Lost and Found

In the cold vastness of space there weren’t a lot of places that one finds restricted access; the gravity well of suns and black holes, massive asteroid fields, and dangerous nebulas were mere specks that could easily be avoided and most spaceships do. There was one sector of space however that was restricted for a completely different reason, one that was far more mysterious than the usual space anomalies. It was called sector zero and was considered one of the most dangerous parts of space, which meant that it was heavily infested with pirates and raiders as well as whatever caused the area to be locked down in the first place. Recently there has also been word that those same pirate vessels had been disappearing completely, and despite the idea that having less of them should make things safer it didn’t stop the crew aboard the small vessel skirting the edge of that space from being nervous.

The rather large spaceship was actually a salvage vessel run by five people, all of whom were in the bridge section as they watched the blackness of the void of space pass by in their viewscreens. “I hate this part of the run,” a wolf said as he sat back in his chair. “Why can’t we just take the standard route that everyone else in the system does and not go through a place where we could get caught and killed by raiders?”

“Because that route takes another four days and that’s if there aren’t any comet storms that come from the nearby field, not to mention the tolls on a trip like this wouldn’t even make the run worth it,” the gruff voice of the tiger replied. “Salvage is down right now and these delivery runs are the only thing that is keeping this ship from becoming scrap herself. Unless you know where we can find an old space station or destroyed freighter we can dismantle we need to do these runs, and if we want to be competitive we have to offer better times and prices than anyone else even if it means a bit of tax dodging in a restricted sector.”

“It still gives me the creeps,” the wolf stated. “What about you Serathin?”

“A paycheck is a paycheck,” the draconic-sabrewolf said with a shrug. “These runs can be a bit tense but better tense and profitable than boring and poor, plus I heard that there’s something out in sector zero that’s picking off the pirates and invading their vessels. Whether it’s a rumor or not it seems to keep them busy, so I’ll take this then having to shell out half our profits to go the safe route.”

The other two, a cobra and a hawk, nodded in agreement and that seemed to be enough to get their lupine crewmate to stop talking. There was a certain tenseness in the bridge of the ship as silence fell over them while everyone continued to look out through the viewscreens at the blank expanse of space. Despite the need for funds none of them enjoyed delivery runs and less so ones that brought them close to the region of conflicted space. While the horror stories that they had heard were quite ridiculous there were pirates and raiders that they would have to look out for the entire time and the need for constant vigilance had started to fray all their nerves.

So when the radar began to beep loudly it caused all five members of the crew to nearly jump out of their seats, though when the cobra went to check the radar screen in front of him he quickly informed them it wasn’t a ship… or at least not an entire one. “From the signature it appears to be a lifepod, but I’m not getting any signals from it and it looks like the beacon malfunctioned. I can tell that it’s been drifting for a few weeks now though.”

“So that’s going to be fun to open,” the tiger said.

“Sir?” the wolf spoke up. “We’re not going to actually pick this thing up, are we?”

“A lifepod, even a malfunctioning one, can bring in a hefty sum,” the tiger stated. “I’m not going to turn down free credits that cross our path and our hold is essentially empty right now. Arrange an intercept course with it and activate the energy grapplers, we’ll pull it in and do the cursory examination while we get back in transit.”

“Sounds like a plan,” the hawk said as he began to work on his console. “I guess the only question is who is on decon for the death capsule.”

Everyone looked at one another until all their eyes had settled on the draconic sabrewolf, who had sat back and started to read on his tablet without paying attention. When he finally felt the gaze of the others on him Serathin looked up and gave the others a questioning look before a grin appeared on the tiger’s face. “Looks like we got ourselves a volunteer,” the tiger said. “I’m sure you don’t mind taking on such an important task, right Serathin?”

About an hour later Serathin sat in the small office that was in the cargo bay, the pressurized compartment allowing the hybrid to work even with the doors open to the vastness of space. He grumbled at being tricked into agreeing to something just because he hadn’t been paying attention to them, and because of it he was in charge with bringing in the life pod and checking it. Fortunately most of the former was done automatically as his fur began to stand on end from the energy tethers being activated. Thanks to the skilled piloting of their avian crewmate he could see the steadily blinking lights of the metal sphere, especially when it began to glow from the tethers latching onto it. Though the process was automated Serathin continued to monitor the machinery that drew it into the cargo bay.

It only took a few minutes before the life pod was drawn inside and brought into one of the salvage bays. Once it had finished being secured the cargo bay doors closed and seals before the atmosphere returned and allowed Serathin to get out of the cramped room and into the bay itself. That had been the easy part, with the salvage at hand there had to be an inventory done and everything identified, and with this being a life pod it had to be checked just to make sure there wasn’t someone still alive inside. Most likely though he was opening a coffin as he went over to grab a blowtorch in order to bypass the controls.

When Serathin moved over towards the door, which would be the easiest point to breach, he was surprised to find that the electronics were still functional. That was a bit perplexing since if someone did die in a pod it would lock down in case there was a biological contaminant inside, but it appeared to have been bypassed. Did that mean that there was some sort of malfunction that caused it to launch accidently? That would make things much easier for the hybrid as he disengaged the door and took a step back to allow it to open.

As the pod door popped open however it seemed to stick only about an inch or two from opening before he heard the grinding of gears that caused him to flinch. It appeared there was something inside that was causing it to stick and when the mechanicals gave up the ghost he grabbed a prybar and went over to the malfunctioning pod. As he went over he could smell something coming from the crack and at first he thought that he had been right that this was going to be a dead body, but it didn’t quite smell like the usual death and decay as he slipped the metal between the cracks. Perhaps there was something else inside that he could snag for himself without telling the crew, he thought with a smirk on his face, wouldn’t be the first time they stuck him with death duty and he got something out of the deal…

The smirk on Serathin’s face disappeared when he wrenched open the pod on the first try and found sticky strands of some sort of organic residue which was the cause of the door jam. A cloud of vapor had also started to rise up from the inside of it and the curious hybrid looked inside to see what could possibly be inside. His green eyes widened in surprise when he finally glanced within the pod and saw that everything was covered in a pulsating alien organic material complete with large glowing nodules that were softly glowing where it covered larger lights. It was something that he had never seen before and it reminded him of the stories that the others were telling on the deck, which prompted him to go and attempt to close the door of the life pod to seal it up before reporting it in.

Unfortunately the mechanisms were completely jammed and the exposure of the inside of the pod to the warm cargo bay had caused the organic material within to shift and mutate. As Serathin pushed on the door unsuccessfully the eggs within wiggled and came to life. The pod had been hiding more than just the goo as a set of three tentacles pushed their way out from the rubbery skin of the nodule that contained the parasitoid, reacting to the new environment to come to life. By the time the draconic sabrewolf had given up on getting the pod closed without the use of tools it had completely pushed itself out and the slug-like creature made its way over the corrupted life pod with shocking speed to the opening.

“Piece of junk…” Serathin muttered as he went back to the opening of the life pod, only to be surprised as something leapt out of the pod straight at him! “What the hell?!” The impact of the creature against his chest caused him to nearly fall backwards as he felt the slimy object wrap a tentacle around his neck and try to pull its way up towards him. The draconic sabrewolf brought up his hand to keep a second one from latching around his muzzle and he brought down his hand on it, trapping against his body while the other one pulled up his leather shirt. Even though it briefly brought it closer to the place this thing seemed insistent to go Serathin managed to keep it trapped against the thick material before getting his shirt completely off and wrapped around the creature.

Once he had managed to wrap it up into a tight ball Serathin panted heavily as he stood there shirtless in the salvage bay, feeling the creature squirming still within its trapped confines as his brain raced to catch up with what just happened. He had just had a close encounter with the creature that the others might have been talking about and had an idea of what was going to happen if this thing had succeeded in climbing inside of him. While he could see that it was still trying to find a way to wiggle out and even saw a tentacle try and squirm from within the balled up shirt he had managed to keep it contained for now. At the moment he was unsure on how to proceed from this point; he either had to find a way to kill or contain this creature, or retain his grip on it to ensure that it will remain captured while trying to alert the bridge to what had just happened.

But as the draconic sabrewolf continued to stand there his eyes widened as Serathin felt something hit him square in the back. As the tentacles slithered up through the fur of his back and wrapped around the roots of his wings to pull it back up the hybrid realized he was in a bad predicament. The alien parasite that was slithering up his back was quickly making its way towards his head, but in order to try and stop it he would have to drop the parasite he was holding to do it. As he felt it slide up around his neck though he knew he had to take the risk in order to pull off the other one, but as he dropped the shirt he found that the parasite had done more than he thought. As the leathers fell away Serathin suddenly felt the tentacles that had escaped wrap around his wrists and bind them together, weighing his arms down enough that it prevented him from grabbing the other parasite as one of the tentacles wrapped around his sabreteeth.

Serathin tried to keep his mouth closed as he started to run for the emergency alarm, normally used only in the case of equipment failure or a breach, but the other tentacle not anchored around his neck managed to push its way inside with surprising strength. The draconic sabrewolf faltered and fell to his hands and knees as he felt his jaws get pried open and the creature pushed inside. Even with his hands bound with the other parasite’s slithering tentacles he got to his knees to try and bring them up to claw at the creature, but the slimy, squishy body made it impossible to grab onto as the tentacles that had been wrapped around his saber teeth pushed forward down into his throat. At this point Serathin tried to shout but the only thing that came from his throat was a gurgle as the main body of the parasite pushed its way down and caused the muscles to swallow it as though on reflex.

While the initial invasion didn’t take long it seemed like ages for the scavenger as his neck bloated out with the large body of the parasite, his body writhing as he felt the tentacles continued to push their way down. Suddenly the one that had been around his wrists fell away, but as Serathin saw the purple fur of his chest stretch slightly from the lump within before it disappeared. With the alien creature deep inside of him all he could think about was warning the ship, but as he slowly got to his feet and looked to the emergency button he couldn’t get his arms to reach over and push it. As the alien within reached his stomach more tendrils grew unseen within his body, though as the draconic sabrewolf felt his shoulder muscles twitch and flex the fur of his back stretched slightly as it continued to infest his spinal cord.

Soon all Serathin could do was gasp as his body no longer responded to any of the signals that came from his brain, he managed to stay on his feet but it wasn’t long before he couldn’t even move his head. His mouth started to hang open as he felt something alien starting to push its way up inside of him, not only was his throat starting to get stretched but he could feel the flesh on the back of his neck starting to bulge as well. The draconic sabrewolf tried to do something, anything in order to stop what was happening to him but as tentacles pushed their way up into his skull there was nothing he could do to stop the onslaught. As his nerves and muscles were being taken over his entire body began to twitch and quiver from the invasion as the alien biomatter infested his brain and his throat bulged from something emerging within.

In a matter of a minute Serathin’s jaws were stretched open once more, but this time it was from tentacles that were pushing their way out of his throat. His maw stretched unnaturally as the three appendages that pushed their way out were much bigger than they had been before as the alien assimilated the host that it had taken over. The glowing green eyes of the hybrid rolled back into his head as several smaller tendrils pushed out of his ears and nose while more pushed their way over his skull. For a few moments there were more pronounced movements of the host, including what looked like the attempted forming of words even with the tentacles wiggling around in the air, but as the area around the spine continued to swell and tendrils spread through the hybrid’s body eventually the movement stopped and the eyes of the host remained completely white as more parasitoids began to move out of the pod and towards the host.

Even though the draconic sabrewolf’s body had stopped moving it was still twitching as the alien mutations continued. With the complete fusion of Serathin and the parasitoid the fingers of the body began to move more fluidly as claws erupted from the shifting fingers. As the second parasitoid pushed into the gaping maw of the hybrid more started to crawl up his legs, eager to get into their new home as the tail of the creature started to grow more bloated. Already Serathin’s muzzle looked more alien as the blue scales and black fur were assimilated into pulsating alien flesh while his eyes started to glow the same orange color as the tips of the parasitoid’s tentacles. The new creature stumbled slightly as the muscles of the host body started to bloat, pushing out the fur as his stomach grew more rotund with each parasite pushing down into the thickening throat of the salvager until eventually the entire thing shifted to his rapidly thickening tail…

A few minutes later the door to the salvage bay opened once more, the cobra on the other side looking in to see where the draconic sabrewolf was. “Hey Serathin?” the serpentine man said as he walked into the salvage bay. “You’re late to dinner and the captain wanted to make sure that you weren’t sleeping inside that life pod that you found in order to try and avoid your duties. Even though you got tricked into salvage duty doesn’t mean that you can shirk everything else, especially not when we’re riding this close to sector zero space.”

When there was no response the cobra frowned slightly and walked further into the salvage bay, which as he did he immediately noticed that the life pod was open and that something was growing out from the edges of the door. It looked like some sort of alien biomass that was dripping from it and had already started to creep along the metal of the bay. The snake made a face as he went over towards the control panel and was surprised to not only see more of the alien goo but also the clothes of the hybrid on the ground. Stranger still while the shirt seemed relatively intact it looked like his pants were in tatters, though both were also covered with the same slime as the cobra backed away and went over to the intercom.

“Captain?” the cobra said as he had also noticed that there were pieces of underwear as well. “Are you there?”

“Yeah, still on the bridge,” the tiger replied with a grunt. “Is Serathin still sulking in the corner?”

“No… something really strange is going on here I think,” the cobra salvager replied. “I think there may have been something alien in the pod, maybe even something that came from sector zero.”

“Or that’s what he wants you to think,” the captain stated. “This is probably a prank to get back at us and the scanner didn’t show signs of life. If he wants to play this game then just come back to the mess hall and let him hide there all night.”

The cobra agreed but before he could say anything else he suddenly found himself pulled off his feet by a tentacle that had wrapped around his neck! His clawed feet kicked in the air as he was brought away from the control panel and pulled into the shadows of the nearby storage bay, letting out a gasp when he saw what they were connected too. As the alien tentacle retracted he could see that it had grown from the thick forearm of a huge creature that he could only vaguely recognized as the raconic sabrewolf. The hybrid looked more like an alien than his usual self as his chest was barreled out and covered in alien flesh instead of purple fur with only patches of black still on his body, though his hands and feet were completely mutated as a second tentacle morphed from the finger on Serathin’s other hand and wrapped around his legs.

With the infected creature much stronger than him all the cobra could do was wiggle and squirm as he was pinned up against the metal wall while the three tentacles in the maw of the creature wiggled around. More tentacles had formed on the muzzle of Serathin and though they all stretched out towards him it was the former tail of the mutant creature that was sliding up towards the scaly man. The appendage was huge and as the half-transformed wings flailed about the end of the parasitoid’s abdomen came up and the tip opened right in front of the cobra. For the briefest of seconds the cobra screamed before the opening pushed over the open muzzle and as the half-changed host watched with blank orange eyes it wasn’t long before a large lump pushed its way out of the abdomen and down the red-scaled throat, followed by a second and eventually a third before it finally detached.

The parasitoid shuddered in pleasure as Serathin stepped back, allowing the cobra to slide to the ground while trying to cough up what had just been implanted into him. The infected crewmate clutched onto his stomach as his eyes widened and his breath came in short, ragged gasps that grew more intense with each second. Soon the face of the cobra went completely rigid as the throat of the crewmate bulged once more and as the forked tongue slipped out past his lips it was quickly joined by three tentacles that grew out from the parasite within. Already the two minds were being knit together as tendrils pushed into the serpentine skull and infested the new host’s mind, and as the scaly arms already began to grow and thicken from the alien mutation Serathin moved out and made its way towards the open door with a dozen parasites still squirming around inside his abdomen…

Meanwhile in the mess hall the three members of the crew waited around the table, the tiger tapping his finger impatiently as the hawk and wolf stirred the contents of their mostly-empty bowls anxiously. “I realize that we’re on kind of a boring run right now,” the captain growled. “But if these two are going to be playing grab-ass with each other they should at least wait until they get to the station to do it.”

The other two just looked at each other as they recognized that the tiger was getting angrier by the second, but they had already attempted to call both of their missing crew mates over the intercom with no response. “Do you think that I should go down there and see what’s going on?” the wolf asked. “I could tell them that they need to come up here.”

“No way, last thing I need is three people that somehow lost track of time,” the tiger stated, which promptly caused the wolf to look down at his meal while blushing. “I’m not waiting for the two of them to finish up, they can go ahead and starve for the night. Finish up what you got and go back for seconds if you need before I shut down the food processor.”

Though the other two looked nervous they weren’t going to say no to extra food rations as they slurped down the rest of their meal. With being so far out in the dead of space, especially in a restricted zone, they had to make sure that they conserved as much as possible just in case of engine failure or something else like that. Once the wolf had finished with his bowl first he went over to the processor in order to get more, but as he did the door next to their makeshift kitchen opened. The tiger immediately looked up to see who he was going to chew out first but as his eyes glanced up the first thing he saw was a look of terror on his lupine crewmate’s face as his bowl dropped to the ground.

In the next few seconds there was a flurry of activity as an alien creature jumped from the open door and pounced on top of the wolf, knocking him to the floor as the other two crew jumped to their feet. The monster was unlike anything they had ever seen before; its body was covered in glistening brown flesh as two thick tentacles that were on its back swayed through the air, and though the hulking creature was nearly unrecognizable as the captain approached he could see that the distended jaw that was moving to the muzzle of the wolf had a set of sabrefangs and a somewhat familiar pair of horns on his head. It couldn’t be… but even as the knowledge that this was potentially their hybrid crewmate all that the captain concerned himself with was saving the wolf as he grabbed a chair on his way.

By this point the three tentacles that wiggled in the maw of the alien creature had wrapped around the wolf’s head, but they were quickly dislodged when the tiger swung with all his might and bashed the chair into its head. The parasitoid was knocked off-balance enough that it let go of its prey to look at the threat, but as it did the hawk came up with a fire extinguisher and emptied the contents right in the creature’s face. As soon as the freezing substance made contact with the mutant creature it caused it to back away long enough for the captain to pull the wolf away and get him back onto his feet. The two continued to use their makeshift weapons in order to keep the alien back as they made their way towards the door towards the loading bay that was closest to them, only for it to open before they could get to it.

As the three turned around they saw their cobra crewmate standing there, their eyes widening as the distended jaws of the snake man wiggled with the tentacles within while alien flesh covered part of his face and scales. Though not nearly as mutated as the one they were trying to keep at bay they could see that huge claws had erupted from the bloated hands of the creature and his chest looked almost lopsided with the muscle growth that came from the alien infecting him within. The tail of the cobra was also very swollen and as it flicked around in the air they could see the tip open up and three tentacles similar to the one slithering in his maw wiggled out from it. The captain quickly threw the broken chair at the new threat and the hawk unloaded the entire fire extinguisher into the mess hall to provide enough cover for them to get to the next nearest door which lead to the engine bay.

“What the fuck!” the hawk exclaimed as the captain put in his password into the door to lock it, essentially sealing them off from the two creatures as the metal reverberated with a loud bang. “What the fuck were those things?!” The tiger told him to shut up and to keep moving, the three making their way towards the engine room proper.

“Serathin… he told us…” the wolf muttered, the lupine crewmate looking like he was about to be sick. “Those things… they’re invading…”

“Well they haven’t gotten us yet,” the tiger replied with a growl as he felt the wolf falter, taking the traumatized crew member and letting him fall to his knees. “Look, we can activate the engines from the bay and manually steer ourselves back into federation space. Even if they are invading the ship they won’t be able to reach us in there.”

The wolf began to tremble as his hand went to his chest, his breathing intensifying as his eyes widened. Both the hawk and the tiger began to back away slightly but as the captain tried to move away the other hand of the wolf suddenly reached out and grabbed him by the sleeve, yanking him down with surprising force. “Not… the ship…” the wolf said as his breath came in heaves, the tiger’s jaw dropping as something began to push out the fur of the lupine’s throat and quickly travel upwards. “Invading… meeeaarrgghhhhh!”

The cry that came from the wolf soon became muffled as his jaws stretched wider, the tiger able to watch as the throat expanded and three tentacles emerged from his maw. The infected crewmate continued to maintain a grip on the captain’s coat as his eyes rolled into the back of his head, already tinted with the same orange as the tips as the shoulders and chest of the creature could be seen with something squirming around within. All the tiger could do at that point was take his jacket and rip the zipper, then pulled away as he saw the thick tendrils that had already wrapped around the spine of the wolf push down into the tail to begin its mutation into an alien abdomen. By this point the hawk had already turned and ran and the tiger quickly came up behind him as the new host rose unsteadily onto its feet, though the parasite seemed to be getting more control by the second as the boots of the wolf burst and several tentacles flopped out along with the thickening claws that protruded from each mutated, growing digit.

Fortunately by the time it had started to run towards them both of the remaining crewmates had managed to get behind the door, closing and locking it behind them. The sound of the increasingly alien creature couldn’t be heard over the sound of the machinery attached to the engines whirring and pushing them further into space. Once they were sure that the newest creature couldn’t come in the two eyed each other up wearily, but when neither appeared to be transforming into one of those aliens they finally breathed a sigh of relief and looked around. The first thing they did was find better weapons, which were the heaviest tools they could find that they could reliably swing, and then looked for a way to get out of restricted space.

The problem was that the wolf was their engineer, and with both the draconic sabrewolf and the cobra also out of commission that just left he captain and the hawk that happened to be their navigations expert. “This isn’t good…” the hawk stated as he looked at the diagnostics screen. “Without him I can’t figure out how to point the engines the way we need, I would have to get back to the bridge if I wanted to turn the ship.”

“Well I’m not sure if you’re aware, but there are now three of those alien creatures between us and the bridge,” the captain replied bitterly as he looked at the door. “We’d be lucky to escape this room, much less all the way to the bridge. No doubt they’re on the side of that door waiting for us to try.”

“The main entrance may be blocked, but there are other ways to get around the ship,” the hawk stated, pointing upwards where the tiger saw a pair of vent openings. “If we use the utility vents we can possibly make our way back up towards the bridge. It’s not going to be comfortable but from the looks of it having those tentacles push up your throat probably wouldn’t be either.”

The captain frowned at that but knew that he was right; with the engineer gone their entire plan went to hell, and if they were going to have any chance of escaping they would need to get through to the bridge once more. At the very least they could signal for help as the hawk man grabbed a ladder while the tiger tried to find a way to pry the vent covers off. After a few minutes they had everything they needed and the hawk used the crowbar they had in order to just pop the screws and open it up to the other side. It took longer than he would have liked but eventually the avian navigator managed to get it off, telling the captain to look out as it fell to the ground with a loud clang.

Just as the hawk looked down to see the scowling face of the tiger beneath him the feline was suddenly pulled from his field of vision, which also caused the ladder to be yanked out from under him. The navigator let out a yelp as he dangled there high up in the air, the crowbar he had been holding jammed up against the edge that kept him from falling down. As he looked out he saw what had happened as the captain was slid back to the door that had been opened by several alien tentacles enough for them to slither inside. The tiger shouted for the hawk to run as he struggled to try and break free of his captors, only for more of them to coil around his body and keep him pinned against the partially opened doors.

With the adrenaline coursing through his system it allowed the hawk to pull himself up enough to get into the vent itself, though in the course of the process the crowbar became unstuck and fell to the floor as well. At that point he didn’t need it anymore, but as he saw the dark vent that would potentially be his safety he couldn’t help but wonder if he could potentially save the captain. With the vent open all they would have to do was reset up the ladder, but as he looked back down his eyes widened as a thick tentacle that slithered around the tiger’s neck pushed its way into his mouth. As his lips were parted and his muzzle was stretched the hawk could see something being pushed in through the tentacle from where it emerged from the door and finally pulled himself away before he could watch it bulge out the throat of his captain.

The hawk pulled himself back from the vent opening and held his head with his hands, trying not to tremble as he sat there in shock. He had to leave, his mind told him, but he couldn’t find the means to get his muscles to go. As he tried to regain his composure and started to crawl backwards he heard a loud thud and the grinding of metal that caused him to pause. From the light that came up from the engine room he could see shadows moving around and knew that the aliens had gotten in. Would they be smart enough to know where he had gone? The hawk didn’t know what to do and hoped that if he just stayed still they thought that he had left and would search for him elsewhere.

Beneath him the sounds continued on for what seemed like ages before they finally stopped, and as the hawk felt his breath catch in his throat everything became quiet save for the hum of the engines below. Had they gone? He new better than to go and look and that he couldn’t hide there forever, which prompted the hawk to slowly begin to move once more. Just as he got a few feet away however there was a loud bang and he let out a scream as two thick tentacles pushed their way up and latched onto the surface with the sticky substance it secreted.

Before the hawk could even move he suddenly found himself face to face with the creature that started it all, the saber teeth and vague shape of his head the only thing that remained of the draconic sabrewolf as it used its heavy clawed hand to push its way up while the tentacles on the other slithered towards him. He tried to climb away but was quickly dragged backwards by several of the appendages that wrapped around his ankles. The hawk desperately tried to hold onto the sides of the smooth metal but it didn’t even slow him down as the creature continued to crawl into the cramped space. As his head was brought to the underbelly of the parasitoid he could see the other three crewmembers in various stages of their mutations, from the cobra that looked much like the one in front of him to the tiger who merely had the three tentacles that pushed out of his maw.

Soon the heavy abdomen tail of his captor slid over the hawk’s beak as several tentacles kept him pinned, his eyes widening as he felt something push up against it before it was pried open. Since he was the last one he would only need one parasitoid, the hawk’s eye squeezing shut as he could feel the muscles undulating to move it forward. Beneath him the others were starting to secrete their slime onto the floors and walls, preparing the cocoon for the first of their kind to fully evolve as the hawk started to swallow involuntarily upon feeling the smaller tentacles push inside of him. Serathin pulled back his abdomen in time to see the body of the parasite squish its way into the last crewmate, and when the hawk opened his eyes again they would be completely rolled back as tendrils quickly pushed up and assimilated him just like the others had.

With their infestation complete Serathin dropped down and went to the corner of the room, the tentacles that used to be his wings slithering around him and causing the alien material to thicken. While his body had changed substantially it would need more time before the parasite could fully convert its host, and with three others ready to guard him, which soon became four as the hawk flopped down while tentacles wiggled out from his beak, they were ready to begin the process. It wouldn’t be long before the salvage ship turned and went deeper into zero sector space, ready to join the rest of the hive that waited for them eagerly…