



SERIEL: Guardians Of The Stars part 3: An Unlikely Confident by Noah Lister-Stevens

Statistics:

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The bridge of the Valorous was silent after the computer spoke those words. Axel stared at the screen with eyes as large as golf balls. Richard's face was so full of rage his skin had turned a light purple in color. Those few seconds were the shortest eternity the resistance had experienced in a long time.

"WHAT?!" Axel roared in disbelief, blinking to see if he'd heard wrong.

"Blast it out of the sky!" Richard said loudly, his hands shaking in anger at the memories of the kredor.

"Captain, if I may, something's wrong here" the man said, squinting at the screen as if he was double-checking something.

"What??" Richard asked, still shaking with fury.

"The kredor hasn't attacked yet. Most could attack us long before we picked them up on our sensors" the man said, turning around with a quizzical look on his face.

Axel frowned, walking down to the man and staring at the screen hardly. "He's right. But this makes no sense! The kredor are berserkers! They'll attack anything without the command of a hive mind"

"Who cares?! Blow that thing to pieces! That's an order!" Richard roared in hatred.

"Wait!" Axel yelled, holding up his hand. "Let's see what this thing is up to. Put it up on the main screen. If it tries ANYTHING, shoot it down"

"Yes Commander" The man said, not without reluctance. Clearly he remembered the last invasion of the swarm as well as everyone else.

The Valorous's rear flank appeared on the screen, nothing showed up at first, but after a minute or so, a small shape appeared flying along the ship's length slowly.

“Commander, this is NOT a good idea letting a monster like this get too close to us!” Richard said, his eyes so full of fury it actually frightened Axel.

Richard had been especially affected by the invasion of the swarm. His family had been slaughtered when the kredor had attacked and nearly destroyed a colony in the Carbon system. He was born on that colony no less, leaving him with nothing left except the rebel group.

“I’m willing to see what it’s up to” Axel said, looking at the screen.

“I didn’t think you were capable of this, old friend” Richard spat.

Richard stormed off the bridge in anger, the doors shutting behind him. Axel frowned. He couldn’t really blame him, but Richard should know when to trust his commander’s judgment.

“Commander, the kredor is approaching hangar 4C, arming neutron blasters now.” Said the man sitting at the command station.

“I want two dozen marines with fully loaded weapons at the ready in that hangar! Target it with all our weapons, don’t let it get any attacks off. I’ll meet this thing personally” Axel said, walking off the bridge.

The commander walked down the hallway, the elevator already waiting for him. Pressing the button, the laser-encoded metal plate read his thumbprint and sent data back to the main database. Approving the print, the elevator moved, shooting down to the fourth level of the starship.

Axel practically ran through the hallways to the hangar, his hand straying to his belt and touching his personalized pistol. It was a special model, a Neutron-Magnum 001. It could fire off all of its 12 rounds inside in a second. Those bullets were special too, MK-XIII Penetrator Rounds, made with additional aerodynamic capabilities that allowed it to punch straight through three feet of Hypersteel.

Axel stormed through the doors into the hangar. Unsurprisingly, the crew on the bridge had ordered all the starships out of the hangar, leaving the floor barren. At the rear of the chamber a blue aura that was the air shield kept the oxygen from leaving the ship and allowing the vacuum of space to enter. Ships could pass out of the shield at will, but unless they were authorized, no ship could re-enter.

However, if the shield were to shut down, seven meter thick blast doors would shut off the hangar and would remain closed until the shield was operational. Biological creatures were an exception. Anything that was not metal could pass through the shield unharmed. It wasn’t a huge problem since neither humans nor kredor could survive in the vacuum of space for long. Although the kredor did have an advanced respiratory

structure that allowed them to hold their breath for hours and breath in deadly conditions to humans, they couldn't last terribly long since space sucked the air from their lungs.

Behind Axel, the marines he ordered charged into the hangar, carrying huge rifles the length of a small child. All the marines nowadays wore battle suits, armor that was designed to stop bullets and provide maximum protection. Granted, it was pretty heavy and slowed its driver down, but it allowed troops to fight in conditions that would be impossible, like airless planets due to the suit's supply of oxygen.

The suits were constructed of Hypersteel, an alloy created by the smelting of normal, earthen steel and a high-density form of carbon found almost everywhere else in the galaxy. The soldier inside was protected from most forms of gunshots, save for shots to the face, where only a visor that came down over their face protected them.

"Commander" one of them said, the symbols on his suit showing he was a lieutenant. "We're ready and waiting, just give us your signal to fire"

"Thank you lieutenant" Axel said, walking down the steps onto the hanger floor, the marines flanking him and moving alongside their commander.

For a solid minute, all was silent. Then, it appeared. The kredor flew on huge wings that were folded back, clearly it had gained a lot of momentum before entering space and was now drifting along peacefully. It drifted through the air shield and into the hangar, its huge wings unfolding and flapping once, sending it shooting through the air.

The marine behind Axel raised his rifle, pointing it at the creature anxiously. Axel felt like ordering him to lower it, but he wasn't sure what it wanted yet. The kredor landed on the steel floor with a resonating crash. For a moment all you could see was a bowed head, its body was nearly entirely covered by demonic wings. Then, slowly, it stood up.

It was huge, standing almost if not seven feet tall. It stood on powerful, huge legs ending in four-toed stomping feet with claws for toes. As Axel's eyes traveled up its body, he saw that this had once been a human, given the body structure. The arms were smaller than the legs, but were covered in muscles that Axel assumed weren't just for show. The hands were the same as the feet, and although five fingers remained, they were now thicker and ended in talons.

The kredor's infection had turned the infected human's natural white skin black as night, with the white veins thrusting up against the surface. All over the arms and legs, wicked white spines thrust out of the skin menacingly. The creature's face was something out of a nightmare. It was half human, with the same general shape and structure, but the kredor's infection had turned the skin into a nightmare, making it enlarged and furious.

Two, curled back horns crowned the monster's head, which had been sharpened to ensure maximum damage. But the most terrifying feature was the eyes. The pupils were

crimson, and glowed a terrifying red, that made even the most battle-hardened marine shiver.

The kredor looked at the marines and their commander in front of it, and bared its teeth, showing that the human's teeth had been replaced by sharpened teeth not unlike that of a shark. The tongue slid out of its mouth, showing that it was also sharpened like a snake tongue.

Axel stepped forward, his hand hovering over his gun. The kredor stayed where it was, looking at the commander with its red orbs. It spoke, in a deep voice that could cause children to shake in fear. "I seek Axel Doomson"

"That's me" Axel said, silently dumbfounded it knew English. "What is your purpose here?"

"I wish to speak to you, Axel Doomson, alone" the kredor said again, its facial expression unchanged.

Axel frowned. "And what reason do I have to trust you?" he asked, raising an eyebrow.

The kredor smiled, a sight that reminded Axel as the kind a predator would make just before making a kill. "You cannot. I could kill you now, but I do not because I wish to speak to you, and if you did not wish to hear me, you would have killed me already"

Axel's eyes widened ever so slightly. Not only was it fluent in English, it was shockingly intelligent. Axel had believed that kredor were like insects, unable to think independently. Considering the creature's request, Axel slowly nodded. "I will agree. But you will be escorted to a room where we will talk in private"

The kredor nodded its huge head slowly. "Very well Axel Doomson. But what I have to say, I believe will be of great importance to you"

Axel nodded again, turning to the lieutenant. "Take him to the interrogation center, don't waste time binding him. Keep your weapons on him, but don't shoot him unless he attacks"

The lieutenant nodded inside his suit and two other marines walked beside the kredor and on a silent command, it started to walk. Axel walked out of the hangar, and was confronted by Richard, who was so full of rage he was shaking. "Are you out of your goddamned mind?!" he hissed, barely preventing himself from yelling.

Axel's face was neutral. "I'm going to hear it out Richard. I want to hear what..."

"I didn't sign up for my commander negotiating with MONSTERS" Richard spat at his commander.

Now it was Axel's turn to snap. "You signed up to follow my orders! Now either start doing that or GET THE HELL OFF MY SHIP!" Axel roared in his second-in-command's face, attracting the attention of the rest of the hallway.

He stormed to the elevator and slammed the button, the elevator shooting up to the prison core, the Guardian's holding cell. As the elevator came to a screeching halt, Axel entered the long hallway whose walls were nearly entirely cell doors. Most were empty, but some housed traitors to the resistance, spies for the United Forces and prisoners of war. Further down the hall, closed doors with normal walls represented interrogation rooms.

As Axel walked down the hall, ignoring the cries of prisoners, the opposite elevator opened and the marines from the hangar walked out. The huge kredor stepped out beforehand, the marines pointing assault rifles at its back. Axel knew they weren't kidding. Kredor were tough, no doubt, but those rifles fired sixteen shots a second, so high powered they would punch through the toughest armor.

Axel threw the door wide and entered one of the rooms, sitting down. The room was bare, save for two chairs and a table. On the far wall, a tinted window allowed the interrogators to watch their prisoner without him seeing them back.

The kredor was pushed through the door, two marines taking up a defense behind their commander. Axel gestured to the seat, silently telling the creature to sit. The kredor sat on the steel chair, the metal groaning at its weight.

"So" Axel said, drumming his fingers on the table. "You wanted me, here I am"

"Tell your drones to leave. I will speak then." The kredor said in its menacing voice again.

Axel frowned, but then looked behind him and tipped his head, telling the men to leave. They did so without hesitation, walking into the back room to watch.

"Now, before I hear what you need to tell me, I want to know what you want from us first" Axel said with a neutral expression. "Do you have a name?"

"I am known as Ziircor, Axel Doomson" the kredor said, placing its muscled arms on the table, the white spines twitching restlessly.

"Very well Ziircor. What's your story?" Axel asked. "How did you get here?"

"Six of your years ago, I was a swarm commander of my race" Ziircor said while looking away, as if remembering that time. "When the gate into your world opened, I was a leader of our fighters. I spilled much human blood, and much of..." Ziircor struggled, as if unable to pronounce a word.

“Much of what?” Axel asked, narrowing his eyes.

“I do not know what you called them. Our master told us to destroy them as well.” Ziircor said.

“You mean the caladria?” Axel asked, remembering the green and white-skinned aliens from his past.

“Yes. After you and the caladria” Ziircor hissed, trying to pronounce the word correctly “destroyed our master, I fled. I hid in a far corner of your universe, away from your hunters. I do not know where I hid, but I learned your language from listening to your species talk”

“I see. And why are you here? Why not go back to your universe?” Axel asked, his interest in Ziircor growing.

“Simple. I cannot” Ziircor explained, the spines on his arms twitching. “And nor do I wish to”

“Why not?” Axel asked, drumming his fingers on the table again.

“I have seen the brutality of my race, and how easily corruptible they are” Ziircor hissed, his fist clenching so hard his hands shook. “We allowed a monster to control us like animals. Part of what you think of us is true. My race loves the feel of battle, we thrive on it”

“But what you do not see is that we try to make our own lives. We are not mindless, nor are we savages. We were comfortable thriving on our own...” Ziircor continued. As he spoke, the glow of his eyes intensified, and his face twisted into an enraged form. “And then, something... controlled us. We called it our master, and we could not ignore its call. It turned us into brutes, living on the feel of blood and the rush of combat. So much so that we could not survive without it”

“This master you speak of...” Axel said, leaning back. “I believe we call it the Doomsoother”

“Yes. I’ve heard your kind speak of it” Ziircor confirmed with a nod. “It commanded us to take over our universe, and then, when we had conquered everything in our reality, the master opened the gate into yours”

“I see. What happened to you after you went into hiding?” Axel asked

“One of my race created a gateway to communicate with me from our world. I was exiled for not returning to my world, and branded a traitor in the eyes of my race” Ziircor said, his eyes glow intensifying and the spines flexing again, reflecting his anger. “I am no longer welcome among my people, Axel Doomson”

“I understand” Axel said, nodding at his approval of the kredor’s story. “Alright Ziircor, what is it you want from us”

“If you would have me, I would appreciate refuge from those who would hunt me. Should you agree, I will provide you with information I have gathered from the time I was abandoned here” Ziircor proposed.

“And how do I know that you aren’t working for the United Forces? How do I know I can trust you, Ziircor?” Axel asked, more playing with the kredor than actually being literal.

“United... F-forces?” Ziircor asked, not understanding the word. “Ahh! You refer to the other humans, the ones in brown armor...”

“Yes, that’s who I speak of” Axel said, seeing that when Ziircor said brown armor, he referred to the color of the battle suits that the UFH wore. While the guardians wore black and white battle suits to distinguish them, the United forces wore brown suits.

“As long as your kind does not hunt me, I shall lend my assistance to you to defeat these humans you oppose” Ziircor said, bowing his head in respect. “But them... they have hunted me since the gate closed, I have no more love for them than you do Axel Doomson”

“And as for trusting me, I shall make you a deal” Ziircor proposed, his nails tapping the table and making small indents from the claws. “If you are willing to shelter me in this ship, I will share my knowledge of your enemies, and help you to defeat them.”

Axel leaned back again, thinking. Ziircor’s knowledge could be helpful, but what of his men? Would they be willing to fight alongside a kredor? To them, they were still violent, bloodthirsty animals. But the kredor interrupted his thoughts in his deep voice.

“And, I will tell you...” Ziircor started, then looking off in a corner. “I will tell you how to find, Liam Doomson”

Axel’s mind reeled in surprise. His surprise quickly turned into rage, and he stood up, drawing his weapon and pointing it at the kredor, cocking the gun with a swipe of his thumb. “If you want to talk about my cousin, be very, VERY careful about what you say next”

Ziircor hissed menacingly, and stood up himself, the spines on his arms standing straight up, reflecting his emotion. “I do not lie, Axel Doomson. Your cousin is alive, alive and hiding” Ziircor said, his claws flexing powerfully. “I will help you find him, if you are willing to let me stay aboard this ship”

“LIAR! He’s dead, he’s been dead for over six years!” Axel roared, pulling the trigger and firing a round into the wall beside Ziircor threateningly. As the bullet hit the wall, two

marines suddenly appeared beside the furious commander, raising their rifles at the kredor.

Ziircor snarled and a growl slid from his throat. "Believe what you will. Your cousin is not dead, he is very much alive. And I told him that should I ever find you, Axel Doomson, I would tell you this. So that you may seek him out"

Axel's face twisted with emotion, the pistol in his hand quivering. His mind was swimming from feelings from what Ziircor had just said. "Where... w-where did you see him last?" he tried to speak in a straight voice, dismissing the two marines.

"Just after the gate closed into my world. I found him when I attempted to flee the cold planet you call Ash're." The spines on his arms flexed again, as if having a will of their own. "He tried to kill me, but I managed to convince him I did not wish to fight. He spoke of how he survived the war against my kin, and then..."

"Then WHAT?!" Axel roared, his gun straightening in anger at him.

"He spoke of you" Ziircor said, his face actually looking a little sad at the thought. "He spoke of how you led the swarm who opposed that which would kill us all, I assume he meant these, U-united Forces of yours"

"I told him I would find you and tell you that he is alive, that he, even now, is hiding, and waiting for the day that evil plagues you once again" Ziircor said, his face hardening again.

Axel gasped, falling onto his chair and the pistol shaking, mimicking the movement of his hand. The very idea that his cousin had survived the starship crash made his eyes water with happiness.

When he was growing up, Axel's parents were killed in an attack by the caladria, who at that time, were foes. Liam had spent nearly all of his time with his younger cousin, becoming as close as any brother to the young Axel. They had been friends and brothers in arms, spending their lives together in Axel's old house.

When he had died, Axel had nearly lost his mind from the pain of losing the closest person to him in the universe. And now, the hope that he was alive made the resistance leader's eyes nearly overflow with tears of joy. "Where is he now?" Axel asked in a shaky voice.

Ziircor shook his huge head. "I cannot say. The last time I saw him was over six years ago, but he said he would guard the portal until the time came"

Axel took a deep breath, calming himself. There was a chance he could find his cousin again, and this supposed monster was the key. Axel looked at Ziircor with a look of wonder. He had always believed the kredor to be nothing more than blood-hungry

animals, bent on devastation. But talking to Ziircor made him look with newfound amazement on not just him, but his entire race.

Axel nodded once, making his choice. "Ziircor, you can stay here. I'll provide you with food, sustenance and shelter" Axel said, standing up and composing his face in a manner not unlike that of a diplomat.

Ziircor bowed his head, smiling and showing a hint of those teeth again. "And in return, I will aid you in battle against your enemies, I will provide you with all the information I have that can help you, and I will do everything under my wing to help you find your cousin, Axel Doomson"

Axel smiled, the tears almost coming again, but he forced them down. Axel's hand left his weapon for the first time since he entered the room, and slowly, it began to rise over the table. The hand stopped halfway up, and Axel relaxed his fingers, opening his palm to the kredor.

Ziircor's eyes widened for a fraction of a second, as if he had not expected this treatment, then he smiled even wider. The kredor's hand rose as well, meeting Axel's and clasping it tightly, shaking once. Axel found the hand of the infected human to be rough and calloused, but not unpleasant.

"We have an accord" Axel said, looking upon Ziircor as if he saw something in him most humans did not have.

"I must say Axel Doomson, when your cousin spoke of you, he spoke of your unrelenting selflessness, and your unshakable sense of justice." Ziircor said, still smiling that same smile. "After the events of today, I can say that he understated that fact"

Axel chuckled, he could almost hear those words coming from his cousins' mouth. "You honor me Ziircor, I hope I can live up to those words" Axel said, releasing his hand. "I'm needed on the bridge, but I'll get you a room and something to eat"

Ziircor chuckled, although what came from his throat was more like a bark. "You need not worry yourself Axel Doomson, my species mostly lives underground, I'll be comfortable anywhere you see fit. And my kin do not eat, we only need to devour certain types of gases to survive"

Axel nodded once, then opened the door of the room, gesturing for Ziircor to follow. After the kredor walked through the door, Axel waved his arm, motioning for his men to follow. Nobody spoke to him, most knew better than to question his orders. All within the Guardians knew that when their leader made a choice, he had taken into account all his men's safety, not just his own.

That wasn't the main reason though. This time it was because they knew that the one thing Axel Doomson could not stand was insubordination. One time, when a marine had

disagreed with him about an attack plan on a United Forces world, Axel had ordered him stripped of his armor and made to do custodial work for a year. The only one who was actually allowed to backtalk him was Richard, since, as both of them knew, he was irreplaceable.

As they walked, Axel's mind was working faster than it ever had. Now that Ziircor was on his side, the information he could provide would be invaluable. He had spent six entire years observing and spying on the United Forces, and if he spoke fluent English almost as well as any born-and raised human, the information he could have overheard could be extensive and helpful.

They reached the end of the hallway, the elevator doors opening. Axel pressed the button and the elevator shot upward with a lurch that made one of the marines nearly lose his balance. Ziircor's horns touched the top of the metal box, making small scratches and showing how sharp his horns were. Axel wondered if he sharpened them himself or if they were made of a particularly tough material.

The doors opened, allowing them access to the bridge again. Axel stepped onto the main deck, the pilots below still working. Richard was absent, though after what had happened in the hallway Axel wondered if he would ever see him again. He knew it wasn't fair to his first lieutenant to ally with a member of the species that had killed his family, but Ziircor was not a mindless killing machine, and Richard had to realize that.

Axel's thoughts strayed back to his cousin, and what Ziircor had said. Axel remembered the last time he had seen him, just after he had joined the Guardians of the Stars. Liam was leaving to take the fight to the kredor on Ash're, and he had ordered Axel to stay behind, for fear of his younger cousin getting killed.

Axel smiled at the irony. Liam had risked his life to destroy the kredor, and now, who was helping him find his cousin but one of the kredor themselves. Willingly no less. Although Axel didn't completely trust Ziircor, there was something he saw in the kredor that made him... worthy. Worthy of Axel's trust, and worthy of life in this universe without being hunted and hated.

Axel watched the planet below them slowly rotate, its brown surface overshadowed by the absence of a star to give it light. Turning his head, he saw Ziircor was watching it too, his crimson eyes softening as he took in the beautiful scene. Axel smiled a genuine smile, his bright blue eyes softening as well. Straightening his back, Axel enjoyed the silence aboard the bridge, and watched as the first few rays of sun crept over the horizon of the planet below.