

Alexander Nofftz



Episode 18

# D O R G O N

**FAN CYCLE OF THE PERRY RHODAN ONLINE CLUB**



## The Estartu Alternative

A Soman returns home - and seeks help against a common threat

# D O R G O N

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### The Estartu Alternative by Alexander Nofftz

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**FAN SERIES OF THE PERRY RHODAN ONLINE CLUB**



In the year 1291 New Galactic Era (the year 4878 A.D. of the old Terran calendar), Perry Rhodan and the other immortals are fighting in various galaxies against forces controlled by the mysterious Torr Samaho. Homer G. Adams is the only cell activator bearer remaining in the Milky Way, which becomes the site of a new threat: the terrorist organization Mordred!

Adams confronts Mordred with the help of the charismatic Saggitonan Aurec as well as Joak Cascal, a veteran of the Solar Empire, Will Dean, a League of Free Terrans agent, and the Somanian ambassador, Sruel Allok Mok ("Sam"). Upon Rhodan's own return to the Milky Way, Mordred is defeated. Number One is unmasked and executed by the now repentant Cauthon Despair.

But Mordred was only the beginning. Dorgon still looms behind them! No one knows exactly who or what Dorgon is, and Perry Rhodan is warned to beware of Dorgon's revenge. As Rhodan himself has to go into battle against Materia and Torr Samaho, ten Camelotian ships, including the *Ivanhoe*, leave for M 100, the home galaxy of the Dorgonans. Aurec and Homer G. Adams are leading this expedition and are accompanied by Cauthon Despair, Joak Cascal, Sandal Tolk and Sam.

After a first attempt at peaceful contact with the Dorgonans fails, Aurec and Adams travel to the planet Cermos where they come across the term "Cathedral," although its significance remains a mystery. Is it a planet, a town, or a system? The *Ivanhoe* also investigates the important world of Mesoph and returns with more valuable new information.

Meanwhile, Sam and Will Dean are on an important mission. There is another option in the fight against Dorgon: The Estartu Alternative...

#### Main characters

**Sruel Allok Mok ("Sam")** – The Soman returns home

**Will Dean** – Sruel Allok Mok's travel companion

**Salaam Siin** – An old friend

**Eravar** – A powerful Elfahdan

**Triaz** – The corrupt Soman is playing a dangerous game

1.  
*Arriving in Som*

“Som,” Sam said.

It was more than just a word. It sounded as if all his longing to return home was packed into that name: the humming S, then the slightly gurgling long O, and finally the M that vibrated through Sam’s beak.

Will Dean looked at him. His eyes glowing, the Soman seemed to be completely absorbing the hologram that was displaying his home planet. Sam made a quick calculation and realized that at least six years had passed since he last had been to Siom Som.

“I haven’t been back for far too long,” Sam now said to Will. “Surely we could have used the Heraldic Gates for a visit...”

Dean remained silent. It was best not to disturb Sam’s reverie. The *Siom Som* slowly descended through the clouds of the planet. A vast plain and a coastal area with high cliffs drifted into the holocube.

“The Srurul!” Sam whispered, moved. “I went there often to think about important things. You can’t imagine what it feels like to stand on those cliffs, to spread your arms and to feel how the cold wind from the sea moves through your feathers...”

Beyond the relatively small ocean, a jungle came into view. Will thought that Som’s landscape was obviously rugged, but somehow soft as well. It reminded him slightly of a volcano.

“The cemeteries of our heroes!” the Soman called enthusiastically. “Here we bury all the great people of our race.” Sam was telling stories from the Somans’ past, but Dean wasn’t really listening. His thoughts were still on Dorgon. With disgust he recalled the atrocities that the local leader Ojemus had committed on the planet Harrisch.

“Do you believe,” he finally addressed the Soman, “that the citizens of Estartu will help us against Dorgon? So far, no one here has heard of them and...”

Sam stopped telling his tale. “Of course they will help us!” As if to support his argument, the feather on his head stood up. “Dorgon is

not only a danger to Camelot or the Milky Way, but a threat to all the other galaxies! We had to watch as they ruthlessly destroyed several planets. We saw their gigantic fleets. Their powerful weapons. Their technology. Their...”

He waved his arms in frustration. Will had a hard time suppressing a smile at the way the feathered creature reminded him of a bird that wanted to fly away.

He sighed deeply. “I hope you are right.”

The Soman wanted to reply, but hesitated and looked up. The *Siom Som* just had landed. A delegation was already awaiting them at the landing pad.

“Salaam Siin,” Sam exclaimed. “The famous Ophalan. Here!”

He turned around and ran to the airlock so fast that Dean had trouble keeping up with him.

\*

Will Dean had heard about the Ophalans and their psionic chants in school and later during his training as a Terran League Service agent. But he had to confess that he could not imagine what they were really like.

That would change today.

Fascinated, he listened to the enchanting songs Salaam Siin and several more Ophalans sang to greet him and Sam on Som. He could feel how those soft sounds, more *felt* than heard, entered him, enveloped him, and transported him into another world. He was not walking. Instead, he was floating, unable to open his eyes nor to make even one small intentional move. And yet he moved, gliding along with the rhythm of the chant that was not just a chant but much more. A symphony of the stars. The sound of life. The music of the...

Suddenly there was silence. Will opened his eyes and looked around, confused. What had happened? Where were those spherical sounds? What was he doing here? His memories slowly returned. He remembered that he was standing at the spaceport of Som. The Soman Sruel Allok Mok was standing at his side and the *master singer* Salaam Siin in front of him.

Sam took one step forward. The dull, brutal sound that his feet made on the metal-plastic of

the spaceport seemed like an acoustic insult to Dean.

"We thank you for this friendly greeting, Salaam Siin," Sam said. His voice was unusually soft, nearly a whisper. "I am happy to be home again. But as I told you on the com-line, this visit is not a casual one. A great menace looms over the spheres of influence of *Estartu* and *IT*."

"I know," the soft reply came from the Ophalan. "But let's not start with such unpleasant news. Look over your accommodations first, rest a while, and then join us at the banquet we will hold in your honor." His trunk moved in Will's direction. "Of course this invitation includes you, Terran..."

"Will," the Afro-terran quickly replied. "Call me Will Dean."

"Of course, Will. Welcome to Som."

Two of the tentacles that surrounded the barrel-shaped body of the Ophalan in six pairs moved upwards and waved for two creatures to approach. Will was puzzled. At first he had believed those egg-shaped bodies that glowed in all the colors of the spectrum to be special effects or illusions caused by the psionic chant, but now?

"Sam... ?"

The Soman understood immediately. "They are Ghaarts. They are remnants of the Eternal Warriors. After the Sothos were defeated, many of the Pterus were not able to cope with the new situation. A lot of them grieved over the end of the Permanent Conflict. Who knows what was going on in their scaly heads when their view of life was destroyed? However, many of them felt responsible for the things that their degenerated brothers had done to all those creatures out there. They called themselves *Ghaarts*. In Sothalk this means *Shadow-warrior*. They started to wear those special energy-fields to prevent themselves from touching anyone, at least in a symbolic way. Those energy-shields compress the molecules of the air in a way that creates a refraction, so that no one can see the cursed ones. It is said that they can see quite normally inside those fields. Unfortunately, not all of the Pterus have taken that path..."

Will watched the Ghaarts as they ap-

proached. Yes, they seemed to be able to see quite well inside those fields, judging from the way they evaded all those bystanders. Only one thing remained a mystery to him.

"But if they are that penitent, what are they still doing here?"

Sam smiled. "Of course it did not stay that way. Soon the Ghaarts longed for battle regardless of their oath, if that is what you want to call it. So they let themselves be hired as mercenaries or bodyguards. They are very good and reliable bodyguards, too. There are some working here at the Council of Estartu."

"I see," Will replied. Despite that fact that Sam had explained all of this to him—or because of that—he did not trust those creatures. He had seen pictures of Pterus. For him the lizard-like beings were like close relatives of the Terran dinosaur *Tyrannosaurus Rex*, and he did not like that creature at all.

He tried to keep a distance between himself and the glowing beings. Who knew what the Ghaarts really hid beneath it? Individual protective shields? Weapons?

Will made a fist. What was happening to him? Him, the TLS agent! He had fought the bloodhounds of Mordred on the *Base* and elsewhere!

To his complete surprise, the Ghaarts suddenly stopped. Will gasped, because he almost bumped into one of them. One of the Ghaarts turned to face him and pointed towards a door.

"Your quarters," a deep and hollow voice hummed through the energy-field. "The banquet will start in four hours."

Without more, the Ghaarts moved on as if nothing had happened.

Will shook his head and opened the door. There were truly strange creatures out there.

\*

The apartment proved to be large and luxurious. To make things easier, Will and Sam had asked for joint quarters. The large common room was surrounded by bedrooms and sanitation chambers that were equipped for both Soman and for Terrans.

"Perfect," Will exclaimed happily after he had inspected everything.

"My pleasure," Salaam Siin sang from the door. "We will see each other this evening."

After the door had closed, Will sank down into an armchair, visibly pleased.

"I see that Soman and Terrans have quite the same views about what is comfortable," he remarked.

Sam laughed. "No. This armchair is here for your sake only!"

## 2.

### *The banquet*

Will had hoped that Salaam Siin would be singing again for them at the banquet, but unfortunately, the banquet proved to be quite boring. At last he managed to escape the ubiquitous empty phrases by saying that he wanted to take a walk.

Sam threw him an angry glance, but then Will was done. After leaving the banquet, he decided to take a closer look at the government center.

He walked through the halls and corridors in total amazement. Why was it so difficult to work together in the Milky Way? Why did the Arkonides, Blues, Akons and even the Terrans have to fight each other all the time? Here, in Estartu, peace obviously was working out for a whole group of galaxies!

He finally reached his quarters. He hesitated at first, but after a glance at his watch, he decided to open the doors.

Sam was already back. The Soman was going through some of his papers and looked quite startled when Will entered.

"Did I scare you, Sam?" he joked. "Dinner is already over? Or were you bored, too?"

The Soman did not answer. He only pointed towards the armchair and moved to the drink dispenser.

"Ah, we really do understand each other," Will exclaimed happily and slowly descended into the armchair. "But on the rocks, please..."

With incredible speed Sam turned around and pointed a silvery object at Dean. Will went

silent and tried to see what it was. The only thing he saw was a flash and then, darkness...

\*

"We thought that you wanted to flee from your own celebration," Salaam Siin happily hummed when Sam entered the room. "The same thing that this Dean has already done..."

"I am truly sorry about that," Sam affirmed "but this Terran sometimes can be quite stubborn. But we do work very well together." He sat down. "I think that we should get down to business now and talk about the real problem."

The Ophalan interrupted him. "Please, don't let us talk about such things this evening! I have called for a plenary assembly of all the senators of Estartu for tomorrow. You can talk to the plenum then. I think we can handle this situation much better there than in this small circle." He placed one tentacle around the Soman's shoulders. "You haven't been here for many years. A lot of people regret that you decided to join Perry Rhodan."

"He is quite a personality."

"You don't have to tell me. I know him. We have fought the Warriors and have traveled the Net together. Only with his help was I able to assemble one thousand and two hundred singers and destroy the Heraldic Gates with our singing." He paused. "And at his side I was in the stasis-field and could help rebuilding all of this."

"Dorgon is much more dangerous than the Eternal Warriors ever were," Sam made another try.

Quickly Siin retracted his extremity. "Nothing, *nothing* is more terrible than this brutal heresy of the Permanent Conflict. I have held Ophalans in my tentacles. Ophalans that had been mutilated in the name of the Sothos. Their throats had been..." He shivered. "No, I do not want to talk about something like that. Not here and not now!"

"I have been down on Sverigor," Sam mutely broke the silence, "That planet was destroyed by Dorgon and its stellar bombs. Billions of people died within minutes. Hardly anybody was able to flee. All they could do was stare

into the flames and wait until they reached them and blew them away...”

They both remained silent. The rest of the table was silent, too. Nobody dared to comment on those horrible incidents in any way.

After some minutes, the master singer started to speak again.

“Now we have managed to destroy the happy mood with which I wanted to greet you here. I think it is no use continuing this discussion today. We will see each other tomorrow then.”

### 3.

#### *Captured*

When Will Dean came to, there was not one single muscle in his body that did not hurt. At least he managed to repress what would have been a cry of pain into groan.

*Knockout-blaster*, he analyzed the situation. *Looks like I have been unconscious for some time.*

He tried opening his eyes, but the feeling of looking directly into an atomic explosion made him close them again instantly. Now he let out a cry anyway.

*It was Sam!* he suddenly remembered again. He shot me! Why?

Was somebody else there? He listened intently, but was not able to make out any other sounds than the hammering of his own pulse. He remembered his TLS training and carefully flexed certain muscles. First there was excruciating pain, but quickly it became better.

At last he dared to open his eyes. After some blinking and rubbing of his eyes, he looked around.

He was lying on a plank-bed in a totally empty room. The room had three walls. On the side opposing the plank-bed, the wall was missing. Instead, an equally bare corridor led past the room. He concentrated on the edge of the area and, indeed, a faint flickering indicated that the room was sealed off by a force-field.

*A cell?* He mused. *What did I do? What kind of Chaotarch has suddenly possessed the Soman?*

He was thinking about getting up and taking a closer look at his surroundings, when he heard a metallic rattle in the corridor. The rattling became louder and louder as if somebody were coming along the corridor.

He pretended to be still unconscious. Finally the thing that produced the rattle reached the cell. It became quiet.

Will forced himself to breathe regularly. Nevertheless, sweat was running down his face. Who or what was standing there?

Suddenly he heard a voice. It sounded clear and a little like some sort of melodic singing but quite unlike an Ophalan, and it certainly did not fit the rattling sound he had heard before.

“I know that you are awake,” he heard. “You don’t have to play the sleeper any longer.”

Will gave up and sat up on the plank-bed. Only now did he open his eyes and looked in surprise at the speaker. In front of the cell there was a nearly two meter-high metallic hedgehog. He could not believe it, but the creature in front of him really looked like a Terran hedgehog. A multitude of spikes stood up on the back of the armor, which consisted of a lot of moveable parts that were loosely connected enough to have explained the rattling sound.

“Looks like you have never seen an Elfahdan before.” The voice sounded amused. It truly came from the metallic assembly. “Well, that is completely irrelevant in this case anyway.”

“W... why... ?” Will tried to say.

“Why are you here? Well, I have the sad duty of telling you that Sruel Allok Mok, whom you call Sam, has unmasked you as an agent of Dorgon...”

“But...”

“There is nothing more to say! You have tried to become friends with Mok in order to infiltrate Estartu and open up a way for Dorgon into this galaxy. Who cares what made you do this!”

“But I did not...” He still needed an eternity to speak each word. Helpless, he could only watch the Elfahdan turn around and move away without paying any more attention to Will’s words.

## 4.

*The Plenary Session*

When Sam awoke, he discovered that he had only minutes left before the start of the plenary session. He had been distracted by his troubled thoughts last night and had forgotten to instruct the servo when to wake him.

Hastily he grabbed some of his data-discs, threw a contemptuous glance at the door to Will's bedroom and was on his way.

Salaam Siin was already waiting for him.

"Finally," he greeted him sternly. "Good morning. A few more minutes and your chances would have worsened considerably."

"I..."

"No need to apologize. I will support you in every way I can."

Sam looked at the master singer in surprise. After what had happened last night, he had not expected something like that.

"I have done a lot of thinking," the Ophalan confessed. "A lot of grief lies within my memories. But we have to look to the future. And that future does not look good for us, if the Dorgonans try to stretch their tentacles towards our worlds..."

They entered the plenary hall. On the outside, along the horseshoe-shaped assembly of seats for all kinds of different species from Siom Som and the surrounding galaxies, holograms showed the miracles of Estartu. At the center of the hall, another holo-projector had been installed, but was currently inactive.

Sruel Allok Mok moved directly into the center of the room. He, who had gotten used to his nickname Sam, derived from combining his initials, had to confess that he missed another feature found in the Milky Way: a lectern. Thus, he felt a little small and unprotected in the vast empty space surrounded by all the creatures that were looking at him expectantly.

He pulled himself together and handed his data-discs to the servo that hovered nearby. The light dimmed immediately and a large hologram appeared that initially showed an enlarged likeness of the Soman.

"Citizens of Siom Som, Trovenoor,

Absantha-Gom, Absantha-Shad, Syllagar, Shufu, Muun, Palcaquar, Urumbar, Dhatabaar, Erendyra and Mujadjh," he began. "Difficult times lie ahead of us. We already have had to live through a lot of grief, caused by the Warriors, the Cosmocrats and the Chaotarchs and the intrigues of Naupaum. But let's forget about the past now. The time of rebuilding is over—now we have to face a time of trial! A terrible danger threatens to attack us. I am speaking of Dorgon."

With a gesture of his hand he conjured up the first holo image. Above his head the clearly visible picture of a totally destroyed planet materialized. A murmur went through the hall.

Sam continued: "This is the planet Sverigor, totally destroyed within minutes by Dorgonian weapons. Millions of intelligent creatures died. But so far, on an intergalactic scale, Dorgon has remained in the background. In the Milky Way they only became active through the organization Mordred. That group of terrorists first threatened Camelot, the current home planet of the Immortals that you all know well, but soon widened their attacks on targets all over the Milky Way as you can see in this example."

The next image showed a creature completely encased in silver armor.

"This is Cauthon Despair. He had been influenced by Dorgon since his childhood and was revived after a mortal accident through superior technology. As a result he must wear this armor like the Elfahdans here. Perry Rhodan was able to bring Despair to his senses. Despair realized that he had only been blinded by the power that Dorgon had offered him."

In reality Sam did not know whether Dorgon had influenced Despair when he was a child...

Another image showed Wirsal Cell.

"This is the man who infiltrated Camelot and continued Despair's 'education'. He cooperated with Dorgon and established Mordred. He was able to stay in Rhodan's close proximity right until the end without being detected—I just mention this as a warning to everyone here!"

He looked around among the senators. Some of them looked really shocked by his report, others seemed completely indifferent. Sud-

denly a Soman spoke:

“Tiraz from the planet Srallok. Judging from your presentation, esteemed Sruel Allok Mok, it becomes quite clear that Dorgon clearly threatens the Milky Way. What does this have to do with Estartu?”

A consenting murmur went through the rows. Sam pressed his beak tightly shut. He had not expected such a question, especially not from a Soman!

Salaam Siin answered before Sam could: “The Galacticians reacted the same way when Mordred only posed a threat to Camelot. They quickly came to regret their point of view when Mordred suddenly destroyed Sverigor and also banded together with the Arkonides against the Terrans.”

“Even if Dorgon poses no immediate threat against Estartu,” Sam added, “it is our duty to help our friends. You all know how they helped us against the Sothos!”

“The Sothos threatened the Milky Way as well!” Tiraz called. “If Dorgon really is that dangerous I think it is quite a mistake to draw their attention by aiding the Terrans on behalf of a nonexistent mutual aid pact.”

Again a murmur of agreement filled the hall. Sam could feel that the chances for his petition were rapidly dimming. He was already seeing some gestures of affirmation for Tiraz. A quick glance towards Salaam Siin showed that he was at a loss as well.

*A Soman—of all people!* he cursed in his thoughts. *If only it had been one of those damned Pterus. Why?*

It was clear to him that he had only one chance left to get the delegates on his side. If he was not able to do this now, he would be returning to Homer G. Adams with empty hands.

He took a deep breath for his reply, when suddenly the doors flew open.

“Stop! Sruel Allok Mok is a traitor and is working for Dorgon. We can prove it!”

## 5.

### *Escape Plans*

No matter how much Will Dean thought

about it, he was not able to come up with an explanation why Sam would suddenly suspect him of working for Dorgon. And then, this strange creature... Was it just coincidence that it looked so much like Cauthon Despair? Were they too late, and Estartu was already under the control of Dorgon?

Or was Sam a traitor? Had he been able to deceive Rhodan and infiltrate Camelot on Dorgon's behalf just as Wirsal Cell had?

With a loud roar he jumped up from his plank-bed. It was just too much for him! How was he supposed to find the answers to all of this? Especially in his current situation?

The first thing he had to try was getting out of here. He glanced around nervously. The cell was nearly empty. Except for the bed, it was completely bare—not even an air-vent could be seen.

Will became suspicious. Somehow there had to be a way for air to enter the cell, or he would already have suffocated. He checked the walls and the ceiling, which was not hard to reach for him since he was significantly taller than a Soman. But as much as he looked, there was not one opening where even a single molecule could have passed through.

So the only thing that was left was the force field. Carefully he moved his hand along its surface. He could clearly feel a wavelike pattern. That was the solution! They used a low-frequency field consisting of a standing wave. This meant that it was relatively weak between amplitudes and that the air could pass through there. This was the place to look for any weaknesses to exploit.

He tried pushing his hand through one of those openings. That worked to some extent, but the opening was not big enough and he was only able to push his fingers through. The rest of his hand was simply too thick.

He tried to remember the physics lessons from his TLS training. The product of wavelength and frequency always equaled the speed of light. He guessed the wavelength to be 10 centimeters judging from what he was able to measure with his hand. So he was dealing with a frequency of—he did a quick calculation in his head—3 gig hertz. All he needed now was



a generator that was able to produce an energy field with a frequency of 3 gig hertz or a multiple thereof, then the two waves would cancel each other out, and he could escape!

*Nothing easier than that, inside a cell! he thought ironically. A field generator certainly is hidden under the plank-bed...*

He thought for a moment and then started ramming one wall of his cell over and over again with his shoulder.

## 6.

### *Accusations*

Sam could not believe it. A virus had been cleverly hidden in the materials he had used for his speech. The virus had implemented itself into the Syntron-network of Som during his presentation and had nearly shorted out the whole network.

An Elfahdan by the name of Eravar, whose company owned much of the syntronic network on Som, had discovered the virus spreading and had been able to start countermeasures. His technicians had been able to quickly identify the source of the virus: the plenary hall!

The Soman could not understand how the virus could have gotten into his documents. He had prepared them on the flight here and had completed them on Som. No one had access to them—except Will.

Sam startled. Was the Terran behind all this? He remembered not seeing him this morning in their suite. Was he the one who had planted the virus in his documents, and did he leave after that? But why?

Was Will Dean an agent of Dorgon? Was it his job to undermine his mission here and to prepare the campaign against Siom Som?

But why had he fought against Mordred then? Will, who had crawled through the waste-disposal shafts of the Dorgonian spaceship, a traitor?

It would be easy to test him, but first you would need to get him here.

Salaam Siin had been as surprised as Sam. But he had immediately come to the Soman's

defense. He had not been able to get him diplomatic immunity, but at least he had been able to insist on a trial.

It was to begin in an hour.

Plenty of time to think.

Sam was close to despair.

## 7.

### *Escaping*

Will was triumphant. Shortly after his “running amuck” they had appeared and had tried to tie him down on the bed. He feigned suffocation, and indeed he was able to deceive the Ghaarts who did not know enough about human anatomy. Finally they had put an energy field generator on him that was supposed to prevent him from getting closer than a few centimeters to any wall.

They had designed it more cleverly than he had anticipated. The energy-field not only prevented him from hitting any walls or getting close to the plank-bed, it also worked on the inside to render impossible any manipulation of the device.

At least it was impossible if you were not a TLS agent. Will could not help smiling. The Ghaarts, or their ominous masters, seemed to be unaware of the fact that Sam's Terran companion was a fully trained secret agent.

What was most satisfying to him was that Sam could be ruled out as a traitor, as the Soman was quite aware of Will's TLS background.

Will probed around the inner field. The Ghaarts had placed the generator on his back, just low enough that the inner field covered his stomach without reaching up to his heart. He gulped. What would have happened if they had placed it a little higher?

The outer field reached from just above his head down to his lower legs, which made standing or walking very uncomfortable. He felt as if someone had put him into very strong bandages that prevented blood circulation in his feet. Worse, the field forced his feet outwards while his knees were pulled inwards, adding to his discomfort.

He tried to recall the generator's appearance. He had studied it with care as they were putting it on him. Based on how they had put it on his back, the controls had to be facing downwards. Thus, somehow he had to get his hands through the field and close to the generator.

Dean reached backwards with both hands around the field until they met at his bottom. Now he tried slowly moving them upward. However, they did not follow his back but slid along the energy-field!

Next attempt. He reached through his legs with his right arm and succeeded in getting a few centimeters further up. Unfortunately he was not flexible enough to reach the controls successfully.

Cursing, he retracted his hand and shook it until his muscles stopped hurting.

Furiously he looked around in his cell until his eyes met the edge of the bed.

*This could work, he thought. All I have to do is be fast enough to penetrate both fields...*

He placed both his hands near the generator and onto the field behind his back. Then he put as much distance between himself and the plank-bed as the energy-barriers allowed. After that he turned his back towards the bed, took a deep breath and ran backwards towards the edge of the bed. Just before he reached it, he let himself fall to the ground and slithered the last few centimeters on the outer field. There was a massive jolt, but he continued moving. He had succeeded in penetrating the outer field. Now he had to...

Will groaned with pain. Indeed, his aim had been so precise that his hands had struck exactly against the edge of the bed, which now squeezed against his fingers with unbearable force. But only a fraction of a second later he felt another spasm of pain from the other side of his fingers as they smacked against the generator. Then a jolt, as the energy fields catapulted him away from the bed.

For a few seconds he lay, or rather, floated, in the air more than a meter high in the middle of his cell, his hands immovably pressed against the generator. His elbows were exactly at the outer rim of the energy field and were being brutally forced outwards. Will tried to push them in

the opposite direction and after he managed to overcome some small resistance, they suddenly smacked onto his hips.

Thus, he now was floating in the air, his arms pressed tightly against his body as he groped for the controls of the generator with his fingers. Will began to sweat. This whole undertaking, and now also having to fight against the constant force of the energy-field, was fatiguing him.

After several long minutes, he finally succeeded in finding the controls. He could feel two dials and two switches. He tried the first switch with no result, and then the other one without success either.

*Somehow they must have disabled the off switch, he thought. Let's hope that the dials for intensity are working...*

Now he tried using the small circular dials. He moved the first one and promptly moved down a half a meter. Pleased with the result, he now tried moving the second one, but this one could go no further in that direction. He moved it in the other direction, only a small distance. Suddenly his hands were free, but now a terrible force was pressing on his neck and forcing it down mercilessly. In panic, he moved the dial further and suddenly crashed on the floor.

Groaning, he stood up, completely amazed. The energy-field had completely disappeared. He felt his belly and the surface of the generator for anything unusual, then moved his arms as far out as he could. Nothing.

*I must have accidentally hit on the two settings that cancel out the two frequencies.*

He went to the exit of the cell. Now he only had to manage the same thing with this barrier that he had just accomplished with the first two fields.

With some discomfort he reached for the dials. In order to work this he would have to use high frequencies and high intensities. That meant that things would get extremely uncomfortable. He placed the index finger on the left-hand dial and the middle finger on the right-hand dial. Then he moved one dial down and the other upward as quickly as he could. For a second he could feel the nauseating squeezing sensation moving again through his body.

When the left dial could not go any further, his fingers were pressed down against the generator again. Shortly after that, his middle finger reached its target as well. Dean felt himself floating some centimeters above the ground again.

*Well, he thought with some amusement, now it's just a matter of keeping our fingers crossed!*

Slowly he decreased the outer field. When his feet touched the ground again, he pressed himself against the barrier as hard as he could. Millimeter for millimeter he moved the dial.

And suddenly he was through! He fell forward and slithered on the energy-field towards the wall of the corridor. He bumped into the wall and was repelled towards the other side of the corridor. This happened a few times before Will finally enlarged the inner field again so that it cancelled out the outer field.

Again he hit the ground and cursed. A thought crossed his mind. What if they had heard him? What if they were watching him the whole time and had noticed his escape?

He had to get out of here. He moved one of the dials a little and silently floated through the corridor until he reached an antigrav-shaft.

After neutralizing the field he carefully inspected the shaft. So far, he hadn't encountered anybody—even the other cells had been empty—but once inside the shaft, that could quickly change.

Will was lucky. Nobody was there. He entered the shaft and moved down two or three levels, then immediately exited the shaft. Now he knew where he was. He had been in this corridor while taking his stroll last night. He had thought it strange that the Somans had a prison inside their governmental complex, but this seemed to be only one of the many peculiarities that he had encountered already here in Estartu.

He decided to go to the apartment. If the Somans and Ghaarts acted even remotely close to the way a Galactician would, this would be the last place where they would be looking for him. Provided they had discovered his escape at all.

Quickly but without undue haste, he approached the apartment. When a group of Somans and Ophalans came around the corner, he

resisted the urge to flee. But they paid no attention to him. Will even had the impression that they purposely ignored him.

While he was thinking about that, he reached the suite. Quickly he entered. He sighed when he found the rooms empty.

Now he had to look for some evidence. Will sat down at the desk and looked through the pigeonholes and drawers, then he moved to the Syntron. A quick search of its memory banks only brought up the materials for Sam's speech that had been scheduled today and some general information on Mordred, Dorgon and—Thoregon!

Will was surprised. He had not known that Sam had shown any interest in that third organization.

At that moment, the door opened.

## 8.

### *The Trial*

Sam looked up annoyed when he noticed that someone was approaching the energy-field barrier.

"Salaam Siin," he called happily when he recognized the master singer.

"I was successful in setting you free for the time being, Sruel," Siin said. "Despite the accusations—which I very much doubt—locking up a diplomat is not legal! Nevertheless the hearing will be held."

The Soman nodded and then remembered that this was a Terran gesture.

Salaam Siin laughed. "Yes, they are quite influential, those Terrans..."

"Salaam Siin, do you think it would be possible for me to..."

"...return to your quarters or into the *Siom Som*?" the Ophalan completed his sentence. "Certainly not if...you don't want to make yourself any more suspicious than you already are."

Sam sighed, frustrated. "Then let us go to the courtroom..."

"I hereby open the trial *United Galaxies of Estartu versus Sruel Allok Mok*," Triaz intoned and arrogantly looked around at the spectators.

It was common in the legal system of Siom Som that the accused entered a plea which the prosecutor had to answer. Anything like lawyers or public prosecutors was as unknown as professional judges. Usually a member of the government or council took that position. In this special case Tiraz was chosen as well as Salaam Siin, a member of the thirteen-person Council of Estartu which represented the government in the same way as the Terran Council did on Earth. Ordinarily, the master singer acted as the Presiding Judge, but the Senate had found him to be biased and had chosen Triaz to lead the proceedings.

Sam stood up and approached the platform.

"Citizens of Estartu," he began, probably the most difficult words of his entire life. "Dorgon has brought a lot of pain to the Milky Way. They are treacherous and try to stay in the background. Their main weapons are a superior technology and absolute ruthlessness. They use every way they can think of to get control over other galaxies. In their own galaxy the Dorgonans are suppressing the other races in the most brutal way. You either surrender control to one of their governors—or you will be extinguished without mercy!"

He paused for a moment and looked around. Triaz glared at him angrily, but it was the right of any accused not to be interrupted during his opening speech.

"As I explained yesterday," Sam continued unmoved, "Wirsal Cell was the Dorgonans' agent in the Milky Way. He managed to reach what at that time was still the top secret planet of Camelot and became Perry Rhodan's personal advisor. Nobody was able to see through his ruse! I came here to ask for a fleet of ships to aid those Galacticians who now already are in the galaxy of the Dorgonans trying to eliminate the threat once and for all, even before it reaches Estartu. But as we now have all seen, Dorgon already has extended its influence to this place. I say that somewhere high up in the hierarchy—perhaps even in the Council itself—there is a traitor working for Dorgon, and this person is

trying to prevent the raising of this fleet!"

All hell broke loose. All of the assembled council members, senators, and visitors were calling and yelling at each other. It took nearly half an hour for Triaz to quiet the chamber again.

"This is quite an accusation," he said. "But you should not forget, Sruel Allok Mok, that it is you who stands trial here." His voice became louder. "A few years ago you vanished from Siom Som. You were a Council member back then. Later we learned that you had joined Perry Rhodan without thinking about how to fill the void you left on your planet. Now you suddenly return as if nothing has happened and are calling for military power against some mysterious threat. And on top of that you incidentally infect the local intranet with a vicious virus... IT IS YOU WHO IS A TRAITOR!"

He had yelled those last words at Sam. The two Somans stared at each other. A silent duel was taking place, neither willing to turn away first. For nearly a minute they glared at each other until Triaz finally lost the battle.

"I call the Elfahdan Eravar," he then announced, as if nothing had happened.

A massive creature entered the hall, accompanied by loud shrieking and rattling. It looked like a historical knight but also might have resembled a turtle walking on two legs, had it not been for the spikes on its back.

During the time of the Permanent Conflict the amorphous Elfahdans in their exoskeletons had been squires and aides to the Eternal Warriors, which made them no more likeable to Sam.

The Elfahdan went to the platform.

"Eravar, with Srella Syntron," he introduced himself. "Yesterday, my syntronic security programs detected a very destructive virus that began spreading over Som's intranet. My co-workers and I were able to eliminate the virus and locate the plenary hall as the source of the virus. Later I checked the data-crystals of Sruel Allok Mok, which also contained this virus. That makes it quite probable that the data-crystal is the source of the virus."

"Quite probable?" Salaam Siin asked. Everyone was allowed to ask questions during the

trial.

The armor-like exoskeleton of the Elfahdan squeaked a little. "One instance of the virus was found on the crystal," the voice, which was quite soft and high for a body of that size, answered. "The plenary assembly's Syntron contained over a thousand instances. Besides that, the crystal was no longer connected to the net when the virus started to spread."

"But there is no real proof?"

"Irrelevant," Triaz dismissed this question. "We have to assume that the virus was indeed part of this data!"

A murmur went through the hall. Triaz glanced around angrily.

"I call the next witness," he ruled, now sounding surprisingly amiable. "Grar Gullam Frer, head of the internal prison-sector."

Sam looked up surprised.

"Under the law it is my turn to call for a witness," he objected. "Will Dean!"

Triaz waved his wing casually. "Wait and see!"

The called-for Soman entered the hall and rushed toward the podium. "Yesterday, the Terran Will Dean had to be arrested..."

Sam froze. "Arrested for what?"

"...today the Terran escaped from his cell," the Soman continued, ignoring the interruption. "He was able to neutralize the energy-field barrier without using any visible tools."

"It seems like he has used a superior technology that went undetected when he was arrested," Triaz speculated.

"A definite possibility," the head of the prison answered, who then left the hall after Triaz excused him.

Triaz addressed Sam: "Do you want to call a witness?"

Sam thought about it. Will had vanished. Aside from the Terran, he hardly knew anyone around here, at least no one who could help him here—except ...

"I call Salaam Siin," the Soman said, frustrated.

A murmur went through the room as the master singer and chairman of the Council went to the podium.

"Sruel Allok Mok, until a few years back a

member of the Council, and well known as a peacemaker, has warned us of a terrible danger. A few years ago he joined Perry Rhodan after a diplomatic visit to the Milky Way. This has nothing to do with treason! Nobody knows better than I, what potential that immortal Terran has. Many Somans, Ophalans, Elfahdans and Pterus who were not around during the war tend to forget that it was *Rhodan* who freed us from the tyranny of the Sothos and the Eternal Warriors. Why should Sruel not join this man if he could do so much more good at his side than he could do here? And now this terrible danger in the form of Dorgon threatens to conquer the Milky Way, perhaps even tries to get a foothold in Estartu. All he asks for are a few spaceships to send to the aid of the Galacticians. Look at this Soman! Does he have the face of a terrorist? Think of what he has done, for all of us! What if Dorgon *really* tries to get to Siom Som? Do we want to live under the same conditions again as under the Sothos, or even worse?"

Complete silence filled the hall as the Ophalian returned to his seat. After a few long minutes, first one, then all of the other jurors stood up and left the room in silence but with pensive looks on their faces.

Triaz watched them leave. As the door closed behind the last of them, he announced a break in the trial to allow for deliberations, then he rushed off as well.

Sam thought about going to his quarters. Somehow he felt that Dean would have gone there. Instinctively, he looked to Salaam Siin, who made a circle in the air with his trunk, the Ophalian gesture for "no."

Sam left the hall nevertheless.

## 9.

### *The Traitor*

Will threw himself under the desk. He deactivated the Syntron and disappeared under the table in one fluid motion. He had practiced such things a thousand times during his training as a TLS agent.

He made himself as small as possible under the table. Luckily it was standing right behind

the armchair so that he could not be seen from the door. Now he regretted that he had not yet gotten rid of the generator on his back. But the Ghaarts had pulled it so tight that it might have been difficult to do so. And now he was not able to get closer to the armchair, because the generator prevented that. Besides, he had to be careful not to touch any of the controls with his heels. He did not want to think about what could happen in this situation if the energy-field was reactivated.

He carefully watched the door through a small gap. A Soman was standing there, looking around a little lost.

*Sam?* Will asked himself. *Of course. Who else could it be!*

He thought about leaving his hiding place and telling the Soman all that had happened. But then he remembered what the knight-like creature had told him. What if Sam really was an agent for Dorgon? If they had somehow “converted” him?

He decided to observe the Soman for a little longer. If Sam found him, they could still talk.

The bird-like being’s gaze was fixated on the desk. Will cowered down. Had he been detected?

One moment later two thin legs with two toes and a heel-claw appeared. Will thought amused that this was the first time that he saw Sam from this perspective. He discovered that Sam had a scar on his left leg. It ran along the whole length of his foot on the inside and ended between the two toes. Sam once told him that he had been attacked by a late follower of the Eternal Warriors. Perhaps this scar came from that attack.

Carefully, Will leaned a little forward. Now it proved to be quite useful that Somans had beaks. Sam could not see him because his beak blocked the view.

Sam activated the Syntron. Will heard a data-crystal being inserted, and then Sam verbally instructed that a file named “Thoregon” be copied onto the local system.

After that the Soman got up and left the room.

Will carefully crawled out of his hiding place. He activated the Syntron again. As the holo reappeared above the table, the file name

“Thoregon (supplements)” came to his attention.

Will opened the file. It opened up into a reading-layer that moved in front of the directory. Will quickly read the text and froze. What he had just opened was some kind of diary reaching back some months. It included in short sentences how Sam got to Perry Rhodan and then continued on to Camelot as his associate. He had written that this was a great success for Dorgon since they now had another agent besides Wirsal Cell in the vicinity of the Immortals. He had played the peaceful diplomat, feigning shock by the things that Dorgon did, until he finally managed to get Homer G. Adams to send them to Estartu, where Sam could finally initiate the conquest of Siom Som.

Completely shocked, Dean sank down into the seat. At the moment he did not care that the seat had been built for Somans and was far too small.

*Sam is a traitor!* was all that went on in his head. *He deceived us all until he was completely sure, and now...*

He had to warn the council. Salaam Siin had to get this file at all costs before anything terrible could happen. He started looking in the drawers of the desk again for a data-crystal, when the door opened for a second time.

Only a fraction of a second later Dean was again cowering beneath the table. Once again, switching off the holo and hiding had been one fluid motion.

Carefully he peered through the gap between the desk and the armchair. Sam had returned—and he had brought two Ghaarts.

Will held his breath as the three unwelcome guests started to systematically search the room. Why was Sam searching his own room? Why did he accept the help of the Ghaarts even if he hated the Pterus?

The Soman rapidly approached Will’s hiding place. Will pulled his feet closer to his body. His knees tightly pressed against his body, he felt the blood flow being cut off and his feet turning numb. He would not be able to stand this posture for very long. Suspiciously he watched those bird legs that were right in front of his knees. He saw the scar again, so it had to

be Sam.

"I found something," the Soman announced. "We don't have to look any further!"

A few moments later two colorful shimmering energy-fields appeared at the side of the Soman's legs. Will heard a data-crystal being inserted.

"Good! Now we have all we need," Sam commented on the sound. "Let us return to the trial..."

The beings disappeared from the TLS agent's view, then he heard the door being opened and shut again.

Will crawled out of his hiding place a second time. His feet tingled horribly. What now? The Ghaarts accompanying Sam could only mean trouble. What had they been looking for? Had Sam been looking himself, or had he been forced to do so?

He activated the Syntron. Perhaps Salaam Siin could help him.

"Locate Salaam Siin!" he instructed the Syntron.

"The Chairman of the Estartu Council is in the courtroom."

"Courtroom?" Will murmured confused. "What trial?"

"The trial *United galaxies of Estartu versus Sruel Allok Mok*."

"What are the charges?"

"Treason. Sruel Allok Mok is accused of being an agent for Dorgon."

So it was true! Or perhaps not? Was it just a devious plot?

*The scar!* Will suddenly remembered.

"A picture of Mok. Magnify the legs."

Will studied the holo-picture very carefully but he was not able to discover any scar.

"How old is this picture?"

"The hologram was created the day before yesterday when the ambassador returned."

Will fell back into the armchair. So the Soman had not been Sam after all. Why did all Somen have to look alike anyway? But what was much more important was who wanted to get Sam caught in such an elaborate trap? Somehow he had to get Sam out of this, because the actual terrorists would drag out this trial all the way to the bitter end.

Will left the suite and let a servo show him the way to the court.

*Just storming in and freeing Sam surely is the wrong approach,* he thought while he was on his way. *How do I get him out of there?*

His gaze stopped at an alcove in the corridor. An exotic plant that distantly resembled a Terran aloe stood there in a beautiful pot.

*What a tempting hiding-place!* Will grinned. *As if built just for me! Wherever they head after the sentencing, they will have to pass along here...*

After a quick glance around, he vanished behind the plant and waited.

## 10.

### *The Execution*

Sruel Allok Mok, whom the Terrans called Sam, entered the courtroom nervously. The two Ghaarts who had "found" him did not move from his side until he sat down at the place for the accused.

Shortly after that Triaz and the jurors returned as well.

"The jury has decided," Triaz pompously announced upon reaching the podium.

The jury foreman stood up.

"The accusation weighs heavily," he began. "Sruel Allok Mok is a well known diplomat of the United Galaxies of Estartu. A former member of the Council, he left Estartu to join the famous Terrans. No one can hold that against him. We heard Salaam Siin, who may be biased but nevertheless is a friend of Rhodan and chairman of the Council. History books describe Rhodan as an extremely charismatic person to whom Siom Som and the other galaxies owe a lot. Meanwhile, we have this almost ridiculous accusation. Why should someone like Sruel be a traitor to his home? We have reached the following conclusion..."

The Soman was cut short mid-sentence when the door flew open. Sam turned around and saw the armor of an Elfahdan in the door. It was Eravar.

"We have new evidence," he roared through the hall.

The Elfahdan held up a data-crystal and approached the room's Syntron terminal. A large holo appeared displaying the word "Thoregon."

"These files were obtained 15 minutes ago from the Syntron of the accused. They were not present when he was arrested, so we have to suppose that he created them during the break..."

"I was only..." Sam protested, but Triaz cut him short with an energetic gesture.

"The content of this file is quite interesting" the Elfahdan continued. "It clearly shows that Mok truly is working for Dorgon. First he swindled his way into Rhodan's staff of advisors and now he has come here to take control of Es-tartu!"

To support his words he showed the holos. Eravar magnified the emblem that attested to the origin of the file: Sam's Syntron.

The jurors started whispering excitedly. Sam only stared through the room speechless. Triaz glared at him with hate. Eravar looked away. Salaam Siin let his trunk hang in despair. *Why?* his gaze asked him. *Why?*

The spokesperson stood up again. "We have reached a verdict... guilty!"

Sam let his arms hang from his body. There was nothing that could be changed any more. Everything had been said. Now all there was left to do was for the judge to announce the sentence, but that did not matter to the Soman. What possibly could there be that could make things worse? Dazed, he only made out some of the words:

"...convicted of high treason... sentenced to death by converter..."

Sam stood up as if in trance. All was lost. He would not get any fleet. However, the real problem was not the help that Adams would not be receiving now but the impending termination of Sam's own life, although there was nothing he could do about it.

Two Ghaarts approached him and flanked him as they left the courtroom. Sam could only think of one thing: who was behind all this? Who was the real traitor?

Sam recognized Salaam Siin who stood in front of him. The Ophalan sang a very sad song. When Sam passed him, he murmured: "Why,

Sruel, why did you do this?"

Sam did not answer. He would not have been able to give one anyway. If even Salaam was convinced that he was guilty, what hope was there?

The doors opened in front of Sam and he faced a long corridor. Sam thought he could already make out the deadly flickering of the converter down that corridor as he lethargically put one foot in front of the other. Just one foot in front of the other. That was all that Sam's thoughts contained at the moment. Only his feet and the corridor. And that flickering.

He nearly bumped into one of the Ghaarts, who was standing in the middle of the corridor. He had not seen him, because he had been completely lost in thought. Feet, corridor, converter...what was this Ghaart doing here?

Sam forced himself to shake off his lethargy and looked around. The Ghaart and two other Ghaarts were standing in front of a native fug plant set in an alcove. It looked like they had found something. Well, what did it matter to him? It would not alter his destiny.

One foot in front of the other. Soon, plant and Ghaarts were out of sight, only his two guards were still present. The converter came closer and closer. One foot in front of the other. Sam thought he could already feel the heat as the antigrav-shaft appeared in front of him.

One of the Ghaarts passed him and entered the shaft going down. The second Ghaart pushed him into the antigrav field. Only now did Sam realize that he did not know where the converter was in this building. He had just been walking along without even knowing if he was going in the right direction. Now one of the escorts preceded him, so he certainly would not get lost. The converter came closer and closer.

Sam left the shaft, following the Ghaart. The same old routine all over again: one foot in front of the other. The last steps of his life. Memories flooded his mind. Memories of times gone by.

He saw a Soman woman. His wife. A nest. His nest. Seven eggs. Shortly before hatching. Then he saw a Pteru. He was holding his wife in an iron grip. Sam could see her eyes bulging. She tried to fight off the Pteru, but the lizard-like creature strangled her mercilessly.



Finally she went limp. Sam tried to attack the Pteru. To jump at him, hit him, strike him down, kill him, take revenge. But he was not able to move at all. The paralyzer was still affecting him. Numb. Paralyzed. Helpless.

The Pteru approached the nest. No! he tried to yell, but his vocal cords were paralyzed as well. With a cold smile the Pteru grabbed an egg and held it in front of Sam's staring eyes. Sam watched the claws penetrate the shell. Just a little bit more, and it would... it burst! Some fluid, yolk, an unborn Soman—Sam's child!—landed in the hand of the Pteru. He laughed and made a fist. Then he let the clot drop to the ground and stepped on it with his foot. Sam could not see it, since it was out of his field of vision. But that sound. Never would he forget that sound. A slushy noise. The sound with which his child's life ended before it had even begun.

*Just kill me*, Sam wanted to yell at the Pteru. *Don't make me watch this*.

The Pteru snickered. As if he had been able to read Sam's mind, he grabbed another egg. Five left. He pressed it against Sam's forehead. Despite the paralysis, Sam could feel the round surface of the shell. Yes, he could feel it. How well he could feel it!

"You wannabe-diplomat," the Pteru whispered into Sam's face. The smell of that breath! Sam wanted to retch, but that, too, was impossible. "Remember: the Eternal Warriors still exist. Despite these peace talks of this Salaam Siin. We will always exist. And this is for you causing the arrest of Ruag..."

With brute force the Pteru pressed harder. Sam had to watch helplessly as the second shell burst, spewing forth the almost fully developed embryo, which slid down Sam's face between his eyes and finally came to rest on his beak. Sam could see feathers on the soft skin. Feathers! Only a few more days, then his—their!—children would have hatched. The hatchling moved. Yes, it moved! It was alive!

The Pteru had noticed it as well. With a furious roar, he grabbed the innocent creature with both hands, tore off its head and threw away the remains.

"Remember," he bawled at the paralyzed So-

man. "Don't get in the way of the Pterus!"

He moved away, stomped, trampled through the nest. Sam heard a shell crack. Then another one. And another one. Five shells altogether. The Pteru roared again and left the room, leaving a dead Soman, seven dead hatchlings robbed of their chance to live, and a paralyzed peacemaker. A once-happy family, now wiped out. A life's cause destroyed.

Three years later, Sam had left Siom Som to go on a trip on the *London*. After that, he had joined Perry Rhodan. He simply could not remain in the galaxies of Estartu. He could never return, so he thought.

One foot in front of the other. The converter came closer. What reason was there to go on living? He had lost everything. One foot in front of the other. Step by step. A hangar came into view. A *hangar*? A space jet appeared. A *space jet*? One of the Ghaarts began to growl, but the other one pushed Sam up the ramp.

Was the execution to take place in outer space? It was all the same to him. He was done with his life. The first Ghaart rushed into the jet. A few moments later, the second one, the one that had growled in disagreement earlier, forced him out again.

There seemed to be some kind of disagreement between Sam's two guards. In any other situation, he might have found this to be quite amusing, but here? One foot in front of the other. He heard a hissing. One foot in front of the other. A shout. One foot in front of the other. Heat. The converter? One foot in front of the other. Someone fell down next to him. A Pteru! Sam stopped. A blaster-shot had destroyed the generator on his back. That was the reason why the Pteru had become "visible". And dead. Sam turned around. The other Ghaart was standing on the ramp. Obviously it had been him who had fired that shot. An ally? Impossible! It was a Pteru! Nevertheless he stepped onto the ramp and entered the space jet.

"Why did you do this?" he asked the figure behind the rainbow-colored energy-shield.

It did not answer, but closed the airlock. Then it ran into the command center and commenced take-off. Sam followed, incredulous,

and sat down in one of the seats. He looked through the observation dome as the jet passed through the cloud layer and approached the *Siom Som*, which had gone into orbit around the planet.

“What...” Sam started anew.

The Ghaart’s refracting energy-field suddenly retracted upwards and then flew right across the bridge to the opposite wall. Sam now gazed at the figure that had been behind the shield. It was...

“Will!” Sam yelled.

“Yes, Sam. It was lucky I could save you,” the Afro-terran blurted out. “They arrested me. But then they put this energy-field generator on me, and I was able to escape. I discovered that awful evidence in your Syntron and decided to free you, but then...”

“Wait, wait, one moment!” Sam stopped him. “First things first. They arrested you too?”

Will nodded and took a deep breath to calm himself down a little. Then he reported in detail what had happened.

“I hid behind this plant,” he concluded his report. “A short while later, a Ghaart appeared. He probably had a heat-sensor because he came right at me. I was quite shocked when he asked me what I was doing here. Then he ordered me to follow him. He led me straight into the courtroom, where we picked you up. That’s when I realized that the Ghaarts had put one of their own energy-field generators on me in the prison. All this time I had been running around covered up in one of those refracting energy field without realizing it!”

Sam smiled. “The first good news in a long time. But it’s not over yet. We still have to find the person behind all this.”

The space jet had reached the *Siom Som*’s docking bay. Its two occupants emerged from the jet.

“Actually, we could leave *Siom Som* right now,” Will thought aloud.

“No!” Sam countered. “In court, I suggested that Dorgon may already have a foothold here, and I have the growing feeling that I was right!”

“That remind me: did you return to the apartment after the trial began?”

“No, Salaam Siin explicitly warned me not

to do so.”

“So, which Soman was it then... wait!” Will bent down and took a close look at the protesting Soman’s legs. “No scar. It really wasn’t you...”

“Of course not. I have already told...scar? Who had a scar on his leg?”

“The Soman that was messing around with the Syntron. He looked very much like you.”

“It must have been Triaz. He was attacked by an extremist Pteru-sect a few years ago, just as I was...”

Sam stopped, and his beak started to tremble, but Will Dean did not notice that.

“So, it was Triaz then, hmm...” Will picked up the generator again. “I’m returning to Som.”

“What? That is too dangerous, Will!”

“For you,” the Terran replied. “But I will be disguised as a Ghaart. I simply can’t believe that Dorgon is already here. You are seeing ghosts, Sam. The Dorgonans are humanoids. They don’t look like you Somans at all. No, an agent of Dorgon could not work in the disguise of a Soman. Better would be...”

“An Elfahdan,” Sam interrupted him. “Eravar!”

“I will investigate that. You better stay here.”

## 11.

### *Dorgonans?*

Will Dean left the *Siom Som* with the jet. Surely they were asking themselves down there what had happened. Better he took the initiative.

He radioed that the other guard had been a traitor and had joined ranks with the Soman and that he had been forced to fly Sam to his ship. But he had been able to capture the space jet and return to Som.

He landed and left the jet. He was not stopped. The Ghaarts seemed to have some privileged role on this planet. He asked for a meeting with the Elfahdan Eravar. Only half an hour later he entered his office.

“Greetings, Ghaart,” Eravar greeted him. “What can I do for you?”

Will took the direct approach. "We believe that the proceedings against Sruel Allok Mok were staged and that you are the one who is responsible for that." He took a step closer to the creature. "Do you want to speak voluntarily, or shall I first destroy your exoskeleton?"

If Eravar was indeed a Dorgonan, this threat would have been meaningless. But if he was a real Elfahdan, he was an amorphous being completely dependent on his armor. Fortunately, Sam had told Will why all Elfahdans needed this armor, which really was an exoskeleton. Not to mention that anyone would have a lot of respect for a Ghaart anyway. Overall, a threat like that would be a foolproof test.

And sure enough, Eravar became nervous. His armor began to tremble loudly.

"No, no!" he called. "I am innocent. Triaz forced me to develop the virus!"

Triaz? So it was true! But why was the Elfahdan cooperating so readily? Something was wrong here.

Without taking any further notice of the terrified Eravar, Will left the office. On his way to the governmental building, he relayed the recorded conversation to Sam. It certainly would improve his chances at an acquittal.

He then approached a Syntron-terminal. "Locate council member Triaz."

"Triaz has left the building a few minutes ago," the Syntron answered. "He is on his way to the spaceport."

Spaceport? The insidious Elfahdan had warned him. They seemed to feel quite secure here.

Hastily he ran to the nearest glider taxi. The flight to the spaceport seemed to take forever. Finally it came into view, just in time to see a Soman ship take off.

Will cursed aloud and ran towards his space

jet as soon as the glider had landed. As quickly as possible he took off and checked the scanner-holo. He sighed with relief when he made out Triaz' ship on it.

"I'm following Triaz," he told Sam over hypercom. "He was behind all of it. Perhaps we'll not see each other for a while. Good luck with your trial."

"His escape will not go unnoticed," Sam replied happily. "I expect to be acquitted soon!"

At that point Triaz already entered hyperspace. Will kept on his heels, but tried to keep a distance. Despite changing course a few times and making random flights through hyperspace, Triaz was not able to shake off Will. Will always kept back far enough so that Triaz was not able to detect him with his inferior instruments. It was only a matter of time until the Soman felt secure that he was alone.

Then the time had come. Triaz' ship entered a solar system. Instead of vanishing into hyperspace like he had done countless times before, Triaz now seemed to have all the time in the world.

Will studied his screen more closely. What was it that the Soman wanted in this system? Sure, there were planets, but except for endless deserts there was nothing to find here.

A signal from the scanner caught his attention. A ship fell out of hyperspace. Another ship? A secret meeting-place?

Quickly Will magnified the picture only to fall back in his seat with a groan. His heart had nearly stopped when he made out the form of the other spaceship. Until now he had not quite believed it, but the unique characteristics of that ship left no doubt. There was only one race that used those ships.

Triaz was rendezvousing with an eagle-ship of the Dorgonans.

## T H E E N D

*Dorgon has reached Estartu. A frightful proposition indeed! Obviously, Triaz is a traitor who's job is to lay the groundwork for that sinister power. But Will Dean is on his heels.*

*Ralf König will continue with the action in Estartu in the next episode, which is titled*

## D O R G O N COMMENTARY

## Syntrons don't lie

Well, that was quite a close one for our two heroes!

Nevertheless it is quite disturbing that Estartu's sphere of influence has already been infiltrated by Dorgon—but this problem will undoubtedly be addressed soon.

A devious trap for Will Dean and Sam—a virus in the communications-network, a forged file that was supposed to lay blame on Sam...because Syntrons do not lie. Or do they...?

Even in our own time, any sort of picture, film, or sound file that has even once been stored on a computer might not be accepted as evidence in a court—the likelihood of manipulation by clever methods and modern technology that are available to electronically alter pictures and sounds is just too great.

The question is, whether the same is true of Syntrons as well, or rather, whether it ought to

be regarded as true.

The fact that Syntrons basically are artificial intelligences speaks against that. After all, a Syntron would know who created what file and when, and what had been done to it. At least that's the general idea.

However, let's just throw two concepts into this discussion: millennium bug (which proved to be far less dangerous than expected) and KorraVir. Even just these two "small" examples alone show how easy it can be not only to manipulate the data itself but also any data-storage devices and data-processing equipment.

Thus, a talented Syntron specialist can probably not only easily conjure up any necessary evidence for or against something out of thin air but then also make it immune against any challenge of its authenticity, since "Syntrons don't lie" ...

**Martin Schuster**