

One Man's Trash

Synopsis

CROFT and his girlfriend MARIA wake from stasis to discover their autopilot has failed and they have emerged from skipstream on a collision course with their vacation destination, the Truck Stop at the Center of the Universe. An emergency program from an unidentified woman saves them at the last instant, and their ship gets off with only a few scrapes.

Maria is terrified the incident will cost her hard-earned water trading business and/or land her in jail. Croft volunteers to take the heat in favor of keeping her in a good mood, since he spent his life savings on this romantic getaway in an attempt to salvage their deteriorating relationship.

Security meets them at the dock, but are there instead for two shady treasure hunters, who they warn to keep away from the alien technology inherited by the human owner when they found the station.

Croft lets Maria go ahead to a restaurant. He gives a coin and a story to the robot helping with the luggage, but is stopped on his way to the restaurant by a misogynistic dog alien, KAIZON, from whose ship Croft hears the woman crying. Croft discovers from another luggage bot that the woman is okay. Croft tips that bot as well with a coin and story. The bot rewards him by dropping a communication module, which Croft jury rigs to speak with the woman on the ship. She has a great sense of humor and they have a wonderful chat until his jury rig fries.

On his way to join Maria, he encounters a spindly bird alien named ECKLE, who accidentally and repeatedly punches him in the face due to instinctual reflex, sending him to the medical ward. Croft puts his ship mechanic skills to use and fixes a surgical bot while he's there, who gives him another communication module.

Croft tries first to catch up to Maria, only to discover she took Kaizon out for a joy ride in their space ship, which stokes his jealousy, made worse when Eckle claims that Kaizon is known for womanizing. Eckle offers to replace their autopilot in thanks for Croft not pressing assault charges, which Croft accepts.

Feeling lonely, Croft takes the communication module to a repair shop, where a helpful bot unexpectedly grants him access to a diagnostic unit. Croft rewards the bot with a coin and story, then talks to the mysterious woman. They agree to meet on her ship, despite Kaizon's visitor ban. The ship, a racer, is in need of repair. Croft discovers that the woman, garbed in robes that hide her features, is a chained prisoner aboard the ship. She isn't comfortable with helping herself, so Croft leaves her with a promise that if she ever is, he'll help.

He decides to retire, only to discover that unordered room service is waiting for him, along with the surprise of another communication module. The woman makes the strange request for Croft to name her. He thinks hard and comes up with Blossom, which suits her innocent nature. Blossom is too touched to speak and hangs up.

Maria returns soon after. Croft fills her in. She becomes unexpectedly jealous and attacks him with passion lovemaking, where it comes out that the reason she's been so focused on her business—and put their relationship in jeopardy—is because she's socially awkward and trying to provide for Croft the only way she knows how. She also calls him her husband by accident. Embarrassed, she flees the room, giving him much to think about.

On her way to confront Blossom, Maria encounters the head of security, who reports that her autopilot had been knocked out by an electromagnetic pulse in the skipstream, probably artificial, but was otherwise fine. They also observe the treasure hunters talking up a space traffic controller, though they don't know why. Maria continues to illegally board Kaizon's ship. She discovers that Blossom loves Kaizon but seems to push him away no matter what she does, and is at a loss. Maria can't see beyond her jealousy, however, and stops herself just before she bashes the girl's head in with a wrench. She drops it, however, and it unexpectedly clangs off the woman's head.

At the same time, Croft has dinner with Kaizon and learns that Blossom is a ship autopilot from a line of racers whose autopilots have a habit of committing suicide because they're too expensive to maintain and become terminally depressed when they can no longer race. He also admits that he can't afford to keep her anymore, so he came to the Truck Stop in a last-ditch effort to secure the water trading contract.

After learning her story—and discovering she isn't a threat to their relationship—Maria becomes as determined to help Blossom as Croft. She, Eckle, and Croft brainstorm a way to help and find that the water contract would pay far too little to fix Blossom. They're unexpectedly led to a private room where the luggage bot Croft had given a coin to awaits. To repay Croft's kindness to the artificial life forms on the station, the bot tips them off to the treasure hunter's real goal: an unclaimed alien repair base of unimaginable value, to which the bots know the coordinates.

They depart soon after: Croft piloting Blossom in case she breaks down, Maria and Kaizon in Maria's ship, while Eckle stays behind. Croft and Blossom arrive first and find an asteroid-sized mass surrounded by small objects, along with a beaten up, derelict ship. They use the ship to determine the asteroid's crushing defenses. Before Maria and Kaizon arrive, enemies appear out of nowhere an open fire, forcing Blossom to use her superior maneuverability to get past the crushing defenses and wrecks herself in the process.

Inside the alien base, Croft gets Blossom's body and mind back online. Blossom becomes terminally depressed when she sees the state of her ship—herself, but he snaps her out of it, promising to work himself to the bone to get her flying again. They disable the base defenses, allowing Maria and Kaizon to land. Kaizon offers to be Croft's lifelong slave if he will only fix Blossom.

A surprise energy shot blows off Blossom's arm. Croft fears the treasure hunters have finally caught up with them, but discovers Eckle is not only the shooter, but a treasure hunter himself who intentionally knocked out their autopilot and sent them on a collision course with the Truck Stop. Kaizon sacrifices his life to save Blossom. Blossom goes into a rage and attacks Eckle. She disarms him, but her safety protocols prevent her from finishing him off, so Croft rushes in and pays the birdman back with a much-earned punch in the face.

They discover Kaizon isn't quite dead and load him on the ship. Blossom becomes hysterical, so Croft reluctantly shuts her down. Before they depart for the Truck Stop, Croft proposes to Maria.

Over a year later, a huge party is thrown on the alien repair base, which Croft, Maria, Kaizon, and Blossom have brought back into operation. The luggage bot has the unprecedented honor to speak, congratulates them on their marriage, then christens Blossom's ship, reconstructed using the alien technology.

Overwhelmed with joy, Blossom launches herself toward the racer—her body—where her new life awaits.