

Chapter Five

Me and My Shadow

"When you notice something out of the corner of your eye, but it's gone if you look directly, can you be sure there was really nothing there?"

- The Amateur Horror Movie Director's Manual.

Wing-Sergeant Khriys stretched out to his four metre full span, rippled the feathers at the tips, flapped hard, feeling the pull on his sleeping perch, then snapped smartly shut with a satisfyingly loud clap.

He looked up to the other end of the egg shaped ship where two of his crew were making ready to change over the watch. His watch partner was also waking, and to give him room Khriys gently pushed off the perch, twitched his wing tips and sailed up to the conn.

"Report, First Vrakke."

"Sir. We have tracked the cruiser Hresaty since you ended your watch. No incident has occurred. The miners are making good progress in reshaping the large metallic asteroid. Their report of one hour ago indicated they have completely melted it, and have commenced hollowing it, and they expect to be able to begin to cool and pressurize it in two more days. The ships following up the survey have found more large deposits of the minerals we desperately need." Vrakke was doing his best to restrain his excitement. "They also confirm the survey report that there was an alien craft on the far rim of the belt. It would appear from the evidence of exploration that they were seeking the same minerals. They also left in a hurry, since there was no attempt at concealment."

"Good." Khriys encouraged the youngster; he was trying so hard! Fresh out of the Academy, still in last-juvenile plumage, and yet he was a true First already. Ruefully, he decided that it was a good thing they would not see any combat action: his first fleet command, and