

Invasion of Earth, Take Two

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Vorg, First Level Officer of the great Frontian Empire, strode through the base corridors to the Supreme Commander's headquarters. Entering the office, he stood at attention and awaited his leader's orders.

The Commander acknowledged and quickly read the last messages coming in on his screen, then turned to Vorg. "The final reports have been made and are being entered in your ship's computer. You and your pilot are to make first contact. Leave immediately; the rest of the fleet will be three Earth days behind you. The information you return with will be vital to the Empire's success. Do not fail us in this mission!"

Vorg saluted. "I am honored to serve the Empire. I shall not fail." Turning, he left to return to his ship, where Xlig, his pilot and second in command, waited for the order to depart. The Supreme Commander had personally cleared their launch to prevent any delays. Within moments they were off, beginning the final scouting mission before the Frontian Fleet attacked.

The invasion of Earth was about to begin.

Three segments (approximately four Earth days) later, Xlig brought the scout ship down to land in a small, wooded area near a large metropolis. The ship had been cloaked since they had entered the solar system, and no one was around to see them land.

"Shall I activate the personal shield?" Xlig asked, read to program in the appropriate Earthling-type appearance.

"Negative," Vorg replied. "The purpose of our mission is to judge what difficulties the fleet shall be facing upon their arrival. We shall first discover how the local natives react to our natural appearance; if necessary, we can activate the shields later."

The Frontian officers collected their translators and currency belts, then headed toward the closest building in sight – according to Vorg's wrist computer, a "hotel."

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Mary Ann Tinnet sighed and fanned herself with the program again, wondering where her relief was. Registration was slow, now that the opening panels had begun, and her costume was so *hot*!

Suddenly she noticed two figures entering the hotel and perked up. "Their costumes must be even more stifling than mine," she muttered to herself as they approached. "And they must be novices," she added more cheerfully, noticing how unsure they seemed. "Over here!" she called, waving them over. They really had excellent costumes, for newcomers. Such lovely beaks and claws; and those beautifully iridescent, purple wings!

Vorg looked around the building they had entered, puzzled, then turned to his companion. "Xlig, this is very odd..." he began.

"Yes, sir, I've noticed," Xlig replied quietly, his eyes watching the many humans moving about in the room. "They don't seem to notice us at all."

“Oh, they notice us,” Vorg corrected him, cautiously returning a nod to a passing human female. “They simply don’t seem to notice anything different about...Xlig!”

Xlig immediately drew his Immobilizer, hearing his leader’s shocked hiss.

“What, sir? Where?”

Vorg gestured to a figure in the next room. “Do my eyes deceive me, Xlig? Or is that actually a *Groklet*?”

“But, but it cannot be, sir! The Groks have not yet developed space flight!”

“It is here, however. And...” Vorg blinked, then looked back at his second.

“And it seems to be calling us over.”

Mary Ann quickly grabbed two program packets as the two approached.

“Welcome to Existicon!” she said brightly, handing them the envelopes. “Did you folks prepay, or did you want to register now?”

“Er, now will be fine,” the taller man said. At least, it sounded like a man’s voice, only it seemed to be coming from a small speaker-pendant around his neck. Neat costumes! Mary Ann sighed with envy, then got on with her job.

“Okay, that’ll be twelve bucks each. Oh, and you’ll have to leave the weapons here – strict policy.”

The two looked at each other, then Vorg nodded and Xlig carefully removed the power pack and handed the Immobilizer to the Groklet. Vorg programmed his currency belt for the country and amount, then removed several crisp, green papers and handed them over. The Groklet gave them each a white paper in return – which she called a “receipt” – then pulled out two plastic cards and a pen. “Okay, names?”

“I am Vorg, and this is my...” Vorg thought quickly for an appropriate term. “...my partner, Xlig.”

The Groklet wrote the names on the plastic cards, muttering something about unspellable alien names – odd, Vorg thought, coming from a race whose names usually took 27 clicks to say aloud – then handed them to the Frontians.

“Here you are,” she said, remarkably fluent in the native language. “Nice to see you getting into the spirit of things. This your first con?”

“Er, yes, yes it is,” Xlig replied, fiddling with the mechanism on the badge, and wondering what a “con” was.

“Well, I’m sure you’ll have a fascinating time. Enjoy yourselves, fellas!”

“We shall endeavor to do so.” Vorg nodded to the Groklet, spreading his wings in the Grokian farewell gesture, then wandered down the hall with Xlig.

Mary Ann stared after them, fanning herself again. “Wonder what they look like out of those suits...Sarah! There you are! I thought you’d never get here; I’m late for my panel!”

Sarah grinned as Mary Ann maneuvered herself from behind the table without knocking anything over with her wings. “Sorry about that. I had to wait for three elevators before I could squeeze into one. See you at Denny’s tonight?” she added, sitting down and pulling out a book.

“Sure thing,” Mary Ann called back, running down the hall. “Look out ahead!” she yelled. “Late female coming through...!”

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Xlig looked back down the hallway to see the strangely aggressive Groklet greeting a normal-looking human, then taking off in another direction. He looked back at his commander. "Vorg? There is something very odd going on here. Why did none of the earlier reports mention the presence of Groks...or of Flitterbies, for that matter?" he added, as a male of the latter species entered the room in front of them.

"I do not know," Vorg declared, leading the way into one of the rooms. "However, the Supreme Commander will be very interested in hearing that the Groks have developed so far in so little time. Meanwhile, we are still here on a mission, to..." Vorg's voice trailed off as he froze in the doorway, shocked.

Xlig peered around him, to see a large room filled with tables of books and pictures, several female humans...and representatives of everyone known race in the Universe, as well as some never before seen. He and Vorg hurriedly moved away from the doorway to let one of the more dangerous looking beings pass into the room.

"How could the probes have missed this much space traffic?!" Xlig whispered, horrified. "I had no idea Earth was this technologically advanced!"

"The Earthlings could not possibly have advanced so far without our earlier scouts noticing. They must have had help from other planets." Vorg headed back down the hall, Xlig falling in beside him. "Come. The scouting records indicate that this sort of building offers temporary lodging. We will need one of these accommodations as a headquarters. We are still on a mission, and it is more vital than ever that we discover as much information as possible for the Supreme Commander." The two officers reclaimed Xlig's weapon from the human female and went off to the hotel desk.

Sarah stared after the two men, a gleam in her eye. "Wonder what they look like out of those suits..."

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Once settled into their hotel room, Xlig examined the paper from the envelope the Groklet had handed them. "Sir, this seems to be a schedule of sorts. What is the local time?"

Vorg hit a button on his wristcom. "1723 hours, or 5:23 p.m., depending on preference." He frowned, then looked back at Xlig. "How on Frontia could this race have made it into space when they cannot even decide on a way of telling time?"

Xlig shrugged, then went back to deciphering the schedule. "According to this, there are presently panels on the ST Federation vs. the B7 Federation – neither of which I was aware existed, sir – Makeup and Costuming, Leadership 101: Blake vs. Kirk, and..." Xlig's eyes widened and he looked up at Vorg. "...alien sex!?!?"

Vorg shook his head. "Whoever it is that has been helping these Earthlings is certainly giving them a great deal of pointless information." He took the schedule and looked it over for a moment. "The Makeup panel doesn't sound terribly vital, and I certainly think we can ignore the last one. You attend the Leadership session, Xlig, while I take the Federation debate. Then we'll meet here, at this Masquerade event. It must be important; nothing else is scheduled. Oh, and Xlig?"

“Yes, sir?”

Vorg winked at his second officer. “Do try and restrain yourself around the women, Xlig? At least for tonight?”

Xlig looked hurt. “Sir, I am on duty.” He grinned suddenly. “Although that Groklet seemed awfully interested in you, sir!” And Xlig was gone before the startled Vorg could more than blink.

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Trying to wait at the door to the Masquerade for Xlig, Vorg was caught up in the crowd and ended up in a seat near the front. He quickly claimed the seat next to him as well, then looked around to see Xlig standing at the back. Vorg beckoned the younger officer over before turning back to the stage in front. There was an announcer introducing a “filker” to entertain them before the main event. Xlig seated himself as the female Kadok began singing to the accompaniment of a large stringed instrument.

Vorg leaned closer to Xlig. “Well? What have you learned?”

“It was very odd, sir. The session seemed to be a comparison between two commanders: Blake, who led a crew of untrained rebels to fight the injustice he saw in the Federation; and Kirk, who commanded a military ship in the Federation for the purpose of exploring space and meeting new life forms. However, as the Federations involved seemed vastly different, I fail to see what such a comparison could accomplish.”

Vorg looked thoughtful. “It seems to be connected with the meeting I attended; the two Federations discussed seem to be the same that your two commanders were involved with. The one Federation was interested in space exploration and in protecting its member planets from more violent races; the other concentrated on colonizing as many planets as possible with Earthlings, apparently with the express purpose of exploiting the various minerals and resources.” Vorg looked thoughtful, then turned back to the pilot. “Perhaps the Earth people are choosing a new form of government?”

The announcer abruptly returned to the stage, to much applause, and began introducing the first “contestant” by name and background. The Frontians gave each other puzzled glances as a Kittedis couple appeared on stage, only to stand still as the audience applauded and hooted.

“Perhaps...some sort of beauty contest?” Xlig suggested, as the couple was replaced by a female Dearcet, then by the Groklet they had met earlier. Vorg blushed bright blue when she winked and tossed a flower at him before leaving. Xlig snickered.

As nothing was scheduled after the masquerade, Vorg and Xlig waited until the room had mostly emptied before leaving. As soon as they walked out of the room, the Groklet and her human friend popped out at them.

“Hello there!” the Groklet said cheerfully. “I’m Mary Ann, and this is Sarah. We just thought we’d see how you two were doing, being new and all. Sarah, meet Vorg and Xlig.”

The Frontians bowed in greeting, Xlig enjoying the nervous look in Vorg’s eyes. “We are indeed honored by your attention, ladies,” Xlig said cheerfully, choosing the more casual of the Frontian greetings. “We are doing quite well, are we not, Vorg?”

Vorg gave him a dirty look as Sarah spoke up. “If you boys are hungry, we’d love to have you join us for dinner. We’re just going next door to Denny’s; would you like to come?”

“I’m very sorry, ladies,” Vorg spoke up firmly, “but we have already eaten. Xlig and I were just going to find some reading material before returning to our room.”

“Oh! Well, in that case, we’ll just show you where all the good zines are, right, Sarah?” Vorg suddenly found himself being led down the hall, arm in arm with Mary Ann. Xlig – enjoying himself immensely – followed with Sarah.

“But, er, we really cannot keep you from your meal, ladies...” Vorg began, only to be cut off by Sarah.

“Oh, we can eat any time. It’s probably crowded anyway. Taking you boys through the dealers room should be much more fun,” Sarah added, giving Xlig a meaningful look.

Vorg sighed.

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The next morning, Vorg sent Xlig to record the more interesting meetings – and to keep Sarah and Mary Ann busy. Collecting together the items they had purchased the night before, in the “dealer’s room,” Vorg set up the portable teleport and transferred the five boxes back to the scout ship, then went to meet Xlig to leave.

Xlig, however – along with Mary Ann and Sarah – had made other plans. “They want to take us out to lunch as a farewell give,” the pilot hissed quietly, ignoring Vorg’s glare. “They insisted! What was I supposed to do – tell them we can’t stay; we have an urgent appointment with an incoming invasion fleet.”

“I’m sure you weren’t very hard to convince!” Vorg scowled, then gave in. “I suppose another hour or so won’t hurt our schedule too much,” he sighed, as they walked over to join the women. “Let’s just hope there’s something available that we can eat!”

Finally, loaded down with ice cream and water, and with Vorg blushing again from the kiss Mary Ann had planted on his cheek, the officers went to reimburse the hotel before departing. They left the building and headed into the nearby park, waving to Sarah and Mary Ann before disappearing into the trees.

“Boy, for novices, they’re awfully brave,” Mary Ann mused.

“What do you mean?”

“Are you kidding? Even I wouldn’t go around outside in costume, except in large groups; you never know what kind of weird people you could run into!”

Sarah laughed. “Oh, they’re just going through the park; they’ve probably got a taxi waiting on the other side and just wanted to take a stroll.” She sighed as they headed inside. “It is a pity, though...”

“What is?”

“Well, we never did get to see them out of costume.”

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After completing their report, Vorg and Xlig stood silently at attention before the Supreme Commander. He, in turn, sat silently making a few notes on their debriefing transcript, then looked up sharply. "Opinion, Officer Vorg."

"In my opinion, sir, the previous scouting missions have been greatly lacking in several vital areas of information. I believe the invasion of Earth should be postponed until we discover who has been introducing the Earthlings to such advanced technology, and with what purpose. I would advise that an undercover scout, perhaps more, be placed on Earth as soon as possible."

The Commander nodded. "Excellent advice. The scouts should no doubt be recruits from a humanoid species, in order to simplify infiltration. I place the operation in your hands, Space Leader Vorg." A slight twitch of his feathers was the only reaction Vorg showed to his sudden promotion. "And you, of course, will assist, First level Officer Xlig. Excellent work, both of you. Once the scouts are placed safely on Earth, you will both be assigned 23 segments of leave-time."

The Commander rose. "You have both served the Empire well. Report to me when the scouts are placed. Dismissed."

Vorg and Xlig saluted and left the office to send work for scouting volunteers. Relaxing in their ship later, they began making plans for leave. "So, First Level Officer Xlig, whom shall we grace with our newly promoted presence?"

Xlig grinned wickedly. "Well, Space Leader Vorg, I wonder if Sarah and Mary Ann are still at that hotel..."