

Chapter 18

Act Swiftly Or Die

Titan stood beside one of the panoramic windows in the throne room of his undersea palace, gazing out into the deeps of the Pacific Ocean. He felt consumed with a cold rage. He now had proof that the Terrainean World Government were planning to start a war against all of the undersea races so they could invade and colonize the ocean floors.

Many underwater leaders had rallied to his call for an alliance against the surface world but even their combined forces would not be strong enough to repel the aggressors. It was all far too late for that now.

He should have seen this coming from the day the accursed World Aquanaut Security Patrol had first discovered the existence of his people.

If he had acted more swiftly and built strong undersea alliances he could have developed more powerful weapons that would have deterred the Terraineans from ever planning to live in his domain

Was it his fault that mighty Teufel had turned his face away from him?

He would find some way to make the Terraineans pay dearly for this. Their eventual victory would not be an easy one

Titan walked over to the Shrine of Teufel that was located next to his raised coral throne. He knelt down in front of its centre-piece; the circular viewport into the Fish God's Sacred Aquarium which was currently devoid of life.

"Oh Mighty Teufel. Why have you forsaken me and my people in our time of greatest need?" called the ruler of Titanica almost pitifully as he peered into the empty viewport.

It had been four days since Teufel had last shown itself to Titan even though the ruler of Titanica had called for his advice every day.

Fifteen marine minutes passed and Titan was about to stand up and walk back to his throne when the Great Sea God suddenly appeared filling the viewport with its great green bulk.

"Instruct me Mighty Teufel. How can I stop the accursed Terrainean forces from invading my...our oceans?"

Teufel's large eyes held the undersea monarch in a baleful glare. Titan felt his senses failing but he was locked in his kneeling position by that dreadful stare. Suddenly a beam of intense white light sprang from the Fish God's mouth and enveloped Titan.

Slowly Titan's senses returned to him and he rose to his feet.

Teufel was gone from the viewport.

How long had he been in communion with the Fish God?

It could have only been marine minutes but his mind was so full of unbelievably terrifying images and information that he almost blacked out again.

Titan only just managed to reach his throne and sit down before his legs lost their power to support him. His whole body shook with terror.

If the thoughts that Teufel had implanted in his mind were true then a war with the surface world was the least of his worries.

He would have to contact Marineville and ask for the Terraineans help.

What else could he do?

"We have a radio call sir, it's coming from Titanica sir." Reported Lieutenant Aston

"Titanica? We have no subs in that area yet..." said Jordan

"Sir, the man claims to be Titan, he's the... the..."

"I may be a Navy man but I know who Titan is Lieutenant. What does he want? Let me guess, surrender or he attacks Australia."

"He didn't say sir, he demands to speak with you sir."

"Oh, he does, does he? In that case Lieutenant, tell Titan I'll speak to him when I have the time."

"Sir? I... That is..."

"Never mind, I'll be right over."

"This is Captain Jordan, Commander of the WASP. To whom do I have the pleasure of speaking?"

"This gives me no pleasure Terraineen. I am Titan, ruler of the mighty city of Titanica. You will heed my words or suffer consequences..."

Jordan knew when he was being menaced. "Your attack will fail. We are intercepting your mechanical fish, and then I will personally see to it that you will definitely suffer consequences."

"Your pitiful attempt at implicating the undersea peoples in a false attack has failed. My surface agent has destroyed your missile base. Your death and the death of all Terraineans comes not from Titanica, but from the stars. The sun will become as ice and the whole world will perish."

"What kind of threat is that?"

"I make no threat! I have seen this. Many craft from a distant star. The end is coming."

"Which star? What craft?"

"The star where your submarine vessel, Stingray, is located. As for the craft, you have already seen one, but these are large, much larger. This audience is at an end. Act swiftly Terrainean or die... We will all die."

"He's closed the channel sir." said Aston

"Yes, I noticed. I noticed something else too." said Jordan

"Sir?"

"He sounded frightened."

Captain Tempest opened his eyes abruptly and found that he was staring up into a clear turquoise sky. A woman's voice was calling his name; at least he thought it might be his name.

"Captain Tempest? Are you all right?"

Troy struggled to focus his eyes and his mind. A blonde haired girl seemed to be standing a few feet away. She appeared to be wearing shapeless light grey overalls; and a very worried expression.

Troy sat up slowly and found that he was on a beach. The sand felt warm against his bare feet, and he could hear the sounds of the sea. He seemed to be wearing the same kind of overalls as the girl. The colours around him seemed strange, as if everything had a slight greenish hue. He rubbed his eyes, trying hard to remember something. Then his memory suddenly came flooding back to him. He remembered being betrayed.

He got unsteadily to his feet, ignoring the hand that Doctor Venus was holding out to him.

"Where is Marina?" he demanded.

A hand gently touched Troy's shoulder causing him to swing around sharply.

"Marina!" he exclaimed.

“Skipper!” Phones called as he ran across the beach to join them.

“Say, are you okay? We were real worried.”

Troy glared angrily, “Worried? What’s this all about? Why did you knock me out?”

“Simmer down Troy... You must have had a bad dream.”

Troy was bracing himself for a fight, “You fired a gas gun at me Phones — and just before I went under I saw Venus slug Marina with a gun.”

Marina nodded. She took Troy’s arm, plainly frightened and confused.

Doctor Venus spoke matter of factly, “You were hallucinating Captain. I would do no such thing. I’m afraid you passed out during our tests.”

She advanced on Marina, but the girl backed away. “I won’t hurt you. I’m a doctor,” Venus said with concern in her voice.

“Back off ‘Doctor’,” Troy said coldly, “I don’t know what goes on here; but right now I don’t trust you or Phones.”

“That’s crazy talk Troy,” Phones said worriedly. “We’re all on the same side.”

Troy stood his ground, his hands balled into fists, “I want some answers. Where are we? Why are we all dressed like this?”

Suddenly Troy felt a slight dizziness, causing him to clutch at his head in confusion. The strange feeling passed and Troy looked embarrassed, “Gee Phones... Doctor Venus... I’m really sorry. Don’t know what came over me.”

“That’s okay Skipper,” Phones smiled, patting Troy on the shoulder.

“Please don’t worry Captain,” Venus said sweetly. “Now, we must get on with our work — if you are quite well now.”

“Yeah... I feel fine now,” Troy grinned. “Let’s get back to work folks.”

Marina was alarmed by the sudden turn of events and began tugging at Troy's sleeve. He gently pushed her hand away, "No time for that now Marina — duty calls. We can have some fun later."

"Say," Phones smiled, pointing towards the sea, "here comes Atlanta."

Marina was shocked to see an alien Aquaphibian emerging from the water. It lumbered slowly towards them, studying the small group malevolently.

"Hi Atlanta honey," Troy called. "We'll see you tonight after we're through with the experiments."

For a moment Marina hesitated, then she smiled and waved to the ugly fish-man. It turned and headed back to the sea.

"Nice how you girls get on so well," Phones grinned amiably as they began walking along the beach together.

Captain Jordan called General Zero on a scrambled telephone link and told his story.

"Has your submarine engaged the enemy yet?"

"Not to my knowledge General. Swordfish was ordered to maintain radio silence. The element of surprise is all that Swordfish has against maybe a dozen mechanical fish. The Navy is still more than an hour away..."

"So what of Titan's story that one of his agents destroyed a missile base?"

"Unable to verify yet General, I called you immediately."

"Ross to Space City... This is Fireball XL7 calling Space City..."

"Where in space have you been Lieutenant?" responded Zero

"I was hijacked sir. But listen Commander, er General, I've just destroyed a missile site under the ocean."

"You did what?"

"The missiles were being launched at Australia sir!"

"Get XL7 back here right now Ross! You have a lot of explaining to do!"

A short while later XL7 Junior, along with a fighter escort, arrived at Space City.

Ross was more than a little surprised when he was taken into custody by security guards as soon as he left his ship.

After a lot of explanations and cross questioning Ross was ordered to prepare Fireball XL7 for launch.

Zero informed General Rossiter about Beatty, using a scrambled video link to World Security HQ, Unity City.

"So Wilbur, it was a staged attack as we suspected. I'll have to inform Admiral Bristol and General McCormack. Looks like the chickens are coming home to roost..."

Zero frowned, "I'm guessing one particular chicken is going to be heading out of the Solar System."

"My advice is let him. You don't have the resources to track him down and deal with an attack on our entire system."

Zero nodded, "Yeah, I guess it would be a job for the World Intelligence Network, but they are up to their necks in this whole business."

"Leave Beatty to me Wilbur," Rossiter said, "You have more important things to do."

Marina watched in astonishment as Troy, Phones and Doctor Venus continued to act as if everything was normal; as if they were back at Marineville, and not on some strange alien world.

"Say Troy, let's take the girls to the Blue Lagoon tonight."

Troy smiled, "Great idea Phones. Doctor Venus, would you like to join us?"

Marina edged away as the conversation continued. She had to do something — but what? She looked at the various pieces of equipment laid out around them. Some looked familiar, she'd seen them at the hospital. Other items looked alien and had a fluid, melted appearance. The landscape looked equally alien somehow.

Several hideous looking Aquaphibians walked by, but only glanced briefly in her direction. They were heading towards the sea.

Marina's instincts told her to head for the sea too.

Admiral Beatty, now dressed as a civilian, boarded the Universal Spaceways express ship SS Ventura, bound for Mars.

He found his window seat and sat down, his briefcase clutched firmly in his hands.

As the cabin began to fill up another passenger sat down beside the Admiral,

"You'll find there's a locker under the seat." said the dark haired, middle aged man beside him.

"Oh, thank you."

"Once we take off they like everything stowed in case there's a glitch in the artificial gravity."

"Is there likely to be?"

"Oh, I didn't mean to worry you. No, never known anything like that to happen. It's just one of those safety things. Like the oxygen pill dispenser that'll open up in the seat back if we lose air. Or there's the..."

"Yes, yes. I get it." Very reluctantly, Beatty stowed his case in the seat locker.

"This your first time away from Earth?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I just wondered if you'd decided to try something new."

"Do I know you?" Beatty asked a little testily.

The man smiled agreeably, "I don't think so... Unless you happen to be in the toy business."

"I'm afraid I don't follow you."

"That's kind of my line of work."

"It is?"

"Yes," the man tapped his own chrome coloured metallic briefcase, "I'm a toy salesman."

Beatty stared out of the window, "Fascinating I'm sure."

"Well," the man said as he reached down to put his own case in the locker, "I get to travel a lot. Usually I take the overnight ferry to Mars, but once in a while I like to fly on the express, get to Mars in only four hours."

The World President looked up to see his PA enter the office.

"Mr President, we have been unable to contact Admiral Beatty." said Alvarez.

"Where in blazes is he?"

"Mr President, we have reason to believe he has left Earth."

"Without my authorisation? Do you have reason to believe why?"

"Mr President, please understand this is only conjectural. I have no substantive evidence to support our suppositional..."

"Stop blathering Alvarez! I want a straight answer. What in space is going on?"

"I fear The Great Plan has failed. He has fled, Mr President."

"Failed? What do you mean failed? I am on the verge of total global domination!"

"The attempt to liquidate Shore's daughter failed. Two agents dead, one captured. Captain Jordan was a witness. General Zero is backing them..."

"Why haven't you dealt with them?"

"We understood that Admiral Beatty was going to brief you..."

"I see. Can't we just eliminate the agent? An accident or something?"

"An attempt to obviate the threat was made when the, er, plot, was discovered, Mr President. It failed. They are in Unity City. We believe there have already been private discussions with the Vice President."

"Traitors spreading their lies! This sounds like an attempted coup. Alvarez, convene an emergency meeting of my advisors. I have to move swiftly — and decisively!"

In the alien waters of a far off world, Marina was following the small group of Aquaphibians. She had been swimming for over an hour now and was convinced that she was no longer on Earth. She had found the salt water of this sea was strangely invigorating. It seemed to the girl that this ocean was far cleaner than the oceans of Earth, far richer in oxygen. Gradually

though she was noticing a change, there was a familiar oily metallic tang to the water.

Marina continued to pursue her quarry down towards the seabed. Her keen eyes began to make out dim shapes below her, many large structures, like a vast unlit underwater city stretching out into the distance.

As she drew closer she saw that the structures were submarines, similar to the one which had engulfed her terror fish, but much larger. She realized they must also be space ships if she was now on another world.

For a moment Marina thought she'd spotted a familiar shape, but movements up ahead brought her attention back to the Aquaphibians she was trailing. They were splitting up; four moving towards the submarines and one setting off alone.

