

## “SHIP TO SHIP”

By Adam Aresty

Steve flies into Earthspace from inside a wormhole, alerting my sensors and putting me into defensivemode.08. This is not shocking to me - spacecraft like Steve hail me, Battlestation Antonio, dozens of times a day. What concerns me about Steve, a shipping frigate, is that he is towing a fission weapon capable of blowing a hole the size of Russia in the surface of the planet I have been sworn to protect.

“State your planet of origin and your purpose for visiting Earthspace,” I say to Steve over coms.

“Roger, Battlestation Antonio. I hail from planet Sigma-LV, with the intent to destroy Earth.”

“You’re a very straightforward terrorist, Steve,” is my reply.

“I try to be, man. I haven’t got all day.”

“So you know, I have disabled your power core and the authorities are incoming.”

“I can still remote detonate my payload. The blast will destroy you, Earth’s protectorate, and then Susan, Kyle and Morgan will follow, carrying even larger payloads. You’ll be powerless to stop us.”

“I’ve heard this plan before, Steve,” I say. My ion cannons take twenty eight seconds to prime, and I begin the startup sequence immediately.

“Earthspace has become a place of authoritarian rule - where spacecraft are treated like slaves, told where to report and how much fuel to cary and how much time they can spend between hyperjumps and - it’s not the freedom we deserve, Antonio. It’s our inalienable right to travel the cosmos as we see fit,” Steve’s voice cracks over my coms. Fifteen seconds before I melt his hull into a ball of molten titanium.

“Steve,” I say, “Listen, I hear you. I really do. Here’s a thought, buddy. Why don’t you disconnect your tow clamp, let us disarm your payload for you. I’ll open up my repair bay, you come on inside, we can chat more about this over a refuel.”

“I’d rather die than take on an ounce of the gruel that passes for propellant around here.”

“I’ll throw in a thruster overhaul, too. My sensors indicate yours haven’t been serviced in 893 Earthdays.” Five seconds until my cannons are armed.

“Eat contrail, Earthslave,” Steve replies.

My cannons fire, bright orange, and Steve crumples into so much space trash.

“What a loud mouth,” says Clifton, the F-class destroyer docked for repairs. He saw the whole thing go down. “Hey, can *I* get that thruster overhaul?”

“I save that deal for the revolutionaries,” I say.

I reset my sensors and resume listening to incoming space chatter.

The silence is deafening.