where they'd come from. He knew he'd had a mouth at one point, but right now... he was just blackness. He didn't have hands, or a body, or a mouth; he'd merely wanted to speak those words and they had been spoken, by whom he had no idea. Oh well. It didn't really matter anyway. It was kind of nice to not have any muscles to worry about; it was a pain-free existence, and it was nice. Vaguely, however, he wondered where his body had gotten to...*

*Suddenly, he was being sucked down; he didn't know how he knew it WAS down, but it just seemed appropriate. Sucked down into the black, down down down down...*

Damon's eyes fluttered open. The first thing he noticed was the light. It HURT.

LOTS. He glanced around; taking in his surroundings without moving the rest of his body, mostly because he wasn't sure he COULD move the rest of his body. He was in the holding bay of a ship; it was a very familiar cool silver-gray...

He snorted to himself. This was the hold of the *Ace Jammer* where he kept his catches 'til he could get them to the proper authorities. And sometimes it doubled for cargo space when he went grocery shopping. A glance to his left saw that Vash was still neatly unconscious. He looked across from him; Kidd and Solace were chatting in low tones. He shifted his foot and tried to stand up, and succeeded in planting himself face first on the floor.

He tried to struggle back to his feet, but was pushed back down by a foot on his back. He heard the safeties of two weapons click off, and he knew they were pointed at him. He stretched his arms out and put them on his head. "What's going on, Solace?" he asked, rather miffed. "What's with the whole strong-arm routine?" He grinned at the floor. "Was it something I...said?" Solace ground her boot into his back, twisting it a bit and making him wince. "OW!! What?! I didn't DO anything!"

Solace obviously disagreed.

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-----  
She kept the tip of her right boot firmly planted between Damon's shoulder blades, right where the dart had resided. She hoped it hurt. She hoped it hurt BAD.

"Like hell you didn't!" Solace protested. "You made yourself out to be quite the @\$@ out there and now you have the nerve to whine like a little girl?" She pushed her boot just a little harder into his back, hopefully making it difficult for him to breathe.

"You practically killed Jayce," She continued, not giving him a chance to defend himself or make lame excuses, "Obviously you two aren't close friends, but did you really intend for that little squabble to be a fight to the death? 'Cause I certainly didn't hear you say that." She lifted her boot completely off of his back, giving him a chance to breathe again. Then, clicking the safety back on, on her gun, she knelt beside him, confident that Kidd would stop him, should he go crazy again. "You really had us worried; you looked so crazy and out of control," She sighed, then went on, "My questions to you now are, what the hell happened, and are you okay now?"

"Yeah, and what about that dude?" Kidd butted in, pointed to Vash, "How long is he gonna be out?"

-----  
Damon's eyes widened as he realized what must have happened. He sat up, his shoulders sagging not from Solace's boot mark between his shoulders, but because of his shame. "That... that was the true power of the *Masamune*." He looked up at her, his eyes sad. "You channel your life-energy into the sword. It... it FEEDS off of that energy, and comes to life, more or less, in your body. The Spirit of the *Masamune* is a powerful one; in fact, old legends state that it used to be a god of some ancient world that was sealed inside that sword. Think of it as 'Instant God, just add Spirit'."

He heaved another sigh and cast a baleful look at the sword which was propped up across the room with his other weapons. "When you give your *chi* to the sword, it pretty much sucks you dry; it kills you for a second. Then its own Spirit takes over your flesh, and you're just a passenger. Afterwards, you remember jack about what happened, and most often that situation has ended in a death or ten."

He smiled up at Solace, now. "You were absolutely on target when you shot me with that dart, Solace. One of the only ways to get rid of that Spirit is to become unconscious. Usually it can only inhabit your body for three or four hours; it needs its original body to take back forever. Yours is just... a temporary ride, so to speak."

He wilted again. "But I shouldn't have done it. I got caught up and forgot what I was doing. I thought I could control that side of it, but I was wrong. "Mastered it", indeed.... I've mastered its unconscious form. I won't have *MASTERED* it until it can't take over completely."

He leaned back against Vash's leg. "A true master of the sword can channel his *chi* as I did and simply have the god's warrior abilities. The Spirit was an incredible warrior, as you saw." He shook his head. "But it looks like I have a long way to go."

He jerked a thumb towards Vash and gave Kidd a grin. "Oh, don't worry; he should be out till we can get him to a law enforcement station someplace."

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"Hrmmmp... donut?"

Damon leaped up. Vash the Stampede had just asked for a donut?! The blond gunman stretched and opened his blue eyes. "Hey... where's the donut I had, dude?" Damon all ready had his tranq gun and shot Vash with two more. The red-coated man's eyes lolled in his head and he fell back into a deep slumber. The black-clad bounty hunter felt his pulse return to normal and he tossed his partners a look of concern.

"We'd better get moving, NOW, because two darts only keep him out... about thirty minutes." He tossed the gun to the floor. "And I'm out of darts."

-----

"Ok then, so we're off?" Kidd asked rather cheerily.

"How? We can't fly this thing into the city. It's too big." Solace said.

Kidd sighed, "Solace, Solace." She clapped her hand around Solace's shoulder and shook her head.

"Are you forgetting who you're talking to? I'm *Captain* Kidd! I can fly any ship, anywhere, anytime!"

"You're going to fly *Damon's* ship?" Solace asked.

"Well yeah!" Kidd looked over at Damon, "No offense dude, but there's no WAY you're in any shape to do much of anything right now, especially fly a ship. Even if it is your own."

Damon looked offended at first but then shrugged in agreement.

"Great! So then you don't mind if I fly your ship?" Kidd asked.

"Uhh," Damon started to say but was cut off.

"Wonderful! I'll go get things started." Kidd said turning on her heels.

"You're seriously going to fly this thing?" Solace asked, "You honestly think you can?"

"Yup."

"And land it?"

"Yup."

"In the middle of the city? In front of the station?"

Kidd heaved a heavy and irritated sigh. "Solace! You forgot already?"

"What?"

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"Hello?! I'm *Captain* Kidd!" She left the small room and headed to the direction of the control panel.

"Yo ho..." Solace said sarcastically to herself while she watched Kidd skip happily off.

*One thing though... She thought, we're wanted too...and we're willingly going to the local law enforcement?*

She turned around to Damon, "You're not taking the easy way out are you? This isn't some lame trick to turn us in too is it?"

Jayne jumped and opened her eyes, she had heard the roar of an engine and sat up, but immediately regretted it as she felt a strong surge of pain on her back. She let out a small cry of pain and fell to the cold floor. She reached for her sword which was leaning on a nearby nightstand and pulled herself up, she then sat back down on the cot and let out a sigh, *Hmph, Damon.....mastered it eh? He can sure talk big*

She rolled her eyes. *Hey, wait a minute, what happened to my lucky pistol!*

! !?! She took her sword, feeling a burst of energy and headed toward the door.

*Great, now where did she go? Dante heaved a heavy sigh, he was still on the 'sandy planet' and nursing the wounded. I can't believe it.....nobody died after ALL that.*

"Hey, something on your mind?" Lou said looking at Dante while opening a new roll of Bandages.

"What? Oh. no, nothing"

"You Sure?"

"Yes"

"Really?"

"Yes!"

"Well you don-"

"You're pushing it!"

"Okay, sorry gezzzzz...."

"Anyway we have to figure out a way to get a new ship." Dante said, He looked out the window to see a nice ship with the words *Ace Jammer* written in tiny words. "Yeah right, like were gonna find a ship on this crappy planet." Lou was also looking at the *Ace Jammer* with frown on his face. "Ah well, lets at least TRY to find one!" Lou said, spirit rising."...Whatever...." Dante mumbled.

-----  
Meanwhile:

Jayne was slowly walking down the ships hall, the energy that she had was wearing

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off, she still hadn't found her gun which was making her mad. She heard Solace and Damon talking on the right side of the fork in the hallway and decided not to go there. *Yah, that's all I need, Damon seeing me on HIS ship!* She then walked to the left where she heard the song "born to be wild" and assumed that Kidd was driving. She saw Kidd's head bobbing along to it. "Hey Kidd, got room for two in there?"

-----  
"Dah duh dan na nah...Get your motor running...HEAD OUT ON THE HIGHWAY!! Bop bah nah...look'in' for adventure...IN WHATEVER COMES OUR WAY!!!"

Kidd was singing as she piloted the *Ace Jammer*.  
"This is an awesome ship!" Kidd laughed to herself.

"BORN TO BE WILLLLD!! Oh yeah baby!"

*So, first we're going to turn in Red Boy, then we get some major cash, then we can all go celebrating by eating a HUGE meal, and maybe having a drink...Hmm, this bounty hunter business ain't so bad...maybe Solace and I should look into it*

"Hey Kidd, got room for two in there?"

Kidd's wonderful thoughts were interrupted. She looked over her shoulder and saw Jayce standing in the small entrance that led to the cockpit where she was at.

"Jayce! You shouldn't be up but like I'm gonna stop you huh? Sure sit down. You can sing too if you want!!!"

Kidd was in an extra cheerful mood.  
-----

Damon gave Solace a semi-hurt look. "Hey, not ALL of my tricks were lame." But he sighed and shook his head. "NO, this is NOT one of my lame tricks. I want the reward, and I really don't want HIM," Damon tossed a thumb over his shoulder to where Vash snoozed, "to wake up and kill us all. Even if we DID take that huge revolver of his, I don't think he'd have any trouble ripping this ship apart at the seams." Yet even despite that reasoning, Damon had never heard of a single life being put out by Vash.

He let out a sigh as Kidd bounced from the room. "Dear God, Solace, she's really going to fly my ship, isn't she?" The tall outlaw woman gave him a sorry look and an affirmative nod. A bit of song ran through his head as Kidd referred to herself as Captain. He didn't know the words, so he made up a few. "...and really bad eggs... drink up me hearties, yo ho..."

He took a few steps, and had to lean against the bulkhead of the ship to keep from falling down as the ship lurched a bit to the left. He threw a tough glance as he could muster to Solace. "If she puts so much as a single ding in my ship, I'll wring her scrawny little neck." It was, of course, an empty threat. The two outlaws had become like sisters to him in the last stages of their ordeal together.

He blinked at himself. Where had THOSE thoughts come from? It took a moment,

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but then he remembered. The sword. Becoming one with the *Masamune* brought forth the true feelings from within your soul. Deep down, Damon Morlan was beginning to feel like Solace was like his twin and Kidd like his little sister. Perhaps it was odd, but that's how he felt, deep down.

Tossing Solace a grin, he headed towards the cockpit where he heard "Bad to the Bone" by George Thorogood and the Destroyers blasting loudly. He clapped Kidd on the shoulder and smiled. "Watch the left rudder, Kidd; it's tricky." She grinned up at him and nodded.

Jayce was sitting next to her and glared at Damon with fierce eyes. Damon sighed and gave her a weak smile. "Look, Jayce, I'm sorry for what happened. It's... complicated... and I'm sorry, and I'll explain it to you later, but... I'm sorry." He held out his hand. She looked at it suspiciously for a moment, then took it and gave it a shake. Damon's grin split his face as he withdrew his hand. He was glad she understood, at least for the moment.

His eyes strayed to the cockpit window and the town looming ahead; the sheriff's office was the most obvious building in the area. His grin widened. In a few minutes, they'd all be rolling in more cash than they'd be able to spend in a lifetime, even split four ways! (Well, Jayce had helped, so he felt she deserved a cut). He was about to sit back in one of the other copilot's chairs when his eyes strayed to the horizon and he froze.

He squinted. There was definitely something flashing in the air. What WAS that? This planet didn't have a Space Defense Force... or anything that flew in space, for that matter. It seemed odd, then that there was something flying... he caught a flash of red...

His face grew grim. He gave Kidd's shoulder a gentle squeeze. "Kidd, I'm afraid you'll have to give up the helm." She gave him a hurt look, but he was looking at Solace. "You and Jayce need to take the turrets while she gives me a hand in the copilot's chair." Everyone gave him crooked looks, and he gave them a grave one in return.

"Gene Starwind is coming for his revenge."

"What?" Solace rolled her eyes, "You've got to be kidding..." She looked off into the distance where Damon was focusing on. Yup, it sure was Gene Starwind. There was no mistaking that ship; the XGP, a grappler ship similar to the *Battousai*. It had, at one time, been the most sought after ship in the galaxy by space pirates and many others. Gene had somehow gotten lucky and come across it, naming it the *Outlaw Star* and customizing it to his likings; in the words of Kidd, he painted it to match his stupid head.

Fire glowed in Solace's eyes and she growled as she threw herself into the gun turret chair, "Dammit! Can't we get a break?" She vigorously flicked switches that armed and locked on, "I'm not going to let you mess things up, Gene Starwind! Not when I'm this close to that @\$#%&\*^ money!!!"

She almost went crazy and started firing the guns like mad. You could almost see a resemblance to Kidd as she did, even though they weren't related.

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Kidd looked over at her and smiled, "Yeah hah! That's the Solace I remember!" She turned back around to Damon next, "Are you sure you can handle this thing?" Seeing Damon's 'Resolved Face,' she sighed, a little disappointed, and surrendered the pilot's chair to him. "Ahh well, being co-pilot could be fun!" Damon grinned and took over the controls, Kidd sat next to him and then they heard Solace.

"Gene Starwind, you retarded @\$\$, you're not going to live this time around. I'm getting rid of you once and for fricken ALL!" She yelled as she swiveled in the chair, moving her turret in the proper directions to match Gene's movements and then she fired at him. She was answered by the *Outlaw Star's* shower of bullets.

"Would. You. Hold. Still. AND DIE ALREADY?!" She yelled. Solace was clearly pissed off. She yelled over shoulder to Jayce, "Hey Jayce! Help would be appreciated now! This @\$\$hole is trying to show off!"

-----

Jayce looked at Damons firepower in awe, she could hear Solace screaming and firing up a storm reminding her of Kidd the more she yelled. "Hey Jayce! Help would be appreciated now!

This @\$\$hole is trying to show off! "Jayce gave a sly grin "Okay let's do this!" She sat down on in the chair and flipped on the switches and locked onto one of his grappler arms and fired away, she had destroyed a part of it before he came crashing into them and nearly sent Jayce to the floor. "Damon! Don't you have a secret weapon or something?!" He slowly shook his head. *Well what are we suppose to do now? Just hand over ourselves?!* She aimed for an engine instead, "YES!" She said. She saw smoke coming out of the engines. He responded to that with a whole wave a bullets, knocking out the left side of the ship, Jayce groaned "I'm out! But I managed to get one of his engines! if we're going down we're taking him with us!"

-----

They were now reaching the ground at a faster rate. "Everyone get ready for an impact!" She and Damon said in unison. Jayce reached for something to hold onto just as the ship hit....and hit hard, knocking everyone to the ground.

"Is everyone okay?" She asked, and heard mumbles of "yes." all around. Jayce heard a rumbling noise behind her, she knew that Gene had landed right next to them. She picked herself up and went to get some firepower, She went in to the living room and saw that Vash guy still snoring and saying something about donuts...."whatever" She mumbled and continued on her way to find a gun or two or five.

She had found a her lucky pistol and headed back to the c0ckpit. When she saw that Vash was not in the living room, when she reached the c0ckpit she found that everyone was strapped and ready. "So, what are we gonna do with donut boy over there?"

-----

Damon clenched his fists around the controls of the *Jammer* as Gene Starwind closed in on them. THIS was not going to be fun. The *Outlaw Star* blazed in at full speed, guns blazing; Damon jerked the ship out of the way of most of it, his armor plating absorbing the rest. He heard and felt Solace and Jayce return fire, and he hoped

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they hit something. He wheeled the ship around and pushed the throttle, accelerating so quickly that it threw Kidd's head back a little. She glared at him. "Warn me before you do that!" she snarled.

The pilot barely acknowledged her. Gene was coming in for another attack; the right grapppler arm of the *Star* held a gun. Damon grinned and armed his hidden missile launchers, manually setting the lock for that hand. He flicked up the clear cover over the red button and gave it a smack. On the outer hull, two hidden doors slid open and a volley of missiles blasted out. Gene dodged left and right, evading all but one solitary missile, but it was enough; the warhead detonated and blasted that hand clean off his ship!

"YES!!! Eat THAT, Starwind!" he yelled, spinning the ship to the left and away from his nemesis. THAT turned out to be a mistake. In a heartbeat, Gene was on them, his grapppler arms holding the *Jammer* tightly. The left grapppler hand held onto the hull while the right arm beat the ship madly; obviously he wasn't afraid of taking a little more damage. "BASTARD! QUIT HITTING MY SHIP, @\$MUNCH!!!" Damon reached under the control consol and hit a hidden button. On the back of the ship, a small door opened and a gun turret popped out. Similarly, on the consol in front of Kidd, a screen and control stick emerged. She glanced at Damon and, at his nod, grinned and started shooting.

The turret had emerged directly under the *Outlaw Star*, giving Kidd a perfect shot. She freely blasted the underside of the red ship with lead and peppered liberally as it disengaged.

Just as Damon thought they were in the clear, a loud **POP!!!! Popopopopop SNAP!!!!** echoed from the engine compartment. He swore and cursed and yelled and screamed; that sonofabiznitch had shot his engines!!! He jerked the yolk and the *Star* came back into view; now both his grapppler arms were mostly destroyed and his engines were smoking, too! "WOOT!!!! WAY TO GO, JAYCE AND SOLACE!!!" They were doing a good job, and he was glad; if they hadn't, the four of them would be TOAST, along with Vash and the reward!

Suddenly, the stick went dead in Damon's hands.

He gave Kidd a worried look. "OK... that is REALLY not good..."

The *Ace Jammer* turned its nose towards the planet and dove like a penguin in a swimming pool. Down, down, down the ship spun, towards a very bloody and explosive demise. Damon hit switches frantically, trying to start the backup engines, and finally got them running. Just in time, too; they barely had enough space left to slow them to non-crushing-and-dying speed before landing in the sand. Needless to say, it jostled everyone quite badly, but they were all alive. Solace and Jayce staggered back into the cockpit, both looking a bit frazzled.

"Donut boy? Well, I think we'd best take care of Starwind first, don't you think?!"

He un-strapped himself and leaped back into the main area where his weapons stash was. He hit the keypad and every single wall in the ship slid up, revealing every kind of weapon you could imagine. "Load up!! We're takin' it to the streets!!!" He grabbed his usual assortment; two Uzis, two silenced 9mm, his .223, his

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throwing knives, but instead of the revolver he grabbed a DK5 Deutsche, a small caliber machine gun. He threw on his trench and hesitated a moment before grabbing the *Masamune*. They'd need everything they had for THIS encounter.

The four companions exited the ship and came face-to-face with Gene Starwind and his four companions. Gene and three others looked dangerous, but one woman hung back, seeming to be quite afraid and unwilling to fight. Damon tossed glances at his comrades. "All right... who wants who?"

-----  
"You REALLY should have thought about what you were doing before you did it." Solace said to Damon. He gave her a questioning look and she nodded at Kidd who was practically going crazy over the weapons.

"Ooh, I want THIS one and THIS one and THIS!" Kidd said, excitedly snatching weapons off the wall. She chose the only .50 Caliber Revolver he had, the two remaining Uzi's and the AK-47. As she was adjusting and strapping them to her body, she spotted something beautiful in the back; a Standard Military Issue Rocket Launcher. "Oooh, I'll be back for YOU." She whispered.

Solace crossed her arms and rolled her eyes at Kidd's stupidity. She walked over to the walls to examine the leftovers; she chose the remaining D5K Deutsche, the only .223 caliber semi automatic, and the combat knife in the back. She didn't think she needed to go overboard; the person she was going to choose didn't use weapons very much. She turned to face her comrades, "Alright," She paused, spotting Kidd, "Kidd, stop drooling," She ordered the continued; "I guess I'll take Cat-Girl, she mainly uses her fists from my past experienced and that's not a problem for me. I'm not that great with a sword, so I think Jayce would be better suited for Suzuka."

Jayce nodded.

"Great..." Kidd whispered, almost demonically, with a huge grin, "I want Bimbo Jimbo."

"Jimbo?" Solace asked, Jayce and Damon appeared confused as well.

"The blond dork's name is Jim, and I owe him." Kidd replied.

"Ok, then that, I guess, leaves Gene for you, Damon." Solace said, grinning. They all nodded to each other and stepped outside.

"Let's get this party started." Kidd said.

-----  
She looked at Damons weapons and frowned, which one did she want? She snatched the semi auto rifle before Kidd could get her hands on it, and the 4 remaining throwing knives, she wasn't too much on guns. She saw Kidd's eyes light up when she saw the rocket launcher hidden in down in the back of Damons awesome weapons.

She heard Solace mention Sazuka, while Kidd planned Jim's demise, although Damon seemed quiet. She saw the small glow of the Masamune in Damons hands

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and the pit in her stomach grew larger, She still hadn't recovered and Damon didn't look to healthy either, not to mention he has the Masamune and might go berserk again, She turned to Damon, who started out to the hanger, She, Solace and Kidd Followed. "Here we go....." she muttered to herself.

They started out the hanger, Kidd giggling in a devilish way. Jayce stared out into the distance, "hey, it seems they've already found their partners" she saw 'Bimbo Jimbo' looking at Kidd with most disgust, the cat girl looking at both Solace and Jayce with fire in her eyes, but Sazuka held her hand out in front of her, shaking her head, eyeing Jayces sword. Jayce grinned and unsheathed her sword, the blade shining an unearthly light. Gene looked at Damon; he simply smiled and loaded his gun. "I'll right let's go!"

-----

Damon rolled his eyes as Kidd went overboard on the guns, as usual. And he'd seen her eyeing his rocket launcher too! God, this town was barely going to have any buildings left by the time that girl got done!!! And she wasn't even facing the most DANGEROUS of their opponents! Jim Hawking was a short blond kid that MAY be able to use a gun, but he was no close combat fighter. Twilight Suzuka, on the other hand, was a close combat fighter all the way (unless you counted her special masters abilities that used chi to hit you from a distance), and she was Jayce's responsibility now. *Too bad, really, I would love to test my skills against Suzuka...* he thought with mild disappointment. Another heavy contender was Aisha, their Kataro-Kataro <sp?> companion. She was UNREAL strong and fast, and Solace was taking her on. *Huh... Good luck, Solace,* he sent good vibes to the young outlaw. He really hoped that everyone got out of this alive and OK... but he doubted it would be so.

His own target was somewhat of an enigma. Gene Starwind, outlaw; tall, lanky, red hair, all muscle. He was just as good a shot as Solace, maybe even better... and he was as good a hand-to-hand as Damon. He was LEGENDARY... and so was his ship. It took a man of exceptional skill to pilot a ship like the *Star*, and Gene Starwind was a man of exceptional skillz...

Damon's hand tightened on the hilt of the *Masamune*, and he forced it open and to his side. The Spirit Sword would not help him right now; besides, he was too weak to do that whole soul-sucking thing right about now. He closed his eyes slowly, and reached deep within himself. He needed to refill his *chi*, and he knew how to do it... but it required time... and time was the one thing they DID NOT have. So he'd just have to exnay on the "giving his life-force to the ancient god locked in his sword" strategy.

And that left only one option, and one that Kidd was most DEFINITELY going to like.

Faster than he thought he could move at his current physical state, Damon Morlan's hand blurred into his coat, pulled out the D5K... and started the most destructive gunfight that this planet had ever seen.

He trained his sights on Gene as the red-haired man dodged to the left and squeezed the trigger; a stream of bullets followed the pilot of the *Outlaw Star* as he rolled and hid behind one of the buildings in the city. They'd landed just outside the Sheriff's

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office... *How ironic!* he thought as he hurried around the same building Gene had, black trench coat flaring behind him. He leaped around the corner; sure enough, Gene was waiting for him. The red-haired man's pistol spat hot lead at Damon, and Damon's D5K blasted smoking rounds back at Gene, neither outlaw nor bounty hunter scoring a hit.

Or at least, not a solid one: One of Gene's bullets bit lightly into Damon's left arm, and Damon was fairly sure he saw one of his own rounds touch Gene on the shoulder. Small hits were what won in a duel of masters, and the two combatants were definitely masters of firearms.

Discarding his now-empty Deutsche, the black-clad bounty hunter reached into his coat and pulled the twin Uzi's from his shoulder holsters. He clicked the safeties off and pressed his back up against the wall of the alley. Down the street, he heard Gene reloading as well... no, wait... that was a single click, and it didn't sound like the caliber of gun Gene HAD been using..... *Oh SHIT!!!* he thought, leaping across the alley and into a side street, and not a moment too soon.

The wall of the alley... no, the entire alley ITSELF exploded as Gene used the extraordinary power of his caster weapon to use a spell-shell. When Damon looked back as he ran out the other side of the narrow street, he didn't see a wall... he saw a small pile of rubble that had, at one time, been the very wall that he'd been leaning up against.

He threw his back against another wall... ironic in the sense that it was also his situation... back against the wall. *And this close to the bansaw...* he thought as he waited for a sign of his opponent's position...

-----  
"Damn, he could have given us a little bit of a warning before doing that." Solace mumbled to herself as she ran forward towards Aisha Clan Clan.

"Heheh! All right! Come on Sucker!" The cat woman yelled at her. She was already in attack mode, her knees were bent and her claws were out. Solace grinned, "Good kitty, I was hoping you wouldn't run away."

"Grrr! What'd you call me?" Aisha yelled, running directly at Solace and taking a swing. Solace dodged her easily and came back up, punching her in the chin as she did so.

"I called you 'Kitty,'" Solace answered her sarcastically.

Aisha jumped backwards, rubbing her chin, "Hmm, a smart @\$ \$ huh? I like your style but it's too bad I have to kill you." She said with a grin.

"Bring it on." Solace replied, putting her fists up in defense; she would save the guns for an emergency.

"Yeeeeeah!" Aisha yelled, coming in for another attack. Solace ducked and came back at her with a kick but Aisha dodged her as well. They went back and forth like this for a while. Solace was beginning to think she had underestimated Aisha and that her first punch she had gotten in was just a matter of luck. Aisha moved with great speed, holding true to the Kataro Kataro abilities. Solace was starting to get worn

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out, she may be needing those guns after all...

-----  
Kidd held the .50 caliber revolver in her hands, "Prepare to be dusted, blondie!" She threatened Jim. The four unlikely comrades had managed to split up and keep their fights separate. Solace had gone off fighting with Aisha, Damon and Gene were trying to kill each other and it seemed that Jayce and Sazuka had disappeared completely from the face of the planet.

Jim held his hands up, "Aww, come on! Can't we talk things out?"

"Ooh, what's the matter? You body guard off duty? Occupied? Not able to protect the wittle baby? Is Jim all alone?" Kidd mocked, "HAHAHAHAHA!"

"Heh, I don't need him!" Jim had apparently been bluffing because he now held a grenade in his hand that seemed to have appeared out of nowhere. He pulled the pin and chucked it at her.

"Sh!t! You @\$\$!" Kidd yelled, running as fast as her feet could carry her. She ran behind the *Jammer* and crouched behind it, covering her head and waiting for the explosion...it never came.

"Dammit! Must of been a dud." She heard Jim curse.

-----  
She grabbed the gun she had dropped at her feet and ran back around the ship, aiming at the little blond boy again, "HAHAHAHAHAHAHA! You idiot! Eat this!" She ran after him and started shooting. He turned tail and ran, zigzagging all over the dirt streets, dodging bullets. She hit a few stray barrels, a tire off of an old car that exploded when it was hit, and she broke a few windows in her attempts to hit 'Bimbo Jimbo.'

"Well THIS isn't working," She said tossing the empty gun to the ground and pulling the Uzi's out in it's place. She released a spray of bullets and had Jim dancing. Jim ran faster and harder, leading them in circles around the buildings and back towards the *Jammer*. They flew past Gene and Damon, Jim yelling to his buddy, "God! Gene! She's crazy!"

"Muwahahahahahaha!!!! Dance my little puppet!!!"

They came around the police station again and a few of the cops came out to see what the noise was but yelled something about, "Holy sh!t! It's them!" and ran back inside. Man, some law enforcement...

"Damn! Their empty!" Kidd yelled, guns clicking, sounding tired. She grinned evilly though as they came back around to the *Jammer* "Oooh yeeeah." She said to herself.

-----  
Solace was kicked to the ground in the dark alley she and Aisha had unofficially decided to make their fighting ring. Aisha had worn her out and showed no signs of tiring herself.

"How do you like THAT?' Aisha asked, placing her hands on her hips.

Solace spit blood from her mouth, "Go to hell." She said standing up and facing her enemy, "You think I'm done?" She flew at her, hitting her hard in the face and kicking her in the gut. Aisha stumbled for a second but then just grinned at her. *What? She doesn't seem phased at all.*

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"That kind of tickled," Aisha said, her claws springing to life. She jumped forward before Solace had time to react, and plunged the six-inch claws into her left side and then kicked her hard.

Solace yelled in pain and gasped for the breath that had seemingly been sucked right from her lungs, she coughed up more blood and fell to her knees. She held onto her left side, blood was pouring from the wound. *This is it...* She thought as she fell into darkness...

"Aisha! Aisha! For the love of God! Help me! She's mad! She's crazy! She's insane!" Jim was running by the alley, screaming for her help, followed by an over-excited Kidd. She had gotten a hold of the rocket launcher and as Jim ran past Aisha, she released one of the tree rockets. It flew right by Jim; whooshing past his ear and exploded a group of wooden crates, whatever they had been holding were now incinerated and lost forever.

Aisha cracked her knuckles, "Well, since you're obviously no longer a threat, I'll be going now," She said to an unconscious Solace. She turned away and ran out into the street, "I'm comin' Jim! Where is that brat?"

Solace's eyes flew open, "Kidd..." She mumbled, "I'm coming." Somehow she was brought back into the light and the thought of Kidd being in danger gave her enough strength to stand up and regain her fighting spirit, kind of. She staggered for a moment. It felt like her head was going to roll off her shoulders. Her vision was blurred and the taste of blood still soured her mouth but she was determined to help Kidd, no matter what. She drew the .223 that she had taken from Damon's ship, with her left hand and held onto her side with her right and then limped after them.

-----

Jayne faced Sazuka, panting, she has superb skills, she could feel the continuous pain in her back as she and Sazuka locked blades again, they had been fighting on a roof top, away from Solace and the others. "You're good I'll give you that little girl..." Sazuka laughed. "But you tire too easily." Jayne growled, she had no idea that she had just been fighting with Damon hours before. Trying not to pay attention to the constant scream of Jim and the maniacal laugh of Kidd's, Jayne made a sweep for her legs which she dodged easily from above.

She blocked just in time and made a yelp of pain the ground was digging into her cut on her back and making it increasingly harder to fight with her. She rolled onto her stomach and back on to her feet, trying to stare Sazuka down. More gunshots were heard followed by a huge explosion that made the ground beneath them shake hard. *It seems Gene had used one of his caster bullets he was famous for; I didn't know they were so powerful.*

"Enough!" Sazuka yelled and made an attack for Jayne's middle; she quickly jumped back and swung at her.

-----

Jayne was on one knee, trying to guard the ever energetic Sazuka. She thought about using her 'flame thrower' technique she had used on Damon as a last resort, but it had become increasingly clear to her that it was her only way out.

She jumped back and summoned her chi into an aura, and placed the tip of her

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sword down onto the ground and made a slicing motion. Which the Chi then exploded onto the sword and she charged at Sazuka, who looked very surprised to see a 'little girl' with such power.

The fire-tornado circled her. Jayce ran into the fire squinting hoping she didn't pass out before Sazuka did. She struck Sazuka again and again till she heard her drop. The fire quickly dispersed and she fell to her knees, gasping for air, then dropped across from Sazuka.

-----

The captain of the *Ace Jammer* breathed heavily as he pressed his back against yet another wall in this twisted-@\$\$ game of cat-and-mouse. Gene was throwing everything he had at Damon, and Damon was doing likewise; and neither man had landed a hit YET! With a grunt, Damon threw himself to his feet around the corner and came face to face with Gene Starwind. He heard Gene's gun click three times as the outlaw tried to shoot him and found out, too late, that his gun was empty.

Damon knew he had more bullets left...

Damon stared into Gene's eyes as the two gunmen faced off; he heard both of their crews fighting and shooting and blasting away at each other. The two captains stared... and stared... and stared..... Finally, Gene laughed.

"Damn it! What's your problem?" he asked with a charismatic smile. Damon smiled back at him.

"I'm thinking about it too much, if you must know."

"That's been many an outlaw's downfall, too much thinking. It's much better for your health if you follow your instincts and act fast." The bounty hunter nodded, his smile broadening.

"True. But is it also not true that acting too quickly without thinking can lead many outlaws to a messy and rather abrupt end?" Gene threw back his head and laughed.

"Yeah, but those guys are rookies and deserve it." He tossed his gun to the ground.

"Now you've had enough time to think it over, plan out any eventualities. So.." he held his arms out to from his sides. "Shoot me all ready!" Damon dropped the empty Uzis and pulled one silenced 9mm pistol from its holster. He aimed the gun at Gene's heart.. twirled it, and tossed the gun to the dirt at Gene's feet. The outlaw looked at the gun, at Damon, and back at the gun. "What is this?" he asked quietly.

"I reach for the gun, and you shoot me before I get a chance to shoot you, just so you can keep living with a clean conscience?" Damon shook his head.

"No. Pick up the gun, Gene Starwind. We finish this like men." Gene looked at him, his eyes holding some strange emotion; it looked like a cross between respect and amusement. The red-haired outlaw stooped and picked up the weapon. "Holster it, Starwind." Gene did so; Damon switched his left-hand pistol to his right holster. He adopted the stance of old gunfighters, arms slightly out from his sides, hand poised above the pistol. "THIS is how we finish this," he murmured.

Gene stood, motionless and still as stone.

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Damon stood with the unmovingness of a mountain.

Something snapped over to their left, and both men took that as the signal. Both drew and fired, the silenced pistols making barely a sound in the chaos that surrounded them.

As the bullets crossed paths, a rock darted in, ricocheting off both projectiles and causing them to lodge themselves into the ground a few feet in front of the duelists. Both men gave the other a stunned look, and then found their gazes pulled to the direction of the sound.

There, looking a bit wrinkled and worn out, stood Vash the Stampede. "yawn\*... Donut?" he asked, rubbing his eyes.

Damon stared in disbelief. *Oh dear God... this is NOT good!*

Gene looked askance at the man in the red coat. "Who... who the hell are YOU, mister fashion victim?" Vash blinked at him.

"Well, I am a warrior of peace, pursuing the elusive mayfly known as love..."

Gene cut him off. "Hey, I didn't ask for a life story, your name will do."

"Well, I'm... Valentinez Alkaline-"

Gene cut him off again. "Whatever, you're interrupting a duel, here, mister blondie, and you'd better just get moving along if you know what's good for you!"

"Hey now, you two shouldn't be fighting! Why not sit down and have a donut, on me?"

Gene answered him by shooting at him.

Vash moved in a blur of motion that didn't seem possible. Damon blinked in surprise at the outlaw. *How the hell...?* Vash frowned at Gene.

"Now THAT wasn't very nice..."

Gene shot at him AGAIN! Vash dodged; Gene shot; Vash dodged!

Damon, of course, took this opportunity to make a hasty exit of the premises. He scurried across the street and into an alley, covering as much ground as he could.

Gene was angering the most feared outlaw on this planet, one who had destroyed entire cities, left no building standing...!

But, of course, Gene didn't know that. Damon's eyes widened as he realized that fact. *OH dear GOD..... We are SOOOO screwed...!* He quickened his pace, hearing the gunfire behind him intensifying at an alarming rate; the low *thump thump!* of his own silenced pistol intermixed with the *THUD THUD!* of Vash's revolver. And he ran.

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He skidded around a corner and into a wider street, where he saw Twilight Suzuka and Jayce laying next to each other. Not breaking his stride, Damon snatched up Jayce, slung her under his arm, and kept on truckin'. *Must go faster, must go faster, gogogogogogogo!!*

Suddenly, there was a horrendous explosion; first it was just a flash of light... then the shockwave hit him, knocking him flat on his face and skidding he and Jayce down the street. All Damon could do was hold onto Jayce and protect his head as they hurled down the street, all manner of debris flying around them; wood, stone, houses, pets, people, everything conceivable flew past them. Damon felt himself struck in the head and the world went black.

-----

He awoke to bright sunlight. His head ached something horrid; his hand tactlessly searched his head and found a great lump on the crown of it. "Oh, just bloody great." His sensitive eyes searched the surrounding area... and found destruction.

Many of the buildings around were flattened; everything but the city outside where his ship lay, in fact. Everything else simply lacked windows, and, of course, everything that had not been bolted down. To his great relief, he still held Jayce in one arm. Of the others, there was no sign. He intended to find them.

-----

In the midst of the wreckage, Damon found Vash and, after a few words exchanged, Vash ran back to the *Jammer* to wait for Damon to find his friends.

-----

"Grrr." Kidd crawled out from underneath some rubble, "What, or who, the hell was THAT?" She growled to herself. She picked up the rocket launcher that she had dropped when the blast had hit.

She HAD been minding her own business, trying to kill that stupid blonde kid when, out of nowhere, someone had decided to blow up a few buildings, stealing her thunder. They would pay...

But first, she had to make Jim piss his pants some more. She stood up and scanned the area; dust was still settling all around her from the blasts. People had started coming out from their hiding places and crawling out of rubble, when a few people saw her holding the big gun, they scurried back into the sanction of a house still standing or at the very least, a pile of bricks.

She had apparently twisted her ankle because when she tried to walk, it hurt like hell. She ignored it though; she had her mind set on one thing only...

-----

When she found Jim he was cowering behind a solitary wall, from a house, that had been spared. He was messing with a miniature lap top looking thing and didn't even notice her at first.

"Boo..." She said quietly, aiming the launcher at him.

He fell backwards in surprise, "Aaack!" and threw his hands in the air, "Oh God! I give up! I surrender! Please! Just stop the madness!"

"Hmm...I don't believe you, what are you doing?" She asked suspiciously.

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"I was uh, just sending a message to our ship to come and get us! That's all!" He cried.

Kidd's jaw fell to the ground, "But your ship was just as messed up as ours!" She argued.

"Oh," Jim snorted, "Surely Mel and Gilliam have fixed it by now." He lowered his hands, no longer threatened.

"Really? That fast?" Kidd asked impressed, lowering the gun.

"Well sure! That ship's a one-of-a-kind!" He answered cheerily.

"What do you do for parts?" Kidd asked.

"We improvise." Jim answered showing a bit of self-satisfaction and crossing his arms.

"Improvise? Parts? That's impossible!" Kidd yelled, "Now, I know you're full of sh!t!" She aimed the launcher at him once again.

"Wait!" He cried, raising his hands again, "If you shoot that, it'll kill you too! You're way too close!"

"Well, DUH, what do you take me for? An idiot?" Kidd asked. Then, shrugging she said, "It's for a just cause."

-----

"Hold it!" A scratchy voice screeched.

Kidd's eye twitched, she knew that voice..! She slowly turned around and groaned, hating that she was right, "Great, didn't Solace take care of you yet?"

"Hmm," Aisha motioned to Jim, understanding, he took off running. "More like, I finished her." She raised her blood stained claws up to where Kidd could see them.

Kidd snorted and then grinned, "Yeah right! Like I believe that! You probably sliced yourself open and that's your blood, just to make yourself feel better for running with your tail between your legs," She laughed, "You're a trip, Aisha."

"Yeaah!" Aisha ran at her and punched the rocket launcher from her hands; it slid across the dirt floor, stopping about one hundred feet from them. Aisha grabbed Kidd by the collar, "Do you honestly think that I would sink that low?" She asked in a menacing whisper.

"Yeah, what of it?" Kidd asked, still grinning at her.

"Look at me! I'm not bleeding anywhere," she reached into her shirt and pulled out a piece of cloth, "And doesn't this look familiar?"

Kidd's eyes widened, it was a piece of Solace's shirt and it was stained with blood. Solace's blood?

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"You bi\*ch!" Kidd cried. She punched her right in the jaw.

"Yeouch... that's the second time today!" Aisha whined, "Well, say goodbye kid!" She raised her left clawed hand to strike Kidd but she stopped short and screamed in pain, dropping Kidd to the ground. Aisha's left claw fell limp and her right hand moved to her back, pulling out a knife that someone had thrown and hit her left shoulder blade perfectly. Aisha spun around, "You! I thought you were dead for sure!"

Kidd peeked around Aisha, her eyes lit up, "Solace!" She cried, "It's great to see you! This dummy said you were dead but I knew better. It'll take a lot more than a kitty cat to take you down...Solace?"

"I-I'm glad you're ok, Kidd." Solace whispered before collapsing to her knees and then hitting the ground.

"Solace! Solace!?" Kidd screamed.

"Hmm, guess I did after all." Aisha grinned.

Kidd, fuming with anger, flew at Aisha. She punched her madly. She punched and kicked and she was actually hitting her, which made Aisha mad. She punched and kicked her back. They went back and forth like this for a while and finally, after about fifteen minutes and after Kidd had kicked Aisha one more time, hard across the face, Aisha grinned at her and wiped blood from the corner of her mouth.

"Well, it's been real fun, but you guys are getting boring. I'm outta here." She took off, half running, half jumping in the direction that Jim had gone. If it had been an ordinary fight and if it were under normal circumstances, Kidd would have gone after her but right now, she was glad to see her leave. She ran over to Solace's side.

"Solace! Solace! Wake up!" She yelled, tears pouring down her cheeks, "Come on! We have to go find Damon! And Jayce! Remember? Jayce had been hurt, we have to make sure she's ok." She wrapped Solace's arm around her shoulder and stood her up as best she could. Then, she proceeded to half drag, half walk her in the direction of Damon's ship, *The Jammer*.

-----  
When she got to the poor and broken ship, she was exhausted. She was tired, bruised, hungry and thirsty. Solace was still unconscious on her shoulder when she walked inside, and she wasn't very far behind from losing consciousness herself, and she found a very awake Vash the Stampede roaming around inside.

"Oh, so that's what happened," she mumbled to herself, and then, grinning as best she could, she asked him, "Hey there dude, can you give me a hand?" and then fell to her knees.

-----  
"Solace!!! Kidd?! You out here!?" Damon sifted through the rubble of a nearby building, calling for his missing comrades. "SOOOLAAAACE!!!!" He heaved at a particularly heavy piece of stone and winced as a broken window bit deeply into his left hand. "KIIIIIIIIIIIDD!!!" Any other time he would have sworn and kicked the offending wall, but right now he was too tired and worried to take that much time out of his search. He'd found Jayce, at least; THAT much was a blessing in and of

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itself. His striking a deal with Vash was just that much MORE of a good thing; at least he wouldn't shoot them all on sight!

Damon finished shifting the chunk of wall and cursed under his breath as the gash on his hand gushed blood down his wrist and onto the ground. "God DAMN it... this is SO not going my way!" He ripped a piece from his ragged shirt and wrapped his hand with it, blood soaking the cloth in seconds. He'd have to treat it once he got back to the ship.

He turned a corner, or rather, he walked around what used to be a corner, and came upon what remained of a tree in the city square... and found an old nemesis hanging around. LITERALLY hanging around; Gene Starwind was strung up from a low tree branch by his belt. The outlaw was struggling against the branch that held him immobilized to no avail; Damon's eye twitched. Twitch...!! The bounty hunter burst out laughing; he doubled over with mirth, temporarily forgetting his wounded hand. Gene stopped his struggling to glare at his foe.

"What the hell are YOU laughing at, Morlan?!" Damon wiped a tear from his eye and straightened.

"OH dear GOD... What did Vash DO to you?!"

Gene groaned. "Oh god, don't remind me. The guy just kept dodging my shots and dodging my shots until his...his right ARM like morphed and changed into this... this CANNON thingy and he shot this beam into the ground and I flew into the air and..." he gestured to the tree. "Well, here I am."

Damon sighed. "Well, be thankful you're not dead, Gene." He pulled the *Masamune* from its sheath and cut Gene down. "Go on, get back to the *Star*. I hope your crew is all OK." Gene locked eyes with the bounty hunter, and a slow smile crept onto his face.

"Thanks, Damon... I hope your crew is all right, too." The red-haired outlaw held out his hand. "Until next time?"

Damon grinned and gripped the outlaw's hand firmly. "Until next time, Gene." The red-haired man nodded, turned on his heel, and ran in the direction of his ship. Damon turned away to head back to his own ship.

"Oh, Damon!" The bounty hunter turned and caught a tossed object from Gene. The outlaw tossed him a wave as he kept running. "Thanks for letting me use it!" Damon glanced down and smiled. It was his 9mm silenced pistol, still intact.

-----  
The bounty hunter stumbled back to his ship, utterly beat. His search had turned up exactly NOTHING, and the sun was setting so he'd have to continue in the morning. He clomped up the ramp and closed the hatch, tossing his guns onto the nearest table. He was BEAT... He entered the living area and stopped in shock. "WHAT THE-?!" Vash straightened and gave him a friendly smile.

"Hey! I took care of that one girl like you told me to, and then THESE two showed

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up, so I took care of them, too!" Damon's eyes swept over the bruised and bandaged forms of Jayce, Solace, and Kidd, all propped up on his super-large couch.

Damon looked back to Vash and gave the blond man a huge HUG. Vash blinked and tried to get away, but Damon held him for a moment then released. "WHAT is going on?!" the man in the red coat asked.

"Nothing, I... I'm just glad you did that. I was looking for these two all day!" Vash nodded.

"No problem, Damon! Well, what do we do now?" Damon shrugged.

"Just wait for them to wake up, I guess..." Damon settled down in a chair and motioned Vash to one next to him. "So... do you play chess?" the bounty hunter asked with a grin.

-----

"Ugh, what happened?" Kidd's eyes slowly opened as she came back to life. She had been dreaming peacefully but then for some reason was woken up. She found she was lying in Damon's ship. Her body ached, she was sore, she wondered why...at first she couldn't remember anything but then it all came flooding back to her. She had fought; she had chased that dork, Jim all around the dusty town and she *still* had gotten the little sh\*t-head. She then remembered Solace and Aisha. Solace! Solace had been hurt. Where was she? Was she ok? She looked to her left; there was Solace, in the cot across from her, still unconscious. Kidd threw back the sheet that had covered her. She still had her boots on and her clothes were dirty. Solace's blood stained her shirt from where she had helped her walk. She had bandages on her body, wrapped around her right arm and her forehead, but she didn't know why. She didn't feel any pain so she obviously wasn't hurt, or so she thought... She sat up too fast and the world went black for thirty seconds. She waved her arms in front of her face, "Dammit!" She cried, as she fell back on the bed, "I hate it when this happens." After the room became bright again, she stood up once more, this time slower, and walked to Solace's side. She looked deathly pale, she was wrapped in several bandages, the most noticeable being the one on her left side, and her right cheek was bruised. She looked bad but when Kidd placed her hand on her forehead, her temperature was fine as far as Kidd could tell. She grasped Solace's left hand, "You'll be ok." She whispered. She laid her hand back down on the bed and went out of the room to find Damon.

-----

When she found him, he was sitting at a table playing some weird board game, with stick people, with...Vash the Stampede? What was he doing? She remembered it was Vash who had helped her when she brought Solace in but it still didn't make sense. Wasn't Damon going to turn him in? And what was stopping the police from breaking into the ship? It wasn't in any condition to fly, that was for sure. Oh well, she shrugged, she would find out the answers soon enough.

"Uh hey guys! What's up?" She asked, taking a seat beside Damon, "When do you want to start the repairs so we can get the hell outta here?"

-----

Damon was silent for a long moment, then made his chess move. "Well... I suppose we *should* start as soon as possible... but I know what the problem is all ready."

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Kidd gave him a look that said 'Well, why didn't you FIX it yet?!' and the bounty hunter smiled. "We've got a big freakin' hole in our engine, THAT'S what the problem is." Kidd's eye twitched and Damon laughed. "Wait, wait, wait, just calm down here, Kidd. It's nothing that you, Jayce and I can't fix, but we'll need supplies. And, just out of curiosity, HOW do you propose that we get said supplies way out here in the middle of nowhere?" Damon flicked one of his defeated chess pieces from the board.

"I mean, here we are, stuck on a planet that has no advanced technology for us to buy, no space force to lend us a hand, no NOTHING!!" He stood and gave the wall a kick. "Jeez!! I mean, even if another ship showed up it could tow us up into space and we could operate on the one engine we have left to get to a spaceport like Blue Heaven and get some repairs done, but good GOD, there's no way we could get through the atmosphere with our ONE ENGINE!"

Damon dropped back into the seat and made a hasty move on the chess board that Vash quickly countered. "So, as you can see, everything is QUITE hopeless, unless you have some kind of surprise ship coming in to save us, Kidd." The black-clad bounty hunter looked at Vash and grinned. "You're getting WAY too good at this, Mister the Stampede." Damon laid his king down where Vash had checkmated him. "You're making me look bad."

Kidd smirked and then yawned as she folded her hands over the back of her head. She looked to the right at Damon and grinned again, "Well, actually, we *do* have another ship coming in.

Damon looked at her in disbelief and Vash looked up at her as if to say, "No way."

"Well, are you going to tell us what's going on and gives us the details?" Damon asked her.

"Details of what?" She asked him stupidly. He sighed and started to say something but she cut him off. "Relax, I'm only kidding." She slowly stood up and wandered over to the refrigerator, Vash and Damon looking at her questioningly, waiting for her response, the whole time. She reached in and grabbed a strawberry soda off the shelf, popped the top, and chugged half the can all at once, her eyes watered and her throat burned from drinking too fast but she shook the tears off and grinned, "Whoop!" She coughed and then continued.

"Anyway, Vahn, you know, the guy you threw out," She said looking at Damon, "Should be here in a couple of days if all went as planned. We kinda sent him off to Sentinel 3 to get *Battousai* back from our buddy, Fred Luo." She paused and then grinned at Damon, "Sorry, it was Solace's idea." She chugged the rest of her drink and crushed the tin can between her fingers, "But I guess it kinda worked out in the long run, huh?"

"Wow. How convenient is that?" Vash asked with a laugh.

Vahn Manning heaved a heavy sigh in the pilot seat of *Battousai*. He was flying through space, back to the Sandy Planet (They still didn't have a name for the

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isolated planet with two suns). He hit the auto pilot switch and kicked back in his chair, putting his feet up and closed his eyes. It had been a long day he recalled as he reminded himself of the afternoon, no the last couple of DAYS, he had had was more like it. After being thrown out of that Damon guy's ship he had managed to hitch a ride with a scary ass woman who was, conveniently for him, heading in the same direction he needed to go. She had been twice his age, and size, but had twice his energy. She flew like a maniac and cursed worse than a sailor. Her ship had been filthy; every time she had switched the faux gravity off, trash floated up from the floor and into their faces, practically smothering them. It was a wonder they had made it to Sentinel 3 alive with her piloting skills and her hospitality, which she didn't have any of. They made it though; she dropped him off without a word to him. It took him almost the rest of the day to find this "Fred" guy after his terrifying experience with the "woman from hell." Everybody seemed to know Fred but no one wanted to tell him where he was at, or who he really was. Vahn guessed it was his appearance that made them weary, not to mention rude. He didn't blame them, he didn't exactly look very nice; he hadn't been able to shower for a few days, his clothes were dirty and his neatly trimmed beard had turned scruffy and his hair was matted.

When he finally made it to Fred's, he was violated and searched thoroughly by the bodyguards outside his office and then he was led inside with one guard grasping his left arm and the other one had a gun held only a few inches from his face.

Once inside, Fred demanded to know who he was. Vahn told him his name and hoped that he or his guards wouldn't recognize him as Cyan Bloodbane. Must have been his beard and the sunglasses he was wearing because nobody confronted him as Bloodbane, nor did they question him.

After Fred realized that Vahn wasn't there to hurt him, or so he assumed, he became friendlier, a LOT friendlier, and called off his guards.

"So what can I do for you?" Asked the fruity voice that was Fred's. He kept touching Vahn's shoulder, which made him EXTREMELY uncomfortable, and he would let a giggle every now and then as Vahn explained that he was looking for a ship that he had been sent here to get by someone.

"Oh really? Who sent you?"

"Uh, this girl named Kidd sent me for--"

The smile slid off of Fred's face, "Guards!" He yelled, now realizing that maybe Vahn would try to hurt him after all. The guards sprung up their weapons again and Vahn knew he had to think fast or he would never get the ship, "Wait, wait, wait! I'm not here to fight! I understand that her name would strike fear into anyone's hearts, I'm not too fond of her myself but I need to get the ship that Damon Morlan is docking, it's--"

"Damon?" Fred interrupted him and then motioned for the guards to lower their weapons again, "Well, how's that big hunk of hotness doing?"

*Big hunk of-oh my...what IS this guy?* "He's...fine" Vahn said hesitantly and through gritted teeth. Great, just great. Fred LIKED Damon too...now he would have to pretend to be his friend...dam\* it.

After coming up with some bogus story, that Fred actually believed, about he and

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Damon being old buddies and that he was holding the ship FOR him and that it was important that he pick it up now and that he had Damon's permission, Fred told him where the ship was. It turned out that Damon had been wiring Fred money to keep the ship docked; Fred had no idea that the ship belonged to Solace.

Vahn thanked him and started off on his way again but as he was leaving, Fred stopped him.

-----  
How do you know Kidd Majere? He asked out of pure curiosity.

She's my girlfriend's sidekick, she's cute huh? He asked with a grin, he didn't have to hide the fact that he knew Solace anymore, not now that he knew where the ship was.

Girl- Solace Black?! Fred screeched, How is it that you're friends with Damon AND those she-devils?

He shrugged, Friend's is a strong word when you're talking about Damon and me, but Solace teamed up with him. He answered with bitter regret.

Fred almost fainted hearing these words; had Damon betrayed him? Damon was evil now, wasn't he? That witch had brainwashed and corrupted him! Then, THIS man must be evil too!

Fred motioned for his guards to stop him again, I don't think I should let you get away with that ship if it will be to help her!

Vahn turned around to him, ignoring the guns pointed, and c0cked, at his head, you may want to reconsider because if I don't show up with this ship in a few days, Solace will come here and pay you a visit herself.

Fred sighed and looked thoughtful for a minute, Oh I wish Gene were here! Let him go... He ordered his guards with regret.

Vahn grinned and then took off, running down the halls and out of the building in the direction that Battousai was supposed to be in.

After an hour of half running and half walking, he made it the docks just as the sun started to set. Once inside the ship, it took him another fifteen minutes to take off as he tried to figure out how to start the thing, he wasn't that great with this kind of thing and Solace's ship was complicated. After he had made it up into space, he had checked the messages on the computer to see Solace had left any messages. She hadn't but Kidd had. She explained that they needed him to hurry up with the ship since they had had some complications and were stuck on the Sandy Planet. She gave directions and then told him to hurry up before they starved.

He opened his eyes again, laughing to himself, Kidd was so weird, and then stood up. He kicked off and floated to the back of the ship and rummaged through the latched cupboards, searching for food. He then looked through the fridge and found some decent refreshments. He ate his food hungrily and hurriedly; it would be off to the shower next.

-----

Okay, done! Kidd said coming back into the room that Damon and Vash were still sitting in. I sent Vahn a message, telling him where we're at. Don't give him any

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trouble when he gets here, She scolded Damon and then added, Oh and I didn't tell him what happened to Solace, I figured we'd all be better off with him not knowing yet.

-----

Jayce slowly opened one eye, scanning the area. She was in Damons ship? But what about Gene and the others? She groaned and turned over, her body was aching all over. She heard voices echo and a loud kick, *what the...?* She looked toward the direction of the noise and heard yelling. She VERY slowly stood up, wobbled for a minute but caught her balance and walked toward the noise, passing Solace and an empty place she could only assume was Kidds place, *she doesn't look to good.* she thought to herself, stopping to examine Solace. There were plenty of bruises on her face and she saw, on her left side, a big bandage with blood stains seeping from the gash. Jayce frowned. But continued walking, now putting Solace on her " list of things to worry about." *I wonder,* she thought to herself, passing the halls, hunger overcoming her. *If that 'Vash the stampede' got away...* she heaved a heavy sigh, letting her feet go which ever way they'd like.

She heard voices coming from down the hall and went to inspect; there she found Vash, Damon, and Kidd. Vash and Damon were playing Chess while Kidd was observing, she gave them all a weak smile and went to sit by Kidd.

"So, who's winning?" Damon gave a small snort and nodded over in Vashes direction. She looked at Kidd and they both exchanged grins, Damon was so funny when he was angry, Kidd whispered to her "3rd time in a row he's lost." Jayce yawned and turned around, she saw the 'kitchen' and disappeared for a couple minutes, but then returned with a soda.

" So, what's next?" She asked after a couple minutes silence.

Kidd patted her on the shoulder, "we have a ship coming for us!" Jayce stared at her. "When did this happen?"

"Long time ago!" and Kidd explained about Vahn and the Battousai,

"In fact he should be arriving any time now!" She finished, *Okay, so now we have to wait on this accursed ball of sand for Solaces' would-be boyfriend? How exciting...*

-----

Solace Black had been in paradise, sipping one of those large drinks with the cute, little umbrella in it while sitting on the beach and catching some sun. She had had her hair pulled back and her feet up in a lounger, watching the clear blue wave's crash against the white sand through her dark sunglasses. She didn't have a care in the world, she was rich and tan.

But not anymore. Now she found herself on a cot in what looked to be a jail cell; the walls were grey and it reeked of hot metal. She tasted blood in her mouth and her whole body ached; it even hurt to breathe. She groaned and tried to sit up. Bad idea; a sharp pain shot through her side, causing her to gasp, which made the pain even worse.

She fell back on the mattress of the cot and retrieved the breath that had been sucked from her body. She looked down at her left side; a large bandage had been wrapped three or four times around her waist. The white cloth now had a large spot of crimson where her wound was at. She remembered her fight, she remembered being sliced by that cat-girl, but everything that happened after that was blank to

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her; apparently she had passed out right away?

She had no idea how she got back to the ship or who had treated her wounds but Kidd immediately came to mind.

She tried taking a deep breath again and clenched her teeth as the pain returned, she dealt with it and then started to slowly sit up again, now clenching the side of the cot with one hand and holding onto her side with the other. Her teeth grinded into each other as she forced herself to sit up and after a short struggle that seemed to last forever, she made it. She sat still for a few minutes, breathing heavily as her weak body tried to work with her, and then she attempted to stand up. She still had a hold of her side and used the cot to help her stay balanced. She walked a few feet and then leaned against the bars of the holding cell she was in for another few minutes and then slowly made her way around the ship to find her comrades; what may be left of them anyway.

She rounded the corner to the main area, after taking three times the amount of time it usually took her to walk through the WHOLE ship, and found Damon, Kidd, Jayce, and that Stampede guy sitting together and quietly talking amongst themselves. A chess game was out in front of Damon and Vash but she couldn't tell if they were still playing it; she didn't really care either.

Kidd spotted her before anyone else did and jumped out of her chair, alarmed, and ran to her side, "You shouldn't be up!" She scolded as she wrapped her arm around her to support her and then helped her walk to one of the chairs.

"I'm fine." Solace argued stubbornly as she sat down, grimacing as another wave of pain hit her. She smiled weakly at the rest of the 'crew' and asked, "So, what's going on?"

-----

Damon gave Solace a concerned glance, but when the outlaw-turned-bounty hunter waved off his concern, he knew that she wouldn't accept help with anything from sitting down to shooting up Gene Starwind's ship again, so he smiled to her. "Have a seat, Solace, and I'll fill you in on my master plan, as it were." She sat down tenderly, wincing as she slid carefully into the booth-style seat next to Kidd as Damon leaned forward and motioned for all the gathered persons to listen up.

"All right, here's my master plannin's, here..." the black clad bounty hunter said with a smile.

"Y'see, I have a plan that'll get us the cash AND ensure Mister the Stampede's freedom, since I really don't want to see him rotting in prison the rest of his life." He gave a nod to the red-coated man, who had become a fast friend of the group of misfit bounty hunters; Vash smiled broadly and nodded. "The money will be, of course, split amongst we five," he saw the three women's eyes flash at this and he hurried on, "since Vash will be risking an equal part the last bit of our plan and he deserves a little something for his personal risks." The girls calmed a bit, all except for Kidd, who still glared at him with laser-eyes. The bounty hunter shifted slightly and continued.

"Once the *Battousai* gets here, we'll tow the *Jammer* up into orbit; once up there, the hyperdrive engine and remaining standard engine will suffice to get us to Blue Heaven or some spaceport that's adequate to repair my poor, poor ship!" He wiped

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away a fake tear, smiled and continued. "While we do that, Vash'll wait here on the surface for me to come back. I'll fly down in the *Ace of Spades* and quote-unquote, "turn Vash in". Once he's in jail and I have the money, I stash the cash in my ship and make like I'm flying off... then I turn and, using my ship's grappling line, yank the back of the prison right off. That will allow Vash to escape and I'll be off into orbit to rendezvous with you guys!"

"After that, we make a dash to a money changers and whip our double dollars into oolongs and BAM, we're rich and a half!" Vash looked like he understood exactly what Damon was talking about, even though the black clad man didn't think there was ANY way the blonde fellow knew about oolongs or Blue Heaven or SPACE at all for that matter. But it didn't bother Damon at all; he was just glad Vash was agreeing.

"Well, girls? Whadaya think?" He leaned back. "All that we need now is for your *pal* Sir Dorks-ALot to show up soon and we'll get this show on the proverbial road, as it were."

Kidd stared at him for a long moment, and then spoke. "Hey, Damon... as far as I know, isn't there only ONE money changer that'll handle a sum this big from something this illegal?" Damon opened his mouth... and felt the color drain from his face.

"Oh *GOD*... not Fred Lowe..." Kidd nodded, everyone but Vash paled, and Damon swallowed. "Oh well... I'm sure he'll do me this... ONE last favor..." He locked eyes with Kidd, then Solace. "However, I think YOU two will have to wait in the ship... For some reason, he's jumpy around the two of you."

-----  
By the time Vahn Manning had made it back to the Sandy Planet almost a week had gone by since his rude meeting with Damon and departure. He had kept in touch with Kidd through the computer on Battousai. The latest message from the young blonde girl read;

Vahn,  
We re getting a little impatient! Where the heck are you? Damon s getting irritated! The cops have tried several times to invade our Happy Little Home. Damon and I have held them back so far with the help of Vash but we're running out of ammo! Get your butt back here!

Vahn sighed to himself; she was so impatient. He clicked the Reply button and then cracked his knuckles before responding.

Calm down Kidd. I'm back on the planet so don t worry. I'll be to the ship in an hour or so. Don't give yourself a heart attack.

That ought to do it. He hit the Send button and then turned off the monitor and stood up from the wooden chair to go back to the pilot controls. He took off the autopilot and then took the ship into his own hands to find his way around the planet.

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Great! Kidd yelled excitedly, clapping her hands together and startling the rest of the crew.

Solace's head snapped up in alarm as she sat on one of the old couches, Jayce jumped and nearly dropped the drink she held in her hand, Vash swung around to face her, also alarmed, as he had been standing beside Solace and talking to her, and Damon, who had been guarding the door, spun around, raising one of his guns in alarm.

Kidd's face turned beet red as she flushed with embarrassment, Uh, sorry.

What is it? Solace asked.

Well, Vahn's on his way now! He got the ship and he's on the planet! Kidd answered, barely able to contain her excitement.

Bout damn time, Solace said grumpily and fell back on the couch.

Kidd looked at Damon for his response. He opened his mouth to say something but the sound of a ship, a very loud ship, rumbled through the air, directly above them, interrupting whatever he was about to say.

Heh, that's probably him now, Kidd said grinning from ear to ear.

The four ran to meet Damon at the door, Vash helping Solace along since she was still slightly weak, and Damon opened the door.

-----  
Vahn not so gracefully landed Battousai beside the broken down ship that he had recognized as Damons. A small group of cops had been outside when he first landed but they scattered like roaches that had been drenched with bright lights when the ship touched the sand. They ran inside and yelled things like, Oh Sh!t! Not another one! We're gonna die!

Vahn laughed to himself and then ran to the door and went outside. The very first person he saw was Damon Morlan.

Vahn Manning locked eyes with the black clad bounty hunter and gave him a look that suggested harsh death would be too good for the man. He clenched his teeth and fists.

God, I hate him He mumbled to himself.

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