

“Again, I can’t tell you,” Derrick replied.

“Then why am I here?” Milton asked. “Why set this up?”

Derrick gave a friendly sigh. “Always the curious soul. You’re here because we need to chat. You’ve gotten yourself in quite a mess at the moment, haven’t you?”

Milton nodded in agreement.

“You try your best to stay out of everything only to be pulled back in. You feel responsible for everyone’s actions when it comes to you,” ‘Derrick’ began. The more you resist the more responsible you feel. You are definitely one of my most emotional and anxious children.”

“I...I’m your child,” he recalled the kiss he shared not too long ago. It was a very Skywalker moment.

“Not in a biological sense. I have on occasion taken care of you. But that is not the point. I’m here to let you go of the responsibilities you have put on yourself. You are not responsible for creating the Empire. Those beings stole humans from their world and treated them badly. Of course, they rebelled. You are not responsible for their actions. You didn’t tell them to become just like their former masters. You are not responsible for Chaos or the Order or their agents. That struggle has been going on for many millennia and they won’t stop until they both realise that they are one and the same.”

‘Derrick’ paused and held Milton’s hand. “You have a right to exist like anybody else in the universe. Help others if you think that is what you want, but don’t be burden by what they do.”

“They would be able to do the things they do without me,” he argued.

“Did you tell them to use you? No, you didn’t. Remember this. You have been violated; your body stolen without your permission. You are not responsible for the actions of others because you were simply there.”

“Does that mean I walk away?”

“What you do is your responsibility. If you think walking away is best, then that is your choice. If you wish to pursue the matter, again your choice. I’m just saying, you can’t control what others do, but

you can yourself.” He smiled. “Unless of course someone sprays you with red kryptonite and you go all evil.”

That made Milton laugh.

“You brought me all this way to tell me that?” He felt more at ease than he had felt in a very long time.”

“Yes and one other thing. When you are ready, make your way to the crucible. You’ll find what you are looking for there.”

Before he could ask any further questions, ‘Derrick’ kissed him on the cheek and started to fade. The rest of the café around him did the same. Milton still had so many questions. Who was he? Who were they? What and where is the crucible? Unfortunately, they would have to be for another time. For now, there were some decisions to make, but this time he was able to see things a little more clearly.

....

The first thing Milton saw as he opened his eyes was the curious face of General Rahn’Diem securitizing Milton’s appearance. It wasn’t exactly the face he expected or wanted to see after having your standard beginning of Act three vision.

“Great you’re awake,” Lillianna called over. “We’ve got something you might want to see.”

Chapter 30

The ITU Corvette sounded a lot cooler than it actually appeared to be. From most angles it was a light brown pointed cylinder that was designed for one thing; speed. It wasn't a Sportsship by any stretch of the imagination. By most angles it looked like, well there was a reason why it was called the Shooter. The new upgraded systems on the other hand were something else though. Milton had certainly taken his time enhancing everything on this ship; from life support to engines. He definitely had the fastest ship in the ITU. He may never get his Captaincy back, however, it would be easy to take this for a spin and have his own adventures.

Unfortunately, he couldn't. He had a moral obligation to fulfil and he was feeling particularly guilty in his role in all this chaos. Even if he was manipulated in a way. He willingly choose to hurt the Empire, but didn't consider the dire consequences his actions would take. So, first he would tell the ITU and PC, then he'll go off on a wild and whacky adventure to the great beyond. Being loved and admired by those around him was no longer a goal of his.

The controls were surprisingly intuitive and the ship was basically automatic. Which was handy because he wanted to get to the ITU fast without actually having to go through Empire space. He already had enough of it. Jumps were limited, however. He had to make a shorter jump than Milton had as he was the one powering it. He could only make it three quarters of the way to the border. The rest of the way would have to be by conventional means. The obvious downside to this was that he was reaching the outer territories of the Empire, which was where most of the action was taking place.

"Switching to normal FTL drive," the computer announced.

"Good, I don't want to be standing about with my pants down."

"Affirmative."

He calculated that from his current position, it would take about three quarters of a day to reach the closest part of the Empire border. He hoped that there was enough juice in the engines to also power the camotech when things got a little hairy. For the time being, it was off; emergencies only. He didn't want to waste energy.

"Switching complete, course?" the computer asked.

"Take us to sector two one three five, near the Gum nebula, at your fastest speed."

“Affirma....Multiple vessels approaching!” the computer interrupted itself.

“Camo on. Computer identify?”

While the ship on the outside disappeared from view, the ship inside became dimly lit. Granted the internal illumination had no bearing on what on the camotech, it just got people in the mood to be a little more stealthy than usual.

“PCFS McGuffin! PCFS Grant! PCFS Patton! PCFS McArthur! PCFS Crassus!”

“What the hell was the McGuffin doing in Empire territory being flank by a group of battlecruisers?”

“Captain Dirk, this is Captain Myres. No need to hide, you’re with friendly company.”

Dirk was hesitant. There was something wrong here. During his career he had often advocated a stronger hand when dealing with the Empire, but this was a full-scale declaration of war. This was not the PC way, it wasn’t even Dirk’s way of doing things.

“Captain, I repeat. This is Captain Myres. Confirmation code six six two six Oh seven oh oh four omega.”

“Confirmation confirmed,” computer added.

Billiam decided to open an audio channel, but kept under camo. There was no need to trust explicitly.

“It’s funny to see you guys around here. Are you far away from Isothorpe?”

“A little,” came the reply. “We’ve been monitoring the situation. We grew concerned for you and the Commander and our usual Empire contacts, well they haven’t returned our calls.”

While that sounded something that he would have said when he was captain, this was not Captain Myres. Billiam had never served with him, which would have driven both of them nuts, he knew him on reputation. There was a reason why he commanded the McGuffin, the sistership to the flagship

of the Planetary Collective. He always had a steady head and hand. Rushing head first was not his style.

“You brought some heavy company with you. Some might mistake that for an act of aggression.”

“Well it would seem that there is a lot of that going on around here. I didn’t want to find you without some protection.” Captain Myres paused for a beat. “Saying that, is Commander Belle with you?”

How would he explain this one? It was a very long story, not one to have over a comm system. Thankfully, the Commander had left him a note.

“That’s a negative. It’s a long story but the Commander wanted me to give you this note.” He sent the file. “There’s a lot going on around here that we need to talk about.”

“Yes, I’ve heard about this ancient battle of control and bull shit. I don’t believe it myself. The forces of Chaos and Order? Please. Don’t tell me you and the Commander have been dragged into this?”

That just raised more questions.

“How did...”

“It’s not important how I know. What I do want to know is where the Commander is. Where is she?”

Captain Myres’ tone was unusually aggressive.

“Captain, I’m waiting on your answer!”

This wasn’t Captain Myres, and if it was, something was controlling him. If anyone could tell, it would be Billiam. He had to think of an escape plan fast. As long as he was still there was no way that they could detect him, if he tried to move however, there was a chance they could track the emissions. They were in the space between star systems, a shift in radiation would be like a bull in a wheat field. Small enough not to be seen, but damn you can hear it. There was no possibility he could wait until they moved on.

“Captain, what is the delay and why haven’t you taken down your camo?” Captain Myres ordered.

“Computer are you sure we can’t jump?”

“Affirmative!” it replied.

“Is there a way we could route energy from non-essential systems?”

“Insufficient Power!”

“Ok, what about all fuel reserves plus energy from the non-existent weapons systems?”

“Insufficient Power!”

“Ok, what if we made a small jump?”

“How far?” the computer curiously asked.

“Nowhere! I want to make it look like we are leaving, wait for them to move on, then return. How long could we do that for?”

“Calculating. Jump engines could sustain a portal for five point three minutes. After that it would become unstable.”

“I’ll take it! Prepare the Portal.”

“This is your first and final warning Bill. We trusted you to find the Commander before she got into any more trouble and you’ve come up empty. You maybe a citizen of the ITU but I know you’re loyal to the PCF.”

“Portal ready!”

This was it. He was about to openly defy the Planetary Collective. An organisation he swore to protect at all costs.

“Computer, jump!”

The inside cabin lit up, the ship was no longer cloaked. At the same time the jump engines were talking energy from anywhere it could find it.”

“You’re making a big mistake, Bill! You can’t escape.”

“You are not Captain Myres! Who are you?!” he yelled.

“Don’t be ridiculous.”

There was a flash of blue light outside the Corvette. Billiam could feel the gravitational pull. He knew he wasn’t going anywhere but hopefully the people out there, whoever they were, didn’t know that. As the ship grew closer there was a jolt. Something was pulling him the other direction. Many somethings from the looks on the sensors.

All five ships had locked on with tractor beams.

“Did you really think you could run away from us that easily? You’ve lost your touch, Bill. You’ve been in the ITU for too long.”

It was a fight between the unopen portal and the ships tractor beams. It felt like the ship was being ripped apart. The computer confirmed it.

“Captain, have a little dignity. Don’t try to run away like a coward.”

There was nothing Billiam could think of. He was all out of crazy ideas.

“You didn’t come all this way to look for the Commander and I did you?”

Captain Myres' stern face appeared on the forward screen. I came here to bring order to a chaotic situation!" His face transformed into a grin.

Billiam knew that now they other shoe had dropped.

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