Apocalyptica: Book One

First Contact

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Prologue

An insecto-humanoid ran through a dimly lit corridor, his clawed feet clicking on the metal floor. He checked his belt for the third time and breathed a sigh of relief; the memory card was still there. Vital information was stored on that card and if he lost that then the Triad could lose two very important planets. The Torlan’Dahk stopped at a door, swiped his I.D card against the metal plate set into the frame and entered the room. The room was a small office that consisted of a desk and a large screen set into the wall. Immediately in front of the Torlan’Dahk was a black, high-backed swivel chair.

“Sectin, I bring grave news,” He said

“What is it now Alaton?” The chair turned to reveal another Torlan’Dahk.

“There have been reports of massacres on Mustar and *Le Drakange Haleu*, sir,” Alaton replied handing the Sectin the memory card. The Sectin inserted the card into a slot in his desk and a series of graphs and figures appeared on the screen.

“This is terrible,” He said, looking at the information in horror. The Sectin pressed a button on the keyboard in front of him. “Velgor, tell the rest of the Sectinate that we are initialising Project Alpha-Beta-Alpha,” Alaton was shocked.

“Are you sure sir?”

“Yes Alaton, I need you to find the first,”

“But he will not accept,”

“Tell him that the time has come for the Four to join, he will understand.”

Chapter one: Radon

The beach is an amazing place; white capped waves crash against immovable rocks, seagulls cry their incessant and maddening cries and rather pissed off demons chase innocents, who were just trying to find a nice place to sit down and eat their lunch, across the golden sand. Ok, that last bit isn't normal and needs a bit of explaining. My name is Radon Temporum-Drakus Jr. A bit of a weird name, yes, but I’m not your average, run-of-the-mill human. I am, in fact, a Drakange, or Dragon in Earth tongue. To the untrained eye I look like your average 23 year old, trench coat-wearing human male: about six foot tall, short brown hair and a bit of stubble. In truth what you see is a disguise and is purely for ease of living as my true form is rather large and cumbersome. The pissed off demon, however, is exactly that and I am now running for my life.

I looked over my shoulder and ended up tripping on a large rock, landing flat on my face. I looked up to see that the demon was getting closer so I got to my feet and started to run towards it, sparks dancing over my hands. When the demon was about three feet away I adjusted my path so that I was running to the demon's right hand side and I struck out my right arm. I felt my arm connect with the demon's neck, sending 10,000 volts coursing through its body. It fell to the floor, shaking uncontrollably and slowly turning to dust.

I located a suitable rock and sat down, placing my bag by my feet and removing a medium sized plastic container. I removed the container’s lid, took out a sandwich and proceeded to eat. As I ate I thought about the circumstances that had led me to this unassuming planet. A few weeks ago I had been approached by a shady looking man in a brown travelling cloak asking me to go to Earth and fetch him a sword that was hidden in the cellar of a dead necromancer’s mansion. Being the intrepid adventurer that I am, I accepted and set off to return to the planet on which I was raised (long story). For the past two weeks I looked for anything that would tell me the location of the elusive mansion and I was finally brought to Penzance, Cornwall. Well, that’s not true, the mansion itself was located in Oxford but after a good old fashioned cellar exploration I learned that the sword had been moved to a secret location in Penzance hence me eating ham and marmite sandwiches on a beach. I reached into my coat and pulled out a small leather-bound diary and opened it. After one last check through my notes I reassured myself that I had finally located the sword’s resting place, an old tower atop a hill near Ludgvan called Roger’s tower.

When I had finished my lunch I stood up and walked up the concrete path that was set into the rocks behind where I was sat.

“Radon Temporum?” I turned to see a Torlan’Dahk standing in the middle of the path, the strolling humans completely oblivious to his existence.

“Yes?” I replied.

“We need your help. It is a matter of great importance,”

“When you say ‘we’ you mean the Triad don’t you,”

“Yes,”

“Then no. They’ve messed me around enough as it is,” I turned away and started to walk.

“You say they have let you down, but you still fight in their name,” Alaton said, running to catch up with me.

“My reasons are my own now get lost, I have work to do,”

“The Triad are willing to pay… generously,”

“I don’t need money,”

“Not money,”

“Then what?”

“A new ship and the artefact you are currently looking for,” I stopped.

“I’m listening,”

“It’s a refurbished X-83 Raven called the Cygnus,”

“A space station?”

“Yes, and yours to command,”

“Ok, the ship I can believe but the sword is hidden a mile underground in a cave that no-one has been in for over two centuries. How the hell did you get it?”

“Well, I must preserve some professional secrets now, mustn’t I,” I was still unconvinced about the sword but I desperately needed a ship as I wasn’t a big fan of public transport.

“It’s still a no,” I resumed walking.

“The time has come Ancient-son,” I stopped again. No-one had called me that in over 5 years. “Time for the Four to join,”

“Ok, what do you want me to do?”

“We are assembling a task force to investigate a series of massacres on both Mustar and your own home and we want you to assemble and lead it,”

“Why me though?”

“Because you’re the best we’ve got,”

“I thought the Triad said they’d never call on my services ever again,”

“They did but we’re desperate, Radon.”

“Alright, ok, I’ll do it. Where am I going first?”

“Mustar, we need you to recruit Ras’lion Gond,”

The Cygnus was huge. It was currently in orbit over Japan, undetected by any of Earth’s scanning instruments even though it was the size of a small town. I was standing on the bridge looking down on the Human civilisation.

“Plot a course for Nehshlakairn,” I said to the navigator.

“But our orders are to go straight to Mustar, sir,”

“I know but there is something I have to do first. Alaton, do you have the sword on board the ship?”

“Yes, it is in your chambers waiting for you,”

“Thanks. Rhian, the course?”

“Oh yeah, sorry sir,” Rhian inserted the co-ordinates into the computer and the Cygnus entered hyperspace.

The double doors of my cabin slid apart with a hydraulic hiss and I walked in. Although I was the captain of the ship, I had been given a standard crew cabin as the captain’s cabin was being refurbished to suit my ‘arcane nature’ as Alaton had put it. My current sleeping quarters weren’t very big but were sufficiently furnished. There was a bed set into the left hand wall with a desk directly opposite. There was also a chair, coffee table, drawers and an empty bookshelf. I walked over to my bed and found upon it a long object wrapped in purple fabric. I picked it up and removed the fabric. Inside was the sword I had been looking for. It was about a metre long with a golden handle, pommel and cross-guard and a blade made of a strange white metal that had a purple sheen. The handle had a scale pattern carved into it that improved the sword’s grip and there was an oval amethyst set into the centre of the cross-guard. I could now see why the nehshlakairnian wanted this sword.

“Sir, you’re wanted on the engineering deck,” Said Rhian’s voice through the comm link. I wrapped the sword up, placed it back on my bed and headed down to the engineering deck.

The engineering deck was located on the bottom level of the Cygnus and was home to the ship’s engines and infinity drive. As I exited the elevator, I was greeted by an old friend.

“Ah Radon, it’s so good to see a familiar face down here in the pits of Tartarus,” Said a muscle-bound engineer.

“Asteronth, what are you doing here?” Asteronth was a Farin, a native of Fairia, Mustar, and his appearance reflected that. His skin was tanned from the heat of the magma that surrounded Fairia and his hands were scarred and calloused from working the forges. He was about seven feet tall with dark, shoulder length hair and a thick but short beard.

“I needed a ship back to Mustar and the Triad were looking for engineers to look after this rust bucket,” He replied, tapping the wall.

“Cool, so how’s Ras these days?”

“Fine, I hear he’s been chosen for this taskforce you’re assembling,”

“Yeah, I’ve just got something to do first and then we’ll go get him. Anyway, you asked for me,”

“Yes, we’re having a problem with the infinity drive,”

“Show me,” Asteronth led me across the deck to a large blue cylinder located in the centre of the room.

“We’ve been having a hard time getting this thing started in time with the rest of the ship. I’ve checked the computer and it says that there are two phaser couplings missing but I’ve looked and they are all there,”

“Let me have a look,” I walked over to the other side of the room and removed one of the panels. Behind it were about twenty cylinders all of which had vertically oriented handles. “Here’s your problem,” I reached in and turned the first and last cylinders ninety degrees so that their handles were horizontal. “There you go, problem solved,”

“Thanks mate; you’ve made my life a lot easier,”

“You’re welcome but tell me, what is Torlan’Dahk tech doing on a Iehashtovorkian ship?” Asteronth shrugged.

“All hands to your stations, we are now approaching Nehshlakairn,”

The landing craft touched down on Nehshlakairn and a staircase lowered, allowing me, Alaton and Asteronth to leave the craft. Nehshlakairn was known throughout the Triad as ‘The Slums Planet’ and was populated by thieves, assassins and other lowlife scum. The place we had come to reminded me of a medieval village with cramped, smelly streets and shady inhabitants. The Nehshlakairnians themselves came in a myriad of forms as they were a polymorphic race like the Drakange.

“So where’s this dealer then?” Asteronth asked. I pointed to the door that I was stood next to and knocked. A small rectangular section of the door slid open to reveal a pair of beady eyes.

“Password?”

“S*hlalock Ka’lein*,” I heard the sound of bolts being removed from the other side of the door.

“Come in,” I pushed the door open and we entered a small dark living room with nought but a carpet and fire. “Do you have it?” I handed the dealer the sword, which he then removed from the purple fabric. “She’s even more beautiful than I imagined. Do you know what she’s forged form, Dragon?”

“No,”

“A rare ethereal metal called féthenhír, the spirit metal. But that is not why I want the sword,” The dealer pulled out a knife and tried prising out the amethyst but to no avail. The dealer then spontaneously burst into flames and was ash within seconds. The blast from the flames knocked us back and I hit my head on the wall, knocking me out.

I awoke in my cabin with a sandwich on my coffee table. I sat up and rubbed my head, which ached like hell. I got off my bed and walked over to my desk, picking up the sandwich on the way. I sat down and took a bite, ham and peanut butter, strange but nice.

“Come in,” I said and Alaton walked in.

“How did you know I was here?” I pointed to my screen which showed CCTV footage of the corridor outside my room.

“How long was I out?” I asked.

“About twenty minutes.” I shrugged and continued to eat.

“Who brought this?” I asked, waving the half eaten sandwich.

“Rhian, sir. He thinks very highly of you,”

“I know. He’s a good kid, slightly dim, but good. And the sword?”

“Asteronth is looking after it,

“Good, how long till Mustar?”

“Half an hour, sir,”

“Ok.”

Alaton left the room and I returned to my sandwich.

About five minutes later there was a knock at my door.

“Intrude,” I said and Asteronth walked in, carrying the sword and wearing asbestos gloves to prevent his hands from being burned. “You really shouldn’t be wearing that stuff,”

“I’m immune to asbestosis,”

“I’m not[[1]](#footnote-1). Anyway, aren’t you resistant to fire?”

“Burns from enchantments are different. Where do you want this?”

“On my desk, please,” Asteronth placed the sword on my desk and left the room.

“Sir, you’re needed on the bridge,” said Rhian over the comm.

“What’s up?” I asked, running onto the bridge.

“We’re being hailed, sir,” Rhian replied

“In hyperspace?”

“No sir, we’ve dropped out; Mustaran law[[2]](#footnote-2),”

“Ok, who’s hailing us?”

“The sanctum, sir,”

“On screen,”

Chapter 2: Ras’lion

I stood next to the Captain on the parade ground, the entire ships company of the Mustaran Defensive Destroyer Sanctum had just formed into squads of their respective branches and were waiting for him to stand forward and welcome them back, but for most it would be a welcome home speech. I took in my surroundings, the hard concrete floor, the faint smell of boot polish and bees wax, not to say the gleaming boots which were the source of this familiar smell. I smiled; it felt good to be back after all that time. The Captain then took an inhale of breath and moved forward to a raised podium and pressed the button that was in front of him. I then took my first real look at the squads; almost over three thousand of the best engineers, electricians, cooks and stewards stood before me and the moment that the Captain spoke his voice was projected to 10 times the normal volume.

“You may stand at ease.” In an instant the sound of three thousand boots moving apart, almost all in unison, made a clear snapping noise and again I smiled; I never got tired of that noise, like the team was already firing up the well-oiled machine of teamwork. “Let me be the first to welcome you back to the Navy, I guess you all enjoyed your year off.” I saw a majority of shaking heads. “I thought not.” He paused as many laughed. “However on a grimmer note I see a few holes in our ranks, not to desertion but to our last engagement and I want all of you to put your heads down and remember them for they are the heroes who saved us last year.” I put my own head down, thinking the people I knew that had not made it last year, Bor’dam, Kahin and Heo’lop. “May their souls find the fire of eternity with Amethyst” The Captain said as we all raised our heads. The sound of three thousand replies rang through the square. “And may us to follow, when we are done with this life.” A pause then the Captain spoke again.

“Now today is not a day to lament on the past because as of today we once again step on-board the most heavily defended ship of our fleet and set course for the future, but before we do that I want to introduce out new X.O, Commander Ras’lion Gond, a man who fought with lightning skill and was the one who masterminded our escape last year.” I took a step forward and saw all eyes on me (talk about pressure) but I took the Captain’s place as he stood down. I took a brief look on the squads and knew instantly that those eyes on me where judging me on every step and movement. Of course they would look for flaws, I was known throughout the ship but it would be impossible to meet and please everyone, so this was one of my chances to make a good impression. I then opened my mouth to speak and almost shouted forgetting that my voice was now enhanced ten times making most people put their hands to their ears (good impression ruined).

“I’m so sorry; I’m not used to doing this kind of thing, it is kind of nerve racking. But I will say this before I run away from the spotlight, it is a pleasure to be the X.O not to the Sanctum but to a more brilliant crew for all the people I know on this company, no one has let me down nor disappointed me and I feel that it’s my responsibly to make sure you are well getting your chances and getting your rewards for hard work. Welcome back” I took a step down and felt a hand on my shoulder. The Captain said in my ear.

“Not bad for your first one lad.” I nodded and the Captain resumed his position and starting talking about crew leaders and other senior staff duties.

I was sitting in the X.O’s cabin, my cabin, and looked at the new modifications that had been recently installed, to the terminal that connected me to the rest of the ship and the bunk that had been updated to cover me in a protective sheet just in case a hull breach happened while I slept. I hated them, I was brought up with the older versions and trained in them and now through the last year I had been through, what was basically, my training again to understand how a fire extinguisher worked (not that I would need them). I moved forward and sat in the chair in front of my desk and terminal, I tapped the screen and my private messages appeared showing I had two new messages. One from Hir’tor, the ship’s Captain and Heuran an engineering officer down below, I tapped the Captain’s first as it was flashing to state it was important. It read:

Commander,

At 17:00 come to my cabin, no later as this is important and concerning your duties for the next few weeks.

Captain Hir’tor.

I looked at my wrist watch, it was only 14:30, and whatever the Captain wanted to talk about would not be too important if he was to hold it off till then. So I tapped off his letter and continued to Heuran’s.

Ras

Meet me and Jan’ryt on the engineering deck when you can, time to open that bottle of King’s brass firemake to celebrate the Sanctum being back on active duty.

Heuran.

I smiled; Heuran and Jan’ryt were always quick to open a ‘celebration’ bottle after anything significant enough to be an excuse. However being away from the old girl made me think twice and I decided to go down and take a peek. I quickly locked my terminal, got out of my chair and moved towards the steel door that retracted upwards to reveal the passage outside. I took a left and walked down the thin corridor, other familiar Mustarans smiled at me and I gave a return, we were all happy about being back on the MS Sanctum. The feel under the feet felt good, but some of the upgrades I kept seeing around made me think that the Sanctum was a long lost friend whose old face you’d never forget. I reached one of the many elevators and pressed the button on the side. While waiting for it I thought about Mustar below us, my family and friends who I won’t see again for at least a few months and I had to be honest to myself; I was glad. One more prank on me from my niece and brother I would blow a casket (trust me you would too if you found Neahfj worms in your pillow after a hard day). The elevator doors opened and saw a two young men step out and gave me a quick salute, a vertical hand coming up the body to chest height with a flick. I returned it and stepped inside the elevator, pressed the engineering symbol and waited. In the old Sanctum the elevators made a slight hydraulic hiss when it operated but now it was non-existent which freaked me out, so I started hissing myself only to realise it was my hand on fire, I quickly willed it to be extinguished and realised that I was at the engineering deck and the doors in front opened and I walked forward, I then slowly turned to face a balding Jan’ryt, who was wearing dark blue overalls which were still clean but he still managed to receive a grimy face after a few hours. I smiled at him and we both shock hands which gave me some unwanted oil on my hand but it was still good to see the old man.

“Tis good to see you Ras, I mean sir.” He said in his heavy Enlavon accent while saluting. I waved him down and replied.

“Ah experience is more valuable, put your hand away and you can call me Ras old timer.” Jan’ryt gave me a small smile and said.

“Nice to know your elders have experience, which is underrated in some parts on this ship, but I think you’re more interested in seeing Heuran are you not?” He asked.

“It’ll be good to see her yeah, how you and her been then?” I asked as we started to walk down the corridor.

“She is fine, little soft around the edges now, not so the lean mean Heuran machine anymore, she is getting older. She is only a few years younger than me.”

“What so a few years younger than eternity then.” I then laughed. Jan’ryt didn’t but he smiled.

“What cheek, don’t let her hear you say that. She’ll pommel you faster than a Bulron on a rampage. As for me well look at my head and that’ll tell you.” We turned and reached a narrow and short corridor just enough to fit one person down it with a little space left over so I moved forward first and ducked my head down a little.

After a minute or so we reached an iron door in front of us, the plaque read Heuran Nabill, Senior overseer of Engineering. I knocked three times to get a loud reply.

“Come in.” I moved forward and pushed to door open, Heuran’s room had not changed in the slightest. I saw the bunk that had been up right against the side wall, a working table that had a terminal and a ton of paper work already. And sitting in the chair in front of it was Heuran herself, Jan’ryt was right, she wasn’t in her prime physical condition anymore but it seem that she could still knock you off your feet if you were not careful, she stood up and gave me a firm handshake. “Welcome back Ras.”

“And to you, shall we open that bottle?” I asked, Heuran nodded and moved back to her desk and opened a drawer and took out a bottle of Firebrand and three plastic cups.

“Suppose you want one as well Jan.” Jan’ryt smiled and moved forward and picked up his cup. I did the same and so did Heuran.

“To the sods that fell last year, Amethyst rests their souls in the fires of eternity.” Jan toasted.

“To return of the Sanctum and her much needed presence” Heuran replied

“To a safe but fulfilling future and lack of Neahfj worms.” I continued, we all downed our drinks and Heuran refilled.

Two hours later I emerged from Heuran’s cabin, the place smelling of expensive wine. Heuran and Jan where completely out of it, unlike me as I only had the two glasses and just watched them wolf the wine down while sharing old stories and memories. I looked down and saw it was 16:50, I then realised I had to be at the Captain’s cabin in ten minutes, so I quickly rushed back down the narrow corridor and quickly walked towards the elevator, only to find it filled with engineers and other workers. So I waited for the next one and sighed thankfully when the heavy doors opened. I moved forward and rapidly pressed the bridge deck icon. After a few minutes I reached the top of the ship, moved to my left and followed down the heavily decorated corridor to reach a door on my right, the plaque read Captain. R. Hir’tor. I rapped on the teak door and a clear and inspiring voice replied, “Enter.” I moved forward and opened the door; the Captain was at his desk tapping his terminal, he briefly looked up and down again. “Hello Commander, enjoy your first day back?”

“Not that I have done much yet sir, it’s been good to see some old friends.” I replied and moved forward towards his desk, he smiled and picked up a piece of paper and handed it to me.

“That’s the times you are running the bridge, you’ll see the other duties you should be doing on the bottom when you’re off.” I looked at the time table and it said I should be on the bridge now.

“Thanks sir. I better get going” I gave him a quick salute and moved for the bridge.

A few hours into my shift on the bridge was strange to me, I never really came up here as my old job on the ship meant I was down on the gunnery deck however because of my retraining I knew what to do, I had to keep the Sanctum just patrolling the northern hemisphere and make sure nothing unannounced got though without my permission. I looked to my right, there was communication, left: weaponry, in front: sensors and behind me was engineering, with myself in the centre. There were about nine of us on deck, two for each branch, one officer and a rate. Everything was fine till the sensor rate told me that an incoming ship was traveling without permission towards us at FTL speeds but quickly dropped out and I could see the mass of it to our port.

“Scan them.”

“Aye X.O” that came from a Lieutenant in front of me, who quickly scanned the ship. The results appeared on the terminal in front of me; it was an X-83 Raven called the Cygnus and was under the allegiance of…….

“Oh god what are they doing here?” I said as I read the last word of the report: Triad.

“Who is it? Anyone worth blasting apart sir?” Asked my communication rate, I looked at him and answered.

“I think it best we hail them instead of shooting them, we are under an alliance with them.”

“Who is it then?” My chief engineer officer asked.

“Triad: and they brought an X-83.”

“Hmmm, well I wonder what they’re up to.” The communication officer turned and said to me.

“X.O, you’re on screen in ten seconds.”

“Thanks Loy. Everyone be quiet.” They all nodded and turned their heads to a screen that just opened up and revealed a Iehashtovorkian who spoke first with a rather impatient tone.

“Mustarian ship Sanctum let us though, this is Triad business.” I smiled coldly.

“You’d do whatever you damn please wouldn’t you, however under Mustarian law I have to speak with your Captain, no matter who you are. Otherwise we open fire.” The Iehashtovorkian went out of sight and in about thirty seconds another face appeared, a face I recognised immediately.

“Ah, what a pleasant surprise, however I’d never thought I see you working with the Triad as a team again, Radon.” The man, or should I say dragon, Radon then smiled and I returned it.

Chapter 3: Radon

“So let me guess, you want me to go on a Triad mission that is certainly going to: one, injure me; two, freeze me; three, somehow burn me; four, maybe kill me and five, make me jump in front of running lunatics. If not I decline," Ras said.

We were at the docks in Orion Auros standing next to a pair of landing craft, one mine and the other his.

“Well, I’m not so sure about the burning, but everything else is in abundance, especially the running lunatics,” I replied.

“It’ll be like the good old days, Ras and Radon facing death and danger whilst laughing in the faces of both,”

“Urm, about that; Death called in sick so Certain Doom had to take his place,”

“Oh. So is it just us or do we get a team?”

“We get a team, us and two others. It’s a Triad project called PABA,”

“PABA?”

“Project Alpha-Beta-Alpha,”

“Ah, who else is on the team?” I shrugged.

“I need to check into the Triad HQ to find out,”

We stood there for about five minutes until Ras’lion said,

“We going or what?”

“You’re the native; you should be taking me there,”

“Well in that case, follow me Mr Temporum,”

“Lead the way Mr Gond,” And so we went.

The Triad HQ was located near the centre of the city in a building that was so overt it was covert. It was an old stone building that wouldn’t look out of place in 19th century London. We passed through the revolving doors and entered the lobby. The room was a good 30 feet tall with a row of desks at the far end and The Triad icon, a peace symbol with avian wings, covering the floor. For the most part the lobby was empty, save the couple of dozen people. There were races from all corners of the universe: Mustaran, Torlan’Dahk, Aelvorian, Iehashtovorkian, Shargaroth and a black scaled European Dragon. We made our way to the central desk and I asked to see Mr Berwick.

Five minutes passed when we were approached by an Enly, a native of the earth region with pale skin and dark hair.

“Hello Mr Temporum, my name is Abelhandov Berwick,” He said, shaking my hand, “And, judging by your uniform, you must be Commander Gond,”

“A pleasure, Mr Berwick,”

“Come my friends, we have much to discuss.”

Abelhandov’s office was quite small, fitting only a desk with computer, two chairs and a small bookshelf. Me and Ras took a seat opposite the desk.

“So, you’re here to learn of the location of your next team member. But before we do that there are some things you need to know. First, your funding and resources are managed by me so I will be accompanying you though I shall not be leaving the ship,”

“Great, our resources are being managed by a guy called ‘Swindler’,” I said.

“My name is in a dead language so it is meaningless,” Abe replied.

“As is mine. Coleopteran is not as dead a language as you may think,”

“As is so, but we are getting side-tracked. The second point is that when you have assembled the crew you are to report to central HQ for a mission briefing,”

“Why?” Ras asked

“I don’t know, these are my orders,”

“Anything else?” I asked.

“No that is all. Now onto the subject of your next target. His name is Kale Jones, I believe you are acquainted.”

“Yeah, we’ve met. So where is he?”

“We don’t know, last I heard he was sighted near Yggdrasil.”

After three days of searching, Kale was as elusive as ever. On the fourth day, I was awoken by Ras and finally given some good news.

The bridge was alive with activity.

“Sir, I think we’ve found him,” Rhian said.

“Show me,” I leaned over Rhian’s shoulder and looked at the screen. And, sure enough, there it was. A large, bone coloured vessel that fit the description on our file.

“That’s an alpha class cruiser! I mean it’s been modified, but the basic structure is still the same,”

“Should we hail?”

“Yes,”

An unfamiliar face appeared on screen.

“Is this Kale Jones?” I asked.

“’Tis. Speaking?”

“I am Radon Temporum-Drakus.: Captain of The Cygnus. “

“I know who you are Radon,”

“Your assistance is required in a matter of universal safety,”

“Take it up with my arse because that’s the only thing that gives a crap,” He replied.

“Master Jones, this is non-negotiable!”

“Is it really? Well I disagree,”

“Sir, there is an unidentified ship preparing to fire on us,” Rhian stated.

“We will finish this conversation later,” I said to Kale.

“We shall see,” He replied, vanishing from the screen.

“This is the Alantéa asking you nicely to surrender your ship and all its cargo. This is a one-time offer and shall not be repeated,” Said a female voice over the comm system.

“Right, who turned off the comm security?” I asked. Rhian slowly raised his hand. “I’m not going to bother,” I pressed a button on the arm of my chair. “This is Captain Temporum-Drakus of The Cygnus telling you to get lost or have your ship torn in two by a barrage of striker cannons,”

“Ah Captain, your reputation precedes you. Why don’t you come over to my ship and we’ll have a chat about your current situation.”

“I’d rather take a bath in molecular acid, but thanks for the offer.”

“It wasn’t an offer.” I took my finger off the comm button.

“Ras, how far out is the Sanctum?”

“About half a minute’s flight,” Ras replied.

“Good, have them prepare to fire upon the pirate vessel. Rhian, charge the guns,”

“Yes sir.”

“This is The Cygnus asking you nicely to turn your ship around and get out of my sight. This is a one-time offer and will not be repeated.”

“Sir, we have a problem,” Rhian said “it seems the Alantéa has boarded the Cygnus and her crew is making its way up to the bridge,” And, sure enough, the bridge doors opened, allowing a dozen men, armed with rather nasty looking guns, and one woman, presumably the captain, to enter.

“Kill them all,” She said. The men raised their guns.

“Don’t even think about it,” I said. I felt a sharp pain at the back of my skull and everything went black.

When we returned to the bridge of the Cygnus all of the pirates were burned to a crisp and Ras was sitting in my chair looking rather pleased with himself.

“Get out of my chair,” I said.

“What? No thanks! I just saved your crew.”

“I know but the chair comes first, now out!” Ras got out of my chair and went to his own. “Anyway where was I? Oh, yeah, good work Ras. Ladies and gentlemen I would like to introduce a new member to our group, Andro Drake,” Andro gave a little wave. “Now I want everyone to treat him like one of the crew even though he has his own ship. Ok? Now back to work!”

“Sir, what should we do about the pirate ship?” A crewman asked.

“Whatever you like, I don’t care.”

“Priming cannons. 10%...30%...70%...100%. Firing,” On the screen the Alantéa was blasted by hyper-accelerated dark matter cannon balls and was reduced to space dust in a matter of seconds.

“So, where to now?” Andro asked. I shrugged.

“Wherever the last recruit is.”

“Delta Vega,” Rhian stated.

“Onward to hell we go.”

Chapter 4: Ras’lion

Compared to the Sanctum, the Cygnus was as advanced as a caveman was to knife. The bulkheads, hatches and corridors where all copper lined with a noise cancelling effect. I stood in awe at the advanced computers and monitors that appeared at every corner, some looked powerful enough to fly the ship on its own and the prospect of the weapons outside outmatched any Alpha cruiser tenfold, the scanners and communications where almost weapon grade powered and cloaking device could stay clocked for hours at a time without the need to charge. Every time I took a breath I could almost taste a newish metallic taste that proved my theory that this space station had just been renovated, and my other guess was that it was renovated just to tempt Radon and looking at all the features of this colossal station who the heck would say no to bribe like this?

I stood in my ‘new’ cabin that was very similar to the one on the Sanctum, just a lack of a home feel. I took my sword and shield out of their holdings, both had the stains of blood on them from the battle of against the pirates and I decided to get them cleaned, so I moved towards the hatch and it without out sound it opened, I looked to my left then to my right carefully to get my bearings as I was having trouble navigating the ship without help from the station’s A.I. I moved right and walked down corridor, every step made almost no sound and I remembered how the Cygnus did not need a mass crew to operate, unlike the Sanctum, so the lack of noise unnerved me but it did not feel hostile so I was comfortable enough however it still felt alien to me. For a few minutes I continued to walk, I then realised I was lost. Annoyed I spoke “A.I mate, dude, err thing.”

“Yes, Commander Gond” A metallic voice replied that seemed to have a hint, don’t get me wrong it’s an A.I but it sounded like humour, that it was enjoying me getting lost. (That’s an A.I for you).

“Errm, you can call me Ras, everyone does but where can I get my weapons cleaned before they rust?”

“Take a left at the next turn and walk down for 12 meters, there is an elevator which can take you to level 8, you then take a right turn and then make your way to a three way fork and take the left turning, next you…” Annoyed because I knew there be a simpler route I interrupted the A.I

“Yeah, thanks I’ll find my own way.”

“As you wish; Ras.”

Eventually, like after two hours, I found myself at a wash station type thing, well it was really a unused galley but what the heck no one was around and the blood had dried which would be a pain to get off. I moved into galley and flicked on the lights, and I thought I saw a large silhouette near the end of the hall before the lights came on but I realised it was nothing. I looked around and saw a sink, clean and gleaming. I smiled, not for long it won’t be. I moved towards it and placed the shield and sword on the surface next to it and looked around for scrubbing materials in the cupboards below the sink, I found a sponge, brush and thankfully some washing liquid which was perfect. I stood up to realise that my sword and shield and disappeared, I then felt the tip of a sword on my back and remembered the shadow, bollocks is the only word that came to mind.

“Long time no see Ras.” I recognised the gruff voice. In one lightning quick moved I jumped on the sink and jumped over the huge mass of the man behind me grabbing the sword and shield in the process from the man’s bear like hands.

“Mother told us not to steal.” I said as I landed, the man turned around which revealed his beaten face, “Did she not Asteronth?” I smiled, dropped the weapons and embraced the man.

“Good to see you brother, it’s been what five years or more?” He asked.

“About that yes, but why are you here working with the Triad?”

“I was helping with the refurbishment on this station, and heard a team of Rentruns were being assembled and your name was mentioned so I decided to stay, just to see you again.” He smiled and bent down and picked up the weapons off the floor, and put them on the surface behind him. “Dried blood on the weapons, terrible to remove; Ras why didn’t you clean after the battle?” I looked at him and said,

“It’s easy to get lost on board; it took me a few hours to find this unused Galley.”

“Did you not ask the A.I?”

“Yes, but it seemed to be having a ball at my misfortune and seemed to be mocking me with directions.”

“Oh really, well Sasha does have away with her own twisted humour but there is no better A.I out in the universe.” I wondered why the A.I was playing with me; I’d been thinking it was male based.

“Thank you Mr Gond. And oh, Mr Go... I mean Ras. Radon would like to see you on the bridge.” Replied the A.I, who I guessed was listening all along not just at the moment Asteronth complemented it. Asteronth then turned and turned on the tap behind me and said.

“I’ll clean your weapons for you, you go and see Radon then, we have likely reached Delta Vega for your next recruit. “ I smiled and replied.

“Well, if I can find a way to an elevator first that can get me to the bridge level, otherwise Radon will be waiting for a while.”

“Well the nearest elevator is down two doors on your left.” He replied as he began to pour on the washing liquid on the sword, and I could start to see the blood lift off already.

“Cheers Aster, I’ll talk to you later.” I moved out of the Galley to see that guy of the Alpha Cruiser waiting outside, Andro was it? What the hell was he standing watching me for?

“Ah, Ras’lion Gond; your reputation precedes you.” He hinted at my scars on my face, a testament to my old Triad days. I nodded and said.

“Well I can’t say I have heard much of you sir, but being able to drop off radar for 69 years must be an impressive feat.” He shrugged and replied.

“69 years is like a day to me now, but I like the shadows and keeping out of the way. Anyway I think Radon wants us both up on deck, shall we proceed?” I nodded and took off for the bridge.

We arrived on the bridge and looked for Radon, who was not present, just the bridge crew who ignored us except Rhian who approached us and said.

“Radon is just on his way, he found out the name of your next team mate, a rather well experienced Rentrun by the name of Nagaon,”

“Well whatever this mission is about I feel sorry for who or what we are going after,” I said while almost laughing, Andro however was a bit confused at me saying this.

“What is so special about him?”

“Well he is for one, a Genlor and a rather large one at that; he is a colossal creation of nature over 8ft tall and well as the legend goes he has skin thicker and tougher than steel. Plus I heard he took down an entire enemy squad of thirty men just using his fists, but I think the number has been stretched over the years however,” I explained as I moved to the forward observation hatch. “Although, rumour has it that the reason he became a Rentrun was that he killed his best friend in order to complete a mission, a mission that if he did not complete meant the end of his own race. I cannot even understand the position he was in but he made it and, like Radon and myself, afterwards he left due to rules and regulations concerning that mission, stating that if he did his way he could have saved his friend.” I watched as a small and rusted freighter passed on the port hand side, named The Divingston. I turned back around and continued. “Well that’s the story anyway,”

“And all of it is true,” said a voice from the elevator, it was Radon.

“Captain on deck!” Rhian shouted as everyone except Andro and I stood up straight and still.

“Rhian, how many times stop doing that, I don’t like it.” Radon expressed as he moved into the bridge.

“Sorry, sir force of habit.” Radon grunted and moved to where I was standing and took a look at the freighter that just passed, his eyes seemed to sharpen but nothing out the ordinary.

“The Divingston, what is a ship like that doing here I wonder?” He asked, and straight away an officer replied to his question.

“On a trade route to the Banner quadrant but stopping here for fuel, privately owned business called Trade King.” Another grunt from Radon to say he heard, he moved away and started to talk again.

“Well, to business lads. As Ras just told you we are going after a Genlor named Nagaon, a very old and well respected Triad member. However, as Ras said, he quit due to a personal assignment.” A brief pause as Radon looked around, “Information says he’s got a bounty on his head from annoying some mobsters on the surface so he has gone underground but he kept information going to the Triad and it says he is in Gamek and will meet us at these coordinates.”

“Do you know what mobsters you’re talking about?” Asked Andro, who had been silent up till now.

“Ever heard of the Bosat and Foxtrout families?” Andro nodded but I had never heard of them.

“What do they do?” I asked.

“The Bosat, their leader Gen’hime, an Enly who deals in drugs, mainly in the drug Persona, holds territory in a small parts of Muster and Janred and got upwind of Nagaon blowing open their secret ring, placing a four hundred thousand kW[[3]](#footnote-3) on him. And the Foxtrouts love to gamble and racketeer, and Nagaon ‘accidently’” Radon used his fingers as quote marks, “killed their boss Jugo Flamesteed, and set their own bounty of six hundred thousand kW on him increasing the total to a grand total of a million so you can guess he is very popular right now.”

“I can guess” I replied, “What’s the plan then if we know hostiles are involved?”

“Well to be honest, I’m going to be devious and let the two families take each other out; I forgot to mention they hate each other’s guts.” Radon said smiling.

“And once they are killing each for the glory of killing Nagaon, we snatch him out and bring him aboard.” Andro brought up.

“That’s the plan; I think you best gear up: we leave in an hour.” Radon ordered, and turned back around to watch The Divingston, his eyes almost penetrating the surface of its rusted hull.

An hour later, I was all ready for the landing. I was geared up into my combat gear, a flexible under body suit of armour with a dark reddish flak jacket, black combat trousers and sturdy black boots; this protected me from some sword slashes and blunt attacks not to mention low temperatures seeing as I hated them. On my right was my sword (cleaned and shining) inside its sheath, my shield strapped to my back and two hidden knives, one hid in my boot, the other in my jacket, I also wore a wrist band on my right wrist which was good luck charm from home. Radon sitting on my left was in his usual trench coat with his katana on his right side hidden just out of view, and lastly Andro who was sitting in front of me. He was wearing, err whatever you call that what he was wearing. The shuttle we took was rumbling slightly and making good haste towards the surface, we seemed to be heading toward a large green lit city, which of must have been Gamek. In about ten minutes we landed on the lime coloured surface, in the city’s high-rise district which was impressively dominating, gloomy and filled with skyscraper currents which gave a chilling wind which hit me the second I got off the shuttle, followed by Radon then Andro. A sign to my right said ‘Welcome to Gamek’s Financial District’ in bold black writing which was difficult to see in the gloom, our trio moved away as the shuttle prepared to set off and I took another scan around us.

“Well, this is a depressing place,” I concluded, I took a sniff of air and it smelt like a damp wall that had been left for a few weeks; lovely.

“Hmm, you never been on Birv 9, it worse than this,” Andro told me, “But less infrastructure and more violent persons.”

“Don’t get your hopes up,” Radon said while discreetly hinting with his head in front of him; a gang of four moved had forward to greet us. The one in the middle, a rather large and hideous Demon, who had to be their leader, moved forward and took from his back a rather large but crude battle axe. He spoke in a heavy demonic accent with a hint of malcontent.

“Welcome to our little corner of the universe, to keep it going in pleasant conditions we require your visitor’s tax,” He smiled and showed us his oversized axe, “now where’s the kilowatts?” I nodded to Radon to say ‘I got this’, I took a step forward; keeping my hand in my jacket and replied so only the Demons leader could here.

“My friend, I think you should reconsider this, getting on the wrong end of three Rentruns may end your little charade quicker than you could swing that battle axe,” his face seemed to lose its edge and confidence but the determination was still there.

“How can I believe you?” He replied loudly, his friends seem to ready up and surround me. Andro and Radon put their hands on their weapons, believing I had it out of control.

“I give you one more chance to leave, or I will have to force you to go … in a wheelchair” I said threateningly but the Demon’s friends had completely surrounded me and one lost his patience and swung his scimitar at me, I ducked and tackled the leader who crashed to the floor and dropped his battle axe. I recovered and looked back around, the one with the scimitar charged, weapon slashing in front, easy. The weapon didn’t even come close when I side stepped to the right and hit the buggers hand which made him drop the weapon, I then kicked his stomach which made him bend over, another powerful kick which made contact to the face knocked him out cold. The other two behind me tried to tackle me but the second they made contact I jumped and back flipped them like I did to Asteronth earlier, grabbed their heads and knocked them together. Like their other friend they went down like a ton of bricks. However the leader of the group had picked up his battle axe and began to swing it, aiming for the neck. I quickly moved forward out of blade reach, grabbed the metal shaft pulled it out of the Demon’s grubby hands and swung the shaft which hit the right side of his head, knocking him out. “I told you I’d finish you before you swing that axe.” Radon and Andro moved forward to greet me.

“Why didn’t you just kill them?” Andro asked.

“Well we are trying to find someone with a bounty; we don’t need the attention of killing four men.” I replied. I looked at my hand, that Demon had a powerful swing as it was stinging red, I shook it off and asked Radon.

“Where is this café?”

“Down the street a bit, we need to be there in ten minutes or Nagaon will leave.” He pointed down the green tinged street. Andro started walking in the direction but stopped as he heard one of the goons groan; he walked up to him and kicked his head which completed the job of knocking him out.

“Perfectionist,” I muttered, Andro turned and replied.

“No efficient, it’s like you said we don’t want any unwanted attention down here.” I nodded and Radon moved forward down the street with Andro and me following.

It didn’t take long to find this café, but time was running short. The café itself, like the street, was small, made of mossy limestone and had no one in except a massive mass of a man who had to Nagaon. The legend of him seemed to be true, he was about 8ft tall wearing combat amour and where ever the amour wasn’t present his skin looked like it was up to the task of defending him, his head large was bald with a Triad symbol tattooed into his left hand-side of his face but a line down the centre showed his Rentrun status. I smiled as I had the same piece of art on my right arm with a line down it. A permanent scowl also lined his face and when we entered it turned to a half smile but his squinted brown eyes seemed to sharpen looking for anyway to tell we weren’t his party of friends. Radon, who was followed by Andro then myself, moved towards him and took the squishy seats opposite him. Radon was the first to speak.

“I am Radon Temporum…”

“I know who you are Radon, you’re a famous dragon indeed.” He cut in, and moved his gaze to Andro, “The Outliver as you are called on my planet, Andro Drake,” Andro seemed surprised to see that he knew of him, and this surprise continued as Nagaon said. “You’re not the only being who can live for centuries.” And finally he moved to his sharp eyes to me, “Ah yes, I know you too, Ras’lion Gond the evenly famous Infettor, the unkillable Farin of Mustar, yes?” He smiled as I slightly nodded. “So you need my help for what? Bringing me into the open where those assholes can find me.” He said as put his hand to a pocket and pulled out a tin case, which Nagaon opened which revealed cigars. He tried to find a lighter but hinted to give it to me. He passed it and I lit it the tip of my finger and passed it back. “Cheers, now what is the mission?”

“We don’t know, it being kept secret till we gather the team.” Radon replied, Nagaon’s face darkened and he sucked harder on the cigar which almost went down halfway in one suck. I knew what he was thinking of, the mission where his friend died was in the dark too before it began.

“Hmm, so what’s in it for me? What do I get for helping you in this dark mission” He demanded. Radon moved forward and gave him the proposition.

“You will, if you choose, be released from Triad service whenever you want on a full blown pay each year, we’ll remove the bounty on your head and you’ll never hear from us again and you can live in peace from Triad affairs unless in a war crisis. And anything else you want as long as it’s reasonable.” Nagaon smiled and countered.

“I want more each year, something in the region of 800,000 kW and bonus payment for completing this mission of 2 million kW. These cigars are not cheap”

“Done.” Radon quickly said and they both shook hands but suddenly the windows on the café blasted open and I went under the table, my eyes and ears out of control: they had used flash bangs. A massive group of men charged in and took hold of anyone they could; however under the table they missed me as they took a struggling Andro, Radon and Nagaon out of the café quicker than I could clear my head from the effects of the explosions. But I could hear men speaking.

“We got two spares, and the big one.” One replied

“I’m pretty sure there were four in there.” Another replied  
“Nah, it was just them I think. Who knew that this teamwork would pull off, I mean we hated each other a week ago.” I then realised it was the families who put bounties on Nagaon, I then also realised they were working together so Radon’s plan on putting them against each other seemed to be flawed. I swore under my breath and thought up a plan on how to get them back. Judging by the amount of men who charged in, the talking and walking outside I put a rough estimated of twenty men. No way I could deal with them alone, so I crawled out from the table to the counter and looked around for something. For some strange reason I have yet to understand, a megaphone was under the counter, maybe for advertising or something, but who cares I could work with it. I crawled to a stairwell leading upstairs to the roof and stood up; in the dark and gloom it seemed that the men below, who were preparing for a shooting of the three, could not see me. I switched on the megaphone and spoke though it.

“Congratulations on capturing him and his friends, but which family is going to kill him, only one can do it and no one is on both families are they? So which gets the honour? The Bosat or Foxtrout? You decide.” I said, hoping it would work and give me enough time to get them out of here.

“The megaphone is right; we should do it for killing the boss!” One shouted.

“No! We should, he destroyed everyone under our pay: we should kill …” A gun shot stopped the man as one more shouted.

“We’d kill you fir…” Another gunshot, and before I knew it a mass gun fight had broken out and I quickly rushed back down to the ground and ran outside, bodies lined the street and blood was running in the gutters, the three had already broken their bonds and saw me coming.

“I think we have outstayed our welcome!” I shouted while running, the others followed me down an ally, away from the fighting and we didn’t stop till the noise of battle where gone, somewhere near a bank down a main street.

“Good work Ras, very nice work; I’d never thought they’d work together.” Radon said while panting, I smiled.

“I think we should get back to the ship now.” Andro suggested and I agreed.

“Well, this is interesting turn of events, but I think going to the ship would put the crew in danger.” Radon stated. I was confused.

“Why?” I asked, but I had not needed to for I saw the men on the rooftops, more professional and deadly looking and I recognised the weaponry, a katana with three bones on the blade, Yugofashion assassins, after Nagaon’s bounty of course. They must of tried but gave up after the families got him. Our escape had walked us right into an ambush and allowed them a second chance. I also looked into the direction of the docks; the old rusted freighter was there, the Divingston; Radon had his suspicions correct.

“Hmm, well this is an unfortunate turn of events.” Radon said while pulling out his own katana. Andro conjured up some energy in his hand and Nagaon pulled out a large hand cannon but in the mist of my eye I saw what could be an escape route, the only problem the assassins had very good aim even when their target is running; I once saw one shoot down an entire retreating squad, without missing a single man. Our chance of staying and fighting was dim too, of course all of us could kill a few of them but I made a count of a very large group of fifteen, a bit odd for them but today had been to hectic to understand it. Andro took a step back and was about to fire but Radon stopped him by putting his katana in front of him.

“Ever fought one of these people?” Andro shook his head.

“The best chance is to wait for them, they attack when they’ve analysed the situation in defence; there’s no stopping them. Also their sight is not too great, being raised on an asteroid without much sunlight.” Andro seemed to understand, shrugging again. But while those two talked I had been moving towards the escape route, and got the attention of Nagaon who saw my logic, he began to move as well, leaving Andro and Radon still speaking about the situation.

“How about a sneak attack if they can’t see?” Andro suggested.

“Well their hearing is now much more refined. That’s out of the question they’d here you miles away,” Radon then turned to me who then saw me and Nagaon trying to escape, “what ar…” I put my hand to my lips and mouthed, ‘move slowly backwards to me’. Radon nudged Andro and put his hand to his own mouth and Andro looked back to see our plan and got the idea. Nagaon and I had managed to reach the building and almost in the clear when I tripped on large object I could not see. I fell hard and every assassin turned their heads to my direction and started moving this way, but only to me not the others. Radon looked frightful and I nodded and mouthed, ‘If I’m quick I can draw them away from you and lose them’. He replied ‘you’d better’. I stood up and tried to impersonate Nagaon’s deep voice. “OI! YOU, OVER HERE COME GET ME.” I then got up and ran, harder than I had before because the assassins followed me. Their speed on the rooftops was amazingly beautiful but deadly. I ran into street then ally, back to street and finally found myself completely surrounded by my pursuers. One off the taller ones jumped down and said darkly.

“Thanks for the chase Nagaon but our employers need you dead.”

“Dumbass, I’m not Nagaon. It seems you could not distinguish my foot steps to his? Well I doubt you’ll get him now.” I gloated in my normal voice, but now I was in a sticky situation. The tall assassin whose face was covered in metal replied.

“Well done in confusing us but I doubt you’ll live now, good bye.” He took out a long katana but before he could swing there was a loud band and he dropped dead. A massive hole in his back showed a mass accelerated energy bolt must of disintegrated every bone in his body. All the other assassins however had flocked to one area; the sound of the gun shot. It was my time to escape but I could not let my saviour die. Before I could go I was tapped on the shoulder.

“I love magic; short range transportation is amazing in a bucket load of situations,” It was Andro, holding what seemed to be Nagaon’s gun, confusing the assassins even more. “Best get a move on, otherwise when they realise that he’s not there they’ll be back for you.” I nodded and he grabbed me, and a second later I experienced what seemed to be pulling and spinning sensation meaning I had been transported to somewhere different. We had landed by a refinery of some sort, Radon and Nagaon were there, both smiling at mine and Andro appearance.

“Whose plan was that then?” I asked as I regained my senses.

“Andro’s, now time we best leave; those assassins are not ones to give up so easily.” Nagaon said as he walked to what was a metal door. He opened it to reveal that the port was only a few minutes away. He took a step outside, followed by Radon, Andro then myself. The refinery was at the moment being used to melt down the masses amount of bruily, a metal used for amour on high importance ships, like the Sanctum. The process, however, is super violent. High pressure and heat from nuclear grade weapons are required to melt it down to be tempered and shaped but the resistance of the metal made it valuable but deadly. The four of us moved forward, being extremely wary of our surroundings. Throughout out this entire mission I had noted something rather strange; the lack of people was disturbing, a city of this size had to have a least a couple of million people, not a few scum bags from earlier.

“Nagaon, what’s with the lack of population?”

“Did Radon not tell you?” Looking at my face of confusion he continued, “You must of seen the green aura around here, it is the effect of melting bruily, heavily toxic to most races but last year an explosion a few miles from here had made this pace uninhabitable, but my kind can live here. The city, however, is dead, filled with the buildings of old and the refineries work remotely with remote security. But it can’t affect you if you’re here short term so there’s no need to worry.” I looked around to see the refinery hard at work on its own and only now realised the sound of faint explosions compressed by explosions reducers. What had industry done to this place? Killed all life in general, it made me think of my own province on Mustar, we had grown up with violent systems and gases and used heavy industry; but luckily nothing like this had befallen us.

We walked for a couple of minutes and reached the place where I had knocked out the scum who tried to rob us. The only problem was that they were not there anymore, but behind us pointing not melee weapons but firearms.

“So you had not learnt your lesson then?” I asked them sarcastically. The leader, who was sporting a broken nose and cloudy eyes, spoke.

“This is revenge and a mission, we know of your bounties.”

“That’ll be *my* bounty then mate” Nagaon said, an emphasis on ‘my’ as all of us turned around and charged. One straight fist hit one out dead straight away. The others, however, shot and Radon and Andro shouted in unison and ran to his aid, leaving me behind trying to see what happened to Nagaon and, after close observation, it seemed that his skin or armour had saved him and was already knocking the other three out. One shot out but the shot was deflected by Radon by snatching the gun and the fairly large photon gun discharged away from Andro where it was aimed at the refinery. At first I was little concerned of the shot going towards it, but it’s new found path was going to hit a reducer, and the power of the photon would easily break it’s hold over the contained power explosions and cause the refinery to go up in a nuclear explosion. Crap is the only word that came to mind as I shouted.

“Guys! Look out!” Nagaon looked in time to see the photon hit. A second later all noise was cancelled, green light turned to bright gold then back to green as a miniature nuclear explosion ripped the refinery apart, chunks off metal soared with trails of fire. Unfortunately for the three in front of me I saw the refinery sign, a huge piece of iron heading right for them, and Nagaon saw it. He grabbed both Radon and Andro and threw them out of the deadly sign before it landed. The shockwave when it landed was enough to topple me over; I hit the concrete hard and became dazed for a few moments, oblivious to the violence in front of me ripping apart the entire refinery. I blinked trying to get rid of the dust that tried to settle in my eyes and quickly stood up and witnessed the carnage. The landscape had changed massively; the refinery was nothing but twisted metal, and the surrounding area was being licked by green fire. The smell of nuclear waste was evident and made me feel ill. I looked around for my friends, Radon was to my left and Andro to my right, both lying down eyes closed. The fear hit me as I thought they died but quickly realised the rising and fallings of their chest, which meant they were okay for now. However I could not see Nagaon, the colossal man was no-where to be seen and that was a rather good achievement for him. But the iron piece that knocked me down was in the exact place where he was a few minutes ago. Then the real fear hit me, nothing, not even he could of survived an impact such as that I thought as I moved forwards to see if he was under there and a giant hand, which twitched, meant he had been crushed in a very literal, ironic way. I almost smiled at the thought but the death of him quickly banished the thought. I heard rustling from behind the iron sign to see the Demon leader; both his legs had been crushed limited to moving his arms and torso. His eyes widened when he saw me come around the corner.

“No, stay back fiend!” He cried, I drew my sword and he fidgeted even more desperately trying to find an escape. I put the tip of the blade to his throat and he immediately stopped.

“Give me a good damn reason why I should not cut you up into little pieces? The damage you and your lackeys will last for generations, not including on harming the Triads interests.” I said deeply and darkly, the Demon then saw what many people have never witnessed, my left hand started to glow and transform into a searing hot ball of fire; a conduit of my rage and a weapon I reserved for the most terrible of battles and skirmishes. The Demon broke down into nothing but babble and apologies,

“Please spare me! I will disappear, take on a new life and become a civil person, I promise on my hearts!” He hid a cross on two spot on his chest with his right hand. I calmed down, ridding the lively flame in my left hand and asked.

“How are you getting out from under there then? For I only see one way and that was what I said earlier.” The Demon tried to remember and then it came back to him.

“No don’t, please there’s got to be another way!” He begged but I had already placed my sword away from his neck but down to his trapped legs. He screamed, and I raised the sword but before the strike I said.

“Lucky for you medical science can regrow back limbs.” The strike went down quickly, efficiently and cleanly, a successful cut of legs. The screams however managed to pierce my ears so much that I had to knock the demon out with the butt of my sword.

“What the hell was that?” It was Andro; he had come around and saw the now shortened demon.

“Bit of an amputation.” Andro looked at it and asked.

“Why not kill him?”

“I was tempted, but I think another chance is all it takes to change people, or demons.” Andro looked at the sign and said.

“Don’t tell me he...” I nodded and Andro bowed his head in respect and went over to where Radon fell then had just risen up from the ground. I saw Andro tell Radon of Nagaon’s demise.

“WHAT! NO, HE CAN’T BE,” Radon shouted as he got up faster than a dragon to pure gold and rushed over to the sign. The truth hit him. “Fuck! That is a rather unpleasant way to die.”

“What do you mean? Being crushed isn’t that bad; it’s instant.” Andro said.

“No, Andro he means his death is rather funny,” Andro looked disgusted at me, “No I mean it is ironic, he was a big heavy guy who has taken so much over three hundred years almost blown up by a star going supernova but it takes just a *sign* to kill him, an *iron* sign at that; I mean well,” I saw confusion lit up all over Andro’s face, “Ah forget it, anyway on a serious note we now need a new fourth person because I have no clue what to do.”

“I have no clue either,” Andro said his confusion over.

“I got one but he may be a bit, err, too crazy a Dutchman for some of us.” Radon said, I thought of the crazed telekinetic Torlan'Dahk/Dragon hybrid.

“You don’t mean him?” I asked Radon, who nodded with a smile.

“Well just let me put down a medical scanner for our friend here and then you can make the call to get him to us.”

Chapter 5: Radon

“Sir, approaching Triad HQ,” Rhian said.

“Ok, prep the landing craft,” I replied. I got out of my chair and left the bridge with my ‘associates’ in tow. Out of the four of us, Andro was the most excited; he’d never seen HQ whereas Ras, Velgor, who was Nagaon’s replacement, and I had all spent most of our training years there.

“So, how big is it?” Andro asked.

“Big,” Ras replied.

“Yes, but how big?” I stopped and turned to face Andro.

“Try, occupies an entire planet both above and below ground,” Andro looked awe-struck.

“Whoa,”

“Yeah, whoa.”

We reached the hangar bay and entered the landing craft, a ship similar in design to the Lockheed SR-71 Blackbird but with a larger holding capacity and made of a psychomorphic metal called viridium. I sat in the pilot’s chair whilst everybody else strapped into the row of seats that lined the ship. I made the necessary preparations and started the engines.

“Ready?” I asked.

“Yeah,”

“Yep,”

“No,”

“Alright, this is your captain speaking. Flight 666 to Triad HQ will commence in 3...2…1,” I set the ship hovering, increased the thrust and released the handbrake sending us shooting out of the Cygnus.

Within seconds Triad HQ came into view. Although it was classed as a planet, HQ did not orbit a star as it had been built by the Coleopterans, the founders of The Triad, over 8 million eons ago; that’s about 8 billion years. It was slightly larger than Earth with artificial seas and atmosphere. The surface was silver from our position although I knew that was because of all of the buildings that covered the surface.

It took me about ten minutes to reach HQ and when we reached the edge of the artificial atmosphere, we were hailed by planetary control.

“Please state the reason for your visit,” Said an automated voice.

“We’re here for a mission briefing,” I replied.

“Crew size,”

“Four,”

“Ship name,”

“Cygnus,” There was a moment’s pause from control.

“You are assigned to hangar P-83, co-ordinates are being uploaded.” A set of co-ordinates appeared on the screen, which I set into the Auto-pilot.

Five minutes later we had landed. We stepped out of the ship and into the hangar where we were met by Mr Berwick.

“Ah, you made it, but who’s this?” He said, gesturing to Velgor.

“This is Velgor Stelleriath; he’s our heavy’s replacement,” I replied.

“What happened?”

“Two tons of irony,” Ras replied. Mr Berwick looked confused. “He was crushed by a two ton iron ‘E’,” This added to Abe’s confusion but he dismissed it.

“So, you’re the new heavy then.” He stated.

“No, I’m a telekine,” Velgor replied. Before Abe’s head could explode with confusion, I changed the subject.

“So, why did we have to come here for a briefing?”

“Come, I shall explain on the way,” We left the hangar and headed down into the planet.

“WHAT?!!” We were in the briefing room waiting for the council to arrive. Whilst we were waiting, Abe gave us a low down on the situation. It was not good news. “These massacres have been directed at my home state AND YOU DON’T BOTHER TO TELL ME?!” I had Abe pinned to the wall.

“The Triad didn’t think you should know,”

“WHY NOT?”

“I…I…I don’t know, I’m just a supervisor,” I let him go and he fell to the floor. He picked himself up just as the council entered the room. Well, it wasn’t the true council as they were The Ancients. These three people were their representatives although they were allowed to make their own decisions. The current council stood as so: Toran D’ahl, representative of Torlan; Thanatos, representative of the Shargaroth and Ysvan Maninchov, representative of Iehashtovorkia and a friend of mine. They all stood at the head of the large briefing room.

“You have all been brought before the council for briefing due to the personal nature of this mission,” Thanatos said. “As it stands, the two governments have been powerless to stop these massacres,”

“How long have these massacres been going on?” I asked.

“We don’t know,” Toran replied. “What we do know is that they have been targeted at areas personal to you and Ras’lion and we can only guess that Andro and Velgor’s home worlds will be next,”

“So, it’s someone who knows us?” Andro said.

“Possibly, or just someone who knows of your reputations,”

“What gets me is that you didn’t bother to tell us of the full situation before now,” I said.

“Dear friend, know this,” Ysvan said, “at the time we thought that if you knew then you would refuse and go solo.” I remained silent, he knew me too well.

“So, after we investigate the cause of these massacres what do we do?” Velgor asked.

“Bring down all those involved,” Toran replied. “Your first port of call will be Energon as we believe that will be the next target.”

“Where’s that?” Andro asked.

“Home,” I replied, “I’m going home, well Energon isn’t my home but it’s right next door to Chaotica so it counts.” I could tell by Andro’s face that he was having a good day; first HQ now the not-so-fabled land of Dragons.

After the briefing we went back to the Cygnus, promising Andro a tour of HQ when we returned. The ship was ripe with excitement when I announced our destination, The Dragon Halo was in a completely different dimension and many tales had been told of its beauty and near impossibility.

“What makes it impossible?” Velgor asked.

“I have no idea, but I was brought up there so I haven’t noticed anything strange about it.” Velgor dropped the issue and went to the library to research it.

It took a good couple of days to get to The Dragon Halo and the amount of people asking for holiday leave was staggering, pretty much the entire crew wanted a chance to walk upon the land of Dragons. Unfortunately, due to the current danger levels, I couldn’t approve all of the applications.

Finally the day arrived when we broke through the last dimensional barrier and reached our destination. The crew stood in awe at the sight. The Dragon Halo was a huge ring of rock, about the size of Earth’s mantle, inner and outer cores put together. Due to the fact that we lived on the cross section this allowed about 10 billion Dragons to live there with room to spare. Looking at it from the bridge I could finally see why people believed it to be impossible. As a ring, there should have been no day and night. This was circumvented by the heartstone, a large piece of magical crystal that was attached to the bottom of Cedilla, the island that was located in the hole in the middle of the Halo.

“It’s like a giant ring doughnut,” Andro stated.

“Yeah, a large inedible doughnut,” I replied. The twat was making me hungry. “Come on, we have work to do.”

The landing craft set us down at Keahlin ridge on the Chaotica-Energon border.

“This brings back memories,” Ras said. Keahlin ridge was the location of the Mustaran invasion during the war between our people. I looked down at my left arm, the scar a vivid reminder of my part in the invasion. “It wasn’t entirely your fault,”

“I beg to differ,” I replied. “Had I followed orders and stayed my hand the battle wouldn’t have happened,”

“And the war would still be raging,” I thought on this. Both sides considered the battle a victory; for the Dragons it had ended a long and bitter cold war and the Mustarans had succeeded where many had failed, a successful voyage to the fifth dimension.

“Let’s not hang on past events and think about the present,” Velgor said. We agreed and set off across the ridge. The border was easy to spot, a sudden change from the Asian landscape of Chaotica to the urbanised Energon. Towers and stone buildings covered the state. Dragons of all types roamed the streets from huge Wyverns that looked down on all, to tiny Pumice Dragons that would fit in the palm of my hand. The urge to relax and change into my Draconian form was overwhelming but the need to remain unnoticed was greater; a Chaos Dragon[[4]](#footnote-4) rarely leaves his homeland and is therefore very noticeable elsewhere. I could tell the group was slightly disappointed with my decision as the streets were built for Dragons and were therefore very long and took ages to traverse. After half an hour the others began to tire.

“Come on Radon, just until we reach a café or something,” Ras whined.

“No, a Chaos Dragon is noticeable enough, but one with three passengers? Nah, it’s too risky,”

“Ras has a point; we aren’t cut out for this amount of walking. I’ll keep an eye out and if I see anything suspicious I’ll tell you,” Velgor said.

“No, we need to keep a low profile,” The matter was ended, much to everyone’s distaste.

After an hour we reached our designated safe house. We entered the house to find it empty. I went to the back of the house and pressed the Triad symbol. The wall slid open revealing a passage that led under the house.

“Ladies first,” I said to Andro. He gave me a sarcastic smile and entered the tunnel followed by Velgor then Ras and, finally, me.

At the end of the tunnel was a metal door with a keypad on it. Andro entered the code and the door opened. The actual safe house was basically a metal box with some simple furnishings: chairs, a sofa and a *Kashkla* (a large mattress set into the floor), a weapons case, a kitchen and four computer terminals. Fortunately the last occupants were Dragons so the room was large enough for me to ‘relax’. I changed into my Draconian form, similar to an Asian *Lung* but with golden fur, silver horns and an arrow headed tail that opened to reveal a poisoned spike. I walked over to the *Kashkla*, curled up and went to sleep.

*I was in a white hall, alone. I heard footsteps and turned to see Arunya walking towards me.*

*“Where am I?” I asked.*

*“Somewhere where we won’t be disturbed,”*

*“I’m not dead am I?” Arunya laughed.*

*“No, you’re not dead. I needed to talk to you in private.”*

*“What about?”*

*“Ras’lion.” I was confused by this.*

*“Why Ras?”*

*“It’s a long story. Just know this, when you return to Mustar take him to the Shrine of Orion Auros.” The vision began to fade.*

I was roused by Andro a few hours later.

“Come on big guy, time to get up,” I yawned and shook my head.

“Too tired,” Andro stamped on my paw making me snap at him. “Alright I’ll get up.” I assumed my human form and walked over to the kitchen. I opened the fridge and took out a pork pie, which I then proceeded to eat.

“How long until event?” I asked.

“Half an hour,” Velgor replied. I sat down at a computer terminal and began looking through files and reports to find out as much about the massacres as I could. Fortunately I still had level 1 clearance so I could access all files. According to what I found the massacres started about two months ago with a couple of random killings but soon escalated to full blown massacres. The massacres on Mustar and The Dragon Halo seemed to happen at the same time implying that whoever was behind the killings had agents on both planets. Unfortunately the eyewitness reports had been discounted due to ‘impossible events’.

“Hey Velgor, do you know what these ‘impossible events’ were?”

“Something to do with ‘ancient beings’ and some random connection to Thanatos.” This troubled me. If this was somehow connected to the Shargaroth then it meant that history may be repeating itself.

“Ten minutes until event, time to go,” Andro said. I logged off the computer and went over to the weapons case and picked out a pair of *katanas*, a plasma pistol and a pair of throwing knives which I slid into the sheaths hidden up the sleeves of my trenchcoat.

“You always have a trick up your sleeves don’t you,” Ras commented, picking out his sword and shield. Andro chose a staff and *gladius*. Velgor, however, didn’t take a weapon from the rack but removed his pendant which became a glowing red scimitar.

“Vyliertiry,” I said, “I thought that was a myth.”

“Nope.” We left the safe house and set off to find the massacre site.

It didn’t take long to reach our destination, there were dead Dragons littering the streets almost as soon as we left the house. After a couple of minutes running through clogged streets and panicked crowds we reached the town square. What we saw will never leave us. Right in the middle of the square was a huge stone portal from which many strange creatures spilled forth. The eyewitness accounts were correct; Demons were responsible for the massacres. One name came to mind when I saw this sight.

“Shan-dor,”

“Who?” Andro asked.

“The person responsible for my parents’ deaths,” It didn’t take long for the Demons to notice our presence. A Keller hound tried attacking us from behind but Velgor dispatched it before I could realise what was happening. Within minutes we were swarmed by Keller hounds. As I swiped and shot I kept an eye out for The Hound Master, the Demon that controlled the hounds. It didn’t take long as The Hound Master was right next to the portal. I unleashed a blast of lightning at a group of hounds to clear a straightish path to my target. But it seemed that The Hound Master had similar plans to me and charged. We clashed near the portal and a vicious battle ensued. The Hound Master lashed out with his flaming whip and disarmed me so I threw my throwing knives at him. They hit it in the chest but seemed to do nothing. I resorted to using my pistol which did negligible damage. Man this guy was strong. I dropped my pistol and switched to a magical assault, letting loose lighting and fire. This raged on for a good couple of minutes but did no harm to the Demon. Then it hit me, the portal was supplying it with an insane amount of power. I redirected my attacks at the stone arch, chipping of bits of basalt but not severely damaging it. I needed to think bigger.

“Ras!” I shouted, “We need to destroy the portal.”

“How?” I thought for a bit.

“Do you remember the battle of Harnak?” His face lit up.

“What happened at Harnak?” Andro asked, kicking a Keller hound of his chest and roasting it with a well-aimed lightning bolt.

“Big boom,” I replied. Ras ran over.

“Are you sure about this?” He asked.

“Positive,” We locked our hands together and combined fire and lightning into a massive ball of energy above the portal. We released the energy and there was a huge explosion which threw us into the air. We landed just outside the now obliterated square. Pain shot up my arms and I saw that my hands were badly burned, an unfortunate consequence of such a powerful ability.

“What the hell was that?” Andro asked.

“The combined power of fire and lightning mixed with the unstable energies of a Planar Gate,” I replied.

“Well, if you do that again, warn us,”

“I did.” I went over to the crater left by the explosion and retrieved my weapons, which had somehow survived the blast. “I don’t think that there will be any massacres happening here any time soon. Now, on to Mustar.”

1. Strange but true; Asbestosis is one of the only diseases dragons can catch, the others being gangrene, Ebola and Draconian influenza. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. All ships in hyperspace must drop out upon entering Mustaran space(a radius of about 30,000 miles with Mustar at the centre) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In the Apocalyptica universe, people use energy as currency. 1 W is equal to £1. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Just so you know, the name Chaos Dragon is derived from the original name for said race, *Chaosye Drakange*, which means “Gold Dragon”. They have nothing to do with causing mass hysteria. Well, Radon does but that’s an exception to the rule. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)