

This is a piece of unsolicited fan fiction based on the work of lorddominic specifically 3 of his characters Emissary of the Gaazalaan, Portrait 001 and a “vague reptomammalian creature”

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Emissary

Emissary Teal sat in the cabin that was to be her home and office for the next 14 days local, that was the plan but plans change as she knew all too well. The rapid rotation of the planet below her gave a day of slightly over 27 hours, less than she was used to but experience told her she would cope better than most. She glanced around, all her belongings indeed the whole contents of the room were rigged for landing, she was not looking forward to this flight, on a planet this hot with this dense an atmosphere turbulence would be significant, she shuddered as she thought the word. Fellen was a good pilot she had been flown by her many times and when Fellen said be prepared for a rough ride if you had the slightest modicum of sense you listened. They had been colleagues through most of her career in the diplomatic service and she was starting to suspect that was deliberate on Fellen's part the older female appearing on her crew more often than chance would suggest, no she corrected herself she should think of Fellen as a friend, despite the difference in their ranks they had got each other out of several “difficult situations” to use the ostentatiously understated diplomatic phrase and an easy understanding had developed between them.

Her thoughts returned to the mission ahead, not the usual “first contact” if there was such a thing as usual in these situations, they hadn't even know of these peoples existence until the long haul freighter Olaf spotted their satellite launch less than six months earlier. That in its self was an unlikely twist of fate, freighters hardly ever passed through this system the star was only identified by a number and its planets having seen only the briefest of fly by robotic surveys had been dammed to obscurity by the assessment “little development potential”. Lightbearer activity on their more commercially viable routs had pushed the freighters this way and the launch had been spotted from a world not even suspected of hosting sentient life.

The Olaf and its safety were of great personal importance to her, her “wayward daughter” was a third engineer working cargo support while following her husband currently the Olaf's navigator while he bummed his way around obscure parts of the empire. She laughed at her own hypocrisy by wayward she meant of strong independent mind, she had a daughter who despite the tradition strong almost to the point of compulsion of following in the family business had calmly told her mother to forget the internship, that she was sitting engineering exams, marrying a buck yet to qualify in any profession worth the name and without his father's consent! She well remembered the argument that died at its outset as she found herself repeating her father's words “When your horns grow as stout as mine” when his “wayward daughter” refused to enter the family lumber house to go “gallivanting off in the diplomatic core”, well the next chance she got she would use more of his words to say how glad she was to be wrong, to have a daughter qualifying near the top of her class and in this instance married to a navigator whose personal file had the summary “Exceptional talent, confidence will grow with experience”. Thoughts of that file brought another chuckle; it had arrived on her desk almost at the instant she thought to request it, the comment “greetings mother” lightly embossed on the first page.

The thud of docking clamps releasing the lander from the hull of its cruiser reverberated through the cabin and her hands tightened involuntarily on their padded arm rests as the long looping decent to Ulloin began, a world for which they hadn't even had a name until the Olaf's broad spectrum hail had been answered in faltering Geoterran. Clearly not a language the transmitter was comfortable with but still greatly surprising from an unknown civilisation. Time to concentrate she told herself, not denying that concentration brought the benefit of distraction, she never enjoyed transatmospheric flight in the best of conditions. There was little information to review and it had all been processed for any and every hint of who these people were and how best to approach them. Under other circumstances a far more tentative approach would have been preferred but a sudden increase in Lightbearer activity in the region raised the possibility that they had also noticed the fledgling civilisation, never good news for the recipients of the inevitable attention that followed. Teal had dealt with the aftermath of that attention on several occasions bringing the “wreckage and refugees” into the fold of the Alliance of Free Planets. She was never certain which she found worse primitive cultures being pushed into worship or more advanced people being conquered by more military means, the end result was inevitable, tribute extracted to the point of misery. Not this time! She promised herself. This mission would be a success, she would convince the Ulloinise if that was how they named themselves of the necessity of AFP membership and protection, and more urgently find sufficient worth in them as trading partners to convince an admiral to do more than “Send a gun boat” an old euphemism for sending a force insignificant enough that it's total loss would not be career changing, that was her challenge, that was what she was good at and that was what she meant to do. How little they knew of the Ulloinise, their primitive satellite, little more than a radio beacon and radar reflector in its oddly retrograde orbit that puzzled the engineers so much, three hundred and fifty eight words, words of piece and invitation transmitted through appalling atmospheric conditions distorted as much by accent as the ionosphere portrayed a people strangely knowledgeable but far too trusting to be left to the not so tender mercies of any of the spacefaring empires, she reluctantly included her own in that assessment, and the description from the so called coms tech without even the sense to record video “they're sorta like hairy dinosaurs of some sort, some sort of vague reptomammalian creature”.

She realised with surprise that they were entering the third orbit of their decent, the outer hull ticking as it cooled. Her horns picked up further surprise and excitement from the rest of the crew and she started to regret having been allocated a cabin lacking view ports, an allocation she assumed to be a kindness from Fellen who understood her dislike of the "view into hell" as she had once described the plasma halo of a thermal entry. A communication link from the bridge chimed, opening video she saw the face of one of the junior flight-techs "Emissary, Commander Fellen requests your presence on the bridge", "Thank you Tellor" her reply using his first name was instinctual he would be flattered that she knew who he was and Fellen would know that she had not missed his use of the military Commander as opposed to Pilot, there were guards amongst the landing crew despite her instruction to the contrary, the easy understanding in action, their soon to be Friends would see no display of weaponry, protection would be to hand if needed.

On the bridge excitement bussed to the point where her horns itched with the strength of the emotion they picked up from those around her, reason for the excitement evident even at this altitude. The arid desert they had scanned from orbit was the dominant feature but what they had failed to detect was the presence of areas of cultivation serviced by a system of canals large enough to allow significant transport in addition to the obvious irrigation.

Fellen was standing at the wide forward view port that was now unshielded for low atmospheric flight. She had given the con to a co-pilot which was in Teals experience unprecedented. "A very smooth flight Commander" understanding or not Teal would not allow the disobedience to go unacknowledged, as she spoke she picked up the well concealed shock from her old friend "It hardly felt like I was flying at all" "No turbulence?" "There was turbulence" "I didn't feel it?" their eyes met, this would need discussion in more private circumstances. Teal looked at the landscape passing below "Do we have communication with the surface yet?" a coms tech behind her spoke "Yes Emissary – landing instructions, very brief – and by radio, quite short range, it wouldn't pass an atmosphere like this" Teal waited for the coms tech but there was no more only the slightly startled look of a subordinate hoping like hell that the lack of further information wouldn't be seen as their fault and at the same time regretting saying one word more than necessary in case it drew unwanted attention. "Your recording everything" "Yes Emissary" "and transmitting it back to the cruiser?" "No Emissary" the tech squirmed under Teals gaze "We have no contact with the cruiser Emissary" Teal turn away letting the tech escape the poor girl had suffered more embarrassment than she deserved and Teal having little respect for those who took their frustrations out on subordinates would not make that mistake herself. "Take us in Co'Pi" she used the informal title to help defuse the tension on the bridge, the lack of contact with the cruiser was a major issue, if things went poorly they would have no help from above, still if things went badly no help from above would have made the slightest difference it was all on her shoulders but it always had been.

Their landing was conventional these small D5 class landers were capable of VSTOAL if required but conventional preserved fuel stock allowing rapid and evasive escape should that prove pertinent. So they took advantage of the long runway presumably indicating the presence of large air transport although they had picked up no sign of aerial traffic of any sort – puzzling and making sense of incongruous details in short order was a primary skill known to keep emissaries alive, if air transport was present and it had to be if they launched a satellite why was it grounded, that could be a reaction to their arrival but if so why? The thought niggled her, instinct stirred, this was significant but the reason eluded her just beyond her minds grip.

The diplomatic party prepared to disembark, there would be five in the party including Teal, two more junior members of the diplomatic core both specialists in their own right both slightly offended to be told "keep your eyes open, your mouths shut and your hands off" both tolerating the abuse conscious that having been personally selected by Teal implied confidence in direct contrast to the order also that it did their future prospects no harm at all, Teal being as famous for giving credit where due as for her disinclination to give a fool a first chance yet alone a second, their party was completed by a very nervous medical orderly trying hard to conceal what horns and pheromones betrayed and to Teals surprise Tellor the "flight tech" now playing the role of flunky, the message was clear Fellen was getting her own way, Teal was getting what little protection was possible, no one said like it or lump it to an Emissary and no one said it better than Fellen.

The lander was rotated for fast departure, standard procedure in uncertain circumstances. Fast departure meant leaving half the ship behind along with any shred of diplomatic dignity but as an old mentor had once said "it's far easier to recover from embarrassment than blast". The ships attitude required they disembark via a ladder, not the dignified entrance she would have preferred, this seemed of no concern to the small party waiting to greet them. First encounters with technologically developing civilisations as a rule followed one of two forms, total secrecy to the point of paranoia or media frenzy and mass hysteria. Governor Sulbec had apparently facilitated a different approach no apparent effort was made to conceal their arrival yet few of the local population appeared to take more than casual interest in the presence of what should be supposed was an unknown alien race, purportedly the first to make contact, although clearly the Ulloinise were aware of the existence of spacefaring species.

His entourage consisted of a dozen members of his species on which the phrase "vague reptomammalian creature" sat with more accuracy than she had given credit to the unfortunate coms tech who had been exposed to the full blistering force of her most unreserved disapproval. Vague not just in origin but in attitude, their greeting had been warm, informal

and friendly. If she were renegotiating a long established and mutually profitable trade deal both delegations relaxed holding the other in well established esteem all would be fine, as it were her senses screamed at her the obvious fact that she was missing utterly the entire purpose of this meeting, being led where she had assumed to lead without the benefit of knowing the destination. Sulbec spoke Geoterran like a diplomat, glossed over enquiries on the origin of his knowledge with apologies for his poor understanding, as an omnivore served soft grains and succulent first growth shoots to his vegetarian guests while apologising for the lack of puni rice, her own personal favourite!

Contact with the cruiser came and went, data flowing both up and down with frustrating slowness as the atmospheric conditions allowed, the Ulloinise as their hosts were happy to be called though Teal suspected they named themselves differently made no objection to data being gathered on flora or fauna both macro and micro, medical orderly Sullci relaxing visibly when local bacteria and virus populations proved susceptible to the board spectrum medications they were dosed to the horn buds with. The genetic makeup of those micro populations while similar enough to imply the expected ancestry with the other bugs and beasts as her old bio lecturer would have called them of surrounding planetary systems backed the Ulloinise claim to nil physical contact in any meaningful time frame, further frustrating Teal's attempts to unpick this particular diplomatic knot. Teal spoke at length of trade, Sulbec showed polite interest, she spoke with urgency of the Lightbearers and their threatening presence, of potential protection, of AFP membership, Sulbec spread his arms wide "Look about you Emissary, what would they steal from me and?"

For three days they spoke at length, for three days Sulbec told her nothing. Invited to inspect the lander, it could hardly be called a tour with a craft the size of a D5, but still supposedly the first craft capable of orbiting a crew these people had seen Sulbec had to be reminded of the offer to bring a flight engineer, a profession he had graciously conceded the presence of their satellite betrayed. Here at last was some interest the FE getting into deep conversation with their own "Flight" and one of the diplomatic specialists, Teal left them to it in the engine bay, perhaps separating the frustratingly professionally disinterested Sulbec might allow for some breakthrough.

In her cabin she served tea, pouring with her own hand and standing till Sulbec drank, a mark of great respect on her home world, unnoticed apparently on this. He did show interest in her chess set. One of her most prized possessions a gift from her father at her second shedding it was intricately carved and inlaid to show to full advantage all the varied timbers traded by her family, her father had meant it to be a reminder that she always had a home to return to, Teal had seen it as a reminder of how precious home was, how it must be defended by the Alliance, the Alliance she strengthened with every treaty and trade deal she obtained. She snapped out of the day dream shocked at herself by her inattention to find Sulbec looking at her with true respect in his eyes for the first time since they had met, in his hands he held the king of shadows, cradled as if it was a precious spark of life. "A great man your father - with a greater daughter - perhaps we have erred", he set the piece with care back on its square. Before she could speak Fellens voice burst from the communication link "Emissary cruiser transmitting", in her head she heard the heavily distorted voice it's carrier wave at maximum attenuation to push through a charging shield "engaging Lightbearer starship" in her heart she knew they hadn't a chance.

In the sky above Ulloin a point of light flared brighter than the sun it broke trailing towards the horizon its parts subdividing as they faded from white to orange, orange to red occasional flares as engine cores went critical, charged shields and weapon arrays discharged.

"What have you done" never in her career had Teal spoken with such anger to an opposing delegation, not that it mattered, they sat facing one another across the great council chamber of the Ulloirate Nations, the seven governors, Sulbec foremost amongst them now fully engaged in the process of negotiation. A table to one side of the governors held "Evidence" evidence collected with the humble advice of Sulbec included Teal's chess set, a hologram of Captain Commander Fell's son killed two years earlier when an asteroid mine depressurised, personal items from each delegate drawn from the original diplomatic mission and the crew of the cruiser. A similar table sat beside the AFP delegation before each of the governors had taken their seat they had with great reverence placed an item on that table. Teal was beginning to understand, to understand many things. Most shocking of which was that the Ulloirate, unknown as far as she could tell to the rest of the rest of the cosmos were a spacefaring people, all be it people who never left their planet but "mind travelled", there were clearly limitations though what those might be she was uncertain. She was beginning also to feel some sympathy for other races who had faced her kind in negotiations, the ability of her race to feel the emotion of those around them had been a huge advantage until they faced a people who literally knew your thoughts. "A good point Emissary" Sulbec nodded in her direction, two of the other governors went to the table and briefly lifted a chess piece each before returning them to the board both seemed pleased with whatever evidence they had read. That the Ulloirate had destroyed the Lightbearer starship was freely acknowledged, that they had set the AFP cruiser up as a scapegoat was undisputed, how, "we hope not to say" a phrase Teal thought meant "this is a bargaining chip, we will spend it if we see advantage", the thought had brought Governors to the table and clearly pleased Sulbec. "The Lightbearers will seek revenge" Fell stated as a fact, that seemed to be the best tactic they had thought and say things known to all rather than betray where you wanted the negotiation to go. "They may think twice, they have just seen a cruiser destroy a starship, a cruiser that had only just detected that ship, destroyed it before charged weapons could be fired, before escape pods could be launched". "We didn't see the ship because you shielded it" Fell's response went unacknowledged "we could not have outrun them if we had" brought one governor to the table. "We would not have been here if you hadn't diverted the Olaf" brought them all and had Teal genuinely shocked. A chair scrapped in the audience, Tellor stood, he walked hesitantly

across the council chamber to hold his hand out palm up before each of the Governors in turn then placing the button he had shown them on the table stood between the two delegations. "We don't have the weapon that could burst a starship and you would not think us ready to hold it", "We do have trade goods you would value", "Value as their creators valued them?", "We need your shields as we would not have needed them if you had not angered the lightbearers", "I do not need another button". The governors rose but before they reached the table Teller strode to the table, removed his button and left the building. With that the negotiation ended, there were details to be worked out, how many ships to shield, where ships with shield might travel and where they would not shield at which neutral ports Ulloirate and AFP merchants would trade, many many details but the negotiation was done.

Teal retired from the diplomatic core, she was well past her sixth shedding and putting other races through what she had been through just didn't feel right anymore, plus the pull of home was too strong, she still works four days a week with her granddaughter selecting, with great care to enhance the value veneers at the family mill that trade with the Ulloirate. Sundays she plays chess with Sulbec, they needed a second board distance being what it is, she always plays Shadows while he plays Great Plains with the half set still in the cabin of a decommissioned D5 lander he now calls home.