

“Presumably, it wants to wreak havoc amongst the Empire,” Milton began. “If what we figured is true, it wants to destroy what it’s adversary created.”

“Your Eminence, even if this is all true, we have a war to fight and a civilisation to save. We can’t spend all this time speculating where this creature is,” the Fleet Admiral interjected.

“He’s right, I have state matters to attend to, even if find Chaos, I still have enemies to fight. General Rahn’diem, I need you to work with these to capture Chaos.”

“Whoa! I didn’t sign up to be a member of the Empire military establishment. No offense, but I need to return to the ITU,”

“Whatever!” The Empress waved. “The rest of you, send me a report when you have something,” she stood up and proceeded to the back exit with her entourage, Rahn’diem excluded.

“Can I get access to your records on Order and Chaos?” Milton asked hurriedly.

This made the Empress laugh for the first time in a while. It was a deep genuine laugh. “That’s sweet of you to ask, but I’d have a hard time stopping you accessing any file. Just....” She paused. “don’t cross me.” Her face conveyed her intent. Despite the fact that there was little she could do to him, Milton found it intimidating none the less.

Chapter 28

General Rahn'diem wasn't what you thought to be a member of the military establishment, especially a high-ranking one. He was about half the size of Lillianna and didn't look like he could out run or out gun a slug. He escorted the three to a set of living quarters on the ship, much more comfortable than the cargo bay they had been waiting in, though that wasn't saying much. From what they had seen of the Empire, comfortable was not something they held highly. At least not for those below the Empire elite. After he showed them around he stood in the middle of the living area, as the three found a place to sit.

"Can we help you?" Lillianna questioned staring at the awkward man.

"As the Empress said, I'm here to assist you in capturing the entity known as Chaos. How do you wish to proceed?" He was staring at Milton.

Lilliana could see that he was uncomfortable. Well, he had just figured out that he was supposedly responsible for the Empire's existence as well as the death of countless sentient beings that resulted in its creation. It would make anyone 'uncomfortable'.

"Why are you looking at me?" Milton asked angrily.

"Well don't get me wrong Milton, you are the leading expert on all this, we're kinda hoping that you would take the lead on this."

Billiam grunted as he shifted around in his chair.

"Do you have something to say, Billy Boy?" Lillianna questioned.

"Look, I don't know why we are even talking about this," he began.

General Rahn'diem gave him a glare.

"No offence to you, but I'm returning to the ITU and the PC. They need to be warned about this, in case we are wrong. For all we know, it has decided to cause chaos in the ITU or the PC. Even things up a bit."

Lillianna considered that for a moment. It was not an unreasonable assumption.

“How would you get back?” she asked.

“You mean, how do we get back,” he countered.

Lillianna hadn't thought of that. To be honest she assumed that she would be helping Milton and the Empress out here, however, it would be expected of her to return to PC space. No doubt they would presume her missing or dead. It was a difficult decision to make. Her loyalties were all over the place.

“I...I...”

“It's okay if you need to go Lily,” Milton blankly stated, his mind in other places. “I have access to the resources of the entire Empire at my disposal.”

General Rahn'diem, who had remained standing rigidly in the middle of the room for this entire exchange, nodded and grunted in approval.

“I assume, I can get access to my ship?” Billiam asked the General.

“The Empress indicated you could leave,” he agreed. “After we have finished with the repairs.”

“What repairs?” Billiam asked.

Rahn'diem didn't give an answer, besides from the cheeky grin on his face.

“Oh god, you're doing something to my ship,” he walked quickly towards the exit. “Lillianna are you coming or what?”

She hadn't decided. She needed to warn the Planetary Collective of this new threat, but she felt that she needed to be with Milton for moral support and a friendly face. Which, looking and the General

of the Miscellaneous wing of the Empire military establishment, could be few and far between. An asset like Milton in the hands of her enemy wouldn't be the best military decision either.

"Come on, I promised Captain Myres that I would return you and I keep my promises."

There were many arguments she could come up with to counter that, but this wasn't the time.

"I'm going to stay here," she finally answered.

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That stopped Billiam in his tracks. It would appear that he hadn't expected that answer.

"I don't understand. You're volunteering to stay in the Empire and help them with a civil war."

"No, my only goal is to stop Chaos from spreading. I'm not interfering with Empire affairs."

"Ok, whatever Lily. Your funeral." He started out the door.

"Could you relay a message for me,"

"Sure, whatever, send it to my ship!"

Billiam left the living suite. He doubled back as he realised that he was going the wrong way.

"He is a very unpleasant man!" Rahn'diem commented.

Lillianna agreed with him. She looked over at Milton. He had moved to the computer access terminal. He was lost in thought, working everything out as the rest of them bickered. She thought it best to leave him alone in his thoughts. Rahn'diem looked over at him as well and became alarmed when he saw Milton's hand merged with the computer console. She assured him that this was normal, it was how he accessed computers. To be more accurate though, he didn't need to merge to access, he merged to modify things. He could hack computers like a normal person without the need of this level of interaction.

While the two of them waited they went on with other tasks. Lillianna wrote a long message and sent it to Billiam. He had finally regained access to his ship, after Empire engineers were done

scanning it. Rahn'diem was having fun messing with Billiam over the comm as he tried to leave. He forced Billiam to say please and thank you for every request. It was no doubt humiliating for him, however from Rahn'diem's Empire perspective it made him look weak. No doubt a little revenge for all the embarrassment the former Captain had caused back in the old days.

After a couple of hours, Milton finally removed himself from the computer access terminal. For a person of energy, or something that produced a lot of energy, he looked exhausted. Lillianna hoped that he hadn't lost himself in the Empire's computer system, like he had on the shuttle.

"How are you doing?" she queried. "I was getting worried."

He looked at her with uncertainty. "I thought you left with Billiam."

"I said I was staying here, don't you remember?"

"When did that happen?"

"A couple of hours ago."

"What?!"

With that Milton fainted.

Chapter 29

Milton found himself sitting in a café on Scarborough Street. It looked like the one he and Derrick used to visit when times were happier and less complicated. He wasn't sure how he got here. From the window he could see the hustle and bustle of a Gold Coast morning. School children were waiting for their bus, business people were getting their morning coffee from the usual bars. He smelled the air. It was just as delicious as he remembered. There was nothing like a well-brewed cup of coffee. Australians always knew how to brew a good coffee, you could thank the Italian immigrants for that.

But why was he here? It was a question he couldn't answer. He was just talking to Lily before he collapsed and now he was sitting at his table by the window.

"Here you go, babe."

Milton looked up to see a face he never thought he would see again. The man smiled with his glowing white teeth. His raven black hair was parted on the left, with that one bit at the back that had never seemed to stay down.

"Derrick?!"

Derrick looked at Milton strangely. "You looked like you've seen a ghost."

He could keep his eyes off him. His mouth was open in surprise. As Derrick sat down next to him, Milton went to touch his arm. His hand was shaking, his breathe with shallow. He wanted to know if this was real but at the same time didn't want to break the illusion just in case it wasn't.

"Boo!" Derrick playfully jumped.

Milton jumped and fell back on his chair.

"Oh babe, I'm sorry I didn't meant to scare you," Derrick sounded concerned.

Derrick's hand touch Milton's arm. Milton could feel the pressure on his arm, the smell of his musky cologne that he always hated, except for today. He put his hand on his. His skin felt warm and more importantly it felt real. He was almost at tears.

Milton let Derrick help him get back in his chair. He kept his eyes on him the entire time.

"I don't understand," Milton stammered. "How did we get here?"

"What do you mean? We walked here. At your insistence. Something about getting some exercise, which is hilarious coming from a person who doesn't actually need to consume anything."

They didn't keep secrets from each other. The fact that Derrick kept his secret and wasn't afraid of him was one of the reasons why he loved him more than anybody he had ever loved before.

"But I was on the Revenant, talking to Commander Belle about..." he stopped.

"Oh, you come up with the silliest of stories. Were you up late watching the Star Trek marathon on Syfy again?"

Milton, so wanted this to be real. He wanted the past 200 plus years to be a fantasy and live back at this moment before everything went to hell. He heard a gunshot. He looked around in a panic but saw no one else was.

"What's up buttercup?" Derrick was sitting there as if nothing happened.

"What is this place?" he asked.

The image of Derrick's bloodied corpse flashed in front of him and disappeared.

"Sweetheart, you don't need to be thinking about that right now. Let's enjoy this moment together while we can. Let's break this reality."

"You mean it's not real?"

"It's as real as you want it honey bun." Derrick touched his hand and moved closer.

There were many things swirling around Milton's head, however, that all seemed to stop as Derrick kissed him. A flood of happy memories came rushing back as he felt his soft lips on his own. It was exactly how he remembered it. Unfortunately, too exactly.

"Why am I here? Where is this place," he asked when Derrick sat back down.

Derrick sighed. "Always curious, my little Billy. If you must know, this is real and not real. You're on what you might call a different plane of existence.

"So it's not a dream?"

"No, but I'm fascinated you developed the ability to do that. It's quite unusual for someone like yourself."

That question raised more answers.

"I wish I could tell you more about yourself, but I unfortunately can't. You have to learn that by yourself.

"Why?"

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