

# Dread / Lock (What happened to original title of Deadlock? Please change it back)

Her name is Ali McAllister. (Ali sounds too masculine. Maybe something like Amy instead?) Her job? Bounty hunter. She's been taking jobs in the Andromeda galaxy for 10 years, but her latest mark may be her toughest yet. Akanksha Purandare, the most brutal space marauder in the system, and a woman that Ali once called friend. (We've come around to her former friend being a woman, as it tested well in focus groups, but change the name to something simpler for English-speaking audiences to pronounce) Former partners, they travelled together, collecting bounties and striking fear into the hearts of those who would set foot on the wrong side of the law. But after a fateful crash landing on a remote planet, Ali awoke to find her partner missing. She would remain missing for several years, until the day Ali unwittingly accepted Akanksha's bounty, now operating under the title of "Mistress of Mutilation" (Perhaps something a little less visceral?). Shocked to see Akanksha alive, she has set out in search of clues as to her former partner's whereabouts. Her first stop? Their favourite drinking hole, "The Tramp's Tankard". (Change it to something like "The trickster's tavern", we have a rating board to please here)

Ali stops just inches from the old swinging saloon doors she's fallen in, and out of, countless times. She recalls the time an impromptu drinking buddy, whose name she has long since forgotten, told her they apparently had saloons just like this back in the old west. She didn't understand what a saloon or the old west was, but tales of old Earth always filled her with a sense of romance and unearned nostalgia. As soon as the memory subsides, she passes through the swinging door, saunters in and is greeted by a smell her nose could never forget, the musty aroma of "Bankai Moonshine". (Thank you for changing the name from "Bitches blood", maybe reread the original edits and change everything else I mentioned as well!) Terrible for the liver, but there's nothing this side of sector 11 that'll knock you on your ass as quick. Before Ali can even rest her arm on the bar, the patron behind the counter turns around, and with a wide grin calls out "Ali!". Ali responds "It's good to see you Xiayou, you haven't aged a day. And don't say likewise because I sure as hell know I've aged like milk on mars". (Focus testers had trouble pronouncing Xiayou, perhaps a simpler Chinese name like Chun would suit more. Remember, our main demographic is young white males!) "I see your knack for predicting what people are gonna say hasn't dulled one bit. I'm happy to see you again Ali." Xiayou's grin slowly fades, and the mood becomes somber. Xiayou pipes up, "I'd ask what brings you back here after so many years Ali, but I watch the news same as anyone else, and I'm sure I was just as shocked as you....". Ali looks down at her feet, sighs and takes a seat at the bar. "I suppose we can cut to the chase then. Have you heard anything Xiayou. Do you know where Pura is?". Xiayou pauses for a moment, picks

up a glass and starts wiping it with her rag. It's what she does to calm her nerves, or so Ali believes. "Before I tell you Ali, I want to know one thing.... when Pura went missing, why'd you never come back here? Why did I have to hear about her going missing from a Communication-Bot, instead of her friend's- from our friend's mouth?". Ali awkwardly shifts in her chair. She looks down at the drink-soaked bar, recognising all the old water marks from all those years ago. From when Ali wasn't even called Ali. (This seems to be an allusion to Ali having transitioned into a female. We've been over this, the execs put their foot down, and there's no chance Ali can be transgender. I'm sorry. Perhaps another character can be a trans representative, but not the main character. It's too alienating for our target audience. Please remove this line.) When Pura, Xiayou and herself would stay up drinking after closing time, wondering what their lives would be like in the future. But now the future is the present, and there's little point looking back on the past. "I'm sorry Xiayou. I don't expect you to forgive me, but the truth is I was too scared to return here. To face the fact that all the happy memories we had here would be just that. Memories. And I was too scared to face you too. To tell you that our best friend was gone because I crashed our ship. That it was my fault... I'm sorry." Xiayou stays silent for a moment. A cool breeze blows through the bar, and Xiayou just continues cleaning her glass. Ali's head sinks even further down, and she can feel her eyes grow heavy, tears welling up for the first time in a long time. (Maybe cut the reference to her crying. She's supposed to be a badass bounty hunter, not a lost puppy!) The urge to get up and walk away begins to build inside of her, the urge to continue running from the past, like she has for so many years. But before she can rise from her stool, she feels Xiayou's hand resting on hers, and when she tilts her head up, Xiayou's warm smile blows away the spectre of fear that aimed to control Ali yet again. "Ali... I do forgive you. I forgive you because I was scared too. I could've called you anytime, but I didn't. Guess we're both gutless huh?". Ali wipes away her tears, stands up and holds her friend's hand tight "I suppose so Xiayou...but not anymore. Please, tell me, what do you know?". "Come with me Ali. I don't have the answers you want. But someone in this town does". Xiayou hops over the counter and gestures towards the swinging doors. "Let's go Ali, it's getting close to closing time anyway". Ali follows close behind, "Who are we gonna see?". Xiayou swings the door open, letting the pale light of 3 moons shower them in its glow. "I'm happy to take you there Ali" Xiaoyu grabs Ali's hand and leads her outside. "But I'm not sure you're gonna like what you see..."