

THE DJIAHANEL PROPHECY

-I- The Sigamee Menace

When the star of Kgitah will be completing its 123rd phase, the shadow of Evil will cover Kgitah and would follow a dark era where two successive shadows of Evil would take over, chased away on the next day by the People of Kgitah.

At the dawn of the new era, a distant star will appear from a distant star when the Savior, Dik, will make the trip back to Kgitah.

The Savior will appear with the People of Kgitah, and the People of Kgitah will be the first to see the Savior.

MONSTERP63

The Djiahanel Prophecy

Part 1 – The Sigamee Menace

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Originally written in french. Translated by the author... with the help of Google Translate.
So.. forgive me.

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PROLOGUE:

Earth's astronomers know it as the star named Gliese 364. Located in a rather empty and uninteresting constellation in the southern hemisphere called Antlia or Air Pump, this distant star about 35 light-years from Earth is home to a global system of six planets, of which the 2nd one is home to intelligent life. In fact, more advanced than the Earth, since thousands of years older than our good old planet. But that, no one living on Earth knew. At the moment of this story.

That second planet, about one and a half times the size of Earth, is known as Kgitah.

Like all civilizations, the planet Kgitah, had its great eras and dark eras. Eras of discovery and eras of destruction, but about 200 Kgitahns-years ago, roughly 300 Earth years, Kgitahns began their space exploration with their first spacecrafts still unable to travel faster than light, so their explorations were confined to their own solar system.

The people of Kgitah were barely taller than the average Earth human, slender and muscular in appearance. Their body hair was similar to Earthlings. Only a slightly greenish complexion could betray that they were not of our world. If someone looked carefully.

About 100 years before our current era, they met the Sigamees in a rather brutal way: They attacked Kgitah. What they wanted were Kgitah's natural resources, rich in iron, copper, gold and titanium, plus huge deposits of diamonds and emeralds used in the manufacturing of light-speed engines, in addition to a more generous fauna and flora.

The Sigamees were smaller than average Earthlings, fatty looking and had rather flat heads, similar to a toad, small eyes, pointy ears and a bluish colored skin with glints of copper. Their hands had three fingers and a thumb.

The Sigamees, although their planet was twice the size of Kgitah, had over-exploited it and it was at the end of its resources. They had to find other deposits and Kgitah all seemed appropriate. They had already passed by the Earth, its deposits were estimated too poor and its inhabitants too primitive to bother with.

The Kgitahns having no space army, were quickly dominated. While they were on the verge of surrender, a people then unknown to all, the Dolarons, manifested themselves.

They came with sophisticated and more efficient vessels than Sigamees, which forced them to retreat to their home world, some 60 light-years away in the outskirts of the galaxy.

The Dolarons were taller, had an oval shaped head with large almond shaped eyes, and a greenish skin, like the aliens that are described by those who had been abducted on Earth. They lived in a planetary system located 10 light-years lower in the plane of the galaxy than that of the Kgitahns, a system the Sigamees had not yet discovered. It has 11 planets, including Dolaron, one of three inhabited planets. It was the size of the Earth and had four moons. Dolarons followed the evolution of Kgitah and had no intentions to interfere before they discovered light-speed. They were outraged by the wild attack of the Sigamees, and they could not simply stand idly by.

The Sigamees were expelled, and technology was exchanged between Dolaron and Kgitah. In return for their technological advances on the spacecraft, Dolarons were receiving raw materials from Kgitahns, mainly emerald stone used in the engines, but also transplax, a rare metal, stronger than titanium but still transparent, used in the manufacturing of faster-than-light spacecraft. Dolaron had a small reserve, while the 2nd moon of Kgitah possessed a large deposit. However, the most sought after mineral, Mirandum oxide, commonly called Mirox, which was the fuel needed to travel faster-than-light, proved to be the most important issue: Sigamee was holding the largest supply.

The Coalition of Three Stars was created with a trade that satisfied everyone except Sigamee.

Their planet was rendered barren following over-exploitation. Their moon, the biggest source of Mirox, had an erratic orbit due to its excessive exploitation, wreaking havoc on Sigamee's orbit and climate. The Dolarons and Kgitahns offered to supply Sigamee with food and would try to restore their moon's orbit, while Sigamees wanted more of a support in technology and especially materials with a goal thinly veiled: rebuild their military fleet.

The market functioned somehow until the day when Dolarons discovered another ore, Kar, which gave ten times more power for half the volume needed. Kgitah had the largest deposits. Economic power in Sigamee sank to an all time low: Mirox had no more value.

This was enough for another armed conflict to break out between Sigamee and Kgitah. Dolaron, true to his doctrine, did not interfere at first, but when she was attacked in turn, she had to fight back.

The war lasted for five years and made huge losses on all sides, especially Sigamee, who lost the battle.

The main Kgitahns mine, containing 50% of all reserves of Kar alone and its city, Kar-Mol, were destroyed.

The war was won by the Allies, but with heavy losses. Sigamee was put under guardianship, and resources, or what remained of it, was managed by the Coalition of the Three Stars.

Sigamees was a nation of warriors and conquerors, and this other defeat was not appreciated. And now they were totally dependent on the other worlds of the Coalition.

They would not remain inactive and good neighbors indefinitely.

The end of the war, the beginning of a new life.

The cries of children were heard everywhere, regularly covered by the low pitch vibrations from the bombing that raged outside.

They were nearly 100,000 crammed into this cave near the outskirts of the city. The majority were women, taking care and protecting the children. Many children appeared alone, abandoned. But they weren't. A Kgitah would never abandon a child.

Like in all wars, some kids had lost everything, parents and family and were walking amidst the group, like lost, but someone always looked out for them, cared for them.

The sound of bombing and earthquakes that accompanied it in the cave quickly subsided and everything felt silent. Even the crying of the young ones ceased. The only noise left was made by the generators and the ventilation.

And this smell, a mix of sweat and moisture and... anxiety. Everyone sensed something, but what was it? Was this the end of the fighting, or the silence before the storm of the ultimate ending?

For more than five endless hours, nothing happened, nothing at all. Not the slightest sound, not the slightest explosion, not the slightest vibration. All radio calls remained silent. Many complained that it was getting hotter, but all the sensors were reporting that the air conditioning was working fine, and that neither the temperature inside or outside had changed dramatically.

Those located near the door began to move. Hands were raised in the air. The small whispers were getting louder, and a wave of screams and people yelling ran through the crowd, in time, reaching every part of the cave.

"It's over! It has ended! We won!" said one.

"We drove the Sigamee bastards away!" said another.

A soldier made its way through the excited crowd. Suddenly, a girl of about 8 years old ran towards him and grabbed his leg.

"Uncle Pakit! I'm so happy to see you!" she said, smiling.

"Me too Jahana. Me too. It's over, kids. The war is over." he said while crouching down to be at their level.

Behind her, a boy of 10 years old approached, with a forced smile and looking serious.

"And our parents? Have they been found?"

Uncle Pakit could only look down. He put a knee down and asked the boy to approach him, hugging the two children in his arms.

"We'll take care of you, kids. I'll take care of you." he said, tightening his grip.

The boy raised his bright eyes to the man.

"I want to enlist. I want to eliminate the last of the Sigamees. I want to be a soldier, like you."

"We will see, Gill. Violence is not always the best solution. You are young. You'll have all the time to think... and forgive." He said, hoping his vengeance would pass.

Together, they followed the crowd walking out of the shelter, and like all others, remained awestruck by the scene of Apocalypse, which was offered to them: Their city, which was once a megalopolis of 20 million inhabitants, with its conical towers in countless cascades at the foot of Mount Graffe, was a heap of ruins, towers sectioned at different heights, stretching out of sight, choked by heavy black smoke rising from buildings in flames and the multiple spacecrafts that had crashed landed there during the heavy fighting.

Where was once the tallest point of Mount Graffe, was now a gaping hole, which was also the largest source of Kar in the world, see the Coalition. This mine had been at stake in the war, and nobody had won. All had lost.

A red glow of molten Kar, emanated from the huge crater. It would continue to burn until there is nothing left to fuel it, because, once ignited, a Kar fire cannot be put out.

The procession went to what was once the centre of the city of Kar-Mol, in silence.

The city was no more. It had no usefulness anymore, and with the Kar that would burn for decades to come, the land was, suddenly, less welcoming.

Ggitah had won the war against the Sigamees, but at a hefty price.

25 earth-years later

The night was rainy. The young man was dressed mundane, a long grey raincoat over his baggy pants and sweater. He got off the public transport magnetic train, maglev, and waited a few moments on the sidewalk. The autogravs, small personal vehicles for up to 8 passengers, were passing in the streets floating half a meter above the ground, their drivers not paying him any more attention than anybody else. He walked toward the south, covering the nape of its neck off his coat. The rain had turned to a hot drizzle. The weather would be nice tomorrow, he said to himself.



He walked three blocks amidst the grey buildings, shipwrecked survivors of war, looking furtively behind him a few times before turning quickly to his left, in a small deserted alley. He clung to the wall, hiding in the shadows a few moments to make sure he was not followed.

He smiled and went on his way, through the alley leading to the ruins of an old factory, destroyed by the war.

Barod became his adopting city. His hometown, Kar-Mol, located on the First Continent no longer existed. Raised by his uncle Pakit, the only family he had left, he had to follow his travels in search of employment in this devastated world that Kgitah had become.

Six years earlier, he had arrived here in Barod, the long standing capital of the planet. Located on the Third Continent, in the northern hemisphere, it was the largest city of Kgitah, but still showed heavy scars of its past.

New towers, sometimes tubular, sometimes conical, extended over a hundred kilometers to house 50 million people.

Barod became a prosperous city, but the neighbourhood in which he was, was in fact the poor district, the neglected, the forgotten one.

On a clear day, there was always at least one of the three moons of Kgitah reflecting the warm rays of Solar, but on this cloudy night, everything was dark, lit only by the aura of the city. But he didn't need light to look for his way. He knew where to go.

To the right behind the concrete block, left off the wrecked Sigamee ship, to the right at the crater, a little to the left of the vitrified ground. Even after all those years, after all those *wash downs*, those wrecks still had this distinctive smell, the one giving back bad memories.

He managed to reach another wrecked spacecraft, too twisted and melted to identify its origin and went in after giving a last glance behind him. He came out in a large room where in a corner, twenty or so makeshift chairs were lined up, made from debris. They were almost fully occupied.

A woman was standing before the group and was recalling events, knowledge, convinced of what she saw.

Gill approached slowly, so as not to interrupt, and sat in the last row, greeting a few heads that had turned to him.

Left over from the rain was running down his face. He wiped it with his sleeve, revealing a young featured face, slightly oval in form. He had a little beard, just a small inverted triangle between his lower lip and his chin.

The speaker was a tall and slim elderly woman, with white, straight looking hairs, going down to her shoulders. Judging by the number of wrinkles she had on her face, she could be around 125 years-old. She was speaking from a soft voice she was projecting with force. She was holding her hands together, finger crossed, at chest level.

"... I assure you.... He had no right to be granted this permission. Why do Sigamees are always allowed to bypass the rules, and with permissions and directives from the top consulate. No, I'm telling you, there are scams down there. Well, that's all."

Under the murmurs of approval, a man that stood in the first row walked up and sat next to Gill. He was rather large and had the build of a soldier. In fact, he had served in the last war, and his face showed a wide scar that ran from the corner of his left eye to his jaw. His grey hair betrayed that he had reached fifty.

"Glad you came, Gill." He said. "Everything's okay? You look perplexed?"

"Glad to see you too, Kimal. Thing is... well, all those special permissions and other pass-throughs that the Sigamees have been receiving since the past few months, that

bothers me. We won the bloody war, and we have paid dearly. It seems we're becoming their partners again, and I fear how it will end."

A middle-aged man of a hundred years, stood before the group..

"Hello, dear followers. I work in a glass factory, and we had a very special order lately: making hemispheres of about ten centimeters in diameter as thin as an eggshell, with a glass that disintegrates very quickly, almost water soluble. These hemispheres were to be joined later by the customer.

The client, you ask? The client is said to be an exporter. Who can it... export these goods to? There's the Dolaron and the Sigamees. Dolaron always dealt with us directly, which leaves only... I'm telling you, the Sigamees are preparing something. Thank you. "

He resumed his place under the murmurs of approval.

"Yet another one, Gill," said Kimal. "For some time, it's always the same story: we manufacture parts for a strange, anonymous client, or for exports, all under the approval of the Presidential seal. You work in the government building number 1. Open your eyes and ears. Take note of anything that seems strange, unusual, any meeting. "

"Kimal. I do maintenance. Much of my work is to remove oringus from ventilation ducts. They wreak havoc. They manage to eat bolts off external grilles, I'm never among the top brass... unless their air conditioning fails. I do not know what information I could fish out. "

"And your uncle?"

"Pakit? Are you kidding! The only thing he monitors is it's blood alcohol content, and he maintains it as high as possible."

They went silent when another speaker spoke. This was a secretary in the office of the Civil Police who had to cancel a notice of violation against a Sigamee. Order issued by the Presidency...

Speakers succeeded for another hour, everyone shared his observations and opinions.

For everyone, it was too much, and most importantly, in a too short period of time. And this short time? It began with the election of President Moaol.

After the meeting, all shook hands, promising to monitor around them and to figure out Sigamees and Moaol plans. Then they left the meeting, a small group at a

time, at different times, so as not to draw attention to the meeting. Gill went at two-thirds of the group, walked a kilometer before taking a maglev to get home.

He opened the door of their small apartment, in fact his uncle's apartment he shared with him and his sister Jahana, in one of the cylindrical housing towers of the periphery. It was a small tower, barely fifty floors. Their apartment was on the eighth floor. He heaved a sigh. It was the usual scene: Jahana was in her room trying to grow plants, and his uncle was dead drunk on the couch. He stuck his head in the door of Jahana's room.

"How are things going, sis?"

She turned to him. Slim and slender body swayed on moderate heeled shoes. Her long brown hair waved over her shoulders. She was everything to him, and although they did not get along very well, like any brother and sister, he would do anything for her. He felt responsible for her since the death of their parents and especially since Unkle Pakit became a drunken rag. Basically, he saw her as his daughter more than his sister.

"I think I found the right fertilizer!" she said cheerfully. "You see these plants, they are peppered irises. They have totally disappeared from the planet. It no longer grows since the war, but I managed! Look!" she said, pointing to a tiny seed in a small pot of reddish earth.

He admired her young face and pure, sparkling eyes and contagious smile of her triangular face.

"Fantastic sis!" Gill said, giving her a hug. "You will make a first class botanist ... if only..."

"If only what, Gill? Your conspiracy theories again? There will not be another war, Gill. Sigamees have understood the message." she said in her usual naive tone, her eyes lit by love.

For her, everything was fine. There was no conflict. It is as if she had built a mental wall not to see it. And she was not alone.

"You're too naive Jahana. Look around you. Look what's happening. Tonight, a man..."

"Oh, stop with the lies. It's brainwashing. I don't want to hear it. Leave me alone" she said dryly, pushing him out and closing the door on him.

Gill bit his lower lip. He cared about his little sister. She was all that was left of his family. If only she wanted to see. But she was too preoccupied with her botany, her desire to put the flora of Kgitah back as it was before. It was a noble cause, but if there was another war, or if Sigamees took power, the protection of the plants would be their last interest.

He went back into the living room where his uncle was sleeping off the bottom of the bottle of alcohol with snores that would make an earthquake go unnoticed, and looked exasperated. He picked up the empty bottle that Pakit had dropped on the floor when he sank into his alcohol induced semi-coma and threw it away. He tidied up the flat as best as he could, then picked up his uncle and dragged him to his bedroom where he took off his clothes, leaving him with only his underwear, put him to bed and covered him.

Then he went to his own room, went to bed and tried to sleep, but it proved not easy to come. There were just too many questions in his mind. Too many unresolved questions.

Another day, another problem.

The day promised to be beautiful. Already the sun was up and it was about 25 degrees or warmer than normal, thanks to the damaged atmosphere, which had taken a hit during the war, and had hardly recovered, making the heat of Solar become more intense.



Gill prepared breakfast. Jahana ate little while his uncle practically slept on his plate. He took a good portion of it, although the appetite wasn't really there, and helped Pakit to get ready to go to work.

"Come on, uncle Pakit. We should go now, we're going to be late!"

Grunting, he lifted his almost limp body and dragged his feet to his room to dress, arms dangling. Gill remembered the man, strong, right and brave who fought for the

Kgitahns, to retain their freedom. But he changed, sank into alcohol and became a wreck.

"You should lower your alcohol intake, Uncle Pakit, or you will get fired." Said Gill as Pakit closed the door.

"Why are you telling me this?" angrily asked the uncle, in a hoarse voice. "I'm not drunk." he grunted through the closed door.

Gill opened the door to Pakit's room, making him freeze in mid gesture, a bottle of alcohol in hand.

"Because I know you're already drinking and it is not even 7." said Gill in a monotone, emotionless voice.

Pakit put the bottle cap back on and put the bottle down like a child who just got caught touching a forbidden object.

"That's all I have left!" he shouted through the door Gill had just closed. He opened it again.

"Ah, you're right. Even your dignity is gone, somewhere at the bottom of one of these bottles. Uh ... just... fuck you. You're on your own. I'm sick of dragging you all the time!" he said while getting out, slamming the door behind him.

He left the residential building, a tower among others, in a row with 20 others, and went to the maglev waiting dock at the next corner, walking fast and pretty much stomping to dissipate his frustration. The next maglev would be there in 5 minutes, and it was right on time, as always. Just as the doors closed, he saw Pakit enter, panting, his eyes almost out of their sockets. He looked at Gill, smiling a devilish smile, like victorious. The latter looked away.

They arrived at work, at the General Administration building, thirty minutes later. Pakit had been mobilized for war, but had resumed his work once it ended: building maintenance. He had managed to get a job for Gill there too.

The building housed the administrative offices of the Coalition of the Three Stars, as well as the administration of the planet. It consisted of three conical towers grouped together, their bases forming a. The towers were not centered on their cones but were all aligned along their mating sides, making it vertical. The first tower was fifty-five floors, the second ninety floors and the third one, 135 floors. The base of all the three towers together had a section of 500 meters.

Twenty-five years have elapsed since the war, and things have changed. Slowly at first, but especially since the election of Moaol, a little less than 2 years ago. Relations had softened. Moaol advocated a return to free trade with Sigamee. He said that the hatred had had its time and it was time to move on, that all the planets had risen from their ashes following the war, except Sigamee which was limited by means of punishing austerity measures, and that had to be fixed. Free trade was a solution.

Free trade? Free exchange? Of what? Sigamee had nothing to offer but Mirox, stuff that almost nobody wanted anymore.

Moaol was elected on this point of view, but by a very narrow majority, so much that many suggested foul play. There was a resistance group, a group of underground protection, that had one objective: The monitoring of Sigamees. They were Kgitah's protection against another possible invasion, as they said. That group was not there to take down the government. Only to check on the Sigamees.

That group formed shortly after the war, some sort of underground militia. Following the election of Moaol, it had grown and many disciples had joined. Dolaron, true to form, stood neutral and with no opinion. They were not a group of action,

bombing or high visibility acts. They were just monitoring and preparing, to be ready to fight back when the Sigamees would try to invade again.

Everything Moaol's Government did was scrutinized by the dissidents, and when you go looking for vermin, you find vermin. But is finding one rat the proof of an infestation?

In recent months, however, it happened a lot. Moaol defended his ideas of being more flexible towards Sigamees, but others thought there were a little too many accommodations made to them, and they appeared to dictate their desires... and that Moaol was only following their desires. A puppet.

Gill and Pakit entered the 3rd basement of Tower 1, located at the bottom of the long slope that led to Mont Lyrma. The towers were the last buildings against the mountain, one face of the triangle being in the slope, while most of the other two faces were part of the downtown part of the city. The huge building was built on a slope, which was such that in some places, what was at ground level at Tower 1 was five floors below the ground at Tower 2. Because like any self-respecting city, Barod, and especially the most important building, was built on the side of a mountain, a practice that dated back to the dawn of time when belief said that all the mountains protected their inhabitants.

They went to the headquarters of maintenance where they were handed over the tasks of the day. Several robots took care of routine maintenance, but other tasks requiring judgment had to be performed by humans, although Gill often wondered what judgment Pakit could still have left with his brain drowned in alcohol. He would often spend considerable time searching with his right hand... for the tool he held in his left hand. Maintaining such huge towers required a lot of people. They were part of a group of 20 people assigned for maintenance.

A check here, a leak there, the day went well. Just after lunch, he took a call on his personal communicator, being told that a fan on the second basement in the back of Tower 3, facing the mountain, was no longer functioning. He winced. He had a pretty good idea of the very reason for the failure. He went to the second basement and located the access panel vents closest to the problem, removed the grating and climbed into the access that was two meters off the ground.

He crawled further into the pipe for about ten meters before reaching the problem: A mountain oringus was stuck in the blades of the fan. Protection system had stopped the motor from overloading, but the blades had time to chew much of the neck of the animal the size of a fox. His mouth was wide open showing his teeth that were hard enough to bite steel and sharp as razor blades on a simple skin.

Gill withdrew, cursing at the blood that had spilled on the duct, soaking his working suit while he crawled backwards, dragging the animal and leaving a long trail of blood. He knew that a robot cleaner would clean up and disinfect everything, but it was still disgusting.

When he arrived at a junction which started to his left, he heard voices and, at the moment, paid no attention, since it was common to hear conversations while crawling in the ducts. But when he heard the rough voice of a Sigamee, he focused his attention on it. He stopped and stretched his ears. One such voice was that of President Moaol; the other, he was almost certain, was Crom's, the Chancellor and General of the Sigamee army. Although, it could be someone else just as well, when all their rough and cold voices sounded practically the same.

Although officially Sigamee had no army, they had security forces. However, on Sigamee, army, police and security forces were described by a single word, of which all the Kgitahns preferred the translation: army.

He paused and listened.

"Many people are beginning to ask serious questions, Chancellor."

"Calm down Moaol. The plan is going well."

"Yes, but all these exceptions, all these permissions are becoming difficult to explain, to justify."

"Trust me, Moaol. You won your elections, right? I kept my end of the bargain. Now you keep yours. After all, you know that it is all for the good of Kgitah, what am I saying, it's all for the sake of the Coalition. " Said Crom using a slightly sarcastic tone before continuing.

"Just a few more steps, Moaol. Once the crates... What is that?"

A successive series of beeps sounded, exhoeing, seemingly coming from everywhere at once.

Gill swore. It was his communicator. He struggled as best they could in the narrow passage, holding the oringus and trying to take the communicator.

"Yes... Gill speaking."

"Where are you? They're looking for you." Asked the voice of the Director of Maintenance.

"Inside the conduit 223 -2. There was an oringus stuck in the fan." answered Gill.

"Where are you with that?"

"On the verge of leaving, but I should go see the outside grid. The oringus entered through a..."

"No time, you will return to that later. There's a leakage of compressed air at the 82nd floor, in the labs C, Tower 2. The robots are there, but the leak does not stop. You're the one who knows this air network the most. "

"Got it. I'll go after I get rid of the oringus."

He replaced his communicator and continued to crawl to the exit. He lowered himself toward the ground, taking grip and hanging off one hand, letting himself drop to the last half-meter. When he turned around, he found himself face to face with the President and Crom.

"Who are you and what were you doing in there?" Moaol asked in a solemn tone, while Crom looked at him with a look of disgust while trying to stifle his laughter. After all, Gill was wearing the standard maintenance overall, with his name and job position clearly embroidered. And more, the reason he was in the conduit was obvious since Gill held the oringus at arm's length.

"I'm Gill, maintenance, number GE153465. I came to pick this beast off a fan."

"You've gone through the hangar 56J?" Crom asked in his hoarse voice, slow and in a tone slightly threatening.

"Uh... no, sir. This duct leads directly to the outside. There are branches every five meters. Probably one of them leads to 56J. Want me to check? Is there a problem with the ventilation of 56J " he said, taking his communicator.

"No, everything is fine with the 56J" Moaol hastened to say. "Forget it. Good job." said the President, looking with disgust at the oringus, dripping blood.

"Forget you saw me, too." Crom added.

By the look of questioning Gill, he realized he had said too much. He was quick to add:

"... It would not be good news to know that I came to beg for Kgitah's help, if you know what I mean." He said, rolling his eyes with a smile that showed his row of yellow teeth, none of which was completely vertical, while scratching his chin.

"It would be very... sensitive information to the press," Moaol quickly added with its finest diplomacy. "This visit will be announced in good time."

"Yes, it will. In good time." Crom completed.

"Well... As you wish, Mr. President." Said Gill. "If you'll excuse me..." he said, showing the oringus.

With the approval of Moaol, he closed the gate, which started the fan and left the scene under the heavy eyes of two men.

"We'll have to make sure he did not hear anything." Crom said in a low voice when Gill had left his sight. "

"Come on," said Moaol. "He did his job, and he said the conduit does not lead through the hangar. Nevertheless I will check his file and if there is something wrong, I will go further. Having him followed will only bring up some suspicion he might have. Luckily we revealed nothing in our conversations. I told you that it was risky to see each other. "

Crom groaned. Moaol was right.

"We have to remain cautious." Crom ended.

Gill threw the oringus into a chute that led to an incinerator and changed his overall before he went to the 82nd floor, the discussion he heard endlessly echoing in his head. Something was afoot. Yes, something was coming, and he did not trust Moaol, and even less Crom.

This is becoming a habit.

A leak here, a breakdown there, the work day was over. But he had important information that he felt he must communicate.

He didn't go home, but took another train, telling his uncle that he was meeting a buddy who was restoring an old autograv dated from before the war.

Hovering autogravs were the usual mode of personal transportation. Before the war, there were several models, from more efficient family models to sportier ones. But after the war, production was focused on what was essential, and all models built *for pleasure* were no longer manufactured. Only multifunction models were available, all identical, a kind of a flat rectangular housing, slightly rounded at the corners with a single curved transparent transplax bubble over the passengers compartment. The bubble roof would raise to allow occupants to get in and out. No breathtaking performance. No flashy panels. No customization. Just plain and boring.

In fact, Gill was afraid of being followed, and that old friend, Ethan, was there for such an occasion. He came unannounced. Having called him before could arouse suspicion, if monitored, of course, but he had no way to know. Ethan opened the door, and familiar with this kind of impromptu visit, offered Gill to enter without waiting.

He was of Gill's age and it was perfectly plausible that they were friends. After a good meal together, they went on a ride aboard the old autograv.

It was a machine from another era when everything was easy, where the frivolities of any kind were allowed. A time when life was fun.

The Epsilon was a two-seater sports autograv and was shaped like a helicopter cockpit: short, narrow, a sharp nose and a wide rear curved upwards. Its canopy of transplax covered all the front of it, and was opening by pivoting upward to let its passengers in.

They made sure they were not followed, and when they were satisfied, they parked and went into a club, where they came out the back door to take the maglev towards the meeting.

One went down two to three blocks from the location of the meeting, the other, two blocks, always making sure not to be followed. When they finally arrived at the meeting, it was almost the end.

Gill was anxious and nervous. He hasn't revealed anything to his friend. He would reveal his information at once, to the entire group.

All remained silent. This was serious. Moaol and Crom were preparing something. Kimal went to him.

"Great discovery, Gill. Thank you. Good job." He said, shaking his hand vigorously.

"I have done nothing extraordinary, Kimal. I was just in the right place. I would have learned more if my damn communicator..."

"On the contrary. You knew how to listen. You recognized the voice, and your communicator rang at the right time, if it was. It is better this way. If they would have said more and your communicator would then have shown itself up, they would be even more nervous, or worse, you wouldn't be there telling us about it. That the election was rigged, everyone is suspicious of it. You should try to learn more about these famous crates. Did you see anything unusual around this hangar? Devices, weapons?"

"No. Well, actually, I haven't been there a long time. I worked on almost every floor after that, but never returned to level -2. I'll try to have a look tomorrow but it may be suspicious if it does not matter, say, officially."

"Couldn't you, say, create a fault?"

"The only way that leaves no trace is direct action, and again. With all the cameras and sensors..."

"Make for the better, Gill. You have our full support." Kimal concluded with the approval of the group.

"You bring me home, Ethan? After all, we went for a ride in your autograv."

They took the opposite route, returned to the club where they left through the front door. Ethan then took Gill home. They exchanged a lot during that trip, mainly conspiracy theories. Things were looking odd.

When he entered, he found his uncle, a glass in his hand, staring at the 3D-TV screen.

"Finally, here you are! Where were you?" he asked, grunting, not even taking his eyes out of the sports match shown.

"I told you when I left. I went to Ethan's. We worked on his Epsilon autograv. Why?"

"The Presidential Security rats came. They wanted to talk to you. What did you do, boy. Don't put yourself in trouble, you will lose your job."

"I've done nothing wrong, Pakit, I swear. Did they say what they wanted?"

"No. They just asked if I knew where you were. I spoke of Ethan... or is it Nathan. Nah, they bugged off. Choose your friends carefully, boy." He said, taking a sip, at the same time realizing that his glass was empty. "Fuck..."

He rose to fill his glass and Gill took that chance to go into his room.

The night was rough. He felt watched, trapped. Now he was sure he had struck a string, that something was going on. Something fishy.

The next morning, Pakit had his usual hangover and Gill stayed silent. They went to work. Around noon, Gill received another call: something blocking the fan at -2. Again.

He went and took the same conduit to reach the fan. During his time at the junction where he had heard voices the day before, he stopped and listened for a few moments. Nothing. Either the warehouse was empty or that the grid had been blocked to prevent further indiscretions. He came to find a new oringus stuck between the blades of the fan. He withdrew, swearing.

Two oringus in the same fan in 2 days. The grid must be open or something.

While dragging the oringus, he crawled up the nearest air intake and found the problem: the gate was open, the oringus having eaten the latch, besides a bar of the grating was about to fall off.

It was located approximately 1m above the sloping ground, relatively steep, coming down to his left out of the duct. It ended right at the door of the hangar at level -3. A Kgitah spacecraft was there, and he saw two men loading in some boxes before returning to the hangar through the side door, the main door being closed. Two men, but not Kgitahns, Sigamees. Why would Sigamees use a Kgitahns a ship, if it wasn't to go... unnoticed.

It was risky, but he had to know what they were bringing with them. He had no weapon, no way to protect himself in case he was attacked. What could he do? What could he invent?

He looked at the grid and snatched the loose bar from it. Holding the iron bar in his right hand and the oringus in his left hand, he walked down the steep slope covered

with compacted red dirt to the spacecraft. Carefully, listening for voices, he got closer to the opened hatch, getting up the loading ramp. He ventured his head gently inside the spacecraft the size of two buses, and slowly sneaked inside. He heard nothing. He saw no one. There was nobody. He looked around for the crates and discovered them: there was a bacteriological hazard symbol stamped on them. Nothing else. He looked into 2 more rooms. Each contained about a dozen crates of one cubic meter, still with only the symbol of danger. He was about to walk out, a little disappointed from finding out more when he heard voices. He recognized among them, those of Crom and Moaol. They were returning, walking to the ship. He had no place to hide, unless... he hurriedly ran across the spacecraft and entered the cockpit.

"Everything will be on time, Moaol. In four days the plan will be ex... what is it that?" Crom said, taking out his concealed weapon. A weapon he shouldn't have. Not on Kgitah.

Loud banging noises were heard from the cockpit of the ship, as if there was a battle, but Crom's men were beside him carrying crates. Someone was fighting in the spacecraft. And with whom... or what? It was supposed to be empty."

"Take that, filthy beast! Fuck, I hate those things!"

Gill left the spacecraft, the sleeves of his suit torn, blood and lacerations to his face, holding in his right hand an oringus and in his left hand an iron bar. He looked surprised to see them.

"Oh... Mr. President, Chancellor Crom... Uh, sorry... I think I had it before it caused damage to the spacecraft. It is unwise to leave a door open in this region with all those oringus running wild." Said Gill. "They're attracted to electrical fields, for a reason I don't know, you know?"

"But what are you doing here?" Moaol asked, still pointing his gun at him, Crom having hidden his weapon as soon as he saw the oringue dangling from his hand. Gill did not move.

"Uh... Mr. President, I had an alarm that the fan VS2-136B was not working. Again. Another oringus had made for it. It was the second time in two days. I pushed my research further and discovered that the sucker had torn off the protective grating of the ventilation duct. While I was looking at the damage to the grating and the work to do, I saw one enter the spacecraft. I screamed but there was nobody around, so I came and... well... saved you a lot of problems. "

Crom looked at Moaol's employees.

"You left the door of the spacecraft open? Weren't you aware of the risks with the oringus?"

"Well... no... I mean, yes, we left the door open, but Oringus, never seen one before, General. Truly disgusting critters." Said the first, making a grimacing face looking at the blood dripping animal.

"Uh... I... I knew about the oringus. This is a real infestation since the war, radiation seems to have made them stronger and more voracious... but we left just for a few minutes, I did not..." began the second man.

"It's okay. I've heard enough." Moaol cut in. "You close the damn door between EACH load. UNDERSTOOD?"

"Yes, Mr. President" they said in one voice, doing a little bow.

"Can I... uh... can I get rid of it?" Gill asked, looking slightly uneasy, holding the oringus while the President was still pointing his weapon at him,

"Yes, yes, of course." He said, lowering his weapon. "You two, clean this mess, and disinfect the whole spacecraft." He said, pointing to the trail of blood left by Gill who dragged the dead animal.

"One moment... Gill, right?" Crom said.

Gill froze. He knew that Crom was ready to eliminate all those who were in his way.

"Yes, Chancellor." Gill said in a voice that tried to be as frank and fearless as possible. Gill realized at the same time his men called Crom General and all others, Chancellor. Although he covered both positions, the two hats that seemed to be separated... and active.

"Where were you in the spaceship, exactly?"

"Uh... in the cockpit, sir. These critters are attracted by electric fields, and this is where they are known to go. He had begun to scratch one of the control panels, at the right of the entrance. I do not think it is too damaged, and... "

"Did you see what's in the halls of cargo compartments?" Asked Moaol who suffered an elbow nudge from Crom which meant to shut up. Gill saw it and acted as if he didn't.

"Cargo No, why?... Excuse me..." Gill said while his communicator sounded.

"Yes, Gill here... Yes, I removed it and I checked the grid.... Yes, repair it... yes... The sooner... Understood, I'll get the welder and the parts for the latch... I have to go through the infirmary, a problem with an oringus... yeah, the grid first, my injuries later... "

He turned to Crom and Moaol.

"Excuse me, I need to fix the grid immediately. Apparently another oringus has already infiltrated. Should I get..."

"Leave it." Crom said. "Our men will take care of it."

"It's a nice offer, General, but it's my job and the parts..."

"We'll deal with it." Moaol cut in. "Get rid of this thing and do not worry about the grid. The oringus will not open it again."

"Uh... well. Gentlemen." Gill said heading towards the closest service door, which was the one used by the men.

"No!" said Moaol in a commanding tone. "Err..." he began, trying to catch his own mistake, "In... instead, take the next service door... This one is... crowded." Moaol hurried to find an excuse. Crom did not seem very proud of the way that Moaol managed the situation.

"If you go through that door with this... thing," cut in Crom, "we will have to disinfect all of our cargo. You wouldn't want to do that, won't you?" he asked with a broad smile showing his yellow crooked teeth.

"No, of course." Said Gill, climbing the slope back towards the damaged grid, the nearest door being just a little higher.

When he was far enough, Crom and Moaol turned around and whispered in an angry tone so loud that Gill heard anyway.

"You idiot. Why talk about the cargo? He'll want to learn more about it now. Why order him not to go there? He will suspect something now. You're so stupid."

While Moaol stammered an apology, Gill smiled. Moaol was obviously not the smartest Kgitah, but Crom was not the smartest Sigamee either...

He got rid of oringus and said to himself that he could forgo the first aid treatment, since it was only superficial wounds he had inflicted himself to make believe the oringus story was true. He retraced his steps and crawled forward until he saw

them, making sure they couldn't see him. Armed with small binoculars he looked at the ship and its loading.

Other cases, these ones with the bacteriological warning label, were loaded. Then it was the turn of other boxes with a seal painted over, like to hide it, but looking at all the boxes, since the hiding job had been botched, he could make it out: the seal of Dolaron: It could only mean that these were parts. Since the last war, Sigamees were forbidden to acquire key pieces from Dolaron so they could not rebuild an army. These parts must be approved by the Coalition. All other parts can be purchased directly from Dolaron. That was to say that these pieces were more than just spare parts, and probably the reason why they did not want him to go into the warehouse.

The loading seemed finished. Moaol went to see one of the men and began to gesticulate towards the gate giving orders. Gill realized it was time to go. He crawled backwards until he was completely out of sight and returned to his work. Once inside, he turned his communicator he had turned off before, not wanting to be caught again. His boss was already yelling, looking for him.

"Sorry boss. I had it turned off accidentally. I'm in the AS1-45 access duct, I'll be there in 10 minutes."

Alert

The rest of the day was routine. In the evening, he took the maglev to return home, however, he felt as if he was being followed. He saw no one but he somehow felt eyes staring at him. At the apartment, his uncle wasn't there, having made a detour to a bar and his sister was spending the evening with friends. He prepared a quick dinner and turned in circles. He did not know what to do. He couldn't wait for the next meeting, it would be too late. If what he heard was right, to the effect that in four days, the plan would be executed, he had no time to lose. He decided to call Kimal. He took his communicator, but he saw a very quick flash off the screen: It was bugged. He could not call the leader of his group of dissidents. At the last moment, he chose to call Ethan. He gave him no time to talk.

"Hey, Ethan. I'm still waiting, what are you doing? Are we going for a ride in your Epsilon or not? I've booked my evening for you."

A fraction of a second, Ethan looked surprised, but quickly realized the ruse and went on with it.

"Oh shit! That was tonight? Completely forgot about it, pal. I removed the modulator to clean it," he said, pointing to the part he was holding in his hand. "I'll put it back in place and I'll go get you. I'll be there in an hour."

"Yeah... I'm not going to walk around in circles for an hour. Can you meet me at the Defendor?"

"Perfect, I'll be there."

"Yeah, and drinks are on you for that!"

He was certain to be under surveillance. Cameras might have been installed in the apartment, however, Ethan's Epsilon was safe from microphones.

Gill arrived at the Defendor about half an hour later. It was a small restaurant where he was a regular and knew most of the other regulars there. He sat down at a table and ordered a laïpi root extract. Either he was becoming paranoid, or he was right, but it seemed there were a lot of foreigners, and they all looked suspicious, especially two burly men, being the perfect type for presidential guards. They wouldn't have to know why. If they were asked to follow someone, they would.

He felt watched, and he was certain they had pointed a directional microphone at him to listen to their full conversation.

Moments later, Ethan arrived and Gill immediately began to talk about the Epsilon and asking if he had solved the problem with the gyro. The discussion revolved around issues of the vehicle restoration, and while they took their time to finish their laipi extract, Ethan clearly got the messages from Gill, and took note of the two men. They left to go for a ride in the Epsilon. No real surprise, the two guards came out right behind them.

"Shit, Gill. What's going on?" Ethan asked once on their way.

"I am under surveillance." said Gill proceeding to recall his misadventure.

"Four days? That does not leave much time. Kimal Should be made aware of that."

"Yes, but how? I'm under surveillance, and you will be soon if not already. They will surely intercept our communications."

"It will not be easy, but I'll see what I can do. Try to maintain a low profile. Try not to find yourself face to face with them again."

"Not obvious. The odd thing is that I don't seek those meetings. They just happen."

Ethan glanced in the mirror where could see the guard's autograv following, two vehicles behind. They were not trained for covert tailing. Regardless of the streets or alleys he took, they followed. Easy to spot. He lined up on the main road between Barod and Fom-Kali, the neighboring town.

"You want to see what it's like to have cleaned the modulator?"

Without sufficient time for Gill to answer, Ethan accelerated, pinning its occupants against their seats, leaving behind the guards. Gill felt his lungs crushed and could hardly breathe.

"Jus... just cleaning it?? Shit!"

"Well... maybe slightly modified." Said Ethan while the acceleration gradually ceased.

"How fast is it? 600?? This is three times the normal speed! And you say *slightly* modified???" he said, giggling, leaning to look in the mirrors, seeing the followers becoming just a speckle of light, far behind us.

A few moments later, the guards were no longer to be seen. They were probably completely disoriented seeing them disappear in front of them like that.

"Expect to have visitors at your home. This is totally illegal." said Gill. "They're going to report it."

"No patrol was in the area, apart from our two crows. If they throw the police in, they will no longer be able to watch me unless they remove the case from the police, which will attract questions and draw attention to them, something they want to avoid at all costs. These are only presidential guards. No secret service agents."

"And now what do we do?" Gill asked, looking at the blur that had become the trees whizzing by to his right.

"I'll drop you off at home. Play dead. I'll have a mechanical problem not far from Kimal's home. Don't worry, I'll fix it. We have a plan in place in case such a situation arises."

Gill asked no more. It was agreed that the less everyone knew, the less risky it was for their organization to be exposed. Gill obviously did not know where Kimal lived, but Ethan knew.

He was dropped at his place, the autograv of the presidential guards parked on the other side. Ethan waved at them and they looked stunned...

Ethan left and, without surprise, was followed.

Once inside the apartment, Gill was not surprised to see his uncle half-unconscious on the couch and Jahana talking to her plants. He went to bed, but sleep was light. Every noise seemed suspicious. Every flickering light drew his attention.

In the meantime, Ethan returned to the main road and had a few more bursts of accelerations, then took a lonely path that brought him back to his home without crossing the city. He very well saw his pursuers' headlights in the distance.

Suddenly, his autograv had ups and downs and began to sputter and everything died. He tried to restart it, without success. Behind him, the lights slowly approached and passed. So slowly he could easily recognize the two presidential guards. Certainly, for inauspicious spying, they were not the best. He saw the lights go out further, as they entered a farmhouse, because it was the only type of building in the area. Nothing else, just farms.

On the other side of the road from Ethan, you guessed it, was a farm. He knew that the guards had certainly pointed a directional microphone on him. He knocked on the door and a stocky man came to answer.

"I'm sorry to bother you," Ethan said, "but my autograv just broke down. Everything seems dead. I restored it myself, so I know it well, and I think my modulator is blown, but I do not have a spare with me. If you have a spare I could borrow or buy? "

"Ah, of course, my boy. These fucking modulators go up in smoke every week in my machinery. They do not build them the way they used to before the war. Which model? Mk8? Mk9?"

"Uh... Mk3. This is an Epsilon."

"Mk3? Shit, this is old. An Epsilon. Awesome good autograv, but sorry, I only have 8 and 9. However, the guys on the other side of the road, just a little more ahead, Kimal is his name. He has a bunch of old parts, a true collector. He surely has what you are looking for. "

Ethan thanked him and walked to the other farm, another reddish-brown stone house, the best house for a farmer. The entrance door was flanked by a light on each side, lighting the driveway where a huge machine was parked, still partly splattered with mud.



Kimal opened the door and pretended not to recognize him. Ethan explained the problem and Kimal brought him to his barn which was used to store equipment. He knew that surveillance microphone, even infra-red cameras would not work and that they would not be able to get any information from the inside. He built it that way.

Ethan briefly explained the situation. Less than a minute later, they emerged with an old specimen

of machinery and armed with flashlights, walked to where his autograv broke down. Replacing the modulator took half an hour and they returned to the farm holding, at arm's length, by the end of a harness of wires and tubings, a steaming piece of metal. Kimal threw it into his trash bin and invited Ethan for a drink.

The latter thanked him for his hospitality, but refused, saying having to return home, that it was already late, and that the part installed, though generously given, was far from being new and would not allow him to go very fast.

Ethan left and drove out slowly. Once his autograv was out of sight, the guards turned on their headlights, but all lights went off in Kimal's driveway as they drove in. A guard came and went to the trash bin where he recovered the modulator still smoking. Kimal looked through its surveillance screens and smiled. They would find nothing, since the replacement part was simulated and they had a damaged one, which was already out of use, to the point that there was nothing useful to be extracted.

Kimal smiled. Any victory, even wasting their time on futile research, against the President and his illegal moves, was pure joy, but the information obtained from Gill was disturbing.

Ethan put the accelerator to the floor and in no time he was back home. The guards were still looking on small roads, certain that he could not go faster than a snail.

The next morning, Gill was trying to do his morning routine as usual, but he was concerned, and it showed.

"Is something wrong, Gill?" Pakit asked, but in a tone more or less interested, as if trying to make conversation without really getting involved.

"No, not really. Oringus. These damn critters that seem to come from everywhere." he lied, suspecting that there were microphones in the apartment and not wanting to draw the attention of the presidential guards.

"They are filthy vermin. We should exterminate them all. They do nothing but damage."

"All creatures deserve to live." cut in Jahana. "It is us who have invaded their territory with our cities. They try to adapt, to survive, that's all. Actually, we should help them."

Help them... How? They chew electrical cables!" said Gill, angry after her sister who sees only the beauty of nature and none of the realities. "How about ilarums from the Liya swamps? Do you worry about them? Should we save them too?"

Jahana gave a disgusted grin. In fact, almost everyone had a look of disgust when one would talk about this one meter diameter spider which keeps their victims alive for four months while it slowly eats the inside.

"It's... That's not like that. Ilarums are..."

"Living creatures, like any other, except that those are ugly and sadistic, so we can destroy them, but if it's cute or all it does is eat metal, it would not matter because..."

"Hey! Enough!" said Pakit in a loud voice. "Do not start this endless discussion another fucking time. I have a headache just thinking about it!" he said, rising.

"Ah yes, Pakit. Thanks for your support, and do not forget to drink your bottle of alcohol before going to work, just to cure your headache and your back pain."

Uncle Pakit froze on the spot. Jahana bowed her head and silently went to her room, while Gill left home.

Pakit stared at the door, pain visible in his eyes. Yes, it was pathetic. Yes, he was an alcoholic. He should be their support, being the only family member left willing to take good care of them... and he failed. He looked around toward Gill's room then looked at the door again, got up and went to the counter to take a bottle of alcohol and drank half of it in one gulp.

"If only you knew, Gill", he muttered. "If only you knew my pain."

The Discovery

Gill's workday began like any other, with its list of tasks to do. One of them was to check that the gate of the air intake 223 of level -2 was repaired by Crom's men, and had been done correctly. When he saw repairs, his head almost exploded.

"No, but... Damn. IDIOTS, DUMB ASSES... STUPID!" he shouted to anyone who would listen. "To weld everything in place IS NOT REPAIRING SOMETHING".

He knelt in front of the grid and examined the job done.

"Bunch of morons! They welded all around, and speaking of welds, I've seen a kid make better looking ones. Oh shit. I will have to completely replace the outlet pipe and the outer gate."

He took his communicator and explained the work to his boss. Two hours later, he was at work, cutting a part of the grid with a laser to access the inner bolts to remove it all, when the Kgitahn spacecraft came back and landed just outside the hangar door.

Fulminating, out of his mind and pissed off for the additional work that their repair was causing him, he ran down the steep slope toward the spacecraft while pesting.

He had gone halfway and the engines of the spacecraft were not completely extinguished when Crom hurried out and quickly went to Gill.

"What are you still doing here? Your damn grid has been repaired. No more oringus will go through."

"Welding an access grid shut is not a repair, idiot. Your moron workers have welded everything in place.. Now I need to replace the gate AND its support. Next time let the right people do the right work! " Shouted Gill while going down the slope with a firm step, but Crom seemed to steer him away, walking toward him.

"Back up, you can't stay here. Even better, go have a drink, my treat," said Crom, tending credits.

"I do not want your credits, I want to talk to the idiots who did the work in.... What? Why are you blocking my way and why do you want me to go elsewhere? Do you have

something to hide?" Gill said, stretching his neck to see inside the spacecraft, where he saw a man dressed in a bacteriological protection suit. "What the fuck..."



Seeing that Crom was about to draw his weapon, Gill turned away and ran, pushing Crom down the slope as he ran uphill as fast as he could.

"Stay where you are!" Crom ordered while trying to raise his big stocky body.

But Gill had nothing to do with his orders. He continued to run and clearly heard the discharge of a weapon, and felt heat near his left ankle while a plasma ball melted the

ground at his feet in a warning shot. That did not stop him, however. Five steps later, he plunged into the pipe he had just opened.

These ducts, he knew their paths like the back of his hand, and could even remain hidden inside for some time, but that was not in his plan for now. He had to do something, he should tell someone. He thought only of Ethan, that he would know what to do, that he had to warn him.

A bend to the right, left at the next T, to slide one floor to the next vertical pipe. He knew the way.

He emerged in an unused meeting room. The door in the wall vanished as he approached it. He looked quickly on both sides of the corridor, went to the left and ran. Stairs were accessible 10m further on the right. While he got there. two security guards cut off his route.

"Gill! The guy I was looking for." Said the strongest of them. "I don't know what's going on, but we have orders from the President to lead you to his offices. If you'll come along, please."

"Uh... hi Rodder, Slym... Uh... do me a favor guys, you did not see me, okay? Just... trust me." he said while going past them, but Slym grabbed him by the arm.

"Sorry, Gill, but our orders have priority. You will gently..."



Slym could not finish his sentence as Gill, rotating back around himself, kicked him in the chest cutting off his breath and pushing him onto Rodder who lost his balance.

For a split second, Gill wondered where those self-defense moves were coming from. He never knew himself capable of such feats. But he was quickly pulled back to reality.

"Gill!... Shit. Gill!" yelled Slym while seeing Rodder recover his weapon in his hand. "Fire, damn it, SHOOT

HIM!"

"Shoot him?" asked Rodder, round eyes, "But we're talking about Gill here. I can not pull the trigger on Gill, we know him... "

Slym, who was on his back, raised himself on his elbow, drew his weapon, aimed at Gill and pulled the trigger. Gill felt the heat of the plasma ball in his back as he forked in another corridor. The alarm sounded on all security communicators. Any weapon's fire in the building automatically activates an alarm.

"Shit, this is serious." He said, making him fear for the worst, that what he had seen, which was basically nothing more than a Sigamee in protective clothing, was hiding something much bigger than what he thought and it should not be revealed.

He went down a floor, and crashed on the exit door, blocked. As expected, his access card had been deactivated, except that just by having tried it, he had revealed his position. He knew what to do. He took a tool from his belt and in less than ten seconds, the access panel was opened. He had to be quick, the General Alarm, if not given yet, would soon be.

Opening an access panel was part of his job, but knowing which wire to use to bypass an interlock, that, he never knew how... until now. Now, he knew it. That was it. He pulled a few cables and a moment later, the light was turning green. He opened the door and stepped out into the hot sun just on the other side of the spacecraft that had just landed. He had time to see men in hazmat suits, entering with boxes unmarked, but he had no doubt about what must be in them: organic products he had seen the day before, but in a solution so unstable that a full protection was required.

"There he is!" he heard one of the men, his voice muffled by the hazmat suit.

Gill ran without looking back, joining the crowd of the downtown business district

He mingled with the crowd, but knew he should hide, he would be on the search priority of all agents in a few minutes at most. And an order from the Presidency does not need justification.

He hid in a small alley between two buildings, one of which was partially in ruins. With debris, he made himself a cache and waited for nightfall. It will be easier to move in the dark. The problem was that he should communicate with Ethan, but if he used his communicator, he would be immediately tracked back.

On several occasions, he made himself as small as possible while a patrol was searching the area. He could hear them send their reports to their superiors "Area 1329J secured."

He got out, but stayed into dark corners. He did not know at what level the search had been issued. Was it just the police, or was his hologram displayed at every intersection?

To his relief, this was not the case. So, a search order had been given to the civil police, but not an overall public search advisory. They wanted to keep a low profile. It would probably help.

His communicator rang. It was Ethan.

"Where are you? I do not know what you did, but it's everywhere."



"I'm behind the 14C. I say... Oh shit!" he said as he saw an old beat-up autograv stop in front of him and the canopy opening. It was Pakit!

"Get in. Hurry up!" he ordered.

"This... That's Pakit, Ethan. What should I do?"

"Perfect! Go on. He's on our side!."

Gill plunged into the autograv which went off quickly, merging into the traffic.

"Are you okay Gill?" asked Pakit with a calm tone... and sober.

"Uh yes. But what are you doing here? Where did you get that autograv?"

"Bah, it's an old piece of junk I had prior to the war." he said, driving off and merging to disappear into the nearby traffic.

"What? You had an autograv? And you never told me? Why?" he asked, puzzled, shocked and pissed off at the same time.

"Sorry to have poisoned your life." answered Pakit. "I have no excuses, only reasons and those reasons are lame as fuck."

"I want to hear it nonetheless." said Gill, really puzzled by Pakit's sudden half confessions. What was he hiding?

"I was a single guy when the war, with its outcome came crushing our lives. Out of nowhere, I had two kids to take care of. I was not prepared, hell, I didn't even want kids in the first place, but there I was. I was not to let my brother down. He gave his life for our freedom.

But the anxiety of raising both of you took its toll."

"And you found an escape route with booze. Classic, Pakit."

"Yeah, I told you the reasons were lame. I did try to quit many times, believe me, I tried, but each time, the stress and anxiety got the best of me. I had been a part of the resistance from the very start and I did the best I could and, frankly, being... drunk, help me get away with sneaking on some conversations. I might have been drunk, I was not stupid and had a good memory. I hid this Autograv for just such an emergency. Nobody knew I had it. It was my secret weapon."

"Oh, and suddenly, just like that, you're sober and you can drive?"

He produces a little bottle with three pills in it.

"You have to thank them for it. They make you sober within 15 seconds, and their effect lasts about an hour."

"But?... I feel there's a 'but' following that."

"Yeah... but when they wear off, it's like getting squeezed in a meat grinding machine, the pain is unbearable and I will without a doubt pass out to wake up to constant all-body pain for a week... which of course..."

"Can be lessened by drinking. That's lame. You ruined my childhood, Pakit."

"Yes Gill, I told you my reasons were lame, but today I will pay you ba... Shit! Fuck! She did not listen. "

He parked the autograv not far from his apartment building where three unmarked autogravs but all evidently belonging to the presidential guard were posted.

"Jahana?" asked Gill.

"I called her immediately after the warning about you to tell her not to go inside, but she wanted to go see her fucking plants. They must have grabbed her..."

Gill's communicator rang. The identifier was... Crom.

Pakit strummed keys on the on-board computer of the autograv and the call was transferred over.

"Secured Link." he said, opening the communication and making a sign to Gill. Crom's face appeared on the screen. He could see the faces of Gill and Pakit.

"Yes..." answered Gill, shyly.

"Mr. Gill. I'm sure you are a reasonable person." Crom replied in a confident tone. "You wouldn't want your pretty sister to get harmed, am I right? Neither would you, Pakit" he said, stepping away from the camera to reveal Jahana sitting on a chair at the dining table, flanked by two armed Sigamees, pointing their guns at her head.

Jahana seemed calm, but remained silent.

"Maybe a good drink would do you good, Pakit." he said with an arrogant smile, holding a bottle of alcohol in hand. "Come share a drink with your friends..." he said tersely, but his voice changed dramatically when he added "... if you want to see her alive." before cutting off communication.

"Any ideas?" Gill asked, looking at Pakit.

"Let me think for a moment, boy." he said pensively. He sought a solution, a plan, and imagined a scenario. Everything had to fit.

He had seen only Crom and 2 other Sigamees, which meant, in theory, that only Sigamees were in the apartment.

"Moaol is nothing more than a puppet in the hand of Crom." Pakit said. "It is Crom who controls everybody but Moaol's guards will only answer to the president himself. Even if Crom orders them to shoot, they will not do it."

"You're sure of that?" Gill asked, visibly worried.

"No... but we have to take that risk." he said with the smile of a warrior ready to jump into action. "Wait for me here. I should be back in about 15 minutes."

He gently manually opened the autograv's canopee, just enough for him to crawl through. Gill did not even know that was possible, and he saw Pakit disappear into the night, blending into the background. A few seconds later, he had lost sight of him. While being nervous, he was very relieved to be with Pakit, and blamed himself for having treated him as he had done in recent years. Even if being an alcoholic was nothing other than its cover, and that he knew nothing of it.

He was alone with his thoughts, and he was able to see the chain of events of the recent days. He was trying to understand. What was in those biohazardous marked boxes? What devilish plan Crom and Moaol were making? Could he do otherwise? Could he have protected his sister better? He felt responsible for putting her in such a situation.

He jumped when the canopee opened softly. Pakit returning as stealthily as he went.

"OK. Head for the main door of the apartment building..."

"But all the guards will be there."

"Of course not. They certainly expect us to attack them from behind. Much of the guards are lying in ambush to take us by surprise. There will be minimum presence at the front door. I've always said that the presidential guards weren't what was needed for this kind of mission. I have proof... They are so, um... well-hidden, a blind man could find them. "

"Okay, and then what?" Gill said, not so sure of himself.

"Take care not to be seen, of course, and wait for my signal. When you see it, run into the apartment, look for Jahana, and get out of there, quickly. There should be only Crom and two Sigamees we saw. You and Jahana, head for the street 2856.

"But it's on the other side of the building. Shouldn't we return to the autograv?"

"No. That's precisely what they will expect us to do, that we would come back to the autograv, not go the opposite way. Look for Ethan's autograv."

Gill smiled. If Ethan was involved, there would be no problem.

"What will be your signal?"

"I... I'll improvise, but you'll know it when you see it."

Pakit went away and Gill stepped out of the autograv a few moments later to sneak up on the front door of the apartment building. As mentioned by Pakit, only one presidential guard was to be seen. Perhaps there were more of them indoors, on the floors, but it was impossible to know. In addition, Crom had obviously no idea of the capabilities of Pakit... just as Gill.

Time seemed to pass slowly. Gill was impatient to get into action, not knowing what the signal would look like, when suddenly an explosion lit up the night and a flaming autograv rose ten meters up in the air before falling on top of a 2nd one. Immediately, the guard watching the front entrance went to see what was going on, leaving the way open to Gill, who rushed inside, quickly climbing the eight-storeys leading to his dwelling. He was breathless, but he was in good physical condition and recovered quickly.

A sound from another staircase. Gill sought a way out but it was too late. The person entered the corridor: it was Pakit, evidently less fit than Gill, heavily panting.

"... Was my... signal... good?" he said, looking for air.

"Impossible to miss. And now what?"

"We go in!" Pakit said as he went to the door, which slid soundlessly upon his arrival, the access system having recognized him.

"Not bright enough to lock the door." Gill whispered as they waited on each side of the doorway, ready to pounce on anyone who would come through, but nobody came.

Gill ventured a look: nobody. In fact, yes, but they were, including Crom, nose glued to the window watching the show while the fire detonated a third autograv.

Pakit led the way. When they reached the kitchen, they made a sign for Jahana not to speak, but she alerted everyone!

"Finally! Finally! Hurry, get me out of here!" she yelled, showing her handcuffed wrists. "

"Shut up! Shit!" Gill said while grabbing and dragging her with them, almost making her jump over the dining table, leaving the unit, running. Pakit stayed behind and fired a shot toward Crom and his men.

"Run, I'll catch up!"

While keeping them unable to fire, Pakit closed the door and locked it. They would be able to get out only by blowing up the door.

He caught Gill and Jahana who were hiding in a bush near the exit.

"The door will not hold very long, Pakit" said Gill.

"Oh yes!" he said, smirking. "It is armored. They will need plasma torches to pierce it! Come on. Forget Ethan's autograv, they are too much monitored. I saw two spacecraft a few streets down. We take one and flee toward Dolaron."

"Hey! How about my handcuffs?" Jahana said.

Pakit pulled a tube from his pocket and approached the handcuffs which opened. Under the gaze of the amazed two kids, he replied:

"I went to war, you know. You're never too prepared. Come on!"

He led them through the bushes and buildings two blocks away. Along the way, they passed Ethan's autograv. It was empty, Ethan was likely putting more explosives somewhere else.



In front of them were two spacecraft. None were monitored, everybody was gone to see the explosions and / or trying to get Crom out of the room. Jahana was struggling in the bushes in her footwear, often tripping.

"Way to go, fashion girl" said Gill.

"Sorry, if I knew I would be running for my life, I would have chosen something else this morning, moron." she harshly answered.

They approached the first spacecraft, a Kgitahn ship built for 4 people, very average. Beside it, a Sigamee all purpose utility spacecraft. They chose the Kgitahn one. After all, would they consider a Sigamee spacecraft superior?

They were only a dozen meters away when a firing weapon ricocheted off the wall of the spacecraft, missing Gill's head by a hair. He rushed down, turning the weapon in his hand, ready to fire. Jahana took off like a sprinter on fire and ran before diving head first into the spacecraft. Moments later, the engines were running.

Then they exchanged gunfire with the guards, Gill and Pakit looked surprised at Jahana's behavior. Pakit then smiled.

"I'll explain." He said, satisfied, before firing again. "Go ahead, I'll cover you!" he yelled while a plasma discharge exploded near them.

Gill ran without looking back and also plunged into the door, then turned around to guide Pakit and cover for him. He could see, approaching dangerously, Crom and his guards, a plasma rifle in his hands.

"Run, Pakit! Quick"

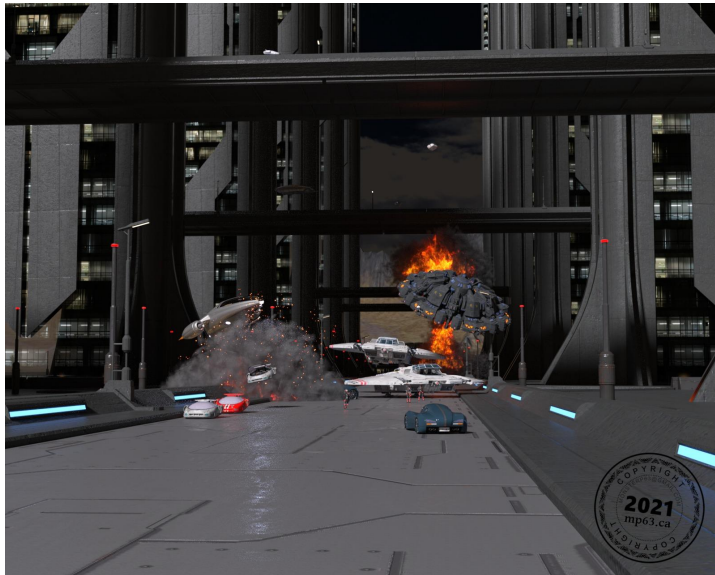
The Escape

After a final shot that drove back Crom, Pakit rushed to the ship, He knew he had very little chances to reach it. He felt this was it, this was the right time. He suddenly 'knew'. He looked at them, smiling, like fully liberated from decades of weight on his shoulders, and very clearly mouthed "You'll be fine. Go."

Half a second later a plasma shot hit him right in the back, shattering his body, splattering Gill with blood and flesh.

"NO! Pakit! YOU ARE GOING TO PAY FOR THAT!" Gill said pointing and hitting one of the guards in the head then another one through his shoulder, who stumbled backward, hitting Crom, making him miss Gill, who recoiled in time and commanded the door to close.

"Takeoff Jahana, TAKEOFF".



She enabled all systems, as an expert, and looked one last time at the torn body of their uncle before switching the power to maximum, projecting a stream of particles on those around them. The maneuver was normally prohibited, even locked while within the atmosphere, but she did not care, and for some reason she ignored, she knew how to remove the locks in the sequence.

On the ground, those who were too close, were incinerated in seconds, including Pakit's remains.

"Set the heading for Dolaron. We hide out there until we learn more about the events to come. I'll try to get in touch with Ethan as soon as we're in a safe zone."

He looked at her confidently handling the spacecraft.

"But... How did you learn to fly a spaceship like that?"

"I... I do not know. After diving through the door, it was like an electric shock in my head, and suddenly I knew what to do.... As if I had always known, but it... it was blocked. "

"Pakit did not seem surprised by your sudden... experience. He told me he would explain later, and somehow, I feel the same too. I discovered new knowledge I have no idea about, like hand to hand combat, rewiring an access panel and stuff."

The spacecraft sped out at full power into space, ignoring all the flight rules.

"Uh... Jahana, Dolaron is on the other side." Gill said softly, seeing the moons drifting to their left.

"I know, but I have the... intuition... to go away from it. If we put the cap on Dolaron, they will alert their friends there, and we will have no chance. So I'm creating a... decoy".

"Wow. Impressive. I'm curious to know where this comes from."

"Me too." Jahana replied weakly. "I have another intuition, to look for, in the general learning database at a specific location."

"Learning database? We don't have a hypno-learning st... wait a minute. This is a Presidential's Guards ship." he said, getting up and running at the back of the ship.
"Yes, we do have one!"

"So?" asked Jahana.

"So far, listening to those feelings has saved our lives. That might not seem a good time but... go ahead. I'll send us in transpace toward Teg-Gir to lose them a little. This trip should take about an hour."

Without another word, and no better idea, Jahana went to the hypno-learning station of the ship and sat in the chair, put on the headphone-like apparatus and asked the special designated location. A hypno-learning station could be used both for teaching in hypnotic mode or peek into the huge library of the coalition.

Once the spacecraft was launched in transpace, Gill relaxed and the high pressure the last hours sank in a sleep of exhaustion. He awoke startling when Jahana gently shook his shoulder.

"Gill? Are you okay?" she asked, worried.

Gill opened his eyes and blinked in the dim light of the cockpit, lit by its instruments.

"Yes... Are we at Tef-Gir yet?"

"No, not yet, a little more than half-way... I... I found out why I suddenly know how to fly a spaceship: Pakit implanted that knowledge in me when I was young. He did the same for you. When a life-threatening condition would arise, it would fire into action, which was the case... As if he had planned the events, as if he knew... Oh, Pakit... " she said, sobbing.

"Whatever the reason, he did well. And to think I had no confidence in him when in fact, it was the opposite. I feel so bad with myself for all the things that I have said to him. "

"I think he took as much pain to lie to us like that, but it was for our own good... Generally, this is the message I understood."

"Did he give you an idea of what to do now? May I remind you that we'll have part of the Sigamee army on our tail quite soon."

"Yes, he said that Kgitah is counting on us, and we need to find help.. It sounded like a Savior, and he spoke of a prophecy."

"A Savior? Prophecy? Surely this is not on Teg-Gir we will find it all. He left you a name, a hint?"

"No, only that it was on a distant star. He was referring to the Prophecy of Djiahanel, I think."

"Oh damn -- don't tell me you believe in this shit too?"

"Yes... No... Oh, I do not know." She said, sobbing. "I want to see Mom and Dad!"

"Me too, Jahana, me too." Gill said, clasping her in his arms.

A few minutes later, the spacecraft was jumping into normal space, before turning toward Dolaron. Meanwhile, a dozen spacecraft Sigamee were dispatched to Teg-Gir and waited. They would vaporize the small rebel spacecraft when it materialized. They would wait for it... for a long time.

Three hours later, the spacecraft left the transpace at the limits of the Dolaron system, but was quickly spotted by a small Sigamee spacecraft who chased him. The small Sigamee spacecraft looked harmless, but they were quickly confronted with the fact that it was armed, a violation of treaties, and proof that they were actively sought after.

"Gill, this is Rah speaking. Cease your little amateur game, and give yourself up."

Jahana looked at Gill with a question mark on her face. Who the heck was Raw and how did Gill know him?

"And why should I do that? What did I do wrong except discover that you want to destroy the planet?" he replied.

"And you think you're this smart? You're not armed, and the only shield you have is just good for deflecting meteorites and debris. Surrender or I will destroy you!"

Gill maneuvered as he thought he was never able to, began to strum on the various buttons and controls at breakneck speed and came face to face with Rah's spacecraft. The imminent collision in less than five seconds seemed inevitable.

Jahana screamed and Rah was barking orders, and against all odds, against all proceedings, Gill's spacecraft ended-up in transpace.

Once past her emotions, Jahana looked at Gill, with still amazed eyes.

"How did you do that? Spaceships are locked-protected against it? We can't go into transpace within a distance this close to a planet?"



"I... I do not know how I did it. I punched a series of keys that apparently unlocked the mode, but I have no idea what I did. It's as if I was programmed..... a bit like you when you knew how to fly. "

"What... are we?" asked Jahana.

"We seem to have been programmed... both of us... and... your program, where does it lead us?"

Gill consulted the charts and the computer.

"Earth."

"Earth?... Damn. Now," said Jahana, "Who the heck is Raw?"

"That's Crom's chief of secret services." he said, clenching his teeth. "We had a briefing about him in one of my meetings. If he's involved, it means that whatever I discovered is really big and deep within Sigamee command... and that we're in deep shit."

Jahana stayed silent. Thinking things she never thought she would think, triggering survival skills she never knew she had.

Fifteen hours later, a small spacecraft appeared near the orbit of the planet Mars and quickly headed to Earth to finally land on the far side of the Moon. Gill and Jahana took advantage of the break to go to the hypno-learning station and learn as much as possible on Earth. They then put on flight suits, a metallic white and blue or red figure hugging suits. These suits would protect them against pressure variations, in case the ship is damaged, but not against the vacuum. They had their helmets beside them.

"And now what do we do?" asked Jahana while the spacecraft was resting in a small crater.

"We don't have much time. We should get in touch with the authorities and tell them what will happen."

"And what will happen?"

"That's the problem. I do not know. All I know is that Crom filled a spacecraft with boxes marked with the bacteriological hazard symbol. Since I saw that, he's been trying to kill me."

"That, I believe you." Jahana said in a sarcastic tone while rubbing her right shoulder with her gloved hand, a souvenir of her dive-in while fighting on Kgitah. "It would seem he intends to use a biological weapon? But it's crazy, it can kill them as much as us."

"I know, but that's all I know. I do not know where or how, but I know that it will be happening in about four days."

"Four days! Damn, that does not leave much time." Jahana said.

"No... worse." Gill cut. "That was yesterday. We have... three days remaining, at best."

A light flickered on the console at the same time an alarm sounded. Gill and Jahana hastened to put their helmet on and put their visor down. They were rather tight but lightweight helmets, far from the bulky ones of spacesuits.

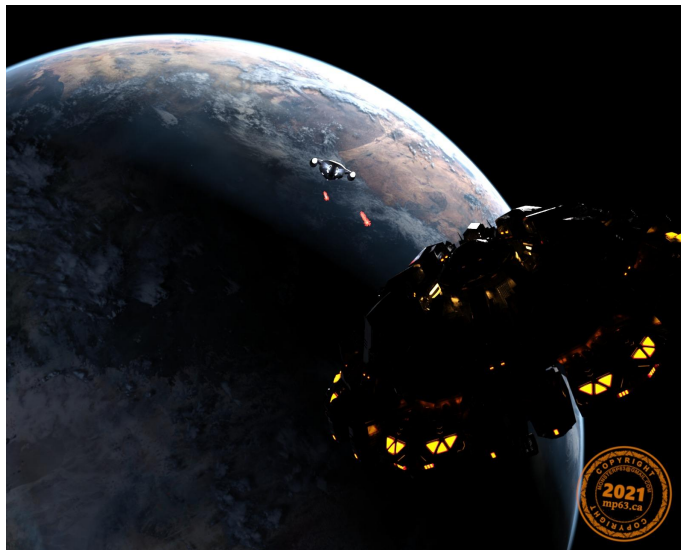
"I believe that our destination was too obvious," says Gill, turning on the engines.

The spaceship rose from the surface of the Moon sending a cloud of dust. The spacecraft that had been detected was approaching them at high speed.

"Beautifully feigned Gill. Your pilot's prowess impresses me." Said the hoarse voice of Rah in the communicator. "But you do not show an old geezer how to do those tricks."

Gill wasted no time responding. Another maneuver, followed by another, but Rah was sticking to him and was firing relentlessly.

Gill saw only one way out. Even if it were certain that Rah would follow him, he had to try everything, even to hide in the ocean if needed. He sped toward the Earth at full speed. He had the advantage, this spacecraft was better suited for control in an atmosphere than Rah's. He dived, Rah high on his tail, firing almost constantly, but missing each time, until a plasma discharge struck the engine.



Both occupants were shaken in their seats, firmly held by their safety belt.

Another plasma discharge struck the right side of the spacecraft where a part of the steering console exploded.

Jahana saw the piece of console hit her brother straight on the head, and his head fell lifelessly. She knew she could do nothing for him. She took control, but the spacecraft was in an uncontrollable spin, and headed to the mainland, to the north, where it

was covered with snow. She piloted like she had been programmed to do so for survival, and no maneuver was off-limits to her.

The spacecraft went into a cloud. Rah continued to shoot. Jahana made some maneuvers that almost sent Rah crashing to the ground, but he resumed at the last second. Jahana was flying by programming. Rah was flying by experience.

There was a shock when she touched the ground at high speed, and felt the spacecraft drag on the snowy surface.

Epilogue

When the ship stopped, she undid her seatbelt and went to see Gill. The visor of his helmet was cracked and was filled with blood. There was nothing to do, his neck obviously broken. Staggering, she found her way to the door, opened it and plunged into the white snow to try to disappear. A few seconds later, she saw Rah's spaceship hovering above, and fired a disruptor cannon, a weapon totally prohibited. The spacecraft became incandescent. In normal times, she would have been charred, but her flight suit and the cold snow protected her. Their spaceship vanished, leaving no trace.

She heard Rah's spacecraft fly away in the cloudy sky and she slid slowly to the snow-free area opened by the destruction of their spacecraft and feeling the remnant heat of the weapon. She tried to get up, and saw someone approaching her, an earthling. She lost consciousness.

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English version, June 20th 2022