

Paul had never served in the army. He had no overly romantic notions about martial honor or the glory of battle. Yet, he was not prepared for the dull monotony of camp life. He imagined that in most campsites the pace would be somewhat more hectic, owing to the need for posted sentries. In this particular camp, there was no need for sentries, at least not in the obvious sense, so that the pace seemed almost somnambulant. The days seemed to drag on interminably.

Paul tried to keep himself occupied. One day, he volunteered for visual sentry, just to give him something to do. His request was of course, rejected. He tried his hand at cooking, but was not very proficient at that task, causing the camp a great deal of consternation. Finally, he decided to go over to volunteer his services to Albertus and the men working on the worm program. That too, failed.

"Elissar, what can I do to help. I'm going crazy sitting around here, waiting for something to happen."

"Well, we don't need sentries, at least the kind you're familiar with. And you can't cook. Maybe you could pay Albertus and his crew a visit. If I remember correctly, you're fairly proficient with a computer."

"I already tried to help Albertus. When I asked him what type of language he was working with, he gave me a strange look and went on working. If I knew the language maybe I could help."

"What do you mean by language?"

"Oh, I see what the problem is: you don't know whether I mean operating language or applications language. Take your choice, I can program in machine language or about five or six upper level languages."

"Paul, what are you talking about when you say language? We communicate directly with the machine through the voice. Oh, yes, your people cannot communicate as we do. Does that imply a usage of instruction sets for the machine?"

"You can talk directly to the computer through the voice? Do you guys think in binary?"

"To answer your questions, we can communicate directly with the

machine; and no, we do not think in binary. Binary has'nt been used by the civilized races for hundreds of years."

"No wonder Albertus looked at me like I was crazy when I asked him for a flow chart pad. How do you you write the program if you communicate directly with the machine?"

"Simple. We tell the machine how to arrange the arguments, then instruct it to execute the program steps. We keep testing the program through iteration until we get it right."

"Well, I don't think I'd be of any use to Albertus. I would still like to be able to do something, though."

"Well, I'll tell you what: I was just preparing to go for a tour of the campsite. How would you like to accompany me?"

"I'd be grateful to come with. Let's get going."

Elissar and Paul made their way through camp, stopping along the way to talk to the men or inspect some equipment. After stopping by to visit Albertus and his crew, they made their way to the communications center.

"Good morning, Ulrasur, how goes the watch?"

"We've had a lot of activity in this quadrant for the past few days. No one has entered our airspace, but the Panterran have been leaving their home planet in fairly large numbers. We can't tell yet if they are headed for this planet. One thing is certain: the leaders on this planet are not expecting re-enforcements, nor do they expect any further supplies from home. We have'nt been watching the Mantodeii as closely, but they too expect no further re-enforcements or supplies. I guess we'll just have to sit tight and wait for one of the ships to enter our airspace."

"How do you figure the increased activity?"

"Hard to say. Could be additional forces on either side, although with what we know, I'd say that's unlikely. Could be curiosity seekers in small aircraft. Could be spy drones; either side could have launched them enmasse and then instructed the individual drones to separate locations. Like I said, sir, we'll just have to sit and wait."

"Any news from the field?"

"Orand reports that his worm mission was successful. The Panterran are already taking some land back. The Mantodeii, meanwhile, are scrambling to figure out what's wrong with their computer while at the same time staving off the Panterran counter-offensive. The Panterran leadership, flush with their recent success, has stopped entertaining thoughts of nuclear deployment. So far, the cat and mouse game is working splendidly."

"Any word from my sister?"

"No sir, we have heard nothing new. The last message we received asked that we stall for time. No indication was given as to the status of the resolution before the Federation."

"All things considered, it looks as though we're doing fairly well. At least we're giving my sister more time; I hope she uses it to her advantage."

"Thank you for the information, Ulrasur. I think we'll go visit the training center. I have'nt seen Arawan in a few days. Leave instructions with your men that any news from my sister is for my immediate attention. See you in a few days."

Paul and Elissar trudged off in the direction of the training center.

"Hey, I just thought of something. Why are we walking around this camp like a pair of fools. You could contact these people telepathically for their reports."

"The answer to that is quite simple. If I contacted them through the voice, then I would have nothing to do all day. So you and I are in the same boat - we are bored bored to distraction. Let us therefore continue toward the training center."

"Good idea, Elissar. That's what I like in a leader: resolution, forcefulness, insight and boredom."

"Paul, in the vernacular used on your planet 'don't give me any shit.'"

"Hello, Arawan how goes it?"

"Oh, I'm sorry, Paul; I had forgotten you were unfamiliar with the rest of the galaxy. The Grssh-Nak are an elite group of Panterran warriors. They are a highly trained fighting force and strike terror into the hearts of the Panterran themselves. No enemy has ever withstood the onslaught of the Grssh-Nak.

"Something is wrong here. The Grssh-Nak should not have been summoned for help. To all appearances, the Panterran are again winning the battle. That would also account for Rakreesh's anger at the summons. I wish I had word from my sister."

"Why don't you just use the voice to call her?"

"I wish I could, but we are prevented from doing so. We must wait until she contacts us."

"What could possibly prevent you from contacting her?"

"Detection. Did you think the voice was magic? We are not dealing with some romantic novel from your planet. The voice is a physical reality, it is therefore capable of detection."

"How the hell can it be detected?"

"Are you familiar with brain-wave patterns? In a normal waking state, brain waves form perceptible patterns. The same applies to various other conscious and semi-conscious states. It is equally true for the voice trance-state. A brain wave pattern is developed which is different from other patterns. The pattern is similar for the sender as well as the receptor of a message.

"The Federation has been aware of the telepathic ability for some time now. There have been isolated examples of telepathic behavior for several centuries. Up till now, the Federation has taken the stand that the incidents are too few and unrelated. Recently, they have begun a study of the phenomena and have conducted experiments to determine whether telepathy is a learned response.

"My sister fears that opposing members of the Federation have set-up telepathic monitors throughout the central city of Regul, where she resides, because they believe telepathic powers are being employed somewhere within the government. She has advised us not to transmit directly to her, until she establishes contact first. She has built a specially designed room where their filters cannot pick-up her brain wave activity during transmission.

?H-

"Fairly well, Elissar. The men are doing well in the combat drills. I just hope we never have to use the skills we acquire here. Of course, some of the younger men want to march off into battle. I hope my temperance has a sobering effect upon them, but I doubt it. Hello Paul, how are you?"

"Feeling pretty useless right about now."

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"Yes, I know what you mean. My men and I have been mere ornaments until now. Most of the work has been done by Elissar, Orand, and Ulrasur in this engagement. Its not that I resent the way this war is going - I would much rather have it settled peacefully - its just that it gets difficult sitting around waiting for something to happen. Well, I keep the men trained in case we are needed, so I suppose I serve some useful purpose."

?H- "Don't get discouraged my friend. You are doing a fine job. Let us hope that you will never be called upon to display how well you have trained our men. But I know how hard it is to wait to prove yourself. I have waited two hundred years for my chance. Patience, patience; the time is drawing near."

Just then, a look of alarm swept over Elissar's face.

"I am being summoned by Ulrasur. Paul, let us go. Arawan, come with for this involves you as well."

Elissar ran off in the direction of the communications center, followed by Arawan. Paul followed at a much less strenuous pace, owing to his breathing difficulties.

Paul arrived at the communications center and saw the once-passive facility abuzz with activity. In the midst of all the activity were Elissar, Arawan and Ulrasur engaged in a rather heated discussion.

"Are you sure the Grssh-Nak are on the way? I thought they were putting down a revolt in the Andromeda system."

"They have apparently abandoned that encounter to concentrate their efforts here. According to the transmission recieved by the Panterran leaders, they are expected here any day. I can tell you that Rakreesh is not too pleased with this latest development."

"Damn! We had not counted on this possibility. Our contingency plans did not include this eventuality."

"Excuse me, but what is going on here?" asked Paul.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Paul; I had forgotten you were unfamiliar with the rest of the galaxy. The Grssh-Nak are an elite group of Panterran warriors. They are a highly trained fighting force and strike terror into the hearts of the Panterran themselves. No enemy has ever withstood the onslaught of the Grssh-Nak.

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"She must be in constant danger of being detected."

"She is. While we have a difficult time preventing disaster on this planet, her job is by far, more difficult. She must escape detection, while at the same time provide the necessary impetus for passing legislation to enforce sanctions against the Panterran and Mantodeii."

"It seems that the whole operation hinges on her being able to pass that legislation. Aren't you unduly worried that she will fail?"

"You do not know my sister, for if you did, you would know she will not fail. But she has taken precautions nevertheless. Her primary objective is to prevent the enemy from gaining access to the secret of telepathy. She is for that reason unshai. Unshai means that she has the ability to go into another trance state which cannot be detected by monitors. This state will cause her to suicide before she can lapse into the telepathic trance state."

"I don't know what to say. And you all possess this ability?"

"We do. Our only hope is to bring an end to the system of government which tolerates the ruthless slaughter of life forms for self-aggrandizement. We have one advantage over the enemy which we must use to our benefit. That advantage is our superior communications and organization. But the enemy is making progress toward achieving the same end. Within a few hundred years, he will surely have the same ability. That knowledge, combined with his superior military power and wealth, will make him invincible. I believe that the Panterran especially, if they acquired such power, would feel themselves to be the equals to the old ones. I fear for the entire universe if the Panterran were to acquire such power. Nothing could prohibit them from seizing whatever they wanted."

"Owhindamon told me about the old ones once before. He made it seem that they were semi-mythic, or that at best, they were indifferent to the plight of the rest of the galaxy."

"The old ones have not been heard from for thousands of years. Many believe that they have passed beyond the realm of such as you or I. We have tried to contact them for several hundred years, but so far, our efforts have been in vain."

"Do you think they would help you?"

"Who knows? The answer to that question is beyond me. My duty is to do what I can here. Others have been assigned the task of contacting the old ones. Each has his own task - each should follow it to the best of his ability."

"I have no task - I am useless."

"You have already performed your task, and quite well at that. You sold the planet to the Panterran and then to the Mantodeii. The sale of the planet triggered off this war, which was still another diversion necessary to buy time. Even more importantly, it became obvious to the Federation that the two principal protagonists in the galaxy were getting too warlike for their own good. You also stalled the Panterran long enough for us to get organized and implement our plans. Besides, who can say what opportunities will come our way? You may yet have more to do in the days ahead."

"For today however, we will retire to take council. Tomorrow we will leave this camp."

"Where will we go?"

"To the front lines to meet the Grssh-nak."

"Are you crazy? You just said no army has ever withstood that force. What makes you think you will be any different?"

"Because I have waited two hundred years for this opportunity. Because I am stronger, smarter, more cunning and more deadly than any of the Panterran. And finally, because I have many deaths to avenge. I will not fail."