

The Strange Case of Starship Iris

[Report One: Violet Liu](#)

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AGENT

The Strange Case of Starship Iris, report five: The Carmen Gambit.

Thanks to resources allocated to us by General Jahansooz, my team has put in long hours to catch up with the Rumor's transmissions and monitor their doings in real-time.

(grim) We are all aware of the events that transpired on Elion an hour ago. More notes to follow at the end of this report.

JUNIOR AGENT

Warning for any future agents reviewing this case: this transmission contains graphic violence. If you have been diagnosed with combat-related PTSD, or if you have reason to believe that exposure to the audio may otherwise be detrimental to your long-term or short-term efficiency, please fill out form 74-A and L832-B and review the written transcript instead.

AGENT

Also note: this is an ongoing investigation. All agents reviewing this case should begin with Report One: Violet Liu and proceed chronologically. In accordance with regulation, a brief summary follows.

["Previously on"]

Transmission seven, begin.

(FX: engine room noises)

ARKADY

(singing, cheerful) *When your back is to the wall*

When your back is to the wall

It means there is no room for you to fall!

(FX during: door opening and closing) *Landers never—*

Morning, Sana.

SANA

Someone's in a good mood.

ARKADY

It was bound to happen eventually.

SANA

How're we looking?

ARKADY

Made all the tweaks to the engine like you said. We're running as tight as we can, but let's just say it's a damn good thing we're in the home stretch.

SANA

Well, we'll need to hit the ground running. Land, refuel, drop off our old goods, pick up the new ones, back in the sky.

ARKADY

Still, it'll be nice to walk on real ground for a bit. See some clouds, some birds--hell, maybe even a *tree*.

SANA

I'm sorry that we're selling to the Fowleys this time around.

ARKADY

Hey, the Fowleys are the lowest of lowlives but they're predictable, they're simple. I am ready for simple. Let's go take some dirty money from bad people, and distribute their ill-gotten cargo.

SANA

It's twenty cases of noise-cancelling headphones.

ARKADY

Really.

SANA

Mining companies on Rosalind have a monopoly.

ARKADY

So it's practically charity work. (Pause) Hey, Sana. Feels like you should be more excited about pulling one over on the evil mining execs.

SANA

The closer we get to Elion, the worse I feel about working with these people. (sigh) Not that I've got any right to complain to you. If we'd done things your way, we'd be safe on Telemachus right now, drinking with Campbell and trying to stop Krejnh from doing shots of hot sauce.

ARKADY

(kind of blurting it out) Yeah, *and Violet would be dead*. (Didn't necessarily mean to put it quite so bluntly. Pause.) So. I'm glad I was over-ruled, okay? But we left our best customer in the lurch to go play space detectives. That's bound to have consequences.

SANA

You're right. We need to solve this as soon as we can, and in the meantime, try to minimize the damage.

ARKADY

Hey, we've dealt with people like the Fowleys before. Nature of the business. Not all these guys are Robin Hood. (pause, more to the point) Not all these guys are Campbell.

SANA

(Heavy) I know. (More practical.) We need to be on our guard.

ARKADY

I need to be on my guard. *You* need to make sure they're not cheating us.

SANA

I've been thinking about what you said, how hard it is when we all rely on you to do the dirty work.

ARKADY

...I have no memory of saying that.

SANA

You phrased it a little differently. I think it was something like, 'Sucks sometimes, being the scum of the universe, but hey, gotta play to my strengths.'

ARKADY

When was this?

SANA

The night after you talked Violet into taking a chance on us? You were pretty drunk. Point being, it's not fair to saddle you with all of that.

ARKADY

Not that I object, but what are we gonna do, send Jeeter out there?

SANA

(amused) You're so protective of him, the minute he's out of earshot.

ARKADY

I just don't want that dude in the way. Hell, he's probably a *pacifist*. (mutters) College boys...

SANA

Still, if it was safe for him to set foot on Elion--

ARKADY

Shit, I still can't get over that: who goes after *Jeeter*?

SANA

Historically, several mafias.

ARKADY

I know, but. *Jeeter*?

SANA
Yeah.

ARKADY
Like, who *are* these people? Where do they live?

SANA
You're ready to take on the Fowley siblings and *multiple* mafias? That is some good mood. Did you finally process that Violet said she thinks you're smart?

(FX: incoming comm noise)

KREJJH
Captain Tripathi!

SANA
Yeah, Krejjh?

KREJJH
Is First Mate Patel still with you in the engine room?

ARKADY
I'm here.

KREJJH
Fellas, I got some bad news and some--well, okay, they're both bad news.

SANA
Lay it on us.

KREJJH
What do you want first?

SANA
The--bad news.

KREJJH
Yikes. So Crewman Jeeter and Science Officer Liu did a little research on Jemison System, I guess they were hoping to pick up some, uh, poornut barter?

SANA
Peanut butter.

KREJJH
(Humoring her) If you say so. Uh, we're seeing heightened security across the whole system. Like, a lot.

BRIAN (also over comms)
Brian here. We're getting accounts of regular searches, agents stationed at every dock--

ARKADY
Even on Elion?

BRIAN
Especially on Elion. Which brings us to the other problem: someone's flagging our IDs.

ARKADY
What?

BRIAN
Yeah, we did a quick check when we heard about the heightened security. Captain, the name you went by during the uprising--

SANA
I haven't used it in years.

BRIAN
Well, don't start now.

VIOLET (over the comms as well)
Arkady, you've lost at least four aliases. Including Kay Grisham, Sister Teresa Margaret, and, uh...Duchess Calpurnia Higginsworth-Cobb?

ARKADY
Goddamit.

SANA
...Hold on, we'll be in the cockpit in ten seconds.

KREJJH
Gotcha. Krejjh out. (comm hangup sound)

(FX engine room door open)

SANA
What're you thinking?

(FX engine room door close, footsteps that accelerate into jogging as Sana and Arkady talk)

ARKADY
Agents on Elion? It's mob country.

SANA
Yeah, it's weird, right?

ARKADY
More than weird.

(FX: the boop boop boop boop of a four-digit security code entered onto a keypad with almost violent precision.)

(FX: door open)

SANA

Guys, what do we know?

KREJJH

Less than we'd like, Captain Tripathi.

VIOLET

Aliases all tagged roughly three hours ago. The warrants accuse you of smuggling, fraud, violating interspace treaties, conspiracy to commit insurrection--

ARKADY

All pretty standard when the IGR's pissed at you.

VIOLET

So we think this is definitely coming from the government? I mean, no offense but uh I'm under the impression that (kind of whispering) *you guys have a lot of enemies?*

ARKADY

We're rocketing through outer space, Liu. You don't have to whisper. *They can't hear you.*

SANA

Most of our enemies aren't on great terms with the Regime, either. It's hard to imagine them putting a government bounty on our heads.

BRIAN

And if this was a mafia thing, they wouldn't be targeting Arkady and the Captain.

KREJJH

You don't think it could be all the--crime? We *are* a bunch of devil-may-care outlaws.

VIOLET

Okay, I can't be the only person thinking this has to be about the Iris, right?

ARKADY

Not sure how they'd connect it to us.

Maybe Eejjhgreb sold us out?

KREJJH

No.

SANA

A Dwarnian diplomat striking a deal with the IGR?

ARKADY

What's the alternative?

VIOLET

They bugged us.

ARKADY

How?

VIOLET

You guys scavenged a bunch of stuff from my ship, maybe some of it's transmitting--

ARKADY

Liu, believe me when I say I scan everything and everyone we bring on board, using equipment that can detect a recording device the size of a grain of sand, which is, by the way, something humans can't even make yet--

KREJJH

Well, what about that robot swarm!

BRIAN

What?

KREJJH

It's...very small, right? Doesn't really have--motive, it's basically mist, but--it's so small!

VIOLET

How would it have gotten in? Guys, if the ship wasn't airtight, uh...we'd know.

SANA

Krejhh, when are we due into Jemison System?

KREJJH

'Bout half an earth-hour, Captain Tripathi.

SANA

Look, any breach is a serious problem, but we don't have the fuel to orbit Elion until we figure this out. And that means, for now, we have to move on. Does anybody onboard still have a clean alias?

VIOLET

Looks like you've got one left. And Arkady's still got, uh, seventeen.

ARKADY

I like having options.

SANA

We needed new names and ident cards for Violet and Brian anyway. Short-term, we just move that up on the schedule and make it a slightly bigger job.

VIOLET

In the meantime, how do we land with agents at every port?

ARKADY

No problem, we just need to work outside the grid. And we need to find a forger on Elion.

SANA

Oh hey!

ARKADY

Know one?

SANA

No, but I know who does. (suddenly more businesslike) Computer, outside call. Sana Tripathi to Ignatius Campbell.

GRATUITOUSLY PLEASANT FEMALE VOICE

Attempting connection. Attempting conn--

CAMPBELL

(Cheerful) Captain Tripathi! You're alive!

SANA

(Amused, maybe despite herself) Hey, Campbell.

KREJJH

Hi Campbell!

VIOLET

How'd he know about--

SANA

He doesn't. That's his usual greeting.

CAMPBELL

Yeah, weirdly, it always seems to apply. What's the latest, Captain? Do I hear a new recruit in there?

SANA

Campbell, we would love to get caught up--

ARKADY

Some of us more than others.

SANA

But unfortunately, this is a business call. Urgent business.

CAMPBELL

(Suddenly in serious mode) What's going on?

SANA

We've got some compromised IDs. Who's the best forger you know who--

CAMPBELL

Me.

SANA

Who's the best forger you know on Elion?

CAMPBELL

Oof. If you wanna work outside the mob, pickings are slim.

SANA

I was afraid of that.

CAMPBELL

Tell you what, send me your info. I'll work on it remotely and pass it over to my contact in Elion for printing and pickup. How many do you need?

SANA

Let's say four.

CAMPBELL

We can have them done in two hours.

ARKADY

Great, you have thirty minutes.

CAMPBELL

That's too bad, 'cause it's a two-hour job. (Pause.) Look, you guys have eaten at my table, I'm not padding my time. If I say two hours, I need two hours. (Concerned) It's getting scary out there. You don't wanna cut corners on this.

ARKADY

(Through gritted teeth) That's a long time to be hanging around on Elion without IDs.

SANA

Still feels like our best option.

ARKADY

...yeah.

SANA

Campbell, about payment--

CAMPBELL

We'll handle it later. Hagglng's no fun when you're too nervous to barter. Sending you my guy's coordinates for when you land. Ask for Red Gregor.

ARKADY

Don't tell me the "Red" is for blood.

CAMPBELL

Short for "Theodore," actually, but you didn't hear it from me. Tell him I sent you; he owes me.

SANA

Thank you, Campbell. So, how've you been?

CAMPBELL

Something's eating my tomatoes, right off the vine, but you know what they say, any day breathing--

SANA

Sorry again we had to skip our drop-off.

CAMPBELL

Hey, I get it, that's business.

SANA

Yeah, but I--it's no way to treat a friend.

CAMPBELL

Y'know, when you told me you were rerouting to Jemison, I was a little angry. But this is the first dropoff you've ever missed. No way you didn't have a damn good reason. (Half-second pause) You in trouble?

SANA

We'll be fine.

CAMPBELL

Let me know if I can help. I mean it.

ARKADY

Have you heard of any abandoned docks on Elion? Or a place that gets a lot of automated interstellar freight? Preferably near Capitol City.

CAMPBELL

I think there might be a landfill on the edge of town. Should I send you the coordinates on that too?

SANA

That'd be--really, really great, Campbell. You're a lifesaver.

CAMPBELL

Hey, none of that now. I'm just a man with a weakness for good stories and bad moonshine. Hate to have to find a new source.

SANA

We'll tell Red Gregor you said hi.

CAMPBELL

Ask him how he liked that sandwich.

ARKADY

That's why he owes you?

CAMPBELL

Trust me, it was a very good sandwich. (More serious) Hey. Sana. Uh, Captain Tripathi. If things ever go south, or just—in general, you are more than welcome to drop by, anytime. (Pause. Remembers it's not a private conversation.) The crew too, of course. Tell Krejhh I've still got that hot sauce.

SANA

We'll try to head out that way after Rosalind. I—we miss you, too. Good luck with your tomatoes.

Sana Tripathi out.

GRATUITOUSLY PLEASANT FEMALE VOICE

Connection ended.

BRIAN

Arkady, do me a favor, dude?

ARKADY

What?

BRIAN

When you go see Red Gregor, can you get me an awesome fake name? Like, something rad, y'know?

ARKADY

I'll try to match the dizzying heights of "Brian."

(FX: the entire transmission suddenly goes silent. A crackle of static.)

JUNIOR AGENT

Junior Agent McCabe here. Conversation continues in this vein for some time. I've taken the liberty of trimming about an hour of audio from this section, all available in the archive in the unlikely event it is needed. Resuming in the cockpit, forty-four minutes after the Rumor touched down on Elion. On-ship time estimated to be seventeen hundred hours.

(Another crackle, and the transmission picks up again)

VIOLET

Got any nines?

BRIAN

Go fish. Krejhh, got any fours?

KREJJH

Two of 'em, here you go.

BRIAN

Thanks.

VIOLET

...that's an eight of clubs, ripped in half.

KREJJH

(A badass renegade) I play by my own rules. (Pause.) I'm winning, by the way. By, like...*a lot*.

VIOLET

When do you think they'll be back?

BRIAN

Should be another hour, maybe? Little more, with travel time? Assuming everything goes to plan.

VIOLET

Hey, any progress on finding some link between Alvy Connors and the other Violet Liu?

BRIAN

I'm gonna keep looking, but so far no.

VIOLET

I'm not any closer to figuring out where she is either. It's weirdly difficult to find anything about her, right?

BRIAN

Verging on, like--

VIOLET

Suspiciously difficult, yeah. I guess there's no point assuming that's something sinister right off the bat, though. She could be covering her own tracks.

KREJJH

(Absolutely believes something sinister is going on, but proud of Violet for trying to be positive) Hey, that's the spirit!

VIOLET

So, speaking of being wildly out of our depth, did you make any headway on what that alien robot swarm was trying to tell us?

BRIAN

I did my best with Eejjhgreb's dictionary, but man.

VIOLET

What's the problem?

KREJJH

Pronouns.

VIOLET

What?

BRIAN

Krejjh, you wanna do the honors?

KREJJH

(Clears throat and recites Brian's translation from memory) 'Hello? Hello? Is that Craddock? Is that Thasia? Why do we not respond to us? Us can clearly sense we. We must be compromised. Us cannot...rescue? touch? repair? ...we, for fear of the same as we. May we forgive us and the...something something something something fools. Us loves you. Goodbye.'

VIOLET

Uh, any chance you got some part of that a little wrong?

KREJJH

Not likely. Crewman Jeeter triple checked it. Plus, he's brilliant, so...

BRIAN

Something could be escaping me. But the other explanation, the one I'm hoping for, is that-- I mean, we're talking about a language that's been borrowed by a pretty different group of speakers and left to its own devices for millennia. So we could be looking at some serious shifts in meaning from classical Vre Chel Nokean.

VIOLET

That'd make it almost impossible for any of us to figure it out, right?

BRIAN

Well, maybe, but. *A group of robots co-opting and adapting a language for their own needs?*

VIOLET

...so, another dead end.

BRIAN

Yeah, but--*dude*.

VIOLET

An *interesting* dead end. Hey, speaking of Thasia, I've been meaning to ask--

KREJJH

Yeah, wish I could help more on that front, Science Officer Liu, but like I said: nobody knows what happened. Thasia used to wander into the Neutral Zone a lot, Halton Station in particular, but we're talking about someone who wandered everywhere. Thasia was--um. Lechassa?

VIOLET

What?

KREJJH

("Help me!") Crewman Jeeter!

BRIAN

Um, an explorer? There's a spiritual element to it, too, like, exploring's their religion.

KREJJH

Yeah, so Thasia vanished, and a lot of Dwarnians who wanted war took it up as their torch. "Human barbarism" blah blah. I can't tell you much else.

VIOLET

What about Craddock?

KREJJH

Doesn't sound like a Dwarnian name. Some old Vre Chel Nokean?

VIOLET

Or a human.

KREJJH

What?

BRIAN

She's right; Craddock can be a human surname--of course, it doesn't explain why the nanoswarm would be looking for them along with Thasia.

VIOLET

If Thasia spent a lot of time in the Neutral Zone, they might've met a few humans, right?

KREJJH

It's been known to happen.

BRIAN

Still, you'd think that if humans had discovered this thing, that information would be out there.

VIOLET

I think that heavily depends on who did the discovering.

(FX: same as before, all of the sound cuts out, a burst of static, and then)

JUNIOR AGENT

Junior Agent McCabe again. Cutting in with some relevant audio, picked up concurrently in Elion, in a building suspected to be controlled by the Fowley siblings.

(FX: slight crackle of static, and then we cut to Sana and Arkady talking.) (FX: Elevator music playing softly in the background.)

SANA

...I think that went well.

ARKADY

Sana, you really wanna have this conversation now, in the elevator?

SANA

You said it wasn't bugged.

ARKADY

I would've said the same about our ship.

SANA

Still, I think that went well.

ARKADY

I flipped a table.

SANA

Nobody got hurt, the Fowleys were too afraid to highball us. It went well.

ARKADY

Yeah. Hey, earlier, with Campbell. Did it seem to you like he let us off too easy?

SANA

Campbell's a good dude.

ARKADY

Oookay, but did it seem like he was hitting on you?

SANA

...Arkady, if we wanna open that door, can I just say that you and--

ARKADY

(hurriedly) No, that door is shut and locked. I mean--

SANA

You mean how do we know this isn't Ricky Q all over again?

Because it's Campbell. The security boost and the IDs could be coincidence. Besides, there's only one Ricky Q.

ARKADY

Thank god for that. Alright, IDs, and then we blow the hell out of here to Rosalind.

ANOTHER, DIFFERENT GRATUITOUSLY PLEASANT VOICE

Ground floor.

(FX: Elevator ding, doors open)

(FX: We hear the static that denotes a change of location)

JUNIOR AGENT

Returning to the Rumor. Resuming roughly one hour forty five minutes since touchdown on Elion. Estimated on-ship time 18:00. Estimated local time 09:30.

KREJJH

--anyway, so there I am, on Ryedell Station for the first time, and I know about six words of Earth English--

BRIAN

Seven if you count "cowabunga"--

VIOLET

(Amused) No, sure.

KREJJH

And there's humans on all sides, pushing and yelling and selling things, and I'm thinking, 'Yikes, Krejjh, you have got to hire a translator,' and that's when I hear this human voice shout--

BRIAN

Hang on, we're being hailed. (FX: typing noises)

KREJJH

That's not what you--oh.

GUARD

Attention!

VIOLET

Shit.

GUARD

We're conducting a sweep of all interstellar vessels, I'll be needing your ship registration, and IDs for every soul aboard.

VIOLET

Do we answer?

KREJJH

If we don't, we risk getting the ship towed.

VIOLET

When are the others due back?

BRIAN

Five minutes, maybe.

KREJJH

Think you can stall for that long?

GUARD

Attention! Attention! Rumor, do you copy? Stat out now, upforth! Upforth!

BRIAN

'Upforth.' I bet we're dealing with someone from Crixton Col.

VIOLET

What?

BRIAN

We can stall.

(FX: the sound of Brian flicking some switches.)

BRIAN

Hey, officer, sorry, weather's been really haring with the signal. You outside? We're statting out now.

GUARD

Roger that. Make it fast. (FX: whatever sound effect ended the call with Eejjhgreb in Ep 3)

BRIAN

Okay. Krejjh--

KREJJH

Already hiding. Go!

BRIAN

Right. C'mon, Violet.

(FX: fast-walking footsteps through this whole conversation)

VIOLET

...Is Krejjh gonna be alright?

BRIAN

This ship was designed to be boarded. There's tons of secret compartments and tunnels in here.

VIOLET

What are we gonna do?

BRIAN

The first chance you get, go off and contact Arkady. She'll think up some cover story to get us the IDs.

VIOLET

What are *you* gonna do?

BRIAN

The Carmen Gambit.

VIOLET

What?

BRIAN

Here's what you need to know: we're here on vacation. We didn't hear about the sweeps because our signal's been down. We bought the Rumor second-hand because it was very, very cheap.

VIOLET

Do we have papers for the ship?

BRIAN

Of course.

VIOLET

I mean, in real life.

BRIAN

The best money can buy.

VIOLET

What's Crixton got to do with this?

BRIAN

It was a colony out in the deep, one of the first. We lost all contact with them for about fifty years. They ended up creating the first distinct regional vernacular native to space.

I did a report on it in Grade Ten. Do you remember how to open the airlock?

VIOLET

Yeah?

BRIAN

It's gonna be fine, just play along.

VIOLET
Uh-huh.

(FX: Three buttons. Airlock doors opening. Probably not as dramatic when you're on solid land.)

GUARD
Morning. Sorry to disturb you. Mind showing me those IDs?

BRIAN
Hey, of course, sir. C'mon in. This way.

(FX: Walking footsteps)

BRIAN
Couldn't help but notice your accent. Are you from Crixton, by any chance?

GUARD
Why do you ask?

BRIAN
Sorry. It's just--so good to hear someone from home.

GUARD
You're a Crixser? You don't sound like it.

BRIAN
Yeah, unfortunately, I picked up the Mars Base accent when Dad moved us out. He was worried about the bogstorms.

GUARD
The bogstorms? You just need a good growler.

BRIAN
(To Violet) He means a gas mask.

VIOLET
Oh.

BRIAN
And yeah, that's what mum said. I think he was looking for a way out. Miss it every day. I still dream about that soup, sometimes.

GUARD
With the dumplings?

BRIAN
Hey, are there any restaurants out here that--

GUARD

Nah, just the standard slop in these parts. Hey, North Crix or South Crix?

BRIAN

North Crix, are you kidding me? South Crix might as well be Mainspace.

GUARD

Haha, yeah. Can I just say, one Crixer to another? From inside, this ship is the *ugliest* pile of paste-parts I've ever--

BRIAN

(Laughing) No, it's a full gramble, for sure.

VIOLET

We got it at a very steep discount.

GUARD

You were robbed if it wasn't a gift. It's a *gramble's* gramble. (Both the Guard and Brian seem to find this very funny.)

VIOLET

Hey, uh. I'm gonna go check the back room, I think I left my purse in there.

BRIAN

Sounds good.

(FX: Violet's footsteps.)

(The next four lines get quieter as Violet gets farther away)

GUARD

She's a Mainspacer, yeah?

BRIAN

I try not to hold it against her. Hey, you want a cup of tea? It's not like the stuff from home, but beats a Parvo dustcloud to the eyes.

GUARD

My mum used to say that.

BRIAN

Mine, too, when she wasn't saying worse. (Both laugh a little) Lemme dig up some cups--

(FX: Four beeps of the door pad and a door open sound. Footsteps inside. Door shut. As soon as the door shuts--)

VIOLET

Holy shit, holy shit, holy shit. Uh. Private connection, Violet Liu to Arkady Patel.

ARKADY (FX: maybe some traffic sounds in the background)

Violet, look, we've got the cargo, we got the IDs. Traffic's a mess, but we'll be there in fifteen and I've had a rough couple hours, so if you could--

VIOLET

There's a guard on the ship.

ARKADY

What?

VIOLET

Fifteen minutes won't cut it, we need you now.

ARKADY

Sana, code red, how much faster can we go?

SANA

(from off-mic) Ready to break some traffic laws?

ARKADY (behind her, the sound of tires squealing)

Violet, tell me everything you know.

VIOLET

I just ducked back in here pretending to look for my papers, not sure how long I've got. Uh, we're doing the Carmen Gambit?

ARKADY

How's the guard reacting?

VIOLET

Brian's making him tea?

ARKADY

Good, you got at least five minutes there. What's the guard look like?

VIOLET

(Had been making careful note of this) Medium height and build. Green uniform jacket, old boots. A gun holster, a little loose. Definitely armed.

ARKADY

If the holster doesn't fit, we're not looking at career brass. Part-time muscle to fill out the ranks.

VIOLET

Is that good or bad?

ARKADY

Depends. They're unpredictable, harder to bribe.

VIOLET
Really.

ARKADY

Any guard who's been in the IGR for more than a year can be bought, at least for a little while. Even if you came in clean, the job's got a way of crushing you.

VIOLET
How do you know that?

ARKADY

Used to be one.

VIOLET

Um. What's your ETA?

ARKADY

We will be there as soon as we can. In the meantime, it's important that you stay very very very calm.

VIOLET

(Definitely starting to lose it) Yeah. Or else.

ARKADY

No. Take every thought that's not useful and set it aside. It'll be there later, just set it aside. You've got five minutes before the tea's even done, right?

VIOLET

Yeah.

SANA

(off-mic) Arkady, do you wanna play this like we did on Rowan?

ARKADY

Yeah, that's good. That's good. Violet, stall as long as you can. When the guard gets impatient, suddenly remember that you left your IDs in the hotel where you were staying. Hotel Virgo, okay? Call Hotel Virgo in the guard's hearing. I'll do a private connection to Krejhh, explain what's up, and forward that name to Krejhh's line. And I'm the helpful courier here to return your property.

VIOLET

Uh, what do I do if the guard doesn't buy it?

ARKADY

He will. You just need to--

VIOLET

Calm down. Yeah. Um.

ARKADY

You've got four minutes. What do you need right now?

VIOLET

Can you--talk to me for a bit? Please?

ARKADY

Not a problem. So, the Carmen Gambit is Jeeter's pretentious name for one of the easiest short-term cons of the modern age. Named for the novella, obviously.

VIOLET

Sorry, what?

ARKADY

Carmen. It's about this broke Roma con artist. There's a scene where she's about to be arrested for a street brawl, and then she realizes the officer's from this tiny, remote part of Spain. Carmen plays on his sympathy by pretending she's from there too. "Oh, I was only punching that dude because he insulted our glorious homeland" blah blah. Part of him knows she's lying, but he's so homesick--

That's the thing, right? All of us living out here in space. Go back one, two generations and most of us are from someplace else. Another planet, another station. Earth. They raise you on stories of a place you've maybe never even seen, until it's just an outgrowth of your imagination. So we fly around and we spread out farther and farther, and in the meantime, in the back of our minds, we're constantly nostalgic for someone else's memories.

VIOLET

That's beautiful.

ARKADY

Yeah, here's the real beauty. It makes people stunningly easy to con.

VIOLET

Before, when you were pretending to be Captain Kay Grisham...you were using the Carmen Gambit on me.

ARKADY

Hey, don't feel bad. It really does work on anyone. Find something people already wanna believe and they'll do half your work for you. Nobody wants to think they're alone.

VIOLET

(Distinctly aware of how alone she feels right now) Yeah.

ARKADY

There's an opera version too, of *Carmen*? But for my money, it's overrated. Gimme *Die Rosenkavalier* any day, y'know?

VIOLET

Yeah, I actually don't know anything about opera. Where'd you learn--

ARKADY
Prison.

VIOLET
(Starts to laugh, realizes Arkady is not laughing. Oops. *Yikes.*) Um. Really.

ARKADY
(Not actually offended) Cresswin Landing used to be the biggest jail in the galaxy. Let's just say I've met a theater type or two.

VIOLET
Is that where you were a guard?

ARKADY
No. (Pause) Look, I'm sorry that it's me on the line.

VIOLET
It's okay. I mean, yeah, you lied to me when we met, a lot, and we don't get along, and apparently you've been to prison.

ARKADY
Look, about that--

VIOLET
Don't worry about it. Hey, if I can trust a purple space alien who fought on the other side of the war, I think I can wrap my mind around trusting you. And okay, you're a little intense but how much of your job is just standing behind the Captain and looking tough enough that people take her seriously?

SANA
(off-mic, clearly concentrating hard) Add it to your resume, Kady. Also: brace yourself because--

ARKADY
Tell me we are not going over that ramp.

SANA.
Sorry. (Car noises) Woo!

ARKADY
Violet, you need to go back out before it's suspicious, but we'll be there in under ten minutes, okay?

VIOLET
Uh-huh.

ARKADY
When you called, did you set up a private channel, so nobody can hear me but--

VIOLET

Yeah.

ARKADY

Good. Smart. How are you holding up?

VIOLET

I'm gonna get through this. Because if I don't...

No, sorry. I'm trying. I *am* trying.

ARKADY

(down to earth and comforting, strong shades of Kay Grisham) Hey. First the IGR blew up your shuttle, and then they blew up your ship, and you're still in one piece. I think we need to face the very real possibility that you are, as a person, just bad at dying. Like, embarrassingly bad. (Violet gives a short laugh that's more a release of tension than mirth.) I need to set some stuff up, but stay on the line, okay? I'll be back in your ear as soon as I can, and I'll walk you through every step of this if that's what it takes, Liu.

VIOLET

Thanks, Kay. (Pause) Oh god, I mean.

ARKADY

It's fine. It's fine, alright? Whatever you need. I will sing the entirety of Whiskey in the Jar if that's what it takes.

VIOLET

All six verses?

ARKADY

I learned seven. Talk to you soon.

VIOLET

(takes a deep breath)

(FX: Doors open, footsteps, doors close.)

GUARD

Anything?

VIOLET

(startled sound) Um. I found my purse, but no. No luck.

BRIAN

Yeah, we just got done sweeping the cockpit, the galley, the mess--nothing.

GUARD

Your ship papers check out, but the penalties for missing or improper ID are--well, think carefully.

BRIAN

Do you have any idea where else we could've possibly--

VIOLET

Hey, have we seen our IDs since we left the hotel?

BRIAN

(Immediately catching on) I--thought you said you packed them.

VIOLET

I said I packed *up*. You had the itinerary, I assumed--oh my god.

BRIAN

Listen, Harrison, if I could step out for a sec-- (To Violet) do you remember the name of that place where we stayed?

GUARD

Sorry, at this point technically you're suspects. I can't let you leave until this is resolved.

VIOLET

It's okay, we can call Hotel Virgo.

BRIAN

We--can?

VIOLET

Computer, outside call. Vi--Uh, hang on. (coughs) Computer, outside call-- (cough)

ARKADY

(Hurriedly) The name on your ID is Francesca Chen.

VIOLET

Francesca Chen to Hotel Virgo.

GRATUITOUSLY PLEASANT VOICE

Attempting connection.

Attempting connection.

Attempting connection.

GUARD

Sounds like you might have the wrong place.

VIOLET

Maybe with my cough, it didn't go through. Ahem. *Computer, outside call. Francesca Chen to Hotel Virgo.*

GRATUITOUSLY PLEASANT VOICE

Attempting conn--

KREJJH

Hello! (Attempting a human impression) You have reached the Hotel Virgo, and I am Stevie Gregor, working the front desk today. *It's a great day to stay the Hotel Virgo way!* Can I have your name, please, valued customer?

VIOLET

Hi, this is Francesca Chen and (coughs)

GUARD

Hey, what *did* you say your name was?

BRIAN

Sorry, I--Frankie, do you want some water?

ARKADY

(as Violet continues to cough) Wolfgang Foxhaven.

VIOLET

I'm fine. (to "Stevie") Wolfgang Foxhaven.

BRIAN

That's me.

KREJJH

How can I help you two?

VIOLET

Hey, Stevie, sorry, this is kind of an emergency: did your cleaning staff happen to find two universal IDs in room 406?

KREJJH

Hang on one moment. (off-mic) HEY! HEY BECKY! BECKY DID WE FIND ANY UNIVERSAL--TWO OF THEM? FOR FRANCESCA AND WOLFGANG? YEAH, I'LL TELL THEM. (on-mic) Becky says we've been trying to contact you kids all morning!

BRIAN

We've been having network trouble.

KREJJH

Gosh, that is just the worst! Can you send me your coordinates, please?

BRIAN

(typing sounds.) There you go.

KREJJH

Excellent, excellent, now you two sit tight and we will send our best courier to your location, pronto.

BRIAN

Thanks, Stevie.

KREJJH

Thank *you* for choosing Hotel Virgo! Stevie Gregor out.

VOICE

Connection ended.

BRIAN

Hey, Harrison, sorry about this, but if you don't mind waiting a couple more minutes, we can get this all sorted out, upforth, no paperwork required. So why don't I get you another cup of this shit excuse for tea, and--

GUARD

Hey, yeah, just let me radio to my superiors?

VIOLET

Sorry, what?

GUARD

We've gotta file these quarter-hourly reports on any open cases? Just your names and a quick physical description, it'll be cleared up the second we get those IDs.

ARKADY

Violet, you can't let him contact anyone. Procedure is to connect with customs to make sure you entered through a checkpoint. *You need to stall.*

GUARD

Wolfgang, when you get a chance, wouldn't mind more of this *paste* tea. (more professional) Ahem. Outside c--

VIOLET

PLEASE, NO!

GUARD

Ma'am?

VIOLET

Listen, I know there are procedures and rules but I *am begging you*, don't make that call.

GUARD

Ma'am, I need you to calm down.

BRIAN

Frankie, what are you--

VIOLET

Please, officer. He can't know I was here with Wolfgang!

GUARD

Who can't?

VIOLET

My husband.

GUARD

What?

VIOLET

We might as well tell him, Wolfgang. About our affair.

ARKADY

Smart. Keep it going.

VIOLET

I'm not ashamed. I love you, Wolfgang. I wish I could tell everyone on this whole miserable planet--

ARKADY

Okay, reel it in.

VIOLET

But your safety comes first. Officer, my husband has always hated Wolfgang. I don't know why.

BRIAN

He's from Echo-7, you know how they feel about the homeworld.

VIOLET

I am married to a very important person. If you send that report, and our names appear together--you know how easy it is to bribe people on the force. That information is gonna get back to my husband, and things will be very bad for us. For Wolfgang.

GUARD

Why'd you even marry an Echo-Sev?

VIOLET

I'm, um, not a very good judge of character. (Pause.) But I'm getting better.

GUARD

Off the record, I'd love to put one over on those smug Echo-7 bastards. But listen, I need this job, and if they find out I skipped a report on an unresolved case--

ARKADY (FX: Footsteps, maybe some outdoor noises vaguely in the background)
I can see the ship, I'm running up, we just need fifteen more seconds--

BRIAN

Please, brother. From one Crixser to another. It'd mean everything to me.

GUARD

It *is* not every day you get to help a kid from home. Tell you what--

(FX: radio crackle)

JUNIOR AGENT

Attention all units stationed along the perimeter of Capitol City. Be advised that three dangerous fugitives may be currently hiding in a freighter called the Rumor, docked near the Capitol Landfill. Be on the lookout for a young Dwarnian; a female biologist, five one, one hundred and forty pounds with a septum piercing; and a highly skilled linguist who answers to the name Brian Jeeter. If needed, shoot to kill.

VIOLET

Oh god.

GUARD

Hands in the air. Where's your accomplice?

ARKADY

(quietly) Violet, hold on.

VIOLET

How?

GUARD

Your accomplice! Where's the Dwarnian!

BRIAN

Listen, man, this is not--

GUARD

Save it, *Jeeter*. You are going to tell me where the Dwarnian is, or I'll shoot her first.

BRIAN

Let's not lose our heads here, dude, it's--

GUARD

(FX: gun cocks)

ARKADY

(whispering, tense) (There is an echo on this line as though Arkady is crawling through a very small space) Violet, I need you to do something for me. Keep your eyes on the guard, okay? Eyes on the guard. *Do not look up.* Arkady out.

GUARD

Where is the Dwarn--

(FX: The clank of a grate being kicked out from a ceiling tunnel and hitting the ground.)

(FX: Sounds of a scuffle. The clatter of the officer's gun being thrown across the floor.)

ARKADY

Jeeter, grab the gun!

GUARD

(FX: a radio being engaged) Outside call, Officer--

(FX: a different clatter--the radio being disengaged, then being thrown against the wall.)

ARKADY

Liu, the radio!

VIOLET

I--look out!

ARKADY

Right.

(FX: A thud--Arkady knocking his head against the ground.)

GUARD

(A sound of pain)

(FX: Another thud. It is a nasty sound.)

(Pause)

ARKADY

Everyone okay?

BRIAN

Did you just...kick out a grate and...*drop out of the ceiling like a bat?*

ARKADY

Benefit of a ship full of secret tunnels. Liu, you okay?

VIOLET

I...yeah. Think so?

SANA

(FX: incoming comm noise) Arkady?

ARKADY
We got him.

SANA
Brian, get Krejhh and open the airlock. We need to load up much, much faster than usual.

BRIAN
On it, captain! (Footsteps)

VIOLET
He's still breathing. Concussed pretty badly, though.

SANA
Can he ID the ship?

ARKADY
Well? Violet?

VIOLET
...we only showed him the fake papers?

SANA
We've got three alternates, we're fine.

ARKADY
He got Violet's new fake name though, right?

SANA
(in pain) ...I think we need to operate on the assumption those IDs have already been compromised.

ARKADY
Captain?

SANA
We'll leave him outside, call it in once we're safe in space. Can you guys carry him to the airlock?

ARKADY
Yes, Captain.

SANA
Good. Sa--

VOICE
Incoming call from: Ignatius Campbell. Incoming call from--

SANA
Computer...decline connection. Sana Tripathi out. (comm end noise)

VIOLET

He's not waking up.

ARKADY

Kinda the point, for now.

VIOLET

No, I mean--if he does come to, he is *not* gonna be okay. Like, ever again. (Freaked out) You hit him really, really hard.

ARKADY

...yeah. Listen, Liu--go head down to the cargo hold, help Jeeter load up. I've got this.

VIOLET

(Distant, still freaked out)...okay, that--sounds good. (Footsteps.)

ARKADY

(Lets out a long breath and then, quietly--) Well. Shit.

AGENT

End of transmission.

Please note: had local authorities on Elion immediately cooperated with Agent McCabe's original requests, it is very likely that at least three crew members would now be neutralized. Recommended that this case be evaluated for Priority 3 status. Recommended that an investigation be launched into the command structure on Elion.

For more on Kreijh, see file marked Brittony LeFever.

For more on Violet Liu, see file marked Cindy Chu.

For more on Brian Jeeter, see file marked Jamie Price.

Be advised we need to expose at least 17 more aliases for the fugitive known as Arkady Patel, not including Kay Grisham and Ishani Kanetkar.

Ignatius Campbell could be a pseudonym for several different forgers operating within the Telemachian underworld, including Alexander Cole or Jonathan Johnson.

Sana Tripathi confirmed as Rukhmani K. Desai, a major instigator of the Cresswin Uprising.

The name Ricky Q has been associated with the same event. However, an extensive search of Cresswin records show no prisoners named Richard, Patrick, Enrique, or Ricardo with Q anywhere in their initials. The individual in question may be a second-gen inmate, or, perhaps more likely, this may be another pseudonym.

This report has been transcribed by Ensign Best, with direction from Agent Clark. If you need to review a written version, please access procyonpodcasts.com. That's p-r-o-c-y-o-n podcasts dot com.

This is Agent Park, codename Apollo, thanking you for reviewing this report. Thanks to Junior Agent McCabe, codename Andrews, for their help as well. Additional thanks to Agent Bauman, Agent Cross, and Agent Shemaiah, and to the specialists at Procyon.

Officer Harrison's body was discovered at the Capitol Landfill with contusions on the back of his head and a cleanly broken neck. Harrison's partner, Officer Lamont, has been notified.

The one silver lining of this development is that, with Officer Harrison's death, the crew of the Rumor will lose both credibility and sympathy, should they attempt to go public. Thus, we may be able to proceed with somewhat less caution.

Thank you. Long live the Republic.