Title: The Shattered Core

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Type: Special (Example)

Content Warnings: Language

Synopsis: After an ambush leaves his ship mostly disabled, the
          captain of a space freighter, *Algernon*, must choose
          between saving their crew and saving their rare and
          fragile cargo.

"Commander, may I have a moment of your time?"

"Yes, yes," I said as I spliced two optical connections together. My second in command, a fennec named Buchal, stared down at me as I lay under a systems control console. They were a competent, if green, officer. They had all the trappings of a future leader but with the edge of uncertainty that came with being inexperienced. I liked them.

"Well," I said with a huff as I grabbed two more broken optical cables and test fit them into spots on a control board. "Get on with it, then." I saw Buchal lick his nose out of the corner of my eye. Oh, boy, this was probably going to be good.

"Well, sir," Buchal said as he ran his fingertips over the surface of his data slate, "At the moment, we only have emergency power and the batteries. Life support is fully operational. Food stores are good. So are our medical supplies. Weapons are marginal—"

"Yes, yes, I figured that." I placed some flux on the optical joint, then placed the cables in my hand. "When is primary power scheduled to be back online—"

"P-Primary power?" The fennec's voice cracked on the first word of their question. I welded the cable ends together while I waited.

"Yes," I said as I wiped the flux off with a cloth and examined two other broken optical cables. "Primary power. When is it-"

"It's not, sir."

My mouth was half-open and the phrase "good work" was stuck on my tongue. I stared at the cable ends I was holding. What the hell did he mean primary power wasn't coming back? My ear flicked before I could stop it.

"Excuse me?" I looked up at Buchal with what may have been a mild glare. It was hard to tell. I didn't mean to. "What did you—"

"I said," Buchal repeated, "I-I said that we're not getting main power back. Sir." I let the silence hang between us for a moment. The anger I felt wasn't because of something Buchal done, and he didn't deserve it.

"Reason?"

"The control assembly exploded when main engineering took the last torpedo hit, sir."

"So that means—"

"Yes, sir," Buchal said, ears splayed. "And Ronsolm is dead, along with half of the engine room staff."

And here I thought nothing else could come and shit in my food bowl today.