

One Day At A Time

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by Kyle Eggleston

It had been six months since Jack O'Brien had been arrested on his station for the murder of his original self and the knowledge that he was a clone. Six months of being locked up in this damn prison cell. Locked up like a rat in a cage. Jack did not enjoy being locked up, it reminded him too much of his time on Dubor under the hateful care of Ketish before he escaped.

O'Brien was in solitary confinement after a failed escape attempt. He couldn't tell you why he tried to escape. He had done nothing wrong. He had fulfilled an ancient prophecy that had been around for centuries on two different alien planets.

Even though he was in solitary, Jack was not alone. There was always Holo Ketish around to keep him company. Sure he hated the company, but it was at least something.

"Hello Jack."

Speak of the devil.

"Ketish." Jack said. "About time you showed up ... again. Like clockwork everyday. What is it you want to discuss today?" He sighed. The daily visitations from his implant chip monkey were growing tiresome.

"You've been in here a long time Jack. They don't have anything on you, just assumptions." Holo Ketish said. "Why didn't you fight back? Why did you allow yourself to be arrested?"

Jack shrugged. "I don't know." He said. "She sounded very official. I figure I'd been had." He paused looking around. "This isn't any jail I'm familiar with. I'm not even sure I'm being held by the government."

"Bingo!" Holo Ketish said. "He catches on!" Holo Ketish vanished.

"Dammit!" Jack exclaimed. Stuck in a prison and nowhere to escape to. He frowned at the thought. As he stood there wondering what was going to happen next he was caught in a teleportation beam and whisked away.

Jack rematerialized aboard the bridge of a United Earth Force Alliance Star Ship, Heavy Cruiser. Jack looked around confused. "What the hell?" He asked.

Bert McDuff looked at Jack. "Welcome aboard the Fresno major." He said. "You're a tough man to track down. Sorry it took so long." Bert looked to the helm officer. "Set course for Crimson Gamma maximum speed. She needs her commanding officer back."

"Thank you for rescuing me commander." Jack said. "But you know you just murdered me right? I mean those teleporters are *death machines*!"

Bert coughed and chuckled. "It's captain actually. I got a promotion since you've been gone. They gave me the Fresno, we're still watching guard over Crimson Gamma." Bert paused. "As for the so called *death machines*, the Fresno has an experimental teleporter onboard. Our scientists have fixed the cloning and killing issue. You haven't died." He gestured to the first officer's chair. "Have a seat."

Jack sat down. "Congratulations on the promotion captain." He corrected himself. *What the hell? Things sure have changed since I've been gone.* He thought to himself.

"Leaving Titan's orbit." The helm officer said. "Plotting a course for Crimson Gamma and engaging the FTL drive." The ship jumped into FTL.

Jack looked to Bert shocked. "I was on a moon in orbit of *Saturn*?! I thought I was being held on Earth!" His mouth hung open.

Captain McDuff nodded his head. "I'm afraid so sir. It took us five months to even locate where you were kidnapped to, then another month to negotiate with Saturn's government for an extradition process ... they said no. So we had to find another way of getting you out of there. It's not sanctioned by either government. We got sneaky." He chuckled. "Now we run like hell."

McDuff paused. "I want you to go checked out by the doc. Make sure they didn't do anything to you. Last thing you need is some kind of implant in your brain. Don't worry, it's Matt Allen, someone you trust. He requested to come along, I agreed."

Jack nodded. *If only you knew about Holo Ketish.* He thought. "Right." Standing up, he exited the bridge. He was happy to hear Matt would be taking a look at him. Matt already knew about the chip in his brain Ketish had implanted.

In the transport tube Jack gave the order to have it take him to the Med Bay. As he waited for the transport to take him to his destination, Holo Ketish appeared.

"Going to Med Bay huh?" Holo Ketish said. "They won't find anything ... at least not yet." He grinned. "Matt will find something eventually, just not today. So don't worry about it."

Jack sighed. "Get out of my head. Get out of my head. Get out of my head." He said out loud. Jack closed his eyes and waited for the car to come to a stop. Exiting the transport tube, Jack walked across the corridor and into Med Bay.

"Major." Doctor Allen greeted Jack. "Welcome aboard." He said. They walked into an exam room. "Have a seat, remove your shirt."

Jack did as ordered. Sitting down on the medical bed, he removed his shirt. Jack looked down at his chest. There was the scar where he had open heart surgery a year ago. He sighed. A reminder of what he was. Not fully human, but of Dubor and Shuka heritage as well. Jack was still growing accustomed to living with that fact. Jack patiently waited for Doc Allen to run his scans on him.

"I see you still have that damned implant in your head." Matt noted. "Aside from some malnutrition, you appear to be in good shape." He continued his examination. "Hmmm ... you have some high blood pressure. I'm sure that's to be expected though." Grabbing a med shot, he gave Jack a shot. "That should take care of it. I recommend some rest. There should be some empty cabins onboard, we don't have a full crew onboard. So pick one at random and you're good to go." He paused. "I do recommend you drop in and see the ship's counselor though. You've been through a lot."

"Thanks Matt." Jack said as he slid off the table and put his shirt back on. "What's the senior staff compliment currently on this ship?"

Matt rubbed his chin. "I believe we're completely staffed ..." He said. "But I do believe there is an ambassador cabin not in use. Should have running hot water in an actual shower. None of that fake water bullshit."

Jack smiled. That's exactly what he was looking forward to. An actual hot shower. "Thanks Matt." He exited the Med Bay.

Matt took out a comm unit. "Doctor Allen to Counselor Tomari, I believe I have a patient for you. He'll be in contact. Allen out." The comm channel closed.

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Two hours later, Jack was seated in front of Counselor Tomari. His legs were restless. Jack wasn't sure if the counselor could tell he was nervous or not. Jack was used to talking with the doctor or his security chief about life stuff, never a full on qualified counselor. It's just how things worked out for him ... until now. He hated the thought and yet here he was.

“Whatever you do Jack, don’t tell her about the torture.” Holo Ketish suggested. “She won’t believe you.” He smiled, always that damned smile.

I’ll tell her what I want to tell her! Jack thought. *You can’t stop me!* He wasn’t sure if he was going to tell her about the torture sessions he had to endure. They were rather quite intense from what he could remember which wasn’t much. A lot of Jack’s memories were missing from his time in the prison on Titan. He wasn’t sure why that was.

“So, what, are we supposed to talk about my feelings? Is that it?” Jack asked.

The counselor picked up a datapad, ready to take notes. “We can talk about whatever you wish to talk about major.” She said. “Do you mind if I call you Jack? You are my superior I mean.”

Jack nodded. “Jack is fine counselor.” He said. Jack didn’t really care what she called him. He wasn’t there to critique her counseling techniques or anything and he wasn’t her commanding officer. She could call him mud if she wanted to. Jack was sure the counselor wasn’t going to call him that, but she could if she wanted to.

“You’ve been through quite the ordeal.” The counselor said. “Tell me about it.”

Jack leaned back and sighed. “Well, it felt a lot longer than six months.” He stared off. “There were days the guards didn’t even come and check on me. They didn’t feed me for days at a time, I think they were trying to break me ... of something. They never did come out and say what it was they wanted. Even the interrogation sessions were rather tame by comparison of what I have been through on the Dubor home world.”

She made notes on her datapad as he spoke. “So you were tortured?” She asked.

Jack nodded his head. “In a manner, yes.” He paused as he thought about it all. “They seemed interested in my heritage more than anything. Like, they didn’t want to know my command codes or anything like that. They wanted to know about my DNA of all things. I managed to avoid telling them anything about my DNA though. I’m not sure how I accomplished that.” He frowned. “That and the fact that I’m a clone.” There it was, the clone thought came to the front of his memory.

“I see.” The counselor said. “Why do you think they were interested in the fact that you’re a clone?” She asked.

Jack shrugged. He put his hands on his legs to stop them from shaking. “I ... I don’t know. Maybe because Earth hasn’t mastered cloning yet? Not that I know of at least. I was being interrogated by humans. I wonder if they wanted to know about the procedure. I didn’t have any answers for them. They were not pleased with that, and took all light sources away from me for over a week. I was in the dark for a week. I mean it was solitary to begin with, but being in the dark ... alone? That was hell.”

“Being without food or water and in the dark for that long must have been difficult.” The counselor said.

“No shit.” Jack responded. “I ...” He was cut off as an alert klaxon sounded.

“All hands, this is the captain.” McDuff’s voice came over the wire. “All hands to battle stations. Two enemy vessels approaching.”

Jack stood. “We’ll have to continue this another time.” He ran out of the counselor’s office.

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The bridge was bustling with activity. Jack entered the bridge and took an empty station.

“Aft view, on monitors.” McDuff ordered.

Two unidentified vessels was on the Fresno’s tail. They were gaining speed and getting closer by the second. Jack tried to see if they were anything he had seen before, but everything was coming up blank.

“I thought we couldn’t be tracked through FTL.” Jack shouted over the alert klaxon.

“Things seems to have changed.” McDuff replied. “I don’t like the sound of this. Increase speed! Maximum strength to aft shields.”

“Aye!” Two officers said in unison as they went about their tasks.

A torpedo was fired from one of the enemy ships, it hit the Fresno’s aft port shield effectively taking out the port engine. The Fresno dropped out of FTL, the pursuing vessels dropped to sub light speed so they wouldn’t lose contact with the Fresno.

The bridge of the Fresno burst into flames. As fire damage crews entered the bridge to take care of the fire, McDuff clutched onto his command chair. “Return fire!” He commanded. Bert watched as torpedoes fired from the Fresno and hit their intended targets. The enemy ships seemed to hold.

“Keep firing.” Bert ordered.

“Aye sir.” The tactical officer said.

The Fresno shook again from weapons fire. “Warning, hull breach deck four. Life support failure. Sealing deck.” The computer reported.

“Dammit!” Bert yelled. He would have to get a casualty report later. “Bring the main battery online, charge to full power.” He ordered.

A few moments and more torpedoes later, the main battery was ready to fire. The tactical officer didn’t wait for the order, she just fired the weapon. It hit its target puncturing one of the enemy ship’s shields and destroying it.

“Whoa!” Bert yelled. “I didn’t want it destroyed. Just damaged so it couldn’t pursue us.”

“Sorry sir.” The tactical officer said. “I only charged it to eighty percent of normal. There must have been other issues with the ship, it shouldn’t have exploded like that.”

“Sir! We’re being hailed by the other enemy ship. They want to talk.” The tactical officer said.

Bert leaned forward in his chair. “Put them on the forward monitors.”

A woman appeared on the screen. “Don’t fire.” She said. “I repeat, do not fire.”

Bert stood from his chair. “This is Captain Bert McDuff of the U.S.S. Fresno. With whom am I speaking?” He said.

“My name is Elise Vanderspiel.” The woman said. “We demand you return our prisoner.”

Bert shook his head. “Seems we are evenly matched. Or more so, since I just destroyed one of your ships. You will surrender and return from whence you came.” He ordered. “if not, we will open fire with maximum power to our main battery. That should punch through your shields and disable or even destroy your ship.” He paused for a second. “Now, you don’t want that ... do you?”

Elise shook her head. “No, we don’t want that. But you don’t know what dangerous person you have aboard your ship.” She warned. “He’ll kill you all before you know it.”

Jack stood from his station. He walked close to the main viewing monitor and took a good look at the woman on the screen. He did not recognize her. Either she never visited him in his cell, or he just didn’t remember her. Maybe his memories had been altered in some way? He wasn’t sure.

“I’m *not* going back there!” Jack yelled at the screen. “As the captain said, stand down or you will be destroyed!”

Elise looked Jack square in the eyes. “You are making a mistake *alien*.” She said.

Jack shook his head. “No, it is *you* who have made the mistake.” He said. “I think you got lucky with your shot at our port engine. I scanned your ship, you’re running low on

torpedoes. You don't have the firepower to finish us off. You will surrender and prepare to be boarded."

Bert leaned back in his chair. The major seemed to have things under control.

Elise hesitated. She didn't want to give the surrender order, but the major guessed correctly. They didn't have the firepower to take the Fresno out and had been lucky with their main shot. She had no other choice. "We surrender. I will lower my shields so you can dock with us."

"Teleport their crew to holding cells on decks six and seven." Bert ordered. "Send a damage control team over to that vessel and secure it. Get her off my screen!" The communications channel went dead and Elise's face disappeared from the main monitor.

Bert looked to Jack. "Nice work major." He said. "Not bad at all."

Jack nodded. "At least we have one of their leaders. I'd recommend putting her in her own cell away from the rest of her crew. When a crew doesn't have a leader, they're more likely to cooperate." He knew this from experience.

Bert nodded. Tapping his fingers on his command chair he looked to Jack. "True." He said. "Captain McDuff to security, have that Elise woman brought to my office for questioning."

"Aye sir." The security chief replied.

"All hands, this is the captain. Go to condition two. I repeat go to condition two. Begin repairs to the ship. I want this boat space worthy within the hour. McDuff out." Bert said. Standing up, he crossed the bridge over to his office where he would wait for Elise to arrive so he could question her.

Jack felt like a fish out of water. He was used to being in charge of a mission not the one being rescued. To be honest, he didn't know what to do with himself. Sitting back down at a vacant station, he brought up a casualty list. Reading over the list, he noted that six members of the crew were dead and several were severely injured seeking medical attention in the Med Bay. Doc Allen would be busy for sure. Jack frowned at the loss of life. Sure they knew what they had signed on for when they joined up, but he felt responsible. It was because of him that they had set out to attempt a rescue mission.

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Captain McDuff sat in his office, seated across from him was Elise. They were mid conversation. McDuff frowned as he folded his arms. He was not interested in hearing lies. If That's all Elsie had to tell him, this was going to be a very short conversation.

"And that's when you decided to kidnap Major O'Brien." Bert said confirming what Elise had just informed him.

She nodded. "Yes, we wanted to crack his cloning method. We've been unsuccessful so far in our endeavors." She sighed. "The Saturn government has no knowledge of this. My base was a secret until now. Thanks for that." Elise added sarcastically. "They all saw your heavy cruiser drop in from FTL and teleport something from Titan. It won't take them long to figure out exactly what, or who in this case."

"I see." Bert said. "Well you know you're under arrest by the Articles of The Alliance. We're taking you back to Crimson Gamma where a proper trial can be held. We'll decide what to do with you then."

Elise sighed. "Promise me one thing?" She asked.

Bert shook his head. "I can't promise you anything. You don't have a say in anything. But I'll listen to the request." He waited to see what she had to say.

"Don't hold my crew accountable." Elise said. "You have me, please let them go. Or at least go easy on them. I'm their commanding officer. I should take all the brunt of the punishment coming to me." Her eyes pleaded with Bert. "Please." She said sincerely.

Bert leaned forward. "I can't make any promises. But I'll see what I can do for your crew. I get it. If I was in your place, I'd be making the same plea for my crew as well." He sighed. He really *did* get it. His crew came first when it came down to it.

"I have a crew over on your ship securing it. Any booby traps I need to know about before my crew gets killed by one of them?" Bert asked. He should have asked this question *before* sending over a team. But now it was too late. They were already over there.

"You did what?!" Elise exclaimed. She tried to stand up but was restrained to the chair by leg irons. "Dammit! Call them back before anything bad happens!" She was dead serious. "Honest, call them back now!"

Bert looked out the window at Elise's ship. It's engines turned red and then began exploding. "McDuff to teleportation room!" Bert yelled into the comm unit. "Transport our people back now!" He jumped to his feet.

The teleportation chief came over the comm unit as the rest of Elise's ship exploded in a brilliant flash of light. "Sir, I could only get a lock on two. The rest are ... dead. I'm sorry sir."

Bert slumped back into his chair. He looked at Elise with hate in his eyes. “Ten of my men are dead Elise.” He said. “Ten men! What did you do? Set an auto-destruct of some kind?” He was mad and it showed.

Elise shook her head. “No, no auto-destruct was set. There was a fail safe device embedded in the ship’s core. As long as a certain sequence was entered in every fifteen minutes, that device wouldn’t trigger the explosion you just saw. Looks like fifteen minutes elapsed without the code being entered. I’m sorry for your loss.”

“You’re *sorry* for my loss?!” Bert exclaimed. “Sorry doesn’t even begin to cover it! You just killed ten good men and women!” He yelled at her. “Any deal you thought you had? Is off!” Pressing a button on his desk he opened a comm channel. “McDuff to security, escort Elise back to her cell.”

“Aye sir.” The security officer said.

A moment later, Elise was escorted out of Bert’s office.

Bert turned around in his chair. He knew going on this mission was dangerous at best. But he didn’t expect to lose people on a simple mission to check out and secure an enemy ship. Bert dreaded filling out the paperwork to let the families of the deceased know they were dead.

“Computer, begin dictation.” Bert said. The computer beeped in response.

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Jack laid down in the ambassador cabin. It had been a long day and all he wanted was to get some much needed rest. As he laid there the thought of the deceased crossed his mind. Two enemy ships had been destroyed today. One carrying a full crew, one carrying members of *this* crew. He frowned at the thought. Jack couldn’t help but think if he hadn’t of been kidnapped none of this would have happened. If he hadn’t of been cloned, none of this would have happened. There was no way he could have prevented any of it, but he felt guilty for it happening.

Sitting up, Jack walked over to the molecule sequencer. “Whiskey, neat.” He said. A glass of whiskey appeared on the small pad before him. Picking up the glass, Jack shot it back quickly. He didn’t want to feel this pain anymore. Jack knew that would be impossible and he would just have to take things one day at a time from then on. That was the only way to live.

The End