

Chapter III - Zablaron II

Zablaron pulled his maroon, double-breasted trench coat tightly around himself as a chilly wind swept over the docks. The temperature was almost freezing as this half of Metallon had been cooling away since dusk. It was about dawn now.

He wore his trench coat over dark-red denim jeans with gray, calf-length boots. On his hands were warm, cobalt-blue gloves. His VBP was strapped to his right forearm with a black strap.

Silhouettes of ships of all kinds and sizes rocked gently along the quays as the water lapped against the waterfront. Myriad containers were grouped in stacks, some under the open sky, and some under columned structures with upturned roofs typical of Metalloy architecture. Idle cranes towered above like gigantic beasts poised to snatch up everything in their paths.

Zablaron watched as a red-and-gold MagneCar appeared in the distance. Owing to Metallon's powerful magnetic field, these specially designed cars could magnetically levitate over the planet's stainless-steel roadways and even off-road metal-plated terrain.

The MagneCar skimmed between the containers and pulled over a few feet before Zablaron. Ferrina stepped out of the passenger seat, adjusting her grossly oversized shades. As if wearing shades in the dark is going to make you look any less suspicious, Zablaron thought. She anxiously glanced at both sides before walking over to Zablaron.

"Alright, what do you want?" she demanded, looking over her shoulder.

"I care little for your tone."

Ferrina glared at Zablaron but did not reply. Zablaron went on, "Soon, you will be running for President. You should know how to act like one."

"I'm guessing you didn't bring that up for no good reason?"

Zablaron ran a hand through his hair. "Of course not. I have been wondering why you would start this horrendous tirade against me right about the time you decided you want to play President."

"I want the clutter to be cleared up before I take up office. I don't want powerful weapons in the wrong hands."

"C'mon, Ferrina, try a little honesty for a change. Trust me, it feels good. It's just the two of us here except that lout in your car. We both know I didn't supply any arms to King Riplartz. What are your motives, then?"

"Since you seem to think you've got it all figured out, why don't you venture a guess?"

"You want to wage war on the heart of the galaxy," Zablaron said dryly.

Many governments coveted the planet Karomoz since mer first perfected space travel and set foot on each other's planets. It was often called the 'heart of the galaxy' owing to its middlemost position. It had an abundance of natural resources, its climate was moderate, and its strategic position meant that anyone in control of Karomoz held sway on the rest of the galaxy. The Karomozians had certainly exploited all those advantages over the centuries, transforming their planet into a superpower.

Ferrina pursed her lips for a moment. "Do I? Or is it the Karomozians who want to wage war on us?"

"Doesn't matter to me. You wanted my reputation tarnished just as my parents' reputation was tarnished. You wanted my assets seized and brought under the control of the government. Once you took up office, Point Blank would be yours to command. You could order the manufacture of as many arms for the Metalloy army as you wished, minus the cost."

"Very nice," Ferrina said. She then dug into her purse and produced a cigar and a lighter. She lit the cigar up, put the lighter back, and took a puff. "No offense, but I had my own valid reasons for doing so. For all your cleverness, you wouldn't understand."

"I can think of one good reason. Everyone wants to have a piece of Karomoz these days. Take your friend King Riplartz, for instance."

"Don't you dare equate me to that greedy old hound!" Ferrina snapped.

Zablaron ran a hand through his hair. "The correspondence you produced to look like I was striking a deal with him — I couldn't help but commend how authentic it seemed. Yet the more I thought about it, I realized it was you striking a deal with him. That correspondence was actually between you and him."

"I'm afraid we have strayed too far from the point," Ferrina said wearily, then blew out a puff of smoke. "Why are you explaining my motives to me? What do you want from me?"

"I have a bone to pick with the Karomozians too," Zablaron said as a smile crept across his face.

"Ah! So, you want a piece of Karomoz too?"

"I don't want a piece of it! I want my piece back!" Zablaron said sharply.

"What piece?"

"Lately, a small but significant share of arms manufactured by my company has been getting smuggled into unknown locations on Karomoz. I haven't been able to investigate the matter decently, what with you and a whole lot of other fools trying to mess me up," Zablaron said, rolling his eyes. "I tried putting small trackers on the weapons, but the signatures disappear after they arrive at the Karomozian spaceport. Now that I have gotten you out of my hair, I intend to go to Karomoz and find out who is smuggling my product."

"And what does that have to do with me?" Ferrina asked, blowing another puff.

"I need you to arrange safe transport for me to Karomoz."

"Well, for that, you will have to get my name cleared first." Ferrina shrugged. "Only then will I be able to help you."

"Let me say this, Ferrina — I don't trust you. I don't trust you one bit. I would trust a Trezonish snake before I trust you," Zablaron said, unsmiling. "You are a resourceful woman. You should be able to get me to Karomoz even as the situation stands. If not, well then — I guess I won't be making any calls to the police to tell them the truth. Oh, and one more thing."

"What?" Ferrina asked gruffly.

"You are stupid. You should know you can't just launch an attack on Karomoz without any justification. I can get you one if I can find out who on Karomoz is getting my arms smuggled."

Ferrina took another puff. She blew out smoke, swept away by the wind toward the water. Then she licked her lips, gazing out over the water. "You assume too much. You think I don't already have a justification for going on the offensive? One hears about so many developments underway on Karomoz these days — excavations for powerful, forgotten ancient relics, experiments to create the perfect soldiers, hoarding of fuel and other supplies — weapons included. They are preparing for war and domination. Since you pointed out precisely how you don't trust me, I am willing to let you in on my plan as an act of good faith. But then you will have to help me further."

"Not to mention, I will foil it if I learn it on my own," Zablaron pointed out.

"King Riplartz will stage an attack on the Metalloy Embassy on Karomoz. Not only will he get rid of those stupid puppets over there for me, but it will allow the Metalloy army to swoop in on Karomoz to protect its interests. From there, it's quite easy to proceed further. I would have had your company provide arms to both King Riplartz and the Metalloy army when I became President. If you agree to provide these arms, I will arrange transport for you."

"I'm not sure if you've thought it through," Zablaron said, stroking his chin. "Wystalline has always been Metallon's greatest enemy. If you provide arms to King Riplartz, why would he stop at the embassy? What makes you think he will not use those arms to annihilate the incoming Metalloy army as well?"

"For two reasons. One, Riplartz would have assaulted the Metalloy Embassy unprovoked. While we would have a justification for bringing our army, he would have none. He will earn the wrath of the Confederacy of Planets, and he can't fight that. Two, we can always cut off his supply once the embassy has been dealt with. Then we will overpower him and anyone who gets in our way," Ferrina finished with an air of satisfaction.

"We? Don't you think for a moment I am with you in this. I will provide these arms, but I can't promise I won't return to dethrone President Ferrina Tielin," Zablaron said with a look that shot daggers. "Get cracking on the transport and never use the word 'we' in my company ever again."

As Zablaron turned to walk away, he heard a chuckle behind him. "Ever again?" he heard Ferrina say. "So, we will meet again."

Zablaron ignored her and kept walking. The wind was blowing in his face now. He took a journal out of his inner pocket, bound in a maroon cover. He took the pen out of its wire binding, opened it to an empty page, and began writing. It feels like a good start. Yes, I have never felt more hopeful in a long, long time. They will soon find out that it will be far more difficult to bring me down than Mom and Dad.

Do give me your feedback about this chapter, and if you enjoyed it, please consider dropping a vote. Have a great day!