

TIDES OF CHANGE

~ PRELUDE ~

Darkest Night

The floor was cold against his bare feet. Being honest with himself, he relished the sensation. Toros Nayl stared at the completely non-augmented flesh that still existed from the knee down on both his legs and smirked. This was a good feeling. The steel plating and micro-metal inlays that made up over 15% of his body were quite strong, and even more resilient; but they conveyed absolutely no feeling whatsoever. For everything else it was, at the end of the day it was simply cold, hard, metal. It wasn't fancy by any stretch of the imagination; not being made of the infamous nanosynth fiber material those of his kind would get together and dream about over an amber malt when he had time to visit the local pubs in Falserest. Having Nova do a study on the metal, it was primarily something called Tungsten, but it certainly made him stronger and tougher than most men his size. He was lost in thought regarding the changes that made him who he was, when the lights on the Hallowed Eve flickered and went out. "Damn," he said out loud, although no one could hear him in the isolated weapons control room. What had he touched now that he shouldn't have? He really didn't feel like admitting to Victor that he screwed something up again, causing the ship to power down because he pushed the wrong button combination on the defense console. And he certainly couldn't lie about it over their next meal like he tried in the past. That never seemed to work with this group, especially if Whisper was in the room. But this time it really *wasn't* his fault. He hadn't even got around to checking the defense controls yet. It wasn't more than a few seconds after that when the invisible gas seeped through the air vent into the small room, and Nayl found himself falling to the steel floor, his entire world going black in an instant.

The communication logs showed no signs that anyone or anything had tried to contact the ship. Whisper Darhk absently ran her fingers over her cirlet as she contemplated what she might have missed. The 50 hours' worth of data graphs she searched through didn't register so much as a blip, indicating things were deathly silent while they were in the Dream Fade. She licked her teeth, thinking. After a few minutes, the clever woman got an idea. If she checked the ECCM activation spikes, maybe they would show something. If an enemy ship laid down an Electronic Counter Measures spread, it was very likely EvE would have answered automatically with a counter countermeasure of her own; and that should be recorded! Now... where exactly would that data be? She opened a private channel to the main engineering station. "Nova, it's D. You there?" Whisper didn't wait for a response, imagining the tech-head was covered in oil and grease and had his head jammed up into some access shaft somewhere, but was probably listening all the same. "So, I'm trying to ascertain where I can find the records for ECCM spikes in EvE's system files. With her database shot to hell, I need to extract the data manually, and have absolutely no clue where to look. Any ideas?" Before the engineer could offer up any type of response, her entire system console went completely dark, followed by the lighting in the room itself. Sighing, Whisper bent over and began feeling around for a portable light she kept under the main panel. Before she could even locate it, something hit her on the back of the head and she fell unconscious to the floor with a dull thud.

“Ouch!” came a cry from an air purification duct deep in the bowels of the Hallowed Eve engineering bay. Being caught off guard by the Inquisitor’s sudden request over his console’s loudspeaker, Victor Nova instinctively lifted and turned his head to hear what she was saying. In doing so, he banged the back of his skull against the top of the small passageway, and a wayward screw-head jammed its way into his flesh. “Stupid Victor!” he berated himself, mini-torch in one hand and tero-goggles in the other. Putting the goggles around his neck, the ace technician rubbed his head vigorously as he felt a lump already beginning to form. That was going to hurt so much worse in the morning. Quickly looking over his work, Nova must have been satisfied with the weld, for he began to crawl his way slowly toward the open grate and the duct primary ahead. As he shimmied forward, Nova couldn’t help but think whoever built this ship must have had a physical frame that was either very small or incredibly thin; neither of which would even remotely describe the 6’4”, muscular mechanic. Just before he reached the duct’s end, a shadowy figure emerged from out of nowhere and closed the grille in front of him. He caught just enough of a glimpse to know it wasn’t a member of his crew. With no portable communication unit on his hastily donned uniform and his robot assistant powered down in the far corner of the room, the technician could only hope Kane noticed something on the Pilot’s console indicating the service passageway was closed with a live person still inside. “Nighty night,” was the last thing Victor heard when a small container was thrown into the ductwork and some type of sleeping agent knocked him out cold before he could even register a response.

“I said 30 degrees to the LEFT,” yelled Kane Holiday from his pilot’s chair as he stared intently at an archaic looking radar screen. “For a so-called genius, your sense of direction is about as good as a peanut.”

“Oh, shut it, furball!” came the quick response from a tall, half-clothed Trevor Zee who had been muttering to himself about something. Kane hadn’t shaved in months, and his beard was wily and out of control. Trevor took every opportunity to remind the pathfinder he looked like a tall scruff-maw bush.

“Insults will not make this job go any faster you know!” Holiday yelled back. “I don’t understand how hard it could possibly be to manipulate a rotor-bearing 30 measly degrees!”

“I will have you note that there is a reason nobody else was willing to help you with this,” retorted the Adept, not the least bit intimidated by the loud and frustrated Kane. “It’s because you get mean and unbearable to deal with if things don’t go EXACTLY your way. It’s a condition you really should seek some professional help for you know.”

“Wait. So YOU are the one lecturing ME on getting professional help?! That’s a joke, right?!”

As the two friends continued to battle back and forth, taking the other to task for every little idiosyncrasy the other one possessed, (*which was quite a long list*), a tiny blip suddenly appeared somewhere under the console Kane was sitting at and Trevor was trying desperately to manipulate properly before a new flurry of scolding remarks began.

“What was that?!” the pilot quickly asked, checking the multitude of screens positioned across his control deck to see if anything showed up on the audio-visual panels he was still trying to fully understand.

“What was what?” Trevor queried with a shake of his head.

“I heard a blip sound and saw what looked like a rapid light flash. What micro-processor panel did it come from?” Kane asked excitedly.

Trevor stared blankly at the conglomeration of wires, flex hose, synth conduit, and piping that intertwined between what had to be two dozen processor boards. “Uhhhhh.... I’m not sure.”

“What do you mean, you’re not sure?!” Kane yelled again. “You are down there looking right at it! It would be positively impossible to have missed it. You can’t be serious!”

Trevor had had about enough of this abuse for one day and stood up with the small socket wrench in his hand, pointing it at Kane menacingly. “Now listen here, Mr. Perfect...” he began what was surely to be a very colorful riposte when the entire pilot’s cabin suddenly went completely dark.

In unison, both Kane and Trevor stopped arguing, sighed, and yelled, “Toros!”

It was a lighthearted moment that immediately broke the tension between them, only to be followed by one of the eeriest feelings they had experienced this past year.

“I am afraid your friend Toros had nothing to do with this, Cryomancer,” came a deep, almost melodic and incredibly sinister voice from the darkness. “Now if you don’t mind, this takeover will go much smoother if you both go to sleep now.” And before either Kane or Trevor could process what was going on and offer any kind of resistance, a brilliant flash appeared in front of their faces, activating the sleep centers of their brains and sending them both into a deep, catatonic slumber...

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TIDES OF CHANGE CAMPAIGN BEGINS HERE

In Episode 01

“Adrift in a Sea of Sand”