

His usual lengths of time with them were blissful. They went out of their way to make sure he relaxed before going out on his stressful duty of protecting the Planetary Collective. His kids would hang on his every word as he told stories about the planets beyond the rim of known space, the interesting people he would meet and his victories over his enemies. They were proud of being the children of such a heroic man.

This a man who had everything most humans desired. However, it was never enough for him, hence the harassment, or in his own mind, flirting. It all started with that insolent Yeoman Belle.

So now he was Captain again. He could get away from his desk and away from spending too much time with a family who begun to realised that he wasn't as great as he was cracked up to be. Unfortunately, for Billiam the PC had changed. In some of the bigger ships, they started to allow family members on board. Try as he might, he couldn't find away from preventing his family coming on board. He was now stuck with them no matter where he went.

But let's skip a few months of 'wedded bliss' and couples counselling to the incident.

It was one of the first official meeting between the PC and the Empire. The PCFS Chawla had recently saved an Empire Convoy from a gravitational anomaly, at the cost of the ship and it's captain. The incident had convinced the Empire that maybe the PC weren't the cowards and weaklings they had once thought and decided to finally answer their call for a peaceful meeting between the two human founded civilisations. For the PC this was the opportunity they had been waiting for. Everyone wanted the humans to reunify for the sake of the galaxy.

Being the warriors they were they requested their most decorated officer in the fleet, now Captain Billiam Dirk. They too saw his decision to get back into the fray to be a warrior's calling, something they highly respected. Billiam originally declined the invitation. He had no love for the Empire. They were brutes, murders and sadistic rulers, which wasn't an inaccurate assessment. He had seen firsthand what they did to the worlds they conquered, the slaves they abused and the ships they plundered. The PC shouldn't be trying to sit at the peace table with these monsters.

Unfortunately, the problem with being a Captain again was that it was difficult to disobey an admiral's orders. So, he went to the first official meeting between the PC and the Empire. His superiors had sent along a few members of the diplomatic core to attend and make sure things went smoothly. Again Captain Billiam Dirk was under orders to listen and follow their advice.

"The only good Empire soldier is a dead Empire soldier," was a phrase that was thrown around a lot.

What he didn't count on was that there was another type of good Empire Soldier and that was the attractive Empire soldier. The Captain of the Empire Ship Ragnorok was a beauty. She was tall, athletic and had the cunning look in her eyes. She was absolutely stunning and not in the pew pew way that most Empire soldiers would stun you. And her uniform, along with the rest of her crewmates, didn't leave much to the imagination. Their uniforms were, efficient, in their headspace. But Billiam wasn't complaining.

Billiam had gone to the welcoming reception alone. He and his wife had gotten into another argument and she refused to be anywhere near him. There had been moments where Billiam had forgotten himself and became a different person, a person who had couldn't forget and couldn't process what he had seen. But that's a story for another time.

Today was the final nail in the coffin.

"Captain Dirk, may I present Captain Phonus Namus"

Both Captains greeted with a handshake. The custom had not changed despite the separation of the species.

"It's an honour to meet you Captain Dirk, we have heard many stories of your victories in the Empire. My father was fond of telling me about you." Her voice was surprisingly husk.

Billiam smiled is patented smile. He always enjoyed getting his ego stroked but he could have done without the age reference.

"I'm surprised to be so revered in the Empire. I would have thought I was despised."

"Now, now. There's..." the diplomat tried to interrupt, however the pair ignored him.

"Oh, we do. Your effigy is burned in the halls of every capital city on every world. Your name is the worst insult our people can utter. Even my father has described in great detail what he would like to do to you if he ever got his hands on you. I believe vivisection was his favourite."

"Charming," the diplomat commented. He knew he was being ignored but he was there to make sure the Captain Dirk behaved himself, not the Empire Captain.

“Well, I’m flattered,” he remarked. “Unfortunately, I don’t think I’ll be visiting your father anytime soon.”

Captain Namus’s laugh was deep and raucous. “Perhaps not.” She smiled at him. “But despite all this, you are respected as a warrior who fights and protects his people, even if most of them are cowards.”

The diplomat did one of those fake smiles that only someone in politics could give. At least Captain Dirk was behaving himself for once.

“Well, don’t paint us all with the same brush,” he charmed looking at the diplomat in a cheeky way.

“I’ll try not to,” she responded. Billiam was thankful he was talking to a foreign dignitary that didn’t need human idioms explained.

“Well this is going swimmingly,” the diplomat jumped in. “I’m just going to get some refreshments from the table over there.” He turned awkwardly and went over.

“Tell me, are you politicians and diplomats the same in the Empire?” he asked.

“Unfortunately, yes. I received many messages not to screw this up. There was a time when we did not care for such people but as we grow politicians became a necessary evil.”

“Well at least we have that in common.” Billiam took two champagne flutes off the table and passed one to the Captain.

“Cheers,” he offered. Captain Phonus was unsure of the ritual. It would appear that not every cultural custom had remained in the Empire. He raised his glass to hers and tapped them together. He drank the flute in one gulp. She did the same.

“Not bad!” she exclaimed.

By this point Billiam was unexpectedly charmed by this gorgeous Empire Captain. Decades of hate had disappeared for a night.

“Say, would you like a tour of the ship, before he gets back,” he was pointing at the diplomat how was filling his plate with the delectable devilled eggs, that had been donated and prepared by the Chiketans.

“An interesting offer, Captain. I would be most interested to see your weapons array,” she smiled.

“Ah, I don’t think I should take you there. But there are plenty of places we can ... explore,” he smiled back. The diplomat had been right, it was going swimmingly.

“Well, how can I refuse? Just give me a moment to adjust my spy cams and we’ll head off.” They both laughed.

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“This is your office?” she stood in the door frame between the Bridge and the Captain’s ready room. “It’s surprisingly small for a man such as yourself. Your people have done you a great dishonour.”

Billiam couldn’t have agreed more. “It suits it’s purpose.” He gestured her to come in and sit on the sofa. “Would you like something to drink? Some more champagne perhaps?”

“Hmmm,” she murmured as she sat down. Her movements were swift and purposeful as well as elegant in an unusual way. “Do you have anything stronger? Maybe with less bubbles and less sweetness. It reminds me too much of ...”

“The PC?” Billiam interjected.

“Exactly,” she gestured towards him. “No offence.”

“None taken.” He went over to the synthesiser and ordered a couple of Catarian Rums. “My people of late have changed since I was originally Captain. There a little less eager to fight for what’s right and more eager to chat mindlessly. We’ve become as dull as the blue and silver panels that line the halls of my ship. We’ve lost our edge.” He handed her the drink. She sniffed it. Her expression showed that she was intrigued.

“To be honest captain. My people are the same. We are not the same people we once were. We now negotiate with those we once conquered. We talk with our enemies.” She raised her glass up.

“But that’s not always a bad thing.” He sat down next to her while keeping eye contact. Her eyes were an intoxicating emerald green.

“Too true, Captain,” she tapped his glass and swilled it. “Ooof, this is not bad. It’s very similar to Promethean Whiskey. Quite a spicy tinge to it.”

Billiam could feel a spicy tinge himself, but it wasn’t coming from the alcohol.

“Thank you. I do pride myself on being able to read my guests.” He put his hand on her thigh.

“What are you doing?” Captain Phonus’s countenance immediately changed. Billiam’s eyes became deer in the headlights.

“Don’t you dare touch the daughter of the Emperor.”

Billiam moved his hand off her and jumped up.

“The daughter of the Emperor?!” he shouted. “But...”

“Do you think we would just send any old officer to meet with you? What foolishness!”

She stood up and left the ready room in a huff. The bridge crew could see a stunned Dirk standing in disbelief.

That was the final nail in the coffin for Billiam Dirk. He lost everything that night; his ship, his crew, his family and his dignity. But he was going to get it back. All of it back. He was going to restore his honour, and all he had to do was deliver Billiam to the Empire and press the button.



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