

Nils Hirseland



Episode 21

D O R G O N

FAN CYCLE OF THE PERRY RHODAN ONLINE CLUB



Dorgon

The Galacticians arrive at the center of power—Emperor Thesasian receives the strangers

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by Nils Hirseland

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FAN SERIES OF THE PERRY RHODAN ONLINE CLUB

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

Nobody knew exactly who or what hides behind Dorgon. The wreck of a Dorgonian ship revealed 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 failed. Aurec and Homer G. Adams were forced to act. The Galacticians reached the world of Cermos where they acquired some valuable information.

Meanwhile, the Ivanhoe's personnel explored the important world of Mesoph. However, along with Mathew Wallace a group of Galacticians was captured by the Dorgonians and had to endure interrogation and torture. Although Wallace and some others managed to escape in the end, the rest of the group betrayed the mission under the deadly torture.

But now Aurec and the Galacticians will finally meet the Dorgonian emperor and learn some of the secrets of the galaxy called Dorgon...

Main characters

Emperor Thesasian – Ruler of a great empire

Aurec – The Saggitonian learns Dorgon's secrets

Cauthon Despair – Once more he tips the scales

Nersonos, Carigul und Klausius – The Emperor's relatives

Uleman, Ulesia und Arimad – Members of an influential Dorgon family

1.

Dorgon

Billions of years ago, the gods created the galaxy. They let billions of years pass before the first worms began to exist on the uncounted planets.

Many years later, the gods turned to the planet Dorgon and gave it life. Intelligent life!

First, the animal kingdom ruled this beautiful world, but then Man climbed the ladder and – chosen by the mighty gods – began to evolve.

Two hundred thousand years ago, the first tribes appeared. They were nomads and wandered from region to region.

For many thousands of years, the tribes fought with each other, knowing nothing of the cosmic destiny that only their descendants would discover.

So it happened 80,000 years later that the tribes established permanent settlements, which then grew into the first nations.

But time and the eternal ice erased their traces. The old high cultures now exist only in warriors' legends and drinking stories.

We do know that a few thousand years later, there was a gigantic migration of tribes across the world. They mixed, blended their cultures, and formed the first enduring peoples and nations.

Over the course of centuries, a single race came to the forefront – the Aegonians. A strong and proud people, which strove to become the greatest power on the World of the Gods.

Magnificent cities, heroic battles, and mighty heroes characterized this people's era. But they were not the chosen ones – not yet...

The historians of yesterday ascribe a golden age 5,000 years long to the Aegonians before they were replaced by the Sulvites.

Long lasting and bloody wars swept across the land. Women were raped, buildings and entire cities burned, and then the glorious realm of the Aegonians fell into dust.

Enslaved by the Sulvites, the Aegonians lost more and more of their importance. Time degraded them to a third-class race.

The age of the wild Sulvites began. The bar-

barians from the steppes of the cold north plundered and burned all known civilizations of this world.

Then came a miracle and a sign! The prophet, the emissary of the gods, Dorgon, appeared and stood alone and unarmed before the armies of the sinister Sulvites, led by the devil Sarnus.

The Redeemer exhorted the Sulvites and demanded that they drop their weapons. And Dorgon declared that all races should be brothers and bury their conflicts. They should live together in peace and prepare for the events of the future, for there was a great danger approaching.

Idolized by the Aegonians and other enslaved peoples, mocked by the Sulvites, Dorgon was assassinated. The Emissary of the Gods was burned alive, his limbs strewn to the four corners of the world.

The Sulvites were at the height of their power. They ruled bloodily over the entire world. Then Dorgon's prophecy came back to haunt them.

The beasts landed! Spiders, gigantic and intelligent – and just as brutal – came from the stars. Were they also sent by the gods? Were they the Sulvites' punishment? Were they the prophecy of which the revered Dorgon spoke?

But why did they punish everyone? They spared neither the Aegonians, Traadians, Karpoians, nor even the pious Otzonians. All were abducted for food by the invaders.

That was many years ago, but nothing has changed to this day. We are raised like cattle and herded to the slaughterhouse.

Known under the demonic name Charkos, the spiders are far superior to us. They possess technology that must come from the gods.

The gods...

Belief in them fades because more and more the Charkos show us that our world is just one of many. Dorgon also spoke of this, that we are the chosen ones, but how can we be?

The priests are gone. The Charkos tell us of races that fly through the universe, and that our gods are but superstitions. They break us in every conceivable way.

I will not have to live to witness the end of our civilization. To be born, to live, and to die in slavery, that has been my own fate.

I pray to Dorgon and his gods that my descendants will live in a better and more glorious era.

But they should be reminded of these dark times. If my writings, the chronicle of our people's suffering, should reach the world to come, then my life will have had a purpose.

May Dorgon's prophecy someday be fulfilled...

From the Book of Asumas, about 100.000 years ago

2.

The Galactic Fleet

The nine ships had traversed innumerable light-years in the last few weeks. Two months before, they had set out to uncover the mystery of Dorgon, which apparently intended to occupy the Milky Way.

Perry Rhodan had made first contact with the Dorgonans. An emissary named Sereanus had supported the terrorist organization *Mordred* in its efforts to destroy Camelot.

Mordred failed, however, and Sereanus killed himself before the Galacticians could find out more about his mysterious race.

His only statement was a threat: "Fear the vengeance of Dorgon."

Rhodan and his companions took this pronouncement seriously. Since the leader of the immortals was occupied with the battle against Shabazza and his master, Torr Samaho, Aurec and Homer G. Adams volunteered to organize an expedition and go to Dorgon.

In the wreckage of Sereanus's ship the coordinates of a galaxy were found that corresponded to M100, 56 million light-years away.

Ten ships left for the still unknown galaxy: the *Gold Start* (under the command of Homer G. Adams), the *Sagriton* (Aurec), the *Neles* (Cauthon Despair), the *Takvorian* (Joak Cascall), her sister ship *Ivanhoe* (Xavier Jeamour), along with the *Siom Som*, the *Drusilia*, the *Akran*, and the *Rudo*.

After a voyage of several weeks, they reached the outlying edges and encountered Dorgon's enslaved races, who were being ruthlessly exploited and suffered terribly in their slavery.

Not long after, they had an initial encounter with the Dorgonans. The Dorgonans were humanoid, resembling southern Europeans, and came across as not only arrogant and brutal, but also powerful and superior. They had style and dignity.

Posing as intergalactic traders, the Galacticians met with the Dorgonans, but the first discussions were fruitless.

Only when a scouting party landed on the planet Mesoph could new information about Dorgon be learned. It became all the more evident that it was a gigantic empire that stretched over the entire galaxy.

All races except for the Dorgonans were enslaved and easily subjugated. No one dared to resist.

There were also strikingly few non-humanoids in M 100. Only pure-blooded Dorgonans were allowed into the army. The non-Dorgonans were used mostly for lower sorts of labor. Even colonists like the Jerrers were repressed and had to serve the high and mighty Dorgonans.

So far, not much was known about their form of government. Apparently, an Emperor ruled at the top. Beneath him was a Senate. The various Senators controlled their districts, which often sprawled over a thousand star systems.

One of them was Priamus, Senator of the planet Mesoph. This Dorgonan was one of the most respected and powerful citizens of the empire. He was just as brutal and unjust.

Some Galacticians lost their lives on Mesoph before the *Ivanhoe* returned from its reconnaissance mission.

The information she brought back was valuable, however. The scouting party had been able to learn the coordinates of Dorgon's main planet! The planet was also called Dorgon and part of the Dorgonia System, some 51,345 light-years from Mesoph.

When the *Ivanhoe* rejoined the fleet with the other eight ships, the *Siom Som* was already

on the way to Estartu's sphere of influence to search for allies. Then Aurec and Homer G. Adams called an important conference of all ships' commanders and the key members of the expedition.

About seven hours later, with hardly anyone on the *Ivanhoe* having had a chance to get any sleep, the leading officers met on the *Gold Star*.

Homer G. Adams was already sitting in his chair and sipping a cup of coffee that struck him as much too cold. He had removed the space-suit that seemed to him old fashioned and often clumsy, and instead wore a "body suit" that was much more comfortable for him.

Aurec looked at the Terran in some surprise. He wore his white and blue uniform, which was easy to wear under a space suit.

Meanwhile, the first of the commanders had reached the large conference room. From the *Ivanhoe* came Xavier Jeamour, Mathew Wallace, Lorif, and Irwan Dove. The last three had been on Mesoph and while there had not only learned some key information but also had some adventures.

Mathew Wallace seemed depressed. He grieved for his three murdered friends, who had been brutally tortured to death by Priamus's henchmen.

They had learned of the death sentence from the palace message traffic, whose code Lorif had cracked on Mesoph. The entire crew of the *Ivanhoe* was grieving deeply. Hendrik Swahn, Tim Beranoh, and Cerak Atz had been very much beloved on the space ship.

According to a message that Gajanus had sent to Priamus over conventional electronic channels, he had employed all of the arts of torture, and the prisoners had revealed some information but did not survive the interrogation.

Moreover, Wallace thought constantly of Saraah, the beautiful Jerrer who had to live in slavery with next to no hope. He wanted to be her hope, to rescue her, and to give her a happy life.

But he had not been able to, Matthew Wallace felt very disappointed, especially in himself.

A short time later, Cauthon Despair, Sanna Breen, Joak Cascal, and Sandal Tolk also ar-

rived. Along with Trabon Saranos, Coreene Quon, Taröty Jylk, the first officer of the *Gold Star*, Ceboky Jefrar, the science officer of the *Gold Star*, Sonya Kirchbarg, Harun Mowahn, Ermos Kositar, and Luigi Benatoni, various staff officers were also present.

Aurec greeted all the participants and without further ado turned the meeting over to Xavier Jeamour, who read the report of his three crewmembers aloud.

He ended the report with the words, "the tragic loss of our three crewmembers will not put us into deep mourning, but instead will spur us to continue, for we now know that the Dorgonans have nothing good in mind."

For a moment there was silence, broken by Tyler: "If those guys interrogated and tortured our men, the question now is, how much do they know about us?"

"Tim and the others never would have given anything away!" Matthew protested energetically.

Tyler smiled weakly at him. "Boy, I've seen methods of torture that would make you crap in your pants. You can't take the pain any more, and you talk! Besides, the Dorgonans have a lot of technological gadgetry, and they must have drugs too.

"They know everything about us!"

Tyler glanced around the group. Faces with concerned expressions looked at him questioningly.

"If that's so," Luigi Benatoni said, "then we won't be able to operate freely much longer. We'd run too much risk of being discovered and destroyed."

Harun Mowahn and Ermos Kositar also supported the *Aramis'* commander's suggestion.

Sonya Kirchbarg shook her head angrily. "And you call yourselves men! We can't just run away! The Dorgonans are a serious threat to our Galaxy. We're the only ones who can stop them."

"How can we do that with eight ships?" Benatoni shot back hotly. His retort surprised even him. When Sonya glanced at him sharply, his face went red. He looked disconcertedly at the floor and felt ashamed. He secretly felt something for Sonya, but couldn't bring himself to

admit his affection to her. He didn't think that such an erotic woman would feel anything for a bureaucrat like him. She thirsted for adventure while Benatoni only wanted to do his duty. According to his best knowledge and his conscience, as it said in the manual! To fulfill that duty, the Italo-Terran was always intent on being certain and upholding the regulations.

"If you want to run away with your tail between your legs, fine!" Sam Tyler then interjected. "I'm staying here!" As usual, he wore his black leather jacket and did not make a particularly sympathetic impression on those present. Tyler calmly looked at the people across from him, who apparently did not dare answer his challenge.

"This argument isn't doing any of us any good," Adams said, interrupting the tense atmosphere.

"I can only agree," Aurec said. "It doesn't matter if the Dorgonans know all about us. We have to find out what this empire is planning for the Milky Way. We won't leave M100 until then!" Aurec meant his words very seriously. With steely determination, he looked into the eyes of each commander as well as every other participant in this conference.

Adams was often surprised by Aurec's eagerness for action. The matter did not involve his own people, but he was doing everything in his power to help the Galacticians. The Saggi-tonian deeply impressed Adams.

"What's our next step?" asked Joak Cascal, who had realized the seriousness of the situation from the start and preferred to act rather than continue the pointless debate.

"We've obtained the coordinates of Dorgon's main world," Cauthon Despair said. "We have Wallace and his scouting party to thank for that." He walked slowly around the room, giving Luigi Benatoni the creeps.

"What exactly have you learned, Wallace?" Cascal asked.

The young Terran looked around blankly. He and his thoughts were on Mesoph. He couldn't help thinking constantly not only of the death of his friends but of the love of his life, Saraah. Although he had known the young slave for only a few days, he loved and trusted her. He

wanted only to rescue the young Jerrer, but didn't know how he could accomplish that. In his mind's eye, he kept seeing Saraah smiling at him. When he first met her, her eyes had been full of sadness and hopelessness. But then he had been able to fill her with joy and hope. He wished that it had not been all in vain.

"Wallace?"

"What?" Mathew suddenly jerked out of his reverie and looked around in confusion. More than a dozen faces looked at him inquisitively, but he stared back at them with the same expression.

"What exactly did you find out about the main world?" Joak Cascal asked, repeating his question.

"Oh, sir!" Lorif broke in. "I think I can answer that question even better, since it was really – without trying to seem too pushy or forward – Irwan Dove and I who were able to learn a few things about Dorgon's main planet."

Cascal rolled his eyes slightly. "All right, then, shoot!"

Dumbfounded, Lorif stared at him. "At whom or what should I shoot, sir? May I remind you that according to Paragraph 199, Section 3, Line 7 of the Space Fleet Regulation Book, which Camelot has also recognized, the discharge of an energy weapon without a compelling reason is completely forbidden!"

Adams couldn't suppress a smile.

Cascal buried his face between his hands and shook his head. "Just tell us about the main world, Goldtop!"

"Goldtop? How impolite! Well, be that as it may, the main world lies in the Dorgonia System and bears the same name as the interstellar empire: Dorgon!"

The Dorgonia System was then displayed on a three dimensional map. Lorif explained more about the star system. "The Dorgonia System lies 24,212 light years from the center of the galaxy. It has a yellow G type sun that closely resembles Sol and an extension of approximately 125 billion kilometers."

"It comprises of seven planets, of which the fourth is Dorgon. This planet, along with the sixth planet, Helsuf, serve the Dorgonans as living space. The other planets are gas giants or

oversized lumps of cold rock.”

The display changed to the fourth planet. Lorif pointed at the blue world. “That is our goal: Dorgon!”

Silence reigned in the room for a while. The planet looked very peaceful, but everyone knew that Dorgon was the source of the threat to the Milky Way.

The Posbi was not yet finished with its explanation. “As everyone here already knows, Dorgon is the fourth planet of the Dorgonia System and has a diameter of 21,452 kilometers. Its gravitation is 1.1 g, and thus it is very similar to Terra.

“The planet has five continents. The largest, Patronn, is completely covered by the capital city, Dom. The capital houses 789 million inhabitants and even extends underground.”

“Two continents serve as purely recreational areas. The other two are covered by ice or desert, although a few cities have been built on them.”

“Altogether, Dorgon has 2.4 billion inhabitants. The average temperature is 22 degrees Celsius, and three fifths of the planet is covered by water.”

“The two continents, Sasus and Agol, possess diverse fauna and only a few settlements, mostly hotels and villas for the recreation of the citizens. Our understanding is that on Dorgon, only Dorgonans live in freedom. All other beings living there are either indispensable traders or slaves.”

The conference participants needed a few minutes to absorb the collected information.

Aurec looked around. Luigi Benatoni chewed on his fingernails, suggesting a certain discomfort on the part of the Terran. For her part, Sonya Kirchbarg stared at the data projected in the middle of the conference table.

Tyler leaned against the wall; his arms crossed on his stomach, and gave his usual impression of being relaxed.

“We are indeed going to Dorgon,” the Saggittonian said thoughtfully.

No one objected. Everyone knew that they had to go to Dorgon in order to find out what the Dorgonans intended.

“How will we proceed?” Cascal asked.

“The *Gold Star* will go alone to Dorgon,” Adams explained, “while the other ships remain at the edge of the system. As we did on Cermos, we will claim to be intergalactic traders and offer the Dorgonans trade with the Saggittonian empire.

“Aurec will pose as a decadent prince and I will be his financial advisor. We will then make radio contact and request to offer our wares on the planet.”

Adams glanced at his chronometer and nodded imperceptibly, then gave the order to Taröty Jylk to take the entire fleet to the Dorgonia System. The Blue confirmed the order with his shrill voice and left the conference room.

After Aurec adjourned the meeting, the other ships’ commanders returned to their posts.

Luigi Benatoni, however, remained behind. As Sonya Kirchbarg was a very curious woman, she also decided to stay. She wanted to know what the coward, as she thought of him, wanted.

“Sir! With all due respect, I don’t think that this is a good idea. . . !”

Adams looked questioningly at the commander of the *Aramis*.

Aurec, who had been conversing with Despair, turned to Benatoni at once. “Why?” he asked.

“I...I have a bad feeling about this,” the Italo-Terran explained with a trembling voice. “These Dorgonans are just too much for us, sir. We should explore the other regions instead and go back.”

Sonya Kirchbarg laughed contemptuously. “You coward!” she sneered.

“Enough!” Aurec exclaimed. “We don’t have any other choice but to go to the planet Dorgon. I’m not entirely comfortable with the whole thing either, but we have a great responsibility. Each of us.”

The Saggittonian’s words had their effect on Benatoni. He clenched his teeth and stiffly saluted the two expedition leaders, then walked away.

“He’ll never get anywhere,” Sonya murmured to Aurec.

The Saggittonian was rather surprised. “He is a loyal officer. His objections were justified,

though in our present situation we don't have any choice."

The Terran woman smiled at him. It was a very attractive smile that fit the appearance of the Euro-Terran from Austria very well. "I like more fearless men... such as you."

Now Aurec also had to smile. "I feel very honored, but..."

"I understand. Maybe we can go out to dinner sometime after the expedition is over."

"Perhaps."

"I'm reluctant to interrupt your conversation," Adams said, "but the commanders should return to their ships so we can plot a course for Dorgon."

Sonya gave Aurec a meaningful glance before leaving the room. Adams also gave Aurec a meaningful look, but it was more severe. The Saggittonian excused himself.

For a while, the three men stood silently in front the large view screen that showed the nothingness of hyperspace.

Then Despair said, "The time has come. Now we will learn what the Dorgonans are planning for the Milky Way, and if this crew can live up to its responsibility...!"

3.

Many Millennia Ago

I am resolved to continue the work of my ancestor. The tragedy has come to an end, because someone has had mercy. A brave, strong Agonian. Perhaps a chosen one of Dorgon? His name: Domulus!

Following thousands of years of slavery under the Charkos, he has come and risen against them.

The spiders have taken everything away from us. People have been robbed of everything – their land, their harvests, and their families. All for one purpose, to serve the Charkos as food. But one did not want to die.

It is said that Domulus escaped from the Death Caves and killed twenty Charkos. It was probably only three, but what counts is that the Aegonians, Sulvites, and all the rest had a new

leader who openly preached resistance against the oppressors!

Domulus possessed the intelligence of the gods. He learned the technology of the invaders and understood it. It was whispered that Dorgon had appeared to him and given him a sign.

As for myself, I just don't know...

The struggle began. Open attacks on the vile Charkos were now a regular event. However, the beasts slaughtered the rebels.

But Domulus did not give up. He found more and more supporters. Tales of his heroic deeds spread like wildfire.

Within three years, he raised a great army and succeeded in something even the holy Dorgon had never been able to do: he united the Aegonians and the Sulvites!

The battle of Terar Mountain was perhaps the most important in the recent history of our people. There, the first great victory over the Charkos was won. Domulus killed one of the leaders and seized technology that his people could now use.

With everyone working on them, energy weapons and flying machines were soon constructed. However, it was not the sword that sealed the fate of the invaders, but the virus.

A viral infection welling up from the rock deep in the subterranean stations had a deadly effect on the Charkos.

Hence, the Charkos disappeared! Freedom had come for our world. Domulus was our leader and our king!

Then Dorgon appeared and praised the people who honored his name. He showed us the way, confirming that Domulus was a chosen one, and prophesied a great future for our people. The people, who from now on would bear his name as a symbol of unity, the planet as well as the people, a single name: Dorgon!

And so it happened.

Then began the first golden years. Reconstruction kept everyone busy. Progress blossomed. The technology of the Charkos was developed further, and Domulus was the first Dorgonian on our moons.

Domulus explored our solar system and named it Dorgonia, the mother of Dorgon. The planet Helsuf was colonized and so became the

second homeland of our people.

A century of peace and progress under the rule of our King Domulus followed. But not even our hero could win the battle against time.

He died!

The city of Dom was built in his honor. It will ensure his spiritual immortality and be Dorgon's capital city for all time.

His successor, the noble Romanus, began where Domulus left off: the exploration of the galaxy.

Planet after planet was colonized and settled by Dorgonans. Because they worshipped other gods, undesirable castes such as the Jerrers were banished from the blooming central planet.

They accepted their fate at first, but eventually resisted perpetual exile. Thus came the first armed conflicts between Dorgonans in centuries. Wise King Arunus gave the Jerrers an entire star system and believed that he had solved the problem.

Dorgon continually expanded the territory under its rule and soon encountered the first primitive alien races, which were easily conquered.

Under Hermasus IV, 890 years after the death of Domulus, it was announced that the Dorgonian people were the only truly intelligent beings in the galaxy, which led to the galaxy itself being named Dorgon as well from then on. The Dorgonans were the chosen ones and the crown of creation!

For millennia the Dorgonans lived in that belief, but then, 2,000 years later, they encountered the Tutsamanians. The lizard like beings claimed for themselves the right to be the leading power in the galaxy.

War broke out between the two galactic powers, a war in which death was the only victor. Many years, decades, and centuries passed before a turning point came. The Tutsamanians, severely weakened by the Dorgonans, allied themselves with the avian Zarkos and with Dorgon's worst enemy, the Charkos!

Colonies were brutally attacked and pilaged. As a historian, I know whereof I speak. My beloved wife and three of my children were murdered by the Charkos.

I now lie dying and curse this ghastly war. I long for Domulus and Dorgon, but night is gathering around me.

May life be better for those who come after me...

From the Book of Iramus, 80,000 years ago

4.

Preparation for the Great Meeting

The eight Galaxian ships and the Saggittonian ship were still 7,000 light-years away from Dorgon.

The closer they got to the main planet of this galaxy spanning empire, the tenser every crew member grew.

Adams termed the venture "a leap into the lion's den." It was not just a cliché. A mistake could doom the entire expedition fleet.

Cauthon Despair mentally prepared himself for the events to come. He removed his armor, donned a black uniform, then sat in a separate room adjacent to his cabin and meditated.

This room was totally dark. Only two lights, one red and one blue, gave off a dim glow.

Suddenly he heard the sound of a door opening. Despair looked up from his meditation and got to his feet.

He heard a female voice. "Cauthon? Are you asleep?" It was Sanna.

His armor was in his cabin. He could not go in without Sanna seeing him.

That was something Despair absolutely wanted to avoid. But it was too late. Sanna went looking for him and came to the door.

"Sanna! Go away!" he exclaimed agitated, but she entered the room and for the first time saw Cauthon Despair without his mask.

To some extent her eyes showed horror, but also pity. She stared at him. Despair hated this feeling. He knew that her affection for him would be weakened. Just like Zantara Solynger, she would reject him because he didn't live up to her ideal.

They both fell silent.

"I'm sorry," Sanna said softly after a moment and slowly approached Cauthon as he

drew back. She took his hand and stroked it. "I should have told you I was coming," she said, mildly reproaching herself. She sensed how Despair felt.

"It's too late for that now," Despair said laconically. He went into the next room and threw himself into a chair.

Sanna watched him with sorrow. She tried to find suitable words but without success.

"I wanted to avoid this. You shouldn't have seen me in this deformed state. Now everything is over before it has even begun."

Sanna looked at him in confusion, then went to him. She kneeled in front of the melancholy Camelotan and stroked his hand. "Nothing is over, you dummy. Do you think your appearance is all that important for me? Of course, I'd prefer it if you were a paragon of male beauty, but for me what's more important is your personality, your soul, what's inside you!"

Despair felt uncomfortable. Still, he wanted to be certain. Cauthon loved Sanna and she confused him. Did she feel only friendship for him, or something more? "Does that mean we're still friends?"

She smiled. "Of course!"

"I wish fate had been more merciful to me. We could have been something more to each other, but...!"

She put her finger on his lips. Then she pulled his head down and put her lips to his. Cauthon's heart beat faster. An unfamiliar feeling rose within him.

She slowly drew her lips away. "Was that your first kiss?" she asked with a slight giggle.

He smiled weakly. "I think so...!"

"It wasn't your last," she whispered and started to kiss him again, but Despair suddenly stood up.

"I can't. I don't want to do this to you. You deserve better than me, Sanna. You are the most enchanting woman I've ever met and I love with you all my heart, but I am not worthy of you."

Sanna stood up and went to embrace Cauthon, but he pulled back. "Please go!"

"Cauthon, what do you mean?"

"Please understand. I would make you unhappy someday. It's no use."

Tears ran down from Sanna's eyes. "You've

already made me unhappy," she sobbed, and ran out of the cabin.

Cauthon Despair remained behind, cursing himself.

*

Aurec sat in his chair and watched his crew at work. The commander, Captain Serakan, and his first officer, Waskoch, stood at a railing in the middle of the control room, their arms crossed behind their backs.

The Saggittonian began to play chess with the on board Syntronic to alleviate the boredom, but then the *Sagriton* suddenly dropped out of hyperspace.

"What's going on?" Aurec called out in surprise.

Waskoch ran to the navigators, who explained what had happened. "Chancellor, there's interference with our systems. That's why the *Sagriton* came out of hyperspace. Apparently it's some kind of security barrier around the system. We are three light-years from Dorgonia."

"Contact the *Gold Star*. Did the same thing happen to them?"

"Yes," Serakan confirmed, and glanced at the screens. "All of our ships have dropped out of hyperspace."

Aurec immediately contacted Adams, Despair, and Cascal by comlink. The same conditions responsible for the abrupt emergence from of hyperspace had been registered on the other ships.

A squadron of Eagle ships suddenly appeared in front of the Galaxian-Saggittonian fleet. There were twenty ships in all, each more than 800 meters long.

A demand for identification was transmitted in Dorgonian. Aurec thought for only a few seconds, then ordered a communication channel opened. "Greetings, noble Dorgonans. This is Aurec speaking, Prince of Saggittor. We come with peaceful intentions. We are traders from a distant galaxy and wish to offer our goods in Dorgon."

One of the Eagle ships broke out of the squadron and flew around the nine starships of

the presumed trader.

A few minutes later, a hologram of the squadron commander formed. He wore a golden helmet with a black bristle crest. The bearded Dorgonan looked at Aurec with distrust. "How did you learn of our galaxy?" he demanded.

After a moment's reflection, Aurec began to explain, gesturing for emphasis at the same time. "The reputation of Dorgon has spread beyond its boundaries! We voyage through space to sell our goods. We heard of Dorgon in another galaxy. The inhabitants did not dare go there, however, they feared your might."

"Very wise," the soldier replied cynically. "You should have heeded that advice as well."

"We are peaceful traders and have goods to offer that surely will interest you," the Saggittonian persisted.

After a brief silence, the Dorgonan spoke. "How should I know that? I would have to inspect your goods."

Aurec looked at the floor for a moment and considered a new idea. He gave a quick wink to Serakan, who understood at once. The captain hurried off and began to make the *Sagriton* look somewhat more like a trader's ship.

"You are welcome to come on board. You will surely find some items that we can let you have out of gratitude for your efforts and infinite patience."

The Dorgonan grinned for the first time. Aurec had evidently found the commander's weak spot. Corruption could often be a powerful ally.

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Centrus Salus flew to the *Sagriton* in a small auxiliary ship. Homer G. Adams, Cauthon Despair, and Joak Cascal were already on board the enormous Saggittonian starship.

About three dozen soldiers stormed out of the shuttle and lined up on either side of Salus.

With deliberate slowness, the Dorgonian commander marched through the hangar, seemingly examining every nook and cranny.

He stopped casually in front of Aurec and gripped his belt, which like his helmet shone

with a golden shimmer and in addition was decorated with several medals.

Aurec showed a friendly smile and bowed before the Dorgonan. He would have preferred to kick him in his fat belly, but that would have been tactically unwise.

"Would you like me to guide you through the ship?" the Saggittonian began, but the Dorgonan gestured dismissively.

"I don't have that much time, Sakronian!"

"Saggittonian!" Aurec corrected him, politely but firmly.

"You shouldn't be so impertinent," Salus replied coolly and took a few steps further. He looked at Adams and paused for a moment in front of Despair. Aurec thought he saw something like respect in Salus's eyes.

"These are my lieutenants: Homer G. Adams, my bookkeeper; Cauthon Despair, my bodyguard; and Joak Cascal, my military strategist."

Salus looked at Aurec in surprise. "Why a soldier? Aren't you traders?"

Aurec knew that this question was a potential trap, but he had been expecting it. "Well, the universe is very wild and dangerous. Trade caravans are often the targets of choice for intergalactic pirates. That's why we need some self-defense."

The Dorgonan nodded imperceptibly and crossed his arms behind his back. He looked expectantly at Aurec, who clapped his hands twice. Some rather scantily clad women brought out the Milky Way's latest high-tech products. The Saggittonian was attempting to lure the Dorgonan particularly with entertainment and amusement devices.

Salus examined some trivid games and holo programs with interest. Grinning broadly, he picked out several holo programs along with their projectors, with which he could select between war games and comedies.

Then the commander turned serious once more. "Very well, I will allow you, Aurec, to fly to Dorgon in a small ship. Your freighters will remain at this position."

Aurec nodded submissively.

"It would be appropriate if I were often enriched with such gifts," Salus added.

“Of course, noble Dorgonan,” the Saggitonian replied with a slight undertone. “The latest and most exciting programs are in development as we speak, and they will surpass your imagination.”

Salus merely nodded and left the *Sagriton* with his escort.

The plan of the Galacticians and the Saggitonians was working! Aurec had been convincing enough to deceive Salus. Of course, the Dorgonan’s corruption and arrogance had also played a certain role. Had he taken the trouble to look more closely at the ship’s weapons, the trick probably would not have been successful.

They now had permission to fly to the planet Dorgon in a small ship. A landing place at Dom had already been allotted to them.

First, they chose the ship. It was the *Jay Jay III*, under the command of Mathew Wallace. At his side were Irwan Dove and Lorif.

They counted for three members of the scouting party, and Aurec and Adams made five. Now the other members of the delegation had to be selected.

The choices were: Cauthon Despair, Sanna Breen, Sam Tyler, Chris Japar, Trabon Saranos, and Joak Cascal.

Nadine Schneider had also wanted to come, but Adams turned her down. He did not especially trust the resurrected woman, and under no circumstances did he want a Trojan horse in the small group.

Sandal Tolk and Xavier Jeamour were given the command over the fleet that remained behind. They were ordered to wait at a distance of three light-years from the Dorgonia System.

It was almost time for departure.

While Sam Tyler and Chris Japar checked their weapons, Aurec and Adams considered what to do once they were in Dom.

“For cover, I suggest that we set up a bazaar where we sell all kinds of merchandise,” Adams said with determination in his voice. “We’ll attempt to win influential customers and use them to reach the imperial palace. Lorif, Dove, and Wallace will study Dorgon technology. Sooner or later, we’ll know what we’re up against!”

Then Joak Cascal, wearing a backpack, came trotting into the hangar and reached the *Jay Jay*

III out of breath. “Sorry I’m late.”

“Couldn’t you tear yourself away from Nadine?” Adams asked.

Cascal cleared his throat and chose to proceed directly into the space jet. Adams watched him go in with some concern.

Cauthon Despair strode slowly through the *Sagriton*’s huge hangar and spotted Sanna Breen, who was just then having Lorif bring her luggage aboard the *Jay Jay III*. Thoughtfully, Despair went over to her.

Sanna only looked at him, without saying a word.

“Are you doing all right?” he inquired, sounding almost clumsy.

The Terran woman had to laugh, a little abruptly. It was a sarcastic laugh that bothered Despair’s guilty conscience. “How well can I be doing when I’ve just been rejected?”

“You will get over it,” the silver knight replied. “Someday, you’ll realize it. You wouldn’t have been happy with me.”

Sanna grew angry. “Why don’t you leave that decision to me? There isn’t any good reason why we shouldn’t have tried. Your appearance doesn’t bother me, and if it bothers you, you can get therapy. With today’s medicine, you can have a perfect body again. I’m not interested in your past – I see you as you are now. You shouldn’t be alone. I’ll be there for you, Cauthon!”

Despair thought about those words for a moment. He was suspicious. Never before had a woman sacrificed herself for him. Once he had laid an empire at the feet of Zantra Solynger, but she had turned him down. Sanna Breen was different. She gave him warmth and security. He had always had to do without those two things in his life. Now they had been offered to him and he had turned them down. This was wrong.

“You’re right,” he said softly.

Sanna smiled and embraced the knight. It was a strange scene. The hulking and threatening giant seemed tender and noble.

Tyler and Chris were disgusted by the sight. The fat Springer rubbed his ponderous belly with his hand. “If the little lady needs a man, she should take me. I’ve got more going for me than that cripple.”

Tyler grinned and finished polishing his laser machine gun. "Shall we make a bet?" asked the Terran with the high forehead.

"What kind of bet?"

"I'll blast more Dorgonian brains out through their skulls than you!"

"You're on! I'll bet a barrel of Vurguzz!"

The two men shook hands and so sealed their sleazy bet. Then they went on board the Space-jet. Aurec and Adams were the last to board the small shuttle.

Both men knew that the decisive phase had begun!

5.

Thousands of Years Before

The war was over. 10,000 years of killing had ended, but the price was high. Perhaps not for the Dorgonans, who left the battle field victorious, but for all other beings.

The Charkos no longer existed. The spider creatures had been exterminated with biological weapons based on viruses.

The Tutsamanians and Zarkos surrendered and begged for Dorgon's mercy – in vain, because Dorgon was the power, the glory, the might of the gods in this galaxy.

The era of the Dorgonian kingdom was finished. Sulvetius crowned himself Emperor and declared the realm of Dorgon an empire!

The laws were changed. The rights of aliens were cut back. The Dorgonan was the highest being. All other creatures existed to serve Dorgon. Even some colonial peoples, like the impure blooded and heathen Jerrers, were enslaved.

Over the centuries that followed, during the bloody era of Sulvetius and his sons, the Zarkos and Tutsamanians were wiped out. There were no more of them in Dorgon. Utter genocide had been perpetrated three times in this galaxy.

All in the name of Dorgon, Domulus, and the gods!

We writers of history were given the task to record the glory of this mighty deed. But I will write only the facts. I will leave it to posterity to

draw the unmistakable conclusions from what I report here.

For 30,000 years, the Dorgonian imperium reigned in all its splendor and ruled the entire galaxy. The Dorgonans had accomplished everything. They possessed everything. They became decadent. Corruption, bureaucracy, and intrigues gnawed away at the empire.

Perhaps the most tragic figure during those years was the Emperor himself. Emperor Romus XI was assassinated by his own wife while bathing.

The empire collapsed. From then on, everyone tried to seize power. Gallus, Seramus, Tazus, even the Jerrer Jefru.

No one could hold the Emperor's title for long. One assassination followed after another. No one wanted to be Emperor any more.

Revolts in the enslaved colonies forced the Senate to make reforms. The three sons of Romus XI fought each other for their own power. The inevitable result: Dorgon was divided, into East, West, and South Dorgon.

Three empires, two too many, for the once loving brothers bitterly fought to absorb each other's territory.

The battles went on even long after the brothers had died. What was the reason for the fighting? No one could answer that very well. One fought each other because one's forefathers had fought each other. It was a senseless civil war that went on for a long time.

After 2,000 years, it was still not over. Even when East Dorgon became more liberal and allowed aliens more rights, South and West Dorgon were still considered the enemy.

Another 2,000 years of war, with short intervals of peace and new periods of conflict, went by, until wisdom finally won out. The religious Pasmus emphasized the old values of Domulus and the obligations that one had to Dorgon and its gods.

He achieved the incredible: he united the empire and restored the old republic. The Senate had more rights and Pasmus became Chancellor of the Dorgonian Republic. Aliens and slaves were also recognized as beings with equal rights.

The Golden Age of the Republic began.

It was a time of pride and honor. A time on which posterity can look back with joy!

From the Book of Sixus, 35,000 years ago

6.

Flight to Dorgon

The shuttle slowly approached the Dorgonia system's first space fort. It was much larger than the Terran outposts in the Solar System. Even in sheer numbers they seemed superior.

Worried, Adams stared at the thousands of Eagle ships apparently making a patrol flight through the system. "How can we stand up to a power like this?" he asked.

Silence...

The space jet made its way through the Dorgonans' defensive lines. A squadron of Eagle ships crossed their path. For a moment, Adams' heart stopped. He prayed that they wouldn't be stopped for an inspection.

Aurec seemed considerably calmer. He was already preparing himself for his first appearance as the prince of a trading caravan. He had gained his first experience in the Protectorate of Harrish and had seemed very convincing to the then governor Ojemus.

For their part, Sam Tyler and Chris Japar continued to busy themselves with polishing their weapons. It was a task they eagerly performed. If the ruse with the trading caravan failed, then Tyler and Japar would be called on.

Tension was thick in the air. It grew with every kilometer they came towards the planet Dorgon.

Cauthon Despair appeared to be meditating, while Sanna Breen stared into empty space. Cascal smoked a cigarette, sometimes with pleasure, sometimes nervously. Meanwhile, Dove, Wallace, and Lorif sat in the control seats of the *Jay Jay III* and were trying to fly as inconspicuously as possible.

Aurec stepped onto the small bridge and looked into the panorama screen with a serious expression.

No one dared say a word. Even the normally loquacious Lorif had decided to be quiet for a while.

Everyone was waiting for the same thing! It had to come soon. The more minutes that went by, the less the distance between the *Jay Jay III* and Dorgon became.

Then the time had finally come!

"Alien ship!" announced a voice over the loudspeaker in the Dorgonian language, which everyone had learned from hypno training. "This is Orbital Control of the Dorgonian Empire! Identify yourself at once and state the destination and purpose of your visit."

"No turning back now," said Aurec thoughtfully. The Saggittonian smoothed his uniform, then stood before the holo cameras that would capture his image and send it to the sentry fort. "This is Aurec, Prince of Saggittor. We are the vanguard of a harmless and peaceful trading caravan that wishes to bring the treasures of many galaxies to the mighty empire of Dorgon."

How oily, Wallace thought.

Aurec preferred to think of it as diplomatic. He wanted to make a harmless and peaceful impression. That way the Dorgonans would not consider them dangerous.

The Saggittonian mentioned Salus's patrol squadron and that the Dorgonian had already given him permission and assigned him a landing place.

The sentry fort had no objections either. The way to Dorgon was open! The members of the scouting party were obviously relieved.

7.

The Cosmocrats in Dorgon

After the death of Pasmus, the power hungry counselor Zababus tried to seize control, but his plans failed and he had to pay for them with his life.

For several thousand years, peace reigned in the galaxy. The Dorgonans reached towards their cultural high point.

Money, gold, and power were now only of secondary importance. People counted for more. It was a time of tolerance and brotherly love, a time in which crime was unknown.

Dorgon was a paradise. Was this what the holy Dorgon had once prophesied for us? Now,

when we stood on the brink of a new phase in our evolution, a powerful being calling himself a Cosmocrat appeared before us.

He spoke: "I am Sipustov, your friend and benefactor. I have observed you for millennia. The time has now come for you to fulfill your destiny."

He said nothing of the holy Dorgon. Why?

The Cosmocrat said that he was of the Powers of Order and Dorgon had been chosen to fight for Order and Justice in the universe. He told us of the Moral Code, which was virtually the Universe's DNA and consisted of innumerable cosmic nucleotides. The Cosmocrat also told us of the onion-peel model of the Universe, and of the superintelligences, who were regarded by many as their gods.

Was Dorgon also such a superintelligence? If so, where was he...?

The Cosmocrat spoke of the Powers of Chaos, who were out to seize power for themselves and destroy any and all harmony.

What happened then is difficult to describe. The mighty being would not accept "No" for an answer. We were to serve him from now on whether we wanted to or not. According to the powerful Cosmocrat, it was the duty of Dorgon to serve Order.

In the beginning, all were enthusiastic and we joined him willingly. But the euphoria quickly passed when the terrors of the Powers of Chaos attacked us. Hordes of the evil ones overwhelmed our worlds and many Dorgonans had to go to other galaxies to fight for Order.

The longer the struggle went on, however, the less we understood the point of this war. We never received any help from the Cosmocrats. We felt like cattle led to slaughter, dragged from one end of the universe to the other to fight in a war in which we had no stake. Why us?

Why did women have to be made widows, children orphans? Could the Cosmocrats explain to them why their men had to die? No! They didn't even make an attempt to explain. It was taken for granted that we would serve them and die for them.

But the Cosmocrats did not take the pride of the Dorgonans into consideration. The belief that we were something better than most other

beings came to the surface again after several thousand years.

Rebellion against the Powers of Order broke out, and after 7,000 years in the service of these entities, the courageous Sulvarus declared the entire galaxy free of the Cosmocrats.

Not even the most radical freedom fighters against the Cosmocrats expected what followed. One expedition after another came to punish us.

The armies of the Cosmocrats' other allies attacked Dorgon – but we had learned a few things. Ingenious scientists had developed the Hypertron Impulsator and the Hypertron Shield, which effectively routed the aggressors.

And Sipustov spoke: "You will pay for your impertinence to us! You will pay for your treason for as long as you were in our service!"

Those were the last words of the once so friendly Cosmocrat. For 7,000 years, death and suffering were visited upon us. Many generations were cursed by the mistake their ancestors had made – making the pact with the Cosmocrats.

Then, 14,000 years after Sipustov had appeared for the first time, Dorgon lay in ruins. The population was decimated and we were a long way from taking the next step in evolution.

Dorgon was finished! The Republic crumbled. Many small principalities arose, though they all stood under the Dorgonian banner. While every king called himself a Dorgon, he had the sole authority in his small and self-sufficient realm.

But this period of "petty powers and pettier politics," as the powerful Senator Archivus termed the situation, did not last for long. East and West Dorgon were reestablished and annexed many of the principalities. Once more there were two powers, though they co-existed in peace.

Memories of the Cosmocrats faded after a few centuries. Everyone knew of them and had learned to fear them. Everyone hoped that they would never seek Dorgon out again.

For several thousand years, the two states lived side by side in peace. Things were going well for us once more...until the old envy and the old hunger for power rose once more.

In a time full of hatred and suspicion, the peaceful and proud Jerrers decided to secede from East Dorgon. They wanted to live their own lives and pray in peace to their own god, which the Dorgonans did not recognize as their holy emissary.

That was the cue for many other states to return to autarchy. As punishment, East Dorgon made war on the Jerrers, but then West Dorgon intervened, and a new galactic civil war broke out.

Only after several years did events cool down. Then the charismatic Jusilus appeared. He used the economically unfavorable situation, the poverty and dissatisfaction of the citizens, to overthrow both Chancellors and unite East and West Dorgon in climactic battles. His goal was now clear to everyone: To make the Dorgonian Empire rise again...

"I am the new Emperor and your god!" he declared before the Senate, his head raised high and his chest swelled with pride. It was the beginning of the new Dorgonian Empire.

"I will take Dorgon to new heights," he went on in his speech to the Senate and the people. "I will be the one who lays the cornerstone for Dorgon's cosmic power." At his side stood his nephew, the intelligent and prudently acting Decrusian, who was always both advisor and friend to his Emperor.

Jusilus crowned himself the new Emperor and declared that the entire galaxy belonged to the Dorgonian Empire. He ruled harshly but justly. The realm was expanded and actually did achieve new glory.

But Jusilus had many enemies who pretended to be friends, such as the unscrupulous Testusian and the plotting Bukulus. Decrusian warned the Emperor, who always impetuously and too self-confidently associated with his enemies and preferred to be drawn into the fleeting pleasures of an adventure with the Queen of Phyrasus.

"My Emperor, don't you sense the danger that threatens you?"

"Decrusian, my friend, what could possibly happen to me? I am Emperor and god. No one would dare lay a hand on me. It would be suicide for him."

Decrusian was outraged by Jusilus's thick headedness. "Many Emperors have already died unnatural deaths," were the warning words of the designated successor, who in spite of that attractive prospect had remained loyal to his Emperor. "Be careful that you aren't one of them!"

Decrusian had to leave on a mission for the Emperor to put down a revolt on Hesophia. Jusilus spent the time with the beautiful Amoria, the Queen of Phyrasus. She was the only woman the Emperor had ever loved – really loved. But tragedy could not be avoided. Under the leadership of Bukulus, a squad of soldiers surprised the Emperor and his beloved on the morning of the 17th day of the month of Yde and murdered them. Jusilus, strong and proud, tried not to show the pain that the fatal sword thrust gave him. It was said that he pushed his opponents, or rather, kicked his opponents back until he finally collapsed. Amoria was killed at once with a stab through the heart.

A soldier who later surrendered to Decrusian reported that a smile had briefly played at Jusilus's lips and that just before dying he had whispered, "Yes... I'm coming, Dorgon..."

Even with the death of the Emperor, however, the empire did not fall. Many had feared that the empire would die with Jusilus since he had created it, but there was one man who could prevent it. It was Decrusian, who hurried back to Dom as soon as the news reached him. Filled with grief and anger, he vowed to find the murderers and destroy them.

Bukulus and Testusian freely admitted that they were the ones who had murdered Jusilus. They revolted against the new Emperor Decrusian and tried to strip him of his power. But with the help of General Alexusian, a supporter in the army, Decrusian was able to put the revolt down and after two years of war, defeated Bukulus and Testusian and had them executed.

Like his predecessor, Decrusian was considered a harsh but just Emperor. Under him, the Dorgonian people prospered. He expanded the empire – to the very last corner of the galaxy.

The Dorgonian Empire, which had existed for millennia, could not be destroyed. Decrusian promised that it would exist forever.

It was he who reintroduced the old “virtues” that enslaved the Jerrer and allowed only pure Dorgonans into the army. Aliens were stripped of their property and partly enslaved.

He made an example of the Jerrers, the people who were hated so much. They would forever be denied the rights of Dorgonans. They would be slaves until the end of time!

A glorious era dawned that continues to this day, even after Decrusian, a hero of Dorgonian history, had died upon being in power for 112 years. A strange story surrounded his death. At the age of 175 years, he contracted a grave illness and his hours were numbered. Lying on his deathbed, it was said, he began to fantasize. He spoke of a mission. He seemed to believe himself chosen for it. A mission which he absolutely had to carry out. But he died that same night and no one ever knew what he had meant.

I have spent my entire life writing the history of Dorgon’s past 25,000 years – this is just a small excerpt, which gives an overview of the most important events. Unfortunately, the young Dorgonan has grown weary of reading. He prefers to devote himself to the sword, women, or wine instead of studying the history of his forefathers.

The last 4,000 years of the mighty Dorgonian empire have seen many Emperors, many civil wars, and many golden ages.

But never has the holy emissary Dorgon reappeared. Why did Sipustov never speak of him? Why did Dorgon not help us in our darkest hours? The ways of the gods are unfathomable.

The Dorgonian Empire was strong, but was it good? No! Many peoples suffer under the might of Dorgon, but I cannot pass judgment. I am merely a writer of history, a chronicler who should not hide behind Emperor Thesasian, even though he views me as his friend.

Thesasian has become embittered since the death of his wife. He plans great things and wants to expand Dorgon’s power to a distant galaxy called Galaxia. But whether he can accomplish this within his lifetime, no one can say. He is old, but still strong. However, the gang that is his family, above all his weak-minded son Carigul, is obsessed with the succession, and pray every day for the death of

their Emperor.

But Thesasian has their respect. They are afraid because they know that he is still powerful and would kill them at once if they dared to shake his throne.

The latest significant events include the battle of the Throgahn Triangle, in which the resistance group “New Republic” was completely annihilated and its leader, Erastos, killed. This battle made the heroic soldier Vesus Supreme Commander of the Dorgonian armed forces. A further event was the appearance of a strange red-skinned being who wore a black robe.

It was he who drew Thesasian’s attention to Galaxia. He said that there was a gathering of powerful beings that would be a threat to Dorgon. It was he who challenged Thesasian to raise his government to new heights as the first Emperor to annex another galaxy to the empire. Thesasian was enthusiastic about the idea. The beings in Galaxia appeared to be worthy opponents.

He sent Sereanus to Galaxia in order to set up a fifth column that would weaken the governments and infrastructure there. We never heard anything from Sereanus after that. . .

Who the stranger was, he did not say. Nor did he say whence he had come. He did speak his name. It was a strange name that sounded dark and threatening. He called himself Cau Thon. . .

From the Chronicles Book of Nirvus, present day

8.

Dorgon

Aurec gazed upon perhaps the most gorgeous city he had ever seen. Dom stretched over an entire continent and was rich in magnificent buildings, statues, and works of art that reflected Dorgon’s whole history.

Even Terrania City paled next to this city, Adams thought, visibly impressed.

Thousands of gliders and shuttles were in motion above the golden capital of the empire. The space jet flew over various sections of the

city and its parks, temples, and palaces before it reached the spaceport.

Escorted by two Dorgonian interceptors, the Terran discus ship landed on the field where it was directed. It was one of the many hundreds of spaceports in Dorgon's capital. Hardly had the jet landed when several security guards and a protocol robot marched towards it.

Aurec took a deep breath and issued the last instructions. From now on, no mistakes could be afforded.

The Space-jet's entrance hatch opened and a ramp was extended. Aurec, followed by Adams and Cascal, walked down until they stepped out onto the Dorgonian surface. Reflective, the Saggittonian paused for a moment and took in his surroundings.

It was very hot on Dorgon. The Saggittonian felt the warm rays of the sun on his face. Adams seemed less able to deal with the heat. He was breathing heavily and loosened his tie.

Aurec listened for a moment to the sounds of twittering birds, glider motors, and the wind. He had to smile to himself over the contradiction. On the one hand, Dom was a technologically super-advanced city, but on the other, birds flew through the area. Huge green expanses of parks ornamented the entire city, and the wind that originated on even this planet blew through the streets.

The soldiers and the robot stopped in front of the three allies. The droid floated slowly towards Aurec. "State the purpose and length of your stay on Dorgon," the artificial intelligence demanded with a metallic voice.

"We are traders," the Saggittonian began carefully. "I am Prince Aurec, and these men here are Cascal and Adams, my most important subordinates. We travel through the universe and desire nothing but to trade with the peoples of the cosmos."

The robot paused momentarily. They were tense seconds for Aurec and the others. What could the robot be thinking? Then it said: "I was already informed of your harmlessness by one of our sentry fleets. You are granted a visa for one of our months. Report to the Commercial Center and there you will receive permission to engage in trade." The metal being

pressed some identification cards into the Saggittonian's hand and then, followed by the Dorgonian security forces, proceeded to the next group of visitors to Dorgon.

Aurec exhaled in relief and looked happily at the others. "Bribing the sentry officer really did pay off. Tell the others that we'll be here for a while."

Cascal informed the rest. Wallace, Lorif, and Dove remained for the time being on the Space-jet, while Despair, Breen, Tyler, Japar, and Saranos went with the others.

The group slowly and thoughtfully crossed a bridge that connected the landing fields. Below them were hundreds of breathtakingly beautiful buildings that stretched out over thousands of square kilometers.

"So this is Dom!" Adams exclaimed in awe, as though there was something unholy about this city.

*

The Galacticians left the spaceport and hailed a taxi glider that would take them to a hotel.

On the way, Adams made a stop at a bank to exchange precious metals for Dorgonian currency. Otherwise they probably would have had problems paying for their rooms.

Again and again, the beauty of the city impressed them. Anyone just looking at Dom would not believe that this was the center of a tyranny.

After they had settled into several rooms in a luxurious hotel, Aurec decided to hold a meeting to discuss the situation.

"Dom is more impressive than we imagined," Adams began. "It's an awesome city that doesn't have a match anywhere."

"We aren't here to admire the architecture," Tyler broke in curtly. "We're supposed to stop an invasion."

Before Adams could respond, Cauthon Despair raised his hand. "We don't have time for useless complaining! Dom merely reflects the power and advancement of this civilization. No matter what, we dare not underestimate it."

Aurec nodded imperceptibly, then stood up and gestured with his hands. "We must now have to be clever in how we proceed. First, we should set up a bazaar in the marketplace in order to make a name for ourselves and discreetly gather information. We can then concentrate on the government when we advance to Phase Two!"

The Saggittonian looked around. No one had any objections, so he ended the meeting.

*

The market swarmed with activity. There were hundreds of businesses, stalls, and bazaars crowding the several kilometers occupied by the Decrusian Market Place. The square looked old fashioned and modern at the same time. Large white walls surrounded the area, with large entrances in each direction supported by gigantic columns. In the inner precincts of the marketplace were traders who had set up their stalls on the sandy ground. To the sides stood beautiful palm trees that decorated the area. Aurec was impressed by the Dorgonans' aesthetic sense. They knew how to bring technology and nature in harmony. Nowhere in Dom was there a barren desert of pure metal or concrete.

Beings from all parts of the galaxy hawked their wares here, but it was evident that it was mostly just Dorgonans who possessed the good locations for their stands.

The enslaved peoples had far fewer rights. Many of them were sold for high prices to rich and decadent officials or politicians. Aurec turned away from the slave market in disgust.

However advanced in technology the Dorgonans may be, he thought, they're just as low in their ethics.

Aurec could not understand how such a technologically advanced people, with so many achievements, so many beautiful buildings, and such a love for art and nature, could be so callous towards the lives of others.

The group walked slowly through the crowded plaza. The strangest and most diverse races were attempting to peddle their wares to visitors here. It reminded Adams of an old Terran market place in England. The many dealers

represented were in fierce competition and battled for survival. The enslaved peoples were tolerated here only because the rich and decadent Dorgonian citizens needed their wares.

In spite of the heat, a cold shiver went down Sanna Breen's back as she observed the auction of two small children. They were hardly any older than five or six. The two Jerrers, as Sanna assumed them to be on the basis of their bronze colored skins and long bluish black hair, were sold to different owners. Tears running down their faces, the two were separated and turned over to their new masters, who would probably make their lives a living hell.

Angry and looking for help at the same time, Sanna glanced up at Cauthon Despair, who had also watched the proceedings. "We cannot change the fate of these beings," he said. "If we intervene here, we run the risk of being discovered. Preventing an invasion of the Milky Way is more important than the lives of two nameless brats!"

These words outraged Sanna. "How can you say such a thing? What if Dorgon had taken over the Milky Way and those two were our children?"

"We are here to spare the children of our galaxy just such a fate," the silver knight replied coolly. He chose not to comment on the reference Sanna made to their children. Despair knew only too well that he could never be a father. He would never marry Sanna and start a happy family.

Not that he didn't love her. He did, and with his whole heart. But an inner voice constantly whispered to him and spoke of his destiny. And his destiny did not include Sanna Breen.

Meanwhile, Aurec had picked out a suitable place to set up shop. Tyler, Japar, and Cascal unpacked at once and helped the Saggittonian and Homer G. Adams with erecting their stall. Before very long, a small but attractive bazaar of Terran design stood in the Dorgonian market place.

A touch of pride filled the Immortal and he smiled slightly. "I'll make a fortune!" he exclaimed and took his position behind the counter. Then he was serious again. The first step had been taken. Now it was a matter

of building a reputation and supplying enough goods to the Dorgonans.

For a while Cascal and Adams observed their competitors while Aurec wandered through the plaza.

“Well, who wants to be the crier?” Cascal asked, then inhaled deeply from his cigarette and squinted his eyes in the low, blinding sun. “We should have brought Sandal along,” he added with a smile. “He would have been good at that.”

Adams just nodded. “I’ll do it,” he finally said, and from a container pulled out some basketball sized floating robots. They scattered around the marketplace and their metallic voices praised the Galacticians’ wares to the skies in Dorgon.

Cascal was surprised and made a complimentary gesture in Adams’s direction. Meanwhile, Sanna Breen had changed clothes. She now wore a gown with a bare midriff that showed considerable skin. This, too, was part of Adams’s marketing strategy. Terran beauty would draw people’s attention to the stand.

Cascal grinned broadly as he examined Sanna’s new outfit. “It’s a good thing Sam isn’t here or he’d want to throw a coat over her,” the veteran said, referring to the Soman’s rather conservative views.

“I hope that Sam succeeds in Siom Som,” Aurec said, somewhat concerned.

Cauthon Despair was less pleased by Sanna’s costume. He himself had a rather more frightening effect on the customers. Still, no one had the idea of causing any trouble at the bazaar, since everyone seemed to fear the vengeance of the silver knight. Nor did the neighboring dealers think of picking any fights.

After just a short time, the first interested parties approached the stand. Adams offered an especially large selection of entertainment products of all sorts. The Terrans were masters in producing games, films, music, and books for diversion. However, Adams flatly rejected Cascal’s collection of classic sex films and did not offer them for sale, which the Solar Imperium veteran did not quite understand. Several Dorgonian soldiers came by the stand as well but did not buy anything.

Joak Cascal and Sanna Breen decided to take a look around the market for themselves.

“Would you like one, too, Miss Breen?” Cascal asked, offering Sanna a cigarette.

She smiled and shook her head. “You don’t have to be so formal, she said. “You can call me Sanna.”

Cascal nodded and gave her a slight smile. Then his expression twisted as a few people bumped into him without even apologizing.

“They’re just as impolite here as they are on Terra,” he remarked and went on. The two watched the sale of a young and beautiful female slave. An ugly old man, accompanied by two muscular Dorgonans, bought the girl. Cascal could just imagine what use this man would find for the slave. Several soldiers, one of them highly decorated, marched past the two Terrans. One soldier, a tall blond Dorgonan, made eye contact with Sanna for a few moments.

Cascal cleared his throat. “Miss Breen...er, I mean, Sanna...you shouldn’t flirt with Dorgonian officers. What would the silver tin can have to say about that?”

Sanna became somewhat angry. “His name is still called Cauthon!” she snapped at the former soldier of the Solar Imperium.

“Yes, I know. Still, I can’t forget the terrible pictures of Sverigor. That was his doing. Before you come up with some pseudo psychological excuses, I want to give you a piece of advice: Find somebody else. Despair is certainly not the dream man you’re looking for.”

Sanna was surprised and touched at the same time by Joak Cascal’s direct manner. But she didn’t want to show it. “How do you know what I’m looking for?” she demanded stubbornly.

He seized her arms. “You are a woman who longs for adventure, and for love and romance as well. Despair can’t give you all that.”

Sanna wanted to reply but found herself unable to say anything. She looked at the ground in embarrassment, then suggested that they go back to the stand.

There, a green skinned being that resembled a ball of slime was haggling with Adams.

“25 Terzes for the shower gel,” Adams insisted. “Not one Terz less. You will, of course, want to buy the entire line.”

The slime ball gesticulated wildly. "I want to take a bath in this slime, but 25 is too much. Let's say 15 Terzes!"

"Fifteen Terzes? Nonsense! Twenty-four and a half, and that's my final offer!"

"17!"

"No, 23!"

"19!"

Aurec noticed Cascal and went over to him. He had an exhausted look. "They've been at it for quite a while. I hope they'll come to an agreement sooner or later. . ."

"21 and a quarter Terzes!" Adams insisted.

"No, no, no! 20 Terzes! No more!"

"Sold!" Adams exclaimed and handed over the merchandise. As a symbol of the deal, they slapped each other's palms. Adams, however, did not realize that he would get a very slimy hand in result. Aurec could not suppress a smile when he saw the Immortal suddenly wipe off his hand.

"So far, business has been good," Adams then told him.

Suddenly, they heard some noise. Their attention was drawn to a nearby stand. There, the Dorgonian solders did not seem entirely happy with the service.

"What were you thinking?" the highly decorated officer demanded. "I'm a general!" Two other soldiers grabbed the old Jerrer and threw him to the ground.

"I'm sorry, but I couldn't know that the fruit is spoiled!" The desperate man tried to apologize, but the general just kicked him in the head. The Jerrer screamed loudly.

The blond officer who had made eye contact with Sanna went to his superior and tried to calm him, but the Dorgonan was firmly determined to teach the Jerrer a lesson. "You wanted to poison me with this fruit! You Jerrers are a treacherous lot! Throw him into the deepest dungeon!"

The two soldiers carried the order out at once and dragged the frantically struggling Jerrer from the market place. The general looked at the stand, then ordered that it be removed from the square at once.

Aurec and the others watched aghast. It was one more proof how little the lives of others

meant to the Dorgonans. Adams wanted to spare the Terrans and all other Galaxian races this fate no matter what.

Another dealer came to the Galacticians' stand and shook his head vigorously, which had an unintentionally comic effect since it made his mouth tentacles shake back and forth. "Terrible, simply terrible!" he remarked on what had happened.

"Who is that Dorgonan?" Adams wanted to know, pointing to the highly decorated soldier overseeing the dismantling of the Jerrer's stand.

"That is General Celusian, one of the most powerful men in the empire. He is supreme commander of all ground forces. Together with Admiral Vesus, he holds the top position in the Dorgonian military."

"Ah," Aurec murmured.

The dealer looked at him in surprise. "You must have come from very far away if the names Vesus and Celusian mean nothing to you."

Aurec shook his head. "True, they mean nothing to us. We do indeed come from far away, but I think that we'll be dealing with Celusian and Vesus before much longer."

Now Sanna Breen spoke up. "And who is the officer next to Celusian?" she wanted to know.

Cascal could hardly hide a smile.

"That is Centrus Valerus, one of Celusian's adjutants."

Sanna smiled slightly, but her expression was serious when Despair looked at her. For the first time, she felt uncomfortable when he was nearby.

*

Towards evening, after the sun had already set, an old man in a white toga came to the Galaxian bazaar. "You offer many interesting things for sale," he said in acknowledgement.

Adams thanked him politely and invited him to look around.

The Dorgonan had a corpulent body and white hair. He was grossly overweight, yet had a wise and friendly appearance. He looked around for a while, but could not find anything. "Like I said, nice things, but nothing productive. It's all amusement. . .!"

Then Aurec stepped in. He approached the fat man in an amiable manner and introduced himself. "Have you no children?" he asked politely.

"Ah, but I do. Two daughters!"

"How old?"

"They're 16 and 28."

Aurec rummaged around a bit and seemed to find some suitable items. Not only the obese Dorgonan but Adams, Cascall, and Breen looked at him in surprise.

"For the younger one, I have here a collection of the best music from my homeland. Excellent artists like DJ Garbage Dump, DJ Arkon firecracker, the Gatas Boys, and Scooter with his latest hit, 'Fuck the Cosmocrats,' are all included on this exclusive memo-crystal."

Adams flinched inside when he heard the title, but fortunately the Dorgonan did not understand the old Terran language.

"For the older daughter, I have a make-up kit with the finest blushes and mascara. In our homeland only the greatest beauties may adorn themselves with such high quality products."

The man looked at Aurec for a moment in some confusion, then drew a credit card from his cloak and paid for the goods. In so doing, his name was revealed: Uleman.

With a friendly manner Uleman took his leave from the Galacticians and their "leader," who watched him go with a grin.

"When his daughter hears that howling, he'll probably be back here with an army to arrest us," Aurec casually joked.

Adams was less inclined to be amused. He hoped that the memo-crystal and the make-up kit would please the man's daughters because he had just received a report on Uleman from Lorif, who was still on the Space-jet. The man was a high ranking Senator of the Empire!

9.

The Artist

Next morning the sun shone in its usual fashion on Dorgon. Rain was rare on this planet and often had to be artificially induced by weather

control when catastrophic drought conditions threatened.

Even in the early morning, the heat was almost unbearable. Except for Tyler and Despair, everyone wore light clothing.

The silver knight went to Sanna, who was just then eating some fruits for breakfast. He stood before her and seemed almost threatening to the Terran woman.

"Good morning, Cauthon," she said and went on eating.

"We'll see if this really is a good morning. You should put on something less provocative."

"Oh, do I hear something like jealousy in your words?"

"Concern."

"Really? Concern that I might please someone else?" She crossed her arms in front of her chest and waited with a challenging air for an answer from Despair. He seemed extremely embarrassed and did not know what to say. He was once more the man she had fallen in love with. She took his hand. "Cauthon, everything that you see – and more – you can have...!"

Before the silver knight could respond to Sanna's offer of love, a ghastly yowling distracted their attention. A litter carried by four Purudian slaves was the source of the noise. The litter was brought directly in front of the Galacticians' stand, and then the passenger ordered the slaves to stop. He was escorted by three soldiers.

Overheated, the fat Dorgonan climbed out of the litter and groaned loudly. He wore a white toga, sandals, and a large amount of jewelry on his fingers, wrists, and throat. The Dorgonan's face was adorned with a beard that covered everything except his upper lip. His hair was curly. The man was still young, but appeared decadent and world weary. He called to one of his advisers, who was in another litter.

"Nirvus, get over here!" the Dorgonan squawked loudly but with difficulty, as though he had been working for days without a break.

The other man was old and had gray hair but seemed somewhat more vigorous. "My noble friend, I am already here."

The man waved the older one to him. "Nirvus, what did you think of my Ode to En-

nui?" the young Dorgonan asked. This Ode was what had been the ghastly yowling to Sanna's ears.

Nirvus made a gesture of appraisal. "For a normal artist, it would be good work, but for someone like yourself, someone with talent given by the gods, it's much too modest, noble Nersonos!"

The one called Nersonos gave a start. He clutched at his heart and seemed to gasp for air. "What do you mean? You dare speak to me in such a fashion?"

Nirvus smiled and laid his hand on Nersonos's shoulder. "Well, I could flatter you like most people do. But I am a true and honest critic of your musical art. That is why I urge you to greater effort!"

The words sounded harsh. Despair and Sanna, who had followed the conversation, assumed that the portly Dorgonan would knock the other down, but he only began to laugh. "You are too good to me, Nirvus. You are a true friend. I know very well that you love my music and that a day without my songs is a lost day for you. So I appreciate your criticism very much and will redouble my efforts. That's a promise!" Nersonos began to giggle and stamped on the ground. Then he turned and looked at the Galacticians' stand. His eyes narrowed. "You there! What do you rabble have to offer me?"

Aurec had to pull himself together. Who is this lunatic? the Saggittonian wondered.

But the man himself immediately answered that question. "I, the great Nersonos, nephew of the Emperor, honor you! Consider yourselves honored!" He waited for a moment. Aurec and Cascal looked questioningly at each other.

Adams comprehended more quickly. He bowed several times before the Emperor's nephew. "We feel greatly honored, Your Highness!"

Nersonos looked affectedly towards the sky and reached out his hand, which Adams grasped and kissed.

"Now then, I wish to be merciful and look around to see what you have to offer me," the Dorgonan declared.

A voice suddenly shouted in the background.

"You won't get that far, you piece of filth!" Four men ran towards Nersonos. They were armed. The three imperial soldiers stood in front of Nersonos but were killed by energy blasts. Nersonos screamed. One of the attackers drew a sword and was about to deliver a fatal blow when Despair intervened and cut off the terrorist's arm with a calculated slash. Cascal finished off one of the other men while Despair quickly and efficiently killed the remaining two with his sword. Guards quickly arrived and secured the area.

Nersonos calmed down only slowly. "Who wanted to kill me?" he cried, stunned. He saw the wounded attacker and grabbed a beamer from a soldier who had just arrived. Without hesitating, the Dorgonan pressed the trigger and killed the attacker.

"That was not wise," Despair said.

"Who dares question my action?"

The imposing figure of the knight stepped closer to the astonished Dorgonan. Despair had no fear of Nersonos. He seemed to know exactly what he was doing. "I dare, Your Highness. With that you have killed the only one who could have told you who sent him."

Nersonos waved his arms wildly and beat his cloak back and forth. His face expressed irritation and dislike for what Despair had said. Then a thought apparently came to him and he began to laugh. "You are rather impertinent, but you have also saved my life while my Dorgonian soldiers stood by uselessly and watched as my precious and irreplaceable life was about to be snuffed out..."

Despair bowed slightly. The Galactician quickly realized that he could ensure the favor of this Dorgonan. It was a unique opportunity, since Nersonos, as the Emperor's nephew, had entry to the palace. There was no one better to work on, Despair thought.

The others followed the exchange silently and hoped that Despair would do nothing to turn this advantage into a disadvantage.

"I did what I had to do. You yourself said that your life is of supreme value. It was my altruistic duty to risk my life for yours."

"Well, did you hear that?" Nersonos exclaimed, turning to Nirvus and the others. "This

man knows exactly which personage he is dealing with,” the Dorgonan added and giggled slightly. Then he looked almost reverently at the armor and walked once around Despair. “What awe-inspiring armor you wear. Impressive. Tell me your name, my rescuer!”

“I am Cauthon Despair, son of Ivan and Selina.”

Sanna was surprised that he would mention his parents’ names. He had never spoken of his father and mother before. And she knew them only from what Cell and Rhodan had told her.

Nersonos stood before him and puffed out his chest, which looked unintentionally comical for the plump man. He extended his hand to Despair. “From now on, you, Cauthon Despair, are my friend because you have saved my life. To show my gratitude, I would like to invite you and your retinue to a celebration at the palace tomorrow!”

Despair bowed slightly and expressed his thanks for this generous act. “Your Highness,” he said, “my retinue and I accept this invitation with joy!”

“Good, then let it be so,” Nersonos said in departing. He mounted his litter once more and was carried away by the four slaves.

Nirvus gave Despair and the others another searching look, then climbed into his own litter and followed the Emperor’s nephew.

Aurec and Adams exchanged glances, then went to Despair. Both were elated by the invitation. No one had expected to be able to take the next step so quickly.

“All right, we’ll have to dress up for this – we’ll be meeting the Emperor of Dorgon,” Adams said solemnly, pulled his coat on, and headed back to the hotel.

10.

Emperor Thesasian

The next day, the Galacticians and the Saggittonian were picked up very early by a glider escort.

Centrus Valerus, the handsome officer at General Celusian’s side, led the reception committee. After a moment, his gaze naturally fell

on Sanna Breen, who came through the hotel exit in a breathtaking black ball gown, closely followed by Cauthon Despair.

“A sight more beautiful than Dorgon’s sun.”

Sanna smiled at the Dorgonan’s compliment and thanked him, while Despair stood threateningly before Valerus.

“You can spare yourself your remarks, Centrus, and take us to the Emperor!”

The centurion was infuriated by the silver knight’s curt manner. Normally, he would have arrested him at once, but this stranger had saved Nersonos, the powerful nephew of the Emperor. Valerus could not do anything except ignore the remark.

Only the three crewmembers of the *Jay Jay III* along with Tyler and Japar remained in their quarters. Since Aurec knew Tyler’s “provocative” manner too well, he wanted under no circumstances to provoke the Emperor.

Joak Cascal wore an elegant uniform that probably dated from the time of the Solar Imperium. He greeted Valerus as soldier to soldier.

“Guests of Nersonos! I will now escort you the Imperial Palace, the government building and center of Dorgon!”

Aurec acknowledged it with a nod, indicating his readiness.

Valerus pointed to the waiting gliders. “Gentlemen and lady, if you please. . . !”

Adams and Aurec were the last to go aboard. Adams seemed depressed and had a concerned expression.

“What is it?” asked the Saggittonian.

“It’s just that the uncertainty worries me. What is waiting for us?” he asked lowly, but his words did not escape the ears of the centurion, who could hardly take his eyes away from Sanna Breen.

“Have no fear. What awaits you is a meeting with God!”

*

The Galacticians and Aurec had seldom seen such a display of military might. There were innumerable soldiers marching through Jusilus Square, the largest street in Dom. Hundreds of armored gliders, regular gliders, shuttles, and

jets thundered over the city, cheered by millions of joyous Dorgonans, who enjoyed this spectacle of their empire's power.

To top off the show, gigantic Eagle ships, flying low, roared over the 400-meter wide street.

A loud fanfare was played by a military band, followed by a march that matched the rhythm of the goose stepping soldiers.

The scene reminded Adams of long gone moments in Galaxian history. The Third Reich, Iratio Hondro, the Arkonide Crystal Imperium, and the Laries. The Dorgonans seemed even more imposing.

An all but endless line of festively decorated soldiers marched through Jusilus Square before the palace.

In comparison, the Galacticians' escort was almost unnoticeable. "What's the reason for this parade?" Aurec inquired.

Valerus laughed. "It's the Emperor's birthday, Prince! Every year, such a parade is held in his honor."

Adams and Aurec merely nodded.

"Just look," Valerus said and pointed to the mighty palace that looked more imposing than the Crystal Palace on Akron. Huge columns decorated nearly every floor. At the entrance stood three enormous statues, probably of former Dorgonian Emperors. The palace might have been more than a kilometer long and some 500 meters wide.

The roof of the colossal building was ornamented with a reddish gold precious metal. Aurec could not even guess the extent of the parkland surrounding it. Endless gardens, landing places, barracks, and servants' quarters followed one after the other. Truly an impressive establishment, the Saggittonian thought respectfully.

"There he is – Emperor Thesasian!" Valerus exclaimed joyfully.

And there he was, in person standing on the palace balcony. The man whom the Dorgonans worshipped as a god. He wore a black robe, a red cloak, and on his head a golden wreath. Aurec could not make out his face. Next to him stood what were probably members of his family. Nersonos was most likely one of them.

About a dozen soldiers and advisers also

stood on the balcony.

Entranced, Aurec and Adams watched the parade and noticed a pair of especially decorated gliders that slowly passed by the palace; their occupants saluted the Emperor, who was enjoying the show in his honor.

"General Celusian and Admiral Vesus," Valerus explained, as though he could guess their question. "Celusian is the commander of all ground forces, while Vesus commands the fleets. They are the commanders of all of Dorgon's armed forces with one exception: the Emperor's bodyguard. That stands under the sole control of Digalinus, a dangerous man but a loyal subject of the empire."

Aurec was grateful to the Dorgonan for this insight. They were gradually learning more and more about the alien empire.

The glider headed for the palace and landed on one of the many towers, which had been outfitted as a glider landing pad.

"It's time!" Vesus said.

*

The inner halls of the palace were just as impressive as the exterior. The building comprised hundreds of sections, wings, and rooms.

Valerus brought the presumed Saggittonians – since they could certainly not introduce themselves as Galacticians – through a side entrance, which was so large that it hardly deserved such a diminutive term, and into a reception hall that was full of beautiful statues and wall tapestries.

Slaves and robots flitted through the room and carried glasses, dishes, drink, and food. They were apparently preparing the ceremonial banquet.

Here, too, Aurec saw three statues that resembled those out in front of the palace. Curious, he asked Centrus about these effigies.

"Those are the three greatest Emperors of the realm! First, there is Domulus, the founder of Dorgon. Then Jusilus, who restored the empire, and Decrusian, who made Dorgon what it is today!"

The young centurion's voice rang with immense pride. For him, these Dorgonans seemed to be true gods. "Someday, Thesasian will be

among them,” the Dorgonan added, “for he will accomplish something that no one before him has ever done.”

“What would that be?” Adams asked.

“He will conquer another galaxy and annex it to the empire!”

Aurec and Adams knew which galaxy that was and said nothing. Valerus led them into the next room. It was a throne room. Guards stood in double rows and waited for the Emperor’s arrival.

A fanfare sounded, and the imperial family entered the room, with Emperor Thesasian coming in last.

In a low voice, Valerus pointed out the family members. First, Carigul, Thesasian’s son, came into the room. He wore a uniform and had curly blond hair and a frail body. He was followed by the Emperor’s brother, Klausius. The hunchbacked middle aged man was conspicuous not only for his ugliness, but for his limp, the result of a left leg that was too short. Nersonos was already familiar, as was Nirvus, who may not have belonged to the family but was a good friend and adviser to the monarch. Finally, there was the Emperor himself. He still wore his black robe, which was made of some silk like material and decorated with a golden pattern, and the red cloak. His face looked stern and angular, and his hair was white. The ruler’s eyes radiated coldness. Thesasian looked around for a moment, raised his hand in greeting, then sat down on the throne.

Meanwhile, Vesus, Celusian, and Digalinus had also arrived. Vesus was very thin and had a haggard face, which was probably due to his lifestyle. Although he was an exemplary and disciplined soldier, in his free time he enjoyed the pleasures of women, wine, and smoking to the fullest.

Digalinus, commander of the Prettos Guard, was still very young and hardly seemed to stand out. His smooth and beardless face gave him an attractive appearance. His outward appearance as well as his personality had charmed Nersonos, however, which no one was supposed to know.

The fourth soldier in the group was Valurus, the father of Valerus! He was an admiral

of the fleet and Vesus’s right hand. The four soldiers stepped before the Emperor and lifted their swords in salute. They congratulated him and swore eternal loyalty. Thesasian seemed unmoved. His face showed no reaction. With piercing eyes he was already observing Aurec and the others. He thanked his soldiers with a slight nod and gestured to Valerus to bring the Galacticians to him.

“This is Prince Aurec of Saggittor,” the centurion explained. “He and his retinue are intergalactic traders and have saved Nersonos’s life.”

Thesasian looked deep into Aurec’s eyes, almost as though he was attempting to x-ray him. What is he thinking? the Saggittonian wondered.

Finally, the Emperor spoke. “Which of them saved Nersonos?” were Thesasian’s first words.

Cauthon Despair stepped forward, thereby answering the question without speaking a single word.

For the first time, Thesasian showed something like respect in his manner. “Your name is Cauthon Despair, I am told. Garbed like a knight with the grace of a cat. I thank you for the life of my nephew, who should concentrate more on studying the arts of combat than struggling in vain to pursue the Muse!”

Nersonos looked in horror at his uncle, who apparently was not a fan of his nephew’s music.

Despair bowed slightly. “It was an honor, Your Majesty!”

“Very well. As a sign of my recognition and of my interest in your visit, I shall permit you to stay for a while in my palace. You are hereby invited to partake of today’s banquet.”

Aurec accepted the invitation in the name of the entire party and asked Valerus to inform Tyler and the others. Perhaps Lorif and Dove could find out more about Dorgonian technology from right in the center of it all.

In the meantime, Thesasian and his family had retired to the great banquet hall, which was not outfitted according to modern Terran standards. To Adams it seemed more like old Terra and reminded him of the ancient Romans.

Each diner was assigned a couch, with the food standing next to it on a low table. In the middle of the room was a fountain and several

women danced. Musicians stood in a gallery and gave their best efforts to insipid songs.

Aurec went to the places allotted to him and his retainers. They were located right next to the imperial family. The Saggittonian recognized Senator Uleman on the other side. He hoped that the politicians' daughters were happy with their presents.

The galaxy's finest food and drink were served. The Senators, generals, and great scholars leaped on their food like starving animals and stuffed it down their throats.

Carigul, the Emperor's son, took a beaker full of wine and emptied with one swallow. Aurec's eyes involuntarily went wide when he saw that.

"Now, Aurec," said Thesasian, "tell me the reason for your visit to Dorgon."

"Well, we want to conduct business," Aurec replied with calculated friendliness. "Our race consists mostly of business people who travel through the universe in starships in order to buy and sell. We came across your galaxy by chance and observed it for a while. You seemed quite suited for trade."

Thesasian eyed the Saggittonian distrustfully. A shiver ran down Aurec's back. This Dorgonan made him uneasy.

"So we are, are we?" Thesasian murmured. "Very well then, tomorrow I shall see what you have to offer, Saggittonian...!"

"It will be an honor for me."

Carigul stood up and staggered from one side to the other. He grabbed one of the serving women and began to kiss her violently. She energetically defended herself and shoved the drunken man away. Carigul lost his balance and fell to the floor.

"You stupid slut!" he shouted hatefully. "I'll make you pay for that!" He picked up a whip and struck the defenseless Jerrer again and again. His ocean blue eyes shone with madness. He seemed to be enjoying torturing this woman.

Aurec could not bear to watch any longer. He stood up and was about to run over to Carigul and rescue the slave, but Adams held him by the arm and shook his head. Outraged, Aurec had to watch the spectacle without doing anything.

"Enough!" resounded the Emperor's voice.

Carigul turned in surprise. He grinned furtively. "But Father, she's just a slave...!"

"Not in my house in front of my guests. Behave yourself, my son, or leave the banquet!" Finality echoed in Thesasian's words.

The corner of Carigul's mouth and his cheeks twitched uncontrollably. He dropped the whip and fled from the room. A murmur ran through the guests, though drowned out by the music.

Nersonos shook his head and turned to Despair. "Well, that's my uncle's designated heir. In my view, Carigul is a dangerous madman and so terribly crude."

"I understand!"

Nersonos rolled to the other side of his couch in order to take a few fruits out of a dish. One by one, he picked the grapes from their stem and swallowed them. "What's more, he is culturally unrefined," Thesasian's nephew added. "He can't appreciate my songs. Speaking of which... Uncle? May I perform my new Ode to Ennui?"

Thesasian looked sternly at his nephew. "An ode with a name like that will hardly contribute to the mood of my celebration. Therefore, it is inappropriate!"

"That's not fair!"

"D... don't w... worry a... about it, Nersonos. The true gr... greatness of artists is only ap... apparent after their d... death!" Speaking was Klausius, Thesasian's brother, who resembled the imposing Emperor only slightly. Klausius was ugly and deformed, and one of his legs was too short. Since the Dorgonans believed that their god, Dorgon, gave people the bodies they deserved, they did not change them even when it was surgically possible. Moreover, Klausius was spastic. He frequently had attacks, he drooled, and his speech problem could not be ignored. His mind was clear and bright, however, but no one took him seriously.

Nersonos turned to his second uncle. "Uncle, I find such remarks rather uncalled for in view of yesterday's incident. Please don't bother to answer – it would take too long."

Klausius said nothing.

Despair had his own thoughts. The imperial family was very strange. Only Thesasian seemed rational, and he was especially dangerous. Still, Despair had to stick with Nersonos, hard on the nerves as the man was. "Well, Nersonos," the knight said, "if you don't mind, you can play some of your songs for me after this." He hoped he would not regret it.

"Oh, how nice of you. Of course I'll play something for you tonight. At least there's one person interested in me. I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship."

Nersonos raised his glass in the direction of Despair, who politely nodded. Then Nersonos emptied the glass and wiped some of the liquid that had spilled down his chin. Digalinus gave the chubby Dorgonan a glance. Nersonos responded by enthusiastically blowing him a kiss. Despair did not know what he was supposed to think of that. Actually, he did not want to know, either.

Aurec went over to Uleman, while Adams tried to make connections with other Senators.

The Saggittonian greeted the Administrator of Antyoch in a friendly manner. Uleman stood in greeting and bowed.

"I trust your daughters have no complaints?" Aurec inquired politely.

"How's that?" Uleman said. "Oh yes, the memo-crystal and the make-up kit. Well, it's best if you ask them yourself." He pointed to the two gorgeous women who were just coming out of a refreshment room.

Uleman introduced the younger of them to Aurec as Arimad. She was 16 years old but seemed already very mature. She had long black hair, a sweet face, and a pale complexion. Her sister was named Ulesia. Aurec was entranced by her beauty. Like her sister, she had long black hair. She also had deep blue eyes and a striking golden tan.

Aurec bowed to them and kissed Ulesia's hand. "If I had known how beautiful you are, I never would have dared give your father a make-up kit."

The beautiful Dorgonan smiled in embarrassment. It was a smile that sent Aurec off into raptures. "Thank you, but who are you?"

Aurec looked at her in surprise, then under-

stood. "Oh, my name is Aurec, Prince of the Saggittonians. We are a trading people who travel from galaxy to galaxy to—"

"To sell make-up kits and memo-crystals with hideous music?"

"Something like that."

"Interesting. You can make a living doing that?"

"And a very good one!"

Uleman interrupted the pair's conversation by clearing his throat. Aurec looked around somewhat confused, then Uleman offered him a place next to him.

The two conversed for a while, and Aurec made an effort to find out more about Dorgon's history. Perhaps he could learn something about the reason for the impending invasion. Of course, the Saggittonian could not ask anyone directly about the invasion, since that would give him and the others away. Uleman, who in contrast to most Dorgonans seemed quite friendly and not arrogant, referred him to old Nirvus, who was currently the Dorgonian Empire's official historian. Aurec decided to seek Nirvus out the next day.

Ulesia glanced at Aurec again and again, which he tried to overlook, but it was difficult. He decided to leave the three and went into the garden. There, he received a com message from Tyler, who had arrived in the palace with Lorif and Dove.

"Tyler, look around as much as you can. Maybe you can pick up something about the technology used in the Eagle ships."

Sam Tyler acknowledged and went out with Lorif. Meanwhile, Dove and Wallace stayed on board the *Jay Jay III*, which had been parked on one of the many landing towers.

"What a lovely night...!" Aurec heard somebody say. He whirled around, afraid that the speaker had heard his conversation.

It was Ulesia. She was entrancing in her white, silvery shimmering dress.

Aurec gave her a sly smile and approached her. "Yes, but the nights on Saggitton are much lovelier," he said softly.

Ulesia came close to the Saggittonian. "Tell me about the nights on your world."

Before Aurec could say anything in return,

Uleman appeared. He seemed angry about something. Aurec hoped he was not the reason.

"Ulesia, we're leaving!" the Senator snorted, walking towards his older daughter.

"What happened, Father?" she asked, concerned.

"I had another political argument with our Emperor. He continues to insist on taxing living means of propulsion." Uleman's face had turned red. He had apparently really had a serious dispute with Thesasian.

"Excuse me, but taxation of living means of propulsion?" Aurec asked, unable to imagine what was meant.

Uleman gave him a surprised look. He had apparently not noticed Aurec until now. He pushed some strands of hair from his sweat dampen forehead. "On many enslaved colony planets, there aren't any gliders or motorized vehicles. The peasants are dependent on horses, oxen, and the like. If these are now taxed as well, it would cost the lives of many beings since they would starve. There just wouldn't be enough money there. The state takes more than 90 percent in taxes!"

Aurec was astonished. He had thought that exploitation was bad enough in the Milky Way, but Dorgon was much worse.

"And you are against this?" the Saggittonian asked cautiously. He wanted to see if Uleman might be a potential ally.

"What does it matter to you, Saggittonian? You're hucksters, and your only god is Profit. Trusting you would not be wise...!"

With these words, the Senator took his leave. Ulesia gave Aurec a helpless look, then ran after her father before Aurec could say anything. He understood Uleman's reservations. The Dorgonan did not know the strangers. Still, in contrast to the rest of the Senators and the imperial family, he seemed more socially inclined. It was not only because of Uleman's charming daughter that Aurec wanted to cultivate a friendship.

He drank the rest of his glass and went back into the banquet hall. The mood did not seem depressed at all. Apparently such disputes were part of the daily routine. Thesasian had to rule with an iron hand.

Trabon Saranos had also arrived in the mean-

time. He'd had some minor problems getting past the guards but Adams was able to convince them that he belonged to the Saggittonian party.

"Sir, I've managed to come by some memo-cubes that cover Dorgonian history. That Nirvus was very helpful to me. He seems like a nice guy!"

Aurec was somewhat suspicious and said as much to the industrious Akonan, who was a genius in his specialty.

Adams urged the Saggittonian to earn Thesasian's respect. Aurec called Dove and Wallace over the com and had them bring over all manner of precious goods and luxuries from Saggitto and the Milky Way.

The Emperor showed his satisfaction and thanked them for the gifts. For the first time, there was a hint of a smile on Thesasian's seemingly stony face. "It is late and there will be much work tomorrow," Thesasian said. "I wish you a good night." Then he retired to his chambers.

Aurec and Adams also decided to retire in order to study the memo-cube more closely. Despair, however, stayed near Nersonos, who staggered drunkenly through the room and played on a harp. His voice was hideous and the music dissonant. It was little short of an insult to the ears, but no one dared say anything against the Emperor's nephew.

11.

Connections

After Nirvus's presentation on Dorgonian history, Aurec and Adams needed some time to absorb the new knowledge. They had been given 100,000 years of Dorgonian chronicles. Now they knew what names like Domulus, Jusilus, and Decrusian meant.

What was interesting for the Saggittonian was that there was an entity named Dorgon. Was it behind everything or had it long since departed from the scene?

The Cosmocrats, too, were not unknown to the Dorgonans. Like the Galacticians, the Dorgonans had more or less been able to break with

the Cosmocrats. It surprised Aurec a little that the Cosmocrats had actually given in.

The most important information, however, was the appearance of a certain Cau Thon. No one knew what this name meant. It was just astonishing that, put together, the name spelled Cauthon. Was this a coincidence or was there a connection between the red skinned alien and the silver knight?

Neither Adams nor Aurec could answer this question. But one thing was clear. Someone else stood in turn behind Dorgon. This Cau Thon had spurred Thesasian to attack the Milky Way. He had used the Dorgonans for his own reasons, whatever they were. What did Cau Thon have against the Milky Way? Was he acting on behalf of yet another unknown party?

Adams was desperate. Again and again, just when he thought that he had made some progress, he found that he had only climbed one more of many very high stairs. First there had been *Mordred*, then behind *Mordred* was Dorgon, and behind Dorgon was Cau Thon. But who was that last being?

No one could answer these questions now. The situation was becoming increasingly serious. Not only because Cau Thon had been discovered as a new enemy, but because there was still the threat of an invasion by the powerful Dorgonian empire. Could the Galacticians put up anything to match 300,000 Eagle ships of superior technology? No, they could not. It was still impossible to crack the defense shields. The situation was nothing short of critical.

Aurec and Adams very quickly understood that. They needed reinforcements right away. Their nine ships could not win a war against an entire galaxy.

Adams's hopes lay with Sam. Perhaps the Soman could get help from his people when they understood that Dorgon was a threat to everyone.

Suddenly, Lorif and Tyler burst into the quarters. Tyler had an odd grin on his face, which Aurec could not interpret.

"Any news?" Adams asked indifferently.

"Oh, yes!" the Posbi exclaimed. "Sir, we have acquired something of immense importance. First, Mr. Tyler and I went through the

palace, trying not to be discovered. In so doing, we came upon a hangar and were spotted by guards. We were able to extract ourselves from the situation by explaining that we were looking for replacement parts for a defective compensator. Thanks to the imperial seal, we were treated most helpfully. In fact, I must add that one of the guards...!"

"Lorif!!!" Adams admonished curtly.

"All right, all right! I won't go into that. In any event, we were referred to a young scientist who also helped us. Some databases were stored in the Syntron in his office, and while Tyler diverted the scientist, I downloaded some data on my Pikosyn, which was very easy since the terminal was up and running and the scientist had already logged on."

The Posbi deliberately paused for effect. Adams gradually grew impatient and even Aurec was waiting tensely for the results.

Lorif went to a table and set up a terminal. He made a wireless data connection and a hologram appeared. "I am assuming that you would not be able to do very much with the raw Dorgonian data. Therefore I will explain to you the principles of Dorgonian weaponry.

"I will start with defensive weapons. In principle, the hypertron shield functions like a regular paratron shield. That means it diverts incoming energy or matter into hyperspace.

"However, the hypertron shield has a different sort of energy supply than the paratron. And that functions as follows:

"When a hypertron shield is established, a field forms around the ship in which normal physical laws are effectively negated. The boundaries between normal space and hyperspace blur. Incoming energies do not have to be diverted with the use of an outside energy supply (as with the paratron), but they divert themselves in that they break through the blurred boundaries between the fourth and fifth dimensions under their own power, and there dissipate. Transform bombs do not reach their targets, but are instead diverted into hyperspace. Thus every known weapons system shoots into nothingness, and the shield cannot be overloaded, as is the case with every other normal defensive field. For maintaining the shield, only

a constant energy supply is necessary, and the amount is not affected by bombardment. Moreover, the ship itself can no longer be tracked except as an irregularity in the space-time continuum. That, by the way, is conspicuous enough, since these irregularities are spherical in shape. Otherwise, the hypertron shield has all the properties of a paratron: the ship is maneuverable, et cetera, et cetera. . .

"With this shield, the Eagle ships are virtually invulnerable!"

No one dared interrupt Lorif's presentation until Cascal did: "And so just what have found out?" he asked in incomprehension. He had never had much use for "techno-babble."

"Just this, sir! We know that the defensive shield is invulnerable to conventional weapons, and I may add that so far we also have no countermeasures. . ."

Cascal shook his head.

"Please continue, Lorif," Aurec told the Posbi, who was only to glad to comply.

"Well, one offensive weapon is the Hypertron Impulsator, whose acquaintance Rhodan made over Dermos."

"The Hypertron Impulsator is clearly the Dorgonans' most powerful weapon. With a special emission device, an impulse of Hypertron fields is discharged that spreads out in wave form in the desired direction. The emitted Hypertron fields compensate for every known kind of defensive screen in that they divert their energies into hyperspace until the defense shields are overloaded. Normally, that lasts a maximum of ten seconds, depending on the size of the ship. At the same time, the structure of the entire enemy ship is first gradually destabilized and then dispersed as well. This takes a maximum of five seconds, according to the ship's size. In connection, there is a resulting visual effect similar to the shockwave of an atomic bomb explosion: the ship appears to be 'blown away' by a gigantic storm.

"The drawback of this powerful weapon? Its energy requirement! Such an enormous amount of energy is necessary for a single shot that even the largest Dorgonian ships can manage a firing rate of only about one shot every 15 minutes.

"The Dorgonans' second most powerful

weapon is the Transtronator. It can be thought of as a focused hypertron field, or a hypertronic energy beam. The target shot at is dematerialized only in the spot struck and beamed into hyperspace. Paratron shields offer limited protection against this weapon. A paratron is overloaded only by intensive bombardment, not by the first hit. If the defense shield is neutralized, then the effect on the ship is similar to that of a gravitation bomb, only in concentrated form. The matter in the struck area is dematerialized and completely beamed into hyperspace. Moreover, the transtronating of a ship is unbelievably effective; it takes less than a second, for example, to transtronate a hole through a NOVA-class starship. The Transtronator can be fanned out as well as concentrated. With normal focusing, the ensuing hole has a diameter of about 22 meters. At the strongest focus it's no more than 30 centimeters."

"The Transtronator is used in space battles almost as a surgical tool, in contrast to our Transform cannon, which does have a high degree of effectiveness but also eliminates everything within range.

"The Dorgonans use a hyperphase drive, similar to that of the *Sol*. If anyone is not familiar with this technology, I will proceed to explain it."

Before Cascal could raise any objections, Lorif rattled on. "A hyperphase drive is based on the principle of a transition drive. In 1,230 hertz phase, so-called 'soft' transitions occur. That means the starship is pulled out of normal space. However, it is not dematerialized as in a classical transition, but instead is surrounded by a Grigoroff Bubble, the so-called Hyperphase Vacuole, at 1,230 times a second. There is also no de- and rematerialization pain. For those who don't know or have forgotten, a Grigoroff Bubble in effect represents a small mini-universe that is made for a starship that is almost in hyperspace. It is also used in meta-grav drives.

"Because a starship that finds itself in hyperphase mode never completely returns to normal space in hyperphase, it cannot be tracked or shot at with conventional systems."

"For entrance into hyperphase mode, a min-

imum velocity of half-light speed is required.”

After Lorif’s lecture, Aurec and Adams needed some time to rest. That had been too much information to absorb at one time.

“Lorif, you have the assignment of developing a counter weapon no matter what it takes!” Aurec ordered. “Get to work!” He announced

another conference for the next day.

He did not quite know where to go from here. As things stood now, they did not have any hope of preventing the Dorgonans from invading. However, Aurec could not and did not want to give up.

T H E E N D

In episode 21, we have learned a great deal about Dorgon itself. For the first time, Aurec has found out something about a certain Cau Thon, who apparently spurred Thesasian on in planning an invasion of the Milky Way.

This plotline will be continued in the next episode

RESISTANCE IN THE EMPIRE

written by both Nils Hirseland and Ralf König.

D O R G O N COMMENTARY

In the Lions’ Den.

Applause for the Galacticians after some breathtaking moments!

Although the situation is anything but favorable, they have now taken the most daring step they could – they have gone to Dorgon, in the midst of the lions’ den! Whether this will prove to be a wise move is another question... At the beginning, the little expedition seemed to have been blessed by luck, starting with the successful bribery of the Dorgonian customs agent, continuing with the perfectly staged appearance as Saggittonian traders, and on to Cauthon Despair’s heroic act in the market place. This was what apparently opened the doors at last for the Galacticians to Dorgon’s innermost affairs. The weapons technology is now known, connections to a “humane” Dorgonan

and a possible ally have been made, and Cauthon Despair has an in with one of the Emperor’s sons. Moreover, they have come significantly closer to the mysterious red skinned Cau Thon. But there is still... Senator Priamus! And now that the Emperor has been warned and the Galacticians’ disguise is useless, is everything lost? Not at all! Most of us will remember the Traversan Cycle and the end of Pyrius Bit... He was simply taken before the Emperor, accused of treason, and condemned to death. The question is now whether this technique could be used on Priamus... a close confidante of the Emperor! Perhaps Uleman is a possible solution...?

Björn P. Habben