

## Chapter 1

The defeat of the Donnaki invasion force at the hands of the Free Society should have ushered in a new era of peace and tranquility in the Milky Way Galaxy. The Paxran and Maklakar were overcoming their past hatred and trying to regain the spirit of Ai-Makla, with the support of the other maklan societies. The natural Hives on Zulanan and Fistnan should be able to provide security and supplement the power of the constructed Hives on Tak-Makla and Atar Pa. Yet Admiral Dave Brewster was obsessed with Zeet and the Bandabar. He knew it would take many years for Zeet to rebuild his robot army, but the power of that one decentralized brain had been amazing. Zeet had come within minutes of disabling the Maklakar battle station, the most advanced military hardware in the known galaxy. Dave also knew that Zeet was not unique. He had told his capturers of the other, another member of The Accord who had come to Bandabar to recruit new members. If there were more monsters like them, they could potentially take over the Free Society and possibly the entire galaxy with their armies of robots and lack of concern for sentient life.

“Jon, do you know what I find the most disturbing about the interviews recorded with Zeet?” Dave asked.

“No, Dave. The whole interrogation I witnessed was quite bizarre, so I’m not sure I could isolate just one thing,” replied the captain of the star cruiser Nightsky.

“It was the first question Commander Kalak of Maklakar asked. He said, ‘Who are you and why did you attack this station?’ Zeet said he didn’t understand the second question.”

“Yes, I remember that clearly now,” Jon answered. “It’s almost as if he doesn’t recognize life to be intelligent if it is not of The Accord.”

“Precisely!” Dave shouted. “Now can you see why I’m so preoccupied with The Accord? They think only their particular type of intelligence is meaningful. The entire population of the Mondor and all of our planets look like nothing more than a source of food to them.”

“Unless we accept the offer to be of The Accord as well,” Jon said.

“Maybe, but we don’t really know that for certain,” the admiral replied. “Zeet said there were hundreds more on Bandabar who agreed to join their little club, but there is no confirmation of that yet. Hopefully, Zee Gongaleg and his Hive can find evidence one way or the other. But I don’t think that’s enough.”

“Well, I’m certainly not taking this ship to the Magellanic Clouds to find out in person,” Jon laughed.

“You’re right, Jon, that suicide mission would only provide more refined metal and dinner for those animals,” Dave agreed. “But we need to learn more about what The Accord has done and what their plans for us are, and I have a plan.”

“I’m in, as long as there’s an escape route,” Jon said. “Ever since I left Far Sky, we have been on an incredible adventure. What’s the plan?”

“I’ve asked our two Hives to look at as many barely habitable planets as possible in the Clouds. For starters, I want to check out some that have sentient life but no signs of The Accord. If possible, my team will use the natural Hive on Fistnan to jump to those worlds,

leaving enough people behind to track our movements and yank us out quickly if needed,” Dave began.

“Barely inhabitable planets? I don’t understand, Dave,” Jon pondered. “Plus, I don’t think Mencius or the Council is going to send the Supreme Fleet Admiral into such a dangerous place.”

Dave sighed, “Yeah, it’s going to be a hard sell, but I think I’m the only one who can pull it off. I’m the one with the strong connection to Universal Power, and I think I can convince Odo Pak and Obu Neela to stay on Fistnan to extract us when necessary.” He stood and walked over to the coffee station and refilled his cup, then walked over to the view port in his ready room and looked out at Tak-Makla from the ship’s high orbit. “I’m looking for miserable planets because I think that is what would remain after The Accord extracts all the metals. A creature like Zeet will always need more metal to replace and expand his fleet of robots, not unlike our own military. Such a beast could stay longer to finish feeding on the life-forms, but if there was a problem requiring new metal, it would be putting its own life at risk. I don’t think a logical creature would do that.”

“Why not use the Hives to jump a group of Maklakar battle stations there?” Jon asked. “They would provide a lot more defense.”

“That is true, but they would also provide a bounty of new metal that The Accord would be thrilled to have. Zeet, a single Being, almost defeated the Mondor. For all we know, there could be thousands or millions of Zeet-like creatures waiting there. If it’s just a few humans, maybe they won’t notice or care, especially if we are on a planet with little or no metal left,” Dave said.

“That makes sense,” Jon agreed. “I assume Hive agents will do all the investigation so there will be a strong likelihood of success before we put people in harm’s way.” Dave nodded. “I can’t help but think this is not the mission we signed up for, Dave. What about founding new colonies for the Free Society? And what does Darlene think about this?”

Dave laughed. “Yes, I’ve thought about those issues. Darlene will try to convince my superiors I am too valuable to risk. I appreciate the sentiment, but I have no intention of getting myself or anyone on my team killed. I’m even thinking about adding her to the team. Her diplomatic skills are phenomenal, and that’s what we’ll need when we encounter intelligent life. Also, the idea of The Accord is pounding in my brain like a gong. You know, if you and I found a thousand new planets this week, it is possible an invasion force from The Accord could destroy all of that life in hours. By us placing infrastructure on a new planet, we’re giving The Accord exactly what it wants, more food and metal. I can’t live with that.”

“But that may never happen, Dave,” Jon argued. “As far as we know, Zeet is the only member of The Accord in this galaxy.”

“That’s exactly why we have to go to the Magellanic Clouds, Jon,” he smiled. “If we determine The Accord is no threat, I will be the happiest guy in the galaxy. You and I can go on with our mission, confident that we are growing the Free Society. However, if an invasion is imminent, we will be forewarned and can take defensive measures.”

“What do you think we will find?” Jon asked.

“They’re ready for an invasion,” Dave said coldly. “The evidence is too strong for me to ignore.”

“What evidence is that?”

“Jon, when Lini and I were traveling back to this time after our imprisonment on Solander, we were sidetracked and stopped for a few moments deep inside Zeet. We also stopped on the Mondor and saw the Predaxian agents. Universal Power is not random and took us there for a reason. I had heard of the Maklakar battle station but had no idea about The Accord. Universal Power wanted me to see Zeet. The only reason I know of would be as a warning. I have been warned about The Accord, and now it is up to me to find a way to stop it,” Dave said and then sat heavily in his chair. “Jon, I know this isn’t what you signed up for. While I’m gone, De-o-Nu is going to continue our normal mission. You can certainly go with him. I won’t need Nightsky where I’m going.”

“Dave, do you remember when I was about to be elected head of the High Council on Far Sky? I gave it up to follow you, and it wasn’t about building new planets or growing our cultures. It was about the adventure. Now you’re telling me that mobs of robots could swarm into our galaxy at any time and lay waste to our civilization. Of course, I’m going with you. If there is any chance my help will stop The Accord, I’m going,” Jon smiled.

A tone sounded on Dave’s control console and he pressed the flashing button, “Yes, Lia, what’s up?”

Communications Officer Lia Lawson’s face appeared on the screen. “Dave and Jon, Greater Gallia advises that Zeet is on the move. Captain Lake, De-o-Nu is requesting one Maklakar battle station and ten cruisers to jump to that location as soon as possible. I have already communicated with Tak-Makla, and they are prepared to jump us there on your command. The Mondor and twenty Galliceans cruisers are already at the scene.”

“Tell Tak-Makla to make the jump in thirty seconds,” Jon said. “Dave and I will be on the bridge in ten.” The two men rose and rushed through the doorway and onto the bridge where they sat in their command chairs. On the viewscreen was the face of Loni Arrak, Chief Engineer of the tekkan Hive.

“Good luck, Nightsky,” she said. “Jumping in five, four, three, two, one. . . .” The planet below them was gone. Now they were surrounded by warships firing at a plasma ball from the Mondor.

“Target any plasma balls!” Jon shouted to Frake Landres, his Chief Weapons Officer.

“Aye-aye, Captain,” the large man bellowed back. “Those robots are attacking the Dar-Fa, sir. Their captain reports dozens of hull breaches and many casualties!”

The screen split and Fa-u-Nu, captain of the Dar-Fa, was staring at them. “My ship is lost! Please get the Hive to evacuate my crew! We’ve only got seconds left.” His image disappeared. In the view screen, the horrified bridge crew could see thousands of small robots hacking away at the hull of the Dar-Fa. The giant cloud of robots was rushing toward the failing ship until the hull was covered in them.

“Jon, this is Loni, we’ve evacuated all life from the Dar-Fa,” a voice said over the intercom.

“Lia, put me in contact with all warships now!” Jon shouted. She pressed the buttons and nodded back at him. “Fleet, this is Jon Lake. All Galliceans have been evacuated from the Dar-Fa. Train all fire on that ship’s engine nacelles. A single coordinated attack from our weapons should start a chain reaction which will hopefully stop the robots! Fire now!”

The plasma balls from the Mondor arrived at the Dar-Fa as the same moment as the fire from the cruisers. All the view screens blacked out due to the intensity of the explosion. The

crews were tossed about in their ships as the shock wave struck and pushed them away at near light speed. Most ships lost all power and hung in space for several minutes before systems started to regenerate. “Jon, this is Ka-a-Fa of the Kong-Fa. Where is our fleet? Is anyone out there?”

“Ka-a-Fa, it’s good to hear another voice,” Jon replied from the darkened bridge. “Our power is just coming back on now. Our instruments show we are one hundred million miles away from our original location.”

“Jon, we’re starting to hear from other ships now,” Ka-a-Fa replied. “We are not reading any robotic activity at the original position, so I think your plan worked. Where did you come up with such an idea?”

Jon chuckled and said, “I used to be a physicist and starship engineer. The intensity of the fire seems to have created a tiny singularity which then exploded. It’s kind of like our own little Big Bang. By the way, I’m still in the dark here.”

“Hailing all ships. This is Commander Vard Kalak of the Mondor. Has anyone taken any casualties? Our thick outer shell protected us quite well. We have advanced medical facilities if you need them. And Captain Lake, thanks for the quick thinking. It definitely seems our friend Zeet learned from our first encounter.”

“Where the hell is Dave?” Jon gasped. “We just got our lights back on and Admiral Brewster is not here.”

“Obu, why am I here?” Dave asked. He was sitting in the small open temple at the Mount Alila Temple on Lagamar Ulu. The High Priest was walking toward him with two glasses of brandy. “Why did you take me away from the battle? What happened? Did they defeat Zeet?”

“Your fleet is fine, Dave,” Obu replied while handing him a glass. “Only the one ship that was attacked by Zeet was destroyed. Unfortunately, a hundred Galliceans were killed before the evacuation due to hull breaches. But to your first question, I did not bring you, so I cannot say why you are here.”

Dave touched his glass to his friend’s and sipped the drink. “Well, I wonder who did this? Can you help me get back to my ship?”

“Of course, dear friend,” Obu smiled, “but I think it might be important to determine why you are here and who brought you first. It seems odd that you would arrive without any reason. What exactly happened back there? I did feel an enormous disturbance in the Source. Did you do that?”

“Not that I know of,” Dave replied. “Jon ordered all the ships in our fleet to fire at the crippled Gallicean cruiser at the same time. When all the fire hit that ship, I was just here.”

“Well, I’m no nuclear engineer, but it seems the attack may have created a minute singularity,” Obu said. “All of the plasma striking the engines of the starship compressed to a tiny spot of nearly infinite density. When the external pressure dropped, the singularity exploded. That could open thousands of wormholes through space and time. I suppose it is possible one of those openings sucked you in and delivered you here.”

Dave laughed. “I think the odds are pretty small there. A random wormhole could have sent me anywhere or any timeline, but I came here. Something must have directed me to you.”

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“Perhaps there is something you need from me,” Obu said. “Have you been thinking about me lately, dear friend?”

“Yes, I have,” Dave smiled. “We are looking for planets in the Magellanic Clouds that have been abandoned by The Accord. I want to send a team to such a planet to learn more about The Accord and their plans. Frankly, I believe The Accord is planning an invasion which I doubt we would be able to stop.”

“But what does such a voyage have to do with me?” Obu asked. “You certainly don’t need an old priest on such a team.”

Dave laughed. “I would never put you in such danger, Obu. I was thinking you and Odo could be on Fistnan or another natural Hive planet. If my team encounters any danger, you two could pull us out.”

Obu wagged his finger at Dave and said, “There you go again, putting your life in mortal danger. There is a galaxy full of brave soldiers willing to fight for this cause. Why are you putting yourself in such a position?”

Dave put his hand on Obu’s knee and replied, “When Lini and I were traveling back to this time, we stopped for a moment deep inside Zeet. That can’t be random. The Source wanted me to see him and know the danger he and the rest of The Accord pose for our galaxy. If you think that isn’t true, then tell me why I stopped there.”

Obu sighed, stood up and walked to the edge of the temple, gazing out at the mountains in the distance. The second mountaintop was still scarred by the attack meant for the temple. “I hate to admit it, but you’re right Dave. You see that mountain with the scorched forests and piles of stone rubble? That destruction was meant for this place. I should be dead now along with the leadership of this planet. It was the Source that helped us then and I agree it is directing you now.” He turned and smiled at Dave. “Perhaps there is another trip we may take first. I have an idea.”

## Chapter 2

A massive ten-legged robot moved easily through the maze of machinery. Strapped to its back were two large boxes. Hundreds of other robots moved about in the same chamber, each coordinated to make certain none affected the other's path. It approached a tall, reinforced metal door and tapped it with his front forelegs. A small panel opened and another robot stepped out to greet it. The new robot stood upright, but its body was only two feet tall. It had four arms on each side and a large crystal globe for a head. Two cameras were attached to the head. Inside the crystal globe was a brain suspended in gel. The small robot climbed onto the larger one, checking every inch of the robot for unintentional passengers. After it was convinced the other was clean, it signaled the large doors to open. The large robot entered with the small one still on its back. The doors slammed shut again.

The room was one hundred square feet and the walls and ceiling were packed with computer hardware. Thousands of ant-sized robots climbed on the walls checking on the equipment. A single glass plate was positioned in the center of the far wall. Behind the glass was a pool of gel and a gigantic Bandabar brain. The large robot squatted down and used four of its legs to remove the two large boxes from its back. Meanwhile, the smaller robot rushed to the far wall and climbed up next to the glass plate. "Zeet, how do you feel?"

"Not well, Noz," Zeet replied. "Terrible, in fact. What did those evil creatures do to Zeet?"

"The final sensor readings from your team were unbelievable," Noz began. "All the enemy ships fired on their own ship and created super dense plasma which then exploded, vaporizing most of your robots."

"That was all the spare metal I had!" Zeet agonized. "Not to mention the damage to my brain. Will Zeet survive?"

"Of course you will," Noz answered. "I have brought a new gel and some nourishment that will help you regenerate yourself. You should feel better soon, although it may take years to find enough metal to replace what you lost."

"I'm so sorry, Noz," Zeet replied. "Now you and our Friends will be delayed even longer. My attempt to escape was foolhardy, but I needed to contact the others. Now all hope is lost."

"Zeet, you are still alive and master of this world. The rest of your Friends and I will be here to help you. We are of The Accord. You must remember that. Those vicious monsters that attacked you will be punished."

"But how?" Zeet whined. "It will take years to replenish our metal. They might come back today and kill all of us."

"I have an idea to expedite it," Noz said. "The core of this planet is molten metal. If we can mine that, there will be an almost limitless supply of metal for us. You, I, and our brothers can all build our robots and take over this galaxy."

"But what about Bandabar?" Zeet replied. "Won't this planet become dead if we do that?"

"Honestly, Zeet, I don't care. All of those birds were given the opportunity to be of The Accord and refused. With the metal gone, we will leave and find new worlds. What happens to this food source is inconsequential," Noz spat. "Now let me get to work. This first part is going to be painful, like always."

“I understand, old friend,” Zeet replied.

Slowly the gel surrounding Zeet’s brain began to drain away. Zeet was writhing in pain and many of the ant-sized robots were falling to the floor of the room in piles. Zeet was losing control of his machines. When all the gel was emptied from the chamber, all the robots besides Noz and the large robot were inactive. “You’re killing me, Noz,” Zeet said.

“Patience, brother,” Noz replied. He signaled the large robot, which took one of the boxes it had carried in and inserted it in an opening above Zeet’s chamber. New gel poured down and surrounded Zeet’s brain. The large robot then removed the empty box and attached it to his back again. Zeet was still inactive. The large robot then opened the other box and removed two live Bandabar women with one of its large claws. The two females were squirming and screaming as the large robot pushed them into another chamber next to Zeet’s brain. The door slammed shut, locking the females inside. A loud whirring sound began and the Bandabar women screamed for an instant, until their bodies were crushed and blended into a pulp and mixed with another liquid. That liquid was then pumped into the chamber with Zeet and the gel.

“Zeet, can you hear me?” Noz asked.

“Yes, Noz, I can hear you now,” Zeet replied. “I’m feeling better already. Please go ahead with your plan for the core. The sooner we get out of here the better.”

“Please be a bit patient, Zeet,” Noz said. “Accessing the planet’s core is delicate business. We will likely destroy the planet’s magnetic field and potentially change its orbit around the sun.”

“Without the magnetic field, local life-forms will be exposed to gamma rays from the sun,” Zeet warned. “We need food.”

“Don’t worry, brother, we will make sure the planet remains safe until we are ready to flee,” Noz said as he turned to leave the chamber. His large robot followed him to the door.

A blinding flash of light filled the room, momentarily distracting the robots. After it faded, three heavily armed Bandabar soldiers and Dave Brewster were standing in the room. The giant robot spun around to face the attackers, raising its giant claws to chop them apart. Two of the Bandabar began to fire their blasters at the monstrous machine. The third charged the small robot with the crystal head, swinging his war blade at it. The sword smashed the glass globe and sliced through the brain inside. The giant robot fell to the ground dead, as the brain controlling it was dead. The thousands of ant-like robots jumped onto the attackers, chopping at them with their tiny claws. Dave drew his two blaster pistols and shot at the glass wall between them and Zeet’s brain. The Bandabar leader rushed to Dave’s side and fired at the glass as well.

The doors to the room were opening and thousands of larger robots pushed inside to thwart the attack. Just as they reached the defending Bandabar, the blaster fire shattered Zeet’s enclosure, flooding the chamber with the gel and gore from the slaughtered women. Dave and the Bandabar warrior continued to fire on Zeet’s brain, which exploded, covering them with blood and tissue. All the robots froze in place and the room fell into darkness. Admiral Veek Alar of the Bandabar Fold removed his helmet and slapped Dave on the back. “Wow! That was amazing. Do you think it’s over now?”

“I certainly hope so, Veek,” Dave said. “I believe that other robot you killed was one of the other Bandabar who chose to be of The Accord. Zeet told me there were hundreds of them, so

your men need to find and eliminate them all before they can establish themselves as Zeet's replacement." The two other soldiers began to place temporary lights on all surfaces they could find.

"Dave, when you and Obu told me about what this monster had done to the Bandabar home world, I didn't believe you," Veek admitted. "Even when you took me into Universal Power to see for myself, I was certain this was an elaborate trick. It wasn't until we reached orbit that I could see the reality. Thank you for allowing me to help free my planet. God bless you, Dave Brewster."

"The people of this world need you now," Dave said. "You and your men did as much as I. Actually, this trip was Obu's idea. Frankly, I had no idea Zeet was this weakened. Obu believed the explosion of the singularity so close to the planet overloaded his circuitry. If we would have tried this earlier, we would have been killed and fed to Zeet almost immediately."

"I still feel we owe you something for this," Veek said. "Perhaps we can return Paranon Nar to you. A planet for a planet."

"No, definitely not that. The Society of Humanity is dissolving. You will need that Hive to stop others from invading your space. Also, with that Hive and the help of one of ours, we can move your ships back and forth while you are returning life to normal on Bandabar."

"Dave, I don't think you're being fair. It would honor my people if we can repay you and your Free Society in some way," Veek replied. "Don't dishonor my family by refusing me."

Dave laughed. "Let's not worry about that right now, Veek. There is much to be done and, from my experience, you and your people will likely repay us many times before it is over."

Colonel Nik Paka of the Bandabar fleet entered the room and walked over to his superior, being careful not to slip in the slime on the floor. He saluted Veek and said, "Pardon me, Admiral, but I must say it stinks to high heaven in this room. What is this mess?"

Veek laughed. "Nik, this gunk is the remains of Zeet, and I know that Admiral Brewster and I are covered in it too. How goes the battle?"

"It appears the remaining Accord members occupy one small brain robot and one large working machine. It will take several days to eliminate them all. I have already requested two more star cruisers to jump here for support," Nik said. "Sir, we also have liberated a camp in this station with several hundred normal Bandabar. We believe they were being used for food."

"Oh my God!" Veek replied. He turned to Dave and asked, "Is this true, Dave?"

"That's what we heard from the first encounter with Zeet. He claimed they only consumed what they needed to survive, but I have no reason to believe anything he said," Dave replied. "Please forgive me for being indelicate, but we believe they would liquefy their victims while they were alive and inject that into the gel."

"I hope never to find out the whole truth, Dave," Veek said. "Nik, please tell your men what the Admiral has said. The lives of every Bandabar on this planet hinges on our ability to kill the rest of the enemy as fast as we can." The colonel stood at attention, saluted, turned, and rushed out of the chamber. Veek put his hand on Dave's shoulder. "What is your plan now, my friend?"

"After I bathe, I need to make a plan to go to the Magellanic Clouds to find out more about The Accord. Also, our scientific teams are working on a stable singularity weapon to fight off any further incursions."



“I know it is late tonight,” Veek began. “I have asked my teams to investigate as much of the planet as they can by this time tomorrow. Perhaps you can join me for drinks and dinner tomorrow night. Then we will both know what’s been found.”

“That would be perfect. I may invite a few of my team to join us, if that’s okay. I have heard that Bandabar whisky is one of the best in the home galaxy. I look forward to a few glasses,” Dave smiled. “Just sent me a time stamp and I’ll be there. Good luck hunting.” Dave pressed a button on his com-link and Mitch Nolobitamore flashed into the room, landing on Dave’s chest. He smiled and the two disappeared.