

Chapter Six - The Carnan Sand Dunes - Part Two

A whining pitch carried on the wind. Evan picked out the sound and looked up to see a black spot against the rose coloured sky. The other two had yet to hear the engine sounds.

The dark shape grew as it descended into the atmosphere. Evan determined a blocky shape, with two bulges stretching out on either side. Landing lights glittered on the underside, casting a light over the clouds it passed through.

"That's a big ship," James noted, finally noticing it.

Evan estimated the ship to be larger than his family castle, and twice as long. It had been a long while since he had seen a ship of its size.

"A Great Ship," he muttered absently. "I thought them all destroyed or lost from the Break."

"It's a big one, alright," Sam said. "But there are no Great Ships in service anymore. What remains are just wrecks and relics. A true Great Ship would've been atleast four times that size."

The whining engines were accompanied by a deep rumbling as it passed high over them. This one may indeed be smaller than the fabled ships of old, Evan determined.

"Looks like it's heading to the Hath-Ba spaceport, past Riondon," Sam added.

"I've seen a Great War Ship," James said. When they both looked at him, he turned away, somewhat embarrassed. "Well, the remains of one, of course. Not a real working one. There's one buried in the ground, down towards the West Sands. You can see it from Mount Volton."

"Can you, now?" Sam asked, raising his brows. "Quite a sight it'll be, I'm sure. Hard to find a relic from the Great Wars."

Evan fell into thought as they walked. In his mind's eye, he saw starships the size of cities surrounding the planet, careening airships trailing black smoke through a battle-filled sky. Explosions sent clouds of fire and dirt into the air. Thousands of soldiers battled on bloodied fields, surrounded by thousands of dead bodies. Detonations of sorcery ripping through the air and striking the devastated ground. An entire planet crumbling under the immense powers.

He had seen these images a long time ago, in the ancient dial stone of his old tutor, Albian Feloria. A glimpse into the Great Wars that desolated the galaxy over ten thousand years earlier. Evan had been fascinated with the visuals in the cloudy orb that Albian possessed, so different from all the other dial stones he had seen before.

His father had never approved of Evan seeing what the wars had been like, but his old tutor thought that Evan could handle it, and had a right to see what gluttony for power and domination had achieved. On one occasion with the dial stone, Evan had seen an expanded view of a star system, littered with colossal space craft and countless tiny ships attacking each other. Fire ripped through the crumbling planets, torn apart by the incredible firepower of the Great Ships. The magnitude of the loss of life in just that one glimpse was lost on Evan at the time, being more in awe of the spectacle of it all.

"What do you know of the Breaking, Sam?" James asked. "I know of it, of course. My personal memories may be gone but I still have a fair bit of knowledge about a few things. But I get the feeling that you'd know a bit more about it all."

Sam shrugged, wincing from the gesture. "I know what's in the history books. Along with the endless, widespread battles, hundreds of Great Wars saw to the Breaking of the galaxy. Whole star systems, gone. Countless lives lost. In the Aftermath, the leading galactic bodies, such as the Uri-Thuren and the Sumasai, put together the S.P.A and announced the Armament Restriction Law.

"The law severely restricted and monitored the use of armaments and munitions across the galaxy. All firearms of any kind would be manufactured in an inactive state, unable to be fired without a corresponding Trigger Switch. So a person can only fire a specific weapon, if they have the Switch for it, and unable to fire any other."

"So I can't just pick up a rifle and fire it," James said, hopping over a rock.

"Nope," Sam said. "Not unless you also had the specific Trigger Switch for that rifle. And the Switch, usually the size of a thumbnail, can come in many forms. Attached on a glove, like the gauntlets the Lawmen wear in Tyken Town, or even embedded into the skin, usually in a palm. It's not fool-proof, of course. People will always find ways of manufacturing weapons without Trigger Switches, and the criminal organisations of this galaxy will certainly have their own means. But, there is a greater control of firepower and weaponry than there was thousands of years ago. Back when technology and munitions reached their peak. Back when a war raged across the entire galaxy."

"All that destructive power," James said, shaking his head. "It was no wonder it would break the galaxy if everyone used their forces to full effect."

Sam nodded. "And with armaments greatly restricted across all the governed systems, other tactics and strategies grew to prominence."

"Like these swords, which they say came from the old days before," James said, nodding to the blade on Sam's hip and the broadsword slung across Evan's back.

Sam tapped the hilt of his sword. "No real way to lock the use of a good old blade."

Evan frowned. "Technology would always destroy more than it aids. Societies will always destroy themselves, relying on such things."

"You're probably right," Sam said. "Tech and mechs are heavily relied upon for the daily lifestyles we've become accustomed to, and many have never known any other way. But with advanced tech comes the ability to increase the fire power of weapons."

"They go hand in hand, don't they?" James asked.

"Power breeds power, and control. Fear leads to the need of greater defences, which means greater power. It's never enough." Sam's tone had become melancholic, and he now studied the sky with a solemn look.

"Wars always rage," Evan told them. "The Voarn have hundreds of wars in their history, fought with sorcery alone."

The yellow mist around Sam was so distinct that it surprised Evan. A glowing edge surrounded the mist, something that Evan had not often seen. Sparks of light spread through the aura, like a lightning storm around Sam's head.

Evan felt more than saw the image of blood strewn across a battlefield. He forced himself to look away, to clear his mind before he delved too far. He could tell there were many death in Sam's past; a lot of pain and suffering. Evan wanted no part of it.

"Sam," James said, pausing before continuing. "So, you mentioned that the Oneron are capable of jumping great distances? Like we did in the cave?"

Sam regarded James, but seemed to wait for him to continue speaking.

"How does it work, exactly?" James went on. "We just... jump, like normal?"

Sam smiled at James's bemused face. "Aye, just jump. An average height of around thirty or so feet, and somewhere around fifty feet across is the average distance. But the range varies greatly between Oneron."

"So I could just jump, right now, up into the air?" James asked, his speech slowing as his thoughts took over.

This time Sam laughed. A low, breathy sound. "You want to jump, now? Go for it."

They came to a stop.

Evan stepped back and watched them both, wondering what Oneron sorcery they spoke of. He had seen Sam jump onto a rooftop in Tyken Town, but did not know about the jump in the cave of which they spoke.

When James squatted, readying himself to jump, Sam burst with laughter. A lighter, heartier laugh.

"What?" James asked, clearly confused.

"I'm sorry, Isles," Sam said, stifling his laughter. "I just haven't seen an Oneron squat so low with such a determined look on his face before. Sorry, I had flashbacks of jumping as a child." He cleared his throat as he composed himself. "Okay. So, it's a lot simpler than you may think. Just go for a simple hop upwards to start with. See how you do."

James's stern look remained when he nodded and re-positioned his feet. He bent low, and pushed up, flying into the air. Evan estimated his jump to have reached fifteen feet, before James fell back down.

James stumbled when he landed and steadied himself. A smile was on his face. "Ha, like you said. It's just a jump. Strange how I never found this out while I was living in Tyken Town."

"What use does a grown man have to jump, anyway?" Sam said lightly. "But we all would have been in a lot of trouble if you did happen to figure out that you could jump over a small building."

"Right. I would have ruined my own cover as an ordinary man."

"I told Tam that we should've shackled your feet together as a precaution, but our Foreman seemed to think that wasn't such a good idea."

James smiled, holding back a laugh. His expression shifted when he looked away, the merriment leaving his face.

Evan did not need to tap into his gift to know that James was thinking of his time in Tyken Town. The two years he had lived there, not knowing of his past. Not knowing that Sam, who posed as a work colleague, really knew who he was. Or that their employer, the one they called Tam, also knew of James's true identity. Wavering flashes of Tam's dark, stern features washed over James's head, confirming Evan's assumptions.

"We would never have shackled you," Sam said, his voice softening. "You know that, right?" When James looked up at him, Sam smiled and added, "We would've given you a heavy bag to carry at all times."

This brought a laugh from James. He sighed. "I know, Sam. It's okay. I know you all had my best interests at heart." James pressed a hand on Sam's arm. "Look, I'm sorry I was so harsh with you, back in the caves. It was just the heat of the moment. I know you aren't to blame for anything that happened to me."

Sam regarded James with a solemn look. "If I could have told you everything when I first saw you in Tyken Town, I would have."

James nodded. A moment of silence passed between them, before James added, "Come on, let's get going."

They continued walking for some time.

After several minutes, James bent down and pushed off, soaring into the air. He sailed in a wide arc, before landing several yards ahead of them.

"That is *so* much fun," James said when he turned back to them. "Come on, Sam, show me what you've got."

Sam shook his head, smiling. "I'd love to, James, but not right now. I'd need a good rest before I can hope to do anything other than walking and talking."

James frowned deeply as he looked over Sam's bloodied shoulder.

Splashes of purple and yellow burst over James's head, rippling in the air like heavy objects dropping in water. It was then that Evan determined the truth behind James's guilt. He had a chance to help Sam, and fear had frozen him. Evan shook his head. Why the gods had sent him across the galaxy to find this man, James Island, Evan still could not say.

They passed the rest of the way with some idle talk, but they eventually fell silent as their journey went on. The sweltering sun had risen high in the sky by the time they reached the outskirts of Toolin.

1. So this chapter serves as a recap for the overarching story, which kind of got left aside while they were in the caves. What did you make of summarising about their plan moving ahead? I tried to give details without getting bogged down with everything, as we'll be getting more into things later.

2. How are the characters coming across?

3. This is the first chapter (aside from the very first one) where we get Evan's POV and see that he has some strange things going on inside him. Any thoughts about that?

4. Anything else stand out for you? Good or bad?