



SPACEPORT



B.J. McCall



SCAVENGER

Changeling Press

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Scavenging space junk isn't glamorous or lucrative, but finding a disabled Allied Planets Security drone is an unexpected treasure Captain Anexa Loy can't pass up. Although pinching the drone is illegal and outrunning an APS Patrol fighter is dangerous, Anexa needs the money.

The booty on board, Anexa returns to Spaceport Adana where she meets Davis, a sexy hunk too charming to ignore. Giving into temptation can be risky business.

Lt. Davis Darkano of APS Patrol falls hard for the Spaceport beauty, but when he discovers the woman of his dreams has the stolen drone Davis must decide between love and duty.

Chapter One

“Claws on target.”

Seated at the bridge, Captain Anexa Loy watched the action on the cargo bay monitors as the huge claws of the retracting arms clamped down on the twisted chunk of metal. To most space trekkers it was junk, but to a scavenger the hunk of floating debris was credits in the bank. Her crewman, Souzai, was working the claws and keeping Anexa informed of his progress. Souzai's sister, Ulina, was poised to close the huge bay doors the moment the junk was retrieved.

“Arms retracting,” Souzai reported.

Excited by the find and already calculating the worth of the metals, Anexa asked, “What is it?”

“Looks like an APS drone or what's left of one,” Souzai said.

Allied Planets Security had hundreds of identical drones patrolling AP controlled space. Anexa adjusted the camera controls, focusing closer on the mangled mass. A blast had taken out a good portion of the side, exposing the drone's interior.

The smugglers and pirates were getting bolder. With the AP Security expanding its patrols, business was suffering. Unauthorized scavenging included. Grabbing a drone and busting it down for parts and metals was risky, but so far Anexa's forays into the AP restricted zones had paid off. If she was caught scavenging without a permit, the Scavenger Guild would fine her ass.

If she was caught grabbing a drone the APS would toss her ass in jail, but times were lean and Adana creditors were downright mean. At least the APS couldn't accuse her of blasting the drone. The *Karang Guni* had never carried that kind of firepower.

Moving slowly, the huge arms pulled the drone toward the empty cargo bay. Bringing the twisted hunk of metal into the ship's bay required skill and precision. Her finances were tight enough without expensive repairs. "Careful, Souzaï."

"Millimeters to spare, Captain."

As the nose of the damaged drone entered the bay, Anexa thought about all the overdue bills the haul would pay. She might have enough left over to afford a few necessities like spare parts.

Anexa lived aboard the *Guni* and sold her junk on Spaceport Adana. The rusting structure supported a growing population unable to survive on the hostile environment of the planet it orbited and for which it was named. Although the ship was aging, the *Guni* was home and collecting space junk wasn't glamorous, but it was honest work, most of the time.

The monotone voice of the ship's computer sliced into Anexa's joyful anticipation. *Unidentified craft. Range two hundred.*

Chui! Anexa tore her gaze from the bay monitor, swiveled in her captain's chair to the primary sky screen. Moving fast, the tiny speck of light was bearing down on her position. "Interception?"

Nine standard minutes.

"Identification?"

Working.

Anexa glanced at the bay monitor, mentally fighting a quick battle. Bring the drone in and risk interception or release it and run. Given her desperate financial situation and low supplies, breaking down the drone into scrap was worth the risk. "Souzaï. We've got company, coming at us fast. Can we do this like now?"

"Aye, Captain."

Eight standard minutes.

Anexa's heart pounded as the seconds ticked off. Her gaze darted back to the screen.

Craft identified. Allied Planets Security Patrol fighter.

The fighters were armed to the teeth and the pilots were the AP Security hotshots. "Souzai. APS Patrol fighter. He's coming fast. We've gotta move. Now!"

Anexa's gaze flicked back to the cargo monitors. The tail of the mangled drone was still outside the bay doors.

Seven standard minutes.

"Ulina. The second you have clearance, close the doors. Souzai, secure the arms and lock the load. Prepare for a hot jump."

No strangers to skirting the law, the crew responded with sharp affirmatives. Anexa flexed her fingers, waiting for the critical moment to punch the *Guni's* thrusters. Smaller and faster, Patrol fighters were difficult to outrun.

Six standard minutes.

Muscles tensed, Anexa watched the progress of the Patrol fighter on the screen. Snagging AP property was serious business. If the pilot identified the drone, he could legally blow the *Guni* to bits.

Don't get caught! Ready to act the moment she had the clear signal, Anexa watched the screen. The fighter was closing on the *Guni's* position.

"Load locked!"

"Doors secured!"

Anexa hot jumped the *Guni*, firing the thrusters. Instead of depending on the ship's computer, her fingertips flew over the controls. The *Guni's* hull groaned as Anexa whipped the ship around a large asteroid and dove into a dense portion of a massive asteroid field, the scattered remains of a shattered planet. Given the desperate situation, Anexa pushed the *Guni's* engine to the limit.

Despite her radical maneuvers, the fighter was still tracking. Whoever piloted the fighter deserved the moniker of hotshot. If he got any closer, no way could the *Guni* outrun him. Anexa shot out from between two large asteroids and slipped into a long open channel she'd discovered during her frequent forays into the AP controlled space. Heart banging inside her chest, Anexa initiated hyper-speed and raced toward the free zone, the safe, narrow strip of uncontrolled space.

* * *

Lieutenant Davis Darkano raced after the freighter. "Base, this is Patrol eight-four-one. In pursuit of a Raven class freighter in restricted sector thirty-two. Negative Ident transmission. Negative response to Ident request."

"Eight-four-one, acknowledged."

Davis bore down on the freighter. His Patrol group had been running search patterns for days. Their orders were to locate a missing Patrol drone and remain in position until the drone was picked up, but chasing a smuggler beat hunting for a dead drone.

Despite the Raven's radical maneuvers, Davis matched it turn for turn. Nothing like a hot pursuit to get his blood running high. Davis's admiration for the pilot's skills rose along with his determination to run the nose of his fighter right up the Raven's ass.

He punched his thrusters, but the Raven beat him to the free zone. Running side-by-side with the freighter, he activated his scanners and swept the Raven's hull. Secured inside the blast-proof cockpit, Davis was completely dependent upon his instruments and view screens. The image of faded Guild markings on the Raven's hull flashed on his screen. *Scavenger*.

He matched pace with the Raven, giving the fighter's scanners time to confirm the ship was a scavenger and not an armed smuggler masquerading as a junk collector. The scanners revealed no weapons. Davis shook his head. What possessed an extraordinary pilot to make a living collecting and selling space junk?

"Eight-four-one, this is Base. Position and status."

Although he couldn't legally stop the vessel in the free zone and fining errant scavengers was a low priority even when a drone wasn't missing, Davis would remember this encounter. "The Raven's a scavenger. Returning to search pattern."

"Acknowledged."

As Davis turned away from the Raven, he saluted the unseen pilot and vowed, "One day, scavenger, your ass will be mine."

Chapter Two

"Twelve hundred credits?" Anexa gritted her teeth. "The load is worth twice that amount."

The droid slid an official Guild appraisal across the counter. "Twelve hundred credits."

Anexa knew better than to argue with a Guild droid, but twelve hundred was barely enough to pay the crew and supply the *Karang Guni*. The replacement parts she'd needed for the *Guni* would have to wait until another section of the drone was broken up into small pieces. She considered complaining to one of the Dollaveras, the clones that ran the Amalgamated Spaceport Guild of Scavengers, but even if the price was adjusted her future loads would be discounted to make up the difference.

Her financial situation would improve immediately if selling the drone in one load was possible, but fencing AP property demanded breaking it down into small unidentifiable parts. Nothing good would come from rousing the curiosity of a Dollavera.

"Fine. Twelve hundred." Grumbling, Anexa collected her credits and walked away. After she caught up on a few overdue bills, she'd have just enough credits to buy supplies and pay her crew who were waiting for her in Haze.

As she hustled along the catwalk on her way to the mall, she glanced across the central atrium to the crowd, mostly men, moving in and out of the thriving Red Light District, its guts exposed for all to see. The activities taking place in public view ranged from basic to sordid. Men, all shapes, sizes and species, visited Spaceport to spend their credits for sexual satisfaction.

All those men seeking pleasure and she was alone.

Anexa didn't want forever and she didn't need a man in her day-to-day life. She wanted a lover. Someone yummy. Someone like the tall man heading toward the Red Light District would do just fine. His hair was as dark as deep space and cut short. His broad shoulders and confident stride made him stand out in the bustling crowd.

Sighing, Anexa pushed away from the railing and joined the crowd heading into the mall. Instead of indulging her own pleasures, Anexa would have to hang out in the *Guni* until her crew had exhausted their credits or their welcome on Spaceport.

Her creditors paid, Anexa strolled into Haze and scanned the room for her crew. She spotted Ulina's short, spiky hairdo and Souzai's long tawny mane. Anexa had plucked the brother, sister team out of a homeless camp on Level 26. The best crew she'd ever had, the siblings were hard workers.

On the way to her crew's table, Anexa skirted the bar. The tall man she'd seen earlier was standing at the bar. He was dressed in a black, long-sleeved body shirt, cargo style pants and boots. Up close, he looked even better, like a whole lot of pleasure.

As she walked past the hunk, Anexa checked out his ass. Nice. The hunk turned and caught her looking. His eyes were gray, his expression appreciative. She winked at him and their gazes locked for a moment, a searing moment in which a multitude of sensual thoughts bounced around in her head.

Her blood heated at the images her thoughts evoked. Anexa dropped into the empty chair next to Ulina.

Souzai's gaze narrowed. "Your cheeks are red. What's up, Captain?"

"I have your chits," Anexa said, ignoring his question.

"Look at that. Yum."

Anexa and Souzai turned to see what had caught Ulina's eye.

Bottle of rum and glass in hand, the hunk was heading toward Anexa's table. Back straight and shoulders squared, he walked with confidence. Only a zonked out fool would dare to challenge this guy for the coin in his pocket.

Anexa's pulse leapt as the hunk slid into a seat at an empty table, directly in her line of vision. He poured a generous portion of liquor in the glass, took a sip and closed his sexy eyes. Anexa took a long appreciative look. His face was lean, his nose straight and his chin strong. Beneath his body shirt, his muscles were well defined.

As if feeling her lingering gaze the man opened his eyes and looked at her. Piercing gray eyes met hers and his mouth curved into an easy grin. Haze was huge and full of empty tables, yet he had chosen one just a few feet away from hers. Warmth flooded Anexa's middle and a sexual fantasy featuring him flashed in her brain.

"How much did we get?" Souzai asked, yanking her out of her reverie.

Anexa dragged her gaze from the sexy stranger and retrieved the payment chits out of the inside pocket of her jacket. "Twelve hundred."

Ulina's mouth thinned. "Maybe we should have stayed out and broken down a larger section."

Anexa shook her head. "We'll keep the amounts small. It will take more time, but the last thing we need is an appraiser asking questions. Agreed?"

Ulina and Souzai answered to the affirmative.

Anexa handed out the chits. "If you're willing to leave by twenty-four hundred, we can bust down another section. We'll come back and make another sell."

Souzai's frown turned into a grin. "Now you're talking."

She glanced at her wrist unit. "You have six hours. Have a good time and stay out of trouble," Anexa warned. As a teenager Souzai had made a living by various means, most of which were illegal. Although he'd reformed, almost, 'Port Security was disinclined to give him a pass for even minor infractions.

Ulina and Souzai stood. "Twenty-four hundred," Anexa warned. "If the *Guni's* still docked because you're late, the overtime fees will come out of your pay."

"We won't be late." Ulina glanced over at the hunk. "He's interested."

"That's good quality rum," Souzai said. "If he offers you a drink, take it."

"Maybe you'll get lucky," Ulina said. "Good liquor and good looking. I'd like that kind of luck."

Anexa glanced at her wrist unit. "I haven't got the time for small talk and drinks."

"You've been grumpy, Captain. With his looks, action is more satisfying than words," Ulina said without taking her eyes off the stranger.

"I'm not grumpy."

Souzai winked at Anexa and walked away. Ulina waved and scurried after her brother.

* * *

Davis sipped his rum, savoring the smooth taste as it slid over his tongue. The bartender had said it was from Old Earth and worth the hefty price. Davis agreed. He wondered if the red-haired woman liked rum. Her amazing hair and lithe body had caught his eye. Instead of visiting the Red Light District and indulging his needs as planned, Davis had chased after her, but had lost her in the crowded mall.

When she'd walked into Haze and passed within two feet of him, she'd taken his breath away along with his ability to speak. Her eyes were green, snapping fire, and her lips were lush. The sway of her hips was so mesmerizing Davis had to follow. He wanted to know her name and ached to learn every curve and hollow of her body.

Now that her companions had left, Davis waited for the beauty to look his way. When her gaze finally met his, he smiled. "Can I offer you a drink?"

To his surprise, she rose from her chair and walked up to his table. Taking the glass out of his hand, she sipped the rum, closing her eyes as she swallowed.

Her neck was long and slender, her skin pale and flawless, her long hair like silken flames. Despite the drab green trousers and old brown jacket she wore, Davis thought she was sexier than the barely dressed women hawking their bodies in the Red Light District.

When she looked at him and smiled, his heart tumbled and a fierce ache stabbed his balls. She licked the rum glistening on her lips and handed Davis the glass. The ache turned into a deep throb. "Delicious." She slid into the booth next to him. "Thanks. I'm Anexa Loy."

"Davis Darkano. I'll get you a glass."

"No need. I can't stay long."

Davis took a drink and handed her the glass. "Then we'll share."

She smiled and desire swamped him. Davis understood horny. He lived in that state of unreleased sexual tension between his visits to Spaceport, but the heat Anexa evoked rolled through him hot and heavy. He tugged on the collar of his body shirt.

Anexa sipped slowly, savoring the rum. "I haven't tasted quality like that in a long time."

"I have a whole bottle."

She glanced at her wrist unit. "I have to be somewhere."

"Is there a someone?"

Her gaze met his. "No."

Beautiful and unattached. The gods were smiling on him today. "I hate drinking alone."

"I'm leaving port in a few hours."

Had he found his dream girl only to lose her? "I'll settle for one of those hours." He had to find out as much about her as possible, at least her name and link number. Maybe she'd be willing to get together during his next leave. "Your friends called you captain."

"My crew," she corrected.

"What are you flying?" The sexy captain took another sip and handed him the glass. Davis ached to lick the rich rum off her lips.

"A Raven."

"You run cargo?" he asked, lifting the glass to his lips. He downed the contents.

"I'm a scavenger."

Davis nearly choked on the rum.

"Metals mostly," she continued. "Less money than working the mines or the Red Light District, but I like it out there."

Davis understood. When you spent as many hours as he did in the vast nothingness of his patrol zone, you either loved it or hated it. Davis loved it. "Most people find it dark and cold. A necessary space to traverse."

"To make a living at collecting space junk, you have to live out there."

Was it possible? Was she the scavenger who'd outrun him a week ago? He poured three fingers of rum and offered her the glass. "Please."

She accepted the drink. "And who is Davis Darkano when he's not drinking rum?"

If he told her he was APS Patrol she wouldn't give him the time of day. He'd lost track of the number of scavengers he'd tagged and fined for working illegally in AP controlled space. He didn't like lying, but no way could he tell Anexa the truth.

"I'm in security equipment. Sales."

"Do you own a ship?"

"Wish I did. The commercial transports are packed." At least that part was true. He was on leave and had taken a transport to Adana. "One hour," Davis said.

When she glanced at her wrist unit, Davis took her hand. He slid his fingers over her wrist. Her skin was so soft. How long had it been since he just held a woman in his arms and enjoyed her scent, her softness and the sound of her voice?

Too long. Even if Anexa proved to be his scavenger, Davis wanted to spend time with her. His body throbbed at the thought of kissing her, touching her, everywhere and in every way.

"Rum this good should be shared and savored."

Chapter Three

Conversation came easy with Davis. As a security equipment salesman, he'd traveled through most of the Allied held space and had visited some of the interesting spaceports and planets her father had told her about. Places a spaceport kid only saw in vids.

Davis was more than a sexy-as-hell, hard body hunk; he was interesting and had a great sense of humor. Having been raised on-planet, or dirtside as the spaceport population referred to those lucky enough to take natural gravity for granted, Davis had attended an AP-sanctioned school and had served in the military. He'd seen plants and trees growing in the ground, picked flowers and had swum in the ocean. Things Anexa had only imagined doing.

"Where did you receive your pilot training?" he asked, refilling her glass.

"My father taught me how to fly. At six I was learning basic engine maintenance."

"Six?"

"I grew up on the *Karang Guni*. It's home. I've never lived in port."

"So scavenging is a family business?"

"My father ran cargo between Adana and the Pakit system. Before he died I joined the Guild and became a scavenger." No point in telling him her father had been a smuggler, fatally wounded during a weapons buy gone wrong. On his deathbed, he'd made her promise to go legit. Except for the drone and foraging without a permit, she'd managed to keep her word. "I've got to go. Thanks, I enjoyed the rum and the conversation."

"I'll walk you to your ship."

"It's a long walk."

Davis picked up her hand, rubbed his thumb over her palm. "The longer, the better." He held her hand as they walked, the simple gesture forging a temporary, but tangible connection.

During the elevator ride to the docking level, Davis drew her close. Anexa liked his size and the way her body fit to his. *Slow down. No man is perfect. But this is as close as it gets.*

Their strides lengthened as they approached the *Guni's* berth. The aging freighter sat on launch skids with an access chute attached to its portside hatch. When they reached the berth Davis stared at the freighter. "Something wrong?"

He slid his arm around her waist. "How does she fly?"

"Better than she looks."

"Can she sustain hyper-speed?"

"She's fast enough."

He drew her close. Desire burned in his eyes. Letting anyone other than her crew, especially a stranger, aboard while the mangled drone rested in her cargo bay wasn't the best idea, but Anexa was tempted.

Davis slanted his head, giving her plenty of notice of his intention before he kissed her. Anexa lifted her mouth to his. Temptation slid into attraction as his mouth moved over hers. She could always lock down the *Guni's* cargo bay. Hot, sultry, slow and lush, Davis knew how to meld mouths. If he made love as well as he kissed...

Anexa gripped his body shirt, clutching at the tight fabric, digging her fingertips into the thick, hard muscle beneath. *Ohhhhhh!* He felt so good. Tasted good, too. By the time he ended the kiss, Anexa's heart thundered and her breath came in short gasps. Attraction slipped into hot surrender.

"Anexa?"

She liked the way he said her name and she loved the way he smelled, clean and masculine. "Hmmm."

"Is that a yes or a no?"

Heat coiled and a delicious throb began between her legs. Anexa touched her palm to the security screen. With a hiss, the airlock panels whirled open like the petals of a flower. Anexa stepped through the airlock. He followed her across the access chute and into the narrow hatch.

"Welcome aboard the *Karang Guni*." He glanced around. Anexa followed his gaze, suddenly aware of how the old ship must look. A decent coat of paint would cover the decades of discoloration and one of these days she'd have enough credits to give the ship some spit and polish, but the engine and nav systems were more important. "The *Guni* isn't pretty, but she's all mine."

His gaze settled on her, hot and intense. He hooked a finger beneath her chin and brushed his lips to hers. "She has a beautiful captain." Shivers slid down Anexa's spine. He pulled the collar of her jacket aside and nuzzled her neck, pressing soft kisses to her quivering skin. "Beautiful and soft."

Given more time, the man could talk her clothes off, but right now Anexa just hungered for his hard male body. Silken tongues had other uses, too. "I bet you're a great salesman."

"I'll take that as a compliment."

She led him to her quarters and locked her door on the off chance Souza or Ulina might return earlier than expected. Her bunk wasn't designed for two, but it was roomy enough for their purposes. Anexa yanked off her jacket and tossed it aside. He placed the bottle of rum on the table beside her bunk, then snaked an arm around her waist and pulled her close.

His mouth covered hers with lips that were warm and firm. Anexa felt the heat all the way to her toes. She gripped his body shirt, tugging the stretchy fabric out of the waistband of his pants. She slid her hands beneath his shirt, pressing her palms to his flesh. His skin was smooth and hot to the touch. His moan was low and throaty.

He yanked the shirt over his head, baring his chest. The muscles in his arms bunched as he moved. His shoulders were wide, his chest solid and his skin golden brown. His trousers rode low on lean hips.

Davis slid his arms around her waist, crushing her breasts to his chest. Groaning, he buried his face in her hair and ran his hands up and down her back. He squeezed her tight. "You feel so good." For a moment he seemed content just to hold her, but the heat pouring off his skin and the hard ridge digging into her belly told Anexa that Davis wanted more.

Anexa wanted more, too. She wanted him. "So do you," she said. He lifted his head, his heated gaze meeting hers. He slid his hands down the slope of her hips and pushed her up against the door. Anexa waited to see what he'd do next. Would he go for her breasts or dive for her pants?

He grabbed the hem of her tank top and pulled it up, exposing her breasts. His eyes glittered, his chest heaved, and his grip on her top tightened. Her nipples puckered in anticipation. Lowering his head, he latched onto one taut point. She arched her back, pressing her breast to his mouth. He sucked a nipple deep into his mouth, tugging hard on her aching flesh. Anexa throbbed and burned, her whole body begging for his hands, his lips and his cock.

He grasped the clasp on her trousers and yanked the waistband open. The front seam separated as his warm fingers slid into her pants, pushed through her curls and between her legs. Anexa wanted to scream as one finger probed her creaming slit. Her veins and arteries turned to rivers of heat. When two long fingers shot into her, she moaned and nearly came.

Without missing a beat he released her breast, buried his face in the crook of her neck and his fingers deeper inside her weeping pussy. "Ohhhhh!" She wanted, needed faster. He pumped his fingers, pummeling her wet, swollen flesh. She was almost there, hovering on the sweet edge. Then his thumb slid over her clit. Back and forth he teased the aching bud, his touch demanding, but gentle. She bit her lip at the sensation, the intense pleasure. Every nerve on fire, Anexa plunged over the glorious edge.

He raised his head and his heated gaze met hers. "I want another," she whispered between audible gulps of air. His mouth curved into a sexy smile as he

removed his fingers and began working her pants down her hips. Just thinking about what he could do with those lips made her shiver.

He dragged her trousers down her legs as he dropped to his knees. A man who took direction well! Bless the stars! He looked up at her. "You're a beautiful woman, Red."

Beautiful. Men were known to say things in the heat of the moment, sexy things, fuck words, but no lover had ever given her a nickname or told her she was beautiful. Her heart rate went into double time. "Make me scream."

"Got a bio-scan handy?"

Anexa blew out a breath. She jerked her head toward the built-in drawers next to her bunk. "Bottom drawer."

"You've no idea how much I want to make you scream, but you've got to know I'm safe because when I'm done, I'm gonna beg you to wrap those gorgeous lips around me. Then you're gonna make me scream."

Anexa licked her upper lip. Just thinking about suckling his cock made her mouth water. "I'd like to hear you scream."

By the time she'd removed her boots and kicked her pants aside, he'd found the thumb-sized scanner. She read his results. They were negative as were hers. Davis dropped the scanner and knelt before her. "Let me make you scream, Red."

Sweet anticipation burned through bone and muscle, the heat pooling between her legs. He lifted her leg over his shoulder and ran his tongue along her inner thigh, sending shivers down her spine. His fingers stroked her ass. Her weight balanced on one foot, Anexa leaned into him, offering her hot, plump flesh. His heated breath brushed the damp curls shielding her pussy, then his lips settled over her.

Slowly, he licked her quivering, expectant flesh. With agile tongue and mobile lips, he explored, caressed and delved, teaching her new pleasures. His tongue slid over her clit. With each slow stroke, she hovered on the edge of ecstasy.

Demanding satisfaction, Anexa grasped him by the hair and arched her hips. "Davis, now!" He fastened his lips on her clit and suckled, deeply, firmly, relentlessly,

giving her what she needed. She trembled with satisfaction as he eased his grip on her ass and ran his palms over the backs of her thighs.

Anexa slid to her knees. She stroked him, feeling his heat and hard length through the fabric of his trousers. "On your feet, Darkano." He jumped to his feet, yanking at his belt and fly.

Chui! He was big, thick and long. Grasping his shaft, Anexa licked the hot, silky head, circling the crown with the tip of her tongue. She blew gently, letting her breath flow over his wet flesh.

His knees dipped. "Do that again."

She slid her tongue over and around the crown, wetting the sensitive head of his cock, then fanned him with her warm breath. He shuddered and moaned. She teased him with her tongue and tugged on his length with her hand. He groaned and whispered her name.

Anexa stroked his thighs. His muscles were rock hard beneath her palms, his skin hot. He grasped her hair, pulling gently. "Suck me, Red."

Chapter Four

Tremors racked his body as she swallowed him, sucking him in and out of her glorious mouth. Davis bucked his hips, eager for her to suck him harder. Heat poured off his body, slicking his skin with perspiration.

Pressure gathered, the need to release escalating with the pull and drag of her lips, mouth and tongue. Reining in his raging need, Davis tugged on her hair and pulled his cock out of her mouth. "I'm gonna come," he said through gritted teeth. Davis pulled her to her feet. Gripping her upper thighs, he lifted her, banging her ass against the door. "And when I do, I want to be inside you."

Straining and on the edge, he pushed his hips between her thighs. She wrapped an arm around his neck, hooked her legs around his waist and grasped his cock. He thrust. She guided.

Wet and ready, her pussy stretched and held him tight. He froze and fought for control. The climax he'd been holding back threatened to explode. Heart banging against his chest wall, Davis closed his eyes and exhaled. His balls hummed. "You test me."

She nipped his shoulder. He thrust, driving deep inside her tight, slick sheath. She bucked her hips, taking him deeper. Hips pumping, Davis drove into her quivering flesh. With each thrust, he buried his cock deeper into her soft, moist flesh.

Her throaty moans of pleasure and rocking hips told him she needed, wanted more. He rammed his cock deeper, faster until her moans changed to strangled gasps. Hot, mindless and primal, this was fucking *and* fucking incredible. Heat poured from his body, slicking his skin with perspiration. His balls tightened, painfully taking him to the brink.

She arched her back and dug her nails into his shoulders. She clamped down on him impossibly tight, then her pussy flooded with wet heat. His climax tore from his balls, raced the length of his cock, exploding into her hot, moist pussy.

Legs trembling, he leaned his forehead against the door and tried to catch his breath. Sweat ran down his temples and chest to dew her breasts. "You're the best, Red. Ever."

She laughed softly and nipped his ear lobe. "That felt great. Thanks."

Davis smiled. "My pleasure, Captain." He couldn't recall the last time he felt so good, so satisfied and wanting at the same time. He'd never get enough of Red.

He touched his lips to hers and her mouth parted. Deepening the kiss, Davis tightened his hold. Her breasts were so soft, her body supple and her skin was warm and damp with perspiration. Just holding her made him hum with pleasure and renewed desire. He wondered if his flagging cock could rise once more before she kicked his ass out of her ship.

Unwrapping her legs from his waist, she pulled her mouth from his and slid her hands down his chest. He stepped back, giving her space. She crossed the room and picked up a black robe off her bunk. She slipped on the short robe and tied the sash. "I've got work to do."

Davis pulled up his trousers. Great Stars! He'd fucked her with his boots on. He'd taken her up against the door, instead of on her bunk. He had to see her again, had to have more time and make it romantic. He grabbed his shirt off the floor and dragged it on. "I'd like to see you again."

Her beautiful mouth curved into a smile, but she didn't say a word. He reached out and cupped her cheek. "I want to see you, Red. When are you usually in port?"

"I don't operate on a fixed schedule."

"My clients drive my schedule. Give me your link number and I'll let you know when I'm coming to Adana."

She brushed her lips against his hand and gave him her number. Davis committed it to memory. "I'll show you out."

He followed her into the corridor. "Just one more request. I'd like to see your ship."

"Not much to see. She's like a hundred other Ravens."

"The *Guni*'s not just any Raven, she's yours and I'd like to see her."

"I'll show you the bridge." The tour was brief and she was right. The ship looked like a hundred other Ravens he'd seen, but Red wasn't like a hundred pilots he'd observed. She was impressive.

As they passed her quarters on the way to the exit chute, Davis reached out and grasped her shoulder. She turned into his arms. "I'll miss you, Red." He opened the sash of her robe and slid his arms around her soft, naked body. Burying his face in the crook of her neck, he inhaled. The scent of her hair and skin sent a slow tremor through his body. His cock stretched. "Touch me."

Her hand slid between their bodies, rubbing him through his trousers.

He groaned, letting her know how much he liked her hand on him. "You drive me crazy. I'll be thinking about you."

She released him. "Maybe our paths will cross again."

Davis lifted his head. "If we happen to be in port at the same time will you be available?" The question hung between them for a heartbeat. Davis worried she had no intention of seeing him again.

"I could set aside an hour."

Relief rolled through him, but next time Davis wanted more than a short hour that passed far too quickly. "How about several?"

"I'd like that." She rubbed her body against him. Heat flooded his middle, from where her breasts touched his chest down to the sweet vee where she cradled his swelling cock. "How about a fast one now?"

His heart rate went into hyper-speed. Was she serious or just kidding around?

Anexa pulled the robe off her shoulders and let it slide to the floor. "Fuck me hard and fast, then get your ass off my ship."

Before she changed her mind, Davis scooped her into his arms and carried her into her quarters.

The taste, the scent, the feel of her filled his senses. Her skin was warm, her breasts woman soft against his chest. Every curve and hollow tempted and teased. Desire, deep and powerful, rolled through him as he laid her onto the bunk. She reached up and stroked his straining cock through his trousers. "You have me at a disadvantage -- or do you prefer fucking with your boots on?"

Davis pulled off his boots and stripped off his shirt and trousers. His breath hitched as she rolled onto her belly. Her long red hair slid over her slender back, a silky flame against her pale skin. When she rose onto her knees and displayed her sweet ass, his cock jerked. After his ball-wrenching climax, he hadn't thought he had it in him. Then she spread her thighs, giving him a glimpse of her pussy. Mesmerized, Davis swallowed.

Climbing onto the bunk, Davis stroked his length. He wanted to meet her demands and fulfill her needs. She rolled her hips, swaying her ass. "Red, you're gonna kill me."

"Prepare to die."

Davis stroked her hips. "You're a fantasy come true."

She wriggled her hips in blatant invitation. "Fuck me till you scream."

He slid his cock between her thighs and groaned as the head dipped into her moist center. She rocked back. He thrust and went deep. Tight and wet, her pussy surrounded him. Balls humming, the need to come surged. Muscles trembling, Davis fought against coming too soon. He wanted to please her, give her the best fuck of her life.

When the urge passed, he thrust. Her hot walls clenched around him, driving him to the sweet edge. Gripping her hips, he went deep, then pulled back, almost withdrawing.

Anexa threw her head back, sending her bright hair flying up as she slammed her hips backwards, meeting his thrust. "Fuck me!" She wanted it harder, faster. Living his fantasy, Davis pounded into her creaming pussy.

Her body moved with his in perfect rhythm, each stroke pure ecstasy. The sounds of her gasps, his groans and slapping skin mingled. The musky scent of sex hung in the air.

When she cried out and her pussy clamped down on him, Davis lost the fine edge of control. His climax shot from his balls, in hot, thick spurts. Sweet agony.

Chest heaving and slick with sweat, Davis gulped air. Reacting to the powerful climax, his muscles trembled and heat poured off his skin. Davis opened his eyes as Anexa sank onto her belly. When she rolled onto her side, he stretched out beside her on the narrow bunk. Wrapping an arm around her waist, he anchored her against him.

She brushed her fingers through his damp hair. "You didn't scream."

"I'm more of a grunter than a screamer."

Chapter Five

Five standard days had passed since Davis had left Adana. While on patrol he'd had hours to think and Anexa consumed his thoughts. Upon his return to base from a long patrol, he was ordered to report to the commander immediately.

Never had Davis been ordered to appear before the admiral. Senior officers dealt with performance errors. Wondering what he'd done, Davis entered an office large enough to house several fighters. Since he'd made the rank of lieutenant, Davis had occupied a room not much larger than his commander's desk. After six years of being based on an APS base, he'd gotten used to small spaces.

Admiral Ganch stood before a large screen displaying the AP controlled space he oversaw. The admiral turned and locked gazes with Davis. Beneath a pair of bushy black eyebrows, his eyes were a penetrating blue. "Lieutenant Darkano. Two weeks ago you discovered a Raven class freighter in a restricted zone?"

Since he wasn't given an at-ease order, Davis remained at attention. "Yes, sir." An image of the *Karang Guni* flashed onto the screen. Why was the Admiral interested in Red's ship?

"You pursued this vessel into the free zone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Your report stated the vessel was non-threatening."

The admiral's questions surprised Davis. Surely, the admiral had been briefed. "I think my weapons scan supports my analysis, sir."

"What are those markings on the ship's hull?"

"Authorized scavengers display the Adana Guild insignia."

The admiral nodded his head. "Is it your assessment that this ship originates from Adana?"

A bad feeling bloomed in Davis's chest. "Yes, sir."

"We've received intel that drone engine components have surfaced on Spaceport Adana."

Davis had heard that the AP Security had paid informants on Adana. Apparently, the rumors were true. The admiral pointed at the image of the *Karang Guni*. "It appears your scavenger found the missing drone and is selling it piecemeal."

Red had the drone? From the moment Davis had looked upon the berthed *Guni*, he knew the identity of the pilot who'd outrun him. His admiration for Red had gone up several notches, but he'd never suspected her of pinching the drone.

But hadn't she told him she traded mostly in metals? To Red, the drone would be a financial boon and busted down in small pieces, the metal hull would be unidentifiable. Then why would Red sell traceable engine components? It didn't make sense.

"It was your squadron's mission to find that drone, Lieutenant. You failed. If the drone's operating chips fall into the wrong hands, the entire unmanned patrol system will be compromised."

Smugglers and pirates would pay top dollar for the ability to circumvent the system. The knowledge of the drone's patrol paths would allow ships to traverse vast areas of AP controlled space without detection.

"I'm sending you to Adana, Lieutenant. Locate that scavenger and find those guidance chips."

Why didn't the admiral trust his informants to track down Red's ship? Apparently, the informants hadn't identified the components as drone parts or realized their significance. The admiral didn't want his informants connecting the dots.

"You'll report directly to my office. Understood?"

"Yes, sir."

“Do not report to ‘Port Security or advise them of your mission. Officially, you’re on leave. Dress and conduct yourself accordingly, but find those chips.”

A fist encircled Davis’s heart. He’d spent his adult life following orders and doing his job. Now he was torn. “Yes, sir.”

“Keep a low profile. The last thing I need is that insufferable Holly Barberossa getting wind of our situation. No good ever comes from the press getting involved. If word gets out, whoever has those chips will realize their value and we’ll never recover them. The APS Oversight Committee will look for someone to blame.”

Translation: *your ass is on the line, Darkano*. Davis understood he’d have to take the hit for allowing the scavenger to outrun him. “Yes, sir.”

Within hours of leaving the admiral, Davis stepped aboard a transport bound for Spaceport Adana. “Welcome aboard.” Davis nodded at the flight attendant. He located his assigned seat and buckled in the safety harness. Wrestling with the official task he’d undertaken, Davis leaned his head against the padded headrest.

Chui. His life had always been the job and until he met Red his work had been enough, but she consumed his thoughts. She stirred his senses and made him crazy. The good kind of crazy that gets under your skin and makes you think about the future.

What have you done, Red? He prayed she had nothing to do with the missing drone, but in his heart Davis knew Red was involved.

* * *

Anexa’s heart pounded as Davis walked along the docking bay. He was dressed in a dark gray shirt, black pants and boots. She wanted to run and jump into his arms, but instead Anexa gripped the edge of the airlock and waited.

She’d thought about Davis a lot, far more than she’d anticipated. At times she wondered if her memory had enhanced his looks. It hadn’t. The closer he got, the hotter he looked. Her insides heated and between her legs, she throbbed. Anexa couldn’t wait to tear off his clothes and fuck his brains out.

She slammed her palm against the security panel and punched in the code.

"Red." He cupped her face in his hands. "You look good enough to eat." He kissed her. A deep, devouring kiss so intense her blood roared in her ears. Wrapping her arms around his neck, she pressed her chest to his. The throbbing between her legs became painful and urgent.

When the airlock whirled open, he broke the kiss. "I'm hard as baridium."

They hustled through the chute and Anexa secured the hatch. As they walked the short distance to her quarters, he wrapped an arm around her and squeezed her hip.

"Where are your crew members?"

"They aren't on board yet. I don't expect them for hours."

Inside her quarters, he pulled her into his arms and held her tight. "I missed you."

"I missed you, too."

He stroked her hair. "I need to talk to you."

The hard ridge of his cock dug into her belly, sending rivers of heat steaming through her middle. "Can't we talk later?"

He released her and stepped back. "It's important."

Important meant bad news. To hell with bad news, it could wait. Anexa yanked off her tank top. "I can barely think for wanting you."

His gaze slid to her breasts. "Remember, I tried." She barely registered his husky words before he picked her up, tossed her onto one shoulder and carried her to the bunk. He dropped her onto her back and pulled off her shoes, then her pants. Her need rose as he stripped off his clothes. "You've been driving me crazy. All I think about is fucking you." He dove between her legs, the broad head of his cock plunging into her drenched pussy. Clinging to his broad shoulders, Anexa lifted her hips, taking him deep.

Gasping, he stilled. A shudder slid down his spine. "*Chui*. I don't want to come, not yet." His chest heaved and his breathing was harsh and audible.

"Don't stop. Fuck me," she whispered.

A groan tore from his chest and the fire he'd withheld ignited as his hips moved, faster, harder. His powerful body unleashed, he pounded her pussy, driving his cock into her, thrusting and relentless. She came, swearing and crying out his name. After a few minutes, he rolled onto his side and spooned his body to hers. For a long time he held her, stroking her hip and planting soft kisses on her shoulder. "I love you, Red."

Shocked, Anexa gasped. She lifted her head from his shoulder and looked into his eyes. She saw pain. "You don't look all that happy about it."

"I lied to you."

He was married! Probably had a kid or two at home waiting for him. She started to roll away, but he held her fast. "Don't hate me. Just try to forgive me."

"Forgive you? I don't fuck married men!"

"Married? I'm not married!"

Relief washed through her. "What else would you lie about?"

"I'm not a salesman."

"Smuggler? Thief?"

He shook his head. "I'm APS Patrol."

APS Patrol! Pain stabbed her right in the heart. Like a fool she'd been missing him, wanting him. He'd filled her dreams and her thoughts. If he were a smuggler, even a pirate, she could handle it, but AP Security Patrol was the enemy. She'd fucked the enemy!

Anexa pushed at his chest, shoving hard. "Why couldn't you be like any other lying married man? At least the day *might* come when I might forgive you."

His fingers dug into her upper arm. "You'd like me more if I was a married salesman than a single patrolman who's crazy about you?"

"Either way I'd kick your ass."

"You would, wouldn't you?" His lips curved, slightly grinning. "Must be that red hair."

How could he laugh at the situation? Anexa closed her eyes against the pain and pushed him away.

He grabbed her by the hair. "Look at me, Red."

Anger ripping through her, Anexa met his gaze. "Don't call me Red. It's Captain Loy to you!"

"Did you pinch the drone?"

"Let go of me," she said through clenched teeth.

He took a deep breath and released her. Anexa jumped out of the bunk and grabbed her pants. Davis rose and scooped his trousers off the floor. Anexa grimaced. She was going to have to sterilize her sheets to get the cop stench off of them.

"My commander sent me to Adana to find the scavenger selling engine components," he said, pulling on his trousers. "You're lucky that he sent me to find your ass and not a covert ops team that wouldn't think twice about forcing the information out of you."

Anexa yanked on her tank top. Only the foolish or the desperate would sell traceable parts. "You've got the wrong scavenger."

He fastened his trousers and stepped toward her. "The fighter that chased you out of the restricted zone was me." He stabbed a forefinger into the center of his chest. "If you snatched that drone, you've got to tell me."

Anexa planted her hands on her hips. If he came any closer, she would kick him right in the balls. "I don't have to tell you anything."

"This is serious business. So, don't lie to me."

"I think we've already established who's the liar."

He started to reach out to her, wisely reconsidered and raised his hands. "The moment I saw you, I wanted you. Until that moment, I'd never been dumbstruck by a woman. I knew if I told you I was APS Patrol you wouldn't let me near you. I had no idea you were the scavenger I'd chased until I saw the *Guni*."

She should kick her own ass for bringing him back to her ship.

"My squadron was searching for that drone. You were in restricted area thirty-two. I chased you. I would have caught your ass if you hadn't slid into that open channel and jumped into hyper-speed. You beat me to the free zone, but I kept pace

with you long enough to scan the *Guni* for weapons. I filed a report on the encounter when I returned to base. Am I lying now?"

Anexa's mind raced. He had to be the Patrol pilot who'd chased her. "You have no jurisdiction on Adana."

"Drone engine components have been sold here. If this situation isn't resolved quickly the AP Security Oversight Committee that funds my patrol will demand action and accountability. If the next time the *Guni* leaves port it disappears, who's gonna care, Red? Who's going to help you when your ass is sitting in a military prison accused of espionage?"

He had to be bluffing. How could destroyed components be sold? Unless... Anexa rubbed her temples. Chui, *Souzai*. *What have you done?*

"This is serious. Talk to me." He took a step toward her. "Trust me."

She stepped back. "Trust you? I've spent most of my life avoiding Patrol."

"Who else can you trust?"

Anexa realized she had no one to help her. Stealing APS property guaranteed the Guild would throw her to the wolves. The last thing the local authorities wanted was AP Security breathing down their necks. "What can you do for me, Patrolman Darkano? Fuck me on the way to prison?"

"It's lieutenant and whether you believe it or not, I don't want AP Security touching a single hair on your head. Do you have the drone?"

Not only was he a patrolman, he was an officer. Why didn't he just turn her in and walk away? "Why are you so interested in a twisted hunk of metal? What's in this for you?"

"Twisted?"

"Half of it was blown away when I found it. Most of the engine was gone and it was floating around. What's so important about a carcass?"

"The chips in the guidance system. I know you hate APS Patrol, but without us, the pirates and the thieves would take over. I've seen what some of these people are capable of and it isn't pretty. I don't care if a guy is running a load of rum, but I care if

he disables a transport, kills the crew, steals the cargo and sells the passengers, men, women and children to the slavers. Life isn't perfect, but you have to take a stand against bad guys." He raked his fingers through his hair. "I've got to find those chips, Red, or you're in some serious shit."

Anexa led him to the bay. Most of the drone had been sold in small sections of metal and plastine. Only a mangled chunk remained. "I didn't sell the components. I ordered my crewman, Souzai, to break down what was left of the engine into small parts and dispose of it."

"Dispose of it how?"

"I told him to toss the parts, a few at a time, into the recycle grinders on Level 28."

Darkano rubbed his chin. "Apparently, he's selling those parts a few at a time. I'd like to search his quarters."

"What are we looking for?"

"The chips are enclosed in four circular disks. Each disk is small enough to fit in your palm. They're housed inside a plastine tube about this long."

"About your length?"

His eyebrow shot up, then he caught her joke and grinned. "You compliment me, Red."

"You might be a liar, but you were a good lay."

"No matter what happens, I'm still crazy about you, Red."

"Yeah, I'll expect your face is the first I'll see when I'm released in about a hundred years."

Although the *Guni* was her ship, Anexa hated searching Souzai's room, but she did anyway. She'd always respected her crew's privacy and was relieved when nothing was found. But if engine components were being sold, she had no choice but to suspect Souzai of disobeying direct orders.

"Let's try Ulina's room."

They found nothing. "It could take hours to search the entire ship. Maybe we should talk to your crew." Anexa agreed. As they exited the airlock, Davis placed a hand on her shoulder. "Thanks for trusting me."

"What choice do I have?"

"None." He dropped his hand. "Where are we going?"

"My crew hangs out in Havoc, Level 24."

They hustled to a lift. As they stepped onto the catwalk on 24, Anexa asked, "If we can't find the chips, what happens?"

"AP Security will come after you and your crew."

Who would notice if the *Guni* left port and never returned? "And if we find the chips and hand them over, won't they still come after us?"

"Not if you bargain with your silence. My superiors don't want this to become public knowledge."

"What's my guarantee I won't be out there working one day and be blown to bits? Silence can be bought with one AP pulse missile."

Davis grasped her by the arm and stopped her mid-stride. He looked her right in the eyes. "Me."

"You?"

He cupped her face in his hands. "Trust me, Red."

* * *

Trust me.

Her father had taught her to put her faith in no one but herself. He knew the day would come when she'd lose her heart and his advice was to ignore what your lover says and believe only in what he does. *Actions speak louder than words.*

Davis had already lied to her once. Would he do it again?

Anexa glanced at Davis as they entered a section called Havoc where the restaurants and bars catered to the underprivileged young people of Spaceport. The narrow metal streets were cramped and beggars stood in doorways. The smell of

unwashed bodies mingled with the stench of puke and stale air. Above a clothing store sporting riot bars on the doors, music blasted from an open window.

Two punks with purple hair pushed through the crowd without regard for the old or the infirm, but quickly stepped aside when confronted with Davis's determined gaze and purposeful stride.

Anexa guided Davis into an alley favored by Zonkers. Addicts with telltale injection tracks running along the column of their necks slept on filthy mattresses lined along one side. At the far end of the alley was Mayhem, a bar famous for cheap beer and local bands.

Dressed in body-hugging dark pants and a back-less top, with silver sparkles in her hair, Ulina was easy to spot in the group of young women gathered in front of the bar. It was obvious from the animated conversation and the laughter that Ulina was among friends. Never had Anexa hunted down her crew and infringed on their leave time, but then she'd had no reason before.

The conversation died as Anexa and Davis approached the group. Ulina's eyes widened as she stepped away from her friends. "Captain?"

"I'm sorry to interrupt," Anexa said. She lowered her voice. "I need you to return to the ship. It's important."

"Sure, Captain." Ulina said her goodbyes and fell in step with Anexa.

"Where's Souzai?"

"He's with his girl, Vina."

"Do you know where he is?"

"Vina shares a room with a couple of friends on the next block."

Housing was limited on Adana and a room even in this area was a luxury many couldn't afford. "Take us there."

As they exited the alley, Ulina asked, "What's the emergency, Captain?"

"AP Security is on to us."

Ulina gasped and glanced at Davis. "How?"

"We'll explain when we find your brother," Davis said.

When the crowd thinned a bit, Ulina asked, "Who's your friend, Captain?"

Anexa realized she hadn't introduced Davis. "This is Davis. He's helping me."

"Is the AP after you, too?" Ulina asked.

"No, he is --"

Davis grabbed Anexa's arm. "I'm a friend that's going to help you and your brother from being arrested for stealing a drone."

Ulina's eyes widened. "You told him?"

"I'll explain later," Anexa said. "Right now, we've got to find Souzaï."

Ulina guided them to a poorly lit doorway and up a narrow stairwell. On the second floor, Ulina led them along a corridor lined with doors. Upon reaching Vina's room, Anexa knocked. Davis stood to one side.

Souzaï answered. He wore trousers. His chest and feet were bare and his tawny hair hung loose around his shoulders. "Uli, what gives?"

When Anexa and Davis stepped into view, Souzaï's gaze narrowed. He looked at Anexa. "Captain?"

"I need to speak with you. It's important." A pretty girl with long brown hair and tinted eye shades appeared. She wore a high-necked bright red dress that clung to her slender body. "This must be Vina?"

Souzaï wrapped an arm around the woman's shoulder and introduced Anexa. When he looked at Davis, Anexa gave only his first name. "We really need to speak with you, in private."

The room was so small the single bed doubled as a sofa. Vina and her friends were shift sharing, a common practice for the young and the poor.

"Ulina, would you mind waiting outside with Vina while we have a word with Souzaï?"

The girl looked at Souzaï who nodded. "It's okay."

Anexa and Davis stepped back, allowing Vina to exit the room. As Vina passed Davis, he grasped the girl's high-neck collar and pulled it down. Faint but visible injection tracks ran down the side of her neck.

When Davis pushed Vina out the door, Souzai lunged at him. "Don't touch her."

Davis's hand connected with the crewman's chest with a *thwack*. Anexa shut the door. "Your girl's a Zonker," Davis said.

"Who are you?" Souzai demanded.

"Where are the parts?" Davis asked.

"What parts?"

"I know about the engine components," Anexa said. "Instead of destroying them, you sold them and AP Security is after the scavenger who pinched the drone. They're after us, Souzai."

The fire went out of Souzai's eyes and his broad shoulders sagged. "I'm sorry, Captain."

"If you have any parts, we need to see them."

Souzai leaned down and slid open a compartment beneath the bed. He pulled out a cloth sack and handed it to Anexa. She gave it to Davis who dumped the contents onto the bed. Most of the components were a mix of metal and plastine. Some had dangling wires, but one was a smooth plastine cylinder with connection slots on both ends.

Davis scooped up the cylinder and inspected it closely. "This is it. You're lucky we found it."

"Who are you?" Souzai asked.

"I'm the guy who's going to keep your ass out of an AP prison."

Davis cupped Anexa's chin and kissed her, hard and fast. "Leave Adana, go out to the edge of the free zone, the place where I caught up with the *Guni*. Dump what you have left of the drone and clean any trace of it out of your bay. Find a spot in the asteroid field and stay there until I contact you. Understood?"

Out there, she and her crew would be alone and vulnerable.

"Get moving, Red."

"What makes you think I won't jump on the next transport and disappear?"

His thumb skated along her lower lip. "I haven't known you long, but I'm willing to bet my career that you would never abandon the *Guni*. You might be foolish enough to try to run, but not without her."

The *Guni* was her home, the only thing she had. She'd die defending it. How was it Darkano read her so well, while she'd never suspected he was APS Patrol?

When she nodded, he kissed her again and opened the door. "I can make this right with my superiors. You take care of the drone and find a place to wait this out. Just stay away from Adana. Together, we'll make it."

Together. Anexa liked the sound of that. Was she crazy to put her life in his hands?

"Who is he?" Souza asked as Davis disappeared from view.

"He's Lieutenant Davis Darkano of APS Patrol and the man I love." There it was. She'd said it.

"APS Patrol! Have you lost your mind?"

Maybe. She'd certainly lost her heart. "Get dressed. We've got to dump that drone."

"What about Vina?"

"What about her?"

"I can't just leave her. She's broke and I can't pay her share of the rent."

Anexa's brain was spinning. She was worried about getting rid of the evidence and staying out of jail and he was blabbing on about his girl's problems. "Neither can I."

"Let her come with us. She'll sleep in my quarters, share my rations."

"I don't hire Zonkers or slackers."

"I love her, Captain."

"I can't believe you're letting a Zonker suck you dry."

"She's kicking her habit. I told her I'd be there for her as long as she's clean. I've got to keep my word."

Anexa started to refuse.

“What about you, Captain? I can’t believe you just declared your love for a guy who not so long ago would have arrested us.”

Anexa stuck her forefinger in Souzaï’s handsome face. “If I find any Zonk on my ship, I’ll toss Vina’s skinny ass out into space. Understood?”

Souzaï wrapped his arms around Anexa’s shoulders and gave her a hug. As if realizing he’d stepped over the line, he released her. “Sorry, Captain. Won’t happen again.”

“No drugs. Everyone pulls their own weight. Explain the rules to Vina.”

“Aye, Captain.”

“Gather her things and be quick about it. We’re leaving the moment you’re aboard.”

Chapter Six

Anexa stood at the airlock door awaiting Davis's arrival. He'd made her wait a few weeks before giving her an all clear. Finally, she spotted him. He had a large duffel bag slung over one shoulder and he carried a smaller one. He raised his right hand and smiled. That smile was her undoing. She ran and jumped into his arms, knocking him down, bags and all. Anexa landed on top of him.

"Miss me, Red?"

She'd ached for him. Their time apart had seemed never ending. Then he'd contacted her and told her he'd returned the guidance disks and retrieved what was left of the drone from the drop point. His superiors were satisfied and she was free to return to Adana. "What do you think?"

"I missed you. I missed you so much I've given up my commission."

"Why?"

"I don't want to live without you. If you're willing, I want to join your crew, but only if I can sleep with the captain."

Had she heard him correctly? "You're giving up your career to become a scavenger?"

"We make a good team. I was thinking we could transport supplies. I have good contacts in several AP ports with companies that supply the AP Security carriers. Adana needs food and medicine."

"Supplies cost."

"I have enough credits to seed Darkano Enterprises."

"What about Loy Enterprises?"

"Since we'll share the same name, why not keep it simple?"

“Confidence. That’s a good quality in a crewman.” Anexa trailed a finger along his jaw. “What other skills do you bring to the job?”

“I’m an excellent pilot.”

“That’s good. Anything else you’re good at?”

He cupped her face in his strong hands and kissed her. The kiss was slow, deep and intense. By the time he stopped, her bones had melted and her toes were curled.

“Loving you, Red. I’m really good at loving you.”

B.J. McCall

A multi-published author of contemporary and futuristic sensual romance, B.J. McCall is a West Virginia native now residing in Northern California. Thanks to an older sister who was a librarian, reading became B.J.'s favorite pastime. B.J.'s idea of the perfect way to spend a rainy afternoon or a day at the beach is reading a Romance novel. The phrase "Do what you love," applies to B.J. -- she loves to write and each story is special. She hopes her readers will enjoy each and every one of them. Visit her website at www.BJMcCall.com.