

A Conflict of Interest

Written by Tano'rath and TwistedSnakes

Sun, mountains, valleys, and most of all, the fact that I had managed to twist enough arms to get permission to take my three years worth of leave on sunny Alkonas. A world of beautiful mountain ranges and valleys, stunning views, yet with all the modern amenities that you could wish for. This place was almost created to be a holiday destination. The only thing that seemed to make it better was the fact that I had an uncle here, who was kind enough to host me for the two weeks worth of vacation that I would be having.

Uncle Offemmarsh had settled in well after his retirement from Drakobar Industries - Agricultural (DKBI-A), and his family was definitely happy to be away from the Industrial planet that was the company's namesake. I hadn't told him that I was on leave, but it turned out that my mother had told him about it, and despite my protests, he had picked me up from the spaceport and insisted that I take his guest room. No complaints there, of course, since that saved me a fair amount of credits from the excellent hotel that I had intended to splurge on.

The atmospheric regulators here were pretty good too, with nice clear skies most of the time prevailing, unlike the ageing ones in use on some of the older colonies. While some Coastal Drakonians would have elected to go to the beach and roll in the sand, I, being of the Mountain Breed went to scale the sheer peaks and cliffs of the highlands, with a small engine strapped to my back, so that I might take flight if I so fancied.

If anything, I was just happy to be away from the metal walls and doors of my ship. It was a bit of a shame that they didn't allow me to bring my racing car here, but it was fair that they didn't want me to leave tyre marks all over the place. Wheels were still dated, no matter how much I liked them. At least Offenmarsh was nice enough to lend me his spare hovercar, a small hatchback, which was ponderously slow. High Command had agreed to leave me alone unless the planet was going to implode, so I was expecting no drama.

On this day, I was busy scaling Mt Alrit, one of the taller peaks on this fine planet. It was no dangerous affair, of course, but it was indeed challenging. I felt my muscles strain against the gravity as I hauled myself over rock after rock, growling down at the granite as I worked my way up.

While the black Drakonian was scaling the mountains, another dragon was busy with something else. The high-security defences in the planet's military headquarters weren't very effective, at least not to this dragon. He stepped out of the shadows in a deserted corridor and the pale yellow lights of the building reflected off his blue scales. Around his head was a silver visor with orange lenses that connected him to his own headquarters.

His name was Crestor, and he was here on a mission. He looked right and left for signs of patrolling guards. Nobody. Good. He dashed down the corridor in a blur of blue and came to a halt next to a door labelled "Server room". A swipe of the access pass he stole from a knocked-out guard opened the steel-reinforced door.

Crestor walked down rows and rows of beeping processors and servers arranged on steel racks and made his way to the centre of the room where a keyboard and a floating display screen mounted on a white ceramic pillar. From his visor, the dragon pulled out a tiny chip and slotted it into a slot on the side of the keyboard.

His fingers flew over the keyboard's various characters as he navigated the security system. There was a flash of red and the words "Backing up password" appeared on the display as the password was copied into his chip. The blue dragon smirked. This was easy. Too easy. If he'd tried to break into the control room he'd be riddled with bullets before he could take a step in. There was no need for that as everything could be accessed from this server room, so long as one knew where to look.

I was busy scaling the mountain when a small shuttle approached, blasting my snout with rock chips and sand, as the airlock hissed open.

One of the corporals, presumably from the local garrison, saluted as he looked down at me. I steadied myself on the ledge on which I had barely stood properly on, and returned the salute. "What's this about, corporal?"

"There has been a breach in the mainframe. Your leave has been suspended, Captain. You are required to investigate. Do you object?" The corporal shouted over, trying to ensure that the whining of the engines didn't drown out what he was saying.

I couldn't help but sigh as I nodded. "Very well. I will jump."

The corporal nodded, shouting something inaudible to the pilot, as I leapt off the ledge, flared my wings and glided my way into the shuttle. The airlock slammed shut behind me and the green Drakonian handed me a combat vest and sidearm. "Sir."

I took the equipment and nodded. "The fuck's going on, soldier?"

"We have a situation. Priority 1-A," he replied, as we both made our ways into the passenger seats, while the pilots rammed the tiny shuttle to full throttle. The engines roared, as we surged forward.

I couldn't help but sigh again. "1A means fucked up me mum's arse, corporal. What got taken from the mainframe?"

"The codes to the defence system and the failsafe self-destruct." Came the reply.

I felt the blood drain from my hide as he uttered the words. "You didn't just say that."

"Yes, sir. I did." He replied, and I began to realize that he too was pale.

"Pilot, override engine safety lockdown. Engines to 170%! Command authorisation!" I snapped, rattling off my command codes as I checked my weapons.

The engines were pushed beyond their rated limits as the pilot complied and we reached the local mainframe in far better time than we should have. I yelled at the pilot to alert High Command as I all but jumped out of the shuttle onto the cold concrete below.

The shuttle pattered its way away towards the spaceport nearby as I flicked the safety off the pistol, and bolted into the building.

After an almost never-ending maze of corridors and rooms I finally came upon what looked like a blue-scaled variant of my species, but his proportions were off. He wasn't a Drakonian.

I raised my weapon and faced him down yelling, "I.D.A.F! Drop to the ground! Hands on your head!"

"Yeah? And I'm supposed to be scared of you?" Crestor smirked at Tano'rath, the black dragon getting in the way of him and mission success. His opponent was dressed in brightly-coloured shirt and shorts, not at all something he'd expect from the military.

"I don't care. Just get on the fucking floor, cunt. Now!" Tano'rath commanded angrily, pointing to the ground with his free hand.

"Not happening," Crestor flatly stated, spreading his wings to charge at the black dragon in a half-sprint, half-flight.

Tano'rath whipped out his energy gun and fired two shots towards Crestor's direction. Crestor's visor gave him realtime feedback through a neural link, overwhelming his senses with information on the surroundings, including the incoming bursts of energy. The bullets missed their target as the dragon dodged the shots with uncanny dexterity.

With a punch, Crestor knocked the gun out of Tano'rath's hands. Another punch sent the black dragon stumbling backwards. Tano'rath threw back another punch in retaliation, hitting Crestor squarely on the light plate armour on his chest. The armour absorbed most of the blow, but the wind was still knocked out of the blue dragon as he fell to the floor. With a clawed leg, he swiped at Tano'rath's feet and knocked him to the ground.

With the help of his tail, Crestor swiftly spun around and pinned the struggling black dragon on the ground with his knee. "Sleep tight, Imperial scum. And say goodbye to this planet," Crestor smirked. A well-aimed punch at Tano'rath's snout sent him falling into a void of blackness.

Leaving the unconscious black dragon on the ground, Crestor charged away from the scene in a streak of blue.

He found a quiet alley between two tall grey buildings and crouched behind a stack of iron crates flushed against a wall. "Hey," Crestor huffed into the microphone on his visor, "Agent 2948. Password. 'Sky of the blue moons'. Yes. Got the codes." he panted.

He tapped a button on the visor and the words "Uploading file - 0%" appeared in front of his eyes. "Yes. Uploading now."

The upload completed. "The high commander wants to speak to you," came the voice on the other end. What? The high commander? Zulez, the high commander of the Crestor's ship, was in charge of the fifty battalions that were mobilized on the ship. Through his two years on the ship, he had not so much heard, much less seen a glimpse of Zulez. Now, being able to speak to him was going to be a huge honour.

"Y-yeah, sure," he stuttered in anticipation.

By the time I woke, the trespasser was long gone, and my communicator was filled with about thirty messages telling me to evacuate. I felt my earpiece buzzing in my pocket, and when I put it into my ear, my eardrum was exploded by my boss, Admiral Hector. "TANO'RATH! WAKE UP!"

"GAH!" I had to bite back a warble from the sudden loud noise. I nearly threw the earpiece away on instinct too. "Sir! I am awake!"

"Evac! Now!" he yelled, nearly deafening me a second time.

I had to pull the earpiece out of my ear for a moment before I put it back in and replied. "Sir, please don't shout. What's the drama about?"

"They killed the shields, and there is a weapons lock, Tano! Get out of there! Ships are being scrambled to evacuate. We need all hands available to help with the evacuation! Detonation projected in two hours!" I could tell that the Admiral was making a concerted effort not to shout as I picked myself off the ground and retrieved my weapon.

I shook my head a little, trying to clear the fog in my mind. "Acknowledged. Evac point?"

"Spaceport, pretty close by. You have authorisation to requisition any vehicle you might need, captain. Report in once you are off the dirt. May the Emperor give you strength. Hector out," the reply came and I heard the communications channel cut out.

I holstered my gun as it was useless now. I bolted down the hall, towards the car park.

After a large amount of swearing and avoiding other people I pushed, shoved, and ran my way to the closest usable vehicle: a wheeled utility vehicle with a flatbed. There was already a red-scaled female walking towards it. She unlocked the doors with the dangle as I approached.

"Armed Forces, ma'am. I am requisitioning your vehicle." I snapped as I blocked her way to the driver's door while flashing my ID.

She snorted at me. "You can't do that."

"Pursuant to Article 771, Section 5-B. I have been ordered to take possession of any vehicle that I might need in an emergency situation. I have been given such authorisation." I snapped and snatched the keys from her grasp as I whipped out my communicator and snapped a photo of her. "This photo will be sent to my superiors. The Government will be in contact with you to replace your vehicle or reimburse you for your loss."

She stared at me. "E...emergency situation?"

"Classified, ma'am." I snapped yet again and pulled the door open. "Have a good day, ma'am. I suggest going home to your family and waiting for further instructions."

With that, I clambered in and slammed the door shut, fumbled with the seatbelts for a moment before tossing the transponder into one of the cubbyholes. I hit the button to turn on the electric motors and went through the motions to start the backup Hydrogen Combustion Engine. Although my personal vehicle was older, the controls were similar enough that I didn't have too much trouble.

The engine jumped to and started with a rumble and the whining of the supercharger. "Good girl," I muttered as I slammed it into gear.

The journey to the spaceport was a blur of dodging traffic, squealing tyres, and fighting the steering apparatus. I spent half the time shouting at the windscreen as I dodged traffic and pedestrians, sometimes simultaneously, as I weaved down the streets, honking at any pedestrians who were stupid enough not to get out of the way.

It was almost frustrating since the High Command hadn't seen it fit to advise the public yet since the ships hadn't arrived. As much as I could see that they were trying to avoid a panic, I wished that the streets were clear.

I drove with the vehicle at full throttle, the engine screaming, and the coil whine from the electric motors deafening. I finally screeched to a halt in the carpark of the spaceport and was quickly pointed to the furthest docking berth by the guard.

"FURTHEST?! Are you bloody fucking kidding me?!" I screamed, as I turned and bolted towards the entrance of the terminal.

My military credentials got me through the checkpoints fast enough given the situation and I subsequently ran towards my shuttle. The only things running through my mind was the fact that I needed to get there fast, the fact that my holiday had just become shit, and the fact that my combat vest was crumpling my favourite shirt, the one with pictures of tiny shoes on it that always elicited the funniest of reactions from people.

I ran and ran, reaching the final stretch with even more swearing, until I heard the click of a safety catch being disengaged behind me, and whirled around to find the same blue not-Drakonian behind me. He held a weapon, pointed right at what would have been my back.

"Thank you for your contribution to the cause," a gruff voice congratulated Crestor over his visor.

"No, thank you, sir, for the honour," Crestor involuntarily bowed before realizing the high commander wasn't watching him.

"Transmission end," the voice declared. There was a click from the other end but the communication channel was still open. "Disable the shields. And charge the decimation beam."

Wait. Decimation beam? That weapon of mass destruction works by charging up a sphere of concentrated energy. Once fully charged, there was no holding back as the beam tore through its target, ripping atoms apart in its path. The beam couldn't be stored, meaning that in an hour's time this planet would be gone. But that meant...

"H-hey! I mean sir! There's not enough time to begin my extraction. Is there a ship in planetary orbit that I'm assigned to?" Crestor shouted into the visor's microphone.

"Oh? This is still on?" Zulez's voice came through the speakers. "Well. No. Extracting you would give Alkonas enough time to repair the shields. In lieu of mission success, we're going to leave you behind. Unless you magically find a way off the planet, the beam will tear your body apart. Transmission end, properly this time please."

"What the flying FUCK?! Come back here you cowardly turd!" Crestor screamed into the dead microphone and threw a punch at the iron crates, sending them toppling to the ground.

Ugh. There was no time for this. He needed to find a way out. The military base would have ships. Running faster than he ever thought he could run, Crestor made his way to the military hangar with the help of base's blueprints that the visor projected into his eyes.

He kicked down a door and entered a large cavernous room lined with white metal. Most of the ships had been mobilized to counter the security threat but a few remaining ships were suspended from the ceiling by numerous steel cables with large industrial wires running from the walls into various ports along the sides of the ship.

With his wings, he flew up to the nearest access panel that sat on a platform high above the ground next to a ship. He tapped the keyboard furiously. "Emergency lockdown. Ship disabled until further notice" blared the words on the screen.

Damn it! He jumped off the platform and soared over to another ship. "Emergency lockdown. Ship disabled until further notice" the familiar words taunted him again. Ugh. He was not going to die on this hovel of a planet.

Just then, Crestor saw a streak of black, orange and green go past the hangar's wide doors. Wait. Was that the dragon from earlier? Would he have a way out too? He didn't have any choice.

Crestor flew out the hangar doors, landed on the ground floor behind Tano'rath and whipped out a gun. His gun was now aimed at Tano'rath's back. "Stop, or I'll shoot," he threatened.

I turned to regard the offending individual, seeing no point in bothering to draw my weapon. "Ah, you again."

"Give me your ship!" the intruder growled at me.

"No." I simply said. No point wasting effort on this. It was pretty obvious that this was the same dragon from before. I couldn't help but wonder why he was still here.

"Then I'll shoot you." He snapped, still holding my gaze.

I stared him hard in the eye, noting the maelstrom of emotions within. "Sure, and it'll go into lockdown and you'll die here with me."

Evidently, my guest was getting impatient as he gestured with his weapon towards the shuttle behind me. He even growled too, probably thinking that that would intimidate me somehow. "The ship. Now."

I couldn't help but chuckle at the irony of the situation. He had left me for dead earlier, and now, he would have died too if I had actually passed on. "Looks like your friends space-side abandoned you, no? How sad. No. No ship for you."

This only served to further aggravate the assailant. The question, however, was whether he would actually shoot me. "Shut up! I'm gonna kill you. Then I'm gonna steal your ship. And I'm gonna kill Zulez too."

I was still alive. This guy most probably had the shaft the size of one micron I figured. Maybe half a micron, since it was a bit chilly, and the cold makes things contract. "Fuck if I care about your former boss, whelp. Ship won't start if I'm dead. Go figure."

With that, I turned and continued walking towards the shuttle. It was illogical to waste any more of my time.

This, however, left the assailant even less impressed with me. I bet he kept the weapon trained on me while he snapped, "Fuck this shit, I don't have time for this."

I heard him run off to somewhere as I walked towards my shuttle.

I stepped back into the same shuttle from earlier as the pilot from before nodded to me. The Corporal had apparently returned to headquarters to report on the situation.

Crestor dashed back to the hangar. A main control room would give him override access to the ships. He just needed to break in. He reentered the hangar and looked around. His eyes caught a small box with glass windows overlooking the entire hanger and he flew upwards to the box. The window pane broke as the blue dragon punched through the glass.

Crestor threw himself through the window and scratched himself on sharp shards that still remained on the window. Blood seeped through the cut but everything was insignificant if he couldn't get off the planet. Standing on broken glass, Crestor punched the power button on the control panel that overlooked the rest of the hangar.

The system took what felt like forever to start itself up. The hangar slowly hummed into life as power and ventilation systems were turned on. When the terminal finally responded to input, Crestor quickly navigated the menus.

"Ships in lockdown. Re-enable: Y/N" the terminal asked.

The dragon smashed the "Y" key and a box appeared, asking for the security key.

Panting apprehensively, Crestor pulled out the chip from his visor and slotted it into the terminal. There was a whirr of a disk and words appeared on the screen: "Access codes has been updated. Request the new password from your superior."

A million words of profanities screamed through Crestor's mind as he threw his fists down on the control panel. "Fuck!" he gasped, panting in pain. The pain wasn't from the sharp cuts across his body or the glass shards beneath his feet. The pain came from a deep realization that his long journey of life would all end on this planet.

Ugh. After all he had done for the Draconic Council, they had left him behind to die.

"Pilot, intercept course. Hangar." I snapped, buckling myself into the copilot's seat.

The pilot looked over and cocked his head. "Sir? The hangar is just behind the terminal. We were ordered to rendezvous with the Defiant, your ship, sir."

"Obey my damn orders. I have a potential source. One that is so desperate he will sell his ass to me to survive." I retorted, checking the status of the shuttle on my screen. "Initialise engines!"

The pilot stared at me for a moment more, before he began his own preflight checks. "Aye, sir, all systems nominal."

"Disengage docking clamps, make ready to move," I replied, pausing to look at the readouts on my screen once again as I shifted my seat a little so that I could hold onto the controls comfortably. "Confirmed, all readings nominal."

"Engines warm, sir. We are good to go," the pilot added as we both heard the hisses and clunks of the docking clamps disengaging. "Moving towards the hangar now."

I finished up typing my orders into the screen. "Good,"

The pilot glanced at his screen, then at me for a moment. "Sir? Weapons are coming online at full power."

"Aye. weapons armed. We might have to make a hole," I replied as we cruised towards the hangar.

The pilot simply nodded, probably having given up on figuring out what I was doing as we looped around towards the hangar proper. "Approaching hangar. One life sign detected. Sir, they were supposed to have evacuated!"

"Indeed. Intercept course, now." I replied, while looking at the same readout. "Prime and lock weapons on the roof next to him. Make ready to fire. Low power only, We don't want to kill him."

"Sir, may I ask what is going on?" The pilot demanded, though, because he was busy doing his job, he didn't turn to look at me.

I hit the trigger to fire the twin cannons on each wing of the shuttle. "No," I snapped at him. "Move it alongside the hole. Hold position till I either get shot, or I give you a different order."

The twin energy bolts streaked out and melted their way through the corrugated steel walls of the hangar, revealing a familiar trespasser.

I made my way to the airlock and opened it, staring down at what had been the source of my problems for the past two hours. "Get in."

Crestor squinted as sun and dust got in his eyes. Blinking to clear his eyes he found himself staring up at the side of a familiar ship, hover-locked just an arm's length away from the building. Tano'rath was standing in front of the ship's airlock glaring at him.

"You!" Crestor said accusingly.

"Don't waste my time. Jump you twit!" the black dragon commanded, obviously annoyed.

Crestor was taken aback. Was his way out of the planet simply offering itself to him? He dashed at the opening, folding his wings behind him so that he could fit through the opening and did a running jump into the ship.

"What the fuck are you doing?" he gasped at the black dragon.

"Saving your sorry fucking ass and getting to the bottom of this," he grunted at Crestor. "Pilot, move! Resume previous orders! Posthaste!" Tano'rath went back into the captain's seat in the ship, stood in front of it and faced the ship's windshield.

Crestor grunted. "Thanks for saving me," he thanked the black dragon reluctantly. He stood awkwardly beside Tano'rath's chair and started picking out the glass shards that had gotten under his scales.

"Thank me when this is done," Tano'rath turned to face him. "You got a name?"

"Crez," the blue dragon grunted.

"Call me Tano," the black dragon introduced himself as he massaged his lower jaw. "You throw one hell of a fucking punch. Now," he whipped out his gun and jabbed it into the soft flesh below Crestor's snout, "give me a reason why I shouldn't kill you where you stand for treason."

With Tano'rath's gun tilting his head upwards to the ceiling, Crestor shot him a suspicious glare. "Then you'll be finishing what the Council started when they abandoned me," he responded coldly.

Tano'rath smirked and holstered his gun. "Council you say? What do they want, what are they going to do, and how much time do we have? Spit it out."

"We're-" Crestor stopped. "They're gonna blow up this planet," he corrected himself.

"Yeah, keep stating the obvious, runt, and I'll cut your damn fingers off. I want a timeframe! How long do we have?"

Crestor's fingers twitched. "One hour," he stated flatly. "Started thirty minutes ago."

"Good. We're in a hurry. I know you can shoot, so will you shoot me in the back? After all, I'm a, what did you call me? 'Imperial scum'? How do you know I won't take the shot eh?" Tano'rath shot back.

"Fuck the Council, I stand alone now," Crestor glared at Tano'rath.

Tano'rath snorted and pushed Crestor against the ship's wall, pinning him there with an arm to his neck. "Not good enough," he growled. "You got to swear the oath."

Crestor struggled to breathe comfortably as his windpipe was pressed against the metal hull of the ship. "Ugh. What stupid oath?" he asked.

The black dragon slammed his arm harder against the wall and the blue dragon winced in pain. "To do no harm to the Empire or its subjects, terrorist," he snarled.

"Ngnn!" Crestor gasped. "Fine. I won't do anything to harm 'the Empire or its subjects'" he said, repeating the last phrase in a mocking tone.

"You want a knife up your nose, hatchling? Because that's what that tone gets you," Tano'rath threatened.

"I'm not a hatchling. And I've sworn your oath, so you can back off," Crestor growled.

Tanoth snorted and let go of Crestor who panted as he caught his breath. "Very well then, what kind of ship are we looking at, how big a crew, and who is the target?" he sent another barrage of questions at Crestor. "Speak fast, for we have no time to waste."

"The Behemoth. Crew of thirty thousand. Twenty-five thousand military, five thousand support crew. The ship commandant is Zulez, and I'm going to kill him." Crestor replied, his eyes furrowing at the thought of his former leader.

"I can't guarantee that since that's over my head. Hold," Tano'rath commanded as he dug a piece of black plastic from his shorts and put it into his ear. For the first time, Crestor noticed the designs on the brightly-coloured shirt that the black dragon was sporting. It was a bright neon orange covered with Hawaiian floral patterns. Tiny shoe prints danced their way across the shirt in a haphazard pattern. Khaki cargo shorts were matched with the hideous shirt to complete the look.

"Command!" the black dragon barked into the earpiece. "Capital class threat. Timeframe: half hour. Scramble."

Crestor snorted. "Like the shirt," he mocked sarcastically.

Tano'rath glared back at him. "Thanks."

An ominous ship was floating just out of Alkonas' orbital range. Energy was building up in front of the ship as it pointed at the target planet, a spherical force field surrounding the energy in a shape of the ball. Once energy levels had reached the threshold, the force field would be removed, annihilating the defenceless planet.

A tiny speck was approaching the massive ship. On board the ship was a crew of three: two dragons and a pilot. "Yeah, pull by the side of the ship," Crestor pointed to a seemingly smooth hull of the ship. "The radar has a blind spot in this corner," he explained, "And don't deactivate the cloak until we're next to the hatch."

Tano'rath glared at the blue dragon, trying to figure out how he knew all that. He snorted as he realized that Crestor was seeing everything through the visor. "You know that I can see fuck-all, right?"

"Shut the fuck up and pilot the ship," Crestor retorted, still staring upwards at the hull.

"I'm not the damn pilot, you fucking idiot! What do you think I am? A fucking lieutenant?"

Tano'rath protested. Angrily, he nodded to his pilot who was looking to him for approval to proceed with Crestor's instructions. The ship slowly turned to its side, still maintaining forward momentum as it drifted gradually alongside the giant hunk of metal.

"A little more. There. Let's go," Crestor nodded to Tano'rath.

I returned Crestor's nod and pointed to the relevant locker. "E.V.A. suits in there. I'm going toilet."

Crestor made his way to the closet and opened it, as I made my way to the restroom. Rookie mistake. Everyone knows that you need to clear your bowels before going out. It didn't really matter, though, since it was just a short jump across.

I finished my business and pulled a second suit out of the locker, pulling it on on top of my clothes. As usual, it was a hideous fit. It always was since these things were always one size fits all and thus would hang off my frame like some sort of sad deflated balloon. I fumbled with the suit for a bit before muscle memory kicked in and I put it in properly. I couldn't help but grumble a little about the sizing as I finished up.

I clipped my weapon to the side and nodded to the pilot to open the airlock. The force field snapped in place, separating the pilot's cabin from the rest of the shuttle as the airlock hissed open, and we were sucked out towards the other vessel. It was indeed a capital ship we were dealing with since it made this shuttle look like a tiny speck. We hurtled towards the other airlock and after some fighting with the mechanical override, we managed to get it open, slipped in and shut it.

Crestor pointed me towards the maintenance shaft off to one side and we crawled in after removing the suits.

The two dragons charged swiftly through the maintenance shafts. Ships built on such a large scale would require a means for mechanics and engineers to access every nook and cranny of the ship's large mechanisms and this ship was no exception. Hundreds of workers had crawled their way through this space and now Crestor was joining their numbers with Tano'rath following behind.

"We're in the heart of the ship now," Crestor informed Tano'rath as he stared at the blueprints on his visor.

"Right. The maintenance thingy hits a dead end up ahead, it seems. Ideas?" Tano'rath asked.

Crestor nodded in acknowledgement as he studied the corridors and tunnels of the ship. There was a path that would lead them straight to the bridge. "We'll have to go through some corridors stealthily to reach the bridge," he explained, crouching down in front of a circular hatch illuminated by a luminous strip.

Crestor turned the wheel, slowly opening the hatch and peering through. The corridor below was empty, so he jumped into the hole. As if on cue, the sound of clanking metal armour drifted from the end of the corridor. "Oh for the love of Tharsus," Crestor exclaimed exasperatedly under his breath.

Things had gone pretty well except for the time where I had to break wind. However, the moment Crestor dropped down into the corridor below, I could hear the sound of clanking armour as the guards came running.

Obviously, I had to join him. I would be of no use hiding in this ridiculous shaft. I slipped out just in time to see two guards coming around the corner. I barely had time to fire a covering shot. "Oh, you fuckin' idiot!"

Crestor grunted as he quickly dispatched the two guards with his firearm and dragged me into a recess in the wall which held a door marked 'Supply Room'. As we moved the sound of yet more guards approaching floated around the corner.

In fact, I was quite impressed that this bumbling idiot had lasted this long. His shots were incredibly accurate too, and I suspected that it had something to do with that visor of his. That was probably what helped him to best me earlier too.

I drew my knife with my free hand and looked to Crestor, taking care to keep my voice low. "Talk to me. What's the plan?"

Signalling to Tano'rath, Crestor put two fingers up, followed by making stabbing motions in the air. The guards in the ship patrolled in pairs. If this group was another regular patrol, they would be expecting two more guards.

Tano'rath nodded in response. The sound of the two guards was approaching them. As the two guards turned around the corner, the two dragons each sent a dagger through a guard's neck.

Crestor put his palms under the dead guard's arms and dragged the body backwards. "Help me hide these," he instructed. With a tap of his visor, the door of the supply room opened and he pulled the body in.

Tano'rath grabbed the other guard and pulled him into the room. Crestor was already dragging a guard from the first pair that they killed. "Come on, this is getting ridiculous. They're gonna keep coming," Tano'rath grumbled as he began moving the last body.

Crestor obviously hadn't realized that sooner or later the guards were going to wise up and come in groups larger than two. He shouted at me to just pull and I did so, tossing the limp body into the room.

I, for one, didn't want to die, so I glared at him as we shut the door. "Can you not? They're just gonna keep coming, you fucking twit! Just move!"

"Fine." Crestor relented and began moving towards what I presumed to be the bridge or CIC.

I stopped to ensure the door was shut and in case the guards weren't truly dead, I melted the lock shut with an energy bolt from my sidearm. Only then did I turn and join Crestor. "How many are we looking at?"

Crestor decided to do a very good impression of a broken record, rattling off the details he had mentioned earlier. "Crew of thirty thousand. Twenty-five thousand military, five thousand support crew. "

I growled. That was obviously not what I wanted and my memory wasn't that bad either. "I mean on the bloody bridge. Not on the whole damn ship!"

"Six personal elite guards." He replied. Finally.

I couldn't help but snort. "Doable. If not, I have life insurance. I hope you do too."

Crestor simply grunted. He probably didn't have any insurance.

I glanced at him and chuckled.

"Shut up. You can be the first to open the door then" He snapped, glaring over at me.

I couldn't help but laugh again. "Sure. I've faced down worse odds."

We arrived at the blast doors that presumably stood between us and the bridge. Crestor tapped on his visor as I stood against the wall, next to the door, ready to breach. The control panel beeped, indicating that his access had been rescinded. No surprise there, although it was worth a try. I motioned for him to stand clear of the panel and simply shot it, causing a power surge in the door system, overloading the capacitors which exploded with a loud 'Boom'. The doors slid open in a shower of sparks as the electrical surge fried the motor. That door wasn't closing again anytime soon.

Unlike most ships, the bridge of the Behemoth was a large, circular room located in the centre of the ship. A maroon-scaled dragon stood proudly in the middle of the room, surrounded by six guards in thick, black armour bearing the Draconic Council's insignia. In front of him was a sleek, curved pillar that projected a holographic view of the ship and a control panel.

Every inch of the room's walls was covered with a display panel that streamed live feed from the various cameras located on the outer hull of the ship, giving the red dragon a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree view of the ship's surroundings.

A notification popped up on the side of the holographic and the dragon tapped on it. "High commander!" the face of a worried guard appeared on the screen. "We're under attack from within!"

"What?! Show me!" the red dragon ordered furiously. Another window appeared on the screen, showing a camera feed of two dragons, one blue and one black, eliminating his guards as they fought through the corridor.

"It's that soldier! Argh!" the dragon screamed. "Fucking deserter! Bring him to me!"

There was a sound of an energy burst followed by an electrical explosion as the entrance to the bridge slid open in a shower of sparks.

A blue dragon stepped into the bridge wearing a confident smirk. "Looking for me?"

As Crestor sauntered in, I decided to announce my own arrival. I, too walked in, beside Crestor, and raised my weapon. "Drakonian Delivery service! Knock, knock, motherfuckers!" I took aim at one of the hostiles within the room and fired, the red energy bolt flying straight and true, striking the guard, and sending him crumpling to the floor.

Of course, this caught the attention of the rest of the guards who lifted gauntlets that were on their arms, projecting portable energy shields in a roughly-rectangular shape in front of them before they readied their weapons.

They seemed to be clustered around Crestor's former boss too, who had only just called Crestor a traitor. I had to admit though, his scales were indeed a nice shade of maroon.

Crestor wasn't impressed with my entrance. "Shut up!"

I dived behind a computer terminal and took cover. "No."

Crestor rolled his eyes at Tano'rath's senseless defiance, but there was no time for petty disputes. His visor had sent a warning through the neural link, indicating that more bullets were being fired at him. Time seemed to slow down as he jumped into the air and twisted his body, narrowly avoiding two bursts of searing energy. With a well-aimed shot while in the air, Crestor took down another guard.

Tano'rath sent another guard tumbling, raising an eyeridge as Crestor sailed gracefully through the air. "Seems like he is more than just talk after all," he thought. A guard was raising his weapon to shoot at the dragon in midair. "Shit!" Tano'rath shot at the guard, forcing him to duck before he could shoot Crestor. "Fuck," he cursed again as his gun ran out of energy shots. He pulled a knife and threw it straight at the guard, sending it through his skull.

The remaining two guards were blocking Crestor's shots with their shield. "Argh!" he charged at the guard on the left and threw himself onto the guard, who raised his shield to block Crestor. The blue dragon didn't seem to care, pulling the guard's shield gauntlet down and sending a burst of energy through the guard's face.

There was but one guard left but that was one more than the number of charges left in my gun. Seeing no other real alternative I vaulted over my cover and charged at him. The guard clumsily raised the gauntlet to activate his shield as I charged.

We couldn't have any of that. With no other weapon to use, I threw my spent pistol at him, hitting him squarely on the head, causing him to stumble back a little. I didn't bother to slow, instead ploughing into him, using his body to cushion the impact against a display screen, which cracked with a spectacular burst of sparks.

I snatched the trooper's sidearm out of the holster and proceeded to discharge a few rounds into his head.

As I let go and let the body slump to the ground, I noticed Crestor picking himself off the floor too. "It's over now," he declared, turning to the red dragon.

"You've got me. I can't fight the two of you at once," the person that was presumably Zulez muttered as he raised what looked like a remote control and pointed it at me.

The next thing I knew, I was suspended in the air, held still by some form of orange force field and unable to move. Nonetheless, I tried to fight it anyway.

Crestor brought up the gun and pointed it at Zulez. "Hurt him, and I'll end you," he threatened. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Tano'rath's determined expression. Crestor nodded. He would make Zulez pay.

The maroon dragon ignored the gun. "You are quite the loyal supporter of Draconic Council, you know that right?" he cooed. "Having helped us destroy this planet."

Crestor growled. "Were," he corrected his former commander.

"Oh, but you still are." Zulez grinned. "Look at you, still wearing the equipment we gave you," a clawed finger tapped on the holographic screen and white filled Crestor's vision as electrical shocks shot through his visor, scrambling his thoughts through the neural link.

"Argh!" Crestor screamed in pain as he collapsed to the ground clutching his head. The pain was unbearable, reaching through every inch of his being and tearing him apart.

Zulez smirked at the writhing dragon. "Ah wells, you are pretty resourceful for having made it off Alkonas, but a pity you sided with the enemy," he nodded towards Tano'rath's frozen figure. "And a traitorous dragon is a useless dragon," he declared with venom in his voice.

Crestor could hear words being spoken but couldn't understand them. The neural link was disrupting his thoughts. He tried to get up to his feet but another signal ruptured his thoughts and he fell back to the ground.

Zulez stepped towards Crestor and stood in front of the kneeling dragon. He picked up Crestor's gun and aimed it at his head. "Goodbye, soldier."

As the two of them traded barbs I noticed Zulez's aim falter as the emitter drifted further and further away from pointing at my chest. As Crestor fell to the ground and was subjected to shock after shock, I found that the field had weakened enough for me to move again.

I continued struggling against my orange restraints, seeing the emitter drifting further off course, eventually ending up pointing at the wall behind me, rather than at me. It took a considerable amount of effort, but I was able to finally break out of it.

The hold upon me broke and I was dumped unceremoniously onto the ground. Grunting as I picked myself up, stalked over to Zulez and hit him on the snout with all that I had to give. This, thankfully, was enough to knock him away from the console, giving me an opening to rip the visor off Crestor's head. It was then that I turned to glare at Zulez. "The Empire never forgets, Terrorist. Nor does it forgive."

While Zulez was still reeling from the hit, Crestor groaned and shook his head as he tried to clear his senses. I took the opportunity to retrieve my knife from the guard that I had "given" it to earlier. When I turned back around, I saw that Zulez, too, had seen this opening, and was trying to slink his way towards one of the escape pods.

I threw the knife at him, sending it directly into the dragon's kneecap, sending him to the ground as the leg buckled under his own weight. "Nuh, uh, no running."

While I walked towards the fallen leader, Crestor stumbled his way towards the control panel, obviously still not quite fully there as he fumbled with the interface. He did, however, eventually manage to bring up the cancellation routine. Zulez, who was now crawling away, turned around as the console beeped. "Stop! You're undoing all our efforts!" he yelled at Crestor.

I could see the countdown on the screen from where I was. We had three minutes left and counting. Unless everything fell into place right now, the colony would be destroyed.

He was in no way fast at crawling, very likely due to the pain from the knife in his knee. I closed the gap easily. I squatted down beside him and spat by his head, "You've already lost." With that I sent another blow into his chest. "This is for my family, you sick fuck!"

This, of course, elicited a roar of pain which brought some measure of grim satisfaction. I knew that time was running out. Whatever happens, at least vengeance had been wrought as demanded by my honour.

"I know what I'm doing," Crestor replied as a smile crept up the side of his lips.

The words "Password required" flashed on the holographic terminal.

"Hahaha, give up now," Zulez taunted, fighting back the pain as he forced a grin. "you don't even have the code,"

"And you don't have a fucking knee!" Tano'rath shouted, grabbing the knife in the red dragon's knee and twisted, before tearing the blade itself out. Zulez screamed in pain, falling over as he clutched his bleeding knee.

Crestor ignored the other two dragons. He looked up at the display and smirked as he tapped the keys on the holographic keyboard in front of him. "Freedom or death," the Draconic Council's motto appeared in the password field.

"Access granted" the terminal chimed. Outside the ship, the force field disappeared and the energy burst in all directions. The blast sent a wave of heat so strong that even the three dragons in the centre of the ship could feel it.

"No!" Zulez screamed in anguish and hammered a fist on the cold steel floor. Years of planning and scheming wasted. Down the drain.

Having someone howling 'no' into your ear is quite unpleasant so I turned the speaker off with a smack from the handle of my blade hard against his temple. "Hush."

I vaguely recalled Crestor mentioning that he wanted this kill. Hence, I paused and looked over at him. He simply nodded and I turned to glance at Zulez and hauled him to his knees, causing him to growl in pain, as I forced more weight upon his bleeding knee.

I flipped the knife and offered its handle to Crestor. "I'll let you do the honours."

Crestor raised his eyeridge and walked over to Tano'rath. He accepted the dagger from the black dragon and turned to the trembling dragon. "You wouldn't do this to me, would you?" he begged, "I'm the high commander, one of the twelve in the Draconic Council, leading us to victory and onwards."

Tano'rath rolled his eyes. Him and his stupid 'Council' again. He kicked the dragon's open wound, sending him grabbing his knee in pain again.

Crestor stepped in front of Zulez, who looked up at him pleadingly. "I don't know this 'Draconic Council of which you speak of," he declared, raising the dagger up into the air and sending it deep into the maroon dragon's skull.

The dragon fell over with his eyes open in fear and his maw gaping with his tongue hanging out.

After all that hullabaloo, I glanced at the knife that was now lodged in Zulez's head then back to Crestor. I raised a hand. "I would like my knife back."

Crestor simply nodded towards the knife, where it sat.

I snorted as I went and retrieved my pistol. "No, no, you made the mess, you clean it up, dear sir."

Crestor kicked the bloody skull but the knife didn't budge. "Nope, not coming out."

I shrugged, holstering my weapon and surveying the carnage around us. "Very well then." I guess I didn't really want the bloody dagger back. It wasn't as if military-issued daggers were very expensive or hard to come by. "The way I see it, you are on the run from both the Empire and the Council. I can get the charges against you dropped, but it'll be a few days," I explained. "So, you are going to take a ship and you are going to leave before I can take you into custody. As stated in my report that hasn't been written. I'll ping you when things cool down. It's the least I could do."

It would take many favours and lots of shouting but I was confident enough of getting it done to give him my word at least. I just hoped that he had enough sense not to linger too long. I was sure that the fleet would be here any minute. I paused to send the all clear back to the colony so that they could stand down red alert. My communicator pinged with a message: my ship had arrived and was standing by for extraction.

Crestor's brow furrowed in deep thought. "Yeah, the ship will have a falcon shuttle in the bay," he told Tano'rath. "I'll grab one and escape before anyone finds me." He shrugged resignedly and tapped on the holographic control panel.

The room darkened as the display screens around its walls powered down. The soft blue light of the holographic screen illuminated the bloody scene before them. Crestor sighed in relief. Save for the bay, the entire ship's power should be down now. This should give him enough time to escape before the Council could chase after him.

Tano'rath nodded at Crestor and turned to walk away. He hesitated and turned his head back to Crestor. "Perhaps you're not so bad after all," he told the blue dragon. "If you ever turn up again, ask for Captain Tano'rath."

"Yeah, I could do that," Crestor responded. "Sounds a lot better than disappearing from society forever.*"

Tano'rath nodded one last time at Crestor and walked out the bridge door. "No, lost sight of him," Tano'rath spoke into his transceiver to his crew. "Defiant, one to transport. Dispatch the shuttle at once."

Crestor looked down as his smashed visor, its cracked display flickering feebly. He should still know his way around the ship that he once called home. When he looked up to the bridge door, Tano'rath was already gone.

The sound of more guards approached. The troops surrounded the half-open bridge door and burst into the room. The sight of seven dead dragons sprawled on the floor greeted them but there was no sign of the two intruders.

~ End ~