As a means of cutting cost and building staff, engineers in the Galactic Federation of Systems are only given rudimentary field training.

The idea made enough sense when you laid it out on paper—why waste time and resources giving a bunch of technologically and mathematically inclined recruits excessive physical exams when 99% of their job was going to be spent hunched over a desk?

Idolyne had been top of her class and had graduated as a Science Officer First-Class before being placed on the *S.S. Sainte Marie* and she’d only had to pass a very basic physical *once* in her first year as a recruit.

For the five years that she had been deployed into the Uncharted Territories, Idolyne hadn’t once faced a problem that couldn’t have been fixed with her engineering skills, the telepathy naturally endowed upon her species, or one of the Rangers stationed on deck with her. She hadn’t *once* needed to know how to forage for food, identify drinkable liquids, or build a shelter under times of duress—and if she’d had to, she could have simply read it from the minds of those stationed around her.

Until her escape pod had crashed on this miserable little rock where everything was not only non-sentient, but was also trying to kill her.

And then she had spent every day of the next two months wishing that she had signed up to become a Ranger.

In times of duress, the only thing that she could do was fall back on what little training she *had* received. She dressed her wounds, gathered her supplies, and charted out how long her rations would last her. Holding up in her can-shaped life raft, cracked open like a giant tube of rations, she had known nothing else but to try and get off of this dank horrible little rock. With giant carnivorous fauna and toxic flora threatening her at every turn—she literally couldn’t afford to do anything *but* attempt to fix the repair beacon.

It wasn’t until she detected the littlest flicker of intelligent life, in the form of a primitive scavenger, that she allowed herself to think of anything but.

Using her telepathy, she was able to calm the native. Despite the fact that they were so different physically, she must have looked like a haggard mess. Her long black hair fizzled and crazed, a frightening shade of “giant frog-monster” blue courtesy of the remains of her space suit, her brown skin dirtied, cut, and singed from working almost non-stop at the workbench… no wonder the poor thing had tried to hide from her!

Idolyne stooped down to touch the little gray girl on the shoulder, and used her gift to overcome the language barrier.

*Don’t be afraid, little one… My name is Idolyne, and I won’t hurt you.*

***You… speak… to me?***

*I most certainly do…*

She searched for the creature’s name.

*Iolande.*

Upon hearing her own name bounce off the walls of her mind, the scavenger looked at Idolyne with the same shock and awe that most underdeveloped species reserved for green-skinned federation members, or space ships. The squat woman grabbed her by the hand, and pulled her away from the ruined shuttlecraft.

***You…gift… Heart Speak! Come with!***

Searching Iolande’s residual thoughts, Idolyne knew that she had no reason to be scared. She was child-like. Simple, and easy to read. Her people were on a similar evolutionary level as Neanderthals—capable of using tools, communication among her peers, and little else.

An hour-long trek took the two of them back to what Idolyne had assumed to be their village. Small thatch huts made from the more benign flora that littered the planet. A group of twenty, maybe thirty people similar in shape, size, and intelligence to the little scavenger who had shown her the way were busying themselves around the settlement before they all went wide-eyed at the sight of the tall, blue-and-brown woman with the wild black mane being tugged along by the hand.

As she got closer, they grew more afraid until Iolande, in her native tongue, explained to them that she had found her in the (aptly named) Deadly Forest.

She explained to them that Idolyne had a special gift, and described her ability to “speak to the heart”—something that raised immediate mental comparison among the natives of their previous chieftainess.

In that moment, she had known that Iolande had brought her back to her village in order to lead, and be worshipped, as their new spiritual leader.

The mental imagery formed by the consensus of acceptance from the other villagers was strong. Idolyne was given images of the future that would await her within the Great Hut in the center of their little town—what they, as a people, were happy to lavish upon those which they considered Divine.

In exchange for her leadership, they would worship her. Pamper her. Spoil her. Feed her from the great beasts that thundered the land beneath them, and merely want from her in return the ability to solve conflicts between the tribe.

She was to grow fat.

She saw the collective image created by the awestruck primitives’ heritage and customs—she saw *herself* being doted over by hunter-gatherers, and hand-fed by ladies-in-waiting like Iolande. Her stomach would distend and widen, leaving her suit in tatters before adopting the primitive garb. Before long, it would lap over her sex. Later visions showed it slapping against her knees. Her arms would grow weak and flabby, eventually swelling to the size of the great fruits that she was to dine on in their disuse. Her legs would grow plump and ripened, given little reason to so much as rise under her own power throughout the day. Her jaw would soften, her cheeks would swell, and eventually her neck would become buried underneath a ring of fat.

Stunned by the vivid visions that the collective psyche of this village had thrust upon her, she had offered no resistance when walked to the throne erected at the bonfire.

Iolande offered her a special mixture of reptile and berry mix while the hunters dragged the carcass of a large, bipedal lizard into the camp to be cooked. To be offered. To her.

And as disturbed as she was by the visions of what they expected her to become… she hadn’t eaten well in months.