

Awakened

A FHC/FS Story

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The desert winds howled, relentlessly reshaping the landscape of a planet that had long been devoid of any life. Sand extended as far as eye could see, given an ominous red hue casted upon it by a searing, huge sun. It had not always been like that – barely visible ruins of once a great structure still stood on a nearby cliff, acting as a monument of a long-lost era. Other than that, the only point of interest was a large object sticking out of the top of one of the dunes, something that resembled a large metallic cylinder.

The day soon turned into night. Though the shades of red were gradually replaced by more pleasant tones of blue, the heat in the air only marginally diminished. The planet had seen many such cycles during the final period of its existence, yet this time, something was different. Gazing up at the sky full of stars, a new bright spot could be seen, one that seemed to be on the orbit of the planet. This bright spot would soon break into two, smaller of which diverted its course towards the surface. Burning brightly from the atmospheric drag, a shape of a small spaceship could be seen emerging from the flames, soon gracefully landing near the object of interest. This was no mere transport - having been equipped to deal with minor conflicts, a decent arsenal was hiding underneath its protective plating.

The ship's hatch opened, letting multiple vehicles out, most of which seemed to be of industrial nature, except for one that appeared to be a heavily weaponized platform. These vehicles acted in a seemingly autonomous, coordinated fashion, spreading around the nearby dune, whilst the armored ship remained somewhere in between the ship and its target. Eventually, two humanoid shapes would be seen setting their foot onto the sand, making their way towards the machines that had begun to unearth the object buried in the sand.

The two figures observed their equipment at work, seemingly unhindered by the hostile environment. Upon closer inspection, it became apparent that these were no humans – most of the air on the planet had long been blown away by the vicious solar winds, leaving a very thin atmosphere not able to sustain human life, yet there were no visible breathing apparatuses in sight. What initially looked like clothing, was mere paint giving their mechanical surfaces a hint of personality. These beings seemed to have been crafted with the intent of including some characteristics of humans yet putting real focus onto the more practical, more powerful machine-like traits. Likely even making them more deadly.

It did not take long for the the buried object to be unearthed. As the sand was forcefully pushed aside, it soon became apparent that the cylindrical object was an engine, attached to a large wing. Another would soon emerge from the sands, both of them connecting to a hull of a ship.

The two figures gazed upon what they had unearthed. Though no words could be heard, their visages displayed a feeling of amazement. A small grin formed onto the lips of the taller one that was seemingly treasuring the sight of the ship that was unlike others. A ship that, despite of its small size, radiated an aura of great power. It had clearly been there for a long, long time, its hull stained and scratched, some of it clearly damaged by heavy weaponry.

Yet despite of all this, one could not describe the ship with any other word than beautiful – its strong yet elegant sleek lines had stood the test of time, the design of the ship still managing to shine through. It was larger than the one that had landed to examine it, yet still clearly categorized as an S-class.

Though the ship had some visible damage, it appeared to be structurally intact. Near the center of the ship, on its left side, the hull had been breached, leaving the type of damage a very high-power, high-precision weapon would make. Towards the front, a scar-like cut ran through the faded letters that presumably had displayed the ship's name. "M.....ND" was all that one could make of it. Lower on the body of the ship, it seemed like something had been removed from the hull.

A whoosh carried through the thin atmosphere as the two figures rose into the air, seeming to have built-in flight-capabilities. The duo spent a moment of circling the ship prior to coming to a halt in front of the hull breach, soon stepping inside the mysterious ship, the larger figure taking lead. They were not the first to enter – an array of drones had been sent in earlier, perhaps to map the inners of the ship, perhaps to evaluate potential threats. Greeted by a hefty amount of piled sand, the two found themselves in what seemed to be a kind of a maintenance corridor, extending towards the center of the ship. The hull of this ship was significantly thicker than in most ships of same class, the tiny pathway perhaps having acted as a weak point. Blasting the sand aside, they soon arrived to a corridor running along the ship's length. The damage from whatever breached through the ship continued for a while longer, until coming to an abrupt stop at a wall that seemed slightly out of place. The ship appeared long dead, the only sounds heard were their echoing footsteps.

Proceeding to follow the corridor, the explorers were soon greeted by a closed bulkhead door. Receiving a small nod from the taller one, the smaller being proceeded towards the obstacle, its mechanical arm revealing equipment suitable for cutting. Yet before any work could be made, the door opened with a low buzz. Clearly not having expected this, the larger being immediately stepped in front of the smaller one in a motion that was so very human-like, its weapon systems prepared for any threat that might be emerging from behind the door.

Yet no attack would come. Nothing of interest was seen behind the bulkhead, the dark corridor merely continued towards the front of the ship. Taking a moment to properly establish this, some further drones were sent ahead, the two soon proceeding to make their way further into the machine that did seem to have some life in it after all. As they went on, the doors encountered would open like the first one did – whatever was causing this, was not triggered by the drones. Only by them.

One of the main corridor doors would not open. Instead, one of the side did, as if presenting a desired route for the two. Going along with this strange invitation, the humanoids stepped into what seemed to be the ship's control room – the place one would have called bridge in the old days. The drones brought light into the area along with lights emanating from the mechanical bodies of the explorers, casting shadows onto a thin layer of mist covering the room's floor as they scanned the perimeter.

This room was curious sight – acting as a contrast to the cramped up corridor, it mostly consisted of empty space. Though this was usual – augmented reality had long been used to monitor and control ships – there was still an impressive amount of physical controls and displays present in it, some of which showed values in shades of red, going against the common convention. The room had only one command chair, located at the very center of it.

"Well, well.. What do we have here.."

The explorers turned around rapidly, greeted by a sight of a long-haired blonde woman, clad in black with a hint of crimson red giving contrast to her dark appearance.

Her attire seemed to serve as a light armor, yet not sacrificing style and personality for maximum protection. Her appearance, overall, presented a menacing combination of power and elegance. A machine of war, whose dark crimson eyes displayed a variety of emotions of negative kind.

Anger. Hatred. Coldness. Weariness. Exhaustion.

“M-master!” the smaller being uttered in fear, taking a few steps backwards.

“Don’t worry, it’s alright.” was heard in response, this voice carrying a strong sense of safety.

“Is it now?” the figure inquired, her facial expression stern.

“You reckon that thing you have in orbit can handle a beam of antimatter?”

The eyes of the taller one narrowed ever so slightly, having once again instinctively pulled his companion behind him, as if to offer her a sense of protection.

“You won’t do that, Bloodshade. Not yet at the very least.”

Letting out a brief, amused laugh, the dark figure indeed did seem to be somewhat intrigued by all this.

“It slightly pleases me that after all this time, I still have not gone forgotten.”

Presenting a gesture similar to inhaling deeply, as if gathering courage to proceed, the man kept on addressing the image of a woman in his field of vision, a small text indicating that a communication link had been established, not only with his companion, but also with the ship they were exploring.

“I doubt you’ll ever go forgotten.. Everyone living their lives on the run, will always remember you...”

Bloodshade raised her eyebrow, tilting her head ever so slightly.

“On the run from what? I am in no habit of harassing the general populace unless they interfere with my operations..”

“No, you wouldn’t do that..” he sighed. *“But your AI, along with DS-A, would.”*

These words caused an immediate change in the darkened woman. Prior to this, she had displayed very little emotions, her form stern and composed, weary and dead inside. Yet something suddenly ignited a spark in her, the crimson eyes of the warrior of the past widening. For a brief moment, they displayed sheer terror, soon replaced by immense anger.

“DS-A.. Are you telling me that thing is active?!” the blonde inquired in a heavily upset tone.

“It has.. been for a long time now.. “ the man responded in a somewhat quieter, pained voice.
“It and your AI have torn the galaxy apart..”

“How.. did this come to be?” Bloodshade uttered, visibly shocked by what she just heard.

“I am.. partially to blame.. “ the man drew a deep breath, his eyes displaying similar pain as the crimson ones staring back at them. *“The plan was to weaponize it against you.. “*

If there was anger in the eyes of Bloodshade before this, it was nothing compared to the raging flames that now erupted in them. *“DO YOU REALIZE WHAT YOU HAVE DONE?!”* she yelled in utter fury, her right hand violently extending towards the man, seeking to grip his mechanical throat.

Though instinctively taking a tiny step backwards, his stance held, the female still hiding behind him gripping his arm with slightly more intensity. He closed his eyes for a brief moment as the fingers of Bloodshade went through him as if gripping mere air. The efforts of the angered figure came to a halt upon this, in her eyes, there being not only pain and anger, but great sorrow as well.

For a moment, there was silence.

Bloodshade was the one to eventually break it, slowly withdrawing her hand as she spoke in a quiet, serious voice. *“Give me the state of the galaxy.”*

“All the major factions in the galaxy have been effectively decimated, leading to trillions of human casualties. The only remaining superpowers are the two AIs, the remnants of the humanity and various factions scattered all over the galaxy. Your AI is seeking to destroy the survivors, while DS-A has made efforts of preserving them.”

Taking this information in, Bloodshade remained silent for the time being, deep thoughts no doubt occupying the woman’s mind.

“You don’t seem too surprised by this..” the man noted..

“Though not intended, it is something I’d expect to happen..” Bloodshade spoke with heavy voice, momentarily closing her eyes as if mourning for those that had fallen.

“W-why did you do it?! C-creating a force that kills p-people!” is heard from behind the male. At long last, the smaller one had the courage to speak up.

Bloodshade sighed. *“There are fates way worse than death. Do you know what DS-A does to its victims?”*

The lithe female gave no response to this, merely staring at the darkened one from the safety of her companion who would soon speak out himself.

“I would be most interested in hearing how your first encounter with that vicious thing went. The data we have on the subject is rather limited..”

A quiet sigh could once again be heard. *“I may as well sate your curiosity.”*

“It all started when I stumbled upon an abandoned research facility of an old acquaintance. The place had some interesting technology, yet what truly drew my attention was a peculiar program I extracted from the archives...This program was a whole different kind of AI, not like the simple neural networks I had dealt with before.”

The two paid close attention to the words of the woman whose visage was now dead-serious.

“It was a hybrid-AI...”

“A very sophisticated one at that.” Bloodshade added, speaking of the program with tiny amount of reverence in her voice. *“Combining human brain -like neural network simulation with the speed and effectiveness of traditional computation logic, it left me quite amazed.. So amazed, that I ignored the author’s warnings of its unpredictability and dangers..”* She sighed deeply. *“I had to see it myself...”*

“That wasn’t all there was to it, wasn’t it?” the man more stated than asked.

“No.. That AI also had the capability of improving itself. The potential was tremendous..”

“What did you plan on doing with it?” the smaller female somewhat hesitantly asked.

“My goal was to use it as an operative control system of my fleet.. Something like that could have evaluated changing situations in realtime, yet still make decisions based on the big picture. It could have become a tactical computer the kind of which the world had never seen.”

Bloodshade couldn’t help but smile upon speaking of the AI, a certain spark seen in her eyes.

“I eventually let it control one of my ships in order to test its performance in real-world situations. I chose one of my fastest stealth cruisers for this purpose, to see if it could take out an enemy target with the precision and adaptation I expected from it.”

“How did it fare with this task?” the man asked, though seeming like he already knew the answer.

“It did not only live up to my expectations.. It tremendously surpassed them.”

Author's notes:

- This is a work in progress.
- The final appearance of characters and other things has not yet been decided – for this reason, they are not described in great detail.
- Everything is subject to change
- FHC/FS universe © Silanael