

## Chapter 21

The Empress sat on her lounge was again in the darkness of her suite, looking out to the streaks of multicoloured light. They would arrive at T'Vi'shion in a couple of hours. She had some tough choices ahead, if she were to save and reunite her people. However, that wasn't why she was brooding in the dark, something that was becoming a habit of late. It was Lee'dur and Lo'var.

Emperors through Empire and even Earth history have had their fare share of concubines and mistresses. However, Se'Cond, who was thinking of changing her birth name, was the first Empress of the Empire in its three-hundred-year history. She wasn't sure what the expectation was for her. In any case, she never thought that she'd be having boy problems as the leader of the Empire.

What Lee'dur did was unforgivable for both what he was doing and why. For starters he gave the Commander an opportunity to escape. Secondly, he was going to take advantage of a prisoner, whether or not that was part of the commander's plan, is not important. That violated the ethics of the Empire, it was dishonourable. However, the why was personal. He was going to do it because the Commander resembled her; because he wasn't getting enough attention. This wasn't the time for academy relationship drama. This was the balance for control of the Empire, control of the galaxy. She didn't have time to stroke the egos of people who she has had relationships with. She didn't want this to take up any headspace.

The Empress had a home to reclaim. She needed to be keeping up to date with troop movements. Most of the forces on T'Vi'shion were still loyal to the Empress but a small division, along with a rising militia, controlled by Lieutenant Governor Thornside, had caught them unawares. They opposed the Empress's decision to imprison Governor Buxtab.

Then of course there was the big picture. She had a million things to decide. She didn't have time for men acting like boys.

Her door rang. Only one person was permitted to ring her doorbell.

"What is it A'ten?"

The attendant stepped through the doorway but no further. They weren't going to enrage her, not directly anyway. They were just the messenger.

"The Commander is awake. Doctor He'la says her injuries are minor and she will recover but she needs rest."

"I wish I could give it to her," she sighed. It was time for a second meeting, perhaps something a little less shocking.

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"Forgive me if I don't stand your highness," Belle said in an overtly sarcastic manner.

The Empress went up to her bed chamber, as close as she could get with the field in the way. Commander Belle was still a prisoner. The field was non-lethal. Even the Empire had their standards, not many tough.

"Forgiveness is a weak trait, as are apologies," the Empress replied. "However, in this case..." She stopped herself from continuing.

"Wow! The Empress was going to apologise. The same one who not a few hours before fried me to an inch of my life."

"As I said, apologies are weak."

"So what are you doing here then? Are you going to pull a Mr Hyde from your Dr Jekyll to get answers from me?"

The Empress didn't get the reference.

"Don't worry. After your demonstration, there's no way I'm going to give you what you want. I'm not saving my life to endanger billions, perhaps trillions of people."

"Do you even know who your companion is?"

"Was," Belle interrupted. "It's been like three ships since I've seen him."

“Believe or not Commander I believe you,” she knew that she would never have the Commander’s trust. She didn’t need it. But what she did need was for her to understand her role in the big scheme of things.

“Wow, another shock. This is certainly different than I expected the Ruthless Empress to be. Where’s your cold dead heartless eyes? Your quickly and deadly wit?”

The Commander did go on. She had spirit, the Empress gave her that but she had the inflated ego of a Peacy officer.

“I’ll ask my original question. Do you know who he is?”

“Should I?”

“He’s the most dangerous being in the universe!”

“I think that title falls to you there, sister. He’s not the one blowing up moons and destroying world. I assume that’s what you plan to do to your old home. Follow me or I’ll destroy you?”

“I understand you’ve been through a lot and I’ve been a big part of that.”

“No, shit!”

The Empress had to gather her composure.

“I know you weren’t responsible for the death of my family and my ship.”

“Well at least your not stupid.”

“I know it was him, at least physically. Whether he intended or not, I need to determine.”

The Commander looked at her, scrutinizing her. The Empress didn’t feel like herself. Things had changed over the past 24 hours. She didn’t want to deal with this Peacey blowhard but the situation called for it.

“Well I guess if there’s a Mr Hyde, there would be a Dr Jekyll.”

“I’m not sure what you are referring to?”

“It’s a story about a man with two sides. Dr Jekyll was a peaceful doctor but had another side, an evil side called Mr Hyde. It’s basically an allegory of recognising the evil side in all of us but not try to hide it under denial. I guess it works the other way too.”

“The Empire is not evil.”

Commander Belle laughed hysterically. “Ok, I’m sorry I shouldn’t be laughing, but I’ve been through too much shit to hide it under my tolerance and understanding. You literally enslave other species, you torture your prisoners and from what happened in the cell block I guess your soldiers take advantage of their prisoners. I’m sorry, but that seems pretty damn evil to me.”

“I’m not going to get into a philosophical debate about what is right and wrong. The Empire has a lot of work to do, but so does the Planetary Collective.”

“So what do you want, please tell me why we are having this ridiculous conversation?”

“I need you to answer three questions for me. One, do you know who he is? Two, did he destroy the Victory on purpose and three is he coming for you?”

## Chapter 22

To say that T'Vi'shion was a paradise would be a lie, to be perfectly honest. It was a shitty world on the edge of Empire Space. Not the best place to have the two most powerful children on the Empire to live. Granted the children of the Empire had everything at their fingertips, but besides from the heavy pollution it was also a target for many pirate raids. As long as the Children were safe, the planet was safe.

So why was it a valuable world to the Empire, why was the Empress concerned with retaking this joke of a planet? Why did people live on this unliveable planet? Well money and power. Why else?! The planet was rich in resources, it powered a third of the ships in the fleet. Plus it was on the border of ITU and PC space so it had strategic importance as well.

As Milton and Billiam descended into the atmosphere, they could see the capital on fire. From the messages they intercepted, they were aware of the civil unrest. They would have avoided the planet to begin with, however, there weren't any moons to hide behind and the stations in orbit were a hive of violent activity. It would be too much of a risk hiding anywhere near them. Well not for Milton, but he wasn't going to let his human companion get hurt. That's how he got into this mess in the first place.

As for the human, Billiam, he was surprisingly quiet. Before he was either asking questions or reminiscing about his glory days. Now he was just sitting there, almost comatose even. It looked like Milton wanted to wake him up, but thought better of it. He would need to rest before more shit hit the fan. It would still be an hour before the Revenant got there. Milton was forced to 'jump' ahead. A little taxing, but it wasn't as big and uncontrolled as before.

Billiam, however, was not asleep. He was having a right old conversation with his patrons. Apparently, this was not what he had signed up for. Cutting the Empire's supply lines was one thing, potentially destroying a planet was quite another. He wanted his old job back and a little revenge on that bitch, the Empress but genocide was definitely off the table. If he was going to go through with what his patrons had in mind, well he'd be unleashing the most powerful destructive force anyone has seen in the galaxy, perhaps the universe.

"I'm not gonna fucking do it, you hear me? I'm not going to kill millions of innocent civilians."

"Disappointment." It was their main response.

"You used me to get him here, so you could destroy this world."

“It’s what you wanted”

“I wanted to hurt their military, prevent them from hurting the Empire or anyone else again. That doesn’t mean wiping them from existence.”

“That is what you desire.”

“What, wiping them out, no! Granted it looks like they are going to do that to themselves, but I’m not going to accelerate it. I’m a PCF officer, well I used to be, but it means I protect, I defend. And I certainly don’t strike first with a world destroying weapon.”

“No choice!” the voices whispered.

“Yes, you have no choice. I’m not going to do it.”

“No!”

“Yes, that’s right. You can’t make me.”

“You have no choice. You will follow!”

“What?!” he woke up in a gasp, but he wasn’t lying in his cot and his body did not gasp. He was looking through a mask. He was looking through his eyes but he couldn’t control his body. “Oh shit!” He was no longer in control of his own body. From now on, he was just a passenger for the ride.

“Oh your finally awake, Billiam, came a familiar voice. “Let me update you on where we are with everything. Billiam was shouting as loud as he could to get Milton’s attention, however, Milton was unable to hear him.

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