

They Said No

Cycle 4510.12.3

“They said no.”

The Reaper was eyeing the room nervously, his black hooded cloak swaying gently from side to side as Azrael, sitting in the seat behind his desk, stopped moving his head, instead keeping his gaze seemingly fixed on the glowing tab in his hand. After few minutes of silence he slowly put it flat down on the desk and raised his head, his black, formless face somehow staring straight at the Reaper.

“What do you mean they said no?”

The Reaper stammered slightly, his hood sagging down on his forehead.

“Well they... the Terrans, said no. They refused.”

“They refused?! They refused the harvest?” Azrael answered with an authoritative tone, smoke emanating from his body. “There’s never been an issue before. We’ve harvested Terrans for thousands of cycles.”

“Yes, I know, but they’ve advanced quite fast for the past hundred cycles, increased their longevity. Impressively so, actually, there haven’t been a natural death that have required harvesting for some time, even before that progress. And they have always been quite the war-mongering species, usually there haven’t been bodies left to harvest. So when I got there I guess... It’s always been customary to make them surrender willingly. I guess they have forgotten about us.”

Azrael stood up and floated over to a massive screen protruding from the white wall. Smoke was billowing out from underneath the gray cloth hanging around his thin body. He waved a hand, and the screen flickered on, displaying a series of text and images labeled Terran Culture. He started scrolling through the information.

“See? We have been a part of their culture their entire existence. It’s always been accepted. Expected even. They even fear us, and we’ve let it stay that way, made the

job easier. When they are near-death, we go there and we take them. As we do for all species. You did explain our function to them?”

The reaper made a dispirited motion. “I tried! I tried to give them the whole thing, how we’re simply there to take the individual, how a biological body extrudes an enormous amount of energy upon death, and how that energy is transformed and spread out into the netway. I even explained that we are working under direct orders from the galactic dominion. They wouldn’t listen, they just accused me of being a murderer, they said they are done with me.” He scoffed slightly. “I’ve never even been there before.”

“I thought this was a type 2 civilization by now?” Azrael said quizzingly.

“They are,” the Reaper responded. “They’ve spread out quite quickly throughout their own star system, and the neighboring ones, and are showing no signs of slowing down. Thing is, they’ve been using warp technology, so they haven’t been in contact with the dominion.”

“Terrans... arrogant bastards.” Azrael sighed. “Yama, you are a Reaper, and this is the duty given to us. Go back, bring backup if you have to, and don’t return without that energy. It’s not just us, a lot of the galaxy depend on this. I don’t care if they’re using outdated warp technology instead of the netway tunnels, they’re just gonna have to accept that and stop being selfish.”

Yama nodded affirmatively. “I’ll get on it.”

Cycle 4510.12.8

“Yes, come in.” Azrael put his tablet down and leaned back in his chair. Upon seeing the Reaper entering his room he sat up straight. “Mórrígan? Why are you here, where’s Yama?”

The Reaper shuffled around nervously. “There... there was a small problem.”

“You didn’t get the harvest?”

Mórrígan slumped her shoulders down in a defeated motion, making her long cloak drag along the floor. “No... we didn’t.”

“Damn it! Why not? And where’s Yama?” Azrael rose up hastily, causing his robes to knock over the tablets lying scattered on his desk.

Mórrígan floated back slightly as she started stammering:

“Sorry, I’m sorry, Yama’s... He’s gone.”

Azrael’s body froze as he stared hollowly in front of him. “What do you mean gone?”

“We traveled back to the Terran homeworld, I was going as backup, just as you said, and we were gonna take the body. It had almost expired by now. But they... they were waiting for us...” Mórrígan’s voice started cracking, and Azrael could see the despair in her fleshless, eyeless face.

“What happened?” He said.

“They stabbed him with... something. Some kind of melee weapon, and they shot me with a ballistic.”

“How? Didn’t you have your phase-shields on?” Azrael asked, his voice betraying uncertainty.

“Of course we did! We even brought scythes for defense!” Mórrígan responded pleadingly. “They... somehow they’ve devised a way to counteract the phase-flux. I don’t understand how that’s even possible. And the ballistic, when it hit me, it was so painful I’ve never felt anything like it. I dropped the scythe... I had to flee.”

“Mórrígan, where’s Yama’s body?” Azrael said as he floated towards her.

Mórrígan set herself down, slumping down on the floor in a puff of smoke, burying her face in her thin, boney hands. “They have it. They would have killed me to, there was nothing I could do!”

Azrael turned around, and put his hands on the table, his fingers slowly crushing the metallic surface, making a loud, screeching noise reverberate through the room, as the Reaper lay on the floor, dry-sobbing.

“There hasn’t been a Reaper-death in modern galactic times. Not since we took over the duties of harvesting...” Azrael almost whispered to himself.

After a while he finally pulled himself up straight and floated over to Mórrígan, urging her to get up. As she composed herself and got up, Azrael put his hand on her shoulder, and stared with his formless face into hers, the blackness of his non-features almost glowing a crimson red.

“Mórrígan, listen to me carefully. The Terrans can not be allowed to keep Yama’s body, and they are hereby placed under quarantine. Take a heavy cruiser, and a full set of staff. You go back there, you make them surrender the body, along with a complete deposit of harvestables of their own to compensate for the energy loss incurred due to their stubbornness. A permanent Reaper will be placed there until we deem it no longer necessary. Remember, we have a duty to fulfill, one that has been assigned to us, entrusted to us, by the highest echelons of the galaxy. We will not be humiliated by a barbaric, second class civilization like the Terrans!”

Mórrígan stretched herself up, and raised her head proudly. “I won’t let you down!”

Cycle 4510.12.16

Azrael was deep in thought when he heard a weak knock on the door. His attention was brought back in full after a few seconds, on the second knock.

“Yes?”

Upon seeing the door meekly open, and the Reaper walk in, carrying a metal crate in front of him, Azrael slumped down in his chair.

“Please tell me you have some good news? I lost contact with Mórrígan more than 0.0.5 cycles ago, have you heard anything?”

The Reaper put the crate down on the middle of the floor, looking as if he would collapse at any moment.

“The Terrans... they were waiting for us,” he began quietly. “The cruiser’s security footage has been sent to you. It just arrived. It was set to autopilot... There’s no one left. No one... whole anyway. This box was placed in the steering deck...” The Reaper’s voice trailed off, sounding almost sickly.

“Yes?” Azrael inquired nervously.

“It was placed in a circle made by bones from the crew.” The Reaper slowly turned around and made his way out the door. “I haven’t dared look in it.”

Before he closed the door he turned his head and looked at Azrael: “The rage that has been awoken... What have we done?”

As the door closed Azrael remained unmoving in his chair. A small ping on a tablet alerted him to a new message. Absentmindedly he motioned his hand, transferring the message to the large screen on the wall. Not sure what to expect the greyhooded Commander of the Legion of the Reapers watched as the footage began to play. He witnessed through the ship’s scout satellite as it arrived near the moon of the Terran homeworld, and how a blast of energy disabled its cloaking device. He watched as a dozen ships jumped out of warp right next to it, and with a speed and synchronicity he had never before witnessed, the ships surrounded the cruiser, penetrated its hull, and an army of Terrans storming it. He saw through the cruisers interior cameras as a field of fog, light, and fire scorched through the ship, burning everything in its path. He heard the scream of Reapers, and then the cameras went dark.

Azrael sat frozen in the moment as the static of the screen drowned out everything else. He slowly got up and approached the crate. With shaky hands and an icy chill running down his spine, he opened it, and recoiled immediately at the sight of Yama and Mórrígan’s decapitated heads staring at him, their featureless faces somehow frozen in a moment of agony. After yet some time Azrael noticed a piece of plastic with engravings on it fastened to the top of the crate. He carefully scanned it, and as the universal translator booted up, he sent it over to the screen. As he read the short message he felt fear washing over him.

“For too long have we lived in death’s shadow.

For too long have we lived in fear of you.

This ends now.

We will no longer be slaves to the forces of decay, we will no longer bend to your will.

We will seize our own destiny, and purge the universe of you.

Now, it is your time to live in our shadow.

Now it is your time to live in fear of us.

We're coming for you."