

World Eater

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by Kyle Eggleston

Jack O'Brien and Jeff Killpack were playing a game of Sun Disc. It was a simple game, the first player to drop the disc after it being served to them, lost. The disc deflected off the wall, Jack shot it with what looked like an ancient earth toy known as a slingshot. Instead of throwing rocks, it generated an energy beam that hit the disc. The disc flew to the far end of the gym. Jeff had to run to make the shot, which he missed.

"Four to three." Jack shouted in triumph. "That's game!"

Jeff grinned. "Yeah, you win again. Good game." He said. "Same time next week?"

Jack returned the smile. "Yeah, sounds good to me."

Jeff walked out of the gym.

"I thought he'd never leave." Ketish said.

Jack sighed. Another visit from hologram Ketish that only he could see and hear. Just perfect. What did he want today? There was only one way of finding that out.

"What do you want Ketish?" Jack asked. In a way he *didn't* want to know the answer, but deep down he really did want to know. Because that's how Jack's mind worked. The deeper the information the worse things seemed to get. *Bring on the bad news.* Jack thought.

Ketish frowned. "Right to the point." He said. "Never time to catch up on old times. Never a chance to ask how are you today Ketish? How are things going on Dubor and the world you are taking care of? Never anything like that." He sighed. "Oh well. A world eater is coming to Shuka. I thought you should know. You *are* taking care of that cursed planet."

Jack stared Ketish in the eyes. *World Eater?* He thought. *What the hell is that?*

Ketish could read Jack's mind. "A world eater is exactly as it sounds Jack. It destroys worlds. Quite effectively I might add. I wish we had one in our arsenal. It would make taking over planets so much easier. Can't have an uprising if everyone is dead."

Jack folded his arms. "Is that the weapon you used on the eighth planet in this star cluster?" He accused Ketish of the destruction of a planet, he *knew* Ketish had something to do with it. He had been on the ship in orbit when the attack happened.

Ketish shook his head. “No, the World Eater would have made quick work of that planet. What we left behind was nothing compared to what the World Eater can do.” He paused. “Total destruction. It can kill an entire star system in an hour. Shuka is doomed. After they destroy Shuka, they will come after Dubor. You cannot allow that to happen major.” He said. “Save us. Please.”

Ketish wasn’t known for saying please. The plea for aid seemed genuine to Jack. He was taken back by the plea. It scared him a little as well. Jack would have to give it some thought. If the threat was real, he would protect Shuka at all costs and as a result protect Dubor and the other planets in the Comeki Star System.

The holographic image of Ketish vanished.

In a way Jack wished others could see the mental hologram of Ketish that he saw. At least he could go to *someone* and tell them what was going on. Without evidence, no one would believe him. He would look like a crazy man, Jack didn’t need for that to happen.

“O’Brien to the senior staff. Meet me in my office, immediately.” Jack said into his comm unit. He left the gym.

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Jack’s office was filled with the senior staff when he walked in. Jack leaned forward in his chair, he was seated at his desk. Looking around the room, all eyes were on him. Their mouths dropped open, Jack had just told them all about the World Eater that Ketish had warned him about.

“You’re shitting me.” Madison finally said breaking the silence.

Jack shook his head. “Nope. Not shitting you. A World Eater is on its way to Shuka as we speak. We have to find out as much as we can about it and stop it from destroying the planets in this system.” It seemed simple when he spoke it aloud, but it was much more complex than it seemed.

Norev sighed. “The World Eater is a myth among my people.” She said. “Who did you say gave you this information again?”

Jack shook his head. “I didn’t say.” He said. “I would rather *not* say at this moment.” The less they knew about Ketish’s transmissions the better. At least until circumstances indicated otherwise.

Nokev was put off. It was unlike Jack to *not* say where his source was from. She would have to have words with him later. Yes, she would have words with him.

Grilka eyed Jack, she could tell something was up. She knew him better than anyone else in the room did. Whatever was on his mind, he was not saying it out loud. He was keeping something hidden deep inside, so deep he wasn't even showing it. Grilka kept a keen eye on her lover.

"I'll have Med Bay prepped for any casualties coming in." Doc Allen said. "Obviously a thing as big as a World Eater won't come alone. It will have some kind of escort to protect it. That means the station will be firing and being fired upon."

Jack nodded. "Yes. That's to be expected."

Jeff sighed. "Oh boy. oh boy. oh boy." He said. "Shit is going to hit the fan."

Jack looked at Norev and focused on her. "You said the World Eater was a myth, probably stories to scare children into going to bed at night. What does the myth entail exactly?"

Norev breathed in deeply. "It's been a while, let me see what I can remember." She paused for a moment. "There are rumors that a space faring entity would come to different worlds and simply consume them. All resources on the world would be depleted. All life on the world destroyed. Eventually layer by layer the world itself would be destroyed." Her eyes seemed distant, her lips trembled. "If it is true? If the World Eater is coming? Your station won't even survive the attack. We are doomed."

"A planet wide evacuation is in order." Matt Allen said. "How much time do we have?"

Jack shrugged. "I haven't a clue. Could be hours, could be days." Standing from his chair, he turned to face a wall monitor. "Computer. Access the long range sensor array, is there anything on a direct course for the Shuka planet?"

The computer whirled and beeped a few moments before responding. "Affirmative." It finally said. "An unknown vessel is on a direct path to Shuka."

Jack turned to his people. "There you have it." He said. "Computer, what is that ship's ETA?" He wanted to know how much time he had to prepare for an attack. Maybe they had time to evacuate the planet, maybe they didn't. Would they have time to call in reinforcements? There was no way of telling until the computer came up with a response.

"One Solar Day." The computer replied.

Jack gasped. "Well there you have it." He said. "We don't have time for reinforcements to arrive from Earth. So that is out of the question. We're in trouble people." He looked around at the eyes of those focused on him. They all said the same thing. *We're with you. No matter what the hell happens, we've got your back.* Jack was grateful for that sentiment.

Grilka spoke up. "Ketish should have some warships he can spare." She suggested.

Jack nodded. *Maybe* Ketish would help them out. He had a lot at stake too with this incoming attack. It wasn't only the Shuka people in danger of being wiped out, it was all of the other planets in the star system as well. Dubor included.

"I'll contact him." Grilka said. "One less thing for you to do major." She smiled.

Jack nodded. "Thanks." He hated talking to Ketish. Especially now that the man could just pop in whenever he felt like it and strike up a conversation with Jack.

"You should have asked me for help Jack." Ketish said.

Jack turned around, sure enough Ketish was there projecting himself to Jack. "Shut up!" Jack screamed.

Everyone in the room looked at Jack, they were staring at him like he was mad. After a moment, Grilka walked up to Jack and put her hand on his shoulder. "Jack?"

Ketish put his finger up to his lips. "Shhhh. They can't see or hear me. Try and pretend I'm not even here."

Jack sighed. "It's fine. I'm fine." He turned back around to face his crew. Looking to Jeff, Jack did a deadpan. "Increase security throughout the station. I want to know if there are any unauthorized transmissions coming in or out of this station." Looking to the others he nodded. "You have your orders. Move."

His senior officers left the office leaving Jack and Ketish a moment alone to talk.

"Oh your security chief won't be able to track this signal." Ketish said. "There is no signal to track. I'm all in your mind. I lied when I told you I was transmitting from the Dubor home world. It just seemed easier that way." He grinned. "But now you know the truth. Doesn't it feel ... freeing?"

Jack frowned. "You lying son of a bitch!" He exclaimed. "I really can never trust you, can I?"

The image of Ketish shrugged. "I don't know Jack, trusting me is all up to you. I can't force you to trust me just like you can't force me to not believe in the prophecy. That's just how things are meant to be."

"What kind of information are you transmitting back to the real Ketish about me?" Jack asked. He was genuinely concerned with what Ketish knew about him. If the hologram was inside Jack's brain, he knew everything Jack knew. It was unnerving.

Ketish continued to grin. "Oh, nothing gets transmitted back to *him*." He said. "At least not yet. In order to do that we'd have to remove the chip in your brain and well, to be blunt, that would kill you." He paused and then frowned. "I don't want to see you dead Jack. So let's just keep it *our little secret*, for now." He vanished.

Jack wasn't sure if Ketish was lying to him again. He would have to take him at his word, for now. That thought alone bothered Jack. A man can only die so many times before he doesn't trust someone again. Usually that's only once. It only made sense to Jack.

Sitting down at his desk, Jack spun around in his chair for a moment to get the feeling back in him, to get the blood pumping. He wanted to feel alive. Then that daunting word came back to his mind, *clone*. He was a clone. Not the real thing, not the genuine article, not the real McCoy. He was just what he was, an impostor, and that was the truth to it all.

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Grilka entered her quarters. "Computer seal doors." She said.

"Door sealed."

Activating her computer console, Grilka entered in a few commands. "Establish a communication link to the following coordinates. Dubor home world. Attention Ketish. Urgent."

"Link established."

Grilka waited for a response.

Ketish appeared on the monitor before her. "Wench." He said. "So you finally decide to contact me. What do you want?"

"Send your warships." Grilka said. "You need to send backup to end this World Eater that threatens the Comeki Star System."

"Do I now?" Ketish said. "Wasn't my warning about the World Eater enough? Now you want more of me." He sighed. "How many ships do you want me to send? I do have borders to protect you know."

Grilka threw a vase across the room, it shattered in thousands of pieces. "If you don't help out, you won't have any borders to protect! Did you ever think about that?"

Ketish drew in a deep breath. "You've gotten more aggressive since we last spoke. It suits you." He said. It wasn't meant as a compliment, more of an observation than anything else.

Grilka stared him down. "How. Many. Warships. Are. You. Sending." She demanded.

Ketish gave in. "I can spare two warships. I will be there personally to make sure you and your *human* friends don't screw this up. We cannot become extinct!"

Grilka frowned. Two warships didn't seem like it would be enough firepower to take down something as big as a World Eater, but it was better than nothing. "Agreed." She said.

The channel closed.

Grilka contacted Major O'Brien and informed him about her conversation with Ketish. Needless to say he wasn't thrilled about any of it, but would take whatever was offered to him. Two warships it was.

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Down in Main Engineering, Madison was hard at work making sure her Dock Workers were prepared for whatever was coming their way. She was looking over the station schematics analyzing them seeing where power could be diverted in an emergency, just in case.

"I want that shield generator to have a backup!" Madison yelled across the room.

A tech on the other side of the room nodded a confirmation. "Right, on it!" They got to work.

Madison wanted the shields they gutted from the Franklin to work. They just needed to work. That's all that mattered most. If the shields failed, the station would fall and that was the last thing they needed to happen.

Madison opened a channel. "Park to Monson."

Kate Monson's voice came through the comm unit loud and clear. "Monson here, what's up Madison?"

"Just wondering where you were at the staff meeting. The major didn't say anything, but your absence was noticed. What's up with that?" Madison asked.

There was a long pause. Kate sighed. "I've been busy covering this damn threat to Shuka up here in C&C. I thought my time would be best trying to research it instead of standing around in a damn meeting room. That okay with you *dock worker*?" The way she said dock worker was an insult.

Madison was taken back. She thought she had gained some respect in Kate's eyes. Apparently not. "Yes ma'am. Was just checking on you. That's all. Park out." The channel closed.

Madison cursed. "Damn her!" She looked at a datapad, on it was a countdown clock. Twenty hours thirty minutes and change before the World Eater appeared.

“Ma’am” another dock worker approached her. “The main reactor sub unit six needs to be replaced. The problem with that is, we don’t have time. It’s a twenty-four hour turn around to swap out the core and get a new one in there.”

Madison took a datapad from the dock worker and double checked their findings. “Shit.” She said as she realized it was right on the money. She hated bad news like this. Talk about a downer. “Alright, see if you can divert power around that conduit. Let’s see if we can do without.”

The dock worker nodded. “Aye ma’am.” They went on their way to do the work planned.

Diverting power was a tricky thing to do. If it wasn’t done right, half the station could be destroyed. Then who would be there to defend the Shuka planet? No one. Madison could feel the weight of the situation on her shoulders. There was so much that needed to get done and less than a day to get it done. She felt they were screwed. No matter what would happen, they were going to be screwed.

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Up in C&C Kate Monson was hard at work. After that annoying interruption, she was back at work. Opening a channel she spoke into it. “Crimson Gamma to U.S.S. Fresno. What’s your status lieutenant commander?”

Lieutenant Commander Don Clipper answered the hail. “Five by five commander.” He said. “Everything is on track, my power reserves have been checked and double checked. Our shields are at one hundred percent as are our weapons systems.” He said. “I think we’re ready for whatever the hell that’s coming. We’ll either take it out or die trying.”

Kate nodded. “Good job. C&C out.” She smiled. At least something was going right for a change today. She turned her attention to other matters that required her attention. There were at least twenty things to look at, all of them annoying. Talk about a crazy day to be alive on the edge of the frontier.

As she looked over the reports coming in, an alert sounded. “Warning, Dubor warships entering shield perimeter.” The computer announced.

“What the hell!?” Kate yelled. “Someone, open a fracking channel to the lead ship. Now!” She demanded. It was more than an order, it was a demand. “Lead Dubor ship, this is Commander Monson of Crimson Gamma. State your business for being so close to our station that I can smell your stench!”

Ketish appeared on the monitor. "Commander Monson." He said. "We are here to help you fight off this World Eater that is coming your way. We were invited." He paused. "If you want, we can simply turn around and forget this ever took place."

Kate shook her head. "If you were invited, then that's different. I'll alert Major O'Brien that you are here. Just back your ships off a bit, you're too close to our shield perimeter. I don't like it."

Ketish gave the order to back away slowly. "My apologies commander." He said. "We will be more careful in the future."

Kate smirked. "If there is a future."

"Indeed." Ketish returned the sentiment.

The channel closed.

Kate pulled out her comm unit, "Monson to O'Brien. We have visitors."

* * *

Twenty hours later, O'Brien stood in C&C. He waited for the enemy to knock at the door. He checked over data records, reports of the status of the station. So far, everything was in order. The three star ships, two from Dubor one from Earth were in position. O'Brien contemplated on contacting the World Eater through all known channels. It was within range, only a half hour out.

What the hell. O'Brien thought. He opened a channel.

"Attention World Eater. This is Major Jack O'Brien in command of Crimson Gamma in orbit of the planet Shuka. The same planet you plan on destroying. Please respond." He waited for a response from the alien weapon, assuming there was someone onboard actually steering the damn thing.

Kate began running scans on the approaching World Eater. "I'm reading an atmosphere on that thing with long range scanners. It is indeed a ship." She reported. "It's not a life form like we had theorized."

The channel crackled with static for a moment as his message was sent through all possible channels. Hopefully one would get the alien's attention. If not, then his message was useless. Moments passed. Jack wondered if they were even listening for a communique to come through. If they were on radio silence, well it would be a quick encounter. Destroy a planet, murder an entire solar system, just the typical day at the office.

Another moment passed, then the garbled voice of an alien came through. "Prepare for death." It sounded almost robotic in nature.

Jack's ears burned. At least they could communicate. "Why? Why do you wish the destruction of the Shuka planet? Please respond."

More static.

"Prepare for death." The message repeated.

"Sir, they're increasing speed." Kate said from her station.

Jack sighed. *Great.* "ETA commander?"

"Ten minutes." Kate responded.

"Scramble the Atlantic fighters. Hail the warships, have them set an intercept course." Jack ordered. "Take them out of my sky!" He yelled.

Kate got to work. In seconds the Atlantic fighters were deployed, the orbiting warships were in pursuit of the World Eater. As they made contact, the World Eater began firing at the ships. The Atlantic fighters were all destroyed within moments. The Fresno and Dubor Warships were taking heavy damage, but kept returning fire.

On the bridge of Ketish's ship, he ordered more weapons fire. "Destroy that ship!" Ketish ordered. He stormed around his bridge looking at readouts. The bridge shook as they were hit by more weapon fire. Ketish held onto a hand railing to steady himself.

"Sir, traditional weapons are having no effect." A member of his crew reported. "The Fresno is reporting the same."

Ketish nodded. "Fine. Go nuclear." He ordered.

"Aye." The weapons officer said. Flipping a switch a keyhole appeared on the station in front of her. Taking a key from a chain around her neck, she placed the key into the slot and turned it. "Ready."

"Fire!" Ketish yelled.

Taking lead from Ketish's warship, the Fresno too fired nuclear weapons at the World Eater. Bright flashes of white explosions shown all over the screens. The radiation from the nuclear warheads scrambled the sensors on the ships involved.

Ketish stood firm. "Fire again! Don't allow them to return fire. Target their weapons systems. Fire! Fire! Fire!"

The Dubor warship continued its barrage of weapons fire. The World Eater backed away from the fight to regroup and recover. Its outer shell began to regenerate. It was badly

damaged though. Ketish hoped its weapons were down as they had stopped firing at the Dubor Warships and the Fresno.

“Hold fire.” Ketish ordered. The Dubor Warship stopped firing. “What is she doing?”

“Unknown.” His first officer said.

“Open a channel to Crimson Gamma.” Ketish said.

“Channel open.”

Major O’Brien appeared on the main viewer of Ketish’s ship. “Major.” Ketish said. “They seem to have taken considerable damage.” He said. “They’re regenerating their shielding and protective armor it would seem.”

O’Brien held his breath. Was it over? Did they want more? He couldn’t tell. “What do their power levels show?” Jack asked.

There was a brief pause before Ketish answered. He was obviously getting answers from his crew. “Their power levels are down from what they were before.” Another pause. “Oh no, they’re firing again. Brace for impact!”

The channel closed as the Dubor Warship took on more fire.

Jack slammed his fist down on the console in front of him. “What kind of cover fire can we provide?!”

Kate shook her head. “Not much. We’re too far away still. The World Eater needs to come closer for us to even fire at them.” She frowned. “I’m sorry sir.”

Jack checked the fighter bay. There were no more Atlantic fighters available. They had all been destroyed. Deployed and destroyed. He sighed and rubbed the sides of his head. Today was getting bad.

Ketish held onto his command chair as his ship rocked from more fire power from the World Eater. “We need to stop this thing. Now!” He yelled over the klaxons and alarms going off all over the bridge.

“Sir, port side ruptured. Our main power reserves are going down fast!” Ketish’s first officer reported. “The Fresno is dead in the water.”

“What of the other warship?” Ketish asked.

The first officer checked her console, did a double take, and frowned. “Destroyed.”

Ketish nodded. “Understood.” He looked at readouts. “Oxygen levels are dropping. Emergency reserves are depleted. We have a leak somewhere.” He paused. “The Fresno’s dead in the water weapons wise, what about their life support?”

The first officer checked her console readings. “Their life support and engines are still operative. If we teleport over to their ship, we will be able to get back to Crimson Gamma.” She said. “Before that World Eater takes us out.”

Ketish nodded. “Alright, hail the Fresno. Tell them we’re coming over.”

“Message sent.” The first officer noted.

On the Fresno’s bridge, Lieutenant Commander Don Clipper watched as Ketish materialized on his bridge. The other survivors of Ketish’s flagship teleported to other areas of the Fresno. “Welcome aboard.” Don said. “Helm, set a course for Crimson Gamma, get us the hell out of here!”

“Aye sir.” The helm officer said.

“Attention Fresno crew, we are headed back to Crimson Gamma. Work on repairs, hopefully we can get our weapons back online so we can aid in the fight from there. Bridge out.” Clipper said.

On Crimson Gamma, O’Brien watched as the Fresno came within the station’s shield perimeter. “Extend shields around the Fresno.” He ordered.

Ketish teleported into C&C. Alarms went off. O’Brien sighed. “Stand down.” He said. Turning to Ketish, he frowned. “Next time, announce your intentions of entering my command center *before* you teleport.”

Ketish nodded. “Noted Jack. I thought this would be the quickest way.” He said. “I have a report for you. We managed to slow the World Eater down a bit. But it is regenerating and coming back for Shuka. We must act.”

O’Brien thought over his options. Nuclear weapons slowed the World Eater down a pace. What other weapons did he have under his arsenal? There was one weapon he thought of, it was still in the experimental stages though. Nothing about it was concrete. It had yet to be tested in battle.

“I have one idea.” Jack said. He locked eyes with Ketish. “It has the danger of never been tried before.”

Ketish smiled. “Sounds like a good idea to me. Fire at will.” He liked to live on the dangerous side of life. There was no other way to live according to him.

Jack nodded. “Alright.” Looking to Kate he gave orders. “Prepare antimatter warheads on torpedoes one through six. Detach safeties.” He said.

Kate nodded. “Aye.”

“As soon as that World Eater comes into range, fire everything we’ve got at it.”

Kate nodded her response as she prepared the warheads. "Setting warhead yields to a maximum of ten. Shields to maximum strength. Ready sir." She stood at her console ready for the World Eater to arrive.

In the distance a large explosion took place out in open space. It was the World Eater destroying Ketish's flagship. Ketish frowned. He had worked so hard on making that warship special. It was his first warship ever that he had designed from the ground up. Now it was gone, for good.

"Sir, the World Eater approaches." Kate announced.

"Fire." O'Brien ordered.

The first volley of antimatter warheads left their salvos and made contact with the World Eater. The warheads ripped through the World Eater leaving behind six holes in its outer shell. The inside of the World Eater was a bright yellow, as bright as a star. Small explosions could be seen from the outside.

O'Brien smiled. "It's working. Setup another six torpedoes and fire!"

Kate fired six more antimatter warheads at the World Eater causing it to explode. Debris of the World Eater hit the station's shields and denigrated. "A final message transmitted from the World Eater before it was destroyed completely." Kate said.

O'Brien nodded. "Alright, let's hear it."

The robotic voice came over the loud speakers in C&C. All that were present could hear the final words of the aliens. "You may have one this fight, but you will not win our next engagement." The message ended.

O'Brien and Ketish exchanged glances. "We beat it." Jack said.

Ketish nodded. "Yes, it would appear so."

"They'll be back ..." The holographic Ketish whispered in Jack's ear. "This is only the beginning of the end."

Jack frowned at the thought. If they only delayed the inevitable, they were in some deep trouble later on down the line. But for now they could breathe easy. Shuka could breathe easy. Hell, the entire Comeki Star System could breathe easy ... for now.

The End