

DAIBON, 4034:0204

"Commander Anthony Higgs."

The man so named turned to face the alien that approached him, a typical looking member of the Sazin people – blue skin, large pointed ears, and a pair of antenna. He wore white robes cut in respectable fashion and walked with his arms behind his back, the larger of his two mouths slipping into a slight smile. Anthony, who towered over him, saluted and tried to stand.

"There's no need to trouble yourself, my friend. My visit is... unofficial."

"Uh-huh. Keaton, I know you got better things to do than drink in a dive like this with a broke down service man. What brings you here?"

"I'd hardly call this a dive." Keaton pulled up a chair and sat, looking around. Every surface glimmered, every glass was spotless. The clientele of this pub included some of the most powerful sentients in the Galactic Federation, a role Anthony had inherited from his recently deceased commander; he was not yet comfortable with his newfound authority.

"You're the Acting Chairman of the whole damn Fed, Keaton." Anthony leaned back and hissed, the movement causing his leg to ache. "The Bottleship Fiasco is causing you nothing but grief. If you're comin' down here, you got a reason."

"I do." Keaton paused to order a drink. A handful of eyes looked towards them but none stayed looking for very long. "Have you read Colonel Sakamoto's report?"

"Started to. That piece of trash wasn't worth my time."

"Or anyone else's. Most of it has been redacted. His efforts to make himself look good at the expense of the late Commander Malkovitch, your team, and the Hunter, well, it was short-sighted."

"His characterization of the Hunter pissed off a lot of people."

"Myself included. I'm glad she left before reading it."

"I heard you launched an investigation."

"Of course." The drink came and the small Sazin drained the glass in one long gulp, wincing from the strength of his drink. He took a moment, ordered another. "We used Jovians to investigate the situation. He abused his authority, was behind the whole thing. Vogl might have funded some of the projects, but you know how careful that creature can be."

"We shoulda killed him ages ago."

"That is not how we do things." Keaton sighed, resting his head on one hand as he looked out and over the world-city of Daibon, watching the last of three suns set. "The Prime Builder knows it would have made things simpler."

"You're makin' me think we ain't quite done with this."

"Oh, we aren't." Keaton placed a small device between them and clicked a button. Anthony looked at it, recognized it. A small radio wave generator used to create white noise fields around small areas. Politicians used them to ensure their conversations were private.

"The andriod... did you notice anything strange about her?"

"MB?" Anthony had met the creature only briefly, a clone of the psychic weapon Mother Brain placed in a cloned human body. "I only really saw her at the end."

"Ah, well." Keaton cleared his second throat. "I've just had a picture sent to your PDA. Please take a

look at it and tell me what you think.”

“What the hell is this?” Anthony looked up at the little alien. “Looks like Princess back when she was just startin’ out. Why you openin’ the family album?”

“That isn’t the Hunter.” Keaton finished his second drink. “That, my friend, is what the android looked like. We currently believe that Doctor Yoshio used tissue from the last survivor of K-2L to clone a body for a certain cloned consciousness.”

“I’ve heard that name before,” Anthony frowned. “Wasn’t he arrested for breaking some decency laws?”

“Having sexual relations with spacekill, and yes.” Keaton sighed, turned his attention back towards the sunset. “We’d ask him about it, but he died during the android’s initial escape.”

“You better pray Princess doesn’t find out about that.”

“Oh, I think Sakamoto should be the one entreating whatever deity he thinks might listen.” Keaton leaned back. One of his mouths smiled. The one that continued speaking did not. “There is some evidence to support that the android you destroyed was a fake and that the real one escaped. The destruction of the Bottleship makes finding out for certain impossible.”

“You mean that thing might still be out there.”

“That is exactly what I mean, yes.” Keaton leaned forward. “That is why I am in this dive. You are the only person not under investigation that had any contact with the android. We need to know everything we can, try and figure out what it might do next.

“What about Madeline Bergman?” Anthony asked. The small blue alien gave a single slight shake of one antenna. Anthony knew what that meant, turned to face the encroaching darkness. His reached for a weapon he no longer carried, his leg aching, sweat breaking out on his brow. “We’ve got a very serious problem here, you and me.”

The Sazin said nothing.



*PLANET 457-23, GFDATE 4034:0205*

“It’s interesting how everything falls into place.” The blonde woman was seated in her laboratory, studying the input of a dozen different monitors. Her eyes flickered from one image to the next, her thoughts translated to a record displayed on a separate monitor. The person to whom she was speaking lacked the means to respond, not that the woman minded. His bleating threats had ceased to have meaning several days ago.

“Did you know this facility was built by one of the doctors you employed on the Bottleship? A Doctor Yoshio. He wanted a back up of his work. Work. A perverse man, but a genius for all his perversity.” She turned to face the kneeling man, he kept that way by lines of energy.

“The Hunter is on her way here. Do you think she is my mother or my sister? I am uncertain, though more comfortable with the idea of sister. My original template was designed by the Chozo, the same people that gave her life. Hmmm? Do you have something to say?” She giggled, leaned down, unfastened the gag that kept him silent.

“All the canaries are dead,” he panted. His eyes were glossy and watering.

"Yes. Brilliant observation." She scowled down at him, refastened the gag. "You may be interested to know that the facility is up and running at optimum capacity. The Hunter is on her way, lured here by a distress beacon that is masking her location. I doubt she realizes this. It will not be long before my experiments can begin in earnest."

The bound man didn't try to struggle. He knew struggling was useless. The woman went back to ignoring him, more interested in the events she had set in motion. The man could not blame her for this or anything else; she had made certain of that, her psychic influence having reduced his mind to whatever she wanted it to be, crushing his mental defenses with ease.

He was trained in psychic warfare, able to withstand the probes of B-Class psychics, his will able to give even A-Class level problems. He was not dealing with either.

Melissa Bergman was in a class all her own.