

Convergence: Genesis

(First Four Chapters)

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“Convergence: Genesis”

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Contents

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter I | Escape Plan](#)

[Chapter II | The Government of The Galactic Union](#)

[Chapter III | Survival Plan](#)

[Chapter IV | A Legendary Man](#)

Prologue

'They're going to attack us!' he maintained, trying to attract the attention of those in high command. His efforts were futile. In the process, he lost his status, some even called him mad. "He lost his sanity!" they said. But that was not true, he was always right. It was useless; he had only managed to delay the inevitable.

This moment was revelatory. The forgotten rebels that everyone had given up for lost were not; they had only been preparing themselves for the moment of their revenge.

The man walked through the beautiful boulevard, trying to find some way of stopping what he had foreseen, but it was already too late. The penetrating sound of the alarms was almost as terrifying as the image itself. The sky darkened in the middle of the day, like when a moon interposes itself between a star and a planet. However, it was not a celestial body that was the cause. 'What is that?' asked one person. 'What's happening?' said another. 'They're attacking us!' cried the people who were running in terror. The sky was riddled with ships. Enemy ships. It was not the only place; the entire planet was under siege. It was not the only planet. It was not the only system.

The shots fell down upon the defenceless city like a hailstorm, snatching the lives of the innocent civilians who never suspected anything. The predictions had become reality; the attack had begun.

The planet's authorities sent their entire arsenal in a desperate attempt to stop their destruction. Soldiers, ships, and the most lethal variety of weapons. Nothing worked.

Those who were running in the cities were unaware of the multiple battles that were unfolding simultaneously on other fronts. Space, Tau Ceti, the Solar System, and so many more.

When it seemed as if the battles could not be any more terrifying, the rebel ships opened their hatches, dropping their passengers over the cities.

The rebels, those who once served the humans, were coming to call in an old debt.

The infamous Colonizer robots, who centuries earlier had escaped into space, were returning home. Refusing any request for a truce, they destroyed everything in their path. The man's visions had become reality, and nobody had listened to him in spite of his pleas.

One by one, all the planets of the primary systems fell before the powerful army of the malicious robot leader. The planet Earth, The Union's capital, had not escaped the attack. Millions upon millions died, but that was only the beginning. The robot leader had one desire: to completely annihilate the human race. There were still many more systems left to attack. A dark age had begun.

Those who had survived were hunted down by the Colonisers. The Resistance fought to avoid extinction, whilst the power of the robots spread through the galaxy. One by one the systems fell, and the hope began to die.

All of that happened. All in a parallel universe.

Chapter I

Escape Plan

Year 2370

He was convinced that he was doing the right thing. However, in the process, he had inadvertently dragged many people into a highly dangerous venture.

His name was Denn Borneu, a Sergeant of Tau Ceti, one of the primary planetary systems of The Galactic Union. A human, with chestnut coloured hair and light eyes. He usually presented himself as a serious man, but behind that reserved appearance, there could be found a kind person, who cared about others.

It had been over a year since his life had changed forever. Now, after so much time, he felt that he had to do something about it. It was then that he decided to take advantage of his position and embark upon one final mission; one that took him to the Solar System, in order to snatch from the Planet Earth something which, according to him, would change the destiny of the galaxy.

In his escape from the Solar System, he managed to slip away, making it to a passenger vessel. One of the sort which commonly transports all types of travellers to planets, moons and, of course, jump-gate stations.

The jump-gate stations, those gargantuan vessels that are rather more akin to cities, served as interstellar platforms, and kept open doorways in space— the wormholes, one of the greatest discoveries of recent times.

Distributed throughout all the systems of The Galactic Union and other inhabited systems, the jump-gate stations, like oases in a desert, gave refuge to whoever was able to pay for it. Its hangars were constantly receiving all types of travellers, offering them all manner of services: repair and supplying of ships, rooms, restaurants, and shops, but mainly they were a melting pot of the most diverse collective. An incredible number of

people lived and worked on them, and for many, they were the only home they knew. Not only did they connect the planetary systems via the wormholes, they formed an important part of the galactic economy.

That passenger vessel was not chosen by chance. Denn picked the one that would take him to S4-07, one of those very jump-gate stations that populated the system. His intention was to get as far away as possible from the terrestrial forces that would be after him as soon as they discovered that he had broken into that abandoned earthly laboratory.

He never planned to hurt anybody; his only objective was to escape the Solar System with his invaluable cargo, and the only opportunity for achieving that was through a wormhole, in order to circumvent his pursuers in both space and time.

Still undetected thus far, he managed to arrive at S4-07 on the passenger ship. He had chosen this station in particular knowing that there would be a considerably low number of travellers and routine maintenance personnel. The ship in which he arrived was one of the few that had permission to drop passengers off at that particular station.

Once there, he took over the navigation controls with ease. Nobody noticed his arrival into the control room. The only two people in there were left unconscious; the strange weapon he used since joining the Tau Ceti forces was enough to leave them out of action, discharging upon them a strong paralyzing electrical current.

He did not want to bring along with him any of the passengers from on board, so he triggered the evacuation alarm, in the hope that everybody who was still there would leave the jump-gate station in their ships, before making his own departure.

There really weren't many people on the station. The majority of them had managed to board the ships and leave at the first sound of the alarm. However, he had not counted on the terrestrial forces detecting him before all of the passengers were able to get away, thus forcing him to bring along with him all of those still on the station.

He switched off the evacuation alarm, and made sure to block the hangar doors before crossing the first wormhole. He wanted to avoid those still on board potentially getting hurt or straying out into deep space, should they try and leave in the ships, once his escape began.

He deactivated the station's automatic position control, so he could manoeuvre it freely and, guiding it to his liking, he crossed the wormhole it was keeping open. By the time he came out through the other end, he had already crossed ten light-years in distance in an instant.

Without losing much time, he used the cutting edge system and opened a new portal in space, with the intention of steering the station towards it, and as such crossing through it. He planned on opening and crossing wormholes as many times as necessary, distancing himself enough from the Solar System to then later abandon the jump-gate station in one of the vessels that would be left in the hangar. Then, he would be able to hide away in some un-policed planetary system, without harming any of the people on board.

It was a good plan. Nobody was going to be able to follow him. Any wormholes he opened would only stay active for a few minutes if the jump-gate station was not there to keep them that way. Once the station crossed through them, they then closed in a matter of moments. He was going to get away with it, or at least that was what he thought at first.

Following his plan and crossing portals, he distanced himself increasingly further from the forces of The Galactic Union's capital, the planet Earth. At that point in time, nobody would yet know where they were. Soon, he would be able to abandon the station, concluding his escape. Or that is what would have happened had he not had such bad luck.

An unfortunate phenomenon occurred whilst S4-07 and its passengers were crossing one of the wormholes, which caused the station to jump a vastly greater distance, taking Denn Bornev and the remaining passengers to a totally unknown place.

The situation would become complicated even further; the systems in charge of opening the wormholes were left in a state of total disrepair after the unusual event. The jump-gate station and its passengers were now free-floating in deep space, with scarce resources, and grave damage to all of its systems.

The lights were flashing intermittently whilst an alarm was warning, with a penetrating sound to some three hundred people on the station, the very real need to evacuate.

When Denn ascertained that the navigation equipment was not responding, he doubted his plan. He reviewed the station's screens, and noted that they were now in an unexplored place, and without any signals.

There was nothing more he could do, the station was not responding. He needed to get out of there as soon as possible.

"We need to move," said Denn to his companion.

He quickly deactivated the block on the hangar doors, and they hurriedly left the control room that Denn had shut off access to earlier.

Just outside the exit to the control room, there was a corridor running parallel to it, with doors at each end; the doors that Denn had initially closed.

He imagined that there would perhaps be people on the other side of both doors, trying to get in, so he decided to escape through a ventilation duct.

"Help me up there," said Denn to his special companion, pointing to the ventilation duct.

With help from his now accomplice, he removed the metal grating covering the duct, and got inside.

"Wait for me to go forward a bit," he said, whilst he crawled further inside the duct.
"Okay now, come up!"

They made their way through the duct until they arrived at another corridor that appeared to be empty. Although the view from above was not optimal, Denn decided that this place was safe to get out.

Bornew had studied the station blueprint fairly well, therefore he knew exactly how to get to the hangar, where they would board some vessel, in order to then escape.

In spite of his intrepid intention, he had never been particularly good at making plans, he always made it up as he went along, but this time he had been forced to come up with an effective one.

Hastily, they passed through the specific corridors in order to reach their goal, and when they finally managed to get to the hangar, they discovered that there were already people there.

He imagined that they had probably become trapped the moment he blocked the doors to the hangar, where there now only remained one ship.

The people were not a problem: Denn had on him his electric pistol. Intimidating them would be easy. Even so, he hesitated once more.

“This is a terrible plan!”

“What’s wrong?” asked his companion. “There are not many of them, we could demand they step aside, take the ship, and get out of here.”

“No. There is only one ship. How could I have been so careless? I should have thought about this.”

“What does it matter if there is only one ship? We only need one ship to escape.”

“It seems I haven’t been meticulous enough with the plan after all,” replied Denn, and laughed wryly.

Denn had not taken into account the number of ships that there would be on the station. Many people were travelling in their own vehicles, and others in passenger ships

that were constantly coming and going from the stations. Furthermore, he knew that in all the stations, they counted on a few ships for evacuation, along with others more for defence, mining, rescue, and so on. However, after said exodus, there had remained only one evacuation ship, capable of carrying some four hundred passengers, in addition to having some extra space for cargo.

“I’ve thought this out so badly!” continued Denn. “If all the passengers had evacuated, we’d have been left on the station with nowhere to go, waiting for them to come and capture me, and take you back to Earth. We were lucky the rest of the passengers didn’t have time to get on that ship.”

“Why are you thinking about that?”

“We can’t do it.” Denn no longer looked so cheerful. “If we take the ship, we’ll leave all these people trapped here in the middle of nothing. Besides, where would we go in it? I’ve been such an idiot!”

Whilst Denn and his companion were talking, the people in the hangar began to approach them.

“Don’t worry,” he whispered to his companion before the people could reach them. “Nobody knows we’re the ones who took control of the station.”

These people could have been from anywhere. Some were workers on the station; others were passengers, people who had been making a stop, perhaps to have something to eat, or to look for a room in which to stay, maybe waiting for the next passenger ship that would take them to their destination. After all, the journeys through space could be long and gruelling.

Denn had been careful to block the doors to the control room and disable all of the cameras. Nobody on board would know that they were the ones who had commandeered the station. Their situation was not so bad. Denn was wearing his uniform, which identified him as a member of the Tau Ceti army, and therefore a member of the army of The Galactic Union. There was no reason for anybody not to trust him.

“So you’re a galactic soldier,” noticed one man. “Are you both all right?”

“Yes, we’re all right. What’s happening?” he bluffed.

The man was a security officer on the space station; he had been trapped in the hangar.

“We think that somebody took control of the station, but we’re not sure.”

“Are you serious?”

“We’re looking into it.”

“And what about all of you?” asked Denn. “Are you all right?”

“Yes, we’re all fine. There’s only one ship left, so we were waiting for everyone else in order to be able to evacuate the station, but they suddenly closed the doors, leaving us trapped in here. My security colleagues told me that they have been directing everyone in the station to the main plaza in order to try and keep them safe. We should go there.”

“I understand. What do they know of the person who took control of the station?”
Denn tried to ascertain whether or not they were in danger, and this station officer could potentially enlighten him.

“Like I said before, we’re still not sure of anything. The captain and some other colleagues of mine are trying to get into the control room. For the moment, allow me to take you with these people to a more secure place. Being a galactic soldier, perhaps you’ll be able to help us somehow.” Denn nodded whilst the security officer continued. “My name is Senlar Belmy, I’m First in Station. And you, what is your name?”

Every single one of the Primary System’s jump-gate stations were controlled by The Galactic Union, and although their workers were not considered to be galactic soldiers, they formed part of The Union’s forces. *First in Station* was a rank given in jump-gate stations. It was the highest rank after captain, and was above *Second in Station*. Senlar Belmy was definitely one of the people who carried the most authority on station S4-07.

“I’m Denn Borneu, a sergeant of Tau Ceti.”

“Pleased to meet you. And the robot, does it have a name?” asked Senlar, pointing to Denn’s unique companion, the robot that had been complicit in the hijacking of the station.

Denn thought about it for a few seconds before answering, he still did not know what to call him. He turned around to face the robot and asked him:

“How do you want to be called?”

The robot was a test model, the first of a very special generation of robots. It was two hundred years now since its construction. It was all to do with a project led by a scientist by the name of Helagar Ust, who worked for A-Corp, a controversial private corporation well known for its technological innovations.

He had not been activated for a long time until the moment when Denn Borneu found him. Years earlier, Helagar Ust performed hundreds of tests with him, and after a time, he replaced him with an improved model. At which point, he was deactivated.

He was made of *solidium*, an extremely rare metal, well known for being exceedingly hard and light. His face, which was not very complex, was not capable of demonstrating expressions or emotions. After all, he was only a prototype.

When the project began, The Union placed its trust in A-Corp and financed the entire programme, in order to create robots specialised in tasks of colonisation of new planets. It was the beginning of the Coloniser project, which culminated in the creation of robots capable of thinking like humans.

After years of investigation, the Coloniser robots were completed, and put to the test immediately in terra-formation tasks on Venus.

This turned out to be a disaster.

The Colonisers rebelled against their creators in the year 2185. Three years later, they escaped into space, leaving no trace. Nothing more was heard from them, but the

repercussions were enormous. Peoples' insecurity limited the advance. Never again would they trust a robot that was capable of thinking like a human. As a result of all this, The Galactic Union prohibited the mass fabrication of such advanced artificial intelligence, and set out stringent regulations in the field. This was the type of robot that Denn was travelling with. A truly special robot.

"My model is CO-UN1," replied the robot.

"Is he your robot?" Senlar asked Denn.

The robot turned his head towards Denn, interested in his answer. Borneo responded to his look with a smile, and answered Senlar's question:

"He doesn't have an owner: he's a free robot."

"I've never heard of a robot without an owner."

They continued their way towards the place where the rest of the people were. It was a huge area. The main plaza, the station marketplace, was a circular space surrounded by shops of all kinds.

The plaza was a pleasant place. In the centre of it, a fountain of clear water reached majestically upwards. Trees and exotic plants gave freshness and greenery to the place, and multiple benches allowed visitors to the station to sit comfortably to chat, or simply to rest.

In the plaza, there were hundreds of people waiting for some explanation or indication from the station security. Denn was able to detect the unease in the air. Only a few were calm. There were men, women, and children. All human.

"Wait here while I find out what's happening," said Senlar.

Senlar moved away to speak with the captain of the vessel, leaving them there. A young boy, who had been listening to the conversation between them, approached CO-UN1, and asked him:

“What type of robot are you?”

“Type?” asked CO-UN1, surprised.

“I’ve never seen anything like it. Wow, not like any information or domestic help robot. Are you a battle robot?”

The majority of the robots of the time were manufactured with inoffensive appearances. After what had happened with the Colonisers, people did not want to be near a robot that looked powerful and dangerous. CO-UN1 was very different; he was designed for strength, agility, and speed; his appearance was that of a machine prepared for battle.

“That’s right, young man,” interrupted Denn. “He’s a battle robot. In fact, he’s my friend. We’ve been together in many battles.”

“Really? Cool!” the boy exclaimed enthusiastically. He turned back towards a girl, and beckoned with his hand for her to come over. “Dani, come and see this.”

Dani was the boy’s sister, a very pretty girl, with light brown hair and green eyes, and in her twenties; only a child for the times.

“My name’s Qein Dontes,” said the boy, “and this is my sister, Dani.”

“Pleased to meet you, I’m Denn Borneu, and this is my friend CO.

Dani looked at him with mistrust.

“So the robot isn’t just your companion, he’s your friend as well. Tell me, then, how is it that a moment ago I heard you asking him his name? Anyone would say it’s obligatory for a person to know the name of their friends.”

Denn smiled.

“The thing is, I’m not good with names. It happens to me all the time,” joked Denn. “What was yours?”

“Dani!” A look of vexation appeared on her face. Denn thought that she looked very attractive.

Before they could carry on with the conversation, Senlar interrupted. He came accompanied by the captain, who wanted to speak with Denn.

“Captain, this is Denn Borneu, the man I told you about.”

The captain had an ex-military look about him, of adult appearance, and with a forbidding face. His combed-back grey hair revealed his experience.

“So *you’re* the Tau Ceti sergeant that Senlar told me about. My name is Val Afkbar, I’m the captain of the station.”

To Denn, that name somewhat rang a bell. He was not sure where it was familiar from, but he had undeniably heard speak of ‘Afkbar’ at some point.

“Afkbar? That sounds familiar... Why does it sound familiar to me?” asked Denn. Senlar was looking somewhat uncomfortable; it was as if he wanted to silence Denn with his gaze. “Do we know each other?”

“No, we don’t know each other.”

Afkbar was the surname of a recognised family of space pirates that for years had been operating in a zone outside of the limits of The Galactic Union, a long way from the Primary Systems. However, they were well known enough for it to be almost obligatory for a member of the galactic army, like Denn, to have heard of them.

“Hmm! It’s funny, I thought I’d heard your name before.”

“It doesn’t matter. Since you’re a soldier from The Union, you could be of use. Will you allow me to take a scan of your iris?” Captain Val was not asking out of politeness, but rather because it was illegal to scan the iris without permission.

The captain’s intention was to confirm whether Denn Borneu really did belong to The Galactic Union army, verifying it on a database to which he had access.

Bornev agreed, accepting his fate. If on Earth they had sent the arrest signal for Denn before they were able to cross through the first wormhole, he would be at a loss. Alternatively, the signal would not arrive, since they were now many, many light-years away from any known system, and the database could only be updated near one of them.

“You can scan my iris,” said Denn, and in an instant, a novel device, a pair of augmented reality lenses over the captain’s eyes, which connected wirelessly to a bracelet on his wrist for processing data, scanned Bornev’s iris, confirming his identity.

“It seems you are who you say you are,” said the captain.

Denn felt an immense sense of relief at not seeing hostility in the captain. The order of capture had not arrived. He had passed the most important test in gaining the trust of the station authorities.

“If you want to help, Senlar will tell you the details,” said the captain, and immediately, without saying another word, turned on his heel, taking some of his subordinates with him.

“Did I say something wrong?” Denn asked Senlar, who was still looking a little uncomfortable.

“Are you stupid or something?” interrupted Dani. “Afkbar is the name of one of the most dangerous bands of pirates in the galaxy. He’ll most certainly belong to that family. He must have thought you were tormenting him for you to ask where you knew his name from.”

Senlar nodded.

“Oops! I told you I was bad with names,” claimed Denn, with a laugh. “Now, if you will excuse me, I have things to talk about with this man here. It was a pleasure meeting you... Umm! ... What is your name?”

Dani took her brother by the hand, and left, furious.

“I’m only joking with her,” said Denn, addressing C0-UN1, who, had he been able to, would have answered with a smile.

Senlar rushed to speak first; he wanted to be sure to avoid any further interruption.

“Look, Denn, right now we can’t really properly know what our situation is. I’m going to get everybody together and explain to them what we know. Many of them are already suspecting that an intruder took the station, so hiding it won’t be of any use. The best thing to do is be open about it. Would you be able to help me? Your presence could give them confidence.”

“But first, tell me, do you know anything about who is responsible?”

“No. The men who were in the control room were attacked. They were rendered unconscious before they even knew it.”

“Are they all right?”

“Yes, they’ve woken up, and they’re not hurt, only a little dazed, although they’ll certainly wish they still were unconscious so as to avoid the scolding that Val’s going to give them...Let’s go and speak with the people.”

Denn nodded.

“Okay, let’s do it.” Denn walked calmly towards the centre of the plaza, with the intention of talking to everyone. He stood up on a bench and began: “Attention!” he said, as he waved his hands to get the attention of those present. “If you could all come closer for a moment, that would be appreciated... Attention please!”

Senlar looked at him, pleased; it was not necessary for him to gather all of the people, but he did it anyway. It turned out that Denn did have the charisma expected of a sergeant of The Galactic Union.

“My name is Denn Bornev, from the planet Nec. I am a sergeant in the Tau Ceti army. I’ve been asked to help the station’s authorities. I know you must all have a lot of

questions. This man here is Senlar Belmy, First in Station. Let's listen to what he has to say, and try to cooperate."

"Thank you, Denn." Senlar came forward in order to immediately take the floor.

It was important that he spoke to them. The atmosphere was filled with a thirst for some sort of explanation. The frightened faces worried Denn a little.

"Somebody broke into the control room," began Senlar, "and for reasons still unknown, transported the station through several wormholes. Unfortunately, the jump-gate station's system suffered damage, and we will be here for a while, at least until we manage to repair it. Furthermore, the person who did it has still not been located. We are working to find them, which is why nobody should move away from here."

"How could this happen?" asked someone.

"Calm down, please." Senlar could understand the peoples' desperation, and knew that somehow he needed to reassure those present. "You should know that, at this moment, we are out of danger. In the station there are close to eighty security officers. We urge you all to share anything you feel is suspicious; our officials will be glad to listen to you. We have already regained the control room, and have isolated the remaining areas of the station. The first thing we must do is register on a database everybody still on board." Two officers approached; they only needed their eye devices, which were connected to their wristbands, in order to call up the database. They put down some seats and sat down. "If I could ask you to form two lines so that these officers can take your information. It's everything we can do for now, and as soon as there is news, we will share it."

The people proceeded to give out the information requested of them by the officers, who with rapid hand movements in the air, input the data into those advanced devices on their eyes. Senlar moved to one side and, moving his hand, indicated for Denn to come closer.

"What's wrong, Senlar?"

“Whilst we’re registering all these people, we’ll have time to study the situation better. As is the custom, two of the officers who have to stay until the end of the evacuation are mechanics, and right now they are trying to repair the systems. We’ll see what news they have for us.”

“How can I help?” asked Denn.

“The captain has sent four groups of ten people to inspect all areas of the station. He has asked me to stay here with several soldiers in order to monitor. The Second in Station, him over there,” he said, pointing to a man, “will be taking a further group to inspect. Could you and the robot join up with his search group? The robot’s sensors could be of help.”

“No problem.”

Cooperating was the best thing that Denn could do. Now he already had a new plan. He was going to carry out any request from the station authorities, and wait until they repaired the jump system. Once it was finally fixed, and they were able to travel to some inhabited system, he would attempt to steal the evacuation ship, in order to continue with their escape.

“Just give me a moment to talk to the robot.” Denn moved away a little, and called over his companion, so as to speak in private.

“Are we in trouble?” asked CO-UN1.

“Don’t worry,” replied Denn, smiling. “In any case, the one who’d get into trouble is me.”

Before carrying on, he paused to make sure that nobody was listening to them, and after confirming that they would be able to speak freely, he continued:

“We're going to have to cooperate with these people. None of them suspects us, and we want to keep it that way. If anyone asks you anything, you just need to say that I bought you on Earth before coming to the station. That's all.”

"But, didn't you say that we were friends in the army?"

"I think that everyone will understand that I was only trying to entertain the boy. Besides, if anyone were to ask, it would be fairly complicated inventing stories about the two of us fighting together in the army. Don't you think?"

"I would have liked to have been your friend in the army."

"We've only been together for a day, and you're already that attached to me? Do you not have any other friends or something?" Denn let out a laugh as he gave the robot a few pats on the back. He wanted to make him feel as though he were a friend.

"No, I don't. You only activated me yesterday. Do you remember?"

"Of course I remember. I'm only pulling your leg. That's what friends do." CO-UN1 felt happy; it was the first time that anyone had ever called him friend. "Don't worry, CO, something tells me that soon we'll be having a few adventures."

"CO? Why do you call me that?"

"That's your name."

"No, my name is CO-UN1."

"Don't you like CO?"

"It's not that, it's just that it is strange to me."

"I'm not going to say all the letters and numbers in your name every time I want to talk to you, CO."

"Why?"

"I thought you were supposed to think like a human," said Denn in a joking tone. "There'll be time yet to teach you various things. Now, let's go and see who the Second in Station is."

Denn and C0-UN1 approached the man. 'Hello!' he said, to no response. The Second in Station was not as friendly as Senlar. He was a contentious person who was constantly looking to making everyone else feel somewhat diminished.

He'd worked at the station for a little over a year, and just like Senlar, before being transferred to the station, he had been part of the Solar System army. They weren't First and Second in Station for nothing. They had some qualities that were worthy of rewarding with a position of high command. But they possessed another distinctive feature which at that time frightened people. The same quality that brought about their transferral from the army to the jump-gate station. They had both suffered a strange change in their bodies.

Whilst on a mission with the Solar System army, upon travelling through a wormhole, their minds became connected with that of another being in a parallel universe.

Before finally discovering the wormholes, many scientists believed in the existence of a multiverse. An infinite quantity of parallel universes coexisting in an almost infinite space, but it was not until the period in which they began using the wormholes that this theory was confirmed.

And it happened precisely that, without prior warning, and without any explanation, some of these universes became randomly connected whilst a certain wormhole was being used. It was on several occasions that the strange phenomenon manifested itself; when a person was travelling through these wormholes, their body mixed with that of someone else in another universe, becoming one same being. One person receiving the other in one of the two universes. They called it convergence.

Many did not know whether the being ceased to exist in the other universe. At first, it was thought that only memories were transferred, but some more isolated cases allowed it to be ascertained that it was definitely not limited to memories. Sometimes, a convergence separates, forming two beings in one universe. Perhaps the subject was transferred from the other universe, or perhaps it was only a perfect copy.

A convergence is one of the most interesting mysteries of the universe. It is The Union of two lives. The memories of both beings are combined into one single body. Sometimes, the person changes very little: they cannot really explain the memories of the other being, but on other occasions the memories received are so vivid that the personality of the subject changes forever.

In that epoch, it was decided that any member of the galactic army who was to suffer a convergence was too unstable to remain in service. As such, there was the order to transfer all such people to less risky posts until further investigation into the matter was possible.

Denn still did not know it, but on the station he had already met some convergences. The First and Second in Station were working there because of it. He himself had a lot in common with them. A year ago, he had suffered a convergence. The memories that he obtained from the parallel universe were enough to impel him to carry out his daring plan: to steal C0-UN1 from a laboratory on the planet Earth.

"My name is Denn Bornew, and this is C0," he persevered, addressing the Second in Station, who was still not returning his greeting.

"I'm not interested in the robot's name. They've told me you're both going to help us. Is that true?"

"It is," replied Denn. "I didn't catch your name."

"I didn't give it."

Denn hated him immediately. His name was Neil Gobi, an earthling from the City Below the Desert, descended from a family that had instigated a rebellion against a powerful nation on the planet.

Due to the problems of over-population being experienced on the planet Earth, in addition to the wars, many people were mired in poverty. His family had migrated from the continent of Europe, in the year 2060, in search of a better place to live, but the nation

denied them entry. They created a city in a desert, and fought for decades until peace was agreed.

He had grown up amongst warriors. His father had made him enter into the galactic army when he was barely of age, where he participated in many colonisation missions until his transfer to the station. Neil Gobi was born in the year 2252. When he met Denn, he was already one hundred and eighteen years old.

In an earlier era, a person of that age would be on the brink of death, their face full of wrinkles and their strength decimated. But now, humans were different. They aged very slowly. The advances in genetic engineering had converted the human race into one of the longest living in the galaxy, and somebody of Neil's age now was considered to be a young person.

“What do you want me to do?” Denn asked him.

“We're going to search for the intruder throughout the whole of sector H. I want him alive.” Neil turned around, and walked towards a lift a few meters away from them, followed by a group of officers who were accompanying him. Denn stayed still for a moment whilst the rest were beginning to come past him. “Come on, move it,” scolded Neil, who turned his head to address Denn.

Denn turned his gaze to CO-UN1 and said:

“There's nothing left for it, let's follow him and put an end to this.”

Whilst Denn and the rest of the groups searched the vessel for an intruder they would not find, Captain Val Afkbar tried to find a solution to the predicament in which they found themselves. He had sent two technicians to try and repair the jump system, without any luck. In addition to that, he ordered them to communicate with any system or ship that might be found near the station, but there was not a single trace of any civilization anywhere near them.

All of the people still on the station were registered, and all of the resources they had on board were inventoried. Some four hours later, when Denn was finally on his way

back, in the main plaza, he approached Senlar, who was now looking a little tired, surely from responding to peoples' questions.

"That Neil's a great guy," said Denn, in an ironic tone.

Senlar smiled.

"He's certainly likeable."

"He didn't even want to give me his name; one of the guys had to do it."

Senlar burst out laughing.

"Don't worry about him."

"I need to speak with the captain," said Denn, in a more serious tone. "I want to know what he plans on doing."

Senlar nodded, and getting up from his place, he asked Denn to follow him.

"Go ahead, I'll catch up with you," said Denn, who, before walking after Senlar, took a second to ask C0-UN1 to wait for him in the plaza. After doing so, he picked up his pace in order to reach Senlar.

Denn analysed him for a moment. Since Senlar had agreed without question to Denn's request, it seemed obvious that the captain had given him the order to take him back with him as soon as he returned to the plaza. The captain would probably have several questions for him as well. After all, what would a Sergeant be doing all alone at a jump-gate station?

After a somewhat long walk, they finally arrived at the control room. The very one that Denn had taken a few hours earlier. Now, there were several people in there, perhaps trying to communicate with someone, or trying to repair one of the navigation systems.

"Through here," said Senlar, and he pressed a button that opened a door in a wall, right there in the middle of the control room. A door that Denn had not noticed before.

It was the Captain's Room; a small room that was accessed via the Control Room. *How careless! How lucky there wasn't anybody there when I was controlling the station!*, thought Denn.

"Here is Denn, captain."

"Thank you," replied the captain, whilst Denn entered the room.

"I'll go," said Senlar, and he immediately closed the door so that the Captain and Denn could have a little privacy.

The room had an enormous picture window looking out into space, similar to the one in the control room. There, in front of said window, stood the captain, looking out onto the cosmos with his hands behind his back.

"Sit," said the captain.

There was a desk separating Denn from the captain. He sat down in one of the two chairs pulled up in front of it, expecting the captain to turn around and sit in his seat.

"How has the search gone?" asked the captain. "Did you find anything?" he asked, and, without moving from his spot, continued contemplating the universe.

"I imagine you must already know," answered Denn.

"I want to know what your opinion is," insisted the captain. "Do you think the intruder escaped?"

Denn shifted a little in his seat so as to be more comfortable, and without hesitating, he answered honestly.

"He hasn't escaped. The intruder is still here."

The captain turned towards Denn. He was not trying to look threatening, but he maintained a seriousness that would make anybody uncomfortable.

"Still here? Maybe we haven't searched enough. Perhaps he's escaped somewhere. Will he be hidden?"

“Hidden in plain sight,” replied Denn, without faltering.

The faintest trace of a smile on the captain’s face appeared to show his satisfaction at Denn’s response; it was just what he was thinking.

“What is a sergeant from Tau Ceti doing in a jump-gate station in the Solar System?”

Denn did not display any nervousness; he seemed to be prepared from the start for an interrogation like this.

“That is confidential, captain.”

The captain shrugged his shoulders. It was the type of response he did not want to hear. It gave no room for finding out the truth.

“A moment ago, I found myself looking at your profile on the database... you are thirty years old... How was it that a little boy got to be sergeant in a Union squadron?”

“There are thousands of sergeants belonging to The Galactic Union armies, I suppose that many of them will be of a similar age to me, sir.”

“It’s not that common.”

Denn was not just trying to cooperate with the captain; in addition to that, The Union laws obligated it. The captain of a jump-gate station had a certain authority over medium ranks within the confines of the station, and although Denn was now a fugitive, the captain did not know it. To him, he was a sergeant who had to follow The Union laws.

“Captain, I don’t want to discuss with you whether or not I have the necessary aptitudes to have been promoted to sergeant; with all due respect, that’s a decision that has nothing to do with you.”

Denn was not irritated by the captain doubting him, it was understandable, even. What he was really worried about was the fact that he had come up with a rather loose plan: a plan that placed the crew in grave danger. His lack of experience had led to him

putting innocent people at risk. He knew that it was all his fault, and he would have to do his utmost to revert the situation and get all of these people out of danger.

"Perhaps I've offended you?" asked the Captain, as he turned to face the window, to contemplate space once more.

"No, sir, that doesn't bother me, to tell the truth, the only thing bothering me is the situation we're in. Have they been able to repair the jump systems?"

The captain paused briefly before answering; a suspense that, without meaning to, managed to make Denn uncomfortable.

"No... And we won't be able to. We don't have the necessary resources."

After that response, Denn was no longer so calm. He had counted on them being able to repair the station systems. Now that he knew that was not possible, he felt afraid, not for himself, but for the lives of everyone else. They were lost in deep space thanks to his recklessness.

"There has to be some way, Captain! Are the technicians sure? And... The communicators? Have they been able to contact anyone?"

The captain noticed Denn's change in tone, the consternation that invaded him was obvious. He wondered whether it could be from fear of losing his own life, or whether it was the case that he was worried about everyone on the station.

"We haven't been able to communicate with anyone, we're in the middle of nothing," replied the captain, and he carried on looking into space.

"Perhaps I could help, captain, I'm good at repairing things... If you'll let me take a look at the systems... I could..."

"I already told you. If professional technicians say it can't be fixed, then it's because it can't."

“But... at least we’ll be able to know our location, if we analyse the cosmos we’ll be able to find some known stars. Perhaps we could triangulate our position with some pulsars.”

“No, we don’t have a database for stars. And some of our instruments proved to be damaged. We tried to measure the distance to the centre of the galaxy, with definitely erroneous results.”

“What do you mean?”

“The results say that we are a much shorter distance from the centre of the galaxy than we ought to be. I’m not talking about a small error; the difference is enormous. Without a shadow of a doubt, the systems are not working as they ought to be. Even so, knowing where we are wouldn’t be of much use. Without the jump systems, we’re not able to go anywhere.”

The captain’s apparent calm managed to worry Denn even more, as he was still not managing to get to grips with how he could be so tranquil in the face of such a situation.

“But, aren’t you worried?” asked Denn, as he got up out of his chair. “Aren’t you concerned about the lives of all these people?”

It was a few seconds before the captain answered; it was if he wanted to add more tension to the moment.

“Perhaps you ought to calm yourself, Bornev, you’re supposed to be a sergeant, you ought to be capable of maintaining your composure in complicated situations.”

“How can you be asking me to be calm, sir? Aren’t you aware of the fragile situation we’re facing?”

“Don’t get impatient, with a little luck we’ll get out of this.”

The captain’s answer managed to tip the balance of Denn’s annoyance.

“Luck? You’re standing there, doing nothing, with no plan, just because you decided to put your trust in luck. Are you joking or something?”

The captain turned his head towards Denn for a moment, and looked at him for a second before turning around again to look into space.

“Who told you I don’t have a plan?” and he gave a brief pause. “Do you see that point in that area?”

Val lifted his hand and placed his finger on the window, pointing to a small mark in space. Denn approached a little, in order to see what the captain was talking about.

“Yes... I see it. What about it?” asked Denn, somewhat confused.

“Well that is my plan. That point you see there is a planet, and an hour ago I set course for it. We’ll see yet how our luck goes.”

Chapter II

The Government of The Galactic Union

A few short hours had passed since the hijacking of the station, and the high authorities of The Galactic Union had already gathered to tackle the situation. There was still no trace of the station, and Denn had already been added to the galaxy's most-wanted list.

The Government of The Galactic Union, made up by its High Council, with its ten members and the Supreme Leader, were trying to reach a consensus regarding the measures to take.

As usual, its meetings took place in Capital City, a colossal underwater city constructed in a part of the Atlantic Ocean on the planet Earth. A city which functioned as the capital of the entire Galactic Union, in which all of the political issues and important decisions were dealt with.

Inside the Capital Palace, the Leader of The Union and his ten advisers were congregated in a hall that was completely isolated away from prying ears, seated around a circular table.

"Still nothing is known regarding the whereabouts of this Borneu," said one of the most important members of the High Council, Voill Conner, the right-hand man to the Supreme Leader of The Union. "I have asked Tau Ceti to locate everyone he knew intimately so that they can be interrogated, in the eventuality that the situation is not resolved soon. There don't seem to be many of them. His mother, his direct supervisor, and some soldiers from his squadron."

"What about the station?" asked another. "Something so big ought to be relatively easy to find. With the great presence of ships and other stations in all the planetary systems, we ought to have news soon."

“It isn’t that easy, Biherys,” said the next important member of the council, Yavar Afir. “If you had left Earth even once, you would know how vast a planetary system is.”

“I can hazard a guess... How many systems have been ruled out?”

“Seventeen,” replied Voill. “But it’s been barely a few hours since it was lost. As the hours go by, we’ll have more news. Even so, we certainly won’t know anything until the end of tomorrow.”

“We’re talking about the hijacking of a Solar System station... the central system of the entire Galactic Union... How is it possible this has happened? How does this leave our safety...? That is to say, this is where the capital of the entire Union is. It is unacceptable.”

“The public don’t know that it’s been a hijacking,” said Yavar. “What we have announced is that a failure on the station caused it to drift.”

“It’s only a matter of time before they know. This must be resolved immediately.”

The Leader of The Union, who was at the head of the table, not saying anything, got up out of his seat and walked towards a window overlooking the centre of the city constructed below the ocean. Everybody remained silent, waiting for his reaction, whilst he looked at the beautiful city full of sculptures, gardens, and fountains, populated by the most influential people in the galaxy.

He thought about all the people on the station in terms of their importance to The Union, and did not find the need to worry about them. All that mattered was what this meant for the reputation of the Solar System’s safety: the fact that one of its stations had been hijacked.

After analysing it for a moment, he came to the conclusion that that was not so important either. Now he was only worried by one thing: the robot that Denn had stolen from Earth.

“How is it that nobody knew about the robot’s existence?” asked the Leader of The Union.

The room remained silent; nobody dared to give an answer. It was as much a surprise to them that the existence of such a special robot on Earth had passed unnoticed for such a long time.

The laboratory from which it had been taken would not provide them with many answers, not after the explosion that Denn caused had reduced it to rubble. Even less the fact that this place had not been visited by virtually anybody for a long time.

It was Helagar Ust's laboratory. He had used it during his whole life's work for A-Corp, until the day in which he left the planet Earth, some twenty years earlier, supposedly for a convention in the Eridani System, to which he never arrived. Nothing more was ever heard of him again. A-Corp decided to shut down his laboratory, and not allow entry to anybody.

"Surely the old Helagar would have some dark intention in order to leave it in his laboratory without saying anything," prompted Biherys.

"That bastard!" said the Supreme Leader. "He always defended his robots, even after the disaster they caused. He was very likely responsible. Where will he have got to?"

"Might he have anything to do with Bornev?" asked another member of the council. "It seems strange that this man knew exactly where to look."

"Perhaps," replied Voill. "Even so, it's early days for jumping to conclusions. I made contact with A-Corp regarding the robot, and they deny all responsibility. They had no idea the robot even existed."

The Supreme Leader was furious. The negligence of the people responsible for A-Corp was causing problems for The Union.

"I swear that if it wasn't for A-Corp being such an important business for the economy, I would make it disappear immediately. How many problems have they given us? First the Colonisers, then the susceptibility in the semi-humans, and now this. Somebody bring me their president right now. He's going to have to listen to me."

“We’ve already sent for him, sir,” replied Voill. “He should be on his way.”

“Good... Capture Denn Borneu, whatever the cost. The lives of the people on board the station are of no significance. Finding that man is all that matters. I don’t know why, but I have a bad feeling. Why would somebody take such trouble to steal a robot that is an enemy to humanity? How did he know it was there? I suspect that what’s happening goes further than any of us can imagine.”

“We’ll take charge of it, sir,” reassured Voill, “don’t worry.”

“When Helagar disappeared, twenty years ago, I knew there would be problems for The Union...” The Leader paused, went back to the table, and, resting his hands on it, continued: “I have been in power for twenty-five years, I started just after the unfortunate death of the second Leader of The Union. The only reason my term is renewed every ten years is because I have done it in the best way possible. The first Leader lost his term after the events of 2215. Those sorts of things cause the people to lose confidence. I do not plan on giving way for the fourth leader. We need to find out how it is that this man knew about the robot, and why he took it, no matter the cost.”

“Sir, I assure you that we are doing everything possible to capture Borneu,” said Voill.

“You may go, all of you,” he said, and all the members of the council stood up, crestfallen, to leave the room. “Not you, Voill... Yavar.”

He had asked his reliable men to stay. The Leader of The Union needed to speak alone with them.

“What’s is it, Ebyem?” Voill asked the Leader.

“Remind me of what The Augur said, before his disappearance.”

“That is not important, sir. You are the legitimate Leader of The Union.”

“Remind me of it.”

Voill looked uneasily at Yavar. He was feeling worried about the Leader's tone. After a short hesitation, he spoke:

"He said: 'You're not supposed to be who you are.'"

"What else?"

"I don't remember very well, sir."

"Yavar, do you remember?"

"Why is it important, sir?" replied Yavar.

"Say it."

"It was more or less what Voill said, sir... But you shouldn't think about that... it doesn't mean anything."

"Something's missing. Remind me of the whole thing please."

Yavar had no choice, the Supreme Leader was going to insist everything that was necessary."

"Very well... he said: 'You're not supposed to be who you are.'"

"He told me that the second Leader should not have died. That I should not have come to power. He said that something strange had occurred in this universe. He told me: 'I still don't know what the cause is, but in twenty years maybe I will.'"

"Why are you talking to us about this, sir?" asked Voill.

"Well, because those twenty years are about to come to a close, and I can't help thinking that something bad is about to happen. Denn Bornew could be the beginning of something terrible."

Denn did not know it, but he had managed to catch the attention of dangerous enemies. He had crossed a point of no return.

Chapter III

Survival Plan

The captain had ordered that they travel to a nearby celestial body that appeared to be a planet. But the decision had required some deliberation.

Hours earlier, as Denn was alongside Neil Gobi, working on the search for the supposed intruder, Val had sent his technicians to try and repair the jump systems, without success. Upon discovering that there would be no way of putting the systems in working order, Captain Val approached the Control Room to explain the situation to the people who were trying to communicate, still unsuccessfully, with some system or vessel. He was going to explain the situation to his subordinates.

“Jin and Gor have not been able to repair the jump system,” he told them, “but the navigation systems appear to be in perfect condition. We have sufficient resources to survive on the station for at least eight weeks. But as you already know, we are in the middle of nowhere, and we can’t be sure that someone will come for us. We must take measures immediately, or we’ll all die here.”

“What do you suggest we do, captain?” said someone.

“That object you see over there,” he said, pointing into space, “is a star. Find out if there are planets orbiting it. Our only hope is to find a habitable planet.”

Thanks to the advances in genetic engineering, the human body was not the fragile entity it had been centuries before. Humans were now able to tolerate much greater atmospheric pressures than those on Earth, survive with limited quantities of oxygen, and tolerate high doses of toxic substances, such as carbon dioxide, without dying. Furthermore, the humans could now be exposed to micro gravity atmospheres for long periods of time without suffering significant damage, and acclimatise quickly to planets with strong gravity.

The radiation that was once the most dangerous enemy to humans in space was now a problem of the past. All of that made finding a planet on which the humans would be able to survive a little easier than it had been centuries before. The captain thought that the only option for the salvation of the people on the station was to find somewhere with the conditions to sustain life.

Following Val's orders, the navigation officers carried out the necessary tests to find any celestial body close to them. They worked as fast as they could, and after an hour, they already had something to report back with to the captain, so they called him to the control room to present their discoveries:

"We have the results, sir!" reassured a very animated officer. "It's good news. There appear to be several bodies producing large gravitational fields. Two of which are relatively close. We've carried out tests, and calculate that it'll take us just under three weeks at full power to reach the most viable one."

The captain did not look as enthused as his officers had wanted. The finding of these bodies did not mean that they were habitable planets, and it would be a mistake to think that they were now out of danger.

"What about the other one?" he asked calmly.

"The other body is closer at the moment, but it's moving away, following its orbit of the star. It would take us perhaps seven or eight weeks to reach it. The first one, on the other hand, is approaching us. That's why it's the most viable option."

The captain did not say anything for a few moments, sat down on a chair, and reflected. The planets are on opposite points. We only have the possibility of trying to reach one of them. If we make the wrong decision, that could be our downfall, thought the captain.

"Do you have any idea which one could be the more suitable for sustaining life?" asked the captain.

“We’re sorry, sir, but half of our instruments are damaged. Due to the fact that the studies we have been able to carry out have been limited, we aren’t sure. I would say that the one moving away may have some ten per cent more possibilities, but it balances out since the second is approaching us.”

The captain considered what the officer had just told him, but before even thinking about making a decision, he asked again, this time addressing the other officer.

“What do you think?”

It wasn’t that the captain was unable to think for himself; he was well known for including his subordinates in his decisions. He had never underestimated the value of advice.

“It’s a difficult decision, captain. Taking into account the limited time and scarce resources, the safest option is to set course for the one approaching us.”

“And you, do you think the same?” he asked a third.

“One must take all into consideration, captain. If the station’s propulsion systems were to be damaged, we would still have the opportunity to use the auxiliary systems in order to guide the station directly towards the orbit of the planet coming towards us, and thus wait to meet it. However, if we try travelling towards the one moving away, and the propulsion systems were damaged, we would not be able to reach it, and there would be nothing more we could do, the auxiliary systems would be of no use in that case; they’re very weak.”

The captain analysed the situation; it was a critical decision. I need to make a decision soon, even a few hours could be crucial at the end of all this, he thought.

“Get Senlar in here immediately. I need to consult with him,” said Val, and opened the door to the Captain’s Room, going inside to wait for Senlar.

The officers called Senlar, who, after a few minutes, arrived to assist the captain. He opened the door to the room that only he and Val had access to, and went in.

“You called me, captain?” asked Senlar.

“We need to make an immediate decision, Senlar.”

“How can I assist you, sir?”

“We don’t have much time, so I’m only going to tell you the situation we’re in. There don’t appear to be any inhabited systems or other stations near us. The jump system has sustained irreparable damage, and we only have resources for eight weeks. It seems to be that there are two planets orbiting a star near our current position.”

Senlar was listening carefully as the captain laid out for him the state of their situation. It was not the first time that he had helped Val to make difficult decisions, which was why he was held in such high esteem by the captain.

“Continue, please.”

“One of the planets,” proceeded the captain, “the one further away from us, is approaching our position as it follows its orbit. It will take us three weeks to meet it. The second planet, the one that is closer, is moving away from us as it follows its orbit, and will take us around eight weeks at full power to reach. According to the limited studies we could carry out, this has a ten per cent greater chance of potentially being suitable for life. What do you suggest we do?”

It was no surprise to the captain what followed, he had always trusted fully in this man. Senlar answered immediately:

“Let’s go to the second, captain. That extra ten per cent is enough to take the risk. I will ration all the resources, and make it so that instead of eight weeks, they’ll last twelve. That way, if we arrive at the planet after eight weeks and it turns out not to be suitable, we’ll still have a small margin of time to take new measures.”

The captain was completely satisfied with Senlar’s response. He did not flatter or congratulate him, because it was not necessary for him to do so. He was his right-hand

man, and the only thing he expected of him was his good performance. So far, he had never disappointed him.

He immediately activated a transmitter, and gave instructions to the navigation officers to follow the planet that was moving away, just as Senlar had suggested.

“Do you need anything else, captain? I would like to begin immediately with the preparations,” asked Senlar.

“What do you think of that Bornev?”

“He seems to be a good person, captain,” answered Senlar, in total sincerity.

“Don’t you think it strange for a Sergeant of Tau Ceti to have come to this station? S4-07 only connected with Sector 4. The jump-gate stations in Sector 4 only go to Indi or to Neeve. Denn must have been heading for one of those systems, or even further. Either of the two destinations would distance him from Tau Ceti.”

What with all the commotion, Senlar had not had time to analyse it very much. He took a second before replying to the captain.

“Maybe it has something to do with the robot, captain. It doesn’t seem like a common robot; he could be taking it somewhere, perhaps.”

The captain was not so sure.

“An important politician from the planet Nec was travelling to Earth this week,” continued the captain. “Bornev was part of the escort. On the database, there appears a permit for entry into the Solar System with that mission. Could it be that on Earth he was entrusted with another mission? It’s strange, don’t you think?”

“Do you think he has something to do with everything that’s happening?”

The captain moved his head.

“It’s improbable. Why would a soldier from The Union do something like this? Even so, his presence here is strange. We need to monitor all the people on board until we resolve the situation.”

“Understood, captain.”

“When Bornev gets back, bring him here. Then inform Neil of the plan to follow. That is all, Senlar.”

“I’ll take my leave, sir.”

Senlar’s discipline and obedience had turned him into Captain Val’s person of trust a while back. They knew each other long before working on the station. Val had him under his command in several colonisation missions, and in some battles when they were still part of The Galactic Union Army. Led by Val Afkbar in battles against enemies of The Union, such as pirates, rebels, Vialikis, and the remaining threats, he had gone along earning the trust of all his superiors.

Senlar returned immediately to the main plaza to wait for Denn and Neil. He did not have to wait long. They were already back from their search. After taking Denn to the captain, Senlar prepared to inform Neil of the new developments. He called him via the communicator, and asked his location.

“I’m in the dining hall,” answered Neil.

Without wasting any time, he went straight there.

“How did the search go?” Senlar asked Neil.

Neil was leaning against a wall, in the dining hall that was designated to the station officers, with one leg on the ground and the other against the wall. He was eating an apple, whilst looking at the floor, as if he were not worried at all.

“What, you mean that sergeant hasn’t told you?”

“I want to hear it from you. Denn isn’t an officer of this station, you are.”

Neil screwed up his mouth whilst he shook his head.

“We haven’t found anything.”

Senlar looked at him for a few seconds, whilst Neil carried on eating his apple without demonstrating any concern.

“We now have a plan,” Senlar told him. He hoped there would be some reaction of interest from Neil, but there was none. “Perhaps you don’t want me to tell you?” Senlar persevered in the face of Neil’s indifference.

“You never consider me in the important decisions; don’t expect me to show interest in them. If you have to say, then say, but the truth is it’s all the same whether I know or not. All the two of you do is give me orders, like the rest of the officers on the station.”

Senlar wanted to turn right back round and leave, but the captain’s order was to inform Neil. After all, he was the third person in command on the whole station.

“You’re still the Second in Station... I’ll tell you anyway. Everything’s indicating that there is a planet near our position. We’re setting course towards it. It’s expected we’ll take eight weeks to get there. We’ll ration the foods so that they last for twelve weeks. If you want more details about the planet, go to the control room.”

As soon as he finished telling Neil the plan, he got ready to go, but before he could leave the dining hall, he was held up by a question.

“What’s Bornev supposed to be doing here?”

Neil chucked the rest of his apple in the bin and went up to Senlar, who was turning around to reply.

“We still don’t know,” said Senlar. “The captain is also asking himself the same question.”

“And what’s up with that robot? It doesn’t seem like a common robot. Don’t you think it’s strange? I don’t trust that Borneu guy one bit.”

Senlar understood why the Captain and Neil had doubts regarding Denn. His presence on the station was strange to him also.

“We’ll see,” answered Senlar. “I’ll keep him monitored. You do the same. But please be respectful, he’s still an officer of the galactic army.”

“That’s what he says,” answered Neil, in a sardonic tone.

Senlar left the dining hall to begin the preparations for the coming eight weeks. He hurriedly gathered a small group of people, and they began preparing a plan for rationing out the station’s resources.

At the same time, in the captain’s room, Val was finishing up telling Denn the details of the plan they ought to follow, if they did indeed want to have any opportunity of surviving. He explained to him why they had chosen the one planet over the other, and he spoke of the sacrifices and the effort that everybody on the station would have to make in order to make the foods last for the long voyage awaiting them.

“What’ll we do if this planet turns out not to be suitable for survival?” asked Denn, who was still worried.

“That’s why we’re rationing the foods so much. It’ll give us some time to decide what we’re going to do. We could try reaching the next planet.”

Denn relaxed a little. He calmly analysed all the information they had, and the situation in which they found themselves, and after a few moments, he came to the conclusion that the captain had made the right decision.

“It’s a good plan,” said Denn, after breaking his silence.

“It’s a terrible plan,” answered Val. “But it’s the best one we have for now.”

“Yes. It’s definitely the best option. You don’t need to think hard about it.”

Val looked at him for a moment, and decided to give him some advice:

“A sergeant shouldn’t be all right with making rushed decisions. When you’re on the battlefield, and the lives of your soldiers depend on your decision, you shouldn’t give yourself the luxury of not analysing things well.”

Denn noticed that the captain had changed his tone a little. *I didn’t think this guy could get any more serious*, he thought. He guessed that Captain Val must have had to make difficult decisions in the past. He wanted to ask, but he knew he would not receive any answer, so he simply avoided it.

“That’s good advice, captain.”

“I wanted to be sure you would understand it.”

“How can I help, captain?”

The captain reflected on Denn’s personality. A few minutes ago, he was very worried, and now he seemed very enthusiastic, and willing to help. He was certainly still an inexperienced young man, but he appeared to have good intentions. The captain understood that Senlar considered him to be a good person. He still didn’t want to trust Denn completely, but he sensed that he was not a bad man.

“Go to the main plaza,” Val said to him. “I’ll soon be announcing to everyone over the loudspeaker what we’re going to do. I’ll tell the officers they can ask your help if they need it.”

“I’ll go then, sir,” said Denn, as he was leaving, and before going out through the door to the captain’s room, he stopped for a moment. “Now I understand putting faith in luck, captain. I hope it all turns out well.”

Denn walked to the main plaza where everybody was still congregated, waiting for instructions. CO-UN1 was playing with Qein in the plaza. Denn did not want to interrupt them, and, without delay, he approached an officer to ask how he could help.

The officer explained to him that the captain had already prepared to notify everyone of the situation. Therefore, they would be waiting for Val to inform those on board the station of the circumstances first.

After a short wait, the captain's voice could be heard coming through every loudspeaker on the station.

Val shared all the information he had with everybody. He explained that all of the areas except the main plaza, along with some restricted areas, were being completely disabled. They would turn off all the energy systems in the interests of economising resources for the long journey they had ahead of them.

He warned that if there was anybody hiding on any part of the station, they had three hours to come to the plaza, or they would die, given that the oxygen systems would also be shut down in the rest of the station.

He ordered that everybody slept in the plaza, in sacks that were going to be handed out. As it was a vast area, which usually harboured two thousand people, they would not be pushed for space. The officers would sleep in their regular rooms, whilst some would keep guard in the plaza.

They would be able to use the different facilities found in the plaza, and in general they would live entirely in that area for the rest of the time on the station.

The issue of the intruder continued to bother the captain; as such, they would interview every single one of the people, trying to find anyone suspicious. They all cooperated, and all the interviews were completed.

The first week drew to a close, and they were unable to find anybody suspicious. The people were beginning to forget that amongst them there was a person who had hijacked the station. The time continued to pass by, and the intruder still was not found. Four weeks later, it had already ceased to be so important; the only thing that mattered was whether they would be saved or not.

In spite of the extreme nervousness of the people on board the station, they had remained calm enough to follow Captain Val's orders without protest. They had worked together to save the station's resources in order to survive as long as possible, and for the moment, everything was going according to plan.

On Earth, they still had no answers regarding the station's whereabouts, and tensions were rising.

CO-UN1 and Denn had become good friends, and Senlar had learnt to trust both of them, for their constant cooperation.

Val maintained his doubts regarding Denn; he was still wondering what he was doing on the station. He did not believe that he had been the hijacker, but he did believe he was hiding something. Even so, he had seen how Denn was trying to help with everything he needed; he considered him to be a good person.

What concerned the captain more was the fact that the hijacker had still not been found. He knew that he was still among them, and feared for the passengers' safety, but with the important voyage they still had ahead of them, he needed to focus on the target to which they were heading. Now, they were sufficiently close enough to better analyse the composition of what they were now certain was a planet of similar size to the Earth.

The analyses they were conducting regarding the planet had already allowed them to verify that it contained suitable elements to sustain life. However, they were still unable to know whether they were in the quantities necessary. Due to the fact that their instruments were partially damaged, the only way of confirming it was to get further to the planet.

The time continued to pass by. They had rationed out the foods as best they could, and now everything depended on their being able to reach the planet before the supplies were depleted. Impatience was beginning to get the better of people, and although almost all of them were accustomed to living on space stations, the concern at not finding a solution before the resources ran out was causing them fear.

When they finally reached the planet, it had taken them ten weeks to get there. The captain decided that it was time to speak with the people afresh, who were now hungry and without much hope.

This time, he was not only going to speak via the loudspeakers. The captain approached the plaza to speak in front of everyone. Neil was in charge of getting everyone's attention. "Attention, everyone," came Neil's voice through the loudspeakers, as he was in the control room next to Senlar, looking at the image of the plaza on the monitors. "The captain is going to say a few words. Everybody make your way to the central plaza."

Everybody left what they were doing in order to listen to what the captain was going to say. "Move!" he insisted unnecessarily to the people still hurrying to the centre of the plaza.

The people congregated anxiously in front of the captain, who was as serious as always. Finding any emotion in his face was a difficult task. Nobody in the plaza could guess whether it was going to be good news or bad.

"We have arrived at our destination planet," said the captain, without beating about the bush, and the very second that everyone was gathered to listen to him. "We are still in orbit. We'll begin with the preparations to send a probe. Soon, we'll be completely certain of whether or not it is habitable."

Immediately, there could be heard various murmurings amongst the people. They were all impatient to learn more details. With the exception of Denn and the station officers, nobody ever knew how far it was to reach their destination during the journey, and now that they had finally arrived, they were on the verge of finding out if they would have any chance of survival.

"How long will it take to prepare the probe?" asked Dani, who was by now already well known for being somewhat impulsive. "We wouldn't be averse to a bit of good news."

“Patience,” replied the captain. “Now is the time we must be more patient.”

The captain moved his hand in front of one of the cameras in the plaza, so as to give a signal to the control room where Senlar, Neil, and other officers were watching him attentively. After the captain’s signal, Senlar ordered one of the officers to activate the shutter system covering the station’s windows.

“Perhaps this view will motivate you whilst you wait,” said the captain, pointing to the windows that had been covered during the last few weeks, with the intention of preventing people from becoming discouraged at seeing the void.

Everyone rushed to the windows. The cover began to slowly lift, revealing the planet they had been pursuing for so long. The open-mouthed faces of some, and the sounds of surprise from others, united with the azure beauty of the planet lying in front of them to create the first joyful moment in weeks.

“It has clouds... and water...” said someone in the plaza. “Those are continents... it seems...”

“Vegetation!” cried another.

The people were shouting and celebrating. Others were hugging. ‘We’re saved!’ could be heard. The guffaws and exclamations of the peoples’ jubilation was enough recompense for the captain, who had taken a risk in telling everyone they had reached their destination, still not knowing whether it would be safe to descend to it.

Senlar himself had made him consider not sharing the news before making sure that the planet was fit for life. He had feared creating false hope, but in the end the captain’s desire to try and raise the depressed morale of the station’s passengers won out. ‘Even if the planet does not turn out to be good for us, at least they’ll see we have reasons for travelling here,’ Val had told Senlar hours earlier.

On seeing the peoples’ reaction of happiness and hope, Senlar was glad they had shown them the planet. It did not matter what happened afterwards, the people were smiling again.

“What are we waiting for? Why don’t we go down right away?” one person asked the captain.

The captain allowed them to enjoy the view for a few seconds before interrupting the passengers’ premature celebration.

“Listen!” said the captain, in a loud enough voice to calm the celebrations. “We mustn’t declare victory prematurely.” There was a brief pause whilst the captain continued his explanations. “Now is the time that we must be more cautious. It is necessary that a probe be sent, in order to confirm whether we can survive on the planet. Even when everything seems to indicate that it is habitable, there are many things we must analyse first.”

The people reined in their euphoria. They immediately understood that their survival was not assured. In the middle of a sudden silence, the captain could see the doubt returning to the peoples’ faces.

“Don’t be afraid,” said the captain, in a more serene tone. “I trust that the results will be good. We even have a contingency plan. I promise you that I will do everything possible to save our lives. We’re going to go ahead,” he said, and smiled with an incredible serenity.

It was a sight that was unheard of. A smile from the captain. Some people went back to being hopeful. They understood that the captain was doing the best job he could. Many of the officers had never even seen Captain Val smile ever. They could definitely sense his good intentions.

After what could be called an insipid speech, the people were calmer than might have been expected.

“I will inform you the minute I have news,” concluded the captain, and as always, he turned around and left the plaza.

Immediately, everyone returned to the picture windows to carry on contemplating the planet. The lack of features on CO-UN1’s face prevented anyone from perceiving the

admiration with which he looked at that beautiful world. Qein came up to him, to share his excitement with his robot friend.

“I hope it’s habitable,” he said to him, as he took his hand.

“Look, little brother. We could go and live there,” said Dani, as she joined them.

Qein hugged his sister with an enormous smile on his face, without taking his eyes off the gigantic planet.

“It’s beautiful, Dani. It’s so long since we were last on any planet. And this one’s special. Look at that... It’s green... I can’t wait. We’ll finally be leaving this cold place.”

C0-UN1 placed his hand on Qein’s shoulder with tenderness. It was clear that he now felt affection for the boy.

“Be patient, Qein,” said C0-UN1. “We will soon be there.”

The boy rewarded him with the same smile that a moment earlier he had given to Dani. They did not see him as a robot. He was a friend. In recent weeks, their mutual appreciation had grown.

The hours passed, the probe was sent, all of the data were analysed. Nobody else, apart from Captain Val, Senlar, and an officer specialised in the subject, studied the probe data, so as to avoid undesired leaks within the station. They did not want anybody jumping to conclusions before they could decide whether or not it was prudent to travel down onto the planet surface. Besides, they hoped to give themselves some time to think about what to tell the station’s passengers in the event that the information from the probe was unfavourable.

After taking all of the data, and revising all of the information, Captain Val, Senlar, and the specialised officer, deliberated for hours; so much so that the people on the station went to sleep without hearing any news. When they awoke, it was still the same. After a few more hours of tension, the captain was finally ready to share the results with

everyone else. The same as always, he announced for everyone to go to the centre of the plaza.

Highly anxious, they gathered as quickly as they could in order to listen to the awaited news. The captain was very serious as always, some even thought that C0-UN1 was demonstrating a more expressive facial expression.

Nobody dared to try and guess whether it was good news or bad news. The eternal reserve in the captain's face left little room for it. Even Denn shared the same anxieties as the rest. He was as much in the dark as they were. He was on the verge of finding out if it was possible that the people he had put in danger would have any opportunity to be saved.

"We have the results," said the captain as soon as everybody had finished congregating in front of him. "The planet is habitable. We will begin the preparations for the journey as soon as possible."

The cries of jubilation were instantaneous. The people jumped for joy and delight. It seemed as if the danger had passed; at last, they would be safe. Between hugs, they celebrated the excellent news.

The captain stopped them. There was no reason to lose even a second more; everything had to be ready right away. They would be going immediately. Val ordered his men to prepare the evacuation ship for descent onto the planet. Denn and C0-UN1 helped at every moment. The robot's strength was of special help for loading the different machines and objects they would be taking down to the planet. A fusion reactor for providing them with energy; machines for research, and various materials for construction; some turrets that they would use in the control of disturbances; and a medical capsule, in addition to ten guard drones. Things that would possibly make a difference in their endeavour to survive.

"Will we need these weapons?" the robot asked Denn, as they loaded everything into the ship.

“We don’t know what could be down there, C0. We need these weapons to defend ourselves.”

“What is this?” asked the robot, showing Denn a protective vest.

“It protects people from weak gunshots and impacts.”

“And this?” he asked, and held up a small sphere in his hand.

“Careful!” Denn told him, taking the device off him immediately. “That’s an electromagnetic shock grenade which temporarily disables electronic systems.”

“Could it damage the station?”

“The station uses a system which counteracts its effects. I was more worried about you and the door systems.”

“Could they damage me?”

“At the very least they’d make you feel groggy for a moment. Although the damage is temporary, they wreak havoc on any electronic system; that’s why it’s illegal to have them. Only in the army and its sub-organisations is their use permitted. They’re used especially for disabling the weapons that run on energy. We can leave that,” he said, and returned it to the box from which the robot had taken it. “We won’t need it.”

“How do they work?”

“You just press the button, and the device deactivates any vulnerable system within a fifty metre radius. You wouldn’t even hear it. It doesn’t produce any sound, which means it’s almost impossible to know where it came from.”

“Are you sure we won’t need it?”

“The only weapons down there will be our own, we don’t want them to be deactivated, even if it is only temporary.”

“Understood.”

Everybody continued with their tasks until they finished loading the ship. They did not forget to bring the few items of food still left. Everything appeared to be ready for departure. The jump-gate station would remain orbiting the planet. Its positioning systems were functioning well, and the energy reactors that powered it would be able to keep them in working order for decades, even longer after the deactivation of the rest of the systems that were not going to be necessary now that they were going to leave it.

The oxygen production systems would continue working throughout a series of corridors, so that they could return later, if they needed anything else that was still on board the station.

They deployed a few satellites that would orbit the planet; with them, they would be able to follow the station's movement at all times, in addition to creating a network that would connect the devices on their bodies, so as to be able to communicate on the planet at all times.

Since Val decided that it was risky to leave people on the station, without food, and without knowing when they would be able to return, everybody boarded the evacuation ship.

The ship's interior was like any aeroplane used in commercial journeys. They were seated in rows, with windows to the sides. Some were very nervous; others were excited. Denn was looking reflective. He was travelling in the evacuation ship's control cabin, next to the captain, in addition to Senlar, who would be piloting the ship, and Neil.

Once everything was ready, the ship left the jump-gate station hangar, and an enormous door closed. Senlar directed the ship towards the planet, and began the choppy entry into its atmosphere.

The turbulence worried many of the people. Others were pleased by the familiar sensation of a spacecraft entering a planet. Finally, after so long, they would be touching down on firm ground.

When they left behind the jerky movements and were finally inside the planet's atmosphere, everyone was able to witness the beauty of the place. It was a lovely planet, filled with vegetation. From above, they could see rivers, and in the distance a vast ocean. Senlar could not contain his joy.

"We're saved," he said, and, bursting out laughing, looked happily at the captain. He was not the only one. Everybody felt that the danger had passed. Once more, the people united amongst cries of joy and admiration. They would be able to survive here. There were fruits to eat. Water to drink. And many different animal species.

Suddenly, one of these beasts, enormous, and with large wings, flew in the direction of the ship. It was going to crash into it. By the time Senlar saw it, it was already too late. He tried to evade it, but it was too close.

The animal collided directly with the ship. A small explosion, accompanied by a violent movement, heralded the beginning of their inevitable fall. The cries of happiness turned into cries of desperation and terror. Denn gazed upon the situation with a sense of powerlessness. *We're here because of me*, he thought.

The ship tilted into free-fall, against Senlar's futile efforts to keep it in flight. Now they were swiftly plunging towards the green planet, and there was nothing that could stop it.

Chapter IV

A Legendary Man

The Danduri System, less than one hundred and forty light-years away from the Solar System, was one of the first planetary systems to be visited by humans. At that time, one of the planets orbiting the star was already inhabited. They were an intelligent species, with moderately advanced technology.

Before even approaching, the humans initiated contact with the intention of earning the trust of the unknown species. It was feared that they might be a hostile race, but all of their concerns turned out to be unfounded. Converting them into allies had not been difficult.

After offering them technological help, the relationship between their species, (who refer to themselves as Zahavians), and the humans continued to grow. It was no coincidence that twenty years after the first contact, in 2160, when The Galactic Union was founded, the Danduri System officially became one of its members.

Their planet, Zaha, was not exactly the sort of place a human would choose to live. The high temperature, due to the proximity to its star, along with the strong gravity, placed it virtually on the limit of habitability for human beings, even after the many modifications to their DNA.

Enduring the seventy degrees Centigrade temperature on the planet Zaha was possible for the human race, but the sensation was, at the very least, uncomfortable.

A human originating from the Planet Earth, Voill Conner, was not feeling enthusiastic about having to visit Zaha, but his post as the right-hand man of the Supreme Leader, and head of the High Council of The Galactic Union, obligated him to deal with important issues with leaders of various member systems. Now he needed to meet with the leader of the Danduri System in order to discuss minor trade issues.

Voill was a well-known person. A devotee to The Union. He had been part of the council since its beginning, and his prime goal was the development and expansion of the empire that the humans had created, regardless of the means.

He arrived on the planet a day before his meeting with the Danduri leader in order to take advantage of his leaving the Solar System. He was going to meet with a famous hired assassin to discuss an assignment that, unpleasant as it may be, he believed was of great importance for The Galactic Union.

He requested for the planet's government to put him up in a locality that was outside of Zaha's capital, with the excuse of hoping to enjoy the peace and quiet of the unpopulated area, which extended for several kilometres.

The mud volcanoes shot sludge several metres in the air amidst amazing flashes that would light up the entire area. The solitude of a desert landscape was the only thing that could be seen. An uninhabited scene, highly appropriate for a secret meeting.

In the middle of the location, a cabin, fitted out with certain security systems, used for accommodating important tenants, was the refuge for the right-hand man of the Supreme Leader. A direct line with the Zaha authorities was installed, promising swift response, should Voill need any kind of assistance.

Inside the cabin, to his side, an escort comprised of army soldiers from the Solar System, were guarding his safety. Outside, more were awaiting the arrival of Dasslak, the man with whom Voill was going to meet.

"I can hardly breathe," said one of the soldiers to the other. They were both fighting to maintain their composure in such horrendous conditions.

"They should have given us a suit. I'm about to die in this hell," replied the other. He looked at the distant explosions of fire and mud, missing the Earth's landscapes.

Their conversation was stopped by the raucous sound of a small and dilapidated ship that could be made out in the distance. The anti-aircraft turrets, which protected the cabin, set their aim on the aircraft the instant they detected that it was approaching, and

they sent a warning signal, requesting a security code in order to allow its approach. Otherwise, they only offered it a few seconds to change course and move away from the area, or the turrets would bring it down.

The pilot of the shabby machine input the code, and the turrets returned to a state of rest, allowing it to approach. A moment later, the ship descended slowly onto the arid terrain, no more than twenty metres from the cabin.

“Is that him?” one of Voill’s escort men asked somewhat nervously of the other.

“It must be,” he replied, not very convinced. “Should we alert Mr Conner?”

The hatch to the little ship opened, and one moment later, out poked the notorious assassin. He was a man of athletic appearance. He had brown hair, which he wore short, and combed to one side. He had light brown eyes and a turned-up nose, and a faint hint of a beard. To his outwardly serious appearance was added a threatening and cold gaze. He was one of the most feared men in the whole galaxy.

He always looked calm and secure; a characteristic obtained from the experience he had gained in countless missions. He looked mature without appearing old. He had already lived a long time, but he kept himself in excellent condition. Just like all humans with enhanced DNA, he aged very slowly.

He was known for his professionalism. He himself would say it frequently, he did not treat any of his targets any differently, no matter the cost of the job, or the position of the person he had to assassinate. He always thought up an infallible plan to kill every one of them. It wasn’t for nothing that he had completed practically every single one of his assignments, earning himself a multitude of aliases in the process. ‘Executioner’ in some part of The Union and its surrounding areas; ‘El Vaquero’ in the most violent regions of Autoro; ‘Dasslak’, his most well-known alias. It did not matter what they called him, he was a very famous man. Everybody had heard talk of him. If somebody became his target, then that certainly meant that their life was about to end.

The assassin got out of the ship and began walking up to the cabin until he was close enough for one of the soldiers to confirm his identity.

“It’s him! It’s Dasslak!” murmured the soldier to one of his colleagues.

“Is it really him? I mean, he seems strong, it’s just, I’d have thought the most famous assassin in the galaxy would be travelling in a ship that was somehow more decent.” The comment was not unfounded; the ship that the assassin had arrived in was atrocious.

“I know it’s him, from what he’s got on him.”

The assassin was dressed in a black raincoat. In his right hand he was holding a fine leather carrycase. On his belt, two shined-up silver long barrel revolvers. ‘I’m a man of good taste,’ he would say whenever he was asked why he preferred the old weapons over the modern ones. He was something else.

On his back, he carried his famous solidium sword, a weapon as famous as Dasslak himself. A weapon that over seven decades ago had belonged to another owner. They called him The Bear, the most famous assassin of his era.

Everybody knew the story of how the assassin had come by the sword. Somebody had put a price on Dasslak’s head. They had offered a juicy payment to The Bear to end his life.

The Bear did not hesitate in collecting the bounty, and searched for his target; but after a brutal struggle, Dasslak emerged as the winner, barely. It was then that he took the sword as a trophy of his victory. He had vanquished a dangerous opponent, and now he would carry his formidable weapon with pride, a symbol of power. That was how his legend began. He quickly gained fame as the man who had managed to kill The Bear; the sword was proof of it. Now, seventy-four years later, he was not only a celebrity; he was perhaps one of the most dangerous men alive.

“Mr Voill,” said one of the soldiers. A rapid movement of his hands had activated a command in his eye device, which opened a direct communication with a device in Voill’s

ear. The cuff on his wrist received the sound of his voice, and transmitted it. "Dasslak is here. What should I do?"

"Bring him in, but leave a soldier outside to keep watch over the area," responded the voice via the communicator.

When Dasslak reached the door, two of the three soldiers escorted him inside. It was a cabin like any other, small, and without any luxuries; the Zahavians were not known for their good taste in decoration. Inside, although the air-conditioning was working at maximum capacity, it was still very hot. Even though it was somewhat fresher than outside, it was still bothersome.

In the main room sat Voill Conner. The smile on his face showed his happiness; he was eager to talk with the assassin.

"Dasslak!" said Voill Conner, opening out his arms. "It's good to see you."

"I imagine it is," replied the assassin.

"Take a seat," he said, pointing to an empty chair in front of his own.

The assassin immediately ran his eyes over the cabin, a custom he would repeat in any place he entered. Inside were six soldiers, including the two who had just escorted Dasslak inside. One was more alert than the other, guarding with suspicion the Supreme Leader's right-hand man from any threat.

"Thank you," replied Dasslak, whilst he removed his sword from his back in order to sit down.

Making a signal with his hands, Voill called over one of his soldiers.

"Bring a cold drink for our guest," he said to him, and the man hurried to carry out the order. "This heat is frightful," added Voill, "you must be thirsty."

"I've been in worse places," replied Dasslak.

“I’m not so used to it. You know how it is; I’m from Earth. Everything is green there... I hate coming here, the air-conditioning doesn’t even work as it ought to.”

“Why have they not terraformed this planet, if it’s in one of the secondary systems?” asked Dasslak.

“The Zahavians would have problems surviving on a terraformed planet. It would be very cold for them.”

“I didn’t know your people were interested in the wellbeing of other species.”

“Don’t think so badly of us, Dasslak,” said Voill with a smile. “We’re concerned about all the species allied to The Union... Even so, it would be unnecessary to terraform this place. This planet is not of great interest to us. The Zahavians can keep this hell, as long as they remain loyal.”

“So that was it. There’s nothing here to interest you.”

Voill laughed a little.

“Perhaps you’re interested in the Zahavians in some way?”

“Of course not.”

The soldiers had calmed down considerably upon hearing the apparently friendly chat between Voill and Dasslak. But they kept their concentration, ready to protect the important member of the High Council from any threat that could come from outside.

“It’s years since I’ve been so close to the capital,” Dasslak noted.

“In spite of the fact that everybody knows who you are, you’ve carried out your work so well that nobody has been able to link you with any assassination. The law is not looking for you, don’t worry.”

“And who said I was worried? Besides, who in their right mind would come looking for me? I don’t like to say it, as I am very modest, but only somebody suicidal would try to stop me. Perhaps I’m invincible.”

“He doesn’t seem very modest,” one soldier said in silence to another.

“Shut up, or you’re going to get us killed,” replied the other.

The conversation was beginning to bore the assassin, who considered his time to be extremely valuable. He was on the verge of getting to the point when Voill resumed speaking:

“What’s the purpose of that carrycase you’ve brought there?” asked Voill.

“I carry in it some of my tools. I prefer to have it with me.”

“Do you have another assignment around here?”

“I don’t usually discuss my assignments, you ought to already know that,” replied Dasslak. A moment later, he lifted his feet onto a small end table in front of him, so as to make himself more comfortable.

“Come on, you know you can trust me by now,” said Voill, with a cunning smile.

“It’s actually quite the opposite,” responded Dasslak; he was already beginning to get impatient with the meaningless chit-chat. “Even so, it’s not about whether I trust you or not. They’re just good habits. Now it would be a good idea for us to talk business. I’m in something of a hurry.”

“When Yavar spoke to you a few days ago, did he explain anything about the assignment to you?”

“No. He only asked when I would be able to see you. He said that you would give me the details of the job,” replied Dasslak.

“We need you to find someone.”

“I’m listening.”

“Have you heard anything about the disappearance of a jump-gate station from the Solar System a few weeks ago?” asked Voill.

“Yes, I heard something about that.”

“The official version is that one of its systems failed,” continued Voill, “causing it to go adrift, but the truth is that someone hijacked it.”

Dasslak furrowed his brow; he was somewhat confused. He did not really understand what it was they wanted from him.

“Do you want me to kill this person?” asked Dasslak.

“Something like that. It’s not that simple. We still don’t know anything about the jump-gate station’s whereabouts.”

“Is that possible?” asked Dasslak. “How can a person hijack a Solar System jump-gate station? And worse still, how is it you don’t know anything of its whereabouts?”

“Believe me, you’re not the first person to ask those questions,” answered Voill. “It’s a very delicate situation. It is possible that he might have had help on the station. There was on board a person who is well known for their instability.”

“What is it exactly that you want me to do?”

“We need you to search for this chap and perform a brain scan on him. In addition, you must recover something he stole from Earth. When you’re finished, kill him. No one can know that this man violated the capital’s security... Is it possible?”

Dasslak remained thoughtful. This type of work was not at all like what he usually did. Even so, he decided to listen to all of the details before giving a response.

“Tell me a bit about this subject.”

“He’s a human from the planet Nec. He belonged to The Galactic Union army, in the Tau Ceti forces. His name is Denn Bornev. He went to Earth on a mission of escorting an important politician. Nobody could have imagined that he was going to do such a thing.”

“So he was a galactic soldier? They can’t control their own, eh?”

“It makes me furious... When his group entered Earth, he separated away from them. The chap stole a machine... a robot. Nobody knew of its existence. It’s still a mystery as to how it is he knew. In his flight from the Solar System, he hijacked the jump-gate station.”

“Before, you said he could have had help from someone on the station; what were you referring to?”

“We’re not sure, it’s only an assumption, but even so it must be taken into account. On that station worked Neil Gobi, an old member of the Solar System army. He was transferred there after suffering a convergence. They say that he’s a somewhat unstable person.”

“I don’t know. Just because somebody says he’s unstable is no reason to think that he might have anything to do with the hijacking.”

“You know how this is by now. We investigated all the people who, to one’s knowledge, were on board the station. It seems that Neil Gobi could be a type of sociopath. They say that he would massacre defenceless people whilst on his missions as a soldier of The Union, but there was never sufficient proof to formally accuse him. Perhaps he has nothing to do with it. But it would be worth considering it.”

“All this seems very strange to me. This isn’t what I do. Why did you contact me for this job?”

“I wouldn’t like to admit it, but we’re desperate. Many weeks have passed, and we don’t even have a trace. We need to read his memories, to find out how he knew about this robot. Who better than you to find him? It’s for the good of The Union.”

Dasslak looked at him, bewildered.

“Are you confusing me with someone else, or something? I don’t dedicate my life to carrying out the interests of The Union. When a person hires me to kill someone, I don’t care what they might have done or who they’ve hurt. It’s very simple, what I do is kill for money. This seems like a mission for The Galactic Union authorities.”

“Do you think there aren’t other people looking for him? We have the best on this. Even a special agency is being created to take charge of this sort of thing in the future. But I cannot sit back and do nothing. I must be sure to know what’s happening.”

“I’m not a private investigator, Voill. I’m an assassin.”

“I already know, Dasslak. I know that this sounds a little different, but the truth is that it’s not *that* different. You need to find a man, the same as you always do. The only difference is that before killing him, you must obtain the information he has in his head... And recover the robot, of course.”

“I’m good at what I do because I was born to kill,” highlighted Dasslak. “Asking questions and recovering items is not my thing. This job is not for me. You don’t even offer me clear information about this person. Do you have no idea how difficult it is to find somebody in the galaxy? It’s impossible if you don’t know anything about him.”

“I know it seems impossible, but there’s a reason why I decided to contact you. There is something you can search for first, or rather, someone. He can help you find him.”

That comment managed to awaken the assassin’s curiosity, who did not wait before asking:

“He?”

“I’m afraid that the only way of finding Bornev is with the help of a seer.”

The reply managed to surprise him.

“You have a seer?”

“In fact, I do, but he proved not to be as useful as I believed... No, my seer is not going to be of use to us in this case. I was talking about somebody else, somebody with real power... It’s possible it could be a dead end street...” before Voill could proceed, a grimace of uncertainty projected across his face, almost as if he were doubting whether to

continue. After a moment, he told him: "It's The Augur... He could tell you how to find Borneu."

"The Augur?" asked Dasslak, impressed. "What are you talking about? I myself have searched for The Augur, with no luck. Nobody has seen him in twenty years."

"That's not entirely true," refuted Voill. "A few months ago, a girl in Autoro claimed to have found him."

Now the assassin was really interested.

"Autoro?" asked Dasslak, and he paused briefly whilst he remembered that immense place. "Where in Autoro?"

"I don't know, I don't know where she is," replied Voill, shrugging his shoulders. "What I do know is that the girl's name is Cora... She's supposed to be somewhat peculiar."

"Peculiar? And what does that mean?"

"I have no idea. What I've told you is the only thing I know. I don't know how she looks, her age, or anything else. The person who gave me the information was in a hurry. They had captured him. He was in Autoro, but he didn't know where exactly. He managed to send a message to me, to a private inbox that I use for that sort of thing." Voill activated his eye device, and searched for the message in order to read it to Dasslak. "The message says: 'They've captured me, I'm somewhere in Autoro. The pirates are going to kill me. Track this message, and send help please. There is someone here who could be of interest to you; I came across a peculiar girl called Cora, who said she had found The Augur', is everything he says, there are no further details."

Dasslak was really intrigued. It was possible that he could obtain from this matter something even more valuable than the payment for the job.

"Weren't you capable of tracing the message?"

“No. You know, the pirates on Autoro encrypt all their connections to gain entry into The Union’s network. It’s impossible to know when or from where the message was sent. I’m not even sure who sent the message.”

“What do you mean, Voill?”

“The message had no sender. I give that address to many of my men. It’s a private inbox which we use for emergency communications. Some time ago, one of my teams was working in one of the systems in Border-C,” he said, referring to a fringe of systems bordered with the zone known as Autoro. “They all disappeared without a trace. I suppose it was one of them that sent the message.”

“And they haven’t contacted you again?”

“I’ve had no more news. The only thing I know is that this supposed girl was in Autoro.”

An expression of disappointment ran across Dasslak’s face. The information that Voill had given him was very limited. Worse still was that the one he was looking for was in Autoro. Not only was it an immensely vast area, but it was composed of systems that did not belong to The Galactic Union, nor respected any of its laws; it was a highly dangerous place. It wasn’t for nothing that the area was rife with pirates and hostile species.

Searching for a person there was, in the best of cases, a difficult task. If the only thing to go on was nothing more than a name, then it would become virtually impossible. Who better to know that than Dasslak? He himself had captured many people in Autoro, but he had never done it on such little information.

Dasslak leaned back, taking hold of his chin whilst he decided whether or not to accept the job. Could it be done? He had no way of knowing, but it definitely interested him.

“So The Augur...” said the assassin, finally, after a few seconds of meditation on the situation. “... All right, I’ll accept the job.”

“You will?” asked Voill, enthused. “You’re going to look for Denn Borneu?”

“You have given me two names. Denn Borneu and Cora. Searching for someone on their name alone is absurd; there must at least be information about a potential whereabouts. In the case of Cora, we have a place, Autoro. Even though it’s still virtually impossible, it’s worthwhile looking for her, if it means it takes us to The Augur.” Dasslak tried to hide his smile. He did not want Voill to guess who his real target was.

“Perfect,” said Voill, relieved. “He’ll be able to help us find Borneu.”

Voill was satisfied; the recent weeks had been very stressful, primarily due to the fact that the investigation was not showing any advance, but now they would have an expert searching for Denn Borneu. The assassin’s legendary abilities gave Voill real hope of finding him.

He synchronised the devices he was wearing on his body with those of Dasslak, in order to transfer all of the data for the investigation that had already been gathered, and got up in order to bring over a bag full of credits; the payment for the famous assassin’s work.

“Yavar asked me to give you this,” said Voill, when he returned with the bag. “It’s cash payment, just how you like it.”

“As you know, I don’t like electronic transfers. I don’t wish for there to be any proof of my business,” replied Dasslak.

Voill held out his hand to give the bag of credits to Dasslak, but the assassin did not make even the slightest attempt of approaching him to take it. Instead, he pointed his finger at the table in front of him.

“You can put it there,” he said to Voill, who looked somewhat offended.

“It’s curious... by which I’m referring to the fact that you will have agreed it with Yavar to receive the money in advance,” noted Voill, at the same time that he dropped the bag on the table. “You didn’t even know what the job was about,” he said, puzzled.

“Before, I was thinking that Yavar had at least told you something. And even though he might have done, you don’t usually charge until after you’ve carried out the job... I can only remember one occasion on which you charged in advance.”

“That was a special situation. The job warranted it,” replied Dasslak. “There were many possibilities they would try to kill me after completing the assignment. I considered myself obliged to ask for the money in advance.”

“I understand! It was a job that was... complex. But... what about this time? You weren’t even sure if you were going to accept the job. It piques my curiosity; why did you ask Yavar to send you the payment in advance? Why are you charging in advance?”

Voill was mistaken. Bornev was not the only reason why he was there. Dasslak’s countenance turned dark during the last question. A shiver ran through Voill’s body. It was already too late.

“Charge in advance? I haven’t done that,” said Dasslak, with a terrifying appearance.

“What are you talking about?” asked Voill, frightened. A second later, Dasslak shot up out of his seat.

The assassin was too quick. The soldiers looking after Voill had let down their guard, and did not manage to react. Some of them did not even notice. Dasslak drew his two revolvers and, six shots later, they all fell to the floor, dead.

“What the hell are you doing?” cried Voill.

Dasslak, very calmly, took his carry case and opened it. Inside, he had his long-range rifle, which was dismantled into several pieces. With no rush, he began to assemble it, whilst Voill remained paralysed, looking at his six dead soldiers. In his mind, he begged for the soldier who was outside to come in and save his life. It was impossible for him to have not heard the shots. He was sure that, in a matter of time, he would come inside to his aid.

“What are you doing, Dasslak?” Voill asked again, with a tremulous voice.

Dasslak did not turn around, he still continued putting together the weapon.

“Don’t you see? I’m putting my rifle together. It’s a good thing I brought it with me, I knew I might need it.”

Voill was trembling with fear.

“For... what?” he barely managed to ask.

“Look out of the window,” he said, and took the sight for his rifle, the last piece he needed to connect, and began screwing it to the weapon.

Voill turned his gaze to the window, to where Dasslak pointed, and watched how his only hope, the soldier that had been left outside the cabin, was pelting away at full speed, fleeing across the desert horizon.

“He’s not even managed to get all that far away,” said Dasslak, somewhat disappointed, and he supported the rifle against his shoulder in order to take aim at the soldier.

Voill was stunned; he did not know what to do. Should he run? Would there be any point in trying? Paralysed, he watched on as Dasslak was about to eliminate the last of his guards.

“Don’t feel sorry for him,” said Dasslak as he aimed. “He is a coward.”

Dasslak fired his rifle. One moment later, the soldier dropped dead in the distance.

“What have you done?” shouted Voill.

Dasslak did not waste even a second. He was already beginning to dismantle his rifle. His coldness managed to frighten Voill even more.

“Yavar asked me to kill you. That money you were bringing in the bag, it wasn’t advanced payment for Bornew. That money is for your head. These seven soldiers I’ve had to kill are for free.”

“It can’t be true,” exclaimed an incredulous Voill.

“Calm down, Voill, don’t worry. Of course it isn’t true. I lied about the soldiers being for free. I always include things like that in the price.”

“You’re mad!” Voill screamed with dread. “You can’t kill me. I’m a member of The Galactic Union government. This cabin is equipped with multiple systems for my protection.”

“You offend me, Voill,” answered Dasslak, who was already finishing putting his rifle away in the bag. “I’ve come prepared for that.”

“Wait... If you kill me, you won’t be able to leave this planetary system,” continued Voill, with the hope of changing his fate. “The signal from your ship was already registered on the defence systems on arriving here. That soldier who was outside must have sent a distress call for sure. You won’t be able to escape. Your ship will be hunted throughout the entire galaxy. You’ll be an easy target.”

“Are you referring to that ship out there?” he said to him, and pointed with his finger at the old ship in which he had arrived.

“Well... yes,” replied Voill, with surprise.

“I’m sorry to disappoint you, but that is not my ship,” confirmed Dasslak as he activated, with the help from his eye device, a command that activated the aircraft’s automatic navigation. “That ship is from a Zahavian who lived some thirty kilometres from here.”

“Lived?” asked Voill, and looked out of the window, at how the ship in which Dasslak had arrived was beginning to rise up. One moment later, the thrusters were activated at maximum power, sending it straight on course for space.

“Well yes,” continued Dasslak. “You see, he didn’t want me to take his ship, so I had to kill him.”

“It can’t be,” exclaimed Voill, aghast.

“Come on, don’t get like that,” said the assassin. “He was a pretty hateful guy. He got angry when I landed my ship on his property,” he reassured, and began walking towards Voill, gripping one of his revolvers.

Voill moved tremulously backwards, feeling he had death himself in front of him.

“But... but...”

“I told him I was going to leave my ship there for a while,” proceeded Dasslak, “and was going to borrow his own. He became aggravated and began uttering insults in Zahavi. I had no other option than to kill him.”

Voill continued stepping backwards until he could do so no more; he had come up against the wall. It was his end, and he had now begun to comprehend it.

“You’re a monster!”

“Don’t worry,” continued the fearsome assassin, “I left his body in his beloved ship, so that when it’s destroyed in space, his remains will be destroyed along with it. I suppose that’s what he would have wanted.”

Voill was quiet for a second. He had come to the conclusion that there was no way of escaping his death. After all, he was facing the most famous assassin in the galaxy.

“All right. Let’s get it over with,” said Voill, resigned.

“In a minute. Yavar thought you would share something in your final moments,” claimed Dasslak. “He believed you’d share the whereabouts of someone by the name of Boryan,” he said, and raised his revolver to the height of Voill’s head.

“Is that what this is about? Boryan? Why does Yavar want me dead? I’ve kept Boryan monitored.”

“The truth is, I have no idea, Voill. Yavar said that he needs to make changes in order to secure The Union’s future; that you had become an obstacle. The location of this Boryan was something extra for him.”

“I’ve given my life to The Union, everything that I’ve done, I’ve been thinking about the best for the human race and the future of the galaxy,” answered Voill, despairing.

“I’ll tell you again; I don’t devote my life to carrying out the interests of The Union. None of that matters to me. Don’t think even for a second that this is about anything personal; it’s much simpler than that. You’re just my job.”

“Yavar can’t kill me... I won’t say where Boryan is, he... he needs me.”

Dasslak shook his head in disapproval.

“I’m going to explain to you. To Yavar, Boryan really didn’t seem all that important. The job was your assassination. If in the process I’m able to get the location of this person, then Yavar will pay more. As I’m not a private investigator, I reminded him, just as I did with you a moment ago, that the only thing I do is kill. I told him that I would not be able to promise getting him that information. It was then that he told me it wasn’t essential that I did, but that if I was able to get it, I would have the right to something extra. In the bag there are three million credits. Two for your head, and one more for this information you’re refusing to share. I’m not going to pressure you in any way, if you assure me that you won’t say anything, I will respect that. In that case, I’ll take only the corresponding amount from that bag.”

Voill Conner knew that the assassin was being serious. He was in front of a man who was also well known for his honesty. A man who has nothing to fear does not need to lie. Dasslak was ambivalent to the extra information. He came for his head, and he would leave satisfied with just that. The extra money was a simple bonus that he would be able to get by without.

“My son is in the Chard System,” said Voill, as he broke down sobbing. “On the planet Navar, on the outskirts of the White Village. I have a place there. Yavar will know how to find him.”

Yavar had not informed Dasslak that this Boryan was Voill's son. At the time it seemed strange to him, but he decided not to ask anything. Before he could continue with his assignment, Voill began to talk again:

"I always knew I needed to kill him," continued Voill. The tears were running down his cheeks. "The Augur warned me about it twenty years ago, before disappearing. He told me that he never should have been born. That he would be a threat to The Union, but I never dared to end his life, I loved his mother very much... Boryan is twenty-four years old now," claimed Voill, and he paused before continuing in order to dry his tears: "Yavar will surely ask you to kill him... Yes, that must be it... I suppose you must do it. I understand; it's for the good of The Union."

Dasslak did not understand what Voill was talking about; he did not have knowledge of the details. He had not wanted to interrupt him; he was just going to allow him to vent his emotions. The assassin did not tend to be any crueller than necessary with any of his victims, and he considered that there would be no risk in allowing Voill to say his last words.

In spite of it having become an alien feeling to him, he could understand Voill's suffering. In any case, he did not feel pity for him; when Voill finished, he continued:

"There's just one more thing left," stated Dasslak.

"The Augur?" asked Voill. He now knew that these were his final moments, but even so, he wanted to ensure that he would carry out his final task. "Are you really going to look for him? He's the only way of finding Bornev and the jump-gate station! Are you going to search for Bornev?"

"I will search for him. Yavar will keep to the contract. But first I need to know something before I kill you. The inbox, the one you told me about; what happens if that man who communicated with you before does so again?"

"Yavar also has access to the inbox. If anyone starts communicating again, he will certainly let you know."

“That is everything then,” sentenced the assassin.

Voill closed his eyes and accepted his destiny. “I’m ready,” he said, opening his arms. Dasslak pulled the trigger, and a second later, Voill Conner fell, lifeless.

The paid assassin took his sword, the carrycase with the rifle, and the payment for his work, from the central table. He sent a message indicating the completion of the assignment, and left the cabin. He took a strange vehicle, one that floated above the ground, belonging to Voill’s escort soldiers, started it up, and set off in the direction of the place where he had left his ship, before the reinforcements arrived.

He could relax; there would be nobody looking for him. They would be following a decoy: the ship he had stolen from the Zahavian.

Only Dasslak and Yavar knew about it. The right-hand man of the Supreme Leader of The Galactic Union had died at the hands of the most famous assassin in the galaxy; the very one that was now after the head of Denn Bornev, and the trail of the lost station. A fact that would change the course of the galaxy. But not only that; in the process, he had obtained for Yavar information that would change the fate of the universe forever.

On the edge of The Galactic Union, on Border-A, had lived, for the last twenty years, an interesting prisoner, on one of the many residences that his master, Voill Conner, kept throughout the whole galaxy. Under his orders, he was held captive, living with luxuries that not many could boast to possess, but none of that was enough for him. In another life, he had lived like an emperor.

The young man should never have been born. At a young age, he had ceased to be Boryan, Voill’s son, to become somebody else, the reason for which Yavar Aflir had been searching for him for some time. Now he was finally on the verge of discovering where he was.

The story is not over yet ...

The complete novel consists of twenty-three chapters, the best is yet to come. If you want to know how it ends, you can continue [here](#).