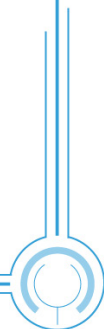
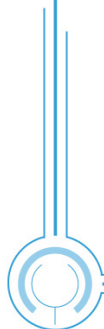


REPTILIA DROC

— VOLUME 1 —

SCAVENGER



REPTILIA DROC

— VOLUME 1 —

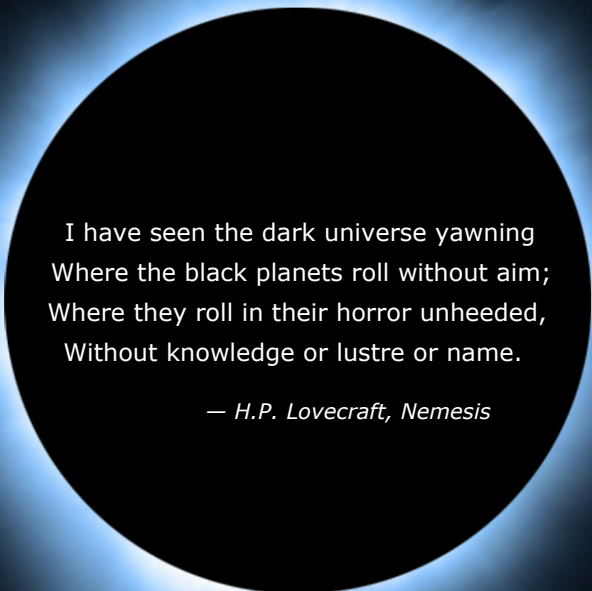
SCAVENGER



Written and illustrated by

Christopher Trefz

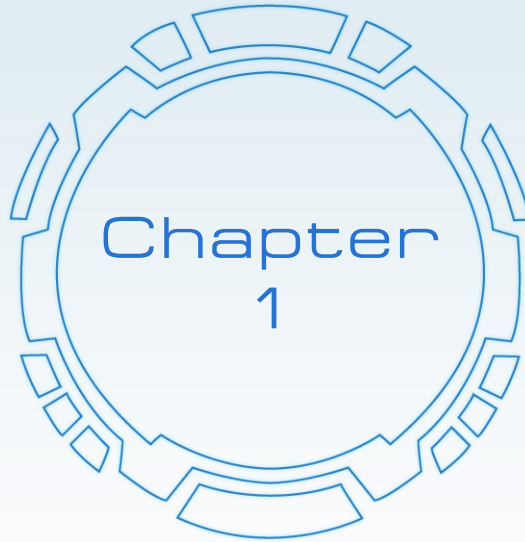
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I have seen the dark universe yawning
Where the black planets roll without aim;
Where they roll in their horror unheeded,
Without knowledge or lustre or name.

— *H.P. Lovecraft, Nemesis*





Chapter 1

"This is insane, we should not be here," I muttered, hastily programming the ship's tractor beam array. I stood behind a freestanding console, its white, glowing surface projected the control interface and along with a two foot long hologram of the freighter below us. Manipulating the display with a combination of hand gestures and mental commands, I strategically tethered the much larger vessel. I was about to lock on the final beam, when a red warning light began to flash on the interface.

I cursed aloud, "You've got to be kidding! Don't pull this crap on me now you piece of junk."

However the computer was unsympathetic to my pleas. I looked expectantly to the short, furry being seated across the room from me, but he continued to simply stare at the wall, oddly disinterested.

"Just a little emergency Sauln, don't get up on my account," I grumbled.

An already chaotic situation got a little worse when my Neural Connection projected the Captain's image into my head.

"I saw the alert, what happened?" the wrinkled, blue faced being asked, looking tense and more grizzled than usual.

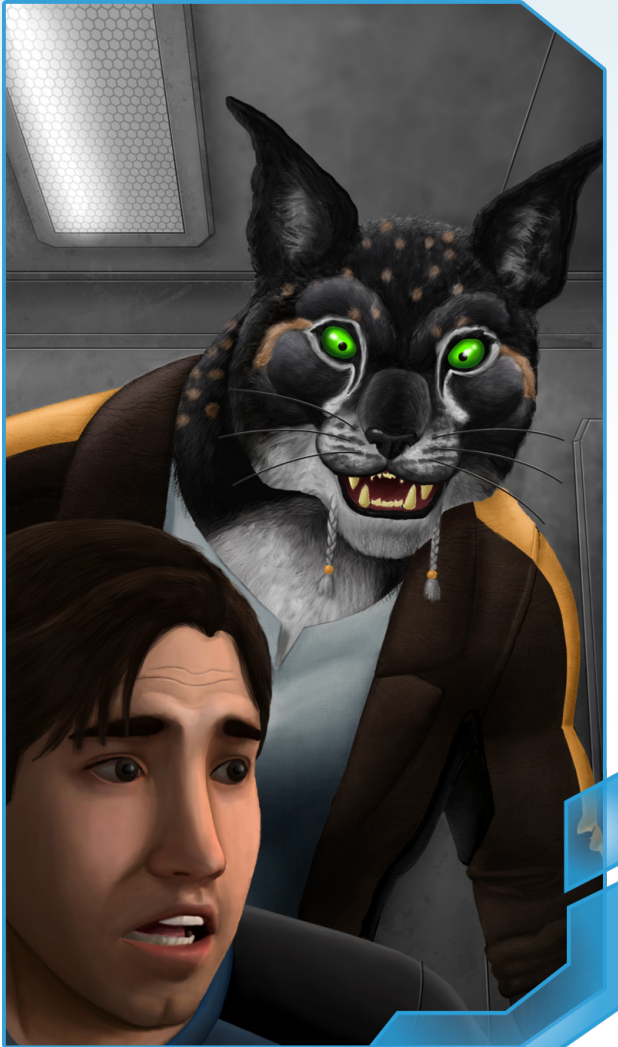
"The rear tractor beam shorted out again, Captain. I told you at the last port it needed to be replaced," I protested via thought.

Captain Bessourn sighed, "Yes Derric, you made your recommendation clear. It couldn't be helped, which is why we had to take this little side job. Now let's focus on the issue at hand, can you get it running at least temporarily?"

I quickly scanned through the error data in my heads-up display. "Yeah, I think I can squeeze one more gasp out of it. I'm going to need another couple minutes though."

He replied, "Good man, but it will need to be faster than green grass through a tjeard. We don't want to be here when a patrol shows up."

"Faster then what? Nevermind. I'm on it, Captain."



Closing the Comm, I hurried down the narrow, dimly lit corridor as the handful of working lights hummed and flickered. A mini-map in the corner of my vision marked the faulty generator with a red dot as I approached it. Spotting the maintenance hatch I yanked on the wall covering, but found the damn thing had rusted shut.

Groaning, I grabbed a screwdriver from my belt and attempted to pry open the stubborn hatch. The task was proving futile, when without a sound, a colossal shadow fell over the latch. Surprised, I spun around to find myself staring at the chest of a hulking, seven foot tall figure which loomed over me. I looked up to see a feline creature covered in black fur, spattered with gold spots, long pointy ears, and emerald eyes.

"Karris, damn... I need to put a bell on you," I sighed with relief. He grinned, bristling his whiskers, and bearing a mouth full of white fangs.

"Need a hand with that?" he asked, shouldering the large plasma rifle he was carrying. The cat-like farhi reached out with one enormous, clawed hand and easily freed the rusted panel. Haphazardly, he tossed it to the side with a thunderous clang. Next, he took hold of the generator and began to pull it out along its access track, until something got snagged inside the wall.

"Hold on a sec, let me see what it's caught on," I said.

"Nah, I got it," Karris replied, and proceeded to tug harder. There was a tearing sound, after which the generator flew out into the corridor, nearly toppling over as it slammed into the end of the track.

"Thanks," I winced.

“Don’t mention it,” he said before giving me a hard slap on the back. I was knocked forward by the gesture and struggled to catch my balance as he continued down the hall, his black, barbed tail swaying behind him. I shook my head and knelt down to examine the generator. A few seconds later a new face was thrust into my head, this time an attractive woman in her late twenties, with olive skin, and bright blue eyes. It would have been a welcomed distraction if not for the current situation, and her heated glare.

“Crite, Derric, what’s the hold up with that damn generator? I could’a suited up and ran a cable out there by now. Should I go slap Sauln awake and have him do it instead?” Ellie continued to rail.

I sighed, looking down at the aged and heavily modified piece of equipment, “You do realize this damn thing is probably older than Bessourn, and being held together with garra-tape and bongum, right? I’m working as fast as I can.”

I sent Ellie an eye-grab of the smoking generator for emphasis.

“Well in that case, don’t sweat it,” she said with an uncharacteristic calm, “we can just ask the Kildathies to take look at it. Before they execute us!”

“Wait, what?”

Ellie’s image was abruptly nudged aside as Bessourn joined in, further crowding my vision.

“Ellie, let the man work in peace. I already explained our need for haste.”

“No you didn’t! You told him they’d give us a fine,” Ellie retorted, “You knew he’d jumped ship if you told him the truth.”

The avatar’s actually shot each other looks from their respective windows, an unsettling touch the marketing guys added to the conferencing app to make the experience more personal. I went back to work and tried to ignore the disconcerting argument.

“Ellie, don’t be dramatic. They’ll only ‘threaten’ to kill us, so they can get a heftier bribe. And a bribe is basically a fine.”

“So you ‘basically’ told the truth, is that where this is going?” She asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Exactly.” As if all this wasn’t distracting enough, a glowing cube appeared on the opposite side of my vision.

“Derric sir,” My native AI chimed in a stuffy British accent, politely waiting to be addressed. I grinned slightly, that voice module reminded me of butler, one of the first things I planned to get if things some how worked out. I lowered the volume on the bickering pair and thought directly to the AI, “Yeah OnBoard, what’s up?”

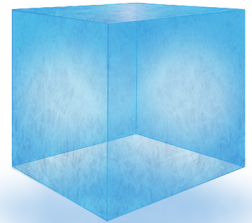
“I’ve analyzed the malfunctioning components and compiled a repair strategy. Would you like to review it?”

“Sure, let’s have it.”

Suddenly dozens of semi-transparent windows were vomited all over my vision, cluttering it with layer upon layer of data and schematics.

“Gagh!” I exclaimed in surprise. “Cute.”

“Problem, sir?” the AI asked, playing innocent. “I was just pointing out the



components that were overdue for replacement.”

“Yeah, the whole damn thing. I already knew that, thanks.”

Having wasted enough time I hide all of the intrusive windows, clearing my vision, and set my NC feed to text only. I immediately received one from Ellie.

“Did you just mute me!?” it read, followed by an angry emoticon.

I ignored it.

““One tour on my ship and you’ll be rich enough to retire,” he says,”I grumbled as the generator sparked from my prodding.

After swapping a few burnt-out boards, the generator sputtered to life. I told OnBoard to finished aligning the tractor beam array as I jogged back to the control console. After quickly checking it’s work, I un-muted my Comm and reported, “Captain, the freighter is secured.”

“Good work,” He replied. “Sauln, how’s the radiation levels? Sauln?”

I looked over at the short, camel-faced being. He was still sitting in the corner, staring off into space, his normally golden eyes bloodshot, and his rectangular pupil’s dilated.

“Sauln!” I shouted.

It pulled him back from whatever world he was off visiting, and almost knocked him out of his chair.

“Huh? Who’s on the field?” he muttered, as I rolled my eyes. “Oh right... the containment field is holding, radiation is within safe limits.”

“Sounds like we’re good to go, so can we please get the hell out of here?” I begged.

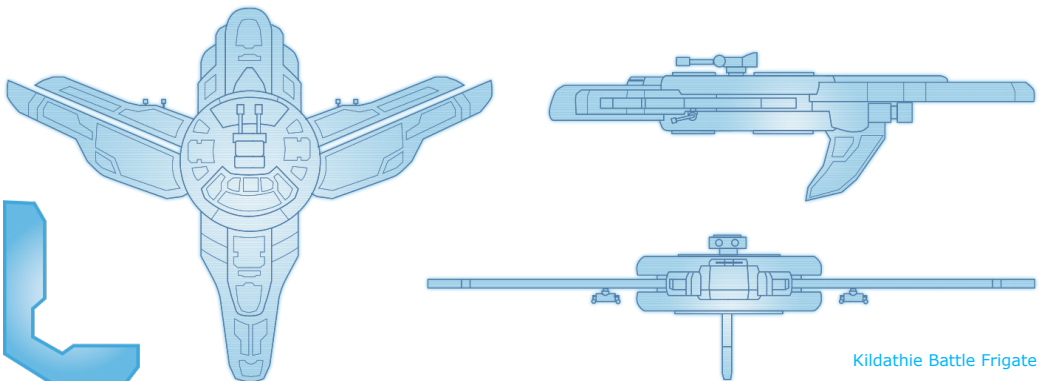
There was a pause on the other end of the line which I didn’t like.

“Hang on Derric, we have company.”

Crite.

With a thought I cued up a view of the ship’s outer cam. It showed a small reddish-brown battle frigate, a relic from a long discontinued corporate line. It was covered in scratches and patch jobs, but still had enough gun turrets and torpedo launchers to mean business. It cruised in close, stopping just a few yards in front of frieghter in our toe. Such close promity was unnecessary and a bit reckless, but if they were going for intimidation, the up close view of its trained canons was quite effective.

I toggled my HUD to Bessourn’s image, to await orders, but he had gone to text-only. Noticing the ship’s external line was active, I patched into the feed



Kildathie Battle Frigate



opening a split-screen. On the left was a view of the cockpit Bessourn called a “bridge”, and the blue skinned a bolyen himself seated in the command chair. In the pilot’s seat in front of him, a tuft of Ellie’s ponytail snuck into frame.

On the right was a male Kildathie, a tall being with brown leathery skin, spattered in black and white speckles. His upper lip was snout-like, while thin tendrils dangled on the sides of the mouth like facial hair. A pair of nostrils sat high on the face, just below his blazing yellow eyes. He was dressed in a gray military uniform, ornate with medals and donning the local regime’s insignia. He wore what looked like a smug expression on his alien face.

“I am Captain Udal, of the Kildathie Republic,” the uniformed figure addressed in a serious tone. “And you are trespassing in our territory.”

“Republic, huh?” Sauln laughed as he staggered over to watch. “Campaigning must be a breeze over there, with only one name on the ballot and all.”

Bessourn cleared his throat and replied in an even tone, “My name is Captain Bessourn of the Pathfinder. I apologize for any intrusion, we were sent in to salvage this freighter for the Destonni Corporation. Its reactor breached and the crew was forced to abandon ship. We were told it was in open space.”

“Well my friend, it may have been before it started to drift, but right now your five hundred feet within our border. That makes this freighter the property of General Saggol and your crew under arrest for espionage.”

My eyes went wide at the prospect of being arrested again. I thought the Conglomerate courts were harsh, I was in no hurry to experience the justice system of an Outer Territory dictatorship. I wondered if Ellie was actually being dramatic about the being executed part.

“What a bunch of bullshit,” I could hear Ellie mutter from just out of view.

I cringed and saw Bessourn shoot her an icy look.

“Captain Udal, please, this was an honest mistake. We’re not spies, we’re not even corporate employees; this was just a simple freelance job. I’m sure we can work out some sort of arrangement.”

Udal smiled, "This is what we'll do, I will take the freighter's cargo in order to strike a blow against your corrupt masters. Then we'll search your ship, to ensure you're not carrying any contraband. If you pass inspection you can make yourselves useful by removing this radioactive heap from our territory, after making a small donation to the Republic of course."

When Udal named the amount he was expecting, Bessourn had to quickly mute the outgoing transmission to hide Ellie's colorful reaction and save us all from getting blown apart.

"Captain," she argued, "If we lose the cargo, what'll be left of our fee won't even cover this 'donation' of his!"

"I know," Bessourn sighed. "Charge the engines, we'll have to drop the freighter and run for it."

"But, Captain..."

"Ellie, I've made my decision."

The first sensible thing I've heard all day.

Sauln laughed again, "Ellie's not going to go for that."

"What do you mean," I raised an eyebrow.

Before Sauln could answer, Udal broke in impatiently, "Captain Bessourn, I am awaiting your answer."

"I'll give him an answer," Ellie replied from off screen.

There was a mischievous tone in her voice I didn't like, neither did Bessourn from the look on his face. It was followed by a warning popup on my HUD. It looked like Ellie was routing the controls for the tractor beam array up to the bridge. I didn't like the way the telemetry data was being recalculated. I rushed to re-route the controls, only to discover she had locked me out.

"Ellie, what are you doing?" Bessourn asked and I wondered the same, as I felt the Pathfinder begin to tilt as well. "I'm ordering you to release the freighter and take us out of here. Ellie!"

Before I could break her lock, Sauln elbowed me with amusement and pointed to the external cam. "This is going to be great!"

The Pathfinder lurched from the directional busters, and I watched in horror as Ellie heaved the massive freighter at the much smaller frigate. On the Kildathie screen, Udal wore an expression of panic, "Halt your tractor beam at once or we will open fire!"

The Kildathie ship fired its engines, desperate to avoid a collision, but they were too close to the bow of the freighter. It only skimmed their hull, but it was enough to cause a thunderous clang over the frigate's Comm, and throw the crew to the deck. There was a chirp as the Pathfinder's audio returned, I toggled screens and saw Ellie's face pop-up and fill the frame. I was a little disturbed by her malicious grin, and the glee in her blue eyes.

"Here's your freighter, Captain. We're going to pass on the donation, but give our warmest regards to the General."

As she sat back down, I could see Bessourn had slumped low in his chair and was massaging his temples. The bridge cam switched off and I nearly stumbled as the Pathfinder's over-sized hauling thrusters roared to life. On the outer cam, the disabled frigate drifted helplessly, but was still able to fire a

few stray bolts of plasma as it shrank into the distance. Fortunately the salvos missed the Pathfinder, but left the rear of the cargo ship a little crispy. Should be interesting explaining the damage to the client.

"Oow... Derric, mind giving me a hand?" I heard Sauln call up from the deck.

