

SPACE RACE

The Legend of the White Lion

Chapter 1- Giving Up and Waking Up

"Dade!"

It had to have been the twentieth time he had been beckoned over the shoddy intercom. However, it was the first time he actually stopped working and looked up. Through strands of dirty, sweat soaked brown hair, Dade stared up at the fuzzy intercom screen and met his wife's eyes. It was only then that time seemed to catch up with him. His knees suddenly ached, his elbows were sore, and his hands seemed to cramp around the soldering gun he held.

"You're done," she said in what seemed like a sad tone. It was laced with anger, as her voice had been for the past few months, but something about her gaze made him sit up straighter. Ah, back pain too. He moved gingerly to his feet.

"I told you this morning, I've got to attach the thrusters and put the caps on the wings, and THEN I'll be done." he said, his voice protesting as he hadn't used it in what felt like days.

Her face seemed to fall. Was it the faulty intercom screen, or did she look ...guilty? "Dade, you're done." she said quietly. "You missed the deadline."

The cavernous workroom he stood in seemed to fade and spin around him. Feet unsteady, he moved to grip something at his side, his eyes unblinking as he stared at her. "It was... I had two days." he whispered, watching her shake her head slowly. Jocelyn rarely gave him heartfelt looks, and he was getting one right then. Dade thought he might faint.

"You had two days, two days ago. The deadline was this morning. It's seven o'clock at night." she spoke slowly, as if he were hearing impaired. At this point he wished he was. Suddenly, anger flooded his system. His brows dropped low over his dark blue eyes and he found his footing for the moment.

"Why didn't you tell me!?" he asked in a harsh tone.

Now her brows dropped over her own black eyes. "I was working all day today, I was working all day yesterday, and I'll be working all day tomorrow. Someone has to work in order to raise our

children, Dade." Her entire demeanor seemed to scream 'danger'. "I suggest you get up here, have a shower and some food, and get a fresh start tomorrow. Joanna's walking now, in case you didn't notice, and I'll need you to keep an eye on her while I go shopping."

He was thunderstruck. The work he had put into it... now gone. It would be years before the next race, and he would be past the age limit by then. It was over. Breathing slowly, Dade sat back down hard on his backside, his eyes going unfocused as he stared at what now seemed a white mass in front of him.

"Come on. I made smoked turkey. It'll be on the table in ten minutes." he heard her say.

Smoked turkey. He loved smoked turkey. Had she made it because she'd known he'd be upset?

Dade stared at the creation before him. Still looking gutted, sitting within the huge 'garage' that he'd had built next to his home. Money from his last two races had gone into the house, the garage, and the secretive building of what he knew would be the fastest ship in the universe. It was shining before him now.... sans the large booster jets and with many parts still strewn about the ground.

'How did I miss it?' He asked himself. How had he missed his chance to show them what he could do? His eyes drifted to the far wall of the large building, where large shining trophies and pictures of him in his race gear still hung proudly on the walls. He and his old crew, grinning in victory (or even near victory) in front of the company ship. His ideas had grown on him then. Dade MacArthur was a genius when it came to racing. Even famous in name thanks to past victories. But he'd wanted to show them what he could build on his own. Years racing in company sponsored ships had given him vast ideas on how much better they could run. What could be built into them to aid in the fast passes, the turns, and even the planetside takeoffs.

Now he stared blankly at what was left of his dream. Nearly done. Nearly. Not fast enough. HE wasn't fast enough! God knew that ship could be. Once built, that ship could pass them all in a heartbeat....

Biting down hard on his lip and setting his jaw, he caught sight of another picture on the wall. Jocelyn, with her long black hair and dark eyes, and their three children. All with her dark hair and his deep blue eyes. Devin, who was now five and speaking his mind whenever he could, Joseph, who was four, and looked up to his older brother too much for his own good, and Joanna, who would be two soon. Walking. She was walking now. When had he missed that?

Finally, his gaze fell on the flyer. Made of tough paper and accentuated with bright colors and bold print, stating: "SPACE RACE 2067 - GET YOUR ENTRIES IN NOW!!!!" The deadline was in bold as well.

Dade nodded to himself solemnly. His mind wrapped itself around the fact that he would miss this race. He looked back up at the ship and nodded at it, too. Somewhere in his mind, he made a promise. He would find a way to watch that ship win, even if he didn't have his own company to back him up in funds. He would find a way.

For now, he thought, his eyes lingering back on his family's picture. For now, he would watch his children grow. He didn't want to miss anything else as important as first steps or words.

Sighing, he got stiffly to his feet, moving to open the huge door with the code on the side wall. He'd locked himself in, now he'd lock himself out.

Dade turned to watch the ship slide out of his view, standing in front of the door once again after it had closed and clicked to lock.

He nodded once more, and walked away.

"Dade!"

"Dade!!!!"

"DAD!"

His eyes snapped open as his body jolted awake.

He was sitting reclined in one of the large fluffy chairs of his living room. It had aged. HE had aged. He moaned a bit as he realized that he'd been dreaming a memory. How strange that it would be that one out of them all-

"Hello. You feeling ok?" said the young female voice.

Dade focused on his daughter, now tall and filled out as a nineteen year old. She had her hair in a strange series of ponytails, which swayed under her chin as she bent over to stare at him. She lifted a hand and waved a soldering gun in his face. "Dad?"

"I'm up, I'm up." he said quickly, breaking out of his dream-haze. It came back to him that he was no longer dreaming. He was back in his time, where the house was still big, but old, where his hair was still brown, but with gray streaks, and where his children had grown into adults.

It was depressing.

"I'm going out with Cheina to work on our bikes." she said as she stood back up again, flipping the small gun in her hand. He noticed she had a handful of tools in the other, and even had a bag of tools strapped across her chest.

"Jo, you don't know the first thing about-

"I *know* dad. But Cheina's brother Faine does. He's ... strange, but damn can he fix stuff."

Had Jocelyn been in the area, she would have expected a reprimand for the curse word, but he ignored it. "Those are my tools." he said matter-of-factly, giving her a deadpan stare.

Then she turned on the 'daddy's girl' charm that she was so very adept at. Somewhere between seven and eighteen she'd gained a very good control over her innate ability to convince him of anything, so long as it involved puppy-dog eyes. "Come on dad, pleaseeease!?! You've gotta go talk to Dev and Joey's bosses today anyway!"

Dade pursed his lips in thought. "Bosses...."

"The race, dad." Joanna said in a low tone. "There's coffee in the kitchen." she added with a smirk on her face, knowing it would take him awhile to wake up.

"Ah!" he said suddenly. "How much time do I have?"

"It's five now. They mentioned something about meeting you at The Marle at seven." she said, shifting her feet on the floor and looking to the ceiling in a sort of anxious manner.

"Alright alright, go. Take the tools, but break them and you know the consequence."

"Ultimate servitude." she grinned and blew him a kiss. "Thanks dad!" she said, turning and trotting out of the room, tools jingling in the cloth bag.

"Seven, seven, seven." he mumbled to himself as he made his way to the kitchen, working out a kink in his neck and running a hand through disheveled hair. He remembered now. His sons Devin and Joseph had been working for Quartzhammer International for a handful of years. This year would be a race year (the space races were held once every five years), and their father's famous name had helped earn them a spot on one of Quartzhammer's famed ships. Sure, they were both skilled pilots. They had both raced once before on a lesser known (and notably lesser built) ship. He'd trained all three of his children in piloting spaceships as soon as they'd developed the hand-eye coordination for it.

His eyes trailed to another family picture, this one showing himself and all three children (no younger than thirteen) in the cockpit of a freight ship that a friend of his had let him use. Those years had been some of their best.

Now he was to meet with the bosses of a multi-billion dollar company to sweet talk his sons' ways into the race he'd competed in years ago. In his prime, he'd been practically bid on by wealthy companies, but he'd been obligated to race for his own (which had since gone bankrupt and been bought out). The corporate sponsors owned the race. They were the only ones who could provide the huge entry fee and the expensive ships to enter the races, and therefore were the only contenders for the large winning sum.

He hated the lot of them.

Still, Dade went to work on showering, dressing as sharp as he could remember how to dress, and working on his good old 'charming smile'. Devin and Joseph deserved the best, after all.

"He'll take you out." Cheina drawled, her hands on either of Joanna's shoulders as she teased.

"You just say that because you've got eyes for him." Joanna mumbled, sliding her tongue between her lips in concentration as she twisted a wrench into a large bike's innards. The two were in a large front yard, tools and parts strewn about all around them as they worked. Or rather, Joanna worked. Cheina spent the time walking in aimless circles, stopping to check her hair, makeup, or clothing in one of the huge windows of the house, or her own bike's mirror.

"Eyes, lips, fingers.... yeah, I'd say I've got something for him." Cheina replied in typical fashion, and Joanna only rolled her eyes without stopping her work.

"Time's almost up." she said around another smaller tool that she'd put into her mouth. "Where's Faine?"

"You know he's never late Jo, just give-" but just as Cheina had begun to round off her sentence, the tall male came out of the house's garage carrying what looked like a muffler. Like his sister, Faine was dark skinned and lithe, though he reached a height closer to seven feet to his sister's six. Both had bright hazel eyes, which stood out against their dark skin. Though Cheina had dyed hers a streaky blonde and brown, Faine still had his onyx colored hair, keeping it pulled back in a shoulder length ponytail. He was handsome, or would certainly be if he hadn't been wearing baggy clothing, a thick goggly pair of glasses, and a perpetual frown.

Joanna removed the tool from her mouth and offered him a short smile, moving out of his way. "That's perfect. Thanks!" she said in a soft, elated voice. "I got the old one out of there for you.... I think." Making a strange face, she stood and stretched a bit, not at all surprised when he simply took her place, moved his glasses to a certain point on his nose, and got to work on her bike. Faine very rarely talked.

Cheina had moved to her own bike and was attaching her bags to it when Joanna trotted by. "I'm getting into my riding gear, can I use your room?"

"I don't know why you still bother asking," Cheina smirked at her, waving her off in the direction of the house.

Within the hour, Faine had finished fixing Joanna's bike, and had politely declined their invitation to attend the challenge. He wasn't fond of the group they were meeting up with, regardless of his sister's attachments to one or two of them. Joanna merely stuck by Cheina, who'd remained her friend even as the two grew apart over the years. Where Cheina was effeminate and flirty, Joanna was what some would call a 'tomboy'. Both had had their share of suitors, but Cheina was the more likely to indulge.

Joanna was in the process of gazing at her bike lovingly when her darker skinned friend approached from a last minute 'hair-check' of some sort. She tossed Joanna her helmet nonchalantly, and shouldered her own. "Ready?" she asked in a serious tone.

Nodding, Joanna grinned and shifted her own black locks behind her shoulders. She'd kept it tied in the strange assortment of ponytails. "Your brother's a genius."

"We're all well aware of that. Too bad he can't make a friend to save his life." Cheina's voice was sardonic, and she moved to mount her bike with ease. Girly-girl or not, she'd grown up with Joanna and her brothers. All things fast were second nature to her as well. "C'mon."

Joanna followed suit, mumbling something about her being Faine's friend while starting her bike

up. "Blake-hills, right?" she yelled over the spurring motor sounds her bike was making. Cheina's was more quiet, but then Cheina's wasn't a racing bike. The other girl nodded a helmet clad head, and the two took off, leaving only a trail of smoke that ended once they'd ascended into the air.

"If we can't make it by the rock trough, we'll take the ship straight up and then drop her back on course. Better than risking it."

"I do like your style, boy. Take after your father, that's for sure."

For the twelfth time that night, Dade attached the grin to his own face in reply, patting his younger son Joseph on the back. "I made sure they knew the basics." he said reflexively. Though in the back of his mind, he knew the race would be much harder than simply remembering obstacles. They changed each time. Space never stood still.

He sat at a large table with his sons, Joseph and Devin. Both had their business-cropped hair slicked back, looking as sharp as he did. Across from them sat their bosses, both with high-class suits and rich sounding names that Dade had managed to forget. Next to them sat the man who would be their third driver in the Space Race that was coming up, one Mitchell Sorn. Though younger than Dade, elder than his sons, he was well known. The company had paid him to drive in the last race, and he hadn't let them down. The two owners of Quartzhammer were now coupling the sons of Dade McArthur with Mitchell Sorn to create what they hoped would be a power team. All three drivers well known by name or surname, in the least.

"The new ship came out impeccably, if I don't say so myself." said Mitchell. "You must have a look at the design Mr. McArthur. I've heard tell that you once dreamed up your own ship to race?"

That had been the spear-to-heart that Dade had worried about. He hoped to hell that his face hadn't cracked its polite, cool demeanor as his blue eyes bore into the soft brown ones of Mitchell Sorn. Nodding, Dade found his voice. "I did indeed. Incidentally I began building it some time ago." he said, avoiding the fact that he hadn't touched the thing, or the garage it still sat in for 17 years.

He watched Mitchell's brows lift in a slightly demure fashion. "Really? Now why haven't we seen it in a race yet? Is it about done, then?"

'Hell. Joseph! Devin! Say something about the weather!! For crying out loud...'

"Just about. I have some more technical work to do, but it wa- is very close to being completed." Lies lies lies lies lies. Had he not been so well trained in politics and speaking with those well above him in the business world, he might have broken a sweat.

"Then you'll be entering it in the race?" Mitchell put in, seemingly excited. Something in his eyes held a touch of... something else. His son's bosses were gazing at him now, one still holding his drink midway to his lips. Joseph was conveniently chewing his food, and Devin had found his silverware extremely interesting.

"Nnnnot necessarily." Was all he could think of to say. Taking a cue from the rest, he lifted his drink and his gaze as he drank.

"Oh, well I must know what's holding you back!" He said, leaning forward onto the table and keeping his eyes on Dade. "If I cannot race you, I must race a ship of your creation. After all, I consider myself your rival."

That made him cough. The fact that he'd just taken in a mouthful of wine didn't help squelch the sound or look of it. Composing himself quickly, he shook his head. "My...rival? Surely I don't hold a candle to your opponents these days." And honestly, he wondered if he did.

Mitchell gave a curt shake of his head, but none of the amusement was displayed in his eyes. "You're the legend, Mr. MacArthur. Now then, what is holding you back from entering this year's race? Is it the money?"

Dade fought to keep the annoyance from showing on his face. Pulling his lips tight for a moment, he shook his head. That was a blatant lie as well. It was the money. He couldn't afford the entrance fee if he took out another mortgage on the house. Sure, the MacArthurs were well off, but not enough that they could sponsor a ship in a race. His mind was suddenly blank. A very inopportune thing when all eyes were suddenly on him. Finally, he cleared his throat, setting his cup down with precision. "I still have to finish building the ship. Then it is a matter of appointing a worthwhile crew. Even after those things are accomplished, I can't say it will run. I do race well, Mr. Sorn, but my mechanic experience is barely worth mentioning." he'd spoken carefully, letting his eyes drift over the table's occupants.

To his utter dismay, Mitchell sat back and seemed to relax, grinning in triumph. "Tell you what, Dade. I'll send some men to see to it that your ship is in good order. Hell, I'll even send out inquiries about a crew for you. Enter your ship in this year's race and beat mine, and I'll pay you half of my winnings from last year. "

Again, Dade fought to control his straight face. He heard Joseph coughing into his cup now, and absently reached over to pat him on the back. At that point something seemed to snap in his mind, his eyes narrowing to focus on the laughing ones of Mitchell. It was as if someone had thrown a match onto a gasoline doused woodpile.

"You've got a deal." he heard himself say. He ignored the short protest that came from Devin, still patting Joseph as he seemed to choke on his drink as he reached forward with his other hand to shake Mitchell's. At the moment where they would have released, however, Dade only strengthened his grip, his gaze becoming harder. "And let me handle the ship and the crew. If I beat you, it'll be fair."

Mitchell's face sobered for a split second, before the two broke the handshake. A moment later he was calling a toast, grinning and speaking in a haughty tone to Joseph and Devin (who looked to have taken on an oddly pale skin tone). Dade went on in a numb state until he realized that the 'bosses' and Mitchell were excusing themselves for the evening. Dade and sons stood up at once, saying proper mannerly goodbyes and heading out the door themselves.

Only then did all three lose their perpetual manners.

"What the *hell* are you thinking, dad?" Devin practically gasped out as he loosened his tie. Joseph's was hanging loose around his shoulders already.

"Don't speak to me like that." Dade replied evenly, though he didn't look to his son. His thoughts were going a mile a minute. He was entering this year's race. At least, his ship was. The Ship! "It'll need about three days worth of work. Then drivers. Drivers, and a mechanic...." he mumbled, eyeing his two sons, who were holding a conversation off to the side that he barely listened to. Each ship in the race was allowed three drivers who would take turns over three segments of the race. A mechanic was allowed on board as well, but four crew members was the cap. Few ships ever raced without all four.

"That jackass just wanted someone to mess with, Dad!"

"He's not a jackass."

"Oh you're just in love with him because he's your superior."

"Don't make me hit you, Joey."

"Go for it! Right here. Lemee have it!"

"Tch! Brat."

"And the money..." Dade whispered while his son's bantered in the parking lot. Within moments they were at each other's throats, but Dade had stopped and was staring off into space. How would he get the money for such a thing?

Suddenly it was like a lightbulb in his head. He grinned and shifted his hand to grab his phone out of his coat pocket just as his sons fell to the ground in a wrestling match. "Wisconsin!"

He sent out the signal and waited for it to be matched, watching the dark sky without seeming to hear the muffled growls and scuffling sounds his sons were still making. Finally, he heard the clicking sound that verified he'd gotten through, and the voice he heard was deeper, but the same.

"Jones." it spit.

Dade paused, confused. "...Jones? Not Wisconsin?"

"Xeno.Jones. At your service." The voice replied in a very specific tone.

Dade's lip twitched and his eyebrows lifted as he realized that the man must have changed his name. He figured it fit. His career certainly called for it.

"Alright Mr. Jones. This is Dade MacArthur. I've got a job for you, if you're up for it."

"Sonofabitch!" he yelled in a hoarse tone, swerving the ship in time with the pronounced curse word. It was a much larger ship than he liked to drive, but his reflexes were still working perfectly for him. He still had a few tricks up his sleeve, but his pursuants were quite persistent.

"I'm not interrupting anything, am I?" he heard Dade's voice come over the speaker to his phone (which was strapped to his shoulder in a holster that was stocked with weapons of every kind).

Xeno eyed the plain brown package next to him and took a short breath, before focusing again on the space in his path. Dade had caught him at an opportune time, for he'd just been finishing up one job when Dade was about to give him his next. "Perfect timing, Dade. Just a little distracted." He said in a hoarse tone, arms jerking violently to the left as he manually guided the large ship. They were launching things in his direction from all angles, not quite ballsy enough to get directly into his path, but still trying to slow his escape. He certainly had something they wanted back.

"I need a large sum of money." He heard Dade speaking, trying to concentrate on both things. It wasn't hard, but the large cruiser behind him had started firing again. "Large enough to enter a ship into this year's Space Race."

Xeno sneered, his lip pulling back into a mix between a grin and a snarl. "That's a lotta money, Dade." he commented, his voice strained as he forced the ship almost straight down. He'd lose

the bastards one way or another.

"Look, you know I was building that ship all those years back. Some hot-shot wanted to challenge me... and I just..." he heard the man cough a bit and sigh. "I'm entering the ship this year, Conn-...Xeno." he said, Xeno frowned as his old friend almost slipped into calling him his old alias. "There's not much I can offer you back, but I'll... I'll let you be one of the crew. If you win it, you get a percentage of that cash prize."

That statment almost, almost made him lose track of his course. Within a split second he was concentrating hard on his retreat, weaving through obstacles and ducking below plasma shots with the ease of someone who'd done this thousands of times before. Of course, he had.

He ignored Dade's stressed voice as he pushed the ship further and further into the blackness of space, and after a handful of minutes, he sat back heavily against the chair, grinning in a wry fashion and patting the package at his side. His dark eyes watched it, rather than the space ahead of him as he spoke.

"Alright, ya crazy bastard. I was gonna spend this prize on a nice getaway and a make-over, but I think I like the sound of this idea of yours." he smirked, eyeing up the black expanse of the area ahead of him.

He practically heard his friend's grin over the phone. The man was years older than him, but somehow he could seem so young.

"Don't get too excited, I just wanna see how fast I can really fly. Plus," he smirked, putting a hand on the control panel to set a course for the 'Solar System'. "I'm not wanted in your district any more. My warrant expired last year."
