

Chapter 15

“Welcome back your Eminence,” her main attendant greeted at the royal docking bay. “I trust your excursion was bountiful?”

The Empress could hear a little sting in his voice. She had left things quite abruptly, not something a new leader should do when they seized power.

“It was,” she looked behind her. Her entourage were carrying the limp body of Commander Belle, who was sedated during the shuttle transfer. “I will need a full update on what’s gone on during my absence. I assume from the debris, the Revenant was attacked.”

The attendant gave a nod of approval. The Empress felt a twinge of guilt. She abandoned them in the name of revenge and power. However, she may have learned the very means to secure her future.

“I will meet with my commander staff in half an hour. Take the Commander to one of the holding cells. The best one we have. We will need her.”

“Yes your eminence.” The attendant walked over to the guards and started relaying her orders. The remainder of her guard followed her through the golden halls. The ship’s lights had remained soft since the ceremony. It gave a more sombre feel to the ship.

“Computer, turn all lights to 85% lamination!”

“Affirmative”

That was better. The halls now glistened gold with the backdrop of crimson red. On the archways and door frames you can see the intricate golden flake detailing of horns and swords and other imagery that highlighted dominance. It was an unnecessary detail in Se’cond’s opinion. The leader of the Empire didn’t need to show dominance through displays of wealth and fortune. Might and fear was all that was needed.

The bridge crew stood up as the Empress step out of the lift. There was a small trumpet sound in the background to alert them of her presence.

“Captain Lee’dur?” she smiled. “I assume that was your doing?”

He nodded as he stepped away from the Captain’s chair. She walked over, still in her red and green battle uniform, that did leave more to the imagination than previous incarnations and sat down where Lee’dur was sitting previously.

“Report!” she ordered.

Lee’dur handed her a pad with the ship’s log.

“We continued towards T’Vis’shun at half speed as ordered until we reached the rendezvous point. That’s when we were ambushed.”

“By who?”

“Governor May’tals forces. He has declared his system and a few of the neighbouring systems independent. They’re calling themselves the Union.”

“Not the cleverest of names.”

“No, however, he does command now a tenth of our forces. The Grashu Shipyards have sworn loyalty to him as well as the majority of the foreign legion battalions. Apparently, he has made all non-human intelligent species equal and freed them from servitude.”

“I see,” she replied confidently. “Well good for him. How many ships attacked us?”

“Three assault ships,” Lee’dur continued. “They were probably hoping to catch us by surprise, but they were reckless. They were no match.”

“That’s good to hear. We will have to deal with May’tal at a later date.”

The Empress could see that Lee’durr looked nervous. The rest of the crew, who were looking busy, looked busy as well.

“What else?”

“I should leave it for your military council.”

“You are a part of my military, what are you not telling me?”

Se’cond got a better look at Lee’durs face. This was someone who had not gotten a lot of sleep. “It would appear the May’tal’s actions have inspired others to rise against you. All of your border worlds, including those near the Independent Trader’s Union, the Planetary Collective and the Perseus Alliance are in revolt.”

“So we are surrounded?”

“Unfortunately, yes your eminence,” Lee’dur replied.

“Including, T’Vis’shun?”

Lee’due swallowed hard. The royal residence has been destroyed, including your home.”

“I have many homes on many worlds, Captain. It was just one.”

While it was one of many royal residents across the Empire, it was where she had grown up. While many would second guess the choice of leaving your children on a planet near the borders of your enemies, for the Emperor it was a symbol that the Empire was strong. That he trusted no harm would fall to his progeny. It was also where the Empress and Lee’dur first met.

“Yes, your eminence,” he bowed and stepped back.

This was the moment that she needed to be strong. She knew that whether she was on board or not, these things would have still happened. She had set things in motion when she ordered the Governor’s to step down. They wouldn’t leave without a fight. But that was ok. It was just dead weight. She would get them back with time. However, she needed a symbol of her own. One to show that the Empire she envisioned, the Empire she grew up in was still here and as powerful as ever.

Commander Belle was the key.

“Comm! I want you to broadcast this as far as you can and as loud as you can across anywhere in the universe that is going to listen.”

The comm officer looked at the Empress and then looked at Captain Lee’dur.

“We may not have access to all the communication satellite’s in T’Vis’shun or other controlled worlds in the sector,” Lee’dur warned. “Besides, it will give away our position to the rebels.”

“I’m aware of the risks and limitations, Captain.” She meant business now. Any affection that they once had had been wiped away, as with the place they first met. After Lo’var’s reactions to her actions on the Widow Maker, she had to put her personal feelings aside. “Do it.”

The comm officer opened of communication channels.

“To all of subjects of the Empire, I Empress Se’Cond the true ruler of the Empire have heard your cries as you struggle against the agents of Chaos! Those who have fallen and suffered at the hands of those who turned away from our kin will suffer a fate worse than death. For those who have left us, to follow a new Order, you have one last chance to reclaim your positions as Empire citizens. I will be merciful to those who return. And to our enemies in the Planetary Collective, the one who assassinated our beloved Emperor and Heir will be tried and convicted for her crimes. If you dare enter our space, her suffering will be ... immense. And I’ll make sure you witness it!”

The bridge was in stunned silence. These were some big plans, plans that one doubted she could achieve. They felt it to be all bark and no bite.

“Captain Lo’var of the Widow Maker! Prepare to fire on the moon below! Comm all sensors on the target. Let’s all witness the power the Empire possesses.”

“Widow Maker to your Eminence, prepared to fire at your order.”

“To those who doubt, let me erase it. Fire”

The Widow Maker, which had delivered the Empress back to the Revenant, had picked up something from the Order Ship, something that should have been erased. It was not a weapon, but neither was a hammer. If there was one thing humans could do, it was to turn anything into a weapon.

At the Empress's order, they fired a simple torpedo with a not so simple element at its core. Something found at the galactic core, where no life lives for good reason. Within half a minute the torpedo hit the surface of the barren moon below. The Widow Maker had turned away and was sublighting it out of there because they knew what was going to happen.

The Revenants sensors picked up a sudden increase in seismic activity. Cracks appeared on the surface, dust was spewing out from the new caverns beneath. The moon's natural EM field began to fluctuate. Soon the moon looked like a broken egg. It was breaking apart from the scenes at an unnatural rate. The Revenant detected an increase in the moon's gravitational pull, so the Empress ordered them to take them away but to keep the sensors locked.

As they sped away, they saw the moon shrink and compress.

"Your Eminence, the nearby planet it's..." called out the operations officer.

The planet, a celestial body a hundred times bigger than the moon, was being pulled towards it.

"That's impossible!" Captain Lee'dur exclaimed.

The rest of the ship watch as the planet collided with the moon it once controlled.

"Captain Lo'var," she began to order, all communications had continued to transmit. "Switch it off!"

"Yes, your eminence."

With the order, the Widow Maker fired an energy beam into the remaining core of the moon. The moon's gravitational field decreased dramatically, however the two celestial bodies were still colliding due to inertia.

"The Empire endures. The Empire is Reborn! End of Message!"

Chapter 16

On the light cruiser both Milton and Billiam witnessed the destruction first-hand. They had managed to reach the scout ship ahead of their calculations, as they didn't expect it to be rendezvousing with a battlecruiser. Their plan was to sneak aboard the ship, using Milton's restored abilities, rescue the Commander and be on their way. However, before they could implement it, the Empress unleashed her fury. Milton had just enough time to hightail it out of there before they too were caught in the gravitational pull. Thankfully, their stealth systems were still in operation, which meant their ships would evade detection unless within a close distance. With all the planetary debris, if they were spotted, they'd probably be mistaken for a piece of rock.

"That's impossible!" Milton exclaimed.

"You're telling me!" Billiam responded. "If I'm not mistaken, that was similar to what happened over Isothorpe. How did they ..."

"How did they get their hands on it?" he thought. He opened up the sensor logs from the pirate ships debris. It didn't take him long to find what he was looking for. "I didn't check." He had been too shocked to see a member of the Order floating in the dead of space that he had forgotten to check for the ship's fuel tank, the core.

"I think it's time you told me what's happening, Milton. I've been patient and I've kept my mouth shut because my goal was to rescue the Commander. Whatever you are was not my concern, but now it clearly is!"

Milton knew he was right. Things had now spun out of control, it was taking all his concentration to keep a hold of himself. He didn't need another episode at this moment.



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