

Standard Gravity

by Michael P Calligaro

Skarab impatiently tapped the fingers of her 47th and 48th legs together. It was only her third day on the job, and marketing was already dragging her around like she was some sort of exhibit. Two of her rear eyes noticed the talog secretary sneaking covert glances at her again. In Talog but with an extreme kiree accent, Skarab said, "You weigh thousand kilos. You move slow motion. Grinding noises when turn head. Why bother trying hide interest?"

The talog "quickly" closed its eyes and turned its head away. The whole endeavor took ten seconds, but that was frantic for a talog. Skarab sighed. What was the point of knowing eight racial languages if they all came out in high-pitched staccato and with dropped words? Her instructor had been able to learn accents. Why couldn't she? Of course, there weren't many kiree like her instructor.

The door in front of her opened, revealing Rrom, the manta salesman, standing next to a projection. He nodded to her. Why couldn't they leave her in engineering, where she belonged? She paused just long enough to make him nervous, then commanded her lower seventy-two legs to propel her forward into the room.

It was a small meeting room divided in half by a long table. A projector sat on the table and beamed company statistics onto a screen next to Rrom. On the other side of the table sat two bored-looking talogs.

In his greasy, salesman's voice, Rrom said, "Gentlemen, please let me intrroduce a memberr of ourr engineerring staff. This is Skarrab."

The talogs turned their heads to see Skarab and, seconds later, they ground their teeth together--a sign of pleasant surprise. Speaking at typical glacial speed, the one on the left said, "Rrom, you never told us you had kiree working for you."

Rrom grinned broadly and preened at his whiskers. "You rread ourr brrochurres, didn't you?" He used a laser pointer to circle a sales figure on the screen. "We got herre in one way, and one way only. We're the best therre is at what we do." He waved one of his two hands at Skarab, "Ourr engineerr therre has a brrain so powerrful that she can simultaneously prrocess input frrom all ten of herr eyes. And she can control each of herr hundred and fifty legs independently. Now*that* is the kind of perrson you want running the calculations forr this extremely imporrtant endeavorr."

"Hundred forty-eight," Skarab said.

Rrom, who'd been making eye contact with the talogs throughout his speech, looked to her with raised eyebrows. "What's that?"

Skarab sent a ripple down her legs and said, "Hundred forty-eight legs."

Rrom gave her a quick glare, then turned a smiling face back to the talogs. "And she's modest too."

Keeping her forward half vertical, Skarab rolled forward to take up a position at the edge of the table. Three of her eyes focused on the talogs, two on the manta, and three more on the exit. She should have listened to her instructor. He'd told her going to work for Gravimetrics was a mistake.

Rrom continued. "So, now that you've seen what we have to offerr, what will it take forr you to walk out

of herre today with a contract?"

The two talogs turned their heads toward each other. Strange. Members of their race generally didn't do that. Moving took so much time that talogs tended to talk without bothering to face one another. They whispered something and then turned back to Rrom. "We will have to discuss this with the council."

Rrom didn't even flinch. Instead he smiled again. "Please. We know that the council has entrusted the two of you with this extremely important of decisions. And you can't go wrong with Grravimetrics. I guarrantee that we'll get the job done forr you. I'll clearr Skarrab's schedule and have herr work full time on yourr account."

Skarab suppressed a chuckle. There wasn't anything else on her schedule.

Rrom gave the talogs a few seconds to think before continuing in a somber tone. "Look, yourr warr with the sliss has stretched into a thirrd decade. And, no offense to yourr military capacity, all indications arre that it'll go forr another century. What if the worst happens? What if they manage to destroy yourr home worrld? You need to be prrpared. You need to have terraformed a new home worrld by then. And surre, you can go to this planet you're thinking about, with its zerro point nine perccent of talog standarrd grravity. But you know you'll neverr really be comfrrtable therre. Low grravity makes yourr heads hurrt." He quickened his voice, "Hey, that's nothing to be ashamed of. We manta have a similarr prrblem with waterr. But Grravimetrics can do away with that prrblem. We can brring talog standarrd grravity to any planet you'd like--including the one you've chosen."

The talogs conversed again, once again taking the time to turn their heads. Skarab focused more of her attention on them, taking in every detail. Like all other talogs she knew, these were large creatures with only a few short appendages. They looked like normal talogs. It was just their mannerisms that seemed wrong.

Eventually the one on the left said, "But your price," he paused before continuing in a pained tone. "Paying it might hurt the war effort."

Rrom didn't miss a heartbeat. "What's the prrice compared to the survival of yourr children? You're at warr with a brrutal enemy--one that will stop at nothing to see you annihilated." They flinched, but that didn't make much sense either. The normal reaction time of a talog would have put the cause of the flinch to be at Rrom's mention of price. But that was no cause for flinching. On the other hand, him saying "annihilated" is what should have caused a reaction. But their bodies couldn't move that fast. So what was it? His calling the sliss "brutal?" This grew stranger by the moment.

Rrom proceeded as though he hadn't noticed anything. "You need a backup plan to ensurre yourr rrace's continued existence. We feel forr you. We really do. That's why I've discounted the prrice so much from ourr standarrd amount. We're barrely going to brreak even herre. Do you know what it takes to send a shockwave back in time? And we need to send one larrge enough to explode a starr." He stopped and made a show of looking back and forth. Then he continued in a low voice. "To be honest with you, we're going to lose money on this. We're hoping you'll be so impressed with us that you'll use ourr serrvices again forr yourr futurre expansions. So we'll be working overtime to win yourr business herre. And all you have to do is sign on the dotted line."

The talogs thought about it for a minute. Then the one on the left bobbed its upper body up and down. Skarab worked to keep her legs steady. The bob was even stranger than the turning of their heads. They would normally just speak, rather than go through the lengthy process of moving body parts.

Rrom didn't seem to notice. He beamed, "Wonderrful!"

* * *

Back in engineering, Skarab went straight to her terminal and checked the manifest. The assignment, including coordinates for the target planet and the size and density of the seed they'd need, blinked at her. Skarab set right to work searching for a suitable star. Of course, Gravimetrics had not designed this station for a kiree, so she couldn't work any faster than a normal employee.

Belan, one of the company's many velerics and the head of engineering, walked up behind her. Like all velerics, he had only two legs, two arms, and two large eyes. But his head was enormous. It housed a larger brain than the one Skarab held in her midsection. And, since he had so few appendages to control, he could work while walking. Skarab both envied and respected him for this.

In his quiet, melodious voice, he asked, "How did it go?"

Skarab kept working. Belan understood that she could easily work and communicate with him without adversely affecting either action. He even encouraged her to do so. It was so nice to be working with smart people. The manta always wanted her to devote her "full attention" to them. She sighed and pulled twenty of her feet in to her chest, linking her fingers. "We got contract."

"But?"

The velerics were one of the few non-kiree races that could hear kiree voice inflections--another reason she liked working with them. After scanning in all directions for furry bipeds, she said quietly, "I not like Rrom."

Belan smiled. "Nobody does. Marketing is hard to take on an empty stomach, but they make it harder still to keep your lunch down if you've eaten."

Skarab laughed.

Belan continued. "However, they are also very important. Without them, we in engineering would have nothing to do."

Skarab flailed her top twenty-six legs in a wave running up to her head--the kiree equivalent of a curt nod.

Belan said, "So, are you getting the hang of that system?"

Skarab "nodded" again, this time using more legs. Being the first non-veleric to use the system made for a lot of learning on her part. But Belan had been very patient in explaining the interface to her. And, though complex, it was manageable. "Understand commands. Need more screens."

"Yes, we should parallelize it for you. We never expected to have a kiree come work for us. I will put Trassia on it right away."

Trassia. Even though their clients were talogs, she was working with a sliss. Belan had assured her that Trassia wasn't political, but the situation still felt inappropriate. Still, she didn't dwell on this. She wouldn't judge Trassia solely on his race.

Still, she hesitated for a moment. Belan asked, "Is there something else?"

She pulled many of her legs in to her chest. "Not understand technology."

"Of course not. We velerics are too possessive of our technology. Though I suspect you could reverse

engineer it."

Skarab flailed all of her legs that weren't touching the ground. She sent the wave up to her head and back down--an expression of joy. He had honored her considerably with his statement. Then she realized a hidden undertone in what he'd said. Guardedly, she replied, "Velerics not like that."

He closed his big eyes half way, a sign of sadness. "No, they certainly would not." Skarab decided to drop the subject.

* * *

Skarab finished the last of her calculations as Belan approached. She now had five screens arranged in a semicircle in front of her, with five entry pads stacked vertically below them.

"How are you doing?" he asked.

"Finished."

He blinked. "So quickly? Fantastic. Can you show me your findings?"

She tapped on all five pads. Three of the screens went dark and the two in the center each showed a star. "Best choices."

"Which is better?"

Skarab pointed to the one on the right.

"Why?"

She pointed to the one on the left. "Fragments might intersect inhabited planet."

"When?"

"Two hundred thousand years ago."

"Probability?"

"Ten percent."

He nodded and thought for a moment. "Which star would require that we go back farther?"

Skarab paused a second. She pointed to the one she was recommending.

"How much earlier?"

Skarab's hearts began to beat wildly. He wasn't going to suggest risking a civilization just to cut expenses, was he? A few of her feet began to shake. "Million years."

Belan exhaled. "That is quite a difference. Which civilization is in jeopardy?"

He was considering it! "Sliss world."

Belan paused for a second and then smiled. "Well, that would be unacceptable. If the sliss's world were destroyed prematurely, our clients would not need to pay us to seed the gravity of their new planet. Go with your first choice."

Skarab relaxed considerably. She wasn't particularly pleased with the reason, but the choice was the right one.

He looked at her carefully. "Are you feeling ill?"

She flailed her legs down to the 35th and 36th--a kiree shake of the head.

"Good." He started to walk away, then paused and turned back around. "I almost forgot. You know that the original pulse is the most expensive part of the operation?"

She gave a curt nod, only twenty legs.

"Well, there is a possibility of us getting another bit of business from it." He drew a small tablet out of a pocket and handed it to her. It only contained a set of coordinates. "See if you can get a second rock to there."

"How big?"

"Well, we need to do a pretty extreme change. Probably a hundred times the size of the one you're currently calculating."

Skarab let many of her feet droop. What could they need that for? A reasonably sized planet would end up with gravity too intense for any of the races. And such a massive seed would destroy a moon or small planet. Unfortunately, since he hadn't offered this information, she needed to ask a different question. Almost instantly, she realized the tact to take. "Usually more exact."

"Well, this is a rough change. It is for high gravity research, and the researchers are not going to pay us much. For low rates we do not worry too much about the accuracy." He looked at her for a second before adding, "They are not even sure if they have funding yet, so make this a background task."

Well, that made sense. She nodded with more legs and said, "Will do it."

"Great. Let me know if you find anything." He started to turn away, but Skarab stopped him.

"Belan?"

"Yes?"

She paused again and let more of her feet droop.

"What's wrong?"

"Talog chosen planet."

He nodded. "The main job? What about it?"

"Sentient race lives there."

Belan half closed his eyes. "Well, 'sentient' overstates the fact somewhat."

"You knew?"

"Surveying the target site is my job. It is unnecessary for you to do it."

There was a trace of disapproval there. She'd stepped on his toes and would have to watch what she said. Still, this was too important to ignore. "What about race?"

"They are little furry creatures. They almost look like manta, but are much shorter and far less graceful. Though they look moderately cute, they spend all their time running around killing each other."

"All will die?"

"Probably not. We're not hitting the planet with *too* heavy a rock. The ones on the far side will probably survive."

Skarab didn't respond.

"Skarab, our clients chose this planet. They would go there regardless of our actions. And with them there, the existing races will be pushed aside by their talogforming. There is no point in worrying about it, because there is nothing we can do."

* * *

The engineering department buzzed in anticipation. While one of the velerics made a last cataloging scan for comets in the general vicinity of the two target planets, Skarab rechecked her calculations for the tenth time. Belan had been nothing but supportive, but she sensed an anxiety about him. She suspected that he had checked her calculations, but that was hardly a guarantee. They were about to send a shock wave capable of destroying a star millions of years back in time to where they thought the star would be. Even with the most careful calculations, the risk of failure was high.

The veleric at the comet-scanning station announced that he was done. Belan looked to Skarab, who was still doing calculations on four of her screens. "Ready," she declared.

"Temporal shields up," Belan ordered.

Skarab focused two of her eyes on the screen showing a live feed of the star in question. In some of her other eyes she saw everyone else in the room turn to the screen. She continued her calculations.

Belan smiled, "Skarab, these are your calculations. As the only non-veleric to ever work those controls, you are about to either insure a long career, or cut one very short. Would you do the honors?"

"Yes, sir."

Continuing to run calculations on four of the data pads, she entered a command on the fifth. The energy stored in the pulse cannons was far greater than the yearly output of most stars. They instantly discharged, sending a single pulse back in time.

Their ship was close to the present location of the star in question, so they would only have to wait five and a half minutes to find out if they'd been successful. The time, though, dragged. As the five minute mark approached, Skarab realized that she'd stopped running all five sets of calculations and was ignoring input from the seven eyes that couldn't see the star on the screen. She blinked and tried to go back to her calculations. But she found that she couldn't concentrate on the task. So she tapped a few keys and all five of her screens switched to showing the star.

One of the velerics said, "We should have visual confirmation in fifteen seconds." No one in the room made a sound. The tension was so high it felt as though Skarab's legs were going to fall off.

"Five seconds. Four, three, two--"

The star disappeared. A cheer erupted from the engineers. Most of Skarab's feet flailed about wildly for a second. She then pulled them under control and looked to Belan. He gave her a proud smile.

After letting everyone rejoice for a minute or two, Belan said, "Good job everyone. But our work has just started. Start scanning for new, extremely dense comets."

* * *

One of the velerics let out a whoop. "I am showing a previously unrecorded comet with a density similar to the star we destroyed. Its mass is close to what we need and it is now just beyond the target site. Skarab, the data should be available on your screens now."

A murmur went through the group while Skarab checked the data. She heard one of her coworkers quietly say, "Why didn't we hire a kiree long ago?"

Belan walked over to her. "That's the best first blast we've ever made. Good job."

She flailed her top twenty arms, starting at her neck and going down. "I hit star. Fragment chose right direction. Just luck."

He smiled, "Do not sell yourself short. The velerics believe that we make our own luck through hard work. I have never seen anyone work and rework her calculations as carefully as you did."

His praise made Skarab feel wonderful, even if she felt it was misplaced. "Thank you." She dove right into running calculations for the fine-adjustment pulses.

* * *

It had only taken one small pulse sent back a scant thousand years to redirect and slightly slow down the star fragment. Now, in the present, it was on a direct collision course with the target planet. And it was now out of Skarab's control. A different station was responsible for shaving off the excess mass and another was responsible for slowing it down enough to go to the center of the planet without punching a hole all the way through. However, she was still busy. They had found a suitable fragment for the second target, and she had turned her attention to it. This fragment was enormous. It seemed to be too big for their plans. But Belan disagreed.

Skarab started working the calculations for redirecting it. Because it was so big, they were going to have to go farther back in time, where the course change wouldn't need to be as great. Even so, her job was considerably easier than for the first blast. She knew precisely where this fragment had started, she knew precisely where it had ended up, and she knew exactly how long it had taken to get there. Tracing its path back was simple. So she made her calculations, checked them over a number of times, and left her station. They wouldn't be able to move to her calculated firing site until they'd finished the first job.

She went to her quarters and straightened out her back, resting all of her feet on the ground. But she couldn't sleep. She kept seeing little furry creatures running about, totally unaware that the small comet approaching had the density of a star core and that, when it hit, most of them would die from the energy released. She told herself that it wasn't her fault. The talogs would do this to the furry creatures whether she helped them or not. Her mind then jumped to her brief meeting with the talogs and their strange behavior. She moved over to a console and reread some of the culture guides.

When these didn't turn up anything new, she decided to call her old instructor. He answered the subspace call immediately and spoke in kiree, a language that sounded to all non-kiree like an enormously fast series of clicks and scratches. "Favorite student Skarab! How are you?"

Though she still had all but her forward four feet on the ground, she sent two waves running up and down the length of her body. "Well, thank you. How training?"

He sent two waves going in opposite directions along his legs. "New students okay. Miss you."

"Miss you too."

"Work interesting?"

She mimicked his leg expression. "Good and bad. Have question."

"Maybe have answer."

"Met two talogs. Acted weird."

Her instructor clasped the top two of his legs together. "How weird?"

"Look each other to talk. Bob heads. Maybe react too fast."

The kiree sent two waves on each side from his neck all the way to his tail. "Not right. Maybe not talogs. Give names."

* * *

The star fragment approached the planet on an unstoppable collision course. "Now!" cried a veleric. They hit it with a pulse, causing it to slow slightly. Skarab, with nothing else to do, ran some calculations for its approach. One more blast just before it hit should slow it down enough. Of course, now that it was getting close enough to perturb the planet's orbit, they couldn't waste any time. She ran some more calculations and found that if they timed the last pulse correctly, it would hit in the middle of an enormous ocean. That would lessen the explosive effect of the impact considerably. She sent her calculation to the veleric in charge of the last pulse. After looked at it, he turned to her and nodded.

The last pulse went off without a hitch, and the fragment smashed into the planet in the center of the ocean. Its impact with the ocean floor caused waves that would be gigantic when they reached land. Their scans showed that the fragment came to a rest in the center of the planet, just as they'd hoped. The planet was now in for an extremely difficult transition period full of massive quakes. But maybe some of the furry creatures would survive. Skarab hoped the talogs wouldn't totally exterminate them when they moved in.

There was a celebration, but Skarab didn't enjoy it. She told herself this was just because the veleric celebration customs were too strange, but that was a lie. Still, she hunted out the only other non-veleric in the room, Trassia, and tried to make small talk with him. The sliss were a strange race. They were basically long tubes without arms or legs--just a small head and a long tail. But they had incredible control of the tips of their tails and decent minds. This made them good technicians. Unfortunately, they were *not* good conversationalists. Trassia basically just listened to what she said and bobbed his head in agreement.

After the celebration, they moved to the fire site for the first redirection blast at the second fragment. Skarab rechecked her calculations ten times and gave the go ahead. Belan came to see her afterward. "Extremely well done, Skarab. The second rock is on target now. In the past we have always had to do multiple refinements to line the rocks up. You are a natural at this."

She smiled, but didn't feel happy. Her instructor was right. She wasn't right for this kind of work. Being extremely good at it wasn't enough. "Thank you."

Belan nodded. "The researchers still haven't guaranteed funding, so we might have to knock this one off course at the last minute. Run a few calculations, for that?"

"Will do. What final fragment mass?"

With a quick shake of his head, Belan said, "We are not going to change the size. We just need to get the money situation cleared up, and then we are done."

Skarab became grateful that Belan was standing behind her. He couldn't see the shocked look on her face. How big was the planet they were going to hit? At its current speed and size, the fragment would split most planets in half. "I run calculations," she said guardedly.

"Great. I will check on you later." He'd noticed her apprehension and was leaving her time to herself. But did he know why she was apprehensive?

She started the calculations on four of her screens, but pulled up planetary information on the fifth. What she found so shocked and dismayed her that she stopped everything she was doing and focused all of her attention on the fifth screen. It had to be a mistake. Maybe she'd entered the wrong coordinates. She re-entered the information on the other four data pads. Now all five screens showed the same terrible result.

Her free feet quavering, she rushed to catch up with Belan. It was a mistake. Or, at the very least, he didn't know. He'd been so good to her. He couldn't know. "Belan?"

He stopped and turned around, "What is wrong, Skarab?"

"Big problem."

He closed his eyes most of the way. "How big?"

"Talk in office?"

"Of course." He led her to his office and closed the door. She couldn't focus on anything but the issue at hand. "Now. What is this about?"

"Target planet."

"The one we just hit?"

"No. New one."

He nodded. "What about it?"

"Is talog home world."

After staring at her for a long few seconds, he sighed and sat down. "Yes, it is."

He knew? He knew! What had Skarab gotten herself into? Her legs flailed about totally of their own control. She tried to say something, but failed to make anything but kiree-language squeaks.

In a sad voice, Belan said, "Look, I didn't want you to know about this. It's not the prettiest part of our job."

Still in shock, she managed to make her mouth work. "Job has pretty part?"

He stood quickly. "Yes! We make worlds livable for billions of people. Ask the manta living on their fourth world what they think of what we do. Better yet, ask the ones who tried to survive on their neighboring planet. But can you imagine what it costs to store up enough energy to destroy a star millions

of years in the past? We have to guarantee that our clients will pay what they promised us. This is so expensive that we would fold quickly if even a few defaulted. So we give them a massive incentive to pay. And let me be very clear about this. They *always* do. When they pay their bill, we misdirect the fragment and it never comes close to their planet. We've never needed to destroy a planet before, but we *need* that threat. The first few times we did this, the clients tried to re-negotiate after we'd done all of our work. We simply can not afford that."

Skarab's instructor was definitely right. She was not cut out for this job. In a slow (for a kiree) voice, she said, "Understand. Not like. Hate. But understand." She didn't wait for him to dismiss her. She just left and went back to her quarters.

There was a message waiting for her from her instructor. He was very agitated. "Problem. No talogs match names. Talog ambassador worried. Never made Gravimetrics deal. War effort too expensive. Can't afford. Now talking wth veleric ambassador."

Her mind racing in panic, Skarab stared at the empty screen. Suddenly, she remembered Trassia at the party. He'd bobbed his head the same way the talog had. Berating herself for not making the connection earlier, she rushed back to Belan's office. "Talog agreed to pay?"

He sighed. "Not yet. They seem to be angling for a lower rate. They say they never made a deal with us."

Skarab waved all of her feet from her tail up to her neck. "I believe. Talogs at meeting strange. Maybe sliss in suits."

He stared at her for a minute. Then he said slowly, "That would be a problem. We have to get paid."

"If believe kiree ambassador," she let that sink in for a second. Her instructor was well respected by all of the races. "Talog not afford."

He stared at her for another minute then nodded. "Let me do some checking."

She nodded with twenty legs. "Will do calculations." She moved to her station and started running them. On four of her screens she checked and rechecked the calculations needed to redirect the fragment. On her fifth screen, however, she worked on something else. Her hearts quivered with each thought of what she was doing. Only the extreme situation gave her the courage to even consider it. Still, she used five of her eyes to watch out for anyone coming near, and each person looking in her direction gave her fits.

* * *

One of Skarab's screens now showed a live news feed from the talog home world. Word had leaked out that the sliss had devised a way to destroy the planet, and the citizens were starting panic. No one had realized just how bankrupt the race was, but it was now known that the talogs couldn't come close to making the Gravimetrics payment. And none of the other races would loan them money. They didn't want to get involved in the talog-sliss war.

Belan walked over to Skarab's station just as the announcer finished a plaintive plea for everyone to remain calm. Skarab asked, "Make deal?"

He sighed. "No, they will not pay."

She sent two waves downward. "Can't pay."

"Unfortunately, that is the same thing to us."

She checked her readouts. There was only half an hour left until impact. "Not same. Order pulse."

He closed his eyes all the way. "I can not."

Skarab let her voice take on a derisive tone. "Mighty velerics. Most technological race by far. But pawns of *sliss*. Disgusting." She stopped what she was doing, turned to him, and crossed her legs in front of her. The velerics had been around far longer than any other race. Their technology made the space-faring kiree look like the primitive, furry creatures on the first target. And here they were, being duped by one of the more backward of the sentient races. She tried to convey all of this in a long stare. Then she said, "Order pulse."

He held her gaze for a moment. With a sigh, he said, "I will talk with my superiors again."

Skarab made a show of turning around to check her readout. "Hurry."

Fifteen minutes later he came back out of his office. Skarab readied fingers over two of her data pads. "Send pulse?" she asked anxiously.

His pause was enough of an answer. "We can not. If we let the talog get away with this, others will try to take advantage of us in the future."

Skarab gnashed her jaws together. "This entire race! Not just business."

"I am sorry, Skarab."

She looked at all of the velerics in the room. All looked a little sad, but none seemed to understand that this was wrong. Trassia was there too. But where she expected him to be elated, he stared at the floor. So, a *sliss* could feel remorse, but the velerics couldn't. She drooped all of her legs except for the ones over the lower entry pad. "Sorry? Me too." She hit a key on the pad and stepped away from the station.

All the screens in the room went off. Then the lights flickered. They hadn't stored up enough energy for Skarab's needs, so she'd broken into the system and had it siphon off all the power it could. Without the temporal shields up, she could hear the pulse cannons charging.

"What are you doing?" Belan yelled.

She turned to him and reared up so that just her lower ten legs were on the ground. Towering over him, she crossed her top hundred and thirty-eight legs, interlocking their fingers. With a sneer, she said, "Right thing."

She lowered herself all the way back down, so that all of her feet were on the floor. A second later the cannons fired. With engine energy being fed to the cannons, the ship knocked back violently. Skarab, whose center of mass was now very low, was the only one on board who wasn't thrown to the ground. She ignored the moments of chaos and went back to her quarters to pack her bags. The velerics had made her extremely angry, more angry than she had ever been in her life. And, it had made her do something she'd never have considered otherwise. Calling her future 'uncertain' now required a considerable amount of optimism. But it was the right thing to do. She just wished the act of doing it had dissipated some of her anger.

Half an hour later Belan barged in. "You wiped the computers. We can not tell what you did. And you fired without the temporal shields up. So we can not even do a survey to figure it out."

She picked up her bags and glared at him. "Maybe destroyed star. Maybe fragments heading for Veleric now. Without information, maybe can't stop."

He clenched his fists and glared at her.

"Or, maybe destroyed talog fragment. Close to star. Can't redirect again to save fragment." She sent waves randomly running up and down her body. "Or, maybe both." She leaned forward and spoke in the slowest, most menacing voice she could muster. "Watch skies to find out."

The End

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