

The Story of the T'zun

Carter always found the different alien races of the galaxy interesting, but none fascinated him more than the cat race of the T'zun. He was all the more enthusiastic that the lessons were given by their teacher of the martial art Jazzir, who himself belonged to this people.

After lunch it was time for Annie, so they sat down as usual in the classroom. But this time Jazzir came in, dressed in a kind of martial arts outfit. They were positively surprised to see him again so quickly because they were their favorite teachers. Major Dunn was also very popular with most of them and Kova was really nice, but Jazzir and Annie were especially popular because of their good-natured characters.

He smiled at them, which, although they knew him by now, they still found somewhat scary. His teeth were always threatening, whether he intended it or not. »Greetings! I am your substitute instructor here for the next two to three lessons. Don't worry, Commander Dalton is doing great. I represent her here because the next section of the lesson is about my people, the T'zun. And who would be better suited than me?«, he smiled.

He called up a virtual representation of a star system. Six celestial bodies were to be seen in it.

»What you see here is one of the oldest inhabited systems of the known galaxy, the Aster-System. My people were already advanced when most other species had not even discovered space travel. Even the modern Vindurans were simple miners and stonemasons back then.«

He pointed to a planet a little further away from the star Aster.

»There lies the world of Basura'Tanoh. In our language, this means »holy root«. It is the original birth world of the T'zun. It is already many millions of years old and a long time ago my people was not unlike that of humans. We exploited the planet, polluted the environment and the term »sustainability« was found only among eco-hippies who were smiled at. The result was that the ecosystem collapsed.

Natural disasters, famines, disease epidemics, the full spectrum. Fortunately for us, we were already well advanced in space travel and had discovered another habitable world within the Aster-System a few decades earlier, Dao Prime. Until then, there were only a few settlements and test sites. Over the next one hundred years, we relocated our entire population there.

Today, Basura'Tanoh is home to only a few million T'zun in sheltered facilities, but most of the planet is no longer life-friendly. In a few centuries, it will no longer be possible to maintain settlements there. So you see what can happen if you have no respect for nature. Utopia is a very young world, but your industry has already reached critical proportions. For this reason, there are a number of circulation systems and atmosphere transformers on the southern half of the planet. We developed this technology to save Dao Prime from a future like the one we've seen before.«

Jazzir's remarks were calm and matter-of-fact, but he had a way of speaking that left each of them hanging on his lips. Carter noticed Kelly drifting. He gave her an elbow thrust and she quickly brought her features back under control.

Jazzir continued: »It didn't take long and we also analyzed the other planets of the system. Pahak-Kaha is a green world that looks beautiful

at first glance, but the atmosphere is ammonia and only a few life forms can survive there. The surface of Suyaka is useful. It is a rocky world without atmosphere, but there are deposits of heavy and light metals, building materials and other useful elements. We have built extensive mining facilities there and in the next millennia the resources there will not dry up. The last thing we did was to study this world here.«

He pointed to an azure planet that was quite bright. »Aeya is a water world, but not a pure water world. It has about ten percent of landmass in the form of white sand deposits. There is no vegetation apart from one tree species, which resembles the Earth palm trees. Neither predatory fish nor other animals can be found there, apart from small fish and a species of bird that feed on them. Algae and corals make up the largest population on the planet. You can't live there. But since we can export everything we need to live there, the world was used as an outpost. You, people, find the scenery there relaxing and visually valuable, so we have allowed you to build resorts there. We T'zun are less interested in water and enjoy the sight of mountains and green.«

The pictures of Aeya he showed them were beautiful. They dreamed of what it might be like there. Jazzir smiled because the pictures seemed to have this effect on everyone.

»Of course, that's not all that the Aster-System currently accommodates. But we'll talk about that in the next lesson. Now we dig a little deeper into the case of Basura'Tanoh.«

From then on the lessons became a little more historical, but Jazzir talked about it as if he had been there. None of them got bored and they never thought that the history of a people could fascinate them so much.

After lunch, it was time for more details. Jazzir was already waiting for them in the classroom and they were looking forward to the interesting explanations. He showed them the representation of his homeworld Dao Prime.

»What you see here is Dao Prime. Strictly speaking, it's not the homeworld of the T'zun, but we've lived there for so long that it feels like it. The planet does not have any seas, but millions of big lakes in the jungle areas and savannahs. There are three climate zones: humid hot jungle, dry hot savannah or steppe, and cold mountains. But not every mountain is cold. There are also many mountains in the jungle area, but they are very pointy.«

He showed them pictures of light brown mountain peaks covered with scattered, crooked trees. Some of them reached higher than the clouds. Between the pointed mountains, they saw large flat rock plateaus, from which many small waterfalls fell into the lakes and rivers in the deeper jungle. It was an idyllic sight. The stone was not grey and dull as in the cold mountains, but had a warm yellow-brown color and looked more like sandstone, as everything was smooth and even.

»We have villages in the jungle. We build them from bamboo wood and often in the trees. Hundreds of lanterns hang there on lianas above and between the dwellings. It is a breathtaking sight. Also, the savannah inhabitants like to build wooden huts, but the technology share is much higher than with the more traditional people in the jungle. And in the mountains, we use caves or high-tech building complexes, but there are also old temples.

The most modern settlements are on the rocky platforms above the forests. There are the most advanced facilities on the planet. My people

know how to unite tradition and modernity like no other. Spirituality and progress do not have to be mutually exclusive.«

Tom reported: »I once heard that the T'zun know no poverty. Is that true? And if it's true, how is that possible?

Jazzir smiled encouragingly. »That's right, Mr. Talbot. As I said last time, my people destroyed their home planet with their own hands. We learned from it when we colonized Dao Prime. We fully automated all production processes and all trade. Machines, computers and our life optimizers, we like to call them Lifebots, make that possible. The Lifebots are called Mechs, Bots, Robots, Droids or Synths by other species. But ultimately they are simply adaptive, networked and VI-controlled machines. They take over all tasks that arise in our society. This means that none of us have to go to work. Everything we do serves the spiritual science or the improvement of living together. T'zun can have whatever they want without working for it. There is no currency with us. For this reason, we dedicate ourselves to martial arts, social projects, our spirituality, science and other fields of progress or community. We have realized that each individual exists for a purpose. If you force someone to do a job just to make a living, that person is serving neither himself nor society. Progress is only possible if everyone engages in the field that truly inspires him or her and where passion plays a role. Only this way there can be breakthroughs and true satisfaction.«

Carter had several questions: »How do you make sure that no one rises above the others? Greed and the need for recognition are a big problem on Earth.«

Henry added: »And how do you control your bots? Learning machines without supervision can have completely unexpected func-

tions.«

Jazzir calmly explained: »The reason why no T'zun uses his possibilities to rise above his fellow citizens is related to our way of life. We always act in accordance with our faith. However, we are not talking here about the theism that is customary among you humans and Pintans, nor about ancestor worship or the likes. We are a deeply spiritual people.«

He showed the representations of the T'zun, their physiology, and their appearance.

»Since the dawn of time, my species has had the ability to focus our body's energy and use it for various purposes. We call this power the Ki. However, it only works if you bring your body and mind into harmony. Greed, envy, anger and similar emotions first infest the mind and then the body. We spend a lot of our time overcoming such feelings. A greedy T'zun will not be able to use Ki in the long run. Besides, it would be a disgrace to him.«

»What religion are we talking about here?«, Kelly wanted to know.

Jazzir replied: »We believe that the world, life, and existence itself are only forms of energy. Every energy returns to its original state at the end of its journey. One cannot and must not enforce this process, because that would not correspond to its nature. This also applies to life forms. We spend our lives following our nature. If we behave wrongly, it echoes in the form of negative resonance in the galaxy and will return to us. The same applies to positive actions. Energies that we release return to us in the same form.«

»That sounds like karma.«, Jane noticed.

»Yes, your simplified name for it. Every energy in nature is released for a specific purpose. When our life ends without us having fulfilled this

purpose, our life energy transforms and forms a new life. This cycle continues until the purpose is fulfilled. Only then can our life essence return to its origin.«

»And that sounds like Buddhism.«, Jimbo said.

Jazzir folded his hands on his back.

»Indeed. Many centuries ago, a T'zun scout ship discovered Earth. It landed discreetly to investigate and assess your species. We wanted to know what you were capable of. The scout found a young man to talk to. The exchange was brief, but the scout explained our views to the boy. The scout realized that you were not ready yet and left again.

The boy had not understood everything, but enough. He brought these insights to your people and later became known as Buddha. I think your Asian cartoonists have often used the concept of a cat-like human hybrid as a model. Our influence on your people was unintentional, but apparently quite comprehensive.«, Jazzir explained.

The recruits were completely perplexed that an entire world religion of Earth had sprung from only a rough reproduction of the views of the T'zun.

»Anyway, our faith is the reason why we are a very social, empathic and peaceful people. And that is why there are very few of us who aspire to power, wealth, or anything of the sort. Crime is a rather alien concept for us. When we came into contact with the first aliens, we were often robbed until we learned from it.«, Jazzir laughed.

Gina asked: »But what about the Lifebots? Couldn't they kill you all in case of a malfunction?«

»Oh right, that question is still unanswered. Well, of course, our virtual intelligences have to be controlled regularly or even permanently.

No matter how fast and well a computer learns, it still sometimes calculates results that are not correct. Computers only know extremes. True and false, yes and no, one and zero. Organic life understands the meaning of gradations. To teach a VI or AI these subtle thought processes is difficult. Therefore, our best experts must use equally complex control systems to find and correct any false results. You have to explain to a VI why the result was wrong in order to avoid the error in the future. The computer must understand that organic life sometimes decides irrationally because logic may always be correct, but it is not always desirable. A brain works differently because it is not only result-oriented. Pleasure, feelings, experiences, these are concepts that a machine does not understand. Therefore, we must teach it to take these factors into account. It is supposed to perform functions in the knowledge that they are wrong because the result is more desirable than a logical one.

For this reason, a large part of our scientists is dedicated to this topic. Not because they have to, but because the subject fascinates them. And they are highly regarded for that.«

They twisted their heads on this complex topic, but at the same time, it was so interesting that they wanted to hear more.

But Jazzir now went into the physiology of the T'zun. »From your point of view, we are cat hybrids. We have claws, long tails, and muzzles with fangs. Our ancestors were perfect hunters, which is why we are carnivores by nature. Men and women differ in about the same way as you humans do, in muscle mass, intelligence, and typical behavior patterns and characteristics. We have a very fast metabolism, more strength than you and can use the Ki energies of our body purposefully. The color

of our fur depends on the natural environment in which our ancestors lived. Brown tones and dots are more for savannahs, white tones are more for mountains and stripes and dark or reddish tones are more useful for jungle areas. There have also been bluish and greenish representatives born on Aeya for several centuries.«

Before the lessons ended and the T'zun subject was finished, they came to speak on the Initiative of the allied races. Jazzir called up the star map again and highlighted a point between two of the planets. »The T'zun were asked by the Salvani for help after the Lorgans had attacked the humans for the first time. At that time we had not yet established any relations with your people. We helped you to ward off an attack on Utopia, and then we negotiated with the Krodaa and the Pintans to form the alliance you know as the Initiative.

Since the Vindurans remained neutral, the Salvani are not as strong militarily, the Pintans refused, and the Krodaa are diplomatically less skilled, we were asked to find a headquarters for the Initiative and lead it. That's how the Harmony space station was created in the Aster-System.«

A longish station with a ring at the end, on which all around further spherical station parts hung parallel to the main part in the middle, was to be seen. It was impressive and resembled power and something majestic. The recruits were disappointed that the teaching about the cat race wasn't any longer and deeper, but they had learned a lot and were curious for more. Carter vowed to visit the home of the T'zun one day.