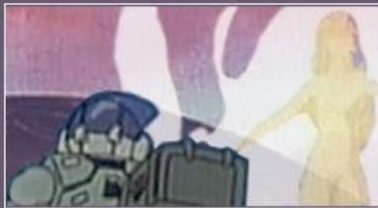


A Hero Must Decide

Robert Farino, hero of the Perytonian rescue mission must decide between his career and his love. As the Jupiter Division prepares to depart for earth, Robert's own task force sets off to seek the escaped Robotech Masters and their Factory Satellite. Gia, the captured Invid Princess remains imprisoned and experimented on by the REF. Robert's decision will take him home to earth, and will bring him face to face with the Invid Regess. In order to save Gia, he will have to choose...

Desertion!



ROBOTECH ROBOTECH ROBOTECH

ROBOTECH
DESERTION
BRIAN MCAFEE

DESERTION

The thrilling continuation of
"The Lesser of Two Evils"

Brian McAfee



ROBOTECH

DESERTION

By Brian McAfee

**The following is based on Robotech created and owned by
Harmony Gold USA Inc.**

www.geocities.com/bmcafee_98/Novel.html

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Special acknowledgement also goes to the Robotech Technical Files by [Pieter Thomassen](#) and [Peter Walker](#).

History may judge me a traitor. My friends will think I have betrayed them, deserted them. That's what I thought as I prepared to do what I felt had to be done. But the truth of it all is that the opinions of others have no bearing on what is right and what is wrong.

The Collected Journals of Commander Robert Farino

Chapter 1

High above Tirol, two groups of REF starships prepared for departure. The larger group was composed of hundreds of warships. Garfish troop transport ships clustered near the much larger Ikazuchi command carriers in preparation for the space fold operation that would take them to Earth. They would fight to free their home world from the clutches of the Invid. The smaller group, consisting of one massive Izumo class battleship, five Ikazuchi class ships and nine Garfish, was preparing to depart on a mission to hunt down the Robotech Factory Satellite which had escaped the battle above Peryton. If the Robotech Masters were able to use the Factory to build a new fleet of starships, they could retake this part of the galaxy and rebuild their empire.

The Izumo class battleship, UES Repulse, looking like a 1400 hundred meter long metallic brick floating in the blackness

of space with three enormous outriggers, one on each side and one beneath, was led by Commander Robert Farino.

Robert sat at his desk in his ready room just off the bridge of the *Repulse*. As he typed on his computer, halfheartedly working on several reports that were coming due, the mountain ranges, cloud covered oceans and stark brown deserts of Tirol scrolled slowly past the large picture window behind him as the ship orbited the planet that had become his home. A knock came at the door and he called for whomever it was to enter. The door slid open and in came Drakinn with a piece of paper in his hand.

"What can I do for you, my friend?" asked Robert.

"Take a look at this," Drakinn said handing the paper to Robert. "I received orders. I leave with the Jupiter Division tomorrow."

"The *Liberator*," commented Robert reading the paper. "She's a fine ship, and General Reinhart is a fine commander."

"I know, but I wanted to stay here on the *Repulse*. Hunt down the Masters and pay them back for all they have done," Drakinn explained.

"Wow, you fold out tomorrow at 1900 hours. That's not much time to get ready. Need any help?" asked Robert.

"No, I'm all packed. I was just hoping there might be something you could do to keep me here," Drakinn answered.

"Well, I may be in charge of a few ships, but I'm still just a commander. If General Reinhart wants you, he's gonna get you. Know what I mean?" said Robert, handing the paper back to Drakinn.

"Yeah, that is what I figured," said Drakinn looking out the giant window as the *Repulse* orbited around into the night side of the planet. The lights of the capital city were amazing when

viewed from this height.

"Hey, looks like you are to take command of the 279th SFS. Does that stand for what I think it does?" asked Robert.

"Shadow Fighter Squadron, that's right," Drakinn answered, pulling his attention back inside the ship.

"I know you want to stay here and see this thing through, but this looks like a pretty sweet assignment," Robert told him, smiling. "You still want me to try to get you out of this?"

"I guess not. Probably wouldn't work anyway. I'll just have to make the most of it. None of the rest of you guys got a shadow fighter squadron to command," said Drakinn starting to cheer up. "I remember how jealous I was back on Peryton. You and Wildcard with your shadow fighters and me stuck with a lousy cyclone. But now I have a whole squadron of them."

"There you go. Always look on the bright side," said Robert standing and offering his hand.

Drakinn shook hands with Robert and the two said their farewells. Drakinn had to get to the main hangar bay to catch a shuttle soon and he still wanted to stop in and say goodbye to the rest of the team.

Robert was starting to get hungry so he headed down to the chow hall. His mind had not been on the mission lately. He sat through briefings and reports, but he found it difficult to focus.

He sat at a table in the chow hall to eat with his second in command, Lt. Commander Nape.

Nape asked, "So how do you plan to find the Masters?"

Robert, daydreaming again, missed Nape's question and Nape had to ask again.

"I don't really know where to start, what do you think?"

Robert asked.

“Maybe we could find some clues back on Peryton,” Nape suggested.

“Sounds good. Let’s do that,” Robert agreed, unable to come up with anything better.

Robert’s thoughts these last few days were of Gia, the Invid princess whom he had captured on Peryton and subsequently fallen in love with. He dwelt upon the stories she had told him of the interrogations, and the experiments the REF and Dr. Lang had put her through. He knew that his constant effort was the only reason her treatment had not been any worse, and he shuddered to think what would happen to her after he was gone.

He found that he couldn’t focus on the mission, and Nape had mentioned it on more than one occasion. Robert started to feel that he might be more of a liability to this mission than an asset, unless he could get Gia out of his mind and focus. Thousands of lives were in his hands, and this mission if it failed could allow the Robotech Masters to start rebuilding their empire. They may even threaten earth one day.

Robert knew that he had to do something soon. He looked at Nape, and saw not only a friend, but a capable commander. Nape had carried Robert through the last few weeks.

Robert decided it was time to finally take action. He stood up from the table and told Nape he was going down to visit Gia.

“You’ve been spending a lot of time with her lately,” Nape said. “You’ve got to focus. This mission is too important.”

“I know,” Robert replied, “but I’ve got to do this. Once it’s done, this mission will be back in capable hands. I promise.”

“Do what you have to do. I’ll make sure all the departure preparations are finished on time,” said Nape.

“I know you will. I can always depend on you, my friend,”

Robert said with a smile, and he turned and headed out of the chow hall.

As Nape walked toward the bridge, he thought *What the hell is he thinking. This really has gotten out of hand. We are preparing for a fold operation that could take us into combat, and he's down there with that Invid again. I think he's probably spent more time with her in the last week than he has on his own ship. What does he expect me to do? We can't leave without him!*

Of course, Nape would never say this aloud. He wouldn't undermine the authority of his commander.

When he arrived on the bridge, he was told that they would be prepared to fold in just under two hours.

"Sir, shall I recall the commander?" asked a communications engineer from her station.

"No, corporal Jennings. He's the boss. Whatever he wants is what he gets," Nape answered. "Just hold the countdown 'till he gets back. I have a feeling we're going to be departing a bit late."

Down on Tirol, Robert talked the guard into letting Gia out for a walk, closely supervised of course. He had been able to do this a few times before, and although their walks were closely supervised, Gia really appreciated the time out of her cell. Robert's fame from the recent Perytonian mission helped to get him favors like this. Today it was particularly easy to talk the guard into letting her out since Robert was leaving today and this would be the last time he would see her for who knew how long.

Robert didn't say much as they walked. He seemed so

distant. He held Gia's hand as she was returned to her cell in the detention area of REF headquarters. As the guard locked her cell door, Gia knew something was wrong. Robert didn't even look at her. He seemed so deep in thought. He looked around the room, his eyes never resting long on any one thing. She hesitated to disturb him, but this was the last time they would be together. After he left here he would be departing with his task force to hunt down the Robotech Masters.

"Robert, what's wrong?" Gia asked.

"Oh, I'm just thinking about something," Robert replied.

"Well, I guess this is our final goodbye. I don't suppose we will see each other again after this. At least not for a long time," Gia said sadly.

Robert continued to look at things other than Gia. He looked around the cell block, at what she couldn't be sure. He looked the guard over more than once. Then it came to her in a flash. She watched his gaze dart from the security cameras, to the guards weapons and she knew what he was thinking. She called him close and gave him a hug through the bars of her cell door.

"Gia, I think I will be coming to visit you one more time before I depart," Robert said.

"Don't do it," she whispered.

He kissed her and turned to the guard.

"I'm ready," Robert said and the guard escorted him out of the detention area.

Robert walked back to the landing pad where his shuttle was waiting. The columns and steps of the Tiresian buildings were strikingly beautiful in the light of the setting sun which cast long shadows in the evening light. The city was looking

better than it had in a hundred years. The REF had cleaned the place up during their time here and the population had a pride in their city that they had never felt before. They weren't just clones anymore, they had lives again. They were people.

Robert noticed none of it. His mind was finally focused for the first time in weeks. He concentrated on planning what he was going to do in the next two hours. He checked his watch again and again as he walked, calculating in his mind just how long each step of his plan would take. His timing had to be perfect.

Once onboard the shuttle, he began to write. He pulled out a pin from his flight suit pocket and got some paper from the flight crew. When he finished, he sat back in his chair. He was calm, collected, and resolved to what he was about to do.

The tower cleared Robert's shuttle for departure. As the Horizon-t climbed into the evening sky, the engines glowed brightly in the fading light of the sunset. Eventually, the blackness of space filled Robert's view port.

With all his preparations made, he was no longer nervous, or anxious or distracted. He sat back and enjoyed the brief calm before the storm.

The Horizon-t set down on the hangar deck of the Repulse. Robert exited the shuttle and went straight over to the maintenance officer.

"Lieutenant, I want you to prepare a shadow fighter for immediate launch. As for munitions, here's what I want it loaded with," Robert said, and handed the lieutenant a list.

"Aye sir, we'll get right on it," the lieutenant answered.

"Make it fast, and keep it quiet."

"I'll put my best man on it, sir," he said and then shouted, "Fredricks, get 852 ready for launch ASAP, and load it like this."

"Yes sir!" Fredricks said as he ran over and took the list then proceeded to prep the fighter for launch.

Robert went to the locker room and opened locker number one. Locker number one was a bit larger than the rest, and was reserved for the ship's captain. He donned a suit of CVR-3 armor. First he slipped his feet into the bulky metallic boots and clasped the thigh guards in place. He slowly and deliberately locked the breastplate around his chest. Then he latched the forearm guards on and reached for his helmet.

This is it. If I do this there is no turning back, he thought to himself. Then he pulled the helmet on. The padding was a tight fit, but comfortable. He took a long breath as if preparing to dive into the deep end of a pool and closed the visor with a sharp slap.

When he emerged from the locker room, the shadow alpha was ready for launch. As he climbed into the cockpit, he handed another note to the lieutenant and instructed him to give it to Nape. He closed the canopy and fired up the propulsion system. The engines screamed to life and twin jets of blue flame pushed the shadow fighter out into the vacuum of space.

As Robert's fighter descended toward the planet, he could see the capitol city was covered by clouds. A storm had moved in and lightning flashed sporadically around him as he descended. He headed straight for REF headquarters. Air traffic control did not call him, nor did the REF's defenses activate. They did not detect his approach. The shadow fighter's stealth systems were working perfectly. The REF never envisioned that they would have to combat their own creation.

Gia paced nervously back and forth in her small cell, wondering what Robert would do. Lightning flickered through the window of her cell and she heard an ominous crash of thunder. She had no idea of the scale of his plan.

Then the ground shook and she heard something large and heavy come to rest outside the building. She looked out the small barred window of her cell and in the darkness she made out the shape of a large black mecha in battloid mode running toward her cell.

The mecha's external speaker blared, "Gia, get away from the wall!" Gia complied and seconds later, the alpha's metallic hand broke through the concrete wall of her cell. Robert transformed his mecha into guardian mode and, lowering the nose to the ground, he opened the canopy. He could hear the alarm sound as Gia ran to him. She climbed into the cockpit with him and sat in his lap as the canopy closed just in time to save them from a hail of bullets. The guards were firing their side arms at the mecha, but with little effect.

Robert fired a volley of smoke missiles at the detention building. They did no damage, but provided excellent cover for him to make his escape. "Hold on!" he shouted to Gia as they lifted off and transformed to fighter mode, heading straight up into the cloudy night sky. Another bolt of lightning lit up the sky for a brief instant and then they were gone.

"Robert! You should not have done this! What do you hope to accomplish? Where will we..."

"Not now! We've got company!" Robert cut Gia off when his radar indicated that three fighters were lifting off to pursue him.

So long as he stayed in the clouds, he was safe. The shadow fighter couldn't be detected on radar, and the clouds

prevented him being seen visually. However, he couldn't stay long. The clock was ticking and he had to get on with the next step in his plan. He flew straight up and made a run for the blackness of space, but the pursuit fighters were waiting above the cloud deck and saw his escape.

As soon as they were well out of the atmosphere, Robert spun his fighter 180 degrees about and flew straight at the three that were rising to meet him.

"This is foolish! We're going to die!" Gia yelled.

"No we're not... We're going home," Robert said calmly. So calmly that Gia was immediately put at ease.

As soon as they were in range, Robert fired a huge volley of missiles. In fact, he fired every missile he had left.

The alphas transformed into guardian mode and fired at the swarm of missiles as they approached in the hope that if they could explode one missile, the rest might detonate.

Several missiles were hit, but to the surprise of the pilots of the pursuit fighters, they did not explode. Seconds later, the missiles impacted the three alphas. All three fully expected to be dead, but to their relief, they were fine. No damage, no injuries.

One of the wingmen called the lead fighter. "Sir, what the hell just happened? I can't see out of my canopy. All my sensors are offline as well."

"That's because those were fire retardant missiles. We're covered in foam. This guy's a genius. He knew he couldn't beat us, so he's blinded us while he gets away," the lead pilot said with grudging admiration.

The three pursuit fighters, blinded by the foam, floated in space. All they could do was wait for a ship to come pick them up.

Robert turned and headed right toward the Jupiter Division fleet. With any luck they would not detect his approach.

Gia was still thinking about what Robert had said earlier. She asked, "What did you mean about us going home. How can we be going home? I don't understand."

"Your home, my home. Same thing, right?" Robert asked.

Gia was puzzled. "You mean the Earth. We're going to Earth? How?"

"Yeah, I saw this in a movie a long time ago. I think it might work. Watch this," Robert said with a grin.

The shadow fighter approached one of the Ikazuchi command carriers in the Jupiter Division fleet. Careful to avoid any external view ports so that nobody on board would see them, he set the fighter down on the skin of the ship, looked at his watch and said, "1900 hours. Time to go."

Suddenly, space went from darkness to brilliant light as the Jupiter Division fleet began their fold operation. Robert and Gia were on their way to Earth.

Nape listened in shock as reports of Gia's jailbreak came over the communications channels. He instantly knew who was behind it. He fell back into the captain's chair and pounded the arm rests.

Under his breath, Nape said, "Dammit Robert. You've thrown your career and probably your whole life away. And what am I supposed to do?"

As if to answer his question, he was handed the note that Robert instructed the maintenance officer to give Nape. He read it to himself.

Nape,

By the time you read this, it will all be done. You and I both know I am in no condition to lead this mission. The slightest mistake could have drastic consequences. I have thought it through and I feel that I must do this. If all works out, I will be fine, and so will she. I love her, and I can't leave her here to be a guinea pig for those REF bastards. I'm taking her home.

You're in command now. I have great faith in you. I'm sure you will accomplish the mission. You must forget about me and focus on the job you have before you. Give the Masters hell, my friend. And who knows, maybe I will see you again some day.

Robert

Nape crumpled the note into a ball and threw it across the bridge, where it struck the view screen and fell to the floor. In a disappointed tone, he commanded, "Resume countdown. Prepare for fold operation."

To this end the following acts are and shall remain prohibited at any time and in any place whatsoever with respect to the above-mentioned persons:

- (a) Violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture;*
- (b) Taking of hostages;*
- (c) Outrages upon personal dignity, in particular, humiliating and degrading treatment;*
- (d) The passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court affording all the judicial guarantees which are recognized as indispensable by civilized peoples*

Geneva Conventions relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War

Chapter 2

General Gunther Reinhardt had just finished his final pre departure mission briefing and was walking back to the bridge along with his aide, lieutenant Yamaguchi. The two walked leisurely down the brightly lit corridor, talking over several aspects of ship deployment and logistics. Drakinn approached the general and saluted smartly, saying "Sir, Lieutenant Drakinn reports as ordered."

General Reinhardt looked him over quickly, returned the salute, and said, "At ease lieutenant. Drakinn is it? You must be the lucky guy that got command of the new experimental

shadow fighter squadron. First day on the job?"

"Yes sir, just arrived. I have not even seen the squadron yet," Drakinn answered.

"Well, we are certainly glad to have you. This new squadron will be a huge force multiplier," said the general. "It will allow us to put maximum firepower on target while risking relatively few lives. Not to mention the fact that it's just what the doctor ordered considering our shortage of pilots."

"I've seen shadow fighters in use. As you may know, we had a couple of them on my last mission," said Drakinn, not quite sure what to make of the general's comments. "They definitely give us a huge advantage, but I'm not sure they reduce the risk to pilots all *that* much."

Reinhardt grinned. "You haven't seen shadow fighters like these before. These are prototypes," he said. "Yamaguchi, why don't you take him to meet his new squadron."

"Yes sir," said the lieutenant.

Drakinn offered a parting salute. Reinhardt again returned the salute and said, "Welcome aboard."

"Thank you, sir," said Drakinn. Then he turned and followed Yamaguchi down the hallway.

They eventually arrived at one of the Liberator's many mecha hangars. In it were what appeared to be several shadow alphas. They were quite similar to the one Robert had piloted on Peryton, but with some differences. Painted mat black with gray accents, they had their squadron emblem on their tail. In gray on black the emblem was a globe with a lightning bolt through it, and a dark red arrow swinging around the globe and pointing directly at a small but unmistakable silhouette of reflex point. These fighters were a little bulkier and looked tougher somehow than a standard shadow fighter. The thing that stood out most

was that they had no canopy. Where the cockpit was supposed to be was what looked like a sensor array. There was one regular shadow alpha in the hangar bay. It was painted like the others, but printed on the fuselage just under the canopy was "Lieutenant Chris Drakinn."

Drakinn smiled, but he knew something wasn't quite right. "Nice mecha, but I thought you were going to take me to meet my squadron," he asked Yamaguchi.

"I hate to have to be the one to break this to you, but this is your squadron," said the lieutenant. "These are shadow drones. They have a fully integrated AI. They can respond to threats, take action against the enemy, and even display a certain degree of individuality and initiative. They have just completed trials and are ready..."

"Whoa, hold on a second!" said Drakinn, cutting Yamaguchi off. "You mean my squadron is a bunch of robots?"

"Well, I wouldn't have put it like that, but essentially, yes," said Yamaguchi, cringing and recoiling as if Drakinn might take a swing at him.

"How the hell am I the 'commander' of a squadron of drones?" asked Drakinn, visibly angry. He felt betrayed, lied to. He wondered if it was too late to jump in that shadow alpha and fly back to the *Repulse*.

"It's true, you will command them," said Yamaguchi trying to calm Drakinn. "Your fighter has a command and control unit built in. The shadow drones will act like your wingmen, and you can direct them to take whatever combat actions you would like. They are fully transformable and are fully mission capable in space, atmosphere, or ground. They are fully programmed for aerial and ground combat. Air to air dog fighting, air to ground attack, squad and infantry tactics. You designate the targets or

objectives and they can take it out or cover you while you take the lead."

"Go on," said Drakinn, starting to take an interest.

"We have a dedicated simulator, specially modified to perfectly simulate your fighter and its integrated command and control systems. The same AI system that controls the drones is loaded into the simulator system. The simulated drones will respond exactly like the real things, so you can get used to your team before you are sent out on a mission."

"All right," said Drakinn. He was calmer, but still a bit perturbed. "I'll give it a try, but never refer to these things as 'my team' again. Understood?"

"Got it," said Yamaguchi.

In space above Peryton, the darkness was broken by six blinding flashes as the Repulse and the rest of the task force defolded from hyperspace. On the Repulse's bridge, Nape told corporal Jennings to open a channel to the Perytonian government.

"On screen." Said Jennings as the image of a horned Perytonian appeared on the view screen.

"I am minister Berak, how may I be of assistance?" asked the Perytonian.

Nape introduced himself, "I am Lieutenant Commander Nape of the UES Repulse. We are here to investigate the incident with the Factory Satellite. If possible we want to determine where the factory might have folded to."

"As I am sure you are well aware, there is no reliable means to determine the factory's destination," Berak explained. "Even if you could, they may have executed a second fold. I'm afraid I don't see what help we can be."

"We just need to examine the site of the mine where the Masters were extracting their building materials. That won't be a problem, will it?" asked Nape.

"No, please proceed," said Berak. "Just let us know if we can be of any further assistance."

"Thanks. I'll do that. Repulse out." Nape concluded the transmission and then punched a button on the intercom panel on the right arm of his command chair.

"Reara, wanna go for a ride?" Nape asked.

"Sure, how should I pack?" asked Reara in reply.

"Pack light. Cyclones, and bring a couple friends with you. See you on the hangar deck in thirty minutes."

"We're on our way."

Nape could hear the smile in Reara's voice. Then he called up Jason on his intercom and asked, "Jason, going down to the planet. Don't expect any trouble, but it doesn't hurt to be prepared. How 'bout some CAP?"

"Ok, boss. I'll get ready and bring my number one guy with me. Is that enough?" Jason asked.

"Great, see you in thirty."

Nape thought that Wildcard and Stram might feel left out, so he called them up and told them to suit up in cyclones and join the party. He also asked them to bring a partner. He didn't need fighters in the air, but he could use a few more feet on the ground for what he had planned.

They all boarded a Horizon-t and descended toward Peryton. Nape briefed them all on the plan en route.

In the troop compartment of the Horizon-t shuttle, there were recessed spaces along either side of the wall. Each of these recessed spaces was designed to secure one cyclone clad trooper for the drop to the planet surface. Each member of the team was

strapped in as the atmosphere began to buffet the ship as it entered the upper atmosphere. Once the shaking had stopped, Nape began to fill his companions in on the plan.

"Once we are on the ground, we need to spread out and start searching the area. The idea is to find any clones that might have been left behind during the Masters' hasty retreat. I know it's a long shot, but maybe we can get some information from anyone we find. He would have to be pretty high in the chain of command to know anything of the Masters' plans, but I can't think of any other way to proceed. I'm open to suggestions."

The team remained silent, so Nape proceeded. "Fan out, but stay in groups of two or more. If you find anything interesting, notify me immediately. Any questions?"

Reara asked, "If we find one of those clones and he is armed, what actions should we take?"

"There's a lot riding on this, so do not use deadly force unless you absolutely have to," Nape explained.

Reara pressed the issue. "What if there are a lot of them. Then can we blast a few?"

Nape shook his head and said, "Sure, Reara. As long as you can tell which one knows where the factory is."

"Ah, right. Got it," Reara replied confidently.

Nape didn't know how to take the grin on Reara's face. Her bright orange hair perfectly matched her fiery personality. He wondered if she took his sarcastic remark as permission to shoot a few, or if she was just making a joke. It could be so hard to read her sometimes.

The shuttle set down gently at the site of the mine and lowered the troop ramp. The team filed out. Wildcard and Stram set off to start searching. Nape called to Reara, saying,

"Reara, you're with me."

"What about Jack?" she protested, motioning to the guy she had brought with her.

"I said teams of two *or more*. He can come with us," Nape answered. "Hey Jack. Nice to meet you. You must be quite the soldier for Reara to have picked you out of her whole squadron."

"Nice to meet you too, sir," Jack said. "I can hold my own, I guess. The lieutenant has faith in me. I just hope I don't let her down. She sets high standards."

With a chuckle, Nape said, "Yeah, that's one way to put it."

The team fanned out and began the search. Stram headed toward the entrance to the mine. It was rough hewn out of the sheer rock face of the mountain. The masters weren't wasting any time when they excavated it. As a matter of fact, it looked like it had been blasted out of the rock with energy weapons and explosives rather than mining robots. They must have been in one heck of a hurry to get their materials and get out of orbit.

Wildcard headed toward the only building, near the landing pad. It was a rectangular structure seemingly constructed out of concrete. Inside, there was nothing of interest. It seemed to have been completely stripped when the masters left. A thorough search came up with little more than some smashed computer and communications equipment that had probably been purposefully destroyed by the masters during their evacuation in order to keep it from falling into enemy hands. Wildcard called some communications technicians over from the Horizon-t to load up the equipment for analysis back on the Repulse, but he really didn't think they would get anything out of it.

Nape and Reara walked the tree line. Much of Peryton was a wasteland, except for the great forest that dominated the center

of the main continent, but areas high on mountains such as this one still had a lot of vegetation. These trees were tall, with thick trunks which spoke of their extreme age. The underbrush was thick as well, and they couldn't see very far back into the woods.

After about half an hour of fruitless searching, a small ship approached from the northeast. It set down next to the Horizon-t and Chronma, the Perytonian who had helped the team during their previous adventure on this world, climbed out.

"Good to see you Chronma. How did you know we were here?" asked Nape visibly pleased to see his old acquaintance.

"I work in the ministry of defense now. Not much happens here that I don't know about. Especially a bunch of REF ships in orbit," Chronma explained. "You weren't going to come all the way to Peryton and not say hello to me were you?"

"As a matter of fact, I was just thinking of calling you," Nape replied.

"Ah, Rera. Always a pleasure," Chronma said.

"Likewise," Rera answered.

As they walked, Nape pressed Chronma for information about the Masters.

"Well, Chronma, have your people performed any investigations of this site?" asked Nape.

"As a matter of fact, yes. Several searches have been done. The last one was just yesterday. I'm afraid we didn't find anything significant," Chronma explained.

"Is that so?" Nape asked. "Wildcard, Stram, you find anything?"

"Nope, nothing but some old bashed up equipment, we're loading it aboard the shuttle now," Wildcard replied.

"There's nothing here. The place must have been totally stripped by the Masters before they departed," Stram answered.

"How about footprints?" Nape asked.

"Don't you think we would have mentioned that if we had found any, Nape?" replied Wildcard.

"Right, I haven't seen any either," said Nape. "Strange, don't you think, Chronma? If you and your team were here yesterday, where are your footprints?"

"That's true. Why didn't I notice that? I stood right there yesterday morning," Chronma said, pointing to the ground next to the landing pad.

"Expand the search. Check the woods. Somebody is still here," Nape ordered.

Wildcard called to his partner, "Hey Smith, follow me." They walked a hundred meters into the forest and then turned to walk a circular path around the facility. Soon, they noticed some broken tree branches and went to investigate.

"That looks suspicious. Look, there are more," Smith said. "I'd say this could have been caused by mecha."

"I think you're right. But a few broken branches doesn't prove anything," Wildcard replied.

The two were so focused on the branches that they forgot to watch where they stepped. Wildcard fell into a deep depression in the forest floor. Unleashing a barrage of four letter words, he stood up and then realized that he was standing in a mecha sized footprint. "This is just great! We gotta get outa here now! Lets go!"

"What is it, what did you find?" asked Nape.

"Mecha footprint! There are mecha in the woods!" yelled Wildcard as he and his partner ran back to the clearing.

A green bioroid stood motionless as the two ran by. Its paint blended into the lush vegetation. Wildcard turned to check on his partner just in time to see the bioroid's metallic foot come

crashing down on Smith, driving him into the forest floor like a nail into wood.

"No!" yelled Wildcard as he unleashed a volley of mini missiles from his cyclone's shoulder mounted launchers. The blast knocked the bioroid off its feet, but it quickly rolled to one side and fired its weapon drum at Wildcard.

Wildcard was hit right in the chest and flew backward right into the trunk of a tree, splintering it. The tree fell, obscuring Wildcard's view of the Bioroid. He quickly stood back up and ran back toward his fallen partner. As he jumped over the trunk of the fallen tree, he had a perfect view down the barrel of the Bioroid's weapon. Then there was a blinding flash as the Bioroid burst into a million small pieces.

"Wh..What the hell just happened?" Wildcard asked.

"You can thank me later," Jason replied. "I think a bottle of scotch should cover it."

Wildcard looked up to see the guardian mode alpha hovering above the treetops. It was the most beautiful sight he had ever seen.

Smith! He thought, and rushed over to his comrade. There was nothing he could do, Smith's helmet had taken the full force of the Bioroid's stomp and had given way under the force of the blow. Smith was dead. Nape and the rest of the team arrived at the scene to find Wildcard kneeling over the remains of his partner.

"Sorry Wildcard. I know it's tough," said Nape.

Wildcard pulled off his helmet and threw it against the nearest tree. "How could this happen! Chronma, are you telling me you somehow missed this? There are freakin' bioroids in the woods, man! You missed this?"

"I am afraid so. When we found no sign of activity at the

mine, we didn't search the woods. We thought that if anyone was left here, they would certainly try to salvage something from the mine. When we saw no sign of anyone in the mine area, we assumed nobody remained," explained Chronma.

"Guys, I got movement to the north." James informed the rest of the team. "Moving away, quickly. I think they are trying to escape."

"How many?" asked Nape.

"Two," replied Jason.

"Remember, we need them alive!" cautioned Nape.

"We're on it," said Jason as he and his wingman transformed their mecha into fighter mode and raced off to intercept their enemy.

"You got a plan, boss?" asked Striker, Jason's wingman.

Jason replied, "First, I need to see them. Then maybe..."

They flew past the fleeing bioroids at treetop level. One was red and the other blue.

"Just as I thought. The red is the leader. We have to catch him!" Jason said. "Just keep the other one off me and I'll take down the red."

"OK, I'll follow you in. Let's do this!" said Striker.

Jason flew at high speed straight toward the red Bioroid. At the last second, he transformed his alpha into battloid mode and slammed into the red bioroid, taking him down in a powerful tackle. He pinned both the bioroids arms behind it's back and stood up. The blue bioroid took aim at him with it's weapon, but before he could fire, striker dropped in between them, gun pod blazing.

The blue bioroid's left arm was severed by Striker's shot and it turned and ran.

"Not so fast, buddy," Striker said as he took aim at the bioroid's left leg. Another shot from his gun pod and the blue bioroid was immobilized. It tried unsuccessfully to right itself.

Striker positioned himself over the immobilized enemy mecha, gun pod pointed right at its chest, however, the bioroid just wouldn't give up. It rolled onto its back and aimed its weapon at Striker, but before it could fire, Striker pulled his trigger. The gun pod tore a hole in the chest of the Bioroid, and killed the pilot within.

Jason was having a hard time holding on to the red Bioroid. It was eventually able to get one of its arms free of his grip. It reached back over its shoulder and grabbed the alpha around the head. Then it bent over at the waste. Jason's alpha came flying over the bioroid's shoulder and landed on its back.

"Stram, Help!" called Jason.

The Bioroid then grabbed the alpha's wrist and elbow and twisted applying pressure so that it could break the joint, but before it could complete the move, Stram kicked it right in the chest, sending it falling onto its back. It started to right itself, but Stram dove his alpha on top of it.

Jason jumped into the fray as well, and while Striker held the Bioroid, Jason pried open the pilot's compartment with the butt of his alpha's weapon. Exposed, the pilot quickly surrendered.

Aboard the Repulse, the captured Bioroid pilot was questioned. Nape stood by while lieutenant Carter, his senior intelligence officer asked the questions.

Lieutenant Carter asked Nape about the methods which he would be allowed to employ in his interrogation.

"Sir, how far am I going to be allowed to go with this?"

asked Carter.

"If you mean are we going to torture him, then the answer is no," Nape answered. "If you ever want to capture another Bioroid, then you had better not treat these prisoners too harshly. Once you have a reputation for prisoner abuse, you just make your enemy all the more likely to fight to the death rather than surrender."

"I understand, sir. But how are we going to get him to talk?"

"I have an idea. Have the body of the other Bioroid pilot brought to the infirmary," Nape ordered. "I understand he suffered a massive head injury, correct?"

"Yes sir. That's correct," Carter confirmed.

"Ask this guy a couple of questions," Nape said. Then with a smile, he continued, "I expect he won't cooperate. When he doesn't, bring him to the infirmary for a mind scan."

"A mind scan, sir? What are you talking about?" Carter asked, confused.

"Just do it, and make sure he understands that he won't survive the procedure," Nape said as he turned and headed toward the infirmary.

"Ah, I think I see where you are going with this. We'll be there shortly," Carter called after him.

Carter started off with the obvious questions. He asked where the masters had fled to, how extensive the damage to the factory had been, and a few other questions.

Of course, the Bioroid pilot didn't answer the questions. He sat in his chair, overhead light shining brightly in his face, and proudly refused to give up any information. Carter did as he was ordered, and told the pilot that if he would not cooperate, he

would be subjected to a mind scan.

"Its almost always fatal," Carter bluffed, with a poker face that was as emotionless as a statue.

"You have no such machine," the pilot answered in a harsh, synthetic sounding, and condescending voice.

"You're sure of that, are you? Very well. You leave me no choice," Carter said, trying not to sound too dramatic. "Guard! Bring the prisoner."

The two cyclone armored guards that had been stationed outside the room rushed in and grabbed the prisoner.

"Bring him," said Carter as he turned and left the room. The guards followed quickly behind with the prisoner.

They walked down the corridor toward the infirmary. Carter continued to play up his part.

"You might get lucky, you know. If your partner has the information we are looking for, you might not have to die," Carter said to the prisoner.

"Shan! He is alive?" asked the prisoner.

Carter looked at his watch then shook his head. "Unless he decided to talk, I'm afraid he's been scanned by now."

"He knew nothing! You have killed him for nothing! Barbaric!" yelled the prisoner.

"Let's hope you fare better than he. I'd start talking if I were you," Carter prompted.

"I do not believe you!" the prisoner retorted.

"Very well," Carter said as they approached the door. As it opened, two technicians carried a stretcher out into the hallway. On it was the dead pilot of the blue Bioroid with his head horribly maimed. The pilot of the red Bioroid began to talk.

"My name is Degar!" he began. "I was left behind when the masters escaped from your fleet. There was no time to pick

me up. Please! I don't know where they have gone."

"That's unfortunate," said Carter as they entered the room. Inside, Nape was overseeing two technicians who were wiping down a menacing looking machine. Degar had no way of knowing that it was an MRI machine, and totally harmless.

"Did you get the brains cleaned off that thing yet?" asked Nape in a harsh tone of voice.

"We're just now finished," answered one of the technicians.

Nape turned to Degar and said, "Last chance. Tell us what we want to know. One way or the other we are going to find out the truth."

"I don't know! Please don't put me in that thing! I don't know!" yelled Degar.

"Put him in!" Nape commanded angrily and the guards grabbed Degar and forced him onto the table. As they tightened down leg and arm restraints, the prisoner relented.

"Optera! They've gone to Optera! I swear it is the truth!" Degar yelled.

Nape yelled, "Stop! Let him up."

"You will see, it is the truth," said the prisoner. "Your scanning device is a hideously barbaric creation. You disgust me."

"Doctor, you can bring in your patient now," Said Nape to the doctor.

As Degar watched, shocked, a man came in and voluntarily submitted to the scan. "What... What is this?" Degar asked in disbelief.

"You see," said Nape, "It's just a medical scanner, and completely harmless."

"But Shan is dead!" Degar exclaimed.

"Died in combat," Nape explained, "Guards, take him to

his cell.”

“I knew it! I knew you had no such device!” exclaimed Degar.

“Yeah, you’re a real genius,” Nape answered as the guards led Degar out of the room.

The violence on the part of the civilian population directed at the REF forces is remarkable. Some villages set up elaborate traps for Robotech soldiers. For the most part, people lived under the mistaken idea that if we just left the Invid alone, they would do the same to us. For the REF to fight against the Invid was to stir up a hornet's nest and invite retribution. Then again, who could live with a hornet's nest in their home.

History of the Third Robotech War Vol. III

Chapter 3

The modified CVR helmet fit snugly around Drakinn's head. Where the visor should have been there was a contoured virtual reality video screen. It was significantly front heavy and he found himself having to push up on the chin from time to time. The helmet was linked both to his fighter's internal computer as well as tiny external cameras mounted all around the modified shadow fighter. Looking around while wearing the helmet gave him an unobstructed view out of the fighter in all directions. He could not only look directly behind the fighter, but also straight down through the floor. There were absolutely no obstructions to his vision, except for a virtual representation of his own body and the flight controls. The computer linked the helmet to the sensors and all the instruments giving him a heads up display that was far more efficient than those of a standard alpha.

In addition to displaying the location of the enemy, the heads up display also highlighted the location of all five shadow drones. Next to each was displayed their number, from one to five. They all responded to voice commands which were translated into data by his onboard computer and transmitted to the appropriate drone, which would obey without question. The only thing they wouldn't obey was a command to attack other REF mecha or personnel.

Right now, Drakinn looked around his battloid mode shadow fighter and saw a dense forest. Although he could see right through the skin of his fighter, the trees, some twenty feet taller than his mecha, prevented him from seeing more than about ten meters in front of him. Despite this, he knew exactly where each of his shadow drones were. The heads up display showed them in a line formation, two on his right and three on his left about twenty meters apart, just as he had ordered.

"Number three, come over here," he said. Out of the foliage, drone number three appeared. "Now go back to your position," Drakinn ordered. The drone did as ordered again. Even though he had been training with the drones for a week now, he still made them perform menial tasks just to see them do it. Drakinn thought, *this is wild. It's just like a video game.*

His sensors showed that Reflex Point was just ahead, about a mile away. The satellite imaging link showed that the forest would provide cover almost the entire way. He ordered his drones to advance slowly, maintaining their spacing and cover.

The forest was utterly quiet. Aside from the footfalls of the advancing mecha, only the chirping of the birds and the wind in the trees could be heard. Then they reached the edge of the woods. Before them was the reddish brown dome of Reflex Point's main hive. The force field flashed imposingly, letting

him know that his approach would be contested.

"Number five, move along the tree line, maintaining your concealment until you reach one mile from our current position. Then approach the hive and attempt to punch a hole in the shield with your destabilizer," Drakinn ordered. The drone moved off as instructed.

Drakinn knew it was a suicide mission, but he was starting to realize the advantage of commanding drones. No guilt. He could send them off on impossible missions and not shoulder the difficulty of sending a man to his death. This gave him a huge advantage.

It didn't take long for number five to get in position. Then, it walked right out of the tree line and straight for the hive. As soon as the drone was visible, the Invid defenders sprang into action. Hundreds of scouts, troopers and other Invid mecha pounced on the drone. It dodged and rolled, trying to make it to the shield as it had been ordered. The air filled with the sound of weapons fire and explosions.

Drakinn said, "Now that they are busy, we move out. Drones one through four advance. Cover me while I disable the shield then follow me through."

He charged at the shield in a full out run. The drones trailed behind in a line formation. The Invid were still engaged with number five and did not notice the rest of Drakinn's group.

"Too easy," said Drakinn as he fired his weapon point blank at the shield. It began to glow and then the shield visibly parted, making a hole big enough for two alphas to walk through shoulder to shoulder.

At that time, the Invid simultaneously finished off number five and realized that another attack was under way. They took to the air and flew toward Drakinn, firing their energy weapons

as they did.

Drakinn ran through the hole in the shield and the Drones followed him through as ordered. "One and two, remain at the breach and do not allow any Invid through. Three and four, follow me and keep me covered," he ordered.

The Invid outside the shield found it exceedingly difficult to hit the two defending drones. They were inside the shield firing out, almost completely covered, and being shadow fighters they were almost completely invisible to their enemies. Any scout or trooper that approached the breach received a volley of missiles from the two drones. The dead hulls of Invid mecha began to pile up outside the shield.

Drakinn and his two drone escorts switched to guardian mode and flew toward the main hive. A hatch opened near the base of the dome and out flew three Invid royal command battloids. Drakinn knew his stealth systems would not work against them. Their humanoid pilots would target him visually.

The lead battloid stood fast to bar Drakinn's approach. The other two circled around behind. Drakinn ordered, "Fire on the lead RCB, we must make it to the hive!"

Drakinn's heads up display registered the destruction of drones one and two. He knew the defenders would pour through the breach now and surround him. His two remaining drones fired at the Invid battloid ahead of them. It tried to dodge, but took heavy damage as several missiles impacted its upper body.

His heads up display registered the destruction of the last two drones. He turned around just in time to see them fall to the ground, smoking. When they hit, they erupted into balls of flame. Now Drakinn was alone against three enemy battloids.

He fired a volley of missiles at the damaged RCB. This time, he was so close it had no chance to dodge. The blast tore

it limb from limb and it was utterly destroyed. An explosion rocked Drakinn's fighter. His heads up display told him that he had been hit, thrusters were out, he was in freefall. With his unobstructed view out of the cockpit, he saw the ground rush up at him. Then his helmet screen went blank.

Pulling off the helmet, he was somewhat disoriented for a second. The helmet visuals and the motion control system had been so perfect that he had started to believe the simulation. As he stepped out of the simulator cockpit, General Reinhardt approached him.

"I'd say you have finally gotten the hang of commanding the drones," said the general.

"But I failed, sir," replied Drakinn.

"If you were capable of taking out Reflex Point by yourself," said the general, "well, I guess I'd be planning my retirement party right now instead of the largest offensive in the history of warfare. You did fine. You think any other type of unit could get that close? No way. Get some rest. You'll get a chance to try again tomorrow, but tomorrow will be for keeps."

Robert and Gia, hungry and tired after their long ride, approached the planet. They watched the Earth grow larger and its features grow more distinct as they approached. The Jupiter Division fleet remained in orbit around the moon behind them. Fortunately, they had not been detected. He new, however, that with the next ship to arrive would bring with it news of their escape.

Robert landed the shadow fighter a good twenty miles from Reflex Point, the Invid command center. He did not want to come under attack by the Invid or the REF forces that might be assembling near the hive. Then he queried Gia about the best

way to approach.

"I think flying this thing right up to the front door is probably a bad idea. What do you suggest?" he asked.

"We should probably approach on foot. That way they will be sure to recognize me," she explained.

Robert said, "Well, I agree that we should make sure your Invid friends see you and don't fire on us. But walking is not necessary. We'll ride. The Alpha has a cyclone that we can use in a compartment behind the cockpit."

"You know, there is no reason for you to accompany me. I can make it from here alone," Gia said.

Robert shook his head and told her, "First of all, I love you. And second, let's not forget that I can't exactly go back where I came from. I'll stand by you through this. To the end."

"To the end," Gia echoed.

Robert pulled out the emergency cyclone from the Alpha and they began the ride to Reflex Point.

In orbit above Peryton, Nape ordered the task force to execute a fold that would take them to Optera, the former home world of the Invid. When the ships came out of the fold above the planet, they saw the desolate world below. The Praxians, who had inherited the world after the defeat of the Invid had only just begun to terraform and re-foliate the barren world. They had also renamed the world New Praxis, after their original home that had been completely destroyed.

Nape did not expect to find the Factory Satellite simply floating there next to the planet. That would be too easy, not to mention the fact that the Praxians would have contacted the REF about it if that had been the case. He ordered a full sensor sweep, but again, he didn't expect to find anything. Not that he

thought the prisoner had lied, but again, if there was anything to detect, it probably would already have been reported.

"Notify the Praxian government that we will be in the area. Have the squadron commanders and intel report to the conference room," Nape ordered Jennings.

"Aye, sir," she answered as Nape left the bridge.

Nape entered the conference room and brought up a three dimensional holographic projection of the star system. Reara, Wildcard, Stram, Jason and Carter soon joined Nape as he contemplated the chart. There were two gas giants and three rocky planets in the system.

Nape asked, "If you were the Robotech Master, where would you take your factory?"

"They'd need plenty of raw materials," said Reara.

"So the two larger planets are out," Jason commented.

"Not necessarily," Nape corrected. "They may have moons that would suit the Masters' needs. I'd say the only one we can rule out is Optera itself."

"Lets just start at one end and search 'em all," said Carter.

"I don't think so," said Nape. "A single ship would have a much better chance of finding the factory without being detected. We'll split up. Reara, Wildcard, Jason, and Stram will each transfer your squadrons over to one of the Ikazuchis.

As Robert rode with Gia on the back of his motorcycle mode cyclone, he suddenly realized that he had no idea just how much the native population knew about the Invid. Would they recognize Gia, or would they be as ignorant of this new human form as he himself had been when he first saw her. Better to play it safe, he thought.

"Gia," Robert began. "I think we should get you some new

clothes. It's probably best if you don't attract any more attention than is absolutely necessary."

"Right." She agreed. "But from where?"

Robert looked around. They were near the top of one of several beautiful grass covered rolling hills. From here they could see for miles. In the distance was a small town consisting of no more than a few houses and a small convenience store. One of the houses had laundry drying on a clothes line in the back yard. Having no money on him, Robert decided his only choice was to acquire some of the drying laundry.

He hid the cyclone and told Gia to wait, concealed in a nearby tree line, until he returned. While Robert was off obtaining her ill gotten garments, Gia climbed into a rather thick bush at the base of a tree. It offered excellent cover and a good view of her immediate surroundings. She could hear the wind blowing gently through the trees. The light coming through the canopy of three branches danced around her and she began to enjoy taking it all in. Such simple pleasures she had not known before as an Invid. Soon, a rather fat housecat came running by. Gia, not having seen a cat before assumed it was a wild denizen of the woods in which she was hiding and decided it was best to let it be.

Robert snuck up to the house on foot, trying his best to balance his need for stealth with not looking too suspicious. There didn't seem to be anybody home, so he jumped the fence and grabbed some clothes from the line. Again, he jumped the fence and ran full speed for the trees.

Back in the forest, he looked around for Gia. She waved to him from her hiding place in the bushes.

"Here, put these on." he said, tossing Gia the clothes.

From behind him, Robert heard raised voices and turned to

see three men coming in his direction. Had he been seen?

"Gia, I think we've been seen," Robert said as he ran to hide next to Gia in the bushes. It really was an excellent place of concealment.

Robert and Gia were silent, listening for any sign that they had been followed. Then they heard them. The three men were coming right for them. One of them said, "He went this way, I'm sure of it."

"Hey Joe, take a look over there," said one of the three.

The tall, red haired man named Joe walked straight over to the bush where Robert and Gia were hiding. He walked around behind their hiding place, cutting off their escape route. They couldn't tell what he was doing behind them, but they could hear the bushes being disturbed. They dared not move.

The other two men walked over and stood right in front of them. Slowly, so slowly that his movements were barely perceptible, Robert drew his sidearm and pointed it at the man. Every small movement seemed to Robert to be a cacophony of sound. The dry leaves covering the ground, the twigs and branches, all screaming a warning to the men who were searching for him. Robert was sure he would be discovered any second.

Then, the one closest to them yelled, "Hey! Get on outa there."

Robert knew he had to shoot or be captured. What would they do to Gia? They might recognize her as an Invid. His finger slowly depressed the Gallant H-90s trigger. At about half squeeze, he stopped. He just couldn't do it. He couldn't kill these men. They were not the enemy. His finger moved off the trigger and he lowered the weapon. He resigned himself to his fate, he was caught.

Just as Robert was about to stand up, he heard the man yell, "Grab him, Joe! He's gonna get away."

There were some rustling sounds from behind. Robert thought the men must be looking through the bushes, trying to find him and Gia.

"All right, I got him," said Joe as he came out from behind the bushes where Robert and Gia were hiding. He was carrying the rather portly cat that Gia had seen earlier. With feline in custody, the three men turned to leave, commenting on how frequently the cat seemed to sneak out of the house.

"Stupid cat. I'd just let him go if my wife wasn't so attached to him. Thanks for your help guys," Joe said as they walked out of the woods and back toward the town.

Robert and Gia left as soon as the three men were out of sight, and they didn't stop for at least five miles. Only then did they take a break for Gia to change into the ill gotten clothes. It was a lavender colored sun dress. The color complemented her hair perfectly, and it looked beautiful on her.

The two of them mounted the cyclone and started riding again. They soon found a road that seemed to be going in the general direction of Reflex Point and decided to follow it.

Following the destruction of Praxis, and the defeat of the Regent on Optera, it was decided to relocate the Praxian population. Optera was renamed New Praxis. Under the watchful care of the Praxians, the planet was re-foliated and became lush and green again, much as it was before the coming of Zor and the Robotech Masters.

History of the Sentinels' War Vol. IV

Chapter 4

The Ikazuchi carriers split up to search the Optera system. It was decided that using the fold systems to arrive at each planet in the system, while certainly taking the Masters by surprise, would definitely get the REF ships detected. The ships would approach using sub-light engines only. Hopefully, the Masters would not notice the approaching ships. If any one ship spotted the factory, it would signal the rest of the task force and they would all converge on that location.

Reara's squadron was assigned to the UES Vanguard. Even though shadow fighters were in extremely short supply, most of them being assigned to the Jupiter Division, each ship was equipped with one shadow Alpha and one shadow Beta, which had to be shared between the various fighter squadrons.

Upon arrival at the fourth planet of the system, Reara took the shadow Alpha and Jack took the Beta. They split up and started searching, scanning for any traces of the Masters. This was repeated by other ships at every planet in the system.

The fourth planet was a gas giant, slightly larger than Jupiter, and had an extensive ring system. This worked to their advantage since it was easy to conceal themselves among the rings.

Reara ordered Jack to orbit the planet, while she should check out the four moons. It was around the third moon, a rocky, cratered ball about half the size of Earth's own moon where Reara first caught sight of it. The metallic gray surface of the factory blended in so well with the moon's surface that she didn't see it until it had completed half an orbit and was again silhouetted against the blackness of space. Her first instinct was to get in closer and see if the main cannon was still damaged. So she flew toward it, counting on the shadow fighter's stealth systems to hide her approach.

Reara cut her engines and coasted in so that she might be mistaken for some natural meteoroid adrift in the system. To this end she made no control inputs that would alter her course.

In theory, they would have to acquire her visually in order to detect her. She should be invisible to sensors, but she still felt some apprehension as she moved in. It was so large, by the time she was a hundred kilometers out it was all she could see out her canopy. The main gun seemed to have been damaged beyond repair by the Nuke, but she had to know for sure. If it was repaired and functioning, the task force wouldn't stand a chance against it.

She flew closer: fifty kilometers, forty, thirty. Then a large door opened on the surface of the factory. Her heart raced.

They must be sending interceptors after her. She remembered that they had somehow detected Robert and Wildcard during the battle over Peryton. Her hand went to the throttle, but she didn't fire her engines just yet.

Out of the gigantic bay came one of the large starships like the ones that she had seen on Peryton. These Tirolian Multipurpose Transports were as large as an Ikazuchi command carrier and nearly as well armed. But their primary purpose was to transport troops and material.

If it spotted her, it could blast her with its main cannon and she would disintegrate instantly. She probably wouldn't even feel a thing, just a bright flash and then she would be gone. She watched the ship as it exited the factory.

Fortunately, the ship started to descend to the moon's surface. It had not spotted her. At this point she noticed several structures on the moon's surface.

Reara decided that she had pushed her luck far enough and decided to head away from the factory. She fired her engines just enough to alter her course a bit so that she would coast by the factory at a good distance. Once she was far enough from it that she felt safe, she called to Jack and told him to rendezvous with her back at the Roosevelt. He acknowledged and soon they were back aboard.

Nape called meeting of all key personnel. In the meeting, a plan was worked out for dealing with the masters. It seemed that the Masters had not detected either Reara's shadow fighter or the rest of the fleet, so the element of surprise would be on their side. Reara was congratulated for her discovery of the Factory Satellite, but she was told that she would not be on the team to disable it.

"What?" Reraa protested, "Why am I not on the team? I found the thing after all!"

"Subtlety is not one of your strengths, to put it nicely," Nape explained. "This mission will require us to sneak inside and disable the Factory without being detected. I think that is a job better suited to Lieutenant Carter."

"Wait a minute!" Jason protested, "He has no combat experience. One of us should lead the team. If not Reraa, then let me do it!"

Jason realized after he had spoken that he had just volunteered for what amounted to a suicide mission. Even knowing that, he still felt strangely compelled to go on this mission.

"No, Jason. Carter has been trained for just this kind of mission. That's the reason Robert chose him for this task force, and I agree with that decision one hundred percent. My mind is made up on this, end of discussion," Nape said.

"Right," said Carter. "I'll chose my team and be ready to go in two hours."

Nape said, "Good. Your objective will be to infiltrate the fortress, make your way to the central computer and sabotage it. I have chosen that as your target because I do not want the hyperspace fold system damaged. If possible, I want to capture this thing and take it back to Tirol with us. Taking out the main computer will keep them from activating the fold system, and hopefully neutralize some of their automatic defenses. Also, we can transfer some equipment from our ships to the fortress after we have taken control of it and repair the computer enough to reactivate the fold system."

"Makes sense. How will we insert the team?" asked Jason.

"We will load them in the bomb bay of a shadow beta and

deposit them on the surface of the factory," Nape continued. "From there, they will make their way to an airlock, enter, and head to their objective. So long as this factory has a similar layout to the one back home, they should have little trouble locating their objective. I will authorize cyclones for this mission, but if you have to use them before you get to the computer, it means you have failed your mission. If you are detected before you disable the computer, you will have the entire crew of Zentraedi and Robotech Masters after you, and a couple of cyclones aren't going to make much of a difference."

"Boss, let me fly them in!" Jason insisted.

"Ok, I don't have a problem with that," Nape agreed.

"That was my mission, DeKirk!" yelled Reara.

"Ha! You snooze, you lose!" Jason called back at her.

As Reara jumped out of her seat, Jason flinched and thought, *Oops, probably shouldn't have said that.*

"Don't hurt him, Reara," said Nape. "That's an order!"

Reara complied, saying, "Yes sir. Are we done here?"

"Yes, dismissed," answered Nape and they all left the room led by the enraged Reara who stormed out muttering something incomprehensible.

Jason was finishing his pre-flight preparations on the Beta when Carter showed up. He had two other men with him, and they were already wearing the VR-041 saber cyclones. These were lightly armed, but with their CADS blade systems which extended from their forearm shields, they were very good for covert operations.

"Nice choice. You guys ready to roll?" Jason asked.

"As ready as we'll ever be," answered Carter. "This is Jeffries and McMillan, my team."

Jeffries was a tall, thin man. He was nineteen years old, born after the REF had left earth. Joining the military was pretty much a given, considering the circumstances of being on a Robotech expedition to the other side of the galaxy. There weren't a lot of choices where careers were concerned. Always interested in electronics, he had become an electrical engineer and put that talent to use in the intelligence corps.

McMillan was a petite young lady, blond and full of energy. She had joined the REF hoping to get into a special ops unit, but Intel was as close as she had come. This mission suited her just fine. Sneaking around on an enemy ship was just the kind of thing she had always wanted to do.

"Nice to meet you," said Jason.

They exchanged pleasantries, and then it was time to depart. The three climbed into the Beta's bomb bay. It obviously wasn't designed to carry three people in full cyclone armor, and they were all glad it would be a short flight.

Jason fired up the engines and got clearance to launch. Soon he was surrounded by the blackness of space. So long as the shadow fighter's stealth systems functioned properly, Jason's part of the mission should be a quiet one.

As the factory finally came into visual range, Jason's head began to hurt. He was getting tired of this, and it was happening more and more ever since he had crashed his alpha back on Peryton. He popped a couple of aspirin that he carried just for this kind of thing.

"We have been found," said Shran to the other two masters. The three of them were in the main control room of the Factory Satellite. Although they were surprised to have been found so quickly their voices betrayed no emotion.

"Once again, our spy has saved us from catastrophe. He has proved to be a most profitable investment," said Dakon.

The three viewed the transmission from Jason and carefully took in all the details of the plan. Then they decided just where to ambush the three doomed men.

"We must wait until the spy is safely away before we spring our trap. We can easily destroy them once they are inside the factory," Baz said.

"Yes, I foresee no difficulties," Shran agreed.

Jason's head cleared quickly, and he noticed that he was much closer to the factory than he had expected to be. He did not let this bother him. He flew in close to the surface, and met no resistance. Everything was going as planned. He was very reassured to find an airlock right where his map had indicated one. This meant that this factory was probably of the same design as the one back at Earth, and the team should have no trouble finding the main computer.

He flew low and slow over the surface and called back a ten second warning to the team waiting in the bomb bay. When he passed over the airlock, he opened the bomb bay doors and the three cyclone clad team members were out. Once they were gone, he punched the throttle and rocketed back to the safety of his ship. He met no resistance.

Carter and his team, having been released several hundred feet above the surface of the satellite factory, floated in space. They fired the thrusters on their cyclone armor to stop their forward motion and navigate to the air lock that they had been briefed about. Once there, Carter had Private Jeffries, who was also an electrical engineer, open the control panel for the airlock and hot wire the door.

The door was enormous, clearly built to accommodate Zentraedi mecha. The control panel alone was three feet across and four feet high, with buttons the size of Jeffries' fist. Using the CADS blades on his cyclone, he pried the panel open and gained access to the electronics within. He soon had the door open and the team was inside.

"Excellent job, Jeffries," praised Carter. "Now how about the inner door?"

"The door should open automatically once the airlock is pressurized. The whole process is automatic," Jeffries explained.

The inner door opened just as Jeffries had predicted and the three entered the factory. The metallic corridor that they found themselves in was definitely built for Zentraedi. It was easily more than forty feet tall and about thirty feet wide. The gray metal was featureless, very spartan, as one would expect aboard a Zentraedi spaceship.

They were at a three way intersection, with one corridor seeming to follow the exterior wall of the station, and the other seeming to go directly toward the center of the ship, perpendicular to the outer wall. They chose the obvious path, heading toward the interior of the station.

Carter had with him a palm sized computer which displayed a digital map of the factory. He used this to navigate through the seemingly endless corridors, keeping them on course to find the central computer control room and avoid places that were likely to be occupied.

They kept as quiet as possible. Every footfall echoed down the metallic corridor. They came to a four way intersection. Carter consulted his map and determined that they needed to turn left. When they did, they saw that only about a hundred

yards down the corridor, their way was blocked by a heavy blast door.

“Jeffries, can you get this open?” asked Carter.

“Sir, I don’t see any control panel. I think this must be controlled from the main command center,” Jeffries said as he looked around.

Carter sighed and said, "I guess we'll have to find another way around."

They went back to the intersection and Carter checked the map. After a while, he pointed down another corridor and said, "I think we can get around that door if we go this way."

Just like the last, a short way down the corridor they ran into a blast door. Their best efforts, short of blowing the thing with cobalt limpet mines, were unsuccessful at opening it. Any explosion would certainly alert the Masters to their presence.

McMillan suggested that they return to the airlock and try another path that bypassed this area altogether. It made sense and they started back. Before long, they ran into yet another blast door. This one had been open when they had passed it before. It then donned on them that they were not only trapped, but the Masters were probably aware of their presence and had closed the doors to contain them.

"Weapons ready!" yelled Carter. "McMillan, blow this door. We're outa here."

McMillan, an expert in demolitions, attached two cobalt limpet mines to the door and the team retreated to a safe distance. The mines blew a hole in the door large enough for two men to walk through shoulder to shoulder, even in cyclone armor. Jeffries was first through. The corridor was pitch black on the other side of the door. Jeffries turned on his light and was shocked by what he saw.

The corridor was filled with mecha. Six bipedal defense drones, unmanned defenders of the factory, resembling Zentraedi battle pods, but somehow meaner looking and better armed, took aim on Jeffries.

Jeffries said, "Damn, it's just not my day."

"What do you see?" asked Carter.

A blinding flash came through the opening in the blast door and the concussion of the explosion knocked Carter and McMillan to the floor as Jeffries was disintegrated by the weapons of the defense drones. Carter and McMillan quickly got back to their feet and ran back towards the intersection, where they hoped to find some cover. At the intersection, Carter took cover behind one corner of the intersection and McMillan behind the other. They trained their EP-36 rifles on the breach in the blast door, preparing to fire on anything that came through.

Nothing came through the opening. Soon they heard the sound of giant footfalls from behind them. They turned to see a trio of Bioroid Invid Fighters marching down the corridor toward them.

McMillan yelled, "I'm not going down without a fight!" and loosed a swarm of missiles from her cyclone's shoulder launchers.

The lead bioroid, his movement limited by the restrictive size of the corridor was struck by the flock of deadly flying explosives, tearing the mecha in half at the waist. The other two wasted no time returning fire. Concentrating all their firepower on McMillan, they blasted her again and again, until she no longer moved.

Carter retreated down the corridor, which he knew to be a dead end. When he reached the closed blast door, he pulled out

the cobalt limpet mines he had been carrying to destroy the central computer and set the timers with a very short delay. At first, he thought he might be able to blast the door before his pursuers caught up with him, but it became quickly obvious that there wasn't time for that. He would not allow himself to be captured. As an intelligence officer, he knew things that could not be allowed to fall into enemy hands. As the two remaining bioroids approached, Carter lowered his weapon and allowed them to move in close. Just as one of them reached down to grab him, Carter's limpet mines exploded, leaving nothing in the corridor alive.

In the Sol system, the REF fleet was assembling for another assault on the Invid held earth. On the bridge of the UES Liberator in Lunar orbit, General Reinhardt sat in his command chair overseeing the final preparations for the Jupiter Division assault on Reflex Point. The communications officer, known as Sparks, called back to him with a report from the last wave of arriving ships.

"Sir, ships arriving from Tirol report that a stowaway escaped Tirol in a shadow fighter, apparently by hitching a ride on one of the departing Ikazuchi class ships," said Sparks. "We are advised that he may be headed to earth with an escaped Invid prisoner on board."

"Damn!" exclaimed Reinhardt. "If they make it to Reflex Point, they could give away our plans to the enemy. Inform all forces to be on the lookout for a rogue shadow fighter."

"Aye sir," replied Sparks as he began to transmit the message to the rest of the fleet.

"And Sparks," said Reinhardt, "Better push up the preparation of Operation Scorched Earth. If our plans are

compromised by this rogue pilot, we may have to launch early."

"But sir! Those were supposed to be a last resort, and only to be used if our offensive failed!"

"Just do it, Sparks!" said Reinhardt with a stern look. "I have my orders, and you have yours."

"Yes sir." replied Sparks.

When they told me that I was the spy, I was as shocked as anyone. I had no memory of any of it. At first, I was in denial. But then I remembered the headaches. It all made sense. How many had died because of me? Even though I had no control over my actions, I felt overwhelming guilt.

From the Personal Log of Lieutenant Jason DeKirk

Chapter 5

In the control center of the factory satellite, Baz, Shran and Dakon analyzed the REF's attack. Baz said, "Based on their course, I would estimate an 87% probability of the main computer as their objective."

"That makes sense," replied Dakon. "The weapons they were carrying would be consistent with that course of action as well."

"Again, if not for our informant, we would have met with disaster," Shran added.

Baz said, "With their attempt at infiltration thwarted, I predict they will attempt another frontal assault. It would be best if we prepared for an immediate fold."

"Agreed," replied the other two masters.

"Recall all spacecraft and prepare for an immediate fold!" Shran commanded the three clones at the control station.

The transport ships lifted off from the surface of the moon and headed toward the orbital factory. Battlepods on patrol were recalled. As soon as all ships were aboard, the fold engines were

brought online, and the massive factory disappeared in a brilliant flash of light.

Aboard the *Repulse*, Nape was dismayed by the failure of the infiltration team to make contact as scheduled. When the factory folded, he had no choice but to accept that the mission was a failure.

Reara, standing behind Nape's command chair, slammed her fist into the back of the chair, startling Nape. When he turned to look at her, he could see the anger in her face.

Reara yelled, "You cannot deny that every time we try to sneak up on those bastards, they always seem to know! How can you be so blind! There's a spy! You must see that!"

"OK! Reara, calm down. You're right, but lets not lose our heads," Nape agreed. "What we need to do is figure out how to catch this spy."

Meanwhile, Jason DeKirk was stowing his flight gear in the locker room adjacent to the *Repulse's* main hangar bay. He was getting tired of the constant headaches, and he was a bit concerned by his short blackout while flying the team to the factory. He decided to head to sick bay.

Jason entered the ship's medical center, which was by necessity as large as a small hospital in order to take care of the ships large crew. When he explained his problem to the doctor, he decided to do a few simple checks. He checked the dilation of Jason's pupils. Touched the fingers on both his hands and asked him if everything felt normal. As the tests continued, the doctor determined that something wasn't quite right, and decided to put Jason into the MRI machine for a scan. Jason made some lighthearted jokes about the machine's deadly capabilities,

referring to the incident with the bioroid pilot and then submitted to the scan.

As the scan progressed, the doctor picked up the phone and called the bridge.

"Commander Nape, this is Doctor Samules. I think you had better get down here, and quickly," said the doctor.

"What is it, Doc?" Nape asked.

"I'd rather not say over the phone," the doctor answered.

"I'm on my way," Nape said, and hung up the phone.

"Reara, something is up in sick bay. I'm gonna go check it out."

Reara said, "I'm coming with you," and followed Nape off the Repulse's bridge.

When Nape and Reara arrived at the ship's medical center, Doctor Samules ushered them into a private office off to the side of the examination room and locked the door. He began showing them the results of Jason's scan and telling them about the anomalies in Jason's brain that he could not account for. Samules was tall and thin, with thick, silver rimmed REF issue glasses. His explanation lacked any concessions for Nape and Reara's lack of medical training, and although Reara nodded and pretended to know what the doctor was saying, Nape wasn't going to have any of it.

About a minute into the doctor's explanation, Nape cut him off. "Wait a minute doc. I don't understand a word you are saying. Just tell me what the heck is wrong with Jason."

Samules explained more simply. "You see, commander, something has altered his brain. I'm not sure exactly what the alterations are doing to him. As a matter of fact, I'm not even sure how he can even function normally like this. I've never seen anything like it. There even seems to be some kind of

foreign organic matter present, the source of which is a total mystery. It's like his brain has been completely re-wired."

Reara immediately grasped the situation, yelling, "He's the one! Somehow the Masters got a hold of him and messed with his brain. He's the spy!"

"Quiet, Reara!", Nape cautioned. "Doc, can he hear us from out there?"

"No sir, not a chance," Samules answered.

Nape asked what Jason's condition was, and Samules told him that Jason was sedated and would be out for hours.

"Does he know?" asked Nape.

"No sir, I sedated him as soon as I discovered his condition."

"Good," said Nape. "Run some more tests on him, and if possible, determine just how this thing is affecting him. Get intel in on this too, but we must keep Jason in the dark on this. I've got an idea, but Jason can't know that we know."

Next Nape met with the intelligence section. The office had just received the word that Carter was MIA, and Nape knew this would get their minds off of it, and probably raise morale a bit.

"So, who's in charge around here?" Nape asked.

"I am, sir," answered Jackson, a young looking lieutenant who was now running the intel office in Carter's absence.

Nape said, "I've got a job for you. Lieutenant DeKirk is currently in sick bay, sedated. It seems that he may have had his brain altered by the Robotech Masters. We're pretty sure he's a spy and he's been giving away our plans to the Masters. What I want you to do is find out what means he's been using to transmit the information."

"Right, we've already ruled out electromagnetic. We've been monitoring for any transmissions and come up with nothing," Jackson explained. "We'll take some equipment down there and get right on it."

Nape ordered, "Be quick about it. I don't want to keep him under any longer than we have to. We can't risk letting him know we are on to him. I want your analysis by 1600, and then I'm giving a briefing at 1700, and he will be there."

Jackson objected, "But sir, he'll give away anything he learns at the briefing!"

"Exactly," Nape said with a grin.

All went better than Nape had planned. At 1600 hours, Jackson reported that they had detected a low energy alpha wave signal and due to the two way nature of the signal, they would actually be able to track the transmission and determine the location of the Robotech Masters next time they made contact with Jason.

Nape gave his briefing as scheduled, in which he told all in attendance, including Jason, that the team led by Carter had planted a bomb aboard the factory satellite, and in approximately two hours it would detonate, destroying the Masters' fold engines.

Jason found himself in his quarters. He had no recollection of walking there. The last thing he remembered was being in the briefing and how excited he had been about the plan to disable the Masters engines.

He decided that he should head back to sick bay and tell the doctor that he was still having problems. When he arrived,

Nape was there along with a security team of four men in CVR-3 armor.

Jason asked, "What's going on?"

"I'm afraid we found the spy," Nape explained, and Jason immediately knew.

Jason exclaimed, "It's me isn't it? That's why I keep blacking out!"

Nape said calmly, "Yes. For now, we have to confine you to your quarters, at least until we can find a way to reverse what has been done to you."

Jason continued, "This all started back on Peryton! When I crashed my Alpha! Those bastards did something to me! They messed with my brain! The blackouts, the headaches, it was the Masters!"

Doctor Samules tried to reassure Jason. "We may be able to reverse the damage, but not with the facilities here on this ship."

Nape said, "We need to isolate you so that you don't have access to anything else that could compromise the mission. These men will take you to your quarters. I'm sorry about this."

Jason took it well. He said, "No, don't apologize. I'm the one who should apologize. I could have gotten us all killed. Well, lets go."

With that, the security guards led Jason to his room. Nape went back to the briefing room, for a much happier duty. The squadron commanders were assembled, along with Lieutenant Jackson from intel. They had been able to use Jason to discover the location of the Masters, and now they would decide on how to use that information.

Nape entered the briefing room and everyone stood at attention until he said, "Seats." All the squadron commanders, the commanders of the ships in Nape's task force, and Lieutenant Jackson sat around a long table. Nape took his seat at the head of the table.

"Jackson, do we have the location of the Masters?" Nape asked.

"Yes sir, here are the coordinates," Jackson said as he passed a sheet of paper to Nape.

Nape looked over the sheet quickly and said, "Excellent. Now, how do we disable the factory?"

"A frontal assault is definitely out," said Reara.

"We could send another team aboard," suggested Wildcard.

"No no no!" yelled Nape. "They will be expecting that. We've got to think outside the box."

The room was silent for a minute, then Reara spoke. "I don't think we can capture this thing. We need to destroy it. If we can get a bomb aboard..."

Wildcard cut her off, "We already tried that!"

"No, not a bomb per se," Nape said, with a smile on his face, "but an explosion none the less. We fold a ship right into the factory. Materialize it right in the middle of the thing. Then BOOM! No more worries."

"You can't be serious!" came the reply from Lt. Commander MacFie, commander of the Saratoga, one of the Ikazuchis in Nape's task force. "You are going to sacrifice a command carrier?" MacFie asked.

"You know we would lose much more than one ship if we attacked, and I don't hear any other suggestions on how we can deal with the factory satellite," Nape answered.

Everyone was quiet. None of the commanders wanted to

be the one to lose their ship. Nape eventually broke the silence.

"The only fair way to do this," said Nape, "is to draw straws. And to be fair, I'll pick too. Even the Repulse will be eligible for the mission. Obviously we will transfer the crew to the remaining ships, and send in the unlucky winner by remote control, engines rigged to go critical as soon as it defolds. Reara, find us something to use as straws."

Reara left the room and returned with a hand full of drinking straws from the galley. She explained that one of them was shorter than the others. She held them in her fist so that there was no way to determine the short one.

"I'll go first," Nape announced.

Reara walked over to Nape and held out the straws. Nape drew one: full length. Reara walked around the table, letting each commander draw one straw until only two remained. Only MacFie and one other, Lt. Commander Stevens of the UES Vanguard. They looked at each other, then MacFie spoke up.

"I'll draw," said MacFie. "If I'm going to lose my ship, it will be by my own action."

He drew a straw from Reara's hand. It was cut, shorter than the rest.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Stevens.

MacFie turned to Nape and said, "I'll begin transferring my crew to the other ships."

"Very well, let me know as soon as your preparations are complete," said Nape. "Dismissed."

Ironically, the tactic of a fire ship, loaded with explosives and then sent in to explode in close proximity to the enemy was well known to the Masters. The Disciples of Zor had used it more than once to help even the odds against numerically superior loyalist fleet. Actually materializing the ship inside the enemy facility was a new twist. It had the effect of denying the enemy the chance to destroy the ship before it got too close.

History of the Sentinels' War Vol. IV

Chapter 6

The sun was setting as Robert and Gia rode into town. They did not know the name of the place, and it didn't seem that anyone was here to tell them. Several buildings were nothing more than burned out ruins, and those that still stood were empty. Signs of looting were everywhere. Stores with the windows broken out, nothing left inside.

"What happened here?" asked Robert.

Gia answered, "We're very close to Reflex Point. The Regis probably had this town emptied to keep it from becoming a staging or re-supply point for the resistance."

"And once the city was dead, the vultures moved in," said Robert.

"I don't understand," Gia said.

"You don't think the Invid broke into these shops do you?"

It was humans. Taking anything of value," said Robert in a somber tone. "But we should at least be able to find some shelter here for the night. We'll head in to Reflex Point tomorrow."

"Why wait? We're so close."

"Because I want to make sure they can see you," explained Robert. "That's the only thing that will keep us from getting blown to bits."

Robert and Gia stayed the night in one of the few standing buildings. The inside was gutted, nothing left, not even furniture. The walls were bare concrete, and I had the feel of being inside a cave rather than a man made structure.

Robert pulled a couple of blankets out of the survival kits on the back of the cyclone and laid them on the floor. Gia slept, but Robert couldn't. He kept a watchful eye out all night in case of trouble, but the truth was that he couldn't have slept even if their security was completely assured. His mind raced. What would happen tomorrow? At worst, they would both be killed as they approached the Hive. At best, he would lose Gia as she returned to her people. He dreaded either outcome, but he never wavered in his resolve. He loved Gia, and he would do anything for her. Risking his life to deliver her to the Invid was nothing, but the certainty of losing her was tearing him apart. Nothing was more important to him than her happiness, and he would see this thing through to the end.

He walked to a nearby window. Some broken glass crunched beneath his boots, and Gia awoke to the sound.

"You're still awake?" she asked.

"Can't sleep," Robert explained. "Besides, somebody needs to keep watch, ya know."

He went back over to her and sat down at her side.

"You sacrificed everything for me," Gia said as she sat up.

"Well, not everything," Robert said. "At least not yet."

"Why don't you let me go on alone?" Gia asked.

"I couldn't. What if you ran into some REF troops, or some freedom fighters. If I'm with you, I can protect you," said Robert. "Besides, I've come this far, I want to see this through... I love you."

It was the first time Gia had heard the words. She wasn't surprised. Robert didn't need to say it for her to know it was true.

"I love you too," she said. Then she leaned in close to him and they kissed. She had not known love like this as an Invid, and as they kissed, she began to question her decision to return to her people.

In space, high above the planet, the Jupiter division began its push toward earth. The Invid responded by launching their clam shaped troop carrier ships to intercept. The front line of Ikazuchi and Garfish class ships opened fire on the approaching Invid fleet, turning many of them into flaming wreckage before they could disgorge their deadly cargo. Still, there were too many of them. The clam type transport ships opened their upper and lower shell doors and hundreds of Invid shock troopers and armored scouts flew out like a swarm of angry wasps.

The REF mecha tried desperately to keep the Invid away from their capital ships, but there were too many. Invid claws ripped holes in the hulls of the Robotech ships. Atmosphere spewed forth into the vacuum of space. Annihilation disks from the Invid weapons blasted holes in the REF ships. Reflex furnaces overloaded and starships burst into giant balls of brilliant light. Both sides fought with everything they had and

neither seemed to have the upper hand.

On the ground, the calm of night was broken by the high pitched whine of Horizon-v engines as the sleek, stealthy shuttles approached their objective area at low level, out of sight and detection of the Invid sensors. The trees swayed in the wake of the giant Robotech ships as they flew by at nearly supersonic speeds at unbelievably low altitudes. They were completely blacked out, no lights inside or out. The terrain was illuminated only by starlight and moonlight. The pilots wore multi-optic helmets that turned the night into day.

Aboard the shuttles, a voice came over the intercom system as the navigator announced, "Crew Nav, one minute warning!"

Scores of REF warriors in CVR-3 armor secured their helmets and strapped themselves into their landing positions. The loadmasters checked the restraint on the mecha so that they would not shift on landing. Pilots strapped themselves into their alphas, betas and destroids and began powering them up.

In an old crater left over from the First Robotech War, the ships set down. Even as they descended, their cargo doors began to open. As soon as they came to a stop, out ran warriors in cyclone armor as they secured the area for what was to follow.

One of the first on the ground was a woman clad in a VR-38 light cyclone. She was armed only with a video camera. As soon as her feet touched the earth, she knelt out of the way of the offloading troops and began to film the operation.

Loadmasters unloaded mecha and equipment. Alphas, betas, weapons and ammo came out of the Horizon-v cargo pods at breakneck speeds. Pilots walked their mecha out of the ships and took up fighting positions around the area to protect the most powerful weapon in the inventory. The shuttles began

lifting off back into the blackness of the night even as one last ship landed. One of its cargo doors opened and out rolled a machine that looked like nothing less than a gigantic gun on a hover pad. It was the synchro cannon. It was capable of devastating destruction on the same scale as the main cannons aboard the capitol ships in orbit.

The last horizon-v departed, the whole operation had taken less than five minutes and now the REF had ground forces in place. After a few minutes, the report came in. Inbound enemy mecha. The Invid were coming. The REF warriors strategically placed their synchro cannon where they could get a good shot at the approaching enemy and prepared themselves for battle.

Robert and Gia were awakened by what seemed to be an earthquake. They ran out of the building they had been sleeping in and looked around.

Gia asked, "What is this, what is going on?"

"It's like an earthquake, but with lightning!" exclaimed Robert.

The night was instantly illuminated like day and the two heard a deafening roar the likes of which they had never experienced. It was followed by loud explosions in rapid succession much like rolling thunder. The ground shook again and Robert began to feel panic take its grip on him. The two were terrified.

Then, about three hundred feet above their heads, a damaged alpha fighter went streaking by with flame lapping down its sides. As the sky was lit up again by a brilliant flash, Robert could see the thick black smoke trail the fighter had left behind. Seconds later, two Invid shock troopers went roaring by in pursuit of the stricken alpha.

"It's a battle!" yelled Robert. "But what kind of weapon can shake the ground and light up the sky like this! It's maddening! And that sound!"

After about fifteen minutes, the night was quiet again. Robert and Gia stood in the cool night air. Robert held Gia close and they looked up into the night sky. The flickering lights above told Robert that the fighting was just as intense in space as it had been on the ground. The final offensive was on.

Gia said nothing. Robert could see her eyes had welled up with tears. Her attachment to both races gave her a unique point of view and she was sensitive to the losses on both sides. Robert felt the great loss as well, but he knew he could not show it. He had to be strong for Gia.

Robert held her in his arms. Eventually she spoke. "We have to stop this. Can we not learn from our mistakes? If this keeps up both our races will be extinct."

No argument there, thought Robert. The rest of the night neither of them could sleep.

Most people are only familiar with the SDF-1 and 2, but there were in fact many more Macross class battle fortresses, fifteen in all. They were used by the Masters' border fleet and were some of the most advanced ships in their inventory. It is no wonder that the rogue Masters would set their captured Factory Satellite to constructing them.

History of the Sentinels' War Vol. IV

Chapter 7

On the bridge of the Repulse, Nape supervised the preparations for the destruction of the Factory Satellite. The Saratoga was empty, except for her commander and two bridge officers.

"Commander MacFie, status report," demanded Nape.

"Sir, preparations are complete, we are setting the 15 minute countdown at this time," came the reply.

On the bridge of the Saratoga, MacFie flipped up the cover of the guarded switch which would initiate the countdown. With the switch exposed, he flipped it up and a computerized voice reported, "Fifteen minutes to hyperspace fold engine overload. The option to terminate the overload will expire in five minutes."

MacFie looked around his bridge for the last time. His hand went to the armrest of his command chair. Although the bridge was practically empty, all of the monitors were active and all the devices were still operating just as they always had. The

electronics filled the empty bridge with a quiet noise which he had not noticed before. He had never really paid attention to the beeping of the computerized controls or the hum of the cooling fans before. There had always been too much activity, too many people talking for him to notice the background sounds. *I guess it's time to go*, he thought.

"Ok, lets get to the hangar bay," ordered MacFie to the two remaining members of his bridge crew.

MacFie and his officers left the bridge and were half way to the waiting Horizon-t shuttle in the hangar bay when the normally white lights of the hallway switched to red and the computer voice announced, "Proximity Alert, enemy ships detected."

Then an explosion rocked the ship, knocking MacFie and his men off their feet.

"We're being fired on!" yelled MacFie. "You three get to the shuttle. I've got to go back to the bridge and make sure nothing happens to this ship!"

"Yes Sir, we'll wait for you," replied one of the bridge officers.

"Negative, if there's time, I'll take an alpha. Get yourselves out of here!" MacFie yelled as he turned and ran back down the corridor toward the bridge.

Bursting through the hatch, MacFie was greeted by a shocking scene on the main view screen. Five Tirolian all purpose transport ships, three Tirolian heavy destroyers and a massive battle fortress that looked surprisingly similar to the SDF-1!

On the Bridge of his ship, Nape saw the same picture filling the view screen in front of him. The bow of the battle fortress began to split in two and Nape yelled, "Crap! I know what that

means. Hard to port! Evasive maneuvers. Bring our energy barrier system online!"

Technicians from around the bridge replied, "Barrier system active!", "Maneuvering at maximum velocity!"

The split bow of the battle fortress began to glow and energy arced between the two bow pylons.

"Brace for impact!" yelled Nape just before a bolt of yellow-orange energy leapt from the battle fortress right at the Repulse. The energy bolt hit the Repulse's energy barrier and split in half, part being deflected over and the other being deflected under the ship. At the last second, just as the energy started to drop off, the barrier gave out and the beam hit the side of the ship.

Nape was thrown from his command chair by the violent force of the attack. He picked himself up off the floor, blood trickling down his forehead where he had struck the navigator's chair. "Bring us around! Prepare to return fire!"

"Main cannon charging! Ten seconds to full power!" yelled the weapons officer.

The Tirolian heavy destroyers, half the size of an Ikazuchi command carrier, but with even more firepower, converged on the Repulse. The Garfish troop transport ships moved to defend the Repulse, firing their triple barreled bow cannons. The blinding flashes of energy weapons filled the blackness of space.

"Now in firing position!" reported the weapons officer.

"Fire!" Nape commanded.

The view screen went completely white as the energy discharge from the main cannon overloaded the ship's external video cameras. The immense energy drain dimmed the ships lights, with the brightness of the view screen casting stark shadows across the bridge.

The sensor operator reported, "Direct hit! No damage!"
"No Damage?" asked Nape.

The view screen returned to normal, and Nape could see the faint green glow of an energy barrier around the battle fortress. Just then, the ship rocked again as one of the Tirolian heavy cruisers fired its main cannon at the Repulse, hitting it right in the bow and disabling the ship's main weapon.

"Main cannon damaged! Switching to secondary batteries!" reported the weapons officer.

"Order all ships to concentrate their firepower on the battle fortress!" ordered Nape.

Beams of brilliant blue energy leapt from the anti-ship turrets of the Ikazuchi command carriers in Nape's task force. The heavy destroyer turned again to take another shot at the Repulse. Seeing what was happening, Lieutenant Robert Stram called to his fighter squadron. "Follow my lead!" he yelled as he dove for the rapidly approaching cruiser. "We've got to stop that thing before it takes out the Repulse!"

"We're with you!" called Wildcard as he joined his formation of fighters with Stram's.

Two squadrons of veritech's dove right at the aft end of the cruiser just as it lined its bow up toward the Repulse, and its main canon began to glow.

"On my mark, loose all your missiles. Target the main engines. If it can't maneuver, it can't shoot the Repulse," explained Stram.

From all the missile launcher's on Stram's alpha there emerged a swarm of smoke trails streaking away through the blackness of space. They were almost instantly followed by hundreds more from the fighters in his and Wildcard's squadron.

All the fighters broke off their attack and bolted for safety.

The missiles impacted the main engines of the cruiser with more than enough firepower to completely destroy the drive section of the enemy ship. The blast mangled the stern of the destroyer and sent it tumbling out of control, fire and atmosphere spewing from within.

"Thanks for the assist," said Stram.

"Just like old times," said Wildcard.

Stram and Wildcard could see the brilliant blue energy beams from the Ikazuchis' turrets slice through the blackness of space and strike the battle fortress. The Garfish fired their tri-cannon batteries again and again. The rays of destructive light crashed against the battle fortress' omni-directional barrier like waves against the shore. It flickered, but remained intact.

Aboard the Saratoga, Commander MacFie realized that the combined firepower of all the Ikazuchi's wasn't going to be enough to knock down the battle fortress' energy barrier before it could recharge its main cannon. With only minutes before it was able to fire on the Repulse, MacFie set a course straight for the battle fortress. His ship broke formation and charged at the enemy. The ship shook violently as the Tirolian ships fired on the approaching Saratoga.

Nape's voice came over the communication system, "MacFie, what are you doing? You're going to get blasted to pieces!"

"No sir, that's not the plan," replied MacFie. "This ship's going to blow in three minutes, and there's nothing I can do about it, except take them with me."

"Get out of there, that won't break through their barrier!" yelled Nape.

"Just watch! I'm going to end this right now!" MacFie replied.

In the background of the explosions and static, the computer voice reported "Sixty seconds to Hyperspace Fold Operation."

The Tirolian ships battered the Saratoga as it sped toward the battle fortress, but even though they knocked out its cannons and its engines, her momentum was enough to carry her forward, right towards her target. Just as it looked like the Saratoga would collide with the battle fortress' energy barrier, a bubble of blue-white energy formed around her. The Saratoga began to fold the very fabric of space, and she was taking everything nearby with her. When the brilliant ball of energy dissipated, the Saratoga was gone, and so were three of the Tirolian escort ships.

The battle fortress tumbled helpless in space, a full third of the ship was missing as if it had been chopped away by a giant cookie cutter. Atmosphere and sparks spewed from the remains of the vessel. Seconds later, her reflex furnace exploded. The fireball consumed the two other Tirolian ships that were nearby. The enemy destroyers broke off their attack on Nape's task force and fled.

"Report," Nape demanded.

The sensor operator replied, "Six enemy vessels destroyed, the three remaining ships are in full retreat. We lost two Garfish and the Saratoga."

"And the fold system?" asked Nape.

"Still functional sir."

"Commence a recovery operation. If there are any survivors from the two Garfish, get them aboard as quickly as possible. Then assemble the task force, we are folding for the factory satellite," Nape ordered.

About two hours later, when the Repulse and the remaining

ships of the task force materialized near the factory satellite, Nape knew his mission was over. The factory was in ruins, the Saratoga had materialized right inside her and the engines had detonated according to plan. The moon like structure looked like a massive gray apple that had a huge bite taken out of it.

"Sir, all factory functions have ceased, including life support. No sign of enemy ships in the area," came the report from the sensor operator.

"Very well, stand down from battle stations," Nape ordered. "Navigator, plot us a course to Earth."

"Earth, sir?" asked the Navigator. "We're not going back to Tirol?"

Nape answered, "That's right, I've got some unfinished business yet, and I think Earth is where I'll get my answers."

With Nape's ships on their way to the other side of the galaxy, the three Masters began to power their ship back up. Fortunately for them, they had been aboard a battle fortress, similar to the one destroyed by the Saratoga. The battle fortress was still deep inside the factory satellite, and its construction was not quite finished.

Shran asked, "What is the status of this vessel?"

A clone replied, "Life support, sub light and fold engines operative. Weapons partially functional. No mecha or munitions have been loaded aboard yet. Ships stores are only sufficient to sustain the crew for two weeks."

"It will have to be enough," said Dakon. "Prepare to take her out."

"But Masters, we cannot open the main hangar doors," replied the clone.

Baz coldly explained, "We will use the ship's main cannon.

This station is no longer of any value, damage to it is irrelevant."

Outside the space station, the side of the gigantic factory was pierced by a massive beam of energy. Pieces of the station floated away in the weightlessness of space and the battle fortress slowly emerged.

"We must start over," said Baz.

"Yes, but this time we must take greater efforts to conceal our efforts," added Shran.

"Set course for the Praxis system," ordered Dakon.

Confused, the clone said, "But Masters, Praxis was destroyed."

"Then why would anyone want to go there?" asked Shran with a smile. "Initiate the hyperspace fold."

The door to Jason's quarters opened and Nape entered. Through the open door Jason could see the two guards that were posted in the corridor outside his room.

Jason had turned off the lights in his room. He sat in the darkness looking out the view port into space.

"How are you doing, Jason?" asked Nape.

Without turning away from his view of the stars, Jason asked, "What's going to happen to me?"

"The doctor says that there's nothing medically that can be done for you," Nape answered.

Jason finally turned to face Nape, saying "That's not what I meant, and you know it."

Nape shook his head, "I suppose we will have to turn you over to intel or something."

"The scientists," said Jason, "They'll cut me open to see how this thing works."

Nape said, "I don't know about that. Maybe..."

Jason cut him off, "I know. I'm sure of it. I'll be a lab rat."

His expression changing to mock enthusiasm, Jason said, "But my sacrifice will prevent this kind of thing from ever happening again. They'll invent detection systems and scanners. It'll be great. Assuming I survive the procedure, and assuming they can cure me, I might even live a semi-normal life afterwards. More likely, they'll keep me locked up for the rest of my life and experiment on me from time to time."

Nape said, "Maybe there's something I can do."

"Like what?" asked Jason.

Nape took Jason's place at the view port, staring out at the stars as he thought. Then he turned to Jason and said, "I don't think you are a threat anymore. Really, the Masters are defeated, and we're on our way to the other side of the galaxy. I don't see why you couldn't lead a normal life."

Jason said, "Well, I don't think Dr. Lang will see it that way."

Nape had been talking with his intel people, and he was afraid that Jason's prediction was actually pretty likely to come true. They would definitely want to find out how his brain had been altered, and although it might just result in a cure, it could just as likely leave him as a vegetable for the rest of his life. The prospect of having someone cutting into your brain, and not knowing if they can put it back together again would scare anyone.

There was also Reara to consider, if she got her hands on Jason, it would get pretty ugly. She had made her opinion clear last time Nape had talked to her. She felt that Jason deserved whatever happened to him. If he died on the operating table, then it was just punishment for those who had died because of his espionage. Nape had tried to explain that Jason had no

control over his actions, but she wouldn't hear any of it.

Nape on the other hand thought of Jason as a friend, who had not done anything to warrant a death sentence. Jason was not responsible for his actions, and Nape had tried his best to convince the Plenipotentiary Council of this. His orders were to bring Jason back for scientific examination and possibly a trial.

Nape turned and started to walk toward the door to Jason's quarters. An idea came to him, and he turned to look at Jason again. He carefully considered exactly what he would tell the council upon his return, and thought he might just get away with it. Finally, he turned to walk out of the room. As he walked away, he said, "I've got to get back to work. We'll be defolding over Earth in a few minutes. I'll have to make sure your door is well secured because I'll need the guards to help in the search for Robert and if you were to escape, it'd be almost impossible to find you down on the planet."

Jason watched as Nape closed the door behind him as he left.

It has often been speculated that Lieutenant Graham's assignment to the departing Jupiter Division was handed down by a jealous Admiral Hayes-Hunter. Such motivations are of course difficult if not impossible to prove, however, it is no secret that Graham and Rick were very close. Rick met with her at least once a week as she recorded his recollections for a documentary on the First Robotech War. At least until her fateful assignment to the 36th that is.

A Pilot Looks at Forty, Unauthorized Biography of Adm. Rick Hunter

Chapter 8

The next morning, as the sun rose, Robert was convinced that this would be his final day with Gia. They packed up what gear they had used the night before and loaded it back onto the cyclone. Before them was a ridge line from which they were sure they would be able to see Reflex Point. Robert was determined to go to the area they had heard the battle in last night.

“Won't we be caught?” asked Gia upon hearing Robert's intentions.

“I can't help it, there could be people there who need help. Also, we might be able to salvage something from the wreckage,” Robert explained. Really, it was more of a morbid curiosity. He wanted to see what had happened. He had never experienced anything like that before; that light and those sounds. It somewhat reminded him of how the Masters had used the factory satellite's main cannon to destroy Gia's hive back on Peryton, but he had seen no energy beams falling from the sky

last night. He had to know what it was.

They climbed onto the cyclone and started riding off, away from the site of the battle.

Gia asked, "I thought we were going to check out the battlefield?"

"We will," said Robert, "but first, we're going to make a quick stop over this way."

Robert wasn't excited about what he was about to do, but he recognized that it was quite necessary. They drove off the road and into the woods. Broken branches lay all around them. Robert knew that the alpha he had seen the night before had crashed in this area somewhere. Robert needed to find out if there was anything left of the pilot. As they proceeded, they saw splintered trees and parts of a blue alpha fighter. Then Robert saw what he had been looking for. Robert approached the crumpled aircraft and opened the canopy with the emergency rescue handle. The pilot had died instantly in the impact.

Robert had watched the alpha crash, and knew there was nothing he could have done to help, nevertheless, he felt bad. Not only for not being able to help, but for using him like this.

The alpha was hardly recognizable after the crash. The fuselage was mangled and burnt. The canopy had shattered, leaving the pilot exposed. Robert opened the small tool box attached to the back of the cyclone and started to work on the dead REF pilot's armor.

"What are you doing?" asked Gia.

"His shoulder plates. I'm trying to get them off so I can switch them with mine," Robert answered.

"But why?" Gia asked, visibly dismayed by what was going on.

"Insignia," Robert said. "Look at my shoulders... Now

look at his... Get it now?"

Gia noticed that the symbols on Robert's shoulder plates were different from what the dead pilot was wearing. On one of the pilot's shoulders was a number, nothing remarkable except that it was a different number from Robert's. On the other shoulder was a letter "J" on a heart shaped background. This was the symbol of the Jupiter Division. Now Gia understood.

Robert felt as if he were some kind of grave robber, but he tried not to show it. Again, he had to be strong for Gia. This would greatly improve their odds of making it to Reflex Point.

While Gia waited, Robert replaced his own shoulder plates with the one from the crashed pilot. Now he would not stand out so badly if they came across some REF forces.

His new insignia in place, Robert mounted the cyclone with Gia and they headed out toward the battlefield. They approached through the woods, hidden by the underbrush. When they came to the edge of the crater in which the battle had taken place, Robert saw damaged mecha strewn everywhere. Arms and legs of alphas and betas, Invid shock troopers still oozing nutrient fluid. Destroids slashed open by Invid claws. In the distance, a group of cyclone clad troops were escorting a giant cannon of some kind up a steep incline. It seemed to be hovering on its own. Above, several veritechs flew cover for the operation.

From behind them came an unexpected female voice, "You there, why aren't you helping?"

When Robert and Gia turned around, they saw a woman with long black hair wearing black CVR-3 armor and holding a large video camera over her shoulder.

"What's going on here?" asked Robert.

"Wait a minute, who are you?" asked the woman.

“Um, I’m commander Bob Thompson,” said Robert thinking quickly. “I crashed last night during the fighting.”

The woman in the black armor said, “Well, commander, glad to see you are alright. I’m lieutenant Sue Graham, chief intelligence officer of the 36th Squadron. And who is this with you?”

“This is Garnet. She helped me when my fighter went down,” explained Robert.

“Fascinating, but right now I need you two to step aside. I came up here to get a good wide angle shot of the troops moving the synchro cannon,” said Graham as she moved to the edge of the crater and began filming.

Robert knew as soon as he saw it that the synchro cannon was what had caused all the commotion the night before.

“What are you doing with it?” asked Robert.

“We’re hiding it in the rocks. The Invid wiped out most of us just after we landed last night, but we managed to repel them with the help of the cannon,” explained Graham. “If they come back, we probably won’t be able to stop them. We can’t let the cannon fall into enemy hands. It’s desperately needed for the assault on the main hive. That’s why we are hiding it.”

“Good move,” Robert said. “How is the rest of the assault going?”

Graham stopped filming and turned to face Robert. “Not good,” she said. “As you can see, we were decimated. The other two landing zones seem to have gone undetected by the enemy, and they are pressing forward toward Reflex Point. But, with only two thirds of the ground forces and no synchro cannon, we may have to resort to operation scorched earth.”

“What? Scorched earth?” asked Robert.

“Come on commander, of course you know about the

missiles,” said Graham with a quizzical look and a glance toward Gia.

Playing it off, Robert said, “Of course I do, but I’m shocked to hear that they are actually planning on using them.”

“Only as a last resort,” said Graham.

Robert knew that she must have been talking about the Neutron-S missiles that had been in development back on Tirol. They were unbelievably powerful doomsday weapons that would irradiate a planet’s surface and likely destroy all life. The very thought of them being used on earth appalled him.

“Let’s hope it doesn’t come to that,” said Robert.

“I had thought they would be used as a bluff,” said Graham. “But it seems I was wrong.”

“What do you mean?” asked Gia, beginning to realize the gravity of the situation, even though she didn’t know what the missiles were capable of.

“Well, you can’t bluff your enemy if he doesn’t know about it,” Graham explained. “For fear that the Invid would destroy the weapons, they were kept secret.”

Robert, with a grave look, said “It would seem a terrible error has been made.”

“Well, I’ve got to get back to work. I’m going to go down and get some close ups,” said Graham as she walked off.

“You seem to enjoy your work” said Robert.

“I had a life... A good one... Back on Tirol... But now all I have is a job,” said Graham as she walked away. “So I make the most of it.”

Once Graham was safely out of sight, Robert and Gia walked back into the woods. Soon they were back on the cyclone and speeding toward Reflex Point. Robert went as fast as he thought he safely could on the dirt road. They passed

patches of trees and grassy fields as they drove and the warm light of the still rising sun bathed the scenery in warmth. But then Gia said something that changed the mood.

“I sense my people. They are coming toward us!”

Robert pulled off the road and shut down the cyclone. They hid under the cover of some trees and watched the sky. After about two minutes a swarm of Invid mecha flew overhead. Through the canopy of tree limbs Robert and Gia could see hundreds of shock troopers, scouts and pincer command units go streaking by.

“They are going toward the soldiers,” said Gia in a whisper.

“I know, but what can we do?” asked Robert. “One more cyclone isn’t going to make a bit of difference in that fight. We should continue on.”

Gia nodded, and they drove away.

Why did she spare us? She could have left us to be destroyed by our own weapons. Perhaps the protestations of her children won her over. Perhaps she learned something intangible about us when she peered into my soul. Perhaps it was all just a coincidence that the weapons just happened to be in her way as she left. I guess we will never know.

The Collected Journals of Commander Robert Farino

Chapter 9

As Robert and Gia approached Reflex Point, the battle raged around them. Alpha and beta fighters raced overhead. Smoking REF and Invid mecha fell from the sky. Waves of cyclone clad infantry rushed at the enemy. Invid Shock Troopers burst from the ground and began firing their shoulder mounted cannons and swatting their crab like claws at the oncoming tide of REF warriors.

Robert and Gia watched from a distant hilltop. Even from two miles, they felt that they were in imminent danger.

"The fighting is a bit less intense over there," Robert said, pointing to an area on the western side of the Invid stronghold. "We might be able to get close if we go in over there."

"OK! Let's go," yelled Gia over the roar of the battle.

Robert turned his cyclone and headed toward the point he had shown Gia. A deafening roar from above caught his attention and he looked to see what it was. He swerved to the left and stopped just in time for a green alpha in fighter mode to crash to the ground in front of them. The flaming mecha

slammed into the ground, pieces of it flying here and there as it plowed a trench a hundred feet long into the soft ground.

Immediately, Robert thought of the alpha that had crashed near them last night, and how he had taken the shoulder plates from the dead pilot. An overwhelming feeling of sympathy came over him, and against his better judgment, he turned the cyclone and headed right for the flaming wreck.

Robert rode up to the crashed mecha, and saw that the pilot was unconscious. The mecha looked as if it might explode at any second. He leapt off his cyclone and yelled for Gia to stand back. Robert ran up to the canopy and tried to open it with the emergency release handle, but it was horribly mangled.

Thinking quickly, he pulled out his Gallant H-90 energy pistol and carefully aimed it at the locking mechanism for the canopy. He had to shoot it a couple of times, but it eventually released. He threw open the canopy and pulled the pilot out. It took all of his strength to pull the pilot, fully clad in CVR-3 armor from the wreck. There was no way he was going to be able to carry him.

Laying the injured pilot on his back, Robert grabbed the back plate of his armor right at the neck and began dragging him away from the burning fighter. They had only gotten about twenty yards away when it blew. Robert was knocked down, but quickly got back up and started dragging the survivor to a safe distance. He could feel the intense heat of the flaming alpha on his face.

Once he judged that he had gotten the pilot to a safe distance, he checked him for injuries, and found nothing that he judged to be life threatening. He called to Gia, and they jumped back on the cyclone and continued toward the hive.

Robert felt as if he had somehow paid off a debt that had been haunting him. He felt lighter somehow, like a weight had

been lifted from his shoulders.

He and Gia hadn't gotten more than another tenth of a mile before the ground in front of them exploded! Hundred pound chunks of soil flew everywhere and Robert had no choice but to stop the Cyclone again. There were now two Shock Troopers blocking his path. They reared back their claws and Robert started to turn the cyclone around to speed off back the way he had come, but before he could, Gia said, "No! Stop Immediately!"

At first, Robert thought she was speaking to him, and he stopped. He then realized she had been speaking to the Shock Troopers. When he turned to look, he saw them frozen, motionless, as Gia held out her hand like a policeman directing the traffic to stop.

"You will allow us to pass!" Gia said to them in a stern tone of voice.

The two shock troopers lowered their arms, but something in their posture made Robert doubt they would really let them through, but then they parted. Robert cautiously drove between them and on toward his goal.

They finally reached the energy barrier that surrounded Reflex Point. Robert wondered how they would get through, they didn't have a destabilizer rifle, but then he saw something remarkable. A group of REF mecha following a creature that seemed to be made of pure energy. They were inside the shield, and heading for the Hive.

"What is that?" he asked Gia.

"We are not the only ones to call on the Regis today," Gia said.

Gia dismounted the Cyclone and stood next to Robert. She said, we won't be needing that any more. Then she transformed

herself. Purple flame emanated from every part of her body and she became pure energy. Robert nearly fell off the cyclone.

"What's going on? I don't understand!" yelled Robert.

Gia reached out her arm and said, "You have delivered me to my people, you need not go any further."

She rose off the ground and turned to face Reflex Point. Then the energy barrier around the hive dissolved in front of her and she was able to enter. Robert transformed his Cyclone into armor mode and used its thrusters to hover above the ground. He followed her through the hole in the barrier.

Gia said, "What are you doing?"

"I'm coming with you," Robert said. "What do I have to go back to? Prison? Besides, I love you, and I can't wait to meet your parents."

Gia smiled and said, "I love you too, but I don't think mother is going to like you too much."

"Come on, let's go," said Robert as he flew to her side.

This part of the barrier was actually pretty close to the exterior of the hive. As they flew toward it, they saw the seasons begin to change around them with remarkable speed. Plants grew, flowered and died in less than a minute. Snow fell and melted. Robert saw the others following their own flaming apparition toward the hive. It was obvious that Robert and Gia would get there first.

Behind them came a blast of energy and Robert turned to see what happened. It was an alpha, and it had just blasted an Invid battloid to pieces. Robert knew that this battle was just about over. The pilot was clearly shocked by the sight of a human and an Invid racing toward Reflex Point together. Rather than fly on to engage another target, he paused watching Robert and Gia approach the hive. Robert knew this could not be good.

Soon the whole fleet would know.

Aboard the UES Liberator, General Reinhardt was becoming overwhelmed by the scope of the battle. He didn't know who was winning. His forces were dwindling, but the Invid were near defeat.

Sparks called to his commander, "Sir, a report from the surface. The rogue alpha pilot has been spotted. He is entering Reflex Point with what appears to be some new type of Invid!"

"That's it Sparks. Begin final preparations to launch the Neutron-S missiles," ordered Reinhardt.

"Sir, you can't! We still have troops down there!"

"If the enemy learns about the missiles, they will destroy them before we have a chance to launch! We have no choice. We must assume our plan is compromised," explained the general.

"Aye sir," replied Sparks.

Robert and Gia arrived at the main hive dome of Reflex Point. They passed through a diamond shaped opening on the outer wall and Robert followed Gia through a web of darkness and light toward a source of tremendous energy. Then they were instantaneously transported to the command center of the hive.

Face to face with the Invid Regess, Robert stood in shock. She appeared not entirely corporeal. She seemed to be at the same time solid and energy. Her face was that of a strong human female. She had no hair and on the collar of her robe were faces which Robert somehow knew were in some way alive.

"Gia! What have you done! This is no place for their kind!" said the Regess.

“Mother, hear what I have to say! This human saved me! He brought me all the way here from Tirol just to return me to my own people!” Gia explained.

The Regess continued, “My child he is the enemy. He and his kind are the children of the shadow. I am afraid your time among them has poisoned your mind.”

“No, they are not the children of the shadow! They fight only for what they rightfully deserve: their home world. Are we any different?” asked Gia.

“Come Gia,” said the Regess, “we will show you the truth and you may retake your place alongside your brothers and sisters. Together we will rid the galaxy of the influence of these humans.”

Finally, Robert spoke, “That may be harder than you think. We are willing to die to defend our world, and we will take you with us if necessary.”

The Regess turned toward Robert and her gaze pierced him to his core. He felt the Regess’ powerful mind inside his. She instantly knew about the Neutron-S missiles and operation Scorched Earth.

Robert, his face contorted, screamed, “Get out of my mind!”

The Regess released her mental hold on Robert and he dropped to his knees.

The Regess spoke, “Your people will not use these weapons. What would you gain by eradicating your home world? I do not believe you would make such a terrible error.”

“Mother, will you not relent? Will you not compromise?” pleaded Gia. “Will you fight this war until they are all dead, or we are?”

The Regess reached out her hand and said, “Come Gia,

come back to us and lead our people to victory. We have crossed the great gulf of stars and time, now this world is ours. We have a home again. We must protect it.”

“You are right, it is time for me to join my people,” Gia answered. “Come Robert, let’s go.”

Robert stood up and walked haltingly to Gia’s side. “Are you serious?” he asked.

“You would choose them over your own people?” asked the Regess in disbelief.

“Yes, mother. Think on that,” said Gia as she and Robert disappeared in a flash of light.

Seconds later, another of the Regess’ daughters appeared before her, this time with even more humans. Ariel, the Invid simulagent stood before the mother of the Invid, human friends at her side, and pled her case. The Regess could not believe that her children had turned against her. What could cause them to do such a thing? Was it possible that what they were saying about the humans could be true?

Outside the Liberator, floating in the blackness of space, Darkinn and his squadron of shadow drones waited for orders. His squadron, along with several others and a small group of capital ships had been held in reserve.

The battle wasn't going well. Reinhardt had lost communication with almost every ground unit assaulting Reflex Point. He had hoped they could secure the ground outside the shield before sending in the shadow fighters to blast it open. Now, it seemed that the shadow fighters were the only card he had left to play, so he gave the order.

"Squadron 279, detach from present coordinates and

proceed to Reflex Point, over," came the order from the flag ship.

"Roger command. This is squadron leader, we're on our way," replied Drakinn.

Drakinn and his drones moved in. His fighter buffeted as he entered the upper atmosphere. The heat of reentry caused tongues of flame to lap around the exterior of the six mecha as they dove toward their objective.

The situation on the ground was far more chaotic than he had imagined. The Invid were decimating the REF warriors, but they were not all destroyed. Perhaps the overloaded Invid shield was preventing communications, but there were still many human mecha fighting in the air and on the ground around Reflex Point.

The ground was littered with crashed REF fighters. Many downed pilots simply climbed out of their fighters, donned their cyclones and continued to take the fight to the enemy. Others were injured and needed to be extracted. Mayday calls came in over the short range communications channels. Rescue teams rushed to their aid.

Aboard a Horizon-H, the specially modified rescue version of the Horizon class shuttle, a team of Pararescue Cyclone Riders prepared to enter combat. Both cargo pods were filled with jumpers ready to risk life and limb to pull an injured pilot out of his crashed fighter and take him to safety. As the shuttle approached the site of a downed beta fighter, the loadmaster called, "Two minute warning!"

The cyclone clad rescue warriors stood and faced the cargo door at the end of the pod. The twenty armored soldiers positioned themselves almost toe to heel. Looking down the cargo pod, the loadmaster could see them all close their helmet

visors. Behind the first cyclone rider, the bulky armored team stood in a straight line so that a procession of helmets and cyclone wheel thrusters was all he could see.

Reaching for the control panel mounted on the cargo pod wall, the loadmaster opened the cargo door. A rush of cold air blew into the compartment. On the ground it might be warm, but at ten thousand feet, it was quite chilly. Now the loadmaster called, "One minute!" The lead jumper, clearly in charge, passed hand signals to his team mates, and they checked each other over one last time. Then he turned and watched the set of lights next to the door. There was one red light on each side of the exit.

The loadmaster stood at the edge of the cargo floor and looked directly down, nearly two miles, and saw the sprawling complex of hives below, all connected by metallic spurs that were surely tunnels for Invid to transit between the various domes. He could see flashes of weapons fire and explosions sparkling all around beneath him.

At ten seconds out, he stood aside to give the jumpers as much room as possible. Then the red lights next to the door switched to green and the twenty jumpers moved quickly to the edge of the door. Some simply stepped off into empty sky, some did back flips and other feats of acrobatics. As they fell away from the shuttle, they watched the hive grow larger as they fell toward it. They could see the smoking beta fighter that was their destination.

The altitude indicator inside their helmets counted down, five thousand, four thousand, three, two, one. When they were only a few hundred feet above the terrain, they fired the thrusters on their cyclone armor and decelerated. As they hit the ground feet first, just a few yards from their target they immediately

began running to set up a defensive perimeter. Everyone knew exactly where he was expected to go and what he was to do.

Invid charged in from all sides, but none made it through. The defenders used the latest in REF firepower to blow all challengers out of the air.

Drakinn's shadow drones blasted holes all around the shield. Alphas, betas and other shadow units poured inside, taking the fight right to the main hive.

The shield, flickering and glowing, began to emit massive amounts of electromagnetic radiation. Communications between the ground forces and the fleet in space were now completely cut off. Blind to what was happening on the ground, General Reinhardt made the decision to deploy the REF's ultimate weapon.

The massive, starship sized missiles came to life. Their propulsion system spooled up they began to move slowly toward the planet, gaining speed as they closed on their target. The missiles dwarfed all but the largest of the REF's warships. Thrusters adjusted their course and put them on a path to impact Reflex Point. With the final course adjustments finished, the drive sections fell away as the warheads entered the upper atmosphere.

Drakinn led his team of shadow drones through the tunnels of the central hive. His objective was to end the fighting by the fastest means possible, find the Regess and eliminate her. He had heard the reports of several other REF mecha being sighted entering the hive, so he was careful to check his fire. He knew the drones would not accidentally fire on a friendly, but he was still human, and therefore fallible.

He was also concerned about the reports of the deserter entering the hive. He had been briefed before launch about the situation. He still couldn't believe it. His former commander, Robert, was the deserter. He was also well acquainted with the Invid he was aiding. He did not know what he would do if he came across them.

The Hive began to quake. Drakinn could feel the tremors even through the mecha. The shield must be down. The REF was bombarding the hive from the outside. It would not be long now. This war was almost over.

They approached a perpendicular intersection in the corridor. Drakinn ordered drones number one and two to take point and check around the corner. It was all clear. Drakinn ordered the two drones to continue down the perpendicular corridor. They were to fly ahead about a hundred yards, Drakinn and the other three drones would follow.

Drones one and two raced off down the corridor, but they did not get far. They were immediately challenged by two defenders of the hive. One was a royal command battloid, and the other a blue saber type cyclone. The drones were confused to find themselves up against another REF mecha. Their programming had not covered this eventuality. Taking advantage of their indecision, the blue cyclone fired two missiles, one at the sensor head of each of the two battloid mode drones. With their external sensors destroyed, the two drones were effectively blind. They slumped to the floor of the corridor, smoke billowing from their destroyed heads.

Drakinn's HUD registered the loss of the two drones. He called up the sensor data from their last few seconds in order to get a look at the enemy. He played the video of the encounter and was shocked. He saw the cyclone clad warrior and the Invid

battloid and immediately thought, *that must be Robert!* He zoomed in on the helmet visor of the cyclone, and was shocked to see it was a man with long blue hair and a gold headband. The Invid pilot wasn't Gia either, but rather a girl with short green hair.

Drakinn stopped the playback and considered his next move. The two were advancing down the corridor toward the intersection. Strangely, they seemed to be having a light hearted conversation. Drakinn knew he could take them by surprise. That guy might be human, but he was certainly working for the Invid. Drakinn ordered his drones back, away from the intersection. He waited quietly just around the corner, allowing his opponents to get a little closer. As they flew near, he sprang out from his concealed position and stopped right in their path, taking careful aim on the Invid mecha and firing. He scored a hit right on the RCB's shoulder, nearly tearing its left arm off.

Unfortunately, he didn't do nearly as much damage as he hoped, and the Invid mecha stood back up and fired on him. The shot hit his mecha square in the chest. His shadow fighter lost power and crumpled to the floor. Drakinn felt excruciating pain in his right shoulder, and in his lower body. The blast had ripped a hole right through the mecha's armor and crushed the pilot compartment in on him. He was pinned in place at the waist by the main control panel and he couldn't feel his legs at all.

The three remaining shadow drones immediately charged to defend their commander. One leapt right over his crippled mecha and dropped to one knee directly between him and the two enemies. The other two stood and fired over the shoulders of the kneeling drone. Drakinn called for help, but he was doubtful that any rescue forces could reach him this deep inside

Reflex Point.

The drones pressed their attack against the Invid battloid, and although they couldn't fire at the cyclone, it seemed as if they might drive them both back. Then, to Drakinn's surprise another REF mecha, a beta fighter, showed up. *I'm saved*, he thought. But the Beta began firing on the three drones. Incapable of firing back at the REF mecha, the three drones were easily destroyed. "What the hell is going on here!" he yelled, racked with pain. The image of the blue haired cyclone rider burned into his mind as rage welled up inside him.

A three man team of cyclone riders moved stealthily through the corridors of Reflex Point. They had been part of the rescue team operating outside the hive when they received Drakinn's call for help. While the rest of their team remained outside helping other downed pilots, these three had volunteered to venture inside the hive itself to attempt his rescue. Sergeant Marks led the team, and privates Malar and Santo watched his back.

As they rounded the corner in the tunnel, they saw the pile of shadow fighters. Malar and Santo took up defensive positions as Marks approached the damaged mecha. He could hear Drakinn screaming in pain as he ran to his aid. When he looked into the exposed pilot compartment, he exclaimed, "Oh my God!"

Malar and Santo turned and looked at their team leader. They had never heard him react like that to seeing anything before, and they had seen their share of blood and guts. The hive began to shake again. This time it was no explosion. It was a steady rumble, and the team knew something big was about to happen.

Marks saw how the control panel was pinning Drakinn inside the cockpit. He was bleeding badly, and there didn't seem to be any way to extract him. Thinking quickly, Marks ordered the two privates over to his side. He explained, "There's no way to get him out of there. We're going to have to drag the whole thing out of here."

"There's no way we can drag an alpha!" remarked Malar.

"We can do it if we use our cyclone thrusters to give us some extra push," Marks explained.

"What if we get jumped?" asked Santo.

"It's the only way! Now let's get to it," yelled Marks.

Jets of blue flame flared from the three cyclones thrusters as they pushed Drakinn's shadow fighter down the corridor toward the outer portal of the hive. Drakinn's screams got quieter as the team pushed his mecha from the rapidly deteriorating hive. It seemed as if the structure might fly apart at any moment. Eventually Drakinn's screams subsided to low moans and then nothing at all. The last thing he saw before losing consciousness was the light of day as the three cyclone clad heroes pushed him out of the hive and back into the raging battlefield outside.

On the ground, Robert and Gia ran from the battle. Gia, now back in her corporeal form, stopped suddenly. Robert turned to see what was going on. The sound of the fighting and the overloading shield was deafening

Gia said, "Something is happening! The Regis is calling all her children to her. She is leaving!"

"You can still go back!" yelled Robert over the noise.

Gia turned and looked back toward the hive. It seemed to be dissolving right before her eyes. It transformed into a pillar

of yellow energy and began to reach for the heavens.

Gia began to speak, "I think... I should.."

Robert grabbed Gia by the shoulders and turned her so that they were face to face. "If you're going to go, it's now or never!" he yelled.

Then Gia remembered seeing her sister leading the other group of humans into the hive. Perhaps she wasn't the only one who felt this way.

Gia smiled and said, "Let's get out of here!"

"I said I was taking you home!" yelled Robert,

"No, you said WE were going home!" Gia corrected.

"Now come on! We've got to go!"

All of the Invid warriors everywhere on the planet transformed into energy and joined their Regess as the fiery pillar rose into the sky. As they left, they encountered the Neutron-S missiles as they fell through the atmosphere. The incredible energy of the departing Invid life force dissolved the deadly machines and continued on into space. Every starship that stood in the way of the departing Invid life force was disintegrated. Only a few ships remained. Miraculously, the UES Liberator survived.

*She finds him strong and brave.
 And how she wants him so, so much.
 So much she knows she needs that touch
 To lead the way to love.
 She spies a gentle soul,
 Waiting for her to find someone so,
 So very sweet and kind
 To lead the way, the way to love.
 And now they have their space.
 They've run the final race.
 Love's given them a place
 Where love can live.*

Mid 21st Century Song Lyric

Chapter 10

Nape's task force arrived to find an Earth free of the oppression of the Invid. Giant REF starships landed and thousands of humans set foot on their home world, tears of joy streaming down their faces. Not far from the crater which had once been Reflex Point, a concert was going on. Yellow dancer sang and put on an incredible show for natives and REF newcomers alike. There were many happy reunions, and some sad goodbyes. In the crowd, Robert and Gia celebrated along with the thousands of joyous people.

On the bridge of the Repulse, Nape was informed that ground forces had reported seeing Robert and Gia entering Reflex Point. What happened after that was anybody's guess.

“Should we start a search?” asked a lieutenant from her station.

Nape replied, “Prep a shuttle, I’m going down there.”

Nape stood on the bridge of the Horizon-t as it approached the Earth. He was struck by the beauty of the blue oceans and the white clouds. From up here, you couldn’t even tell that there had been a war.

The pilot said, “Sir, better take a seat, we’ll be landing in a few minutes.”

Nape went into the troop compartment and took his seat. Soon they were on the ground. Nape knew Robert well enough to guess what he would do, assuming that he was still alive, and still on Earth.

After the concert, the crowd started to disperse. Robert and Gia climbed back onto their cyclone and began to drive away. They drove slowly through the meandering people leaving the concert. A few people thanked him as they did the other soldiers in the crowd. Robert didn’t know what to say to them. He waived and smiled and determined to head south, perhaps down to Chile or some other country where he and Gia could hide and live a life without having to fear being found by the REF.

Finally, Robert found a road that seemed to go in the right direction and he turned to look at Gia.

“Well, here we go,” he said.

A look of utter surprise went over Gia’s face and she said, “Robert! Look!”

When Robert turned back around, he saw Nape standing in the road before him. Nape was wearing his REF uniform, but no CVR-3 armor. He was standing right in the middle of the road,

directly in their path.

Robert stopped the cyclone and said, "Nape! What are you doing here?"

Nape threw a balled up piece of paper at Robert, the note he had left behind, and said, "This is what I'm doing here. How could you do this to me? To all of us?"

"I knew you could handle things without me, and I had to do this," Robert explained.

"You didn't trust me?" asked Nape. "You just left without telling anyone. Just this stupid note."

"And what if I had told you? What then?" asked Robert.

"I probably would have tried to talk you out of it. But that's not the point," said Nape.

"No, it's not," Robert continued, "There's no chance in hell that you would have talked me out of it. That leaves you with only two options. Try to stop me or try to help."

"What makes you think I would have tried to stop you?" asked Nape.

"No, you don't get it," explained Robert. "I was pretty sure you would have tried to help, and I didn't want you to get involved. Who would have led the mission against the Masters if they had arrested you for aiding me?"

Nape walked over to his old friend. "So, you did it to protect me?" he asked.

Robert nodded, "So what now?"

Nape thought for a minute and then said, "I don't know..." After an awkward silence, Nape grinned and asked, "Have you two set a date yet?"

"Thanks, my friend," said Robert as he shook Nape's hand. "We'll make sure you're invited. Make sure the others know that everything worked out for us."

“I’ll do that,” said Nape. “Reara won’t understand.”

“I know,” said Robert shaking his head.

“Now you two get out of here before someone else sees you,” said Nape.

Gia thanked Nape and gave him a heart felt hug and then they were on their way again.

Robert waved to Nape and he and Gia started off down the road.

Nape walked back to the shuttle. It was empty. The crew, thrilled to be on earth after living in space for so long, were all out looking around.

Nape walked up the ramp and into the troop compartment where he had sat for landing. On his seat was a neatly folded piece of paper. He opened it and saw that there were but two words written on it. “Thanks, Jason.”

After driving for a few minutes, Robert and Gia found themselves behind an old, beat up looking M-304 jeep.

Looks like it’s seen quite a bit of action, Robert thought to himself.

Robert went to pass but as they went by, Gia called out, “Ariel! Robert, it’s my sister!”

Robert looked over and saw that one of the people in the jeep was a young lady with long red hair and the same mysterious eyes as Gia. It was obvious that they really were sisters.

“Pull over!” yelled Robert to the driver.

On the side of the road, Gia and Ariel had a warm reunion. Robert learned that the rather portly looking guy driving the jeep was known as Lunk and the energetic girl riding in the passenger seat, who just couldn’t stop going on about how

exciting it was to find Marlene's sister, was named Annie.

Robert asked, "Where are you guys headed?"

Lunk answered, "We're going to meet up with some friends. A guy named Lancer and his new girlfriend. I think her name is Sera."

Gia turned and asked, "Sera? You don't mean..."

Lunk chuckled and said, "That's right. Gonna be quite a family reunion, huh? That is, if you guys come with us."

"You don't mind?" asked Robert.

"Are you kidding?" said Lunk with a laugh.

Robert turned to Gia and asked, "Wanna ride with your sister? I don't mind."

Gia gave Robert a hug and started to cry.

"Hey lady, are you all right?" asked Annie.

"I think I'm going to be just fine," Gia answered.

Drakinn awoke to find himself in an REF hospital. The room was pretty spartan, and he found that he was sharing it with four other injured personnel. The medical facilities were full of the injured after the battle. A nurse was attending to one of Drakinn's roommates. A video screen was mounted on the wall and the news was showing. The anchor man went over the amazing events of the battle for Reflex Point.

Drakinn then noticed that he could not feel his right arm or his legs. He tried to move his arm, and although he was unable to feel it, the arm did move. The point where it met the shoulder was sore beyond belief. Then he noticed it. The arm was shiny and metallic. It was not his arm at all but some mechanical prosthetic. He pulled the sheets off his bed and looked at his legs. They too had been replaced with robotic prosthetics.

He began to yell, "What the hell happened to me! What

happened to my arm? My legs?”

The Nurse ran over and tried to calm him. She explained that he was injured in the battle and they had to amputate. Drakinn was furious. As he looked around the room, out of the corner of his eye he caught the image of something that sparked a deep feeling of rage. The news was showing footage of the concert that took place after the end of the battle. The singer flung off her dress to reveal that she was indeed a man. The tall, slender man with long blue hair thanked the crowd. Drakinn lost control.

He grabbed the nurse by the arm and spun her around to face the video screen. “Who is that man?” he asked, yelling at the top of his lungs.

“What?” asked the nurse, not yet understanding that he was referring to the image on the news.

“That man on the video screen! Who is he?” Drakinn asked again, growing more enraged by the second. He shook the nurse violently.

“That’s Lancer!” the nurse yelled, desperate to pacify Drakinn. “He used to be a singer that went by the name Yellow Dancer. He’s been part of a resistance group operating on earth for about a year now. He fought in the battle for Reflex Point. He’s a hero.”

Drakinn pushed the nurse aside and stood up, yelling, “I know he fought at the battle! He’s the one! He’s the one that took my legs!”

About the Author

Brian McAfee is currently on active duty with the United States Air Force. He serves as a crewmember aboard the HC-130P, combat rescue variant of the venerable C-130 Hercules. He has flown on dozens of combat missions over Afghanistan in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. During his time with combat rescue, he has been credited with approximately 20 lives saved and another six assists. He is married and has one daughter. They currently reside in Arizona. Brian's robotech.com user name is Seifrietti Weisse.

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