

Welcome to the

TEMPLAR MINISERIES

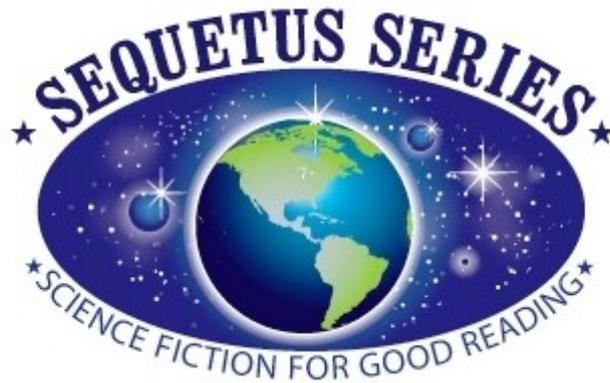
NICK
BROADHURST

Books 9 - 12 in the epic
SEQUETUS SERIES

9-12

N I C K B R O A D H U R S T

The
TEMPLAR MINISERIES



BOOKS 9 - 12

By Nick Broadhurst

Published by Nick Broadhurst

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DISCLAIMER

The SEQUETUS SERIES, the TEMPLAR MINISERIES are works of fiction. Names of individuals and companies used in the book, unless historical fact, are pure fiction.

THE SEQUETUS SERIES GLOSSARY

Part of this volume is a chapter named *Glossary*, a list of terms and words and what they mean. When a word in the glossary is first used in the story it is shown slanted *like this*.

MEASUREMENT

In the Federation there is Standard Measurement, such as kinopacs, or Ks and pacs, but those who have left Earth may still use kilometers.

HOW THESE BOOKS ARE NUMBERED

The Sequetus Series is broken up into four miniseries. Each miniseries is comprised of between four to eight books.

The miniseries are

THE NEW EARTH MINISERIES

Books 1-8

THE TEMPLAR MINISERIES

Books 9-12

THE JUGGERNAUT MINISERIES

Books 13-17

THE EARTH SYNDROME MINISERIES

Books 18-23

Each miniseries can be read in its own right.

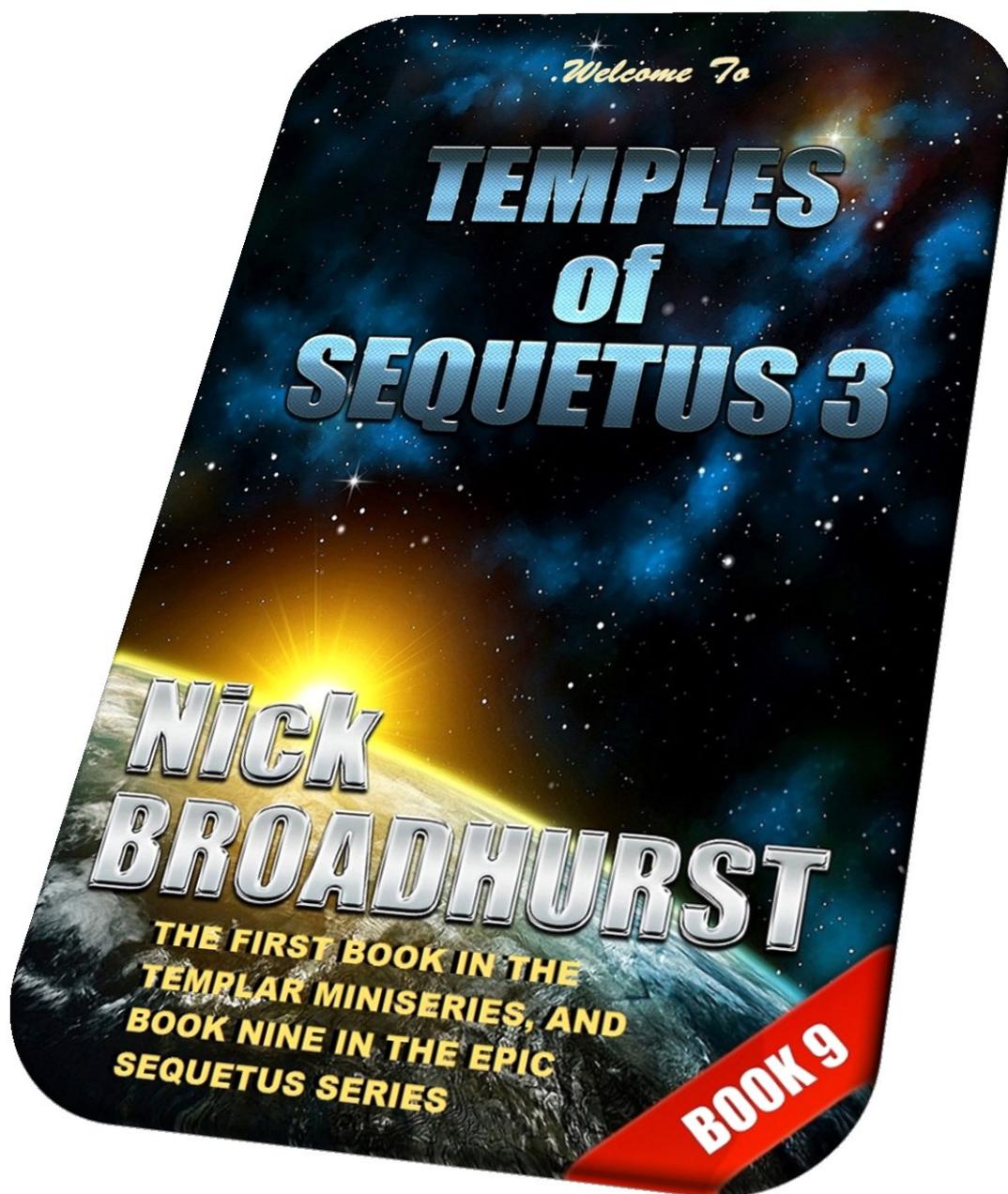
A lot of care has gone into creating this epic, and everything has been done by way of glossary, pictures, maps, notes, credits, and so on, to assist the reader to have an enjoyable reading experience.

Contents

Chapter 1	Temples of Sequetus 3
Chapter 2	Temples and the Juggernaut
Chapter 3	Escape From Federation
Chapter 4	The Book of War
Chapter 5	Glossary
	Back Page

Definition: Juggernaut: Any blinding idea for which people are prepared to sacrifice their lives, forsaking all else.

N I C K B R O A D H U R S T



THE TEMPLAR MINISERIES

Page 5 | 606

CHAPTER 1

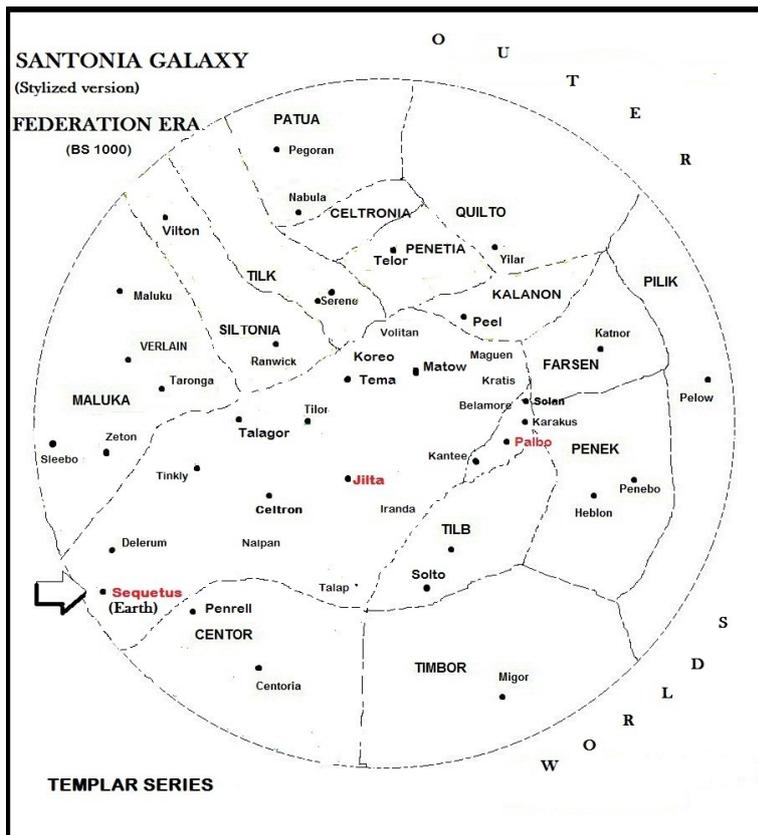
Advance on Sequetus 3

Sub-Contents

MAPS

- Sub-Chapter 1 Jaron
- Sub-chapter 2 House of Torren
- Sub-chapter 3 The Bank
- Sub-chapter 4 Rambus 2
- Sub-chapter 5 Salvage
- Sub-chapter 6 Life of Rambus
- Sub-chapter 7 Jaron in Training
- Sub-chapter 8 Leaving Home
- Sub-chapter 9 Cravana
- Sub-chapter 10 Escape From Sequetus
- Sub-chapter 11 The Southern Continent
- Sub-chapter 12 Turning History
- Sub-chapter 13 Leaving Rambus
- Sub-chapter 14 Icy Grave
- Sub-chapter 15 End of an Era

MAPS



JARON

The old man lamented. “The ground-world is reclaiming it now. From mountain to mountain, the land was sick. The over-ground dwellers, lived as far as the eye could see. That was, until the *resurrection*¹.”

The class of juniors looked on as the old-one spoke about the history of the world. They did not miss a syllable, of how the world retook what once the over-ground dwellers’ land, and it was being returned intact to their village.

The old man was going through the same story, he so often told before. He looked out, from his cave and stared towards the mountain ranges, beyond. The day was temperate, and clouds scudded to the east. The old man smiled. Every few years he was given a new crop of youngsters, from the village. He told the same old stories, year in and year out. Some of the villagers said he was as old as resurrection itself. *He* said that he was over a thousand years old and spoke only from memory. Few believed him.

¹ **DEFINITION: RESURRECTION:** That time when the Earth began to be healed, and mankind started to diminish in numbers, about one thousand years ago.

He looked down at the wide attentive eyes of the children, who were, temporarily away from the village and its petty squabbles. It was here, that he taught the children to survive the world. It was here that the village sent their children during the day, to learn of the world, as they had done and their ancestors, before that. In three years, the old man would teach them how to survive a world that grew more deserted, with neighboring village populations simply disappearing overnight.

This group had twelve boys and nine girls, the eldest being sixteen. They all sat around him, in their scant native garb. Their black hair and dark brown skins were silhouetted against the light, at the entrance of the cave. They were a captive audience.

The children looked at him. Some said that he was crazy. Most did not believe him, but his stories were hard to turn away from. The old man spoke slowly and deliberately. "Yes, it's hard to picture," as he extended his arms. "From the land of the eagle in the south, to the ice in the north, the land was dead. It festered and grew upwards, from the ground to the sky as a disease, and people dwelled within that disease."

The old man continued with his riddled talk, trying to get the children to understand what he had seen. The jungle had long ago taken over the desolate and wasted land; a land where the world couldn't survive, but teemed with human life. "The world was dying, until the resurrection." He

hesitated, remembering the hell that came with that term. "With the resurrection, came the eyes; the eyes of the night, that could see as far as the mountains. If they spotted you, they would come for you, and you would disappear. You won't be of this world anymore. They're the eyes that saw all, that created the resurrection. They're the eyes that created the destruction, and changed the world. Ground folk, be careful of the eyes, or you too can vanish."

The children stared up, at the old man. The sun had fallen behind the distant hills, and the last of its rays were still breaking over the horizon. The old man looked down to the valley, now blanketed in darkness. There was no fire, no sign of life. Down there, was the village that supported him; that he protected, with his knowledge. In return for his teaching, he was provided with food, and any personal needs. In exchange, the village still existed, where others had vanished overnight, while their campfires still burned. The old man knew when the village had to move, when to stay, and when to find a brand new location.

Night was rapidly approaching. The old man thought back to a time when the valley was strong and villages and people were common. That had changed, with time. Now, they were the only village, and even the numbers within it, had diminished over the years.

One of the boys, an inquisitive fifteen year old pointed to the first stars, up in the sky. “Why are they always there? They never change their position.”

The old man scratched his long grey beard. “They have always been that way. They’re part of the greater creation. Those are stars, and are the ultimate creation. Like this world, they’re permanent.”

“What about that star; which moves?” The boy pointed to the dark horizon, over the mountains.

The old man strained to see through the gloom, to see over the valley. He paled as he saw it. A small light rose from the horizon. “That isn’t a star! That is an eye, an eye that is looking for you, and if it finds you, that will be your end. Run! Run to your mothers! Hurry, before the eye sees you!”

He raised his arms, to show them the way and the children ran, in fear of the rising pale light, in the far night sky. Down the track, into the cover of the jungle blackness, they ran. In moments, they had vanished from sight. The old man looked about, the blackness of the cave offering security from the scanners, now overhead. He watched, as the tiny dot of light passed over and began to recede, to the other horizon. He sighed; they had not been detected, so he turned, to seek refuge, deeper into the cave for the night.

As he turned, he saw one of the children was still with him. It was the bright fifteen year-old *Jaron*,

who smiled at the old man, and looked out at the sky.
“Don’t be angry at me, old man. I told my mother that I would be late tonight.”

“I see, and why will you be late?”

“I need to talk more, with you.”

“Why?” asked the old man, stroking his beard.

“I need to know, more.”

“Why?”

The boy shrugged. “I don’t know why; I just need to know more, and I know there is much I need to learn.”

“I see; and how much more do you want to learn?”

“Whatever it takes... anything you need... I will do anything there is to learn.”

“Hmmm... What do you think there is to learn, Jaron.”

The boy looked out to the stars, and turned back to the old man. “I have this feeling that there is much to know ...of out there. Not the jungle. I’m a good hunter, and that is important, but there is more that needs to be known about. You must teach me.”

“Why must I? Are you not satisfied with being a great hunter and helper; for your family?”

Jaron smiled. “Maybe this is strange, but I somehow feel you owe it to me. Perhaps this is because you’re getting old, and you need to teach a new one. I believe I’m that one, and I want to know what you know.”

“Which is?”

“What is it that I see and feel about this place? What is it I feel about you, old man? What is it that I sense, that I can’t see, feel or hear?”

“Hmmm...,” mused the old man, “Well, if you must learn, then you must. Get back to the village now, Jaron. Be here at mid-morning. I will give you my answer, then.”

Jaron looked into the tired grey eyes of the old man. They seemed to know so much, feel so awesome, powerful. Jaron nodded and backed away. He turned and disappeared into the night.

As he ran, he avoided the trees and vines in his path. Fleetly, he passed through the nocturnal forest that had now come to life. Around bends he ran, over two creeks and finally down the last path, until he saw the first silhouette of the huts through the trees.

The old man looked down and watched the boy, as he was engulfed by darkness. Warily, he turned and walked back, to the rear of the cave. He thought to the echo of voices, which seemed to surround him, in his mind.

After a moment, he squatted on the rock floor and looked at the food, which the children had brought him. He smiled, and the cavern immediately filled with a dim light, which simply emanated within the hollow of the cavern itself. The old man picked up some food, which had simply already been heated by his thought. He broke off a piece, put it into his mouth and lay back contented. The cavern darkened

and warmed slightly, to guard against the outside chill, which would soon descend over the jungle. He fell into a pleasant slumber.

Ω

The old man awoke, startled. Light shone in, through the cavern entrance. He heard a voice and headed out of the cavern, to be greeted by the brilliant day and young Jaron hopping around, shaking his hand in the air, obviously in pain. The old man smiled in his torn tatters, which the village had provided for his services. "Jaron, am I to believe you tried to enter my dwelling, without my prior approval?"

The young boy jumped around trying to withhold the pain. "Yes old man. I'm sorry. It won't happen again. The pain in my hand is.... great." His eyes winced as though he was about to cry.

"Jaron, look at me. The pain has gone."

The boy stopped and stared at the bearded old man. He then looked at his hand. It was true; the pain had gone. He looked at the old man suspiciously. "How did...."

"Come inside, boy. I will explain." The old man stepped back into the cave and glanced back to Jaron, who now was motionless a pace from the entrance. Jaron stared at the rock-face; then he looked around him; he could find no evidence of

anything, which could have inflicted him with such pain.

“Come on, boy!” called the old man.

“How do I know that it’s safe?”

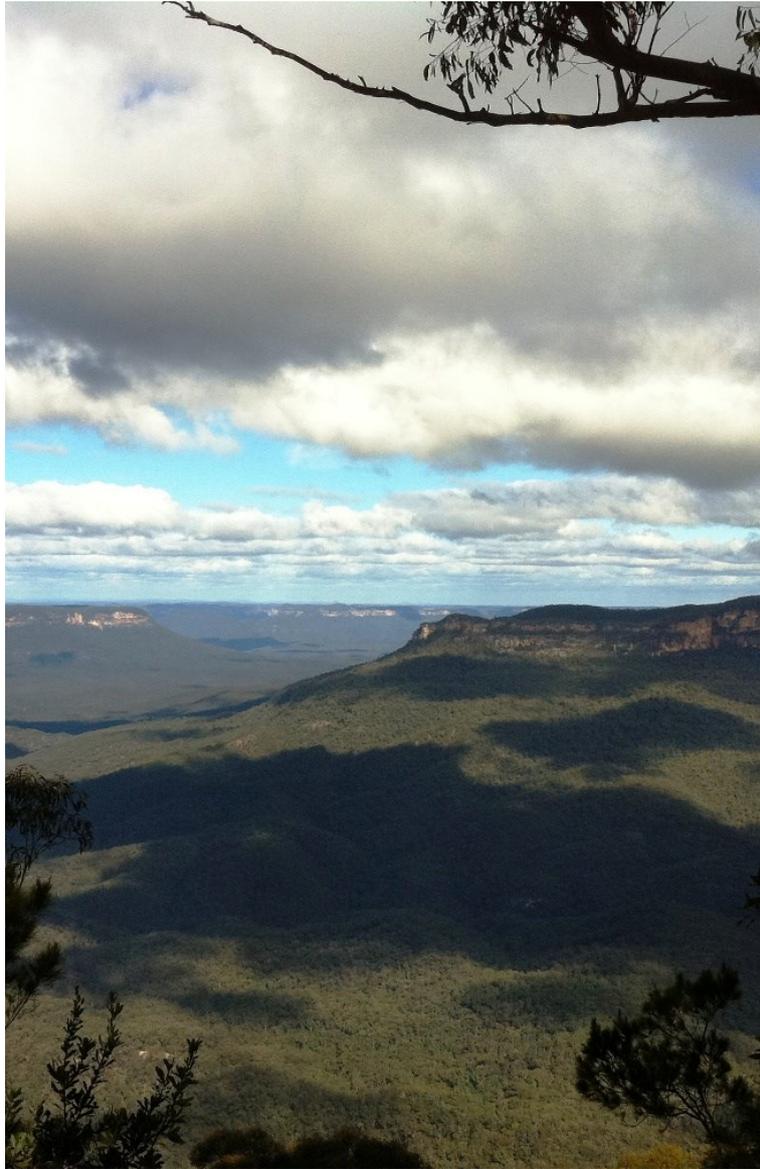
The old man laughed. “You were not welcome, then. You’re now. It’s safe.”

The young boy tentatively pushed his arm forward. He felt nothing, and then looked towards the old man. “It’s safe!” he called, and walked into the cave.

The old man looked up and shook his head. Can this be the one he was to teach? He turned, to see the skinny Jaron catch up to him. He said to the boy: “You believe that you must learn, what I have to teach?”

Jaron nodded. “More than life itself. How did you do that, back there?”

The old man squatted, looking out towards the entrance. He motioned for Jaron, to do the same.



Looking from the cave

They both stared to the valley below. “If you want to learn from me, you must get used to doing as I say, without question. That is, until I tell you otherwise. Do you understand?”

The boy nodded his head.

“Tell me; what you think is out there, Jaron.”

The boy peered at the horizon. "I don't think that the world is empty, as village lore would have us believe. I think there are people out there."

"How many?"

"Many villages, old man. More than I could count."

"How far away are they?" asked the old man.

Jaron thought for a moment and said, "On the other side of the world and then beyond. Maybe even in those stars."

"In the stars, you say. What makes you think that?"

The boy shrugged. "Just a feeling, is all."

"Have you ever seen any other tribes?"

"No."

"Have you ever heard of other tribes, outside of the world?"

"No, but I know that they did exist and that they're still here, if smaller."

"I see. Are they good or bad?"

Jaron's body began to tremble. "I don't think that they're all good. I don't know why."

"Hmmm.... What is it, which you expect to learn from me?"

Jaron stood and paced to the entrance and back. He looked at the old man. "Somehow, I feel that there is bad out there, beyond where I can see. I feel you can show me something, which can help me fix the wrongness, but perhaps you can't. I don't know anything else."

The old man smiled. "You're correct. I'm the one to teach you. I too, am looking for something. I'm looking for one to teach, so that he may correct the wrongs out there. Tell me if you're he."

Jaron went onto his knees by the old man. "I'm he, the one you want to teach, the one that has to correct what is out there. Please old man, I beg of you; what is it that you have to teach me? Why am I here? Where am I going?"

The old man smiled under his pale grey beard. "I will show you, if you will promise never to reveal it, and what you're to learn here, is to be used in the demise of our common enemies."

The boy's eyes pleaded the answer. He said nothing and the cavern began to fill with light. Jaron's eyes opened wide with excitement. He looked at the old man, who was smiling as pieces of fruit, from the far corner of the cave, began to roll across the floor, to the feet of Jaron. Three pieces of fruit rose in the air, rotated and fell into the boy's lap.

Jaron held one piece up, for a closer inspection. "Is this wizardry, old man?"

The old man smiled and sat back. "In a fashion. I believe this is more an exact science, than magic. If this is what you seek, then I can teach it to you. However, the teachings don't come without responsibility. There is also the learning to be battle ready."

The boy nodded. "I need what you have to show me. Yet, I believe that I'm already battle ready. It

was only three days ago, that in single hand combat, I defeated the great-spirit snake, anaconda.”

“So I heard. Many of the children have sung of your courage. To defeat that great snake, is worthy of the best of poems. Those, who you will battle, will have the skill of a hundred anacondas. Will you be ready for that?”

“I will try. There is another hunting party going out, tomorrow, and I will be in it. I will run harder and faster than before. I will get these muscles and bones ready, for the hundred anacondas.”

“Good, Jaron. When you’re ready, then we shall begin. Now, hurry outside. Sheril is coming up the hill, looking for you. It seems that you did not tell your mother that you would be here, this morning. You should go, now.”

Jaron stood. He looked towards the entrance. He did not hear her, until a moment later. Off in the distance, he heard her voice singing. “How did....”

The old man smiled. “You will also learn that, later. Now, go.”

The boy turned and ran from the cave, to greet the pretty Sheril. She was pleased to find him, and they descended the hillside, together.

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CHAPTER 2

HOUSE OF
TORREN

1053 BS

AFTER BATTLE OF SEQUETUS 3

The Great Hall of Jilta was full. Over two thousand Temple leaders had thronged to the annual speech of The *Master Templar*, the sixteenth in the line of succession. The center of the greatest *religion* in the *Federation* was on *Jilta*, having left *Sequetus 3* less than a millennium ago. *Jilta*, it was promoted, was the holy home planet of *Lorde Torren*, who died over a thousand years ago. It was *Jilta* that had sent out the expeditions, to liberate *Sequetus 3* and in turn the *Galaxy*. It was *Jilta* that had spawned the religion of *Torren*, not *Sequetus 3*. That small planet, *Sequetus 3*, *Earth*, had only been a local battleground, though the events there had changed the *Federation* and the *Galaxy*.

Since the early days of *Torren*, his name and glory had spread to the far *Outer-Worlds* of civilization. At first, the Temples were a curiosity, while the fervor their short-life *Earth* followers created, was looked upon with scorn. Now, there was at least one Temple, on eighty percent of all civilized planets. That did not mean that the religion's growth was slowing, as its followers comprised only a small

percentage of any planet's people. The religion was expanding, but in its own estimation, it needed to have a greater impact, more followers, more influence.



Planet Jilta

Keeping with tradition, the Master Templar was a *short-lifer*. He stood before the massive thronging crowd.

The *Royalty* of Jilta had vanished with the exodus of Lorde Hymondy, and the prior fall of the *Federation Alliance*, over a millennium ago. Now the Royals, what was left of them, were no longer a united elite race, of their own. Most had disappeared, prior to the Battle for Sequetus 3. Earth had been saved, but it was the beginning of the end, for the known Federation. The Royals no longer ruled. On some of the planets, they still held a position of status, but

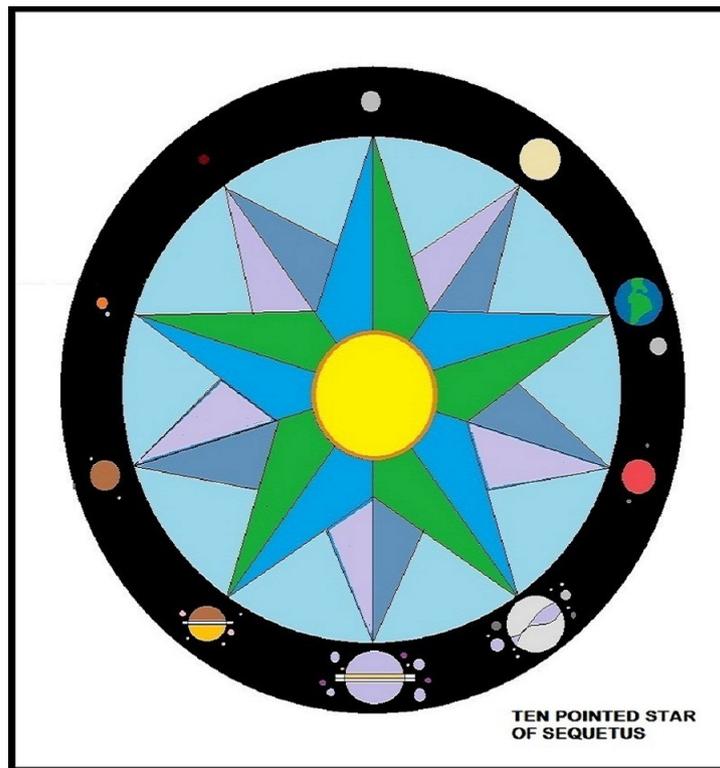
their ability to wield power had diminished. They were often being only a Head-Of-State, as an antiquated rubber-stamped institution.

Planet administrators were representatives of the leading interest groups, on the planets. Most planets had representatives from the military, the *Warp Drive Bank*, the larger commercial corporations, people's representatives, occasionally a member of a Royal Family, and more recently, a representative from the *House of Torren* of the Temple.

On Jilta, the planet had been swept up by the teachings of Torren. It took little time before the House of Torren safely filled the vacuum, left by the Royals. There were now over one hundred and twenty-seven thousand *Temples* throughout Jilta. The once *Great Palace* of Lorde Hymondy III, was now the heart of the House of Torren. Such was the influence and power, of this new religion.

The Master Templar stood on the podium in the Great Hall, its stained glass windows reaching through the fingers of intricately carved rock walls, to forty *pacs* above. Its vaulted ceilings now had paintings of Earth scenes and Jilta, as sister planets, in a sea of confusion.

The Master Templar raised his hands. His garb was heavily embroidered with gold, on royal-blue velvet. Over his left breast, he wore the *ten-pointed star* of the House of Torren.



He looked down on the thousands below. Not all were local. Some had journeyed from the far Temples, of the outer reaches of the Federation.

Behind the Master Templar, was that famous picture of Torren, holding the bullet that had been shot at him, by the assassin on Earth, over a millennium ago.

“Control is what was needed then, and it’s needed now!” cried the Master Templar to his audience.

“More control!” the crowd called back.

“How are we going to get it? By becoming bigger, assuming the void of power left to us, by the Royals. Only then, can this Galaxy be at peace, with

itself. It needs the guiding hand and spirit, of a well controlled House of Torren.

“We’re what was prophesized; we’ll govern all aspects of life, in the Federation. Already, we have seen Temples flourish in the new worlds, well beyond the old sectors of the Federation. Yes, this is a religion spawned on Earth and carried on the migrating wings of the masses, from Earth to their new worlds.

“However, this isn’t a religion of Earth versus the Federation, as some protagonists would lead the civilized worlds to believe. This is a religion for all people, short and long-lifers alike. Only when enough see the light from the House of Torren, will all of mankind be set free.

“We’re no threat to anybody. We wish all to do well in life, to be honorable and good. We will, however, expand our Temples, our followers, and the number of planets we’re on. Let no one try to stop us, for we shall not be stopped. Until now the only limit to our expansion is the limit that we have put on ourselves. If you don’t agree with those limits on our work, then may man finally be free. It’s in your hands, that freedom.

“Thank you, and remember, as was said by the Torren, himself: Only we make our own future. Do what is right, and good night.” The Master Templar raised his hands and waved. Music began, after a short pause; he turned and stepped down from view.

Applause filled the air, and so ended the final service, of the annual *Sortet*².

The Master Templar removed his golden-hood; a symbol of the torment Torren had gone through in his final days, to save all known civilizations.

The Master Templar hurried down a corridor to his quarters, where he would refresh himself, before his next meeting, with the Seven *Cordellos*.

The Seven Cordellos were the seven most powerful *Templars* in the Galaxy. They were the Temple leaders of the seven largest Temples. The size of a Temple was determined by its income, generated from followers, the size of its membership, plus the number of *Temple Minors*³ around it.

Currently, the largest Temples were three from Jilta, one from *Kalanon*, one from the sector of *Silto*, and the last two were from the sector of *Centor*.

The Master Templar was nervous. Until this year, Jilta had held a majority of four seats of the Seven Cordellos. Now, the fourth seat had changed, and was a temple in the *sector* of Centor. There was little reason to believe that the Master Templar's

² **DEFINITION: Sortet:** The annual Grand Meeting lasting two weeks, of the House of Torren. All Temples from the civilized world are represented. SOURCE: SERVICE'S GUIDE TO TEMPLE BEHAVIOR, THIRD EDITION 1211 BS, PP. 23-25

³ **DEFINITION: Temple Minor:** A smaller temple, a subsidiary temple. A Temple could have ten, or ten thousand Temple Minors. A Temple Minor could have as many as a hundred thousand members, with smaller local missions consisting of thousands of members. Temple Minors and missions are all temples. SOURCE: SERVICE'S GUIDE TO TEMPLE BEHAVIOR, THIRD EDITION 1211 BS, p. 437

position was at risk, as the Seven Cordellos had never in the past broken from the tradition, to elect a Master that was nominated by his forbearer. Traditionally, the Master Templar was a short-lifer, a Jiltanian, who endorsed and ratified the rulings of the Cordellos. As per the House of Torren's own constitution, the Master Templar was elected by the Seven Cordellos, and gave the official approval to their plans and projects. The Master Templar also had the power of veto, nullifying the power of the Seven Cordellos, with the exception of his own election.

The Master Templar waited, in the small anteroom to his residence, where the Seven Cordellos would soon appear. He drummed his fingers on the table. Had his speech been powerful enough?

The Centorians were fanatics about expansion. He knew what they wanted; military advancement. They wanted to arm, to develop a galactic fleet that would go to the rescue of any Temple under attack, for expressing its beliefs.

The Centorians had sent their resolution in before, when they had only Minor Cordello status, and it had been declined year after year, for the past two decades. Now, Jilta had lost the control of power. The Cordellos of Silto would side with the Centorians. They had done so in the past. It was the Cordello of Kalanon who was a wild card. Which way would she vote? Would she go against Jilta? Would she side with the Centorians? Could this see the

office of the Master Templar removed from Jilta, after a millennium of expansion? No, in the past the Kalonian had always been an ally of the Jiltanians, but now the Kalonian held the balance of power and that made the Cordello from Kalanon, one of the most powerful people in the Galaxy. Which way would she vote?

Last year, the Cordello from Kalanon attempted to introduce a ruling; to expand the number of Cordellos from seven to nineteen. The other six Cordellos had defeated the resolution. It obviously would have been a diluting of their power. Now the Master Templar wondered. Where did the balance of power lie? If he did give approval, for the number of Cordellos to increase to nineteen, how would it affect the control of the House of Torren? From twelve new members, there would be four from Jilta, two from Centor, one from the planet *Sleebo*, another from Silto, one from Penec and the last three would be from the new short-life Outer-Worlds, beyond Penrell. Yes, the Outer-Worlds beyond Penrell, held the balance. The Earth colonies were traditional, and colonial, but not military expansionists. If they ruled, as the balance of power, at least the Galaxy would be safe from a military backlash from the Federation, which he feared would occur, if the Templars took up arms. The only way to expand, was in peace. It was difficult to see expansion, under any other guise, than peace.

The Master Templar sighed. He knew that times were changing quickly, now. There was really only one simple solution, and that was for Jilta to work harder and for their Temples to regain their former splendor. It was only five hundred standard years ago, that all of the Seven Cordellos, were all from the planet of Jilta. It was recorded as a great triumph for expansion, when one of the seats finally went to another planet.

Yes, with that expansion came shifts in the balance of power. He knew that the shifts were swinging away from Jilta. He did not object to that. He only wanted the expansion to be strong, but devoid of militarists. Only then, could they be assured of placing their Templars in positions of power, in every organization, on every planet. Only then, could the dreams of Torren be achieved. They would usher in a time of peace, when good men could hold their heads up high. That time was still in the future.

The Master Templar had held his position for twenty-three standard years. He was fifty-eight years old and of Earth ancestry. He was of medium build and had a powerful ruddy face. He would like to rule for the next five years, fulfilling a natural office term of thirty years. He would then be able to witness the results of any resolutions, passed during this session.

All resolutions adopted as *Canon Law* would be adopted for a trial period of five years, as per their

constitution. Upon the lapsing of five years, the canon law would be reviewed and if changes were required, they would be adopted for another five years. Should no changes to the law be deemed necessary, then the law could be granted *permanent status*.

In walked the Seven Cordellos; hooded in gold cloth, and contrasted by burgundy capes, heavily embroidered with gold thread depicting the heraldry of their own temples. The Master Templar sat at the head of the long table, nodding to each, as they sat.

Finally, the senior Cordello for Silto, entered, a middle aged man, but different to the others. He had been a Cordello for fifteen years, the first as a long-lifer, the first true Federationists to gain the title, within the Temple.

They all opened their agendas. The first two items were ratifications of existing five-years-laws. These passed, without much discussion. The next item was the ordination of a hundred and twenty more Minor Cordellos, from the far Earth colonies. These were also approved quickly.

Finally, they reached the familiar proposal of the Cordello of Kalanon. She read her proposal and looked up. She never expected it to be passed, but she earnestly believed that the time was approaching, when the Jiltanians must throw the burden of control open, to the other Temples and that, only with greater representation from the new worlds could the

House of Torren expand, beyond the clutches of their enemies.

She sat there, stunned. The Master Templar smiled at her soft face. It was not hard to realize why she had so much power. She looked every part of the saint. Wisps of bright golden hair curled, from under the hood. The Master Templar estimated her age as no more than thirty-six.

The three Jilta Cordellos had just approved her motion. This meant that, for the next five years, starting in twelve months, the Sortet would be ruled by nineteen Cordellos.

She stared at the Master Templar, who said, "Well done. Times are changing and our expansion must continue. It would appear that the control of the House of Torren must now be shared with many others, at least for a period of five years.

The two Centorians exchanged glances. They had voted against the proposal, but knew better than to voice any disapproval, against the outcome. This was obviously a time to be amicable, and to try to get the Kalonian Cordello to vote for their proposal. They knew that they had lost the play, for a stronger stand against the enemies, of the House of Torren. As soon as the Jiltanians had approved the Kalonian recommendation, while the Centorians had voted against it, they had no chance of having their own recommendation approved by her, this year.

Their recommendation was now tabled quietly, and politely denied. There would be no military arm of the Temples, this year.

The Cordellos politely rose, bowed and left the room.

The Master Templar looked towards the Jiltanian secretary, taking the recorded minutes and said, "That means we survive a Holy Junta for another year."

"Next year, what will happen?" asked the secretary, as he rose from his seat, with the transcripts.

The Master Templar shrugged. "We have a year to lobby and buy favors. A year to get our marginal Temples into the top nineteen," he sighed. "It appears that the simple easy days of expansion, are past."

ψ

THE BANK

1053 BS

“What do you mean the recommendation was not approved?” The tall skinny man was glaring at the man standing by the wall.

“The Cordellos voted against the proposal,” the shorter man answered.

There were three others there, with them. The room was small; its walls were decorated with maps and systems of the Galaxy.

The tall man was livid. “We invested a lot of money in the Centorian temples, to get them to the needed size, so as to be able to break the Jiltanian stronghold. They should have easily taken the recommendation and acted upon it. Did we not provide enough provocation, to have them want to go military? Did we not attack and destroy enough temples, and destroy their merchant shipping to the Outer-Worlds? Did we not have at least a dozen temples burnt to the ground in Kalanon? What more do they require, to tell them they need to arm; to protect what is theirs? What will we have to do, for this proposal to be accepted?”

The second man swallowed and said nothing.

One of the others stepped forward. “It isn’t so bad. We all know that for the *Bank* to grow stronger,

fastest, it must have two parties at war. Otherwise, there is little profit. We need the Templars to arm, so the Federation will realize the risk that these fanatics pose, to our peaceful society. This will be done, and if not in this Sortel, well, then there is next year.”

The tall man nodded. “All our work, our timetable...,” he sighed. “We needed to start producing this now. We’re losing control, over the Galaxy. First, the wars with the Alliance a millennium ago saw us as victors, but we lost our monopoly of manufacturing *Warp Drives*. There are three independent manufacturers, now!”

“I know, I know,” said the third man. He was old and had seen most of the changes to the Bank, from its days of glorified single rule over the Federation, to making wars and ceasing wars, to suit its own ends. All was done, in the name of good economics. “Still, we have come a long way since that woman arrived here...” The others fell silent. It has been agreed that she would not be spoken of, again. The third man looked around, shaking his head. “You forget how easily she made us succumb. There is almost nothing recorded of her and look what happened. A millennium ago was...” A pain in his head made him double over. He tried to say her name, but couldn’t. He straightened, and resumed talking, on a slightly different subject. The pain vanished. No one could ever recall that woman, and what happened on Palbo, a thousand years before.

The third man continued, "As our forefathers realized, the only way to rule and provide peace in this Galaxy, has been to have one ruler. That ruler has been us, since the inauguration of the Warp Drive Bank, and it shall remain that way. Only by singular economic rule, will there be peace that lasts. Yes, sometimes, that means minor wars have to be started, to divert the populace's attention away from us. It was during those times of uprisings against the Royals and the Federation, by the last of the Confederates, which saw our greatest leaps forward. We're still the kingmakers, and what the loss of power of the Royal Families, pays tribute to that. They went against us and now, they're relics; a forgotten era of the Galaxy."

A squat round man, who had been sitting away from the rest, now rose. "That was a mistake and I won't go into why again, but I say that the Royals were our greatest asset. They ruled on our behalf. They did our bidding as programmed, except for one last occasion. That singular mistake did not mean that they should have been disposed of.... like rats."

"Get to the point Rachass!" called the last man, also old, but not as rotund. He walked over to the group, wearing a black single piece suit, as did the others, but with heavy gold on the arms depicting rank.

"Yes." Rachass stiffened and looked ahead. "It isn't as bad as it seems. The work and investments, fostering hatred for this group of misfit religious

fanatics hasn't been wasted. I understand the reason the Centorian's recommendation was not passed, is because the bill put up by the Kalanon Cordello was accepted, and that acceptance threw off the Jiltanian stranglehold. They just defeated themselves."

"Good," said the last man. "All things will be achieved with time and perseverance. All that is needed now, is that continued perseverance."

"So, what has happened on Sequetus? Have we found him yet?"

The tall skinny man's face tensed as he went over to his notes. He stared upward and then slumped into the chair. "No sir. The depopulation has almost finished. We have not found him. I believe it may be possible that he eluded us, and escaped to the Outer-Worlds."

"No. He is there, otherwise we would have heard of him, elsewhere. Keep the operation going, until you find him. He must not escape, especially to the Outer-Worlds."

"Yes sir." The others were returning to their seats.

"Good," the round man said. "What we need to do now is look at our strategy of the past two years. We need more strength in our attacks. This religion isn't hated enough. It's getting too free a reign in the short-lived Outer-Worlds. In fact, without our direct intercession, too many of the peoples of Earth would have emigrated. They breed prolifically."

The long skinny man looked at his leader, "Sir, we have tried to provoke violence between the long-lifers and those of Earth, and there seems little interest."

"Yes, but wait until they increase in numbers and appear as a threat to the long-lifers. That will worry them. They're of insufficient numbers on the inner planets, and the outer planets are too far away from the old Federation, for the long-lifers to be concerned. Arming the House of Torren, shall change that attitude. When the Templars take up arms, then they will be seen as the threat, which they really are. Then, the old Federationists will awake and want to eliminate them. It will be then, when we regain our absolute ruler status."

The meeting continued.

ψ

RAMBUS 2

LATE 1053 AD

Gerome sat at the head of his table. On his left were his two daughters and on his right, his son and son in law, Rango.

His wife smiled, at her husband and their life. This was a time of celebration, the *Exodus Week*; the week when the *First Fleet* set out from Earth, to colonize the Outer-Worlds, beyond the Federation.

In Gerome's case, life had been good, as it had in the case of all his ancestors, since the first settling. *The Planet* was good to them, their friends and all the colonials.

"Before we eat, I think today being especially *Arrival Day* it would be good to take a moment's silence to think about what *The Torren* gave up, so that we could all be free." Gerome looked about him and then lowered his gaze to the ground. He waited a moment and then glanced up. "Hazel, could you pass the bread?" he asked his wife.

The table was full of produce. The family began to pass the food back and forth. There were breads, vegetables, baked protein yeast, sauces and a few fruits. The planet had been very good to them, and this week, they would eat only what the planet had directly supplied. During this week, there would be

no imported goods on the table. Such were the new traditions of the Outer-Worlds.

The mealtime lasted an hour. Celebrating Arrival Day, was the major event of the five hundred and twenty-three day year. A day was twenty-eight *standard hours* long.

Gerome stood up from the table and the children ran out from the dining room. "Don't be too long on the holo-phone, to your friends. Satellite hire is still expensive."

"Yes papa," called the eldest, as they ran out to their other rooms. Gerome knew they would be all calling their friends on the next station, six hundred kilometers away. Still, if it made his children happy, how could he complain on Arrival Day?



A township on Rambus

Gerome stood looking out through the wide glazing, over the dry desert and rock, which stretched out below him. Today, the mining *harvesters* of the desert sands would be inactive. He looked towards the far craggy hills on the horizon, at the glinting of their metallic sands, against the sun. Beyond them, were the great lakes, eleven kilometers deep. They provided the heat from the inner planet; the energy for the algae to grow and breed, creating the oxygen that had built up in the atmosphere over the millions of years. The soil itself was too arid and poisoned with *bauxite* and hard metals, to allow any significant plant growth on land. The algae seemed to be able to withstand the metallic components in the water and, had in turn, protected the water source from the overhead sun.

Tomorrow, he would return to work in the mineral harvester.

Ω

The first mate cried out, to the crew, "We have been boarded! Defend the ship," and he dashed from the bridge, with ten guards.

He made a stand, shooting from the other end of the hallway, against the white shining uniforms and dark faceplates of the pirates. The mate dived to the left, as he shot.

The guard behind him fell, with the left side of his chest exploding. The mate glanced up and fired

at the approaching enemy. A series of shots whizzed past, and he scrambled back to the bridge over the dead bodies of crewmates. As the door opened, he collapsed. His right arm was severed with the knife-like precision of laser fire. He lay on the floor, one eye staring at his arm, lying alone, across the hall. He could barely breathe.

The first mate heard a few more shots, footsteps; and then a boot came down hard on his severed shoulder, driving pain into him, until he almost passed out. He screamed, until his skull exploded, from a close range shot, from a pirate. His body twitched and another shot was fired into the brain.

The pirate looked into the bridge. Three of his comrades were dead, as well as the whole complement of this ship's crew. He pushed his way past two dead bodies. "Colonial short-lifers, the scourge of the Galaxy!" he grunted. The sight of short-lifers disgusted him. Carefully, he adjusted the controls, and viewed the planet on the screens. The ship would be within its orbit in twelve hours.

The pirate looked towards his own men; nodded and motioned that it was time to leave. All the raided ship's crew was confirmed, as dead.

Ω

Gerome looked out from the bubble side-dome. "It seems that the density of bauxite is lessening. See if we can locate a new deposit, Rango."

"Sure boss. I reckon going to the east, will pay."

Gerome nodded. "Gerome, to bridge.... Ralph, move the rig to grid 134 by 1295. We'll try one more run, before we change shifts."

"No problems boss," came back the reply, over the radio.

The great rig began to lumber over the desert plain. Gerome and Rango were in a reconnaissance sand-craft that moved, using twelve triple jointed legs. There were eight such craft, which operated around the clock, except Arrival Day.

The rig was two stories high, with accommodation quarters above, and the operations deck below. Crew rotation was done by *gyrocopter*, at the end of each shift, them being ferried, back and forth, to the mother harvester.

Gerome sat, strapped in his chair, bouncing up and down, as the great aluminum machine lumbered over the craggy landscape.

After fifteen minutes Gerome received a call from the harvester, two hundred kilometers away.

It was the harvester captain. "Gerome. Urgent mission. It looks like we have been pirated."

Gerome looked at the man on the screen. "They have never been this far out before; why would they want to attack our merchant ships? There is almost nothing aboard, on the incoming flight."

"I know, I know. There is no answer, only a short mayday, and now the ship is on a collision course, with *Rambus*, through our atmosphere. I need you to detour. It's coming down now. The expected impact point is being transmitted to you."

Gerome looked down at the map points. The destination was a lake, not far from them. "Impact point identified. Rover 1 out."

He stared out from his bubble to see a long streak of smoke flash across the sky, and vanish, across the horizon.

Rango's voice came over the speaker. "By the Torren, boss, did you see that?"

"Sure did. That is where we're headed now. That was our freighter and supplies up there, coming down."

"Not pirates!" groaned Rango.

"Apparently so."

"Damn it. I had a gift for Silfy," said Rango. Rango was twenty years old, planet born and had not yet ventured beyond the atmosphere. He had married Gerome's eldest daughter Silfy, who was eighteen. He loved her deeply and worked long shifts, to provide the things he wanted, for her. On the freighter were items he had purchased; some jewelry and household appliances.

Commodities were expensive out on *Rambus*, but the life was free. Free to work hard and earn a living, away from stories they had heard, about of the crowded cities of Earth.

Primarily, Rambus mined bauxite, and on the harvester it was converted into aluminum. In great slabs it was lifted, and sent *off planet*, aboard the freighters that found it just economic enough, to serve their small community.

The bauxite harvesters were run on a cooperative basis, with those who served in them, having bought their right to be there. Those who had initially bought and paid for the original harvesters were wealthy now, by any planetary standard. Initially, the first loans for the operations came from the *House of Torren*. Hundreds of years later, they were still paying back the original, no interest loans. No one begrudged the payments, for if it was not for the will of the Templars and their desire to expand to make the Galaxy theirs, then none of the settlers would have reached the colonies.

Rambus did not have a Temple yet, but it was hoped that when they reached a population of one million they would be assisted by the Templars, to build one. That site was down near the southern pole, where the temperature was cooler and plants could grow outdoors, in treated soil. There was even now a small town, down south, which was almost self-sufficient, away from the harvesters. That was progress.

Gerome owned the rights to the exploration vehicle, they now roamed in. He was contracted to harvester *H1*. His job was to find the bauxite and guide H1 to it.

As Gerome watched the screens and stared out to the rock hills looming ahead, he thought of the components that had been lost on the freighter. He had bought a new satellite dish, and presents for his children; but more importantly, how would the harvester get its aluminum off the planet? The freighter should have had aboard the anticipated planetary food supplies for six months, as well. Rambus was able to produce necessities to support itself, but luxuries were always imported and looked forward to. Would they be able to salvage any food, or anything else, from the freighter?

Gerome wondered what hardships this would bring. He had heard of whole new communities being wiped out, through supply ships being pirated. He watched as the ground slipped by, underneath. They had only this one last rock outcrop to scale, and they would see the lake.

He could now spot it over the ridges beyond a smaller lake. "There is deep water on that other side," he called to the crew.



The crashed freighter on Rambus

Their machine lumbered up, to the top of the last rocks. Gerome stared, as they rested at the summit. The freighter was there. Its shining silvery hull was half out of the lake pointing upwards. It had not broken up completely in the atmosphere, and was nose down and half of it, a good three hundred meters above the surface of the lake. Gerome stared. It was the largest structure that he had seen in his entire life.

It had crashed into the lake, and its superstructure was still intact, not sliding to the lake bottom. Gerome started the exploration vehicle, down to the lakeside.

Ralph's voice came over the radio. "By all Torren boss. If that don't beat all. Look at the mark of the water line, on the shore. It must have sent a wave, a kilometer inland."

Rango's voice now cut in, over the top of Ralph. "Look! Smoke from the far side. It's gradually slipping down."

"Got it Rango. Images are being transmitted to *Mother*." *Mother* was the nickname for H1, their harvester.

The captain of H1 was on line. Gerome tuned in the image, as they reached the bottom of the rocks and began traversing the flatland, towards the lake's edge. "Gerome. We have now launched three gyrocopters to you. I can't understand why the ship hasn't burnt up."

"Perhaps there was someone still aboard and somehow they slowed down the descent," answered Gerome.

The captain nodded. "Maybe the pirates are getting sloppy. Check it out. Does it look like you can get out there, before our help arrives?"

They were closer to the shoreline. "I doubt it, but I will scout about, to be certain. It looks like the surface lining of the lake was scattered out over the desert when the ship crashed. There may be a chance someone survived."

"OK, but don't take any unnecessary risks. Keep me informed. H1 out."

A few minutes later and they were at the lake's edge. Gerome stopped the machine. He noted that the freighter had slid another twenty meters into the water since their first view. The smoke had vanished.

“I’m going out there. If any of you wish to join me, do so.”

Gerome threw open the lid to his compartment and scrambled out, into the fifty-three degree Celsius heat. He glanced towards the sun and then back at the lake. He walked along, to a ladder and stepped down to the ground. He sank a few inches into the ground. Mud! This would have to be the first time that this place had seen mud.

The surface kelp and weed that prevented the lake from evaporating, was now scattered for kilometers, over the dusty and rocky land surface.

Gerome breathed in the hot air and squinted over the lake. The water around the ship reflected the light from the hot sun. Normally, that water couldn’t be seen. A reflective weed covered it, and it protected the water from the sun’s rays. However, at the same time it permitted some light to penetrate into the water below. The weed leaf was translucent. Few other plants could survive so near the surface. The sun’s rays were deadly. Just below the surface leaf, was jammed great kelp and plants that enabled the water to support life. It was almost solid plant for the first seventy meters; it then gave way to the softer plant life, followed deeper by microscopic algae. At the deepest points, who knew what lay down there, for the lakes had never been surveyed.

N I C K B R O A D H U R S T

THE TEMPLAR MINISERIES

Page 49 | 606

SALVAGE

Gerome's two crew members stood behind him and stared out at the enormous hulk that protruded from the water. More smoke began to waft up, from the far side. The great drives stretched up, a hundred meters into the air. Slowly, a rumble began to shake the ground. An explosion ripped through the near side and flames belched out towards the shore.

The three stepped further back, in response. Gerome stared at the large flare, traveling up into the sky. The water began to be struck with falling debris, from the explosion. The great hulk moaned and inched closer towards the bottom of the lake. Its slide into the murky depths began to speed up as another underwater explosion, sent water spouts into the air. A large wave of plant and algae began to travel towards the shoreline.

"By the Torren, let's get up from here," called Ralph as he leapt up from the water's edge. The others followed.

They arrived back at the exploration craft, in time to see the wave wash up the shore and slowly recede into the mud. Gerome looked back to the freighter, which had since slipped another fifty meters downwards, towards its grave.

He turned towards the sound of the radio aboard his craft. It was the captain of H1.

"Gerome. We have just received a distress call, from the freighter. There is someone aboard. Can you get in?"

"Negative Captain. The exploration craft would become entrapped in the surface weed. We would never get out. How long until the gyrocopter arrives?"

"Another fifteen minutes. Can the ship stay afloat that long?"

"I don't know, Captain. It's still going down. Let me get back to you in ten minutes, I have an idea. Out."

Gerome put the microphone back and looked at the crew. "Get aboard. I have an idea." He swung up to the top level, jumped into his seat and was followed by the crew. A minute later, the craft slowly stepped onto the shallow water.

"Where are we going, boss?" called Ralph.

"Look on the screen. See that area of water, there?"

"Yeah."

"See how all the weed and vegetation has been washed ashore?"

"Yeah..," said Ralph slowly.

"That weed came from that section of water. There is every chance that the water is clear. If it is, we may be able to slip our way down and clear a line

to the freighter, under the growth. With luck we can then rescue whoever is aboard.”

“Got it,” said Ralph.

The exploration craft found a path down to the shore and slowly began to lower into the water. Gerome watched, as the water came up to his window. The craft stepped into deeper water than its depth and floated, with only its small antennae breaking the surface.

Gerome retracted up all the craft’s legs, submerged and watched the weed and kelp beyond his bubble window. He looked at the controls and slowly they descended.

He was correct. Most of the vegetation had been washed ashore, leaving their section clear. His only concern was that when the freighter slid down towards its grave, would the weed on the surface close back over, preventing them from reaching the open surface again?

Gerome looked at the instrument panel before him. He checked his gauges. “Ralph, how does it look, at your end?”

Ralph looked about, the light of his cabin shone into the blackness. Occasionally, some of the kelp flashed past his plastic bubble hatch. “Looks clean here, boss.”

“Rango?”

“A heavy wall of weed to the right. That’s better. Plenty of room, it looks fine now,” answered Rango, from the underbelly of the craft.

Gerome watched the controls, as the craft continued down, beyond all light from the surface.

He leveled out at one hundred and twenty meters, set course for the position of the freighter and slowly edged forward.

"Rango, take the helm while I get below."

"I'm on it."

Gerome flicked a switch and his seat descended downwards into the craft. Quickly, he unstrapped himself and edged up the corridor, leading to the discharge chamber.

The exploration craft were multipurpose vehicles, and suited off-planet and wet-planet uses, alike.

Quickly, Gerome donned his suit and helmet.

"Ralph, can you see the freighter yet?"

Ralph looked out, beyond where the lights of the craft were streaming. "Nothing yet," he indicated to the boss.

Gerome strode to the decompression chamber and waited.

Ralph finally saw the side of the hull of the freighter. There were small lights. "We're almost there skipper. It's still sliding down. I would estimate that it will still hold for another fifteen minutes."

"Good Ralph. I want Rango to radio to the freighter, to tell whoever is in there that they must get out first, before the ship goes down. In the meantime, I will get ready."

"The plan, boss?" called Rango.

Gerome checked the decompression chamber, flicked some valves. "When that old bucket goes down, it will go down fast and take all around it, too. I have no intention of getting inside it, but if whoever is in it, can get out, wearing a suit, then I can pull them aboard, here. We'll then exit to the surface, through the temporary opening in the weed, which the ship has left. If the gyros get to the ship before it goes down, then maybe they can pull the survivors out."

"If the person can't get out? I mean, all the corridors to the exits are possibly blocked," called Rango.

"Then, they will go down with the ship," returned Gerome. "There will be no further risk of life. Understood? We'll make every opportunity to save whoever is there, but they must help us by making it out from the ship, themselves."

"Understood."

"Boss," it was now Ralph. "She is moving. Get ready for evasive maneuvers!"

The floor tilted up, as a shock wave threw the craft about. An explosion. Their craft pitched and spun. Another explosion.

"She's really going down fast! I reckon she will be completely underwater, now. There go the drive stacks." Another explosion and their craft almost pitched upside down.

Gerome was thrown from one side of the craft to the other. He slammed against the far bulkhead.

"Hell. By the Torren, Ralph, what the heck are you doing? Trying to kill me?"

The craft was thrown again and began to rotate, spin and gyrate. They were heading down and Ralph was doing all he could, to cease their descent. Sweat was pouring from his brow. "Boss, we're following the freighter down. It's already far below us. We're following, in its wake. Our engines are screaming and we're still going down."

"For Torren's sake Ralph!" screamed Gerome. "This tub will implode, in another thousand meters. We're not built for this depth...." He was thrown into the far wall, and knocked unconscious.

Ralph strained to twist the controls. Their craft was still being sucked down, but the rate of descent was now slowing. He guessed that the freighter was far below them and their descent would halt, but would it stop before their hull gave way? There was already moisture on the inside of Ralph's bubble hatch.

Finally, their craft began to level out, at a depth of one thousand two hundred meters. Very slowly, they began to rise to the surface.

Ralph called out, down the corridor, after wiping the sweat from his brow. "Rango! Go and find the boss. I think something has happened to him. We're ascending slowly. Instruments tell me that there is clear water above us all the way, to the surface. If there was anyone in that ship, they're thousands of meters below us now."

"Roger, Ralph." Rango unstrapped from his chair and slid down the corridor, where he found Gerome on the floor, blood trickling down the side of his face.

"Brace yourself!" cried Ralph over the radio. Immediately the craft lurched up and to the side, caused by the last death-throws of the freighter, as it imploded below. More shock waves hit, at lessening degrees. Slowly they continued to rise.

Gerome opened his eyes. They were only a moment from the surface. He was lying in the small infirmary. He looked at Rango. "Have we stopped the descent?"

"We're only meters from the surface, boss."

Gerome sighed and slowly sat up, felt the lump on his head and grimaced. He would be all right. He stood and steadied himself, then slowly walked back, down the corridor, to his seat. He strapped himself in and activated the chair so that it rose to the position, under his bubble window. He could see light coming in, from above; it felt a relief.

The water line above, broke over the hull of their small craft. The beautiful blue sky world above, flooded into Gerome's cockpit. Their craft was well afloat and kilometers from the shore line.

Above three gyrocopters were circling. "Good to see you EX1. We thought we had lost you. Any sign of other life down there?"

"Negative, Commander. It went down, before we could make any communications," said Gerome.

He flipped his bubble lid open, desperate for some natural open air.

Before anything else was said, the surface began to swirl as hundreds of bubbles started to disrupt the flatness of the water. More bubbles erupted and then large turbulences, as gases made their way to the surface from the freighter. Gerome figured that they were the last few pockets of air as the freighter was finally crushed, by the thousands of meters of water, above it.

The bubbles ceased and without warning a large metal sphere, the size of half of their craft, burst to the surface.

“Lifeboat!” cried Gerome. He lifted himself from his cockpit, to stand on the top deck of the explorer craft. He dived into the water. Twenty strokes and he was by the lifeboat, gripping the side rail of the sphere, and slamming his hand against the hull, twice. A noise returned, from within.

Then a grating sound from above was heard, as the top hatch began to unbolt. Gerome hauled himself out of the water, up onto the side ladder. Slowly, he climbed up and peered in to look at the occupant.

Gerome grinned. He waved and then looked up, to the hovering gyrocopters. He beckoned the gyros to move in. “Commander. We have a survivor. It looks like a Caucasian, fourteen year old girl. Send down a line and harness.”

“Got it EX1 Leader,” and a line was lowered. Gerome grabbed the line and motioned to the teenager, to fix the harness around her waist. A minute later, she was being lifted safely, into the air.

Gerome closed the hatch and motioned to the other gyro, to drop a line. It did. Gerome then waved for Ralph to connect it to their exploration craft. They should be able to tow the lifeboat to the far weed, about half a kilometer away. The gyros then dropped five more lines; Gerome joined them, and then held up the loop so that it was picked up by a gyro. The plan was simple. The gyro flew with the line, towards the shore, over the weed and vegetation to the clearer water, where the exploration craft could pick up the line. The exploration craft would submerge once again and then resurface, closer to shore. There, it would tow the lifeboat to dry land. Once on land, the lifeboat would be transported back to the settlement. At least there would be some salvage, as compensation, for the exercise.

Gerome dove back into the water, swimming over to his exploration craft.

Ω

Gerome had flown back to the settlement, after his shift. It had been an interesting day. The bauxite deposits he found, turned out to be minor. He looked out over the desert, as the sun began to slip beyond the horizon. He waved goodbye to his wife. He was

on his way to the Communication Center. The captain of H1, who had flown in with her, was debriefing the teenage girl, who had been found.

“Evening, Gerome,” said the captain.

“Evening, Captain, Miss,” said Gerome, turning his gaze to the girl.

They were in the Communication Center of a settlement, that housed five families and it looked as though there would soon be another family. It seemed that his second eldest daughter, *Amy* had her heart set on Stenton, the eldest son of George Landel.

Gerome looked at the teenager now in front of him. She was small, with pale brown hair. Her features were petite. She was wearing what Gerome knew to be a dress, white, soft and embroidered with delicate patterns of blue flowers. Dresses were impractical on Rambus, but Gerome’s books on historic Earth had showed him that such attire was common, once upon a time.

She had a slight smile, and bobbed with a small curtsy, when Gerome looked at her.

“What is your name?” asked Gerome, in a soft voice.

“I don’t recall, sir,” she said in a singsong accent.

Gerome looked at the captain, who said, “It seems that she won’t or can’t recall who she is or where she is from.”

“I see,” nodded Gerome. “Do you recall what happened, aboard the freighter?”

She shook her head.

“How did the freighter come to be destroyed? Were there pirates?” he asked.

Again, she shook her head violently. “Sir, I don’t recall who I am, or where I’m from, and I have no idea where we are, now.”

She looked to the captain, who said to Gerome, “It seems that she can’t recall anything. Her accent is strange to me. It could be, that she is Federation. I heard of one such Federation race, which spoke in such a manner - from the planet of Sleebo in old Malukan territory. Her words are not all from Standard Galactic. There is too much short-lifer about her. Anyway Gerome, I want to leave her here, with you. I need to get back to H1, and at the rate you’re losing daughters, this one should be welcome.”

“Of course, she is more than welcome,” said Gerome. “She can help Amy. If her memory returns, I will call you. In the meantime, I suppose you had better give her a name.”

The captain smiled. “There was a name embroidered in her clothes and she seems content with it. It’s Anna Kathrine. When she saw the name, she said Anki, and the crew of H1 have used it to her liking.”

Gerome looked to her. “Is Anki what we shall call you?”

“Yes, my Lorde.”

“Good, but please, my name is Gerome. Some call me *boss*, because I own the leases to the properties here. I would prefer Gerome. I’m not a *lorde*. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Gerome, sir,” she curtsied slightly.

Gerome looked at the captain, with a wry smile. “Very well, I’m sure that Amy will be able to show Anki what she can do to be part of the settlement here. Farewell, Captain. Do you want us to signal out, that we have a survivor?”

“Not at this stage. I think it can be our secret, until we can get some data from her, as to what actually happened out there. For the moment, we have signaled the loss of the freighter and that is all. I will let the Temple’s regional representative know by hard copy dispatch, that she is here, but no one else. Ensure that none others, outside of your settlement, learn of her. These pirates might return, if they thought there was a witness, and we’re not prepared militarily to defend ourselves. So, keep it under wraps.”

Gerome nodded and saw the captain out, to his waiting gyrocopter. It was dark; the blades whipped up the sand and soon it was heading into the cooling night, against the backdrop of the twin full moons and black sky.

Gerome turned to the girl beside him and said comfortingly, “We’ll go inside, before it gets too cold. I want you to meet my family. I have three

daughters. They will be excited to have a guest. Visitors are rare, out here and always very welcome.”

They turned and walked to the front door of the residence, where the light was streaming out through the small windows, giving more detail to the simple outline of the house. It was a home that could withstand the battering two hundred kilometers an hour sand-storms, plus the scorching sixty degree sun in the peak of summer, and the subzero temperatures in the winter. Full summer was still approaching.

ψ

LIFE ON RAMBUS

“Come on Anki or we’ll be late,” called Amy, who was backing out the *wheel-drive*, a large open vehicle with four huge water filled tires, at low pressure. Each of the four wheels was one and a half meters tall, and drove independently of the other three wheels. The cabin of the vehicle was open; it had no doors but a canopy was over a tubular metal cage, to protect the occupants, in case it rolled. *The wheeler*, as it was nicknamed, was built to go almost anywhere on the planet.

Anki slipped into the passenger side and stared at Amy, who was gunning the throttle.

Amy winked at the girl and the machine lurched. It was early in the morning and the sun had not risen too high, yet. They were off to the nearest lake, to check on the water supply, which provided power and steam to the settlement.

Sixteen year-old Amy loved the great expanses of the planet. She had read about the choking of Earth, with its tens of billions. The wheeler increased speed over the flat. The air rushed past them, at the vehicle’s maximum speed of fifty kilometers per hour.

Amy had to yell to Anki, in order to be heard. “This machine is powered by solar batteries, which are charged back at the house. It also has an

auxiliary petro engine. We're going to check on the water power plant. The solar power and heat from the lake is being used to drive steam driven engines, which in turn pump the water to the settlement. Something has stopped it, so we're going there now, to find out. You don't talk much, do you?"

Anki shrugged, as she looked ahead, through her goggles.

"That is OK. My father tells me that I talk too much. Maybe that means we'll be well suited." They both bounced off their seats, as the machine went over a series of rocks.

The two girls were wearing a standard colonial variation of the *shocksuits*, normally worn by the Federationists. The settlement's suits were thinner, whiter, shinier, and reflected a lot more sun, enabling the wearer to withstand sixty-five degrees Celsius, for up to three hours, without hyperthermia.

The journey took only half an hour and the view of the lake soon stretched out, before them. It was small, compared to the lake that the freighter had gone down in. Land could be seen, on the opposite shore. At first glance, there appeared to be no water, but that was the visual effect of the surface vegetation.

Slowly, they wound their way, down a path, which led to the compound that housed the solar powered steam motors.

Anki and Amy stepped from the wheeler and walked over to the compound. Amy looked beyond

the wire fence, enclosing it. The fence was designed to protrude seventy meters into the lake. Inside it all the weed and vegetation had been removed, to create a large clean reservoir for the pumps to draw from.

“As I thought,” said Amy. “The blasted weed has choked the fence. The weed does that to stop the loss of water from the lake. Sometimes I think the weed has its own intelligence. We’ll have to clear it, to let the water into the reservoir. Come on, get in.” She motioned to the wheeler.

They were in, and Amy glanced at the shimmer from the weed-encrusted lake. She pressed two switches and watched, as water was bled from the tires, and replaced with air. Slowly, they moved out, onto the surface of the weed. The wheeler slowly rotated its tires, inching carefully forwards. “There should be no problem, for the weed to hold the wheeler up, and should the machine collapse through the plant crust, the wheeler will float with all the air in the tires,” yelled Amy.

Slowly, they drove over the weed-encrusted water, to the other side of the compound.

Amy stopped the machine, hopped out and stood confidently, on top of the weed. They were now at the back of the compound. Anki watched Amy as she strode around, to view the fence.

Amy looked back. It seemed Anki was too timid to leave the wheeler. “Anki, it’s perfectly safe. Here, pass me that blasting rifle.”

Anki turned, to get the rifle and when she returned her attention Amy, she had vanished. She stared at where she had been, only three seconds ago; she looked to the right and the left. Amy had vanished. Anki felt a sudden terror. Tension built up inside her, when to the right, a noise came from the water.

A hand shot up, out of the water, and then Amy's head. She burst from the water and grabbed a breath.

"Thanks," Amy yelled, as she reached for the weapon. With the rifle in her hand, she took another deep breath and disappeared beneath the water. Anki sighed with relief, as she saw her companion appear, once again. Once more, she went down. Anki peered through the pale leaves on the surface, to see a few flashes from the rifle. She looked towards the compound, which was now beginning to fill slowly, with water.

Amy returned to the surface. She passed the gun to Anki and dragged herself from the water. She balanced on some of the larger vegetation and began to clean the green algae off her suit.

Anki smiled and held her hands over her face, trying to cover her amused expression.

"What?" called Amy.

Anki couldn't contain herself, any longer, and said, in a fit of laughter, "Your hair..."

Amy's hair was thick with green algae. She had been down deep, to get at the roots of the plants, to

sever them from the base of the lake, but the hot surface water contained thick green algae. Amy nodded, then stooped to pick up some algae and hurled it, at Anki.

Anki's expression went from one of laughter to one of horror. She looked at her once clean shiny suit, and felt her face, which was now splattered with a green sludge.

Amy laughed; Anki looked at her and then at herself, to join in the laughter.

Tucking the gun away, Amy then climbed into the wheeler and reversed slowly out from the lake. They both felt better when they were ashore.

Amy stepped out and took a hose from the wheeler and ran it down to the now filling compound. She immersed it in the water, and then returned to connect the tires with other end of it; to replace the air in the tires, with water.

"This will take twenty minutes, so if you want to strip off and have some fun, now is the time while the water is cool and clear in the compound."

Anki was again horrified by what she saw. Amy had stripped down to under garments and dived into the water of the filling compound. She swam from one end to the other. The water was from down deep, and was cool and clean. The heat had not produced the choking algae that would soon consume the compound again.

Amy swam and ducked under the water, and then reappeared. The green from her hair was gone. "Come on in if you dare. By Torren, this is fun."

Anki was shocked by that expression and turned away. Slowly, she watched Amy, as she swam from one end to the other.

Amy finally got out, took the hose, which was bringing water to the tires and pretended to begin to wash the wheeler. "We must clean off all the dirt." Suddenly, she turned the hose on Anki and for a few seconds, squirted her up and down. Quickly she ran back, down to the water's edge and dove in.

Anki stared at the crazy girl and then at her wet suit. Finally, she decided that she would join in. She stripped off and dived in.

Ω

On the way back, Anki was chattier. Amy suspected that she had been through a lot, and perhaps never really had any friends. They were only a hundred meters from the house, when Amy asked, "You're from Earth, aren't you?"

Anki said nothing.

"From a Temple upbringing?"

Anki's mouth dropped, with a quiver.

"It's OK, Anki. I'm not going to tell anyone, but you know a lot more than you let on, don't you?"

"Yes, but please don't tell, or they will take me away again. Please don't tell," and she started to cry.

Amy put her hand on Anki's arm. "I won't share your secrets with anyone else. I won't tell, and no one will take you away from here. If you want to stay, I can make sure of it. My father is very influential. All right?"

Anki nodded. "I would like to stay, Amy."

Ω

It was three days later, when Amy caught Anki outside, staring up into the heavens. The sky was bright with stars. The first moon, Lomar, was just appearing over the horizon, while the second and smaller moon was obscured in darkness, by the shadow of the planet. Anki had her hands on the railing outside the settlement compound.

"Thinking about home?" asked Amy, as she walked up behind Anki.

Anki turned and smiled. "How did you know?"

"I have seen that look, on other visitors. What did you do on Earth?"

Anki turned away. "I don't think I'm ready to tell you, yet."

"OK. Do you want to go out onto a harvester tomorrow?" asked Amy.

"Really? Sure!"

"Yes. Father is being flown out, for another tour tomorrow. He said that both of us can go with him and return with the outgoing shift. You will have to

go to sleep soon, as the gyros will be leaving here at 04:00.”

Anki turned. “Time to sleep then. Goodnight Amy. I’m glad you’re my friend.”

Ω

The beat of the gyrocopter reverberated through the machine. The six of them sat, looking out at the brightly star studded night. They had left the settlement two hours ago and should be nearing the harvester in about twenty minutes.

The two girls were still partly asleep, until Amy pointed through the window. There it was; the huge harvester, H1. So big, that it made the dwelling they lived in, seem like something from a miniature toy set. The lights of the night shift blazed into the darkness, with the hull lumbering twelve stories tall above the desert rock and sands.

The gyrocopter swooped down low, over H1 Harvester. Only thirty-five men ever needed to operate the great machine. Slowly they descended down to the top deck.

Harvesters mined and processed, mostly during the cool of the night, leaving travel and relocating for day operations. The smelting and excavating took enormous reserves of energy and were regenerated by the solar power banks, during the day.

Steadily, they lowered, and then they landed. Amy and Anki were the first to jump down.

Gerome looked around, there was a cool breeze coming across from the desert. He tucked his collar in, and pointed the girls to the direction of the far decks. He yelled to be heard above the screams of machinery and the gyros, "You girls will have two hours, before the return journey. Be here, when it leaves. I'm now on my way, to my exploration craft. The gyro will go back with the returning shift from EX1 and you will leave with them. In the meantime, keep out of trouble. Brad Norton is over there. He will show you around. Be good and be ready to leave, on time. See you both in one week." He kissed his daughter quickly and returned to the gyrocopter.

"Love you, Papa!" called Amy as her father hopped back into the gyro. Slowly, it rose in the air, turned and disappeared into the night.

"Your father..." shouted Anki. "He always trusts you to do what is right."

"Yes, he is a good man. He knows me. Come on. Let's get Brad Norton to show us around."

The pair walked over to the tall young man, who was standing by the far rail. The breeze was strengthening from the north. The lights were bright and the pair could see about a hundred meters into the desert, in any given direction. Wind driven sand was now beginning to strike hard against the face of the pair, as they strode quickly towards Brad.

He smiled with pleasure, at being in charge of two girls on the rig. "Hello Amy, this must be Anki.

You won't know me, as I was not aboard H1 when you were here, last. Did you see much of the Harvester, when you were here?"

"No," replied Anki.

"Then, let me show you. At the bow end we have the actual harvest end of the ship. We call it a ship, as it's our boat, in a sea of sand. If you fall overboard and get left out there, adrift for any length of time during the day, you will soon perish, as in any sea.

"Now, up here, we have the bow and where the excavation takes place." They peered over the edge and below were great shovels, working on thick chains, gouging the ground, scouring the surface, for a depth of thirty meters. The sand and rock was being moved by conveyor, to the inner section of the ship.

The girls followed Brad, down below. They traversed a catwalk, and watched the passage of the ore. It moved at a rapid rate past half a dozen men and other machines. Brad explained that they were testing the material and contents for other metals, apart from bauxite.

On the far side, were the offices and beneath the nearside, were sleeping quarters. They slept during the heat of the day.

As they walked forward, great waves of searing heat blew upwards from the rear of the harvester. Brad explained that these were the smelting sections. They were able to extract and smelt ten tons of

aluminum per night. "If we try to smelt during the day, the temperature rises beyond human endurance and the machinery also breaks down," explained Brad. "The record to date, is fifteen tons in one day. When the raw blocks of aluminum are complete, they're stacked in silos around the planet, to be picked up later. The freighters have their own on-planet barges, which can lift five tons of material at a time. Due to the rare nature of bauxite, this planet potentially is one of the wealthiest in the Galaxy. It's only our isolation, which prevents us from getting bigger markets."

Brad looked knowledgeable and continued. "As you probably know, the bulk of all galactic shipping uses aluminum for eighty percent of its construction. The superstructures of the great galactic cruisers and military craft, still use aluminum as their base metal. It's economic to buy when balanced against its usability for space construction. Heavy metals such as iron, have no use up there. They consume too much time, being manufactured, in space. Even if you had the iron in space, which is difficult and expensive to get up there, it takes fifteen times more to erect than aluminum. Iron is strictly for *on planet* operations.

"This section is where we refine any rare metals such as gold, zinc, tin and nickel."

The three continued their tour for an hour, before they returned, topside.

Anki dreamily looked out, towards the horizon. The wind had died and the first sign of light was starting to thread its way over the craggy surface. The horizon had taken on a pale green glow, where the rock and night sky met.

“Our shift will be finished soon. There comes your lift home.” Brad pointed to the sky.

The gyros soon buzzed over the top of the great machine and began to lower. The sun’s rays had stripped back the night and the last of the stars were vanishing. The desert floor was beginning to be seen, as a series of waves of sand with rocky outbursts.

Within a moment, the pair had left Brad, and were on their way home.

ψ

JARON IN TRAINING

EARLY 1054 AD

Jaron stabbed at the great snake that had wrapped itself around his body. Slowly it tightened, squeezing the life from him. The anaconda and the boy again vanished, beneath the water. Again, they rolled on the riverbank. Jaron could no longer see the trees, the vines or the other animals that peered out from the jungle canopy, to the battle below. Jaron began to close his eyes and dropped his knife.

The old man hurried down from the shadows muttering. He grabbed the head of the great snake, and looked it in the eyes.

“Boy, is this how I taught you? Is this how you conquer the Great Spirit of the snake, and the river? No, you’re too stupid to understand.” He was talking to Jaron, who had slumped to the floor, as the snake loosed its grip, unwinding its coils.

The old man released the snake and it retreated towards the forest, stopping only at the old man’s mental instruction.

Jaron unsuccessfully attempted to lift himself from the mud and was eventually raised, by the old man. “Boy, you have the gift. Use it and have the Great Spirit on your side, not as an enemy. Look at

anaconda. Entice him.” The old man threw the boy again, into the coils of the snake.

The snake’s head drew back, its body ridged ready to strike. Suddenly the mind of the old man was there, soothing, sending understanding thoughts, and caressing the mind of the great snake. Jaron’s mind followed the old man’s, and repeated the actions, until the old man withdrew.

The snake was pleased to have Jaron as a friend, and Jaron was happy to have the great snake as his friend. Jaron looked up, at the old man. “Now, I understand.”

“Good. Now heal its body.” He pointed to the stab wound.

“How?” asked Jaron, as the snake rubbed against him, affectionately.

“I don’t know, boy, you have the power; not me. Look at the wound; each cell is an individual living unit. Heal them.”

Jaron looked at the place, where his knife had stabbed the snake. He looked down into the cells, imagined them, imagined being in them. He felt the pain and the harm that had occurred. He felt the pain as one cell separated from its neighbor, the pain of cells being separated from their life-giving oxygen and blood. Slowly, Jaron became aware of the harm he had done. Gradually, he seemed to communicate with all the wounded cells, moving them, merging them with one another. Gently, he brought his

attention out of the wound, to see the skin of the great snake had healed. He looked at the old man.

“You have finally done well. It seems that the snake does genuinely like you, heaven knows why.” The old man shook his head.

Jaron looked at the snake that was over ten meters long, now curling its way, around a tree trunk. “Does that mean that I have the power to heal and that I no longer need to be a warrior?”

The old man looked away towards the trees. Sometimes, he wondered if the boy really was, who he thought he was. He looked back, shaking his head. “There are times when one needs to know his allies and then there are times, when one needs to know who his enemies are. His enemies need to be struck down, with a mixture of intelligence and warrior courage. One needs to distinguish a friend from an enemy, for there are many out there, which would destroy you, boy, no matter what you do to their minds. The difference as to why the anaconda is an enemy one moment and a friend the next, is that it has always been your friend. Only recently, have you chosen to be its enemy. Now, that may have changed.”

The boy nodded as he saw the great snake disappear, into the jungle.

“Come, we have much to do,” said the old man

Ω

That day, as they walked, the boy spoke with many of the animals, the great eagle, the panther, and even the forest itself.

As the day's end drew nearer, the pair returned to the rocky home, of the old man. He stopped at the entrance. The village had left more food and clothing for him. "Your parents are good people, Jaron. Tomorrow, I will start to teach you the way of real combat; the form of fighting an enemy, which you have never encountered before."

"Why? I'm the best fighter in the village," boasted the boy.

The old man struck the boy's shoulder and sent him reeling down the slope. "When you're good enough to stop that, then and only then, will you be good enough, to fight at this old man's side. Until then, you're not a warrior that I can rely on. Tomorrow you will begin to change."

Jaron looked up, from the bottom of the hill. He did not even see the hand, which had struck him. He looked at the old man. His pride was slightly dented at the insult, but he was still elated, at the promise of the learning to come. He waved and began to run home.

Ω

The following week, Jaron learned the art of war. The old man delighted in teaching his young charge, about the real limits of the human body. Slowly, the

boy was able to display some of the skills of a real fighter; the type which the old man could recall, from his own earlier days.

Jaron sprang into the air; his foot struck the melon, suspended by the vine, three meters overhead. His right hand then struck the two lower melons, he snapped two dead tree branches, and finally he landed. As he rolled, he threw two rocks at a target, twenty meters across the stream. The first struck the target and second the bank, behind.

The old man sighed. "You have done well, but there is still room for minor improvement."

The boy rolled to his feet and ducked a fist that the old man threw at him.

The old man smiled. "I'd welcome you to fight by my side, at any time. Come, let's return home. It's time I gave you something special. It's called history."

The pair made their way, to the cave of the old man. It was getting dark quickly, now. They entered and stepped to the rear of the cavern. The boy turned away, as the old man motioned his hand towards an empty wall.

When the boy had looked back, the old man presented him with a book. "This is called a book. In it, is the course of events of this planet, a thousand years ago."

Jaron looked at it, turned the pages and then looked at the old man. He felt the paper, and then another page, and another. "Old man. This *book*, as

you call it, shows images, of things I see, but they're not really there...."

The old man laughed. "They're called pictures and represent what was there, at the time. Look, that is a city, and that a crowd of twenty thousand people."

The boy looked up. "In one place!"

"Yes, they were listening to one great man. His name was *Goren Torren*, the greatest man in the history of this planet."

The boy looked up. "What happened to that great man?"

"He was killed by a group, which tried to retain control of the planet."

"What happened after he was killed?"

"His *Lorde Hymondy* controlled the planet, and he ruled well, but after he died, those waiting, soon regained control and began to depopulate the planet."

"Depopulate?"

"They removed almost all living people from the planet, because they were looking for someone. They needed to find the spirit of Goren Torren."

"The spirit?" asked the boy.

The old man strolled to the entrance of the cave and looked out. "There's more to living, than being a body. That person that is you, some would call the spirit. It doesn't perish when the body dies, but survives to live again. That is why the depopulation program began." The old man turned. "Those now in control of this planet, are looking for the spirit of

Goren Torren. They're looking for that great man, knowing he will be in a new body."

"How will they know him?"

"The usual tests are by using devices that you, as yet, know nothing about. Standard tests such as eye iris, vocal tests and the like, can test physical characteristics carried from one life to another. They're removing every human from the planet, and in so doing, they have the opportunity to test all. Once they find him, they want to implant a thought into the mind of this great man, so as to destroy a religion that left here, and was made known, to the civilized Galaxy."

The boy was puzzled, so the old man continued. "There is a group in the stars out there, which are known as the Templars. They believe that this great man will return to them, to liberate them, from those who prevent them from expanding their influence. They believe in the teachings of the Torren. They try to practice what he taught to the masses on this planet, when he was alive."

"His teachings, are they here, in this book?"

The old man smiled. "Yes. I will teach you how to read this book, and others like it."

Jaron thought for a moment. "This man Torren. He was alive, a thousand years ago. Did you know him?"

The old man laughed, as he opened the book to a particular page. "I did. How did you know, my boy?"

"I don't know, perhaps it seemed to be deductively obvious." The boy looked at the picture that the old man was holding open. "That man there. It's you, when you were younger, and you're next to the man, Torren. What was your name, at that time?"

The old man looked away towards the stars, through the cavern opening. He found he almost couldn't answer the boy's inquisitive mind. The answer stuck in his throat and slowly he turned. "My name is *Letone*; Captain of Lorde Hymondy's Boguard. *Instructor* of the *Aaron*."

Jaron looked at the old man, as though something had woken inside him. "You loved this Torren, like a brother?"

"More, my Lorde. I would do anything to protect him. Even forsaking my friends, and wait a millennium to be in touch with him again."

The old man, Letone, smiled and looked at the stars. "There were days when I wondered if my Lorde was gone. Had they found him, already? However, I knew he was still here, on Earth. I knew that one day he would return to me. Together, we would go back to the stars, to liberate the people of the Federation, and beyond; for his mission of a thousand years ago, isn't yet ended."

The boy looked out towards the stars with his friend, Letone. He watched a satellite, he now knew as *the-eyes*, as it passed overhead. "What would they do, if they caught the one known as the Torren?"

Letone looked at the boy and shuddered. "They would pump him full of a poison, which they have used for centuries. It bends the mind and the spirit to their bidding. Then, they would fill his head with white lightning, followed with commands that would have him spellbound and fixated, to do their bidding, without him even knowing that they existed. With the great Torren at their side, the enemy could plunder the universe, into a darkness no free man has considered. Their true purpose hasn't yet been revealed to the Federation."

The boy was inquisitive. "Who is this enemy?"

"The *Federation Warp Drive Bank*."

"They control this planet?"

"Yes, my Lorde. They have done so, for the past seven hundred years."

"What has happened to the crowds, which once ruled here?"

Letone watched the satellite disappear over the mountains. "Most of the billions were subject to mass drugging and programming attempts, which resulted in wars and destruction, two hundred years ago. As the masses made their move to get off the planet, the Earth was declared a shrine to the Torren. The Bank found planets outside the Federation; people were herded there and died, in atrocious conditions. Somehow on the planet Jilta, the Templars began to salvage some of the emigrants and the Templar movement began to grow. That is really all I know, of out there."

"I see. Then the Torren should be out there and not here. What would the Torren do, if he were here, now?"

Letone handed the boy the book. "He would learn how to read, learn how to fight, and learn how to liberate a Galaxy from the potential grip of slavery."

Jaron looked up, into the old man's eyes. "Teach me, please, how to read."

Ω

Four months passed, as Jaron and Letone studied the past and how the Torren came to rise above the masses. Finally, Jaron explained that he was ready.

With a smile he held up his arm. The fruit on the ground began to rise. Slowly, it rotated and peeled itself. Jaron said, "I really am ready."

Letone thought about striking the boy and Jaron responded to the thought, by diving to his left. Letone nodded and said, "You're ready. You've received your training, as a young Boguard, and have responded well. Come, we must leave."

The boy stopped, "I can't go. Where are we going to?"

Letone pointed to the sky.

Jaron shook his head, "My mother expects me to catch fish tomorrow, as my father is ill, and we have a small crop of potatoes to harvest in a week..."

"Quiet!" said Letone. "Follow me, and we'll go to the village, but follow me."

Jaron wanted to object. Suddenly, he found himself scared. Was he mad, or was this old man crazy? Did he really think that he could be the person in the pictures? He followed silently.

Letone was content as they climbed the hill, to his cave. He felt the boy's thoughts and anxieties. They were questions that the boy would eventually have to answer, himself.

Letone stretched after reaching the top of the rock face. His old body was beginning to ache. He stepped into his cave, to the rear darkest corner.

He looked down to the floor. "Dig."

The boy looked at the floor, found a large stick and began to scratch the surface. Soon, when he was half a meter down into the soft dirt; he struck a metal container, unearthed it, and hauled it clear, into better light.

Jaron watched as the old man opened it, and pulled out two shining garments. One, he passed to Jaron. He held it up against his body. It was white with gold braid, and a ten pointed star was woven over the left breast.

"What is it?" asked Jaron.

"It's what you wear. It's called a *shocksuit*. Yours is Independent Dress White, while mine is black, the traditional dress for Boguard." The old man smiled, as his fingers caressed the fine embroidery of his suit. It had been so long.

He recalled when he removed it, the day following the CIA inspired raid on the home of Goren Torren. That day, he had begun his journey, to South America.

Letone snapped out of his daydreaming as he watched the young boy, pulling on his nylop boots. Yes, it would be like old memories. Letone donned his shocksuit, and respectfully set aside the local village garb that he had grown used to.

From the container, he withdrew a set of scissors and after five minutes of sheer terror, Jaron's appearance looked more civilized. Letone then cut his own hair.

Next, he drew out four weapons. "These are called guns. They shoot particles and green fire, which can cut a man in half. That is the next part of your training. You must become familiar with all these. The last is an electric stick, which can temporarily cripple a man, for a short time. It induces pain, but the person survives. These knives tuck in here, behind your calf. This is a communicator. It snaps on here. I will show you later, how it works. Now, let's return to the village."

ψ

LEAVING HOME

The pair walked down the track to the village. Jaron's mind raced, as they crossed the small stream. He felt stronger and leaped to the far side in one stride, looked about himself and seemed to perceive colors, sounds and images of the jungle, which he had never seen or heard before. He glanced at Letone who was only a moment behind.

The old man also looked different, stronger, and younger. Certainly, his hair was still grey, and shorter, but there seemed an emanation of strength and power, which Jaron had not noticed before.

Letone said in anticipation to Jaron's thoughts, "It's your purpose in living, which gives you strength. When one is fulfilling his own purpose, he really knows he is alive. He feels the true power of living. We're now fulfilling our dream. That is what makes us strong."

Jaron nodded. As he neared the village, he knew he could never go back to being an Indian boy. He loved his parents, but he felt a greater destiny.

Up ahead, they saw the village. Two young Indian girls stood there, ahead of them. They stared at the pair, and ran on to the village. Their shrieks of fear rang though the valley.

Villagers rushed out, from their thatched dwellings. Twenty villagers stared, as the pair stepped into the meeting circle. It had been a decade since Letone had been into the village, and it had not changed at all.

Jaron's mother pushed in front and stood there, in local native garb. Quietly she hugged her son and said, "I knew you were different, the moment you were born, and I knew you would leave. You were stronger and different to the rest." She turned to face Letone. "You, old man, I also knew you would take my boy away. Please take care of him." She burst into tears and held her now grown son tightly. "I always knew you would leave." She caressed his short black hair and cried.

Letone stepped away and looked at the father, who was staring at the Bogueard. He also had known his son would leave, one day. He had spoken of it, with Jaron's mother many times.

Jaron's father lightly touched the shocksuit, it sliding away from his finger, like that of a snake. He quickly withdrew his hand.

Sheril stepped up to Jaron, "If you're going, then we should celebrate, tonight." It seemed that the whole village agreed. Their best young warrior was going on a journey, to meet an enemy of the village. Tonight they would celebrate his strengths and good fortunes.

An hour later, an open fire was roaring. Three freshly killed monkeys' bodies were lying skinless

over the coals. This would be a night to remember. Letone kept an eye overhead. It was still light and the fire would be difficult to spot from above.

Finally, they had eaten their fill, so Letone decided that he would tell them some history, of a thousand years ago - the days when the Federation and the Boguard ruled the known Galaxy. He described the stars, where he and Jaron were about to go; the enemies they would face, and the horrible deaths; which many of his friends had suffered.

Sheril gasped at the horrors she was hearing. "How could you hope to battle such an enemy?"

Letone smiled. He pulled out his laser gun, aimed it at a far rock. "With superior intelligence, a greater fighting spirit and with equal armory." He pulled the trigger and a green light shot out and the rock exploded.

The children squealed with delight while the elders sat fearfully quiet. Jaron's father looked at the weapon and then at the other weapons, attached to his son's belt. His son was a different kind of man now.

Letone stood up. He looked towards the stars, above and then spoke. "That isn't all that can be done by a member of the Boguard." He extended his hand and slowly a light began to shine from within it. It grew brighter and brighter until his whole hand emanated light. He looked at the far tree and the light seemed to erupt and explode from his hand. Like lightning, it crashed through the tree, exploding

and setting the tree alight. Letone turned; now, even the parents were afraid. Who was this man who had watched over them, all these years?

Letone spoke in a soothing voice. "I'm the protector of the people in this world, this valley around us. There are other people, out there beyond the mountains, who would hurt you, as they have many of your neighbors. It's time that Jaron and I, set out, to find those enemies. If we don't do this, they will be here soon, and I won't be able to protect you. Even my body will grow old and die, and I fear that time is approaching."

The villagers seemed to understand.

Ω

The following day, the pair had put some distance between them and the village. They were heading towards the direction of the rising sun, and had gone only two hours, when Jaron stopped. "Do you hear that, old man?"

Letone halted. He did not hear anything, but knew what the boy was referring to. "You tell me what you hear."

Jaron scanned the forest, for the sound. "There it's again, someone, calling my name."

Letone smiled. "That is well done, Jaron, but it isn't someone calling your name, but someone thinking it. Put your attention about fifteen minutes, behind us."

Jaron looked and peered in the direction from where they had come. He could see no one. He continued to strain his senses. "It seems that the sound knows I'm looking for it." He waited for a minute and then he burst out laughing. "It's Sheril. She's following us."

The old man smiled. "She has been, since we left. It only took you ten hours to hear her thoughts."

"Wait here then," Jaron called, as he leapt back into the forest.

It was another five minutes before he dragged her out, from the jungle shadows. "She wants to travel with us, Letone. Tell her that she is only a girl and has no place beside fighters, like us."

Jaron did not see the girl's left arm as it swung over his right and smacked him down to the ground. She stood over him. "I can still beat you, Jaron. Get up and fight, warrior. I don't need fancy clothes! I'm a woman, not a girl!"

Letone sat down on a tree root. To Jaron, it seemed the entire jungle was watching. He was not about to fight a girl or a woman, and looked to Letone, for guidance.

Letone shrugged in amusement. Sheril stood ready to defend her position. "I'm going with you. I told my parents that I would be a warrior, at your side. They granted me permission. I'm going."

Letone stood and stretched, looking towards the east. “We have much ground to cover before nightfall, Sheril.”

Ω

They traveled six days, catching and eating small lizards and occasionally man-eating fish, which swam in the rivers. On the eighth day, they climbed a ridge. As they were almost upon the summit, Letone motioned them to be still.

Jaron watched Letone vanish, amongst the trees ahead. Sheril watched everything with her green eyes, like an eagle. Jaron was impressed by her ability, to move within the forest unseen and unheard. His fascination of her increased, when she left her hand in the water, as bait, to grab a man-eating fish. That took nerve.

While Jaron waited for Letone he saw Sheril’s young form dart off, to the right. The rags she wore, blended into the forest. A moment later and she was back. She had two pieces of sweet-fruit, a fleshy and sugary melon, which grew in the underbrush.

Jaron looked at it. He cracked open the husk to see that the ripe fruit had gone past the best time of eating. He smelt it. It had been in the heat too long, and the sugar and juice had become an alcoholic cocktail.

Sheril grinned and began to eat, edging Jaron to do the same. Jaron looked into the green eyes of

hers and quickly found that he had devoured the sweet-fruit. He stared at her, both images of her, and she laughed.

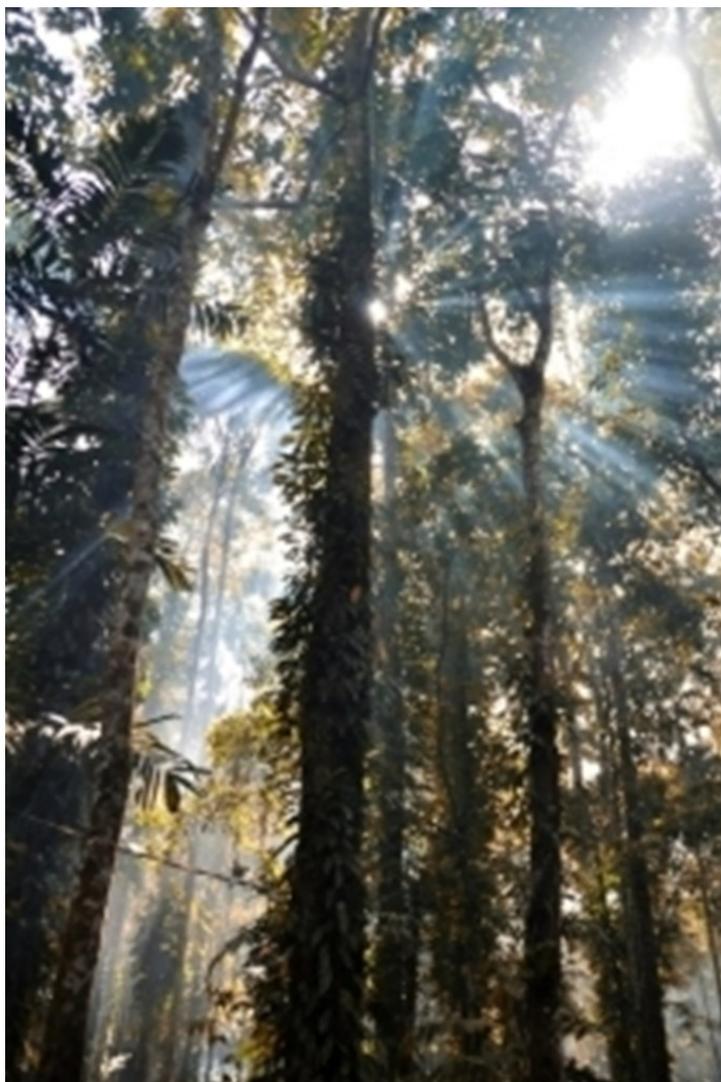
She stood, and when Jaron stood, she pushed him over and laughed more.

Jaron found the world spinning, but the thought of beautiful Sheril would not leave his mind. How beautiful she looked. Her dark brown face, set against the mischievous white and green of her entrancing eyes. Jaron tripped as he tried to stand and Sheril fell on top of him. She slowly ran her fingers through his dark black hair and closed her eyes. The world was spinning.

Letone returned to find the pair asleep together, in the grass. He looked at the remains of the sweet-fruit and shook his head. The night would be spent here.

Ω

The next day, Letone was sitting by the fire, when Jaron and Sheril woke. They both crawled to where Letone had strips of meat, cooking. Both winced at him, as they accepted a slice. Both their heads were sore.



Amazon forest

“Are you well enough to travel?” Letone asked.

Jaron nodded as he ate, and reached for the plastic pouch, filled with water. “Yes. Where are we headed?”

“Just below the next ridge is what is called a small town. There are not many towns in this part of the world, but this one remains, as a continental

outpost. It's from here, that they move drugs, which are harvested in the jungle basin and transported out past the stars." Letone pointed up.

Sheril crawled by the hole that protected the fire from being seen, other than from directly overhead.

"Chew these leaves. They will give you the strength, which was consumed by the sweet-fruit," said Letone. He broke camp and emptied the plastic pouch of water over the fire, folded it, and tucked it back into his shocksuit.

ψ

CRAVANA

The three looked down, from behind a large rocky outcrop. Below, was a town of about ten thousand people.

"That is *Cravana*," pointed Letone, "It's a military installation. To its left, is the transport section. At the far rear, are the housing and administration sections. Our task is to get in, remove a fast craft, and escape the atmosphere in it."

"That sounds simple," said Jaron.

"Not at all. The only craft that can get off this planet quick enough, are military. There are no craft here that can, as we call it, Warp Drive out. Those are kept out there, securely. Their sole purpose here, Jaron, is to keep you from getting out there."

Sheril shook her head. "I don't understand...."

Letone explained. "You saw our abilities back at your village. We're capable of a lot more, and so are you. Jaron is known in another time by another name. And that name inspires fear in his enemies. My task over the past millennia has been to wait for Jaron, and then return him to the people that need him, a race called the Aaron, out there."

"How is it that Jaron is known out there?" she asked.

"Many lifetimes ago," is all that Letone said.

Jaron shrugged as he looked at Sheril.

“It’s time to move,” said Letone. “The sun will go down in two hours’ time. When the twilight sets in, for its ten minutes’ duration, we shall strike.”

Letone slowly crept out from behind his rocks and slipped down, into the forest.

He crouched low in the jungle, looking out over the township. He studied the buildings and the occasional person, going about his job. He turned to Jaron. “Move around to the other side of the base, to see if there is a way in, without being seen. Keep in touch with me, using your communicator.”

Jaron nodded and vanished amongst the trees.

Twenty minutes later, Jaron called. It was as Letone thought. Not all the town was surrounded by open land. To the rear, was a section of river and jungle, which ran right by the military section. Letone smiled. This was fortunate. He had not expected the enemy to be so undefended.

Letone and Sheril quickly joined Jaron. The three peered through the foliage, to see the badly maintained buildings, with broken windows and doors swinging in the breeze. Jaron could hear the roofing sheets, flapping and groaning, as the air whistled through the rusty iron sheets. The sound was eerie, and if Letone was not there Sheril would have said that wild spirits of the forest protected it. There were no bird sounds in the background. In fact, the whole of the jungle had become quiet, and the quiet surrounded the town.

It was getting darker. Jaron asked excitedly.
“That there; are we going to take it?”

Letone looked to an old shuttle, out in the yard. It was worn and heavily patched. “No, boy. That old craft is atmospheric only. The sort of craft we’re looking for, will be in the hangers over there.”

“How is it that you know about this town?”

Letone smiled. “I was here, three hundred years ago. Let’s move.”

The three could barely be seen, during the time the villagers termed: *no-night*. They quickly ran through the alleys. Slowly, they crept behind what Letone called the base communications-center.

They ducked behind a wall, as three men came out of a building laughing.

Jaron was getting impatient. “Why are we here, if our purpose is to get transport out? Surely, we’re better to take a machine and go, now, before we’re found out.”

“Go where?” sniped Letone.

“I don’t know, anywhere.”

“Exactly. We have to know, where to go. That data is in there. It’s no good simply vanishing from here, aboard one of their craft. We must know where we’re going, so that our time out there is a minimum. That will improve our chance of success. Now; stay here.”

Letone stepped out, into the light of the base. He walked past two guards that paid him no

attention, and then he slipped into the communications office.

Upon entering, Letone realized that the language the base spoke was Spanish. Times had changed, for when Letone was here last, the only language permitted was Standard Galactic. The Federationists had left the base in the care of terrestrials.

Letone stepped in and said hello to the computer operator, in Spanish. The man briefly looked up from a book, grunted and went back to reading.

Letone said, "I have been ordered here, to get the next time, for the run out north."

The man looked up again. "Who wants it?"

"Bandrid."

"Never heard of him, but the times are over there. Do you know how to get the time, off the screen?"

"Oh, yes," answered Letone.

The man did nothing, but continue his reading.

Letone went over to the computer. He looked back towards the operator, and then back at the computer. Quickly, he pulled up the time of the next run north and then he flipped the mode over, to arrivals.

It was, as he hoped. There was a courier craft, overhead. It was delivering to the planet, small supplies and messages. It would be directly overhead, in six hours.

"What are you doing?" called the operator.

"Sorry, wrong command on the screen," answered Letone.

"Like heck!" and the operator reached for the alarm button.

He got only half way there, before Letone's left foot flashed up, into his face. This was followed by an elbow downwards onto the back of the neck; snapping it with a clean break. The body slumped to the floor.

Quickly, Letone glanced outside. He instructed his charges to join him, immediately.

When they arrived Sheril was horrified. She stood back and stared.

Letone instructed her. "Remove the man's clothes. You will be wearing them. Jaron, keep a lookout over by the door. Sheril, you're going to impersonate the man who died."

The girl's skin looked white, but Letone was pleased that she did as instructed, first telling them to look away, while she changed clothing. She tucked in the dark green battle shirt. The boots were only slightly too big, and her hair was too long to retain under the army hat.

Letone looked around and handed scissors to Sheril. "Cut your hair."

She stared at him in defiance. "I can't do that. Not until I'm another year older. You know what it means, when a woman my age has her hair cut, and I'm not one of those."

Letone nodded and said, "We have to remain here, for another five hours and if you want to die, because you want to look like an Indian.... I'm not prepared to die for that. Now you either cut your hair, or I will do it for you." Killing people seemed to upset Letone, as he grew older.

As she cut off her hair, Sheril said that she did not realize how mean he really was. He had no heart and she could never go back to her home, now. Her long dark hair fell to the floor.

Letone gathered it up, and put it into the bin. He looked at Sheril, straightened her cap and then smiled. "I think you will fit in, as a space trooper, very well."

"Someone is coming," called Jaron.

Letone hid the dead body in a large cupboard, and sat Sheril at the operator's bench, with the book. He motioned to Jaron, to sit beside her.

Two men opened the door and stepped in, laughing. The first man looked at Sheril and then towards Letone, and then finally looked Jaron up and down. He turned again, to Sheril and asked, "Where is José?"

Sheril did not understand and politely shrugged.

Letone said softly, "He was here a moment ago, but said he had a meeting, if you know what I mean," Letone shrugged.

The lieutenant knew exactly what he meant. José was known for his midnight rendezvous in the

township. The lieutenant stomped out, followed by his subordinate.

Letone sighed relief.

They waited half an hour, while trying to get more data on the overhead craft. The lieutenant returned. Two armed guards flanked him.

Letone knew they were here, for blood. Letone leapt, crashing into the first guard, sending the laser rifle skidding across the floor.

Jaron slammed his body into the second guard. His elbow smashed into the guard's left eye, sending it into his brain. He died instantly. In the same motion, he swept his arm, and snapped the neck of the lieutenant and then crashed all his weight into the legs of the subordinate, which snapped. The man went down in great pain. Jaron grabbed the laser and *vitt...*, the subordinate lived no more.

Letone looked about him. He dragged the first guard inside. While Jaron was hauling in the others, he threw Sheril the laser rifle. "Pull the trigger here, and *zep*, your enemy is gone."

Sheril stared at the gun in her hand, and then at the dead men before her. She was shocked. Standing over the four dead men she tried to object, "This is... they did not have...."

"Quiet," hushed Letone as he studied the outside. "If you're here, then you're with us." He looked outside and then said, "We're getting out of here. Over there, in that hanger is a craft. We can't wait, more."

Letone stepped over to the computer banks, and discharged his hand laser, four times. "That will prevent any communications, for a few hours. There are five hours left, before the ship overhead leaves. Follow me."

Letone ran from the communications building, to the far hanger; the younger pair ran by his side. One, two, three, they dashed into the side building.

Sheril was shivering with fear. She managed a small smile, with sweat dripping down her forehead. The laser rifle was held hard, against her chest.

Three seconds later, Letone stepped out under the light and was followed by his fledglings. Across fifty meters of concrete they sprinted, without being spotted. They were outside the hanger, which should hold the spacecraft.

They breathed deep, leaning by the side door.

Jaron asked, "How do you know the craft is here, old man?"

"I saw it, three hundred years ago."

"You're kidding me?"

Letone shrugged and burst into the hanger. It was dark; a light was on in the far corner. He aimed the gun in all directions and called out. "Pedro, are you there?"

There was a noise from the far corner and two men appeared. Four laser shots later and they lay on the floor dead.

Sheril stepped over and stared at the small holes, burned through the center of their skulls. She

looked up at the catwalk, to see three men aiming rifles at Jaron. She fired immediately, rolled and fired again. Two stood and returned her fire. She took another down, and a flash of light from the far side took the last. Letone nodded to her.

Jaron rose from his crouching position and stood, staring at the machine, which took up most of the hanger. It was huge, long, shining; emanating great power from its hull. It gave a person the feeling of strength and control. Jaron ran his hand over the hull, pressed his face to its smooth surface and stared at his own image reflected in it.

Jaron turned.

Letone nodded while still looking about for any enemy. "It's called an Interceptor *J Class*. I doubt that it has been used much, in the past three hundred years. It's possible that it may not work. My guess is that it has been administratively forgotten."

Letone climbed up, onto the hull. He motioned for Sheril to follow. She put her foot into the recessed ladder, moving upwards, onto the short wing. The dust was thick. Letone felt for the catch, on the rear of the first canopy. It gave. He hauled the canopy back, revealing the pilot cockpit.

Letone grinned and lowered himself into the seat. He smiled wider. Finally, he might be leaving this menacing planet, with his young prodigy. He flicked the start switch on, and the panel lights pulsed into an array of different colors. The craft was alive. He could feel its power. It emanated from within the

metal itself, like a predator seeking prey. A press of another switch and the two rear cockpits slid open. Letone called out, "Sheril, take the seat in the center." She obeyed, stowed her gun and sat down into the craft.

Jaron shouted up to the others. "There is much noise outside. Lights are flashing and people are running about."

Letone shouted back. "Get up here, fast, now!" and he started the turbines.

A whine filled the hanger, punctuated with a crescendo of the high-pitched screams, as the engines began to warm.

Jaron scrambled up, to the wing. The far door slammed open and men ran in, blasting the craft. Jaron fired back, and slid onto his rear seat, with laser fire all around him. Letone stood and fired four shots. Some of the men went down. He drew back the missile firing-covers, on the instrument panel. He fired two small rockets and the hanger door exploded, into splinters.

He fixed the canopy covers and pressed down on the thrusters, released the brakes, and the interceptor began to roll, out of its resting place. Letone could feel the craft's presence. It yearned for opened space. It begged it.

Particle and small laser fire struck the craft, harmlessly. As Letone turned the interceptor to the runway, he called down to the microphone. "Hold on to your seats and strap in, if you can work out what I

mean.” Letone vacuum sealed the canopies. Flashes of light bounced off his screen. He could see three vehicles racing around, from the right. He zeroed them in, with the sights. Six shots from the cannon and they were incinerated. Letone saw that Jaron had worked out how to shoot the rear guns.

The engines revved to a high-pitched scream. It was like the machine was crying to be let out, to be free. Letone pulled the controls right back. The great craft began to pitch forward; it rolled and then gained speed. Letone threw open the launching thrusters and the machine bounced down the runway, nosed up and blasted from the ground, into the darkness of space. It was free. They were free.

ψ

ESCAPE FROM SEQUETUS 3

Jaron tried to right himself, in the rear cockpit. He straightened, found the gunnery controls and fired a test round. It blew the roof off the hanger. He then turned it on two wheeled vehicles, which were racing them along the runway. They exploded into flames. He turned and fired again. He missed. The craft was rolling fast and soon the enemy was behind, but still well within the view of his guns. He was about to fire, when his body was thrown against the back of the canopy.

He watched, as the lights of the base grew smaller and the world retreated from vision. Immediate terror struck. The first thought he felt, was that he wanted to throw up against his canopy. He tried to pry himself loose, but couldn't even move his arms. Was this what happened, when you died? Was he going to the clouds of the great warriors? Was he going to meet his ancestors?

The interceptor banked to the right and roared into the upper heavens. It soon began to decelerate and maintain a constant speed of ten thousand kilometers an hour, departing the atmosphere.

Jaron had fallen back from the rear canopy and was staring, out of the side view-port. Fear grabbed him, as he clutched at his seat.

Sheril was amazed at the brightness of the stars. She understood clearly what had happened and where they were. "Old man, can you hear me?"

"Yes, Sheril," answered Letone.

"I feel strange. What is happening to me?" she asked, as she looked at her body.

Letone watched her on his screen while she lifted her gun up and watched it float. She pushed herself from the seat and she also floated. She giggled. Letone said, "It's called weightlessness. It's normal out here."

Letone watched Jaron on the screens, trying to hold back his fear. "Jaron, we're headed for the craft I have shown on your viewscreen. It can get us out of the system, without being followed."

Jaron looked at the screen. They would be there, in fifteen minutes.

"Jaron, Sheril, look below. We have others coming up. Ready your weapons, and strap yourself in this time." Letone saw them obey.

The enemy interceptors made a pass overhead. There were three of them.

"Disengage current course!" came the radio call.

Letone ignored that call and two more of the same.

Finally, the first interceptor loosed a missile. Letone threw their interceptor into the atmosphere

and drove it down, down to the green jungle, at a speed of ten thousand kilometers an hour.

Letone pulled at the machine, the interceptor pulled up just above the treetops, with the missile exploding harmlessly in the jungle.

Their interceptor then burst from the atmosphere, with the three enemy interceptors in sight. Letone rolled his craft and launched three missiles. Both Jaron and Sheril had learnt the art of gunnery.

Their interceptor weaved its way, through the enemy. One of them exploded and now others were joining in, from the other side of the planet. Letone squinted, as he thought to himself. This was not going as per any plan, which he had dreamed of.

Letone's craft weaved and rolled; now the enemy was closer.

Instruments showed that six airborne fighters had been sent up, from the planet. They would be in range, in five minutes. More fighters! Another three were sent, from the moon. Letone and his novice crew were getting a fast introduction to the Federation and space.

Another two interceptors were rising from around the horizon of Earth. Letone shook his head. He was hopelessly outnumbered. His choices were limited. He would not surrender, and to stay was to fight to the death. If he tried to land on Earth, under cloud cover then he could stay hidden for some time, but it would take only a few months and then half the

Galaxy would be down there, looking for them. At least that would give them much needed time.

One other alternative was to try to outrun the enemy to a safe point. However, there was no safe point, bar the possibility of Mars Base, the old scientific observation laboratory, which used to monitor Earth, used by Federation scientists. There was that faintest possibility of escape, but that assumed certain conditions. That assumed it was operational, but they never had warp drive craft there on Mars, to be able to leave the system.

The last possible escape route, was for the ship out there. It would mean penetrating the ship, taking its crew and then warping out of the system.

It was the last plan, which had the greatest chance of success. Letone aimed his interceptor at the ship and began to close the gap. The ship was a small military space hopper. It had room for either an interceptor, or two fighters. Most often, they carried one fighter and a shuttle. As Letone and his crew bore in, towards it, both of his Indian charges fired at the enemy, as it zigzagged across their path. Missiles were not used now, as they would endanger the military space hopper.

With only a hundred kilometers to go, the ship began to waver, shimmer and it vanished from space. It had warped out from the system.

Letone responded by diving his craft down into the atmosphere again. He turned and twirled down

into the thickening air. Behind him, a throng of craft were blasting away at him.

Jaron was shooting back, at everything in sight. His seat swiveled at the slightest touch from his fingers. Another fighter passed overhead. Again, he missed.

Sheril scored! "That is how it's done, by a real warrior!"

Jaron continued what he was doing. There was no time for hurt pride. It was only the intelligent piloting of Letone, which kept them alive. Down into the atmosphere, they continued. They lost the fighters, but the armored interceptors followed. They loosed missiles. This forced Letone to increase his speed. Seven missiles were closing.

He screamed, "Shoot at those blasted things, or we're dead!"

The two gunners hammered away. Letone held the craft steady, as they defended. He saw on his screen three missiles disappear. Four left. Another went and then another. Two remained. He had to level. He began to pull the machine up; it was almost out of control. The interceptor would not pull up. They were hurtling towards the Earth, at over twelve thousand kilometers per hour. The missiles were closing. Clouds flashed by, as a blur. Finally, the interceptor began to respond. Pulling up, pulling up. Level at last!.

The missiles exploded behind them, in the white blur. Half wanting to escape, but knowing that this is

where they must set down, Letone eased back on the speed. Air brakes were out. He lowered, to try to get a glimpse of the ground. It was still white, with cloud.

Finally, he got under the cloud. The ocean was only meters below them. Suddenly, out of the white clouds came a wall, white and towering above them. Letone pulled on the controls, to get lift. They were going up, over the white wall. Something hit the interceptor and they were going out of control. Letone shut down the drives, fought to regain direction and tried to hold up, the nose of the craft. They descended, struck the ground, and were again in the air. They struck again and Letone was thrown against his straps. He fought to control the machine, uselessly. The interceptor struck the ground again and Letone passed out, unconscious.

ψ

THE SOUTHERN CONTINENT

Letone willed his eyes to open. Outside of his canopy was white, nothing but white. He groaned. His arms and shoulders ached. Where were they? He called out, "Jaron, Sheril?"

There was a slight moan, from the rear.

Letone shook the sleep from his head and looked around himself. The instruments were off. The cockpit was full of the pale white light, from outside. He threw back the bolt and drew back the canopy, a fraction. His hands pushed away at the white snow above him. They were buried. How deep, he had no idea, but deep enough for the interceptor's instruments not to function. That was good for it meant that they might not be detectable, either.

He closed the canopy and swiveled his seat. He now faced the rear and he slid into the interceptor's narrow tunnel, connecting the rear. Crawling on his hands and knees, he found the feet of Sheril. He wrenched a side lever and her seat tilted back and lowered. Letone could tell she was fading in and out of consciousness. She had cuts across her right eye, from the butt of her gun.

He passed her and crawled to the back of the craft. There, Jaron had been squashed up, against the canopy. Letone slowly straightened him while checking for bone breaks. No obvious breaks, so he drew him down, lengthways in the tunnel. Now that Jaron was straight, he felt one of the boy's arms. It had a minor fracture and would have to be splinted.

Letone back crawled to pull out the survival-kit. He drew out an inflatable splint and wrapped it over the boy's broken left upper arm. He pulled at the arm, Jaron yelled. Letone reset it, cleanly and then inflated the splint and clipped it to the side of the boy's clothing, at chest level.

Letone looked at it, and at the cellular level, and they were already healing, fast. Jaron would be fine, for a while. Letone crawled back to Sheril and looked at her forehead. He sponged away the blood. She opened her eyes, looked around. "Where are we?"

Letone smiled, "We're still in our craft and will be, for some time. We're on the continent of Antarctica, under meters of snow. For the moment, we're safe. How do you feel?"

She shrugged. "Perhaps a little cold, but otherwise fine. Snow?"

Letone nodded and pulled out from the side of the tunnel, a thin heat wrap. "Tuck this around you. I'm going outside. I will bring back snow." With that, Letone crawled back, to his seat.

He drew the canopy back. The snow was soft and Letone was able to push some aside. It was only

a meter thick. He broke through to the surface, hauling himself clear.

Almost immediately, he was blown back down. He tried to look around, but the snow and ice was blowing hard. There was a blizzard outside, which meant that there would be no one searching for them, for a while.

Letone withdrew. There was no obvious way out.

Ω

For three days, they stayed in the interceptor. Jaron regained consciousness. He looked around and accepted the small amount of food, which was offered to him. He was suffering from fever, a complication of the fractured bone. Sweat dripped from his face. Letone hovered over him. Jaron's immune system was in shock and not dealing well with the fever.

Ω

On the sixth day, after their landing, Letone went to the surface, with his water pouch. They had turned the craft into a cozy survival center. The onboard survival-food, properly rationed, would last another three weeks.

As Letone broke the surface, he could see the vast expanse of snow and ice leading down towards the distant blue ocean. The view in some ways, was

a relief. Overhead, the clouds were receding, and the sun hung low on the far horizon. Icebergs drifted aimlessly in the far ocean, reflecting a pink radiance off of the sun.

Letone sat there for a moment and contemplated their future. How would they ever get off this planet? It may well be that they would freeze, right here. He looked over to his left. There was a mountain range. On his right, was the frozen and broken ocean. He looked up and wondered how long it would take to be found.

Letone turned and looked back at the bulk of the interceptor. It was well covered in snow. It seemed that it must have burrowed down, upon impact.

Slowly, Letone covered up the entry to the canopy, closed it and withdrew to his seat, to think for a moment.

Sheril crawled up forward and behind him. "There is no way out, but surrender, is there?"

Letone turned, with a scowl. "We shall escape. It isn't a matter of how, but when. We may have to wait until winter, so that there is no light. Until then, we need to survive, and that means a much longer time, than we have provision, for."

Jaron could hear the conversation and called out, "We're with you, old man, just tell us what to do."

Letone turned. "The only way we can escape is to try another run with this machine, or wait until a better opportunity presents itself. Personally, I would prefer another method of getting off, than in the

interceptor. I believe that we'll find it doubly hard next time, as the enemy will be looking for us."

"Will they not be looking for us, now?" asked Sheril.

Letone glanced down to the instruments and said softly. "Yes. They will be trawling this area, very soon. Fortunately, they will be limited by the weather and the location. Also, they will be waiting for reinforcements, which will arrive in about four months. That is why it isn't safe to go out. There will be satellites soon, positioned on a permanent basis, over the Antarctic."

Sheril looked around. "How long can we survive here, in this interceptor?"

Letone brightened up. "This craft has a good source of power, that could last fifteen years, but it's the food that needs supplementing. We need to be able to catch our own food."

"How?" asked Jaron. He could now see the other pair, through the tunnel.

"Below us, is the exit door to the hold, and from there, as long as it isn't jammed, a door from the hold exits, below us. We'll be able to tunnel through the ice, to a water source of food, not far from here."

Sheril's eyes lit up. She liked fish and disliked the bland survival-food, which she had been eating.

Letone continued. "The tunnel can be carved out with the laser rifles we have. They can be recharged from the interceptor. The tunnel could be completed with about three weeks' excavation."

Ω

Sheril started work on the tunnel. Letone went outside, up on the surface sometimes, to keep an eye on any events that may have been occurring. Most days the weather was abysmal, but sometimes the views were spectacular. On those days, Letone would encourage the other two to surface, for a brief time. When topside, they hid beneath a reflective heat blanket. Letone found himself lying more often on the surface with binoculars, watching.

One day he saw a pair of craft circle, about ten kilometers away, but they soon vanished, over the horizon.

After two weeks, the sun began to dip below the horizon and shed shadow from the hills. Letone noticed that the ocean water edge seemed to be getting further away as it froze.

Ω

A month after landing, Letone and Jaron were down in the tunnel. Any day now, they would be breaking into the ocean. Letone kneeled down, watching the young team carve the next section of ice. The green light from the laser emitted steam and gushes of hot air. The cold of the ice quickly glazed the sides of the tunnel and froze the water, created by the laser.

The green light sizzled again, into the dark ice. They were close enough to the surface, to witness the dull glow from above.

Jaron looked back at Letone. "We're there. Look; the radiance at the end of the tunnel."

Letone smiled and nodded.

Jaron crawled to the edge of the tunnel and aimed downwards, with a low charge. A hole opened wide, showing direct light. They were on a cliff of ice. A moment later, they had created a hole, big enough to crawl through. Jaron looked out over the water, only ten meters below. It was a calm day, with calm seas.

Letone crawled back along the tunnel, to the interceptor. Back in the warmth of the craft he sat, listening to its open band radio. He heard Sheril slide down into the hole, with a line that would hopefully, bring them live food. Letone was relieved. The radio crackled, as it did so often. Recently, the transmissions were coming from nearby. The enemy had not given up its search; possibly it had intensified.

Letone recognized the name of Goren Torren over the radio and sat back, remembering the heady days at the beginning of the millennium, when he and Goren had defended *Home*, the residence of Goren and the Boguard in California. He thought of the attacks on *Home*, the arrival of Hymondy and then Letone's self-imposed exile, and the long wait for what was bound to occur. Now, the exile was over

and all he had to do was to somehow return, to the Pleiades.

His memories drifted on, until he heard some sounds from behind. There was an old familiar smell, of cooking fish.

Sheril's beaming face popped into view, as she brought in a small container of food. "This is for you. We caught three fish, almost immediately. It was easy. The laser was able to lure the fish to the surface and then, fizz, no more life in the fish."

Letone tasted it. The smile on his face showed how good it tasted. He sat back after his meal and closed his eyes. They had finished the tunnel and now he would have to turn their young minds to another task. He turned the radio off and fell asleep.

Ω

The days drifted on and the sun sank lower over the horizon. Soon, the nights were longer than the day. The enemy, it seemed, were no closer to finding their location, than weeks ago.

Letone had devised a new scheme. They would turn the interceptor around and take off, during the dead of winter. Letone had no real illusions of success. In fact, he could see no way of escape. However, if they should die then, they would always have the opportunity to live again, in another day, in another time.

N I C K B R O A D H U R S T

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THE TEMPLAR MINISERIES

Page 121 | 606

TURNING HISTORY

The senior representative of the Bank stood at the head of the table. He addressed twelve others, all wearing the uniform of the Imperial Federation Warp Drive Bank. The hall was large and in the background were three large stained glass windows that extended seventy pacs, to the ceiling. The floor was of polished stone tiles covered with hand woven rugs. The walls were naked stone block. Outside, it was a beautiful day, the sun streaming through the windows. They were on planet Palbo that, through the Bank, almost ruled the Galaxy, again. On this planet, *Palbo C.C.* was again, the most powerful.

The Palboan cities played for power. The most powerful cities had directors on the Bank board. Palbo C.C. had three Directors. The president of *Merron City* was *Brandon Mirak*.

Brandon Mirak was talking again to the Bank's board of directors. "A millennia ago, we did not interfere. We let go of our monopoly of Warp Drive travel. Fortunately, with shrewd commercial dealings, and changing the charter of the Bank and the Federation, we have managed to regain much of that total control we stupidly lost. We now control ninety-eight point five percent of Warp Drive travel."

The head of the table waited for Mirak to finish, smiled and then turned to the screen and said, "The man that brought about our temporary demise was killed on this tiny outpost planet, Sequetus 3, otherwise known as Earth.

"His name was Goren Torren." He pointed to the picture showing Goren in front of a crowd, in New York City. "He was assassinated far too early. In fact, our plans were to not kill him. To handle a man of this nature, one must treat his body. You can't deal with his mind, unless it's with the body. After he left his body, we had to wait for the demise of the authority of the planet – a Royal, known as Hymondy. After Hymondy's death, we began the depopulation of Earth. Not a single human being has left that planet, which was not scrutinized, by our people. We're still searching for Torren, Hymondy, and others of that time, who gave us so much trouble."

He was about to mention that woman, Felice Karo, but a sharp pain struck him. He continued. "It's of the utmost importance that they are found, for if they escape and reunite in the Galaxy now, with the far colonies as they are, they could ignite a reaction again against us and cost us our impending control."

Another man stood. He turned to the next picture. In it were hospital beds with hundreds of people receiving treatment. He explained: "Here, are the rehabilitation units where those who opposed our rule, have been reprogrammed to return to society;

thus, accepting us. There has been no failure, to date. With the use of exact laser and electric arced impulses to the brain, and prerecorded messages down the sensory channels, the patient is made compliant. The machine here traps the *life force* inside the brain, with a series of electric arcs. The patient's body is then moved away from the arc, and we have suspended inside the arc, the living essence of the person – the life-force itself. With that life-force are all his memories, and personal traits. Then it's up to us to replace around the suspended life-force, another body of what and whom we please. This technology had made us the creators of new life, in the Galaxy."

The man laughed. "This was the rejuvenating we offered the Royals of the Federation. We gave them new genetic reconstructions, of their old bodies. We grew the new bodies, and when the Royals reported back to us, we transferred them into their new bodies." The man nodded.

Mirak now took the floor, again. "Somehow with Hymondy, and the Duke of Kalanon, the program to return, failed and they chose to die a natural death, and we lost them both. We lost them. Most other spirits of the Royals however, we still have stored – suspended – set inside carbon dioxide ice.

"When we get the new Goren Torren – whoever he is now - we shall place him in a specially constructed machine. It's imperative that he and his

fellow conspirators be found. It's impossible for him to resist the machine. It will control him."

The screen went onto the next shots, showing great expanses of ice. "Here, it seems is the clue, which we have been waiting for. Our rabbit Torren, finally made a move. Two months ago, there was a failed attempted escape from the planet Earth, by someone. We have every reason to suppose that it's Torren. We have sent a mammoth taskforce of six cruisers, to intercept him."

Mirak looked around for questions.

"Mirak, isn't six cruisers a trifle over reacting, for just one man that rules no army yet?" asked one of the directors.

Mirak laughed. "If we sent twenty cruisers the cost would not be too great. If it would assist, I would send thirty. This man is the most dangerous in the Galaxy. I only fear that I still underestimate him.

"He is somewhere down here, in the southern ice called Antarctica. Our task force will be there, soon. When it arrives, we'll be able to locate him. There is up to two Ks of ice over the continent, but that won't obstruct the cruisers. We should have word of his capture, in less than seven standard weeks."

The next picture came to the screen. It was of a different place and another situation. The proposed contracts for the first defense ships for the Templars were to be ratified by the board. The meeting continued for seven more hours.

After the meeting, Brandon Mirak sat back in his office chair, looking over the park below. This was a modern office complex. It was from here, that he ran the city. He was president of the Board now, effective ruler of Palbo and its reemerging empire.

He stretched and pondered on how easy it was, to rule his ordered society.

He stood up and watched the people below. They were all doing their job, cooperating with each other. None of them realized the inner peace that they had, was due to the programming they had received, after birth. There was no crime, no war, and no dreaded competition.

With this technology, developed by the *psychrons*, each member of this ordered society of Palbo had been carefully conditioned in the *health-retreats*. Here, the individual was given mild electric stimulants, into the brain while receiving audio and visio instructions on what laws not to break, and what morals not to transgress. It was the perfect nice-ordered society, and almost no one knew why.

It had taken hundreds of years, to slowly perfect. With the basic mental implants given two days after birth, the population was then fed the slow mind mind-numbing restimulation of the mental implants, by mass media transmissions. There was not a computer or screen today which did not carry the implant restimulation impulses. They were in the

airports, in the advertising in shops, in private cars, planes, phones, and everywhere that used any visualization, to sell or promote a product. The Bank controlled them all.

Mirak looked down on the people. They were happy. They had no political problems; the society was affluent and controlled much of the destiny of the Galaxy. Each one of his populace would willingly wage war and die for him and him alone. Though it was their implanted duty to do so, Brandon still hoped that it was, because of their love for him. He realized however, that they really did not know who he was. Still, he was their ruler and one way or another they obeyed his commands, even if they did not know it.

A beeping sound emitted from his desk; he stepped over, to see his wife on the visio caller. Yes, she too, had been programmed. Being the President's wife, she had received special treatment in marriage gratification, and indeed, it was the perfect marriage with the perfect obedience to his wishes. She never knew, and Brandon knew it would be wrong, for her to find out. She was happy the way she was.

Brandon discussed the dinner they were to attend and the conversation ended amicably as it always did, with him getting what he wanted. He thought about the *psychrons* that had time after time requested that the President also receive their programming, to ensure his own compatibility, to the

needs of his people. As had his father and all prior presidents done, he refused. No president would ever receive programming, and neither would his children until one of them was old enough to be selected and named as his successor. Then, the other children would be programmed, accordingly.

He recalled the time when he came home and found himself involved, in an argument with his wife. He smiled. The psychrons modified that. She only had been in the health-retreat for ten days and had never spoken against Brandon since.

Yes, this was a good society.

Brandon pulled a history book from the shelf. It had the data on the Royals, for which he had been searching. They never did find out what went wrong with that program. For fifteen hundred years, the psychrons and their predecessors had successfully programmed them, retaining control over the Federation. He chuckled to himself, as he thought how many psychrons were reprogrammed themselves, over that debacle.

Still, it had cost them considerable control over the Federation. The psychron technology had been transported to Earth, in the nineteenth century, but it failed there too, and the result was the explosion of the Torren cult, which swept the Galaxy.

With that cult of Torren, came the dwindling of the control of the Federation, while the old boundaries had been extended fourfold, by the short-lifers. This was worrying.

The Bank was close to striking a deal with the Templars, to lease military support ships to protect merchant Templar ships from pirates. It was still a long way from having the Temples owning military ships, but that gap was closing. The next Sortet would see the center of power shift, from Jilta. Then the short-lifers would have all the military hardware that they needed. Only then, would the long-life Federationists see the short-lifers, as a real threat.

Long-lifers tended to trust Jilta, but once the Templar power shifted, that perception of the Templars would be easy to change.

Brandon smiled at the thought of the ensuing civil war, which would see the Bank provide necessary support to both sides, while ensuring the success of the long-lifers. Though in Brandon's mind, it mattered little who won, as long as the Bank drew profits and regained its ascendancy as the great, all-embracing power that it once was.

There was a rap on the door and Brandon turned. His secretary placed a parcel on his desk and left.

Brandon unwrapped it. Inside was a message disk. He slotted it into the descrambler.

Brandon shook his head, as one of the pirate captains came onto the screen. They knew better than to send data directly to him. If only they would consent to conditioning, then this would never happen. He played the disk, anyway.

The captain was wearing civilian cloths and a short beard. "Hello," he said. "I want you to know that we have located the girl."

This excited Brandon. He had taken particular interest in this project. The spirit of the girl was thought to be one, who escaped Sequetus, centuries ago. It was believed that she had been once part of the Torren group and had been found now, as the daughter of the Templar Master of Jilta. Three attempts were made to kidnap her, but they had all failed.

After that, her father sent her away, to a destination unknown. It was never the intention of the Bank to harm the girl, but to only program her with psychron conditioning. After that, she would have been returned to her parents and the Temple. She would have received no harm, but she would no longer be a threat to the Bank, or its executives. Maybe she could have been an asset to use, to exert pressure, on the Temple.

However, she escaped and a large-scale hunt revealed no results. This was another reason why, the Bank was against the expansion, into the unknown Galaxy. The people were reaching out, ahead of the Bank, setting up in places that took up to a year, to travel to. It was dangerous to have any galactic expansion, which couldn't be controlled by a single *benevolent* body, such as the Bank.

The pirate captain continued. "We believe the girl has been found. Four months ago, we raided a

ship, bound for the outer sectors. The ship had little of value. It crashed on the planet Rambus. It had a survivor, a girl, fourteen years old and fitting the description of Anki, the daughter of the Master Templar of Jilta. I await your instructions.” The captain bowed and the screen went blank.

Brandon shuddered. That planet of Jilta had been a thorn to the Bank, for millennia. First Hymondy, and now the Temple Masters and their ridiculous cult. Brandon never objected to the teachings of Torren, in fact they were good and useful, in a world that assumed that all people had a right to their own destiny. They provided a stable guiding reference in an otherwise life of confusion. However, self-destiny was contrary to the tenets of the Bank, and the doctrines of the surgeon-psychrons, who recognized the need to maintain a structured and ordered peaceful society.

Brandon wondered what would happen, if this expansion of the populated Galaxy was to continue. Eventually, control would be impossible. Maybe, there would be multiple empires, and this would lead to war, civil war and the endless suffering of billions and trillions. It was far better to end that right now, before the realm of the Federation expanded too far. One fast civil war; destroy the short-lifers and their ridiculous Temple cult and see the Federation return to normal. With the help of the surgeon-psychrons the Bank could have their programming implemented, throughout the whole Galaxy.

Brandon turned on the recorder. "This message will erase, as it plays, so listen carefully to me, Captain. Retrieve the girl; the Bank will reward you, with double this month's remuneration. She must be returned to Palbo in the next eight months. Mirak out," and he turned off the recording, sealed the disk, and then called for his secretary.

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LEAVING RAMBUS

MID 1054 BS

Anki looked at the cold barren landscape, from her window. It was a far cry from the hot summer she had known months back. Outside had been getting colder day by day over the past three weeks, and now the temperature was permanently below zero.

She looked past the window and began to recall her earlier days, on the warm planet of her youth. Her planet was not inhospitable to its population. Still, the people of Rambus had been kind and had accepted her into a family with no questions. They did not seem to care about her past. If she wanted to talk about it, that was fine, but they did not pry. Anki thought about Gerome. He was a kind man and his family loved him.

Amy broke Anki's reverie. "Anki, I'm taking the wheeler down to the lake, to check the generator pipes. Do you want to come along?"

Anki shrugged. She may as well, there was little to do around the homestead.

The journey took its familiar track, down to the lake. The girls had on their chill-jackets and thick gloves.

As the air rushed past, Anki breathed deeply. The cold felt good, against the skin. She sat down

low, in the seat and listened to Amy's wild stories. It seemed that for Amy, all life was an exciting adventure on Rambus, and must be talked about.

The sun seemed far off and faint on the skin. The rocks appeared more orange, this time of year while the sky was a deep blue and the horizon appeared as a dark deep purple line, not the wavering pale shimmer of summer. Soon, there would even be light snowfalls and frost, in the nearby mountains of the lakes.

The wheeler halted. Amy jumped out and beckoned Anki to follow. The pair went into the compound.

The top of the water was frozen, half a meter thick. Amy walked straight out, onto the frozen surface while Anki called after her, "Are you certain that it's safe, Amy?"

Amy laughed. "This is the best time of year. Here, I will show you, and yes, it's safe, as long as you follow what I say."

Amy stepped inside the compound building and quickly reemerged and said, "This is our secret. Here hold this."

Anki held a long wide strip of aluminum, which was two meters long.

Amy said, "Now, put it on the ground and connect this pole. Yes, that's right. Now, unfold this, and run it up the side, here. Yes. Now, what do you think?"

Anki stood back and a big grin took over her face. "It's a para-racer."

"A what?"

"Para-racer. That is what we call it, where I come from. This is exciting. How fast can it go?" asked Anki.

Amy was pleased that her friend was impressed. She unfurled the sail from the mast, and threaded through the rope. Next, she put her feet into the stirrups. "It depends how fast the wind is blowing, but seventy Ks isn't uncommon. Watch."

Amy pulled her goggles down and pushed the ground away. The wind filled the sail and immediately she took off, on the aluminum mono-ski. She gained speed, and then with a spray of ice the stirrups dug in, the sailer turned into the wind and sped away, to the right. Anki jumped up and down with excitement, as Amy flipped the sailer from one direction and then the other, with professional skill.

Five minutes later Amy was back at Anki's side.

"Hold your body out like this, for balance, and lean back. Don't go too close to the center of the lake, as it may not be frozen over completely, yet. Okay?"

Anki was holding the rope and the side of the sail. "What happened to the pipes?"

"They're only an excuse to be here, they're fine."

Anki grinned. "I see. Let it go. I will see you in a few minutes." With that, she took off in a gust of wind.

Anki looked down at the ice as it scudded beneath her. The sailer began to pick up speed; the sail ballooned out and it picked up more speed. The wind increased and the roar of the ice and the metal became deafening. Still, the wind increased. Anki was no longer enjoying her ride; she was quickly becoming terrified. She was now too scared to drop the sail and fall; the ski was traveling at over eighty kilometers an hour and increasing more.

Amy realized that something was wrong, as her friend was being carried out towards the center of the lake. She screamed, "The stirrups, slam in the stirrups. They're your brake!" Amy knew that she couldn't be heard. She ran to the wheeler, and started out onto the lake.

Anki was getting further away. Amy was traveling as fast as the wheeler could go. All she could do was watch and try to follow.

Without warning, Anki could be seen letting go of the sailer and then both disappeared.

Amy kept the engine and the gears of the wheeler screaming.

Soon, she came within about twenty meters from where Anki had gone down. Amy shut down the engine, grabbed a line from the back of the machine and tied it around her waist. She ran to the hole in the ice, about ten meters wide and with no indecision, executed a beautiful long dive to beneath the surface.

The weed and plant life had withdrawn, to several meters below the cold water surface layer, as

usual. She swam down, four meters, to the top of the plant life. Visibility was low.

The water was beginning to seep into Amy's suit and chill her body. She swam and there, before her was Anki alive, struggling with the sail and ropes caught around her, and in the plant life.

Amy swam over, kicking madly against the water and cold. Her lungs began to scream for her to surface, to get a breath of air. She reached Anki, withdrew a knife and gracefully slashed the stirrups from Anki's feet. The rope was entangled, around her left foot. Her hair was caught in the kelp and Amy simply ran the knife through it. The whole scene seemed surreal.

Free, they both kicked to the surface, but Anki was losing power. She had been in the cold water much longer, than Amy. Finally, they broke the surface and both grabbed the ice.

Amy pushed Anki against the ice for support. Amy blustered, "You OK?"

Anki breathed in and out, deeper and deeper she breathed and finally slowed down. "Sure. Great fun Amy." Anki gulped and began to shiver.

Amy loosened the rope around herself and tied it around her friend and said. "Come on, Anki. You have to pull yourself out."

Anki pulled while Amy pushed and finally, Anki lay on top of the ice breathing heavily. Soon, both were free of the icy water.

It was cold and Amy's fingers were turning blue. She slid along to the wheeler and Anki followed. The machine started and soon both the girls were on their way back. The wind chill quickly turned all the water on their clothes and bodies into ice.

Twenty minutes later, the girls had finally returned to the house. Gerome stared at the pair. Anki was the first to enter. Her hair was frozen stiff, around her face and her fingers were blue. Her brow was frozen to the hood, which she was wearing. Anki tried to smile and Amy said, as they entered. "Anki learned how to sail the lake today."

Gerome nodded. He saw his wife was about to scurry after the girls but he held up his hand. Quietly, he smiled and said. "I think our girls have learned some sort of lesson today. When they're ready, they will tell us. For the moment, I think you girls need to immediately get into the hot showers, cloths and all. I had better stoke the heating. Get some warm blankets and I will radio for the medical supervisor. Check for frost bite, but I think they look fine."

His wife smiled and kissed her husband warmly on the cheek. "You're a good father, Gerome. I will see if Rango can put the wheeler away, in the shed."

Ω

The girls spent the next day in bed, as per the medical supervisor's instructions.

Three days later, Gerome came up to the pair outside; they were rolling out a barrel of oil, made from the lake plant life. It was being loaded onto the wheeler and would be taken down to the compound, at the lake. At the peak of the winter, the generators needed oil auxiliary power.

"Amy, Anki," Gerome said as he walked over. "There is a freighter overhead. It will be bringing down supplies."

"I know, Papa," said Amy.

"How would the pair of you like to be taken aboard the freighter, for a guided tour?"

Amy looked at Anki in disbelief. "Really?" she squealed with delight. "I, we would love it, Papa. When do we go?"

"In about five hours."

Ω

The teenage girls finished their work on time and were ready, when the gleaming white shuttle appeared, low in the sky.

The most difficult part of getting ready was what the girls should wear.

The shuttle neared and soon it was descending its last three hundred meters. Almost all the homestead had gathered for the shuttle, the time when the life's work was paid for in consumables, imported from all over the Galaxy.

Amy was excited. All she was really interested in, was whether the young men aboard the freighter liked Rambus girls.

Ω

Half an hour later, the two girls were aboard the shuttle and making their way up, though the atmosphere. For Amy, it was another of life's great adventures. She had never left the planet before.

She stared out at the planet, as its red surface receded, away.

The viewscreen showed the freighter, up ahead. It was long, with windows on the bow; great stacks were at the rear drive sections and in the center were the loading bays.

Ω

Gerome was a happy man. His daughter had a great friend, in Anki. The pair were inseparable, and together, seemed to get into more trouble, than the rest of the family put together. However, Gerome had a special place for Amy and could never find it in his heart to scold her. Gerome justified this, by saying that Amy always learned by her mistakes and thus never needed any punishment. Life was her teacher. His wife simply said that he was a good father and loved his daughters too much.

The shuttle berthed and the girls stepped out. They were in a huge circular void, which could have taken up the whole of the homestead and then more. Above, were a series of catwalks and beyond were lashed down boxes and bulk stores. On the other side, was netting that held other small lightweight objects, in fixed containers.

Anki and Amy stared all around them, as they moved away from the shuttle. They were told not to go too far from the shuttle and they had half an hour, before they must return.

A young male deckhand came over to the pair and said, "Hello, my name is Mike. Would you like me to show you young ladies around?"

"Sure. We'd love it," said Amy; her eyes beaming.

"I will be back in a minute. I have a friend who might want to come with us." Mike ran over to the far hanger, where another two shuttles were being loaded.

Amy was excited and bubbly. "He's cute Anki. What do you think?"

"Okay, I guess."

"Okay? He is hmmm!" was Amy's reply.

Mike quickly came back, with a friend. "Hi. This is Gerry, and your names are...?"

"I'm Amy and this is Anki."

Anki pointed to the shuttle, which was leaving. "How is it that the craft can leave and the air still remain inside?"

Mike led them over to the shuttle bay doors, which showed the planet Rambus and the sparkling Galaxy, outside. The first moon could be seen, rising over the horizon.

"This is...," began Mike.

Without warning, a loud siren began and lights started to flash. The sound grew in intensity and Mike started to run.

He screamed to the girls, "Follow me. Pirates! Get away from the entry!"

Amy stared out and froze, as all of a sudden the outside scene began to shimmer and soon had vanished, completely. Quickly, she ran towards the edge and Mike grabbed her.

He turned her around and said, "Amy. There were pirates out there and we have just entered warp drive space."

Amy stared back at the pale purple universe, which lay beyond the hold doors. "When will we be able to return to the planet's surface?" she pleaded.

Mike held her by the arm and slowly led her away. "Amy, we seldom return to where we have encountered pirates, for several journeys. Time-wise, that could be months. It's possible that another freighter will make another run, but it's getting too dangerous out here, in the perimeter colonies."

Amy was becoming distraught and fought to get away from Mike, as though she wanted to run towards the exit.

He shook her and screamed, "Amy. You can't go back. If there are pirates out there, we don't stay, not without an escort. The first sign of them, and we pull out."

"The shuttle..." begged Amy, "You have to pick up the shuttle."

Mike shook his head. "No Amy. We would never return for the shuttle. That would be a risk too great for this ship and its cargo. Come on. Let's go and see the captain."

Amy looked behind and then at Mike. She followed.

On the way to the captain, she asked, "What will the pirates do to my family?"

"Nothing. They never attack planets. The pickings are too lean. They're only interested in taking a heavily laden freighter, like ours. They were after us, and for that reason, we did not hang around."

Amy was feeling better and she walked quickly, behind Mike. Anki followed. They left the storage bays and were marching down a hall, to the elevators.

Amy asked, "Where is your next stop?"

Mike turned with a smile and said, "There is no next stop. After a pirate raid, the only stop is home port, Jilta."

Anki froze in her tracks and stared at the three ahead. They were headed for Jilta.

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ICY GRAVE

Letone gave a hand to Jaron, as he blasted the last of the ice, so as to allow the interceptor to turn around.

As the craft had sunk into the ice over the months, the three had cleared a hanger-space cavern, within that ice. The craft finally faced the ocean. Their current project was to create a wide opening, and make a runway long enough, as well.

Letone knew that it was hopeless and that half the Federation would be out there waiting, but what else were they to do? They couldn't give up.

The tunnel was almost complete. Perhaps in another day, they could test the runway.

The craft appeared to be in perfect order. The instruments checked out, but only on launch day, would they test the drives.

Letone squinted down the dark, frozen corridor. He felt his way, up the side of the interceptor. His body temperature seemed to be momentarily dropping, lately.

Once inside the protection of the interceptor, Sheril handed him another variation of boiled fish. It still tasted good. It amazed Letone how good a meal could taste, when it could be one's last.

After eating, he opened his canopy. He walked up the three meters, to the surface and peered out. It was another dark afternoon. He grabbed his binoculars and stared towards the horizon. He was right. He thought he had heard a noise, while he was down in the tunnel. There were craft, moving around the overhead surface.

“Damn!” he thought to himself. They would be found soon. He could see about twenty craft in the air and a dozen on the ground. They were doing a methodical grid search, of the ice.

Letone studied them for a moment and noted their actions. They were sending small explosive devices into the ground, which were returning seismic echoes. It would take about eight hours, before they were upon them.

Letone dropped down and fastened the canopy. He crawled along the interceptor tunnel and dropped into their icy cavern. The space measured about four meters high and about seven meters wide. He skidded down the corridor, which had been carved out for their escape.

It was dark and Letone slipped and fell. He slid down the last section.

“Jaron! Jaron!” he called. “They’re here, about ten kilometers away. We have to make our escape now.” Letone could barely move his almost frozen fingers.

Jaron saw how the cold was affecting his teacher, and turned on the laser and formed a pool of warm

water. He pushed Letone's fingers in the warmth of the water.

Letone smiled in relief. "We still have to leave, now. How far away from the face, are we?"

"Almost there...here look." Jaron aimed the laser and soon, there was a clear hole, letting in a pencil shaped small amount of light. "About an hour away. Do we have that long?"

Letone nodded. "I will get Sheril to wrap up the last of the fish; who knows where we'll be, in a few hours from now.

Jaron nodded and continued to fire at the ice.

Back at the interceptor Letone, began to warm the craft and then crawled towards the surface, again. He watched the machines, as they approached from the direction of the horizon. Overhead, he saw the reflection of a satellite or spaceship in the sky. He looked harder and saw another three bright specks.

Letone swallowed. The Federation was up there, in force. There was no more time. They had been found. Those machines were coming straight for them, now. They were no longer using seismic testing. Letone guessed there were cruisers, above too.

He slipped down, into the interceptor. He called down the tunnel to Jaron, on the communicator. "Jaron! Get here now! We're leaving. Don't worry about the last section. We'll blast it out, as we leave!"

Letone gave Jaron three minutes, to get up the tunnel and then he began the drives. He revved and then heard Jaron clamber aboard. Sheril call out, "All aboard and sealed!"

Letone gave his instruments one last cursory check. He roared the drives and the interceptor began to shake. Slowly, it advanced and skidded down the tunnel. It gained speed and slid faster and faster. They were at the final one hundred meters. Letone flipped the cover, to fire off two rockets, which exploded the last meters of ice. The interceptor burst through the cloud of ice into free air over the ocean.

Thrusters and turbines wailed, as the great machine dipped down low, over the water. Letone turned the nose upwards, drove the thrusters on and the craft blasted its way up into space, leaving the ice-capped continent behind.

Jaron watched, from the comfort of his rear gunnery position, as the interceptor drew away, from what had been their home, for months.

Letone strained to hold the craft. It seemed that some of the control had been lost, when they crashed.

"Enemy at three o'clock!" screamed Letone, over the radio.

Sheril looked up, gripped the gun butts and swiveled around. Instantly, the darkening sky burst into a cascade of pencil light, flashing from one side of the horizon, to the other.

Letone knew what was happening. They were being fired upon, with only intent to maim. There must have been cruisers up there and lots of them, with dozens of guns firing, from different positions, in the heavens. Letone pushed his interceptor to its limit. Afterburners were on. It shuddered and banked to the right, out of control. It had taken a hit, then another, but there was no effect on the power. Letone fought to regain control. He then turned the craft, into three three-hundred-and-sixty degree turns, weaving and threading through the laser fire, which came from the horizons.

The drives screamed, as the interceptor blasted through the upper clouds, towards open space.

Jaron and Sheril were returning fire at the ground and then to a gaggle of planet based atmospheric fighters, which had fired rockets. They gunned them down, with blinding flashes of crimson light. Jaron exploded two enemy craft, in as many seconds.

Still, the interceptor raced into the upper stratosphere.

Letone saw a squadron of twenty-four fighters on the screen, lurking ahead. Beyond, was a Federation cruiser. Should he go for the cruiser and disregard his own life? He had waited so long to leave this planet, a victor. He was not about to destroy himself, yet. He banked and rolled, away from the incoming fighters.

Jaron screamed, "Hit, hit, hit. I got three."

Letone saw on the instruments, that there were three explosions, in space.

They next headed back for atmospheric protection, and were accelerating.

“Where are we going?” screamed Sheril.

“No idea! Keep shooting,” yelled Letone.

They nose-dived back into the atmosphere, out of the range of the cruiser fighters. Down, they fled.

“Rockets, five!” yelled Jaron, as he kept firing.

Down they dove and as Jaron kept firing, the atmospheric based fighters swelled up in apparent size to greet them.

Sheril fired, forwards, adrenalin soaking through every cell in her body.

Down, they continued. Flash one, then another, they passed the exploding fighters.

The night sky was ablaze with light. The laser fire from over the horizon continued. The night looked like a webbing of flashing bright green light.

Lasers struck the interceptor over and over again, but never enough to destroy it, only sufficient to cripple, or slow it down and take away its maneuverability.

That was the plan, Letone realized, to capture them, to take them prisoner. The fighters above and the fighters below would keep them in mid-flight long enough, for the lasers to cripple the craft and bring them down.

Now, they had ten rockets on their trail and closing.

They continued their dive and the interceptor was shuddering, and vibrating so hard, that Letone thought he was no longer in command.

The ocean was nearing. If Letone could shake the rockets off his tail, and let them fall into the water and free them, maybe he could escape again, as he had done, only months before.

He pulled on the control and slowly, the heavy interceptor began to arrest its descent. The craft shot across the tops of the white caps, at over three thousand kilometers an hour. The sky and the water were nothing than a brief blur in his mind, as he lifted the controls and threw power back into the slowing machine. Once more, he took off, into the clouds, but still with half the rockets behind him and more were coming. They appeared as blips on a screen and closing.

He did not know what to do, was there no escape? As he began to power into the atmosphere, a soothing quiet internal voice said to him: *Enough*.

He sat back and stared at the space beyond, the blackness that he had lived in, and loved so much. He took one last look, at the stars in the sky. He apologized to his friends, those that he loved, those who, in his past had died, to help him and his cause.

Calmly, he looked ahead at the stars, and glanced at the rockets coming in. He knew he couldn't out run them; they outnumbered him. He was out-gunned and out-witted. He pointed the nose of the great craft, which would soon be his coffin,

towards space, flipped the controls and instantly, all the power was off.

Gently, he lay back and felt the minds of his companions. They were with him, as one. All were weary of the chase, which they knew they couldn't win.

The interceptor slowed, and slowed, until like a streak of lightning, the rockets raced past their mark, back out to space, as he knew they would. Letone knew they would not have hit him. He knew that once the power was off they would seek another hotter target. He knew that the rockets would be detonated, as soon as they had left the atmosphere.

The interceptor now began to slide back, on its path. With inner peace, Letone felt his body relax.

The view of the sky soon turned into the darkness of the ground, and then to the sky again as the interceptor tumbled through the air, being pulled towards its inevitable grave.

Letone smiled, as he saw the stars flash past, with each revolution. The strain of the fall was pulling at his flesh. He could see the darkness of the ocean ahead, then the stars, followed by the flashes of laser fire again.

Slowly, he felt himself being pulled into a deep unconsciousness, a time of peace and well-being, like another time, when nothing mattered. In the background, he heard his friend Jaron scream and all of a sudden, he could see the flashes of the rear tail

gunner. The boy was not about to go down, unless he could take all and any others, with him.

Letone admired his fighting spirit and would not intrude.

The craft seemed to increase its tumbling and the waves could be seen in the moon light, as they flashed past, on each revolution.

They were about to hit, when out of the corner of his eye, Letone saw the sky above light up, like a beautiful sky, but brighter. As his craft rotated, he saw it again, it was a huge bright light, bigger than any cruiser.

The light grew in intensity, until it filled his whole vision and the vision within his mind. He recalled that last time, when he had seen that familiar light. The waves came up and he saw them, as the interceptor smashed into the ocean, sending a water, spout ninety meters into the air.

Ω

The captain of the Cruiser Kolin, saw the fight, below. He admired the pilot of the interceptor. He was good, as good as any he had seen; perhaps even better. Somehow, he wished the pilot was his. Maybe he even wished the pilot could escape. He deserved it.

Slowly, the craft that they had planned for a month to destroy was there, and they had a job to do. Unhurriedly they weakened its hull, and chased it

from one part of the atmosphere, to the other, out to space and then back again.

The captain saw the finale of the craft, as it disengaged its drives. The captain saw the rockets explode harmlessly past the interceptor. Somehow, the captain wished again, that his quarry could escape. He deserved better than what was about to meet him, should he survive.

The captain knew of the psycho-surgeons, and what they would do to the spirit of that brilliant pilot, once they had him. The captain had seen it done, to many of his own men. Once full of spirit, his men would be transferred to the *Health Retreats*, which were becoming far too common, throughout the Galaxy.

Yes, some of his best men had been there. Not by his orders, but as part of the new Federation policy. The captain shuddered at the results, but he was not about to complain and end up in reprogramming himself.

He saw the interceptor tumble, on its graceful final descent towards Earth. The captain now hoped that the pilot would not survive. Somehow, there was something inside the captain, which was touched by the heroic display, below him. The captain wondered who the pilot was, to have called upon him such a display of military might.

The speed of the tumbling increased, as the craft approached the Earth.



“Captain!” called a voice from the bridge’s communicator.

The captain looked around towards the side of his bridge. His eyes stared, at a new image on the screen. It was a bright light, coming over the horizon of the planet, closing in at great speed.

The captain asked, “Is it Federation?”

“No reply, sir. We don’t even know if it’s a space craft. It could be terrestrial.”

"Search the computers, for any previous record of this light. What is it?" demanded the captain.

The communicator looked up, in dismay. "Sir, this is strange. On the computer all it says is: *Classified data. Report situation only. Don't intercept, contact, or engage.* Weird sir."

The captain sat back and watched, as the light grew bigger and closer. It seemed that it would fill the whole screen. It was three times the size of his cruiser. "Obey the instructions. Withdraw all forces from engaging the light."

The light came closer, over the ocean. The captain watched, as the interceptor began its last death throes and its guns began to blaze in all directions. With one last act, the craft smashed into the Antarctic Ocean.

Intrigued, the captain watched the massive ball of light lower over the ocean and submerge, partly into it. It stayed a moment and then faded from view.

The captain sat back, drummed his fingers and looked at his crew. "Is the interceptor or any of its wreckage, in or on the ocean?"

"No sir."

"Any sign of human life or survivors or bodies?"

"None apparent, sir."

"Keep searching." The captain hid a smile. Who were they?

N I C K B R O A D H U R S T

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THE TEMPLAR MINISERIES

Page 157 | 606

END OF THE ERA

Letone opened his eyes. He thought he knew where he was. He looked about him and felt the tranquility of being there, with friends. He had not died, nor been captured. He felt his body and looked around the room. Instantly, he knew that young Jaron had also survived, as had Sheril.

The room was white; he wondered how long it had been, and instantly, the answer came to him. For two weeks he had been in a coma between life and death. He knew where he was and how he arrived. He recalled his last feelings and images of Earth, when the icy waters of the Antarctic Ocean touched his face and lungs. He had drowned or almost had, and now he was alive again, in his old body. He smiled and lay back. He was going home, with the Aaron. He had been saved and was going home, to a beautiful place in the Pleiades, where he could hopefully rest out the remainder of his old days, as an administrator.

As he lay there, he wondered how he had been saved. How did the Aaron find him?

The door opened and in walked a strong looking youth, in black shining Boguard dress. "My Lorde Letone. May I sit?"

Letone nodded and smiled at the address of Lorde.

"My name is Genel, and I'm here to answer your queries. To begin with, the Aaron has known of your plans for centuries.

"You were the only Boguard, not to have been rescued, a millennium ago. We knew you were on Sequetus 3 and that your plan was to liberate the Torren. However, we never knew when."

Letone nodded.

Genel continued. "As a result, we left a Boguard officer under cover, on Mars Base.

"For centuries, we waited for the return of Goren Torren. We wondered who would be the first to find him. It appears you have, in the guise of young Jaron.

"Your initial escape attempt had you revealed by the Earth authorities to Moonbase. That message was picked up by our officer on Mars, who transmitted it to us, immediately. We then arrived, shortly before the Federation, and waited."

"You exposed yourselves and this ship... something that is never permitted," protested Letone.

The man smiled. "We know, but that was a sacrifice we had to make. We had to either risk the Federation seeing us, or risk losing you and the Torren again. There was no question of what was right." Letone nodded and Genel continued. "Your body is old and functions well, sir. It's advised that you take more sleep, to assist in its repair." The man

looked down and smiled, to see that Letone had already slipped into a comfortable state of dreaming again.

Ω

Brandon Mirak's face was becoming red. History was beginning to repeat the events of one thousand years ago. He had learned how his ancestors had lost so much of their control of the Galaxy, when the Torren was let loose on the Federation. Ever since then, Torren had been hiding on that wretched planet, Earth.

"The Bank has searched for him, even depopulated the planet to force him out, and finally, after all this wait, he surfaces. So, where is he now? You tell me he has gone into a bright light?" Brandon slammed his fist, down on the table. He normally did not become so emotional about issues. He threw his hands into the air and walked around, in circles. "How could the Commander of the Fleet let one man, slip through his fingers? I sent out enough armor, to destroy twenty systems!"

The Federated Military Council members were cringing at the power and terror, which Brandon emanated.

"Get me that Commander and all his junior officers. I want them re-programmed. They won't fail me again!" he demanded, of the Head of the Council.

The Head was normally a calm man, and his programming was light by comparison, to what was due for the Commander of the Fleet Task Force. He stammered in the face of Brandon, who leered at him. "He... he... he comes from... from a series of planets within the Federation that... that don't subscribe to programming... sir."

Brandon slammed his fist onto the table again. "I don't care. I have given you an order. Do you have a problem, yourself?"

The head of the Council swallowed. "No sir. If necessary, we shall abduct them. They will be here, for the Health Retreats in less than ten months."

Brandon seemed more at ease, now. He looked out of the window and returned to the table. His face glowed with a warm smile, as though now, nothing had been out of the ordinary. "That brings me to the next item on the agenda, gentlemen. The *psychrons* have informed me, that in order to counter this wave of religious fanatics, they have developed a method of programming that will soon be accepted, by all. "It's the subliminal sounds, which can be played through the music channels, on all out transport craft, either military or commercial. The sounds are outside the level of human awareness, but absorbed by the subconscious, and reacted upon accordingly. We can place on the recordings - that will be masked or not masked - messages to trust the Bank, obey your superiors, or whatever we like. It has been suggested by the psychrons that messages should

also contain broadcasts of good will and the good intentions of the psychrons. I have agreed with them, that the recordings may go ahead in our own controlled planets. Particularly, they will be in schools, hospitals, libraries and all government institutions.”

A picture appeared on a screen and Brandon continued. “We’re exporting our floating universities and military academies. They will be installed in all ships and will have a message of warning, against the Templars and Torren.

“The psychrons have ensured me that they can get the whole of the populated Galaxy under programming within the next ninety years and no one will know enough about it, to oppose it.”

The Council seemed to be pleased with the ideas and departed in harmony.

Brandon Mirak stood and stared down at the crowd outside, as it bustled across the other side of the park. He thought of how much he hated the Templars and all the evil that they stood for. Their evil ways would be exposed, as well as their treacherous methods, of gaining control over the Galaxy. Brandon would show them, as all the planets of the Federation would show them.

Brandon sat fidgeting. He felt nervy today. It must have been all the bad news. He would feel better soon. It would be much better soon, thanks to the help from the psychrons.

Brandon sat back and tried to relax. He did not hear the sounds and subliminal messages that emanated from his ceiling. In fact, he would never look at the ceiling, again.

Ω

In another building, in another part of the city, were three technicians, working on a project that would ensure the everlasting peace in the Galaxy, or so they were told.

They looked at each other in their white coats and as the speech of Brandon Mirak finished; they turned the next recording onto a relaxing mode, a mode of total sublimation.

They adjusted the sound and the volume. They smiled at each other. They were only a handful of a bigger organization, but their efforts were important. Soon, it would be them that controlled the events of the Bank, the Federation and thus the Galaxy.

Two of these psychrons were in their third year of a well-orchestrated program, which was determined to take eventual rule from the Presidents of the Bank, and pass it to the psychrons. In less than fifty years, the galactic populations should be under their control, a control that would prevent any further need of war or police or justice systems. Soon, there will always be psychrons, to look after all the worlds.

To date, there were about seven hundred psychrons, dedicated to improving life for all, on the planet Palbo, by the use of otherwise illegal *programming*. The psychrons were not so concerned about the illegality of their work, as all would soon agree to their being programmed regularly, along with the rest of the population. Such was the power of those unheard sounds.

Ω

The Master Templar, at his headquarters on Jilta, was elated, at the news of his daughter being found. He was in the *Great Hall*, which had once served Lorde Hymondy III. The enormous room had not been changed. The walls were stone with great stained glass windows reaching up to the timber-trussed roof. The Master also sat on the throne, which once served Lorde Hymondy III. He looked towards the far end of the throne room.

The doors opened at the far end. The Master stood, in anticipation. He was wearing his formal burgundy robe.

It was his daughter, with a friend and four escorts. The Master of the Temple of Jilta had heard that a freighter had emerged outside of Jilta from warp drives, and that it contained two teenage girls, from Rambus.

He saw the girls, and stood down from his throne.

Anki ran and embraced him. "Papa, Papa... Papa...." Tears began to roll down her face.

Tenderly, he held her tight and stroked her hair. His daughter was alive. "Anki... I won't send you away again. Thank the Torren, that you're safe. I had heard you had been killed."

Anki stood away from her father, and wiped her eyes and said, "Papa, I almost did perish twice. On one occasion pirates attacked the liner, which had been transporting me. I escaped with only three of the initial guard, to a nearby freighter that was on its way, to Rambus. That freighter was then in turn, pillaged by pirates again, as though they were waiting for us."

"They were not waiting for you, my daughter. The pirates are everywhere. What happened, then?" he asked.

Anki looked away, and then another tear formed. "The freighter then crashed, into the planet Rambus. I was rescued, by the family of my friend, Amy." Anki pointed to Amy, who was still half way down the Hall.

The Master of the Temple looked down and beckoned Amy, to come forward.



Amy of Rambus

Amy slowly advanced. She had no idea that the girl she had befriended was the daughter of one of the most powerful men in the Galaxy. No wonder Anki was silent about her origins. Amy bowed.

The Master Templar shook his head. "It should be me who bows to you, Amy. You saved Anki."

Amy blushed.

Anki said, "But Papa, it was not just the one time, but she also saved me, when I was drowning in freezing water."

The Master smiled even more. "It looks like I'm doubly in your debt. Is there any way, in which I can repay some of that debt?"

Amy looked up and said quietly, "You can return me to Rambus, as soon as possible, sir."

The Master walked over to Amy. He reached for her hands. He knelt down in front of her. He dropped the tone of his voice. "If I could, I would. Your freighter was slow and another craft was at Rambus, three weeks after you left." He looked away. He couldn't tell her and he stood.

Anki stared at him; tears welled up in her eyes. She looked at Anki.

Anki tugged on her father's sleeve. "What Papa?" she whispered.

He turned away, looked back over to Amy, stranded in the middle of the floor, helpless. He walked over to her again, with tears in his own eyes. Why did it have to be him, to give this girl this news, the girl that had saved the life of his daughter, twice?

He looked over at his daughter and then at Amy. She was shaking now. He spoke quietly, as the words were extremely hard to get out. "The pirates did it. It was reported that the whole planet had been irradiated; with no survivors. Amy, I'm truly sorry... your family is... dead. Your planet is dead... and won't be able to sustain human life, for another seventy years.... Amy, I'm so sorry...."

Amy started to back away. He called quietly to her. "We're your family now...."

Amy stepped back and turned and ran.

"Daughter... quickly...."

Anki ran, after her.

N I C K B R O A D H U R S T

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THE TEMPLAR MINISERIES

Page 168 | 606

N I C K B R O A D H U R S T

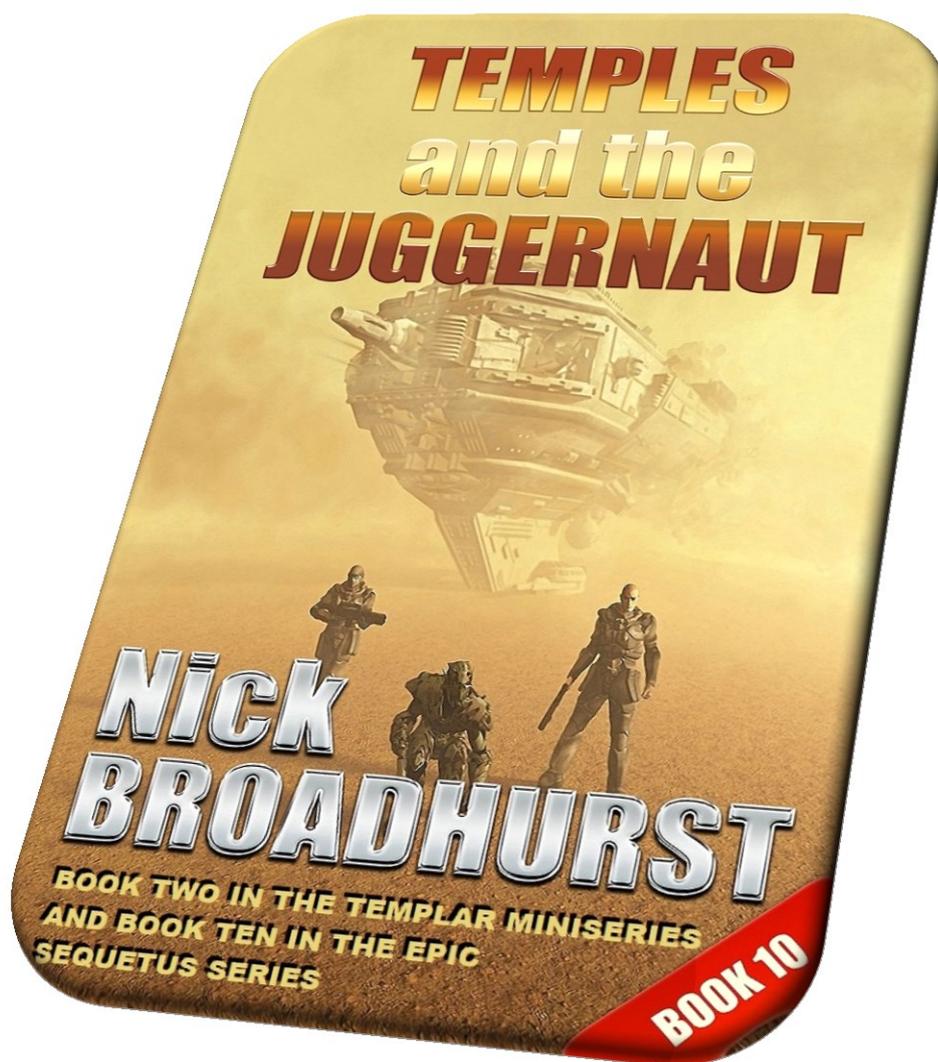
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THE TEMPLAR MINISERIES

Page 169 | 606

N I C K B R O A D H U R S T



THE TEMPLAR MINISERIES

Page 170 | 606

CHAPTER 2

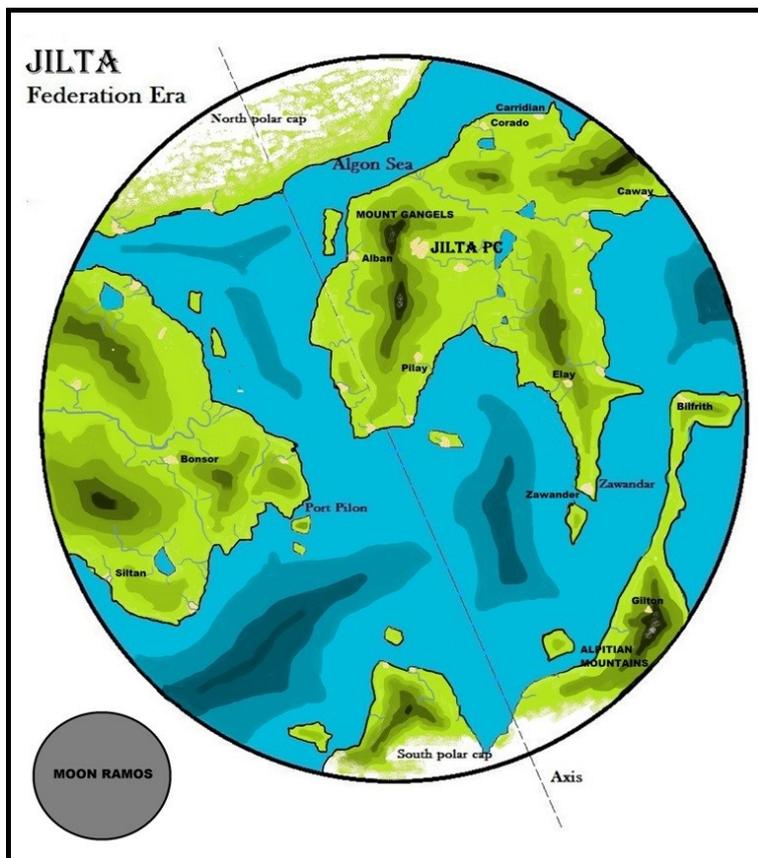
Temples and the Juggernaut

Sub-Contents

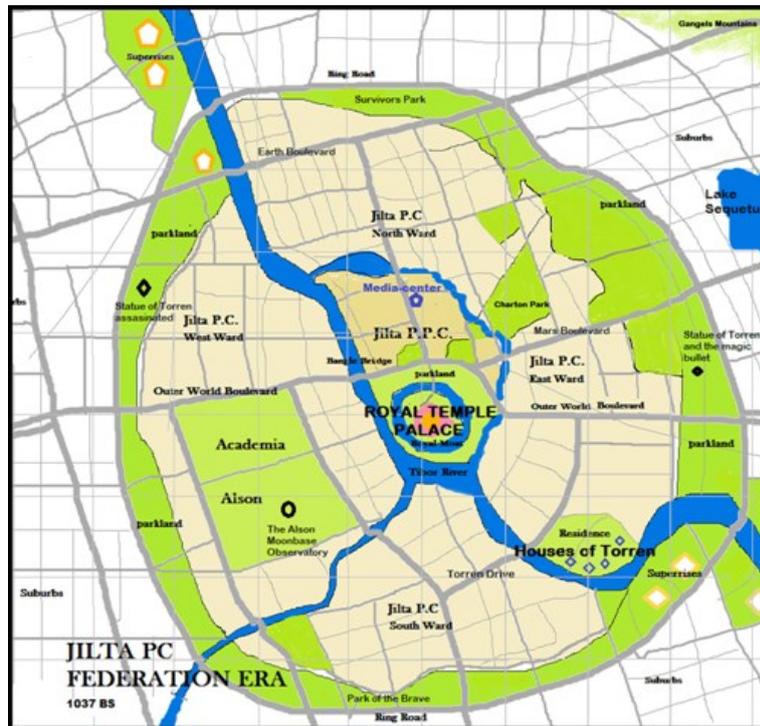
MAPS

- Sub-chapter 1 New Horizons
- Sub-chapter 2 Ataran
- Sub-chapter 3 Jilta
- Sub-chapter 4 Rambus Revisited
- Sub-chapter 5 Attention On Rambus
- Sub-chapter 6 Victims Of Rambus
- Sub-chapter 7 Death Of Rambus
- Sub-chapter 8 Rendezvous On Rambus
- Sub-chapter 9 Enemy On Rambus
- Sub-chapter 10 Under The Great Lake

MAPS



Planet Jilta



Jilta Planet Centre and Royal Temple Palace

NEW HORIZONS

LATE 1069 BS

Jaron stepped out onto the balcony overlooking the expansive subterranean cavern. He deeply breathed in the cool air. It had been seven years since he and his tutor, Letone, had been rescued off *Sequetus 3*.

His life was now spent in the catacomb of subterranean caves of *Yaltipia*, the sister twin planet of *Orbat* of the *Pleiades*. *Yaltipia* was the larger planet with a higher specific gravity, one that the Pleiadians of *Orbat* found difficult to tolerate, over long periods of time.

The Pleiadians on *Orbat* were an immigrant race settled with the blessing of the Aaron, the native and stronger race of the *Pleiades*. Over the millennia the *Aaron* had vanished from the surface of the planets, to assume a self-bestowed destiny of *incognito* control, over the galaxy. The Aaron left the appearance of a nomadic few on the surface, which gave the impression that the Aaron race had not been lost completely. They continued to trade and perform duties for what appeared to be the more technically advanced Pleiadians of *Orbat*. The Aaron traveled through the galaxy, unknown to the Pleiadians of *Orbat*, who saw their native landlords as more, an

enigma than an ally or a threat. Often the Aaron was called upon to maintain the fields and mine machinery for the Pleiadians, on Yaltipia.

The Pleiadians, in fear of being persecuted and found by an ancestral predator, had now long vanished in time, from other parts of the *galaxy*, and were reclusive, to the point of paranoia.

On the surface of Yaltipia, grew fields of meticulously mechanically attended crops, for Pleiadian consumption. Living below those crops was a race actively and desperately mapping out the future of humankind, for a galaxy.

Jaron stretched. *Letone* entered the room. He seemed not to age. They both pulled up a seat, at the far table. The room was plain, small, devoid of much furniture, and seven levels below the ground surface. The walls were bare, revealing only the hardened natural calcified rock.

Jaron opened a file and spread out its contents. He looked up at the old man. "I understand that the Temples have contracted the *Malukans* to construct a *Warp Drive* Fleet. Are there any military craft included in the latest order?"

Letone smiled. "No. They still have only the obsolete traditional drive military craft, which they inherited when they assumed governmental control of Jilta six years ago. Most of the military craft are still stationed around Jilta or its nearby systems. None have been moved to the outer systems."

"Hmm. Will the Jiltanians survive another year without being forced to arm themselves?"

"Unlikely. I expect the *Centorians* will finally have the numbers, this year."

"We can't intervene?"

Letone looked away. "We have interfered too much already. It is not the way of the Aaron to use the *Boguard* to control the minds of their patrons, even if it is for their own survival. We came close to corrupting our own self-determined proclamation for humankind, fifteen years ago when you and I were salvaged from the *Sequetus System*. That was a necessary exposure of the Aaron."

"The mistakes made in manipulating the minds of the nineteen *Cordellos*, after the last three *Sortets* can't be repeated."

Jaron stood and looked out over the view. "Yes, I understand. The plan and control of the galaxy is in a delicate balance. One small push against the real desires of mankind can whiplash backwards, with terrible force. What we need is one more year, and then the *Temples* will have the strength to survive a military attack by the *Bank* plus the *Palboan Federationists*."

Letone nodded and looked through the files on the table.

Jaron was caught in reverie about Jilta, the great planet that had been his home, many lifetimes ago, under the guidance of *Hymondy III*. It was now the

first Federation planet, to come under the direct rule of the Temple.

Jilta now had a duly elected government, of both *short-lifers* and Federationists, alike. The majority of that government belonged to the *Temple*. Jilta was the proof that both short and *long-lifers* could cooperate and live in harmony. Added to that, was that the economy and quality of life on Jilta was continually improving. Once again, its *Academias* were the most sought after, typifying the resurgence of knowledge, which was now so common on Templar planets.

Ω

The head *psycho-surgeon* looked down at his patient. He sighed. He had been recently highly commended, for his work. To him, his work was an art, as beautiful as any that he had seen in the city galleries.

The patient writhed, terror evident in his eyes. The straps that held him down were firm. The psycho-surgeon plunged the long needle, deep into the patient's trembling arm. He watched the man's eyes lose their fear, the eyelids flutter, his eyes dilate and the body relax.

The psycho-surgeon smiled. This was the fifth military commander this week, to need his services. He stared at the body, which was still experiencing a slight spasm, every twelve seconds. There was no

feeling sorry for this man. Like the others, he had to return to slay their enemies. Still, he knew exactly what he was doing to the wretched person, in front of him.

Secretly, the psycho-surgeon had studied the forbidden recordings of *Torren*. They were outlawed to the lower ranks of psycho-surgeons, but he had a friend who had managed to get hold of the *Recorded-Lectures of Sequetus*, while visiting one of the *Outer-Worlds*, on a raiding vessel.

The psycho-surgeon swallowed as he concentrated and swung the man into the *psychrat-chamber*. He watched on the screen, as the patient's eyes opened to the subliminal commands.

The psycho-surgeon thought of the time when he had put his own wife and children in the chamber, when they had been subject to the implanting of thoughts and ideas, which were not really their own. Still, he knew that it was done for the good of the Bank and the Federation, which was now otherwise slowly losing its power. This was the Warp Drive Bank's last chance to regain their former great authority, over the galaxy.

Macy was this psycho-surgeon's name. He swallowed and fought the thought that what he was doing could be wrong. He thought that it might help himself, if only he could scream sometimes. Perhaps that could rid him, of the haunting images of the people he had treated.

Macy pressed the image focus, which projected into the rear of the patient's retina. He knew this image. It was the same for many of the high commanders, a series of sequential pictures, showing the patient's own wife and family being tortured, by Templars. One scene showed the patient's wife being raped, by a short-lifer. Accompanying the video imagery was the subliminal sounds, and story of the images. Whether the patient liked it or not, these computer constructed pictures, would now form part of his memory. This would now be his new reality. This would now be the world which the patient knew. He too would soon hate the short-lifers and the Templars. He wouldn't allow them even faint mercy in battle.

Macy watched, as the military commander in the psychron chamber was injected with a very light hallucinogen, which would make the memory seem more solid, more lasting, and more real. Slowly, Macy turned up the voltage and the patient began to stiffen. His whole body was being put through an electric field. The patient would be feeling pain, and the pain was increased, to the median level. The patient's body, and mind needed to associate the pain with the images. The body began to writhe again. Slowly, Macy turned the power down. The image showed the wife being beheaded. A sharp short jolt of electricity ran through the commander's chest. The images began to blur and then fade away. The sound explained that this had occurred while the

commander was on his last mission. The recording further said: *“Totally forget his treatment by the psycho-surgeons, who are good; the psycho-surgeons are here to help the people of the Federation; the long-lived Federationists must take revenge on the short-lifers, for what they have done to the families and the galaxy of the long-lifers.”*

Macy tried to smile, as he removed the commander, from the chamber. He wondered what really happened to the man's wife. He supposed that she was in another retreat getting a similar dose of the psychrat-chamber. It seemed so unfair, that they would never see each other again, but this was the way to salvage the Federation.

Macy tried to reassure himself that soon there would be no need for the chamber, and that soon the Federation and the Bank would be strong again, and that the galaxy could live in peace.

Macy looked at the next patient. His eyes were also in terror. Macy glanced at the record on the base of the mobile bench. “You have seen action at Sequetus 3,” Macy said, with high admiration. He bent down and stared at the man. Another commander, but this time it was a fleet commander.

Macy knew that the man couldn't speak in reply. He was far too sedated; but his eyes could communicate. “You must have slipped up badly,” Macy said. He filled the syringe and stared at the man. “What was it like, on Sequetus 3? Was it a

desert, as they say? Was it all but destroyed by the short-lifers?"

Macy looked at the card. He then looked at his patient. It seemed that the man knew something, which had to be forgotten. His program plan said that he was to have no memory about the past twenty years. In its place, he was to have the memory of being a clerk for the Ministry for Surgeons.

Macy put down the card. "If only you could talk. I want to know so much, about the planet Earth. Is the ghost of Torren still there?" He looked at the man's eyes, which seemed to be pleading with him, to let him go. This man obviously knew so much. "You saw what happened to the commander before you, didn't you?" Macy seemed to perceive a slight quivering from the patient's eyes.

Macy swallowed and plunged the needle into the man's arm. He watched the familiar fluttering of eyes. He did not put him into the chamber this time, but placed him beside the previous commander.

Immediately, a door behind opened and three orderlies entered.

Macy smiled. "This one is ready for the recovery ward, along with the others, over there. Transport them. I'll be up later, to see them."

Macy left. The fleet commander was never programmed.

Two days later, Macy was reported dead, in an accidental laboratory fire. Only a few charred

remains of his body were found, along with his metal pass-card.

Ω

Jaron's *tunno-car* was swiftly descending to the lower shafts, dropping twenty-three levels, to emerge in a small cavern, which only a handful of Aaron knew about.

Quickly, he strode to the central dais and stopped. Letone and several other Boguard, were already there. Slowly, the body of one of their brothers was being carried from the dais to lie beside those, of his companions. Jaron did not need to ask. They were all dead, seven Aaron, dead before their time. They had died, unannounced and accidentally.

Letone motioned Jaron to move, into the center of the dais. Jaron had only ever been here, once before, and was slightly familiar with the operations. It was from these caverns, that the Aaron searched for higher life forms, which they believed existed. They had reasoned, that all sentient beings had the inbuilt belief, in a higher life form. Some cultures worshipped and had assigned it, total responsibility for their lives and all that happened, while others simply believed only in its presence.

The Boguard were a race and culture, of the latter. They believed that somewhere out there was a higher infinite existence, something that had existed beyond man, and was possibly even still,

evolving. It was possibly greater, than all the human forms put together. It was in these rooms that they searched for it. Letone stared at the seats, which the seven had sat in. They were unmarked, yet the bodies were burned, beyond recognition.

Letone thought to his young charge. *There will be no further search until the cause of this misadventure is explained.*

Jaron answered. *I don't understand.*

Simple. The Aaron is not only searching this universe for a higher life form. There are other universes; universes without matter and energy. That is where these Aaron were searching when they vanished.

Vanished?

Vanished. Only the charred bodies remain. There is no life presence here. It is as if all life was sucked from their bodies, and their bodies then slowly combusted. Even the cellular life existence seems to have been sucked away, in order to achieve this affect. Our brothers are still some place however, but far removed from here and now.

Jaron nodded and the pair left.

Ω

Mirak stood in front of the Warp Drive Bank Board of Directors. The most senior psycho-surgeon on Palbo was standing, in front of them.

Mirak's face was red with anger. It seemed about to explode.



Brandon Mirak of Palbo

Mirak screamed. "What do you mean that you lost him? How can you lose a patient? Do you know what that Fleet Commander knows? He knows every piece of our military operation. He has begun to feel sympathy for the enemy, and you want to treat him. All right! Instead of demoting him, as would normally be the case, and shipping him to who knows where, you convince me that he can be programmed to forget and then become better, more useful, and more hateful of the enemy than ever before. So what do you total incompetents do? You lose him!"

Mirak drew for breath and began his torrent of abuse again. "If you don't have him in three days I'll

personally begin dismantling your program! You know what I mean!”

Mirak felt a slight prick on his arm and looked down and then at the psycho-surgeon. He couldn't believe it. His vision began to blur and his muscles began to tense. He tried to scream but only gagged on his own breath. He felt his legs begin to lose strength and give way. At the same time the far door opened and three white-cloaked orderlies entered. They grabbed Mirak and escorted him out of the room.

The psycho-surgeon smiled at the Board of Directors and said, “Don't be concerned for Director Mirak. He only needs rest. I understand that he has been overworked. We will give him a check-up at the *Noble Retreat*, where we can assess his health and he can recover in a peaceful environment.”

The psycho-surgeon looked around at the Board of Directors and smiled once again. He produced a scroll. “Of course, for us to assist our leader, we will need fully signed consent.” He passed around the paper to each of the Board members. They in turn applied their seals of approval.

The psycho-surgeon thanked them, and strode out of the room. He smiled to himself. The operation had been simpler, than he had imagined. Each of the Board had previously been conditioned and programmed, in earlier times. The disappearance of the Fleet Commander from one of their hospitals was a coup. Mirak really went insane there, for a

moment. His fit seemed so natural; there was so much authenticity, in the final moments.

The psycho-surgeon exited the building and stepped into the ground floater, awaiting him. It was he, who was the most powerful man in the galaxy, at this time. Now, it was time to move into the next phase.

The psychron technician, who was listening to the events in Brandon Mirak's office, nodded, as the whole operation obviously went precisely as planned. All he had to do now, was to speak a few words of peaceful condolence and the Board Members would be satisfied that Brandon Mirak was in capable hands.

The technician reached for one of his favorite speeches and turned it on. Its subliminal message reached the Board instantly and from the screens; the technician soon saw them disperse, quietly and happily.

ψ

ATARAN

Jaron stepped from the elevator car, onto the third level. Here, he could see across to the second tier of the *Aaron Library*. He turned; the gold embroidery of his flowing black uniform sparkling as he strode down the granite floor, towards the far shelves.

He looked about him. This library was the largest of all the Aaron academic facilities. Jaron was in the city of Ataran, which housed the *Boulan*, the ruling class of Aaron, which predicted and controlled much of the future, of some of the galactic civilizations. There were five hundred *Boulan*, out of two million Aaron, of which ten percent were in faraway parts of the galaxy serving as Boguard.

Jaron glanced down, towards the ends of the *Great Library*. He had been admitted to the *Boulan* himself, only just three years ago. This was evident as extra braid, on his robe. He pulled his hood back.

Being *Boulan*, meant he had access to data on the second tier, of the *Great Library*. It was here, that the prediction and manipulation of broad galactic events took place.

All Aaron could access the third tier of the library. It was the intention, that all the information of the entire known galaxy, would be stored here, eventually. From here, events could be predicted and then to some degree, controlled. The third tier was available via computer, while it was the second tier

that took up shelf space. There was no electronic access, to this level of data. Everything in it was in hard copy, only.

Jaron looked down the rows and rows of shelves, which stretched for hundreds of paces in both directions. He had heard that if the third tier were in hard copy, then it would have taken up half of the planet's surface. The only data that Jaron was not permitted access to, was in the first tier. This was reserved to only fifty *Boulan*. He had been told that one day, he would be entitled to *First Tier Library* rights.



Part of the Aaron second tier library

Jaron shook from his thoughts, and looked around. There were approximately another seventy *Boulan* currently in the second tier. His mission was

to add to the library, more of his memories of Earth. In the past twelve months, he had been compiling a seventh volume of his experiences, on the small planet of his birth.

Jaron sat back in a wicker chair, pulled out a pen and began to write down more memoirs, in the current volume.

Letone, Jaron knew, might need a lot more time before all the knowledge he had regarding Earth, would be written down. The rules of the Library were that no one left Yaltipia, until their mission at the Library had been completed.

Jaron leaned back. He had been at it, for seven hours now. He rose from his desk and stretched, closed the folder and walked over, to a nearby shelf. Moving a rolling ladder into position, he stepped onto it, and filed away his notes until the next morning.

Ω

The next day, he rose. The room he had been allocated was small. Jaron was two hundred *Ks*, from his own residence. Ataran was the heart and intelligence hub, of the Aaron.

Jaron's home residence on Yaltipia was in the battle ward of the city, named *Banquast*. There, Jaron trained and learned the warfare ways, of the Aaron.

There were seven Aaron cities under Yaltipia, each supporting a critical action and function, of the Aaron.

Jaron recalled when Letone took him to *Econdar*, the city of education, where, for two years he received his initial instruction, in the way of the Aaron.

Jaron robed and walked to the library. He would finish it today, meaning that he could finally leave Yaltipia, on an external mission.

He sat down, at his now too familiar desk and became engrossed in the reverie of his days, on Earth. He put the pen aside finally and stared at the folder. At last; he had finished. The work was now complete.

That afternoon, following a series of examinations, Jaron was proclaimed as having completed his Library mission. He was soon on the underground rail, to meet *Sheril*, in the small energy city of *Carvan*.

Carvan was deep in the heart of the planet, Yaltipia. The crust of the planet was a light silicate and easy to tunnel through. The Aaron had taken advantage of the meandering natural vents that permeated the planet, and which took water, air or other gases from one part of the planet, to another. The planet's crust was a catacomb and riddled with natural pathways. The Aaron had simply taken what existed naturally. The Aaron used the minutest number of pathways, within the planet. Should the

overhead Pleiadians wish to burrow down into the surface of the planet, it was unlikely that they would ever discover the Aaron.

As to the Pleiadians, they seldom remained long on the surface of Yaltipia, as its specific gravity was slightly higher, than that of the sister planet Orbat. Those who did stay on the planet, usually could expect a shortened life span, due to the extra burden placed on their hearts to pump through the extra muscle bulk, which developed on Yaltipian Pleiadians.

Those Pleiadians, who did stay on Yaltipia, were generally well-paid farmers, and occasionally miners, who worked in shifts. Most of the work undertaken on the planet's surface was by robot, or the nomadic surface Aaron.

Ω

Jaron looked up from his seat in the rail carriage. The signal flashed, to indicate his stop ahead. The carriage slowed and finally halted. Jaron stepped out to see Sheril in the distance. She waved enthusiastically, over the heads of the small crowd.

An hour later, they shared time together, looking out at a natural waterfall, which spilled into a large grotto. The area was very popular with the Aaron, because of its beauty.

Sheril looked at the water, as it cascaded out into different channels before it ran down another tunnel, to be blown by up-vents to the surface again.

On the surface of Yaltipia, storms could exceed two hundred Ks. This was why farming occurred only in the temperate north, away from the seas, of the south. In the far north, there was almost no water, so there were many deserts, which spanned tens of thousands of Ks, across the planet. The Aaron had gathered, mainly under the surface of the storm ravaged south; not below the ocean, but under the land, away from the temperate farmlands, to the north.

Jaron smiled, at the illusion in the water pool. A fungi, which thrived in the naturally damp caverns, supplied the light, to the underground caverns. The fungi grew all over the rocks providing an eerie glow that haunted the whole Aaron way of life. The water cascaded over varieties of the fungi that shed light in the blue to green spectrum band. With those colors, against the yellow to white glows in the caverns proper, and the occasional red light fungi in the drier areas, it made the grotto seem alive, with its variety of reflections. As the water sprayed across the grotto, which measured three hundred paces, dozens of rainbows rose and fell, in response to the wafting moisture.

Jaron threw a pebble into a pool, which shone brightly and radiated in blues and greens. The ripples set off new rainbows overhead.

“So, when will you return?” asked Sheril.

Jaron shrugged. “I’m being sent to Jilta, the center of the Temple movement, to establish our

strengths and weaknesses. I believe I could be sent from there, to another planet, as needed.”

He held Sheril's hand and looked into her green sad eyes. This had been the moment, which he had been pushing away from his mind.

They had a six-year-old son, Yandra, who was now being schooled at Econdar. He was a natural birth, and a surprise to the Aaron, whose natural birth rate had dwindled down to zero, as a result of the phosphoric fungi that lit and provided warmth, to the caves. Their spores reduced human fertility. To counter its effect the Aaron had built embryonic nurseries, where genes were reproduced and spliced, to make bodies for the future generations of Aaron and Boguard.

Once a pair of Boguard was ready to have a family an embryo would be implanted within the womb and a pregnancy could proceed. The pair, from which the genes had been selected, would be acting as custodians for the first six years, of the child's life. After that time, the child would be transferred to the sole care, of Aaron education. After such child rearing it was normal for the contract between the pair of parents, to be dissolved and each be sent out on missions, to various parts of the galaxy.

Now, was such a time. There was no longer any contractual bonding arrangement, between Sheril and Jaron.

"I shall miss you, Jaron," she said. "I have grown used to you, and I love you very much. Don't come to harm."

Jaron watched a tear roll down her face, as she looked to the water. He knew that the galaxy was moving out of Aaron control, once again. His was a short-lived body, and it was possible that he may never return. He held her trembling body, close to his. He recalled the times that they had shared on Earth, and in the depths of Yaltipia.

She pushed him back, wiped her tears and smiled. "Don't be sad for me, Jaron. I know that you have a destiny to fulfill out there, like no other has. Your time has come again, now. We will have no contact soon."

Jaron nodded. It was true. He watched, as a large green and yellow glowing butterfly flittered past, in front of them landing on a nearby wet piece of stone. Its wings twitched nervously, backwards and forwards, as if watching the pair, and feeling their pain.

Sheril smiled. "Hello Mister *Lallow*," the Aaron name for butterfly. "Do you have some news?"

The insect's wings twitched backwards and forwards as if in answer.

Sheril bent down and very gently lifted the insect up onto her forefinger. It seemed at peace, there. She held it up, in front of her face. Its wings were the size of her hands and wavered slowly backwards. Its light seemed to dim and its wings began to lose

color. They were now transparent, an omen of trust. The insect trusted the couple, and felt good enough to stop emitting the light, that would ward off predators. The green light was similar to that, of the toxic fungi *palma*.

Jaron watched, as Sheril gently lifted the insect and gracefully launched it into the air to fluttered over, to by the pool.

Without warning, the light from the pool began to shift. There was movement beneath the surface. Instantly, as the lallow drifted over the water, a large set of jaws sprang from the water, to snatch the insect.

Sheril gasped as the mouth somehow narrowly missed its target.

Jaron watched the lallow, as it now returned to a corner of the cave. Only Jaron's reflexes and mind strength had prevented the eel, from catching the lallow. Such was the normal way of life in the caves below Yaltipia.

"Thank you," said Sheril. She had felt his mind push aside the eel.

Jaron nodded. He held her by the hand, and said, "I must go now. I have said farewells to our beautiful son, *Yandra*. I'm departing in twelve hours...."

Sheril leant up and gently kissed him.

Ω

Jaron was back on the cliffs of Banquast. Below him was the largest known underground canyon, on the planet. The opening stretched for eighteen Ks. The roofs of the dwellings glistened, under the moist atmosphere, lit by the phosphoric glow above. In the distance, he could see the lights from the *fibrerail* as it transported Aaron from the neighboring cities.

This moment, could well be the last time Jaron would see Banquast. The cliffs of Banquast were what Boguard longed most to see, when away, on their missions.

Jaron jumped back, into his floater. It rose off the ground and glided down the slopes, to the city below.

A few hours later, Jaron was overlooking the bustle of the city, from his balcony. Directly beneath, was a small troop of cadets, on their way to the arena. Jaron wondered what they would learn today. He recalled his own very first training, at the hands of Letone, on Earth. He sighed at the time, which had passed between then and now, the years and the times of longing, to be back in the far outstretched Amazon jungles. Certainly, he had the sophisticated life of the Aaron, and the secrets of the universe had been partly opened to him. Yes, he knew what life was, what power it had.

Jaron had had his memory returned to him of his life, as Goren Torren, but he was Jaron now, the jungle boy. He did not feel like the larger than life Goren Torren, no matter how much he explored the

inner secrets of his mind and memories, of over a millennium ago. Too much time had passed between then and now; too many mundane things had happened. At first he had thought he would try to be Goren Torren, but that was being someone else, and he couldn't live in the image of a previous self, as that was not who he was now.

Jaron recalled his days on Jilta, as Goren, still. Would *Jilta PC* be unchanged, or would it have altered beyond imagination? It was now seeing its fourth administration, since he had journeyed to salvage Earth, as Goren Torren, all those centuries ago.

After Goren Torren left Jilta, the Royal administration fell, and *Lorde* Hymondy III had fled the planet, with the help of the Boguard. The next rulers were the Malukan allied forces, for a short period, and then the planet returned to the hands of the Federation Alliance, for a decade. With the collapse of the alliance, the Federation Warp Drive Bank administrators ruled the planet. However, they too, fell, with the growth of the Temple movement and the Torren memories. Hymondy had cared for Earth, during the intervention centuries, and for a short time he returned to Jilta, but after his passing Jilta again slipped into a malaise of misadministration, from which the Temple movement strength truly sprang.

Goren knew that the Temple movement had altered the control, which the Bank had planned for the galaxy. As the Temple movement grew, the

power of the Bank diminished. Much of what the Templars needed, was now produced on Outer-Worlds, more cheaply and with less stringent controls. The Bank had claimed that this new religious fervor would pass, but it had not. There was no abatement in the growth of the new movement, as it seemed to spread with the expansion, of the short-lived humankind. The Bank had never seen exploration and development of the Outer-Worlds as something that was needed for the old Federation, as that would limit their own control. Now, the short-lifers were spreading without their control to new worlds, at a rate, which they even couldn't record. The Temple movement financed this new exploration, and it was leaving the Bank behind. Soon, the Bank would be powerless about this ever-growing single galactic religion.

Now, however, it seemed that something had changed within the ordered structure of the Bank. Where it had previously simply seen its demise, as a part of altering galactic ways, the Bank seemed to be fighting back. Something or someone, seemed to be changing the balance of power, and the Temple movement also seemed to be altering. The balance of power, within Temple movement was no longer confined to that of the Earth colonies and the short-lifers.

There were long-life Templar communities, as well. Why should there not be? Had not Goren Torren been a Federationist of the old school,

standing for the old values of the Royals? He was a long-lifer also.

Now, it seemed that the Templars were on a collision course with the Bank, which was trying to gain support from the long-life dominated planets, while at the same time arm the Templars.

The Aaron, and thus the Boguard, who had been most active, in the past decade, where trying to keep the Templars unarmed, irrespective of the scenarios on the Outer Worlds. In the most part, the Outer-Worlds had been permitted to possess their own defense systems, but they seemed hopeless without an attack system, which could preemptively seek out and destroy the pirates.

That was why Jaron was needed. It seemed that the way to diffuse the situation, was to eradicate the pirates. This would be Jaron's mission, to search out and remove the pirates. Once this was done, it was anticipated that the power of the Bank would begin to diminish again.

With no pirates, the Templars would have no reason to arm. When the Federation long-lifers saw for themselves, that the Templars were not arming, as was contrary to claims by the Bank, on long-lifer planets, then the movement to confront Templars and perhaps even plunge the Santonia Galaxy into civil war, would diminish.

Jaron looked at the door. A knock alerted him, that it was now time; to go. He grabbed his belongings and strode out, to be greeted by two

comrades, with whom he had previously trained. The three marched, down the corridor. Out on the street, they entered a waiting floater and moved off, towards the departure port.

ψ

JILTA

Jaron stepped from the floater and walked towards the passageway, leading into the Aaron *Man-o-War*. He stood and admired the craft. Only in the departure docks in Yaltipia, could a Boguard Man-o-War be viewed, as it really was, without the mind image benders, distorting that which the viewer perceived.

Its polished mirror-like surface of its sleek hull reflected the terminal lights. The craft was one hundred pacs long, by thirty pacs wide and tall, with few protrusions.

Jaron stepped aboard. The interior was as polished and smooth, as the exterior. There was only one main entrance. He passed under an opening, measuring the full height of the craft. Inside, were seven single seat *strikers*, any one of which, could take on a small squadron of Federation Fleet *fighters* and *interceptors* – and win.

Jaron glanced at his two comrades, as they walked into the elevator. Both wore less braid, than he. Jaron stepped from the elevator. The bridge was not very different to a Federation destroyer, except there were no screens, computer controls or any markings, on the walls. The room resembled a circular lounge, more than a battle center.

Jaron sat down, in a large chair in the center of the room. A female Boguard sat opposite, in olive-green garb. The color indicated, along with the gold braid over her left shoulder, that she was the *Captain of the Expedition Fleet*. Jaron wore black, as *Leader of the Expedition Boguard*. He was the ground Commander. Both Leader Jaron and *Captain Brijet* wore three gold stripes of equal rank over their left shoulders.

The method of Expedition Command was simple. Both *captain* and *leader*, would command equally and in consensus. *In flight* the captain always assumed total command while *on planet*, the leader had total command. The two commands could never overlap during a time of war. It was the captain who would decide; where to place his ship and how, while it was the leader, who directed where the ground battles were to be fought and when.

Captain Brijet nodded to Jaron. "The others will be in soon. The ship is still being loaded."

"Thank you," replied Jaron, withholding the thoughts, which flooded his mind. The captain was truly beautiful; she had paler skin than he, with auburn hair and hazel eyes. On Earth she would have passed for twenty-eight, but Jaron judged her age to be likely around two hundred and ten.

The captain looked at the far wall, and it lit up, showing the massing of the Boguard, inside the muster room. All two hundred and eighty Boguard were present and accounted for.

On the other side of the room, another image faded in, showing the large entrance door closing and equipment being fixed down, ready for flight.

An opening appeared in the far wall, and three other officers in green stepped down, towards the sunken chairs. As they sat, the center of the room with the chairs began to sink, with a dome rising up, from the floor center. Images and words began to flash, on the dome.

Jaron knew that they would be leaving, in a few seconds. He looked at an image of the outside cavern as it began to grow dim. Slowly, the ship rose from its berth. The outside rooftops and cavern light began to shimmer and vanished, into a murky pale background. They were now in warp-drive space. The estimated time of arrival on Jilta was just under two standard weeks.

The speed of the Aaron craft was superior, to the Federation. Where the Federation could only travel at certain speeds above light, until they began to burst through the warp drive *shroud*, the Aaron had no similar trouble, with their ships. They could, if permitted, travel at just under the speed of light squared. The only limiting factor was the time needed to accelerate to that speed and determining where one was, during the travel.

Jaron stood and nodded to the other commanders; his Boguard awaited their first briefing, by their leader.

Ω

In the expected time, almost two weeks later, the image on the far wall showed the static, returning to dark solid form. Outside, were lights, lots of lights. Beyond the brilliance, Jaron could discern the underground cavern. The images showed that they had finally arrived and a delegation of four rows of Boguard waited outside.

As Jaron stepped out from the ship, he gazed over the great canyon that was a kilometer below Jilta P.C. He had never thought such a place could have existed, a thousand years ago when he was the Independent of Lorde Hymondy III.

The Boguard that had served the Royalty of Jilta seemed as enigmatic, as the Royalty which they had served. There had been rumors, of course, but nobody ever really questioned the Royals. In all that time under the city, the Boguard were trying to prevent civil war, while at the same time, prevent the tyranny of the Warp Drive Bank from strangling the culture, of the Federation.

Ω

Jaron was soon on the surface of Jilta P.C⁴. He had with him, Captain Brijet and the pair of Boguard that had accompanied Jaron, on his way to the Man-

⁴ **DEFINITION: Jilta P.C.:** The capital city of the Planet Jilta, P.C. meaning Planet Center. Population 1.75 million. Source: Searfinders Index PP. 234-5.

o-War in Yaltipia, *Leader Grugar* and *Leader Bilan*, both one degree of lesser rank, than Jaron.

Grugar was of medium height, dark hair and had a rugged, swarthy face. He would lead the *Boguard Fronts*, a group of Boguard that could advance into enemy territory to bring about a quick collapse, in defensive command communications systems. Bilan, on the other hand, was a thinner, taller leader, from Boguard intelligence. His position was to predict the enemy's reactions; and plan and coordinate attacks thereupon, accordingly.

The Boguard wore civilian clothes, while being escorted around the city. Jaron couldn't recall much of his life style of over a millennium ago, but there did seem a familiarity in what he saw. He visited the *Residence* that had belonged to him, as the *Independent*. He also visited the court of the Temple and had an afternoon tour, of the Academia.

The tour guide was a Boguard, called Macrodo Curr. He pointed to the far structure. "That, my sirs, is the New Temple. It was built two hundred years ago. It was the first building, to be erected on the old estate, of the *Independent*. It holds the *Administration Houses*, of the Outer-Worlds. That is where most of the data about the pirating of the Outer-Worlds, will be found."



The New Temple on Torren Drive, Jilta PC

Bilan carefully looked over the grounds. “The outside is under heavy surveillance. I can see twelve cameras, which are observing us at this very moment. Also, I can sense a series of listening devices in the ground, as well as in the air.”

Jaron nodded. “Obviously, that is why they built the structure there. It is easily monitored, being in a relatively open space.”

Brijet stared at the building. “I can see why it would be impossible to tunnel into. How do you intend to get the information?”

MacroD nodded and turned to the direction of the city skyline, past the trees and the far tall stone fence. “The old Imperial Royal Palace still has many administration centers. We can access much of their data, from there.”

Bilan stared at the hazy impression of the old palace in the distance, its domed copper roofs protruding proud, over the rest of the old-city, proud on the natural hillock that it was built upon. "I heard of the underground tunnels, which were constructed by the Boguard throughout the old palace."

Macrood nodded. "Yes, up to a millennium ago the early Boguard were heavily threading the city with tunnels and escape routes. The new Templar movement is paranoid about being penetrated by their enemies and has listening devices, all through the city now. We had to stop all tunneling over five years ago, when a deep excavation was almost exposed, by the Templars."

"We still retain control and influence over the palace, though?" asked Brijet.

"Of course," replied Macrood. "The Boguard have been permitted into the old palace as a form of human bodyguard, but we're far from the trusted position of running the palace, as was the case, a millennium ago. We were accepted back into the palace publically, only when the Temple assumed control of the planet government, democratically."

The small band began to exit the *Grounds of Torren* and walk down *Torren Drive*, to the business district. They stopped two Ks from the palace, and entered a small four-story building, fifteen hundred years old.

Macrood smiled at the two by the entrance as his group waited for the elevator. The doors opened. A

moment later, they were in the basement. They walked over to a blank wall, with barely enough light to see. The wall began to shimmer and the group walked into, and through the wall and vanished.

Jaron looked around the shimmering elevator car, as it descended seventy paces. Jaron had followed Macro, as he vanished, from inside the car. A second later, and the five were standing in a small cavern. It was damp, with old stale air.

Macro turned to the commanders. "Sirs, we have had to rely upon natural ventilation, down here. Anything mechanical would attract the attention of the Templar guards. Follow me, please."

Macro led them through a series of corridors and passageways, until the openings and sizes became larger, to resemble those on Yaltipia. They passed many Boguard, dressed in their traditional black, and finally stood at the entrance of a wide cavern with hundreds of people working around advanced computer and holographic communications systems.

"This," Macro waved his hands, "is the center of our base, on Jilta. We're directly below the Royal Templar Palace."

"It was like this in the millennia before?" Jaron asked.

Macro grinned, "Even larger then. Now, all we can do is receive data from nearby transmissions. If we were to use the amplifiers needed to detect transmissions from *off-planet* we would be detected.

Still, this is a good base of operations. The Templars have found some of our tunnels, but they have been unable to locate about ninety-five percent of them. As Boguard, we're under suspicion, as there are little records of the reign of the Royals. Still, we have managed to convince the Templars that we're needed, as protection against assassins, and that the tunnels they have found are the remnants of the forgotten Royal era."

Jaron nodded and stared at the beauty, of the roof cavern. It was covered with the luminous mosses and fungi of Yaltipia, a part of the natural ventilation, of the canyon. As well as light, the mosses and fungi were prolific producers of oxygen. In Yaltipia they provided the great ecosphere, below the planet's surface.

MacroD led them to a small room. Inside, were another three commanders. The head was a command leader. At any one time there were fewer than five command leaders across the galaxy. Command Leader Tinnel was one.

Jaron looked at the man, an old man. He would have been the same age as Letone. Probably, he had been here, in the time of the Royals, a millennium ago.

Tinnel nodded at Jaron, as he sat. "So you're Jaron. You have an important mission. Do you recall much of what you had experienced, and seen above ground?"

Jaron hesitated and then smiled. “No sir. I recall very little, from that earlier life. Certainly, there are places that seem familiar, but they have lost their meaning of what happened over a millennium ago.”

Tinnel thought for a moment, and then turned to his staff. A screen was brought into the room. Tinnel continued, “This is the position of Jilta. Here are the sectors of *Siltonia* and Centor, which now have the balance of power in the Templar movement. They are very pro-military, and intend to arm the Templars against obvious aggression – the pirates. Here are the Outer-Worlds, predominately inhabited by short-lifers. As the Temple movement spreads across the galaxy, the Federationists too are migrating to the Outer-Worlds.

“The Templar movement is financing all the exploration and settling these new worlds, and for some reason piracy seems to have become overwhelmingly prevalent. The Templars are being hit and their worlds being destroyed. Given that there seems to be an undercurrent of feeling, that the pirates are short-lifers, not Federationists, and that the Templars are doing the pirating themselves to justify going military, then this option shouldn’t be discounted.

“Over here; we have Palbo, the heart of the *Warp Drive Bank*. They have several planets and many allies. They are currently negotiating to have the Templars buy military-ware, to help them to

combat the pirates. It appears that they will gain much, if there is civil war, within the galaxy. It is possible that they are the source of the piracy, but that hasn't been established. We have sent many patrols into their area but they never return.

"Your mission, Jaron, is to find the whereabouts of the pirates, who is controlling them, and get that data back to us. You have two years. After that, the cruisers that the Templars have commissioned will have been built and put into action. Then, it will be a matter of time only, before the galaxy explodes, into civil war. Are there any questions?"

Jaron asked, "If there was civil war, which do you think would win?"

Tinnel smiled, "The Warp Drive Bank. Half of the population, of the entire galaxy could perish. The short-lifers outnumber the Federationists, but technology is on the side of the old Federation. They have much more military hardware and have been steadily armed by the Bank, over the past five hundred years. The Federationists would out-survive the short-lifers, but that balance is gradually swinging to the center and it is that swing, which makes the galaxy nervous."

Brijet looked over, from examining the map. "Do we not have any idea where the pirates are from geographically?"

Tinnel shook his head. "None; it seems a mystery to us, as well as the Templars. Since the control of the Templar movement recently slipped

from Jilta, a large building was erected, on the Grounds of Torren. It is for the *Department of the Houses of Administration of the Temples*. Each planet, when it provides a Cordello, becomes a *House* in the Templar movement. As Jilta is no longer in absolute control of the movement, the newcomers have insisted that the Administrations Houses be no longer in the Imperial Royal Palace. Jilta is still the theocratic center of the movement, but the Administration Houses now have their own autonomous buildings.” Tinnel looked at Jaron, to ensure he understood.

“As it turns out, each House, which represents their home planet – like an embassy - is responsible for its own security and finance. Each of the Houses is very competitive. To maintain their current standings, as Houses, each House must grow, proportionally. This has led to great expansion in recent times, in the searching and exploring for Outer-Worlds.

“The actual settlement out there is not funded by the Templar movement, but rather by the Houses of Torren. This has in turn, led to minor squabbles over the discoveries of uninhabited planets, and secrecy from one House, to the other. It has been suggested, that the piracy is from one of the Houses. This needs investigation. Also, it makes the possibility of civil war between the Houses possible, should they arm with offensive type weapons. If they do arm, they may use their arms against each other.”

“So it seems, Command Leader,” said Jaron, as he stood to view the galactic chart, a little closer, “We should first establish what data the Templars themselves have on the pirates. With the right data, we can evaluate whether or not to infiltrate the planets, of the Warp Drive Bank.”

“Exactly,” responded Tinnel, “Your first move will be in the Houses of Administration. We’re already convinced that the House of Jilta has no useful data, on the origin of the pirates.”

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RAMBUS REVISITED

Amy looked out, from the small ship's screens, onto the planet below. Her heart beat wildly, as the little craft came out of warp drive, and she sighted her home planet of *Rambus*.

It had been years, since she was whisked away from *Rambus*, as pirates invaded. Now, she had managed to secure the lease, of a small passenger craft. This was so she could find out for herself; how *Rambus* was destroyed, and what had become of her parents' remains.

The *Master Templar* had absolutely forbidden any expeditions, to investigate the report that the planet had not have been destroyed. *Amy* had feared that, if the *Master Templar* had found out her plans, he would have had her locked away. When approached, the *Master Templar* had always said, that the cost was far too prohibitive. That was not enough for *Amy* who believed there was much more to the destruction of *Rambus* than was publically available. *Amy* couldn't even be certain that her parents were actually dead.

It was fortunate for *Amy*, that she had met a blue blooded Federationist on *Jilta*, a year ago, who had become quite infatuated with her. He was the

son of an ore dealer, a very wealthy trader, by galactic standards, and it seems that he never wanted for anything but excitement, and Amy. Well, here, Amy gave him both opportunities. *Brilton* was his name; he reveled in the chance to help a girl in distress, and they set out on this venture, with great promise, of intrigue and mystery.



Equatorial Rambus during summer

Brilton had simply leased the vessel through his father's account, and convinced two of his friends to come along. A quick message, via view screens was sent to Brilton's parents, before the four had vanished from the universe.

That was three months ago, and now Amy's quest seemed to be nearing an end. Brilton came up

to her and smiled. "Are you ready, to descend to the surface?" he asked.

Amy shook her head. "We must firstly test for radiation, or anything else, that may have killed my family."

Brilton nodded. "Fran has those results now. There is no radiation. Also, there seems no evidence of any major battle. Added to that, there are life forms down there; they are major forms and could be human."

Ideas raced through Amy's mind. Perhaps, it was now a base, for the pirates. Perhaps it was a secret base, of the Templars. Possibly, not all died and some of those could be down there, and could be her family. Maybe the pirates did not kill all the population.

"It is habitable?" she asked Brilton.

He gave her an aristocratic nod. "Lots of oxygen and very breathable."

She smiled, and then kissed him on the cheek. "I think we should begin, to lower to the surface. You and I can take the navigation. I want to see firsthand, what happened in the area where I used to live. Fran and Phion should stand by to warp us out at the first sign of hostile attack.

"Any radio transmissions?" she added.

Brilton looked at the floor, as though he didn't want to disappoint her. He replied, "No, but that may be because there are no radios, or because we have

been spotted. We should still proceed, but with good care.”

Amy smiled and hugged Brilton. She was so excited. She gasped, as the small craft began to descend.

The sensors showed the southern half of the planet was experiencing winter. The view screens brought up images, of the frozen lakes and drifting sands. They were now a hundred Ks above the surface, and moving around over the sector, where Amy had once lived.

She watched, as her companions Fran and Phino monitored the surface, for any signs of contact.

Slower and closer, to the red scarred surface, they descended. The surface was now only twenty Ks, below them.

“No contact yet,” called Fran.

“No transmissions or mechanical movement on the surface yet. We are still getting life signs, but no indication of civilization,” called Phino.

Amy ignored them. There was someone or some life down there; she could feel it. The screens showed that they were now only pacs, above the surface. The craft raced over sand dunes, then frozen lakes, some a hundred Ks across. A few red ridges appeared to come up, to greet them. They skimmed over the top, to see more dunes, on the other side.

Amy squinted at the horizon, to the right. “There, there,” she called excitedly. On the horizon,

a structure appeared, obviously man made and reaching far above the desert.

Tears came to Amy and she tried to push aside her emotions. She swallowed. "It is a bauxite *Harvester*. There, the markings. It's Harvester One, H1." She jumped and hugged Brilton with excitement, while wiping another tear away.

The craft slowed as it approached the towering hulk. Obvious signs on the outside of it, showed the great machine had been out of action for years. The tracks were under pacs of sand. The top sections had been blasted by sandstorms and were falling apart.

The small passenger craft settled on H1's upper decks.

Amy looked at her comrades. "What are we receiving, on the screens?"

Brilton checked and turned around, "Nothing human. This is an old hulk, which hasn't been used for years. Are you figuring on going outside?"

"Is it safe?" she asked.

"I'm checking virus and chemicals in the air. There appears to be nothing, which indicates danger. Perhaps that era has passed," said Brilton.

Amy sighed and looked to the steps, down to the departure lock. She stood up and asked, "Is anyone else coming?"

Brilton shrugged and stood up. "I would suggest that we take some weapons, plus, I think it would be a good idea, if you two remain on board, and inform us instantly if anything changes. Also be ready to

warp out and save yourself, at the first sign that something, is not as it seems. Understood?"

Fran and Phino agreed.

A moment later, Brilton and Amy stepped from their craft, onto the corroding deck, of the Harvester. The air was bitterly cold. Amy realized that she should have brought her gloves. She held her radio in her left hand and a small laser in her right. She wore a grey jump suit, heavily padded and a visorless helmet, with a small series of lights, shining forwards.

She moved slowly and kicked at the sand, which was piled thigh high. Brilton, all of a sudden realized that he was at the edge of known civilization. This was a land, where a whole population was reported at having been, wiped out. Now, Brilton was nervous. He looked around, and followed Amy, as she made her way to some metal stairs, leading to lower decks.

Amy very slowly, began to step down. She had nothing to say, and was conscious of her own breathing. One foot went in front of the other. Sand spilled behind her. It made her jump.

Brilton's heart also jumped at the sound.

Amy continued, until they were down onto the second level. Mostly, this level was black, except where many of the outside hull panels had been sandblasted through by the wild storms of the summer. The lights of her helmet shone brightly.

She trained her gun wherever the light shone and whispered to Brilton who was close behind.

"No sign of what happened, yet..." he said.

Amy nodded to indicate the door, on her right.

Brilton took a deep breath and leaned hard against it, until it gave way, slowly groaning open.

They were now in the corridor, which led to the administration section. Apart from their helmet lights, it was absolutely dark.

Amy seemed to know where they were going. At the end of the corridor, was a door marked *1*.

"The commander's office," she whispered, as she stepped aside.

Brilton sweated, as he eased the door open. The hinges screeched and sent a shiver up his spine.

Amy stepped in. Brilton followed, their lights piercing across the room.

Amy gasped and shot at the body that was crouched, in the corner. The laser fire raised only dust. The body did not move.

Carefully, Brinton stepped over. He nudged the body with his boot and it fell to the ground, with its skull falling to the floor.

Amy stared at the skull, as it rolled across the dust. The uniform of the body showed that the man was indeed the commander. She turned to Brilton. "See if there is anything written. A log or something."

Brinton nodded. As he searched, he asked "Do you think we should take the body aboard, or perhaps the skull, so that we can do an on-board examination?"

"No, but keep looking...here, I have some letters...." Amy swatted her hand. She felt her skin; it felt as though it had been stuck with a needle. It happened again, and then on her face. "Come on Brilton, we're getting out of here, now...."

"But, I have not...ouch...."

"Now!" Amy dashed for the door, and ran up the corridor. It was closed. "Brilton!" she yelled. It did not move under her weight.

His lights showed that he was not far behind. He heaved and the door came to. She glanced behind her, and then turned and sprinted for the stairs.

Brilton followed, "What the heck is going on...." he tried to call, as she raced up the stairs. He followed and found she had already entered their craft. He followed and closed the craft's small door safely, behind him.

Inside the protection of their craft, he strode up the stairs and looked at the screens. His friends Fran and Phino stared at him, and then at Amy, expectantly awaiting an explanation.

Amy sat panting and pulled off her helmet as she watched the screens. "I'm sorry Brilton. I was feeling all closed in. I don't think there is much to learn, here. I would be pleased, if we could move on."

Brilton sat back in his chair and plucked at the controls. "As you say, Amy. I'm loading in the next set of coordinates. We should be at your old home site, in fifty minutes."

Amy sat back, obviously relieved and rubbed the back of her hands. "I think I'll go below to rest."

Fran could sense the fear in her voice. Consoling, he said, "I'll call you, Amy, should anything come up. Get some rest."

Amy vanished down the stairs.

Fran turned to Britton. "What happened?"

"Nothing. She just saw an old skeleton. She spooked and dashed out. I have our journey on film. I managed to grab these papers, before we left. With luck, they will give us an insight, into what happened."

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"Papa. Is it so bad?" pleaded *Anki*.

The Master Templar paced back and forth, over the stone floor. He looked around, as though someone may hear him, but they were alone, in his residence. He looked out over the courtyard, which had once served the Royalty of Jilta. He watched an insect, crawl over a flower, the bees pollinating his garden. On a normal day, this would have brought him delight, as it had, to royalty, before him.

In the intervening years, between the Royals and Templars, the garden, as with much of the palace, had been left to run wild. It had taken the terms of the last two Master Templars, to bring about a proper reformation of the palace, to its former glory.

He watched the insect and shuddered. Slowly, he turned to his daughter, who looked so wonderful, in the sunlight. Here, they were together, in a tranquil garden, on a beautiful day, with the walls of the palace to protect them.

A Boguard brought a tray of refreshments and waited to be dismissed.

After he had gone, the Master Templar felt it was time that he explained more. "My daughter," he said, "I haven't been totally truthful, about Rambus. The planet was not totally destroyed, by radiation."

"Papa...." she began to interrupt.

The man held up his hand to let himself continue. Anki decided that she would at least hear her father out.

He continued. "I have deceived both you, and our friend, Amy. The planet was not destroyed. It should have been destroyed, as per my own orders. I ordered its destruction, but it never eventuated."

She saw the hurt, in her father's eyes and saw there was much more, to the story. She encouraged him to continue.

Her father faced away, from her and began to speak in a slightly broken voice. "The planet was invaded by pirates. They were looking for you. I knew they would be after you and I let you be the bait, so that I could destroy them." He turned, to look into his daughter's eyes. "You see, daughter, we do have our own military, out there. It is a small force, but it had a sole objective to hunt down and

destroy those pirates. However, it was a secret, and if the whole galaxy knew, it would have all the people, turn on the Templar movement. We must protect our people, but we don't need a whole galactic army, to deal with only a few pirates.

"I let you be used as bait, to lure them out and I almost lost you.... Can you ever forgive me?"

Anki looked at her father, who seemed much older, now. She held his hands and said, "Father, I forgive you. I'm fine, but what has that to do with Amy, now?"

He forced a weak smile, and looked at his daughter. "The method of attack on Rambus, used by the pirates, was so gruesome that most, or all animals and humans would be destroyed, in a few weeks. The manner of destruction was so horrific, that the entire planet should have been destroyed, to prevent the means of killing, being transferred to another world.

"Those were my orders, to irradiate the planet, so that no one could visit it."

Anki asked, "What was used, to attack the planet, Father?"

Her father escorted her over, to the flowers. He looked around, nervously explaining, and watched the distress spread, over his daughter's face.

She asked, "Were the pirates found?"

He shook his head. "We failed, and they escaped to plunder again. They have been using the same means of attack, for years and we have been

irradiating the planets behind them, accordingly. Now, we will have to send a stronger force there, to finish the job. It was hoped that as Rambus was so far out, that no one would ever go there, again, but I never expected that Amy would do this.”

“What will happen to Amy now?”

He cleared his throat. “If she’s on the planet, she may die from the radiation, which we will inflict on the planet, but it is unlikely that she will survive, more than her first week down there.” He looked away. “If our patrol finds her, they will most certainly kill her, and her friends.”

“No, Papa.... There must be another way....”

“Not that I know of, daughter. The destruction patrols have already been sent. The plot is set. She was like a second daughter, to me....”

Anki turned, in tears. “I forgave you for using me, Papa, but I can’t forgive you for the lives, which shouldn’t yet be ending.” She ran out, crying.

Her father looked at the flowers, and at the tiny insects, which crawled over them, tending them and giving the flowers a future life.

Ω

Fifty minutes later, the Master Templar received another distressed message. His daughter was gone, and so was his private yacht. There then had been a message, from a source, deep in space, identifying

itself as his yacht and Anki. The message was; that she was off to help a friend, on Rambus.

The Master Templar sat back. The message was broadcast, on the general band. Whoever the pirates were linked to on Jilta, would have the message, in an hour or two.

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ATTENTION ON RAMBUS

Jaron led the patrol. He knew the grounds, of his old residence. He put out a scanning thought, and picked up twelve visual sensors. He recorded their position and passed on his thoughts, to the other two Boguard. Next, he noted the thermal sensors, which had been set to locate and monitor all, within the human heat limits. Then, he put out thoughts to pick up sound sensors. He found seven. The next mental computation was sent, to locate guards. He found three, outside the grounds.

It was pitch black. There was no moon orbiting Jilta to brighten the night. Clouds blanketed the stars overhead. The ground was covered in blackness.

The earth, beneath Jaron's belly, was cold and damp. The evening rain was about to start. The first fine drops began to sprinkle on down, over the three. Slowly, they crept forward. Jaron kept his mind on the movement sensors, to be certain that he was moving slow enough, to avoid detection. They crawled silently and only a few pacs, every ten minutes. A slow crawl would ensure that electronic and human eyes, couldn't sense them.

They were soon coming into the range, of the heat sensors. The sensors did not operate on

changes in heat but on the detection of heat within the human bandwidth. For that reason, the three had been dressed in heavyweight shocksuits, which had a reflective inner lining, permitting no heat exchange, with the outside air. The result was that in a slow moving environment, the wearer would suffer from excessive heat, in three hours. To partially counter this, the Boguard lowered their body temperature, before setting out on their mission. All three had been immersed into freezing water, prior to the mission's onset in an effort to lower their temperature two degrees.

The freezing water had worked; Jaron was only now beginning to feel his body again. His limbs had been numb, ever since they had set out. Only now, did he feel warm and comfortable. He knew this comfort zone would soon pass and that they would be experiencing inner heat, which couldn't be cooled.

He signaled to the others, to don facemasks. Their air would now be filtered through a small compressor, on their waists. It would cool the air expelled, to exactly outside air temperature. In turn, they would heat further.

Moments later, Jaron could see clearly the entrance to the building, through his mask. They were thirty paces away, and had not yet been detected.

Jaron listened to himself, breathing and then looked towards his left. A guard was moving around, to the front. Jaron and the others waited patiently.

Moments passed and the guard was not about to move. Jaron could feel his body's heat climbing.

It was imperative for the Houses of Administration, to never think that they had been penetrated, or other higher security measures would need to be installed.

Still, there was a limit of how much a body temperature could rise, before it cooked the body muscles and organs itself, causing the body to break down, and that time was approaching. Sweat was beginning to build up, behind Jaron's mask and his breathing was getting heavy and labored. Still the guard did not move on.

Jaron signaled, to the others, to move around, to the left of the guard, but to keep out of sight. The black forms moved the ten pacs in twelve minutes, without detection.

Finally, Jaron gave out a mental message, to the stationary guard. *Look to your left.*

The guard did. He stared to his left; into the darkness.

Jaron put his mental attention on a tree out there, in the dark. A small branch fell, to the ground. The guard stood, and tried to peer out. Quickly, he began talking to the central guard monitors, on a small thin microphone, imbedded into his collar. Jaron smiled, as he saw the cameras and sensors move, to the left of the guard. For the next moment, all the sight and the sound sensors had been directed away from the entrance. Jaron signaled, and the

three dashed up to the entrance. They were silent and there was no need to interrupt the guard, as he began to carefully walk out into the darkness.

The three stood at the door for only a moment before the door unlocked itself, at a thought command, and they slipped in.

Jaron glanced up, and down the hallway. Their intelligence had been correct. There were no sensors in the hall. All at once, the three ripped off the facemasks, stripped open their suits, with sweat dropping over the floor.

All three stood there, gasping the welcome cooler fresh air, into their lungs. Jaron unzipped the side of his suit. Perspiration virtually spilled out. He breathed deeply.

No one spoke and soon, they were ready to commence phase two, of their mission. They vented their suits, placed them back on, wiped the floor dry and then, they split up. Each would check one of the Houses of Jilta, Centor or Siltonia, which they had already been assigned.

They sprinted down the corridor.

At the end, was a junction, which led to many corridors, like the spokes in a wheel. Each knew which one to take. Jaron and the pair had visited the Houses, the previous day, in the guise of finding out what each could get, in return for contributing, funds to a House of Torren. On those visits, all monitors had been clandestinely noted, and mapped.

Jaron stood, at the end of his corridor. The door was eight paces high; it slid back, at the touch of his hand. Jaron followed the circuitry of the door with his mind, and cut off the relay signal to the security section of the building, so that his entry wouldn't be detected.

A moment later, he was at the *compuscreen* of the senior attaché's office. All sensors had been bypassed, except for the heat sensor. Jaron had to remain fully suited, because of that.

He let the screen come on. There were files, millions of files to access. He watched, as the directory scrolled down. Jaron's attention was caught by one small file amongst all the rest. Its contents spilled onto the screen. Jaron recorded, all it offered, and then went on to another. His mind became one with the computer, and soon all its secrets were his, for the asking. Mostly, the data was minor. He was beginning to overheat again and mentally signaled the others.

They too, had some data; it would be pooled together soon, came their thoughts.

He closed the screen down and locked the door, behind him.

A moment later, the three were at a rear exit. Jaron pried it slightly open, to sense the presence of more monitors. A second later, and all the external monitors on the west side were out of action. It would take fifteen seconds, before the House security could find the fault and have it rectified.

In that short time, the three had exited and started sprinting for the far garden wall, about three hundred paces away. After three seconds, they were out of sight of the compound. Within ten seconds, they were almost there. Jaron felt his throat begin to gag, in the heat. His legs continued running, even though they were sending messages to his mind, to stop. Jaron overloaded the body, with his own commands. The three kept running, dodging trees and soon the four meter high wall loomed up, before them.

Time was running out, and Jaron felt his body begin to falter. His left leg seemed to have lost feeling and response. He had not fallen, so he knew that it was still operating, but for how long could he keep this up? He watched his two companions leap, for the wall. He too, leapt, but his strength failed him, and he felt his body crash, into the stone. Two arms grabbed, at him. He was barely conscious of his body being dragged, over the wall. He was aware of sirens wailing and shouting coming, from behind them. His last memory was of traveling horizontally, in a floater and someone ripping off his mask.

Ω

Moments later, Jaron found himself in the care of fellow Boguard. His comrades had stripped down and were in white hospital garb.

The first leaned over Jaron, and said quietly, "Well done Jaron. For an old body of twenty-two, you did well. It seems that we lost three Ks of fluid, during our short mission. All the data records have been sent to intelligence, and we will have a better overall picture soon."

Jaron smiled and sat back, thinking about what a really old body of thirty-seven, would be like.

A door opened and Jaron's Expeditionary Leader for Intelligence, walked in. He wore traditional black. "I see you have recovered. While the three of you are here, I'll brief you on our initial discoveries."

Jaron nodded his consent and the intelligence officer continued; "It appears that the Templar Houses have each been involved in purchasing weapons and military ships, from the Warp Drive Bank. At first we thought that it was only Jilta. To their credit, they had been buying from the independent suppliers, in the Malukan sector. However, since the Bank effectively bought out the Malukans, the Temple wealth is returning back to the Bank. It seems that the Centorians, the Silts and all the others have been arming, to some degree. Between them, they process small fleets of ships with interceptors and fighters. None have been sufficiently wealthy enough, to purchase cruisers. The first to arm, were the Jiltanians, and they possess a seventeen ship fleet. It seems that these were purchased, over the past one hundred years. Buying a ship, every few years, could be hidden in the

Templar House Treasury. I would guess that once the Bank had Jilta buying arms, it would follow that the other Houses would think alike. With the pirates still at large it is surprising that more military might hasn't been bought.

"With the swing away from a more militarist regime of Centor, I would expect only the current orders with the Bank to be fulfilled, but a few cruisers can be expected to be ordered sometime. Another reason, for the sudden rush to arm by the other houses, could be the fear of the House of Jilta itself. Some of the outer houses can see Jilta as the strongman, rather than just the benevolent center of their movement."

"So, where does that leave us?" asked Jaron.

"Added to the immediate problem of today, someone tried to scale the walls of the Grounds of Torren tonight, but they were chased away by *Temple Security*. That is no longer of any concern to us.

"Secondly, though, they seem to have a lot of concern, for a planet in the Outer-Worlds, by the name of Rambus."

Jaron sat up, interested.

The intelligence officer continued, "It seems that some son, of an important trader and transport mogul has taken off, heading for that planet, and all craziness has broken loose."

"Interesting," said Jaron. "What does it mean?"

The intelligence officer shrugged. "Hard to say, at this stage. It is possible that the trader has made

vast sums of money on the planet, trading and transporting ores. It is also possible that he has a hand in the pocket, of the Warp Drive Bank. We know that some of his silver and plutonium, end up in the electronics systems, of military hardware. We also are aware that he doesn't approve of the Templar movement. He gave vast sums, to opposition movements, against the Templars here, on Jilta. Recently, his objections seem to have been overcome, and he's now silent.

"What seems to be his problem now is that his son is attached to a certain lady, who is a close friend of the family of the Master Templar, and the father of the son, doesn't approve. In fact, it seems that he was ready to publicly disown the son, prior to him disappearing.

"Now, that in itself meant little, until the father learnt that his son had gone off with this girl, named Amy, to the Outer-World called Rambus. Once hearing she was from Rambus, the father almost had to be sedated, by his physician.

"He, in response has sent out a virtual army of privateers, after the pair. Apparently, he has now taken quite ill and does nothing but ask: have they found his son.

"To complicate matters, the pair went off with two others, from the ruling administration class of Jilta. The background of those two families is that they have been administrating Jilta since the time of the *Confederated Council of Planets*, before the

Royals reigned. They are very well regarded and lead much of the opinion on this planet. They don't see the Templar movement, as anything bad, nor do they subscribe to its doctrines. They seem quite neutral to the movement. The parents of these families, are concerned for their children, but don't seem to share the fear, experienced by that of the trader and transport mogul."

"Interesting. So, what is this place, called Rambus?" asked Jaron.

"It is a small planet, which was destroyed by pirates, about seven years ago. Supposedly, it was irradiated and now can't be occupied. It was also the planet where the Master Templar's daughter had taken refuge, for half a year, until she was rescued, just prior to the pirate attack.

"The planet used to manufacture aluminum, and was of no economic or military prize for the pirates, or anybody else."

"However, the Master Templar's daughter would have been a great prize; right?" grinned Jaron. He was beginning to feel a lot better. He drank another glass, of *highwater*⁵.

The intelligence officer nodded. "She indeed, would have been a prize. I understand that someone had been chasing her, for some time, before she found her way onto Rambus."

⁵ **DEFINITION: Highwater:** Water combined with minerals, vitamins; body salts and with the citrus fruits of Jilta, sold commercially. *Source: Searfinders Index, pp. 1223-4*

"Hmmm, I wonder what the attraction of the planet is, now?"

"I don't know, sir, but that is not all."

Jaron smiled.

"Sir, the daughter of the Master Templar took off for Rambus, in his private inter-system yacht, less than three hours ago. The Master is now beside himself, with fear. He fears for the Temple, as much as he does for his daughter. I would expect that what military support he has, would be drawn there, as will the pirates. The yacht's destination was broadcast, on the commercial bands."

Jaron shook his head. "So; it seems that all paths lead to Rambus."

The Intelligence officer looked at him, strangely.

Jaron put on a white robe and carefully observed the weight of his body, on his legs. They would support him. He walked over, to his clothes. He selected a black shocksuit. "How far away is Rambus?"

The officer responded. "About three months for commercial vehicles, and less for military. We have no idea if there are any military in the vicinity, or how long it will take for military to be mobilized, by the Templars or the pirates. The girl, Amy and her friends will arrive, in about three months. The daughter of the Master Templar, Anki, will reach there, about a week after their arrival. They already have quite a head start, but our own Man-o-War

could arrive, at about the same time. It would be unlikely that any military will be there ahead of us.”

“Thank you. Call Captain Brijet, for me. Tell her that it is necessary, to meet in the next hour, that we already have our destination, and that we will be leaving, as soon as she has her Man-o-War ready.”

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VICTIMS OF RAMBUS

The small craft skimmed over the sand dunes, detouring around a cloud of swirling sand, which reached into the upper atmosphere.

Fran softly called Phino, to the bridge. "You had better come up here. I don't like the look of things here."

Phino arrived, to see Fran pointing to Brilton who was fast asleep, in the navigator's chair. Phino chuckled. "Looks like our wealthy patron has simply fallen asleep, after an exciting day. I wouldn't be too worried, but I'll check it out. Actually, they are both asleep."

Phino moved up to Brilton and shook him by the arm. "Come on.... It is time to move...."

"Er...are we there, yet?" Brilton mumbled, as he roused himself. He rubbed his eyes and looked around, to see Fran watching him.

Phino shook his head. "No, but we will be soon. I just want to take a blood test, before you venture out again."

Immediately, Brilton withdrew his arm and looked at his old friend, as though she was the enemy. He quickly snapped out of it, and said, "Yes,

of course. Sorry, I still seem to be a little sleepy.”
He followed Phino, down to the infirmary.

Ten minutes later, Phino bobbed back up to the bridge. “There appears to be nothing amiss, in their blood system. No strange biotics or chemicals. I guess they were simply tired, from whatever spooked them.”

Fran smiled. “You had better make sure they are both awake, because this time we have a small settlement coming up, just as predicted. Still no sign of civilized life. We will arrive in two minutes.”

All four were on the bridge, as the craft slowly circled the settlement, on a wide radius. Amy rubbed her hands and said, “We will be able to find out what happened, now. This was my family home. Put us down, over there, please Brilton.”

The small craft came to rest, outside the entrance of Amy's old home. She saw the window which she once looked out from, as a young girl, when she wondered if she would ever leave the planet.

The craft stopped. Amy stood, and asked for volunteers. All four decided to leave the craft, though Fran would stay within earshot, of the warning systems.

The day was beautiful, with a sharp bite to the air temperature. The crisp wind was coming up from the southern pole. There were no clouds in the sky, but the sun was low.

Fran looked out, towards the horizon and then to the homestead. She wondered how the Out Worlders could stand to survive, in such a desolate place. No trees, no big cities, no theater and not least of all - no real history. It was only a bleak settlement in a windswept sandy planet. Fran wondered if there was any sane person who would voluntarily live in a place, like this.

She watched, as Amy and the others entered the house. The doors were open. Sand had piled up, onto the roof on the far side and was calf deep, stopping the door from closing.

It was not long, before Amy returned. "The bodies are in there, as expected, but there is no indication of how they died. I wonder if they were subjected to biological attack, which has long since dissipated. It is obvious that the place hasn't been disturbed, since the attack. I'll do an autopsy."

Fran looked puzzled. "How?"

"I studied basic medical science, at Alson. I know how to hold a scalpel, and I know how to run the samples through these machines, here."

Briltin walked outside. "If you intend to autopsy, then it should be performed outside of the ship. Can we get power out here?"

Amy looked around and then walked over, to the far shed. As expected, the *wheeler* she had become so fond of, as a youngster, was there. "If you can get this started, you can follow the pipeline here, down to the lake, where there is a generator plant. At the

plant, if you can start the generator, we will get power," she called back, to the others. "Any weed that you find, surrounding the compound, will simply need a bit of clearing."

Brilton and Phino looked in the shed. Brilton shrugged. "Why not. Here pass me this shovel and we can clear this sand. Hmmm. Petro chemical added motor...see if you can get some ethanol, from the ship. Also bring out some cleaning fluid...."

A moment, later Brilton tipped a high-powered cocktail into the fuel tank. The tank was almost full, but would have lost its potency, over the seven years. Brilton figured that by adding the cleaning fluid, it could belt out added punch.

He was correct. He drew out a lead from the ship, and the starter motor turned over the supplementary motor for about two minutes, before it burst into life. It roared, then spluttered and then roared, again. Brilton turned to the carburetor, and adjusted it, to a constant purr.

Phino stared, unbelievably.

Brilton grinned. "Carburetors! There is more to me, than merely my daddy's money. I race this type of machine, at home. In the early days of the Confederacy, there was nothing but this type of machine. Even on Sequetus 3 - Earth - these machines ruled. It was the persons that controlled the fuel to them, who controlled the planet. There, wars were fought purely to control the supply of this fuel.... Here, that should do it."

To Phino's disbelief, the machine idled quietly, as it poured out grey smoke.

Brilton jumped into the front seat. The gearshift ground out its sounds; and the vehicle moved and rolled up, over the sand. With a great big smile over his face, Brilton drove the wheeler out, into the open.

He called out, "Amy, where is that compound?"

Amy shook her head. She was amazed. "Well, if you can follow it, that pipeline leads straight to a large lake. The generator works on light and water, but has no petro-chemical auxiliary like the wheeler. The light generates electricity, which then pumps back hot water, to the settlement, here. The hot water heats the house and generates electrical power. The compound will be clogged with weed. Take a rifle and blast a clearing around the pumps and you will get water for at least a few days, until the weed grows back. If you have any queries, give me a call."

"Sounds fine to me, Amy." He dashed into the small ship, and came out with a pair of laser rifles, communications belts and a small radio camera.

"Coming, Fran?" he asked.

"Sorry. I think I'll keep watch around here. Maybe I'll see if I can find out, what has caused these deaths. Maybe something is written inside, a diary or something."

"Alright. Maybe they simply starved to death," said Brilton, as he revved the engine. He passed

their gear to Phino, and the two men drove off, out of the settlement.

Fran watched for a moment, and then turned to follow Amy, who had gone back into the craft.

Amy sat down, reading the notes that had been collected from the harvester. They made little sense to her. She read them again and again: something about an unseen enemy, and over and over, about their condition. It seemed that the crew went crazy, and hacked the rest of the crew to death. They ate each other, and there was no escape. Humans eating humans; total insanity, caused by the enemy. When Amy finally looked up, she realized that she had been reading for an hour.

She checked on Fran, who answered her call. "I'm in the house. I believe it is the study. If you like, I'll bring up the books, which I'm reading. I think I have come across a diary, written a few days, after the pirates arrived. It is written by someone.., could be your father.... I'll bring it up. Damn... these insects are bad. Are they always that bad? Damn things bite. I've got to get out of here, they are getting thicker now."

Amy sat back, and thought for a moment. She did not recall any biting insects, when she was young. She looked at the bites that she experienced, while aboard the Harvester. The two on her hands were beginning to fester, like boils. They were small, but were developing into little blistering skin spots.

She waited until Fran came in carrying the diary. "Yes," Amy said. "The diary is in my father's writing." She flipped open the book; read the second page, written in new-English, and then stared at her friend. She quickly read another two pages; and then dropped the book. "Oh Fran... we're going to die, soon!" Amy stared at her.

Fran tried to look lighthearted. "No, don't joke with me, Amy. We're not going to die. What is in the book?"

Amy was not joking. She looked at the small spots on Fran's arms; where she had been bitten. "Those insects out there; they are the weapons the pirates used to wipe out the planet. The insect bites the human, lays eggs in the skin and the larvae grow under the skin, then break into the blood stream, go into the brain, and drive the host human crazy. That is how all the deaths occurred, according to this diary."

Fran stared at her arms. There were about ten to fifteen spots, which showed she had been stung. "But... but... surely, there is surgery we can have? We can cut them out. We must be able to...."

Amy jumped up, going to the screens. "The boys - down by the lake. They must be told, to stay away."

Ω

The wheeler drove smoothly. It rode over all the ridges and sand dunes, which covered the pipes. They arrived at the compound, to find it partly covered in sand. Brilton could see what Amy meant by the weed clogging the compound. He drove the wheeler down, beside the fence. He jumped out, and passed Phino the other rifle. Phino went into the compound building, while Brilton walked down, to the water's edge.

Brilton could see the intakes in the water, about three paces down. Also, he could see the weed, choking the intakes. He aimed and fired the rifle. Again and again, he fired. Slowly, the intakes seemed to become freer. Soon, they were clear, all around.

The radio was beeping. Brilton turned, and called Phino, but there was no answer. He turned, and picked up the receiver.

"Brilton, here."

"Brilton, look out for insects. We have isolated...." went the radio.

A noise came from the shed, and a crash. Brilton put the radio down and approached the shed, cautiously. "Phino...are you all right? Phino?"

Another noise came from the shed. There was another crash, and then a muffled sound.

Brilton readied his laser rifle. As he walked closer, and without warning, Phino staggered out, blood all over his face, hands groping in the air. He

tried to cry out, but as he fell, he managed a cry, and that cry was, "Kill me please...."

Brilton stood back and stared in shock, as his friend crawled on the ground. His eyes were gone, only red sockets remained. His face was cut and lacerated. Under his clothes, his skin and body writhed, as though it was attached to a dozen snakes. Phino began to gasp, and gasp again. Then, all of a sudden, he collapsed, with his last breath.

Brilton watched, as most of the body stopped moving. Phino's head fell to the side, as his dead body relaxed. As Brilton began to kneel down, beside his old friend, Phino's mouth, which was open, began to move. Without warning, a small worm crawled out, towards Brilton's foot.

Brilton jumped back, in fright. He shot at the worm, which was now reaching for him. He shot again and again, until it ceased writhing. When he thought that it might now be safe, the body of his old friend began to move, again. Brilton got out the camera. The eye openings of his colleague sprang open; two tapered finger worms, pushed their way out, and began to explore the air. Brilton dropped the camera onto the seat of the wheeler, and began firing at his friend's body. Over and over, he fired and the body shuddered, under each blow.

"By the Torren," cried Brilton, as he saw what was coming out of the shed. It was a human body, unclothed. It faced the direction of Brilton. It was followed by another, and then another. Two more

followed, and they were all approaching him, and the wheeler. Brilton moved back, from the wheeler. He fired at the front human body. It was male. There was no response. To his horror, there was another human body, coming out. It was only four or five years old. It must have been born, after the attack by the pirates. Could it have been born to these human animals?

Brilton moved away and fired a volley of shots, at the first two human types, which approached. The effect was only to place holes, in their bodies. He fired again. The result was minimal; they kept on coming. Brilton backed away. He could tell that the creatures, like his dead friend, couldn't see.

As they approached the wheeler, he turned and fled, camera in hand. The front creature had a small finger-like worm, crawling around and outwards, from its mouth. It flickered in the air, as though trying to locate something. Then, all the creatures began to turn, towards Brilton.

My scent, Brilton realized. He fired at the mouth of the creature, but it only left a burn.

Brilton could hear the radio call. It was Amy's voice. It drew fainter and softer, as Brilton ran off, over the sand hills. He was not about to try, to regain the vehicle. Instead, he was going to make it back to their craft, on foot. It would take an hour and a half, if he were lucky. He left the small band of creatures behind him, as he took up a slow canter, alongside the pipe line.

Ω

Amy watched in horror, as the viewscreen showed her friend being shot, worms coming from his mouth and then the creatures that looked like dead humans, coming from the shed.

She analyzed the screens, and then got back to reading her dad's diary. She read on, for a moment, then slammed the book back down on the table, and jumped from the chair. "Quickly Fran, we have got to try to get Brilton out from there."

A moment later, they were on the bridge, and the craft was skimming over the sands.

"There!" cried Fran.

In seconds, the craft was down and Brilton staggered aboard. Finally, thoroughly exhausted, he spluttered, as he slumped into a seat, on the bridge, "I...I...couldn't save...Phino."

"We know. Catch your breath and I'll explain," said Amy.

The small craft rose from the ground, and sped over the sands, to the compound by the lake. On the screens, were the human creatures.

"Brilton, while you were away, Fran came across this diary, explaining the last days on the planet. Our own days appear numbered, and I'll explain why.

"Into the atmosphere, the enemy released insects, which have now bitten or stung, all of us. Look at the spots on your skin; bites. Under those

bites, are eggs incubating. When they hatch they will produce larvae, which will grow within the human host, until it drives the host mad. The parasite expands, to the size of a human arm. It begins to control the nerve centers and the actions, of the host bodies. It is probable that the parasite even uses the host body to propagate, so that the parasites have new host bodies. That child out there; is or was, no more human, than the worms that inhabit it. The insects come from the eggs, which are laid in the nearby water. The parasite is the worm that inhabits the host, and it also feeds slowly, at the water's edge on the plant life. It travels on a rotation basis, from host to water. It then returns to the host and its waste is digested, into the host, as sustenance. In the lake, the worm lays the eggs, and they hatch, and then seek out new hosts. Obviously this is a well-designed weapon. It is hideous, and we three, are its newest victims."

ψ

DEATH OF RAMBUS

The three sat back stunned. What could be done? Each insect had laid twenty or thirty eggs with each bite.

Fran again, suggested, "Surely surgery can remove the eggs. I'm willing to try," she pleaded.

"I'm willing, too," joined in Brilton.

Amy was undecided. "I can't say that you shouldn't try, but according to the diary, surgery was tested here, on the settlement, but there are no records of how they went about it."

Fran stood and began to scratch her arms, "Well, we have to try. I can't just lie here and die. We must try something. What about getting back to Jilta, they must know how to deal with this. Surely!"

Amy shook her head. "If we die here, it is certain that no one will catch what we have caught. If we return, and this parasite gets out, onto the planet of Jilta, then the cost could be billions of lives. Jilta is the hub, to this half of the galaxy. If the parasite reached there, it could be transferred to another seventy planets, before it was noticed. This parasite could reach the whole, of galactic society. That is something, which can't be risked."

Fran looked down. She sighed. "I agree, but then we must try: either surgery or drugs. I vote that surgery be done on me. If it fails, please kill me. I couldn't bear the thought of me, simply being used as a host, for these things. Promise me that."

Amy looked away. Brilton reluctantly promised that he would end her life, if necessary.

As Brilton stood, he turned with a smile, "Perhaps we could drink them out, drown them in alcohol. Maybe intoxicate the things, so that the drunken parasite decides to leave, of their own accord." He chuckled at his own idea, and then rubbed his arms.

Amy looked up, and tried to share his smile. "As long as the parasite doesn't react violently, to your drinking habits.... However, that is one idea," she tried to resist scratching, her arms. The craving to scratch was becoming irresistible. "There must be something that will kill the insect larvae, which are now inside of us. Who would be willing to experiment, at the cost of their own life?"

Both her friends indicated that they would. Amy agreed. Anything was better, than sitting around; waiting for death.

Amy thought, for a moment. "The two options to kill this thing, is one at a time, or to kill them; all at once.

"One at a time, such as surgery, could be either by scalpel, by burning, laser, microwave laser, acid or anything that is localized. The other option is

something that is put into the body, such as poison, radioactive solutions or anything else, which could kill the larvae en masse, without killing us. That could include raising or lowering, the temperature of the body.”

Fran looked at the other two. “I would like to volunteer my body; for scientific experiments.” However, her humor seemed ill spent.

Amy shrugged. “Well, that is it, then. What I would like to suggest, is that we get some samples of these bugs from ourselves, via surgery. As I was bitten first, the parasite will be further developed, than yours. I believe that we should take samples from my arm, and Fran's arm, and compare the different results. I....” Amy looked at her arm, which was craving to be scratched, and stared, as the skin began to move.

Under the skin, something large, and creepy, was moving. It was pushing at the skin and travelling towards the festering area.

Amy gasped and glanced at the other two, who were also staring, in horror, at the writhing insect, beneath her skin.

The boil, on her lower left arm, began to move. Amy wanted so much to scratch it; but resisted. The boil moved and a tiny rivulet of blood appeared, at the top of the boil. It was only a drop, when it was followed by a custard yellow sickly fluid, thin to begin with, but thickening, as it flowed out. Amy wanted to scream, as she watched the fluid run down her arm.

Slowly, it became thicker as though it was being pumped out. The smell was similar to that of decaying flesh. The sight and smell was enough, to cause Fran to collapse. Amy stared on, in horror, as the flow of fluid ceased, and was followed by a small ring of blood.

Slowly, and painfully, the red skin of the boil began to split open further, and a small thin moving pale larva end, pushed out. It may have been as long as a finger, but only a fingernail length of it pushed out, into the air. It was as though the small larva was testing, its new environment. It swiveled and turned, touching the skin around it.

Amy felt as if she wanted to throw up.

"Don't move, Amy. Every person must have experienced this, and many would have attempted to remove the thing, right there and now. What is needed, is to cut open the skin and remove the entire parasite, not just part of it. We have no idea what will happen, if half or part of it, is removed. It may react, by splitting in half and burying deeper into the body, or emitting a toxin," said Brilton.

Amy swallowed. "I believe it would be a good time for you to cut into me, now." She watched as the thing disappeared back into her arm. "Follow me into the surgery."

They left Fran, still unconscious on the floor, in the coma position, and opened the door to the surgery, which was little more than an over-sized cupboard.

Brilton pulled out an anesthetic.

Amy shook her head. "Not a good idea, as we have no idea of how the little things will react to it. I want to get them out, not have them burrow deeper into my body. Don't give me anything, not even local."

Brilton nodded and pulled out a pack of scalpels and then gently washed the wound. "Please lie down, and rest your arm on the table, Amy. You know that there is the possibility, that this may bring about your death, prematurely."

Amy nodded. "If you mean by a few hours or days, it means little. I think that the odds are stacked; in my favor. Cut away." She gritted her teeth.

Brilton tried to grin. "If you wish to watch; that is fine with me, but there are two monitors overhead recording visio, your body temperature, and all sounds."

"Thanks for the offer, but I think I'll look at the picture of Jilta, on the wall. Don't gab, just cut!"

Brilton looked at the wound, which seemed to have lost its redness. He watched the writhing of the thing, under the skin. It was his guess that the sickly yellow fluid was part of the body's rejection mechanism, and that the parasite was making sure it was discharged properly, so as not to kill off the host. Brilton recalled what he remembered, of such insects. Few parasites actually killed their hosts. Most needed the host alive for them to continue to live.

After putting on sterile gloves, he carefully sliced the scalpel into the upper fatty tissues of Amy's arm. He could feel Amy wince, but she did not cry out. As the inside flesh became exposed, blood flowed out, over both sides of her arm. The cut was neat and didn't sever any arteries.

Brilton leaned over, to place his own forehead onto a towel on the bench, in order to wipe his brow, so he didn't contaminate the sterile gloves he was wearing. Then he watched the flesh writhe, just under the scalpel. He stroked the flesh again with the knife. This time he exposed the tail of the worm and just followed it along to the surface of the boil, exposing its full length.

The parasite squirmed in the fresh air, and obviously was about to burrow down deeper, when, with a simple flick of the scalpel, Brilton dislodged it. It hung on. Brilton held the bulk of the body of the parasite flat, on Amy's arm with his scalpel, but the head seemed to be burrowing again, into the fatty tissues.

Carefully, Brilton examined the creature and saw the small hooks, which hung around its head. With no hesitation, Brilton cut the flesh around the head and pulled the complete worm out, onto the tray; the parasite and a very small portion of Amy's flesh.

Brilton put the parasite into a glass jar and immediately into the incubator. He turned to face Amy, as she had fallen unconscious. He looked at her, checking her airways were clear. Her three boils

had now become seven. Brilton again mopped his brow and reached for a new scalpel.

He finished, an hour later. Amy's arm was a mess of stitches. Brilton was no surgeon, and certainly not a neat stitcher. Amy's arms were bound in *bacterol-bandages*™. The wounds would take forty hours to heal, before the bandages could be removed. He only hoped that he got them all.

Ω

Amy awoke, to find Brilton; sitting beside her. She looked and felt herself, noting the bandages on her arms and head. "Did you...."

Brilton shrugged. "I took out all that I could find. We have eight of them to experiment on, plus a few pieces of your arm." He tried to laugh. "I'm no surgeon Amy, there will be scars and...."

Amy sat up and stared at the bandages. She felt fine. She had passed out from the pain and was not experiencing any side effect of drugs. She smiled. "You did the best that you could. Any scar is preferable to death, and even death is preferred to what we saw, down at the compound. You did well. How is Fran?"

Brilton laughed. "She's fine. At the moment she's experimenting with our guests. It would seem that scratching the skin, tends to want to make them burrow in, deeper." He looked down, at his own arms. He craved to scratch them.

Amy stood and walked to the bridge. Her arms were only partially immobilized and her fingers were free.

Fran came up to the bridge, with Brilton following and said, "We don't seem to have any great results from our experiments. Every time I tried to poison, heat, drug, chill or radiate these things, they become violent and thrash around. They grapple for anything they can. It seems that the parasite will simply burrow deeper from the surface and be more difficult to dislodge, when threatened. Good thing there was no anesthetic used on you, Amy."

Amy looked at her arms and sighed.

Fran looked up at Brilton. "I'm next and I want you to do me, now!" she said.

Brilton nodded and walked down the steps.

A moment later, he was in the surgery. Fran was lying down with her arms exposed. Amy was standing, behind her.

"Ready?" asked Brilton, as he got out new scalpels and gloves.

"Yes," she answered.

Brilton nodded and slowly sank the knife, into her arm. Deeper he ran the blade, to expose two finger lengths of fatty flesh. Blood trickled and Fran whimpered, cried out and then slumped on the bench, unconscious. Amy attended her with breathing apparatus.

Brilton looked at Amy in dismay. "By the Torren, Amy, will you look at this? I have no idea of what to do, now." The sight was turning his stomach.

What had been exposed was not just a few, but literally dozens or perhaps hundreds of the little larvae. The yellow sickly fluid was mixed in with the flesh. The larvae seemed to squirm in it.

Amy stared at them. "It would appear that hundreds of eggs are laid in one bite, and they are transported through the body with the endocrine system. This seems to keep them lodged in the fatty tissues of the body. I would imagine that once they got into the blood stream, then that would be it, they would next enter the brain. I also would guess that they must eat or live off each other, otherwise you would have found more in my tissue."

Brilton nodded, "What can we do, here?"

Amy looked at the mass of squirming creatures in her friend's arm. "I suppose we try to get them out now, while we can. It would be useful to have more, to experiment with."

Brilton nodded and started to cut into the flesh. The creatures wouldn't let go. Some began to disappear from view. He couldn't see them, when they vanished into the putrid yellow fluid, which seemed to be thickening.

Brilton shook his head. "I'm closing this wound up. This is too premature. Some of the larvae have gone, deeper. If they have entered into the blood stream, then ...I don't want to think about it."

Amy nodded. She did not think she could control the contents of her stomach, much longer.

Both Amy and Brilton were watching, when Fran opened her eyes. She blinked at them and sat up, saying, "Well, did you get them all out, are they all gone?"

Amy smiled. "No. We found the parasites were too immature, to remove. There were too many, but they will reduce in number, and then...."

Fran jerked her head, and then looked at the pair and said strangely, "Well, you were usually incompetent. I suppose I might have expected this. In fact, I believe you left me like this, so that you could see me die. I know that was the reason why you brought me here, so that you could kill me!"

Amy sat back, "No Fran, you're my closest friend...."

"Friend... I'll show you how to kill a friend!" and Fran lunged, at Amy's throat.

"My god!" screamed Brilton, as he turned to pin Fran down. He held her tightly, as she screamed. He reached for the sedation needle and shot her with it in the arm. Fran's eyes bulged, her muscles tightened and she collapsed onto the floor.

"She should be out, for a few hours," he said looking at her limp body.

Amy swallowed, "I think the larvae may have entered her brain." She looked at Brilton.

He looked at the body, as it lay there. "Possibly."

Ω

Hours later, when Amy was on the bridge, she heard crashing below; then there was a silence. She flicked on the screen and saw Brilton lying on the floor, motionless, and then a shadow reached for a laser on the bench and vanished from the screen.

Amy jumped from her seat and grabbed a rifle from the closet. She waited, at the top of the steps. She could hear the breathing, of her friend. "Fran? Fran, is that you?"

Immediately, the lights went out. It was pitch black. A flash appeared, and a laser bolt had just missed Amy, by a hair's thickness. She rolled over to the console and squeezed the trigger at a movement, down towards the base of the steps.

Amy called, "Fran, this is stupid. Where are you?" Amy's heart was beating; her breath was short and rapid.

On the lower deck, a light went on, shining up, through the stair well. A shadow passed, to Amy's left. Amy rolled. A flash of laser fire exploded to her right. A second flash hit her; in the leg. Amy screamed in pain and leaped across to the bridge, to escape. Sitting behind the captain's chair, she crouched, with pearls of sweat making their way down her face. Her pulse was racing, as she cowered in the corner. Her rifle aimed outwards, but she could see no enemy. She waited.

Three seconds passed and a flash of light struck the rifle she held, exploding it from her hands, crippling her fingers. She held her fingers to her face as she saw the shadow approach her. The silhouette showed Fran, holding a rifle. The barrel lowered and Fran laughed. "Try to kill me, would you, bitch?"

The cabin lights flashed on. Fran's eyes were wide and insane looking, saliva hung from her chin. Suddenly she swung around and dropped to the ground, with the rifle clattering, away from her, across the floor. As she fell, a small puff of smoke rose, from her chest.

Amy stared, as her comrade lay there, face up.

Emerging from the stairs, was Brilton. He stood and looked down at Fran, a rifle in his hands.

Amy crawled from behind him, and kneeled, at the side of Fran's body.

Fran opened her eyes. The insanity was gone from her face. A tear trickled down her cheek, as she choked out the words, "Forgive me. Please, please kill me. Please say...."

Amy looked up at Brilton, who pulled the trigger twice and two holes appeared, in Fran's forehead. Amy sat back; looked at her friend and cried.

ψ

RENDEZVOUS ON RAMBUS

Amy watched, as Brilton tightened the helmet of his life-suit. He bent down and lifted the body. He stepped into the airlock and in a moment, he was gone. Amy watched from the screens of the bridge, as he dug a shallow grave for their friend's body.

Amy sat back and wiped a tear, as it ran down her face. Would Fran be the only lucky one? Was she at least now spared this fate; worse than death? Would she be the only one, to receive a burial?

A moment later, while watching Fran being covered over with soil, she stared in horror, as Brilton removed his helmet.

Amy snapped on the vocal-controls. She fumbled, as she tried to turn them on. Her fingers throbbed, with the pain she had suffered, by being shot by Fran.

Finally, she was able to contact him, "Brilton...what are you doing? This is suicide. Please, put your helmet on. You're becoming exposed, to more of those insects. Please." She felt herself about to break down and sob, when Brilton looked up, from his desert landscape.

He waved over to her, from the grave and called, "Princess, I'm sorry, but there is nothing you can do

for me. Look at your fingers. You can't lift a scalpel. I refuse to become what Fran became. I tried to cut one of these out, of myself.... I was not successful. You would never be able to survive me, if I attacked you. I treasure you, more than my life. You, at least, have a chance. I have none."



Brilton, on Rambus

Amy screamed, as she watched her boy friend lift his laser gun, to his temple. Slowly, he pulled the trigger. It blew the left section of his head away. His body slumped over and fell, into the grave of his friend.

Amy sat there. "No. No, no, you bastard. You bastard!" she cried. "You bastard, bastard." She collapsed, onto the floor, in grief. She had never felt so stunned, and deserted, in the entire universe before.

She sat on the floor, watching the screen display of the desert and grave.

Amy knew that she had killed her friends, as surely as she had pulled the triggers herself. It was she, who had led her friends, to this forsaken planet. She had watched them all die, one by one.

Ω

Three days later, Amy was two thousand miles, further south. She had decided to leave the settlement of her youth. There was nothing there, except bad memories.

Her small craft approached the township of Cowra, once the home of a thousand people. If the inhabitants had developed a method of controlling the parasite, then it could be safe to return to Jilta, once Amy was treated. She could at least hope that someone had found a treatment.

The township appeared as a break in the shimmering desert. The red line wavered, as it met the blue sky. That line was broken by a few of the larger structures of the town, with large snow-capped mountains behind.

Amy scanned for life forms. Several showed up, in the center of the town. There were no radio transmissions. Amy would have to assume that these life forms were parasite hosts, until proven otherwise.

It took an hour, to locate the Cowra Hospital.

The town contained only one and two story buildings. Amy settled the small craft, in front of the hospital. She donned her suit and helmet and stepped outside, keeping a rifle abreast and eyes peeled for hosts or insects.

The day was bright and there was no wind. The buildings were covered in the red dust, which had blown down from the equator, but it was cold.

Cowra had been built on the shore, of the largest lake on the planet. It was more than large enough to support ships and a marine produce section, for the planet. At its widest point, the lake was the size of a small ocean, two thousand Ks wide.

Amy pushed the hospital front door. It was locked, from the inside. She tried to peer through the dirty, dusty, streaked plate glass. There seemed no one around, so Amy stepped back, blasted the two locks on the door and entered.

The foyer directory showed that the administrator's office was on the first floor. Following the corridor, Amy found no bodies. In the administrator's office there was nothing unusual. Finally, Amy found the surgery.

She closed the door, opened the instrument cabinet, removed her suit and rolled up her shirtsleeve. The wounds of her Brilton's efforts were now healed. Only the great wide scars remained. Amy stared at new boils, which had begun itching, a day ago. She clenched her jaw, and turned the laser

on, set the penetration to light. It bit deep still, as it burned at its predetermined depth, below the flesh.

Amy cut, almost collapsing from the pain, as sweat began to form on her brow. A trail of blood and yellow fluid ran down her arm. The sweat filled her eyes. She gritted her teeth and gasped as the laser knife ran up the side of a worm, exposing its white writhing body. One last twist, and the parasite and a piece of her flesh, were lying on the tray.

Amy sat back, gasping, as she stared at the thing, rolling around on the metal. Slowly, she ran the laser over the worm and sliced it up into several sections, until it stopped all movement.

She looked at her arm and reached for the bandage. Once applied, it would act as an antibiotic and repel the bleeding. Bandaged, she collapsed onto a bed and looked at the ceiling and gasped for air. Slowly, she looked at another throbbing sore, further up her arm, demanding to be scratched.

Lying back, Amy wondered how many of these wretched creatures still resided, inside her body. She slept for the next three hours.

For two more days, she continued the operations, becoming quite adept, at pulling the worms from her body.

The pain of the operations no longer showed on her face. Amy had become determined to survive, and managed to raise her pain threshold. She wouldn't give in to the parasites. In two days, she had removed twenty-eight of them. The scars from

the early operations healed well and Amy continued to operate, as the boils appeared, one after the other. Even two, which had appeared on her cheek, were no longer beyond her will.

Amy glanced at the mirror, on the third day. The boils seemed to be diminishing. There were only two new ones, this day. She grinned. They too, would be gone, soon. She looked at the scars, which ran the length of her body, mainly on her arms and face. It seemed that she would survive, but there would be payment for this terrible thing, which had happened to her.

Amy also knew that she had changed, over the past week. She had hardened. The death of her parents had been brought home to her. She resented it, and the death of her friends would never be forgiven or forgotten. She vowed it. Somehow, she would escape. She would even the score. She swore it. The agonizing death of her lover Brilton, would be avenged. As she stared at the scars, she saw how hideous her features had now become. The reflection, in the mirror, screamed for revenge. Hate shone from her eyes. Was that really, how she looked? Was it really, how she felt? She looked hideous.

She looked at her face. It was not as bad as the rest of her body. Most of the damage had been to her arms and torso. However, her face showed a tough hardened conviction. She was going to even the score.

She picked up a rifle and dressed, putting on her suit. With the helmet fastened, she walked out, into the street. Twenty minutes later, she was down at the water's edge, looking south. It appeared that thin clouds were approaching, the land. Amy had heard from her papa, that there was such a thing as rain, in the south. She had never really believed in rain, until she visited the moist planet, of Jilta.

Amy scanned the shoreline, back towards the buildings. A black swarm rose from the water, and began to buzz around her. She pulled out a small net from her belt, and drew it through the air, three times. She looked at the insects, which she had caught. If she were fortunate, she could develop a poison, to kill them. She examined the catch. There were several dozen live specimens, which she sealed into a jar, and placed into her pocket.

There was a movement to her left, near a house. Amy stared. Through the haze of insects, there stood a naked male, then a female and four others, behind her.

Amy waved. They did not respond. They began to edge, slowly, towards to her. There was nothing civilized looking about them.

Amy fired. One down, two, and then all six, were lying in the dust, with parasites flickering from the wounds.

Tentatively, Amy walked over the sand, which drifted into the air, around her feet. Only paces away, she fired another six volleys into the host bodies.

Amy's eyes blazed with excitement, as she filled the host bodies with laser fire. Lowering the rifle, she began the task of waiting.

A few minutes, later complete parasites began to slither away from the wounds, of their hosts. Slowly they drew their full length, out from the bodies. The largest parasite was a full pac, long.

Amy swallowed and fired. Again and again, she shot the parasites to pieces. None arrived at the water's edge, to find sanctuary.

Once the carnage was over, Amy placed sections of the parasites in more jars and clipped them to her belt. She looked up, as greater insect swarms seemed to close in, on her.

Amy looked at them. Each and every insect, on this forsaken planet, was her enemy. She would destroy them all. Were the insects controlled by a singular mind, or were they controlled individually? She wondered. It mattered not; she hated them, no matter what made them exist.

In quick time, Amy was through the control lock, which she had rigged up, in the center at the hospital. She looked at the flashing alarms.

Ω

Anki watched the screens, as she circled hundreds of Ks overhead. There seemed to be little evidence of life, yet the planet was not desolated. The waters were still laden with small water life and

there seemed to be odd, large life forms occasionally, over the planet's surface, but there was no evidence of advanced civilization. She had come out of warp drive, two hours ago and there was no sign of her friends.

She watched the screens, as she picked up a faint distress signal, beaming up, from down south. It was coming, from just over the horizon. Setting the course of her yacht, she streaked over the red planet.

As she drew closer, she instructed the automatic pilot to take the yacht down.

She was waiting patiently, by the screens, when all of a sudden the image changed, from static, to one of Amy.

"Amy!" cried Anki, with delight.

"Anki?" came back the tentative reply. "Is that really you?"

"Sure is, adopted sister. Where have you been the past few hours, and where are the others?" Anki was delighted, to have her friends back.

Amy looked away, from the screen and Anki could tell there was something strange, about her face.

Amy returned her gaze and smiled. "I'm glad it is you, Anki, but there are no others. I'm the only survivor, on the planet."

"But..."

"Anki..." came the calming voice, "You must not set foot on this planet. It is a product of evil, which

has destroyed all human life, including our friends. I was fortunate to survive. You may or may not, be that fortunate. I want you to leave for Jilta now and never return. Do you hear me?"

Anki shook her head. She set her head squarely in front of the screen, and stared at her old friend. "Amy, you saved my life too many times, to order me away. I'm coming down. You can either accept my arrival, or I'll work out how to survive, as you have. Do you understand that?"

Amy knew how stubborn her friend was, even to the point of stupidity. "I concede your desire to make life hard for me. You may set down on the planet, but only, as per my instructions. Understand?"

Anki understood. "Yes. I'm on my way."

Ω

An hour later, Anki had stripped off her helmet and suit, in the Cowra hospital. Her face was beaming until she saw the arms and face, of her friend. A cold shiver ran down her body.

Amy tried to force a smile, but simply said, as she turned and walked away, "Good to see you. I still wish you had not come. Follow me, and I'll show you what is happening."

Anki followed; stunned by the cold welcome, which she had just received from her best friend. Anki had just come out of warp drive and her friend

was usually a warm and excitable person. Amy emitted only coolness and tension, now.

Amy dimmed the lights, in the administration quarters and flicked on a pair of screens, which she had prepared for such an eventuality. In case she did not survive, there was a movie, as her legacy, to warn of the dangers, on Rambus.

Anki swallowed, as she watched the full gory film of the insects, the hosts and the operations. Hundreds of skeletons had been found, rotted. Some were in mass graves and others were scattered, in the desert. Anki could feel Amy's pain, as the film showed more and more of Amy's operations, without anesthetic.

Next, was the tour of the laboratories, where Amy insisted that they both wear suits and helmets, as a precautionary measure.

Two hours after setting foot on the red planet, Anki now fully understood, what had happened.

They were sitting in the hospital lounge and Anki asked, "What are you doing here, now? I understand that you're free from the insect's."

Amy shook her head; looked towards the glass roof and the stars beyond, into the blackened night. "There must be a way of destroying these insects and their hideous parasitic larvae, and I want to find it. Once a cure is found, then I'll leave." Amy turned to Anki, and stared straight into her eyes. Amy's stare scared Anki, and she tried not to show it.

Amy continued. "This won't be the only planet, which has suffered like this, at the hands of the pirates. How many others, are victims, like this one?"

Anki looked away and slowly returned her gaze. "I have heard that the pirates have destroyed between fifteen to eighteen planets. The reports vary."

Amy polished her gun. She then sat back, as though to signal that her point had been made. Slowly she nodded, and looked up, to the stars. "How many dead, the same as here?" There was no reply. She continued. "I intend to find who did this, and return them a meeting, to repay them, for the dead.

"Oh, and it may not just be enemy soldiers, who took out Rambus," continued Amy. "The enemy of this planet is a calculating enemy, who has taken great pains to destroy a whole planet, for no apparent reason. This planet and its people never hurt anyone." Amy clenched her teeth. "I'll take revenge, and enjoy their blood that I'll spill! I swear it. This is my sworn destiny. I'll avenge. I swear, I'll even the score, and by the Torren, it is right to do so."

Anki swallowed. She did not know this new Amy.

Anki was silent for a moment, and then spoke, slowly. Her voice had a slight tremor. "Amy, I don't know how to tell you... this, but... the reason that the pirates struck here, was because of me. I was their

target; they wanted to take me as ransom, to attack the Temple. My father told me. He used me as bait, for them and my being here, was only accidental. It could have been any other planet. My father and I are equally to blame.”

“Ha!” scoffed Amy, as she rose. “Don’t try to pass any of that, onto me, Anki. I know you too well. I love the Temple. Sure, it may have been the so-called reason for the pirates being here, but they did not have to destroy the planet, and torture every human being, here. You were not here by then. They did not have to do it, but they did it, anyway. That was a purely evil force, and an equally resistive new force will meet it. I’ll be that new force, Anki. May the future be my witness.” Amy holstered her gun.

“Single individual human beings can have big effects in this galaxy.” Amy grabbed Anki’s hand, to allow her fingers feel the contours, of Amy’s scarred face. “If you can’t stomach it, you need to leave.”

Anki held Amy’s hands to her own face and cried.

ψ

ENEMY ON RAMBUS

The two women spent the next three days, either in the laboratory or on the shoreline.

Anki fired again, at a host. That made six, which they had found, this morning. They were becoming more difficult, to find. The women knew that there were at least a hundred of them, but they seemed to hide, now.

Anki wiped her visor, as rain pelted down. It seemed that they were in for a dust storm from the north as well, and a thunder storm, from the south. The result was raining sludge and mud. It was dangerous to stay outside, with visibility hampered, so they began to return to the hospital.

Amy was signaling from twenty paces away. Already, their suits had lost their bluish silver color, because of the red, of the rain.

Anki waved in return and looked up, as the sky became completely blotted out, by the rolling black and red swirling clouds. It was as though the clouds were warring, with each other. Sheet lightning exploded above, followed by its clap of thunder.

Anki hurried, as she caught up with her companion. "It looks like it is going to get serious, up there."

Amy nodded. "Yes, we had better get in, under cover," she screamed, above the rain and the thunder.

"By Torren! Look!" screamed Anki, as she pointed, overhead. Green laser fire crisscrossed, out of and through, the clouds. More fire, and then red laser return fire erupted. An explosion above shook the heavens and the shockwave threw the girls, to the ground.

"Follow me!" screamed Anki. "They are back!"

Amy ran with her. "Who? Who is it?" she called, after her friend.

"Pirates!" yelled Anki as she scrambled through the mud, after being thrown down by the force of another explosion, overhead in the clouds.

"Pirates? Where?"

"Up there! We have little time, to get out of here!"

"They are not attacking us. Who else?" called Amy.

"They are being fought, by Templar Guards," called back Anki.

Amy did not understand, but followed.

They slammed the hatch to Anki's yacht tight, and in two minutes, the craft had risen and then slammed, into the surface of the lake. There was no chance of making any escape, overhead.

Ω

The Templar Frigate *Barouser* struck hard, at the first pirate destroyer.

A frigate was a special Templar design. In comparison to Federation military, the ship was smaller than a destroyer; it possessed no fighters and had no interceptors. Its sole purpose was to search out and destroy pirate shipping. It had no attack potential against a planet uprising, none against a fleet of interceptors or fighters. It couldn't attack any mass targets, but it could and was designed to attack any Federation ship, which was unfortunate enough to attack it, with its fleet of fighters or interceptors. It was a singular killer, of destroyers and cruisers.

The frigate's defense was intensive. The craft was ten times the length of an interceptor, was slower than an interceptor, but was able to outmaneuver and outpace any destroyer or cruiser, in the Federation. Each frigate contained a crew of twenty-eight, had three officers, and two hundred and thirty laser and missile ports. The skin of the ship was a layer of steel, interlaid with nylop and titanium webbing thread.

The captain of the lead frigate looked at the screens, which revealed four destroyers and one cruiser, now edging over the Rambus horizon. He glanced at other screens, which showed the faces of the two other frigate captains, under his command.

Frigates hunted, in packs of three. They had no idea when the pirates would appear. The commander of this frigate only knew that they would appear. He

studied them, as they drew closer. Once, he had encountered a pirate destroyer that had trapped a Templar freighter, which he had used as bait. The destroyer had put up resistance for only five minutes, before it was torn to pieces.

The commander plotted a course, for the outside destroyer. The three frigates would select only one target, one single destroyer. If the enemy launched its other craft, especially the cruiser, then it would be effectively disarmed.

The commander grinned. It seemed that the pirates were willing to engage, what appeared to them, a smaller and inferior fleet. It was this underestimation of killing power of the frigates, which was their deadly advantage.

Ω

The command-chief of the pirates sat on the bridge of the *Cruiser Gendale*. He had overseen the *reduction* of the planet's human life, seven years ago. He then had almost been *liquidated* himself, as a consequence of losing the Templar girl. He wouldn't make the same error, again.

He watched, as the three unusual craft came over the horizon. The planet slowly revolved, below them. The position of the humans had been isolated, in to the township of Cowra. He watched, as the screens showed a great storm from the sea, now

mixing with a large dust cloud, coming down from the north.

The chief leaned across his consol. His face was ruddy and his clothes civilian. His blue eyes gleamed, contrasting with his red face and blond hair, as he gave the order. "Have two interceptors with half cover, go out down to the planet to intercept the targets."

His second in command nodded, and spoke through to the flight deck. Moments later, eight small attack craft were seen leaving, the fleet.

Ω

The commander of the lead frigate diverted his attention for a moment, down towards the planet's atmosphere. One attack from his weaponry exploded three of the fighters, but the interceptors continued downwards, into the atmosphere. His lasers followed them down, but frigates couldn't survive atmospheres, nor could they survive the heavier gravity.

The frigates still shot at the smaller craft, as they pulled out of range, too close to the planet's surface to follow.

The commander glared at his enemy and peeled off, to port, to resume the engagement of the first of the destroyers.

It was only moments later that the first of the destroyers, was ablaze. The frigates had passed one

after the other, in a broadside display of flashing lasers and rockets. The destroyer had taken a bad strike directly into the hanger quarters. Two fighters inside had exploded, as lasers struck.

In return, rockets from the destroyer exploded harmlessly, against the frigate's heavily layered armor plating.

The commander of the frigates turned his force, to bear upon the next destroyer.

Immediately, interceptors from the cruiser were let loose. They raced toward their mark, dancing around the frigate's lasers. Simultaneously, the cruiser blasted away with cannons, laser fire and rockets.

The frigates shook; all the fire power of the other destroyers plus the interceptor's, was concentrated on one frigate, the lead ship.

One atomic explosion, after the other, lit the black universe. The frigates retaliated, with atomics of their own.

The heavens appeared like a fireworks display of exploding orange, red and green laser fire. The lead frigate was already beginning to glow; some of its lasers were non-operational.

Within the hull of the frigates, was refrigerated piping, weaving in and out of the armor plating, to take the radiant heat, and dispel it to the cooler side of the ship.

The second destroyer began to rupture. The frigates had again penetrated the hanger doors,

before they closed. The great craft began to split, along its centerline with massive seams exploding, as gas erupted into space, and its outer shell blasted apart.

The frigates carried on, towards the last destroyer, when a single interceptor was launched, from the cruiser. The frigates were only Ks away, as a sole interceptor dove down, in amongst them.

Ω

The captain of the second frigate stared at the single craft, as it closed in on them. It loosed no rockets or cannon fire, but fire was increasing from the cruiser as it began to swing around, showing only its proposhield, making lasers inoperative against it.

The first frigate passed the interceptor and was bearing down on the cruiser when the interceptor exploded. The light of the explosion sent all imagery, out of commission. The interceptor had been packed with twenty-eight atomic warheads, a drone. It continued exploding. It was a disguised *defense sortie craft*, a weapon, unseen, for thousands of years.

Ω

The commander of the frigate pack was in the second ship. His world had gone insane; the ship had lost gyro power, while instruments exploded on the

bridge, men were being thrown through the cabin; and screens showed sections of the frigate, ripping apart. The cooling had seized, and they were still in the center of a searing atomic fireball. The gravity plates ceased to be operable, and there was no response from the power sections. Finally, the life that the commander had known and enjoyed, fell apart. The ship started to buckle; the air escaped and with one last explosion, all the onboard atomics ignited, and the ship fragmented, into a billion pieces.

The command-chief of the pirate cruiser smiled, as the fireball began to die away. There was only the front frigate, remaining. That frigate now pulled away from the battle. Its strength lay, in hunting in packs. Its commander knew that to engage in battle now, would be to throw away his ship, and crew.

As the chief of the pirates called for damage reports, the frigate retreated back, to the far side of the planet.

The command-chief smiled. He had an admirable enemy, who was only prepared to battle, on his own terms. Those small craft were deadly, but they had no place on a planet. He ordered his interceptors, onto the planet, to pick up their quarry. Once the women were aboard, the frigate out there would be like a predator, without teeth.

The pirate interceptors landed in the township of Cowra. The leader of the four crewmen stepped out of the small craft. There was no sign of the girl or

her playboy friends. He looked around, and ordered that the hospital be searched.

They did find the experiments, which the girl had been conducting, but she was nowhere, to be found. As per the data they had received, the girl Amy could be used to lure the Master Templar's daughter into surrender, when she arrived in a day or two.

The chief on the cruiser looked anxious, as the ship slowly docked into orbit, over the small town. They had to be there. What if he was wrong? What if the Master Templar's daughter had somehow arrived, earlier? What if the speed of the Templar's yacht, was faster than their spies had believed? They may have already gone, days ago.

The leader of the ground crew was now reporting in. The chief watched as the crew stood in the background. It seemed that there must be rain.

"Sir," addressed the leader from the ground, as he wiped red mud from his visor. "We can't find any of the personnel; however, we do have a daily diary, which had been filled out using today's date. As we did not see any ship leave the area, and the ship that they arrived in is still here, then it is fair to say that they will be here, on the planet, somewhere. My belief is that they will be hiding somewhere, in the town."

The chief nodded, deliberating. "That is good. So, they are still there. I have just received another report, from the old homestead. All of her companion's dead bodies have been found. They

were victim to the insects. The girl must be alone. What do you suggest?

“Sir, I should think a patrol of two dozen would have this town searched, within thirty hours. If she’s here, then she will be found.” He had to wipe his visor, in order to see, again.



The first pirates arrive on Rambus

“Very well. I’ll send you a full complement of a patrol, plus defenders. I understand that experiments have been taking place, so I’ll be sending down two biologists. They are representatives of our patrons, so treat them well.”

“Yes sir.”

The screen went out, and the chief stood. He looked at the most recent damage report. The cruiser should be fairly functional, in twenty hours’ time. It had received minor damage. The remaining destroyer was less fortunate. Its bridge and communications section was out of commission, and three of its senior executives were dead. Still, it would survive. There remained much work, to place it again, into active condition. He sighed. Those Templars were good, out there. That craft they traveled in would prove a problem, not just to the pirates, but also to those, who supported them.

Ω

The leader of the pirate ground forces watched, as the second ferry touched down. The first pirate troops were already on their way, to search half the town’s buildings. Shots could be heard as the troops engaged the parasite’s hosts.

The leader escorted the biologists, into the hospital. Container after container was being landed, in after them.

Then, more scientists arrived, along with accommodation units. Two transports were now hovering, overhead. They would drop off the containers that would each support six men, for a period of ten days.

The leader of the ground forces grinned. It seemed that the chief upstairs, was not about to risk that the girl might escape him. Everything was coming down: sound amplifiers, sonic searchers, heat seekers, and even sniffer machines. He shook his head, as the next container was lowered; a kitchen.

He stood back and viewed the camp. They were now a party of seventy-two and still growing.

The rain had not let up and its continual sludge resulted in a slippery arrival, for his crew.

The leader looked out to over the water. It was comparatively calm, even allowing for the force of the winds, which had been whipped up by the storm. It too, was brown, with very small waves. He looked harder and wondered. Yes; he wondered.

Lightning struck again, overhead and he received the message, which said that the transports were pulling out; because the winds were now too strong. They had already lost one container, along with three injured men. They would have to do the best they could, with what had already arrived, until the weather eased.

The leader smiled, as he read the report. The static, from the clouds overhead, meant that they were not receiving radio. That, along with the dust

clouds stopping laser signals, meant that the only means of communication was via the ferries, which traveled beyond the planet and back, to the cruiser.

The wind grabbed the sheet, with the message and blew it, away out over the water, where it was lost. Again, lightning lit the sky, across the heavens. Indeed, it was getting violent up there. Clouds began to crash down, upon each other. Lighting was flashing through the sky and the sludge belted remorselessly, down onto them.

Most of the men had been called back, from their search. Radios were working locally, but the light from the sun had been blotted out. It was as if it was night-time.

The leader of the ground forces, Oblone, screamed to some of the troops, as they tried to secure one of the containers.

“Get those in, tighter,” he yelled.

The containers were almost secure. The wind was rising, and it was becoming difficult to stand. Oblone cursed, as he was blown against a container wall. He pulled away, ripping his suit lining. His back hurt, but he figured that he could stand the pain, for a little longer.

He stepped into the *decam 1* container, which would clear off all the mud from his suit, and electrify any bacteria, insects or virus, which may have entered with him.

Quickly he then stepped into *decam 2*, where he stripped off, and he then strode into *decam 3*, which electronically, gave him a final inspection.

Oblone dressed, and was given the green light, to enter the corridor and go into the duty section, of the Admin Container. He flicked on the screens, and all the data about their quarry began to scroll down.

He bypassed the historical information and punched in: *Weather, Storms*. He found what he was looking for. The storms in the south of Rambus were greatest, at this time of year, and worse at this section of the *Lake Torren*. Storms were known to last fifteen days, and were instigated by the irregular activity of solar storms. Winds were not uncommon at one hundred and fifty Ks per hour.

Oblone sat back, and looked at the monitor, which showed an example of the type of activity that he could expect. The sun heated *Lake Torren*. That in turn, drew up moisture into the air, to form clouds. These in turn, created a draft, inflowing from the desert regions. The air across the desert was negatively charged, while that from the water was positive. The result was explosion after explosion, in the upper atmosphere.

The ensuing rain was a potent mixture of sludge, which when dry, was used as solid soil for plant growth by the settlers. This was why the settlement was at Cowra. The settlers could grow plants and vegetables there.

When the planet moved away from the sun, the storms abated.

Oblone looked at the screen. It seemed that the storm had only just begun. According to his data, the storm time shouldn't have been for another two days, yet. There would be another ten days before it petered out.

"Poranne," he called out.

His second in charge answered, from the other side of the container. He was installing more compuscreens and linking them to the hospital data center. "Yes, boss," he replied.

"Are all of the men inside?"

"All; except those who are securing the container compound, to the hospital. They are having to build a separate link between the two, but they should have it complete, within three hours."

"Fine. Are there any communications alive, with upstairs?"

"No, I hold out little hope for that, until this weather clears. Is it always like this?"

"No, but it will take up to ten days to clear, and I don't think we will have that long. How far can ground radio travel?"

"About two hundred pacs, but we can set up relay points and have the search parties work in groups, within a hundred pacs of each other, and thus, keep in touch."

Oblone nodded. He also had thought of that. "When is the next ferry due back?"

Poranne moved out, away from the rear of the container and handed a screen to a nearby technician. "In about twenty minutes." The technician moved away, into the next container through the interlocking doors.

Oblone sat there; drumming his fingers on the bench.

Ω

The chief watched, as the ferry departed the cruiser. There had to be a better method of communications. He also had checked the weather data, and they did not have ten days to wait. Certainly, they had the cruiser in a defensible position, but if any more of those frigates turned up, the tables would be turned. Who knew if they had sent for reinforcements, or even if there were more, already on the way?

Added to that, the frigate out there wouldn't merely be waiting by, as they abducted the female known as Amy. It would be plotting something.

If the Master Templar's daughter appeared, would there be a sudden rush to abduct her from both sides, putting the ground mission in danger?

He looked at the mass of clouds and dust that swirled around, over thousands of Ks across. Up here, the whole thing made sense, but he wondered what the conditions were really like in Cowra.

The screen changed, to show the frigate still out there, watching every move they were making. Well, it could watch all it wanted. There was little it could do; right now.

There was little that the chief could do, either. All his other destroyer had to do was to stay close to the cruiser, until they warped out; at the end of the raid.

Ω

The next day, the winds had increased and the mud, which was being slung down from the heavens, cut into the landing capabilities of even the ferry. It was decided that it would have to wait, aloft.

The search continued, however. From house to house the troops probed for the girl.

By the fourth day the results showed nothing. No sign of her had been found. The winds had died down slightly, and the ferry was now operating again, much to the relief of the chief.

Oblone found himself at the shoreline, again. He could see the waters, as they rolled with the turbulence. He knew that the weed in the water kept the surface from being choppy, but the overall swell was still evident.

He wiped the mud from his visor and wondered if there was not another craft here, on the planet. There had been no sign of the Master Templar's daughter, or her yacht. Was it possible that the

capabilities of that craft had been inaccurate and Anki was on the planet with Amy, in the Master Templar's yacht?

Ω

Oblone wondered. They could be out in the desert, covered by tons of sand and mud by now, but that would inhibit their escape. More likely, if he were they, he would have escaped, into *Lake Torren*.

He grabbed the rail of what was left of the settler's jetty, as he stared past his muddy helmet. His vision only reached a few hundred paces. He had a feeling, though.

Oblone turned, and was back two hours later, with a team of scientists, who were not impressed about being dragged out, to the water's edge.

"Is there any way that you can tell?" Oblone yelled, to be heard above the roar and moan of the wind, as it pounded his helmet.

"We can only try, but I don't like our chances," screamed back the head scientist.

Oblone stared out, at the waters. They were out there; he was certain of it; now.

Ω

The next day, testing facilities had been set up. The wind had lessened and the rain seemed to have increased, but without the mud.

On the shore, they had secured a series of tents to the old jetty. There was now a hum of activity around the water's edge.

They had managed to get the ferry alongside. The wind still whipped around them, but it was safe. Oblone followed the last man, aboard.

Moments later, they were heading out, over the water, with the scientific testing equipment.

The message from the cruiser said that now was the eye in the storm overhead, and that they should be able to get direct transmission, from ship, to the ferry.

It did not take long to find it.

Oblone stared at the computer-enhanced sound waves, which floated over the screen. He turned to the view screen. The chief's image was there. "Sir," he said. "We do have confirmation that there is a machine operating down there, but due to the complicated nature of the vegetation we can't locate its exact position."

"I see," returned the knowing reply. "Can you tell if the machine is inhabited, or what shape it is?"

"No, sir. We're unable to tell if it is moving, or if there is someone aboard, but I would say it was a K deep, at least. I can't tell exactly, with this thick weed all over the surface."

The chief nodded. He also knew of the obstructional properties of the weed. The cruiser had likewise attempted to use its sensors, to locate the craft but had failed, due to the refracting effects of

the plant life. The cruiser had even failed, in its attempt to locate the bottom of the lake. "I'll be sending you down a submersible," he said, as he turned the screen off.

ψ

UNDER THE GREAT LAKE

Amy had become very restless. During the times that they had surfaced, she had spotted the enemy and its camp through the driving rain, twice. Her desire was to go out and kill them, to kill them all, even if it meant the end of her own life. She did not care for herself, but rather for the desire for an exacting of vengeance, through hate. It was hate, which had enabled her to survive, until now. It would serve her in the future too.

Four days ago, Anki had removed a parasite, from the base of Amy's neck, and since that time, there had been no new boils. It probably meant that she was free of the parasites. That was small relief. Amy had become so used to the pain and ugliness that she had been turned into. It seemed that the pain of each operation made her more determined, for revenge.

Now that the enemy was overhead, it made sense they were being searched for.

Anki's face appeared, on the wall screen. Amy sat up, on the bunk.

Anki said, "It seems as though we finally have visitors, down here. You were correct; they were not prepared to wait, until the end of the storm.

“The monitors show a submersible up there, at the top of the weed. It will take a few hours to cut its way through.”

“Thanks, Anki. On my way up; now.” Amy stood, and pulled on her shocksuit and boots. She would take care of this submersible craft, which had just entered her domain. They had been rehearsing for this moment, for days now.

The Master Templar’s yacht was equipped with many things not issued as standard, for its make. The yacht was equipped with sonar and small missile systems, as well as a thicker than usual hull.

The yacht began to descend, without using any motors.

The downward dive continued for a thousand pacs, stopping when it nestled, onto the surface of a ledge.

Amy watched the screens, as their enemy was now using sonar, to locate them. As long as they remained motionless, they could remain hidden for some time, but eventually the enemy's heat monitors would detect them. There was little at this depth that would absorb heat, and heat was impossible to contain, within the yacht.

Amy watched the direction of the submersible enemy, as it seemed to be sweeping Lake Torren with its sonar. Below them, at seven thousand pacs, was another horizontal layer of weed. It was thinner than that on the surface, and below it, was a mystery. No one had ever been down that far, before. There was

never any reason to. Below that layer; could be more of the lake, or simply the bottom. No one knew.

The view screens were showing pitch-black. The only signs of life were the occasional sounds of the enemy.

The submersible had to cut through the weed, before it could submerge.

The captain of the submersible knew how to use his ship, like a weapon. He watched the sky recede, with its swirling morass of clouds, to change from being only a faint reflection through the top of the water, to nothing, as his ship cut its way, down to the clearer depths, below.

The captain sat on the small submersible's bridge, watching his scopes and screens. There was a crew of three others. Finally, he was clear of the weed. He could pick up no movement, so he threw on his lights and the whole of the underside of the weed came to life.

Above, was the weed that hung in the water, for seventy pacs thick. Lengths of it dangled down, into the deeper waters, trailing like tendrils, from a single gigantic predator life form.

With lights ablaze, the small submersible finally dived down. It was quickly scanning the depths for the great tendrils of weed. After minutes, the sub was finally clear of all weed. It dimmed its lights.

Ω

Amy watched the screen, as the pulses grew brighter. She turned to Anki, "The enemy is closing. I believe it may have picked up our heat-leak."

Anki watched, from the side. Their craft was still sitting on the ledge, a K away from the submersible. She took a deep breath and said, "Time to move."

Amy nodded and engaged drives and lights. The chase was on. The Templar yacht began its dive; to deeper depths.

Like a spider after its fly, the submersible threw its drives into full power and rotors began to hum. Lights blazed, spreading out in all directions. The machine moved down. The submersible could outrun and out flank the yacht, which was not designed as an underwater warrior.

As the distance between them lessened, the yacht fired out with lasers, but the distance was still too great to take effect.

The submersible fired a torpedo, then another.

As they homed in on their target, the yacht dove down the side of an abutting cliff face. The torpedoes exploded at the stroke of Amy's lasers. There was now only three hundred pacs distance between the two machines.

The yacht drifted down the rock face, with its pursuer behind.

"Now!" cried Amy, and tree flashes of laser knifed through the water, to hit an extended ridge, up on the cliff. Again, it flashed and finally, the overhang started to collapse.

The yacht pulled down, hard to port.

The submersible followed, apparently too late to escape the well laid trap.

Amy pressed full ahead and upward, dimmed the lights and left the swirling rocks and submersible craft to continue to tumble down, into the dark depths of the unknown.

Anki stepped back from the screen and nodded. The screen had gone black. None of the monitors reported any mechanical or visual response. "It appears that you have destroyed it."

Amy looked up, as she studied the screens. They were silent and stayed that way, for seven minutes.

However, like an unwelcome nightmare, the sound of the submersible came again, echoing through the cabin amplifiers.

Three minutes later, the lights of the submersible were behind them and gaining.

"Amy, what do we do now?" asked Anki, with fear on her face.

Amy directed the yacht towards the surface. The weed was only five hundred paces above them. She slapped at the laser controls, which caused the explosion of three torpedoes that had been closing in, on them.

The weed was getting closer.

Amy smiled, with a hint of hate in her eyes. "We're not finished...."

The first tendrils of the weed lay, just above.

Amy threw the yacht up and turned off the lights. They would rely on the computer, now.

Anki held her breath. They were surrounded on all sides, by weed, which they had spent days before, carving into a tunnel.

The pair listened. Their scanners were useless, amongst the weed, so close to the surface. Carefully listening, they could hear the slow sound, of the motors of the submersible. He too, had turned his lights off and was following the escape tunnel, with sonar.

Suddenly, there was silence. Anki put her hand to her mouth and bit her finger. How close was he?

A minute later, he began to move again. It seemed that he was getting nearer.

Amy waited another minute and breathed, "Now!" She switched on the lights and then blasted with lasers. As predicted, the enemy was caught, following the trail of the tunnel, blindly. It had not expected to find Amy waiting, so close.

Immediately, the submersible responded with lasers and torpedoes, but it was too late. The yacht had moved, just after the initial strike.

Amy had the computer take over the control of the yacht's navigation. As the coordinates of the tunnel and its turns were already in the yacht's computer, the yacht could now outrun the submersible.

Three times, the yacht caught the submersible.

Again, the submersible was about to be sprung, but instead, it sent a series of three torpedoes, loose amongst the weed. Harmlessly, they exploded, but created enough force waves, to throw the yacht into the weed.

Amy thrust the ship into reverse, they did not move. They were stuck, tangled in the thicker strands. Lasers flashed out. That gave away their position, but they were free of the weed.

"No way to win now, Anki, except by getting out," shouted Amy. The viewscreens showed the surface; thirty pacs away. They blasted through the top weed and crashed through the first waves.

Amy threw the drives over to lift, and the yacht was aloft into the freedom of air.

The screens showed that the storm was still severe. The ferry had receded to the safety of the shoreline, and the rain was again turning to sludge. The eye of the cyclone had moved outwards, to the center of Lake Torren. Seven seconds later, and the view of the lake was obscured by the brown dark image of the clouds, as they convulsed overhead.

The craft began to rock and shudder as the clouds hurled mud onto the yacht.

Anki held on tight, to the rails of the little bridge, as Amy grinned.

Just as quickly, they were in clear blue sky heading for the openness of the upper atmosphere and space. Unlike some of the larger private yachts, they did not have the facility to ionize their outer hull

while on a planet. This in turn, meant that the craft had to be free of the atmosphere, before it could enter its warp-drive state. It actually had to separate the physical universe from the craft, or the machine could malfunction.

The yacht shot through the outer atmosphere, leaving the twirling clouds behind.

Ω

The chief sat on the bridge of the cruiser. Damn those surface conditions! The Master Templar's daughter had arrived early.

He knew that it was only a matter of time, before they would try their escape. The submersible had been sending reports to base and they in turn, had been relayed up by ferry.

The chief watched, as his three interceptors now swooped down, into the atmosphere. Cannons blazed and lasers flashed, through the sky. The small yacht ducked and weaved and withdrew down, once again to the refuge of the swirling mass of clouds.

The interceptors cruised overhead, not getting drawn into the cloud masses.

The chief waited. This time, that quarry wouldn't escape him.

The second-chief on the bridge spoke. "Chief, there they are! Coming into the eye of the storm."

The chief slammed his fist down. "Strike, you fool!"

He had no sooner commanded, when a white light lanced down, from the large cruiser.

He sat back and watched his smooth team of subordinates, as they now took control. He smiled.

Ω

Amy was thrown from her seat, against the far corner of the bridge. She cursed, as she tried to get up, but found the falling twisting descent of the craft far too much.

They had only momentarily escaped the planet to be now forced, tumbling down, into its atmosphere. They had been struck and damaged by an unseen laser source. The yacht was helplessly falling.

Amy looked up at the screens, which showed the water looming ahead, rapidly. She braced herself and was thrown into the other wall, upon impact. She cursed again, as her head smashed into the bench top.

The leader of the ground forces, Oblone, had received a message from a ferry, which had managed to beat the weather and fire a missile with its message, into the camp, about the latest strike.

Oblone threw on his suit and had a patrol of thirty ready, alongside a small carrier.

"No way!" screamed the driver. "You will die out there. That weather will kill you. One gust in the wrong direction and you can be smashed down onto the ground, into splinters. We will all be dead."

Oblone pulled out his laser, held it to the driver's visor and screamed, "I think the wind and this *grutting*⁶ mud has clouded my hearing, comrade. Can you give it to me, again!"

The driver stared at the gun and swallowed. He knew Oblone would use it. He walked to the carrier; opened the doors and beckoned them quickly in, through the driving rain.

In two minutes, the craft was in the air. Oblone was in the front, beside the driver. He watched from the window, as the craft was thrown around, by a 150 K down-wind. The ground loomed up from between five hundred pacs, to twenty pacs, in a matter of seconds and as the driver accelerated upwards, and they were then thrown sideways.

The driver cursed and during the first twenty seconds, Oblone counted four instances in which they would all have been killed, if it were not for this driver's skill.

Ω

As the ferry left the shore, the wind appeared to die down, and finally the craft came more under the control of the driver. Ten minutes later, and there

⁶ **DEFINITION:** **Grut**, n. Grutting: A word used in a cursory manner, slang. Origin: The Confederated Council of Planets administrative planet Tilan. A grut was an instrument used to artificially inseminate wild animals for domestication purposes, with outer planet genes. *Source; SEARFINDERS INDEX, pp. 1239-43.*

was no land to be seen, only water and surface weed, in all directions.

Oblone looked through the optical navigator. They were now receiving directions from the cruiser.

"There!" pointed Oblone.

The driver had already seen the disabled yacht, stranded partly in the water.

Oblone grinned. "You know Prlan," he said to the driver. "You're exceptionally good. I could never have gotten us through that weather."

Prlan gave a sideways glance at Oblone. "You're the son of a..." and the craft dropped three hundred paces in two seconds.

Oblone was not ready for the rapid descent, and had to restrain himself, from being thrown from the chair. He stared at Prlan who merely smiled, and said, "We're here. The yacht is directly below us."

Oblone steadied himself, on his feet and went back to the cabin sections. This driver could wait. First; they needed to secure the craft below and its occupants.

The rear door was open. Oblone looked below, to the white surface of the yacht. He jumped and landed in the weed-infested water, nearby the yacht. As he lifted his legs to try to get onto the craft, others fell into the water, next to him.

His orders had been that the occupants were not to be killed. They could be injured, but if anyone killed one of them, that person would be tortured,

before being killed in turn, later. His men understood that plainly. They had already seen Oblone, in action.

The sky was now finally fairly clear, and blue, with no indication of the hammering the shore was receiving, hundreds of Ks away.

The water and weed supported his weight, up to his thighs. Oblone struck the door, but received no answer. He waved and a crate of explosives was dropped, from above. Oblone carefully set a dozen small charges, around the hatch lines.

Ω

Amy awoke, with the sound of pounding in her ears. She looked around herself. The craft was in the water, on a fifteen degree tilt. The screens were still active and showed many white suited troopers outside on the yacht hull, and in the water.

"Pirates!" she screamed, with a gleam of joy in her eyes. She slid over to Anki and tried to revive her. She was out cold. Amy then swung around and grabbed a rifle. She crawled to the grenade locker, and heard them packing the hinges of the door. It wouldn't be long.

Quickly, Amy ducked down and shoved three small jars into her belt. She crouched by the far wall, waiting for the door to explode.

She fell backwards, and was not disappointed. The explosion rocked the yacht and threw her into the

corridor. Smoke billowed in, and the door began to be pried loose.

Amy set the grenades and heaved three, immediately outside, through the door. The explosion ripped the outside door off and sent the yacht down another three degrees, into the weed.

Laser fire came back through the opening, and Amy returned fire, with more grenades. The explosions were muffled by water and weed, and the craft had slipped downwards, to the point where water was slowly rising up through the door.

A quick laser fire, and then a smoke grenade was hurled into the craft. Amy coughed, and simply fired and fired at where she knew the opening was. She heard some moans from outside, pleasing her. She grinned, as the smoke cleared. There were six bodies; writhing on the floor of the yacht. Another leapt through the door, to be struck by a laser, from behind.

"That's mine!" cried Anki.

Amy rushed the door with her rifle blazing. She shot five more outside, and then threw herself into the water. There was another, and another. She aimed and blew away the head of one, took out the throat of another. Amy felt joy. She shot another and then from behind she felt a slash at her back, then another. She had received two mild shots, by lasers. Amy fell into the water, totally submerged.

She broke the surface again, with the laser blazing and with one last grenade, which she had

been keeping. The three on the roof of the yacht, fell to the water. Another was trying to get inside, as Amy blew his left leg off. It felt good, she was sure.

As she turned, she received two more bolts into her arm. She fell, dropping the rifle into the water. Her arms wouldn't carry out her commands. She reached for the pistol, but the arm was limp. Damn!

Three men dropped on her; from above. Amy turned and lunged at one, pushing him down, into the water and biting the hand of the other. With her free hand, she pulled out the pistol and blew away the first man's throat. Amy grinned, as she watched him gasp for air while he lay in the weed. His throat let out a gurgling sound, as he rasped for air.

From behind a man grabbed her, by her injured arm. Amy grinned. Pain meant nothing, after what she had been through, and maybe, there was some small pleasure in it. With her left foot, she pushed the body of the gasping man into the weed, until his gurgling throat was under the water. She drove him down harder, and then shot at the man behind her. She did not see it, but something struck her on the head, and she collapsed, into the water.

Ω

Oblone watched, from the doorway of the yacht, as that wild woman was cuffed and bound. She was regaining consciousness. Oblone looked at her. She had the wide eyes of a crazed injured animal.

Still it took three men to restrain her. Oblone couldn't believe her strength. She stared at him, which made him shudder. This one was extremely dangerous.

Amy then smiled at Oblone and asked sweetly, "How many did I kill?"

"Twelve dead and ten wounded," he said, hesitantly.

Amy bowed, still with her arms and legs bound. "Glad to enjoy myself!" Immediately she sprung up, head butted the first guard and rammed Oblone into the severed hinge, at the side of the door. She heaved and heaved at his body until she felt the hinge spikes push in past his suit, and into his back. She pushed harder as the spike drove through into his lungs, and bright red frothy blood oozed, from his mouth.

Hands grabbed her and yanked her down, hard. A line was attached, and in two seconds she was hoisted and swinging in the air, by the ferry. She watched and tried to spit on the body of the man, which she had just killed. That makes thirteen, she thought. She sighed, as she saw the horror in the dead eyes, of Oblone's body.

Ω

The chief was greatly relieved, when he heard that the last woman had been successfully sedated.

The ferry was on its way up. Interceptors were standing by.

His attention now was on the frigate, which had moved in closer, over the past six hours.

His second mate turned, "Chief, that ship is coming in. If they are as fanatical as what I just saw down there, then we could be in trouble."

The chief nodded. "Agreed. Any chance of getting the ferry here, first?"

"No, sir."

"Prepare the crew for action. Have the Deltone get as close to us, as possible," he said, indicating to the destroyer.

The frigate came in, blazing. It immediately knocked out two of the interceptors and the rear of the Deltone caught alight.

The frigate then turned, and was making for the cruiser.

The chief watched, as the guns from both ships traded fire.

The second mate looked up, in surprise, "He intends to ram us!"

The chief merely looked towards the screens. "I knew he would. He has no other option, now. Evade him, and secure all sections aft. He will be going after the warp drives. Announce to all."

The second mate carried out his duties and three minutes later, the frigate was almost upon them. There was nothing the huge cruiser could do, but wait and try to absorb the impact.

A moment later, the tiny frigate had engaged the cruiser in her finale. The chief gripped his chair, as the old lady of his command groaned, and began to rotate. Terrible grating and tearing noises were sounding, through the air-conditioning ducts, and through the mass of the hull itself.

The screens showed the impact. The frigate had rammed; fair between the Warp Drive compartments. The drives would be down, but could be repaired, as long as they did not immediately vaporize the entire ship.

The frigate was exploding and beginning to fall away, but its damage was done.

"Sir," came the second mate, "Six Templars boarded during the ram, and they are being engaged by our troops."

"Thank you, mister. Don't attempt to capture them. Kill them. We have lost too many already."

The chief sat back; watching the death throes of the frigate, as it drifted away and exploded the last of its munitions. The chief wondered what sort of a crew would sacrifice themselves, for the name of a cause. He wondered what sort of a cause would be worthwhile sacrificing oneself for. Money he could understand, but dying for a cause, only made a little sense. He wondered.

He then sighed, as the damage reports began to pour in. It was, as he suspected. The frigate's impact had taken out the warp drive systems.

As the last of the frigate vanished, in a token fireball, the ferry neared with its passengers. He wondered if he had won anything at all to date.

He stood. He would want to see these two women personally.

Ω

Jaron stared at the hologram of the battle, two million Ks away. The dais had been dancing with battles and killing ever since they had arrived in the system, ten days ago.

The Boguard had arrived to see Amy lose her friends, and then she and Anki, avoid the pirates for several days.

Jaron was very interested in both these women. He wondered who they were. The air to the right of him shimmered slightly, and he curiously stared at it.

Brijet glanced up, as the image of a frigate exploded. She looked at Jaron and asked, "Do we intervene now?"

Jaron shook his head and looked away from the shimmer. "We can't expose ourselves. If I'm correct, then the victors down there, have lost the use of their warp drive. That means that they would have to travel at sub light speed, to their destination. That would take years. They will probably manage to makeshift repair their drives instead, and then we shall still be able to follow.

Brijet shook her head and disagreed. She looked to others for support. “We have lost ships before, in chases through the warp drives. If they repair the ship, we could lose them. Time has lost most of its agreement, when we enter that realm of existence.”

Jaron nodded. That was a fair argument. “True on many occasions, but that drive system out there is leaking, and will continue to leak until they get back to their base. Any young Aaron could follow its trail.”

All agreed with Jaron. They wouldn’t expose themselves yet.

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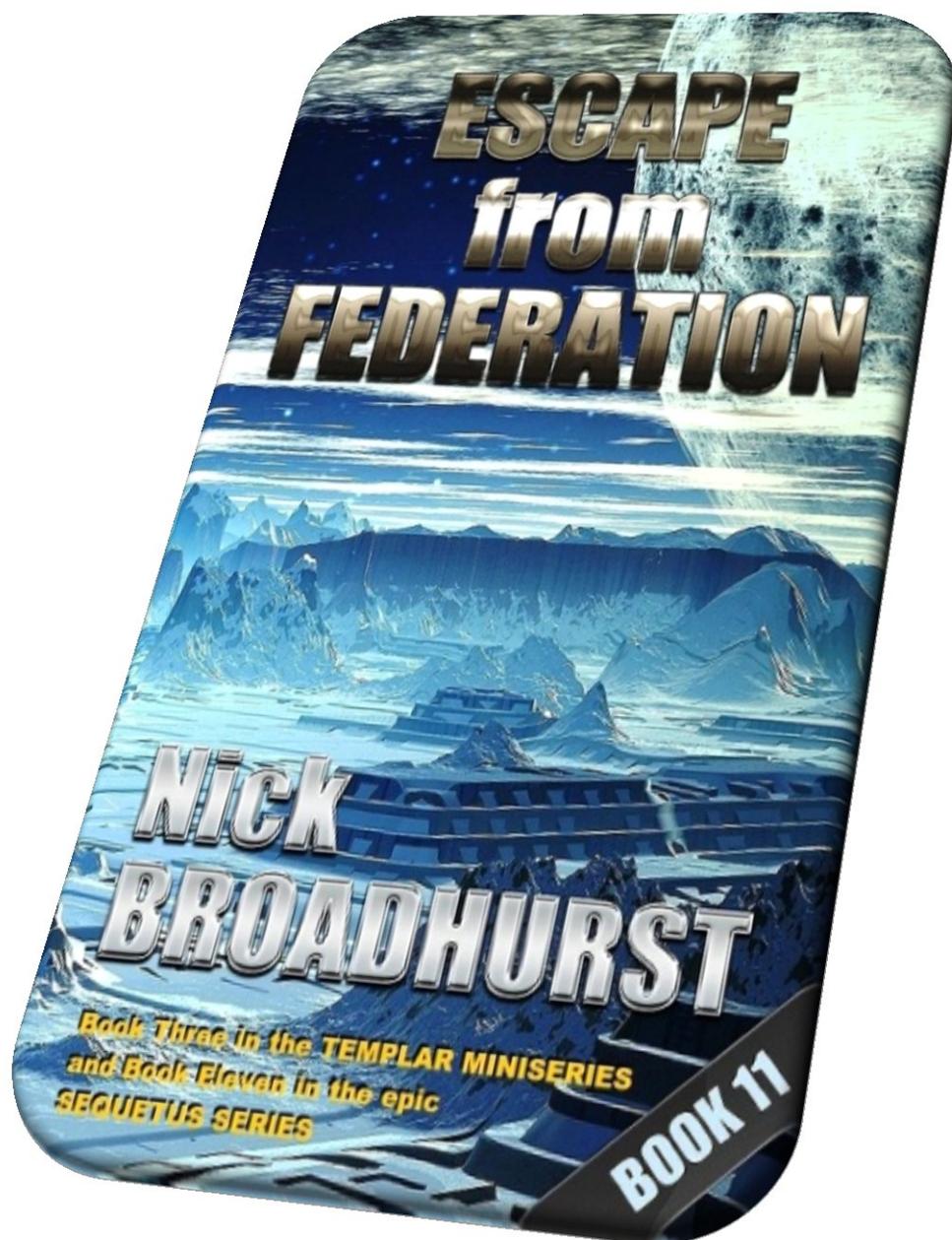
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THE TEMPLAR MINISERIES

Page 315 | 606

N I C K B R O A D H U R S T



THE TEMPLAR MINISERIES

Page 316 | 606

CHAPTER 3

Escape From Federation

Sub Contents

MAPS

- Sub-chapter 1 Greendale
- Sub-chapter 2 Escape
- Sub-chapter 3 Vagras
- Sub-chapter 4 War
- Sub-chapter 5 Cordellos
- Sub-chapter 6 Sleebo
- Sub-chapter 7 Rigrano
- Sub-chapter 8 Escape From
- Sub-chapter 9 Mount Drapper
- Sub-chapter 10 The Sleeboans

GREENDALE

R*igrano* couldn't recall much, but then he felt there was no need for recall. All his needs were satisfied; here. Where was here?

Sometimes he never really knew. He looked at the hills; beyond the windows. It was another perfect day. The sun shined and the green hills were so attractive. He sat back on his bed and sighed. Life really was so good to him. Why? The psychrons tried very hard to make it that way.

Rigrano looked at the clock. Soon, it would be dinner time. He enjoyed that. That was the time when the kind psychrons came and helped him to the table. They were so kind. He had only good things to think about them. If it were not for them, he wouldn't be here, and if he were not here, then where would he be?

A sharp pain ran through his skull. He winced and thought a nice thought, about the psychrons. The pain suddenly vanished. He smiled. The psychrons told Rigrano that his pain was related to his past and that they would help him. They must have helped as he couldn't recall the past and the pain had mostly gone just as they promised. He was grateful for that.

The door opened and two white coated males stepped inside.

The larger one of the pair smiled, "Are we ready?"

Rigrano nodded and they helped him from his bed.

They placed him in a wheeled chair and they were soon moving down a corridor, when, without warning two other white cloaked psychrons passed by, and the pair helping Rigrano then lay on the floor, in a pool of blood.

Rigrano stared at the blood and then at the two men, by his side. They were carrying knives.

The one with the blue eyes said, "Come on, Commander, we are leaving here."

Rigrano was confused. The word *commander* seemed familiar to him, but they were his friends, there, on the floor. They took away the pain and now the pain was coming back. Rigrano tried to speak, but found the words stuck in his throat. He felt his body being lifted from the chair. The men were talking to him, but he no longer could understand them. They talked about ships and evil things. He wanted them to stop, and leave him alone. He was happy here. He didn't want to leave.

The pair dragged him to the outside food elevator. It took them to the surface of the underground building. All around were dead psychrons and psycho-surgeons. Rigrano was dismayed at the deaths of his good friends.

He smiled, as he reached the outside. This was the view to which he had become accustomed to. The hills and serene surroundings were his, to soak in again. He looked and there were another seven that were in patients' clothes like his. He did recognize some of them, but it only increased the pain.

Overhead was a floating craft. Rigrano stared at the machine, as a small car descended from it. He became anxious, even panicky, and started to scream, at the sight of the car. He couldn't leave *Greendale*. He would die; he knew he would. Rigrano screamed; his arms flayed at anyone that tried to stop him. He would run away, the psychrons would save him, they had to.

As he ran, he saw three forms move behind him. Something pricked his arm and he collapsed to the ground.

Once aboard the craft, it shimmered and vanished from view, Palbo and the universe.

Ω

Brandon was enjoying himself that fine day, on Palbo. Palbo City Central was the hub of a small planetary empire, which ruled much of the Federation, with the economic might of the Federated Warp Drive Bank behind it.

Directly within this small planetary empire, were thirty-three inhabited planets. This may have been small, compared to the rest of the Federation, or

even the Outer Worlds, but it was still large enough to stage a fight back, for Federation supremacy.

After all, it was only a millennium ago, when Palbo fought off the rebels of the so called Alliance, which was sparked off by a crazy Jiltanian dissident who had intervened in the Malukan mess. Yes, and that ended in... in... that woman...F...F... and the pain made him think of something else.

Brandon recalled the data, which he was privy to. Yes, Lorde Maluka had wanted to set up in opposition to the Warp Drive Bank. Maluka had engineered the puerile planet of Sequetus 3, into developing the warp drive theory necessary, in order to manufacture his own ships.

Unfortunately, the Royal on Jilta, Lorde Hymondy III, had found out Maluka's scheme and intervened. By this time, the Bank had disposed of Lorde Maluka, but there was no way of ridding the sector of the excess number of ships that he had built.

This was handled in the end, by a war between the Alliance and the Malukan sector.

To make things better for the Bank, several other Royal sectors had thrown in, with the Malukans. They lost out to the Jiltanians and their Alliance. The Alliance in turn, seemed to have been headed by a singular entity called Goren Torren who in turn was assassinated, a millennium ago.

Well, it mattered far less now; the Alliance fell after only a decade, and its control had passed back to the Federation and then again to the Warp Drive

Bank. In fact, the war had served a great purpose. Boundaries had altered and new ships had to be constructed, to replace those lost in war, meaning great rewards to the Bank, and the small planetary empire of Palbo, in particular. In the last five hundred years, great prosperity had befallen this small group of planets. Of course, there was that woman and her fanatics... but the pain stopped those thoughts, and Brandon Mirak thought of something else.

Brandon looked out of the window of his car, as it floated over the surface-way. He leaned forward and asked the driver to open the top. Yes, the breeze did feel better.



Brandon Mirak's floater over Palbo CC

As he looked ahead, he could see there was a jam of vehicles, up ahead. "Flash the diplomatic lights, driver, and take the upper level."

The driver did as requested, and the car soared to the upper level stream of traffic, away from the vehicles below.

Car expressways had four levels. There was the lowest level for prime movers, which floated along only two pacs above the surface. Next, was the transit class, which was for the general public transport. Above that, was private transport, for

those who could afford their own car floaters. The top level was for the exclusive use of diplomatic and governmental vehicles.

The top level was clear today, and Brandon was able to look downwards, at what was causing the congestion, below. It was a prime mover that had capsized and spilled its load. It then had been hit by another vehicle, travelling too close behind, resulting in confusion for other drivers, and smoke billowing, blocking visibility on the second and third level, thus creating further congestion.

Brandon sighed, as he looked ahead again. There was no sign of the traffic-patrol, yet. In the meantime, Brandon could enjoy the view, as he passed over the countryside.

The sky was a cloudless blue. The sun felt good on his face, as did the warm wind, as it wafted past. Below, the fields were almost ready for harvesting. Such was the joy in the abundance of the Palboan Empire. It was his to control, and his to enjoy. Brandon sat back, closed his eyes and let the sun warm his face. He was content. Perhaps it was the first time, this season. In fact, this was the first time he had left the office, in eighty-three days. Yes, he deserved a break, and a small trip like this would help him to unwind.

He didn't know why he had felt so pent up in the past year. Perhaps it was that stupidity on Sequetus 3, which had started it all. No, maybe it was the Rambus fiasco. Yes, that was it. Those stupid pirates

had missed out on grabbing that girl. He opened his eyes again. It was as if all his concerns had returned. He knew what he would do, just look out the window, enjoy the scenery, and he calmed down.

As Brandon turned to his right, the car-floater pitched and rolled. It dove with a speed that left Brandon hanging on, to avoid being thrown from the vehicle.

Terror struck his heart. What the blazes? The car top was closing over, but his wild ride was not finished, as the car now rolled to the other side. It banked back and then raced forwards, up into the sky.

“Are you crazy?” Brandon snapped on the voice phone and screamed at the driver.

A tort fast reply came back, “Ground rockets; fasten your belt!”

Brandon snapped his belt buckle locked, and he stared out of the window, in bewilderment. The driver was right. There went another rocket, as the driver swerved. It missed and continued into the upper atmosphere, where it exploded harmlessly.

The car banked and dove again, as another swished past.

This was lunacy, thought Brandon. He couldn't be attacked here, not on Palbo, and certainly not just outside Palbo City Centrum.

The driver switched on the intercom. “Sir, the attacks appear to have ceased. I'll be accelerating to our arrival point, and I have notified the authorities.”

Brandon sank back into his seat, stunned. "Thank you, driver; carry on." This had never happened before. Why should it? The people here loved him, and why shouldn't they? Palbo was wealthy. The living standards here, were the highest in the galaxy, and he, Brandon Mirak, was about to return them to being the supreme rulers of the Federation and beyond.

Brandon was indeed badly shaken. He would have to travel now, with an escort. Luckily for him, those rockets were primitive, without *seekers*, otherwise he would be dead.

Brandon sunk low in his seat, and was pleased to see a military patrol arrive, from over the next hill tops. Twenty minutes later, he had arrived at the *Greendale Health Center*.

A tall man stood apart from all the others, and shook Brandon by the hand. "My dear sir. What a horrific experience? I hope you were not harmed."

Brandon put on his best made-up smile. "I'm fine. These...rebels, are they prevalent? I had never heard...?"

The tall man spoke while pointing the way. They began to stroll towards the outer doors. "No. They are a new force. I say a force, as they do need to be reckoned with."

As they passed into the outer wards, the staff welcomed Brandon, but his attention was still on the attack, "Doctor Craz, am I to understand that this has happened before?"

The tall man nodded as they strolled the wards. "The attack which you experienced is a new thing here on Palbo, but it has been rife on the other planets of our sector, for some time."

Brandon shook his head. "I was never informed."

"Understandable, sir. It would have been seen as nothing, but a civil manner. However, now it seems to me, that there is a combined force behind it. A conspiracy."

"A conspiracy, here on Palbo? You must be wrong," Brandon said, incredulously.

"I wish I were, but please, come with me." The doctor led Brandon over, and through another ward. Stretched out before him, were seven bodies, on tables. Brandon looked up, in surprise.

The doctor continued. "Two days ago, we had an escape. It was the commander of the force, who had led the fleet on Sequetus 3 seven years ago. He was the one that missed the boy, who was thought to be the return of the Torren, the one that the Templars talk incessantly about. If you recall, the commander and his officers were turned in here for programming, they escaped, but were captured again. A year ago, they were reprogrammed again, but with heavier methods and it seemed as though they were on their way, to a full recovery. However, two days ago, we had a break-in. Six psychrons and a psycho-surgeon were murdered. The intruders escaped with the commander and his junior officers. It was conspired

and enacted, from outside and I suspect that the attack on you, was part of that same conspiracy.

“Whoever is behind it, would also like you assassinated. That is my theory sir.”

Brandon stood and looked at the man and then turned towards the bodies. “Where was the commander being kept?”

“Three floors; underground, sir.”

“May I see it?”

“You may, but the area isn’t ready for visitors and we would prefer to clean up, first. There was much damage.”

Brandon nodded. “Perhaps another time. What would you suggest next, then?”

As they continued through the outer wards, the tall man smiled. There were ten psychrons and two administrators trailing, behind them. The doctor turned, and pointed to some smiling patients and said, “Obviously there are people out there, who are hostile to you and your administration. We have the technology to change that, and create a better world, a saner world. What we need, is approval to conduct a program of search-and-find, in the populace. We have the means to find as well as control the people, who are your enemies.”

Brandon studied the man, talking to him. “Sometimes I think we have already gone too far,” he said.

“I understand your concern, sir, but what are you going to do when this whole planet is in civil war

and the power of the Palbo realm has diminished, to next to naught? Whose rights are diminished when Palbo is destroyed and insanity is rife? Don't the people of this world deserve a sane system of control? Don't all who reside here deserve to live in peace, rather than live in the constant fear of war and terrorism?"

Before Brandon could answer, a note was thrust into the hand of the tall man. The tall man read it and then smiled. "It appears from the first reports, that the accident on the express-way was also deliberate sabotage. The same rockets that were fired at you, struck the prime-movers. It seems that the incident was staged, in order to manipulate your car to be in the upper level, by itself."

Brandon breathed deeply. He could see what the tall man was getting at. There were troubles, out there. "I see," he said. "Please lead on. I would like to inspect the work that you have been doing."

The tall man smiled. "If it pleases you, of course, but unfortunately, I'm the head administrator and due to what happened here two days ago, and in light of today's attack, I would like to personally see to the security arrangements, of your passage home. The head psycho-surgeon will be honored to show you around."

Brandon nodded. "I'll still be leaving in four hours. Perhaps we could talk about the cost of your program, over a meal."

The tall man, the head administrator of the *Greendale Health Retreat*, agreed, bowed and left. Brandon continued on his inspection of the wards and the smiling successes of the programmed patients. It was all very impressive.

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CHAPTER 2

ESCAPE

The tall man looked at his second administrator. "You what?" he said, incredulously, "You let them escape? You blithering idiot! How did it happen?"

The other smaller man trembled, as his superior flew into a rage. He had heard that sometimes people disappeared, when this tall man was upset. The small man swallowed and tried to answer. "We staged the accident... just as you said. We fired the rockets, as you instructed...."

"Get this straight...Boris, I never instructed and I know nothing about what you have been up to. Understand?" The tall man was red in the face and standing aggressively over the smaller Boris. If he was not so useful in the administration of *Greendale*, he would have been replaced or reprogrammed, years ago.

Boris understood his innuendo, nodded, and continued in a stammering voice. "We took the Commander to the site, where you...I mean, where I had decided the attack should take place. We left him there, as you said, with his junior officers, as well as others, who have been troublesome outside, lobbying against us. They should have been unconscious from the drugs we gave them, and the

security patrol we sent in, should have found them and been able to kill them, there and then.

“However, it didn’t happen that way. When the security patrol arrived, they were fired upon, by assailants unknown. Many of the patrol are dead, and the commander and his junior officers have escaped or been freed.”

The tall man slammed his hand down on his desk and menacingly spoke, with hatred. “That will be the work of those Templar sympathizers, in Palbo C.C. We must be able to arrest them.”

The tall man then turned and looked at the scene, beyond his window. He knew that the only thing beyond his window was another room, but the scene still appeared real. He watched the wind rustle through the leaves, and then he turned. The redness in his face had vanished and his manner was calmer.

Quietly, he spoke. “How did our guest take to our suggestions, do you think?”

The small man tried to smile. “I believe that he was genuinely shaken by the attack, and will probably allow our proposals for subliminal control of the population, in a confined area, to prove the programming does work.”

“Good, have preliminary proposals drawn up. I believe there is a village nearby, which may be of use. This will be the first time that it will be used on a full society. We must not mess up, and those who oppose us must be terminated. We may not get another chance, like this again.

“With regards the rebels that kidnapped the Commander, find them privately. Brandon Mirac is never to know, or else he may start to wonder what we really are doing.”

The small man bowed slightly, and left the room.

Ω

Commander Rigrano opened his eyes every now and again. They were very heavy. He tried to remember where he was, who he was, but it all seemed a blur.

He did recall some images of white coats and men scurrying about, but that seemed to give him a headache. He also recalled bodies, lying on the ground. There were buildings and some blood. It was very confusing; there was also someone, who he knew. Perhaps it was a psychron, but they seemed distant now. He closed his eyes, and slipped away again. It all seemed too hard to comprehend.

A day later, he awoke, with a startled feeling. He looked around and saw three people gathering wood, by a large tree. He looked at their clothes, and then his own. Where was he, he wondered? It seemed that these people were wearing cotton clothing, or at least something woven, appearing as cotton. He certainly was not wearing patient dress.

Rigrano tried to lift his head, and coughed, and then collapsed, back onto the grass. He lay there; feeling helpless, but at the same time appreciating

the sunlight that dappled through the leaves of the tree, providing warmth to his face.

One of the men came into view. He leaned over Rigrano's body and smiled. He seemed familiar; but Rigrano couldn't place him. He spoke in a kindly voice. "So; you're awake, Commander? Can you sit up?"

Rigrano was surprised; at the familiarity of the man's voice. He seemed friendly and compassionate, and obviously knew him. Rigrano spoke quietly; with much deliberation. "Sir, I can get up with your help, but I must confess to not knowing who you or I are." He looked around, helplessly.

His senses picked up the smell of a hot *kalo* brewing on the fire, as he was helped to his feet.

He was offered a drink immediately. He sipped while one of the others spoke. "You can't recall the *Greendale Health Retreat*?"

Rigrano winced at the pain, which seemed to pulse through his brain. He almost collapsed as he said, "No. Nothing... but... nothing."

The other man raised an eyebrow and nodded. He spoke softly, "We have all suffered at the hands of those barbarians. You have, too. We, like you, were rescued from the psycho-surgeons...."

"But...but..," stammered Rigrano. "They are our friends."

The nearest man spat on the ground, and threw his beverage into the nearby bushes. "They are your enemies, and ours. Here is a picture of you and us,

before we were passed into their hands. Look at yourself now. You can't even remember who we are."

Rigrano stared at the picture. He then looked down, at himself, and then up at the others. He looked up, "We, I mean I, we are in military uniform. How can that be? I think I was a peasant farmer, before I was taken ill."

"Peasant farmer, ah! Sir," said the nearest. "You were a Federation Fleet Commander. We were your junior officers. Look at the rank, on your sleeves in the photograph. What does that show you?"

Rigrano stared at the photo, and looked up. "It shows that I was in a uniform when this picture was taken, and nothing else. There could be truth to what you say, but I think it would be best if you take me to the nearest authorities."

The man by the fire came over, with a new brew. "I'm sorry sir, but we can't permit that. It would put us all in danger."

Rigrano looked around, for a means of escape. Feeling the terror in Rigrano's mind, the man with the beverage handed it to him. "If you think you were a farmer, then tell us what you farmed, how you did it, and where your family is," he said.

Rigrano stiffened with pride and said, "I'm from...from.... Well, I'm from... and I harvest... no I...." He stared at the men, and sat down. His eyes felt moist and he said, softly breaking into grief, "I

don't know who I am, or where I'm from. I'm not ... a... peasant farmer."

One of the men stooped down to Rigrano. "Sir, you received far more programming than any of us. After you masterminded the last escape, they vowed that you would recall nothing of your past existence. We, on the other hand received simply more, of the same programming. Yours was on a more severe level. We can recall glimpses of our past, but we won't be satisfied until you're one of us again, and help us stop this poison, in galactic society.

"Sir, they may have wiped out your memory, but we do have records and details of your life, and if you permit us to present them to you, then we hope that you'll be able to dig it up, and join all the parts again. We want you to remember who you were, and all the abilities that went with being you."

Rigrano looked up and nodded. They helped him up to his feet and led him over to the other side of a hill, and into a small interplanetary craft. It shimmered and vanished from view.

Ω

Brandon stood at his desk, looking out, over the park. He had just received the news of another terrorist attack. He read the data slower, in order to be certain. Three government ministers and two administrators had just been killed, in an ambush, outside Central Hall.

Brandon Mirac pulled a document from his drawer, which he had been keeping, for some time. He unscrewed the cap from his pen and slowly signed. This would inform the *Supreme Council* that he was behind the general subliminal control that the psychrons would now put in, on the population. Perhaps, they could curb the current unrest.

Ω

Rigrano had been watching actual footage of his own treatment, in the *Greendale Health Retreat*.

The man he had got to know as Johnny was running through the film again. He continued explaining, "Here is where they treated the patients initially, with their latest methods, subliminal implanting. On a level of hearing, lower than is consciously audible, they play messages to obtain agreement from the patient. It sets up a circuit in the mind of the recipient, who unknowingly acts out the implanted commands. It is an effective, but light method of implanting. It can be broken by simply replaying the implanted messages, at a level that the patient is aware of. In your case they are as follows."

Johnny turned up the volume of the recording. The screen was showing three patients with the phrases being repeated over and over, below the level of the patients' awareness. "Psychrons are good. They are here to help you. Psychrons are your friends. Only psychrons can be trusted."

Rigrano had his attention fixed to the screen until he said, "I think I have heard and seen enough."

Johnny nodded. He waited for the next video to start, before ordering food. He continued, "Here, they use what is called, narcosis-therapy. The patient is placed asleep for hours and days, while commands are played through speakers. Once the subliminal messages have hold of the patient, the resistance of the person, at this level, is almost zero. I'll play the massages that were programmed into you later, along with the names of the drugs, which were used to hold your mind in control.

"The next method is what is called aversion therapy. In your case, you were heavily drugged on hallucinogenic drugs and then shown a picture of your old job, along with a simultaneous jolt of electrical current to the head. You were shown these pictures, of military uniforms, as well as Federation military. They used pictures and film while you were given a current of seventy volts for up to three minutes, through your brain. The result was that if you recalled any memories of your past existence, then you would re-experience the same pain, and headaches."

Rigrano winced, under the pain. "Like now!" he said, as he could barely watch.

Johnny nodded. "We will run this one through a few times, and the pain will finally disappear."

Moments later, the pain had gone and Johnny continued. "Here is where they blank out the last of

any memory. Short sharp electric current is run through your brain for fractions of a second. The power is high, and irreversibly damages the brain cells, which are turned into scar tissue. I'm afraid this is what we can't repair."

Rigrano had one last question. "How did you manage to get access to all this data?"

Johnny shrugged. "Like our initial escape, we have no idea. When I awoke, it was near the tree that you were under. I then woke my friends, and we found the craft, nearby. All the footage of imagery was in it. I have no idea how it, or we, came to be here."

Johnny stood and let Rigrano go through it, again.

Ω

It had been several months since Brandon Mirac had permitted the installation of the subliminal programming, on a large social level. He had even approved the programming of some of the Directors of the Security Council.

The amount of terrorist attacks seemed to be dwindling.

Ω

Rigrano sat back and stared at the image, and then looked to Johnny, "I seem to get the idea that I was part of a large fleet," he said.

Johnny nodded. "That is part of your next step. As your memory is as far as we can tell, permanently impaired, we will furnish you with data, to take its place. In other words we will show you material, so that you can replace that, which has been permanently lost."

Rigrano nodded, as he sat back and watched the screen. They soon came to the part of his last major command, *Sequetus 3*.

Rigrano became fidgety. Finally, he said in a shaky voice, "There is something frightening about this place. I can't put my finger on it though."

Johnny nodded. "Continue to watch. I believe it might all come back to you, as it did, to us. What you're about to see is real footage. It is from the Fleet Flagship *Cruiser Bridge*, which you commanded, at the time.

The recording rolled on. Together, they watched, as a lone interceptor escaped from Earth, only to be forced back down through the clouds, and then return again. The display from the pilot's viewpoint was magnificent, but he was grossly outnumbered. Eventually, the craft cut its drives system, and free fell, down to the ocean. Next, the image panned across to the west, where a large white light, the size of a cruiser began to rise, over the horizon. It grew in size, and descended over the

fallen interceptor. The orders at the time, were given for no action to be taken, and all recordings of the event to be marked *Security Council*, viewing only.

Rigrano nodded, "I do recall that thing, now. I had no idea what it was then, and no more of an idea, now."

Johnny agreed. "Yes. Whatever it is, it is known by the Security Council. You may recall, your orders were, to not engage."

"I remember."

"So why were we sent to Greendale?"

"To hide what we knew, but what is it that we knew?" asked Rigrano.

"Well, what we were doing out there, coincides with the mystic law of the Templars. They claim that their Goren Torren would be found, a millennium after his assassination, give or take a few years, and that is about seven years ago."

"So what was that bright light? Some form of a pagan god?" asked Rigrano.

Johnny shook his head. "I don't think so. It isn't part of their religion, but it sure has the Security Council bluffed."

"Where to now, then?"

"For the past several weeks, we have been warping from one place to another, on Palbo. We are unable to escape the planet. As you may know, the warp fields around this system were mined, a millennia back. You need a map to get through, and a map, we don't have."

Rigrano shook his head in shame. “They have mined the shades of time, the warp fields? That is horrific.”

“Correct. So, our first mission is to get into the ministry of transport and steal a copy of the pathway, out. Then, we have to escape.”

Ω

The preparations for the intrusion into the ministry took them ten days. The small band succeeded, and vanished from the Palboan sector, heading for their home planet; Sleebo.

Ψ

CHAPTER 3

VAGRAS

A hundred and fifty pacs under the island of Vagras on Palbo, worked eighty-five psychrons and psycho-surgeons.

On top of the island was a tiny sleepy fishing village. At the rear of the village at the base of the mountains, was a three story hotel, also in a sleepy existence. Its purpose was to provide tourist and holiday accommodation, during the peak periods of summer. The hotel lay directly over the underground work levels, and provided a vertical link between the two facilities.

It was no surprise that the majority of the tourists were psycho-surgeons and psychrons. Without them, the economy of the small island would die.

The island had the name of Vagras, and that meant *paradise*, in an ancient and unused tongue, for it was to be *paradise* for those who visited.

It was six hundred Ks out into the ocean, off Palbo C.C. For those not immediately familiar with the region, the island was relatively unknown.

Amongst the psycho-surgeons Vagras was very well known. More recently the island, and especially the hotel, had been frequented by government diplomats and administrators.

The island was shaped like a horse-shoe, with the hotel high up on the slopes in the center and a small jetty jutting out from the southern wall by the sea. Leading from the jetty, a small road threaded its way up to the village, via the hotel.



Island of Vagras

This day was beautiful. The breeze gently wafted in from the ocean cancelling some of the sun's harsh equatorial rays. Out past the jetty, could be heard the putt-putt of the day's incoming steamer. The ship was of two levels, with paddle wheels at the rear. The trip had been a perfect run, from island to island and the small ship hooted its whistle.

Cautiously, it pulled into the old wooden jetty, with waves gently lapping up against its side.

The lines were secured by a bustle of attendants and the gangways hoisted over. This was a big day on the island and only happened once a week. After the boat left, there would be no scheduled transport, until the next week.

It was strange, this anachronism. The boat was new, but the form of transport had not generally been seen in the waters of Palbo, for three millennia. It had been decided by the owners of the hotel, that in order to achieve a restful atmosphere, ancient transport would reduce the state of turmoil a visitor

might be in, when he came to the restful retreat of Vagras.

There was a small crowd, at the jetty. Behind them, were the only six floaters, permitted on the island. Dust rose around the bustle of activity, as goods began to be offloaded and some fishing products put on board for export.

The boat had originally been loaded, at the nearby island of Catoomb, six hours away.

The passengers began to disembark, and were greeted by hotel staff.

Morris was a psychron, top of his field, and was here to welcome some special guests. He wore a white suit, and had hotel staff standing by, at his floater.

Morris called out, over the crowd, "Doctor Elan...Doctor... over here." He waved his hands, as goods and passengers brushed past him.

The female, whose name he had called, was still on the boat, waiting her turn to step off. Behind her, were a patient and two attendants. As the boat slowly rocked to the slight rhythm of the waves, the crowds began to clear. It was a glorious day, with only the occasional scudding cloud to detract from the brilliant blue sky.

Finally, Doctor Elan reached Morris, an old friend and associate. They shook hands and smiled. Morris had known her from the Palbo Academia decades ago. She had graduated, to become one of the shining lights of the psycho-surgeons.

Her bright green eyes sparkled, as she spoke. "Morris, it has been such a long time, since we worked together. You have been well, I hope?"

"Of course, Elan. Thank you. Is this your patient?" Morris asked, as he pointed to the man, standing behind her.

Elan smiled, turned and nodded to the two assistants, who gently nudged the man forward. "Yes, this is my charge. We are about to make him stronger and better than he ever was. When he returns, no one will recognize the new man."

Morris smiled. "Well, you're at the right place. No one could do a better job, than here. Please follow me."

Morris led the way. The patient was gently nudged along the path. The floater was only moments away.

The patient had lost most of the vitality, in his eyes. He seemed to only stare, three feet in front of him. His arms just hung, and he responded to neither casual speech nor command.

Morris had seen many patients, like this. This was the retreat of retreats. The patient would be fine, like all the others. He would recuperate, and become a much stronger human being – a super human being.

Though Morris knew the man wouldn't understand what Morris was saying, he said it anyway as the man was pushed into the rear seat of the floater, "Welcome to Vagras, *Brandon Mirac, sir.*"

Ω

Letone stood, at the head of the *Council of Order*. The room was large, with high ceilings, and natural rock spotted with glowing moss. Letone pointed to the hologram, which danced in the center of the dark room. He spoke to the Council. "This, fellow Aaron, is the escapee, Commander Rigrano and his junior officers. No one has ever successfully penetrated their warp-mine fields.

"What appears to have happened is some form of resistance to what the government has set up. That resistance has somehow managed to free Rigrano and his compatriots, and create some havoc, throughout their systems.

"There, as you see, is some form of military hostility, striking at a government transport."

Letone then shrugged. "That is all we have. The hologram message was transmitted to us in Jilta, from outside of the Palbo group of planets. We don't know who this group is that opposes the Mirac regime, or who sent us this message, but we can assume these two groups, Rigrano and the resistance, are the same or closely allied. Also, we know that Rigrano and his crew are headed for their home planet of Sleebo."

The image ceased.

Letone turned to the rows of *Order Members*. One by one, they said, "A Boguard mission to Sleebo."

Letone nodded and bowed slowly.

Ω

Under Vagras, the psychrons and their surgeon counterparts readied the treatment, for Brandon Mirac. All the preliminary work had been done at Greendale, but on Vagras, the research was further advanced.

Brandon had been escorted from his hotel room, down the lift, to the sixth level, below ground. Here only the most trusted of psychrons were employed.

Brandon was lying in a room, coming around from the great quantities of narcosis therapy.

A young male psychron looked down, as the patient moaned.

Elan stepped over. "Thank you Glaon, but he has to return for his next session."

She handed to the youngster her clipboard and waved two psychron orderlies, to move Brandon's bed.

A moment later, he was under a long lamp that illuminated his whole body. Elan looked on, as the attendants attached six wires to Brandon: two at the temples, one at each palm, and one at the heel of each foot.

She turned on the power and soon twenty volts was flowing, through Brandon's body. Over the period of an hour, the voltage would gradually increase, to eighty volts.

Elan smiled, as Morris walked into the room. She pulled him aside and whispered, as the voltage steadied. The body seemed to tense, relax, tense and relax. Elan whispered, "As the body tenses, we reduce the current in wattage, and then the body muscles relax. As the muscles relax, we in turn increase the wattage. At no time do we alter the voltage, or take less than seventy-five minutes to build up, to the optimum voltage of eighty-five."

She nodded, as the body tensed and then relaxed again. "With the correct narcosis, this can be kept up indefinitely. The narcosis will render him unconscious, and relax the body, so that the muscles are not ridging too tensely, but there must not be so many drugs, that they create pain. Do you understand, Morris?"

"Of course, Doctor."

"Now watch, as the head-phones go on. His whole mind is open to suggestion. What he is listening to, is a series of messages, which will be with him, for the rest of his life."

"They are?" asked Morris.

Elan drew the attention of one of the attendants, and the sound in the earphones filled the room:
You're a great man. The Templars hate you, and they must be destroyed. Destroy the Templars. The

*Federation is great. The Federation must be great.
At all costs, the Federation must be great. Palbo
through the Federation, shall rule. It shall need total
war, to rule. The Federation shall rule the galaxy.
Brandon Mirac is strong. Brandon Mirac is great.
Brandon Mirac will lead the Federation to total
victory, over the Templars. The Templars are evil.
The Templars must be destroyed.* The voice of the
commands was professional, soothing, and masterful.
Behind the voice, was relaxing aesthetic music.

After a three second pause the sound faded. The
attendee checked the instruments.

Elan smiled. "The therapy will be complete, after
twelve sessions."

Morris nodded. "That will change him?"

Elan put her hand on Morris's shoulder and
began to lead him out. "He'll become a superman, a
man, above other men. He'll lead the Federation
against that cult of short-lifers. Soon, our worlds will
be free, from their interfering influence."

"Will Brandon Mirac be strong enough to do it?"
asked Morris.

"More than enough. If we can keep him on the
narcotics during this, then he'll have those messages
in his mind as natural a thought, as his own. The
excellent part of the therapy, is that he'll never be
able to tell the difference between how he used to
think, and now. Even if he could, he wouldn't be able
to do anything about it, anyway."

Morris's voice showed that he was impressed.

"So, where do these narcotics come from?"

Elan turned and smiled. "Sequetus 3."

Ω

The Chairman of *The Imperial Council for Psycho-Surgeons of Palbo*, was Rees Jay. He was a small man, with an amazing vision of how the universe was to unfold. It was he, as Chairman, who had orchestrated the programming of Brandon Mirac and his government. It was he, Rees Jay, who had the grand ideas of reinstating the power of the *Federation Warp Drive Bank*.

Certainly, there was backing from the Directors of the Bank, as they had already been programmed. Now, with the assistance of the government and Brandon Mirac as its head, all those in authority, could embrace the doctrines of the psycho-surgeons. The power of Rees Jay now seemed unlimited.

He stood as erect as his short body would allow, cleared his throat and looked at the group of twenty-three, that sat around the table. He recalled the day outside, three floors above, in the over-ground. The weather had cooled and it pleased him.

All eyes in the spartan room were on him. He looked down and then stared back at them. He continued his speech. "We must aim to permeate every educational activity in our galactic life: academia and technical education, those who provide

the teaching, the principles upon which they work, and the people upon whom they work. They must all be the object of our interests. Public life, politics and industry should all be within our sphere of influence.

“Especially since the last great Alliance, a millennia ago, we have done much, to infiltrate the various organizations, throughout the Santonia Galaxy.

“We have made a number of useful attacks upon a number of professions. The two easiest of them naturally were the teaching profession and the Temple. Yes, we have infiltrated the Temple with our ideas. The two most difficult to penetrate have been law and medicine.

“We don’t need to act as *The Psychronic Council* to change the galaxy, now. We need only act individually from our own corners of the galaxy. It won’t matter if *The Psychronic Council* is never heard of, again. We will become a fifth column into galactic society. The military will lead the attack, but that will soon cease, and then it will be up to us, to take control of a galaxy, in its turmoil.

“However, we will need a long-term propaganda plan.

“We have the technology to change life. We must use this power our technology gives us, or it shall be viewed in the future, as criminal neglect.”

Ω

Brandon Mirac had returned to his role, as head of the Warp Drive Bank and absolute administrator of the planet. In the meantime, there had been a series of executions, military triumphs and power consolidations.

Over two hundred days prior, he had yearned for and been granted power to revitalize the Palbo influence, over the Federation.

He had miraculously found himself at the head of the military. It was through lobbying by the Bank, and the execution of three generals, that he now was head of the Palbo Empire military machine. He was now Commander-in-Chief. Palbo had a new constitution.

Brandon Mirac was the first to admit that the might of the Palbo military was small on galactic scales, but the Imperial Federation Warp Drive Bank was still the most powerful organization in the Federation, even with the advent of the Templars.

The Bank, coupled with the Palbo military machine, would grow, and it would grow in numbers, finance and planetary possessions.

Brandon Mirac was now outlining the plans that he had in mind, for the military. Two generals and five marshals sat watching him, as he pointed to a holographic impression of their sector of the galaxy.

Brandon slammed his palm down on the table in defiance of any, who would dare defy him. "These planets are held and farmed by Templars. They are short-lifers and a blemish to the name of the

Federation. They are a blemish to Palbo and its neighbors. In the name of decency and the Federation, it is up to us to liberate these planets. There will be no sleight of hand here. We need the Federation to be seen, as a consolidated force. We from Palbo, will show our weak bellied allies, how easy it is for these Templar planets to be taken.

“A simple fleet of two cruisers, plus a backup fleet of ten destroyers with landing support, can take and control any Outer World. With two destroyers overhead to consolidate our power, these planets will be ours, thereafter.”

The plan was simple. A small ground assault would land secretly, on the planet. The commandos would take out the administrative nerve center and then a massive twenty minute aerial bombardment would create mayhem, followed immediately by a general ground assault to consolidate the gains. Give a week to mop up any resistance, and the fleet minus two destroyers could pull out.

This was the beginning of many easy conquests, to return the balance of power of the Federation to the Palbo Empire.

ψ

WAR

Brandon Mirac stood; smiling, in front of the ecstatic crowd of half a million, which had gathered to see him. He had just finished speaking, to the people of Palbo, and had demonstrated the power of their military and fighting men. They had extended their boundaries far into the new territories, with small loss of personnel. Twelve planets had fallen to Palbo, and now a team of psycho-surgeons and psychrons was securing that position. His personal following had risen. It seemed that people genuinely loved him. They cheered and carried images of him.

Brandon waved and the crowd below him, the seething masses, chanted his name. He gave one last salute, and turned from the balcony, back indoors.

He asked the aide, "Please leave the doors open. It pleases me to feel the warm breeze of Palbo, with the sound of its great peoples."

Brandon turned to his Marshals, who bowed.

The Marshal, with the three stripes over the left breast of his grey and black uniform, stepped forward. "My Leader; our cruisers have just taken over the small principality of Palacon. I also have news that we have a treaty with Pilmon and Felano, who have agreed to forsake their heads of planetary

control, in exchange for Palbo's protection. In ten days' time, we expect the small Duchy of Py to concede to the embargo, which we have placed on the planet, and for them to agree to you, as absolute monarch of its constitution."

Brandon threw off his cape and sat into a large chair, which automatically contoured itself, around his body. The thought of power made him feel ecstatic. The feeling of power was exhilarating. It was like an electric current running through his body. It felt soothing, relaxing and satisfying.

"The terrorists?" asked Brandon.

One of the generals at the rear, stepped forward. "Leader, the terrorists are being hunted down, as you ordered. They are being executed, at every possibility, but still they seem to come out, being bred from nowhere.

"There can be no more than a dozen, which we know of, who have not been caught, but we will catch and execute them all."

Brandon nodded thoughtfully. He looked up, "Execute them publicly, and if that fails, begin to get hostages from the towns of known terrorists. Execute the hostages as needed, until the terrorists come forward, or are named. We can't have Templar sympathizers. Is that understood?"

The general bowed and backed out.

Brandon turned; his body indeed felt electric. His face was flushed and his voice rose, as he addressed the others, "The people out there love me.

I'm the greatest liberator to come to Palbo. Even in the earlier days of the Warp Drive Bank, the people had not invested so much power in one man. We are now more powerful, than we have ever been.

"Here is our next objective. It will be in two stages. The Marshal Tarrow shall take his expedition through the Outer Worlds, who remain loyal to the Templars. Remember, it isn't our apparent objective to remove the Temples, but rather take control of the planets. The Temples will be removed, at a later date. For the moment you'll find it simple enough to take control without much resistance. It has been found that the Templars will give up control of their beloved New Worlds, if we leave their Temples intact.

"These last eleven planets fell at our knees, from only our mere presence. That will continue, as we push further away from their power base, Jilta.

"To assist us, we have called on the *Palbo Youth*, to supply men and women, to travel to these new worlds to take over the major decision making processes. Once on these Outer Worlds, they will be granted the best dwellings of the locals, and be allowed to determine their own rewards; after all it is they who will have had to leave their comfortable existence, here on Palbo, to help those barbarians rule their repugnant little Outer Worlds.

"You, Marshal Philani; you'll take a larger force, into the established realms of the Federation. There, you'll take the sectors, by threat, force or treaty.

You'll ensure that it is me, who is head of their military regimes."

Finally, Brandon Mirac turned, to his last general. "You, old friend, General Kalap. It will be your job, to go directly to Jilta, and offer them my express wishes that I don't intend to wage war against the Templars or their federated sectors. They must be made to understand that we could no longer sit by idly and see the worlds around and beyond Palbo be exploited, without our own control put in. Tell them that the Temples may continue, if the existing inhabitants don't offend our new administration. Tell them General, that we don't want war, but if the Templars and Jilta force it upon us, then we shall wage it, and it will be bloody."

Brandon halted for a moment, and beckoned three diplomats into the front of the hall. "These emissaries shall assist you, General. It will be their charge to travel to the sectors of Siltonia, Kalanon, Centor and Kantee. They must deliver the message that we are offering peace to Jilta and the Templars. Our expansion is then complete. They must be told that."

The general asked tentatively, "The Malukan sector, my Leader?"

Brandon nodded, and put his arm around the shoulder of the general, "Old friend. There is still the Warp Drive Bank. That will secure the abstaining of this sector, from any conflict. The Malukans still bear grudges against the Jiltanians, because of their loss,

in the *Battle of Sequetus* 3. That memory can be revived, and I can assure you that the Malukan sector won't rise up against us. At worst, it will remain neutral. Possibly, it will become an ally."

The general nodded. Brandon Mirac straightened and turned to the remainder. "Leave now and may the grace of genetic superiority win out against the barbarians."

Brandon now turned and walked to the window, as his staff left.

Below, were the remnants of the rally. Half a million people had packed into the square, to see him speak. Some had come from other planets, some from other continents, but most were local. They had all cheered. He was a hero, to all who saw him.

He wondered what the future would hold. Would the Templars resist attacking? If they did, then Palbo would have time to gather strength and then deliver the decisive blow, and become the only rulers of the galaxy.

Brandon thought back to the time of a few hundred years ago, when all seemed bleak for Palbo and the Bank. They were dark times, when no one realized the strength and power that a Federationist possessed. That power had been unleashed now and he would be ruler of the Galaxy. He thought about it. This had never happened before.

His left hand twitched. He watched it, as though it had a mind of its own. It seemed to move and shake, of its own accord. Brandon stared at it and

concentrated. Eventually, he grabbed it with the other hand, and held it down on the balcony rail. The twitching subsided.

The days were getting shorter. The summer was over and in months, the cold would arrive. Brandon mused over the cold. It was the cold that motivated and drove the Palboans to greater endeavors, to climb out of the earlier oblivion, to develop new ideas, dozens of millennia ago. It was Palbo that was the recognized center and source of galactic civilization. It was from here that the original Royals set out, to meet the *Confederated Council of Planets*. Brandon smiled, as he recalled reading how soon the victory in that part of the galaxy transpired. The CCP had little weaponry that could match the success of the Federation cruisers and warp drive travel. The Royals quickly won and colonized the CCP worlds.

Brandon would do the same. He would take the planets and rule them, as his forbears had done, millennia before him. He sighed. This was the second coming of the Palboans.

Ω

In a small metal clad building, in the north of Palbo City Centrum, a series of experiments were being carried out. The building was a disused factory, which had once manufactured wire strand, for interstellar cruisers. The works had since moved

away from the city, to confidential underground work havens.

Three floaters pulled up, outside the old building. The day was overcast and the first sign of snow was in the air. Palbo was moving well away from the sun, on its elliptical orbit.

Doctor Elan stretched as she stepped from the second floater. She smiled, as a small group at the front entrance greeted her. The full party stepped out from the floaters and crowded around a central figure, who stepped forward.

"We're pleased you could attend, Doctor Elan," said Doctor Rees Jay.

Elan smiled. "The pleasure is mine, to be in the presence of such a distinguished and notable psychosurgeon, doctor."

The doctor smiled. "Thank you. If you'll follow me I'll begin." He looked up, casually. "It is the wrong time of the year, to be outside like this."

The party made its way, undercover. It had already begun to snow. Only the guards posted, were left outside.

Inside, was barren. Only a few screens and chairs, scattered around half a dozen beds with patients, could be seen. The rafters of the old steel building were exposed, as was the steel structural shell of the walls. Elan wondered if it was colder inside, than out.

Rees stood at the front of the party. Including those already inside, there would have been close to thirty-five in the group.

He cleared his throat and waved to the attendants at the rear. The outer lights dimmed. He began, "Distinguished guests and colleagues. I apologize for the surroundings, but due to the terrorists, it is difficult to maintain a foothold for these valuable experiments.

"If you're not aware, it seems that the terrorists have singled us out, as their enemy. That is unfortunate, as there is no other science that can deliver this galaxy its freedom, from the yoke of the Templars.

"The experiments that I'm about to show you, are those that were the methods used, on the Royal Families a thousand years and more ago. Through these experiments, we were able to control the galaxy, until the coming of Torren and the Alliance. Since then, we have not lost the use of this technology, but we have not had a great use for it. However, now with the advent of war, it is well that we revive this old craft.

"This simply, is the removing of the living life-force, or mind, from one body, and placing it in another living organism. I don't mean removing the physical brain. With the essence of the mind, we are acting. We did this successfully with the Royals, for millennia. We have the technology, and I wish to

demonstrate it to you, but before I do, I'll tell you how useful it was back then.

"Royals aged as you, or I, in their somewhat cumbersome bodies that came from the planet, *Talax*. They are larger than bodies of Palbo, and when the invasion of the Confederated Council of Planets was planned, it was decided that the large bodies of Talax would show we conquerors to be bigger than life. The effect was successful.

"What was done was the mind of a normal Palboan administrator or General was removed, from his existing body, and then the mind was removed from the Talaxon. The bodies and minds were then interchanged. As we also programmed the minds, and as they were the most intelligent and able of minds we had, then the result was phenomenal. The Royals simply ruled the galaxy, at our behest.

"What we also implanted in them was a failsafe command; that was as they grew old, they would return to Palbo for reprogramming and get new bodies, which we grew in advance, and which were grown, from the cells of their existing bodies. They then could later return to their planets in the Federation, rejuvenated with new bodies, but with their own very experienced and savvy mind. Due to the commands of the reprogramming, they would always do as we commanded, as well as return to Palbo. In exchange for this, the Royals lived lives that were effectually forever.

“However, with the advent of the Alliance, the Royals fell and were lost. Some of them returned. Where the majority went, we are not totally certain, but we do have a hint of where.”

An attendant entered, wheeling two beds with bodies.

Rees continued, “I’m now going to demonstrate something. Here, gentlemen, is the body of a captured terrorist. He has been hypnotized, to remain unconscious until the sound of the snap from my fingers. He is strapped down.

“Next to him, is the body of an ape. It is a lower primate, from the Sequetus system. It can’t talk nor think, to any great capacity. It is nothing, but a wild animal. It also is strapped to the bed.

“Now, the next part is to have their minds removed. You’ll see what I mean, when I say that the mind isn’t the brain. The brain remains intact.” Rees waved to the attendant, who had wheeled in a machine that he placed over the bed of the primate. He positioned the head of the primate so that its skull was sitting in between two electrodes, directed towards each other, but out from the skull. The attendant then did the same for the human, and bowed to the audience.

Rees smiled and continued, “The current from one electrode will simply arc, from one side of the machine to the other. As the mind is electrical, and only resides in the brain, and isn’t actually the physical brain itself, then the arc - if I let this

continue - will entrap the mind - and in this way, it can be separated from the brain.

"The arc spins wildly at first, but then it narrows down, once the mind is attached. It is at this point, when the body can be removed. The arc will be seen travelling across the electrode, and the mind will be entrapped here. It is at this point when a new body can be entered, inserted, and the process reversed; just like we have done here.

"Please watch," he said as he turned back to the experiment. Rees looked around to make sure all were watching. He snapped his fingers. The human opened his eyes and looked around the building, to find the audience at his side. He saw them from the corner of his eye and began to scream. He had already been told what was going to happen to him.

"For the pity of humanity!" called the human patient. "You can't do this! Do you not have any decency left? For the love of"

Rees nodded; the machine began to hum and the man's eyes began to flutter. His voice trailed off and after a small gasp, his rigid body went limp. The machine was slowly removed away from his body, but with the arc still travelling from one electrode to the other.

Rees smiled. "As the body won't operate long without a mind, we must move fast... please." He indicated to the attendants.

The primate simply stared at the ceiling, as the hum of the machine went on and then slowly it closed its eyes.

Its machine was then removed, away from its head, while the arc lit the area around it.

The bodies were exchanged. Slowly, the human body was wheeled into the machine, which had previously had the electrodes on either side of the primate's skull. The electron arc hummed and then disappeared, and the sound of the machine died away.

Reece nodded and the same was done with the primate body.

Seconds later, there was nothing but silence. "Remove the straps to both the creatures," said Reece.

The straps were undone. The human body opened its eyes and stared at the ceiling. It rolled its head over and then sat up. It grunted at the audience and then loped over to the far end of the factory, with three attendants chasing it. It ran and then tried to climb the walls. Finally, they drugged the human and it fell, into a heap.

Rees simply smiled, and snapped his fingers.

The primate's eyes opened, and stared at the ceiling. It rolled its head over, to look at the audience and stared at them. It sat and then stood, looking around, as though for a means of escape. Slowly it looked downwards, at its arms, its legs and its crooked stance.

Again, it stared at the audience. It shrieked. Its eyes became like fires of terror, as it bolted for the audience. The hum of laser rifle from the side was heard. The animal fell. It regained its footing and rose. Two more shots and then a third, and it still made for the audience.

Three more shots and it fell at the feet of Elan. Another shot, and it was immobile, dying. It opened its eyes and stared into those of Elan's. The burn marks of the laser were deep. He knew he was about to die and grateful for that. Slowly, his big black lips curled as he looked at her, and a single word came out, "Why?" and he fell back to the floor with eyes rolled upwards. The primate was dead.

Elan stood in horror that such a wild primitive animal should have gotten so close. "Doctor, the theatrics of your experiments are well known. I can say that I see a great need, for these experiments to be underway, again. It will save the loss of some of our greatest commanders. I, for one, support the experiment. I believe it to be one of the greatest advances, for humankind. However, I'm a bit shaken. Please excuse me."

Reece grunted and smiled. His point had been made.

As Elan left, the image and the word spoken by that ape would haunt her, for the rest of her life.

ψ

N I C K B R O A D H U R S T

THE TEMPLAR MINISERIES

Page 368 | 606

CORDELLOS

The Master Templar had called an emergency meeting: of the Temple Cordellos. There were twenty-three Cordellos now, seven from Jilta.

The Master Templar was worried. He waited only until the last Cordello had been seated around the table, before he began his address. The room was filled with the antiquity of previous Royal days.

He saw that the agenda had already been handed out, and so began. "Thank you all for attending, on such short notice. As you know, the Palboan Empire has undertaken a series of ventures into the Outer Worlds, and taken almost total control. This was never completely a surprise. We had always expected some direct attacks, since the first appearance of the pirates. What we didn't expect, was the following attacks and consequential submission of the older Federation sectors, our neighbors, to come directly under control of the Palboan dictator, Leader Brandon Mirac.

"It seems that sectors are falling at his feet and handing over their military, for him to command.

"The reason why we are now here, is to decide what to do before we are conquered, to become only an interesting historical anecdote."

The head Cordello from Silt, stood. Two other Cordellos also represented his sector. "My Master," he addressed the meeting. "It is known widely that the tyrant Mirac has offered peace, and that all they want is to claim planets that arguably could be considered theirs. It is possible that they don't intend to attack any of us. I propose that non-aggression is something, which we should consider."

"Granted," said the Master Templar, "But we all have received the delegates from Mirac. The question is, whether or not to believe him."

The Cordello from Kalanon stood. She bowed. "Gentlemen. This Mirac, is the most dangerous human being alive in our galaxy. He'll destroy all culture and education, in his psychotic quest to be the greatest and most powerful person there is." She looked around.

"Like some of the other Temple planets, the Kallonians have their intelligence gathering agencies." She looked about her, watching the faces drop, and continued. "Our intelligence has to be one of the best and as such, we can name all the other Templar Intelligence agencies. We all know that Mirac is killing the so called terrorists, on his home worlds. His people have extracted great wealth from our Outer Worlds, and great cruelty has been brought upon our Outer World populations. I propose that we stop this outrage, and if that means the Templars have to precipitate a war, then so be it!"

A Cordello slammed his fist down and rose. "That is planetary suicide. My home sector isn't ruled by Templars, and such action would precipitate civil war, as well. Already, there is a backlash against us. If we war against Mirac, then at home, the non-Temple long-lifers will side with Mirac, in return for peace."

The Kalanon Cordello stared at the man. "Agreed, but if we don't stand up to this tyrant, then who will save the rest of the Federation?" She looked around the room, and smiled. "We have the craft; to take them on. We all know that we have ships, to protect our stronger planets. We have military craft, on order from the Malukan construction planets. We also have defense craft, from the CCP era. If we send some of our reserves, to secure the production of the Malukan craft, then we can form a formidable defense. However, first we need time, and time is also what Mirac is after. The question is, who will benefit the most from waiting?"

The Cordello from Centor was shaking his head.

The Cordello from Kalanon laughed. "You can shake your head, if you want, but you, Cordello.., you have one of the largest private fleets out in the galaxy. Don't be ashamed. You're not alone. The largest and first was the House of Jilta. They have just recently fought a great battle out near Rambus. There, part of their fleet was decimated, but they have more ships, as you do. If we be honest, we will find out that the combined strength of the Houses is

great, and I believe, greater than that madman, Mirac. Our job here, is to consolidate the strength of the Houses, where necessary, take control of the military through legal and constitutional means. We must strike back, as soon as possible. I believe Mirac needs time more than we do, so I suggest an immediate strike.

“Who has a private fleet that can strike now, or do I need to come clean for you all?” she smiled. “Why do I know this? It is because Kalanon is a small principality, and as such, we can’t afford the fleets of military hardware that you have all been buying. However, we can afford one of the finest intelligence gathering services, in the galaxy.”

She sat and waited for a reply.

Her comments turned the meeting. The center of operations would be Jilta, a Temple controlled planet, and seen by Mirac and Palbo as its natural counterpart.

Ω

The Cordellos met again, the next day. It was decided unanimously, that under the tenant of Torren, they must fight. They couldn’t run from an enemy, which eventually would ultimately destroy them.

The attack was to be launched, in several stages. The first would be intelligence, the second a public relations machine on the Temple planets, and finally

an arms buildup. All told it would take about ten months. The Temples would then deliver a decisive military attack. In the meantime the Templars would agree to Mirac's choice of peace.

ψ

SLEEBO

Letone meanwhile looked down at the small white planet. His Expeditionary Craft had just come out of warp drive. He was heading his last mission as Boguard, to rescue Rigrano and his junior officers.

Sleebo was on its larger orbit. Unlike most planets, Sleebo had two orbits around its solus. The inner orbit was short and only months long, while the outer orbit was most of their calendar year. The variance was due to the wobble in the solus revolution and a large Sleebo moon. The result was a mini winter, followed by a small summer, then a long drawn out winter, when the whole planet was under ice, then a spring, a short summer, autumn and then the short winter, when the whole cycle repeated itself. The planet Sleebo had six seasons and currently it was in the beginning of the long cold winter, when temperatures around the planet would drop to minus twenty degrees at the equator and minus seventy at the poles.

The view of the hologram was one of a white planet in turmoil; of swirling white masses of clouds.

Letone sat and thought of his young protégé, a millennium ago. It was here, that Goren had promised to visit, for the young Anqi Storm. Letone recalled the face of the young Malukan Trooper, who

had been positioned on Mars Base, a thousand years ago. She had helped, and fallen in love with, the great Goren Torren, who later died in her arms, assassinated by a bullet, through his head.

Letone's reverie was pulled away, as the image of the distant star came into view. Sleebo was approaching its furthest position, away from its solus. Letone shuddered at the thought, of working down there.

A sign lit up, in his room. They were ready to depart. Letone threw on the last of his *weather suit*⁷.

Moments later, he was joined by twenty other Boguard. He was an old man amongst them, but he carried their absolute respect. For an Aaron to be sent out on a Boguard mission in his twilight years was an honor to the persons, who served with him. All would learn, from such a man.

As Letone sat in the shuttle, he watched the clouds loom ahead. The shuttle rocked and shook, as it lowered through the first layers of clouds. Eventually, the craft shook so much that Letone was sure there must have been some malfunction.

Just as quickly, the small craft broke through the cloud layer, to reveal to them a sparkling white series of mountain peaks, which receded into the distance.

⁷ **DEFINITION:** Weather Suits: Wear that is the principle winter gear of Sleebo. The inner skin is (imitation) fur lined loose fitting garments. *Shocksuits* are today often worn beneath. With the fur the dress looks baggy and unfinished: Source: Searfinders Index pp. 23-26.

Pristine white ice glistened under the lights of a small village, on the slopes of a large mountain close by. They descended towards the village. Many small cottages dotted the scene, poking their small white roofs through the ice and snow.

The shuttle was lowering into the village of Alsam. It had a population of three thousand people, which was quite large for Sleebo. Sleebo was a single planet in a system that seemed to watch the events of the galaxy pass it by. It didn't possess any great exports, but was mostly self-sufficient, with a small planetary population of around seventeen million. The villages were spread out, in a random fashion.

In the summer, there was the *Bearing Harvest*, when the mountain people came down from their peaks and grew crops in the valleys, to last them through the winter. The winter was a time when little was done, when adults spent time with their families, when children played in snow, and when the population generally awaited the thaw of spring.

Due to the cold, there was little gained from any military acquisition of Sleebo. The costs of ore extraction, or farming beyond subsistence, were too expensive for export. Export drives had been attempted, but inevitably failed. Markets were too far away and the galaxy could obtain whatever Sleebo produced, from cheaper sources.

The shuttle quickly lowering down, to the gentler slopes of the mountains. There was no government security station to visit or obey, upon entering

Sleebo. There was never any need for it. Sleeboans were not a threat, nor were any others a threat to them. The joke was if anyone ever wanted to take over Sleebo, they would only have to ask the locals. It would cost more to try to hold the planet, than it was worth by selling it.

The small craft landed on what was a frozen lake, frozen to its bed seven pacs down. All life within it was frozen, as well. In the spring, the lake would thaw, swell in size and come to life, in amazing abundance. The life that had frozen would return back to be living, during the thaw.

After the landing, Letone stepped out from the circular craft.

He stared up, into the valley, inhaling his first breath of the alien air. The bitter cold and dryness ran down, into his lungs. It surprised him. He looked around and saw the other Boguard, removing Federation snow transports, from the craft. He trudged around to the side, from where the wind was blowing. It hit his face, bringing sensations of biting pain, along with feelings of freshness and good health.

About two hundred pacs away, were a group of children, playing on the edge of the ice lake. They appeared to be making a small dwelling, using the snow. They looked up at the craft, Letone and the others, and quickly began to saunter up the side of the mountain, towards the village.

Letone checked his pockets. He had all he needed. He signaled to four of the twenty, to accompany him. The others would move out on their single seat floaters, searching deeper, down into the valley. They would all return, in about six hours.

Slowly, the five crossed the snow and ice.

Snow crunched beneath his feet and they soon came across the area where the children had been playing. Letone smiled and turned to the others. "A Federation cruiser, in the snow. Hopefully our quest is close to an end. Our records show that Rigrano originally came from Alsam. He would be a hero, among the villagers."

They marched on, until they trudged past a home, then another and another, many joined together. Soon, they were walking up the main street of the village.



Alsam, of Sleebo, during the recess of winter

THE TEMPLAR MINISERIES

Lights brightened the pretty scene, with colors reflecting off the snow. Lights shone from windows of occasional shops. People peered out, to watch the visitors, as they walked up the hill.

Soon, the five stopped at a small single story building, which echoed inside, with raucous laughter.

Letone smiled. "An inn," he said, as he walked towards the front door.

He shook the snow off his clothing and entered. The others followed. Immediately, all noise stopped.

It was warm inside, and the pungent stale smell of alcohol wafted, into his lungs. Letone looked at the watchful eyes and walked to the front inn bar. There were about fifty people present, and it seemed that Letone and his friends had interrupted the evening's entertainment.

Immediately upon reaching the bar, Letone drew the attention of the keeper. "Sir," he said in plain Standard Galactic. "I would like to buy a drink for all the people in this room. It seems I have interrupted their occasion, and that was not my intention. Perhaps this will help." Letone placed four coins on the bar and the noise began to pick up again. As the mugs of *meedle*⁸ began to be carried out to the customers, the raucous laughter returned.

⁸ **DEFINITION: Meedle:** A drink often served in the Malukan sector. It is distilled from barley and mixed with cinnamon and pepper derivatives. Served warm to hot and alcoholic: Source: Searfinders Index, pp. 989-91.

The air was warm and heavy with tobacco, a gift and curse from Sequetus 3. Letone and the four Boguard took their seats, around a vacant table. As the keeper served them Letone grabbed hold of keeper's arm softly and asked, "Do you know the whereabouts of this man, Rigrano?"

As Letone held out a holographic image for the inn-keeper to view, the little old man pulled away in fright. He hurried back behind his counter, and then into the rear rooms.

Letone shrugged. He noticed two others, on the adjacent table staring at him, so he asked, "Have you seen him?"

The men turned away. The larger man, with a fiery red beard came and pulled a chair up next to Letone and said, in educated Standard Galactic, "Listen. I don't know what you and your boys are doing here, but forget trying to find Rigrano. It would be very dangerous for your health. Understood?"

Letone didn't understand. He looked at his own men and then back, into the eyes of the Sleeboan, "My man, I don't know why you seek to hide him...." The man cut off the rest of Letone's sentence, as he grabbed Letone's clothing around the throat and pulled him, face to face.

The man's eyes glowed in hate, fired by the alcohol. "I said, mister, please leave it alone. Get out of here, before I or...." Immediately, the man let go of Letone with a shriek. He waved his hand around as though it had been burnt.

Letone calmly spoke again. "Your hand is unharmed. You need to tell me why you're so angry. I'm here to help Rigrano. He is already in much danger, and more is coming."

By this time, about a dozen others were milling around the table. Letone was noting their positions, carefully.

One of the men threw a piece of paper, onto the table. Letone read it and looked up at the men. He nodded. "This does explain your animosity and need to protect your comrade." He handed it to his men.

The paper was a reward; posted for any that could catch Rigrano and return him to Palbo. He was worth three times more, alive than dead. The names of four junior officers were included, as was the town and planet, of where to find him.

Letone looked at the men, around the room. It wouldn't take much to stir these men into a fight. Letone was still calm, as he said, "I see that the five of us are covered by lasers. Fine. Have others been around, in search of Rigrano?"

"Ha!" said the man with the red beard. "About half the galaxy have."

"Hmm," mused Letone. "Then you won't be readily accepting anything I say. Why do I not make you a proposition, then? Take me to him, while you guard my friends, here. If Rigrano believes it wise to kill me, and my friends of course, then do it. If, on the other hand, Rigrano decides that I'm not to be

killed, then you let my friends go and Rigrano and I'll plan our next move, together."

The crowd seemed to be split on the idea, until Letone said to the one with the red beard, "Of course if six Sleeboans, with lasers aimed at the back of an old man are no match for the old man, then I can understand your reluctance."

That was enough, and the bearded man went to grab Letone but pulled his hand back quickly. "Listen old man, I tried to warn you, but if you insist, then come with me."

Letone heard the off-clicks of six laser safety latches. He stood, and followed the man into the rear room. Behind him, came the occasional prod, of a rifle.

ψ

RIGRANO

Letone was led into a small room, lined with timber. The short inn-keeper was there. He nodded and the far wall opened. Letone was hustled inside.

For a moment, Letone stared at the tunnel he was now in. A primitive form of electric bulb lit it. He was quickly pushed ahead. They had gone only one hundred paces, when the lights were turned off, and another set turned on. It was another tunnel, leading in a different direction.

Letone had been briefed on the tunnels of Sleebo. In its primitive past, the planet had been a halfway haven, to wealthier planets. The Sleeboans in turn, were looted and as such, all towns developed tunnels, interconnecting the above ground dwellings. The tunnels also served as local transport routes, when the temperatures dropped far below zero. There were of course, two types of tunnels, those that everyone knew about, and those that were hidden, which everyone still knew about.

They had traveled five hundred paces, as far as Letone could tell. Letone estimated they had gone into the mountain, and were well below the surface.

Finally, they arrived at a door. It opened and Letone was shoved through. Six people were sitting around an old wooden table. A woodstove was

burning in the corner, its flue going up, into the rock. There were two other doors, on the far side.

Letone felt at ease; the tunnels felt like home. He recognized the person sitting amongst a small group. It was Rigrano. Letone nodded at him and sat.

Rigrano pulled back his hood, and said in a gravelly voice, "Who are you?"

Letone looked at the six lasers, which were again pointing at him and the angry ruddy bearded faces, behind them. He said, "My name is Letone. I have a secret, like you. My secret is my origin. Let it suffice to say that I'm Boguard. Does that mean anything to you?"

Rigrano smiled, and sat back, looking the old man over. "Boguard...hmmm.... The Boguard were known for sending their best, to help the Lordes, the Royal families, but they vanished with the race of Royals. How can you be Boguard?"

"I just am. We are not just a piece of history, as the Royals became; we are still present on Jilta, assisting the Templars."

"Why did they send you, old man?" asked one of the junior officers. "You're too old to fight."

Letone replied as he leaned forward, "Young man, I could still beat you with both arms tied behind my back, but I didn't come here to fight you, but rather, we need your help. I'm the last surviving Boguard, who took part in the *Battle for Sequetus 3*."

All the men sat back. "That was over a millennium ago," said Rigrano, looking at Letone sideways.

"Indeed, I'm that old."

Rigrano looked around the room, and said in a smug smile, "Then if you were there, then you could tell me who it was, that the Torren loved."

Letone smiled, "My Lorde Goren Torren was in love with a young trooper, from this planet. Her name was Anqi Storm." Letone smiled, as he recalled her name and added, "She was beautiful and innocent. Her eyes were smoky-blue and her hair, auburn. She was tall, adventurous and loved life, until her death, aboard the *Destroyer Aliza*. She died with all other hands." The old man looked down, as he recalled the images of the terror, of that terrible day. He swallowed and took a deep breath.

Rigrano stared at the old man. He was an enigma. Why would he be here? He surely couldn't be strong enough to overpower them, even if he were Boguard. He asked, "Anyone skilled in literature could have learned those facts, though granted, they are little known. If you're Boguard, then prove it."

Letone looked at the man directly in the eyes. *I don't have to prove who I am. I came here, as I needed your help. You need my help. If you still don't believe me, then attempt to kill me!*

Rigrano fell back, off his chair. He was helped to his feet. He had received the thoughts of the old man, clearly. He looked at those old burning eyes of

fire, across from him. Certainly, that was not an ordinary Federationist, sitting opposite.

Rigrano coughed and finally said flustered, "I believe you, old man Boguard. What did you say your name was?"

"Letone." *Letone!*

Rigrano nodded quickly and turned to his men. "Letone is Boguard, as he says. Please ask his friends to come down here, if they wish. Also, ask the inn-keeper to prepare food for our guests."

One of the men, at the rear began to object, as did two of the junior officers.

Letone intervened, "Commander Rigrano, it may make your men feel more at ease, if my crew are simply let go, as was our agreement. They are also Boguard. For them, it will be enough that I have found you, and that you're willing to listen. I'll stay with you, as we need to talk and plan."

Rigrano waved his men away. They understood. "Food for us two, then," he called back.

Ω

After some hours of discussions, Rigrano and his junior officers had explained their internment and escape, from Palbo. Letone learned of the terrorists and the activities of the psycho-surgeons. He also learned of the earlier mission to Sequetus 3, and the escape of the lone interceptor and the admiration Rigrano had, for its pilot.

Letone was finally alone with Rigrano, when he again spoke of Sequetus and his last days there. Letone smiled and said, "Commander, the pilot of that interceptor was me. Thank you." Letone bowed slightly.

Rigrano looked at the old man, shook his head and laughed, "Not possible. Those maneuvers that pilot executed were brilliant. An old man...."

You doubt what you know to be true?

Rigrano shook his head in amazement. "I'm pleased to finally meet you," and laughed. "I wanted to work with you... and here you are...."

Ω

The topics covered next, were the mining of the warp drive entry to Palbo, and its Empire. The entry to Palbo was almost impenetrable, and Letone knew that Rigrano must have had a map of the clear route out. Rigrano conceded that he did have such, but didn't intend to give it up.

Letone understood and asked, "Commander, does the government of Sleebo have much sway in the Malukan Council?"

Rigrano laughed, "There is no planetary government to speak of. In the winter, there is no way that one town or village can communicate with another, except through personnel passage. The weather doesn't permit shortwave, long-wave or

microwave transmissions around the planet, and we are too poor, to afford land lines.

“What is happening on the other side of the planet, we won’t know, until the summertime. Even then, there are very few radios. We once had a satellite, but it malfunctioned during a winter, and no one knew that it had fallen to the planet, for another eight months. With that form of communications block, no one is interested in forming a planetary government.

“Don’t get me wrong. Each village has its own council, and they administer and form the laws. During the summer, the heads of the councils meet and confer on new laws, but there is no real planetary government, as such. The result is that we have little say in galactic affairs, and we like to keep it that way.”

Ω

It was established that Letone would stay underground, and send a message to his craft, outside of the village.

The topics they discussed were simple. Would Sleebo fall in, behind Commander Rigrano, one of their most decorated military *IFFCo* officers in centuries? If the planet did follow behind him, would they be willing to fight?

Rigrano didn’t know the answers, but was willing to find out. He would however, need protection if he

was to proceed above ground. The bounty offered for Rigrano was more than enough, for a regiment to retire on. He loved his countrymen, but it didn't mean that he trusted all of them.

The following day, three sets of patrols set out, from the small village of Alsam. Each patrol was headed in the direction of a different neighboring village. Their support would be enlisted, on a village to village basis. The appearance of a space craft would bring mistrust; jeopardize their chances, so travel must be by floater.

The floaters skimmed over the snow and ice. Letone was in radio contact, with the other Sleeboans. Over short distances, the radio disturbances in the atmosphere made little difference.

The daylight was occluded by low lying cloud. There were ten members, in each team. In two columns of five, they threaded their way around the mountains. Cloud banks cut visibility to only fifty paces, and then suddenly it would clear, before being cloudy again.

Letone was in the first group. They had just burst through another cloud bank, and were travelling down the side of a mountain, when out of the sky, came a thundering roar. Letone looked back, over his shoulder. It was a large planetary craft, about a *Kinopac* across. It was enormous and getting closer.

Rigrano didn't have to be told what this was. His floater shot off to the side, as did the Boguard. Floaters and men scattered everywhere, down the

side of the mountain, into the snow. Letone did the same. His body hurled over the crest of the edge, into the oblivion of whiteness.

As he contemplated his body, hurling through the air, Letone saw his floater falling ahead of him. He went onto a snow drift, head first. He heard a sound behind, as another body and floater landed into the snow.

Letone stared around himself. He was well in the snow drift. He twisted his body, expecting at any moment to feel the wrath of enemy lasers.

In a moment, Letone had pushed his head above the snow. There in the distance, the huge machine was disappearing over the horizon.

Almost disappointed, that they had dived for the security of the snow, for nothing, Letone pulled himself free and found others, doing the same.

Over to his left, Rigrano was trying to steer his floater out from his snow drift. Letone labored and helped heave the machine, clear. Moments later, all those that had left the track above, were back above the snow, hovering. Letone noted the grin on some of the younger faces; those who had not sought the safety of the snowdrifts. The grins would have been on dead faces, if those had been bounty hunters, above them.

When they had arrived back on the track, Letone asked Rigrano, "If that was not a bounty hunter, then what was it?"

Rigrano sat there, on his floater, looking over towards the horizon. The wind was whipping up snow, making visibility blurred. "I have heard there may be Federationists further north, but a craft that size, is very unusual." He turned to Letone. "Who would need something that big, on Sleebo?"

Letone shrugged, adjusting his goggles and face mask. "Our next town is Tourman, and we will be there in an hour. Maybe they'll have an answer."

Rigrano agreed. He looked at the others, who were suited and helmeted up. They quickly took off out, along the trail.

Letone followed. The snow was now coming down faster and thicker.

Tourman was the fourth town they had visited, in three days. The previous towns and villages had pledged support, to Rigrano's cause. Letone wondered how their counterparts were finding the weather to the south.

On time, they reached Tourman. It loomed out of the snow, to reveal only small low buildings.

Rigrano asked Letone to wait. "I know some friends in this village."

Letone lowered his floater, as Rigrano and two of his men vanished into the whiteness. Letone settled down, by the small craft and pulled his mask and hood tighter, as he crouched. The wind was beginning to howl. The temperature had dropped, to thirty degrees below freezing. Letone left only the

slits of his eyes open to see by, as the wind whipped snow, in all directions.

He sat there silently, for an hour. Ice began to form inside his mask, from his breath. He cleared it and looked up, the snow had almost covered him and his body, but it mattered little, as he withdrew into his own world of thought.

Twenty minutes later, Letone was roused by the sounds, on the small radio receiver he wore. Opening his eyes wider, and clearing the snow from his mask he could see that the outside was dark. Quickly, the light had vanished and night had set in. Letone estimated the temperature had now plummeted, to minus forty degrees.

He stood to find himself up to his waist, in snow. The bitter wind whirled and groaned around him.

A crackling noise came, over the air. Letone put his hand to his ear to hear the message. It was Rigrano, "Everybody put your lights on. This is Rigrano; we have an audience for this evening."

Letone brushed the snow and ice from the controls of the floater. He switched on lights and heater. Ice fell away, and the floater slowly rose to the top level of the snow.

Stepping back onto the craft, Letone saw the outline of Rigrano, waving ahead. A minute later, all had rendezvoused by a small street light, at the lower end of town.

Rigrano yelled coarsely above the roar of the wind, "We have accommodation; tonight."

Ω

That night, the group met the village elders. No one knew whom the ship belonged to, that had flown overhead, that day. The villagers had seen it. The only added information was that they had seen the same craft, and two others, three days before.

The visit was successful, and pledges for support were made.

They were now five hundred Ks from Alsam, and only one village was left to visit; Prenteel.

The following day, as for most of the journey, the group traveled again, in blizzard conditions. They had gained two thousand pacs in height over the past three days, and now the atmosphere was totally in turmoil.

Letone wondered who would live this far up. Rigrano assured him that outside of the peak of winter these small villages were the most aesthetic places to live in, in the sector.

It was later in the day, when they were almost at the tiny village of Prenteel; the clouds cleared suddenly and Letone slowed. To his right, was a vast white canyon. Below, were wisps of cloud, and in the distance were sharp peaks reaching into the sky.

Letone held his hands to his face, to keep out the wind. He stared. Something to his right caught his attention. There it was, again. A faint glint, again,

from a distant mountain peak. Rigrano had seen it, also.

“What do you make of it?” asked Letone. Some of the others began to mill around, waiting.

“No idea. There is certainly something strange happening, here. First there are ships in the sky; and now, occasional flashes, in the peaks of uninhabited mountains.”



The Kendal Ranges of Sleebo

Letone stared out, into the distance; looked at the other Boguard. “They are inhabited,” he said. Letone brought the screen up, on the floater. He wiped the ice off it, with his thick glove. The map lit up, showing they were about to turn north. The flashes came from a place, in the west.

Letone looked over, to where the flashes had come from, and pulled his mask down from his mouth. “While the others travel up into this village, I want to investigate that mountain peak. My senses tell me there is something going on up there I which I would rather not know about. Are you with me?”

While the group resumed its travel north, Rigrano and Letone hung back, and waited as the weather closed in.

ψ

ESCAPE FROM

Jaron watched, as the faint image of their quarry faded in and out of view, as they raced through the relativity barriers of the universe.

The pirates had left a trail, long and wide. Finally, it stopped, after five and a half months. Their journey had been slow, due to the damaged destroyer.

Jaron gave the order to come out from warp drive, and the universe reorganized itself around them. A quick scan of the monitors showed there was a system nearby, which supported life. They were in the Malukan Sector.

Scanning further located the pirates, six million Ks into the system. The Boguard followed.

Ω

Letone and Rigrano had spent the first two hours of the night, riding towards the peak. A light flashed on and off twice, about six Ks away; they were getting close.

The cold was now for the first time, beginning to penetrate the old bones of Letone.

Rigrano smiled. "You don't have to be old, to feel minus fifty-eight my friend. Come, it is time we warmed ourselves."

They parked the floaters, under a snow bank. The wind was screaming up the slope and they had to shout, as radio communicators were too close to the enemy and would give away their location.

Conversation was difficult while they set about, getting ready for night fall.

Rigrano found a compact snow bank, and with the aid of a holster-laser he began to bore into it. In twenty minutes, he had gouged out a place to hide and sleep, which was well away from the now gale force winds. Quickly, he pulled out some food, which he had taken with him. He plugged the laser charge socket plug onto a small pan and it began to heat the food.

He went outside of his snow hollow, and found Letone. "Come on, friend," he called, "These machines will be here in the morning. Time to get inside." He noticed that the side of Letone's jacket had a short rip in it. Also, the old man's glove was slightly torn away.

Letone stumbled. Rigrano grabbed him. It was no use shouting at the old man, as the wind was lacerating his face every time he removed his mask, to speak. He grabbed Letone by the shoulders, and heaved him through the snow and wind. Ducking, he bent down and dragged him, into the dugout. The wind's deafening roar eased, once they were inside.

Rigrano removed the old man's mask and hood. Ice had begun to form, over his chin and eyebrows.

He plugged the laser charger chord into a plastic container of food. It warmed and instead of opening it, he placed it down Letone's tunic. Rigrano did this another six times, until he was certain the old Boguard felt the warmth, permeating his bones.

Letone's eyes flickered open and then closed. Rigrano felt his pulse; he was still alive, but sleeping.

That night, Rigrano didn't sleep, but kept watch over the old man. Their hollow was lit by a small incandescent source, which was attached to the Sleeboan's belt. He turned the light down, low. Rigrano patched Letone's torn jacket and glove, and kept heating the plastic containers of food. Every few hours he would slide outside to recharge the lasers from the floaters.

Finally, the Letone awoke. He looked up and over to Rigrano, and smiled. "Thank you," Letone said very slowly and quietly.

Rigrano held up a hand; to indicate to him to stop talking, "Not now. Please, here, eat this," and he placed a spoonful of very warm food into Letone's mouth. The Boguard swallowed it, and then more, until finally; he fell asleep, once again.

Rigrano sat back and sighed. The cold on Sleebo was treacherous to the native Sleeboans, let alone to

off-worlders⁹. Rigrano surmised that Letone must have torn his jacket and glove, when they dived from the track into the snow bank, two days back. It was not unusual for a person to dismiss damaged clothing, until it was too late.

Rigrano smiled. His friend would be fine. He pulled out the flask of meedle, which he always carried with him, put it to his lips, and smiled. He inhaled its heady aroma. There was nothing as good as Sleebo meedle on a cold night. He closed his eyes and drank.

The next morning, Letone awoke to the sizzle of food. His senses told him that he was in good hands. The wind had died down, and there was even light penetrating, into their small cavern.

A sound came from the entrance. It was Rigrano. He smiled and then laughed, as he saw Letone prop himself up.

Rigrano pulled tight the flap behind him, to keep out the wind. It seemed that he had more food. His voice had a feeling of warmth, when he spoke. "You look good. The day outside is unusual. There is an opening in the sky. The solus is visible, which means we will be, too. We can observe but not move. The outside temperature is up to minus nineteen and still rising. For us, it means a terrible day." He laughed.

⁹ **DEFINITION: Off-worlder:** Standard Galactic. A person not from the local planet. Someone native to the outside galaxy. Source: Searfinders Index, P. 398.

Letone threw off the reflective blanket that he was wrapped in, looked at the repair on his jacket and nodded. "The fall," he said and then looked over towards the food. It was sizzling in a shallow dish, attached to the chord on the end of Rigrano's holster-laser.

Rigrano offered him a piece of the food, on the end of his knife. It tasted better than it smelt. After eating, the pair then crawled their way outside. Letone was feeling the best he had; in days.

They lay and covered themselves in snow, while wrapped in reflective thermal blankets.

Rigrano handed the binoculars to Letone. "Up there, on the peak, is an opening," he said.

Letone strained to see; yes, it was there. Looking very closely, he saw there was movement, at the mouth. "Maybe there are three people, and the opening is big enough to allow that craft to enter."

In the distance behind them, a familiar noise began to reverberate up the valley. Instantly, Letone looked back and saw another huge craft lumbering closer, through the sky, towards them. In seconds, it was overhead and continued up, to the mouth of the mountain. The roar was deafening and vibrated the ground they lay on. No quicker had it come, it had disappeared again.

Letone spoke slowly, as though trying not to be overheard, "Do you think we were spotted?"

Before Rigrano could answer, his eyes showed what all Sleeboans feared. Above them, was another rumble that was quickly turning into a roar.

Rigrano jumped up from his position and grabbed at Letone, "No time to take anything, just run. This way!"

Letone jumped to his feet and together they waded slowly and helplessly, through the snow.

The noise from the huge craft had set off an avalanche, above them. It was gaining momentum and they seemed to be too slow; as they tried to outrun it.

The noise was soon replaced by a gushing wind and that was traded for a second, by a biting cold rush, then without warning, the world went upside down.

Letone tried to fall with the flow of the avalanche. It took him, and rolled him over and over. He had no idea if Rigrano had managed to outpace the snow onslaught. Letone kept tumbling. He tried to keep his arms in, and his legs tucked up, but eventually the whiteness of the world went black. He continued to be carried down the mountainside; unconscious.

When Letone opened his eyes, he couldn't move his limbs. He wondered how long he had been lying submerged in the snow. Mentally the answer came; three hours. He tried to feel throughout his body and was relieved to detect no broken bones. He moved his hand and then his arm. Gradually, he was trying

to push aside the snow, so that he could maneuver his body. He was facing downwards.

Quickly, he stopped his hand movements, as he heard digging above him. Something caught his hand, and then his arm. He was being dragged upwards. In two seconds, he was lying on his back, on the side of the mountain, staring at the ends of seven laser rifles.

Rigrano was there with them also, his arms fastened behind his back. He shrugged. Letone was lifted up. He could have fought, but to where could he have escaped? He offered no resistance.

The head of the party, who found them, offered no explanation. "Get aboard the floater, now," he simply said.

Letone was bound and pushed aboard the machine, which hovered above the ground. Unlike the small mono-floater, which he and Rigrano had used, this seated ten persons. Soon, they were ascending the slopes.

In five minutes, they had entered the mountain they had previously been observing. Inside was an enormous cavern.

The floater descended, and Letone saw ships and hundreds of men, moving about their business. Overhead, were catwalks carved into rock, and to the side of the ships were steel gangways and troops.

In the background, was the noise of grinders and welders, repairs and manufacturing. To the right, were stairs down and a bank of elevators. This was

far more information than he could take in, now. Letone surmised that there must be administration and accommodation, in the floors, below.

Letone also noticed the electron screen at the opening, which permitted large matter to move back and forward but prevented the penetration of smaller charged particles. The voltage was low and barely noticeable, as the floater went through. This was how the heat was kept in. Letone figured that the inside temperature must have been one or two degrees, above freezing. He threw his hood back. It was warm.

The floater settled down on the base floor, next to a ship. Letone guessed the ship was the one that had started the avalanche. Inside the ship, there appeared to be a commotion.

There was shouting. One guard was thrown out from the ship, and then another. Letone was being hustled away, but he kept watching. Soon, the shouting ceased and whomever it was, was now muzzled. Muffled noises came from the craft, and again, another trooper was ejected from the side door, to sprawl over the decks.

Finally, four troopers staggered out, pulling on a series of chains. Behind them was a woman, gagged and bound. The woman kept trying to pull on the chains and attack her restrainers. Letone mused with the idea of deciding that the chains should snap, but thought better of it. With the way the woman was

acting, it may be safer for her, if she remained chained.

Another three guards, pulling on chains from the opposite direction - to keep the woman in check, followed the woman. Another young woman, in turn followed them. Her hands were only bound, behind her back.

Letone called out to her above the commotion. "You, girl! What is your name?"

The guard, behind Letone, slammed the rifle butt down onto his spine. The old Boguard went down to the ground, in pain.

A voice came back from the girl, "Anki, daughter of the Master Templar."

As Letone was hauled off the ground, he saw the girl being gagged and shoved away, but not before he had caught her eye.

Letone knew that thought. He sent a message, *Hold tight, Anqi.*

Letone soon lost sight of her and was being shoved down to the next floor. He looked at Rigrano and nodded. *We will get out.*

I know.

"These are the pirates, who have been raiding the Outer Worlds," said Letone.

A laser pistol was pushed under Letone's nose. The Trooper snarled, "Keep your mouth shut, or I'll seal it, with this!"

Letone nodded.

Doors opened, and they were escorted down a series of corridors.

Finally, they stopped in front of a large metal door. The Trooper inserted a card and it opened.

They stepped inside to be greeted by four people. Rigrano's mouth fell open, with surprise.

Ω

Brijet ordered the Man-o-War to keep a million Ks away from Sleebo, and the circling fleet of pirate ships, which they had been following.

Quickly, she checked: her scanners showed another three destroyers had warped into the system.

A large ferry was seen, leaving the cruiser for the planet's surface, but due to the atmospheric conditions it was impossible to track its movements, this far out.

The chief of the pirate cruiser received his verification.

"That craft, which is three million Ks off the port beam, is confirmed as the one that was in the Rambus system," said the second-on-the-bridge.

"Damn!" the chief cursed. "Who are they?"

The second scanned the computer and shrugged. "No idea, sir. The scanners are not even picking up that sort of craft correctly. Different scanners show it as different shapes and sizes... which is how we know that it is the same craft."

The chief walked over to the screen; looked very closely and studied what was shown. "Have a message sent, asking it to identify itself."

The message was sent, and after three minutes the second said, "Sir, no reply."

The chief paced across the floor. How could he be tracked? Even if someone had been able to follow his warp drives, he had laid a zigzag course. Damn that craft; out there.

He turned and said to his battle-commander. "We need the craft brought in. Send three interceptors."

The battle-commander reached over and gave the command. Four minutes later, three streaks into the blackness of space showed afterburners, as the interceptors sped, to their quarry.

The chief kept his eyes on the screen, and as soon as the interceptors arrived there, the strange craft shimmered from view.

Ω

Jaron sat beside Brijet, at the helm of the Man-o-War. The message came through, from the chief of the pirates. Brijet advised against answering the message. Jaron agreed.

When the interceptors arrived, Brijet warped out from their view, to reposition themselves.

Ω

The chief had his fleet gradually close into orbit over Sleebo and watched, as the planet slowly spun, in its winter turmoil. As it revolved, it showed something new. On the other side of the planet was the glowing bright craft that had eluded his interceptors.

The chief slammed his fist down on his consul again. "Damn it! Who is that out there, who will ignore a whole battle fleet? It is close enough, now. Have all craft fire full lasers at it!"

Over the next three seconds, the lasers of eight battle seasoned ships, fired at the strange ship, which seemed to have no apparent dimension, nor shape. It shifted and shimmered, to only appear again further out of range of the lasers.

The chief mused for a moment. "It appears that the lasers gave no lasting damage to the craft, but it certainly was not slow, in getting out from direct strikes." He thought for a moment. "I wonder who they are?" He slowly returned his attention, to the activities on the planet.

ψ

MOUNT DRAPPER

Rigrano found himself speechless.

“Surprised, commander? Welcome to *Mount Drapper*.” said Helann. It was the Commander Rigrano's second in charge, his most trusted junior officer.

“Why?” pleaded Rigrano. He could see that Helann was there, of his own will.

“Money is a good motivator, but there are other reasons.” Helann shook his head, with a smirk. “You had no idea, did you? Did you not wonder who had rescued us, or why we never met anyone, or any, of the so called terrorists?”

“*So called* terrorists?”

“So called, my gullible commander from the famous village of Alsam. That is because there are no terrorists. The terrorists are just a ploy, developed by the psychrons, to entrap those who oppose them. There are no terrorists.”

Rigrano began to feel his world unravel. Hesitantly, he put forward another question, “But why bring me here? Why this elaborate hoax?”

The taller man from the rear stepped forward. He extended his hand, “My name is *Balgoss*. I’m the commander, of the base here. It was intended that you would endorse our being here, so that you would

help us. It was well known that you despised the work of the pirates, and that your sympathy lay with the Temples, though you were known as a Federation military man, through and through.

"You see, Rigrano, we are Federationists as well. It is just that we don't believe that the Templars are a good influence, upon our societies. In fact, it is quite the contrary. As the Temple movement grows, then the power of the long-lifers in the galaxy, diminishes.

"It was intended that you originally join us, as a fifth column movement. You were not to find out that we were the pirates, until a later date. It was expected that then you would consider helping us, without any hesitation. As it happens, this old man here, let the idea slip out, but never mind. The question still remains; will you join us?"

Rigrano shook his head slowly, "Sorry. I could never slaughter defenseless civilians, no matter where they are from, or their genes. I'm a military man, who takes out military targets. I'm not a butcher. I'm sorry," he said, shaking his head, ignoring Balgoss's hand.

Balgoss only smiled and withdrew his hand. "That is no matter. There was another important reason for having you here, and that was to capture this man."

Immediately he pointed to Letone, who was at the same time lunged at with a syringe. For Letone, the world began to swirl. He staggered, fell against

the desk, then the wall, and finally, he collapsed onto the floor.

Balgoss smiled and nodded at the body, on the floor. "We believe that the balance of the galaxy is somehow tied to this man, or at least, his Boguard. We also know that they are assisting the Templars on Jilta. We knew that if you were to escape the psychrons, we could lure the Boguard here, to Sleebo, so, well done, Rigrano. You have struck a great blow, against the Boguard."

Rigrano jumped at Balgoss, but was felled short, by the back of a gun butt, from his ex-junior officer, Helann.

Ω

Letone awoke; disoriented. He was conscious of his awareness; of being exterior to his body. His old body lay down flat, on a table, under him. It was breathing, slowly and shallowly. Also in the room, were two men in white coats.

Letone noticed that the walls felt surreal. There seemed like there was a distortion of time, as the men were endlessly withdrawing the needle, from his body's arm. The door was opening, opening and still opening. It appeared to be forever opening. It opened, and in stepped the commander, of the base. He was moving faster, than the rest. He seemed to be saying something.

Then, the men in the white coats were trying to say something, to his body. They looked very strange, down there. Letone seemed in a good position, up near the ceiling, looking down.

What was the question? What was his name? He knew that, but he shouldn't tell them. He knew he shouldn't tell. What was his name? He could remember. It was Letone, Captain of the Aaron, but he wouldn't tell. He was not allowed to tell. What was his name? He just remembered that, but he wouldn't tell.

Letone watched, as the body began to move its lips. The men slowly leaned over it and were beside the head. The body continued, to move its lips. It was saying things, which it was not allowed to tell. Stop that body. You're not allowed to tell.

Letone began to feel frantic. The body was telling. He willed it not to tell, but the body wouldn't obey him, anymore. He was outside it, now. Letone was trying to stop it. The body wouldn't obey. Now, the men in white coats have his name.

What was that? Where is his home base? Oh, the body must not tell. Please, don't tell body, please don't tell. Letone willed with everything that he had, for the body not to tell, but the body was trying, and so was Letone. The lips moved a bit, but Letone would stop them. He wouldn't let his body tell them where the base of Aaron was located, but he couldn't stop it. The world was going so slowly, and he couldn't stop his body from telling.

Letone's mind almost gave up, when he finally called for help.

Help.... Help.... Body will tell.... Help. His message went out to anyone, who could receive it. He simply sent out a thought broadcast for anyone and everyone, to pick up.

Jaron was alert. He felt a *mind-call*. He picked it out, somewhere on the planet, calling for help. *The body will tell... help....* Immediately Jaron knew that it was his old mentor, Letone. He could identify another Aaron's mind, just as anyone else would recognize another's voice. A mind was just as distinctive.

Jaron sent out an alert to the other Boguard, on the Man-o-War to join him, and then followed the mind of Letone, in to the room, with the psycho-surgeons. Horror and revulsion ran through Jaron, as he *far-saw* what was in store, for his old comrade.

Letone watched, while he felt first the presence of a friendly mind, and then a whole room full of friendly minds. The men in white coats were thrown backwards, from the body on the table, and slammed against the walls. Then, the door opened and a force, which they couldn't see, threw them out, as well as the commander. The door slammed shut, and the tumblers in the lock rolled and froze into position.

Letone had thought to himself, when the other mind called him, but he couldn't think of how to respond. The ceiling now seemed closer to the floor, and the walls were going around and around.

Ω

Jaron sat back. He looked at Brijet. "We have problems. Captain Letone is down there; on the planet. It appears that the enemy knows who he is, and have used some form of narcosis intervention, in an attempt to strip data from him. I suspect that they are after the whereabouts of the Aaron."

Brijet nodded. The Aaron had not been under such a threat, in a long time. "The protocols are plain. The body of the Captain must die. He'll live again, and come back to us. We can't afford the risk of him giving out our location," she said, in a slow cold steely voice.

Jaron understood, but he wouldn't concede it, just yet, "If Letone is there, then other Boguard, will be down there. Let me find them, and see if they can assist. For now, no one can get into that room."

Brijet nodded, sharply. She had far-seen the room. "Very well, but you know our mission-charter. We must not put the Aaron at risk, and we are not to be seen, intervening in the affairs of the Federation."

Jaron sighed. "I'm fully aware of it. I'm also in control of the events, on the planet. For the moment, this affair is in my domain."

"As long as the Aaron isn't at risk, but it is the responsibility of every Aaron, to see that the risk is eliminated," she said.

Jaron's attention went out, to the planet of Sleebo. He found other Boguard. He also found out what their mission was, and why they were there. There was great support for the Commander Rigrano, who they assumed, was in the mountain.

Ω

Balgoss couldn't believe what had just happened. He righted himself and rammed the door, but it was shut tight. He grabbed at the handle, but received a burn on his hand. He stood back, and looked at the two psycho-surgeons. "What in the universe was that?" he asked.

One of the psycho-surgeons managed to stand. "It is as we were led to believe, sir. These Boguard are ... powerful. They are not as you or I, sir. You can see what one man is like, when he is in a coma, with narcotics. Imagine what they can do as a race, if they decided to declare war, on the rest of the galaxy. That is why they were lured here. They are dangerous. Now for the first time, I truly understand why."

"Right. There are about twenty others like him, on the planet. Be alert for them. I'll send out search patrols and in the meantime, get that door cut open."

The man dusted his coat down, and looked at the door. "I don't think I would bother. The head psychrons want this specimen in prime condition and in one piece. When we are ready to deliver him, we

can blow the hinges. Before that, we can keep him unconscious, with the ventilation system. Then we will send him on to Palbo. I'm certain that Doctor Rees will be most impressed with this specimen. The first relay destroyer is due in two days."

Ω

Jaron was organizing the events down on the planet, while the Boguard were readying. The Man-o-War was back on full mission alert.

Ω

Balgoss watched the image of the Man-o-War, which had been sent down from the cruiser. He saw how the lasers had little effect. Still, he thought, there was nothing to indicate the event was related to his prisoner. When this man Letone arrived, there were no other craft out there. In fact, there was nothing to indicate that the craft out there, was a craft. It may have been some sort of illusion or natural phenomena, but then, he couldn't take that risk. He was now a worried man.

What was this race that had some form of control over matter by thought, he wondered.

Ω

Gandin was the leader of the Boguard group, which had journeyed to the south. They had received many offers of help, from the warmer towns and wealthier Sleeboan families.

He now had a mission to take up those offers, and advance a small army north. He did so, and soon met with the Boguard team, who was travelling west, to the base of Mount Drapper. There, he would meet up with the remaining teams. Each team had brought a local contingent of Sleeboan forces.

The Sleeboans were not quiet. Many had experience in the galactic mining companies, some were ex-troopers and some were just rough-necks, after excitement. For whatever their reason for being there, they were welcome.

Gandin had no opportunity to see his following, of over three hundred men, as the weather was howling its obscene cry, with ice through the air.

He looked through the slit left open for the eyes. The world was a white blitz of swirling snow. Gandin threw his arm forward and hoped the message would be relayed down the line. Three hundred men soon were moving again.

The day was slowly ending, as Gandin and his troops edged forward, through a freezing minus forty-three degrees. They had no idea where the opening to the mountain was. The weather had been kind to them, and provided some of the lowest temperatures and highest winds for weeks. There was no way that they could be observed. Only with Jaron's vague

overhead directions, did Gandin know where to climb. All floaters and electrical equipment had to be left behind. If the weather held out, they could arrive, unseen, in three hours. This was the last ascent.

Gandin crawled over more rocks, as the wind bit at his eyes. He felt his lips under the mask, as they began to freeze. He could barely make out his companion, at his side; the snow was building up so fast against his goggles. He placed one leg before the other, along the ledge, blind to all, bar Jaron's directions from above.

Finally, after two hours and twenty minutes, Gandin found a sheer cliff face. He turned to his companion. "Scout ahead, and find where this leads us; that way," he yelled.

His companion waved in acknowledgement, and had vanished into the blackness within two seconds. The night had taken over their world. Gandin could see no one; no stars, no lights, and no movement.

A hand rested lightly on his shoulder, "Gandin, friend." It was a fellow Boguard. "We have to use lights. It is too dark, and I can't feel any energy detectors up there."

"Very well!" Gandon shouted back, through the screaming wind. The Boguard vanished to pass the news. Gandin turned on the light of his belt, which would be good for a distance of three paces. Beyond that the snow and ice blinded even that large glow-lamp, from view.

Another Bogueard nudged up, along with a dozen other men. In the lee of the wind, they could be heard. "What are we doing now?" screamed one of the Sleeboans.

"Reconnaissance!" yelled Gandin, shaking his head.

"All right! Just wanted to know. I came here for a bit of a fight, not to become a frozen slab of meat for the *high-volves*¹⁰ in summertime!"

Gandin nodded, when another light came into view. It was the Bogueard, doing the reconnaissance. "Leader," he yelled over the wind, "The cliff face is outflanked by an easy passage, to the right. Only seventy meters beyond, is the opening."

Gandin grinned, "Pass the word. When we reach the cliff face, all glow-lights are to be dowsed. Let's go!"

Slowly and quietly the covert band of men crawled, through the snow. Many had laser rifles strapped to their backs; others had simply holster-lasers, while some possessed both. Gandin's men passed out six boxes of percussion grenades.

Ω

Letone opened his eyes, and stared at the ceiling. The first thing he thought about was eating.

¹⁰ **DEFINITION:** High-volves; Native animals that are notoriously vicious on the peaks of Sleebo. Hibernating carnivore. Source: Searfinders Index. PP. 3112-3.

Then he thought to himself, that he had to recall where he was. He tried to sit up, but feeling his head swirl, he almost fell onto the floor.

He grabbed the side of the bed. Steadying himself, he looked at the door. There was knocking, coming from the other side. No, it was pounding. Then Letone realized that he was not alone; there were other minds in the room. Help was with him!

The door was being held tight by those minds, and whoever was on the other side, was being held out.

Quickly, Letone recalled the events of the past two days. He couldn't make a lot of sense of it, but that was the effect of the psychron-drugs.

Getting in touch with Jaron, Letone informed him of the other important people, in the building.

Jaron understood.

Ω



Amy, locked in a cell in Mount Drapper

Amy sat chained to the wall, her hands strapped to her sides. All she could see was the door. All she could think about was escape and killing the enemy.

The room she was in was small; devoid of fixtures. As one of the psychrons had said, they had no intention of drugging her. It would be far more enjoyable for them, to have her to watch with frustration, as they performed small operations on her friend Anki. She knew what to expect. The thought drove Amy even crazier, to the delight of the psychron attendants. The more she struggled, the more they described what they were about to do.

Ω



*The pirate base entrance at
Mount Drapper, during the day*

Outside the base, in the dead black swirling cold of night, a small army off Sleeboans was amassing.

In one finite second, the world around Sleebo began a tiny change.

ψ

THE SLEEBOANS

Gandin waved a small band of twenty, towards the far side. He threw the first percussion grenade. Five more exploded, in a deafening roar, through the base from his left.

A volunteer corps from the village Krano flooded through the entrance, down the far left, with lasers blazing. There were twelve of them; some of the toughest miners in the sector.

Another swarm of volunteers, including retired troopers, ran in from the right, and Gandin's group in the center followed them. Their orders were to kill all; until the enemy surrendered.

The pirate base had been caught only partly off guard; extra patrols had been stationed near the huge troop-carrying ferries. As the miners and Sleeboans swarmed in, the pirate troopers returned fire.

Sleeboans fell, but still, many continued to advance in.

Commander Balgoss was caught asleep. When awakened he asked how long the fighting had been going on; the answer: one minute. He grabbed his weapons and rapidly barked out some orders, through the communicator. The view on the screens showed him, that the invaders had already taken

control of the base entrance level above, and were now beginning to swarm down, below.

Gandin fired and blew away the side of a pirate's face, then another's arm. He swung and returned more fire, to over on the cat-walks. The enemy fell from its perch. He was making ground and controlled half the floor area of the base around the ships.

He could hear the hollow ricochet, from inside the ferries. Some of his men dashed over, to join the fight. The ships were then secured.

The group on the left had reached the communications section and taken control. Those on the right were gaining access, to the lower floors.

Gandin sprinted over, to the stairs; they effectively now had control of the open level. Three percussion grenades were thrown down the stairs, to the lower levels. The explosions were followed by a swarm of men, tramping down, and firing at anything that moved.

Gandin dashed down further, to find the next level littered with dead and writhing pirates. The bodies seemed everywhere. He could hear the echoes of the zips of laser fire down through further-away corridors.

More men followed him, down the stairs, and more percussion grenades followed.

As Gandin was about to leave, he saw the dead body of a man in sleepwear with a laser by his side. Gandin bent down and turned him over and pulled the bracelet from his wrist. Base Commander Balgoss, of

the Federation Command of Palbo. Gandin smiled and continued down, to the next level.

Ω

The chief of the pirate cruiser looked at the screens. "Mister," he said. "That strange craft is getting closer. Give me coordinates."

The second confirmed what they saw, visually. The craft was getting closer. In fact too close.

"Get out three interceptors, now!" he bellowed, but it was too late; the screen began to die down. Its power went down, and the lighting on the bridge began to dim.

The chief stood and then ran to the communications banks; they were down too. Only emergency lighting remained.

"Second, get down into the lower sections and get me a report; fast. Have the damage-unit report, now!" called the chief.

The second sprinted to the door, but found it sealed - no power.

Finally, the thought dawned on him. His cruiser was now without any power, bar what was being produced by the emergency batteries. There would be no lighting to the corridors, doors would be sealed and no communications systems were working. They were about to be boarded.

The chief pulled out his laser and fired at the seal on the door. He felt it. It was not even warm.

Ω

Jaron watched as the cruiser came nearer in the hologram. *Now*, he thought and the lights of the cruiser began to dim. In unison, a hundred Aaron minds joined him. Moments later, the destroyers followed suit.

He nodded to Brijet. "If we could have transport down below, please."

She turned to those behind her and nodded. They were ready.

Jaron smiled and left the bridge. Moments later, he and twenty of his ground forces were being whisked down, to the icy planet.

Ω

Jaron soon found Boguard on the open decks and was directed to the stairs, where a cordon had been drawn around. He descended. There was still heavy resistance below, by some of the well-seasoned enemy troops.

On the third level, Jaron came across Gandin, "Have you found him?" was all he asked.

"No, Sir." Gandin replied smartly, to his new ground commander.

Jaron looked about and yelled over the commotion, "The next level down!"

With that, they fell back to the stairs. Above, a miner dropped and crashed down two flights, below them. Jaron fired at the source of the shot. He missed; looked surprised at Gandin, and then dashed down the stairs.

They were three floors down, now. There was far less noise. The corridors were empty of bodies.

Jaron turned to Gandin, "The experimentation section. They will be down here. Check all the doors."

The pair ran down, trying all the doors that were locked, until they came to one in particular. Jaron burst the hinges, with merely a thought. The door fell back into the room, with a crash. Jaron and Gandin stepped inside. On the far wall was a woman, tied and strapped. She stared at them, in terror.

Jaron looked at her. Images raced through his mind. Her terrified eyes rested on his. She felt quiet for a second.

Jaron noticed a shimmering of air, to the right.

"Is she insane?" whispered Gandin noticing a strange look in her eyes.

Jaron walked up to her, very close and looked directly into her eyes. They burned with fury. He turned back to Gandin, "No, definitely not." and then looked at the woman again, and removed the gag from her mouth. He said simply to her, "We work for the Temple," and dashed off.

Amy stared at these two, who had burst in, like they were from some crazy Sequetus archive movie.

After the gag was removed, she still sat there, stunned. She felt calm and looked, as the straps and chains fell away. "Sure!" she called. She then thought after the two, who now were further down the hall.

She jumped from her seat and promptly fell down. Quickly, she willed the blood to return to her legs and followed after the pair.

"Wait!" she called out.

She caught up to them, well down the corridor. She pulled at Gandin's shoulder.

"You can't just walk in there." She pointed to the door. "That is where they developed their biological experiments," She touched the scar along her cheek. "Let me!"

Jaron nodded, and passed her his laser.

She shook her head and pointed to the knife, clasped on his belt. She said softly, "When I go in, don't let anyone else in, until I give the all-clear. If those psychrons have already let their experimental creatures loose, then we and the whole galaxy are at risk. If I tell you that this whole place has to be incinerated, then that is what you must do. Understand?"

Jaron nodded. He recalled the bravery of the woman on Rambus, as she disappeared behind the door. One thought, and the door was sealed, once again. He turned to Gandin and said, "That is one, who should be Boguard."



Inside the base lower floors

Gandin looked at Jaron as if to ask, "Really?"

Inside the room, Amy could see the five doors that led away, to the experimental section. Through the glass partitions, she could see the white coated psychrons and a single psycho-surgeon.

The first psychron she crept up behind, was standing over a microscope. Amy slowly came closer, gagged her, and dragged her down, below the bench by her left forearm, while cutting through her windpipe. Amy thrust her left hand over the psychron's face, and felt for the woman's eye socket. As the body writhed she thrust two fingers under the eyes, up through the bone, into the brain. The eyes bulged and pushed out. Amy delighted in feeling the rubbery tissue give way, within the skull. She pushed her fingers harder, into the other eye socket, and the body finally ceased to kick. Removing her fingers from within the psychrons brain, she pulled out her knife and slit the throat properly. She watched, as

the body slumped to the floor and blood trickled down the psychron's collar. There was no breath left in it, anymore. Amy started to feel better.

She then looked up from the bench, and saw her next victim, in the other room. Slowly, Amy crept over; it was another female psychron. This one was poised over her notes and tried to scream, as the hand covered her mouth, from behind. She fought, as her unseen assailant dragged her down and pinned her on the ground.

Amy shoved a glass jar into the woman's mouth and then tied her right arm to the leg of the bench while holding her down, by her knees. Amy then taped the other arm so the woman was lying face up, and arms out. With a grin, Amy whispered, "Is your heart pumping with terror? I hope so, because you're about to die." With that Amy rolled the woman's sleeves up and slashed an artery on the right arm with the woman watching. Blood sprayed over the walls while the woman struggled helplessly.

Amy then left, for her next victim. This time it was a male psycho-surgeon.

Moments later, she rapped on the door and Jaron opened it. "Safe!" she said, smiling calmly.

Jaron swung the door open to see the walls covered in blood, and six white coated bodies, strewn over the floors. Each had its throat cut. Two had their eyes gouged out; another had its head barely attached to its body.

Jaron swallowed. He nodded to the woman, who was covered in blood, her raging anger having disappeared from her eyes. "Professional," is all he said.

Amy passed the knife back to Jaron after wiping it on her tunic. She smiled. "There are some friends, over in there," she said, and pointed.

A moment later, Letone found himself staring at his young protégé. Jaron hugged the old man. After letting go, Jaron handed him a laser pistol. Letone felt relief. He followed the three.

"I seem to recall doing something like this before, with you," called Jaron loudly.

Letone smiled. "A long time ago, and it was I who was dragging you out from that CIA base, on Sequetus 3, I recall."

The next door blew from its hinges and Amy dashed in, to find her friend Anki.

Anki jumped up. "This will be another time that you have saved my life. My father will be tired of this," called Anki, as the straps were cut.

"I think not," said Amy. "It was not I, but these people, who claim to be working for the Temple." Amy moved aside, to let Jaron into the room.

Jaron extended his hand. Anki shook it and stared into his eyes, and thought; that this man doesn't work for my father, but he is good. Jaron smiled.

Gandin shouted, from the corridor, "How many more of these rooms have captives?"

Amy dashed out. "There are still the Sleeboans, which the psycho-surgeons have been experimenting on." Amy led the way.

Ω

Two hours later, the base had been completely secured. One hundred and twenty prisoners were taken, and locked in the floors, below. The dead measured ninety-seven. There were many more wounded.

Jaron was near the entrance to the mountain, when a young Boguard came up to him. Amy and Gandin were at his side.

"Commander Jaron, there has been an accident on the third floor. A psychron got loose and smashed three experimental cages, letting out the insects of death."

Jaron turned, to see the terror once again fill the eyes of Amy. He said, "Have the base pumped full of the outside air. Reduce the inside temperature to that of the outside. That insect is a local inhabitant of the southern extremities of Sleebo, where it is warmer for far longer and the water doesn't freeze. The cold should kill it. Seal off the third floor if it has not been done."

Jaron watched the Boguard, as he sprinted off. Jaron turned to Amy and said, "Most of the southern continent of Sleebo is plagued by the insect. Up here, the water freezes down to the bottom of the

lakes and rivers, and thus the insect dies. It doesn't hibernate and can't survive the cold conditions, but I'll have the floors sealed off and we can inspect all, to ensure that those that have now been bitten are treated. We have treatment for the insect and its eggs."

Amy stared at the man, who had taken charge of the base and she asked, "Who are you, really?"

Jaron shrugged and simply said, "Boguard." He turned to follow the men, who were boarding the ferry. "This battle is only half over. Are you staying here, or joining us, Ma'am?"

Amy didn't wait. She sprinted over and jumped aboard with the door quickly sealing tight, behind her.

Ω

The chief of the pirate cruiser had been trying to exit from his bridge, when finally the door slid open. He was staring down the barrels of ten laser rifles. He stepped back and swallowed.

Three Boguard grabbed him, and held him up against the wall. As Jaron looked around the room, four laser shots zipped through the air. One came from the front of the bridge, while the other three were from his own men. Two pirates lay dead, on their console.

The Boguard stepped aside, as a group of twenty Sleeboans stormed past, to take over control, of the ship.

Slowly, Jaron moved down to the bridge center, and watched, as all faces were now upon him.

As the Sleeboans reefed the pirates from their seats, Jaron spoke to the men in front of him, plus the remainder of the ships' complement, through the viewscreens, "Your cruiser, as with your destroyers, has been captured. We are in control of your vessel, from the engine compartments to the galley. You can fight us, if you wish, but I warn you that you'll die, and that we will suffer light losses. Your cause was evil, and for that reason alone we shall prevail. For the moment you shall, each and every one of you, be interviewed. Mercy will be shown to you, who cooperate. For those that continue to oppose us, this will be your fate." Jaron turned on a screen showing six bodies floating, out in space, their eyes exploded from their skulls and their tunics bulging from the internally bloated body-pressure. They had been ejected into space, without protective suits.

Jaron sat in the chief's chair and turned, to face his enemy. Jaron's voice was straight to the point, "You and your men will remain prisoner, until you can be tried for your crimes against any and all humanity, and the galactic civilizations of the Outer Worlds."

"Ha!" screamed the chief as he was being taken away, "There is no crime in exterminating vermin.

That is what you all are! Vermin! Vermin....” His voice trailed off, as he was led away, struggling.

Ω

Twenty hours later Jaron was conferring with Rigrano, Letone and the leaders of the Sleeboans. They would return to the village of Alsam, to collect the micron discs that contained the mine outlays, of the route to Palbo. Then, there was only one more step and maybe it could be done from here, on Sleebo. A full scale galactic war might be averted, if they were swift enough.

After five days preparation, the pirate fleet would be readied with a Sleeboan crew and provisions, and they would be setting their course, for Palbo itself.

The prisoners would be interned, on Mount Drapper. They would be left provisions and heating. They wouldn't be left warm clothing or transport. A single destroyer would stand guard, over the planet. The reports were that the insects had died, as expected. There were only three cases of bites and they had been treated. If the prisoners interned on the mountain should suffer from further insect bites, then that was no worse than what they inflicted upon the Outer Worlds. However, it was unlikely.

During the next five days the cruiser would undergo repairs on its warp drive system by the Boguard.

After five days, Jaron looked at the screens and watched the universe outside begin to shimmer.

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N I C K B R O A D H U R S T

The End of

ESCAPE

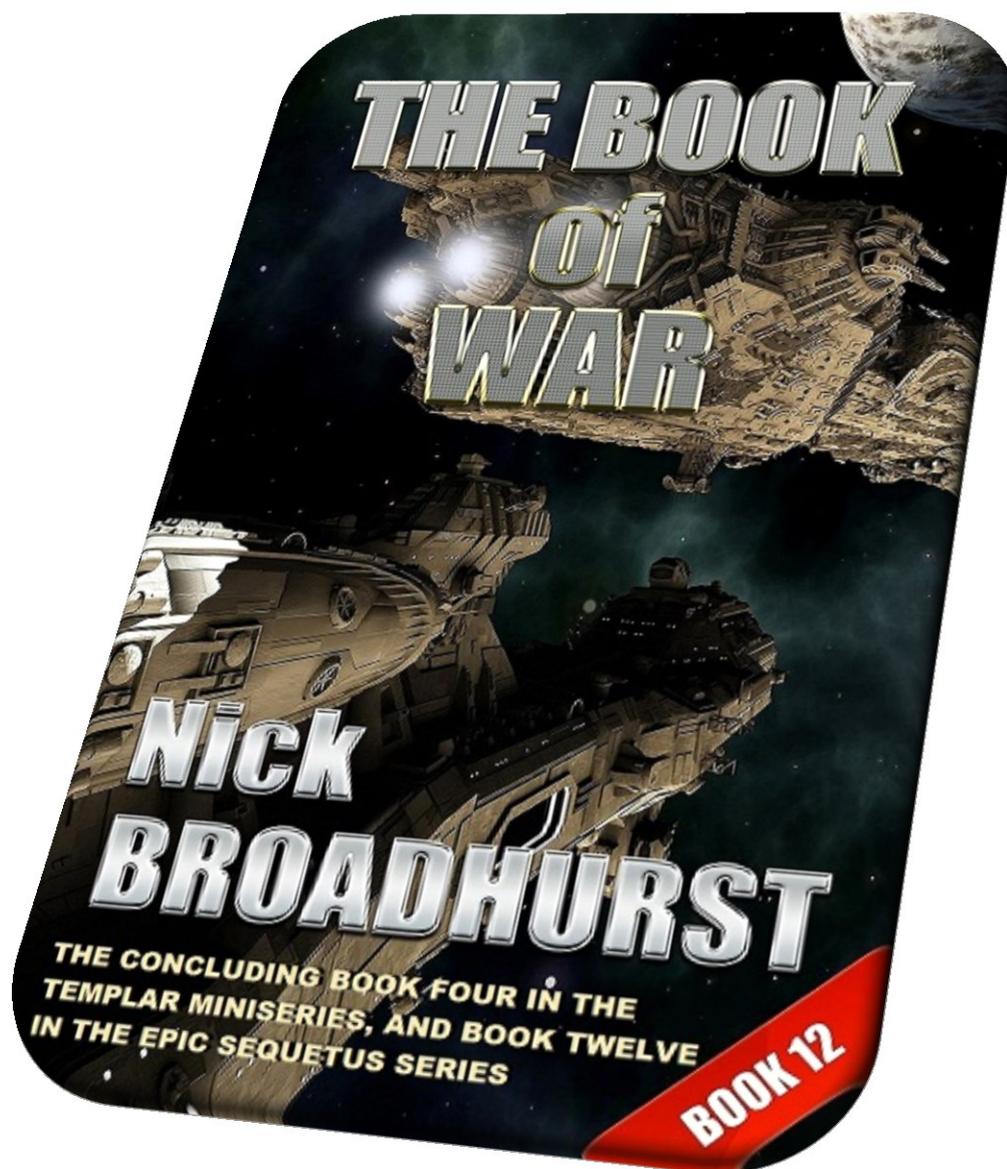
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FEDERATION

THE TEMPLAR MINISERIES

Page 436 | 606

N I C K B R O A D H U R S T



THE TEMPLAR MINISERIES

Page 437 | 606

CHAPTER 4

THE BOOK OF WAR

Sub Contents

Maps

- Sub-chapter 1 The Ravages Of War
- Sub-chapter 2 To War
- Sub-chapter 3 Mines
- Sub-chapter 4 Arrest
- Sub-chapter 5 Palbo
- Sub-chapter 6 The Great Black Woods
- Sub-chapter 7 Jilta Again
- Sub-chapter 8 Jilta P.C.
- Sub-chapter 9 Palbo C.C.
- Sub-chapter 10 Solution

THE RAVAGES OF WAR

Brandon Mirak stood looking over a large wall screen of the galaxy. The red covered his *New Territories*. The black represented the worlds he had yet to conquer. He mused as the red sections grew, to overtake the black.

A rap on the door interrupted Mirak.

"Enter!"

The door swished open and an officer smartly marched in. "My Leader Mirak, I have news from Base Commander Balgoss."

"Yes?" Mirak turned away from his map to glance up at the guard.

"The news is that they have captured the daughter of the Master Templar. The message goes on to say that she will be delivered to you, as soon as she's assessed by the psychrons at his base."

Mirak nodded and turned away, as a gesture of dismissal. He wanted to enjoy that feeling, that inner glow of success. The next step was to use this news, to place an emotional grip on his adversary in Jilta. He would do it slowly, taunting the Master Templar at first, before sending him the image hologram of his daughter in captivity. It was so good to be the victor.

He looked from the window of his office. He had changed his abode, on the suggestions of the psychrons, after their assessment of the typical rebel profile. They found that the rebel was intelligent, highly motivated, and would die rather than be captured. The rebel's devotion to the overthrow of Mirak, meant he could expect suicide squad attempts on his life. Thus, Brandon Mirak accepted their advice and surrounded himself in a fortress, protected by guards that had been programmed and approved by the psychrons.

He looked from the window of his fortress; he no longer saw the people moving about in the park below. He couldn't see the traffic buzzing around, from the pickup terminals. Now his only view, was of walls surrounding him, his protection. He could see three guards standing on the perimeter wall and no doubt there would be many more beyond. Mirak sighed; sometimes he wondered if he was a prisoner and not a ruler. He guessed that was the sacrifice he had made, for greatness. Palbo and the Federation would once again rule the galaxy, as superior specimens of the human race. Brandon Mirak had no other purpose.

Ω

The short cold mid-winter day was drawing to a close. Three generals stood at close attention. The tallest general was attired in a black spartan uniform,

dagger and laser hanging from his black wide belt. He stepped forward and pointed to the map of Palbo, the planet.

“My Leader,” he said. “The rebels seem to vanish into thin air and then appear in another part of the world.”

Mirak’s face reddened, as he seemed to be trying to control his ferocious wild temper, which he had become known for. He strolled over the hard baked terracotta floor, and stared the general with ice blue eyes.

Mirak began to feel the growing heated rage, trying to burst from him. Finally, he let out the tensely controlled words. “My life and my regime are not safe. Either you find the rebels, or... else....” He turned and walked away.

The general had inherited the rank from his predecessor, who was hanged for *non-dutiful acts* of not fulfilling Mirak’s orders, to dismantle all rebel opposition. The general left the room.

Mirak drew the ornate window curtains. He looked at the harsh yellow light on the black walking compound, and tall grey stone fence beyond. He wondered whether he was really the master of the New-Age, or a victim of his own paranoia. He shook his head. Such thoughts were counterproductive to the aims and needs of the Federation. Yet, he wondered if it was possible that his whole existence was nothing, but a manufactured dream. How did he really know that he ruled over the Outer-Worlds?

How could he really know that he now ruled, unconditionally over a third of the old Federation? He could never get to see the limits of his New-Age. He had to rely on the reports of persons, who he never knew.

Strolling over to the banks of computer screens, he glanced at the reports that were flooding in, on the states of the various planets. His ground forces were now in control of the last resisting movements, on four Outer-Worlds, and two defiant Federation sectors had capitulated, in just the last two days. He sighed as he realized the data was three months old, at least. News could only travel as fast, as warp drive craft could carry it.

The lack of being in total control of all events simultaneously seemed to make him nervous. Was he becoming paranoid, really?

He looked at the screens, showing the most recent locations of the Templar forces. It seems that they would soon disclose their strengths. It mattered little. He knew about their secret separate Cordello fleets. The fact, that these fleets were now about to join made little difference. Every moment he grew stronger, larger and his own forces unassailable. Mirak smiled, as he realized his gamble to stall, which was accepted by the Templars, was their undoing. Smugly, he moved to the next screens to read how his plans to destroy their fleets, without mercy, without survivors, was proceeding.

Mirak had already gained the upper hand, and fighting from planet to planet had gained him many victories. He was not interested in fighting great space wars. It was, who controlled the planets, controlled the galaxy. With the advent of warp drive travel, the distance between planets was irrelevant. It was planetary war, which was winning the galaxy. He now had the forces and numbers, to overcome the remainder of the Templar controlled sectors. The newly designed Templar frigates would have no impact. These latest ships of the Templars were known for their deadly accuracy and killing power, but they couldn't fight a ground war, nor could they destroy planets. They were designed to kill cruisers and destroyers, and as long as those forces were not committed too long in one place, then that weapon of the Templars was impotent.

Yet, it seemed that the real war was about to begin. The Palboan fleet outnumbered the Templars, seven to two.

Mirak stepped back. He had full faith in his generals and turned to view the jewel of the galaxy, which had eluded him and his forebears. On the other side of the room, was a tall hologram of the planet Jilta, revolving, in all its magnificent glory.

Jilta was a sister planet to Palbo. It was watered and culturally similar, but it had never been tamed into the fold of the Warp Drive Bank, as Palbo had. When the Alliance fell over a millennium ago and the Royals had vanished from rule. The Warp Drive Bank

had taken control of their financial affairs, but the planet was individualized. It seemed to refuse the role as second sister, to the greater planetary culture of Palbo.

Now, the destiny of Palbo would befall it, as ruler over Jilta. Mirak smiled, as the holographic impression turned with glistening waters, under its sun. Under Mirak's New-Age, Jilta would be his second seat of power. From there, he could rule the far side of the Federation, as Jilta now did with its Templar influence.

Mirak felt the pounding within his head. He wondered if he should call the psychrons. He seemed terribly anxious.

Ω

The Master Templar had received word from the Outer-Worlds a week before, that his daughter and Amy had escaped captivity of the pirates on Sleebo. Three days ago he got a message from Leader Mirak, who said that he had his daughter captive, and would return her unharmed should he decide to submit the rule of Jilta, to the merciful reign of the Palbo military. The Master Templar had not acknowledged a reply, yet. It seems that the *Leader* of Palbo was not in control of all the data, yet. Perhaps the Temple could exploit this flaw.

Ω

It was an emergency summit meeting of Cordellos, or what was left of them. Many had vanished, as the Palboans plundered their planets. There were thirteen Cordellos at the meeting, with seven of those no longer having sectors to return to.

The Master Templar stood at the head of the long dark timber grained table. Their attention was fixed on him. In times of emergency, he had broad sweeping powers, over the Cordellos. The Master Templar couldn't be disobeyed. His decision was final, and not open for a debate. No longer would democracy govern within the Temple. With war, it would run as benign, theocratic military governance. It was strength in leadership, which would bring the Temple through this crisis, not popularity. This was the way of the Torren, as it was written.

The Master Templar threw back his hand to indicate the screen behind. His deep voice boomed about the room. The tall arched stained windows showed little light as Jilta P.C. entered its winter. The great slender yellow lights that hung halfway down from the ceiling flooded the room with an amber hue.

The screen showed the most recent state of the Temple Empire. "This, fellow Templars, is all we have left. We are, but a shadow of our former strength.

"There are now only three sectors secure, and we have by no means the craft to protect them."

A Cordello rose, his golden hood drawn back, "My *Lorde*. What could we defend?"

The Master Templar turned to the screen and spoke sorrowfully, "We could defend Jilta. That would mean forsaking all other Temples, to the barbarian Mirak."

There was a hushed brief murmur around the room, until the Master Templar resumed. "What we will do, is withdraw all military, to the bases at Jilta. We can't defend any other planet in the Jiltanian Sector, or any other sector without risk of losing Jilta. Fellow Cordellos, we won't risk Jilta.

"The other planets and sectors will survive, under the lunatic Mirak's reign, until Jilta regains ascendancy. In the meantime, we must prepare a resistance on each of our former planets. We must have the Palboans keep as much military presence on the other planets, as we can force them to. He must over stretch his resources, as he reaches for Jilta. Then, and only then, we may be able to strike a blow at our enemy and chase him as he withdraws back to Palbo.

"What is needed is for all craft and military, to travel to Jilta. There won't be one craft left out there. With the use of our frigates, I doubt that Mirak could sustain a strong campaign on Jilta. Should he attempt it, then we shall have the ground forces from the other planets here, to resist him."

The Master Templar looked around the room, at the dour faces. There was naught else he could do.

He continued. "Jilta has had other invaders, before. It won then, with the help of the Torren, and we will win out again!"

The Cordello from Kalanon stood and threw back her hood. Her voice was strong and distinctly feminine, in the male dominated room. "My Lorde and fellow Cordellos, the Master Templar is correct, we must save the Temple, or at least die, trying. There is no purpose in throwing away defense forces that will be defeated. My own forces from Kalanon shall be leaving, as soon as I can get word. I shall send that barbarian Mirak, word that my planet shall be undefended and left at his mercy, but the people of Kalanon shall really resist them. My military forces, as small as they are, plus the forces of the provincial government of Kalanon, will soon be on their way the Jilta. I shall return home to my planet to personally lead the resistance.

"May the grace of the Torren be with you, my Lorde!" She bowed extremely low, and then strode from the room. All eyes followed her.

Ω

Mirak was pacing back and forth. He had recently returned from a rest week, on the instruction of the psycho-surgeons. He had resisted going, but they insisted. Mirak wondered how they could so easily have persuaded him when the war was at its peak?

The latest reports indicated, that the last of the Federation systems around Jilta were capitulating rapidly. The end was in sight.

As Mirak paced back and forth, he couldn't find why he felt so ill at ease. He should be elated. The vermin of the galaxy was being exterminated and he was the conqueror, but the pleasure of conquest seemed to have eluded him, for the moment.

He recalled the pleasure he had felt in days gone by, when he ruled only the Warp Drive Bank. Those were good days, when it was safe for him on his own planet. He shuddered at the thought of people out there, Palboans, who wanted him dead. They were the dreaded rebels who had already slain three of his top generals.

He thought back again, to the days when the galaxy was run on commercial lines, not military. Suddenly, a pain shot through his head. He fell to his knees. It was the same pain as always. Whenever he began to reminisce about his former life, with the Bank, as its Chairman, he fell victim to the pain.

Mirak managed to haul himself up onto the large chair, by the window and sit, taking deep breaths. Was this war about to take him as its next conquest? He held his temples, as the pain cursed through his veins. He recalled how, when his wife had died, only years ago, of a blood clot in her brain; he had had all the directors of the hospital slain. It was then, that his plans, for absolute military rule of Palbo, fell into place. Finally, the planet administrators that had

imagined him as a threat to the Palboan sovereignty vanished.

The pain went away, and with it came the thought that all would come to pass, and even the unpleasantness would be forgotten; for one day it would be recorded that Brandon Mirak saved the galaxy, from the vermin short-lifers.

He stood and straightened. Outside, it seemed that the bitter cold winds of winter were dying away. Soon, there would be spring and with it the news of the *New-Age*¹¹.

Mirak seldom had visitors any more. It seemed that they only upset him. All his news was sent via viewscreens and via a few trusted aides. Last month, there was even a failed assassination attempt on his life. The assailant was caught before he had made it over the wall.

Mirak's hands had begun to tremble uncontrollably. He tried to hold them onto the chair, but couldn't grab hold. Like the war, Mirak knew this too would pass.

Ω

The Master Templar had moved his residence from the center palace of Jilta P.C., to Belevak, the military center for on-planet operations.

¹¹ **DEFINITION: New Age:** On Palbo, three years before, it was declared that the reign of Mirak would usher in the New Age of Prosperity. This became known as the New Age. Ref: Palbo Times 23/12/7896.

Almost all operations centers were underground. He viewed the rows of viewscreens and computer banks, seeing the hundreds of craft surrounding the planet and the thousands of military stations, buried under its surface. On the moons of the gas giants, of the system were attack craft, as well as defending stations, mid-way between Jilta and its solus.



The skies over Jilta filled with defense craft

He looked at the screens and saw the variety of craft that had shipped in, from the other systems. There were hundreds of mining, and private craft, as well as government craft. The results had surprised him. New craft were arriving every hour.

The response to strip their allied planets of anything military, and ship it to Jilta, was overwhelming. At last, the Master Templar began to wonder, if there was a chance that they might beat the tyrant Mirak.

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N I C K B R O A D H U R S T

THE TEMPLAR MINISERIES

Page 451 | 606

TO WAR

The lead marshal and four other Palboan fleet marshals sat abreast, staring at the Jiltanian planetary system, watching from the fleet cruiser's bridge. The data, from their scouting intelligence craft, was now beginning to be displayed.

The lead marshal stepped over to the screens. Their own five fleets were shown on the lower part of the scene. The solus of Jilta was in the center and the planet of Jilta lay in between.

As the lead marshal circled the floor he spoke deliberating on each sentence. "The enemy is well prepared. We can see that he has taken great aims to set his crown planet Jilta, behind a screen of defenders. I'm surprised at the amount of defenders, but then, one could expect this to be a response from the other sectors, in light of their easy capitulation."

One of the other fleet marshals stood, "My Lead *Marshal*, it would seem from our reconnaissance, that the planet is surrounded by many sizable objects."

"Yes, this will mean that our campaign will have to be one of stealth. We will need to be close in, carefully, and only at such speed if we're certain that the enemy has no external forces deployed, on its outer unoccupied worlds. I estimate this siege will be in the order of several months. This won't be a swift battle."

The other marshals agreed.

The lead marshal studied the screen as it displayed updated figures. "Hmm, it also appears that our opponent has a wide variety of craft. Some of which, are unknown to us."

The other marshal sat down. "Well... I have heard that the destructive power of those frigates can cripple an unprepared cruiser. Those civilian craft are an enigma and will need further investigation.

"Their asteroids will be an obstacle."

The lead marshal turned to the other four, "The siege will start with their asteroids. We will take time, and learn from the errors of the earlier large battle in space, the *Battle of Sequetus 3*. Our opponents down there, will have learned about that battle backwards, and how and why it was won. We have time to study those tactics too, and should this siege extend into years, then so be it necessary.

"To start, our five fleets will position strategically around the Jilta solar system. Generally, we won't close in until we have checked on the whole system, thus ensuring that we can't be attacked from outside.

"Marshals; to your fleets now."

Moments later, the lead marshal watched the fleet marshals leave in their shuttles, followed two hours later by the dividing of the fleets to reposition themselves around the outer parts of the Jiltanian heliosphere.

Ω

The Master Templar watched the images of the enemy, from his underground headquarters in Belevak.

Thirteen generals and eight Templar marshals stood by his side. This was the time, when the enemy finally revealed itself. This could be a turning point.

General Talbar asked, "Do you think he will expose his all at, the first sighting?"

The Master Templar shrugged, "He may. There is little advantage in him showing all. He will have other reserves beyond our detection. What percentage is here, now, will only be a guess, at this stage. We will have to see what reports come in, over the next month."

The Jilta guard-marshal said slowly, "It would be unwise for our enemy to blunder into the system, when we have had so long to prepare. He will spend time, scouring the outer parts of the system and then gradually move on. He won't be provoked, into a full scale early attack, but will respond to any test of his defenses. He will stay on, and remain behind the asteroids, until he's certain that they are rid of anything, which we might have put there."

One of the other marshals added, "The enemy will close in slowly, perhaps taking far longer, than we intend him to take."

"Then, we shall have to ensure that he does close in, at the time that we dictate, not on his

schedule. That will be our battle, to ensure that he arrives on time.”

The Master Templar turned to his generals, “Are the ground forces in position? Are we prepared?”

The Home General stepped forward. “Master, the home of Jilta is well protected. If the enemy lands, he will find resistance, that will overwhelm him.”

The Master Templar saw the screens, showing their relative strengths and readiness. He was impressed and said to the guard general, “Should our marshals fail, and the enemy does get to touch Jiltanian soil, then we have to be certain that he will land, to fight a land battle. He may decide to use a space barrage, if he thinks that superior forces will overcome him. So, generals, keep your strengths well hidden until called.”

The Master Templar looked towards all his loyal officers. They were not all Templars, but they were sworn to uphold the honor and traditions of Jilta. Some were Federationists and a few were long-lifers, but they knew that the Master Templar had supreme authority to govern, on Jilta. All would obey him, as they would any other elected president, of their planet. He was a short-lifer, but he had brought much culture, prosperity and fame to Jilta.

The main concern of the planet, was the enemy atomics. Would it use atomics on the surface of Jilta? The word was that he would not. It was well known that Mirak knew, that even a beaten planet could

obtain a small craft and use atomics in retaliation. It couldn't be put past Jilta, that if it failed to repel him, that it may retaliate with the use of atomic attacks on the central planet of Palbo.

The Temple movement had lost many planets, such as Siltonia and Centoria, whose Cordellos had vowed that if atomics were used on Jilta, or any of the Templar planets for that matter, then atomic suicide squads would in turn certainly be unleashed on Palbo C.C. It was understood that Mirak had received this message and to date no atomics had been used by Mirak's forces.

Ω

Brandon Mirak had just dismissed another three generals. He was feeling elated at the news, that the five fleets had united outside the Jiltanian system. The end of the Templars and the birth of the New-Age were drawing closer.

Mirak fought to control his hands that seemed to want to hit the side of his body. The psycho-surgeons had given him a narcosis cure, but the effects had worn thin. Mirak stared at his arm, in amazement, as it struck his side again. Perhaps he should have it strapped, or even removed, he wondered.

His attention was caught by the latest data scrawling down the screens. It showed that a large fleet had become stranded, in the warp drive mine

net. Mirak strained to control his arm, as he knew that at any moment, two marshals would enter.

Ω

GALACTIC RANKS OF THE MILITARY:

These ranks are recognized throughout most of the galaxy.

SPACE MILITARY COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF:

This is the supreme commander of the military.

GUARD MARSHAL (AKA DEFENSE MARSHAL):

Commands in the defending role. Commands the fleets in defense and is subject to the command from the commander-in-chief.

LEAD MARSHAL:

Commands all fleets during an attack operation. Is equivalent in rank to the Guard Marshal and is subject to the command of the commander-in-chief.

FLEET MARSHAL:

This is the Marshal who has command of a single fleet. He's either subject to the command of the Guard Marshal, the Lead Marshal, or the commander-in-chief.

MARSHAL:

The commander of a cruiser and its support of destroyers. May be subject to the direct command of any of the above. (Similarly this applies to frigates)

SECOND MARSHAL:

This is the commander of a cruiser only, has no control over the support craft unless the Marshal's command falters. (Similarly this applies to frigates)

COMMANDER:

Is in command of destroyers, civilian craft of notable sizes. Can command a large squadron of interceptors.

CAPTAIN:

Is in command of an interceptor or fighter-group.

CAPTAIN SECOND CLASS:

Commands an interceptor or fighter.

LEADER:

Can command a fighter, serve on an interceptor, or command a troop of guards.

GUARDSMAN FIRST CLASS:

Commands a troop of guardsmen aboard a military space vessel.

GUARDSMAN:

The common soldier of the military space machine.

GROUND FORCES, EITHER IN ATTACK OR DEFENSE

HOME GENERAL:

Commands the defending forces on the ground of the entire planet. Is subject to the command of the commander-in-chief only.

LEAD GENERAL:

Is the equivalent of the Home General but in an attacking role. Will play the role of the conqueror. Is subject to the command of the commander-in-chief

CONTINENTAL GENERAL:

Is in command of the continent or the planetary forces.

GENERAL:

Is in command of an army. (Of up to six sections)

CAPTAIN:

Is in command of a section. (Of up to five patrols)

LEADER:

Is in command of a patrol (From fifty to two thousand men).

TROOPER FIRST CLASS:

Is in command of a patrol (From ten to two hundred men).

TROOPER SECOND CLASS:

Is in command of a patrol of up to twenty men.

TROOPER

Is the common soldier, throughout the Federation.

N I C K B R O A D H U R S T

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THE TEMPLAR MINISERIES

Page 459 | 606

MINES

Sheril had arrived home from the library. Her mentor was one who had demanded so much excellence and she lacked the natural flair of Jaron.

She thought about him sometimes, wondering what he was doing. There had been concern over his further mission to Rambus, and only three days ago word had been received that he had reached Sleebo and left for another destination. She believed that would be Palbo.

From her balcony Sheril stared to the barely lit park below. It was deserted. The Aaron was on galactic-alert, the first in a millennium.

She didn't understand all the ways of the Aaron, but she knew enough, to know that something had scared them badly. The pending galactic war was not as they had predicted, and nor had the ready capitulation of the Templar sectors. That had not been expected.

As she looked out, she sensed her son, little Yandra, as he came and stood behind her. She said nothing but simply stared out over the colorfully speckled parklands, while wrapping her arm around his shoulders. There was not a great deal of light in this quarter of town, but the glowing mosses and

fungi, did display a fascinating small array of rainbow colors.

Yandra, simply looked out from the balcony beside his young mother. He was seven years past now. He held her by the hand, tight. He wondered when his father would be coming home.

There was no need of speech. They shared their special moments in silence, thinking to each other. He could tell his mother was concerned for Jaron, as well for the events of the galaxy. He too, had heard about the experiments deep down in the Aaron wards. As well, he had heard about the remains, of the charred Aaron warriors. This was not planned or predicted, either. He felt the group uncertainty.

He was not concerned for his father. He felt Jaron would always remain alive. He smiled. He had led a short but special life, being a natural-born Aaron. Aaron children were not meant to be attached to their parents. They were being groomed in the ways of Boguard. He sighed. It was easier for children who were not natural-born, he thought. It seemed the natural-birth placed a bond there between parents and children that was hard to explain to non-naturals. He knew that both his parents felt this. They had not voiced it, but he knew they felt it. He was not just a short-lifer, like his parents. He was the first short-life Aaron to ever exist. His parents weren't Aaron, as they were born on Sequetus 3, but they were Boguard however. He on the other hand was born on Yaltipia to his Boguard

parents, and that made him Aaron, of which he was proud, even if he would be short-lived.

Ω

A day later, a few Ks away, and several levels below the residential quarters, an experiment finally succeeded.

The captain was present. He watched from the observation station, as all five of the Aaron opened their eyes. The five looked at each other, and then towards the observatory, above them. The leader of the five grinned and said cheerfully, looking around; "We're back, and in our own bodies, alive."

The captain had quickly threaded his way, down the stairs to the experimental floor. As the five stood up from their ordeal, the captain embraced each of them. Finally, he said jubilantly, "That means that you got through? You know what the obstacles are?"

The leader of the five nodded and smiled, "My Captain, we will be making a report almost immediately. However, yes, we do know where the mines are laid. For the first time we have been able to get a glimpse of the planet Palbo. It is no longer occluded to the minds' eye of the Aaron. Finally, it too can fall under our influence. The mines that have been killing the Aaron, have been located. My four colleagues and I, we know where they lie."

With that, the five Aaron turned, to make their debrief.

The captain watched as the five walked out, after their three hour ordeal, of mind mapping the warp-fields surrounding Palbo and its neighbors. He recalled with still a twinge of horror, the first five attempts to penetrate Palboan space, and the resulting bodies, charred beyond recognition. He remembered those who had managed a glimpse of Palbo in their mind, only to become babbling mindless idiots, upon their return to consciousness, waking again in Yaltipia.

Slowly though, they had managed to locate the secrets, that lay in the warp-fields around the planet. Like mental stepping stones, they went. Hideous thermal and *psychotronic mines*¹² lay out there, to wreak unsuspecting damage upon any, who would

¹² **DEFINITION: Psychotronic Mines:** Military mines. First developed and laid out in the warp-fields opposing the *Alliance* in the Torren wars, but now thought to be unused. Signed treaties exist against their use across the galaxy. Once mines had been laid in warp-fields, they were difficult to extract.

Psychotronic mines react upon perceiving energy from a living being and are directed to its presence. They explode in close proximity. The deadliness of them is that they are impossible to detect by a craft in warp drive, as they are only in the same time band as the warp drive craft, for a fraction of a second, long enough for the craft to vanish and long enough for the mine to compute a direction and alter course. Eventually, the mine shares the same space and time as the target and then it discharges.

The mines are laid in a particular time net, by a single craft in time slots, micro seconds apart.

To travel the mine field safely, one needs to know not only where the mines are laid, but also what fraction of a second into the future or the past, they have been laid in. On correct assessment, a craft can alter its warp drive, to operate safely in time and spatial coordinates, outside a mine field. *SOURCE: Searfinders Military Handbook, Third Edition. Pp. 568-97.*

dare venture, across the warp drive universe fields of time.

Finally, now the Aaron could warp onto the planet Palbo, and weave their magic as galactic coordinators.

ψ

ARREST

They would soon be arriving in the sector of Palbo. Jaron paced about the bridge. There was no way he was able to contact the Man-o-War, as upon entering warp drive all the craft in the fleet were travelling on different time coordinates. As accurate as the warp drive systems were, there was no way yet of coordinating exactly the time shifting, of any two craft within the field.

Jaron paced because he was nervous and that meant there was something wrong. He looked at the pale grayish purple screens, showing the shimmering of the warp fields. It would be at least another week, before the fleet would warp out at their predetermined arrival point, in the Palboan system.

Ω

Brijet looked at the wavering screen of the holographic imagery of the Jaron's fleet, before her. The hologram showed the two cruisers and seven destroyers, fading in and out of space nicely, as expected.

The images of the craft lacked the solidity of a normal hologram, but even their ethereal vision gave

some consonance to Brijet and the Aaron aboard the Man-o-War.

As she watched, she didn't notice the gradual clouding of the peripheral images.

A voice called, from the other side of the bridge, "Captain Letone... quickly. The Federation craft have entered a zone with small objects, in the warp field. Hundreds of them! Thousands!"

Brijet stood; horrified as the nine Federation craft drew closer, to the tiny flickering dots that lay ahead. "Mines!" she called, now staring at the others.

She knew there was no hope. The Man-o-War mustn't be risked. She gave the order, which meant she might never see her comrades under Jaron's command ever again, "Warp down now."

Watching the hologram fade, the blackness of space overtook the room. She looked to the second in command. "Find out where we are. Prepare to pull away. Firstly, do a calculation as to where Jaron's fleet would be, should any have warped down. Also, I want to know how long it would take, to get to those coordinates under conventional drives."

"Yes sir," he replied.

Letone looked up from his chair. He had been watching and already had approximated the time. "Jaron's fleet will be about two weeks, away under conventional drives. They'll have crossed billions of Ks before us, when the mines took effect. Let's hope they got down, with minimum damage. If not...."

Ω

Jaron was still pacing when a screen flared, showing the living quarters had just been engulfed in flames; then the galley. The screens showed they were under attack from within the craft.

Jaron yelled, to all on the bridge, "Warp down.... Now.... Mines!"

The crew obeyed instantly and the screens began to shimmer, but not before more of the cruiser erupted into flames.



The shimmering image of warp fields of time

Some of the screens went down. No images or response resulted. Others showed the flaming sides of the cruiser and images of flames within. The screens showed they were quickly out of the warp fields, and into the *real* physical universe that they recognized. The warp drives had not been struck.

Jaron felt a shudder run through the ship. The damage reports were rolling down the screens. They may have to abandon her.

He grabbed two Sleeboans, who had volunteered as communications officers. "Come with me. I want to see the damage, firsthand."

The three ran from the bridge down the corridors. The elevators were out of action, and chaos reigned. Smoke poured up through the ventilation shafts. Another shudder ran through the huge ship.

One of the Sleeboans who was jogging at Jaron's heels yelled above the noise. "Do you think we will be able to hold her, sir?"

Before Jaron could answer an explosion ripped through the corridor. The three, along with thirty others, were flung to the ground. A fireball rolled across the ceiling above them and subsided.

As Jaron stumbled to his feet, a party of five dashed past with extinguishers and foam hoses.

The three continued. Finally, Jaron reached the fighter bay. It was relatively eruption free, apart from a fire in the far corner. Jaron slid and jumped down a ladder and across the floor. The first images from the inspection craft were being received.

The port side hull had imploded. The ship was on fire from bow to stern. Another explosion erupted, in the mid sections.

An hour later, Jaron was able to report that the flames that licked the outside sections were diminishing, leaving only black scorch marks of the devastation.

Inside the craft, whole divisions had been sealed off, in an effort to eliminate oxygen from the fires. The loss of life was in the hundreds.



Cruiser afire, coming out from warp drives

Back inside, Jaron surveyed through the wreckage. Twisted aluminum and steel littered the corridors. Most of the sections had been temporarily secured and the bodies were being removed from the fire ravaged bulkheads.

Jaron returned to the bridge and sat, viewing the damage that was rolling over the screens. The ship could be saved, but was crippled.

Jaron turned to the communications volunteers, "Have three interceptors travel along our original flight path, to search for other survivors of the fleet.

"We will continue to drift for the moment, on our present course. Have the interceptors maintain an open line with the bridge."

The message was relayed and Jaron watched, as three streaks of afterburners moved away from the screens.

Ω

Reports returned, of other craft, three days later. There were more survivors. There was also the other cruiser, which was now powerless, as well as three destroyers. The other four destroyers were lost, somewhere in space, in another time. They wouldn't be seen again.

The fleet cruiser neared its companion cruiser. Jaron was shocked, but pleased that such a badly damaged ship could still exist. He could see from the lights of the interceptor that the cruiser had almost been separated into two pieces. The light of the cruiser's decks was extinguished and there was almost no activity inside. The hanger doors had been blown off, and Jaron could see that the drives had suffered.

Jaron sighed, and made a mental note of the Boguard who were still present.

The remaining destroyers had actually suffered far less damage, and had rendezvoused with the disabled cruiser.

Detailed inspections showed the heavily damaged cruiser was beyond repair, but that the ship could be cannibalized for parts for the other ships.

Ω

The Palboan fleet marshal looked around his Bridge. His ship marshal looked up. "Two minutes to point triple zero, sir," he said.

The fleet marshal nodded. Two minutes later, the screens shimmered and the familiar star studded blackness returned. He watched, as his six destroyers came out of their warp drive minutes later, spaced about five thousand Ks apart.

Within an hour, five interceptors and a cover of ten fighters had taken off, on a radial search of the region.

Ω

Jaron watched on the screens, as his own incoming interceptor teams were found. "By the anaconda! No!" he cursed out loud. The enemy had located them.

There was nowhere to run. The ships were still partially incapacitated and couldn't outrun the enemy, even if they were weeks start.

Jaron gave the command; to prepare for enemy engagement.

He could finally see the enemy fleet, as tiny dots a million Ks away.

As they drew nearer, the enemy interceptors kept a healthy distance away.

Twelve hours on, and the two fleets could see each other very clearly.

The first communication came through, from the enemy fleet marshal, "Please confirm your identity."

Jaron waited a moment, before responding. Should he surrender? The enemy was fresh; military trained, and outnumbered them. They couldn't warp out, without risking further psychotronic mines.

"We're what are left, of a party from Sleebo." He responded.

"Why were you not using the current time grids?" came the next question. The screen showed a man with a hard jaw and heavily set dark eyes.

"I can only say that we were using the latest grids. However, our commanders were lost in the explosions. What went wrong?"

"Never mind what went wrong, identify yourself," came the repeated order.

"Never mind who I am, that is classified information which only Leader Mirak can declassify.

What are we to do now, light years from any nearest planet?"

"What was your purpose of transit?" said the face on the screen.

"Classified, but carrying two very important visitors for Leader Mirak. She still survives." Jaron looked at Anki and Amy who were now on the bridge.

While the enemy seemed to contemplate the reply Amy said with venom, "I vote that we fight those *grutters* to the death, their death!"

Jaron looked at the woman, with the long scars across her arms. "You may get your chance. Can you pilot?" he asked.

"Hah!" she responded as she looked away in disgust. "I can pilot rings around any flyer that they can send at us. Just give me my chance!"

"You will get your chance. The enemy has decided to send an envoy, to board this ship. They are concerned that we're not, who we claim to be. When they arrive, they must believe that we're pirates. Then, we may be able to even the odds, with surprise. For that to eventuate, we will need to send you back, in their ferry. Your mission will be to return their ferry to this ship, before you reach their ship."

Amy grinned and rubbed her hands together. "I had better suit up."

Jaron nodded and watched the young woman, as she left the bridge. The enemy's interceptor was drawing closer.

Jaron walked down the burnt out sections of corridors, finally arriving at the hangers to see the enemy interceptor and ferry. He took the elevator down.

He greeted the three Palboans, from their interceptor. Two enemy fighters circled outside. The Palboans asked to be shown the captives.

Jaron turned to his aide, a bearded miner. "Have the two female prisoners come down."

The miner nodded, ascended the escalator and rapidly vanished. He reappeared moments later, with the women.

He pushed them forward, towards the captain of the enemy interceptor.

The captain smiled. He took hold of the pair of women and said, "We will just take this pair along, so that we can confirm that they are the pair, being sought by Leader Mirak."

In a flash, Jaron had a gun at the nose of the captain, smiling. "They are our cargo out of here, captain. If they both go, we have no assurance that you will take us along. If we're left here, without grids to the mines, we won't survive the journey to the nearest planet, twelve years away, under conventional drives!"

The Captain smiled and very slowly pushed away Jaron's laser pistol. "I shall take one. Which is the daughter?"

Jaron looked and nodded to Anki.

The Captain laughed, "Thank you," grabbed hold of Amy, and threw her into the arms of the interceptor copilot. He had his own gun drawn. "One thing I have learned from you mercenaries, and that is never to trust you! We will take this one along and confirm her. When we return, you will be given the correct grids, so that you can get out of here."

The door slammed and the interceptor was out of the hanger in seconds.

Once inside, Amy was thrown to the rear. The copilot only took his eyes off her for a second, before a sleek steel blade flashed out from her boot, to slash across his throat. He gave out a half muffled gurgle, as he drowned in his own blood.

Seconds later and there were two other dead Palboans in the interceptor.

The interceptor turned, ignoring calls from the fighters, and slowly returned to the Sleeboan occupied cruiser.

Jaron smiled, as Amy stepped out, grinning at him. She wiped the blood from her hands and walked away. Jaron rolled his eyes, shaking his head, and returned to the bridge.

Slowly, Jaron spoke to the Palboan command over the communication system, "Sir, we have a problem. We don't trust you. You don't trust us. We have a cargo that is so highly valued in Palbo; it is worth more than the lives of all of us. That was the reason for our reluctance to hand over the prisoners. If we give up our prize, then we have no reassurance

that you will lead us out of this mine field, sir.” Jaron waited for a moment and then added, “It is well known that the military hold mercenaries in contempt and nothing would probably please you more than to leave us here to rot in space. So, unless you want to see your prisoners sent to you floating across space unprotected, then I suggest that you take our expedition out of here. Alternatively, blow us up and the cargo, and explain that to Leader Mirak.”

Jaron saw the rage building up, on the face of the fleet marshal, but before he could express that anger he was moved aside, and spoken to, by another marshal. The fleet marshal then nodded. “I shall be sending coordinates for your path in, sir. Should you deviate you will be destroyed and I’ll enjoy that.”

Jaron nodded. The enemy then proceeded to give the coordinates for the path through the mines in the warp drive fields. Then, as quickly as they had arrived, the enemy left. Their fleet shimmered from view.

Ω

Brijet finally had a report about the lost fleet. They were only hundreds of millions of Ks away. Within hours, they were soon on the holograph.

Letone also felt the relief, but the fleet began to shimmer again and vanish, back into warp drive space. The Aaron would follow. Somehow the fleet

was on the move, albeit five fewer ships, but this time leaving a wide-open warp drive leakage trail.

ψ

PALBO

Jaron watched the screens scroll down, showing the first glimpses, of the Palboan system, to be seen by Boguard in recent history. He swallowed quickly, when he saw they were also in the company of twenty other ships, five cruisers with a balance of supports.

Jaron glanced to the two young women, on the deck. "We're so outnumbered that it looks like that the only way is to continue, is as mercenaries," Anki said.

The screen flickered on; a new face appeared. It introduced itself. "My name is Home Marshal Sevron and you're in Palboan controlled space. Regardless of your stated cargo, all weapons are aimed at your craft and upon the count of ten, you shall be destroyed. All you have to say to live, are the words, *we surrender*.

"I'm now counting: one... two... three...."

Jaron could only think of the Man-o-War, that was somewhere, in space. Had it survived the mines? That craft was not here and could have been their other chance.

Jaron quickly scanned the minds of the Boguard and then the mind of his enemy.

Their fleet was hopelessly outgunned. The home marshal knew already, that they were not mercenaries and he was not about to hesitate in their destruction. The home marshal had in his mind that if he could destroy these intruders, then he would appear good in the eyes of his commander-in-chief, Brandon Mirak. It seemed that he wanted to destroy Jaron's fleet and didn't believe that the daughter of the Master Templar was worth any more to them alive, than dead.

"Eight...nine...."

"We surrender...." Jaron said, looking at, and feeling, the home marshal's disappointment, at not being able to satisfy his programmed yearning for a kill, any kill.

Jaron watched the home marshal, as he now seemed angered by the decision. "Prepare your ships for boarding and be ready, to be taken prisoner. Any resistance will be met with your entire fleet being vaporized into space matter," he said gruffly.

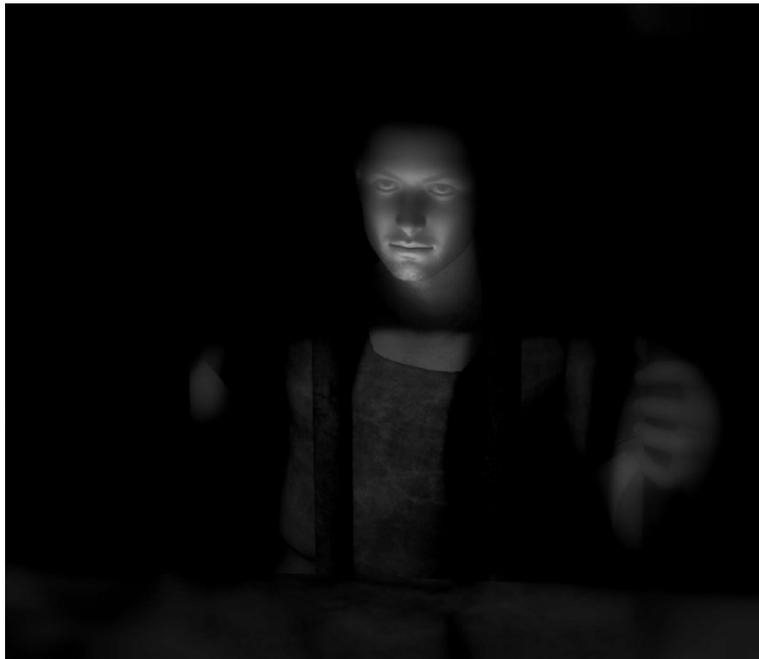
Moments later, the fleet was boarded by the Palboans. By the score, Sleeboans were arrested and removed, using ferries. Ferry after ferry proceeded to transport them down to the planet's surface.

Jaron was sufficiently free to be able to note that his Boguard were being shipped to different parts of the planet.

Jaron too, was loaded quickly, with two dozen others and moments later he was far from his ship, headed towards the planet's surface.

Ω

Jaron had lost sight of Anki and Amy, hours earlier and was now staring out, from a cell. There were eight others sharing his cell. The walls were plain concrete; there was an air-conditioning duct and a single steel door, with a small glass panel in its center. To the left was a small hatch, to pass ablution buckets through, and another on the right for food.



Jaron behind bars on Palbo

Jaron lay on his bunk and looked at the miners that were his company. He stretched and lay back,

while trying to locate the other Boguard present in the prison. He found forty of them.

He closed his eyes and brought up a picture of the outside of the building. He imagined he viewed the building as though he was there, outside, and soon, part of him was. He could see the building and began to let his attention wander to the courtyard. From way above, he could see the city lights of Palbo C.C. in the distance.

Quickly as the door to the cell began to creak open Jaron's attention returned to the cell. A small man, in a white coat entered. Jaron could feel the man's thoughts, as they emanated through the room. The little man stared at Jaron, opened his mouth in an attempt to say something, but promptly retreated with a headache, wondering where he was. This was a strange day for him. He became a bit dizzy. Maybe he was experiencing low blood pressure. He closed the cell door and left.

Jaron knew what that man had come in for; he was after someone, on which to experiment.

Jaron jumped up from the bunk and stood by the door. They had to leave, now. The other men simply looked at him strangely.

Jaron had been silent the moment that he had been interned, but now he talked. "We're leaving now, and unless you want your brains to be fried with electricity by these white-coats, you will follow me. They want to use us for psychron experiments. The

psychrons believe we're mercenaries and see nothing wrong with experimenting on us, as non-persons."

A tall heavy bearded miner named Abran slid down from his bunk. "I'm certain that I speak for all of us. We don't want to be rat fodder."

Jaron slowly looked at the door; it clicked open and gradually swung free. The miners jumped from their bunks to follow the young man, who had led them this far.

Jaron's mind was one with his Boguard and quickly, he had pointed the way to the Sleeboans. Eight men ran down the corridor and as they did so, other doors unlocked. Jaron and his men ran through the first airlock and before the Palboan guards could respond, they were overpowered.

Jaron was soon leading three hundred people. Quickly the whole wing of the building was in their command.

After two minutes, they had guns and percussion grenades from the armory. Jaron led the charge on the open administration sections. Moments later, they had control of the whole building, but alarm sirens were now blaring.

Within the next few moments, the masses had reached the external walls. The gates fell open, in front of the Boguard, and the prison hordes poured out. There would have been over a thousand, including Palboans, who had been interned as criminals, for speaking up against the Mirak regime.

Jaron led them through the gates. Outside, was a swamp and beyond it, a forest.

So, their prison was an island within a swamp. There were no boats. There were no roads. The choices were stay and wait for the Palboan military, or risk the unknown swampy water, outside.

It was dark. None really knew what could be lurking in the water, or how deep it was.

“Sir,” said one of the Boguard, addressing Jaron. “I sense no predators in the water. It does have living organisms in it, but they seem like fish, that feed on insects. If we stay here, the military will kill us, in several minutes.”

“Agreed” replied Jaron. He looked around as hundreds now watched him, and he dove into the swamp water, swimming for a far bank. Minutes later hundreds were getting out from the water, with him.

As the first of them made it to the protection of the big tall trees, some six hundred paces from the prison, there appeared on the horizon, ten disc shaped objects.

Within half a minute, they were hovering over the fleeing hundreds. Green laser fire was striking out from the craft. Men fell, some screamed and others fell back, into the protection of the water.

Some of the men, that had made their escape, fired back with the hand held rifles, uselessly.

Jaron stood at the foot of the forest and watched, as the prisoners were mowed down. Still,

many ran, crawled and leaped to the safety of the trees.

The craft began to concentrate their fire over the prison walls. Men stumbled, yelling. Some in the prison had weapons, and some had hand-rockets. They were countering the craft.

In a further response, a huge, high powered explosive was dropped on the prison. The heat instantly killed anybody outside, within a couple of hundred paces, guards and all.

After that, craft lowered from the sky and settled inside the prison walls. Firing from the few prisoners left could be heard, continuing.

Finally the noise from the prison and the water lessened. More craft appeared on the horizon, and were soon settling within the prison walls. Thirty minutes after the first escape the prison was again secured, by the Palboans.

Randon stood behind Jaron. "Commander Rigrano tells me that the enemy will torture those men inside, with the psycho-surgeon techniques. That is Egrat Prison and notorious for it. He says so-called *experts* will be brought in, from the city."

Jaron nodded. He estimated that about two hundred and seventy of them had made it through the swamp, from the initial thousand he had led at through the gate. The forest was large, and would absorb them, but there could be no future here, at the edge of the trees now.

Jaron turned, "Have Rigrano and any Palboans that escaped with us, be ready soon for debriefing on how this planet operates. We eventually will have to get out from these woods later, and strike a blow deep into the enemy. For the moment however, we must recede deep into the forest."

The following three days, saw the Palboans mount an air, search and destroy, mission. The escapees moved well into the forests, which stretched for hundreds of Ks.

The escapees divided into four sections. The woods, they learned, from data supplied by the Palboans who had been interned, stretched to the ocean, and up to another larger commercial city called Tilcan. The woods were divided by three small roads, connecting smaller townships and villages within it.

Those Palboans, who Jaron freed from the prison, had previously been detained, as being suspected rebels. Apparently, they were innocent and Jaron believed them. Now they agreed however, that the government of Palbo must be changed, and they would wear the colors, which they had been misbranded with. They would side with the Temple.

As the four sections separated, they operated independently within the woods. To strike back; they would bring concerted independent blows to the enemy. That was the plan.

Amy had gone with one of the groups due south three days after the escape. Two Boguard along with

an undisciplined bunch of Sleeboans had accompanied her from several villages around Alsam of Sleebo.

The second group to leave had a mission to reconnoiter the town Repack. This group comprised Commander Rigrano, his officers, along with twenty Boguard, thirty Sleeboans and six Palboans.

The third group had set off to explore the villages of Pindor. Randon led seventeen Boguard along with a mixture of forty-three others.

The last group, headed by Jaron, consisted of eight Boguard, forty-six Sleeboans and three self-proclaimed Palboan rebels. This group had the mission of coordinating the overall attack on the enemy.

Ω

Jaron looked out, standing on the bough of a tree fork, above the forest floor. The tree was twenty pacs wide and took twenty minutes to climb.

Beyond the woods, were the choices of open swamp waters or the prison, both of which they had fled free from.

Jaron whistled downwards to the ground, to indicate an approaching column of armored people carriers. They had been ferrying troops and ground craft from Palbo C.C., for the past three days, to the edge of the forest. Soon, they would be attempting to penetrate the forest to capture the escapees.

The trees were too tall and many, for the floaters to successfully operate, and the canopy was too thick and intense, to accurately spot the small bands of escapees from above. Thus, the enemy had to advance through the forest on foot and using wheeled vehicles.

The vehicles began to move, and soon the entire column was leaving the barges at the swamp, and going towards the forest. Jaron noted the accompanying floaters hovered quietly overhead and out of sight. They would be used to dispatch lasers and missiles on escapees, once located by the ground forces.

Quickly, Jaron climbed down the tree. They couldn't outrun them, and the vehicles would be needed for their own faster escape. After a few whistles and hand gestures, they took to their positions, deeper into the heart of the wood.

Jaron was placing the last of the leaves around his body, when one of his forward scouts called from below. "They're approaching!"

Jaron listened hard. The faint sounds of wheels could be heard. Within moments, Jaron could see the huge wheeled vehicles, as they mowed down small trees and undergrowth in their path. In a few seconds, the vehicles were below him.

The deep green vehicles had seven crew each. They had six large wheels, which also towered over the top of the vehicles. Some had the personnel hatches off, with the crew exposed standing; looking

ahead. Military weapons and optical sights were displayed on all sides.

Jaron saw the six pass slowly under his tree, with fifty troops walking slowly behind. As the last of the noises of the enemy seemed to recede into the distance, Jaron and his followers dropped silently to the forest floor. Each lay on the ground patiently, until they were certain that none of the enemy had been left behind.

Jaron pushed the wet underbrush aside to see if troopers were still visible ahead. He then looked to the Boguard on his right and received the go ahead. Along with the others, he now began to pace the enemy.

Slowly they crept, listening as the vehicles ahead crashed through the trees. Jaron looked, glanced over at the Boguard on his right and then to those seven on his left. They all nodded in response. In a concerted effort, they stared at the wheeler, at the rear of the line. It faltered, surged and spluttered. It surged again, but soon smoke was belching out from within it.

Quickly, a hatch was thrown open and the crew began to jump free. The vehicle had stopped. The crew and some of the troopers milled around waiting for the smoke to clear. The remainder of the army moved on into the forest; it was not going to be slowed down, for the repair work on one broken vehicle.

The crewmen tried to start the machine, once again. The motor whirred but died, and so it was until the engine seized.

Jaron watched, from the protection of the forest floor as the head of the Palboan crew looked around, suddenly realizing that he was in a hostile forest, a long way from his division. He looked overhead, but couldn't see if any floater had waited behind for him. Holding his rifle towards the woods, he looked out; frightened.

One of the other crew members looked out into the distance and whispered, "Rildo, the woods are silent. What is happening? Why did we stay behind? This isn't what we are trained to do!"

The other crew members and troopers froze, realizing their dilemma. Their minds had become confused for some reason; their vehicle had broken down and instead of abandoning it, they had remained behind, to repair it.

All nine of them looked out quietly, as the forest seemed to close in around them.

Jaron watched the enemy as he crouched, only paces away. Their minds were truly confused. He, along with the other Boguard, concentrated on their weapons. Quickly they stood up and walked out in front of the enemy.

The enemy had terror on their faces. Jaron waited, as he heard the clicking of the laser rifles, misfiring. The enemy looked at their guns and then at the leafy figures that approached. A Boguard

ordered them to drop their weapons, and they did. The instant obedience of the enemy surprised Jaron's men, as much as it did the enemy.

Jaron slowly walked around the enemy crewmen. He too, was surprised at how susceptible the Palboans had been, to mild thought-control. He touched out with his mind and felt their confusion and fear. He tried to touch each of them with the calm, that he so wanted them to feel, but at the touch of his mind, they reeled and collapsed onto the ground unconscious.

A Boguard looked over towards them. "Their minds have been badly tampered with. At the first sign of help, they have an overriding suggestion that they should go unconscious."

Jaron nodded, and three other Sleeboans assisted the unconscious men. Two Boguard dropped inside the vehicle and it whirred to life.

The enemy Palboan crew soon came around and found that their vehicle was now operational, and moving. They looked up, to see their captors, while bouncing inside the wheeler. Jaron said firmly, "You need to listen to this," and he played the message that had been playing on the vehicle radio, all the time the vehicle ignition had been on.

"It is played at a level of hearing, below what you're consciously aware of. You're hearing it now, at an audible range. Listen to what it says, and the effects of the programming will erase."

The message played and the enemy prisoners began to experience anger, rage and finally, understanding over what they now realized they had been subjected to.

Ω

Jaron was well ahead, with his group of Boguard. They now were staring at the fourth vehicle, which also slowed and spluttered. Smoke began to pour from the vents and it stopped.

The day continued in this manner, with the capture of eleven vehicles, all driven away, with their crews inside, to a base, far to the south of Mount Elbon.

Ω

That afternoon, as the darkness of the woods overtook the enemy armada, it slowed. After a short break, floaters began to flood the woods with light from above. Artificial brilliant eerie blue light filtered down, through the trees, to expose any movement below. They were not going to permit the escapees to sleep, but, one by one, the Palboans lost another eight vehicles, as they disappeared into the dark blackness of the woods.

Jaron gave the word for his team to withdraw. Silently they left, with the last three wheelers. Jaron sensed the terrain ahead and steered the vehicles in

the blackness. Without warning, his black forest lit up again, from above. From overhead, the forest came alive with laser fire. Jaron ducked into the safety of the wheeler, as green fire lanced into the trees and forest. The wheeler dodged, as massive tree trunks fell to the ground. The floaters above fired at the vehicles; rockets crashed into the tree boughs well above them.

Jaron watched, as great tree sections smashed into the undergrowth, to his right. Another flash, and the tree ahead exploded, in a ball of yellow light. The percussion rocked the vehicle. Jaron aimed and fired up into the sky. No effect. Again and again, Jaron's group fired only to have their lasers strike the tree canopy.

Still, the floaters rained down destruction, crashing through the trees above.

Jaron's vehicle rocked and the instrument panel exploded. They had suffered a direct hit. As the Boguard returned fire, they received another hit and the wheeler lost power. "Leave the vehicle," called Jaron, as he threw open the hatch. The Boguard clambered out, with lasers igniting trees around them.

They dashed into the forest, while the enemy followed. More Boguard abandoned the remaining two vehicles, and all sprinted into the shadows of the woods. They vanished in seconds.



Palboan forest at night

Jaron perched on the bough of a tree, to watch from a safe distance, as the enemy still slammed home destruction, on the wheeler-vehicles. As another eleven enemy wheelers approached, a rocket exploded onto the nearest of the captured cars. Soon, the other two recaptured vehicles were crawling with enemy Palboans. The enemy looked around, into the darkness of the woods and realized that their escapees had escaped them again.

Ω

Two days later their group recovered their morale, led by Jaron. They out maneuvered the enemy, with the aid of the captured wheeled vehicles. This time a supply train of food and weapons went missing.

Jaron looked ahead at a small rocky outcrop. There were caves on the lower side, a large canopy overhead and a small stream below. They had finally found a base, to operate out from.

In two hours, all gathered around their first fire since their escape from prison. Even their *captured troopers* welcomed some rest and warmth.

ψ

THE GREAT BLACK WOODS

As Jaron set up his base camp, on the southern slopes of Mount Elbon, he harassed the enemy with small numbers of surprise raids, stealing weapons and taking more prisoners. Other groups moved further south of the woods, doing similar.

Ω

Amy led her group through the higher lands, over Mount Elbon and continued down the far side.

She held her hand up and instantly the miners and Boguard behind, halted. There had been no question of her right of command. The miners knew of her blood-thirsty reputation, and were well impressed.

Amy ducked into the grass; others followed. She lay flat, looking out across a track, into the center of a one hundred pac clearing, which split the forest. She knew this was the road to *Port Patara*. Above, she could see the traffic of floaters, travelling between the port and Palbo C.C. The track existed as an emergency landing surface, for floaters.

Those above seemed oblivious to any activity on the ground. Amy couldn't make out any police

actions up above, only the constant stream of commercial traffic, on two levels.

The forest was dark and there was an open strip of one hundred paces, which they would have to cross, in order to get to the other side.

She raised her arm, looked to either side and sprinted to the center of the track.

Instantly, dozens joined her, in a long thin line that snaked along, coming from the tall dark trees.

The grass was short and her legs were fast, as Amy sprinted. Her heart began to pound. She had reached the center track and some of the faster miners had begun to overtake her. She kept her attention on the far trees, when, without warning, the ground to her right erupted. The flash and shock threw her forward to the ground. She rolled and glanced quickly upwards, to see three dark grey floaters descending rapidly, from clouds. More rockets were loosed and she scrambled and dove to her left and then ran, zigzagging across, to the woods. Others were already there, waiting. The ground seemed to be pulled out from under her. She saw two pairs of arms; they grabbed her and almost pulled her arms from their sockets. She was hauled into the air and the ground quaked under her feet. She heard two more explosions and she fell. The world grew dark but she was hauled away. There was black and quiet around her.

Amy opened her eyes, to see dozens of eyes looking back at her. A big fat bearded face in front of

her broke into a smile and said, "You're indeed the fortunate one. We have been carrying you for half a day and now that we have stopped for food, you have chosen a good time to open your eyes." He began to laugh.

Amy looked around and then began to see the food that he talked about. They were in a grove of wild melons. Her stomach confirmed that time had passed. "Were any...."

The bearded man smiled, "None of us were harmed. Miraculous, was it not?"

Amy thought about it for a moment and then accepted the quarter flesh of a melon, which had been picked and peeled. She felt a bump on her head with her fingers and winced; then recalled being thrown through the air and striking a tree, at the edge of the clearing.

The miners had decided that this was a secure place to spend the night. Camp was struck, in the branches of trees.

The next morning, the small band rose, while the forest was still black. A smudge fire, which had been tested not to attract the enemy, was dug deep, well into the ground. Only smoke emitted; but before dawn that was not visible.

Amy looked around and soon they were off again. The Boguard led the way, using instinct as their guide through the Black Woods. Others seemed to understand the inner knowledge of the Boguard, even if they couldn't directly see it.

After hours of threading through the woods, their quarry finally had come into sight. Amy could see dull daylight, filtering through the trees ahead.

All afternoon it had been raining and the constant drizzle was beginning to get her down. The march had been monotonous and wet.

Now, after one last tree was the clearing beyond; the miserable wet cold woods produced more rain, but with a manmade structure, across, on the other side of a river.

Seventy paces from Amy was the *Pedron River*, and beyond that was the *Redron Mill*, one of the manufacturing plants, housing timber yards, mining equipment and residences for six hundred and fifty personnel. The mill had twenty-three separate buildings and stretched away beyond Amy's visibility. The rain pelted down hard, obscuring any clear view.

This was the opportunity that she had wanted. The rain was bucketing down, in torrents now. The mill vanished behind the downpour.

Amy pulled down on her collar and slowly began to crawl to the water's edge, through the grass, down the rocky sides, and finally to the rushing swirling water. She put her hand in the water. The cold bit. Looking up, at her mining followers she plunged deep, into the river.

A moment later, she was swimming across a strong current, which was sending her downstream. She was lifted over a rock by the current, and continued to stroke to the other bank. Her head went

under, but she surfaced to keep on swimming. The river continued to drive her along.

Finally, she felt the current die, then the stony bottom. Soon, she was dragging herself from the water. Heaving her small frame onto the wet slippery bank, she looked back up the river, unable to see anyone through the rain and haze.

She wiped the water from her face and eyes. Next she pulled the twine from behind her, which had been trailing in the river. She followed the river's edge back upstream, until the twine ran out, flat above the water. Slowly, she hauled in the twine, until she came across the thin nylop rope attached to it. He then hauled that in and a larger nylop rope appeared. After fastening that larger rope tightly around a tree, the other members of the party began to swim across, using it as a guide, with one arm over the rope.

Within the hour, all had crossed.

The next twenty minutes were used, surveying the buildings. There was movement occasionally.

Amy looked at her bedraggled followers. They had broken up, into three groups. One group would handle the communications building; the other would seek out any guards while the last group, with Amy, would lead to the infirmary.

Amy circled the far side, passing several Palboan workers. She dashed through the rain. She knew that a building complex this large, would have its

resident psychron. Six followed behind her, in the rain, nodding to the workers they passed.

Amy brightened as she saw through the rain, a building that was traditionally marked as Federation Medicine.

She stepped up, under the extended roof. She looked around, drew her hood back and stepped inside. Immediately a woman, who seemed intent on herding her and her wet friends outside, stopped her. Amy couldn't understand a word of the gibberish that came from her mouth. Without warning Amy drew out a long shining bladed knife and slit her throat; a quiver of pleasure ran down Amy's spine.

Holding the body's arms, Amy dragged it over to the far bench and hid it behind the counter.

A moment later, she was walking down the corridor, her steps echoing the hint of impending disaster, to any who might oppose her.

A young orderly stepped out. Amy withdrew the blade from his belly after a sharp twist. She wiped the blood on his jacket and continued to the last door. She recognized the sign. Pausing only slightly, she opened the door and saw three faces stare up, in surprise.

One asked, "Can we help you, miss?"

Amy couldn't understand them and said, "Speak *Standard*¹³," while dripping on the floor.

¹³ **SPECIAL NOTE: Standard:** The abbreviation for Standard Galactic. It is the agreed upon, interplanetary language. Many

The male in the white coat closest to her stepped forward, and said with a smile, "I don't know who you are, but please, I would like to help you."

Amy watched another at the rear, move to the other side of the room. She lunged at the male in front and then threw her knife into the back of the other. Leaping over the counter, she kicked the third member's head into the edge of a filing cabinet. Blood spilled out from his left eye, as he slumped to the ground. Amy pulled out the knife from the third and then slit the throats of all.

She looked up, at the three miners, who had entered into the room. "Just to be sure!" she said.

They nodded to each other with grunts.

Now standing, she looked across the room at the electrical gear. There were amplifiers and recording equipment, but not what she was looking for.

A few seconds later, she smiled as she uncovered a door to a chamber, which led underground. In an instant she was gone from view. The miners dashed after her but were too late to stop the execution, of another three orderlies.

The miners found Amy standing above the three twitching bodies. She looked up and said with a smile, "Here is what we need. If we can increase the pitch of the message, which is constantly being piped

planets still retain and use their native tongues as a second language. *SOURCE: Imperial Secular Doctrine notes 223/AA/rt.*

to the workers, then we may be able to communicate to them.”

Soon the message that was normally transmitted subliminally was now being heard openly. It was in Palboan. Quickly, she opened computer files.

A series of flashes and the screens above showed a pattern of planetary coordinates. Some were highlighted while others weren't. Soon, the coordinates converted to maps and plans. One stood out, from all the rest.

Amy took note. With luck it would be the detention center, where she believed Anki was being held.

Ω

Brandon Mirak was a worried man. He paced back and forth, occasionally looking out, beyond his window, to the grey courtyard, outside. The cold wet weather seemed only to add to his depression.

Finally, he stopped shaking and stared at the two generals in front of him. His body slightly trembled as he barely could get out the first words.

“How...could you not have retrieved them? I have given you all the manpower that you needed! Now you tell me that not only have they raided a mill, ransacked and killed the psychron of the mill, they have left the mill with over three hundred and ninety Palboans joining them!”

He walked over to his window, which now was clearly the limit of his living tomb. He turned, "You come to tell me that another group of these rebels have struck north, in the small town of *Bankatal* and killed three hundred and twenty of our troops, along with all the psychrons and psycho-surgeons. You tell me how this group, which numbered no more than fifty, could do that! The reports showed the rebels were not even armed!" Mirak was feeling his blood pressure rise, something the psycho-surgeons had warned him about.

He turned and stared out of the window again. He sighed and wondered what had possessed the masses of people to leave the village of Bankatal. Why had they left the village, to side with the rebels? Was Mirak not kind to the populace? Didn't the psychrons promise that all the population would be satisfied with his rule?

He turned. "Get out! Don't return until you have caught the offenders. You had better bring a change in that wood or else. Burn the wood, use nuclear if you have to. Just catch or erase them!" he screamed.

The two generals bowed and withdrew, from the large chamber. The first shook his head, when finally he was free of the compound, walking over to his floater. He spoke to the other. "We can't burn the woods, it is too wet this time of year and the Great Black Woods are a planetary treasure. If we used

atomics we won't survive the wrath of the population."

As the second agreed, he wondered if there was a way that this insanity could be overcome. Was Mirak really the person to lead them? Was Brandon Mirak breaking up, under the strain of winning the Galaxy and was now losing his sanity?

Before he could think any further, his head began to ache. The pain sharpened when he thought of how he could fit into the scheme of a new order as the possible leader. He shook his head and concentrated on the mission of ridding the Great Black Woods of the growing band of rebels. The pain vanished instantly as he saluted the waiting dozen guards and stepped aboard the military floater.

Ω

The campaign, to rid the woods of the rebels was a failure. The rebels seemed to grow more numerous, over the next three months. The small village of *Pindor*, along with Repack and other mills, had all been struck with similar results, with populations defecting.

The weather had chilled, and the first snows had fallen on the slopes of Mount Pedron.

Amy's following had grown to over three thousand. They had met the enemy's generals on the *Pedron Plains*, and won a decisive military battle. The enemy had underestimated the wits of the rebels and

their desire to win. Amy's group had also taken captive twenty-three military floaters and their missile launchers.

Amy had heard of the other victories, and the raid on Repack, by the other two groups, which had joined forces. However, she had never heard any word of her friend, Anki. Her groups searched each village and mill they raided, for information, without success. The answer had to lie in Palbo C.C.

Ω

Amy and her band now waited, by the Palbo River. She heard that Jaron had successfully retaken Egrat Prison, long enough, to liberate the remainder of the prisoners. The raid had gone well, with more guns and equipment secured.

As per the plan, today would be a very decisive blow to the enemy. Jaron's forces would openly attack. Amy's role would be to infiltrate and disarm the enemy.

She stared at the river, as large chunks of upper mountain ice drifted along.

Ω

Brandon Mirak fidgeted and began a typical verbal abasement, of his generals. He raised his fist in anger, yelled and slammed it down again on the table, with the sound reverberating around the room.

“What do you mean they are effectively harmless? They are out there, growing larger and stronger, day by day! They are there, and you, my best generals, with all the fire power in the galaxy, can’t destroy a misfit bunch of criminals from Sleebo!”

“My Leader,” pleaded one of the generals. “They are but a small sore, in the side of our mighty military machine. They shall be crushed, my Leader, but we mustn’t lose sight of the great victories, which are occurring in the far sectors of the galaxy.”

Mirak turned; his face was red with anger.

“Don’t tell me what you will crush one day! Get a cruiser or a whole fleet of them and wipe the woods clean! Turn them into dust, my quiet generals, or I’ll turn you all into dust. I won’t be held here, captive, in this mausoleum, while the enemy is so close and free!”

Brandon Mirak turned to brood, while he stared out from his *window*. He knew they would do his bidding. He had already had these new generals programmed with the latest that the psychrons could offer. He was promised, that these generals would absolutely, and without hesitation, destroy the enemy of his nightmares.

Ω

Amy looked around, to her followers. There were only two hundred behind her, now. The remainder would meet her, further down the river.

The ice was floating downstream and the cold was still in the air. She looked up, at the far mountains. The snow would be a long time melting.

The river was wide and the other side had open-stretching plains. They were at a section of the woods, which met at the river and curved, to hide the upstream from a long distant view.

Amy saw a wave, from one of her followers, as he signaled that the large military barge was now coming downstream.

It had been used to re-establish the superiority of Palboan dictator, in the township of Pindor. It was on its way down to Palbo CC, to load up again, for further fortification of the town.

Amy held her breath and waited for the last possible moment, before the barge appeared. She, along with thirty others, then dove into the freezing swirling waters of the deadly Palbo River.

ψ

JILTA AGAIN

The Master Templar watched the screens, showing the enemy closing in, from the left. The sortie, which the brave home marshal had led against the Palboans, had been mercilessly routed. Three non warp drive cruisers with support craft had been sent out, to punch a hole in the Palboan defenses.

The Master Templar looked at the screens. All that remained, were eight burning hulks, still erupting, belching crimson explosions and lighting up the asteroid belt. Even his interceptors and fighters had been eliminated, with unbelievable swiftness. Now, the enemy still advanced, with only the loss of two destroyers.

He watched, as a fleet of frigates raced out to the asteroid belt, to halt the enemy. There were five frigates in all, with no support craft. Three hours later, the result was clear. The enemy had vastly greater numerical forces. The frigates had done well, but were no match for overwhelming numerical superiority. Two frigates escaped the slaughter and were retreating to the security of the Jiltanian orbit. The price the enemy paid was three cruisers and four destroyers. Two of the frigates had been rammed, showing the enemy's successful methodology of dealing with Temple warships.



Approaching the Battle of Jilta

The Master Templar stared in disbelief and turned from the huge screen at the end of the large military bunker. Shaking his head he said, "How can the Palboans be so merciless, against their own troops? They destroyed thousands of their own lives, for the price of ramming our frigates."

One of the marshals spoke up. "Master, it may be that the enemy is prepared to throw away human

life, as he has contempt for it. Suicide, for whatever reason, is now common within the Palboan Empire.”

The Master Templar nodded. He could see its effectiveness.

Just as he was feeling that all could be lost, a messenger ran in, from the adjoining bunker. He handed a message disc to the nearest general, who in turn passed it, to the Master Templar.

	Jiltanian	Palboan*
CRUISERS	18	84
DESTROYERS	53	833
FRIGATES	89	0
GRADE RUNNERS	78	0
INTERCEPTORS	797	1,238
FIGHTERS	898	6,278
ARMED SATELITES	1,198	0
MILITARY STATIONS	5	0
(in orbit)		
SUPPORT CRAFT	155	427
MILITARY PERSONNEL	12,287,000	unknown
* As estimated and assumed		
Numbers for the Battle of Jilta as known to the Temple at the time.		

The Master Templar looked up at the numbers, on the left of the screen. They were not encouraging.

The Master Templar could see that attacking the enemy was not an option. Their only way to survive, was to hold out, beyond the siege. If the enemy attacked, the Templar defensive positions should still prove effective. As he had been advised by his

generals, only with an all out ground war, would Jilta be able to amass a strike force large enough, and close enough, to strike at the enemy and win. For the enemy to be victorious, there were many interceptors and planetary defense weapons, which the Palboans would have to overcome. In facing those weapons, there was a chance that the enemy could still be defeated, but that would mean that the battle was to be fought over and on, the surface of Jilta. That was something that the Master Templar and his Cordellos had wanted to avoid. Still, what would the great Goren Torren have done, in such circumstances? He would have thought and believed in himself, to overcome all such oppression.

The Master looked at the disc that had arrived by diplomatic pouch, from Sleebo. He gave it to the aide by his side. A moment later, an image came onto one of the smaller screens. It was someone who called himself a Sleeboan.

His features were rugged and his black beard filled the screen. He spoke in a gruff voice, "Hello sir, I hope this message reaches you. If you're watching, Master Templar, then you should take comfort from what I'm about to tell you. Our planet was used as the hiding place, for the pirate base that had been attacking you. That base has been destroyed along with those Palboans in it. They are of no threat to you or the Temple any more. Furthermore, there were two women who were liberated. One said she was your daughter, Anki, and said that this message

must reach you. The other was a woman named Amy. That is all there is to this message, except to say they, and their liberators, have moved to another sector to fight the Palboans in another theatre of war. I hope this disc doesn't fall into the wrong hands. I hope it reaches you in time. Thank you and good luck. My countrymen and I are with your cause!"

The message ended and only the grey of the screen remained. The Master Templar looked from the screen to his generals. Emotions welled up, inside of him. His body trembled slightly. It was news like this, which made him feel that the weight of the galaxy had been lifted slightly, from his shoulders. He already knew, Anki had left, but it was more to know there were others out there, sharing the burden of conquering the dictator Mirak. As the Jiltanian generals were quick to point out – Sleebo was not a Temple planet, and the people were long-lifers.

As the generals applauded one another and the Sleeboans, the Master Templar withdrew from the group. He spoke softly, "I'm going for a walk outside, in the coolness of the Jiltanian night. I wish to admire it, soak in its magic, for this may be the last night like this. I'll need no escort; I'll be safe. Relay that disc to all the troops and people of Jilta. The Sleeboan ambassador, standing in the background nodded.

A moment later, the Master Templar was outside. The air was still. He reflected on how, in the

past centuries the Temple had grown strong and led Jilta and her sector into an ethical way of existence. Was this all about to end? Would the Temple fall in a few days or months? Would the Temple survive this Mirak? That was all he had on his mind. He had heard of the dismantling of the Temples, and even the destruction of the buildings that housed the Templars in the Outer-Worlds. The enemy wouldn't be able to stamp out the memory of Goren Torren, nor would it be able to douse the works and speeches that began the Templar religion.

He looked up at the sky and wondered why it looked so peaceful and calm, up there. A puff of sweet air wafted passed his face, bringing a smile to him. He recalled times that he had shared with his daughter, a long time ago.

Ω

Two days later, the Master watched the enemy begin to close in on the planet, from all directions. It sat there, poised to strike, but making no move to attack.

The Master looked at the formation, as it loomed menacingly close to the Jiltanian stations and defense satellites.

The Home Marshal's aide, who was standing close by spoke slowly: "It would appear they are about to begin by taking out the stations, and then our own satellite defenses."

The Master Templar watched, as lasers opened fire from the stations and then at the Jiltanian satellites, that seemed to be massing in the southern hemisphere. Next, there were rockets, followed by fighters emerging from the stations. The Palboans responded by dispatching a section of three cruisers, supported by destroyers from the south. The Jiltanians countered, and it became obvious that this was no small expedition to test the Jiltanian defenses. The real war was underway.

The Master Templar watched, fixed to the screen. Hour after hour, he maintained his vigil. The next day he was still there. The enemy had hurt them, but the Jiltanians had scored too.

The following night, the numbers of both sides were diminishing. The enemy had taken big losses of destroyers. The frigates were swift, and in packs they heavily pounded the enemy's flanks.

All stations had been destroyed, as had the defense satellites. The battle was drawing closer to the planet; now it was only about three hundred thousand Ks away. The Jiltanian losses had included almost all their destroyers and half their cruisers. Six frigates had been lost.

Hours later, the Master Templar had taken night refuge on the field, above the Bunker. He was tired and needy of sleep, but felt if he slept then it would constitute betrayal.

A few paces away a soldier was standing, staring out into the black night sky. The Master looked up at the stars and stepped over. "Scared?" he asked.

It was a young male guardsman. He didn't turn to the questioner but continued to look above. A small star brightened and died from view into the blackness, then a sudden short streak brightened and moved across the sky. It quickly faded.

The young man said, "Nothing to be scared about. If we die, we die. In fact, we can't die. This body may perish, but I'll be reborn and live again. If I die, I won't be dead, only resting until I return again, to face another battle. I only hope that the memory of us lives on, so that we learn how to come back and finally be victorious."

The Master Templar watched another speck of light glow brighter and stay bright. That would be the destruction of a cruiser or destroyer.

"The memory of us will be carried on, no matter who rules, son."

The guardsmen looked down and around to the voice only to see the cloak of the man vanish, to the stairs below. Clearly he made out the markings of the uniform of the Master Templar.

The war raged and over the next three days, both sides took more heavy losses. The cities were now fighting back with their defense lasers.



A defense laser from a Jiltanian city

The Master Templar took to having short naps of sleep. The enemy was closing in, and soon the engagement would be all over the atmosphere. He watched the screens, as the surface interceptors took off, soon leaving the atmosphere behind.

It was the tenth night in a row that he was on the field, looking up to the sky. The sky was alight with the blazing hulks and exploding craft. A trailing fiery red streak fell to the east, probably an interceptor. The sky was active. Jiltanian

interceptors raced across the sky; missiles fired and an enemy interceptor exploded into a ball of flame. Moments later, ground rockets and lasers lit the sky flashing to the east. Enemy positions were exposed above and more explosions erupted. Rockets raced through the heavens and the far hills erupted in billowing crimson explosions. Two sets of ground lasers were now dead. More rockets raced across from the other direction and then more again. Rockets left towards the sky and more lasers broke the black night.

The Master Templar turned to the touch of two general's aides.

They could see the tears forming in their leader's eyes. They felt his grief too. They were losing. The marshals and he, had failed the planet, and the surface would soon be breached.

The closer aide said quietly, "Master, it is no longer safe to be out here. The final assault on the planet has begun. We must escort you below and seal up the *Bunker*, until after the enemy invades."

The Master Templar nodded. He knew that the defense over the planet had been lost. There were only a few frigates operating now. Almost all the interceptors had been spent and any, which had returned to the planet's surface, were being destroyed as they slowed for re-entry, to the atmosphere.

The Master Templar gave one last thought to the brave men and women who had gone to battle,

knowing they would die in the attempt to save Jilta. They would be back. They would live again. There was barely a *spacer* in their force that believed they were going to survive the battle now. The Master Templar swallowed as he realized that there had not been one report of desertion while the war raged. The image of the Torren would live on.

Upon stepping back into the *Bunker* the Master Templar saw that the images on the screens had changed to show ground positions.

A general moved forward, "Master, as can be seen the Palboans have advanced swiftly over the past hour. They have now landed on Jilta, and taken control of Jilta P.C. and the *Royal Palace*. They're now moving large numbers of soldiers into three of our other main cities, in an effort to breach and take control of the planet. As per your instructions we are not fighting in the historical parts of towns and cities."

The Master Templar saw the images flash to life, as rockets slammed into more defense batteries. Other screens monitored the movement of troopers, as the generals displayed their tactics. The enemy would be permitted to land in the cities, but he was going to have to fight a hand-to-hand battle. All major cities had been evacuated of its civilians. If there were going to be landings, then the enemy would be met and if he wanted the planet, he would have to fight by hand.

The screens showed over the next three days, the changes that occurred, from suburb to suburb. The enemy was winning. He still was able to call on power from above but the advantages of fleet superiority, overhead, had been heavily negated by the nature of door to door fighting.

Still, the evidence was that the enemy was gaining. On the twenty-third day of battle, the enemy controlled the city of Jilta P.C. outright, and was marching over the planet, from the cities across all continents.

By the thirty-third day, almost all major resistance had been squashed.

The Master Templar watched, as he saw the latest images being transmitted from Jilta P.C., on the domestic airwaves. It was an offer of twenty million credits for information leading to the arrest of the war criminal, known as the Master Templar. Two million credits were being offered for the whereabouts of any Cordellos.

Ω

The senior Bogueard in Jilta P.C. watched from the Royal Balcony, as the first of the Palboans arrived that night. They were coming for the *Royal Palace*, once administered by Lorde Hymondy III as a member of the *Royal Family*, over a millennium ago.

At that time, Lorde Hymondy had entrusted the *Palace* with the Bogueard, until his return. That

burden, they still upheld. His orders were explicit. The Boguard would do his bidding for all time, if needed. The Boguard now, had taken on the needed guise of civilian staff. They wouldn't oppose the invaders.

The fighting was becoming intense in the newer sections of the city. The west side was ablaze.

The senior Boguard left the balcony. There was much to prepare.

ψ

JILTA P.C.

The doors to the Great Hall drew open, and a team of five generals and staff marched loudly and ceremoniously down the famous hall, once the center of Federation and Templar power.

As their boots thundered, echoing around the hall, the generals fixed their attention on the famous jewel studded raised golden throne, at the head of the hall. It was from here, that Lorde Hymnody III had ruled a thousand years before, and split the Federation, of which this war was to be the final chapter.

The Palboans were the victors, after many weeks of fierce fighting. They had won legitimately the power the hall and throne represented. They had waited and now claimed their right.

As they approached the end of the Great Hall, the generals' attention was drawn to the dozen or so civilians standing at the side, against the stone walls. They were observed, when the generals first walked in.

The general, with six gold stripes on the sleeve of his tight black and grey uniform, walked over to the civilians. The civilians drew to attention.

The general with six stripes was General Kransten Stowe, now military commander of the Jilta

system. His role was to subjugate the population of Jilta, and bring any resistance to its knees. He was tall, with an eye for a good kill. Brandon Mirak had hailed him as *the converter of the Outer-Worlds*, for General Stowe had led only three missions to swiftly establish rule over the entire Outer-Worlds. He had also converted fifteen Federation worlds, from the dominance of the Templars to Palboan, in less than seven weeks.

He looked at the front civilian. That civilian, Boguard Leader Kegin, simply looked ahead and said softly, "We're the custodians of the *Palace*. We have assisted in its administration for over two millennia and consider ourselves secular and non-political in nature. We maintain that the war you have with the Jiltanians and Templars doesn't involve the *Palace*."

The general was surrounded by his staff and looked sideways at this dozen men. Finally, he said sharply, "Wait outside. You may be useful, and you will be called upon. Dismissed."

The dozen civilian clad Boguard bowed, and smartly exited.

Outside, hundreds of Palboan troopers lined the corridors, to the entrance to the *Palace*. As Kegin and his Boguard passed each trooper, they touched their minds and they were shocked at the dull response, to their sensitive telepathic touch.

Ω

The generals kept Kegin waiting outside, until the heavy timber and iron door to the hall reopened. The generals then called upon the Boguard. Leader Kegin stood there finally, in front of the five. Another four civilians stepped into the hall, from the small side entrance. Kegin had been expecting them. They looked at Kegin contemptuously and then to General Kranstin Stowe.

The tallest of the four spoke, in an aloof high nasal voice, "I hope, General, that you don't expect us to work with these local Jiltanians."

The general nodded sternly. "I do," he said, with a smile coming over his face.

"My general, if I cannot...."

The general stood from the glistening throne and looked down on the four, and said, "You need room to set up your insidious devices and if these creatures of Jilta believe that they are nonpolitical, well, fine. They will assist you in setting up your research laboratories. There are no other civilians in this dammed city, so if these are happy to betray their own kind, to keep their palace, then be happy to use them. So, take this help Rarn; there will be none other."

The man Rarn turned, and stared at Kegin. "He isn't even programmed...."

The general pushed the man on his chest, with rage and screamed, "Well, you fix that. He's all you get. It is your job to assist in changing the attitude

of this populace, so you had better start with this one man!”

Rarn glared at the disguised Boguard; and he would extract a price for this humiliation. Rarn assumed a mask of a friendly smile, towards Kegin. “It will be good to work with you. We will need a place to set up our scientific equipment.”

Kegin bowed and smiled. “As you wish. Please, follow me.”

As the pair left, Kegin could feel the mind of Rarn, a psycho-surgeon. Hate emanated like vipers lashing at Kegin's mind.

Ω

Within a week, the equipment had been set up in the *Palace*. The psycho-surgeons never got around to treating the dozen civilians, which always seemed to be around, helping. It slipped their minds.

It was during the third week, that news arrived about the Master Templar, having being located. Two hours later, an update stated that he had been captured and now was on his way into the *Palace*, under military psychron guard.

Ω

After four hours, a thirty man guard marched noisily into the *Palace*, escorting the Master Templar, in chains. The chains had echoed through the

streets, and metal clanged when the Master Templar collapsed, to be kicked and hauled along over the stone paving, semiconscious.

Kegin watched, from the other side of the *Palace* walls. Within the Hymondian *Palace*, there was a honeycombed series of tunnels, riddling its structure, a three dimensional maze. If the tunnels were to be discovered, the possibility of someone finding their way through the maze unaided was very remote.

Kegin saw the Master Templar being beaten around the head with a whipping stick, before being dragged into the *Great Hall*, in front of the generals.

As the doors closed, behind the groaning Templar and his consort of terror troopers, Kegin moved around, within the walls of the *Palace*. Carefully, he spied through an adjacent wall, to see the Master Templar semiconscious, facing the five generals, who were sitting where the Royal Throne had been.

The Master Templar was soon sprawled on the floor. One of the troopers lifted the Templar's head up, by his hair. Kegin stared at the glazed eyes of the Master Templar, realizing that he had been drugged prior to being beaten.

Kegin touched out to the Master with his own mind. With all sympathy available, Kegin sent the mental message *Pain? We're here.*

The Master Templar seemed to look up in his hazy stupor. His mind let out a whimper.

General Kransten Stowe stood and whispered to his other generals, who nodded in return. He then turned to the Master Templar, and said, smiling: "It has been decided that you should know how you were found. One of your own guards turned you in, for the reward. He's dead now, of course. You see, we despise traitors of either side. They are worse than an enemy.

"Have you seen the state of your planet, my good Templar?" The general turned to a bank of screens, which lit up. Scenes of burning cities and desolated scorched farmlands showed the effects of the war.

"There is nothing left now, oh great Master Templar. You see, it is all gone, all gone. In a month your people will start to starve. All we need from you, is the admission that it was all false to begin with, and then we can spare you. That is what we want. You just admit that the end of the Temple has come, and renounce all it stands for."

The Master Templar had his face lifted to face the general. Blood seeped from an eye and he collapsed unconscious to the floor.

The general stepped down and said with a harsh smile, as he lifted the Master Templars head, "You have lost all. You will renounce the religion of Torren. You won't die, we will see to that. You *will* renounce. We have specialists for that." The general turned and stepped away while the troopers began to drag the

Master Templar out from the hall. He would soon be in the hands of the psycho-surgeons.

Kegin put out another thought, as the Master vanished behind the closed great doors. *We're still here and will protect. Please have trust and believe in the great Torren.*

Kegin turned around in the small tunnel. He returned to the lower depths of the *Palace*, depths that not even Lorde Hymondy was aware of, during his reign. Down here, was another world, the world of three hundred Boguard. It was here where the salvaging of Jilta, was being planned.

Moments later, Kegin was looking at the map that had been scrawled on a wall. Boguard, who were scattered thinly over the planet, were sending information into the *Palace*. The enemy had installed programming stations in every city, and members of the Templar religion were already defaming and reneging on their previous avowed doctrines.

"The object can't be simply to destroy the psycho-surgeons, as Palbo will merely import more. Our simple objective is to...."

The twenty Boguard gathered, were commanders of smaller units in the field. They were being briefed on the final part of the plan.

Kegin glanced around the room. He had all their attention. "As you know, we have had to refrain from exposing ourselves to the Jiltanians or Palboans. Now that the Palboans are this close, we can go into normal operations.

“Let us go over the facts again; we could never fight the Palboans and we never wanted to. As per all war, it is nothing more than having your enemy adopt your point of view, albeit using force instead of dialogue. When violence and killing is the only option, then that is the means to take. Presently, that isn’t our preferred option. What we intend, is to get the military command of the Palboan forces to adopt our point of view, by alternative means. In doing so, we will have won.

“Now that the enemy is in our midst, we can exert our usual influence. Also now that the psychosurgeons are here, we know whom we really have been fighting in the galaxy. The Palboans are not our enemy, the psychrons and their masters are.

“To affect a victory, we now have the military might of the Palboans, at our disposal. Should we be able to disaffect them, then we will be able to use that disaffection, to turn them, against their programmers. As we know, a person set against his former programmer is a highly effective weapon.

“The enemy above, has given us their weapon. We have the ability to communicate with every person on the planet now, but those important to us are far and few in number. They are the military commanders. The tool of communication will be what the psychrons have already introduced into the *Palace* and all major civilian meeting venues. The tool is the subliminal message player, which has been connected up to the media transmission units.

“We, as the Boguard, have the ability to hear the transmitted audio signals, but the Federationists and short-lifers are deficient in awareness, at these lower levels, while their minds still record the messages. A circuit in their minds records these subliminal sounds, and sets up a mental loop that the person reacts upon, subconsciously, when stimulated.” He looked around, to be sure he was understood.

“The way to break this loop, is to play the message within the normal hearing range of the subject. That is our mission. In so doing, we shall be able to eliminate the loops in the minds of the military commanders and their troopers. That will let those subjected to the treatment of the psychrons, to again think under their known control. For those under the influence of more severe forms of thought-control, we will have to provide individual assistance. That assistance will be available firstly, only for the military command.”

Ω

It had been eight weeks since the ground invasion, and all had gone well for the invader. The Palboans had quelled almost all resistance on the planet.

Kegin was running through the secret passages in the *Palace*. The light was dim and after a long upward run; three other Boguard, all in standard uniform, joined him. One was named Macrod Curr.

Quickly, the four burst into one of the *Palace* dungeons. They broke out of a sheltered small room, to find themselves in a tall long passage. They splintered and crashed down a small thick timber door, with iron bars. They looked around and crashed through another small door, which led to a room humming with a wavering sound of electricity.

The room had been fitted out with beds and wires. In the far corner was a man, barely conscious. His eyes were yellow and his head limp. Two men looked up from his side, one of them carrying a metal cap, with wires leading back to the humming small box, by the side of the bed.

In two seconds, the surprised psychrons had their necks broken and the side of the skulls caved in. Another fifty seconds later, the Master Templar was in the hidden passageways controlled by the Boguard.

Elsewhere in the capital, other small teams of Boguard were carrying out similar operations salvaging, Cordellos and important citizens, who had not yet been programmed.

In Jilta and the other six continental capital cities, more Boguard were making simultaneous raids on the media transmission stations. Soon, the messages of the subliminal recordings were being broadcast around the planet on a higher frequency, for all people to consciously be aware of.

Ω

The Master Templar eventually woke. Around him, was a multitude of faces, some of them were familiar. His eyes seemed to travel over the room, without his control, but after a moment he was able to focus at the people around him.

He swallowed, as he realized the men and women here were Boguard. He recalled some of them now. There, the one in front; he knew.

The Master Templar tried to clear his throat, but it felt as though he had a mouth full of sand, his throat ached, but he still managed with some words, "You...are Kegin... the assistant."

Kegin stepped forward and bowed his head. "Master, correct, I'm Boguard. It has been our mission to protect you and the *Palace*. You have been rescued and we're currently bringing about a change over the planet surface above us, to return the planet to you."

The Master Templar looked up from his bed, to the ceiling. "Above, where are we and...."

"We're below the surface. I won't reveal the location, but you have been here for nine days now, in our care. Above, there is a second war raging. It is the war between the Palboans. It is a war within and between their own military."

"But how...."



A Jiltanian city destroyed by war

“They have destroyed three of their own cruisers and seven destroyers have burnt out. There is also war within their occupying forces, on all six continents. The control of the *Palace* has changed hands six times, since the invaders came. It may change again, but the result will be that the Temple will survive.”

The Master Templar tried to smile, but fell into a contented slumber. He knew all along the tradition of the Boguard was more, than he had ever had revealed to him. They were more than just the protectors of the *Palace*.

ψ

PALBO C.C.

Amy felt the side of the huge barge, as it glided through the water. The current was swift and freezing. She grabbed for a hold, but felt the side continue to slide past. She threw her arms up at a trailing rope on the side. Glancing down the hull of the barge, she saw other hands reach out from the water. Having to dodge small broken pieces of ice didn't help. She found the strength in her arms fading. With one last intense pull, she hauled herself from the water, up to the gunnels, feet still dragging in the water. Again, she hauled and her tired muscles pulled her free, onto the rail. She fell over the side onto the deck.

Quickly, she looked around and saw no guards nearby. There were three or four over at the wheelhouse, so she lay patiently, catching her breath. The wind seemed to want to bite into her face. She heard the slush and thuds of other bodies dropping over the side around her.

In a moment, along with several others crouched low, she sprinted to the wheelhouse. Amy saw a guard begin to lower his rifle. She fired from the hip. He fell with his rifle clattering over the decks. Within seconds laser fire was coming from all sides of the barge. A percussion grenade shattered the

wheelhouse windows and Amy saw a blur, as three figures dashed in.

Others stormed the deck below. Amy heard the sizzle of laser. A moment later, she heard the all clear from her followers. They had taken the barge suffering two wounded.

Amy stepped into the wheelhouse and watched as the side-wheels slowed, and the barge was brought closer to the left bank. They drew in closer again, until the great trees overhead began to drop vines over the deck.

Upon a signal, bodies above began to fall. Hundreds and hundreds fell onto the deck, as the long graceful barge swept beneath rows of trees.

Moments later, they were out into the main currents again, swiftly proceeding towards the planet capital, Pablo C.C.

Amy turned to the black bearded heavily set Palboan steering the barge. He was on their side. "I understand that Palbo C.C. is predominantly a military city now," she said.

The Palboan was one of the escapees from the prison. He had been interned decades ago for his plot to overthrow the Warp Drive Bank, in favor of a democratic state. He had failed and was labeled a rebel.

He looked at Amy. "Yes Ma'am. The city has been taken over fully, by the military. Once it used to be vibrant, of civilian planetary administrators.

They have been replaced by military rulers, who consider themselves unassailable.”

“Any resistance to the military, from within itself?” she asked.

The man shrugged. “I don’t know. I suspect that they will be completely indoctrinated by the psychrons and psycho-surgeons. However, I believe the majority of them could be turned, if the programming was exposed, as was done with myself.”

Amy nodded and watched down the river. It would be several hours, before they reached the first checkpoint.

Ω

Brandon Mirak had just finished throwing things at his home generals. He had ordered them to leave him. They did so, and he fell into a stupor and wept. No one believed him, anymore. The enemy was amongst them and his generals ignored him. He tried to tell them that the whole planet was against him. The entire population was trying to overthrow him. They should be destroyed, the entire population of Palbo, all of it. That would get rid of the rebels. Destroy the planet, and destroy the empire; that would cease all opposition to his plans.

As he wept, crouched on the floor, the door opened. Mirak didn’t hear it, but three orderlies and the head psycho-surgeon, Rees, walked over. Mirak

didn't feel anything, but his mind slipped into the oblivion of unconsciousness. The psycho-surgeons would help him. He had heard some words like that, somewhere.

Ω

As the first checkpoint was approached, all retreated to the lower deck of the barge.

The checkpoint was the first wall, outside the city, a large stone wall that ringed the city and spanned the river in two places. To its right, was a docking bay for the usual customs checks, and inspection for entry into the city.

The barge was thrown into reverse and the huge hulk began to slowly steer into the dock. The winch engaged, and the three hundred pac long barge drew closer to the wharf. Finally, it was secured.

Amy watched as three military guards with rifles boarded the boat. She and the three standing beside her, were wearing military uniforms, stripped from those who were now restrained in the hold below.

The leader of the Palboan security stepped into the wheelhouse, looked at the four and then at the damaged window. He asked, "What happened here?" pointing at the window.

The Palboan steersman stepped forward and said, "We had trouble with rebels, up river."

The military man stared at the four, and before he could move, he found a laser pistol in his ribs.

Quietly, Amy said, "Tell your other men to come inside, or I'll pull the trigger now and turn on your men immediately. Cooperate, and you will be tied up with the crew, below."

The military man lowered his rifle, and carefully turned to the others outside and called them. As they stepped into the wheel house, they faced three laser pistols. Moments later they were down below; stripped, tied and gagged.

Three of Amy's followers had signed and handed the papers back to the *River Master*. The Barge was on its way again; to the center of the city.

It passed under bridges and crossovers; until finally docking in the *Centrum City Dockside*. After coaxing the River Master to accept them; Amy and twenty of her followers jumped the barge. Before the River Master knew what had happened; he and his guards were unconscious.

Moments later; the whole barge was unloaded and its manpower were cantering up the steps; towards the inner city gate-house. It was already after dusk and the enemy was unprepared.

Hundreds of Amy's followers ran through the gates. The enemy was eliminated with lasers. Others crouched behind, waiting.

As prepared, the forces of Jaron began their raids; and missiles fired from the slopes of Mount Elbon. For three minutes; salvos rocked the far side of the city. Amy watched as the sky was lit up from the explosions. Then again, the sky erupted, from

the heavens, as cruisers above answered with their space to surface laser fire. She could see the mountains erupt, as the lasers found their mark.

Amy pressed on, with the advantage of surprise, making the most of the distraction Jaron had brought her.

The Palboans however, were soon alert to them, but it was too late. The group was inside the city center and advancing onto the military headquarters. Amy's followers numbered hundreds and were all armed. The Palboans fell as did many of Amy's forces, but not before the center city gates had been breached, and the remaining thousands of Amy's legion flooded in. The city was in chaos.

The battle was being waged ferociously, in the central plaza. Palbo City Centrum was falling, lasers spraying in all directions. The city was never designed for this defense. Cruisers above could do nothing. Percussion and smoke grenades were reverberating around the compound, making sight and prediction impossible.

Jaron was soon reorganized and another salvo of missiles slammed into the far side of the city. As night set in, the sight of Jaron's explosions were as spectacular, as they were frightening.

Amy screamed at the top of her lungs, for the group to move onto their target. They began to take more of the enemy as they fought their way to *Empire House*, the large multistory military building, with enormous classical columns in front.

They fought their way into the building and continued fighting, as they moved through the hallways. They had lost half their force now, and the enemy was regrouping, to retake their positions.

Amy yelled, as she shot another trooper, who was coming out of the elevator, "Seal the entrance! Barricade the doors!" and she continued to make her way across the foyer. About a thousand of her militia was now in the building.

Her group soon took full control of the building, and had rounded up all the persons seemingly there, inside.

After having regained control outside, the enemy had taken up positions, to fire from. Amy's group were responding and would hold out against the Palboans, for only as long as the enemy couldn't get explosive penetrating shells to blast the external structure.

The prisoners they took, were not who she had expected. She paced, up and down. They knew they were in the correct building, but where was Mirak? By her reports, he should have been here. Were they about to die for nothing? Was this a useless gesture, which was going to take the lives of a thousand good people? Where was Anki? Amy wondered if she would have to scour the whole planet, to find her old friend. Would that woman always have to be rescued, she wondered? Maybe, Amy thought. If Amy died now, who would rescue Anki?

Two of her followers ran towards her. The first screamed above the shooting, "We have found it, what we came for. Get a hundred men and follow!"

Amy selected a section of the group and ran after the pair. First, they descended the far stairs, then through a small door into a room that seemed more like a closet, and then through a wall that had been blown apart.

Amy stared: she couldn't believe what was on the other side. Slowly, she stepped into a huge room, which stretched for a hundred meters, in both directions. Columns separated rows and rows of beds. There were hundreds of beds; thousands of beds.

One of the pair that led her there, said, above the muffled sounds of explosions, two floors above, "It extends further than what you see. We found four more wards, larger than this one. I suspect there are at least five thousand people here, extending well under the city!" He pointed as far as could be seen.

Amy nodded and stepped over three dead bodies cloaked in white robes. She could see more dead. One of their own was lying on the floor, to the left.

She turned as she stared at the moaning bedridden bodies and said, "The smell, the stench. Do they not wash the patients?"

"Apparently not," the woman said. "The machines and operating centers are over there. There would have been at least forty or fifty attendants, when we arrived. They fled and I suggest

that the wards be inspected and their escape routes found, or we might have enemy troopers here any moment.”

Amy agreed and instructed three patrols to find and seal any exits.

Moments later, they returned with some of the missing psychrons and psycho-surgeons. They were filed in front of Amy, who had now inspected some of those in the beds. There were over twelve thousand people, lying in unkempt conditions. Most had been laid unconscious with the use of drugs. Some simply stared into space, with blank looks on their faces.

Amy was now in front of a line of psychrons. Pulling out her pistol, she said to the tall arrogant white cloaked male on the end: “Tell me where Anki is, the daughter of the Master Templar.”

The man looked sideways and didn’t answer.

Amy smiled, and pulled the trigger. It blew away half his head and sprayed the psychron next to him with blood and brains. As the body fell Amy smiled and moved over to the next psychron. As she was about to ask the question, and before any word could leave her lips, “Over there, at number three, on the end!”

Amy thanked him, and shot the psychron next to him, blowing his face off. “That is for him not speaking before you. You will be freed if she’s there.”

Amy nodded for her aide, and a patrol to enter the far room. A moment later they emerged with a

woman; filthy, her hair tangled and burn marks over her face and head.



*Anki, captive in Empire House,
Palbo C.C.*

Amy stared at her old friend. Amy cried out, as she raced towards her, "Anki, we're here again.... Anki...."

Amy stopped in front of her and saw Anki's stare at the far wall. Amy snapped her fingers, "Anki, do you know where you are?"

There was no reply, as Anki simply stared into the distance, as though she was not there.

Amy looked at her, knowing that her old friend could no longer recognize who she was. Amy walked around her and shouted at the top of her lungs, "Anki, wake up, it is me, Amy!"

Still, there was no response. Anki simply stood there, with her arms limply hanging by her side, staring blankly into the distance.

Amy dropped her weapon; grabbed her friend and held onto her tight, arms around her, and slowly cried. There was nothing she could do. She shook and cried.

After a few long moments, Amy pulled herself away from the bedraggled body. She ran her hand through Anki's shorter hair, and felt the scar line of the operation, at the side of her skull. Instantly she knew; her friend likely had part of her brain cut up, to control her. Anki must have resisted them, until their last option was to remove her ability to perceive, remember and think. This was the final control of the psycho-surgeons.

Amy turned expressionlessly to the psychron and simply said in a cold voice, "I want Mirak. Where is he?" She raised her laser towards the first psychron, who merely pointed to another room.

Half a dozen of Amy's followers produced an old man, that Amy knew really was the tyrant Brandon Mirak. His eyes were heavily sunken, from an overdose of drugs. His skin was red from a rash, and his

lips were cracked. As a human being, he was dying. He had been destroyed and he looked up at the torn face of Amy. He knew these were the rebels, which he had feared, during the past year. He knew that they were his captors and that he had lost.

Strangely, he smiled slowly at Amy, and his eyes conveyed a pleading, as his voice whispered, "Kill me... please...." He fell on his knees, looking at the floor.

Amy turned to her men. She couldn't speak. She was silent. Tears welled in her eyes. She swallowed and slowly gave strict orders. "This man is to be accorded the best possible treatment. I don't want to kill these vermin, either, yet!" she said as she pointed to the group of psychrons.

She walked over to one of them, grabbed his hand and blew his fingers off, with a grin. She grabbed the next and discharged a round into his hand. She grabbed the next psychron, until her followers grabbed her.

Amy turned towards her own troops, weapon raised in the air. "I'm fine." She had control of herself again. "I want to know who is in charge here." There was no answer, so she blew the head of a psychron off. She looked at her followers. They nodded.

She looked around. She blasted a hole on the chest of another.

"No... no.... You cannot," the most senior pleaded.

His cries for mercy were answered with a swift volley of green laser fire, and in less than five seconds, more psychrons were lying on the floor dead.

Amy looked around and pointed. Three psychrons were cringing in a far corner. She cried, "You three: come with me and you will be spared."

The three, plus a patrol accompanied her to a double set of doors, on her far left.

Amy felt the panic that overtook the psychrons' faces.

The locks were blasted and the group carefully stepped into a realm, which was beyond any known reality. It made Amy's visit to Rambus mild, for in these rooms, lay row upon row of human beings, writhing naked on shelves. Each cubicle was a cell with the wall between it and the hall, transparent.

Amy saw men and women with longer arms, shorter legs and hair, all over their bodies. Two of the poor unfortunates even had short tails.

She stopped at about the tenth DNA experiment, and looked as an aware human being stared back at them. He had fine long tendrils growing out from his skin, all over his body. The tendrils were skin and extended as far as a finger. For even Amy, this made her reel. She turned to one of the psychrons and said, "Get that poor human being out of there, get him help."

The psychron hesitated and saw Amy's pistol rise and he pleaded, "Please! Don't send me in there."

That room is full of spores, which when they touch your skin, begin to merge with your cells and then start to grow out away from your body. Once in the blood stream, it can't be reversed. After ten days the spores then make their way to the brain, where they grow and compete with the brain, for space. The person becomes mentally deficient, though obedient."

Amy felt as though she wanted to vomit, rather than kill, but continued with the inspection. It was not long before she found worse experiments.

Within the hour, she completed her tour. They were still holding back the Palboan army, at the front of the building. Amy wondered if it mattered now. If they lost, who would care? Would Anki know?

Ω

As the enemy persisted with small weapons, and continued to break down the barricades at the front of the building, Amy and others began to record, what they had found in the subbasement of *Empire House*. Within the hour, she was broadcasting on the military and civilian bands. She played the subliminal sounds, which were found in a recording studio, nearby the experimental wards.

The enemy started to breach the building, and descended onto the roof. Amy's group had begun to take losses and was withdrawing into the sub-basement. Only a hundred of them now remained.

The subliminal commands were being played throughout the planet, within Palbo C.C., as well as the *Empire House* public address system itself.

Soon, Amy was seen on the screens, displaying the conditions of the wards. The expanse of wards and the methods of treatments were being shown, all over the planet. Finally, she showed Brandon Mirak and displayed the dead bodies of the men responsible.

She said, "People of Palbo, you're not my enemy and I'm not yours. These men in white slowly took over your lives, quarters and your leaders. They stole power by controlling your thoughts and your loves ones. It was their desire to take over the stars, which turned you into their living mindless bidders for war. You have seen what they have done to your leader and your friends. We don't wish to fight you. We don't want to conquer you. What we want is the right to think and be ourselves, without the cruelty of this abuse of the mind."

The pictures went out every twelve minutes, over and over. They had hacked into 68% of the planet's transmissions.

Film of the programming, of Brandon Mirak, had been found and was included in the transmission. In the meantime the remaining last hundred of Amy's followers were dying.

She was at the far end ventilation shaft, trying to plan an escape, when the noise and sizzling of the

laser fire began to die down. Amy stared ahead, listened; there was no sound.

A messenger from the first ward came running over through the smoke, panting, "Amy, Amy... they have surrendered...."

Amy blinked at the woman, who had just brought the incredulous message. "Surrendered?"

"Surrendered!" she reiterated. "They have surrendered!"

Amy didn't wait and began to carefully jog back through to the wards. She saw a general standing with his hands on top of his head, with an armed escort, in the center of the ward. He stared around, at the pitiful sight of dead amongst the maltreated.

Amy stood before him and he said while lowering his hands, "In the name of the defenders of Palbo C.C. I'm offering you my army, in surrender. My men and I'm with you, Ma'am. Both my officers and I are distraught, at the sight before us. We all promise the city, is now yours."

Amy stared at him. She had won. The city had officially surrendered.

Shocked, she saluted the general. "Thank you General. Please then, take control here, with your men. We need help with these Palboans, here in these beds. I need a patrol out there, to find all the psychrons and psycho-surgeons you can find. Intern them or kill them. I'll leave that to you. Meet me here, in twenty minutes again. Is that all right?" she asked.

The general saluted, with his captains by his side also saluting this wild woman.

Amy began to slowly walk back out of the ward. Gradually the war she had been fighting since her return to Rambus, was coming to a close. Amy seemed not to notice those around her, as she holstered her weapon, and walked over to her friend, Anki.

Tenderly, Amy took Anki by the arm and said, "Come, Anki, we should go outside and see this world."

Anki didn't respond, but simply stared ahead blankly. Amy pulled at her, shook her and cried, "For the sake of Torren! Anki, wake up, and be here! It is your friend, Amy! Please!"

Anki remained silent and her body shook to the pressure of Amy's grip.

Big tears formed in Amy's eyes, as she led her friend from the ward.

They passed dozens, and then hundreds of Palboan troopers. Some had hands on their heads, while others saluted. They stepped back from the pair, as Amy led her friend up and out to the front steps of *Empire House*.

Amy stood and pointed out towards the square, while thousands of Palboans milled around, standing, and watching her.

"Anki!" pleaded Amy. These people have surrendered. We have won!"

Anki merely stared in front of her, offering no response.

Amy held her hand and fell to her knees and cried. “What is the purpose of this war if all we come away with is this? What price is peace? Oh, Anki, why did you ever follow me? Why could you not have stayed at home....” Amy broke down and cried. She cried for all the harm done, to all the victims and for all the victors in the stars.

The crowd of Palboans watched, and not a sound was made from anyone.

ψ

SOLUTION

Within the hour, Jaron had landed by ferry in the city along with three hundred of his men. The remainder of his makeshift army was entering by road, courtesy of the Palboan military.

The news of the surrender ricocheted around the planet quickly, with other cities surrendering to local resistance units.

The Boguard had taken control of *Belpak* and the surrender of Tilcan had been accepted.

Jaron stepped past the destruction around him and into the foyer of *Empire House*. There was Amy, looking tired, and beside her, Anki. Anki had been washed, tended to, and dressed, but there was no hiding that something dreadful had happened to her. She made no response to Jaron's greetings, or presence.

Jaron nodded. "You have done the impossible, Amy. You have avenged Rambus and taken Palbo. There will be peace now, for a time."

Amy merely nodded, "I did what I had to do, but there can't be revenge for what has happened here." She looked towards Anki.

Jaron stepped over to the young woman and spoke; there was no reply. He felt the line above her

temple. The scar had healed, but the evidence couldn't be removed.

Jaron nodded and said, "She has had her brain matter separated and white matter within the frontal lobes has been slashed.

"Repair to a lesser degree, may be possible, Amy, but she won't be the same again."

"You can help her?" asked Amy expectantly.

"I know healers who could, but the results will be limited. She will suffer great memory loss, short attention span and other affects, which I wouldn't be able to explain. I believe that she may be able to speak again, to a lesser degree."

Amy pondered and then said, "Any help is good."

Jaron understood and scanned the mind of the young woman that had become the most prized jewel in the galaxy; she was there and responded. Jaron exchanged thoughts but knew that the woman would never be able to express those thoughts to anyone, but him.

Jaron looked over, and up staggered Brandon Mirak. He handed Jaron the signed and sealed declaration, of the unconditional surrender of the Palboan Empire. He looked at the young woman, Anki.

A tear ran down Mirak's face as he said in a soft tired croaky voice, "I'm pleased to surrender my empire. Don't harm the people." He bowed his head and said, "I'm to blame for my actions. I'm responsible."

Jaron looked at the shrunken man. "That is true; you are ultimately responsible, but you were not alone. You will face a military court. Your surrender is accepted. We will help your people."

Jaron then turned to the camera, that was recording and playing the events live, to the galaxy and said, "I'm the link between the planet Sequetus 3, Earth, the Empire of Jilta and the Palboan Empire. I'm not a Jiltanian and I'm not a Templar. I'm from Sequetus 3." He walked closer to the camera.

"I'm now the ruling victor of Palbo. Your planet and its empire shall be returned to its former greatness, of times prior to its militarism. It will be repaired."

Jaron turned away, to his aides and then stepped into *Empire House*.

Ω

Over the next few days, city after city surrendered to the *New Order of Palbo*. Some cities resisted and were threatened by forces, which had once been loyal to Mirak's Palboan Empire. The new order spread.

Jaron had no intention of changing the military; he would use the old structure of the planet as it suited him. He needed an organization and the Palboan military was the only organization big enough, outside of the psychron network, to hold order.

The Boguard led a hunt through the planet, for psychrons and psycho-surgeons. Thousands were rounded up and interned for trial.

The island Vagras was found, searched, and all its personnel also interned. Rees was found dead in a basement outside of Palbo. He appeared to have committed suicide. Thousands more experimental stations and patients, were located in buildings, in other cities and towns. Slowly the dismantling began. What was found was also broadcast to the public.

Ω

On the other side of the galaxy, the Master Templar was brought above ground. He had lost the absolute military power, which he possessed, prior to war. However, he was able to accept the allying of the Palboan military. They pledged their support to Jilta, as allies.

Once again, the Master Templar sat upon the throne, in the *Royal Palace*. On his right, were the Boguard, highly trusted assistants that he vowed to understand better: those mysterious fighters for the liberty of the Temple.

He sat patiently, as the surviving Cordellos filed ceremoniously, into the Great Hall in front of the camera.

Ω

On the tenth day, after the surrender of Brandon Mirak, a bright star lit up the sky, over Palbo. It grew in intensity until it shed dozens of smaller bright stars that seemed to vanish over the planet.

Jaron heard the news and was visibly excited.

Within the hour, an old friend was standing in front of him. Jaron smiled at his old mentor.

Letone stepped up to his former young charge, shaking his head. "You have come a long way from Earth, Jaron."

Jaron looked up into the dark Palboan sky. He could see the group of stars that surrounded the Sequetus system. "Yes, the jungles seem a long way from here. My mother and my father.... I only hope the eyes have not found them now that we're no longer there."

Letone looked up at the starry night and smiled. "There is peace up there tonight, my Lorde, and Lorde you will be called from here on. Jilta is at peace, and the Aaron is no longer at risk."

Jaron's mind was touched by Brijet and the Boguard, who had spread out through the system, aboard the Aaron *strikers*. For the next few weeks, there would be an added Aaron assurance, that no intruders would warp into the system and disturb the peace.

Jaron turned to Letone and spoke, as they began to walk through the central plaza. "What must I do to keep this peace now that we have won?"

Letone nodded sagely as he looked back to *Empire House*. "My Lorde, you must do what has been the tradition of conquerors. In this case, you must marry the daughter of the Master Templar and produce an heir. They are your mission orders from the Boulan."

Jaron turned and saw Anki standing by Amy on the steps of the *Empire House*. Jaron smiled and then turned to Letone and said softly, "That is what I would have thought. It extends and consolidates the Temple here on Palbo. It gives the Palboans protection from the excesses of Jiltanian Templars, who may wish to extract a high price for the Palboan war. But..."

Letone nodded. "Yes, there is Sheril, and your son on Yaltipia. They are Boguard, and your son Yandra is Aaron. They have been consulted, both of them. They understand and know why. They are who they are. The galaxy is bigger than any of us, including them."

Jaron nodded. "I thought it would have to be that way."

Letone looked down. "You forgot to mention that Anki also just agreed. I felt her thoughts as well, my Lorde. She also agrees to the union, which is good. Anki has strong thoughts for you."

Jaron nodded, "She does. How well do you think you can make her?"

Letone thought to the young woman, feeling her damaged brain tissue; he exchanged a thought, and

returned his attention to face Jaron. "She will be capable of limited speech and very partial memory. She will have to be sheltered, and protected. Fortunately, she will be able to communicate with you, but her full memory won't be able to be easily accessed, even telepathically."

Jaron looked at her, a hundred paces away. She was beautiful. He turned to his mentor. "You will stay, for a ceremony?"

Letone shook his head and held the shoulders of his younger charge. "This body of mine is past its time. I must return home, so that it may die."

Jaron understood and swallowed. The pair continued to walk.

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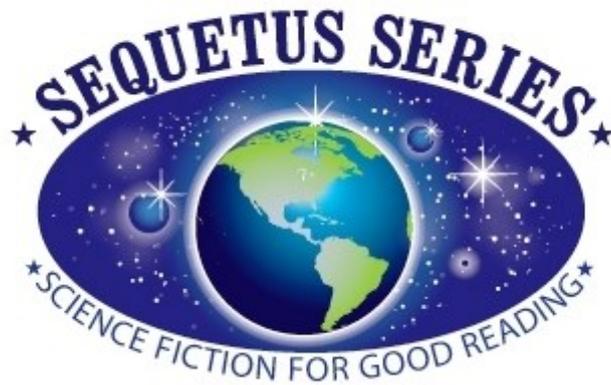
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THE TEMPLAR MINISERIES

Page 558 | 606



CHAPTER 5

GLOSSARY, DEFINITIONS, HISTORICAL NOTES AND BACKGROUND DATA

Editorial note: When the term *Terrestrial* appears beside a word or term or historical note, this means it is a terrestrial word from Sequetus 3 – Earth – and the definition is a terrestrial definition, or historical note. It isn't a fictional term or definition.

Aaron: Original name of the race on Yaltipia, otherwise known as Boguard outside the Pleiades, and the Galaxy. On Yaltipia the original race was called the Aaron. Technically anyone can evolve to become a Boguard through their training programs and can join and become Boguard. However, to be Aaron, one needs to be born on Yaltipia within the Aaron race.

Aaron Library: An underground library of 17 levels, that measure about a k wide in each direction. In Earth terms, it covers 17 square kilometers of library floor space.

Academia: 1. A college of high learning, tertiary education, offering doctorates. 2. (Plural – academies) The institutions of the highest places of learning in the Federation. *Source, Jiltanian* after the gardener *Academos* who used to tend the gods in by making their gardens a paradise.

Acran: Pleiadian for Devout Coordinator of On Planet Operations. This began in Sequetus 3. Acran Anderson was the first of many Acrans to follow.

Acron Field: This is one of several kinds of fields that hold free-air inside military craft. The Acron Field is generated around a ship and prevents the free-air from leaving, while permitting large solid objects to enter and leave the ship. This effect is achieved by a magnetic force that is held as a ridge at the perimeter. The magnetic force is strongest nearest the center of the source of the field. Through unifying fields gravitational, electrical and so on, the magnetic fields can be made denser, further out from specified epicenters. They then prevent free-air molecules passing; while at the same time allow more solid masses and objects to pass. Named after its inventor, *Luis Acron* of Tilk.

Afterburners: The effect of dumping fuel out through the exhaust system, and igniting it within the system, the continual explosion of such *afterburning* adds speed to the craft.

Aftersun: 1. When a ship has a permanent station orbiting a planet, the period when the ship goes into the shadow of the planet is called aftersun. 2. It simulates night. 3. The shifts aboard Federation military craft are divided into two per Standard Day. The first is called Foresun while the later Aftersun. There is no *night* aboard military craft.

Agent: 1. Two levels below independent. Starting from the top is: Independent, Junior Independent, *Agent*, and *Agent* Junior Grade.

Alfrash: The planet that was first colonized by the Pleiadians. It has 1.04 Standard Gravity, was lush with forests, had deserts, ice poles, temperate and tropical rain forests. A super solar flare, itself a series of 12 flares, took out the colony over a sixty-year period. There were enough suspicious circumstances, to indicate that the

flare(s) may not have been completely natural. Over ninety percent died, during those sixty years. The planet was abandoned, and at vast effort, it was engineered, to remove all evidence of previous occupation.

Algon Sea: The nearest sea to Jilta PPC, measuring 765 Ks across at the widest point.

Allied Council of Free Sectors: The name given to the first authority controlling the new Federation Alliance. It was made up of the remnants of the Federation after the Battle of Sequetus 3, and consisted of the military heads of all the known sectors, including Farsen, which was restored. It was the forerunner to The New Federation.

Alliance, Federation: An alternative name for the Federation after the *Battle of Sequetus 3*.

Allied Council of Jilta: 1. After the atomic war on Jilta the planet set up a temporary government called the Allied Council of Jilta. 2. After all the Royals had left their Federation planets; the planets no longer had their autocratic control. There were members of the Federation military, as well as government, who tried to seize control of their own cities, countries and continents. Some seized atomic weapons. In the Federation, wars were starting to break out. On Jilta this culminated in an atomic war between three factions. After three years, and with almost all of Jilta PC and its sister cities completely wasted, the war ended. The government that took over was named the *Allied Council of Jilta*. This shouldn't have happened and for several years after the *Battle of Sequetus 3*, Torren traveled to Jilta trying to stop the wars and the fighting. He was unsuccessful, and it continued to the almost total destruction of the former prosperous cities of Jilta. As the other planets became embroiled in similar wars Torren found he was just as ineffective, so he concentrated his efforts on Earth, and hoped that when he found who was behind what was happening on Earth, it would lead to the same solution for the rest of the Santonia Galaxy.

Allied Imperial Federation: The full term for *Federation Alliance*. *Allied Imperial Federation Forces*. AIF, or AIFF, which all mean the same thing.

Alson: 1. A suburb in Jilta PC. 2. *Alson*, Academia, most prestigious tertiary Academia in all of Jilta. It teaches most degree doctorate courses and has forty five thousand students enrolled per year including full time, part time and by correspondence.

Aneel, FAS Destroyer: The Aneel went through the portal with the Expeditionary task force, in BS 10 and never returned, presumed destroyed.

Anki: The teenage daughter of the master Templar of Jilta. Was shipwrecked on Rambus and saved by settlers there. She attended Academia Alson of Jilta. For former past lives of Anki see *Anqi Storm* and *Vicra Starn*, both separate lives at different times, but the same person.

Amy: The teenage daughter of a family of settlers on Rambus. She used to dream of finding out what was outside of Rambus. She became strong friends with Anki of Jilta. She was stranded off from Rambus after the planet was raided by pirates, and they killed her family and friends. On returning to her home planet and experiencing the death of all she loved, and almost dying herself, she swore an oath that she was even the score.

Anqi Storm: 1. Malukan trooper, former resident of Sleebo. 2. Important in saving Sequetus 3. Daughter of Nobus Mas and Regel Subar of Taronga PPC. Educated in biophysics in Anst Academia at Taronga, joined the Malukan Guards shortly after graduation.



Aquel: A local length measure of stride from the planet Aqeliam

Arenic Alps, Jilta: On the continent of Algorico, the Alps run through the center and are on the opposite side of the planet to Jilta PC.

Arlon, Doctrains: Head of household staff of Residence of Jilta. Employer Goren Torren. Has a degree in Business Management from Academia Alson, Jilta. He moved with Goren Torren to Earth, and survived the *Battle of Sequetus 3*. On Earth he headed the *Home* of Goren Torren. He showed flair and became active with *Boguard Letone* in external affairs. He vanished after the FBI assault on *Home*, along with other *Household Staff*. Later he was found and did his part to bring about Intervention. After intervention he became a national USA celebrity on terrestrial television, made eleven movies, and married another member of his household. He returned to Jilta three times but remained as a

resident of Earth. He had two long-life children. He died 498 BS a full supporter of the Temple movement. He was deemed a Minor Temple of Sequetus 3. See the definition of *Temple*.

Armsman: Federation for Master at Arms, MAA. His prime purpose is to keep order on a ship.

Arrival Day: The day of arrival of the First Fleet and its pioneers, to a new world, sponsored by the Templar movement, the anniversary of is celebrated as the Arrival Day each year.

Ataran: City of Ataran, which housed the *Boulan*, the ruling class of the Aaron. Ataran had 110,000 people and was one of the oldest and biggest Aaron cities in Yaltipia. It was hydro powered by the cross currents of water flowing through the planet's crust. The city is at least 15 thousand years old.

Automatic beam: Simply means that weapons lock on target automatically and are fired by computer programs. The advantage is that they are not only accurate, but will continue well after the crew manning them is dead or incapacitated.

Bacterol-bandages™: Bandages with anti bacterial impregnated layers, which bring about fast healing. Made by Medicol Corp Inc. Jilta.

Balgoss, Eroni: Base Commander of the Palboan outstation on Sleebo, pirate station. Aged 234 when killed in the fight for Mount Drapper.

Baling: 1. The martial art of fighting with a two pac long thick stick made from the dense wood of the Baling tree of the Nalpan province. 2. The name of a tree from Nalpan province. Their folklore says that this tree was intelligent and the chief god over Nalpan would come to think and get his best ideas while sitting under a Baling tree. 3. It is said that a Baling stick has a mind of its own and after meditating with the stick, the stick and the fighter think as one, during a fight, in order to overcome a more powerful enemy.

Bank: See The Imperial Federation Warp Drive Bank. Home planet Palbo.

Banquast: A city of 60,000 on Yaltipia, made up of the warrior class of the Aaron. There were twenty-three warrior cities of similar sizes. The city occupies six interconnected canyons.

Battle Bar: 1. The saloon aboard a cruiser or destroyer where alcohol is be served. 2. The name of the flight bar on the *FSS Nebulus*.

Battle of Sequetus 3. The: *The Battle of Sequetus 3* is the official title for the battle between the Hymondian and Malukan forces in the Sequetus Series in 1990 local time.

Battlemaster: The Malukan equivalent of a marshal and commander of a fleet or armada.

Battleroom: A temporary make shift war room, CIC – Combat Information Center – inside the palace. It was 50 by 80 pacs, with seventy staff, troopers or Boguard.

Battle of Six Worlds: The battle in which both Pleiades and Boguard fought Centrecom, out in space, and in which Torren battled with Centrecom.

Bauxite: A rock that is mined, and which when treated by a process, is converted to aluminum.

Bearing Harvest: A two week period on Sleebo, when it is close to the sun and crops can be harvested. The whole of Sleebo get busy, harvesting the year's crops, during this one two week period.

Biobots: The surgical automated worms, which are used to inspect, stitch and repair tissue, during an operation. Biobots generally are 10^{-4} pacs in diameter.

Biotynes: The small insects bred and let loose onto a planet, that destroy human and mammal life by the pirates. The Warp Drive Bank sponsored the breeding and release of the insects themselves.

Blackheart: Pleiadian term, for meaning a person who lives against the better good of the community and self. A law breaker, a breaker of moral and ethical codes of behavior. One who creates turmoil, and one who does more harm than good around him. See *also Clean Heart*.

Bloodwood, Jiltanian: A tree measuring up to 390 pacs tall, found in the temperate regions of Jilta. Its wood is a rich red, dense and sought after for making furniture on Jilta. Today the trees are numbered and protected. Each tree is plotted on a map. They can live to seven thousand standard years. There is an entire industry on Jilta dedicated to protecting these trees. They are the source of much of early Jiltanian folk lore. Each tree has resident within it hundreds and thousands of other species. Its aroma is known to keep away parasites and plagues.

Bluster: See Microwave bluster.

Boguard: 1. Guard at the palace to protect of Lorde Hymondy III.
2. Race of bodyguard for the protection of Lorde Hymondy III. Their inception into the Federation region was about 550 standard

years after Federation conquest. Origin of race unknown. Life expectancy indefinite. Run along military lines. Source of instruction: Lorde Hymondy III. They are known to speak many languages, are trained in martial arts, physics. No command links with IFFCo. Being a race the word *Boguard* is capitalized.

Boguard Front: The assault corps of Boguard. They can be anything from 500 to 500 strong depending on the objective. The Boguard Captain Felice Karo made them famous when she defeated Palbo 1,000 years before. At that time there were up to twenty thousand *Boguard Front* that hit the planet in one strike, carefully coordinated, taking out all communications systems in one unified moment.

Boguard rank:

The following is the Boguard field ranking from highest to lowest:

Captain

Guard Instructor

Instructor

Leader

Boguard

Boguard Novice (student)

Boulan: The Boulan number exactly 500. They reside in a small section of Ataran of a square K in area. They are the ruling elite of the Aaron and Boguard.

Bridge briefing: 1. *Bridge briefings* are where missions are presented and discussed in a formal manner. They are recorded for future reference. Discussions of missions are not permitted outside of such briefings. All crew attend. 2. They are called *bridge briefings*, not because they happen on the *bridge*, because in larger craft they don't, as the *bridge* can be too small for all crew. Only senior personnel present the bridge briefing usually from the *bridge*.

Brijet, Captain: Female senior Boguard officer captaining the expeditionary forces fleet taking Captain Jaron to his objective mission. She was 283 years old at this time. It was her first command as an entire fleet command.

Broadmatter Theory: Broadmatter is that matter that is so small that current instruments can't read it, but it acts similar to a sea supporting molecular-matter that floats within it. It transmits heat and ALL energy and in this way is very different from the concept of dark matter. Broadmatter makes up the bulk of the universe mass, and is the reason why the universe is expanding at an accelerated rate. Broadmatter ties in with space and time and without broadmatter there would be no space, no gravity and presumably no time. Without it all other matter would collectively condense. See Broadmatter theory Addendum at the end of Book Seven for more details.

Bunker, The: The seven story complex below ground built during the time of the Confederacy, which was for officials of Jilta PCC during times of war and threat of war. It was maintained by Hymondy and other officials and still looked after, by the Temple.

Caff: The place, where non-intoxicating beverages are served, aboard a vessel.

Captain: 1. Upper middle rank in IFFCo. Usually in command of an interceptor squadron, a destroyer, or a fighter team. It is below Lieutenant Commander, in rank. 2. Highest field rank in the Boguard.

Carriers: 1. Short for non military ore carriers. They are generally made in space, and can be many kilometers long. They are under WD. The carriers connect up section after section (sometimes known as pods), and can be as many as four sections long. Often, the term *carrier-trains* is used to express the long attached lengths of the carrier containers.

2. Federation military *carriers* contain a complement of between 100 to 800 fighters, and a onboard crew totaling between 1,200 to 9,600. These ships pack a tight crew, and have high morale. In the Federation of Jilta, the slang word *hive* is used to mean *carrier*, and *darlt* is often used for *fighter*. A *darlt* is an insect from Jiltanian mythology that when stirred would seek out its enemy anywhere to attack, even if it meant the insect itself died. The tradition of using this term goes back well before the Federation of Jilta.

Carriers, Ore Carriers: Unarmed ships, used to transport mining produce or spoil. While they are big they have a very small crew.

Carvan: A city near two cross currents of water as well as geothermal power sources, and was one of four such cities devoted to manufacturing clean power for the other Aaron cities.

Cast-outs: The term given to those who are cast out into space unsuited. An illegal act, but practiced in some sectors, especially in remote mining areas.

Law systems turn a blind eye to the practice as most offences happen in return for illegal acts. That is, when a person gets caught committing theft or murder, and there are no law enforcing officials around, often the local inhabitants, meet and pass sentence with cast-outing being the penalty

Centoria: A democratic rim sector of the galaxy, adjacent to Jilta. Centoria is the capital system, where there are two inhabited planets. Being adjacent to Earth, Centoria has the most number of temple buildings, secondly only to Jilta. Centoria is the closest system capital to Earth.

Centrecom: Either a life-force or a computer program that ran the Six Worlds.

Charlton, Navia: Social anthropologist from Academia Alson, companion and associate in Sequetus 3 to Independent Goren Torren. Torren and Charlton both attended Academia Alson together studying, prior to Torren applying for his Independent's Certificate in Jilta. They were married for three years during at this time. Upon the end of the *Battle of Sequetus 3* Navia moved to Sequetus.

3. On Earth, she headed the Torren corporate empire of ACI. That corporation collapsed after a siege, by the terrestrial forces. She then took on a role gathering data and waited for the return of Torren, using the new corporation Acram. Upon intervention she continued on in Sequetus, and went back to her earlier profession of lecturing in anthropology until her retirement. She wrote 23 books while as a lecturer to universities in New York, London and Tokyo. She died 480 standard years after C Day. She never returned to see Jilta, maintaining that she wanted to retain good memories of her home. She never remarried, no children. See *NEW FEDERATION* for more data. 4. She's considered by the House of Torren to be one of the Temples (see definition of *Temples* of Sequetus 3.

Civvies: (*Terrestrial*) Slang. Civilians. It also means civilian clothes, civilian life, as distinct to military.

Clapboard: A computer pad upon which a flashscan is taken for identification verifying the user. The palm and three fingers must be present.

Class A rocket: Non-explosive rocket. No warhead.

Class B rocket: A non-atomic warhead, but packed with explosive.

Class C rocket: A non-atomic warhead, but packed with liquefied explosive gel. Designed to explode and send the burning gel to other areas and set those other areas alight.

Class D rocket. The warhead is packed with explosive shells, so that when the war head explodes it sends armor piercing unexploded shells through armor plate and they in turn explode on the other side of armor plate.

Class J rocket: J is the Juggernaut series, containing atomics of various subclasses.

Clean Heart: Pleiadian term. A person who does more good for society and self than harm. A person who abides by the ethical and moral codes, and laws of society. See *also Blackheart*.

Clerical Law: The Templar law as written by the Foundation Temple Goren Torren or as was ratified by the Sortet, during meetings of the ruling Cordellos.

Clife: A long Federation military blade made from Magnopolop (a non-metallic resilient compound) that is worn in a sheath on every shocksuit. Clifes are either dress or combat style. *Origin:* from the days before Federation when the Royal race was planet bound, the clife was worn as an instrument for bonding of the earlier warrior clans.

Cold Hype: Death that results from exposure to subzero temperatures in space, freezing of the limbs and body.

Communications Center: A ship has a *bridge*. A Base has a *Communication Center*, which is the focus of all data going in and out. It can also be called a *War Room*, or a *Combat Information Center*, depending on the sector.

Compu: ® The largest computer manufacturer in Crackess. Famed (or infamous) for its early invention – *intelligent computers*. After the Medallian Rebellion, the *Compu* executives were interned off-planet and CCP administrators placed inside the company. After this the company expanded, to become the largest interplanetary corporation in the Federation, with 1.7 million staff, in total.

Compubanks: ® a collective name for viewscreens and computers, which plot a craft's course and synchronize with Warp Drives. Manufactured by Compu Systems Interplanetary Inc.

Compuboard: ® Often found in airports, these boards are an instant tally board showing craft departures and arrivals. In a space fleet they are used to show the tally of battle. Manufactured by Compu Systems Interplanetary Inc.

Computata: ® Abbreviation for Computer Data or non-intelligent computer information, or in slang: a *dry-computer* – meaning no intelligence. Manufactured by Compu Systems Interplanetary Inc.

Compuscreens: ® Computer screens manufactured by Compu Systems Interplanetary Inc.

Computers, Intelligent: 1. 5,550 Standard Galactic Years prior to Federation, Luis Medallia developed the first recorded fully mobile *intelligent computer*. At the time it was recorded as a brilliant technological marvel. Not only could it store and extrapolate data to logical conclusions, but also it had the ability to self-perpetuate in other computers. The basis of all *intelligent computers* was the program *create*, coupled with the subprogram *survive*. 2. Intelligent computers led to the lowering of human-life to that of a servile status to computers. Without the intervention of neighboring galactic civilizations, and the *Medallian Rebellion*, these social

degrading phenomena of humankind would have spread throughout the Santonia Galaxy. It is speculated that without the *Rebellion*, within several millennium, all humanoid races may have become extinct. The cost of the Medallian Rebellion was fifteen billion humanoid lives which were needed to defeat the intelligent machines.

Confederacy: The loose governing body, democratic, that ruled the known outer galaxy prior to the conquest by the Federation. The full title is *The Confederated Council of Planets*. (CCP) It existed loosely for a hundred and twenty thousand years. The Federation defeated it in only decades.

Confederacy: Full title - Confederated Council of Planets. (CCP) The loose and often extended term applied to the political attempt to bring the multitude of races, political systems et al together to end the warring of two hundred and thirty standard years in the Santonia Galaxy. The *Confederacy* failed at total unification and was succeeded by the Federation.

Confederacy: Travel could take decades. As a result the *Confederacy* was never conquered by a single force or in agreement with itself. Often planets would get forgotten and cultures rediscovered over centuries.

Conquest: The CCP was conquered by the Federation. While many planets simply didn't fight and changed governorship of who was ruling them, some planets resisted and fought the Federation fleets and armies. During this fighting many government sections of cities were razed and government records lost. This was as much a cultural and economic set back as anything else. It was a loss of historical records.

Consol Agent: The chief and legal representative of an intragalactic corporation to a planet. Similar in status to an ambassador.

Control-fathers: Those who implemented the program to go back in time to avert the catastrophe that happened in the Galaxy, which originated in Sequetus 3. They in turn became to be known as the *Masters* on Six Worlds.

Cordellos: The heads of the Houses, which represent the strongest Temples. There are Ten Cordellos, but that will later expand, to include more Minor Temples. There were originally five Cordellos, and they were presided over by the Great Sharman. There were another five Cordellos representing the Lessor Houses. This number has been increasing, as the Outer-Worlds becomes inhabited.

Council: 1. Another term for the Confederated Council of Planets, CCP. 2. Confederacy, CCP, *Council*, Confederated Council of Planets.

Council of Order: A small body of Boguard whose task it was to decide what areas the Boguard should influence, and how, to bring about the goals of the Aaron.

Crackess (Krackass): 1. Home of the Confederacy inspired uprisings against the Federation in the Hymondian Realm. This cost the lives of three million civilians and military. 2. A planet in the Federation, which previously was relegated to backwaters after severe depression. It, being a mining planet that also relied heavily on computer manufacturer was depressed economically after the Medallian Rebellion.

Crackess Uprisings: See Crackess.

Cravana: Settlement in the Amazon of Sequetus 3. Population 420, at date 1,000 BS, and an outpost for the federation. It once had a population of 50,000 at date 500 BS.

Credit: 1. The galactic pronunciation of the credit is dahl. Its subunit is *dihlo*, and takes ten *dihlos* to a *dahl*, and ten *strake* to make a *dihlo*. For the sake of translation in this book we use the word *credit*. 2. Federation unit of currency, whereby tied to the Average Production Index. The average person earns about seven hundred *credits (dahls)* a week, but this varies upon the wealth of the planet. The value of *credits* remains constant and inflation and deflation are negligible with the Average Production Index system. 3. Material assets only rose and fell against the Average Production Index, not *credits*.

Crosshair Nebula: The giant gas cloud in the Pleiades wherein the Karo Series lies. It is a collection of dust particles that block out much view through the Pleiades.

Cruiser: The largest Federation military strike ship. It is half a Kinopac long of destructive power. It houses between forty to sixty interceptors with five escort fighters for each interceptor. Personnel number around 3,000 per ship. [◀Return](#)



Darlt: Jiltanian insect in early mythology. It had 12 legs, was the size of a finger. It was said to travel to any length to carry out its deadly sting. In the myth the *darlt* wouldn't stir until stirred. A *darlt* hive was said to have killed the son of the god of Jilta, after its hive

was brushed against, accidentally during a hunting tournament. The insect was thus given intelligence by the god – Taurius, so that when Taurius destroyed the dart species, the insect would realize why it was being destroyed. The term *kill like a dart* means to not carelessly choose your target, but to seek one's target intelligently, with purpose, and not fall back until the kill has been effected.

Dates: 1. From fifteen years after the *Battle of Sequetus 3* all dates were recorded from that date, which on Sequetus 3 was known as 1989. So, the year 2000 on Sequetus 3 was recorded as BS 11. BS being the abbreviation of *Battle of Sequetus 3*. 2. All dates before the battle have a minus symbol before the number. BS -50 is a date 50 years before the battle, and would be 1939 local date.

Decam: Slang term for *decontamination*, done when leaving an isolated world or system.

Defense Fleet Destroyers: This large class off Jiltanian destroyer bristles with guns, torpedoes, and single man *defense-sortie-craft*.

Defense Marshal: The most senior *Marshal* ranking. See *Marshal*.

Defense Sortie Craft (DSC): Craft likened to suicide capsules designed to singularly target an enemy incoming ship. The single crewman may, or might not evacuate, just prior to impact. The craft would come in at speeds low enough to not be deflected by the Acron or Proposhields. Once the warhead was (armed with electromagnetic pulse - EMP) within the shields the *DSC* detonated. The Acron and Proposhields would then be eliminated. The atmosphere around the launch bays leaves the ship and makes the launch and landing bays inoperative. Those caught in the bays die instantly as their bodies explode out due to zero external pressure. The effected launch bays remain down and open for hours, enabling enemy crews to board and fight their way into the ship. The EMP not only downs the shields, which enables external laser fire to be effective, but it disengages electronics, making electrical doors inoperative. The *DSC* is a very powerful weapon, but has almost no return rates for its single crews. Not used in the *Battle of Sequetus 3*. Crews often have some external reason why they volunteer. All crews are volunteers. They and their families are always subsequently highly honored and decorated.

Delerum: A planet, seventeen light years from Earth. The home of the bone traders, that brought about the extinction of the great dinosaurs on Sequetus 3.

Delopacs: Ten thousand pacs, 10 Ks.

Destroyer: An IFFCo military ship. It houses six interceptors and six fighters per interceptor.

Dispatchers: Staff – Bogaard – who would deliver messages on behalf of Hymondy and ensure they are obeyed by the recipients.

Docks and Checks: The docking procedure used in space, and where the crew and ship are inspected per regulations.

Drysuit: “The helmet was similar to that of any aquanaut. Breathing tubes were connected to the suit through a series of cells, it was able to draw oxygen out of the water. The used air was expelled through the suit walls, which were of a molecular size small enough, being then absorbed by the water.”

Duality: The universe can't exist as singular events, items or happenings. It exists as dualities. Men and women are one such duality.

Duchy: *Duchies*, may have up to a thousand stars of which only a few may have habitable planets. A sector has 1001 stars or more. There are two Duchies in the federation – Kalanon and Celtronia.

Econdar An education city of the Aaron in Yaltipia. It housed students and educators and administrators and had a population of 65,000 population. It was near the equator.

Element analyzer: It analyses the physical elements for their various properties, a planet's atmosphere, the temperature of space etc.

Elevator: (*Terrestrial*) Lift. Interchangeable term for lift.

Elevators: Vehicles used to exclusively lift great tonnage into space. In effect they are one big gravity plate with two pilots and one navigator. Twenty-five *elevators* can lift a destroyer off a planet with specific gravity of 1.0.

Empire House: On Palbo, *Empire House* was built to accommodate the military and administrative interface with the governments of Palbo. The building had 75 floors and encompasses six city blocks. Some said it had secret rooms of that the construction crews were not allowed to enter, it was that secret. The building itself was neo classical in style. It had a special section to accommodate psychron administration and experiments. The building was also serviced underground by its own rail loop service, its own landing decks for shuttles, and dedicated satellites above, for security and communications.

Empire of Earth: It lost in civil war to long-lifers, in BS 5789. The Earth Empire that ruled the Galaxy for over five thousand standard years.

Engineers, Federation: *Federation Engineers* are famous for their work; repairing almost anything, getting bases occupied, making bridges, and so on. Generally, they are non-combat crew.

Exodus Week: As with clerical law, the Outer-Worlds celebrate a week remembering the exodus from Earth, to the newer Outer-Worlds, such as Rambus.

Expedition Fleet: The Boguard fleet, of 4 ships, including a Man-O-War, which goes out on a mission for a designated predetermined objective. A total crew complement of up to 200.

Far-saw, far-see: The ability to see something remotely from a distance, well away from the object to be seen.

Farsen: A region of space with few planets, but ruled over by the Federation.

FCS: Federation Civilian Ship. The title given to a registered civilian vessel within the Federation.

Federation: Stands for The Imperial Galactic Federation, The Lordes Of All Worlds And Vassals Within The Domains Of The Galaxy. It has been the governing body that ruled the Galaxy after the CCP.

Federation: 1. The Imperial Galactic Federation (IGF), The Lordes of All Worlds and Vassals within the Domains of Santonia Galaxy (Santonia - Quadrant 451f or New General Catalogue 9154 Galaxy [Terrestrially termed *Galaxy*]). 2. FEDERATION - formally established in the standard year 13,576 upon cessation of the Santonia Wars of 13,331-574. Federation saw an end of 116,158 separate intra galactic domains of varying strengths. 3. Galactic political unification through federation after 120,000 years of varying peace and interplanetary warfare.

Federation Fleet Command; 1. (IFFCo – Intragalactic Federation Fleet Command) The military command of the Federation fleets. On planet armies are not subject to IFFCo, but come under Planet Military and Guard – PMG, the military force over guards, and guardsmen and on-planet troopers. 2. IFFCo pronounced “if-co”, is the vast interstellar military arm of the Federation. It is represented on all planets. 3. IFFCo doesn’t usurp the sovereign power of the royal sectors, and the sovereignty of each sector was senior to IFFCo, until the arrival of the junta that ruled the Federation, then IFFCo became senior to civilian authority.

Federation Sectors: See attached map. The sixteen Federation Sectors are: Hymondy, Maluka (Maluku), Pilik, Timbor, Penec, Centor, Qilto, Siltonia or Silt, Tilk, Patua, Serene, Penetia, Kalanon, Celtronia, Kantee and Farsen. Farsen did exist until taken by

neighboring hostile sectors of Qilto, Penec and Pilik. Each sector is made up of provinces.

Fibrerail: The train that is used, through the tunnels of Yaltipia. The railcars are pulled up and down the canyons, more for vertical travel, but also lateral, to a degree.

Felice Karo: See Karo, Felice

Fighters: 1. Fighters are the only real defense craft against interceptors. They are non-atmospheric and short ranged, and very fast. Usually they are quartered on carriers, cruisers or destroyers. 2. *Fighters* have a complement of one pilot with sometimes a second co-pilot.



Two more of the *fighter* crew remain at the carrier, so each fighter has a tight assigned squad of four personnel. Fighters further have allocated to them, a general staff of seven more support crew (cooks, doctors, administration staff etc) on board a carrier, cruiser or destroyer. Thus each fighter carries ten to twelve personnel. Also see *carriers* for more data.

Final Battle: BS 26 That battle which was waged around Earth as the last battle for the *Federation Alliance* against the *Far Federation*. It was after the Alliance had fallen, subsequently to Jilta being taken. Those not under the *Far Federation* gathered around Sequetus for one last stand. The Alliance forces were outnumbered 10 to one.

First Fleet: The First Fleet was those first ships bringing the pioneers to the new worlds for settlement. Each planet had its own First Fleet. Those who came on the First Fleet were revered.

Flashscan: An instant scan of human details taken with multiple bands of light. The scan checks for life in what is being scanned, as well as other details such as finger prints, palm prints, foot

prints, iris recognition, facial recognition etc. People are not always aware they have been flashscanned as these are used in docking bays, banks, stores, airports, trains, and even highways.

Fluid-wellness: Given to any crew in the infirmary who are ill aboard Federation military vessels. It consists of protein mixes, vitamins and carbohydrates, depending on the body type. There are a dozen varieties, and within those types, various strengths.

Fransibar: Planet Capital of Orbat, of the Karo System, in the Pleiades. Population fifty-eight million.

Free-area: Slang for a place *free* of tight discipline.

Free Areas: 1. *Areas*, which are *free* from certain codes of military law. Often found as the recreation areas of military personnel. 2. *Slang - Free Areas* are also civilian commercial areas, of trade.

Frigate: A warship by the Templar movement, which was brought into being, to counter the piracy against its colonies. It had up to 45 crew.

FSS: Federation Service Ship, the title given to each military ship in the Federation.

Fundamental form: The original form that populated the Galaxy long before changes that adapted the body to environmental requirements. "People from Earth have *fundamental form*."

Galactic Council, Boguard: It is the Council's sole purpose to guide the future of the Galaxy, towards a path of greater survival.

Galaxy: (*Terrestrial*) *The Milky Way* is the *Galaxy*. *Galaxy* means *milky way*, and it also means the universe. Once there was thought to only be all the stars above in the heavens and they were in this Galaxy, called the Milky Way. There was no other Galaxy other than this Galaxy. There is no other name for it than above. Later on other galaxies were discovered. Thus you will read the term Galaxy as capitalized and it means the Milky Way, the Galaxy that Earth is part of.

Gandin, Guard Instructor: Boguard leader, who lead the assault on Mount Drapper in Sleebo, against the pirate base.

Gangels, Mount: The tallest mountain in Jilta, 250 Ks due west of Jilta PCC. Height 4,289 pacs, said to be home to the gods of Jilta.

Garato: The Nalpan martial art of fighting, with rope and wire.

Gods of Jilta: 1. From mythology, dating back 15,000, who were said to be the ruling class and who ruled the world from Mount

Gangels. 2. A saying, exclamation of emphasis. *By the Gods of Jilta....*

Goldor: Administrative Member of the Confederated Council of Planets.

Goren Torren: 1. An independent of Lorde Hymondy III. He graduated in Galactic Law at Academia Alson before being accepted into the School of Independent Learning of Jilta PCC. Once he had completed his apprenticeship, he finished a mandatory one year in the Federation Guards in a neighboring system, before returning for his *independent* internship. He was the youngest intern cadet and graduated with honors. He once was married to Navia Charlton. Other relationships unknown. He inherited his family estate early in life. No siblings.

2. Torren comes from old Jiltanian, *torre* or *torenza* meaning *heavy rain*, and Goren comes from *gore* meaning to *fetch*. *The addition of the letter n* is to indicate it is a masculine word. So Goren Torren would mean the man who seeks to make the heavy rains, or the one who breaks the drought.



Above: Goren Torren stops the assassin's bullet in mid flight.

3. *The Independent*, as prophesied by *The Early Works* as Magi.

4. The personage as promoted by The Master Templar, and accredited to be the founder of the movement that grew later on. *For more history, see the NEW-EARTH SERIES.*

5. The foundation Temple for the Houses of Torren. See definition of *Temple*.

Graviton: (*Terrestrial*) Is the force of gravity, and for many it is described in theory as a particle.

Great Hall: In the Jiltanian Palace is the Great Hall. It was designed and built by Jiltanian architect Gioveni Gabalo and is 1,275 standard years old, predating Federation royalty.

Great Holy War: As described in *The Early Works* there would be a holy war unrivalled in history that would set mankind straight again. Here mankind had a new chance after the war to take a higher place in the existence of things.

Great Palace: The Palace of Jilta that was taken as residence by the Jiltanian leaders. It was once the home of Lorde Hymondy III. More recently the Master Templar resided there. It originates from the time before the Confederacy. Estimated as 1,780 years old.

Great Search: After Goren Torren vanished one of the biggest searches in federation history was undertaken. The search was not limited to just Sequetus as there were purported sightings in other systems, but there were none that proved true.

Great Sharman: The first was John Anderson of Sequetus 3, who fired the assassin's bullet that created the legend of Goren Torren. After the assassination was foiled Anderson hid and then joined the army. He was lifted off the planet by Letone to a higher status, but was then back on the planet, running the Temple Movement and was Torren's representative on Earth. Each subsequent Great Sharman has been Torren's representative in the Galaxy. There are other Sharmans, one for each major planet, which have the status of one hundred temples or more under them.

Greendale Health Retreat: A 1,500-bed mental health retreat on Palbo, situated 45 Ks outside of Palbo City Centrum, the hub of central interplanetary government of Palbo. The retreat comprises 17 buildings, over 300 nurses, psychrons and psycho-surgeons, and over 200 administrative staff. It sits on 15 square kinopacs of land, has its own airport and security forces and a small weapons depot.

Groundflight: ® A vehicle used on a planet's surface. *Groundflights* can elevate two pacs above the ground. A *groundflight* seldom carries more than eight persons or that equivalent in cargo. Manufactured by Resilient Industries Inc of Jilta. The Groundflight model was the center piece of their production.

Grut: A curse word of the federation. It came from the Confederated Council of Planets administrative planet Tilan. A grut was an instrument used to artificially inseminate wild animals, with outer planet genes, for domestication purposes.

Guard Instructor: A high field rank in the Boguard, below Captain.

Guardsmen: The basic military personnel on a planet. *Guardsmen* are contracted and are mostly on the planet and less likely to see military action. They have defensive roles. They can be used as a supplement for local law and order. They can also be

found on ships and remote bases during times of low conflict. See also Trooper.

Gyrocopter: A single seated autogiro, which is a form of aircraft, which has freely rotating horizontal vanes and a propeller. The difference with a helicopter is that the vanes of the gyro are not powered but instead rotate in the slipstream. The power of lift comes from the propeller in front.

Halz: The term to represent something bad. In ancient Jiltanian mythology, Aqin, son of God Zoltro of the mountains was kept captive in an underground prison, in Mount Halz by Zoltro's enemy, named Lansider. Lansider kept Aqin alive for 25 years, some said under constant torture, until Zoltro relinquished his status as head god. Aqin was boiled alive and it was his skin that was given back to Zoltro by Lansider that made Zoltro give in. Lansider was never caught but was always there, potentially waiting to take what was important. So there are phrases such as *hot as Halz*, *as bad as Halz*.

Harvester: The large multi -story machine, which extracts bauxite from the surface of the planet, Rambus. H1 means simply Harvester 1. There are five or six harvesters on Rambus.

Heat seeking nose: Particle guns can be equipped with a heat sensor, which enables the particles to target the warmest parts of a body, the heart or brain. The heat seeker is accurate for 20 to 30 pacs at 5 degrees. Settings can be changed. Standard trooper issue.

Health Retreats: The retreats set up by the Bank to treat those who disobey their commands. See series deprogramming to understand more about what is done to people at these retreats. Detention centers would be a better suited name, than health retreats. The physicians overseeing those treated therein are psychrons.

High Parade Dress: Parade dress with campaign bars, medals, honors, distinctions knives, and awards worn over Parade Dress which is a quality shocksuit. Parade Dress has gold braid for rank on top, of a standard shocksuit white issue uniform.

High-volves; Native animals, that are notoriously vicious, on the peaks of Sleebo. Hibernating carnivore that has a 25 year life span, weighs the same as a man.

Highwater™: Water combined with minerals, vitamins, and body-salts and with the citrus fruits of Jilta, sold commercially and made from similar fruits in different sectors. Made by the Highwater Company of Jilta.

House of Torren: Part of the Temple Movement. Each House represents one of the Temples of the Templar movement. House of Torren, House of Charlton and so on. See *Temple*.

Hymondy: A Royal Lorde of the Federation. With rejuvenation he has reigned over Jilta since its conquest. Lorde Hymondy III of Jilta.

IFFCo: Intragalactic Federation Fleet Command. See *Federation Fleet Command*. Pronounced: “if-co”

Imperial Federation Warp Drive Bank: The organization, which control the transport regulations and lease agreements of the Federation Warp Drive systems. They are an all-powerful body that predict and plot the expansionist policies of the Federation. They are the instrumental power behind the Federation, as without it all commerce and military travel would effectively cease. See also Warp Drives.

Independent: 1. A contracted vocation of intelligence gathering and sometimes action amongst the royal families of the Federation. 2. A license is required after a five year internship, in which is possible to enter after completing a prior tertiary degree, *independent* schooling and apprenticeship. The quota for *independent* licenses is low. 3. Most *independents* have a non-military background, though this isn't mandatory, but they must complete one year's duty in an alternate defense force prior to acceptance. Most sectors have reciprocal exchange programs whereby *independent* students are permitted into off-world training programs.

Independent, the: Short for the Independent Goren Torren. (Now capitalized as Independent)

Instructor: A Boguard high field rank. It is below Guard Instructor, but above Officer.

Interceptor: 1. A winged space craft that can stay in space or enter atmospheres. It is the prime attack craft of the Federation.



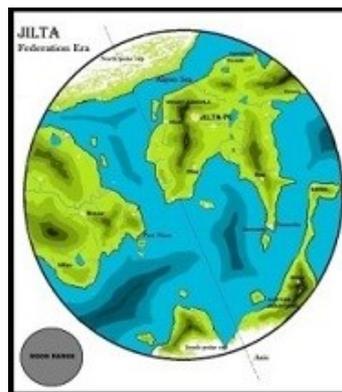
It carries atomic warheads on its rockets. Manufactured by various corporations, the most common is Fair Space Industries Inc. The interceptor was the fastest of all Federation military attack style vehicles.

2. There were many models of interceptors, depending on the region they were to be used in. Various ones were wide bodied, some narrower. Some had more or less rockets. The variance depended on the gravity and the expected atmosphere the craft was to encounter.

Jaron: Born 985 BS in the Amazon, Sequetus 3. Married Sheril Brud, of The Amazon in Yaltipia 1002 BS. One child. Jaron became Boguard Leader rank, in 1015 BS.

Jenny Wanten: Resident terrestrial anthropologist in Western Australia. Instrumental in assisting Independent Goren Torren in his *estimate* of Earth. Graduated University of Western Australia 2013. Deemed a Minor Temple of Sequetus 3. See the definition of *Temple*.

Jilta: (pronounced *Yilta* in English) Is the Royal Planet in the Hymondian (now *Jilta*) sector. It is the center of the sector and the residence of Lorde Hymondy III. Population half a billion.



Jilta is a watery planet with oceans over half its surface saturated, 11 continents, frozen polar regions, and some deserts.

Before the Hymondian Realm Jilta was a prominent hub planet of a small province of the CCP.

Jilta P.C.: P.C. stands for Planet Center and is the capital city of the planet. Population 1.2 Million.

Jilta P.P.C. *Jilta* Prime Planetary Center, *Jilta PCC*, the inner center of Jilta PC, the capital city of the planet *Jilta*, where the government administrative offices are.



Jilta PC layout.

Population 210,000 (Note; to pronounce *Jilta* it is necessary to pronounce the *J* as a *Y*, so the reading of *Jilta* is pronounced *Yilta* in Standard Jiltanian speech. This pronunciation is a local dialect of Standard Galactic.)

Juggernaut: Any blinding idea for which people are prepared to sacrifice their lives forsaking all else.

Ks, K: Kinopac, a thousand pacs, over a kilometer long. Also used to mean kinopacs per hour.

Kalanon (Kallon): Reluctant ally of Jilta. Kalanon was the Duchy of Kalanon, a relatively small sector. Its royal was the Duke of Kalanon. At the end of the Battle of Sequetus 3 he arrived in Sequetus to support Hymondy.

Kalo: 1. Mild stimulant pick-me-up bean roasted and ground, that when mixed with hot water is a popular drink. 2. Very popular drink around Jilta. 3. A Jiltanian equivalent of coffee. 4. *Kalo* is from the underground root, a legume, of the *kalo* tree. The “beans” are roasted and ground. Depending on the soil conditions, the taste and aroma may change, but also the ratio of “bean” to root ratio depends on the stimulant effect. Kalo beans can also be eaten whole, similar to Earth peanuts, which are also a legume. 5. Kalo as a drink can be taken black, or mixed with creamer, sweetener added, or mixed with alcohol. It can be put into cakes. 6. The kalo industry was once a prime industry on Jilta, ranking only second behind learning. 7. Tradition has it that the kalo tree was a gift from the head god Zaltro, to his son. 8. It is said on Jilta that a drink of kalo a day, leads to good health and long life.

Kantee Sector: One of the inner sectors of the Galaxy. Home of the royal bloodline and separate race known as Royals, who provided the push to form the Federation. While the Royal race didn’t seek a dominant role in the Santonia Galaxy, they were forced to rule it – benignly – or suffer the consequences of being overwhelmed by increasing wars and skirmishes of neighboring races of the Confederacy.

Karakas: 1. A planet in the Outer World province of Belamore. In the Hymondian Sector, and in from the Penek Sector, its nearest neighbor.

Karo, Felice. Pleiadian Daughter of the Governor General of the *Karo Series* of the Pleiades.

Later, became Boguard and captain of the Boguard during the Battle for Centrecom, and battle of Palbo, where she excelled. She transmuted when she rehabilitated her otherwise lost abilities when training as Boguard. Said to be the duality of Goren Torren and just as important.

She's deemed and titled as one of the Temples of Sequetus 3. (See the definition of *Temple*.)

Karo, Series: A series of 27 planets within the Pleiades, otherwise unknown to the Federation or the CCP. It has five of its 27 planets habitable, including those it is terra-forming.

There are two races, the original Aaron, otherwise known as Boguard, on Yaltipia, and the Pleiadians, who arrived, after fleeing Earth in their long forgotten history, and who set up a new life, on Orbat.

Kelvin: (*Terrestrial*) Temperature measured in the same as degrees Celsius, but where absolute zero, where there is no temperature at all, is zero on the Kelvin scale.

0° Kelvin = -273.15° Celsius

Kinopac: 1. It is exactly 1030.91 Meters. 2. A thousand pacs. Kinopacs is abbreviated to *Ks*. 3. *K*, slang meaning kinopac or kinopac per hour.

Kintecs Province: A former industrial and technological planet famous for its intelligent computers before the Medallian Rebellion. It is now in the Hymondian Sector.

Kul: A transport beast known for its cussedness. It can carry the weight of twenty men, over rocky ground.

Kwankindo: The martial art of unarmed combat. Taught in most military schools.

Lallow: - The word comes from the minute sound of its wings, Lal-loh. The lallow can live two years, and adopt the colors of various fungi for repelling enemies or attracting mates. They are a sign of good fortune and cherished by the Aaron. Many Aaron cultivate small sections outside their homes certain fungi the lallow feed upon, to attract them. The local lore says that while the lallow reside in the labyrinth of caves below Yaltipia, so can the Aaron.

Last Battle, The: (*Also see Final Battle*) This was the last stand by the Federation Alliance against the Far Federation. There were no other battles after this. The Alliance totally fell at this point. Twenty-three ships were destroyed in this battle, and it was the first time the Alliance had confronted the enemy face on.

Leader: Boguard field rank below *Officer* and above *Boguard*. See *Boguard rank*.

Letone: (Historical information only) A Guard Instructor of the Boguard, Commander of the Boguard. He was assigned to Lorde Hymondy III of Jilta. He's seen below in the Wanted Poster. He died (presumed) in BS 27 when *Home* was raided by Earth intelligence agencies.

He was born on Yaltipia, age unknown. He was in charge of security at ACI under Goren Torren in California, Earth. He was also in charge of the mission that captured Anderson from the Wright Patterson Air base and brought back the dead alien Tog from the crash retrieval.

He was loyal and believed in the freedom of Sequetus 3 to maintain its own sovereignty without interference by external forces. A statue was erected in his honor in Los Angeles. He never married, no offspring known.

Deemed by the Templars as a Temple of Sequetus 3.

Life-force: (*Terrestrial*) That spiritual singular existence that gives energy to a living organism and which does its computing and decision making.

Life suit: A pressurized, helmeted space suit. *Also lifesuit*. The suit can be worn in space, with no atmospheres, toxic atmospheres and even atmospheres such as Venus, which has sulfuric acid clouds. The same suit can be worn underwater and is good to 180 pacs. Made by numerous manufacturers on many planets.



Lift: (*Terrestrial*) Elevator. The terms are interchangeable. Lift is more English and elevator is more American.

Lorde: 1. Lorde, meaning a title of trust, and honor, used by royalty and high ranking religious officials of the Federation. 2. (*Terrestrial*) Old English 1200 – 1300 The spelling of lord was lorde, along with other spellings in England at that time. From *Hlaford* means *bread-keeper*.

Long-lifers: 1. A slang term meaning someone who would normally live a long-life, as distinct to some planets, which produce short-life humanoids. 2. A long-life is 250 standard years or more. Short life is less those 250 standard years. 3. See *Genesis* for a list of prior long-lifers of *Sequetus 3*.

Lotta: A flesh eating predator from the mountains of Jilta. Protected species. The most similar mammal on *Sequetus 3* would be the Bengal tiger in size and habitat.

Magi, The: From *The Early Works*, one who has redeemed his natural inherent abilities of life, who will lead the Galaxy away from a hidden tyranny. Goren Torren became the Magi of the Early Works.

Magi: (*Terrestrial*) 1. The fourth century BC the Greeks saw the magi as being associated with the Zoroastrian religion of Persia and the term became synonymous with practitioners of magic, astrology, and higher knowledge. The Gospel of Mathew refers to magi being the *wise men of the east*. The number three (three wise men) was added perhaps a thousand years later to the English version. 2. The Old Chinese word for magician, wizard, is *m'ag*, coming from *magi*. The Old Chinese symbol for this is the following cross: (A cross with serifs: 卄) The point being is that

the term has crossed from China to the far West and generally means people who have wisdom and who can perform real magic.

3. The term illusionist, or one who performs tricks, to make people believe the magician is performing a real feat came during the Hellenistic period of Greece, when the term magician was applied by skeptic thinkers. This term survives today in the English words magic and magician.

Magnaplate: *n.* The flexible plate threads that are electrically locked into polynylop. When woven into nylop and charged, the impregnated nylop adds dramatic strength and endurance to the wearer. *v.* magnoplasting.

Magnoclamps: ® Clamps which hold vehicles in space stationary to each other, and lock them together. They are used particularly on interceptors when they dock for refueling and need a quick turnaround. Magnoclamps are made by Standard Solid Industries, of planet Peel.

Magnopopol: A non metallic resilient compound that has no magnetic properties.

Maluka, Lorde: A Royal Lorde who rules the Malukan sector, originally from the Kantee Sector.

Maluka, also Maluku: The main central and Royal Planet of the Malukan Sector. Famous for its industrial products, and engineering skills. The Malukan sector was once larger than it is now and was the sector that Sequetus was in.

Man-o-War: The Boguard warship, which works in harmony with its crew, as though the ship itself was a living life-force in its own right. It works on thought rather than mechanical operation. The man-o-war varies in size up to a hundred crew, and can be as small as twelve crew.

Mars Base: The scientific expedition base on Mars set up by the Federation on Sequetus 4, in the Cydonia region. Its job was to monitor the Sequetus Series for Scientific purposes.

Marshal: The senior military rank in IFFCo. The rank of Marshal in order downwards is:

Defense Marshal - five stars, Ranking Marshal - four stars, Reserve Marshal – three, Marshal - two and one stars.

Master Templar: The ecclesiastic head of the Templar movement. He was elected for life. The elected position had been male dominated since the movement began, but no rule to enforce so. The position is decided upon by a vote, by the Cordellos.

Matow: Planet previously known for its industrious work ethic, and manufacturer of galactic ships on its three moons, prior to its demise at the hands of the Patuans.

Meedle: A drink often served in the Malukan sector. It is distilled from barley and mixed with a cinnamon and pepper derivatives. It is served warm to hot, and highly alcoholic. 2. On Sleebo meedle is drunk extensively, easily made, and there are great competitions for who can produce the best.

Mepat: Captain of the Boguard stationed at Jilta. His Excellency High Commander of the Boguard. See also the Great Manapet. He was deemed a Temple of Sequetus 3. See the definition of Temple.

Merron City: On Palbo, a powerful city, that built cruisers and was the final manufacturing place of Warp drives. Population of 2.8 million. It was laid waste by Felice Karo, during the intervention of Sequetus 3. Getting Merron running again gave power to the Bank and Mirak did this for 150 years before being elected to the Board of the Bank. After 45 years on the Board was elected to the Boards chief executive and administrator.

Mind-call: A call mentally from one to another or all. A Boguard term.

Minor Cordello: A Cordello representing a Minor Temple, such as the Minor Temple of Wanten, who represents Kalanon.

Mirak, Brandon: Head of the Imperial Federation Warp Drive Bank, the chief administrator, and once elected by the Bank Board, he has a ten year term of office. Already having being elected as President of Merron City – population 2.8 million, got him onto the board of the Bank.

Mount Drapper: A mystical mountain in the Kendal Ranges of Sleebo. It is 18,000 pacs above sea level. It is permanently covered with snow, and its peak is weeks away from the nearest village, by foot. It is one of the remotest parts of the planet.

New-Age: The New-Age of Palbo, or Empire II, as some called it, then. It was a new reign of Palbo, over the other worlds. Mirak first used the term in a speech, to a crowd before he received his first programming. It was one of his last original thoughts.

New Territories of Palbo: The New Territories were the states, planets and acquired territories of Palbo, gotten by threat, force or intimidation.

Nylop: 1. A tough material that is used to create fabric, especially for use in military clothing and upholstery in galactic craft. 2. A

synthetic material of Confederacy origin, easily molded, resilient to tear, but pliable. Often used in the manufacture of garments.

Off planet: v. 1. The term used to mean leaving or being away from the planet. 2. Leaving to go into space, or to another world.

Offplanet: Meaning not from the planet one is on, from another place, off from this planet. *"Tomorrow I go offplanet on my holiday."*

Off-worlds: A term used in the Karo Series, to refer to the habitable worlds, beyond Orbat and Yaltipia.

On planet, on-planet, onplanet: v. The term used to mean going onto the planet from out in space or another world. *"I'm going on-planet from the cruiser."*

Orbat: The chief planet in the *Karo Series* in the *Pleiades*. Standard gravity: 0.97, Water 68% of its surface, 267 million kpac from its solus. One of a binary pair of planets.

Out synchronization, or out-of-sync: The term applies to the mechanism of misalignment, of sub atomic particles and time, when the Warp Drive fields engage.

Outer-Worlds: Not to be confused with the out-worlds of Jilta, those small regions lying on the outer part of the Jilta sector. The Outer Worlds on the other hand are those worlds that fall outside of the Federation of the long-lifers. The outer-worlds were never inhabited, until the Temple or House of Torren pushed humanity out there beyond the earlier Federation limits.

Pac: 1. Officially 1.03091 Meters (*Terrestrial*). 2. A length of standard measurement used throughout the Federation. 3. One pace or step.

Palbo: In the Kantee Sector, the planet rose to prominence, due to it being the home and headquarters for the Warp Drive Bank. 38% water, not counting another 23% of frozen water caps. 12 continents, but with one supercontinent at the northern polar region. There are three native races on Palbo. Three moons, gravity 1.23. Oxygen 23%, nitrogen 75%.

Palbo C.C.: Palbo City Centrum, is the central planet administrative city of Palbo. It is the head of the government bureaucracy and the administrative functions of itself, the planet, and the sectors and regions that it governs. It was once home to the headquarters of the Imperial Federation Warp Drive Bank, but that moved to Kalexia on the continent of Calex. Palbo itself simply means *home*, in the ancient Palboan dialect. The city can trace its origins back 35,000 years.

Past-lives: (*Terrestrial*) There is frequent mention of past-lives in the sixth book of the NEW-EARTH SERIES. This phenomena of a past-life is simply a person leaving his humanoid body, as a spiritual life force, and getting another humanoid baby's body at its next birth. This is distinct to reincarnation, which allows for migration of the spirit between species. Past-life theory doesn't subscribe to migration between species and this is the concept used in this book, past-lives.

Patua System: Planet system nearest the Jiltanian System.

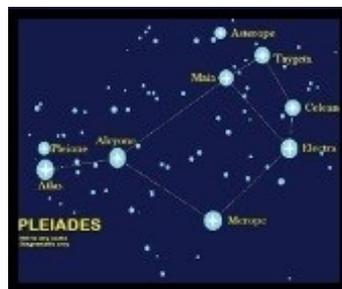
Patu, Lorde: Ruler of Patua.

Peel: Royal planet of Kalanon. Population 29.1 million.

Permanent Status: When a law is submitted and approved it is provisional, but it is put into effect straight away. After a predetermined number of years of testing the law, it goes before the Sortel again and gets ratified as a permanent law. To revert the law after that, it needed a new law be provisional and so on.

Plant: Someone planted amongst a group to spy on them. "A plant that high amongst us?" An infiltrator, a spy, put there to steal, and pass on confidential data.

Pleiades: (*Terrestrial*) 1. Star cluster known as the Pleiades, or Messier object 45 – M45 – or the Seven Sisters.



2. A cluster with seven stars known as the seven sisters containing middle aged B type stars – hot blue - in the constellation of Taurus. They were formed around 100 million years ago. The stars are 440 light-years away and about 48 light-years across. There are around 1,000 stars.

3. The name Pleiades comes from Greek mythology and the names of the seven sisters are the seven sisters from Greek mythology.

4. The Pleiades are reportedly referred to in the following ancient cultures: Maori, Australian Aboriginal, Persian, Chinese, Japanese, Mayan, Aztec, Sioux and Cherokee, Babylonian, Hindu

(six mothers of war), Revelations 3:1, and perhaps is the Star of Najm referred to in the Quran.

Pleiades: 1. There are three star systems with inhabited planets known by the Federation. They are: Thora, Lordal and Quintex, with about ten million people on each. 2. There is the Karo Series, a system with several occupied planets. When someone in this story is referring to the Pleiades as a civilization they are usually referring to these coming from the Karo system. 3. A relatively young set of stars in the Galaxy.

Polynylop: 1. A fabric made from twisted metal thread that when intertwined with nylop produces a material that can be used to cover space craft skins, space suits, boots etc. It is extremely strong, and rigid and durable, depending on the ratio of nylop to the metal thread. Its strength also varies depending on the metal used. Polynylop is watertight to over 150 pacs, and airtight in space. 2. *Polynylop 0* (strongest) can be used in space suits. *Polynylop 9* can be tailored as desert clothing. The graded number represents how tight the thread is woven and its strength. Polynylop rope and twine is the recommended material for tying down and securing loose objects in federation craft.

Profood: They are self heating packs of food. This is the Federation equivalent of junk food, extensively used by outspacers, but high in protein and nutrient value.

Proposhield: An electronic shield usually in the front of the ship that negates and or deflects laser fire. See the Broad Matter Theory in the Addendum for more working data. It operates differently to that of an Acron Shield.

Psycho-surgeon: Professionals from Earth who were seconded to Palbo, after Earth was introduced to the galactic civilizations, to operate of malcontents and those who would oppose the Warp Drive Bank's rule. They introduced surgical implants, for new-born infants, the size of a grain of sand, implanted in the brain through the soft skulls of the new-born, to ensure future compliance as the child grew older. They later changed the name of their profession to the term *psychrons*, however the profession divided into two schools of activity. The psychrons dealt with purely the mind and non intrusive methods of implanting, while psycho-surgeons dealt with manipulating the body to change behavior.

Psychotronic mines: The mines go into Warp Drive automatically and send out millions of signals in millions of time slots. If any return, a signal is then is plotted. If there are any craft in the same time instant as the mine then it is registered. If it can be plotted, with subsequent plots, as well then the craft can be intercepted and mined and destroyed. *Time-mining* it is called.

Psychrat-chamber: 1. A four pac chamber, which, when a person is placed into it, head first, it wraps itself around the person, applies a certain amount of pain and numbing sensation by the use of alternating currents to the whole body. At the same time the person is fed imagery through the eyes, to create an entire new memory for the person. Psychrons and psycho-surgeons do it. 2. Through drugging and hypnotically instructing the patient has to keep his eyes open and by projecting into the patient's eyes pictures and movies, along with a verbal sound track of the logic of what is happening and of why and what the patient is to think, the patient can be made to take up new causes, fight previous alliances and so on. A complete artificial memory can be induced, into the patient as real as any he had lived during his lifetime.

Psychrons: A branch of physicians dealing in series-deprogramming, who originally came from Earth in 89 BS. They were shipped to Palbo from Earth to work with the Warp Drive Bank re-instate its control over the population, which had been liberated from the Bank by the Boguard and Felice Karo after BS 35

Psychrons are the control-fathers that the Masters on Six Worlds claim to have come from, and thereby linking their heredity line to the mind controllers of Earth from the 20th and 21st Century. Psychrons is another term for psycho-surgeons.

Quantum Drive: The sub-light method of travel during the Confederacy era of the Galaxy. Federation Warp Drives outdated the technology.

Quiet-talk: The term used by four year old Mathew Wanten, to describe the concept of thought communication.

Rambus: An Outer World planet discovered 789 BS. It has .96 standard Gravity. It is mostly desert with huge lakes and weeds. There are some mountains, and in the colder area is snow on the mountains by the lakes. There is some sparse vegetation near the lakes. Oxygen is produced by the various plant growth, beneath the water of the lakes. Bauxite extraction is its primary industry. Its population was destroyed by the pirates. Rambus became a symbol to the Temple over later years, to never give up fighting back.

Rapid gunneries: Guns that fire over three thousand rounds of particle fire from space craft per second. *Rapid gunneries* work in space only, as they are generally inoperable on planets due to their excessive heat generation.

Recount coils: The coils used in broadmatter theory to bring about WDS operations. They cause a unifying of the different physical fields to change time and space.

Reduction: A pirate term for administering the *biotynes* - the insects that burrow into human beings, mammals and destroy human populations. The insects are safely managed, using large spheres, that are sent from space down to the inhabited regions on a planet. Reduction can take from week, or months, depending on the resilience of the population being attacked.

Regeneration: ® 1. A process that Royals underwent when returning to their home in Kantee Sector. 2. *Regeneration* is complete body rejuvenation. 3. *Regeneration* is technology administered by the Warp Drive Bank. *Regeneration* isn't permitted on non-royalty.

Religion: (*Terrestrial*) means simply the organized way to explain oneself, the universe and how one fits in the cosmos now, the past, and in the future. Often answering the age old questions of who am I, what am I, do I have a purpose, and what happens after death?

Residence: The home residential name for Goren Torren's home on Jilta. It has now become the administrative center for the Houses of Torren of the Temples.

Resurrection: The era after Earth had been introduced to the Federation, and the time when depopulation of Earth had been instigated, by the Warp Drive Bank by lifting off humanity in its billions to other worlds. It was seen as a time of healing of Sequetus 3 after it had been heavily polluted and ravaged by the short lived species of man on Earth. No one has records of those who survived the travels to new worlds or how many of those billions were lost in the ether worlds of warp drive space. The Templars kept the only true records for those they sponsored to arrive at the Outer Worlds.

Rigrano: Fleet Commander serving the Palboan Fleet Command, originally born in Sleebo. Very highly decorated career officer, he saw service in Sequetus before being taken out of commission. 434 years old, son of Bubbo Brin and Dorin Rigrano of Dacal, North Sleebo.

River Master: The official on Palbo who authorizes the passage of boats beneath his checkpoint.

Royals: A tall humanoid race from the Kantee Sector of the Galaxy measuring up to 2.5 pacs tall. *Royals* as a race are olive complexioned, have stronger foreheads and cheek bones, and wide shoulders. Usually their hair is dark brown to black. They have a naturally high IQ. Prior to the development of W.D. *Royals* had no expansionist policies. *Royals* is sometimes capitalized – being a race, sometimes not.

Santonia (Santona) Galaxy: 1. Named after astronomer Rel Santonia, who mapped the Galaxy for space travel seventy-five thousand standard years ago. 2. The name for the Galaxy in Federation is *Santonia Galaxy* or *Santona Galaxy*. The terrestrial name is simply *Galaxy*, or *Milky Way*, which has exactly the same meaning. Galaxy means a milky way. Galaxy is capitalized when referring to the galaxy we're in, as it is the name of our galaxy – Galaxy. Galaxy and Santonia Galaxy mean the same. Galaxy is terrestrial, and Santonia Galaxy is Federation.

Screens, ship: Aboard battlecraft are different types of screens. They are not linked to a central computer, but rather are run as completely isolated computers with their own separate attendants. These are datascreens, which access data; and commscreens, which access communications going in, out and around a ship; viewscreens, for general display of information, briefings and so on. There are mapscreens for showing overlay, ground enhancement and positions in space. For security of data these systems are physically never linked.

Searfinders Index: ® 1. The two hundred and seventy-three reference volume set of books that is used to standardize galactic cultures and education, which had been missing under the Confederacy. Searfinders Publishing Industries Inc. is headquartered in the Kantee Sector and has half a million staff around Santonia. Searfinders publish over 1,800 daily, weekly, monthly and quarterly publications through the Galaxy. 2. Searfinders are a conglomerate of publishing divisions. They have a mandate to accumulate and publish data, for the cultural future of humanoids, to bring about an improving civilization. 3. Searfinders are an aligned body of publishing houses.

Sector: The region of space controlled by a Royal family within the Santonia Galaxy. A *sector* can have a million stars, of which only a few hundred are barely habitable. Some *Sectors*, *Duchies*, may have only a thousand stars of which only a few may have habitable planets.

Security Council of Palbo: The body of 13 men, six military, seven non-military, that answer to the President, and who preside over all security matters of the planet and its empire.

Sequetus: The solar system that includes Earth. The system is wondrous in all the different types of planets that are involved, and that Sequetus 3 and 4 are or were habitable. From Latin, *sequi*, meaning to follow.

Sequetus 3: 1. Earth (terrestrial name). Fully colonized and expanding. It is in pre-intervention stage of development. 6 billion inhabitants.

2. (*Terrestrial*) One natural satellite – moon. Diameter 7,654 miles - 12,654 km, 90 million miles (149.6 million km) from the sun. Density 5.5 times water.

Sequetus 4: 1. Mars (terrestrial name). A planet that once boasted a large colony of some seven hundred thousand colonists. The planet was terminated and colonists moved to Sequetus 3. Named after one of the early explorers of the CCP, Mares Bey who gained a ruthless reputation in slaughtering local inhabitants.

2. (*Terrestrial*) Mars is 141.6 million miles or 228 million miles from the sun. Diameter 4,208 miles, or 6,787 kms. Its red color comes from the iron rich mineral surface. Tenuous carbon dioxide atmosphere.

Sequetus Series: 1. The *series* of habitable planets in the Sequetus system. *Series* as a title applied only to *systems* that contain more than one habitable planet. Sequetus has *Sequetus 3* and *Sequetus 4* as its *series*. *Sequetus 4* is barely habitable today but has been so in the past, and therefore qualifies for the title of *Sequetus System* to be upgraded to the title of *Sequetus Series*. 2. A System is the title of a star with one habitable planet. A Series is the title of a star with two or more habitable planets.

Series deprogramming: 1. A form of mental and administrative exercises which may be as light as a short mission debrief, but could be as intrusive as removing memories, by the use of otherwise illegal controversial means. This may involve electrocution to the brain, removal of parts of the brain, microwaving to cook the brain, or ingesting chemicals to prevent the brain from operating. 2. On Sequetus 3 series deprogramming is done in psychiatric institutions and laws have been set in place to enable it to be administered by qualified Malukan agents (or others), as a legal therapy.

Shaman: (*Terrestrial*) n. priest or clan witch doctor, claiming to have sole contact with gods etc.: hence *n*, shamanistic *a*. [f. G schamane & Russ. Shaman f. Tungusian *saman*.] (Oxford Dictionary)

Sharman, the Great: 1. The sole person responsible for speaking to and being able to understand the spiritual deity of Goren Torren. To be the Great Sharman one needed to be able to transmigrate through time itself to be able to contact the Holy Torren. 2. The title was first accepted by John W. Anderson on Earth. In the two thousand years after the graduation of the Holy Torren in BS 31, there have been five holders of the title of The Great Sharman. 3. Sharman is an alteration of the word shaman.

Shanar: Title pronounced upon a person by The Master Templar. Technically it isn't a name but is received as a title. Such a person has to reach a certain mental and spiritual enlightenment state, as

well as certain physical ability, before being granted Shanarian recognition. This was the title given to the public relations officer of the Master Templar 2020.

Sheril: Born in the Amazon to an Indian tribe 986 BS. Had one son to husband Jaron, and moved to Yaltipia of the Pleiades.

Shocksuit, Shock-suit: ® 1. Space wear for military duty in the Hymondian and some other sectors, manufactured by Hard Ware Enterprises Inc. Also worn by Boguard.

2. The shocksuit is designed to absorb blows and distribute the load of such physical shock around the body, so that no one place is overloaded with impact. The result is that the wearer is able to exert himself far greater with far less risk of damage. The standard shocksuit colors are dress-white, black, grey, sand, buff, and jungle green and navy blue. All the above colors are available in camouflage as well as special order colors.

Short-lifers: Those who live a lifespan of between 70 – 150 years thereabouts. Until the emigration of peoples of Earth into the galaxy, short-liferism was listed as a physical treatable disease of the DNA. Short-lifer then became a derogatory term meaning someone with Earth ancestors.

Siltonia: Sector, with Ranwick as the Capital and Royal Planet. Siltonia, also known as Silto, was a major ally of Jilta during the Battle of Sequetus 3. After the Royals slowly vanished the sector elevated to being a democratically run republic.

Six Worlds, the: The name given to the six planetoids beyond the portal. The six worlds are: Yildon, the home of Vila and the Masters. Tibel, the home of Centrecom. The others are Vauxou, Paleno, Ferrow, and Julipor.



Sleebo: Outer planet in the Malukan sector near the central rim. A cold planet much of which is frozen. After the Earth intervention day the planet became a major trading partner with Earth, due to the very close proximity, and a wealth of resources for the Templars.

Solan: 1. Planet in the Federation that previously was relegated to backwaters after severe economic depression. Solan was a mining planet that relied heavily on computer manufacture, but was wiped out economically after the *Medallian Rebellion*. 2. Remote province in Centor Sector.

Soldo: An inner Pleiadian colony planet, of the Karo Series. Already it has had human habitation and pioneers for 300 years, population 3 million.

Solus: The center of a system, star system source of heat and light. Note; a solus isn't simply a star. A star must have a system of classified orbiting natural bodies, in order to be classed as the system's solus.

Sortet: The annual Grand Meeting lasting two weeks, of the House of Torren. All Temples from the civilized world are represented. Traditionally the Sortet is on Jilta on the same date every standard year.

Spacer: A general term meaning anyone who was connected to the interplanetary military, mining corps, or anyone else who travelled in space.

Standard atmospheric: 1. A term applied to atmosphere pressures. This can vary to extremes. It is a relative term. 2. Sequetus 3 is 95% Standard Atmospheric, while Mars is 2%, Jupiter varies from 800% and above. 3. 1.0 is Standard Atmospheric.

Standard Book of Records. A subsidiary of Searfinders Index for government data records.

Standard Centre: A relative measure from the center of a Galaxy. 0.0 is absolute center. 1.0 being very the outside rim. The measurement is decided on the proportion of mass within the nominated figure, not distance. Example 0.3 has 0.3 of the mass of the Galaxy to the center of the orbital position nominated.

Standard Galactic (SG): 1. The language that was forcefully imposed upon Galaxy administrators after Federation conquest. Local languages still represent most dialogue, and there are over a million different languages in the Federation.

Standard Gravity: The gravity of the original royal planet is 1.0. All other planet gravities are a comparison to this by the term *Standard Gravity*.

Standard-year, Standard Year, standard year: 1. A *standard-year* is the measure of average time, which all the Royal Planets take to traverse one full annual cycle around their solus. While each planet has its own local-year, and measures time on the

planet in Earth-years, Jiltanian-years, and so on, there is a *standard-year* that all years can be measured against, and that is by taking all the royal planets and making the average time of each of those years, a *standard-year*. 2. By using this as a benchmark, it means that all planets have had an input into making the standards upon which the Federation is built. 3. A standard-year is 1.0595 earth-years.

Starion: An animal for riding, burden and for racing, bred on Jilta.

Storm, Anqi: Malukan garrison trooper on Sequetus 4, daughter of Jarn Storm and Maggri Bulin. Born on Sleebo. Anqi Storm assisted Goren Torren in his work in setting up the defense of Sequetus 3. Grew up in Sleebo. Storm Island off the coast of Ankrass in Sleebo is named after her, as well as the Anqi Marine Park, also off Ankrass. She was deemed one of the Temples of Sequetus 3. See the definition of Temple.

Strikers: Attack craft of the Boguard, not dissimilar to fighters, but which move at the use of thought, accelerate approximating the speed of thought, and which can actually alter position in space solely determined by thought.

Superrise: A building that exceeds 200 floors. Predominant in countries with climate extremes or which have excess population problems.

Superrises could have up to seven floors of shops and offices and service industries below it. It could also have underground rail stations inside it.

Suppressor-plates: Plates which absorb lasers in battle. These are defense plates that allowed the lasers to hit, absorb and transfer the energy of laser fire, rather than deflect the energy with proshields. Thus CCP military craft were bigger and heavier than Federation craft so as to be able to absorb laser fire.

Supreme Council of Palbo: A full bench of nine judiciary that approved laws and proclamation put into effect by the President of Palbo. They are non political and are drawn from the legal fraternity usually. 2. Some say the Supreme Council are only a rubber stamp for the planetary president's Office, while the council was formed, so as to curb excessive abuse of power.

System-alignment ports: While Warp Drives will work without the ports, only the drives themselves would be transported. To include the entire craft, its occupants and craft in the transportation, the crew and ship need to vibrate in harmony and synchronize with the Warp Drives. That is the job of the system alignment ports. They polarize the electrons of all matter within the ship so that the Warp Drives recognize the ship and its load as itself, and transport it all accordingly. *Port* means to travel, teleport, transport, *port*, so

systems-alignment port means traveling with the *alignment* of a whole system. Normally alignment takes a variable time depending on the volume to be transported.

System Security: The security personnel of a planet, a ship or a station.

System, Warp Drive: A *Warp Drive system* is the hardware of the drives plus the integration circuitry as well as the intellectual knowledge of WD making up the full workable *Warp Drive* product.

Talax: Fabled planet, where the Royals are said to come from originally. While no history books actually record its existence as real, it is said that in one of the myths it was an early Outer World, beyond Migor of the sector Timbor.

Tallum: A giant planet in the Karo Series in the Pleiades. It has six moons, one of which is being organized for colonization. Target date 4,000 years.

Tema: Administrative Member of the Confederated Council of Planets.

Templars: Those who are the clergy of the House of Torren and the Temple, and who follow the Temples of Sequetus 3.

Temple: 1. The term temple doesn't mean a building that holds religious relics and statues. The term temple here means the body of the person who holds the spirit of Torren to their way of being. Every person who became a follower of Torren, and adopted some or all his teachings was referred to as a Temple of Torren.

2. There were some temples of Torren who were posthumously elevated to Temple-Status (sainthood) as being the pillars of the Temple movement. There is the Foundation Temple, and five Temple and five Minor Temple statuses as follows:

Foundation Temple:
Goren Torren

Temple Navia Charlton
Temple Mepat
Temple Letone
Temple Felice Karo
Temple Anqi Storm
Lesser Temple Mathew Wanten
Lesser Temple Arlon Doctrains
Lesser Temple Jenny Wanten
Minor-Temple Erin Torb
Minor-Temple Hymondy III

Temple Minor: A smaller temple, a subsidiary temple. A Temple could have as many as ten, or ten thousand Temple Minors. A Temple Minor could have as many as a hundred thousand members, with smaller local Missions consisting of thousands of members. Temple Minors and Missions are all temples.

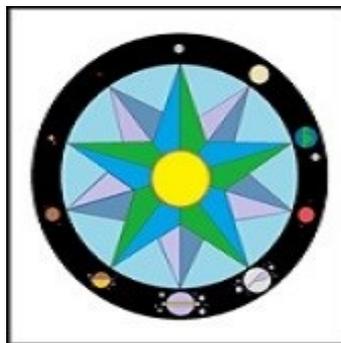
Temple Security: The security arm of the Temple movement. It handles the straight security affairs of the Temple. But it also has gotten involved in small clandestine activities as needed, such as hunting down pirates and where they originate.

Temples: The buildings that are congregation points for those who follow the word of Goren Torren.

Temples of Sequetus 3: The above eleven mentioned are the Temples of Sequetus 3.

Ten Pointed Star of Sequetus:

1. The star has the following symbolism: In the center is the sun, source of persistence. It gives life to the eight planets and many planetoids of Sequetus. They are in the order closest to the sun: being Mercury, on out to Eris. The ten points are indicate the green for life, dark blue for water, and pale blue for air. The shades of gray represent the other planets. The black represents space.



2. It is said to be a Boguard symbol and if one was to fix his stare on the star for five minutes the star starts to rotate within the wheel, as does the sun.

3. (*Terrestrial*) There are 5 known planetoids, three additional to Pluto and Eris. There are likely a lot more yet to be found. There are 8 planets and 5 planetoids, or dwarf planets.

4. The Federation recognizes only the ten planets of Sequetus in the Searfinders Index.

The Way: The Boguard training and realization activity and program, that when adhered to, brings about the states of self-recognition and understanding, that enables a person to transform into being Boguard. It is by invitation only.

Throne: *Slang.* The special ornately carved seat, for Lorde Hymondy, at the end of the Great Hall. While it is used for meetings it also has a military function, meaning to sink down, into a battle mode of command.

Tilk: The administrative planet, of the Serene System.

Tilon: Planet in the Federation, which previously was relegated to backwaters after severe economic depression. It is a mining planet that once relied heavily on computer manufacture. It was wiped out economically after the *Medallian Rebellion*.

Time, The: The Early works prophesize that at *The Time*, a magi will appear from Sequetus 3 and save the Galaxy from an encroaching evil. *The Early Works* outline the clues that will show the Time.

Time and space. Both time and space are properties of broadmatter. Time needs space and space needs time. They are invariably linked. One can't have one without the other. Broadmatter is so small that it can move in space through time. *See Broad Matter Theory Addendum*

Time-mining: See psychotronic mines. Time-mining was outlawed after the Far Federation fell to the joint forces of the Boguard, the Pleiades, and Earth.

Tinkly: Garrison planet run by the Hymondian realm within the Malukan sector. It is a very dry planet with lakes and vegetation toward the poles. It has a 0.4 standard atmosphere, which is breathable.

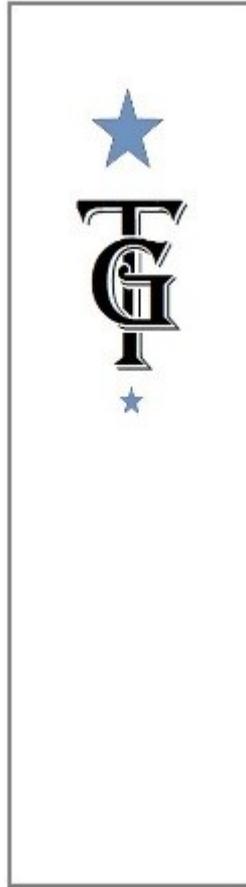
Torren Crest: The adopted symbol of Goren Torren, Magi.

The crest is simply a smaller star at the bottom, being oneself – a small spirit looking for betterment. That spirit rises up and becomes larger, as it is more fulfilled by the philosophy of Goren Torren. Up is the traditional direction of attainment and growth.

The outward thrust of the five pointed star represents the outward drive of the spiritual being as it trusts outwards to control the universe around it. One has more control as a larger star.

The white background symbolizes the spirit and its everywhere-ness through the universe. The initials TG are simply the physical world representation of the body, the agreed form and the name of Goren Torren.

Commissioned by Felice Karo and inspired by the PR firm, Galbaty and Michaels of New York.



Torren, Goren: Independent of service to Lorde Hymondy, of Jilta, tenth generation descendent to Phil Torell. Son of Betta Niq and Bil Torren. See Goren Torren. For more data read the NEW-EARTH SERIES.

Torren, The: A way of referring or mentioning Goren Torren, as the Foundation Temple, of the Templar movement.

Traditional-form: The traditional battle-formation of fleet versus fleet was cruisers at the center, destroyers on the flanks, with interceptors and fighters placed where needed. Usually this is a wide flat approach. After Sequetus this was found to be an ineffective fleet formation.

Trell: Administrative Member of the Confederated Council of Planets.

Trolley-bus: On cruisers and destroyers there are electric carts called a trolley-bus. They carry weapons, parts and so on, but can also carry passengers.

Trooper: The basic military fixed force personnel of space. Troopers answer to PMG and IFFCo. A trooper serves in space command posts, and small military outposts. The training of

troopers is similar to that of guardsmen, and the basic rank of trooper and guardsmen is alike.

Truth, a: The Great Sharman explains a *truth* as being something that can't be broken down into further explanation; that which needs no further explaining.

Tugract: A small heavy lifting ship used for dense planets to lift craft into space. It has lots of grunt, but no speed. The Tugract corps are specialized Federation engineers.

Tugs: The space stations from which *elevators* work. *Tugs* support ten elevators each.

Tunno-car: A small vehicle used in the underground tunnels of Yaltipia. It is electrically powered, from electricity generated thermally under Yaltipia. It can seat two or four people, travel at speeds of up to 500 Ks. The cars are centrally coordinated for traffic control and computerized to arrive at their destination as swiftly as programmed.

Underthought: The lower more depraved forms, of thought. Underthought is shrouded with evil, and its intent is to harm other life.

Unison, unison-mind, and unison action: Whereby all minds present are strong enough to feel the presence of each other's minds and then act in coordination with the other minds to bring about a single agreed upon effect into the physical universe.

Vicra Starn: Born in Norway of Earth shortly after the Battle of Sequetus 3. She was always interested in stars and UFOs. She just happened to be at the crash-retrieval site of an interceptor in Norway and reported it to the authorities. They visited her and no further action was taken. She then was at another retrieval site and this time met and spoke to Federation troopers, and to a Boguard (Letone). She informed Vicra's parents of this, and they made reports to the authorities; and subsequently they died in a rail accident. The Boguard Letone brought Vicra off planet; as he had been monitoring her for two years.

She attended Guardsman and Trooper basic courses and was adopted by *Commander's Care* (a trust the Commander set up to deal with children who saw IFFCo activities prior to Intervention and who in turn were removed off-planet when other means was not available, so as to prevent them from further harm by agents or renegade Earth agencies.) When she was 12 years old, she was brought to the Flagship. There she later met Independent Torren, became involved in intervention activities. She married Mathew Torren in BS 36 and had children and died on planet Earth.

2. Aka Anqi Storm in her earlier life, and deemed a Temple of Sequetus 3. See the definition of *Temple*.

Visio: Slang for visio screens on a craft or in an office.

Viton: Planet under Malukan control.

Warp Drive: The faster-than-light speed travel around the Federation. Theoretically possible at the speed of light squared. See also *Imperial Federation Warp Drive Bank*. See *Broadmatter Theory Addendum*.

Warp Drive Coils: “Before them was the coil that circled the entire rear perimeter of the ship. It was the Warp Drive coil, and moved them from the now universe into another smaller universe which was only theirs, from which they could travel at accelerating speeds beyond the relative speed of light.

As free electrons surged into the coils, and then reversed, it created a charged field. That field was interwoven with another field, which was woven around the previous field, like coils around coils. The fields didn’t cancel each other out but instead created a greater field that extended over the whole ship. The influenced was hyperbolic, increased by smaller coils around the larger ones. Soon all the ship and its components would start to harmonize in resonance with the coil fields. Then the final accelerators would play. Around the coils small electronic particles would be accelerated. They cut the field from time itself. The ship could then be edged into the future or back into the past by *nanoseconds*.”

“Before them, was the dark grey void of space. No stars, no coil, nothing. All she saw was black, as though all before her, had absorbed all light. Navia couldn’t determine how far the coil went up, but she felt it must have been sixty pacs. She looked towards the sides, nothing. It was not as though the coil was black, or missing, but rather like a dark black fog shrouded the coil and it was prevented from being seen. The blackness had no edges, no corners or center. It felt as though you could simply walk into it to vanish forever.”

“The coil was a series of spikes, like millions of tiny tentacles they waved from a central band”

“The Drives occupy their own universe, or are at least accessed from a different universe.”

Warmsuit: ® A one or two piece multilayered suit that is thermostatically set to keep the body warm by warming layers separately within it. The suit has ten layers with glass and metal fibers, which conduct energy from the inner to outer layers. The suit has a thermal inducing battery within the lining. This stores

electrical current, so as to transfer heat. As the suit's outer layers cool to sub zero temperatures the suit uses battery power to warm the suit's metallic layers. The cold outside air contracts and shrink the suit fabric, trapping warm air therein. As the suit warms, it then expands; allowing trapped warm air to ventilate out, permitting cooling. Also see *Electroware*. Made by Suit Enterprises, Dalka, and Jilta.

WDs: Warp Drives

Weather Suits: Wear that is the principle winter wear of Sleebo. The outer skin is an (imitation) fur lined, loose fitting garments. Shock suits are now often worn beneath. With the fur the dress looks baggy and unfinished. 2. Weather suit is a generic term and not a trademarked apparel item.

Wheelie: ® A wheeled electric ground vehicle for mining camps. Dozens of models available. Maximum speed 15 Ks. Initially manufactured by the Wheelie Vehicle Co. Inc., Telco, Kinetics Province.

Word, the: The Master Templar was given a spiritual understanding, through insight, that he was the chosen one, to promote the testimony of Goren Torren. This undertaking came to him as a moment of revelation, during in deep meditation called the Word.

Xelofom: Royal leader in Karacas, before the uprising. He believed that by placing mental implants into the brains of people, one could control the thoughts of the many, from an external source. He thought this would eradicate war, poverty and bring about an ideal society. It did the reverse, and led to the Karacas uprising. He was tortured by his own people and parts of his body dismembered while alive.

Yaltipia: Karo 4, the larger of the binary planets of Yaltipia and Orbat. Yaltipia is the home of the Boguard race. It varies in gravity around 1.4 standard. It has 28% water coverage.

Yandra: Son of Jaron and Sheril of the Amazon, later to be Boguard. He was the first short-lifer, born as Aaron on Yaltipia two years after his parents left Sequetus 3.

Zaltro: The senior god of Mount Gangels, God Zaltro, of Jilta. He procrastinated in saving his son, and in turn his son was boiled alive. The phrase *for the sake of Zaltro* means not to procrastinate. See *Halz*

Zip Suit: ® A bullet proof suit, also known as *zipsuit*, made in Tilk by Tilk Industries. These are the preferred suits most government dignitaries wear. During the first 100 years after Federation there were a recorded 15,679 assassination attempts on various

government officials in the Federation sectors, mostly in the first twenty years.

Acknowledgement: The **artwork** on the cover and most of the artwork inside the entire series comes from www.dreamstime.com. The author acknowledges the brilliance of their artists and selected each picture himself.

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List of Sequetus Series Books:

THE NEW EARTH MINISERIES

- Book 1. Advance on Sequetus 3
- Book 2. Over Sequetus 3
- Book 3. Chariots of Sequetus 3
- Book 4. Magi
- Book 5. The Silent Enemy
- Book 6. The Federation Unravels
- Book 7. Savior of Sequetus 3
- Book 8. New Federation

THE TEMPLAR MINISERIES

- Book 9. Temples of Sequetus 3
- Book 10. Temples and the Juggernaut
- Book 11. Escape From Federation
- Book 12. The Book of War

THE JUGGERNAUT MINISERIES

- Book 13. Juggernauts
- Book 14. Temple Worlds
- Book 15. Far Outer Worlds and Sequetus 3
- Book 16. The Talkron Hunter – Part I
- Book 17. The Talkron Hunter – Part II

THE EARTH SYNDROME MINISERIES

- Book 18. The Earth Syndrome
- Book 19. Final Passage
- Book 20. Vigil
- Book 21. Maluka Rising
- Book 22. Orbat
- Book 23. Galaxy

- Book 24. Expanded Series Glossary and Notes



This is the conclusion of the *Templar miniseries*, and the twelfth book in the epic *Sequetus Series*. It is fast. As the story leaves you behind, you might wonder how the writer managed to come up with it. The first three books lead you to the planet Palbo, the home of the Palboan Empire, and where there is an evil pervading into to the known galaxy.

Yes, this is space opera in its purist. It has a spiritual turn, and this makes it extremely interesting, and believable.

Like the last book, this one is bloodthirsty – but that’s what it’s really like out there, without the social veneer of a planetside civilization.

Follow Broadhurst as he takes you through this book with imaginative skill. You feel like you’re there with him. Good luck!