

SUPREME MAGUS

Chapter 5 Collateral Damage

After much screaming and freaking out, Derek finally regained his composure and started to analyse his current predicament.

The first thing that caught his eye was a huge hole in the space suit at the chest level. The contours of the hole had burn marks all over it and there was a lot of purple jelly on both his suit and the dead bodies.

That meant the purple jelly was coagulated alien blood. Derek turned his head to see the spot where he had woken up, noticing a lot of blood and even something that he found safe to assume were some kind of splattered viscera.

"This makes no sense." He thought. "All the evidence points to the fact that this body was dead as Julius Caesar until I somehow happened to inhabit it. And for whatever reason, it's also fully healed. Oh man, this means all religions are dead wrong! Luckily I never believed in any mumbo jumbo, otherwise I would be really disappointed right now."

Derek then proceeded examining his new body. It had four arms, only two legs but all the limbs were long and skinny. The legs were reverse jointed, like those of a cat. Both hands and feet had only three fingers each.

Derek was really curious about his facial features but there was no reflective surface in sight. So, he tried feeling his face with the fingers, but the suit turned out to come with a helmet, which did not impede his senses though.

The only thing he could establish was the shape of the helmet, and based on it Derek's new head should have been something similar to a shark's dorsal fin.

Then he tried to speak. "Test, test. Derek Esposito. One, two, three." He could somehow do it, but it was still English. That meant that he did not inherit neither the muscle memory nor the intellect from the body's previous owner.

Derek tried getting up, but the centre of gravity was too different from his old body, so he had to give up and proceed crawling like a baby.

So, he started examining the corpses to make heads or tails of what was happening around him. Judging from the suits, there were two factions at war.

One had a red coloured space suit, and the other, which Derek was donning, was grey. He had no idea which side was winning, but it would not make any difference to him anyway.

Unless the suit was equipped with a universal translator, he was incapable of communicating. Enemies would kill him on sight, allies would probably ditch him like garbage.

"Who would ever want a rambling idiot, incapable even of walking during a life or death situation? I'm not even here from a day and I am already as good as dead."

Refusing to give up, Derek managed to get up by leaning on the walls and started exploring.

The corridor had many doors, yet his choices were painfully limited, since he could only go through the open ones.

Derek had no idea how to open the doors nor how to operate the control panels that he found along the way. He tried pushing buttons at random but nothing happened.

And he was starting to get hungry.

"Will I die like this? Starving in a goddamned space ship, alien planet or whatever the f**k is this? I don't know what this useless pile of flesh eats! Even if I stumble on a mountain of food, I have no way to know what is what. And even if I did, I do not know how the heck to remove this helmet."

After walking for several hours, hunger and frustration drove him to hysteria. Derek screamed and kicked whatever was within reach, until exhaustion made him fall asleep.

When he woke up, his mind was clear again.

"This is a nightmare. I am all out of options, to the point that even if I wanted to kill myself, I would not know how." He banged the back of his head against the wall to keep frustration at bay.

"I never thought about this, but being reborn in a sci-fi environment is truly the worst-case scenario. Alien body, alien customs, complete lack of the new species common sense. And to make things worse everything here is so high

tech that I cannot even operate a door. Heck, every god damn button could be tagged and it would still be useless to me since I don't know their language."

His hunger was rising and he was feeling weaker by the hour. Having no time to lose, he started wandering again, this time banging and screaming at every door he met, trying to draw some attention

Derek was on the verge of fainting again due to hunger and exhaustion when finally a door opened up.

The shock was great enough for him to lose his grip and fall to the ground. On the other side there were grey suited aliens in a wedge formation.

Every one of them was holding some kind of long metal staff as if it was a rifle. Derek didn't even attempt to get up, he just waved with his right hand, hoping it was a peace sign.

"Captain! That's Xa'rk! His life signal getting back online wasn't a glitch in the system, he is still alive."* (from this point onward * means words that Derek does not understand)

The formation opened and a taller and bulkier alien closed in. The soldiers never lowered their weapons nor lost focus, waiting for the attack order.

"What are you doing on the floor, soldier? And how in Thrak's name did you survive that ambush?"* The captain asked with a coarse voice.

"Dude, I have no idea what you did just said."

"What is he rambling? Medic, any reading on that blaster wound?"*

A purple dressed alien walked forward while scanning Derek's body. "None, sir. It's not any dialect in the empire. And the scanner confirms that the hole in his armour is definitely from a Corellan blaster. I have no idea how he survived it unscathed. It's a miracle."*

"It's a liability."* The captain's tone was grim. He took a staff from a soldier's hands and by pushing a button it became a glaive, whose blade was made of pure energy.

"Well, seems that I'm going to die from a lightsabre. It's cool, one hit and I'll be turned into dandruff. Lucky me, another painless death incoming."

When the captain plunged the glaive into his chest, it did not make any burning sound. It pierced him from side to side, bleeding him to death.

The blade was not a laser-based weapon, but a hard-light construct, making it no different from an ordinary glaive.

"Listen up, soldiers. Xa'rk was a good soldier and we will remember and mourn him as such. When and if we get out of this alive. But that thing, whatever that is, is a risk we cannot allow to take. Not with Prince Rek'hart in our care and those Corellan rebel scums still at large. Better some collateral damage than a spy among our ranks. Now shut that door and check the perimeter again."

This time, death was far from painless for Derek. He felt like his chest was on fire, but what really hurt wasn't the wound as much the lungs.

Derek was struggling to breathe. Every breath was shallower and more difficult than the last. Blood started gurgling from his mouth, and he felt like slowly drowning.

His throat kept contracting trying to draw in air, but to no avail. It took Derek less than a minute to die, but for him it seemed to last forever.

Once again, he found himself basked by blinding light and pulled towards it. Just like the last time, he felt all his worries and rage fading, but instead of enjoying the feeling he was simply annoyed.

Derek had never believed in any god, hence he never believed in heaven or hell.

"Humankind has always been a terrible race" He thought. "It's impossible to define someone as truly bad. Most of the times the bad guys are simply people who never got a chance to be anything but criminals.

Then there are people, like me, whom life had pushed and pushed until they broke. Not to mention psycho and sociopaths. How could someone that is born bad be sent to hell simply because his head is malfunctioning?

Hence, I have always believed that either there was an afterlife for everyone, or no afterlife at all. Death is supposed to be final spirit level, good or bad, rich or poor the destination has to be the same.

Instead I got this cheap excuse of reincarnation screwing with me.

What purpose being reborn could possibly have if I retain all of my memories?

Whatever body or planet I would end up in, I would still carry my baggage, so once outside the light all my pain, rage and contempt toward humankind would prevent me to learn whatever lesson I am supposed to learn!"

Inside that otherworldly space, he had the clarity to see that his psychologist was only half right. He could only change if he wanted to, but because of all his past experiences he had no will to.

It was a perfect example of a catch-22 paradox.

Suddenly, he was pulled downwards and away from the light.

His vision was a blur, but he could still hear a lot of commotion around him.

Giant hands were holding him still while he was puking god knows what, and judging from the breeze on his buttcheeks he was naked.

"I don't know what the heck is going on" He thought "but I bet I am in deep sh*t again."

When Derek was finally able to see again, he discovered that the hands were not gigantic, the issue was him being very small. A baby, to be precise.

"He is alive! I did it! I managed to save your boy's life."

A further inspection revealed that said hands belonged to some gibberish rambling old hag. Derek was currently inside a wooden shack, surrounded by people dressed with rags that could be called clothes only if they were part of a 1000 AD themed renaissance fair.

"Man, I hate being always right!"