

Dolash groaned as his eyes squinted open in a futile attempt to identify his surroundings. *Oh no...* Did I drink last night? If I did it must have been infused with bantha tranqs. He noticed the room was dark and slightly chilly. It was too dark to get his bearings so he began to reach his hands out to find something to stabilize the room from rocking, or more reasonably, himself. As his hand reached out he bumped something – glasses? – he picked them up and hooked them on his tank top. He heard them fall and hit the floor with a resounding clank.

Am I... naked? He immediately began patting his person, realizing that his normal clothes had been replaced by some sort of skin tight jumpsuit. *What in the deep jungles of the Demon Moon is going on?*

Questions began to flood his mind as he realized that he had not gone out drinking the night prior since he had been preparing for a hunting trip with his old pal Jax. That old zakkeg was fierce competition and there was no way Dolash was going to go with him still half drunk from the night before. So where was he? Where was his gear? Whose glasses were these? Not one to underestimate the importance of proper vision he decided to put on the glasses figuring the owner would hopefully recognize them and he would then be able to return the thick spectacles.

“What the-?” He was interrupted by a deep, monotone male voice. He turned around to face the source but recognized nothing. Out of the corner of his eye he caught in large writing, ‘USS Enterprise, Cell Block 2’. “Cell block?!”

The well dressed man who spoke clicked his feet together in perfect military fashion and looked at Dolash with a certain look of... contempt, maybe? He wasn’t sure, either way this situation was only getting weirder considering he was apparently being held by some authority. “Ahh, yes, you’re lucky we found you when we did Mr. Dolas.”

“Dolash,” the Tarenti mercenary corrected before adding, “Really? I’ve never needed such a tight leash before especially not in any situation I considered myself ‘lucky’.”

The man retrieved some kind of holo device from the wall by the cell. He then glanced sullenly at Dolash, “Are you feeling homicidal?”

“It depends, when do I get to have questions answered?” Dolash’s snide remark only received a chortle as the man tapped something onto the screen in front of him. “I don’t think you know who you’re messing with, *aruetii*.”

“Interesting. Well, you needed a blood transfusion when we found you. We only had one match and that was the man you were with in that dense foliage alongside the large beast. We had both of you beamed alongside each other aboard the *Enterprise* and then our medical officer took over at that point. Our mission is to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and-“

“You did what to me? Beamed me?” Dolash asked incredulously, his interruption considered a slight to his host judging by the change in his facial expression. “You’re going to have a lot to answer for when you meet my *riduur*.”

“I beamed you up from the surface of the planet where you were bleeding out onto a table in the medical lab.”

Dolash stared blankly at him. What the frak was going on here anyway?

“It’s a process executed by a machine called a transporter. It converts a person or object into an energy pattern through dematerialization then it “beams” it to a target, for example in the medical bay, where it is then reconverted back into matter, ergo rematerialization. You know, *beam me up Scotty*?” The strange man chuckled awkwardly, recognizing that Dolash mostly likely had no understanding of anything he just told him.

“So you saved my life and then put me into a jail cell?” Dolash knew he was getting anywhere so he decided to cut to the chase. “Why wouldn’t you just return me? Or, you know, not bother at all in the first place?”

“I am Lieutenant Sulu, my Captain would never accept your death knowing he could prevent it, it is merely the way he is. Besides, McCoy is a top notch Doctor and had you remedied right away. Then he mentioned the fact that you have scarring over 70% of your body and of course, we determined that until we knew your intentions we had to restrict your movement. That beast you defeated with the other man? We took a sample of it. It’s biological parameters were unbelievable, considering its skin is as hard as a ship hull.”

“Ah, a zakkel.” Dolash did recall waking up and meeting with Jax. What this man told him made him realize a very sobering possibility. “What happened to the man who was with me?”

Sulu grimaced before admitting, “I’m afraid he was dead when we arrived. No wonder, considering the beast you were attacked by. It’s astonishing you managed to defeat it without a tank...”

“May I see him?” Dolash was stoic, but his eyes were betraying the guilt and pain he was feeling in that moment. “Please?”

“One moment.” Sulu replied curtly before trodding off outside the cell block. Dolash sat back down and laid his head in his hands with an audible sigh. There was no way Jax and himself would both be defeated by a beast they had hunted so much that their burc’ya had begun calling them the Demon Eaters. The Lieutenant returned and with him someone else that probably handled security aboard the vessel. He came and opened the door to his cell. “Follow me.”

Sulu and his escort led Dolash outside the cell block and into an area with various repositories in the bulkhead. Sulu put his eye up to a small holomonitor and one of the doors unlatched. He opened it

and retrieved a bag that he handed to Dolash. "These are your personal effects minus your weapons. Please get dressed and we will take you directly to your partner."

Dolash tore off the jumpsuit feeling relieved he was getting back into his own gear. It fit him like a glove by this point. For many Mandalorians their gear held sentimental value and Dolash was no exception. He nodded to Sulu upon finishing, "I'm ready."

Sulu gave a small smile and motioned him through a blast door. They proceeded through the ship's pristine interior lit up by control panels riddled with buttons and lights. Dolash quickly realized that what he was caught in now was unlike anything he had ever encountered. This ship's technology was unlike anything he had ever seen and he certainly did not recognize neither the uniforms nor the writing on their screens. His concerns began snowballing but he was pulled from his reverie when Sulu announced, "He is right inside here."

The Lieutenant stepped inside a room and stood aside, allowing Dolash to go ahead of him. With a gulp the displaced Mandalorian stood above the motionless body on the table and pulled the cover back from the head. Underneath was most certainly not Jax. Whoever it was did not die from being mauled by a zakkell either. The body was not ripped in half but was entirely intact, however, Dolash pulled the blanket back further revealing a blaster wound on the torso.

"This was the man who was with me?"

Sulu nodded, "Affirmative, he was dead when we arrived and you were unconscious just a few feet away from the ... zakkell?"

Who was this man? Why was he with Dolash? Where was Jax? More importantly, *where am I right now?*

“Who exactly are you people?” Dolash asked as politely as possible, not one to disrespect an accommodating host.

As Sulu began to answer the door opened and another man emerged who began, “Space, the final frontier... These are the voyages of the starship *Enterprise*. Its five-year mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man-“

“-no one,” Sulu corrected him. He hated it but he was right.

“Er, right,” He conceded before continuing, “Where no *one* has gone before. I am Captain James Kirk, CO of this vessel. It’s nice to see you’re finally awake Dolash, we have much to discuss.”

“*We* do?” Dolash was bewildered beyond his comfort zone. In a perfect cliché he asked, “How do you know my name?”

The Captain Kirk smiled knowingly, “Well, Jax told me, of course. He just left a few minutes ago, I was coming back to greet you from the teleporter room when I saw your cell door ajar. I, had, prepared... for an escape!”

He chuckled heartily then suddenly he seemed to grow very serious, “You see, your friend Jax is not who you think he is, Dolash.”

Dolash scowled, feeling that this whole situation had been a game for these people. He liked games, but this one was not fun. His patience had run thin after being told his friend had been killed, but instead another man was killed and his friend was in discussion with this strange Captain? This was too much and far too uncharacteristic of Jax. He needed the truth. With military precision and years of live combat to perfect it, he spun behind Sulu and placed him in a grapple.

“Woah, there is no need for that!” Kirk shouted as several people ran in with weapons pointed at Dolash. He motioned for them to put them down and turned back to Dolash, “You have to trust me. We’re here to help you but there’s some things you need to know first.”

Dolash didn’t relinquish the hostage, still weary of his circumstances on this strange ship with these confusing people. “Like what?”

“For example, Jax is an elite member of Starfeet Intelligence. He was on a deep cover mission in your galaxy-“

Dolash actually laughed at this part, “You’re telling me the guy I’ve been hustling at pazaak for the better part of three years is a – a what – a spy?”

Kirk frowned. “Your galaxy is in danger of invasion by an oppressive species capable of mind control en masse. They will turn half your galaxy into their thralls and then destroy the rest of you. We’re from the future in a different timeline. We’ve come back to help you convince your leaders and to gather as many elite warriors from your people as possible. We can end this fast and with minimal effort. If we don’t? I guarantee you everyone you know and love *will* die or for lack of better explanation, *cease to exist*.”

Dolash loosened his grip on Sulu and took a step back. This was not happening. Time travelers from a different timeline? Jax was one of *them*?

Am I crazy for even considering what they’re saying?

If this was true... No... but if it was? The stakes were too high. There is something going on with these people, something unexplainable. Something... of another temporal dimension? WHAT?! Even so, if they were lying he was still at their mercy. He had no weapons, no plan, and not even the slightest clue of where he was. Perhaps it was worth listening.

Sulu felt Dolash's strong grip loosen and then push him away. Dolash put his hands up and groaned, "I surrender. I'm willing to listen to what you must say, but if you're tricking me? I will murder you."

Captain Kirk nodded and motioned for the security to leave. He looked over at Sulu and pointed to the door, "Give me a few minutes alone with him, Lieutenant."

Dolash watched as they all left and realized that he was right. He was in over his head this time. Whatever the truth of the situation was, something much bigger than anything he had ever handled before was going down right now and he was placed directly into the center role of it all.

Captain Kirk looked to make sure they were alone and then spoke, "This is all going to sound crazy to you, but give me the benefit of a doubt."

TO BE CONTINUED....