

TWENTY

Paul woke up at three in the morning, as did all the other men in the camp. Revelry was very effective, since it was conducted in one's own head. Paul did not like all the aspects of telepathy he had been exposed-to. He liked revelry least.

Paul dressed hurriedly. In addition to his regular clothes, he put on an oversuit which contained portable oxygen generators and which could sustain a mild last blast without too much discomfort. He also wore special boots and armed himself with various knives and throwing devices. His last piece of armature was a laser gun shaped very much like a terran rifle. He was told that he could blast a spaceship out of the sky with his weapon. From the few times he had practiced with the device in the past several weeks, he believed the claim to be true.

Paul was assigned to Elissar's special guard, as much to protect himself as to protect Elissar, he thought. After he finished dressing, he made his way to Elissar's tent.

The army gathered in the clearing surrounding their leader's rest area. In all, Paul estimated that there were some three to four thousand men in this small army. He waited, along with the others, for Elissar to emerge from the tent.

Elissar came out, accompanied by Arawan, Orand and Ulrasur. For the first time, Paul saw Elissar in full battle gear. Paul had never imagined Elissar as a king, but when he saw him at that instant there was no doubt that Elissa's blood coursed through his veins.

The troops were relatively quiet as they fell in behind Elissar, Orand or Ulrasur. They marched out of the camp in the opposite direction from which Paul and Elissar approached several weeks ago. After about five minutes march, the army entered a large clearing. In the clearing were several spaceships. Troops filed into a ship based upon some unknown pattern. Then a voice came into Paul's head directing him toward a particular ship, and he knew the method to the assignments.

As it turned out, Paul was in the same ship as Elissar. One of the men Paul sat with explained the destination of the vehicle to Paul.

"We are headed toward the southern continent to meet the Grssh-nak. We will be flying at relatively low altitudes and speeds in order to escape detection. Once in position, we will disembark, and get in position for battle."



After a short while, the acceleration of the ship decreased, and soon, the engines stopped. Paul along with the rest of the men on the ship, disembarked and formed into a semi-circle. They were joined with the men from the other ships, and all awaited Elissar. The King emerged from his ship and looked at his troops.

"We have taken counsel, and will go out to do battle with our enemies. No longer will we be able to make our plans in the shadows. Today, we step into the sunlight for all to see. Our path will be more difficult from now on. We will be known to our enemies - both the Panterran and the Mantodeii. We cannot turn back.

"The odds are against us, this each of you know. We are outnumbered fifty or one hundred to one. But my friends, we are outnumbered to the eyes only. We go forth with thousands in each of us. We carry within us the sage advice of countless warriors, chieftains, leaders, soldiers. Let the other lives guide and direct us; in them is our hope; in them our strength. With our friends within, with our resolve and courage we outnumber the enemy by the thousands! Add to this number, those who are oppressed and homeless, those who by themselves are powerless - and we add untold billions more. Unblock the voice - let the trance take hold - become receptive to those who would help in our time of need, and none can stop us! We go to war. A war we did not want. A war we did not create. A war we did not look for. But a war we must fight for those who are alive now, as well as for those who went before! We go to victory!"

A cry went up from that camp, such as Paul never heard in his lifetime. He thought that the Panterran must surely hear that cry and quake in their boots. As the cries carried into the dawn, the army marched off to war.

As near as Paul could determine, the plan for battle called for for the army to eliminate the Grssh-nak before they could join forces with the rest of the Panterran forces. With a great deal of luck, they could eliminate the Grssh-nak without the knowledge of the remaining Panteraan armies. They would therefore buy additional time to carry-out their plans in secrecy. The more likely scenario would be that the other Panterran forces would be alerted, and that Elissar's men would be discovered. The worst-case scenario involved discovery, along with additional battle with the Panteraan and the Mantodeii.

Three main prongs of the army would form a semicircle around the Grissh-nak encampment, while a smaller group, led by Orand, would loop in back of the Grissh-nak camp and destroy Panteraan spaceships and generators. As the army marched from their ships, the men proceeded to their respective assignments. Soon the three columns were arranged, and a fourth band of men advanced far into the forest. At four-thirty in the morning, the three columns had gotten into position and Orand's men were at the back of the Grssh-nak camp. Elissar was arrayed with his men in the middle of the semi-circle, with Ulrasur on his left and Arawan on his right flank. One by one each of the



leaders sent the ready signal to Elissar. At four-thirtyfive, Elissar gave the attack signal.

Elissar's men stormed the enemy encampment. Ulrasur and Arawan were hard-pressed to keep up with Elissar's assault, and only by the most concentrated effort could they gain their leader's attention and convince him of the necessity of not breaking formation. Soon, the three prongs of the army closed in on the Grishh-nak. In the distance, came the sounds of explosions, as flames leapt into the still-darkened skies.

The Panterran leaders were not prepared for an assault. Still, they were the best fighting unit in the galaxy and soon rallied their troops. A unit of the army which had not fallen under direct attack formed into a phalanx and charged the oncoming forces. The result was predictable: the Grishh-nak had broken through the enemy lines. It now remained for the assault to wheel around and attack the enemy's exposed flank. What followed next was unpredictable. Before the Grishh-nak could complete a turn, the enemy had assembled into a phalanx in perfect precision, and attacked the Grishh-nak. The onslaught was devastating: Ulrasur's men cut the Grishh-nak down by the hundreds.

Meanwhile, Elissar had pressed onward with his men, driving further and further into the enemy encampment. Wherever he went, Grishh-nak fell before his feet. Soon, the Panterran's finest army was in full retreat before him. Elissar signalled to Anawar to double back to aid Orand and to cut off a Panterran retreat.

Arawan instructed his men to disengage and loop back toward the spaceport to help Orand, and cut-off the Panterran retreat.

A small contingent of Grishh-nak forces had managed to make its way toward Orand's men. Orand was badly outnumbered but managed to hold off the Panterran while he signalled for help. He was informed that Arawan was on his way with re-inforcements, and instructed to hold his position. Gradually, the number of Panterran forces opposing Orand's small band increased, as Elissar drove back more and more of the Grishh-nak. Orand increased his calls for help, and was again instructed to hold position until Arawan arrived. Finally, unable to maintain his ground, Orand formed an orderly retreat. Orand's men gave up ground slowly and exacted a heavy toll on the Panterran, but nevertheless continued their backwards march. As they gave ground, Orand's band passed a small building to which they gave little thought. A concern passed over Orand's consciousness as he passed the building, but his chief worry was that the enemy would mount a laser atop the building and commence target practice.

Several of the Panterran made their way into the building, and the balance continued the attack on Orand. Growing desperate, Orand called on Arawan himself. At almost the same instant, Orand received



Elissar had conveyed the message to Ulrasur, and instructed his general to alert the troops. When he replied to Krssh-ng-fad, his men were therefore in readiness to depart.

The victorious army, along with its prisoners, made its way back to the spaceships. Within minutes, the ships had departed and were on their way back to camp.

Rakreesh received word of the attack on the Grissh-nak and reacted with mixed emotions. On the one hand, he was amazed that anyone would attack the Grissh-nak. Of course, it was inconceivable that any army could defeat the best troops in the galaxy. Still, it appealed to him in a morbidly fascinating way. On the other hand, he was secretly hoping that whoever attacked the Grissh-nak would be victorious. Rakreesh detested Krssh-tg-fad: he was the one person who stood between Rakreesh and his rightful position. Krssh-tg-fad had been a constant thorn in Rakreesh's side for the past several months. It was he who opposed Rakreesh's purchase of the planet, and it was he who sought to humiliate Rakreesh by using the Grissh-nak to defeat the Mantodeii.

It was with a great deal of happiness that Rakreesh stepped out of his spaceship. It appeared as though the Grissh-nak had been roundly defeated, and he learned from those wounded in battle that Krssh-tg-fad had been captured. It was of course, necessary to issue the sincerest words of concern. Search parties would have to be organized; retribution would have to be made; rescues would be attempted. Rakreesh was fairly certain that all attempts at rescue would fail, and that retribution would be slow and perhaps, ineffective. The Panterran would never have a King who suffered such a grave defeat. But a King who defeated their most pernicious enemy would be most welcome by the Panterran. Rakreesh knew just such a person to be elevated to Kingship. Damn Krssh-tg-fad! Damn him forever! Long reign Rakreesh, King of the Panterran. It had a nice ring to it.

Rakreesh walked around the campgrounds, talking to the few survivors who had not yet been beheaded. He was amazed at the small number of enemy soldiers who had died. He was also puzzled as to where these enemies came from, and how they escaped so quickly. He was about to lop off a few heads himself, when an aide announced that they had captured a prisoner. The aide was sent to fetch the creature, while Rakreesh waited with as much patience as he could muster.

"Hello, Rakreesh," said Paul Phillips.

"Well, well, my old friend Paul. How nice to see you. My, but you do get around. Nice of you to stop by and visit; saves me the trouble of hauling myself to your miserable little planet to kill you. But before you expire, you and I will play a few games. How would you



his reply from Arawan, and the Panterran felt the rearguard action of Arawan's troops. The Grissh-nak broke formation and ran about in near panic. Within a few minutes the entire Grissh-nak contingent, which had attacked Grand, was dead. Grand sent ahead to Elissar for instructions.

Elissar instructed Grand to lead his men at right angles to Elissar's position, so as to form a semi-circle around the right-most edge of the Panterran camp. He informed the two men that Ullasur was aligned in the same manner at the left-most part of the Panterran camp. He then instructed Arawan to proceed with his men in phalanx formation directly through the center of the camp. Elissar's forces would meet those of Arawan, while Ullasur and Grand would take care of any stragglers.

At once, the attack began, with all four parts of the army moving in unison. The remaining Grissh-nak were, by this time, in total confusion. Upon realizing that they were in a trap, they offered to come to terms. Elissar directed them to drop their weapons, and asked for their leader to come forth. A large and vicious-looking feline stepped forth and cast an evil glare at Elissar.

"Before we talk, I wish to know your name," snarled the Panterra.

"Your kind has heard it before, but doubtless, has forgotten it. My name is Elissar. Who is it that inquires?"

"Krrsh-tg-fad I am called, King of the Panterran tribes. I have never before met the like of your army. We would gladly purchase your contract from the devil-spawn who employ you. How can a being such as yourself work in the employ of those mindless insects?"

"I am honored by your comments, Krrsh-tg-fad, and your renown is proclaimed throughout the galaxy. But we do not wish to be employed by the Panterran, thank-you. We prefer to work for our present masters, thank-you. And know, if we may come to terms?"

At that moment, Elissar received a transmission from the home base.

"Elissar, a fleet of Panterran warships has just launched from the airstrip on the other side of the continent. They are headed in your direction. If you can break off the engagement, do so at once and return."

"Well, Krrsh-tg-fad I think we can wait awhile to hear your terms. In the meantime, we will be leaving this fine continent for another. Men, shall we leave."



like that, Paul?"

"NrsHH-Kr1, show Mr. Phillips to his quarters please. And please make sure he has whatever he wants. We would not wish to make our guest feel unappreciated. I will be by in a few hours to see if he is still breathing."