

Chapter 31

Milton finally had made a decision. He was going to stop Chaos. However, it wasn't because he felt guilty for being used. No, he was doing it because it had always been his nature to help people and he knew that he was the only one who could help. This was his choice to take responsibility of taking it down.

In his time merging with the computer, he had time to analyse current ship movements in the Empire, at least those still loyal to the Empire. Unfortunately, this number seemed to be decreasing as time went on by either conversion or destruction. He was looking for anything out of the ordinary, well out of ordinary for a civilisation in the middle of a power struggle. Chaos had certainly made a good hiding place. Who would recognise a drop of water in the ocean?

However, as his vision said Chaos and Order are more similar to each other than they wish to admit. There was an order to Chaos, the biggest different being the sensitivity of the variables. In order everything is known, in chaos, there is the unknown which can mess everything up. When one understood that one began to see the reality of these two supposedly fundamental groups. The Order wanted to know and understand everything. Anything it didn't, it tried to eliminate. Whereas Chaos revelled in the unknown, wanted to test things out but never considered or cared about the consequences, no matter what they were.

So, how did this help Milton? Simple, he looked for the unknown. It was unlikely Chaos was going to eliminate another planet. It did that already, but it definitely wasn't done with the particle. Milton was sure that it wanted to know the full destructive power. So, what was the next step? A star. Milton had no doubt that the next step would be to destroy an entire star system. The problem now would be which one. He had to consider the variables. For that he needed to get out of his head and share with his allies.

"So, my guess is it would be a system full of sentient beings, perhaps the most densely populated one," Commander Belle through out there.

"That would mean here!" General Rahn'diem called out. Panic fell over his face.

"No," Milton interjected. "Destroying the Rise system would end this civil war here and now. It lit the match and fanned the flames. Now it wants to see how much will burn. Given the intensity of the civil war, it's not going to die down anytime soon, unfortunately.

"We will be victorious!" the general interrupted.

"I'm sure," Milton said lightly.

"So how do you know it's going to blow up an entire system?"

"It would seem that Chaos has many projects going on at the moment. It would stand to reason that they would have the attention span of a child. While it waits for the Empire to burn up it will distract itself with other things."

Milton brought up a 3D map of the Empire. It was covered in red, yellow and green patches. The green were the safe zones, which included the Rise system. Yellow zones were those under threat or considered seceding. Red of course were zones in a current conflict. These zones seemed to be increasing by the hour.

"It would seem the Empress has a lot to handle. And she's only a few days into the job. That must suck." Lillianna sounded sympathetic towards the Empress, despite her actions when they had first met.

"She will be Victorious!"

"Of course," Lillianna replied. She gave him a pat on the shoulder.

Milton stared into the map, looking for something, looking for the unknown. Was he wrong about Chaos wanting to stay in the Empire to monitor how things went? Surely he wasn't an omnipotent creature. It wasn't corporeal. However, it seems to need a host, like Billiam. If it could stay in its non corporeal form, it wouldn't have needed Billiam to take him all the way to the T'Vi'Shion system. So, it wouldn't leave the Empire, just in case something needed its attention.

"The unknown," he mumbled. There was a thought gnawing at him. There were other factors he hadn't considered.

"What are you thinking about Milton?"

"There's something I haven't considered. Something that has been here all this time."

"What's that?" Rahn'Diem chimed in.

“Where’s Order?”

“What do you mean, they kidnapped me, remember?”

“That was an agent of Order, not Order itself.”

“Now there’s an order?” Rahn’diem sighed.

Both ignored him.

“I think it’s safe to assume that Chaos and Order are two similar creature or creatures. We shouldn’t rule out that there is only one of each. They weren’t around during the last war and information on them is sketchy at best. In any case, the agent got spooked by the display over Isothorpe. He was looking for me. Chaos knew who I was from the beginning, so I don’t think Order would have made the same mistake.”

“Ok,” Commander Belle felt a little dismissed there. She felt he didn’t need to be an ass about it. She recalled that moment.

“If and when you see Milton. Give him a message for me. Tell him: The Order stands for him still. He is not alone anymore.”

“Tell me Milton, how did it all end last time? How did you defeat both organisations last time?”

This was a memory, he didn’t want to remember.

“I overloaded.”

“Overloaded?!”

“I’m an energy source, right? I soaked up the sun’s energy, lined up the ships and directed the blast at them. Managed to hit every single ship. Well maybe not all.”

“You destroyed both groups?!”

It looked like Milton was trying to hold himself back. “I was going to disable them, take away their technology, end the madness once and for all, including myself. I somehow got carried away in the moment.”

The General looked at Milton with an uneasy look. “What are you? Surely you have limits, don’t you?”

“To be honest, I don’t know.”

“You could take over the galaxy with that power.”

“I could, but why?”

“Why not?”

It was a very Empire response. Just because something can be done, it didn’t mean it should.

“Why did you ask me?”

“I don’t know. I thought it would reveal something. Why did they say they stood for you, when you destroyed them?”

“Because for a moment, you stood for them!” the general chimed in.

They had dumbfounded look on their faces.

“You destroyed them because they were tearing the galaxy apart. They were the unknown element and had become Chaotic. They had lost their way. By destroying both the agents of order and chaos, you eliminated the unknown and restored order to the galaxy.”

The pair were still dumbfounded by Rahn’Diem analysis of the situation.

“You said it yourself, what they can’t quantify they destroy, eliminate the variable. You did that. You became an agent of order, intentionally or unintentionally. If the original order has come back with it’s chaos counterpart, they maybe seeking you out. You are not alone.”

“Wow! I didn’t actually think you were listening,” Milton pointed out.

The general smiled. “This is what I do for a living.”

“The order had sent a scout to find me, but they stuffed up. They knew I was on the shuttle. They’re waiting in the shadows, their waiting for their moment. That’s why they didn’t come to T’Vi’Shion when the Empress was trying to bait them. What do you think Lily?”

Lillianna had become distracted with something that appeared on the 3D map. Blue dots had just appeared in a Red territory, when before it had been green and orange. Rahn’Diem looked confused for a moment. Then explained what each dot meant. The Green dots were rebel ships, the orange one were Empire ships. The blue one’s were the PCF Ships.

“The PCF have just invaded the Empire.”

“I don’t think the Order is waiting anymore.”

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Milton was in no shape to portal the Empire First Fleet to Fin'la. To his credit he tried, but he was physically exhausted and didn't have the energy to do it. He found it hard to explain that even he had his limits. This meant that the Fleet would have to get there by conventional means.

Fin'la was one of the planets that joined the Union and it would appear that they had the backing of the Planetary collective. The Empress had to see this first-hand and nip this in the bud before it got out of hand. If word got out the PC had a foothold in Empire territory, she doubted her ability to control her people.

For Milton and Lillianna, through their long brainstorming session, theorised that this was the order's response to chaos's activities. That perhaps they allowed chaos to make the region unstable so that they could clean up their biggest mistake; the Empire. It was based on a lot of conjecture and assumptions. There were a lot of unknowns here and a lot variables that could screw everything up. Even if it wasn't the Order, it was a good bet that Chaos would take advantage of the situation. They needed to stop it before he did any more damage.

Lilianna stood outside the Empress's quarters, flanked by two guards. They weren't Lee'dur's guards. When he was stood down, those guards were replaced, just in case they wanted revenge. It was a good thing too because this would have been the best opportunity to enact some revenge. She approached the Attendant.

"She's expecting you?" he asked curiously.

She nodded. The old man went over to the communications panel. The door opened and he went inside. Lillianna was about to follow him in when one of the guards put her arm on her shoulder. The old man appeared after a few moments and ushered her in.

As she stood inside, she noticed that all the lights were turned off. The only light source was coming from the flashes of light from the FTL. The door closed quickly behind her. Her stomach was churning loudly, her heart beating fast. The last time she had been alone with the Empress, she had shocked her towards an inch of her life.

"Don't be afraid, Commander. I'm not here to interrogate you."

From the ambient light, the Commander could see the dark outline of the Empress laying on the sofa near the main window. She had a glass in her hand. After taking a drink she put it on the short table in front of her, next to another.

“Please, sit.”

Lillianna hesitated but did after the Empress had insisted.

“Do you truly believe that this is the Order’s doing?”

Lillianna wanted to say yes. She didn’t want to believe that the Planetary Collective would openly interfere with the internal struggle of the Empire. There were laws against this. However, the Planetary Collective had had its questionable decision in the past, even in the interest of peace.

“I don’t know!” she finally answered.

“Well at least that’s an honest answer, if not a helpful one,” the Empress responded. “I and others have always thought that the PC had designs for the Empire. I opposed the summit because I thought this was how the you guys conquered, through words instead of weapons.”

Lillianna took a few sips of the wine that the Empress offered. To her surprise, it was quite fruity. She had always thought the Empire didn’t concern themselves with flavour. Granted she had never met a civilian Empire citizen before, only their disciplined soldiers.

“The Planetary Collective was never about conquering, it was about working together. Humanity wanted to prove to the interstellar community that it wasn’t like their old selves. They moved on from bigotry and intolerance. And then we discovered you.”

“So you think we are bigots and intolerant?”

“Well, if you are looking for honesty, yes. We saw you as the dirty reflection of ourselves. We were embarrassed. You enslaved entire star systems because of what their ancestors did. You became what you hated.”

“You know what. I agree.”

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