

The Beginning

101

by Kyle Eggleston

Five Years Ago

“We order you to surrender!” Captain Jack O’Brien sat on the edge of his chair. He was seated on the bridge of the heavy class starship Aphrodite. “I repeat Mister President, we order you to surrender. You will hand yourself over to the civilian authority near your location.”

President Thomas Cain laughed at the radio transmission coming from space. Sitting in the White House, he hadn’t expected the war to come down to this. He was on the winning side, at least he thought. Those were the latest reports from his troops. Maybe they lied. President Cain sighed. “Go to hell!” He yelled back.

“Security, get in here!” President Cain screamed into the intercom. He watched as five security officers loyal to him entered the Oval Office. They surrounded him.

As they approached Tom smiled. “Good, good!” He said. “What’s the situation on the scrambler?”

A man stepped forward. “Mister President sir, teleport scramblers are online. If they want you, they’ll have to get down here and take you by force. In which case we’ll be ready.”

Tom’s smile grew. “I knew I got the right people in place.” He replied. “I’ve lost access to Earth’s defense grid. It’s obviously been sabotaged. The Fresno is on her way. She should be able to take out that damn ship in orbit.”

“Yes sir.” The security guard said. Checking his weapon he made sure it was ready to go at a moments notice. The safety was off as was standard since the fighting started. You couldn’t be without a weapon ready to fire.

“I repeat Mister President you are ordered to surrender!” Jack’s voice came back over the intercom.

“Shut that damn thing off!” President Cain yelled. “I don’t want to hear it anymore.” A moment later the intercom exploded from gun fire.

Back on the Aphrodite, Captain O'Brien clenched his fists. Cain wasn't about to make this an easy transition. He had joined the fight soon after the civil war was announced. At the start of it all, he had a choice to make. Which side to choose. The current administration or the opposing faction rising into power. In his mind, the current administration was evil and needed to be stopped at all costs.

The president had tried to make Earth a xenophobic atmosphere. The countries of Earth were split on the decision sixty-forty. There hadn't been such a conflict in over two hundred years during the Moon riots of 2024. But those were simpler times. Earth had barely ventured out into space. Building colonies on the Moon was sure to bring about *some* conflict. There were those on Earth who believed the Moon wasn't meant to be inhabited. Others felt differently.

Captain O'Brien looked to his communications officer. "Lieutenant any response?"

The lieutenant shook her head. "No sir. It's all quiet."

O'Brien sighed. He had hoped this fight wouldn't take long. But it would seem that wouldn't be the case at all. "Launch Fighter Six Alpha, send him down there. I want the president taken alive."

"Yes sir! Fighter Six Alpha is away." The communications officer said.

An alert sounded as a klaxon came on. O'Brien turned his attention to the forward viewer. He watched as another heavy class starship dropped out of FTL guns blazing. The Aphrodite rocked back and forth from the ships attack.

"The Fresno." O'Brien noticed. "Return fire. Target their weapons and shield generators."

At tactical, a young man stood carrying out the order. "Aye captain."

The Fresno kept firing as quickly as she could.

Sparks flew across the bridge as enemy fire found its targets. Crewmen fell as the fire fight progressed.

"Keep firing!" O'Brien yelled over the noise of the fight. "Status report!"

The tactical officer checked his console. "Their aft shield generator is down. They're launching their fighters. Our shields are holding for now. Weapons are at sixty percent efficiency."

Several small ships could be seen leaving the Fresno heading towards the Aphrodite. As they approached they began firing their own weapons. The Aphrodite rocked from the increased weapons fire.

“Engineering has been hit.” Another voice came in over the comm channel. “Sealing breaches as fast as we can.”

O’Brien winced. He couldn’t handle Engineering being taken out. Basically any other section was expendable except for Engineering and Weapons Control. Accessing his control panel, O’Brien pressed a button. “O’Brien to fighters launch! Launch! Launch!”

The viewer filled up with other Atlantic class fighters taking on the enemy fleet. O’Brien watched as other fighters were destroyed, some simply disabled. The Fresno kept firing as she was fired upon.

Down planet side, an Atlantic fighter landed on the grass of the White House. A man stepped from the cockpit and drew his weapon. He quickly made his way towards the Oval Office. He was surprised that there were no guards in the hallways. The president must have quite the ego, he thought, in order for him to get through the halls without problem.

Coming upon the office door, he shot the doorknob off. Carter could only imagine what chaos was about to go down. Opening the door, he walked in. The security guards aimed their weapons at the door as it opened. Carter took aim and fired taking them out one by one.

President Cain ducked under his desk. “Don’t shoot!”

Carter walked up to the desk surrounded by the fallen security guards. He trained his weapon on the hiding president. “Mister president, I hereby place you under arrest. If you’ll come with me.”

President Cain peeked up over the top of the desk. “Oh my.” He said. “Please don’t hurt me.”

Carter frowned. “Unfortunately those aren’t my orders. I’m to take you into custody.” He kept his weapon trained on the president to ensure the president knew he meant business. “You will come out from under there and order your ship to stop its attack.”

President Cain stood from under the desk, his hands behind his head. “If only I had another heavy class starship, you wouldn’t even had a chance. But the battles took them all out.”

Carter nodded. “Yours, ours, we both lost ships Mister President.” He paused. “Come with me. You have an appointment with my captain.”

Cain nodded. “I see.”

They left the Oval Office.

In orbit of Earth, the remaining fighters kept firing at each other. On the bridge of the Aphrodite, O’Brien kept giving orders. They were going to win this firefight if it was the last thing he could do.

A moment later Carter and President Cain entered the bridge. Cain looked around, if only he had a few more ships that were on his side. He would win this war. It would seem he would be mistaken.

O'Brien looked up from his armchair console. "Mister President, you will order that ship to stand down."

Cain shook his head. "Where is your president captain? What has he done in this conflict?"

O'Brien couldn't believe the question. How dare he ask about the president who chose the winning side of the war. How dare he! Standing up, he pulled his weapon from its holster. Pointing it at President Cain's head he gave orders. "I told you to tell that ship to stand down!" He breathed heavily, "If you don't, I will shoot you."

Cain lifted his eyebrows in surprise. "You would kill me over this?"

O'Brien nodded his head. "Yes. Now, order them to stand down."

President Cain grunted and fumed. How could this have happened in such a short amount of time. The war had been going on for three years. His political friends had all assured him he was going to win. Sure there were moments of loss, battles that didn't go his way. But he had been assured he would win the war. Now it came down to this.

"All right, all right." Cain finally said. "I'll give the order. Open a blasted channel!"

Lowering his weapon, O'Brien pressed a button on his command chair. "Channel open, *Mister President*."

Cain took in a deep breath. "Attention U.S.S. Fresno, this is President Cain. I order you to stand down. I repeat, stand down. This battle is... over. We surrender."

A woman's voice came over the comm channel. "Sir? Please verify your order? I'm not sure we received correctly."

Cain sighed. Of course they didn't understand the order. "Repeat, this is President Cain. I order you to stand down."

The woman remained silent for a moment as the bridge rocked again. "Understood *Mister President*, we are standing down."

There was quiet now as the ship went back to green mode. The all clear given.

Cain turned to face Captain O'Brien. "There, I've done what you ask. I submit to your security forces now captain."

O'Brien smiled. "If only I could execute you right here and now Cain, I would. But you will be held for trial. Treason is a serious crime after all. Security, take this man off my bridge."

Cain frowned as he was escorted from the bridge.

O'Brien looked at the viewer. The Fresno looked rough around the edges. "Contact the Fresno, ask them if they need assistance from the butt kicking we gave them."

The communications officer hushed a snicker. "Aye sir."

The war was over. There would be no more ships coming to the president's aid. No one would come up against the Aphrodite, the last remaining ship of the fleet. Oh there were rumors that the Venus hadn't been destroyed months ago, that it was out on the Galactic Rim, but those were just rumors. O'Brien saw the official reports, it had been destroyed with all hands by the Fresno; Cain's only remaining loyal vessel at his command.

O'Brien wondered how the rest of the world would take it that their president was stepping down from power as it were. There were some tough times to come for sure. He only hoped he was up to the challenge of making those times as smooth as possible.

"Communications, send word to President Wilcox that we've taken command of the fleet and everything else that's transpired. He can go home now." O'Brien said. "Retrieve the fighters and tow the Fresno into spaceport."

His crew got to work.

Year 2245, Earth Standard

Major O'Brien sat at his desk in his home. Looking out the window, he watched as the waves hit the beach. Florida was known for many things, its beaches was one of them. He enjoyed the atmosphere the Eastern Coast had to offer.

The past five years had been mostly peaceful. People hadn't taken the news of the fall of President Cain and his administration. But who were they to argue, they had chosen the wrong side of the war to begin with.

O'Brien was finishing up some paperwork for a newly commissioned starship to be built. Ever since the war, he was in charge of planning and building new starships. It was a quiet job most of the time. The only thing he had to worry about was red tape. Most of the time O'Brien could see past that. It was a cushy job to some, but he took it very seriously.

"Computer, file under section forty-seven and save file." O'Brien instructed. The computer beeped in response.

“File saved.”

O’Brien nodded. Pulling up his calendar, he looked over the next couple of meetings for the coming days. They were of nothing important. More planning on the new starship he was in charge of constructing. It had taken the senate council ninety days or so to accept the design and approve the money necessary for the undertaking of constructing a new ship. The president wanted more exploratory vessels out there and that’s exactly what O’Brien had given him.

Earth was on the verge of exploring new territory further out than it had in the past. In order to do that new starships were needed. Exploration was the motto of the president. There had been enough xenophobic tendencies with the previous president. It had all but ceased to be.

Those who continued to fight the war after it had ended, were placed under arrest and brought to mind wiping centers. Their brains needed to be retrained to get rid of any hostile emotions. It was a way of keeping the peace and it seemed to work. Crime had gone down immensely since the president had put in the executive order to order such wipes. People were speaking out less and less against policies and practices followed by Earth and its space officers.

Major O’Brien tapped a button opening his E-mail. “Computer, dictate message.”

“Ready.” The computer replied.

“Message to President Wilcox regarding new Exploratory vessel. Recommend name to be the Alexandria. Willing to think over other suggestions as needed. Send message.”

“Message sent.” The cold voice of the computer said.

O’Brien wished he could reprogram that damn computer system. It never seemed to be warm or even remotely interested in the company of humans. Of course it was a computer system, what else could it do but compute and crunch numbers. He let it go.

“Incoming transmission.” The computer said.

O’Brien perked his eyes up at who was calling. “He couldn’t have read my E-mail already.” He whispered. “Receive transmission.”

The computer terminal in front of O’Brien lit up with the face of President Wilcox. “Major O’Brien.” The president said. “Good to see you.”

O’Brien smiled at the gesture and returned the compliment. “Good to see you too sir. I was just E-mailing you.”

The president grinned “Hopefully nothing important.” He said. “I was calling to see how you were doing and to see if you are up to a new assignment.”

O'Brien nodded his head eagerly. "I'm doing great Mister President, new assignment?" He asked. "What do you have in mind?"

President Wilcox continued. "Yes a new assignment. As you know we've recently overhauled our deep space station orbiting the Shuka home world. At the Shuka government's request we're reconsidering who to put in command of the station. Commander Johnson just wasn't doing the job that needed to be done. We're offering command of the station to you Major."

O'Brien couldn't believe his ears. He had heard rumors of the station, things that went on there. It wasn't as glamorous as a starship command, but it had its own beauty. There were a few deep space stations out there, the one orbiting Shuka was on the edge of the frontier. The space station had been built at the request of the Shuka Government in orbit of their planet.

"I accept." O'Brien said. "I wholeheartedly accept Mister President."

President Wilcox nodded. "I thought you might. Get packed, I want you there by the end of the week." He said. "The Shuka Government is having some border disputes between them and a neighboring planet. I need you to help guide them through it."

O'Brien made a mental note in his head. "Yes sir." He said. "You can count on me Mister President."

"I know." President Wilcox said. "This is my official last act of the year as president. I'm stepping down next year. I wanted to get someone in there I can trust. After that last war, you're the only man I do trust."

"Stepping down sir?" O'Brien was shocked. "You have at least one more year in office."

Wilcox nodded. "I know. I know. I'm getting too old for this position." He said. "It's time for someone fresh to run the planet. Get some new blood in here. My time here is up. It's time for me to move onto other things. Better things."

Better things? O'Brien was confused. What would be better than being president of a planet? Well it was up to the president to decide what was better, it was none of O'Brien's concern.

"I'm glad you're up to taking command of Space Station Crimson Gamma." President Wilcox said. "I'll transmit the official orders to your in an hour. Wilcox out."

The screen went blank.

O'Brien leaned back in his chair. Running his fingers through his dark brown hair, he smiled. A space station. An honest to goodness real space station. Jack looked out the window again, taking in the view. He probably wouldn't see that view again for a while. His smile

dropped as he realized something. He had to pick out a first officer. Someone he could trust. There was only one man he could think of that could fill the role.

Crimson Gamma had been in orbit of the planet Shuka for the past eight years. Over the course of those years it had seen its fair share of commanders come in and out of power. The Shuka Government were very picky about who they wanted in charge. It was orbiting their home world as it was. So they usually got their way.

In exchange for Earth's help, the Shuka Government provided technology to help further Earth in its goals. At least that's what was written on the treaty signed. Now they were in over their heads. An alien race was hell bent on conquering Shuka.

O'Brien folded a piece of paper and put it in his pocket. It was a little light reading for his trip to Crimson Gamma. He looked out the window of his cabin and watched as the station came into view. The station looked like a long snake. Estimated to be six miles in length and several stories high, she was one of Earth's furthest out outposts.

"Prepare for docking." The ship's computer said.

O'Brien sat down and fastened his seat belt. Docking could be a bit tricky at times, bumpy most of the time. As expected the ship rocked a little back and forth as the docking arm reached out from the station and took hold. A long tube extended from the station to one of the ship's airlocks allowing movement to and from the station.

"Docking complete. You may now move about the cabin." Again the computer's crisp voice echoed through the ship.

Unbuckling his seat belt, O'Brien stood and gathered his things. Someone would be along for the larger items, but his personal bag would be enough for now. Exiting his cabin he made his way to the walkway that would take him to the station.

Reaching the station's airlock, O'Brien took in one final look at this ship he had come in on. She wasn't as beautiful as one of Earth's starships, but she got the job done. He was grateful to have arrived in one piece. The older ships weren't nearly as stable as the newer ones. The artificial gravity generator needed an overhaul as well as the inertial dampeners. But those were just comforts of home really.

Pressing a button on the wall, the outer airlock door opened. O'Brien stepped in side as it closed behind him. He stepped towards the inner airlock door and activated it. It too opened granting him access to the station. He took a look around. He stood in a giant room with several hallways running off from it. There were several shops running along the walls. Mostly local merchants trying to make a living. Some were from out of town, but not many. He could tell by the English on the signs vs the Shuka main dialect.

“Welcome aboard Major.” A woman said approaching him. “I am Norev, delegate of the Shuka Empire. I was told to be expecting you, so here I am.”

Jack smiled at the woman and extended his hand. “Thank you.”

Norev looked at Jack’s hand and then shook it. “Ah yes, an Earth custom. I forget sometimes.” She said. “You’ll excuse my ignorance.”

Letting go of her hand, Jack nodded. “Not a problem at all. Tell me Norev, you speak English very well. Where did you learn it?”

Norev held up a small black orb roughly the size of her hand. “It is through this device that I am able to communicate in your tongue major. I only speak a few phrases in English like where is the bathroom. That sort of thing.”

“Ah” Jack said. “I understand.”

“If you’ll follow me, I’ll take you to your quarters.” Norev said. She started to walk down a corridor connecting to the central space.

Jack followed her.

Reaching the end of the hallway, they found themselves at a transport tube. It would take them anywhere in the station. The transport tube could go up, down, left, right etc. Any direction it needed to go it would. Stepping inside, Norev and Jack looked at the station directory. On it was displayed most of the main areas of the station.

“Level Three Epsilon.” Norev said.

The doors closed as the lift moved towards the major’s quarters.

Norev’s green eyes glowed in the low light of the transport. Major O’Brien marveled at the color. It was like nothing he had ever seen before.

“I hope you find your quarters satisfactory.” Norev said. “They were the old station commander’s quarters. They might be spartan depending on your tastes, but that can be corrected. We have many shops down in the main gallery where we met.”

Major O’Brien smiled, he was used to not having a lot of clutter. It was his way. “I’m sure they’ll be fine.” He said. O’Brien paused for a second wondering if he should ask the question that had been heavy on his mind. He decided to keep it till later.

The lift doors opened to an empty hallway.

“This way major.” Norev said leading the way.

After walking for a moment they came upon a door. There was a panel with a retinal scanner attached to it next to the door.

“Computer, activate cabin three four seven delta. Major Jack O’Brien.” Norev said as she entered in some credentials.

The computer beeped for a second and then responded. “Retinal scan required for activation.”

O’Brien leaned over to allow the computer to scan his eye. A red light emanated from the wall and scanned his left eye.

“Cabin activation verified. You may enter.” The door opened.

Walking inside the cabin, Jack looked around. Norev was right, the cabin was very spartan. No paintings on the walls, no decorations of any kind. He would have to make some adjustments here and there to make it feel like home. Jack knew no matter how many adjustments he would make, it would never feel like home. Nothing felt like the real thing.

Setting his duffel bag down on a chair, Jack walked into the bedroom. It too was barely decorated. A king sized bed was the only thing in the room. A piece of paper laid on the bed folded in half. Jack picked up the piece of paper and read it.

Good luck.

Jack smiled, a parting thought from the former station commander? He pocketed the note and exited the room.

“I hope you’ll find these satisfactory.” Norev said. “The previous commander ran a tight ship. Some would say he ran it a little too tight for most tastes.” She mused at the thought it was no wonder the Shuka Government wanted him gone. Norev could see it plain as day.

“C and C to commanding officer.” A female voice came over the comm channel.

O’Brien walked over to the wall and pressed a button. “O’Brien here. What is it?”

“Sir,” the female voice said. “The Fearless just dropped out of FTL, a Commander McDuff is demanding to speak with you. Says it’s urgent.”

Jack sighed, already an urgent matter on his first day there? He didn’t recognize the commander’s name. But that didn’t surprise him. Jack didn’t know many of the fleet commanders anymore. He had been too busy with other matters to learn everyone’s name.

“Have the commander escorted to my office.” O’Brien said. “I’ll be there shortly.”

“Yes sir.” The comm line went dead.

O’Brien looked to Norev “I’ll meet up with you later.” He left the cabin.

By the time O’Brien made his way to his office, Commander McDuff was there waiting for him. McDuff was pacing back and forth, obviously irritated by something.

“Commander McDuff,” O’Brien said “sorry to keep you waiting. What is it you wanted to see me about?”

McDuff approached O’Brien and raised a fist. “Major O’Brien I come to you with a warning. Do not trust these people. They have a hand deep in Earth’s pocket and you simply cannot trust them.”

O’Brien stepped behind his desk and sat down. He had heard of people believing that the Shuka Government was up to no good. But for someone to come all the way out to the station? That seemed a bit of a stretch. This wasn’t earth shattering news, he had heard it all before. Ever since the station went online there had been protests from both sides human and non human alike.

“Commander” O’Brien said “Trust me, there’s nothing to worry about. We are here at the request of their government. We’re here in good faith.”

McDuff lowered his fist and put his hands in his pockets. Rolling his eyes he continued. “I have heard this before from the president.” He said. “It’s what is said when someone is lining your pockets with gold.” McDuff was frustrated, at least he had stopped pacing.

“Listen, I know the war did things to our people. Caused diversities among us. Hell it divided us to the point where we wanted to kill one another. But trust me, it’s going to be alright. There’s nothing to worry about here.” O’Brien tried to calm the commander down. “If anything we can learn from these people who have endured a hundred years of peace. That’s nothing small.”

“I *know* these people major.” McDuff countered. “They will shoot first and ask questions later. Mark my words.” He left the office.

O’Brien sighed. Already a naysayer in regards to the people he had sworn to help. McDuff didn’t bring any evidence with him, just his words. Words that O’Brien couldn’t be bothered with. He was there in good faith and was going to see that his mission was successful.

Every mission O’Brien had been on eventually had a hiccup here or there. He hoped this would be the only hiccup in the bunch. People were entitled to their own opinions on things, but never in his years of service was he confronted in such a manner. To take an active duty ship off its mission to divert to a space station on the outer edge was unheard of. O’Brien couldn’t help but wonder which side McDuff was on during the war, he had a feeling he knew the answer to that.

Any officer who questioned the intentions of an outside species when it came to Earth was to be watched carefully. Sure they might have some legitimate concerns, but that wasn’t

always the case. O'Brien didn't trust many people. He could count on one hand the number of people he *could* trust. McDuff wouldn't be one of them.

"Computer, bring up personnel file. McDuff, Commander. U.S.S. Fearless."

O'Brien read through the file, it was pretty cut and dry. McDuff had been brought up on charges multiple times during the war. Staged his own mutiny even. All because he thought he was right and his commanding officer was wrong. Why the hell they would give him a command after that was unimaginable. Well, he could understand why. Earth needed people to command their ships. New ones had been built since the war, they needed to be commanded and staffed. People like McDuff somehow slipped through the cracks and placed in charge of one. Must have hurt not to be promoted to captain though. Not many commanders were given charge of a starship.

Leaning back in his chair, Jack rubbed his eyes. It was a long trip to the station. Even though FTL cut the trip in half from what it normally would be, it was still at the end of known explored space.

Jack called up a few other queries regarding the station. Mostly command staff that were currently assigned, people he would have to work alongside. His first officer would be arriving in the morning, that was a bit of good news. Jack didn't know who he could and couldn't trust. With a staff of over twenty thousand people, he had better figure that out as quick as possible. With a population of a quarter of a million people on the station at any given time, he felt that was nearly impossible. Good thing Jack liked a good challenge.

Norev seems to be a good person, Jack thought, I'll have to see how that plays out.

Person. Jack froze. Is she a person though? She's an alien from an alien civilization who knows how old. A person would indicate a human. He wondered how to refer to the alien culture on the station. It wasn't just the Shuka people, there were over a hundred different worlds represented on the station. Some of them were enemies of each other. Others wanted nothing to do with other kind and just wanted to be left alone. A weird thought considering they *wanted* to live on a space station orbiting an alien planet.

Jack couldn't just call them aliens. He would have to think about that for a moment or two. He was accepting to all alien races, to do otherwise would be what President Cain wanted and that man was currently serving time for what he thought was right. That's the funny thing about thoughts, everyone has them. Some are obviously right and others wrong. But to those who think them, they're always right.

His daydreams were cut short as another call came in from C and C, this time it was the security chief.

"Security Chief Killpack to Major O'Brien."

O'Brien pressed a button on his desk. "Yes, go ahead."

"There's a fight breaking out in the cafe. I've ordered security guards down there, but it's going to get messy. Thought you should know." The security officer said. "I'm on my way there now."

Jack stood from his chair. "Understood lieutenant, I'm on my way." A fight breaks out and they call the man in charge? He shook his head. There was something wrong about that. The lieutenant should have been able to take care of the situation all by himself. Oh well, nothing like getting to know your officers the first chance you get. Jack walked out of the office, weapon in hand.

The cafe was a nightmare. Aliens, humans, more aliens all running trying to get away while others pulled them back into the fight. Punches being thrown, kicks being kicked. Aliens being tossed left and right, humans being trampled on.

Security teams were trying their best to handle the situation but weren't doing that great of a job doing it. Talking wasn't going to do a damn thing to control the crowd.

Lieutenant Killpack entered the scene with his weapon drawn. Holstering it, he drew a taser stick and prepared himself. Fortunately no one was firing weapons. A taser stick would help subdue the crowd and help stop the fighting better than a handgun set to pulse fire. One by one he found those throwing punches and tasered them. When some saw what was coming they laid down on the ground ready to be arrested, those were mostly the aliens. They didn't want any trouble.

Jack arrived on scene a moment later. He walked over unconscious and conscious bodies. Holstering his own weapon he nodded his approval. "Good, no unnecessary force."

Killpack saluted the major. "Sir. The situation seems to be under control now."

Jack nodded his approval. "Good lieutenant. I want those involved arrested and placed in the brig. Have your men escort them out of here."

Killpack nodded "Aye sir." He began organizing his men and the crowd that had been in the fight. Assessing which ones needed to go to medical first and then the brig.

A red headed man sat on the floor surrounded by aliens with black and blue eyes, some had broken bones. Well those that had bones at least, they were broken. As Jack approached the man, he recognized him. The same man that had been in his office just moments ago.

"Commander McDuff." Jack sighed. Could today get any worse.

McDuff was drunk, he looked at the major with a grin on his face. "I told you major, nothing but trouble. They are nothing but a menace."

Jack pulled McDuff to his feet and tried not to breathe in whatever the man was breathing out. His breathe reeked of alcohol. Jack didn't even want to know what kind it was. It was bad. He was shocked to learn the man couldn't hold his liquor. He couldn't have been away from Jack's office a mere thirty minutes or so. Of course *some* alien liquor was much more potent and stronger than whiskey.

"Mr. McDuff. You know the regs. No drinking while on active duty. I believe you are on active duty aren't you?"

McDiff nodded his head slightly. "Possibly. But they started it." He burped loudly.

Jack tightened his grip on the man's collar. "Oh really now. I'm willing to bet you're the one who started it."

"It's true!" A woman said as she walked up. "He provoked them all into this fight. Now I have damages. Are you going to pay for those damages major? Or is he?" She was obviously the cafe's manager or owner. One of the two, and she wanted repayment for what had gone on.

Jack smiled at the woman and then looked back at McDuff. "Well Mr. McDuff, it would appear you aren't liked much here. You should know better than to start a fight with innocents around. I shouldn't even have to explain it to you."

Turning his attention to Killpack, Jack shook his head. "Take him to the brig. Keep away from anyone else, I don't want a fight starting in there either. Inform his ship of the situation."

"Yes sir." Killpack said as he escorted McDuff out of the cafe.

As the area cleared of aliens and humans, Jack watched as the cafe owner started cleaning up the mess that had been created. Dishes shattered, tables broken, chairs upside down. It was quite a sight. He was glad he didn't have to clean it up. But he had other messes to control now.

Jack decided to take a walk. See the station for himself. His official day didn't start until the morning, but that didn't seem to keep him from getting his hands dirty already. He wanted to learn about the aliens that lived there by himself. Jack didn't want outsiders to cloud his judgment of his new surroundings, he wanted to know it for himself.

As he walked, he listened to the different speech patterns of those around him. He couldn't understand a word that was being spoken without a translation device of course but that didn't matter. Jack enjoyed listening to all of the new sounds he was experiencing. This was his first time being the minority surrounded by what he considered aliens. They of course would consider him in kind as he was alien to them as well.

One hour passed, then two, then three. Jack was still walking the six mile long station. Every chance he got, he would poke his head in the different nooks he would come across. Some were interesting, others were less than interesting. Yet it was all the same station. Some places of the station found wanderers hiding from someone. Others found peaceful families living their day to day lives.

He found it an interesting tour even if it was self guided.

After another hour of walking, Jack found himself lost. He tried to find his way back but just ended up getting further lost. Not wanting to give up, he continued walking. Another hour passed and another. Soon he had been walking for six hours straight and not a clue where he was on the station.

Finally realizing his error, he pulled out a communications device from his pocket. It was roughly the size of a cellphone from the early twenty-first century. Pressing a button he called C and C.

“C and C, what can I do for you major.” A voice came over the line. “No, wait don’t tell me. You’re lost.”

Jack laughed for a second. Lost, how could they know he was lost? Oh they knew alright. There was no doubt in his mind they knew. They knew and they wouldn’t let him live this down till the day he died or was transferred, whichever came first.

“Don’t worry major, I can keep a secret.” The woman chuckled. “I’ll transport you to C and C right now.”

Jack sighed. “Thank you lieutenant...”

“Lieutenant Commander Kate Monson sir. Your second in command.” The comm line closed.

Jack was confused, his second in command was supposed to be William Carter. Who was this woman? He was whisked away in a teleportation beam. They say you can’t see anything while within the beam, but Jack knew better. Some said it was a death machine, that a clone of you arrived at your destination and not your original self. Others didn’t know what to believe when the technology first came out twenty years ago. They’ve had time to improve upon the device sure, but there was still a wonder if it was good enough. If the device wouldn’t kill a person. Jack just waited for the inevitable to happen.

As he materialized, Jack walked towards the forward duty station where Lieutenant Commander Monson stood. “Lieutenant Commander Monson, when were you going to tell me you replaced my second in command?” He asked quite frankly.

Monson turned from her station and saluted. "Major, I was told you'd be informed the moment I arrived. That was two hours ago.... While you were um."

Jack nodded. "Understood. Well it's good to meet you, a surprise, but good to meet you." He would have to take this up with command later on. There was no excuse for his first officer to be replaced with some lieutenant commander. He wanted Carter dammit, if that wasn't realized from his request then he was mad.

"Computer, time." Jack said.

"The time is sixteen hundred hours." The computer responded.

Jack nodded. It had been quite an eventful day. "Since I don't officially begin until tomorrow, I am off duty for now. Call if you need anything."

Monson smiled "Yes sir. Understood sir. Enjoy your evening."

Jack returned the smile halfheartedly. "I will, thank you." As he exited C and C, he smiled to himself. Things were going to take a time to get used to. A new command always took some time to adjust, this wouldn't be any different. Jack still wondered what happened to his first officer, the man he chose to lead in case things went south. He was surrounded by new faces, none of the familiar.

Turning back to her console, Monson typed out some text and sent it as a transmission away from the station. It read:

He doesn't suspect a thing.

The End