

Dominik Hauber



Episode 20

# D O R G O N

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



## First Steps

The Galacticians in the hands of the Dorgonans—A desperate fight for survival

# D O R G O N

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# First Steps

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

Mordred has been defeated. Number One was exposed and was brought to justice by the remorseful Cauthon Despair. Mordred, however, was only the beginning. The mysterious power behind Mordred is Dorgon.

Nobody knows exactly who or what hides behind Dorgon. The wreck of a Dorgonian ship reveals the coordinates of a galaxy: M 100! Under the leadership of Homer G. Adam and Aurec, ten ships, including the *Ivanhoe*, left the Milky Way for this unknown part of the universe to learn more about Dorgon and to try to neutralize this potential menace.

Their first attempt at peaceful contact fails. Aurec and Homer G. Adams are forced to act. The Galacticians reach the world of Cermos where they acquire some valuable information.

Meanwhile, the *Ivanhoe*'s personnel explores the important world of Mesoph. However, along with Mathew Wallace a group of Galacticians has been captured by the Dorgons and have to endure interrogation and torture. Nevertheless, they succeed in making some small first steps ...

### Main characters

**Mathew Wallace** – The Terran is in the hands of Dorgon

**Irwan Dove** und **Lorif** – Wallace's comrades

**Priamus** – Dorgonian Senator to the planet of Mesoph

**Saraah** – The slave who loves Wallace

**Zenturio Galanius** – A merciless henchman of Priamus

Prologue.  
*Somewhere at the edge of a  
city*

*Run!*

Perspiration streamed from his forehead. Strands of hair hung down his face, sticking to his skin.

*Faster!*

His feet sunk into the deep mud across which he was running. His steps became heavier, but he knew he had to escape his pursuers!

His clothing was dripping wet. Whether from the rain that had been pouring down for hours or from his perspiration, he didn't know.

*They are closing in!*

He heard shouts behind him, apparently from his hunters. Panicked, he hurried onward. He stood on a rise from which one could overlook the city. It was night, but the lights of the town were visible.

*Where are the others?*

It made no difference. First and foremost he had to escape and save his own skin.

He raced onward, panting. Automatically, always one foot in front of the other.

He was completely exhausted.

*I must keep on running!*

His feet didn't obey him any longer. He became frantic. Suddenly, he stumbled over a branch and fell down. His limbs went limp, and his strength left him.

*No!!*

He tried to get on his feet once again but simply couldn't. Crawling, he moved forward, only to collapse again.

Mathew Wallace lost consciousness.

1.  
*Flashback: Three days  
earlier*

"Come on, out with you!"

Irwan Dove angrily glared looked at the Dorgonian guard and rubbed his wrists, which were sore from the handcuffs from which he had just been freed. The guard, wrapped in a purple cloak, gestured impatiently for him to get out of

his cell. Dove sighed heavily. It hurt the strong man to be so helpless and utterly incapable of taking any initiative, as it disagreed with his nature as an action-loving Oxtornan.

They had already been in Dorgon's custody for a few days after having been captured on Mesoph. They had since been regularly interrogated by Dorgonian officers. Communicating with the other crewmembers of the *Jay Jay II* was virtually impossible, consisting only of brief glances when they crossed on the walk between the interrogations. That's how he knew that Mathew Wallace was in the same area. He had seen Lorif only once. He suspected that the robot had deactivated itself to avoid the possibility of information being stolen from its memory.

Every one of the imprisoned Galacticians was in a single cell, chained to the wall. Each cell was protected further by an energy shield. This contrast between modern technology and ancient methods befuddled Dove a little.

He had lost his sense of time shortly after arriving at this high security section. The prison was far below the surface of Mesoph, and one had no way of telling the difference between day and night.

*A few more days here and I'll crack up*, Dove thought. He was already mentally exhausted, and without the special training that all expedition members had undergone before the departure to Dorgon, he would not have been capable of surviving this ordeal. He was interrogated for three to four hours daily. The rest of the time he was chained by hands and feet to the wall. There were no facilities for even the most basic needs, and the cell reeked.

"Come onj" the Dorgonian yelled.

Dove stepped out of his cell. To his left and right were the cells of the remaining prisoners, their shapes diffused because of the energy shields and the dim lighting. The hallway went on as far as the eye could see in each direction. Dorgon's insignia appeared at regular intervals between the cell doors.

*If they apply such methods against their own people as well, I wonder how they manage to maintain their rule*, Dove thought.

The Dorgonans had not been able to elicit any information from him in the previous interrogations. He now feared that impatience would gradually make them move on to harder, harsher methods ...

\*

Foedus moved in a shuffling, slow gait to his orthopedic executive chair. Even by Dorgonian standards Foedus was extraordinarily ugly. Groaning, he dropped himself into the chair and immediately clutched the gilded armrests, anxious over the fate that he might be facing.

Priamus, planet Mesoph's senator, had asked him for the report. For the past three days Foedus had interrogated the "strangers," as they were still called by the Dorgonans, with only meager results.

*Hopefully the senator is not all that annoyed,* Foedus thought for a moment. Admittedly, Priamus was not necessarily known as someone who favors severe punishments, but like all senators he also had a tendency toward high-handedness. In turn, his sense of his own superiority could also result in quite unpleasant consequences for his underlings.

Foedus looked at himself in a mirror. He had made it a habit and endeavored to always look as nasty as possible, for which he was already famous, or rather, notorious. Startled over his almost acceptable looks, he retrieved a makeup kit from a casket and began to disfigure himself. Upon completing this effort he once again gazed into the mirror.

*Very good,* he thought. Now, he could step in front of the senator.

With the press of a button he activated the hologram, and the connection with the senator stood.

As if out of nowhere, Priamus's face was projected into the room. With his countless decorations and his purple-colored cloak, he was quite an imposing sight.

"Foedus?"

"At your command," came the reply.

"I would like a detailed report on the interrogations of the strangers. Where they come from,

what their objectives are, and so on."

Foedus began to perspire. What should he tell the senator?

"I am listening ...," Priamus impatiently insisted.

"Well – yes, we have made some progress."

"What kind of progress?"

"Well, we ..."

"What do you know about these creatures?" interrupted Priamus

"They are humanoids, possessing two arms and legs, one relatively ..."

"I don't want to hear a biological report. That's already available to me," Priamus interrupted him again. "I would like to know what else you have found out."

Foedus sighed. "Well, we know their names, and, err ..."

With a hiss, the door hissed, and Irwan Dove and his guard entered. They stopped at the door as Foedus gestured for them to wait with a sweep of his hand.

"That's what I thought," Priamus said with a mocking smile. "Your services are therefore no longer required as of tomorrow. I have engaged Zenturio Galanius of the security guard to take over the interrogation, because this man knows the newest and best methods for persuading even mutes to speak. He will be arriving at the seventh hour tomorrow."

"Is that all?" Foedus asked relieved.

"Yes, that will be all for now."

The hologram was deactivated, and Dove was led to a chair. Handcuffs closed themselves around his joints, and the interrogation could begin. Dove planned to admit only useless information.

"Name?"

"Irwan Dove."

"Age?"

"176 years."

"Why have you penetrated into Dorgon?"

"We are in search of my grandmother."

"What business would your grandmother have in Dorgon?"

Foedus couldn't get rid of the nagging feeling that he was the butt of a joke. Meanwhile Dove had to make a considerable effort to hold back the laughter.

"She was banished by the Cosmocrats because her famous pea soup represented a danger for the Strangeness Constant of our universe."

"Ah, that is quite a new outlook." Foedus meticulously noted everything in a notepad. "What are peas?"

Dove couldn't hold back any longer. He burst out laughing, causing Foedus to react bewildered.

"I would prefer that you come out with truth!"

*How far can I go?* Dove thought. He simply decided to give it a try: "Well – she had stored the Frost Rubin in a bottling jar, which was hurled into a parallel universe when her space ship backfired ..."

"That's enough!" Foedus screamed. "This is your last chance!"

Dove looked at the Dorgonan, weighing up the situation. No, this man would not dare harm him before the expert whom the senator had personally retained could interrogate him.

"I admit everything. We are six dispersed hobby bowlers who have come to Dorgon to look for the ultimate challenge."

Foedus turned a shade of green. "Take him back to his cell. We will continue with the next prisoner."

\*

Mathew Wallace sat in his cell, blaming himself. Could he have prevented their capture somehow? Had he made a mistake? As the leader of the mission he of course carried full responsibility. Irwan Dove was his subordinate on this endeavor. He had no clue as to how the other expedition members were faring. He knew that Lorif had either deactivated himself or had been deactivated, and he thought he had recognized Dove in one of the neighboring cells. As for Hendrik Swahn, Tim Beranoh and Cerak Atz, however, he didn't know.

That he had to find a way to break out of the prison was clear. That was easier said than done, though. They were far below the surface, and the elevator that led to daylight had to be reached first.

He thought of the events leading up to their

capture.

*Saraah!*

He had taken a liking to Senator Priamus's black-haired slave. Unfortunately it was debatable whether he would ever see her again, but as long as there was a chance, that alone probably was the most important reason for him to escape as quickly as possible.

The question simply was: how?

\*

Dove put his earlier amusement behind him as he was pushed along in handcuffs down the long corridor leading to his cell. Since the first minute in this prison Dove had been thinking about a possible escape, but there was practically no opportunity for it. An escape from the cell was unthinkable, as the protection shield made such a venture impossible. They were guarded constantly outside the cell, so only a miracle could help them.

Or maybe ...

Dove inconspicuously squinted over his shoulder and looked at his guard. Again and again the guard glanced into the cells that they were passing and didn't seem to be particularly watchful. Then the guard directed his attention to Dove once again, and Dove quickly looked away.

Dove had already toyed with the idea of faking a heart attack and then trying to take the guard by surprise. But now another option had appeared.

Once again the guard seemed inattentive, as best as Dove could make out from the corner of his eyes.

*Now or never!* he thought to himself.

Moving as fast as lightning, he rammed the guard in the stomach with his elbow. The guard first seemed somewhat surprised but recovered relatively quickly and pulled out his gun. Dove swung around and kicked the weapon out of his hand. Before the guard could pick it up, Dove kicked it out of his reach.

Dove knew that he could not afford to give his adversary enough time to catch his breath, so with a huge leap he jumped onto the Dorgonan, to whom he was physically superior.

Clinging to each other, they rolled along on the ground. His hands still bound, Dove's freedom of movement was strongly restricted. The Dorgonan almost succeeded in sending Dove into dreamland with a series of ferocious blows. Blood shot from Dove's nose. The Dorgonian guard reacted with a hate-filled grin.

As if out of nowhere, Doves' fists slammed against his opponent's temple. The colossus from the planet Oxtorn now succeeded in sitting on top of the guard. With the chain that was at his handcuffs he started to choke the Dorgonan, who, however, pulled Dove toward him and bit down on his nose. After a few moments, Dove could not endure this any longer, and he rolled away to the side.

I have to get the keys . . . !

Dove became inattentive for a moment, which gave the guard a chance to activate his radio equipment.

"Attention, this is an emergency. Section . . ." the Dorgonan began, but in a flash Dove knocked the radio equipment out of his hand. The heavy Oxtornan, almost three-and-a-half meters tall, grabbed the Dorgonan by the collar and threw him with unimaginable force against the wall. His victim sank to the ground, breathing strenuously.

Crawling and completely exhausted, Dove reached for the guard's gun.

"I'm really sorry, old boy!" Dove whispered sarcastically with a glance at the Dorgonan or rather, what was left of him. To be quite certain that the guard would give him no more trouble Dove adjusted the ray weapon to the lowest setting, which he figured to be stun mode. He aimed the weapon at his target and pressed the trigger.

*Oh my God!*

The designers of this weapon didn't seem to have considered a stun mode necessary. A large gaping hole had replaced the Dorgonan's chest. Dove was truly sorry that this had happened.

After staring at this shocking image for a few seconds, he realized what he had to do now. He had to let the body vanish inconspicuously, no question. Dove took the key and the code card from the Dorgonan's clothing. They were at least still partially usable.

Dove considered hiding the body but then discarded the idea. The Dorgonan was dead. Therefore it made no difference how he got rid of it. So, with another shot, he vaporized the remains.

He tried to get his bearings. No easy task, he realized immediately, because until now the guards had always escorted him. Finally he noticed that he was only five cells away from his own.

Now he wanted to try and free the others, but he only knew the approximate whereabouts of Wallace. And he had to move as quickly as possible. Most likely the Dorgonans would now systematically search all sections of the prison.

Dove trotted toward the cell where he thought Wallace was held. With a glance into the cell he could tell that, despite the distorted image caused by the energy shield, it was not Wallace.

*Or he has changed quite a bit since I last saw him,* Dove thought, having to grin despite the situation, for the cell held a fat elephantine female alien.

Dove tried his luck with the neighboring cell, and this time seemed to have found the right one. He pushed the card into a slit obviously intended for this purpose on the cell's outside wall, and the energy shield was deactivated.

Wallace enthusiastically looked across at him but could not move forward because he was chained to the wall.

"You took your time," Wallace said with a grin, but Dove didn't respond.

"We don't have time for your jokes!" Dove snapped at his commander. In another situation he presumably would have gotten himself a reprimand.

"What do you want to do?" Wallace now wanted to know.

Dove stepped up to him and removed his manacles. Astonished, Wallace noticed that Dove hadn't disposed of his own handcuffs.

Dove tossed the dead guard's cloak to Wallace and briefly explained what had happened.

"It's time to get the hell away from here. The Dorgonans are not content with what we have told them so far and are sending a specialist to take care of the whole matter. Here's my plan:

you pose as a Dorgonan and I as your prisoner. Admittedly your skin color doesn't correspond to the Dorgons completely, but that is the best and possibly only chance we have."

Mathew Wallace nodded slowly. "Have you been able to discover the location of Hendrik Swahn, Tim Beranoh and Cerak Atz?"

"No," Dove replied. "I suspect they are in another section of the prison. And Lorif . . ."

"I saw Lorif yesterday as I was being taken to the interrogation," declared Wallace. "They have led him into an area where, as best I could tell, hundreds of old and broken androids and robots were located."

"Would you be able to find it again?"

"I think so."

"Then let's go. We have very little time, and we cannot rely on our camouflage to work."

The two left the cell and reactivated its energy shield in the hope that their escape would not be noticed too quickly. Wallace suspected, however, that the shield's deactivation had long been registered.

They approached the area where they thought they would find Lorif. A Dorgonan approached them from a side hallway.

"Walk normally," Wallace whispered to his subordinate.

The Dorgonan scrutinized them with a curious gaze and said something to Wallace. Wallace could reply nothing, of course, and simply smiled. The Dorgonan seemed content with that and continued on.

"We just made it," Dove sighed, relieved. "Had we been recognized, then . . .," He left his train of thought unfinished.

The corridor was filled with the buzzing of the energy shields. Finally, they left the prison section and arrived at the area where they hoped to find Lorif. They were somewhat amazed that no one had challenged them during their walk of about one kilometer.

The bulkhead slid aside, and Dove and Wallace entered what appeared to be a storage area. They were presented with both an impressive and a somehow sad sight, countless machine parts, worn out robots and seemingly only partially working androids. These were piled up almost twenty-five meters high over a distance

of about three hundred meters. The whole place resembled a gigantic junk yard. Many robots still buzzed and blinked. An airworthy machine raced around in a circle and kept bumping against the wall at the same spot with almost painful precision. Other still moved, rolling or bouncing around, but most were simply switched off. Right in front of Dove, a robot moved in insane curves and bows. If it had ever possessed a working sense of bearing, it was completely gone.

"A robot graveyard," Dove realized with a groan after overcoming the initial shock. "How can we find Lorif in this chaos?"

Wallace still stood there with a dumbfounded expression, his chin drooping. Finally, he gave himself a resounding smack in the face. "This cannot be true. I must be dreaming this rubbish . . ."

He held his painful cheek. "That hurt," he said surprised. "But . . ."

"Mathew? Is everything okay with you?" Dove asked with a doubting expression.

"I think so," he replied. "But I just don't know how we'll be able to find him in here either. Though I assume he is the only Posbi around."

"Well, let's go on then . . ."

\*

Fortunately it took them only fifteen minutes to find Lorif. After they had wandered around for a while, one of the robots had bitten into Dove's rear end and would not let go. Because of the pain Dove almost jumped from his scrap metal pile and tried to get rid of the robot by rolling around. Although he succeeded, he fell quite painfully precisely onto Lorif. Incidentally, they named the robot "the mean biter."

Hence, Lorif had been found. However, the difficult part had just begun. They had to reactivate him in record time because the events that might happen outside were worrying them more and more. First they had to find the other members of expedition as fast as possible and then flee to the surface. That was easier said than done, considering that the uncertainty factors numbered over a dozen. They now had to

take the first step, because without Lorif, they presumably didn't stand a chance in hell to get out.

Dove picked up some pieces of scrap metal lying around and managed to unscrew Lorif's back plate, accessing its insides.

"First I must determine whether he is only deactivated or whether the positronic systems are damaged," Dove explained. Wallace was crouching beside him on the ground, every now and then nodding with apparent understanding, and more or less relegated to holding the tools. Dove's head half-vanished inside Lorif as he started testing the robot's circuits. Suddenly he swore.

"Damn . . ."

He seemed to have received a small electrical shock, as he was waving his apparently rather painful hand around wildly.

"I did something wrong," he explained in a lecturing tone to the incredulously watching Wallace.

"I would not have known," Wallace replied mockingly. This irony seemed lost on Dove however, who continued: "At least now I know for sure that he has only been deactivated."

Before this mission, in the event of a case like this Lorif had been equipped with a code with which they could activate him again if necessary. The possibility of capture had been included in this dangerous mission's planning.

As the commander of this mission, Wallace had received the code before their departure. By entering it now, Irwan Dove succeeded in making Lorif functional again.

The Posbi first ran his standard boot routine: "All programs were executed successfully after checkup and debugging and are running within standard functional parameters."

Apparently Lorif's data seemed to have suffered no damage. This made Wallace and Dove extremely happy, as they depended on Lorif's sense of orientation to escape this subterranean labyrinth.

Dove pressed for their departure. They had already lingered for quite a while in this scrap metal yard. Foedus would now probably enforce a general mobilization in order to capture them. They left this rather unusual prison area

and stepped back into the hallway once again.

"Now things will get critical. You two must appear as my prisoners," Wallace instructed his comrade-in-arms, as he himself still wore the Dorgonian garment.

The corridor was illuminated by the red lights of the alarm sirens. In addition, a voice blared over the loudspeakers, screaming the same instructions in Dorgonian.

So far the screens along the walls had displayed the symbol of the Dorgonian Empire. Now, images of Wallace and Dove appeared. Obviously, the prison's management had reacted relatively quickly.

Dove pulled his uniform's collar well over his head in order not to be immediately recognized in case of an ever too likely enemy contact.

"Lorif, we must free Swahn, Beranoh and Atz. Where do you think where they are?" Wallace queried.

"After analysis of all the known facts I assume that they are in another section. However, localizing them could become difficult," replied Lorif.

"I agree," Wallace said. "Work out a pattern from which we can proceed."

"Understood."

They turned around—and ran directly into the hands of a Dorgonian guard, who thoroughly scrutinized them for a few seconds while they hurried on, as if nothing had happened. Suddenly, Wallace heard a clear command coming from the Dorgonian. Wallace cursed. Throwing aside his moral principles, he turned around and fired. The Dorgonian was disintegrated and his atoms sent into the nirvana of hyperspace. But it was already too late. More Dorgonian units streamed from the adjoining corridors.

"Looking for the others right now serves no purpose. We will abandon this sortie and first try to get our butts out of here," Wallace decided.

Meanwhile, Dove had recovered the Dorgonian's weapon.

*We are trapped*, Wallace realized. From all sides, Dorgonians entered the scene.

"Let's keep moving forward," Dove yelled



out. Wallace rebelled at the idea that his existence could come to an end within the next few minutes, a fate more than likely given the much superior strength of the enemy. On the other hand they simply couldn't allow themselves to fall into enemy hands again.

Wallace fired blindly as he raced into a side alley.

"Cover my back!" he yelled to Dove.

Multiple shots hit the wall beside him. The material from which the wall was built didn't seem to be especially heatproof. Drops of molten material splashed on Wallace's face, burning him with a hellish pain. He pulled himself together and kept firing.

Several Dorgonans vanished in his rapid fire. A shot went over Wallace's head and almost scalped him. Lorif was between Dove and Wallace, with the two men positioned back to back. Not carrying any firearm, the Posbi currently was of no help. Meanwhile Dove had his hands full just trying to keep the Dorgonans at bay.

Finally Wallace succeeded in shooting enough Dorgonans to clear a path ahead.

The three ran along the walkway. Lorif had figured out the way to the elevator with which they had been brought down. His task now was to lead the small group.

Dove still fired some shots behind them in order to slow down their pursuers.

*This is going better than I had hoped*, Wallace realized.

They had wondered why they had been brought down with a conventional elevator and not with an antigrav lift. They still hadn't found a satisfying answer to this question.

Once again, they turned into an adjoining hallway. Dove disintegrated an approaching Dorgonan without batting an eyelash.

Lorif headed for the elevator.

*We probably would be "up the proverbial creek" without him*, Wallace realized.

After several hundred meters they reached the elevator. However, access to it was blocked. A guard, who had seen them approach, had closed the hallway's bulkhead. However, that represented no major obstacle: Wallace and Dove put their weapons on maximum power and fired. The bulkhead exploded. The Dor-

gonian guard was killed instantaneously by the explosion. Wallace became nearly sick as he saw that the Dorgonan was torn into several pieces and that his guts were spread all over the place.

The door of the elevator stood invitingly open, and Wallace, Dove, and Lorif stepped inside. They closed the door, and Dove tried to activate the elevator.

They didn't get past the attempt. All the buttons were locked. Nothing worked anymore. And the door remained locked, despite all attempts by Dove and Wallace. They could of course have shot the door to pieces, but if they stepped back into the walkway again they would have become cannon fodder for their persecutors.

They were trapped.

"What a naive idiot I am!" Wallace screamed, filled with panic. Dove meanwhile tried to think calmly.

"One thing is clear, we must get out of here quickly," Dove replied tonelessly. "Take cover!"

Wallace didn't have time to ask what the security chief of the *Ivanhoe* had in mind. Dove shot the ceiling of the elevator to bits. A small hole appeared.

"Voilà ...," Dove said with a grin that masked his true feelings.

He and Wallace frantically shoved Lorif through the hole, and Lorif lifted the two right after him.

Now they were standing on the roof of the elevator. To his relief, Wallace determined that another option for escape presented itself a few meters beside the elevator: a metallic spiral staircase. With a huge jump Wallace leapt across, and Lorif and Dove followed suit. Not a second too early, as the Dorgonans stormed the elevator at the same moment.

The three Galacticians hurried up the stairway, a stairway that they knew would become a torture as they began climbing its 5,000 meters, the distance to the surface. After about a minute and hundreds of steps, the number of feet that were trampling on the metal apparently multiplied. The Dorgonans were hard on their heels.

A first shot hit barely twenty meters above them. Dove returned fire.

Wallace severed the elevator's rope with a shot in order to prevent the Dorgonans from following them. It was still a long way upward . . .

Afterwards, neither Dove nor Wallace could say how they had conquered the stairway. They had reached the surface some three hours later, after getting rid of their jailers with some tricks. Approximately 2,000 meters up the staircase they had come across a shelter that was cut into the rock independently of the stairway. From there, they had shot the suspension of the stairway to pieces. The stairway crashed below their position, collapsing into itself. The Dorgonans were squashed or buried.

This maneuver, however, had been rather risky and nearly spelled their doom. The stairway above them was no longer secured. But Lorif managed to improvise a type of cross-beam with some of the stairway's broken parts, and they had been able to continue their long march upward without their pursuers.

Things became even riskier as the Dorgonans prepared to blow the stairway from above. After a small initial explosion, however, nothing more had happened. Wallace suspected that Foedus had sensed the possibility of catching them alive by simply waiting for them at the surface. After the group had discussed their next step, the Posbi decided to use his built-in deflector to try and sneak past the guards posted above. Then it would be child's play for Lorif to overpower them from behind. They had to hope that the guards' detectors were not sophisticated enough to pick up the radiation from the Posbi's deflector. All three agreed on this plan, which probably had the best chance of success, and Lorif was on his way.

After the other two Galacticians had waited the agreed upon time span, they got going. Upon reaching the top, they were happy to see that the guards posted above were lying on the steps, bound. They approached Lorif to congratulate him. For the first time, nothing else could hinder their escape.

\*

"You have let them escape?" Foedus screamed, stunned.

"Yes, your ugliness," the chief of the Dorgonian troops replied in a flat voice.

Foedus threw himself despairingly on his bed, grabbed his pillow and thrashed about, howling incoherently.

After a few minutes he abruptly stopped his whining and sat up straight.

"Search for them . . . , and find their spaceship."

\*

Wallace, Dove and Lorif stepped out of the small structure that constituted the entrance to the elevator leading down to the subterranean prison. The sun was low on the horizon. It was evening. The sky was covered by a reddish light, but the view was crystal clear. No smoke lay over the city. As the three already knew, the city was named Mesoph.

"We should first get ourselves an exact overview. Where are we precisely? And what is the position of the Space-Jet? Wallace wanted to know.

"The Space-Jet is approximately twenty-two kilometers north of here," the Posbi answered. "I would consider it unlikely, however, that we will reach it without being discovered. I would bet my positronic memory that the Dorgonans are feverishly searching for us."

"What do you propose, then?" Wallace asked.

"We should first try to hide somewhere in the city."

"That could be difficult," Dove interjected. "We must assume that the Dorgonian troops will find us in the city as well. And here, outside the city, we are easy prey."

"We should look for shelter with someone who sympathizes with us," pondered Lorif.

"But who could that be?"

Wallace's eyes lit up.

"Saraah!"

"What?" Dove asked blankly.

"We should hide in the slaves' huts. I think that those who are oppressed by the Dorgonian Empire will help us first.

Dove shook his head. "How can you be so sure of that?"

"I have ... already made contact with a slave."

"Saraah?" Dove looked at him inquiringly. "It would be pure coincidence to find her again within the masses of slaves that the Dorgonans possess."

Wallace's heart sank. He wanted so much to see her again. He coveted her with all his heart. He had been allowed to see her only twice, briefly, but her entire demeanor, her whole appearance fascinated him. That she was a slave of the senator only stoked his hate against the Dorgonian Empire even more.

Presumably, finding her again would not prove too difficult. They had possessed a map before their arrest, and Lorif had stored it in his data memory banks.

And yet, it was not yet quite clear what should follow. All the equipment they had carried had been removed from them. Thus, Dove opposed Wallace's idea.

"Mathew ... forget it. If we are stupid enough to go right back into the lion's den, then we might as well head straight back to jail. I'm in favor of first trying to establish contact with the *Ivanhoe*."

Wallace sighed. "And how do you propose we do that? Our only equipment is the guns that we removed from the Dorgonans."

"You forget the communication system integrated in Lorif."

Lorif interrupted him with a metallic voice. "My systems only have a restricted reach."

"But it should be enough to reach the *Ivanhoe*."

"Theoretically."

"But isn't there a risk that the Dorgonans will detect our signal?" Dove wanted to know.

"In principle," declared Wallace. "But we must chance it. Furthermore I don't believe that a short signal will attract attention, what with the thousands and thousands of messages that are constantly transmitted through the ether."

With a nod of his head, Wallace signaled for the Posbi to proceed.

Lorif started to chirp and rattle. His head split in two halves. A hyper-radio antenna ap-

peared. His systems blinked everywhere, and the Posbi gave the impression that he was listening to himself.

After approximately a minute he retracted the antenna. Wallace almost thought he heard a little disappointment in Lorif's voice as his inquiring gaze was answered.

"No response. The *Ivanhoe* has left the system, presumably in order not to be discovered. And that could prove fatal for us."

Although Lorif's remark undoubtedly described the facts, strictly speaking it still was an understatement ...

\*

The senator rose from his bed where just now he had been contemplating the emperor's supposedly new ambitions of expanding the empire more aggressively. The hypercom's beeping had forced him to rise from this comfortable lying position and to attend to Mesoph's current problems.

One of these problems had a face and name: Foedus. Foedus had reported barely half an hour ago that the prisoners had escaped. Priamus was extremely displeased over this and had communicated to Foedus that he would think about an appropriate disciplinary action and would convey his decision to him in the next few days. In Priamus' own mind, the only possible penalty for such gross inefficiency was already clear: execution!

Pursuing the foreigners was more urgent however, because Priamus sensed that ultimately, knowing the goals of the foreigners could be crucial for Mesoph or even the empire.

The hypercom buzzed again. Finally, Priamus deigned to press the button and start the holographic conversation with his caller.

The image of Gaius Octus, the governor of the province Mesoph-North, appeared on the small holographic platform.

"Please excuse the disturbance, honorable senator ...," Gaius Octus began submissively. An impatient sweep of Priamus's hand cut him short. *Recite your report*, was the unspoken, unequivocal order.

“Districts 23-H to 39-F are being feverishly searched. All storekeepers, hotel operators, and so on were informed on an as-needed basis.”

“Have the troops found any trace?” Priamus inquired with a demanding, menacingly restrained voice.

“I’m sorry, sir. We have not yet found them. I recommend that the search be concentrated on the surroundings of the entrance to the prison.”

Priamus laughed disdainfully. “If the strangers have made it to their vehicle which, by the way, we still haven’t located, they could be anywhere.”

“I doubt that they were that successful within such a short time span,” Gaius Octus responded, quite convinced.

“By no means can we underestimate them,” Priamus disagreed. “Order the troops to proceed more thoroughly and more aggressively from now on.”

“Yes sir,” Gaius Octus confirmed before terminating the connection.

The ringing of the doorbell is almost intolerable. The head of the household opens the door, and armed Dorgonian soldiers force their way in. He tries to slow down the soldiers or at least find out what’s going on. The soldiers press him to the ground and hold him at gunpoint. Meanwhile, the mother has dropped the pot of soup that she was about to serve. A soldier rushes to her and pushes her against the wall. The woman screams in panic, while a completely scared child is held in place by another soldier. The remaining soldiers search the house in a rush. One of them finally reports to the Dorgonian unit commander.

“Nothing to be found.” The Dorgonian apologizes. His only excuse: “We are just looking for someone . . .”

Similar events take place all over Mesoph.

## 2.

*In the home of a ordinary  
family, in a habitual quarter*

The ringing of the doorbell is almost intolerable. The head of the household opens the door, and armed Dorgonian soldiers force their

way in. He tries to slow down the soldiers or at least find out what’s going on. The soldiers press him to the ground and hold him at gunpoint. Meanwhile, the mother has dropped the pot of soup that she was about to serve. A soldier rushes to her and pushes her against the wall. The woman screams in panic, while a completely scared child is held in place by another soldier. The remaining soldiers search the house in a rush. One of them finally reports to the Dorgonian unit commander.

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Similar events take place all over Mesoph.

\*

“Damn!” Dove hit the nail on the head. Their situation was not exactly pleasant. Granted that they had now escaped Dorgonian captivity, but they had not succeeded in establishing contact with the *Ivanhoe*. That meant that no direct escape route was open to them even if they succeeded in reaching their Space-Jet. Moreover, three of their people were still in a subterranean Dorgonian prison, and they had to be rescued if at all possible.

“We should try to get our equipment from the Space-Jet,” Lorif proposed. “Then we would at least be more mobile.”

Nothing spoke against this reasoning. Besides, this probably was their only remaining viable option. As long as the *Ivanhoe* was out of reach they had to try at all cost to survive on the planet. To liberate their partners was, for now, completely out of reach anyway.

“Then let’s get going . . .,” Wallace decided.

They began their march, a march that would last for several hours according to their predictions. Assuming they would finish it . . .

The Dorgonian chewed listlessly on a wurk. Wurks are slippery, slimy animals, which the Dorgonians above all liked to chew alive like chewing gum. The wurks were good to bite, and their length of just about ten centimeters quite met the “purpose” assigned to them by the Dorgonians.

The Dorgonans had already searched a sizeable area in the hours since the escape but had yet to find a trace of the prisoners.

Suddenly a holodisplay lit up, startling him, and he spat out the wurk. "I believe I have something," he informed his colleague, who sat diagonally behind him. He pointed at his console.

"An unauthorized hyper-radio signal, approximately 1,300 meters from the entry of the prison elevator. Try to identify the recipient."

"Maybe not," the other Dorgonan objected. "If that's really whom we're looking for, we shouldn't reveal to them that we're on their tracks. In order to identify the sender, I must access its local database, which most likely would be locked or incompatible. In any event, the strangers would then be warned."

"I'll inform headquarters," the first one said. "We mustn't lose these strangers."

The other Dorgonan was busy fiddling at his computer. "OK, some infantry troops have been dispatched. However, I can't detect any life signs."

"That means nothing. The strangers might have technology that makes their life signs invisible to us."

"I should at least be able to detect energy emissions. Just a moment."

The Dorgonans started analyzing the various energy emissions that the scan had picked up, knowing full well that they now probably had the strangers in their grasp.

### 3.

#### *Federal Security Services, Mesoph-Central*

The Dorgonan chewed listlessly on a wurk. Wurks are slippery, slimy animals, which the Dorgonans above all liked to chew alive like chewing gum. The wurks were good to bite, and their length of just about ten centimeters quite met the "purpose" assigned to them by the Dorgonans.

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\*

Dusk slowly began to fall. The two men and the Posbi were walking through the undergrowth of a forest in the pale twilight. The Space-Jet had been hidden in a remote area. Without Lorif's photographic memory and his eyes, serving now as lamps, they would presumably not have found it again.

The path was burdensome, as they were hindered by undergrowth and branches, and the ground gave way under their feet. Furthermore their bodies were worn out from the earlier forced march, which had covered five kilometers. Dove had to support Wallace several times, as he was close to collapsing.

Lorif had to wait for the two again and again; the twenty-two kilometers would have repre-

sented no big endurance test at all under normal circumstances, but now each step turned into a seemingly insurmountable hurdle. Lorif finally was allowed to carry Wallace on his back as they remained in constant danger and had to reach the Space-Jet as quickly as possible. At last, by late evening, the green shining moon having already stood in the heavens for many hours, they last reached the clearing in the forest where they had landed and camouflaged the Space-Jet.

"Finally . . .," Dove said relieved.

Lorif put Wallace down, who had recovered a bit in the meantime. Wallace walked slowly and still somewhat shakily to the Space-Jet and removed the foliage and the undergrowth from the entry hatch. He also removed some still partially moist clay, and a lever appeared. Wallace turned it to the side and pulled.

The hatch opened. Wallace nodded to Lorif and Dove and they entered the Space-Jet.

The air smelled somehow strange, which was no surprise because the Space-Jet's systems had been deactivated for some days.

Wallace pointed in the direction of the necessary equipment. Long ago they had decided that it was of no value to them to use the Space-Jet for transportation on the planet. Therefore they wanted to take only the bare minimum and then disappear again as quickly as possible. Once they had attempted to free the remaining members of the expedition, they wanted to leave Mesoph again.

However, things were to turn out quite differently than they had imagined.

"Mathew . . ." Lorif's tone indicated an unpleasant surprise.

"What?" Wallace asked as he turned around with some reluctance. He had just emptied the lockers on board of the *Jay Jay* and was now sorting the pile.

"Mathew . . .," Lorif repeated. "I'm picking up seventeen life signs, all no further than eighty meters away. I believe they have found us."

Wallace did not reply. He had feared this latest development, but it was a shock nonetheless.

Dove stepped up to him. "If that is true . . . and it most likely is, knowing our Lorif . . . then

we must take off immediately."

Wallace shook his head. His gaze became glassy. He seemed no longer to grasp the situation completely. Nevertheless he calmly replied: "It's not possible, you know that just as I do. We would immediately be located and would be cannon fodder for the defense forts of the Dorgonans."

Dove answered in a disdainful tone. "You are right, I know that just as well as you. But you have misunderstood me. We must disappear as quickly as possible – without the Space-Jet."

Wallace was obviously nervous. "We can't simply let the Space-Jet fall into the hands of the Dorgonans."

"Of course not. The rules for such a situation are unambiguous."

"You don't mean that . . ."

"I'm not trying to be subtle. We must destroy the Space-Jet, whether you like it or not."

Suddenly Wallace came out off his apathy and stared Dove straight in the eye.

"Over my dead body, Irwan. As long as I am commander of this mission, this Space-Jet will not be destroyed. We cannot take away our only escape possibility!"

Dove shook his head blankly. "Mathew, calm down. Listen, we have to blow her up. It's our only chance."

"The life signs are closing in," Lorif reported.

Wallace wiped the sweat from his forehead. It cost him all his willpower to say: "Well, okay. Let's get it over with."

He leaned against the console and typed in some instructions. "Self-destruction, authorization Wallace Omega Four Seven Beta zero. One minute silent countdown."

A buzzing sound was heard. "One minute silent countdown. No further warnings will be given."

Dove had put on the deflector shield that they had found in the *Jay Jay II*. Wallace did the same.

"Activate deflector shields."

The three crawled outdoors. They were now invisible to the environment, but they nevertheless tried to stay as close to the ground as pos-

sible in order not to be hit in case of a chance shot by the Dorgonans.

Wallace could now make out the Dorgonans. Despite the dark, some silhouettes were visible.

The Galacticians crawled around the Space-Jet and disappeared into the forest in the opposite direction from which they had come.

Meanwhile, the Dorgonans approached the Space-Jet.

“Pecunius speaking. We will now storm this spaceship. If possible don’t injure the strangers. But, in case of doubt, you have the authority to eliminate them,” the leader of the troop instructed his men.

The soldiers confirmed the order in accordance with standard protocol. Pecunius gave the signal. The storming of the Space-Jet began based on a pattern rehearsed many times. The members of this elite troop had exercised it so often, they could do it in their sleep. Two of the soldiers positioned themselves beside the bulkhead of the Space-Jet, weapons ready. Three more lay flat on the ground and scoped the entrance of the Space-Jet in their visors. The next one quickly threw a bomb with fast vanishing numbing gas into the still open entrance. That was the sign for the others to storm the Space-Jet. Pecunius, who led the operation from outside, followed his men’s conversation over his helmet’s radio.

“Where are they? I don’t see anyone.”

“Correct, there doesn’t seem to be anyone around. But we have seen them going in, and nobody has come out since.”

“All computers are apparently switched off. Only on this console here something is still blinking. I wonder what it means . . .”

Pecunius realized it at once. He cursed himself in the next second. “Get out of there! Immediately! All of you! Out of there!”

Pecunius threw himself flat on the ground, but it was too late, too late for him and too late for the remaining sixteen members of the elite troop. The Space-Jet exploded in a glaring light. Death came swiftly to the Dorgonans: They either burned up in the flaming hot fireball or were shredded to pieces from the shock wave.

Approximately twenty minutes later, the whole thing was over. Only a crater roughly

thirty meters in diameters remained.

\*

They had marched through the night and reached the outskirts of the capital Hesuk early in the morning. They had more or less carried Wallace. The body demanded its tribute. He simply couldn’t go on without the help.

After a long discussion about their next step, Lorif agreed with Wallace: nobody would think of looking for them in the huts. Therefore it was probably best to walk into the lion’s mouth. Dove was adamantly against it; to him this was suicidal: “We are running eyes wide open right to our death!”

However, after Lorif had stated his arguments in favor of Wallace’s idea, Dove agreed, somewhat reluctantly.

Dove was not in a good mood, understandably so. He felt rather vulnerable with the Space-Jet gone. For him it had represented the backup solution of the mission, so to speak, at least in a general sense. At worse, they would have been able to use the technical facilities of the *Jay Jay* in an emergency.

In the meantime they had reached the center of the city. The deflector shields provided an immense relief, for without them they would have not been able to move about so casually. However, they still had to be careful not to collide with anyone in the dense crowd.

The buildings themselves appeared somewhat strange. For Wallace they were a mixture of antique elements and modern technology. Most constructions were supported by temples on the ground floor but apparently were equipped with the most modern technical facilities as well.

Lorif had set Wallace down once again, who had recovered a bit.

“Lorif, how far is it still to the palace of the senator?” Mathew asked the Posbi.

“Precisely 2,136 meters to the gate of the property, assuming that we always remain on the ideal line.”

“That’s okay . . .”

\*

Foedus sat limply in his chair. He had failed, that was obvious to him. He was more than unhappy.

A buzzer sounded. A glance at the chronometer on the table confirmed Foedus’ assumption: the seventh hour was approaching.

Foedus closed his eyes. He didn’t know this Galanius, but Priamus had sent him in view of the recent events. Foedus had a sick feeling.

The chronometer changed its display. The seventh hour had begun.

A hissing sound let Foedus know that the door bulkhead had slid aside. He spun around in his chair.

A fanfare was played pompously by two Dorgonian guards. After a few seconds a man stepped into the doorway. He was two meters tall and had what was for a Dorgonan an unnaturally pale face and rough, protruding cheekbones. He wore a dark cloak embellished with golden stripes.

Motionless, the man stood in the door. His entire demeanor appeared depressing and dangerous to Foedus. Through the glaring light from outside he looked like the avenging angel in person.

Finally he entered the room. With a gesture of his hand he gave two other Dorgonans, obviously his assistants, a signal to enter. The two carried heavy metallic suitcases.

The man stood legs apart in front of Foedus. *He is a monster*, Foedus thought.

“I am Galanius,” the figure began.

*Of course, who else*, Foedus thought. At the last moment he managed not to blurt out this foolish remark and choked up a “nice to met you.”

“I was sent here by Priamus in order to interrogate the strangers, as you obviously are incapable of doing so.”

Foedus didn’t reply.

“Unfortunately, the situation has changed somewhat. Three of the prisoner were able to escape . . .”

“A chain of unfortunate circumstances,” Foedus tried to assure him, but Galanius interrupted him.

“It is not my task to examine this regrettable incident or even to pass a judgment on it. The senator will do this personally,” he replied coldly.

Foedus felt his throat constrict unpleasantly. This man seemed to be completely emotionless.

“Furthermore, I wish to begin the interrogation as soon as possible. You will quickly see that I have my own methods,” Galanius continued.

“I am convinced of that,” Foedus sighed and pressed a button to give order to bring the prisoners.

\*

Finally they had arrived at the senator’s palace. The sight of the pompous installation overwhelmed Wallace once more. Unlike last time, the entrance of the property was not heavily guarded. Only four guards were posted at the two big columns that marked the entrance.

The three carefully sneaked past the guards. Wallace hoped that all would go well. They had not been detected last time, but now Mesoph was on high alert. It would come as no surprise that the senator’s estate was under increased protection. Wallace assumed that the reason they had not been discovered last time was because their anti-detection device was activated. He had not been really sure, though, and now his doubts had increased.

They ran along the lengthy path that led to the main building. Left and right were magnificent gardens. The Dorgonans certainly had an unequivocal sense of aesthetics.

The three passed the main buildings and continued to the remote facility that contained the shacks of the slaves. They waited for the right moment, and when a slave deactivated the energy field that blocked the access, they scurried through.

The slaves were all on paltry makeshift beds and looked quite unhappy. Dove noticed that there were hardly any conversations going on, although most slaves seemed to be awake.



"Seems to me most of them have completely given up. They seem to have come to terms with their fate," he said through his radio.

"That could well be," Wallace agreed with him.

After searching for a while, they found Saraah. She had been in one of the wash-rooms and was obviously alone. As she had just stepped out of the shower, she was stark naked.

A shiver ran down Wallace's back. Again he noticed what an incredibly attractive woman she was.

"I ..., err ..., shouldn't we wait until she comes out?" Wallace asked.

"Why?" Lorif asked. "We should go in and speak to her."

"Uhm, Lorif ...," Dove smiled. "I don't think she would appreciate that ..."

"What? Ah, I understand ... Why do you humans have such problems with your nudity? I am not wearing anything as well, and ..."

"That is a little different ...," Wallace grinned.

"Whatever. If things go wrong, we may not get a chance to talk to her later.

Wallace had a stupid grin. "You think I should go in there now and ..."

"Yes."

"Okay ..."

Wallace straightened up and entered the wash hall. Saraah had gotten partially dressed in the meantime.

*She is beautiful but somehow she also looks fragile,* Wallace thought.

He stepped close to her and removed his helmet so that she could understand him.

"Psst ... don't be scared!"

Saraah twitched briefly but knew who stood behind her. As she turned, Mathew Wallace appeared slowly before her.

"Mathew!"

She walked to him and embraced him heart-felt. "Mathew ... you are here again! But ... you are in danger!"

"You must obtain clothing for me and my friends, the same as what you slaves wear. We must disappear for a while," Wallace whispered rapidly.

She nodded. "Make yourself invisible again and wait here ... I'll get something for you."

A thought flashed through Mathew's brain.

"Just a moment ..., we only need two outfits ..."

For a moment he had completely forgotten about Lorif's Posbi nature.

Saraah went out into the hall where her belongings were.

Wallace waved at Dove and Lorif to approach.

"I think everything is okay."

"Do you believe we can trust her fully and completely?" Dove asked in a doubtful tone.

Wallace scrutinized him with a fiercely angry gaze that said more than a thousand words.

"Okay, I'm sorry," Dove apologized. "I just want to be completely sure. I'm still not quite comfortable with the thought that our worst opponent on this planet is only a few hundred meters away."

Wallace nodded understandingly.

Saraah came back. She was carrying two sets of garments under her arms. Dove and Wallace deactivated their deflector shields.

"Here are some clothes," she said.

The two men accepted the clothing gratefully and within moments looked like perfect slaves.

Saraah looked at the pair with a smile. "With your face no one will be suspicious," she said to Dove. Wallace burst out into resounding laughter, which was abruptly cut short as Saraah emphatically ran her hand through his hair, destroying the greased-up curl he had so painstakingly maintained. "So, now you look more credible," the broadly smiling Saraah told Mathew while Dove held his stomach from laughing so hard.

"What of your other friend?" she asked the two.

"He is a robot," Wallace replied.

An indignant clearing of the throat seemed to come out of nowhere and made him correct his statement.

"Okay, he is a positronic-biological device. He won't reveal himself for security reasons. We, on the other hand, cannot be camouflaged all the time. We must eat once in a while."

Saraah led them into a hall that apparently was shared by many slaves. It seemed to be one of the better rooms in this quite shabby building.

*She does not fit in here at all ... , she deserves something better,* Wallace thought.

\*

Meanwhile, deep under Mesoph's surface, preparations for another interrogation were taking place ...

Hendrik Swahn sat in his cell, his whole body shaking. He had been vaguely aware that the escape of his friends had apparently succeeded. Now he wondered why they had left him behind, along with Beranoh and Atz. He felt that he would not be as lucky as Wallace.

*Mathew, why have you left us?*

Panic began to grip him. He knew that a different fate awaited him and his comrades ...

The day neared its end.

\*

Mathew Wallace and Saraah were alone in a room. Wallace had asked Dove to wait outside. He still wanted to discuss something with Saraah.

"Saraah ..."

"Yes?"

"Saraah ... I love you."

The eyes of the pretty slave welled with tears. Then she started to sob and threw her arms around his neck.

"I love you too, Mathew!"

"And Saraah, I would like you to come with me."

She shook her head sadly.

"It's not possible."

"Why not?" Mathew was almost annoyed.

"I am so sorry ... I can't. As much as I want to I can't!"

"But why?"

"They have ... inserted an implant in me after I was captured. Should I stray too far from the station a horrible mechanism will kick in. My body would implode."

Wallace swallowed. He was really shocked. All his dreams, burst like a bubble.

"That ..."

"I know, Mathew. But I have never given up hope."

"Can one remove the implant?"

"No, it was implanted directly into the heart. There is no way to get near to it."

Tears ran down Wallace's face. That simply could not be true.

He felt Saraah's breath. She looked into his eyes. Then her lips gently parted and Wallace stepped closer. He took her head into his hands and leaned to kiss her.

At this moment Dove walked in. "I'm truly sorry to disturb you, but ... Mathew, we must disappear as quickly as possible. Apparently there is a traitor among the slaves."

Unwillingly Mathew straightened up. He knew that this meant he must bid farewell to Saraah, possibly forever. He embraced her once again.

"Saraah ... before I go I have another important question. Do you know the coordinates of the main Dorgonian worlds?"

"Yes, of course. Every child knows them. Why do you want to know?"

"I really am sorry ... I have no time for explanations. Please give me the coordinates."

She rattled off some data, which Lorif immediately registered.

The three turned away and left the room. As Wallace was dragged along by his friends he turned around again and again to glance at Saraah.

And then all hell broke loose around them.

\*

Foedus activated the holoprojector. Galanius stood besides him, leaning against his chair. As Priamus had taken some time with his decision regarding the so-called "disciplinary measures," Foedus hoped that the penalty would be quite mild.

The senator appeared on the small projector platform and immediately began to speak. "Foedus, I have thought about your failure and I believe I have found an appropriate solution."

The former prison director took a deep breath.

"You will be executed at exactly nine thirty by the hand of Galanius. The type of execution is at the executioner's discretion."

Foedus fell down backwards and remained lying on the floor, unconscious.

Galanius stepped before the projector.

"I will do as you order, senator."

Priamus ended the communication with a nod.

\*

Despite activated deflector shields the three were at risk during their escape. The Dorgonian hunters shot blindly, and it was clear that the escapees were in danger of being hit.

They made it through the gate.

The ground inside the palace was partially wet. Because of that, they left footprints that the guards could easily follow.

Dove and Lorif rushed away in front. Wallace followed, a few meters behind.

They approached the outskirts of the city. Wallace wondered how the guards could still follow them. Apparently they had succeeded in locating them.

Inches from Wallace's side, a shot hit a stonewall. Wallace was thrown to the ground by the explosion. He needed almost ten seconds to shake it off and get up again.

He determined with some horror that his deflector shield had been damaged by the explosion. He would run out of energy within the next three hours.

But even worse, his radio equipment had been destroyed. And after losing sight of Lorif and Dove long ago, he had lost every possibility of communication.

He had to struggle along alone now. He aimed for a hilly area close to the city while dark clouds in the heavens pointed to an upcoming storm . . .

The cold steely shackles closed around Foedus' wrists. He cried out in panic, he wanted to wriggle and revolt, but he simply could not do it.

His feet were chained to the wall. He more or less hung in the air. His neck now rested on a metal block to which he had been chained.

Galanius opened one of his four suitcases, took out a red pen and carefully marked the intended spot on the delinquent's neck. After each step he ticked off an item on the checklist that was attached to the wall.

One of the assistants pushed a bucket before the metal block. It was a few seconds before Foedus realized the bucket's purpose.

He began to screech and to yell. Galanius nodded to one of his assistants, who gagged Foedus.

Foedus screamed no longer, because it was useless. The security guard specialist opened another suitcase. Inside was a carefully sharpened axe. He retrieved it, lifted it, and in one sharp blow let it come down on Foedus' neck.

Blood shot from the stump. As intended, the head fell neatly into the bucket.

Galanius ticked off the last item on his checklist.

"Now let's get something to eat. Hard work makes an honest man hungry!" the executioner declared, as though nothing has happened.

Epilogue.

*End of the flashback*

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\*

Jonathan Fraces steered the Space-Jet safely and aptly over the surface of Mesoph. The *Ivanhoe* had left the system in order not to be discovered, and now Jeamour had sent him down to bring back the six crewmembers of the *Ivanhoe* safely on board again.

It was a disaster: He had only found Lorif and Dove. All three of them were still searching for Wallace.

"There he is," Dove called out. His console's instruments had located Wallace.

Wallace was picked up. He was completely exhausted, weakened from the hour-long chase. He urgently needed some rest.

But for the moment they could not afford to waste time. The three other expeditionary members were still in captivity ...

\*

"No, I won't tell you anything!!" Tim Beranoh remained steadfast. He showed true heroism in these seconds, but it was debatable how long he could still carry on. Galanus had attached the two thumbscrews to him and was now turning them tighter and tighter. Beranoh knew that he would rather endure the pain than betray the expedition.

His remark had made no impression on Galanus.

"Believe me, in the end you will."

He took an obviously very sharp knife and lay its point on Beranoh's stomach.

"If I was in your position I would think it over very carefully. Release your information!"

"No! Never!"

Galanus moved the knife and started to slit open Beranoh's stomach, who began to scream loudly from the unimaginable pain. Dark red blood spurted, and Beranoh's guts slipped out a bit. Galanus proceeded with Atz and Wallace's chief officer Hendrik Swahn in the same manner. The room was filled with the men's crazed screams and screeches. "I will give you one last chance. Either you speak now or it will be a real hell-ride for you."

Galanus' voice now no longer sounded quite as emotionless as at the beginning of the "interrogation," which now it had become torture.

"You have chosen your fate," he then said. Galanus unpacked something and attached it to their bodies: electrodes! He gradually increased the power level until Atz finally gave up and spoke.

All three expedition members died while still on the tables on which they were strapped. Any help for them would come too late.

Galanus looked disdainfully at the blood-covered cadavers. He wiped the sweat from his head and looked at his chronometer.

"I do really love my work, but sometimes I need a break just like everyone else," he said and gave the memo cube with Atz's confession to the officer who was to take it to Priamus.

\*

Fraces, Dove, and the others found out what had happened. Actually, Lorif was supposed to have been sent down in order to free the prisoners in a type of suicide mission. But before proceeding, he had entered the structure that housed the elevator that led downward and jacked into one of the prison's information terminals. After bypassing some barriers, the Posbi found out that "the three strangers" were dead.

Depressed and angry, the Galacticians headed for the Space-Jet, the *Highlander*, and

flew back to the *Ivanhoe*.

\*

Priamus restlessly paced back and forth in his room. He was expecting Galanius's report any minute now. Since the disaster in which seventeen Dorgonans had died, Priamus took

the situation even more seriously. He put all his trust in Galanius and was therefore convinced that he would be successful in prying the truth from the remaining three prisoners.

Finally a buzzer sounded and Galanius began to report.

"My senator, there is news that in its significance could be of crucial importance for the entire empire ..."

## T H E E N D

*Using brutal methods, Priamus has gained important information about the Galacticians. However Aurec and Adams now plan to approach the main world.*

DORGON

*is the title of episode 21. It is written by Nils Hirseland and will provide deep insights about the empire!*

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## D O R G O N COMMENTARY

### Exposed

Now the game is over. The Galacticians have been exposed. The only success of the Mesoph mission was finding the coordinates of the Dorgon central world, but the Dorgonans now know about the Galacticians.

The next move is forced upon the Galacticians. But what to do? Dorgonian technology and the numerical inferiority of the Galacticians make a frontal assault practically impossible, and sabotage behind Dorgonian lines seems more hopeless than ever before. Well, good advice is never cheap ... either allies need to be found now, or Dorgonian technology needs to be appropriated, or at least a way to handle it needs to be investigated.

For Mathew Wallace, a failure on all fronts – the beloved Saarah cannot leave Mesoph. It would mean her death.

What then has this expedition accomplished?

Let's recount from the beginning: First, information has been acquired about Dorgonian culture and the Dorgonian empire, not to mention the coordinates of the central world. Furthermore, during its escape the landing team killed a seemingly ridiculously low number of Dorgonans. On the other hand, however, the expedition was discovered and captured, three of them are now dead and—most importantly—Dorgon has been put on alert.

Overall, has this mission been worthwhile for the Galacticians?

Setting this question aside for now, the central problem remains: how can Dorgon be "cracked?" ...

**Martin Schuster**