

EVE Online: Crossfire

A Short Story
By Daniel Bastion

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Caldari Space

The Forge region

Etsala Constellation

Kiainti

Planet IX - Moon 8 - Prompt Delivery Storage

“I can't do this, and I can't stay here!” Abby said in a desperate tone.

The words from four years ago echoed in Jillian's memory with a vivid, clear intensity. She could still see Abby storm out of her quarters with her sun fire colored hair. Jillian fleetingly thought the stylist did a great job matching the color with Abby's personality. The young woman was home visiting after graduation, but she had no interest in being part of the family business.

Jillian was three years older than Abby, and she had decided to reject the numerous offers made to her from some very profitable companies. Instead she returned home to take

over the family transport business because her father decided he wanted to retire. She did not like being told what to do by anyone, and running her own business was the only solution.

After Jillian's mother died, her father could not handle the stress of the company anymore, and he decided to buy some land and settle on the seventh planet in the solar system. He was wealthy from his years in business, and he built himself a nice house to settle down in with plenty of extra room for the girls to come visit. The family company was on the threshold of becoming something more if managed successfully.

Jillian made her own offer to her younger sister a few days prior to their argument. Abby had refused, and the two sisters had exchanged some harsh comments. The truth was Jillian needed her sister because the company was growing faster than she could handle alone. Abby left angry, and Jillian was just as infuriated. She had flung herself on the couch and screamed into a pillow.

Four years later, the memory of that argument made Jillian feel empty inside. The hallway where she stood was very cold, and Jillian buttoned her black coat in response. Slipping her hands into her pockets she gazed through the thick pane of glass that separated her from Abby. A wave of remorse seeped into Jillian's heart over the arguments that had followed the first. It had gotten so bad that the two siblings had stopped talking completely.

Tears welled up in Jillian's eyes as she looked at her sister, and she pressed a hand to the cold, smooth surface of the window. Jillian had accused Abby of being self-centered and selfish, but Jillian realized that she was the one who was wrong. Abby was simply following her dreams, and Jillian was

the one who was selfish. She had meant to contact Abby, but time had gotten away from her meeting all the demands in her life. Or perhaps her stubbornness and pride kept her from making the transmission.

Sisters fight, but she never imagined they might not get the chance to set things right again. As Jillian looked at her sister through the transparent barrier, tears began to roll down her cheeks as her heart ached. She felt like she had let Abby down.

Abby lay motionless in a bed with white sheets. Her head was wrapped in white gauze that came down over her right eye, and she was on life support. The right side of her body had been terribly burned. She was unresponsive, and the doctors did not know the cause. The rest of her was covered in bruises, stitched lacerations, and her left leg had been amputated above the knee. The doctor had said that based on the brain scans they had done, Abby had severe, extensive brain damage, and she would require care for the rest of her life if she survived.

Even worse, there were law enforcement officers assigned to guard her room, and they would not let anyone inside to be with her. They told Jillian they were there to protect Abby. Other than that, they could not provide any further information on a classified case. Frustration and grief had clouded Jillian's judgment, and she had been escorted out of the hospital by security when she had tried to force her way into her sister's room.

As visiting hours were over, Jillian dropped her hand from the glass and slowly made her way down the stark hallway to the nearest lift. Her senses were assaulted by images of intensive care patients with various problems, the smell of acrid

cleaning agents, and the putrid odor of human waste. She came to the hospital late in the evening everyday hoping for any improvement in Abby's condition.

Waiting for the elevator, Jillian glanced down the hall back toward Abby's window. A frown touched her features. A nurse had stopped and was cleaning the window where her hand had touched, erasing any evidence of her visit. The nurse gave her a dirty look as she finished and moved on. Jillian sighed softly and shook her head.

Jillian took the elevator to the parking garage and disembarked on her level. As she approached her station transport, she pressed her hand to the access pad. The blue door of the vehicle slowly opened for her, and the vehicle powered on with the lights inside slowly increasing to their maximum setting.

“Excuse me?” a man's voice said from behind her.

Jillian was about to get into the transport and jumped at the sound. She turned quickly with a startled expression on her face. Being so focused on her thoughts, she was completely unaware of her surroundings.

“I'm sorry,” the man said apologetically with a raised hand, palm open. “I didn't mean to scare you.”

Jillian shook her head a little composing herself. “It's okay. I wasn't paying attention.” The tall man was standing several paces away, so it was enough distance to keep Jillian from feeling uncomfortable. He was also wearing a very professional, dark gray suit and tie. He was clean shaven, and his dark blond hair was trimmed close. He was holding a matching jacket draped over his forearm.

The woman looked down at herself a moment feeling under dressed. She was wearing her black boots, dark work pants with various pockets, and a light v-neck work shirt under her coat. It was ship inspection day earlier for her small fleet of transports, and she never went on inspections dressed like an executive.

Jillian took a breath and drew herself up to her full height and command posture. She looked the man in the eyes even if she was still looking up at him being shorter. “Can I help you with something?” she asked.

The man flashed a white smile, “Yes. You are Jillian Oshindo?” His friendly demeanor and tone of voice was meant to help her feel at ease.

Jillian perked up an eyebrow. “I am... unless you are some kind of news reporter.” The fact that her sister was in the hospital might have drawn the attention of the local press. She looked tired. It had been a long day, and her sister was hovering near death.

The man shook his head glancing to his left and right for a moment. “Not a news man,” he said with an easy chuckle. He returned his gaze to her, and slipped his free hand into his jacket as if reaching into his inside coat pocket for a business card. Jillian had seen the motion hundreds of times dealing with other executives. She was relaxed until a gun was pointed right at her face.

Jillian slammed into the side of her transport as she tried to back away. Her arms moving to each side, her palms searched the smooth, cold metal for anything she might use to protect herself. Her breath caught in her throat as fear welled up inside of her, and her eyes were wide with fright. The gun

appeared massive with the silencer attached to the end of its dark barrel.

The man moved forward, dropping his jacket to the gray pavement, and the end of the gun hovered near her forehead. The man's white smile and blue eyes took on a sinister appearance. "Take a breath," he ordered quietly.

Jillian's wide eyes were unblinking, and she was holding her breath.

The man said it again, "Take a breath." He spoke with a very soothing, relaxed tone the second time. He nodded his head. "Yes?"

Jillian nodded a little, and drew in a fast breath through her nose.

"Now, let it out through your mouth," he whispered gently, but with an edge to his voice. He was nodding again.

Jillian nodded slightly and slowly let out the breath through barely open lips. The man's eyes drifted to them as she did so.

"Good," he said, "now, you are going to keep doing that and relax. Okay Jillian?"

Jillian nodded, "Okay," she managed to say as she forced herself to keep breathing.

"All we're going to do is talk," the man said. He gave her another friendly smile. "Do you understand Jillian? That is all we're going to do."

"Okay," Jillian said in her stressed voice.

"Quietly," the man said in his calm, threatening manner.

The frightened woman nodded. The two stood in silence as the man made breathing gestures for her to

follow. She breathed in and then let it out slowly through her mouth several times.

“Nice and relaxed...” the man murmured. He brought the gun down and let the edge of the silencer rest lightly against her lower lip. “You’re not going to scream.” he said soothingly.

Jillian shook her head once, her lower lip sliding slowly along barrel’s edge as she did so.

“Good,” he said. They stood there a few, long moments as the man gazed into her eyes in a searching manner. Then he slowly lowered the gun barrel until it rested against his leg. “Pardon my intimidating manners,” he continued, “I needed to get your attention... and submission.”

“What do you want?” Jillian asked, her voice tight with trepidation.

“I don’t want to shoot you,” he answered with a friendly smile, but it did not look friendly at all to Jillian. “The people I work for are the ones who put your sister in that hospital bed,” he said flatly.

“What?” Jillian said in an angry whisper her eyes lighting up with fiery emotion.

The man raised the gun and rested the silencer’s end against her lower belly. She looked down for a moment. “Ah... a streak of defiance,” he said, “very good.”

The woman gritted her teeth, narrowed her eyes, anger and fear blending within her gut.

“Abby didn’t do her job, she didn’t finish her assignment, and in our organization... if you don’t finish the assignment you are worthless,” the man continued. “Understand?”

Jillian nodded slowly, confusion and multiple questions showing in her eyes.

“You have a choice to make,” he explained. “You can die right here, which I don’t prefer. Or you can finish your sister’s job so she doesn’t die in that bed. I promise you we will finish what we started if you don’t cooperate.”

Fear won out over anger inside Jillian, and she began to tremble from the adrenaline pumping in her veins.

“You can choose for you both to live. Or you can choose poorly.” The man appeared to finish his proposal and stood quietly waiting for her reply.

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Jillian returned to her quarters with a data chip in hand. After getting her obvious answer, the man walked off into the shadows of the garage. If Jillian had been tired, she was completely exhausted when she arrived home, and her mind was roiling with the knowledge Abby had gotten mixed up with some really bad people. She could barely get her mind around it.

Moving to her communication system, she was about to make her nightly call to their father to update him on Abby’s status. Her hand stopped and hovered above the access console. Sighing heavily she turned away and walked into her bedroom. There was no change, and she hated the despair she saw in her father’s eyes.

Jillian dropped her black coat on a chair, and she sat on the edge of the wide bed pulling off her boots. Standing up she loosened her belt, unbuttoned her pants, and slowly slid them

down. Tossing them on the chair, she walked to some drawers built into the wall. Reaching beneath her shirt, she unclasped her black bra, let the straps slide down from her shoulders, pulled one arm free then the other, and dropped the garment on the top of the drawers.

Turning she noticed her image in the full mirror, walking over to it, she ran a hand through her shoulder length, brown hair barely conscious of her actions. Her hair was parted on one side, and her blue eyes glimmered with the evidence of deep emotions. Her light, thin v-neck held her unbound breasts with its soft fabric, and her black, boy shorts hugged her hips. Looking into her own eyes, the emotions erupted. She fell to her knees trembling as the tears fell freely, and in the loneliness of her quarters she sobbed heavily.

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The trip to Mastakomon was uneventful, and Jillian docked safely with the Joint Harvesting Food Packaging station in orbit above planet seven. Securing her Condor class vessel took a few minutes, and when she completed her shut down procedures she unbuckled from her flight seat. She hoped this would be a quick visit. She did not care for the Amarr attitude. They seemed arrogant to her, and their self-righteous, religious superiority only served to highlight their false piety.

Jillian stood, stretched, and headed aft to prep the ship to accept cargo. She wore her sealed, space ready black and gray full body flight suit integrated with her flight helmet, gloves,

and boots. Pausing at a storage locker she put on her gun belt grumbling to herself.

As she opened the air locks to her small cargo bay, she went over the assignment in her head. It was a simple job. Pick up a container in the designated station in Mastakomon as Abby Oshindo and deliver it to specific coordinates in Kainti. Jillian was unsettled because the other parameters were to avoid law enforcement, avoid customs, and protect the cargo. Thus Jillian chose a ship for speed, agility, and appropriate equipment for smuggling.

Sighing heavily when she saw that her cargo was not waiting on the dock, she leaned against the threshold and waited. The station had alerted the appropriate people that she was on approach, but they were not on time. Another quarter hour passed until the docking bay door opened. A team of two in dark gold uniforms entered with an anti-gravity sled carrying a container. The man pushed the sled up the ramp and nodded to her as he passed.

The other was a woman carrying an electronic inventory pad. She walked up to her as the man loaded her cargo. “Good day,” she said with her Amarrian accent. Her face reflected in Jillian’s visor as she looked her over.

“Hello,” Jillian said. Her voice had an electronic quality being routed through her helmet comm system.

“One small, secure container to be picked up by Abby Oshindo,” the woman said reading off the pad obviously bored of her tedious routine.

Jillian nodded. “That’s me,” she said.

“Verify identity please.”

Jillian took the pad. Abby's picture and credential verification was showing. She carefully entered her sister's personal code and waited. A moment passed and the verification processed successfully. Jillian sighed inwardly in relief as she handed the pad back to the dock worker.

"Have a pleasant day," she said in a flat, uncaring tone. The man quickly unloaded the cargo and walked back down the cargo access ramp with the sled. They both left without another word.

Jillian looked around the small, station cargo bay a moment. It made her feel lonely again in its glorious emptiness. Closing the cargo bay access doors, she returned to her flight deck. Strapping in she prepped her ship for launch.

"Station flight control, this is Flight Officer Oshindo aboard the Condor class frigate, Nightstar. Permission to undock?" Jillian waited patiently as the seconds ticked by on her chronometer.

"Permission granted." The stuffy voice of the Amarr flight controller responded leisurely three minutes later.

Jillian rolled her eyes and fired her navigation thrusters. Her sleek craft lifted and joined the other ships undocking from the station. As soon as she was in the clear she kicked her speed to maximum and shot out into the emptiness of space. She rolled and weaved a bit feeling the freedom of her vessel around her.

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The trip home was quiet, and Jillian was extra careful to avoid direct travel paths as she made her way to each

stargate. She would find her spot just within scan range and wait patiently for a number of craft to be present before warping to each destination. Plummeting into the depths of a highly energized gate's wormhole always made her feel squished and a tad nauseated until she entered the tunnel connecting her to the next star system.

When she reached the Kainti system she took a deep breath in relief. Smiling a little, she accessed her navigation console, keyed in the coordinates given to her, aligned, and engaged her warp engines. The warp tunnel opened for her and she plunged into the depths of the system below and away from the sun. She traveled at maximum warp for a number of seconds before her computer brought down her warp field.

Jillian's ship came to a stop exactly where she was supposed to be, and she gazed out ahead at a space complex. There were numerous structures, debris, and ships. Some were docked and others were coming and going just like her.

Her comm console notified her there was an incoming transmission. Reaching over, she pressed the screen to open a channel. A gruff voice spoke, "What's your business?" Short and to the point.

Remembering her instructions, she thought about the end line contact. "I'm here to meet with Sunder." Jillian rubbed her gloved hands together a moment.

"About what?" the man asked.

"A delivery," she said and gave her authorization code included in her mission data. The comm went silent.

"Approved," he said unmuting the comm channel. You are clear to approach docking airlock six." Then the channel was cut without waiting for a reply.

“Perhaps you need to learn some manners?” Jillian muttered as she increased speed and set her destination. The main space complex was multiple, mobile habitats interconnected to create a larger unit. There were all kinds of other structures as well for different purposes. The guns that were locked on to her ship and tracking her approach made her throat tighten up slightly. Several high-powered lights burned in the darkness of space, and there were a multitude of operation lights and hundreds of view ports glowing with internal light.

A docking, tractor beam locked on to her frigate when she was within ten meters, so she cut her engines. The beam was weak, so any real resistance would have broken its hold. For a moment, Jillian thought about escape, but her desire to keep her sister and herself safe kept her on course. The beam brought her in automatically, and she listened to the sounds of docking as the air locks came together and sealed. Unbuckling she returned her side arm to its holster and headed to the airlock. She released the locks and the doors slowly slid open.

Standing at the interior airlock, a young woman with multi colored hair appeared to be Jillian's welcome. The majority of her hair was black with purple high lights and a long purple stripe in the front flowing to the woman's left. “Hi!” she said with a bright smile. “Welcome to Kia-Sigma Station. I'm Vel.”

“Hello,” Jillian said in as much of a relaxed tone as she could fake. The woman looked over Jillian's reflective visor. Vel was wearing a blue and white outfit, very short skirt, and her midriff was visible. There were also shiny fragments of

what appeared to be metal entwined in the fabric of the garment.

“Can I help you with that?” Vel asked motioning to Jillian’s helmet.

The pilot nodded. “Please,” Jillian said, “I can always do it myself, but helping hands make it easier.”

Vel smiled. “Sure, I’m happy to help” she said as Jillian unfastened her helmet, and a quarter turn to the right the internal pressure released making a quick hissing sound as the atmospheres inside and outside equalized. Vel helped Jillian slip the helmet off her head. “Oh wow!” she said sweetly. “You’re pretty.”

Jillian perked an eyebrow and a slight smile touched her lips. “Thanks,” she said a little awkwardly. Taking her helmet, she stored it in the air lock storage locker, and loosened her hair and ran her fingers through it to shake it out after being held together to wear her helmet.

“I was told to take you to Sunder,” Vel said as she turned to lead Jillian down the corridor.

“Yes, that is correct,” Jillian said as she followed. “I have a delivery.”

“Right this way,” Vel said. The two walked along the habitat corridors until they came to a set of metal, double doors. There were numerous people in all kinds of different outfits and conversations as they made their way to the destination. It was a festive atmosphere despite the low lighting. Jillian did enjoy the indirect lights. It was obvious to the new visitor that people were drinking heavily, imbibing exotic drugs in various ways, looking for the pleasures of the flesh, and having a great time doing it. Jillian was not a

novice attendee to such establishments, but she had never seen it on such a large scale.

The double doors slid open and the heavy bass of the electronic dance music flowed over her. The multi-level dance floor before her was massive. The fog and smoke rolled outward like a carpet welcoming the new arrival, and the light show was incredible. Everywhere she looked people were dancing and having a great time. Numerous men and women were half naked, and if there was any thought of modesty it was lost in the haze of mind altering influences. The bars were full, and there were massive windows letting in a breath taking view of space with its darkness and burning stars.

Vel led the way through the crowds and took Jillian's hand to make sure she did not lose her. Jillian began to smile as she followed feeling the music pulse deep inside of her, and a sense of euphoria began to slip into her awareness. She wanted to dance. Her guide led her up several levels and finally to a particular group of people that were extremely well dressed. Vel approached one woman and tapped her on the shoulder since she was facing away from them.

“Sunder!” Vel yelled glancing at Jillian and thumbing toward the woman. She was wearing a red blouse made of thin cloth that flowed down to a black skirt. It was cut low in the back, and Jillian could see the distinct cybernetic, round implants of a capsuleer. She was holding a half full wine glass in her left hand. Her long tanned legs were toned, and she wore simple flats that matched her outfit. The woman's hair was long, had multiple braids, and was a red color with orange, yellow, and blond highlights that flowed downward

until their was no red at the ends. The words ‘sun fire’ echoed through Jillian's mind.

Sunder turned and looked at Vel, then glanced at Jillian as her guide motioned toward her. Sunder's eyes met Jillian's and the two women's faces registered sudden surprise mixed with shock. Jillian's mind reeled, stunned by the woman before her. Sunder was the exact image of Jillian's sister Abby. There was no mistake in Jillian's mind, and her mouth hung open in astonishment. The two stared at one another for a number of seconds with Vel glancing between the two looking confused.

Sunder quickly regained her composure and stepped forward taking Jillian's arm in her hand. Even though she moved with purpose and urgency, she gently pulled Jillian through the crowd heading toward a door. Vel hurried behind them holding the wine glass Sunder had handed her. Jillian did her best to keep up with Sunder, but she was having a hard time processing the situation. Slapping the door controls, they slid open. Sunder hurried Jillian inside and thundered to the occupants of the small room to “Get out!” When the two men and three women quickly departed, she closed the door leaving Vel just outside looking even more confused.

“Jillian!” Sunder said in the quiet room as she took Jillian's shoulders in her hands. “What are you doing here?” There was surprise, astonishment, and trepidation in her voice.

Jillian tried to shake her head, and her words were hard to get out. “You... hospital... how... are you here? How? I don't... understand. Who are you?”

“Jillian, it's me Abby,” Sunder said trying to calm her voice.

Jillian shook her head and tried to pull away. “No... Abby is in the hospital.”

Something seemed to fall into place in Sunder's eyes and fear filled them. “Jillian,” she said with complete calm. “For the next few minutes, I need you to put aside everything you are thinking and trust me as your sister, Abby. Please... can you do that?”

The fear and calmness in Sunder's voice was like a splash of cold water in Jillian's mind. It took a couple of moments, but Jillian nodded. She had seen that look before from her sister.

“Come on,” Sunder said with urgency, “we have to get out of here.” Opening the door back to the dance party Sunder grabbed Vel's arm and dragged her inside and closed it. Then she turned, moved to the other door in the room and opened it. “No questions Vel. Bring her and come on! This way,” She said hurrying out.

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Jillian sat at a viewport of Sunder's Raptor and looked at the new, very bright, massive burning yellow star in the heavens. She felt curious about it somewhere in her dazed mind. The chemical high from inhaling the various intoxicants back at Kia-Sigma Station was powerful and very arousing. But, it was slowly wearing off. The haze of the escape, coming on board, helping Sunder hurriedly strip down, watching her connect and enter her pod, and being hurried to a flight seat and strapped in by Vel was a murky flash in her memory.

As the Raptor launched and Sunder sped away from the station, Jillian could see her Condor where she had left it. Then a fleet of ships dropped out of warp in the distance. “Guristas incoming,” Sunder said calmly over the ship’s internal comm system. Almost immediately, Jillian’s ship lit up into a tiny sun whose fire erupted violently. The churning, burning blast wave engulfed the station, incinerating everything. Jillian had to look away or be blinded by the nuclear fire.

The energy wave from the explosions was quickly approaching the ship. “Warping now,” Sunder said and the scene of fire and death disappeared as the ship streaked away into the black leaving its fading footprint. The warp tunnel swirled and bent space around them as they accelerated to safety. Vel was weeping softly when Jillian closed her eyes.

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“Special Agent Abby Oshindo, this operation has been completely compromised.” Captain Welthar bitched loudly in front of the classified Caldari Navy review board inside a low lit, stark conference room. “When did you realize your cover had been blown?” he demanded.

Abby’s eyes were cold and calculating. “When I saw my sister,” she said with honesty, “and I didn’t have any indication before that moment.”

“None at all?” he demanded again.

“None,” Abby said softly with a tone of finality.

Captain Lon shook her head at the end of the exchange. “Over a year of work lost,” she said sadly. Her Caldari Navy uniform was pristine, starched, and perfect. “I’m deeply

troubled that one of your clones remained alive long enough to be returned to your family.”

Abby nodded looking down at her note pad for a moment. She looked back up. “I can only conclude someone tampered with my pod's cloning system so that the nanotoxin would not be injected or effective at pod destruction. I know there was a breach, but the pod must have held together long enough for them to capture it. I examined my clone with a team of doctors, and the transneural burning scanner functioned correctly.”

“Is it true there was a fake security presence at the hospital to keep everyone away?” the fourth Captain on the review board asked. “And that your cybernetic systems had been completely removed to conceal that you had undergone the capsuleer initiation procedure?”

Abby nodded to the question. “That is correct. They wanted to keep that fact hidden from any medical personnel that examined my clone's body. That would have created numerous questions and drawn unwanted attention to the case.”

“Explain to us what your analysis has revealed about the involvement of your sister... Jillian Oshindo,” Captain Lon said.

“My assessment is that the Guristas were threatened by the activities and progress of our target organization. As they were beginning to cut into the profits coming from the constellation, the Guristas must have begun to plot a way to destroy the leadership. Somehow my cover was compromised. They captured my discarded clone, and used it to coerce my sister into delivering an explosive nuclear device to Kia-Sigma Station without her knowledge. In addition to killing the current leadership, they wanted to kill me as well. Being

compromised, I can only conclude they wanted retribution for my activities undermining the criminal underworld. So, they sent Jillian to die with me. She was simply an innocent victim caught in the crossfire.”

About the Author

Daniel Bastion has a family and works in a non-literary career field. He has a lot of different interests and passions including fantasy, science fiction, gaming, reading, and writing.

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