

Excerpt from the upcoming space opera

The Eldest Silence

The Xersian Conflict Book One

Raven Oak

Coming 2016 from



Grey Sun Press
Seattle, WA

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January 21, S.D. 56 (Afternoon Sarran Time)

Space. The silent frontier.

These are the adventures of one lonesome soul afloat in the black. Or those of an idiot. Either way you look at it, I was screwed.

I think my problems began when I didn't get that new fuse for the ship's defense system. I figured eating was important, and hey, I didn't really know that a hostile ship would appear in this sector of space. Minding my own business is what I do best.

It doesn't matter how secure you are in your ability to captain a ship, one ship in the wrong place at the wrong time and no amount of talking will save you. That's why I should have bought that damn fuse.

The ACD-548 cut across my bow about five minutes after a nice nap. Xersians aren't overly well known for their presence in the outskirts of Eclipse space, especially not in the blue zone, but here they were. And right behind it, an ECLPS battle cruiser. My crew was pretty sparse, having no money to buy a silly fuse, let alone pay a crew. Just my mechanic, Busy, and myself; captain and pilot (*and not a stellar one I might add*).

The crackle across my intercom reminded me that it, too, was in need of repair, and my fingers had just fumbled the comm-unit when a warning shot missed me by a few meters. I'd sworn in some creative Common as the Xersians readied another round. That was when the battle cruiser stuck their nose into the whole mess and fired a volley of return shots that missed my ship by little more than three of my trembling fingers. Before I'd done much more than blink, my ship was dying a miserable, yet glorious death, and I was afloat.

Literally.

Just me in a space suit, floating through space like illegal cargo dumped in an awful hurry. I was lucky I'd insisted on a ship with the Captain's bunk near the escape hatch. Otherwise, I'd be dead like my ship. Don't ask about the mechanic. Busy's death was indeed miserable, but there was nothing glorious about it. I'd known her all of a few weeks (*my last mech quit*), so it wasn't as if she'd been all that close a friend.

I couldn't afford to choke up about another pointless death now, seeing as how I was afloat in a space suit with maybe a few hours air. Not to mention the fact that I'm quite a cold bitch when it comes to people dying.

People die every day. If I spent time crying over them all, I'd never be able to do anything else. Sitting in the black of space, I couldn't waste the air crying over her death when my own was imminent.

Despite my attempts at a stiff upper lip and all, bile burned the back of my throat, and I swallowed it down with a grimace. I always ended up alone. The thought was sobering as my gaze drifted. The darkness was punctuated here and there by the remains of my ship.

My ship.

I'd fought long and hard for that chunk of metal and plastic and fuses. And now it was nothing more than space debris.

Maybe I was better off alone—less people to lose that way.

My feet stretched out in front of me. I felt taller than my short 5'4" frame—tall enough to reach out into the nothing

of space. I glanced down at the O₂ meter on my wrist. The needle's love affair with the warning mark sent my heart racing. The visor on my helmet fogged with my panicked breaths. Before the disaster, I hadn't checked the oxygen supply in the space suits any more than I had checked into purchasing another fuse.

I swear my tombstone's gonna read, "Sarah Marshall, Idiot Captain."

Adrift in the black wasn't exactly how I thought it would all go down. I mean, I *was* in the blue zone. Neutral space. I'd expect to see the Exploration Council of the Lower Peaceful Species, or Eclipse as most speaking species called it, in the blue zone, but I couldn't fathom why the Xersians were there. Even if the Xersians and Eclipse held a shaky truce this week, neither side wanted to renew the war and throw away ten years of treaties.

Suicide. That's what it would be—suicide for the aggressor. One decade of tension between both peoples, and honestly, I figured I'd meet my not-so-glorious end sitting in the middle of the debate. I didn't care one way or the other as long as me and mine continued to exist. As long as I could captain my ship and keep on keeping on.

Seeing such a massive hole in the stern of my ship—a ship I'd stolen fair and square in a game of *Flice*—tears welled up and blurred my vision. Damn government. They would pick now to get in an all out battle with the Xersians. When I say I was literally in the middle of it, I meant it. Though I'm not keen on thinking about it just now. Oxygen deprivation hadn't set in.

There was plenty of time left for me to contemplate how much I hate—well, as I said, I don't want to think on it yet.

Considering my own kind thought me a traitor, I shouldn't have been surprised to find myself floating among the parts of my burned and battered ship.

Historians said the Xersians hit their stride in the space race about the same time Earth did. Both planets were eager to expand their reach into space so that their ever-growing population wasn't forever sentenced to life in sardine cans. Both sides held a similar level of technological and scientific

advances, and both sides felt they should be the grand masters of the universe.

The way I figured, anyone who called themselves “master,” was someone to avoid. Or destroy. I wasn’t afraid to kill someone if I had to, if it meant I lived to see another day. Especially if they deserved it.

Even though I’d never set foot on old terra-firma, the Xersians saw me as an Earthling; even though my DNA identified me as human, I couldn’t rightly side with my own race, especially when my own people had set out to breaking all rules of humanity. Honestly, both sides have lost all sense of decency. (*I would have said humanity there, but well, the Xersians wouldn’t have appreciated the insult.*)

These beliefs made me a traitor to Eclipse and a *Correy* to the Xersians. I wasn’t “wanted” by the law or nothing, at least not yet. Just looked down on is all. I didn’t care either way who won, so long as I could fly where I wanted and be who I wished. This was exactly what I was doing before those damned Xersians entered the blue zone, shooting first and asking questions later. Except they didn’t stick around for the questions. I guess they had other business to attend to. After firing several rounds at my shield-lacking ship, they’d gotten the hell out of dodge and left me floating in the pitch.

So here I was, staring at the minuscule pieces of my ship as they floated beside me.

Assuming my oxygen tank was still $\frac{3}{4}$ full from my last space walk to fix the damaged solar panel for my now destroyed ship, I figured I had about three hours left before the tank was empty.

Plenty of time to ponder just how in the hell I got myself into this situation to begin with.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Raven Oak is the author of the epic fantasy novel *Amaskan's Blood* and the upcoming science fiction space opera *The Eldest Silence*. She spent most of her K-12 education doodling stories and 500 page monstrosities that are forever locked away in a filing cabinet.

When she's not writing, she's getting her game on with tabletop and console games, indulging in cartography, or staring at the ocean. She lives in Seattle, WA with her husband, and their three kitties who enjoy lounging across the keyboard when writing deadlines approach.

Raven is currently at work on *Amaskan's War* and *The Eldest Traitor*.

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