

David

Unintended Consequences

The warped space around the ovoid craft gradually returned to normal as the ship slowed on its approach to the fourth planet of the Theuss system. Ebwje had been searching neighboring star systems for signs of sentient life for what felt, even to him, like a very long time.

His species had existed for almost a billion star-cycles. They were a languorous species, lacking a proclivity for procreation; not really having much of a need to do so as they could live for hundreds of thousands of cycles. With plenty of food and no enemies, their technological advances were few. Eventually they had developed space travel, fearing that their longevity might one day cause them to outgrow their world. But, not having the capacity to wage war, or even the ability to defend themselves if attacked, they stayed close to the world that had kept them safe for so long. Ebwje, aside from being an anthropologist, was an adventurer at heart. And so it was, with a mix of apprehension and excitement, that he approached the planet he had named T-4-7.

As the ship broke through the planet's troposphere, Ebwje gasped at the arid desolateness of the place. *Not likely to have much in the way life*, he thought. *I could have sworn this world...*

He stopped mid thought as some type of small settlement appeared on the horizon. A smile spread across his face.

I knew it.

He activated the ship's light deflectors as he neared the settlement, rendering the ship invisible to the natives. The ship slowed and came to a stop, hovering fifty feet above the small town.

He observed the hideous looking creatures for several hours. So immersed was he in his study of the intriguing beings, he didn't notice the distant cloud of dust as it grew larger and larger. A sudden alarm from the ship's proximity sensors roused him from his reverie, just in time to guide the ship away from a flock of low flying creatures, ridden by the same type of life forms he had been observing. They circled the town for several seconds, then dove toward the populace below. The flying creatures' drill-like beaks impaled the locals, who seemed completely oblivious to the attack, while the riders threw a variety of projectiles killing anyone still standing.

Then they landed.

The locals came out of their habitats and engaged the newcomers in fierce combat. It lasted less than ten minutes. When it was over, the two lone survivors climbed aboard their flying mounts and disappeared into the dust-shrouded horizon.

Ebwje remain frozen in horror for several more minutes. He stared, mouth agape, at the carnage on display below. The battling creatures had virtually eviscerated one another, leaving the still bleeding remains rotting in the dusty streets; the fluids oozing from their bodies turning the dusty ground into blood infused bogs.

Then, the creatures came. Even more horrifying than the other inhabitants of this planet, they dragged themselves up from the earth with slow, ungainly motions and began feasting on the remains. What they could not eat, they dragged away in their large spiked talons, until all that was left to indicate any sort of carnage had taken place was the soggy, bloody ground.

He had seen enough.

Ebwje guided his ship through the planet's atmosphere at a rate of speed that was probably not prudent. It didn't matter; all he wanted was to put as much distance between him and this vile place as he possible could.

In the back of his mind, only one thought circulated; a question he had never asked himself in the almost immeasurable amount of time he had lived.

What kind of creature could be predisposed to such violence?

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As he walked to the Chamber, Ebwje looked around at a desolate landscape that had once been verdant beauty. In their desperate attempt to acquire the necessary resources to rebuild their rapidly depleting fleet, the Newones had stripped the planet bare.

How had it come to this? When had everything gone so wrong? He couldn't shake the feeling that it was all his fault. If only....

The Council Chamber was empty. The people were starving. Few had the strength or will to attend; and Ebwje was all but positive that this would be the last meeting regardless.

The remaining Elder looked up as he walked in; his face passive. "Ebwje. I hope you are well."

"As well as can be expected."

"I am afraid the news is not good. The Scavea have completely routed the last attack fleet. What remains of Nwahrt's task force is retreating here; undoubtedly pursued by the Scavea. They will be here within the hour."

Ebwje remained silent.

The Elder studied him. "You have something more to add."

It was a statement, not a question.

“We must safeguard the survivors,” Ebwje said at last. “It is the least we can do after the unconscionable wrong we have perpetrated on them.”

The Elder opened his mouth; as though about to remind Ebwje that this plan, all of it, had been his. But the words never came, perhaps seeing that Ebwje had already accepted all the blame of his own accord. “What is your course of action?”

“My colleagues have already begun the preparations. There is a system I have named S-3-9. I believe it has an adequate biosphere. We will treat their injuries and erase their memories; so their existence may continue, unburdened by their involvement in this war. I have also prepared a surgical technique, which will cut their life span by over half; to prevent their technological prowess from advancing too fast in their new world.”

“And the ship you have had under development these last two cycles?”

“Part of the preparations. It will carry them to their new home and disperse them evenly across the planet. Hopefully, integration into the ecosystem will be eased.”

The Elder nodded. “Very well. Proceed. Once the Newones are gone, so too shall we leave this planet. A system has been located by some of your people that we believe should support our needs. Our fear, however, is that it will be a moot point. Once the Scavea arrive, do you believe they will destroy us all?”

Ebwje once again didn’t answer right away. “I am certain they consider us their enemies,” he said at last. “And they have no need of prisoners.”