

Numb fingers fumbled with straps, but she did her best to keep moving. After what seemed like an hour, Crusier was on her side, pulling down her breastplate and locking it in. “You were a second class cadet, Helga. They prepared you for this,” he whispered. “Push that fear to the side and ready your *thyping* gear.”

She inhaled deeply to calm her nerves and then took command of her body. It didn’t take much; she was conditioned for this. She reached into the locker, grabbed her helmet, and then pulled it over her head.

Cruiser adjusted it from behind and it snapped into place, and the HUD suddenly appeared before her eyes. It showed her heart rate at 108 bpm, and a green paper doll with the condition of her armor. An empty gauge floated at the bottom of her vision, and another gauge wrapped around it all, showing how much fuel was left in her booster.

This was the first time she’d seen the inside of a PAS, though she’d simulated wearing one no less than a hundred times. All the ESOs were in their armor as well, including Lamia Brafa, who wore something sleeker with red highlights.

“Strap yourselves in, this moon is not playing,” Crusier shouted, and Cage picked up his command and screamed at them to get strapped in.

Helga jumped into her seat and pulled her straps tight, then looked over at Crusier who was working the controls.

They began to shake, as if a giant had grabbed the dropship and was attempting to shake them out. Helga felt as if her guts were being pushed up into her throat and then they were past it and she could see the surface of the moon.

Suddenly her HUD began to scream in red text. She could make out “breach,” and atmosphere warnings, so she looked to Crusier for help. The chief was slumped over in his seat, with a hole in the place where his heart used to be. Now she heard shouting from the men behind her.

“*Thype* me,” she whispered. “Adan, please don’t be dead.” She made to scream but caught herself. He would want her to be strong. Fumbling for the release on her arm restraints, she leaned forward to take over the controls. Two blast doors slammed down in front of Crusier, protecting the ship from the breach. Helga heard more shots against the hull, then cannons exploding everywhere.