

“Let me tell you about humans.” Xan'tul was drunk, and surly. His species didn't cope with alcohol well, given the distributed nature of their liver equivalent, and the rather low levels (compared to other carbon- and water-based life of their mass) of Alcohol Dehydrogenase. The Autogol had made a serious error in judgement asking Xan'tul about this subject.

“Humans,” Xan'tul began after a slight pause to take another drink, “are the most fiendishly violent species that I have ever met. Especially for being so damn thick. Do you know how long it took them to discover the damn Rest Frame? Centuries of space travel, that's how long. They just ignored what was right in front of their... noses? That's the thing they have on their face, right?”

“It's a protruding olfactory and breathing apparatus on the front of their head.” The Autogol confirmed.

“Weird place to put olfactory, if you ask me. Why not in appendages? Why the hell do they breath through it, too? What happens if there's an awful smell? They just can't breathe?”

“What happens if Prenthin encounter an unappealing odor?”

“We block the receptors on our hands. But that's not the point. Humans are insidious. Their only genius lies in finding inventive ways to commit violence upon others. Did you know that their entire planet was in a state of near-constant warfare for centuries? They'd jump from big, global conflicts, to small ones, and then back to big ones once they had recovered enough. Even now, they're still fighting each other. Even with their 'United Systems' crap.”

“Different species have different genetic traits. Perhaps a penchant for violent behavior is a part of theirs. There are other violent species.”

“Every damn species but yours. Do you even have a genetic equivalent?”

The Autogol chose to ignore the comment. “Why are humans so much worse than, say, the Ragnar?”

“Because humans are pretty damn clever. While the Ragnar are physically brutal, Humans abandoned physical might for technological violence. They should have been quarantined when they attacked Rymir.”

“I'm not sure anyone knew what was happening at that point. The Prenthin had captured several unknown ships which had jumped out of the Reference Frame in their system. All the humans knew was that their ships were captured by an alien force.”

“And they presumed hostility.” Interjected Xan'tul.

“You said their history was one of violence and warfare. That was the correct assumption for them.”

“Was it correct to annihilate our entire fleet in orbit around Rymir?”

The Autogol remained silent. Xan'tul wouldn't have been able to read him sober, and decided he had no chance of doing so drunk. He continued.

“They managed to send weapons... bombs, more destructive than we'd ever seen, through the Reference Frame right into our damn ships. That's the kind of insidious clever shit I've been talking about. Harnessing the power of the atom for the sole purpose of violence. Being able to make hops more precise than I've seen anyone make with an object that small. We still have no idea how they controlled drift, or even how the hops were made. The bombs destroyed all the evidence, you see. Along with thousands of my people.”

Xan'tul glared at the Autogol for a short while, until he determined that it seemed sufficiently cowed. At least, until he determined that trying to get the Autogol to express any emotion was an endeavor in futility.

“But it didn't stop there. The Census should have fucking quarantined them right then and there, but they didn't.

“Instead, we ended up embroiled in a war for years, with our entire military slowly but surly being wiped out.”

“It was the opinion of the Census that you had instigated the conflict, as I recall.” The Autogol

interjected.

“Instigated.” Xan'tul made a derisive sound through his neck flaps. “We attacked the next ships they sent. Seemed like the appropriate response, given the massacre they had already caused.”

“The humans claim that their next ships were an attempt to resolve any emerging conflict.”

“And the Ragnar claim to have noteworthy scientists. Still not true.”

The autogol elected not to pursue that line of conversation.

“The war did end with peace.”

“*Peace*. Bah. We surrendered. Then the humans claimed that they never wanted to fight us in the first place. Utter shit. Their government and their military are basically the same body.

“Of course, the war had one beneficial side effect. It kept the humans from exploring the rest of the quadrant. Because once they did, they found the Wylin. And after that incident, I'll bet the Census had wished they quarantined them.”

“After that incident, the Census didn't have the strength to quarantine them.”

“And now humans fill the gap that the Wylin left in their power base. Funny how that worked out.”

“I understand the reasoning behind their crippling of the Wylin. Slavery has never been the most popular concept among sentient species, and humans seem to be particularly ashamed of their own history with it.”

“I don't fucking buy it. These same ruthless killers suddenly develop a sense or morality when they run into the Wylin? And the rest of the damn galaxy has the sense to stay out of each other's business. How would you like it if the humans began investigating Autogol space?”

“Autogol space isn't reachable by the Rest Frame, so their travel technology wouldn't allow them to.”

“I was being figurative. Update your damn heuristics. Attacking the Wylin was a cold-blooded strategic move. Now they have the support of half the quadrant, and the 'unending gratitude' of the Chorians and Serians. And they control too much of the Census. At least they can't stop fighting each other. Maybe we'll get lucky and they'll rid us all of themselves.”

Xan'tul, now thoroughly angry, got up from his stool. He stumbled for a moment before catching his balance on his third leg, and shuffling, his gait arrhythmic, out of the bar.

A moment passed.

“I wouldn't take everything he said about humans to heart.” A soft female voice spoke from behind the autogol. It turned.

“The prosthetics are convincing, but you're running too hot to be a Chorian. And your human aphorisms don't translate as well as you seem to think. They rely upon a cultural understanding.”

The human laughed. “You autogol are always incredibly perceptive. I'd appreciate your discretion as to my species, though. A human can hardly move safely in a Prethin city.”

Hearing no response, the woman continued.

“Many of us—most of us, in fact, feel rather bad about Rymir war. We wish it had never happened. We're not a horribly aggressive species, but we *are* are terribly brash one.”

“Your external temperature has lowered to Chorian norm. How did you do that?” Queried the autogol, something akin to bemusement in its inflection. The woman just winked.

“Something else I'd imagine doesn't translate right, but I don't care. Many of us prefer nonviolent solutions to problems, or at least minimally violent solutions to them. The United Systems is slowly coming around, though it moved much slower than the Jupiter Republic. Just give us time. We haven't been a part of this big family for too long.

“We'll figure out a way to make up for our mistakes.”