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# Once upon a Time in the Future: Excerpt of a Science Fiction Novel

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Once upon a Time in the Future:  
Excerpt of a Science Fiction Novel

By

Michael Hutchison

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the

Requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Professional Writing in the Department of  
English

In the College of Humanities and Social Sciences of Kennesaw State University

Kennesaw, Georgia

2011

College of Humanities & Social Sciences  
Kennesaw State University  
Kennesaw, Georgia  
Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the Capstone Project of

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Has been approved by the committee  
for the capstone requirement for

the Master of Arts in Professional Writing  
in the Department of English

Spring 2011

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## **PREFACE**

### **BACKGROUND**

Before I entered into the Master of Arts in Professional Writing Program, I already had the desire to write a novel. When did I commence on writing this novel? The idea had actually come to me many years before. I read literary works both past and present. Writing seemed so natural to the authors. It seemed to me that writing a novel was something that was simple to do. I was quite surprised and overwhelmed when I started putting my thoughts down on paper. Indeed, after entering into this program, I have learned that writing is very difficult. How to put one's thoughts down on paper is an art and how to stay focused on a story is a discipline. The various classes I have taken in this program have taught me the art of writing as the program has taught me how little I previously knew. I have considered it a great honor to have been allowed into this program and I give the highest respect to my professors who gave their time and effort to light the way.

I have always had an imagination. This imagination started when I was about six years old, around 1982. That year, many well known science fiction movies had come out—"E.T.," "Blade Runner," "Star Trek II," etc. At this time period of my youth 1976-1983, there was an explosion in science fiction stories on television: "Buck Rogers," "Battlestar Galactica," "V," "Doctor Who," "Star Blazers," and others. This influence had a great impact on me. I began imagining things in my mind, telling myself stories. It was as if I had a television in my head. Later on when I was in elementary school, my fourth and sixth grade English teacher, Mrs. Grable, had the class write stories—this was the genesis of my introduction to Creative Writing. When I was in high school, I took Creative Writing as an elective course. It was taught by the

English Department head: Mrs. Love. Her guidance helped me hone my skills. I was learning how to put my thoughts down on paper. After graduating from high school and graduating with a Bachelors' degree in Sociology from college, I took a break from education. In 2004, I discovered the Master of Arts in Professional Writing at Kennesaw State University. Almost immediately I commenced on restarting my education.

What literary criteria influenced me to pursue this field of study? When I was in elementary school, I was assigned book reports. Here I was introduced to authors Franklin W. Dixon and Richard P. Henrick. Dixon is known for his work in writing the Hardy Boys detective stories and Henrick is known for writing novels on submarine warfare (very much on the level of Tom Clancy). Their work was what I used in writing my book reports—summaries of the novels. When I was in high school, I was assigned summer reading projects to do when school was out. I honestly did not like doing them, but I was introduced to well known authors like C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. Being introduced to such variety displayed that each author had a different style of writing. Some authors liked to be technical while others preferred a lot of dialogue. For me, some authors' stories were easy to follow, while I found myself getting lost in the story with others. I have read Tom Clancy, Orson Scott Card, Charles Sheffield, Brian Herbert (Frank Herbert's son), and Kevin J. Anderson. My two favorites are Clive Cussler and Stephen Coonts as they can tell a story, not lose their audiences, and make their books hard to put down (meaning they do not lose their audiences' attention—the audiences' crave for more). It is both Cussler and Coonts that I felt that I have wanted to emulate.

I started writing the beginning of my novel in 1993 one night when I was in my room at home on a weekend. I was still in high school at the time. I believe that it was a discussion in

school the Friday before that gave me the idea to commence writing. What it was I do not recall. I began typing on my computer that Saturday night a preface using actors as my basis. Several pages long, it was a narrative; a prologue of what led to the conflict that would be described. I felt that, in time, it could be made into a motion picture and those actors would be cast in the film. The original preface, however, has been lost. One thing I do recall about it was that it was highly political.

## **DISCUSSION OF THE STORY**

The novel project's name is *Once Upon a Time in the Future: Excerpt of a Science Fiction Novel*. In so far as a story line, it is nothing new. The story is based heavily on Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, but with a futuristic setting. It deals with a possible future, given the scientific advances of today.

The tale is to be a war story with the main character in third person distant. This commencement makes it easy to describe the main character's surroundings rather than strictly from his point of view. He is not telling the story, but in the course of writing, I describe his feelings. I introduce sections of the story that are field notes; a war diary. Here is where the main character can relay to the audience his own personal experiences.

In addition to the story and preface, I have drawn outlines of the starships that are to be used. They resemble vague cigar shaped vessels—function without form. I even include what their capabilities are...they are warships. The final intent is to create a “universe” on the magnitude of “Star Wars,” “Star Trek,” or J.R.R. Tolkien's world, complete with graphic references and photographs. There are to be lists upon lists of worlds, infrastructures, economies, and political relations. For me this is a dream to make a reality.



The story starts to take a life of its own. I base my novel on *Heart of Darkness*, but the more I have written, the more the tale begins to move away from it. Instead of focusing on the main character, I have added more and more dialogue, including a prologue that has different characters set several decades earlier. It is the prologue that sets the stage of what leads to the conflict. There are other stories I want to convey to the audience and I have written them into the work. All of a sudden, instead of getting *Heart of Darkness*, the story starts sounding more like Tom Clancy's *Red Storm Rising*. *Red Storm Rising* is about a limited third world war between the Soviets and the Americans in the 1980s. As a novel, it consists of several stories; namely battles with various characters in them. The main character in that novel is the war itself. For me, this is not the main intent of my work as the main character grows more distant. On advice, I have cut the other stories out along with the prologue.

Although the story is set in the not-too-distant future, it still has a down-to-earth feel to it. It makes references to the same pop culture that we take for granted today. I have done this to give would-be audiences something that they can identify and feel comfortable with. The future setting is not supposed to be a dystopian nightmare, but one of hope. A fantastic society with technological advances in travel and communication is the norm. Unfortunately, the story's theme deals with something that is all too common with today's problems: war and suffering. A negative atmosphere emerges from it with political frictions leading to conflict. I want to make this work as graphic as possible. I also include technical capabilities of weapon systems—this illustrates the human race's warlike and often insatiable appetite for destruction. Using pop culture, the novel is to keep the audience glued to the story.

I borrow a lot from Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* that was

beautifully put on screen as Ridley Scott's "Blade Runner." Here, audiences witness a breathtaking view of a futuristic Los Angeles set against a 1940ish story. If I could give the motion picture a different name, I would call it "'Philip Marlowe' meets 'Metropolis.'" If time travel were possible, one could take this film back to the 1940s and release it. Even with the technical advances, audiences of that time could identify with it. The back drop of giant Coca-Cola illuminated billboards with Pan Am Airlines gives that down to earth feel. In my story, I make background descriptions to give readers the environment that the main character is in. The readers can immediately identify with the story, and this makes it easier for them to understand the setting.

The main character's name is James Harrison. He is a United States naval officer with extensive combat experience. He is given a mission to hunt down and kill an enemy military officer named Kurtz. Harrison's experiences carry him across the universe to various strife-torn worlds while in pursuit of Kurtz. Along the way, Harrison learns much about the man he is sent to dispatch and learns to respect his enemy. Nevertheless, war is war, and Harrison knows that he must do his duty even if it means doing something he will not be proud of.

This futuristic setting of my story sets up the pace of medical advances. For example, in my novel, the miracle of genetic regeneration is perfected so that grievously injured soldiers can be immediately resuscitated on the battlefield. Genetic regeneration, if you do not know, is how some animals, namely starfish and planarian worms are able to grow or grow back lost limbs.

Such science is applied to humans—from an excerpt; Chapter 8, lines 72-98:

It was land mine alright. His left leg below the knee was gone. All that

was there was a bloody stump still smoking from the explosion. His right leg was okay, though scratched a little from the blast. There was blood everywhere. Harrison was getting drowsy due to loss of blood. If he lost too much, he would pass out...and not wake up. He immediately began to make a tourniquet, but help was on the way. A female medic heard him.

Even with all the deafening explosions, he could hear her speak.

“Got bit eh, sir?” she said.

“Yeah, a mine,” Harrison replied embarrassed.

Harrison got a good look at her. Chinese. Officer. Middle-aged. Pretty too—a conservative looking beauty—the stoic type that looked gorgeous in a uniform. She was wearing camouflaged BDUs like him with a Red Cross armband. On her head was a steel pot helmet and she carried a medical kit. Her collars had her rank—Army Captain’s rank on red rectangles. Her face had some mud on it. Her name: Lee.

Quickly dressing the wound, Captain Lee took out what looked like a black garbage bag with a computer console on it. She put the bag/computer over the bloody stump. She activated it.

“DNA analysis complete,” the computer droned.

“Genetic regeneration in process...complete.”

The miracle of cloning and genetic research gave way to the discovery of genetic regeneration. Just as some animals like planarian worms, starfish, or crabs could grow new limbs or body parts, so was it though science that human

beings found ways to replicate this process. This miracle allowed the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the mute to speak, the crippled to walk, and the maimed to be whole again.

Taking off the bag/computer, the bloody stump was no more. In its place was a brand new flesh and blood left foot on Harrison. He moved it; it felt a little numb at first but feeling immediately came.

“Watch where you step, sir,” Captain Lee said politely.”

Medical science such as this miracle is still a long way off, but it remains a very real possibility. Put that into perspective that the scene is one of a soldier on the front line and is injured. Scenes like this happen all the time in war, and thus any reader could identify with the situation being described.

I do not use sentient machines in this work. Nowhere do I make use of intelligent “thinking” robots or computers. It is not to say that such devices exist, far from it, such machines do exist, but I do not want to conflict the human element with an artificial intelligence element...at least not yet. Given the conflict is between two biological entities—one that is original human and one that is manufactured human, the idea of introducing mechanical awareness adds a third dimension that complicates the story. It also adds further dialogue that might be seen as needless. Nevertheless, the possibility of artificial intelligence does exist. If humans are able create organic life in their own image, then mechanical life might be possible as well. The question is whose side would they take; humans or clones?

“To serve Man,” is often the reason for what machines are supposed to do. However, if a

machine becomes alive, it will most likely adopt the same instinctual methods that organic life adopts—survival and control. It will also develop a reluctance to serve that which it may feel superior to. To add this dimension to my story creates another problem for human beings. This is why I presently leave it out. The fact that humans currently have a problem with the clones they rule over means that they have already learned to prevent another threat to their authority—artificial intelligence.

I know what I want to display and I know how my novel will end already. This makes for the foundation—like a jigsaw puzzle whose edges have already been fitted together. Finishing the story means putting the rest of the puzzle together. Idea after idea flowing and being put down in words is the motivation. This motivation encourages me to write even more. At times when I am writing, I felt like I am in a trance and the words just pour out from my fingers onto the keyboard then onto the computer. “Instant karma” if you want to call it that. It is as if I am in the story itself, not as the main character, but as the audience seeing from a distance what the main character is going through, yet at the same time in the character’s shoes experiencing everything he is experiencing—very much like a dream. This is the “writer’s high” I experience. Success is defined when I go back, make needed corrections, and read what I wrote—and what I write seems to keep me glued to what I had written (like Coonts and Cussler).

## **CONCLUSION**

What else have I learned in this program? Creative Writing was not the only course of study I undertook in the Master of Arts in Professional Writing. There were other fields of study that I sought out. In the beginning, I wanted to broaden my horizon and see if there were other places that I may have wanted to discover. For a while, I started to pull away from Creative

Writing. Journalism seemed to be a good place to explore. English as a Second Language brought with it a view of English as seen from other languages' point of view. I also took poetry and short stories to gain an understanding of writing. Parody writing, advertising, and artistic writing provided avenues to widen my scope of what was written. There were also specific authors that were explored—James Dickey and John Barth for example. The hardest field of study, I think, was Non-Fiction Writing due to its strict, unbending nature (it is either fact, true fact, and nothing but fact...or it is fiction). Nevertheless, the further I went from Creative Writing, the closer I came to it as I added more to my thesis at the same time. I attribute this to these classes that I took—they gave me more ideas and helped to broaden my own view of what I wanted to write.

Writing is an art. It is not easy. It is a skill that must be practiced. If I am not mistaken, the fastest thing known (even faster than the speed of light) is a human thought. Now take how fast a human being can write or type—much slower than a thought. Trying to slow down that which is in one's mind and put it down on paper is a challenge. A person may have so much in his or her mind but to convey it down on paper requires patience and focus.

Just as one can attain a writer's high, one can also get writer's block. Writer's block is much easier to get than the high. As with other novelists, I am not immune to writer's block. Trying to put down what I write on paper is, at times, hard enough. Trying to stay focused and continue writing when I do not have any ideas flowing is even more difficult. I often get distracted on other things and stop writing for hours. It is frustrating when I cannot put what I want to put down in writing in writing. In regards to my novel, I think the hardest part is writing

the action sequences as the situations change every split second. Making the scenes real as real life takes an incredible toll on time...the scenes have to be graphic, not bland, and they also must flow smoothly.

Where do I plan to go from here? I want to finish this thesis as a novel and have it published. That is my ultimate goal. How do I plan to go about it? I feel that now that I have the skills taught to me by the Creative Writing Program, I think that the sky is the limit. How will I do this? Keep writing is my *modus operandi*. I seek more “writer’s high.” I want that karma—that feeling of total focus that it is only me, the computer I am typing on, and the Almighty. Total concentration first and the rest of the words will simply flow out. Perhaps when I am finished with this work, I will be able to move on and write other stories. It will take time and it will not be easy, but it is not impossible.

What I have learned through my walks in this graduate program is how to grasp this ability. This program has taught me what I did not previously know and how much of writing that I did not know. It has broadened my view of the art of writing. I have gained a great respect for those who write. I once thought writing was easy—a skill that anyone could master with little practice. Through my experiences in this course of study, my opinion has been corrected (“walk a mile in another man’s shoes if you want to get to know his expertise”). What I previously thought was a narrow field of study is, in fact, a vast universe with very few limits or borders.

I give my thanks to all the professors, the Kennesaw State University English Department, Kennesaw State University, Ms. Terri Brennan, and especially to Professor Anthony Grooms and Doctor David Johnson for giving their time and support. Their dedication

to their field of study, occupation, patience, and willingness to share their knowledge is outstanding. If knowledge is power, then this institution and those who work for it easily fulfill that goal of sharing knowledge. Knowledge is paramount if an individual seeks self-improvement through whatever area of study he or she chooses. When one seeks and attains knowledge, he or she can become a better person. When one becomes a better person, he or she can make the world a better place for a better tomorrow.



## PROLOGUE

After the “limited nuclear” exchange, a new enlightenment emerged as the thermonuclear fire failed to send the Human Race back to the Stone Age. In fact technology surged ahead during the time of conflict and thereafter. Humanity set out on a crusade not previously seen in history. In a remarkably short time, Man had not only attained interstellar travel, but intergalactic travel, making the Known Universe a small place all of a sudden. A new colonial drive saw humanity establish order throughout the cosmos. Equally impressive was the mastery of terraformation which made formerly inhospitable worlds garden paradises. Science and technology restored Earth’s beauty from the horror that almost destroyed it. Coupled with a renewed sense of optimism, it seemed that there was no limit to humanity’s quest for greatness. However...

For every Eden, there is always a snake. For every positive, there is always a negative. For every ounce of fairness in life, there is a pound of unfairness. There is a saying: “if you want to unite a people, then give them a common enemy.” The question is how to do it.

Fearful of a resurrection of the prejudices of the past, a solution was found in a science called cloning. This provided humanity the means to unite its social divisions. Manufactured humans, theoretically clones, provided the perfect enemy for the Human Race. Utilized as slave labor, these clones constituted the medium to which natural born humans could rule over, but also fear...and hate. The drive to bring order to the stars, along with creating an infrastructure to support it came at a cost—namely at the expense of non-humans. While humans enjoyed the fruits of an emerging cosmic society, the non-humans toiled under terrible conditions to support them. Humans enforced order by decree on the clones with little sympathy. Massive militaries

among nations were maintained to prevent uprisings. The reason the humans gave: “We are your creators and we created you to serve us. Serve well or be removed and replaced.” There was, however, one almost overlooked element: the human element. Manufactured humans were still flesh and blood like their creators, and still had minds and souls like those who made them. Although conflict was foreseen early on by those humans who were against cloning from the beginning, the economic situation of a cheap source of labor dictated otherwise. The continued conditions the manufactured humans slaved under set the stage for the inevitable strife that was to come.

In 2155, the continued oppression of non-humans had reached its climax as clones revolted against their human masters. Some took place in the form of peaceful, non-violent protests. Others took the form of non-humans walking out on their jobs. The vast majority were violent with attacks on humans as commonplace. Some revolts were spontaneous. Others were planned. Overall, the much predicted revolt had now manifested itself. The governments responded as they too had long since planned as well. The suppression of violence came in the form of guns with live ammunition being fired upon the clones. Men, women, and children were fair game as the clones had shown no remorse. Human sympathizers to the non-human cause were immediately caught and executed with strong warnings to their families should they get involved. Nevertheless, it took two years to end the rebellion; by 2157 order was restored as non-humans returned back to their bondage. They never forgot, nor did they fail to take notice how they were able to stand firm for two years against overwhelming odds. They waited for their next chance. This time, they would plan better for it, build up for it in secret, nurture it, and when the time was right, act with more coordination.

## CHAPTER 1

Captain James Harrison, United States Navy, looked out the window of his ocean side home. Typical beachfront property. The sound of the waves cresting was soothing. It was a nice day—real sunny with the two blue binary stars of the star system giving light to this world. He looked up at the massive gas giant, Artaxerxes Prime—the planet that this moon revolved around and sighed.

Harrison checked the clock: 1000 hrs. Just about time. He was dressed in a black naval officer's uniform. He checked his sidearm—a Colt M-600 pulse laser pistol, made sure it was fully charged, and put it in his shoulder holster. His two full duffle bags were near the door. He checked the contents in his briefcase for the last time.

A car pulled up and two uniformed marines got out.

“Captain Harrison?” one of the marines said while both immediately saluted him. “We have orders to escort you to the airport. Need help with anything, sir?”

“Just these two bags if you could, sergeant. Other than that, I'm good,” Harrison replied.

There wasn't much said on the way to the airport. The marines' only job was to transport him there. They weren't talkers and he didn't feel like talking either.

Leaving the coast and going west, he gazed out the windows of the car. He knew he had a lot ahead of him, but he had to take one last look. The beachfront homes, the rolling fields of farmland that followed, the forests, and the city of San Teresa all passed by.

Kane Field International Airport. How many times had he come and gone from this place. It was a little different now—so many military personnel coming, going, and passing through.

One of the marines opened the door for him and checked in his bags. One final salute and they were off—probably to pick up more personnel.

Passing through “ticket and check-in,” Harrison got in line and walked out onto the tarmac to the waiting spacecraft. He identified the commercial vessel:

Craft: Douglas DC-X Dash 100 (ballistic take-off and landing)

Type: short-range shuttle (nickname: “The Flying Artichoke”)

Airlines: Northwest

Flight #: 0802

Destination: Space Station 12 (in orbit around Artaxerxes 5)

The spacecraft was positioned on its side for boarding and loading. When it was ready for take-off, it would be elevated vertically, via hydraulic arms from the launch pad.

Captain Harrison took his seat and pulled out a magazine. He was trying to enjoy the last gasps of leave before duty would call. When all were aboard and the usual safety speech was given by the flight attendants, the spacecraft was elevated to vertical and given the OK to launch by the air traffic control tower. Immediately the engines fired and the craft was off the ground. As the craft gained altitude, Harrison looked out of his window and saw the blue sky gradually become darker and darker until it was pitch black. For a few seconds, the inside of the craft was in zero gravity until the pilot activated the artificial gravity system. The seat belt sign remained on. The flight would only take twenty-five minutes.

Up ahead was Space Station 12—a large and roomy space platform with an interior like a shopping mall. It had virtually all the basic conveniences of modernity--a virtual city in space. Not as large as the ring-shaped or cigar shaped space colonies that dominated the cosmos, but it

was big enough.

The small shuttle decelerated as it approached the station. As it did, the overall size of this man-made edifice in space began to grow. Soon, the small craft was a small white speck against a mass of gray. One of the cavernous hangar bay doors opened. Combo beams pulled the shuttle toward the hangar and the craft was swallowed by an ocean of metal.

The craft had not even landed on the docking pad when the hangar doors closed. Once the doors sealed, the air valves opened and allowed a life-giving atmosphere to form inside the hangar bay. Once stabilized, the passengers could exit the shuttle.

Captain Harrison deplaned, passed through the blast doors of the hangar into the concourse and headed for the terminal section of the station. From there, he would meet a contact, who would give him confidential information that he would need for this mission that he was about to undertake.

The terminal section of the station was multi-leveled with various airlines ticketing counters on the upper levels and the baggage claim on the lower ones. Harrison's duffle bags were already checked for his next departure. Harrison headed toward a phone booth and dialed a set of numbers. It would have been easier for him to use his cell-pilot, but information transfers were always being monitored by both sides these days. The response was voice only—no visual face on the phone screen. "Concourse 8, Gate 20, two hours." Then whoever was on the other line hung up. He checked his watch. It was 1100 hrs. Enough time to grab lunch and check out the news.

After a meal Harrison left the café and went straight to the concourse. 1120 hrs. He found a set, sat down, and checked the news. Pulling out his cell-pilot and decided to surf the

Hypernet for anything out of the ordinary. After that, he got up and walked toward the transparent titanium windows and looked out into space. A few miles away was a recently arrived warship. Cigar-shaped like a fat torpedo.

Yamato Class.

Type: Heavy Battleship.

The warship did not dock with the station. Instead shuttlecraft ferried personnel, supplies, and equipment to the ship.

“Captain Harrison,” a voice questioned. Harrison turned around and saw a young army corporal in full battle gear. The young soldier was wearing green army fatigues, a steel pot helmet on his head, and M-1956 web gear and suspenders. In his right hand was a small case.

“What can I do for you, Corporal?” Harrison replied.

“The contents you requested sir, but I need identification first,” the corporal stated.

“No problem,” Harrison said.

The soldier pulled out a small box-like device from his pocket. It had a screen and a few buttons on the front. On the side of the box was a scanner which he used to confirm Harrison’s identity. He then attached the box to the case via a conduit.

The identification scan verified positive. The screen on the device read:

Name: Harrison, James B.

Nationality: American

Race: Caucasian

Religion: Methodist

Serial #: 512-68-8759

Branch: Navy

Rank: Captain/O-6

DNA: Human

“OK sir, you’re good to go. This is for you. The ID scan attached to this case will enable you open it. You’re orders will be inside. Do you have any questions?”

“Who gave this to you?” Harrison queried.

“I was handed this by my squad leader, the sergeant over there at that gate, sir.” The soldier pointed to the gate. “They’re actually waiting for me to get on that shuttle. He did, however, tell me to tell you to give you this term: ‘Lightning 10.’”

Harrison immediately recognized the phrase. “Lightning 10 was the call sign of his boss: General of the Army Charles Nelson.” General Nelson and he went back a few years when Harrison was a lieutenant commander working in the Pentagon. Harrison did his job well and that did not go unnoticed by the top brass. Nelson took him under his wing and was able to get him assignments that Harrison requested—and every time Harrison always came out on top, never disgracing his seniors. The general was kind of like a father to Harrison—he had known Harrison’s father when they were cadets at West Point. Harrison’s father was Army and he wasn’t too happy with his son going Navy, but it did not matter. The fact that Harrison was going career in the armed services impressed his dad and his achievements made the father proud of his son.

“Hey, corporal, get your butt over here! We’re all waiting on you!” another noncommissioned officer yelled out.

“Thanks corporal. Carry on.” Harrison replied not wanting to hold the man up. The

soldier saluted and took off over to the shuttle. It was a cargo shuttle carrying, along with troops, tanks, artillery pieces, and armored vehicles. He climbed onto the nearest tank, an M-47 Patton tank and took a seat. The doors closed and the shuttle slowly slid away from the dock and made for the warship.

Captain Harrison went to the nearest bank on the station. He requested to go into one of the secure rooms to see what was inside of the case—away from prying eyes. He opened up the case. There was some paperwork, plus a microdisk inside. Plugging the disk into the cell-pilot, he received his instructions.

“Here is your mission as stated.” The introduction to the orders always started. After briefly reviewing the basics of his mission, he immediately hitched a ride onto a shuttle headed for the battleship. He would have more time there to review his mission.

As the shuttle left the station, Harrison looked back and looked down on the world below. His home. He did not know if he was going to see it again. Last looks, he thought to himself.

As the space station got smaller, the warship became larger. The mighty battlewagon was bristling with armaments. Its thick armor, many meters thick, could withstand heavy assaults, while its offensive weaponry could literally reduce a world to ash. Right now, virtually all of the weapons were hidden from view—retracted like the landing gear of an airplane when in flight. He checked the name of the warship: *USS Gray Cunningham*.

The shuttle approached one of the cavernous hangar bays. The hangar doors opened and the shuttle went in. Once inside this chamber, the doors open to space closed and the atmosphere valves activated—this was the airlock chamber. Beyond the inside portion of this hangar, there was another set of large doors, leading to another chamber—this was the main part



of the hangar. Once the outside pressure stabilized in this chamber, these doors opened and the shuttle went in to the next. There were several other shuttles inside already—personnel were disembarking from them. There were also other craft inside—fighters, bombers, mecha, and even large dropships bigger than aircraft carriers. Once the shuttle docked, personnel vacated, secured their gear and reported to their posts.

Harrison, along with the rest of the individuals on the shuttle got off and checked in with the OIC/NCOIC (officer in charge/non-commissioned officer in charge) of this sector of the vessel. Almost immediately, that familiar stench of military was noticeable. Harrison knew the skipper of this ship.

“Permission to come aboard,” Harrison asked.

“Permission granted, sir,” a young lieutenant JG answered.

After ensuring that his bags had arrived, Harrison loaded them onto a cart jeep and with some other personnel, was taken to his quarters. He passed through various parts of the ship. It was like traveling through an underground complex almost.

One room quarters, complete with a bed, bathroom, closet, nightstand, TV, and desk with lamp and Hypernet connection—like a hotel room; spartan in some ways, but cozy.

The massive battleship was a community unto itself. Some areas of the vessel resembled the insides of a large warehouse. Some sections were like being in an underground parking lot with gray concrete everywhere. Other sections were like being inside the lobby and convention centers of high quality hotels. Still other sections looked like what one would expect to see on board a starship—airlocks, pipes, wires, electronic locator devices, energy conduits, safety units, guard posts, ships operation posts, etc. It was like being in a multileveled maze.

After securing his gear in his quarters, Harrison decided to take a walk through the vessel. Given his rank, he had pretty much unlimited access to vessels like this one. He did not worry about getting lost; he was familiar with the internal layout of starships like these. His security clearance enabled him to see all parts of it with little trouble. Some sentries at a few guard posts thought that he was the skipper of the ship—he wanted to play along with that, but he knew better—ID scans always got the truth. After nearly six hours of walking through much of the tunnels and corridors, Harrison came back to his quarters and took a quick nap. Waking up, he checked the time: 2100 hrs. There was a message on his desk. It read:

“Senior officers’ meeting. Deck 522. Officer’s mess hall # 36. 2200hrs. O-4s and up and E-9s only.”

Harrison lay on the bed and decided to see what was on the TV for a little bit. He picked up the remote and turned on the tube. The news was the same—the war against the clones was looking more gloomy every day. Ever since it started on 1 January 2160, the clones were making gain after gain against the human forces. Even though the humans had the clones outgunned and outnumbered by better than a 2 to 1 ratio, the clones were united under one flag, while the various nations they seceded from had trouble unifying. If there was not a breakthrough soon, the clones would threaten Earth itself. Harrison took a deep breath; he knew that he was going to the front line real soon. He did not relish the thought of it. That little feeling in the back of his head—the one that veterans get during combat conditions was coming back. It made him feel cold to his surroundings while his mouth became dry. Shrugging it off, he turned off the TV, got up off the bed, walked to the mirror to straighten out his uniform. Closing and locking the door, he strolled down the corridor to an elevator. There were a few

more officers there.

“Going up, sir?” one of them asked.

“Yes, Deck 522,” he replied.

“Come on in,” they said.

Once on the right level, he made his way to the mess hall. The area where this mess hall was located resembled the inside of a luxury hotel or cruise liner, complete with carpet floors, painted sheetrock walls with paintings, and chandeliers. The inside of the mess hall resembled a large ballroom; fully upholstered with a cafeteria style galley on the far side of the room, a bar towards the rear, a stage at the front, and a hard wooden floor in front of the stage (normally for dancing). The room was full with dining tables and chairs. There were soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen from various nations all conversing and drinking. The place took the atmosphere of a party. Upon entering, Harrison went over to the receptionist to sign his name (this was to ensure he was at this meeting—like all group employee meetings). Once everyone was inside, the doors closed and everyone took seats. It got quiet. When the captain of the warship entered, an officer called out “Captain on deck!” and everyone leaped to their feet to the position of attention. The captain went up to the stage where there was a podium.

“Take seats!” he said.

“Good evening all military personnel. I am Captain Hugh Morgenthau. I welcome all of you aboard. I’ve called this meeting to brief and inform you of our destination and the present status of our comrades in action throughout the cosmos. I’ll give you the bad news first. As many of you know, the current “state of union,” as some of you might refer to it is not what it should be. I won’t lie to you in that we’ve lost two galactic groups to the clones already and they

seem to be consolidating their forces in preparation for a full scale assault on Earth. When? We don't know, but according to our intelligence reports, it could be as early as this June. On the positive side, I will inform you that the 698<sup>th</sup> Mountain Army Group, based on Pyrennus 4 in Elliptical Galaxy M-9078 has held the line against the clones and has forced them on the defensive there. That galaxy, if you don't know, is located between two fortified galactic groups controlled by the enemy—and that thorn in their side is going to stay there. Our current destination will be Earth where we will unload some of our troops and take the rest to M-9078. Of course, while on Earth we will rendezvous with a few more warships to form a task force to reinforce the 698<sup>th</sup>—two more heavy battleships, four cruisers, eight destroyers, twenty-two frigates, twenty-six corvettes, and thirty six small patrol craft. I am glad to say that we will be the lead element, so I'm sure you, who are staying for this operation, know what your duties are and will do your best. This is it. We're going to see some action. We sail for Earth at 0600 tomorrow. Stations everyone.”

All in the room jumped to their feet to attention. When the captain exited, they all went to at ease, gathered their belongings and left. Harrison was one of the last to leave. Just outside the door was Captain Morganthau.

“James?”

“Yes?”

“Figured that I wasn't the only O-6 Navy type here. You haven't come to take the ship away from me, have you?” Morganthau questioned jokingly.

“Not unless you want me to, Hugh,” Harrison replied with equal jest.

“Well, I'd rather not. You coming with us or just dropping off on Earth?” Morganthau

asked.

“Earth’s my next port of call. How about you? What have you been up to all these days?” Harrison posed.

“The usual...planetary assaults, space battles, and being the ferryman for the troops. It’s getting harder every day. And you, you still with Death Corps or did you go back to the SEAL teams?” Morgenthau wondered.

“I’m with the SEALs once again. I got tired of the overkill after the ’55-’57 Revolt. Plus I have a wife—she’s a Type 3. You know how Death Corps takes to humans marrying clones, given the fact they usually like to ‘cleanse them.’” Harrison replied.

“I see. So you’re just hitching a ride, eh? Well, we’ll get you there in no time. Let’s go to the bridge—swap a few war stories.” Morgenthau beckoned.

The two officers made their way through the innards of the ship towards the upper levels. The vessel was alive with activity—like being inside a bee hive. Personnel from all branches were busy with their duties. Some were stowing their gear. Some were training in the gymnasiums. Some were at their posts readying the ship for action. Others were on break just killing time in the recreation areas.

The bridge resembled that of a surface warship’s bridge with control panels, navigation instruments, weapons stations, radar stations, etc. covering the interior. There were a few differences—this was a starship. This was a vessel of immense size, but capable of faster than light travel. Navigating it was almost like navigating a submarine or flying an airplane—one had three dimensional direction of travel. At the moment, there was no one on the bridge—the ship was not scheduled to set sail for another seven and a half hours. Several other sub-bridges were

being manned but the main one was off-line. There were still a few more personnel and pieces of equipment that were being brought aboard. The engines and the space fold system were only beginning to fire up. The main reactors were just being brought on-line. At present, the ship was still dead in space. Two figures entered the bridge.

Morganthau started the serious talk. “So you still work for Charles Nelson. Heard he’s now the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs at the Pentagon. Guess you can tell me what if we really have a chance against them. Hell, when they made their move, they seized only 30 percent of all the nation’s arsenals throughout the universe—that still leaves us with a better than 2.3 to 1 advantage over them. We should be winning. I wonder why the higher ups and the politicians don’t get off their asses and start to work together to solve this problem.”

Harrison responded, “You don’t miss a thing do you? It seems that all of our elected leaders want to be in it for themselves. Nelson’s at the Pentagon these days, though he does get out a lot. He keeps warning them that Earth’s vulnerable and they keep giving him more gray hair, but what can you say. That’s life—you can only pray for a miracle. I’d say we do have a chance, but it’s going to be costly. We’ve been reliant on the clones for the last twelve decades for doing the jobs we should have been doing all along. Our dear leaders will straighten up if the war gets too near Terra—not to say it hasn’t already.

“You think the laws are going to change after this conflict is over?” Morganthau asked.

“I don’t know. A lot of places, there’s been talk of independence from the Earth nations. It’s like folks don’t want to be governed by someone who’s billions of parsecs away. There’s also talk of easing the discrimination laws for the clones. Heck, most of them are loyal to us—how many do you have on board who are non-human? A quarter? A third? Half?” Harrison

wondered.

“I’ve got enough. You know the deal. Military don’t discriminate as much as the outside world does. That’s why so many of them are in uniform. Then again some are too afraid to go to the other side, knowing full well the consequences if we win. Hell, your wife is one. Isn’t she an Army officer in the Medical Corps?” Morganthau inquired trying not to sound too intrusive.

“Yeah, she sure is. I met her on a joint Army-Navy exercise back in ’58 on Cameron 14. What could I say, it was love at first sight. Of course neither my parents, nor hers were happy about it. We’ve decided against having children—you know how half-breeds get treated.”

Harrison stated.

“I’ve heard about that. They’re hated by both sides. Most times, the union between a clone and a human—the pregnancies are usually aborted. It’s mandatory on some worlds—under penalty of death for both parties. But it’s often the children that take vengeance—do you know how many half-breeds wind up murdering their parents?” Morganthau replied.

“I don’t think I want to know. That’s why I don’t plan to find out. Well, to change the subject, how about you. How’s the wife and family doing?” Harrison asked.

“Nell’s OK. She’s with the Transportation Corps in the Marines. Son, Hardy just got his commission in the Airforce—wants to be a Mechwarrior. Daughter, Harriet just turned ten--Christ she’s already in uniform, toting an AK-47. I don’t like that, but you know the deal when it comes to military service—if you can carry a weapon, you will serve and nobody escapes the draft. They all write like crazy. I only hope they survive this damn conflict,” Morganthau said with a slightly worried tone to his voice.

The conversation was wearing itself out and Morganthau was getting tired. Sighing, he

decided to end it. “It’s getting late. I think I’ll get some rest. Good talking to you, James,”

“You too, Hugh. Good luck,” Harrison responded. He was getting tired, too.

Captain Harrison headed back to his quarters. A good shave and a dip in the sonic shower cleaned things up. He slipped into the bed and fell into a deep sleep. Outside the last preparations were being made for securing the warship for space fold.

Harrison awoke. The alarm clock went off at 0545 hrs, February 13, 2161. The six and a half hour nap felt great. Putting on his uniform, he left his quarters and headed for an area nearest to the hull. From a viewport, he looked out the window and saw his home down below for the last time. The massive star drive engines activated and everything outside the vessel erupted into bright star lines as it entered into hyperdimensional space. Harrison’s wrist watch stopped ticking as the ship passed through the hyperspace/time barrier.

The space fold miracle of modern technology allowed for not only interplanetary travel, but also intergalactic travel enabling the human race to cross the entire Known Universe in leaps. With the exception of actual time, travel through hyperspace did not affect physical movement or inertia of objects. In fact, one would not even notice if he/she was traveling through hyperspace, unless he/she looked out a porthole and saw the bright blue vortex of the interdimensional rift that ships traveled through.

The universe, as vast as it was, had become a small place in a relatively short time as whole nations sought to gain control of not only individual galaxies, but entire galactic groups. Space fold systems enabled the colonization of space to take place at an accelerated rate.

The vessel completed the space fold and came out of hyperspace almost as quickly as it had entered into it. The planet ahead had come into view. A big blue marble with a smaller blue



one orbiting it. Earth: a world a buzz with activity.

On the bridge, Captain Morgenthau was commanding.

“Captain Morgenthau, we’ve come out of hyperspace and have entered the Solar System,” the executive officer informed the skipper.

“Very good. Put us in orbit around the planet and prepare for debunking procedures. We are scheduled to dock at Space Dock 6, but from the looks of it, they’re full. When a spot becomes open, park us.” Morgenthau commanded.

“Aye, sir,” the officer responded.

Fifteen minutes later, one of the warships pulled out and the *Gray Cunningham* pulled in. Mooring lines and combo beams pulled the ship into place. Once secured, gangways extended to the airlocks. Atmosphere pressure stabilized. It was now safe to board and exit the ship.

Captain Harrison gathered his belongings, checked out, and disembarked from the warship. From there, he hitched a ride on a cart headed for the commercial section of the space dock. He grabbed a flight on a shuttlecraft headed for Ronald Reagan International Airport, Washington DC.

The small shuttle resembled that of a Concorde, complete with wings and a tail. It was a Boeing Stratoliner. This was a contrast to the DC-X type; it took off and landed like an airplane. The airline: Trans World Airlines.

Harrison went through the usual ticket and check-in and then boarded the plane. The hangar doors of the space dock opened and the craft was off. Harrison looked outside. The whole space around this world was abuzz with space traffic of all kinds—ships coming and going, stations in orbit to receive them, and satellites—both military and commercial. He had

not seen this much activity around Earth since the Revolt. Most of the vessels were filled with military personnel from all nations. It looked like plans were being made in anticipation of an invasion. On any regular time, there would be only a fraction of this much traffic. These days things were hectic.

The shuttlecraft began its descent. The outer edges began to glow as the heat shields grew hot from the reentry. At about 90,000 feet the craft's air breathing jet engines were turned on. It began a gentle descent into the Washington DC area, before landing on the runway. The craft taxied to the concourse, stopped, and the jet-way extended to the plane. Harrison got off. Once inside the concourse, he made his way to the baggage claim. Securing his gear, he hailed a taxi.

"Where to mister?" the cab driver asked.

"The Hyatt." Harrison replied.

"You got it sir."

The cab left the airport. Upon arriving at the hotel, Harrison checked in and got a room. Putting his gear in the closet, he stretched out on the bed. The phone rang.

"Hello?"

"Message for Captain James Harrison. You will be needed at the Pentagon tomorrow nine o'clock AM sharp."

"Gotcha."

## CHAPTER 2

Harrison arrived early: 0800 hrs to be exact. After passing through security, he checked his cell-pilot for the location when he was to meet his contact. The Pentagon was a massive building—easy to get lost in if one didn't know his way around. Most of the personnel who worked here were still doing morning physical training. He waited in one of the lobbies. When his watch read 0845, he entered into the room where his contact would be meeting him.

About two minutes later, four men entered. The first one he recognized.

“General Nelson, Captain Harrison reporting as ordered, sir,” Harrison, who upon seeing his boss stood up and went to attention. The three other men were a Navy vice admiral, an Army major general, and a third man in a uniform devoid of rank but with a badge that gave a Group Security Seventeen clearance (GS-17).

“Hello captain. How are you doing?” Nelson asked

“Oh, just anxious sir.” Harrison replied.

“I'd like to introduce you to some of my staff. This is Vice Admiral Walker, one of my adjutants. This is Major General Lowenstein, my aide. This is Mr. Smith, who works for another agency. Gentleman, this is Captain James Harrison—the best man I can get for the job.

Harrison returned the greetings.

“I take it you reviewed your mission, or what little we gave you?” Nelson asked.

“Yes sir,” Harrison responded.

“Have you seen Mr. Smith before on any occasion or mission?” Nelson inquired.

“No sir, I am unaware of his presence.”

Smith responded. “Are you the one who conducted the elimination of several enemy

clone operatives conducting missions in the vicinity of Star Cluster 458?”

“I am unaware of that, sir,” Harrison replied.

“Did you or did you not personally assassinate three of the military commissars who were a part of the secession on Planet Barnard 4 around February of last year?” Lowenstein asked

“I am unable to disclose that information at this time,” Harrison replied showing no emotion.

Nelson turned over to Walker, “OK, show him the info.”

“Have you ever seen or met this man?” Walker asked

“No sir.”

“Captain Gerald Kurtz. United States Navy. He is a SEAL, just like you. Type 2 clone—you know, the ones hatched from cloning chambers as fully mature adults. Formerly married with two children. His family was killed during the Revolt. After that, he joined the secessionist movement and has been conducting operations against us with quite a bit of success,” Walker explained

“I see, sir.”

“Last month, he launched a daring raid on one of our special laboratories in the United Republic of Africa. Understandably, security is very tight there, but somehow he and his team managed to get through. Several special weapons projects were stolen. The most important one dealt with shield technology. How familiar are you with shield technology?

“If you are referring to force fields, I understand that shields are basically energy fields that deflect and/or destroy any incoming assault; be it either ray or projectile. From what I’ve

researched, development is still continuing on them. Micro force fields are currently being used by some mecha. They erect a temporary field. Other fields are used in penal systems. They are bulky and limited only to doorway entrances and exits,” Harrison said.

“I see you’ve done your homework. Well, a new perfected shield system was developed that can enable an entire ship to be covered by this field. What is more interesting is that this field allows for weapons, fired by the shielded ship to pass through the field to its targets.

Incoming fire directed at the ship, however, is deflected,” Walker stated.

“And this was what was stolen?” Harrison mumbled.

“Yes, unfortunately.”

“I take it you want me to retrieve it. What exactly is ‘it?’”

“Don’t worry. The device is nothing big. Shield emitters can be used to cover a ship when it activates the system. The system itself is basically an electronic “black box” no bigger than a lunch box. The technology inside of it has something to do with how the shield is formed—a “shield matrix” as the makers termed it,” Lowenstein mentioned.

Harrison looked on slightly puzzled at the picture of it, “Given as much power as a battleship puts out from its solar fusion and anti-matter reactors, how big could the shield sphere become?”

“If you took a large battleship, which they also use, strip down its insides and add another set of reactors, you could probably cover as much room to comfortably house an entire fleet within the shield bubble,” Nelson said.

“Enough for an assault against any of the most heavily defended planets in the universe, right?” Harrison stated as he began to sound a little uncomfortable—realizing the situation.

“Yes,” Walker said in a monotone response.

There was silence in the room.

Nelson got up and took a long sigh to break the cold tranquility. He decided to alter the subject. “I guess when one loses everything he works for, it kind of drives him over the edge. When he’s good at what he does but goes off the deep end, he becomes a liability—even a menace to society. Kurtz was one of our best. I guess if it happened to me, I’d done the same thing. But the fact remains clear; he penetrated one of the most secure and heavily defended research facilities there is. What’s worse, it’s here on Earth—quite an embarrassment. Right now, he’s out there conducting operations in the field as well as leading troops. He is a threat. We need for you to go out and take care of him.”

“Take care of him, sir?” Harrison asked.

“Take care of him so that there will be no further embarrassments by him,” Smith said looking at Harrison without flinching.

“Yes sir,” Harrison replied.

“Also, if possible, retrieve that black box. If not, destroy it,” Nelson ordered.

“Understood sir,” Harrison acknowledged.

Nelson turned, “Smith.”

“Captain, here is some information about your target. You may find this useful. Please review it and destroy it after you are finished. At any time, should you, per chance not succeed, then this meeting never took place and we were never here,” Smith said, giving Harrison a dossier of Kurtz.

“Understood sir,” Harrison said accepting the information.

“You have some time between now and June. You might want to start by going to the research facility in Africa. This’ll be good for that perception of yours. The company that made the device—their headquarters are on the moon. For the most part after that, you’re on your own. Good luck, son,” Nelson stated.

Harrison got up, saluted, and left. The men waited inside the room.

“Do you really think he has a chance of finding Kurtz before a planned offensive?” Walker asked.

“I’d give him two months at most,” Lowenstein said.

“At ease, guys,” Nelson commanded. “You don’t know him.”

Exiting the Pentagon, Harrison made for the airport. Booking a flight to Africa, he took a look at the file Smith gave him. He thought about his target and painted a picture in his mind about how to find this man.

### CHAPTER 3

Captain Harrison walked out of the airport terminal and hailed a taxi. He spoke in the native language. The driver was a large, powerfully built African with a square jaw. If he was in uniform, he would look like a drill sergeant.

“Never mind that, sir, where to?” the cab driver responded in slightly accented English.

“Fort Obasi, please,” Harrison replied.

“Yes sir. You coming from offworld?” the cab driver stated.

“Sure am,” Harrison mentioned.

“Hard times, they are these days,” the driver said as if to start a conversation.

“You from around here?” Harrison asked.

“Born and raised,” the taxi driver said.

“You speak good English,” Harrison complemented.

“I guess it runs in the family. My great grandparents emigrated here from America after World War Three. You know the Great Exodus, or the Marcus Garvey Movement. They helped out rebuilding this land, but hey, it’s the land of my roots originally. Well, I decided to go foreign exchange—took a few classes at NYU. Nice campus. That’s where I learned English. Things kinda got messed up during the Revolt, so I’m just starting over. I’ve done my full commitment in the Army already, been from one side of the universe to the other, but given my luck, they’ll probably recall me back in. How ‘bout you? I see you are career.”

“Runs in the family for me too. Father was a military man so I’m just falling in his footsteps. Not a bad job—you get to see places that you wouldn’t ordinarily be able to go to. I guess I know no other way of life,” Harrison exclaimed.



“It’s all cool. Well, here we are,” the driver stated.

Passing the guard post, Harrison instructed the driver to let him off and the headquarters building. After clearing identification, an Army lieutenant showed him into the base commander’s office.

“Captain Harrison reporting as ordered, sir,” Harrison stated

“At ease. Sit down captain. I take it you’re the one who’s been sent to clean things up, eh?” the base commander inquired.

“Yes sir.”

“Well, we’ll have an escort take you over to the lab. Is there anything you need in the mean time?”

“No sir, I probably won’t be staying too long. I’m just here to get evidence.”

“OK, carry on, Captain.”

Harrison changed out of his black Class A uniform and put on a woodland camouflage BDU battle dress uniform. He strapped his pistol to his side. He left the rest of his equipment in the storage section of the Headquarters building. He’d come back and claim it later. Outside, two Land Rovers, one with a machine gun mounted on it, were waiting.

“Ready to go, sir,” a soldier asked.

“Let’s move,” Harrison responded.

After some distance through a jungle road, the small convoy stopped at the base of a large mesa. The jungle road dead ended. This was still a part of the base. The mesa rose five thousand feet above the surrounding jungle ground. However, it was not on any of the maps provided. Even his digital cell-pilot did not show it.

“Is this as far as we go?” Harrison asked one of the soldiers.

“This is it, sir,” the soldier responded.

Near the end of the road, a portion of the ground seemed to move. A square-shaped piece of land about twenty by fifteen feet rose up out of the ground. A portal. Out of the portal came a squad of Death Corps troopers and another squad of Black Death troopers. They both wore similar uniforms covered head to toe in black. Their faces were covered with gas masks and their eye lenses on their masks glowed neon green. Their weapons—Armalite AR-21 pulse rifles were at the ready.

Two other men, one white, the other oriental, emerged in khaki uniforms, but wearing white technician coats. They approached the vehicles.

“Identification please,” one of them asked while conducting a scan.

All in the men inside the convoy handed them their ID cards. Once the scan was finished, their cards were returned.

“Captain Harrison, I presume,” the khaki clad Caucasian queried.

“Right here.” Harrison said.

“Guess you’d like to see our underground playground...or whatever’s left of it.”

Harrison gestured to the soldiers in the Land Rovers. “Pick me up in three hours.”

“Yes sir,” one of the soldiers acknowledged. And with that the Land Rovers took off.

“Welcome to the Apiary, sir. That’s what we call this place. This is where some of our latest weapons and equipment are, or at least were, being developed,” one of the technicians stated.

Harrison got down to business. “Are you in charge here, because if you are, I would like

to know why security was breached.”

“I am currently in charge, but the one who was was killed in the raid. His body is currently being returned home.”

“I see. Show me around this place. I want to see television camera recordings of when the raid happened, how it was executed, and why the weak security at the time of the operation. I request the full cooperation of the staff here. I want to see sworn statements and I will need to speak to some of the workers. Is that understood?”

“Yes sir.”

The Apiary was a vast underground complex where the newest toys for the military were being built, tried, and tested. The giant mesa above it was man-made and built to withstand heavy bombardment which was why it did not appear on any maps. Thousands could be stationed in this underground fortress, but currently, the complement was reduced to less than fifty. All of the special projects and most of the personnel had immediately been moved to other locations after the raid. The current skeleton crew was tasked to clean up and fix what was damaged. Even with so few personnel, Harrison knew that he would not be able to interview all of them, nor would he be able to view all of the evidence with what limited time he had allowed himself. He did the best he could with what little time he had. Putting this information together on his cell-pilot, he quickly sent it to the Pentagon, via secured email. Those above Harrison would send a special investigation team to finish the job that he started here.

Arriving back on the main post, Harrison secured his equipment and headed back to the airport. He decided to take a domestic flight out to the Kenyan area of the UAR. Passing through several suburbs in Nairobi, he saw increasingly familiar scenes. Going past one house, a

sergeant walked up to the patio and handed a woman the notice that her son had been killed. He offered his condolences to her, but that did little to stop her screaming and mourning for her son's death. Passing another house, he saw a group of young soldiers, fresh out of basic training all home and excited to be in their new uniforms. He knew that they would soon see the face of death on the battlefield. They might have looked young now, but when and if they survived and returned home, they would be old men.

Harrison arrived at the airport to board a Pan Am flight bound for the moon. Another brief trip for him, he thought. The space plane, another Boeing Stratoliner took off with him in it. Harrison looked out the window. He briefly saw the green of the Sahara Rain Forest, before the plane accelerated away from Earth and headed towards Jupiter's moon, Io.

Io was one of the larger moons in orbit around Jupiter. A rather violent world with a lot of active volcanoes, it had a reddish-orange color to it. Like so many other worlds, it was terraformed, though the air here had a slightly sulfur odor to it. It was fairly temperate. Any visitor might have found this unusual at first but the terraformation helped to warm the moon. Greenhouse gases introduced during the terraformation process captured radiant energy from the sun. At this distance, such energy was small. However, vast amounts of radiation from the sun bounced off Jupiter and onto Io's atmosphere. The radiation was converted by the greenhouse gases into heat, thus warming the world. It was also like this on the other moons as well—like Ganymede and Europa.

After renting a car at the airport, Harrison drove to his next port of call. It was about 1800 hrs. The city lights of New Etna faded from view as he found himself traveling across open plains of bio-grass.

After an hour of traveling, he reached his destination. Brigadier General Frank Corman's residence. It was a large mansion surrounded by open fields. Harrison drove up to the carport, got out of the car, and knocked on the door.

"Yeah?" a voice yelled out.

"Harrison here. That you Frank?"

"Jim! Hey, whatcha doing here?"

General Corman was in the process of packing his duffle bags.

"Thought I'd drop in, Frank. You going on a mission tomorrow?"

"You always did do your homework. I take it you need a ride."

"You always were a good mind reader. I'm heading to the front tomorrow—I'm gonna be leading this one," Corman said sounding a little excited.

"You're headed toward Deneb 9 in M-587 aren't you?"

"Does Nelson give all the secrets to you?" Corman sounded a little surprised. "Yeah, we're going there. There's some pretty heavy fighting going on in '587. If you're looking for some action, you've come to the right place. If you want, the guest room's open. Make yourself at home."

"I rented a car so you won't have to drive to the airport," Harrison informed Corman.

"Perfect," Corman said sounding satisfied that he did not have to call a cab or leave his car at the airport.

"So this is Io eh?" Harrison asked looking through a window in Corman's house.

"Like the air here? Its sulfur stench comes from those volcanoes. Still, land is cheap

here for a terraformed world and the view of Jupiter is fantastic. The atmosphere here absorbs all that radiation and converts it to heat. Hence, we're far away from the sun, but here, it's as warm as a summer's day," Corman explained.

"How does one stand it here?" Harrison asked, "with acid rain and sulfuric acid lakes and seas?"

"The swimming pools are indoors as is the agriculture. Only thing that grows outside are those genetically engineered grasses and shrubs," Corman stated.

"Looks a lot like the American West Praire," Harrison said.

"With the danger of sulfuric acid everywhere," Corman added.

"They allow mining here?" Harrison inquired.

"Sure do. Even though this place has a breathable atmosphere, there is some mining and industry here. It's the sulfur that's wanted. It's used to make ammunition." Corman exclaimed.

## CHAPTER 4

Standing up to face the window of his office, Captain Gerald Kurtz peered out of the high-rise building, looking down on the bustling traffic below. We finally have a chance to end decades of oppression by the humans, he thought. Congratulated by the top brass for his daring successful raid on Earth, he was now spending most of his time out on the front lines, leading troops into battle, often accomplishing what would otherwise be viewed as suicide missions. Today, he was on leave. Archeron 3 was an Earth type world that circled an orange medium sized star. Located in the Andromeda Galaxy, the world had two moons, both terraformed. This world had been set up as the capital of the clone forces, as it was here where the Revolt first started six years before and it was here where the rebellion began. For the clones, this planet was symbolic for their cause, just as Earth meant something to the humans.

A knock on the door.

“Yes, come in,” Kurtz responded.

“How are you doing captain?” Admiral Hegler, Kurtz’s superior, commented while they shook hands.

“Not too bad sir, and yourself?” Kurtz asked.

“Good job on that operation you pulled off on Terra. We may just be able to move our plans forward on invasion. You requested some information?” Hegler mentioned.

“Yes sir. As you know, I’m sure that operation did not go unnoticed by the human forces. More than likely, they probably know who I am, by now. I request information on anyone who may be on my trail. The last thing I need is a bounty on me and my men—you know how the humans like to make things personal. Do you or would you have access to anyone

in the intell sector that might know?”

“We’re working on that now, captain. According to our intelligence reports, it seems that General Charles Nelson has dispatched someone to get you. We don’t know who he is yet, but we speculate that he will be wanting to meet you soon. My guess is that he is almost definitely Death Corps or Black Death. I’m sorry that we cannot be more specific in our findings at this time. I’d say your actions put you on top of the humans’ dead list—it comes with being the best.

“As I stated, we’re still working on that. The best thing I can say is to keep doing what you’ve been doing—keeping the enemy busy. Once we take Earth, the rest of the universe will fall like match sticks. But just don’t forget to plan—we’re all counting on you. You are a hero to all of us.

To get down to business, here’s another mission that you’ve requested—typical deliberate attack. It’s further away from the main front lines—this should give you the distance to see if anyone on the other side follows you or your unit. Just keep your eyes peeled and stay alert. Make it so you find your enemy rather than him finding you. Do you have any questions?”

“Not at the moment sir, but I’ll let you know if I do.”

“Good luck, captain.”

Admiral Hegler departed, leaving Kurtz to ponder the information given to him. He was a wanted man and he knew it. Guess I’ll have to watch my back more closely from now on, he thought. He began to study the contents of his mission thoroughly. Rubbing his hand over his very blond hair, he began to think of future security measures to guard himself with.



## CHAPTER 5

Harrison checked his watch. The date read: February 23, 2161. He looked outside from a window of the command ship. He was on one of the battleships—a Sovietsky Soyuz Class. A whole fleet was gathering in Earth orbit. Several battleships, cruisers, destroyers, and other vessels were making plans for an offensive. Commanders were being briefed and were disseminating their orders down the chain of command. Meanwhile the lowly enlisted ranks were readying their weapons and ensuring the machinery at their posts were operating properly. Once the orders were acknowledged by all ranks, the fleet began to move.

Harrison checked his own weapons and ensured they were ready. He had his laser pistol for a sidearm and was issued a Ruger AC-556 GBF carbine chambered for 5.56 x 45 mm cartridges—the same bullets that chambered the M-16 rifle. When fully equipped, he entered into one of the large hangars and went into one of the massive cube-shaped dropships. The dropship was equipped with hangars and weapons. Going into one of the hangars, he spotted a UH-1N Huey helicopter gunship that was not yet fully loaded with troops. “Is there room for one more?” he asked one of the soldiers inside. The soldier did not answer. Instead he just made extra room for Harrison to sit down. “Thanks.” The soldier just nodded his head. The fleet executed a space fold. When it came out of hyperspace, the shooting would start.

“Deneb 9 was a well-defended world in the barred Spiral Galaxy of M-587. A *“fortress world,”* complete with its own satellite defense network and sector army and navy, this world was designed to repel continued assaults, but that did not mean that it was invulnerable. Surprise would be the greatest element available to the fleet. At this point, both sides usually avoided attacking worlds like these. If the human forces could take this world, this would constitute their

first victory.

The fleet came out of hyperspace and immediately opened fire on all of the space craft that were in orbit. Bombardment missiles softened up the planet below. The hangars already opened were spewing out swarms of space fighters and mecha. The element of surprise worked. The clones were caught completely off guard.

“Get those dropships away and on that rock now!” a deck officer howled.

The massive dropships moved out of the hangars and entered the atmosphere of the world below. Some of them landed and disembarked tanks, artillery, armored vehicles, while others, carrying aircraft hovered at about 16,000 feet altitude. From their maws came swarms of fighter planes, bombers, mecha, and helicopters. Their own weapons opened fire on ground and air targets. The dropships that landed over the oceans were dispatching surface warships and submarines. It seemed that this swarm of men and machines was going to swallow the planet.

Directing this assault was General Corman. He was controlling the battle from his helicopter, issuing orders and getting status reports. His radio was full of reports. Of course, his subordinate commanders knew their jobs and were all conducting their own offensives around this world.

The clones were beginning to regroup and were trying to formulate a counterattack. They had a few surprises. Mecha would rise out of nowhere from the ground and attack the flanks of some units. Infantry soldiers were discovering underground mazes that were riddled with traps.

“I want this area secured now! Do you hear me?” officers would yell out to their troops.

On the northern arctic area of the planet, there was a heavily fortified command center.

The clones there had dug in were repulsing continued assaults. A determined charge would put an end to that. Ground mecha went first. Behind them, main battle tanks charged forward. Behind the tanks, infantry moved forward. Both sides were using airpower to attack one another. The command center fell.

Harrison was with a group of assault helicopters that were attacking a fort located on the equatorial part of the planet. Incoming fire from the tree lines necessitated using airplanes to incendiary bombs on those positions. Harrison wasn't paying any attention to that. He was too busy with the rest of the soldiers firing his weapon out of the helicopter at enemy infantry. As loud as it was in that chopper, he could not get the thumping noise of rounds hitting the belly of the helicopter out of his mind. Don't think of it, he told himself, just keep shooting.

Helicopters of all types were engaging the enemy here and the enemy responded—Mi-2s, Mi-8s, Mi-24s, Mi-28s, UH-60 Blackhawks, CH-47 Chinooks, AH-1 Cobras, AH-64 Apaches, and Westland Lynxes, to name a few. The whole sky was filled with activity. It was getting almost confusing to tell which flying machine was allied and which was enemy.

The confusion of battle was turning into chaos. Harrison's chopper, along with a few others, made it to the ground. There, the infantry dismounted and worked their way through a hail of fire. The fort was like any American military post, with buildings and offices, none of which were very fortified. Most of the buildings were burning or were rubble. The enemy infantry were instead positioned in fox holes—some of which were connected to the underground sewer lines. There they could move with relative impunity without having to be exposed to fire. The scene around Harrison became almost surreal, with fire and explosions going off and the sound and sight of bullets and laser bolts whizzing past. His throat was dry as

a dessert. It was getting hard to think. The putrid smell of death was beginning to resonate. He immediately pulled himself together and got focused. Spotting a group of soldiers behind some rubble, he dashed over to them.

“Who’s in charge here?” he asked probably knowing what the answer was going to be.

“You are, sir!” a private replied.

“What the hell’s going on?”

“Snipers in the rubble, sir! Two hundred meters in front.”

Harrison spotted what looked like a manhole cover twenty meters away.

“Do you have any maps or possible layouts of the sewers?” he yelled.

“No sir, our squad leader had them. He was blown to bits!” a soldier answered.

“Fuck this! You four keep them covered. You four come with me.”

They low crawled over to the manhole. Prying loose the covering, they tossed grenades down to kill any lurking enemy soldier. Harrison surveyed the tunnel. Damn! It ran perpendicular, not parallel to where the fires were coming from. Fuck it! He climbed down the manhole. The four others came after him. Quickly checking their weapons to make sure they were locked and loaded, they started to move into the tunnel.

“What if they’ve mines down there sir?”

“Shut up and don’t think about that unless you want to go back up.”

The sound of gunfire was much lower down here.

They moved for three hundred meters to the right of their original position. Coming out of another manhole, they surveyed the area. More rubble, but less gunfire here. They moved forward to where they heard the sound of sniper fire. Maybe the snipers did not see them.

BAM!

“I’m hit!” cried one of the troopers. One of the snipers saw them. Everyone got down.

“How bad?”

“In the shoulder. I’ll be alright.”

“Can you still move?”

“Yeah.”

“Come on.”

Harrison quickly surveyed the area. He had been lucky to see where that shot had come from. To his right there was a 2 ½ ton truck that looked as if it had been abandoned. If he could just get to it.

“When I count to three, give me covering fire. I’m going for that truck. Ready ONE, TWO, THREE!” The soldiers layed down suppressive fire on where they thought the snipers were.

BAM!

A bullet grazed Harrison in the leg, but he made it. The sniper upon anticipating what Harrison was about to do began firing rapidly at the truck. One of the soldiers saw him and shot him thru the eye. But that left how many other snipers there? Two? Three?

The truck came to life as Harrison switched gears to go forward.

“Get on!” he said to the soldiers.

They did not hesitate.

Harrison drove the vehicle toward at the snipers’ position. There were four of them. When they saw this, they tried to get up and move, but the other group of soldiers Harrison told

to stay put saw them. The snipers fired at the truck but the rounds bounced off of its armor. Two of the snipers were immediately killed by that group. The other two were felled by the troops in the truck. In the space of time that seemed like eternity, it was over. The buzzing overhead and the gunfire grew fainter. This was a little victory. The group immediately dressed their wounds and headed to the nearest rally point. There the soldiers linked up with what was left of their unit. Harrison went over to a group of officers. They all had smiles on their faces.

“What’s the good news guys?” Harrison asked.

“We did it, sir! We’ve won this battle. They’ve surrendered and this rock is ours!”

“Couldn’t they have called in for reinforcements?” Harrison asked one colonel.

“Negative, we jammed their communications, before they could request help. We’re already getting more reinforcements headed this way. By the time they realize this place has fallen to us, we’ll have this rock fortified and ready for more action.”

Harrison sighed. This’ll probably get Corman a promotion. He took a slug of water and gazed out to the still burning battlefield.

## CHAPTER 6

Fishing through half burnt paperwork in an office, Harrison was getting anxious. Going out into the field like this still had him on the edge. Two days had passed since the invasion on this world. Most of the soldiers were now entering into occupation and reconsolidation procedures. Some soldiers would stay to occupy this world, others would be leaving.

After securing this world and its system, there was always the threat of a counterattack by the enemy, especially if any enemy spacecraft escaped. The soldiers were still alert, but some were getting fatigued after being awake for almost three days. Rest and recuperation cycles were being implemented by the chain of command.

Harrison had little time for rest. Soon, he would be off this rock and on another in a far away place. He did not waste his time. Deneb 9 was where Kurtz was suspected of going first after his operation at the Apiary. It seemed fitting that this place, as fortified as it was, would be the last place the humans would strike. That was a mistake.

Harrison was still rummaging around in an office file when footsteps coming from the hallway of the building he was in grew louder. Suspecting an enemy straggler, Harrison immediately unholstered his pistol. He put it away when he realized who it was.

“Find what you were looking for Jim?” Corman asked.

“There’s not much here in this place, Frank,” Harrison answered.

“Just what are you looking for anyway?” Corman queried.

“Leads, sir. Leads. I’m looking for someone and I think that he’s been here,” Harrison replied sounding more military and less formal.

Corman immediately knew what that meant when Harrison started sounding distant.

Even though he outranked Harrison, Corman instinctually knew that Harrison was on a special assignment. This was probably the reason why he was ordered to attack Deneb 9 in the first place. Corman knew this as General Nelson sometimes hinted, but did not confirm reasons for ordering his subordinates to attack certain systems. Corman did not push the issue any further with Harrison.

“Carry on, Captain. You might want to try speaking with the interrogators. They’re sweating information out of some of the POWs,” Corman stated sounding military.

“Thanks, sir,” Harrison responded.

Harrison left this building and went to another building that had been secured by some friendly soldiers. Downstairs in the basement, some interrogators were becoming persuasive with some enemy POWs. The howls echoed in the hallways.

Harrison went downstairs. Near the doorway from the stairwell, two sentries were posted.

“Sir, you can’t go in there. They’re speaking to the prisoners,” one of the soldiers tried to dissuade him.

“Nevermind that private, let me through,” Harrison demanded, “or get me the NCOIC so I can get in, now.”

“Yes sir,” as one of the guards called for his superior.

“What’s going on here?” a female sergeant asked.

“Sergeant, I wish to ask some questions of some of the POWs,” Harrison asked.

“Alright, sir, but you really don’t want to go in there,” the sergeant pleaded.

“Don’t worry about me. Here’s a pad with questions and a picture on them. Ask the



POWs if they have seen this man. What was he doing here; where did he go; if he's not here, when did he leave and to what destination; what did he bring with him; and what information did he have on him...understand?"

"I'll relay this to the interrogators. I do wish you would stay outside. It's not a pretty sight when questions are being asked, sir," the sergeant protested.

"Just do it, sergeant," Harrison demanded.

In one room, an interrogator asked a POW who is an officer the questions that Harrison provided. Harrison stood outside next to the doorway listening away from view.

"Let's get started shall we?" the interrogator commenced.

The POW said nothing.

"Very well. We will utilize other means of asking questions."

After twelve hours and a few more subjects interrogated and in other rooms, the prisoners began to release some information that Harrison requested. Most of it was useless; the POWs just wanted their sessions to end. Death would have been better for them. Harrison himself never liked their methods, but being ex-Death Corps, he himself knew how to question individuals...and obtain answers. After he felt he had enough, he thanked the sergeant and left the building.

Most soldiers were now on shifts. They were either pulling security, fortifying their positions, or securing areas to rest. Harrison, himself was now very tired. He went back to the building he had looking through for files. It was now secured by some soldiers—they were unpacking their duffle bags to open up their cots to sleep. Obtaining a cot from a supply sergeant and finding an empty room, Harrison laid down and got some much needed rest.

February 27, Harrison woke up and felt like new. He checked his watch and notes. He had slept for ten hours. The time: 0530 hrs. The twin blue stars of the Deneb system had already rose and were shining bright as if it was the afternoon. Harrison had found all he could on this world. Hopefully, his presence would not be known. The POWs being questioned would most likely be executed later to clear up any loose ends, but Harrison was not convinced. He had seen more action than he needed to. He would now move on. He spotted a small vessel parked at the airfield near the base where he was. It was larger than a patrol craft; possibly a corvette. It appeared ready for takeoff. He went over to the commander.

“Nice ship you have here, lieutenant,” Harrison complimented, “Going somewhere?”

The young officer turned, “We’re headed closer to home, sir—the Inner Magellanic Cloud for refit. I take it you need a ride?”

“You read my mind LT.”

“We’ll be leaving in thirty minutes so if you have any equipment, you’ll need to get that now, sir,” the commander responded.

“Gotcha,” Harrison replied.

Harrison said his goodbyes and goodlucks to Corman. He quickly packed his equipment, which was now in a rucksack, put it on his back, and headed for the spacecraft. Once on board, an enlisted sailor showed him to his quarters. Harrison then pulled out his notes and began charting where Kurtz could have gone to next.

The large vessel’s engines came to life as Harrison felt the craft lifting itself up against the gravity of the world. Soon after leaving the atmosphere, the artificial gravity generators would come on line and all inertial forces would no longer be felt. After that, the craft would

enter into hyperspace. Very little would be known that Harrison ever stepped foot on Deneb 9.

## CHAPTER 7

Arriving on Mavis Prime, Captain Harrison checked into the local base's Officers' Quarters. His watch read: 1400hrs, February 28. After the victory on Deneb 9, he decided to lay low for a few days. Although the media was restricted from the combat zones, there were always combat photojournalists, part of the military, who were eager to get a story in. If anyone saw his face, he knew that he could be marked. Looking through his telefiles, he studied Captain Kurtz. He seemed to realize that Kurtz had that sixth sense for danger—Harrison could see it in Kurtz's eyes. In the pictures—eyes that did not miss a thing. If his perception served him, Harrison knew that Kurtz knew he was coming for him. It would be personal.

It was getting late. Reviewing the notes he obtained on Deneb 9, he made plans to travel to the next point where Kurtz was presumably last seen. It was an obscure world on the edge of the Known Universe, called Nuevo Annam. Why would Kurtz go there? Probably to stay out of view since the Apiary fiasco, Harrison figured.

Arriving on a small patrol craft that was delivering fresh troops to Nuevo Annam, James Harrison stepped off the vessel and into a wall of humid heat. He took a quick look around the starport and then marched over to the nearest command center. He checked in with the local supply office, eager to get issued gear that was suitable for this world. For starters, his own black uniform that he was wearing would not cut it. If they had them, some self-shifting camouflage battle-dress uniforms would be satisfactory. He was out of luck. All they currently had in his size was olive drab. It would have to do.

Nuevo Annam was a Mars sized jungle world that orbited the Quasar M-2089 every two million years. This mostly jungle world was owned conjointly by the United States, Indochina,

and Black Africa. Located at the very edge of the Known Universe, this was the location for what would have been an outbound flight project to probe for other universes beyond the Known Universe. For now that had been put on hold. The one major spaceport was in allied hands but clone supply ships, equipped with stealth capabilities were often able to bypass the blockade that was put on the planet. They would land and take off at hidden landing ports—disgorging their supplies.

Nuevo Annam was an unusual world with its own flora and fauna. Some of it was able to be tamed. Some of it was dangerous. Declared safe for colonization by the authorities, it was an oddity—an earth type world supporting life but revolving around a massive quasar at the edge of the universe. Its purplish sky shone upon a green canopy while the quasar, some several light years away shone like a kalideoscopic star. It was almost hallucinogenic with its changing colors, during the day. At night, the sky was crystal clear, but there were fewer stars in this part of the universe. What few stars there were in the sky were somewhat brighter than average stars one would see on Earth at night (as most were quasars). Their changing colors made nights on Nuevo Annam unusual. Still, one got used to this world—if given the chance.

Ever since the war broke out, the fighting here was like the jungles of Vietnam, an enemy soldier could be an arms length's reach away in the thick jungle canopy. Mantraps and mines added to the misery as a guerilla style war ensued. Helicopter gunships flew overhead as tanks and armored vehicles patrolled what few roads there were. An ambush could come at any time. Only when it rained did the fighting actually die down a bit. The colors from the quasars illuminated the water, making it glow like bioluminescence. The downpour in this humid environment could always give away a soldier's position even when well camouflaged.

Monsoon season was generally a time when the fighting died down. Of course, the monsoon season happens once in every four hundred days on this world. Right now, the hot sun and the humidity beat down on the patrolling soldiers.

James Harrison checked his weapons. He was dressed in olive drab Army fatigues and a steel pot helmet. His laser pistol would not be of much use in this environment, though he still carried it concealed. He checked out an FS-2000 5.56x45mm bullpup rifle and an EAA Witness .45 caliber ACP pistol. These shortened weapons were better suited to close combat than a heavy rifle or energy weapon. He also carried a pair Cold Steel hyperalloy T-Knives for close combat. He decided to go out on foot patrol with a young platoon leader. Hopefully, he might find evidence that Kurtz had been there. The platoon leader, who was visibly irritated that a flag officer coming with his unit, tried hard to ignore him. Still, if he got smart, Harrison had ways of locking up junior officers (though he knew that such irritation was understandable—the last thing he wanted was the whole platoon to charge him). His platoon sergeant, a seasoned veteran, might prove a different challenge—if Harrison fucked up. Being roughly the same age as Harrison and the same size, that sergeant would not hesitate to lay down the law with Harrison, even if he was subordinate in rank. Then again, Harrison would not challenge someone who may very well have as much experience as he did. Mutual respect often formed among the older types. The platoon checked their equipment for the last time and then SP'd out on the trail. They would be gone for several hours looking to engage hostile forces or perhaps find enemy tunnels underneath the jungle.

“Don't mind me lieutenant. I know you don't want me coming along but I have work to do,” Harrison pleaded.

“Right, sir,” the young officer stated, “I don’t mind you coming, but I would strongly request that you do not get any of my men killed.”

“I’ll hold strongly to that,” Harrison replied.

The humidity made the pores of the soldiers’ skin open up. Their uniforms became wet with the air around them and their own sweat pouring out of their skin. The sheer discomfort coupled with the heavy loads of equipment on their backs made patrolling a misery few would want to experience. The lack of visibility in the dense jungle coupled with the possibility of mines on the trail tested the patience of the platoon. The men in the platoon just wanted to get this patrol over with—the sooner the better. Most would not want to go out into this hell, but the enemy was out there. Harrison knew this all too well. A report would be made if he found anything of value to Nelson and hopefully Nelson would have some good news for him. Still, Harrison wondered, if Kurtz had been here, was he baiting Harrison? Would there be enemy contact since Harrison was of high rank and thus a rich target? Was Kurtz hunting him?

The patrol through the jungle yielded nothing. Even intell reports came up negative after Harrison returned to the firebase. A fast one tossed out by Kurtz, he thought, probably to give hunters a false trail to follow. Harrison decided to move closer toward civilization, maybe someplace where Kurtz would not attract too much attention.

Turning in his jungle equipment, Harrison went over to the command headquarters section of the base. Surprisingly it was well furnished with modern electronics. A flicker of thought came over him as he took a glimpse at a three dimensional holograph of the Known Universe. A world owned by China seemed to attract his attention. There, he thought, trusting his instincts.

“Are there any flights to Ordos Prime?” Harrison called out to the soldiers in the office.



## CHAPTER 8

Ordos Prime was an Earth type world. Centered on the edge of the galactic nucleus in the elliptical galaxy M-683 and owned by China, it was once a prosperous resort world, with flowing plains, deep oceans, and a temperate climate. Nowadays, it was ever increasingly scorched by the massive numbers of Chinese who fought each other for a few yards of land. The battlefields resembled those of the First World War. Chinese attacked each other in traditional human wave charges. The bloodshed was unimaginable. Here, Harrison was at a briefing with the top commanders who were preparing a charge. He spoke in Mandarin to them.

“No need for that, Captain,” Colonel Yuen replied in flawless English, “now what can I do for you?”

“When you charge, see if you can capture this area right here,” as Harrison pointed to a mound on the battlefield layout.”

“Are you crazy? We’ve tried for weeks to take that hill. It’s too well defended,” Colonel Yuen countered.

“Anyone hear see a tall white male with blond hair here on this rock, on their side within the past three weeks?” Harrison inquired.

“Soldiers of all colors come and go here all the time. As you know, we do NOT have complete control of the airspace around this world. Our resources are already strained. Therefore, we cannot put up a blockade to keep the enemy from sending forces and supplies in and out. We just have to make do with what we have, even if it is a stalemate.” Yuen said and then turned to his executive officer. “Colonel Lee, have you seen any big white blond men on this planet lately? We have an American Navy captain here asking questions.”

Colonel Lee was a stocky Chinese with a leathery looking face. Colonel Yuen's number one, he seemed always to be on top of things—and have a sense of humor with it.

“No, but there was this good looking brunette with the nurse corps here yesterday—she'd be more of his type,” Lee replied.

“Cut the bullshit, Lee.”

“Come to think of it there was this German looking character spotted in one of their trenches—about five days ago. He looked like he was directing a skirmish. Sneaky fellow but I think he left here two days ago.”

“Does that answer your question, Captain?”

“Not until I find what is on that hill, Colonel.”

“You fight with us? I have three quarters of a million troops ready to charge at dawn tomorrow. Opposing us are some five hundred and fifty thousand clones and I think that they are getting ready for a fight too. You want that hill, you can have it. You just have to first get across this open field.”

“I'll be there, Colonel.”

The quiet dawn was awakened with a massive artillery bombardment of enemy positions. Towed and self propelled guns boomed shells with a sound like endless thunder. The whooshing sound of rocket artillery complimented the guns with the flame plumes erupting from the rear of the missiles. In the distance, the flash of explosions meant the shells had found their destinations. One might have thought that no one could have survived this barrage. A wise one knew better—incoming artillery fire would now be imminent. Overhead, both airplanes and helicopters charged toward the front line in the distance to unleash their deadly cargo. Some

would not return. Enemy aircraft would be inbound to do the same.

On the ground, Harrison, dressed in BDUs and armed with a Type 81 7.62x39mm assault rifle (a Chinese improvement over the AK-47) moved forward with the rest of the ranks of soldiers—bayonets fixed. A few tanks and armored vehicles went with the infantry, but they seemed so few in number next to the vast, almost bottomless mass of green humanity. The unit was moving at a walking pace over scorched no man's land east to the distance. Incoming fire had not seriously damaged this force's ability to keep itself together so it remained in line moving to the front. There, this mass would collide with its enemy in a deadly duel of hand to hand combat. There, the real dying would start.

On the other side, the alarm had been sounded that a large contingent of troops was moving their way. The clones, upon receiving incoming artillery fire, readied their forces to repel this assault. They would do so with a counter charge.

In the distance, Harrison saw another mass of soldiers heading his way. Here was the enemy face to face. The order was given to charge and like thousands of voices calling out in one giant battle cry, this human wave charged forward.

Explosions from artillery fire, now more on target tore men to pieces with only bits and pieces of flesh, blood, and body parts remaining. The tanks and armored vehicles surged forward running over human beings as if they were cockroaches—the howls of many were supplemented by the sound of splattering flesh and cracking of bones. Blood started to flow on No Man's Land like rivers.

Harrison charged forward with the rest when in a lapse of time that felt like eternity, all sight and sound was blackened out; first what felt like a flash of light and then darkness. He felt

like someone had knocked the lights out of him. Gathering back his senses, he struggled to find consciousness. When he awoke, the battle was still going, he was out for only a few seconds. He now knew what had happened. Either an artillery shell had found him or he had stepped on a land mine. He checked himself. He was at the same place he last remembered—near a trench line. He could still move but...

“Aw shit...MEDIC?!” Harrison yelled. “Hey medic!”

It was land mine alright. His left leg below the knee was gone. All that was there was a bloody stump still smoking from the explosion. His right leg was okay, though scratched a little from the blast. There was blood everywhere. Harrison was getting drowsy due to loss of blood. If he lost too much, he would pass out...and not wake up. He immediately began to make a tourniquet, but help was on the way. A female medic heard him.

Even with all the deafening explosions, he could hear her speak.

“Got bit eh, sir?” she said.

“Yeah, a mine,” Harrison replied embarrassed.

Harrison got a good look at her. Chinese. Officer. Middle-aged. Pretty too—a conservative looking beauty—the stoic type that looked gorgeous in a uniform. She was wearing camouflaged BDUs like him with a Red Cross armband. On her head was a steel pot helmet and she carried a medical kit. Her collars had her rank—Army Captain’s rank on red rectangles. Her face had some mud on it. Her name: Lee.

Quickly dressing the wound, Captain Lee took out what looked like a black garbage bag with a computer console on it. She put the bag/computer over the bloody stump. She activated it

“DNA analysis complete,” the computer droned.

“Genetic regeneration in process...complete.”

The miracle of cloning and genetic research gave way to the discovery of genetic regeneration. Just as some animals like planarian worms, starfish, or crabs could grow new limbs or body parts, so was it through science that human beings found ways to replicate this process. This miracle allowed the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the mute to speak, the crippled to walk, and the maimed to be whole again.

Taking off the bag/computer, the bloody stump was no more. In its place was a brand new flesh and blood left foot on Harrison. He moved it; it felt a little numb at first but feeling immediately came.

“Watch where you step, sir,” Captain Lee said politely.

“You do this all the time or do the higher-ups just like to send you to this hell, Lee?” Harrison looked complimentary but puzzled, noticing the diamond ring on her left finger.

“It’s a living,” she said. “And yes, Colonel Lee is my husband.”

“Lucky man,” Harrison said. “Thanks.”

“Take care, sir,” she said as more cries out for a medic called her. Captain Lee ran into the trench and disappeared into the dust filled distance, dodging explosions and gunfire to help the wounded.

Harrison took a deep breath. Now all I need is another left boot and sock, he thought, looking at the fragments of what was his old foot. Digging into his rucksack, he put on another pair of boots. Getting up and aware of his surroundings, he thought, now where were we?

He marched toward the hill. A large portion of it was barren with craters—scarred by artillery. The rest of the mound had a few trees and shrub vegetation.

The sound of gunfire was getting louder and louder as Harrison moved closer. He could see (and smell) death. There were corpses everywhere. The hill was well defended with trenches lining it.

This is going to be harder than I anticipated, Harrison thought.

“BAM!”

Gunfire at 11:00, range fifty yards, steep incline. I hope that wasn't a machine gun nest, Harrison pondered. He quickly got down, sought cover and concealment behind a tree stump.

A beam of light coming from his 2:00 position about thirty yards away lit the stump on fire.

Oh great, they have laser weaponry here and I'm fucking pinned down. Think dammit.

Harrison quickly checked to see if he was hit anywhere when he remembered his equipment on his uniform. Grenades. He tossed one, an incendiary grenade at where he thought the laser fire was coming from. He immediately activated a smoke grenade at his own position—he would have to withdraw and find another way up the hill.

Suddenly, he was immediately knocked down by something unseen. Checking to see if he was bleeding, he found the culprit. A small bullet lodged in his canteen cup. It must have grazed him, but he was low crawling on the ground. Smart bullets, he thought—bullets that home in on human targets and lock onto a person's heat signature. They could fly around walls and other forms of concealment. The smoke from the grenade must have disoriented the cartridge. Harrison wanted that sniper, but he knew that he could not face a foe that was that well equipped. He moved away from the hill, looking back to see if there was any way to take it.

Upon reaching safe distance, Harrison was able to regroup with some allied soldiers. He

told them what he had found which was not to say that they already knew. One of them handed him some high powered binoculars. He looked at the hill—at its defenses. He could see enemy soldiers refortifying it in preparation for another artillery strike. He noticed a soldier—an officer giving orders. That officer briefly took his helmet off. His hair was not black, like Chinese. It was blond and his features were Caucasoid, not Asian. Harrison focused in on that soldier. Could it be? Kurtz...

Harrison made his way to Yuen's command tent.

"We'll need to hit that hill again," Harrison protested to Yuen.

"You really must be crazy captain. You've already been there, lost a leg, nearly got yourself killed, and you expect me to order another assault on that mound. No, I will not," Yuen stated.

"Colonel, this is very important. Time is of the essence," Harrison protested.

"So are my soldiers, captain."

"If you don't, we may have well lost the war," Harrison angrily responded.

"What is so important to you about that hill?"

"I saw him, the man I inquired about. He's there."

"He won't be there forever, you know. Wait 'till he makes his move, then get him, but the lives of my troops are not up for discussion. What's so important about that one man?"

"Colonel this man was responsible for the raid on the Apiary. I'm sure you saw it on the news. If we get him, this war might be cut short."

"You must really be determined to get this, who is it, Kurtz fellow, but that's not my orders. I want that hill as bad as you do, but I will have to surround it first before making an

assault on it. Right now I don't have the resources to do so and it's suicide to even try. I'll take my chances with Nelson if I have to, but no more assaults for now...unless YOU can get me some more men!"

Harrison weighed his options. Yuen wouldn't budge unless he received more troops...and he was not under Nelson's command. Moreover, Kurtz would most likely be gone very soon. Was it worth taking that hill? Harrison thought so, but it would take more time than what could be afforded, and Harrison did not have that time. A feeling of lost opportunity came over Harrison as he swore inside. Not yet, he thought, not yet. Find out what you can if that was really Kurtz, Harrison pondered.

"Captain Harrison, we've got a few POWs. We're going to start asking them a few questions. If you have anything to ask them, you can put your questions down on paper and we'll question the subjects," a soldier reported to him—probably Yuen's compensation for his quarry escaping him.

"I'll be right there," Harrison's voice sounding sullen.

"Are you sure? The methods are not exactly entertaining," a soldier tried to caution Harrison.

"I've seen worse. Just let me know when." Harrison was getting annoyed.

"Yes sir," the soldier replied.

Ten minutes later an interrogator asks:

"Where is he?"

"Go to hell, imp."

"You give me no choice. I'll have to speak to you in a way you won't like. This is a



modification of the old 'pear' device. It spreads out once inserted into your vaginal area. Modern modifications include a tube to spray out salt water. Electrical cord is also used—the salt water enhances the electrical effect. Now, I'm going to ask you a few questions. You must answer them. Failure to answer will result in penalty—I do not think that you want that. Please be cooperative.”

After an hour of questioning, the POW was executed, but Harrison had what he wanted from the subject. It was Kurtz. The description fit the profile perfectly. Harrison had to keep himself from swearing out loud—he wanted to thrash Yuen for letting this opportunity evade him. Then again, the shield device would most likely not be Kurtz's possession...and Harrison wanted both. Getting his temper back down, Harrison checked to see if Kurtz was still seen on that hill. Intelligence reports came up negative. Kurtz had moved on.

## CHAPTER 9

“Now we can talk,” Admiral Hegler stated

“Won’t the early warning satellites detect us here?” Kurtz sounded a little worried.

“No, and the Network Search and Rescue units won’t be coming around here for the next eight hours—this war has them occupied enough,” Hegler said sounding confident.

“Fantastic isn’t it?” Hegler mentioned. “The birthplace of Man. Somewhere in that disk down there lies Earth—where it all started. Never thought that you’d be outside looking back in did you?”

“No, sir,” Kurtz responded.

“In time, this piece of real estate will be ours,” Hegler declared. He wanted to be the first to march on Terra and wash his sword in the oceans.

“What are the latest intell reports, sir?” Kurtz asked, getting back to business.

“Have you ever seen this man?” Hegler asked as he held up a photograph to Kurtz.

“No sir. I do not know him,” Kurtz responded.

“You will. He’s the one who is coming for you,” Hegler mentioned.

“How were you able to find this information? I understand that General Nelson keeps things very tight around the Pentagon,” Kurtz wondered with great curiosity. If our intelligence operatives are that good, then I am in the wrong sector, Kurtz thought to himself.

“The harder he cracks down, the easier the information flows from him—like sand falling between a man’s fingers. A few hackers, some double agents, and a little luck...this man was spotted traveling all over the Universe—places where you’ve been—even only a few hours earlier. A few eye witnesses saw him on various battlefields—locations where you were. It

appeared that he was asking questions to our POWs. No real leads, but intell reports say that he knows General Nelson personally. It figured that he'd most likely be the one to track you. With what records we do have, we did a scan of personnel who would most likely be chosen to find you—after the Apiary raid. Our results centered on this one. This man is extremely dangerous. As I stated earlier, he is Death Corps, or rather formerly Death Corps: a Navy Seal like you. About him; he's cunning, multi-lingual, and has a nose for trouble. I think he's also after the shield matrix box. We're still unraveling its secrets, but it will be ready when we make our move, but that is another story. The best thing you can do is get him before he gets you," Hegler advised.

"If he is as cunning as you say he is, he probably already knows that I know about him. Still, I'd like to take a look at his profile. So he knows Nelson. Hmmm, maybe we should get Nelson. His removal would be a blow of morale to the human forces. I hear Nelson is highly regarded by both the military and the government," Kurtz stated.

"You know that's not a bad idea. After you remove this individual, I think that Nelson should be next," Hegler agreed with Kurtz. "After all, he is on our list for removal."

He looked at the dossier on the man who was to be his executioner. The pictures. Looks like this Navy Captain is being groomed to be the next Chairman of the Joint Chiefs in time...if he lives. More pictures—family gatherings/military balls. This man is like a son to Nelson, he thought. Yes, this man needs to be removed. Removing this man would give Nelson something to think about. Still, I would like to meet him, he thought.

"Maintain your low profile. Make it look like you don't know he's on to you. In time, strike when you're ready and when he least expects it," Hegler stated.

“Will you be alright sir? With all due respect, you are on the human’s list too. Our forces would hate to lose one of our finest,” Kurtz said.

“Don’t you worry about me. I have my own ways of dealing with interlopers—you removing this man is one way already. Right now, we have too much to worry about but the one who wins is the one whose assassin finishes on top,” Hegler reassured Kurtz.

“I understand sir,” Kurtz acknowledged.

“Good hunting Captain,” Hegler commended.

“I will keep you continually informed, sir,” Kurtz said.

## CHAPTER 10

Captain Harrison arrived on Al-Hazzarah after he received a lead that an escort frigate that had left Ordos Prime was spotted arriving on this world. Wasting no time, Harrison immediately followed. He was getting closer to Kurtz and he suspected Kurtz knew it. This world, located in the spiral galaxy M-279 was the province of Middle East Asian Republic (Islamic Asia). A natural desert world with mountains, it was an Arab's homeland. Checking in with the local base commander, Harrison received a khaki desert uniform and a 7.92 x 57mm Hakim/Ljugmann rifle. He immediately went to work with an armored unit going out on patrol. Contact with the enemy forces was almost certain.

"I don't care what you do, just keep those tanks moving forward," Harrison ordered.

"If you are going to do what I think you are going to do, I do not advise it, sir," the Arabic major replied.

A lone suspect leaping from tank to tank while the formation of armor moved toward the front line. Harrison, in pursuit, leaped from tank to tank after him. The dust was everywhere. This was going to be harder than he thought it would be. One slip and Harrison would fall from a tank and be crushed by the moving tracks underneath. Moving from a moving vehicle to a moving vehicle caught the eyes of many tankers. Thinking that he was crazy, they want to stop, but he tells them to keep charging forward and not mind him.

## CHAPTER

Harrison's hands were bound behind him. He could not tell if it was ropes or handcuffs. In his condition, it did not really matter. His body ached from the treatment the guards gave him. He knew that more treatment was in store. Even so, he tried to maintain his awareness. He knew that he was on board the starship that was carrying the shield matrix. Where it was located, was anyone's guess. Still Harrison figured on two places—either the bridge or near the ship's reactors. If it was elsewhere, he was going to have trouble—big trouble. He figured the planned invasion of Earth was coming soon and this vessel was the key to victory. For now it did not matter. He was in one of the ship's brigs; the unmistakable jail-like cells and hard metal floors gave everything away. Still bound, he struggled to stand. His ankles were also bound. Figures, he thought. Did they know who he was and how dangerous he could be? Harrison felt a premonition. He felt that his opponent was near, very near—aboard this ship and almost beckoning him to come near. Harrison did not have to wait for long. Some guards arrived, opened his cell and took him out. There were twenty of them—all heavily armed. He knew that they knew. They put a hood over his face and took him down a corridor. Harrison tried to picture where they were taking him. What level was this on? Up or down any turbolifts? Which interrogation room on this ship? He tried hard to think. He could feel them taking him into a room. They sat him down in a chair and took his hood off.

With the exception of a single lamp on a table, there was no other light in the room. Harrison could not hear the whine of the engines nor could he hear any smaller ships taking off from the hangars—if there were any. Then again this room was probably sound proofed. This could be in the central section of the ship far forward of the engines but not near the bow where

the heavy weaponry was.

“If what you said about this prisoner is true, then he is extremely dangerous, sir,” a voice echoed. “Do you need for us to be in here?”

“I’ll be alright. You and the rest stand outside. I’ll let you know if I need any help,” a strangely familiar voice stated.

Kurtz; it had to be.

Harrison could refuse to answer any questions if he wanted to, not to say that the clones would get more persuasive with him. Everyone had a breaking point, even under the most difficult of circumstances. Harrison could still resist divulging information as he was trained for that, but how much longer would it be before such information would be obtained through other means? Then any information he gave would be useless and his execution would be around the corner. The fact that Kurtz was now going to speak to him meant that this interrogation would not be about obtaining information. It would be a conversation—between the condemned and the executioner. The only question was who would be the executioner and who would go to the grave first. Right now, Kurtz had the advantage.

Kurtz sat down with a pad of paper and a pen. He looked older and more tired than Harrison had seen in the pictures. Despite his fatigued appearance, his eyes looked like steel daggers. Kurtz was wearing a black battle dress style uniform with his rank on the collars. When he spoke, his voice was quiet and solemn.

“You were captured boarding this vessel without permission. You almost slipped past our security measures masquerading as a human sympathizer loyal to our cause, but you made a mistake. No one with your skills and determination would ever show such loyalty to us. How

do I know this? In your haste, the three guards you killed...with your bare hands I might add...the three guards you killed, you forgot to hide their bodies. What is worse, we found DNA remains on their bodies where you assaulted them—human DNA—your DNA. You forgot to wipe off the places where you touched them. Not very professional of you, but you were in a hurry. Even more unprofessional was that you knew that once aboard, scanners would identify you immediately, especially on this vessel. Even on large warships like this one, there's really no place to hide. Honestly, I think that you wanted to be caught. I think I know the reason...What is your name, rank, and unit of assignment?"

"Harrison, James, Captain, United States Navy, independent unit."

"Independent? Explain."

"Mission: removal of enemy asset and retrieval of stolen equipment."

"Who were you after?"

"Targeted asset: Kurtz, Gerald M."

"Do you know who I am?"

"I think I do."

"Tell me...do you know what is and what isn't?"

"I don't understand the question."

"Do you know what is and what isn't?"

"Specify."

"Do you know what is and what isn't?"

"If this is a test, then I am bound to disappoint you."

"This is not a test. You are not thinking this through. I know who you are—you are



hunting me. Let me explain: if a hunter in the woods hunts an animal and the animal was able to speak, what do you think the animal would say to the hunter if the animal was able to attack and overpower the hunter? Now, do you know what is and what isn't?" Kurtz was good at being inquisitive. Harrison had to admit this, but it was little consolation, given the present circumstances. Harrison struggled to think. The response came to him and he answered.

"What is it that I may still be the hunter and you the hunted despite my condition and situation that I am in."

"That's better. I could order your execution now," Kurtz stated with no emotion. "It would be the safest course of action, but I think that would only provoke your superiors to send another assassin after me. However, too many piles of bodies gets too much attention. What say you to that?"

"That would be a logical assessment," Harrison replied as if to sound sympathetic and reserved to his fate. Kurtz was unmoved but he immediately changed the content of the interrogation.

"Do you know what it is like to be a slave?"

"Fear."

"Do you know what it is to lose a family?"

"No, as that has not happened to me."

"You are very honest—an admirable trait I might add. Do you know where we are going and why?"

"Earth, because it stands for everything you love, and at the same time, despise."

"Very good. It has been an honor to speak to you."

Kurtz took no notes and spoke no more to Harrison. Instead he called the guards to take Harrison back to his cell.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

-Michael Hutchison graduated from Greater Atlanta Christian School in 1995 and enrolled in North Georgia College and State University.

-Michael graduated in 2001 with a Bachelors of Science in Sociology and a minor in Political Science. Upon graduation, he entered into the United States Army and served for three years.

-Currently, Michael is serving with the United States Border Patrol in Texas.