

“A squadron of fighters are closing in, given that they have weapons charged. I don’t think they are friendly,” the comm officer reported. “We’ve also not heard from any other ships in the area. There are a dozen possibilities, but again it’s scattered. I can’t get a fix and they aren’t responding to hails. They could be too damaged to reply.”

“How is that possible? There’s no way that the cruisers here were that easily defeated by a Militia group. How did they mobilise so quickly?” She paused. “Are there any other ships in the area, non Empire?”

She was hoping for a sign from either the Order or Chaos groups.

“I’m detecting another ship, small ... it’s a trader ship, from the ITU security bureau, according to the registry.”

The Empress sat back in the captain’s chair pondering why the ITU would send such a small ship all the out this way. It made no logical sense. And then it clicked.

“He did come for her. Shit!”

“Blow up that ship immediately,” she commanded.

“But that would violate the ...”

She didn’t need to say anything, her glare was enough

“Yes, your eminence.”

The pilot set a course directly towards the ITU shuttle, which had just settled between them and the Militia ships heading their way. There was no way they were going to reach it in time before the other ships arrived. They didn’t want to be distracted by the Militia as they were disabling a weapon of mass destruction.

“Beep, Beep!” No one else seemed to hear the comm activating except for the Empress.

"I've got a crazy idea," came the voice of Commander Belle.

"Are you completely nuts?!" she yelled in response to Commander Belle's plan. The rest of the crew were confused. She had forgotten that no one else could hear her.

"Weapons Chief, clear torpedo bay one."

"Yes, your eminence but why?"

"I don't need to explain myself to you!"

"Very well. Clearing now!"

"You've got two minutes," she whispered. "Con, is the ITU ship doing anything?"

It wasn't. It was hanging in the dead of space, its engines and systems appeared to be on idle. However, as they approached it, the interference became thicker and even the militia ships they were approaching seemed to be harder to lock on to.

"These systems are going haywire, I can't make sense of them."

The Empress got the signal.

"Tactical, send a torpedo from bay one and aim it at that ship. No questions asked,"

"Yes, your eminence." He pressed the fire button.

.....

"You can't hold on like this forever Milton," came the possessed voice of William Dirk.

Milton had his feet melded into the floor and his hands holding on to Billiam's forehead. He hadn't melded with him, but he had created a connection to his mind and disabled his physical functions. Whatever purpose Chaos had with Billiam, Milton was going to stop it before it happened. Unfortunately, this meant that Milton had to take over Billiam's automatic functions as well because he could create a hard connection. It was hard to keep the ship stable, keep the poor Captain alive and find the agent of Chaos that was swimming around Billiam's body.

"Why can't you find some other place to play? Haven't you caused enough damage in this part of the universe, I'm sure there are other places you could go!"

"You would think so, but this is the only galaxy around here that is unprotected."

"Unprotected?"

"It's a long story, it would be difficult for even you to understand. Let's just say that we need to restore the balance of the galaxy, but first we need to do some weeding!"

"You're not an agent of Chaos, are you?"

"Very clever. You know what, you deserve a prize. We hoped that our agents would keep things ticking and hold the Order in place, unfortunately, the Order followed us. That was a pain, but that's another story. However, you'd think that that would have made our agents' job easier. Well we were very disappointed to hear of their defeat. We had such high hopes for them, oh well."

"Are you saying you're the original?"

That question had cost him some concentration. He missed a heartbeat. Billiam winced in pain.

"Dear Dear Dear, Milton," the entity quipped.

"Torpedo incoming," the computer alerted.

Milton could sense it. The Revenant had fired a single torpedo at them. They hadn't even tried to communicate with them. Unfortunately, he was stuck between his three goals; run the ship, keep Billiam alive and prevent whatever scheme Chaos was up to. Milton knew that it wanted him here. It waited for the Revenant to be here. This had been its plan all along.

“You have to choose, Milton. The life of this old Captain, or stopping whatever I have planned. Who knows, perhaps I’m going to throw a party for everyone. I am Chaos after all. You never know what I might do.”

“Impact in thirty seconds,” the computer alerted. Sirens were going off around the ship as the emergency lights gave the inside of the corvette a red glow.

“Isn’t this beautiful, nothing like a good red alert alarm to give a little ambiance to this little dilemma of yours.”

Milton knew that it would be simple to kill Billiam here and now, prevent Chaos from unleashing whatever it had up its sleeve which no doubt would kill everyone in this star system. One life versus millions. A fair trade by most standards, not for Milton. Something told him the agent wanted to force this decision, either way someone was going to die.

“Impact in 20 seconds,” the computer alerted.

“Tick, tick, tick!” Billiam went. “What’s it going to be?”

“Billiam! I know you’re in there. You have to fight whatever it is. I know that this isn’t what you want.”

“I don’t think the poor old captain has it in him.”

There was a flash of light outside followed by an impact.

“Well that was a little anticlimactic,” sighed Chaos. It looked over to Milton’s face to see his smile brimming from ear to ear.

“You better hold on tight!”

At that moment, the port hatch swung open blowing out all the loose items on the ship at a violent rate. Milton was fairly secured on the ship and had secured Billiam with a tighter hold. He focused all his attention on keeping Billiam alive. A figure dressed in a spacesuit crawled in, fighting against the air being blown out.

For Milton, he didn't need air to breathe, but knew Billiam wouldn't last long. He could keep him alive for a little while longer, but if the door didn't close quickly no amount of life support could make up for the extreme temperatures and lack of oxygen that the vacuum of space was going to provide. He had to hold on tighter, share the residual oxygen and heat he had in his body and share it with Billiam. He made the connection.

The figure took its time, but managed to brace itself on the inside of the hatch's inner bulkhead. Milton sent a signal through his body to shut the door and restore life support.

"Quickly, get to the cockpit, I need your help to take back control of the ship, then I need your help here."

"A hi would have been nice, but ok," responded the astronaut in a very familiar tone.

Milton looked at Billiam who was regaining consciousness quickly, surprisingly quickly. He felt the astronaut accessing the ship's systems.

"You have to delete the new program that's been added before it becomes aware you're here." Milton felt the synapses reconnecting in Billiam's brain. He hoped that the original Billiam would be able to at least have a chance to retake control of his body before Chaos had a chance to do the same.

"Done," replied the astronaut.

"That was fast. A little too fast," Milton was suspicious.

"I had some time to plan. It's a long story."

"Well, well, well," Billiam's voice echoed. It was not the original Billiam. "The infamous Commander Belle. It's unexpected to have you here, but then again I'm a fan of surprises."

"That's not Bill, is it?"

"I'm afraid not Lily," he smiled. "But you know what?" He began to chuckle. "I have what I need."

Billiam's body began to jerk, twist and spasm. Milton, who was still attached, began to follow suit.

"You have to let go!" Lilianna yelled.

"I can't, he..."

"He's using you to trigger the same event that happened over Isothorpe. You have to let go!"

He didn't need to be told twice. He detached himself. Billiam continued to spasm as a light purple presence seeped out of every possible orifice.

"It's leaving the body, whatever it is." Lilianna pointed out. They continued to watch as the mist coalesced and headed through the ventilation system.

"Can you track it?" Lilianna asked.

Milton ran over to the cockpit and began a scan. "It's heading out of the ship, bearing 181 mark 72. That's..."

"Directly to T'Vi'Shion."

"Revenant to unknown ITU ship. Commander Belle, is the situation under control?"

"That depends on what you consider under control but the ship and Milton are stable. It would appear that the radiation has cleared up. Are the Miltia ships disabled?"

"They won't be interfering with us anytime soon," the Empress replied.

"You destroyed them, didn't you?"

"You don't dictate Empire policy Commander. They are enemies of the Empire. You should be grateful that I allowed you to do that stupid stunt instead of destroying the ship."

As they began to argue, Billiam snapped back to life.

“You’ve got to stop it before it reaches the planet!”

“Bill, what do you mean. It’s a wisp of smoke, what can it do?”

“It took a piece of him before it left. You shouldn’t have merged with me.”

“Shit!” Lillianna and the Empress uttered simultaneously. “It’s time to bring in the Widow Maker!” Lillianna added.

“Affirmative. Comm signal the Widow’s maker to exit FTL at the planet’s coordinates.”

There was a pause of the Corvette’s comm systems.

“What do you mean they’re not responding?”

“Empress, what’s going on?”

“The Union! Where did they come from?”

“What’s going on Lillianna?” Milton panicked.

Lillianna wanted to answer the question, but needed to focus on the task at hand. She didn’t have time to explain.

“Revenant to all ships in this system friendly or otherwise. Fall back to these coordinates immediately. Commander you, too. The Widow Maker has been destroyed.”

Lillianna went back to the pilot’s chair and punched in the coordinates. As they jumped to FTL, Milton saw the look of utter dread on Lillianna’s face. It burned into his memory.

## Chapter 24

Only a handful of the Empire loyal ships had managed to escape far enough from the system before they were caught in the anomaly. Most of them had been disabled by the radiation cloud being emitted by the ITU Corvette. The captains suspected that the ITU had sent the rebels a gift to aid in their fight against the Empire. Thankfully, the Empress had enough clout to prevent them from destroying the ship when the ship had joined them at the evacuation point. After that, the Corvette stayed close to the Revenant, just to be sure.

As they got a chance to catch their collective breath, Lillianna caught both Billiam and Milton up with the situation. Billiam did the same. For the first time in a very long time, he felt ashamed of his actions.

“Typical, you only thought of yourself,” Lillianna wasn’t afraid to show her disgust.

“That isn’t helping, Lilliana,” Milton interjected.

“You wanted to live out your glory days by committing genocide!” she continued.

“Hey, genocide was not in the agreement. I was told to persuade him to come here. That’s it!”

Yeah, knowing full well what he could do!”

## Creative Commons



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).