

Starless Void
The Confessor's Journey: Chapter 1
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The slight hum of the Dant station's rotation wasn't normally a comforting noise to most. Rex, however, couldn't help but come to enjoy it as peaceful ambiance. There wasn't much else for entertainment at the moment, the cell he was in lacked anything else for him to enjoy. He didn't want to concentrate on anything else, or else he'd be reminded of the reason he was imprisoned here in the first place.

He looked over to the dripping faucet of the wash station and felt it too tempting to ignore. Standing up and stretching a bit he lightly scratched his thick, black hair as he made his way over towards it. Rubbing his face down with water he sighed in relief as the station's atmosphere was a bit too warm, enjoying the soothing and cool sensation.

When he looked up and saw his reflection in the mirror, his light smirk disappeared as he finally confronted himself since his imprisonment. Through his eyes, he had aged a bit; his light, peachy face appearing distant and cold. His grayish-blue eyes appeared empty and bland of emotion, wondering if part of his soul was swallowed up from the events that led him here.

He didn't get another second to think about it before he heard the unlocking mechanics of the hall door shifting in the distance, quickly followed by a pair of footsteps. Rex curiously raised a brow, not expecting anyone to see him for another dozen or two rotations. He turned a bit slowly, looking to see who awaited him on the other side of the bars.

A tall, older Jornican man decorated with security attire now stood before Rex; his piercing, slit dark green eyes looking somewhat fiercely to Rex as he watched him.

His grey, scaled and hairless face seemed to lack any visible enjoyment, something Rex was all too familiar with in his time being here. Yet, Rex couldn't help but lightly smirk a bit charmingly as he spoke.

"Chief Gaersun, I'm a bit surprised you're here again. You gave me my rations not long ago, so I can't help but wonder if there's something to look forward to with your return."

Chief Gaersun scoffed and shook his head to this. His deep, boisterous voice started calm at first, but eventually picked up into a stern tone. His tall, yet slim body lingering over Rex as he looked down scornfully while speaking.

"I know that smirk, Rex. I'm not here to let you out of this cell. This isn't just another landing incident, and you damn sure ain't getting any bunk mates you can buddy up with to buy your way out of here again. Not with what you've done this time."

Rex was taken aback by this, as conversations with Gaersun were not nearly as talkative as this one. Gaersun was a being of few words, almost all of them dedicated to security policy on this particular station. The sharp incline to yelling was nothing new to Rex, as Jornicans were well-known for being naturally intimidating in social encounters. From his tone, it almost sounded like Gaersun were scolding one of his young as opposed to a prisoner in a cell.

"You're not alone, Gaersun. I don't think you'd stop to visit if you were just bringing someone else in here for detainment," Rex quipped, looking around Gaersun to

see where this unknown visitor was. For a moment there was only silence until a small set of footsteps was heard approaching from behind Gaersun. Rex expected no guests, and certainly no trustworthy friends that were in this system, curiously turning around to see who was here.

An old, hooded Dant male stepped forward. His short but stout body was covered by a set of light brown robes covering his eyes with the hood, only parts of his sloth-like face were visible to Rex. His demeanor appeared peaceful and inviting, smiling a bit and bowing his head to Rex as he began to speak with a soft and comforting voice.

"Rex Starless, it is an honor to make your acquaintance. Among my people here in the Dant system, I am a Listener. I would like to hear your tales if you wish to share them."

The Sphere, a cluster of star systems swirling around a large black hole known as the Void, was filled with many races of vast shapes, sizes, and cultures. The monk-like, native species of the Dant system felt all beings of the Sphere served a purpose. Specific Dants who personified great dedication and skill in their lives were granted honorable Titles, viewed as idols of extreme importance in their society, even replacing their birth-given name entirely.

A Listener was often responsible for seeking out the greatest tales and knowledge of all people, sharing with the Sphere to bring hope and prosperity to all beings. Great tales and life-changing technological information was passed down through Dant Listeners, dating back to the early contact ages of the Sphere. Sadly, with

the system's current diminishing economic state, their small population and culture have dwindled; rarely seen or understood by other races.

Rex, however, was quite knowledgeable of all of this, surprised a being of such importance stood before him.

"What is a Listener doing here on this part of the station? Your skills are surely more suited alongside scientists, poets, or even those who are near their end. Why bother with someone like me?" Rex couldn't help but look down a bit, thinking back to his own reflection in the mirror moments before. "Why me, a simple fool and prisoner?"

The Listener's smile simply grew and he slowly nodded his head before responding, "I have heard many stories from these cells, as it provides some relief to hopeless beings that believe they will never be heard again. Although a journey may come to an end, there is still time to marvel at one's legacy."

Chief Gaersun cleared his throat before speaking up, "the Listener sits well with the Overseer of this station, Rex. If you have any chance of getting out of this cell before you're pruned up, you'd better talk good and long. Good behavior sits well with the Dants, as I'm sure you're well aware."

The Listener couldn't help but lightly chuckle to this, softly putting his hand on Gaersun's long forearm and politely nodding his head as he spoke to him.

"Do not worry, my friend, I believe he is willing to speak. Not just for the freedom from this cell, but because there are things that need to be said as well."

Gaersun simply nodded his head, giving a fierce gaze to Rex for a moment before turning towards the exit, yelling out a bit as the hall door was unlocking for him.

“You’d better be talking when I come back with your rations, Rex, if you know what’s good for you.”

After the door closed and locked, there was a brief pause as Rex made his way towards his cot and laid down upon it, looking up to the hard metal frame of the bunk above him, finally speaking up once he was comfortable.

“I have to say, it’s a bit disarming getting to speak freely. Even more so since an actual Listener is my audience. Usually when someone wants me to speak, it’s because I’m being questioned. If you don’t mind, perhaps that would be the best way for me to determine what to tell you?”

The Listener smiled a bit and nodded his head, carefully seating himself on a chair Gaersun had set aside before he left. “You are familiar with the Dant and our customs; that is surprisingly rare, despite how many different beings pass through our system and its station. How did you become familiar with our culture?”

Rex smiled a bit before he spoke, “my adopted caretaker was a Watcher among the Dant. He cared for many different wayward children aboard his freighter, teaching us the history of the Sphere and informing us on all the systems we would visit. He certainly wasn’t a traditional Watcher, however. Despite being aboard a large freighter and delivering legitimate trades, he also helped provide for us by stealing from others.”

The Listener couldn't help but lean forward a bit in surprise, his head slightly tilted in confusion. Rex couldn't help but chuckle a bit seeing this, adjusting himself to sit up on the cot and look to the Listener as he continued.

"Hard to believe there's a thief among Dants, isn't it? 'We take only from those who have plenty, and we give to those who cannot live without,' he would say. Those are words I grew up with, and words I still believe to this day."

The Listener took a moment, but simply nodded his head before speaking back, "A Dant thief is indeed a bit surprising to hear about. However, the charity towards others despite questionable actions comes as no surprise. My people certainly have come a long way from our humble beginnings."

The Listener couldn't help but laugh a little after saying this, causing Rex to smile as he continued.

"We would appear stranded in a system that was rich in supplies, sending out a distress signal that drew in local traders. While the Commanders of these trade ships were busy helping the Watcher with his 'damaged' propulsion systems, we would go aboard and replace some of their full cargo blocks with empty ones. We even went as far as replicating the directory tags of the empty blocks to make it look like an error from the supplier. Once we had it in our possession, the Watcher would take us to one of the less maintained systems and sell our stolen goods for almost a quarter of their worth, profiting only enough to provide us until our next catch."

The Listener nodded his head a bit, smiling to everything that was said. Rather than continue discussing this like Rex expected, the Listener asked another question.

“You are obviously free from his care now, and your voice suggests you are matured and experienced. Did you still follow this Watcher’s teachings?”

Rex shook his head to this, his demeanor a bit more reserved now as he slightly looked away when he spoke.

“In different ways, I suppose. Before all of this, I worked alongside a group of mercenaries who sold illegal goods under the guise of an art auction. The pieces that were sold concealed harmless intoxicants that were discreetly desired by the aristocrats of the system. Our prices were higher than average, and everything we felt was more than enough we gave away to needy souls we encountered in our travels.”

The Listener lightly hummed a bit happily and nodded, his head tilting downwards a bit before speaking again.

“You are a good soul, Rex Starless. Although your methods could sound questionable, your instincts reflect a Dant’s generosity for those that are often forgotten in the Sphere. It is certainly a surprise to hear, considering you...”

The Listener stopped abruptly, and Rex couldn’t help but look a bit surprised as he could assume where the conversation was heading. Rex broke the silence after a moment, unable to look at the Listener now as he spoke.

“None of the Watcher’s teachings reflect in what I’ve done. I, alone, am

responsible for all the actions and decisions that condemn me here.”

Rex sighed a bit as he lay back down, his eyes staring off into the bunk above him. He took a moment before he spoke again, the Listener simply sitting and waiting quietly on his chair.

“You want to hear why I did it? You want to know why I killed Wylex Ezetrell out in the rings of Dant IV?”

The ambient vibe of the station’s rotation filled the silent air once again as the Listener took a moment to respond.

“Despite the prestigious title I’ve been given, most Listeners find it best not to direct a conversation towards anything more than what the individual wishes to share. Anything you wish to tell me is by your choice alone. I am only here to listen.”

Rex closed his eyes a bit, finally taking in the reality of his circumstance. His life before felt like nothing more than memories now, as the act he committed changed everything for him. The Sphere would continue many cycles forward, and yet, he would stay confined to this cell. It was a bit overwhelming, yet there was a hint of relief he felt confessing it aloud to the Listener, feeling no judgement from his presence. It took a moment, but as Rex opened his eyes once again, he looked back over to the Listener and continued.

“Wylex Ezetrell may have a clean record on data, but his soul was as black as the Void our systems swirl around. It was not my intention to kill him at first, but with

everything that transpired out there in the rings, I did what I thought was necessary.”

The Listener sat very quietly as he heard all of this, uncertain if it was appropriate to speak again. Rex slowly shifted himself to sit on the edge of his cot, looking to the opposing wall of the cell as he spoke again.

“What he did was never discovered within the Sphere, because it never happened there. It took place in a patch of space unknown to nearly everyone, just barely out of the grip of the Void. There, Wylex killed my parents mercilessly, even leaving me to expire in the cold, lifeless space I was stranded in.”

Rex couldn't help but let out another sigh, disturbed by the memories of his past replaying in his head. After a moment, the Listener spoke up once again.

“That is... quite an extraordinary confession to announce. And yet, it does not sound as though you are crafting this tale as a fabrication. You are sincere in your words and in the pain you feel by remembering.”

Rex nodded his head and couldn't help but lightly smile, happy to hear that the Listener was able to determine this. What the Listener told Gaersun before was right; it wasn't a desire to free himself that let him share this confession, only that someone else know he wasn't just a heartless killer.

“I know this cannot be used to grant my freedom, as I have no evidence from so many cycles ago. If my confinement to this cell is as long as I'm anticipating, it is relieving to know someone can hear the truth of my crime.”

The Listener could only give a large smile, quite happy to hear this. Before he could speak again, the locks in the distance were heard opening as Chief Gaersun made his way over to the cell, looking to them while holding Rex's next rations. The Listener lightly stood up from his chair, nodding his head a bit as he balanced upon Gaersun's arm to stand up.

"I believe there's much more willing to be shared, Gaersun. We have had a very intriguing conversation so far. I must give him time to reminisce so that his story can be told with clarity, as such a journey should not be told in haste." The Listener then turned to Rex, "many great legacies have been shared and observed within the halls of the Dant Temples. From everything you've shared, I believe your journey could be told within them as well."

Rex blinked a bit, surprised at this response, but also quite humbled at how the Listener felt. The magnitude of this task quickly dawned on him when he realized he had only a night to consider what tales to tell, what legacy he could share worthy of the Dant Temple walls. The Listener smiled pleasantly back to Rex for a moment, bowing graciously before giving his farewell.

"I look forward to seeing you soon, Rex. And I am certain I will enjoy hearing your journey on my next visit."