

The Pampshifter: Chapter 19

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Gazing into the enclosed Petri dish that sat in the palm of her hand, Luna was by no means happy with the decision she was making. She may not have enjoyed the company of the crew Juventas much but that didn't mean she had any desire to do them in. However, if Mason was going to continue preventing her from escaping, then he left her with no choice.

"There we go. The path to the airlock is being cleared as we speak. Once Donnie and his pet goop wander inside, it's game over," said Mason, so confident in his plan that he was feeling a tad cocky. He sat back in the captain's chair and gently rested his arms on the armrest. In almost any other situation, he never would've dreamed of sitting in Ellis's chair. But as the interim captain of this vessel, it was almost expected of him, at least in his eyes.

Tragically, this left his back turned to Luna, gifting her with the perfect opportunity to enact her own, cruel plan. Tiptoeing across the cockpit, she arrived at the rear of the captain's chair with Mason none the wiser. Her heart rate ticked up to heights she'd never experienced before as she placed two hands on the Petri dish and hovered it over Mason's head. "I'm sorry, Mason but I'm not gonna end up like the others," she said, unscrewing the lid of the Petri dish and flipping it upside down to allow the creature's sample to descend onto Mason's head.

Poor Mason looked up just in time for the small bit of slime to drip directly onto his face. It didn't even register in his mind what the substance was until it started to move and form on his face. "AHHHHHHH! Get it off!" he shrieked as he instantly reached up to pry the goo from his body. Tragically, all this managed to do was let the creature spread to his hands as well, covering much of his upper half in a gooey prison. In a last-ditch effort to save himself, he reached for his knitting needles. He had no idea how they would help him in this situation but it was the only weapon he had in arms reach. Sadly, it was a wasted effort as the goo absorbed more and more of his body, causing him to drop his only line of salvation as the slime monster dug its growing tentacles into Mason's diaper.

Shaking as she backed away, Luna watched in horror as, to her knowledge, the only other non-infected person on the ship was done in by the slime's full-body takeover. Now believing she was on her own, she rushed to the cockpit's lone door before saying, "Mother! The ship's cockpit is compromised! Open the door!"

"NEGATIVE. THE CAPTAIN HAS ORDERED A DESIGNATED LOCKDOWN," responded Mother as anticipated.

Luna, however, was not about to take no for an answer. "The captain is also compromised! There is no other remaining crew! That makes me captain! Now open the fucking door!" she screamed, too fearful to look behind her at how Mason was developing as she slammed her fist against the door.

A moment passed before Mother responded, her voice sounding surprisingly solemn for an AI, "AFFIRMATIVE CAPTAIN. OPENING DOOR TO COCKPIT."

"Yes!" said Luna, scurrying out of the cockpit as soon as the door was open wide enough to squeeze through. She yelled for Mother again almost immediately after getting to the other side, "Seal the cockpit!"

"YES, CAPTAIN. SEALING COCKPIT DOOR."

Only turning around once she was a safe distance away, Luna watched the tail end of Mason's transformation as the door to the cockpit closed. With the danger no longer immediately present, she let out an exasperated breath and collapsed against the wall, choking back tears. "Snap out of it, girl," she said to herself, slapping her cheeks with both hands as she fought back against her rising emotions. After all, now wasn't the time for despair. Now was the time to move. Wiping the unformed tears from her eyes, she steeled her emotions and set off for the escape pod, carrying with her the heavy guilt of Mason's demise.

Peering around the corner of a long corridor, Meg silently signaled to Ellis that the coast was clear. Together, the pair moved slowly and stealthily, staying back to back all the while. "It's funny. This all reminds me of some of the missions the Federation used to send us on," quipped Ellis, keeping his voice down and his eyes up as he spoke.

"Even those didn't feel like nearly as much of a suicide mission as this scheme of yours," said Meg, ripping into her captain's makeshift plan.

Ellis could only shake his head and laugh at Meg's remark, knowing, well and good, that she was right. Unfortunately, it didn't matter how bad he knew his idea was. If he was going to rescue his crew from that monster's slimy clutches, this was the best and only option he could think of. "The way I see it, this creature acts like a parasite, right? Attaching itself to a host and taking over completely. If that's the case, then knocking out Donnie should be our highest priority. Without him, the goo will have no brain power to operate with, rendering it defenseless," he said, making a lot of big assumptions in his desperate attempt to regain control of his ship.

"No, I get that part. It's the whole airlock-knockout thing you thought up," replied Meg, taking more issue with the how and not the why, "It's already crazy enough to think we can lure it into the airlock using yourself as bait, but then you want to deprive the entire cabin of oxygen just to knock Donnie out. As far as far-fetched plans go, that's pretty out there."

Sighing as he pondered over everything that could go wrong with his plan, Ellis knew that now wasn't the time to balk. "That's why you're going to be on standby to resuscitate me when this is all over," he said, snickering at his own comment while Meg stared at her captain with mounting anxiety, "It's this or tossing Donnie, Roland, and that thing in space. I don't know about you but I'm willing to take any risk necessary to avoid that conclusion." He let his head

hang low, feeling the insane pressure of his position weighing down on him. Success or failure, everything rode on his shoulders.

“STANDBY! OPENING AND SEALING ALL DESIGNATED ENTRANCES,” said Mother, her voice suddenly appearing over the ship’s comm system. Neither Meg nor Ellis had any time to react before all of the doors around them started to shift.

Spotting the door ahead of them beginning to close, Ellis shouted “Run!” before grabbing Meg’s arm and pulling her forward. The crewmates spirited for the shuttering door, diving forward in hopes of clearing the entrance in time.

TO BE CONTINUED...