Space Bones

By Ann Chiappetta

The *Nine Lives* slipped past the *Hound*, engaging the warp drive and entering hyperspace.

Blood and bones,” snarled the *Hound*’s commander Akita, “Ensign, track that ship,”

“Arf, Captain,” she   barked, toenails tapping.

“Captain, the ship is headed for the Feline Space cluster,”

The Captain licked his canines.

“All dogs on deck, “Captain Akita howled.

He turned to his first officer, Commander Rottweiler,

“this could be a trick, be ready for anything,” he growled, shaking out his annoyance.

“Arf, Captain. red alert!” he snarled, a thick black toenail tapping the communication array.

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The stealthy pirate ship slowed as it entered the star cluster, the fur on the bridge relaxing after the harrowing chase.

“Don’t congratulate yourselves yet, pretties, that ship has our scent. Tux, employ the scent cloaking device. Tabby, set course for the Hair Ball sector, full light speed,” growled Captain Blackie, hissing his orders through needle sharp teeth.

“aye, Captain,” Tux and Tabby replied.

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“Report” snapped Captain Akita.

The ensign whined.

“Ensign, do I need to trot over to your station and read the report for you?”

“N-no, Captain,”

“Well?”

“We’ve lost them in the cluster,” she stammered, delicate, Whippet tail tucked between her legs.

The bridge quieted, Akita scratched an ear. He stared out the bridge window. He didn’t have a choice, he had to chase the other ship, it was his assignment and if he did not succeed all would be lost.

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Captain Blackie tracked the ship’s progress, claws kneading the seat. He had to reach the check point, the pride depending upon their success. Just a few more clicks and this would all be over. His mouth watered in anticipation. He could practically taste the reward of a fine, roasted breast of fowl, feminine company and the adoration of his world for delivering the precious cargo. He scanned the bridge reports and hissed. The cloaking pheromone gas wouldn’t last much longer. He made the calculations in his head, it would be close, too close. He flicked his tail. The captain of the *Hound* was dogged but not flexible.; they would be able to slip by unnoticed and once in *Cat Nip*’s orbit all would be well. He was counting on it.

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Commander Rottweiler raised a paw.

“Speak,” said Captain Akita.

“Sir, consider this: Captain Blackie is most likely counting on us to break off the pursuit once we reach the Hair Ball sector,”

“Yes, I’d read all the reports. What’s your point??”

“Well, Sir, it seems to me that we should think like a cat,”

The Captain swiveled his ears forward and as if on cue, the pack tilted their heads at an odd angle.

“Go on,”

Commander Rottweiler explained the plan.

“It’s the best plan we’ve got, it’s either this or going back with our tails tucked,” said the Captain. The pack yipped in agreement and scrambled to their posts. If it worked, thought Akita, he’d be able to retire and not slink away in defeat.

“Approaching the planet *Cat Nip* in one minute,” reported the ensign.

Sixty seconds later the star lines melted away and the *Hound* appeared above the planet.

“Mr. Doxy, take us to the lee side of the planet with sub-light thrusters, power down, then remain there until we detect the other ship,”

Agile paws piloted the ship and soon the deepness of space enveloped them.

“Steady, Mr. Doxy. Ensign, begin countdown the moment that ship drops from hyperspace,”

He swept the bridge with his best alpha expression,

“We’re on the prowl, Commander Rottweiler, is the tracking beam ready?”

“Arfirmative,”

“Let the hunt begin,”

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The *Nine Lives* shed the hyperspace star lines above the planet and Captain Blackie retracted his claws. He gave the command to the pilot to begin entering the atmosphere. Boris, a Russian blue hissed a warning,

“Captain, there is an anomaly orbiting the lee side of the planet,”

Blackie flattened his ears.

“We’ll be within scanner distance in 30 seconds,” Boris said, then counted down.

The ship nosed into the planet’s shadow and found nothing.

“Scan for the anomaly,” hissed Blackie, a bad feeling quivering his whiskers.

Then all hell broke loose. Every alarm went off, proximity alarms, tracking alarms, weapons arrays, and then the canine ion cannon blasted them into submission.

Too late, Captain Blackie realized the Hound was behind them, using the shadows to first drop below them, then attack from behind, just like Blackie had done a hundred times before. It was a pirating maneuver he didn’t believe a canine would or could employ. Being chased wasn’t usually so demeaning to Captain Blackie, he’d been chased before but this time it was infuriating—those space dogs used his own strategies against him. He vowed at once that if any of the Hound’s captain and pack ever trotted into his territory, he’s scratch out their eyes.

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Akita sat on the bridge, thinking. The rest of the pack had disembarked hours ago. He completed the reports but wasn’t ready to go, not yet. There was one last thing to do. Exiting the bridge, he trotted off to find the new captain of the ship. Commander Rottweiler stood at the observation deck, lost in the business of the spaceport. He turned when he smelled Akita’s scent.

“Captain,” he said Akita nodded and sat beside him, taking in the activities below.

“You did well today, Commander, I am proud to have served with you,”

“Served, Sir?”

Akita met his eyes, then dropped his gaze and settled down, forepaws outstretched, chest touching the floor.

“I’m retiring. You now have command, Captain,”

Rottweiler stood and shook, stretched and smiled, his tongue spilling out a gap between his teeth.

“It was an honor, Captain,”

Akita stood,

“Now that this is settled, let’s go eat until we puke,”

The two dogs turned, playfully walking beside one another from the ship.