

Repair Work

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Date : November 24, 2017

As a person who lives off-grid with an old truck and older boats, I've often found myself crawling, squirming, or otherwise maneuvering into tight spaces within their mechanical anatomy in order to repair something or other that has chosen NOW to reach the state we commonly refer to as FUBAR. I find that my personal experiences often get reflected in my writing.

Eldranth is my "jack-of-all-trades" character – a person who has traveled around enough and experienced enough that he has learned to do a little bit of everything. As a result, he often ends up having to do some less than savory jobs. He's fairly adroit at mechanical repairs, and this has led to several scenes in the story where his skills have "saved the day" ... here's two which give both the dangerous and humorous aspects of the repair business.

If there was a sixteenth hell in Voryn, I imagined it would be as hot as the Foalen's engine room. I could smell a sharp metallic odor, and the residual smoke in the room made the back of my throat burn. Lying on my side with copious quantities of sweat trickling into my eyes, I faced the right engine controls. Visually, I quickly scanned the components laid out in ordered rows along the face of the engine. It wasn't exactly like the engines in the Foalen's Destiny, and the component I was looking for was not immediately obvious. My heart was pounding in response to both fear and the tremendous heat in this tight space. Taking a deep breath, I forced myself to concentration on my search. There! I could see it now.

Unfortunately, the misbegotten piece of scrap was probably going to be very hot, and I hadn't had time to search for any gloves. Steeling myself, I reached out and grabbed the back of the burned out relay with both hands, giving a hard pull. Thankfully, the relay came loose with a snap; however, the smell of burning flesh immediately filled the hot air. Pain brought tears to my eyes and I nearly screamed, but I kept my jaws clamped shut. The last thing Dari needed right now was to be distracted by me. Fumbling with my burned hands, I slammed the new relay in place, and it engaged with a comforting thunk. The whine of the engine quickly changed pitch, indicating that it was now operating at full power again. Still biting my lower lip against the pain in my hands, I felt relief flood through me. "Fixed," I reported back to Dari. I crawled out of the engine room and staggered upright.

The late afternoon sun was hot on my bare back: it was only a handful of days until Davandria reached its summer solstice. Now properly cooked, I was being swallowed alive by a giant

monstrosity of metal. My arms were deep inside its gullet, my darkly tanned skin stained tarry black by its lubricating saliva. I had already tried kicking the beast several times during my day's activities, but it seemed that I was destined to be consumed, bruised and chewed by the ancient mechanical components that made up its digestive system. With an effort, I fought back, dragging my battered body out of the maw of the beast, the broken component clenched triumphantly in my hand.

Once firmly back on solid ground, I frowned at the now quiescent beast, stretching out cramped muscles. If it had eyes, I'm sure the six-wheeled contraption would have stared back with an expression of innocent mischief. While I knew the transport had nowhere near the computational capacity of the Foalen's Destiny, I wasn't entirely convinced that it didn't have enough to develop something of a personality. It remained silent. I laughed, holding up my hard-won trophy.

"You won't be up to any tricks until I get this fixed," I warned it. Entropy laughed silently back. I wiped the sweat off my forehead with the back of my not very clean hand. I was going to have to wash up before I could help Eldari with the clinic – I could feel more lubricating fluid in my hair.

I stared at the six-wheeled ground transport hulking in front of me. It was painted a dull brown-grey color, matt and dusty. Three diagonal blue stripes, the Medic's symbol, were painted on each side. The transport was ancient technology, one of the many versions of combustion engines that have been invented, forgotten, and reinvented again. This one was a relatively efficient and non-polluting model, except for the excessive amounts of lubricant that it seemed to require.

The transport was basically a box with wheels. Photoelectrochemical panels covered the top of the transport, generating hydrogen in a process similar to the electrolysis of water. In the rear of the transport, a series of metal-hydride containing tanks stored the hydrogen until it was required as fuel for the engine. This hydrogen was combusted with atmospheric oxygen in the engine, generating the power necessary to operate the vehicle. The engine was located in the front of the transport, which also featured windows and the drive controls. An access hatch located below the front windows, propped open at the moment, permitted servicing of the engine. It was from out of this hatch that I'd just pulled myself.

Entropy, as we'd humorously named the transport in response to its propensity towards increasing chaos, remained silent, its combustion engine unable to function without the part that I held. Transports were rare now on Davandria, and I knew we were lucky to have one. However, most of them, like Entropy, were old and constantly requiring repair. Luckily, when we acquired Entropy, we'd also gotten a good selection of spare parts. With some luck, we had a replacement for the piece I held. But that would be tomorrow's work ... right now I needed to get cleaned up and help Dari pack up the equipment from the clinic, which would be closing soon.