

New Thunder

By Mark Flavin

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"When the darkness overtook us, we just can't recall. We only know it was insidious, and inescapable, or so it seemed." -Dens Virtro

Genesis

It was the beginning of the seventh millennium of human existence among the stars. The myth of a mother world from where all origins had sprung was still alive, but tenuously. The Way had long since replaced what the Maxors termed religious superstition and evolutionary dogma with their own explanation of origins and beginnings based on the laws of mathematics and chaos. It was all so focused and rational, so elegantly simple. Life was the result of the interactions of chaotic sequences that ultimately led to sentient self-directed existence. All phenomena observed in the real world reinforced this principal. The observation of a super nova sun was a favorite example they often used. This suicidal titanic blast, which violently led to the birth of heavier atoms that then allowed the reconstitution of new worlds prepared for human habitation, was sufficient proof. The data and the theory so beautifully blended in the harmony of micro and macro interaction of elemental forces. It was so simple, the weaving of space-time into a tapestry of harmonic resonance. It was how they held power over a civil and military machine stretched across seven worlds - the ethereal premise of some mindless Universal Force, and the heavy hand of technology.

Earth as it was called was the epicenter of chaos, the first cause, the fulcrum in the entire universe that produced the human kind. It was gone, lost in a past that defied reconstruction, an era of primordial recollection that had vanished forever. Oh certainly there were some who privately held to their beliefs, who stubbornly clung to the heresy of other origins, but with each passing generation fewer and fewer embraced anything outside the mainstream. To do so would mean economic and political suicide, or worse, the attention of the Maxors. Yet in spite of the tyranny of mass hypnosis some sensed that somehow the lie was a lie. They held out hope deep within their bosom, like the hope of one stranded in a life pod far from the space lanes. No matter which world, no matter what strata of society one common denominator surfaced in a society based on prime numbers. It was unspeakable, unimaginable in such a closed sterile directed culture, unthinkable to the enlightened mind – The Dade would come.

The Dade, this character of superhuman proportions, would somehow make right a multiplicity of wrong. It was a child's fantasy of deliverance from the dark and sinister world of calculated, exact scientific reality. Were the Dade, and the Magi that he drew his legendary strength from, a fanciful myth created to foster hope when none was warranted, or was there substance to the myth? Would such a person be able to break the bonds of control? Bonds so deeply cemented into the minds of twenty billion humans scatted across seven planets, the Seven Worlds of Earth, as folklore had dubbed them.

Among all the noise and confusion of life was a consistent reoccurring theme: There must be such a person, an antidote to the systemic poison of the Dark Enemy. An equally alluring legend that mothers would use to frighten their disobedient children. Few really believed in such a titanic battle of good versus evil, dark against light. Surely it was only a myth suitable for frightening children?

Even in this society devoid of spiritualism, some tiny remnant seemed to possess a freedom of thought that allowed them to cling to hope. A concept long since abandoned as layer after layer of rational thought, mind control and brutal repressive reaction to Anomalies - individuals who seemed immune to the structure of order so carefully crafted and imposed. Such Anomalies once discovered were re-educated based on the Five Principals to conform to the main stream.

Soon a new and potent weapon would be ready for use. It would magnify the power of the Conduit far beyond what was considered possible. This new weapon would be at their disposal so that even Anomalies would not be safe from the invasive and destructive force of this ultimate and final weapon against the thoughts and souls of mankind, firmly under control of the Dark Enemy.

It was taught by the Maxors that the child within was held captive by the disciplined, logical, adult mind, the mind that over time had given up such frivolous concepts as knights in shining armor, deliverance, salvation, truth, evil and other trappings of primitive thought that allowed an escape from hard science. The Dade was dismissed by a secular, rational, erudite, populace as a relic of Earth and the other fables of a mythical planet of origins. To even think yet whisper the name Dade was punishable by a slow, calculated, agonizing death!

CHAPTER 1: Sins of the Past

The twin tawny moons of Alpha were just peaking over the craggy walls, in the Canyon of Completion. Their creamy pastel soft light clearly framed the rugged outcroppings. The ripples on Stavold Creek glistened in the moonlight. A rich faint tapestry of stars stretched from rim to rim. It was the eternal starlight of the mother galaxy, from which the Maxors taught that all life sprang. The brightest jewels were just becoming visible in the sky, which faded to a deep endless blue toward the far horizon.

The chirps and clicks of a million insects, all with their distinctive yet blended symphony of sounds emanated from the thick underbrush near the creeks edge. The gentle warm dry breeze of summer caressed the canyon walls and swirled around the small group assembled in a circle near a crackling fire on a raised portion of the creek bank. The rushing embers convected skyward merged and then disappeared into the infinite blue.

It was the evening of the Molee of Teshran, the beginning of the seventh day of the seventh month on the seventh planet at the start of the seventh century of human occupation of Alpha, the seventh of the seven worlds of the legendary planet of origins called Earth.

Benyo, a harshly rugged man, his huge hands gently held the squirming body of his newborn son skyward - his tiny naked body dripped blood and embryonic fluid.

“A’kee wehaun,” Benyo shouted in the ancient tongue of the Magi.

“A’kee wehaun,” the assembled group replied.

“Long live The Dade,” Benyo boomed, in a husky powerful voice.

“Long live the Dade...” It echoed, reflected off the canyon walls. They felt the exhilarating tingle of defiance of having shouted words that were unlawful to even *think!* As they blended their voices and sang an ancient song of salvation - the melodic sound of men and women of faith drifted from the clearing and was swallowed by the jagged rocky cliffs. The fire was mostly gone as they embraced one another with the joy and love that most of secular cold humanity would never feel. The new mother was comforted, and tenderly cared for. Before the next full moons all but three of those assembled would be dead.

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Captain Avalon Parder examined his crisply pressed dark blue uniform in the large beveled hall mirror. He adjusted his SP Command wings. They glistened a brilliant gold in the buttery morning sun that poured through the large window next to the door.

Is it sorrow or is it sadness? He pondered this thought, as he stood at the edge of this barren melancholy desert in his military career.

Neither, he decided, *it’s remorse.* Remorse for screwing up so badly that he now flew a tech desk as his buddies called it. It had always been so exciting to him to push the regs systematically to the breaking point. He always did everything systematically. He liked to tell

the story of the time he tore the aero shell off his FZ-11 fighter by systematically increasing the re-entry angle each mission until it failed.

Lucky, he thought. Not that he had survived, that was a given, but that he hadn't been caught and forced to face a court martial and ultimately be processed. The FDC box had somehow been smoked during the emergency decent.

Funny, he mused... How technology can be a blessing and a curse, all at the same time. But that was behind him. Now his reward for past sins was an attachés job. He should have... would have been, booted out were it not for the family name. The Parder name was renowned. He was the first officer to disappoint the family in a long line of distinguished men.

What a unique contribution to family pride, he thought.

"It wasn't all my fault," he stormed as he combed the last perfect pass through his jet-black hair.

"It certainly wasn't my fault that everything came too easy," he said in a huff to Killer, who only blinked his orange tomcat eyes slowly.

And it was too easy to do what he did. He always marveled at others who struggled and languished during his academy days. They washed out by the hundreds while he cruised effortlessly.

The attaché job was slowly achieving its intended purpose. Predators don't do well in captivity and Avalon Parder was no exception. Like the big cats in confinement that spend their days rhythmically pacing in one spot - back and forth like some automaton with a shorted circuit path or an endless program loop. Avalon was seeing the enigmatic disease systematically dulling the years of training.

He knew he was first and forever a trained hunter, and one of the best. Whether it was pursuing raiders on the frontier, or smugglers on home world all suffered a similar fate - capture or annihilation. He lived for the four elements that made good star pilots, great star pilots; abundant amounts of hands on piloting, competition of any and every kind, tactics, the irrepressible attitude of winning at any cost, and his own unique fifth element he liked to call intuitive advantage.

He tried to satisfy the void left by the loss of flying status. There were the endless hours at the base gym beating every one at smash ball until no one would accept a challenge. The next binge had been fencing, since neither he nor anyone in the local contingent of young military men had any knowledge of the sport. He found a Major who was a System Master, and after a considerable amount of negotiation agreed to act as instructor and match official. Same story — after a time no one, including the unwitting Central Command Major, was foolish enough to get waxed by the ace. His athletic prowess was matched only by his ego. Always he paced back and forth wearing the floor of the same dreary confining cage until the pads on his paws were bloody. His behavior carefully monitored in stealth, the motive of sweet revenge driving the destruction of a champion.

His comm band beeped.

"Time to go Killer."

The well-fed muff of a neutered male tomcat barely acknowledged a slit eyed sleepy glance from his perch on the hall table.

“No *peeing* on the couch,” said Parder flipping Killers ear when he walked by.

Cats, he thought, why had he ever agreed to keep the contingent mascot?

“Not the smartest thing I’ve ever done,” he said to Killer who acknowledged with another slow blink.

Just the latest in a round of poor decisions. The door closed, the cat rose from his haunches, stretched, and jumped down onto the couch, eager to systematically push the regs.

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His ride to the Command Compound had now become rote. The mood of Brauntame, The most military of the military worlds in all of Federal Space, was both repressive as well as depressive. Repressive in the omni-presence of troops virtually on every street corner, the drab streaked pastel appearance of the structures, even on this sparkling sunlit crisp morning was stark. The only color seemed to be the red slash on olive green of the Prime Command flag waving in the stiff chill of autumn from the tops of the endless rows of government structures along the treeless boulevard.

The whole planet might just as well have been the Prime Command Compound. The only way it seemed you could tell was the presence of Stripe Troops and their black uniforms as he entered the sprawling secure compound. It was completely walled with its huge brown stone barrier topped with sharp gleaming spikes.

“*Are they keeping people in or out?*” he thought.

“*Immaterial,*” was the answer. They were keeping him in and it did little for his psyche to know the answer.

Brauntame Star Force Base as it had once been known was self-determined to maintain it’s pre-eminence over the other seven worlds, no matter the cost. It had become a highly advanced, .9g, mechanized, military world.

The summation of the spirit of the Brauntame people could be reduced to one word - proud. Proud they had overcome a humble beginning as remote outpost of Alpha World on which the scum of the seven systems had gravitated.

The almost spontaneous generation of vermin had stunned the other systems in how quickly they had consolidated control and power over the other older worlds. After all, the First Maxor had come from Brauntame when it broke away from Alpha.

The Great Heretic as he was disdainfully known by outsiders who were ignorant of his power and savvy was considerably underestimated by the other societies during his calculated and assisted rise to supremacy. His influence and ascension to power had stunned the leadership on even the most remote planet.

From that time forward the course of human development among the stars had been unalterably changed forever... for the worse. The inexplicable marriage of strange philosophy and technology was a powerful opiate to cultures devoid of belief in anything beyond the material. One by one the other worlds had demanded and received their Maxor, the ultimate master of body and soul. Each one was a clone of the first Maxors body, if not his soul.

They ruthlessly mastered their respective worlds, taming the populace like seasoned trainers would condition their captives to perform on command of the whip. Only in this case the whip was the Conduit. The institution and device for control was a perverted code called The Way. It became both a system of government and a system of belief. All human transactions were processed through The Way. Those who oppose it became an enemy of the state, and therefore would be processed, a euphemism for having their thought patterns painfully and permanently erased.

A Sergeant snapped a crisp salute as he ID'd the transport.

"Badge Sir," his hand outstretched, as he wiggled his fingers with impatience.

Parder handed his badge to the anxious sentry.

I've got him, the sentry said to himself.

He loved any opportunity to catch an Alphan ever so slightly in the wrong, *and this one was an SP Captain to boot*. He would have bragging rights tonight in the NC club.

"You'll have to step out of the vehicle, Sir."

"Limits," Parder said under his breath, stepping into the autumn chill. He wished now he would have grabbed his flight jacket, on the way out.

"Limits, sir," quizzed the Field Sergeant with obvious annoyance. "Oh, I just noticing the new speed limits sign." He replied.

"That sign has been there for over half a year".

"Oh really," said the Sergeant, his look, even through military issue dark sunglasses was laser penetrating. Parder tried to change the subject, "Is there a problem with my badge?" The sergeant stared at him for an instant longer than felt comfortable.

"This badge expired at 06:30 hours this morning." The sentry crossed his arms.

"But it's only 06:45," Avalon put out his hand to reclaim the badge, but the sergeant was unmoved.

"Too bad Sir. There are *limits* on everything on Brauntame. You Alphans ought to know better!" The disdain was toxic.

One hour later after a second dispute with a cute brunette female security clerk, he mistakenly thought he could charm, Avalon was on his way to Prime Command. A new badge - with a very unflattering photo - dangled from the dull black clip on his breast pocket.

“Limits,” he said in disgust as he headed for the Quad.

The wind had picked up, the sun was gone, and the chill became cutting and cold. There were ominous towering clouds building to the south.

Another Big Southern, he thought to himself.

The locals bragged about how tough they were at enduring the severe winter storms that would blow in from Lispak Sound. Knowing he faced an even bigger storm inside the command building made him shiver and clasp his open collar as he walked briskly toward the arched doors of Prime Command. The large polished gray metal handle on the door was frigid, like the hearts of the men that ran this citadel of ego and repression.

This was not a good day to be late for the weekly briefing of the attachés from the other worlds. General Katreean was never in a good mood. His towering stature, strong chiseled features; full head of streaked gray hair, and impenetrable steel blue eyes were a most awesome barrier, even for a seasoned officer.

Captain Parder had no choice but to step up to the huge mirror buffed alloy door, open it and step into the fire and ice inside. Around a large glass & chrome conference table eight figures were seated, each in a different military uniform. There were flags circling the table representing all of the seven worlds, with one larger and more dominant than the others - an olive color background, with a signal red slash.

Captain Mixel, from Vela Kappa stood at attention, his eyes looking straight ahead at no one. He spoke in an echoing nervous monotone. At the head of the table sitting rigidly erect was the General.

The gruff look on his face flashed to anger as he looked up from his e-pad. With his writing probe in hand he gestured like a swordsman when he spoke.

“CAPTAIN PARDER...WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?” The most bass penetrating voice in the all of known space bellowed at Avalon, amplified by the smooth tabletop. The other attaches fidgeted in their chairs.

“Sir, I was...” his response was cut off by the growl of a king predator.

“I *will* file a protest with your government this time Captain. You continually *test* the system here on Brauntame, *always pushing!* You Alphans like to provoke don’t you,” his voice snarled, the veins on his thick neck bulged.

“Sir, I offer no excuse, I will do better, you have my word,” the false contrition was way too evident. “You have no word. *You have no honor!* If it were solely up to me you and your kind would all be working the mines on Fundal. Now *sit down* so we can *continue!*”

Parder took his customary place next to Captain Kent from Fundal. He wanted to whisper some glib comment to Kent, but for once in a long, long time he resisted.

The meeting seemed to suspend the concept of time, like teetering on an event horizon. After the detailed oral reports from each attaché, which were verbatim of the written

versions transmitted to Central Command, it was time for Katreean to drone on. He lectured the Captains, all seasoned military men, like plebe cadets at the academy.

His incisive laser eyes swept the glance of the six young officers seated around the gleaming uncluttered table. Probing like a sensor beam, he looked for what most predators look for, weakness. His adjutant, Colonel Arcon, a sturdy wicked looking hulk of a man with a deep, crimson burn scar on his left cheek, always sat to the right and behind the General. His uniform was the impeccably tailored black of the Stripe Force. Wingman, as Parder had nicknamed him to the other attachés.

Like any good wingman, he was ever vigilant always ready to pounce on any adversary his liege engaged, as if the General needed any help. They acted mostly like two wild dogs confronting an adversary. They had a carefully choreographed unwritten battle plan. Parder enjoyed the mental combat of challenging either opponent and seeing if he could tell who was playing which part.

It would usually start as an innocent question by one of the other attachés. Something benign like, "When will our governments receive the new communication protocols?" Parder would then follow up with an innocent question about what to do with the old protocol disks, which would irritate Katreean, Arcon, or both of them and so began the process. Stripe for stripe he would escalate the battle. Maneuvering to try for the kill shot, he kept his back away from the adversary always moving, never tied for longer than a second or two to any topic.

It was wonderful, he thought, seeing the veins bulge in their necks - exhilarating, as he watched their colors change from a light pink to a deep red. Marvelous, he thought - as he viewed the mental ballet unfolding. When either one had risen from his chair a kill was secretly scored. Only on one meeting had he scored two kills when they both shot to their feet in unison.

"Where will the..." he didn't even hear the question, he didn't need to. His pupils dialed, heart rate rose, the battle had begun! The sparring was particularly intense. Maybe it was the incident at the main gate or the position of the moons but something was different. The trigger was a benign question aimed at Arcon about which frequency was allocated for fighter craft leaving the Brauntame system, knowing that the information was a published fact. Within thirty seconds or so both the General and the Colonel were on their feet shouting loud enough to cause the guards to enter the room.

Double kill, Parder thought as he smiled to himself with no hint of the glee he inwardly felt, not a twitch or even a change of expression, just the cold disinterested stare of mutual contempt.

The meeting was over before anyone could react. The young men scrambled to stuff their e-pads into their briefing pouches, and exit before the radiation levels reached critical. The huge gleaming metallic doors thundered shut behind them as elite guards took their positions.

Bevey ran to catch up with Parder, "Wow, pal you *really* like to live dangerously!"

Captain Bevey was a black man, Parder's one and only ally among the six. This was a man he knew he could count on. Call it instinct - call it blind faith, whatever the reason Bevey was trustworthy, and a good man. Although they had never discussed his reason for

being assigned the duty, the SF wings on his chest said it all. Avalon was a pretty good judge of character, and this guy was no clueless automaton like the rest of the attachés.

“Dangerously my ass, those two bags of vent gas are about as dangerous as my cat,” snapped Parder.

“I don’t know Pard, Katreean is a hard case,” said Bevey, a concerned look on his young face.

Bevey dug in his pouch for some tokens or a credit chip.

“Well, I’ve absorbed as much toxic dosage as I can take from this hole, its time for a new vista,” Parder said as he reached in his pocket.

“Here bud, put your tokens away I’ll buy you a Banner.”

The two paused at a vending cove.

“Just watch your back, the locals say this guy evaporates the competition,” said Bevey and then sipped his hot Banner. The thick pungent aroma filled his nostrils.

Parder studied Bevey's face. The guy was cool under fire. He wished he could do real work with Bevy. Patrolling the frontier, hassling raiders, hell even running freight, anything but Brauntame and the endless crap they had to put up with.

“Fair enough, kid ...fair enough. Hey, why not slip away to the sim room for a little combat training? You kicked my butt last time, I demand a rematch,” Parder said as he winked.

“Do I look that stupid, you let me win Pard. Besides, I have a date with Dinah that’s bound to end up in the stratosphere. I need to do a little pre-breathing to get ready.” He smiled as he sipped from the cyclor cup.

Bevey’s girl was a local, and Parder didn’t like locals. Dinah was an exception, and a delight to be with. She and Bevey seemed to fit and function as a team, which seemed right. He knew it wouldn’t be long before they were bonded, that seemed wrong. It was wrong for a warrior to be so permanently connected to another. A point of weakness he thought. Still they seemed happy together, and the place was seriously short on happiness. He looked at his smiling face.

“I’ll meet up with you tomorrow, we can try a little snuffle vid at my place, bring Dinah along, she likes Killer and he could use some attention, it might keep him from destroying more furniture.” Parder crumbled the empty cup and made a perfect arching shot into the open waste container six meters away.

“Sounds stable, I’ll talk it over with Dinah, and be at your place at... say 17:00, and we can hit the O’ Club afterwards.”

“You’re on,” said Avalon.

As he walked toward the lobby, his mind cycled through the usual pathways after a briefing. He rolled his eyes muttering to himself, "Too much free time with this job, way too much."

The boredom was a part of the punishment, and he knew it. No matter what he did or planned, it was always a substitute for the real thing - space combat. He wanted it bad, and everyone knew it. Like most things in his life the more he wanted it the farther it moved from his grasp.

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Arcon stood next to Katreean at the window overlooking the courtyard. From within the polished sterile office of the Commanding General of Federal Space the eagle and the vulture watched Captain Parder stride toward the gate, his head up, the bounce of a victor in his step.

"Kill him, I don't care how you do it just kill the packer." Katreean, his right fist clenched, slapped the open palm of his other hand.

"General, there might be a way to achieve a double victory in this," said Arcon, stroking his scarred cheek.