

Vs The World

205

by Kyle Eggleston

President Thomas Cain sat in his office, he was watching the latest newscast about his approval ratings. His first ninety days back in office had been rather rough. It was to be expected, he had been put in office by the military after some under the table bribes had been placed and accepted. Naturally the public couldn't know about that. Any kind of dishonesty leaked out to the general public at large, his ratings would go into the negative.

Looking out the window, Cain saw soldiers walking down the street on patrol. He was proud of his officers. The loyal ones at least. They could be counted on, trusted even. Cain was very pleased with those he could trust.

There was a knock at his door. Followed by the door opening and a woman entering the office. "Mister President, there's news on the Fresno. She's two days away. She survived our assault."

President Cain leaned back in his chair. "The Fresno survived an attack from two of my warships?" He asked. "How?"

The woman shrugged. "A Dubor warship came in and interrupted the fight. The Fresno fled without much harm being done to her. Some micro fractures is all she managed to get hit with." She said. "After repairs were complete, she continued her course to Earth."

Cain sighed. "It's going to take a lot to take that star ship down I'm afraid." He said. "How many ships do we have in orbit?"

"Six." The woman said. "The rest are too far out to call home, they wouldn't make it in time. I think six would do good against the Fresno." She continued. "They are no match for what's waiting here for them."

"Thank you Lindsay, it is a comfort you bring to me." Cain said. "The Fresno won't know what hit her." He chuckled to himself. "They'll rue the day they fought against me!" He slammed his fist against his desk.

Lindsay nodded in agreement. "Yes sir they will." She turned and exited the office.

Cain turned his attention to a monitor, on it showed the schematics of a new type of star ship. Something more advanced than anything they currently had. A prototype was in

production and would be done any day now. He hoped it would be ready for when the Fresno came to Earth. This new warship was heavily armed and armored. She could take a pounding and keep on going for who knows how long. The testing trials would have to be cut short in order for the ship to be ready to fight the Fresno.

Flipping screens, the monitor changed to the weapons systems. Three main batteries, sixteen missile systems, a defensive shield grid and a form of enhanced armor in case the shields failed. It had the works.

Cain picked up a phone and dialed the space dock in orbit of Earth. A man answered the call. "Hello, Space Dock Six. What can I do for you?"

"Major Jones." Cain smiled. "I hear good things about that special project you've been working on for me." He thumbed his fingers on his desk. "I was wondering when you'll have a deliverable."

Jones shuffled through some papers. Finding the correct one, he made a humming noise. 'Ah yes, the Victory.' He said. "I'll have her in orbit of Earth ready to defend the planet in a day. Two tops." Jones seemed quite sure of himself, confident even.

Cain grinned at the news. "Good, that's very good news." He said. "Make sure she's armed to the teeth. I want to have a surprise for the Fresno when she drops out of FTL."

Jones nodded. "Of course, that was the goal after all. It's the best ship we've built to date." He closed the channel.

Cain swiveled around in his chair. He threw papers up in the air. He was going to win this war, whatever it took he was going to win it. It was about time something went right for him and this was his chance to get payback at Captain O'Brien for taking him from office.

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Onboard the Fresno, Captain O'Brien sat in his office. He was reading a personnel file. The president's personnel file. He wasn't sure why he was reading the personnel file of his enemy, maybe he wanted to figure out how the man thinks. Maybe he wanted a deeper connection to his enemy so he could feel right about taking him out of office, again. Maybe it was none of those things. He wasn't quite sure, but it felt right to check into the man. That's what he wanted, to look into the eyes of the man he was going to take down.

Zooming into Cain's photo, Jack stared into the eyes of his enemy. They were cold blue steel eyes. There was no joy or happiness in the man's eyes. Nothing that showed he cared or gave a damn about the human race. Power was his game, that and money.

O'Brien continued to stare. Cain was a man who hated aliens of all kinds. It didn't matter where they came from, if they weren't human he hated them. Jack could only imagine what Cain thought about him. Ever since he found out he was part Dubor, Jack had feelings he wouldn't get along with that many people, or people wouldn't accept him rather. He was sure there were *some* people that didn't take to him. Jack didn't care about that though, he was who he was and nothing could change that fact.

"Computer, how far away are we from Earth?" O'Brien spoke into the air.

"Two standard Earth days." The computer replied. Its tone was cold, dark. Maybe it was just Jack's thinking about what he would face when he got to Earth. Probably an entire fleet of Earth ships loyal to President Cain would be waiting for him in orbit.

O'Brien breathed out. "Two fracking days." He said. "A lot can happen during that time." Jack wished he could make the Fresno fly faster. The sky was just too damn big. But it was his sky and he wanted it to be smaller.

Opening a channel, Jack called down to engineering. "O'Brien to Park, Madison I need some good news about now."

Madison seemed out of breath, she was clearly hard at work. O'Brien's hail couldn't have come at a worse time, but well here it was. "Park here." She said. "The docking bay is scrapped. We'll have to rebuild her. The fractures in the hull have been fixed. I should be able to increase our speed within the hour."

O'Brien nodded. "That is excellent news." He said. "I'll let you get back to work. Keep up the good job." He closed the channel. Turning his attention to the bridge, Jack thought he might make an appearance. Standing up, he walked towards his office door. It opened as it sensed his presence.

"Captain on the bridge." An ensign said.

O'Brien waved his hand. "As you were." He looked to Kate who was seated in his chair. "Report."

Kate referred to her console. "Nothing new sir. It's the same when you asked an hour ago. We're still two days out. I hope you have something special planned for those ships we're bound to meet up with." She paused. "Like an actual plan. I'd rather like to live to see my next birthday."

Jack nodded. "I know Kate, I know. I'd like to see my next birthday too." He looked at the forward main viewer. The stars streaked by as usual. On a typical day, any other mission, he would have found it to be peaceful. Today he felt dread. It would take a lot of courage to do what he was planning on doing, to take back the world he called home. In a way, he wished General Tague was there with him. He felt she was starting to understand what was going on.

But it was too late for that. She would be replaced with another commander of the station and they would rule how they saw fit. It was only a matter of time. Jack hoped he would somehow regain his command of the station. It wasn't the most glamorous posting, but it was what he wanted.

Jack wanted to learn more about his heritage, it was a mix between Dubor and Human. He wanted to learn all he could. Maybe that's why Ketish was so interested in him. Because of the blending of their two species, well it had to be something.

"Sir, a ship has entered FTL with us." Kate said. "It's a Dubor warship." She stood and moved to her own command chair.

Jack sat down in his captain's chair. "On viewer."

The main viewer shifted from stars to that of a Dubor warship. Jack recognized the vessel. It was the same ship that all but destroyed the Fresno during their last engagement.

"Great." Jack sighed. "Has she locked weapons on us?"

Kate shook her head. "Negative. She's simply scanning us. Possibly determining our defenses." Her hands flew over her controls. "Our shields are at eighty percent. If our last encounter with that ship means anything, we're still no match for them."

"I know." Jack said. "Open a channel, let's have a chat."

Kate nodded. Keying in a sequence, she confirmed. "A channel is open sir. You're on."

"This is Captain Jack O'Brien calling the ship that is following us. What is it you want Ketish?" Jack said. He waited for an answer. Jack wasn't sure Ketish was aboard the ship chasing them, but had a sinking feeling he was.

Ketish appeared on the main viewer. "O'Brien." He said. "It is agreeable to see you again. I am glad you are still alive, there are things you must accomplish. This plan to take back your home world from your president is foolish. I recommend you turn back while you still can."

Jack winced at the thought of Ketish being happy to see him. It was unnerving for Ketish to find such an interest in Jack. Did he too read the sacred texts of their people? That a half breed would bring about peace? Did Ketish know this, or was there something else he wanted of O'Brien. Jack wanted to know, but now was not the time for that. He had a mission to complete.

"I don't know what game you're trying to play here Ketish." Jack said. "But I'm not falling for it. You shouldn't have any interest in human politics. That's what this is all about, politics." He said. "Now either you are going to fire on us, in which we will have to fire back. We are at war you know. Or you're going to let us go on our way. It's up to you."

Ketish's smile dropped. "No Jack, I don't want to fire on you. I'm not interested in your human politics, but I am interested in your Dubor heritage. There is something about you that intrigues me, I can't explain it. But it is there. I cannot allow you to complete this mission, if you do so you will die." He said. "I can't allow that to happen. You are important to me."

Jack chuckled at the thought. Here was Ketish saying he didn't want Jack to die, yet only months ago he was doing exactly that. Killing him over and over again. Sure, he made sure Jack was revived but only so he could kill him yet again. What kind of sick bastard was he?

"I've got an idea." Ketish said. "Why don't you follow me out to The Rim. We can go exploring together. I'm sure that Shuka scientist has told you stories of The Rim. Haven't you been wanting to explore and see it all for yourself?" He teased at the thought of exploration. Humans lived for exploration, why else would they go out as far as they had?

Jack shook his head. "No deal." He said. "We have much more at stake here on our own turf. How do you know of Nokev? I thought your people didn't care much for outsiders. That you wanted to conquer not learn about them."

Ketish smiled again. "Well, I am different than most Dubor. As are you. But I'm sure your whore Grilka has told you that before. It's nothing new. Tell me, why do you have such an interest in Shuka?"

Jack tapped his fingers on the communications control button. One click and he could end the conversation. How dare Ketish interfere with his mission he was trying to accomplish. "I could ask you the same question."

Ketish chuckled. "I thought my goal was obvious. We, as a people, conquer other worlds. Shuka is in our sights. Once we are done with Earth, we will move onto Shuka and take what is rightfully ours. Again."

Standing up, Jack walked towards the main viewer. He folded his arms across his chest. "If you want to stop us that bad, you are going to have to destroy us." Jack said taunting Ketish. "But I don't think you'll fire. You might kill me in the attack. You would have attacked us by now if you meant to. So, what's your goal?"

Frowning, Ketish continued. "You're right Jack. I can't fire on you. There is so much for you to accomplish. So, we will accompany you to Earth. We will stand by your side as you take back your planet. Call it a truce of sorts, for now." Ketish hoped Jack would believe him at his word. Jack had no reason to do so of course, Ketish had literally killed him, and that was just something you didn't overcome.

"Let me get this straight." Jack said. "You want to fight along side us, against our own people to take out our president. In return you get to see me live, is that it?"

Ketish interlocked his fingers. "More or less, yes that's it. You got it right on the nose." He paused. "I do hope I said that expression correctly. Your human phrases can be difficult sometimes, I am learning though in order to get closer to you."

Jack froze. Closer to him. He didn't like the sound of that. There was something about Ketish that really gave him the willies. Just his deep interest in Jack was enough to make any poor bastard hesitant on trying to live their life without the thought that someone was always watching. That's what Jack felt, that Ketish was always watching him.

"Are you going to accept my proposal or not?" Ketish asked. "I give you ten of your minutes to respond." The channel closed.

Jack looked around the bridge. "Options."

Kate hesitated, but responded anyway. "Their shields are down. Perhaps they can't operate their shields while in FTL. We can fire at them, disable their engines."

"They would detect a weapons lock." Jack said. "They'd fire at us, possibly destroying our shield generator in the process. We'd be sitting ducks at that point. We can't fire on them."

"Five minutes." Kate said. "Then we will have to accept his offer. Having such an advanced warship on our side, is rather enticing. But what's to say they won't attack once we overtake the president's ships." There was too much at stake.

Jack nodded. "Right. Ketish's interest in me can only go so far. He won't be entertained for long. He'll give up eventually once he learns I won't cooperate with whatever sick plan he has." He paused. "Reopen a channel, I want to speak with him."

Ketish reappeared on the monitor. "Two minutes to spare. What do you choose? Do we join forces, or are you going to start firing on us. I'm sure you've noticed our shields aren't up. A tempting target to be sure."

Jack nodded. "Yeah, we noticed. Look, what guarantee do we have that you won't turn on us once we've defeated Earth's defenses and taken the president into custody?"

Ketish smiled. Good, the Dorf was thinking it over, taking his proposition seriously. That's all Ketish really wanted to begin with. To be taken seriously. "Trust me, I won't attack you. You will be free to go back to that space station you're so fond of. I will not keep you from it. I will not kill you. I promise."

Jack didn't like the words that were coming out of Ketish's mouth. But he appeared to be promising a lot for nothing in return. Well, his life wasn't exactly nothing. Ketish still wanted Jack to survive this confrontation. If they did survive, would Ketish expect something in return? Maybe not now, but down the line? Jack didn't like those odds. But what else could he do about it.

“Alright.” Jack finally said. “I accept your offer. But, any sign of betrayal and I will attack your ship with everything I have. Mark my words.”

Ketish smirked at the thought. O’Brien’s ship was no match for his warship. He had proven that in the past. If the Fresno couldn’t hold her own in their last attack, she wouldn’t be able to do anything now. Nothing had changed. If the Fresno attacked, Ketish wasn’t sure he wouldn’t destroy her this time around. O’Brien’s life wasn’t that important to keep an entire ship alive just because he willed it, or was it.

“I’m sure you will.” Ketish said. “And you will lose. Just like last time. But I don’t think we will get to that point, do you?”

Jack frowned at the thought. Ketish knew the Fresno’s capabilities. He *knew* he could defeat her easily. Perhaps they could raise their shields while in FTL and weren’t as a show of good faith. He hated not knowing the specifics of what was going on. He wanted to know and that bothered him.

“No I guess not.” Jack said with a smile. “Hope you can keep up.” He joked.

“I’m sure we will. Ketish out.” The channel closed.

Jack looked across the bridge. “Tactical, keep a low level scan on that ship going, if they target us fire at them. Disable their weapons.”

“Aye sir.” The tactical officer said.

Walking towards the transport tube, Jack called out to Kate. “You have the bridge. I’ll be in Med Bay.”

Kate nodded. “Right.”

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Med Bay was quiet. Like the calm before the storm. As Jack entered, Matt didn’t look up from his work. “Captain.” He said as though he had been expecting him. “What can I do for you?”

Jack walked up to Doctor Allen. “Matt, we’re two days away from Earth. I want to make sure Med Bay is ready for the casualties I’m sure we’ll be sending you.” He looked around. Med Bay was squeaky clean and looked like it hadn’t been in a firefight in ages. Matt really had the dock crew working overtime.

Matt nodded. “Yep, you got it boss.” He said. “Just try not to send me too many at once. I know it can get hectic up there on the bridge, but remember us little guys.”

Jack sighed. That was one thing he hated about command. Sending good men and women to their deaths even if it's for a righteous cause. Saving Earth from itself was a good cause in his mind. Saving it from an evil dictator as it were.

"Noted." Jack said. "I hate sending them to you, if I could prevent it I would."

Matt nodded. "Yeah, I know captain. I know."

"What the devil are you two up to?" Lieutenant Jeff Killpack's voice echoed throughout Med Bay. Both Jack and Matt looked over to see him walking in the room. "Man this is as boring as security is." He paused. "So, giving the ol' hey I'll be sending you dead people talk eh? I get it. I saw the ship alert, a Dubor warship is on our ass huh? What's that about?"

Jack frowned. It was difficult keeping secrets on a ship this size, especially when your security chief had command codes to access the ships video records. Oh well there was nothing he could do but demote the man, and Jack wasn't about to do that.

"Yeah, they're going to join us in the fight." Jack explained. "Not sure I can trust them, but I'll take what I can get at this point."

"I see." Jeff responded. "Well I hope you know what you're doing with that. Look, I'm saying this as a friend Jack. You can't trust Ketish, you know this. Watch your back."

Jack nodded. "I will. I won't lie, I'm anxious as hell to go into this fight. I know we need to take Cain out of office, I get that. He's not meant to lead this war against the Dubor. He's not the right man for the job. But that doesn't stop me from being scared."

Jeff rested a hand on Jack's shoulder. "We got you captain." He said. "We have your back, no matter what you go into we are right behind you, you lead the charge."

Jack nodded. "Thanks Jeff, I appreciate your confidence in me." He looked to Matt "I best be getting back up to the bridge now that I've spoken to both of you. I feel a little bit better about it all, what's coming." He turned and left Med Bay.

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Grilka looked out the window at Ketish's warship. She wondered what they were planning on doing. She wanted to call Ketish and demand to know what his motives were for following the Fresno, but knew she didn't have the security clearance to do so. Asking O'Brien was out of the question, he might ask questions of *why* she wanted to contact Ketish, what kind of loyalty she still owed the man. Too many questions to be had for sure. Grilka wanted to avoid those things at all costs.

O'Brien stood outside Grilka's quarters. He regretted allowing her onboard his ship during this time. He couldn't assure her safety during the attack. She would have been safer if she would have stayed on Crimson Gamma, but she had insisted on coming with them. There was no changing her mind.

Pressing a button next to the door, it unlatched the door and opened it. Jack stepped inside Grilka's quarters.

"Hello Grilka." Jack said.

"Jack." Grilka said, she was still looking outside the port window. "Tell me Jack, why do the stars look so peaceful when we're in FTL transit?" She wrapped her arms around herself.

O'Brien approached Grilka from behind and held her in his arms. He kissed her neck. "It is quite a sight isn't my dear." He said. Then he saw what she was really looking at, it wasn't the stars it was that damned warship chasing after them. "Oh, that."

Grilka nodded. "Yes, that." She said. "What does Ketish want with you this time Jack? Hasn't he tormented you enough already? What more could you possibly learn from him?"

Jack shrugged. "I don't know. He's up to something, wants me alive for some reason, and wants to see me through this suicide mission." He sighed. "I hope it's not a suicide mission, a one way mission for us. There's so much left for us to accomplish."

Grilka smiled. "It's because of the prophecy isn't it. He wants you alive to see where it will lead, even though he hates the Shukan people, the prophecy promises peace. Even I can't pass that up."

Jack hated that damned prophecy. Ever since he learned of its existence, he regretted being what he was, who he was. Jack wasn't about to tell Grilka that of course. To tell her that he was ashamed to be the same race as she was? That would be a slap to the face. He wasn't about to slap her in the face like that. It wouldn't be right.

"Do you honestly believe in that prophecy? That I will have the ability to cause peace to come between our two peoples? In effect our three peoples? Shuka, Earth, and Dubor?" Jack asked.

Grilka nodded her head. "Yes I do." She said. "Ever since I met you, I had a feeling you would be the one to complete the prophecy, make it come to pass. There was never any doubt in my mind. Ketish saw it too, but he's too stubborn to let go of the prophecy. He will make sure it comes true, even if it destroys the way we know how to live at the present moment."

Jack had to make sense of this all. "But he plans on taking over Shuka and Earth. If the prophecy states otherwise, why does he want to dominate both worlds?"

Grilka tilted her head. Jack had a point. "It's his upbringing. His training. He is a man of the Holy Order. He has a path to follow and walk himself until the prophecy can be fulfilled. That path includes taking over other worlds that are not Dubor, for all cattle must be led to food and water in order to be useful."

She didn't mean any offense, Grilka only spoke the truth. What all Dubor were told since they were younglings. It was their belief they were to inhabit the universe, that all other species and aliens were nothing more than work horses. It was a difficult belief to overcome if the prophecy was to come forth.

Jack nodded his head. He thought he understood what she was saying. It would still take some time for him to fully comprehend what was being said though. If Ketish was telling the truth, then Jack had all the time in the world. He would be safe from any upcoming war all because one alien had faith in him. He couldn't believe it but would go along with it, because that's the only thing that actually made sense these days.

"Well, get some sleep my dear. It's going to be a very busy two days, and then all hell will break loose." He kissed her neck again.

Grilka nodded. She doubted she would sleep well, not with Ketish and his warship following the Fresno. "I will try. You do the same my love."

Jack left Grilka's quarters. He wouldn't sleep that night, that was for sure. As he walked the corridors of the Fresno he could only think of one thing. The same thought over and over within his head. The calm before the storm was one hell of a drug.

The End