

Telling the World

There is also another threat you should know about. 580 light years from Earth, in the Beehive Cluster, there is another star empire. And this one is made up of Humans - Humans who were abducted from ancient Troy in 1184 B. C. It's a long story; but they are also going to be a problem.

- Pandora's Message.

Two Days after Pandora

New York City - U. N. Headquarters

Jake Hammett glanced at the two women standing beside him. Both of them gave him a glare, as if to say, *get on with it!*

So he did. He stepped out onto the stage and walked to the podium. Turning, he placed his hands on it. He stared at the audience.

The rustle and bustle of the hundreds in attendance filled the air with sound. Jake looked at the hall of the U. N. General Assembly stretched out before him. There were no empty seats. In fact, it was standing room only - people standing on the sides of the hall, in the corners, in the back - as many as could cram into the room, and dozens more peeking through the doors in the back.

How the hell did I end up here? What the hell am I doing?

He felt, as much as heard, Teresa and Kirsten come up beside him, one on each side. He was the designated spokesperson; *Pandora* had made that clear to them. He was the leader.

But he didn't know why.

Clearing his throat, he hesitated. He realized that the President of the United States, Margaret Bolt, sat right in front of him. The leaders of every major country on Earth had flown to Washington for this meeting. The Chinese, the Russians, the leaders of Europe, Africa, Asia and Australia were all sitting right in front of him. Waiting.

Beside him, he heard Teresa speak in a low voice.

“You gonna take all day, squid?”

Turning to her, he glared. “You want to do this, zoomie?”

Teresa winked at him. It pissed Jake off, but on the other hand, it broke the spell that had frozen him.

He realized that was her intent.

She is one smart cookie.

Jake turned back to the audience and cleared his throat again. Public speaking was not his forte. But as Teresa said, he had to get it done. Taking a breath, he started speaking.

“My name is Jake Hammett,” he began. “Beside me I have Lieutenant Colonel Teresa Tolleson and Dr. Kirsten Monk. By now, most of you probably know what happened to us two days ago...”

A snicker passed across the crowd. There was probably not a Human on Earth who didn't know what had happened to these people two days ago. A starship had landed on the lawn of the White House and demanded their presence. And they had been located, and shanghaied, and flown to Washington, and sent into the ship. And now they were reporting to the world.

“We've already sent out a press release that explained the basic facts of our encounter with *Pandora*. As that press release described, *Pandora* is a sentient starship of great intelligence, an intelligence that she claims is roughly equivalent to a thousand Humans.

“As we explained in our press release, *Pandora* came here from the inner part of the Milky Way – the Core. We've learned that the Core is called Machine Space, and it's reserved for artificial intelligence creatures only. The outer part of the galaxy, where we live, is called the Rim. The Rim is reserved for biological beings, such as ourselves.

“Under normal circumstances, Machine Space creatures don’t interfere in the Rim. But the Ruling Council of Machine Space has made an exception for Earth. They’ve sent *Pandora* to warn us of two great dangers.

“One - the least of the two dangers, but still a danger - is the Aeolian Empire. That is a star empire in the Beehive Cluster, about 580 light years from Earth. It is, unbelievably, made up of Humans - people who were abducted from Greece and Troy in 1184 B. C. These people were taken there and abandoned; somehow they survived, and somehow they’ve created a star empire with technology far in advance of our own. The danger we face from them was described in the press release. But I’ll summarize it as follows: if they find us before we are ready for them, they will almost certainly subjugate us and make us a slave colony to their Empire. That’s the way they roll. So that is our first threat.

“Our second threat, and the greater threat, is a bit farther away - 805 light years from Earth, behind the Pipe Nebula. *Pandora* said those aliens would look to us like tall, walking bats - so she calls it the Bat Empire. And they represent a much more serious threat to our existence. The Bats don’t take slaves. They don’t take prisoners. They just kill you and take your planet.

“So - that’s the warning *Pandora* has brought us. She says we’ve got about a 10% chance of surviving the Bats. Not the kind of news we want to hear. But there is some hope. *Pandora* is willing to provide us with a technology boost to give us a rough level of parity with the Bats and the Aeolians. She says it will take us about one hundred years to get there. If we can survive undetected for that long - and if we do everything right - we’ve got a chance.

“Now for the crazy part. Crazy to me, and I’m sure crazy to you as well. *Pandora* has stated that this technology will be given to the three of us here on this stage. She has designated us as the caretakers of this great effort to bring Humanity to the stars. Why? We don’t know - she won’t tell us. She just says we are the right ones to make it work. When we questioned her about it, she said she’s performed millions of

simulations, and we three are the ones. And that's all she'll say about it.

"How we are supposed to do this, we don't know. But somehow we have to figure it out. Come up with a plan. Of course, we need your help, and the help of every Human on Earth, to make this work. We need to get manufacturing up and running to build starships from the designs *Pandora* will give us. We need to form a Space Navy. We need colonization of planets to provide us with the resources and population to fend off the Bat Empire and the Aeolians. All of these things have to come to fruition within one hundred years. So the challenge is immense.

"With that said, we're here to answer what questions we can. Please know that we've put just about everything we know into the press release sent out yesterday. So there's not a whole lot more we can tell you. But anything that is not in the press release is fair game. If you'll look around, you'll see several people with microphones. Please get their attention and they'll bring a mike to you so you can ask your question."

Dozens of hands went up instantly. Jake waited patiently as the first question came, from China.

"Why did *Pandora* land in the U. S.? Why are only white people meeting with her? Have you had prior contact with *Pandora* before her landing? Is this some kind of setup?"

Jake shook his head. "Sir, to my knowledge there was no contact with *Pandora* before her landing. I'm certainly not aware of any. And as for why she chose the three of us to bring into her confidence, I cannot tell you, because she will not tell us. Her only statements so far have been that based on her computations, we are the ones who must do this. I can't tell you more than that, because that's all I know."

Another person tried to get a question in, but the Chinese representative interrupted before they could continue. "So you are locking out Asians? No Asians will be allowed to have this technology?"

Jake shook his head again. "Sir, that is not true. We are not locking out anyone. Please understand - this is only the third day of us trying to come to grips with this situation.

We're sailing in undefined waters here. But I assure you, there will be no discrimination against anyone. To the extent that the technology is released for civilian use, there will be no discrimination."

Jake felt Kirsten poke him hard in the back. Jake realized he had said too much. And he was right, for immediately the next questioner jumped on his statement.

"Are you saying that you will *not* release *Pandora's* technology for civilian use? Are you setting up some kind of monopoly?"

With a sigh, Jake realized he now had to address something they had hoped to avoid.

"The threat facing Humanity is huge. The nature of the project that is in front of us is unprecedented. This will be a one-hundred year project to bring Humanity to a point where we can defend ourselves against the Bats and the Aeolians. The implications of that are staggering. The three of us - Teresa, Kirsten and myself - have stayed up nearly all night for the last two nights, trying to work out the guts of a plan to accomplish that. We came to certain critical decisions. I know some of these decisions will not be popular, but we intend to stick by them. I had hoped not to bring this forward in this kind of public forum, but I see that I can't avoid it - so here we go.

"One - we will first use the technology *Pandora* provides to build a space navy. That space navy will be called the Rim Defense Force - the RDF. Since we cannot know when we might be discovered by the Bats or the Aeolians, that will be our first priority. Nothing can take precedence over that.

"Now - *Pandora* is willing to give us designs for two kinds of spaceship propulsion systems. One kind is called a system drive, or an sDrive. Those are the drives that work inside the solar system. With those drives, you can get to Mars in a few hours. You can get to the outer solar system in a day or so. So those plans will become available to everyone, as soon as we can get them out the door. There will be no restrictions on those designs.

“The second type of drive is the tDrive - the drive that can go interstellar, and take us to the stars. Now, everyone, please think about this...the last thing we need is for some crackpot to jump in a ship with a tDrive and go shooting off to the Bat Empire, trying to strike some kind of a deal with them. That would bring them right to our doorstep, long before we are ready to face them. And that would be the end of Humanity.

“So - the design for the tDrives will not be released until two things have been accomplished. The first is to find some way to prevent civilian tDrives from traveling to the Bat Empire or to Aeolis. *Pandora* says we can develop an AI controller that can be built into the drive to prevent that from happening.

“The second condition is that we have a viable Space Navy of at least fifty ships to patrol the space lanes and maintain peace. We can't have a free-for-all out there with no law and order. When those two conditions are met - an AI-controlled tDrive for civilian use that cannot travel to the Bat Empire or the Aeolian Empire, and at least fifty ships in the RDF Space Navy - then we'll release the tDrive for civilian use.

“Next question, please.”

As hands shot up all across the auditorium, one person took matters into her own hands. The President of the United States, Margaret Bolt, rose to her feet. Jake waved the crowd to silence, then nodded graciously to her.

“Madame President,” he said, recognizing her.

“Mr. Hammett, this morning at 4 AM, this so-called sentient spaceship - *Pandora*, I guess you call it - took off from the White House and shot off into space. Our tracking systems show that it landed nearby the airport in Geneva, Switzerland. Just what the hell is going on?”

Jake nodded graciously at Bolt. He well knew her reputation - she was a dangerous, volatile President. There were persistent rumors that anyone who crossed her simply disappeared. Very persistent rumors.

“Yes, Madame President, *Pandora* has relocated to Geneva. We've selected Geneva as the RDF Headquarters to ensure

Humanity's Space Navy remains neutral of all Earth governments."

A strange look came over President Bolt's face. Jake felt a shudder go down his back. He had never seen such unadulterated hatred on the face of another Human before.

I think we're in trouble here, thought Jake.