

"Nrssh-Kr1, how does Mr. Phillips like our accomodations?"

"Not too well, sir, for he carries on quite vehemently."

"That's what I like about you, Nrssh-Kr1, you've got a fine sense of humor. Well, on to more serious business. Has he admitted to working for the Mantodeii yet?"

"No sir, he has'nt. He says he does'nt work for anyone. When we asked him what army destroyed the Grssh-nak, he says that it was not a large force, but three or four thousand men. I think he is deliberately taunting us. I have waited till your arrival to determine if we should increase his torment."

"You say the force which destroyed the Grssh-nak is three thousand strong? Why lie to me, Paul. You will only make things difficult for yourself. Why not tell the truth and forgo some unnecessary pain. If you are worried about living, please don't trouble yourself. You will die whether you co-operate or not. Now, answer Nrssh-Kr1's questions or I will instruct him to get rough with you."

"I have answered his questions truthfully."

"Paul, why do you persist in lying to me. Three thousand men could not possibly defeat the Grssh-nak. Nrssh-Kr1, take whatever measures you deem necessary."

"Yes sir. Grassh, fix the mind probe upon Mr. Phillips. Good, now just let him know what the probe can do. Ah, Mr. Phillips, do you like the sensation? I rather doubt it. Now, for every answer that you give me which I don't think true, I will instruct Grassh to administer another charge. Do we understand the rules to the game? Grassh, explain the rules once more to Mr. Phillips before we begin. Good, now answer my questions, Mr. Phillips."

"Do you work for the Mantodeii?"

"No."

"Wrong answer. Grassh, please. Now, let's try again. Do you work for the Mantodeii?"



"I told you no, you fucker."

"Such language. Still not an acceptable answer. Grassh, again. Want to change your mind. No? Well, maybe you are telling the truth. We've got plenty of time, Mr. Phillips so I'll just ask a few more questions."

"How did you get to this planet?"

"I used the blue haze."

"Who told you how to use it?"

"One of the men in the army who defeated the Grssh-nak."

"Grassh, please administer the mind probe. Thank-you. Mr. Phillips, your answers irritate me. Now, why don't you admit that you work for the Mantodeii and that they showed you how to use the transport system."

"I am telling the truth."

"Grassh, increase the power on the probe. Ah yes, the probe seems to be working quite well now, judging from Mr. Phillips' reaction. You know Mr. Phillips, you will pass out shortly from the pain. We'll wait till you recover until we begin our questioning again. Grassh, please administer another charge from the probe. Look Grassh, he has indeed passed-out. Wake him up so we can begin again. I think maybe the laser whip will cause him to wake. Hello, Paul how are you? glad to see you're awake again. Shall we continue? Did the Mantodeii acquire a real deed to the property?"

"Fuck off you god-damn overgrown alleycat."

"My, but we are impudent. Grassh, your decision: the mind probe or laser whip. At this rate, we might be here all day. I do hope there is something left of Mr. Phillips for Rakreesh to kill. Well, all this hard work has made me hungry, I think I'll get something to eat. Grassh, care to join me? Mr. Phillips, I hope you don't mind? Grassh, he passed-out again! I guess he won't mind too much."

Elissar and his men had just launched when Paul's disappearance was noted. Elissar was immediately informed of Paul's status. He gave instructions to continue back to their camp.



Once the army had disembarked, and stored their prisoners, Elissar tried to contact Paul.

"I can't get through to him, but I can tell that he is a great deal of pain."

"Will he give up our position?"

"Of course not, Ulrasur. I trust Owhindamon's judgement implicitly. It is unfortunate that he will die, however. I am sure that the Panterran will kill him when he does not satisfactorially answer their questions. I wonder if we may use their king as a bargaining chip. Arawan, have Krssh-tg-fad brought here.

"My only regret is that we did not make him unshai in case the pain becomes unendurable. Ah, Krssh-tg-fad, how nice to see you. Last time we talked, you were going to offer terms. Well, have a seat and let us discuss the terms of your surrender."

"Aren't you being a little premature? I have a force of hundreds of thousands yet on this planet. Why should such a force surrender to you?"

"Well, for starters, we conquered the finest fighters you had. Secondly, you have another enemy in the Mantodeii; an enemy who would be handily beating your troops had we not interfered with their communications systems. Finally, your warriors will never find you: our communications are such that we will anticipate their every move and stay one step ahead of them. I think those are good reasons for wanting to make terms."

"You know, I am inclined to agree with you. I can see only one problem with agreeing to your terms. That problem is named Rakreesh. I am sure that within a fairly short period of time, he will arrange to have himself made King. I am afraid that you have captured a fairly worthless hostage."

"I see. Now I wonder if we can't somehow turn this situation to our advantage. Suppose you were to contact your home planet and have Rakreesh declared a traitor before he could make a claim for Kingship. In return for your continued occupancy of the throne, you issue a cease-fire in this war."

"Elissar, that is a very facile way out of this situation. But really, do you think that the Panterran would have me for a King after having lost a battle and suffering the first known defeat while leading the Grissh-nak? Do you also think that I would want to be King after such a defeat? As I said before, you have captured a



"Greetings, Elissar how are you?"

"I am well enough. It is Paul who I am worried about. The Panterran have made him prisoner. I fear he is being tortured, and that we are powerless to help."

"Have you tried contacting him?"

"We have, but he does not respond. We can detect signs of extreme pain when we make momentary contact with him. We fear that Rakreesh has captured him."

"If it is in fact Rakreesh, then Paul has a short while to live."

"Is there any way we can get him out of there?"

"Short of sending someone in after him, I can see no other way. The person who is sent to perform the rescue operation stands a fairly good chance of being captured or killed himself. Have you tried using the prisoners you captured as hostages?"

"Yes, in fact we have captured Krsch-tg-fad. He believes that he would be useless as a hostage, since Rakreesh would lobby for the knigship."

"I see. The best we can hope to do is buy some time. Let us draft a message to send to Rakreesh and the Panterran High Council. 'From Elissar, to Rakreesh and the Panterran leaders: I have captured your king, Krsch-tg-fad, and hold him hostage. I have no wish for war with your people, nor with any any other members of the galactic community.

I do however, desire the end of the current conflict between the Panterran and Mantodeii over the property rights of a certain planet in the Rigellian system. I also desire the release of my friend, who has been detained by the Panterran army. I therefore propose to exchange the liberty of your King, along with the remnants of the Grsch-nak, for the cessation of the current war and withdrawal of Panterran troops from the aforesaid planet along with the return of one Paul Phillips. We will allow you three days for the consideration of this offer. If at the expiration of the third day, you wish to accept the offer contact us on frequency 570Mhz. We remain yours, Elissar."

"I don't see what the message will accomplish. They will never accept."



useless prisoner. If you truly wanted to help me, you would have me executed. I am of no use to my people and of less use to myself. I am sorry I cannot help you in your present situation. If you wish to negotiate terms, I suggest you contact Rakreesh. Before you contact him, I think maybe you ought to win a few more battles so as to negotiate from a position of strength. I must admit though, I admire your audacity."

"Arawan, have him taken away. Make sure that the needs of his people are attended-to."

"Damn! Phillips cannot expect help from that quarter. Has anyone attempted to reach Owhindamon? Well, try to get him; his advice is necessary in this matter. I hope Paul can hold out for a while longer; perhaps Owhindamon can help us free him."

A messenger walked through Elissar's tent and approached the King.

"Yes, Anandur what is it?"

"While you were gone, a message arrived from your sister. I waited until after you were finished with the Panterran to tell you."

"Well, what did she say?"

"She said the Federation is becoming more receptive to the idea of adopting sanctions. Both the Mantodeii and Panterran have threatened to press counter-sanctions against anyone agreeing with the Federation on this issue. Owhindamon is trying to line-up support for the sanctions, but she sees the balance of power being evenly divided at best. They are looking for more support, but they doubt that it will be forthcoming in less than a few days."

"Well, this is welcome news, if only provisionally so. Good work, Anandur."

"Ulrasur, have we contacted Owhindamon yet?"

"Yes sir, he will be here in a few hours. He is currently in the Sirius sytem trying to drum-up support for the Federation."

"Time, I wish I had more time. Damn it, Paul, hang on; we're doing our best. I just hope our best is good enough."

"Hello, Owhindamon your counsel is welcome."



"I agree, they will not accept. It is only intended to buy time. Your sister has agreed to contact me within three days. She will provide me with the final piece of information I need to contact some help for her lobbying efforts."

"Do you think the legislation will pass?"

"Realistically, without the assistance of the old ones, we have little chance of the legislation passing. Both the Panterran and the Mantodeii are opposed to the statute. I cannot get enough support from the balance of the galactic community to discourage the two protagonists."

"The legislation is doomed. Three days will not help you."

"Do not despair. You have waited so long for your time, what are a few more days to wait? As I told you, your sister will contact me within three days."

"What can she tell you? The old ones are a myth."

"You are wrong my friend, the old ones do indeed exist. Your sister will confirm my method of contact, and then we shall secure the old ones' aid."

"But what will we do about Paul?"

"Once I hear from your sister, I will get Paul."

"But you just said that the rescue operation will be perilous. You cannot take that risk."

"Nonsense! I can and will take the risk. Now if you don't mind, I have work to do. I will let you know when your sister contacts me. In the meantime, see that I am not disturbed."