

EVE Online: Touch the Stars

A Short Story
By Daniel Bastion

EVE Online: Touch the Stars

Caldari Space

The Forge region

Etsala Constellation

Walvalin

[Citadel Identification Redacted]

Banging against the locked doors behind him caused a muffled thumping that made his stomach heave within his abdomen. The dense, metallic doors with their thick transparent panels held back the inevitable resistance he knew would try to thwart him. Glancing that direction for a moment, he could feel drops of sweat rolling down his neck from his hair line at the back of his head. Several security personnel stared at him across the barrier, their mouths shouting as one slammed the bottom of his fist against the transparent material. Their words were nothing more than silence as the sound of their voices did not penetrate the sealed chamber.

Turning away from the locked entrance, the man quickly pushed the antigravity sled to one of the medical type beds in the long, dark room. Red light shown down from above, and several dark green lights flickered from the equipment connected to each station. The man moved around the sled, hovering over the long, rectangular cargo container looking over the electronic display. His earpiece snapped on.

“Security detected me. They are moving to counter my intrusion,” a deep voice said. “I am not sure how long I can keep them occupied.”

“I just need a few more minutes,” Miriah said with tension pulling his voice taut. “Hold them off. Please.” His last word spoken with desperation.

“I am doing my best,” the voice replied.

“Initiate retrieval,” Miriah said as he entered his codes to open the container. He could hear the station’s systems in the room powering up from standby.

“Retrieval in progress,” Miriah’s computer slicer reported. The man, known as Goshin on the other end of his comm device, was highly recommended for his skills.

A wide, floor hatch to Miriah’s left, at the head of the bed, slid open suddenly as a yellow alert light set in the ceiling above began to flash.

“Caution. Storage tube, serial number three-two-seven-two-nine-one alpha arriving,” a computerized female voice announced with precise pronunciation. “Stand clear of hazardous area.” The control panels connected to the bed sparked to life with an abundance of data scrolling across their screens.

The clear storage tube slid upward into place, and a dim, dark green light above it switched on. Miriah’s brown eyes

misted over with emotion as he paused in his work and looked that direction for a few moments. He ran a hand through his light-colored hair, peppered with gray, and wiped the sweat from his forehead. Drying his hand on his dark pant leg he returned his attention to opening the container. The sound of access being granted chirped from the control panel, the panel lit up green, and the container's lid slid open.

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Caldari Space
The Forge region
Etsala Constellation
Kiainti
Planet X

10 years in the past...

Stars burned bright in the distance among a vast blackness touched with various colors of spacial detail. Massive clouds of gas and stellar dust, illuminated by the distant fires of solar activity, could be seen from the huge window aboard ship. A nearby planet with blue oceans and white clouds reflected the golden light of the system's own burning nuclear furnace.

"It's so pretty," the seven year old girl in Miriah's arms said as she wiggled to get down. The big man gently set his daughter's feet on the deck and watched as she ran to the window. Her small hands pressed against the transparent surface as she stared with wide eyes outside. "I want to touch the stars," she said in her innocent, sweet voice. Her simple blue dress brought

out the azure color of her eyes, and her blond ponytail kept most of her hair pulled back out of her face.

Miriah walked over next to her and knelt on one knee looking at her. The sight of her smile and eyes filled with wonder touched his heart. “One day Arissa, if you work real hard, you’ll be able to fulfill all of your dreams,” he said, “but, you should know that the stars are really hot, so it might be a little difficult to touch them.” The big man chuckled as he caressed her back lightly.

“They sparkle like diamonds,” she said. “I want to catch one and wear it on a necklace!” She looked over at him and grinned. “Can I do that?”

Her father shrugged a little. “When you fly to them, they are really big,” he answered pointing toward the burning orb at the heart of their current solar system. “But, I’ll see what I can do,” he offered.

Arissa laughed appearing delighted by his response. Then she patted his bearded face with both hands. “I love you, daddy,” she said. Turning back toward the window, she gazed outside once more.

“Maybe, we can fly real close and catch a spark for her,” a man’s voice said over the ship’s internal communication system. The pod pilot connected to the vessel went by the name Sokoth, and he invited Miriah to bring his daughter along on their short journey to pick up some supplies from a planetary colony far below them on the planet. The ship was approaching a launched container, and the ship’s crew prepared to receive the shipment.

Miriah chuckled, glancing around the observation deck of the second-generation Badger class cargo ship. “Much appreciated, captain,” he said.

“You’re welcome,” Sokoth replied, “we’ll do that soon, Arissa. You’ll get to see the star in this system up close.”

The little girl clapped her hands and jumped a few times in excitement. She ran to the next window in the room and looked outside once again, softly singing to herself. Miriah smiled hearing the familiar melody his wife sang to her most nights before bed as he stood up. His family lived on one of the space stations in the system, but their small quarters were deep inside the interior. They did not have an exterior window, so Arissa did not get to see the stars as often as she liked.

Miriah worked as a systems technician for Sokoth on his vessels, and he was one of his regular crew members. Having gotten to know him over a couple of years, Miriah was pleased to see the pod pilot took an interest in his team. Most did not. On safe, routine missions to pick up cargo, the pilot often made an effort to invite crew members’ families along to experience and see life aboard ship for a day or two. It was beneficial on multiple levels, and it improved morale.

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“Cargo retrieval complete,” Sokoth said, informing his crew over general comms. “Great job everyone. We’ll be taking the scenic route on the way back to station. Prepare for warp.” The pod pilot watched through interior cameras as his crew secured the valuable planetary materials. Turning his attention to plotting his route across the system, he decided on the perfect

spot to visit the system's star. A solar filament with a majestic prominence would be on full display.

Crew members on the bridge settled into their duty seats and buckled in preparing to get underway. Sokoth's attention turned to the flashes on the solar ecliptic. Surprise touched him as he did not expect anyone to arrive in their vicinity. And he did not expect the two incoming ships to land so close. Preparing to warp, the badger slowly aligned toward the sun as he brought his ship's active defensive modules online out of standard practice. Energy flowed outward, rippling along his shield's perimeter, and interior defense fields came online.

The pod pilot was even more surprised when the two Cormorant class destroyers locked on to his ship. It happened so fast, Sokoth did not have much time to react due to his internal denial. Opening a comm channel he was about to question their intent when they opened fire. A warp drive initiation failure message flashed through his mind as his navigation computer was assaulted and failed. The two attackers poured charge after charge into his shields from their blasters as they orbited close enough for him to see them track his ship.

Alarms went off as his shields buckled under the strain, and the blaster fire tore into the badger's armor. Debris and pieces of glowing hot metal erupted from the transport as Sokoth engaged his sub-light engines, finally recovering from his inaction. The wounded ship lurched forward having come to a halt once warp initiation failed, its engines breathing blue white flames. Smoke and fire belched from the slow moving ship as the hull screamed with punctures. Sokoth could feel his ship coming apart, could hear the cries of his crew, and the agony of helpless vulnerability.

Activating his only chance for survival, a wave of multispectral, electronic energy burst from the burning ship. Smashing into the relentless attackers, Sokoth felt a sudden relief as their weapon locks dropped unexpectedly. Initiating his warp drive once more, the transport ship seemed to hesitate a long moment as his warp field bent space around them.

Just as his ship's engines fired, he saw flashes on the ecliptic as a Concord patrol warped into the fray. Catching just a snippet of their communication on the criminality of the attack, his ship streaked toward the system's sun. Though with a lack of energy capacity, the transport fell out of warp far before it reached the intended destination. Fire and smoke from the burning atmosphere leaking from the ship's interior could be clearly seen venting into space.

"Emergency condition critical," Sokoth said over general comms, his voice a calming sound in the chaos and disorienting haze of surviving combat. "Initiate emergency damage control procedures. Fire teams proceed to your designated areas. Activating repair systems. Verifying all containment fields." The pod pilot responded much faster than a human crew could on their own as the damage to his ship poured into his mind through his neural interface. Somewhere in his mind, the sound of a father's grief registered.

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Miriah held Arissa against his chest, limping heavily on his injured leg. Blood dripped down his face from multiple lacerations falling onto his daughter's bloody, blue dress. Tears streamed from his eyes as he made his way to the medical bay.

A conduit exploded at the back of the observation deck during the attack, and the kinetic energy smashed them into the bulk heads. The flames seared the little girl's flesh, and most of her hair burned away. She was so bloody, Miriah could not tell where her injuries began and ended, and he reacted with instinct alone.

“Help us...” he said in a hoarse voice, barely able to speak above a whisper as he entered medical. “Help us,” he pleaded. The room was filled with injured crew members, and many sat against the walls on the floor as there were no seats available. Others were laid out anywhere there was room. Those who were conscious looked his way, many of them gasping and shaking their head in distress at the sight of the little girl in his arms. One woman burst into tears, her hand covering her mouth. Others stared vacantly at nothing, obviously in shock.

The sounds of suffering and pain echoed around Miriah as he limped to the nursing station, moaning and weeping reaching his numb ears. The smell of foul, bodily odors wafted over him, mixing with the smell of his daughter's charred flesh. Vomit rose in his throat, and he struggled to contain it. Shaking his head a little, he looked into the nurse's wide eyes and begged, “Please, please help my daughter.” The woman glanced from his eyes to the little girl in his arms and jumped up. She led him immediately through the doors that slid open when she approached.

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Kiainti

Planet IX – Moon 8 – Prompt Delivery Storage

Ten years in the past...

Four months after the attack.

Arisa laughed softly, a smile touching her lips as she watched a holovid cartoon. She focused with her left eye as the right was a milky color with no ability to see. The seared flesh of her skull would not grow hair, and Miriah and his wife chose to keep the other patches shaved. The little girl sat in her wheel chair, a breathing apparatus strapped to her throat. Her broken bones and lacerations were mended, but her small body was paralyzed from the neck down. No amount of medical treatment could restore her spinal cord, as it was severed by heated metal that cauterized most of it. She was fortunate to even be alive with the severity of her injuries.

Miriah sat next to her in the medical ward on their home station, waiting for the final discharge papers to be signed by the team of doctors overseeing Arissa's care. The road to heal was long and terrible, and Miriah and his wife struggled deeply to even stay together. His wife's terrible anger boiled over most days, as she seemed to blame him for their daughter's condition. She did not want Arissa to go out into space with him, but gave in after he badgered her for several days.

He was thankful she left to go to their apartment to make the final preparations for Arissa's home coming. They planned a party, and even his parents arrived by transport the day before to attend. His mother-in-law arrived the day they got to the station and never left. He detested and appreciated the 'old bitch' at the same time. He never spoke his name for her, but he thought it often.

The door to their room slid open and two female nurses entered. Their black scrubs were starched and clean, and Miriah did his best to ignore their attractiveness. The one with the short brown hair, tan skin, and crooked smile never failed to flirt with him, but the enticement was the farthest thing from his mind. Perhaps she considered his cold demeanor a challenge.

“Time to get you changed and cleaned up for your trip home,” the other nurse said cheerfully to Arissa who looked her over. Being pulled out of the happy world of her cartoons seemed to displease the little girl. Her only response was a nod.

“I’ll be in the hall,” Miriah said as he turned away.

Helin stepped in front of him as he approached the door, looking up into his eyes. The playful look she gave him showed brightly, and she grinned a little. “Do you have everything you need?” she asked softly. “I know we’ve been over the procedures several times, but I want to make sure you don’t have any questions.”

The large man shook his head. “I’m good,” he said. “I have everything in my notes as well as in here.” He tapped his temple emphasizing he remembered.

Helin gazed into his face for long moments gauging his words and expression. “Okay then. If you need anything, please contact us. I’ll be happy to help, answer questions, or come by if needed. You do have six months of in home care,” she said.

Miriah nodded. “Thank you,” he said, trying to move past the woman. She smiled sweetly, turned so he could get by, but made sure that as he passed her breasts rubbed against his upper arm. Miriah looked down at her to apologize for his lack of distance, but found her grinning widely. Choosing not to say anything he stepped out into the hall and rubbed his face feeling

awkward. The doors shut behind him and he leaned against the wall feeling absolutely miserable.

He did not bother to look when he heard footsteps approaching to his right, but when they came to a stop next to him he peered up at the person. The tall Amarrian with his stern face regarded him. “Sokoth?” Miriah said in surprise. He barely saw the man in person while flying together, and now he suddenly stood right next to him.

The pod pilot nodded his greeting. The man’s dark hair was kept short, and his piercing gray eyes burned into Miriah with a deep intensity. He was clean shaven, straight backed, and dressed in a dark gray military style outfit. His polished, reflective boots shown in the diffused light in the hallway. “Hello, Miriah,” he said, “I hope my visit isn’t inconvenient.”

Miriah stood up and straightened his casual, dark blue tunic that he wore. “Not at all,” he said, “I’m waiting for the nurses to finish their final preparations with Arissa. I am taking her home today.”

“How is she doing?” Sokoth asked in his polite cadence.

Miriah looked at him thinking about the question. “As well as can be expected,” Miriah said. “She... As you know her injuries were quite severe.”

Sokoth nodded. “I have kept up-to-date on her condition,” he said, “and I want you to know that I will do everything in my power to garner justice on her behalf against the two pod pilots that attacked us.”

“I know,” Miriah said looking down at Sokoth’s boots.

There was a pause between them for a few moments. “They may exist in a place where they can elude death, but I

promise you they can be made to suffer in a variety of ways. I will make sure of it. I've already put a plan in motion."

Miriah looked up at him, words escaping his grasp. He did not know how to respond. Then he spoke, "Whatever happens to them, it will never be able to undo what was done to my little girl." He spoke passionately, overcome with buried sorrow. "Yes, I want justice, but they will never be made to exist in a burned, broken body like her!" Miriah turned away trembling, his hands clenching repeatedly. Taking a couple of steps away from Sokoth he stopped, breathing heavily. Struggling to not be overwhelmed.

Sokoth remained silent, watching the man from his place. A frown touched his stark features, and he looked down at his pale hands. He flexed his fingers looking up at Miriah's clenched fists. Relaxing once more he spoke, "I want you to know I have transferred a final deposit into your account. It is substantial, and I want you to take as much time as you need."

Miriah nodded turning slightly, not looking at him. "We very much appreciate your help," he said. "Words will never be able to do justice to how thankful we are for your assistance." Miriah's voice quivered and the genuine emotion was evident to the pod pilot.

"Words are not needed," Sokoth said, "and when you are ready you always have a place with me. You are one of the most talented systems technicians I have ever encountered, and you will always have work on board my ships." He paused once more for long heart beats before continuing. "I very much regret what happened."

Miriah turned fully around and looked at him. "I know," he said, "and like I told you before I don't blame you. You

managed to get us out of there, and I owe you my life. Not to mention what you have done for us.”

It was Sokoth’s turn to feel awkward. He glanced to his left and nodded. Sighing softly, the Amarrian turned and leaned his back against the medical ward wall. Running a hand over his shaved chin he appeared reluctant to speak as he crossed his arms. Then seemed to decide and nodded to himself. “I want to help Arissa,” he said, “but it will take time, and will require a great deal of resolve from both of us.”

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Nine months in the past...

Arissa frowned as she tried to blow out the candle on her birthday cake, but she was not able to get the amount of air into her lungs she needed to do so. She looked up at her father who only smiled sweetly and leaned down to do it for her. “There you go,” he said giving her a kiss on the cheek, “Happy seventeen.”

“Thank you,” she said with a forced smile. Deep anger boiled within her heart, but she kept that well hidden from him. The few friends she managed to make from her special school wished her happy birthday too, and some were even able to clap from their own wheel chairs. Others just nodded unable to move at all. Their parents were gracious enough to bring them over, and they did their best to have a wonderful celebration.

Arissa’s mother was no where to be seen, having left them both years before. Part of the young woman wanted to scream and cry, but she held it back to keep up the happy appearance. Her dad opened the few gifts available for her, and she thanked

each participant for their thoughtful contributions. She did appreciate it, but her hate for the sympathy she saw in their parents' eyes ruined her mood. She just wanted to be left alone.

Helin wagged her ass around the room chattering like a non-stop parrot always mimicking those she interacted with during the party. Mirroring their mannerisms and choice of topic during their conversation. Arissa rolled her eyes when no one was looking knowing the woman was completely fake. Not long after her mother left, Helin wriggled her way into her father's life. She hated her and wished she would choke on her next bite of cake.

"Do you want some of your cake?" her father asked timidly hovering at her elbow.

An ironic smile touched Arissa's lips. The young woman looked up at him with her clear blue eyes and shook her head. "Not right now," she said, "maybe after everyone leaves." A hollow feeling bloomed in her chest, not wanting people to stare at her when she was being fed.

"As you wish," her father said in reply to her answer. He gently squeezed her shoulder in his loving way and sat down. Lifting his glass, he took a long drink of his alcoholic beverage. She could smell the strong liquor in the fruit punch. Their living room was small, but it had plenty of comforts. Designed for someone in her condition, she found that she preferred being at home.

"Can I have some of that?" Arissa asked innocently nodding at his glass.

Miriah glanced at his cup then back at her. He picked up her own cup with the straw and brought it to her lips. "Here you go."

Arissa frowned at him. “I don’t want mine,” she said glaring at him.

“No,” her father told her, “you don’t need any of this. Plus with your medications.”

Arissa gritted her teeth and looked away. “Forget I asked,” she said. The anger within her churned and stabbed at her. Images of all she explored on the galnet came to her, and she wanted to experience it all. With everything in her she wished she could explore life outside of her broken body. The recent movie she watched with the young people partying, the drinking, and so many other experiences she would never get to try.

The emotional storm that bloomed within the young woman erupted as she looked around at all of the broken people in her living room. The parents politely talking as the abnormal tried to act like them. They were not normal, and Arissa wanted to scream at them. She wanted to hurt them.

The first indication of trouble was Miriah noticed Arissa’s cheeks and neck flushed. She ground her teeth, and she shook her head back and forth. The episode took her and she struggled to breath. Her breathing function was beginning to deteriorate over time, and she was getting worse. Feeling like she was suffocating, Arissa screamed as she fought the oncoming attack. Blacking out with the injection was her only relief.

Later that night, Miriah with a heavy heart accessed his electronic messaging system. He sent one message. “We can’t wait. We must act now. She is getting worse. The doctors are not giving her much time.”

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“The sample you provided shows slight incompatibility,” Lothil reported.

The dark bar they chose in one of the station’s towers was sparsely populated during the work week and late hour, but the two men sitting opposite from Lothil wanted it that way. Miriah and Sokoth stared at the man showing no emotion. Their drink glasses glimmered with the dull, small, electronic lighted candle in the center. Miriah looked out of the large windows at the space beyond and shook his head feeling great disappointment.

Sokoth leaned forward. “By how much?” he asked.

“Why does it matter?” Lothil asked. His unsavory, rough features scowled beneath the mess of black hair hanging down from his head. His long nose and mustache led down to thin lips. His circular glasses gave him an intelligent look, and the men knew it was justified.

“Just answer the question,” Sokoth demanded.

Lothil sat back shrugging, his leather jacket mostly hiding the gesture. “Two percent,” he answered, “but it doesn’t matter. Any incompatibility will be rejected.”

Sokoth drained his cup and sat it back down on the table. “Do it,” he ordered. “No questions. No arguments. Do what you have to do.”

Lothil looked completely surprised. He was about to complain when Sokoth leaned forward and scowled.

“Are you serious?” Lothil asked him. “No preparation. Nothing?”

Sokoth glared at the man. “Do it. When complete, I will give you the location of the station I want you to transfer it to,”

he said. “Your operation is already illegal, so there shouldn’t be any problems. Right?”

Lothil looked back at him with obvious doubts, but after long moments he nodded his head. “No problems. Your payment was received.”

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Caldari Space

The Forge region

Etsala Constellation

Walvalin

[Citadel Identification Redacted]

The present...

Moving through the citadel with the antigravity sled did not draw too much attention. Transporting goods back and forth was common. Moving into the area of Miriah’s destination brought more scrutiny, and he was forced to use his tazer on a couple of staff members when he fell under suspicion. It was unfortunate when another one witnessed his activities down the hall and ran to alert security. This particular room was never used as it existed for one purpose alone. Out in the black, it was unnecessary away from the central systems that normally handled such activity.

As the fog cleared from inside the cargo container, Miriah looked down on his beloved daughter. He had been forced to place Arissa into cryo suspension when she fell into a coma after her birthday. Lovingly reaching down, he carefully gathered her

weak, broken body into his arms. Holding her against his chest, he gently laid her on the table before him. Pulling off his long, black jacket, he carefully covered her nakedness from the eyes of the security forces.

Stepping to the side of the bed, he tapped on the display preparing to initiate the sequence. A metallic, robotic tool on the left of the bed moved over and came down on Arissa's arm. Sensors and needles slid into her flesh, and the first portion of the process was complete. The display began scrolling data and showing vitals as the system prepared for stage two. A warning showed up on the side of the digital screen as Arissa's compatibility score displayed. "Override the system lockout," Miriah said into his comm device.

It took a couple of seconds for Goshin to respond. "Protocols removed," he reported. A few more seconds passed and the activation icon displayed on the screen. Miriah's hand began to move toward it.

"Get away from the console!" a security officer yelled as the doors slid open. His energy gun leveled at Miriah's chest. The other two behind him rushed into the room, guns pulled and ready. The anger in their eyes burned bright, and Miriah gazed at them for a moment before his finger touched the display.

The energy discharge from the security officer's gun pierced Miriah's chest, burning a hole through his dark clothing into the flesh beneath. The edges of the wound burned brightly. Miriah looked down at it and back up at the officer, his eyes widening in disbelief. The portions not cauterized gushed blood, and the crimson pulsed out with the beating of his heart. Stumbling backward, he fell hard against the medical bed behind

him. Sinking to the floor, propped up against it, his eyes turned toward his objective.

The bed's apparatus lifted up over Arissa's head in the process of Miriah being shot. The two containers with their chemicals, attached to the metallic tool, plunged downward pushing the contents into her veins. Blue white beams lanced downward passing through the flesh of her forehead, pass the bone of her skull, and began to scan her brain. The process took very little time.

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Arissa felt naked, and that made her angry. Slowly opening her eyes, the glass in front of her was sliding upward until it was fully out of the way. A tall man she knew was standing in front of her, a soft look on his normally stern face. He appeared concerned and anxious as she looked back at him. There were other men, some standing, some on the ground, but she did not know them. Glancing down at herself, her body was only covered with black undergarments. She moved her arms to cover herself out of instinct, but realized her arms and hands moved.

Stumbling forward in sudden panic, Sokoth caught her, keeping her from sprawling on the cold, metal floor. Disoriented she looked to her immediate left and her eyes widened. There on the table, she saw herself. The burned skin, shaved head, old wounds from the worst day of her life. She leaned against Sokoth and his dark gray tunic, his warm arms holding her.

"You're okay," he said. "You're okay. Welcome to your new life."

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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